

# **Land West of Ashgrove Road, Sevenoaks**

Green Belt Appraisal  
September 2022

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This document has been prepared and checked in accordance with ISO 9001:2015.

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1. Background

LDA Design was commissioned in March 2022 to provide landscape design and assessment services in relation to the proposed residential development on the land west of Ashgrove Road, Sevenoaks (the 'Site'), on behalf of Sigma Strategic Land Limited.

Sigma Strategic Land Limited promoted the site to Sevenoaks District Council during its Call for Sites in January 2022. The Site has been promoted with an indicative capacity of 47 dwellings as an edge of settlement site and as a sustainable and logical extension to Sevenoaks.

The Proposed Development comprises an Outline Planning Application (OPA) for up to 50 homes, together with associated green infrastructure. All matters reserved except for access

This Green Belt Report considers the contribution the Site makes to the purposes of the Green Belt (as defined by National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)) and the ability of the Site to accommodate development without impacts on the strategic function of the Green Belt.

It is noted Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) have undertaken a borough-wide Green Belt Review (published in 2017) which determines how different areas perform against Green Belt purposes and makes recommendations for potential sites for Green Belt release. The Site was not recommended for further consideration as part of the SDC Green Belt Review, however, SDC have confirmed that they are undertaking a further review of brownfield sites and Green Belt land in order to meet predicted housing targets.

SDC are in the process of preparing an updated Green Belt Review, and it was understood that this was due to be published in Summer 2022, but has subsequently been delayed. As such, the current Green Belt evidence is not up to date and does not necessarily reflect current growth strategy / housing requirements.

This Green Belt Report part of a suite of documents supporting the OPA for the Proposed Development. It should be read in conjunction with the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA); which consider the impact of the Proposed Development on landscape character and views; and Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Report, which considers the contribution the Sites makes to the natural beauty and special character of the AONB

### 1.2. The Need for Green Belt Release

Over 90% of Sevenoaks District is designated as Green Belt<sup>1</sup> thus providing a clear constraint for the ability to meet the overall development needs across a new local plan period, both for housing and employment uses.

Green Belt release to meet housing and employment growth is a strategy being undertaken by a number of Local Planning Authorities and has rigorously been tested through Local Plan examinations. The table below provides details of Local Plan adopted within the past 2-3 years that have included Green Belt release.

<sup>1</sup> Development in the Green Belt SPD - Sevenoaks District Council. Available at (online) [https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/file/314/green\\_belt\\_supplementary\\_planning\\_document](https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/downloads/file/314/green_belt_supplementary_planning_document) [accessed 22 July 2022]

Local Authority	Adopted Local Plan	Polices Map
Guildford Borough Council	Guildford borough Local Plan: strategy and sites (2015-2034) (25 April 2019)	<a href="https://www.guildford.gov.uk/localplan/policiesmap">https://www.guildford.gov.uk/localplan/policiesmap</a>
Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council	Adopted Borough Plan (11 June 2019)	<a href="https://ftpes.nuneatonandbedworth.gov.uk/planning/BOROUGHPLANPOLICIESMAPFINALauto.pdf">https://ftpes.nuneatonandbedworth.gov.uk/planning/BOROUGHPLANPOLICIESMAPFINALauto.pdf</a>
Sunderland City Council	Core Strategy and Development Plan (2015-2033) (30 Jan 2020)	<a href="https://www.sunderland.gov.uk/media/22425/CSDP-Policies-Map/pdf/CSDP_Policies_Map.pdf?m=637290405026470000">https://www.sunderland.gov.uk/media/22425/CSDP-Policies-Map/pdf/CSDP_Policies_Map.pdf?m=637290405026470000</a>
Wycombe District Council	Wycombe District Local Plan (WDLP) (19 August 2019)	<a href="https://www.wycombe.gov.uk/uploads/public/documents/Planning/Wycombe-Sheet-1.pdf">https://www.wycombe.gov.uk/uploads/public/documents/Planning/Wycombe-Sheet-1.pdf</a>
Stevenage Borough Council	Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031 (22 May 2019)	<a href="https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/planning-policy/stevenage-borough-local-plan/policies-map.pdf">https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/planning-policy/stevenage-borough-local-plan/policies-map.pdf</a>
Bolsover District Council	Local Plan for Bolsover District (4th March 2020)	<a href="https://www.bolsover.gov.uk/index.php?option=com_content&amp;view=article&amp;id=90">https://www.bolsover.gov.uk/index.php?option=com_content&amp;view=article&amp;id=90</a>
Rugby Borough Council	Rugby Borough Local Plan 2011-2031 (4th June 2019)	<a href="https://www.rugby.gov.uk/info/20004/planning_strategy/348/local_plan_2011-2031">https://www.rugby.gov.uk/info/20004/planning_strategy/348/local_plan_2011-2031</a>
South Oxfordshire District Council	Adopted Local Plan 2035 (10 December 2020)	<a href="https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/Adopted-Policies-Layers-Map-2020-Dec-North-and-South-25000.pdf">https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/Adopted-Policies-Layers-Map-2020-Dec-North-and-South-25000.pdf</a>
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Local Plan (9th September 2020)	<a href="https://www.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk/article/428/Interactive-planning-map">https://www.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk/article/428/Interactive-planning-map</a>

### 1.3. Report Structure

The report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2.0** summarises the national and local policy background applicable to Green Belt purposes in Sevenoaks District.

- **Section 3.0** provides an overview of the Site context with reference to landscape features, landscape character, topography, green infrastructure, access and recreation and views/ visual amenity.
- **Section 4.0** summarises the findings of the Sevenoaks District Green Belt Review and makes independent judgements regarding the evaluation of the relevant areas / parcels appraised.
- **Section 5.0** assesses the Site against Green Belt purposes, using the same criteria applied to the Sevenoaks District Green Belt Review
- **Section 6.0** describes the emerging development proposals and how the scheme has been informed by an understanding of its Green Belt context.
- **Section 7.0** provides the summary and conclusions.

A series of supporting figures are included at the end of this report, as follows:

- **Figure 1:** Site Location
- **Figure 2:** Immediate Site Context
- **Figure 3:** Landscape Designations
- **Figure 4:** Topography
- **Figure 5:** Local Landscape Character
- **Figure 6:** Access and Recreation

#### 1.4. Site Location and Context

The Site is located to the south-west of Sevenoaks, , adjoining the existing settlement edge to the north; and lying between Ashgrove Road to the east and Oak Lane to the west. The Site comprises a single field parcel of rough grassland pasture, and accessed via a neighbouring field to the south. The Site extents to around 2.3ha. **Figure 1** places the Site in its local context.

**Figure 2** places the Site in its immediate context and illustrates that the Site's boundaries are defined by a combination of vegetation comprising native trees, shrubs and hedgerows. As shown on **Figure 2**, there is a small area of woodland to the south-east corner of the Site and a small overgrown pond along the eastern Site boundary.

The Site's boundaries are defined as follows:

- To the north, the Site adjoins existing residential properties (comprising detached and semi-detached dwellings situated between Oak Lane and Ashgrove Road), delineated by close-board fencing and rear garden hedgerows. Further north lies numerous residential properties to the east of Britains Lane, alongside The New Beacon School to the west of Britains Lane. Immediately to the north-west of the Site lies a small collection of agricultural fields, associated with isolated properties / buildings, beyond which lies woodland. Further north lies two expansive and well-established woodlands – Great Britain's Wood and Mill Bank Wood.
- To the east, the Site abuts Ashgrove Road, along which lies a row of predominately detached residential properties and forms the southern-eastern extent of the built-up

area of Sevenoaks. Beyond this the residential area extends north-eastwards towards the town centre.

- To the south, the Site adjoins another field, marked by a row of tree / shrub planting and a post-and-wire fence. Further south, the landscape comprises some isolated properties (with expansive curtilages), which are surrounded by well-established woodland (which are unnamed).
- To the west, the boundary of the Site is delineated by a combination of well-established tree and shrub vegetation that line Oak Lane. To the immediate west of Oak Lane lies a small collection of agricultural fields, associated with a nearby two properties along Oak Lane. These fields border Mill Bank Wood and A21 / Sevenoaks Bypass, which is a strategic route north-south, connecting London / M25 to Hastings on the south coast.

## 1.5. Approach, Assumptions and Limitations

This Green Belt Report considers the contribution the Site makes to the purposes of the Green Belt. The purposes are defined by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), as set out in **Section 2.1** below.

This Green Belt Report reviews and utilises the assessment methodology and findings of the Sevenoaks District Green Belt Assessment and is supplemented with independent desk and field studies undertaken by LDA Design.

In line with the Sevenoaks District Green Belt Assessment, this Green Belt Report considers the contribution that Site makes to Green Belt purposes independent of the proposed type / form of development. It then considers the ability of the Site to accommodate development without impacts on the strategic function of the Green Belt; and how the design of the Proposed Development has been informed by Green Belt context.

## 2.0 Policy Context

### 2.1. National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012 and sets out the Government's planning policies for England. The latest revision was published in July 2021.

Section 13 of the NPPF provides guidance in respect of Green Belt land, confirming that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policies is *"to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence"*.

Paragraph 134 identifies the five purposes of Green Belt land as follows:

- 1) *to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
- 2) *to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
- 3) *to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
- 4) *to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
- 5) *to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.*

Paragraph 140 states that *"once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans"*.

Paragraph 142 states that *"when drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account."*

Paragraph 143 identifies how plans should define Green Belt boundaries. This includes not including land which is unnecessary to keep permanently open; and define new boundaries using recognisable, physical features.

Paragraph 148 refers to proposals affecting the Green Belt. It states that:

*"When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations"*.

### 2.2. National Planning Practice Guidance

The National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) on Green Belt provides further guidance in relation to matters of openness and compensatory improvements to the Green Belt.

In relation to openness, it states at Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 64-001-20190722 that relevant considerations include:

- *"openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume;*
- *the duration of the development, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness; and*
- *the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation."*

In relation to improvements, it states at Paragraph: 002 Reference ID: 64-002-20190722 that policy-making authorities should make provision for enhancing the environmental quality and accessibility of the remaining Green Belt land. This could include:

- *“new or enhanced green infrastructure;*
- *woodland planting;*
- *landscape and visual enhancements (beyond those needed to mitigate the immediate impacts of the proposal);*
- *improvements to biodiversity, habitat connectivity and natural capital;*
- *new or enhanced walking and cycle routes; and*
- *improved access to new, enhanced or existing recreational and playing field provision.”*

## 2.3. Local Planning Policy

Adopted local planning policy is set out in the ‘Core Strategy’ (adopted 22 February 2011) and ‘Allocations and Development Management Plan’ (adopted February 2015), along with a number of adopted Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). Policies of relevance are outlined below:

### 2.3.1. Core Strategy (February 2011)

#### **Policy LO1 – Distribution of Development states that:**

*“Development will be focused within the built confines of existing settlements.*

*The Sevenoaks urban area, which includes Sevenoaks town, Riverhead, Dunton Green, Chipstead and Bessels Green, will be the principal focus for development in the District in accordance with Policies LO2 and LO3.....*

*In other locations priority will be given to protecting the rural character of the District. Development will only take place where it is compatible with policies for protecting the Green Belt and the High Weald and Kent Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, where relevant”.*

#### **Policy LO2 – Development in Sevenoaks Urban Area requires that [inter alia]:**

*“...In bringing forward Sites for development the emphasis in this area will be on:*

- ...
- *protection of the setting of the urban area and the distinctive character of the local environment and also respecting the physical and community identity of the adjoining settlements, and prevention of further coalescence.”*

#### **Policy LO8 – The Countryside and the Rural Economy requires that [inter alia]:**

*“The extent of the Green Belt will be maintained.*

*The countryside will be conserved and the distinctive features that contribute to the special character of its landscape and its biodiversity will be protected and enhanced where possible. The distinctive character of the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and their settings, will be conserved and enhanced.*



*Particular regard will be given to the condition and sensitivity of the landscape character and securing the recommended landscape actions in the proposed SPD to ensure that all development conserves and enhances local landscape character and that appropriate mitigation is provided where damage to local character cannot be avoided..."*

## 2.3.2. Development in the Green Belt SPD (February 2015)

This SPD provides guidance for development proposals within the Green Belt.

Section 11 provide design guidance for Green Belt development. This includes:

- Careful consideration to the siting and form of proposed buildings, including impact on views from form both the immediate vicinity and wider countryside
- Careful consideration of materials, using those that are sympathetic with the local context and reduce visual impact.
- Careful consideration of landscape setting, including retention of existing trees and hedgerows / field boundary pattern; new planting; and sustainable drainage systems,

Section 12 defines 'Very Special Circumstances'. It states that:

*"When attempting to prove Very Special Circumstances the onus is on the applicant to prove that the exceptional nature of the proposal outweighs the harm that it would cause to the Green Belt.*

*Circumstances that are accepted as being "very special" are very rare, but will usually involve a specific judgement being made that no other option is available in light of the unique circumstances and individual case. These circumstances are not common and are unique 'one-offs' that are rarely likely to be repeatable"*

## 3.0 Baseline Conditions

### 3.1. Introduction

This section provides a summary of the baseline landscape and visual context of the Site, with reference to:

- Landscape Features, Landuse and Topography
- Landscape Character and Sensitivity
- Green Infrastructure, Access and Recreation
- Views and Visual Amenity
- Other Environmental Considerations

For a full description of the baseline landscape and visual environment, please refer to the supporting LVIA.

### 3.2. Landscape Features, Landuse and Topography

As set out in the **Section 1.0 Introduction**, the Site comprises a single field parcel of rough grassland pasture, which is accessed via a neighbouring field to the south. The Site's boundaries are defined by a combination of vegetation comprising native trees, shrubs and hedgerows. As shown on **Figure 2**, there is a small area of woodland to the south-east corner of the Site and a small overgrown pond along the eastern Site boundary.

The local context is generally suburban, with predominately largely scale, detached housing on the outer edge of Sevenoaks along a network of roads and lanes. Houses are typically set within well vegetated plots, contributing to the well-treed character of the local area. The Site itself – and the land to the south and west of the Site – could be described as 'urban fringe' as it comprises scattered settlement, small scale grazing fields and woodland forming a transitional area with the surrounding countryside.

The Site is located within the extent of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Metropolitan Green Belt, as shown on **Figure 3**.

The Site contains no Tree Preservation Orders and is not within a Conservation area. There are no public rights of way (PRoW) or cycling routes within the site, and the land is not designated for its heritage or biodiversity value. It contains no Listed Buildings or locally listed heritage assets and is not Registered Common Land.

**Figure 4** presents the topography of the Site and its wider context. In general, the topography of the Site and its surroundings is characterised by an undulating landform, that broadly rises to a local ridgeline that is formed around Goathurst Common, Bayley Hill and Hubbard's Hill. The surrounding residential areas sits a similar elevation as the Site, with the south-western edge of Sevenoaks extending up the base of the ridge, before giving way to steeper ground and areas of woodland. However, to the south of Sevenoaks, the urban area encompasses higher ground around Weald Road and Tonbridge Road. The Site itself comprises some gentle undulations, generally falling from west to east. The highest area of landform is located within the south-western corner, at approximately 170m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). It falls towards the eastern extent the Site, with is at 158m AOD. Along the Site's eastern and western boundaries, there are in places a difference in

levels, up to 2m in height (approximately) between the Site's field and the adjoining road. Where this occur, steep vegetated embankments are found.

### 3.3. Landscape Character and Sensitivity

The 'Sevenoaks Landscape Character Assessment' ('SLCA') sets out the sets out the primary evidence base for landscape character within the district, mapping and describing the key characteristics of the landscape.

The Site and the surrounding area fall within SLCA 10b – Sevenoaks Western Chart, as shown on Figure 5. The key characteristics of this area are described as [inter alia]:

- *“Undulating woodland and agricultural landscape, steeply climbing to central hills reaching over 200m AOD.*
- *Extensive wooded commons of dense, mixed broadleaf, acid woodland with irregular pasture clearings and heath.*
- *Historic land uses such as wood pasture, coppice used for charcoal burning.*
- *Rural settlement set around greens or in a linear pattern fringing commons.*
- *Large mansion houses set in woodland on the ridge, for example West Heath School.*
- *Generally enclosed landscape with occasional glimpsed views over the Low Weald from the steep south facing scarp.”*

The 'Landscape Evaluation' of LCA 10b – Sevenoaks Western Chart describes that the landscape is generally in 'good' condition with a unified and intact pattern of woodland and pasture. However, it is noted that there is some decline in places and that large modern properties; horsiculture; and the A21 Sevenoaks Bypass all detract from the rural character of the area.

The 'Landscape Sensitivity Assessment' ('LSA') provides a general overview of comparative landscape sensitivity around the key settlements (based on landscape character) for Sevenoaks District. It provides information within each assessment area from which key sensitivities can be identified and achieve the best integration of built development.

The LSA considers sensitivity to the most likely type of development to come forward in Sevenoaks, which were concluded as being residential development (defined as 2/3 storey properties); and commercial development (defined as small-scale office, light industry or small sheds (B1/B2)). The assessment considers sensitivity to the 'principle' of these development types, without knowing the specific size or location of potential development.

The LSA provides a more detailed description of the landscape to the west of Sevenoaks, and highlights its predominately rural character, however, it does indicate that this area is less typical of the wider 'charts'; has a high degree of enclosure; and is influenced by the settlement edge.

The LSA states that the overall sensitivity of the landscape to residential development is medium-high due to the highly rural character, although it is noted that land along the settlement edge of Sevenoaks it likely to be less sensitive:

*“Areas with lower sensitivity would be the areas of flat land well enclosed by trees on the modern edges of Sevenoaks while areas of higher sensitivity would include elevated hills and ridges including the scarp top, areas of common and areas that are disconnected from the settlement edge.”*

The study also notes that there is a well vegetated edge to Sevenoaks which separates it from the wider landscape; this area plays no role in providing separation between settlements; and that land to the west of the A21 Sevenoaks bypass has not been assessed as the road forms a physical barrier within the landscape. All these judgements this would suggest that the land to the east of the A21 is closely associated with the urban area of Sevenoaks.

### 3.4. Green Infrastructure, Access and Recreation

There is no known Green Infrastructure Strategy for Sevenoaks District, however, the Adopted Local Plan contains policies relating to green infrastructure generally and the creation of multi-function green space.

The Site itself is not publicly accessible although a Public Byway runs to the south of the Site and provides access to the wider countryside.

It is also noted lies approximately 1km to the south-east of the Site. This is publicly accessible Local Wildlife Site, with a network of paths and lanes criss-crossing an area of woodland.

### 3.5. Views and Visual Amenity

Field study has been undertaken to understand the Site’s visual context.

From within the Site itself, there are outward views north, east, and south-east of adjoining residential areas. In the higher parts of the Site – which are located in its south-western extents – there are more open views across Sevenoaks and towards Knole Park, which is located to the east of the town centre. To the south / south-east, residential properties are also visible, along with the adjoining field parcels and woodland beyond the Site. The woodland in the surrounding areas curtails views such that there are no views beyond the immediate context of the Site to the wider countryside. Views to the west are largely obscured by the Site’s boundary vegetation, and there are no views of the A21 Sevenoaks Bypass or the countryside beyond.

Visibility towards the Site would generally be restricted to the Site’s immediate context, from the local roads (Ashgrove Road and Oak Lane) that border it, and a short section of the PRoW (ref. 0221/SU36/1) to the south of it. Visibility from the wider landscape would, in places, extend up to approximately 1km from the Site’s boundaries, however, such views would be limited to locations on elevated landform where intervening vegetation and/or buildings does not screen views (or there are gaps), and likely to be glimpsed views at most.

Overall, it concluded that the Site is not highly visible in the surrounding landscape / townscape mainly due to the screening / enclosure provided by existing boundary vegetation.

## 4.0 Sevenoaks Green Belt Assessment

### 4.1. Introduction

The following Section provides a review of the Sevenoaks District Council Green Belt Review undertaken in 2017. A summary is provided of the assessment findings of relevance to the Site and LDA Design's professional opinion of how the Site itself preforms against Green Belt purposes. Commentary is provided on the approach / methodology applied and any limitations.

It should be noted that there is no prescribed methodology for the assessment of Green Belts. However, practice has evolved which typically divides the Green Belt into parcels which are then described and their contribution to Green Belt function analysed against the purposes of Green Belt policy set out in the NPPF. The issue with this approach is that the ability of the Green Belt to continue to perform its fundamental purposes should a particular site be developed – within a larger parcel - is not fully considered; resulting in parcels being discounted for Green Belt release but where there may be some potential.

### 4.2. Green Belt Boundary Review 2017

#### 4.2.1. Overview

The Green Belt Boundary Review (GBR) considered the whole of the Green Belt within Sevenoaks and seeks to ascertain:

- Whether all land designated fulfils clear Green Belt purposes.
- The degree of significance attached to various parts of the Green Belt in strategic terms.
- The extent to which some Green Belt could be considered for release without compromising its overall purpose.

A series of strategic-scale Green Belt parcels were identified and defined mainly by the identification of motorways; A and B roads; railway lines; and rivers, brooks, and waterbodies as boundaries to these parcels. In some instances, other features were used to define the parcel boundaries, including combined boundary features where they were close together. Parcels extending across neighbouring authorities were also identified where appropriate.

Each of the Green Belt parcels were assessed against the five purposes of Green Belt land (as defined by the NPPF) and using defined criteria for both qualitative and quantitative judgements.

A score out of five was attributed for each criterion based on whether the parcel met the Green Belt purposes 'strongly' or 'weakly', as follows:

- 1 - Meets Criterion Weakly or Very Weakly.
- 2 - Meets Criterion Relatively Weakly.
- 3 - Meets Criterion.
- 4 - Meets Criterion Relatively Strongly.

- 5 - Meets Criterion Strongly or Very Strongly.

Following completion of the individual Green Belt parcel assessments, the scores for purposes 1 - 4 were collated, highlighting those areas meeting the purposes to a lesser or greater extent. It is important to note that each of the NPPF purposes were considered to be equally significant, and that any Green Belt area scoring 'strongly' for at least one Green Belt Purpose was considered to meet the assessment criteria 'strongly' overall.

Parcels performing 'weakly' were recommended for further consideration / more detailed assessment. Report also identified whether there are any smaller scale sub-areas within strongly performing parcels which met Green Belt purposes weakly and thus should be recommend for further consideration.

The areas for further consideration were broadly categorised as follows:

- Whole Parcels scoring weakly overall against all NPPF purposes which could be considered further.
- Whole parcels which, although medium or strongly scoring against the NPPF purposes, have particular characteristics which might lend themselves to further consideration. These specific characteristics are set out clearly for each recommended area.
- Medium or strongly scoring Parcels where there is considered to be clear scope for sub-division to identify weakly performing sub-areas.

Those areas (either parcels or sub-areas) recommended for further consideration where then subject to three further separate and concurrent assessments:

- Assessment Against Local Considerations
- Landscape Assessment
- Boundary Analysis

## 4.2.2. Assessment Criteria

With regard to **Purpose 1 - To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas**, the GBR considers the role of the Green Belt in preventing the sprawl of London, but also large built-up areas across the Borough and within neighbouring authorities. Large built-up areas have generally been defined to correspond to the Tier 1 / 2 settlements identified in the Sevenoaks District Settlement Hierarchy (2015) and comprise the Dartford / Gravesend; Tonbridge; Royal Tunbridge Wells / Southborough; and Oxted.

In assessing the risk of sprawl, the GBR considers that a parcel must be at the edge of one or more distinct built-up areas to prevent development which would constitute sprawl and considers the relationship between the built-up area(s). The following criteria are defined:

- A parcel predominantly surrounded or enclosed by two or more distinct areas of built form and that also retains a strong link to the wider Green Belt, would play a particularly important role in preventing sprawl. The assessment refers to this as 'contiguous'.

- A parcel displaying a low level of containment by a large-built area, such as if it was simply abutting a large-built area, may prevent sprawl but to a lesser extent. The assessment refers to this as 'connected' with a large built-up area.
- A parcel almost entirely contained or surrounded by built development which forms part of a single built-up area and has limited connections to the wider Green Belt, would only prevent sprawl to a limited extent (rather, potential development would likely be classified as infill). The assessment refers to this as 'enclosed' by a single built-up area.

This initial assessment is supplemented by additional analysis on the degree to which sprawl would be restricted by another barrier / features, such as infrastructure and landform.

With regard to **Purpose 2 - To prevent neighbouring towns from merging**, the GBR considers the gaps between all non-Green-Belt settlements in the Borough (which includes towns, larger villages, and smaller rural villages), along with settlements adjacent to the edge of the District.

The extent to which an area of Green Belt protects land that stops settlements from merging was assessed using the following criteria:

- 'Essential gaps', where development would significantly reduce the perceived or actual distance between settlements.
- 'Wider gaps', where limited development may be possible without coalescence between settlements.
- 'Less essential gaps', where development is likely to be possible without any risk of coalescence of settlements.

With regard to **Purpose 3: To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment**, the GBR considered openness and the extent to which the Green Belt can be characterised as 'countryside'. The GBR Report notes that urban fringe land uses – such as commons, caravan parks, racing tracks, nature and wildlife reserves, deer parks, country houses and grounds and golf courses - can all have an impact on the 'openness' of the Green Belt.

The degree of openness was initially determined on the percentage of built form within a parcel and supplemented by judgements on character. The extent to which a parcel might be identified as 'countryside' was defined on the following broad criteria:

- 'Strong unspoilt rural character' - defined as land with an absence of built development and characterised by rural land uses and landscapes, including agricultural land, forestry, woodland, shrubland/scrubland and open fields.
- 'Largely rural character' - defined as land with a general absence of built development, largely characterised by rural land uses and landscapes but with some other sporadic developments and man-made structures.
- 'Semi-urban character' - defined as land which begins on the edge of the fully built-up area and contains a mix of urban and rural land uses before giving way to the wider countryside. Land uses might include publicly accessible natural green spaces and green corridors, country parks and local nature reserves, small-scale food production (e.g. market gardens) and waste management facilities, interspersed with built



development more generally associated with urban areas (e.g. residential or commercial).

- 'Urban character' - defined as land which is predominantly characterised by urban land uses, including physical developments such as residential or commercial, or urban managed parks.

With regard to **Purpose 4 - To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns**, the GBR considered the extent to which surrounding countryside contributed to a settlements special character and historic setting. Appropriate 'historic towns', both within Sevenoaks District and neighbouring authorities, were identified through various heritage studies and comprised Sevenoaks, Westerham, Edenbridge, New Ash Green, Otford, Old Oxted; Wrotham; Ightham; Tonbridge; and Tunbridge Wells.

Two aspects are of particular importance with regard to assessment:

- The role of the Parcel in providing immediate context for the historic settlement (along the boundary between the settlement and the Green Belt)
- Contribution to views or vistas between the historic settlement and the surrounding countryside, looking both inwards and outwards where public viewpoints exist.

With regard to **Purpose 5 – To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land**, this was excluded from the GBR on the basis that urban land has already been considered by the council before considering potential Green Belt release land.

With regard to the **Assessment Against Local Considerations**, this was based on 'absolute constraints' – such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); Scheduled Monuments; and Ancient Woodland; and 'non-absolute constraints' – including Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) of the recommended areas. Constraints were identified using GIS data sets.

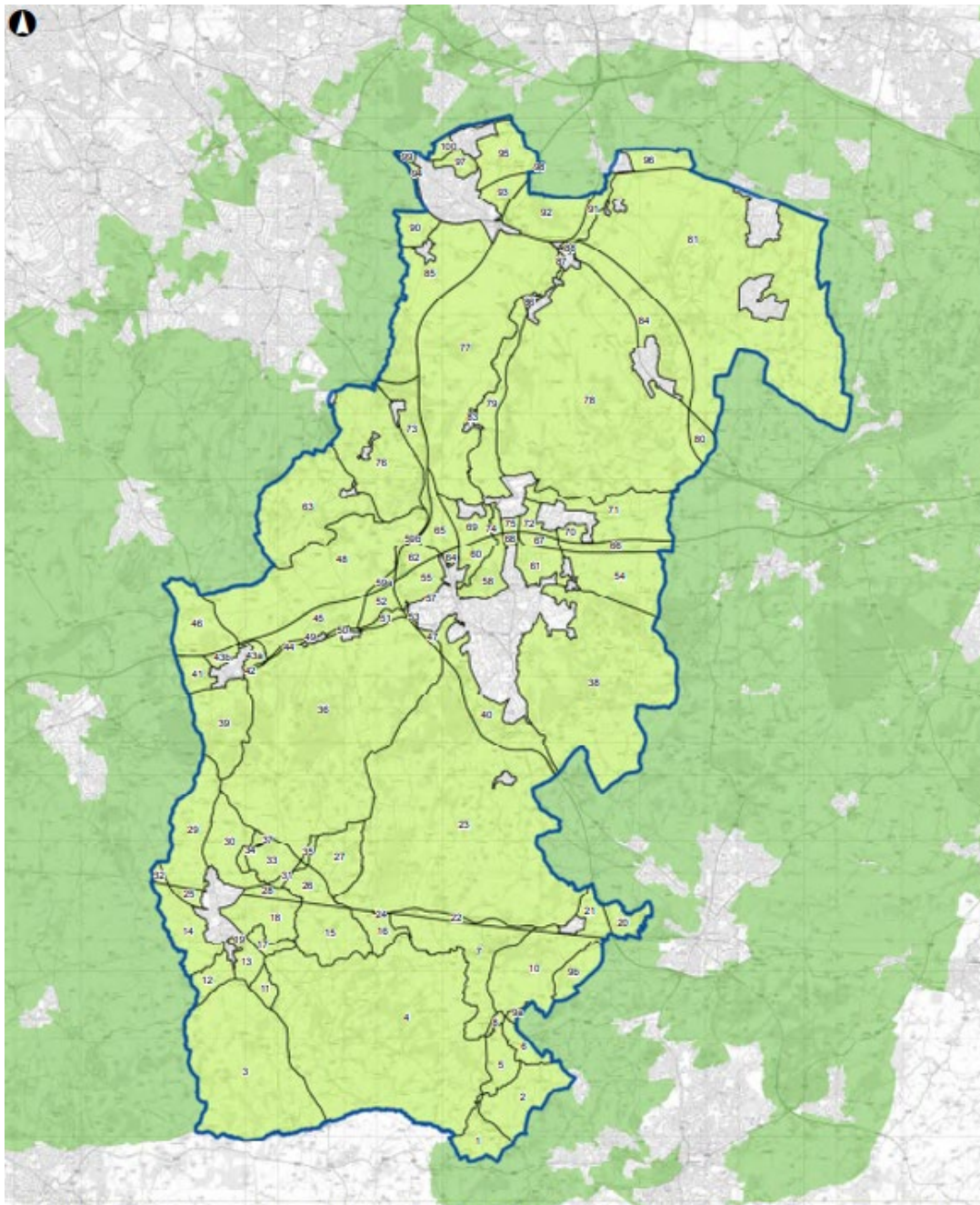
With regard to **Landscape Assessment**, this was based on a high-level assessment of landscape character / designation GIS data sets, along with a desk based review of the relevant special qualities/significances set out in the management plans for the High Weald AONB and the Kent Downs AONB. A finer grain, field based landscape and visual appraisal was then undertaken for each of the recommended areas, culminating in an assessment of landscape value, susceptibility and sensitivity for each site.

With regard to **Boundary Analysis**, each Recommended Area was considered in more detail to identify appropriate defensible boundaries.

#### 4.2.3. Parcel 40 Assessment Findings

The Site falls within Parcel 40, forming part of a relatively narrow tract of Green Belt between the settlement edge of Sevenoaks and A21 Sevenoaks Bypass.





The judgements made in relation to Green Belt purposes for Parcel 40 are set out below, alongside a summary of LDA Design's own judgements.

For the purpose of this commentary, a distinction is made between the northern part of Parcel 40, between the Riverhead area and Brittain's Wood; the central part of Parcel 40, between Brittain's Wood and Sevenoaks Common; and the southern part of Parcel 40, between Sevenoaks Common and Riverhill.

**Purpose 1 - To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas**

Green Belt Assessment:

*The parcel is connected to the large built-up area of Sevenoaks. The large built-up area is predominantly bounded by features lacking in durability or permanence, consisting of B-roads and the backs of houses. The parcel is an important barrier to sprawl.*

**The parcel scored '3+' / meets purpose moderately.**

LDA Design Opinion:

It is agreed that Parcel 40 helps prevent the sprawl of Sevenoaks to the west and that existing Green Belt boundaries lack durability.

As recorded in the GBR, the Parcel is 'connected' to the large built up area of Sevenoaks (as opposed to be contiguous or contained) - this is defined by the GBR methodology as an area that may prevent sprawl but to a **lesser extent**.

Due to the presence of the A21 Sevenoaks Bypass - which provides a clearly defined and durable boundary between Sevenoaks and the wider countryside; lack of other built up areas to the west; and the ability of existing roads and woodland within the Parcel to form new, durable Green Belt boundaries; there is potential for some Green Belt release without resulting in unrestricted sprawl.

This judgement would seem to be supported by the Landscape Sensitivity Study which – although not a review of Green Belt function – found that the landscape closest to the settlement edge was least sensitive to new development, and it was the woodland to the west of the parcel along with the A21 Sevenoaks Bypass, that separates Sevenoaks from the wider landscape and therefore would prevent widespread urban sprawl.

**Purpose 2 - To prevent neighbouring towns from merging**

Green Belt Assessment:

*The parcel forms part of the wider gap between Sevenoaks and Edenbridge, and between Sevenoaks and Sevenoaks Weald, maintaining the overall openness and scale of the gap. The north of the parcel is less important to preventing coalescence between these settlements.*

**The parcel scored '1' / 1 - Meets Criterion Weakly or Very Weakly.**

LDA Design Opinion:

LDA Design agree that Parcel 40 forms part of the gap between Sevenoaks and outlying settlements, and the north of the Parcel is less important in preventing coalescence. LDA Design consider that it is the southern part of Parcel 40 which plays some role in providing separation between Sevenoaks and Sevenoaks Weald, while the central and northern sections are less important, with no built up area in close proximity to the west.

However, LDA Design disagrees with the definition of this Parcel as being part of a 'wider gap' – it would more accurately be described as a 'less essential gap' where development is likely to be possible throughout the Parcel without any risk of coalescence of settlements. This is in part due to the presence of the A21 Sevenoaks Bypass, which provides a clearly defined and durable boundary between Sevenoaks and the wider countryside. As such, there is potential for some Green Belt release without resulting in neighbouring towns merging

This view would seem to be supported by the Landscape Sensitivity Study which – although not a review of Green Belt function – found that the this parcel provides no role in separating settlements.

### **Purpose 3 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment**

#### Green Belt Assessment:

*Approximately 2% of the parcel is covered by built form, comprising a school in the north of the parcel, and residential properties, a health centre and a school in the centre / south of the parcel. The parcel is characterised by agricultural fields and concentrated areas of woodland throughout, contributing to a very unspoilt rural character. Wooded areas restrict long views, but there are mid-length views where the parcel is more open. Overall, the parcel has a predominantly rural character*

**The parcel scored '4' - Meets Criterion Relatively Strongly.**

#### LDA Design Opinion:

LDA Design agree that Parcel 40 possesses a largely rural character, albeit the northern and central sections of the Parcel – which contains the Site – has qualities of 'semi-urban character' with pockets development between Brittain's Lane / Ashgrove Road and the A21 Sevenoaks Bypass. The urban area is most apparent around the intersection of Oak Lane with Brittain's Lane / Ashgrove Road, where development is more visually prominent within the Green Belt. Further south, development within and around Sevenoaks Common is more integrated into the countryside by surrounding woodland. While a degree of encroachment on the countryside is inevitable, it is considered that there is potential for some Green Belt release within the northern section of the Parcel without undue harm to the overall character of the area.

This view would seem to be supported by the Landscape Sensitivity Study which – although not a review of Green Belt function – found that the landscape closest to the settlement edge was least sensitive to new development, and it was the woodland to the west of the parcel along with the A21 Sevenoaks Bypass, that separates Sevenoaks from the wider landscape and therefore would limit the degree of encroachment.

### **Purpose 4 - To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns**

#### Green Belt Assessment:

*Although the parcel is connected to the historic town of Sevenoaks, it does not directly abut the historic area as identified through the Kent Historic Towns Survey. The parcel therefore does not meet this purpose.*

**The parcel scored '0' - Does not meet this purpose**

#### LDA Design Opinion:

LDA Design agree that Parcel 40 does not meet this purpose.

## 4.2.4. Parcel 40 Summary

Overall Parcel 40 was considered to perform a 'strong' Green Belt function. This was primarily due to the role of the Parcel in checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; and assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. As such, it was not recommended for further review / consideration and was not subject to Assessment Against Local Considerations / Landscape Assessment / Boundary Analysis.

LDA Design agrees that Parcel 40 has a role in checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas and assisting the safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. However, the assessment does not fully recognise the variations across the Parcel and the wider role of the A21 Sevenoaks Bypass in defining the break between the suburban fringe of Sevenoaks to east and more open countryside to the west.

While Green Belt release would inevitably result in some encroachment on the countryside, development within the central / northern section of Parcel 40 have the potential to relate well to the existing settlement area and result in more permanent and durable Green Belt boundaries.

As such, there is clear potential for some sub-division of the Parcel and definition of new Green Belt boundaries. In line with the GBR methodology deployed, medium or strongly scoring parcels were recommended for further consideration where specific characteristics were identified.

The conclusion that Parcel 40 performs a 'strong' Green Belt function is also heavily influenced by the higher score given to a single purpose (assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment). The Parcel only scores 'moderately' for Purpose 1; weakly for Purpose 2, and has no role in relation to Purpose 4, yet this is not reflected in overall the judgement.

## 5.0 LDA Design's Assessment of the Site

Using the same methodology as applied to the GBR, the Site has been assessed by LDA Design against the relevant Green Belt purposes i.e. to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; to prevent neighbouring towns from merging; and assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

With regard to Purpose 4 - **To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns**, this was not considered further as the GBR concluded the wider Parcel does not meet this purpose.

With regard to **Purpose 5 – To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land**, this was excluded from the GBR and therefore is not considered relevant.

### **Purpose 1 - To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas**

The Site is physically at the edge of the large built-up area of Sevenoaks and is adjoined by residential land-uses to the north and east.

The boundary between the Site and the Sevenoaks built-up area is reasonably well defined to the east, following the alignment of Ashgrove Road, but it less durable to the north, being formed by planting / fence along side and rear private gardens.

Oak Lane to the west of the Site would function as a similar boundary to that of Ashgrove Road, whilst the existing planting along the southern Site boundary has the potential to be retained and enhanced, and provide a defensible new Green Belt Boundary.

Beyond the Site to the south and west, woodland and clusters of development around Fig Street would ultimately prevent any further sprawl into the surrounding landscape.

The woodland beyond the Site creates a sense of enclosure, containing the existing urban edge of Sevenoaks. The woodland also prevents visual links between the Site and the wider Green Belt.

Further west, the A21 Sevenoaks Bypass provides a further physical barrier within the landscape that would prevent sprawl.

**Overall, the Site is considered to score '2' / meets purpose relatively weakly in accordance with Green Belt Review methodology. The Site adjoins one distinct built-up area and would only prevent sprawl to a limited extent. Oak Lane and retained / enhanced boundary vegetation could create a durable new Green Belt boundary.**

### **Purpose 2 - To prevent neighbouring towns from merging**

The Site forms part of the wider gap between Hersham and Edenbridge, which is important to maintain to prevent coalescence between the settlements.

The existing Green Belt 'gap' is at its widest (some 9km) across the Site and encompassing a large swathe of countryside. Even with development in place, there would be no discernible difference to the scale / function of this gap, and the A21 Sevenoaks Bypass



would continue to provide a physical barrier on the edge of Sevenoaks that would prevent coalescence.

It is noted that there are smaller settlements to the east of the Site, namely Goathurst Common, some 2.5km to the south-west. Again, the development of the Site would give rise to no discernible difference to the scale / function of this gap.

**Overall, the Site is considered to score '1' / meets purpose weakly in accordance with Green Belt Review methodology. The small scale of the Site and large scale of the existing gap is of such that the release of the Site from the Green Belt will result in no discernible change to the gap / will not cause the merging of settlements.**

### **Purpose 3 - Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment**

The Site is influenced by the settlement edge to the north and east, and to a lesser extent, other development to the south / south-west. The three large, detached houses immediately to the north of the Site have a particularly urbanising influence, being large in size / scale, and with boundary of close-board fencing which border the Site. However, it is acknowledged that the Site retains a largely rural character.

The woodland beyond the Site creates a sense of enclosure. While the surrounding woodland does positively influence the character of the Site and create a more intimate character, it also seeks to contain the existing urban edge of Sevenoaks and provides a sense of separation from the wider countryside beyond.

Surrounding woodland and the existing boundary vegetation also seeks to visually enclose the Site, and desk / field study has concluded that the Site – and any proposed development – would not be highly visible in the landscape.

Any new housing would result in encroachment into the countryside; however, it would relate well to the existing settlement area and would not be highly visible in the landscape, reducing the perception of encroachment.

**Overall, the Site is considered to score '3' / meets purpose moderately in accordance with Green Belt Review methodology. There would be some encroachment into the countryside however the proposed development would be contagious with the existing settlement area and not a prominent or uncharacteristic feature within the landscape.**

Based on the above scoring, the Site itself does not score 'strongly' for any of the Green Belt purposes. The Proposed Development would result in some encroachment on the countryside, but would have little or no impact on the role of the Site in checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; and in preventing neighbouring towns from merging.

It is acknowledged that individual Sites cannot be considered in complete isolation, and that even the development of small scale sites can affect the overall strategic function of the Green Belt. However, in this case, it is clear that there will remain a large swath of Green Belt to the west of Sevenoaks that would continue to protect the wider countryside and prevent coalescence.

## 6.0 Emerging Development Proposals

The emerging development proposals have been informed by the landscape, visual and Green Belt context, and a range of measures proposed to ensure durable Green Belt boundaries are established; encroachment into the countryside is limited; and improvements made to remaining Green Belt land.

### 6.1. Layout and Location of Development

The layout of housing within the Site is arranged to maintain the vast majority of existing vegetation / landscape features, including boundary planting and internal group of trees clustered around the pond. This will help ensure that:

- Development is relatively well screened and the perception of encroachment into the countryside is limited.
- The well-treed character of the surrounding landscape is maintained.
- There is an attractive new setting for development.

The southern boundary will be enhanced with new planting as necessary, ensuring a continuous, well-defined hedgerow lined with trees. This will form a durable new Green Belt boundary if required as well as further screening new development.

### 6.2. Building Scale and Massing

The height of the proposed houses will reflect the scale of the existing built-up area and will be typically 2 storeys. Buildings will also be set back from the entrance and the Site's eastern boundary to avoid creating a new frontage along Ashgrove Road. Development will be stepped down to the south-west of the Site with some single storey bungalows. This reflects the rising topography in this part of the Site and will help ensure long distance views toward Knoll Park are maintained.

### 6.3. Landscape and Green Infrastructure Strategy

Along with the retained tree belts, other multi-functional open space will be created within the Site, providing for amenity, recreation, biodiversity and drainage benefits. This includes an area of public open space on rising ground in the south-west corner of the Site, which benefits from long distance views east, towards Knoll Park.

New pedestrian routes will be provided within the Site, including links to the south-east corner of the Site, where a new pedestrian access will be created on to the Public Byway. This allows access north-east to into the town centre of Sevenoaks, along Hopgarden Lane; and access west into the countryside.

## 7.0 Summary and Conclusions

LDA Design was commissioned in March 2022 to provide landscape design and assessment services in relation to the proposed residential development on the land west of Ashgrove Road, Sevenoaks (the 'Site'), on behalf of Sigma Strategic Land Limited.

This Green Belt Report considers the contribution the Site makes to the purposes of the Green Belt (as defined by National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)) and the ability of the Site to accommodate development without impacts on the strategic function of the Green Belt.

Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) have undertaken a borough-wide Green Belt Assessment which determines how different areas perform against Green Belt purposes and makes recommendations for potential sites for Green Belt release

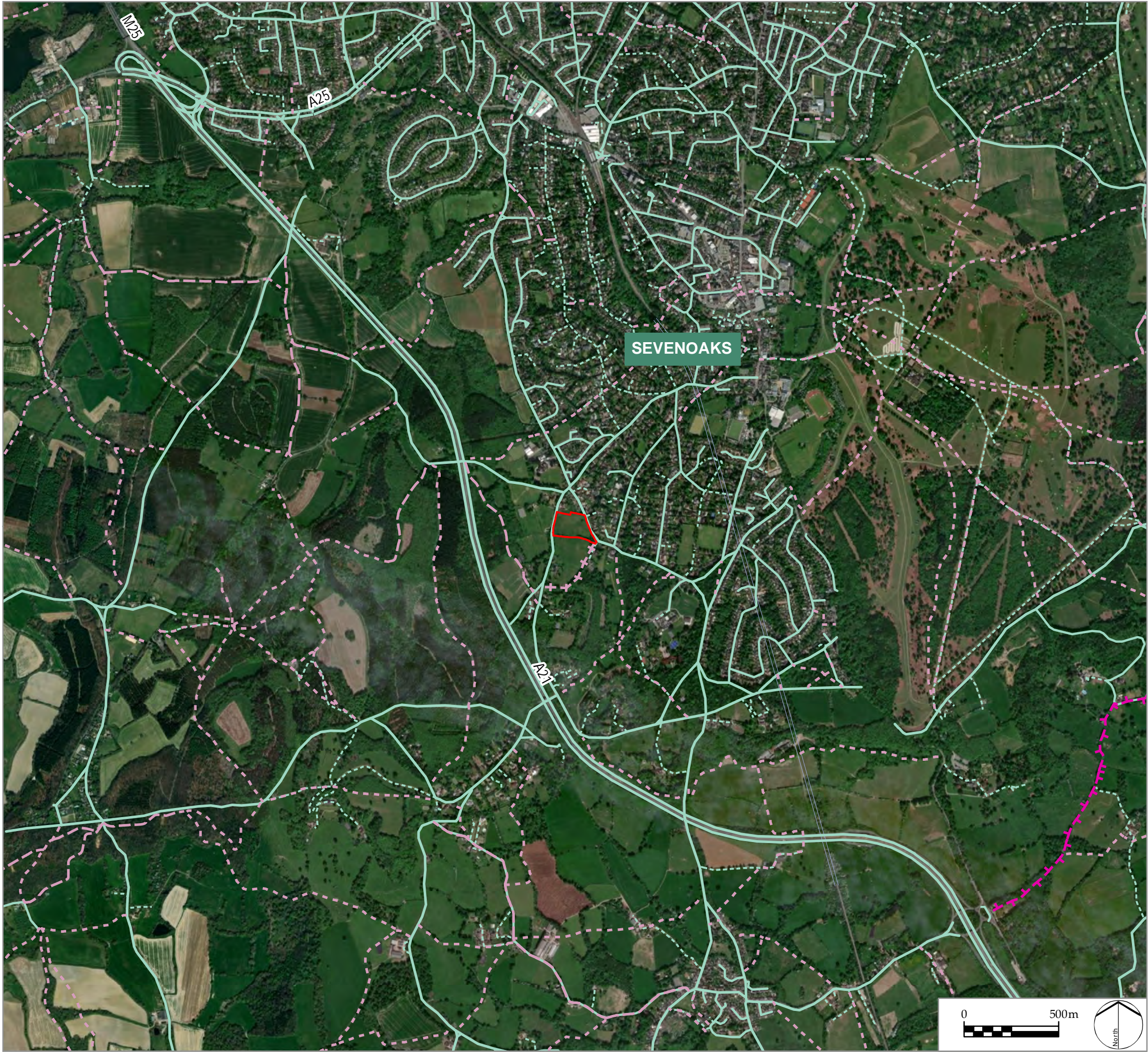
Overall, the Parcel 40 (within which the Site falls) was considered to perform a 'strong' Green Belt function. This was primarily due to the role of the Parcel in checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; and assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. As such, it was not recommended for further review / consideration and was not subject to Assessment Against Local Considerations / Landscape Assessment / Boundary Analysis.

LDA Design agrees that Parcel 40 has a role in checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas and assisting the safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. However, the assessment does not fully recognise the variations across the Parcel and the wider role of the A21 Sevenoaks Bypass in defining the break between the suburban fringe of Sevenoaks to east and more open countryside to the west.

LDA Design analysis of the Green Belt performance of the Site concludes that the Site does not score 'strongly' for any of the Green Belt purposes. The Proposed Development would result in some encroachment on the countryside but would have little or no impact on the role of the Site in checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; and in preventing neighbouring towns from merging. With development in place, there would remain a large swath of Green Belt to the west of Sevenoaks that would continue to protect the wider countryside and prevent coalescence.



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- LEGEND
- Site boundary
  - Local Context
  - Primary road
  - Minor
  - Local
  - Restricted
  - Railway Tunnel
  - Footpath
  - Bridleway
  - Byway
  - Restricted Byway

LD&DESIGN

PROJECT TITLE  
LAND WEST OF ASHGROVE ROAD, SEVENOAKS

DRAWING TITLE  
Figure 1:  
Site Location

ISSUED BY	Oxford	T: 01733 310 471
DATE	26 Jul 2022	DRAWN KP
SCALE @A3	1:20,000	CHECKED NA
STATUS	Final	APPROVED PL

DWG. NO. 8504\_GB\_013

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Area measurements for indicative purposes only.

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Sources: Ordnance Survey, DCLG, Natural England, SUSTRANS, Forestry Commission



 Site boundary

 Primary road

Minor

Local

----- Restricted

===== Railway Tunnel

Footpath

— — — — Bridleway

++++ Byway

LDÄ DESIGN

## LAND WEST OF ASHGROVE ROAD, SEVENOAKS

Figure 2:  
Immediate Site Context

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STATUS	Final

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CHECKED NA  
APPROVED PL

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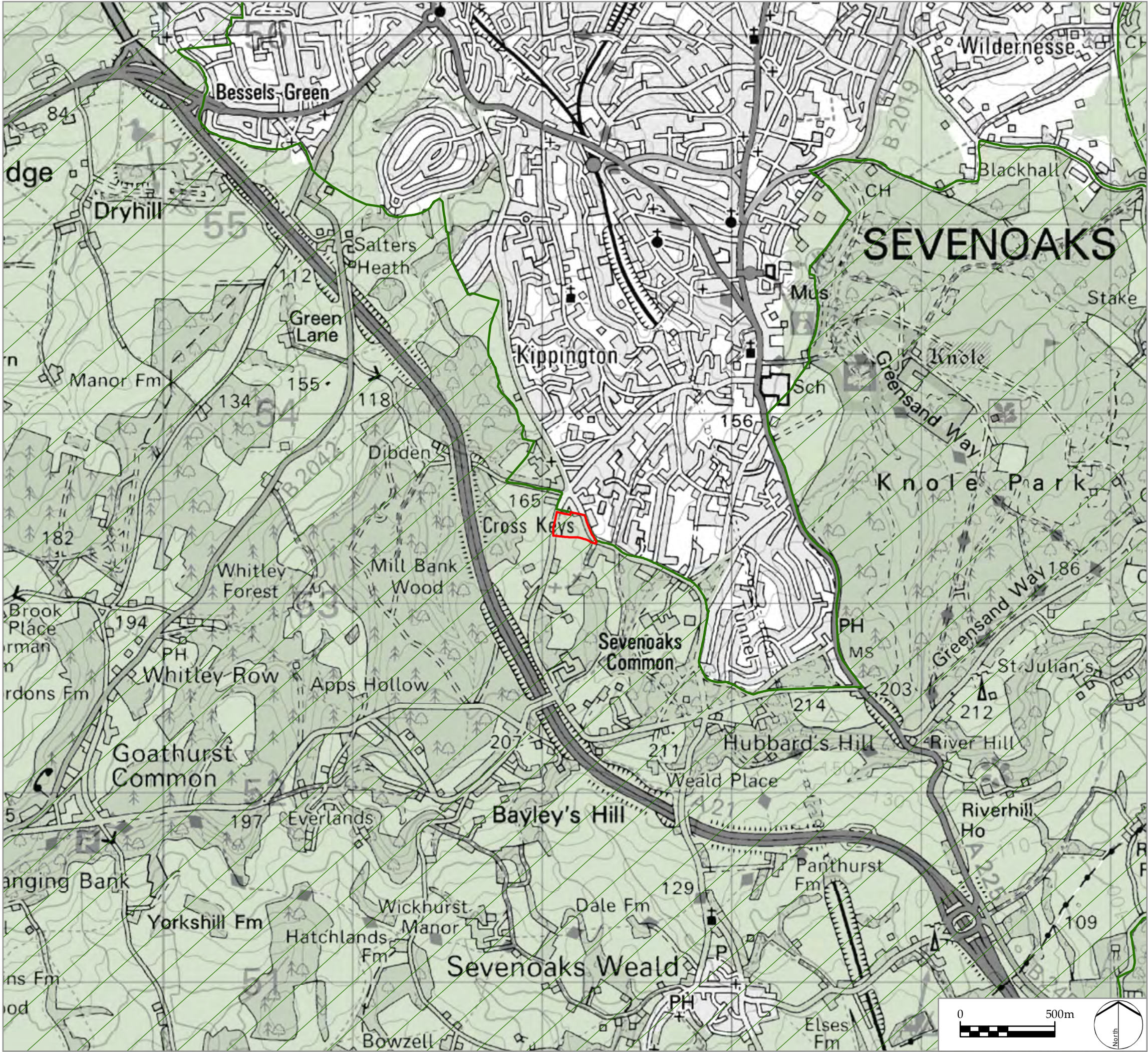
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Sources: Ordnance Survey, DCLG, Natural England, Sustrans, Forestry Commission



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LEGEND

Site boundary

Designated Landscapes

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Green Belt

# LDA DESIGN

PROJECT TITLE  
LAND WEST OF ASHGROVE ROAD, SEVENOAKS

DRAWING TITLE  
Figure 3:  
Landscape Designations

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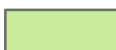


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	210 - 220		130 - 140
	200 - 210		120 - 130
	190 - 200		110 - 120
	180 - 190		100 - 110
	170 - 180		90 - 100
	160 - 170		80 - 90
	150 - 160		70 - 80
	140 - 150		60 - 70

## LDÄ DESIGN

PROJECT TITLE  
LAND WEST OF ASHGROVE ROAD, SEVENOAKS

Figure 4:  
Landform

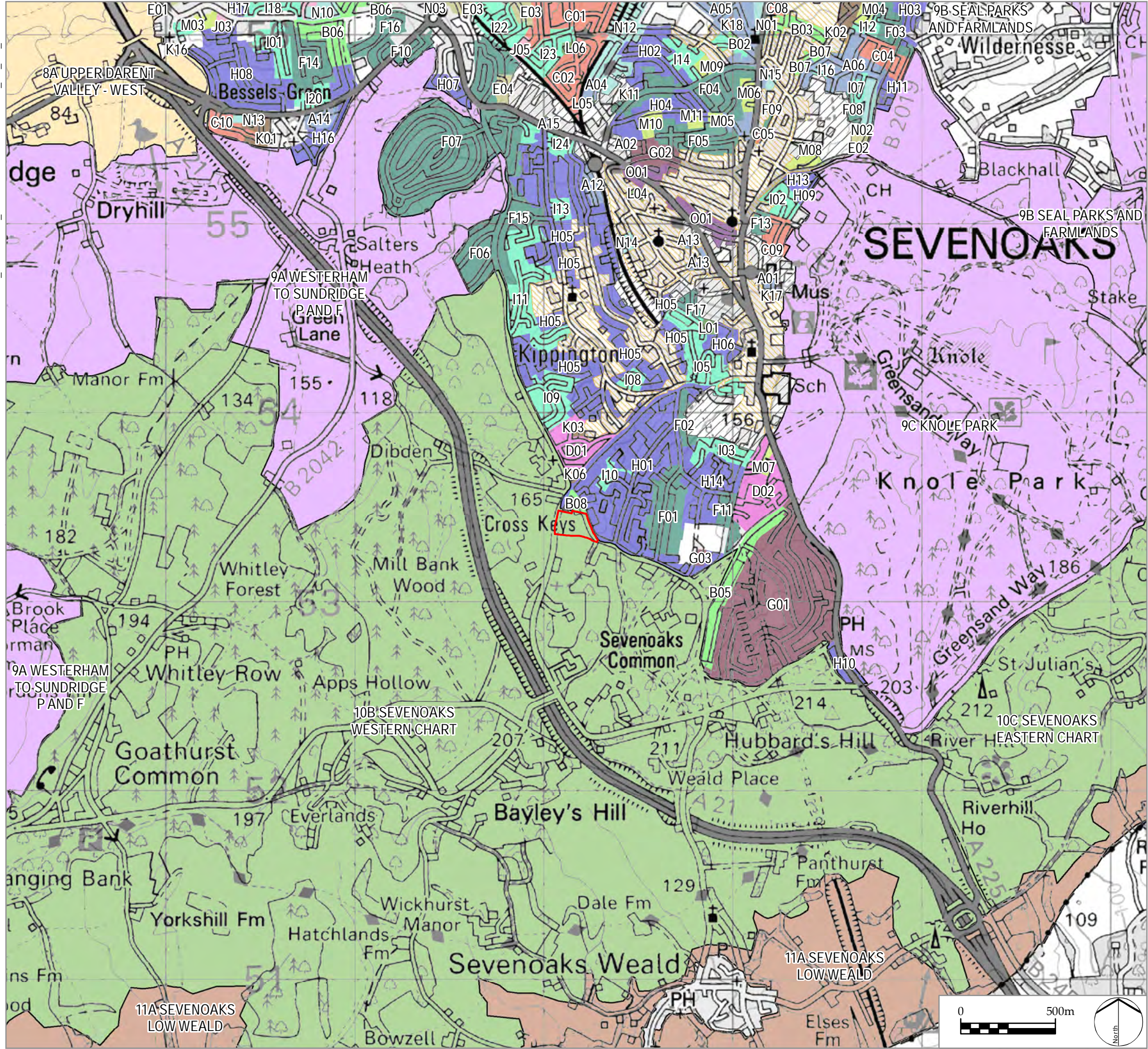
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LEGEND

Site boundary

Sevenoaks Landscape Character Assessment (2017)

Landscape Character Types (*Landscape Character Areas labelled on Plan*)

- Charts
- Clay Valleys
- Greensand Parks & Farmland
- Low Weald

Sevenoaks Residential Character Area Assessment (April 2012)<sup>2</sup>

Residential Character Areas (*Individual Character Areas labelled on plan*)

- A - Victorian / Edwardian
- B - Inter War Linear Development
- C - Inter War Planned Development
- D - Garden City Influenced Planned Development
- E - Formal Semi-detached Layout
- F - Formal Detached
- G - Formal Avenue
- H - Informal Lane
- I - Open Plan
- J - Bungalows
- K - Compact Terraced
- L - Compact Townhouses and Apartments
- M - Clustered Cul-de-sac Developments
- N - Mixed Character
- O - Mixed Use/Town Fringe
- Conservation Area
- Area not covered by SPD

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Digitalised by LDA Design in July 2022 from information contained within 'Sevenoaks Landscape Character Assessment, Sevenoaks District Council' (January 2017).

<sup>2</sup>Digitalised by LDA Design in July 2022 from information contained within 'Sevenoaks Residential Character Area Assessment (April 2012)'

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PROJECT TITLE

LAND WEST OF ASHGROVE ROAD, SEVENOAKS

DRAWING TITLE

Figure 5:  
Local Landscape Character

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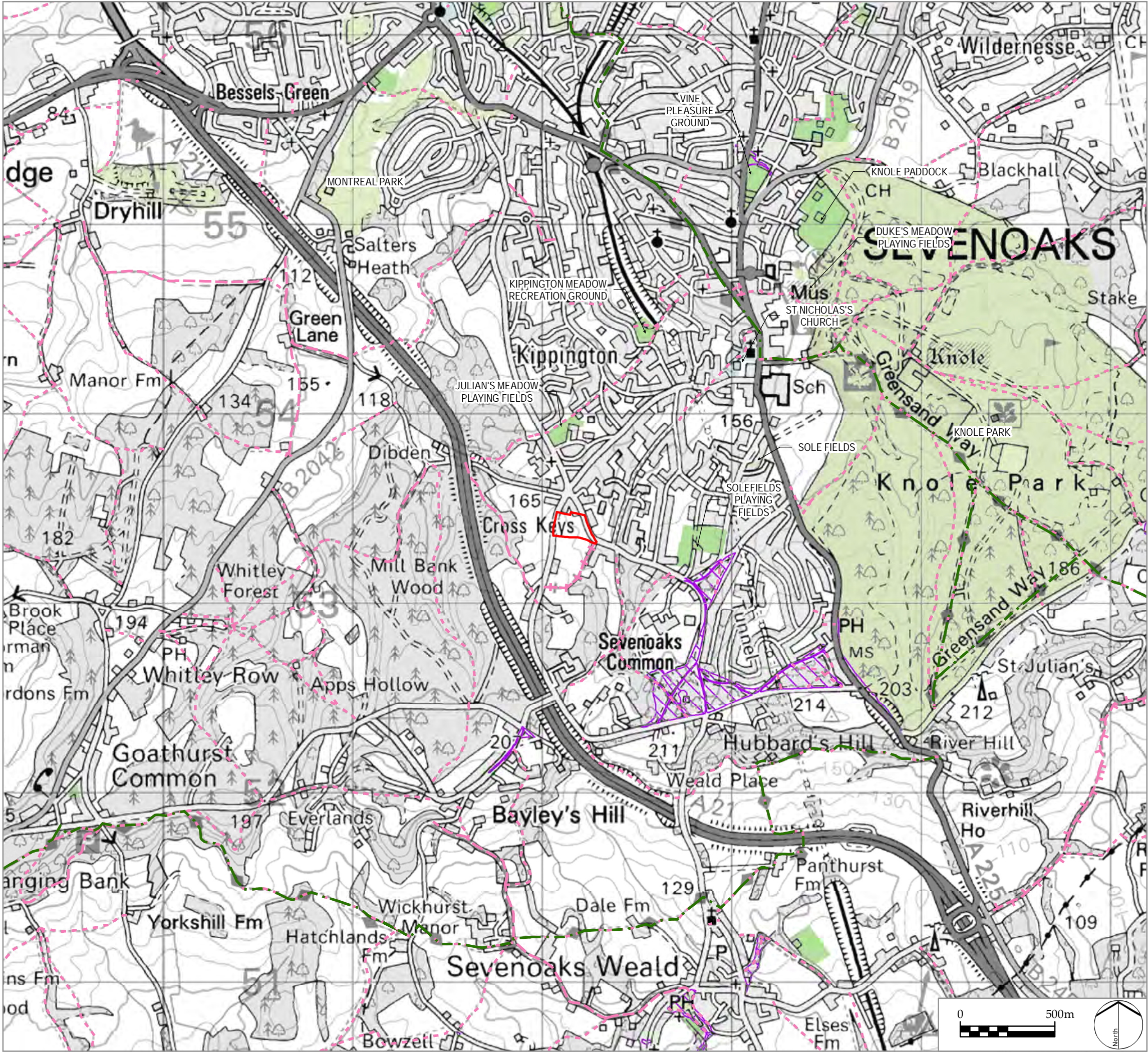
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Sources: Ordnance Survey, NextMap25



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LEGEND

Site boundary

Public Rights of Way, Accessible / Recreational Landscapes and Long-Distance Walking Route

Footpath

Bridleway

Byway

Restricted Byway

Greensand Way (Long-distance walking route)

Access Land

Playing Field

Public Park Or Garden

Religious Grounds

# LD&A DESIGN

PROJECT TITLE  
LAND WEST OF ASHGROVE ROAD, SEVENOAKS

DRAWING TITLE  
Figure 6:  
Access and Recreation

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