

# APPENDIX 1

## METHODOLOGY FOR ASSESSMENT OF GREEN WEDGES IN EAST DEVON

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Purpose of this Report

1.1.1 East Devon District Council is in the process of preparing a new Local Plan. The purpose of this report is to assess areas of search around the Tier 1-4 settlements and other strategic allocations to identify whether they should be, either in whole or part, designated as a Green Wedge. The assessments will form part of the evidence base to support the preparation of the Local Plan.

1.1.2 Specifically, this Green Wedge Evidence Report will cover:

- The purpose of Green Wedge designations and their role as a plan making tool;
- Policy background for Green Wedges including an overview of national planning policy and the preparation of the new East Devon Local Plan;
- Assessment methodology for the review of potential Green Wedge areas and assessment against purpose criteria for Green Wedge designation;
- Analysis and evaluation of each area of search, setting out the results of the desk based research and on site assessments and evaluation against the purpose criteria for Green Wedge designation;
- Recommendations for the Proposed Submission stage of the East Devon Local Plan.

#### 1.2 Purpose of Green Wedges

1.2.1 Green Wedges are areas of land that are locally designated through the plan making process. Green Wedge policies and designations should be reassessed as part of the review of a Local Plan.

1.2.2 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 and function of the Green Wedge. For example, 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.

1.2.3 Coalescence can be defined as, 'the process of coming or growing together to form one thing or system' (Cambridge English Dictionary). On this basis, the concept of coalescence is engaged not only when two settlements physically join, but also as they are perceived as coming closer together as a result of incremental development. Therefore, in the context of the coalescence of settlements, a reduction in the gap between settlements could also be described as part of the process of coalescence and potentially harmful to the identity of the settlements involved.

1.2.4 The primary function of green wedges in East Devon is to:

- prevent the coalescence of settlements and maintain a sense of place and identity for communities

1.2.5 Other benefits which may arise from, but are not a reason for, the designation are:

- maintaining the open character of a green lung contributing to health and wellbeing for residents and visitors
- encouraging accessible formal and informal recreation, sport and play space
- providing valuable wildlife corridors and habitat
- protecting areas of landscape importance and visual amenity
- maintaining space for communities to adapt and be more resilient to climate change

## 1.3 National and Local Policy Context

### National Planning Policy

1.3.1 As Green Wedges are not national policy designations, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and accompanying National Planning Practice Guidance do not specifically recognise them, however they both promote sustainable development and recognise that locally valued landscapes may be identified and protected through a Local Plan. Designating Green Wedges can contribute to the delivery of sustainable development which is a core principle of the NPPF.

1.3.2 We consider that Paragraph 20 is relevant to Green Wedges; they are part of our strategic approach to maintaining local identity and ensuring that the separation of nearby settlements is maintained:

*Paragraph 20 - Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development, and make sufficient provision for:...conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure.*

1.3.3 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) was first introduced in 2014 and provides up-to-date government guidance. The PPG provides guidance to help in the implementation of policy in the NPPF. This paragraph offers useful guidance:

- Paragraph 036 - How can planning policies conserve and enhance landscapes? (ref ID: 8-036-20190721)

1.3.4 The National Design Guide characteristics are based on the objectives for design set out in Chapter 12 of the NPPF. The NDG expands upon the importance of identifying, and maintaining, identity and character in order to understand local context. This is considered to be essential to good design and creating high quality environments. Local character makes places distinctive and memorable and helps people to navigate them. Well-designed, sustainable places with a strong identity give their users, occupiers and owners a sense of pride, helping to create and sustain communities and improve quality of life.

1.3.5 The National Design Guide contains further detail on how an understanding of the context, history and cultural characteristics of an area should influence the location, siting and design of new developments. This will, in turn, create a positive sense of place that fosters a sense of belonging and contributes to well-being, inclusion and community cohesion. The National Design Guide sets out ten characteristics which work together, these include an attractive and distinctive identity which comes from the way that buildings, streets and spaces, landscape and infrastructure combine together and how people experience them. It is not just about the buildings or how a place looks, but how it engages with all of the senses. Local character makes places distinctive. Well-designed, sustainable places with a strong identity give their users, occupiers and owners a sense of pride, helping to create and sustain communities and neighbourhoods. Well-designed places buildings and spaces:

- Have a positive and coherent identity that everyone can identify with, including residents and local communities, so contributing towards health and well-being, inclusion and cohesion.
- Have a character that suits the context, its history, how we live today and how we are likely to live in the future; and
- Are visually attractive, to delight their occupants and other users.

Local identity is made up of typical characteristics such as the pattern of housing, historic assets, special features that are distinct from their surroundings and the landscape setting of a settlement. Green wedges are one of the policy devices used to identify, protect and respond to local character and identity in order to respect and work within the context of existing settlement character and retain and create a strong sense of place.

## East Devon Local Plan

1.3.6 East Devon District Council is reviewing its adopted Local Plan, and a new Local Plan, covering the period 2021-2040, is being prepared and will eventually replace it. The current Local Plan identifies 10 parcels of land as green wedge areas (some wedges comprise more than one parcel of land). These are defined on the proposals map and comprise:

- a) Land to the East of Exeter and South of the A30 and an area to the South of Poltimore.
- b) Land adjoining the Exe estuary and West of the A376 North of Lympstone to the Royal Marines site and North of Exton to Marsh Barton.
- c) Land to the North and North East of Exmouth.
- d) Land between Budleigh Salterton and Knowle.
- e) Land between Seaton and Colyford and Colyford and Colyton.
- f) Land separating the villages of Rockbeare and Whimble from the new community (Cranbrook) site.

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.”*

1.3.7 The first stage in preparing the new Local Plan was the Issues and Options consultation, which set out differing options/approaches that the plan could take, and ran from January to March 2021. In this consultation the Council identified the possibility of “Support(ing) designation of open spaces (for example green wedges) between settlements and local landscape protection areas” and this received support from respondents although a need to review the existing green wedge designations was identified.

1.3.8 After considering the feedback on the Issues and Options consultation, and suggested alternative policy approaches, at the Strategic Planning Meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022, Council Members 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.

1.3.9 This report constitutes the review that was agreed. The areas that derive from it, along with the proposed detailed policy wording, will be consulted upon at the next stage of plan preparation.

## Neighbourhood Development Plans

1.3.10 In addition to the Local Plan, some Parishes have produced Neighbourhood Plans which, once made, form part of the Development Plan for East Devon. Currently, the following made Plans contain policies which seek to reinforce the adopted Local Plan green wedges or, in the cases of Ottery and West Hill, Sid Valley and Beer, protect additional areas of land.

1. *Budleigh – Policy NE7 Green wedges*
2. *Colyton – Policy Coly04 Green Wedges*
3. *Lympstone – Policy 3 Green wedges*
4. *Rockbeare – Policy Rock06 Green wedges*
5. *Ottery & West Hill – Policy NP4 Settlement Containment*
6. *Sid Valley (Sidmouth) – Policy 3 Settlement Coalescence*
7. *Beer- Policy BHE1 Beer Local Gap*

The areas identified through Neighbourhood Plans will progress to assessment along with those in the adopted Local Plan.

## 2. Assessment Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 There is no nationally prescribed methodology for defining Green Wedges, therefore it falls to the District Council to define a methodology at a local level. There are several other local authorities that have developed a methodology for reviewing Green Wedges, and their Local Plans have been successfully adopted after independent examination. These methodologies generally use a combination of desk based research and site visit studies to inform an assessment of existing or potential Green Wedge areas against a set of Green Wedge purpose criteria. The methodology for this report therefore draws on these previously tested methodologies, particularly those adopted by Leicestershire<sup>1</sup> and East Cambridgeshire<sup>2</sup>. It should also be noted that as, Green Wedges are local designations that some local planning authorities have chosen to adopt, their aims and purposes may vary from area to area (although their primary purpose is to protect the open/countryside area around settlements) and, whilst they are usually referred to as Green Wedges, they may also be known by other names such as Green Gaps or Countryside Protection Areas.

### 2.2 Stage 1: Selecting Areas of Search

2.2.1 The first step is to identify existing Green Wedges (or equivalent) identified through the Local Plan (areas subject to draft Local Plan consultation in late 2022 are here ([Draft Local Plan- Green Wedges](#)) and made Neighbourhood Plans (noting that some of these areas overlap). These are:

- a) Land to the East of Exeter and South of the A30 and an area to the South of Poltimore.*
- b) Land adjoining the Exe estuary and West of the A376 North of Lympstone to the Royal Marines site and North of Exton to Marsh Barton.*
- c) Land to the North and North East of Exmouth.*
- d) Land between Budleigh Salterton and Knowle.*
- e) Land between Seaton and Colyford and Colyford and Colyton.*
- f) Land separating the villages of Rockbeare and Whimble from the new community (Cranbrook) site*
- g) Land north of Sidmouth, between Sidford and Sidbury*
- h) Land between Ottery St Mary and West Hill*
- i) Land between Beer and Seaton*

Sites identified as proposed development allocations in the emerging Local Plan have been subject to landscape assessment, including in the context of their relationship to nearby settlements. In recommending allocations we have had regard to settlement coalescence and concluded that they would not be significantly harmful to these issues and therefore they will be excluded from the areas to be assessed as Green Wedges.

2.2.2 In addition, there may be a need for new green wedges in the areas around settlements in the hierarchy (tiers 1-4), and other major allocations not adjacent to these settlements. These are the locations where development is supported in principle in the Local Plan, so there may be potential for settlement coalescence. A desk based assessment has not identified any additional areas for

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

<sup>2</sup> [www.eastcamb.gov.uk/sites/default/files/PE22%20Green%20Wedge%20Study.pdf](http://www.eastcamb.gov.uk/sites/default/files/PE22%20Green%20Wedge%20Study.pdf)

consideration to date, however additional areas suggested through the plan making process will be assessed using the methodology.

2.2.3 A new settlement to the east of Exeter is proposed in the draft Local Plan but the precise location has yet to be decided. It may be appropriate in future to designate a Green Wedge between this settlement and any nearby village/s. The master planning of any new settlement will need to ensure that risks of future settlement coalescence are designed out from the outset. In any event the scale of development at any new settlement within this plan period would not be likely to create such issues. We would therefore see the designation of a Green Wedge around any new settlement as something to be considered in a future plan review.

## 2.3 Stage 2: Desk Based Research

2.3.1 Stage 2 involves desk based research for each area of search to gather factual information that will inform assessment of the landscape, setting and character, including:

- land uses;
- environmental designations;
- landscape character;
- public rights of way and cycle routes;
- planning history; and
- areas developed or proposed for development.

2.3.2 The main sources of information for the desk based research will be Ordnance Survey Mapping, GIS data, websites (such as Magic- the Government website which has a comprehensive list of natural environment designations), aerial photography and Local Plan evidence base documents.

## 2.4 Stage 3: Site Visits

2.4.1 At this stage site visits will be undertaken to view each of the search areas from publicly accessible locations. In each location, the Officer will consider land uses; physical features; setting and character; landscape and visual impacts; threat of coalescence; boundaries (including infrastructure such as roads and railways; natural features such as watercourses and hedges; and existing built form with clearly defined edges); perception of distance between settlements (particularly from public vantage points including footpaths and cycleways) and sense of separation. Photos should be taken during the site visits to support the assessments.

## 2.5 Stage 4: Assessment Criteria

2.5.1 This stage draws together the findings of stages 2 and 3 to assess each area against the Green Wedge purpose criteria using a strength based assessment, as set out in the table below. It is not necessary for a green wedge to score strongly against both purpose criteria but a site should perform strongly overall if it is to be designated as a green wedge.

## Green Wedge Purpose

Purpose Criteria	Explanation	Strength	Evidence
1. To prevent the coalescence of settlements	<p>This is an open area of land that preserves a physical separation between settlements, maintaining the existing settlement pattern. The Green Wedge would prevent development that would result in a significant erosion of a gap between neighbouring settlements or would result in the merging of neighbouring settlements, or neighbourhoods within an urban area. It may also protect important views into and out of settlements.</p> <p>Logical and defensible boundaries ensure the integrity of the designation is maintained.</p>	<p><b>Strong:</b> The area provides an essential gap between two or more settlements, restricting development which would lead to the merging of these settlements by significantly visually or physically reducing the actual or perceived distance between them.</p> <p><b>Moderate:</b> Provides a wider gap between two or more settlements, restricting further development which may lead to the merging of these settlements. There may be scope for some development, but the overall openness and the scale of the gap is important to restricting merging.</p> <p><b>Weak:</b> Provides a less critical gap between two or more settlements which is either unlikely to restrict the merging or further merging between Settlements or is so large that such merging is highly unlikely.</p> <p><b>Does not meet the purpose:</b> The gap between settlements is sufficient that the area plays no role in preventing the merging of settlements, or settlements have already merged.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topography</li> <li>• Landscape character</li> <li>• Views (long and short range)</li> <li>• Perception of distance between settlements/built up areas</li> <li>• Sense of leaving one settlement and entering the next</li> <li>• Presence of built development</li> </ul>
2. To maintain a sense of place and identity for communities	<p>This is an open area of land that safeguards the setting, identity or character of separate settlements. The Green Wedge would prevent development that would result in a loss of the distinctive separate characteristics or identities of neighbouring communities and reinforces a distinct sense of place.</p>	<p><b>Strong:</b> Settlements have separate, distinct and identifiable characters and a strong sense of place. They may have a strong boundary between the developed area and the countryside beyond. The Green Wedge protects an important landscape setting or landscape features which positively contribute/s to local character and/or identity. Such landscape features could be a key component of local character themselves.</p> <p><b>Moderate:</b> Settlements have some distinct characteristics which contribute to their individual character and/or sense of identity. The boundary between the urban area and countryside may not be</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topography</li> <li>• Landscape character</li> <li>• Views (long and short range)</li> <li>• Perception of distance between settlements/built up areas</li> <li>• Sense of leaving one settlement and entering the next</li> <li>• Presence of built development</li> <li>• Development pressure and planning consents</li> <li>• Local Plan Call for Sites</li> <li>• Compatibility with preferred site</li> </ul>

		<p>consistently strong. The Green Wedge would protect areas of landscape which are important to the setting of the settlement but may not have a distinct or important character in their own right.</p> <p><b>Weak:</b> While the adjoining settlements show some distinctive characteristics, the overall character is either generic or disparate so that it does not convey a strong sense of place. Development may be dispersed or bounded by features that are difficult to recognise or weakly defined. Some areas may be of low quality or degraded landscape character which does not contribute positively to local identity.</p> <p><b>Does not meet the purpose:</b> There is no real sense of local identity or distinctiveness. The area may contain sporadic development with no discernible unifying local character and/or no real differentiation between urban area and countryside beyond. The area conflicts with the strategic allocations for new development set out in the new Local Plan.</p>	<p>allocations in the Local Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maps showing evolution of the settlement</li> <li>• Historic records and lists of heritage assets</li> </ul>
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Reports will be presented on a standard proforma