

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning

Appendix D: Areas of Search Assessment and Guidance

Final Report
November 2025



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1 Identification of Areas of Search

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This appendix complements the Skyline and Tall Buildings Study. Part 1 of this appendix provides the detailed sifting of areas of search for tall buildings. Part 2 includes the detailed assessment of six strategic areas of search.

1.1.2 “Areas of Search” are areas that may offer an opportunity for tall buildings in Greater Cambridgeshire, subject to more detailed visual testing.

1.1.3 Areas of Search are the outcome of a sifting process, that condenses an initial pool of potential opportunity sites to a number of areas that are of lesser sensitivity to tall buildings.

1.1.4 Part 1 of this appendix sets out the siftings process.

1.2 Sifting

STEP 1: AREAS OF POTENTIAL FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

1.2.1 The first step to identifying Areas of Search is to identify areas with promoting factors for tall buildings in Greater Cambridgeshire. Principally, these are areas where major development is promoted by the combined planning authority. Large sites, targeted for change, offer an inherent opportunity for more intense and higher density development. They also may be able to establish a character of their own, where taller buildings could play a positive role for place making and legibility.

1.2.2 The starting point for the sifting are areas designated by the planning authority in the 2018 Local Plan as site allocations or as other regeneration and growth areas. These are depicted in Figure 1.

1.2.3 The initial pool of sites has been narrowed down in consultation with the planning authority to exclude sites that are only designated for public realm development, have since been developed or are undergoing development, or that

are unlikely to experience any significant or higher density development in the near future.

1.2.4 A total of 77 potential sites remain and continue into the siftings process. These are shown in Figure 2.

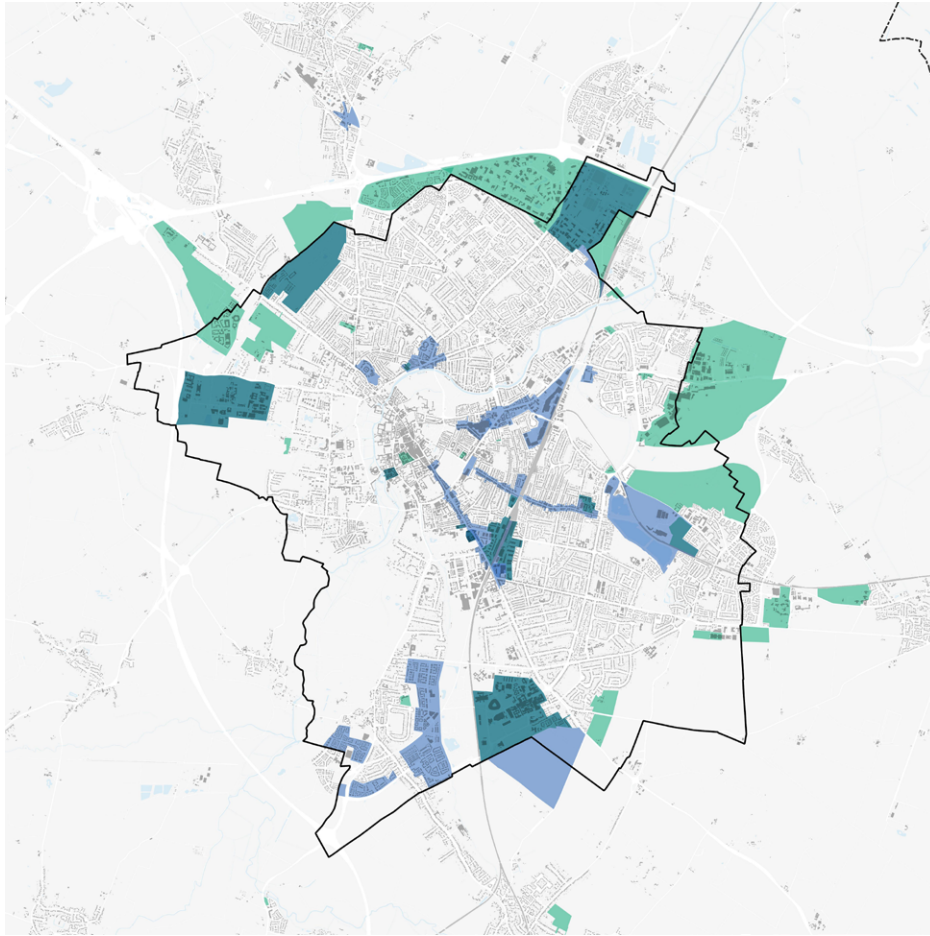


Figure 1: Promoting Factors - Site allocations, regeneration and growth areas

- Cambridge District
- South Cambridgeshire District
- Regeneration & Growth Areas
- Site Allocation

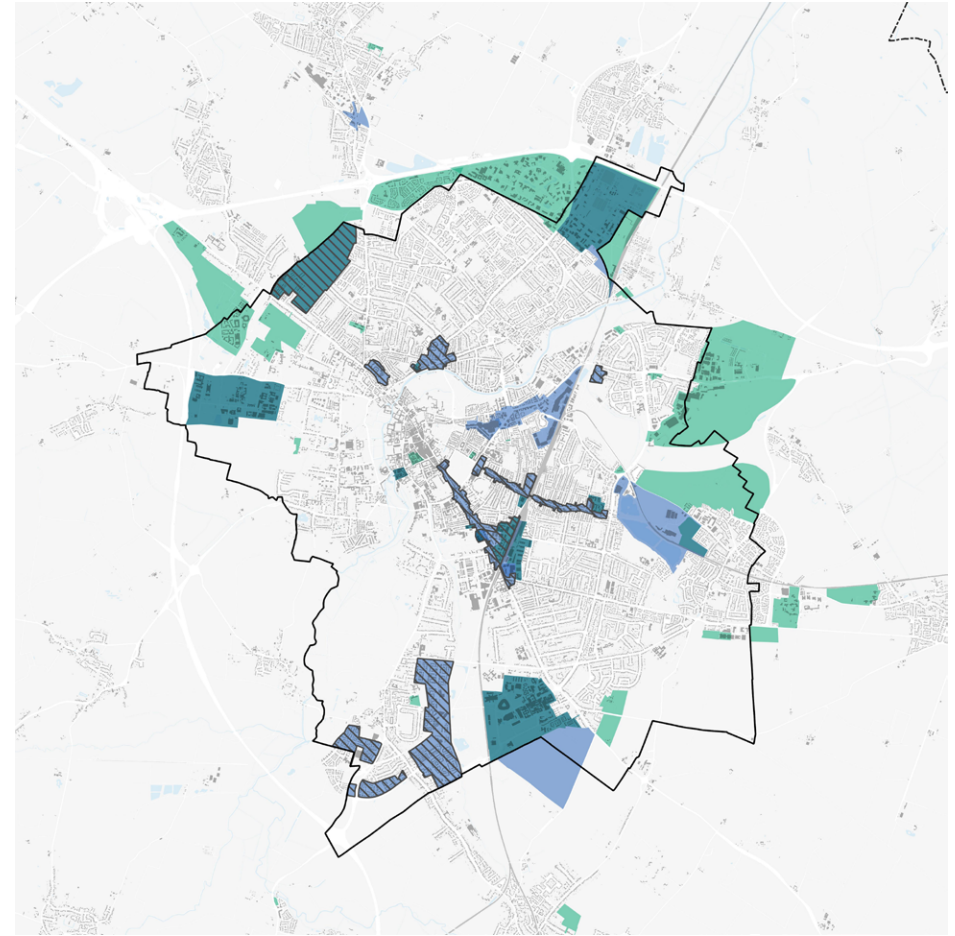


Figure 2: Sites excluded from the sifting process

- Cambridge District
- South Cambridgeshire District
- Excluded areas from sifting process
- Site Allocations
- Regeneration & Growth Areas

STEP 2: IDENTIFICATION OF SENSITIVE AREAS

1.2.5 Step 2 involves collating all areas that are either highly sensitive or sensitive to tall buildings in Greater Cambridgeshire. These are depicted in Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5, and include the following:

- Highly sensitive heritage designations (conservation area)
- Highly sensitive and sensitive townscape character areas
- Highly sensitive landscape character areas

1.2.6 Figure 6 identifies the composite of areas that are highly sensitive to tall buildings.

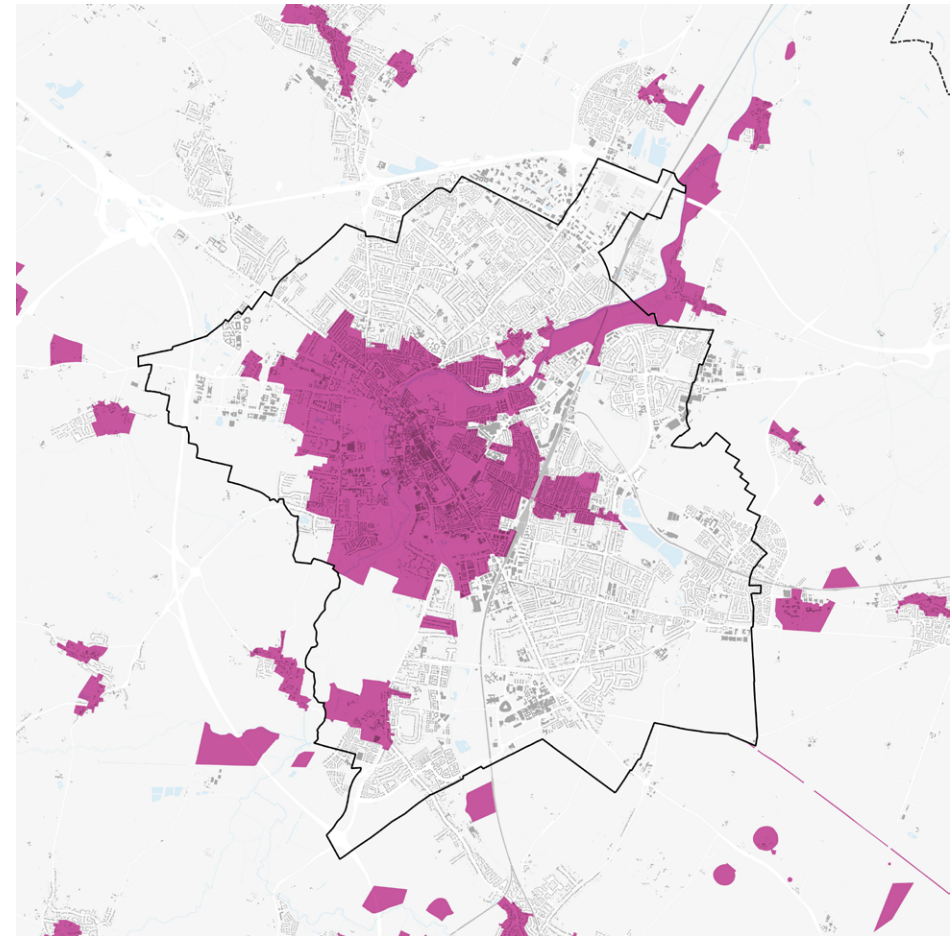


Figure 3: Tall Building Sensitivities - Heritage Designations

- Cambridge District
- South Cambridgeshire District
- Heritage Sensitivity
- Highly Sensitive

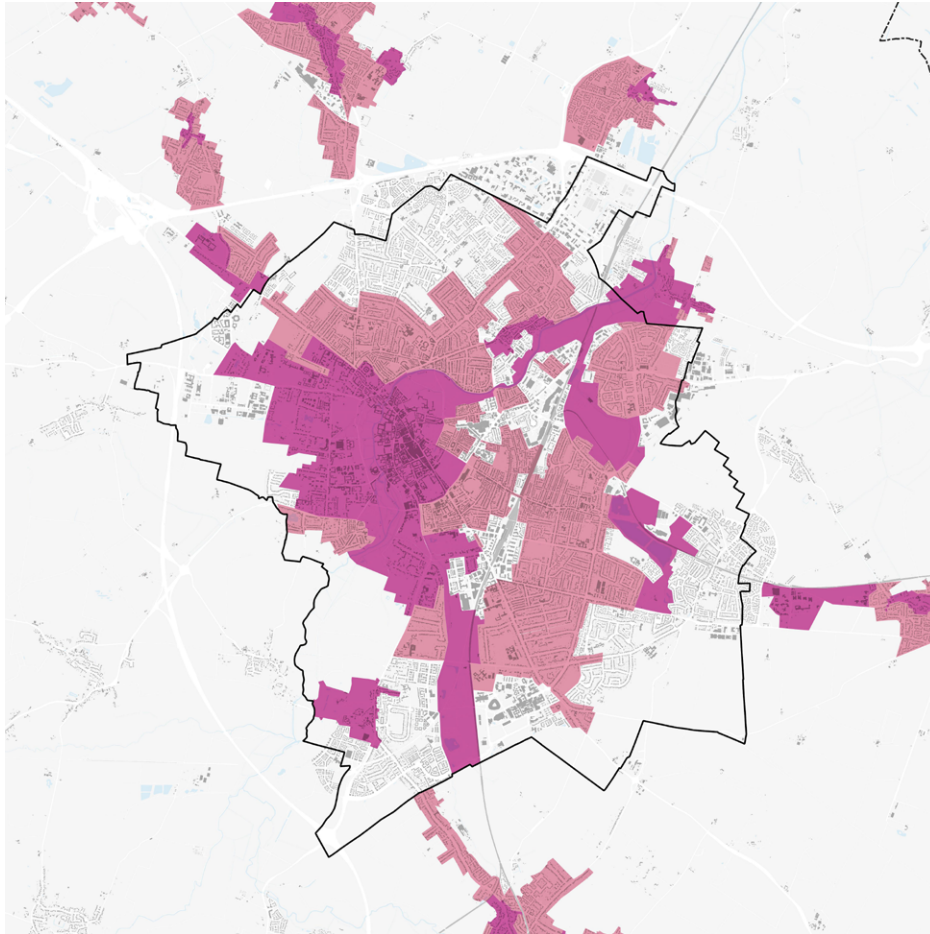


Figure 4: Tall Building Sensitivities - Townscape Character

[Solid black line] Cambridge District
 [Dashed black line] South Cambridgeshire District
 Townscape Sensitivity
 [Dark purple] Highly sensitive
 [Light purple] Sensitive

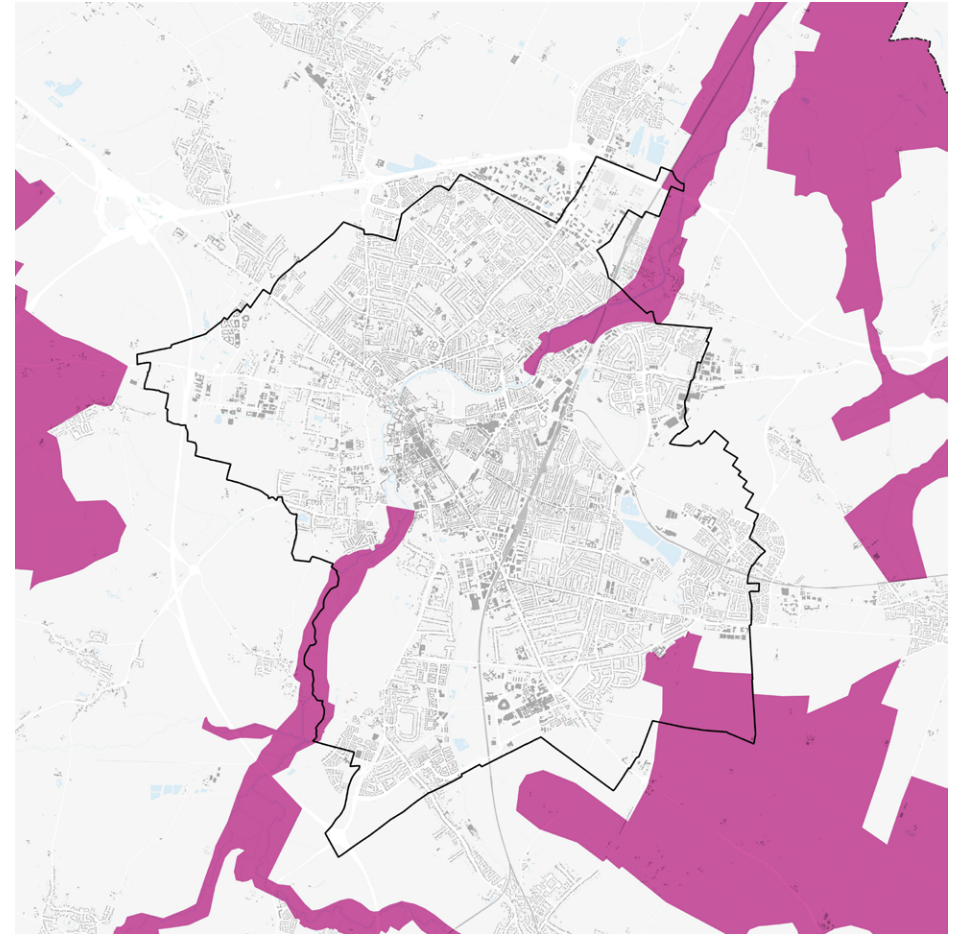


Figure 5: Tall Building Sensitivities - Landscape Character

[Solid black line] Cambridge District
 [Dashed black line] South Cambridgeshire District
 Landscape Sensitivity
 [Purple] Highly Sensitive

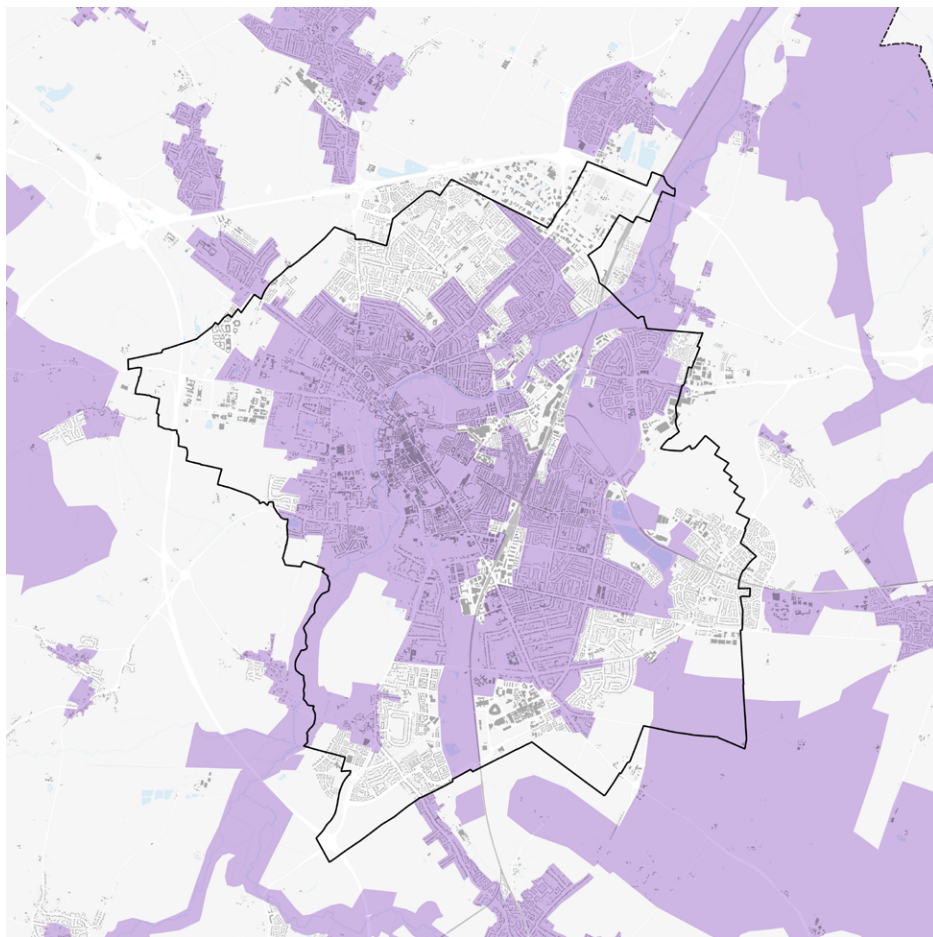


Figure 6: Sensitive areas not promoted for tall buildings - Composite

- Cambridge District
- South Cambridgeshire District
- Sensitive Areas not promoted for tall buildings

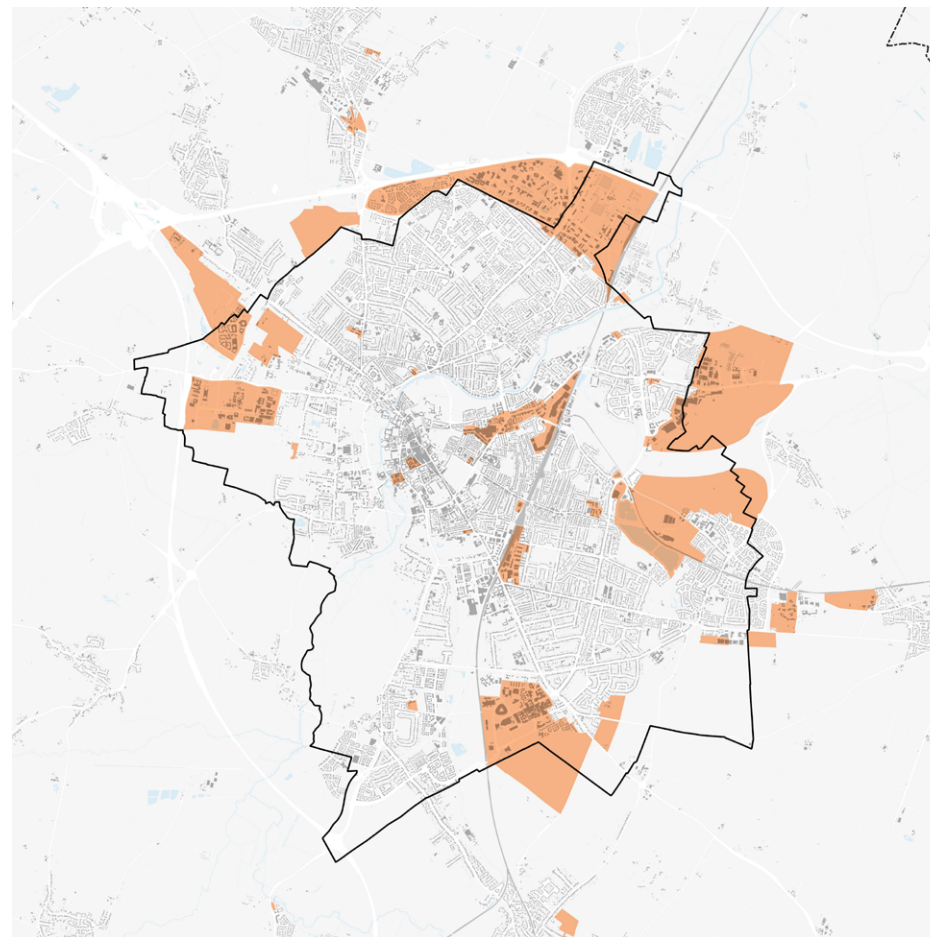


Figure 7: Pool of sites considered for the Areas of Search sifting

- Cambridge District
- South Cambridgeshire District
- Area with promoting factors for tall buildings

STEP 3: SIFTING OF SENSITIVE AREAS

1.2.7 Step 3 removes any areas deemed sensitive to tall buildings from the initial pool of sites with promoting factors. It overlays the composite tall building sensitivities and removes any sites or part of sites covered.

1.2.8 This process excludes 29 sites that are fully covered by one of the above sensitivities. 33 are cropped by sensitivities to into smaller sub-areas (total of 35 sub-areas). 11 number of sites have remained unchanged.

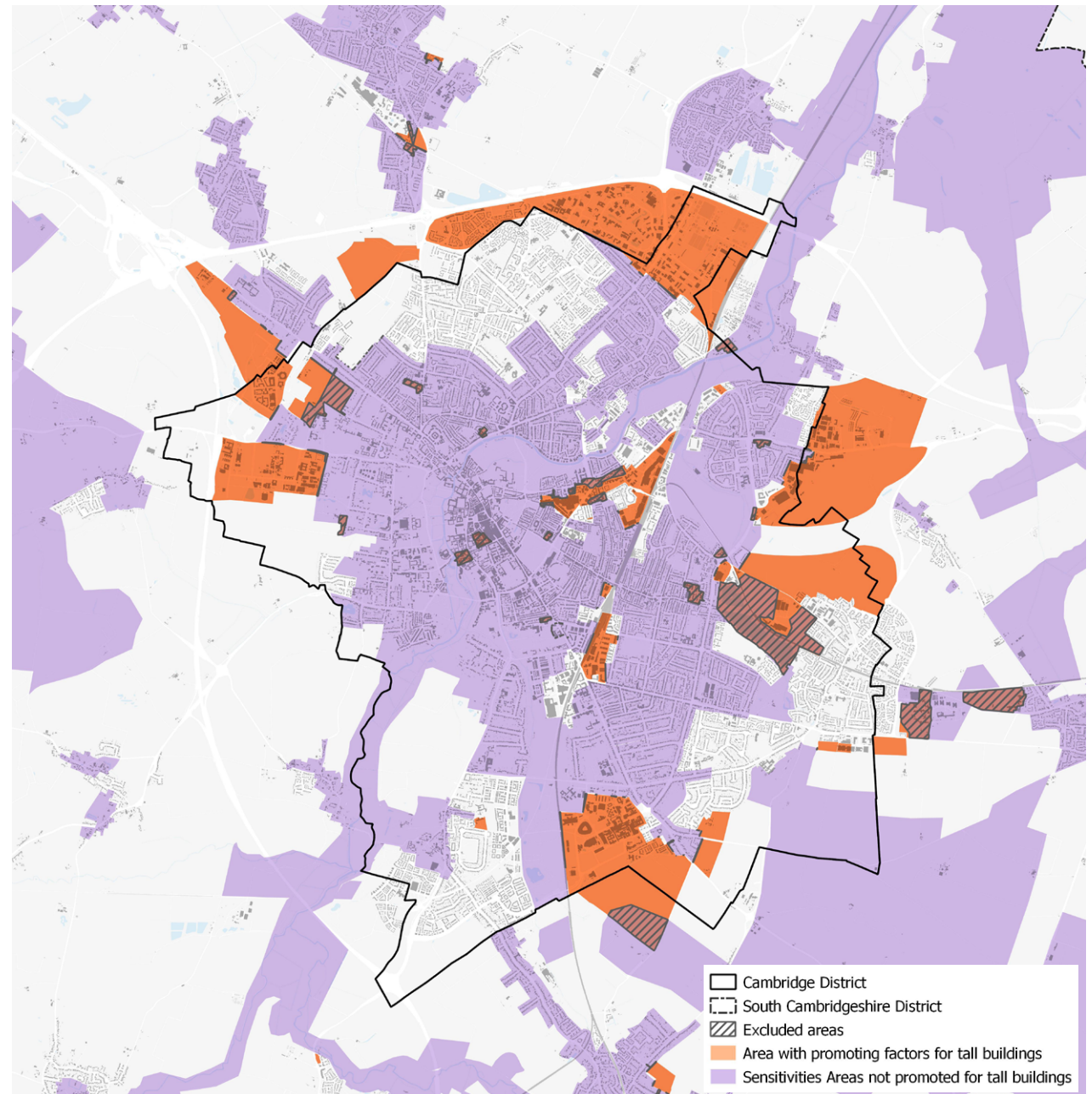


Figure 8: Sifting out of areas that are sensitive to tall buildings

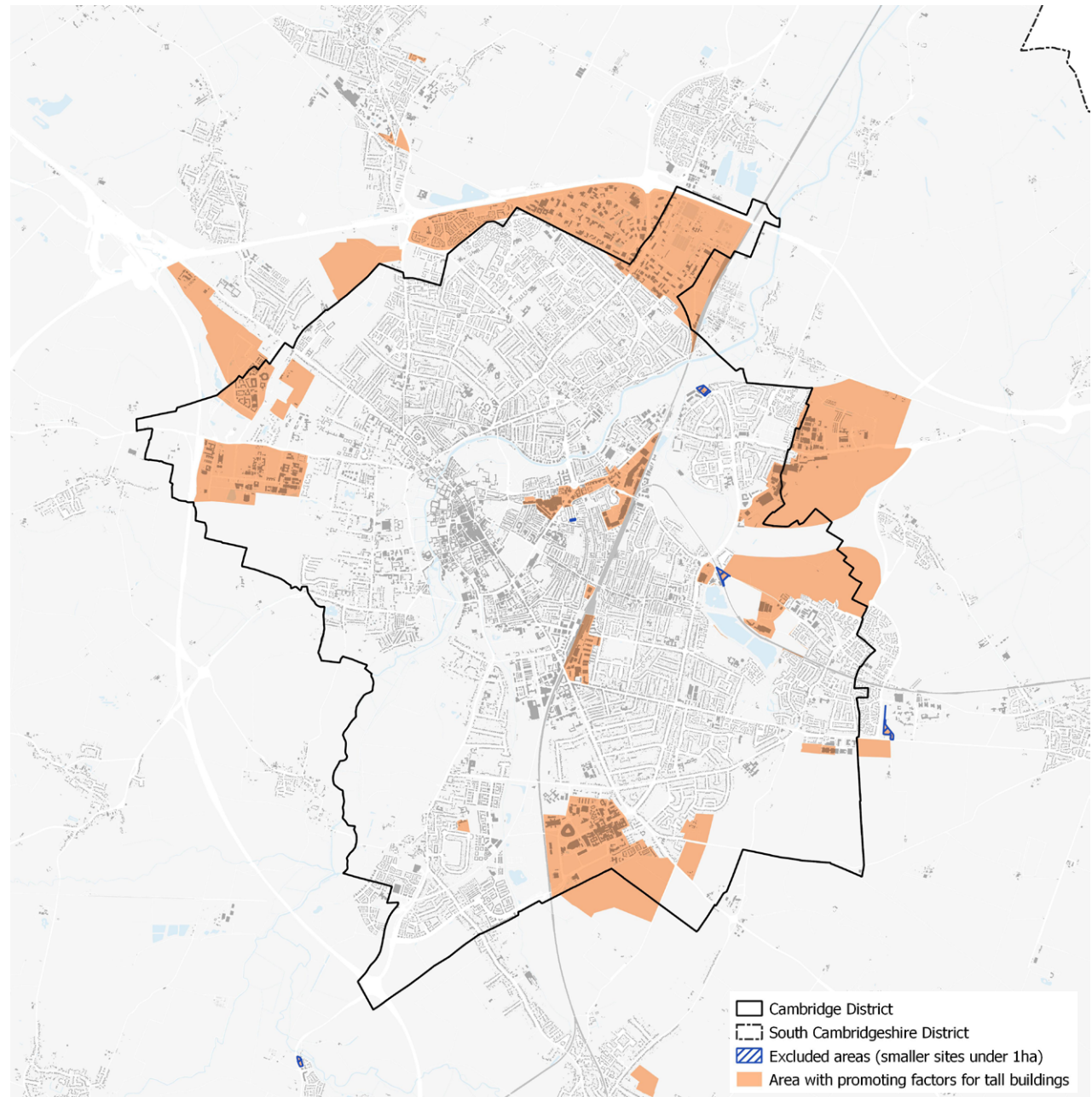
STEP 4: SIFTING OUT OF SMALL SITES

1.2.9 Step 4 removes areas that are smaller than one hectare as they are unlikely to support a comprehensive development of city or sub-regional significance, which would potentially merit a skyline impact in Cambridge (see criteria under para 6.4.19 of the proposed tall building strategy).

1.2.10 Note that this does not mean that these smaller areas are inappropriate for tall buildings in principle, but that they are less likely to satisfy the criteria for an acceptable skyline impact, and that are hence not recommended as potential Area of Search.

1.2.11 In total 7 sites below 1ha are removed as they are considered too small to be actively promoted for tall buildings.

Figure 9: Potential Areas of Search removed due to the site area being below 1ha



AREAS OF SEARCH

1.2.12 The sifting identifies 39 sites as Areas of Search, that may potentially offer an opportunity for tall buildings. 19 sites are situated within (or contiguous with) Cambridge City, whilst 20 are situated in South Cambridgeshire.

1.2.13 For clarity, the identification of an Area of Search does not mean that tall buildings will be appropriate or indeed encouraged in this area. It only highlights that this area may have a greater propensity of being suitable for tall development.

1.2.14 The suitability of any tall building in an Area of Search is subject to stringent assessment, justification and testing of its visual and skyline impact. Given the sensitivity of Cambridge's skyline to tall buildings, the actual scope for tall buildings (especially of greater height) in Areas of Search is likely to be limited.

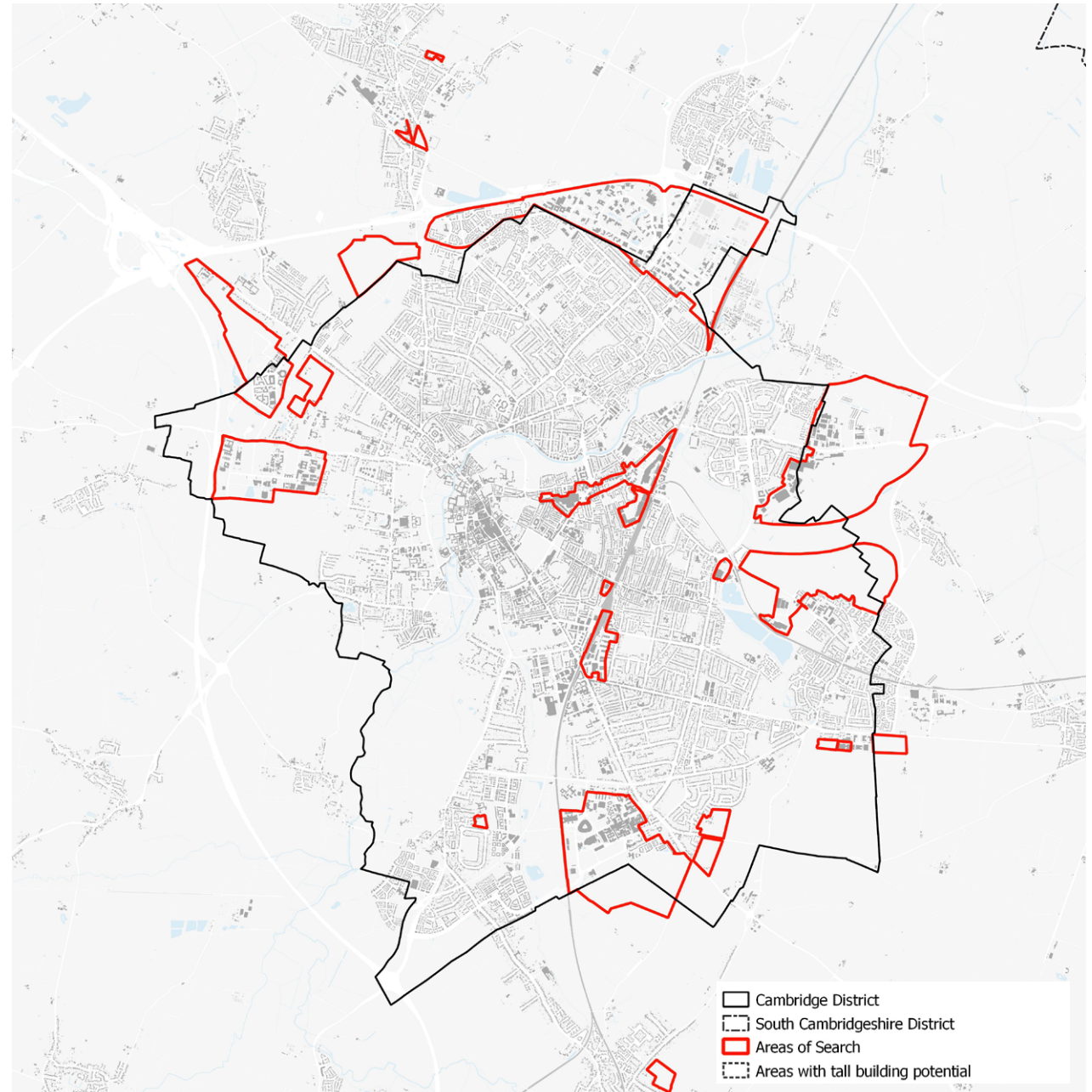


Figure 10: Areas of Search

AREAS OF SEARCH SELECTED FOR DETAILED ASSESSMENT

1.2.15 From the collection of Areas of Search Greater Cambridgeshire Planning Service has identified six strategic areas for more detailed investigation by this study. Analysis of these areas and respective area specific guidance is contained in part 2 of this Appendix.

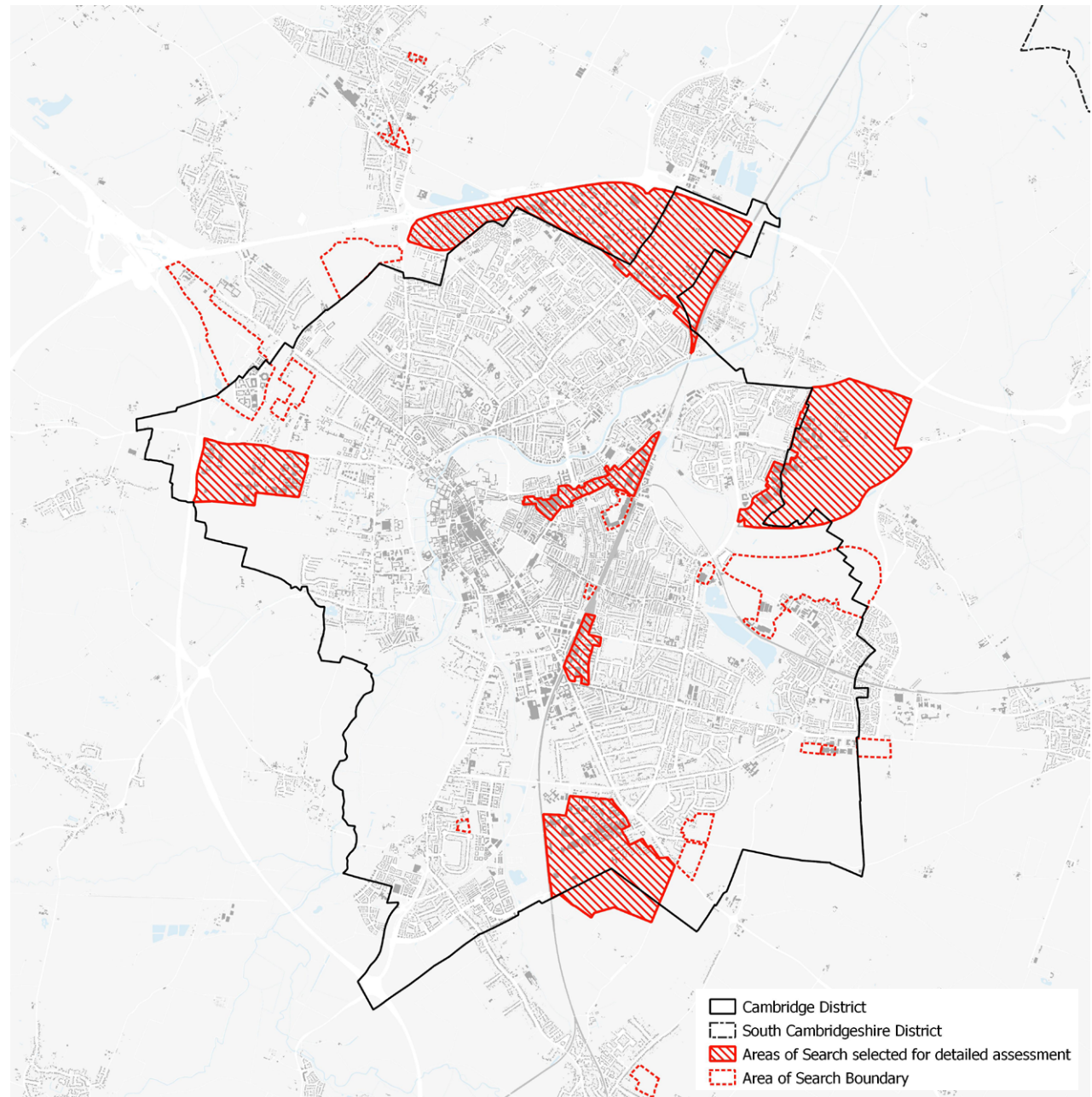


Figure 11: Areas of Search identified for more detailed assessment

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2 Assessment and Guidance for Areas of Search

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Part 2 of this appendix includes the detailed assessment of six strategic areas of search.

2.1.2 These are the following:

- 1 Clifton Road Industrial Estate and Leisure Park
- 2 Newmarket Road (Cambridge Retail Park)
- 3 East Cambridge (Cambridge City Airport and Marleigh)
- 4 West Cambridge (Cambridge Institute of Manufacturing and Schlumberger Research Institute)
- 5 Addenbrooke's Hospital and Cambridge Biomedical Campus
- 6 Northeast Cambridge (Orchard Park, Cambridge Science Park, St John's Innovation Park, Cambridge Sewage Works, Cambridge Business Park)

2.1.3 These sites were identified by the Greater Cambridgeshire Planning Service as in need of additional guidance in respect of the strategic visual and skyline impact, that potential tall buildings could have in these areas.

2.1.4 Each site is covered by its own chapter with two principal sections. The first section describes the site and its context and collates relevant information and maps. This includes the relevant planning policy designations, public transport accessibility, prevailing land uses, the development pipeline, building and context heights, the applicable tall building threshold and existing tall buildings, heritage designations, and landscape and townscape characters. Further it includes the identification of strategic views cones to the historic city centre landmarks that may be affected by development in this area and a map identifying dynamic and open space views in the vicinity. A zone of theoretical visibility of a hypothetical building of 25.5m is also provided to aid identification of local view points from the surrounding area.

2.1.5 The second section comprises of an indicative height testing to ascertain the potential impact of taller development within the Area of Search. This makes use of Greater Cambridgeshire detailed 3d model.

2.1.6 The assessment reviews the potential visual impact on selected strategic views of development of greater height within the respective Area of Search.

2.1.7 For this purpose a total of 11 strategic views were set up in the 3d model and renders of relevant views were produced. Render outputs were reviewed in reference to the visual analysis and description of sensitivities contained in Appendix A (Views).

2.1.8 The testing considered three height scenarios, which were compared against the base case of the existing context plus permitted buildings:

Scenario A - the applicable tall building threshold;

Scenario B - tall development of 6.5m (2 residential storeys) above the tall building threshold; and

Scenario C - tall development of 13m (4 residential storeys) above the tall building threshold.

2.1.9 The thresholds and tall building heights of the scenarios were modelled in the 3d model as area wide massing extrusions, which, where necessary, were adjusted to the local topography.

2.1.10 The generated render outputs are assessed to ascertain the degree of impact on the skyline and in views that would be expected from tall development. It enables an understanding of the height at which development would rise above the tree-line, be visible in the fore ground or back drop of city centre landmarks, be prominent on the skyline or break the horizon line.

2.1.11 Each strategic view assessment is accompanied by a description of the potential impact of the tall building threshold and two tall building scenarios. For each assessed strategic view the impact is ranked and colour coded into the following four categories:

No discernable impact / negligible impact

Moderate impact (overall or in parts of the area)

Significant impact (in parts of the area)

Significant impact

2.1.12 A summary and recommendations for heights and tall buildings is included for each site.

2.1.13 The purpose of this study is to provide greater clarity on the potential impact that tall buildings in Areas of Search could have on Cambridge's skyline, and provide recommendations on the approach to height that could mitigate this impact. It highlights how height might affect the skyline and identifies sensitive aspects or areas that will require specific attention and scrutiny as part of any future detailed tall building testing or strategy development within the Area of Search.

2.1.14 The assessment does not provide detailed area specific guidance on the height or suitability of tall buildings in specific locations in an Area of Search. It also does not replace the need for undertaking detailed VIA for a proposed tall development.

2.1.15 It is recognised that this is a broad-brush simulation, and that in reality, the impact of development will depend on numerous factors, including massing, cumulative effects, modulation and variation

in building form (and gaps between buildings), which could either mitigate or amplify the scale of impact. Nevertheless, this exercise is considered helpful and proportionate to the strategic scope of this study, as it allows the identification of broad areas and height thresholds where harm to the defining characteristics of Cambridge's skyline is more likely, or where strategic sightliness and visual relationships may be affected, ahead of any detailed development proposals being drawn up for these sites. More specific testing of impacts of development would need to be undertaken at planning application stage.



Aerial View of the Area © Bing Maps