

Leicester and Leicestershire Green Wedge Review Joint Methodology

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I. Introduction and Purpose of the review

- 1.1 This Green Wedge review joint methodology has been agreed by the seven local authorities of Blaby, Charnwood, Harborough, Hinckley & Bosworth, Leicester, North West Leicestershire and Oadby & Wigston, which were designated as a Housing Market Area by the Regional Housing and Planning Board in 2004. Melton is also part of the Housing Market Area but is not part of the joint methodology because there are no Green Wedges in its local authority area.
- 1.2 The East Midlands Regional Plan emphasises that a review of existing Green Wedges should be carried out through Local Development Frameworks, and the need for such a review was underlined at the recent Examination in Public of the Hinckley and Bosworth Core Strategy.
- 1.3 Many authorities in Leicestershire have Green Wedges that overlap into other local authority areas and so a joint methodology has been agreed which can be used when/if each individual local authority carries out their Green Wedge review. Having a consistent approach to such a review is considered vital to ensure the soundness of each DPDs prepared by each local authority.
- 1.4 This paper sets out the background and proposes a methodology for the Green Wedge Review.

2. Background

- 2.1 Green Wedge policies were introduced in Leicestershire in the Leicestershire Structure Plan (1987). The relevant policies, L/ST7 and L/ST8, are attached in appendix 1. The Secretary of State's approval makes it clear that Green Wedges were considered to be "*...policies for protecting structurally important areas of open land which influence the form and direction of urban development in Leicester...*"
- 2.2 The Leicestershire Structure Plan (1994) maintained Green Wedge policies. Environment Policies 3 and 4 are attached in appendix 2. Paragraph 3.21 of the Explanatory Memorandum usefully states the four specific aims of the policy.

- 2.3 The Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan (2005), Strategy Policy 6, lists the purposes of Green Wedges. There are subtle differences to the aims given in the 1994 Structure Plan, particularly with regard to “strategic landscape and wildlife links”. Strategy Policy 6 lists the general location of Green Wedges. The policy states that *“The defined boundaries of Green Wedges in the following general locations will be reviewed as part of local plan reviews....”*. The supporting text states that this must not compromise any of the 4 purposes of Green Wedges set out in Strategy Policy 5. Both Strategy Policy 5 and 6 are in appendix 3. The 2007 Structure Plan was superseded by the East Midlands Regional Plan (2009).
- 2.4 The East Midlands Regional Plan (2009) does not contain a policy on Green Wedges. Instead, it 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. Paragraph 4.2.18 of the supporting text (attached as appendix 4) states that *‘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 acts 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.’*
- 2.5 It is the East Midlands Regional Plan (2009) which now provides the strategic context for the review of existing Green Wedges.

3. Proposed Methodology for Review of the Green Wedge

- 3.1 The purpose of the review is to assess the extent of the Green Wedges currently shown in the relevant Local Plan in the context of the East Midlands Regional Plan (paragraph 4.2.18). The green wedge principles as set out in the Regional Plan has been tailored to reflect the local circumstances in the Housing Market Area.
- 3.2 Areas of green wedge primarily seek to guide the development form of urban areas but it is recognised that rural settlements nearby may also be affected by green

wedge due to their proximity to larger urban areas. In these cases, the presence of green wedge helps to maintain settlement identity whilst providing a green infrastructure link between settlements.

3.3 The size of the green wedge will be the minimum needed to fulfil all of the principles below or there should be a potential for particular Green Wedges to fulfil all of the criteria in the future if measures were put in place to allow it.

Preventing the merging of settlements

Green Wedges will safeguard the identity of communities within and around urban areas that face growth pressures.

Guiding Development Form

Green Wedges will guide the form of new developments in urban areas, Consideration will be given to designating new green wedges or amending existing ones where it would help shape the development of new communities' such as potential sustainable urban extensions.

Providing a Green Lung into urban areas

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 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 historic/cultural assets and the links between them

- Links to green infrastructure at both a strategic and local level
- Transport corridors

A recreational resource

Green wedges will provide a recreational resource. This will include informal and formal facilities now and in the future. Public access will be maximised

3.4 The Green Wedge Review 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.

3.5 The review will inform the preparation of each Local Authority's Core Strategy and subsequent Allocations and Designations DPD. The former will show the broad location and extent of Green Wedges in a "Key Diagram", the latter will show the precise areas subject to Green Wedge policy on an O.S. base.

4. The Assessment

4.1 Local authorities within Leicester and Leicestershire will carry out individual assessments, which will follow the following agreed methodology. Where Green Wedges cross local authority boundaries, a joint working approach will be established.

4.2 The following stages will inform the assessment:

Stage I – Data collection/ Desk top survey

Data will be collected about the Green Wedge in respect of:

- Public rights of way/permissive Routes (footpaths/bridleways/cycleways) Degree of access to/from surrounding urban areas + access to strategically important access routes
- Historical landscapes and archaeological remains
- Findings from the Minerals and Waste Plan
- Land use within the Green Wedge including open space, sports and recreation, the location of Sites of Scientific Interest, Local Wildlife Sites and Nature Reserves
- Ecology (assessing whether green wedges form part of an important wildlife corridor)
- Development Control decisions within the green wedge since adoption of the Local Plan, including Appeals.
- Socio-economic data (Proximity to areas of multiple deprivation).
- Agricultural land quality (the opportunities for use of the land as a recreational resource).
- Air Quality Management areas (AQMA's) and the proximity of the green wedge to these (the ability of green wedges to act as a 'green lung')
- Water management (areas of flood risk)
- Connection to green infrastructure in the wider area
- Evidence of development pressures
- Transport routes and infrastructure.

Stage 2 – On site surveys

Officers will undertake a visual appraisal on site of the Green Wedge in terms of

- topography

- identification of key physical features within and out of the Green Wedge
- Significant hedgerows/hedgerow trees/woodlands.
- the extent of built development within Green Wedges;
- perception of separation from several points within and on the boundaries of settlements
- Visible informal uses through the Green Wedge
- Consideration of whether the green wedge could fulfil other functions not yet identified.

An example of a site proforma that will be used is in appendix 5.

Stage 3 – Evaluation

The Green Wedge will be evaluated against the criteria set out in the Regional Plan using the information from the data collection and on site surveys.

Criteria	Does the Green Wedge meet the Criteria?
Preventing the merging of settlements;	
Guiding development form;	
Providing a green “lung” into urban areas	
A recreational resource.	

Stage 4 - Consultation

Key stakeholders will be consulted on a topic paper which will show the analysis of the Green Wedges within the Local Authority areas and the alternative options for the future of the Green Wedge policy. The preferred policy approach will also be identified.

The stakeholder group will consist of representatives from:

- Leicestershire County Council Policy Team
- Leicestershire County Council Access Team
- Adjacent District/Borough Councils i.e. Melton Borough Council (officers);
- Appropriate local authority departments
- Government Office East Midlands
- National Forest Company
- Leicester and Rutland Wildlife Trust
- 6C's coordinator
- National Farmers Union
- Environment Agency
- English Heritage
- Stepping Stones;
- British Waterways;
- Leicestershire Local Access Forum.
- House Builders Federation
- Natural England
- East Midlands Regional Assembly
- Country Land And Business Association

5 Outputs

- 5.1 The assessment will form an important part of the evidence base for future development plan documents.
- 5.2 The green wedge review can be the first step in a process which could conclude with a more detailed management plan.

Appendix I

Leicestershire Structure Plan (1987) policies L/ST7 and L/ST8

Policy L/ST7

“The character of Green Wedge areas between the built-up areas of the fringes of Leicester and Loughborough and adjoining physically separate communities will be protected and, wherever possible, improved. There will be a presumption in favour of land in agricultural, horticultural, community or recreational use remaining in its present use. There will normally be a presumption against the introduction or intensification of development for other purposes.”

Policy L/ST8

“The general locations of Green Wedges are:

- (i) Leicester (Beaumont Leys) / Birstall / Thurcaston / Anstey
- (ii) Birstall / Leicester / Thurmaston (Soar Valley North)
- (iii) Thurmaston / Syston
- (iv) Leicester / Scraftoft
- (v) Thurnby / Leicester / Oadby
- (vi) Oadby / Leicester / Wigston
- (vii) Whetstone / Blaby / Countesthorpe
- (viii) Whetstone / Enderby / Glen Parva / Braunstone (Soar Valley South)
- (ix) Ratby / Groby / Glenfield
- (x) Beaumont Leys / Glenfrith (Leicester)
- (xi) Hamilton
- (xii) Loughborough / Shepshed
- (xiii) Loughborough / Quorn
- (xiv) Loughborough / Hathern

Detailed boundaries of Green Wedges will be defined in local plans.”

Appendix 2

Leicestershire Structure Plan (1994) Environment Policies 3 and 4

Environment Policy 3: Green Wedges

The open and undeveloped character of Green Wedge land between built up areas on the fringes of Leicester and its adjoining settlements, Loughborough, Coalville and Hinckley will be protected and wherever possible improved.

Planning permission will normally only be granted for agriculture, recreation, forestry, transport routes and mineral uses, provided the new development associated with these uses does not damage the open and undeveloped character of the Green Wedge.

Supporting text to above policy

Paragraph 3.19

Green Wedges around Leicester and Loughborough have proved to be effective in retaining open areas both between settlements and extending into the main built-up areas. They also provide essential access to open space. Green Wedges do not constitute a Green Belt in the accepted sense, in that they do not seek to restrict the growth of an urban area. Instead Green Wedges seek to ensure that, as urban development extends, open land is incorporated within it. For this reason it is not necessary to provide for additional development at the inner edges of the Green Wedges. An integral part of the function of Green Wedge areas, however, is to prevent the coalescence of settlements and maintain their physical identity. The detailed boundaries will be defined and reviewed in local plans.

Paragraph 3.20

Environment Policy 3 continues the established policies for protecting structurally important areas of open land that influence the form and direction of urban development.

Paragraph 3.21

The policy has the following aims:

- a) To protect structurally important areas of open land that influence the form and direction of urban development, prevent coalescence and maintain the physical identity of adjacent settlements;
- b) To ensure that open areas of land extend outwards from urban centres to preserve links with open countryside;
- c) To provide appropriate recreational facilities within easy reach of urban residents;

- d) To promote the positive management of such wedges to ensure that they remain or are enhanced as attractive environmental features with good public access.

Paragraph 3.22

The policy gives a presumption for Green Wedge land in favour of agricultural, forestry, transport routes or recreational use. Mineral uses are also likely to be acceptable where they do not permanently damage the character of the Wedges. There will be a presumption against the introduction or intensification of development for other purposes.

Paragraph 3.23

The policy emphasises the need for land to remain in an open state and makes provision for positive management and environmental improvement. Acceptable land uses within Green Wedges are those that maintain the open quality of the area and do not damage their undeveloped character. The policy does not allow for any building which would damage the character of the area and only minor ancillary built development, for example for recreation facilities, may be granted permission.

Environment Policy 4: The General Location of Green Wedges

The general locations of Green Wedges will be:

In and around Leicester

- a) Leicester (Beaumont Leys) / Birstall / Thurcaston / Anstey / Cropston
- b) Birstall / Leicester / Thurmaston (Soar Valley North)
- c) Thurmaston / Syston
- d) Hamilton
- e) Leicester / Scraptoft
- f) Thurnby / Leicester / Oadby
- g) Oadby / Leicester / Wigston
- h) Whetstone / Blaby / Countesthorpe
- i) Blaby / Glen Parva (Sence Valley)
- j) Whetstone / Enderby / Glen Parva / Braunstone / Blaby / Narborough / Cosby (Soar Valley South)

k) Ratby / Groby / Glenfield / Kirby Muxloe / Kirby Fields / Kirby Frith

l) Beaumont Leys / Glenfrith / Anstey / Groby

Other areas

n) Loughborough / Shepshed

o) Loughborough / Quorn

p) Loughborough / Hathern

q) Coalville / Whitwick / Swannington

r) Hinckley / Barwell / Earl Shilton

Appendix 3

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan (2005) Strategy Policies 5 and 6

Strategy Policy 5: Green Wedges

Green Wedges may be designated in local plans in association with planned urban extensions proposed in such plans. The purposes of Green Wedges are:

- (a) *Protecting structurally important areas of open land which influence the form and direction of urban development;*
- (b) *Ensuring that open land extends outwards between the existing and planned development limits of the urban areas;*
- (c) *Preserving strategic landscape and wildlife links between the countryside and urban open spaces; and*
- (d) *Preventing the coalescence and maintaining the physical identity of settlements adjoining the main urban areas.*

Within Green Wedges uses will be encouraged that provide appropriate recreational facilities within easy reach of urban residents and promote the positive management of land to ensure that the Green Wedges remain or are enhanced as attractive contributions to the quality of life of nearby urban residents.

The following land uses will be acceptable in Green Wedges, provided the operational development associated with such uses does not damage the open and undeveloped character of the Green Wedge:

- (a) *Agriculture, including allotments and horticulture not accompanied by retail development;*
- (b) *Outdoor recreation;*
- (c) *Forestry;*
- (d) *Footpaths, bridleways and cycleways; and*
- (e) *Burial grounds*

The following development will only be acceptable if appropriate measures are taken to minimise severance and adverse effects on the amenity of the Green Wedge:

- (a) *Mineral extraction;*

- (b) *Road proposals or dedicated public transport routes referred to in the Development Plan, or where there is no alternative route available outside the Green Wedge;*
- (c) *Park and ride facilities, if no suitable site outside a Green Wedge is available.*

Supporting text

Paragraph 2.27

Existing Green Wedges have been an established part of the Leicestershire Structure Plan for many years. They are structurally important areas of open land that influence the form and direction of urban development, their primary functions being first, to maintain the physical separation between communities and help protect their individual identities and, second, to contribute towards the quality of life for all people living in the urban areas. To this end, any land use or associated development in Green Wedges should:

- (a) Retain the open and undeveloped character of the Green Edge;
- (b) Retain and create green networks between the countryside and open spaces within the urban areas; and
- (c) Retain and enhance public access to the Green Wedge, especially for recreation.

Strategy Policy 6: Review of Green Wedges

The defined boundaries of Green Wedges in the following general locations will be reviewed as part of local plan reviews, and such reviews shall have regard to the sequential approach to new development in Strategy Policy 2A and to the criteria in Strategy Policy 2B:

In and around Leicester:

- (a) *Leicester (Beaumont Leys) / Birstall / Thurcaston / Anstey / Cropston;*
- (b) *Birstall / Leicester / Thurmaston (Soar Valley North);*
- (c) *Thurmaston / Syston;*
- (d) *Hamilton;*
- (e) *Leicester / Scraptoft;*
- (f) *Thurnby / Leicester / Oadby;*
- (g) *Oadby / Leicester / Wigston;*
- (h) *Whetstone / Blaby / Countesthorpe;*

- (i) *Blaby / Glen Parva (Sence Valley)*
- (j) *Whetstone / Enderby / Glen Parva / Braunstone / Blaby / Narborough / Cosby (Soar Valley South);*
- (k) *Ratby / Groby / Glenfield / Kirby Muxloe / Kirby Fields / Braunstone Frith;*
- (l) *Beaumont Leys / Glenfield / Anstey / Groby;*

Other areas:

- (m) *Loughborough / Shepshed*
- (n) *Loughborough / Quorn*
- (o) *Loughborough / Hathern*
- (p) *Coalville / Whitwick / Swannington*
- (q) *Hinckley / Barwell / Earl Shilton*

Appendix 4

Paragraph 4.2.18 of the East Midlands Regional Plan (2009)

Some parts of the Sub-area have established Green Wedge policies. 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 acts 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. 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.

Appendix 5

Green wedge site visit proforma

Green Wedge:

Location:

Time and date of site visit:

Land use description		
Adjacent land uses		
Landscape features (high hedgerows etc)		
Topography		
Can more than one settlement be seen from current position?	Yes	No
Details		
Perception of distance to neighbouring settlements		
Does the current green wedge have a strong defensible boundary?	Yes	No
Details		
Does an alternative strong defensible boundary exist?	Yes	No
Details		
Extent of built development within the Green Wedge		
What effects would built development in the green		

wedge in this location have?		
Does this green wedge provide green open space in a predominantly urban environment?	Yes	No
Details		
Does this green wedge provide recreational opportunities? (including footpaths / cycle ways / bridle paths)	Yes	No
Details		
Can this green wedge be accessed by the public?	Yes	No
Details		
Are the footpaths and bridleways of a good quality? (signposted, stiles / gates, surface condition etc.)	Yes	No
Details		
Is there any evidence of the level of use on the footpaths / bridleways?		
What visible informal uses are there?		
Could the integrity and quality of the recreational opportunity be maintained if the green wedge boundaries were moved?		