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NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE LOCAL PLAN: CORE STRATEGY

GREEN WEDGE BACKGROUND PAPER



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Green Wedge Paper is one of a collection of Background Papers which provide guidance to, and evidence behind, the Council's approach to a variety of issues in its Core Strategy Development Plan Document.
- 1.2 The role of this Background Paper is to outline and explain the approach taken in the Core Strategy regarding the Green Wedge and Area/s of Separation.

2.0 CONTEXT

- 2.1 The area of Green Wedge within North West Leicestershire is broadly located between Coalville, Whitwick and Swannington and covers some 444.19Ha.
- 2.2 The Coalville/Whitwick/Swannington Green Wedge was originally proposed in the Leicestershire Structure Plan approved in 1994. Its boundary was subsequently defined in the Adopted North West Leicestershire Local Plan 2002 and therefore is a long standing policy designation within the District.
- 2.3 The predominant land use within the Green Wedge is agriculture. However; there are also recreation areas such as the playing fields and sports pitches adjacent to Hermitage Leisure Centre and Coalville Rugby Club. Within the Green Wedge there are a number of residential dwellings, these are either lone dwellings or small clusters of dwellings and there are no large concentrations of housing within the Green Wedge.
- 2.4 In November 2008 the Council published a review of the Green Wedge which concluded that the Green Wedge designation could no longer be justified as it did not meet all of the assessment criteria. This document details the work undertaken in respect of the Green Wedge, including how the issue has been dealt with at each stage of the preparation of the Core Strategy and the reports that have been presented to Cabinet. The report presented to cabinet on 1st March 2011 suggested that as the Green Wedge designation could no longer be justified that it be re-designated as an Area of Separation.
- 2.5 As the 2008 Green Wedge review assessed the Green Wedge against the latest strategic guidance it is considered that, to ensure a consist approach, this should also be the case for re-designating the area as an Area of Separation. To this end the latter part of the document provides an assessment of the Green Wedge against the Area of Separation Policy to ensure the re-designation can be justified.
- 2.6 A simple timeline plotting the history of the Green Wedge is included in Appendix One.

Core Strategy Issues and Options Consultation 2005

- 3.1 The Council consulted on its Core Strategy Issues and Options document in November 2005. The consultation document was written in the context of the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan 1996-2016 which was adopted on the 7th March 2005. The consultation document included a section on the Green Wedge which echoed the provisions set out in Strategy Policy 5 (Green Wedges) of the Structure Plan and concluded that although Strategy Policy 5 forms the basis for Planning Policy within the context of the Coalville/Whitwick/Swannington Green Wedge, there may be other more local considerations that should also be taken into account in the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD).
- 3.2 The Consultation Document put forward several questions regarding the policy context of the District's Green Wedge as well as stating that a review of the Green Wedge boundaries would be undertaken as part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) process, in line with Strategy Policy 6 (Review of Green Wedges) of the Structure Plan.
- 3.3 A total of 67 responses were received to the consultation. One of the main strategic issues raised at the consultation stage was that any future review of the Green Wedge should be closely linked to the identification of suitable sites for new development.

Core Strategy Additional Consultation 2007

- 3.4 In June 2007 the Council undertook another round of consultation on its emerging Core Strategy. The Core Strategy Additional Consultation document put forward four possible locations in and around Coalville for a Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE). This included land to the north of Coalville relief road (towards Whitwick) designated as Green Wedge. This was in line with issues raised as part of the 2005 consultation which advocated that any future review of the Green Wedge should be closely linked to the identification of suitable sites for new development.
- 3.5 In total there were 541 responses to the consultation. There was some support for development on the Green Wedge but overwhelming support for development on land to the south-east of Coalville, also known as Bardon Grange.

Core Strategy Further Consultation: A Strategy for Growth and Change November 2008 and Green Wedge Background Paper November 2008

- 3.6 Following the 2005 and 2007 consultations a review of the District's Green Wedge was undertaken in 2008 following additional guidance, contained in the Regional

Plan Panel Report, advocating that Green Wedges should be reviewed. The Regional Plan Panel Report (published November 2007) stated that:

'Green Wedges do not have the national policy status of Green Belt and...they should not be regarded as unduly restrictive and must be subject to review in order to accommodate new development'.

- 3.7 In addition the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the East Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) (published in July 2008) accepted the recommendations of the Panel Report. The Proposed Changes state that:

'A review of existing Green Wedges or the creation of new ones in association with development will be carried out through the local development framework process'.

- 3.8 The review of the Green Wedge was published in November 2008 as a Background Paper to accompany the Core Strategy Further Consultation Document; both documents were consulted upon between 19th November 2008 and 23rd March 2009.

- 3.9 The Background Paper assessed the Green Wedge against the latest available strategic guidance as to how a Green Wedge should be defined. At the time this was provided by Strategy Policy 5 of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Structure Plan 1996-2016. At the time of the 2008 review the RSS had not been adopted although regard was had to the criteria in the emerging RSS which was largely similar to the criteria in the Structure Plan. The only exception being in relation to the recreation use of Green Wedges, therefore, in order to reflect emerging guidance in the RSS a further criterion was added regarding the recreational value of the Districts Green Wedge.

- 3.10 Advice from Leicestershire County Council was that the Green Wedge should meet all four criteria set out in Strategy Policy 5. In their email of 14/02/2008 a Senior Planning Officer from Leicestershire County Council stated that *"it is intended that any land to be proposed for green wedge should satisfy all four criteria set out in A to D of Strategy Policy 5 (though D would only apply in certain geographical situations)"*.

- 3.11 A copy of the assessment is included in Appendix Two.

- 3.12 The review identified that overall the Green Wedge met, at best, only two of the four Structure Plan criteria, and even then only partially. The review concluded that, with regard to the latest strategic guidance which post dates the Local Plan and considering the views of Leicestershire County Council regarding the need to satisfy all four criterion, the Green Wedge designation could no longer be justified.

- 3.13 However, this conclusion does not automatically mean that the land covered by the Green Wedge policy should be allowed to be developed or used for some other purpose. Whilst the Green Wedge designation could not be justified it did satisfy some aspects of Strategy Policy 5, in particular in respect of preventing the complete coalescence of Coalville (south of the A511) with Whitwick and Swannington to the north.
- 3.14 The Background Paper considered a range of options for the future of the Green Wedge, these are listed below:
- Option 1 - identify all three areas as a Strategic Gap or Area of Separation.
 - Option 2 – identify the eastern and central areas as Strategic Gap or Area of Separation and identify the westernmost area as countryside.
 - Option 3 – identify the westernmost area as a Strategic Gap or Area of Separation or Countryside whilst leaving the middle and eastern areas within the framework of the Coalville Urban Area but without any specific designation.
 - Option 4 – identify the central area as a Strategic Gap or Area of Separation, the western area as a Strategic Gap or Area of Separation or Countryside and the eastern area as being suitable for a strategic housing development.
 - Option 5 - identify the eastern area as a Strategic Gap or Area of Separation, the western area as a Strategic Gap or Area of Separation or Countryside and the central as being suitable for a strategic housing development.
 - Option 6 - identify the western area as a Strategic Gap or Area of Separation or Countryside and the central and eastern areas as suitable for strategic housing development
 - Option 7 – identify all parts of the Green Wedge as being suitable for strategic development including housing and employment
- 3.15 Whilst the Background Paper put forward a range of options it did not identify a preferred option. For the purposes of the review the Green Wedge was assessed as one entity, although in both physical and visual terms it can be considered as three separate areas as there are intervening urban features such as roads and built development which split the Green Wedge. The 2008 review provided detailed descriptions of the Green Wedge for which the areas were split into three separate areas – west, central and east.
- 3.16 A copy of the 2008 Background Paper is available on the Council’s Website at http://www.nwleics.gov.uk/pages/core_strategy
- 3.17 The 2008 Core Strategy Consultation sought views on a number of key issues including the Green Wedge. Altogether the Council received 4,154 responses to the consultation and of these a significant number were standard responses. The following responses specifically related to the Green Wedge:

- There were 500 standard responses that expressed concern about the possibility of development on the Green Wedge and the potential implications on infrastructure as a result of new development.
- A further 200 standard responses suggested that a fifth alternative in respect of the Development Strategy should be included, which preserves the Green Wedge and keeps Whitwick and Thringstone separate from Coalville.

Core Strategy Consultation Our District – Our Future May 2011

- 3.18 During May 2011 there was a further round of consultation on the Core Strategy; this included a specific question relating to the Green Wedge, which asked “Do you support our proposal to not build on the Green Wedge”. Overall, the consultation generated some 1,750 responses, of these 1,576 took the form of a standard letter prepared by the Whitwick Action Group. The majority of responses received supported the proposal not to build on the Green Wedge. The responses generated considered that the Green Wedge provides separation between, and identity to, the surrounding settlements as well as a natural environment and public amenity value. Other responses considered that development of one large location (Bardon Grange) for new housing to be a risky strategy whilst the Green Wedge is a sustainable location for development. A copy of the consultation document can be viewed [here](#).
- 3.19 There have been various Cabinet Reports that have been to the Council’s Cabinet during the preparation of the Core Strategy, some of which have resulted in the Consultations detailed above. The following section details the Cabinet reports. Specific reference is made to how the issue of the Green Wedge has been considered at each stage.

4.0 CABINET REPORTS

- 4.1 The initial findings of the Core Strategy Further Consultation (2008) were presented to Cabinet on the 16th June 2009. The report noted the public's objections to potential development on the Green Wedge and that there was some support from public agencies for the deletion of the Green Wedge. A copy of the Report can be viewed [here](#).
- 4.2 A further report was presented to Cabinet on the 20th October 2009. The report outlined emerging views in respect of a number of the key issues from the Core Strategy and provided a direction of travel for further work. The report detailed the concerns raised in response to the consultation regarding possible development on the Green Wedge. It was considered that additional work was required on the overall Development Strategy before any decisions could be made. It was acknowledged that in the event of some development taking place on the Green Wedge that the concerns raised would need to be addressed. The Cabinet Report was consulted upon and 13 responses were received, in respect of the Green Wedge there was support for its retention and it was considered that a thorough assessment of the Green Wedge was needed. A copy of the report can be viewed [here](#)
- 4.3 A further report was taken to Cabinet in August 2010; Cabinet deferred the report which considered possible development scenarios. Due to the nature and public interest in the Green Wedge Members requested that officers consider alternatives to possible development on the Green Wedge. A copy of the report can be viewed [here](#).
- 4.4 A report addressing these issues was taken to Cabinet on 1st March 2011. The report also outlined for members a number of key issues relating to the Core Strategy and sought agreement for a further round of public consultation. The report reviewed available evidence and identified that development could be accommodated on one site in Coalville without developing on the Green Wedge (in the context of revised housing figures). The Report also considered that the Green Wedge could be re-designated as an Area (or Areas) of Separation. Cabinet resolved that the Green Wedge should be protected and re-designated as an Area of Separation, to prevent coalescence and protect the identity of individual villages. Cabinet also agreed a further round of public consultation. A copy of the report can be viewed [here](#).
- 4.5 Following the 2011 Consultation, the responses, along with recommendations on how the Council can move forward with the Core Strategy were presented to Cabinet on the 18th October 2011. The consultation responses demonstrated significant support for the proposal not to build on the Green Wedge. In view of the strong local opinion the Cabinet Report proposed no change in the approach from

that previously agreed to protect the Green Wedge and re-designate it as an Area/s of Separation. A copy of the report can be viewed [here](#).

5.1 Following the publication of the 2008 Background Paper, the East Midlands RSS was adopted in March 2009 and does not contain a policy on Green Wedges. Instead, the supporting text emphasises that a review of existing Green Wedges or the creation of new ones in association with development will be carried out through the local development framework process.

5.2 Paragraph 4.2.18 of the supporting text of the Regional Plan reflects emerging policy that had been published at the time the 2008 review was undertaken and states the following:

'Green Wedges serve useful strategic planning functions in preventing the merging of settlements, guiding development form and providing a 'green lung' into urban areas, and act as a recreational resource. Although not supported by government policy in the same way as Green Belts, they can serve to identify smaller areas of separation between settlements. Provision will be made in Green Wedges for the retention or creation of green infrastructure or green links between urban open spaces and the countryside, and for the retention and enhancement of public access facilities, particularly for recreation.'

5.3 The Government has announced its intention to abolish all Regional Spatial Strategies. However, at the present time they remain in place as part of the Development Plan and so its provisions are still relevant in preparing the Core Strategy.

- 6.1 Following the adoption of the East Midlands Regional Plan (March 2009) and its emphasis on reviewing existing green wedges through the LDF process, the seven local authorities of Charnwood, Harborough, Blaby, Hinckley & Bosworth, Leicester City, North West Leicestershire and Oadby & Wigston formulated a Joint Methodology for reviewing green wedges in August 2009. The above authorities, along with Melton Borough Council form the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing Market Area (HMA). Although Melton Borough Council is part of the HMA they do not have a green wedge within their administrative boundary.
- 6.2 The joint methodology was prepared to ensure a consistent review process across the HMA. Although the methodology was agreed by the local authorities detailed above, it can be used when/if each individual local authority carries out a review of their green wedge. Having a consistent approach to such a review is considered vital to ensure the soundness of the Development Plan Documents prepared by each local authority.
- 6.3 It was considered that the review would inform the preparation of each Local Authority's Core Strategy and subsequent Allocations and Designations DPD.
- 6.4 In addition to reviewing the Green Wedge the methodology also advocated that Local Authorities will also;
- Identify any areas of existing Green Wedges which no longer meet the aims set out in the Regional Plan and which, therefore, could be proposed for deletion in Development Plan Documents;
 - Identify any areas which at present are not subject to Green Wedge policy but could be appropriately included in conjunction with proposals to accommodate additional development.
- 6.2 As detailed in the Joint Methodology the East Midlands Regional Plan provided the strategic context for the review of the existing Green Wedges in North West Leicestershire. The baseline data collected for the 2008 review was considered up to date enough to utilise for the 2009 assessment.
- 6.6 The assessment of the Green Wedge against the 2009 Joint Methodology is included in Appendix Three.
- 6.7 Following the publication of the 2009 Joint Methodology the Steering Group met in July 2010 to discuss, amongst other things, the proposed abolition of the Regional Plan. The meeting concluded that there were no implications for the Joint Methodology and it was amended to reflect this, stating the following:

'The removal of the Regional Plan in the future will not preclude the need to carry out such a review or undermine the legitimacy of the approach taken. The need to undertake a review of green wedges is included in some adopted Core Strategies in Leicestershire'.

- 7.1 Following the Governments announcement of its intention to abolish Regional Spatial Strategies through the emerging Localism Bill (outlined in December 2010), the Steering Group met in June 2011 to discuss possible implications this would have on the Review Methodology. It was agreed that the planning functions set out in the RSS will remain legitimate when the East Midlands Regional Plan is abolished in the future and provide the starting point for the Green Wedge review in Leicestershire. The Joint Methodology was amended in reference to East Midlands Regional Plan to state that it is the Governments 'intention' to abolish regional plans.
- 7.2 The meeting also considered recent appeal decisions in respect of the Green Wedge. It was agreed, following these decisions, that the green wedge should be considered differently at macro and micro scales. The Methodology was amended to state that;
- 'when assessing a green wedge (on a macro scale) in its entirety, or when identifying a new green wedge; a green wedge should achieve all of the evaluation criteria, or be capable of fulfilling all criteria in the future where as at a micro scale it was not the intention to meet all four criteria'.*
- 7.3 The 2011 Green Wedge Joint Methodology was agreed by the six local authorities of Charnwood, Harborough, Hinckley & Bosworth, Leicester City, North West Leicestershire and Oadby & Wigston. Blaby District Council chose to suspend their involvement in the Joint Methodology.
- 7.4 The four evaluation criteria were also amended to reflect issues that had arisen as part of the review process or had emerged through appeal decisions. The four criteria are included in the table in Appendix Four along with the review of the Green Wedge based on the 2011 Joint Methodology. Any changes from the 2009 Joint Methodology are indicated by underlined text.
- 7.5 Both the 2009 and 2011 Joint Methodologies outlined potential approaches to consultation on Green Wedge reviews.
- 7.6 As the Council had consulted on its Green Wedge Background Paper in 2008 as part of the wider Core Strategy consultation the views of stakeholders and the public had been sought prior to the publication of the 2009 Joint Methodology. Therefore, it was considered that no further consultation was required at that stage.
- 7.7 The 2011 Methodology details that as the Green Wedge review forms part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework, the findings of the review will be consulted upon as part of the preparation of a Core Strategy and/or Site Allocations DPD depending on what stage the Local Authority is at in the preparation of their LDF. This will provide the opportunity for commenting on the Green Wedge

reviews. To fulfill the consultation requirements set out in the 2011 Joint Methodology this review is published as a Background Paper to accompany the Pre-Submission Core Strategy Consultation Document.

- 7.8 The latest review undertaken, based on the 2011 Joint Methodology supports the findings of the 2008 review of the Green Wedge and identifies that the Green Wedge can no longer be justified. The following section of the document puts forward the intended future designation of the Green Wedge.

8.0 GREEN WEDGE/AREA OF SEPARATION REVIEW

8.1 As the 2008 Green Wedge Background Paper found that the Green Wedge Policy could no longer be justified and Cabinet had agreed to re-designate the Green Wedge as an Area/s of Separation further work was undertaken to assess the Green Wedge against the Area/s of Separation criteria set out in the Adopted North West Leicestershire Local Plan.

8.2 The following section outlines Areas of Separation policies and how these relate to the Green Wedge Policy; it also details other evidence base documents that have been produced since the 2008 review before detailing conclusions on whether the Green Wedge can be justified as an Area/s of Separation.

Area of Separation Policy Background

8.3 Within the District there are a number of instances where separate settlements are relatively close to each other. The intervening areas are often subject to development pressure, which, if permitted would eventually result in the physical coalescence and loss of identity of these separate settlements.

8.4 The Leicestershire Structure Plan 1991-2006 contained a policy on the separation of settlements. Environment Policy 5: Separation of settlements stated that:

'In areas to which Green Wedge policies do not apply and which cannot be properly designated as countryside, provision will not normally be made for development which would result in the separation between the built up area of settlements'.

8.5 The North West Leicestershire Local Plan (2002) contained a Policy on Areas of Separation (E21); this was in accordance with Environment Policy 5 of the Leicestershire Structure Plan 1991-2006. The Local Plan policy was saved and it states that:

'Development will not be permitted which would result in a reduction in the physical separation between the built-up areas of adjoining settlements provided by the following areas of land, identified on the Proposals Map:

- (a) *Hugglescote – Ellistown*
- (b) *Ibstock – Heather*
- (c) *Coalville – Ravenstone*
- (d) *Donisthorpe – Moira, and*
- (e) *Hemington – Castle Donington'*

- 8.6 The Areas of Separation policy was a local designation and the approach was continued in the following Structure Plan. The Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan 1996-2016 contained a policy on the Separation of Settlements, Strategy Policy 7: Separation of Settlements stated that:

'Predominantly open land between the defined development boundaries of neighbouring settlements which is not part of a Green Wedge but performs an essential function in keeping the built-up areas of those settlements separate may be defined in local plans as Areas of Separation. Within such areas, development will be permitted only where it would not result in a material reduction in the degree of separation between the neighbouring built-up areas'.

- 8.7 The East Midlands Regional Plan, adopted March 2009 replaced the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Structure Plan 1996 – 2016, the policies of which have now expired. The Regional Plan itself did not contain a policy on Areas of Separation as this was a local level designation.
- 8.8 As identified under Local Plan Policy E21 there are five areas within the District already allocated as Areas of Separation and are in place to maintain separation between the settlements and to prevent coalescence.
- 8.9 In general the Area of separation Policy is based on the function of land combined with landscape and topography with the primary purpose of Areas of Separation to maintain the separation of settlements. Therefore, the criteria are less complex and prescriptive than the Green Wedge criteria.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 9.1 On 27th March 2012 the Government published the NPPF and with immediate effect it replaced all previous planning policy contained in Planning Policy Statements and Planning Policy Guidance Notes.
- 9.2 The NPPF is a key part of the Government's reforms to the planning system (along with the abolition of the RSS), to make it less complex, more accessible and to promote sustainable growth. The NPPF sets out the Government's key economic, social and environmental objectives and the planning policies to deliver them.
- 9.3 As part of the NPPF the Government envisages that local communities through local and neighbourhood plans should be able to identify for special protection green areas of particular importance to them. The NPPF states that:

'By designating land as Local Green Space local communities will be able to rule out new development other than in very special circumstances. Identifying land as Local Green Space should therefore be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services. Local Green Spaces should only be designated when a plan is prepared or reviewed, and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period'.

- 9.4 The NPPF details that *"the Local Green Space designation will not be appropriate for most green areas or open space. The designation should only be used:*
- *where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;*
 - *where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and*
 - *where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.*

Local Policy for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with policy for Green Belts".

Work Undertaken by Leicestershire County Council (LCC)

Coalville Green Spaces Consultation November 2011

- 9.6 In response to the Governments Draft NPPF and its stated intention to create a new designation to protect green spaces of particular importance to local communities, Leicestershire County Council has prepared for the new designation by assembling evidence which would assist its implementation.
- 9.7 This has been done through community engagement exercises to understand which green spaces are valued by local communities. This has primarily been done through the 27 Community Forums in Leicestershire, the use of an online tool as well as comments sent by post and e-mail.
- 9.8 The County Council has produced a report which sets out the findings of their engagement exercise. The findings are set out for each individual Community Forum area, and are available on the following website
www.lsr-online.org/greenspacesresults
- 9.10 In regards to the Green Wedge, the Coalville Community Forum meeting was well attended with discussion and debate focussed on the Green Wedge separating Coalville and Whitwick. Overall, the local community identified a number of areas of value which included the three Green Wedge areas between Coalville, Whitwick and Swannington. In addition the Whitwick Action Group and Whitwick Parish Council highlighted the green space separating the villages of Whitwick, Thringstone and Swannington from Coalville as a key area of importance to the local community.
- 9.11 This consultation and evidence gathering exercise undertaken highlights the importance attached to the Green Wedge by local communities.

Green Spaces in Leicester and Leicestershire: Local Green Spaces Toolkit and Existing Policy Context

- 9.11 Further to the Green Spaces Consultation exercise Leicestershire County Council published (May 2012) a Local Green Spaces Toolkit and Existing Policy Context document designed to support local communities and councils in making decisions about the future protection and use of existing green spaces. The document provides advice and support to those wishing to seek to designate green spaces valued by local communities; and by bringing together into one document existing policies and designations.
- 9.12 A key part of the toolkit is a methodology, in the form of 'decision tree', which sets out a decision-making process for deciding whether a particular green space can be designated as a Local Green Space. The process can also help decide whether other

designations are appropriate if the green space does not meet the Local Green Space criteria.

- 9.13 The Policy Context section of the document details the roles of green wedges and the review criteria contained in the Joint Methodology. The document also details that there is no Green Belt in Leicestershire as it has never been deemed appropriate although it has been considered on a number of occasions. The approach in Leicestershire has focused much more on Green Wedges which help to guide and shape urban form whilst giving residents access to green space. Green Wedges are more fine grained and sympathetic to growth and change in urban form and to the specific geography of Leicester and Leicestershire. They do not have the same degree of planning policy permanence as Green Belts but have proved to be effective and have had the necessary support through a number of generations of Local Plan Inquiry processes and individual planning appeals.
- 9.14 The report does not refer to Areas of Separation. The document can be viewed [here](#)

Settlement Fringe Assessment (August 2010)

- 9.15 In addition to the documents published by Leicestershire County Council, the District Council commissioned consultants to undertake a Settlement Fringe Assessment (SFA). The document provides landscape evidence for the LDF to help the Council to ensure that the siting of new development, specifically housing, is located where it would have the least adverse effects on the landscape or the setting of each settlement.
- 9.16 The study assessed the landscape value of land around the settlement fringes of Ashby de la Zouch, Castle Donington, Coalville, Ibstock, Kegworth and Measham. The study helps identify the most distinctive landscapes, and those which are important for the setting of settlements. The assessment also provides a detailed landscape assessment of the possible future development sites around settlements, as identified in the Core Strategy Consultation (2008).
- 9.17 The following conclusions were reached in respect of the Green Wedge. The conclusions include recommendations which consider the key landscape features and identify important characteristics that should be protected and where possible enhanced or increased.

Western Edge of Thringstone and Thornborough/ New Swannington (Eastern part of Western Green Wedge)

- 9.18 This is a relatively prominent site when viewed from the landscape to the west. The setting of the existing built form is a narrow linear settlement with Charnwood Forest providing a prominent backdrop. It would be difficult to mitigate new

development across this site without increasing the prominence of urban edges. New development would also alter the rural character of both Spring Lane and Church Lane reducing the sense of separation between Thornborough/New Swannington and Swannington. Woodland and tree planting could help to screen development although the character of the roads would alter as they would become more enclosed by woodland planting and existing characteristic long views across farmland towards Charnwood Forest would be prevented.

Land between New Swannington and Whitwick (Hermitage Road) (Majority of the Central Green Wedge)

- 9.19 This land is enclosed on all sides by development which reduces the sense of separation between settlements. As development along the roads joins settlements there is little perception along roads or at gateways that there is separation. The land already has both built development and trees surrounding it which limits its prominence within the wider landscape. Existing public open space will help to retain a sense of separation between Thornborough Road and Hermitage Road. The land is used for informal recreation which would be lost if the site was developed and therefore green routeways and some open space would be required within the development to retain connections between settlements. Careful design and layout will be required to retain the wooded and informal character of Bridle Road and to retain channelled views through the site to Whitwick.

Fringe between Hermitage Road, Broom Leys Road and Whitwick (Hall Lane) (Eastern Green Wedge)

- 9.20 The land is currently a pocket of farmland surrounded by development. Development is always visible within the site and there is intervisibility between settlements. Development along the roads between Whitwick and Coalville prevents a sense of separation between the settlements.
- 9.21 Development would need careful siting to retain channelled views; however a sense of separation could be created through incorporation of open space and woodland to the east and west of the site. Development on land to the south of the railway would be relatively easy to integrate without altering the character of the land or sense of separation. The character of Green Lane would be altered through development becoming more enclosed and urban than at present. This could not be fully mitigated although retaining existing hedgerows and including tree planting could help to retain a 'green' character to the lane.

10.0 CONCLUSIONS

- As identified through the 2008 review and the more recent review based on the Joint Methodology the Green Wedge does not meet all of the criteria to justify its continued designation as Green Wedge. However, the Green Wedge does meet some of the criteria; specifically it prevents the coalescence of Coalville with Whitwick and Swannington.
- The Area of separation Policy is based on the function of land combined with landscape and topography with the primary purpose of Areas of Separation to maintain the separation of settlements.
- Generally, the Area of Separation Policy (as set out in the Local Plan) is less complex and prescriptive than the Green Wedge Policy.
- The Green Wedge already fulfills its role in preventing the merging of settlements therefore its transition to an Area of Separation simply removes its requirements fulfill any of the other criteria.
- Community engagement undertaken by the County Council identifies strong local support for the Green Wedge and its continued protection as a locally valued Green Space.
- The Settlement Fringe Assessment identifies the significant landscape characteristics within the Green Wedge.
- The Area of Separation designation is supported by Cabinet.

For the overall conclusions the Green Wedge is divided into East, Central and West areas which reflect, to a certain extent, the areas described in the Landscape Character Assessment. The Green Wedge is assessed against the criteria set out in the Area of Separation Policy as detailed below.

'Predominantly open land between the defined development boundaries of neighbouring settlements which is not part of a Green Wedge but performs an essential function in keeping the built-up areas of those settlements separate may be defined in local plans as Areas of Separation. Within such areas, development will be permitted only where it would not result in a material reduction in the degree of separation between the neighbouring built-up areas'.

Western Green Wedge

- 10.1 The Western Area is the largest part of the Green Wedge (273 Hectares) and provides a continuous link from the urban area to the wider countryside. The areas identified on the Local Plan Proposals Map as Thornborough, New Swannington,

Whitwick and Thringstone are located along the eastern boundary. Swannington extends along the western boundary and Peggs Green is located at the north.

10.2 The LCA refers to the eastern part of the western Green Wedge and considers it a relatively prominent site when viewed from the west and where new development would be difficult to mitigate across the site without increasing the prominence of urban edges. The assessment further details that new development would also alter the rural character of both Spring Lane and Church Lane (Swannington) reducing the sense of separation between Thornborough/New Swannington and Swannington.

10.3 As this area is so vast it is described below in three smaller sections.

Land between the A511 and Spring Lane (Area 1 on Map in Appendix 5)

10.4 The area between the A511 and Spring Lane is a fairly open and undulating. The topography is such that land drops away steeply from the A511 to the railway line (which runs through the area). There are open views from the A511 towards the railway line although views are prevented beyond this due to mature, densely planted trees. This area is predominantly agricultural land. To the north of the railway line there are areas of open fields dispersed between dense woodland planting. When looking north the ribbon development of Swannington is clearly visible and provides a backdrop to this area.

10.5 Within this section there are eight residential dwellings, two areas of allotments and a small collection of fishing lakes which are accessed off Spring Lane.

10.6 There is a by-way and several footpaths in this area although only one footpath goes completely through the area, providing a pedestrian link north to south, (between Coalville and Spring Lane, Swannington).

Land between Spring Lane and Church Lane (Area 2 on Map in Appendix 5)

10.7 This area is relatively flat and open although land to the west of the Swannington Incline slopes steeply downwards towards Swannington and the topography and mature planting along the Swannington Incline prevents any open views from Swannington across the Area of Separation.

10.8 To the east of the Swannington Incline the land is flat and open; although fields are bounded by mature hedgerows there are open views across this area.

10.9 New Swannington Primary School is located on Church Lane. There are two large detached properties within this part of the Green Wedge, one located along Church Lane on the approach to Swannington and one at the junction of Church Lane and Foan Hill.

10.10 In addition to the footpath along the Swannington Incline there are two further footpaths, one running east to west linking Thornborough and Swannington and one that runs north to south from Spring Lane to the Primary School (this links with the footpath described in the previous section and together they provide an off-road pedestrian route from Coalville to New Swannington Primary School).

Land north of Church Lane (Area 3 on Map in Appendix 5)

10.11 This is the largest section of this part of the Green Wedge and the area as a whole is very undulating. The topography and mature trees and hedgerows prevent views most views across this northern part of the Green Wedge. However there are open views across the Green Wedge from Peggs Green to Thringstone and vice versa. There are several residential dwellings sporadically located although there is a concentration of six residential dwellings along the north side of Church Lane.

10.12 There are numerous footpaths in this area although the majority are located in the northern extent, making this area highly accessible.

Recommendation

10.13 In terms of the Area of Separation Policy the Western Green Wedge is predominantly open land between defined development boundaries of neighbouring settlements. However, due to its scale it is considered that it doesn't perform an essential function in keeping the built-up areas of these settlements separate.

10.14 Therefore, it is recommended that this whole area be allocated as Countryside due to its links with the wider Countryside to the north, its accessibility and rural nature. There is little visual distinction between the northern part of the western Green Wedge and the wider Countryside.

10.15 National Planning Policy advocates the protection of the Countryside for the sake of its natural beauty, the diversity of its landscape and its ecology, agricultural and recreational value. It is considered this designation will afford an adequate level of protection given its character and appearance in relation to the wider area.

Central Green Wedge

10.16 The Central Area comprises some 58.76 Hectares. The areas identified on the Local Plan Proposals Map as Thornborough and New Swannington are along the western boundary and Whitwick is along the eastern and northern boundary.

10.17 The eastern part of the area is in use as recreation land and includes an all weather pitch, model railway, crazy golf course and fishing lake. Also included in this area is Whitwick Cemetery which is in the north of this area. There are three large detached

residential properties which also fall within the leisure allocation and adjoin the eastern boundary. A golf course lies along the southern extent. The western part of the area is largely agricultural land but also includes an area of allotments.

- 10.18 The majority of the Central Green Wedge is enclosed on all sides by development. The LCA identifies that this enclosure reduces the sense of separation between settlements and there is little perception along roads or at gateways that there is separation. However, the existing public open space does help retain a sense of separation between Thornborough Road and Hermitage Road. The LCA considers that if the site was developed then an informal recreation area would be lost, therefore green routeways and some open space would be required within any development to retain connections between settlements.

Recommendation

- 10.19 In terms of the Area of Separation Policy the Central Green Wedge is predominantly open land between the defined development boundaries of neighbouring settlements. It does perform an essential function in keeping the built-up areas of those settlements separate.
- 10.20 This area has both recreation use and value. Although the area is not necessarily apparent from roads and gateways it serves to maintain separation between the settlements of Coalville, Thornborough, New Swannington and Whitwick. Therefore, it is recommended that the area be re-designated as an Area of Separation.

Eastern Green Wedge

- 10.21 This area covers some 112.25 Hectares and is almost rectangular in shape. It is situated within the main urban area between Coalville and Whitwick and extends from Broom Leys Road, Coalville to George Street, Whitwick in the north. The area is surrounded on three sides predominantly by residential development although Coalville Hospital is located outside but adjoining the southern boundary of the Green Wedge.
- 10.22 Within the area there are four residential dwellings, one incorporating dog kennels and one, Broom Leys Farm operates a livery yard. Also located within this area is Coalville Rugby Club and Sharpley Avenue recreation ground.
- 10.23 The area is currently a pocket of relatively flat agricultural/farm land surrounded by development. Due to the topography there is intervisibility between settlements.
- 10.24 The LCA considers the current development along the roads between Whitwick and Coalville prevents a sense of separation between the settlements and any development would need careful siting to retain channelled views. The character of

Green Lane would be altered through development becoming more enclosed and urban than at present. This could not be fully mitigated although retaining existing hedgerows and including tree planting could help to retain a 'green' character to the lane.

- 10.25 The LCA does consider however, that development on land to the south of the former railway line would be relatively easy to integrate without altering the character of the land or sense of separation. The area to the south of the dismantled railway line does have a different characteristic in that it has a more enclosed nature compared to the rest of the area; this is partly due to mature trees and hedgerows which run alongside the footpath (dismantled railway) which limit views across the area.

Recommendation

- 10.26 In terms of the Area of Separation Policy the Eastern Green Wedge is predominantly open land between the defined development boundaries of neighbouring settlements. It does perform an essential function in keeping the built-up areas of those settlements separate.
- 10.27 This area is located within the urban framework and serves to maintain separation between Coalville and Whitwick. There is strong public support for its continued protection, identified through the County Council's Green Space's work and the various consultations undertaken as part of the development of the Core Strategy. Therefore, it is considered that this area would be justified as an Area of Separation and recommends its re-designation as such.

Green Wedge Chronology

- Leicestershire Structure Plan 1987 – Policies L/ST7 and L/ST8
- The Leicestershire Structure Plan 1994 - Environment Policies 3 + 4
- Leicestershire Structure Plan 1991-2006 - Environment Policies 3 + 4
- Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan 1996-2016 - Strategy Policy 5 + 6
- North West Leicestershire Local Plan - Adopted 2002 – Policy E20
- Emerging Regional Spatial Strategy - Report of the Panel November 2007
- The Secretary of State’s Proposed Changes to the East Midlands RSS - July 2008
- NWLDC Green Wedge Background Paper – November 2008
- The East Midlands Regional Plan – adopted March 2009 (no specific Green Wedge Policy)
- Leicester and Leicestershire Green Wedge Joint Methodology – August 2009
- NWLDC Update of Green Wedge Background Paper to reflect Joint Methodology
- Proposed abolition of East Midlands Regional Plan
- Leicester and Leicestershire Joint Methodology 2001 (revisions in light of proposed abolition of the East Midlands Regional Plan)
- NWLDC Green Wedge Background Paper 2012

Table 1: Green Wedge assessed against Strategy Policy 5 of the Structure Plan 1996-2016

Policy Criteria	Assessment
a) Protecting structurally important areas of open land which influence the form and direction of urban development	In view of the historical development of the Coalville Urban Area which has been created as a result of the merger of a number of different settlements, the eastern and central parts of the Green Wedge represent the last significant undeveloped areas within the built up Urban Area. As such these areas can be viewed as being important to the overall urban form. The western part is different as it extends outwards from the urban edge and so does not influence the urban form to the same extent.
b) Ensures that open land extends outwards between the existing and planned development limits of an urban area	Only the Western Area extends outwards from the edge of the urban area as both the east and central parts of the Green Wedge represent open land within the urban framework.
c) Preserving strategic landscape and wildlife links between the countryside and urban open spaces	The physical separation of the Green Wedge area into three distinct parts which are not directly linked together, results in a lack of a continuous link from the urban area to the surrounding countryside in landscape and wildlife terms.
d) Preventing the coalescence and maintaining the physical identity of settlements adjoining the main urban areas	There are strips of ribbon development, particularly along Thornborough Road, Hermitage Road and Broom Leys Road which result in the appearance along these routes of almost continuous built development from Coalville towards Whitwick. There is no obvious physical delineation along these roads between Coalville and Whitwick. However, beyond these areas of ribbon development is the existing Green Wedge in the form of large areas of undeveloped land and as a result the Green Wedge area has prevented the complete physical coalescence of Coalville with Whitwick. There is a clear demarcation and separation between Coalville/Whitwick and Waddington such that the latter clearly retains a separate physical identity.
(e) Recreational Resource	There are a variety of informal routes across the Green Wedge which provide opportunities for walking within the Green Wedge. There are two significant formal areas (at Hermitage Recreation Ground and Coalville Rugby Club) as well as a play/recreation ground at Sharpley Avenue. Notwithstanding these facilities the majority of land is in private ownership and hence inaccessible as a recreational resource.

Table 2: Green Wedge assessed against the 2009 Joint Methodology Criteria

2009 Green Wedge Methodology Criteria (based on the Regional Plan Paragraph 4.2.18)	Assessment
<p><u>Preventing the merging of settlements;</u></p> <p>Green Wedges will safeguard the identity of communities within and around urban areas that face growth pressures</p>	<p>Historically the Coalville Urban Area has been created as a result of the merger of a number of different settlements; the Green Wedge represents the last significant undeveloped area within the built up Urban Area. As such the areas of Green Wedge can be viewed as being important in safeguarding the identity of the individual communities that surround the Green Wedge.</p> <p>Although, it is considered that the Western Green Wedge is slightly different due to its size and links with the wider countryside but part of the area does safeguard the identities of Coalville and Swannington.</p> <p>There is a clear demarcation and separation between Coalville/Whitwick and Swannington such that the latter clearly retains a separate physical identity.</p>
<p><u>Guiding development form;</u></p> <p>Green Wedges will guide the form of new developments in urban areas. Consideration will be given to designating new Green Wedges or amending existing one where it would help shape the development of new communities' such as potential sustainable urban extensions.</p>	<p>In regards to Eastern and Central Green Wedge they are situated within the Urban Area and surrounded on all sides by development. Therefore whilst they are considered as important features in the overall urban form as they are constrained on all sides they would not necessarily guide the form of new developments.</p> <p>The Western part of the Green Wedge extends outwards from the urban edge and so does not influence the urban form to the same extent.</p>
<p><u>Providing a 'green lung' into urban areas;</u></p> <p>Green Wedges will provide communities with access to green infrastructure and the countryside beyond. They are distinct from other types of open space in that they provide a continuous link between the open countryside</p>	<p>The physical separation of the Green Wedge area into three distinct parts which are not directly linked together, results in a lack of a continuous link from the urban area to the surrounding countryside in landscape and wildlife terms.</p> <p>Only the Western part of the Green Wedge provides</p>

and land which penetrates deep into urban areas. Green Wedges will also provide multi-functional uses such as:

- Open space, sport and recreation facilities
- Flood alleviation measures
- Air quality management
- Protection/improvement of wildlife sites and the links between them
- Protection/improvement of historical/cultural assets and the links between them
- Links to green infrastructure at both a strategic and local level
- Transport Corridors

a continuous link between the urban area and the wider countryside.

Open space, sport & recreation facilities

In terms of recreation part of the Central Green Wedge is allocated as public formal recreation space and includes a number of sport and recreation facilities. In the Eastern part of the Green Wedge there is a Play area and Coalville Rugby Club.

Flood alleviation measures

The Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment identifies the following:

There is an area of Flood Zone 2 within the Central area of Green Wedge, this is associated with the brook running north to south through the area.

In the Western part of the Green Wedge there is an area at Potential risk from Groundwater Rise from Former Coal Workings, this is between Coalville and Swannington. There is also an area of Flood Zone 3a to the north of this part of the Green Wedge

Air Quality Management

There is an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) along part of Stephenson Way which runs along the Green Wedge boundary from the Stephenson Way/Broom Leys Road junction to the route of the dismantled railway (foot bridge over A511). Therefore, the open and undeveloped nature of the Green Wedge would help alleviate some of the poor air quality associated with the AQMA.

Protection/improvement of wildlife sites and the links between them

The majority of wildlife sites are within the Western Green Wedge and concentrated in north west corner. Links between areas of Green Wedge would be difficult to improve as they are surrounded by development. The Western Green Wedge has links to the north with the wider countryside and therefore wildlife links in this area could be improved.

	<p>The Green Wedge is within the National Forest.</p> <p><u>Links to green infrastructure at both a strategic and local level</u></p> <p>6C's GI Strategy proposed greenway 2 - West Hinckley to Market Bosworth, Ravenstone, Whitwick, Osgathorpe and Loughborough – goes through central part of western GW</p> <p><u>Transport Corridors</u></p> <p>The A511 is a major transport corridor and runs along the southern boundary of the Green Wedge, although is outside of the Green wedge boundary.</p>
<p><u>A recreational resource.</u></p> <p>Green wedges will provide a recreational resource. This will include informal and formal facilities now and in the future. Public access will be maximised.</p>	<p>There are a variety of informal routes across the Green Wedge which provides opportunities for walking. There are two significant formal recreation areas (at Hermitage Recreation Ground and Coalville Rugby Club) as well as a play/recreation ground at Sharpley Avenue. Notwithstanding these facilities the majority of land is in private ownership and is inaccessible as a recreational resource.</p>

Table 3: Green Wedge assessed against the 2011 Joint Methodology Criteria

N.B Underlined text highlights a change from the 2009 Joint Methodology.

2011 Green Wedge Methodology Criteria (based on the Regional Plan Paragraph 4.2.18)	Assessment
<p><u>Preventing the merging of settlements</u> Green wedges will safeguard the identity of communities within and around urban areas that face growth pressures. <u>The coalescence of settlements should be considered in terms of both physical separation and the perception of distance between the settlements.</u></p>	<p>Historically the Coalville Urban Area has been created as a result of the merger of a number of different settlements; the Green Wedge represents the last significant undeveloped area within the built up Urban Area. As such the areas of Green Wedge can be viewed as being important in safeguarding the identity of the individual communities that surround the Green Wedge.</p> <p>Although, the Western Green Wedge can be considered differently due to its size and links with the wider countryside but part of the Western green Wedge provide open land between Coalville and Swannington.</p> <p>There is a clear demarcation and separation between Coalville/Whitwick and Swannington such that the latter clearly retains a separate physical identity.</p> <p>In terms of visual coalescence there is intervisibility between settlements across the eastern Green Wedge, as identified in the Landscape Character Assessment. The topography of the central area prevents visual coalescence and therefore in terms of visual perception the surrounding settlements seem quite distant.</p> <p>The Western Green Wedge is vast and undulating and views across the area are limited. However, from the A511 there are views across the Hough Hill, Swannington and there are some areas of flat land, particularly around Church Lane which are more open and views across some are the area are possible.</p>
<p><u>Guiding Development Form</u> Green wedges will guide the form of new developments <u>as urban areas extend.</u> Consideration will be given to designating new green wedges or amending existing ones where it</p>	<p>In regards to Eastern and Central Green Wedge they are situated within the Urban Area and surrounded on all sides by development. Therefore whilst they are considered as important features in the overall urban form as they are constrained on all sides they would not necessarily guide the form of new developments.</p>

<p>would help shape the development of new communities such as potential sustainable urban extensions.</p>	<p>The Western part of the Green Wedge extends outwards from the urban edge and so does not influence the urban form to the same extent.</p>
<p><u>Providing a Green Lung into urban areas</u> Green wedges will provide communities with access to green infrastructure and the countryside beyond. They are distinct from other types of open space in that they provide a continuous link between the open countryside and land which penetrates deep into urban areas. Green wedges <u>could</u> also provide multifunctional uses such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Open space, sport and recreation facilities ▪ Flood alleviation measures ▪ <u>Improving air quality</u> ▪ Protection/improvement of wildlife sites and the links between them ▪ Protection/improvement of historic/cultural assets and the links between them ▪ Links to green infrastructure at both a strategic and local level ▪ Transport corridors 	<p><u>Open space, sport & recreation facilities</u></p> <p>In terms of recreation part of the Central Green Wedge is allocated as public formal recreation space and includes a number of sport and recreation facilities. In the Eastern part of the Green Wedge there is a Play area and Coalville Rugby Club.</p> <p><u>Flood alleviation measures</u></p> <p>The Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment identifies the following:</p> <p>There is an area of Flood Zone 2 within the Central area of Green Wedge, this is associated with the brook running north to south through the area.</p> <p>In the Western part of the Green Wedge there is an area at Potential risk from Groundwater Rise from Former Coal Workings, this is between Coalville and Swannington. There is also an area of Flood Zone 3a to the north of this part of the Green Wedge</p> <p><u>Improving Air Quality</u></p> <p>There is an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) along part of Stephenson Way which runs along the Green Wedge boundary from the Stephenson Way/Broom Leys Road junction to the route of the dismantled railway (foot bridge over A511). Therefore, the open and undeveloped nature of the Green Wedge would assist in the improvement of air quality.</p> <p><u>Protection/improvement of wildlife sites and the links between them</u></p> <p>The majority of wildlife sites are within the Western Green Wedge and concentrated in north west corner. Links between areas of Green Wedge would be difficult to improve as they are surrounded by development. The Western Green Wedge has links to the north with the wider countryside and therefore wildlife links in this area could be improved.</p>

	<p>The Green Wedge is within the National Forest.</p> <p><u>Links to green infrastructure at both a strategic and local level</u> 6C's GI Strategy proposed greenway 2 - West Hinckley to Market Bosworth, Ravenstone, Whitwick, Osgathorpe and Loughborough – goes through central part of western GW</p> <p><u>Transport Corridors</u> The A511 is a major transport corridor and runs along the southern boundary of the Green Wedge, although is outside of the Green wedge boundary.</p>
<p><u>Acting as a recreational resource</u> Green wedges will provide a recreational resource. This could include informal and formal facilities now and in the future. Public access will be maximised.</p>	<p>There are a variety of informal routes across the Green Wedge which provides opportunities for walking. There are two significant formal recreation areas (at Hermitage Recreation Ground and Coalville Rugby Club) as well as a play/recreation ground at Sharpley Avenue. Notwithstanding these facilities the majority of land is in private ownership and is inaccessible as a recreational resource.</p>

Map of the Coalville-Whitwick-Swannington Green Wedge

