

Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan

Strategic Land Availability Assessment  
Report of Findings (November 2013)

Appendix 1f:  
South East Bristol Green Belt



# Land in the Green Belt at South East Bristol

## Policy Background

- The Draft RSS for the South West required an urban extension of 6,000 homes to the SE of Bristol within an area of search that included the environs of Whitchurch/A37, Stockwood Vale and Hicks Gate/A4. The EiP Panel's Report endorsed this level of development, but the SoS's Proposed Modifications increased the requirement to 9,500 homes (comprising 8,000 within BANES and 1,500 within Bristol).
- Policy BCS5 of the Bristol Core Strategy (adopted June 2011) identifies land in in the Green Belt at South East Bristol at Hicks gate as a contingency for the development of new housing. The contingency will come into play if monitoring shows that planned provision will not be delivered at the levels expected, or if land is required to accommodate higher levels of provision. The capacity of the contingency area is unlikely to exceed 800 homes, if existing uses are retained (BCS 4.5.15).

## Overview of Land Availability and Achievability

- Throughout the preparation of the SW RSS and BANES Core Strategy a number of areas have been promoted by landowners and developers within the former RSS area of search.
- At Whitchurch/A37 key promoters include Taylor Wimpey, Bovis, Robert Hitchens Ltd and Horse World. Barton Willmore (on behalf of Taylor Wimpey/Bovis) has submitted a vision and concept master plan for a Whitchurch Development Area in response to the RSS/ BANES Core Strategy. The master plan currently promotes an area that is capable of delivering a mixed use urban extension of about 3,500 homes.
- Most recently planning applications have been submitted by
  - (1) Robert Hitchens Ltd for a development of up to 300 dwellings at Staunton Lane
  - (2) Horse world for a development of 125 dwellings at Staunton manor Farm
- At Hicks Gate/A4 Crest Strategic Projects and Key properties are promoting an area of nearly 100ha for development on land that straddles the Bristol/BANES boundary. On behalf of both parties RPS Have also submitted a concept masterplan for the area in response to the Draft Core Strategy.
- The concept plan offers a development of 94.3ha to include 27.0 ha of housing (1500 homes), 11.6 ha of employment land, a 2.0ha primary school site, two local centres of 1.0 ha, land for leisure development of 1.5ha, land for a park and ride extension of 1.5ha, additional formal open space of 6.0ha, allotments of 2.2ha, informal open space of 29.5ha and existing uses within the development area taking up 11.0ha.
- Broadly speaking, the employment land is identified within Bristol and the housing land within BANES. If development was to take place in this area the extent and location of any employment land would require further consideration by all parties.
- Given that Bristol CC identify that land at Hicks Gate (within Bristol) has the potential for 800 homes there is some further analysis required to determine the optimum apportionment of uses across the area – should it be required for development.
- Stockwood Vale Golf Club has also put forward its landholdings for consideration. Being disassociated from the urban fringe and the other identified areas, this land has not been assessed re suitability in the SLAA.

## Overview of Suitability

- Much of the land around Whitchurch is suitable for development but the credentials of this area become lower as one approaches Maes Knoll and Stockwood Vale on account of the impact on the setting of the Maes Knoll SAM and on landscape character more generally.
- The Hicks gate area is largely suitable for development
- Stockwood Golf Club is not suitable for development.
- There are a number of other environmental and heritage constraints (including by not limited to concentric field patterns and Grade II\* listed buildings at Whitchurch) the mean that careful master planning is needed in order to mitigate the impact of development.
- In the Whitchurch area, the absence of any planned strategic investment in the highways network currently limits the developable suitable supply of land for housing.

## Housing Potential

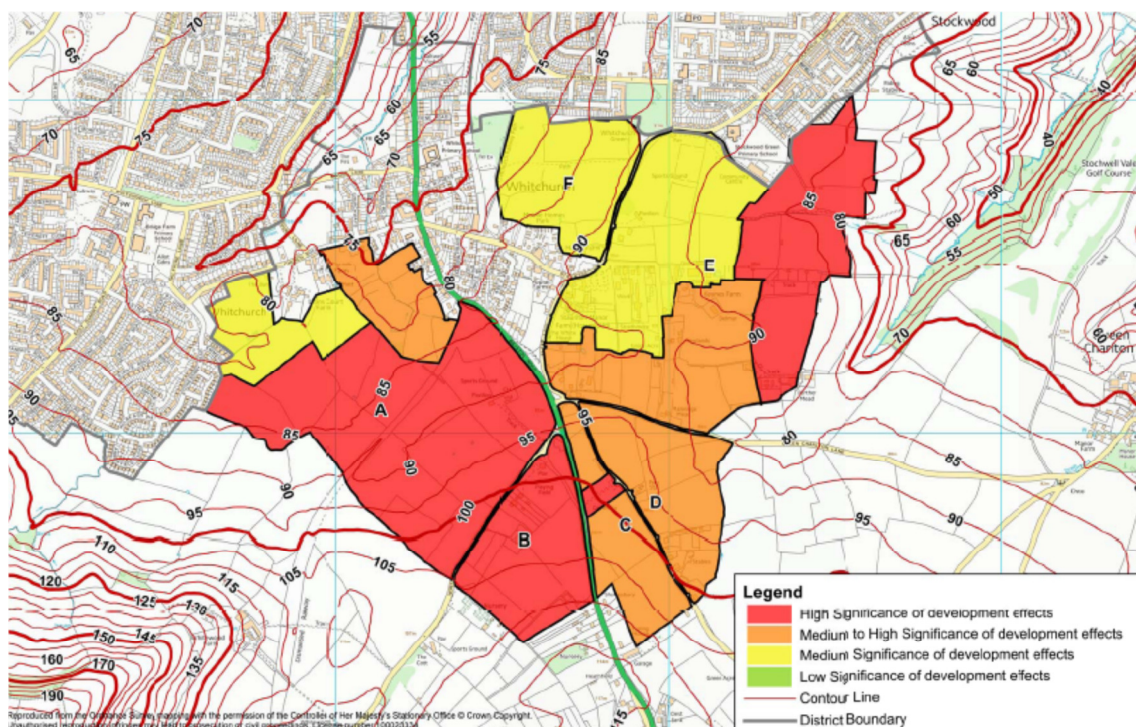
- The [Whitchurch Development Concept Options Report \(Arup, Feb 2013\)](#) **CD9/CO9** indicates that this area could accommodate an urban extension focused around the provision of about 3,000 homes (Option 2, pp28-29). However, this would include much of the land occupied by Horseworld. If this area was removed from consideration (reflecting the purpose of Horseworld's current planning application for 125 units) the capacity of this area is not likely to exceed 2,000 (Option 3, pp30-37). These capacities assume some development (c. 800) to the south of the A37 in areas of high risk re the impact of heritage and landscape assets.

## Land Availability

- A separate plan shows a large development area being proposed by Taylor Wimpey/Bovis (via Barton Willmore). A very high percentage of the land within this area is available for development and some of this is currently being actively promoted by other agents on acting for specific landowners.

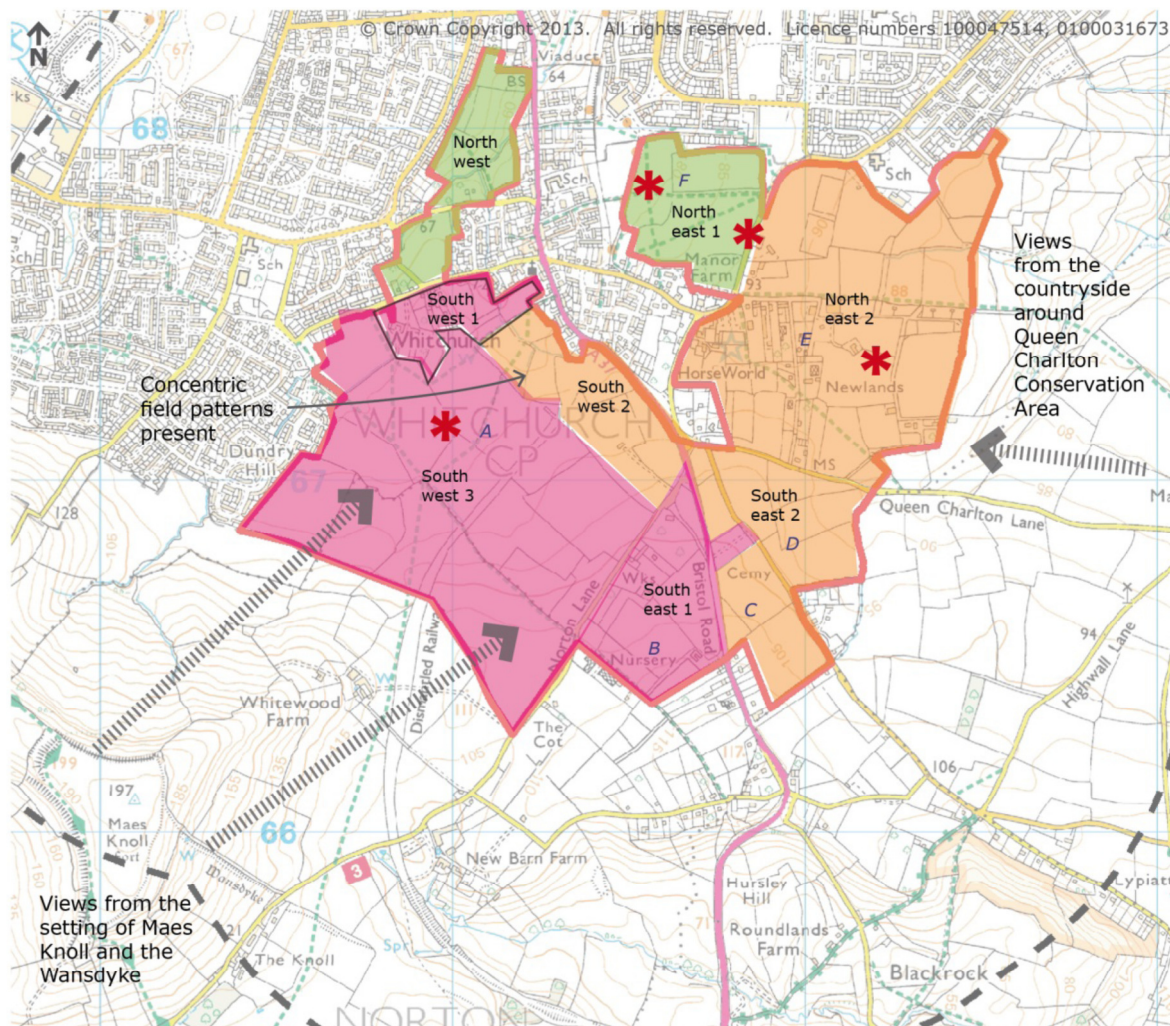
## Landscape and Visual Assessment

- This is contained in the following document [Whitchurch Landscape and Visual Assessment Summary \(BANES, August 2013\)](#) **CD9/LV/6** and is summarised in map form below. See also [Addendum to Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment:Whitchurch \(October 2013\)](#) **CD10/E11**



# Heritage Asset Assessment

- This is contained in [Heritage Asset Study Main Report](#) and [Heritage Asset study Appendix 5:Whitchurch](#) (Land Use Consultants, BaRAS & Conservation Studio, Sept 13) **CD9/LV/1** and is summarised in map form below.



**Whitchurch Summary Map**

- High risk to significance of heritage assets
- Medium risk to significance of heritage assets
- Low risk to significance of heritage assets

**\*** High risk to known archaeological heritage assets, indicative location

*Labels A - F refer to other B&NES studies, in this case the Greenbelt Review, and do not accord with the site boundaries of this report. They are included on the map figure to allow cross reference.*

Risk relating to undiscovered archaeology has not been mapped. It is recommended that a detailed survey be carried out prior to development.

## Nature Conservation

- Analysis in respect of nature conservation is contained in [Preliminary Ecological Surveys and Assessment: South-East Bristol Urban Extension: Location Option 4 – Whitchurch \(2.4 MB\)](#), Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (2008)

## Transport & Highways

- [Transport Evaluation, Main Report \(Arup, 2012\)](#) **CD9/12/1**
- [Transport Evaluation, Appendix J, Land At Whitchurch \(Arup, 2012\)](#) **CD9/12/1**

## Green Belt

- [Green Belt Review: Stage 1 \(Arup, April 2013\)](#) **CD9/E2**
- [Green Belt Review: Stage 2 \(Arup, Sept 2013\)](#) **CD9/E9**



## Housing Potential

- The [Hicks Gate Development Concept Options Report \(Arup, Feb 2013\)](#) **CD9/CO8** identifies that this area could deliver up to 1,200 homes on suitable land within BANES. The Council has only assessed land available within BANES.

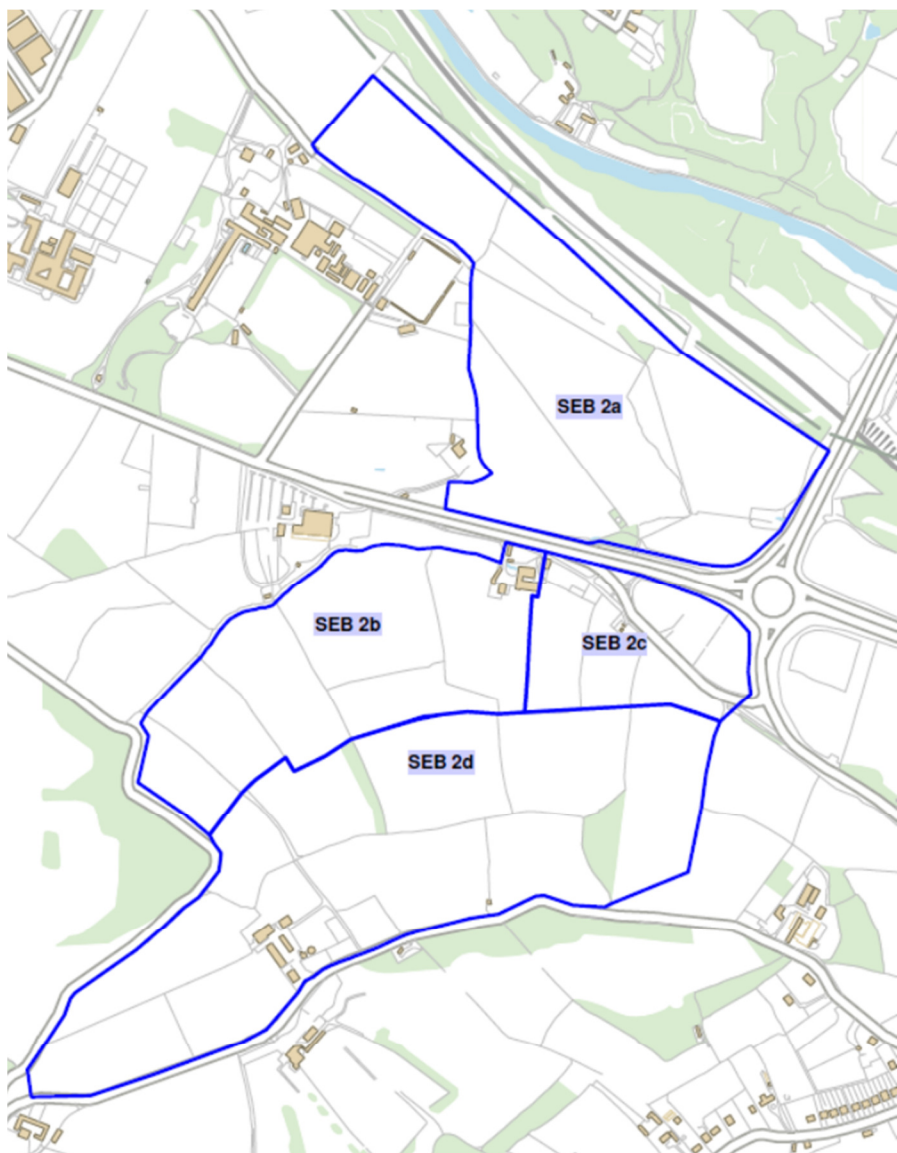
## Land Availability

- The majority of this area is being promoted by area promoted by Crest Strategic and Key Properties. To the east of the Hicks Gate roundabout other parties have signalled the availability of a few small

## Summary of Suitability Assessment

- See plan overleaf for land parcels referred to below.
- SEB2b to south of the A4 is considered to be largely suitable for development. The precise extent of development on the hillside will require careful master planning.
- SEB 2a and 2c are also suitable but the high landscape and visual impacts would be higher
  - Development in parts of this area would have an unacceptably high impact on the distinctive undulating landscape and would urbanise some of the rural area which currently serves to separate Bristol and Keynsham.
  - Development would be isolated from the edge of Bristol due to the intervening college and Long Fox Manor flats in their spacious, well 'treed' grounds.
  - No known significant historic environment or nature conservation issues have been identified, although further assessment may indicate otherwise.
  - Appropriate setting would be required to the Historic Garden south of the railway.
  - Power lines along the north part of this area will require an appropriate development buffer.
  - Development of the higher part of the ridge and the part of the area close to the Hicks Gate roundabout junction would result in high landscape and visual impacts.
- 2d is not suitable.

## Location of appraisal cells



## Landscape and Visual Aspects

### North of the A4 (SEB 2a)

#### **Summary**

- *The landscape and visual impact would be high. Mitigation would be ineffective unless development was very low density in a well treed parkland setting. It would not be possible to mitigate for the loss of the character of the open landform.*

#### **Existing Conditions**

- This is an interesting rural landscape with an attractive, small scale, complex and varied landform which is undulating especially in the eastern half of the site where a stream winds through the landscape. The land rises gently towards the north eastern part of the site. It is divided into a number

of small to medium fields bounded by hedgerows with some walling. There are some significant trees principally along the western boundaries of the site, the northern boundary (railway cutting) and along the stream with some young trees and shrubs forming dense scrub along part of the A4 boundary.

- A significant electricity power line runs parallel to the railway line in the northern part of the site. The A4 bounds the site to the south and the A4174 ring road bounds the site to the east. Immediately to the west of the area (within Bristol CC) , are three properties in large well treed grounds – St Brendan’s 6th Form College, Long Fox Manor, and a smaller private house / farm. These form a distinctive, well ‘treed’ landscape break with the urban edge of Bristol and separate the Hicks Gate North site completely from the City such that it relates more strongly to the rural landscape to the east and south.
- The site is viewed from the Hanham Hills to the north which is criss-crossed by well used public rights of way (PROWs); from Hicks Gate Ridge (Stockwood Lane Golf Course Road) to the south; from the A4 immediately to the south and from paths within the site.
- From the Hanham Hills the site is very prominent in the extensive southerly views. It has no visual relationship with Bristol except for a small area at the western end of the site where the power line prevents development. The site area forms part of the important separation between Bristol and Keynsham and this countryside wedge is seen very clearly from this viewpoint.
- From Hicks Gate ridge the site is prominent in the middle distance and currently forms part of a rural attractive wide sweeping valley landscape set out below the ridge and marred only by the ring road.
- From the A4 where there are significant rush hour periods with very slow moving or stationary traffic with clear views into the site, currently the landscape is rural and the view is dominated by the interesting and attractive undulating landform. There is no visual link with the Bristol conurbation from Hicks Gate ridge or the A4.

### **Landscape and visual impact**

- Development would involve loss of the rural character and loss of the distinctive and attractive small scale undulating landform. Development would be isolated from the edge of Bristol due to the intervening college and Long Fox Manor flats in their spacious, well ‘treed’ grounds and would also break up the rural separation between Bristol and Keynsham.
- From all areas the effect of development is the loss of attractive rural views and, especially when seen both from the higher land to the north and from the Hicks Gate ridge affecting the whole of the much more extensive rural view, thus reducing the separation effect of the green belt between Bristol and Keynsham. The site is sufficiently far from the developed edge of Bristol as to bear no visual relation to it.

## Mitigation

- Development would result in the loss of the attractive open landform which could not be effectively mitigated. Likewise it would not be possible to effectively mitigate the impact on wider views, of which this area is a component part, unless development was very low density and landscape planting was very extensive.

## South of the A4 (area SEB 2b-d)

### Summary

- *SEB 2b: The landscape and visual impacts would be low to moderate. Mitigation would potentially be very effective.*
- *SEB 2c and 2d: The landscape and visual impacts would be high. Effective mitigation would be difficult because of the prominence of the area and because of the landform.*

### Existing Conditions

- The site comprises low lying rural land at the bottom of the Hicks Gate ridge and the curving slopes of the ridge itself. Land use is principally permanent pasture with small to medium fields and many good hedgerows. Hicks Gate Farm is just off the A4 at the eastern end of the site and a garden centre lies adjacent to the A4 within the Bristol area. There are a number of tree belts, small copses, areas of scrub, and hedgerow trees especially towards the western end of the site within the Bristol area. There is an intermittent but effective tree line along the A4 boundary. Stockwood Lane runs along part of the south western boundary of the site.
- The site is viewed in part from Hicks Gate Ridge; from Stockwood Lane; from the A4 and from Hanham Hills, Mount Pleasant and Conham Park all to the north.
- From Hicks Gate ridge the site is largely out of view but from Hanham Hills etc to the south there are clear views over the area. The eastern end of the site reads as open countryside with Hicks Gate Farm well connected to the countryside to the east and the south. Further to the west the higher ground is visible outside the area and the lower slopes and flatter land behind the garden centre within the Bristol area are well screened by trees both along the A4 and within the site and by the nature of the landform itself.
- From the A4 there are frequent glimpses into the area through the intermittent tree screen. Because part of the site is at a lower level than the road, when combined with the roadside tree screen it is not prominent in the view and is well contained visually by the backdrop of the ridge. Towards the eastern end the site is much more prominent in views from the road.

- From Stockwood Lane good hedges on the lane side screen the site which is largely set down in a valley. Glimpses are to a verdant rural landscape with good hedgerows and clumps of trees possibly surrounding ponds in places.

### **Landscape and visual impacts**

- Development would involve the loss of the rural character and probably also the verdant hedgerows and tree clumps. Due to the site extending up to the current built edge of Bristol albeit the Park and Ride site, there is a limited connection with the city.
- The eastern end and the Hick's Gate Ridge are the visually most prominent part of the site and the most visually integrated with the rural countryside around it. The rest of the site is remarkably well contained visually and provided that the A4 tree screen was maintained in one form or another, development could be accommodated without too much visual impact.

### **Mitigation**

- There are some good hedges and tree clumps in the western part of the site, at least some of these should be retained to form green links through the site. Other mitigation measures are likely to include maintaining and adding to the trees along the A4 and planting a tree belt along the southern boundary up the ridge slope to help prevent any skyline effects of development.

## **Historic Environment**

### **Existing Conditions**

- Three Grade II Listed Buildings lie on the western boundary of the appraisal area – St Kenya House, St Kenya House Gates and Stockwood Farm.
- Fox's Wood (Registered Historic Park and Garden) lies within the north-east corner of the appraisal area, adjacent to the railway.
- Within the appraisal area there is evidence of a possible Neolithic henge at Durley Hill, as well as numerous Prehistoric, Roman and medieval findspots and post-medieval boundary markers.

### **Impacts**

- Development of the area could potentially have a very damaging effect on any buried archaeological remains, including the known Prehistoric and Roman occupation in the area, in particular the possible henge monument at Durley Hill. There are also concerns about the high quality landscape along the Avon Valley and the impact on the setting of Fox's Wood (Registered Historic Park & Garden), and that due regard is given to the setting of the Listed Buildings at Stockwood.

### **Mitigation**

- Whilst there is the potential to preserve archaeological sites within open spaces, this requires detailed knowledge of their actual location. The settings of the Foxes Wood and the Listed Buildings could be protected within the development by careful planning around these sites.

## Summary

- Any proposed mitigation will require knowledge of the exact location, extent, date and significance of past settlements/activity. This will require fieldwork to examine the area such as trial trenching and/or geophysical survey. More detailed desk-based assessment will also be needed to address the wider impact on the historic environment, in particular the impact on the setting of Historic Park & Garden and Listed Buildings.

## Nature Conservation

### Existing Conditions

- The northern boundary of this area is immediately adjacent to a site of nature conservation importance (SNCI).
- No records of UK or Local BAP species are recorded for the development area (but little information held).
- The hedgerows within the south west of the area maybe important, but have not been surveyed.
- Working information from BCC indicates no statutory designations within the area of search, but does flag up a local plan designation – a local wildlife network over much of the BCC land. ("Wildlife Network" has local plan policy as follows: NE6 (I) The city's wildlife network will be protected and, where possible, enhanced. (II) Development on wildlife network sites, as defined on the Proposals Map, will not be permitted unless:
  - (i) An open corridor is retained which maintains an effective link in the network;
  - (ii) An open buffer zone which gives effective added protection to any adjoining site of nature conservation interest is retained;
  - (iii) Habitats or features of identified importance to wildlife are retained and protected from any significant adverse effect;
  - (iv) The site is shown not to serve or support any substantive wildlife interest, including the necessary function of the wildlife network, as a result of further detailed site assessment;

### Impacts

- Potential impacts to species-rich hedgerows – a habitat of principal Importance
- Potential impacts to adjoining SNCIs. Impacts to BCC wildlife network.

### Mitigation

- Buffer areas would be required to protect the SNCI sites; retention and enhancements to then wildlife corridor through the site would be required as will protection and retention of key hedgerows.

## Summary

- Limited information is available, but there would appear to be no significant issues subject to adequate provision of a wildlife corridor and protection of adjacent SNCIs. Detailed site surveys and impact assessments are required prior to capacity decisions and site design

## Green Belt

- Green Belt Review Stage 1 Report (Arup, April 2013) **CD9/E2**