



Agriculture Priority Area
October 2014



ENVIRONMENT

A STATES OF GUERNSEY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT

Agriculture Priority Area

October 2014

Contents

	Page
1 Introduction	1
2 Background	1
3 Identifying the Agriculture Priority Area	4

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared to inform the production of a draft Island Development Plan that is a formal review of the Island's existing Development Plans (the Rural Area Plan 2005 and the Urban Area Plan 2002), under the provisions of The Land Planning and Development (Guernsey) Law 2005. The review will ensure that the Island's land use planning policies respond to current and emerging issues over the ten year life of the Plan whilst complying with the States' Strategic Land Use Plan (SLUP).
- 1.2 The Strategic Land Use Plan (SLUP) was approved by the States in 2011 and sets the overarching land use planning framework for Guernsey for the next 20 years. The SLUP is the starting point, providing key direction for the Environment Department in preparing the new Island Development Plan.
- 1.3 The SLUP requires that the Development Plan focuses on maintaining the most important areas of agricultural land and requires that large areas of contiguous agricultural land and other suitable areas well-related to established agricultural operations are identified and protected to meet the agricultural industry's current and future needs whilst balancing and addressing the demands on land of other legitimate development requirements.
- 1.4 The draft Island Development Plan will therefore identify large areas of contiguous agricultural land, and other areas well related to established agricultural operations, which represent Guernsey's most valuable agricultural land. These areas will include some sites which are occupied by redundant glasshouses which lie adjoining to the identified large areas of contiguous agricultural land and which are expected to return to agricultural use and make a contribution to addressing the future requirements of the agricultural industry once cleared.
- 1.5 The purpose of the study is to identify the large tracts of current and potential commercial agricultural land. This has been termed the 'Agriculture Priority Area'. The draft Island Development Plan will contain policy for the Agriculture Priority Area and will show the land designated for this on the Proposals Map.

2 Background

- 2.1 Land used for agriculture is generally understood as including land which is used as arable, meadow or pasture land, for dairy farming, production, rearing or maintenance of livestock, for market gardening or the outdoor cultivation of flowers, bulbs or nursery stock and includes small holdings. Under the Land Planning and Development (Guernsey) Law, 2005 certain land which is, or was, covered by glasshouses must also be treated as agricultural land for the purpose of the Law and any development plan.
- 2.2 Current agricultural practise in Guernsey centres on the dairy industry but also includes outdoor vegetable growing and a range of hobby farming and small holdings.

Although agriculture plays a relatively small part in Guernsey's economy it has a valuable land management function, protecting and enhancing the countryside and providing visual access to open space. In seeking to facilitate a viable rural economy, the farming industry should be protected as much for the role it plays in land management as for its produce.

- 2.3 Due to the nature of land tenure and inheritance laws and due to changes in farming practices over the centuries, Guernsey's farm land has developed a small field pattern which, discounting those areas now developed, continues to follow closely that indicated on the Duke of Richmond map of 1787. The small size of land parcels typifies the traditional, small scale and intricate landscape but has led to a fragmented land ownership. Both are factors in the relatively high operational costs of Guernsey's farmland and these are all challenges to a viable agricultural industry.
- 2.4 In Policy SLP8, the Strategic Land Use Plan seeks to promote a viable agricultural industry and requires a balance to be made between the protection of land for agriculture for the industry's current and future needs and recognising the role it plays in countryside management with ensuring land is available to meet other legitimate development requirements. It guides that the Island Development Plan should focus on maintaining and protecting the most important, large areas of contiguous agricultural land and other areas well related to established agricultural operations identified as being of value to the industry whilst ensuring that land is available for other legitimate land uses.
- 2.5 It is also recognised in the SLUP that dairy farming has played a large part in creating the traditional appearance of the countryside and it continues to have a valued role as a land manager in this respect.
- 2.6 The Development Plan will put in place policies that enable a viable agricultural industry through protecting the most important areas of agricultural land and setting out a flexible approach to development related to the agricultural use including diversification.

Island Development Plan – Key Messages, Issues and Options, 2013

- 2.7 In 2013, the Environment Department published and consulted on Key Messages, Issues and Options. That stage of the Plan review process set out an approach to agricultural land and feedback was sought via the public consultation on the research undertaken by the Environment Department and the approach taken to establish a picture of current agricultural operations on the Island and location of large areas of contiguous agricultural land.
- 2.8 The report 'Approach to Agriculture and Redundant Vineries, July 2013' aimed to identify the most important areas of agricultural land, as required by the Strategic Land Use Plan, by mapping existing agricultural land, land potentially suitable for agriculture and the Best and Most Versatile agricultural land (agricultural land in the

top three grades of soil from the Guernsey Soil Classification 1988). These were identified using the following sources:

- Consultation with the States Commerce and Employment Department;
- The Habitats Survey 2010 (five habitats were selected which best reflect land being used for agricultural purposes - arable land, arable land in ley, improved grassland, semi-improved grassland and semi-improved marshy grassland), and;
- The Guernsey Soil Classification 1988.

2.9 The Approach to Agriculture and Redundant Vineries, July 2013, report also identified current redundant horticultural sites. The study identified 253 existing redundant glasshouse sites and concluded that most of the sites are best suited to reversion to active agricultural use or as open land for visual amenity, recreation, wildlife, etc. due to their location adjacent to land used for agriculture or otherwise open land.

2.10 The feedback to the consultation has informed this study and will inform the policies of the draft Island Development Plan. In summary, the feedback was:

- It was felt that the new Development Plan represents an opportunity to improve current designations to protect agricultural land;
- Support for the return of redundant glasshouse sites in open countryside to agricultural land;
- Support was expressed for retention of viable farming land, agricultural and horticultural, thus retaining it as an unspoilt feature of the landscape, providing visual access to open space, and as a valuable asset for the cultivation of crops;
- In relation to the distribution of the larger tracts of commercial agricultural land presented in the Environment Department's research it was felt that the importance of agricultural land in the north of the Island should not be underestimated;
- Small parcels of land can remain useful for agricultural purposes and incorporation within curtilages should not be made too easy;
- There was concern regarding the impact of fragmentation of agricultural land and the planting of trees, both of which can impact on viability;
- Older glasshouse sites are often contaminated by chemicals and glass and, it is argued, could not be considered valuable to agriculture.

The Economic Development Framework

2.11 The 2014 Economic Development Framework, compiled by the States' Commerce and Employment Department, contains a strategic aim to ensure an adequate supply of affordable commercial premises. In terms of agriculture (including horticulture) the Commerce and Employment Department wish to see:

- Agricultural and open land protected and left undeveloped creating a strategic bank of land for the future;
- Restoration of redundant horticultural land to agricultural use;
- Support for the conversion of some redundant horticultural sites to business or renewable energy use;
- Protection of modern farm buildings from change of use;

- Flexibility for ancillary uses on farms.

Dairy Industry Review Group Report

- 2.12 The Dairy Industry Review Group Report (2013 -14) *Dairy farming in Guernsey and the future* is the Commerce and Employment Department's comprehensive vision for the long term future of the dairy industry. The report will inform the drafting of policies in the draft Island Development Plan. The report recommends that "agricultural and open land is protected and should continue to be left undeveloped, leaving a strategic land bank for the future of food production and farming. Suitable modern farm buildings should be protected for truly agricultural purposes and not given permission for a change of use. Farmers and new entrants should be able to develop the facilities needed to support the operation of their farms. Some flexibility in planning should exist to assist farmers who want to develop uses linked to the operation of a working farm, such as farm shops, to sell the farm's produce and so encourage the buying of locally produced food and create interest for visitors and locals".

Agriculture Priority Area

- 2.13 This report explains how the Agriculture Priority Area (APA) has been devised. The policy approach to the APA in the Island Development Plan will be based on the direction given to the Plan by the Strategic Land Use Plan and the reports and feedback outlined above. The Strategic Land Use Plan requires a balance to be made between the protection of land for agriculture for the industry's current and future needs and recognising the role it plays in countryside management with ensuring land is available to meet other legitimate development requirements. It guides that the Island Development Plan should focus on maintaining and protecting the most important, large areas of contiguous agricultural land and other areas well related to established agricultural operations identified as being of value to the industry whilst ensuring that land is available for other legitimate land uses. As such the Agriculture Priority Area is not intended as an area 'safeguarded' for agriculture but instead an area where the priority is that use. Within the APA the development of new farmsteads will be supported and the loss of existing farmsteads will be resisted. Limited diversification of farms will also be possible for uses which would be ancillary or ordinarily incidental to the primary agricultural use. Other development will be possible within the APA where it can be demonstrated that the land does not positively contribute to the commercial agricultural use of the Agriculture Priority Area or cannot practicably be used for commercial agriculture.

3 Identifying the Agriculture Priority Area

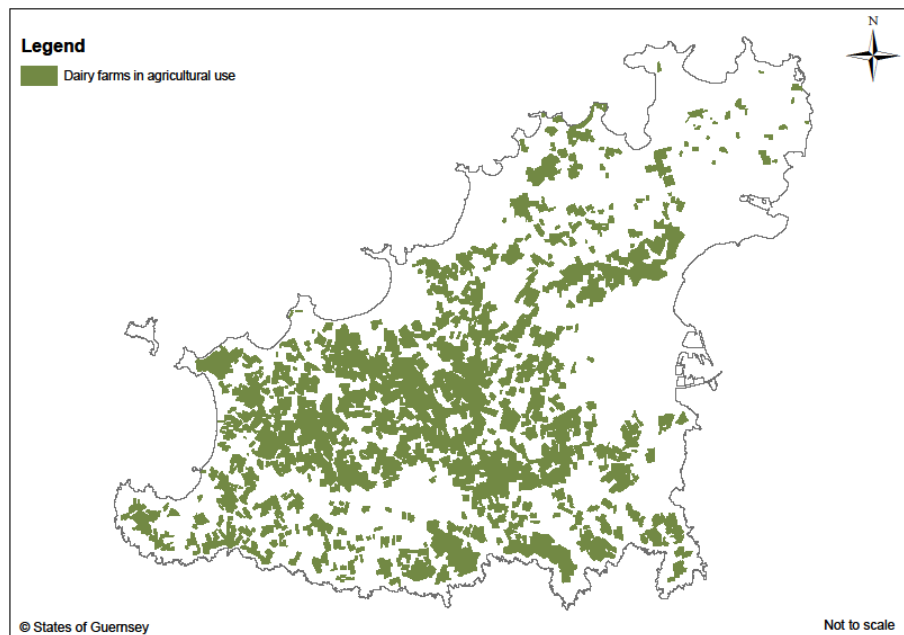
- 3.1 The output of this study is the identification of an Agriculture Priority Area. This has been achieved through:
- A. Identification and mapping of land currently in agricultural use;
 - B. Mapping of the Best and Most Versatile Land;
 - C. Identification of adjoining redundant glasshouses and other suitable areas well related to established agricultural operations;
 - D. Removal of land to be designated as a Site of Special Significance;

- E. Assessment and mapping of A, B, C and D together to identify large tracts of contiguous agricultural land, and removal of isolated areas through testing of options for a minimum size threshold;
- F. Broadly drawing boundaries around the remaining large tracts of land.

A - Identification and mapping of land currently in agricultural use

- 3.2 The location of existing farmsteads and the extent of land in use for farming have been identified in consultation with the Commerce and Employment Department. This has been plotted on GIS as shown in figure 1 below and extends to 4,175 acres (10,310 vergées). In response to the Spatial Strategy of the Strategic Land Use Plan (SLUP), land within the proposed Main Centres, Main Centre Outer Areas and Local Centres was removed at this point to allow opportunities for development. The SLUP sets a spatial strategy for the distribution of development with which the Island Development Plan must be consistent. This is: *Development concentrated within and around the edges of the urban centres of St Peter Port and St Sampson/Vale with some limited development within and around the edges of the other main parish or local centres to enable community growth and the reinforcement of sustainable centres.* Land at the airport was also removed at this point for operational reasons.

Figure 1



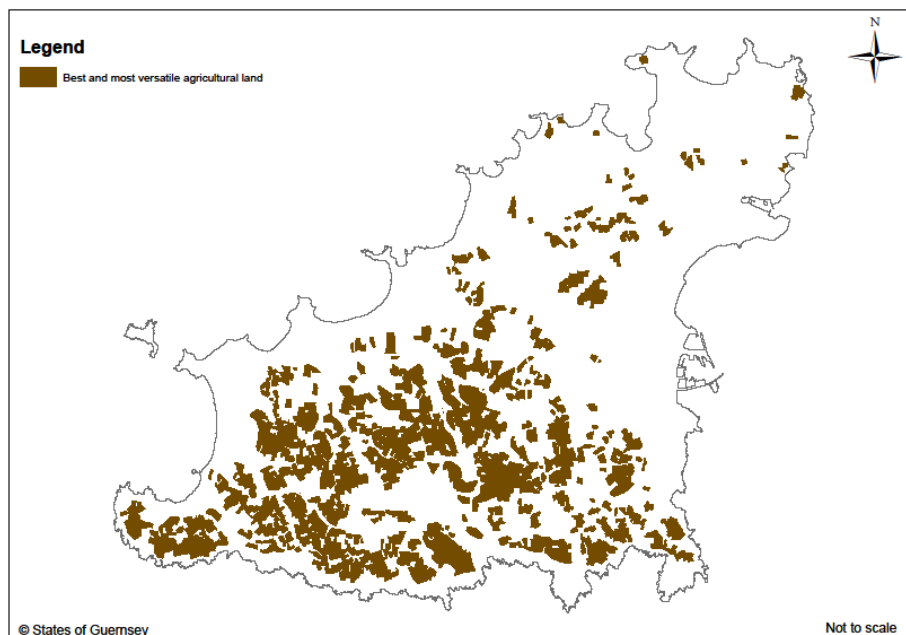
- 3.3 Commercial agriculture in Guernsey is primarily centred on the dairy industry which takes place on 15 farms (reduced from 30 in the last decade as the industry has consolidated) utilising approximately 3,240 acres (8,000 vergées). Other agricultural land is used for outdoor vegetable growing and a range of small holdings, hobby farming and leisure activities, including the keeping of horses. The future requirements of the industry in terms of land are likely to be around about the same

as today as the quantity of milk currently being produced across 15 farms will be still required, perhaps increased modestly, over the life of the Plan to meet the Island's needs. The number of farms may decline but the land requirement is expected to remain at present levels and increase slightly to accommodate growth in outdoor cropping and other agriculture. This requirement for commercial agriculture does not include the growing interest in allotments or grow your own. Although these activities do not represent a change of use of agricultural land in their own right the ancillary development usually required to facilitate them does require planning permission. For the purposes of the Island Development Plan these uses will be considered to be leisure and recreational use.

B - Mapping of the Best and Most Versatile agricultural land

- 3.4 The Best and Most Versatile agriculture land was identified and mapped from the top three grades of soil from the Guernsey Soil Classification 1988 (which sets out a grading of agricultural soil quality across the Island, although this survey information is now dated it is the most recent information available and it is unlikely that soil types and characteristics will have substantially changed since then). These areas were then 'sense checked' using information from the 2010 Habitat Survey and some areas not in agricultural use were removed.
- 3.5 The Best and Most Versatile agricultural land was plotted on GIS as shown in figure 2 below. This represents approximately 2,819 acres (6,961 vergées) of land focussed primarily in the southern part of the Island, extending northward in more isolated pockets.

Figure 2

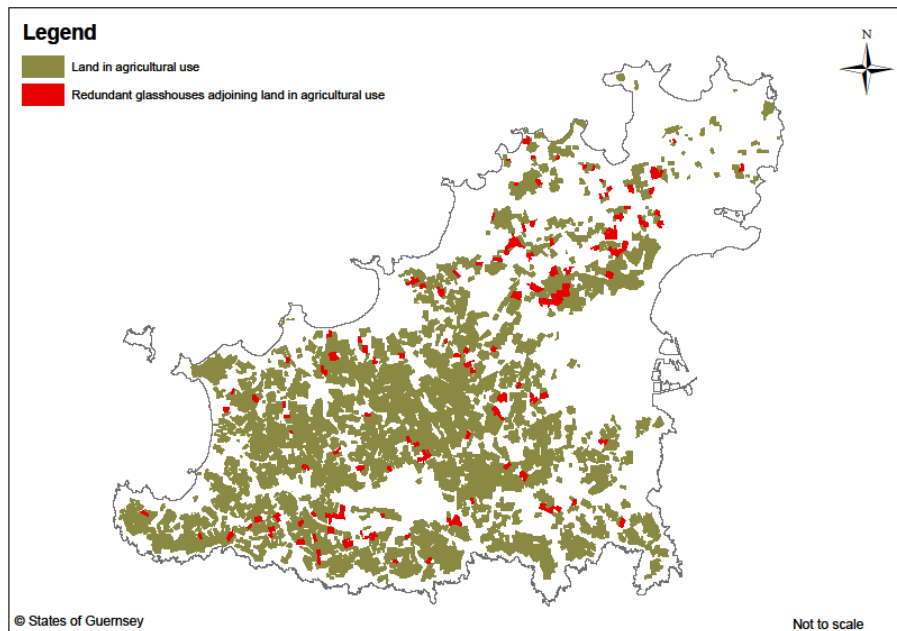


- 3.6 Best and Most Versatile agricultural land not within the land in agricultural use identified in A above was added to the Agriculture Priority Area. The Agriculture Priority Area therefore takes account of the potential of good quality land not currently in active agricultural use to contribute should it become available.
- 3.7 A and B build an overall picture of where commercial agriculture is generally taking place on the Island and where land, which may not be in commercial agricultural use at present but is of good quality and adjacent to existing operations and therefore most suitable to contribute to the industry, is located. The maps identify that agricultural land, and land suitable for agricultural use, occupies a particularly dense swathe of land in the south and west of the Island, continuing at a lesser density and in more fragmented areas throughout much of the northern part of the Island and covers 4,925 acres (12,162 vergées).

C - Identification of adjoining redundant glasshouses well related to established agricultural operations

- 3.8 For the purposes of this report 'redundant glasshouse' has been defined as "a glasshouse or glasshouses together with ancillary structures and land where the horticultural operation has ceased and the glass and ancillary structures have fallen out of authorised use. Often the condition of such structures will deteriorate over time through lack of use and management to leave only partial remnants of structures." Under the Land Planning and Development (Guernsey) Law, 2005 certain land which is, or was, covered by glasshouses must also be treated as agricultural land for the purpose of the Law and any development plan.
- 3.9 The Strategic Land Use Plan includes four possible broad uses of redundant horticultural land in principle including a contribution to commercial agricultural land. The SLUP requires the Island Development Plan to identify redundant glasshouse sites which would, if cleared, make a positive contribution to agricultural land provision. To assess this, the location of redundant glasshouses has been mapped in conjunction with the land identified in A and B above. 142 existing redundant glasshouse sites are immediately adjoining land in agricultural use. These are shown in figure 3 below. This represents approximately 56% of all redundant glasshouse sites identified in the survey of redundant glasshouses.

Figure 3



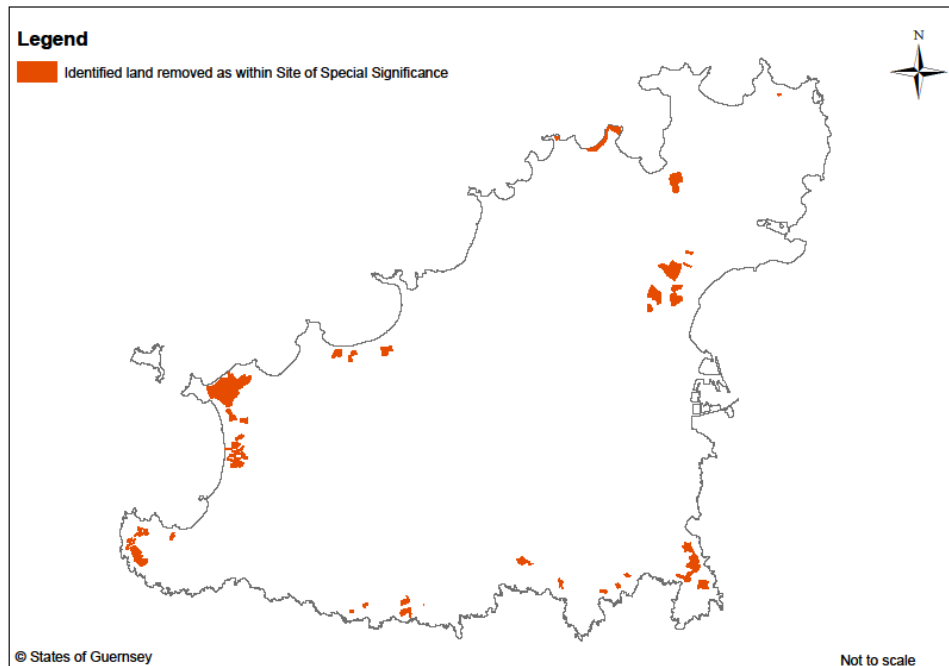
- 3.10 The consultation undertaken for the Dairy Industry Review found support for the restoration of horticultural land to its former open state for use in agriculture. The report notes that “while not all such sites are suitable for restoration, many are on good or potentially good farm land and are linked to existing farmed fields. They could, if restored properly and returned to farming use, create vital links to connect fields or groups of fields”.
- 3.11 It is clear from the above, that returning redundant glasshouse sites to agricultural use would make a significant contribution to commercial agricultural use. Following the revisions to the Agriculture Priority Area in the steps below, 109 redundant glasshouse sites were included in the Agriculture Priority Area.
- 3.12 Further information on the approach to redundant glasshouses is available in the report ‘Approach to Redundant Glasshouses, October 2014’. The future use of redundant glasshouse sites for small scale business use will be considered in detail in a separate report.

D - Removal of land to be designated as a Site of Special Significance

- 3.13 Any land identified through A-D above that lies within a proposed Site of Special Significance (SSS) was removed and this is shown in figure 4. A Site of Special Significance is an area which has been identified as having special significance because of archaeological, historical, botanical, geological, scientific, cultural, zoological or other special interest which it is desirable to preserve, enhance or manage. The land in agricultural use identified following removal of SSS land and with the addition of adjoining redundant glasshouses extends to 4,934 acres (12,184 vergées). The Land

Planning and Development (General Provisions) Ordinance, 2007, Part 1, Section 4 extends the definition of development within a Site of Special Significance, resulting in works normally not constituting development requiring planning permission, such as any works which disturb the ground and materially affect the special interest of the Site of Special Significance, or significant clearance of vegetation. This places significant constraints on development that might harm the special interest of a Site of Special Significance. A significant number of exemptions from the requirement for planning permission under the Land Planning and Development (Exemptions) Ordinance, 2007 are not available in Sites of Special Significance and certain changes of use to agricultural and horticultural uses amount to development in those areas when they do not in others. Given these restrictions on the use of land within a Site of Special Significance, their sensitivity to development and change including agricultural operations, it is considered that such land should not be part of the Agriculture Priority Area.

Figure 4



- 3.14 Following approval of the Island Development Plan, guidance will be produced for each Site of Special Significance. The aim of the guidance will be to help understanding of how best to avoid any negative impacts of development on the special interest of the Site of Special Significance, to identify development that, if carried out in a specific manner, would not need planning permission and to identify the opportunities for enhancement of the area's special interest that might exist through development. The guidance will include details about the extent to which operations (including agricultural operations) would constitute development for each area, how this impacts on the requirement for planning permission and how it will influence how proposals for development within the particular Site of Special Significance will be considered.

- 3.15 Land identified as an Area of Biodiversity Importance (ABI) has not been removed from the Agriculture Priority Area as the legal restrictions applied to Sites of Special Significance do not apply to ABIs and there is less sensitivity to change and development. Areas of Biodiversity Importance do not have sufficient special interest to be designated as a Site of Special Significance but nonetheless are important in supporting the biodiversity of the Island.

E - Assessment and mapping of A, B, C and D together to identify large tracts of viable contiguous agricultural land, through testing of options for a minimum size threshold

- 3.16 After identifying where agriculture is taking place on the Island and where it is most suitable to take place, the approach taken assessed broadly where these areas overlapped and concentrated to inform where larger tracts of land presently are and could be further consolidated or enhanced.
- 3.17 Work was undertaken to establish what would constitute a large tract of land in the Guernsey context. This included consideration of minimum field sizes to constitute the Agriculture Priority Area. However this did not create the large contiguous swathes of land envisaged in the Strategic Land Use Plan given the historic small field pattern. The Environment Department also considered removing those areas used for 'hobby' farming but insufficient information exists to determine what constitutes hobby farming and what land is in this use, and these areas could contribute to commercial agriculture in the future.
- 3.18 Analysis of the areas identified showed the majority to be over 30 vergées in size and as such a minimum size threshold for a large tract of land of 30 vergées is considered appropriate. The 30 vergées threshold would allow for significantly more land to be included within the APA designation than the 8,000 vergées currently used for dairy farming so that, as a minimum this would be maintained whilst allowing an additional buffer to accommodate consolidation, growth and flexibility.
- 3.19 As a result of the above, more isolated pockets of land in current agriculture use have been excluded from the Agriculture Priority Area. This will not prevent the continued use of the land for this purpose and policies in the Island Development Plan will generally support this.

F - Broadly drawing boundaries around the remaining large tracts of land

- 3.20 The Agriculture Priority Area has been broadly drawn and includes areas of land and sites which are not currently used for agricultural purposes and could not be expected to contribute positively to commercial agriculture in the future, for example dwellings and their curtilages. This is because there were some areas or pockets of land lying within larger tracts of land or separating larger tracts and rather than overly prescribe the exact nature of the boundaries, the boundaries were drawn broadly to incorporate these areas to form a more coherent picture and the policy approach will reflect this and allow for other forms of development within the identified Agriculture Priority Area. This is consistent with the approach that gives priority to agriculture in

these areas but does not safeguard these areas for agriculture which would reduce the flexibility of the Plan policies.

- 3.21 The process of drawing these boundaries was informed by further work including a desktop survey of aerial photos and topography (in particular location of the scarp), the exclusion of large areas of development and exclusion of St Saviour's Reservoir from within the designation.
- 3.22 A number of Conservation Areas, as proposed, overlap with the Agriculture Priority Area. The Conservation Area designation will provide protection for buildings and features that contribute to the character of the Conservation Area which would need to be taken in consideration where any development was proposed. However the designation would not otherwise impinge on the continued use of agricultural land, so it was considered that it was not necessary to remove land in a Conservation Area from the Agriculture Priority Area.
- 3.23 The Agriculture Priority Area identified following steps A-F above is shown in figure 5. This covers an area of 6,234 acres (15,394 vergées). This area should accommodate the existing and future needs of the agriculture sector and should promote consolidation and reduced operational costs whilst the policy approach should maintain the flexibility to consider other legitimate development within these areas in accordance with the Strategic Land Use Plan.

Figure 5

