

Policy LP10: Strategic gaps

Strategic gaps are defined to help retain the separate identity, character and/or landscape setting of settlements.

Strategic gaps are identified on the [Policies Map](#) between:

- Weston-super-Mare, Locking and Hutton.
- Yatton and Congresbury.
- Banwell and Wolvershill (north west of Banwell).
- Sandford and Churchill.

Development within strategic gaps as shown will only be permitted where:

- The open or undeveloped character of the gap would not be significantly adversely affected;
- The separate identity and character of the settlements would not be harmed; and
- The landscape setting of the settlements would not be harmed.

The likely impact of the proposal in conjunction with any other developments with extant planning consent must be taken into account.

Justification

Gaps between settlements can play an important role in maintaining the local character and distinctiveness of the settlements, and the sense that they are separate places. Identification and protection of strategic gaps will help to prevent their erosion by incremental development which would be detrimental to the settlements' separate identities, character and/or landscape setting. Protection is particularly important where such erosion could potentially cause coalescence of the settlements such as ribbon development along main roads.

Reliance on countryside policies alone would be unlikely to provide sufficient protection against the reduction or loss of such important gaps to development, particularly in the absence of a clear landscape harm. Without the added protection of strategic gap designation, there is a significant risk that incremental development would eventually erode the gaps, with the detrimental effects on settlement identity and character.

Strategic gaps have a broad similarity to some of the purposes of Green Belts in that they can help prevent the merging of settlements, assist in safeguarding the countryside from 'encroachment' regarding land between the settlements, and help to protect the setting and character of settlements, (though this involves villages as well as towns). However strategic gaps operate on a more localised, focused scale than Green Belts.



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In view of this similarity, it is inappropriate for strategic gaps and Green Belt to overlap, which has had implications in reviewing strategic gaps, in preparing this Local Plan.

For example, the council is proposing to extend the Green Belt to include land between Nailsea and Backwell. Therefore, as a necessary consequence of that, it is proposed to delete the existing strategic gap (in the Site Allocations Plan) between those settlements. However, if the Green Belt is not extended as proposed, it is proposed that a revised strategic gap would be retained.

Strategic gaps often include significant green infrastructure (GI) and are particularly useful in helping to protect GI close to settlements and their communities, giving them convenient proximity to all the potential benefits of GI. Such benefits include contribution to carbon storage, cooling and shading, sustainable drainage, natural flood risk management, and wildlife corridors. They can be attractive places for recreation and exercise, especially where crossed by public rights of way, with the added interest of biodiversity and natural beauty.

The existing strategic gaps as defined in the adopted Site Allocations Plan have been reviewed. The main changes are justified in detail in a background document on strategic gaps, and are as follows:

- Removal of the strategic gap between Nailsea and Backwell (it is proposed to extend the Green Belt between these settlements).

- Removal of the St Georges strategic gap, Weston-super-Mare (Weston).
- Removal of the strategic gap between Weston and Uphill.
- Inclusion of a new strategic gap between Banwell and Wolverhill (north of Banwell).
- Inclusion of a new strategic gap between Sandford and Churchill.

