

Draft Local Plan 2021-2040 (Regulation 18)

Gaps between Settlements Background Paper

January 2024



OUR
**LOCAL
PLAN**

2021-2040

CONSULTATION

22 JANUARY - 4 MARCH 2024

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Gaps between settlements are a planning tool to prevent coalescence of settlements and maintain their separate identity. However, designation of a gap does not refer to landscape quality or character, or protection of the countryside. It is clear from previous local plan engagement that many communities consider maintaining separation between certain settlements to be an important issue. These concerns have been expressed consistently over many years and through several consultation exercises. This support for maintaining settlement character and identity has been reflected in previous Local Plan 'Gaps between Settlements' policies which seek to prevent settlement coalescence between urban areas by maintaining a clear visual and physical break in the built environment.
- 1.2 The principle of a gap policy is well established in development plans in East Hampshire, dating back to the South and Mid-Hampshire Structure Plans (1989/89). They were carried forward into the Hampshire Structure Plan (1994) and the Hampshire Structure Plan 1996-2011 (Review), as well as specific Local Plans within East Hampshire. The Local planning Authority continue to attach considerable importance to the continued existence of gaps. There has been no significant change in circumstances since they were first included in the development plan.
- 1.3 The gaps within the Second Review Local Plan 2006 were reviewed as part of the evidence base supporting the Joint Core Strategy (JCS), Policy CP23 but the intention was to identify precise boundaries for the gaps in future Local plans. Following their re-examination as part of the JCS, it was concluded that all the gaps in the Second Review Local Plan in principle still perform the function of separating individual settlements, the identity of which would be lost by their coalescence.
- 1.4 The new Local Plan provides an opportunity to identify precise boundaries for the gaps that fall within the Local Plan Area. This background paper sets out the methodology and criteria to identify these boundaries, with precise boundaries shown on the associated Policies Maps.

2.0 Methodology

- 2.1 To re-define the precise extent of the gaps the following methodology and criteria has been used:
 - **Desk top review:** As a baseline, taking the original gap boundaries from the Second Review Local Plan held on GIS, supported by aerial photography, each gap has been assessed against the criteria set out below.

Gaps criteria	Explanation/ comment
a) Open and undeveloped	A gap should generally be open and have an undeveloped nature. Ideally there should be an absence of existing urban activity but this will not realistically be achievable.
b) Sufficient separation between settlements	A gap should provide a sense of arriving/leaving a place, a feeling of separation, the identity of which would be lost by coalescence.
c) Aligning to a recognised feature	The boundary of a gap should consider the existing vegetation and land uses (gardens, footpaths, hedgerows, streams, field boundaries, woodlands and backs of houses). These act as a robust edge to a gap (act as visual screen to housing). However, in many cases the boundaries should, where possible, align to the Settlement Policy Boundaries (SPB).
d) Ecological values	A gap should not necessarily include nature conservation recognition (eg. SSSIs, SPAs) as these are adequately protected.
e) Nature of settlement edges	The boundary of a gap should integrate with the adjacent countryside.
f) Alignment with revised settlement policy boundaries	In most instances the boundary of a gap will adjoin the SPB.
g) Planning completions	The boundary of a gap should be aligned against the developments that were not completed during the Second Review Local Plan and Housing & Employment Allocations Plan.
h) Planning permissions	The boundary of a gap should be aligned against the developments with recent permissions.
i) Allocations/ Proposed sites	The boundary of a gap should be aligned against the proposed sites in the new Local Plan and those contained within the 'made' Neighbourhood Plans.

- **Site visits:** The desk top review has been supported by a visual assessment in the form of site visits.

3.0 Summary

- 3.1 With regard to the methodology, it provides guidance and transparency to all interested parties on how the Local Planning Authority has approached the boundaries associated with gaps.
- 3.2 In addition, it establishes a baseline methodology upon which future revisions or consideration to new gaps can be undertaken, ie. through subsequent Local Plans, Development Plan Documents and Neighbourhood Plans.