

Elmbridge Borough Council  
**Green Belt Boundary Review**  
Annex Report 1 - Strategic Area  
Assessment Pro-formas

Issue Rev C | 14 March 2016

This report takes into account the particular instructions and requirements of our client.

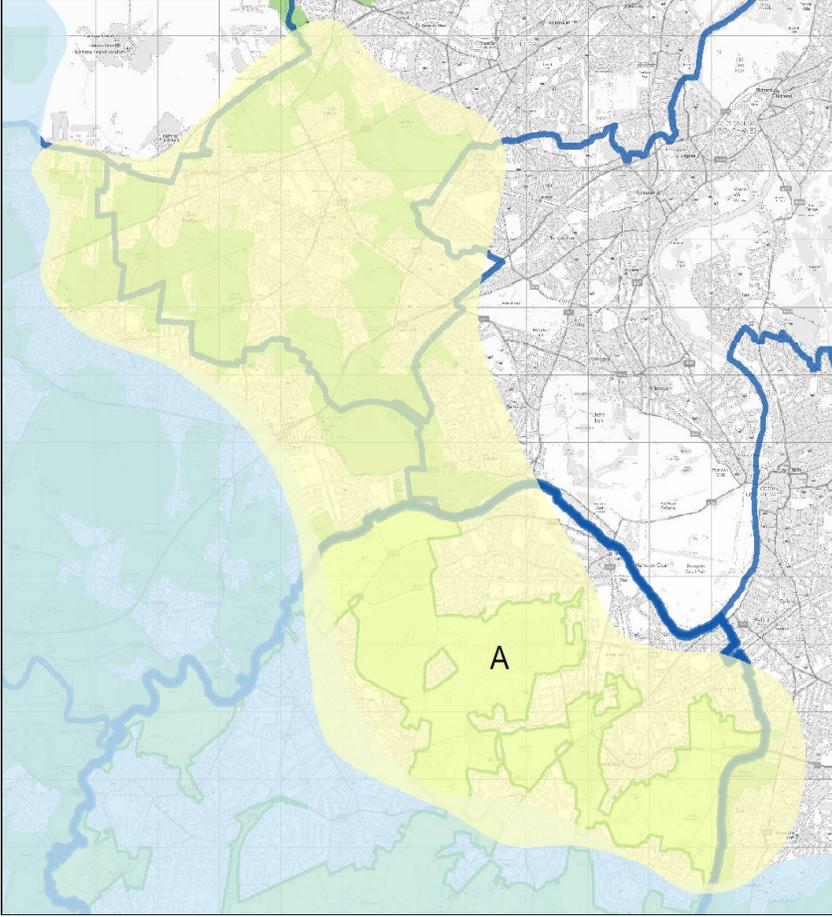
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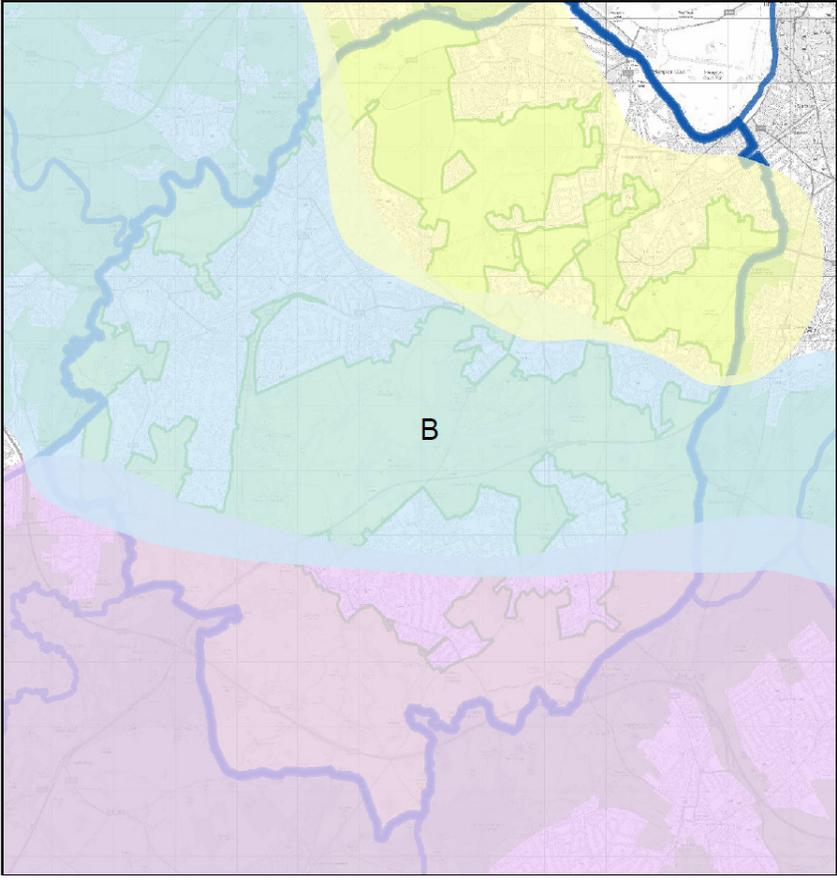
<p><b>Strategic Area</b></p>	<p>A</p>
<p><b>Location Map</b></p>	
<p><b>Sub-regional Context</b></p>	<p>Strategic Area A forms part of a narrow and fragmented band of Green Belt which closely abuts the very edge of south-west London. This strategically important arc of green spaces can be traced from Heathrow Airport through to Epsom and provides a narrow break between the built-form of outer London and the Surrey towns of Ashford, Sunbury-on-Thames (Spelthorne), Walton-on-Thames/Hersham, Esher and Claygate (Elmbridge). The outer London suburbs constitute areas both within the London boundaries, including Feltham (LB Hounslow), Hampton (LB Richmond), Surbiton and Chessington (RB Kingston), and settlements outside which have coalesced, for example, Molesey or Thames Ditton (Elmbridge). The Heathrow site extends some way out into the Green Belt, limiting the northern extent of this arc.</p> <p>As a result of rapid and weakly controlled development during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, this network of Green Belt is narrow and frequently punctuated by areas of built-form. Much of the openness that remains is maintained by man-made lakes and reservoirs located around the Thames Valley (some of which are the result of historic sand and gravel extraction), water treatment works, gas works and various small-scale park areas. Despite its fragmentation, it is the only remaining open/undeveloped area preventing the coalescence of Greater London with Surrey.</p> <p>At a high level, Strategic Area A, as part of this broad sub-regional network, is likely to meet Green Belt Purposes 1 and 2 of the NPPF Green Belt strongly,</p>

	<p>acting to restrict the further sprawl of the Greater London built-up area and prevent the coalescence of the Greater London built-up area with other distinct towns in Surrey as well as acting to maintain separation between the Surrey towns themselves. The release of Green Belt in this Strategic Area would have to be carefully considered in the context of this wider network; further fragmentation of the Green Belt may be harmful to its overall integrity.</p>
<b>Elmbridge Context</b>	<p>Within Elmbridge, this relatively narrow corridor of Green Belt in the north of the borough prevents further coalescence between the Greater London built-up area and settlements in the borough.</p> <p>Historic maps illustrate that, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the once small villages of Thames Ditton and Long Ditton were separated from Surbiton by a sizeable swathe of open countryside. However, as a result of rapid suburbanisation following the opening of the railways, the settlements coalesced and are now part of the wider, continuous built-up area of Greater London; this narrow strip of Green Belt area lies to the south-west, protecting Walton-on-Thames, Esher and Claygate from coalescence with the Greater London built-up area as well as providing separation between these settlements.</p> <p>Taken as a whole, this area of Green Belt fulfils Purposes 1 and 2 to a strong extent. Due to its fragmented nature, and the prevalence of 'man-made' uses, the area scores poorly against Purpose 3.</p>
<b>Character</b>	<p>Broadly, there is a gradual transition in the character of the Strategic Area, from the Thames floodplain reservoirs north and west of Molesey, to the rolling farmland in the east around Claygate and Chessington (LB Kingston).</p> <p>Historically, the Thames floodplain consisted of agriculture, meadows and market gardens, but its openness has gradually been eroded and compromised by urbanising influences.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly evident in the Green Belt between Molesey and Walton-on-Thames, where the openness has been eroded by different industrial developments, utilities and infrastructure, interspersed with horse paddocks. This area is also characterised by a series of reservoirs, including the Queen Elizabeth II Reservoir, Island Barn Reservoir, Knight Reservoir and Bessborough Reservoir; part of a wider network of man-made storage reservoirs to the west and south-west of London. These are large, raised reservoirs surrounded by embankments which tend to dominate the low-rise skyline but also screen built up areas, creating a sense of separation between settlements.<sup>2</sup> Molesey Heath, a restored landfill site, is wedged between the Island Barn and Queen Elizabeth II reservoirs and provides a contrast in the form of a more naturally characterised area but is an isolated pocket of countryside in this fragmented area of Green Belt. This part of the Strategic Area is low lying and relatively flat, forming the wider flood plain of the Thames and its tributaries.</p> <p>The south-eastern section of the Strategic Area retains more of an open and rolling countryside character. The openness of the Green Belt around Esher is, to an extent, truncated by the properties on More Lane and the Sandown Park Racecourse, though in general the network of common spaces that surround the town maintain its unique setting and its separation as a distinct settlement. Further to the east, the dense woodland of Littleworth Common, which creates a sense of remoteness, opens out into rolling arable farmland around Claygate. Here,</p>

<sup>1</sup> Thames Valley: Regional Countryside Character Area, Surrey Landscape Character Assessment, 1997

<sup>2</sup> Draft Surrey Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Types and Character Areas within Elmbridge Borough, hda/Surrey County Council, 2015

	<p>development is restricted to occasional farmsteads, the landscape dominated by arable fields punctuated by hedgerows. The topography here is slightly more undulating than around the River Thames, consisting of dispersed and predominantly gentle hillsides of around 50-70m above sea level, including Telegraph Hill north of Claygate. Given the proximity to built-up areas, the sense of remoteness is restricted, but overall there is a fairly sudden transition from urban to semi-rural, and the limited population within the Green Belt gives this area more of a rural feel.</p>
<b>Function</b>	<p>In line with the contrast in character between the west and east of the Strategic Area, the function also differs quite considerably. The area functions as urban fringe, with horse paddocks and fields interspersed with industry and utilities (for example, the Sunbury Lock Gas Works, BP Oil Terminal and Esher Sewage Treatment Works) and isolated dwelling houses, schools and goods yards. Open land is, in general, poorly maintained, though there are several examples of former industrial sites being restored and designated as nature reserves (for example, the recently commissioned Molesey Reservoirs Nature Reserve and Molesey Heath).</p> <p>In contrast, the east of the Area is predominantly common land, with a mixture of heath and woodland, and arable farms. Surbiton Golf Course is a managed space but is well integrated into the surrounding rural landscape.</p>
<b>Summary</b>	<p>Strategic Area A is part of a narrow but essential arc of Green Belt preventing the sprawl of the Greater London built-up area and its coalescence with towns in Surrey, as well as acting to maintain separation between the Surrey towns themselves. It has been subject to urbanising influences, particularly around the River Thames in the north-west of the Area, and its openness is relatively fragmented by industrial and utilities developments. However, the east of the Area retains a more rural character characterised by small farmsteads set in arable fields, as well as the commons and wooded areas around Claygate and Esher.</p> <p>At the strategic level, the Strategic Area plays an important role in meeting the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy to prevent urban sprawl, in this case, the sprawl of London, by keeping land permanently open. Assessment of the Strategic Area against the relevant NPPF Purposes is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Purpose 1</b> – Meets the Purpose <b>very strongly</b> by acting as an important barrier to potential sprawl from the Greater London built-up area (including Molesey / Thames Ditton / and Long Ditton) and a number of large built-up areas within Surrey (for example Walton-on-Thames / Weybridge / Hersham, and Sunbury-on-Thames)</li> <li>- <b>Purpose 2</b> – Meets the Purpose <b>very strongly</b> by establishing important gaps between a number of Surrey towns from merging into one another and the Greater London built-up area.</li> <li>- <b>Purpose 3</b> – Meets the Purpose <b>weakly</b> due to the fragmented nature of the Green Belt and the prevalence of man-made/industrial uses, in particular in the western section of the Strategic Area.</li> </ul>
<b>Sensitivity to Change</b>	<p>The importance of the Strategic Area as part of a wider Green Belt network must be acknowledged, yet there is a sense that, in some of the more fragmented and/or degraded parts of the Green Belt, change could be accommodated without causing any further harm to its integrity.</p>

<p><b>Strategic Area</b></p>	<p>B</p>
<p><b>Location Map</b></p>	
<p><b>Sub-regional Context</b></p>	<p>Strategic Area B forms part of a wide Green Belt buffer which broadly maintains separation between a series of distinct towns and villages in Surrey, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, as well as the outer-most fringes of London around Hillingdon. The coherence and continuity of the Green Belt is highly variable, with some fairly sizeable swathes of relatively open land (for example, between Weybridge in Elmbridge and Ashted in Mole Valley, and between Staines-upon-Thames in Spelthorne and Slough) but also significant fragmentation around settlements. In particular, this broad arc of Green Belt provides a series of narrow gaps between towns in Elmbridge, Spelthorne, Runnymede and Woking, as well as Mole Valley and Epsom and Ewell, thus maintaining the settlement pattern.</p> <p>Within this strategic arc, there is significant contrast in both landscape and functional terms. The northern part sits within the Thames Valley, encompassing the wider Thames Basin, and is heavily influenced by the River Thames and its tributaries, as well as a network of lakes and man-made reservoirs stretching from Slough southwards through the boroughs of Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead, Spelthorne and Runnymede. Natural England describe these as ‘important areas for wildlife and recreation in an essentially urban landscape’<sup>3</sup>. The landscape is predominantly low lying and flat, with irregular patterns of pastures and paddocks, arable fields and horticulture, as well as man-made developments such as light industry and recreational uses such as golf. The urbanising influence of London is particularly prevalent here, with a relatively high concentration of ribbon or other piecemeal development within the Green Belt. South and east of</p>

<sup>3</sup> National Character Area 115 – Thames Valley: Summary, Natural England, 2012

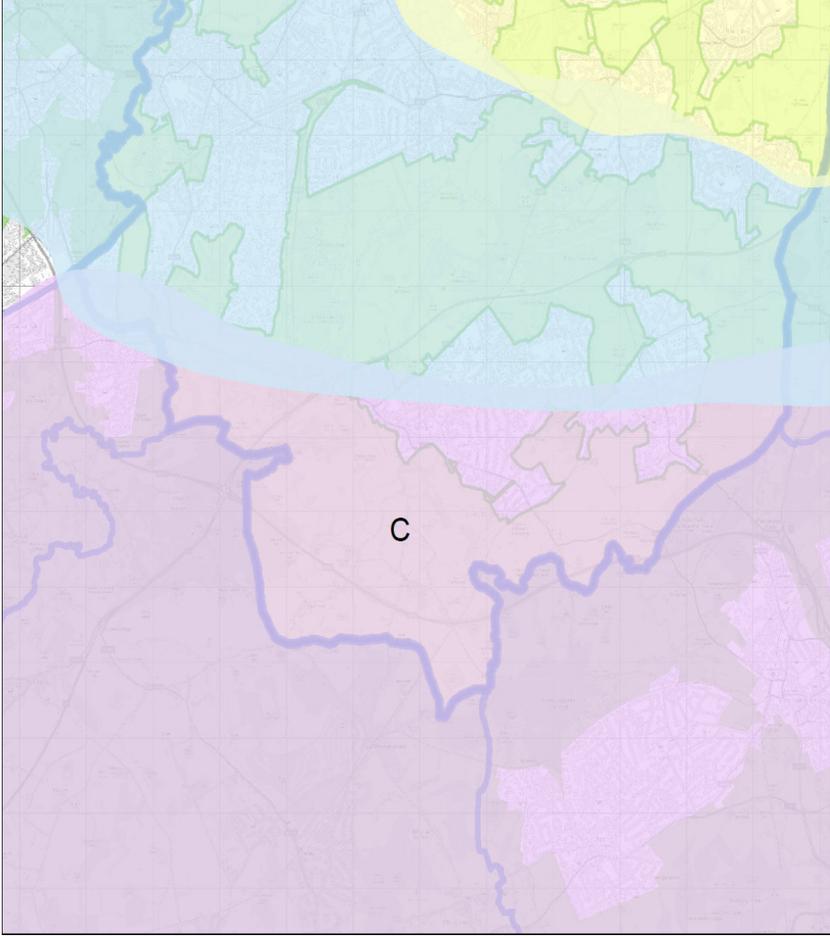
	<p>Weybridge, the landscape becomes increasingly undulating and more unspoilt, characterised by arable fields and woodlands, many of which were (and still remain) part of large country estates, for example, Oatlands Park.</p> <p>This significant arc of Green Belt, which encompasses Strategic Area B, is overall particularly important to NPPF Purpose 2 of Green Belt, preventing a series of neighbouring towns from merging. It also marks the transition from the semi-urban areas around Greater London to the wider open countryside and thus, to varying extents, is likely to serve Purpose 3. Given the significant variation in the characteristics of the Green Belt here, local factors will have a major influence on the sensitivity of different sub-areas to change.</p>
<b>Elmbridge Context</b>	<p>Within Elmbridge, the Strategic Area plays an important role in protecting the narrow gaps between the settlements of Walton-on-Thames / Weybridge / Hersham; Cobham / Oxshott; Esher; Claygate; and Field Common and the gaps at the fringes of the borough to settlements within Spelthorne, Runnymede and Woking in the north-west and west, as well as in Epsom and Ewell and Mole Valley in the east and south-east.</p> <p>Historic maps show that, despite the significant growth of settlements such as Cobham, Oxshott and Hersham during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, much of the remaining Green Belt in this area remains similar morphologically and in terms of land uses as it was in the early 1800s. Strategic Area B protects some particularly narrow gaps between settlements, in particular between Hersham and Esher (which have grown outwards towards each other) and between Weybridge and Byfleet (Woking), where industry has gradually developed on both sides of the former Brooklands racetrack and aerodrome.</p> <p>At a broad level, this area of Green Belt performs strongly against Purpose 2 in Elmbridge, preventing the coalescence of several settlements, and prevents encroachment into some relatively unspoilt areas of countryside (Purpose 3), predominantly in the east of the Borough.</p>
<b>Character</b>	<p>Broadly, Strategic Area B provides a swathe of relatively unbroken countryside, though it is divided into a series of distinct character areas.</p> <p>Three river valleys cut through the Strategic Area: the Thames and Wey to the west (on the fringes of the borough); and the Mole, which passes north-south through the centre of the Area. These areas are low lying and flat. The Thames and Wey valleys are very closely surrounded by development, while more open areas tend not to be actively farmed and are relatively poorly maintained. For example, Desborough Island and the surrounding area consists of horse paddocks, rugby fields, tennis courts, utilities works and scrubland. The Green Belt here is relatively fragmented. In contrast, the Mole valley is predominantly characterised by arable fields, farmsteads and small areas of woodland and, despite being closely bounded by the settlements of Esher and Hersham, remains relatively unspoilt by settlement.</p> <p>The land rises to the east and west of the Mole to a series of highpoints (between 50 and 70m above sea level), with the overall landscape becoming generally more undulating. A series of densely wooded commons envelop Esher, Oxshott and Cobham (including Esher Common, West End Common, Old Common, Fairmile Common, Oxshott Common and Arbrook Common) while further to the east there is an expansive conifer and broadleaf plantation at Prince's Coverts.<sup>4</sup> In between, a more expansive area of rolling arable farmland surrounds Claygate.</p>

<sup>4</sup> Thames Basin Lowlands: Regional Countryside Character Area, Surrey Landscape Character Assessment, 1997

	<p>Although actively managed both as woodland and farmland, this part of the Strategic Area remains largely unpopulated, with only a small number of low density dwellings and the Claremont Park estate in the north. Much retains a historic sense of remoteness and tranquillity, with several tracts of ancient woodland and a series of impressive views across open countryside and along woodland paths.<sup>5</sup> The commons have good levels of public access for recreational use; the combination of this with associated ancillary developments such as car parks and access roads detracts slightly from the sense of tranquillity, yet the area undoubtedly has a strong sense of rurality.</p> <p>West of the River Mole, the Green Belt has a more fragmented character. The landscape is undulating and densely wooded, but the sense of unbroken rurality is diminished by Whiteley Village, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century model retirement village designed by the arts and crafts movement. Further west, St George's Hill consists of an area of large, very low density houses bordered by significant vegetation; developments have, in some areas, encroached into countryside now within the Green Belt. The wooded areas are, additionally, truncated by golf courses.</p> <p>Notably, as a result of Weybridge's stretched, linear morphology along the B374, the strategic links within the wider Green Belt network are almost completely severed, with only a very small section of Green Belt providing separation between Weybridge and Byfleet (Woking).</p> <p>The A3, which runs east-west across the Strategic Area, cuts across all of these different character areas, severing the landscape and impacting visually upon the Area's openness and breaking up different areas of countryside.</p>
<b>Function</b>	<p>Much of Strategic Area B retains a traditional rural function, used either for arable farming or commercially managed woodland. Significant areas are accessible to the public for recreation as common woodland and heathland or as part of country estates and parks, for example, Claremont Park. There are also a series of golf courses across the area.</p> <p>Further west, the rurality of the Green Belt is diminished by urban fringe functions such as residential development at St George's Hill, Whiteley Village, hotels, schools, playing fields, tennis courts and utilities.</p>
<b>Summary</b>	<p>Strategic Area B maintains a series of narrow gaps between Elmbridge's towns, as well as settlements in adjacent boroughs and, on this axis, consists of the first sizeable swathe of countryside outside Greater London. It encompasses the relatively open and unspoilt Mole Valley, as well as significant areas of arable farmland around Claygate and a network of densely wooded commons and heathlands which are of historic importance and provide recreational opportunities for local people.</p> <p>At its fringes, particularly around Weybridge, urbanising influences have fragmented the openness of the Green Belt and diminished its sense of rurality.</p> <p>At the strategic level, the Strategic Area plays an important role in meeting the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy to prevent urban sprawl, in this case the sprawl of settlements in Surrey, by keeping land permanently open. Assessment of the Strategic Area against the relevant NPPF Purposes is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Purpose 1</b> – Meets the Purpose <b>strongly</b> by acting as an important barrier to potential sprawl from large built-up areas such as Walton-on-Thames / Weybridge / Hersham, Staines-upon-Thames, Egham /</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> Draft Surrey Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Types and Character Areas within Elmbridge Borough, hda/Surrey County Council, 2015

	<p>Englefield Green, Addlestone, Chertsey, and Woking / Byfleet / Woodham.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Purpose 2</b> – Meets the Purpose <b>strongly</b> by establishing important gaps between a number of Surrey towns from merging into one another.</li> <li>- <b>Purpose 3</b> – Meets the Purpose <b>moderately</b> (there is some variation across the Strategic Area) by preventing encroachment into some relatively unspoilt areas of the countryside.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sensitivity to Change</b></p>	<p>Given the Strategic Area protects a series of particularly narrow gaps between settlements, the character of the area could be altered significantly by alterations to Green Belt boundaries. Consideration should also be given to the area’s particular sense of rurality. Some areas of Green Belt which already contain developments, such as St George’s Hill, maybe less sensitive overall.</p>

<b>Strategic Area</b>	C
<b>Location Map</b>	
<b>Sub-regional Context</b>	<p>Strategic Area C is intrinsically linked with a large, unbroken swathe of Green Belt extending outwards over the Surrey countryside, including the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), towards Woking, Guildford, Dorking and the North Downs beyond.</p> <p>This area of Green Belt is largely consistent in landscape terms; the gently undulating and moderately open countryside, predominantly arable farmland, is occasionally interrupted by woodland and small/medium settlements which have developed in a linear fashion around transport routes (roads and railways).<sup>6</sup> Remnant parkland, with remains of features including avenues, roundels and boundary walls, can be found across the area.<sup>7</sup> Woking, to the west of the Strategic Area, and Leatherhead, to the east, form hard edges within this wider Green Belt swathe, and around the towns the Green Belt become more influenced by urbanising characteristics; for example, land uses such as golf courses, as well as piecemeal developments. Further south, the open landscape transitions to rolling hills and sharp-sided river valleys at the edge of the North Downs. The topography becomes increasingly steep, leading to dramatic landforms such as</p>

<sup>6</sup> Draft Surrey Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Types and Character Areas within Elmbridge Borough, hda/Surrey County Council, 2015

<sup>7</sup> Thames Basin Lowlands: Regional Countryside Character Area, Surrey Landscape Character Assessment, Surrey County Council, 1997

	<p>Box Hill, and the landscape is dominated by large expanses of dense woodland, occasionally interspersed with open areas of downland. Moving further away from the Greater London area, settlements become increasingly smaller and more dispersed, with some areas of the North Downs the most sparsely populated in the south east.</p> <p>The Strategic Area C plays an important role in preventing the encroachment of development into the countryside (Purpose 3). The Surrey countryside is well preserved in comparison to many other areas in the south-east, maintaining an unspoilt character in many places.</p>
<b>Elmbridge Context</b>	<p>Within Elmbridge, Strategic Area C protects the relatively narrow gap between Cobham / Oxshott, Ashtead, and Leatherhead / Bookham / Fetcham in the neighbouring district of Mole Valley.</p> <p>As of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a series of mills and small settlements (Cobham, Stoke D'Abernon and Leatherhead) had developed along the River Mole. Perpendicular to this, settlements had begun to develop along the various roads which radiated from London and Kingston. Following the opening of the railways, the linear growth of settlements was concentrated in these corridors – Oxshott and Stoke D'Abernon, and Ashtead, Leatherhead and Bookham, respectively. A wedge of countryside, currently protected by the Green Belt, remains in between and continues to separate these settlements. Further west, the Green Belt is connected to a more expansive swathe of countryside stretching southwards towards the Surrey Hills.</p> <p>At a broad level, this area of Green Belt performs strongly against Purpose 2 in Elmbridge, preventing the coalescence of settlements, and prevents encroachment into some of the most unspoilt countryside in the borough (Purpose 3).</p>
<b>Character</b>	<p>Strategic Area C can broadly be characterised as gently rolling, arable farmed countryside, with a sharp transition from the suburban settlements of Cobham and Oxshott to a landscape with a considerably more rural feel.</p> <p>The north of the Area has been shaped by the River Mole, which meanders east-west from Stoke D'Abernon to Leatherhead. The river's floodplain is flat and low lying and remain relatively undeveloped, containing a mixture of arable and pastoral fields. To the east, medium-large arable fields provide the immediate setting for Oxshott and provide a gap to Ashtead and Leatherhead beyond. Although the area is predominantly open countryside, the openness is interrupted in places by occasional low density developments, some of which are in use as small commercial businesses. These urbanising influences reduce the sense of remoteness.</p> <p>West of Stoke D'Abernon, the Green Belt is more strongly integrated with the wider band of wooded, gently rolling lowlands stretching southwards and westwards towards Guildford and the North Downs beyond. Much like the area further east, the landscape is dominated by pastoral and arable farmland interspersed with small areas of woodland and horse paddocks, and interrupted by dispersed hamlets (Downside, Hatchford and Martyr's Green) and occasionally by piecemeal, low density, developments (predominantly farmsteads) along transport routes. Particularly around Downside, the hedgerow pattern has largely been lost and there is intensive market gardening and grazing.<sup>8</sup> Further west, the landscape is more densely wooded, though this is truncated by a series of golf courses.</p>

<sup>8</sup> Thames Basin Lowlands: Regional Countryside Character Area, Surrey Landscape Character Assessment, Surrey County Council, 1997

	<p>South of the Mole, the topography is very gently undulating, rising gently to a series of dispersed, gentle hilltops of around 50m. The M25 and Cobham Services sever the landscape, although the impact on longer views is minimal as the road is largely lowered in a cutting. This is one of the most tranquil parts of the borough and wider sub-region, yet urbanising influences are still present and the quality of the landscape has been degraded in places by the use of fields for grazing, particularly to the north of the motorway where development is also more prevalent.</p>
<b>Function</b>	<p>Strategic Area C is one of the most actively farmed areas of the borough, with arable and pastoral farming particularly prevalent here. However, there is also a particular concentration of more urban fringe uses across the area, with commercial businesses operating from small, low density premises. Alongside traditional farmsteads, this includes stables, catteries, educational institutions, hotels, garden centres and offices. While settlement is sparse around the Mole Valley, further south there are a sizeable number of dispersed hamlets, with associated residential development and services such as public houses.</p> <p>Much like in the rest of the borough, the Green Belt plays an important recreational function. This varies between man-made facilities, including golf courses and sports pitches, as well as areas of common land which are accessible to the public, including Cobham Park.</p>
<b>Summary</b>	<p>Strategic Area C lies on the fringes of a much wider area of strategic Green Belt which extends across much of Surrey. Its strategic role in Elmbridge is to prevent the town of Oxshott / Cobham from merging with Ashted and Leatherhead / Bookham / Fetcham in Mole Valley, though it is also important for preventing encroachment into open countryside. Much of the Area retains an unspoilt and open, rural character, though in some isolated localities ribbon development along roads and the loss of arable farmland to horse paddocks has diminished this character somewhat.</p> <p>At the strategic level, the Strategic Area plays an important role in meeting the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. Assessment of the Strategic Area against the relevant NPPF Purposes is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Purpose 1</b> – Meets the Purpose <b>moderately</b> by acting as an important barrier to potential sprawl from the Guildford urban area, Ash and Tongham urban area, Dorking, and Leatherhead / Bookham / Fetcham / Ashted.</li> <li>- <b>Purpose 2</b> – Meets the Purpose <b>strongly</b> by establishing important gaps between a number of Surrey towns from merging into one another.</li> <li>- <b>Purpose 3</b> – Meets the Purpose <b>strongly</b> by preventing encroachment into some relatively unspoilt areas of the countryside.</li> </ul>
<b>Sensitivity to Change</b>	<p>The Strategic Area includes some of the most open areas in the borough and wider sub-region and, especially given that it protects a particularly narrow gap between adjacent settlements, the landscape may have particular sensitivities if the Green Belt boundaries were to be amended. In general, this sensitivity is likely to increase moving south through the Area (away from the most populated areas).</p>