

GREEN BELT – INITIAL COMMENTARY

Introduction

The following commentary considers the Green Belt constraints associated with the site known as Land at Greenhedge Farm, Bar Lane, Stapleford, identified as Area 1 and Area 2 in Figure 1 (see Appendix), and provides informative considerations concerning the site's contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt. This commentary does not constitute a full Green Belt appraisal. Instead, it provides a high-level overview of the relevant Green Belt policies/guidance and how they are relevant to the site

Cambridge Green Belt

The NPPF (2019) sets out the five purposes of the Green Belt which aim to preserve its essential quality of permanent openness.

These are:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.'*

Policy S/4 within the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2018) reiterates the NPPF guidance.

On a local scale, the evidence base and supporting studies that informed the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 includes the Cambridge Green Belt Study (Landscape Design Associates, September 2002) which focused on the fourth purpose of the Green Belt, see point c) above. It is noted that the study concludes with a vision of Cambridge which includes the site in the *'outer Green Belt'* area, the role of which is to *'maintain and enhance the quality of the open, rural landscape, the diversity of character, and the qualities of views, approaches and villages. Improve access and recreational facilities.'*

The Site

The site is located on the north east edge of Stapleford to the west and south of Greenhedge Farm. The adopted local plan identifies the site within the Green Belt policy boundary, with the north west corner included in Policy SC/1 which is an allocation for local open space (see Figure 2 within the Appendix).

The site is enclosed by roads with houses fronting the site; allotments define its southern extent. On the north east corner, the site abuts a recreational ground. There are some mature trees along Gog Magog Way, Bury Road and around the recreational ground; a denser tree belt defines the boundary of the allotment to the south. A small cluster of trees also enclose Greenhedge Farm from south east to south west.

The site is divided into two distinct areas separated by land associated with Greenhedge Farm.

The site is largely enclosed; long views from the roads surrounding the site towards the countryside are afforded through the two gaps in the built form to the north of Gog Magog Way. Despite this and the intrusion of Greenhedge Farm, the site appears to provide some visual green relief and a sense of openness within the urban fabric.

Conclusion

Based on the above information, it is possible to formulate the following preliminary considerations in relation to the site's contribution to the Green Belt purposes:

- a) The existing built form of Greenhedge Farm and the surrounding mature planting provides viable opportunities to consider alternative Green Belt boundaries.
- b) The site should not be assessed in isolation. The wider green open space as shown in Figure 3 (see Appendix) should be considered in relation to the Green Belt purposes. In this context and based on this preliminary analysis, it is considered that the southern parcels within the site afford a stronger connection to the built-up form and so lessen their contribution to the Green Belt.
- c) Further to point b), the site could be read as a number of discrete areas that present different degrees of enclosure in relation to the existing built form and tree cover. As such, each parcel within the site should be assessed separately against the Green Belt purposes in future detailed assessment work. Arguably, based on current analysis, the southern parcels appear to afford less visual openness, therefore, their contribution to the Green Belt purposes are likely to be depreciated.
- d) The site is not located between villages and therefore its position does not contribute to the separation between settlements.
- e) The recently adopted Local Plan (2018) sets out specific purposes for the Cambridge Green Belt, many of which relates to the contribution of the Green Belt to the setting and character of Cambridge. This is supported further by the findings of the Cambridge Green Belt Study; however, due to its location and scale, the site is unlikely to contribute to some of the purposes and characteristics of the Green Belt supported in the Local Plan, such as:
 - *'Preserve the unique character of Cambridge as a compact, dynamic city with a thriving historic centre'*;
 - *'Maintain and enhance the quality of its setting'*;
 - *'Distinctive urban edge'*; and
 - *'Green corridors penetrating the city'*.

The above are general considerations based on the available information. Although only a detailed Green Belt appraisal as part of future stages of the emerging Local Plan would provide a complete and solid understanding of the site's contribution to each purpose of the Green Belt, it can be concluded that the site shows some discrepancies with the Green Belt designation and its essential quality of openness. As such, we consider the site merits further detailed consideration of its contribution to the policy, to fully explore its capacity for development in relation to its Green Belt designation to ensure that only land that does perform the necessary Green Belt function is retained within the new Local Plan, to ensure the resilience and robustness of any retained Green Belt

APPENDIX

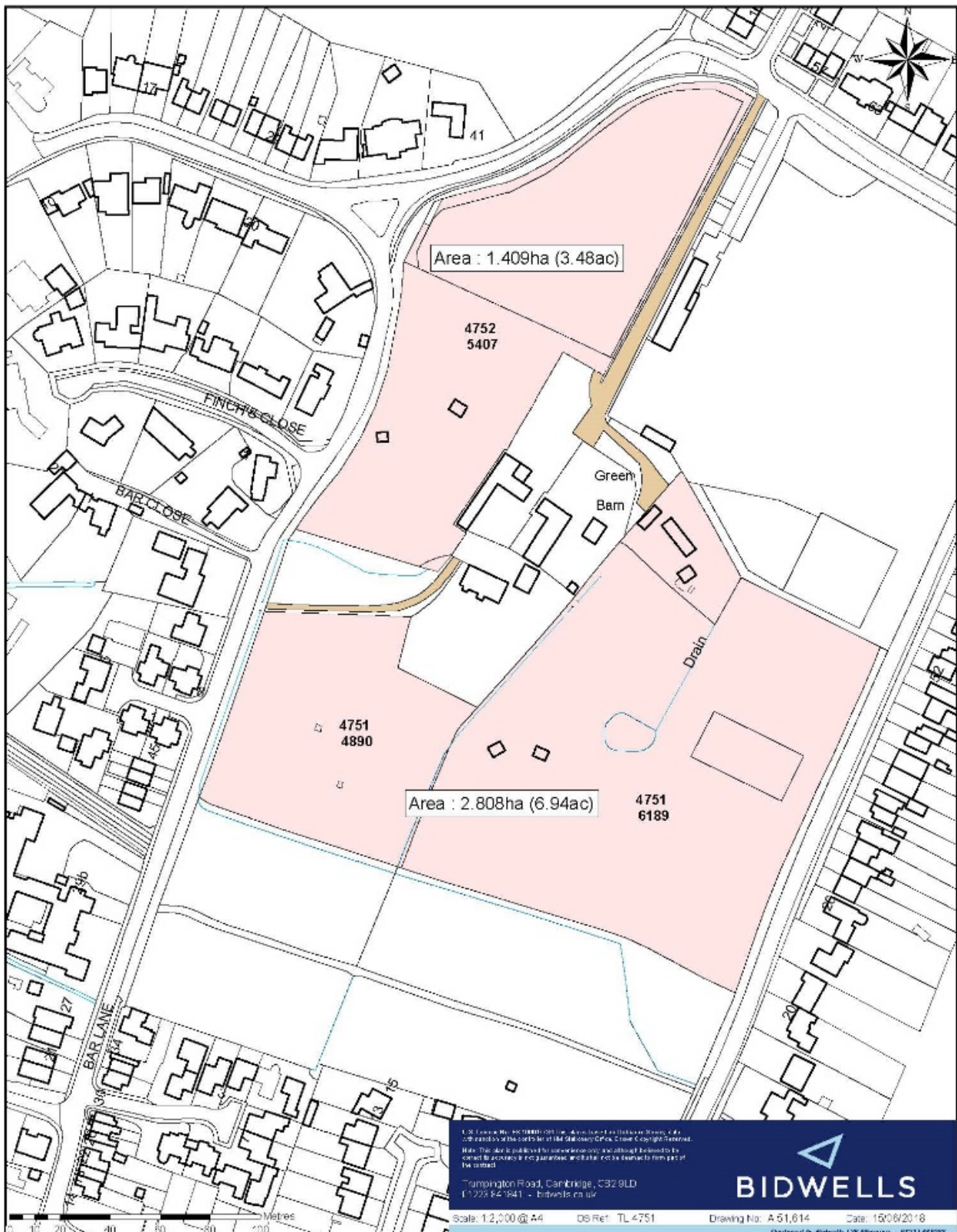


Figure 1 – Site

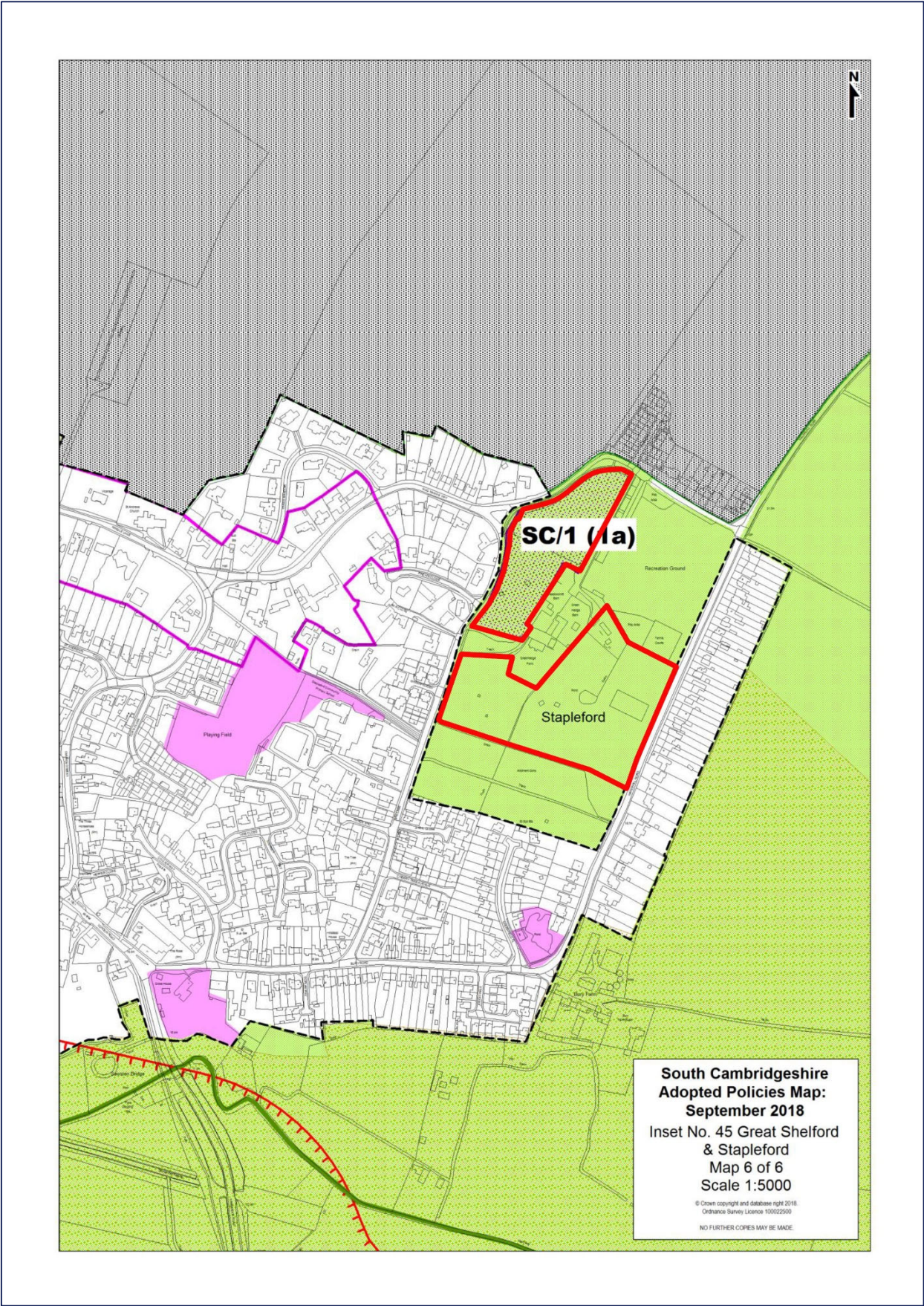


Figure 2 – Site located on the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 - Adopted Policies Map



Figure 3 - Suggested area for Green belt Appraisal