

8.13 The borough is characterised by an extensive network of open spaces, from the large expanse of Green Belt land, countryside and woodlands in the north, Colne Valley Regional Park stretching north to south along the western edge of the borough, and a network of Metropolitan Open Land, Green Chains, smaller parks and open spaces, playing fields both public and private, river and canal corridors in between.

8.14 Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Green Chains have an important role to play as part of Hillingdon's multi-functional green infrastructure and are a strategic feature of the borough.

8.15 The river and canal corridors and associated hinterlands (also known as the Blue Ribbon Network) link across borough boundaries and also have a strategic function in west London. The Grand Union Canal originated as an arterial freight route that carried materials between sites from London and links all the way to Birmingham. It is therefore a very important link between boroughs and provides much wider opportunities for walking, angling and cycling.

8.16 Other types of open spaces are also important in the context of a suburban and densely built-up area, such as roof terraces, front and back gardens including trees, wildlife gardens, allotments and amenity areas around housing estates.

8.17 Hillingdon's open spaces, rivers and canals play an important role in helping to tackle climate change. The natural environment works as a carbon sink absorbing Carbon Dioxide and generating oxygen. Climate change is a major global challenge and loss of carbon sinks, particularly on a large scale, is detrimental to tackling this problem. In addition, the green and blue networks of open space, rivers and canals, are integral to the delivery of sustainable development. They also promote a healthy way of life, encourage social cohesion, and provide an attractive alternative environment to an urban setting. The Grand Union Canal also promotes education and sustainable transport.

8.18 For the purpose of the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 1- Strategic Policies, the network of open space is organised into three categories:

1. Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Green Chains;
2. Blue ribbon network and
3. Open spaces, sport and leisure.

Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Green Chains

8.19 Green Belt: The Borough has 4,970 hectares of Green Belt ⁽⁴²⁾. In physical and perceptual terms the borough is the western edge and gateway to London. The Green Belt extends westwards from the Colne Valley and covers much of the northern third of the Borough with large tracts through Stockley Park and through Harmondsworth and Harlington to the north of Heathrow Airport.

42 Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report May 2005 (Amendments made – 20 April 2006)

8.20 The most important attribute of green belts is their openness. The main purpose of Hillingdon's Green Belt is to keep land open and free from development, to maintain the character and identity of individual settlements and to make a clear distinction between rural and urban environments, in support of strategic objective SO3. The Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 1- Strategic Policies aims to create sustainable communities by concentrating new development in urban areas and local town centres. The Green Belt's role is to help reinforce this strategy by strictly controlling development in the open countryside.

8.21 Metropolitan Open Land (MOL): The borough contains 10 areas designated as Metropolitan Open Land. This designation is given to areas of open land that have a London-wide significance and that are considered to perform the following three functions: providing a clear break in the urban fabric and contributing to the green character of London; including open air facilities serving the leisure, recreational, sports, arts and cultural needs of Londoners outside their local area; and containing a feature or landscape of historic, recreational or biodiversity value of national or regional significance.

8.22 Green Chains: Hillingdon is fortunate to have a diversity of habitats, linked by natural and man made corridors that enable flora and fauna to migrate into the centre of London. The green links between sites, both for recreation and wildlife, include public footpaths, bridleways, canals, rivers, streams and tree lined streets and road verges, all of which contribute to the green network within the Borough.

8.23 Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Green Chains are included on Map 8.1.

8.24 The Green Belt Study (2006) is being reviewed and recommendations for minor adjustments to address boundary anomalies to the Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Green Chains. The Council does not consider that major adjustments to Green Belt boundaries are necessary to accommodate growth over the period covered by the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 1- Strategic Policies. However, minor adjustments to the boundary will be undertaken in the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 2- Site Specific Allocations LDD with more detailed policies in the Development Management Policies LDD. In addition, the revised Green Belt Study will identify areas that no longer serve Green Belt purposes. Where appropriate these areas will also be brought forward in the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 2- Site Specific Allocations Local Development Document.

Main Challenges

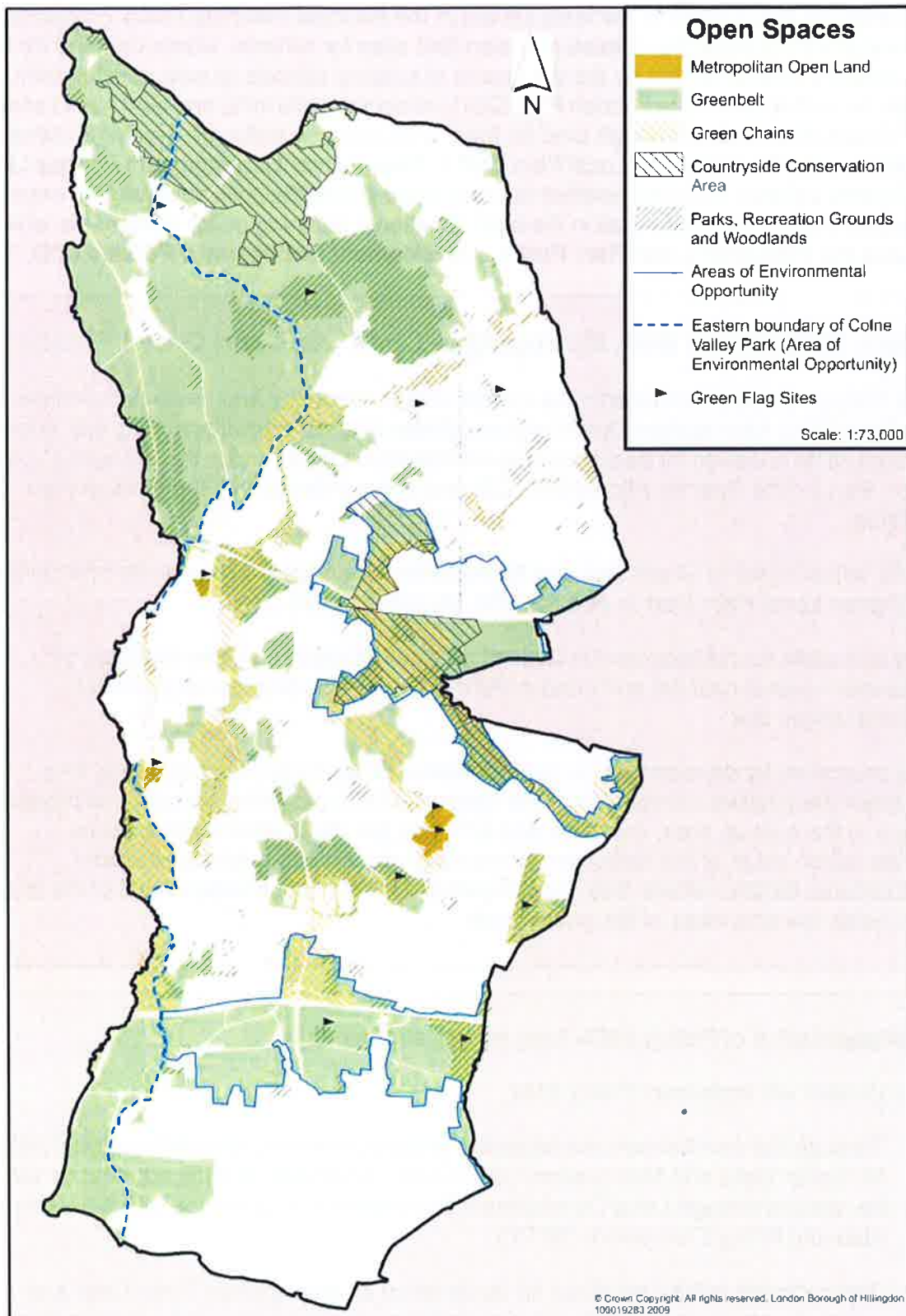
8.25 Table 3.1 in Chapter 3 identifies one main challenge relating to Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Green Chains:

- Pressure on the retention of Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Green Chains for other uses

8.26 The largest Green Belt in the United Kingdom is around London⁽⁴³⁾. As Hillingdon is the western wedge of London, and experiences significant development pressures, it is committed to protect the character of these open areas from urban sprawl.

43 Source: <http://www.21stcenturychallenges.org/60-seconds/the-green-belt/>

Map 8.1 Open Spaces



8.27 The main challenge is to protect the borough's Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Green Chains, whilst supporting the balance of continued growth without spreading into these open areas, keeping land permanently open and free from development. In very special circumstances and subject to the tests set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, the Council will consider the release of Green Belt sites for schools, where demand for new forms of entry cannot be met by the expansion of existing schools or new development on suitable brownfield land. The London Plan (2011) encourages farming and land based sectors in the Green Belt to allow enough land for food production. A policy on food production will be addressed in the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 2- Development Management Policies LDD. The Council will also consider whether to bring forward specific policies regarding major developed sites in the Green Belt in the light of national planning policy statements when it produces the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 2 - Development Management Policies LDD.

Policy EM2: Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Green Chains

The Council will seek to maintain the current extent, hierarchy and strategic functions of the Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land and Green Chains. Notwithstanding this, Green chains will be reviewed for designation as Metropolitan Open Land in the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 2- Site Specific Allocations LDD and in accordance with the London Plan policies.

Minor adjustments to Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land will be undertaken in the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 2- Site Specific Allocations LDD.

Any proposals for development in Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land will be assessed against national and London Plan policies, including the very special circumstances test.

Any proposals for development in Green Chains will be firmly resisted unless they maintain the positive contribution of the Green Chain in providing a visual and physical break in the built-up area; conserve and enhance the visual amenity and nature conservation value of the landscape; encourage appropriate public access and recreational facilities where they are compatible with the conservation value of the area, and retain the openness of the green chain.

Implementation of Policy EM2- how we will achieve this

The Council will implement Policy EM2:

- Through the development management process, in accordance with national policy for Green Belts and Metropolitan Open Land. Anomalies in local boundaries will be rectified through Local Development Documents in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- Green Chains will be reviewed for designation as Metropolitan Open Land and designated through Local Development Documents as appropriate, in accordance with the London Plan policies.

Monitoring of Policy EM2- how we will measure success

- Number of planning applications refused on Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land or Green Chains grounds.
- Number of appropriate developments approved on Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land.
- Net change in hectares of Green Belt, Metropolitan Open Land or Green Chains lost to development.

Blue Ribbon Network

8.28 The waterways of Hillingdon and the associated hinterlands form an important green infrastructure feature and flood mitigation zone within the borough. Hillingdon has seven rivers and about 20 kms of the Grand Union Canal including the Main Line, Paddington and Slough Arms. The main rivers, the Canals along with the tributaries and smaller streams all form the Blue Ribbon Network.

8.29 Rivers, streams, canals, lakes and their banks, provide habitat for a wide range of flora and fauna. They are often significant in the context of settings and provide a sense of tranquillity. They also have the benefit of being a good source of education from a historic and wildlife perspective as well as providing the opportunity for transport and water based leisure and recreation.

8.30 The aim of the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 1- Strategic Policies is to promote the river and canal corridors as a key part of Hillingdon's strategic green infrastructure network. The network will link and connect smaller, more local open spaces with larger and more strategic ones, including the Colne Valley Regional Park and key nationally and locally important habitats.

8.31 For the purpose of the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 1- Strategic Policies, Hillingdon's waterways consist of six strategic river and canal corridors. They can be given a hierarchy of importance as follows:

- Regional importance - The Grand Union Canal Corridor crosses several local authority boundaries and includes many multi-functional sites
- Sub regional importance - The River Colne Corridor crosses more than 2 local authority boundaries and includes a significant number of multi-functional sites
- District importance - The River Pinn Corridor, Yeading Brook Corridor and the River Crane Corridor. These three corridors are mostly contained within Hillingdon but have potential connections with other local authority areas and contain a number of multi-functional sites with the potential for further additions.
- Local Importance – Tributaries and smaller watercourses that provide a distinct role in a local setting.