

AREA OF SEPARATION

1.0 Purpose:

To recommend Areas of Separation (AoS) for the Somerby Parish Neighbourhood Plan.

2.0 Background:

2.1 The NPPF does not specifically address AoS policy. However, NPPF Core Planning Principles, para 17 and NPPF para 156 indicate local plans may identify areas where development would be least environmentally appropriate.

2.2 AoS policy seeks to mitigate the coalescence of settlements, defined as the process of physical, visual or perceptual 'coming together to form one thing'. This can be the result of housing development, and/or the coming together of commercial developments with nearby residential areas.

AoS policy also supports green infrastructure, protects the identity and character of settlements and provides environmental and amenity value.

2.3 In Policy EN4, the Melton Local Plan sets out principles to meet the above aims and adds, in point B, that AoS policy should also 'retain highly tranquil parts of the landscape between settlements'.

Policy EN4 gives Neighbourhood Plans the opportunity to designate local areas of separation, not to prevent all development, but that which would result in loss of individual settlement character.

2.4 Question 37 of the Somerby Parish Neighbourhood Plan Household Questionnaire asked residents how important it was to maintain separation between the villages in and around the parish. 93% stated it was important/very important, and ranking by village separation area, shown below indicates AoS policies would be widely supported:

Villages	No. of respondents rating separation important/very important
* Burrough to Twyford	337
* Burrough to Somerby	358
* Somerby to Cold Overton	345
* Somerby to Owston	347
* Somerby to Pickwell	344
* Pickwell to Leesthorpe	273

With residents' input, the above areas between villages were evaluated to determine where areas of separation could benefit in mitigating coalescence and maintaining settlement character.

2.5 The definition of settlement 'coalescence', and the methodology for the Neighbourhood Plan evaluation was adapted from the approach used by Harborough District in 2017 to assess that district's candidate AoS's. The approach is rural in scope, includes a desktop review, field work, and the scoring of open spaces against ten physical, perceptual and landscape criteria with written comments provided. The methodology is outlined at the end of this report (See Methodology, section 6.0).

3.0 The Plan Area and scope of assessment:

3.1 The map of the Plan Area is in the Supporting documents section of the Neighbourhood Plan. The character of the parish's historic and natural environment, and the settlement character of villages is set out in Chapter 7 of the Plan and in appendices including the Environmental Inventory.

Assessments of landscape character and sensitivity prepared by Melton Borough (2006, 2011 and 2014), the Local Green Space and Fringe Sensitivity Study, 2015 (which assessed only Somerby), bordering Harborough District's landscape study in 2017, and Natural England's National Character Area: 93, 2013, were consulted. (See Sources, section 5.0).

3.2 There are four villages in the Plan Area: Burrough on the Hill, Leesthorpe, Pickwell and Somerby. Kilometre distances by road, including villages outside the parish affecting AoS policy are:

* Burrough to Twyford	3.23km
* Burrough to Somerby	3.12km
* Somerby to Cold Overton	3.33km
* Somerby to Owston	3.37km
* Somerby to Pickwell	1.50km
* Pickwell to Leesthorpe	3.63km

It was noted that the linear forms and high locations of many of these settlements resulted in levels of inter-visibility not only from roads, but also countryside lanes and public rights of way which were considered along with kilometre distance.

3.3 There are ten small.scale (10-49 employees) businesses in or bordering the parish:

- * Burrough Court, Twyford Road, Burrough
- * Pickwell Equestrian Centre, Somerby Road, Pickwell
- * Hoy Team-Somerby Stables, Oakham Road, Somerby
- * Dinghills Farm, Oakham Road, Somerby (wholesale trade)
- * Somerby Equestrian Centre, Newbold Lane, Somerby
- * Somerby Surgery, Oakham Road, Somerby
- * Household Waste Disposal Unit, Knossington Road, Somerby
- * Nesbitt's Buses, Burrough Road, Somerby
- * Belmont Farm, Stygate Lane, Pickwell (pig rearing, energy generation)
- * Melton Meats, Stygate Lane, Pickell

3.4 Considering Somerby parishioners' input, the topography, intervisibility and kilometre distances between villages, the following areas were selected for further assessment:

- * Somerby to Pickwell, AoS-1
- * Somerby to Cold Overton, AoS-2

The other villages ranked by residents would not reasonably meet the definition of coalescence either because of physical distance or typography. Other environmental or housing design policies in the Neighbourhood Plan will help support the maintenance of their individual characters.

Note: The assessment of AoS-2, Somerby to Cold Overton, a candidate under this policy, was completed. It was decided not to include this area in the recommendation as it dealt primarily with commercial developments. The assessment is held in the Neighbourhood Plan records. (Revision, 05/05/19)

4.0 Assessment of land between Pickwell and Somerby, AoS-1

4.1 History:

Somerby and Pickwell are both small, rural villages with extensive conservation areas. Until 1936 they were two separate parishes, each having its own church, school, manors and separate social and economic identity. At 1.5km apart, these villages are the closest in terms of distance.

The settlements are connected by Somerby-Pickwell Road (B route), a paved footpath and public rights of way including the Leicestershire Round and footpaths D68 and D74. During 2017-18, development sites were permitted along Somerby Road for an equestrian centre and dwelling, a barn/stable, and five dwellings. The Melton Local Plan has also identified a SHLAA site suitable for development at the Pickwell edge with capacity for eight dwellings.

4.2 Description:

The land examined is an area located between the residential edges of the two villages, running south from Pickwell to Somerby and on the east and west sides of the sides of the Somerby-Pickwell Road (B route). A map of the area is shown in Figure 1 below.

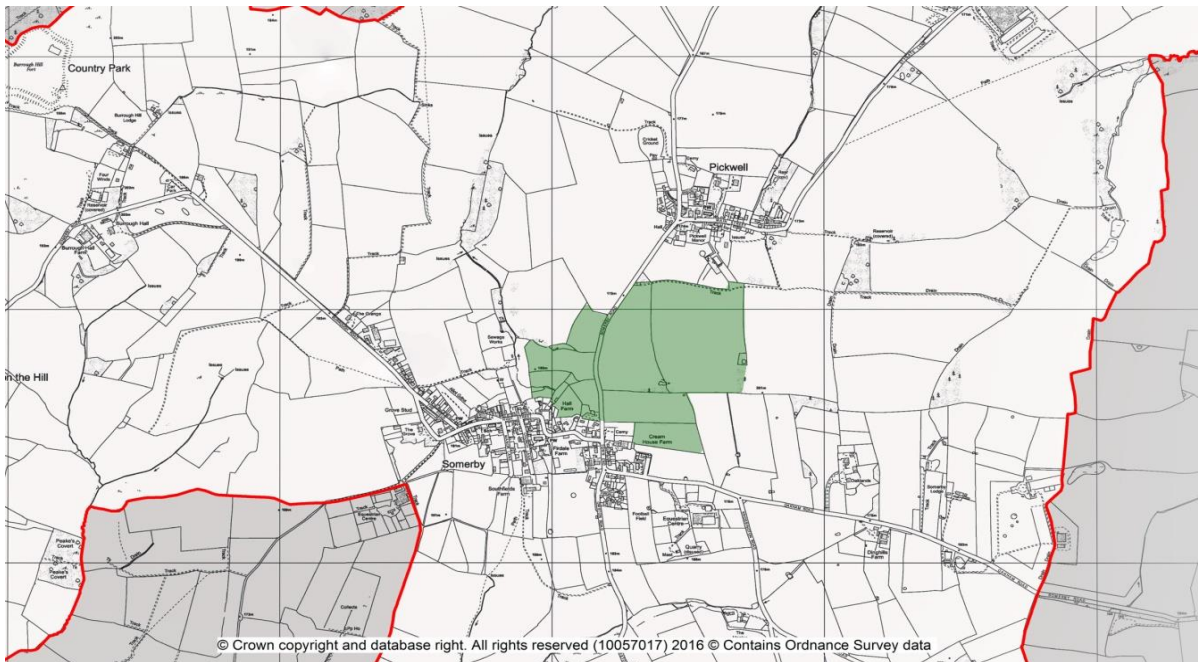


Figure 1: map of recommended AoS-1 between Pickwell and Somerby

4.3 AoS-1 assessment and scoring matrix:

The undeveloped land between the settlements was assessed for its contribution to maintaining their individual character. Ten criteria were marked from A to E, those from C to E indicating greater merit for AoS designation. Where the land examined had qualities which included features of more than one criterion they are both noted. The key to the criteria is covered in section 6.0, Methodology.

Assessment Matrix AoS-1						
Criteria Group	Criteria	A	B	C	D	E
Physical Features	Topography				**	
	Vegetation				**	**
	Land use				**	**
Perceptual Factors	Public visibility					**
	Private views				**	
	Contribution to settlement character					**
	Landscape linkage					**
Landscape value	Designations					**
	Scenic quality				**	**
	Recreation value					**

The assessment, supported by the written commentary following below, indicated that the land mapped as AoS-1 is a primary component of the separation between Somerby and Pickwell and would merit designation under a Neighbourhood Plan AoS policy.

4.4 Commentary on criteria assessment of AoS-1:

1. Topography:

The landscape consists of a gently rolling plateau with an open skyline rising towards Cold Overton hill to the east and the Burrough Hill escarpment to the west. The land form is more varied to the west, flat near Pickwell, but with steeper slopes and hollows carved by a watercourse as Somerby is approached. To the east of the road, the land form is primarily flat and open likely as a result of more recent arable use, with an area of ridge and furrow and a small cemetery located at the edge of Somerby.

The land rises towards Somerby which is situated at approximately 190m compared to Pickwell at 180m lending potential for greater visual and perceptual connection between the villages from the approach road and also from areas on Somerby High Street and Burrough Road.

2. Vegetation:

Clipped hedgerows border the fields along both sides of the Somerby-Pickwell Road, with breaks for gateways, and also a stretch of deteriorating low dry-stone park walling.

Within the fields vegetation is low to moderate, comprised of arable and pasture (semi-improved grass land) to the east; and, immediately to the west of the road, arable and designed park land containing a number of scattered veteran specimen and mature field trees. A small wind break provides seasonal screening for Pickwell Manor park land and parts of Pickwell village at the east. At the northern perimeter of Somerby conservation area, garden trees and shrubs are intermittent. Several larger tree belts are located west of the road towards Burrough Hill, some Priority Habitats.

With the exception of roadside hedges, the topography lessens the role vegetation plays in providing a strong physical or visual containment of the land examined. This is apparent from the strong visual presence of the new equestrian centre which is publicly and privately visible from the Somerby-Pickwell Road, and to a degree the Burrough Road, and back gardens along Somerby High Street and the west end of Pickwell.

3. Land use:

Land use is medium to large in scale but with an open and historic rural character. Arable and grazing fields are located at both the east and west sides of the Somerby-Pickwell Road, and pasture, arable and park land on the west, all opening to countryside. Pasture land is currently used for livestock grazing.

The mixed agricultural land use and park land results in a distinct change of character from the built areas of the two villages. Recently, the Equestrian Centre off the Somerby Road has extended land use to incorporate a commercial cross country course, and a house granted permission. Another barn complex has also been granted permission and built.

4. Public visibility:

Long views to and from the village edges and to Burrough Hill are had in places along the Somerby-Pickwell Road, from the paved footpath as the road rises and falls, and from breaks and gateways in the hedgerows.

When approaching Somerby village from Pickwell by road, there are views of village character features such as Somerby Grade I Church, Somerby Hall park land and ridge and furrow pasture.

From sections of the Burrough Road west of Somerby, Pickwell church is visible (seasonally) in a long view across parts of the land examined, filtered when hedgerows and trees are in foliage.

Public views of the land examined are also had from the Leicestershire Round and footpaths D68, D75 (partial) and D78. The villages' edges are distinct and marked by Somerby Town End, the High Street edge of the conservation area, Somerby Church spire, Somerby Hall and Pickwell park land. (See Public Rights of Way map in Supporting documents section.)

The Leicestershire Round connects with the nearby Jubilee Way, both footpaths are part of the Borough's Green Infrastructure network, and these and the other footpaths have high usage.

5. Private views:

Views of the land examined, some including the east side of Burrough Hill, are had from residential areas along the north edge of Somerby High Street. There are also views from houses along the north-west edge of Somerby on Burrough Road, although a tree belt, a Natural England Priority Habitat, filters these views in the summer. Views from open spaces on the High Street and Town End take in areas of the designed park land and ridge and furrow field.

From residential areas at the west end of Pickwell, private views across the open arable landscape include the east side of Burrough Hill escarpment, parts of Somerby High Street and Somerby Church spire.

6. Contribution to settlement character and their landscape settings:

Both villages have settlement histories of well over a thousand years. Seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth century maps show settlement and land use patterns largely unchanged and agricultural. (1885 Somerby OS map, 1816 Boyce map of Melton Mowbray, British Library, Pickwell estate maps, 1616 and 1736, LRO Collection, T1797 and T1798). In both these conservation villages, housing growth until recently was achieved primarily through infill and conversions with little intrusion into the landscape examined.

The land examined continues to contribute to the separate identities of Somerby and Pickwell, each with its own medieval church, ancient manors, designed park lands, and nineteenth century national schools. The park lands of Somerby Hall (now demolished) and Pickwell Manor, at each end of the land examined, mark the edges of the historic settlements. The villages are still separated by open 'tilled' fields which were once likely contained a more extensive ridge and furrow system.

AoS-1 forms a pastoral and tranquil landscape setting between Somerby and Pickwell. It marks a change of character between the settled areas of each village each with features which reflect

historic village organisation and the social and economic use of land.

7. Landscape Linkages:

The land examined has strong perceptual linkage to NCA:93 High Leicestershire character area, including topography, historic environment, settlement timelines and economic use. Visual and physical linkage includes the east side of Burrough Hill, ridge and valley landscape leading to Cold Overton and the park lands of Somerby Hall and Pickwell Manor. The ridge and furrow field is linked to others located off the Oakham Road, all part of a more extensive field system once surrounding Somerby.

8. Designations:

The area is part of Natural England's National Character Area:93, High Leicestershire Hills with three Priority Habitats within it. It is ranked by the CPRE as within an area of 'most tranquillity' and in the top areas of Dark Skies at Night. It is adjacent to the Somerby and Pickwell conservation areas.

It contains park lands of Somerby Hall and Pickwell Manor designated in the Local Heritage List of the Neighbourhood Plan, and their veteran trees covered by Tree Protection Orders. The area is designated by the Neighbourhood Plan as a Local Landscape Character Area 2, with an Important View (PV 5.3). (Details in Chapter 7 appendices)

9. Scenic Value

Within the land examined there are areas of medium to high scenic and historic landscape value. It is quintessentially pastoral with the juxtaposition of the ancient villages, churches, country house park land, ridge and furrow, and pasture land still in grazing use close to settlements. It contains views to open countryside including the eastern landscape of Burrough Hill Fort (SAM), and woodland, wild flower meadows, ash, oak and willow trees and a watercourse. (See Local Landscape Character Area 2 description and illustrations in Chapter 7.8, and Local Non-designated Heritage Assets in Appendix 8.)

10. Recreational value:

AoS-1 is visually attractive and historically interesting. As such, its network of footpaths including the Leicestershire Round which connects with the Jubilee Way and footpaths D68, D78 and D75, and cycle routes, are frequently used by residents and visitors. (See Public Rights of Way, Chapter 7.13).

4.5 Conclusion:

The assessment indicates the largely undeveloped open space between Somerby and Pickwell makes a primary contribution to their settlement character and separate identities in terms of visual, perceptual and landscape character and landscape value. We recommend that an AoS Policy supporting the recommendation be included in the Neighbourhood Plan.

5.0 Sources:

- North West Leicestershire Local Plan Examination, Position Statement - Countryside and Open Space (<https://www.nwleics.gov.uk/documents>)
- Melton Local Plan, Policy EN4, Areas of Separation and Melton Policy EN6 Settlement Character
- Somerby Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire, question 37.
- Natural England: Profile of NCA:93 High Leicestershire Hills
- Melton Areas of Separation, Fringe Sensitivity and Local Green Space Study, 2015
- Harborough District: Areas of Separation Review 2017 - main report and Appendices 1-3
- 1816 Boyce Map of Melton Mowbray (District), British Library
- 17th/18th century maps of Pickwell (LRO) and 1885 OS map of Somerby
- OS Explorer Map: Loughborough, Melton and Syston, 246
- Landscape Sensitivity and Green Infrastructure Study for Leicester and Leicestershire - Strategic Growth Plan: High Leicestershire Hills, page116.
- Harborough: District Wide Landscape Character Assessment, 2007
- Melton and Rushcliffe Landscape Sensitivity Study, 2014

6.0 Methodology

6.1 The potential areas of separation in the Parish were ranked by residents in the Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire, Question 37. Kilometre distance and topography were used to suggest which were reasonable candidates for further assessment. They were: 1) the area between Somerby and Pickwell, and 2), the area of open land off the Oakham Road between Somerby and Cold Overton where commercial development is nearby residential areas.

6.2 The 2015 Melton Areas of Separation and Fringe Sensitivity and Local Green Spaces Study did not assess areas of separation in Somerby Parish. Therefore, the methodology in the Harborough District Wide Areas of Separation Review, 2017 was adopted because Somerby Parish borders Harborough in places, the border areas are both in Natural England NCA: 93 High Leicestershire Hills and share common rural landscape features.

6.3 Desk studies were conducted using a number of landscape character assessments listed in Sources, along with Natural England biodiversity and Historic England heritage designations within the study area. Neighbourhood Plan assessments for Local Heritage Assets, Sites of Environmental Significance and Important Open Spaces was also considered.

6.4 Reviews of site policies, SHLAA sites and unimplemented permissions within or adjacent to the study area were reviewed.

6.5 Field work was conducted during May, 2018 from public locations and accessible land. The timing of the field work is considered to underestimate visual links between settlements due to seasonal foliage, but it has been reported as observed. The fieldwork was carried out by members of the Neighbourhood Plan, including a member with landscape assessment experience.

6.6 The criteria used to evaluate how a landscape contributes to maintaining identity and

distinctiveness of settlements were drawn from the Harborough District Council Area of Separation Review, April, 2017 and are as follows:

The ten Area of Separation Criteria (taken from point 2.13 of the above document):

Physical criteria

1. Topography - the pattern of landform can reinforce the separation between settlements (e.g. a ridge between settlements) or alternatively it may support linkage (e.g. in a valley landscape with inter-visibility across valley slopes).
2. Vegetation - the level of compartmentalisation, screening, or enclosure by trees, hedges and woodland can have a marked influence on the role that a parcel plays within landscape. Where vegetation provides strong visual/physical containment, it may result in a reduction in the distance required between settlements to provide a sense of separation. Conversely, when vegetation cover is more limited and the landscape more physically and visually open, an increased physical distance maybe required.
3. Land use - the use of land will have a bearing on its openness and character and the role it fulfils in a sense of separation. Agricultural land use would imply a distinct change of character from built-up areas and therefore be more sensitive. Alternatively uses such as playing fields, parks, cemeteries, and allotments have a closer association with urban areas and indicate a reduced sense of separation.

Perceptual criteria

4. Public visibility - the degree of openness to public view from roads, rights of way and accessible land influences the perceptual role a land unit performs in the locality. Locations with open views and public access can strongly reveal the openness and sense of separation. Conversely, locations with limited access and/or appreciation of the landscape would have a reduced role. Locations where there is inter-visibility from or between settlements will be of particular importance.
5. Private views – residential views from neighbouring settlements can form part of a local community's appreciation of land between settlements. Locations with more open and prominent views would have a greater role compared to those which are incidental or more strongly filtered. Locations where there is inter-visibility between settlements will be of particular importance.
6. Contribution to the character and setting of settlements - the character of an area of land can affect the appreciation of a neighbouring settlement or development (e.g. where properties in a settlement front onto open countryside or where ridge and furrow pasture closely relates to a traditional village environment there could be a strong relationship with the adjacent land). Conversely, physical barriers such as major roads, railway lines and associated earthworks may reinforce separation despite the proximity.
7. Landscape linkage - the relationship between land units is an important factor that underlines their combined role in the landscape. These can include physical and/or visual links that form part of a wider composition. In identifying coherent areas of separation, the sum of the individual parts of a landscape may be greater than the individual land units in isolation.

Value criteria

8. Designations - the presence or absence of designations are indication of value. This may include e.g. heritage, landscape or biodiversity features.
9. Scenic Quality - the scenic value of an area reflects a combination of elements and factors, both physical and perceptual. Areas with a pleasing mix of elements are more likely to be highly valued. Such value may be reflected in national or local landscape designations. However, in the context of [Harborough District] as a whole there are no existing landscape designations. Therefore, relative scenic quality is based on professional judgement by the assessor.
10. Recreational value - the degree to which a land unit can be appreciated and enjoyed for recreational use can contribute towards the value of the area. Land that is used for specific purposes e.g. a country park, open access land or playing fields will have a local and community value for recreation. Rights of way provide value, particularly where routes are well maintained and provide convenient links to residential areas.