

- Notes: (1) Objection 128, which suggests that land at Boughton Cold Store should be allocated for employment purposes, is the corollary of objection 126. I have, therefore, dealt with both these objections under the seventh issue (a) in this section of my report.
- (2) Since objection 554 relates to land at Overstone which the draft plan does not propose for inclusion in the Northampton Green Wedge, and as the matter has not been clarified by the objector, I have taken no further action on this objection.

1.1 SUMMARY OF OBJECTIONS

- 1.1.1 Since the proposed Green Wedge would form a virtually continuous belt of land adjoining the boundary with Northampton Borough, within which development would be strongly resisted, it would, in effect, constitute a Green Belt on the northern edge of the town. However, as there is no policy in the approved structure plan that there should be a Green Belt around Northampton, the proposed Green Wedge is unjustified.
- 1.1.2 The proposed Green Wedge would prejudice the proper, long-term planning of housing and other development associated with the expected continued growth of Northampton.
- 1.1.3 The policy is not necessary in order to achieve the stated aims of the proposed Green Wedge, since these are achievable by other policies of the local plan or structure plan.
- 1.1.4 The policy is, in any case, too restrictive in that it does not make specific provision for other forms of development normally permissible in rural areas, for example, facilities for golf; nor does it have regard to the particular social and economic needs of agriculture and forestry.
- 1.1.5 Parts of the boundary of the proposed Green Wedge are arbitrarily drawn in that they do not follow features readily identifiable on the ground.
- 1.1.6 The land for the proposed Northampton North West Bypass (NNWBP), and also that to the south-east of this road line, is inappropriately included in the proposed Green Wedge.
- 1.1.7 If a Green Wedge is to be defined then it should specifically exclude sites at (a) Boughton Cold Store; (b) south of Boughton Crossing; (c) north of Boughton School; and (d) west of the proposed Whitehills housing allocation.
- 1.1.8 By contrast, there are other objections which contend that land allocated for housing development under Policies HS2 - HS5 should, instead, be included within the proposed Green Wedge.
- 1.1.9 Finally, it is suggested that the policy should be made less permissive by the substitution of 'MAY BE GRANTED' for 'WILL NORMALLY BE GRANTED'.

1.2 THE ISSUES

1.2.1 Whether the proposed Northampton Green Wedge is a Green Belt and, therefore, both Policy EN13 and the definition of the Green Wedge on the Proposals Map need to be founded on a specific structure plan policy.

1.2.2 Whether the proposed Green Wedge would prejudice the long-term planning of this part of the periphery of the urban area of Northampton.

1.2.3 Whether the Council's aims for the proposed Green Wedge could equally well be achieved by other policies of the structure or local plan.

1.2.4 Even if otherwise acceptable, whether Policy EN13 ought to make provision, in principle, for specific types of rural development in the proposed Green Wedge, or ought specifically to have regard to the social and economic needs of agriculture and forestry.

1.2.5 Whether the boundary of the proposed Green Wedge is satisfactorily defined on the ground.

1.2.6 Whether land for part of the proposed North West Bypass, and also that to the south-east of this road line, is appropriately included within the proposed Green Wedge.

1.2.7 Whether specific sites at (a) Boughton Cold Store; (b) south of Boughton Crossing; (c) north of Boughton School; and (d) west of the proposed Whitehills housing allocation are appropriately included in the proposed Green Wedge.

1.2.8 By contrast, whether the sites allocated for housing development under Policies HS2-HS5 are appropriately excluded from it.

1.2.9 Even if otherwise acceptable, whether Policy EN13 needs to be made less permissive by the removal of the presumption of the grant of planning permission, except in specified circumstances.

1.3 ASSESSMENT

First Issue: Green Wedge or Green Belt?

1.3.1 The proposed Northampton Green Wedge is referred to as a Green Belt 'in all but name' in the Council's July 1992 leaflet, which was issued as part of the public consultation on the second pre-deposit version of the draft plan. However, it is clear to me that, notwithstanding that reference, Policy EN13 in the deposited plan is not intended to operate as a Green Belt, primarily because the area to which it would apply, as defined on the Proposals Map, would be fixed only for the lifetime of the plan. The policy itself and the area to which it relates would, therefore, be open to review in the normal way at the end of the plan period in 2006, and possibly well before then in response to the adoption of the new replacement structure plan.

1.3.2 As paragraph 1.4 of PPG 2 (1995) makes clear, the fundamental aim of a Green Belt is to keep land permanently open. Accordingly, paragraph 2.6 of this national guidance points out that once the detailed boundaries of a Green Belt have been defined in a local plan, they should be altered only exceptionally. I consider that the lack of permanence of the boundaries of the proposed Green Wedge clearly distinguish it from a Green Belt. There is, therefore, nothing in the statutory regulations or in national advice on the content of local plans which would preclude the adoption of Policy EN13 in the absence of an enabling structure plan policy, or the definition of the detailed boundaries of the area to which it would apply.

1.3.3 I have taken into account that this proposed Green Wedge would apply to a virtually continuous belt of land adjoining almost the whole length of the boundary between Daventry District and Northampton Borough. Even so, I do not consider that either the particular shape or the substantial extent of this proposed Green Wedge means that it would be, therefore, to all intents and purposes a Green Belt.

1.3.4 As well, I have noted that there are similar, though not identical, proposals around most of the remaining lengths of the Borough boundary in the draft local plans of the other two Councils which adjoin Northampton. However, since any objections to such proposals are not matters before me, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on them, other than to state that the encirclement of the Borough by generally restrictive policies does not indicate to me that a Green Belt, as such, is in the process of being defined around the town.

1.3.5 In addition, I have had regard to the fact that the largely concentric Green Wedge around the built-up area of Leicester in the local plan for that area is specifically founded on an enabling policy in the Leicestershire structure plan. Also, I have considered that, elsewhere, Green Wedges are usually wedges, or similar shaped pieces of open land, which penetrate towards the centre of a town from the general periphery of the built-up area. This is the case, for example, with the Harrogate Green Wedges. Nevertheless, in the absence of national guidance on the matter, I do not consider that either the two-stage procedure followed in the Leicester case, or the more common shape of green wedges which have been adopted elsewhere, are binding on this local plan.

1.3.6 I conclude, therefore, on this first issue that the proposed Northampton Green Wedge would not be a Green Belt and does not, therefore, need to be founded on a specific structure plan policy.

1.3.7 However, since the proposed Northampton Green Wedge is not intended permanently to preserve the openness of all the area presently designated, the Council may wish to consider whether it should be given another title. There is no objection before me which suggests a different name, and it would not be proper, therefore, for me to make a specific recommendation on this matter. Nevertheless, in line with Mr M Griffin's suggestion in respect of land identified as part of the Daventry Green Wedge which may not necessarily be kept open beyond the plan period, I consider that the term 'Area of Restraint' might equally well be applied to the proposed

Northampton Green Wedge. However, if the Council so wished, I consider that it might be possible for them to identify certain parts of this area to which a policy of permanent protection from urban development would apply, and which could be called Green Wedges. On the evidence before me, though, I am unable to offer any suggestions as to where such wedges might be defined.

Second Issue: Prejudice Long Term Development

1.3.8 Since the boundaries of this proposed Green Wedge would not be permanently fixed, its extent could therefore be altered when the plan is reviewed if additional land then needs to be allocated for development. Indeed, it is significant that the present boundaries were defined only after sites for housing had been identified, rather than it being the case that an already defined Green Wedge operated as a fundamental constraint on which land could then be allocated for development. Bearing in mind the specific requirement of Policy RES 1 of the structure plan, as altered, that provision be made in the local plan for 1,000 new dwellings related to the growth of Northampton, I consider that it was sensible for land for this purpose to be identified before the boundaries of the Green Wedge were defined. The Council state that a similar sequence will be followed when the local plan is reviewed.

1.3.9 Whilst I can envisage that it may be necessary for particular parts of this proposed Green Wedge to be kept permanently open in order to prevent the unacceptable coalescence of Northampton with certain villages, nevertheless, it is not self evident that development would need to be precluded from every part of it. I do not consider, therefore, that the proposed Green Wedge would necessarily prevent the eventual development of housing and other uses which were required as the result of the long-term growth of employment in the Northampton area.

1.3.10 I conclude, therefore, on the second issue that the proposed Green Wedge would not prejudice the long-term planning of this part of the periphery of the urban area of Northampton.

Third Issue: Other Policies of the Structure and Local Plan

1.3.11 The objectives for the proposed Northampton Green Wedge are set out in section 3 of the Council's background paper on Green Wedges. Although the publication of this background paper post-dates the deposit of the local plan, I consider that its objectives are consistent with the reasoned justification for Policy EN13 given in paragraphs 3.27-29 of the draft plan. These paragraphs state that the policy is justified in order to prevent the coalescence of built-up areas, and that the greatest value of this proposed Green Wedge is as undeveloped open space for recreation, as agricultural land, and as land of high ecological or landscape importance. As well as seeking to protect this proposed Green Wedge, the Council also wish to enhance it and to improve public access to it. There are no objections to any of these objectives, as such, and I am satisfied that they are worthy of support.

1.3.12 This proposed Green Wedge would separate the existing built-up area of Northampton, together with the sites allocated for housing under Policies HS2 - HS5 of this local plan, from the villages of Harlestone, Church Brampton, Chapel Brampton, and Overstone; and to a large extent also from the main part of the villages of Boughton and Moulton. At the same time, it would keep separate the villages of Boughton and Moulton. I consider, therefore, that it would play an important role in the maintenance of the separate physical identity of these six villages.

1.3.13 Most of this proposed Green Wedge is in agricultural use, generally on good quality land; and a substantial part of it south-east of Harlestone and the Bramptons is also of high landscape value. There is clear evidence of public recreational use of parts of this proposed Green Wedge, for example, on the two golf courses south-east of Church Brampton, and also along the length of the Brampton Valley Way footpath and cycleway which passes through the area. In addition, I have little reason to doubt that members of the public make use of the other rights of way in the area. There is also clear evidence of its ecological value, for example, at Round Spinney, and I have little reason to doubt that its hedgerows and small woods, in particular, are also of nature conservation interest.

1.3.14 The Council consider that Policy EN13 would provide a sound basis for the protection of this area, though they accept that the policy would not be able to deal to any significant degree with its desired enhancement, or with the improvement of public access to it, since such land management matters do not come within the scope of a local plan policy. Nevertheless, in their view, this policy would provide more effective protection for this area, which otherwise would be likely to come under intense pressure for development, and may still do so, than would other policies of the structure plan and local plan.

1.3.15 In my opinion, even existing non-agricultural uses such as golf courses could come under pressure for development for housing, especially around their edges; or for other out-of-town urban facilities, such as squash courts associated with golf clubs. At the same time, the fact that much of the area is high quality agricultural land does not itself guarantee protection from development, especially since it is also national policy, as expressed in PPG 13, that the maximum amount of new housing should be located in or adjacent to larger urban areas. Consequently, I am satisfied that, in order to protect its generally open character, this urban fringe will require careful and effective control of development. Accordingly, I now consider the likely effectiveness of other development plan policies in providing such protection.

1.3.16 Policy GN1, and clause F in particular, of the draft local plan seeks to severely restrict development in the open countryside. At the same time, Policy EN2 seeks to restrict new building in the defined Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) to that related to agriculture, forestry, recreation or tourism; or to that within settlements in these areas. In addition, Policy HS39 of this draft plan specifically seeks to resist new residential building in the open countryside, except for that essential for agriculture or forestry.

1.3.17 Policy GEN 2 of the approved structure plan, as altered, also states that new development will be severely restrained in the open countryside; Policy RES 8 includes the statement that, in the open countryside, planning permission will not normally be given for new residential development, except for that essential for the purposes of agriculture or forestry; Policy EMP 9 states that in such areas planning permission will not normally be given for business and general industrial development; and Policy ENV 4 states that in SLAs planning permission will not normally be given for development except where it relates to the re-use of specified types of redundant buildings, is for agriculture, forestry, recreation or tourism, and/or is within towns or villages.

1.3.18 Compared with the above policies it is clear to me that Policy EN13 of the draft local plan would be more comprehensive in that it would apply to all types of development, including to changes of use. I consider, therefore, that this policy would provide effective control over additional types of development to those which are the subject of structure plan Policies RES 8 and EMP 9, and local plan Policy HS39. At the same time, compared with structure plan Policy GEN 2 and draft local plan Policy GN1, which both apply to the open countryside in a general manner, Policy EN13 clearly highlights the intention to provide particular protection for this proposed Green Wedge.

1.3.19 As regards structure plan Policy ENV 4 and draft local plan Policy EN2, it seems to me that certain types of development would be permissible in an SLA under these policies that would be contrary to Policy EN13, on the grounds that such development would, for example, reduce the physical separation between settlements, or would harm wildlife. There is a substantial area of open countryside south-east of Harlestone, Church Brampton and Chapel Brampton which is shown on the Proposals Map as being both Green Wedge and SLA. In order, therefore, to make it clear that the more restrictive provisions of Policy EN13 will apply in this area, and thereby reduce uncertainty for applicants for planning permission, I consider that SLA designation should be deleted from this part of the District.

1.3.20 I conclude, therefore, on the third issue that the Council's aims for the necessary strict control of development in this proposed Green Wedge could not be achieved as effectively by other policies of the structure plan or local plan. However, I also conclude that the areal overlapping of local plan Policies EN2 and EN13 should be removed by the deletion of SLA status from all land designated as Green Wedge on the Proposals Map.

Fourth Issue: Other Rural Development and Interests

1.3.21 In the first part of these grounds of objection it is suggested that specific provision should be made in Policy EN13 for any type of development appropriate to a rural area but, in particular, for facilities for golf. However, as I have already concluded on the third issue, in this sensitive urban fringe area it is justified for there to be stricter

control of development than in the countryside generally. Consequently, a general relaxation, either for rural uses in general or facilities for golf in particular, would not be warranted. Indeed, because golf courses and the like are often accompanied by substantial buildings, usually have large areas of car parking, and can affect the ecological balance of an area, I consider that it is especially important that they be assessed in the light of this policy. I have taken into account that there is evidently planning permission for a hotel at the junction of Boughton Green Road and Moulton Lane, but do not consider that this exceptional case undermines the general validity of the proposed Green Wedge policy.

1.3.22 The second part of these grounds of objection suggests that, in the implementation of Policies EN13 and EN14, regard should be had to the social and economic needs of those who would live and work in the proposed Green Wedges, and especially to the needs of agriculture and forestry. It is not altogether clear to me whether it is suggested that suitable references should be included in the policies themselves, or that they should be added to the reasoned justification. Either way, however, because of the sensitive character of this urban fringe and its amenity value for many town dwellers, I do not consider that the interests of those who live or work in this proposed Green Wedge should be given any greater weight, either as a matter of policy or practice, than is already included in criterion C of Policy EN13.

1.3.23 I conclude, therefore, on this issue that there is insufficient reason to require that provision be made in this policy for either rural development in general or for particular types of development, nor is there sufficient justification for particular regard to be given to agricultural or forestry interests.

Fifth Issue: Definition of the Green Wedge Boundary

1.3.24 I deal with objections to the inclusion or exclusion of specific areas of land later under issues 6, 7 and 8, but consider here the matter of whether the general concept of this proposed Green Wedge is flawed because parts of its outer boundary, in particular, do not follow easily identifiable features on the ground. In my experience, policies relevant to a particular area are generally easier to apply in practice if the boundaries of the policy area are readily identifiable on the ground. However, given the availability of modern means of land surveying, I do not consider that the lack of reference to specific features on the ground would be an insuperable problem in identifying the precise position of all the lengths of the boundary of this proposed Green Wedge.

1.3.25 I conclude, therefore, on this issue that the concept of this proposed Green Wedge is not invalidated by the fact that certain lengths of its boundary do not follow specific features on the ground, especially as none of the objections suggest specific natural or man-made features that should be used instead. It follows that I do not consider that any part of the inner or outer boundary of this proposed Green Wedge needs to be altered in response to these grounds of objection.

Sixth Issue: The Proposed Northampton North West Bypass

1.3.26 The proposed NNWBP is not the subject of a specific policy or proposal in this draft local plan, though, as paragraph 7.27 of the plan makes clear, the Council supports its construction at an early date on an alignment which minimises the impact on villages and the open countryside. A corridor for this proposed road between the District boundary west of the A50 extending north-eastwards as far as the A508 is shown with broken lines on the Proposals Map, including on Inset A. However, it is not clear to me whether this is the alignment specifically supported by the Council, nor whether this corridor represents the precise route or merely a safeguarding zone. No objections have been made, including in respect of chapter 7 on Communications which is dealt with by Mr Griffin, that this road should be the subject either of a specific policy or, alternatively, that it is inappropriate to indicate a diagrammatic corridor for it on the Proposals Map. Nevertheless, in the light of the advice in paragraph 5.35 of PPG 12, I consider that the plan needs to clarify the position.

1.3.27 The Council seem to suggest that, in any case, since it will be for the County Council themselves to consider any applications for deemed planning permission for the proposed road, there is unlikely to be a problem over any conflict between the proposed road and Policy EN13. In my view, however, irrespective of which planning authority determines the necessary applications, if there were any conflict with this policy of the development plan this would need to be fully recognised before permission were granted as an exceptional case. Nevertheless, as there is no detailed or convincing evidence before me that the proposed road would conflict with this policy, I do not consider that Policy EN13 should be deleted, or that the boundaries of the proposed Green Wedge need to be altered so as to exclude the corridor for this proposed road.

1.3.28 At the same time, since I have already concluded on the second issue that there is no need to exclude land from the proposed Green Wedge specifically in order to accommodate development after 2006, it follows that it would not be justified to exclude the large area of land to the south east of this road line. As for the possibility that this proposed road may require a service area near to the proposed junction with the A50 at Boughton Crossing, or elsewhere, there is no technical evidence before me that such a service area would be necessary. Consequently, I do not consider that land should be excluded from the proposed Green Wedge in order to be able to accommodate this unsubstantiated possibility.

1.3.29 I conclude, therefore, on this issue that the plan's support in principle for the proposed bypass does not mean that Policy EN13 needs to be altered or deleted; nor that land for this road needs to be excluded from the proposed Green Wedge; nor that land to the south east of this proposed road needs to be excluded. However, I do consider that the plan needs to clarify the function of the corridor for this proposed road shown on the Proposals Map, including on Northampton Area Inset A, and also needs to amend the notation to remove its diagrammatic nature if the corridor is to remain, or needs to delete the corridor if the Council do not support this particular alignment. Such clarification would most appropriately in chapter 7.

Seventh Issue: (a) Land at Boughton Cold Store

1.3.30 Objection 126 includes the contention that the site of this former cold store, and the buildings on it, should be excluded from the proposed Green Wedge on the grounds that, otherwise, they will not be developable for further purposes. The whole site apparently has an authorised use for storage, and certain buildings on it are also lawfully used for business purposes. Various other parts of the site have, or until recently have had, temporary permissions for a builder's yard, a haulage business, overnight lorry parking and a small garden centre. The site forms a largely isolated pocket of development in open countryside.

1.3.31 I have dealt with the general grounds of objection to this proposed Green Wedge included in objection 126 in my consideration of previous issues. In particular, I have already indicated on the third issue that in this sensitive urban fringe area between Northampton and the villages of Church and Chapel Brampton special care will need to be exercised in the control of development in order to protect the essentially open character of the area. I consider, therefore, that in the absence of any overriding structure plan need for the redevelopment or intensification of use of this site, any proposals for development on it should be assessed against the criteria in Policy EN13 rather than against those in general restraint policies in the development plan.

1.3.32 Further, because of the particular circumstances of this site I do not consider that either the exclusion from the proposed Daventry Green Wedge of the commercial building to the south of Monksmoor Farm, or the proposed policy applicable to the Creaton Road Industrial Estate, Brixworth, justify the exclusion of the objection land from the proposed Northampton Green Wedge. Even were land to the west of the proposed Whitehills housing allocation to be allocated for development as a consequence of my recommendation in section 9, I do not consider that this would justify the exclusion of the Cold Store site from this proposed Green Wedge, since there is no specific structure plan employment need that this site is required to fulfil. In any case, since the site would still be largely in open countryside, which I consider merits special protection, its exclusion from this proposed Green Wedge would not be justified.

1.3.33 It follows, therefore, that I do not consider that the Cold Store site should be allocated for employment purposes as suggested in objection 128.

Seventh Issue: (b) Land South of Boughton Crossing

1.3.34 Objection 434 relates to a long, narrow site between the A50 and the line of the former railway to the west. The site's southern edge is formed by the District boundary and at its northern end it comes to a point just south of the former Boughton Level Crossing. I have assumed that there is specific objection to the inclusion of this site within the proposed Northampton Green Wedge in addition to the general grounds of objection to the extent of this Green Wedge in the vicinity of the site. I have already dealt with these general grounds under previous issues.

1.3.35 The site is used for the grazing of horses. As such, it has an open character which I consider contributes to the separation of the built-up area of Northampton from the villages of Church and Chapel Brampton. Depending on the precise nature of its use, it also clearly has value for either recreational or agricultural purposes. Accordingly, I consider that it is appropriately included in this proposed Green Wedge.

1.3.36 I note that objection 433, which contends that the site should be allocated for housing, has been withdrawn, apparently because land on the opposite side of the A50 is not allocated for housing in the deposited plan. However, even were such land to be allocated for housing as a consequence of my recommendation in section 9 in respect of a westward extension of the Whitehills allocation, I do not consider that it would be justified to allocate the objection site, since any housing on it would be an intrusion into open countryside west of the A50 for which there is no overriding structure plan requirement.

Seventh Issue: (c) Land North of Boughton School

1.3.37 Objection 205 relates to a small area of land to the rear of Boughton School, which is served by a narrow track along the western boundary of the school. It seems to me that this objection is partly to the principle of the proposed Green Wedge, and partly to the inclusion of this site within it. I have dealt with the general matters raised in this objection in relation to this proposed Green Wedge under previous issues, and have had regard to the conclusions of Mr M Griffin in respect of the proposed Green Wedge and Links related to Daventry town.

1.3.38 The Council do not respond to the second, site-specific part of this objection. I have considered it, therefore, in the light of my site inspection and of the purposes of the proposed Green Wedge as set out in paragraph 3.27 of the draft plan. I note, however, that the objection does not specifically propose that the site should be allocated for housing development.

1.3.39 As I saw, the bulk of the site is beyond the northern boundary of the present built-up area of Boughton. Whilst, therefore, it does not play any part in preventing the coalescence of Northampton with this village, nevertheless, I consider that it makes a valuable contribution to the openness of this urban fringe. I conclude, therefore, that it is appropriately included in this proposed Green Wedge.

Seventh Issue: (d) Land West of the Proposed Whitehills Housing Allocation

1.3.40 Objection 1004 relates to a substantial area of land west of the Whitehills housing allocation proposed under Policy HS2. The land is bounded in the south by the District boundary, by the A50 in the west, and by Brampton Lane in the north. The main reason for this objection is that this land should be reserved for long term housing development.

1.3.41 I have already concluded on the second issue that the proposed Green Wedge would not necessarily preclude future development on it, if this were necessary to meet the replacement structure plan's housing or other requirements. I do not consider, therefore, that it would be justified to exclude this site from the proposed Green Wedge because it might be needed for development in the longer term. However, if as a consequence of my recommendation in section 9 the Council were to extend the proposed housing Whitehills allocation as far as the A50, the objection site would then need to be excluded from the Green Wedge.

Eighth Issue: Exclusion of Land Allocated under Policies HS2 - HS5

1.3.42 I assess in detail in sections 4 - 7 of my report the objections to the allocation of land for housing under Policies HS2 - HS5. In doing so I have borne in mind the objectives of the proposed Green Wedge, but also that the Council defined its boundaries only once sufficient land had, in their view, been allocated for housing to meet structure plan requirements for 1,000 new dwellings up to 2006 related to the growth of Northampton.

1.3.43 I conclude on the objections to those policies that no fundamental change should be made in respect of Policies HS2 and HS3, but that Policies HS4 and HS5 should be deleted. It follows, therefore, that in respect of the proposed Whitehills and Boughton Green Road allocations, the proposed Green Wedge should not be extended to cover these sites. On the other hand, it also follows that, since both the Round Spinney and Park View proposed allocations would otherwise contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the proposed Green Wedge, they should be included within it as a modification of the plan. The Round Spinney site, in particular, contributes to a significant degree, in my view, to the maintenance of the gap between the built-up area of Northampton and the core of the village of Moulton; and has significant agricultural, recreational and wildlife value. The Park View site is much smaller but, since it is part of the narrow gap of open countryside between sporadic development on the eastern outskirts of Moulton and the village of Overstone, I consider that it also justifies special protection, notwithstanding the proposal for the A43(T) Moulton bypass.

1.3.44 I conclude, therefore, on this issue that the sites allocated for housing under Policies HS2 and HS3 are appropriately excluded from this Green Wedge, but that those allocated under Policies HS4 and HS5 should instead be included within it. Any westward extension of the present Whitehills allocation under Policy HS2 would also need to be excluded from this Green Wedge.

Ninth Issue: The Policy Is Too Permissive

1.3.45 The inclusion of 'normally' in the draft policy implies to me that, in exceptional cases, even proposals which met all four of the specific criteria A - D in the policy would not be granted planning permission. However, since the policy does not indicate which types of proposal would

be refused permission in such circumstances, nor does the reasoned justification provide specific and convincing arguments for including the word 'normally', I consider that the policy is already somewhat lacking in clarity. It follows that I do not consider that the policy should be made even more discretionary.

1.3.46 In any case, it seems to me that the essence of this ground of objection is that this policy is positively rather than negatively worded. Bearing in mind that the policy is intended to control development in a careful and restrictive manner, I consider, therefore, that it is likely to be more effective if it were worded negatively, that is, so as to indicate that planning permission will not be granted if a proposal failed to meet one or more of the specified criteria A - D, and thereby caused harm to one or more of the purposes of the proposed Green Wedge. In the interests of consistency the policy also needs to include reference to the Proposals Map Northampton Area Insets A, B and C.

1.4 CONCLUSIONS

1.4.1 I do not consider that any of the objections to Policy EN13, either individually or collectively, are of sufficient weight to justify the deletion or fundamental alteration of this policy. Similarly, with the one exception of land west of the proposed Whitehills housing allocation with which I deal in detail in section 9 of this report, I do not consider that any part of the Green Wedge shown on the Proposals Map should be deleted. On the other hand, however, the Council may wish to consider giving the proposed Green Wedge a different title for much of its present extent.

1.4.2 On the other hand, I do consider that, in accordance with my recommendations in respect of Policies HS4 and HS5, land at Round Spinney and at Park View, Moulton should be included within the Green Wedge. I also consider that the uncertainty caused by the overlapping of SLA and Green Wedge status should be removed by the deletion of SLA designation from the relevant land; that the status of the corridor for the proposed Northampton North West Bypass should be clarified; and that specific reference needs to be made to the Northampton Area Insets A, B and C.

1.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

1.5.1 That the first part of Policy EN13 be modified to read as follows:

PLANNING PERMISSION WILL NOT BE GRANTED FOR DEVELOPMENT IN GREEN WEDGES AS INDICATED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, INCLUDING THE DAVENTRY INSET AND NORTHAMPTON AREA INSETS A, B AND C, UNLESS IT WOULD NOT:-

1.5.2 That the plan be modified by the inclusion of land allocated for housing under Policy HS4 at Round Spinney and Policy HS5 at Park View as part of the Northampton Green Wedge; and that land west of the Whitehills housing allocation proposed under Policy HS2 be excluded from this Green Wedge if this land is allocated for housing as a modification to the plan.

1.5.3 That the plan be modified by the deletion of Special Landscape Area status from all land shown on the Proposals Map and Northampton Area Inset A as being part of the Northampton Green Wedge.

1.5.4 That the plan be modified either by an explanation in chapter 7 of the function of the corridor for the proposed Northampton North West Bypass shown on the Proposals Map and Northampton Area Inset A, and by a correct notation of this road on these maps; or by the deletion of this diagrammatic corridor from these maps.

1.5.5 That the Council seriously consider the substitution of 'AREA OF RESTRAINT' for 'GREEN WEDGE' in Policy EN13 in respect of the area north of Northampton, but without prejudice to the identification of any parts of this area where its open character would be the subject of long term protection and could continue to be designated as Green Wedge.

1.5.6 That no other modifications be made to Policy EN13, or to the Proposals Map or the Northampton Area Inset A.

Paragraphs 3.27-3.29: Reasoned Justification for Policy EN13

OBJECTION

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Note: This objection is not related to the non-conformity of the draft local plan with the approved structure plan, as altered.

1.6 SUMMARY OF OBJECTION

1.6.1 That these paragraphs should include a recognition that there are valid planning permissions for the extraction of ironstone and the overlying minerals on sites within the proposed Northampton Green Wedge.

1.7 THE ISSUE

1.7.1 Whether the reasoned justification for Policy EN13 should refer to these planning permissions which, if implemented, would result in opencast mining on sites within this proposed Green Wedge.

1.8 ASSESSMENT

1.8.1 The planning permissions referred to date from the 1950s and, whilst it is now unlikely that these sites would be worked for ironstone, bearing in mind the closure some years ago of the Corby ironworks, nevertheless, it is possible that the overlying limestone, in particular, may be commercially attractive. The District Council recognise the position and, therefore, advertised the following paragraph as a Proposed Change, to be added after paragraph 3.27:

It should be noted that valid minerals planning permissions exist on sites within the green wedge. These date from the 1950s and relate to ironstone extraction but also permit the extraction of overlying minerals. The District Council is not the Minerals Planning Authority but will seek to minimise the impact of any implementation of these permissions and object to any extensions or new applications.

1.8.2 It seems to me that, while ever these minerals permissions remain valid, there is always the possibility that one or more of them may be implemented, in whole or in part. Any measures to minimise the impact of such working would be governed either by conditions attached to the relevant planning permissions, or by any changes to such conditions which the minerals planning authority were able to agree or impose.

1.8.3 It would not be appropriate, therefore, in my view, for the local plan to state that the District Council will seek to minimise the impact of

any implementation of these permissions, since this could cause unjustified inconsistency within the development plan, which consists of both the structure plan and local plan. At the same time, as the District Council are a statutory consultee in respect of all minerals planning applications, it would not be justified for the local plan to state that they will object to any proposed extension of the site of existing permissions or to proposals for any new sites, since each proposal ought to be considered on its merits by them.

1.9 CONCLUSION

1.9.1 Notwithstanding that the County Council apparently do not object to the advertised Proposed Change, I conclude, therefore, on this objection that only the first two sentences of it should be added to the local plan.

1.10. RECOMMENDATION

1.10.1 That plan be modified only by the addition of the first two sentences of the advertised Proposed Change to paragraphs 3.27-29.

SECTION 2

Chapter 3: The Environment

GREEN WEDGES AND GREEN LINKS

POLICY EN14

IN RESPONSE TO POLICY EN13 (AS ABOVE), THE FOLLOWING USES WILL NOT NORMALLY BE GRANTED PLANNING PERMISSION IN GREEN WEDGES:-

HOUSING, OFFICES, INDUSTRY, WAREHOUSING, RETAIL OUTLETS, LEISURE COMPLEXES, HOTELS, HOSPITALS, EDUCATION ESTABLISHMENTS, CAR PARKS, MAJOR HIGHWAYS, OPEN STORAGE, GARDEN CENTRES.

OBJECTIONS either to the policy in general or its application to the proposed Northampton Green Wedge in particular.

29	National Farmers' Union	127	Trustees of G Civil
206	H Holloway Ltd	421	Boughton Parish Council (1)
479	Country Landowners' Association	555	Mrs W Richardson (2)
865	Brian Rice Farms and Others	1005	Northants CC/ Martin Grant Homes
1018	Rugby/Coventry Branch NFU	1156	Mr J Ebsworth
2028	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (3)		
2159	Bryant Homes	2195	House Builders' Federation
2272	Department of the Environment		

General Note: Objections 132 and 305 are not included in the above list as they are dealt with in the report of Mr M Griffin.

- Notes: (1) As objection 421 is to the fact that the Green Wedge does not include the proposed Whitehills housing allocation, I have already dealt with the substance of this objection under objection 420 in my consideration of objections to Policy EN13.
- (2) Since objection 555 relates to land at Overstone which the draft plan does not propose for inclusion in the Northampton Green Wedge, and as the matter has not been clarified by the objector, I have taken no further action on this objection.
- (3) Objection 2028 was provisionally withdrawn provided that the advertised Proposed Change were made to this policy. However, as I recommend that this policy be deleted, this conditional withdrawal of objection 2028 is no longer relevant.

2.1 SUMMARY OF OBJECTIONS

2.1.1 The policy is inflexible and generally too restrictive.

2.1.2 It is inconsistent for the Proposals Map to show the proposed Northampton North West Bypass (NNWBP) whilst, at the same time, this policy seeks to resist the construction of major highways in a Green Wedge.

2.1.3 The policy does not make specific provision for facilities for golf, for farm shops, or for the re-use of redundant agricultural buildings; nor does it have regard to the particular social and economic needs of agriculture and forestry.

2.2 THE ISSUES

2.2.1 Whether the policy is inflexible or too restrictive.

2.2.2 Whether the proposed bypass would conflict with this policy.

2.2.3 Even if otherwise acceptable, whether the policy ought to make provision, in principle, for other types of development in this Green Wedge, or ought specifically to have regard to the particular social and economic needs of agriculture and forestry.

2.3 ASSESSMENT

First Issue: Inflexible and Too Restrictive

2.3.1 Policy EN14 is clearly intended to specify those types of development uses which normally would not be granted planning permission in a Green Wedge. Although the inclusion of 'normally' indicates to me that in certain circumstances the specified types of development might be granted permission, nevertheless, I consider that this policy verges on being prescriptive. Since paragraph 1.8 of PPG 12 makes clear that plans should not be prescriptive, there would thus need to be specific and convincing reasons for the inclusion of this policy in the plan.

2.3.2 In response to the objections, the Council advertised as a Proposed Change that this policy be deleted but that, instead, with one minor alteration, its contents be included as part of the explanatory text to Policy EN13.

2.3.3 However, since this Proposed Change would still leave the contents of Policy EN14 in the plan, virtually unchanged, it seems to me that this could too easily result in disputes about the weight which should be attached to the suggested explanatory text when planning applications were being determined. I have already concluded in section 1 that careful and effective control of development in this proposed Green Wedge is justified and consider that this should be achievable through the operation of Policy EN13, especially if it is negatively worded. In the circumstances, there-

fore, I conclude on this issue that not only should Policy EN14 be deleted, but also that the advertised Proposed Change should not be made. Paragraph 3.30 of the draft plan will also require deletion as a consequence.

Second Issue: The Proposed Northampton North West Bypass

2.3.4 A corridor for the proposed NNWBP is shown on the Proposals Map, and on Area Inset A, running through the proposed Green Wedge from the District boundary west of the A50 north-eastwards as far as the A508. This proposed road is not, however, included as a policy or clear proposal of this plan. I have, therefore, already recommended in relation to Policy EN13 that the plan needs to clarify the function of this corridor, or to delete it. However, if it is to be retained, it is clear to me that there would be a fairly obvious conflict between this proposed road and Policy EN14, or any similar explanatory statement in the plan.

2.3.5 I have, though, already concluded on the first issue, in relation this policy, that it should be deleted, and also that the advertised Proposed Change should not be made. If, therefore, the plan were modified in this way, planning applications for this proposed road could then be determined in accordance with Policy EN13, together with other relevant policies of the development plan and all other material considerations.

Third Issue: Other Rural Development and Interests

2.3.6 Since I have already concluded on the first issue that Policy EN14 should be deleted, and that no similar explanatory statement should be included in the plan, it follows that I do not consider that it is necessary to alter the policy so as to include exceptions for specific types of development in this proposed Green Wedge. In any case, I am satisfied that Policy EN13 would provide a fair and satisfactory basis for the control of all types of development in this sensitive urban fringe, including genuine farm shops, facilities for golf, and the re-use of redundant agricultural buildings.

2.4 CONCLUSIONS

2.4.1 Policy EN14 would, in my view, virtually preclude permission from being granted for specified types of development, and any equivalent statement in the explanatory text of Policy EN13 would probably have a similar effect. Bearing in mind, therefore, the strong degree of control over development which would be exercisable through the operation of Policy EN13, I conclude that not only is Policy EN14 unjustified, but also that the advertised Proposed Change to it is not desirable.

2.5 RECOMMENDATION

2.5.1 That the plan be modified by the deletion of Policy EN14.