

NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE LOCAL PLAN

BACKGROUND PAPER 12

Policy En5: Areas of Separation

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This is one of a number of background papers which have been published to support the Local Plan. The purpose of these papers is to provide more information in support of specific policies than can be included in the Local Plan document itself if it is to remain of a manageable size.
- 1.2 This paper provides more information in respect of Policy En5 (Areas of Separation).
- 1.3 This background paper supplements two previous Green Wedge Background Papers published alongside iterations of the then Core Strategy. The first Green Wedge Background Paper was published in 2008 and the second in 2012. The previous background papers provide additional background context for this paper and are available to view on the Council's website via the following links:

[2008 Green Wedge Background Paper](#)

[2012 Green Wedge Background Paper](#)

2. THE POLICY

- 2.1 Local Plan Policy En5 states that:

- (1) "Land between Coalville and Whitwick, as identified on the Policies Map, is designated as an Area of Separation where only agricultural, forestry, nature conservation, leisure and sport and recreation uses will be allowed. Any other proposed uses will need to demonstrate why they cannot be accommodated elsewhere in the District.
- (2) Development will not be permitted which, either individually or cumulatively, would demonstrably adversely affect or diminish the present open and undeveloped character of the area".

3. PURPOSE OF AREA OF SEPARATION

- 3.1 An Area of Separation is designed to avoid development which would result in the coalescence of two or more settlements. An inappropriate development would be something like a housing or employment development which would contribute to the coalescence of settlements. An appropriate development would be some form of Green Infrastructure which did not result in coalescence.
- 3.2 The Area of separation proposed by policy En5 is to ensure that the settlements of Coalville and Whitwick do not coalesce.
- 3.3 Guidance set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) supports the idea of an Area of Separation in principle. One of the Core Planning Principles in the NPPF details that planning should:
- "take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas...recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it"

3.4 Furthermore paragraph 156 of the NPPF states that Local planning authorities should set out the strategic priorities for the area in the Local Plan which should include strategic policies to deliver, amongst other things conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape.

3.5 Paragraph 157 details that Local Plans should identify land where development would be inappropriate, for instance because of its environmental or historic significance.

4. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF COALVILLE AND WHITWICK

4.1 It is important when considering the issue of separation between Coalville and Whitwick to understand the historical context of the settlement pattern of the area that has developed and which can be seen today.

4.2 Coalville is a Victorian town that grew on an area of land adjoining the parishes of Whitwick, Hugglescote, Snibston and Swannington. No significant settlement existed on the site of the present town; the area was open countryside, with a few farm buildings. Conversely Whitwick is a much older settlement and is referred to in the Domesday Book. A brief history of their development is set out below.

Coalville

4.3 The settlement of Coalville grew on an area known as Long Lane; this was a track running roughly east to west separating the ancient parishes of Whitwick and Hugglescote. This track was crossed at the Red House (now at the heart of Coalville Town Centre adjoining memorial Square) by another track running north to south which separated Swannington from Whitwick and Hugglescote from Snibston.

4.4 The development of the new town of Coalville was initiated by William Stenson who sank his first mine in Whitwick parish in the 1820s.

4.5 The colliery was a pivotal moment in the growth of what was to become Coalville. With the need to house colliery workers and support new trade in the area, workers terraced houses were built along present day High Street and Margaret Street in what is today Coalville Town Centre.

4.6 As the town developed, purpose built commercial properties appeared, including banks and public houses. In the hinterlands of this core, other industries developed complementing the main economic activities, including brick yards, railway wagon manufacture and elastic web manufacture.

4.7 In the 1860s William Stenson's Estates were sold and the infilling of the town began. The 1871 Census reported that the increase in population (which rose from 1,540 in 1861 to 2,081 in 1871) was due to the sale of large quantities of land in small building allotments and the erection of buildings for colliers. This development took place largely along and Berrisford and Melbourne Streets.

4.8 By the beginning of the twentieth century the variety of shopping facilities was considerable and served a district population of fifteen thousand. It was at this time that Coalville was a boom town noted for its good rail connections and diverse industrial base.

- 4.9 House building continued during the first three decades of the twentieth century and construction expanded into the Highfields area, on Forest Road, Bridge Road, Ashburton Road, Bardon Road and Broomleys Road.
- 4.10 The Secondary School and Grammar School were built before the 1914 war and in 1924 the Mining Technical College was built and funded generously by the mining industry. The Miners' Welfare Organisation was responsible for constructing the Swimming Baths in the 1930s and a new council housing estate on Avenue Road.
- 4.11 But by the mid 1950s Coalville's mining industry was rapidly declining. The closure of its rail station (on the Leicester to Burton line) in the 1960s and the growth of private car ownership influenced a more dispersed form of town growth, resulting in the expansion of suburban areas. This trend continued through to the end of the 20th century, together with the growth of out of town centre retail developments.
- 4.12 Coalville represents a significant example of Victorian industrialisation and as it stands today is essentially the product of the development of the coal mining and railway industries dating from the first half of the 19th century.

Whitwick

- 4.12 Whilst Coalville is a relatively new town born out Victorian industrialisation Whitwick is a much older settlement and is mentioned, as Witewic, in the Domesday Book, the name either meaning "The White Farm" or "Hwita's Farm", which may have been a reference to the outcrop of white sandstone which was found there.
- 4.13 Whitwick also had a 12th-century motte and bailey castle (although no remains are left today) and as early as 1293, Whitwick had a weekly market and a four-day fair.
- 4.14 Whitwick Colliery was opened on the outskirts of the parish in 1824. Although the coal mining industry was only present in Whitwick for a century and a half - a relatively short period for a settlement with a documented history spanning ten centuries - the industry had an impact on the character of the village in terms of homogeneous red brick housing development during the 19th and 20th centuries. With the exception of the parish church, few ancient buildings survived.
- 4.15 The Whitwick Colliery was closed in the 1980s and the site is now occupied by a Morrisons food store and retail park and Whitwick Business Park.
- 4.16 The historical settlement patterns of Coalville and Whitwick are largely still intact today, especially around what were the original historic cores of both Coalville and Whitwick. Although the two settlements have grown over time they still retain their distinct character and identity.
- 4.17 Coalville developed around the former mining community and today is the main focus of industrial and commercial activity. The shopping centre in the town is the largest in the district of North West Leicestershire. There are several industrial estates close to the town centre, primarily along the route of the A511.

4.18 In contrast, Whitwick is mainly residential although there are a number of small, local shops along Market Place and Silver Street. The Leisure Centre serving Coalville and the surrounding area is located in Whitwick.

4.19 Throughout the growth and expansion of both Coalville and Whitwick the Areas of Separation have remained undeveloped and represent the last significant areas of undeveloped land within the otherwise built up Coalville Urban Area and have created what is a unique settlement pattern in contrast to most similar sized urban areas which are characterised by their more dense urban form throughout.

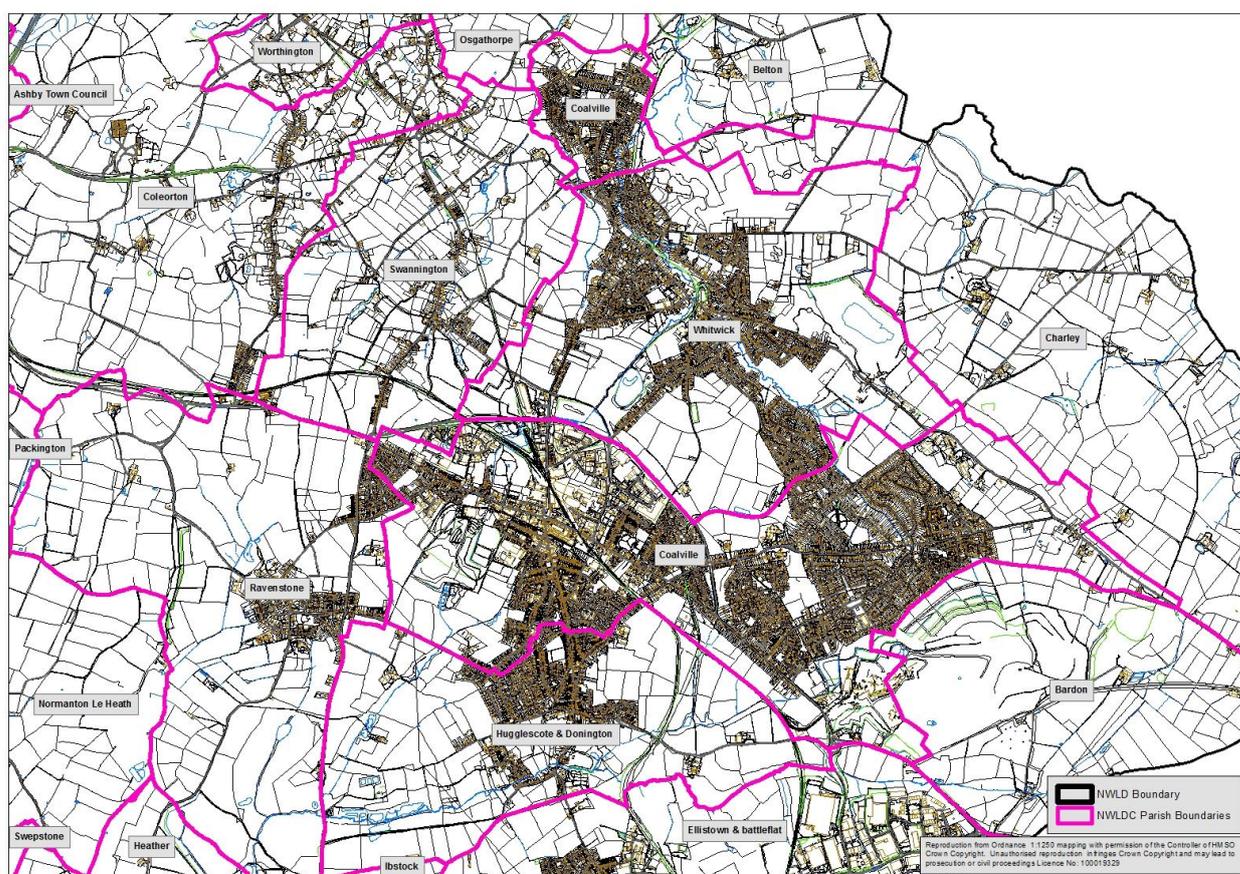
5. COALVILLE/WHITWICK – GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

5.1 Having considered how the settlements of Coalville and Whitwick have developed over time and given their close proximity it is important to consider where, geographically, Coalville ends and Whitwick begins.

5.2 In terms of identifying a geographical distinction between the settlements of Coalville and Whitwick, a large part of Coalville is to the south of the A511 and to the south of Broom Leys Road/Meadow Lane. Whitwick is to the north of the A511 and to the north of Sharpley Avenue, roughly to the north of the dismantled railway line.

5.3 The map below shows the Parish boundaries of settlements in and around Coalville/Whitwick. Although Coalville is labelled on the parish boundaries map, this is for reference only as Coalville does not have a parish.

Map showing the Parish Boundaries



6. BACKGROUND TO THE POLICY

- 6.1 The proposed Area of Separation lies to the north of the A511 (Stephenson Way) and comprises of two large areas of undeveloped land which are not physically connected, an eastern area which covers some 112.25 hectares and lies between the A511 to the south, Broom Leys Road to the east, Hall Lane to the north and Hermitage Road to the west. The western area covers some 58.76 hectares and lies between the A511 to the south, Hermitage Road to the east, Church Lane to the north-west and Thornborough Road to the west.
- 6.2 Both areas are largely in use for agricultural purposes, together with some leisure uses; Coalville Rugby Club in the eastern area and the Hermitage Leisure Centre in the western area.
- 6.3 The Areas of Separation lie approximately in the centre of the Coalville Urban Area. The Coalville Urban Area is a term used to define what constitutes Coalville as there are a number of settlements and parishes in close proximity. The settlements included within the Coalville Urban Area are: Coalville, Donington le Heath, Greenhill, Hugglescote, Snibston, Thringstone and Whitwick as well as the Bardon Employment area.
- 6.4 The first Local plan to cover the Coalville Urban Area was the Coalville Area District Plan which was adopted in 1978. On the proposals map both areas were shown as being outside

of the 'Limit of Area for residential Development'. Policy in the 1978 District Plan set out in Paragraph 5.2.9 stated that "outside the areas proposed for housing purposes, applications for planning permission for residential development will not normally be permitted". In addition, the eastern and southern parts of the west Area of Separation were subject to public open spaces policies which provided for the development of the leisure centre and additional recreation facilities. Policy set out in paragraph 7.2.1 stated that "It is proposed to create a major sports complex to serve the district at Hermitage Road". The supporting text detailed that "in addition to playing fields, provision will be made for water based recreation by the retention as a lake of the former brickyard pond..."

6.5 At the time that the Coalville Area District Plan was prepared the A511 Stephenson Way was identified as a proposed Coalville Town Centre Relief Road, which was eventually realised in the late 1980's.

6.6 Work on preparing a replacement Local Plan began in 1989 and a draft plan was published for consultation in May 1990. The draft plan contained two options for the eastern area; either the development of what was referred to as an Urban Village (in effect a housing development set within a parkland setting so as to create a prestigious development that would be attractive to people moving into Coalville to take advantage of its enhanced road links following the completion of the M/A42) or a Green Wedge where the approach would be to resist development, primarily in order to provide an "open buffer between Coalville and Whitwick".

6.7 The western area was to be subject to two policies; R3 and R11. Policy R3 covered the eastern most part and was designed to ensure that leisure remained the principal use in this area. Policy R11 sought to resist "any development which would change the generally open character of this area, or development which is not strictly ancillary to the recreational use of the land".

6.8 The Council agreed a 'deposit' version Local Plan in late 1990. In the deposit version the eastern area was identified as Green Wedge as this was the option supported in responses to the consultation on the draft plan. The western area remained as per the draft plan.

6.9 The Coalville Area Local Plan was not taken forward as changes to the planning system required the preparation of a district wide Local Plan. This was the North West Leicestershire Local Plan which was adopted in August 2002. The Local Plan (2002) identified both the east and west Areas of Separation as Green Wedge and were safeguarded by Policy E20 of the Local Plan which stated that;

"Development will not be permitted which would adversely affect or diminish the present open and undeveloped character of the Coalville-Whitwick-Swannington Green Wedge, identified on the Proposals Map. Appropriate uses in the Green Wedge are agriculture, forestry, minerals extraction and outdoor sports and recreation uses.

Any built development permitted within the Green Wedge will be limited to minor structures and facilities which are strictly ancillary to the use of the land for these purposes".

6.10 Changes to the planning system brought about through the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 required local planning authorities to prepare Local Development Frameworks, of which the Core Strategy was to be the key local development document. The council began work on a core strategy in 2005 with an Issues and Options consultation

which sought views on whether the then Structure Plan Policy 5 was adequate to control development in the Green Wedge and what the extent should be of any review of the Green Wedge. The responses received considered that Structure Plan policy 5 provided an adequate basis for controlling development in the Green Wedge. There was general support for reviewing the Green Wedge (specifically from the development industry) on the grounds that it may be a sequentially preferable location for development.

- 6.11 In 2007, an Additional Consultation on the Core Strategy was undertaken; the council did not consult specifically on the Green Wedge. However, in respect of the issue of potential Broad Locations for development the possibility of allowing some development on the Green Wedge was referred to. The response to the consultation highlighted that there was some support for development in the Green wedge (specifically from the development industry).
- 6.12 A subsequent consultation was undertaken in 2008 which identified that the then Regional Spatial Strategy required Green Wedges to be reviewed as part of the Local Development Framework process. A review of the Green Wedge was undertaken and set out in an accompanying Green Wedge Background Paper (referred to above in Paragraph 1.3). Although the background Paper concluded that the Green Wedge designation could no longer be justified as it did not meet all of the original stated purposes of a Green Wedge, the Background Paper did identify that the Green Wedge did meet the criteria in respect of preventing coalescence and maintaining the physical identity of settlements adjoining the main urban area.
- 6.13 The background paper set out a range of options for the future of the Green Wedge; these included the potential for development on part of the Green Wedge or its retention as a Strategic Gap or Area of Separation. Given the conclusion of the Background Paper the favoured approach set out in the November 2008 consultation document was to delete reference to the Green Wedge and to identify the then western part of the Green Wedge as countryside and to consider the different development options in Coalville that could meet the housing requirements whilst bearing in mind the role the Green Wedge played in preventing the merging of settlements and the support from local communities for its retention.
- 6.14 In terms of development options for Coalville the 2008 consultation document identified that in order to meet the housing requirements it was likely that two Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs) would be required. One of the potential locations for an SUE was to the north of Stephenson Way (i.e. on the western Area of Separation). Although, if only one SUE was required in the district to meet the housing requirements the preferred location for this was to the south east of Coalville.
- 6.15 The responses to the consultation highlighted overwhelming support from the local community for the Green Wedge to remain undeveloped and as such a further, more focused consultation was undertaken in 2011. This consultation proposed to reduce the overall housing requirement which would remove the need for development on land north of Stephenson Way as the reduced housing requirement could be accommodated on land to the south east of Coalville.
- 6.16 In 2012 the council consulted on its Pre-Submission Core Strategy which noted that although the Green Wedge designation could no longer be justified the area should be

retained as Areas of Separation to prevent the merging of Coalville with Whitwick and Swannington.

6.17 Policy CS35 of the Pre-Submission Core Strategy stated that

“Coalville Urban Area (G) The Coalville/Whitwick/Swannington Green Wedge, as defined in the 2002 North West Leicestershire Local Plan, is deleted and designated as:

- (i) An Area of Separation between Coalville and Whitwick. Within this Area of Separation, development will not be permitted which would result in a reduction in the physical separation between the built up areas of Coalville and Whitwick; and
- (ii) Countryside between Coalville, Whitwick, Thringstone and Swannington”.

6.18 In 2013 the council published its Proposed Significant Changes Consultation which proposed only minor wording changes to the Areas of Separation Policy above.

6.19 The Council held an exploratory meeting with a Planning Inspector in September 2013. Following the discussions at the exploratory meeting and concerns raised by the Inspector through written correspondence a meeting of Full Council held in October 2013 resolved to withdraw the Core Strategy.

7. PLANNING HISTORY

7.1 The Green Wedge Policy in the adopted Local Plan (2002) has been upheld at appeal and Inspectors have noted the open undeveloped character of the Green Wedge, the rural tranquillity it provides as well as its main function of providing an area of clear separation between Coalville and Whitwick.

7.2 Whilst there have been a number of applications on land previously identified as Green Wedge the most notable (and largest in terms of proposed development) was an outline application submitted in December 2010 for development on the now eastern Area of Separation. The application was for Residential development, village centre (including: primary school, retail, business and other uses (Classes A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, B1, D1 (healthcare) and D2 (community facilities)), public open space, recreation areas, play areas, woodland planting, and associated infrastructure including roads, sewers and water storage ponds (Outline - all matters other than part access reserved).

7.3 The application was recovered for the Secretary of State’s determination. The Inspector’s recommendations are outlined below.

7.4 The inquiry was held in February 2012 for the non-determination of the outline planning application (ref: 10/01208/OUTM). The Inspector recommended that the appeal be dismissed and the application be refused outline planning permission. In his report the Inspector noted the following attributes of the Green Wedge (paragraph numbers quoted are those from the Inspectors Report):

7.5 “185. A great many open views from footpaths of attractive farmland, much valued by many local residents, would be lost. Others would become suburban in character, quite different from their present rural or semi-rural aspect”.

- 7.6 "328. It provides a variety of pleasant and unobstructed views, including many of the low wooded hills around Whitwick nearby to the north and east. Despite being subject to some traffic noise from the adjoining A511, much of it also lends an appreciable degree of rural tranquillity, which can be experienced on any of its public footpaths and in Green Lane".
- 7.7 "329...crucially, it provides very clear separation between Coalville and Whitwick. In short, I consider that in general the appeal site functions well as a Green Wedge. To my mind, there is no obvious reason why it should not continue to do so well into the future".
- 7.8 "336. I find, therefore, that the appeal scheme would have a very profound impact on the purposes, identity and character of this part of the designated Green Wedge. It would undermine its purposes, almost nullify its identity, and completely change its character. In short a large part it would be permanently lost. How much does this matter? Plainly it matters a lot to the Council, and to local residents and the general public. In my opinion, the Green Wedge here has served and continues to serve a useful and much valued planning purpose, and it should only be lost for very compelling land use planning reasons".
- 7.9 On 11 August 2011 the appeal was recovered for the Secretary of State's determination. The Secretary of State agreed with the Inspectors findings that the appeal scheme would have a very profound impact on the purposes, identity and character of this part of the designated Green Wedge, and would undermine its purposes, almost nullify its identity and completely change its character. The Secretary of State also agreed with the Inspector that, in large, part of it would be permanently lost. He further agreed that the overall effect of the proposed development would, by eroding the Green Wedge to a large extent, be tantamount to the undesirable coalescence of Coalville and Whitwick.
- 7.10 Whilst the Secretary of State noted that the period the NWLLP covers ended in 2006, he did agree that the Green Wedge here has served and continues to serve a useful and much valued planning purpose, and that it should only be lost for very compelling land use planning reasons. He further agreed with the Inspector that, given its value as part of the Green Wedge, the appeal site should be seen as a very important part of the existing green infrastructure of Coalville and its environs.