

Areas of Separation Topic Paper

Background

- 1.1 Policy 19 of the Central Lancashire Core Strategy (2012) identified 'Areas of Separation' (AOS). The designation's purpose was to ensure that land at locations with the greatest risk of settlements coalescing was protected. Detailed AOS boundaries and policy approaches were consequently adopted within each district's Local Plan¹.
- 1.2 Areas designated as AOS within adopted policy are listed in Table 1 below. Maps of each adopted AOS are reproduced within the appendices of this topic paper. Within Preston, Appendix 1 of this paper shows a clear distinction between adopted AOS and Green Belt, with the AOS designation occupying much of Northeast Preston, whilst Green Belt follows the River Ribble. Appendix 5 and 6 at Chorley and South Ribble meanwhile show a more complex picture. Here adopted policy overlays AOS onto Green Belt.

Table 1: AOS by district

South Ribble	Chorley	Preston
Bamber Bridge and Lostock Hall (AS1)	Chorley and Euxton	Broughton and the Preston Urban Area
Walton-le-Dale and Penwortham (AS2)	Chorley and Whittle-le-Woods	Goosnargh Whittingham and Grimsargh
Between Farington, Lostock Hall and Penwortham (AS3)		Grimsargh and the Preston Urban Area

- 1.3 Within each Local Plan, AOS are subject to slight nuances in policy wording as per Table 2 below. Examiners of both the Chorley² and South Ribble³ Local Plans, prioritised national Green Belt policy over locally drafted AOS tests. Consequently, the Examiners removed all local AOS tests through Main Modifications. Both policies BNE4 and G5 have therefore adopted the

¹ South Ribble Local Plan (2015) – Policy G5

Chorley Local Plan (2015) – Policy BNE4

Preston Local Plan (2015) – Policy EN4

² [Chorley Local Plan Examiner's Report \(2013\)](https://chorley.gov.uk/downloads/file/273/chorley-local-plan-inspector-s-partial-report-october-2013). <https://chorley.gov.uk/downloads/file/273/chorley-local-plan-inspector-s-partial-report-october-2013>

³ [South Ribble Local Plan Examiner's Report \(2015\)](https://southribble.gov.uk/downloads/file/605/inspectors-final-report-june-2015).

<https://southribble.gov.uk/downloads/file/605/inspectors-final-report-june-2015>

terminology and tests associated with national Green Belt policy determining whether development is ‘inappropriate’⁴.

Table 2: Adopted AOS policy tests

District	Policy ref:	Policy wording (summary)
Chorley	BNE4	(Supporting text) Land is protected from ‘inappropriate development’.
Preston	EN4	Development will be assessed in terms of its impact upon the Area of Separation including any harm to the effectiveness of the gap between settlements and, in particular, the degree to which the development proposed would compromise the function of the Area of Separation in protecting the identity and distinctiveness of settlements.
South Ribble	G5	Land is protected from ‘inappropriate development’.

- 1.4 The councils commissioned Land Use Consultants (LUC) to explore the role AOS could play within the emerging Central Lancashire Local Plan (CLLP). Their findings are set out within the Open Land Designations Study: Landscape Assessment (Oct 2022)⁵. The study focused exclusively upon Preston’s AOS as it was concluded that the AOS in Chorley and South Ribble being in the Green Belt did not require this protection as discussed later in this paper.

Review of AOS: Preston

- 2.1 AOS within Preston do not overlay onto Green Belt and are located within areas of Open Countryside. In many respects, their objective is similar to Green Belt purpose b), seeking to prevent the sprawl of Preston City to the northeast and coalescing with Broughton, Grimsargh, Cumeragh and Longridge. It also acts to prevent these periphery settlements merging into each other however. Consequently, LUC within the Plan’s Open Land Designations Study: Landscape Assessment (Oct 2022) followed a bespoke methodology, which divided Preston’s AOS into 14 separate parcels⁶ and identified the strength of each gap⁷ against the below separation criteria:

⁴ NPPF para 154 + 155.

⁵ [Document EV6](https://centrallocalplan.lancashire.gov.uk/media/1183/landscape-designations-study-main-report.pdf). See Chapters 3+4. <https://centrallocalplan.lancashire.gov.uk/media/1183/landscape-designations-study-main-report.pdf>

⁶ Listed in para 3.14.

⁷ Fragile, Moderate or Robust

- Physical – e.g. settlement form, width, physical features.
- Visual – e.g. landscape, woodland, hedgerows, topography
- Connection – e.g. roads.

2.2 The results of the study are summarised within Table 4.3 (reproduced below) and mapped at Appendix 2 of this topic paper.

Open Land Designations Study: Landscape Assessment results (Table 4.3).

Settlement gap	Gap strength
Preston and Broughton	Moderate
Broughton and Barton	Moderate
Barton and Bilsborrow (Wyre Forest)	Moderate
Preston and Goosnargh/Whittingham	Robust
Preston and Grimsargh	Fragile
Preston and Lea Town	Moderate
Lea Town and Clifton (Fylde)	Moderate
Preston and Woodplumpton	Moderate
Woodplumpton and Broughton	Robust
Broughton and Goosnargh	Moderate
Goosnargh/Whittingham and Longridge (Ribble Valley)	Robust
Grimsargh and Longridge (Ribble Valley)	Moderate
Within Preston, between the suburbs of Ingol/Tanterton and Greyfriars/Cadley	Moderate
Within Preston, between the suburbs of Sharoe Green and Fulwood Row.	Moderate

2.3 The City Council discounted some areas identified by the Landscape Assessment (Oct 2022) from consideration where areas were located either: (1) west of the West Coast Main Line (WCML) - considered to form a delineating barrier between the rural settlements of Broughton and Woodplumpton; (2) east of Edith Rigby Way (A582) - Edith Rigby Way (A582) forms a barrier which would prevent the merger of Lea Town and Preston’s urban area (identified by Policy SS2 Settlement Hierarchy and shown on the policies map); or (3) within Preston’s urban area. The proposed changes to Preston’s AOS were categorised and mapped as either ‘Additions’ or ‘Reductions’ to the AOS boundaries as shown in Appendix 3.

Additions

2.4 The City Council made ‘Additions’ to the boundaries of Preston’s AOS, excluding areas previously discounted by the council as outlined in para. 2.3 above, in-line with the recommendations of the LUC Landscape Assessment (Oct 2022).

2.5 Additions were necessary to prevent the coalescing of Preston's rural settlements with neighbouring settlements and/or Preston's urban area. Key areas being identified as and shown in Appendix 3:

- Broughton and Barton;
- Broughton and Preston's urban area;
- Broughton and Goosnargh/Whittingham;
- Goosnargh/Whittingham and Longridge;
- Grimsargh and Longridge; and
- Grimsargh and Preston's urban area (Red Scar)

2.6 The AOS to the north of Barton forms part of the Barton Neighbourhood Development Plan (BNDP), Made December 2023. LUC identified an enlarged area between Bilborrow and Barton within the Landscape Assessment (2022). The Council made the decision to take the area of separation forward as allocated within the Made BNDP.

Reductions

2.7 The boundaries of Preston's AOS were 'reduced' as to accommodate the findings of the LUC's work. Key reductions were made following the recommendations of the LUC Landscape Assessment October 2022, in which, (1) land to the south of Blundell Brook and east of the M6 motorway and (2) land north-east of Grimsargh were recommended for removal as shown in Appendix 3.

2.8 The City Council made further reductions to the AOS where the boundaries overlapped with the reviewed settlement boundaries as identified by Policy SS2 and shown on the policies map:

- Barton;
- Broughton;
- Goosnargh/Whittingham;
- Grimsargh; and
- Longridge.

2.9 Appendix 4 of topic paper compares adopted and emerging policies maps.

Review of AOS: Chorley and South Ribble

2.10 Whilst the examiners of the Chorley and South Ribble Local Plans (2015) found that overlaying AOS onto Green Belt was 'sound', this was at the expense of any proposed local tests. Consequently, applications within AOS are tested exclusively against National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraphs 154

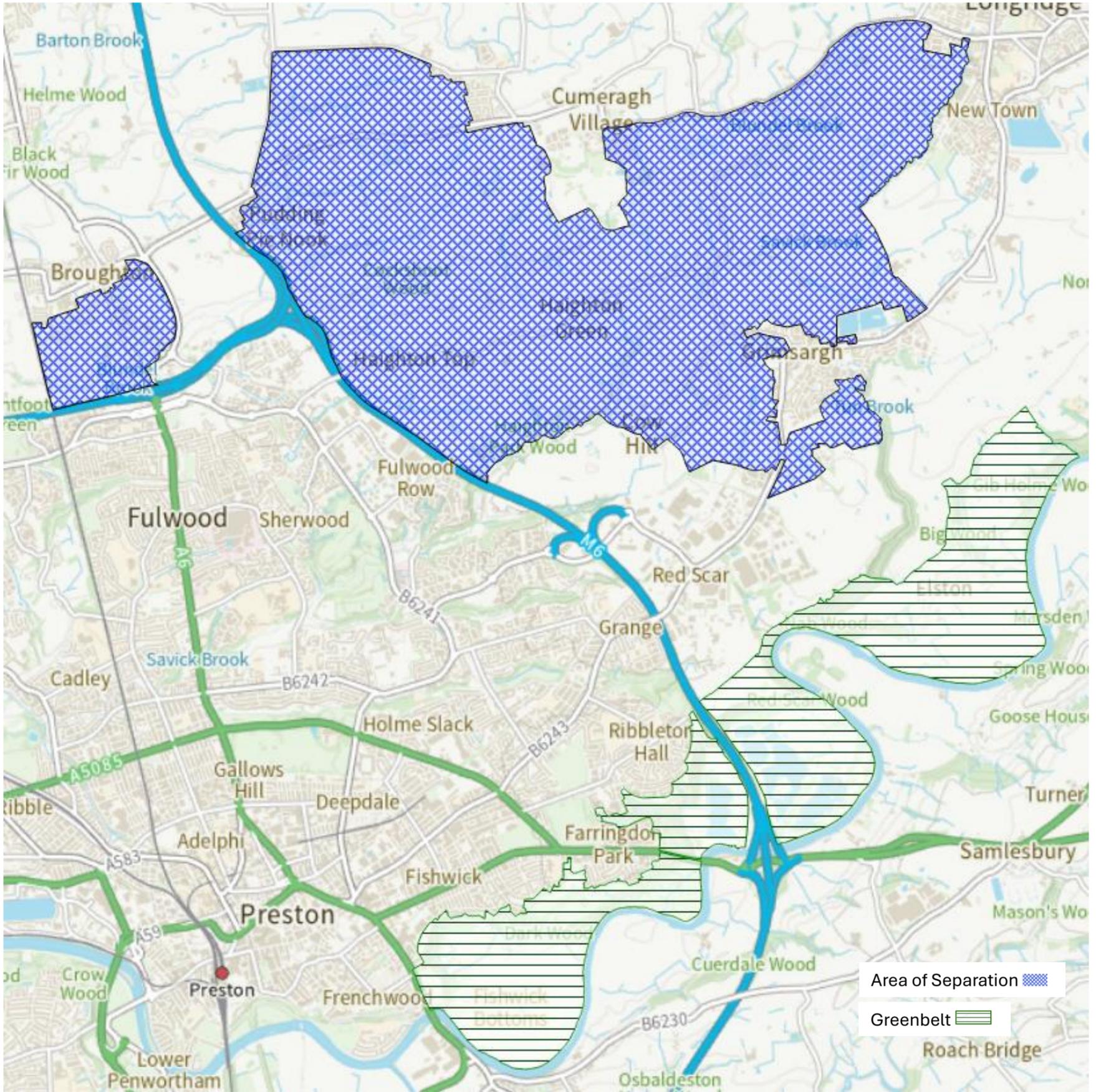
and 155, including assessment of 'Openness'. National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) advises that 'Openness' is a broad test, capable of both spatial and visual aspects⁸.

- 2.11 In the absence of local tests, AOS simply performs a role highlighting areas where spatial 'Openness' pursuant to Green Belt purpose b)⁹ is most vulnerable. Several of these are already obvious and clearly necessary to break up the urban area.
- 2.12 NPPF paragraph 16d necessitates that policies should be clearly written and unambiguous. Duplicating AOS onto Green Belt risks creating a misunderstanding that the AOS designation offers additional policy protection. Spatial separation is however a key component of the 'Openness' test and can be exclusively relied upon to prevent settlement coalescence. It is therefore a 'sound' approach to withdraw the AOS designation in Chorley and South Ribble.

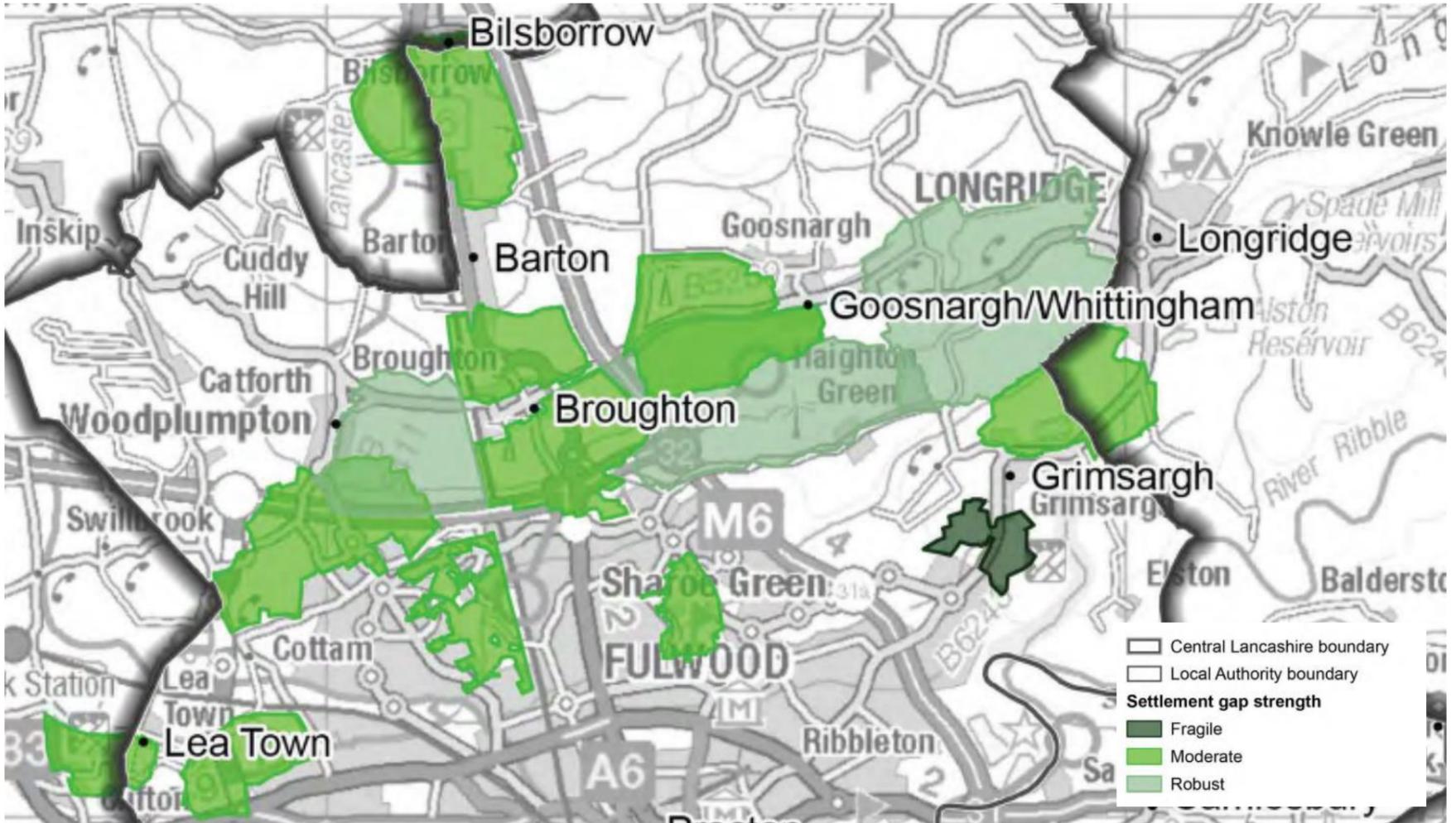
⁸ NPPG Paragraph: 013 Reference ID: 64-013-20250225

⁹ NPPF para 143 b)... to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.

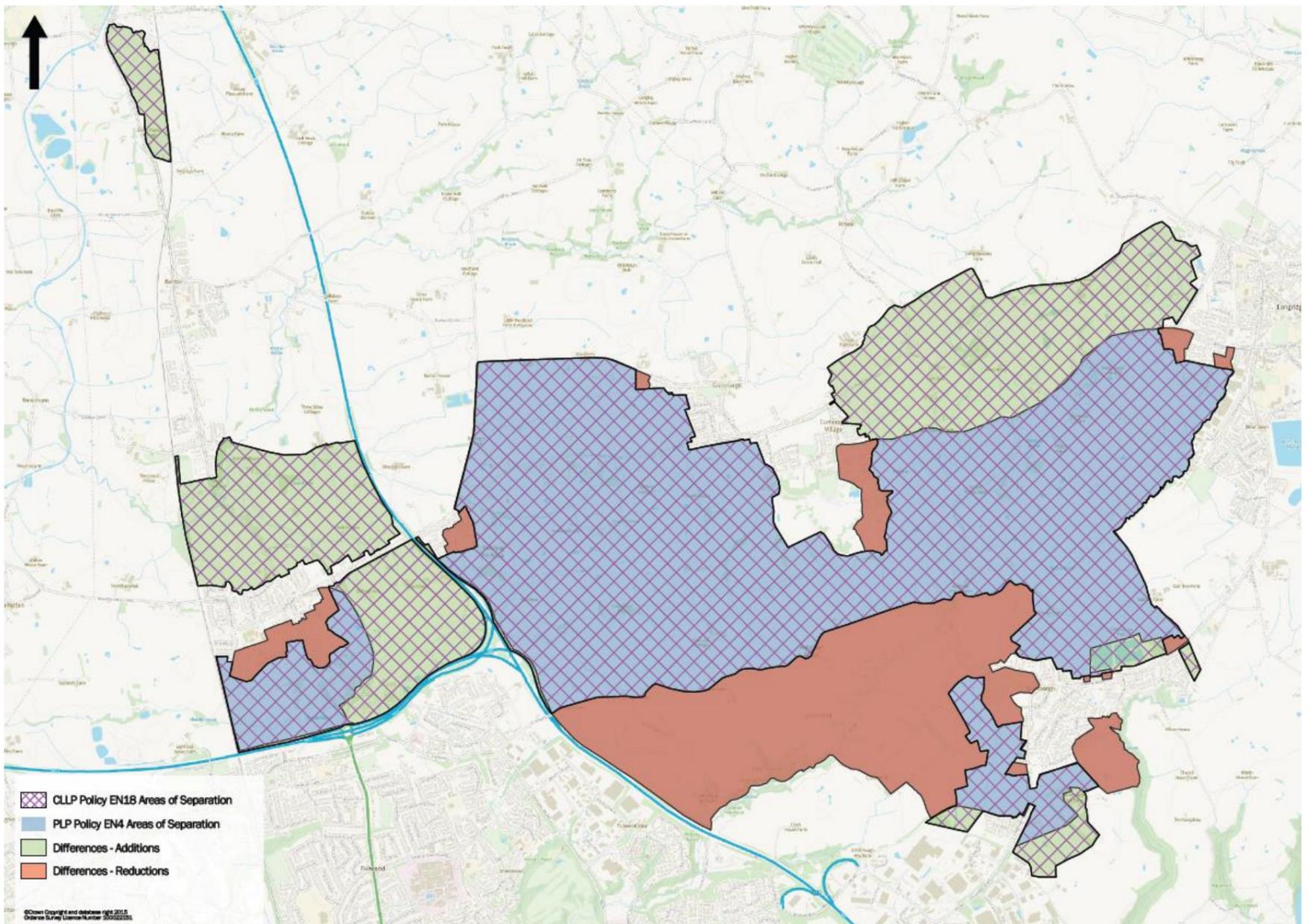
Appendix 1: Map showing Preston Green Belt + Adopted AOS (no overlap)



Appendix 2: Reproduction of Open Land Designations Study: Landscape Assessment (Oct 2022) Figure 4.3



Appendix 3: Map showing proposed changes made to Preston's AOS.



Appendix 4:

Preston: Adopted and emerging AOS

Figure 4a: Adopted policies map

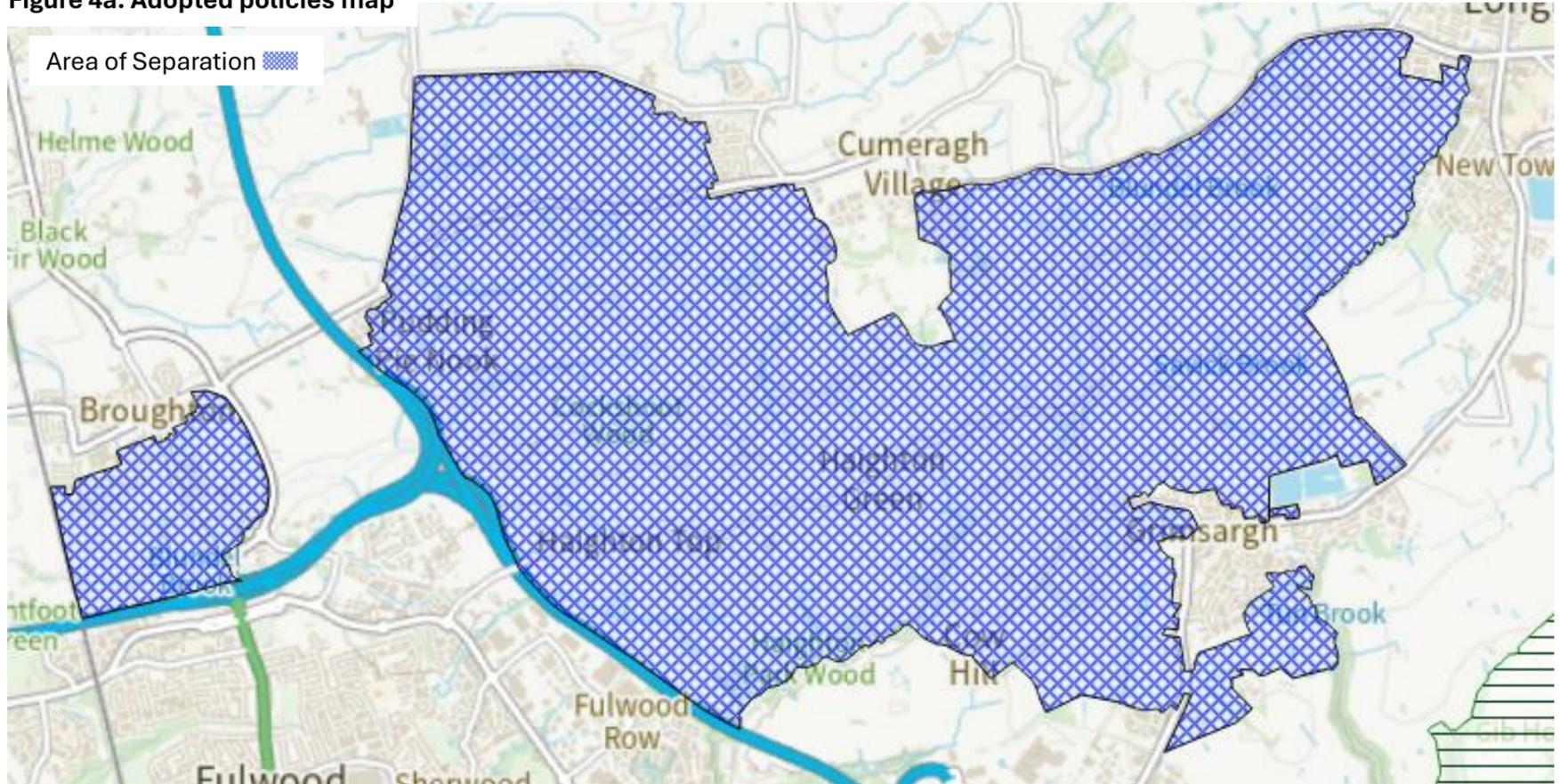
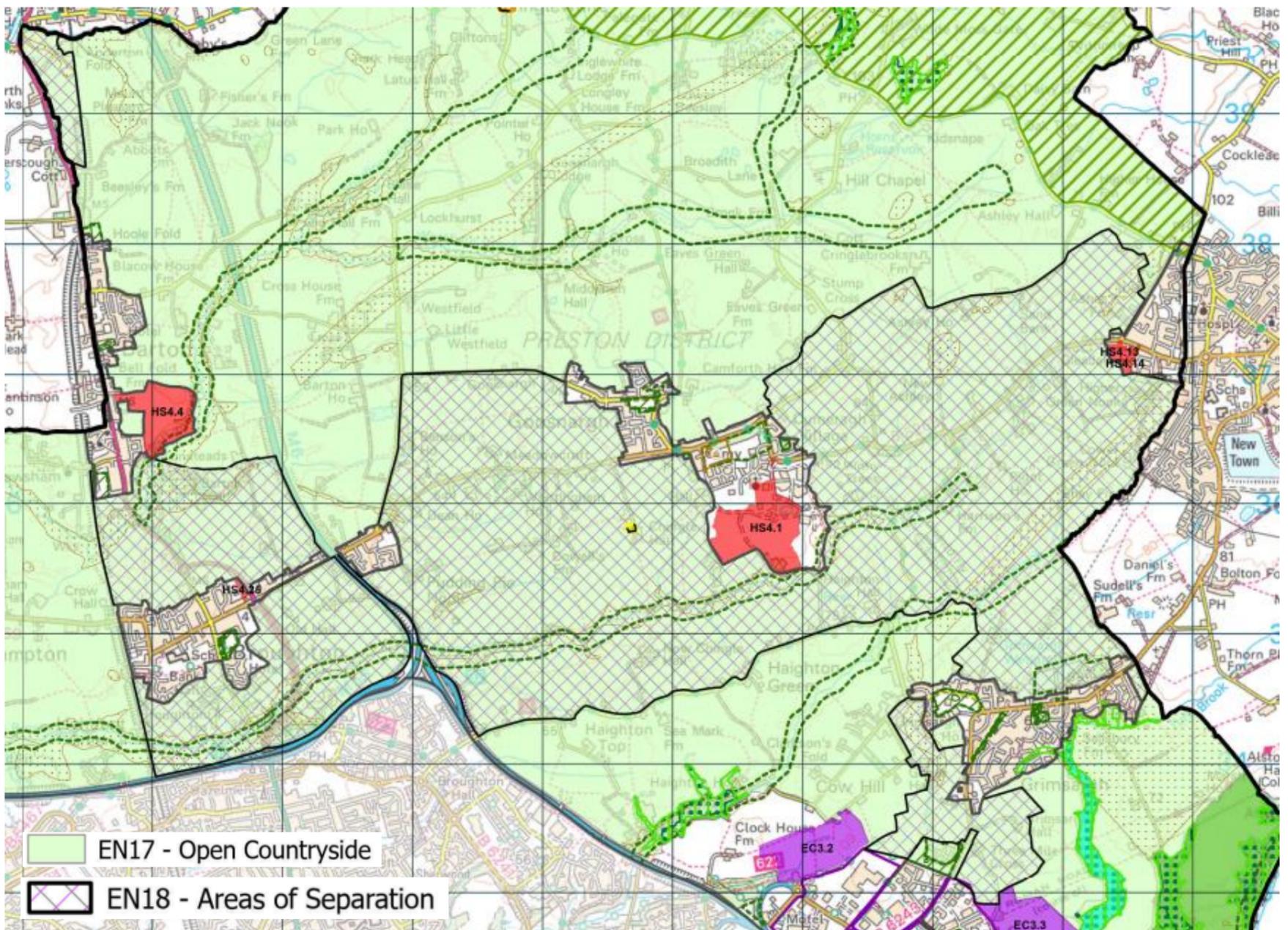


Figure 4b: Emerging policies map with AOS adjusted



Appendix 5

Chorley: Adopted AOS and withdrawal of AOS on emerging CLLP policies map.

Figure 5a: Adopted policies map

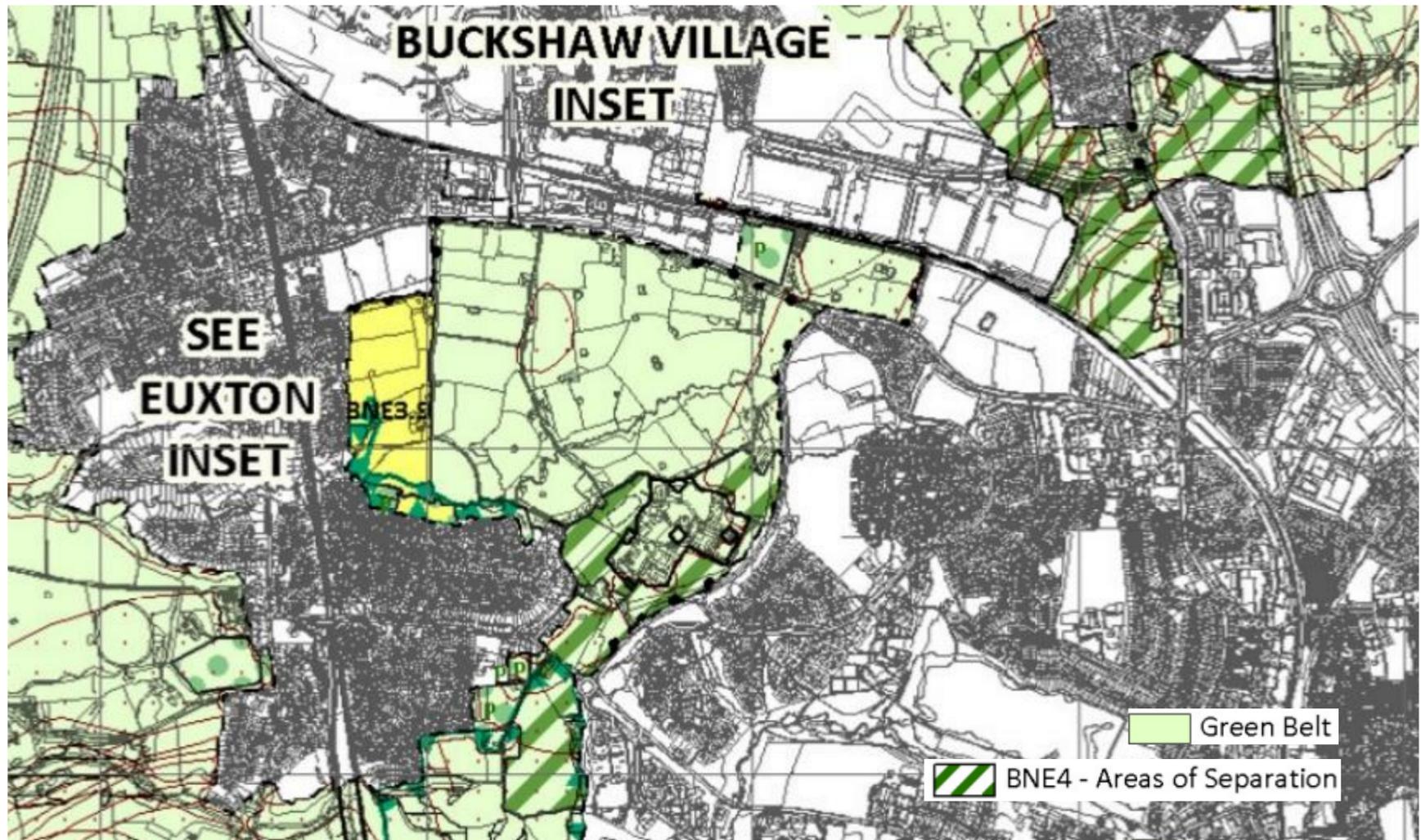
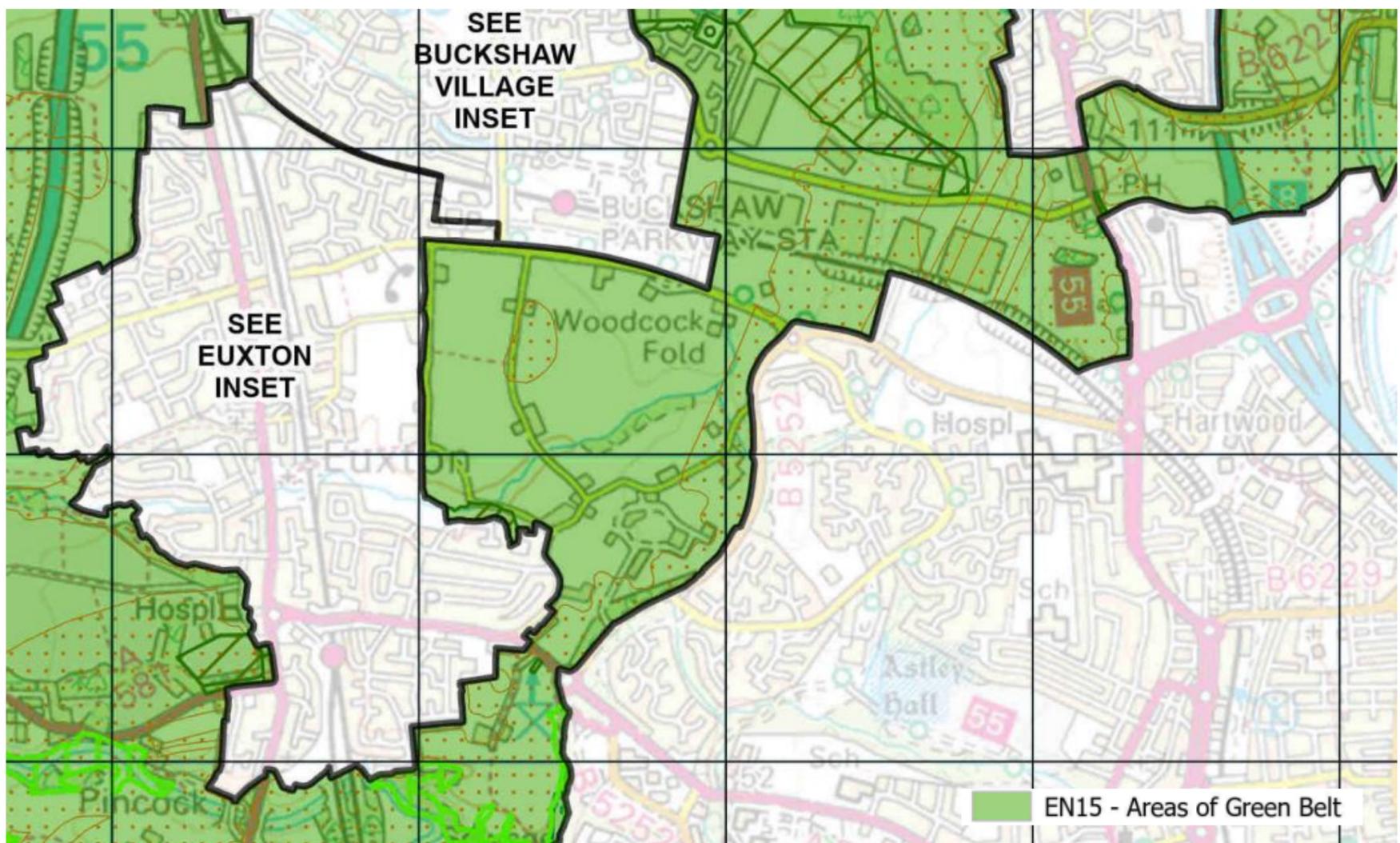


Figure 5b: Emerging policies map (AOS removed)



Appendix 6

South Ribble: Adopted AOS and withdrawal of AOS on emerging CLLP policies map

Figure 6a: Adopted policies map

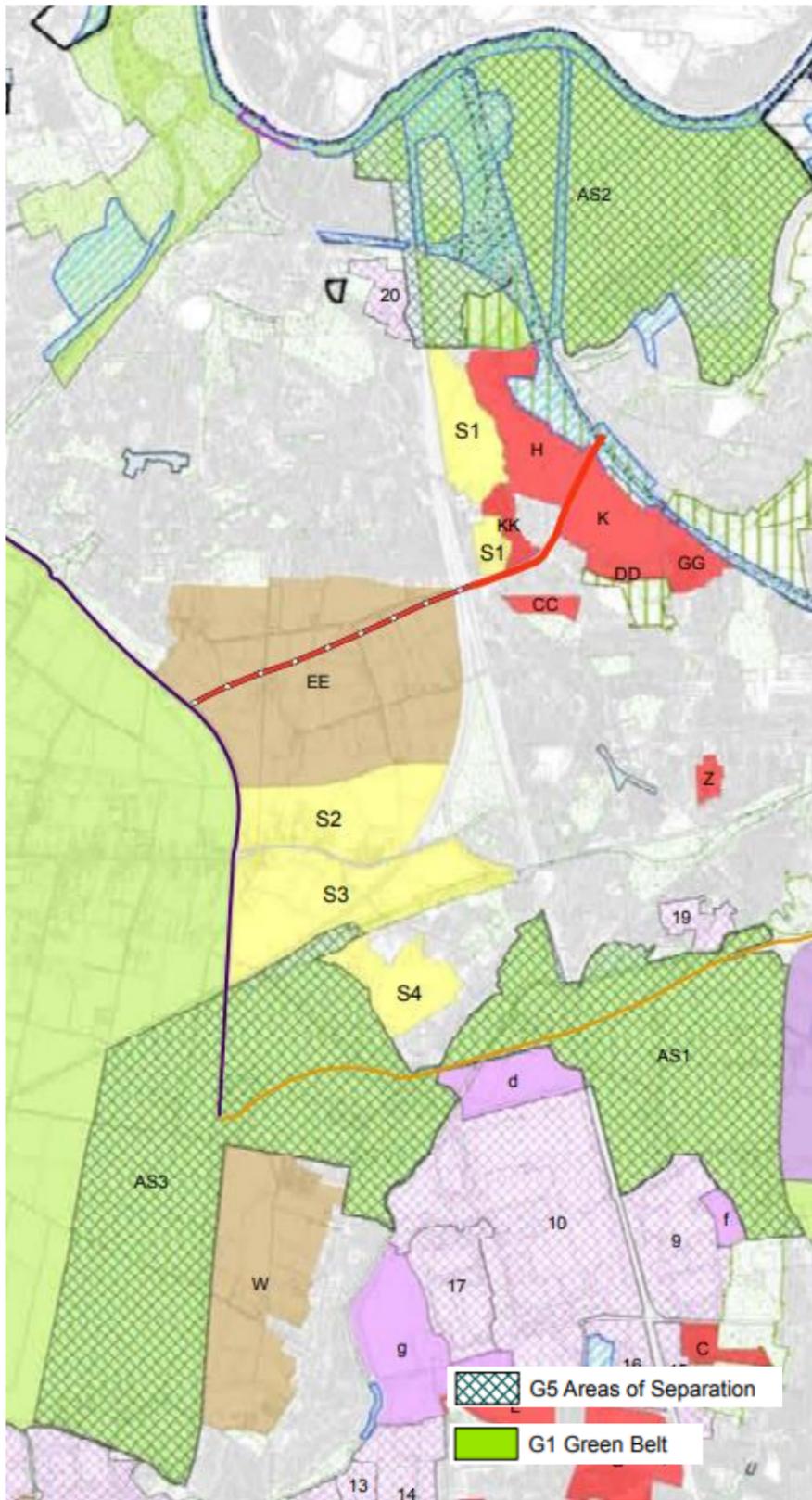


Figure 6b: Emerging policies map (AOS removed)

