

Examination of the Harborough Local Plan 2020-2041

Stage 2 Matters, Issues and Questions (MIQs)

Written Statement by Harborough District Council

MATTER 9: Locating Rural, Renewable and Low-Carbon Energy Development

Whether the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to Locating Rural, Renewable and Low-Carbon Energy Development?

Policies AP03, AP04 and AP05

Matter 9, Issue 1: Development in the Countryside

Policy AP03 Development in the Countryside (Residential)

The Council's response:

Q1. Is it justified and consistent with national policy to treat areas of countryside, categorised as Green Wedges and Areas of Separation in policy AP03, differently from countryside that is not?

1. Yes. Given the potential impact residential development permissible under Policy AP03 could have on the primarily open, undeveloped character of Green Wedges and Areas of Separation, the Council considers treating the designations differently from wider countryside to be justified and consistent with national policy.
2. AP03.2 allows for development to take place in an Area of Separation providing it does not compromise the effectiveness of the designation's role in protecting the identity and distinctiveness of settlements that are in proximity to each other or to nearby employment areas. Applicants putting forward residential development proposals in these areas will need to demonstrate that they have considered the impact on existing separation and demonstrate that proposals do not affect separation and settlement identity or distinctiveness or that any impacts can be mitigated appropriately.

3. As regards Green Wedges, these are cross-boundary strategic designations which extend from within the Leicester urban area (i.e. Leicester City, Oadby & Wigston Borough) through settlements such as Scraptoft, Thurnby and Bushby into open countryside. Given their cross-boundary strategic nature, some broad alignment and consistency of policy approach with neighbouring local authorities has been sought to minimise the impact of residential development in Green Wedges. Hence, under criterion 3 residential development is limited to 'accommodation for full-time worker(s) directly related to agriculture, forestry or equine businesses' provided it meets certain criteria. This will minimise the impact of new residential development while supporting the four functions of Green Wedges and ensuring their predominantly open, undeveloped character is maintained. The Council considers that Policy AP04.3 strikes balance between supporting appropriate residential development in Green Wedges while protecting and encouraging their use as multifunctional strategic green open spaces.

Q2. Is the phrasing and punctuation in criterion 1.a) i) of policy AP03 adequate for the various elements of this long sentence to be clearly understood by users of the Plan?

4. No. The Council is proposing the following modification to address the clarity of this part of the policy:

1. New **residential** development in the countryside, excluding in Green Wedges and Areas of Separation, will be permitted for **where it comprises one of the following**:

a) ~~Residential development, where it:~~

- i) ~~comprises affordable housing on small sites in rural areas that would not normally be permitted for housing as rural exception sites that meets local need as evidenced by a rural needs survey or Neighbourhood Plan where the housing remains affordable in perpetuity and with any market housing at a level that is demonstrably required to enable delivery and is capped at 20% of the dwellings proposed, the exact percentage being determined by the viability of each scheme; or~~

a) rural exception sites for affordable housing on small sites in rural areas that would not normally be permitted for housing where:

i) meeting a local affordable housing need as evidenced by a rural housing needs survey or Neighbourhood Plan;

ii) the housing remains affordable in perpetuity; and

iii) any market housing is demonstrably required to enable delivery of affordable units and is capped at 20% of the dwellings proposed, with the exact percentage being determined by the viability of each scheme.

b) comprises the subdivision of an existing residential dwelling or would re-use a redundant or disused rural building for housing and would enhance its immediate setting.

c) development of accommodation for full-time worker(s) directly related to agricultural, forestry or equine businesses in the countryside where it can be demonstrated that...

5. Within Green Wedges, development will be limited in respect of residential development to **b)** above in line with strategic objectives in Policy DS04.

Matter 9, Issue 1: Development in the Countryside

Policy AP04 Development in the Countryside (Commercial/Non-Residential)

Q1. Is the range of development types in criterion 1 of policy AP04 appropriate and consistent with national policy on supporting a prosperous rural economy?

6. Yes. The Council considers that the wide range of development types set out in AP04.1 is appropriate to support a prosperous rural economy and is consistent with national policy. It allows for a wide range of business growth in rural areas and, while it does not specifically refer to allowing well-designed new buildings, this is allowed for through the NPPF and does not need to be restated in AP04.1. Replacement buildings, extensions and conversions are referred to add further detail.
7. Policy relating to the retention and development of local services and community facilities (referred to in NPPF para. 88.d) is set out in Policy DM12: Protection and Enhancement of Community Facilities. This recognises that community facilities, many of them in rural areas and facing economic pressure, are essential for supporting local, rural life. Their retention and enhancement is supported through the policy, as are opportunities for their diversification.

Q2. Is it justified and consistent with national policy to treat areas of countryside categorised as Green Wedges and Areas of Separation differently from countryside that is not, in policy AP04?

8. Yes. Given the potential impact development could have on their primarily open, undeveloped character, which is central to these designations' roles, the Council considers that it is justified to treat Green Wedges and Areas of Separation differently from countryside under policy AP04.
9. AP04.2 allows for development to take place in an Area of Separation providing it does not compromise the effectiveness of the designation's role in protecting the identity and distinctives of settlements that are in proximity to each other or to nearby employment areas. Applicants putting forward development proposals in these areas will need to demonstrate that they have considered the impact on existing separation and demonstrate that proposals do not affect separation or any impacts can be mitigated appropriately.
10. As regards Green Wedges, these are cross-boundary strategic designations which extend from within the Leicester urban area (i.e. Leicester City, Oadby & Wigston Borough) through settlements such as Scraftoft, Thurnby and Bushby into open countryside. They benefit not only local communities within the District but also those within the adjoining authorities. Given their cross-boundary strategic nature, some broad alignment and consistency of policy approach with neighbouring local authorities has been sought to ensure that only development which supports their four functions of the designation and retains their open, undeveloped character is allowed within Green Wedges. The Council considers that Policy AP04.3 strikes balance between supporting appropriate rural uses in Green Wedges while protecting and encouraging their use as multifunctional strategic green open spaces.

Matter 9, Issue 2: Renewable and Low-Carbon Energy Development

Policy AP05 Locating Renewable and Low-Carbon Energy Development

Q1. Does policy AP05 take a sufficiently positive approach to locating renewable and low carbon energy development, to help increase use and supply of these types of energy, consistent with national policy?

11. Yes, this policy provides a positive approach to locating renewable and low carbon energy development. Policy AP05 is based on the evidence from Harborough Renewable Energy Assessment 2024 [EN-NLP4] and provides a framework in which renewable energy sites can come forward.
12. The policy accords with paragraph 160 of the NPPF 2023 and with planning practice guidance Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 5-003-20140306 (Revision date: 06 03 2014), which advocate that renewable and low-carbon energy development should be encouraged but should not automatically override environmental protections and the planning concerns of local communities. These include impacts on the natural environment from construction, operation or decommissioning of equipment or visual impacts on the landscape.
13. The policy, therefore, provides a positive approach to low carbon energy development, whilst also providing protections to the environment.

Q2. Is it realistic, in criterion 1a) of policy AP05, to expect renewable and low-carbon energy generation development and associated infrastructure to mitigate any adverse impacts on the built and natural environments?

14. Yes, it is realistic to expect renewable and low-carbon energy generation development and associated infrastructure to mitigate any adverse impacts on the built and natural environment and is in accordance with national policy and guidance. Criterion 1 a) of policy AP05 accords with Paragraph 163 of the NPPF 2023 for renewable or low carbon energy '*local planning authorities should; b) approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made acceptable)*' and planning practice guidance Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 5-003-20140306 (Revision date: 06 03 2014) which states that '*all communities have a responsibility to help increase the use and supply of green energy, but this does not mean that the need for renewable energy automatically overrides environmental protections and the planning concerns of local*

communities' Policy AP05 responds to this by requiring low-carbon development to mitigate any impacts on the built and natural environments.