

Bracknell Forest Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council

Green Belt Review

FINAL REPORT SUMMARY



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Amec Foster Wheeler Environment
& Infrastructure UK Limited



Report for

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Document revisions

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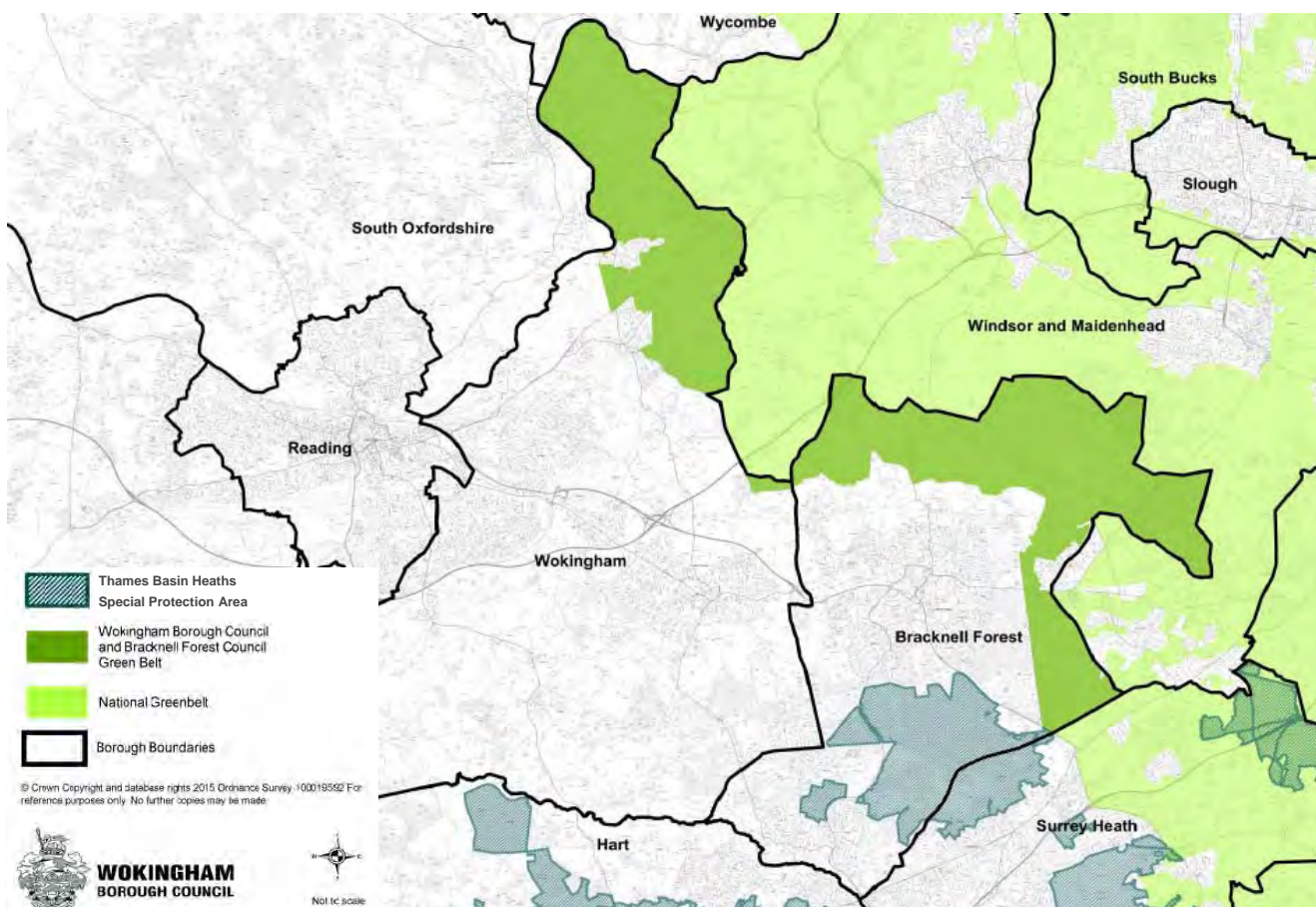
Executive summary

Purpose of this report

1. This report has been produced for the purpose of setting out the results of a review of the Green Belt in Bracknell Forest Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council. The objective is to test the Green Belt against the five purposes set for it in national policy to determine the extent to which it is contributing to those purposes. **The report does not identify land for release or development.** Along with other studies, the report will be used as part of the evidence base in the production of the Local Plans for the Boroughs.

The study area

Figure 1 The Green Belt in Bracknell Forest Borough and Wokingham Borough and its sub-regional context



Approach and outline methodology

2. This Review consists of three parts:
 - Part 1** – a strategic review of the Green Belt, considering its role as part of the Metropolitan Green Belt.
 - Part 2** – a refined review of the Green Belt considering the role of smaller parcels, particularly in proximity to built-up areas.
 - Part 3** – an appraisal of the Green Belt villages within Bracknell Forest Borough¹ and their potential for in-setting (removal of Green Belt designation which currently ‘washes over’ the village).

¹ Wokingham Borough has no settlements in the Green Belt which are classified as villages (that is supporting an appropriate range of services and facilities).

3. The Review tests the Green Belt against its five purposes as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (para 80). To assist the judgement of the contribution of the Green Belt to fulfilling these purposes, the Green Belt is divided into parcels, firstly at a strategic level primarily using roads, and then using rights of way and other features such as woodland edges to identify smaller parcels by which local contributions can be assessed. Whilst these boundaries are of varying strength, they are identifiable features on the ground (and where possible legal entities, in the case of roads and rights of way, thus being permanent). Figure 2 shows the subdivision for strategic purposes, and Figures 3 and 4 the refined subdivision.

Figure 2 Green Belt in Wokingham Borough and Bracknell Forest Borough and Strategic Parcels for the Part 1 Strategic Review

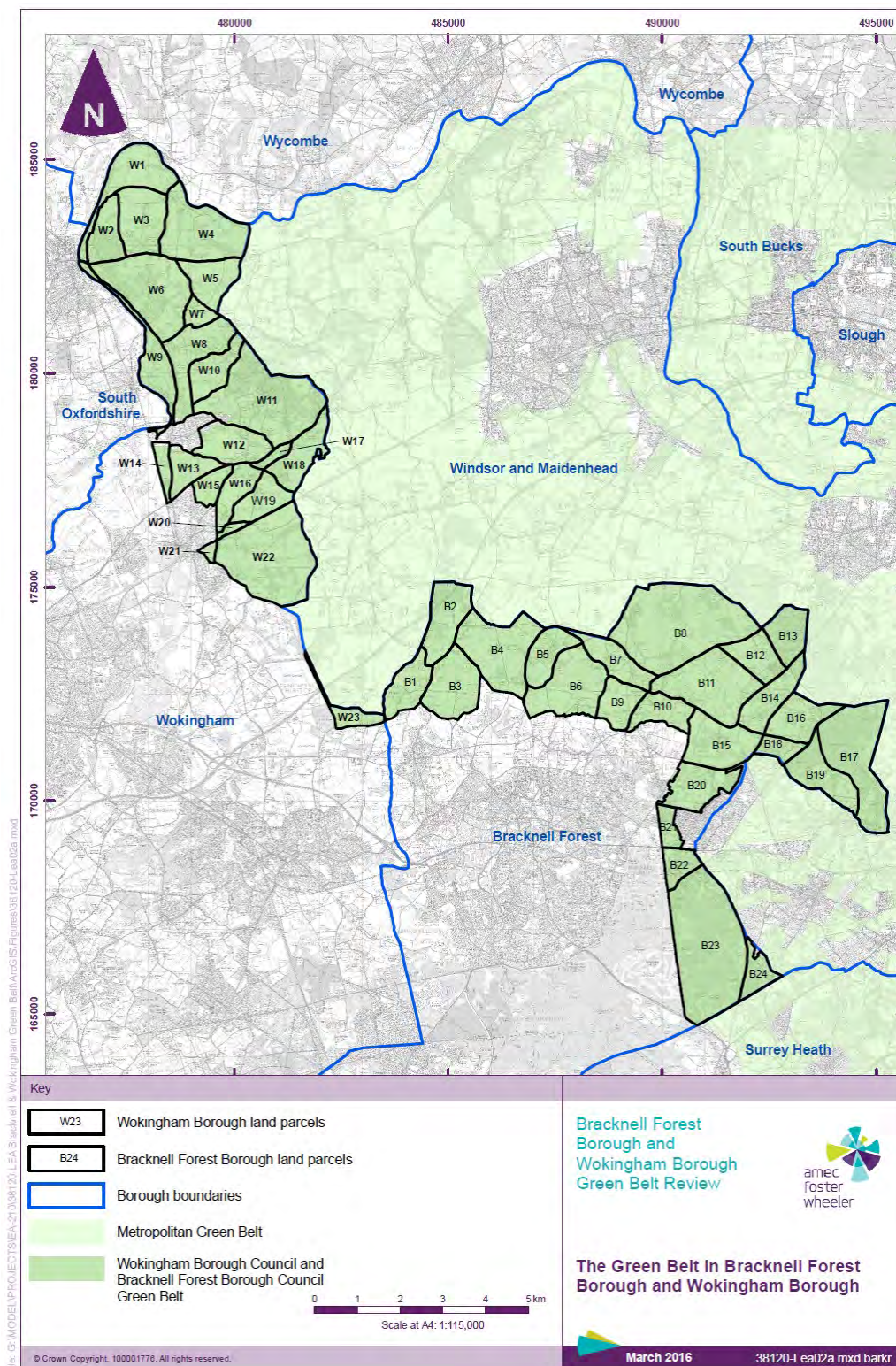


Figure 3 Wokingham Borough: Refined Parcels for the Part 2 Refined Review

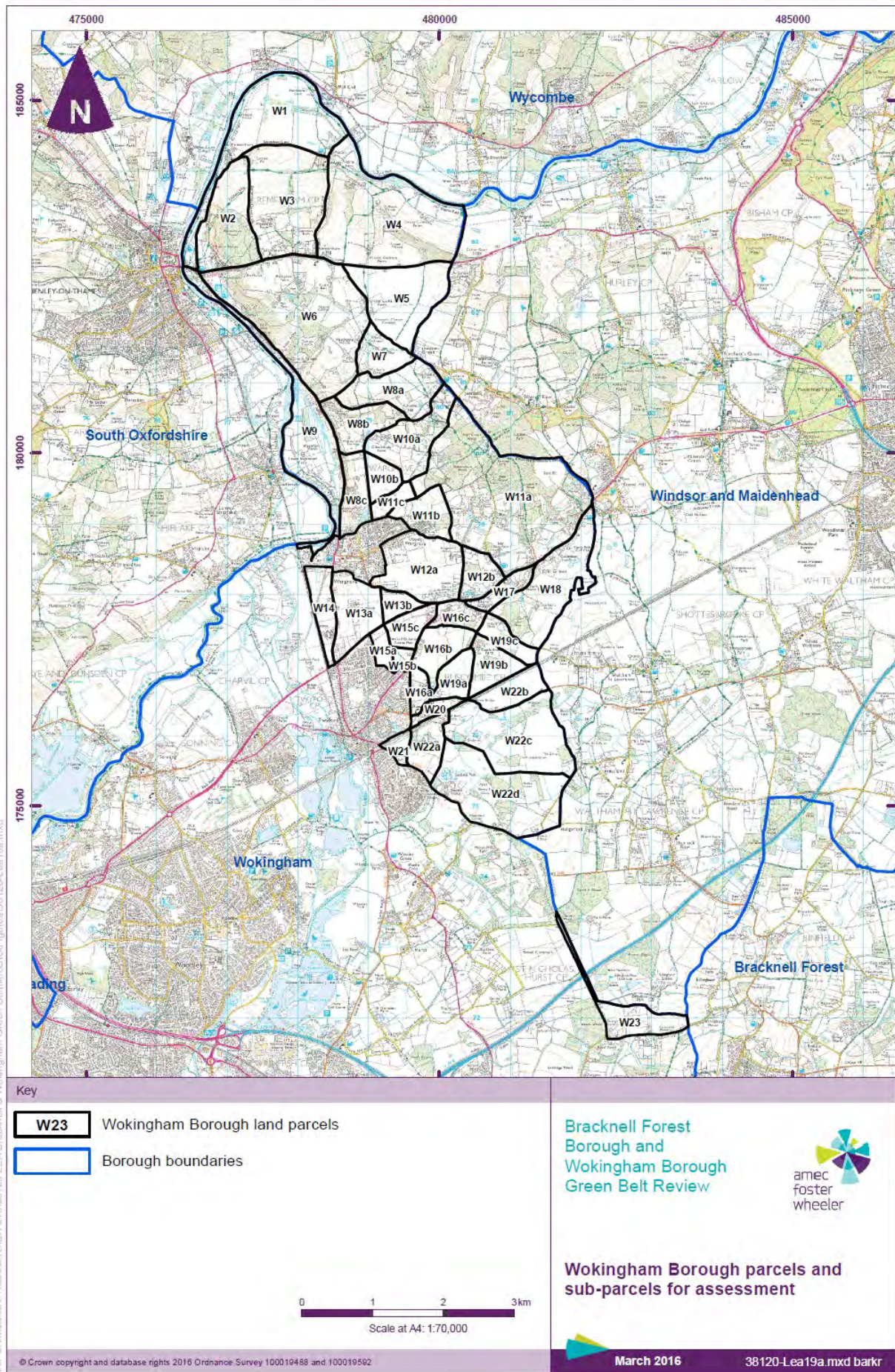
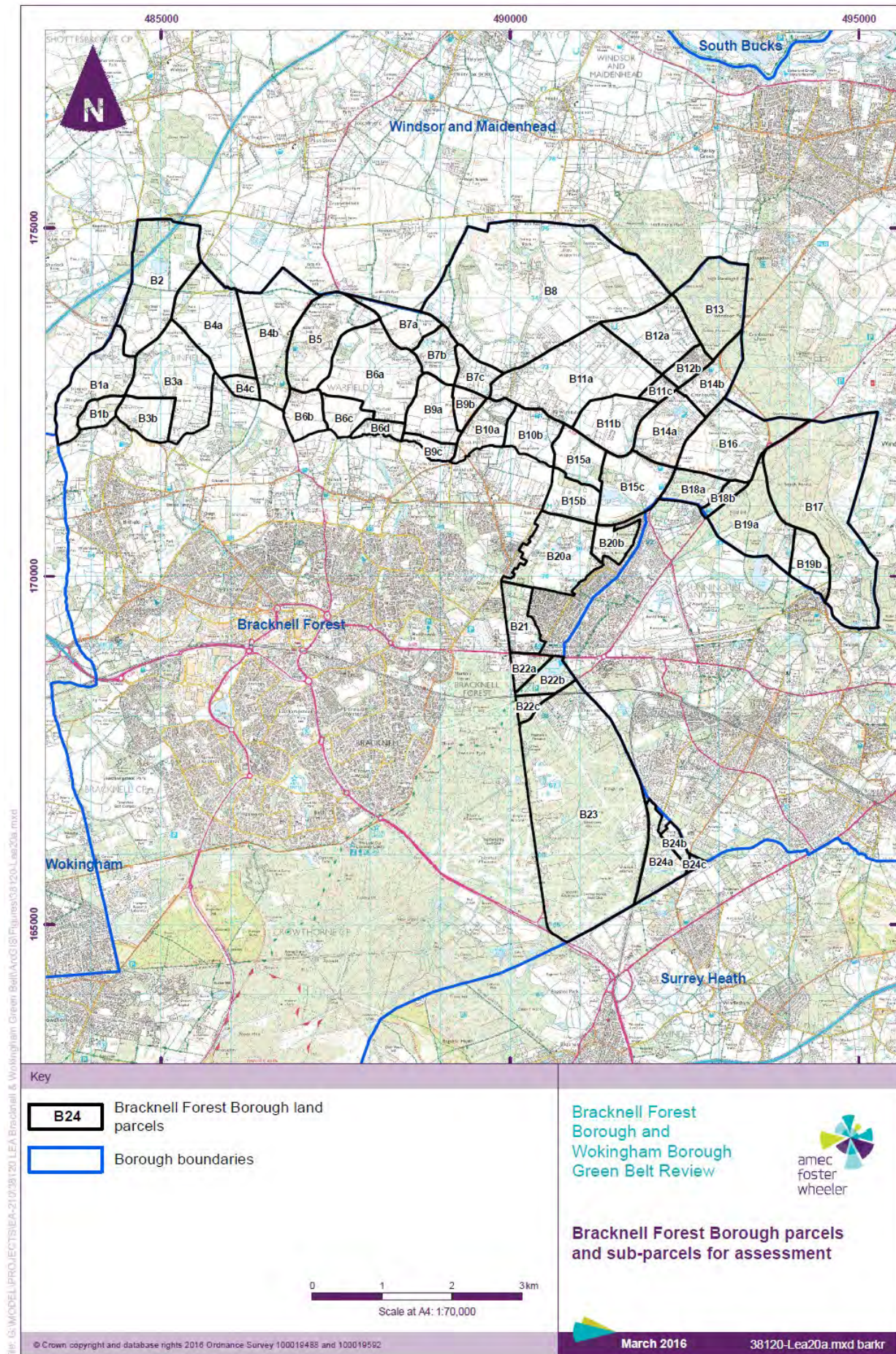


Figure 4 Bracknell Forest Borough: Refined Parcels for the Part 2 Refined Review



4. Table 1 sets out the criteria by which each parcel has been assessed, using professional judgement to arrive at a conclusion on the relative contribution, both against individual Green Belt purposes and overall, of each parcel, at strategic and more refined local scales (where subdivision of strategic parcels was necessary and possible). Table 2 sets out the colouring assessment used to summarise the results of the assessment.² None of the judgements on the relative contribution of the parcel to Green Belt purposes are scored or weighted and the overall assessment reflects professional judgement on the contribution of the parcel to Green Belt purposes as a whole. Thus a Significant Contribution in respect of separation for example, and a Limited Contribution in all other respects, can lead to an overall Significant Contribution reflecting the parcel's prime purpose. Equally, contributions across a number of purposes may still only lead to a judgement of a Contribution overall.

Table 1 Green Belt Assessment Survey Proforma

Green Belt Purpose (NPPF para 80)	Definition	Criteria for assessment
To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	<p>Sprawl – spread out over a large area in an untidy or irregular way (Oxford Dictionary online).</p> <p>Large built-up areas – in the context of this study this is Greater London but also towns within and adjoining the Green Belt – Bracknell, Ascot, Henley-on-Thames, Twyford, Wargrave, Windsor and Maidenhead.</p> <p>(Note for the Part 2 Refined Review, all built up areas within and adjacent to Wokingham Borough and Bracknell Forest Borough are considered).</p>	<p><i>Part 1 Strategic Review</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What role does the land play in preventing the spread of development outwards from larger settlements? Is there evidence of ribbon development along transport corridors? Is the parcel part of a wider group of parcels that directly act to prevent urban sprawl? Does the Green Belt prevent another settlement being absorbed into the large built-up area? <p><i>Part 2 Refined Review</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would potential development represent an outward extension of the urban area, result in a physical connection between urban areas, or lead to the danger of a subsequent coalescence between such settlements? If released from the Green Belt could enduring long-term settlement boundaries be established? Does the parcel sensibly round-off an existing built-up area to help create good built form?
To prevent neighbouring towns, from merging into one another	<p>Neighbouring towns – Bracknell, Ascot, Henley-on-Thames, Twyford, Wargrave, Windsor and Maidenhead.</p> <p>Merging – this can be by way of general sprawl (above) or;</p> <p>Ribbon development – the building of houses along a main road, especially one leading out of a town or village (Oxford Dictionary Online). This includes historical patterns of, or current pressures for, the spread of all forms of development along movement corridors, particularly major roads.</p>	<p><i>Part 1 Strategic Review</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What role does the land play in the separation of towns? Does the parcel lie directly between two settlements and form all or part of a gap between them? What is the width of the gap and are there significant features which provide physical and visual separation? Are there intervening settlements or other development on roads which contribute to a sense of connection of towns? <p><i>Part 2 Refined Review</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would potential development in the parcel appear to result in the merging of towns or compromise the separation of towns physically? Would potential development of the parcel be a significant step leading towards coalescence of two settlements?

Green Belt Purpose (NPPF para 80)	Definition	Criteria for assessment
To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	<p>Encroachment – ‘a gradual advance beyond usual or acceptable limits’ (Oxford Dictionary online).</p> <p>The countryside – open land with an absence of built development and urbanising influences, and characterised by rural land uses including agriculture and forestry.</p> <p>Openness – absence of built development or other urbanising elements (i.e. not openness in a landscape character sense which concerns topography and woodland / hedgerow cover).</p>	<p><i>Part 1 Strategic Review</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the parcel have the character of open countryside? What is the extent of existing urbanising influences? Has the parcel been affected by a substantial increase in the mass and scale of adjacent urbanising built form? Do strong boundaries exist to contain development? Is there any evidence of significant containment by urbanising built form or severance from the adjacent Green Belt?? Has there been incremental erosion of the open character of the land on the edge of the settlement (so that it appears as part of the settlement)? <p><i>Part 2 Refined Review</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there clear, strong and robust boundaries to contain development and prevent encroachment in the long term?
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns	<p>Historic town – settlement or place with historic features identified in local policy or through conservation area or other historic designation(s) – in the context of this study these are Henley-on-Thames, Wargrave, Twyford, Windsor and Maidenhead.</p> <p>(Note for the Part 2 Refined Review, all built up areas within and adjacent to Wokingham Borough and Bracknell Forest Borough are considered).</p>	<p><i>Part 1 Strategic Review</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the relationship of the land with the town? Is there a direct visual connection between the historic components (typically the core) and the Green Belt context? Does the parcel make a positive contribution to the setting of the historic town such as providing a gateway, viewpoint, or historic landscape? <p><i>Part 2 Refined Review</i></p> <p>No additional criteria used.</p>
To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land	Where development in open countryside is likely to render previously developed land less attractive to develop,	<p><i>Part 1 Strategic Review</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the presence of the Green Belt serve to promote the re-use of land which otherwise might be neglected in favour of greenfield land? <p><i>Part 2 Refined Review</i></p> <p>No additional criteria used.</p>

Table 2 The Colouring Assessment for Individual Green Belt Purposes and Cumulative Contribution

The parcel makes a **Significant Contribution** to (a) Green Belt purpose(s) and release (either in whole or part) is only likely to be considered where particular material planning considerations exist to justify this.

SC

The parcel makes a **Contribution** to (a) Green Belt purpose(s) and release (either in whole or part) would need to be balanced against various material planning considerations.

C

The parcel makes a **Limited Contribution** to (a) Green Belt purpose(s) indicating that release (either in whole or part) could be considered in the context of other material planning considerations.

LC

² Note: Tables 1 and 2 have been amended in light of comments made through the consultation on study methodology.

Part 1 Strategic Review of the Green Belt

5. The results of the strategic review of Green Belt purposes are shown in Figures 5 and 6. These are maps of the overall contribution to Green Belt purposes which is a composite judgement derived from the detailed analysis of contribution to the five Green Belt purposes which is set out in Appendices A and B to the main report. None of the judgements on the relative contribution of the parcel to Green Belt purposes are scored or weighted and the overall assessment reflects professional judgement on the contribution of the parcel to Green Belt purposes as a whole. Thus a Significant Contribution in respect of separation for example, and a Limited Contribution in all other respects, can lead to an overall Significant Contribution reflecting the parcel's prime purpose. Equally, contributions across a number of purposes may still only lead to a judgement of a Contribution overall.

Commentary (Wokingham Borough, Figure 5)

6. All parcels at this scale are assessed as making at least an overall Contribution to Green Belt purposes, largely based on preventing encroachment into the countryside, particularly to the remoter east which is nevertheless accessible from settlements to the west. Parcels situated to the east of the River Thames and between Twyford and Wargrave are assessed as making a Significant Contribution to Green Belt purposes overall, based on the role of protecting the setting of Henley-on-Thames and in maintaining the separation of Twyford and Wargrave.
7. No parcels have been assessed as having an overall Limited Contribution to Green Belt purposes.
8. Strategically, the Green Belt within Wokingham Borough is part of the wider Metropolitan Green Belt between Henley-on-Thames and Twyford and Maidenhead.

Figure 5 Overall Strategic Contribution to Green Belt Purposes: Wokingham Borough

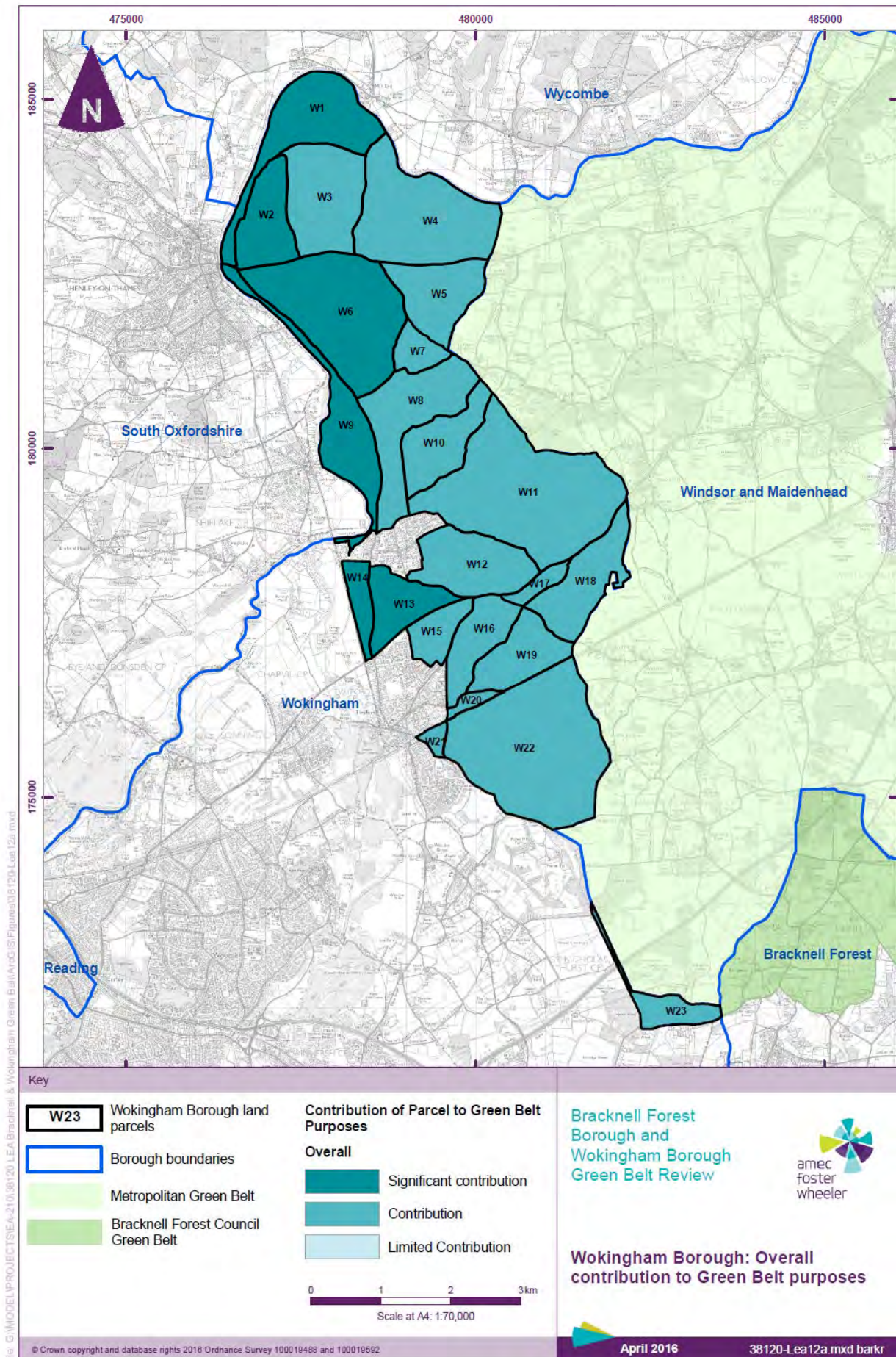
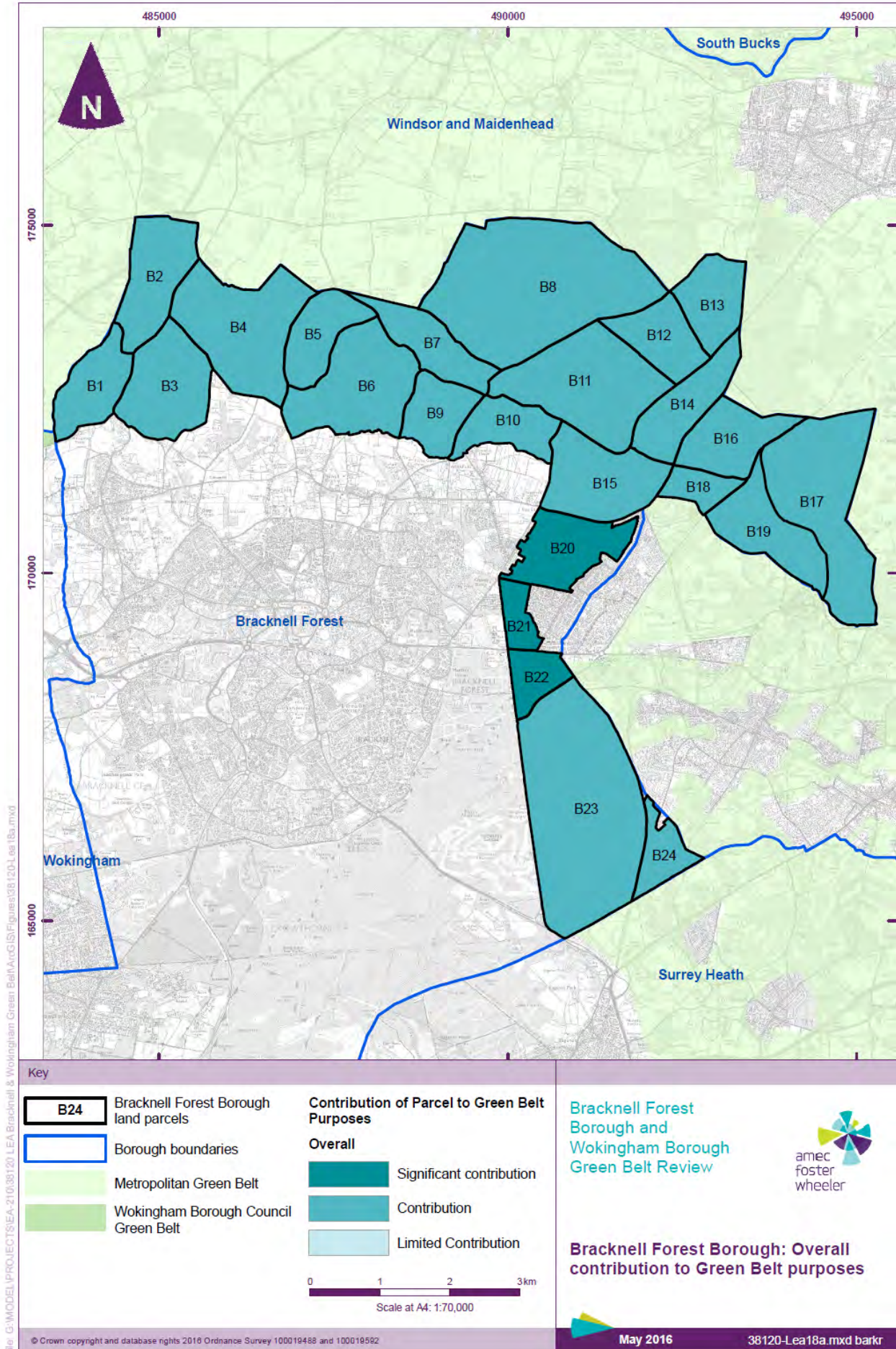


Figure 6 Overall Strategic Contribution to Green Belt Purposes: Bracknell Forest Borough



Commentary (Bracknell Forest Borough, Figure 6)

9. All parcels at this scale are assessed as making at least an overall Contribution to Green Belt purposes, largely based on preventing encroachment into the countryside which is highly accessible from adjoining settlements to the south. Parcels situated between Bracknell and North Ascot are assessed as overall making a Significant Contribution to Green Belt purposes, being the remaining area between Bracknell and North Ascot.
10. No parcels have been assessed as having an overall Limited Contribution to Green Belt purposes.
11. Strategically, the Green Belt within Bracknell Forest Borough is part of the wider Metropolitan Green Belt between Bracknell and Windsor and satellite towns such as Ascot (in its various parts).

Overview of contribution of the Green Belt in Wokingham Borough and Bracknell Forest Borough

Wokingham Borough

12. The Green Belt in Wokingham Borough fulfils its role as part of the outer extent of the Metropolitan Green Belt and performs a number of specific roles: protecting the countryside from urban encroachment across its extent, maintaining the setting of Henley-on-Thames to the east of the River Thames (and more generally the Chiltern Hills AONB to the north), and also a significant separation role between Twyford and Wargrave whilst also protecting the setting of Twyford. There are no parcels which do not make at least a contribution to one or more of the purposes of Green Belt, and many perform multiple functions. In summary, the role of the Green Belt in Wokingham Borough is as follows:
 - ▶ **Checking the sprawl of large built-up areas** – the Green Belt makes at least a contribution, and in some cases a significant contribution, to containing development within its current boundaries, relating to Twyford and Wargrave and to a lesser extent Henley-on-Thames which is bounded to the east by the River Thames.
 - ▶ **Preventing neighbouring towns from merging** – The Green Belt makes a significant contribution to the separation of Twyford and Wargrave (acknowledging this to be of more local significance given that Wargrave is not formally a town¹).
 - ▶ **Safeguarding the countryside from encroachment** – the Green Belt makes at least a contribution, and in some cases a significant contribution, to limiting development in the open countryside, maintaining its openness. This widely applicable role reflects pressures for change associated with increased accessibility to nearby towns.
 - ▶ **Preserving the setting and character of historic towns** – the Green Belt makes a significant contribution for both Henley-on-Thames and to a lesser extent Twyford which has significant amounts of new development on its outskirts which largely conceals the historic core.
 - ▶ **Assisting in urban regeneration** – the Green Belt makes a limited contribution to urban regeneration, reflecting the character of the settlements within or adjacent to the Green Belt.
13. Overall, whilst the Green Belt is on the periphery of the Metropolitan Green Belt it is no less important in meeting certain strategic purposes, although these are often more generalised. The nature of the Green Belt in these areas means that protection against encroachment is its prime function, and to a lesser extent separation, sprawl and historic setting. In common with other areas of the Metropolitan Green Belt (and indeed country-wide), the accessibility of rural and semi-rural areas through high levels of car ownership creates development pressure which is likely to be increasing. The Green Belt overall is considered to be fulfilling its purposes.

Bracknell Forest Borough

14. The strategic role of the Green Belt in Bracknell Forest Borough fulfils its role as part of the outer extent of the Metropolitan Green Belt and performs a number of specific roles: it supports the wider Green Belt to the north and east of the Borough in preventing the encroachment of built development into the open

¹ In the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy Policy CP9, Wargrave is referred to as a 'modest development location', reflecting the level of existing or proposed services.

countryside, as well as preventing the merger of Bracknell and North Ascot in what is a particularly narrow gap between the two settlements. To the north of Bracknell the Green Belt is off-set from the built-up area but nevertheless under its influence through accessibility. The Green Belt therefore performs a clear role in preventing the erosion of openness through additional development which would be difficult to achieve through general policies for the countryside. There are no instances where the overall role of the Green Belt is limited to the extent that it makes no contribution to Green Belt purposes as defined in the NPPF. In summary the role of the Green Belt in Bracknell Forest Borough is as follows:

- ▶ **Checking the sprawl of large built-up areas** - the Green Belt makes at least a contribution to and in some cases a significant contribution to containing development (notably in the very narrow gap between Bracknell and North Ascot) within its current boundaries.
- ▶ **Preventing neighbouring towns from merging** - The Green Belt makes a significant contribution to this purpose in the very narrow gap between Bracknell and North Ascot.
- ▶ **Safeguarding the countryside from encroachment** - the Green Belt generally makes a contribution, to limiting development in the open countryside which is readily accessible from the built-up areas of Bracknell and Ascot immediately to the south.
- ▶ **Preserving the setting and character of historic towns** - the Green Belt makes a limited contribution in this respect, being unrelated to an historic town.
- ▶ **Assisting in urban regeneration** - the Green Belt makes a limited contribution to urban regeneration, reflecting the character of the settlements within or adjacent to the Green Belt.

15. Overall, whilst the Green Belt is on the periphery of the Metropolitan Green Belt it is no less important in meeting certain strategic purposes, although these are often more generalised. The nature of the Green Belt in these areas means that protection against encroachment is its prime function, and to a lesser extent separation, sprawl and historic setting. In common with other areas of the Metropolitan Green Belt (and indeed country-wide), the accessibility of rural and semi-rural areas through high levels of car ownership creates development pressure which is likely to be increasing. The Green Belt overall is considered to be fulfilling its purposes.

Part 2 Refined Review of the Green Belt

16. The results of Refined Review of Green Belt purposes are shown in Figures 7 and 8.

Commentary (Wokingham Borough, Figure 7)

17. Specification of finer-grained parcels substantiates the conclusions of the strategic review of Green Belt purposes, where land to the east of Wargrave and Tywford is identified as making a contribution to Green Belt purposes, this being significant in relation to land in the vicinity of Ruscombe which protects the setting of the village, and for land to the east of Twyford (east of the B3018 Waltham Road). In respect of the latter, any development in this location would create a sense of unrestricted sprawl into open countryside. There are no instances where the overall role of the Green Belt is limited to the extent that it makes no contribution to Green Belt purposes as defined in the NPPF.

Figure 7 Refined Review of the Overall Contribution to Green Belt Purposes: Wokingham Borough

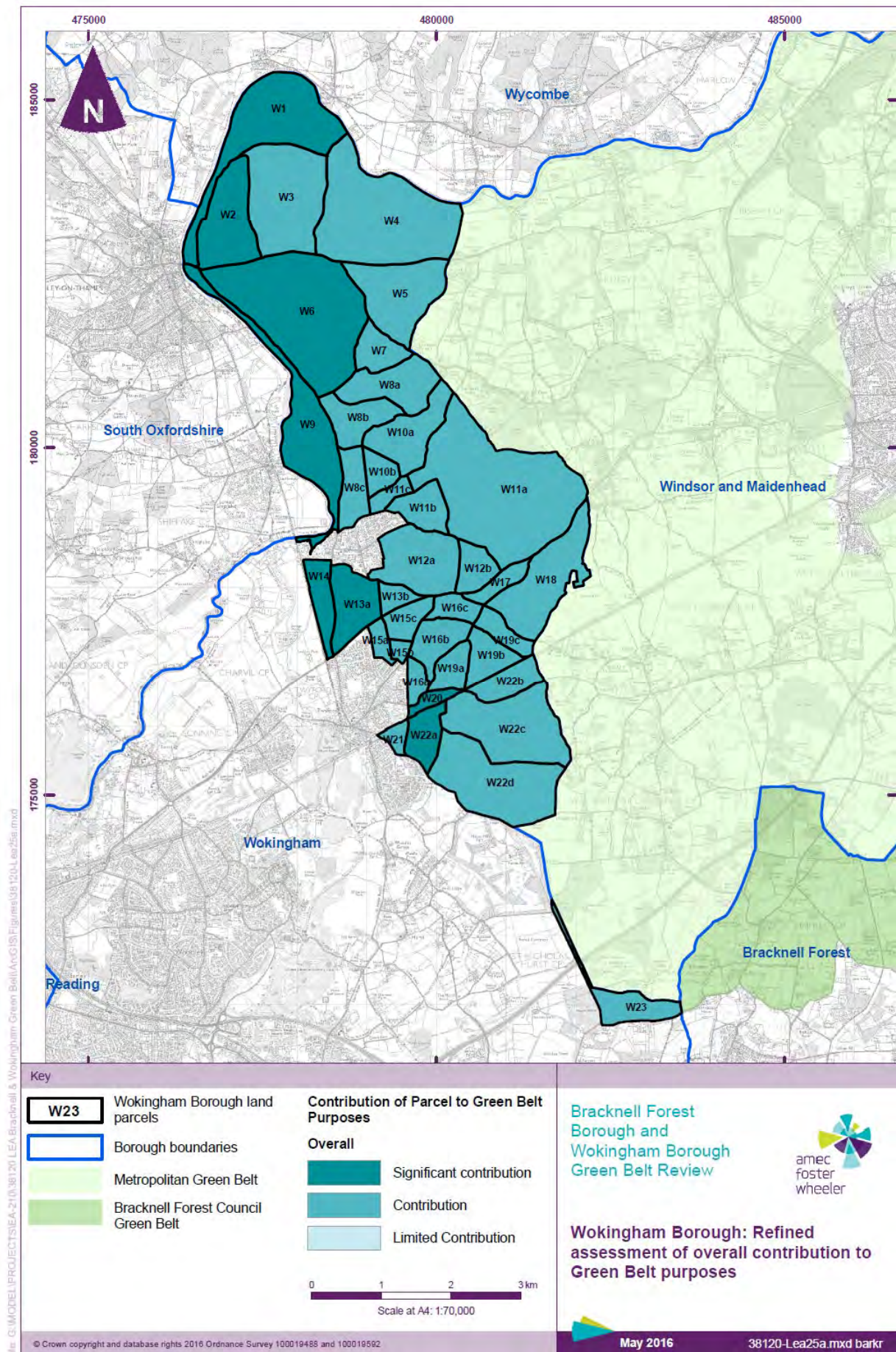
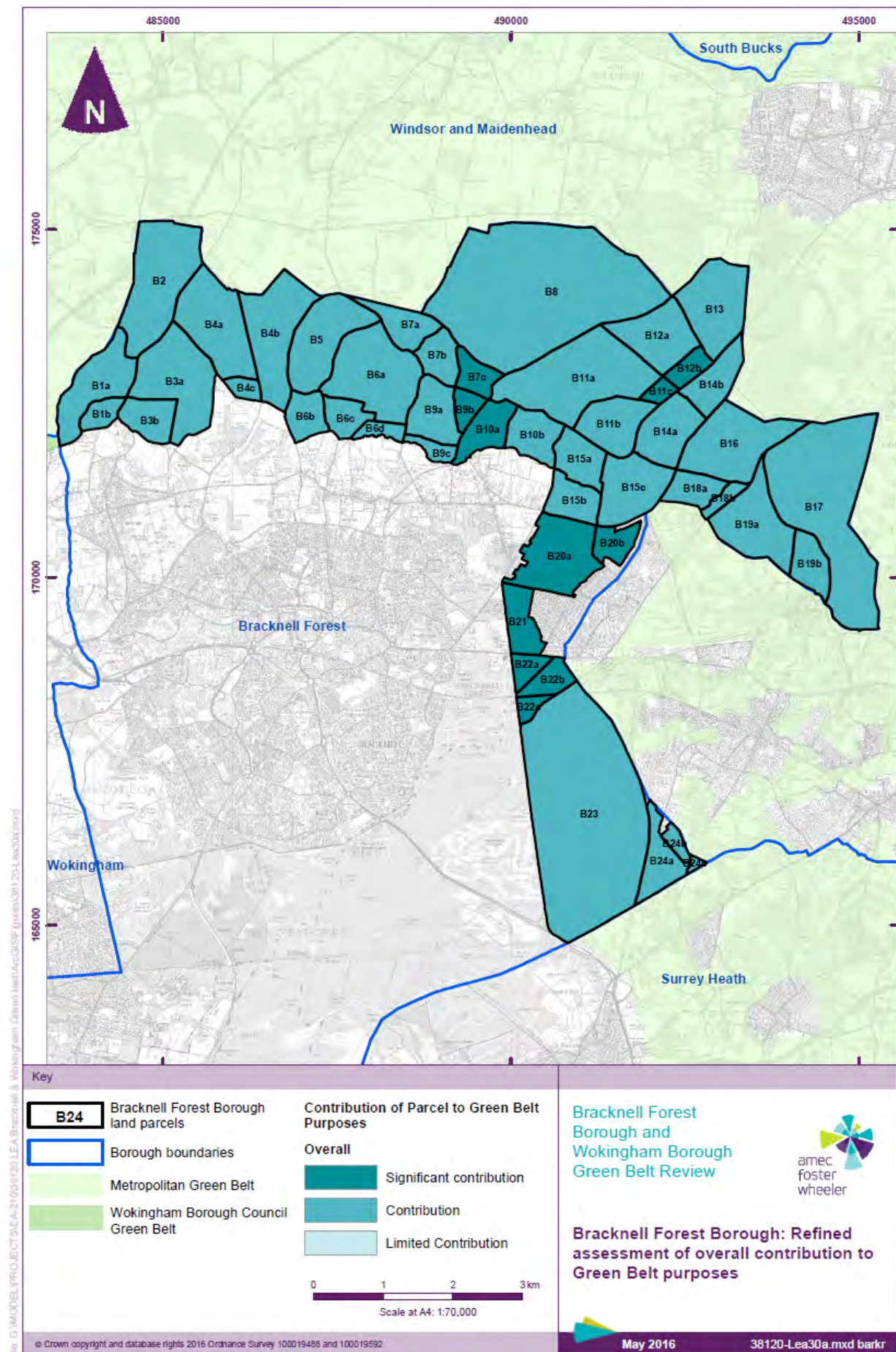


Figure 8 Refined Review of the Overall Contribution to Green Belt Purposes: Bracknell Forest Borough



Commentary (Bracknell Forest Borough, Figure 8)

18. Under the refined review of the parcels, the purposes of the Green Belt were of at least equal significance to fulfilling Green Belt purposes and in some cases more significant, reflecting local circumstances. Thus the narrow gap between Bracknell and Ascot is similarly identified as making a very significant contribution to Green Belt purposes, as well as land in the vicinity of the villages of Maiden's Green, Brockhill and Cranbourne where there is some evidence of pressures for encroachment into the open countryside as a result of incremental land use change. Identification of this more significant role serves to reinforce the conclusions made in respect of the Part 1 Strategic Review which concluded that this broad area of Green Belt is vulnerable to incremental encroachment, albeit of a diffuse character, which over time can erode a sense of openness. There are no instances where the role of the Green Belt is limited to the extent that it makes no contribution to Green Belt purposes as defined in the NPPF.

Part 3 Review of Bracknell Forest Borough's Green Belt Villages

19. Part 3 of the Review considers the case for in-setting various settlements within Bracknell Forest Borough. This exercise is required by the NPPF to determine whether there remains a case for keeping villages washed over by the Green Belt, by virtue of their contribution to it in respect of helping to maintain its openness. The NPPF does not say that there should not be an envelope for villages washed over by the Green Belt, and in practice this helps to ensure that the villages continue to be able to develop in a sensitive way. This will promote sustainable development that will help meet the needs of local communities through appropriate infill and/or meeting local needs, for example. Table 3 summarises the results of the exercise.

Table 3 Bracknell Forest Borough's Green Belt Villages: Potential for In-setting

Settlement	Analysis and Recommendation ⁴
Brock Hill	<p>The village is of a very small scale with a strong visual and physical connection with the surrounding countryside. It is of a largely open character, being only one dwelling deep, with long back gardens directly bordering open countryside.</p> <p>In this location, Green Belt designation contributes to preventing encroachment into open countryside. In-setting and therefore potential further development would impinge upon this.</p> <p>Recommendation: Do not in-set and retain current boundary.</p>
Cheapside	<p>The village in this location has an open character and a relationship with the wider Greenbelt to the north adjacent to and across Water Splash Lane.</p> <p>In this location, Green Belt designation contributes to preventing encroachment into open countryside. Whilst the degree of openness is variable across the village, including modest office buildings at Cheapside Court, this is not of a sufficient scale to warrant in-setting.</p> <p>Recommendation: Do not in-set and retain current boundary.</p>
Cranbourne (Lovel Road)	<p>The village is clearly of an open character which is congruent with the wider largely undeveloped landscape. As such further development through extension of increasing density would compromise this relationship. Green Belt designation has probably maintained the open character of the village and the sense of a clear relationship between the settlement and its setting in open countryside.</p> <p>Recommendation: Do not in-set and retain current boundary.</p>
Maiden's Green/ Winkfield Street	<p>Green Belt designation has probably served to maintain the open character of the settlement, preventing excessive infilling and thereby retaining its rural character. This connection would potentially be lost by in-setting the village, and thereby potentially increasing its density.</p> <p>Recommendation: Do not in-set. Potential opportunity to 'round-off' the village envelope to the north of Church Road opposite Old Vicarage Cottage (thus allowing modest infill) without significant harm to the Green Belt in this locality.</p>
North Street (Cranbourne)	<p>Notwithstanding the existence of relatively dense aspects to this part of Cranbourne (principally the Cranbourne Hall Mobile Home Park which is reasonably well screened from roads on two sides), the overall character of the village is an open one, with reasonably strong connections to the wider countryside throughout. In-setting the village, or part of it such as the Mobile Home Park, would potentially lose this connection and allow more dense development, thereby damaging the Green Belt in this location through urbanisation.</p> <p>Recommendation: Do not in-set. Potential opportunity to extend the village envelope to the west of North Street where there has been redevelopment of a previously developed site (now called Montague Park).</p>
Prince Consort Drive	<p>There is no sense that this is anything more than a housing estate, further development of which through intensification would alter the character of the development.</p> <p>Recommendation: Do not in-set and retain current boundary.</p>

⁴ NPPF para 86: "If it is necessary to prevent development in a village primarily because of the important contribution which the open character of the village makes to the openness of the Green Belt, the village should be included in the Green Belt. If, however, the character of the village needs to be protected for other reasons, other means should be used, such as conservation area or normal development management policies, and the village should be excluded from the Green Belt."

Settlement	Analysis and Recommendation ⁴
Church Road, Winkfield	The compact character of the village, focused on the A330 Church Road, helps to retain a high degree of connection with the surrounding countryside, in turn contributing to the openness of the Green Belt in this location. In-setting would potentially alter this relationship. Recommendation: Do not in-set and retain current boundary.
Woodside (Woodside Road/Kiln Lane)	The village is of a generally compact character, but of relatively low density, which maintains a strong connection with the open countryside in which it sits, in turn contributing to the openness of the Green belt in this location. In-setting would potentially alter this relationship. Recommendation: Do not in-set and retain current boundary.

20. The survey of the character of the eight Green Belt villages has revealed that, notwithstanding the effects of some relatively recent development, they largely retain their open character and therefore make a positive contribution to the wider Green Belt. This reflects their typically linear, low density built form, with frequent glimpsed views to the wider countryside which typically adjoins back gardens. There is no clear case for in-setting of the villages and thereby creating a new development boundary within which in-fill development could occur, although in two cases re-definition of the village envelope could be considered. This accords with policy in the NPPF which does not preclude the definition of a village envelope, even if a village remains washed over by the Green Belt, which would allow for limited infilling, thereby complying with para 89(5) which allows for *“limited infilling in villages, and limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the Local Plan.”*
21. In some locations in proximity to the built-up area, the Green Belt could benefit from positive land management (in light of para 81 of the NPPF) in order to help address some of the typical negative characteristics associated with the so-called ‘urban fringe’. These include:
- ▶ erosion of landscape structure through the removal and decay of field boundaries;
 - ▶ unmanaged hedgerows leading to ‘gappy’ boundaries;
 - ▶ unmanaged woodland resulting in poor structure and reduced opportunities for healthy succession;
 - ▶ fragmentation of land holdings associated with sale and lease for horsiculture;
 - ▶ changes in land management associated with land help for ‘hope value’ leading to scrub encroachment;
 - ▶ unsympathetic, hard urban edges associated with estate development which abuts open farmland.

22. Conclusions and recommendations

1. Across both Boroughs, Green Belt parcels make at least a Contribution to one or more Green Belt purposes and no areas have been identified which merit removal from the Green Belt.
2. Consideration of any extension to the Green Belt in either Wokingham Borough or Bracknell Forest Borough would need to be considered through a further study.
3. There is no clear case for the in-setting of Green Belt villages in Bracknell Forest Borough but there may be a case for a re-examination of the village envelopes.
4. There are opportunities for more positive land management of the Green Belt which in some areas reflects typical urban fringe character.

Consultation and the Duty to Co-operate

23. Consultation on the methodology for the Green Belt Review was undertaken to ensure that key interested parties (adjoining local authorities and Town and Parish Councils within Bracknell Forest Borough and Wokingham Borough) were given an early opportunity to comment on the approach being adopted. A number of helpful observations were made and these were used to adapt the methodology accordingly.



