



Fareham Borough Gap Review.

A review of gap policy designations.

Prepared for Fareham Borough Council October 2012

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the project

This report has been commissioned by Fareham Borough Council to assist with the preparation of the Fareham Borough Local Development Framework (LDF).

The Council commissioned a review of gap policy designations to assist with the preparation of its Site Allocations and Development Management Development Plan Document (SADM DPD). A review of the extent of the gap policy designations is required to support the evidence base underpinning the SADM DPD.

The review has been undertaken as part of the process of preparing the LDF and follows on from the adoption of the Core Strategy¹ in August 2011. This followed a public examination between 28 February 2011 and 20 July 2011. Both the inspector's report and the Core Strategy refer to the need for a review of the strategic gap policy designation, and this report forms that review. New national guidance in the form of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (issued in March 2012, shortly after this report was commissioned) is changing the planning process. This review of the gap policy is still relevant to the production of a sound new local plan under the new planning regime.

1.1. Brief

The brief for the study follows recommendations in the Core Strategy Policy CS22 (Development in Strategic Gaps) which states that:

'Their (Strategic Gap) boundaries will be reviewed in accordance with the following criteria:

- *The open nature and sense of separation between settlements cannot be retained by other policy designations;*
- *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 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.'*

The brief also required that the review should analyse the functionality of strategic gaps in providing physical and visual separation between settlements and should consider the prevention of coalescence between settlements and urban areas within Fareham Borough and in neighbouring authorities.

The brief also referred to the need for an evaluation of Policy C12 (Local Gaps) from Fareham's Local Plan Review (2000) as follows:

- *The Core Strategy does not identify the Local Gaps as a strategic requirement or provide a context for them. However, the evaluation of the Local Gap policy is required to establish whether the continuation of this designation is required and justified or whether other designations are sufficient to fulfil the role of this policy.*

A complete copy of the brief can be found at Appendix I.

1.2. Strategic and local gaps

Strategic and local gaps are spatial planning tools designed to shape the pattern of settlements. They command wide public support and have been used with success in structure and local plans to maintain the separation of settlements in South Hampshire.

The function of strategic gaps and local gaps are principally to define and maintain the separate identity of settlements. Gap policy needs to define clear robust boundaries to prevent coalescence of urban areas and protect the character of individual settlements. The open land protected by the gaps, due to its proximity to the adjoining urban areas, can also provide vital secondary green infrastructure benefits.

The Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) which is a joint collaborative local authority working group, produced a *Policy Framework for Gaps* in December 2008². This defined the location of the gaps which crossed local authority boundaries. The plan at Illustration 1 shows the current distribution of local and strategic gaps based on the Fareham 2000 Local Plan Review.

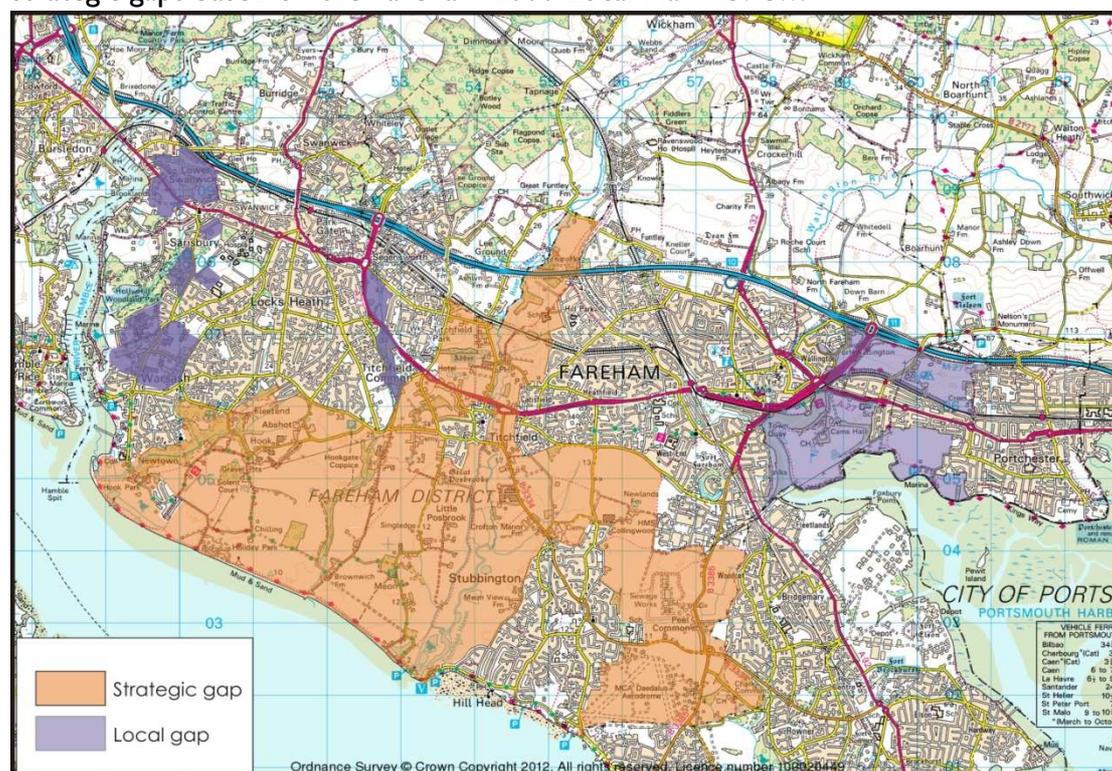


Illustration 1: Areas designated as strategic and local gaps in the 2000 Local Plan Review.

1.3. The nature of the policy

Strategic and local gaps are an essential local planning designation, which have been a feature of county and district planning documents for over thirty years. They are most common in the south east of England, which often reflects the combination of highest development pressure, and the relatively close settlement pattern in this more highly developed part of the UK. Research by Oxford Brookes University in 2001³ identified some 17 counties with similar policies.

Gap designations are intended to increase the level of restraint on development over and above the level of restraint which is imposed by normal countryside policies. Although similar to green belt policies there are certain differences, principally that they do not have the national status of green belt designations.

1.4. Approach

Our review of the strategic and local gap areas focussed on a survey and analysis of the countryside within the borough and whether it met the Core Strategy Policy CS22 criteria to be designated as gap. This was firstly assessed in the field using a structured method, based on the completion of a survey pro forma. This information was subsequently analysed in association with other relevant information using an analysis matrix to assess both the suitability of land for inclusion within a gap, and the broad level of functionality which the land provided in relation to the gap criteria.

2. FAREHAM BOROUGH

2.1. Settlement

Fareham Borough is one of the smaller districts in Hampshire extending to a total of some 75 square kilometres. It is located on the south coast between Southampton to the west, and Portsmouth and Gosport to the east, with the M 27 motorway and south coast rail line running through the borough. The borough had a population of nearly 108,000 at the time of the 2001 census, split between the 15 wards which each have a population of some 7000 people. Geographically the population is spread between three main areas, Fareham, Stubbington/Lee on Solent, and the group of 'Western Wards'; a group of expanded villages, which include Sarisbury, Lower Swanwick, Park Gate, Locks Heath, Warsash and Titchfield Common.

2.2. Geology

The borough is located over a series of sands and clays which were deposited on top of chalk strata which dips down towards the south below the coast. These relatively recent deposits include London Clays (below Fareham and Portchester), Plateau gravels (below the Western Wards and Lee on Solent), Bracklesham Beds (to the south of Fareham), and alluvial deposits (in the Meon and Hook Lake valleys).

2.3. Topography and drainage

In general, the borough slopes gently southwards from higher ground on the northern boundary above the chalk deposits, which lie at up to 40 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), down to the coast of the Solent. There are two major north/south rivers which flow through the borough, the Hamble, which forms the western boundary of the borough, and the River Meon, which separates Fareham from Titchfield and the Western Wards.

2.4. History of growth

The Roman fort at Portchester was converted into a medieval castle in the 12th century, and Titchfield Abbey was founded shortly afterwards. The medieval open fields belonging to the small villages and towns were subject to enclosure during the 13th and 14th century, with Titchfield Abbey being a major landowner. The dissolution of the Abbey occurred in the 16th century, and by the 17th Century the river mouth of the Meon was silting up, and Titchfield's period as a port was brought to an end. This was due to the closure of the river mouth as part of a land reclamation project for the valley.

The 18th and 19th centuries saw the enclosure of the remaining open fields, and the growth of the town of Fareham, linked to the prosperity of its port, and related industry. Many of the buildings which form the core of the borough's conservation areas were constructed at this time, as were various mansions built for wealthy landowners, including Cams Hill, Holly Hill, Brooklands, Hook and Cold East.

The coming of the railway to the area in 1841 and the enclosure of the last areas of common stimulated the horticultural industry and in particular the growth of strawberries. These were ideally suited to the gravelly soils around Titchfield Common, Locks Heath, Warsash and Sarisbury, and by the 1880s, the industry was so well established and productive that it was able to arrange for a station to be built at Swanwick to carry the crop to Convent Garden on 'strawberry special' trains. Whilst the scale of the industry has changed, and many of the former strawberry

fields have been built over, there remains a considerable amount of horticultural cropping in the area, particularly on land south of Locks Heath and Titchfield which is located within the strategic gap. Other local gap areas include both active and redundant horticultural plots growing under glass, poly-tunnels and plastic. The economics of glasshouse cropping have changed, and certain areas within the Warsash-Sarisbury local gap are blighted by derelict glasshouses.

Urban growth since the First World War led to the rapid expansion of the towns and villages, and the merging of a number of formerly separate settlements, these include:

- Fareham with Catishead;
- Stubbington with Crofton and Hillhead;
- Sarisbury, Lower Swanwick, Park Gate, Locks Heath with Warsash and Titchfield Common.

There has inevitably been a change in the character of these settlements, and a loss of their individual identity as the open spaces have been lost, which once separated the settlements. Other development during the 20th century has included the growth of the defence establishments (HMS Collingwood, and the airfield at HMS Daedalus), mineral extraction, and subsequent land-filling in parts of the coastal plain, near Abshot and the establishment of the Solent Breezes caravan park on the coast near Hook.

The construction of Fawley power station on the edge of the New Forest led to the installation of a network of National Grid power cables and pylons across the study area which cross under Southampton Water before coming above ground close to the Solent Breezes caravan park, and spreading north and east.

Land both within and to the west of the Meon Valley at Chilling was purchased by Hampshire County Council in the 1970's to establish the Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve. Other areas of countryside located within the gaps are owned and or managed by the county council, these include:

- Kites Croft
- Warsash Common
- The Hook

2.5. Landscape

The landscape of the borough is fully described in a series of landscape character assessment reports which have been produced by both Hampshire County⁴ in 2010 and Fareham Borough⁵ Council in 1996. Landscape character assessments are designed to 'nest' from the wider scale national and regional assessments down to the county and more detailed district scale assessments. Whilst the 1996 detailed Fareham Borough assessment is now some 16 years old, the method used and the conclusions are still very relevant today, although recent developments have affected some of the mapping. This document has been a major source for this study in that the subdivisions of the study area which have been used for the gap study are based on the rural landscape types identified in the character assessment (see Illustration 2).

2.6. Designations

Nature conservation designations include the Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve, which is also partly Site of Special Scientific Interest and Special Protected Area (SPA). The section of coastline between Lee on Solent and Warsash is also a part of the same Solent SPA and Ramsar site which includes Hook Marshes and associated inland woodland areas.

The land in the borough which is liable to flooding has been identified by the Environment Agency, as being either liable to flooding on a 1-100 year (zone 3) basis or a 1-1000 year (zone 2) basis. Key areas which are liable to flood are the Meon Valley, the Hook valley and parts of the Hamble and River Wallington.

3. Planning policy

3.1. National policy

The publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in March 2012 sets out the current Government's planning policies for England and has changed the national planning policy landscape.

It is noticeable that strategic gaps do not appear to be mentioned in the NPPF. It does however recognise the intrinsic value of the ordinary countryside:

‘.....the need to protect and enhance ‘....valued landscapes’

(paragraph 109).

The principle of countryside protection has been incorporated into the NPPF as one of twelve core principles for planning (paragraph 17)

Planners must;

“take account of the different roles and character of different areas....recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it.”

and

“Conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape” is a strategic priority for local plan making.

A major principle of the NPPF is the presumption in favour of sustainable development. However it cannot over-ride designations and policies that otherwise restrict development. e.g. NPPF cites SSSIs, Green Belt, Local Green Space, AONBs, Heritage Coasts, Birds Habitat Directive sites, National Parks, Broads Authority, designated heritage assets, and locations at risk of flooding or coastal erosion. The NPPF does not cite local landscape and wildlife designations or unprotected countryside for not saying “yes” to sustainable development.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the NPPF also states that:

‘Local plans should identify land where development would be inappropriate, for instance because of its environmental or historic significance; and contain a clear strategy for enhancing the natural, built and historic environment, and supporting Nature Improvement Areas where they have been identified’(paragraph 157).

The NPPF also supports planning strategically across local boundaries.

It states:

‘local planning authorities should work collaboratively with other bodies to ensure that strategic priorities across local boundaries are properly co-ordinate and clearly reflected in individual Local Plans’ (paragraph 179).

and

‘Public bodies have a duty to cooperate on planning issues that cross administrative boundaries, particularly those which relate to the strategic priorities. The Government expects joint working on areas of common interest to be diligently undertaken for the mutual benefit of neighbouring authorities’ (paragraph 178).

The Government also attaches great importance to Green Belts in the NPPF. The relevance of green belt policy in relation to the Strategic Gap study will be discussed in paragraph 7.1

The NPPF also introduces the new concept of Local Green Space which again will be discussed later in relation to the review of Local Gap Policy.(sections 9.3 and 9.9)

3.2. Regional policy

The South East Plan, which was adopted in May 2009,(but is soon to be revoked) contains various policies on sustainable development, green infrastructure and policies relating to South Hampshire. The plan acknowledged the justification for the designation of gaps as follows:

“South Hampshire has a dense and complex settlement pattern, and accommodates a population of nearly a million people. Within the urbanised parts of the sub-region, there are substantial areas of undeveloped land. If local authorities in South Hampshire consider the inclusion of local gaps as essential in terms of shaping the settlement pattern, this policy approach will need to be tested through Development Plan Documents. (paragraph 16.6)”

In the NPPF there is support for using evidence and guidance from regional strategies. Consequently the use of criteria set out in the regional PUSH Gap Policy Framework aligns with the NPPF.

3.3. Sub Regional Policy

The Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) has produced a series of reports, guidance and policy frameworks to assist spatial planning in South Hampshire. The reports and policy frameworks provide the context for detailed policies and proposals in individual Local Development Documents within the overall regional policy framework set out in the South East Plan. Even though the South East Plan is soon to be revoked, the PUSH policy frameworks still provide guidance for the preparation of Local Development Frameworks in South Hampshire including Fareham Borough.

A Policy Framework for Gaps has been prepared by PUSH to ensure there is a consistent approach to the designation of sub-regional gaps in the preparation of LDFs across South Hampshire. PUSH prepared a policy on sub-regional gaps and a list of areas to be considered as sub-regional gaps to be included in the South East Plan. The policy framework sets out criteria to guide LDFs in designating gaps, and also identifies the location of cross-boundary gaps. In Fareham Borough two sub-regional or strategic gaps were identified between Fareham/Stubbington and Western Wards/Whiteley (the Meon gap) and Stubbington/Lee on Solent and Fareham / Gosport.

In order to ensure consistency across South Hampshire and to avoid the proliferation of gaps that may restrict sufficient land being made available for employment and housing development, criteria were set out to be used by local planning authorities to designate strategic gaps.

These criteria were encompassed in Policy CS22 of the Fareham Borough Core Strategy.

The Strategic Gap Policy Framework Guidance states:

" Local Development Documents will identify the location of the gap(s) and include a policy and ancillary documentation setting out the types of development which will be permitted within the gap(s) based on the principle that development within Gaps:-
 a) would not diminish the physical and/or visual separation of settlements; and
 b) would not individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development compromise the integrity of the gap. "

The designation of a gap therefore does not completely preclude development. Proposals which would not adversely affect the function of the gap and which would otherwise be acceptable in planning terms could be permitted. However the cumulative impact of a number of even small scale developments could have a significant impact on the sense of separation between settlements and would be a consideration in the decision making process.

The guidance also states:

"In considering the future planning of the land within defined gaps, the local planning authorities should also consider opportunities for the positive uses of the land within the gap to meet wider planning objectives, such as provision of green infrastructure, although these objectives would be secondary to the primary objectives of separating settlements."

The PUSH strategic gap guidance was closely followed in this review of gap policy.

3.4. Local Policy

Fareham's Core Strategy was adopted in August 2011 and sets out the planning framework for the Borough up to 2026. The Core Strategy Policy (CS22) sets out the policy for Strategic Gaps which supersedes the previous strategic gap (Policy C11) contained in the Local Plan review (2000). The existing Strategic Gap Boundaries as delineated on the Proposals Map (June 2000) remain in effect until they are replaced through the SADM DPD. Core Strategy Policy CS22 commits the Council to a review of the boundaries of Strategic Gaps through the preparation of the SADM DPD. The relevant Core Strategy policies are set out in section 3.7 of this report.

Strategic gaps of sub-regional importance were originally identified in the Hampshire Structure Plan, and later included in PUSH guidance, local gaps were defined by the Fareham Borough Local Plan Review (2000) as being other gaps of more local importance.

3.5. Strategic Gaps

In the PUSH Policy Framework for Gaps four cross authority sub-regional gaps were identified. Two specifically affect Fareham Borough:-

The Meon gap between Fareham and Fareham Western Wards/Whiteley

The designation of the Meon valley as a strategic gap has prevented coalescence and maintained open countryside between Fareham and the Western Wards over the last twenty years. It was first identified in the Fareham Borough Local Plan (1992) and the Hampshire County Structure Plan (1994)

The Meon gap includes the predominantly open and undeveloped countryside along the river Meon valley starting from the coast, enclosing Titchfield and then running north to the Borough boundary to the west of Funtley. The strategic gap extends to

the north west into Winchester District to include land on the western side of the Meon valley. The strategic gap also extends to the south east in Gosport Borough along the Alver valley.

The land which is mainly used for agricultural purposes has been successfully protected from inappropriate development maintaining the separate identities of Fareham, Titchfield and the western ward settlements.

The gap between Fareham/Gosport and Stubbington/Lee-on –Solent

This strategic gap to the south of Fareham has been and continues to be under intense development pressure. It includes the Daedalus Airfield Strategic allocation development site and is adjacent to the proposed new enterprise zone.

The strategic gap includes predominantly open and undeveloped land, which is mainly in agricultural use, between Fareham and Stubbington and Stubbington and Gosport. Other land uses include Peel Common Waste Water Treatment Works, HMS Daedalus Airfield, playing fields, restored waste land and a golf course.

3.6. Local gaps

Local Gaps are identified in the Borough between Lower Swanwick and Sarisbury in the west; separating Sarisbury, Warsash and Segensworth from the main residential area of Locks Heath; and separating Fareham and Portchester.

Local gaps are important areas of undeveloped land between the individual settlements in Fareham Borough. They are not of regional importance but were designated in the Fareham Borough Local Plan Review (2000) to protect the identity of some settlements by preventing inappropriate development and stopping their coalescence. Local Gap Policy C12 was included in the Fareham Borough Local Plan but was not reviewed in the preparation of the Core Strategy.

Local Plan Review Policy C12 Local Gaps

States that:

‘Development that would physically and/or visually diminish the undeveloped land in the following gaps will not be permitted:’

Lower Swanwick-Sarisbury; Sarisbury-Locks Heath; Warsash-Locks Heath; Segensworth-Locks Heath; Wallington-Portchester and Fareham Portchester.

The Local Gap Policy (C12) and Proposals Map designation continues to be saved under Government Direction (September 2007) and remains part of the development plan for Fareham Borough. The supporting text to Policy C12 indicates that there has already been partial or total coalescence of some settlements and the local gaps provide protection from inappropriate development in order to maintain the separate identity of smaller settlements.

3.7. Core Strategy Policies which are relevant to gap areas

Core Strategy Policy CS22 states a review of the detailed boundaries of Strategic Gaps should be undertaken in line with the criteria set out as follows:

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.

Numerous other policies in the Fareham Core Strategy are relevant to this study e.g.CS4, CS6, CS9, CS11,CS14,CS16. The following development policies within the adopted Core Strategy would assist the delineation of settlement and gap boundaries.

CS6 The Development Strategy policy

This policy limits development to within the existing settlement boundaries. Development will be focussed in Fareham, the Western Wards and Whiteley, Portchester, Stubbington & Hillhead and Titchfield and Strategic Development Locations.

CS9 Development in the Western Wards & Whiteley

This states that:

Development will be permitted within the Western Wards and Whiteley settlement boundaries where it :-

- Protects the setting of the settlement;
- Protects their natural, historic, biodiversity and cultural resources;
- Contributes to the provision of green infrastructure;
- Maintains and strengthens the character, vitality and viability of district and local centres;
- Contributes to the following small levels of residential and employment development.....

CS11 Development in Portchester ,Stubbington & Hillhead and Titchfield.

This states that:

Small scale development will be permitted within the settlement boundaries of Portchester, Stubbington & Hillhead and Titchfield where it;-

- protects their setting and the natural, historic biodiversity and cultural resources.....(as above)..

Although these policies do not specifically refer to visual and physical separation of individual settlements they do safeguard their setting and natural and cultural resources.

The following Core Strategy policies will also assist in the protection of gap areas.

CS14 Development Outside Settlements

‘Built development on land outside the defined settlements will be strictly controlled to protect the countryside and coastline from development which would adversely affect its landscape character, appearance and function. Acceptable forms of development will include that essential for agriculture, forestry, horticulture and required infrastructure. The conversion of existing buildings will be favoured. Replacement buildings must reduce the impact of development and be grouped with other existing buildings, where possible. In coastal locations, development should not have an adverse impact on the special character of the coast when viewed from the land or water.’

The core strategy concentrates development within the existing urban areas and strategic sites. Areas outside the settlement boundaries are therefore strictly controlled with development in the countryside only being permitted to meet the needs of agriculture, farm diversification, countryside recreation, leisure and tourism. Where such development is proved necessary in this location priority is given to protect and enhance landscape character, the setting of settlements and biodiversity.

CS16 Natural Resources and Renewable Energy

The Borough has strong sustainable development policies and new development will be expected to safeguard the use of natural resources. Policy CS16 makes particular reference to the protection of mineral resources from development and the safeguarding of good quality and versatile agricultural land. Existing strategic and local gap areas encompass large areas of high grade agricultural land and in the south west of the Borough protected land for mineral extraction.

CS4 Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity and Geological Conservation

Protection of the natural environment in the Borough is covered in policy CS4. This is an all encompassing policy which includes relevant statements on the planning and protection of green infrastructure and the protection and enhancement of nature conservation, areas of international importance, national and local nature reserves and local sites of nature conservation value. Specifically in regard to green infrastructure it states:-

‘...Green Infrastructure will be created and safe guarded through:

Investing in appropriate management, enhancement and restoration, and the creation of new resources including parks, woodland and trees, and wildlife habitats;

Not permitting development that compromises its integrity and therefore that of the overall green infrastructure framework.’

A substantial part of the areas currently covered by strategic and local gap designations can be considered as essential to the green infrastructure network of the Borough. The Fareham Green Infrastructure Strategy will identify the details of the network following on from the PUSH GI Strategy which sets out the sub-regional spatial framework for green infrastructure and guidance from the South East GI Partnership. The Fareham GI Strategy will be implemented through the Site Allocations and Development Management DPD.

3.8. Gap Policies of Neighbouring Authorities

In the PUSH Policy Framework for Gaps it is recommended that a co-ordinated approach to strategic gap designation is taken to ensure sub regional gaps are aligned across administrative boundaries. PUSH stated that gaps should be designated in Local Development Documents and identified four cross authority gaps. Two specifically affect Fareham Borough, Winchester District and Gosport Borough.

Between Fareham and Fareham Western Wards/Whiteley
Between Fareham/Gosport and Stubbington/Lee-on-Solent

Both Gosport Borough and Winchester District Councils have policies for protecting strategic and local gaps in their current development planning documents. They are also reviewing these policies during the preparation of their Local

Development Frameworks. Both local authorities will use the PUSH guidance in relation to designating the boundaries of gaps within their administrative areas. They are however, at different stages in the process of preparing core strategies and development documents.

Gosport Borough have prepared a draft core strategy but following the publication of the NPPF have decided to convert it into a local plan directly and include the work on the core strategy with the site allocation document. This will bring it in line with the NPPF and hopefully a draft will be ready for consultation in the autumn.

Winchester District Council has prepared their core strategy and were about to submit it to government just before the NPPF was published. They are currently in discussion with the Planning Inspectorate on the way forward.

3.9. Approach to Reviewing Strategic and Local Gaps

This review is looking at the functionality of strategic and local gaps and the need for the retention of both gap designations. The following sections describe the methodology used to assess the functionality of the gap area across the study area.

4. Methodology

4.1. Existing studies

The evidence base for the current development plan documents includes a number of relevant background documents which were prepared as part of the adopted Core Strategy. These have been used as source material where relevant to supplement the Fareham Borough Landscape Character Assessment referred to earlier.

The relevant studies used include:

- Fareham Borough Greenspace Study;⁶
- Fareham Local Biodiversity Action Plan Review August 2008⁷
- PUSH Green Infrastructure strategy and appendices July 2010
- PUSH Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
- SE Green Infrastructure Framework
- Fareham Allotments study
- Fareham Playing pitch Assessment Strategy
- Fareham Settlement Profiles study
- Strategic Housing Land Assessment SHLAA⁸

4.2. Analysis of existing gaps

The existing strategic and local gap areas formed the initial study area for the project. The land within the strategic and local gaps provides a range of services from land drainage and recreation to food production and nature conservation. However the primary functions or services which are being analysed by this study relate to gaps as a planning designation. Therefore the study seeks to assess whether the existing designated gap areas are required to ensure the visual and physical separation of settlements (including the settlement character) in the Borough. In addition as a secondary consideration, the study also considered the value of other functions such as green infrastructure which might be lost if development occurred on land which is currently designated as gap.

4.3. Site Survey

In order to assess whether the current gap designation should be retained, the study has analysed a series of criteria. These include an analysis of the inter-visibility of the settlements which the gap is seeking to keep separate, assessment of the sensitivity of the landscape within the gap, and evaluation of the green infrastructure services (public access, recreation, wildlife etc) which the gap provides. These have been attributed values on a five point scale from high to low as part of the analysis of each individual area. The assessment and valuation process has used the subdivisions of the area taken from the 1996 Fareham Landscape Character Assessment, which subdivided the borough into a series of different areas based on landscape character. The boundaries of the individual character areas are shown on the mapping at Illustration 2. A total of 34 different sub areas were generated by using this approach, which reflects the changes in the nature of the countryside within the gap, and the presence or absence of features such as screening vegetation, which is one of the major factors which affect the inter-visibility between settlements.

A site survey was undertaken to assess these various parameters using a survey pro-forma as an aid to the recording of relevant data. An example of a completed pro-forma is to be found at Appendix 2. The pro-forma's recorded information which

was apparent on site and was subsequently used as part of the analysis of the main criteria to assess the gap. These were:

Physical and Visual separation

Settlement character and landscape sensitivity and

Green infrastructure value.

5. Physical and Visual Separation

5.1. *Inter-visibility*

Policy CS22 refers to the way in which the strategic gap designation is intended to help to retain the open nature and sense of separation between settlements, to define the settlement character of the area, separate settlements and maintain their physical and visual separation. Clearly therefore to identify whether the gap is currently being effective in separating settlements, it is necessary to consider whether it is possible to see between the settlements, and whether the countryside between the settlements is 'open' in planning terms which means largely free from buildings.

5.2. *Topography*

Elevated land is more likely to be visible from surrounding areas, hence the topography of the settlements and intervening areas is important. In the case of the Fareham Borough strategic gaps there are height differences across one of the key parts of the Meon gap, between Fareham and Titchfield, with the western edge of Fareham being some 20 metres above the eastern edge of Titchfield. Similar topographical variation occurs across the Sarisbury/ Swanwick local gap. In both cases the presence of trees within the gap generally prevents the inter-visibility which might otherwise compromise the functionality of the gap.

5.3. *Structures vegetation and field boundary patterns*

Trees and woodland /copses help to prevent views across a gap between settlements, particularly when the area is broadly flat. Whilst physical separation is not affected, in a wooded landscape, or a landscape with a dense pattern of tall hedges, visual separation of settlements can be achieved within a much reduced distance compared to a more open landscape.

5.4. *Urban edge character and typology*

The character of the urban edge can affect the manner in which settlements are visible across a gap. Settlement edges formed by a well established hedgerow are less obvious than those in which the buildings are prominent. We have therefore categorised the urban edges adjoining the gaps in accordance with a standardised typology to reflect the likelihood of the urban edge being either more or less visible. The edges of new housing are often more visible than older housing stock as a result of garden tree planting, which has helped to screen the older properties adjoining the gap. Properties which back onto woodland have the most robust edge to the gap, as is the case for example at Warsash, where trees on the Common provide a strong edge and screen housing from the gap. In other locations the interface between housing and gap is formed by a road. In these situations roadside hedging to either side of the road can help screen the roadside housing from the gap. As an example of this, the southern edges of Fareham are well screened from the south by a densely planted roadside tree belt, which provides a significant visual screen to the housing areas to the north. Details of the different types can be found at illustration 3, and these have been mapped according to the effectiveness of the edges in screening the urban boundary on mapping which has been included as illustration 4. This shows how there are relatively strong and effective edges to quite a high proportion of the interface between Fareham and the Stubbington/ Titchfield gap,

but that there are parts of Titchfield, Hillhead and Titchfield Park , where the interface between the developed area and gap are not as strong.

5.5. Analysis

The analysis of the visual separation of the settlements has been undertaken on the area basis as described earlier. This was undertaken by combining the survey findings, and desk findings onto an analysis matrix. An example of the characteristics and how they were assessed is shown on the example analysis matrix at illustration 5

5.6. Physical separation and spatial arrangement of gaps and settlements

The mapping at Illustration 6 shows the spatial arrangement of the settlements which are affected by the main strategic gap designation. The physical distances separating the settlements are clearly an important factor in determining both the need and the effectiveness of the gap designation. The map shows the distances across the gaps between the key settlements at their closest points. The gap between Lee on Solent and Stubbington across HMS Daedalus, and the gaps between the Fareham, Titchfield and the Western Wards are the narrowest and therefore potentially most vulnerable to coalescence. In policy terms therefore these are key areas which the strategic gap designation is seeking to keep separate. The width of the Meon gap varies between 0.3 and 1.1 kilometres, whilst the width of the Fareham /Stubbington gap varies between 0.57 and 1.1 kilometres.

6. Settlement Character & Landscape sensitivity

6.1. Landscape character

The Fareham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (1996) has been used as a basis for the survey and analysis of the strategic and local gaps. Strategic gaps are intended to help protect the special character of the settlements which are to be protected from coalescence. Consequently the character of the landscape / townscape of the settlement edges is an important factor to be considered in assessing the quality of land in relation to gap functionality. This is particularly important where the edges interface with one of the designated conservation areas, which either coincide with or abut a gap. The conservation areas are listed on table I.

Swanwick Shore Conservation Area	Abuts Swanwick local gap
Sarisbury Green Conservation Area	Overlaps Sarisbury local gap
Hook Conservation Area	In Titchfield/ western wards strategic gap
Titchfield Abbey Conservation Area	In Meon strategic gap
Titchfield Conservation Area	Abuts/ overlaps Meon strategic gap
Cams Hall Conservation Area	Coincides with Portchester Local gap

Table I Conservation areas

6.2. Sensitivity to change

The mapping at illustration 7 shows the situations where conservation areas and gap designation overlap. The Titchfield and Titchfield Abbey conservation areas are located within and across the Meon Gap at its narrowest point. This particular area is consequently one of the most sensitive areas to change. This is reflected in the matrix analysis of the individual areas which coincide or adjoin these areas (see appendix 4).

6.3. Future threats

Much of the countryside within the borough appears to be subject to the types of development or landscape pressures which are common on the edges of towns. Urban fringe pressures reflect modern demands for space, recreation and enterprise spreading into the countryside causing deterioration in the quality of the landscape. For example, this includes the subdivision of agricultural land for horse or pony paddocks, and the associated stables and parking of horse boxes, or the short or long term parking of caravans or mobile homes. In some cases illegal tipping and the construction of hard paved areas is associated with these sub-divided areas of urban fringe. These problems are often exacerbated in locations where the land ownership pattern is complex, as a result of the past history of horticultural enterprises. For example, in the Western Wards the land is subdivided into many small plots, which have derelict glasshouses or scrub, here the countryside has almost deteriorated to a point where it is no longer viable as agricultural land. This makes it vulnerable to development pressure.

6.4. Analysis

The analysis of the settlement character and landscape sensitivity of gap areas has been undertaken on the area basis as described earlier. This was undertaken by combining the survey findings, and desk findings onto an analysis matrix. An example

of the characteristics and how they were assessed is included at illustration 8 which is an example of the analysis matrix showing the way in which the landscape sensitivity across each of the 34 areas considered was analysed and recorded. Appendix 3 describes the protocol for the analysis.

7. Green infrastructure value

7.1. Green-space and recreational values

The third set of parameters which have been considered during the study are the value of other community functions which the gap areas provide which might be lost if development were to occur within the gap. Similar to green belt land, the land designated as gap performs an important function as recreational land immediately adjoining urban areas. Consequently the analysis of each individual subdivision of gap areas has included an assessment of the amount of public access and or recreational facilities which the area concerned can offer. Hence highly accessible areas with footpaths and park or common land were rated more highly than areas which were totally private.

7.2. Ecological values

Areas which contained land which had received some nature conservation recognition such as Site of Nature Conservation Value, Site of Nature conservation Importance or Site of Special Scientific Interest were rated more highly in the analysis than those which contained no worthwhile habitat areas.

7.3. Other ecosystem services

Account was taken of other ecosystem services such as agricultural productivity, flood attenuation value (i.e. whether the area was hard surfaced or able to allow rainfall to soak into the soil). These parameters were also included within the assessment matrix.

7.4. Analysis

The analysis of the green infrastructure value of the gap areas has been undertaken on the area basis as described earlier. This was undertaken by combining the survey findings, and desk findings onto an analysis matrix. An example of the characteristics and how they were assessed is included at illustration 9 which shows how the green infrastructure value across each of the 34 areas considered was analysed and recorded. Appendix 3 describes the protocol for the analysis.

8. RESULTS OF ANALYSIS

8.1. *Inclusion of land within the Gap designation area*

After the completion of the process of analysis, it became possible to confirm whether each of the individual areas had met the criteria for inclusion within the gap. This was based primarily on the criteria within the approved core strategy policy CS22 which were that:

- 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.

These were the primary factors which were taken into consideration in chapter 5 covering the visual and physical separation of settlements, although landscape sensitivity and green infrastructure value were a secondary consideration.

The mapping at Illustration 10 shows the areas which meet the criteria for inclusion within the gap designation area. The proposed gap designation area includes the majority of land previously described as strategic gap (within the 2000 Local Plan) with the exception of land to the south west of Titchfield around Brownwich and Hook. Local gap areas are not included with the exception of Lower Swanwick/Sarisbury. Explanation and further discussion of the proposed boundary and the omission of this area from the gap follows in the next section of the report .

9. DISCUSSION

9.1. *Policy protection.*

In the past there has been an assumption that the addition of different layers of policy designation has increased the level of protection afforded to land from development. Consequently areas which have been most valued have been the subject of multiple layers of policy. Recent appeal decisions, have not tended to support this view however, and local designations such as 'area of special landscape quality' or 'local gap policy' have tended to be ignored by inspectors. There is clearly therefore a need to be parsimonious with the designation of additional layers of policy protection over and above the level of protection provided by normal countryside policy.

9.2. *Omission of the coast/ western wards area in the strategic gap.*

As a spatial planning tool the strategic gap policy prevents the coalescence of settlements. If one of the settlements concerned extends some distance away from the other there can be a difficulty determining a logical location for the gap boundary. Land to the west of Stubbington, and south of the western wards has been included within the strategic gap policy area in the past, although there is undeveloped coast rather than settlement in this area. The coast has been a convenient and robust natural boundary to the gap; however the inclusion of this land is anomalous to the purpose of gap designation. It is therefore logical to reposition the boundary of the gap to exclude this land in accordance with the PUSH criteria.

The revised gap boundary to the west of the Meon follows either roads or public rights of way, and includes land which is considered to be most vulnerable to development to the south of Titchfield, but excludes the open countryside between the western wards and the coast. This area will not become more vulnerable as it is mostly owned by the county council and already safeguarded for its minerals and agricultural land and is in part managed as a nature reserve.

9.3. *The need for Local gap designation*

If we consider each of the Fareham Local Plan Review (2000) local gap areas individually we find that a number no longer meet the criteria for gap designation. Considering each area individually:

Locks Heath / Segensworth local gap

In spatial terms this area of local gap does not fully separate settlements, which merge together to the north of the gap. The major part of the area is protected by nature conservation designations and associated policy constraints, consequently we are of the opinion that this area does not meet the criteria for inclusion in the gap.

Warsash/Locks Heath and Sarisbury / Locks Heath local gap.

These have suffered from incremental development and are no longer valuable gap areas. Derelict nurseries are unsightly and land is unmanaged. Although removal of gap status may make them vulnerable to development pressure, it is not accepted that they are continuing to maintain the separate identity and character of the two settlements.

Fareham/ Portchester and Wallington / Portchester local gap.

The two Portchester local gaps which are intended to separate Fareham from Portchester, are slightly anomalous. Ribbon development along the Portsmouth to Fareham road dating back to the 30's or earlier, has already linked the two settlements, and whilst the aim of maintaining open space to the north of the old Portsmouth road is desirable, this can be achieved by the existing Core Strategy policies for countryside and the location of development, policies CS14 and CS6. In addition, land to the south of the old Portsmouth road at Cams Hall is also protected by the conservation area designation.

Lower Swanwick and Sarisbury local gap.

The Swanwick/Sarisbury local gap has kept its identity well with most land remaining farmland or parkland. This gap area is contiguous with open countryside and is protected by Policy CS14. We believe that this area meets the criteria for inclusion within a gap designation, as it is preventing the coalescence of Sarisbury and Lower Swanwick, maintaining their distinctive settlement character. This area forms an important part of the wider green infrastructure network associated with the Hamble valley.

In our opinion there are sufficient policies within the Core Strategy to ensure that the areas previously identified as local gaps would receive an appropriate level of policy protection to be able to retain their open and undeveloped nature. In addition the National Planning Policy Framework sections 76-78 offer local people the option of promoting areas as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans. Retention of the separate local gap policy designation is therefore not needed. However merging some previous local gap areas into a single gap criteria could be considered. Both Gosport and Winchester local authorities are considering this option and may be putting it forward in their draft local plans.

9.4. Relationship with Neighbouring Authorities: Gosport

Gosport are fully supportive of strategic gap policy and have tried to include as much open land as possible in the gap within Gosport Borough. The Alver valley is vitally important to the gap especially the large open space area to the south and east of the Cherque Farm estate which is proposed as country park. The area of recreation ground projecting into Fareham Borough on its eastern boundary is also classified as strategic gap, as well as the marginal green areas along the boundary with Fareham. The strategic gap boundary on the eastern side is therefore contiguous and logical across the local authority boundaries.

The south western boundary of the gap currently running along the southern border of HMS Daedalus, parallel to the East-West runway of the active airfield will be reassessed, in the light of the proposed enterprise zone. The Government designated the development areas within the airfield as an enterprise zone in August 2011. Gosport have identified the area within its Daedalus SPD as suitable for economic development and Fareham has identified the areas known as Hangars East and Hangars West as suitable for employment development in its adopted Core Strategy (2011). In March 2012 the councils resolved to grant outline planning permission for development within the enterprise zone areas.

The illustrative master-plan for HMS Daedalus outlines the potential redevelopment of the site, (see illustration 11) and retains open space associated with the runways

and to the north and east of the site. The proposed development around the site may weaken the effectiveness of the gap in the longer term unless the identified open space and open vistas are retained across the site. Sensitive redevelopment of hangars east and west and the area within Gosport will be needed to prevent further coalescence across the gap.

Gosport will be considering the issue of the need for local gaps during preparation of their new local plan. Currently all of Gosport's local gaps are in existing urban areas, Local gap policy areas are 'saved' in the existing local plan but they are covered by other policies that offer protection. It is likely that the local gap designation will not be retained but the strategic gap policy will remain in the new local plan.

9.5. Relationship with Neighbouring Authorities: Winchester

The Meon Valley Strategic Gap stretches north-westwards from the Fareham Borough boundary into Winchester District. The current boundary of the Meon strategic gap in the Winchester development plan is based on the old Structure Plan boundary. It roughly follows the line of development but the gap is more rural in nature. The top end of the gap is the most difficult to discern as there is no distinct boundary and a rough line from the top of the urban boundaries was drawn from Whiteley to Funtley. The existing boundary around Knowle will need to be reviewed in the light of the New Community North of Fareham (NCNF). There is an issue of whether the buffer areas between the NCNF and the Fareham urban edge and also the Winchester boundary should be included in the strategic gap. It is understood that other consultants working on the detailed planning of the NCNF will be addressing this as part of their work on buffer areas. Unfortunately their work was not yet advanced enough to assist us with any specific boundary delineation.

9.6. Targeting of enhancements

In addition to the assessment of whether land met the criteria for inclusion within the gap, we were also able to allocate a broad rating of the quality of the gap area/function at the current time. This was done by assessing the average overall contribution that each of the individual sub areas of the gap made to each of the individual criteria assessed. A simple high, medium or low system was used for the identification of priority areas which was used to tone the mapping at Illustration 12. This uses a traffic light colour system of green for high, orange for medium and red for low value scores. This process was undertaken in a manner which gave priority to the primary parameters for which the gap is designated, physical and visual separation of settlements, whilst also taking account of landscape sensitivity and green infrastructure functions, as secondary factors. This analysis of functionality helped us to identify potential future target areas for enhancement projects. Key areas of gap land which were found to be of lower quality were located, at Solent Breezes, and at Peel Common.

The Solent Breezes site although developed is relatively self-contained and remote, and does not appear to threaten the integrity of the gap. It is understood that the Council maintains a consistent policy of preventing the holiday homes being occupied permanently.

The Peel Common area is one of the more strategically important areas of gap. It consists of an area of ribbon development which has become degraded through the conversion of adjoining agricultural land to paddocks for horses. The location of this

land in a narrow gap between Stubbington and Gosport means it is critical to the functioning of the gap. Targeted enhancements are necessary in this area to improve its gap quality. This narrow gap will also be under pressure from new development on the Daedalus Airfield which will need to be carefully designed to reduce its impact.

Action to improve the quality of the gap in this area could include efforts to help maintain, restore and reinforce the landscape structure. Targeted planting, possibly on the highway verge, promotion of better equestrian management, and aggressive enforcement in relation to stables and equine use, and other forms of development should be considered. In addition, the targeted use of tree preservation orders could help to ensure the retention of tree belts which help to provide some screening of buildings within the gap. We believe that this and certain other areas should be targeted for enhancements, and these are described in our recommendations.

9.7. Potential mechanisms for enhancement of the quality of gaps

Certain areas of the gaps, should be targeted for enhancement through the planning process. In general these areas contain a higher density of existing landowners and buildings, and or grazing land which has been subdivided for equestrian purposes. Our recommendation is that there should be a particularly robust enforcement of the gap policy in these areas, and that green infrastructure enhancements also be targeted at these areas. These might include: the use of tree preservation orders to protect visually significant tree belts or individual trees, the use of article 4 direction orders (which can be used to prevent temporary uses such as car boot sales, caravan sites, and or the installation of stables or fences) and the planting of new tree belts on public land. The encouragement of better equestrian management should also form part of the package of enhancements.

9.8. Green Infrastructure

Protection of the natural environment in the Borough is covered in Policy CS4 Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity and Geological Conservation. This is an all encompassing policy which includes relevant statements on the planning and protection of green infrastructure and the protection and enhancement of nature conservation areas of international importance to national and local nature reserves and local sites of nature conservation value. Specifically in regard to green infrastructure it states:-

‘...Green Infrastructure will be created and safeguarded through:

Investing in appropriate management, enhancement and restoration, and the creation of new resources including parks, woodland and trees, and wildlife habitats; Not permitting development that compromises its integrity and therefore that of the overall green infrastructure framework.’

A substantial part of the areas currently covered by strategic and local gap designations can be considered as essential to the green infrastructure network of the Borough. The Fareham Green Infrastructure Strategy will identify the details of the network following on from the PUSH Green Infrastructure Strategy which sets out the sub-regional spatial framework for green infrastructure and guidance from the South East Green Infrastructure Partnership.

9.9. Local green space

The NPPF reflects the localism agenda by promoting the creation of local green spaces. These locally valued landscapes must be promoted by the local community. Consideration of designating some existing local gap areas as local green space in Fareham Borough could be explored if there is a strong public lobby and commitment from the local community to designate them.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1. Overall policy

The Core Strategy contains the PUSH criteria policy to protect strategic gaps. There is no specific mention of local gaps in the Core Strategy but existing local gap policies from the Local Plan Review are currently saved. The preparation of the SADMDPD, as well as the introduction of the NPPF has opened up the opportunity to review both these designations.

The review has studied both strategic gap and local gap designations, surveyed them on site and analysed their functionality. The review has shown that there is a clear need for a gap policy to be retained in the Fareham Borough SADMDPD in order to retain the character of, and prevent coalescence of settlements.

In our opinion there are sufficient policies within the Core Strategy to ensure that most of the areas previously identified as local gaps would be subject to an appropriate level of policy protection to be able to retain their open and undeveloped nature. Retention of a separate local gap policy designation would only be needed to protect the one area which we believe requires this (the Sarisbury - Lower Swanwick local gap area). Consideration was given to merging some previous local gap areas with the established strategic gaps into one single gap criteria, to protect the most valuable area of local gap. However this is not possible as we understand that the council are at this stage unable to change the terminology given that the Core Strategy is adopted. Both Gosport and Winchester local authorities are considering this option and are likely to put forward single gap policies in their draft local plans.

Recommendations:

Local gaps are subject to an appropriate level of protection by other core strategy policies and do not require a specific designation.

The Lower Swanwick/ Sarisbury gap was not included within the original sub regional PUSH strategic gap, but does meet the criteria for inclusion as gap, and should retain a gap designation.

10.2. Definition of the Gap Boundaries

The gap boundaries will continue to follow the edge of existing settlements with the exception of the area to the west of Hillhead and Stubbington. The width of the undeveloped area between Warsash and Stubbington is 5 kilometres and is too great to be considered a gap area preventing the coalescence of the two settlements. This area of nature reserves and agricultural land is adequately protected by nature conservation, mineral protection and countryside policies. A new boundary of the western edge of the gap is shown on Illustration 10.

Recommendations:

The gap policy is retained and the boundaries are adjusted in line with the proposal at illustration 10

Local gap policy areas are removed, except for the inclusion of the former Sarisbury / Swanwick local gap within the strategic gap category as shown on Illustration 10.

10.3. Targeting of enhancement:

In order to maintain the effectiveness of the gap in the longer term, targeted enhancement works are required for the areas which were found to be less effective. We would therefore recommend the addition of clauses to the gap policy to encourage the implementation of enhancement measures such as those described earlier, which could be implemented through a joint development management/ green infrastructure initiative.

Recommendations:

A programme of targeted enhancements be implemented which focuses on the following areas :

Titchfield-Western wards

Solent Breezes.

Peel Common.

10.4. Gaps and Green Infrastructure

All gap areas are vital to the green infrastructure of the Borough. Any new development in these areas would be required to fulfil the conditions of Core Strategy Policy CS4 and CS14 being small in scale and unobtrusive.

Consideration of designating some of the areas within the current local gaps (which will no longer be classified as gaps) as local green-space should be explored if there is a strong public lobby and commitment from the local community to designate them. Although the criteria for defining local green-space set out in the NPPF would need to be met. The criteria are:

where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;

where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and

where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

Recommendations:

Current local gap areas which fall out of the settlement gap policy area could be considered as local green-space if there is local support.

Gaps should be regarded as vital for providing green infrastructure

11. References

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<https://www.fareham.gov.uk/pdf/planning/corestrategy/CoreStrategyAdopted.pdf>
- 2 **Framework for Gaps December 2008**
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- 3 **Strategic gap and green wedge policies in structure plans: main report for ODPM 2001**
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- 6 <https://www.fareham.gov.uk/council/departments/planning/ldf/gsstudy.aspx>
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- 8 <http://www.push.gov.uk/work/sustainability-and-social-infrastructure/green-infrastructure.htm>

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