

Harlow Local Development Plan GREEN WEDGE REVIEW



April 2014

Contents

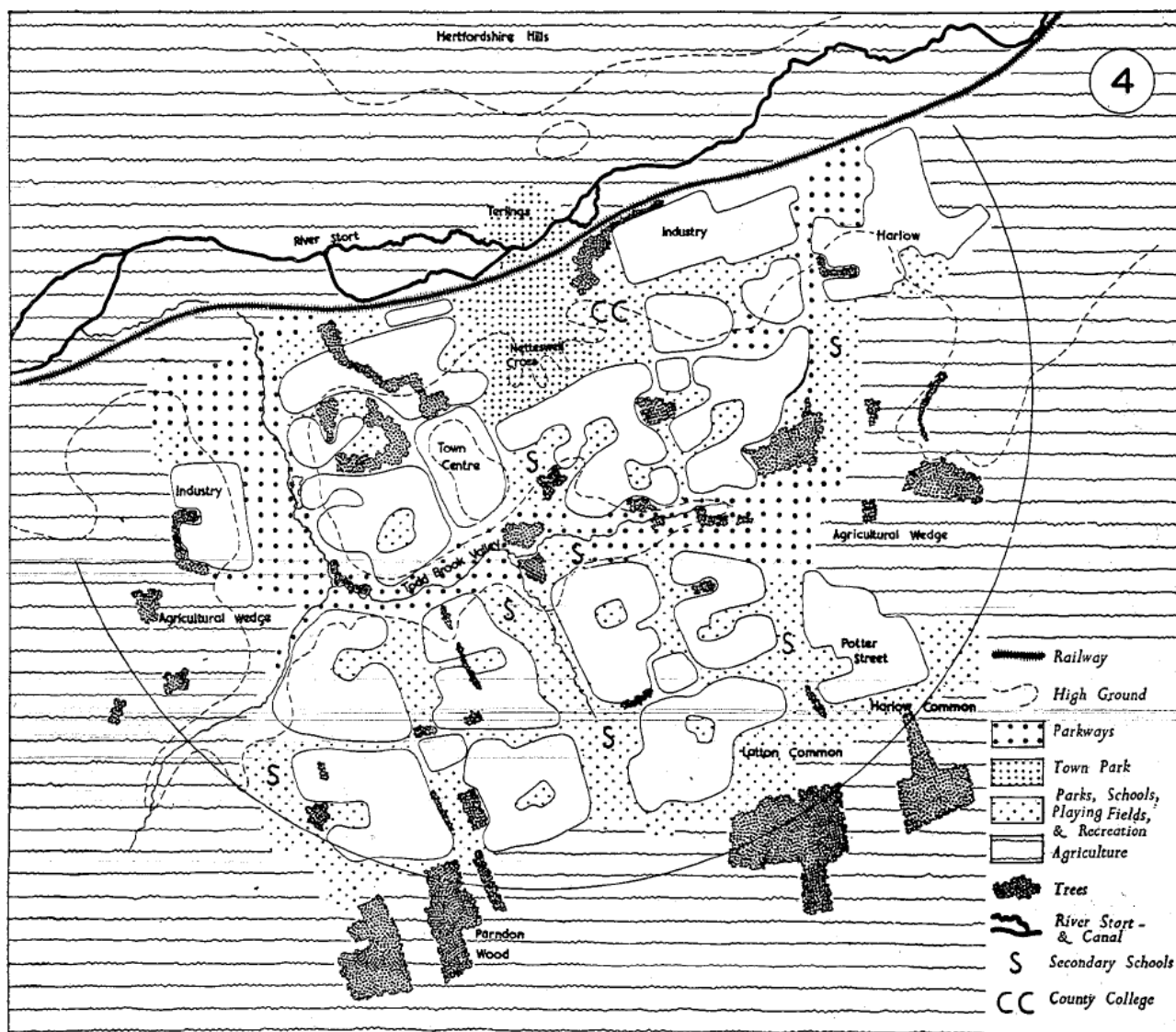
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1. History of Harlow's Green Wedges

- 1.1. Victorian Britain witnessed great industrial change and growth as a result of the Industrial Revolution, but one of the less favourable legacies of this was urban slums. In 1898, the British urban planner Ebenezer Howard published *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, in which he set out his vision for garden cities – based on a utopian ideal – which were designed to eradicate urban slums. The garden cities were to encompass the best of town and country, by intersecting urban areas with grand tree-lined boulevards, canals and generous parks and gardens; and by providing walkable access for residents to allotments, countryside and agricultural land outside the built-up area.
- 1.2. The work of Howard and the garden city masterplanners undoubtedly provided inspiration for the wave of New Towns which were built in the decades after World War Two, in response to the housing crisis as a result of the War. Harlow was designated as a New Town in March 1947 and Sir Frederick Gibberd was appointed as the architect-planner to produce the town's Masterplan. The first edition of his Masterplan was published in 1947 and given ministerial approval in 1949; a second edition was published in 1952.
- 1.3. In designing Harlow New Town, one of Gibberd's main aims was to ensure the existing landscape of the area was respected. The idea of Green Wedges stemmed from this aim, and in the Masterplan, Gibberd stated the importance of Green Wedges in shaping the town's development:

"Links to the countryside are formed by green wedges designed to embrace natural features such as valleys, woods, brooks and quarries. It is proposed that the wedges and valleys left free of buildings should be kept as natural as possible, and in no way turned into the character of a Town Park." (Gibberd, F.: *Harlow New Town Masterplan*, p. 10)
- 1.4. However, at the time of the publication of the Masterplan, Green Wedges were more commonly referred to as 'landscape wedges' or 'agricultural wedges'. Whilst Green Wedges were not specifically mapped, the landscape diagram published in the Masterplan clearly illustrated how the town's neighbourhoods would be separated by 'wedges' of parks, playing fields, parkways and agricultural land.

Harlow New Town landscape diagram



Source: Gibberd, F.: *Harlow New Town Masterplan*

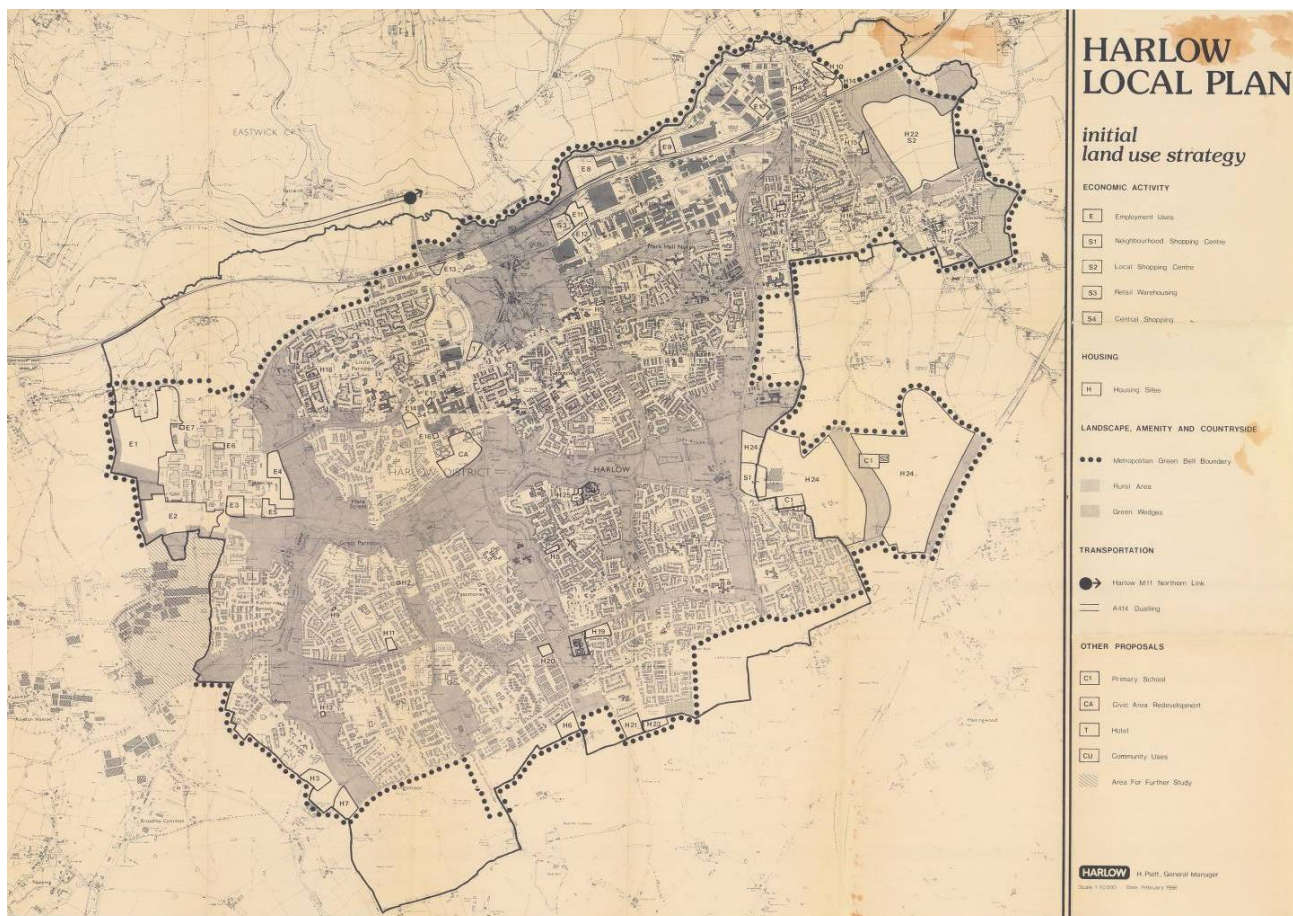
- 1.5. In *HARLOW: The Story of a New Town* (Gibberd, F.), Gibberd described how the open land in Harlow made it “possible to provide several wedges converging on the Town Centre. In practice there are three ... these wedges subdivided Harlow into four quarters. Thus the shape of the land determined the internal subdivisions of the town just as it did the boundary” (p. 39).
- 1.6. Gibberd stated the intention for Harlow residents to have access to natural landscape areas within walking distance of their home via ‘linear parks’ – which nowadays contain roads, pavements, bridleways, footpaths and cycle tracks. This complimented the idea of neighbourhood centres and employment areas being within walking and cycling distances of residential areas, reducing vehicle usage. This idea, which dates back as far as Howard’s garden city vision, is similar to the modern ‘ped-shed’, which is an area mapped within a five to ten minute walk from a pedestrian destination such as an area of shops or a park.

- 1.7. Gibberd also emphasised how the views from surrounding countryside into the town were carefully planned: “[the views are] a carefully contrived relationship of landscape, buildings and road, which brought together the three arts of architecture, landscape architecture and road architecture to make a new scene – a townscape” (p. 35). In *The Design of Harlow* (Gibberd, F.), Gibberd makes further reference to how surrounding countryside is brought into the town through “landscaped ways or wedges”, some of which were used for agricultural purposes, converging on the town centre to separate built-up areas.

2. Local Green Wedge Policies

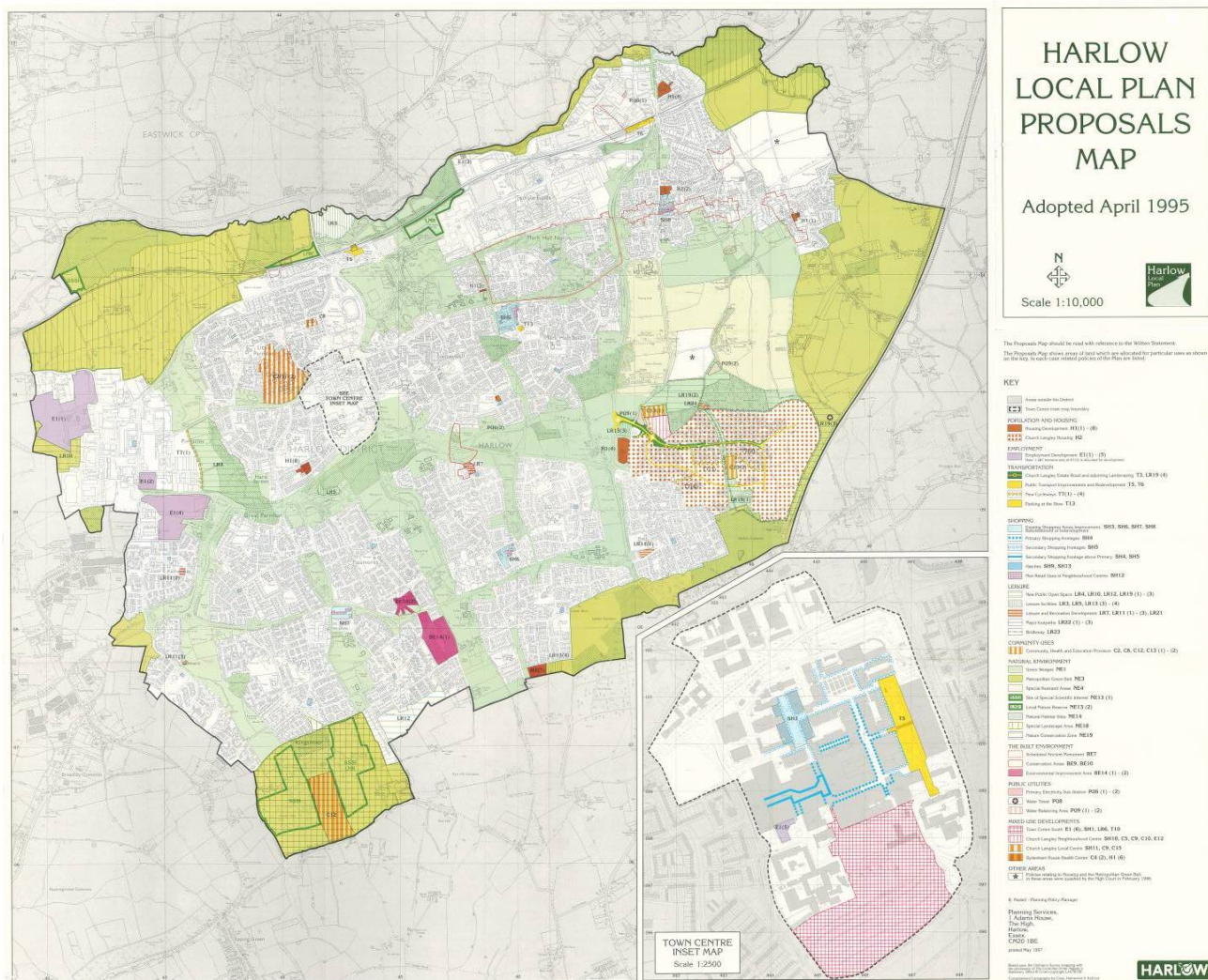
Harlow Local Plan – April 1995

- 2.1. During the preparation of a new development plan to supersede the original Masterplan, an Initial Land Use Strategy map was published in February 1986 which mapped the Green Wedges in the district (see below – Wedges shaded in light grey). This was one of the first occasions that the Green Wedge network in Harlow had been mapped as part of the preparation of a statutory development plan.



Source: Harlow Council

- 2.2. The Harlow Local Plan was adopted in April 1995 and replaced Gibberd's Masterplan of 1952 as the adopted development plan for the district, covering the period of 1986 to 2001. The Proposals Map which accompanied the Plan mapped the Green Wedge network (see below – Wedges shaded in pale green). This was the first time that Green Wedges had been specifically defined and mapped in a statutory development plan.



Source: Harlow Council

2.3. The Harlow Local Plan (1995) described Green Wedges in much the way that Gibberd described them in the original Masterplan, stating their roles as follows:

- to provide a visual and physical separation between neighbourhood clusters and between housing and industry;
- to preserve the natural features of the town, and provide natural habitats for the benefit of people and wildlife;
- to introduce a rural character to parts of the town; and
- to provide for a range of informal recreation.

2.4. The Plan also noted that many of the Wedges remained in their natural state and that whilst “the original projection of farmland into the west of the town has almost disappeared, elsewhere the Green Wedges remain largely untouched”. It also stated that further schemes to expand the current uses of Green Wedges would not be permitted, as the Wedges “integrate with the built-up areas of the town most successfully when they are maintained in a natural or parkland state, and existing alternative uses have been seen to diminish this quality”.

2.5. The 1995 Plan contained specific policies relating to Green Wedges as follows:

NE1: Within the green wedges the primary aim will be to protect and enhance the inherent qualities of the landscape and natural habitats and to retain the open character of existing uses. Permission for any other development will not normally be granted, this includes new buildings or new areas of formal recreation.

NE2: New Green Wedges: Where appropriate, substantial green wedges will be designated to provide visual and physical separation between neighbourhoods and between housing and industry. In defining new green wedges the following land uses shall be considered for inclusion:

- Landscape Areas
 - Natural Habitat Sites
 - Local Nature Reserves
 - Agricultural Land
 - Land uses that are open in character such as schools or recreational areas
- Once allocated as Green Wedge Policy NE1 will apply.

Adopted Replacement Harlow Local Plan (ARHLP) – July 2006

2.6. The ARHLP, adopted July 2006, replaced the 1995 Plan and covered the period of 2001 to 2011. It is currently the adopted development plan for the district until the emerging Harlow Local Development Plan, covering the period of 2011 to 2031, is adopted.

2.7. In the text supporting the relevant policies in the ARHLP, an overview on the continuing value and success of the Green Wedge policies was provided, as follows:

- The Green Wedge policy has been successful and the wedges are largely intact, meaning the fundamental design and character of Harlow has been retained;
- Strong support from the public for the Green Wedge policy has been shown through opposition to large-scale development proposals, consultations carried out during the preparation of the Local Plan and a Mori Poll which showed over 90% of the population supported the protection of green spaces;
- Most of the Green Wedge boundaries have been maintained with only small-scale detailed amendments;
- A small number of planning applications have been made in Green Wedges over the years, mostly for small-scale development which would not have an adverse effect. As such, these developments which were often school, community or sports related, have normally been granted planning permission;
- Large-scale development proposals in Green Wedges have generally not progressed beyond the pre-application stage due to the Green Wedges policy;
- Green Wedges have enabled playing fields and other recreational facilities to be distributed so they are easily accessible to every home, highlighting the importance of the Wedges for informal recreation.

2.8. The main Green Wedge policy in the ARHLP is as follows:

NE1: Green Wedges will be protected from inappropriate development. Permission will not be granted, except for small scale development proposals and the replacement of existing buildings

which do not have an adverse effect on the roles of the Green Wedges which are identified below:

1. Providing a landscape design feature which is fundamental to the character of the town;
2. Protecting and enhancing the inherent qualities of the landscape and keeping areas as natural as possible;
3. Retaining the open character of existing uses and safeguarding the land from inappropriate development;
4. Preserving sites of ecological value and maximising potential for biodiversity in Harlow;
5. Separating neighbourhoods, housing areas and industrial areas;
6. Preserving the setting and special character of a number of historic sites and areas;
7. Contributing towards the amenities of local residents.

- 2.9. Policy NE2 identified two new areas of Green Wedges; these were at Newhall (the New Pond Spring Natural Habitat site forming the basis of a north-south Green Wedge linking Church Langley to Old Harlow) and at land east of Fifth Avenue/west of Burnt Mill Lane.
- 2.10. Policy NE6 states that if land north of Gilden Way – identified as a Special Restraint Area – was required for development purposes, then “substantial Green Wedges shall be designated between the proposed area of development and Old Harlow and Churchgate Street”.

Monitoring of Green Wedge policies in the Adopted Replacement Harlow Local Plan

- 2.11. Between January 2000 and December 2013, 234 planning applications for development on land within the Green Wedge network were submitted to the Council.
- 2.12. Only certain applications which were in accordance with Green Wedge policies in the Adopted Replacement Harlow Local Plan were granted planning permission. Examples of applications granted planning permission include:
- Extending a car park
 - Erection of fencing
 - Construction of single storey extension
 - Removal of skate-park hard standing and installation of new garden
 - Change of use of agricultural land to playing fields
 - Erection of non-illuminated sign
 - Demolition of agricultural barn
 - New access road and bridge
 - Installation of solar panel system
 - Extension of reed-bed habitat
 - Change of use of land to rear of property to become residential garden
- 2.13. Examples of applications refused planning permission include:
- Erection of porta-cabins
 - Two-storey side extension
 - Change of use of landscaped internal open space to garden extension
 - Demolition of garage & extension and erection of 3-bedroom dwelling

- Erection of attached garage

2.14. More information on the planning history of land in the Green Wedge network is provided in Chapter 9 and Appendix 1.

Harlow Local Development Plan – Issues and Options Consultation – January 2011

2.15. In 2011, the Council completed public consultation on Issues and Options as part of the initial stages of the preparation of a new Local Development Plan. This sought views on a range of spatial planning issues in the town, including a review of the role of Green Wedges. In general terms, respondents considered that new development must conform to Gibberd's original Masterplan and that Harlow's existing green spaces, Green Wedges and open spaces should be safeguarded for future generations, and that Green Wedge policy should be strengthened.

2.16. A specific question was asked in the consultation regarding the Green Wedge network: *“Question 16. The Green Wedges have performed a variety of roles in shaping Harlow. Should the roles of Green Wedges be reviewed to meet future development needs in the Harlow area?”* In total, 169 responses were received and are summarised below (number in brackets represents the number of respondents who made the comment).

Development on Green Wedges

- Should not happen at all (70)
- Should only happen as a last resort (3)
- Should be allowed to enable regeneration, providing there were land-swaps to enable new Green Wedges to be provided elsewhere (1)
- Development would be a dangerous precedent resulting in the loss of all Green Wedges (2)
- Green Belt should be built on rather than Green Wedges (1)
- Green Wedges should be built on rather than Green Belt (4)

Review of Green Wedges

- Oppose the principle of reviewing their roles (40)
- Review of roles generally is supported (11)
- Review supported but only to strengthen, improve or enhance them (12)
- Review supported but only to widen roads to ease traffic congestion (2)
- Review supported where new Green Wedges are required to serve new urban extensions (4)
- Review supported to build things that would benefit neighbourhoods, e.g. schools, leisure facilities and retail facilities (3)
- Review supported but only for poor quality open spaces (2)

Other comments about Green Wedges

- They perform important recreational, health/quality of life and movement functions (18)
- They also provide important flood protection role (16)

- Access to them needs improving (18)
 - Consideration needs to be given to how they interact with development areas, which often back onto them (1)
 - There is a need for regeneration and new housing in Harlow balanced against the need to protect the countryside, Green Wedges and open spaces
- 2.17. Question 17 revealed that protecting Green Wedges was the second most important factor that should guide new development in Harlow (with protecting important landscapes being most important, and protecting the Green Belt third most important).
- 2.18. Question 4 revealed that 7% of respondents believed that new homes should be built on Green Wedges (32% outside Harlow, 20% around public transport hubs, 7% within neighbourhood areas, 27% in neighbourhood centres/hatches and 7% on underdeveloped/underused land).
- 2.19. A number of comments regarding the Green Wedge network were also made by various organisations. These are summarised below:

English Heritage

- Green Wedges are an important element of the Gibberd principles in laying out Harlow and should therefore be protected from future encroachment.

The Environment Agency

- Harlow must consider underused open space and other undeveloped land for development before considering releasing land in the Green Belt
- Several of the Green Wedges provide flood alleviation benefits and it's important that these areas are kept free from development
- Development on these Green Wedges may increase the flood risk elsewhere and have a negative impact upon local biodiversity

Epping Forest District Council

- Strongly supports a review of the Green Wedges.

Essex County Council

- Gibberd highlighted the importance of Harlow's landscape setting and Green Wedges, so the role of proposed urban extension(s) should be considered regarding the design and delivery of networks of Green Wedges/green infrastructure linking Harlow town and the countryside.
- Review of Green Wedges should provide a modern definition.
- Green Wedges could function as access corridors for pedestrians, cycling, walking, and passenger transport.

High Wych Parish Council

- The Green Wedges should be reviewed to meet future development – as per quote from Gibberd about Harlow being an organism which changes as people's needs change.

Natural England

- The Green Wedges are important aspects to Harlow's development – allowing for biodiversity, recreation, alongside relatively high densities.
- NE supports the strengthening of Green Wedges and we expect to see these spaces preserved into the future.
- Green Wedges and Green Belt should be lowest priority for new development.
- One of the most important priorities directing new development is protecting green wedges

NHS West Essex

- Green wedges should be retained where possible
- Public health benefits arising from access to and use of open space should inform the decision to redevelop underused open spaces and green wedges
- Minimising the increase in density in areas where it is already relatively high should be balanced against the protection of green wedges

Roydon Parish Council

- Green Wedges should be reviewed.

Harlow Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document – October 2011

2.20. The Harlow Design Guide provides general guidance on the form that new development in Harlow should take, including a range of development types such as new urban areas and residential extensions, and also covers the design of employment areas and green spaces. The Guide considers what works best in Harlow, aiding the shape of future change whilst respecting the distinctive features that give Harlow and its neighbourhoods their sense of place.

2.21. *Green Wedges*

The Design Guide defines Green Wedges as large areas of strategic open space which help define neighbourhoods from each other, bring the countryside into the urban area and are more than movement corridors for vehicles or simply landscape buffers, and are an enduring legacy of Gibberd's masterplan. Principle DG20 details the recommendations regarding Green Wedges, as follows:

Development should maintain the strategic landscape structure of Green Wedges which provide strategic open space for the town. This is particularly important when masterplanning new neighbourhoods, and should be considered when masterplanning new sub neighbourhoods.

New Green Wedges should:

- Be of a sufficient width to provide a sense of connecting to the countryside.
- Accommodate a range of naturalistic, productive and recreational spaces including, for example, natural landscape, woodland, allotments, community gardens/orchards and playing fields and sports facilities.
- Be well-connected to built development to permit easy access to the open space. They should also provide legible and safe walking and cycling routes between adjoining neighbourhoods.
- Provide walking and cycling access to the surrounding open countryside, linking to existing public footpaths and bridleways.

- Provide a setting for new secondary schools and accommodate playing fields and associated outdoor space.
- Provide and enhance strategic walking and cycle routes to the Town Centre and train station, existing employment areas and access to the open countryside.
- Be defined by a strong urban edge with development fronting the open space. Thus providing a positive interface between the development and the landscape and encouraging activity and natural surveillance

2.22. *Green Fingers*

The Design Guide defines Green Fingers as smaller, linear open spaces that form links between Green Wedges and local green spaces, and new Green Fingers could be used to provide a link between a smaller green space and a Green Wedge or open countryside. Principle DG21 sets out specific recommendations for Green Fingers, as follows:

Green Fingers should be created where appropriate, and particularly considered when masterplanning residential developments. Where appropriate they should provide green routes for walking and cycling. Vistas to the Green Wedge and open countryside should be considered.

Green Fingers should be multi-functional spaces and include features such as playspaces or a local park. Green Fingers should accommodate a mix of uses that relate to the local community, and contain areas that promote biodiversity.

The spaces created should be supported by direct frontage to provide a positive interface with the built environment. Green Fingers should be fronted by development providing a positive interface between the built form and the landscape and encouraging activity and natural surveillance.

3. Regional Green Wedge Policies

Essex & Southend-on-Sea Replacement Structure Plan

- 3.1. The Structure Plan was adopted April 2001 and replaced by the East of England Plan. It recognised the existence of Green Wedges in the county, and for Harlow specifically, it stated that the “existing areas of open land, natural features, Green Wedges and woodland within Harlow contribute to the high quality of its local environment”.

East of England Plan

- 3.2. The East of England Plan (adopted May 2008) replaced the Structure Plan but was revoked in January 2013. It stated that Local Development Documents in Harlow should “provide for the creation and maintenance of a network of multi-function green spaces within and around the town” and that “this network should maintain the principle of Green Wedges penetrating the urban fabric of the town and urban extensions”.

4. National Green Wedge Definitions, Policies and Studies

Planning Portal

- 4.1. The Planning Portal is hosted by central Government and serves as a resource for a range of planning topics. It describes Green Wedges as comprising “the open areas around and between parts of settlements, which maintain the distinction between the countryside and built-up areas, prevent the coalescence (merging) of adjacent places and also provide recreational opportunities”.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 4.2. The National Planning Policy Framework was published in March 2012 and replaced existing Planning Policy Statements and Planning Policy Guidance Notes. It does not specifically make reference to Green Wedges, but regarding green spaces in urban areas, it states that:
- The potential of new development sites should accommodate green space, partly to ensure climate change is mitigated against (para. 58 & 99)
 - Through local and neighbourhood plans, local communities should be able to identify green areas of particular importance to them as ‘Local Green Space’, whereby new development would be ruled out other than in very special circumstances (para. 76)
 - ‘Local Green Space’ designations would only be used where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves, where it is demonstrably special and holds local significance (e.g. because of its beauty or recreational value) and where the area is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land. Local policies for managing Local Green Space development should be consistent with Green Belts policy (para. 77)
 - Local Plans should plan positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure (para. 114)
 - Information gained from relevant assessments should be used to determine requirements for open space, sports and recreational provision, as access to high quality open spaces can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities (para. 73)
 - Such existing spaces should not be built on unless it is clearly shown the land is surplus to requirements, or a land-swap would take place to replace the loss of land and equal/enhance its quality, or the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision and the needs outweigh the losses (para. 74)
 - The NPPF defines open space as “all open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity”, and “green infrastructure” as “a network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities”

National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)

4.3. National Planning Policy Guidance was published in 2014 and accompanies the National Planning Policy Framework. The Guidance offers more detailed advice regarding the designation of Local Green Spaces, as follows:

- Local Green Space areas could include land which contains sports pavilions, boating lakes, structures (e.g. war memorials), allotments or urban spaces that provide a tranquil oasis; although whether to designate land is a matter for local discretion
- Designation of a Local Green Space must be consistent with local planning development for the area, meaning the Local Green Space designation should not result in the undermining of local plan-making
- Local Green Spaces may be designated anywhere where the space is demonstrably special to the local community – be it in a town, city or village – including spaces that were planned as part of new development
- There is no lower limit for the size of a Local Green Space although it must not be an extensive tract of land. The land does not necessarily need public access and/or be in public ownership
- A designated Local Green Space would give it protection consistent with that in respect of Green Belt

Strategic gaps and green wedge policies in structure plans

4.4. This report, produced by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2002, provided an overview of the use of Strategic Gaps and Green Wedges. It also identified the differences between areas of green belt, green wedge, strategic gaps and rural buffers, as follows:

- Strategic gaps protect the setting and individual identity of settlements, protecting coalescence; retain existing settlement patterns by maintaining openness of the land; and retain physical and psychological benefits of having open land close to housing.
- Rural buffers prevent coalescence with settlements near a town, until long-term directions of growth are decided.
- Green wedges protect strategic open land which helps to shape urban growth as it progresses; preserve and enhance links between urban areas and the open countryside; and facilitate positive management of land.

4.5. The report identified that Green Wedges:

- serve a more specific purpose than rural buffers and strategic gaps, as Green Wedges are more related to providing access to open space from urban areas;
- are generally narrower and penetrate urban areas;
- through the penetration of urban areas, they preserve and promote green networks and landscape and wildlife corridors between the countryside and urban areas;
- provide space for recreational facilities within easy reach of urban residents;

- contribute to the quality of life of nearby residents;
- prevent coalescence between settlements, villages and other built-up areas;
- are generally protected by a presumption against development, over and above the strict controls normally available to local authorities for the protection of the countryside;
- often have stricter control policies than Green Belts, due to Green Wedges being of a limited extent, providing protection not offered by normal planning policies;
- shape urban growth and retain the peripheral development option for future housing;
- within urban areas may be up to one mile wide; up to four miles wide for peripheral restraint Wedges; and
- provide protection which cannot be offered by normal planning policies.

4.6. The report also identifies potential planning outcomes as a result of Green Wedges, including:

- clear-cut urban-rural boundaries;
- separate identity of settlements (local distinctiveness);
- reduction in greenfield land-take;
- retention and enhancement of biodiversity; and
- quality of life improvements
- access improvements to countryside from urban areas;

Planning Policy Guidance 7 (The Countryside)

4.7. This document, now superseded by the NPPF, was published in 1997 and is being referenced here as it was one of the first formal national planning policy statements regarding Green Wedges.

4.8. It stated that in terms of local countryside designations, local planning authorities should only maintain or extend such designations for good reason and based on a “formal assessment of the qualities of the countryside, or the contribution of sites such as ‘strategic gaps’ or ‘green wedges’ to urban form and urban areas”.

5. Application of Green Wedge Policies elsewhere

- 5.1. Harlow is believed to be the first area in England to benefit from specific Green Wedge designations and the associated policies that offer the Wedges a high level of protection. A number of other districts in England now benefit from the implementation of Green Wedge policy, some dating back to the 1980s.
- 5.2. In Harlow, however, Sir Frederick Gibberd sought to integrate the design of Green Wedges into the urban fabric of the town from its inception. Elsewhere, Green Wedges tend to be found in the shire counties and rural areas, but less so in urban, city and metropolitan locations. Furthermore, other areas often opt to use additional or alternative designations such as green corridors and green fingers.
- 5.3. Similarly to the Green Wedges found in Harlow, Wedges found elsewhere serve to act as natural separation between neighbourhoods and settlements, places for recreational purposes, green lungs in urban areas and havens of ecological importance. However, Wedges found elsewhere are often of a more significant size, often of a historic nature (such as former grazing land penetrating into York city centre now designated as Green Wedge), which provide green lungs between whole settlements and prevent them from coalescing. This is in contrast to Harlow, which benefits from Green Wedges that were planned in the town from the outset as distinct green spaces, separating neighbourhoods from other neighbourhoods and industrial/retail areas.

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council

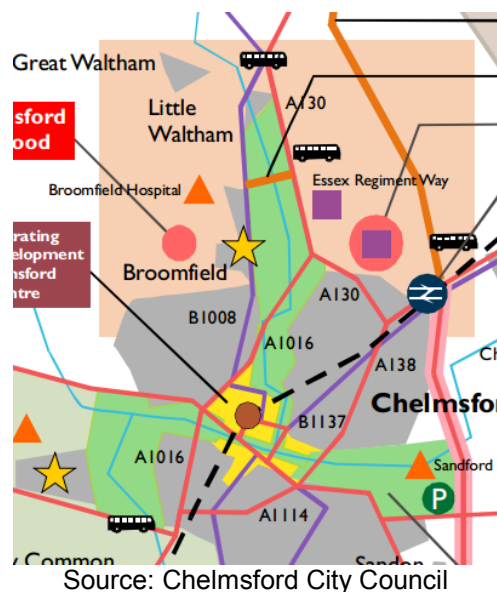
- 5.4. There are seven Green Wedges designated in the Doncaster Core Strategy (2012), which originate in the town centre of Doncaster and stretch out to the countryside and settlements beyond the main urban area. Through local planning policies, the Wedges are recognised as preserving open gaps between settlements and areas of ecological importance, and are an important tool to ensure new developments are sensitive to strategic open gaps.
- 5.5. Development proposals within or adjoining the Wedges are supported only when they meet certain criteria, including providing a buffer of high quality landscaping to prevent coalescence of settlements. In June 2013, a review of the Wedges was carried out using a methodology similar to the Leicestershire joint methodology (see below). The key recommendations from the review were the retention of existing Green Wedge designations, the identification of new Green Wedge opportunities and the recognition of the green wedge concept as a regeneration tool.

Chelmsford City Council

- 5.6. The valleys and floodplain of the Rivers Chelmer and Can are protected through Green Wedge designation in Chelmsford Core Strategy and Development Control Policies (2008) (see map below; shaded light green), to ensure the retention of the open character of the valleys' landscape; and to provide links from the urban area into the countryside, protection for the important network of

natural habitats and nature conservation areas, and leisure and recreation opportunities. Development proposals relating to rural activity or existing residential/businesses uses must be compatible with the character and appearance of the Wedge. Other encouraged enhancements include the commitment to undergrounding overhead power lines, tree planting and improvements of paths.

- 5.7. During the formal Examination of the planning policies, the Inspector noted that the rivers and their valleys act as green lungs providing important amenity, recreation, nature conservation habitats, corridors for wildlife and attractive open riverscape features that give definition and contrast to the townscape through which they run, and that the Green Wedge designations are therefore necessary to recognise and protect the important river valleys and flood plains.



Harrogate Borough Council

- 5.8. There are four Green Wedges designated in the Harrogate District Local Plan 2008. Local planning policies commit to protecting them due to their importance and functions. A review was carried out to demonstrate that the nature and character of Green Wedges are worthy of designation and that they contribute to the character of Harrogate by preventing the urban area becoming one undifferentiated built-up area and safeguarding the links between urban areas and town and the countryside. These factors were assessed through judgements and evaluation through desktop analysis and site visits. Other considerations included the distance that the Wedges penetrate urban areas and the extent to which they divide urban neighbourhoods. The removal of certain parts of land and the inclusion of certain parts of land were recommended.

Leicestershire Councils

- 5.9. In the Local Plans and Core Strategies of the districts and boroughs of Blaby, Charnwood, Harborough, Hinckley & Bosworth, Leicester, Oadby & Wigston and North West Leicestershire, Green Wedges have been defined which provide

large areas of green space between settlements around and up to the city of Leicester.

- 5.10. The Green Wedges are large and therefore contribute to the setting of the district's towns, urban areas and surrounding villages; provide adjoining communities with access to countryside and green spaces; and prevent the coalescence of settlements. The policy basis for defining Green Wedges around Leicester was first included in the 1987 Leicestershire Structure Plan. A later version of the Structure Plan stated four functions for Green Wedges and the types of development permitted in them:

Functions

- Protecting structurally important areas of open land which influence the form and direction of urban development
- Ensuring open land extends outwards between existing and planned development limits of urban areas
- Preserving strategic landscape and wildlife links between the Countryside and urban open spaces
- Preventing coalescence and maintaining the physical identity of settlements adjoining main urban areas

Acceptable uses of Wedge (assuming the open and undeveloped character of the Wedge remains unaffected)

- Agriculture, including allotments and horticulture not accompanied by retail development
- Outdoor recreation facilities, footpaths, bridleways and cycleways
- Forestry
- Burial grounds
- Retention or creation of green links between urban areas and the countryside

- 5.11. Local planning policies recognise the importance of Green Wedges in terms of the functions they provide, how and why they should be protected, and how they can be maintained, improved and enhanced.
- 5.12. Since 2008, the Councils have been carrying out reviews of their Green Wedges using a joint Leicestershire methodology which was adopted in 2009 and revised in 2011. The joint methodology contains four functions of the Green Wedges which are used as assessment criteria:
- Preventing the merging of settlements
 - Guiding development form
 - Providing a green lung in urban areas
 - Acting as a recreational resource
- 5.13. Additionally, the methodology prescribes a desk-based survey of the Wedge, to establish such factors as public rights of way through the Wedge, its land use(s), relevant development management decisions, ecological characteristics and connection to surrounding green infrastructure. Site visits establish such factors

as presence of key physical features, perception of separation and distance from surrounding settlements.

- 5.14. The results of the reviews in the different boroughs and districts identified Wedges which were performing well based on Green Wedge functions and should be retained; areas of Green Wedge where public access, recreational opportunities and biodiversity should be improved; areas that should be removed from the Green Wedge (such as areas with significant built development and areas that do not perform well on Green Wedge functions); and areas that should be re-designated as 'Strategic Gaps' or 'open countryside'.

Peterborough City Council

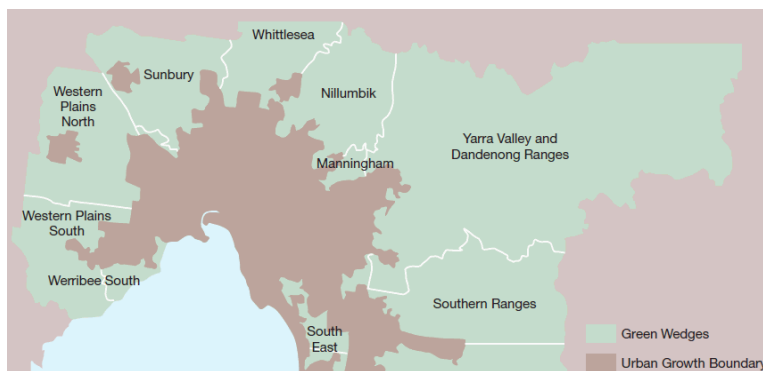
- 5.15. There are four areas in and around Peterborough designated as Green Wedges in the Peterborough Core Strategy (2011). Similarly to Harlow, Peterborough is a former New Town, designated as such in 1967. The areas designated as Green Wedges are considered to be under considerable pressure for development, and if built on, would result in the amalgamation of the urban area with nearby settlements. Therefore, Peterborough City Council is providing a long-term commitment through local planning policies to maintain the Green Wedges by resisting development in them that would reduce the degree of physical separation between settlements, thereby maintaining the separate identity of communities by containing urban sprawl.
- 5.16. The Council recognises that although the Wedges are primarily areas for agriculture and woodland, they may, where appropriate, accommodate new woodland planting, SuDS uses, or landscaping and open spaces associated with an adjoining site.

Other Councils

- 5.17. The following Councils also have Green Wedges within their administrative boundaries, with policies in their Local Plans which recognise the importance and functions of the Wedges, and aim to protect them.
- Blaby District Council
 - Cheshire West & Cheshire Council
 - Derby City Council
 - East Devon District Council
 - Hartlepool Borough Council
 - High Peak Borough Council
 - North Kesteven District Council
 - Ribble Valley Borough Council
 - Seven Oaks District Council
 - South Norfolk Council
 - Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
 - Taunton Deane Borough Council
 - Thanet District Council
 - York City Council

International

- 5.18. In the Australian city of Melbourne, the non-urban areas that lie outside an Urban Growth Boundary are known as Green Wedges and were first identified as such in the 1960s. There are twelve Wedges that form a ring around the city (shown on the map below) and each one has its own management plan.



Source: Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure, State Government of Victoria, Australia

- 5.19. A significant area of the Green Wedges is public land, including national parks and other parks/reserves. Other important functions of the Wedges include biodiversity, agriculture, attractive landscapes, tourism and recreation, cultural heritage and infrastructure that supports the city. Each Wedge benefits from unique key features related values, and a tailored management plan.
- 5.20. Green Wedges are also prominent in the Danish city of Copenhagen and the Swedish city of Stockholm. There are ten Green Wedges in Stockholm which offer untouched green space, woodland harmony, open views and landscapes, biodiversity, cultural history, activities and facilities. Urban development spread out of Stockholm city centre along the main public transport corridors, leaving areas of open space, wetlands, agricultural land, parks and forest in-between, which were officially designated as Green Wedges in the 1990s.
- 5.21. In Copenhagen, a 'Finger Plan' (see below) was initiated in 1947, which allowed Copenhagen to develop along five finger-shaped areas, centred around rail lines which extend from the dense urban area of the centre. In-between the fingers, Green Wedges were provided for agriculture and recreational purposes.



Source: The Danish Road Directorate

6. Roles and Functions of the Harlow Green Wedge network

- 6.1. Having regard to existing and previous policy and the application of other policies in use across England, seven key roles have been identified that the Green Wedge network in Harlow fulfils. These are:
1. Visual, audial and physical separation between industrial areas & residential areas and between whole neighbourhoods; thereby preventing the merging of neighbourhoods and safeguarding the character and identities of communities
 2. Preservation and enhancement of original natural, physical and landscape features (including natural habitats and ecological assets) that reflect the fundamental character of the town
 3. Preservation and enhancement of the setting and character of historic/cultural sites and areas
 4. Provision of a sense of visual delight by bringing a perception of the countryside penetrating into the urban parts of the town
 5. Provision of a range of informal and formal sport/recreation facilities and opportunities, and green spaces where people can walk, play, relax and seek solitude; therefore contributing to the well-being and physical and mental health of Harlow's residents and visitors
 6. Provision of transport and wildlife corridors (e.g. pavements, cycleways and footpaths) which link the green wedges with residential areas and the surrounding countryside, and provide a network of pathways for flora, fauna, insects and other wildlife
 7. Protection for undeveloped corridors of open land in the district
- 6.2. In the longer term, the Harlow Green Wedge network can also aid:
- the creation of a strong, connected and inclusive economy, as green infrastructure can aid economic regeneration, attract investors and increase land/property values
 - the tackling of crime and anti-social behaviour by aiding perceptions of safety and security, and promoting natural surveillance which helps to reduce crime levels
 - more positive land management, including guiding development and change within the urban fringe
 - the creation of more sustainable places, by encouraging the inclusion of new green spaces, Green Wedges and Green Fingers in new major developments

7. Purpose of the Green Wedge Review

- 7.1. The network of Green Wedges is a unique element of Harlow's character that reflects its New Town heritage and clearly fulfils a number of important functions. The mapped and defined boundaries of the Green Wedge network should, in accordance with guidance set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, be reviewed and amended (where necessary) as part of Local Development Plan preparation.
- 7.2. To accommodate Harlow's future housing need, all potential options that could be used for future housing sites need to be identified, including the possibility of allocating land in the Green Wedge network for such development. This Green Wedge Review will demonstrate that all options for accommodating the district's housing needs have been properly considered and will provide appropriate evidence to underpin the continued designation of areas land within Harlow as Green Wedge, in light of the pressures for land to be allocated for development purposes.
- 7.3. This Review is the first time that the Green Wedge network has been assessed in detail and provides an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of it by assessing each part of it separately. Using the evidence from this assessment, it will then be possible to assess whether:
 - areas currently in the Green Wedge network should remain so;
 - any linear areas currently in the Green Wedge network which are of value but are not significantly contributing to the network should be re-designated as Green Fingers;
 - any small areas currently in the Green Wedge network which are not significantly contributing to the network could be removed;
 - any linear areas that are not currently in the Green Wedge network, but which are making some form of contribution to it, should be designated as Green Fingers;
 - any large areas that are not currently in the Green Wedge network should be included in the network
- 7.4. During the preparation of the Replacement Harlow Local Plan (adopted 2006), the existing Green Wedge boundaries which had been mapped in the Harlow Local Plan (adopted 1995) were amended. The main amendments included the removal of an area adjacent to Second Avenue from the Green Wedge network, totalling 6.28 ha in size, which allowed for the eventual development of Leisurezone.
- 7.5. The Open Spaces and Green Infrastructure Study, carried out by consultants in 2013, assessed and audited over two hundred open spaces in the Harlow district. The Study feeds into the Green Wedge Review by providing additional information on the quality and nature of open land which was assessed within the Green Wedge network.

8. Green Wedge Assessment Methodology

- 8.1. There are currently no national or regional standards for reviewing Green Wedges, as Green Wedges are only found in a small number of areas in England. Certain councils in Leicestershire, as detailed in Chapter 5, produced a joint Green Wedge Review methodology which was used as the basis for producing the methodology for Harlow's Green Wedge Review. However, the Green Wedges in Leicestershire differ from those in Harlow as they separate whole settlements. Therefore, the methodology and scoring system for Harlow's Green Wedge Review was tailored for Harlow based on the expected roles of the town's Green Wedges.
- 8.2. In order for the Green Wedge Review to undertake the most relevant and suitable assessment, the Green Wedge network was split into 18 Wedges so each part of the network could be assessed independently. The boundaries of each Wedge were drawn so they include whole areas of green space (often using boundaries identified in the Open Spaces study), rather than truncating them. A map showing how the Wedge network was split is provided at the end of this chapter.
- 8.3. **Desk-based exercises** were carried out to separately assess the Wedges on three characteristic sets: **Structural**, **Ecological** and **Recreational**. The detailed findings of these exercises form **Section 1** of the results (see Appendix 1). An information gathering exercise for each Wedge was also carried out to ascertain various facts about the Wedges, along with the types of land use within the Wedges. The results of this information-gathering is also contained in Section 1 of the results, along with the overall scores for each Wedge.
- 8.4. Additionally, **site visits to specific locations** in the Green Wedge network were visited and assessed on a **Perceptual** characteristic set. The locations chosen are publicly accessible (often on a footpath), spread evenly across each Wedge and located away from the boundaries of the Green Wedge network. All site visits to locations being assessed on Perceptual characteristics were made within a two-week period, at similar times of weekdays and during clement weather, thereby ensuring consistency. The findings of these visits form **Section 2** of the results (see Appendix 2).
- 8.5. Within the characteristic sets are a number of elements which were scored using a 'traffic light' system, whereby poor = red (or '1'), average = amber (or '2') and good = green (or '3'). The traffic light scoring system was therefore devised such that a 'green' score shows that the Wedge is successfully fulfilling the related element. The scoring system was devised and proportioned to highlight which Wedges are performing well and which are not performing so well on each element.
- 8.6. The findings of the Review have also been mapped – see Appendix 3. The following tables detail the methodology and what was assessed as part of the Review.

METHODOLOGY

SECTION 1 (desk-based exercises):

- **WEDGE INFORMATION, LAND USE AND OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES**
- **STRUCTURAL, ECOLOGICAL & RECREATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS: DETAILED FINDINGS**

WEDGE INFORMATION

Information	Information Details	Study Method
Wedge Location and Description	Location and shape of Wedge	Desk-based (maps)
Ward	The ward(s) that any part of the Wedge is in	Desk-based (maps)
Total Area (ha)	Total area of land (in hectares) covered by the Wedge	Desk-based (GIS)
Approx. Length (m)	Approximate length (in metres) of the Wedge, measured along the middle of the Wedge	Desk-based (GIS)
Abutting Wedges	IDs of Wedges abutting the Wedge. Directions of abutting Wedges are shown in brackets	Desk-based (maps)
Open Space Study IDs	IDs of any sites identified by the Open Space Study (OSS) 2013 (LUC) which are wholly or partly located within the Wedge. The Value/Quality (VQ) rating of the sites is shown in brackets	Desk-based OSS (LUC)
LWS/PLWS IDs	IDs of any Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) or Potential Local Wildlife Sites (PLWS) which are wholly or partly located within the Wedge	Desk-based (GIS)
LNR IDs	IDs of any Local Nature Reserve (LNR) sites which are wholly or partly located within the Wedge. <i>Technical note: the IDs are those found in the 'LP Local Nature Reserve' GIS layer, so may not match IDs used elsewhere</i>	Desk-based (GIS)
Planning History of Wedge	Details (application number, location, description and decision) of planning applications submitted on any site within the Wedge from 2003 to June 2013	Desk-based (Accolaid)

WEDGE LAND USE

Information	Information Details	Study Method
Land use type	The specified type of land use in the Wedge. These are categorised as follows: Recreation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • officially identified recreation areas available for public use • outdoor sports provision (e.g. playing fields, football pitches, golf courses, tennis courts and cricket grounds) • outdoor pursuit centres • sport/leisure and other indoor centres 	Desk-based (maps) & OSS (LUC)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • playgrounds and play areas <p>Park grassland / Park woodland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • area of grassland or woodland, found within a designated park/garden • accessible; multi-function; of high quality • opportunities for informal recreation and community events • range of amenities and activities for visitors • contributes to character of surrounding area • range of habitats contributing to local biodiversity <p>Other grassland / Other woodland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grassland or woodland (i.e. a reasonably dense area of trees) which is found in an area not covered by another category • grass verges; green corridors along transport routes; amenity green space; marshland; natural/semi-natural green space • basic amenities • potential for broad range of habitats • limited recreational opportunities <p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • private/state/free nursery/primary/secondary schools, colleges and universities <p>Allotments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • designated allotment plots (normally Council-owned) • basic amenities • range of habitats <p>Agriculture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fields used for crop-growing and animal-grazing <p>Water bodies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ponds, lakes, streams and rivers • could be found in a park or elsewhere <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anything else which does not fit into a category • churches; public houses; residential properties/gardens • roads & pavements; retail/industrial units; railway lines; car parks <p>Each category also includes associated buildings (e.g. the Educational category includes school buildings; and the Recreational category includes clubhouses, changing rooms, etc.)</p> <p>Uses of surrounding land – uses of land which surrounds the Wedge (such as other open space; Green Belt; industrial; retail; and residential)</p>	
% of Wedge	The approximate percentage of the Wedge covered by the related land use	Desk-based (GIS)
No. of sites	The approximate number of sites in the Wedge	Desk-based

	covered by the related land use	(maps)
Descriptions/ names of sites	Descriptions and/or names of sites (including Open Space Study [OSS] site IDs where applicable) covered by the related land use	Desk-based OSS (LUC)

8.7. The tables below detail the characteristic sets, and elements contained within the sets, that the Wedges were assessed against.

WEDGE STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristic	Description	Options & Traffic Light System	Related Wedge function(s) <i>See list above</i>	Study Method
Approx. average width (m)	The width is an average due to the varying form of the Wedges, which results in wider and thinner parts	Numerical entry < 150 150 – 300 > 300	1; 4; 7	Desk-based (GIS)
Approx. % of boundary which is naturally strong + defensible	A naturally strong & defensible boundary is a defined natural physical edge, such as a river or thick woodland	Numerical entry < 20 20 - 40 > 40	2; 7	Desk-based (GIS)
Extent of separation	Extent to which the Wedge separates neighbourhoods. The Wedge may also separate industrial and residential areas	Little/no extent Medium extent Large extent	1; 5; 7	Desk-based (maps)
Variety of landscape and form	The amount of variety found in the landscape and form of the Wedge, such as how much its width varies and resembles a natural feature, rather than being a planned wedge of a fixed width	Poor Average Good	2; 4	Desk-based (maps)

WEDGE ECOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristic	Description	Options & Traffic Light System	Related Wedge function(s) <i>See list above</i>	Study Method
Approx. % coverage of	Approximate percentage of the Wedge which is	Numerical entry < 4	2; 4; 6	Desk-based (GIS)

total SSSI, LNR, LWS and PLWS	covered by: Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); Local Nature Reserves (LNR); Local Wildlife Sites (LWS); and Potential Local Wildlife Sites (PLWS)	4 – 12 > 12		
Flood Risk Zones found in any part of Wedge	A Wedge in its natural state could function well as a flood plain if it is within a Flood Zone, due to lack of built-up areas in it	None Flood Zone 2 Flood Zones 2+3	2; 4; 6	Desk-based (GIS)

WEDGE RECREATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristic	Description	Options & Traffic Light System	Related Wedge function(s) <i>See list above</i>	Study Method
Approx. % of Wedge publicly accessible	Land which is publicly accessible includes designated footpaths, cycleways and bridleways; freely accessible parks and gardens; other (mostly council-owned) areas of open space which are freely accessible, including roads, pavements and verges; and public buildings. Excludes educational uses; recreational facilities with restricted access; and private land. Where a footpath runs across private land, the land is considered not publicly accessible if the footpath is fenced. If the footpath is not fenced and the ownership of the land is unclear, the land is considered to be publicly accessible.	Numerical entry < 60 60 - 75 > 75	4; 5; 6	Desk-based (GIS); OSS (LUC)
Approx. % of	The percentage of	Numerical entry	2; 4; 5; 6	Desk-based

Wedge available for recreation	Wedge which contains recreational facilities, parks and gardens	< 15 15 – 35 > 35		(maps & OSS (LUC))
Public access points	The quality of public access points into the Wedge (such as from a pavement or footpath), ranging from access only being gained from a few parts of the Wedge boundary to access being obtained from most parts of the boundary	Poor Average Good	4; 5; 6	Desk-based (maps)
Transport corridors	The extent to which transport corridors allow access into and across the Wedge. Transport corridors in this instance refer specifically to footpaths, pavements, cycleways and bridleways, which provide movement for people and wildlife	Corridors allow little/no access into Wedge Corridors allow moderate access into Wedge Corridors allow significant access into Wedge	5; 6	Desk-based (maps)
Transport corridors linkage	The type of linkage that transport corridors across the Wedge provide (e.g. a footpath may run from a residential area across the Wedge into other open space, in which case the transport corridor would link a built-up area and an open space)	Corridors do not link any areas Corridors link built-up areas OR open spaces Corridors link built-up areas AND open spaces	5; 6	Desk-based (maps)
Open Space Study (OSS) sites – approx. % coverage of Wedge	The approximate percentage of the Wedge which is covered by sites identified in the OSS 2013 (LUC)	< 45 45 – 65 > 65	2; 4; 6	Desk-based OSS (LUC)
Overall quality + value (VQ) scores of OSS sites	The Value + Quality score (as identified in the OSS) which covers the largest proportion of OSS sites in the Wedge. The first part of the	Most of area covered by OSS is -/ Most of area covered by OSS is +/- or -/+	2; 4; 6	Desk-based OSS (LUC)

	score relates to quality; the second part to value. E.g. +/- denotes a positive value rating and a negative quality rating	Most of area covered by OSS is +/+		
% of OSS sites by individual VQ scores	The coverage of OSS sites in the Wedge for each VQ score (+/+; +/-; -/+; and -/-)			Desk-based OSS (LUC)
Presence of historic/conservation assets	Whether the Wedge is in a Conservation Area; and/or has any Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM), Listed Buildings (LB) or Listed Gardens (LG)	Wedge not in CA, and does not have SAM/LB/LG Wedge in CA, or has SAM/LB/LG Wedge in CA, and has SM/LB/LG	2; 3	Desk-based (GIS)
Quantity of historic/conservation assets	The number of each historic/conservation asset found in the Wedge (see above)			Desk-based (maps)

METHODOLOGY

SECTION 2 (site visits to specific locations): OVERALL PERCEPTUAL CHARACTERISTICS SCORE FOR EACH WEDGE PERCEPTUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF LOCATION PHOTOS OF LOCATION

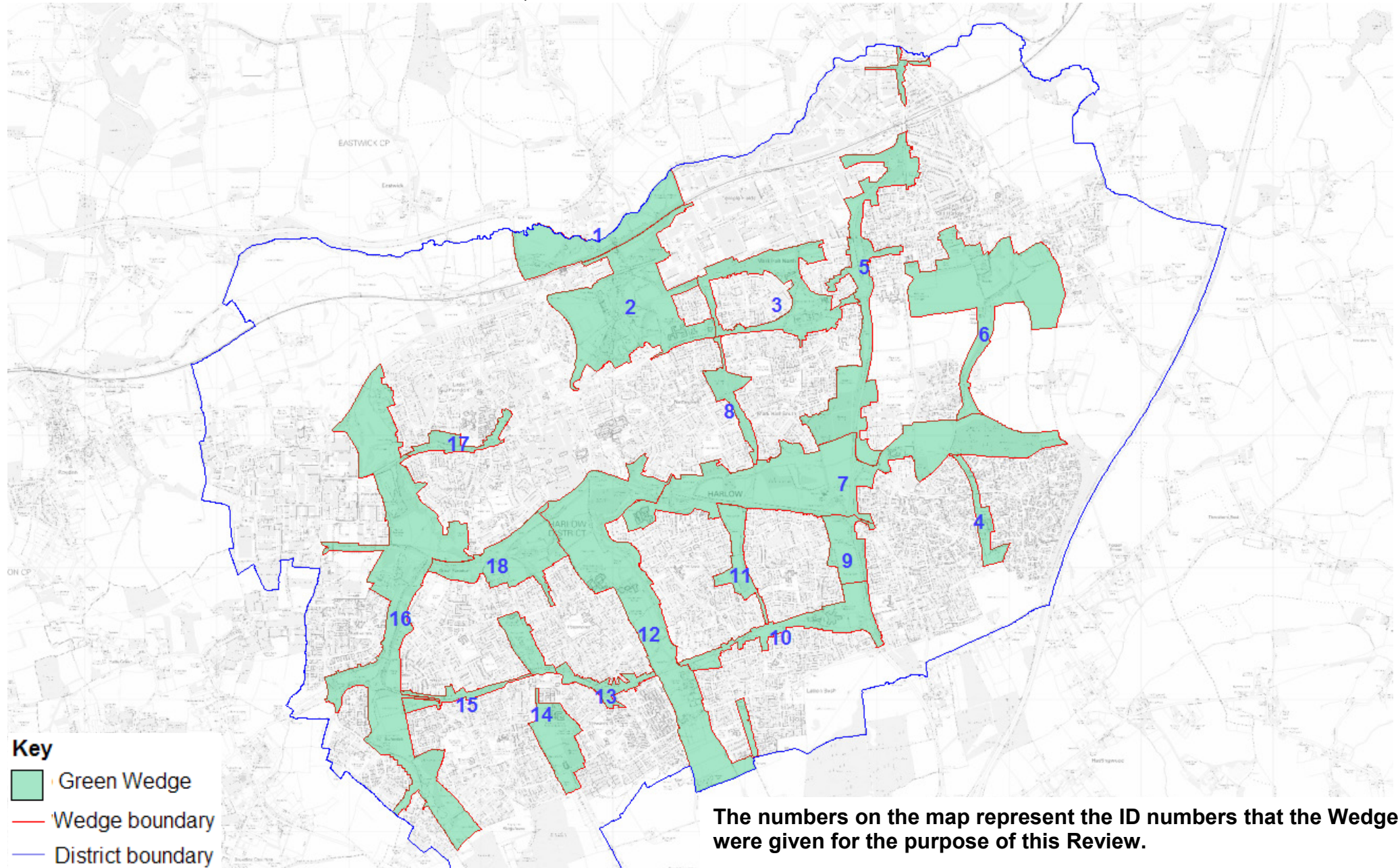
WEDGE PERCEPTUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Wedge Location ID	ID of the location assessed in the Wedge
Date	Date the site visit was carried out
Time	The time of the site visit
Overall Score (out of 3)	The average score for the location, based on the average of the scores of the four elements (assuming red = 1; amber = 2; green = 3)

Element	Description	Scoring System	Related Wedge function(s) See <i>list above</i>
Industrial or traffic noise/pollution buffer/ absorbance	The effectiveness of acting as an absorbance/buffer from industrial and/or traffic noise/pollution	Poor <i>(i.e. definite evidence of traffic/industrial noise/pollution from nearby area)</i> Average Good <i>(i.e. no evidence of traffic/industrial noise/pollution from nearby area)</i>	1; 4
Perception of distance to surrounding built-up areas	The perception of distance to surrounding built-up areas	Close <i>(i.e. urban parts of the district are clearly visible and/or definitely audible)</i> Moderately close/ distant Distant <i>(i.e. urban parts of the district are not visible or audible)</i>	1; 4; 5
Perception of urbanity or rurality	How rural or urban the location feels. A location may feel rural if it lacks traffic/industrial noise/pollution and benefits from other rural characteristics such as birdsong and large amounts of vegetation. Conversely, a location may feel urban if it is surrounded by the built environment, with little in the way of vegetation and traffic/industrial	Strong urbanity <i>(i.e. it feels as though you are still in an urban area)</i> Peri-urbanity/rurality Strong rurality <i>(i.e. loss of perception of urbanity, through such things as birdsong, views of countryside, etc.)</i>	1; 2; 4; 5; 6

	noise/pollution being present		
Evidence of usage	Evidence of usage for recreational purposes – e.g. well-trodden footpaths and desire lines, well-maintained furniture such as benches or picnic tables, signage, markings on the ground (e.g. pitch markings) and levels of activity during site visit	Extreme Moderate Little/none	5

MAP: GREEN WEDGE NETWORK, SPLIT INTO INDIVIDUAL WEDGES FOR ASSESSMENT



The numbers on the map represent the ID numbers that the Wedges were given for the purpose of this Review.

9. Green Wedge Review Findings

- 9.1. As detailed in chapter 7, one of the main purposes of the Green Wedge Review is to demonstrate that the Council has undertaken a robust analysis of all land within the district in order to appraise environmental conditions and to ensure all opportunities to meet its objectively assessed needs have been examined. It will also provide a basis to evaluate existing Green Wedge policy.
- 9.2. The findings of the Green Wedge Review have identified:
- A total of 701ha of land is designated as Green Wedge, which is 23% of the entire area of Harlow (3,054ha).
 - The predominant land uses in the Green Wedges are park & other grassland, park & other woodland, recreational and educational. There are also a number of other uses found in the Wedges, including small numbers of residential properties and other buildings, allotments and agricultural; although the proportion of these other uses is low overall.
 - Seven of the Wedges scored well on structural characteristics, with seven scoring averagely and four poorly. The ones which score the best include those which form the main structural basis of the Green Wedge network, through the centre of the district from east to west, from the centre of the town south-eastwards, and from north to south along the western side of the town. Those which score poorly are of a thin nature, generally comprising little more than areas of grassland and woodland either side of a road.
 - All the Wedges scored well (eleven) or averagely (seven) on recreational characteristics. Those which didn't perform so well generally consist of large areas of educational or agricultural land which is not publicly accessible so cannot be considered available for recreational use. Some of the Wedges which scored poorly on structural characteristics scored well on recreational characteristics, highlighting how different Wedges clearly have different fundamental roles.
 - All the Wedges scored well (eight) or poorly (ten) on ecological characteristics. The larger Wedges scored well due to benefitting from large expanses of land which have a high proportion of land of particular ecological interest.
 - Five of the Wedges scored well on perceptual characteristics (whereby certain locations in the Wedges were assessed for various perceptual elements including evidence of recreational usage and how rural the location felt), with seven scoring averagely and six scoring poorly. The thinner Wedges unsurprisingly scored poorly, as they are largely situated either side of major roads which contributes to them having an urban feel and not a rural feel.
 - Since 2000, 234 planning applications have been made on land in the Green Wedge network.
 - 139 of these applications have been for minor developments (including the replacing of fences, erection of lighting columns, tree works, and extensions to and modifications to school buildings) and have therefore mostly been considered acceptable and granted planning permission.
 - 95 of these applications have been for more significant works. Many of these applications have been for residential modifications (including

extensions, conservatories and erections of garages) and have mostly been granted planning permission, so long as the proposed development does not have an adverse effect on the Green Wedge network and consists of replacing existing buildings and/or contributes towards the amenities of local residents. A small number of these applications have been for more major development, including the construction of existing buildings, and have mostly been refused.

The full findings are provided in Appendices 1 to 3.

10. Green Wedge Review Proposals

Proposal 1: *Identify areas currently in the Green Wedge network which should remain so*

- 10.1. As identified throughout this Review, the Green Wedge network is part of Harlow's unique heritage as one of Britain's first New Towns. According to various consultations which have been carried out over the years, there is strong local support for the Green Wedge network.
- 10.2. Based on the findings of the Review, it is proposed that most of the areas in the Green Wedge network should remain so, although there is scope for the removal of some small areas which are not making a useful contribution to the Green Wedge network, along with the re-designation of certain Wedges and areas as Green Fingers.

Proposal 2: *Identify any linear areas currently in the Green Wedge network which are of value but are not significantly contributing to the network, and should therefore be re-designated as Green Fingers*

- 10.3. The findings of the Review show that certain Green Wedges are not performing particularly well, due to scoring averagely or poorly on Structural and/or Ecological roles, whilst scoring better on Recreational and/or Perceptual roles. These Wedges are generally the narrower, linear Wedges which often have roads and footpaths running through their centre, but also have wooded areas and/or reasonably large areas of green space which are more than just grass verges.
- 10.4. They also generally provide a link between the larger Green Wedges. As such, rather than functioning as Green Wedges, they are better performing as green transport corridors, allowing people and wildlife to travel between areas of green space. There are also other smaller areas located on the edge of the Green Wedge network which are offshoots Green Wedges and are therefore not contributing greatly to the Green Wedge network; they are also functioning more as green transport corridors.
- 10.5. The Harlow Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document states that Green Fingers "provide green routes for walking and cycling", may provide "vistas to the Green Wedge and open countryside" and "form intermediate links between the larger strategic spaces (Green Wedges) and more formal local spaces". It is therefore proposed that the Wedges and areas discussed in this Proposal should be re-designated as Green Fingers.
- 10.6. The re-designation of such areas would better reflect the ways in which they contribute to green space in Harlow, whilst strengthening those of the Green Wedges which performed well when assessed. It is proposed that Green Fingers would have similar development constraints as Green Wedges, although the generally narrow width of Green Fingers would naturally constrain development opportunities in them in any case.

- 10.7. Approx. 74ha of land in the Green Wedge network (10.5%) is proposed to be re-designated as Green Fingers.

Proposal 3: Identify any small areas currently in the Green Wedge network which are not significantly contributing to the network, and could therefore be removed from the network

- 10.8. Each of the Green Wedges was further analysed, and some small areas on the edges of the Green Wedge network were identified which are not considered to be greatly contributing to the network and are also not suitable for re-designation as Green Fingers. Additionally, they are not of significant ecological importance and are not required to meet leisure open space deficit. These areas were assessed and visited; some of them were ultimately considered suitable for continued inclusion in the Green Wedge network, whereas it was proposed that some should be removed from it.
- 10.9. Additionally, all secondary school building footprints which are on the edges of the Green Wedge network are proposed to be removed, thereby recognising that they are not contributing to the network as they are large (two-storey or more), visually intrusive and not publicly accessible. Their removal also strengthens the Green Wedges and the associated policy which does not generally support the inclusion of built-up areas in the Green Wedge network. School playing fields would not, however, be removed.
- 10.10. It is possible that the removal of some of these areas from the Green Wedge network could eventually result in their development, possibly for housing or other uses. However, any future development on these areas may enhance the current Green Wedge network, for example by converting school playing fields to public open spaces as part of a development, or by providing additional landscaping and screening which does not currently exist. Any proposed development on these areas would be assessed in the usual ways through the Development Management processes.
- 10.11. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) assessed many areas of land in Harlow for their potential suitability for possible future housing development. The Green Wedge Review was carried out separately to the SHLAA. However, many of the areas proposed for removal from the Green Wedge network were assessed and scored well in the SHLAA, but there are also areas that scored well in the SHLAA which are not proposed for removal from the Green Wedge network.
- 10.12. Approx. 15ha (2.1% of the Green Wedge network) of secondary school built-up footprints and 11.9ha (1.7%) of other land is proposed for removal from the Green Wedge network.

Proposal 4: Identify any linear areas not currently in the Green Wedge network but which are making some form of contribution to the network, and should therefore be designated as Green Fingers

10.13. A small number of linear areas were identified which function as 'green' transport corridors and are not currently designated as being part of the Green Wedge network. These areas also connect to Green Wedges (or Wedges proposed for re-designation as Green Fingers) and in some cases link them together. It is proposed that these areas are designated as Green Fingers, which would offer them protection by ensuring they retain their 'green' characteristics, whilst also recognising that they are contributing to the Green Wedge network by providing green transport corridors and opportunities for recreation, including walking and cycling.

Proposal 5: Identify any large areas that are not currently in the Green Wedge network which should be included in the network

10.14. The layout of Harlow broadly reflects the masterplan drawn up by Frederick Gibberd in the 1950s. As such, Harlow has a clear Green Wedge network and clear areas of industry, retail and residential. Green Wedge policies in the 1995 and 2006 Local Plans mean that development has mostly taken place outside of the Green Wedge network. As the district has a tight administrative boundary, there is therefore limited scope for identifying new large areas of green space which do – or could – function as Green Wedges.

10.15. Given their important contribution to the character of the town, future development should incorporate new areas of Green Fingers and/or Green Wedges. This could be achieved by designating areas of open countryside – areas which are not currently performing Green Wedge functions – as Green Wedges or Green Fingers.

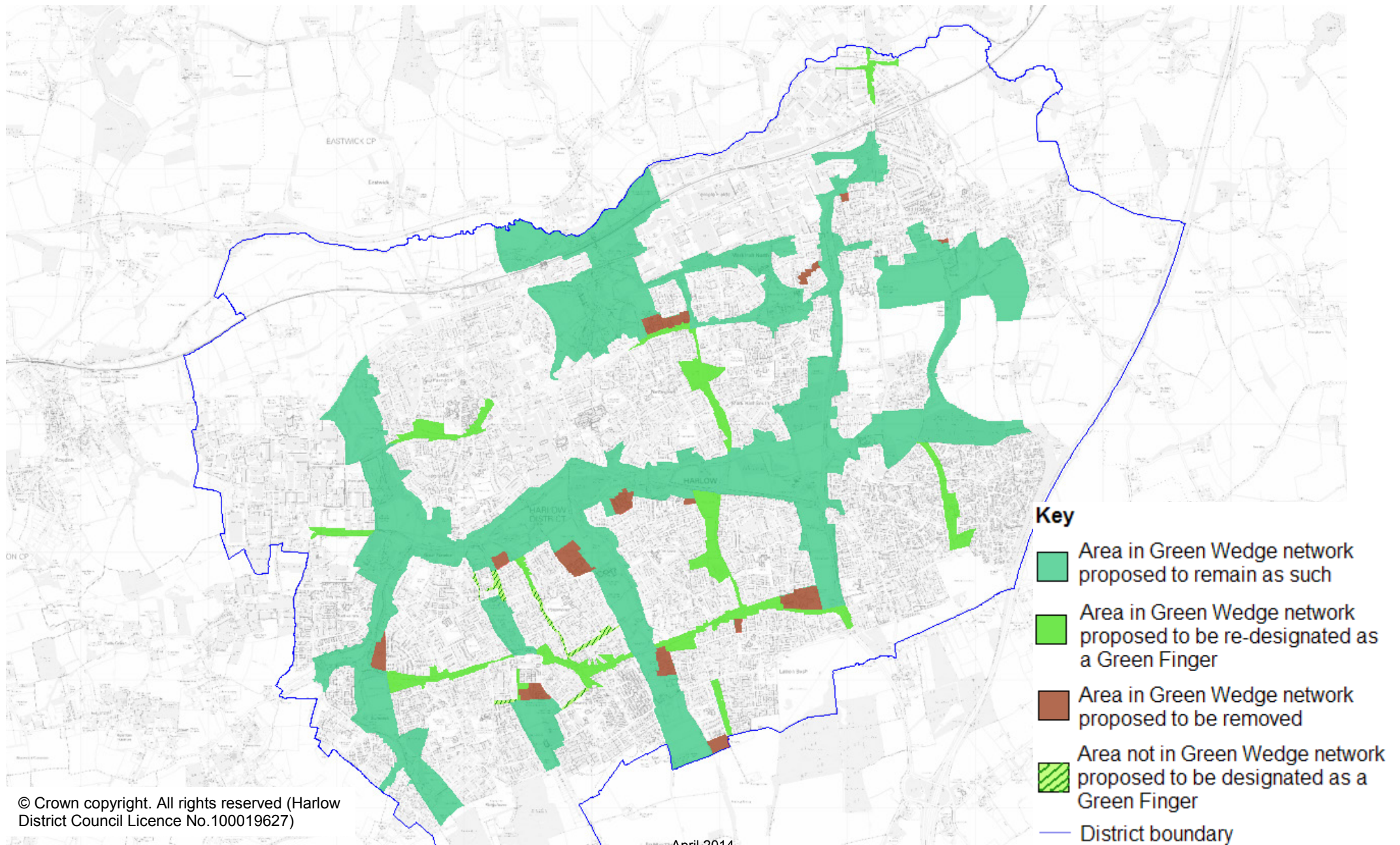
10.16. For example, Policy NE6 in the Adopted Replacement Harlow Local Plan states that if land north of Gilden Way – identified as a Special Restraint Area – was required for development purposes, then “substantial Green Wedges shall be designated between the proposed area of development and Old Harlow and Churchgate Street”. The result of this is that the proposed large-scale development at land north of Gilden Way (which was granted planning permission in November 2012 on appeal) includes Green Fingers which will provide sufficient separation between sub-neighbourhoods.¹

10.17. Any recommendations for the designation of new areas as Green Wedges or Green Fingers will be made through the Local Development Plan preparation process, based on suitable evidence including the findings of this Review and the findings of the forthcoming Green Belt Review. Detailed decisions as to the size and exact location of any future Green Wedge or Green Finger designations would be made through the relevant masterplanning of any future development proposals.

¹ The Inspector's Report into the appeal for the development stated that “the Council conceded that it was appropriate for the scheme to provide 'green fingers' rather than 'green wedges'”, as the provision of Green Wedges (as outlined in the Harlow Design Guide SPD) would severely reduce the number of dwellings on the site and would isolate the development from nearby settlements, which would be an extreme position to take.

- 10.18. The map at the end of this chapter portrays an overview of the proposed modifications. Further information of the proposals, including exact locations, photographs and justifications, are available in Appendix 4.**

MAP: PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS TO THE GREEN WEDGE NETWORK



MAP: PROPOSED NEW GREEN WEDGE NETWORK AND GREEN FINGERS

