

# Oadby and Wigston Local Plan – Examination in Public Green Wedges

## Response to Additional Information Submitted by the Council

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### Introduction

1. The Inspector has invited GVA to comment on a note prepared by the Council (examination document PHD10), which provides further information in respect of Green Wedges, and follows the discussion which took place at the Matter 10 Hearing Session.
2. The Council's note focusses particularly on:
  - i) the proposed inclusion of a piece of land to the south of the Cottage Farm Direction for Growth site in the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge; and
  - ii) the hierarchy of Green Wedges and land in the countryside for the purposes of plan-making.
3. Having reviewed the note, we wish to provide some brief observations in respect of the proposed designation of land to the south of Cottage Farm. The following should therefore be read alongside our Matter 10 Hearing Statement and taken into account alongside the oral representations we made at the Hearing.

### Proposed Extension to the Green Wedge

4. In relation to the piece of land to the south of Cottage Farm, we observed in our written and oral representations that the Green Wedge Review, which forms part of the evidence base to the Plan, reaches conclusions which are in conflict with each other. Of particular relevance here, the recommendation that land south of Cottage Farm should be included in the designated area is in conflict with recommendations that: a) the boundaries are not changed at all; and b) that land at Lucas Marsh Nature Reserve is included in the designated area. Nothing in the Council's latest note addresses the conflict between these recommendations. We therefore reiterate our previous conclusion that the Green Wedge Review cannot be treated as a robust piece of evidence.
5. Another general observation is that, in her note requesting additional information, the Inspector advises that *"the Council has confirmed, since the Hearing session, that there is no further written background documentation available that it can produce."* In other words, this is an acknowledgement by the Council that its proposed allocation of land to the south of Cottage Farm is based only on the Green Wedge Review, which, for the reasons we have explained, is not robust. The preparation of PHD10 is therefore an attempt by the Council to provide new evidence to justify its decision-making after the event. By its own admission, it is not evidence that was available when the Council was deciding its

spatial strategy and policies. That being so, then it cannot be that the Local Plan proposes an appropriate strategy, based on the available evidence. That is, in our view, a significant flaw in the Plan, rendering it unsound.

6. Notwithstanding that conclusion, we note that the Council has attempted to demonstrate how the proposed area of Green Wedge performs against the four purposes of such designated areas.
7. Insofar as the new area of Green Wedge might act as a recreational resource, the Council states that the land in question is used 'minimally' by the public as a consequence of it providing no access to the wider area beyond it. The Council goes on to say that there are no specific plans to increase public access to this piece of land. On this basis, there is nothing to facilitate a more intense use of the land by the public and so it will not act as a recreational resource following its designation. That being so, then the Council has also failed to demonstrate why the proposed extension would meet this function of the Green Wedge.
8. However, the most critical point, in terms of the soundness of the Plan, arises where the Council attempts to explain how the proposed Green Wedge might prevent the merging of settlements. Here, the Council states that it has drawn the boundary of the proposed extension so that an area 400 metres in width will be designated. The Council states that this has been done so that the extension is "*commensurate with the width of other robust areas of the existing Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge*". Figure 1 of the Green Wedge Review is reproduced in PHD10. This shows two red lines that delineate the 400 metre width of the proposed extension and show how it relates to the existing gap between urban areas.
9. Although not explicitly stated, the inference of Figure 1 is that the Council has identified what it perceives to be a critical gap (of 400 metres), into which development must not encroach. The corollary of this is that land in the Green Wedge, which falls outside of that 400 metre gap must be capable, in the Council's view, of being developed without any of the functions of the Green Wedge being harmed.
10. This is particularly relevant given that the Council goes on to say in its note that land in the countryside is of greater value than land in the Green Wedge and that release of land in the Green Wedge is preferable to release of land in the Countryside for plan-making purposes.
11. As the Inspector is aware, we have significant concerns about the Council's approach to site selection and the lack of any transparent evidence which explains how sites have been selected. The Inspector is familiar with our points and so we don't need to repeat them here. However, the Council must be asked to explain why it has not explored opportunities to release land in the Green Wedge (which it says itself is preferable) where it would maintain a 400 metre gap between the urban edges of Oadby and Wigston (which it implies is the width of the critical gap). This is particularly so given that its proposed DfG releases at Wigston Phase 2 and Cottage Farm Phase 2 are both in the Countryside and so, according to the Council, are in less preferable locations than land in Green Wedge outside the critical gap, such as that controlled by our Client.
12. This only further exposes the inconsistency in, and lack of justification for, the Council's proposed spatial strategy, policies and allocations. It reinforces our view that the Plan is not at all sound.