

NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DRAFT LOCAL PLAN

BACKGROUND PAPER 3

Policy S4: Countryside

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This is one of a number of background papers which have been published to support the draft Local Plan. The purpose of these papers is to provide more information in support of Policy S4 (Countryside) than can be included in the draft Local Plan document itself if it is to remain of a manageable size.

2.0 THE POLICY

- 2.1 Local Plan policy S4 defines the area outside the Limits to Development as Countryside and outlines suitable uses that will be allowed to be developed within the open countryside and how these proposals will be assessed using a criteria based policy. A key consideration in respect of any proposed development in the countryside is that of impact upon the landscape within which the proposed development is situated. The following sections provide more information in respect of how we will consider the potential impact of development on the landscape.

Policy S4: Countryside

- (1) Land outside the Limits to Development is identified as countryside which will be protected for the sake of its intrinsic character and beauty, the diversity of its landscapes, heritage and wildlife, the wealth of its natural resources and to ensure it may be enjoyed by all.
- (2) In areas designated as Countryside on the Policies Map, development will be limited to that which requires a rural location and is for one or more of the following:
- (a) Agriculture including agricultural workers dwellings ;
 - (b) Forestry including forestry workers dwellings;
 - (c) The preservation of Listed Buildings;
 - (d) The re-use and adaptation of buildings for appropriate purposes including housing in accordance with the Settlement Hierarchy (Policy S3);
 - (e) The redevelopment of previously developed land for housing in a Small Village in accordance with the Settlement Hierarchy (Policy S3)
 - (f) Flood protection;
 - (g) Affordable housing in accordance with Policy H5;
 - (h) The extension and replacement of dwellings;
 - (i) Extensions to existing businesses;
 - (j) Sites for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in accordance with Policy H7;
 - (k) Small-scale employment generating development or farm diversification;
 - (l) Community services and facilities meeting a proven local need;
 - (m) Development by statutory undertakers or public utility providers;
 - (n) Recreation and tourism;
 - (o) Renewable energy;
 - (p) Development at East Midlands Airport in accordance with Policy Ec5;
 - (q) Development at Donington Park Racetrack in accordance with Policy Ec8;
 - (r) Transport infrastructure;
 - (s) Mineral extraction; and
 - (t) Waste management facilities.

- (3) Development in the Countryside will only be approved where:**
- (a) the appearance and character of the landscape, including its historic character and features such as biodiversity, views, settlement pattern, rivers, watercourses, field patterns, industrial heritage and local distinctiveness is safeguarded and enhanced; and**
 - (b) it does not undermine, either individually or cumulatively with existing or proposed development, the physical and perceived separation and open undeveloped character between nearby settlements either through contiguous extensions to existing settlements or through development on isolated sites on land divorced from settlement boundaries; and**
 - (c) it does not create or exacerbate ribbon development; and**
 - (d) built development is well integrated with existing development and existing buildings, including the re-use of existing buildings, where appropriate; and the development will not seriously undermine the vitality and viability of existing town and local centres.**

National Policy

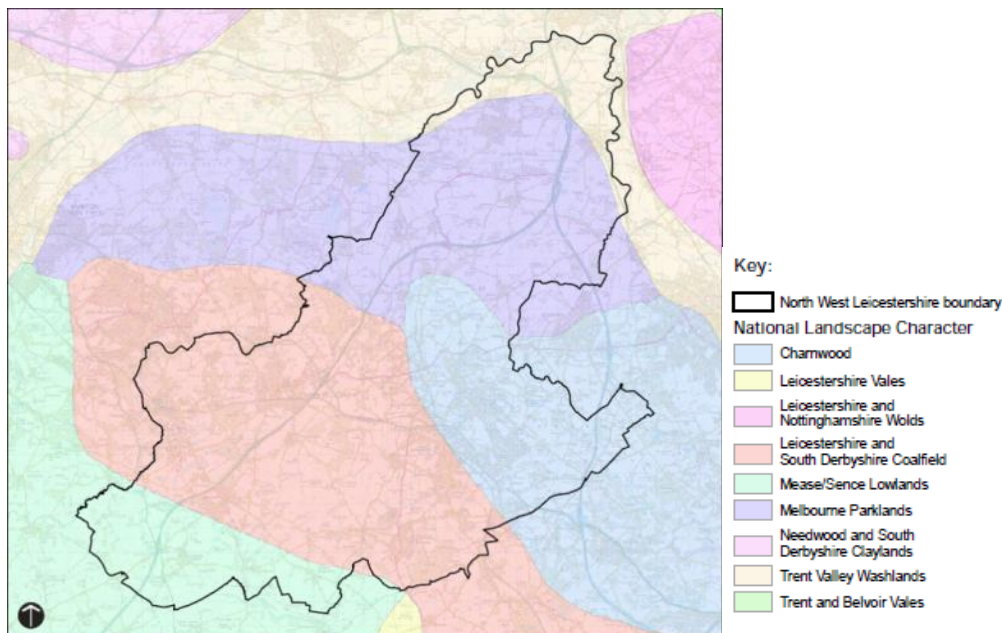
- 2.2 One of the Core principles in the National Planning Policy Framework is that planning should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. The National Planning Practice Guidance states “that Local Plans should include strategic policies for the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment including the landscape”. This includes designated landscapes but also the wider countryside.
- 2.3 Para 109 of the NPPF states that “the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes...” para 113 goes on to state that “Local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites it landscape areas will be judged..”.

3.0 NATIONAL CHARACTER AREAS

- 3.1 Policy S4 is concerned with protecting the countryside for the sake of its intrinsic character and beauty. The landscape and character of the countryside across North West Leicestershire varies from upland areas around the Charnwood Forest to the flat landscape along the Trent Valley. It is important that the design and layout of new development takes account of these varying characteristics to ensure that proposed development complements the landscape setting within which it is set.
- 3.2 Natural England as part of their responsibilities set out within the Natural Environment White Paper, Biodiversity 2000 and the European Landscape Convention, have prepared 159 profiles for England’s National Character Areas (NCA). These are areas that share similar landscape characteristics, and which follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries. Each of these areas has a profile associated with it, which describes in detail the key landscape features and identifies any issues and opportunities. North West Leicestershire is covered by the following five character areas (figure 1), each of the character areas have been summarised below.
- Trent Valley Washlands (Area 69)

- Melbourne Parklands (Area70)
- Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield (Area71)
- Mease/ Sence Lowlands (Area 72)
- Charnwood (Area 73)

Figure 1 – National Character Areas



3.3 When determining planning applications we will have regard to the National Character Areas when considering the potential impact of development on the landscape.

[Trent Valley Washlands](#)

3.3 The Trent Valley Washlands (NCA) covers the western side of Kegworth and Cavendish Bridge, the landscape comprises the river flood plain corridors of the middle reaches of the River Trent's catchment in the heart of England. It is distinctly narrow, linear and low lying landscape, often clearly delineated at its edges by higher ground, and it is largely comprised of the flat flood plains and gravel terraces of the rivers.

3.4 The Trent Valley Washlands are strongly defined by riverien environment and periodic inundation. The key ecosystem services provided are related to water, its availability and regulation of flow. Thick superficial deposits of alluvium and river terrace gravels dominate the Washlands geology. Variations in these, the resultant soils and the differences in elevation above and below flood levels have determined both settlement pattern and agricultural land use. Arable crops are by and large located on the freely draining soils of the river terraces and on the higher ground where fields are big and hedgerows are small with few trees. Pastoral farming generally takes place on the river flood plain, where soils are subject to frequent flooding or are naturally wet. Here fields are usually smaller and the hedgerows fuller with more tree cover. Overall woodland cover in the washlands is very limited, although riparian trees, especially willows, provide an important component of the

landscape. The characteristic species are those associated with these wetlands such as grey heron, lawping and kingfisher.

- 3.5 Buildings are typically made of red brick with clay plain tile roofs with the occasional survival of some earlier timber –framed structures, while grander dwellings and churches are often built from sandstone.
- 3.6 A unifying thread throughout the wash lands is provided by the rivers, their flood plain tracts of pasture and the bordering higher ground; however, it is also a landscape that is heavily fragmented and intruded upon by modern built development, communication and transport infrastructure. It is greatly influenced by past and present industry from energy generation to aggregate extraction. Despite these intrusions, in places, particularly beside the rivers, the Washlands provide a picturesque pastoral landscape bequiling, timeless quality. In addition, the potentially abundant opportunities for recreation offered by the many water resources are particularly important owing to their accessibility to the many people living within and near the area.

[Melbourne Parklands](#)

- 3.7 The Melbourne Parklands are located between the ancient forests of Needwood and Charnwood. The Trent Valley forms its northern and western boundary, in a wide arc sweeping round from its confluence with the River Soar in the north-east, to Burton –upon- Trent in the south-west. The CA covers the following settlements within North West Leicestershire:
- Lockington
 - Hemington
 - Castle Donington
 - Isley Walton
 - Diseworth
 - Long Whatton
 - Breedon on the Hill
 - Belton
- 3.8 It is a landscape of rolling farmland, ancient and plantation woodland and, as the name suggests, a cluster of landscaped parklands with grand country houses, one of which is Calke Abbey which boasts a Grade II* listed historic park and garden. The park has also been designated a National Nature Reserve and contains many notable ancient and veteran trees. One –quarter of the character area is within The National Forest and 10 per cent is woodland.
- 3.9 The area is predominately rural, although there are strong and often abrupt contrasts within the urban areas on its peripheries. The M1 and A42 cross the NCA and East Midlands Airport is sited on the central plateau in an otherwise undulating area.

- 3.10 Most of the land is in agricultural use, with extensive areas under arable production, and mixed arable and pasture on the steeper ground. Siltstones and mudstones of Mercia Mudstone Group in the east of the NCA produce a gently rolling lowland plateau.

[Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield](#)

- 3.11 The Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield NCA covers the following settlements within North West Leicestershire:

- Ashby de la Zouch
- Blackfordby
- Coalville
- Coleorton
- Donisthorpe
- Heather
- Ibstock
- Measham
- Normanton le heath
- Oakthorpe
- Ravenstone
- Swannington

- 3.13 The landform consists of a plateau with unrestricted views of shallow valleys and gentle ridges that become less pronounced in the south due to the layer of glacial till. To the east the land rises steeply, affording views of the Charnwood NCA. Ancient woodland straddles part of the boundary in the north, where the land falls away affording views of the woodland rolling landscape of the Melbourne Parklands. The River Mease Site of Special Scientific Interest and Special Area of Conservation forms part of the boundary with the Mease/Sence Lowlands NCA in the south-west and the Leicestershire Vales NCA forms a less visually defined border in the south.

- 3.14 The area has a developing woodland character, heavily influenced by the work of The National Forest that covers the majority of the character area and which aims to link the remnant ancient forest landscapes of Melbourne Parklands in the north with those of the Charnwood NCA in the east and the Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands NCA in the west.

- 3.15 The landscape is in continuing transition, from an unenclosed rolling landform that was extensively scarred by abandoned collieries, spoil tips and clay pits, to a matrix of new woodland, restored colliery sites, active brick pits and commercial developments that are

woven into an essentially rural, agricultural landscape. Settlements consist of a mix of small hamlets, enlarged market towns and former mining settlements.

- 3.16 The wooded spoil tips of abandoned colliery sites, the prevalence of subsidence flashes, the tramways and Ashby Canal are locally prominent features in the landscape and are strong reminders of a long and rich industrial heritage, The medieval remains of the castle in Ashby de la Zouch provide reminders of a pre-industrial heritage and the focus of a wider visitor interest in the area for recreation that is forming the basis of an emerging visitor economy.

[Mease / Sence Lowlands](#)

- 3.17 The Mease/Sence Lowlands NCA covers the following settlements within North West Leicestershire:
- Appleby Magna
 - Chilcote
 - Newton Burgoland
 - Snarestone
 - Stretton en le Field
- 3.18 The landscape is a gently rolling agricultural landscape centred around the Rivers Mease, Sence and Anker. The lowlands retain a rural, remote character, with small villages, red brick farmsteads and occasional historic parkland and country houses. The National Forest extends into the area north of the River Mease.
- 3.19 The historic character of this area is important, in particular its ancient woodlands, veteran trees, landscaped parklands and areas of archaeological interest, including ridge and furrow.
- 3.20 With 30 per cent of the land classified as grade 2 agricultural land, this is a rich and productive agricultural area. Most of the land is in agricultural use. There is much potential for an increase in appropriate woodland planting as part of the National Forest initiative, which is increasing recreation opportunities, woodland cover and biomass potential for the future.

[Charnwood](#)

- 3.21 The Charnwood NCA covers the following settlements within North West Leicestershire:
- Bardon
 - Coalville
 - Griffydham
 - Osgathorpe
 - Thringstone
 - Whitwick

- 3.22 It is a unique landscape, marked out by its geology and upland qualities, which contrast with the surrounding gentle lowlands. It is formed by a mosaic of heathland, farmland, parkland and woodland. It is a relatively well wooded landscape, with many areas of mixed, deciduous and coniferous woodlands.
- 3.23 Situated between, Coalville, Loughborough and Leicester. Charnwood NCA is surrounded by a large urban area, but retains a rural character. Larger villages lie on the southern, western and eastern fringes, with small, linear villages in the central area. Many buildings in the central part of the area are characterised by local Charnian rocks and Swithland Slate.
- 3.24 Key ecosystem services provided by Charnwood NCA include its internationally important geology and internationally and nationally important wildlife, such as the unique Charnwood spider.
- 3.25 The area is facing key challenges around how to protect and enhance its unique natural assets while accommodating the pressure for modern growth and development, and significant mineral extraction. There is great scope to build on and support the partnership work of the Charnwood Forest Regional Park to protect and enhance this area, and the work of the National Forest in promoting sustainable woodland management and extending woodland where appropriate.