

**NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION
POSITION STATEMENT OF NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

MATTER 8 – COUNTRYSIDE AND OPENSACE



Matter 8a - Is Policy Ec5 consistent with national policy in designating 'Areas of Separation'?

1. One of the Core Planning Principles in the NPPF details that planning should: *"take account of the different roles and character of different areas"*. Paragraph 110 states that *"plans should allocate land [for development] with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in the framework"*.
2. 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. Paragraph 157 details that Local Plans should identify land where development would be inappropriate, for instance because of its environmental or historic significance.
3. Whilst The NPPF does not specifically refer to 'Areas of Separation' guidance set out in the NPPF it can be seen that it recognises the value of areas of local importance and so supports the idea of an Area of Separation in principle.
4. The Area of Separation prevents the coalescence of settlements, provides green infrastructure and protects the identity of settlements. The Area of Separation has both environmental and amenity value. The Secretary of State identified in the Stephenson Green Inquiry (EX/05) that development on the site would result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (para 15) that the *"...appeal site should be seen as a very important part of the existing green infrastructure and its environs"* (para 13).
5. In terms of the historic significance the Areas of Separation are the two remaining open areas within the otherwise built up environment of Coalville and represent the final part of the historic settlement pattern. The preservation of the area is a longstanding Council commitment which was recognised in the Stephenson Green Appeal where the Secretary of State agreed with the Inspector that the Green Wedge is a *"longstanding designation in the development plan that fulfils a valuable planning function"* (para 21).
6. It is considered that cumulatively the guidance in the NPPF provides for the identification of areas of separation.
7. The Area of Separation designation is consistent with the NPPF in that it takes account of the specific role and character of the area, it recognises the areas environmental, amenity and landscape value and it ensures the continued protection of an area that has historically been protected (by the Green Wedge designation).
8. The council considers that the Area of Separation designation is essential in this location as the Areas of Separation lie within the Limits to Development and are therefore not subject to countryside policies.

Matter 8b - Does Policy En5 make appropriate provision for Areas of Separation between Coalville and Whitwick?

9. The Area of Separation is a central tenet of the plan, protecting the identities of Whitwick and Coalville. It has long standing, strong cross-party and local support, and serves the specific purpose of maintaining the separation between, and distinct identities of, the two settlements.
10. Its location, with profile from the A511 in particular, has resulted in sustained pressure for its release to be developed. This has been resisted, and appeal decisions and a High Court Judgement have all supported its retention, recognising its importance. It is the case that its function supports the deliverability of the south east Coalville urban extension, which will include a total of 3,500 new homes. To put it another way, loss of the Whitwick Area of Separation would undermine the attractiveness of the south east Coalville development, which benefits from planning permission.
11. The boundary of the Area of Separation is entirely appropriate, maintaining its integrity and function. Promoters of sites within the Area of Separation suggest that selective release of land will not harm its function, however this openness is a vital element of the Area of Separation and there is no getting away from the fact that urbanising, even in part, will fatally undermine its function which maintains the separation between and identities of the distinct settlements of Coalville and Whitwick, and as a consequence put the deliverability of the flagship urban extension at south east Coalville under threat.

Matter 8c - Should the Plan formally designate Local Green Spaces (LGS)?

and

Matter 8d - Should any LGS designations be delegated to Neighbourhood Plans?

12. As advised in the Planning Practice Guidance and the NPPF, Local Green Space (LGS) designation is a way to provide special protection against development for green areas of particular importance to local communities. Such spaces are to be afforded a high level of protection from development (akin to Green Belt status)
13. The designation of a LGS will need to be consistent with local planning for sustainable development in the area and not prevent identified development needs being met in suitable locations.
14. LGSs can be designated through either the Local Plan process or the Neighbourhood Plan process. Whether to designate land is a matter for local discretion. Paragraph 77 of the NPPF sets out the criteria that need to be met when seeking to designate LGS.
15. The designation of an area as LGS is considered to be a matter and issue of specific local relevance, and the Council is of the view that this would be best served through the Neighbourhood Plan process. Evidence supporting the identification of prospective LGS needs to be provided and local communities,

such as through Parish/Town Councils or community groups, are best placed to be able to do this.

16. Notwithstanding the fact that the Local Plan does not designate LGS, it does contain Policy IF3 that seeks to protect the unacceptable loss of open spaces within our defined Limits to Development. All land which provides an open space, sports or recreational facility would be considered under this policy and not just that which could be designated as 'Local Green Space' subject to the criteria in Paragraph 77 of the NPPF. This allows a more flexible approach to this issue and as defined in the glossary, open space should be taken to mean all open space of public value, including for sport and recreation opportunities as well as visual amenity value.
17. However the designation of LGSs in the Local Plan would not allow this flexible approach. Such a designation does not have to be done through the Local Plan process and for the reasons stated above the Council are of the view that such a designation should be undertaken through the Neighbourhood Plan process.
18. A number of representation received mentioned specific spaces that they felt ought to be designated as LGS. Some of these would be considered to be covered by Policy IF3, those areas outside limits would be covered by Policy S4 and a further site has planning permission and in such circumstances it will rarely be appropriate for a LGS designation.