

## Chapter 6: The Natural Environment

### Core Strategy Policy 6

#### Green Wedges

The objectives of Green Wedges are to:

- retain the open and undeveloped character of the Green Wedges;
- retain and create green networks between the countryside and open spaces within the urban area; and
- retain and enhance public access to the Green Wedges, especially for recreation.

The following land uses will be acceptable in Green Wedges, provided that they are consistent with these objectives:

- agriculture, horticulture and allotments not accompanied by retail development;
- outdoor leisure, recreation and sporting facilities;
- forestry;
- footpaths, bridleways and cycle ways; and
- burial grounds.

Road proposals or dedicated public transport routes will only be acceptable where there is no alternative route available outside the Green Wedge and provided appropriate mitigation measures are implemented to minimise any adverse impacts on the amenity of the specific Green Wedge.

The detailed boundaries of the Green Wedges within the Borough will be identified in the Allocations Development Plan Document. Any review of the boundaries should be undertaken through the Local Development Framework process and in partnership with relevant neighbouring Councils.

*This policy will assist in the delivery of Spatial Objective 13: Green Wedges and the Countryside*

- 6.1** The purpose of Green Wedges is to protect important areas of open land which influence the form and direction of urban development; to ensure that open land extends outwards between the existing and planned development limits of the urban areas; preserve strategic landscape and wildlife links between the countryside and urban open spaces; prevent the coalescence and maintain the physical identity of settlements adjoining the main urban areas; and, allow recreation and access to the countryside. To support these aims, the Borough Council prepared the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge Management Strategy in 2004. A Management Strategy for the Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge was prepared in partnership with the Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project in 2005.





- 6.2** As a small and predominately urban Borough, our landscape plays a major role in shaping the character of the environment, both stimulating leisure and tourism and supporting the overall 'quality of life'. The Oadby and Wigston Landscape Character Assessment (2005) identifies a number of landscape character areas across the Borough and it is important that both the quality and distinctive characteristics of these areas are conserved and enhanced when new development occurs. Therefore, in order to ensure that any new development respects this character and enhances it, new development affecting the Green Wedges should relate well to the existing landscape and be sympathetic to its surroundings.
- 6.3** In relation to the Green Wedges specifically, their existing area should be maintained, in particular because of the valuable role they play in preserving the identity of the urban areas. Green Wedge boundaries will be safeguarded unless an identified need for new development, which cannot be accommodated within the existing urban area, justifies the need to review them.
- 6.4** Green Wedges provide an excellent gateway to link the urban area to the countryside. In the instance of the Green Wedge separating Wigston and Oadby, not only does it separate the two urban settlements, it also provides the Green Infrastructure necessary to access the countryside to the south of the Borough. Management of Green Infrastructure in the Borough is dealt with in Policy 5: Green Infrastructure.
- 6.5** With regard to the Direction for Growth, existing Green Wedge boundaries will be amended, if evidence suggests a necessity to do so, through the Borough's Allocations Development Plan Document.



## Core Strategy Policy 7

### The Countryside

Land outside the Leicester Principal Urban Area, defined limits to development and Green Wedges will be defined as Countryside. The openness and intrinsic qualities of the Countryside will be protected. The Borough Council will promote good management of the Countryside whilst allowing it to adapt to the identified needs of the community.

Some forms of development may be required in the Countryside. Development justified as necessary in the Countryside must be appropriate in terms of layout, scale, height, materials, form, impact and siting. Development should not adversely affect landscape, wildlife, the ecological, geological, environmental, archaeological or historic resources of the specific site and the surrounding areas.

Development causing adverse impacts in the Countryside will only be permitted where there is a justifiable need which outweighs these impacts and where a Landscape Character Assessment has been undertaken to ensure that all detrimental impacts that a development may cause have been assessed and can be mitigated.

*This policy will assist in the delivery of Spatial Objective 13: Green Wedges and the Countryside*

- 6.6** In line with the Spatial Strategy for the Borough, where possible, development shall be focussed in the Leicester Principal Urban Area to minimise development in the countryside. However, land designated as countryside adjoining the Leicester Principal Urban Area will be released through the Allocations Development Plan Document in order to accommodate the Direction for Growth.
- 6.7** This policy provides protection against inappropriate development in the countryside and establishes the criteria for the types of development that may be appropriate. New development in the countryside will only be permitted where a justifiable need can be demonstrated consistent with the principles set out in Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (August 2004), for example, development that will enhance the rural economy and when viable, support the delivery of affordable dwellings for identified local need. Where development does take place in the countryside it must be sympathetically designed and located so as to provide as little disturbance as possible to the open nature of the countryside and to protect the various Green Infrastructure asset that it supports.
- 6.8** Although the Borough of Oadby and Wigston is predominantly urban, land to the south and east within the local authority boundary plays an important role in providing the residents of the Borough and the wider Leicester Principal Urban Area access to open countryside. The majority of the Borough's population live within the built up areas around the centres of Wigston, Oadby and South Wigston. However, it is also imperative that where appropriate, necessary forms of development to meet the needs of residents in rural areas are supported.
- 6.9** As a small and predominately urban Borough, our landscapes plays a major role in shaping the character of our environment, both stimulating leisure and tourism and supporting the overall 'quality of life'. The Oadby and Wigston Landscape Character Assessment (2005) identifies a number of landscape character areas across the Borough and it is important that both the quality and distinctive characteristics of these areas are conserved and enhanced when new development occurs. Therefore, in order to ensure that any new development respects this character and enhances it, new development affecting the Green Wedges should relate well to the existing landscape and be sympathetic to its surroundings.
- 6.10** The exact limits to development in the countryside, for example, in relation to the Direction for Growth and Kilby Bridge will be defined in the Allocations Development Plan Document.





## Core Strategy Policy 8

### Climate Change and Renewable Energy

All new development, including large scale refurbishment, will be required to demonstrate how:

- It makes effective use of resources and materials, promotes sustainable transport reduces predicted CO2 emissions and minimises water use;
- It will incorporate decentralised and renewable or low carbon energy generation; and
- It is sited and designed so as to minimise, mitigate and adapt to the likely effects of climate change

All new development will be required to demonstrate how it reflects current nationally prescribed sustainable buildings standards for energy efficiency.

#### Renewable Energy

In order to achieve indicative renewable energy generation targets for the Borough of:

- Up to 2 Mega Watts of wind energy;
  - Up to 4 Mega Watts of electric building integrated renewables; and
  - Up to 6 Mega Watts of thermal integrated renewables
- the Council will permit new development of sources of renewable energy generation where:
- Proposals seek to minimise any adverse effects on designated environmental assets, important landscape features and significant local biodiversity;
  - They seek to minimise any detriment to the amenity of neighbouring residents and land uses; and
  - They meet high standards of sustainable design and construction.

The Council will further encourage all new development or major refurbishment to incorporate energy from decentralised and renewable or low carbon sources. All large scale development will be required to incorporate on-site renewable energy generation, unless it is not feasible or viable or alternative decentralised and renewable, low carbon sources can be identified.

Proposals should be accompanied by a Sustainability Statement demonstrating how (potential) carbon dioxide emissions will be reduced and by how much.

Further information will be contained in the revised Renewable Energy Technology and Energy Efficiency Supplementary Planning Document.

*This policy will assist in the delivery of Spatial Objective 8: Sustainable Design and Infrastructure; Spatial Objective 12: Protecting and Enhancing Green Infrastructure; and, Spatial Objective 13: Green Wedges and the Countryside.*



- 6.11** Climate change is a global problem requiring local action. The Core Strategy sets out the strategic approach for addressing climate change. It is imperative that we ensure that the approach taken is relevant to the Borough's circumstances so that the policies within the Core Strategy and wider Local Development Framework contribute in a meaningful way. This means ensuring that the development and use of land contributes to the Government's targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increases electricity production from renewable sources.
- 6.12** The basis of Core Strategy Policy 8 is threefold:
1. taking steps to ensure new developments adapt to, and mitigate for, the potential impact of climate change upon the natural and built environment;
  2. increasing the energy efficiency of all new developments and major refurbishment, thus reducing carbon emissions so that our contribution to global warming is retarded; and
  3. increasing renewable and low carbon energy generation within the Borough.
- 6.13** The Borough Council intends to review its Planning for Renewable Energy Technology and Energy Efficiency Supplementary Planning Guidance in line with the adopted Core Strategy in order to provide further guidance in relation to incorporating energy from decentralised and renewable or low carbon sources in new developments and on-site renewable energy generation. The new Supplementary Planning Document will also take account of the most up to date renewable energy generation and carbon dioxide emission reduction targets.
- 6.14** Planning Policy Statement: Planning and Climate Change Supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1 (December 2007) requires proposals for a local requirement for sustainable buildings to be focused on development areas or site specific opportunities. The Core Strategy is not allocating any sites; therefore reference should be made to Core Strategy Policy 1, the Spatial Strategy. This sets out the Borough Council's approach to where new development should be directed and therefore it would be appropriate to follow this approach in determining where the focus for local requirements for sustainable buildings should be encouraged.

### Residential Development

- 6.15** In 2006, central Government announced a 10 year timetable towards zero carbon standards for all new homes from 2016. This would be achieved through a step by step tightening of Part L of the Building Regulation. This equated to energy efficiency improvements for all new dwellings of 25 per cent by 2010, 44 per cent by 2013, 60 per cent by 2016 and zero carbon post 2016. The percentage energy efficiency improvements stipulated by the Government are equivalent to Code Levels 3, 4, 5 and 6 respectively of the Code for Sustainable Homes.





**6.16** The Code for Sustainable Homes measures the sustainability of a new home against categories of sustainable design, rating the 'whole home' as a complete package. The Code uses a 1 to 6 star rating system to communicate the overall sustainability performance of a new home. The Code sets minimum standards for energy and water use at each level and, within England, replaces the EcoHomes scheme, developed by the Building Research Establishment (BRE).

Code Level	Minimum percentage reduction in dwelling emission rate
Level 1 (★)	10
Level 2 (★★)	18
Level 3 (★★★)	25
Level 4 (★★★★)	44
Level 5 (★★★★★)	100
Level 6 (★★★★★★)	'Zero Carbon Home'

Figure 9: Code Levels for Mandatory Minimum Standards in Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Source: The Code for Sustainable Homes Technical Guide (October 2008), the Department for Communities and Local Government

**6.17** In February 2008 the Government confirmed that a mandatory rating against the Code for Sustainable Homes will be implemented for all new homes from 1 May 2008.

## Non-domestic Development

**6.18** Non-residential developments contribute to approximately 40 per cent of the United Kingdom's carbon emissions. The planning system can assist in helping to reduce these emissions by seeking better standards from new development.

**6.19** Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) is an established and widely used environmental assessment method for buildings. It provides a formal classification for both old and new non-domestic buildings. BREEAM evaluates buildings according to set criteria and then provides an overall assessment score.

**6.20** All factors that could have an impact on the environment at all levels of its construction and lifecycle are featured in the criteria, from a buildings carbon emissions and energy efficiency to its recycling facilities and location. The issues assessed in the criteria include:

- Management
- Health and Well-being
- Energy
- Transport
- Water
- Land Use and Site Ecology
- Materials
- Waste and Pollution



**6.21** The standards that can be achieved by a building are:

- Pass
- Good
- Very Good
- Excellent

**6.22** The implementation of BREEAM standards in new development will help the Borough strive towards maximising energy efficiency and minimising pollution, as well as reducing the production of waste and promoting the sustainable management of such. Over the plan period, these standards will contribute towards the creation of quality environments that will add to the overall goal of a more sustainable Borough. In support of the England Waste Strategy (2007), the Borough Council shall encourage all businesses within the area to recycle waste.

**6.23** The Code for Sustainable Homes and BREEAM standards are currently examples of nationally prescribed best practice sustainable buildings standards. Over the plan period it is likely that these standards may change and also new standards emerge. Reference should be made to the most up to date standards when proposing new development.

### Sustainability Statement

**6.24** Where developers are required to demonstrate how their development accords with Core Strategy Policy 8, this may best be achieved by submission of a Sustainability Statement. Detailed guidance as to what will be required in a Sustainability Statement will be contained in the review Planning for Renewable Energy Technology and Energy Efficiency Supplementary Planning Document. In the interim, proposals for new development should be accompanied by a statement setting out the following:

- How the development makes best use of materials, promotes sustainable transport, minimises water use and reduces predicted CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and by how much;
- Where viable, how the development will incorporate decentralised and renewable or low-carbon energy generation;
- How the development is sited and designed so as to minimise, mitigate and adapt to the likely effects of climate change; and
- How the development accords with current nationally prescribed best practice sustainable buildings standards.

**6.25** In relation to promotion of sustainable transport, reference should be made to Core Strategy Policy 4. Through promotion of sustainable forms of travel, reliance on the private car can be reduced, therefore reducing the carbon dioxide emissions across the Borough. This will contribute to tackling climate change.

### Renewable Energy

**6.26** Planning Policy Statement 22: Renewable Energy (August 2004), states *“local planning authorities may include policies in local development documents that require a percentage of the energy to be used in new residential, commercial or industrial development to come from on-site renewable energy developments”*. Following on from this, the Planning and Energy Act 2008 provides Councils with legal powers to require renewable energy systems in new buildings.





- 6.27** The Council, along with partners from Blaby District Council, Harborough District Council, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, Melton Borough Council, North West Leicestershire Borough Council and Rutland County Council, commissioned IT Power to undertake a study into the potential for renewable and low carbon energy generation and included an energy efficiency and climate change assessment of potential development options across the districts involved (such as the Borough's Direction for Growth). The Planning for Climate Change Study (2008) was produced to provide evidence of the local feasibility and potential for renewable and low carbon technologies to supply new development.
- 6.28** The study looked at the potential for:
- Wind energy
  - Hydro power
  - Bio-mass energy (e.g. wet bio-mass, energy crops and waste wood)
  - Building integrated electric renewables (e.g., micro-wind turbines, photovoltaic cells)
  - Building integrated thermal renewables (e.g. solar water heating, heat pumps)
- 6.29** The study concluded that due to the Borough's urban nature, topography and geographic size, there was limited potential for a variety of renewable energy generation facilities. Only one location at Tythorn Hill was identified with potential for large scale wind energy of between 2-4 Mega Watts. The study further concluded there was more potential to exploit building integrated renewable or low carbon energy facilities.
- 6.30** The Borough Council will encourage developers to propose innovative developments that incorporate a range of building integrated renewable or low carbon energy facilities. In addition there is scope for new developments to exploit the potential for consequential energy savings through design approaches, such as, passive solar gain in relation to building orientation, passive solar heating of south facing rooms and permeable street layouts that can reduce vehicle movements.
- 6.31** When relating to climate change, reference should also be made to Core Strategy Policy 5 Green Infrastructure, Core Strategy Policy 9 Flood Risk and the Water Environment and Core Strategy Policy 14 Design and Sustainable Construction where they relate to climate change.



## Core Strategy Policy 9

### Flood Risk and the Water Environment

Development proposals should take into account the potential impact of climate change on water resources, water quality and on the level of flood risk posed, as detailed in the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. Development should be made safe without increasing the risk of flooding elsewhere.

Development proposed in areas that would be at risk from flooding should be avoided unless it can be demonstrated that:

- Appropriate land at lower risk is not available;
- There are exceptional reasons for the development in that location; and
- The risk can be fully mitigated through careful design and engineering methods.

A detailed Flood Risk Assessment will be required for all developments greater than 1 hectare in size. This should identify the necessary mitigation and adaptation measures which should:

- Aim to avoid or reduce the risk of flooding and harm from it;
- Where appropriate include suitable habitat creation and not cause detriment to existing habitats or species; and
- Demonstrate how such measures form an intrinsic part of the overall development.

Development should proactively manage surface water run-off through the promotion of sustainable drainage techniques and positive land management, including the use of permeable surfacing.

Development of Brownfield sites should be accompanied by a desktop study to identify any potential contamination. If there is potential for contamination to be present on site, further more detailed investigation will be required to ensure that contaminants are not mobilised and enter groundwater supplies or watercourses.

*This policy will assist in the delivery of Spatial Objective 8: Sustainable Design and Infrastructure and Spatial Objective 12: Protecting and Enhancing Green Infrastructure*

- 6.32** The proactive management of flood risk is one of the most important ways of adapting to the predicted more intensive rainfall and other extreme weather events as a result of climate change. Some potential impacts of climate change that would have an effect on the Borough's water environment include:
- Increased flood risk due to wetter winters and more frequent as well as destructive storms;
  - Strain on water availability due to drier, longer summers and resultant droughts;
  - Expectation that rain storms will be heavier and more prolonged. Where heavy rain cannot be absorbed fast enough by land this leads to localised flooding and potential flash floods.





- 6.33** Planning Policy Statement 25 Development and Flood Risk (March 2010) sets out national policy regarding managing flood risk. It requires local planning authorities to identify any land at risk of flooding, from what source and the degree of that risk. In addition, there is the requirement to prepare a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (November 2007). This is an assessment of flood risk on a catchment-wide basis in relation to development proposed in an area i.e. Oadby and Wigston Borough. The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment should be carried out in liaison with the Environment Agency. The Sequential Test is a key part of Planning Policy Statement 25 Development and Flood Risk (March 2010). It is used to steer new development to areas at the lowest risk of flooding. In addition, the Exception Test allows limited scope for departures from the sequential approach where development is deemed essential to meet the wider aims of sustainable development. Ensuring flood risk can be managed effectively is an important consideration when identifying suitable sites for development, particularly housing.
- 6.34** The Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (November 2007) was prepared in liaison with the Environment Agency. The aim of the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment is to provide sufficient information for the application of the Sequential Test and to identify whether application of the Exception Test is likely to be necessary. The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment involves a broad scale assessment of areas at risk of flooding within the Borough be it fluvial or other forms of flooding and includes advice on sustainable drainage techniques and other flood risk solutions. The study also predicts likely increased flooding risk in these areas due to climate change. Within the Borough there are two main occurrences of Flood Zone 2 and 3: along the River Sence corridor (which is a tributary of the River Soar), adjacent to the Grand Union Canal to the south of the Borough and the other runs along the Wash Brook corridor which flows west to east between north Wigston and Oadby. There is one further occurrence along the Evington Brook corridor north of Oadby and Stoughton Farm Park, although this is within a relatively small outcrop of the Borough. The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment has helped inform the spatial development strategy for the Borough (see Core Strategy Policy 1 Spatial Strategy for Development) and is the basis on which the Sequential and Exception Tests will be applied.
- 6.35** All applications for development in areas at risk of flooding or with critical drainage problems, and any development on land exceeding 1 hectare outside flood risk areas, will require a site-specific Flood Risk Assessment in line with PPS25.
- 6.36** Appropriate management of the natural environment and major watercourses in the Borough such as the Grand Union Canal and River Sence corridor is essential to help reduce flood risk. The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment offers guidance on how to manage the floodplains in the Borough. Reference should also be made to Core Strategy Policy 5 Green Infrastructure where habitat creation and protection is considered as part of a Flood Risk Assessment. Further emphasis on the links between Green Infrastructure and habitat creation/protection considered through Flood Risk Assessment will be contained in the subsequent Allocations Development Plan Document which will identify broad areas in the Borough where this will be desirable.

## Sustainable Drainage

- 6.37** Traditional drainage is designed to move surface water run-off as rapidly as possible to a discharge point, either a watercourse or soak away. This approach has a number of harmful effects because run-off from impermeable surfaces can increase the risk of flooding downstream, as well as causing sudden rises in water levels and flow rates in watercourses. In addition, by diverting rainfall to piped systems, water does not soak into the ground, depleting ground water and reducing flows in watercourses in dry weather.



- 6.38** Surface water run-off can contain contaminants such as oil, organic matter and toxic metals. Although often at low levels, cumulatively they can result in poor water quality in rivers and groundwater, affecting biodiversity, amenity value and potential water abstraction. After heavy rain, the initial run-off is often highly polluting.
- 6.39** Sustainable drainage systems provide a more sustainable method of discharging surface water and in turn reduce the risk of flooding and contamination. They should be utilized where practicable. Their form or technique used will be determined by the nature of the development and the location proposed. Some methods have the potential for environmental and landscape enhancement improving biodiversity and local amenity. Where sustainable drainage methods cannot discharge total surface water alone, they can be used beneficially in conjunction with conventional piped systems.
- 6.40** Developers will normally be expected to fund sustainable drainage systems and their future management. This will be secured through a planning condition or Section 106 Agreement. Further guidance in relation to flood risk mitigation, adaptation and sustainable drainage systems will be contained in the subsequent Guidelines for New Development Supplementary Planning Document.

### Previously Developed Land

- 6.41** In accordance with Planning Policy Statement 23: Planning and Pollution Control (2004), a desktop study for potential contamination will be required to support proposals on any Brownfield site. The Borough Council is preparing an Employment Sites and Brownfield Land Study to inform development of the Allocations Development Plan Document which should highlight potential development sites that may be contaminated. Further guidance on potential contaminated land can also be sought from the Council's Environmental Health department.

### Water Cycle Study

- 6.42** Oadby and Wigston Borough Council has prepared a Water Cycle Study Scoping Report which provides a baseline understanding of the strategic water related issues in the Borough, based upon other evidence based documents. A Detailed Water Cycle Study will be required to be prepared by the developer in relation to the Direction for Growth in order to inform masterplanning work, relevant local development documents and any subsequent planning application.



