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**Leicester Local Plan  
2020 to 2036**

# **Green Wedge Topic Paper**





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## **Topic Paper**

Submission document  
September 2023

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## 1. Introduction

1.1. The purpose of this topic paper is to provide the context and rationale for the revision of green wedges in Leicester as set by Policy OSSR01. Green Wedges in the Leicester Local Plan 2020-2036.

1.2. From 16 January 2023 to 27 February 2023, Leicester City Council undertook a Regulation 19 public consultation on the publication draft of the local plan.

1.3. A number of representations received state that the local plan fails the 'soundness' test due to de-designation and allocation of sites on land which was designated as green wedge in the City of Leicester Local Plan (2006). Reasons cited for why these allocations on current green wedge land cause the local plan to fail the soundness test include:

- Allocations of site 702 (Policy SL02), sites 262 & 579 (Policy SL03), site 261 (Policy SL04), and site 961 (Policy Ho01) will result in the loss of existing green wedge land
- There is a lack of quantitative evidence for how development opportunities at Site 702 (Policy SL02) outweigh the green wedge score given by the Green Wedge Review (2017) and Addendum Report (2020)
- Land at sites 309, 718, and 1054 (Policy SL05), which is proposed for de-designation from the green wedge and allocation for housing, meets all four purposes of the green wedge, as set out in the Leicester and Leicestershire Green Wedge Review Joint Methodology (July 2011)
- The local plan evidence base does not provide information on how the de-designation of site 715 (Policy Ho01) from the green wedge will impact upon the green wedge function which is performing strongly
- It is not clear how mitigation for the loss of green wedge land has been considered.

1.4. The local plan designates seven areas of green wedge land within the city. These are located at Aylestone Meadows, Castle Hill, Evington, Hamilton, Knighton, Thurcaston Road, and Watermead. The local plan de-designates existing green wedges at Kirby Frith and Anstey Lane. The existing boundaries of green wedges at Castle Hill, Evington, Knighton, and Thurcaston Road are significantly revised by the local plan.

1.5. In total, the 2006 City of Leicester Local Plan designated 943.2 ha of land in the city as green wedge. The Leicester Local Plan 2020-2036 proposes that 698.9 ha of that land should be retained as green wedge. This means 26% of existing green wedge land is proposed for de-designation.



## 2. Policy Context

2.1. Green wedge designation and policies were introduced to Leicester and Leicestershire by the Leicestershire Structure Plan (1987). The current adopted policy relating to green wedges and their designation is the City of Leicester Local Plan (2006) saved policy GE06. Protection Of Green Wedges.

2.2. Land is designated as green wedge if it is an extensive area of predominantly open/green character which penetrates towards the city centre from the edges of Leicester. Green wedge designation recognises and protects the strategic and local importance of that land.

2.3. It should be noted that green wedge designation is different to green belt land and is not recognised at a national level.

2.4. In accordance with the Leicester and Leicestershire Green Wedge Review Joint Methodology (2011) (the Joint Methodology), local plans can designate and/or de-designate land as green wedge. The number of green wedges and/or amount of land designated as green wedge within a local planning authority area can change from one local plan to the successor local plan.

2.5. The Joint Methodology was produced and endorsed by local authorities in Leicester and Leicestershire in recognition of the importance of green wedges in local and strategic planning at the Housing Market Area (HMA) level.

2.6. The four purposes/evaluation criteria of a green wedge, as set out in the Joint Methodology, are:

- a) Preventing the merging of settlements – this means that 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 physical separation and the perception of distance between the settlements;
- b) Guiding development form – this means that green wedges will guide the form of new developments as urban areas extend;

- c) Providing a green lung into urban areas – this means that green wedges will provide communities with access to green infrastructure and the countryside beyond. They provide a continuous link between the open countryside and land which penetrates into urban areas;
- d) Acting as a recreational resource – this means that green wedges will provide a recreational resource, such as informal and formal facilities now and in the future. Public access will be maximised.

### **3. Green Wedge Review (2017) and Addendum Report (2020)**

3.1. In the course of preparing evidence for the Leicester Local Plan 2020-2036, a Green Wedge Review was produced in 2017 and an addendum report was produced in 2020. The Green Wedge Review and Addendum Report were undertaken in line with the Joint Methodology.

3.2. The Green Wedge Review was conducted to determine the strength of green wedge designations in Leicester, and to provide evidence to be used in preparing the local plan. The review assesses all the green wedge designations in the city at a micro-scale and gives a strength rating of 'strong', 'moderate', 'weak', or 'does not meet purpose' to each sub-area of each green wedge. These ratings were then collated to determine an overall average strength rating for each green wedge.

3.3. The Addendum Report provides an update to the development pressures facing each green wedge. It also re-assesses and updates the strength ratings for the green wedges and provides a qualitative summary for each.

3.4. The Green Wedge Review and the Addendum Report do not take local plan proposed site allocations into account when assessing the city's green wedges but rather assess the green wedges in their existing forms.

## **4. Justifications for de-designation of green wedges and revision of green wedge boundaries**

### **The acuteness of Leicester's housing and employment land need**

4.1. Sites have been allocated on existing green wedge land due to the acuteness of Leicester's housing need, which is 39,424 dwellings (2,464 dwellings per annum) over the course of the local plan period. This includes the 35% uplift in housing need that was placed on the city by the Government in December 2020. Prior to application of the 35% uplift, the city had a housing need of 29,104 dwellings (1,712 dwellings per annum). The city's housing need has therefore increased dramatically and the challenge to meet it is made more difficult due to the city's highly constrained administrative boundaries, which is discussed more fully in paragraphs 4.2 and 4.3 below.

### **Constraints on supply/availability of land**

4.2. Leicester is an urban authority that is tightly constrained by its administrative boundaries and has little greenfield space within them. Indeed, the built-up area has grown beyond the city's boundaries in all directions, except for the very northwest of the city which is currently designated as part of the Thurstaston Road Green Wedge and the Castle Hill Green Wedge. However, these green wedges are proposed for boundary revisions and the de-designated land is proposed for allocation in the local plan.

4.3. A Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) on Leicester's unmet need was agreed by the Leicester and Leicestershire authorities in 2022 in recognition of the fact that Leicester cannot accommodate its housing and employment need within its boundaries. Approximately 18,700 dwellings and 23 ha of employment land will have to be accommodated by the Leicestershire local planning authorities. This SoCG has been approved by all Leicester and Leicestershire authorities except Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council and Harborough District Council. Due to the sizeable proportion of Leicester's housing and employment need that the Leicestershire authorities are agreeing to take on, it is incumbent on the city to explore and exhaust all options within its boundaries to meet the remaining portion of its need in order to comply with the NPPF para. 11(a) requirement to seek to meet the development needs of the area. Given how little undesignated greenfield land there is within the city boundaries, it was necessary to explore de-designating and revising the boundaries of green wedges to meet the city's need.

## **Difficulties in achieving sustainable development without impinging on existing green wedge land**

4.4. A key purpose of any local plan is to manage and deliver sustainable growth. To be successful in managing this growth, land for housing and employment should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, as is required by NPPF para. 105. In the context of Leicester, the most sustainable locations are within, or close to, the city's boundaries. The provision of homes and employment within the city reduces the distances residents have to travel to get to schools, services, and their places of employment. It also allows people greater opportunities to travel by sustainable modes of transport. However, as described in the above section, Leicester has a large housing and employment need and cannot accommodate all of that need within its administrative boundaries.

4.5. In accordance with NPPF para. 119, sustainable development involves maximising the use of previously developed or brownfield land, and this approach is recommended in the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) undertaken for the local plan. Housing in Leicester has historically been developed in line with this advice, as 85% of housing completions since 2006/07 have been on brownfield land (pp. 12-13, Authority Monitoring Report). That approach is set to continue under the new local plan as the Central Development Area will accommodate 6,286 dwellings; therefore, a significant proportion of new housing during the local plan period will be delivered on brownfield land. Nonetheless, as the SA notes, there are not enough brownfield sites in Leicester to accommodate all housing and employment.

4.6. Through Policy Ho05 - Housing Densities, the local plan seeks to achieve higher housing densities in the right locations and appropriately optimise the density of development across the city. It also ensures a suitable mix and type of housing will be delivered.

4.7. However, even when taking the above measures into account, in order to meet as much of the city's housing and employment need as possible, the de-designation of some green wedge land for development is unavoidable. This is acknowledged in Section 6.2 of the SA, Balance and trade-offs between types of land use, which focuses on local plan alternatives, including looking at protecting open/green space land uses versus making land available for development. It notes that Leicester's high requirements for housing and

employment land means that the preferred option is to allow redevelopment or reuse of open space, sports, and recreation land/green wedge land on only the poorest quality land. The local plan has broadly followed this preferred path.

4.8. It needs to be borne in mind that the local plan allocations on de-designated green wedge land have been identified during the process of preparing the local plan and have been brought forward on consideration of all the evidence that supports the local plan, not just the Green Wedge Review and Addendum. The need to consider local plan evidence in its entirety is acknowledged within the Addendum Report to the Green Wedge Review, where it states, at para. 3.11, that “it will be necessary to balance a site’s role within the green wedge with wider planning considerations such as the strategic need for employment or housing land in the city.”

#### **The nature and extent of the de-designation of green wedges (or the loss of those parts of green wedge land where the boundaries are revised)**

4.9. The local plan de-designates existing green wedge land at Kirby Frith and Anstey Lane. The reasons for de-designation are as follows:

- Kirby Frith: allows for allocation of Site 702 – Former Western Park Golf Course, which is a strategic site and will be for a mix of uses comprising residential development, employment land, gypsy & traveller permanent pitches, public open space, and a household waste and recycling centre.
- Anstey Lane: allows for allocation of Sites 309, 718, and 1054, which collectively form a strategic site (Land west of Anstey Lane) that will be for residential development and public open space.

4.10. The local plan also significantly revises the existing boundaries of green wedge land at Castle Hill, Evington, Knighton, and Thurcaston Road. The reasons for boundary revisions are as follows:

- Castle Hill: allows for the allocation of Site 261 – Land to north of A46, which is a strategic site and will be for residential development and public open space.

- **Thurcaston Road:** allows for the allocation of Sites 262 and 579, which collectively form a strategic site (Land east of Ashton Green) that will be for residential development, development of educational facilities, employment land, and public open space.
- **Evington:** allows for the allocation of Site 715 – Land north of Gartree Road and Site 559 – Judgemeanow Community College Playing Fields, both of which will be for residential development.
- **Knighton:** allows for the allocation of Site 961 – Welford Road Playing Fields, which will be for residential development and playing fields.

4.11. The four strategic sites allocated on de-designated green wedge land will collectively provide 1,838 dwellings, 30% of which will be expected to be affordable; 13.64 ha of employment land; public open space; educational facilities; a permanent gypsy and traveller site; and a household waste recycling centre.

- The Land east of Ashton Green site is the weakest part of the Thurcaston Road green wedge. It is strong in preventing the merging of settlements but performs poorly in acting as a green lung into the urban area and as a recreational resource (Green Wedge Review and Addendum Report). The site is in the northwest of the city and is close to the Ashton Green development, where there are existing permissions for approximately 2,300 homes and employment land. As an allocation in the local plan, it is expected to provide 670 homes and a 1,200-student secondary school. It will also provide 4.94 ha of public open space as well as green infrastructure. In combination with the sites at Land north of the A46 and Ashton Green, this site can contribute greatly towards building a sustainable extension to the Leicester built-up area. Therefore, the City Council considers that as a sustainable location for development, the contribution this land can make towards meeting the city's housing and employment needs outweighs its retention as green wedge.
- The Land north of the A46 site performs moderately in all four functions of the green wedge (Green Wedge Review and Addendum Report). It is expected to provide 420 dwellings. A masterplan for the site will be developed which will ensure that green infrastructure, public open space, and SuDS are delivered as part of the development. The site is close to the

Ashton Green development, which is currently being built out, and the local plan strategic site, Land east of Ashton Green. Together, these developments will form a new sustainable extension to the Leicester built up area.

- The Kirby Frith Green Wedge, the entirety of which is allocated in the local plan as the former Western Park Golf Course site, has the lowest average strength rating of Leicester's green wedges. The site performs strongly in guiding development form and moderately as a recreational resource. It has a reduced contribution to preventing the merging of settlements and providing a green lung into the urban area due to development to the north in Blaby District (Green Wedge Review and Addendum Report). As an allocation in the local plan, the site is in a sustainable location, being close to existing services, employment areas, and key transport links into and out of the city. The site is expected to provide 412 dwellings, provision for self-build/custom-build plots, 11.24 ha of employment land, 7 permanent gypsy and traveller pitches, and a household waste recycling centre. A masterplan for the site will build green infrastructure, SuDS, and public open space into the layout of the site. The numerous contributions that allocation of this land would make towards meeting the needs of the city tilt the balance in favour of its de-designation.
- The Land west of Anstey Lane site performs strongly in guiding development form. When considered in conjunction with the adjoining green wedge in Blaby and Charnwood, and surrounding settlements within and near to Leicester, it performs moderately in preventing the merging of settlements. In its functions as a recreational resource and as a green lung into the urban area, it performs moderately (Green Wedge Review and Addendum Report). Charnwood Borough Council and Blaby District Council are set to allocate areas of land in their respective administrative areas which adjoin the site. Therefore, this site represents a valuable strategic opportunity for coordinated cross-boundary collaborative development between neighbouring authorities. Collectively, development of these sites will substantially contribute towards meeting the city's pressing housing need in a sustainable location within, and close to, the city. Retention of the site as green wedge land is therefore outweighed by the benefits resulting from its allocation.



4.12. The local plan allocates 3 non-strategic sites for residential development on land which is set to be de-designated from the green wedge. They will collectively provide 62 dwellings.

- Site 559 – Judgemeanow Community College Playing Fields is a portion of the playing fields which is not used for sports or for any other purpose by the College. The site is a natural extension of existing development to the west and east of the site along Stoughton Lane. It comprises a very small part of the Evington green wedge; de-designation of the site would have negligible impact on the performance of the overall green wedge.
- Site 715 – Land north of Gartree Road was submitted as part of the Call for Sites stage of preparation of the local plan. It is a small portion of area B of the Evington Green Wedge. Area B performs strongly in all four functions of the green wedge (Green Wedge Review and Addendum Report). The site fronts onto Gartree Road, where existing development adjoins it to the west; the southern side of Gartree Road is lined with residential development. Parts of the green wedge within Oadby and Wigston Borough Council's administrative area which adjoined the southern boundary of the site have been de-designated from the green wedge. Releasing Site 715 from the green wedge in order for it to be allocated for partial residential development is justified as it would be a natural extension of existing residential development along an arterial route towards the city centre, it would not adversely impact on the overall function of the green wedge due to its modest size, and it would not cause a break or interruption in the connectivity of Evington Green Wedge with adjoining green wedges in Oadby & Wigston Borough Council and Harborough District Council areas.
- Site 961 – Welford Road Playing Fields proposes residential development on only the part of the site that fronts Welford Road. Through development of the site, the aim is to open up the eastern part of the site for use as community playing fields. Currently, this land not publicly accessible. Therefore, the benefits to the community of releasing this land for allocation outweighs its retention within the green wedge.

## **The extent to which impacts on the purposes of the green wedge may be ameliorated**

4.13. Where green wedge boundaries have been revised, only that amount of green wedge land needed to ensure the city's housing and employment needs can be met has been de-designated. This approach minimises the impact that development allocations on de-designated green wedge land will have on the functions and performance of the city's green wedges.

4.14. Where green wedges have been de-designated in total, these have been in locations which are deemed the most sustainable and where the benefits to the city through allocation of the land outweighs the benefits of retaining the land as undeveloped green wedge.

4.15. Policies SL02 to SL05 of the local plan requires delivery of each strategic site to be based on master plans, which will ensure that the development on the sites will be in keeping with the character of the local area and that green infrastructure, biodiversity net gain, and open space will be provided.

4.16. Open space in new development on sites de-designated from the green wedge will be publicly accessible. Much of the green wedge land set for de-designation is either not currently publicly accessible or is limited in its recreational offering.

## 5. Conclusions

5.1. The City Council considers that the city's need for housing and employment land justifies the de-designation of green wedge land. The local plan approach, which maximises the amount of development that can be met on underutilised and brownfield land, has not provided sufficient available land to accommodate the city's need. As a result, the SoCG has been produced in collaboration with the Leicestershire authorities to agree an approach to accommodate Leicester's unmet need. Because such a significant portion of the city's need is being taken on by neighbouring authorities, the city has had to explore and exhaust all other sources of supply within its boundaries to meet the remaining portion of its need. This has unavoidably required the de-designation of green wedge land.

5.2. For the reasons described in Section 4 of this paper, the areas of green wedge land which the local plan proposes to de-designate and allocate for development are appropriate, justified, and informed by local plan evidence.





