

Countryside Topic Paper

TPC5



Harborough Local Plan

2011-2031

Submission

HARBOROUGH LOCAL PLAN 2011-31

TOPIC PAPER: COUNTRYSIDE

1. PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE

- 1.1 Topic Papers are an important source of information helping to outline and explain how policies in the Proposed Submission version of the Harborough Local Plan (2011-2031) have been prepared. For each topic the papers tell the 'end to end' story of how the policies have evolved, setting out the important milestones along the way.
- 1.2 Preparation of the plan has taken place over several years. The Topic Papers set out, for each topic identified, the approach taken to developing policies and the response to various overlapping factors that have been relevant to the process, such as:
- Updating or refinement of evidence as the plan was being prepared. Decisions at different points in the plan preparation process can only take account of evidence available at that point in time.
 - Changes in planning legislation, regulations and government policy and indications of future changes, such as the Housing White Paper.
 - Development proposals emerging during plan preparation, which may present alternatives not previously considered, and as part of the development management process.
 - Taking account of how evidence and emerging proposals relate to plan-making activities in nearby authorities as part of the Duty to Co-operate.
 - The relationship with infrastructure provision, including the existing position, programme for future work and sources of available and required funding.
- 1.3 The Council has prepared a series of Topic Papers. The Spatial Strategy Topic Paper sets out the context to the plan's preparation as a whole. This is then supplemented by Topic Papers relating to Housing, Business and Employment, Countryside, and Transport. There is also a separate Duty to Co-operate Statement and a Consultation Statement.
- 1.4 The intention is to signpost rather than to duplicate the detailed technical evidence which is already available in the evidence base and not to repeat the Explanation given under each policy in the Local Plan itself. The main aim is to assist the Inspector carrying out the examination into the Local Plan, as well as others taking part in the Examination Hearing. It is assumed that these parties are familiar with the National Planning Framework and the national Planning Practice Guidance, so these are not repeated.
- 1.5 The Topic Papers have a common structure:
- identifying the topic(s) covered and the Local Plan policies concerned (Section 2);
 - describing the main issues addressed in the paper (Section 3);
 - listing of that part of the evidence base especially relevant to the topic(s) (Section 4);
 - addressing the issues in the main body of the report (Section 5); and
 - making concluding remarks (Section 6).

2. THE TOPIC AND POLICIES

- 2.1 This Topic Paper addresses Countryside, which is defined as land outside the built-up (and proposed to be built on) areas of the Leicester Principal Urban Area, Market

Harborough, Lutterworth, Broughton Astley, the Rural Centres and the Selected Rural Villages. It covers the formulation and justification for the following policies:

- SS1 Spatial strategy
- GD3 Development in the countryside
- GD3 New housing in the countryside
- GD6 Areas of Separation
- GD7 Green Wedges

- 2.2 These are the main strategic policies relating to development in the countryside, although other policies are also relevant to development of particular types or on specific sorts of sites within the countryside. These include: H3 Rural Exception Sites, BE1 (2) Provision of new business development (Rural Economic Development), RT4 Tourism and leisure, HC1 Built heritage, HC2 Community facilities, HC3 Public houses, post offices and village shops, GI1 Green infrastructure, GI2 Open space, sport and recreation, GI3 Cemeteries, GI4 Local Green Space, GI5 Biodiversity and geodiversity, CC2 Renewable energy generation, and CC3 Managing flood risk. The evolution of these policies is not covered in this Topic Paper.
- 2.3 The Local Plan also contains site-specific policies for Magna Park (BE2), the Bruntingthorpe Proving Ground (BE4) and Leicester Airport, Stoughton (BE5). These relate to sites within the definition of countryside in paragraph 2.1 (and in Policies GD3 and GD4 plus Green Wedges) but where the site-specific policies over-ride countryside policies.

3. THE MAIN ISSUES

- 3.1 The following key questions are addressed in the Section 5 of this Topic Paper:
- How have the countryside policies evolved and why are Areas of Separation and Green Wedges needed as separate policies?
 - What is the justification for Areas of Separation as distinct from Green Wedges?
 - How have the specific designations changed and why?
 - How do they interact with each other and with neighbourhood plans?

4. KEY EVIDENCE STUDIES

- 4.1 There is a comprehensive evidence base that sits behind the Local Plan. All the documents are listed and are available from the Council's website:
<http://www.harborough.gov.uk/supporting-evidence>
- 4.2 The key evidence documents relevant to this topic are:
- Harborough District Landscape Character Assessment, 2007 (LAN2)
 - Market Harborough Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Capacity Study, 2009 (LAN9)
 - Leicester PUA Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Capacity Study, 2009 (LAN6)
 - Lutterworth and Broughton Astley Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Capacity Study, 2011 (LAN8)
 - Rural Centres Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Capacity Study, 2014 (LAN11)
 - Green Wedge Review, Technical Update 2015 (LAN4)
 - Landscape Sensitivity to Renewable Energy in Harborough District, 2016 (LAN5)
 - Leicester PUA Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Capacity Study Scaptoft Addendum, 2016 (LAN7)

- Preliminary Landscape Assessment of Alternative Strategic Development Areas, September 2016 (LAN10)
- Houghton on the Hill Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Capacity Study, 2016 (LAN3)
- Area of Separation Review, 2017 (LAN1)
- Leicester/Scraptoft/Bushby Green Wedge: Background report, 2018 (LAN12)

5. EVOLUTION OF COUNTRYSIDE POLICIES

Background

- 5.1 The Core Strategy (2011) was adopted before the introduction of the NPPF and the Council decided in December 2012 that it needed to be replaced with an updated, NPPF compliant new local plan incorporating strategic allocations. In relation to countryside policy it was recognised that the NPPF emphasis on supporting a prosperous rural economy and the approach to new housing in the countryside needed to be taken into account. Similarly, although national policy does not recognise Areas of Separation or Green Wedges as protective designations, the NPPF's core planning principles are that planning should take account of the different roles and character of different areas and recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. Local Plans are encourage to protect and enhance valued local landscapes, contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, promote healthy lifestyles, and identify where development would be inappropriate. In combination Area of Separation and Green Wedge designations seek to achieve these aims.
- 5.2 The Core Strategy set out an approach that strictly controlled development in the countryside (defined as outside urban areas, Rural Centres and Selected Rural Villages). Only development required for the purposes of agriculture, woodland management, sport and recreation, local food initiatives, supporting visits to the District and renewable energy production was considered appropriate in the countryside.
- 5.3 The Core Strategy also supported in principle the Leicester/Scraptoft Green Wedge and Thurnby/Leicester/Oadby Green Wedge designations around the Leicester principal urban area, recognising their role in preventing settlements merging, guiding development form, and providing access from urban areas into green spaces/countryside and to recreational opportunities.
- 5.4 Green Wedges, a longstanding feature of cross boundary planning policy around the Leicester principal urban area, were defined in retained Local Plan 2001 policy. The Core Strategy acknowledged, however, that a detailed review of their boundaries would be needed going forward in conjunction with defining allocations. In order to ensure that Green Wedges retained their open and undeveloped character, the approach to development was more restrictive than for the countryside in general. The Scraptoft Neighbourhood Plan (2016) defined amended boundaries for the Leicester/Scraptoft Green Wedge.
- 5.5 The principle of safeguarding the individual character of settlements at risk of merging was also recognised in the Core Strategy. Maintaining separation was identified as a particular issue between:
- Scraptoft and Thurnby;
 - Great Bowden and Market Harborough;
 - Lubenham and Market Harborough;
 - Bitteswell, Lutterworth and Magna Park; and
 - Sutton in the Elms and Broughton Astley.

- 5.6 Although Separation Areas were defined for some of these locations in the 2001 Local Plan, the Core Strategy recognised the need to review current boundaries and define new Areas of Separation going forward as part of identifying allocations. The retained policy aimed to restrict development which would impact on the predominantly open character of the land or result in a reduction in the open land separating the settlements concerned. Since 2014 Neighbourhood Plans have been defining Area of Separation boundaries where appropriate, including between Lubenham and Market Harborough, Sutton in the Elms and Broughton Astley, and Scraftoft and Thurnby.

Scoping Consultation

- 5.7 Consultation on the new Local Plan Scoping Report (PRE1) took place in March-April 2013. Alongside the proposed identification of strategic allocations for residential, employment, retail and other land uses, it explained that the Local Plan would identify the boundaries of strategic green space including Green Wedges and Areas of Separation. It also outlined that policy relating to the countryside needed to be less restrictive and more flexible to ensure compliance with the NPPF in supporting sustainable growth and expansion of rural businesses, diversification, rural tourism/leisure and local services/facilities, whilst recognising that the balance between supporting rural prosperity and unfettered development in rural areas was a sensitive local issue. Responses to the consultation demonstrated broad agreement with the proposed approach to updating rural economy policy and the definition of Green Wedges and Areas of Separation.
- 5.8 The Local Plan scoping exercise also highlighted the requirement for a number of evidence studies. During 2013, 2014 and 2015 the Local Plan Advisory Panel considered a number of reports including evidence relating to the approach to limits of development, Local Green Space designations, employment land need and availability, Areas of Separation/Green Wedges, Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, duty to cooperate, scoping for the Sustainability Appraisal and settlement profiles/hierarchy.

Options Consultation

- 5.9 After a period of evidence gathering, the run up to the Local Plan Options Consultation saw alternative policy approaches identified for the new Local Plan. These included alternatives for:
- Housing in the countryside:
 - Option C1: Strictly controlling development in the countryside: Strictly control housing development in settlements below Selected Rural Village level in the settlement hierarchy.
 - Option C2: Limited infill and development management led: Allow limited infill development and conversion of existing buildings to residential use in villages below Selected Rural Village level in the settlement hierarchy which have at least one key service or a village hall together with at least 50 households.
 - Option C3: Meeting locally identified need (in conjunction with C1 or C2): Allow for provision of housing in smaller settlements below Selected Rural Village level where it helps to meet need which has been identified locally through community involvement (i.e. neighbourhood plan or rural needs housing survey).
 - Preventing the coalescence of settlements:
 - Option G1: Define Areas of Separation where the potential risk of settlement merging is at its greatest and within these areas planning

proposals would be assessed on whether they would result in an unacceptable reduction in the physical and visual separation of settlements.

- Option G2: Include a specific criterion in the general settlement development policy to ensure that development on a particular site does not lead to settlement merging or does not undermine the physical and visual separation settlement. Areas of separation would not be defined under this option.
- 5.10 The Options Paper (PRE2) acknowledged that the definition of areas for protection such as Green Wedges (no options were consulted on) and Areas of Separation would only be possible alongside the emerging development strategy for the District as development proposals could impact on their future function and/or boundaries.
- 5.11 Consultation on the Local Plan Options paper took place during September/October 2015. Analysis of the responses relating to 'Housing in the countryside' found that there was a reasonable level of support for Option C1, with that support coming from local residents and parish councils. Developers/agents raised objections to this approach as not being NPPF compliant. There was a good level of support for Option C3 (allowing for housing to meet evidenced local needs) with support split more or less equally between Option 3C (with C1) and Options 3C (with C2).
- 5.12 Analysis of the responses to the 'Preventing the coalescence of settlements' options saw a relatively high level of support for Option G1 and the continued definition of Areas of Separation and accompanying policy. It was felt that the alternative approach would dilute the protection in areas at risk of merging. There was also a call for new or extended Areas of Separation in some areas, particularly in relation to the potential expansion of strategic distribution provision in the vicinity of Magna Park.

Emerging spatial strategy and Local Plan Proposed Submission consultation

General approach to development in the countryside

- 5.13 The need to update Core Strategy policies in order to reflect the NPPF's priority of supporting a prosperous rural economy was recognised early in the Local Plan preparation process and reflected in the Local Plan Scoping consultation. There was also a realisation that this needed to be balanced with the delivery of development in sustainable locations. The spatial strategy within the Core Strategy sought to redress previous trends which had resulted in a relatively large proportion of housing development taking place in rural villages. It recognised that such a pattern of development was not sustainable in the long term. The Proposed Submission Local Plan spatial strategy (Policy SS1) also aims to strictly control development in the countryside.
- 5.14 The settlement hierarchy establishes which settlements are best placed to benefit from further development and meet development needs. These are defined as Market Harborough, Key Centres, the Principal Urban Area, Rural Centres and Selected Rural Villages. Countryside policies apply beyond the land adjoining these settlements but do not apply to Green Wedges (where the policy is more restrictive). Whilst there is an overall policy relating to 'Development in the countryside' (GD3) in the Proposed Submission Local Plan, there is also a specific policy for 'New housing in the countryside' providing clarity as to what will be permitted in settlements below Selected Rural Village level and in open countryside. The following countryside policies formed part of the Proposed Submission consultation (September-November 2017).

Policy GD3: Development in the countryside

- 5.15 Policy GD3 has been drafted to take into account the NPPF's objective of supporting a prosperous rural economy. It allows for development that supports the diversification of the rural economy. It recognises that certain types of development can only take place in rural locations such as renewable energy production and minerals and waste. Also allowed is the conversion and re-use of permanent and substantial buildings, including proposals for the optimum viable use of a heritage asset, as set out in the NPPF. Whilst the policy outlines specific permissible uses in the policy, it allows for other uses which justify and are compatible with a countryside location. This will allow for flexibility and innovation within the countryside thus supporting appropriate economic growth in rural areas. The policy allows for rural housing in accordance with Policy GD4 which is summarised below.
- 5.16 Consultation on the Proposed Submission Local Plan highlighted that Policy GD3 as drafted does not take into account Policy BE2.2 (additional development of up to 700,000sq.m. strategic storage and distribution adjoining Magna Park), the delivery of which requires development in the countryside. As a result an additional criterion under GD3 is identified as a proposed modification to the Proposed Submission Local Plan. This will allow for 'the delivery of strategic distribution development in accordance with BE2.2'.

Policy GD4: New housing in the countryside

- 5.17 With the emerging spatial strategy concentrating rural development at Rural Centres and, to a lesser extent, Selected Rural Villages there is a need to set out the approach to new housing development in settlements below Selected Rural Village level and in the countryside.
- 5.18 There was a good level of support at the options consultation stage for allowing for the provision of housing where it helps to meet local need which has been identified through either a neighbourhood plan or a Rural Housing Needs Survey. This approach has been adopted in Policy GD4 which allows for new housing on small sites of up to 4 dwellings to meet an evidenced local need. Such sites need to be within or physically and visually well-connected to the settlement concerned. This will ensure that all settlements are given the opportunity to deliver sustainable development that caters for specific, identified local needs. The policy limits such sites to 4 dwellings in order to ensure that the strategy based on Rural Centres and Selected Rural Villages is not undermined. A proposal for up to 4 dwellings allows for the development of two pairs of semi-detached dwellings or a small terrace. Without this limit or reference to only 'small sites', the policy would not give enough guidance and potentially encourage unsuitable schemes.
- 5.19 The remainder of Policy GD4 reflects the NPPF by allowing for:
- Housing to meet the needs of a rural worker: the criteria for assessing that such a need is essential reflect guidance that was previously set out in national planning policy (Annexe I to the former Planning Policy Guidance 7: Countryside). This remains a useful and generally accepted basis against which to judge the need and justification for agricultural workers' dwellings; and
 - Isolated dwellings of innovative and/or exceptional quality.
- 5.20 The policy also sets out that the rebuilding or replacement of existing dwellings will be permitted providing there are no adverse impacts on the character and appearance of the area, the existing footprint is used and there is no net increase in housing numbers.

Areas of Separation

- 5.21 Although an Area of Separation Study had been prepared in 2011¹, following the Options consultation which supported the continued identification of Areas of Separation, it became apparent that further more robust evidence was needed taking into account:
- Separation area policies coming forward in Neighbourhood Plans within the District;
 - The outcome of planning decisions/appeals affecting Areas of Separation;
 - Specific development pressures; and
 - National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance context.
- 5.22 Several separation area policies have come forward in 'made' neighbourhood plans to date aiming to prevent coalescence between:
- Broughton Astley/Sutton in the Elms (Broughton Astley Neighbourhood Plan 2014);
 - Scraftoft/Thurnby & Bushby (Scraftoft Neighbourhood Plan 2016);
 - Lubenham/Market Harborough (Lubenham Neighbourhood Plan 2017); and
 - Foxton/Foxton Locks and Foxton/Potential encroachment of Market Harborough (Foxton Neighbourhood Plan 2017);
 - Kibworth Beauchamp/Smeeton Westerby (The Kibworth Villages' Neighbourhood Development Plan 2017)
- 5.23 In order to provide evidence to support the identification of boundaries, the Area of Separation Review (LAN1) was commissioned. The Review, completed in 2017, focused on the following areas where development pressures are particularly high, high levels of growth were under consideration and potential separation areas involved crossing parish boundaries:
- Market Harborough and Great Bowden; and
 - Lutterworth, Bitteswell and Magna Park.
- 5.24 A bespoke methodology was developed for assessing the study areas as follows:
- Stage A: Overview of the Area of Separation study area including:
 - Landscape character context
 - Topographical patterns
 - Main vegetation blocks
 - Landscape change
 - Location of existing built up areas and settlement edge
 - Character of settlement/development edge
 - Distance between settlements
 - Character of undeveloped land between settlements
 - Key views into and from study area.
 - Stage B: Sub-dividing study areas into a manageable number of smaller 'land units' of common landscape character and an assessment of each in terms of its
 - Physical criteria (topography, vegetation, land use);
 - Perceptual criteria (public visibility, private views, contribution to character and setting of settlements, landscape linkage); and
 - Value criteria (designations, scenic quality, recreational value).
- 5.25 Finally, an overall assessment was made for each land unit relating to its overall contribution to the separation of the specific settlements involved and its importance in preventing coalescence. This is indicated as the land unit providing either a 'Primary', 'Supporting' or 'Incidental' contribution. The overall findings relating to the

¹ Archived study, available at:

http://www.harborough.gov.uk/directory_record/458/areas_of_separation_review

two study areas are set out at Appendix A. These findings, along with the emerging spatial strategy focusing on Strategic Development Areas to the East of Lutterworth and Scraftoft North (detailed in the Spatial Strategy Topic Paper) and settlement housing targets for sustainable settlements formed the basis for the definition of the two Areas of Separation in the Proposed Submission Local Plan.

- 5.26 Comments made through the Options Consultation suggested that extended or new Areas of Separation should be defined in light of the potential growth of strategic distribution in the vicinity of Magna Park in line with Policy BE2. This is not an approach that was taken forward in the Proposed Submission Local Plan as the policy does not allocate land for strategic distribution. Furthermore it is considered that Policy GD5 is sufficiently robust to safeguard the local landscape, including the landscape setting of settlements and settlement distinctiveness.

Overall aims of Policy GD6 Areas of Separation

- 5.27 Whilst the overall aim of Policy GD6 is the prevention of coalescence, whether between neighbouring settlements or between settlements and nearby employment areas in the 2 locations outlined below, the policy allows for development which, either alone or in conjunction with other existing or proposed development, would not compromise the effectiveness of the Area of Separation in protecting the identity and distinctiveness of the settlements. Applicants putting forward proposals in these areas will need to show that they have considered the potential effects on separation and suggest mitigation to minimise the impact on separation.
- 5.28 As mentioned earlier, preventing the merging of settlements is also being picked up as an issue in some neighbourhood plans. However, in order to ensure that the prevention of merging of settlements is considered more generally, one of the criteria within Policy GD2: Settlement development is to ensure that development 'does not harmfully diminish the physical and/or visual separation of neighbouring settlements'.
- 5.29 No changes to Areas of Separation policy or boundaries are proposed as a result of the Proposed Submission Local Plan consultation.

Proposed Great Bowden and Market Harborough Area of Separation (GD6)

- 5.30 The proposed boundary of the Area of Separation between Great Bowden and Market Harborough, as set out in the Proposed Submission Local Plan, reflects the findings of the Review. The current Separation Area (as defined in the Local Plan 2001) is extended westwards to incorporate the steeply sloping land up to the ridgeline which adds to the character and identity of Great Bowden and beyond which Market Harborough, incorporating the proposed MH3 (Burnmill Farm) allocation, is contained. Elsewhere the boundary has been adjusted to exclude land that has been developed or which has planning permission (Land off Berry Close, Great Bowden). The land unit to the east of Ridgeway Primary School, on the northern edge of Market Harborough, found to have an incidental role in preventing coalescence, is excluded from the proposed Area of Separation. Great Bowden has a high number of outstanding housing commitments and therefore does not have a minimum housing target in the Local Plan. As a result the proposed boundary will not impact on the settlement's ability to deliver its minimum housing target and will ensure that its character and identity is protected from a growing Market Harborough.

Proposed Bitteswell, Lutterworth and Magna Park Area of Separation (GD6)

- 5.31 The proposed boundary of the Bitteswell, Lutterworth and Magna Park Area of Separation, as set out in the Proposed Submission Local Plan, reflects the findings of

the Review for the most part. The current Separation Area (as defined in the Local Plan 2001) is extended to the north east of Bitteswell in recognition that Lutterworth has expanded northwards over recent years in line with Core Strategy policy. Whilst the Review recommends the inclusion of the whole of land unit 7 within the Area of Separation, in view of Bitteswell's housing target of 30 dwellings, the single small field forming the south-western part of the land unit next to Ashby Lane has been excluded. The Review considered it to be 'relatively less important in providing this separation [between Bitteswell and Lutterworth]' (LAN1, para. 4.34b). This will ensure that Bitteswell, a Selected Rural Village, is not unduly constrained by the Area of Separation. Elsewhere the Area of Separation boundary has been defined so as to exclude the commitment (allowed on appeal during the Review) for 160 dwellings on Land at Coventry Road to the south east.

- 5.32 The Local Plan's spatial strategy sees housing growth in the Lutterworth area focused within the East of Lutterworth Strategic Development Area. Therefore housing development will not be constrained by the proposed Area of Separation. However, policy BE2 relating to strategic storage and distribution allows for additional development up to 700,000sq.m. where it would form an extension of, or be on a site adjoining, Magna Park. The Area of Separation will ensure that separation is maintained between Lutterworth and Bitteswell and the existing Magna Park and prevent additional strategic distribution development where it would impact on the identity and character of the two settlements. The designation will not impact on the delivery of development in accordance with the spatial strategy.

Green Wedges

- 5.33 Whilst a Green Wedge Review was originally published in 2011², a Green Wedge Review: Technical Update (LAN4) was carried out in 2015 and published as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan and to accompany the Local Plan Options Consultation. This review put forward relatively minor amendments to the boundaries of the District's Green Wedges (Leicester/Scraptoft Green Wedge and Thurnby/Leicester/Oadby Green Wedge) at that stage but recognised that the finalisation of Green Wedge boundaries could not take place in isolation of the new Local Plan spatial strategy as follows:

"Depending on the scale of development to be accommodated in the Leicester urban fringe settlements, the identification of potential strategic allocations to meet development needs to 2031 could mean that some adjustment of Green Wedge boundaries as currently defined, or as set out in this Review, may become necessary." (LAN4, para 3.6.4)

"The new Local Plan will set out the strategy for meeting the District's development needs to 2031. A number of options will be considered as part of the preparation process relating to the distribution, scale and location of future development. Any impacts arising from the provisions of the new Local Plan for the District on the Green Wedge designations set out in this strategy will be assessed as part of the ongoing preparation of the new Local Plan." (LAN4, paras 5.2 and 6.2).

- 5.34 An amended Leicester/Scraptoft Green Wedge designation formed part of the Scraptoft Neighbourhood Plan (Policy S6) which was 'made' in March 2016 (see Appendix C). The designation included the golf course, the Local Nature Reserve

² Archived study available at:

http://www.harborough.gov.uk/directory_record/466/green_wedge_review

and land to the east of Scraftoft village. It made relatively minor changes to the boundary and was informed by the review document.

- 5.35 Following the Options consultation, analysis of the options and further evidence gathering took place with a view to developing a spatial strategy on which to base the Local Plan. As part of this process, the full details of which are detailed in the Spatial Strategy Topic Paper, an option relating to a Scraftoft North Strategic Development Area (SDA) emerged. This proposed a development of 1200 dwellings on land to the north and west of Scraftoft village, incorporating the Scraftoft Golf Club, all of which formed part of the designated Green Wedge between Scraftoft and Leicester City. This proposal became one of four Selected Options.
- 5.36 The Selected Options assessment process is described in the Spatial Strategy Topic paper. This led to the identification of the Scraftoft North SDA as part of the strategy for meeting Harborough District's housing requirements, together with provision for unmet needs likely to arise from Leicester City and further flexibility to allow for future circumstances affecting the supply of housing.
- 5.37 The potential loss of a large part of the designated Leicester/Scraftoft Green Wedge was taken into account in the Sustainability Appraisal assessment of effects on built and natural heritage. Moderate negative effects were predicted for Scraftoft in this category. However, overall the benefits and advantages of a strategic development on Green Wedge land to the north of Scraftoft and adjacent to the City were considered to outweigh the loss of this part of the designation.
- 5.38 In identifying Scraftoft North SDA as part of the spatial strategy, it was recognised that identifying a new Green Wedge boundary, incorporating the open land to the west of Scraftoft village and extending into the Area of Separation between Scraftoft and Bushby, would be an important part of any strategy for Scraftoft, Thurnby and Bushby and would benefit local residents including those within Leicester City. As a result the Proposed Submission Local Plan proposes a new Leicester/Scraftoft/Bushby Green Wedge.

The overall aims of Policy GD7 Green Wedges

- 5.39 Policy GD7 designates the two Green Wedges as set out below and clarifies the role of Green Wedges as:
- preventing the merging of settlements;
 - guiding development form;
 - providing access from urban areas into green spaces/open countryside; and
 - providing recreational opportunities.
- 5.40 Within the context of retaining the open and undeveloped character of Green Wedges, the policy sets out what development will be permissible. These are uses which complement and promote the functions of Green Wedges. In light of their overall purpose, policy relating to Green Wedges is more restrictive than the countryside policies (GD3: Development in the countryside and GD4: New Housing in the Countryside) and these policies do not apply to Green Wedges.

Proposed Leicester/Scraftoft/Bushby Green Wedge (GD7)

- 5.41 Justification for the boundaries of the proposed Green Wedge is set out in the Proposed Leicester/Scraftoft/Bushby Green Wedge: Background report, 2018 (LAN12). Whilst the proposed boundary sees the land to the north of Scraftoft excluded from the Green Wedge in accordance with the spatial strategy, the land to the west and south of the of Scraftoft village, which has a strong role in maintaining

its separation from Leicester City and development to the south, is maintained as Green Wedge (see area A on map at Appendix B). As part of the Scraftoft North SDA development, its openness will be retained and its recreational role strengthened through the provision of public open space in this area. This could take the form of sports pitches providing there are no adverse impacts on the function of the Green Wedge. In this way public access to the Green Wedge area will be improved, benefitting residents of both Leicester City and Harborough.

- 5.42 Currently an Area of Separation is defined to the south of Scraftoft village with the single aim of preventing its merging with more recent development to the south (see map at Appendix C). The Proposed Submission Local Plan proposes the replacement of this designation with an extended Green Wedge which incorporates the majority of the current Area of Separation and extends it to incorporate Thurnby Brook valley. The addition of Bushby to the name of the Green Wedge is in recognition of the role it will play in serving the residents of Bushby and guiding future development of the settlement.
- 5.43 The proposed Leicester/Scraftoft/Bushby Green Wedge (shown on the map at Appendix B) fulfils the functions of a Green Wedges as follows:
- Preventing the merging of settlements: The Green Wedge prevents the merging of Scraftoft village with Leicester City to the west and with development adjoining Bushby to the south, including a number of sites with planning permission north and south of Thurnby Brook (shown on Policies Map). These residential sites will extend the built up area of Thurnby & Bushby northwards on valley slopes and eastwards along the A47. The proposed extension will take the Green Wedge beyond existing and planned development but will ensure that the Green Wedge has longevity as further potential development is contemplated in future Local Plan reviews. The Green Wedge does not incorporate the whole of the existing Area of Separation (shown at Appendix C). The large arable field to the south of Covert Lane has been excluded as it is assessed as not vital to the protection of the Scraftoft village's character and extends well beyond the existing built form of Scraftoft. Travelling eastwards along Covert Lane the development is increasingly modern in character. Furthermore it does not have any public access. The tall hedge separating the proposed Green Wedge from this field provides a strong boundary.
 - Guiding development form: The proposed Green Wedge boundary has not been drawn to prevent further development in the area (should it become necessary in future Local Plan reviews). Rather it ensures that, as potential further development takes place and the urban area extends eastwards, the Thurnby Brook valley slopes remain a strategic green area and undeveloped, thus guiding development form. The southern boundary of the proposed Green Wedge is formed by the northern boundary of land with planning permission (extending Bushby northwards and eastwards) and the dismantled railway line. The Green Wedge will ensure the remaining valley and upper slopes are retained.
 - Providing access from urban areas into green spaces/open countryside: The proposed Green Wedge incorporates a network of public rights of way (ROW). The proposed extension (Area B, Appendix B) is particularly well served with one ROW following its entire northern edge, giving views of the Thurnby Brook valley. Three other ROWs cross the Green Wedge north-south. These ROW extend beyond the Green Wedge to give access to the wider countryside. The southern boundary of the Green Wedge is formed by the dismantled railway line, a wildlife corridor with the potential for improved public access. Policy GI1 (Green infrastructure networks) recognises and

safeguards dismantled railway lines as strategic green infrastructure. The north eastern tip of Green Wedge adjoins an area of broadleaf woodland leading to a designated Local Wildlife Site (Four Acres – mesotrophic grassland) and 2 candidate Local Wildlife Sites (Scraptoft Gorse and Square Spinney – woodland). These Local Wildlife Sites abut Covert Lane leading back to Scraptoft village. Area A is less well served with only one formal RoW which appears to be inaccessible. The opportunity exists to improve public access as part of the SDA development.

- Providing recreational opportunities: Area A of the proposed Green Wedge includes the Edith Cole Memorial Park, an open space, sport and recreation site, designated as a Local Green Space in the Scraptoft Neighbourhood Plan. As part of the Scraptoft North SDA proposal it is envisaged that this Area A will retain its open character and be the focus of recreational uses. The Green Wedge extension will be the focus of less formal recreation, safeguarding the Thurnby Brook valley setting of ROWs and encouraging walking with its health benefits for existing and future residents.

5.44 Overall it is considered that the proposed Leicester/Scraptoft/Bushby Green Wedge meets the four functions of such a designation and that the boundary is justified and effective.

Proposed Thurnby/Leicester/Oadby Green Wedge (GD7)

5.45 The Thurnby/Leicester/Oadby Green Wedge adjoins similar designations in the Leicester City and Oadby & Wigston Borough. Only minor changes to its boundary are proposed in the Local Plan. These proposed changes are set out in the Green Wedge Review: Draft Technical Update 2015 and are as follows:

- The removal of the eastern half of the Coles Nursery site north of Uppingham Road which is occupied by nursery buildings and ancillary development;
- The removal of the residential properties along Uppingham Road as this land is developed in character;
- Extending the north eastern boundary of the Green Wedge, south of Thurnby, up to the field boundary to provide a defensible boundary; and
- The removal of the properties along Stoughton Lane due to the developed character.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

6.1 Within the context of the spatial strategy (Policy SS1), the approach to development in the countryside supports sustainable economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity whilst at the same time respecting the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside in line with the NPPF. Policy GD3 (Development in the countryside) defines the types of development which are acceptable in the countryside, in appropriate circumstances, to support a thriving rural economy, whilst Policy GD4 (Housing in the countryside) recognises that all settlements can play a part in delivering sustainable development by allowing for the delivery of small-scale housing of a type which meets evidenced local needs.

6.2 The NPPF's core planning principles are that planning should take account of the different roles and character of different areas with reference to their relative environmental value, should deliver conservation of the natural landscape and should identify where development would be inappropriate. Area of Separation (Policy GD6) and Green Wedge (Policy GD7) designations seek to achieve these aims. Areas of

Separation focus on the prevention of merging while Green Wedges have a wider remit (para. 5.40).

- 6.3 Based on the findings of the Area of Separation Review (2017), two Areas of Separation are proposed within Policy GD6 aimed at protecting the identity and distinctiveness of settlements where potential coalescence is a particular issue.
- 6.4 Policy GD7 proposes the designation of two Green Wedges to serve the residents of the Leicester Principal Urban Area both within Harborough District and in adjoining local authority areas. These proposed Green Wedges take into account the spatial strategy and the need to provide for the development needs of the District and potential unmet need from Leicester City. They will not only guide development form and prevent coalescence but will provide the opportunity for recreation and access to the countryside. Their boundaries have been drawn taking into account available evidence from a range of sources including site visits.
- 6.5 This suite of countryside policies has evolved alongside the emergence of the plan's spatial strategy and has been informed by formal consultation. Taken together they allow for sustainable development within rural areas whilst identifying areas where development would be inappropriate due to the sensitive relationship with adjoining built up areas.

Appendices:

Appendix A: Area of Separation Review findings

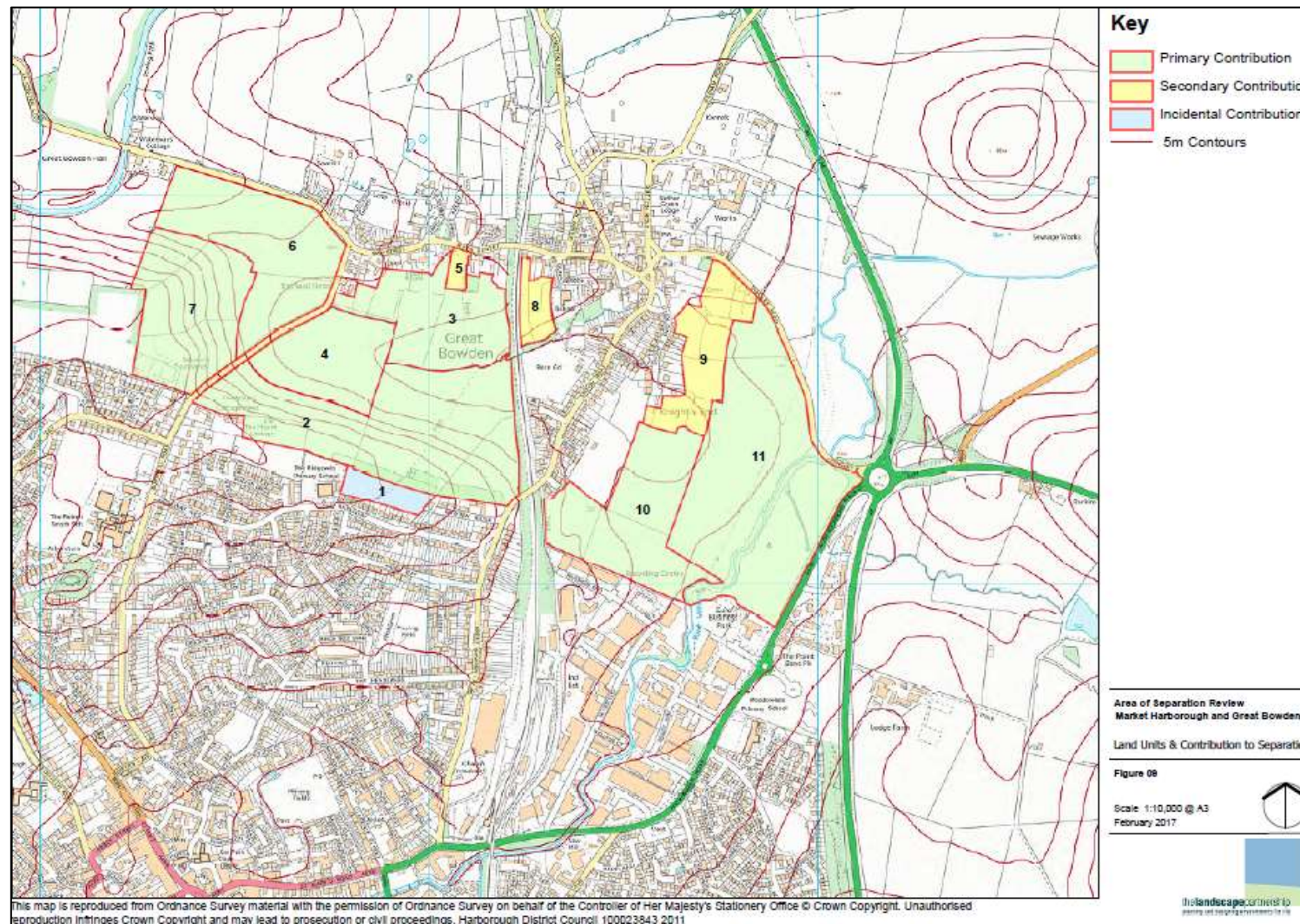
- Market Harborough and Great Bowden
- Lutterworth, Bitteswell and Magna Park

Appendix B: Proposed Leicester/Scraptoft/Bushby Green Wedge sub-areas A and B

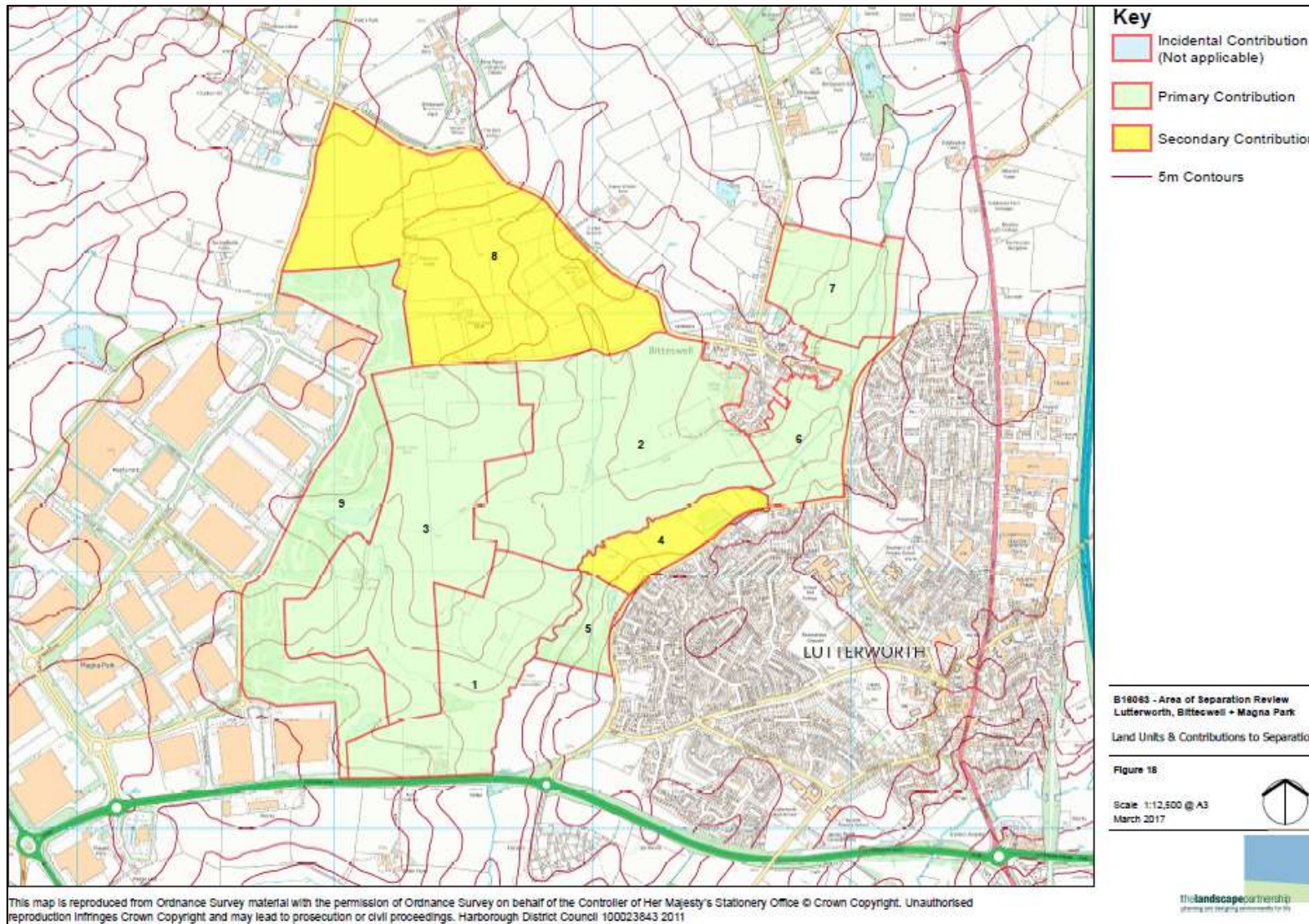
Appendix C: Area of Separation as defined in Scraptoft Neighbourhood Plan (2016)

APPENDIX A: Area of Separation Review (2017) findings

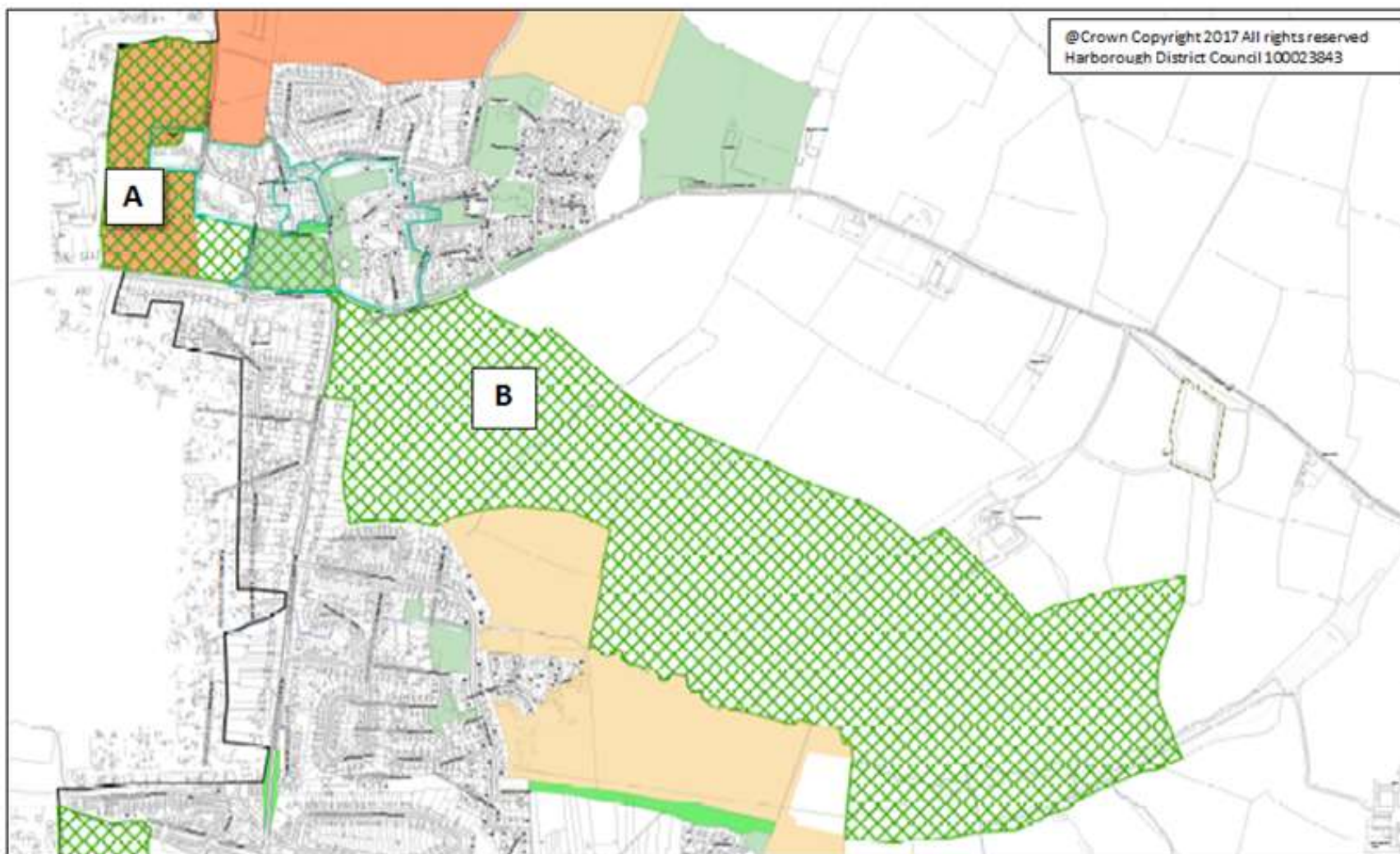
Market Harborough and Great Bowden



Lutterworth, Bitteswell and Magna Park

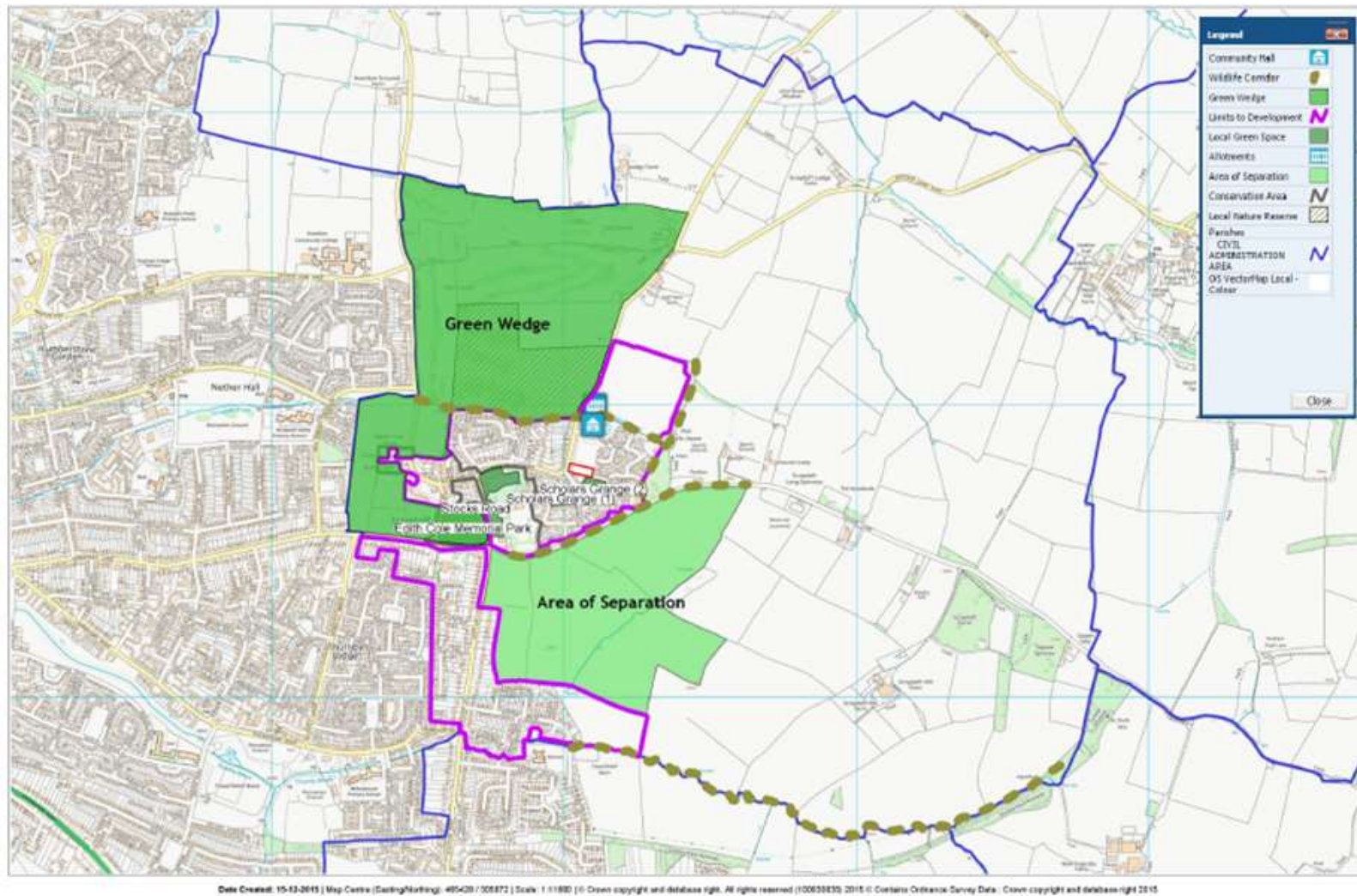


Appendix B: Proposed Leicester/Scraptoft/Bushby Green Wedge sub-areas A and B



Source: Harborough Local Plan 2011-2031 Proposed Submission Policies Map: Inset Map 63 (Scraptoft, Thurnby, Bushby) extract

Appendix C: Area of Separation as defined in Scraftoft Neighbourhood Plan (2016)



Source: Scraftoft Neighbourhood Plan (2016)