

Borough of Oadby & Wigston



Oadby & Wigston

Core Strategy Statement of Further Representations Matter 6

This statement has been jointly signed up to by
Leicestershire County Council



Matter 6 – Countryside, open and green spaces

Key Issues and Questions:

1. **Do policies for green infrastructure, green wedges, the countryside and open space and facilities for leisure, recreation and tourism comply with national planning policy in PPS7, PPS9, PPG17, the Tourism Good Practice Guide, PPG2 and with RSS policies?**
 - 1.1 Core Strategy policy 17 Open Space and Facilities for Leisure, Recreation and Tourism, has been developed taking into account PPG17 and the Borough's PPG17 Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities (PPG17 Study), undertaken by JPC Consultants (adopted May 2009). The PPG17 study was developed in line with the requirements set out in National Guidance, and complies fully.
 - 1.2 The overall aim of the PPG17 Study was to undertake research, analyse and present conclusions meeting the requirements of 'Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation' (PPG17), which therefore includes:
 - An audit of the Borough's open space and sports and recreation facilities, including an assessment of the current quality of open space, using appropriate guidance within PPG17.
 - Assessment of the local communities' current and future provision and requirements in respect of quality, quantity, and access.
 - The mapping of all relevant open space using Geographical Information Systems (GIS), with different types of site clearly identified.
 - The development of recommended local standards for the planning of new and improved open space in the Borough.

- 1.3 Core Strategy Policy 5 (Green Infrastructure) overarching objective is to seek a net gain in Green Infrastructure through the protection and enhancement of assets and the creation of new multifunctional areas of green space. PPS7 recognises that *'planning policies should provide a positive framework for facilitating sustainable development that supports traditional land based activities and makes the most of new recreational opportunities that require a countryside location'*. Paragraph 5.107 of the Core Strategy promotes well designed and integrated Green Infrastructure as being essential in improving environmental quality, health, wellbeing and community cohesion, as well as, providing locations for exercise, sport and informal recreation. Opportunities to create such, include:
- providing a focus and attractive environment for the increased population proposed within the Three Cities growth area, and specifically in the Borough of Oadby and Wigston;
 - providing improvements that respect existing landscape character and that will assist in attracting and retaining inward investment;
 - protecting and enhancing existing biodiversity, creating new areas for biodiversity and reversing the fragmentation of habitats by restoring the connectivity between them;
 - providing continued, new and enhanced links to the countryside; and,
 - coordinating the use of green space to optimise its use for leisure, biodiversity, drainage, flood management and other socio economic activities.
- 1.4 In conclusion, Core Strategy Policy 5, encourages and promotes the government's objectives set out on page 6 of Planning Policy Statement 7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas.
- 1.5 PPS9 Biology and Geological Conservation sets out a number of principles which Local Authorities should take into account to ensure that any potential impacts of planning decisions on biodiversity and/or geological conservation

are considered. Principle One states that decisions on biodiversity should be based upon information about the environmental characteristics of their areas. In 2005, the Council employed ecological consultants, Ecological Services Limited, to undertake a Phase 1 Habitat Survey and Biodiversity Audit of the Borough, which provided the Borough with a baseline of species and habitats. Principle 2 suggests that plan policies and planning decisions should aim to maintain, enhance, restore or add to biodiversity and geological interests. Policy 5 Green Infrastructure seeks a net gain in Green Infrastructure.

- 1.6 The East Midlands Regional Plan identifies green wedges as a strategic priority which (Policy Three Cities, SRS 5) ‘*serve as useful strategic planning functions in the preventing the merging of settlements, guiding development form, and providing a ‘green lung’ into urban areas, and act as a recreational resource*’. Therefore the Core Strategy identifies two Green Wedges, the Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge and the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge. The Borough Council has prepared management strategies for each green wedge, which includes an assessment of the role that they both play in meeting the objectives set out in the Regional Plan at a strategic level. This provided the evidence to illustrate their continued presence within Local Development Documents, more specifically, the Core Strategy. The detailed boundaries of the Green Wedges will be evidenced and defined in the forthcoming Allocations Development Plan Document.
- 1.7 The East Midlands Regional Plan, para 4.2.10, suggests that to ensure the Sub Regional Core Strategy vision is achieved a number of objectives must be observed. The relevant RSS objectives for this question are:

‘To minimise the impact of development on the coalescence of settlements and on the more sensitive parts of the fringes of the Principal Urban Areas’

‘To protect, enhance, and increase the Sub Areas stock of strategic environmental and cultural assets’

‘To provide green infrastructure for existing and expanding communities,

including access to green space that increases biodiversity, promotes healthy lifestyles and can be used for formal and informal recreation and educational purposes’.

- 1.8 Core Strategy Policy 6 will promote the above, via the wording expressed within the policy. Both the policy itself and the supporting text, express the importance of Green Wedges and the need for continued maintenance and management, in line with the Regional Plan.

- 2. Do they adequately support and complement the development proposals in the Core Strategy?**
- 2.1 Policy 5 Green Infrastructure, seeks a net gain in Green Infrastructure within the Borough and suggests the multifunctional uses that areas of green space have. Green Infrastructure includes biodiversity, but also sites of ecological, geological and historic interest, such as, SSSI's and RIGS. Policy 5 supports and complements the development proposals in the Core Strategy, initially by ensuring that the multifunctional uses that contribute towards Green Infrastructure are integral to development schemes.
- 2.2 With regard to the Direction for Growth, for example, the Policy also supports the creation of new Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridors thus, contributing towards ensuring the continued management of the Grand Union Canal and Limedelves SSSI and Kilby Bridge Pit will be supported. In tandem with Policy 17, Policy 5 encourages Green Infrastructure to be sited in appropriate locations/areas, to connect fragmented habitats, and extend the Green Infrastructure network.
- 2.3 Policy 17 of the Core Strategy, suggests that revitalisation of the Grand Union Canal (which is a designated Conservation Area) will be enabled through the protection and enhancement of its route (Grand Union Canal and River Soar Strategy) and the encouragement of tourism development.
- 2.4 Quantity and access standards illustrated within the Borough's PPG17 Study Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities (2009), are based around the relationship between population and provision. For example, the standard for provision of Outdoor Sport is 1 hectare per 1000 population within a 10 minute straight line walk. Therefore, Policy 17 will ensure that all development proposals which increase the size of the Borough's population, will meet the appropriate quantity and access standards.
- 2.5 As illustrated within the Council's PPG17 Study Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities (2009), the Borough is deficient in Parks and Recreation Grounds, Outdoor Sport, Children's Play Space, and Allotment Space.

Therefore, Policy 17 ensures that priorities for provision, are in these typologies.

- 2.6 Policy 6 identifies that Green Wedges within the Borough of Oadby and Wigston play an important role in a number of ways, including; preventing the coalescence of Oadby and Wigston; guiding development form; providing a 'green lung' out to the countryside from urban areas, and; the provision of a recreational resource. Through Policy 6 Green Wedges are to be maintained and enhanced, and any proposed land uses that are not illustrated within the policy, will not be acceptable.
- 2.7 Policy 6 allows for consideration of the detailed boundaries of Green Wedges to be considered in the preparation of the Allocations Development Plan Document. This will ensure that particular consideration is given to ensuring that Green Wedges support and compliment the strategic development proposals in the Core Strategy.
- 2.8 Policy 7 relates to the Countryside. Whilst acknowledging that there are requirements for development in the Countryside it aims to ensure that such development is restricted to only essential uses. This policy therefore compliments the development proposals in the Core Strategy which aims to ensure that the development proposals do not have a significant impact upon the countryside.

- 3. Are the purposes of green infrastructure corridors clear, and does Policy 5 reflect all purposes adequately, in addition to promoting biodiversity?**
- 3.1 Green Infrastructure Corridors are an integral part of the Green Infrastructure Network of multifunctional green spaces. They provide the links to locations of natural heritage, green space, biodiversity and other environmental interests. The Core Strategy seeks a net gain in Green Infrastructure through the protection and enhancement of assets, and the creation of new multifunctional areas of green space. In order to allow these net gains to 'work' appropriately within the Borough's Green Infrastructure Network, green corridors will be needed. Core Strategy Policy 5 Green Infrastructure, suggests seeking opportunities to link fragmented green spaces and habitats. Examples of specific green corridors within the Borough, are the Grand Union Canal, the railway network, the River Sence and the two Green Wedges, which provide 'green lungs' out from the urban areas to the countryside.
- 3.2 As referenced in Core Strategy Policy 5, paragraph 5.107, opportunities to achieve this include:
- * providing a focus and attractive environment for the increased population proposed within the three cities growth area, and specifically in the Borough of Oadby and Wigston;
 - * providing improvements that respect existing landscape character and that will assist in attracting and retaining inward investment;
 - * protecting and enhancing existing biodiversity, creating new areas for biodiversity and reversing the fragmentation of habitats by restoring the connectivity between them;
 - * providing continued, new and enhanced links to the countryside; and,
 - * coordinating the use of green space to optimise its use for leisure, biodiversity, drainage, flood management and other socio economic activities.
- 3.3 Through a variety of ways, illustrated above, well designed Green Infrastructure is essential in improving environmental quality, health,

wellbeing and community cohesion.

- 3.4 Green Infrastructure, as well as the above, is important for providing Green Corridors that contribute to the general visual amenity/aesthetics of the local environment and the character and appearance of the Borough. They can also provide locations for healthy exercise.
- 3.5 Policy 5 within the Borough's Core Strategy, promotes and has biodiversity as an integral part of the Green Infrastructure Network, although is careful not to have the policy too biodiversity orientated as demonstrated in paragraph 3.2 above.
- 3.6 Green Infrastructure, as well as, underpinning the sustainability of the Borough of Oadby and Wigston, including creating resilience to climate and its effects, is one of the ways in which the Borough Council will meet its duty to the conservation of Biodiversity, under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006.
- 3.7 In addition to the Core Strategy policy 5, the Borough Council has developed a Green Infrastructure Plan, a Biodiversity Action Plan, and a Nature Conservation Strategy. With the Borough being dense and urbanised it is imperative that green spaces and corridors are maintained and enhanced. See Spatial Objective 12, paragraph 4.28, pp 33.
- 3.8 In conclusion, Green Infrastructure corridors and their purposes are appropriately expressed within the Core Strategy and Policy 5 does reflect these purposes adequately.

- 4. Are green wedges justified, and are they urban not countryside features?**
- 4.1 See paragraph 1.5 of question 1 of this matter which relates to the justification of Green Wedges.
- 4.2 Green Wedges are neither part of the Leicester Principal Urban Area, nor are they countryside. Green Wedges are a separate designation and this is reflected by 'Core Strategy Policy 6: Green Wedges' which sets out the objectives and land uses applicable to them.
- 4.3 Therefore, the designation of Green Wedges is justified and they are neither part of the Principal Urban Area or countryside, but rather, a separate land designation.

5. Are they too restrictive of farming and leisure activities?

- 5.1 A representation made by Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council suggested that provision for 'indoor leisure' in 'Core Strategy Policy 6: Green Wedges' should be made. The Borough Council considers the policy to be appropriate with regards to its approach to leisure uses in Green Wedges because it is important that the open and undeveloped nature of these designations is protected and also so that the character of the Green Wedges are retained for future generations.
- 5.2 Therefore, Borough Council disagrees with the representation made by Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council and therefore proposes to keep Core Strategy Policy 6 as it is.
- 5.3 An example of why the Borough Council deems this policy to be appropriate is because it ensures that inappropriate forms of retail development cannot be permitted in the Green Wedge. Additional text within the supporting text could usefully be incorporated to state that small scale retail in association with farming may be acceptable within the Green Wedges if a justifiable need to support the local economy can be illustrated.

**6. Is Policy 7 locally distinctive, or merely reformulating national policy?
And does it conflict with RSS and the proposed Direction of Growth?**

- 6.1 The policy does have a locally distinctive edge in that it refers to the *'land outside the Leicester Principal Urban Area...and development causing adverse impacts in the countryside will only be permitted where there is 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'* against. The Borough Council has a Landscape Character Assessment which forms part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy.
- 6.2 Core Strategy Policy 7 does not conflict with the designation of the proposed Direction for Growth. The forthcoming Allocations Development Plan Document will allocate the Direction for Growth and will be accompanied by a Proposals Map which will define the exact boundaries of the countryside and the Direction for Growth (at which time the Direction for Growth will no longer form a part of the countryside).
- 6.3 The policy does not conflict with the objectives of the East Midlands Regional Plan (March 2009).
- 6.4 Core Strategy Policy 7: The Countryside is one of the less locally specific policies within the Core Strategy but due to its context, it still serves a very important purpose as a development management tool and therefore is still deemed by the Borough Council to be sound.

- 7. Does the Core Strategy adequately address the future of Kilby Bridge? Is there consistency between the several references (eg. paragraphs 3.65-8, Spatial Objective 14, paragraph 5.91 and Policy CS17)?**
- 7.1 The Core Strategy draws attention to the current function of the hamlet of Kilby Bridge and its potential to fulfil an important leisure and recreational function on behalf of the Borough and, particularly, the 'Direction for Growth'. The paragraphs 3.41 and 3.42 of the amended Chapter 3 provide a description of the settlement.
- 7.2 The Kilby Bridge settlement has been identified as a Strategic Objective within the Borough. Having recognised the existing function that Kilby Bridge performs, the settlement can play a key role in the future strategy for the Borough by providing enhanced access and a better understanding of the Grand Union canal and its environs, as well, as the provision of small scale development that benefits the local character.
- 7.3 Paragraph 5.91 in recognising the positive characteristics of the hamlet, does draw attention to a number of existing uses that do not enhance the overall quality of the settlement. The Strategy recognises the need to reconcile these different elements and the desirability of growing the leisure offer by proposing that a Regeneration Scheme be prepared.
- 7.4 In order to provide a planned approach to the future of Kilby Bridge, Core Strategy Policy 17 allows for the production of a regeneration scheme. This approach will enable a future role for the settlement, consistent with the wider growth of the Borough, meeting community needs and ensuring the individual character of Kilby bridge is not diminished.

8. Does Policy 17 protect existing open space appropriately, or could it prejudice sustainable development for housing or employment use?

8.1 The Borough Council commissioned JPC Consultants to undertake a PPG17 Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities Study, which was formally adopted by Council in June 2009. Paragraphs 7.69 to 7.75 clearly express the value of the Borough's adopted PPG17 study and the role it plays as a key evidence base document.

8.2 Policy 17 outlines the Borough's Councils position in relation to open space, sport and recreation facilities, as set out in PPG17, as well as, setting out minimum standards for provision and the current level of provision, whether in surplus or deficiency. According to the Borough's Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities Study, as a whole, the Borough is deficient in 4 out of the 6 typologies. To ensure the Council's commitment towards providing every resident with access to adequate, high quality, accessible open space and play areas, the amount of existing land will need to be retained and in some cases added to. It would be detrimental to Core Strategy Policy 17 and the Council's commitments to open space provision, if housing or employment use were to be allocated on a site of open space.

8.3 Reviewing sites in regard to their suitability for sustainable development options to meet strategic housing and employment needs is dealt with through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment process.

8.4 The Borough's adopted PPG17 study reviews 'accessible' open space... *'Simple criteria have been set to establish whether they 'qualify' for assessment, and have therefore been included within the audit, these are:*

- * *They are freely and openly accessible to the community (e.g recreation grounds),*
- * *They are accessible to the public on a managed access basis (such as allotments and some kinds of outdoor sports facility)'.*

8.5 The above criteria illustrates the type of land that is identified and reviewed

during the PPG17 Study process. Only existing open space is taking into account within the study. Land which does not have an open space use or allocation, or has been previously developed is not reviewed. Therefore, land that has been reviewed under the criteria above, is unlikely to have any use other than for public accessible open space.

- 9. On Kilby Bridge, can the aims for (1) protecting the environmental and historic assets and (2) promoting leisure and tourism both be achieved? Is the potential impact of proximity to the Direction for Growth adequately addressed?**
- 9.1 The Borough Council and its partners will seek to develop a Regeneration Scheme which will reconcile the need for quality development within the 'Direction for Growth' and the demands for enhanced leisure and recreational activities in Kilby Bridge. Such a planned approach will allow a more informed concept for the area, that will enable the protection of environmental and historic sites through planning policy, more specifically CS Policy 15 – Landscape and Character.
- 9.2 At a strategic level, the Grand Union Canal and River Soar Strategy, has identified the Kilby Bridge area as a development hub. The Grand Union Canal and River Soar Strategy was derived from a partnership involving, environmental, historic, leisure and tourism stakeholders/partners, thus, is grounded upon expertise and consensus.

10. Can all the above policies deliver (evidence of stakeholder support and potential funding)?

10.1 Policy 5 will assist in the delivery of a number of the Borough's Spatial Objectives, including:

SO 12 – Enhancing Green Infrastructure

SO 13 – Green Wedges and the Countryside

SO 14 – Enhancing Local Heritage

10.2 Policy 6 will assist in the delivery of the Borough's Spatial Objective 13 – Green Wedges and the Countryside.

10.3 Policy 7 will assist in the delivery of the Borough's Spatial Objective 13 – Green Wedges and the Countryside.

10.4 Policy 17 will assist in the delivery of a number of the Borough's Spatial Objectives, including:

SO12 – Enhancing Green Infrastructure

SO13 – Green and the Countryside

SO14 – Enhancing Local Heritage

10.5 Furthermore Policy 17, in particular the Borough's PPG17 Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities Study, will be kept up to date during the annual monitoring process, thus, the Borough will have an up to date audit of the provision of open space, therefore, can plan ahead appropriately.

10.6 The Key outcomes sought in Policies relevant to Spatial Objective 12 (Chapter 8, page 119, table 8.17) will be delivered and implemented by a combination of stakeholders, including, Oadby and Wigston Borough Council, Developers, Natural England, British Waterways, Partnership working with the River Soar and Grand Union Canal Steering Group, Sub Regional Partnerships, and ENABLE.

- 10.7 The Key outcomes sought in Policies relevant to Spatial Objective 13 (Chapter 8, page 121, table 8.18) will be delivered and implemented by a combination of stakeholders, including, Oadby and Wigston Borough Council, Joint working with Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council, other neighbouring districts, Sub Regional Partnerships, ENABLE, Developers, British Heritage, Natural England, and English Heritage.
- 10.8 The Key outcomes sought in Policies relevant to Spatial Objective 14 (Chapter 8, page 122, table 8.19) will be delivered and implemented by a combination of stakeholders, including, Oadby and Wigston Borough Council, Leicestershire Constabulary, Natural England, English Heritage, the Environment Agency, CABI, and Developers.

An example:

- 10.9 The Kilby Bridge hamlet is at the southern end of the area covered by the River Soar and Grand Union Canal Strategy. Whilst no money currently attaches to this emda-funded initiative, having a clear strategy, owned by a variety of interested parties, gives a major advantage when money is made available. The proximity of the hamlet to the improving town centre of Wigston and to the 'Direction for Growth' should also stimulate private sector investment in canal related activities and improvements within the hamlet.
- 10.10 In support of the regeneration of the Kilby Bridge, British Waterways have suggested that where they have largely vacant sites which are surplus to operational requirements, joint ventures on regeneration with partners will be supported.
- 10.11 Also, at a strategic level, the Grand Union Canal and River Soar Strategy, has identified the Kilby Bridge area as a development hub. The Grand Union Canal and River Soar Strategy was derived from a partnership involving, environmental, historic, leisure and tourism stakeholders/partners, thus, is grounded upon expertise and consensus.
- 10.12 In terms of funding, Chapter 8 of the Core Strategy indicates who will be

responsible for the delivery. The Borough Council will work with those organisations in funding outcomes, particularly in relation to preparing and implementing the Allocations Development Plan Document and Town Centre Masterplans Area Action Plans.