

Report to: Strategic Planning Committee



Date of Meeting: 13 February 2024

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

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## Designation of Green Wedges in the new Local Plan

Report summary:

At the 3 October 2023 meeting, this committee agreed in principle that Green Wedges should be designated between nearby settlements which could be at risk of coalescence or loss of identity. Members requested that the potential Green Wedges be assessed using the draft methodology (which was presented to them at that meeting) and be reported back to them for further consideration. It is intended that the proposed Green Wedges, supported by the assessment work, be subject to public consultation in Spring 2024.

### Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget                      Yes  No

Policy Framework      Yes  No

### Recommendation:

1. That Strategic Planning Committee endorse the proposed methodology for defining Green Wedges, set out in appendix 3 of this report.
2. That Strategic Planning Committee agree that the draft Green Wedges drawn in accordance with this methodology, as set out in appendix 2 of this report, be subject to public consultation.

### Reason for recommendation:

To ensure that Green Wedges are based on a logical and transparent assessment process and that the public are given an opportunity to comment on the proposals as part of the local plan production process.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning

- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

**Equalities impact** Low Impact

**Climate change** Low Impact

**Risk:** Medium Risk; It is important that we set out how Green Wedge boundaries are to be defined to ensure a rational process is followed and can subsequently be justified. It is important that the public are given the opportunity to provide feedback in response to the draft proposals.

**Links to background information**

See links in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

**Link to [Council Plan](#)**

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
  - A greener East Devon
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**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Members will recall that a report was brought to SPC on [3<sup>rd</sup> October 2023](#), explaining the background to the Green Wedge policy and setting out a proposed methodology for the assessment of Green Wedges as part of the Local Plan making process. It was explained in that report that Green Wedges are areas of land that are locally designated through the Plan making process and that, as part of the local plan review, the policy and designations must be reassessed to ensure that they remain proportionate and appropriate. Members discussed the methodology extensively and there was a consensus that assessments should be undertaken using it and then reported back. This report fulfils that request. For clarity, the report is accompanied by 3 appendices- the first is a brief summary/overview of the assessments which highlights the differences between the adopted and proposed green wedges plus any areas identified in neighbourhood plans, the second is the methodology that was followed, and the third sets out the assessments in full.
- 1.2 General policies controlling development in the countryside apply in Green Wedges, but, in addition, there is a general presumption against development which is inappropriate in relation to the purpose of the Green Wedge. In East Devon, in locations where settlements are in close proximity and where there is considerable pressure for new development, it may be necessary to have additional Green Wedge protection in order to prevent coalescence and maintain their separate identities. The Green Wedge will perform a strategic function, and therefore be considered a strategic Local Plan policy, as a buffer between areas of development in order to prevent coalescence.

- 1.3 These areas are not intended to cover large swathes of land, or completely fill the space between settlements, instead they are intended to protect features or areas that are key to preventing coalescence or loss of identity. It is suggested that Policy be strengthened within these areas to ensure that no development is permitted which would harm these aims.
- 1.4 In some cases, proposed Green Wedges may be less extensive than previously identified but they will be more focussed, key features will be clearly identified and protected, and the evidence and justification for the additional policy protection will be robust. Outside of settlement boundaries or site allocations, the countryside protection policies will continue to apply and there will continue to be a presumption against development in these areas.

## **2. Current Position with regard to the emerging Local Plan**

- 2.1 The Green Wedge policy in the adopted local plan has two main objectives- to protect the separate character and identity of settlements in close proximity and prevent their coalescence. The adopted policy states:  
*“Strategy 8 - Development in Green Wedges*  
*Within Green Wedges, as defined on the Proposal Map, development will not be permitted if it would add to existing sporadic or isolated development or damage the individual identity of a settlement or could lead to or encourage settlement coalescence.”*
- 2.2 At the Strategic Planning Meeting on 11th January 2022, Council Members discussed the proposed approach to Green Wedges and resolved that  
*“Green Wedges are designated following a landscape review to ensure that sufficient land is designated to restrict development and therefore prevent settlement coalescence and protect the separate identities and character of settlements in close proximity to each other. Extensive areas of Green Wedge that go beyond the area needed to achieve this aim would unnecessarily restrict development that would otherwise be acceptable”*. They indicated that the Green Wedges in the current local plan should be reviewed as a starting point. Alternative policy approaches- to not have Green Wedge areas in the plan; to have more extensive areas of Green Wedges; and to have very tightly defined and small Green Wedge designations- were rejected after considerable discussion.
- 2.3 At the 3 October 2023 meeting the proposed methodology was discussed extensively and Members requested that the assessments be undertaken using the methodology (incorporating the resolution below) and reported back to them. It was resolved to:  
*Amend the proposed methodology for defining Green Wedges (set out in appendix 1 of that report to include:*  
*(a) consideration of all areas identified in neighbourhood plans that seek to prevent settlement coalescence.*  
*(b) to identify conflicts between proposed allocations and Green Wedges for Members to consider further and,*  
*(c) to ensure that all the areas identified for potential Green Wedges are considered under the methodology and that the methodology is used in the preparation of Green Wedge boundaries for consultation.*  
This report meets those requirements.

2.6 Members will note that proposed development allocations, and areas seeking to prevent settlement coalescence in Neighbourhood Plans, are identified in the assessments and have been taken into account. Once the new Local Plan is adopted it will take precedence over any 'made' Neighbourhood Plans where there is a conflict between the two. Including green wedge / equivalent designations from made and advanced emerging neighbourhood plans in the assessment work for the Local Plan has not guaranteed their endorsement in strategic policy. However, it has given the opportunity for fresh objective consideration as to whether these areas, alongside those areas currently designated in the existing Local Plan and others, can and should be carried through into the Local Plan as strategic Green Wedge designations.

### 3. Green Wedge Assessments

3.1 A summary of the proposed changes (appendix 1), the methodology (appendix 2) and resulting full assessments (appendix 3) are appended for Members information.

3.2 As requested, assessments were undertaken for the areas of land identified in the current Local Plan as well as those areas identified through Neighbourhood Plans which perform a similar settlement separation function. These areas are as follows (asterisks indicate areas identified in neighbourhood plans only):

- a) *Land between Beer and Seaton\**
- b) *Land between Budleigh Salterton and Knowle*
- c) *Land between Colyford and Colyton*
- d) *Land between Seaton and Colyford*
- e) *Land east of Exeter*
- f) *Land between Exmouth and Lypstone*
- g) *Land between Lypstone and Exton*
- h) *Land between Ottery St Mary and West Hill\**
- i) *Land between Poltimore and Westclyst*
- j) *Land between Rockbeare and Cranbrook*
- k) *Land between Sidmouth and Sidford\**
- l) *Land between Whimble and Cranbrook*

A summary of the assessments is attached at appendix 1. This succinctly highlights the changes between the current and proposed green wedge areas.

3.3 Given the Committee resolutions, and the fact that the adopted policy has been successfully applied for many years, protecting character and identity and preventing coalescence continue to be the focus of the proposed methodology and it is proposed that the wording of the Policy in the next draft Local Plan will be amended, and strengthened, to reflect this.

3.4 In order to achieve a consistent approach to the drawing of Green Wedges the attached methodology sets out the circumstances in which they will be designated; it is an approach that has been used successfully during the preparation of Local Plans in other authorities.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Report \(charnwood.gov.uk\)](http://Report(charnwood.gov.uk))

[www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/PE22%20Green%20Wedge%20Study.pdf](http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/PE22%20Green%20Wedge%20Study.pdf)

- 3.5 The set of criteria and a detailed assessment process that have been used to guide the detailed work of defining Green Wedge boundaries for inclusion in the next consultation on the local plan are set out as a methodology in Appendix 2.
- 3.6 The proposed Green Wedges, and the full assessments which support their designation, form Appendix 3. Both appendices will be public documents and will form part of the local plan evidence base.
- 3.7 The Green Wedges were previously drawn to cover large areas of land, often completely covering all areas between settlements or extending beyond the settlements into open countryside so that they do not fulfil a separation function. In some cases the settlements being separated do not have settlement boundaries and so are unlikely to expand, in any case.
- 3.8 There is a common misconception that the existing policy in the adopted Local Plan prevents development within the green wedges when it actually only restricts development where it would lead to settlement coalescence or damage the individual identity of a settlement.
- 3.9 The assessments focus on identifying and protecting the features that are key to safeguarding character and identity and preventing coalescence, so most of the areas are less extensive than previously shown. Previously Green Wedges covered extensive areas and resisted development that *could* lead to settlement coalescence but an assessment was required as part of the planning application process. Now it is proposed to designate Green Wedges only on areas where development *would* lead to coalescence so there is far more certainty in determining applications. In some cases designation is no longer considered appropriate as further expansion of settlements without boundaries would not be supported by policy; in other cases the designation is restricted to the areas between settlements only, or to features of particular value to local character and identity. The areas now proposed are considered to be defensible and robust. This approach enables a more definitive policy wording such that the policy would seek to prevent development coming forward in the green wedges other than where there is an essential need for the development and it cannot be accommodated elsewhere. This approach removes the uncertainty and misunderstanding of the current policy and the need for such a detailed assessment when proposals come forward as this assessment has already been undertaken as part of the designation of the green wedge.
- 3.10 Over the years there has been relatively little examination of Green Wedges at appeal. The main cases where this has been an issue have been a mixed-use development on Land East of Harepath Road, Seaton under planning application 12/1185/MOUT and Land to the Northeast of Bridge View, Rockbeare under planning application 13/2676/OUT for a development of 9 houses. Although both cases were some time ago, the policy was interpreted as not being a presumption against development but rather an area where development needed to be assessed to determine if it would impact on the reasons for designating the green wedge. In the Seaton case the Inspector stated "...it is clear that the underlying intention.....is to maintain a degree of open countryside between the two settlements, albeit the actual extent of such separation may be flexible. That is, having regard to the underlying policy context, some development in this area could be acceptable without conflicting with its main purposes". The inspector on the Rockbeare case interpreted the policy in a similar way ultimately concluded that while within the green wedge the development would not lead to or encourage settlement coalescence and for this and various other reasons it was allowed.

- 3.11 These cases confirm officers' interpretation of the policy. They also highlight that designation of large green wedge areas and then leaving it to individual applications to be assessed for conflict with the purposes of the green wedge can create uncertainty over what is acceptable. It can also raise community expectations that all development will be resisted within the green wedges when this is not the case. The proposed revised boundaries have assessed the areas where development would lead to settlement coalescence and sought to provide a greater level of protection to these areas thereby removing that uncertainty and managing community expectations over what protection can genuinely be secured through the green wedge designation.
- 3.12 The countryside protection policies will continue to apply to all areas outside of settlement boundaries or local plan allocations (whether they are designated as a Green Wedge or not) and there will continue to be a presumption against development in these areas.
- 3.13 A summary of the proposed changes (appendix 1), the methodology (appendix 2) and resulting full assessments (appendix 3) are appended.

#### **4. Public Consultation**

- 4.1 It is proposed that public consultation on various local plan designations and allocations, including Green Wedges, will be undertaken as soon as possible after receiving SPC approval. Such consultation will last for a minimum of 6 weeks.
- 4.2 The suggested text and maps for the consultation are overleaf (these may be subject to minor amendments prior to the consultation. These will be limited to typographical or other corrections and improvements to the clarity of the maps/text):

# East Devon Local Plan 2020 to 2040

## Preferred Options Reg. 18 Further Consultation Draft Plan

### Spring 2024

We consulted on a draft local plan from November 2023 to December 2024 that referred to Green Wedges. At that stage we suggested possible policy wording but did not show proposed boundary lines on maps. We are now consulting on:

- The Policy Wording (this has been revised from the previous consultation)
- Green Wedge Boundaries

In considering these we would encourage you to look at the consultation [commonplace-reg-18-final-071122.pdf \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](#) as this sets out the context for the policy and also to read our background technical papers - [insert link \(the summaries, methodology and full assessments\)](#).

The idea behind Green Wedges is that they identify areas between settlements (typically towns and villages) that help define and establish the individual character of those settlements. The concern is that, if these 'gaps' are relatively small, then new development within them could lead to neighbouring settlements merging into a single built up mass and losing their separate identities.

We propose that development is only permitted within Green Wedges in very exceptional circumstances when there is an essential need, for example for infrastructure such as sewage or water connections or an electricity substation, or a modest extension to an existing dwelling, that cannot be located elsewhere. In these cases, the development should be very carefully designed and sited so that its impact on the Green Wedge is minimised.

We have drafted new policy wording for the Green Wedges, as set out below. We welcome your views as to whether the policy wording is appropriate:

#### ***Policy xx – Green Wedges***

*Green Wedges are defined on the Policies Map and are areas between settlements which are essential to preventing physical or visual coalescence and/or maintaining the character and identity of those settlements.*

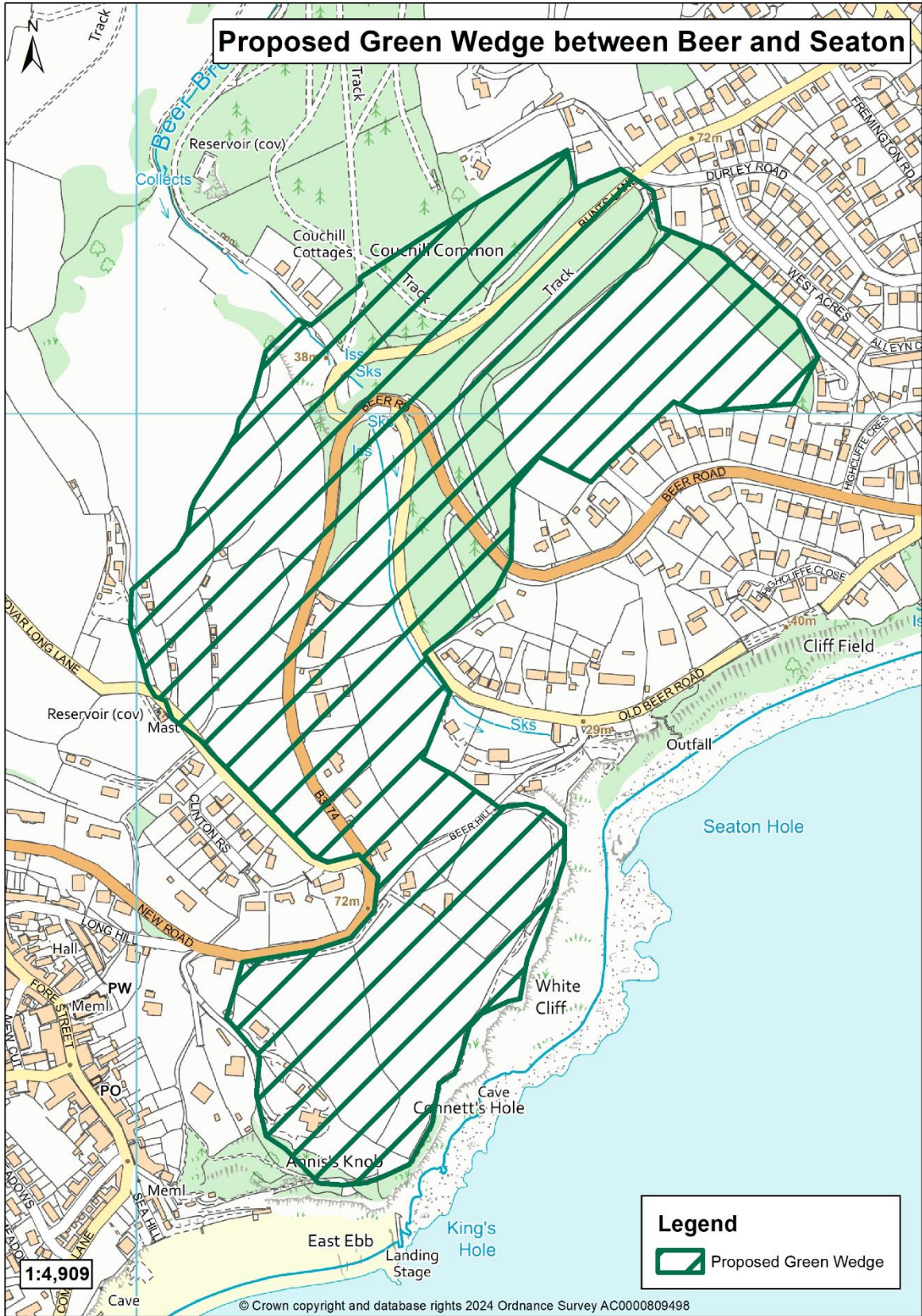
*Within Green Wedges development will not be permitted unless there is an essential need, and it cannot be located elsewhere.*

The maps that follow show the areas of land that we think should be designated as Green Wedges because they are really important in terms of separating settlements that are close together. We think that development in these areas would lead to the settlements merging and losing their distinctive separate identities. We intend to adopt a very restrictive approach to what may be built in these areas.

We include maps on the proposed Green Wedges in the remainder of this report and we would welcome your views on whether you think we have shown appropriate boundaries. If you think that different boundaries would be more appropriate, please tell us where they should go and why.

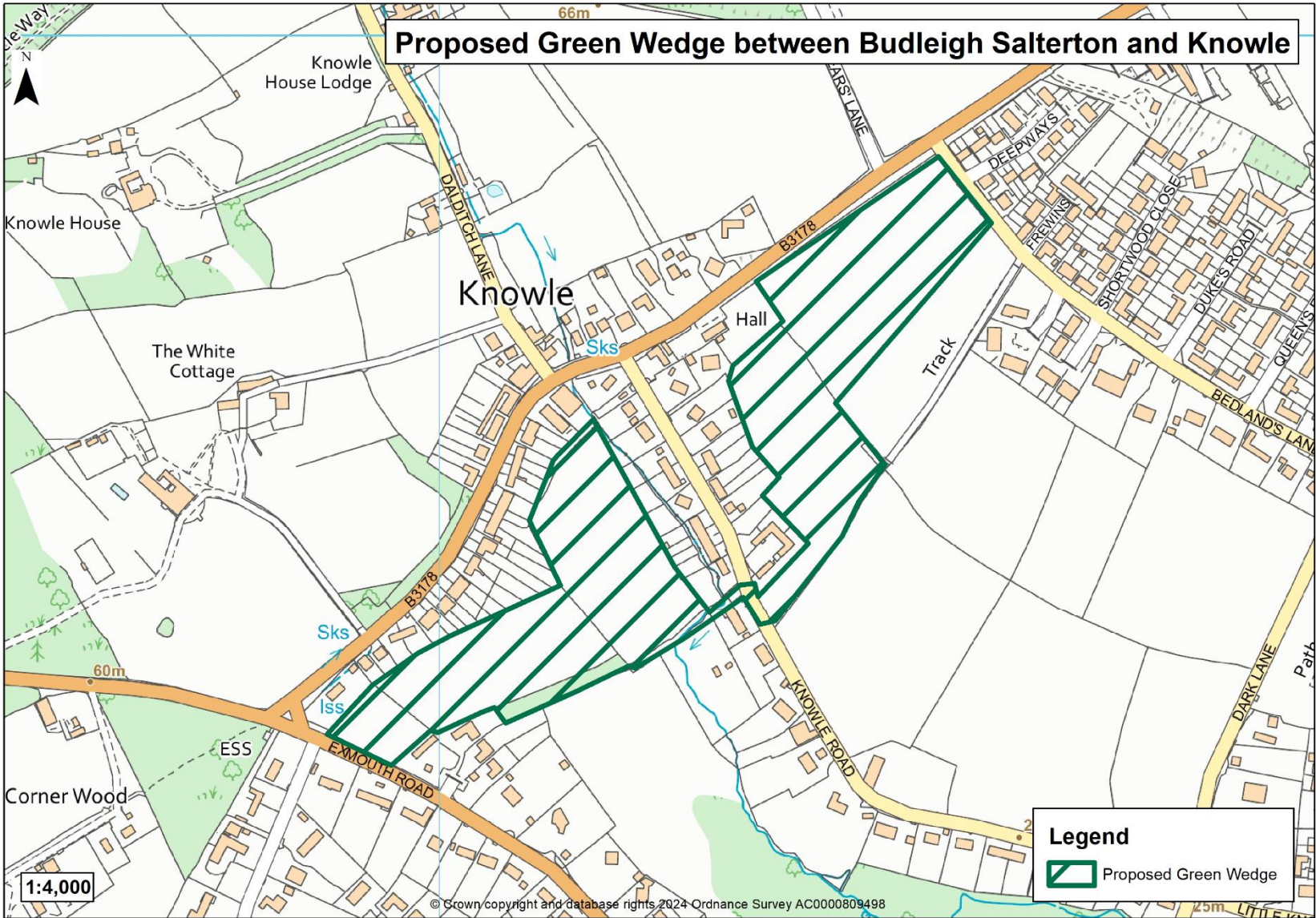


# Proposed Green Wedge between Beer and Seaton





# Proposed Green Wedge between Budleigh Salterton and Knowle

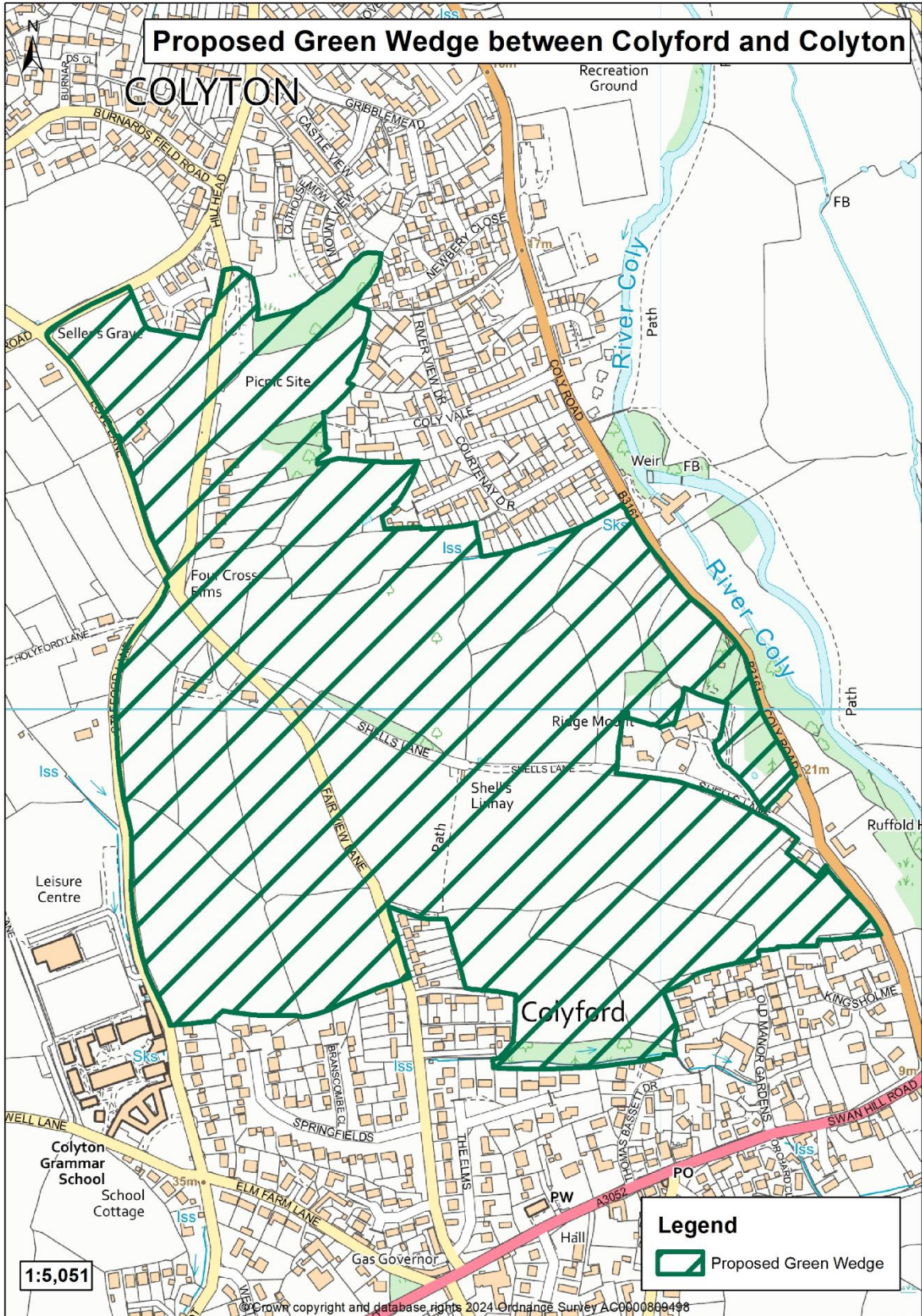


1:4,000

**Legend**  
Proposed Green Wedge

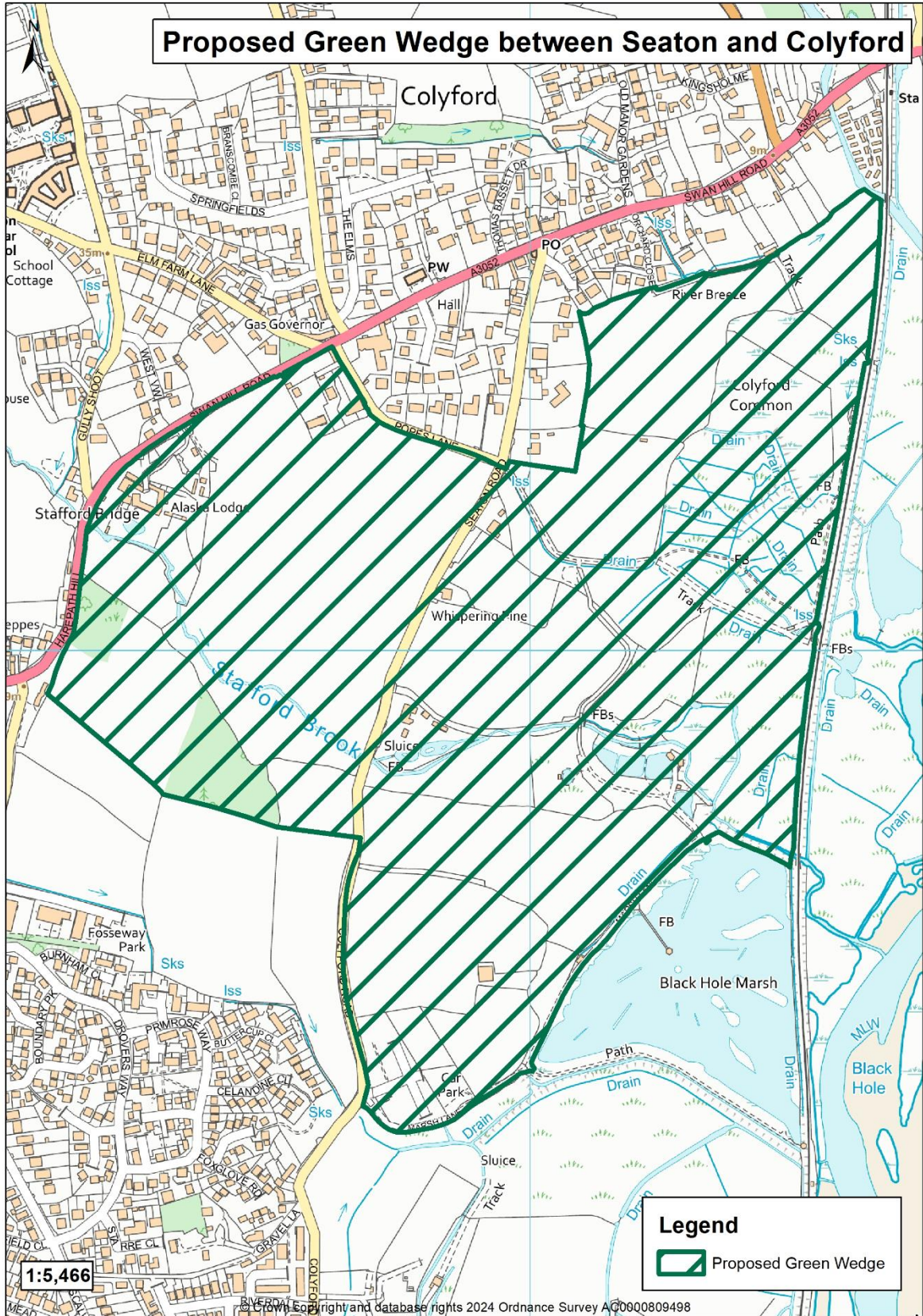


# Proposed Green Wedge between Colyford and Colyton





# Proposed Green Wedge between Seaton and Colyford



1:5,466

### Legend

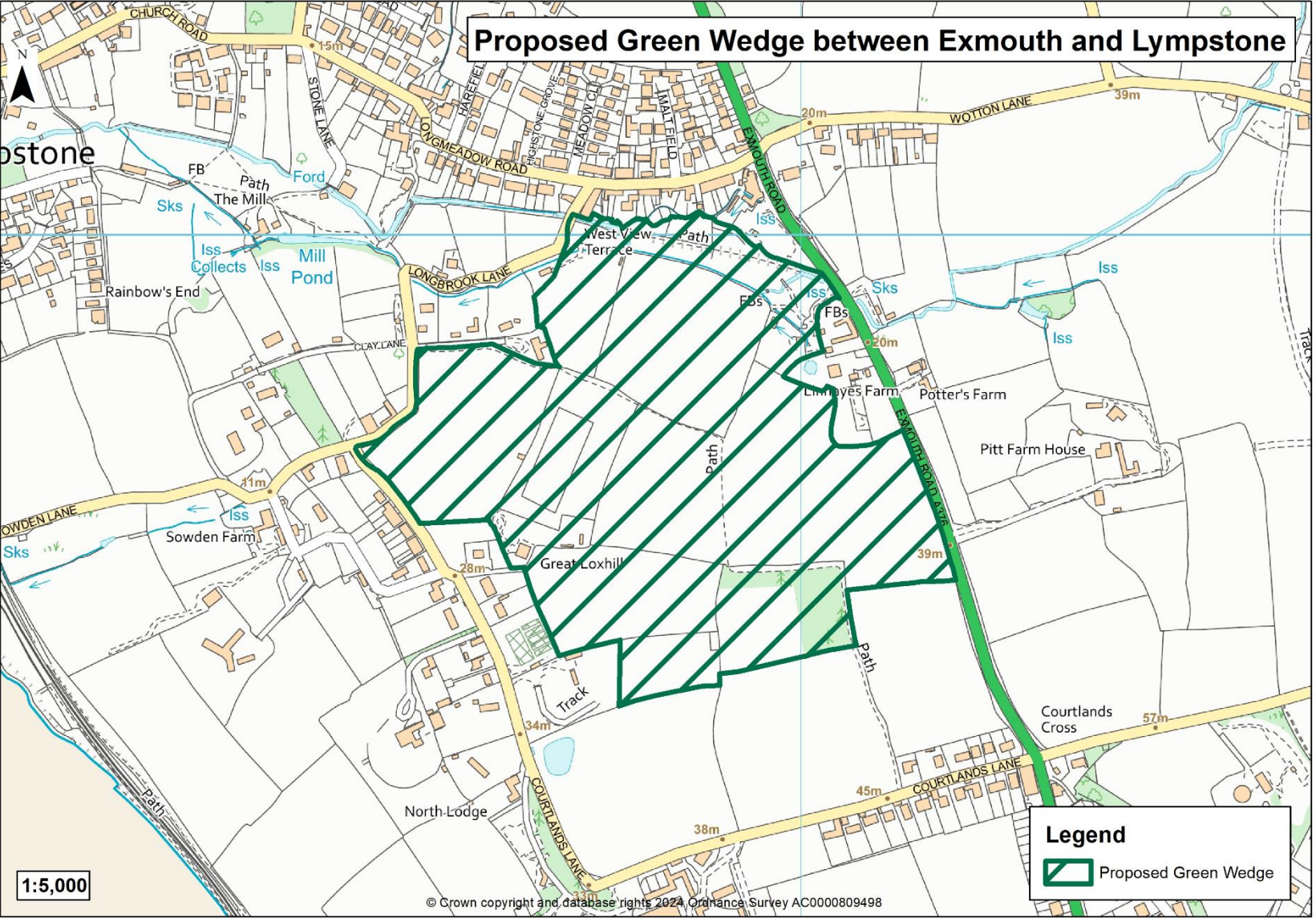
 Proposed Green Wedge







# Proposed Green Wedge between Exmouth and Lymington

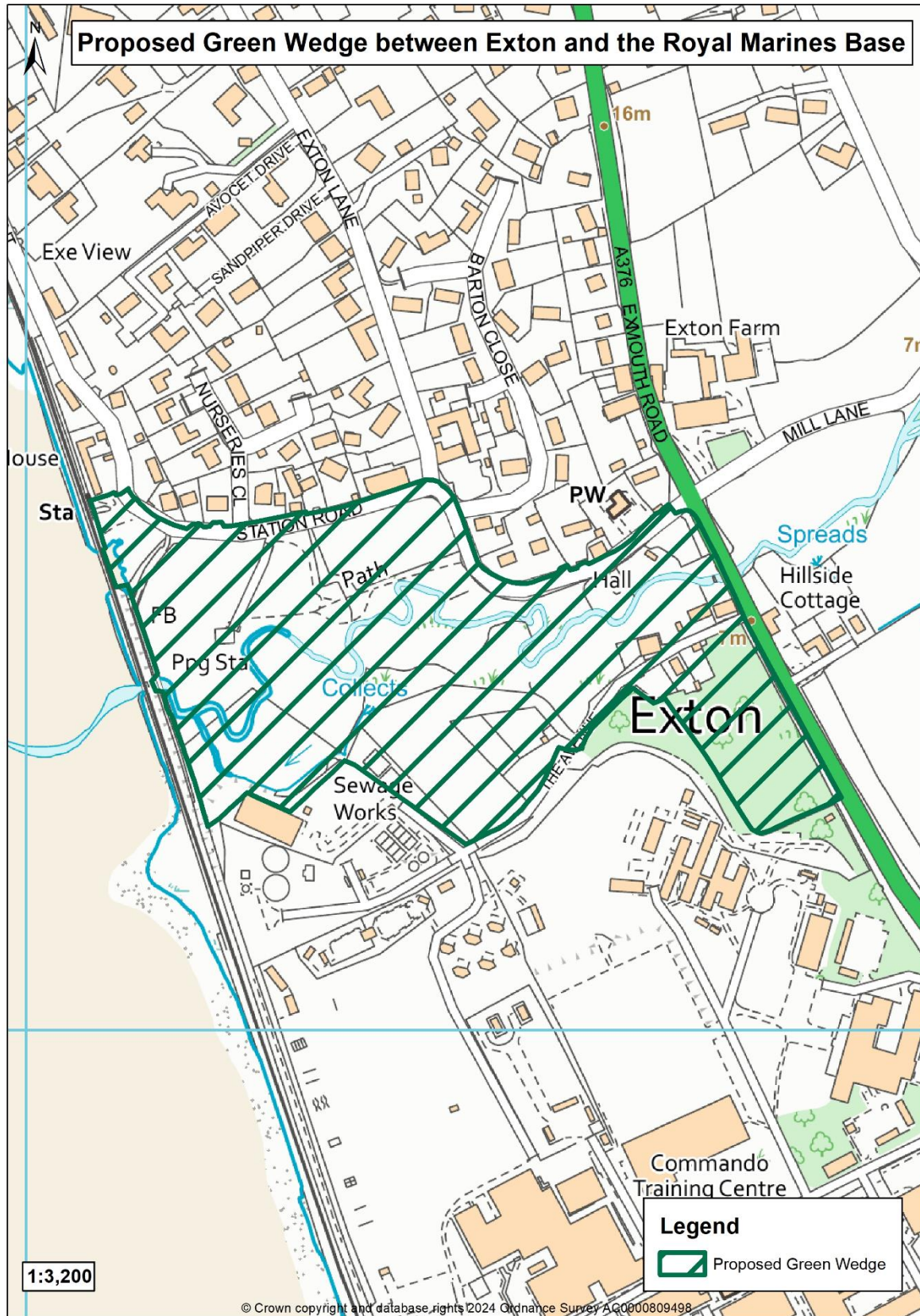


1:5,000

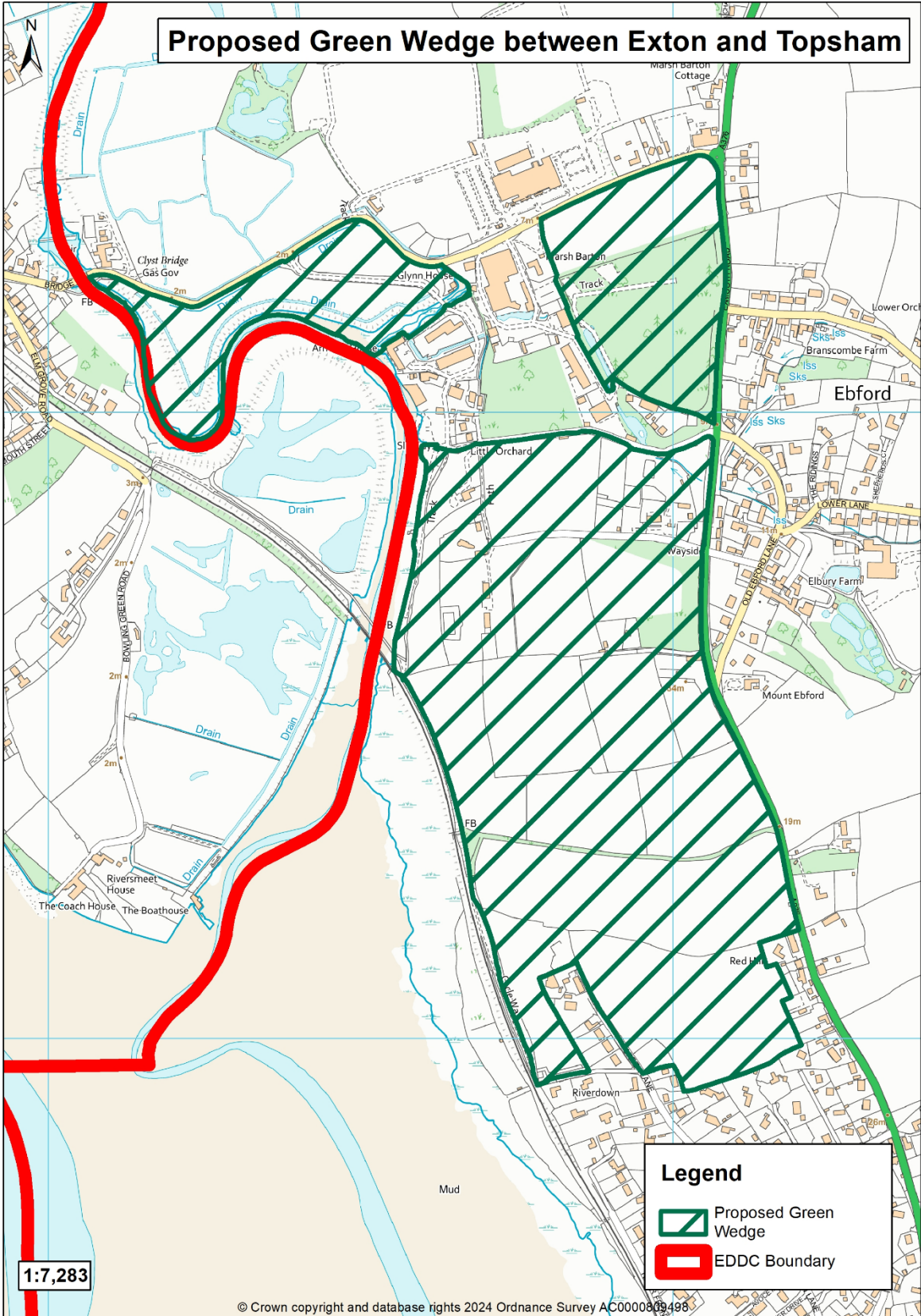
**Legend**  
[Green hatched box] Proposed Green Wedge



This area and Exton-Topsham were assessed as part of the "Lympstone to Exton to Marsh Barton Green Wedge" area

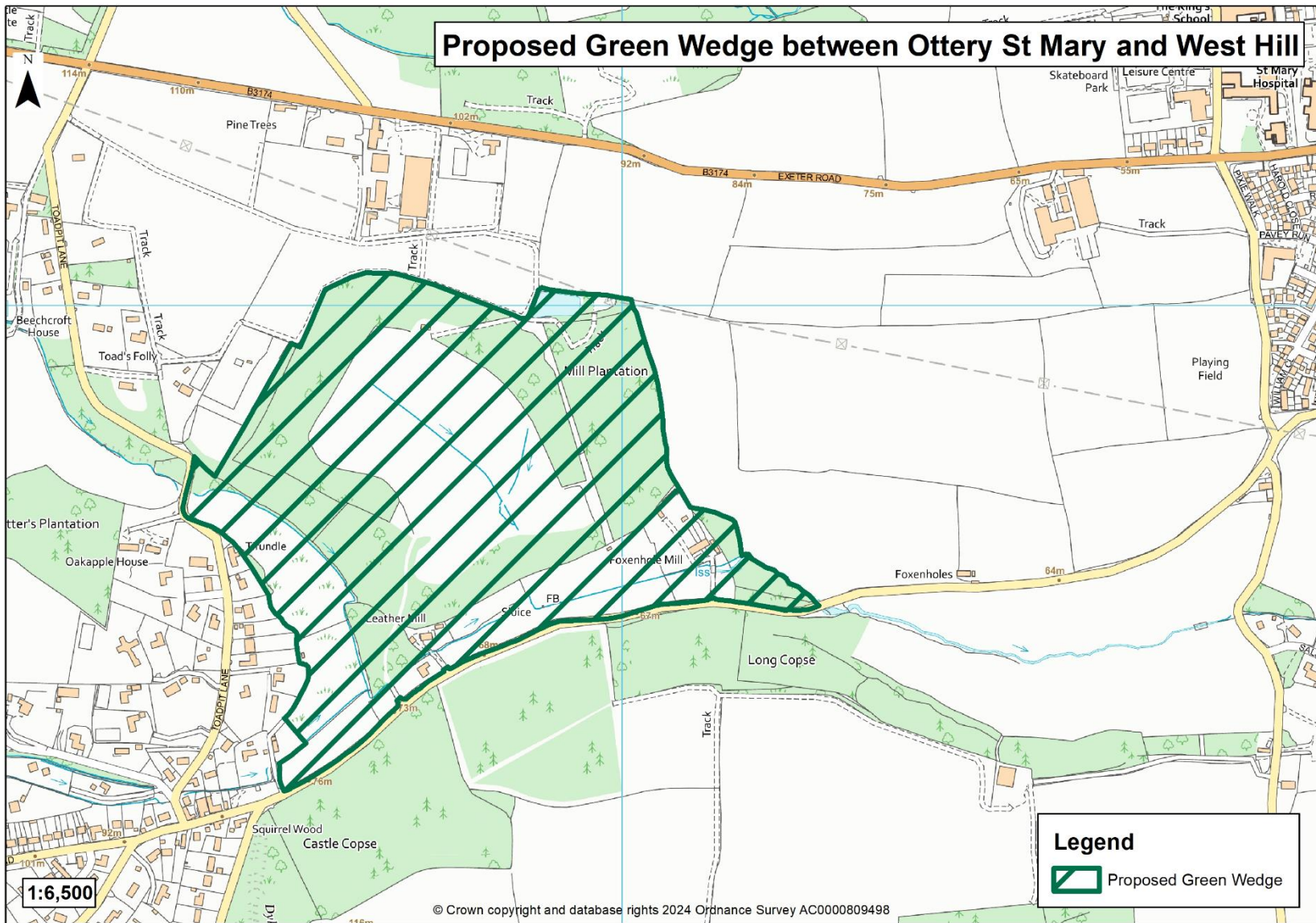


# Proposed Green Wedge between Exton and Topsham





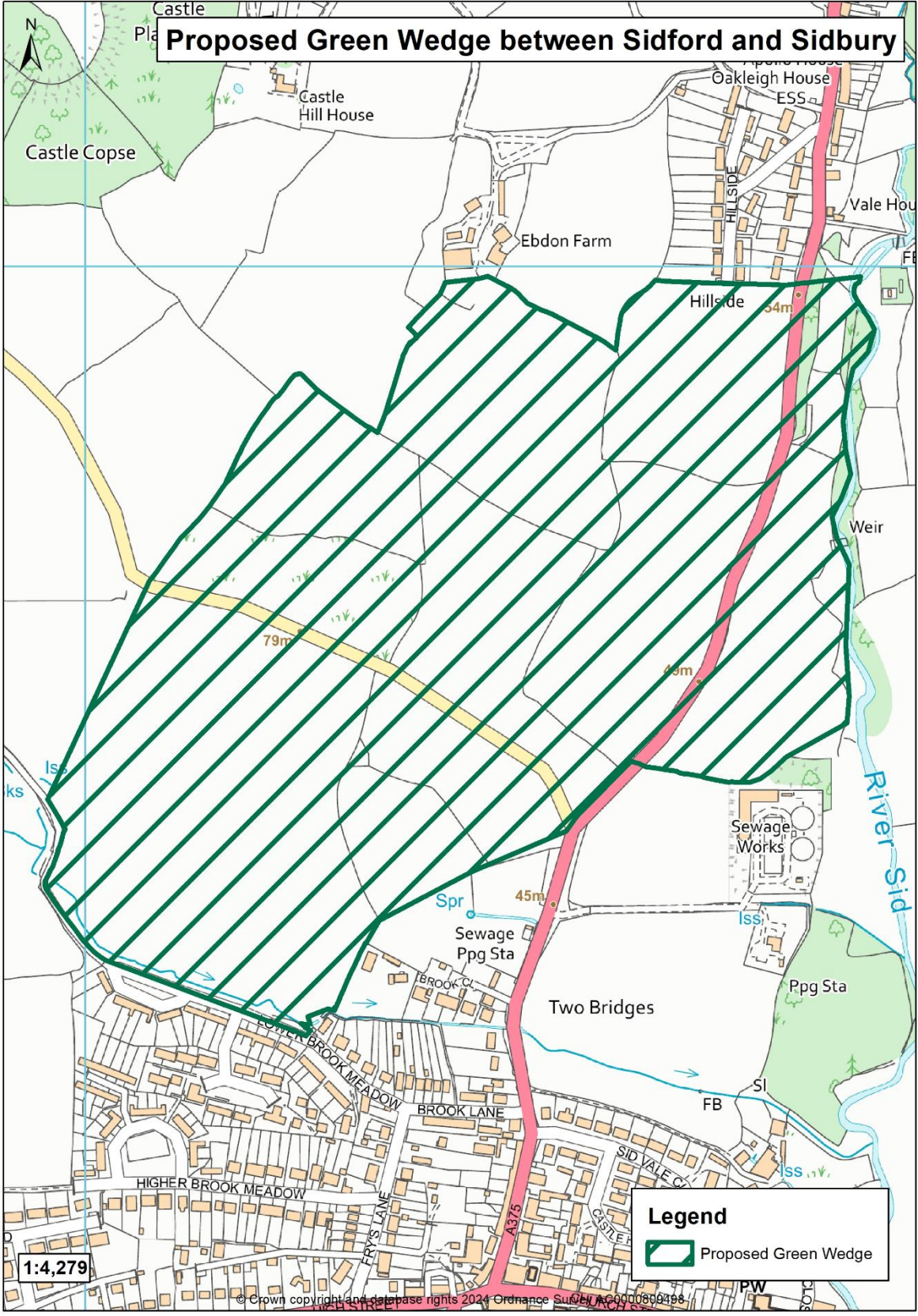
# Proposed Green Wedge between Ottery St Mary and West Hill





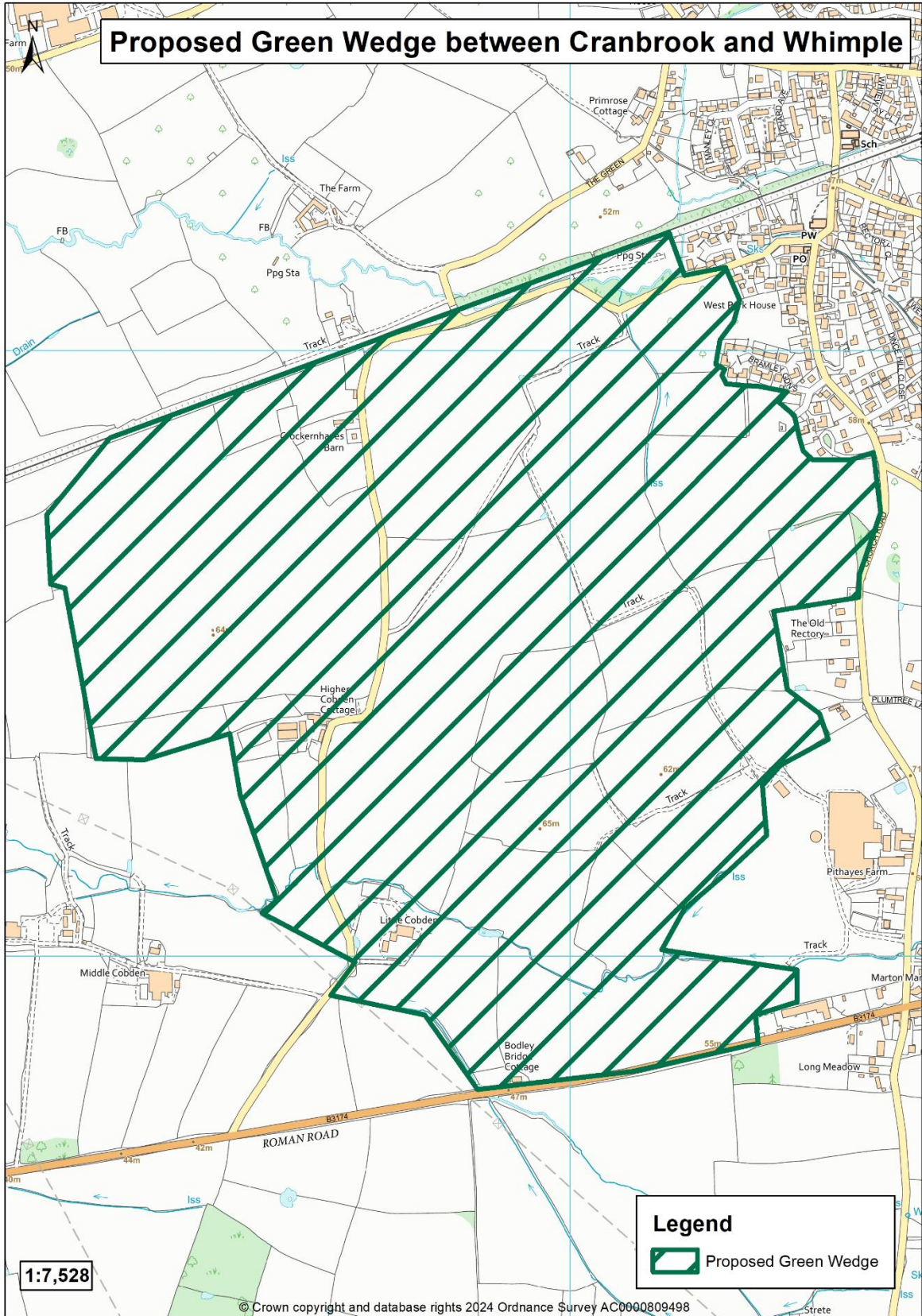


# Proposed Green Wedge between Sidford and Sidbury






# Proposed Green Wedge between Cranbrook and Whimple



1:7,528

## Legend

 Proposed Green Wedge

**Financial Implications:**

There are no financial implications.

**Legal Implications:**

There are no legal implications requiring comment.