

Oadby and Wigston Borough Council – Local Plan

Green Wedge Note

1. Introduction

1.1 This Note has been produced in response to the Inspector’s request for further information relating to paragraph 5.45 of the Council’s Green Wedge Review 2017 (LP09/01) which recommends that –

‘should the Land at Cottage Farm be allocated for development within the new Local Plan, the southern area of the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge should be extended southwards to guide development form in future years by defining development limits. Extending southwards would also prevent any future coalescence of the two settlements of Wigston and Oadby.’

1.2 Due to evidenced housing need, the Land at Cottage Farm (Phase 2) is proposed as one of the Council’s residential led Direction for Growth allocations, comprising of 250 new additional dwellings, within its new Local Plan. The Council therefore considered it appropriate to designate an extension to the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge within the new Local Plan as per the recommendation set out at paragraph 5.45 of the Council’s Green Wedge Review 2017.

1.3 During the Hearing Sessions, the Inspector suggested that it was not clear on the basis of the information before her why the Council had reached the conclusion of extending the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge boundary extent further southwards.

1.4 The Inspector asked the Council to provide additional information clearly setting out why this green wedge extension was proposed, including an assessment and evaluation of the land in accordance with the Leicester and Leicestershire Joint Green Wedge Methodology. The Inspector further suggested that it would assist her if the following could be addressed within the Council’s response;

- Why the extension of Land at Cottage Farm Direction for Growth Area triggers a need for the extension to the Green Wedge southwards?

- What other options, if any, that may also achieve this, were considered by the Council?
- How has the Council arrived at the extent and boundaries of the proposed extension?
- In addition can the Council please clarify the differences between Green Wedge and countryside designations and how this has informed the overall site selection process and where, if anywhere, this is already set out in the evidence base?

1.5 The information set out below responds to the Inspector's questions.

2. Overall Approach

- 2.1 The overarching reasons for the Council's Green Wedge Review 2017 document, recommending an extension to the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge, are to;
- Guide development form now and in the future by defining limits to urban development, and
 - Prevent the future coalescence of the two settlements of Wigston and Oadby.
- 2.2 The designation of the proposed green wedge extension, will also allow the opportunity for increased public access and use for of the land area for leisure and recreational purposes.
- 2.3 In relation to the Inspector's question regarding what other options were considered by the Council, the Council considered the following two options;
- not designating a green wedge extension and the land area remaining as countryside designation; and,
 - designating the green wedge extension.

Having considered both options, the Council considered it appropriate to designate the green wedge extension for the reasons set out in this report.

- 2.4 In considering the option to extend the green wedge the Council concluded that the width of the proposed extension should be commensurate with the width (over 400 metres in width) of others areas of the existing Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge, specifically the existing green wedge area to the south of Oadby Road / Wigston Road (illustrated in Figure 1 edged dark red). The Council therefore ensured that the width of the proposed green wedge extension was in excess of 400 metres, similar to the width of the existing green wedge designation. Figure 1 below illustrates how the proposed green wedge extension relates to the existing green wedge designation to the south of the 'pinch point' (circled blue) at Oadby Road / Wigston Road.

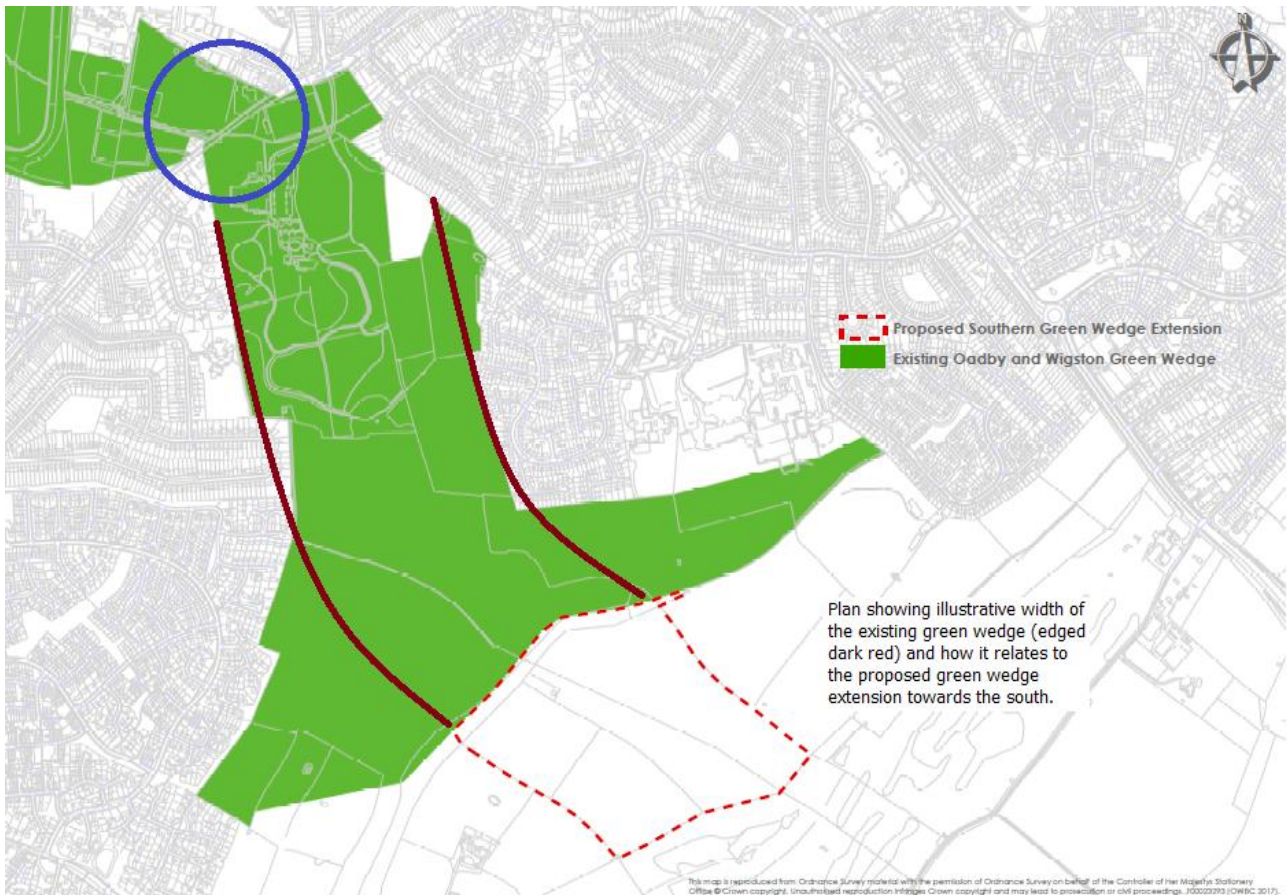


Figure 1 – extract from the Green Wedge Review 2017 illustrating the relationship between the width of the proposed extension and the existing green wedge designation.

2.5 The following information sets out the Council’s reasoning and justification for why a green wedge extension was recommended within the Green Wedge Review 2017 and the reasoning and justification for why the Council considered it appropriate to realise this recommendation within the new Local Plan.

Justification for the recommendation to propose the extension in the new Local Plan

2.6 As stated within paragraph 3.1.2 of the Leicester and Leicestershire Green Wedge Review Joint Methodology (Review Methodology), areas of Green Wedge primarily seek to guide development form of urban areas, whilst providing green infrastructure links between settlements.

2.7 The Review Methodology at paragraphs 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 is explicit in stating that when assessing a green wedge or identifying a new green wedge, the green wedge as a whole should fulfil all four functions (as set out within the Review Methodology), however that at a micro scale level, each part of the green wedge is not required to meet all four criteria, as long as each part contributes towards fulfilling the four criteria. To note, the area of the

Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge proposed extension is not a new green wedge; it is an extension to an existing green wedge and would comprise part of the wider green wedge designation once the new Local Plan is adopted. The proposed extension would therefore not be required to fulfil all four functions through its assessment.

2.8 The proposed green wedge extension extends both Sub Areas 4 and 5, as shown in Figure 4 (page 13) of the Council’s Green Wedge Review 2017.

Green Wedge function / criteria assessed against	Does the proposed extension meet the criteria?
Preventing the merging of settlements	<p>The table set out below paragraph 5.39 of the Council’s Green Wedge Review 2017 states ‘<i>...the southern area of the green wedge, where it abuts the Borough’s countryside designation is also important as it reduces the likelihood of wrap round built development that would essentially join the two settlements</i>’. In other words, the purpose of the existing, most southern area of the green wedge is to prevent built development wrapping around the bottom of the green wedge, joining the two settlements. This conclusion however, is set against the current extent of the built area of the settlement of Oadby and Wigston. The conclusion does not take account of the proposed Cottage Farm Direction for Growth allocation.</p> <p>When taking account of the proposed Cottage Farm Direction for Growth allocation, the existing extent of the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge, would not, fulfil the assessed conclusion of, reducing the likelihood of ‘wrap’ round built development that would essentially join the two settlements. The proposed extension would however prevent wrap round development occurring towards the south of the green wedge.</p> <p>The proposed extension would designate a green wedge area of land that is (in excess of) approximately 400 metres in width, which is</p>

	<p>commensurate with the width of other robust areas of the existing Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge, specifically the existing green wedge area to the south of Oadby Road / Wigston Road (as illustrated on Figure 1).</p> <p>Although the realisation of the proposed Cottage Farm Direction for Growth allocation would not itself create settlement coalescence in the short to medium term, it would contribute towards future settlement coalescence should the new Local Plan's policy triggers be set in motion and further land is required, for example towards the south and east of Wigston. The proposed extension would ensure that should further development be required within the Borough, settlement coalescence of Wigston and Oadby would not occur.</p>
<p>Guiding development form</p>	<p>As suggested in the table on page 25 of the Council's Green Wedge Review 2017, the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge has guided and continues to guide development form effectively. The table also states that the existing green wedge boundary extent where it meets the current urban edge is distinctly defined and there are no 'blurring' of the lines...it is very much urban one side and green wedge the other. In addition to guiding the urban built development form, the green wedge guides land use and development form of the urban green infrastructure network. The green wedge extension would allow the 'linking' of the racecourse, the allotments, the rugby and football sports facilities, Parklands Leisure Centre and Brocks Hill Country Park with Glen Gorse Golf Courses to the south of the Borough. The green wedge extension would allow for a continuous network of land where appropriate (namely that associated to recreation, sport and leisure) built development is in principle appropriate.</p> <p>It is important to note, that the green wedge function of 'guiding development form' is not a reactive approach, it is very much a proactive approach to guiding development form as settlements grow and evolve. The green wedge extension will maintain a settlement boundary that is consistent with the existing urban form and will shape</p>

	<p>the extent of any future urban development.</p> <p>As can be derived from the Cottage Farm Direction for Growth allocation masterplan extract (see Figure 3), the proposed green wedge extension will lie directly aside the most south easterly part of the masterplan’s built development extent. Therefore any subsequent masterplan or planning application will be guided by the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge boundary extent (as extended).</p> <p>The new extent of the proposed green wedge boundary would continue to distinctly define the built urban edge. Due to its relationship with the Cottage Farm Direction for Growth allocation the eastern edge of the extension land would have a distinct edge, with urban one side and green wedge the other. The western edge of the extension land would merge into the existing southern part of the green wedge, which at its western edge, is very much urban one side of the boundary and green wedge the other.</p>
<p>Providing a green lung into urban areas</p>	<p>In the context of current built urban form, the current Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge extent allows the distinctly urban areas of Wigston and Oadby access to an open green ‘lung’ that runs north to south between the two settlements from the City of Leicester, all the way to the Countryside areas of the Borough of Oadby and Wigston and Harborough District beyond. It should be noted that the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge is part of a cross boundary green wedge that links with the City of Leicester at its north westerly edge at Knighton Park and Welford Road sports pitches. The green wedge in its entirety (including the parts situated within the City of Leicester) allows a continuous green infrastructure corridor allowing good public access, as well as an actively managed biodiversity corridor.</p> <p>When taking account of the proposed Cottage Farm Direction for Growth allocation and should the new Local Plan’s policy triggers be set in motion and further land is required, for example towards the south and east of Wigston the current green wedge extent would not fulfil</p>

	<p>the function of providing a green lung into urban areas. Taking account of the above, development could have the potential to abruptly halt the green wedge as it flows out from the distinctly urban areas of the Borough into the Countryside. However, the proposed extension would negate this and would allow for the 'green lung' to remain and flow from the urban areas out to the Countryside areas of the Borough and Harborough District beyond.</p>
<p>Acting as a recreational resource</p>	<p>As the table on page 26 of the Council's Green Wedge Review 2017 illustrates, over 60 per cent of the existing Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge is classified as recreational in its use. Existing uses within the green wedge include a golf course and associated built facilities, a racecourse and its associated built facilities (including stadia), sports training pitches and associated built facilities, and a leisure centre.</p> <p>Due to the proposed extension land area being currently designated as Countryside, public access or use of the land is minimal, with only a single public footpath, and no formal access to the wider area.</p> <p>Although, the Council is not currently aware of any specific proposals for increasing public access or increasing the use of the proposed extension land, designating the land area will allow opportunities to increase public access and use of the site in future years, such as through proposals set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and / or the Playing Pitch Strategy. For example, the Council's Playing Pitch Strategy seeks the provision of a full sized 3G artificial playing surface for both rugby and football within Oadby, which in principle would be an acceptable use within the green wedge.</p> <p>In addition to the above, due to the different policy requirements and / or the differences in allowable uses of a green wedge designation and a countryside designation, the proposed extension to the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge allows for a far greater number and flexibility of uses, specifically those relating to built infrastructure associated with agriculture, horticulture and allotments, and outdoor leisure, recreation</p>

	and sporting facilities.
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2.9 In addition to the above assessment, the following key points should be noted relating to the reasoning for the proposed extension, as well as the extent of the proposed green wedge extension.

- The allocation of the Cottage Farm Direction for Growth allocation is not dependant on the designation of the proposed green wedge extension. The Cottage Farm Direction for Growth allocation would not be affected should the Inspector consider it not appropriate to designate the extension to the green wedge in the new Local Plan. It should also be noted that, should the Inspector consider it not appropriate to designate the proposed green wedge extension, the Council consider that the 'soundness' of the new Local Plan would not be affected.
- In collaboration with the Council, Bloor Homes, the land promoters of Cottage Farm Direction for Growth Allocation (Phase 2) developed a site masterplan illustrating key principles and an indicative layout for the site in relation to the land that was under their control (see red line extent on Figure 2). The site masterplan (see Figure 2) was devised concentrating the urban aspects of the development more towards the A6 and the open land areas including open space, more towards the 'rear' of the site.



Figure 2 – extract from Define Planning / Bloor Homes Strategic Sustainable Development Opportunity July 2017, showing illustrative site masterplan.

- The north eastern boundary extent of the proposed green wedge extension was informed by the masterplan’s residential layout extent (see Figure 2 and 3), the land within Bloor Homes control (see red line boundary in Figure 2 and 3), as well as the existing hedgerow field boundaries.
- The south western boundary extent of the proposed green wedge extension takes account of the potential development limit of any future development towards the south and east of Wigston (see Figure 3). The boundary extent also follows an existing hedgerow field boundaries as well as continuing the south western extent of the existing golf course (see Figure 3).



Figure 3 – extract from Define Planning / Bloor Homes Strategic Sustainable Development Opportunity July 2017, showing illustrative site masterplan and its relationship to the existing Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge boundary and the proposed extension.

- The overall width (and use of existing hedgerow field boundaries) of the proposed green wedge extension was informed by the distance between its north eastern boundary and its south western boundary. The distance between the two boundary extents is approximately 430 metres, which is commensurate with the width of others areas of the existing Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge, specifically the existing green wedge area to the south of Oadby Road / Wigston Road. As set out within the Table on page 24 of the Council’s Green Wedge Review 2017, the *‘majority of the green wedge is relatively wide and forms an effective and valuable separation of the two settlements of Wigston and Oadby. Throughout the length of the green wedge there are minimal pinch points, the narrowest point being approximately 145 metres between Wigston and Oadby. Such ‘pinch points’ should not be increased through the removal of green wedge in the future’*. It follows therefore that when forming green wedge extensions the same principle, of not increasing ‘pinch points’ should apply.

3. Key differences of Green Wedge and Countryside designation

- 3.1 As the Council has stated throughout the Local Plan Examination in Public, green wedge designation is distinctly different to countryside designation, and does not add an 'extra layer' of protection. It is in fact, a designation that allows for a wider variety of uses, including built development, when compared to the countryside designation.
- 3.2 Countryside designation is considered by the Council to be of a much higher value than green wedge designation in the context of its release for strategic urban built development. The countryside designation is more restrictive than the green wedge designation, as the purpose of the green wedge is not to restrict the growth of the urban area, but ensure that, as the urban area extends, open land is incorporated within it. It is also a view shared by other local authorities within the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing Market Area which have green wedge designations located within their authority area.
- 3.3 Due to the higher value that the Council places on countryside designation when compared with green wedge designation, the release of green wedge designation land is always considered prior to the release of countryside designation land should strategic land be required for new built development.
- 3.4 The Council has set out below what it considers to be the distinct differences between green wedge designation and countryside designation.
- The countryside designation is a nationally recognised designation that seeks to restrict development other than in special circumstances.
 - The green wedge is a well established local designation that seeks to allow a number of uses that are open in character, however related to the urban environment in which they are situated in.
 - The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that countryside is distinctly rural in nature and character (see details below).

The NPPF explicitly expresses (within paragraph 17 Core planning principles and Chapter 3. Supporting a prosperous rural economy) that planning should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and that the 'Countryside' is rural in nature and

any development needs to respect its rural character. Paragraph 55 states that local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances such as...the essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside.

- Green wedge designation is predominately more urban in character in comparison to countryside, which is more rural in character. Green wedge designations are predominately situated within or between dense urban areas. Green wedge designations within the Borough area comprise of distinctly (more) urban land uses, including urban parks, Parklands leisure centre, Oadby Town Football Stadium and function / conference facilities, Leicester Tigers training facilities and Leicester Racecourse, which would not be appropriate uses within designated countryside land areas.
- The countryside designation does not serve strategic planning functions (as set out within the now revoked East Midlands Regional Plan 2009), because it does not; prevent the merging of settlements; guide development form; provide a 'green lung' into the urban areas; or act as a recreational resource, whereas the green wedge designation does serve these strategic planning functions.
- Due to the location and situation of green wedge designations within the urban environment, the land areas of which they comprise would not be designated as countryside and would be locations of urban built development or urban open space if the green wedge designation was never to have been devised or the designation had ceased. A good illustration of this can be found within the Council's Green Wedge Review 2017 at Figure 1 on page 3 (an extract of this plan is shown below in Figure 4 of this document). The plan illustrates the green wedge extents for the whole of Leicester and Leicestershire. The plan shows green wedges penetrating deep into the urban areas of the City of Leicester. Due to their situation and character these areas would never be regarded as countryside designation.

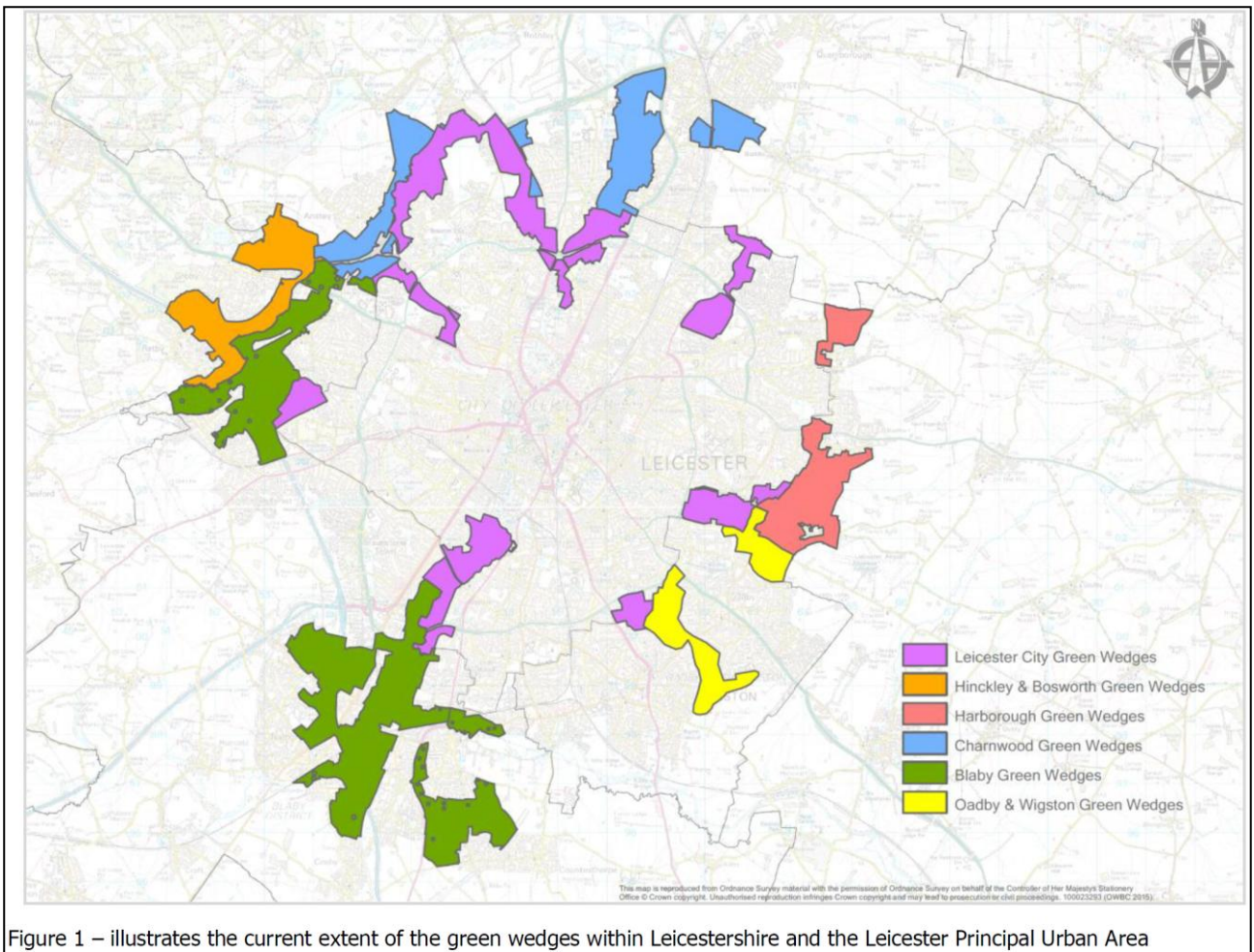


Figure 1 – illustrates the current extent of the green wedges within Leicestershire and the Leicester Principal Urban Area

Figure 4 – extract from page 3 of the Green Wedge Review 2017.