

## **Examination of Oadby & Wigston Borough Council Local Plan**

### **Statement on behalf of Bloor Homes Ltd**

#### **Submitted by Define Planning & Design Ltd**

## **MATTER 6 – SITE ALLOCATIONS AND REGENERATION OPPORTUNITY AREAS**

### **Issue 1: Whether the allocations are sound?**

#### **Q1- Is the methodology and criteria for the selection of sites robust, such that the proposed sites are justified by the evidence base?**

1. To accord with the NPPF (notably paras 14 & 47), the Local Plan must facilitate a continual supply of both market and affordable housing from a wide “portfolio” of deliverable development sites based on a robust sustainable development strategy, with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change. Bloor Homes, therefore, support the Local Plan’s proposed spatial strategy as developments within the town centres and wider urban area, and on strategic greenfield allocation sites, are all required to come forward immediately to ensure that the identified development needs are addressed within the plan period and that a 5 year land supply is maintained. In that context the proposal to allocate the land at Cottage Farm, Oadby as a Direction for Growth in Policy 21 as a fundamental part of that strategy is very much welcomed and supported.
2. Indeed, it is apparent that the Local Plan is supported by an extensive and largely robust evidence base that supports both the proposed spatial strategy and the allocation of the individual development sites.
3. That includes the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) that presents an overarching assessment of the Local Plan and its proposals. However, whilst the SA is a useful tool that informs the plan making process it is only a strategic level assessment. It is, therefore, necessary to fully consider the wider evidence base that assesses both the environmental and development related issues, and the specific development sites including and the emerging development proposals for the allocation sites.

#### **Q3- Are the allocated sites deliverable?**

4. Bloor Homes Ltd are in the process of implementing a planning permission (13/00478/OUT) for the delivery of 150 dwellings on land at Cottage Farm, Oadby (Phase 1). The Reserved Matters (17/00310/REM) and condition discharges were approved in October 2017, and Bloor’s Homes have now began the site preparation and infrastructure provision works. The construction of the first dwellings is expected to start later in the Spring.
5. They also control the additional land at Cottage Farm that is proposed to be allocated for residential development under Policy 21 of the Local Plan. That site lies to the immediate west and south west of the committed Phase 1 development scheme, and its development would, therefore, form a logical extension to it (Phase 2). The initial site assessments and masterplanning in relation to the allocation site has clearly demonstrated the site’s suitability for development and its capacity to deliver a further 250 dwellings, associated public open space and supporting infrastructure. The allocation site could and should therefore, make a significant contribution to meeting the Borough’s identified market and affordable housing needs in the plan period, and provide further competition and choice in the housing market.

6. The masterplanning work undertaken on behalf Bloor Homes was submitted to the Borough Council in a Strategic Sustainable Development Opportunity Report in July 2017. The Report (copy attached to this statement) provides an explanation of the emerging Illustrative Masterplan proposals in the context of the landscape character and visual amenity, and the accessibility and highways assessments that had been undertaken. Consequently, it provides part of the evidence base that supports the proposed allocation of the site. A more recent iteration of the emerging Illustrative Masterplan that reflects the further discussions Bloor Homes have had with the Borough Council (in relation to the provision of a new access and parking to the pitches at Coombe Park) is also attached to this Statement for reference.
7. The development of the allocation site will be accessed via the committed Phase 1 development that will provide a new signal controlled T-junction onto the A6 Glen Road. The access junction incorporates signal controlled pedestrian and cycle crossing points, and the Transport Feasibility Assessment submitted to the Borough Council with the Strategic Sustainable Development Opportunity Report has demonstrated that it would have sufficient operating capacity to cater for the full 400 dwellings proposed in Phases 1 and 2 of the development.
8. The Strategic Sustainable Development Opportunity Report also highlights the proposed allocation site's close relationship with the existing southern edge of Oadby's urban form. The services and facilities within the surrounding area (notably Gartree High School and Beauchamp College, Oadby Town Centre that includes local shops, a post office, a library and a doctors surgery, and the supermarket, health centre and bus services on the A6) would be readily accessible to future residents via the enhanced existing pedestrian links that will be provided as part of the committed Phase 1 development, and there is clearly the opportunity to deliver further enhancements through the development of the Phase 2 allocation site.
9. Whilst the SA highlights a potential negative impact of the development of the Phase 2 allocation site on the landscape and biodiversity (with an unknown potential archaeological impact), that assessment does not have the benefit of the site specific assessments undertaken by Bloor Homes and the potential to incorporate primary mitigation measures into the development proposals. That is recognised with the SA, which refers to the potential negative effects being "uncertain".
10. Notably that the site itself is not subject to any nationally significant or local environmental, landscape or cultural designations, and it is apparent that there are no overriding or particular constraints to development in respect of highways, drainage, landscape, ecology, archaeology and cultural heritage. That reflects the nature of the closely related Phase 1 site which was assessed in detail through the determination of its application and appeal, and the assessments of the allocation site itself that have been undertaken to inform the emerging Illustrative Masterplan for Phase 2.
11. Moreover, the Oadby and Wigston Landscape Character Assessment concludes that there is scope to accommodate new development in this part of the Borough, providing it is well integrated into the existing rural fringe and does not have an adverse impact on the character of the wider area. In the case of the proposed allocation site, the robust landscape framework provided by the mature hedgerow structure and surrounding tree blocks provides an opportunity to absorb a residential development within the site without impacting on the wider landscape character. Whilst the development of the site will result in the loss of part of a field on the edge of the settlement, the majority (at least) of the important landscape features within and around the site can be retained. Moreover, the Borough Council's Assessment also sets out how the Landscape Character of the area can be enhanced, and those recommendations have informed the emerging Illustrative Masterplan.

12. The landscape and visual analysis presented in the Strategic Sustainable Development Opportunity Report also demonstrates that views of the allocation site are extremely well contained by the existing urban area of Oadby to the north. Further visual containment will be provided by the Phase 1 development to the north east. To the south and east, the topography and vegetation, notably that associated with the golf course, effectively limit views to the immediate surrounds and public footpaths that cross the site. The south western field in the allocation site is more visible to the west on the east facing valley side, but even those views are significantly restricted by the topography and existing vegetation structure in the area. Notably, no views have been identified that should be specifically retained or protected and none of the views of the site available from public vantage points in the surrounding area are considered particularly sensitive (because existing housing or other urban elements are commonly visible, albeit often set amongst the existing vegetation structure).
13. The Illustrative Masterplan highlights how development in the southern and western parts of the site would be set back from the allocation site boundaries behind formal and informal public open space incorporating tree and hedge planting that provides an appropriate setting for the proposed development. That will help to assimilate it into the landscape and screen and/or filter what limited views there would be of the development from public vantage points in the surrounding countryside.
14. It is also apparent that even with the allocation of the Cottage Farm Direction for Growth there would still be a wide expanse of countryside between Oadby and Wigston (much wider than the area to the north that is currently designated as Green Wedge). There would be no physical coalescence or, indeed, a perception of coalescence given the limited inter-visibility between the two urban areas in this locality, and the area between Oadby and Wigston in this locality would remain a fully functional part of the wider countryside in agricultural use.
15. Bloor Homes have now instructed the preparation of an outline planning application for the development of the allocation site to be submitted later this year, and the emerging Masterplan proposals for the Phase 2 development will of course be subject to further refinement and detailed design work through that process.
16. However, the attached Phase 2 Illustrative Masterplan has been prepared with a clear knowledge and understanding of the specific characteristics of the site (the opportunities and constraints) and that has ensured that the mitigation required to address the potential environmental impacts that may arise from the site's development has been embedded into the emerging proposals. Indeed the Illustrative Masterplan clearly highlights how the development of the allocation site would realise an attractive and sustainable development that respects and directly responds to the site's features and its setting as a natural extension to the committed Phase 1 development. The proposed development also provides the opportunity to:
  - Enhance the pedestrian and cycle routes/links to provide safe and convenient routes to local facilities and amenities and bus services on Glen Road and within Coombe Rise;
  - Provide a variety of landscaped public open spaces including a substantial extension to Coombe Park providing much needed additional formal sports facilities and car parking in the area with a new access from within the Cottage Farm development; and
  - Incorporate a robust Green Infrastructure Strategy that seeks to structure the development proposals, enhance the area's landscape character and biodiversity, connect the proposed public open spaces and provide new pedestrian links to the

existing public right of way network to enhance the connectivity of the urban area to the surrounding countryside

17. The Cottage Farm allocation site is, therefore, available and suitable for development, and the emerging scheme is deliverable. It is a realisable opportunity that would make a significant contribution to meeting the identified development needs in Oadby and the Borough within the plan period, and positively contribute to the economic, social and environmental objectives of sustainable development advocated by the NPPF.

**Q4 & Q5- Are the allocation policies appropriately framed and expressed?**

18. The representations submitted on behalf of Bloor Homes to the Submission Draft Local Plan highlighted how a number of the development management policies (notably Policy 3: Regeneration Schemes and Large Scale Change, Policy 6: High Quality Design and Materials, Policy 11: Housing Choices and Policy 38: Climate Change, Flood Risk and Renewable Low Carbon Energy) need to be reconsidered to be more effective in terms of both providing clarity to the developers in terms of what is required of proposals to ensure that they deliver sustainable development, and the guidance they provide to the decision makers in that regard.
19. However, Policy 21 that allocates the additional land at Cottage Farm (Phase 2) as a Direction for Growth Area does provide a clear indication of the Borough Council's aspirations and expectations for the development of the site and effectively sets out how the decision maker should respond to a planning application. The policy, therefore, provides certainty and clarity to all of the key stakeholders, including the developer Bloor Homes.
20. Notwithstanding, that the Borough Council's suggested modification to the policy to confirm their support in principle for the development of the site is welcomed.
21. Bloor Homes did, however, object to the requirement to include self build and custom build plots as part of the Phase 2 development. Whilst it is acknowledged that self-build and custom house building is an element of the Government's housing strategy, no clear evidence of need or demand in the Borough has been presented in the Local Plan's evidence base. Moreover, the requirement has not been justified or tested in terms of the potential impact on the deliverability of the development scheme as required by the NPPF (paragraphs 158, 173-174). This requirements should, therefore, be deleted from the policy.