

Green Wedge Review

2017

**Evidence base under pinning the Local Plan
for the Borough of Oadby and Wigston**



1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Borough of Oadby and Wigston has two existing green wedge designations that were originally designated through the Structure Plan and which have been retained through policies set out in the Saved Local Plan, the East Midlands Regional Plan and more recently the Council's Core Strategy.
- 1.2 The Core Strategy states that the detailed boundaries of the Borough's green wedges will be reviewed and identified through the Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD). The Council is no longer producing a standalone allocations document; instead allocations will form part of the new Local Plan. This Green Wedge Review will form part of the evidence base that informs the new Local Plan.
- 1.3 There are currently two green wedge designations within the Borough, these are; the Oadby, Thurnby and Stoughton Green Wedge which crosses boundaries with Harborough District and Leicester City; and, the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge which crosses boundaries with Leicester City. With neither of the designated green wedges entirely sitting within the Borough's boundary, crossing boundaries with Leicester City and Harborough District, it is important that any reviews of the green wedges take into account the Duty to Cooperate. This review has been done so in collaboration with the neighbouring local authorities of Harborough District and Leicester City, who have either published a green wedge report or are in the process of a green wedge review.
- 1.4 The purpose of this review is to assess the boundaries of the existing green wedge designations, as defined on Council's Saved Local Plan Proposals Map and the Council's Adopted Policies Map. The review takes into account the Broad Location for Growth Areas identified within the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and the current options for greenfield release sites identified within the Council's Preferred Options Local Plan consultation document. Each of the existing green wedges will be assessed against the functions set out in the Leicester and Leicestershire Green Wedge Review Joint

Methodology to see whether or not the current designated boundaries should be kept the same or amended.

- 1.5 It must be noted that this review is a technical report and does not constitute planning policy or site allocations. The document will provide an evidence base for the detailed green wedge boundaries that will be designated within the new Local Plan.
- 1.6 This document has been broken down into differing chapters that follow the methodology set out in the Leicester and Leicestershire Green Wedge Review Joint Methodology.

2 Current Green Wedge Designations Overview

2.1 The green wedge designations within the Borough form part of the wider green wedge network within Leicester and Leicestershire, specifically the Leicester Principal Urban Area. Each local authority situated within the Leicester Principal Urban Area shares a green wedge designation with one of their neighbouring local authorities - therefore crossing administrative boundaries.

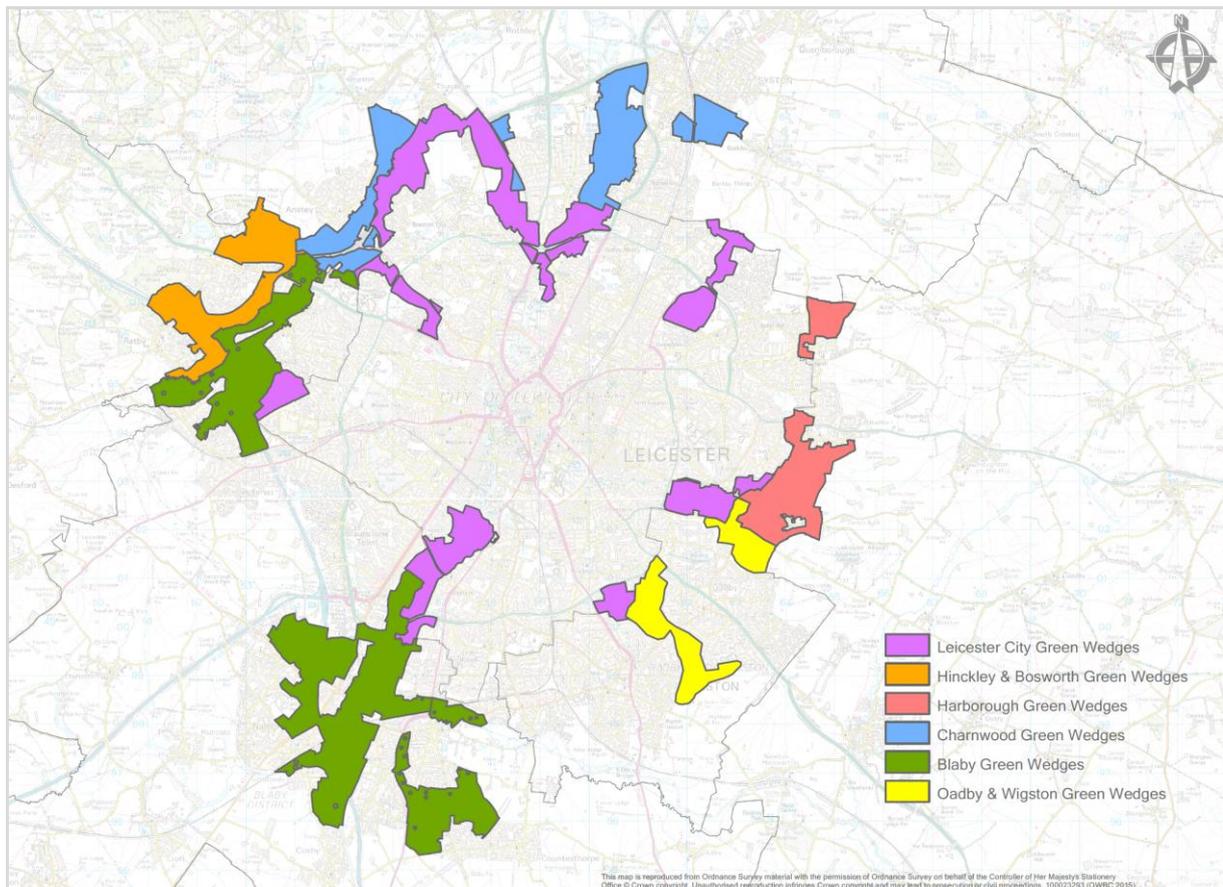


Figure 1 – illustrates the current extent of the green wedges within Leicestershire and the Leicester Principal Urban Area

2.2 Green wedge policies were first introduced in the County of Leicestershire in the Leicestershire Structure Plan of 1987, and ever since have been supported through Regional, Sub-regional and Local Plans.

2.3 Green wedge designations, in short, are strategic areas of undeveloped land between the urban areas that prevent the merging of settlements, provide 'green' access into the countryside from the urban areas, and are locations for

open space and recreational facilities. More information regarding the definition of green wedge designations can be found later in this document.

- 2.4 Although landscape character is an important part of all green wedge designations, green wedges are specifically Planning Policy designations and not Landscape designations.

Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge

- 2.5 The Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge spans the administrative boundary with Leicester City to the north west. The green wedge in its entirety is just shy of 210 hectares, with the Borough's designation being in the region of 168 hectares in size and separating the urban areas of Oadby and Wigston entirely. The green wedge runs north west to south east from Leicester City out towards the open countryside to the south of Oadby and east of Wigston. As well as farm land and open countryside, the green wedge comprises of many appropriate leisure activity uses including sports grounds and training facilities, a racecourse, a golf course and a country park.

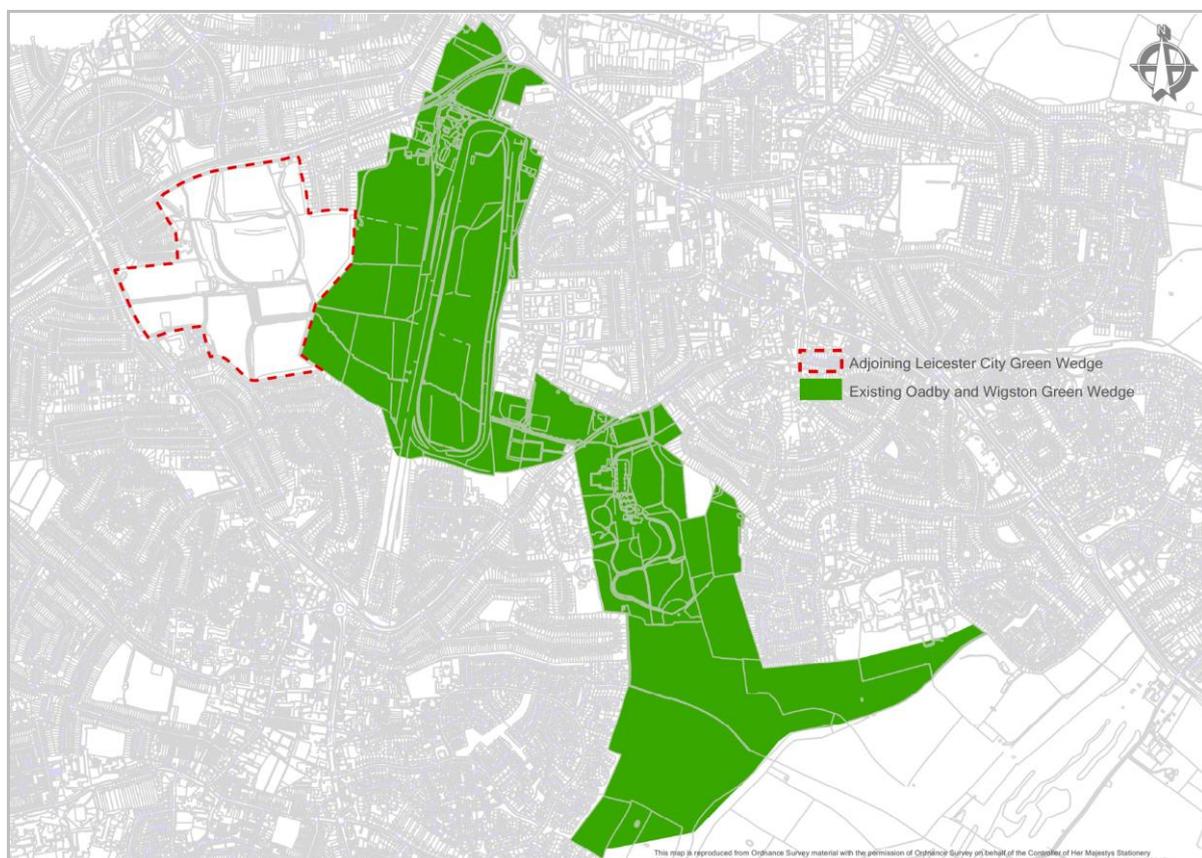


Figure 2 – illustrates the current extent of the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge

2.6 It must be noted that the extent to the green wedge (as shown above) is for illustrative purposes and although every effort has been made to ensure its accuracy it may not necessarily be the definitive green wedge boundary. The current definitive green wedge boundary is set out within the Saved Local Plan Proposals Map and the Adopted Policies Map. Any amendments to these will be set out in the new Local Plan.

Oadby, Thurnby and Stoughton Green Wedge

2.7 The Oadby, Thurnby and Stoughton Green Wedge is situated to the north east of Oadby and crosses administrative boundaries with Leicester City and Harborough District. The overall area of the green wedge is in the region of 467 hectares. The Borough's designation makes up approximately 93 hectares of the total designation size. The area of green wedge that lies within the Borough runs from a north west to south easterly direction and begins at the Borough boundary close to the B582 Gartree Road and extends out towards the countryside to the north of Manor High School in Oadby. Land uses currently situated within this green wedge area include sports pitches, agricultural land, small scale mixed use retail and leisure and a private hospital.

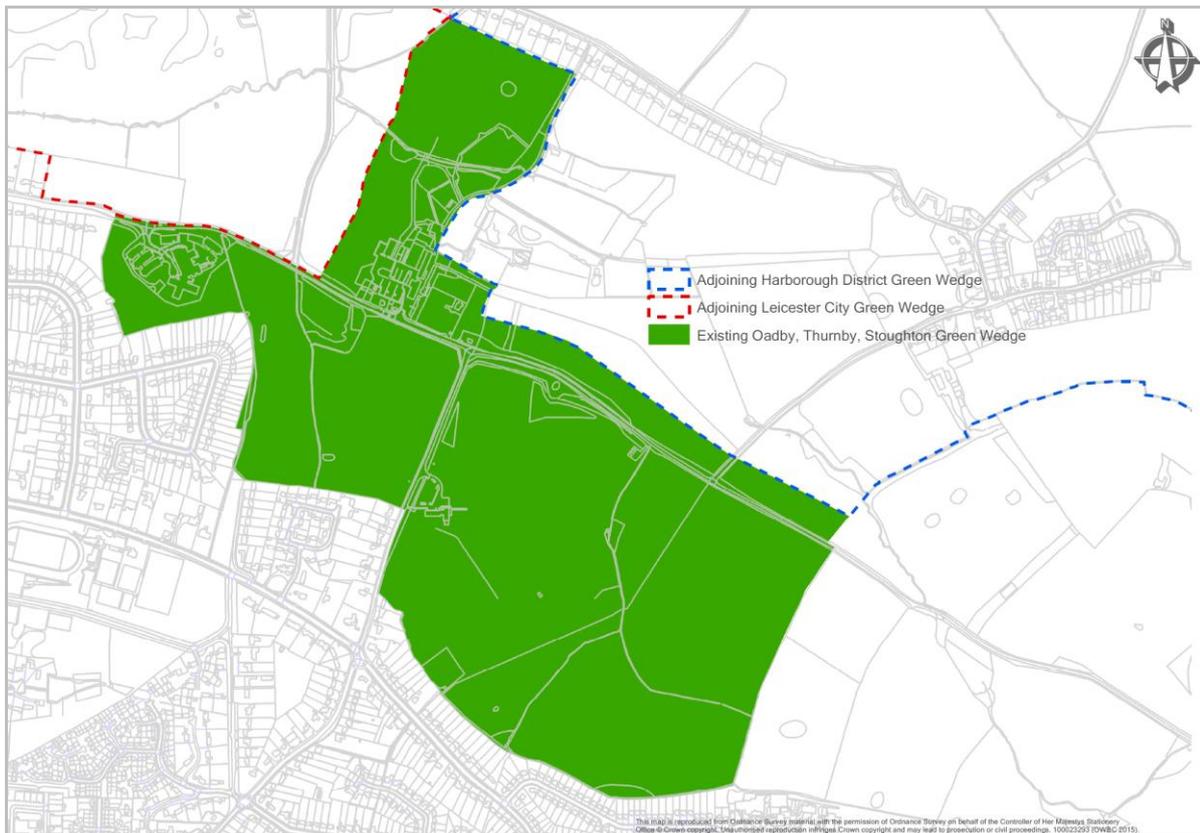


Figure 3 – illustrates the current extent of the Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge

2.8 It must be noted that the extent to the green wedge (as shown above) is for illustrative purposes and although every effort has been made to ensure its accuracy it may not necessarily be the definitive green wedge boundary. The current definitive green wedge boundary is set out within the Saved Local Plan Proposals Map and the Adopted Policies Map. Any amendments to these will be set out in the new Local Plan.

3 Policy Background – Evolution of the Green Wedges within Leicester and Leicestershire

Structure Plan

- 3.1 Green wedge policies were initially introduced in the County of Leicestershire, in the Leicestershire Structure Plan adopted in 1987. The policy stated that *'the character of the green wedge areas...will be protected and wherever possible improved'* and it set out general locations of green wedges. Detailed boundaries of the green wedge designations were then defined and illustrated within each relevant local authority Local Plan.
- 3.2 The Leicestershire Structure Plan (1994) then maintained green wedges through specific policies, for example environmental policies 3 and 4. Paragraph 3.21 of the policies Explanatory Memorandum usefully stated the four specific aims of Policy 3;
- a) To protect structurally important areas of open land that influences 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 (green) wedges to ensure that they remain or are enhanced as attractive environmental features with good public access.
- 3.3 The Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan (2005), Strategy Policy 6, again reinforced the importance of green wedges within Leicester and Leicestershire as well as listing the purpose of green wedges. There were subtle differences to the aims given in the 1994 Structure Plan, particularly with regard

to 'strategic landscape and wildlife links', however by and large the strategy towards green wedges remained much the same. The policy stated that detailed green wedge boundaries would be reviewed as part of the Local Plan reviews. The Structure Plan was replaced by the East Midlands Regional Plan, introduced due to changes to the national planning system in 2004.

Regional Plan

- 3.4 The East Midlands Regional Plan (2009) set out the strategic planning context for the East Midlands area. The Plan did not have a specific green wedge policy but did emphasise that a review of existing green wedges or the creation of new ones in association with development will be carried out through each planning authorities Local Plan process. Paragraph 4.2.18 of the supporting text stated 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.'*
- 3.5 The Regional Plan set out the key planning functions for green wedges, which were; preventing the merging of settlements; guiding development form; providing a 'green lung' into urban areas; and acting as a recreational resource.
- 3.6 In July 2010 the Government announced that it was to abolish Regional Spatial Strategies. A Judicial Review took place on the revocation of Regional Spatial Strategies in February 2011. A judgement was made by the High Court in favour of the Secretary of State, meaning that the intended abolishment of Regional Spatial Strategies was a 'material consideration' which could be considered by local planning authorities and planning inspectors when making decisions. This was reflected in the Localism Bill which was introduced to Parliament in

December 2010. The East Midlands Regional Plan was formally abolished through the Localism Bill on 12th April 2013; however the evidence base underpinning the former plan could still be relevant where deemed up to date.

National Context

3.7 Although the National Planning Policy Framework does not contain a specific reference to green wedges, paragraph 1 of the document makes it clear that the Framework *'sets out the Government's requirements for the planning system only to the extent it is relevant, proportionate and necessary to do so. It provides a framework within which local people and their accountable councils can produce their own distinctive local and neighbourhood plans, which reflect the needs and priorities of their communities'*. The National Planning Policy Framework also sets out its core planning principles of which planning should *'take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it'*. Green wedges are a vital local planning tool used within Leicester and Leicestershire, which is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework, as agreed by Oadby and Wigston Borough Council and other Councils within Leicestershire, including Leicester City, and illustrated within the Green Wedge Joint Statement.

3.8 The National Planning Policy Framework sets out a number of core planning principles that should be plan led, which empowers local people to shape their surroundings. During 2011 Leicestershire County Council undertook a public consultation exercise to understand the public value of green spaces within Leicestershire. Green wedge areas, including the two green wedge designations within the Borough of Oadby and Wigston were valued highly by the public and were said to be greatly important to local communities. Green wedges are valued by the local communities and are important in shaping the communities surroundings.

Local Context

- 3.9 As prescribed within the Leicestershire Structure Plan and the later Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan, detailed green wedge boundaries and policy was identified within the Borough of Oadby and Wigston Local Plan (1999), currently the Saved Local Plan. Landscape Proposal 10 of the Saved Local Plan detailed the location of the green wedges and the detailed boundaries were shown on the Proposals Map. Landscape Proposal 10 stated that the areas shown *'on the Proposals Map will constitute green wedges in accordance with the Leicestershire Structure Plan Environment Policy 4'*.
- 3.10 In September 2010 the Borough Council adopted the Core Strategy that at the time formed part of the Local Development Framework, now the Local Plan. The Core Strategy has a specific green wedge policy that outlines objectives of the green wedges as well as suitable uses for them. Currently the detailed boundaries of the green wedges are contained on the Council's Saved Local Plan Proposals Map and the Council's Adopted Policies Map which was most recently updated in September 2013 due to the adoption of the Town Centres Area Action Plan. Core Strategy Policy 6 Green Wedges states that *'the detailed boundaries of the green wedges within the Borough will be identified in the Allocations Development Plan Document. Any review of the boundaries should be undertaken through the Local Development Framework process and in partnership with relevant neighbouring Councils'*.
- 3.11 Through an Examination in Public, the green wedge policy contained within the Core Strategy was found robust, justified and ultimately sound by the Planning Inspectorate. The Inspector overseeing the Examination stated that they were *'satisfied that Oadby and Wigston's approach to green wedges is in harmony with that of neighbouring authorities. The purposes and functions of green wedges are clear, and I see no need to extend the range of permitted uses. I recognise the benefits to place-shaping, to biodiversity and providing local people with formal and informal open space which green wedges bring to Oadby and Wigston...I conclude that Policy 6 is justified and deliverable'*.

- 3.12 As mentioned previously, this review will form part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan, as the Council is not to be producing a standalone Allocations Development Plan Document, as mentioned within the Core Strategy.
- 3.13 In support of the aims and objectives of the green wedges, the Council, in partnership with the Stepping Stones Country Management Project, produced management strategies for the Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge and the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge, in 2005 and 2004 respectively. The management strategies seek to give guidance on the future use and management of the green wedge and will be used as a survey baseline for this review document.

4 Joint Review Methodology

- 4.1 The majority of the local planning authorities within Leicester and Leicestershire including Oadby and Wigston Borough Council have cross boundary green wedges. To ensure a consistent approach to reviews of green wedge boundaries, a joint methodology was developed in 2009 (see Appendix One), which at the time was in accordance with the East Midlands Regional Plan. Since its original agreement and publication, the joint methodology has been reviewed and updated, where necessary, to take account of changes to national government planning policy and planning appeal decisions relating to green wedges within Leicester and Leicestershire.
- 4.2 Although the most recent update undertaken in 2012 did not amend the joint methodology document, a joint statement was agreed and published in terms of the green wedge designation and the methodology's conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework (see Appendix Two). For the reasons outlined in the joint statement it was agreed that the green wedge designation was consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework and that it is the intention of Leicester and Leicestershire authorities to continue to support the green wedge designation as a strategic planning tool which will be reviewed through the new Local Plan process.
- 4.3 The agreed review methodology allows for green wedges to be reviewed at either a larger 'macro' scale that looks at the green wedge as a whole or a more focussed 'micro' scale that reviews certain sections of the green wedge only. Regardless of the scale of review that is undertaken the green wedge as a whole should achieve all of the functions as set out within the agreed methodology, however at a 'micro' scale, sub areas do not necessarily need to meet all four functions as long as they contribute to the overall designation. The functions that a green wedge should fulfil are – preventing the merging of settlements; guiding development form; providing a green lung into urban areas; and, acting as a recreational resource.

5 Survey Findings

Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge

5.1 For the purpose of this review document the green wedge will be assessed at an overall 'macro' scale, however to ensure a good level of detail the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge has been split down into five sub areas to aid the review process. The sub areas are based on the defined land-use and landscape areas illustrated within the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge Management Strategy 2004 produced by Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project.

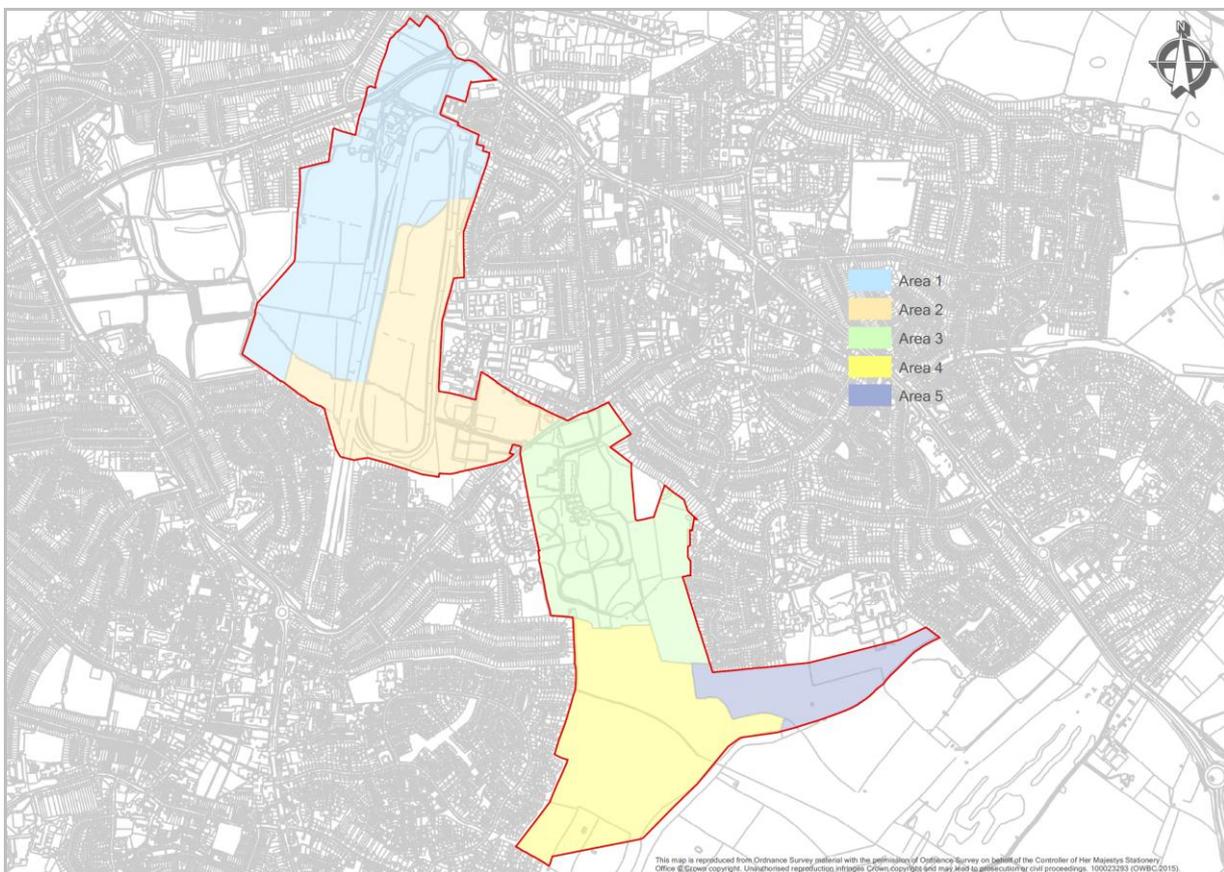


Figure 4 – identifies the five sub areas of the existing Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge

5.2 Since the production of the management strategy in 2004 there has been no enforced changes to the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge boundary. The green wedge as a whole plays an important role in preventing the coalescence of the settlements of Oadby and Wigston and the City of Leicester.

- 5.3 It must be noted that the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge is part of a larger cross boundary green wedge with Leicester City (as shown in Figure 2).

Sub Area 1

- 5.4 Main Land Uses – the majority of this area is currently in use as Leicester Racecourse and former Oadby Municipal Golf Course, however there are smaller areas of natural and informal areas of openspace. The only built development within this area are the structures relating to the racecourse use, for example the stadia, and those directly relating to the former golf course use, for example the professional shop and club house. As well as access roads for the racecourse and the former golf course, this area has part of the A563 Palmerston Way running through towards its northern tip.
- 5.5 Current Boundaries¹ – the current boundary of this area follows the borough boundary with Leicester City towards its western edge, the Wigston settlement urban area towards its south western edge and the Oadby settlement urban area towards its north eastern edge. The area of the green wedge that crosses administrative boundaries into Leicester City is where the boundary follows the boroughs boundary towards the north west.
- 5.6 Topography and Key Physical Features – the land area of sub area 1 is relatively flat with only subtle increases or decreases in land heights (see Figure 5). The lowest area is towards the south western corner of the sub area with the higher land generally more towards the north. The Washbrook water course runs through the southern area of the sub area, meaning there is a relatively high probability for potential flooding, with the immediate area surrounding the watercourse being designated Flood Risk Zone 2 and 3 by the Environment Agency (see Figure 6). There are also remnants of ridge and furrow land towards the northern tip of this sub area.

¹ Will only refer to the green wedge boundary in the sub area and not the sub area boundaries that are adjacent to one another.

- 5.7 Rights of Way or Public Access – sub area 1 has no designated cycleways, byways or bridleways, however does have a public right of way that runs through the northern area joining the built up area of Oadby with the urban area of Leicester City (see Figure 7). Access onto this part of the green wedge is through use of the former golf course or the racecourse or through informal non designated desire lines.
- 5.8 Ecology – the majority of the vegetation within sub area 1 is managed and located on the former golf course land. Trees and bushes line the majority of each hole on the course, as well as surrounding the greens. This area is also part of the Borough Council’s Strategic Green Infrastructure Network.
- 5.9 The Council adopted a green wedge management strategy for the Oadby and Wigston green wedge in 2004. That document alongside the Phase One Habitat Survey for the Borough give more details relating to the ecology of sub area 1.
- 5.10 Development Pressure – since the adoption of the Core Strategy in September 2010 there has been little development pressure. The only applications that have been received for development within this sub area of the green wedge have been for extensions and alterations for the existing facilities on Leicester Racecourse. There has been a site put forward through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and Call for Sites process for residential development within this sub area. The site put forward proposed removal of the most northern area of the green wedge designation, the land area that directly abuts Leicester City’s administrative boundary.

Sub Area 2

- 5.11 Main Land Uses – The majority of this sub area is made up of outdoor sporting facilities, for example the Leicester Tigers training facility, the Leicester Racecourse and former Oadby municipal Golf Course. Also situated within this sub area is Wigston Road allotments and part of Leicestershire County Council’s refuse and recycling facility. The built development within this sub area is that associated with the Leicester Tigers training ground, for example the sports and training pavilion, and the County Council’s refuse and recycling facility. In terms of highway infrastructure, this sub area only has access roads relating to the Council’s Depot and Leicestershire County Council’s waste refuse and recycling site and Wigston Road allotments.
- 5.12 Current Boundaries² – the eastern boundary of the sub area follows the built up urban area of the settlement of Oadby down towards Wigston Road. The southern boundary of the sub area follows the built form of Wigston, however does not include part of the former ‘straight mile’ of Leicester Racecourse or the playing fields to St John’s Fisher Catholic Primary School, Wigston.
- 5.13 Topography and Key Physical Features – this sub area compared to other areas within the green wedge is relatively flat, with only very gentle undulations. In the main this area is the lowest area of the green wedge as a whole (in terms of height above sea level), and forms an almost shallow valley (see Figure 5). The Washbrook water course runs through the sub area, therefore there is a relatively high probability of potential flooding, with the immediate area surrounding the water course being designated Flood Risk Zone 2 and 3 by the Environment Agency (see Figure 6).

² Will only refer to the green wedge boundary in the sub area and not the sub area boundaries that are adjacent to one another.

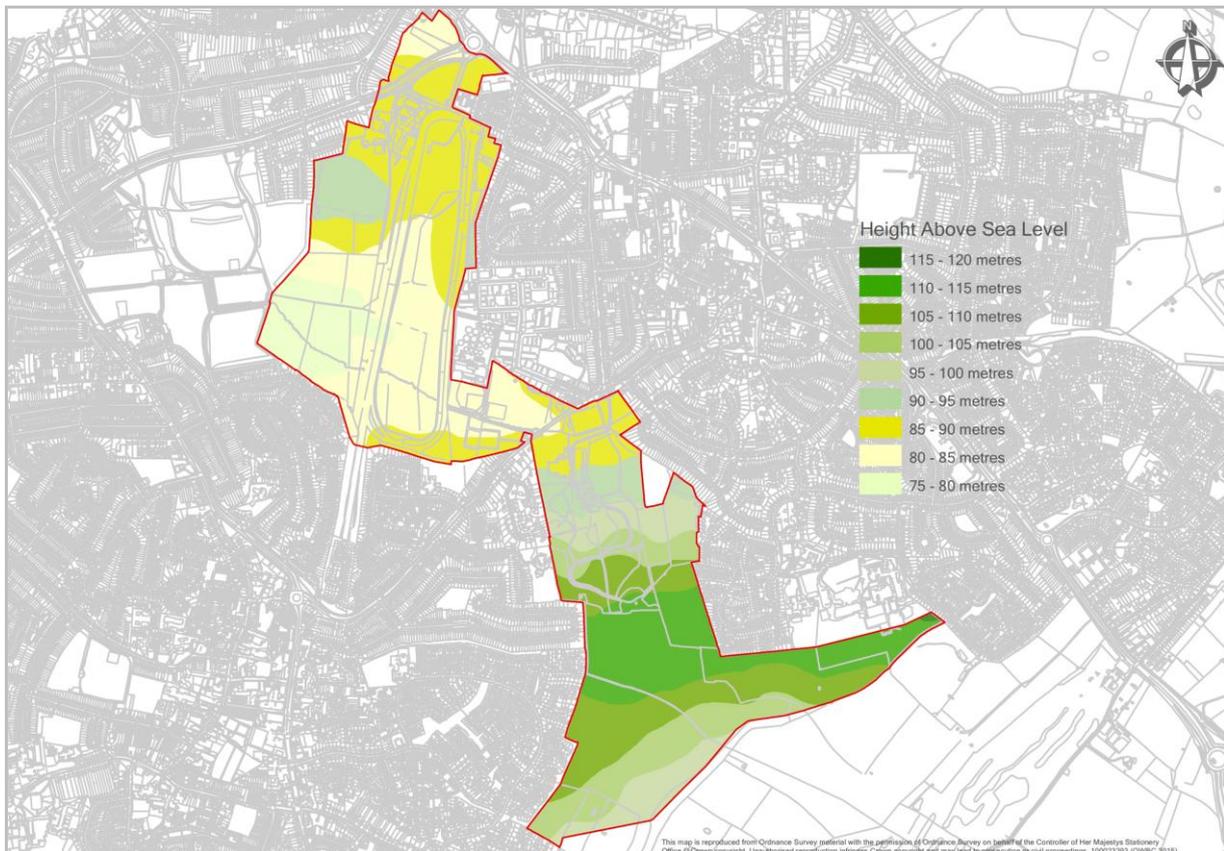


Figure 5 – illustrates the topography within the existing Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge

- 5.14 Rights of Way or Public Access – sub area 2 has no designated cycleways, byways, bridleways or public rights of way. Formal access to this part of the green wedge would be through the use of one of the numerous sporting facilities or through the use of Wigston Road allotments. Informal access to this area would be through the use of non designated desire lines.
- 5.15 Ecology – similar to sub area 1, the majority of the vegetation is located on the golf course, however the part of the Washbrook that runs through this area has its banks lined with various species of trees. This area is also part of the Borough Council’s Strategic Green Infrastructure Network.
- 5.16 The Council adopted a green wedge management strategy for the Oadby and Wigston green wedge in 2004. This document alongside the Phase One Habitat Survey for the Borough give more details relating to the ecology of sub area 2.
- 5.17 Development Pressure – since the adoption of the Core Strategy in September 2010 there has been little development pressure, with only applications to

improve the existing facilities at the rugby training facility being submitted. There have been no sites put forward through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment or the Call for Sites process for residential development within this sub area.

Sub Area 3

- 5.18 Main Land Uses – the majority of the land situated within this sub area is made up of Brocks Hill Country Park and Parklands Leisure Centre. Also located in sub area 3 is Oadby Town Football Club directly adjacent to Wigston Road and arable farmland situated towards the south of the area. Built development within this area is directly related to sports, leisure and recreation facilities, for example the football pavilion and stadia, Brocks Hill Country Park Visitors Centre and Parklands Leisure Centre facilities. Similar to sub area 2, the only roads that are found within this area are part of Wigston Road, and access roads to the football ground, country park and leisure centre.
- 5.19 Current Boundaries³ – the eastern boundary of sub area 3 follows the edge of the built area of Oadby, however does not currently include all of the Local Wildlife Site (Site of Importance for Nature Conservation – Lucas Marsh Local Nature Reserve) designation. The western boundary directly follows the outer limits to Wigston’s urban area, however does not include the playing fields to Glenmere Community Primary School.
- 5.20 Topography and Key Physical Features – the topography of this sub area compared to the previous two sub areas has distinct differences in height. From the Wigston Road area up to the most southern part of the area the ground rises nearly 40 metres to a distinct ridge line that is some 115 metres above sea level. The Washbrook water course runs through the sub area towards the north, meaning there is a relatively high probability for potential flooding, with the immediate area surrounding the water course being designated Flood Risk Zone 2 and 3 by the Environment Agency (see Figure 6).

³ Will only refer to the green wedge boundary in the sub area and not the sub area boundaries that are adjacent to one another.

- 5.21 Rights of Way or Public Access – sub area 3 has no designated cycleways, byways, bridleways or public rights of way, however there is unrestricted public access to the green wedge through Brocks Hill Country Park. The country park has a number of footpath routes that lead into and around the green wedge.
- 5.22 Ecology – the majority of the vegetation within sub area 3 is situated on Brocks Hill Country Park, however there are also a number of hedgerows delineating farmers fields. This area is also part of the Borough Council’s Strategic Green Infrastructure Network.
- 5.23 The Council adopted a green wedge management strategy for the Oadby and Wigston green wedge in 2004. This document alongside the Phase One Habitat Survey for the Borough give more details relating to the ecology of sub area 3.
- 5.24 Development Pressure – since the adoption of the Core Strategy in September 2010 there has been little development pressure. The land upon which Oadby Football Club is situated was put forward in 2007 as part of the Issues and Options Allocations Development Plan Document. Due to this, the site was assessed through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and was found undevelopable due to the constraints associated with the site. The only development to take place within this sub area is that directly related to Brocks Hill Country Park and Parklands Leisure Centre.

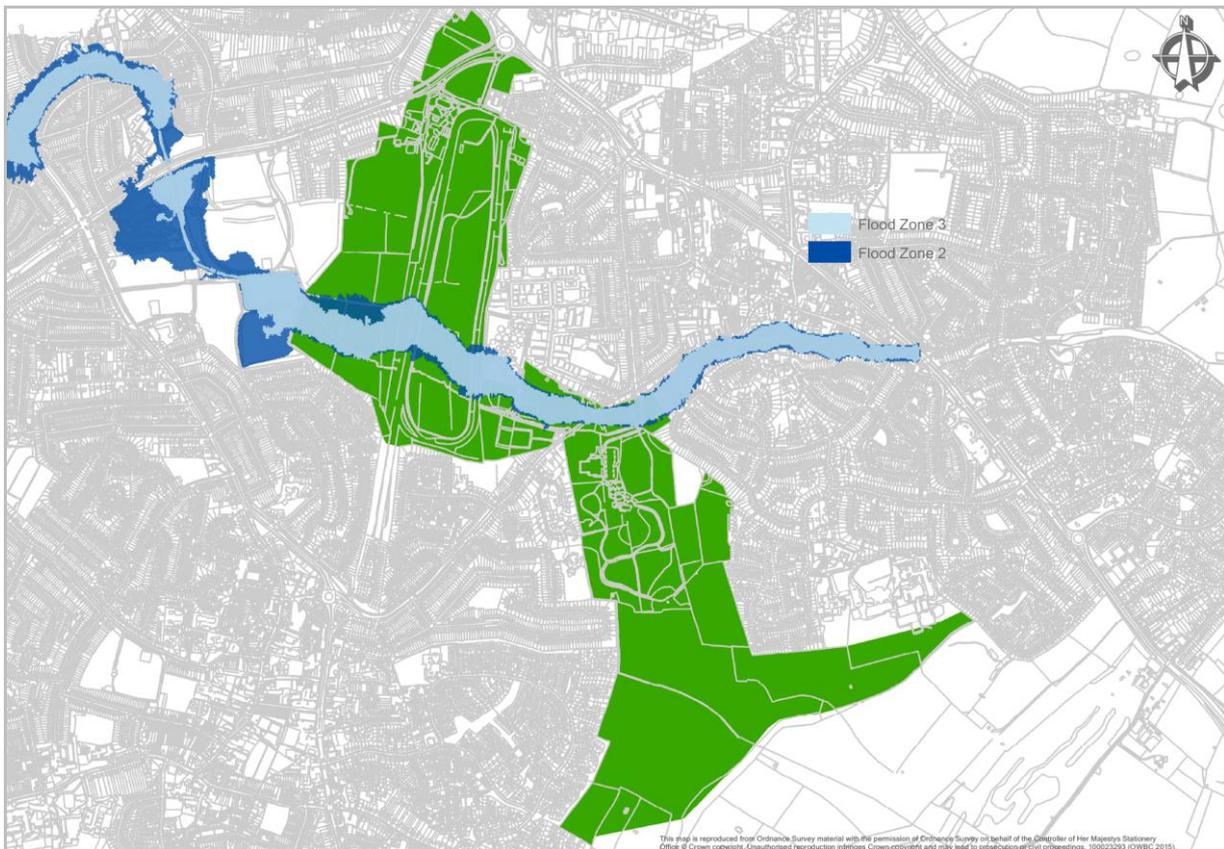


Figure 6 – shows the areas in the existing Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge vulnerable to flooding

Sub Area 4

5.25 Main Land Uses – the entire land use within this sub area is arable farmland.

5.26 Current Boundaries⁴ – the length of the western boundary for this sub area relates directly to the urban edge of Wigston, whereas the southern edge of the sub area directly abuts countryside as defined on the Saved Local Plan Proposals Map and the Adopted Policies Map. There are no formal vehicular access roads within this sub area.

5.27 Topography and Key Physical Features – this sub area, like sub area 3, has distinct changes in elevation. The northern area sees a continuation of the high ridge (110 – 115 metre) noted in sub area 3, however as you move southwards the land slopes away and falls to a height above sea level of 95 – 100 metres. There are no distinct water courses running through the area, however according

⁴ Will only refer to the green wedge boundary in the sub area and not the sub area boundaries that are adjacent to one another.

to the Environment Agency flood maps there is a possibility that the area could be susceptible to surface water flooding.

- 5.28 Rights of Way or Public Access – sub area 4 has no designated cycleways, byways, bridleways, however does have a public right of way running through it which allows unrestricted public access to the green wedge. The public right of way runs from the Canvey Close / Tendring Drive area of Wigston and out to the southern countryside areas of the Borough and beyond.
- 5.29 Ecology – the majority of the vegetation within sub area 4 is situated on the arable fields themselves, however there are a number of hedgerows delineating each of these fields. This area is also part of the Borough Council’s Strategic Green Infrastructure Network.
- 5.30 The Council adopted a green wedge management strategy for the Oadby and Wigston green wedge in 2004. This document alongside the Phase One Habitat Survey for the Borough give more details relating to the ecology of sub area 4.
- 5.31 Development Pressure – since the adoption of the Core Strategy in September 2010 there has been no development pressure, however there has been interest in certain parcels of land within the green wedge. There have been no sites put forward through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment for this sub area. There has however been a site promoted through the Call for Sites process that proposed removal of part of the sub area for residential development.

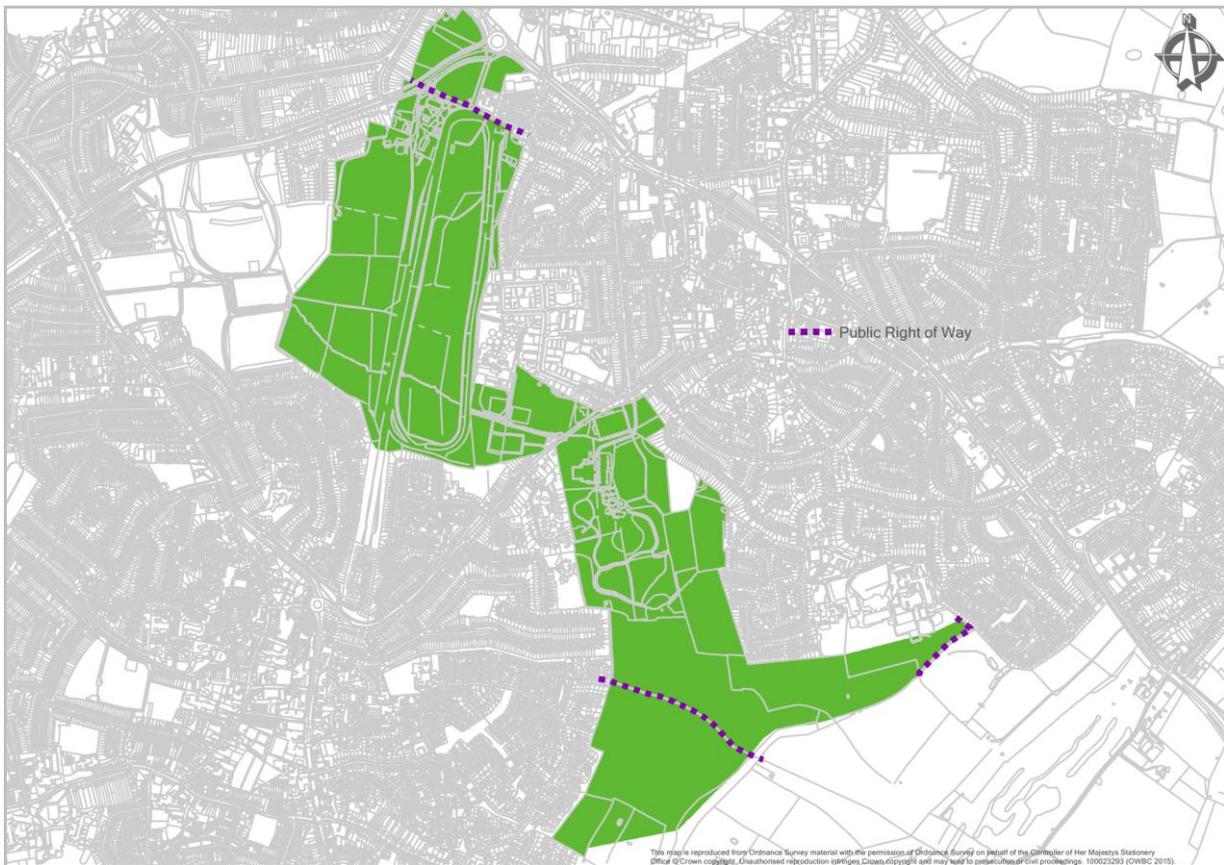


Figure 7 – illustrates public rights of way within the existing Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge

Sub Area 5

5.32 Main Land Uses – the land uses found within this sub area consists mainly of arable farmland. There are however parts of the playing fields for Gartree High School and Beauchamp College that also lay within the green wedge boundary.

5.33 Current Boundaries⁵ – the northern and eastern boundaries of this sub area follow the outer limits of Oadby’s urban edge, however only takes account of around half the playing fields for the two schools mentioned above. The southern boundary of the sub area directly abuts countryside as defined on the Saved Local Plan Proposals Map and the Adopted Policies Map. There are no formal vehicular access roads within this sub area. It is apparent that since the designation of the green wedge in 1999 the schools have extended their playing fields into the green wedge. As there is no built development in these land areas the use satisfies policy that seeks to protect the green wedges.

⁵ Will only refer to the green wedge boundary in the sub area and not the sub area boundaries that are adjacent to one another.

- 5.34 Topography and Key Physical Features – sub area 5 has very similar topographical features and changes in elevation to sub area 4, which it directly abuts. Generally the highest point is the ridge line (that runs west to east), however in the far eastern corner of the sub area there is a peak of 120 metres above sea level. The land then falls away to the south to around 80 – 85 metres above sea level. There are no distinct water courses running through the area, however according to the Environment Agency flood maps there is a possibility that the area could be susceptible to surface water flooding.
- 5.35 Rights of Way or Public Access – sub area 5 has no designated cycleways, byways, bridleways, however does have a public right of way running along its southern boundary which allows unrestricted public access to the green wedge. The public right of way runs from the Coombe Rise area of Oadby southwards to the countryside areas of the Borough.
- 5.36 Ecology – the majority of the vegetation within sub area 5 is situated on the arable fields themselves, however there are a number of hedgerows delineating each of these fields. This area is also part of the Borough Council’s Strategic Green Infrastructure Network.
- 5.37 The Council adopted a green wedge management strategy for the Oadby and Wigston green wedge in 2004. This document alongside the Phase One Habitat Survey for the Borough give more details relating to the ecology of sub area 5.
- 5.38 Development Pressure – since the adoption of the Core Strategy in September 2010 there has been no development pressure, however there has been interest in certain parcels of land within this area of the green wedge. There has been a site assessed through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and the Call for Sites process but was found undevelopable due to site constraints.

Broad Locations for Growth / Greenfield Release Sites

5.39 There are no broad location for growth areas or greenfield release site options situated within the existing Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge boundary. However, the area of land identified as 'Land at Cottage Farm', Oadby, (a greenfield release site option) within the Council's Local Plan Preferred Options document is located directly adjacent to the existing green wedge boundary. Due to the location of the Land at Cottage Farm site; should the site be allocated for development within the Council's Pre-Submission Local Plan document, the existing Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge should be extended southwards to prevent coalescence of the two settlements within the future.

Criteria	Does the green wedge meet the four criteria?
Preventing the merging of settlements	<p>Yes. The Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge plays an important role in preventing the coalescence of the urban areas of Oadby, Wigston and Leicester City. The most northern tip of the green wedge, for example the racecourse land and land north of Palmerston Way is key in preventing the merging of the relevant built up areas of Oadby with Leicester City. The remaining areas of the green wedge situated within the Borough are vital in preventing the coalescence of the settlements of Oadby and Wigston. The part of the green wedge that is located within Leicester City's boundary is also extremely important in preventing the merging of the relevant built up areas of Leicester City with Wigston.</p> <p>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 removal of areas of green wedge in the future.</p>

	<p>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. Having this area of green wedge is also important as it allows people that reside in the urban areas, particularly the area near to Beauchamp College in Oadby, access into the countryside.</p>
<p>Guiding development form</p>	<p>Yes. The green wedge historically has and currently guides urban development form effectively. The green wedge spans the entire length of the Borough's urban area north to south and splits the urban settlement areas of Wigston to the west and Oadby to the east. The green wedge plays a key role in the green infrastructure network of the Borough and ensures there is a continuous network running from Leicester City to the countryside areas of the Borough and Harborough District beyond.</p> <p>Throughout the Oadby and Wigston green wedge the urban edge / green wedge boundary is distinctly defined. There is no 'blurring' of the lines or urban fringe, it is very much urban one side, open green wedge (and its associated infrastructure) the other.</p>
<p>Providing a green lung into urban areas</p>	<p>Yes. The green wedge crosses local authority boundaries with Leicester City and provides a 'green lung' stretching from the urban areas of Wigston, Oadby and Leicester City to the open countryside areas of the Borough and Harborough District beyond. As well as providing access to the countryside for the Borough's human population, the green wedge is a key part of the Borough's green infrastructure network which enables species to use features within all elements of the Borough's rural and urban landscape.</p> <p>As well as the unrestricted public access to Brocks Hill Country Park, there are formal public rights of way as well as more informal paths that provide unrestricted access onto the green wedge from various</p>

	points within the surrounding urban areas. There are three formal public rights of way; one connects the south eastern areas of Wigston to the open countryside to the south; the second allows a link between the southern built up area of Oadby and the countryside; and, the third connects the urban areas of Leicester City with Oadby's urban area.
A recreational resource	Yes. The green wedge is made up of a number of recreational uses as well as arable farming practices. More than 60 per cent of the green wedge could be classified as recreational, with uses such as a former golf course, a race course, allotment space, sport training pitches, a country park and associated leisure facilities. The other 40 per cent remains largely undeveloped and consists of school playing fields and arable farming practices.

Summary

5.40 Overall the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge fulfils all of the functions as set out in the agreed Leicester and Leicestershire Green Wedge Review Joint Methodology. It provides the settlements of Leicester City, Wigston and Oadby with access to a largely undeveloped area of open space that leads out into the south Leicestershire countryside; it guides the form of development effectively, particularly the urban built form of Oadby, Wigston and Leicester City; it provides a recreational resource, with the likes of Brocks Hill Country Park, allotment spaces, a former golf course and the Leicester Racecourse; and, it ensures that the urban areas of Oadby, Wigston and Leicester City do not merge into one entity, thus losing their individual character and distinctiveness. The green wedge is also a key component of the Borough's Strategic Green Infrastructure network where it acts as a Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor.

5.41 Since the adoption of the Saved Local Plan and its relevant Proposals Map in 1999, the boundaries to the green wedge have not had enforced changes from built development through the planning application process. Development has occurred within the green wedge since 1999; however it has been plan led and /

or approved by the Council and has been related to existing uses or creation of new recreational resources, for example Brocks Hill Country Park and Parklands Leisure Centre.

5.42 For the most part, the green wedge has a visually strong and well defined boundary, which is almost exclusively associated with built development, mainly residential areas with a small proportion of industrial premises towards the central northern areas. Where accessible, the green wedge is well used by both residents and visitors. The green wedge is home to a variety of recreational activities with both public and private activities available.

Recommendation(s)

5.43 Recommendation One – with the Borough being relatively small and predominately urban in nature, the green and open landscape plays a major role in shaping the character of the environment, as well as its residents well being. As each part of the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge is integral to its functioning (see sub area survey findings earlier in document) as a green wedge, as defined within the Leicester and Leicestershire Green Wedge Review Joint Methodology and the Borough’s Core Strategy, recommendation one would be that the boundaries are not amended to include or exclude any areas of the current green wedge. The current green wedge functions well and has managed unsustainable and inappropriate development whilst allowing appropriate development for a number of years.

5.44 Recommendation Two – the second recommendation would be to keep the boundaries of the green wedge in the main identical to the existing, however draw in the remaining land area on which the Lucas Marsh Local Nature Reserve is situated (shown below). The entire designation of the Lucas Marsh Local Nature Reserve would then become part of the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge. The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust as well as Natural England encourage visitors to access the reserve. It is said that the reserve attracts a variety of birdlife including Robin, Chiff Chaff and Great Spotted Woodpecker.

The reserve would add to the recreational resource of the green wedge and would further encourage public use of the green wedge.



Figure 8 – shows Lucas Marsh land area proposed for inclusion as per Recommendation Two

5.45 Recommendation Three – 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 the future years by defining development limits. Extending southwards would also prevent any future coalescence of the two settlements of Wigston and Oadby. The proposed extension is shown in Figure 9.



Figure 9 – illustrates the potential extension to the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge

Oadby, Thurnby and Stoughton Green Wedge

5.46 Similar to the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge, the Oadby, Stoughton and Thurnby Green Wedge will be assessed at a 'macro' scale; however will be broken down into smaller sub areas to ensure that a good level of detail is obtained for the green wedge. Due to its smaller size compared to that of the Oadby and Wigston green wedge, it will only be broken down into two separate sub areas, one each side of Stoughton Road.

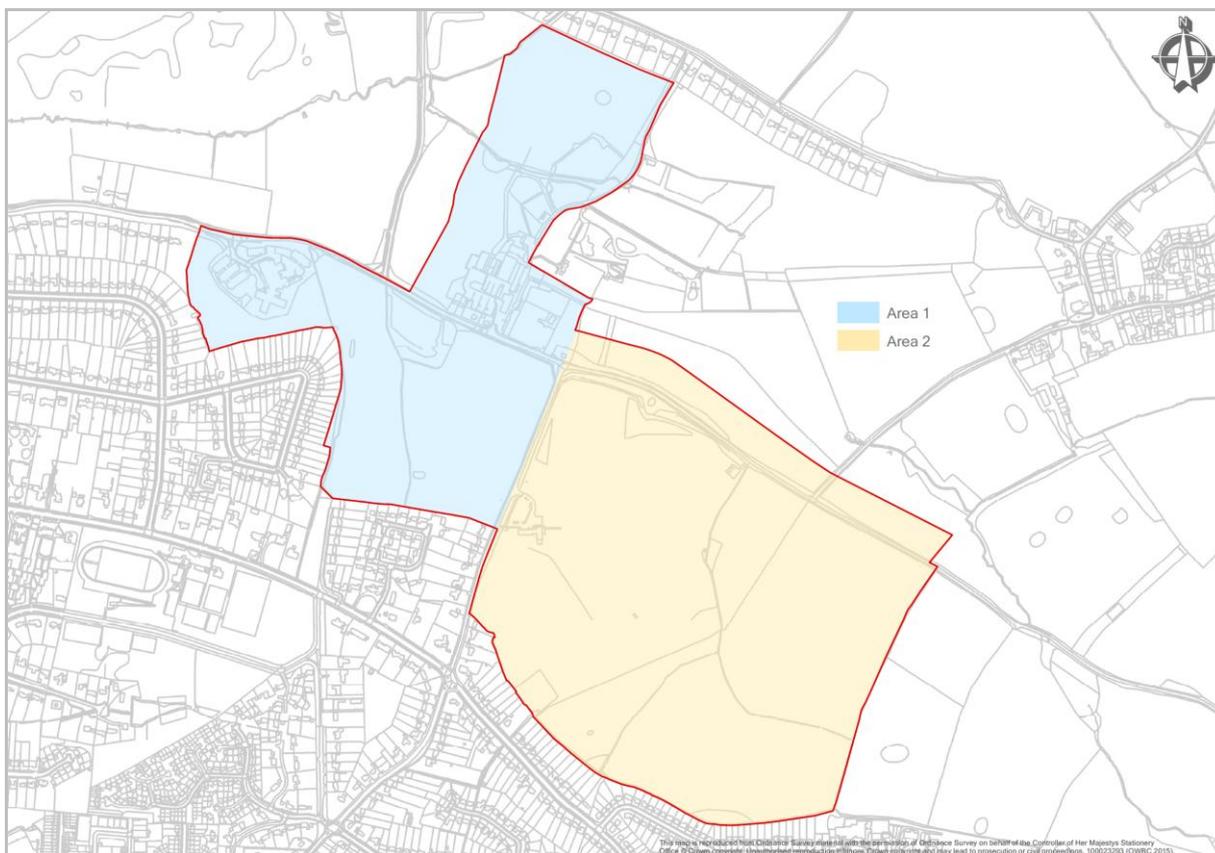


Figure 10 – illustrating the sub areas within the existing Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge

5.47 In July 2005 the Stoughton Green Wedge Management Strategy was published by Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project to provide guidance for the future of the green wedge. The Oadby, Thurnby and Stoughton Green Wedge is a cross boundary green wedge that shares its boundary with Harborough District, Leicester City and the Borough of Oadby and Wigston.

Sub Area 1

5.48 Main Land Uses – sub area 1 is made up of a number of differing uses. South of Gartree Road there is woodland, arable farmland and a private hospital with associated amenity mown grass, whereas to the north of Gartree Road there is a former farm park and associated outbuildings including small scale mixed use development (Stoughton Grange), and pastoral farmland. As well as access roads to relevant areas, the main Gartree Road (B582) runs through this area of the green wedge on an east to west route, with Stoughton Road taking the north to south traffic to and from Oadby centre.



Figure 11 – illustrates the topography of the existing Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge

5.49 Current Boundaries⁶ – towards the south, south western and western areas of the sub area the boundary follows the urban edge of Oadby. Then towards the north western areas the boundary follows the Council's local authority boundary, not its urban edge boundary. It is here where the Leicester City part of the green

⁶ Will only refer to the green wedge boundary in the sub area and not the sub area boundaries that are adjacent to one another.

wedge meets the Oadby part. The northern and eastern edge abuts the local authority boundary of Harborough District. It is here where the Harborough District part of the green wedge meets the Oadby part also.

- 5.50 Topography and Key Physical Features – the land situated within sub area 1 is relatively undulating with peaks towards the south eastern area and the north of 110 metres and 100 metres above sea level respectively and troughs of around 85 metres above sea level towards its western boundary. There is a branch of the Evington Brook that runs through the most northern portion of this sub area north of Stoughton Grange. Due to this there is a relatively high probability for potential flooding, with the immediate area being designated Flood Risk Zone 2 and 3 by the Environment Agency. There are also streams and ponds towards the southern area of the sub area which could possibly be susceptible to some surface water flooding.
- 5.51 Rights of Way and Public Access – this area of the green wedge has no designated cycleways, byways or bridleways, however does have a public right of way running in a north / south direction towards the western boundary of the Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge. Access to this green wedge sub area would either be by use of the facilities located within the area or by informal footpaths or desire lines.
- 5.52 Ecology – with the majority of land type being arable and pastoral farmland there is not a significant amount of vegetation, however the spinney / woodland towards the south of Gartree Lane, the hedgerows that form field boundaries and the streams and ponds do provide habitats for a number of species. This area is also part of the Borough Council's Strategic Green Infrastructure Network.

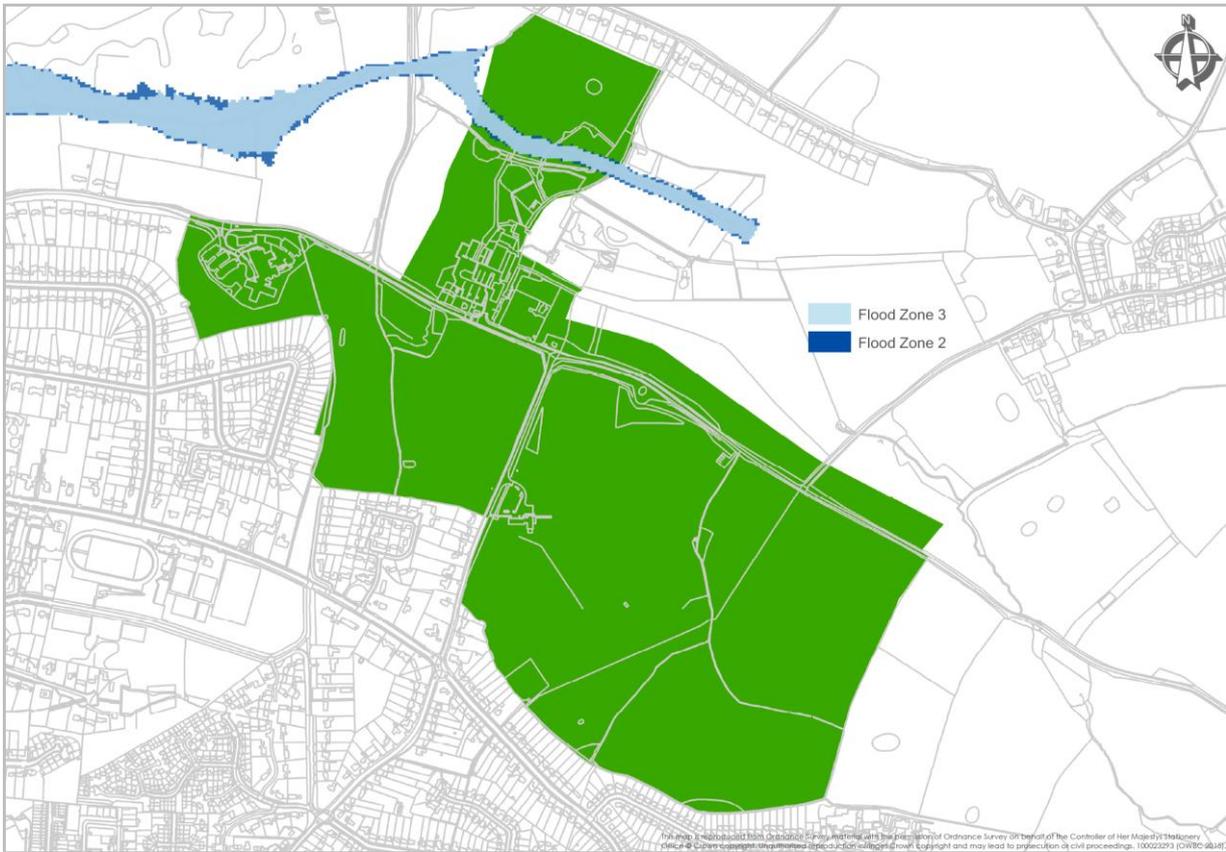


Figure 12 – illustrates the Flood Risk Zones within the existing Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge

5.53 The Council adopted a management strategy for the Oadby, Thurnby and Stoughton Green Wedge in 2005. This document alongside the Phase One Habitat Survey for the Borough provides more details relating to the ecology of sub area 1.

5.54 Development Pressure – since the adoption of the Core Strategy in September 2010 there has been little development pressure for this sub area. Applications and discussions that have taken place regarding development has centred around improving existing buildings, for example Stoughton Grange located off Gartree Road. Through the Council’s Call for Sites process, a site was put forward for potential residential development.

Sub Area 2

5.55 Main Land Uses – sub area 2 is made up of two main land uses; Leicester University sports pitches that include rugby, cricket and football; and arable farmland. As well as the above there is a presence of mature trees and

hedgerows delineating certain areas of the land. There is very little built development within this sub area, consisting of the pavilion and its parking facilities for the sports pitches. In addition there are two main road links running through this part of the sub area, the B582 Gartree Road running east to west and Stoughton Road running north to south.

- 5.56 Current Boundaries⁷ – the southern and (part of the) western boundary directly follow the most outer limits of the Oadby built development. Towards the north the sub area boundary follows the local authority area boundary, with beyond still being green wedge in Harborough District. The most eastern boundary, similar to the northern edge, follows the extent of the Oadby and Wigston Borough boundary.
- 5.57 Topography and Key Physical Features – the entire southern area adjacent to the urban area forms an almost plateau (some 110 - 115 metres above sea level) within the sub area, from which the land form falls the further north you go, the lowest point being around 90 metres above sea level. A water course runs from north to south through the sub area, splitting its course the further south it runs. Due to this, the land surrounding the water course is susceptible to surface water flooding.
- 5.58 Rights of Way and Public Access – the area has no designated cycleways, or byways or bridleways, however there are public rights of way that run through the green wedge. There is a public right of way that connects Gartree Road to the urban area of Oadby and there is a public right of way that runs adjacent to the urban boundary on a west to east route. Access to this area of the green wedge can also be obtained through use of the sporting facilities.
- 5.59 Ecology – with the majority of land type being arable and mown sports pitches there is not a significant amount of vegetation, however the watercourse that runs through the area, the hedgerows that form field boundaries and the mature

⁷ Will only refer to the green wedge boundary in the sub area and not the sub area boundaries that are adjacent to one another.

trees do provide habitats for a number of species. This area is also part of the Borough Council's Strategic Green Infrastructure Network.

5.60 The Council adopted a green wedge management strategy for the Oadby, Thurnby and Stoughton Green Wedge in 2005. This document alongside the Phase One Habitat Survey for the Borough provides more details relating to the ecology of sub area 2.

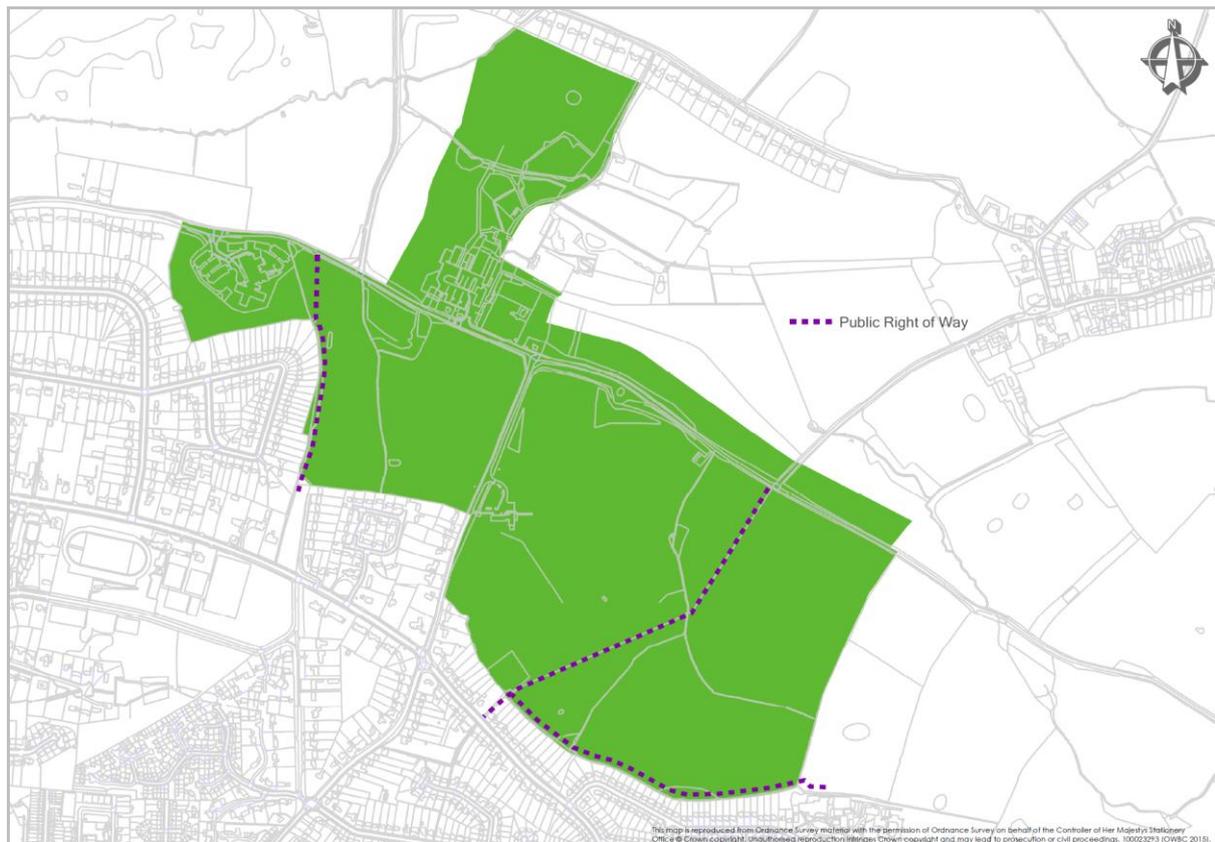


Figure 13 – shows the public rights of way within the existing Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge

5.61 Development Pressure – since the adoption of the Core Strategy in 2010 there has been little development pressure for this sub area, with the only development being a change of use from agricultural land to sports playing pitches. Through the Call for Sites process the land to the south of Gartree Road was submitted for use as a cemetery, as allocated within the Saved Local Plan.

Broad Locations for Growth / Greenfield Release Sites

5.62 Parts of Sub Area 1 within the Oadby, Stoughton and Thurnby Green Wedge have been identified as a Broad Location for Growth within the Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and a Greenfield Release Site option within the Council's Local Plan Preferred Options consultation document. The site is identified as 'Land at Stoughton Road and Gartree Road', Oadby. Should the land area identified be allocated within the new Local Plan it would be removed from the current green wedge boundary, in essence, de-designated.

5.63 The site was identified as a future residential development opportunity due to its location directly adjacent to the existing Leicester Principal Urban Area and its situation between two main arterial highway routes (Gartree Road and Stoughton Road).

Criteria	Does the green wedge meet the four criteria?
Preventing the merging of settlements	Yes. The Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge prevents the coalescence of the built up areas of Leicester City, Oadby, Stoughton and Bushby. On a more local level the part of the green wedge that is situated within the Borough of Oadby and Wigston prevents the merging of Oadby with parts of Leicester around the golf course that branch out towards the village of Stoughton.
Guiding development form	<p>Yes. The green wedge has historically guided and continues to guide the built development form of the Borough of Oadby and Wigston, Harborough District and Leicester City.</p> <p>The green wedge plays a key role in the green infrastructure network of the Borough and ensures there is a continuous network running from Leicester City to the countryside areas of the Borough and Harborough District beyond.</p> <p>The green wedge boundary is distinctly defined; it is very much urban one side, open green wedge (and its associated</p>

	<p>infrastructure) the other. There is no 'blurring' of the boundary between the built up areas and open undeveloped areas of the green wedge.</p>
<p>Providing a green lung into urban areas</p>	<p>Yes. The green wedge spans local authority boundaries with Leicester City and Harborough District and provides a 'green lung' stretching from the more inner city urban areas of Leicester City to the open countryside areas of the Borough and Harborough District. As well as public rights of way, access to the green wedge can be obtained by more informal desire line pathways and from use of Stoughton Grange and the university sports pitches located along Stoughton Road. Looking slightly wider than the Borough's boundary, formal access can also be obtained from the use of The Leicestershire golf course situated directly adjacent to the Borough in Leicester City.</p> <p>As well as providing access to the countryside for the Borough's human population, the green wedge is a key part of the Borough's green infrastructure network which enables species to use features within all elements of the Borough's rural and urban landscape.</p>
<p>A recreational resource</p>	<p>Yes. Both at a local level and a cross boundary level the Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge has high recreational value. The Leicestershire golf course, the university sports pitches and Stoughton Grange play an important role in encouraging and maintaining healthy lifestyles through the use of the green wedge.</p> <p>Although the majority of the green wedge is made up of either arable or pastoral farmland, the public rights of way and the more informal desire lines that dissect these provide an important recreational resource for users, such as walkers and joggers.</p>

Summary

5.64 Overall the Oadby, Thurnby and Stoughton Green Wedge fulfils all of the functions as set out in the agreed Leicester and Leicestershire Green Wedge Review Joint Methodology, an opinion that is shared by Harborough District Council in their Green Review, which says that –

'It has a role in preventing the coalescence...providing green space and green corridors in the urban area, safeguarding valuable ecological habitats close to the Principal Urban Area and providing recreational opportunities and potential'.

5.65 The green wedge provides Leicester City, Harborough District and the settlement of Oadby access to the open countryside and beyond; it defines and has historically guided built development form; it provides a recreational resource, for example Stoughton Grange and the university sports pitches; and, it ensures that the built form of Leicester City, Oadby and Harborough District do not merge into one entity.

5.66 The green wedge is also a key component of the Borough's Strategic Green Infrastructure network where it acts as a Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor.

5.67 Since the adoption of the Saved Local Plan and its relevant Proposals Map in 1999, the boundaries to the Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge have not had enforced changes from built development through the planning application process. Since 1999 Development has occurred within the Stoughton Grange and private hospital boundaries, however it has been directly related to the existing sites uses and the uses set out in relevant development brief and Core Strategy policy.

Recommendation (s)

5.68 Recommendation One – would be to retain the existing boundaries of the Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge that lies within the Borough, as they are.

5.69 Recommendation Two – would be to leave the extent of the green wedge largely the same, however remove the built development of the private hospital located off Gartree Road and the previously developed land at Stoughton Grange, that currently form part of the green wedge.



Figure 14 – illustrates land area removed from green wedge boundary as per Recommendation Two

5.70 The private hospital development predates the Saved Local Plan, however it is not a use consistent with the uses acceptable within a green wedge and is not considered to be open and undeveloped. The removal of such land area would be consistent with Harborough Districts approach for the same Oadby, Thurnby and Stoughton Green Wedge. Harborough’s Green Wedge Review suggests the exclusion of the Stoughton Lane properties (which are directly adjacent to the northern most edge of the Borough’s area of the green wedge) as they, like Stoughton village itself, do not reflect open and undeveloped character. It is felt that the private hospital site itself does not contribute any relevant characteristics to the overall green wedge in which it is situated.

- 5.71 It is a similar situation with the previously developed land area at Stoughton Grange. The land area to be excluded (Figure 14) does not contribute any relevant characteristics towards the green wedge designation. The land area consists of a number of utilised properties with associated vehicle parking as well as unused barns and stores. There is currently an adopted Development Brief for the site that promotes certain types of built development, not necessarily relating to the green wedge.
- 5.72 Recommendation Three – would be to remove the land area identified as a Broad Location for Growth / Greenfield Release Site option, should the Council be required to allocate the land for development within the Council’s new Local Plan. Although, the land area illustrated within Figure 15 currently forms part of the green wedge area situated within the Borough boundary, the removal of the land area would not have a significant detrimental impact on the attributes of the overall green wedge designation. Due to the current, overall large size of the Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge and the current distance between the urban areas of Leicester City, Harborough District and the settlement of Oadby, removal of the land area would not allow for settlement coalescence.

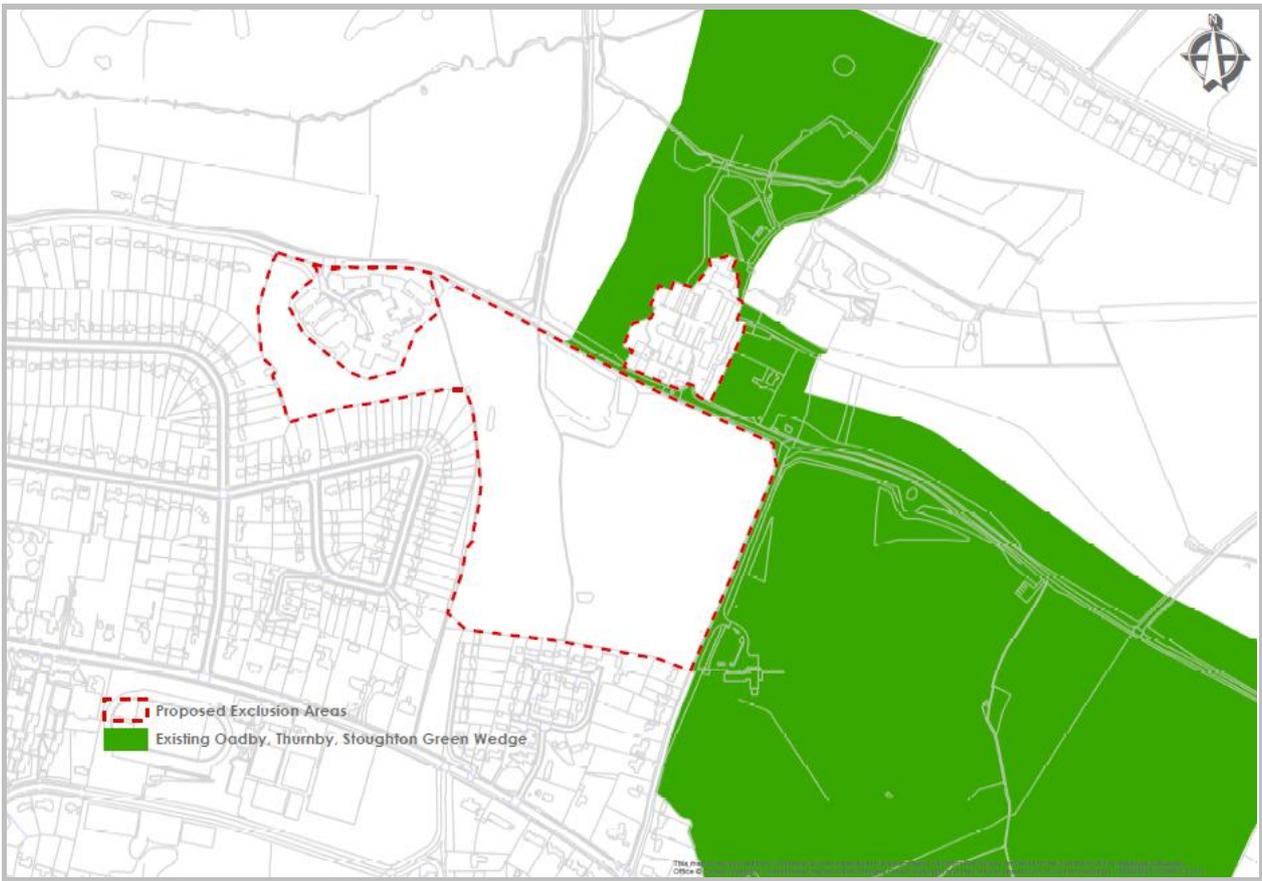


Figure 15 – illustrates land area removed from green wedge boundary as per Recommendation Three

Leicester and Leicestershire

Green Wedge Review Joint Methodology

July 2011

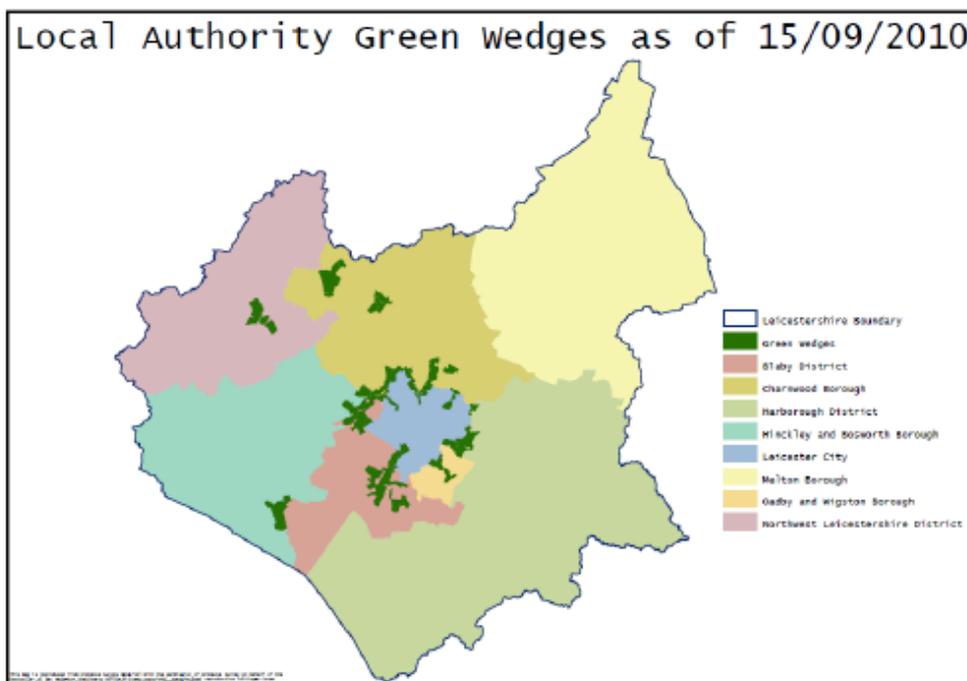


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1. Introduction and Purpose of the review

- 1.1 This Green Wedge Review Joint Methodology has been agreed by the following six local authorities of Charnwood, Harborough, Hinckley & Bosworth, Leicester, North West Leicestershire and Oadby & Wigston, which form part of the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing Market Area. Blaby District Council and Melton Borough Council are also part of the Housing Market Area but are not part of the joint methodology. Melton Borough Council do not have a green wedge within their administrative boundary.
- 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 Examination in Public of the Hinckley and Bosworth Core Strategy in 2009.
- 1.3 Many authorities in Leicestershire have cross boundary green wedges (as shown in the map below), 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 the DPDs prepared by each local authority.



- 1.4 The Joint Leicester and Leicestershire Green Wedge Methodology was first produced in August 2009 in accordance with the East Midlands Regional Plan. On the 6th July 2010 the Government announced that it was to abolish Regional

Spatial Strategies and in light of this the Methodology was amended and republished in July 2010. Due to the ongoing changes to the planning system it has become necessary to amend the Methodology in light of the outcome of the CALA Homes High Court Judgement (February 2011) and the emerging Localism Bill (December 2010).

- 1.5 This paper sets out the background and proposes a methodology for the Green Wedge Review.

2. Background

2.1 Structure Plan

- 2.1.1 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..."
- 2.1.2 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.
- 2.1.3 The Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan (2005), Strategy Policy 6, listed the purposes of Green Wedges. There were subtle differences to the aims given in the 1994 Structure Plan, particularly with regard to "strategic landscape and wildlife links". Strategy Policy 6 listed the general location of Green Wedges. The policy stated that *"The defined boundaries of Green Wedges in the following general locations will be reviewed as part of local plan reviews...."*. The supporting text stated 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).

2.2 East Midlands Regional Plan (2009)

- 2.2.1 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) stated 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.'*
- 2.2.2 On the 6th July 2010 the Government announced that it was to abolish Regional Spatial Strategies. A Judicial Review took place on the revocation of Regional Spatial Strategies, on the 7th February 2011. A judgement was made by the High Court in favour of the Secretary of State, meaning that the intended abolishment of Regional Spatial Strategies is a 'material consideration' which can be considered by local planning authorities and planning inspectors when making decisions. This has been reflected in the emerging Localism Bill which was

introduced to Parliament on 13th December 2010. The East Midlands Regional Plan will be formally abolished through the enactment of the forthcoming Localism Bill. At the time of writing this Methodology, the Regional Plan is still part of the Development Plan. The Regional Plan sets out key planning functions for green wedges namely:

- preventing the merging of settlements,
- guiding development form;
- providing a 'green lung' into urban areas; and
- acting as a recreational resource.

2.2.3 Taking account of the emerging Localism Bill outlined in December 2010, the Leicester and Leicestershire Green Wedge Review Steering Group met in June 2011 to discuss the implications this has on the Review Methodology. It was agreed that these planning functions will remain legitimate when the East Midlands Regional Plan is abolished in the future and provide the starting point for the green wedge review in Leicestershire. The methodology set out in this statement has been achieved through working collaboratively across the Housing Market Area. Partner local planning authorities have agreed a local definition and developed this methodology to interpret the role and function of existing green wedges and to assess candidate green wedge areas. The removal of the Regional Plan in the future will not preclude the need to carry out such a review or undermine the legitimacy of the approach taken. The need to undertake a review of green wedges is included in some adopted Core Strategies in Leicestershire.

2.3 National context

2.3.1 Green wedges are different to green belt and they are not recognised at a National level. In identifying the function of a green wedge however, Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7) is helpful in stating that local authorities should use criteria based policies in Local Development Documents (LDDs) rather than restrictive local landscape designations, as it is considered the role of a green wedge should not be seen as a landscape designation. The following quote is taken from PPS7: *'The Government recognises and accepts that there are areas of landscape outside nationally designated areas that are particularly highly valued locally. The Government believes that carefully drafted, criteria-based policies in LDDs, utilising tools such as landscape character assessment, should provide sufficient protection for these areas, without the need for rigid local designations that may unduly restrict acceptable, sustainable development and the economic activity that underpins the vitality of rural areas'*.

2.3.2 In line with PPS7 it is not the function of the green wedge to act as a landscape designation; this will be achieved by other planning policies where necessary in accordance with the national policy.

3. Proposed Methodology for Review of the Green Wedge

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The purpose of the review is to assess the extent of the green wedges currently shown on the relevant Local Plan Proposals Map in the context of the East Midlands Regional Plan (paragraph 4.2.18). The green wedge principles as set out in the Regional Plan have been tailored to reflect the local circumstances in the Housing Market Area.

3.1.2 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.

3.2 Green Wedge Review Assessment

3.2.1 As a minimum the green wedge review should be undertaken at a macro scale, however can be looked at in more detail through a micro scale review.

3.2.2 When assessing a green wedge (on a macro scale) in its entirety, or when identifying a new green wedge; a green wedge should achieve all of the mentioned evaluation criteria, or be capable of fulfilling all criteria in the future.

3.2.3 A micro-scale review, could be undertaken by an Authority through the creation of sub-areas within the green wedge to enable a detailed analysis. If this type of review were to be undertaken the smaller areas would be determined by the Local Authority. Sub areas within a green wedge may not meet all of the four functions. The four functions were established for the purposes of evaluating the strategic designation of an entire green wedge. When assessing these sub areas, the Authority should identify how these smaller areas function in the context of the wider strategic designation and make a judgment using the evaluation criteria below. The Authority would need to consider the relationship that individual sites have on the role and function of the green wedge as a whole.

3.2.4 The four evaluation criteria are as follows:

Preventing the merging of settlements

3.2.5 Green wedges will safeguard the identity of communities within and around urban areas that face growth pressures. The coalescence of settlements should be considered in terms of both physical separation and the perception of distance between the settlements.

Guiding Development Form

3.2.6 Green wedges will guide the form of new developments as urban areas extend. 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

3.2.7 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 into urban areas. Green wedges could also provide multi-functional uses such as:

- Open space, sport and recreation facilities
- Flood alleviation measures
- Improving air quality
- 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

Acting as a recreational resource

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

3.2.7 The review could inform the preparation of each Local Authority's Core Strategy and subsequent Allocations DPD. The Core Strategy could show the broad location and extent of green wedges in a "Key Diagram", the Allocations DPD could show the precise areas subject to Green Wedge policy on the Proposals Map.

4. The Assessment

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Local authorities within Leicester and Leicestershire will carry out individual assessments, utilising the following agreed methodology¹. Where green wedges cross local authority boundaries, a commitment has been made for a joint working approach to be established.

4.1.2 The detailed methodology is set out below.

4.2 Data collection/ Desk top survey

4.2.1 To form the basis of the green wedge review a data collection process should be undertaken to inform a desk top survey. The data collection exercise could include the following elements:

- Public rights of way/permissive routes (footpaths/bridleways/cycleways). Degree of access to/from surrounding urban areas and 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.

4.3 On site surveys

4.3.1 Officers should undertake a visual appraisal on site of the Green Wedge this could include the following:

- topography
- identification of key physical features within and out of the Green Wedge

¹ Excludes Blaby District Council and Melton Borough Council (see paragraph 1.1).

- 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.

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

4.4 Consultation

4.4.1 Local Authorities may wish to undertake some form of consultation to inform the evaluation of their green wedge review. This is to the discretion of the individual local authorities to ensure that a consistent approach is taken in relation to previous evidence base documents which the Local Authority has undertaken.

4.4.2 The Local Authority will decide upon the level of consultation that is required and who they wish to consult. Key stakeholders who could form part of the consultation are those who have been consulted previously in the preparation of the Methodology and may consist of:

- Leicestershire County Council Policy Team
- Leicestershire County Council Access Team
- Adjacent District/Borough Councils i.e. Melton Borough Council (officers);
- Appropriate local authority departments
- 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 Councils
- Country Land And Business Association

4.4.3 A Local Authority could expand upon this list to ensure that the consultation undertakes a localised approach.

4.4.4 Considering the emerging national policy context the Steering Group are committed to ensuring that the 'duty to cooperate' is followed between the local authorities where a green wedge crosses two or more administrative districts.

4.4.5 As the green wedge review form part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework, the findings of the review will be consulted upon as part of the preparation of a Core Strategy and/or Site Allocations DPD depending on what stage the Local Authority is at in the preparation of their LDF. This will provide the opportunity for commenting on the Green Wedge reviews.

4.5 Evaluation

4.5.1 When assessing the Green Wedge the data collection/desk top survey, on site surveys and where relevant findings from the consultation should be used to inform the evaluation using the following criteria:

- Preventing the merging of settlements
- Guiding development form
- Providing a green "lung" into urban areas
- Acting as a recreational resource

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 policy approach or management plan.

Appendix 1

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 / Thurmaston / 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 Friith
- 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.*

(e)

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 / Scaptoft;*
- (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?		

Appendix Two

Statement on the consistency of the Green Wedge designation with the National Planning Policy Framework

Introduction

Officers within Leicester and Leicestershire have worked jointly to prepare a statement on the consistency of the green wedge designation within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (March 2012). The purpose of this Statement is to set out the continued support for the green wedge designation within Leicester and Leicestershire as a result of the publication of the NPPF.

Green Wedge policies were introduced in the Leicestershire Structure Plan in 1987, since their introduction green wedges have continued to be identified in subsequent Structure Plans in 1994 and 2005. The East Midlands Regional Plan (2009) does not contain a policy on green wedges, however it does identify four functions of a green wedge which includes preventing the merging of settlements, guiding development form, providing a green lung into urban areas and acting as a recreational resource. The Regional Plan emphasises that green wedges are a local planning designation by stipulating 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.

Although the NPPF does not contain a specific reference to green wedges, paragraph 1 of the NPPF makes it clear that the Framework *'sets out the Government's requirements for the planning system only to the extent it is relevant, proportionate and necessary to do so. It provides a framework within which local people and their accountable councils can produce their own distinctive local and neighbourhood plans, which reflect the needs and priorities of their communities'*. Green wedges are a useful local planning tool used within Leicestershire which is consistent with the NPPF for the reasons set out below.

Core Planning Principles

Paragraph 17 of the NPPF sets out a number of core planning principles that should underpin plan making. One of these principles is that planning should be plan led which empowers local people to shape their surroundings. In 2011 Leicestershire County Council undertook a public consultation exercise to understand the value of local green spaces in Leicestershire. The green wedge areas were shown to be of high value and as such important to the local community. Green wedges are therefore important to local people and they help shape the communities surroundings.

Another Core Planning Principle states that [planning should] *'take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it'*. The different roles of the green wedge are defined in the Regional Plan and are reviewed locally to ensure that the green wedge maintains its function and role.

A further Core Planning Principle in the NPPF states that [planning should] *'contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution. Allocations of land for development should prefer land of lesser environmental value, where consistent policies with other policies within this framework'*. One of the functions of the green wedge is to provide a green lung into urban areas; this relates to environmental value such as green infrastructure, wildlife sites, air quality and flood alleviation measures. The presence of green wedges enables a sequential approach to be taken when allocating land with green wedges being identified as having higher environmental value than non-green wedge areas. Green wedges therefore are a useful tool to enable this assessment to take place.

Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

The Natural Environment section of the NPPF re-emphasises the Core Planning Principle identified above and states *'in preparing plans to meet development needs the aims should be to minimise pollution and other adverse effects on the local and natural environment. Plans should allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value'*. The NPPF highlights that a strategic approach should be taken in Local Plans which plan *'positively for the creation, protection and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure'*. The green wedge designation is important locally with green wedges providing multifunctional green space in terms of maintaining settlement identity, providing a green lung into urban areas and providing a recreational resource; the role of green wedges therefore being of higher environmental and amenity value than other areas of countryside.

Green Infrastructure

The NPPF defines green infrastructure as *'a network of multifunctional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities'* (NPPF; page 52). The green wedge designation reflects this as they are a multifunctional allocation recognising the importance these areas have by providing a green lung into urban areas and creating access to green infrastructure.

Plan Making

The NPPF recognises the importance of the countryside and green spaces with the introduction of the Local Green Space designation and the protection of the Green Belt. The Local Green Space designation provides the same level of protection as Green Belt but cannot be extensive tracts of land, therefore they are not an appropriate designation for areas currently designated as green wedges. There is no Green Belt land within Leicester and Leicestershire and green wedges do not perform the same role as a Green Belt. Green wedges do not seek to restrict the amount of development, but aim to ensure that as urban development extends, open land is incorporated within it preserving and enhancing links between urban areas and the countryside. Bullet points 7 and 8 of paragraph 157 states that Local Plans should *'identify land where*

development would be inappropriate, for instance because of its environmental significance; and contain a clear strategy for enhancing the natural, built and historic environment'. Green wedges are a tool which helps to achieve this in Leicestershire by facilitating the positive management of land by helping to shape growth and improve the quality of life of residents.

Duty to Cooperate

Leicestershire Authorities have continued to work together after the removal of the overarching Structure Plan policies to ensure that the green wedge designation retains its strategic cross-border function through review of its boundaries. This included working together to produce the Leicester and Leicestershire Green Wedge Review Joint Methodology. This joint working demonstrates that Leicester and Leicestershire Authorities are committed to the continuation of green wedges subject to their review through the preparation of individual Local Plans. The NPPF reaffirms the duty to cooperate; paragraph 178 states that *'Public bodies have a duty to cooperate on planning issues that cross local boundaries'* and paragraph 180 states that *'Local planning authorities should work collaboratively on strategic planning priorities to enable delivery of sustainable development in consultation with Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local Nature Partnerships'*.

Conclusion

Green Wedges have considerable local support across Leicester and Leicestershire. For many years they have successfully managed development in Leicester and Leicestershire and have guided development form, ensured green spaces penetrate into urban areas, provided a green lung, protected environmental assets and provided a recreational resource. They represent a unique and bespoke local solution to managing growth, which could not be addressed by other national designations.

For the reasons outlined in this statement the green wedge designation is consistent with the NPPF and it is the intention of Leicester and Leicestershire Authorities to

continue to support the green wedge as a strategic planning tool which are to be reviewed through the preparation of Local Plans.