



Canterbury City Council

# Canterbury Area of High Landscape Value Review of Local Plan Inspector's Comments

December 2005



**Canterbury City Council**

## **Canterbury Area of High Landscape Value Review of Local Plan Inspector's Comments**

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## Canterbury Area of High Landscape Value

### Review of Local Plan Inspector's Comments

#### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Inspector's Report for the Canterbury Local Plan Inquiry recommends that the boundary of the proposed Canterbury Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV) be reviewed to provide an area defined by the visual envelope. The Inspector provides guidance on his preferred approach to identify this area.
- 1.2 Canterbury City Council has commissioned Jacobs Babtie to review the Inspector's comments and interpret his proposed methodology to ascertain its effect on the proposed AHLV boundary. The most notable change between this and the methodology employed for the original AHLV visual envelope map (VEM) is the inclusion of blocking features such as major woodlands and buildings.

#### Summary of Inspector's Recommendations

- Only include land that makes a real visual contribution to valley setting of historical city within the visual envelope boundary.
- Omit land offering only intermittent views to and from historic city and cathedral.
- Assume observer's height is 1.5m.
- Remove some of the existing zone on University of Kent land to north of area.
- Retain Stour floodplains within boundary.

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#### 2.0 Review of Inspector's Guidance

- 2.1 The first stage of this project is to develop the guidelines provided by the Inspector into a robust methodology which accords with current landscape and visual assessment guidance.
- 2.2 The revised methodology is required to take account of the Inspector's comments, follow best practice in landscape assessment and only include land which makes a real visual contribution to the valley setting of the historical city within the visual envelope boundary.
- 2.3 The key sources of reference for the creation of VEMs are the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment* (GLVA) and the Department of Transport's *Design Manual for Roads and Bridges Volume 11* (DMRB Volume 11).
- 2.4 There is very little guidance on the generation of VEMs. The best seems to be within The DMRB Volume 11, but this is focused on mapping visibility of road structures. The DMRB Volume 11 was also studied to gain knowledge of methodologies used for visual envelope mapping. This revealed that it is necessary to mark the horizon contour as visible from city centre.
- 2.5 The Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment's *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 2002*, was also studied for guidelines on visual envelope mapping. The guidance in GLVA is very general and, although there are plenty of examples of VEMs, there are no detailed guidelines for visual envelope mapping.
- 2.6 Other precedents for this project were investigated. This included the recent *Character Assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting* by Land Use Consultants and the Countryside Agency. This study uses prime landmark buildings as points of reference, rather than 'historic city' that implies a vague area. This is appropriate to Oxford as its many spires are a characteristic of the city, whilst Canterbury tends to be defined by the dominance of Bell Harry Tower at the Cathedral. The Oxford study identifies an area that is visually sensitive around the city but does not interpret that into a designation to protect these views. The Canterbury's AHLV methodology was revised to include landmark buildings as points of reference.
- 2.7 Existing guidance and worked examples do not provide the level of detail the Inspector recommends. However the methodology he suggests does not conflict with current guidance and established practice for the definition of VEMs.
- 2.8 The next stage takes his recommendations and interprets them into a methodology, incorporating the Inspector's comments and identified guidelines for visual envelope

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methodologies. The methodology entails the categorisation and identification of visually blocking landscape and townscape elements within the District, from trees and foliage to built fabric.

- 2.9 Types, heights and widths of planting blocks were specified so as to provide a list of visually blocking vegetation. Blocks were mapped and checked on site. To overcome the practical and time consuming process of mapping, checking and digitising linear features, hedgerows were converted from the Phase 1 Habitat Survey GIS layer and assigned a common height. It was not considered practical or necessary to separately map the type, quality, dimensions and intactness of the hedgerows for this exercise, as these were unlikely to make a material difference at this scale.
- 2.10 Types of buildings were categorised into generalised blocks to provide a simple yet all encompassing list of visually blocking built fabric definitions. The generalised blocks ensured a methodology which was usable and enabled a correct outcome, rather than one which was more specific and detailed and allowed opportunities for incorrect data categorisation. Defining the general types of building enables an understanding of the approximate height and scale of blocks of development.
- 2.11 The following steps were necessary to implement the methodology:
- Defining the categories and characteristics of blocking structures.
  - Checking these principals on site and amending accordingly.
  - Digitising blocking structures into the VEM computer model.
  - Running the VEM.
  - Checking on site (views from Bell Harry Tower).
  - Reviewing the impact on the AHLV boundary and recommendations.
- 2.12 The following categories were digitised on separate layers to allow the VEM to be re-run to demonstrate different scenarios if required, for example with/without orchards and shelterbelts as these vulnerable to removal and are likely to be omitted from final VEM. Full details and examples of the categories are provided in Appendix 1.

#### **Landscape Elements:**

- Woodland belts and blocks.
- Shelterbelts.
- Orchards.

#### **Townscape elements:**

- Industrial buildings/Groups of industrial buildings/Georgian/Victorian terraces and townhouses.
- Two-storey housing (generally C20th suburban housing).
- Commercial building/groups of buildings.
- Individual landmark buildings.

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2.13 The elements were digitised into VEM computer model. The VEM that was generated from this data is referred to as the Inspector's VEM to distinguish from the original VEM in the following discussion

### **3.0 The Inspector's Visual Envelope Map (Figure 1)**

3.1 The Inspector's VEM provides a picture of what is visible from Bell Harry derived from an input of data based on visually blocking elements.

3.2 It covers a similar extent to the original VEM in that it is largely defined by the topography of the valley. However it is evident that large blocks of woodland, and substantial built fabric, such as the commercial buildings in the Sturry area, have an impact on views out.

3.3 The key points to note are:

- Overall the outer extent is similar but internally the effect is more patchy.
- The southern outer boundary is largely unchanged.
- The northern outer boundary is tighter in the University of Kent area – generally following the road/Park Wood.
- The northeast outer boundary is tighter and Broad Oak is generally excluded as the woodland blocks between it and the city take effect.
- To the east and west – Old Park and Bigbury Hill show a mosaic of views depending on the presence/absence of vegetation.

### **4.0 Views from Bell Harry Tower**

4.1 A visit to Bell Harry Tower was undertaken with officers from Canterbury City Council on 4 October 2005 to check the views against the VEM.

4.2 From the tower it was apparent that the landform was the defining element on the views and valley setting. The urban area of the city centre tends to screen the out-of-town shopping areas from the view and the land then rises to an enclosing ridge to the north and south. This reflects the northern and southern boundaries identified on the VEMs. The blocking effect of the orchards, shelterbelts and hedgerows on the northern and southern slopes is negligible in these views as they are seen on rising ground. Long views west along the Stour Valley are limited by the curve of the river, with Bigbury Hill clearly seen. The longest views are along the Stour Valley to the northeast as far as the church at St. Nicholas-at-Wade. This accords with both the original and Inspector's VEM and the findings of the Canterbury Landscape Appraisal (1998).



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#### 5.0 Review of Impact on the AHLV Boundary and Recommended Amendments

- 5.1 The Inspector's VEM and the subsequent visit to Bell Harry Tower demonstrates that the original visual envelope is modified by the presence of blocking structures to create a more patchy mosaic of views with the proposed designation area. This reflects vegetation within the area and the undulations of the ground. However the overall landform of the valley structure is the key defining element, particularly to the north and south.
- 5.2 The effect of the blocking structures is often reduced as they are viewed on rising ground. This is illustrated on the Inspector's VEM where quite significant areas of woodland or buildings are shown as visible, along with the land beyond them. Examples include Bigbury Hill and Dengrove Wood, along with Rough Common.
- 5.3 The requirement of the 1997 Inspector's Report, which formed the initial brief for the AHLV, was to define the outer boundary of the designation. With this in mind, and considering the practicalities of both drawing and defining policy for a mosaic designation, it is recommended that the inner boundary remains defined by the built-up area boundary (based on current land allocations in the Local Plan) and only the outer boundary is reviewed. Any recommended changes to the outer boundary should conform to good practice and should follow definitive, permanent and identifiable features on the ground e.g. roads, blocks of woodland etc.
- 5.4 The mosaic effect of the Inspector's VEM is created by undulations in the landform and visibility 'shadows' behind blocking structures. In order to produce a meaningful designation area it is recommended that these gaps in visibility are ignored where there are substantial or connected areas of visibility beyond or adjacent to them. This is particularly notable to the south of Canterbury, for example the valley feature that runs to the south east of the city from the railway to beyond the A2, roughly along the line of overhead cables.
- 5.5 It is recommended that the southern boundary of the proposed AHLV is unchanged as its outer extent remains much the same on the Inspector's VEM as the original. Coincidentally it is also a good fit with the adjacent North Downs SLA boundary.
- 5.6 The exception to the above assumption on substantial or connected land beyond the mosaic is the Stour Valley, particularly to the north east where the Inspector's VEM extends for some distance along the valley floor. Here a judgement has been made that beyond Fordwich/Sturry, although there may still be some fine views, it is too distant to form part of a meaningful area. This is consistent with the previous proposed designation and was not questioned by the Inspector. Similarly there is a thinner line of potential views stretching towards Chartham and again this is discounted, as it is too distant and also too narrow.



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- 5.7 Other patches of visibility beyond the core area, such as along the Blean ridge to the north and from the Downs, are also ignored due to their distance and disjointed nature. Again this is consistent with the previous AHLV proposal.
- 5.8 The Canterbury Landscape Appraisal 1998 recommended that the designation area should also be informed by landscape character. In some areas the visual envelope is less defined yet the landscape has strong links with the city through cultural, ecological or landscape associations. It is recommended that where these strong associations exist the areas should remain within the proposed AHLV despite the intermittent or limited views.
- 5.9 To the east the Old Park area has very patchy views of the Cathedral and is therefore less clearly within the Inspector's VEM. However the views within Old Park, whilst intermittent, are considered to be high quality being both direct and of relatively close proximity. Given this, plus the area's status as both SSSI and cultural value as a former royal deer park, and that it is one of the few remaining areas of natural green space that reaches into the heart of the city, it is recommended that it remains within the AHLV designation.
- 5.10 To the west at Bigbury Hill the dense woodland obscures most views. However where these views exist – such as along the Pilgrim's Way they are of particularly high quality and of historic interest. This is an ancient trackway and likely to have been the first viewpoint of the city for pilgrims and their predecessors travelling from the west. In addition to this the ancient hill fort, a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM), has a cultural significance that pre-dates both the Roman and Christian cities. The vegetation on Bigbury Hill is dominated by chestnut coppice. Routine coppicing operations or tree clearance around the SAM could require visually sensitive areas to be cut from time to time. This potentially could open up dramatic views of the city. Therefore given the cultural value of the area and potential visual sensitivity it is recommended that it remains unchanged within the AHLV designation.
- 5.11 Along the northern boundary there is scope for some amendment. The land rises steeply to the University of Kent campus and then plateaus before dropping to the Sarre Penn Valley beyond. The Inspector's VEM and cathedral visit show that only the southern edge of the plateau is visible, partly blocked by woodland and the massing of the existing University buildings. It is therefore recommended that the AHLV boundary is revised to follow the line shown on Figure 2, generally following the road network and southern edge of the woodland blocks.
- 5.12 It is then recommended that the boundary follows the ridge line road across Tyler Hill as shown in the original AHLV designation, but terminates to the east of the woodland blocks that separate Broad Oak from the Canterbury area. In effect this means the orchards to the west and south of Broad Oak are removed from the

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designation. The lower slopes should stay within the AHLV area as they form part of the long views out of the city to the northeast. It is recommended that the blocks of woodland themselves, including Dengrove Wood, are included within the designation area as substantial parts of them are visible from Bell Harry Tower due to the landform. This would also afford them greater protection which in turn would help to maintain their blocking function.

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#### 6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

- The Inspector's methodology to determine the visual envelope is valid and accords with current guidance and established practice.
- The Inspector's VEM and site visit confirm that topography remains the key defining characteristic of the valley setting of the city.
- Blocking structures within the valley form have little overall impact on the outer extent of the VEM with the exception of the northern boundary.
- Landscape character still has a role to play in establishing the extent of the AHLV where there are strong cultural, ecological or landscape associations with the city.

It is recommended that the AHLV designation be amended to that shown on Figure 2 on the following basis:

- There is no change to the outer southern boundary.
- Whilst there is reduced visibility at Bigbury Hill and Old Park the directness and quality of the views that exist, combined with their cultural and ecological value, require them to be included in the AHLV.
- The effect of blocking features, most notably woodland, requires that the northern boundary be amended at the University of Kent and Broad Oak.

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**References**

**Canterbury Landscape Appraisal**

Canterbury City Council 1998

**Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment**

The Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management 2002

**Design Manual for Roads and Bridges Volume 11**

Department of Transport

**Canterbury District Local Plan Public Inquiry – Report on the Objections**

September 1997

**Canterbury District Local Plan Public Inquiry – Report on the Objections**

2005

## APPENDIX 1: CATEGORIES AND DEFINITIONS OF VISUALLY BLOCKING ELEMENTS

### Landscape Elements:



- **Woodland blocks or large shelterbelts** Average height 25m of either evergreen or mixed woodland nature with understorey exceeding 2m in height in parts and 10m plus in width.



- **Shelterbelts** - exceeding 3m in height. May only act as an effective screen if continuous (not gappy) and in full leaf.



- **Orchards** – exceeding 2m in height. Many orchards comprise dwarf stock that may not form a significant visual barrier, and are considered temporary.

### Townscape elements:

- **Industrial buildings/Groups of industrial buildings** - average 10m high with footprint of 20m sq plus.



- **Mostly historic vernacular buildings** - two storeys or more average 12m in height.



- **Mostly 2-storey housing** (generally C20th suburban housing). Five or more residential properties clustered in such a manner as to allow only intermittent views. Average height 8m.

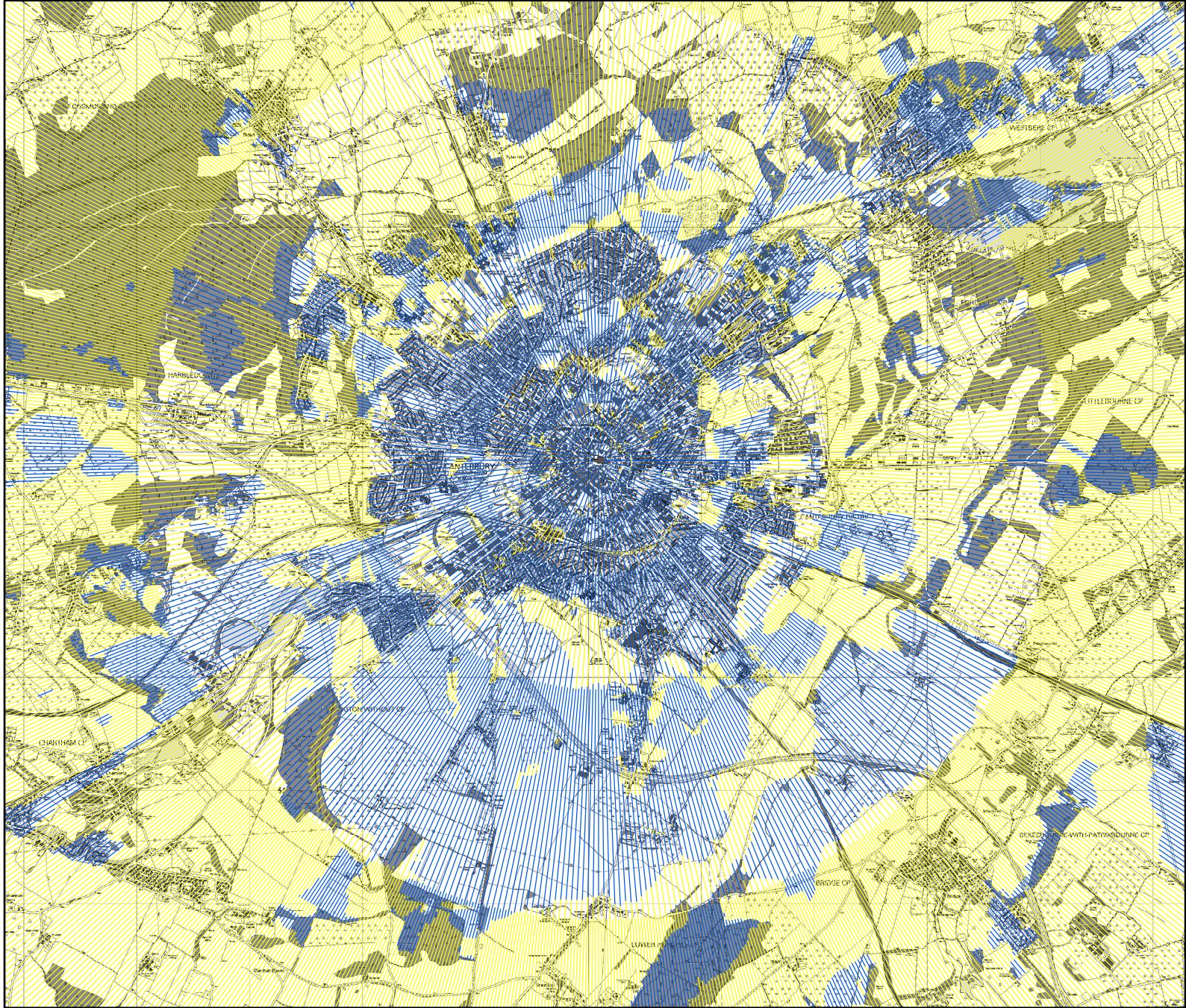


- **Commercial building/groups of buildings** of 15m plus height



- **Individual landmark buildings** with a 20m plus height. Notable spires and towers would be shown at their approximate height.






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**Figure 1**  
**Inspector's Visual Envelope**

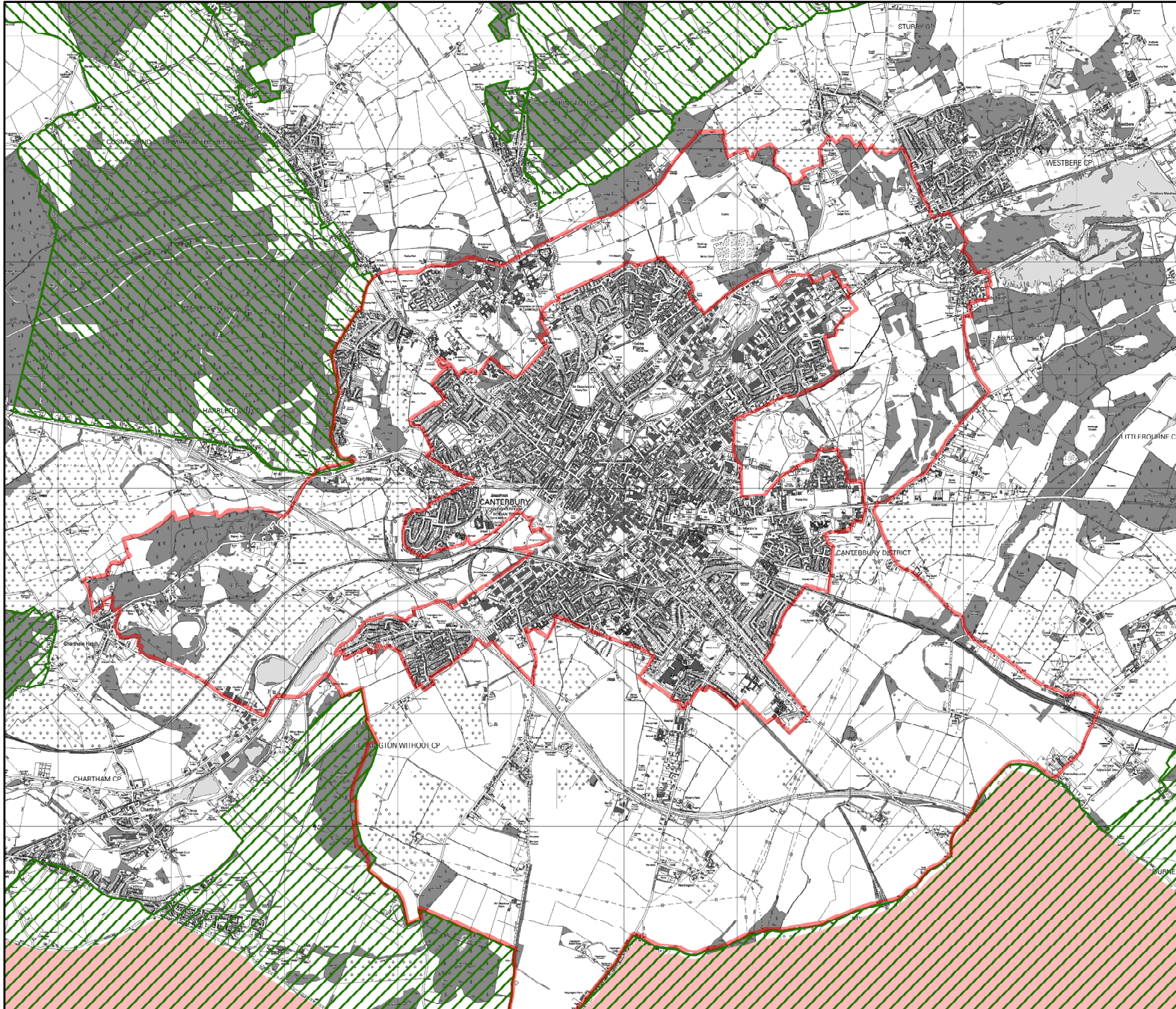
**Legend**

**Zone of Visual Influence**

- Areas not visible from Bell Harry Tower
- Areas visible from Bell Harry Tower

 Scale 1:50,000





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**Figure 2**  
**Recommended amendments to**  
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**Legend**

- Recommended Revised AHLV
- Bean Woods Special Landscape Area
- North Downs Landscape Area
- Kent Downs AONB



Scale 1:50,000