

Bromsgrove District Council
Planning and Regeneration

Development Options in Bromsgrove District



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Bromsgrove
District Council

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Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Policy Context	4
3. Testing Options	10
4. Development Options Around Bromsgrove Town	16
Area 1: Land East of Bromsgrove	17
Area 2: Land Adjacent to Finstall	22
Area 3: Land South East of Bromsgrove	26
Area 4: Land South of Bromsgrove	31
Area 5: Land South West of Bromsgrove	35
Area 6: Land North West of Bromsgrove	40
Area 7: Land North of Bromsgrove	45
5. Conclusions From Analysis of Broad Areas	49

Appendices

Appendix A: Map of Development Options

Appendix B: Map of Areas with Development Potential

1) Introduction

- 1.1 Bromsgrove District Council is currently developing a Core Strategy that will deliver the District's vision and aspirations and provide a framework for guiding change up to 2026. Whilst Core Strategies are not generally site specific documents PPS12 states that strategic sites can be allocated providing that they are fundamental to the delivery of the Strategy.
- 1.2 The Core Strategy was being prepared within the context of the ongoing phased revisions to the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The Phase 2 Revision would have provided Bromsgrove District with housing and employment targets that should be delivered by 2026.
- 1.3 An Examination in Public was held between April and June 2009. The Council put forward an argument for a higher allocation to help meet affordable housing needs and re-balance the housing market by building smaller units. The Panel's Report (September 2009) stated that the Council's approach of carefully targeting those in housing need "should be applauded and used more widely". The Panel recommended an allocation of 4,000 homes for the period up to 2021 with the possibility of an additional 2000-3000 additional dwellings to be delivered between 2021 and 2026 through a Core Strategy review. In terms of employment the panel recommended an overall requirement of 28 hectares with a 5 year reservoir of 7 hectares.
- 1.4 However, on December 13th 2010 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published the Localism Bill which intends to abolish Regional Spatial Strategies. The bill is unlikely to get royal assent until the latter half of 2011. Therefore RSS's will still form part of the development plan until royal assent has been gained. The weight to be attached to the RSS is currently unclear with a full hearing

pending to assess the CLG advice that stated the intention to abolish RSS's is a material consideration.

- 1.5 When confirmed, the removal of this regional tier of planning will enable levels of growth to be determined by local authorities. As highlighted previously there is robust evidence to justify an allocation of 4,000 homes in the district and therefore the Council will still aim to achieve this target.
- 1.6 The purpose of this document is to identify the most appropriate growth strategy for Bromsgrove District that could deliver 4,000 homes by 2021. This will mean considering all of the different growth options that are a realistic possibility for the district. In accordance with PPS12 it is necessary to consider all reasonable alternatives when determining the optimum strategy. Once a growth option has been identified it will be necessary to test broad areas of land to identify locations for development throughout the plan period. This document will assess a wide range of areas and clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses of each site and providing a clear explanation as to why an area has either been discounted or considered as suitable for development.
- 1.7 It will be important to determine from the suitable sites available if it will be appropriate to allocate any as strategic sites within the Core Strategy. Such sites would be fundamental to the delivery of the strategy and need to be carefully planned from early in the plan period.

2) Policy Context

2.1 The Development of Bromsgrove's Core Strategy is guided by national and regional planning policies. At a national level there are a number of relevant Planning Policy Statements (PPS's) and Planning Policy Guidance notes (PPGs) with which the development sites would need to accord. At a regional level the Regional Spatial Strategy is still a material consideration.

2.2 PPS1: 'Delivering Sustainable Development'

2.3 PPS1: 'Delivering Sustainable Development' contains a number of overarching principles that aim to deliver sustainable development. Planning authorities should seek to bring forward sufficient land of a suitable quality in appropriate locations to meet the expected needs for housing. It states the importance of taking into account issues such as accessibility and sustainable transport needs, the provision of essential infrastructure, including for sustainable waste management, and the need to avoid flood risk and other natural hazards. Significant emphasis is also placed on reducing the need to travel and encouraging accessible public transport provision to secure more sustainable patterns of transport development.

2.4 PPG2: Green Belts

2.5 PPG2: 'Green Belts' illustrates the importance the Government attaches to Green Belts, which have been a central element of planning policy for over fifty years. The five purposes of including land in Green Belts are as follows:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;

- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

2.6 The essential characteristic of Green Belts is their permanence. Their protection must be maintained as far as can be seen ahead and once the general extent of a Green Belt has been approved it should be altered only in exceptional circumstances. The lack of brownfield options means that virtually all sites will be greenfield and on the edge of settlements and therefore it will be imperative to test the Green Belt function of the sites, even where sites were removed from the Green Belt through the Local Plan process.

2.7 PPS3: 'Housing'

2.8 The publication of PPS3: 'Housing' puts great emphasis on the need for Planning Authorities to identify and maintain a rolling five-year supply of deliverable land for housing. Identifying sites that are truly deliverable will help to ensure that a housing supply is maintained throughout the plan period. PPS3 aims to provide a wide choice of high quality housing and states the planning should deliver:

2.9 *“Housing developments in suitable locations, which offer a good range of community facilities and with good access to jobs, key services and infrastructure.”*

2.10 It is therefore crucial that sites are located adjacent to sustainable settlements. This provides the opportunity for occupiers of the new housing to have good access to a wide range of services and facilities.

2.11 PPS7: ‘Sustainable Development in Rural Areas’

2.12 PPS7: ‘Sustainable Development in Rural Areas’ promotes a preference for the use of poorer quality agricultural land (grades 3b, 4 and 5) for development. Paragraph 28 states:

2.13 *“The presence of best and most versatile agricultural land (defined as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification), should be taken into account alongside other sustainability considerations (e.g. biodiversity; the quality and character of the landscape; its amenity value or heritage interest; accessibility to infrastructure, workforce and markets; maintaining viable communities; and the protection of natural resources, including soil quality) when determining planning applications.”*

2.14 It is acknowledged that the use of agricultural land will be required for development and the majority the land around Bromsgrove Town is of high quality and falls within grades 1 and 2. The loss of this high quality land will have to be clearly justified to ensure conformity with PPS7.

2.15 PPS9: ‘Biodiversity and Geological Conservation’

2.16 The importance of biodiversity is addressed in PPS9: ‘Biodiversity and Geological Conservation’ and this an important factor in identifying and then developing sites. PPS9 states that it is the role of planning to:

2.17 “Enhance biodiversity in green spaces and among developments so that they are used by wildlife and valued by people, recognising that healthy functional ecosystems can contribute to a better quality of life and to people’s sense of well-being; and

2.18 Ensure that developments take account of the role and value of biodiversity in supporting economic diversification and contributing to a high quality environment.”

2.19 It will be crucial for developments to create high quality environments with attractive green spaces that benefit both wildlife and people.

2.20 PPG13: ‘Transport’

2.21 PPG13: ‘Transport’ focuses on the delivery of new housing in sustainable locations that seek to reduce car dependence and provide the greatest opportunity for the use of public transport, walking and cycling. Paragraph 13 provides detail as to where housing should be located by stating:

2.22 “The focus for additional housing should be existing towns and cities”

2.23 Bromsgrove Town is the only town within the district and therefore in theory is the primary location for growth. Bromsgrove Town has a range of bus services and a new train station is proposed.

2.24 PPG24: ‘Planning and Noise’

2.25 As identified within PPG24, noise is material consideration in the determination of planning applications. Noise is a consideration both in terms of the siting of noise-sensitive land uses and also proposals for development that would result in significant levels of noise.

2.26 Housing is considered to be a land use that is noise-sensitive. PPG24 states that:

2.27 “Local planning authorities should consider carefully in each case whether proposals for new noise-sensitive development would be incompatible with existing activities. Such development should not

normally be permitted in areas which are - or are expected to become subject to unacceptably high levels of noise.”

2.28 The use of mitigation either through engineering, layout or administrative methods is supported within PPG24. With both the M42 and M5 passing through the district noise and disturbance for the occupiers of the proposed dwellings is likely to be an issue in certain locations. Detailed testing will be required to identify the areas which are most effected by noise. This will enable development to be laid out sensitively with employment and other non-sensitive uses located close to the motorway.

2.29 PPS25: ‘Development and Flood Risk’

2.30 It is critical that flood risk is considered early in the planning process with PPS25 encouraging a process of assessing, managing and reducing the risk of flooding. Flood Risk Assessments (FRA) are required for all developments above 1 hectare in size, even in flood zone 1. Paragraph E9 of PPS25 states that the FRA:

2.31 “Should identify and assess the risks of all forms of flooding to and from the development and demonstrate how these flood risks will be managed, taking climate change into account. For major developments in Flood Zone 1, the FRA should identify opportunities to reduce the probability and consequences of flooding.”

2.32 In accordance with PPS25 the Council has completed both a Water Cycle Study and a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment which will provide a starting point for the assessment of flood risk on sites before detailed site specific Flood Risk Assessments are commissioned.

2.33 Regional Spatial Strategy

- 2.34 The Coalition Government published the Localism Bill on 13th December 2010. The bill states that Regional Spatial Strategies will be abolished however this will not actually happen until the bill gains royal assent in the latter half of 2011. Therefore the RSS still forms of the development plan. Although, the weight to be attached to the RSS is currently unclear with a full hearing pending to assess the CLG advice that stated the intention to abolish RSS's is a material consideration.
- 2.35 The Regional Spatial Strategy was undergoing a phased review with the Panel Report in the Phase 2 Revision published in September 2009. Whilst this phased revision never reached adoption stage some weight can be attached to policies within the document. The most important policy in terms of housing development is CF3 that proposes an allocation of 4000 dwellings in the district for the period 2006-2021. The policy also highlights the possibility of a further 2000 to 3000 dwellings being delivered between 2021 and 2026 through a Core Strategy Review.
- 2.36 Policy CF2 is also relevant to the development of housing in the district and supports the development of housing adjacent to market towns and other urban areas outside of the MUA and Settlements of Significant Development (SSD). The policy states:
- 2.37 *“These settlements, which need to be capable of creating balanced opportunities for housing and employment and which should already have a range of local services will be identified through LDDs”*
- 2.38 The Communities for the Future Chapter contains a suite of policies that build on the principals contained within PPS3 that need to be considered in the development of strategic housing sites. These policies include CF6 'Making Efficient Use of Land', CF7 'Delivering Affordable Housing' and CF8 'Delivering Mixed Communities'. It will be

crucial to make the best use of Greenfield land whilst maintaining high design standards that create places where people want to live. A proportion of each site will be used for affordable housing to ensure that mixed communities are created.

3) Testing Options

3.1 How should growth be delivered?

3.2 There are only 2 ways that large scale growth can be delivered in the district. This is either through strategic allocations within the Core Strategy or a Land Allocations DPD. A combination of the two options may also be a possibility.

3.3 Whilst Core Strategies are not generally site specific documents PPS12 states that strategic sites can be allocated providing that they are fundamental to the delivery of the strategy. To achieve the challenging targets the allocation of strategic sites within the Core Strategy will be essential to ensure the delivery of a large numbers of houses throughout the plan period. The Council does not have the resources to begin a Land Allocations DPD until after the adoption of the Core Strategy which would result in a significant time lag in terms of delivery. Subject to the availability of suitable large sites, strategic site allocations within the Core Strategy would provide clarity and a clear focus within the document enabling delivery to begin early in the plan period.

3.4 A Land Allocations DPD may well be used to deliver the remaining sites however no final decision has yet to be made on this issue. It will purely depend on the number of sites that come forward through the planning process as to whether a DPD will be required.

3.5 Growth Options

3.6 In accordance with PPS12 it is important that all reasonable options are considered in the formulation of the Core Strategy and other Development Plan Documents. There are considered to be 5 possible options to deliver housing growth in Bromsgrove District, and these are as follows:

- Bromsgrove Town Focus;
- Spread growth evenly;
- Growth South of Birmingham;
- Growth North of Redditch; and
- A New Settlement

3.7 Bromsgrove Town Focus

3.8 This option would allocate a significant level of growth to Bromsgrove Town. The Town is the largest and arguably the most sustainable settlement in the district offering a full range of services and facilities. This option would also provide the opportunity for limited levels of growth in other sustainable settlements in the district. The SHLAA has already identified that there are suitable and available large sites around the town to deliver this growth.

3.9 Spread Growth

3.10 This option would involve spreading growth more evenly between settlements such as Bromsgrove Town, Catshill, Wythall, Hagley, Alvechurch and Barnt Green. This would place greater emphasis on these smaller settlements to deliver growth and in all likelihood increase demand for local facilities and services. Sites have been identified within the SHLAA in each of the main settlements, although further sites would need to be found in the smaller settlements to spread growth evenly.

3.11 Growth South Of Birmingham

3.12 One method of achieving growth would be through an urban extension to South Birmingham. This was identified as a possible option in the Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners Study which was evidence for the Examination in Public (EiP) into the RSS. However, the Panel Report dismissed the idea of an urban extension to South Birmingham as it

would harm urban renaissance in the MUA. On this basis, there is no sound policy background to justify growth on the South Birmingham border.

3.13 It would also be illogical to build houses for local people adjacent to Birmingham as it would not be close to many of the services and amenities available within the district. Growth in such a location would not help the regeneration of the town centre as people would be more likely to use retail facilities in Birmingham or Solihull.

3.14 Growth North of Redditch

3.15 This option would concentrate high levels of growth adjacent to the border of Redditch. The emerging RSS proposed housing around the edge of Redditch in Bromsgrove District to meet housing needs in Redditch but as the Coalition Government is abolishing RSS's through the Localism Bill there will be no policy basis for this.

3.16 It is not considered that any growth on the edge of Redditch would meet the needs of the local population with people more likely to use services and facilities available within Redditch. Growth in this location is unlikely to stimulate the regeneration of Bromsgrove Town Centre.

3.17 A New Settlement

3.18 PPS3 allows for the possibility of new settlements where it can be justified to be a sustainable option in areas of high need and demand. However, through the SHLAA process no interested parties submitted any suitable or available sites where a new settlement would be possible. In addition the SHLAA identified that a figure of 4,000 can be achieved in sustainable locations in and around existing settlements without the need for a new settlement.

3.19 Summary

3.20 In conclusion it is considered that there are only two realistic growth options and these are the focus on Bromsgrove Town or spreading growth more evenly throughout the settlements of the district. Due to the nature and location of suitable and available sites the Bromsgrove Town Focus is clearly the optimum scenario. This would still leave opportunities for some growth in other settlements.

3.21 Why Focus Growth on Bromsgrove Town?

3.22 Need and Demand for Housing

3.23 As well as being the most sustainable location for growth, the greatest housing need and demand is within the town. Waiting lists for social housing, sourced from Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT), highlight that the highest level of demand is primarily around the Bromsgrove Town. At April 2008 Aston Fields (904), Sidemoor (971) and the town centre (1,060) had some of the highest numbers of applicants. With people able to choose multiple locations these figures are not a true reflection of actual demand but it is nevertheless still a useful indicator. With low levels of housing building in the town over recent years there is a pent up demand for 2 and 3 bedroom properties particularly from young families and the rising pensioner population. Whilst there is high demand and need in other parts of the district it is at its greatest in Bromsgrove where the majority of the population live.

3.24 Public Transport

3.25 Bromsgrove Town has the widest range and availability of public transport in the district. Regular bus services run through the urban areas of the town into the centre with good links to Birmingham, Worcester and Redditch as well as the other settlements in the district. Public transport may improve further with the possibility of a new railway

station that would increase the frequency of trains. If built, the new station would have regular trains to Birmingham and Worcester as well as destinations further a field. A transport interchange may be created at the new station linking bus services with the new station and a large car park would also be provided to discourage car use on longer journeys. Development in Bromsgrove Town is the most sustainable location in terms of public transport options and is likely to lead to further improvements.

3.26 Employment

3.27 Bromsgrove Town has the largest range of employment opportunities in the district with locations such as Buntsford Gate Business Park and Aston Fields Industrial Estate. The Bromsgrove Technology Park is currently under construction and further development in the town could be a catalyst for the Technology Park to be completed and could also attract more high technology firms. Development in the town provides the opportunity for people to live and work locally creating sustainable communities.

3.28 Facilities and Services

3.29 Bromsgrove Town is the largest settlement in the district with a wide range of facilities and services including retail, health care, schools, Sanders Park and the Dolphin Centre. The regeneration of the town centre through the Area Action Plan will lead to an improved retail offer and enhanced shopping experience for local residents. Increased levels of investment and growth in the town are likely to boost the regeneration of the town centre and help to attract investment from national retailers.

3.30 Conclusion

3.31 Bromsgrove Town is clearly the most sustainable location for growth within the district due to the wide variety of services, facilities and

employment opportunities. In addition there are good public transport links by both bus and rail giving people a realistic alternative to the car. With the greatest need and demand for housing in the town it therefore sensible that a significant proportion of the growth is focussed there.

4) Development Options around Bromsgrove Town

- 4.1 It is critical for the Council to test all realistic options before determining which sites are most appropriate for development. 7 broad areas have been tested that encompass Bromsgrove Town on all sides. A map of these sites is attached at appendix A. A number of factors have been considered including sustainability, flood risk, landscape sensitivity, Green Belt implications and environmental designations. The site assessment also includes the main findings of Visual Appraisal undertaken on the sites.
- 4.2 In some cases part or all the broad areas were promoted through the SHLAA process and have developer interest. However it is important to look beyond these promoted sites as it is important that any forthcoming allocations are located to best integrate into the town and help to create sustainable communities.

4.3 Area 1: Land East of Bromsgrove

4.4 Site Description

4.5 This area is located to the east of the A38 to the north east of the Town centre and totals some 200ha. This area is bounded by the Alcester Road to east, Bromsgrove Highway and the railway line to the south, Birmingham Road to the west and School Lane to the north. The settlement of Lickey End is located on the northern boundary of the site and the village of Burcot is situated on the eastern boundary.

4.6 Bromsgrove Golf Course is located on a significant portion of the land that is south of Burcot Lane. Further leisure facilities are located on Pikes Pool Lane where there is Adventure Quest which provides outdoor activities and Pikes Pool fisheries.

4.7 Site Assessment

4.8 Natural Features & Designations

4.9 The area is located entirely within the designated Green Belt and therefore it is important to consider the Green Belt function of this land. The A38 currently provides a long term defensible Green Belt boundary. Development in this location would lead to sprawl into the wider countryside and reduce the gap to the settlement of Burcot. A lack of any clearly defined boundaries beyond the A38 could lead to the coalescence of Bromsgrove and Burcot which would be entirely unacceptable.

4.10 Land levels vary greatly across the site with 2 ridge lines clearly identifiable. At the western boundary of the site adjacent to the A38 (North of Burcot Lane) land levels are 105m AOD but rise sharply to the east up to 155 metres above ordnance datum (AOD). Beyond this point land levels fall towards the Alcester Rd. The second ridge is located south east of the golf course and is approximately 165m AOD.

4.11 The Spadesbourne Brook dissects the northern section of the site flowing in a north east to south west direction. The area surrounding the Brook falls within flood zone 2, where there is between a 1 in 100 and 1 in 1000 year risk of flooding. The remainder of the site falls within flood zone 1 although there is a historic record of flooding on the Alcester Road by the Spadesbourne Brook. Detailed modelling would therefore be required to test the implications of developing this area of land.

4.12 In addition there is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) on Burcot Lane measuring 0.38 hectares in size. The site is known as Burcot Lane Cuttings and is an earth heritage site which would need to be protected if any development took place. A Special Wildlife Site (SWS) is also located on Burcot Lane and is known as Burcot Lane Meadow. The SWS is a rectangular shaped pasture meadow and is a mix of grassland and marsh that contains a variety of fauna and flora. However, development would have to sprawl a significant distance east before there would be an impact on Burcot Lane Meadow.

4.13 Visual Appraisal

4.14 The visual appraisal highlights that a significant proportion of the site north of Burcot Lane is highly prominent when viewed from the east, west and north. Any development would need to be contained significantly below the ridgeline to reduce the prominence. Beyond the ridgeline the land relates to the wider countryside rather than Bromsgrove Town and therefore any development would be completely out of character.

4.15 The most northern parcel of land north of the Spadesbourne Brook is flat and not visually prominent. Views into the site would be restricted to short distance views from the adjacent public right of way.

4.16 South of Burcot Lane a significant proportion of the land is the golf course which is generally well contained and doesn't appear unduly prominent when viewed from public positions outside of the site. The remainder of the site south of the golf course appears visually separate

from the town due to the nearest residential area the oakalls being separated by both the A448 and the Old Stratford Road. Many areas also have dense mature hedgerows with large numbers of trees including areas of woodland creating well enclosed areas.

4.17 Overall there are significant areas that are not suitable for development due to its prominence or because of the visual separation from the town.

4.18 Landscape Sensitivity

4.19 In terms of landscape sensitivity the site is a mix of medium and low with the low sensitivity land located west of the Alcester Road closest to Bromsgrove Town. Solely on the grounds of landscape sensitivity this land would be most appropriate for development as it is able to accommodate change.

4.20 Agricultural Land Quality

4.21 The agricultural land within this broad area is considered to be the best and most versatile as it is primarily a mix of grade 2 and grade 3a. With the majority of land around Bromsgrove Town being either within grades 1, 2 or 3a some high quality agricultural land will need to be used for development and therefore the quality of the agricultural land is not a determining factor in site selection.

4.22 Green Infrastructure

4.23 To the south east of the site there is an area of woodland and other smaller areas where there are groupings of mature trees. There is also a line of mature trees adjacent to the A38. The golf course contains significant areas of woodland and trees forming part of the National Inventory. The area is characterised by fields which have well defined hedgerows.

4.24 Sustainability

4.25 The broad area has been assessed in the Accessibility Study completed by Halcrow. The site generally performed well in terms of access to

services and facilities in the district. In particular the site has good access by cycle. In terms of travel by public transport access is best from the north and west of the site but is considered poor in the south east corner of the site. For travel on foot access is considered to be good in the west of the site but accessibility decreases to the east where it is further from services and facilities.

4.26 Development in this location could have major traffic implications on the already busy and heavily congested A38. At peak times traffic is often at a standstill and additional junctions to create access to development are only likely to worsen the problem.

4.27 There are also major concerns over the availability and deliverability of this broad area. Bromsgrove Golf Club is a long established and successful business and the landowners have not shown an interest in selling the land. Development here would result in the loss of an important sports facility to Bromsgrove Town that is available to all residents. In addition there are popular conference facilities that attract people to the area.

4.28 Summary

4.29 Whilst a significant element of the land has been assessed as low sensitivity in landscaping terms there other overriding constraints that mean that a large proportion of the land is not suitable for development. Firstly, development in this location would cause significant Green Belt harm. The A38 has been a longstanding Green Belt boundary that has helped to prevent the sprawl and ensure coalescence does not occur with either Lickey End to the north or Burcot to the east. There are concerns over the visual impact of development on highly prominent parts of the site and also the fact that much of the site has a strong relationship with the wider countryside. In addition there are also environmental constraints limiting the development potential of the land including flooding from the Spadesbourne Brook, a SSSI and a SWS.

The golf club is not currently available for development and would result in the loss of an important leisure facility to the district.

4.30 Area 2: Land Adjacent to Finstall

4.31 Site Description

4.32 The broad area is bound by the settlement of Finstall to the north, the A448 to the east, the Birmingham to Worcester Canal to the south and St. Godwalds Road to the west. Bromsgrove Rugby Club and Finstall Park are located on the land south of Finstall. The remainder of the site consists of a large number of fields of varying shapes and sizes, many of which are actively used for agricultural purposes. The village of Tardebigge is located adjacent to the south east corner of this area.

4.33 Site Assessment

4.34 Natural Features & Designations

4.35 The site is within the designated Green Belt and therefore it is important to consider the Green Belt function of the site. Development here would mean that the settlement of Finstall would be engulfed within Bromsgrove and would no longer have its own identity. Tightly drawn boundaries have prevented significant sprawl south of Bromsgrove. This has ensured that coalescence does not occur with Redditch. Development as far south as the canal would also lead to coalescence with Tardebigge. It is clear that there are strong Green Belt grounds to avoid development in this location.

4.36 Land levels undulate across this broad area but generally rise towards the south. Adjacent to the built form of Bromsgrove Town land levels are as low as 80m AOD. The area has two obvious ridge lines which are both 140m AOD. The first is located in the north east of the site adjacent to the A448 and the second is located further south adjacent to the canal.

4.37 The broad area is entirely located within flood zone 1. Although there is an ordinary watercourse running through the site and any potential for flooding from this watercourse is currently unknown. There is also a record of historic flooding at the Dusthouse Lane and Walnut Lane junction.

4.38 The Birmingham to Worcester Canal is designated as a Conservation Area is located immediately outside this area on its southern boundary. A number of listed buildings are located within and adjacent to the broad area, the majority of these are locks. Any development would need to retain and enhance the setting of the Listed Buildings and Conservation Area.

4.39 Visual Appraisal

4.40 The visual appraisal identifies two ridgelines across the area which would need to be avoided if development was to occur. Development on or near the peaks of these ridges would be highly visible from a number of public locations.

4.41 Parts of the site are quite flat, particularly the north-west corner adjacent to the town. Long distance views towards this area highlight that an urban extension would not appear unduly prominent due to the landscape and high number of mature trees and hedgerows.

4.42 Landscape Sensitivity

4.43 The landscape in this area is a mix of medium and high sensitivity with the high sensitivity area located south of Dusthouse Lane. In landscape terms it would be preferable for development to only occur north of Dusthouse Lane where the landscape is more accommodating to change.

4.44 Agricultural Land Quality

4.45 The agricultural land is a mix of grade 1, grade 2, grade 3a and grade 3b. The majority of the land is considered to be the best and most versatile agricultural land. With most of the land around Bromsgrove Town being either within grades 1, 2 or 3a some high quality agricultural land will need to be used for development and therefore the quality of the agricultural land is not a determining factor in site selection.

4.46 Green Infrastructure

4.47 A number of public rights of way are located within the site with the most notable being Monarch's Way which is a historic footpath. The Sustrans route No 5, a national cycle route, is located outside but adjacent to the western boundary of the site. These provide an excellent opportunity to encourage cycling and walking if development was to occur in this area.

4.48 The main water feature is the Birmingham to Worcester Canal that provides the southern boundary to the site. Other water features in the site are minor brooks and small ponds.

4.49 A number of dense hedgerows are located within the site and the area is characterised by individual mature trees that are located throughout. Areas of denser tree cover are found in 4 small areas towards the south of the site.

4.50 3 traditional orchards are located within the area, which are recognised as a priority habitat within the Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). The orchards provides habitat for a variety of flora and fauna which are becoming increasingly rare across Worcestershire. These priority habitats would need to be retained if development was to occur and a buffer may be required around them.

4.51 Finstall Park and Bromsgrove Rugby Club occupy a significant portion of the land to the North West adjacent to the settlement of Finstall. Such high quality recreational facilities would need to be protected from development.

4.52 Sustainability

4.53 The areas performance in terms of sustainability is mixed as whilst it is close to the train station which means good links to Birmingham and Worcester this could discourage people from using local facilities in the town centre or gaining employment locally. The broad area was assessed in the Accessibility Study undertaken by Halcrow. Overall

performance is considered to be poor although access by cycle is considered to be good except for the south eastern edge of the site which is furthest from the town centre. Whilst access by public transport is considered to be good adjacent to the train station it is considered to be poor across the majority of the site due to the distance from bus routes. The vast majority of the site is considered to have poor access to existing facilities and services for people on foot. This is because education, health and retail facilities are generally all beyond a reasonable walking distance and the site is over 2km from the town centre. There are concerns that development in this location would increase car travel between Bromsgrove and Redditch. Those people located to the south of the railway line would have excellent road access into Redditch along the A448 where a greater range of retail facilities are available.

4.54 Summary

4.55 Whilst the site has a low flood risk and is close to the railway station there are concerns over the accessibility to services and facilities from a significant percentage of the site, particularly the southern half. There are also overriding Green Belt grounds as to why the site should not be developed. Large scale development directly south of Fininstall would mean the settlement of Fininstall would be engulfed into Bromsgrove and lose its identity. Development in this area would also need to be avoided to retain important recreational facilities at Bromsgrove Rugby Club and Fininstall Park.

4.56 To leap frog the northern part of the site and develop south of Dusthouse Lane would be wholly undesirable in Green Belt terms. It would leave an arbitrary and potentially nominal gap that would effectively create a standalone settlement that is not physically attached to Bromsgrove. This would lead to a very unsustainable pattern of development.

4.57 Area 3: Land South East of Bromsgrove

4.58 Site Description

4.59 This area lies to the south east of Bromsgrove Town and comprises of land south of St. Godwalds Road and extends south beyond Lower Gambolds Lane to the Worcester and Birmingham Canal. The area measures approximately 121 hectares. The most northerly parcel of land is designated as an ADR and south of this is Bromsgrove Cricket, Hockey and Tennis Club. While, most of the site is open land, the club has a range of facilities including a club house and second pitch pavilion. The land south and east of the sports club is agricultural pasture land and consists of a number of fields of varying sizes.

4.60 Site Assessment

4.61 Natural Features and Designations

4.62 Whilst the whole of the broad area was not promoted at the Local Plan Inquiry the land adjacent the former wagon works (BROM5C) was endorsed by the council and the sports club was put forward by the owners of the site as a short or medium term housing site.

4.63 In relation to the land adjacent the wagon works the Inspector agreed with the Council that it should be an ADR stating:

4.64 “BROM 5C represents in my view a very sustainable option for longer-term development, performing well against the criteria set out in paragraph 31 of PPG3. In particular, it is within easy walking distance of Bromsgrove railway station and local facilities at Aston Fields, is readily accessible to the town centre, and has many employment opportunities available in the immediate vicinity.”

4.65 After such strong support from the Inspector the site was removed from the Green Belt and designated as an ADR in the adopted Local Plan.

- 4.66 However, the inspector did not support potential development on the sports club stating:
- 4.67 “There is no compelling argument for extending BROM 5C south-eastwards to Lower Gambolds Lane. To do so would lead to the further loss of confirmed Green Belt. This would conflict with one of its main purposes which is to safeguard the countryside from encroachment. Development here would also be prominent in views from higher ground to the east and south that forms part of the Landscape Protection Area”
- 4.68 For many years the railway line has been a defining Green Belt boundary for the south eastern side of the town whilst development adjacent to the former Wagon Works would breach this the land is low lying with a defined boundary ensuring no significant implications on the wider Green Belt. Significant Green Belt release in this area would significantly reduce the strategic gap between Redditch and Bromsgrove. Beyond the ADR there are no defining features that could provide a defensible Green Belt boundary. The sprawl of development south of the railway would reduce the strategic gap and increase the possibility of coalescence in the future.
- 4.69 Land levels undulate across the site but the site is generally quite low lying with land at the south falling to approximately 75m AOD. However, the land gently rises to the south east with a ridge line of 100m AOD.
- 4.70 The broad area is primarily located within flood zone 1 where there is the lowest level of flood risk but the River Salwarpe, which is a SWS, does run through the heart of the site meaning a small area adjacent to the river falls within flood zone 2. An ordinary watercourse also passes through the site and the flood risk from this watercourse is unknown.
- 4.71 The Birmingham to Worcester Canal is located adjacent to the southern boundary of the broad area and this is both a Conservation Area and SWS. There are several listed buildings located within and adjacent to this area, the majority of these are locks.

Any development would need to retain and enhance the setting of the listed buildings and conservation area.

4.72 Visual Appraisal

4.73 In conclusion this area is generally quite flat although land levels do rise to the south and development on this more prominent raised ground should be avoided. In landscape terms extensions to the south of the town would not be problematic with the existing landscape restricting views into much of the site. Generally, views into the area are localised.

4.74 Landscape Sensitivity

4.75 Worcestershire County Council have assessed landscape sensitivity on the site as a mix of medium and high. Where landscape sensitivity is high there is a general presumption against development as the landscape is not readily able to accommodate change.

4.76 Agricultural Land Quality

4.77 The agricultural land is a mix of grade 2, grade 3a and grade 3b. A significant proportion of the land is considered to be the best and most versatile agricultural land. With the majority of land around Bromsgrove Town being either within grades 1, 2 or 3a some high quality agricultural land will need to be used for development and therefore the quality of the agricultural land is not a determining factor in site selection.

4.78 Green Infrastructure

4.79 A number of public rights of way are located within the site. The Sustrans route No 5, which is a national cycle route is located along the western boundary of the site. These provide excellent opportunities for walking and cycling.

- 4.80 The main water feature is the Birmingham to Worcester Canal that provides the southern boundary to the site. Other water features in the site are minor brooks and small ponds.
- 4.81 There a number of mature hedgerows located throughout the site, particularly in the northern end of the site and there are three small areas where there are a concentrated number of mature trees. If development occurs mature trees and important hedgerows should generally be retained.
- 4.82 Sustainability**
- 4.83 The broad area has been assessed within the Accessibility Study. Access by cycle is considered to be good from over half the site with only the southern part of the area performing poorly. Access via public transport is only considered to be good from the northern parcels of the site, primarily the ADR and the Bromsgrove Cricket, Hockey and Tennis club. This is due to their close relationship with the railway station and bus facilities that are available in Aston Fields. Access by foot is considered to be poor from the majority of the site with south in particular being beyond a reasonable walking distance to any existing facilities.
- 4.84 With access into the town centre generally considered to be poor there would be a reliance on car travel. All traffic heading into Bromsgrove would enter via St. Godwalds Road. This could cause congestion problems with double parking already a regular occurrence on the bridge over the railway line. Large scale development in this location is also likely to encourage people to shop in Redditch due to its proximity, or visit and work in other locations due to the excellent train access.
- 4.85 Summary**
- 4.86 In summary the land designated as an ADR provides a logical extension to Bromsgrove on low lying land with a defensible Green Belt boundary in a location that has good access to local facilities. A more

comprehensive development would have significant highway implications with access towards the town limited to a solitary bridge over the railway line. In addition development beyond the ADR would cause undue harm to the Green Belt due to the lack of a defensible boundary and development towards the south eastern boundary would also be visually prominent. In addition much of the land further south is of high landscape sensitivity and therefore is not easily able to accommodate change.

4.87 Area 4: Land South of Bromsgrove

4.88 Site Description

4.89 This area, totalling some 98 hectares, is bounded by the A38 to the north, employment sites to the north east, the railway line to the south east, Stoke Prior to the south and the district boundary to the west. The northern part of the site adjacent to the A38 contains Avoncroft Museum. With the exception of Bromsgrove School, a cricket club, children's play area and a garden centre the remainder of the land is used for agricultural purposes. The land consists of a number of fields of varying shapes and sizes. The River Salwarpe dissects the southern end of the site and flows from east to west towards the Upton Warren Pools SSSI.

4.90 Site Assessment

4.91 Natural Features and Designations

4.92 The site is located within the designated Green Belt and therefore it is imperative consider the Green Belt function of the site. Development in this location would lead to sprawl into the wider countryside and a reduction in the gap to the settlement of Stoke Prior. The River Salwarpe could be a defined Green Belt boundary but development this far south would lead to coalescence between Bromsgrove and Stoke Prior. It is imperative that coalescence such as this is avoided.

4.93 This land is located wholly within the Green Belt. Land levels are predominantly lower to the southern portion of this site. The land adjacent to the A38 is approximately 85m AOD but levels decrease to only 55m AOD adjacent to the village of Stoke Prior.

4.94 The River Salwarpe bisects the southern section of the site running from east to west. The land either side of the river falls within flood zone 3b which is a functional flood plain. Development in these areas of the site

must be avoided and further modelling work would be required to determine the wider impact of development near the River Salwarpe.

4.95 A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located adjacent to the site at the Southern tip and it is known as Upton Warren Pools. This SSSI consists of a series of pools of different origins. The principal importance of the site is its ornithological interest providing important habitats for waterfowl and wader species. The River Salwarpe, which is a SWS, runs through the SSSI and therefore any development upstream could have potential impacts on this SSSI.

4.96 Any development in this broad area would need to preserve the character and setting of Avoncroft Museum where there are 11 listed buildings. In addition the museum is a major tourist attraction within the district and therefore development close to the museum could not only have implications in term of conservation but also harm viability and vitality of the attraction.

4.97 Visual Appraisal

4.98 The visual appraisal highlighted that land levels generally fall to the south beyond the town towards the settlement of Stoke Prior. With Bromsgrove sitting in a bowl any significant development south would potentially 'spill over' into the wider countryside and therefore could be highly prominent.

4.99 The only prominent ridge is located south of Fish House Lane. If development were to come this far south this landscape could provide a level of containment to the south east.

4.100 Landscape Sensitivity

4.101 Landscape sensitivity varies greatly across the site with areas that fall into low, medium and high sensitivity. The eastern parcel of the site is most sensitive to change and any development would need to be managed carefully.

4.102 Agricultural Land Quality

4.103 The agricultural land consists primarily of a mix of grade 2 and grade 3a and is therefore considered to be the best and most versatile. With the majority of land around Bromsgrove Town being either within grades 1, 2 or 3a some high quality agricultural land will need to be used for development and therefore the quality of the agricultural land is not a determining factor in site selection.

4.104 Green Infrastructure

4.105 A number of public rights of way are located within the site. The main water features are the Birmingham to Worcester Canal that provides the southern boundary to the site and the River Salwarpe that runs east to west through the site.

4.106 There is a well defined network of mature hedgerows located throughout the site. There are also areas where there are a concentrated number of mature trees.

4.107 4 Traditional orchards are located within the area, which are recognised as a priority habitat within the Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). The orchards provides habitat for a variety of flora and fauna and are becoming increasingly rare across Worcestershire.

4.108 It is essential that the traditional orchards are retained within any development. It would also necessary to preserve mature trees and important hedgerows where possible.

4.109 Sustainability

4.110 There area has been assessed within the Accessibility Study. Access by cycle is considered to be good from the northern half of the site but decreases further south due to the increased distance from services and facilities. Access by public transport also had a similar outcome with access considered to be poor at the southern end of the site. The whole of the broad area is considered to have poor access to services and

facilities for pedestrians. The study has highlighted major concerns over the sustainability of this location. The town centre, doctors, dentists and schools all over 2km from the site creating major issues in terms of access particularly as bus links are poor.

4.111 Summary

4.112 In summary there are a number of issues that would make development in this area problematic. The most northern part of the site could not be developed due to the current land uses that include Avoncroft Museum, Bromsgrove School, a play area and a cricket pitch. From an environmental perspective, part of the site is a functional floodplain, the Upton Warren Pools SSSI is located adjacent to the site and a portion of the site is of high landscape sensitivity. In addition the area performs poorly in terms of sustainability due to its distance from the town centre and other important social infrastructure. The site also has an important Green Belt function in terms of preventing the coalescence of Bromsgrove and Stoke Prior.

4.113 Area 5: Land South West of Bromsgrove

4.114 Site Description

4.115 This area is bounded by Timberhonger Lane to the north, Whitford Road/Rock Hill/Worcester Road to the east, the district boundary to the south and the M5 to the west. The eastern boundary abuts the existing urban area of Bromsgrove Town and this area is located close to the Town Centre. The site slopes away to the south west and provides long distance views over Worcestershire. Grafton Manor Hotel is located in the heart of the site. The highest point of the site to the north provides views over Bromsgrove Town. The land consists of a number of fields of varying shapes and sizes.

4.116 Site Assessment

4.117 Natural Features and Designations

4.118 The vast majority of the site is located within the designated Green Belt however a parcel of land adjacent to Whitford Road was designated as an ADR following the public inquiry into the Local Plan. In recommending that the land adjacent to Whitford Road be included as an ADR the Inspector concluded:

4.119 “I believe that on both Green Belt and sustainability grounds there is much to commend this as a potential ADR. It lies on the town’s favoured east-west axis. Encroachment into the surrounding countryside is limited by the M5 motorway and the topography. Together these provide a degree of visual containment. The site is well related to the town centre, linked by a park that could be further extended along the tree-lined Battlefield Brook to provide additional recreation facilities and further opportunities for walking and cycling.”

- 4.120 These wide-ranging benefits convinced the Council the site should be included as an ADR within the adopted Local Plan. The site was then promoted through the SHLAA process on behalf of the 2 landowners.
- 4.121 It is imperative to consider the Green Belt function of the site. The M5 provides a defensible Green Belt boundary to the west limiting the sprawl of development however physical boundaries to the south are more limited with the boundary of the broad area merely drawn to follow the district boundary. Development within this area would need to be carefully located to prevent further encroachment into the countryside. The existing ADR has well defined boundaries with residential development to the east and south, the M5 and dense hedgerows and trees to the west. This provides an ideal limit to development in this location.
- 4.122 As mentioned above, the land slopes away to the south west from the highest point to the north being approximately 120m AOD. Land levels fall to just 60m AOD adjacent to the boundary with Wychavon District Council.
- 4.123 A Special Wildlife Site (SWS) is located within this broad area. It is known as Grafton Manor Pool and is located within the grounds of Grafton Manor House on Grafton Lane. The pool is 1.5hectares in size and contains a variety of notable flora and forna. Due to the contained nature of the SWS it is considered that development could take place without undue harm to Grafton Manor Pool although matters of surface water run off and water quality would need to be addressed.
- 4.124 The vast majority of the site falls within flood zone 1 meaning that there is the lowest risk of flooding. The Battlefield Brook runs parallel to the northern boundary of the site meaning that there is a tiny area that has a risk of flooding. Such a small area would not impede development on a large scale.

4.125 An area of lowland meadows and a small Traditional Orchard are located within the area. These are both recognised as priority habitats within the Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). The orchard and meadow provide habitat for a variety of flora and fauna it is therefore imperative that these habitats remain if development occurs.

4.126 The site contains 2 listed buildings in the southern half of the site and these are Grafton Manor Hotel (Grade II*) and Bowling Green Farmhouse (Grade II). Any development would need to retain and enhance the setting of these listed buildings.

4.127 Visual Appraisal

4.128 The Visual Appraisal highlights that there would be a significant visual impact on the setting of Bromsgrove if large proportions of the site are developed. South of the prominent ridge line land levels fall dramatically and the landscape relates to the wider countryside rather than Bromsgrove Town.

4.129 The parcel of land north of the ridge line (BROM5F) has a stronger relationship with the town and is naturally contained by the landscape. If development is located here it will be necessary to avoid building on or near the ridge line to ensure the development cannot be seen from the south and the visual impact from the north is limited.

4.130 Landscape Sensitivity

4.131 The vast majority of the land has been assessed as being of high landscape sensitivity meaning that it is very sensitive to change and therefore there is a presumption against development on landscape character grounds. There is a small element of land assessed as medium sensitivity to the north which is more accommodating to change. This therefore suggests that the development in the northern part of the site would be less sensitive although further landscape work would be required.

4.132 Agricultural Land Quality

4.133 The quality of the agricultural land varies across this broad area with a mix of grade 2, grade 3a and grade 3b. Although over 50% percent of the land is graded as 3b meaning that it is the least versatile agricultural land around Bromsgrove Town.

4.134 Green Infrastructure

4.135 A number of public rights of way are located within the site and Monarch's Way, which is an historic footpath, runs adjacent to the northern boundary of the site. These provide an opportunity to encourage walking if development occurs.

4.136 The main water feature is the Battlefield Brook that also runs adjacent to the northern boundary of the site. A number of small lakes and pools are also located throughout the area.

4.137 There is a well defined network of mature hedgerows located throughout the site. There are also five areas where there are a concentrated number of mature trees. Mature trees and important hedgerows would need to be retained as part of any development.

4.138 Sustainability

4.139 The site is relatively sustainable with good access to schools and the town centre and local employment also close by. This area also has the benefit of being close to Sanders Park. It is of note that sustainability generally improves in the northern parcel of the broad area with permeable routes becoming apparent into the town centre without the need for private transport.

4.140 Noise and Air Quality

4.141 Whilst the motorway provides a long term Green Belt boundary there is the issue of noise and air quality for residents of any proposed development. This undoubtedly will mean that part of the site will not be

suitable for residential development. Detailed testing will be required to identify the areas where residential development will not be appropriate.

4.142 Summary

4.143 It is clear that part of the broad area has potential for development within the northern part of the site, which is removed from the Green Belt being least constrained. The area allocated as an ADR has strong defensible boundaries on all sides which are not apparent further south. In addition the northern part of the site is least sensitive in landscape terms and is also the most sustainable with better access to services and facilities within the town centre. Whilst the lower quality of agricultural land suggests further development should be located here it is outweighed by the harm to the Green Belt, the wider visual impact of development and the highly sensitive landscape.

4.144 Area 6: Land North West of Bromsgrove

4.145 Site Description

4.146 The site consists of 76.6 hectares of land that is located to the north west of Bromsgrove Town and includes land on both sides on Perryfields Road. The land is situated between existing residential development and the M5 motorway. The site consists mainly of pasture land and is predominantly flat, although the land east of Perryfields Road does dip slightly towards the town. The site also contains Sidemoor First School and Array Fruit Farm. The fruit farm is bounded by large leylandi trees. The Battlefield Brook flows through the northern end of the site.

4.147 Site Assessment

4.148 Natural Features and Designations

4.149 The land consists primarily of a combination of 3 ADR's within the Local Plan and these are BROM 5A, BROM 5B and BROM 5D. All three of these ADRs were included within the Proposed Modifications to the Local Plan that was the subject of the Public Inquiry in 2001.

4.150 The Inspector noted the BROM 5A was in a sustainable location that provided access to the town centre and to a range of public transport options and also that the site was fairly well contained in landscape terms. The Inspector went as far as stating:

4.151 "BROM 5A is the most suitable ADR of all those promoted by the Council around Bromsgrove Town."

4.152 BROM 5B was not considered so favourably by the Inspector who concluded:

4.153 "I believe that the location of BROM 5B on the north-south axis of the town and its adverse impact on the narrow Green Belt gap between

Bromsgrove and Catshill and on the rural setting of the town render it inappropriate for selection as an ADR.”

4.154 The Council rejected the views of the Inspector on the basis that a clear separation between Catshill and Bromsgrove would remain. It was also considered that the sites potential to contribute to new employment development was crucial as this could help to redress the geographical imbalance of workplace to residence that is evident in Bromsgrove Town. After further consultation this ADR was included in the adopted Local Plan.

4.155 The allocation of BROM 5D as an ADR was supported by the Inspector who recognised the sustainability of the site and stated:

4.156 “BROM 5D is within an acceptable distance of the town centre with its broad range of facilities and services, choice of travel modes and employment opportunities, and there are local services at Sidemoor providing shops and a school.”

4.157 Only one part of the site is located within the Green Belt and this is the parcel land north of the Battlefield Brook that is bound by the motorway. However, it is still important to consider the Green Belt function of the whole site and any implications on the wider Green Belt surrounding Bromsgrove Town. As with any greenfield site there is an element of encroachment into the wider countryside. However, with the M5 as a strong defensible boundary there would be no opportunity for development to sprawl further west beyond the motorway. With no town or significant settlement to the west of the site any development would not lead to the merging of settlements.

4.158 The Local Plan Inspector raised concerns about BROM5B however the site does not project any further north than the existing built form of the town and would therefore not cause coalescence between Bromsgrove and Catshill. Through careful design and master planning a scheme

could be developed that integrates into Bromsgrove Town thereby preserving the setting and special character of the historic town.

4.159 The land is primarily flat but there is steady rise in land levels from the south east corner to the North West adjacent to the M5/M42. At the lowest point the land is 90m AOD but rises to approximately 110m AOD.

4.160 The site was assessed within the Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). The Battlefield Brook runs through the northern part of the site and this means that a small area of the site is at risk of flooding. Varying amounts of the site fall within different flood zones and this has been identified as:

- 5% of site within flood zone 2
- 3% of site within flood zone 3a
- 2% of site within flood zone 3b

4.161 There are no other watercourses within this broad area and therefore the remainder of the site falls within flood zone 1.

4.162 The site contains no listed buildings, is not within or adjacent a conservation area and contains no other statutory designations.

4.163 Visual Appraisal

4.164 The Visual Appraisal highlights that the majority of the site is quite flat and has a stronger relationship with Bromsgrove Town rather than the wider countryside. Much of the site is well screened from many public viewpoints and when visible does not appear unduly prominent. On this basis there would be no significantly harmful visual impact to development on the majority of the site.

4.165 However, the area north of the Battlefield Brook is rather open and situated on higher ground meaning it is more prominent from many viewpoints. Therefore any development in this part of the site would have a greater negative impact in visual terms.

4.166 Landscape Sensitivity

4.167 The landscape has been assessed as medium sensitivity. The land is therefore able to accommodate moderate change through development. Careful masterplanning will therefore be required to minimise landscape harm.

4.168 Agricultural Land Quality

4.169 The land falls within grade 1 and grade 2 and is therefore considered to be best and most versatile agricultural land. However, all of the land around Bromsgrove Town falls within grades 1, 2 and 3 meaning that some high quality agricultural land will need to be lost. Bromsgrove Town is quite clearly the most sustainable settlement in the district and on that basis some growth should take place around the town. It would therefore be inconsistent with sustainability criteria to rule this site out on the basis of agricultural land quality.

4.170 Green Infrastructure

4.171 A number of public rights of way are located within the site. The Sustrans route No 5, which is a national cycle route also passes through the site. These provide excellent opportunities for walking and cycling. The main water feature is the Battlefield Brook that runs east to west through the site.

4.172 There is a well defined network of mature hedgerows located throughout the site. There is also vegetation associated with the brook which has notable amenity value. Any important hedgerows and vegetation associated with the Brook be retained if development occurs. The site contains no areas of woodland but does contain the Array Fruit Farm.

This is an intensively managed orchard which may have some ecological value but is not a BAP priority habitat.

4.173 Sustainability

4.174 The site performed well in the Accessibility Study with good access to services and facilities by cycle, foot and public transport. Accessibility only decreased in the western part of the site where most facilities are beyond a reasonable walking distance. The site has the benefit of the recently constructed Sidemoor First School within its boundaries and bus services that run along the Kidderminster and Stourbridge Road at either end of the site.

4.175 Noise and Air Quality

4.176 Whilst the motorway provides a long term Green Belt boundary there is the issue of noise and air quality for residents of any proposed development. This undoubtedly will mean that part of the site will not be suitable for residential development. Detailed testing will be required to identify the areas where residential development will not be appropriate. This could provide an opportunity for uses that aren't so sensitive to noise and air quality such as employment.

4.177 Summary

4.178 This large site is relatively unconstrained providing a sustainable location for development to the west of the town with the motorway providing a strong and permanent Green Belt boundary. The land is of high agricultural land quality but the loss of some high quality land around Bromsgrove Town is inevitable and outweighed by the benefits of the site. Flood risk and noise matters will require further work but should not be an undue constraint on development within the plan period. The visual appraisal highlights the parcel of land north of the Battlefield Brook could appear unduly prominent and therefore development in this area should be avoided.

4.179 Area 7: Land North of Bromsgrove

4.180 Site Description

4.181 The site is located on the northern fringe of Bromsgrove Town and is currently in agricultural use. Norton Farm is approximately 18 hectares in size and is accessed from the Birmingham Road but combined with the hospital site the overall site size is 58 hectares. To the south and east the combined site abuts residential development and the M42 provides the boundary to the north. The site comprises of a number of fields which are separated by mature hedgerows. Boundaries around the sites edges are typically defined by less well established, hawthorn dominated hedgerows and the gardens of existing housing.

4.182 Site Assessment

4.183 Natural Features and Designations

4.184 A significant proportion of the site is designated as Green Belt however part of Norton Farm is classified as an ADR. Norton Farm and part of the Barnsley Hall Hospital site was promoted by the Council at the Public Inquiry into the Local Plan. However, the Inspector in his report raised the following concerns:

4.185 “I am seriously troubled by the Green Belt Implications. The merging of Lickey End and Bromsgrove and a reduction in the area of open undeveloped land separating Catshill and Bromsgrove would, in my view, have substantial adverse effects on the function and integrity of this section of Green Belt. I conclude, on balance, that BROM5 should be deleted from the plan and confirmed as Green Belt.”

4.186 The council accepted the view of the Inspector and understood the merits of retaining much of this site as an important 'gap' between urban areas to the north and east. However, the Council contended that a much smaller ADR on part of the site would be acceptable as the

important 'gap' is retained and the revised site is contained by the slopes facing inwards towards Bromsgrove Town.

4.187 It is important to consider the Green Belt function of the whole site and any implications on the wider Green Belt surrounding Bromsgrove Town. As with any Greenfield site there is an element of encroachment into the wider countryside, however the M42 motorway would be an enduring defensible boundary. With Catshill located to the north beyond the M42 the coalescence of settlements is an important issue to consider. If development took place on the Barnsley Hall site there would be a major reduction in the gap between the 2 settlements. Only developing the Norton Farm site would leave a greater gap between the settlements of Bromsgrove Town and Catshill to ensure coalescence does not occur.

4.188 Levels across the site vary with the lowest point being approximately 115m AOD in the south east corner of the site. Land levels increase to the north with a ridge line that is 130m AOD. Beyond this point land levels generally fall towards the motorway to approximately 120m AOD.

4.189 The Battlefield Brook flows from north to south through the most westerly part of the site. The area surrounding the brook falls with flood zone 3 and therefore has a high risk of flooding. Development should be avoided on this small part of the site.

4.190 The site contains no listed buildings, is not within or adjacent a conservation area and contains no other statutory designations.

4.191 Visual Appraisal

4.192 The Visual Appraisal identifies that the landscape limits development opportunities on the site. The prominent ridge on the northern edge of Norton Farm acts as landscape buffer meaning that views into Bromsgrove Town are limited from the north. If development 'spilled over' the ridge into the Barnsley Hall Hospital site it would appear unduly

prominent and harmful as the landscape relates more to the wider countryside rather than the town.

4.193 However, on Norton Farm some development could be acceptable below the ridgeline as it would be contained by the landscape. Views into the southern parts of the site are limited to localised views primarily from the public footpath that runs around the edge of the site.

4.194 Landscape Sensitivity

4.195 In landscape terms the land has been assessed as medium sensitivity. The land is therefore able to accommodate moderate change through development. Careful master planning would therefore be required to minimise landscape harm.

4.196 Agricultural Land Quality

4.197 The land falls within grade 2 and grade 3 and is therefore considered to be best and most versatile agricultural land. However, all of the land around Bromsgrove Town falls within grades 1, 2 and 3 meaning that some high quality agricultural land will need to be lost. Bromsgrove Town is quite clearly the most sustainable settlement in the district and on that basis some growth should take place around the town. It would therefore be inconsistent with sustainability criteria to a rule this site out on the basis of agricultural land quality.

4.198 Green Infrastructure

4.199 2 public rights of way are located within the site. The only water feature is an unnamed brook that is located adjacent to the Barnsley Hall roundabout.

4.200 There is a well defined network of hedgerows located throughout the site with particularly dense planting adjacent to the motorway. One small area of woodland is located within the site and this is covered by a TPO. Any protected trees and important hedgerows should be retained within any development.

4.201 Sustainability

4.202 The site performed well within Accessibility Study and is considered to have good access to local facilities by public transport, walking and cycling. Bus services are available on the Stourbridge and Birmingham Roads which are located at either end of the site. Sustainability of the site is highlighted by the fact that from many areas Bromsgrove Town Centre is within walking distance.

4.203 Noise and Air Quality

4.204 Whilst the motorway provides a long term Green Belt boundary there is the issue of noise and air quality for residents of any proposed development. The issue of air quality is emphasised by the designation of an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) at junction 1 of the M42. This will undoubtedly mean that part of the site will not be suitable for residential development. Detailed testing will be required to identify the areas where residential development will not be appropriate. This could provide an opportunity for uses that aren't so sensitive to noise and air quality such as employment.

4.205 Summary

4.206 In conclusion the site has a number of strengths including it's sustainable location, low risk of flooding and the removal of part of the site from the Green Belt through the Local Plan process. However the potential for coalescence with Catshill and the visual prominence of parts of the site are a major concern. Restricting development to within Norton Farm below the ridge line would contain the development within the landscape ensuring that long distance views into the site are restricted. This could form a logical extension to Bromsgrove and round off the northern end of the town.

5) Conclusions from Analysis of Broad Areas

5.01 7 broad areas around Bromsgrove Town have been tested for their suitability for development. Of these areas only 4 have realistic potential for development on some or all of the sites in the period up to 2021.

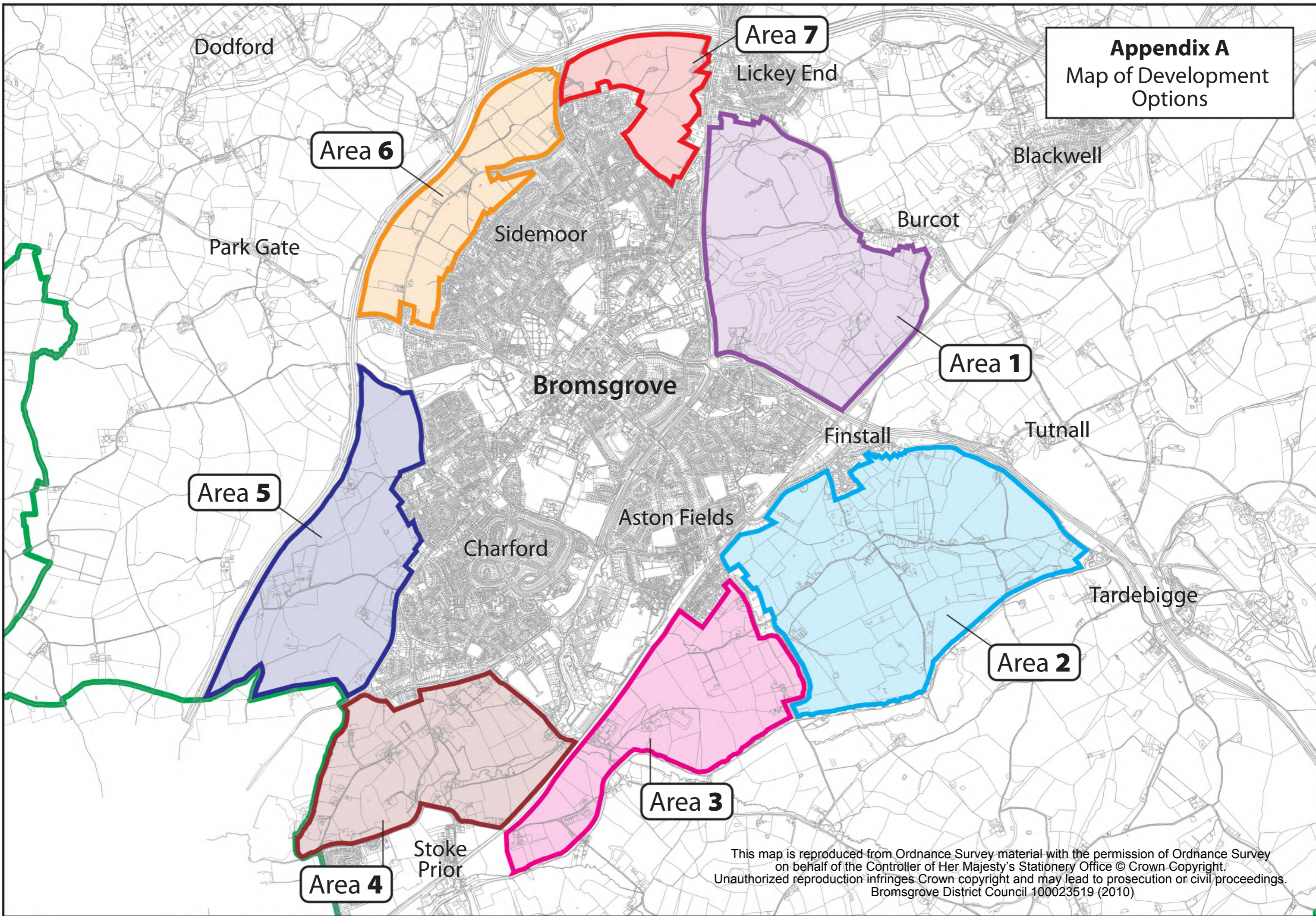
These areas are shown in appendix B and are described as follows:

- Land North of Bromsgrove - The Norton Farm ADR would be a sustainable extension to north Bromsgrove with good links into the town centre and on a site with no obvious constraints.
Development is considered to be less suitable on the remainder of the Barnsley Hall site as there are concerns over the reduction in the Green Belt gap between Bromsgrove and Catshill and the visual impact of development in a prominent location.
- Land North West of Bromsgrove – The majority of the broad area has very few constraints and could provide a logical location for a mixed use development. With careful masterplanning matters of noise and air quality can be addressed. The area north of the Battlefield Brook adjacent to the M5/M42 junction may not be appropriate for development due to flood risk and also noise matters. Whilst non-sensitive uses such as employment could take place here it is not considered that such large amounts of additional employment are not currently required.
- Land South West of Bromsgrove – Development across the whole area would lead to significant sprawl into the wider countryside however containing any built form to the existing Whitford Road ADR would minimise this and avoid development on the most highly sensitive areas of the landscape. This ADR is in a sustainable location and could make a significant contribution to housing delivery.
- Land South East of Bromsgrove – Significant development in this location would have major highway implications, cause harm to the wider Green Belt and damage highly sensitive landscapes. However, containing development within the low lying St. Godwalds

Road ADR where a defensible Green Belt boundary exists would be a sustainable location for approximately 200 dwellings.

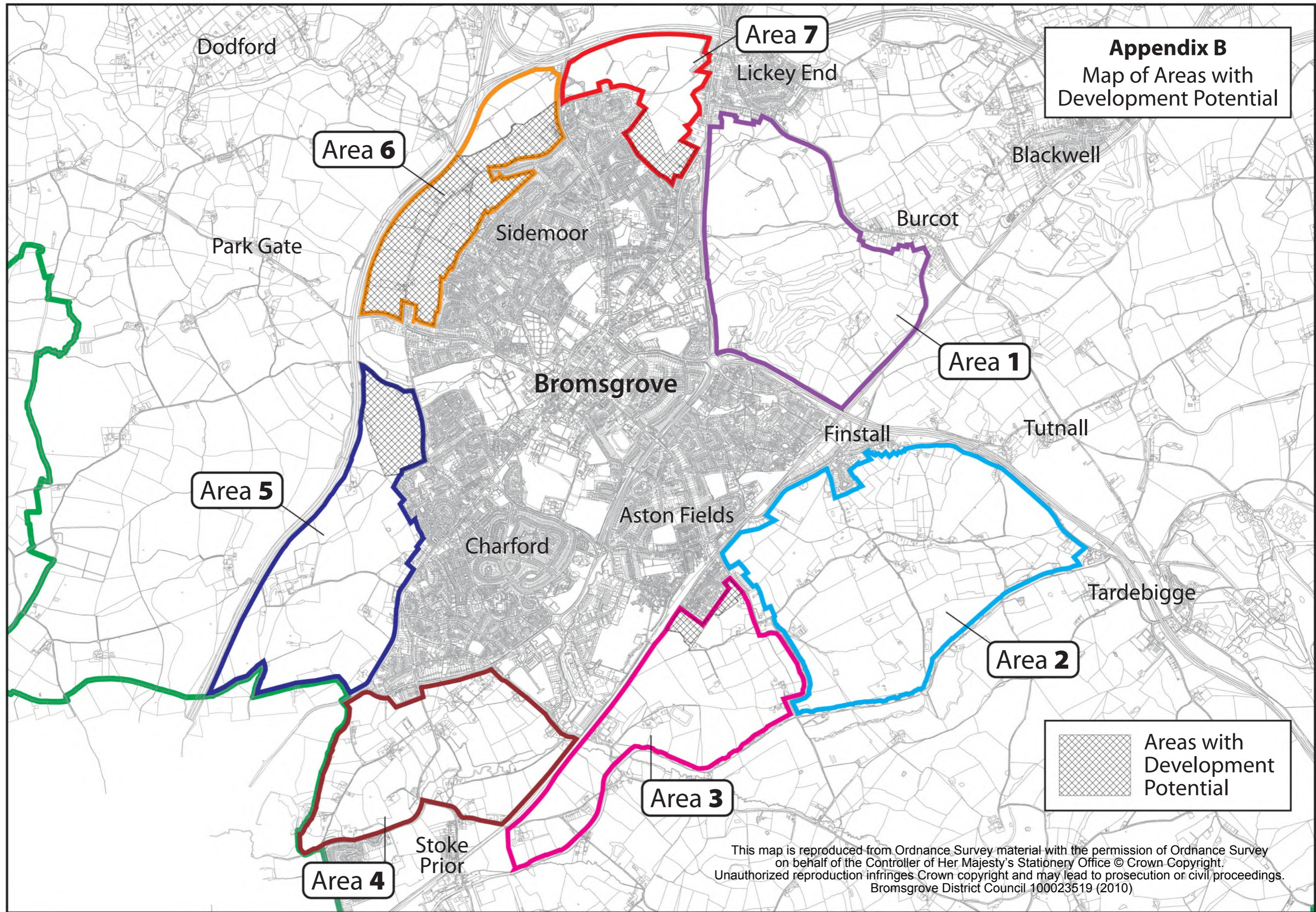
5.02 This assessment of broad areas has identified 4 sites that could come forward for development through the plan period to 2021. The site at St. Godwalds Road is not considered fundamental to the delivery 4000 homes due to its size and therefore cannot be considered as a strategic allocation. The 3 larger sites will be examined in greater detail to highlight any site specific opportunities and constraints to ensure that they are appropriate for allocation as strategic sites within the Core Strategy. This will be undertaken in a separate document entitled 'The Analysis of the Proposed Strategic Sites'.

Appendix A
Map of Development Options



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Appendix B
Map of Areas with
Development Potential



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