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# Isle of Wight Settlement Coalescence Study

Prepared by LUC  
April 2018



**Project Title:** Isle of Wight Settlement Coalescence Study

**Client:** Isle of Wight Council

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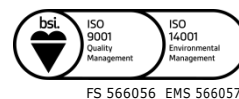
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# 1 Introduction

## Context and key issues

- 1.1 The Isle of Wight has a unique identity characterised by a predominantly rural landscape. Almost half of its coastline is designated as Heritage Coast and over half of the Island is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The majority of residents live in the Island's larger settlements, in particular the main towns of Newport, Cowes, East Cowes, Ryde, Sandown and Shanklin.
- 1.2 The Isle of Wight Council's (the Council's) adopted Core Strategy is in the process of being reviewed and will be published for public consultation in due course. Housing need is key issue facing the Island and this will be addressed in the new Local Plan. The need arises from the Island's growing population, driven by in-migration, long distance commuting, retirement and second home ownership. The location of housing development and associated land uses needs to be planned carefully to avoid placing unnecessary pressure on land around key settlements.
- 1.3 The intrinsic nature of the Island as a self-contained landmass and the coverage of a significant proportion of it by designations, including the AONB, lead to a perception that space is limited. The council is aware from representations received on various planning documents that many of the residents of the Island have a strong sense of belonging to individual settlements and there are community concerns that development will lead to settlement coalescence, reduce the identity and distinctiveness of settlements and have a 'suburbanising' effect on the Island.

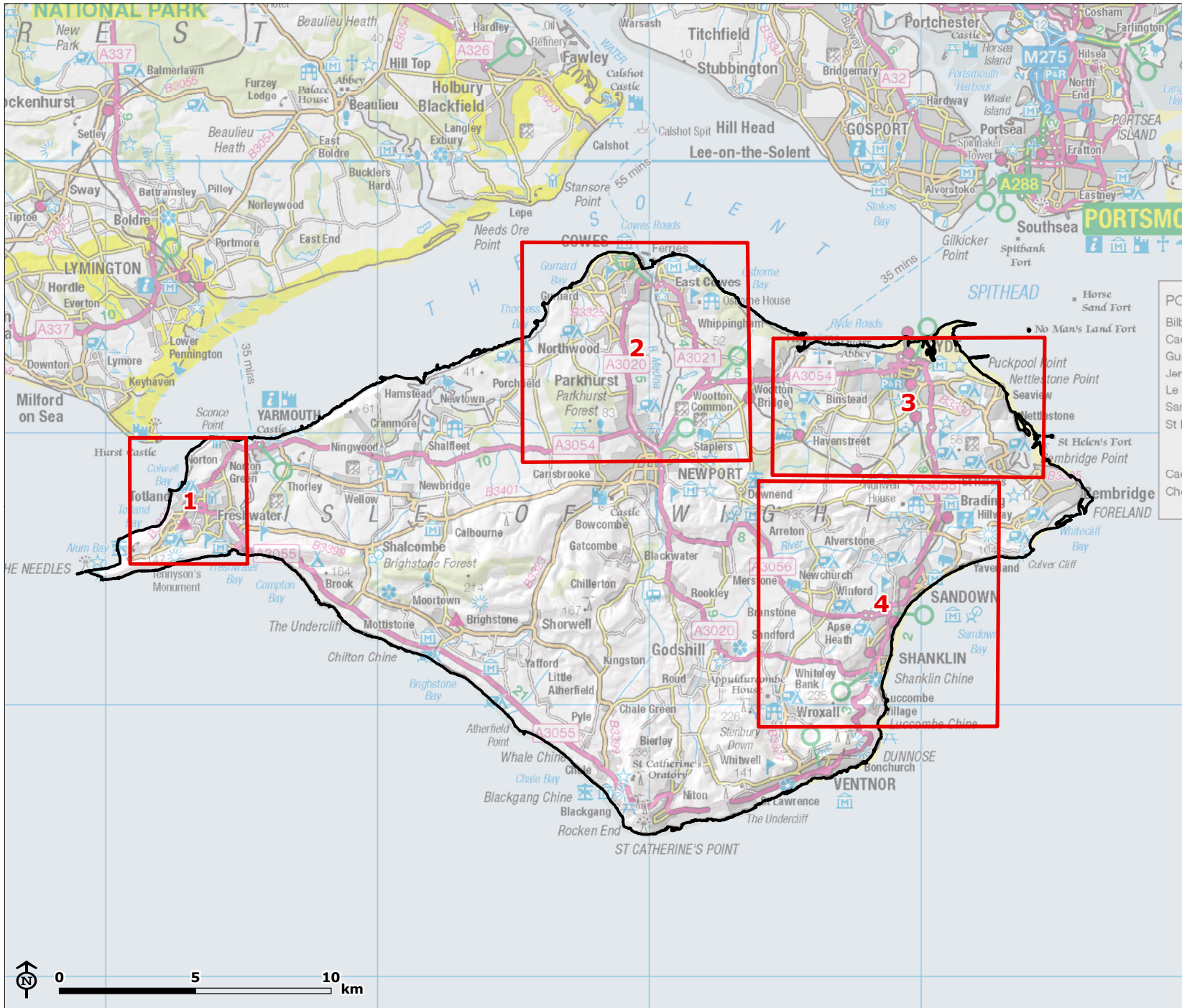
## Purpose of study

- 1.4 The Council commissioned LUC to undertake a robust and transparent assessment of settlement coalescence sensitivity on the Island.
- 1.5 The study is intended to help the Council to identify potential for further development around key settlements without increasing settlement coalescence to an unacceptable level. It also reviews potential local plan policy approaches to preventing settlement coalescence and puts forward a recommended approach.
- 1.6 The Council stated that the new local plan is likely to continue to direct development to three areas:
  - Medina Valley (Cowes to Newport corridor);
  - Ryde;
  - The Bay (Sandown, Lake, Shanklin).
- 1.7 Options for a new settlement may also be investigated.
- 1.8 In light of this likely spatial development strategy and of the existing settlement pattern, the Council directed that the focus of the study should be on the risk of coalescence of settlements in the following areas (see Figure 1.1):
  - West Wight – considering Freshwater, Totland and Norton, with reference to peripheral/subsidiary settlement areas (Middleton, Pound Green, Easton, Freshwater Bay, Afton and Norton Green);
  - Cowes and Newport – with reference to Gurnard, Northwood, Whippingham and Parkhurst;
  - Ryde – with reference to Fishbourne, Seaview, Nettlestone, St Helens and settlements to the south of Ryde (Havenstreet and Upton);
  - 'The Bay' (Sandown, Lake, Shanklin) – with reference to Brading and Yaverland.

# Isle of Wight Settlement Coalescence Study

**Figure 1.1: Settlement areas studied**

- 1. West Wight Area
- 2. Cowes - Newport Area
- 3. Ryde Area
- 4. 'The Bay' Area



Source: LUC

Map Scale @ A4: 1:200,000



## 2 Methodology

### Overview

- 2.1 The Council noted at the outset that some of the settlement areas identified in paragraph 1.8 above may be considered from a planning perspective to have already coalesced. The study acknowledges where this was found to be the case, but also provides commentary where undeveloped landscape elements were in some instances judged to play a role in retaining distinction between 'neighbourhoods', even though no significant physical separation remains.
- 2.2 The study did not seek to make judgements on the value of maintaining separation or distinction between settlements but rather assumed that an objective of the emerging local plan will be to avoid coalescence of these settlements, this being weighed against other considerations in the planning balance.
- 2.3 The extent to which a development might affect perceived settlement separation is partly dependent on the specific characteristics of that development, such as scale, form, density, use, access and mitigation proposals. It is therefore difficult to pre-judge the acceptability of development in principle, other than where statutory or local designations apply.
- 2.4 The approach we took, rather than attempt to define zones within which development should be deemed unacceptable, was to identify broader areas between the settlements where the impact of development on settlement separation or identity should be a *consideration*. We then produced descriptions of the features contributing to these gaps, and 'guidance' points identifying considerations that can assist in determining whether any particular development proposal within these broad gap areas will have an unacceptable impact on settlement separation.
- 2.5 The level of contribution to settlement separation varies within a defined zone: locations within a gap in which the guidance points do not apply might be considered to have some potential for development; however in locations in which they are recognised to apply, the likely harm to settlement separation would be expected to form part of the planning judgement.
- 2.6 The boundaries of these defined zones in some cases include existing built development, where it falls within a broader area that is considered to constitute a settlement gap. This reflects the fact that any redevelopment or intensification proposals should consider potential impact on separation.

### Tasks undertaken

- 2.7 The study involved six main tasks, as described below.

#### **Task 1: Study inception and set-up**

- 2.8 The inception meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the background to the study; finalise the project objectives and scope; gather relevant information to inform the study; agree the approach to assessment of settlement gaps; agree the study outputs; and agree the programme.

#### **Task 2: Assess role of landscape in contributing to settlement character and identity**

- 2.9 For each of the four target settlement clusters (see paragraph 1.8) we carried out a desk-based assessment of the relationships and identity of settlements, making reference to existing local features and development constraints, historic maps and any relevant planned developments.
- 2.10 Settlement gaps were then defined, these being areas within which development could potentially contribute to settlement coalescence, and in which impact on separation should therefore be a planning consideration.



### **Task 3: Site visits**

- 2.11 We conducted site visits to the settlement gaps defined in Task 2. These helped us to assess the perceived gaps between settlements and to identify elements that contribute to those gaps.
- 2.12 Photographs taken during these visits were used to help illustrate gaps from identified key viewpoints in Task 4.

### **Task 4: Gap analysis and guidance**

- 2.13 We drew together the information gathered during the desk-based research and site visits to produce analysis and guidance for each gap, providing the following outputs:
  - a map illustrating the area within which development could potentially contribute to settlement coalescence, and in which impact on settlement separation should therefore be a planning consideration;
  - a description of the actual or perceived separation between settlements, with reference to the nature of the land separating the settlements;
  - guidelines for maintenance and enhancement of each gap's role in preventing coalescence, by reference to the key elements, for example distinct physical features, areas of land, or views, that contribute to physical separation or a perceived gap; and
  - photographs and/or additional mapping to illustrate the nature of settlement gaps.

### **Task 5: Policy review and recommendations**

- 2.14 We reviewed the NPPF and online Planning Practice Guidance to ascertain its support or otherwise for avoiding settlement coalescence via the maintenance of settlement gaps. We then reviewed a number of examples of local plan policies designed to prevent settlement coalescence and comments made on the emerging policies by Local Plan Inspectors. We also reviewed the outcome of planning appeals by site promoters/developers seeking to build within settlement gaps established by local policy.
- 2.15 Drawing on this review we then recommended a policy approach to the prevention of settlement coalescence for the emerging Isle of Wight Local Plan

### **Task 6: Reporting**

- 2.16 Following submission of a draft report to the Council, LUC worked with the Council to refine the study outputs and recommendations before finalising the report.

### **3 Results - nature of gaps and guidelines for maintenance**

- 3.1 This chapter presents the results of the analysis of settlement gaps and provides guidelines for maintenance and enhancement of each gap's role in preventing coalescence, by reference to the key elements that contribute to physical separation or a perceived gap.
- 3.2 The results are presented in the following order:
- West Wight area;
  - Cowes–Newport area;
  - Ryde area;
  - 'The Bay' area.

## West Wight Area



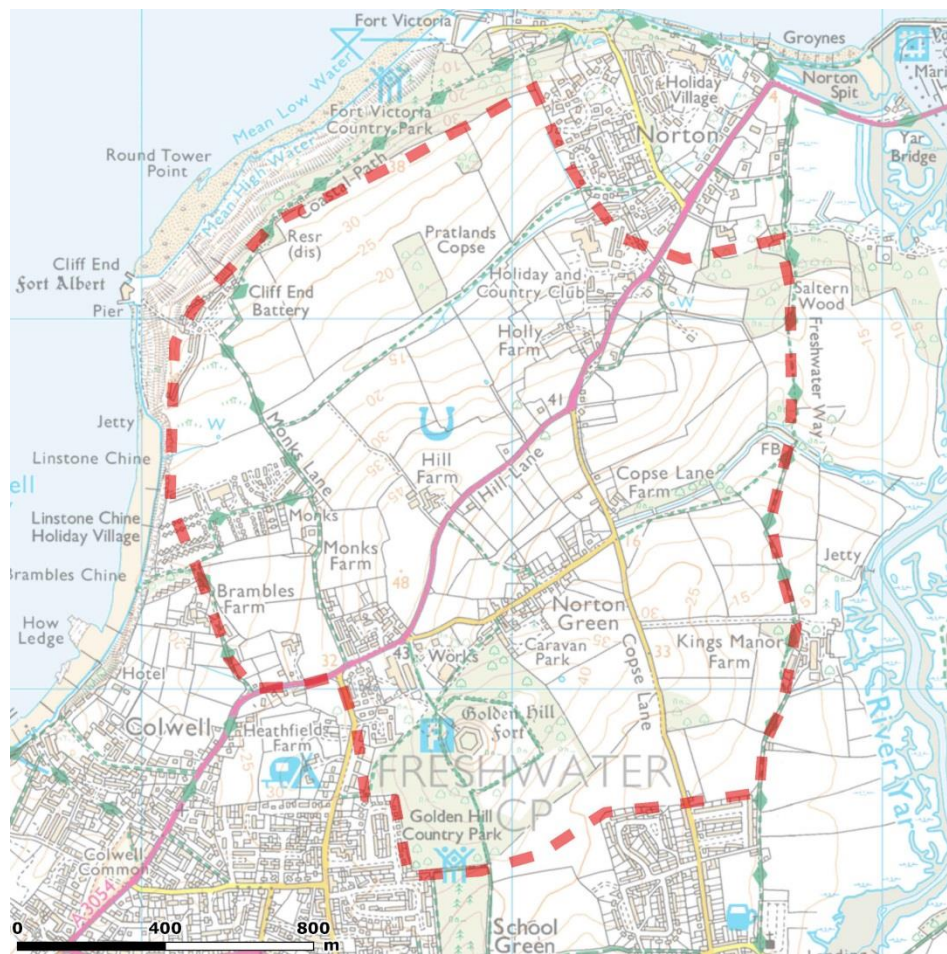
### Settlement gaps

This assessment considers the local scale gaps between the following settlements:

- Freshwater, Norton Green and Norton;
- Freshwater, Totland and Easton.

Afton is separated from both Easton and Freshwater by Afton Marshes, a physical constraint which prevents any potential coalescence. These gaps are therefore not assessed further.

# Gaps between Freshwater, Norton Green and Norton



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Area within which impact of development on settlement separation/identity should be a consideration



## Nature of Freshwater – Norton Green - Norton settlement gaps

The 1960's and 1970's saw significant growth in the Freshwater area, resulting in a northward advancement of the urban edge along Heathfield Road and the A3054 Colwell Road, and on land in between. At the northern end of the town, less than 200m separates employment uses at Golden Hill Park (View 1) from the hamlet of Norton Green, and housing at Solent Hill is only slightly further away. To the south-east of Golden Hill another part of Freshwater, centred on the Parish Church of All Saints, has developed northwards since the 1960's.

Since the 1960's Norton has evolved from what was formerly a looser, linear scattering of dwellings, with several large properties and associated parkland, into a denser village. The village is set within the slopes of a well-defined valley, with Pratland Copse to the west, Saltern Wood to the east and strong hedgerows and tree belts extending south to the A3054 providing additional containment (View 5). The A3054 Hill Lane linking Freshwater to Norton runs along a ridge which rises up from the northern edge of Freshwater and descends into Norton. This route has a rural character, largely influenced by high sided hedgerows, sporadic farmsteads and long glimpsed views over undulating farmland to Colwell Bay, and creates strong separation between the two settlements (View 3).

Norton Green, in contrast, has seen no significant change in its form or extent. It is a linear hamlet contained within a tributary valley of the River Yar that retains a strong rural character (View 4). Golden Hill Fort, built in the 1860s and occupying a prominent position, and its surrounding woodland, form a strong separator between Norton Green and the main body of Freshwater and also enclose the adjacent light industry. This distinction is further compounded by the character of the sunken tree-lined lane from the A3054 Hill Lane to Norton Green, which is narrow and restricted to one-way access (View 2). To the south-east, Pixley Hill and Copse Lane link Norton Green to the eastern part of Freshwater some 700m away, but open farmland between Golden Hill and the River Yar provides visual separation. From Hill Lane, Norton Green appears as an isolated hamlet in the valley below, with Freshwater screened by Golden Hill.

Although there is built development at Linstone Holiday Village, just to the north of the Colwell side of Freshwater off Monks Lane, this is low-rise and does not have any significant intervisibility along the valley with Norton.

## Guidelines for maintenance of Freshwater – Norton Green – Norton settlement gaps

### 1 Protect Golden Hill from development

Golden Hill, both the wooded area around the fort and the open farmland to the east running down to the River Yar, is an important element in maintaining distinction between settlements. Perception of the industrial estate from the main road should be minimised through retention and management of tree cover.

### 2 Preserve openness of the Hill Lane ridge between Freshwater and Norton

The Solent Hill development extended the urban edge of Freshwater uphill across the A3054 into an area that was formerly distinct from the rest of the town and which formed an undeveloped skyline. Any further development impinging on this area of high ground between Freshwater and Norton should be avoided, as it detracts from its role as an undeveloped rural gap between the two settlements.

### 3 Preserve valley containment of Norton and Norton Green

Similarly the settlements of Norton and Norton Green should remain contained within their existing valley settings so that Hill Lane retains its role as a strong rural gap. Woodland and trees on the south-eastern side of Norton should continue to define the outer extent of the village.

### 4 Maintain open views along valley west of Norton

Any intervisibility westward along the valley from Norton to development north of Colwell, e.g. in the vicinity of Linstone Holiday Village, would reduce perceived settlement separation, and diminish the separating role of the Hill Lane ridge.



View 1: Woodland provides strong visual containment to the light industry on the edge of Freshwater.



View 2: Narrow rural lane with restricted access provides separation between Norton Green and Freshwater.



View 3: Centred south-east from the Coast Path at the end of Monks Lane. The Hill Road ridge screens the near edge of Freshwater from view (buildings to the right of the hill are the Linstone Holiday Village).



View 4: Norton Green in its valley setting. Woodland in and around Golden Hill Fort prevents intervisibility with Freshwater.



View 5: South from open space alongside Graeme Road, Norton, showing the village's containment by higher ground.

## Gaps between Freshwater, Totland and Easton



Area within which impact of development on settlement separation/identity should be a consideration



## Nature of Freshwater – Totland - Easton settlement gaps

Settlement extents in this area have not changed dramatically over the last century, but a gradual expansion of Totland, Freshwater, Easton and of smaller intervening hamlets, has reduced what were already small gaps. There is now no separation along connecting roads between the higher, southern area of Totland, around Christ Church, the lower northern part of Totland, and the formerly distinct settlements of School Green and, to the east, the original Freshwater village centred on the parish church. 1960's-70's housing to the west of Queen's Road has left negligible separation along roads between School Green, Pound Green and Middleton, and between Pound Green, New Village and Easton.

Alongside outward expansion, increased development density has given some areas a more urban character, but several areas retain a relatively strong historic character that maintains distinctions between the different settlement areas; this is reflected in the designation of a number of conservation areas.

Between Freshwater, Totland and Middleton, development since the 1970's has created a new residential area around the junction of Summers Lane and Court Road (View 3). Although considered part of Totland, this area is physically and visually separated from the village to the west by a low hill which links south across Summers Lane to a spur of wooded higher ground at Weston Manor. To the north, wooded high ground around Freshwater Court (View 2) provides separation from the urban edge, and to the north and east of this modern residential area, Court Lane and Summers Lane are both narrow, rural lanes.

In views from the high coastal downs to the south (View 1) these elements of woodland, alongside tree cover around Christ Church and along Weston Lane, combine to form a strong southern edge to Totland/Freshwater and also to strengthen separation from Middleton and the urban edge to the north. From the edge of Freshwater on Clayton Road, there is a strong perception of a rural landscape to the south, with occasional dwellings set amongst trees and backed by the high coastal downs (View 4). Strong tree cover to the south of Madeira Road and to either side of Church Hill combines with landform to maintain a distinction between the southern and northern parts of Totland.

The Court Lane/Summers Lane settlement area sits in a small valley-head, which gives it visual separation from most of Middleton. Tree cover alongside the stream that flows from this valley down to School Green, and then alongside the A3055 and down to the River Yar, makes an important contribution to the visual separation of settlement areas, and the maintenance of rural character.

Middleton, Pound Green and New Village all retain a rural character along their principal through roads, with frequent older dwellings, greens, wide verges and a general absence of pavements. Tree screening, occasional views across open fields and specific features such as the pound at Pound Green contribute to distinctions between the different settlement areas. The rural character of this area can also be appreciated from the various footpaths and bridleways that cross it (View 5), from which open views backed by trees and the coastal downs are more readily available. The point at which Queen's Road crosses the tree-lined brook approaching School Green can be considered to mark a transition into the urban area. To the east of this, there is a stronger urban connection between Freshwater and Easton (View 6).

## Guidelines for maintenance of Freshwater – Totland - Easton settlement gaps

### 1 Retain open views from roads to wider rural gaps

There is negligible separation between settlement areas along connecting roads, but roadside gaps in development, permitting views across the wider gaps that exist away from the roads, make an important contribution to retention of distinctions between different settlement areas.

### 2 Maintain tree cover

Tree cover within and between settlements, and particularly woodland blocks and tree clusters such as those around Weston Manor, Farringford Park, Freshwater Court and Christ Church (Totland), contribute to rural character and, from sensitive AONB downland viewpoints (e.g. View 1), a perceived lack of urbanising development between Totland, Freshwater and Easton.

### 3 Retain views across open land to south of Freshwater

The open arable fields to the north of Summers Lane and south of Clayton Lane provide long, broad, rural views, enhancing perception of settlement separation.

### 4 Avoid large-scale buildings

Any new buildings visible from more than one settlement area would diminish the sense of separation between those areas.





View 1: Looking north from Tennyson Down towards Totland and Freshwater.



View 2: Looking north-east from Summers Lane towards high ground separating the main part of Totland from the edge of Freshwater and from development further east off Summers Lane and Court Road.



View 3: Looking east over modern development at Summers Court (off Court Road).



View 4: Looking south from the southern settlement edge of Freshwater on Clayton Road.



View 5: Open space between Bedbury Lane and Pound Green.



View 6: Looking north along Victoria Road, Easton. There is no clear distinction between Easton and central Freshwater.

## Cowes – Newport Area



### Settlement gaps

This assessment considers gaps between the following settlements:

- West Cowes and Gurnard;
- West Cowes and Northwood;
- East Cowes and Whippingham.
- Cowes and Newport;

Gaps between West Cowes and Northwood, and between East Cowes and Whippingham, are considered sufficient to warrant separate assessment from the remainder of the gap between these settlements and Newport. Parkhurst and houses along Horsebridge Hill (up to the entrance track to Crockers Farm) are considered too connected to Newport to warrant detailed assessment of remaining small gaps, but comments relating to them are included in consideration of the wider gap between Cowes and Newport.

# Gap between West Cowes and Gurnard



— — — — —  
Area within which impact of development on settlement separation/identity should be a consideration



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

## Nature of West Cowes – Gurnard settlement gap

The village of Gurnard evolved over the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a distinct village some distance from Cowes, with Northwood Park forming a separating area of well-treed, high ground between the two. Over the subsequent century, linear development along Baring Road, and on several roads sloping down to towards the sea front, has combined with settlement expansion at the Woodvale part of Gurnard (around Woodvale Road, Gurnard Green and Shore Road) down to the mouth of the Jordan Valley to remove the clear gap to the north-east of Gurnard. 1930's development along Place Road was reinforced in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by extensive development in Northwood Park, extending the urban edge of West Cowes to Baring Road, immediately to the east of Gurnard, to leave only the Jordan Valley providing physical separation between the settlements.

Although there is no clear break between the Woodvale part of Gurnard and linear development along Baring Road, topography, tree cover and sea views across Gurnard Green combine to give the former a distinct setting (View 1). Woodland on the steep slopes backing onto Prince's Esplanade creates separation from seafront development at Egypt Point, and the distinction between development on the slopes of the Jordan Valley at Woodvale and the main body of Gurnard to the south is equally strong, with strong woodland containment around Worsley Road, the only connecting route (View 5).

To the south of Woodvale Road, the Jordan Valley is largely comprised of open farmland, and provides clear separation between Gurnard and the urban edge of West Cowes along Baring Road. The physical distance between Gurnard and Cowes is for the most part less than 350m, and there is only an approximately 200m gap where development extends out from Cowes along Tuttons Hill (the principal connecting route between the two settlements), but the valley is a distinct landscape element that creates a strong sense of separation (View 2 and View 6).

Although residential development currently in progress to the west of Place Road will not reduce the width of the existing gap below the current narrowest point along Tuttons Hill (View 3), the fact that it crosses the Jordan Stream (albeit towards the less pronounced, upper end of the valley) means that it has an impact on the separating role of the valley. Further development has been approved (in outline) in the vicinity of Dottens Farm and Baring Road, just to the south of its junction with Woodvale Road.

To the south, Gurnard has a clear settlement edge to the rear of dwellings on Hilton Road, where mature hedgerow and tree cover form a visual barrier to the Cockleton Meadow open space and undeveloped farmland to the south (View 4), which slopes gently uphill towards the large retail and storage buildings near the southern end of Place Road, and the edge of Northwood. An isolated row of houses on Cockleton Lane and the Gurnard Pines Holiday Village in the wooded valley to the west, have stronger physical separation from Cowes.

## Guidelines for maintenance of West Cowes – Gurnard settlement gap

### 1 Retain wooded setting at the northern end of the village

The retention of woodland, and avoidance of development that would individually or cumulatively diminish the sense of wooded containment from both Gurnard to the south and Cowes to the north and east, are important to preservation of the distinct character of the Woodvale part of Gurnard.

### 2 Avoid perception of encroachment down towards the valley floor

The physical form of the Jordan Valley is important in the perception of separation between Gurnard and West Cowes, so development that visibly extends downslope towards the valley floor will detract from this. Tree cover on the valley floor and valley side to the east of Worsley Road is important in the containment of pockets of development which have encroached into the valley.

### 3 Retain agricultural land use and views from Baring Road

The landform permits views across and along the valley, but the retention of open farmland and the management of roadside hedgerows to permit views from Baring Road are also significant in this respect. To preserve this perception of separation in passing views it will be important to limit development along the western side of Baring Road, particular given that likely forthcoming development near Dottens Farmhouse will restrict perception of rural character along part of the remaining open valley frontage.

The rural, agricultural character of buildings located within the valley will be diminished if there is a loss of separation between them and the urban edge. The continued agricultural management of the valley fields and hedgerows is likewise desirable to keep urban fringe characteristics at bay.

### 4 Retain and strengthen hedgerows where gap is narrow, and avoid encroachment on the church

There is particular sensitivity associated with the narrowest part of the settlement gap, along and to the south of Tuttons Hill. Hedgerows in this area need to be maintained and where possible strengthened. The visible

presence of All Saints Church in a hill crest, village edge location contributes to the sense of Gurnard being a distinct settlement, and the adjacent field is used for community events, so any development east of the church would create additional harm beyond that associated with reduction in physical separation.

### **5 Avoid skyline development impact on high ground towards Northwood**

The absence of visible development on the higher ground to the south-east of Gurnard is important to perception of the village's setting as largely rural and avoiding any sense of containment by urbanisation.



View 1: Looking north-east along Shore Road towards the Woodvale Hotel.



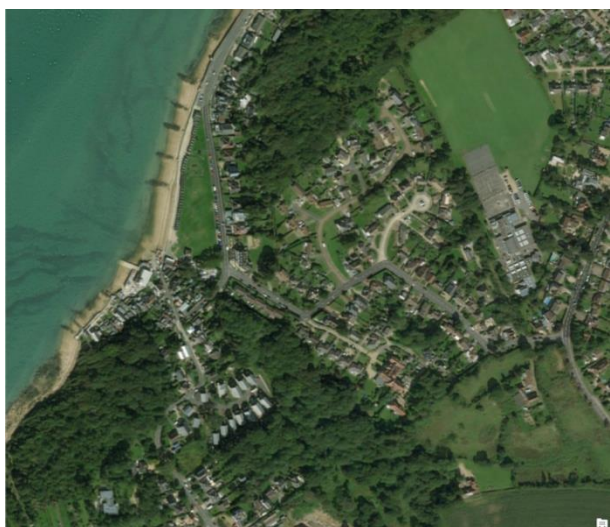
View 2: Looking south-west towards All Saints Church, Gurnard, from Baring Road.



View 3: Looking west along Tuttons Hill towards Gurnard.



View 4: Looking south-east from Cockleton Lane, from the edge of Cockleton Meadow.

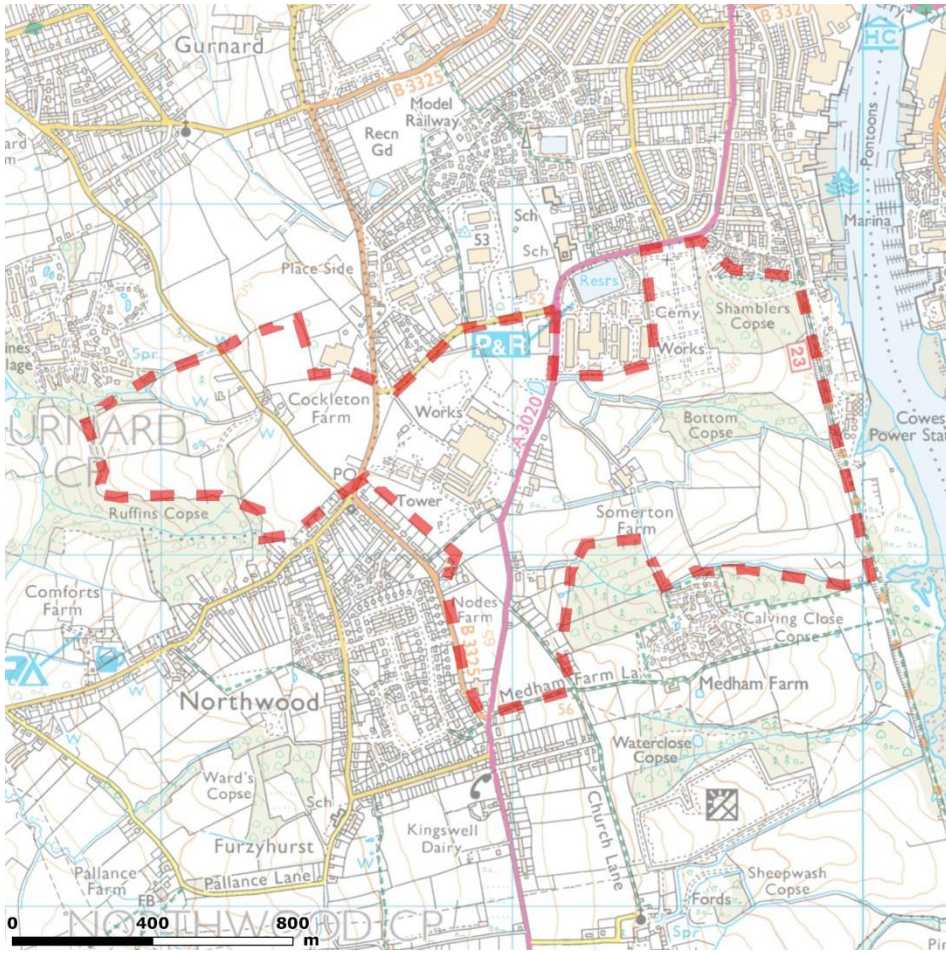


View 5: Woodvale Road / Gurnard Green / Shore Road area, with strong woodland and landform setting.



View 6: Looking north-east along the Jordan Valley from Tuttons Hill

# Gap between West Cowes and Northwood



— — — — —  
Area within which impact of development on settlement separation/identity should be a consideration



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

## Nature of West Cowes – Northwood settlement gap

The village of Northwood is centrally located on a north-south ridge that runs from the western side of Cowes to Parkhurst Forest, falling westwards into the valley of the Gurnard Luck stream, and eastwards down to the Medina River. A number of tributary watercourses run down typically well-treed, narrow valleys to feed both the Medina and the Gurnard Luck.

Northwood did not exist as a village until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A scattering of farmsteads occupied the area, with a row of dwellings along Tinkers Lane and a small hamlet and school at Furzyhurst, to which houses along Oxford Street were added in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Further dispersed growth followed but the principal expansion was in the 1960's when the area that now forms the residential core of the village was built.

The pre-WW2 residential edge of Cowes was some 1.3km from houses along Pallance Road and Nodes Road that now form the northern edge of Northwood, but scattered development (including a close of houses on Broadfields Avenue) and urban fringe uses such as a recreation ground, water works and reservoirs, occupied the intervening ground alongside farmland and an airfield. Subsequent southward residential expansion and large scale industrial development, notably the radar site now operated by BAE Systems, have left little physical separation between Cowes and Northwood along the ridge between the B3325 Place Road and the A3020 Newport Road. Large scale commercial development continues to the present day, notably along the A3020 and Three Gates Road, where a supermarket opened in 2013 and a car dealership is currently under construction.

Physical gaps between Cowes and Northwood are now limited to the farmland to the west of Place Road (View 1), open grassland within the BAE Systems site (View 4) and fields to the south of BAE between Newport Road and Nodes Road (View 5). All these areas are visually influenced by adjacent development, but the farmland to the west of Place Road gives it a stronger rural character, and views westward give it a stronger relationship with the wider countryside. The close mown grassland and structures on the BAE Systems site and its containment by security fencing and busy roads mean that open space here is fragmented and lacks association with the wider landscape, but tree/hedge cover along the edges of the BAE site and the remaining adjacent open spaces help to retain some distinction. The fields between Newport Road and Nodes Road are relatively contained but are in grazing use.

To the east of Newport Road, landscape character rapidly changes to become more rural, with views across the largely undeveloped Medina Valley (View 2). A tributary valley and woodlands create visual separation here between the commercial edge of Cowes/Northwood and the main residential area of Cowes, and landform and woodland also provide strong containment to limit the urbanising influence of the Medham Farm Lane Estate. The dominance of built development along the ridge means that there is no sense of connection across it between the more rural areas to either side, but the undeveloped valley sides nonetheless suggest some degree of settlement distinction in longer views (e.g. see view from Beatrice Avenue below).

## Guidelines for maintenance of West Cowes – Northwood settlement gap

### Retain and enhance landscape structure around the BAE site

Landform and land cover do not create a strong physical distinction between Cowes and Northwood, but the existing fragile separation between settlements would be further diminished if vegetation along the edges of the BAE site (View 3) was lost.

There is potential to enhance the landscape character and ecological value of open spaces around the BAE site and adjacent commercial premises. The introduction/enhancement of landscape structure to increase east-west connectivity and filter north-south views would help to preserve distinctions between the residential edges of Northwood and Cowes and the commercial/industrial premises in between.

### Retain open spaces that preserve a distinction in character between residential and commercial

The combination of large-scale commercial/industrial development and surrounding open spaces helps to distinguish the area centred on BAE Systems from the residential edge of Northwood. The introduction of smaller-scale built development, such as residential dwellings, could diminish this distinction in character and, as a result, the perceived separation.

### Prevent encroachment downslope from the ridge

Development on the ridge top between Place Road / Nodes Road and Newport Road would not significantly alter the rural setting to east and west that falling ground and valley-side woodlands provide, but loss of open views west from Place Road and east from Newport Road, or the expansion of development downslope from the ridge, would be damaging in this respect.

Retention of openness on the slopes of the Medina Valley to the east of Northwood and south of the edge of Cowes contributes to perceived separation between the two settlements, despite the lack of any sizeable gap along the ridge top.



View 1: Looking east from Cockleton Lane towards the BAE Systems site, with the edge of Cowes to the left of the view and the edge of Northwood to the right.



View 2: Looking west across the Medina Valley from Beatrice Avenue, between Whippingham and East Cowes.



View 3: Looking west along Three Gates Road from entrance to Three Gates Business Park (with BAE Systems to the left).



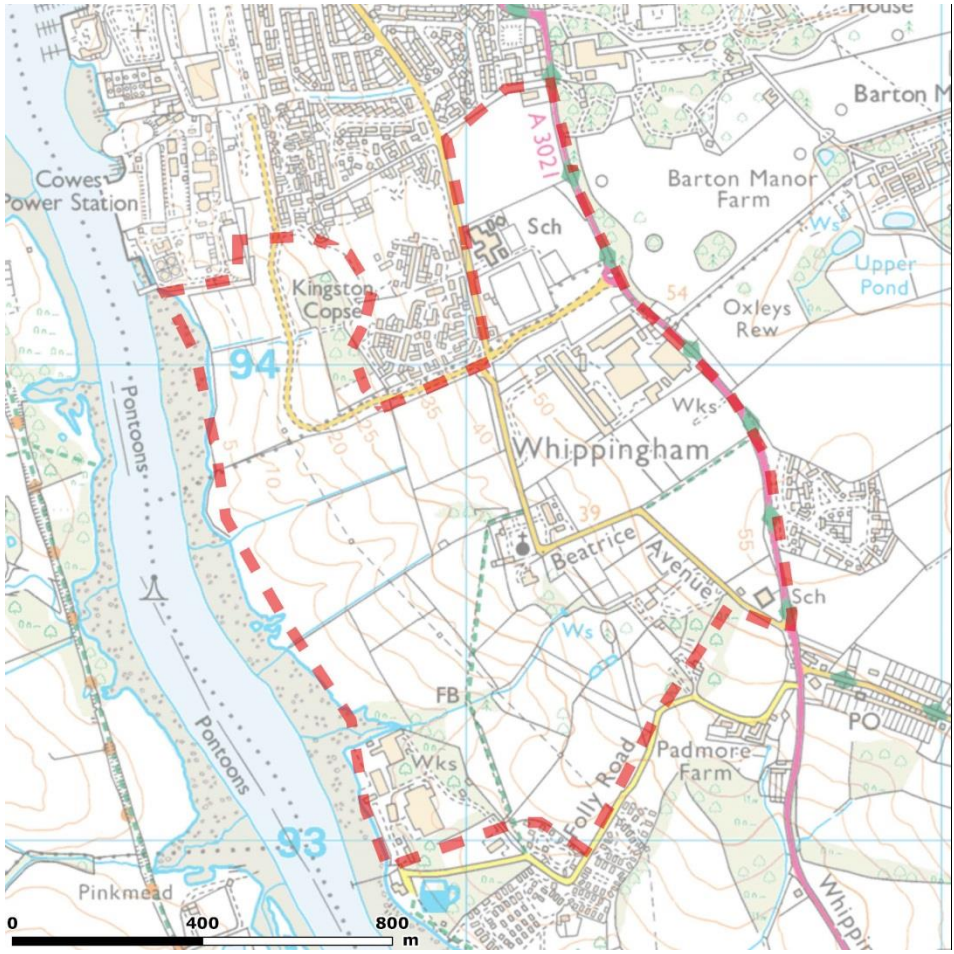
View 4: Looking south from Aldi supermarket towards BAE Systems car park and buildings off Newport Road.



View 5: Looking south-west from Newport Road across field to towards the edge of Northwood along Nodes Road.



# Gap between East Cowes and Whippingham



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Area within which impact of development on settlement separation/identity should be a consideration



## Nature of East Cowes – Whippingham settlement gap

Up until the 1930's, Whippingham was a small hamlet centred on St Mildred's church, with a few outlying dwellings to the south-east along Beatrice Road. Subsequent development has left the historic hamlet around the church (View 2), which has conservation area status, largely unchanged, but has resulted in the development of separate clusters of housing: along Alverstone Road and at Whippingham Heights (both to the east of the A3021 Whippingham Road), and on the lower slopes of the valley at Medina Park.

From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until after World War 2, houses along Victoria Grove formed the southern residential edge of East Cowes, with a few larger scale infrastructure and industrial developments, including an engineering works, cemetery and isolation hospital, located between the urban edge and Kingston Copse. Development up to the 1970's saw the advancement of the settlement edge to Crossways Road, but in the last 6 years substantial residential development (the Hawthorn Meadows estate) has resulted in the creation of a new settlement edge along Saunders Way.

Prior to this recent development, Kingston Copse contributed to the perception of significant separation between the urban edge of East Cowes and Whippingham, but new housing pushing beyond it, in particular the Riverside development along its western edge, create the impression in views from the western side of the Medina Valley (View 1) that the town has spread beyond any physical landscape containment. An existing field boundary adds seasonal screening to houses along Saunders Way in views from the south, and planting along recent bunding to the south of the road will add to this as it matures (View 4), but the remaining gap of approximately 350m of arable farmland between East Cowes and the churchyard at St Mildred's has nonetheless been significantly diminished (View 3).

The settlement gap is also affected by industrial development on the ridge crest to the east, adjacent to the A3021 Whippingham Road, where the GKN Aerospace R&D facility is located. This site has been in industrial use since the 1960's, originally utilising the buildings of a former Royal Navy hospital but with subsequent redevelopment and, within the last 15 years, intensification of use. The GKN site is perceived as quite separate from East Cowes when travelling along the A3021, where Crossways Road still forms the settlement edge, but since the construction of Saunders Way the built footprint has expanded to the north-west to include a new car park, and the first building of a new commercial development, the Island Technology Park, has been completed to the south of GKN.

These developments leave only about 100m physical gap between the Technology Park site and the estate to the east of the A3021 (View 5), and the GKN car park lies immediately opposite houses fronting on to Saunders Way, but landscape and built character help to retain some distinction between East Cowes, the employment area and the various elements of Whippingham. The principal physical distinction is between development on the ridge crest, at Whippingham Heights, Alverstone Road and the industrial estates, and development on the valley side along Beatrice Avenue and Folly Lane: strong hedgerows and small woodland blocks combine with views across the Medina Valley to open fields to give a more enclosed, rural character to the older parts of Whippingham near the church and along Folly Lane, and to Medina Park (a residential park homes site). Vegetation along Saunders Way combines with the lie of the land to minimise intervisibility between the GKN buildings and the new housing.

In terms of character and setting, there is a clear distinction between the Victorian church and dwellings at Whippingham, set in well-treed surroundings, and modern housing on the edge of Cowes. The spire of the church, set within a cluster of evergreen trees, is a prominent skyline landmark, and the open slopes down to the Medina River are its principal setting.

## Guidelines for maintenance of East Cowes – Whippingham settlement gap

### **Avoid perceived containment of St Mildred's Church**

The relationship between East Cowes and Whippingham is very visible from locations across the Medina Valley, e.g. from the cycle way below Medham Farm Lane, and from open locations along the valley floor. There is a danger that further development southwards along the ridge crest will, particularly if it has skyline impact, lead to a sense of St Mildred's Church being contained by the expansion of East Cowes.

### **Retain remaining fields and strengthen field boundary vegetation**

The remaining open fields on the valley side are important to preserving the rural separation between the older part of Whippingham and the edge of East Cowes, but woodland belt planting would help strengthen physical separation in the longer term. Tree belts descending the valley side along tributary valleys are characteristic of the locality, particularly to the west of the river, so a strengthening of planting alongside existing field edge channels would be in keeping with this. Planting to soften/filter views of existing development would also be desirable.

Although its role as a settlement edge feature has been diminished by recent development, Kingston Copse is nonetheless an important landscape element that contributes to perception of this area as being at the rural fringe of East Cowes.

**Preserve separation between commercial and residential areas**

Retention of some separation between the industrial/commercial area and Whippingham Heights could be achieved by strengthening planting along the southern edge of the Island Technology Park site, and by preserving the openness of the adjacent field.

Open land south of Crossways Road contributes to perception of separation between East Cowes and the industrial/commercial area off Whippingham Road and Saunders Way.



View 1: Looking east across the Medina Valley from the footpath east of Medham Farm Lane. The Riverside houses and Kingston Copse lie at the centre of the view, with the spire of Whippingham church visible towards the right edge.



View 2: Looking north-east across the river toward St Mildred's Church from the Red Squirrel Trail cycle way.



View 3: Looking north along Beatrice Avenue, from field edge near St Mildred's, towards houses along Saunders Way

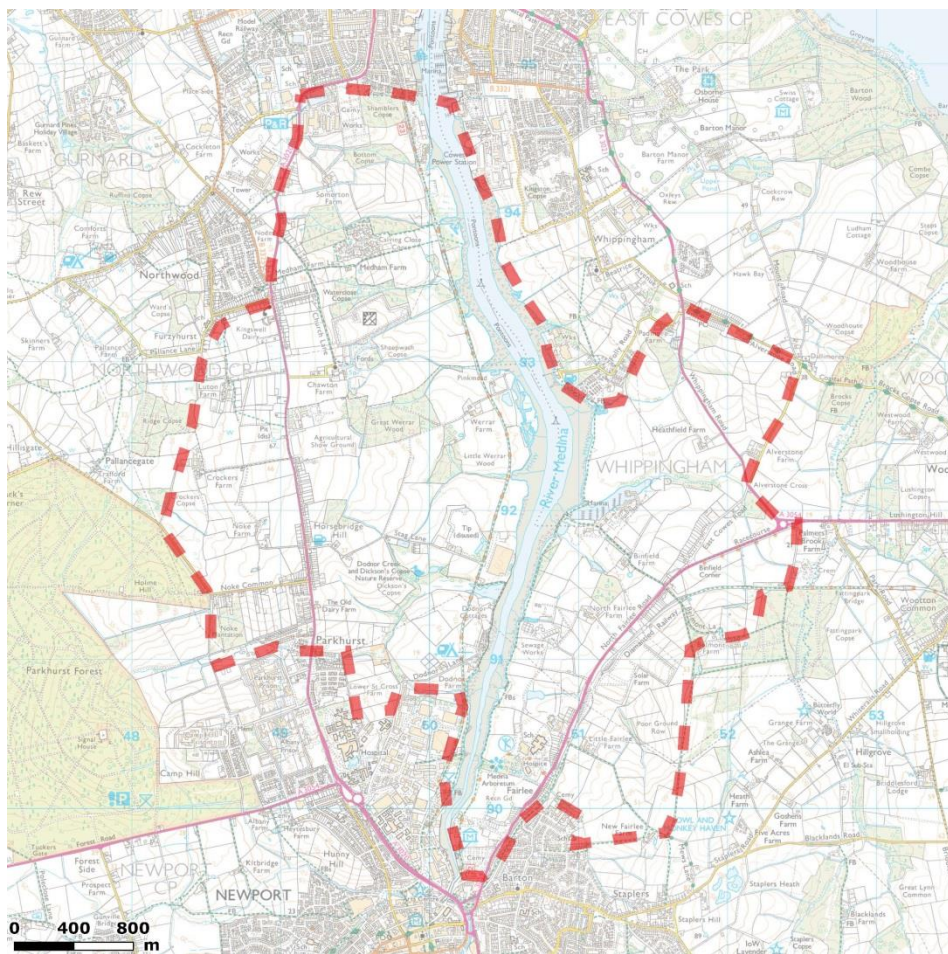


View 4: Settlement edge trees and bunding on Saunders Way.

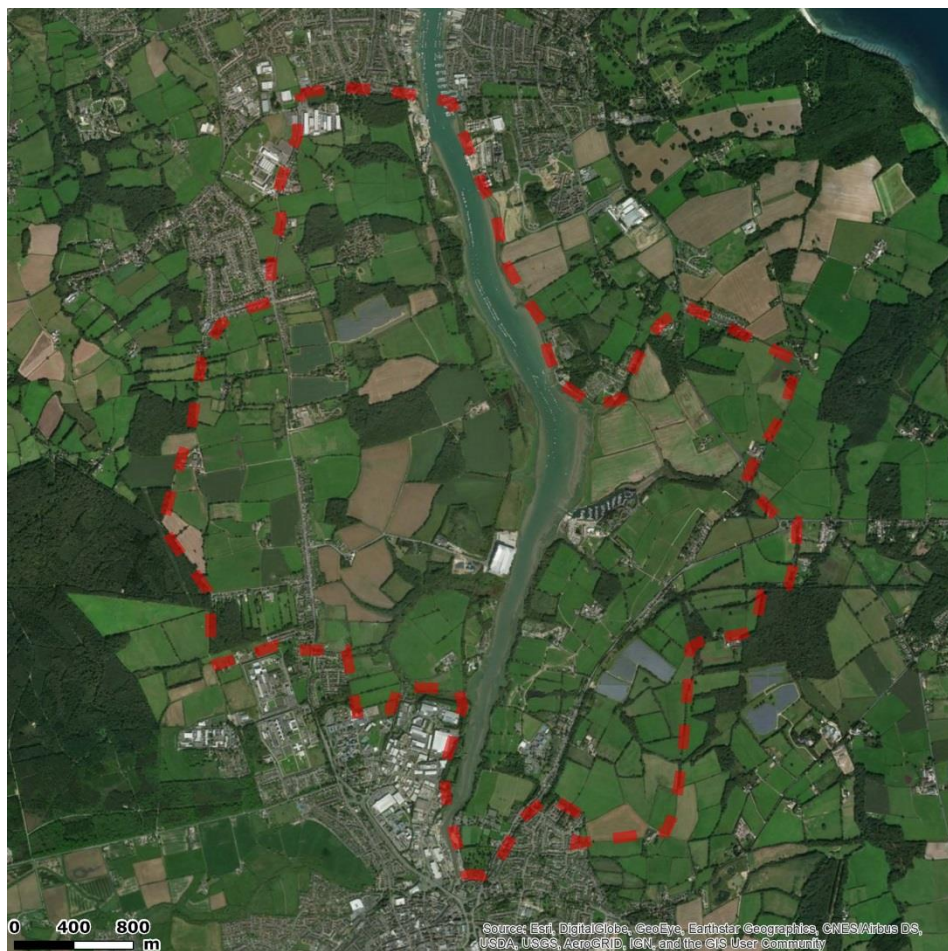


View 5: The narrow gap between the Island Technology Park and Whippingham Heights, viewed from Beatrice Av.

## Gap between Cowes and Newport



Area within which impact of development on settlement separation/identity should be a consideration



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

## Nature of Cowes – Newport settlement gap

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw significant growth of Newport and Cowes, and of the smaller intervening settlements of Northwood, Horsebridge Hill, Parkhurst and Whippingham. Development has continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with recent growth in particular concentrated on the southern edge of East Cowes and the eastern side of Newport. As a result there is fragile separation between West Cowes and Northwood, and between East Cowes and Whippingham (each of these gaps is considered under a separate assessment heading), and very little distinction between Parkhurst and Newport, but also as a result a weakened sense of separation between the two larger towns (View 1).

The A3020 linking Newport and Cowes has an urbanised character along most of its distance, with large-scale development at the hospital and prisons adjoining the residential area of Parkhurst. What was formerly the separate settlement of Horsebridge Hill is now in effect part of Parkhurst (View 4). As a result of linear development along the A3020, there is less than a 750m gap between the last house on Cowes Road and Northwood, with the Wight Military and Heritage museum and several residential dwellings lying in between.

To the east and west the settlement edges of Northwood are defined by the edge of the ridge on which the village is located, with valley-side woodlands forming prominent landscape elements. To the south there is no clear boundary feature, with linear sprawl along the east side of the main road, but the plateau landform precludes any intervisibility between Northwood and the edge of Parkhurst.

To the east of the River Medina the physical gaps between settlements in the Medina Valley are wider, and the connecting route along the A3054 and A3021 is less direct, but the landscape character of the route also adds to perceived separation. Strong tree cover along Fairlee Road, older housing (mostly 1930's) and an absence of large-scale employment uses create a more rural approach to the centre of Newport from the north. Much of the route runs along the side of the valley, and the broad basin in which the Island Harbour marina is located provides long views across a rural landscape, with houses at Binfield mostly confined to the east side of the road. Strong belts of woodland along the southern edge of Whippingham screen the urban edge from view, so there are rural views across the river from the A3021 (View 3).

Away from the connecting main roads the Medina Valley, for the most part, retains a strong rural character, valued by users of the popular rights of way along the riverside and the former railway line (View 2). Woodland blocks on the valley sides (View 5), mostly associated with narrow tributary valleys, are strong landscape elements which create containment from urbanising development on higher ground and from riverside development in Newport and Cowes. The chimneys of Cowes (Kingston) Power Station are prominent on the skyline in some views, but typically with a sense of detachment from the rural valley landscape due to screening of other buildings by tree cover. There are a number of locations with current and former industrial uses along the valley floor, most visibly the Vestas wind turbine factory (View 6), but the valley settings of these sites and isolation from the urban edges means that they do not significantly reduce the perceived rural gap.

## Guidelines for maintenance of Cowes – Newport settlement gap

### 1 Retain open views from the A3020 and preserve Northwood – Parkhurst visual gap

The retention of undeveloped sections of the A3020, with accompanying views across the Medina Valley and also views across farmland to the west, is important to retaining a sense of leaving one settlement before entering another. Intervisibility between Northwood and Horsebridge Hill should be avoided.

### 2 Avoid skyline impact on valley viewpoints

Development that has a skyline impact on public viewpoints from within the valley could intrude on rural character and create a sense of the valley being contained by urbanising influences.

### 3 Preserve undeveloped character and characteristic woodlands in the Medina Valley gap

Either new isolated urbanising development within the Medina Valley, or development that represents a significant change in the form of existing settlements such as expansion down from the ridge top at Northwood or Horsebridge Hill, would reduce perceived settlement separation.

Valley-side woodland blocks are characteristic landscape features that play a strong role in settlement separation, in particular by forming a strong boundary to the southern edge of West Cowes (Shamblers Copse) and to the north of Newport (trees along Dodnor Creek), so these should be retained and appropriately managed. Woodland has been utilised to screen some development from widespread view, e.g. on Medham Farm Lane, but capacity for doing this without detracting from rural character is limited.

#### 4 Strengthen natural connectivity between the Medina Valley and Parkhurst Forest

Strengthening woodland connectivity in the tributary valley between Dodnor Creek and Parkhurst Forest, on both sides of the A3020, would help to enhance distinction between the southern part of Parkhurst, where the prisons dominate, and the linear residential development along Horsebridge Hill.

#### 5 Recognise value of Hunny Hill in preserving some settlement distinction

The open, southern side of Hunny Hill helps to retain some distinction, in views from high ground to the south, between Newport and Parkhurst.



View 1: Looking north over Newport from Mountjoy Cemetery. Hunny Hill is prominent, beyond which Parkhurst extends along the A3020 to the horizon.



View 2: Former works and Folly Inn, on the riverside at Whippingham, from the Red Squirrel cycle trail.



View 3: Looking east across the valley from Binfield; development along Horsebridge Hill is visible in the distance towards the right of the view.



View 4: The A3020 at Horsebridge Hill, looking south from Stag Lane junction.



View 5: Looking north from Stag Lane towards Great Werrar Wood, with Power Station chimneys in the distance.



View 6: Bridge across Dodnor Creek, with Vestas factory in the background.

## Ryde Area



### Settlement gaps

This assessment considers the local scale gaps between the following settlements:

- Fishbourne and Ryde;
- Ryde and settlements to the south;
- Ryde, Nettlestone and Seaview;
- Nettlestone and St Helens.

Wootton Creek forms the entire gap between Wootton and Fishbourne so there is no risk of coalescence.

# Gap between Fishbourne and Ryde



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Area within which impact of development on settlement separation/identity should be a consideration



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community



## Nature of Fishbourne - Ryde settlement gap

Fishbourne lies on the east-facing slope down to Wootton Creek. 20<sup>th</sup> century development saw southward expansion of the village from its historic core near the mouth of Wootton Creek linking up with ribbon development along the A3054 (Kite Hill), the main road link between Wootton and Ryde.

Ryde developed during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and despite becoming increasingly settled during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it closely resembles the same settlement form as of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with a clear gap still remaining between Ryde and Fishbourne.

The hill and valley landforms between Fishbourne and Ryde play a strong role in the separation. The ridge to the west of Newnham Road and Church Road contains the main body of the settlement at Ryde from the view on the western approach (View 4).

The woodland cover with a number of copses, groves and woods (View 6) is important in maintaining the separation between Fishbourne and Ryde. There are some isolated instances of ribbon development along the A3054 (View 5) which partially weakens the gap but woodland and further tree planting restricts intervisibility with adjacent settlements.

The present-day Quarr Abbey (View 1) has occupied the coastal headland between Fishbourne and Ryde since 1912. The Abbey and surrounding grounds, including the ruins of its 12<sup>th</sup> century predecessor (View 3), have a distinctive historic character and are generally contained by woodland which contributes to the sense of isolation from adjacent settlement. The Coast Path (View 2) runs through the grounds and through Quarr Wood, providing a recreational connection between the settlements.

Settlement edges are generally well-defined by woodland, with New Copse at Fishbourne and Quarr Wood and Puckers Copse at Ryde restricting views. Quarr Wood has since the 19<sup>th</sup> century contained a number of large houses in extensive grounds, but more intensive 1960's development of two residential closes has created a perception of urbanisation in views from Quarr Road (which is also the Coast Path).

## Guidelines for maintenance of Fishbourne - Ryde settlement gap

### 1 Retain tree cover

The extent of tree cover in the area is important in containing views of development, to maintain perception of a broad, rural gap.

### 2 Prevent eastward expansion of Fishbourne up to hilltop

Fishbourne is oriented westward towards Wootton Creek. Any expansion of the village up onto the hill top would represent a significant change in settlement form, reducing the sense of rural separation experienced at present on the higher ground and contained valley to the east.

### 3 Retain Quarr Abbey's isolation from urbanising influences

Any development encroachment on the open fields around Quarr Abbey, diminishing its sense of elevated isolation, would have an adverse impact on the perceived separation between urban areas.

### 4 Prevent westward expansion of Ryde beyond ridge crest

The ridge along the western edge of Ryde forms a distinct settlement edge to the south of Quarr Hill. Any development downhill from this would add significantly to perception of the urban area from the settlement gap, particularly near the A3054 where it would be prominent on approach from Fishbourne.

### 5 Consider incremental urbanising effect of development within Quarr Wood

Quarr Wood likewise forms a strong boundary feature, despite localised perceptions being affected by housing within it, but further development could weaken this role. Particular sensitivity is associated with views from the Coast Path.



View 1: Looking north from the Coastal Path. Quarr Abbey commands a prominent position from along this recreational route.



View 2: Looking north-west from the Coastal Path. The woodland around the Abbey is characteristic of the area and prevents intervisibility with Fishbourne.



View 3: Looking north from the Coastal Path. The remains of the earlier Cistercian abbey contribute to the distinctive historic character.



View 4: Looking north from the A3054 to the edge of Binstead. Sloping farmland and woodland copses are key separating features.

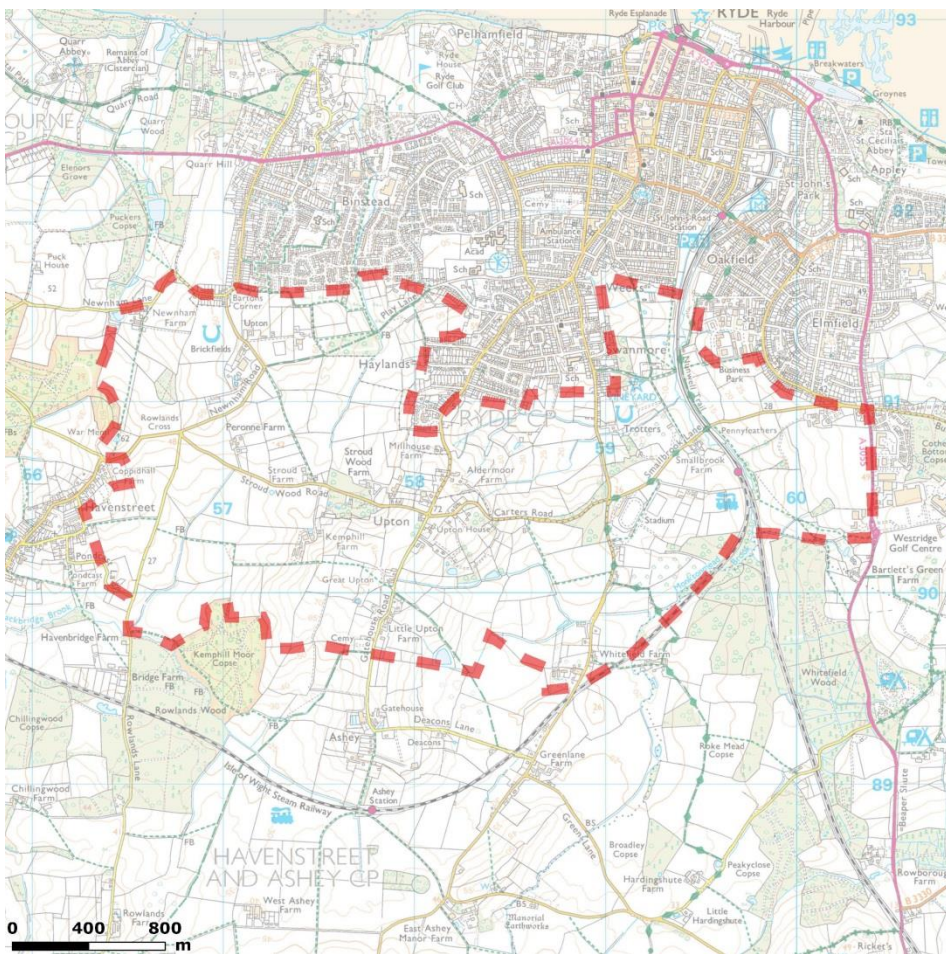


View 5: Looking east from the A3054. The major road and associated ribbon development partially weakens the sense of separation.



View 6: Looking north along Puckers Copse towards the coast. The area's wooded character provides a strong sense of separation between the settlements.

# Gaps between Ryde and settlements to the south



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Area within which impact of development on settlement separation/identity should be a consideration



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

## Nature of gaps between Ryde and settlements to the south

Two valleys run south through Ryde down to the seafront, one at Ryde Harbour and one at Binstead, and towards the southern edge of Ryde a degree of openness remains on the slopes of the ridge of higher ground that separates the two valleys, the area occupied by the suburbs of Swanmore and Haylands. As a result these suburbs of Ryde retain a degree of physical distinction from Binstead to the west and Oakfield and Elmfield to the east, and although they lack separation from central Ryde and are not perceived as separate settlements they nonetheless retain some relationship with the surrounding rural landscape (Views 5 and 6).

The ridge rises south of Haylands (View 4) to the nucleated hilltop hamlet of Upton, from which the land falls away relatively steeply to east and west into the two valleys. There is little more than 200m between the two settlements, but field-edge and roadside trees and hedgerows maintain reasonably good visual separation between the two.

Where stronger views of Ryde are available, such as from Carters Road, the town appears strongly separated by the well-treed valley in between, although large-scale commercial developments at Elmfield and Westridge (View 4) have some adverse impact in this respect. Small woodland blocks close to the southern edges of Binstead, Haylands and Swanmore help to create a distinction between the urban area and adjacent countryside, retaining rural character along the roads that run east-west between the south-eastern edge of Ryde at Elmfield and the village of Havenstreet.

Havenstreet is a linear village running up slope from the Blackbridge Brook on the valley floor to the south to a point short of the hilltop on which the village's war memorial shrine is located. Landform therefore prevents intervisibility with Ryde. The south-western edge of Ryde at Binstead is almost 1km away, but the intervening valley with open farmland and screening of the nearest settlement edge by woodland creates a strong sense of separation from the urban area in views from the hilltop (Views 1-3).

## Guidelines for maintenance of gaps between Ryde and settlements to the south

### **1 Preserve undeveloped and well-treed character of valleys that separate and contain the southern suburbs of Ryde**

Retain an undeveloped buffer between the east-west roads south of Ryde – Smallbrook Lane, Carters Road and Stroud Wood Road – and the urban edge. Small woodlands, strong field boundaries and an absence of development in the valleys to the east, south and west of the Haylands and Swanmore suburbs maintains a link to more rural landscape to the south.

### **2 Avoid development on higher ground that is widely visible in the landscape**

This particularly relates to development that would be visible from locations which otherwise have no significant intervisibility with Ryde – e.g. the rural areas to the south of the Havenstreet and Upton hilltops.

### **3 Consider visual impact from the Havenstreet war memorial shrine**

Minimise any sense of visual encroachment from Ryde into the rural landscape as viewed from the war memorial shrine at Havenstreet.



View 1: Looking north east towards Haylands from the war memorial shrine above Havenstreet. Woodland screens some of the urban edge.



View 2: Looking east from the war memorial shrine above Havenstreet. The intact field patterns contribute to the strong rural character of the gap.



View 3: Looking south from the war memorial shrine above Havenstreet. Remoteness is key to the setting of Havenstreet.



View 4: Looking east from Upton Road on the southern edge of Haylands. Large scale development at Westridge is visible on the skyline over 2km away.



View 5: Looking east towards Elmfield from the south of Weeks. Sequential views of the urban edge serve as a constant reminder of the proximity to the settlements within the Weeks / Swanmore valley.



View 6: Looking east towards Oakfield from Swanmore. Cross-valley views of adjacent development create little sense of separation between Swanmore and Oakfield.

# Gaps between Ryde, Nettlestone and Seaview



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Area within which impact of development on settlement separation/identity should be a consideration



## Nature of Ryde – Nettlestone - Seaview settlement gaps

Settlement to the east of Ryde is focused on three north-south orientated ridges of higher ground, separated by valleys that drain down to the sea at Spring Vale. The eastern edge of Ryde at Elmfield follows one ridge, the village of Pondwell is located on the second, dropping down to Spring Vale, and Nettlestone and Seaview occupy the third.

Cothey Bottom Copse creates a well-defined wooded edge to residential and large-scale commercial development at Westridge, and to the north of this the well-treed valley sides and floor provide a strong rural setting to Elmfield, filtering views of development along Bullen Road and on the adjacent ridge at Pondwell. Closer to the coast there is little distance between Elmfield and houses further downslope at Woodlands Vale and the former Harcourt Sands Holiday Village, but strong tree cover contains built development and, in combination with landform, preserves distinction from the main urban area of Ryde. To the east, on the other side of the valley, the Woodlands Vale Estate (a Registered Park and Garden) forms a strong parkland separator between these areas of development and housing along Oakhill Road at Spring Vale.

Pondwell expanded from a small hamlet into a village with development of a housing estate in the 1960's, but despite descending half way down the valley side from the ridge crest which defines its western edge, the village has relatively strong separation from 1930's development across the valley floor on Nettlestone Hill (View 5), with the steeper lower valley slopes marking a clear gap (Views 1 and 2). Tree cover on both sides of the valley, in particular around Fairy Hill, makes a significant contribution to filtering views of housing (View 6), but the former holiday chalet park site on the eastern edge of Pondwell, which has outline permission for residential development, is somewhat isolated from the rest of the village. Lacking containment by tree cover it has more visual impact in cross-valley views and therefore more impact on perceived settlement separation.

To the south of Pondwell, tree cover along the edge of the village filters views from Bullen Road on high ground. Bullen Road provides expansive views towards Nettlestone in which the intervening valley is a strong gap feature, and glimpses of the Solent add to a sense of elevated separation from urban areas.

Closer to the sea the valley broadens and contains a lake, marshlands, reed beds and scrub combining to form an area with a distinctive character, designated a local nature reserve, that strengthens inland separation between Seaview and Spring Vale (View 4). Along the seafront there is less of a gap between the two settlements, particularly with the recent development of the Normans Landing holiday homes along Duver Road (View 3), but views through to the valley help to limit the sense of encroachment.

The hilltop settlement of Nettlestone developed around Nettlestone Green from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, whilst Seaview was until the 1960's focused primarily on the lower, northern end of the slope down to the sea. There has been no significant sense of separation between Nettlestone and Seaview since the construction of The Heights in the 1960s-70s which effectively joined up the settlements.

## Guidelines for maintenance of Ryde – Nettlestone – Seaview settlement gaps

### **1 Preserve the openness of the lower valley slopes, and maintain the woodland blocks, well-treed hedgerows and individual field trees**

The valleys both east and west of Pondwell are important separating features, and tree cover screens or filters much of the development in the area, preserving rural character.

### **2 Minimise development in exposed locations**

This applies to areas that lack screening tree cover, or where there would be skyline visual impact that might increase the sense of urbanising containment, in particular the open slopes around Bullen Lane to the south of Pondwell.

### **3 Maintain open views south from Duver Road**

Preserve sufficient openness along Duver Road to maintain perception of the semi-natural wetland and scrub landscape beyond.



View 1: Looking north-west from the edge of Nettlestone. Wooded and farmed ridgelines restrict intervisibility with nearby settlements.



View 2: Looking west from Fairy Hill. Settlement edge views across the valley between Nettlestone and Pondwell.



View 3: Looking west along Duver Road. In linear seafront views there is limited distinction between settlements, but views to the undeveloped inland area help to retain perception of a gap.



View 4: Long sea views looking north from Fairy Hill across the former wildlife park.



View 5: Looking east from the Wishing Well pub on edge of Pondwell. Ribbon development along Nettlestone Hill encroaches part-way down the valley side.



View 6: Looking west from the edge of Seaview. Woodland around settlement edges create a sense of enclosure from within the broad valley below.



# Gap between Nettlestone and St Helens



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Area within which impact of development on settlement separation/identity should be a consideration



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

## Nature of Nettlestone – St Helens settlement gap

Approximately 1km separates St Helens from Nettlestone/Seaview. 20<sup>th</sup> century development has infilled the area between The Green and Bembridge Harbour on the southern side of St Helens but there has been negligible change in the last century to the northern extent of the village.

Relatively strong field boundaries and several small woodland blocks give a well-treed character to the edges of both Nettlestone/Seaview (Views 4 and 6) and St Helens, and the gently rolling farmland in between, undeveloped save for a few isolated farmsteads and houses, and St Helen's Church, retains a strong rural character. The landform rises to a plateau between the two settlements, limiting the distance of any visibility to settlement edges.

The sizeable Nodes Point Holiday Park (View 1) lies in between but offset downslope from the two settlements, where landform and tree cover around the fringes of the site combine to screen it well from the surrounding landscape.

There is an overall strong sense of separation with long uninterrupted views over intact farmland contrasting with short contained views from along Eddington Road (Views 2 and 3). Eddington Road follows an indirect route, with several sharp bends, to connect the two settlements, which adds to the sense of distance between them.

## Guidelines for maintenance of Nettlestone – St Helens settlement gap

### 1 Maintain tree cover

The extent of tree cover in the area is important in containing views of and from the settlement edges and the holiday park, to maintain perception of a broad, rural gap.

### 2 Consider visual impact on rural landscape character, including skyline views

Minimise any sense of visual encroachment into the rural landscape as viewed from Eddington Road or from the strong network of public rights of way which serves the area, including the Coast Path which rises inland to pass through the edge of Priory Woods. In particular, consideration should be given to the potential skyline impact of development near the ridge crest on views from lower ground near the coast (View 5).



View 1: Looking north-east from Eddington Road. The holiday centre along the seafront partially weakens the gap but is generally contained by woodland



View 2: Looking west from Eddington Road / Attrill's Lane. Long views across rolling farmland contribute to the rural character and settlement identity.



View 3: Looking south from Eddington Road towards St Helens. Farmsteads and sea views contribute to the strong sense of separation.



View 4: Looking north from Eddington Road towards The Priory Bay Hotel. Small areas of woodland around the settlement edge are a key separating feature.



View 5: Looking north towards the edge of Nettlestone from Eddington Road. The settlement is generally well-screened from the fields to the south as it slopes northwards down towards the coast.



View 6: Looking north near to the southern edge of Nettlestone. Tree cover along the settlement edge provides some visual containment.

## 'The Bay' Area



## Settlement gaps

This assessment considers the local scale gaps between the following settlements:

- Brading, Sandown and Yaverland;
- Sandown, Lake and Shanklin.

Moving inland, at least 1.5km separates the coastal urban areas from ridge-top settlement at Winford and Apse Heath. The valley landform, tree cover associated with Scotchells Brook, the valley-side Borthwood Copse on the edge of Winford and an absence of any sizeable areas of development within what is mostly arable farmland create a strong sense of separation between the coastal urban areas and inland villages. To the south of Scotchells Brook, a sizeable area of woodland and beyond this, the steep AONB downland slopes contain the southern end of Shanklin. These gaps are not considered vulnerable at this time and are therefore not assessed further.

# Gaps between Brading, Sandown and Yaverland



Area within which impact of development on settlement separation/identity should be a consideration



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

## Nature of Brading – Sandown – Yaverland settlement gap

The larger part of the village of Brading is located to the north of the point at which the River Yar cuts through the steep chalk downland ridge (with Brading Down to the west and Bembridge Down to the east), so these features create a very prominent physical setting to the south of the village (View 2). The downland ridge and its immediate surrounds, sloping down to the coast at Yaverland and including the river valley between Morton and Yarbridge, fall within the bounds of the Isle of Wight AONB. To the north-east the river and associated tributary channels and wetlands form a distinctive landscape framed by lower hills to either side of Bembridge Harbour.

Brading narrows where it cuts through the downs at Yarbridge, and continues southward along Morton Road as a narrow strip of development contained between Brading Down and the Yar floodplain (View 1). The Ryde-Shanklin railway line marks the eastern edge of the settlement.

The southern edge of Brading (Morton) and the residential edge of Sandown are also contained by the broad Yar floodplain, with the river splitting into two channels, one along each settlement edge, separated by wet grassland and marsh. A sewage works and industrial estates to the east of Avenue Road are located within the floodplain, forming a visually prominent edge to Sandown.

Yaverland lies on the lower chalk slopes to the south of Bembridge Down. The historic hamlet lies along Yaverland Road, but the size of the settlement increased significantly in the 1960's with the construction of a housing estate to the west of the main road between the old hamlet and the Isle of Wight Zoo. In terms of settlement form there are distinctions between the linear hamlet, the housing estate and the seafront tourist attractions.

The Yar floodplain contains the western edge of the settlement, creating separation from both Brading and the inland eastern edge of Sandown. Most of the wetland between Brading and Yaverland forms the southern part of the Brading Marsh Reserve (View 5), an extensive RSPB reserve that extends north up to Bembridge Harbour. Along the seafront, tourist attractions including the zoo, the Dinosaur Isle museum and the derelict Grand Hotel lessen the physical and visual separation between Yaverland and Sandown, but there are clear through-views to Brading and the downs that emphasise the openness of the intervening landscape (View 4).

Although vegetation has some localised screening impact, the general openness of the floodplain means that there is strong intervisibility between the settlement areas on higher ground at Sandown, Brading and Yaverland.

## Guidelines for maintenance of Brading – Sandown – Yaverland settlement gap

### 1 Avoid development in the floodplain

Landform and environmental constraints play a significant role in the form and extents of Brading, and in maintenance of the gap between all three settlements, with flood risk being the principal historic constraint to built development. It is noted that industrial development on the edge of Sandown, and to a lesser extent residential and leisure development on the fringes of Sandown and Yaverland, has encroached on the floodplain, but this has not occurred to any significant extent in recent times. Respecting the floodplain as a development constraint will ensure continued physical separation of settlements.

The simplicity of the homogeneous, undeveloped floodplain landscape emphasises separation between the three settlements, despite their intervisibility and prominence in sensitive AONB views from the downland ridge. This status should be maintained.

### 2 Avoid development to the east of the railway line at Brading

A small area of land at Brading contained between the railway line and river sits above the floodplain, but in physical terms it is strongly associated with it and strongly separated from the village. Any development east of the railway line would intrude on the settlement gap.

### 3 Maintain and enhance vegetation to screen intrusive elements

The scale of the sewage works and to a lesser extent the neighbouring industrial estate has some adverse impact on the perceived gap. The maintenance and expansion of tree planting close to these structures would help to soften this impact from lower viewpoints. The housing estate at Yaverland could also be better screened from the surrounding landscape with enhanced boundary vegetation.

### 4 Retain open views from the coast road to the downs

The retention of sizeable open spaces adjacent to the coast road, with views across to the downs, are important in maintaining perceived separation between the three settlement areas. The reed-fringed lake

adjacent to the Dinosaur Isle museum provides a wetland habitat that creates connectivity with the rest of the floodplain, and a sharp distinction from the tourist amenities around it.

### **5 Retain separation between residential development at Yaverland and the seafront**

The fact that permanent residential development at Yaverland is set back from the sea front helps to retain its distinction from Sandown. Development on the open grassy slope above the Sailing and Boat Club (View 3) would have an adverse impact in this respect.



View 1: from Brading Down, with linear development at Morton in the foreground, Yaverland to the left and Sandown to the right.



View 2: Looking north-west from the edge of Yaverland towards Brading Down.



View 3: Looking east along the sea front at Yaverland.

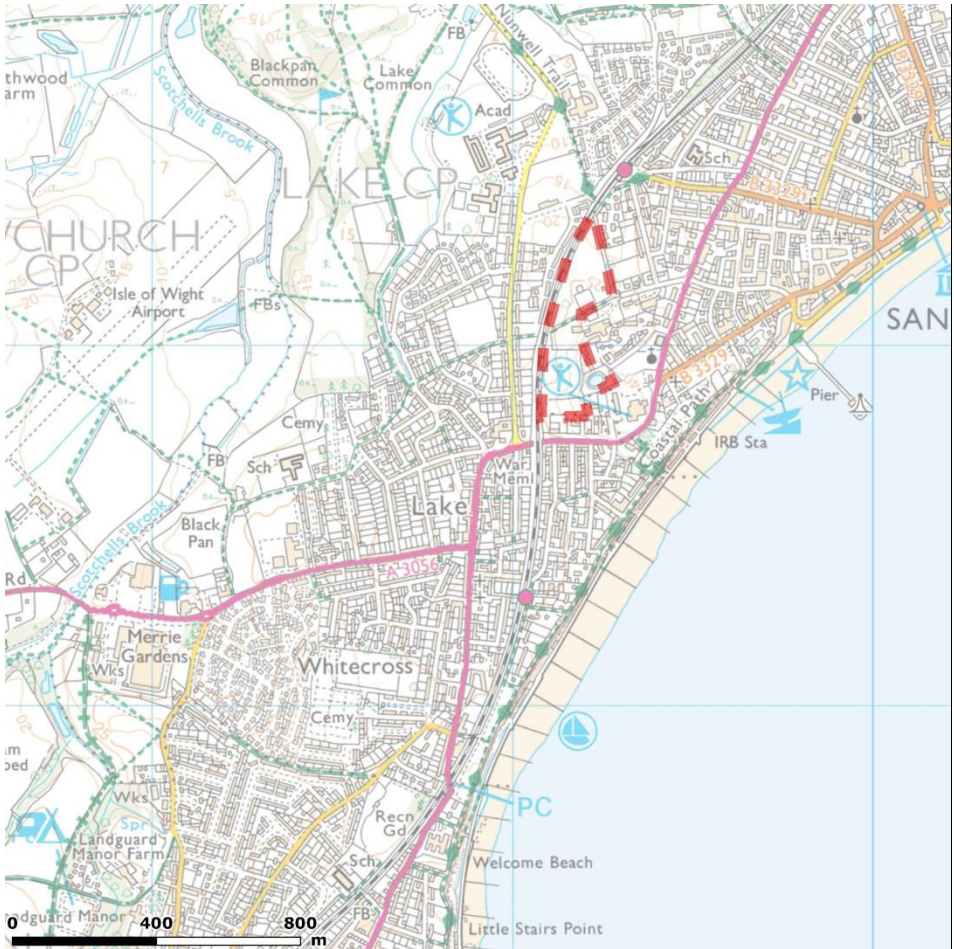


View 4: Lake alongside Dinosaur Isle on Culver Parade, with industrial estate on the edge of Sandown beyond.



View 5: Looking across Brading Marshes (Yarbridge Mead) towards the edge of Yaverland (left) and the Sandown sewage works (right).

# Gaps between Sandown, Lake and Shanklin



— — — — —  
Area within which impact of development on settlement separation/identity should be a consideration





## Nature of Sandown – Lake - Shanklin settlement gaps

Until the mid-Victorian period Sandown and Shanklin were small villages, with Lake and other hamlets in between. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Sandown and Shanklin had grown into towns but Lake remained a relatively small settlement. Linear development along the main connecting road meant that there was no great distance between the three, but topography created a clear distinction, with Lake situated in a valley between hills on which Shanklin and the southern end of Sandown were located. The course of the railway added to the distinction between settlements, with Sandown and Shanklin contained between the line and the seafront but Lake lying to the west of it.

Over the 20<sup>th</sup> century Lake has spread west to Merrie Gardens and northwards along the eastern side of a stream that marks the edge of Lake Common (a well-wooded area in which Sandown and Shanklin Golf Club is located). Residential development has also spread across the railway line at Sandown, so there is now no landscape distinction on the valley floor between Sandown and Lake (View 4). The area where two schools (Sandown Bay Academy and Sandham Middle School), the rugby club and Fairway Athletics Centre are located (View 2) retains sufficient openness to mark some distinction between residential areas but it does not reflect any significant change in settlement character or landscape setting. Shanklin has similarly expanded downslope across the railway line, so there is no physical separation other than that provided by trees alongside the railway, and no distinction in character from the southern edge of Lake (View 3).

On the hillside to the east of the railway line, areas of open parkland – Los Altos Park framed by belts of mature evergreen trees, and an open space to the south of this (View 1 and View 5) – preserve some separation between modern development at Lake and the western edge of Sandown, but south of this there is housing up against the railway line to both sides.

## Guidelines for maintenance of Sandown – Lake - Shanklin settlement gaps

### 1 Retain parklands

There is no significant distinction between Sandown, Lake and Shanklin. With the exception of Los Altos Park and adjacent public open space on the slopes above the railway line, which provide a distinction between an older part of Sandown and modern development at Lake, the remaining open spaces have value for recreational amenity rather than reflecting any distinctions in settlement character. The three settlements in effect form one conurbation, to which the River Yar's floodplain and its tributary streams, set within a well-treed valley, form a containing landscape, and the downland ridges beyond form a common visual setting.



View 1: Looking east from footpath near Winford towards Sandown and Lake – the parkland open spaces and trees are visible on the hillside beneath Sandown (where Christ Church and the mast at the Health Centre stand out).



View 2: Looking south along Golf Links Road, which marks the parish boundary between Lake and Sandown (with Fairway Athletics Centre to the right).



View 3: Looking north along Sandown Road descending to the centre of Lake.



View 4: Looking east towards the tree-edge railway line where it crosses the A3055 Lake Hill.



View 5: Looking from public open space to the south of Los Altos Park down across the railway line to Lake.

## 4 Policy review and recommendations

- 4.1 This chapter reviews current planning policy approaches to the prevention of settlement coalescence via maintenance of gaps. It begins by examining national planning policy and guidance before looking at a number of examples of local plan policies designed to prevent settlement coalescence and how such policies have fared at local plan Examination or during appeals by site promoters/developers seeking to build within settlement gaps established by local policy. Drawing on this information it then recommends a policy approach to the prevention of settlement coalescence for the emerging Isle of Wight Local Plan

### Policy review

#### National policy and guidance on settlement gaps

- 4.2 There is no explicit support or opposition to the maintenance of settlement gaps or the prevention of settlement coalescence in either the National Planning Policy Framework or Planning Practice Guidance, outside of designated Green Belts. This position is not altered by the draft revised NPPF currently being consulted on by the government.
- 4.3 Nevertheless, the concept of settlement gaps is consistent with a number of elements of the NPPF, as set out in Table 4.1. Equivalent text in the draft revised NPPF is also shown for reference.

**Table 4.1 Relevance of NPPF to settlement gaps**

NPPF provision	Draft revised NPPF provision	Relevance to settlement gaps policy
<p>"...planning should: be genuinely plan led, empowering local people to shape their surroundings..."</p> <p>[Core planning principles, paragraph 17, bullet point 1]</p>	<p>"The planning system should be genuinely plan-led... and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings"</p> <p>[Plan-making, paragraph 15]</p>	<p>The Council has established through public consultation that preventing the coalescence of neighbouring settlements is a concern for local people</p>
<p>"...planning should: take account of the different roles and character of different areas..."</p> <p>[Core planning principles, paragraph 17, bullet point 5]</p>	<p>No directly analogous text</p>	<p>Definition and maintenance of settlement gaps in planning policy safeguards local distinctiveness and the identity of different settlement areas by preventing settlement coalescence where the risk is greatest</p>
<p>"Crucially, Local Plans should:...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- identify land where development would be inappropriate, for instance because of its environmental or historic significance; and</li> <li>- contain a clear strategy for enhancing the natural, built and historic environment..."</li> </ul> <p>[Local Plans, paragraph 157, bullet points 7 and 8]</p>	<p>A Local Plan's "strategic policies...should include those...necessary to provide... conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscape and green infrastructure."</p> <p>[Plan-making, paragraph 20]</p>	<p>Unconstrained development is inappropriate in settlements gaps because it threatens local distinctiveness and the identity of different settlement areas; it also provides an opportunity to maintain and enhance settlement gaps as multifunctional green spaces close to where people live</p>

*Conclusions from national policy and practice guidance*

- 4.4 The Isle of Wight Council has confirmed that settlement coalescence and the potential resulting harm to community identity is a concern for local people. Control of development within identified settlement gaps mitigate this risk and can contribute to local distinctiveness and identity. In principle therefore, they are consistent with national planning policy and guidance.

**Examples of Local Plan policy on settlement gaps and related Examination findings**

- 4.5 In the absence of specific national policy or guidance on avoiding settlement coalescence through the use of settlement gaps, local authorities have put forward a range of different policy approaches and justifications for justify protecting them and employed a variety of methodologies for assessing the relative merits of different areas of land as gaps. This is reflected in the variety of names used to describe them, including 'Strategic Gaps', 'Settlement Gaps', 'Meaningful Gaps', and 'Green Gaps'.

*Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council Local Plan 2011-2029 (adopted May 2016)<sup>1</sup>*

- 4.6 Policy EM2 in the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan restricts development in five 'strategic gaps' between existing settlements as follows:

**Policy EM2 – Strategic Gaps**

In order to prevent coalescence of built up areas and to maintain the separate identity of settlements, the generally open and undeveloped nature of the following gaps will be protected:  
Basingstoke – Oakley

Basingstoke - Sherborne St John

Basingstoke - Old Basing

Basingstoke/Chineham - Bramley/Sherfield on Loddon

Tadley-Baughurst

Development in gaps will only be permitted where:

- a) It would not diminish the physical and/or visual separation; and
- b) It would not compromise the integrity of the gap either individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development; or
- c) it is proposed through a Neighbourhood Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order, including Community Right to Build Orders.

- 4.7 At Examination, the Inspector judged the policy to be sound<sup>2</sup> by reference to the Council's 'Strategic Gaps Topic Paper', which underlined the strong community support for the policy and argued that these gaps help safeguard local distinctiveness, help deliver the spatial strategy of the Plan and prevent coalescence where the risk is greatest. In designating strategic gaps, the topic paper applied the following criteria:
- the land to be included within the gap is open and provides a sense of separation between settlements;
  - the land to be included within the gap performs an important role in defining the settlement character of the area and separating settlements at risk of coalescence (in particular from land allocations in the Local Plan);
  - in defining the extent of a gap, no more land than is necessary to prevent the coalescence of settlements should be included, having regard to maintaining their physical and visual separation.

<sup>1</sup> Available from <https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/rte.aspx?id=275>

<sup>2</sup> The Planning Inspectorate, Report to Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council, 6th April 2016, File Ref: PINS/H1705/429/4

- 4.8 The inspector also relied on case law in concluding that the strategic gaps policy was sound. A 2014 High Court Judgment<sup>3</sup> underlines the legitimacy of such policies, provided that they are focused rather than 'blanket ban policies' designed to protect all rural areas outside settlement boundaries. The Judgement states that: *"policies designed to protect specific areas or features, such as the gaps between settlements....could sensibly exist regardless of the distribution of housing and other development"*.

*Derbyshire Dales District Council Local Plan (adopted December 2017)*

- 4.9 Policy PD10 in Derbyshire's Local Plan seeks to preserve the 'strategic gap' between Matlock and as follows:

**POLICY PD10: Matlock to Darley Dale A6 Corridor**

In order to safeguard the intrinsic character and quality of the open spaces through the Derwent Valley between Matlock and Darley Dale, and to prevent the further coalescence of the settlements of Matlock and Darley Dale, the District Council will resist development proposals which threaten the open spaces identified on the Policies Map unless:

- a) the development is required for the purposes of agriculture, forestry or outdoor recreation; and
- b) the development does not have an adverse impact upon the character of the area including views into and out from the Derwent Valley.

- 4.10 The Inspector's report<sup>4</sup> dated November 2013 judged the policy to be justified and appropriate based on site visits to the area, and the findings of the landscape sensitivity study, which indicated that significant areas of land between Matlock and Darley Dale were of high landscape sensitivity, including some parcels which were already developed.

- 4.11 However, the inspector proposed the policy be modified to exclude one particular area as it was considered to not play a role in settlement separation. The inspector also proposed an additional area to prevent coalescence between Upper Hackney and Darley Dale.

*Gosport Borough Local Plan 2011-2029 (adopted October 2015)*

- 4.12 Policy LP3 Spatial Strategy point 10 states:

*"The character and function of the settlement gaps (as shown on the Policies Map) between Gosport/Fareham and Lee-on-the-Solent/Stubbington will be preserved"*

- 4.13 Supporting text states:

*"A key strategic consideration is to retain a significant gap between Gosport/Fareham and Lee-on-the-Solent/Stubbington in order to protect the identity of each settlement and ensure proposals do not physically and visually diminish these open areas. This settlement gap is considered of sub regional importance and is identified in the South Hampshire Strategy. The local boundaries as defined on the Policies Map have been defined in cooperation with Fareham Borough Council to reflect the cross boundary extent of the gap. The Borough Council will work with partners to explore opportunities to enhance the multi-functional benefits of this area as part of the wider PUSH Green Infrastructure Strategy initiative of the green grid (see Policy LP41)."*

- 4.14 The Inspector's report<sup>5</sup> (dated September 2015) questioned whether a further Strategic Gap Review should be undertaken but concluded that this was not necessary for the following reasons.

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<sup>3</sup> High Court Judgment between South Northamptonshire Council (claimant) and Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Barwood Land and Estates Ltd (defendants) – in particular paragraph 47: Ref [2014] EWHC 573 (Admin); 10 March 2014

<sup>4</sup> The Planning Inspectorate, Report to Derbyshire Dales District Council, 13 November 2017, File Ref: PINS/P1045/429/7

<sup>5</sup> The Planning Inspectorate, Report to Gosport Borough Council, File Ref: PINS/J1725/429/4

- The gap between Gosport and Lee-on-the-Solent is largely occupied by the Alver Valley Country Park along with the Lee-on-Solent golf course and the Browndown SSSI. The creation of the country park is a key objective of the Council.
- A considerable part of this gap is in within Flood Zone 3.
- In the preparation of the Local Plan the Council undertook a review of the urban boundary area which included a review of the settlement gap and resulted in several changes to the gap.
- The Council co-operated with neighbouring Fareham Borough Council's review of its settlement gap boundaries to ensure a common approach.

*Canterbury District Local Plan (adopted July 2017)*

- 4.15 Policy OS6 sets out the basis on which development proposed in identified 'Green Gaps' will be assessed as follows:

**Policy OS6 Green Gaps**

Within the Green Gaps identified on the Proposals Map (see also Insets 1,3 and 5) development will be permitted where it does not:

- a. Significantly affect the open character of the Green Gap, or lead to coalescence between existing settlements;
- b. Result in new isolated and obtrusive development within the Green Gap.

Proposals for open sports and recreational uses will be permitted subject to there being no overriding conflict with other policies and the wider objectives of the Plan. Any related built development should satisfy criteria (a) and (b) above and be kept to a minimum necessary to supplement the open sports and recreation uses, and be sensitively located and of a high quality design.

- 4.16 Supporting text to the policy explains that the Green Gaps have been identified between built up areas that are gradually expanding, particularly along the road frontages. The green gap designations have been limited to 'pinch points', where settlements, often due to linear expansion, are at a particular risk of coalescence. These areas are considered critical to the objective of retaining separate identities of settlements, and many of them have come under development pressure in the past, including from proposals for isolated development, and may again in the future. This designation draws attention to specific areas where inappropriately located new development could lead to coalescence between settlements and is not intended to replace more general policies that seek to restrict development in the countryside.
- 4.17 At Examination, the Inspector did not oppose to the Green Gap policy but requested that a number of areas put forward for the Green Gap designation be removed on the grounds that they did not have the function of avoiding settlement coalescence.<sup>6</sup> For example, the Submission Local Plan proposed a new Green Gap between the main part of the city of Canterbury and the University of Kent. However, the Inspector considered that the role this land plays is more to do with safeguarding the historic setting of Canterbury rather than preventing settlement coalescence. In addition the land in question was protected by other policy relating to the historic setting of Canterbury.

*North Warwickshire Borough Council Core Strategy (adopted September 2014)*

- 4.18 Policy NW19 of the North Warwickshire Core Strategy seeks to maintain a 'meaningful gap' between the settlements of Polesworth and Dordon, which are important areas for growth in the plan.

**NW19 Polesworth & Dordon**

The Broad location of growth will be to the south and east of the settlements subject to there being no unacceptable environmental impacts from surface mining and that viable and practicable coal reserves are safeguarded. Any development to the west of Polesworth & Dordon must

<sup>6</sup> The Planning Inspectorate, Report to Canterbury City Council, 15 June 2017, File Ref: PINS/J2210/429/5

respect the separate identities of Polesworth and Dordon and Tamworth and maintain a meaningful gap between them.

4.19 The Inspector's report<sup>7</sup> (dated September 2014) recommended deleting the presumption against anything other than minor development in the gap between Polesworth and Dordon and Tamworth (but ensuring a meaningful gap is retained).

4.20 The reasons for this were due to lack evidence, such as landscape analysis, to support the presumption against anything other than minor development. Secondly, it was argued the policy ran contrary to the Core Strategy Sustainability Appraisal which considered development within part the gap in question would retain the 'character' of settlements.

*Fareham Borough Council Local Plan Core Strategy (adopted 2011) and Local Plan Part 2: Development Sites and Policies (adopted June 2015)*

4.21 The settlement gap designations within Fareham are known as 'Strategic Gaps' and are provided for by Core Strategy Policy CS22 as follows.

#### **Policy CS22 Development in Strategic Gaps**

Land within a Strategic Gap will be treated as countryside. Development proposals will not be permitted either individually or cumulatively where it significantly affects the integrity of the gap and the physical and visual separation of settlements.

Strategic Gaps have been identified between Fareham/Stubbington and Western Wards/Whiteley (the Meon gap); and Stubbington/Lee on the Solent and Fareham/Gosport.

Their boundaries will be reviewed in accordance with the following criteria:

a) The open nature/sense of separation between settlements cannot be retained by other policy designations;

b) The land to be included within the gap performs an important role in defining the settlement character of the area and separating settlements at risk of coalescence;

c) In defining the extent of a gap, no more land than is necessary to prevent the coalescence of settlements should be included having regard to maintaining their physical and visual separation.

4.22 The Core Strategy provides for the detailed boundaries of Strategic Gaps to be reviewed in the Development Sites and Policies Plan and to inform this, the Council commissioned consultants to review the Strategic and Local Gaps in 2012 in line with the Core Strategy criteria. This study informed an update of the Strategic Gap boundaries in the Local Plan Part 2: Development Sites and Policies (adopted 2015). Supporting text in the Local Plan Part 2 explains that the Strategic Gaps between towns and villages help define the separate identity of individual settlements, and prevent coalescence. They are important in maintaining the settlement pattern in the Borough, ensuring that individual settlements remain separate. The Strategic Gaps also help to provide opportunities for green infrastructure and green corridors providing opportunities for recreation and biodiversity. The Local Plan Part 2 also contains a policy on Affordable Housing Exceptions Sites and Housing Allocations (DSP7), which requires such development to minimise any adverse impact on the Strategic Gaps.

4.23 The Inspector's Report for the Local Plan Part 2,<sup>8</sup> (dated May 2015) notes that concerns were expressed regarding the delineation of the Strategic Gap boundaries used in the Fareham Borough Gap Review. Particular concern was raised about the Gap between Fareham and Stubbington. This was because the review had not taken into account the route of the proposed Stubbington bypass and road improvements to Newgate Lane. The Council argued that there was no reason to conclude the proposals would justify altering the boundary gap in those locations. Having visited the site, the inspector agreed with the Council's judgement.

4.24 Fareham Borough Council is now in the process of reviewing its Local Plan, supported by an updated gap review. The Draft Local Plan policy on Strategic Gaps is as follows.

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<sup>7</sup> The Planning Inspectorate, Report to North Warwickshire Borough Council, 24th December 2015, File Ref: PINS/R3705/429/4

<sup>8</sup> The Planning Inspectorate, Report to Fareham Borough Council, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015, File Ref: PINS/A1720/429/4

4.25 Policy SP6 states "In order to prevent the coalescence of urban areas and to maintain the separate identity of settlements, Strategic Gaps are identified between the following areas:

- 1) Fareham / Stubbington and the Western Wards (Meon Gap)
- 2) Fareham / Bridgemary and Stubbington / Lee-on-the-Solent

Development proposals will not be permitted where they cause severe adverse harm to the physical and visual separation of settlements, the settlement pattern and the character of settlements in accordance with the Fareham Borough Landscape Assessment."

#### **Policy SP6: Development in Strategic Gaps**

In order to prevent the coalescence of urban areas and to maintain the separate identity of settlements, Strategic Gaps are identified between the following areas:

- 1) Fareham / Stubbington and the Western Wards (Meon Gap)
- 2) Fareham / Bridgemary and Stubbington / Lee-on-the-Solent

Development proposals will not be permitted where they cause severe adverse harm to the physical and visual separation of settlements, the settlement pattern and the character of settlements in accordance with the Fareham Borough Landscape Assessment.

#### *Conclusions from review of Local Plan policies and Examination findings*

4.26 The review of Local Plan policies and related Inspector's reports shows that Local Plan policies on settlement gaps are being found sound at Examination but a number of lessons are apparent:

- settlement gaps must be based on robust evidence (Examinations of Basingstoke and Deane and North Warwickshire Local Plans, for example);
- evidence supporting gap policy should take into account potential new boundary features that may alter the risk of settlement coalescence in the future to justify their continued inclusion (Examination of the Fareham Local Plan in relation to the Stubbington Bypass);
- gaps designated to prevent settlement coalescence should only include land that plays a role in maintaining settlement separation rather than other purposes such as protecting the setting of historic environment assets (Examinations of Canterbury and Derbyshire Dales Local Plans);
- where a policy seeks to maintain separation from a settlement in a neighbouring district, the authorities should cooperate to ensure a consistent approach (Examination of Gosport Local Plan);
- if a settlement gap policy seeks to preclude certain types or scales of development, this must be based on evidence such as landscape sensitivity study (Examinations of North Warwickshire Local Plan).

4.27 In addition the High Court Judgement<sup>9</sup> cited by the Inspector of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan indicates that settlement gap policies are legitimate provided that they do not seek to protect all rural areas outside settlement boundaries but are focussed on protecting specific areas or features between settlements.

#### **Appeal decisions relating to settlement gap policies**

4.28 In addition to the Local Plan Examination examples above, a number of appeal cases relating to gap policies in England were reviewed to help inform the recommended approach in the Isle of Wight Local Plan. A summary of the key issues informing the Inspector's decision on these cases is provided in Table 4.2.

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<sup>9</sup> High Court Judgment between South Northamptonshire Council (claimant) and Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Barwood Land and Estates Ltd (defendants) – in particular paragraph 47: Ref [2014] EWHC 573 (Admin); 10 March 2014



**Table 4.2 Recent appeal outcomes regarding gap policies, and key issues**

Appeal	Decision	Key issues mentioned in the Inspector's Report
Appeal by M Scott Properties Ltd and Parker Farms (Bassingbourn) Ltd against the decision of South Cambridgeshire District Council. <sup>10</sup>	Allowed – outline planning permission granted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 year housing supply shortfall</li> <li>• Limited landscape character harm</li> </ul>
Appeal by Bloor Homes Eastern against the decision of Tendring District Council. <sup>11</sup>	Dismissed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close to a five year housing land supply (calculated to be 4.84 years)</li> <li>• Negative impact on landscape character</li> <li>• Detract from separate communities</li> <li>• Contrary to local policy on green gaps</li> </ul>
Appeal by Grainger PLC against the decision of South Oxfordshire District Council. <sup>12</sup>	Dismissed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 year housing supply shortfall, but Council taking proactive approach to development e.g. Didcot Garden Town</li> <li>• In setting of AONB</li> <li>• Negative impact on landscape character</li> <li>• Gap preserves settlement separation</li> </ul>
Appeal by Hicks Developments Ltd against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council. <sup>13</sup>	Allowed – planning permission granted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 year housing supply shortfall</li> <li>• Moderate harm to landscape character</li> <li>• Other features (substantial railway embankment) provide settlement separation other than gap</li> <li>• Other open land helped to maintain separation</li> </ul>

*Conclusions from review of planning appeals*

- 4.29 The main lesson from the review of appeal decisions is that an otherwise valid settlement gap policy can be undermined by an inability to demonstrate a five-year housing supply. In the appeal against the decision by South Cambridgeshire District Council, for instance, the Inspector ruled that the 'green gap' policy should be considered out of date as the Council could not demonstrate a five year housing supply. This led to the development securing permission despite the Inspector confirming that it would undermine the visual and physical separation between villages, and the land being classified as best and most versatile agricultural land.
- 4.30 In addition, the successful appeal against the decision by Wokingham Borough Council shows that the continued openness of land within a defined settlement gap must be important in maintaining perceived settlement separation, as opposed to other features (for example a substantial railway embankment).

<sup>10</sup> Appeal Ref: APP/W0530/W/16/3164657: To the west of the Cemetery, Land North of The Causeway, Bassingbourn Cambridgeshire

<sup>11</sup> Appeal C Ref: APP/P1560/W/16/3156452: Land north of Rush Green Road, Clacton-on-Sea, Essex CO16 7BQ

<sup>12</sup> Appeal Ref: APP/Q3115/W/16/3153639: Land east of New Road, East Hagbourne

<sup>13</sup> Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/15/3130829: Land West of Park Lane, Charvil, Reading RG10 9TS.

## Recommended policy approach to avoiding settlement coalescence

- 4.31 A point of principle underpinning the approach to this study has been that the effect of development within the settlement gaps on separation can only be meaningfully assessed once the characteristics of development are known; a judgement then needs to be made as to the likely effect of the proposal on the features we have identified as being important to gap maintenance.
- 4.32 We are not suggesting that any development on land within the settlement gaps identified by the study would adversely affect separation - rather the gaps are intended to identify all areas in which development *may* affect separation; the boundaries of the settlement gaps are therefore deliberately drawn widely and in a precautionary way to capture all areas where separation may be a consideration.
- 4.33 We have avoided the alternative approach of drawing tighter boundaries combined with recommending a policy approach stating that any form of development anywhere within the settlement gap boundary would be likely to compromise separation. Such settlement gap boundaries would:
- be very difficult to accurately define and justify;
  - result in a settlement gap with numerous 'holes' in it (e.g. corresponding to areas screened by woodland or topography or containing existing, isolated development);
  - be likely to exclude from the settlement gap areas of lower density development on the settlement edge in which development/increased development density would have an adverse effect on perceived separation;
  - require frequent updating as new development takes place; and
  - be likely to promote development that was just outside the defined gap boundary but nevertheless capable of some adverse effect on separation.
- 4.34 The analysis provided in Chapter 3 defines the areas of land within which development could compromise settlement separation, based on identification of key features within those areas that contribute to physical separation or a perceived gap between settlements. This is judged to constitute a robust and transparent evidence base to underpin a Local Plan policy that identifies these areas as 'settlement gaps' and seeks to avoid coalescence by maintaining their role in maintaining settlement separation.
- 4.35 In light of the above, it is recommended that the Local Plan policy does not seek to prevent all development or development of a particular type or scale within the settlement gaps. Rather, Local Plan policy should be expressed in terms of preventing development that would harm the physical or perceived separation between the settlements, this being judged by reference to the likely effects of development on the features within these gaps that maintain settlement separation. Similarly, individual development proposals should be judged by reference to their likely effects on these elements. As noted above, the fact that a potential site is located within a defined settlement gap does not automatically indicate that development will in principle be deemed unacceptable.
- 4.36 A suggested policy wording for inclusion in the Local Plan is as follows:

### **Settlement gaps**

In order to maintain the separate identities of settlements and prevent their coalescence the generally open and undeveloped nature of the following gaps identified in the Policies Map will be protected:

- Cowes – Newport
- West Cowes – Gurnard
- West Cowes – Northwood
- East Cowes – Whippingham
- Brading – Sandown – Yaverland
- Sandown – Lake – Shanklin
- Freshwater – Norton Green – Norton

- Freshwater – Totland – Easton
- Ryde – settlements to the south
- Ryde – Nettlestone – Seaview
- Nettlestone – St Helens

Development in settlement gaps will be permitted where it would not have a significant adverse effect on the physical or perceived separation between settlements, either individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development.

The significance of the effects of development on settlement separation will be judged by reference to the 'guidelines for maintenance' of the gap set out in the Isle of Wight Settlement Coalescence Study.

- 4.37 It is recommended that this evidence study forms the basis of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). Such an SPD will help applicants to make successful applications by ensuring that proposed development within a settlement gap is consistent with the gap's 'guidelines for maintenance'.
- 4.38 It is recognised that in addition to development within the settlement gaps identified by this study, development outside of these gaps could also reduce perceived separation between settlements in some circumstances, for example if exceptionally tall or prominent new structures were built within existing settlements. It is therefore recommended that this issue is reflected in the Local Plan's design policy.
- 4.39 It is also recognised that there are sites within the defined settlement gaps that have planning permission but are not yet developed; these were permitted on the basis of existing Local Plan policies. Should these permissions not be taken up and the sites be subject to new development proposals or if detailed designs remain to be agreed (outline planning permissions) once the new Local Plan has been adopted, then development at these sites will have to align with the new policy approach to settlement gaps.