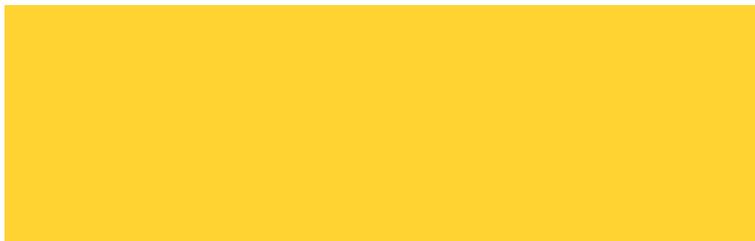
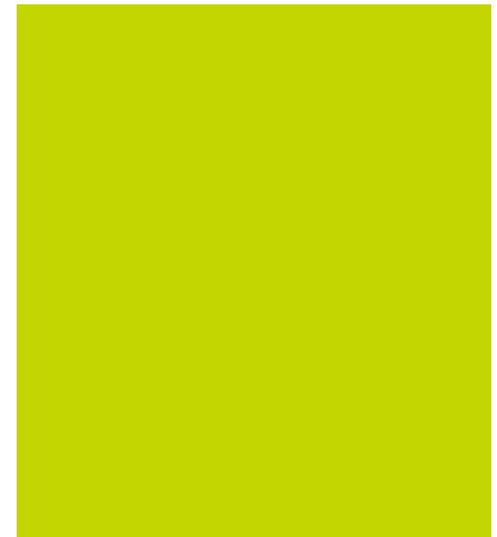
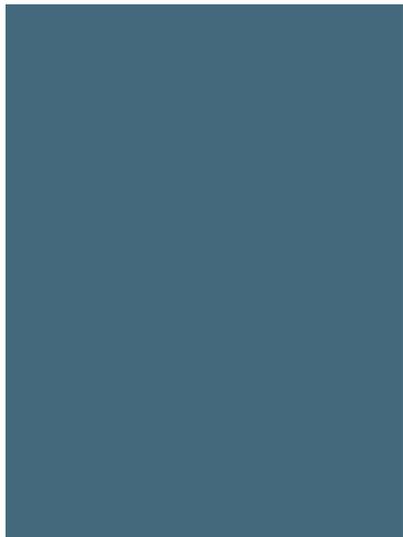
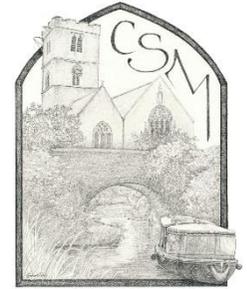


CREECH ST MICHAEL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Green Wedge Assessment

April 2018



1.0 Introduction

Creech St Michael Parish has been designated as a Neighbourhood Planning Area and as part of this process, a draft Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) has been prepared which contains proposed local policies to help guide and inform new development proposals within the NDP area.

Draft Policy CSM11 seeks to designate land to the east of the M5 motorway as a strategic Green Wedge. There is no specific definition of the term Green Wedge within legislation, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) or its accompanying Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). The Planning Portal offers the following definition:

"Green wedges comprise 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 can also provide recreational opportunities."

Green Wedges are currently designated within the administrative planning authority's (Taunton Deane Borough Council – TDBC) adopted Development Plan under Core Strategy Policy CP8. The emerging Policy CSM11 seeks to reflect this approach at a more local level by designating

a Green Wedge at a key entrance to the NDP area. The adoption of Policy CSM11 will not preclude new development and is not intended to replicate Green Belt policy, but instead ensure that the NDP policies reflect the spatial strategy established through the Development Plan at a more local level by directing proposals to the most sustainable locations where appropriate. The implementation of Policy CSM11 will ensure that the rural gateway to the west of Creech St Michael is maintained along with a degree of separation between the urban and rural areas in the context of the planning Monkton Heathfield urban extension, whilst also enabling the green character and setting of villages and open countryside within the NDP area to be safeguarded.

This green wedge assessment forms part of the evidence base to support the inclusion of draft Policy CSM11 within the emerging NDP. The following sections are included:

- Section 2.0: Background and justification
- Section 3.0: Planning policy context
- Section 4.0: Assessment methodology
- Section 5.0: Area of search
- Section 6.0: Desk based assessment
- Section 7.0: Preferred areas
- Section 8.0: Recommendations and conclusions

2.0 Background and justification

Background

In May 2016, Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) approved the designation of the Creech St Michael Neighbourhood Plan (NDP) area.

Since that time, extensive consultation and consideration has been given to the existing and future planning priorities within the NDP area. A draft NDP has been prepared and was subject to an 8 week consultation period from 8th December 2017 until 8th February 2018. The consultation was undertaken in accordance with Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) (the "Regulations").

The comments received as part of the Regulation 14 consultation highlighted the need to consult on the evidence base for the NDP and its policies. A further consultation specifically seeking comments on the draft Green Wedge Assessment (dated February 2018) and the Housing Needs Assessment (August 2017) was carried out between 13th March and 3rd April 2018.

The submission draft NDP contains eleven draft policies, and this includes Policy CSM11: Green Wedge.

Policy CSM11 is set out in full as follows:

Development proposals in the Green Wedge as identified on Plan 10, shown on land between Creech St Michael village and Monkton Heathfield urban extension.

Development proposals in the Green Wedge will be resisted where they conflict with its purposes, which are to:

- **prevent the coalescence of settlements and maintain a sense of place and identity for neighbourhoods**
- **maintain the open character of a green lung contributing to health and wellbeing for residents**
- **provide accessible formal and informal recreation, sport and play**
- **provide valuable wildlife corridors and habitat**
- **protect areas of landscape importance and visual amenity**

Justification

During the consultation for the NDP there was significant positive feedback to designate both local green spaces and green wedges to ensure that rural villages within the NDP area continue to maintain a

separate identity to the planned Monkton Heathfield urban extension and between existing rural settlements. Reflecting the policies within the Borough-wide Core Strategy, but on a more local level, it was considered that the most appropriate way to prevent coalescence of urban and rural areas would be the inclusion of a Green Wedge policy, which would be able to protect areas of land between settlements where appropriate and also encourage opportunities for recreation and biodiversity. Policies CSM10 (Local Green Spaces) and CSM11 (Green Wedges) have been included in the draft NDP.

It is important to note that the objectives of both policies are not to prevent growth, but to recognise the different functions of land contained within the NDP area. It is critical that each settlement continues to retain its own character and distinctiveness including the urban extension which will create a new community in itself. Policy CSM11 has been formulated to ensure that proposals take into account the important functions of the Green Wedge, both rural and urban, and importantly allow those proposals which do not preclude these functions to be permitted. Furthermore, it does not prevent further development within the NDP area that is in accordance with the wider Development Plan and its spatial strategy. In this way the NDP seeks to plan positively to be able to contribute towards sustainable, planned growth whilst retaining and enhancing the NDP area's distinctiveness.

With the above in mind, Policy CSM11 recognises in particular the green and rural aspirations of the overall vision of the NDP in the context of the rural villages to the east of the M5 and north of the NDP area which are under pressure from development proposals within Taunton Deane, and to a lesser extent Sedgemoor. Land is therefore designated as Green Wedge where it has been shown to be appropriate through robust assessment contained in this document, and taking into account consultation responses in particular from TDBC as the local planning authority.

3.0 Planning policy context

National Planning Policy

At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is the presumption in favour of sustainable development and a commitment at paragraph 49 to significantly boost the supply of housing through the plan making process.

The NPPF and accompanying Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) does not specifically recognise Green Wedges as a planning policy designation, however they both do not rule out that locally valued landscapes may be identified and protected through planning policy. Designating Green Wedges can contribute to the delivery of sustainable development, a core principle of the NPPF, by providing an important element of the urban and rural environment to break up built form, prevent urban sprawl and retain the rural character of villages in the countryside. The Planning Portal offers the following definition:

"Green wedges comprise 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 can also provide recreational opportunities."

The following paragraphs of the NPPF are relevant in respect of the designation of Green Wedges within the context of plan making:

- Para 58 - "Local plans should develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected for the area".
- Para 73 - "Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities".
- Para 94 - "Local planning authorities should adopt proactive strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change".
- Para 109 - states the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural environment by "recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services".
- Paragraph 114, bullet point 1, highlights that a strategic approach should be taken in Local Plans which plans "positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure".
- Paragraph 157, bullet point 7 and 8, of the Plan Making section of the NPPF states that Local Plans should "identify land where development would be inappropriate, for instance because of its environmental or historic significance" and "contain a clear strategy for enhancing the natural, built and historic environment".

Local Planning Policy

The NDP area is located within Taunton Deane which includes the county town of Taunton and further south, Wellington. Aside from these towns, the Borough is made up of many villages and hamlets and is predominantly rural. Within the NDP area itself lies the key historic settlement of Creech St Michael and rural villages and hamlets of Adsborough, Ham, Langaller, Charlton, Creech Heathfield, Coombe and Walford.

Green wedges have long been established within Taunton Deane and the neighbouring Sedgemoor District to the north which has a similar rural profile. The East Taunton Local Plan (1991) first enshrined green wedges within local planning policy and they remain designated under Core Strategy Policy CP8, adopted in 2011. Policy CP8 was underpinned by a Green Wedge Assessment carried out by TDBC in June 2015 and this assessment seeks to reflect the methodology used at a more local level. Indeed, the 2015 assessment makes it clear on page 1 that rural buffers and strategic gaps have specifically not been considered. Therefore, the inclusion of a local buffer as a “Green Wedge” within the NDP process is intended to extend and contribute to the Development Plan of the Borough by addressing local issues outside of the scope of the 2015 assessment and CS Policy CP8.

Policy CP8 states that a network of green infrastructure assets has been identified and should be retained and enhanced, including through the

development of green wedges and corridors as envisaged through the Taunton Deane Green Infrastructure Strategy. Development will be permitted outside of settlement boundaries where it will protect, conserve or enhance landscape and townscape character whilst maintaining green wedges and open breaks between settlements.

The Monkton Heathfield urban extension within the western part of the NDP area includes woodland buffers and compensatory habitat, along with a belt of landscaping between the motorway and the development area.

Taunton Garden Town

The Government launched a scheme for towns to bid for Garden Town status, in 2016. As part of this, TDBC placed a successful bid and Taunton become one of three new Garden Towns (and 14 Garden Villages) announced in January 2017, the first in the south west. This status enables bidding for additional centrally held funds and promotes the following key principles:

- A thriving town centre focussed on the River Tone;
- Protecting the environment and encouraging more green spaces and corridors to connect country and town;
- Developing the right environment for business;
- Ensuring good access to skills and education; and
- Major road and rail improvements to facilitate travel in and out of town

Policy CSM11 and this Green Wedge Assessment reflects these key principles, and in particular the provision of green areas to maintain separation of country and town, ensuring that sustainable development is contributed to by a transparent and local context to place shaping within the NDP area.

4.0 Assessment methodology

Area of search

In terms of identifying suitable areas to meet the objectives of a Green Wedge, analysis of the consultation responses was carried out. Account was also taken of the wider Core Strategy policies to ensure that any areas taken forward would not conflict with their objectives and any strategic, planned growth.

The activities above highlighted the following areas for assessment under the Green Wedge proposals:

1. Land to the east of the M5
2. Land to the south of Creech St Michael
3. Land at Walford Cross

Desk Based Assessment

The above identified areas warranted further assessment, and an initial desk based assessment of all three has been included at Section 6.0 of this Green Wedge Assessment. The desk based assessment provides information in respect of the following aspects of the areas in question.

- Current land uses
- Formal and informal open space, sport and recreation opportunities;
- Environmental designations, including nature conservation and historic;
- Landscape character;
- Public rights of way and cycle routes;
- Planning history;
- Areas developed or proposed for development; and
- Future development pressures.

The main sources of information for the desk based research were Ordnance Survey Mapping, GIS data, websites (such as Magic), aerial photography and development plan evidence base documents including TDBC's Green Infrastructure Study and Landscape Character Assessments.

The areas were then assessed against the criteria used within TDBC's Green Wedge Assessment which provided the key evidence based to support Core Strategy Policy CP8. Areas were taken forward or discounted based on this assessment.

Site Visits

Site visits of Area 1 and Area 3, initially proposed to be taken forward as potential Green Wedge, were undertaken in December 2017 from publicly accessible locations within each of the areas of search. On site information was gathered for each area covering information around land use, physical features, setting and character, landscape and visual impacts, threat of



coalescence, boundaries, perception of distance between settlements and sense of separation. Photos were taken during the site visits to capture the main characteristics of each area.

5.0 Area of search

In considering potential land to be designated as Green Wedge, consideration was given to the following:

- Existing land use and its compatibility with a potential Green Wedge use
- Comments and suggestions on potential locations taken from consultation on the draft NDP
- Consideration of areas of current or future development pressure, taking into account settlement limits and site allocations in the statutory development plan.

Based on the above, three areas of further investigation were identified to under-go a desk based assessment and these explained in more detail within this assessment.

The area is bisected by Langaller Lane which runs east-west, crossing the M5 motorway and providing a route via the A38 to Taunton and Bridgwater.

The predominate existing land use is agricultural. The southern part of Area 1 contains Creech St Michael Park which comprises grassed and hard surfaced playing pitches, play equipment and associated car parking and public toilets. There is a belt of trees along the southern and western boundaries of the park, and further wooded areas scattered across the area. Within the northern part of the area there are allotments and a small group of houses accessed from Creech Heathfield Road. Several access tracks (droves) cut across the northern half of the area.

The desk based assessment for Area 1 is set out within Table 1 below.

Table 1: Assessment of Area 1

Policy CSM11 objective:	Assessment of key features and value:	Analysis of contribution to Policy CSM11 objectives:
<p>Coalescence of settlements and wider urban area</p>	<p>Comments from the consultation carried out indicated that this land is valued as a buffer between the wider urban character to the west in the context of the Monkton Heathfield urban extension.</p> <p>This area is under pressure from development proposals for housing, particularly land south of Langaller Lane which has been the subject of a residential planning application which was refused, in part due to concerns around coalescence of settlements.</p> <p>Comments were also received in respect of specific concerns around the coalescence of Creech St Michael and Creech Heathfield as a result of development pressures.</p>	<p>Significant</p>
<p>Contributes to a sense of identity and place</p>	<p>Land to the north and south of Langaller Lane provides a key, rural gateway between the Monkton Heathfield urban extension and the rural villages of Creech St Michael and Creech Heathfield.</p>	<p>Significant</p>
<p>Provides a green lung for health and wellbeing</p>	<p>Area 1 comprises the last remaining open space between the planned Monkton Heathfield urban extension (which does include strategic landscaping to the west of the M5) and its far</p>	<p>Moderate</p>

	reaching views are enjoyed by local residents from public footpaths along Hyde Lane and which are shown on Plan	
Recreation opportunities	<p>Land in the south of Area 1 is used for recreation within Creech St Michael and funding has been used to upgrade facilities to increase use of this popular facility.</p> <p>The majority of land in Area 1 is within private ownership, being used for agriculture, and therefore extensive recreational use is unlikely.</p>	Low
Wildlife value (habitat and corridors):	<p>The area lies between the Hestercombe House SAC and the Somerset Levels and Moors RAMSAR and SPA which are located 2.2m north west and 2.9 miles east respectively.</p> <p>Due to its rural nature, Area 1 provides suitable habitat for a number of protected species.</p> <p>A recent ecological survey (2017) to support a planning application to the south of Langaller Lane recorded 8 species of bat including Lesser Horseshoe.</p> <p>Surveys carried out for development at Hyde Lane in 2012 2013 found suitable habitat for bats and birds.</p>	Moderate
Landscape and visual value:	Due to the flat topography within the northern section of Area 1, there are far reaching views	Moderate

	<p>from large stretches of Creech Heathfield Road out to the west and northwards from the northern boundaries of Creech St Michael.</p> <p>Mature trees and hedgerows contribute to the landscape identity along Hyde Lane and Langaller Lane before they cross west over the M5.</p>	
<p>Overall comment: Area 1 forms a critical gateway between the Monkton Heathfield urban extension to the west and rural villages to the east which contributes significantly to the green and rural identity of these villages. Recent development pressure indicates that the M5, previously identified as an appropriate delineation between the urban and rural area may not by itself prevent coalescence of existing and proposed built development. Implementation of Policy CSM11 for Area 1 would go some way to addressing these issues.</p> <p>In addition, following the response of TDBC to the Regulation 14 consultation, it was recommended to extend Area 1 to address concerns in relation to the coalescence of Creech St Michael and Creech Heathfield. This extended area is proposed to be taken forward and is shown in full on Figure 4 of this assessment.</p>		

Area 2: Land to the south of Creech St Michael

This area comprises two separate parcels of land between the Taunton and Bridgwater Canal and the railway line, as shown on Figure 2 below.



Figure 2: Area 2 extent shown in hatched red, with solid red denoting extent of NDP area

The land is in private ownership and is used for agricultural grazing. Sandwiched between the two parcels that form Area 2 are residential and light industrial properties accessed from St Michael Road which crosses over the Canal and railway north-south. Agricultural fields are delineated by hedgerows and there is a public footpath alongside the Canal which runs the length of both areas.

The desk based assessment for Area 2 is set out within Table 2 below.

Table 2: Assessment of Area 2

Policy CSM11 objective:	Assessment of key features and value:	Analysis of contribution to Policy CSM11 objectives:
Coalescence of settlements and wider urban area	<p>The area in question is located to the south of Creech St Michael village, with the nearest other settlement being Ruishton, at least one mile further south.</p> <p>There is no planned growth between Ruishton and Creech St Michael. Much of the land is located within Flood Zone 3b, the functional floodplain, and is therefore inappropriate for most development uses.</p>	Low
Contributes to a sense of identity and place	Area 2 provides a green landscape and includes a popular route along the canal for recreational users, which contributes to the rural and green identity of the NDP area, and particularly the village of Creech St Michael.	Moderate
Provides a green lung for health and wellbeing	Area 2 provides a green landscape and includes a popular route along the canal for recreational users, which promotes health and well-being through the use of green space by local residents and visitors.	Moderate
Recreation opportunities	Area 2 provides a green landscape and includes a popular route along the canal for recreational users.	Moderate

Wildlife value (habitat and corridors):	<p>The Area is potentially hydrologically linked to Somerset Levels and Moors RAMSAR and SPA which is located to the east because it includes functional floodplain associated with the River Tone and local drainage ditch network.</p> <p>The Canal is designated as a local wildlife site.</p> <p>Hedgerows, semi-improved grassland and the Canal will all provide suitable habitat for a range of protected species.</p> <p>An ecological survey carried out in 2012 in support of an application to the north of the Canal and west of St Michael Road found evidence of badgers.</p>	Significant
Landscape and visual value:	<p>Far reaching views are available from the southern boundaries of Creech St Michael village and the public footpath along the Canal.</p>	Low
<p>Overall comment: Area 2 has potentially significant ecological value and is well used for recreation on its northern boundaries via the public footpath along the Canal. Due to a lack of any strategic roads running through it and location to the south of Creech St Michael within the open countryside, risks of coalescence with other settlements are low. The area's inclusion within Policy CSM10 (Local Green Spaces) and will ensure that its recreational and ecological value is retained and strengthened.</p>		

Area 3: Land at Walford Cross

Area 3 is located within the north-western corner of the NDP area, as shown on Figure 3 below, and abuts the administrative boundary of Sedgemoor District Council located to the north. Walford Cross is characterised by its role as the intersection between the A38 which runs north-south between Bridgwater and Taunton, and the A361 which links Taunton to the south and Glastonbury to the north east.

The village of Adsborough lies to the north of Area 3 and the A38 runs along the western boundary. Area 3 itself includes several agricultural fields and one residential property, Primrose Cottage with its curtilage alongside the A38.

The desk based assessment for Area 3 is set out within Table 3 below.



Figure 3: Area 3 extent shown in hatched red, with solid red denoting extent of NDP area

Table 3: Assessment of Area 3

Policy CSM11 objective:	Assessment of key features and value:	Analysis of contribution to Policy CSM11 objectives:
Coalescence of settlements and wider urban area	<p>Area 3 is located to the south of Adsborough village and is currently isolated from any other settlements.</p> <p>It is located at a strategic road junction and there is no planned growth at this point along the A38.</p> <p>There is a potential for development pressure in the future in the context of the TDBC's urban extension to the south and further development alongside the A38, which could, if extensive in the long-term, result in the wider coalescence of the urban and rural environment.</p>	Moderate
Contributes to a sense of identity and place	<p>At a local level, the area did not appear to be significantly valued based on consultation feedback.</p> <p>Area 3 forms part of the wider open countryside which separates the urban towns of Bridgwater and Taunton. Significant built development in this location would lose this role and identity.</p>	Significant
Provides a green lung for health and wellbeing	<p>At a local level, the area did not appear to be significantly valued based on consultation feedback.</p>	Moderate

	Area 3 does have a potential strategic role as a green lung between Bridgwater and Taunton over the longer term if development pressure proceeds from the north and south along the A38.	
Recreation opportunities	The area is within private ownership with no public footpaths running through it.	Low
Wildlife value (habitat and corridors):	Hestercombe House SAC is located around 2.2km to the north west, with protected bat populations which can travel significant distances. Due to its rural nature, Area 3 provides suitable habitat for a number of protected species.	Moderate
Landscape and visual value:	The topography is more undulating in this location compared to the south of the NDP area which forms the levels and moors. Far reaching glimpses can be seen from the A38 and A361, however public access into Area 3 cannot be gained.	Low.
<p>Overall comment: The strategic importance of maintaining a green and rural identity at the junction of the A38 and A361 is recognised within the assessment. Development pressure through planned growth within TDBC and Sedgemoor is low, although this may change in the longer-term. It is considered that inclusion of Area 3 within the Green Wedge would protect it's strategic identity as a rural environment separating the urban areas of Bridgwater and Taunton and be in general conformity with national and local planning policy. However, following specific comment from TDBC to the Regulation 14 consultation, it is recognised that inclusion of Area 3 alone would not secure protection of the purposes of the Green Wedge due to its location at the edge of the NDP area. This area is not proposed to be taken forward.</p>		

7.0 Summary and conclusions

An assessment has been carried out in respect of all three areas identified as part of the area of search process detailed at Section 5. It is considered that Area 1, including an extension to its boundary as recommended by TDBC, would benefit from being included under Policy CSM11 because this would make a potentially significant contribution to the following criteria, as detailed within the desk based assessments:

- Prevents coalescence of settlements (Area 1); and
- Contributes to a sense of identity and place (Area 1).

Area 2 provides a potentially significant contribution in terms of biodiversity and recreation opportunities, which is more appropriately addressed through Policy CSM13 and TDBC Core Strategy Policy CP8. Biodiversity interests are also covered within national and international legislation. It is therefore not proposed to include Area 2 within the Green Wedge.

The full extent of the proposed Green Wedge to be taken forward is shown outlined within the broken red line on Figure 4 opposite.

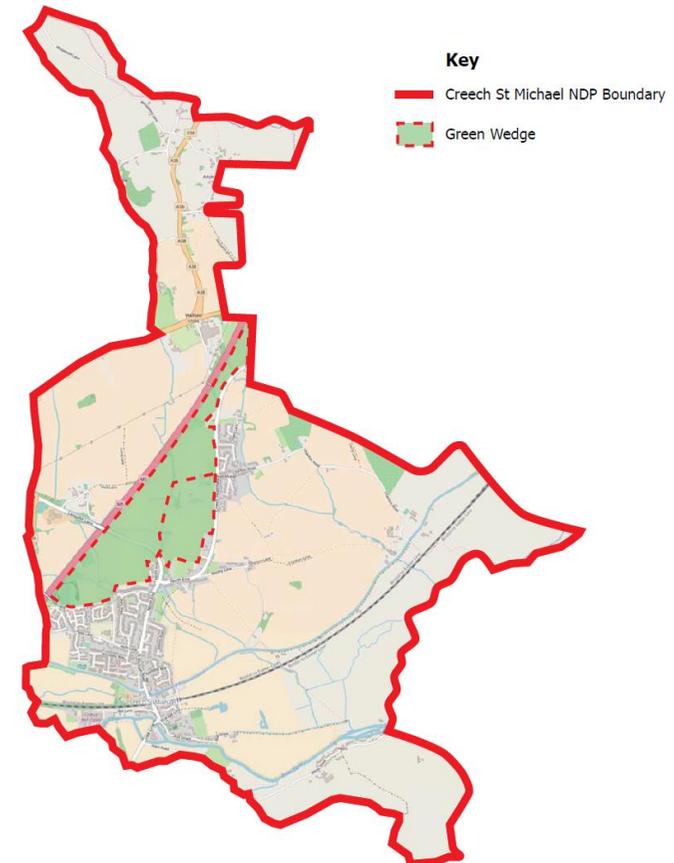


Figure 4: Proposed extent of Green Wedge