

Eastleigh Borough
**Local
Plan**
Review

Interim Settlement Gaps Background Paper

December 2024



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future together



This interim background paper informs the interim Sustainability Appraisal on the Eastleigh Borough Local Plan Review. It provides an initial assessment of the impact of site options on settlement gaps.

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Settlement Gaps Study

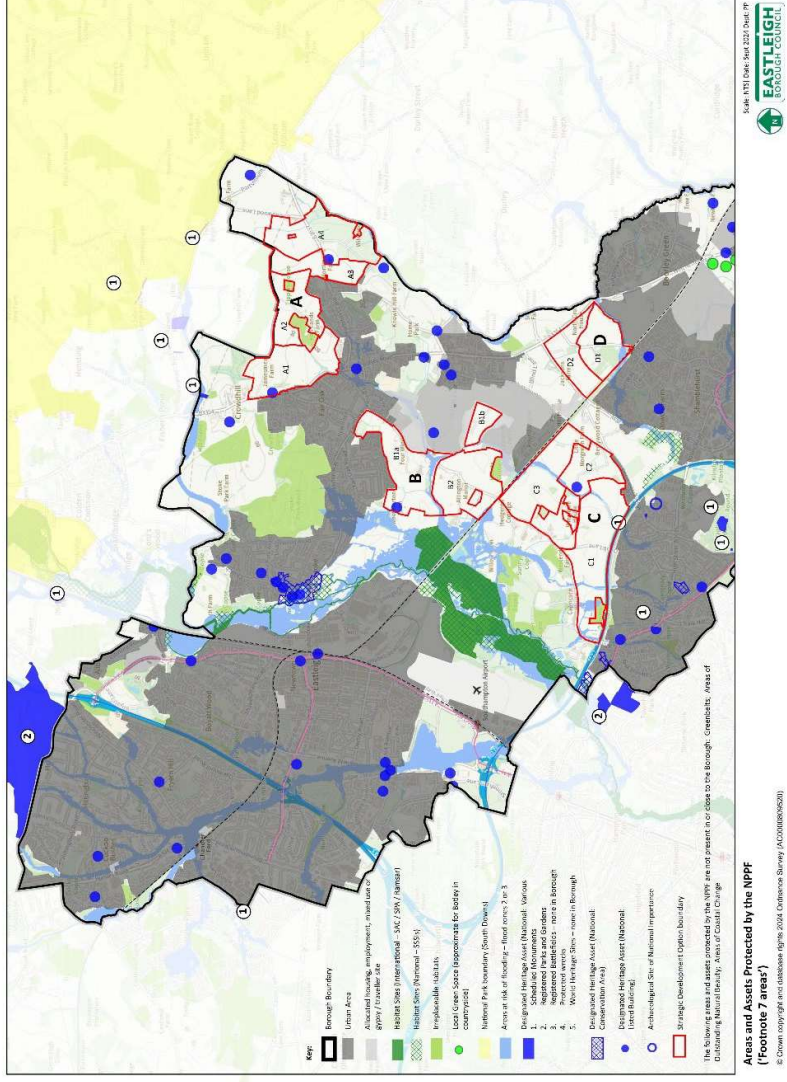
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This study assesses all the Strategic Development Options (SDOs), and the Small and Medium Site Options (SMSOs) which lie within the designated settlement gaps.

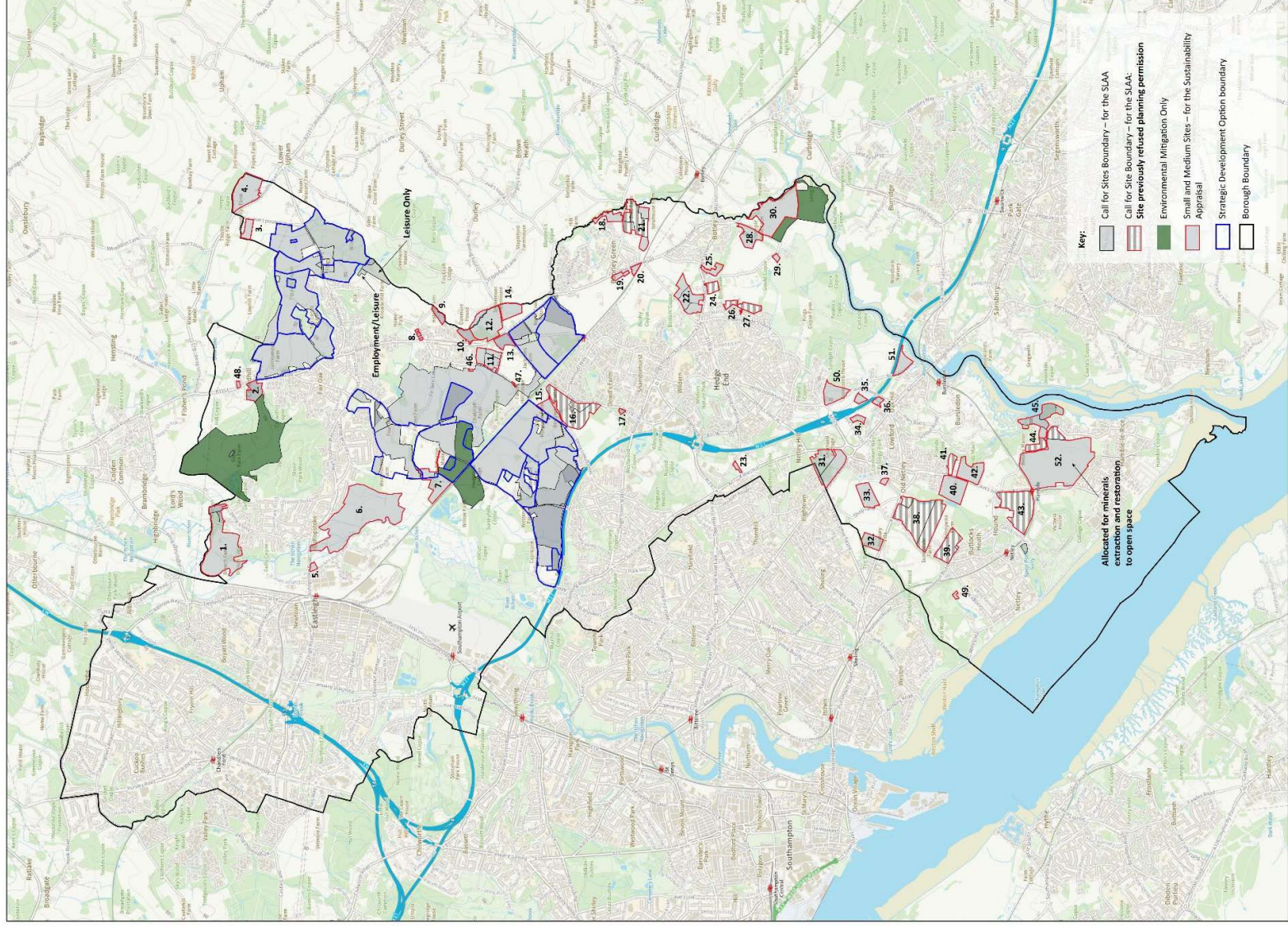
For ease of reference, the maps illustrating the reference numbers for the SDOs and SMSOs are reproduced below, followed by the contents pages.

Individual sites are assessed against all relevant gaps, and so in some cases appear in more than one section of this report.

SDOs:



SMSOs:



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This settlement gaps background paper has been prepared jointly by Eastleigh Borough Council and LUC to inform the Eastleigh Borough Local Plan Review “Issues and Options” stage.
- 1.2 Landowners and sites have proposed sites across the Borough for consideration for development. At this stage the Council needs to assess all these options further, and has no view as to which should be selected for development and which should continue to be protected. For the purposes of assessment, the Council has grouped the sites proposed by landowners and developers into Strategic Development Options and Small and Medium Site Options.
- 1.3 The paper assesses:
 - All the Strategic Development Options (SDOs) (whether or not they are in a designated settlement gap) to identify whether or not they would risk the coalescence of settlements, and if so whether this could be managed through the designation of new gaps;
 - All the Small and Medium Site Options (SMSOs) within existing designated settlement gaps, to identify the extent to which developing the site would or would not impact on the underlying purpose of that gap.
- 1.4 For the “issues and options” stage the paper assesses the impact of sites prior to any mitigation.
- 1.5 After the “issues and options” stage, and prior to the selection of preferred sites, the assessment in this paper will be revised as needed in the light of consultation comments received. It will also be updated to assess the potential of mitigation measures to improve the scores of sites.
- 1.6 Comments are welcome through the issues and options consultation on the assessment within this paper, and on the potential of any measures to mitigate the impact of sites.

2. National Policy

2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023) explains that:

- In-order to achieve sustainable development the planning system has three over-arching objectives which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. These are an economic objective to ensure sufficient land is available in the right places to support growth; a social objective to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, ensuring sufficient homes are provided, by fostering well designed and beautiful places and open spaces; and an environmental objective to protect our natural, built and historic environment (para. 8).
- Planning policies should guide sustainable solutions but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area (para. 9).
- Plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to meet development needs, align growth and infrastructure, improve the environment, and mitigate climate change. Policies should meet development needs unless specific national designations are affected, or any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF as a whole (para. 11).
- Plans should provide a positive vision for the future of each area, meeting housing needs and addressing other economic, social and environmental priorities (para. 15).
- Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places (to ensure outcomes support beauty and placemaking), and make sufficient provision for development / infrastructure and the conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure (para. 20).
- Planning policies should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value (where consistent with other parts of the NPPF), and take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of green infrastructure (paras. 180, 181).

3. PfSH Spatial Position Statement

3.1 The Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH) Spatial Position Statement (2023) is a non-statutory document which contributes to meeting the statutory duty to co-operate. The statement:

- Explains that the PfSH authorities recognise it is important to plan for the development needed whilst protecting and enhancing a coherent pattern of town and countryside, particularly given the range of cities, towns and villages in close proximity to each other. This will mean important countryside is protected to ensure the settings of settlements with distinct identities are protected by appropriate gaps (alongside protecting / enhancing the land with the greatest agricultural, landscape, recreational or ecological benefit). These are important additional sub-regional constraints (paras. 4.7 and 4.8).
- Sets strategic principles for sustainable growth, including addressing the climate and biodiversity emergencies, a fundamental shift to zero and low carbon travel, meeting housing needs where possible, and focussing growth in urban areas first. The need for nature recovery will be prioritised. Plans should consider the need for settlement gaps where they would be important to maintain the character of distinct/separate settlements or visual gaps between settlements. The PfSH authorities will work together to deliver new and enhanced multi-functional green and blue infrastructure (SPS1).
- Elaborates that the network of green and blue infrastructure should deliver multi-functional benefits for biodiversity, nature recovery, climate change resilience, public recreation and health and wellbeing. The integrity, quality, connectivity and multifunctionality of green infrastructure should be protected and enhanced (SPS11).
- States that strategic countryside gaps between settlements are important in maintaining the sense of place, settlement identity and countryside setting for the sub-region and local communities. Councils should identify strategic countryside gaps of sub-regional significance as appropriate, and may also identify local countryside gaps which are of fundamental local importance. Given the long-term need for development the number and extent of gaps should only be that needed to achieve their purpose (SPS12).
- Maintaining the character and separate identity of individual settlements is an integral part of the Statement. Settlement gaps should be defined in local plans where necessary to prevent coalescence and to protect the identity and landscape setting of distinct settlements. They still allow development to be positively planned for in sustainable locations, whilst maintaining room for complementary uses such as recreation and environmental mitigation. Depending on where new growth is located there may be a case for new gaps to ensure growth does not coalesce with existing settlements (paras. 6.100 – 6.103).

4. Characteristics of the Borough as a place

- 4.1 Eastleigh Borough lies adjacent to Southampton city. This is a major urban area which generally extends to the Borough boundary. The Borough itself covers a relatively small area (80 sq km) but incorporates 12 towns and villages, meaning a significant proportion of this area is already urbanised. These settlements generally range from large and medium sized towns (i.e. Eastleigh / Chandlers Ford, the combined urban area with a population of 53,372 and Hedge End with a population of 22,467), to a number of expanded villages, with populations typically ranging from 4,600 to 12,000 each¹. Consequently the Borough consists of a range of significant settlements separated from each other, and from the city of Southampton, in a number of areas by a network of countryside gaps (designated in the adopted local plan as settlement gaps). Given the urban nature of the Borough, these gaps are relatively narrow, ranging from a very minimum of around 100 metres to a very maximum of around 1,700 metres, but with most having a width of generally around 300 metres to no more than 800 metres. Therefore, it only takes a short period of time to traverse any of these settlement gaps by car or public transport before entering the next significant settlement. Furthermore, people using the countryside within these gaps for recreation are often aware of the presence of nearby urban areas. This contributes to the experience of the Borough as being relatively urbanised, with often relatively small areas of countryside separating individual settlements. The Borough has grown considerably in the last few decades, and so these gaps have often already become significantly narrower.

- 4.2 Therefore, the settlement gaps play an important role in maintaining the separation of individual settlements, which in turn maintains their individual and distinct identities. They also, in a densely populated area, ensure that a network of countryside and green infrastructure is available relatively close to each settlement for the benefit of residents, and an ecology network maintained for biodiversity. In short, settlement gaps form an important part of the pattern of town and countryside in the Borough as a place.

- 4.3 Settlement gaps have been a long established element of the planning policy framework in both the Borough and the wider South Hampshire area. Settlement gap policies / designations have been included in previous strategic and Local Plans.

5. Adopted Local Plan

- 5.1 The important role settlement gaps play needs to be considered alongside the need for housing and other development through each review of the local plan, ensuring that only the land necessary to maintain the distinct identity of individual settlements and to prevent their coalescence remains designated as a gap.
- 5.2 As part of the preparation of the current adopted Local Plan, the Council prepared a “Countryside Gaps Background Paper” (June 2018). This paper provided a ‘broad brush’ landscape and visual appraisal of overall gaps, and a ‘broad brush’

¹ All population figures from 2021 Census. Eastleigh, Chandlers Ford, Boyatt Wood and Allbrook and North Boyatt Parishes combined.

commentary of strategic growth options. It did not assess the individual sub areas of each gap or individual sites. It instead drew conclusions on the appropriate extent of the gaps based on the 'broad brush' appraisal. This paper recommended taking 34 areas out of the designated gap, either because they were not necessary for the function of the gap or because planning permission had been granted for development. It also proposed adding two small areas to the gap.

- 5.3 These changes were incorporated into the submission version of the local plan. In overall terms, they resulted in a net 27% reduction in the total area designated as a gap across the Borough.
- 5.4 (The previous local plan had designated strategic and local gaps. The June 2018 paper recommended instead a single tier of settlement gap distinction, on the basis that little distinction was drawn between the different types of gap in terms of policy or practice. This was followed through to the adopted local plan).
- 5.5 The Local Plan Inspector's post hearing letter (1 April 2020) considered the plan's approach to settlement gaps (paragraphs 26 – 37). The Inspector stated that the general principle of designating settlement gaps to prevent the coalescence of settlement is broadly supported by national policy. She explained that the criteria used in the evidence (based on PFSH criteria) would in principle be appropriate: gaps should not include more land than is necessary to prevent the coalescence of settlements; and the land to be included should perform an important role in defining settlement character and separating settlements at risk of coalescence. However, she expressed significant concerns regarding the specific approach taken to settlement gaps. She felt that the extent of gap designations proposed in the submission plan was neither logical nor supported by a robust evidence base. In some cases more land than was necessary had been included, in other cases it was not clear how the gap provided an important role in defining settlement character. This was a significant problem in relation to the selection of the SGOs (Strategic Growth Options) and the proposed settlement gaps in the submitted plan (2018). She recommended that this could be addressed by preparing a clear and robust paper to revisit each settlement gap designation.
- 5.6 As a result, the Council commissioned the "Eastleigh Borough Settlement Gap Study" (October 2020). The report was prepared jointly with Deacon Design.
- 5.7 This study carefully appraised each of the settlement gaps proposed in the submission local plan. It assessed each overall gap (e.g. in terms of settlement character, settlement edge character, sense of arrival / leaving, gap description / characterisation). However, unlike the June 2018 study, it also assessed each sub area of each gap, identifying which gap objectives these areas contributed to (preserving the open nature of the gap, maintaining the sense of separation between settlements, whether the land was necessary to prevent coalescence and to define settlement character). This provided a consistent assessment of each part of each gap. On this basis the study concluded which areas should be removed from the settlement gap designation. 21 different areas (of varying sizes) were recommended for removal from the gap designation (and 1 area reinstated following the lapse of a planning permission). These areas are illustrated on Figure 2, page 139 of that study.

In a number of cases these areas were protected by other designations. These led to a further 18% reduction in the designated gap area. The study is published here:

[DD422R02 Settlement Gap Study Report.indd](#)

- 5.8 The Local Plan Inspector’s Final Report (March 2022) (paras. 184 – 193) recognised that maintaining an element of physical separation between settlements can play an important role in terms of maintaining their visual identity. She explained that the Borough includes lower order settlements which in some instances are bordered by higher order centres and so it has become even more important to prevent the coalescence of settlements (without designating any more land than is necessary). She considered the principle of designating settlement gaps across the Borough to prevent the coalescence of settlements to be generally consistent with the Framework (NPPF) and in particular the protection of the natural environment. She stated that the Council’s latest settlement gaps study (Deacons, October 2020) provides a clear justification for the approach adopted, informed by both a desktop study, fieldwork evaluation and detailed analysis. The evaluation included both an objective and subjective analysis supported by annotated plans as necessary. In particular, the updated work focused specifically on a detailed assessment of the proposed gaps and where appropriate recommended changes, applying the PfSH criteria to provide a comprehensive evidence base. In the light of the representations received on the changes, she was satisfied that the evidence base provides a clear justification, using a proportionate and robust approach.
- 5.9 On this basis, the changes to the designated gaps recommended by the Deacons study were incorporated into the adopted Local Plan policies map. This included the removal of 21 areas from the designated gap, which were in addition to the 27% reduction in the area of the gap as a result of the earlier study. The overall reduction in the area designated as settlement gap was in the region of 40%.
- 5.10 Policy S6 of the adopted plan states that:
- “Development within a Settlement Gap as set out in the policies map will be permitted provided that:
- a. it would not undermine the physical extent and/or visual separation of settlements; and
 - b. it would not have an urbanising effect detrimental to:
 - i. The character of the countryside; or
 - ii. The separate identity of the adjoining settlements...[the remainder of the policy lists the individual gaps]”.

6. Approach for the Local Plan Review

- 6.1 The NPPF supports sustainable development. This means planning for sufficient development to meet needs in the right places, creating strong and vibrant communities, mitigating climate change, and protecting the natural environment. Plans should provide a positive vision for the area, meeting housing needs and addressing other economic, social and environmental priorities. They should set out the pattern, scale and design quality of places, to support beauty and placemaking. Plans should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment, recognising the intrinsic character of the countryside, allocating land with the least environmental and amenity value, and taking a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of green infrastructure. Plans should guide sustainable solutions taking local circumstances into account to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.
- 6.2 The PFSH Spatial Position Statement recognises the importance of planning for development, and given the densely populated nature of the area, the importance of protecting a coherent pattern of town and countryside. Settlement gaps are important to protect the sense of place, countryside setting and distinct identity of settlements, avoiding coalescence. Their extent should only be that required to achieve this purpose. Settlement gaps support positive planning for development and complementary recreational / environmental benefits.
- 6.3 The Borough is located within the wider urban South Hampshire area between the cities of Southampton and Portsmouth. A key characteristic of the Borough, and of this wider area, is that it contains a large number of significant settlements located in a relatively small area, often separated by relatively small areas of countryside.
- 6.4 These countryside gaps between settlements are therefore intrinsic to the character of the countryside, hold higher amenity value by providing local access to the countryside for residents, and help to maintain ecological networks. They maintain a pattern of places (town and countryside) which support strong and distinctive communities, each with their own identity, and strategic networks of green infrastructure. Therefore, settlement gaps accord with and support the NPPF's policy framework. Their importance is supported by all the authorities across PFSH through the statutory 'duty to co-operate', as reflected in the Spatial Position Statement.
- 6.5 The Local Plan Inspector who examined the adopted Local Plan supported the principle of designating settlement gaps as being generally consistent with the NPPF, and recognised their increasing importance given the characteristics of the Borough.
- 6.6 On the basis of the policies in the NPPF, the PFSH Spatial Position Statement, and the characteristics of the Borough and wider sub region, the ability to retain clear overall settlement gaps is an important consideration in planning for the Borough. The underlying purpose of settlement gaps are to protect the distinct and separate identity of individual settlements, and to prevent their coalescence. This forms an important part of a positive plan for the Borough's evolution as a place, to accommodate major new development within a coherent pattern of town and countryside.

- 6.7 The Council has already reviewed and reduced the extent of settlement gap designations through the local plan adopted in 2022, working with the Inspector. The gap designations in that plan are based on a recent review (in October 2022) which the Local Plan Inspector considered provided a clear and robust justification and a comprehensive evidence base informed by a detailed analysis. Therefore the Council considers that the designated settlement gaps in the adopted local plan provide a robust starting point for the local plan review.
- 6.8 However, the local plan review needs to consider housing and other development needs into the longer term. In accordance with the NPPF, it is important to plan to meet these needs wherever possible. The NPPF explains, in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development, that these needs should be met unless the adverse effects of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.
- 6.9 Given the scale of the need for housing and other development to consider in the Borough, and the importance of locating this development in the right places based on a consideration of all planning objectives, it is important to carefully consider the approach to settlement gaps. The principle of maintaining settlement gaps in the Borough remains an important consideration. The extent of gaps which are needed to achieve their underlying purpose should be reassessed.
- 6.10 Therefore, it is important to carefully consider through the local plan process:
1. The impact that developing sites would have on the ability to create and retain clear settlement gaps, focussing on the underlying purpose of gaps to retain the distinct and separate identity of individual settlements and prevent their coalescence; and then
 2. Through the Sustainability Appraisal, how any effect on the underlying purpose of settlement gap compares to the effect of developing the site on other planning objectives.
- 6.11 This will enable an assessment of whether or not developing a site or location would have an adverse effect on a settlement gap which would significantly and demonstrably outweigh any other planning benefits of the site and the need for development. In other words, it will enable an assessment of the relative merits of all sites taking account of all planning considerations.
- 6.12 This background paper focuses on the first part of this assessment, to identify a rating for how sites affect settlement gap objectives, to input into the wider Sustainability Appraisal.
- 6.13 Sites have been proposed by landowners and developers through the 'call for sites'. At this stage the Council has no overall view on which sites should be selected.
- 6.14 The paper assesses the sites which are proposed within existing designated settlement gaps.
- 6.15 The Strategic Development Options (SDOs) are sometimes within but in many cases lie outside of the currently designated gaps. However, given the geographical scale

of the potential development areas represented by the SDOs, there is nevertheless a potential risk of coalescence with adjoining settlements. The PfSH Spatial Position Statement recognises there may be a case for new gaps to ensure new growth does not coalesce with existing settlements. Therefore this paper also assesses all of the SDOs, whether or not they are currently in a designated gap, to identify whether or not they will have an impact on the coalescence of settlements, and if so whether a new settlement gap needs to be designated and the strength of gap which could be created.

6.16 Where sites have a clear relationship to each other in settlement gap terms they are generally assessed separately and in combination.

6.17 The review of gaps is being undertaken in two stages:

1. For the “issues and options” stage – an assessment of sites prior to incorporating mitigation measures.
 2. To inform the “preferred sites” stage – a reassessment of sites incorporating mitigation.
- 6.18 At this point, only stage 1. has been completed. Following the “issues and options” consultation, the assessment in stage 1 will be reviewed as needed in the light of the comments received, and stage 2 will be undertaken. Where stage 1. identifies that sites will have a ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ effect on the settlement gap, stage 2. will consider whether or not mitigation measures could be put in place which would improve the site’s score.

6.19 These scores will feed directly into the Sustainability Framework SA Objective 12: To protect, enhance and manage the character and appearance of the landscape and townscape, maintaining and strengthening distinctiveness and its special qualities:

- 12.1: Will development adversely affect the separation of neighbouring settlements?
- 12.1b: Will development adversely affect the separation of neighbouring settlements after mitigation?

7. Methodology

7.1 The purpose of the Settlement Gaps Study (October 2020) was to assess the overall gap designations across the Borough, in-order to understand the areas of each gap which could be removed from the gap designation. By this stage in the local plan process (proposed modifications following the examination's main hearings) the focus was on the extent of the gaps, not on allocating any further development sites. This led to the extent of settlement gaps designated in the adopted local plan, as supported by the Inspector. The overall extent of these gaps therefore provide a robust basis for this review.

7.2 Starting from this point, this review has a slightly different geographical focus. Rather than reassess the overall extent of each gap, it assesses the individual development sites which have been put forward by developers or landowners through the 'call for sites' at the start of the local plan review. It rates each individual site according to the impact its development would have on the underlying purposes of the gap. The methodology for this study reflects this focus on individual sites, but otherwise is similar in scope and detail to the Settlement Gaps Study (October 2020) which was supported by the Inspector.

7.3 This study undertakes an overall assessment of the strength of each gap, and the overall development impact of each site. This enables the study to better understand the significance of the development impact of each site, recognising that a stronger gap may be able to accommodate a greater impact without loss to its underlying purpose, whereas a weaker gap may be able to accommodate less impact.

Overall Strength of Gap Assessment

7.4 The adopted Eastleigh Local Plan policy S6 and policies map designates the following gaps:

- a. Eastleigh and Southampton;
- b. Eastleigh and Bishopstoke;
- c. Bishopstoke and Fair Oak;
- d. Fair Oak and Horton Heath;
- e. Hedge End, Botley and Boorley Green;
- f. Hedge End, West End and Southampton;
- g. Hedge End, Horton Heath and Boorley Green;
- h. Hedge End and Bursledon;
- i. Bursledon, Netley and Southampton;
- j. Hamble, Netley and Bursledon.

7.5 The strength of each gap is assessed against each settlement. Therefore, if a gap separates 3 settlements, the assessment considers each element of the gap. For example, in the Bursledon, Netley and Southampton gap, the strength of the gap is assessed between Bursledon and Netley, Bursledon and Southampton and Netley and Southampton.

7.6 The strength of the following gaps is also assessed:

- a. Eastleigh and Horton Heath;
- b. Bishopstoke and Horton Heath;
- c. Fair Oak and Colden Common;
- d. Fair Oak and Lower Upham;
- e. Horton Heath and West End.

- 7.7 These are not designated gaps in the adopted Local Plan but do contain Strategic Development Options and so need to be assessed.
- 7.8 The following factors are taken into account in order to reach an assessment of the overall strength of a gap. These draw on the same factors considered in the Deacons settlement gaps study (October 2020).

A Description of the Settlement

- 7.9 This identifies the size of the settlement (city, town or village) and whether or not the settlement has a historic identity (e.g. a conservation area or other significant grouping of heritage assets).

Settlement Boundaries

- 7.10 A strong boundary would include a consistent and not easily crossed physical feature, or strong, year-round visual barrier, for example a major road or railway facing the next settlement*, a river, woodland or mature consistent tree belt.
- 7.11 A moderate boundary would include for example well-established hedgerows (e.g. with several mature hedgerow trees), an intermittent tree belt, or minor roads; a strong feature which has been crossed by development to some extent; or a boundary formed of a combination of weak and strong features.
- 7.12 A weak boundary would include for example a low clipped or 'gappy' hedgerow, back garden boundaries, minor estate roads; or a moderate feature that has been crossed by development.

*A major road or railway forms a strong boundary where it faces the next settlement, as it acts to contain the development from the intervening settlement gap. However, where a road or railway traverses a gap between the two settlements, and so forms a flanking boundary to the site, this does not in itself create a strong boundary. Indeed without any other boundary features the road or railway will ensure any development on the site will be clearly visible to people traversing between the two settlements, potentially reducing the strength of the gap.

Size / Distance of Gap Relative to Settlement

- 7.13 A strong gap would have a wide separation between settlements.
- 7.14 A moderate gap would have either a relatively wide or a relatively narrow separation between settlements.

- 7.15 A weak gap would have a narrow or very narrow separation between settlements.
- 7.16 In some cases the width of gap varies along the gap. In these cases a judgement is applied, based on an average width (where this reflects the characteristics of the majority of the gap), or different widths (where this better reflects significantly different circumstances in different parts of the gap).
- 7.17 People perceive settlement gaps as part of their overall experience of the pattern of town and countryside, and their overall movement across the Borough and sub region. In other words, settlement gaps are perceived and appreciated in relation to the settlements they separate and not in isolation. As such, to achieve a strong settlement gap, the gap between larger settlements needs to be wider than that between two smaller settlements. Where people are moving through a larger urban area, the gap with adjoining settlements needs to be wider in order to maintain the sense of a separate identity between settlements.

Landform and Cover

- 7.18 A strong gap would include for example intervening higher ground preventing intervisibility across much of the gap, or a distinct valley landform that has sense of separation from urban areas, or substantial woodland.
- 7.19 A moderate gap would include for example relatively flat land but with substantial mature hedgerows or other distinct landscape features (e.g. watercourses) to create subdivisions; or a more distinct landform but an open landscape lacking visual screening to create subdivisions.
- 7.20 A weak gap would include for example relatively flat and relatively open landscape, without substantial mature hedgerow to create subdivisions.

Connecting Features

- 7.21 A strong gap would have no direct road or railway line across the gap linking settlements; or roads, railways or rivers forming barriers within gap rather than links across it.
- 7.22 A moderate gap would have a rail link, or minor road with a rural character (e.g. without pavements, lighting, etc) linking settlements; or indirect main road link(s) with pavements.
- 7.23 A weak gap would have a direct main road link(s) between settlements with an urban character (e.g. with pavements, lighting etc).

Urbanising Influences

- 7.24 A strong gap would contain little development of an urban character, and land use which is rural (e.g. farmland).

- 7.25 A moderate gap would have some development of an urban character, or infrastructure / land use associated with urban areas (e.g. major roads / formal recreation).
- 7.26 A weak gap would have development or land use in the gap of an urban character, limiting the sense of passing through a rural landscape.

Conclusion on Gap Strength

- 7.27 A conclusion on the overall strength of the gap is formed by using a judgement taking into account all of these individual factors.

Assessment of Development Impact

- 7.28 This assesses the impact of individual development sites on the strength of the designated settlement gap. The assessment takes into account those factors contributing to the overall strength of the gap which could change as a result of development.

Settlement Type

- 7.29 This factor reflects those gaps which have an additional importance in protecting the identity of settlements due to their historic characteristics. This is not considered a defining character in itself. If the development of a site would not have a significant impact on a gap in any other respect, it would not have a significant impact simply because the relevant settlements had a historic identity. Nevertheless it is considered that if the development of a site had some impact on a gap in other respects, the historic identity of settlements should also be taken into account.
- 7.30 Therefore, a development site's impact on the settlement gap would be:
- Moderate where at least one settlement has an historic identity (i.e. conservation area and/or large concentration of historic assets) and other major or moderate impacts on the gap are identified.
 - Negligible or have no impact where none of the settlements has an historic identity, or where any other impacts on the gap are minor or less.

Loss of Contribution to Separation

- 7.31 A development site's impact on the settlement gap would be:
- Major where:
 - A strong boundary will be reduced to a moderate or weak boundary; or

- there is a reduction in the gap size or separating features, or increase in urbanising influence over the wider gap, such that strong separation becomes moderate or weak; or
- there is any significant further reduction in these factors in a gap where the separation is already weak.
- Moderate where:
 - A strong boundary will be replaced by a less consistent strong boundary; or a moderate boundary will be reduced to a weak boundary; or
 - there is a reduction in the gap size or separating features, or increase in urbanising influence over the wider gap, such that moderate separation becomes weak.
- Minor where:
 - Where the boundary will only be slightly weakened; or
 - there is a reduction in the gap size or separating features, or minor increase in urbanising influence over the wider gap, such that the separation is slightly reduced.
- Negligible / no impact where:
 - Where the boundary will not be weakened, or a weak boundary would be replaced by a stronger boundary; and
 - the reduction in the gap size or separating features is negligible, and the increase in the urbanising influence over the wider gap is negligible, such that there is no reduction in separation.

Overall Development Impact

- 7.32 A conclusion on the overall impact of the development on the settlement gap is formed by using judgement taking account of these individual factors. Each of the features which make up the strength of the gap are usually important to maintaining the distinct identity of individual settlements. Therefore a major impact on any of these features is usually given significant weight in reaching a conclusion of a major overall impact. However consideration is also given to any specific circumstances which may indicate that the impact on the feature is less important or can more easily be sustained given the local context.

SA Rating: Overall Impact on Gap Strength

- 7.33 Where a site is not in a designated settlement gap, the SA rating is 'good'. Where a site is in a gap, the SA rating is divided into 'neutral', 'poor' and 'very poor'. (Where an SDO is outside a designated gap its SA rating is 'good' where it creates no risk of coalescence, and 'poor' or 'very poor' where it creates a risk of coalescence).

- 7.34 The SA rating takes account of both the strength of the gap and the overall impact of the development. The weaker the gap to start with, and the greater the impact of development, the lower the SA rating.
- 7.35 Where the impact of the development is 'major' this crosses the threshold to achieve a 'very poor' SA rating in all cases. Therefore, a 'major' impact on a strong gap is still classed as 'very poor'. Clearly a 'major' impact on a moderate or weak gap breaches this 'very poor' threshold still further.
- 7.36 Where the impact of the development is 'moderate' or 'minor', the SA rating is affected by the strength of the gap. For example, a minor impact on a strong gap generates a 'neutral' rating but on an already weak gap generates a 'very poor' rating.
- 7.37 Where the impact of the development is 'negligible / no loss' this always generates a 'neutral' SA rating, even where the gap is already weak.
- 7.38 Therefore a major impact will always lead to a 'very poor' rating and a negligible / no loss impact will always lead to a 'neutral' rating. However moderate and minor impacts will lead to different ratings depending on the strength of the gap. Clearly a moderate or minor effect can be better sustained in a strong gap, whereas a minor effect on an already weak gap is a cause for concern.
- 7.39 This ensures a balanced and structured approach. It recognises the importance of settlement gaps, the fact that they have already been reduced significantly, and recently been assessed as robust by an independent Inspector. Therefore, a major impact, even on a strong gap, should be assessed as 'Very Poor'. However, the assessment recognises that the stronger gaps are more able to accommodate more moderate or minor impacts whereas gaps which are weaker to start with are less able to withstand these levels of impact.
- 7.40 Where a development site lies within a settlement gap separating three settlements, the SA uses the lowest rating. This ensures that where a development site has a poor or very poor effect in relation to two settlements, this is reflected. The impact on the gap between two settlements is not lessened because the impact on a third settlement is less. This also ensures a consistent approach for sites in gaps between three settlements and sites in gaps between only two settlements.

Potential Changes to Gap Designation

- 7.41 Where a site is currently within a designated gap and is selected for development, the gap designation would be removed.
- 7.42 However, in some cases where a site is selected for development, there may be a need for additional changes to the designated gap in the wider area. These would be cases where:
- An SDO were selected and the scale of growth were such that a risk of coalescence with nearby settlements were generated – in these cases a new settlement gap may need to be designated. This would not negate the assessed impact on the gap from the development, it would simply aim to reduce the risk of any further impact in the future.

- An SMSO were selected and the gap may need to be extended in the local area. Again, this would not negate the assessed impact on the gap from the development, it would simply aim to reduce the risk of any further impact in the future.
- An SMSO were selected and its removal from the gap would leave adjoining residual and isolated parcels of gap designation which no longer served a purpose – in these cases these parcels may also need to be removed from the gap.

8. Summary of Results

8.1 The remainder of this report sets out the assessment of gaps and of individual development sites. The report is structured by settlement gap. Therefore, each section sets out the assessment of that gap's strength, followed by the assessments of the impact of each site within that gap.

8.2 The sites assessed are those proposed by landowners and developers through the 'call for sites'. At this stage the Council has no overall view on which sites should be selected.

Overall Impact on Gap Strength from Development Options

8.3 There are 4 Strategic Development Options (SDOs) with a total of 12 sub areas. Two of these sub areas are assessed as 'good', one as 'poor' and 8 as 'very poor'.

8.4 There are 52 Small and Medium Site Options (SMSOs), 32 of which lie within a settlement gap. Of these 32, 4 score as 'neutral', 4 as 'poor' and 20 as 'very poor'. (Of the remaining sites, 3 score as 'mixed' as the score varies across the site, and 1 as 'uncertain' as it has only recently been proposed and so is yet to be assessed).

8.5 At this stage, most of the SDO phases and most of the SMSOs score as 'very poor'. There are two overarching reasons for this.

8.6 First, at this stage, the scores do not consider the potential for mitigation measures. This will be considered at the next stage for the sites which currently score as 'poor' or 'very poor', to establish whether or not this changes the score.

8.7 Second, as set out in this report, settlement gaps are an important aspect of the Borough. The gaps designated in the adopted plan have recently been tested by evidence supported by the independent Local Plan Inspector. Over time, the Borough's settlement gaps have increasingly narrowed, meaning that further development is more likely to have more of an impact on the purpose of the gap which is remaining.

8.8 The site assessments will be revised if needed taking account of the comments received at the 'issues and options' consultation stage. They will also be reassessed considering mitigation measures. This will produce final settlement gap scores which will be considered against all the other planning issues assessed through the Sustainability Appraisal to inform the decision on which sites to select for development.

Potential Changes to Gap Designation

8.9 The SDO sub area assessed as 'poor' may need a new gap to be designated. The SDO sub areas assessed as 'very poor' are likely or very likely to need a new gap designated, although in some cases there is no ability to create a gap to maintain meaningful separation, or the remaining area is already designated as a gap.

8.10 In a few cases, if SMSOs were selected, it is likely there would be a need to make local adjustments to the gap (either by removing residual areas or by extending the gap). However, in most cases this is not applicable.

9. Maps

9.1 The report below includes maps for each settlement gap which illustrate the currently designated boundaries of the gaps and urban edges, and the sites which are assessed. To ensure a consistent presentation, each of these maps are reproduced at the same scale (1:12,500). The maps for the overall SDOs A, B and C need to cover a larger area, so are reproduced at a smaller scale (1:25,000).