Draft Buckinghamshire Green Belt Assessment

Appendix 7: Irreplaceable habitat

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AECOM

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Introduction

A7.1.   This appendix supplements Section 5 of the main report and specifically deals with Stage 5 of the footnote 7 assessment method, namely assessment of AAs in terms of irreplaceable habitat constraint. This appendix covers:

- Approach and method

- Outcomes

Approach and method

Introduction

A7.2.   This section covers the following:

- A summary of the approach taken

- Detailed discussion of the approach taken

Summary

A7.3.   As an initial point it is important to note that irreplaceable habitat overwhelmingly means ancient woodland in the context of the study area. A secondary consideration is then the limited presence of veteran trees outside of ancient woodlands (there is also data showing their location).

A7.4.   The first step is to run **GIS analysis** to understand the spatial relationship between AAs and irreplaceable habitat, in terms of intersect and proximity. With regards to AAs that entirely or mostly comprise ancient woodland it is a clearly the case that the constraint is such that the AA is not grey belt.

A7.5.   However, the situation is not clear in respect of AAs that partially intersect ancient woodland or include veteran trees. Also, the situation is not clear in respect of AAs that do not intersect ancient woodland, but which are potentially constrained on account of close proximity (or, indeed, a close spatial relationship, e.g. an AA might be surrounded by ancient woodland).

A7.6.   In these instances a conclusion on the degree of constraint affecting an AA can only be reached following supplementary **qualitative assessment**.

A7.7.   This is for two reasons:

- There are no nationally established decision rules regarding intersect with or proximity to irreplaceable habitat precluding development or acting as a significant constraint potentially to the extent of precluding grey belt.

- It is appropriate to consider wider qualitative factors beyond proximity in light of an understanding of potential 'impact pathways'. This is not to the same extent as that discussed above under 'Biodiversity', but the matter of impact pathways cannot be ignored; for example, it is appropriate to take account of whether an ancient woodland is accessible.

A7.8. Reliance on qualitative assessment means that AA-specific assessments must be read in order to understand the full reasoning behind assessment findings. However, this appendix aims to provide insights.

Detailed discussion

A7.9. To begin with, there are 8 AAs that entirely comprise an ancient woodland and so are judged **constrained** on this basis.

A7.10. A further 22 AAs are then also judged **constrained** on account of significant intersect with ancient woodland and potentially with additional factors also taken into account. Breaking this down further:

- For 6 of the AAs the percentage intersect is greater than 50% such that the decision is quite clear cut. Also, in each instance it is possible to identify a wider factor indicative of constraint, with this typically being that the remaining part of the AA includes significant priority habitat.

- For 9 of the AAs the percentage intersect is between 33% and 48%. In each case it is possible to identify a wider factor indicative of constraint, for example wider priority habitat within the AA, wider ancient woodland adjacent to or in close proximity to the AA or the fact that the ancient woodland within the AA comprises a Local Wildlife Site (LWS).

- For the remaining 7 AAs the 'constrained' conclusion is flagged as 'marginal'. The percentage intersect of these AAs with ancient woodland ranges from 16% to 29% and wider factors have a strong bearing on the conclusion. For example, in the case of the two AAs that comprise the least amount of ancient woodland: in one case the remainder of the AA is non-ancient woodland in its entirety; and in the other case the ancient woodland comprises a LWS and there is significant priority habitat across the remainder of the AA including a second LWS.

A7.11. A further 66 AAs are then judged **provisionally constrained**. This is on the basis of quite a wide range of factors that need not be summarised here in full (see the AA-specific assessments), but points to note include:

- 24 intersect ancient woodland with the percentage intersect ranging from 1% to 15%. Taking the three AAs that intersect by 1% as examples:

  – One also abuts a second ancient woodland and comprises a registered park and garden such that there are several veteran trees along with extensive wider priority habitat.

  – One is notably located in between numerous ancient woodlands.

  – One abuts two ancient woodlands to a significant extent, and one of these is accessible.

- 36 are adjacent to one or more ancient woodlands.

- 4 are not adjacent with the distance to an ancient woodland ranging from 5m to 65m. Focusing the AA classed as provisionally constrained despite being located 65m from an ancient woodland, the AA entirely comprises priority habitat.

A7.12. The remaining 271 AA are judged **unconstrained**:

- For 29 the conclusion is 'marginal', and within this:

  - 8 intersect ancient woodland by between 1% and 2.5%. In each case there are limited wider factors suggestive of concern.

  - A further 14 are adjacent to an ancient woodland but to a limited extent and/or there are limited wider factors suggestive of concern.

  - A further 6 are within 50m of an ancient woodland but there are limited wider factors suggestive of concern.

  - One is distant from an ancient woodland but includes 7 veteran trees and wider priority habitat (it comprises a registered park and garden).

- A further 33 AAs warrant an assessment on the basis of proximity to an ancient woodland and/or containing one or more veteran trees, but in each case, concerns are judged **unconstrained** factors are taken into account. The greatest number of veteran trees intersecting an AA is 2.

- The final 209 are beyond 50m of an ancient woodland and do not contain any veteran trees. These AAs are clearly **unconstrained** and the assessment for each simply records "no notable constraint".
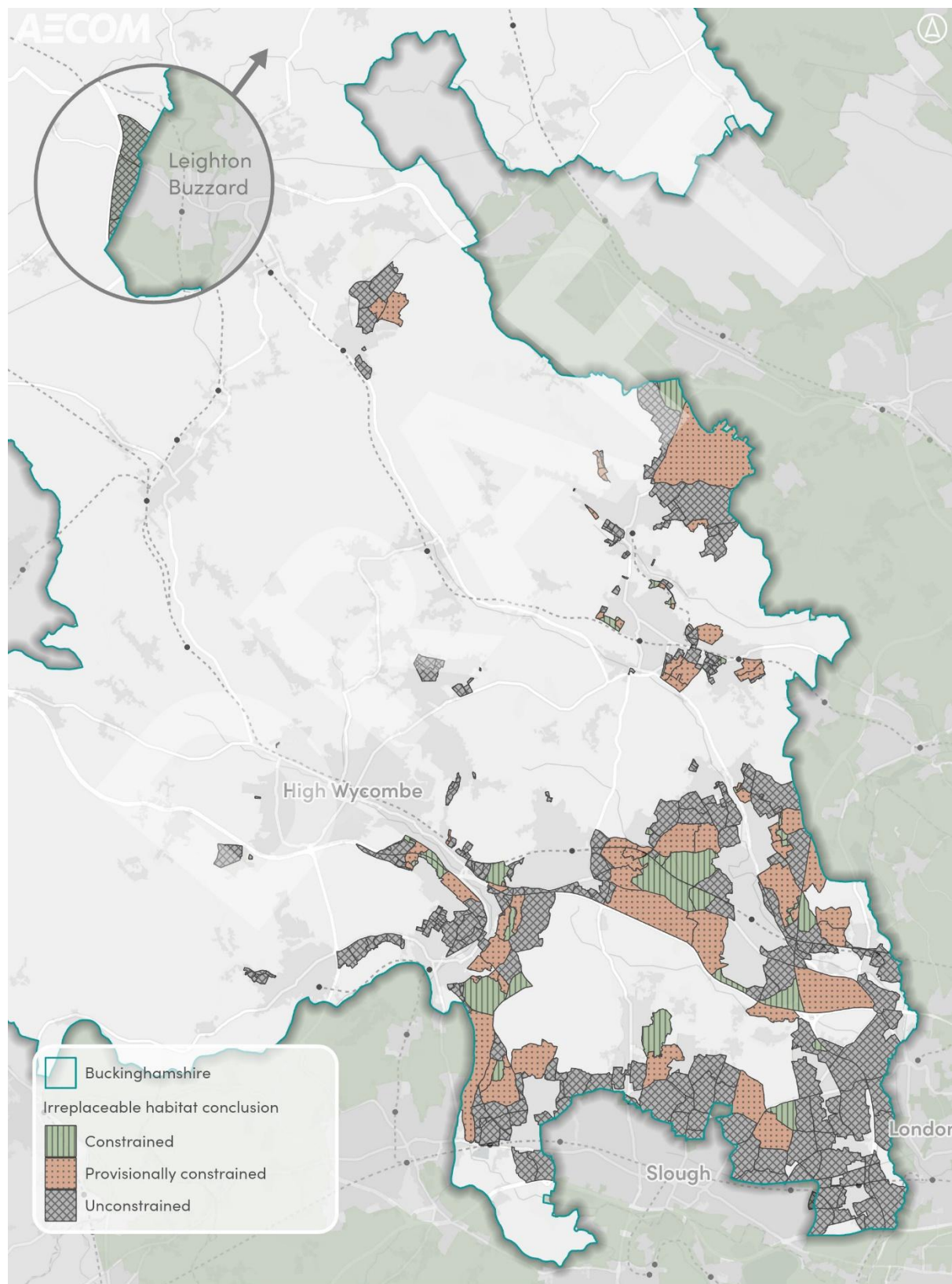
Outcomes

A7.13. Of the 369 AAs assessed at this stage:

- 31 AAs are **constrained** and so are ruled out at this stage of the footnote 7 assessment process as not grey belt. The conclusion is flagged as marginal for 7 of these AAs.

- 66 AAs are **provisionally constrained** such that they are taken forward to Stage 5 but can ultimately only be 'provisional grey belt' or 'not grey belt' where a final decision must also factor in the subsequent footnote 7 assessment stages and also the purposes assessment.

- The remaining 272 AAs are **unconstrained** such that they are taken forward to Stage 6, and all three ultimate conclusions (not grey belt, provisional grey belt, grey belt) remain a possibility subject to wider factors. The conclusion is flagged as marginal for 29 of these AAs.

A7.14. Detailed assessment findings for each AA are presented in Section 6 of the main report which signposts to assessment proformas in Appendix 10.

Table A7.1: Irreplaceable habitat constraint assessment findings

Conclusion	Implication for grey belt	Number of AAs
Constrained	Not grey belt	30
Provisionally constrained	Can be provisional grey belt	66
Unconstrained	Can be grey belt	271

Figure A7.1: Irreplaceable habitat constraint assessment findings