

Harborough District Council

**Areas of Separation
Review**

Prepared: December 2011

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1. Introduction

1.1 There are currently three designated Areas of Separation (or Separation Areas) within Harborough District safeguarding the physical separation between:

- Market Harborough and Great Bowden;
- Lutterworth, Bitteswell and Magna Park; and
- Scraftoft and Thurnby.

The current extent of these Areas of Separation is set out in 'saved' policy EV/3 of the Harborough District Local Plan with detailed boundaries shown on the Proposals Maps. The Core Strategy sets out the Council's commitment to retaining the principle of areas of separation in the above areas and to carrying out a review of detailed boundaries as part of the Allocations Plan. The Core Strategy also recognises that the individual character of settlements needs to be protected by the designation of new Areas of Separation in the following locations:

- Lubenham and Market Harborough; and
- Sutton in the Elms and Broughton Astley.

Detailed boundaries for these new Areas of Separation will be set out in the Allocations Plan.

1.2 The purpose of this study is to assess the boundaries of current Areas of Separation (as defined in the Local Plan) and suggest appropriate boundaries for the newly proposed Areas of Separation, taking into account the spatial strategy for the District and the scale, nature and location of development proposed in Core Strategy.

1.3 This is a technical report and as such it does not represent Council policy. The assessment will provide evidence to help inform the preparation of the Allocations Plan and its findings will be consulted upon as part of this process. Policy in the Allocations Plan will eventually replace Local Plan Policy EV/3 in defining detailed Area of Separation boundaries.

2. Area of Separation Policy Background and Objectives

2.1 Strategic Policy Context (1987-2005)

2.1.1 The principle of protecting an area of land between settlements which neither performs the functions of a green wedge nor can properly be regarded as countryside, but nonetheless should remain open in the interests of maintaining the character and identity of those communities gained formal recognition in the Leicestershire Structure Plan (1987).

The policy was taken forward into Environment Policy 5 of the 1994 Structure Plan as follows:

'In areas to which Green Wedge policies do not apply and which can not be properly designated as countryside, provision will not normally be made for development which would result in a reduction in the separation between the built up area of settlements.'

The definition of these exceptional circumstances was a matter to be determined at a local level and this advice was heeded in the definition of three Areas of Separation designated in the Local Plan.

2.1.2 Policy 7 (Separation of Settlements) of the 2005 Structure Plan also supported the definition of Areas of Separation stating:

'Predominantly open land between the defined development boundaries of neighbouring settlements which is not part of a Green Wedge but performs an essential function in keeping the built-up areas of those settlements separate may be defined in local plans as Areas of Separation. Within such areas, development will be permitted only where it would not result in a material reduction in the degree of separation between the neighbouring built-up areas.'

The Structure Plan was however superseded by the Regional Plan in 2009. The Regional Plan differs from the Structure Plan as it does not specifically refer to Separation Areas. Nevertheless Policy 3 (Distribution of New Development) sets out how development and economic activity should be distributed. Part d) of this policy states:

'The development needs of other settlements and rural areas should also be provided for. New development in these areas should contribute to:

- *Maintaining the distinctive character and vitality of rural communities;...*

2.2 Harbourough District Local Plan

2.2.1 The Structure Plan 1994 provided the policy context for the preparation of the Deposit Draft Local Plan (1995). Policy EV/3 set out the approach to safeguarding the separation of settlements at risk of coalescence as follows:

Separation of Settlements

Most settlements in the District are physically separated from each other and there is little danger of new development resulting in the coalescence of villages. The exceptions are:-

*Market Harborough and Great Bowden
Lutterworth, Bitteswell and Magna Park
Scraptoft and Thurnby*

In the area separating these settlements, the District Council will fuse proposals for development that would compromise the existing degree of separation between the settlements.

POLICY EV/3

WITHIN THE AREAS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP INSETS SEPARATING:

**MARKET HARBOROUGH AND GREAT BOWDEN
LUTTERWORTH, BITTESWELL AND MAGNA PARK
SCRAPTOFT AND THURNBY,**

THE DISTRICT COUNCIL WILL REFUSE PLANNING PERMISSION FOR DEVELOPMENT THAT WOULD:-

- 1. ADVERSELY AFFECT THE PREDOMINANTLY OPEN CHARACTER OF THE LAND; OR**
- 2. RESULT IN A REDUCTION IN THE EXISTING OPEN LAND SEPARATING THE SETTLEMENTS CONCERNED.**

2.2.2 The Policy was adopted without amendment despite the findings of the Inspector. In his 'Report on Objections' (1997) into the Deposit Draft Local Plan, the Inspector recommended the deletion of Policy EV/3 (as set out above) and the removal of Areas of Separation from the Proposals Map. He felt that it was:

- not in accordance with PPG7 (which sought to avoid local countryside designations);
- not in accordance with the Structure Plan in so far as it is countryside; and
- unnecessary as the Local Plan provided strong protection against development in the countryside through Policy EV/5 and Limits to Development line.

2.2.3 Instead of EV/3 he recommended that a further criterion be added to EV/5 (Development in the Countryside) as follows: "*The development does not contribute to the coalescence of two close settlements or diminish the open character of the land between them*".

2.2.4 The Council rejected the Inspector's recommendation to delete policy EV/3 and remove Separation Areas from the Proposals Map, arguing that the areas identified 'contain a mix of land uses including paddocks, cemetery and other urban fringe-type uses, as well as countryside' (Statement of Decisions and Reasons on the Inspector's Report and Proposed Modifications, 1999, pages 25-26) and therefore accord with

Structure Plan policy. The Council did however amend Policy EV/5 to include the new criterion (see para 3.2.3 above) in accordance with the Inspector's recommendation believing it to complement Policy EV/3.

- 2.2.5 Local Plan Policy EV/3 is 'saved' and will be replaced by policy within the Allocations Development Plan Document.

2.3 Core Strategy

- 2.3.1 At all stages in the preparation of the Core Strategy the retention of existing Separation Areas and the designation of new Areas of Separation in connection with new development received widespread public support.
- 2.3.2 The principle of maintaining the separation between settlements at risk of coalescence from new development is supported in Core Strategy. The Spatial Strategy (Policy CS1) establishes the need to '*safeguard the individual character of settlements, by maintaining in principle the separation between; Scraftoft and Thurnby, Great Bowden and Market Harborough, Lubenham and Market Harborough, Bitteswell, Magna Park and Lutterworth, and Sutton in the Elms and Broughton Astley*'. The relevant Policies for Places go on to explain the purpose of each Separation Area more fully.
- 2.3.3 Reflecting national guidance in PPS 1 (para. 20) and PPS 7 (para. 26), the need to ensure that wherever possible urban fringe areas are put to beneficial use is reflected in Policy CS 8b) which states:

'Green Wedges and, where appropriate, Areas of Separation will be the main focus for Green Infrastructure improvements in urban fringe areas of the district. So far as is consistent with their predominantly open and undeveloped character, opportunities to improve public access and recreation use in these areas will be encouraged for the benefit of the wider community. Similarly, opportunities to conserve, enhance and/or restore their biodiversity and geo-diversity value will be a priority.'

3. Review Methodology

3.1 Outline Method of Review

The review of each Area of Separation area has followed the same broad approach:

- Plans of each area are obtained;
- Desk top review (including analysis of aerial photography) is carried out to identify;
 - Main land uses in the area;

- Current physical boundaries;
 - Landscape character and features; and
 - Relevant planning decisions
- The edges of each settlement are identified, and also the “end points” of the settlements which face each other;
 - The area in between is divided into land parcels defined by existing boundaries such as hedge or field boundaries;
 - An assessment is made whether built development of this land parcel would reduce the existing degree of separation between the settlements (considered against an imaginary line drawn from the edges of existing development);
 - Site visits are made to establish issues of topography and land form to add into the assessment process;
 - Conclusions are then written concerning the importance of the land parcel in maintaining the existing degree of separation between the settlements;
 - If land parcels extend beyond an imaginary line drawn between each settlement edge, then unless this is only a very minor area, the whole of the land parcel is recommended for inclusion in the Area of Separation. In some cases where land parcels cannot easily be identified then a judgement is made on an appropriate boundary;
 - The basis for continued or new allocation as an Area of Separation is “that area which is necessary to identify as open land so as not to reduce the existing degree of separation between the settlements”, baring in mind Core Strategy policy for the area.

4 Market Harborough and Great Bowden Area of Separation

4.1 Background

4.1.1 Market Harborough lies in a natural bowl within the valley of the River Welland and development to date is confined by the ridges surrounding the town. These ridgelines create a distinctive rural landscape and the one to the north of Market Harborough acts as an important buffer separating the town from Great Bowden.

4.1.2 Great Bowden lies immediately north of Market Harborough and the majority of the village is physically separated from the town by the East Midlands Trains railway line. It is at this point that the two settlements are at their closest.

4.1.3 The current Area of Separation is bound to the west by Burnmill Road and to the east by Rockingham Road and Dingley Road. Its northern

and southern boundaries are defined respectively by the limits to development of Great Bowden and Market Harborough. The Market Harborough/Great Bowden Separation Area was originally defined in the Market Harborough Local Plan Interim Document (September 1991) and was carried forward into the Local Plan unchanged. It covers an area of some 77 hectares.

- 4.1.4 As the District's principal town, a relatively high level of development is set out in the Core Strategy for Market Harborough. Whilst the majority of development is to take place at the Strategic Development Area, smaller areas of development will be identified around the town. Great Bowden as a Selected Rural Village will receive a share of the rural housing development. An Area of Separation is essential to protect the gap between the two settlements and ensure that the distinctive character of 2 neighbouring settlements is maintained.
- 4.1.5 The Great Bowden edge extends from the Timber Yard at the western edge of the village to the limits of existing development at Dingley Road to the east. The Market Harborough edge extends from Burnmill Farm in the west to Rockingham Road to the east.

4.2 Assessment:

4.2.1 Parcel A

This area is essential to the continued separation of the settlements. It incorporates the relatively steep ridge falling away northwards to Great Bowden. However, the two areas south of the ridgeline adjacent to Ridgeway School would appear not to impact on the separation function of the area. Further assessment of these areas (including consideration of topography and landscape impact) and drawing of detailed boundaries for the Area of Separation will take place as part of the Allocations DPD and review of Limits to Development.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation (with possible amendments to detailed boundaries).

4.2.2 Parcel B

This area falls away from the railway line in the south west to the River Welland Valley, forming the District boundary. Development of any part of this area would threaten the separation of Great Bowden and the employment areas of Market Harborough off Rockingham Road.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

4.2.3 Parcel C

Lying adjacent to Dingly Road and the current village limits, this area forms the northern part of the current Area of Separation. Some of these relatively small paddocks/fields have a close association with the village. Whilst the area should be included in the Area of Separation, there are areas on the immediate fringes of Great Bowden where limited development would not appear to prejudice the degree of separation due to form of the village. Consideration of such detailed boundaries will take place as part of the Allocations DPD alongside a review of Limits to Development.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation (with possible amendments to detailed boundaries).

4.2.4 Parcel D

This area is a continuation of the distinctive ridgeline to the north of Market Harborough which falls away towards Great Bowden and of which Parcel A is a part. It is undeveloped and open agricultural land. Development in this parcel would reduce the existing degree of separation between Market Harborough and western part of Great Bowden.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

5 Lutterworth, Bitteswell and Magna Park Area of Separation

5.1 Background

5.1.1 This extensive Area of Separation incorporates the agricultural land north of Lutterworth's southern bypass and south of Ullesthorpe Road running north west from Bitteswell. It covers an area of some 350 hectares between Magna Park to the west and Lutterworth and Bitteswell to the east.

5.1.2 The coalescence of Bitteswell with Lutterworth has been a long standing concern. At its minimum the physical gap between the limits of the two settlements is only 128 metres. Recognising the threat of coalescence, Policy 3 of the Lutterworth and Bitteswell Local Plan 1983 stated that proposals for development which threatened the physical separation of Lutterworth and Bitteswell would be resisted and defined an area to which the policy applied. The Area of Separation defined at this stage was an expansion on the previous plan to allow for the impact of the Magna Park development. It is this defined area that formed the basis for the Area of Separation defined in the Harborough District Local Plan.

5.1.3 The Core Strategy sets the current context for the review of this Area of Separation. Policies to note are:

- No further phase of development or large scale expansion of Magna Park beyond the existing development footprint (Policy CS 7);
- Lutterworth (Key Centre) to expand to the north of the town (Policy CS 14); and
- Bitteswell (Selected Rural Village) to receive a share of rural development (Policy CS 17).

5.1.4 The current designation has been considered in this policy context and assessed in terms of its separation function (“area which is necessary to identify and maintain as open land so as not to reduce the existing degree of separation between the settlements”). The likely location of new development has also been taken into account in assessing where existing separation may be threatened. Given the size of the Area of Separation the parcels of land considered are relatively large.

5.1.5 The extent of the area assessed has been defined at Bitteswell by end points at Ash Tree Farm (north) and Bitteswell House (south), at Lutterworth from Bill Crane Way to Coventry Road and at Magna Park from north of Woodby Lane to Coventry Road.

5.2 Assessment:

5.2.1 Parcel A

Although the policy context for Magna Park is to contain the site to its existing footprint, it is considered that the inclusion of the area to the north of Woodby Lane maintains the current separation. The area is predominantly open countryside and should remain open and undeveloped. However, the Area of Separation as currently defined in the Local Plan includes warehouse development to the south west of Parcel A and the boundary needs to be amended to exclude this development.

Recommendation: Parcel, excluding warehouse development, should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

5.2.2 Parcel B

Although Magna Park is not going to extend, the need to keep the essentially open and undeveloped character of this area is essential in protecting the character and identity of both Bitteswell and Lutterworth. Whilst the distribution warehouses of Magna Park impact on the horizon, the openness of land running from the brook valley westwards helps to negate the impact of this development. Development, other than allowed for in the Policy CS 14 e), would jeopardise the separation value and open character of this area. However, there are areas on the immediate fringes of Bitteswell in Parcel B where limited development would not appear to prejudice the degree of separation due to form of the village. Consideration of such detailed boundaries will take place

as part of the Allocations DPD alongside a review of Limits to Development.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

5.2.3 Parcel C

Development of any part of this area would jeopardise the current separation between Lutterworth and Bitteswell, threatening the distinctiveness of both settlements.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

5.2.4 Parcel D

The favoured direction of growth for Lutterworth, as set out in the Core Strategy, is to the north of the town. In view of this it is considered that an extension to the current Area of Separation is justified to the north east of Bitteswell in order to maintain its separate identity. This area is defined by Ashby Lane to the west, the main body of the village to the south and the brook to the east. This extension would encompass the land as it rises from the brook.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

5.2.5 Parcel E

Retaining the open and undeveloped character of the area between Bitteswell and Magna Park is a commitment set out in the Core Strategy. It is considered that the inclusion of Parcel E in the Area of Separation would help to secure the continued separation and openness of the area between the village and the distribution centre.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

6 Scraptoft and Thurnby Area of Separation

6.1 Background

6.1.1 Scraptoft and Thurnby are distinct settlements lying immediately to the east of Leicester City. The Leicester/Scraptoft Green Wedge and the Thurnby/Leicester/Oadby Green Wedge help to keep them separate from the built up part of Leicester respectively.

- 6.1.2. Both Scraptoft and Thurnby are historic villages and their core areas have Conservation Area status. Scraptoft is centred on Main Street, Stocks Road and Church Hill. The settlement is located north of the ridgeline defined by Covert Lane and Scraptoft Lane. Thurnby is centred along linear Main Street which runs south of and parallel to the Uppingham Road (A47).
- 6.1.3 More modern residential development has taken place between the two settlements along the line of Station Road both to the north and south of the dismantled railway line causing almost complete coalescence.
- 6.1.4 The designated Area of Separation covers some 51 hectares and runs from the dismantled railway line northwards to Covert Lane just south of Scraptoft. It incorporates the valley of Thurnby Brook with its relatively steep slopes climbing towards Covert Lane. The Area of Separation was first designated in the Scraptoft, Thurnby and Stoughton Local Plan (1987) and was carried forward unchanged into the Local Plan.
- 6.1.5 The identification of this area in the Local Plan 2001 was justified both by reference to the sensitivity of the gap between the settlements but also the development pressures which existed in this part of the District.
- 6.1.6 The principle of maintaining an Area of Separation is now part of adopted Core Strategy policy CS15.
- 6.1.7 For the purpose of the policy review, the edge of Scraptoft is formed by Covert Lane with end points at the junction with Scraptoft Lane and the edge of residential development at Eliotts End. The edge of Thurnby is defined by residential development off Pulford Drive with end points extending from residential development at Station Lane and Leybury Way to residential development at Marefield Close.

6.2 Assessment

6.2.1 Parcel A

This parcel adjoins the corner of Covert Lane and Station Lane and appears critical that it be kept open to avoiding further coalescence. It would lead to a complete loss of the existing separation between settlement end points if built development were to be considered.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

6.2.2 Parcel B

This parcel is at the rear of properties on Station Lane and Leybury Way. It appears very important that it be kept open to avoiding further coalescence. It would lead to a significant loss of existing separation between settlement end points at Covert Lane and Leybury Way if built development were to be considered.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

6.2.3 Parcel C

This parcel is a large field extending from Covert Lane to the rear of properties on Leybury Way . It appears critical that it be kept open to avoiding further coalescence. It would lead to a total loss of existing separation between settlement boundaries at Covert Lane and Leybury Way if built development were to be considered.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

6.2.4 Parcel D

This parcel is at the rear of properties on Pulford Drive and Padbury Close. Whilst any development would not reduce the existing degree of separation between the Leybury Way / Padgate Close edge of Thurnby and Covert Lane, its development would intrude into the gap between Elliots End and Marefield Close and impact significantly on separation.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

6.2.5 Parcel E

This parcel is at the rear of properties on Pulford Drive. Whilst any development would not reduce the existing degree of separation between the Leybury Way / Padgate Close edge of Thurnby and Covert Lane, its development would intrude significantly into the gap between Elliots End and Marefield Close and lead to a significant loss of separation in this area.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

6.2.6 Parcel F

This parcel is a large field to the South of Covert Lane with a slope to the south east. Any development would appear to reduce the existing degree of separation between the Elliots End edge of Scraftoft and Marefield Close edge of Thurnby.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

6.2.7 Parcel G

This parcel is a large sloping field to the south east of Parcel C with rising ground to its western edge. Any development of this parcel would appear to significantly reduce the existing degree of separation between the Elliots End edge of Scraptoft and Marefield Close edge of Thurnby. Furthermore given that this land parcel does not adjoin existing road network its development could only proceed if other sites were brought forward.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

7 Market Harborough and Lubenham Area of Separation

7.1 Background

7.1.1 Lubenham lies just beyond the western edge of the built up area of Market Harborough. At its minimum, the distance between the limits to development of the settlements is just over 1 kilometre. Given the amount of new development which is set out in the Core Strategy for Market Harborough, particularly the relatively close proximity of the proposed Strategic Development Area to Lubenham, the need to protect the character and separateness of the historic village is recognised in the Core Strategy.

7.1.2 The principle of maintaining the separation between the two settlements is established in Policy CS1 (Spatial Strategy) and reinforced in Policy CS13 (Market Harborough).

7.1.3 The edge of Lubenham extends from the River Welland to Manor Farm and the edge of Market Harborough for the purposes of this assessment is defined by the field parcel identified as having low landscape capacity to accommodate development and the current extent of land identified in the strategic housing land availability assessment, taking into account the Core Strategy policy to promote development in the North West area of Market Harborough as a Strategic Development Area. The specific boundaries of land allocations in this area remain to be determined and as such all mapping boundaries are purely shown for the purposes of this study at present.

7.2 Assessment

7.2.1 Parcel A

This parcel includes land running from the edge of Lubenham, bound by Harborough Road, the River Welland (District boundary) and the dismantled railway line, to the edge of Market Harborough at the Farndale View development. This is the area where both settlements are currently closest and the separation needs to be maintained.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

7.2.2 Parcel B

This parcel comprises higher ground to the west of Market Harborough. The eastern slopes are visible from the edge of Market Harborough whilst the western/southern slopes are visible from Lubenham. As this landscape feature has such prominence for both settlements, it is important that it is included the Area of Separation.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

7.2.3 Parcel C

This parcel includes land running up to the ridgeline on the edge of Market Harborough and is very prominent from Lubenham looking eastwards. Development here would impact on the separation between the 2 settlements.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

7.2.4 Parcel D

Comprising large open undulating fields and smaller paddocks on the edge of Lubenham, development in this area would impact on the separation between the settlements and should be included in the Area of Separation.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

8 Broughton Astley and Sutton in the Elms Area of Separation

8.1 Background

8.1.2 Sutton in the Elms lies close to the north western edge of Broughton Astley. At its southern extremity Sutton in the Elms is only a few metres from Broughton Way which runs along the edge of the built up area of

Broughton Astley. Broughton Astley is designated a Key Centre in the Core Strategy with a housing requirement of 400 dwellings (2006-2028) of which 283 remain to be planned for as at 31st March 2011.

- 8.1.2 Recognising the possibility of coalescence, the Core Strategy establishes the principle of maintaining the separation between the two settlements in Policy CS1 (Spatial Strategy) and commits to identifying an Area of Separation in Policy CS16 (Broughton Astley).
- 8.1.3 In identifying the possible boundary of an Area of Separation only land considered essential to maintaining separation between the 2 settlements has been included.
- 8.1.4 The edge of Sutton in the Elms extends from Sutton Farm to the Baptist Church and the edge of Broughton Astley extends from Coventry Road to the junction with Leicester Road.

8.2 Assessment

8.2.1 Parcel A

Development of this parcel would impact on separation. Despite the area having an urban fringe feel due to its use as allotments, development here would adversely impact on the character, identity and setting of Sutton in the Elms. Whilst in terms of measurable distance development here would be a similar distance from Sutton in the Elms as the existing built up part of Broughton Astley, it would have more impact as the road would not be a physical barrier.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

8.2.2 Parcel B

Development of this land parcel would impact on separation. Lying adjacent to the southern extent of Sutton in the Elms and Broughton Way, development here would result in the coalescence of the two settlements and impact on the character of Sutton in the Elms. Although subdivided into smaller fields recently, the boundary indicated is a continuation of the allotments' boundary but could be adjusted.

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

8.2.3 Parcel C

Development of these two agricultural grazing paddocks would result in the complete coalescence of Sutton in the Elms and Broughton Astley (only remaining separation would be Broughton Way).

Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

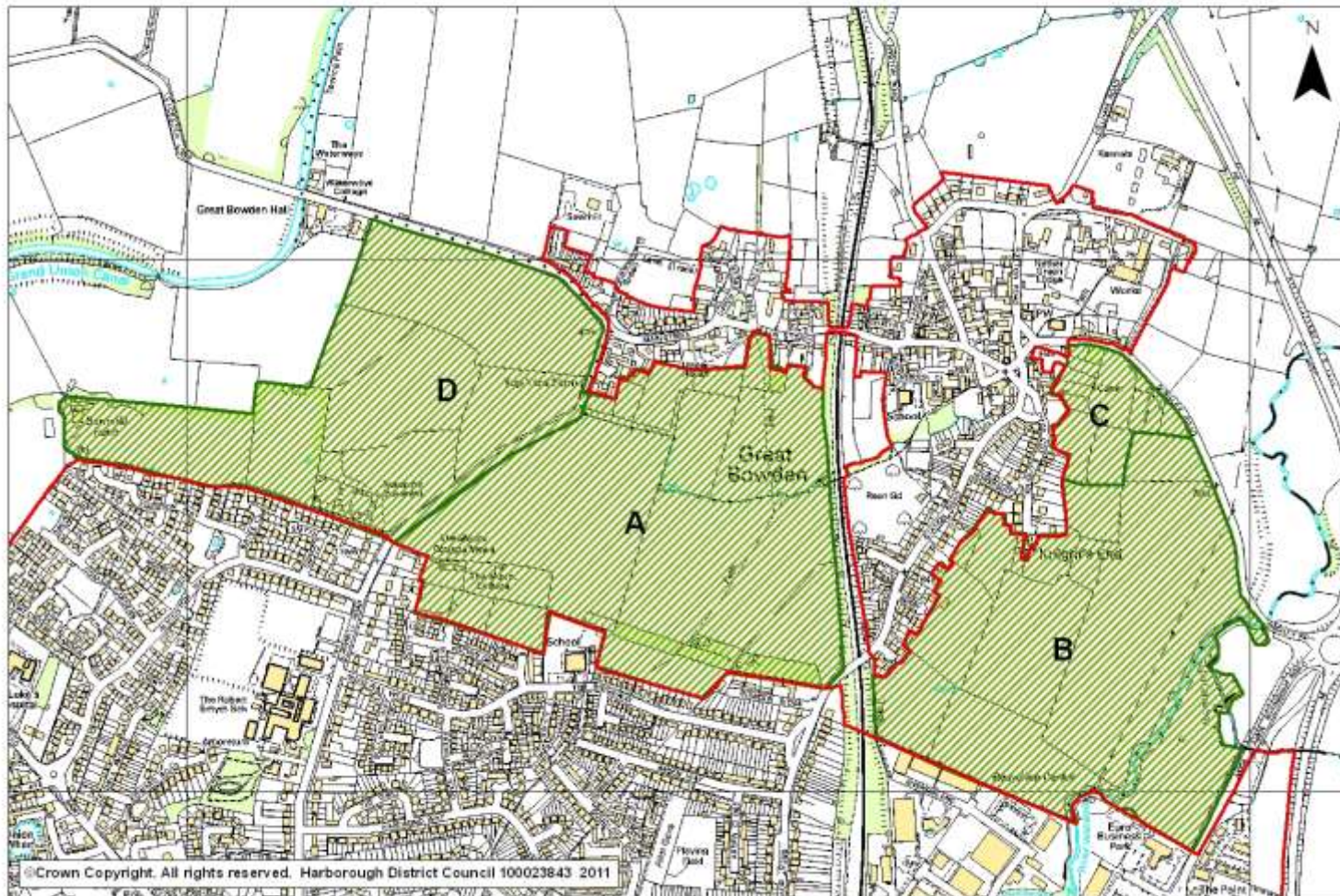
8.2.4 Parcel D

Development in this area would reduce the current degree of separation. The inclusion of this field would protect the separation of the northern end of the village from possible future development.

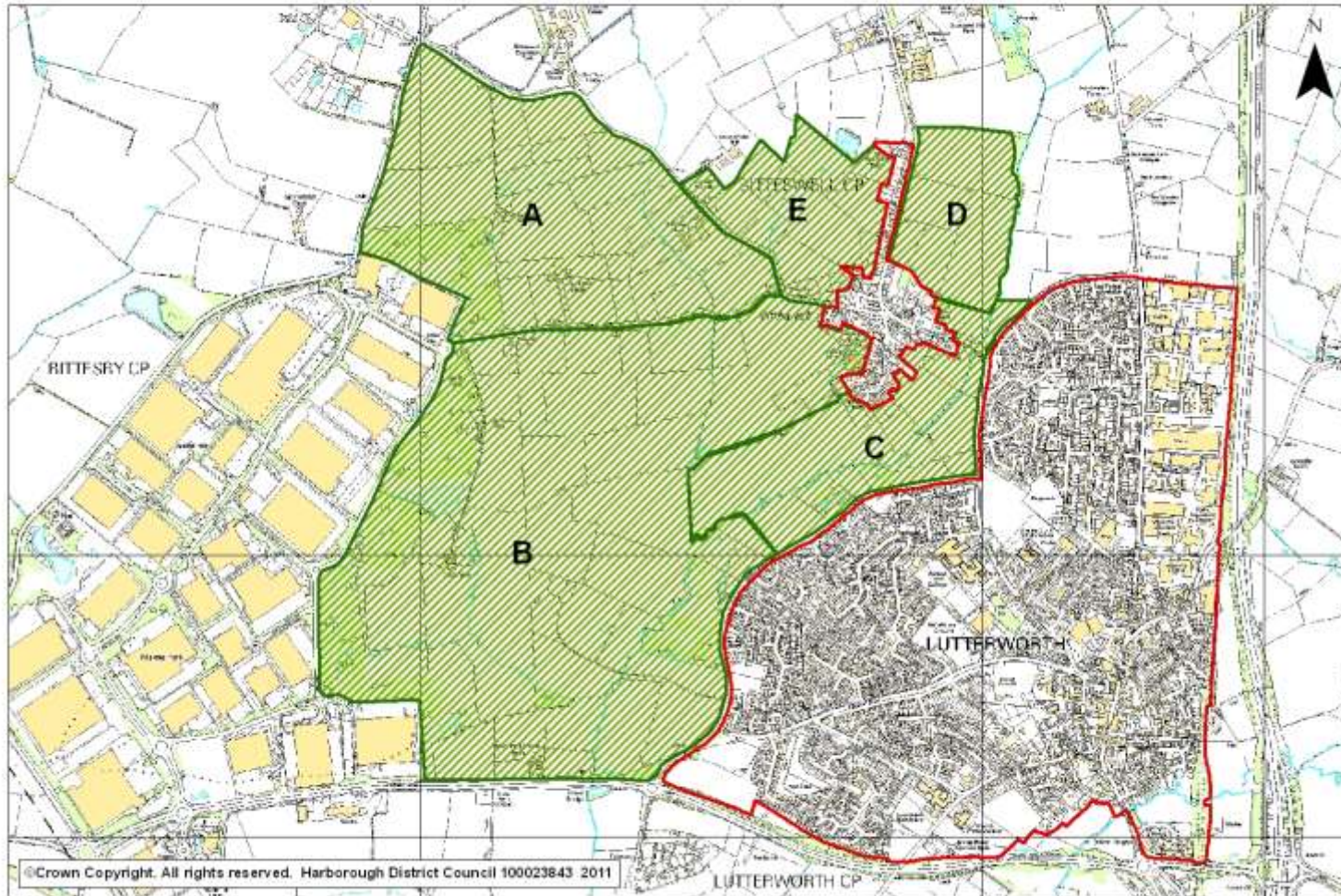
Recommendation: Parcel should be considered for allocation within an Area of Separation.

Appendix 1: Maps of Recommended Boundaries for Areas of Separation

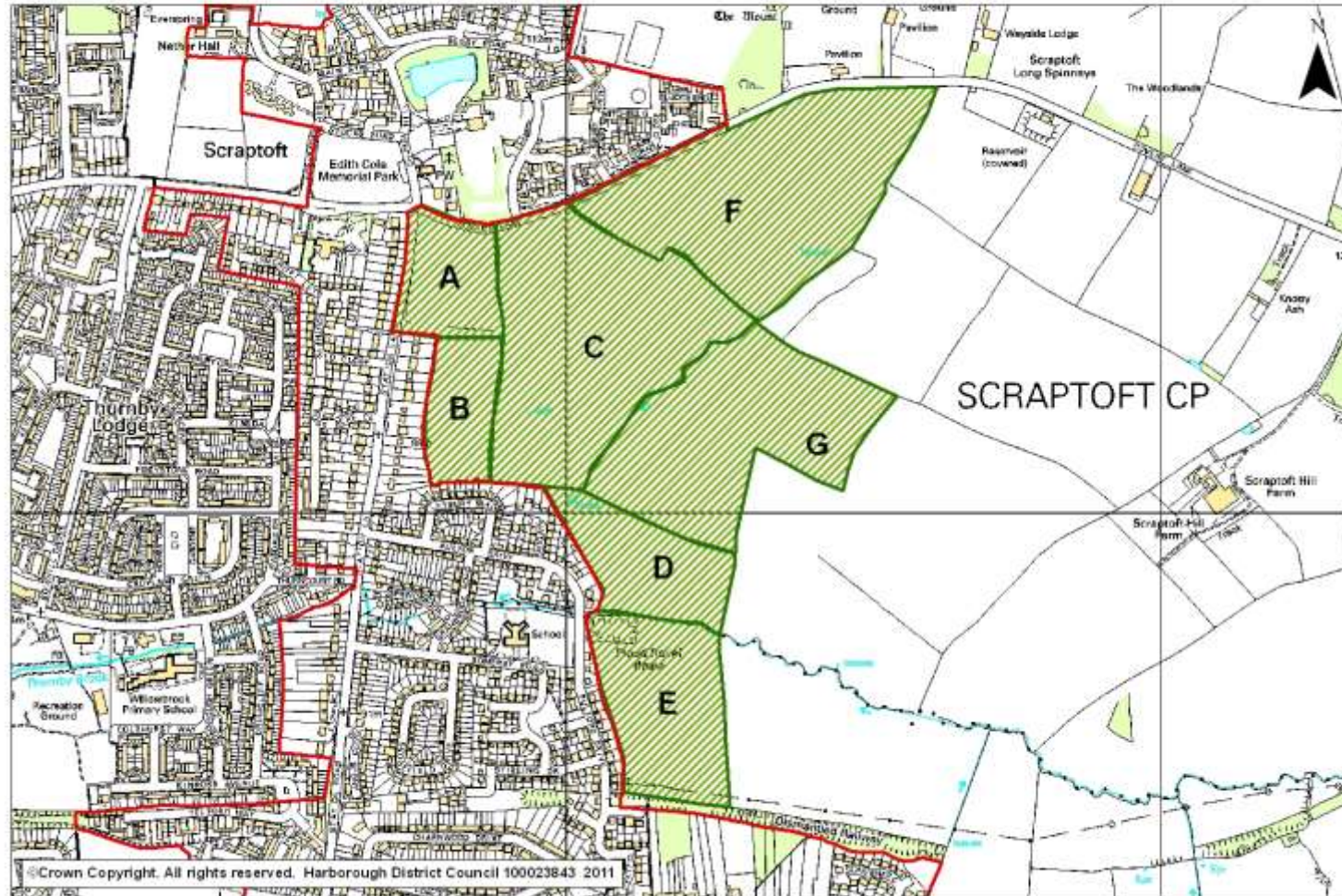
Great Bowden/Market Harborough Proposed Area of Separation



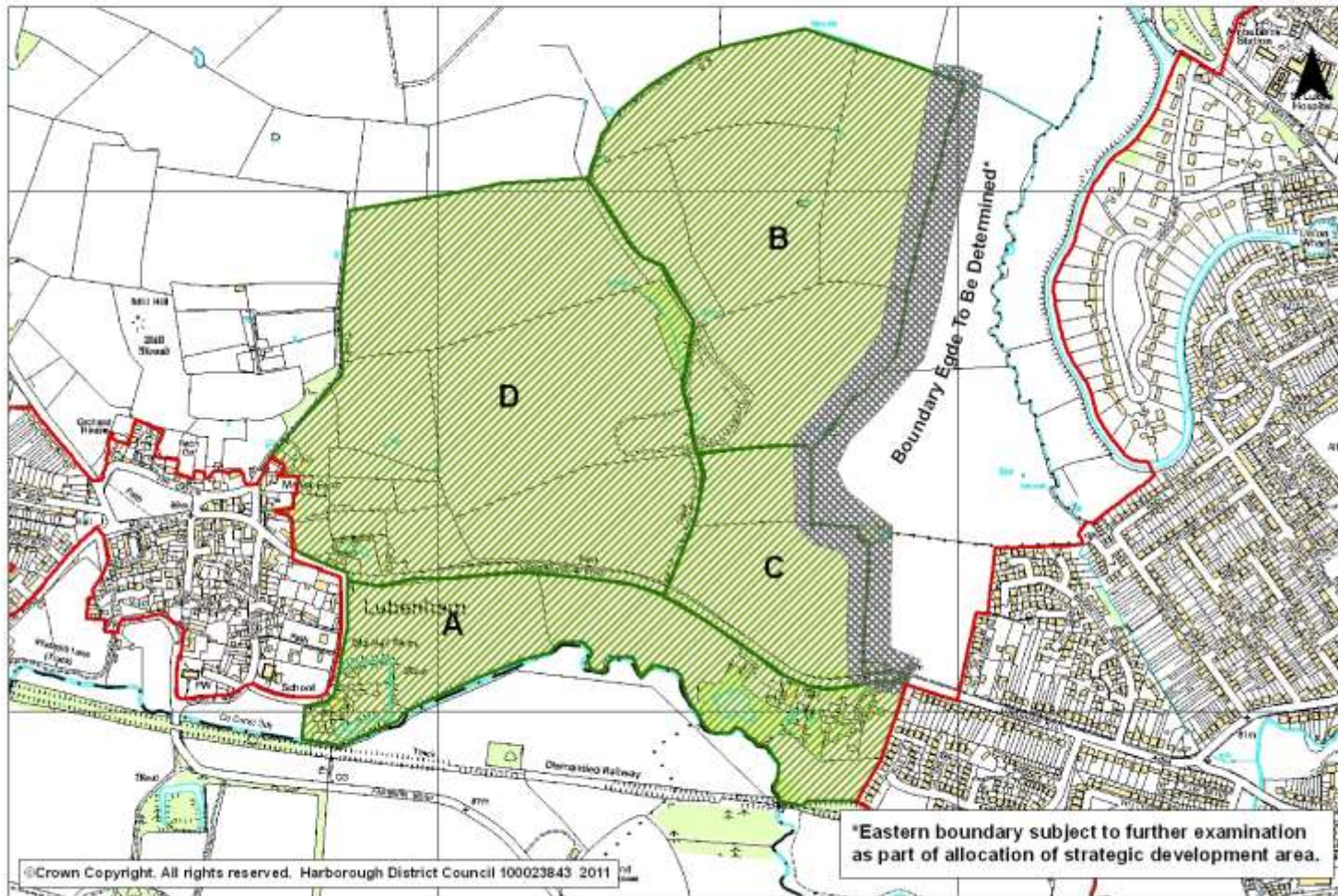
Lutterworth/Bitteswell/Magna Park Proposed Area of Separation



Scraptoft/Thurnby Proposed Area of Separation



Lubenham/Market Harborough Proposed Area of Separation



Broughton Astley/Sutton in the Elms Proposed Area of Separation

