

Landscape Character Assessment

**Evidence base under pinning the Local Plan for
the Borough of Oadby and Wigston**

2018



PART 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1.1 This document has been updated by Oadby and Wigston Borough Council in order to ensure that it is a robust piece of evidence base that reflects current National and Local Planning Policy and Guidance (in 2017). Originally, David Tyldesley and Associates were commissioned in August 2005 by Oadby and Wigston Borough Council to prepare a Landscape Character Assessment for the Borough. Fieldwork was undertaken in late September and early November 2004 and in order to update the document, further fieldwork and desk based analysis took place between throughout 2017.
- 1.1.2 The Borough of Oadby and Wigston contains a diverse range of landscapes including three urban settlements, two green wedges, two country parks and areas of open countryside. The Grand Union Canal and the River Sence run through the south of the Borough. The Borough Council recognises that a high quality and locally distinctive rural and urban environment can make a substantial contribution to quality of life in the Borough and that sustainable development is essential to maintain this quality. Appendix 1.1 illustrates the administrative boundary of the Borough of Oadby and Wigston.
- 1.1.3 Oadby and Wigston Borough Council are working towards replacing the adopted Core Strategy (2010), Saved Local Plan (2013) and the Oadby and Wigston Town Centres Area Action Plan (2013) with the New Local Plan that will provide a strategy for the Borough up to 2031. It is hoped that the New Local Plan will be adopted by Summer 2018. This Landscape Character Assessment provides guidance to inform the New Local Plan and also to inform the effective management of the landscapes within the Borough.
- 1.1.4 The key outputs that the study provides are:
- Identification, assessment and description of the rural landscape character areas within the Borough to include an assessment of development pressure, capacity to accommodate change, opportunities to enhance landscape quality and landscape character objectives for the rural area;
 - Identification, assessment and description of the urban landscape character areas within the Borough to include an assessment of development pressure, capacity to accommodate change, opportunities to enhance landscape quality and landscape character objectives for the urban area;
 - Planning Policy guidance, relating to urban landscape character, for the individual urban character areas;
 - Borough wide urban landscape character objectives and policy guidance.
- 1.1.5 The guidance and policy objectives in this document have been developed with a view to providing the Council with:
- landscape planning and management objectives for the landscape/urban areas;
 - a basis for design guidance on the integration of new development into the landscape;

- a basis for design guidance to preserve, develop and enhance local distinctiveness;
- policy guidance that supplements the new Local Plan;
- the scope of adopted policy and supporting evidence in relation to landscape character; and,
- identification and enhancement of potential green networks and biodiversity potential.

1.2 INTRODUCTION TO LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT (LCA)

- 1.2.1 Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is a process used to assist in planning and the effective management of changing landscapes. The term landscape covers all aspects of the physical terrain, both natural and man-made. Natural features such as hedges, trees and woodlands, as well as man-made constructed features such as roads and buildings all contribute to our Boroughs landscape. The aim of the process is to define areas with similar landscape character and attributes. This character can be used to inform planning decisions and to ensure that appropriate landscape management or enhancement regimes are developed and applied to the correct areas.
- 1.2.2 Within the rural landscape, natural and managed natural landscape features are likely to determine the landscape character, for example woodland cover and hedge patterns. In urban areas, however, it is likely to be the built environment such as street pattern and building use.
- 1.2.3 This landscape character assessment of the Borough of Oadby and Wigston includes an assessment of the rural areas (rural landscape character assessment) and also an assessment of the urban areas (urban landscape character assessment). It should be noted that the urban areas of the Borough were once part of the rural landscape and that landscape has influenced their development. The urban areas sit within the wider rural landscape and maintain some of the underlying features eg landform and watercourses.
- 1.2.4 Sections 1.3 and 1.4 below provide a background to, and explain the methodologies used for, both the urban and the rural landscape character assessments.

1.3 INTRODUCTION TO RURAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT IN THE BOROUGH OF OADBY AND WIGSTON

- 1.3.1 There have been several landscape character assessments of Oadby and Wigston at different scales. The first was completed in 1976 by Leicestershire County Council and was the first Leicestershire County Landscape Appraisal. This included a landscape character zone map based on a consideration of geology, landform, soils, land capability, vegetation, woodland, land use and field pattern.
- 1.3.2 In 1996 English Nature and the Countryside Agency (formerly the Countryside Commission) published the Character of England map. This identified 181 Regional Character Areas throughout the country, 12 of which lie either wholly or partially within Leicestershire. The Borough of Oadby and Wigston is situated almost wholly within the Leicestershire Vales Regional Character Area, with only the extreme north eastern corner of the Borough falling within High Leicestershire. Appendix 1.2 shows the boundary of the Countryside Agency's Regional Character Areas in the Borough, 1996.
- 1.3.3 In 1995 Leicestershire County Council began updating the 1976 county appraisal. This culminated in the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy, which was published in 2001. Despite significant forces of change in the county over the two decades since the first appraisal (such as continued urban growth, new road building and other development, agricultural change etc.), the character zones identified in 1976 were considered to be still broadly valid and formed the basis for fieldwork which began in 1995. However, the larger scale approach appropriate to a nation-wide assessment inevitably led to some minor differences in boundary details and the omission of some character areas seen as insignificant at the finer grained county scale.
- 1.3.4 Consequently the 2001 strategy identified 18 Landscape Character Areas within Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. A line drawn approximately between Oadby and Wigston (roughly through the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge) separates two landscape areas, namely High Leicestershire to the east and Upper Soar to the west. A small area in the extreme south-eastern corner of the district lies within the Lutterworth Lowlands. Appendix 1.2 shows the boundaries of these Landscape Character Areas.
- 1.3.5 The 2001 strategy concentrated on the visual character of the countryside and, in line with the landscape character assessment guidelines current at the time, did not address issues of built design.
- 1.3.6 In 2004 the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge Management Strategy was prepared by Munro and Whitten on behalf of Oadby and Wigston Borough Council. This includes a landscape character assessment of the Green Wedge between the built up areas of Oadby and Wigston, and divides the area into three landscape character areas, namely north, central and south. These are identified primarily by differences in land use, topography and visual characteristics.
- 1.3.7 The methodology used for the rural landscape character assessment was based on the standard 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland' published by the Countryside Agency and Scottish National Heritage. This has been adapted to reflect local conditions and to achieve the purpose and aims of the

assessment as described in section 1.1. The following methodology was followed in the rural landscape character assessment:

Characterisation, which involved:

- Initial discussions with officers of the Borough Council to agree on the scope, appropriate scale and level of detail required;
- Familiarisation visits to gain an initial understanding of the landscapes within the Borough;
- Desk study, to identify natural factors such as geology, landform, drainage, soils and landcover/vegetation;
- Desk study to identify cultural/social factors such as land use, settlement, enclosure and changes over time;
- Field survey;
- Classification and description of landscape character areas and sub-areas.

1.3.8 During the first stages, it was decided that a scale of 1:25,000 would be appropriate for mapping landscape features and character areas / sub-areas within the Borough. However this scale was found to be too small in the field and thus field work was initially mapped at 1:12,500.

1.3.9 During the desk study a number of reports, other background data and mapped information were reviewed, in particular:

2005	2017
National Planning Policy	National Planning Policy Framework
Regional Planning Policy	National Planning Practice Guidance
Saved Local Plan (1999)	Core Strategy (2010)
Structure Plan	Saved Local Plan (2013)
Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge Management Strategy (2004)	Town Centres Area Action Plan (2013)
Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)	Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge Management Strategy (2004)
Local evidence based documents	Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)
Aerial photography	Local evidence based documents
	Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
	Aerial photography
	Tree Protection Order's
	Public Rights of Way

1.3.10 Information was also gained from the British Geological Survey, Leicestershire Environmental Resources Centre, Leicestershire County Council's Records Office, and external organisations including Natural England and Historic England.

1.3.11 Characterisation of draft landscape character areas and sub-areas were mapped and character descriptions prepared for discussion with the Borough Council.

1.3.12 SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis has been undertaken for each landscape character sub-area. Judgements were made on the

sensitivity of each character sub-area, key pressures for change and the capacity for each area to accommodate new development, to enable recommendations to be made. These were discussed and refined to achieve the recommendations in Part 2 of this report.

- 1.3.13 An update has been undertaken of the Landscape Character within the Borough of Oadby and Wigston in 2017/2018. This is to provide an up to date picture of the different character areas within the Borough. The updated Landscape Character Assessment has been produced alongside the new Local Plan, to ensure that all policy guidance within this document supplements and informs policies contained in the new Local Plan.

1.4 INTRODUCTION TO URBAN LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT IN THE BOROUGH OF OADBY AND WIGSTON

1.4.1 Within the Borough's urban character areas, a number of issues have grown in importance. These include:

- the need for development to be environmentally, socially and economically sustainable;
- the need to restore some of the local diversity and character to urban areas that has been lost in the period of expansion since the end of the second world war;
- a new design agenda based on sustainability, increasing density, community safety, biodiversity and the development of key urban design principles;
- the importance of urban areas in contributing to local biodiversity, community wellbeing and creating a positive environment for all to enjoy.

1.4.2 An urban character assessment can provide more detailed and higher levels of information about urban areas to inform planning and design decisions.

1.4.3 The methodology used for the assessment of the urban areas is based on the standard 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland' published by the Countryside Agency and Scottish National Heritage, however, this update has taken account of Government guidance, 'Landscape and Seascape Character Assessments' 2014. The methodology has also incorporated appropriate features from the 'Urban Design Compendium' suggested character appraisal inventory for urban areas and has been adapted to reflect the specific urban features of the Borough. The aim of the process is to classify the urban areas into spatial units that share common characteristics that affect their character. The character analysis was undertaken based on the following;

- The development of the urban form since the late 19th Century;
- Survey and assessment of the urban area;
- An overall review of the current urban form;
- Desktop review of the contribution of open space to the urban character;
- Desktop review of features within the Borough with biodiversity value.

1.4.4 A brief summary has been provided of the development of the urban area since the late 19th Century. This is not intended to provide a full historical account but to explain the current urban form and to help identify the character areas. A desk top review was undertaken of the correlation between the current field boundary pattern and that of the 1885 and 1887 Ordnance Survey maps to ascertain if the old boundary pattern had affected the urban character and if any of the old boundaries remained.

1.4.5 A review was undertaken of the overall structure of the individual urban areas and their relationship to each other which included looking at boundaries, access, gateways and the location of different functions.

1.4.6 The urban area was surveyed and reviewed using a pre-defined set of criteria detailed in the table overleaf:

Table 1.1 – Urban Character Appraisal Inventory	
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Location and boundaries ❖ Linkages ❖ Context within urban area ❖ Landform
Character appraisal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Street pattern ❖ Street hierarchy ❖ Views – long and internal ❖ Landmarks ❖ Open space ❖ Enclosure ❖ Density ❖ Scale
Detailed character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Building age and style ❖ Relationship of buildings to street ❖ Boundary treatments ❖ Materials ❖ Building details ❖ Streetscape ❖ Special features
Additional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Land use ❖ Activity levels ❖ Designations ❖ Historical and cultural associations ❖ Sense of place

1.4.7 A review was undertaken of the contribution that individual open spaces make to the urban character. The review looked purely at this aspect and does not cover amenity or biodiversity value or importance to local communities. Open space included parks, playing fields and school grounds, urban spaces and linear spaces. On the basis of this a conclusion was drawn about the overall impact of open space on the urban character.

1.4.8 A separate desktop review was undertaken to map any features with biodiversity value, to ascertain what green networks existed and if there was an impact on urban character. The review included open space (as defined above), watercourses, prominent groups of trees, large areas of back gardens, linear features, allotments and sports facilities. For the purpose of this study features with a biodiversity potential were identified, but a qualitative assessment of the biodiversity value of the features was not made.

1.5 REPORT STRUCTURE

- 1.5.1 The report includes information presented in textual and visual formats. The report uses visual information in the form of plans and photographs wherever possible to convey information.
- 1.5.2 The main body of the report is preceded by Part 1, this introduction. This section provides a summary of the purposes of the report, an introduction to landscape character assessment and a summary of the methodology used for landscape character assessments of the rural and urban areas. The section also details any limitations in respect of the study in term of methodology or as detailed in the brief for the work. The final section provides an overall summary of the key findings of the assessment process and key recommendations.
- 1.5.3 Part 2 contains the results of the rural landscape character assessment. A number of rural landscape character areas are identified and the section describes the characteristics of each area, identifies the pressures for change and capacity to accommodate change and suggests opportunities to enhance landscape quality. An overall landscape character objective for each character area is provided and an overall conclusion on the rural landscape character of the Borough.
- 1.5.4 Parts 3, 4 and 5 provide the results of the urban landscape assessment for Oadby, South Wigston and Wigston respectively. Each part contains a description of the overall urban characteristics of each settlement and for each of the urban character areas identified, and an identification of issues that may impact on urban landscape character, including development and the capacity of the area to accommodate that change. An overall urban character objective for each character area is provided and then a number of urban character area specific policy guidance are made.
- 1.5.5 The final part of the report, Part 6, provides urban landscape character objectives and policy guidance which reflect the emerging New Local Plan, emerging policy direction and that relate to all of the three settlements that comprise the urban area of the Borough. This section also provides recommendations on what Supplementary Planning Documents could be developed to protect the urban landscape character of the Borough.

1.6 OMISSIONS

- 1.6.1 This study does not include an assessment of the Oadby-Wigston Green Wedge.
- 1.6.2 The urban character assessment has been undertaken to a level of detail in order to identify discrete urban character units, describe their key features and assess the pressure for and capacity to accommodate change. A full detailed character assessment was not undertaken for the purposes of this study. The work on identifying potential green networks and old hedgeline boundaries was based on a desktop study informed by the level of fieldwork undertaken to assess the overall urban character. No detailed evaluation has been made of the biodiversity potential and quality of the features identified. Open space within the Borough has been assessed purely on the basis of its contribution to landscape quality and not on amenity or biodiversity value or value to the local communities.

1.7 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rural Landscape Character Assessment

- 1.7.1 This assessment has found that, differences in the character of the landscape across the borough are very subtle. In essence, the Borough is a transition zone between the more distinct plateau and steep sided valley landscapes to the north and east and the more open, rolling landscapes to the south and west.
- 1.7.2 Natural factors such as geology, landform, drainage, soils and landcover/vegetation appear to have had little effect in limiting the spread of urbanisation into the countryside. Only the canal and railway have limited the southern expansion of South Wigston and Wigston respectively. Elsewhere built development has occurred on some of the highest ground in the Borough (125m+ in the east, in Oadby), and across watercourses (for example Oadby straddles Wash Brook). Landcover/vegetation has similarly had no impact in halting the spread of development.
- 1.7.3 For the most part, though, the urban edge is reasonably well integrated into the landscape. Generally, hedgerows, trees and subtle changes in landform help to mitigate views of the urban edge from the countryside. This is considered to be an important positive characteristic of the rural-urban fringe in the Borough, and one that should be protected and strengthened where necessary. This will be especially important where further development is planned, for example the Direction for Growth areas to help integrate the development into its surrounding environment and mitigate its impact on the surrounding countryside.
- 1.7.4 The overriding aim should be to retain a predominantly open, natural, rural transitional area between urban area and country, which is well integrated with the countryside and which allows good public access to it and through it. In particular the distinctive character of Oadby Grange (landscape sub-area A (iii)) and the Sence Valley (landscape character type C) should be protected. The separation between Wigston and South Wigston should be maintained, see Appendix 1.2.

Urban Character Assessment

Oadby

- 1.7.5 Though now physically part of the Leicester Principle Urban Area (PUA), Oadby still retains its own identity as a settlement. The overall urban character of Oadby is that of a pleasant residential environment, but the settlement generally does not have a high level of local distinctiveness. Only two of the identified urban character areas, the Arboretum in the northwest and parts of the town centre, have a stronger, more distinctive and higher quality urban character. The underlying landscape influenced the siting of the original settlement of Oadby which was developed on the gentle slopes to the edge of the Washbrook. The later development of the settlement, however, has been primarily, influenced by the settlements role as providing housing for an expanding Leicester. The gentle undulation of the underlying landscape is perceptible and contributes in a positive way to the urban character, by providing a sense of enclosure, adding interest to the streetscape and providing a variety of views.

- 1.7.6 Oadby is joined to the Leicester PUA only on its north-western edge. The north-eastern and eastern edges of the settlement are bounded by an attractive rural fringe and Green Wedge. The western edge of the settlement is adjacent to the Green Wedge that separates the district from Wigston and the southern edge of the settlement is also bound by an attractive rural fringe. Due to the lack of views out of the urban area there is little sense of the proximity of the rural fringe, but vegetation along the edge of the urban area is often present in and softens many views within the urban area. There are a number of rights of way, informal paths and access points, which provide valuable access out of the urban area into the rural fringe beyond.
- 1.7.7 The majority of the growth of the settlement occurred during the mid to late 20th Century. An important historic core is provided by the settlement centre, which covers the area of the original settlement, and dates back to before the beginning of the 20th Century. The centre, particularly the western section, has seen loss of character due to development dating from the later part of the 20th century. The pattern of this new development now threatens the centre with disintegration into two different urban character areas. This trend is negative in urban character terms and the unity of the centre as one character area should be maintained. The only other urban character area of historic interest is the Arboretum, the core of which is formed by a garden suburb dating from the early 20th Century with many houses built in the style of the vernacular revival. The remainder of the settlement consists of mid to late 20th and 21st Century housing estates. The estates are distinguished from each other by exhibiting the architectural housing styles and street patterns typical of their period of construction.
- 1.7.8 This study has found that the potential of the majority of the urban character areas, as defined by this study, to accommodate further development was very limited. The areas identified as being subject to development pressure were Oadby centre and the Arboretum. In Oadby centre any new development would have to reflect and respect the character of the centre and could be used to restore some of that character and unity. Within the Arboretum, any development proposals would have to be of a very high quality design. It is essential that not only the impacts of individual developments on the immediate Arboretum streetscape are considered, but that the cumulative impact of development on the wider character of the area is also carefully assessed in particular demolition and rebuilding. The open space review conducted as part of this study concluded that open space within the settlement, apart from that within the Arboretum, made some but not a major contribution to urban character. The recommendation of this study is that any further loss of open space is likely to be detrimental to urban character and that no open space within the Oadby urban area should be lost to development, particularly within the Arboretum area.
- 1.7.9 Due to its predominantly suburban residential nature the urban character of the wider settlement, it is unlikely to face any degree of active change. The single factor that would result in a decline in the quality of the urban character of the settlement is the loss of tree cover. It is critical that the current level of vegetation and tree cover is maintained. The development of the wider green network, including tree cover, the quality of open space and biodiversity networks is the single factor that would improve the overall urban quality of Oadby.

South Wigston

- 1.7.10 This study suggests that South Wigston is a settlement in its own right and in many ways is more clearly defined as an autonomous settlement than Oadby or Wigston. Its urban character is varied. Its form has been influenced by the rail and canal network rather than by strong topographical influences. Its landscape context is difficult to perceive once within its urban area. Its interface with the open countryside is only apparent to the south where on the whole the boundary is abrupt, but often with a good level of tree planting.
- 1.7.11 Bounded by urban areas to its west, east and north, South Wigston enjoys a rural setting on its southern boundary where it abuts the Sence Valley and Grand Union Canal corridor. As well as affording a physical and perceptual barrier to further growth or expansion to the south, the valley affords relatively easy access to countryside of recognised landscape value and recreational opportunities along the towpath and footpath network. The part of the Sence Valley adjacent to South Wigston is designated as an Area of Local Landscape Value.
- 1.7.12 South Wigston is still a relatively young settlement with its oldest housing dating from the very late 18th Century, so whilst its historic environment is limited in variety, it does include some extensive areas of relatively unspoilt Victorian and Edwardian terraced housing where original attention to detail is still apparent (to the South of the railway line). Other residential areas of the settlement to the north of the railway line, are predominantly mid to late 20th Century housing estates, each one clearly reflecting typical street layouts and architectural uniformity of their period.
- 1.7.13 The settlement is characterised by a mix of land uses within a relatively confined area, often with light industry alongside housing and retail uses. This is a key characteristic of South Wigston, and consequently affords itself the potential to be a highly sustainable community. A quality that is further enhanced by access to the railway network, that offers sustainable connections to Leicester and Birmingham from South Wigston railway station.
- 1.7.14 This study suggests that opportunities for further growth in the settlement are particularly limited. South Wigston's only really undeveloped area, apart from the Blaby Road Park, is the 'Railway Triangle', a large central site bounded by three rail tracks which present significant accessibility and amenity constraints on residential development. As it is, the cordoned off nature of the site offers significant biodiversity benefits close to the centre. Existing residential areas are already quite densely developed, and in the main could not be redeveloped without some degree of clearance first.
- 1.7.15 Priorities within South Wigston should therefore be directed towards enhancement of the existing urban character. In particular the centre has the potential to offer a high quality public realm on Blaby Road. Several of its fine facades have been severely compromised through insensitive ground floor treatments to shop fronts, however, reversal of these mistakes would help maximise the sustainability potential of this easily accessible service centre. The development of Tesco, South Leicestershire College and regeneration of Blaby Road Park, have been a catalyst for growth in South Wigston.

1.7.16 Elsewhere within South Wigston care should be taken to maintain the openness and mature treescape of the western fringe character area, especially around Saffron Road area, and to ensure that the terraced areas around the centre retain their integrity as a distinctive built environment. The newer areas of housing offer few possibilities for significant townscape improvements, but the Gloucester Crescent and Ervin's Lock areas would benefit from increased urban tree planting. The links between the town, and the river and canal corridor are not extensive but nevertheless do offer important opportunities for green links and wildlife 'stepping stones' into the urban area, and should be managed and protected accordingly.

Wigston

1.7.17 In common with Oadby and South Wigston, Wigston, though part of the wider Leicester Principle Urban Area (PUA), retains its definition as a separate town and settlement. This is due to the Green Wedge between Wigston and Oadby to the north and east, the railway line between the town and South Wigston to the west, and Kilby Bridge to the south. The urban character of the town consists primarily of reasonably pleasant residential areas, but there are also urban character areas that are distinguished by their employment and educational use. The underlying landform does not seem to have influenced the development of the settlement, apart from on the siting of the original settlement, which required a reasonably large flat area to lay out the 'tofts and crofts' (see Part 5, 5.2.3). The town has grown outwards to the west and to the south until it has reached the manmade barrier of the railway line. To the north the presence of the racecourse originally prevented the town merging with Oadby and additional protection is now provided by its Green Wedge designation. In the last 40 years the eastern and south eastern fringe of the town has gradually encroached into the rural area of the Borough. This trend is to continue albeit planned, in the New Local Plan. There are subtle differences in the underlying landform of the town, with character areas to the north east of the centre being perceptibly higher than areas to the west and south that are closer to the Sence Valley.

1.7.18 Though Wigston is effectively joined to the wider Leicester PUA to the west and north, the eastern and southern edges of the town are adjacent to attractive rural areas. To the south, the Sence Valley is accessible though, due to the flatness of the landform, the urban form and the trees along the railway, views out are limited. The rural areas to the eastern fringe of the town have more undulating landform and are also attractive. There is access out of the urban area and a footpath network to both the south and the east.

1.7.19 The town centre of Wigston is based on a 'toft and croft' settlement pattern, which dates back to the first Millenium. In the southern part of the town centre, the old street pattern, lanes and open spaces have survived the later growth and intensification of the town giving the area a distinct character. From its origins as a farming settlement, the initial growth of the town in the late 19th and early 20th Century appears to have been supported by growth of local employment sources in the town centre and along the railway. The latest phases of expansion, (to the settlement), to the south and east have been to provide new housing and this trend is set to continue through planned growth. The urban character of the town centre has now broken down into two areas. This break down is likely to have started in the late 19th Century when the intensification of urban form appears to have occurred to a greater degree in the northern part of the town than in the southern.

The southern section, All Saints, retains its historical character and sense of place and is one of the highest quality urban areas in the Borough. The northern section of the town centre, St Wistans, has however, lost most historical character and generally any future development should contribute to develop a contemporary character, rather than attempting to restore links to the southern section. Apart from All Saints the only other urban character area in the settlement with a more individual character is the area along Station Road, Guthlaxton. The majority of the remainder of the settlement consists of housing estates built between the mid 20th Century and the present day. The estates are distinguished by their street patterns and the architectural style of the houses.

- 1.7.20 The urban character assessment found that the capacity of the urban character areas to accommodate additional development is generally low. The key urban areas identified as being potentially under threat from inappropriate, unplanned development were the town centre and greenfield land to the edge of the Leicester PUA. If appropriately designed, new development in the north of the town centre could be welcome and be used to facilitate urban character improvements. Any new development in the All Saints or Guthlaxton areas would have to be of a high quality and respect the urban character in order to ensure protection for these areas. The redevelopment of the former South Leicestershire College site on Station Road into a medical centre and housing, is a good example of this. The open space review conducted as part of this study concluded that open space within the settlement, apart from that within the Guthlaxton area, made a contribution to urban character. The recommendation of this study is that any further loss of open space is likely to be detrimental to urban character and that no open space within the Wigston urban area should be lost to development.
- 1.7.21 The impression gained in undertaking the urban character assessment was that the general level of tree cover in the urban area was less for Wigston than Oadby. This may be due to many of the residential estates in Wigston being of a slightly later date and less mature character. The character of many of the urban areas of Wigston could be improved by additional tree planting. Improvements to the wider green network including open space quality, the public realm in the centre of the town and the biodiversity network would also contribute to some raising of urban character quality.

Kilby Bridge

- 1.7.22 Kilby Bridge is the only rural settlement within the Borough of Oadby and Wigston. It is situated south of Wigston, south of the railway line, but north of the Grand Union Canal and River Sence. Its built form consists of a mix of residential and employment uses with the oldest part of the settlement around (and once serving) the canal. The settlement has few amenities other than a village pub and could therefore benefit from some investment, which could be brought about through some small scale, well designed, canal based development.

PART 2 RURAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1.1 In Part 1 of the report, a background to and history of landscape character assessment in the Borough was provided. A number of landscape character assessments have been undertaken that provide the strategic framework for this study. In particular the 'Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy' was used as the basis for the assessment. The aim of this report is to identify a finer grain of distinctive landscape character areas within the Borough of Oadby and Wigston which adds more detail to the county-wide strategy and is in harmony with the Green Wedge Management Strategy. By identifying what is distinctive and important about the landscape of the Borough of Oadby and Wigston, we can make recommendations for managing future change to conserve, enhance or restore the distinctiveness and characteristics that give the Borough its 'sense of place'.
- 2.1.2 In general, there is a distinction at the broad, strategic, county level between the two main landscape character areas within the Borough: High Leicestershire to the east and Upper Soar to the west. In practice however, it is apparent that the Borough is a transition zone between these distinctive landscapes, with areas that shade into each other. This is due to the subtle topography and extensive urban development, as found in the 2001 county-wide Strategy. The main characteristic feature defining the boundary between these two areas is the steepening of slope and a greater than average height.
- 2.1.3 As this is an assessment of the Borough of Oadby and Wigston, the heading of High Leicestershire is inappropriate and is re-named Oadby and Wigston Vales. The description of this area is found in Section 2.2. The heading of Upper Soar is considered appropriate and remains in this report, (although sub-divided as explained below in Sections 2.3 and 2.5).
- 2.1.4 At the subtler, Borough-wide scale the Lutterworth Lowlands landscape character area identified in the County Strategy is not apparent. What we have identified, however, is a third landscape character area along the River Sence Valley. The description of this area is found in Section 2.4.
- 2.1.5 The remaining countryside areas on the urban fringe of the Leicester PUA, between the current edge of built development and the Borough boundary, have been sub-divided into landscape character sub-areas to provide a more detailed assessment of their character to help inform the guidance. In particular it is recognised that these areas are under the most pressure for development and therefore guidance is given on the sensitivity of each sub-area and the capacity to absorb change. Table 2.1 overleaf indicates the classification of landscape types and sub-areas. Appendix 1.2 indicates landscape character areas and landscape character sub-areas adopted in this study.

Table 2.1 – Landscape Classification in Oadby and Wigston			
Regional Character Areas - Character of England Map 1996	Landscape Character Areas - LCC Strategy 2001	Landscape Character Types - This Study	Landscape Sub-Areas - This Study
High Leicestershire	High Leicestershire	A. Oadby & Wigston Vales	A(i) Stoughton A(ii) Thurnby & Oadby Green Wedge A(iii) Oadby Grange A(iv) Oadby & Wigston Green Wedge A(v) Wigston East A(vi) Wigston South
Leicestershire Vales	Upper Soar		(see also Urban Character Assessment)
			B. Upper Soar (North) (See Urban Character Assessment)
			C. Sence Valley C. Sence Valley
	Lutterworth Lowlands	D. Upper Soar (South) D. South Wigston Clays	

2.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE OADBY AND WIGSTON VALES LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE (AREA A)

See Appendix 1.2.

- 2.2.1 As explained above, the Borough of Oadby and Wigston is essentially a transition zone in landscape character terms, between the high dissected plateau and steep sided valleys of High Leicestershire to the east and the open and gently rolling landscape of the Upper Soar area to the west. This landscape character type extends beyond the Borough boundary in the north and east to the countryside beyond. The western edge is defined by a marked change of slope where the land falls along the western edge of Oadby and through the built up area of Wigston. The southern boundary is defined by the flatter ground of the River Sence Valley.
- 2.2.2 The Oadby and Wigston Vales covers most of the Borough. It is a gently rolling landscape dissected by a series of regularly spaced watercourses falling from higher ground westwards to the River Soar or southwards to the River Sence. These have formed mostly shallow sided valleys separated by broader ridges of higher ground.
- 2.2.3 The highest ground in the Borough lies in the north-eastern corner, at a little over 125m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). This is dissected by the Wash Brook and a minor watercourse which cut shallowly through the urban fringe before passing westwards through Oadby, the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge and Knighton Park which lies at approximately at 75m AOD.
- 2.2.4 Oadby has developed on the raised ridge in between the Wash Brook and Evington Brook which passes through the most northerly point of the Borough at Stoughton Grange. South of the Wash Brook, the land rises to a broad ridge rising to around 113m AOD through the southern half of the Green Wedge, south of Brocks Hill Country Park. It then falls again further southwards through the urban fringe to a number of minor watercourses which fall to the Grand Union Canal and the River Sence beyond to about 75m AOD.
- 2.2.5 An underlying solid geology of Lower Lias clay shales and limestones is broken up on the surface by lower lying alluvium in the valleys and broad areas of exposed boulder clay ridges. There are also occasional outcrops of sand and gravel, principally in the highest parts of the Borough of Oadby and Wigston.
- 2.2.6 Residential development at Grange Farm has extended the eastern edge of Oadby to the Borough boundary. Elsewhere beyond the urban edge the Oadby and Wigston Vales comprises a mix of land uses, including arable farmland and grazing land; playing fields; parkland, formal gardens and buildings within the historic landscape at Stoughton Grange; golf courses; Brocks Hill Country Park; The Racecourse and numerous farms. The Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge runs through the centre of the area and the Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge lies on the northern boundary.
- 2.2.7 In general, the urban edge is reasonably well screened and integrates well with the surrounding countryside. This is due to a combination of well-vegetated field boundaries comprising tall hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and the rolling topography. Consequently for the most part views out from within the Oadby and Wigston Vales are confined to glimpses of higher ground close to the Borough

boundary. The large modern farm buildings at Oadby Lodge Farm are conspicuous from some parts of the urban edge, and views northwards to Stoughton village and its church are probably the most extensive. Telecommunications masts are features in several areas of high ground.

- 2.2.8 The two main roads of the A6 and A5199 radiate south-eastwards from the centre of Leicester City through the valleys and ridges of the Oadby and Wigston Vales. After passing through Wigston, the A5199 passes beneath the Midland Railway Line and over the Grand Union Canal and the River Sence, at Kilby Bridge and beyond. Other roads also radiate through the area, notably the Gartree Road north of Oadby and Newton Lane through Wigston. These are linked by the B582 which runs from Gartree Road through Oadby, and Wigston and westwards through South Wigston.
- 2.2.9 A number of public footpaths and bridleways pass through the area, linking town and country. In several places these join up to provide circular routes which are popular with dog walkers and horse riders.
- 2.2.10 Tall hedgerows and hedgerow trees on field boundaries or alongside watercourses and footpaths are the most significant vegetation features in this landscape type. Hedgerow species are typically Hawthorn and Blackthorn with Field Maple. Tree species are predominantly Ash, Oak and Sycamore. There are isolated, small copses, some of which are Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), such as Fludes Lane Spinney, Stackyard Spinney and Glen Gorse, but woodland is not a significant feature. Grassland/meadows and field ponds, many of which are of importance for nature conservation, are distinctive features beyond the urban edge.
- 2.2.11 The Oadby and Wigston Vales landscape character type is further sub-divided into six separate landscape sub-areas, as indicated in Figure 2.2 and in Table 2. These are described in the following sections.

Landscape Sub-Area A(i): Stoughton

See Appendix 1.2.



View of Stoughton Grange northwards across the parkland towards Polton Hill.



Mature avenue of trees along Gartree Road with dense vegetation within Stoughton Grange parkland in the distance (right).

Landscape Characteristics

- 2.2.12 This sub-area comprises the historic landscape of Stoughton Grange, with a number of buildings of historic interest which previously formed part of the Stoughton Grange Estate. This includes a number of lodges alongside Gartree Road and other buildings since converted for re-use and has seen a range of uses on site including a plant nursery, bar and restaurant.

- 2.2.13 This relatively small area in the extreme northern tip of the Borough forms part of a much more extensively designed landscape which extends northwards into the neighbouring district. It also forms the most northerly extent of the Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge as designated in the Council's Local Plan.
- 2.2.14 Former parkland and formal gardens associated with Stoughton Grange still exist and form an important part of the setting of the buildings and an appreciation of their previous use. Some mature vegetation, principally road side tree belts and spinneys, other spinneys and tree belts within the grounds are shown on the First Edition OS Map of 1885. They are predominantly Ash, Oak and Sycamore. Tree belts alongside Gartree Road and more extensive areas of semi-natural roadside woodland are recognised as being of nature conservation/wildlife importance.
- 2.2.15 Gartree Road is a former Roman Road and there is a linear bank feature to the west of Brook Spinney included in the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) as a possible medieval trackway.
- 2.2.16 The ground is undulating, falling from around 100m AOD in the north at Polton Hill to around 90m AOD at Evington Brook, before rising again to a little over 100m AOD at Gartree Road.
- 2.2.17 There are views from within the parkland northwards to houses on the high ground at Polton Hill/Stoughton Lane, set amongst mature vegetation. Consequently there are views from some of these properties southwards across the parkland, but there are no clear views in this direction from Stoughton Lane. There are no public rights of way through the area, but it is understood that a route from Oadby to Evington via Shady Lane used to be a favourite walk on a Sunday evening in the 1800s, to view the parkland and its peacocks. Historic OS maps indicate a footpath running west to east across the parkland just south of and parallel to Evington Brook, which no longer exists today.

Strengths

- 2.2.18 The distinctive parkland and mature boundary vegetation give this area a strong sense of place.

Weaknesses

- 2.2.19 The historic character could become eroded by the loss of parkland trees, lack of maintenance of other mature vegetation, the unsympathetic re-use of buildings and inappropriate signage along the Gartree Road frontage.

Opportunities

- 2.2.21 Opportunities to conserve and enhance the historic character of the area should be taken which could include:
- the re-planting of parkland trees;
 - the maintenance and re-use of historic buildings;
 - controlling the character and appearance of historic buildings (for example by the preparation of a design guide);
 - recreating historic rights of way across the area;
 - Ensuring that any development maintains and further enhances the historic character of the area.

Threats

- 2.2.22 Commercial concerns if Stoughton Grange is not the attraction it used to be could lead to a lack of maintenance of the historic buildings, which could in turn weaken the character of the area.
- 2.2.23 The protected line of the Proposed Transport Route (PTR) passes through the western edge of the designed landscape. This is designated and if built could impinge on the historic landscape area. The character of Shady Lane and thus the western edge of the historic landscape at Stoughton Grange could be significantly harmed by being irretrievably lost.

LANDSCAPE OBJECTIVES

To conserve and enhance the historic landscape character and local distinctiveness of the area, in particular:

- **Historic buildings and their settings**
- **Parkland and other features of the designed landscape**
- **Historic rights of way**
- **Archaeological features**
- **The openness and rural character of the, green areas**

Landscape Sub-Area A(ii): Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge

See Figure Appendix 1.2.



View north-eastwards across the university playing fields and arable land within the Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge, towards Stoughton.

Landscape Characteristics

- 2.2.24 This landscape sub-area abuts the urban fringe in the north of the borough, immediately south of Gartree Road and the historic landscape of Stoughton Grange. It comprises irregularly shaped fields which are in agricultural use to the west and east of the area but which are part of the University playing fields in the centre (immediately east of the B582 Stoughton Road). This area is designated Green Wedge in the Local Plan.
- 2.2.25 The land falls gradually from between 105m and 110m AOD at the urban fringe to around 90m AOD in the north-western corner close to the Spire Hospital. The southern urban edge of the area is recorded as a former boundary on the historic OS maps and is predominantly well screened by mature vegetation. Some houses are visible in views from some sections of Gartree Road except where roadside belts of mature trees and semi-natural vegetation, including Stackyard Spinney provide a dense screen. Sporadic vegetation alongside the field drains running south to north across the area also help filter some views and add to the natural appearance of the countryside. Some of the vegetation alongside Gartree Road is of importance for nature conservation.
- 2.2.26 Views towards Stoughton across the Green Wedge are perhaps the most pleasant of any views out from the urban edge of the Borough, across gently undulating countryside and mature field boundaries towards Stoughton Church. These views are available from a number of locations on the urban edge including residential properties, Manor High School, Stoughton Road and public footpaths. The public footpaths are important links from the town to the countryside.

2.2.27 Most of the area to the east of Stoughton Road, except the field in the extreme south-eastern corner, is recognised as being of archaeological interest, with several recordings on the Site and Monuments Record (SMR). This includes several Roman finds, pit and ditch-like anomalies, enclosures, buildings and a burial, indicating a Roman occupation site.

Strengths

2.2.28 This is an area with well-defined boundaries and a strong rural character, despite abutting the urban edge. Fields are large to medium sized with irregularly shaped boundaries following ditches and historic boundary features. Residential development has for the most part respected these boundaries, which remain except immediately west of Stoughton Road where a former spinney (Gartree Spinney) has been removed.

2.2.29 This is also a landscape with a strong historical character, with many remaining Roman and earlier features, historic field boundaries and footpath routes. Along Gartree Road the roadside avenue of mature trees and other vegetation are an important part of the setting to the historic landscape of Stoughton Grange.

2.2.30 This location and physical characteristics of this landscape sub-area mean it is important visually as a transitional area between town and country, with many public and private views into the area. Views out across the fields are valued.

Weaknesses

2.2.31 The strong rural and historic characteristics are weakened by the well-maintained University playing fields and associated structures such as the brick pavilion, car park and rugby posts, which have an urbanising influence. However, the over riding open nature of the area remains, in keeping with its designation as Green Wedge.

2.2.32 The Green Wedge designation is primarily to provide an undeveloped corridor between settlements and thus to protect their separation. The northern boundary of the Oadby, Thurnby, Stoughton Green Wedge, beyond this landscape character sub-area, is weakly defined in that it does not abut any settlement. Beyond the Borough boundary the Leicestershire Golf Course and Stoughton Grange landscape provide open countryside which is also designated as Green Wedge. Such wider designation may lessen the requirement for the designation within this sub-area.

Opportunities

2.2.33 The setting of the historic landscape at Stoughton Grange could be enhanced by the planting of an avenue of trees alongside Gartree Road, in between Stoughton Road and Stackyard Spinney. This would recreate a former avenue indicated on the OS maps of 1886-1888 and 1904-1905 (see Appendices 2.1 and 2.2) and would help to screen views of the urban edge from this section of Gartree Road.

Threats

2.2.34 This area is likely to come under further pressure for built development. This should be resisted where it would adversely affect the sensitive historic and visual characteristics of the landscape. However, there is some capacity for this area to

accept some development without adversely affecting the character of the landscape as a whole. In particular, a managed extension of the urban edge where detailed design respects the sensitive features and characteristics of the landscape.

- 2.2.35 The protected line of the Potential Transport Route (PTR) passes through the western edge of this landscape character sub-area. This is on the line of footpath Z2 which follows an historic route. The corner of Stackyard Spinney and an historic boundary line running south from the spinney will also be affected. Development of the PTR could bring additional pressure for further development alongside it. If this is the case, vegetation along the historic boundary south of Stackyard Spinney, which is currently sporadic, could be enhanced with new planting to define the eastern limit of any further development close to the PTR.
- 2.2.36 A site off Gartree Road has been allocated within the new Local Plan for a new cemetery. This is in the Green Wedge and thus any development should be limited to ensure retention of its undeveloped, rural character. Development of a cemetery here could act as a precedent for development on adjoining land. An alternative form of woodland or green burial, where development is strictly controlled, for example by substituting trees in place of headstones, could be considered as a means of retaining the predominantly rural undeveloped character.

LANDSCAPE OBJECTIVES

To conserve the natural rural, historic and visual characteristics to maintain a predominantly open transitional area between town and country. Particular characteristic features to be conserved are:

- **Historic boundaries**
- **Historic rights of way**
- **Mature vegetation**
- **Archaeological features**
- **Irregular field boundaries following natural features**
- **Views towards Stoughton across gently undulating countryside**

Landscape Sub-Area A(iii): Oadby Grange

See Appendix 1.2.



Arable and pasture fields with predominantly tall, strong field boundaries fall gradually southwards towards the Oadby Grange estate.

Landscape Characteristics

- 2.2.37 This landscape sub-area lies in the extreme north-eastern corner of the Borough, on the highest ground at 126m AOD along its northern and eastern boundaries. The ground, made up of boulder clay outcrops over lower lias clays and limestones, falls southwards and westwards relatively steeply but evenly to the Wash Brook and associated watercourse.
- 2.2.38 As with sub-area A(ii), the southern and western boundaries are well defined by the edge of residential development. The northern boundary follows the approximate line of a public footpath, an historic boundary shown on the early OS maps (see Appendix 2.1-2.5). The eastern boundary follows the borough boundary which lies a few metres to the east of an historic track (Old Mere/Mere Lane, a possible Roman road) and Gorse Lane bridleway which runs between Newton Lane in the south and Gartree Road further north.
- 2.2.39 As well as these two public rights of way, a footpath runs between the northern and western boundaries, a footpath links Fludes Lane and the Wash Brook to the south-east, whilst a footpath links Fludes Lane and the Wash Brook to Gartree Road in the north-east. Consequently this urban fringe landscape has extensive public links from town to countryside.
- 2.2.40 Fields are small to medium, regularly sized and roughly rectangular in shape. Arable use predominates, with some grazing fields for cattle close to the urban edge. Most fields are bounded by strong, tall, well-maintained hedges of mixed species but mostly hawthorn, and mature hedgerow trees, predominantly Ash with some Oak. There are a number of small copses and spinneys on the boundaries and at the junction of fields, giving a lush, well-vegetated appearance to the area. There are

also a number of set-aside scrub areas, where past uses (including agricultural and war-time buildings and waste tipping) have ceased and in wide verges alongside many hedgerows, adding to the natural, rural appearance. The Wash Brook is a Local Wildlife Site (LWS), with a riffle and pool system, pond, eroded banks and varying stream side vegetation. Fludes Lane and the nearby spinney are a designated LWS, as is an area of wet meadow to the east which is a seasonally flooded balancing facility for the nearby housing.

- 2.2.42 The eastern boundary of this area has been marked out by post and wire fencing and a belt of native tree and shrub planting alongside existing hedgerows. Remnant ridge and furrow is visible on some of the grasslands.
- 2.2.43 The large, modern, industrial-sized buildings and silos at Oadby Lodge Farm are conspicuous on high ground in the north-eastern corner. Two telecommunication masts along the northern boundary are also conspicuous in the landscape in some views. Other land uses are the playing fields of Manor High School in the north-western corner.
- 2.2.44 There are clear views into parts of this sub-area from the adjoining houses, especially Windrush Drive along the western boundary, where the existing hedgerow is small and sporadic with few trees. Other views from the high ground to the north include glimpses from Gartree Road where the urban edge is relatively inconspicuous amongst vegetation on lower lying ground. Even the recent three-storey residential buildings in the south of the area are relatively inconspicuous from high ground, only becoming more noticeable where they break the skyline in views from low-lying positions close-by.
- 2.2.45 A key characteristic of this sub-area is the exposed nature of the landscape from the high ground, such as when walking along the footpaths or bridleway. The sky-scape is more dominant than the townscape, especially on windy days when clouds rush by and planes from the nearby airfield are the most obvious noise source.

Strengths

- 2.2.46 This is an area with generally well-defined boundaries and a strong rural character, despite abutting the urban edge. Well vegetated field boundaries, copses and more recent planting provide a strong vegetative appearance and are important wildlife links between town and country.
- 2.2.47 The extensive public rights of way system also provides well-defined, easily accessible links between the urban areas to the countryside.

Weaknesses

- 2.2.48 Modern developments, notably telecommunications masts and industrial sized farm buildings, have weakened the natural, rural character of the landscape. Further similar development could be conspicuous on high ground.
- 2.2.49 Further development, for example residential, would erode the distinct rural character of the area.

Opportunities

- 2.2.50 Areas of poor quality agricultural soil and underused areas which have been set aside from normal agricultural activity could offer the opportunity to establish a new woodland. This would depend on negotiations with landowners but would help increase woodland cover in the Borough which is currently lacking.

Threats

- 2.2.51 This is an urban fringe landscape, which is often the recipe for misuse in the form of vandalism, waste and rubbish tipping etc.
- 2.2.52 This area is likely to come under increasing pressure for built development. This should be resisted given the sensitive nature of the landscape, which is primarily as a result of its natural and visual characteristics. Further development is likely to require hedgerow and tree removal which would significantly affect the pattern of the landscape. Any new development on high ground is also likely to be visible over an extensive area and would be difficult to screen, thus diluting the urban fringe character.

LANDSCAPE OBJECTIVES

To conserve the natural rural and visual characteristics and to maintain a predominantly open transitional area between town and country, by conserving:

- **The small to medium, regularly sized, roughly rectangular fields**
- **Strong, tall field boundaries**
- **Ponds, spinneys and other features of nature conservation interest**
- **Public rights of way with a predominantly exposed nature**

Landscape Sub-Area A(iv): Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge

See Appendix 1.2.



Glimpses of the Green Wedge from urban areas (in this case Pipestrelle Way, Oadby) provide relief from the built form.

2.2.53 In 2004, the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge Management Strategy was prepared by Munro and Whitten on behalf of Oadby and Wigston Borough Council. This includes a landscape character assessment of the Green Wedge between the built up areas of Oadby and Wigston, and divides the area into three landscape character areas, namely north, central and south. These are identified primarily by differences in landuse, topography and visual characteristics.

2.2.54 The study makes recommendations on strategies which could be adopted by the borough council and stakeholders to guide future management of the green wedge. The recommendations in this landscape character assessment of the remaining parts of the Borough are consistent with those of the management strategy as far as possible.

Landscape Sub-Area A(v): Wigston East

See Appendix 1.2.

Landscape Characteristics

- 2.2.55 This is a relatively large landscape character sub-area lying between the A6, the southern extent of the built up edge of Oadby and the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge to the north, the Borough boundary to the east, the River Sence Valley (mostly bounded by the Midland Mainline railway) to the south, and the eastern extent of the built up edge of Wigston to the west.
- 2.2.56 This is a distinctly rural landscape comprising predominantly medium sized, roughly rectangular, regular arable fields with some pasture for sheep grazing. A series of individual farms lie at regular intervals either side of Newton Lane, namely Seven Oaks Farm, Highfield Farm, Spring Cottage Farm, Elm Tree Farm, Tythorn Farm and Glebe Farm.
- 2.2.57 Other land uses in this sub-area are the Glen Gorse Golf Course, Coombe Park Recreation Ground, sports playing fields, riding stables, kennels and a number of detached properties on land between Cooks Lane and the railway.
- 2.2.58 Landform is a series of undulating ridges and valleys of boulder clay over lias clays and limestones, generally falling from north-east to south-west. The Borough boundary runs along a ridge of high ground which rises to approximately 123m AOD at the A6 and falls southwards to around 80m AOD south of the railway where a watercourse falls towards the River Sence. Between the Borough boundary and the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge the land rises and falls to a further two watercourses which drain beneath Newton Lane and into the canal and River Sence via Wigston Harcourt.
- 2.2.59 The fields are bounded by hedges which are mostly tall and dense close to the urban edge but which become more open, lower and sporadic further east. Some hedgerows have been lost as fields have become enlarged. Hedges are predominantly Hawthorn and often include a number of mature trees, mostly Ash. There are few other copses or spinneys of any note, giving the landscape a somewhat fragmented appearance. The exception to this is the Glen Gorse Golf Course which is designated a LWS due to its woodlands and mature trees, including Black Poplar and Crack Willow, species-rich hedgerows, numerous field ponds and species-rich grassland.
- 2.2.60 There is an area of approximately 4.5ha in between Cooks Lane and the railway which is designated a LWS due to its species-rich grassland and large permanent field pond which is a disused lime quarry of Post-Medieval date.
- 2.2.61 Archaeological finds have been recorded in this area and are included on the County Council's Sites and Monuments Record. These include Bronze Age to Late Iron Age finds and others from the Roman and Medieval periods. The Old Mere/ Mere Lane track running both along or close to the Borough boundary is thought to be a Roman road. The area immediately to the west of the A5199 Welford Road is thought to have been an early Anglo Saxon burial site.

- 2.2.62 Public access across the area is limited. A bridleway follows Mere Lane along the northern half of this landscape sub-area, before continuing along the Borough boundary to join Newton Lane as a track with assumed public access. A public footpath runs from within the built up area of Oadby to the east of Beauchamp College, and continues around the west and south of Coombe Park Recreation Ground, across the golf course to join the bridleway. It then continues eastwards beyond the Borough boundary. A public footpath emerges from within the built up area of Wigston, continues across the southern end of the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge, alongside arable fields, across the golf course to join the bridleway before continuing eastwards beyond the Borough boundary. Finally a public footpath continues from Wigston Harcourt southwards to join Cooks Lane as a bridleway, which continues across the railway to join the Grand Union Canal towpath.
- 2.2.63 The undulating topography is the overriding characteristic which dictates the extent of visibility throughout this sub-area. From the lower lying valleys, views are generally limited to two or three fields. From the higher ridges, however, views are much more panoramic on the edge of Wigston Harcourt views northwards extend to Oadby beyond the green wedge.
- 2.2.64 Vegetation is also important in limiting views from some directions. Dense vegetation within the golf course limits views, and dense hedgerows and hedgerow trees alongside fields to the north of the golf course and to the west of the A5199 Welford Road also perform this function.
- 2.2.65 The combination of topography and vegetation along field boundaries ensures that entrances into the Borough from the east through this area are characterised by a gradual transition from countryside to the town. Houses on the urban edges are generally well screened and inconspicuous until close by. The exception to this is the eastern edge of houses on Long Meadow and Well Spring Hill in Wigston Harcourt, immediately north of Cooks Lane. This edge is quite open due to the weak, sporadic hedges, but despite this views of the houses are limited by landform. If development occurs in this location, all efforts should be made to ensure that this new boundary is well screened and inconspicuous from the surrounding countryside.
- 2.2.66 Apart from landform and vegetation, other features in the landscape are few. A telecommunications mast is a prominent, modern structure on high ground to the east of Newton Lane. Post and rail fencing alongside the riding stables south of the golf course and around horse fields at Norwood House, east of Cooks Lane, are occasional features. There is also some remnant ridge and furrow in the area around Norwood House.

Strengths

- 2.2.67 The undulating topography and distinctive landform, with well-hedged and treed field boundaries, are strong characteristics of this sub-area. These dictate the level of visibility from both within the area and from beyond the Borough boundary.
- 2.2.68 The gradual transition from town to country and vice versa is a particular visual strength of this area, particularly when travelling on the roads radiating into/out of the area and this should be retained as far as possible as the settlements develop. It is also important for ensuring wildlife links along vegetation corridors.

- 2.2.69 This sub-area is in effect an informal extension of the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge, being an open area between the two settlements. It is designated in the Local Plan as Countryside.
- 2.2.70 The public rights of way system through the area enables generally good links between town and country.
- 2.2.71 There are a number of field ponds which are a particular characteristic of this landscape sub-area.

Weaknesses

- 2.2.72 In some parts in the east, field boundaries are breaking down or have been removed. Trees are becoming over-mature. Together with the lack of copses/spinneys, the landscape is somewhat fragmented.
- 2.2.73 Modern structures such as telecommunications masts are visible over a wide area on high ground, which dilutes the essentially rural, natural character of the landscape.
- 2.2.74 Species-rich grassland/meadows are characteristic features close to the urban edge, but there is evidence that some of these have been converted to arable use. Control over such non-statutory designations is difficult and relies on close liaison and negotiation with landowners.

Opportunities

- 2.2.75 Field boundaries could be enhanced with new native hedgerow and tree planting. Planting of new woodland would also help prevent the further fragmentation of the landscape.
- 2.2.76 Encouragement could be given to landowners to create species-rich grassland to prevent the loss of this landscape feature. This could include extending the margins of arable fields, and should include agreement for future maintenance.
- 2.2.77 The opportunity to increase public access across the area, and in particular to encourage greater movement from town to countryside with the introduction of circular walks and cycle tracks, should be explored. This is in keeping with the objective of the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge Management Strategy for improved public access.
- 2.2.78 The possibility of improving the wildlife value of field ponds and the creation of new ponds could be explored with local landowners.

Threats

- 2.2.79 This is an urban fringe landscape with good access, which is often the recipe for misuse in the form of vandalism, waste and rubbish tipping etc. These potential problems are not apparent at the moment but could become a problem in the future.
- 2.2.80 This area, adjacent to the current urban fringe could come under increasing pressure for built development in the future. Development in this area should be resisted given the higher landscape character value of the area and sensitive nature of the

landscape, which is primarily as a result of its natural, historic and visual characteristics. There may be some parts of this sub-area where these characteristics are not as strong as others, and where some form of development may be acceptable in landscape terms as long as it did not have an adverse impact on the character of the wider area.

- 2.2.81 In particular new development such as telecommunications masts on high ground should be avoided and where unavoidable, mitigated through high quality design and screening.

LANDSCAPE OBJECTIVES

To conserve and enhance the natural rural, historic and visual characteristics to maintain a predominantly open transitional area between town and country by conserving and enhancing:

- **The undulating ridges and valleys**
- **Watercourses**
- **Medium sized, rectangular, regular agricultural fields**
- **Ponds**
- **The distinctive pattern of hedgerow field boundaries, generally tall and dense becoming more sporadic and lower further east**
- **Meadows and other features of nature conservation interest**
- **Historic / archaeological features, including ridge and furrow**

Landscape Sub-Area A(vi): Wigston South

See Appendix 1.2.



Gently undulating mixed arable and pasture fields with variable field boundaries around Kilby Bridge Farm, looking southwards to countryside beyond the Borough boundary.

Landscape Characteristics

- 2.2.82 This sub-area lies between the built up areas of Wigston (which is defined by the Midland Mainline railway) and South Wigston, and the River Sence Valley landscape sub-area. It is an agricultural area with a mix of arable and improved grassland for sheep grazing and horse paddocks. It is gently undulating, with a central lower area of alluvium associated with a watercourse falling from around 80m AOD in the north-east to around 75m AOD in the south-west into the Grand Union Canal and River Sence. Either side of this central lower area exposed boulder clay is slightly higher, at around 85m AOD, forming two ridges which fall towards the canal and create a slightly raised edge to the river valley.
- 2.2.83 Kilby Bridge Farm and Ivanhoe Farm lie on the ridge to the east. Other land uses are a former raised waste tip which has been planted under the Community Woodland Planting Scheme (part of the Stepping Stones Countryside Management Project), and Navvy's Pit, a former clay extraction pit now used for fishing, together with a number of smaller ponds close by. Both the former waste tip and Navvy's Pit are LWS, designated for their species-rich grassland and wetland vegetation plus Willow and Ash trees respectively.
- 2.2.84 Fields are small to medium sized, generally rectangular but becoming larger and more irregular in shape to the east. Field boundaries are variable, some comprise tall, dense hedgerows with mature trees, others are lower and sporadic with few trees. Hawthorn and Ash dominate. The dense vegetation around Navvy's Pit includes a large unmanaged hedgerow, and there are isolated groups of trees around the farm buildings. Vegetation alongside the railway is variable, with some

dense patches of shrubby vegetation and trees and other more sporadic areas. Post and wire fences separate the large grass field north of Kilby Bridge Farm.

- 2.2.85 The railway is not a particularly obvious feature in the landscape. Where vegetation alongside the railway is sporadic or where it is absent, the houses on the edge of Wigston create a more noticeable boundary to this area than the railway.
- 2.2.86 A raised footbridge over the railway immediately east of Navvy's Pit is an obvious structure in the landscape in some views from further east. A public footpath crosses the railway on this bridge, providing panoramic views over this sub-area to the River Sence Valley and beyond. The footpath continues past Navvy's Pit to the Grand Union Canal, over the River Sence and westwards. Two farm tracks also pass over the railway, one in the north of the area providing access to the arable fields, the other to the east providing access to the farms.
- 2.2.87 Relatively new housing on the eastern edge of South Wigston, at Pochins Bridge, includes three-storey buildings which provide a visual boundary to this landscape sub-area. They are set within an extensive area of open space, the eastern edge of which has been recently planted, and which together with the planted former waste tip to the north will maintain an open buffer between the houses and the industrial estate to the north.
- 2.2.88 Main views into this area are from close by, from houses overlooking it, from the railway and canal (including the towpath) alongside it and from the footpath that crosses it. More distant views into this area are limited to views from public rights of way to the south and occasional glimpses from Countesthorpe Road further west.
- 2.2.89 Crop marks have been recorded in fields south of Kilby Bridge Farm which are thought to be ring ditches from an Early Bronze Age barrow.

Strengths

- 2.2.90 The northern edge is well defined by the railway which has limited the development of Wigston southwards. Despite abutting the urban edge this landscape sub-area has a strong rural character due to its natural features and views southwards across the canal and river and into the countryside beyond.
- 2.2.91 A Public footpath appears to be well used by local residents as a route out into the countryside and to link up with the canal towpath.

Weaknesses

- 2.2.92 Apart from the northern edge, the boundaries of this sub-area are not well defined. The character of the area, particularly its undulating ridge and valley topography, is typical of the wider Oadby and Wigston Vales landscape character type. However, its boundary with the River Sence Valley to the south is not well defined. It is a transitional area between town and country.
- 2.2.93 The boundary with South Wigston to the west is also ill-defined, as house building encroaches into this area.

2.2.94 Despite being on the urban edge, public access through the area to the wider countryside beyond is limited.

Opportunities

2.2.95 Increased public access, creating circular walks over the railway and along the canal towpath should be explored. This should include access for cyclists.

2.2.96 Field boundaries could be enhanced with new native hedgerow and tree planting.

2.2.97 Encouragement could be given to landowners to create species-rich grassland to increase the amount of this landscape feature. This could include extending the margins of arable fields, and should include agreement for future maintenance.

Threats

2.2.98 This is an urban fringe landscape with some public access. Potential problems in the form of vandalism, waste and rubbish tipping etc are not apparent at the moment but could become a problem in the future if access is improved.

2.2.99 This area is likely to come under pressure for built development. The railway is a well-defined boundary which should prevent the expansion of Wigston in this direction. However, the boundary with South Wigston is less well defined and built development is encroaching eastwards into this area. Any further development eastwards would see the coalescence of South Wigston and Wigston. This should be avoided and an open green area maintained to link up with the school playing fields north of the railway and in so doing maintain a distinct separation between Wigston and South Wigston.

2.2.100 Despite the landscape characteristics of this sub-area not being particularly strong, any new development on the slightly higher ground would increase the visibility of this area from distant viewpoints to the south and west. This would give the impression of the merging of South Wigston and Wigston and should be avoided.

LANDSCAPE OBJECTIVES

To conserve and enhance the natural rural characteristics, to improve public access and to maintain an open transitional area between town and country by retaining a distinct separation between South Wigston and Wigston. Particular characteristic features to be conserved and enhanced are:

- **The gently undulating, mixed arable and pasture landscape**
- **Ponds**
- **Meadows**
- **Public rights of way**
- **Views southwards from the urban edge towards the canal, river and countryside beyond**

2.3 DESCRIPTION OF UPPER SOAR (NORTH) LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE (AREA B)

See Appendix 2.1.

- 2.3.1 As explained in section 2.1 the boundary between the Oadby and Wigston Vales Landscape Character Type and the Upper Soar (North) Landscape Character Type is extremely ill-defined and the areas shade into each other. This is due to the subtle topography and extensive urban development. The main characteristic feature defining the boundary between these two areas is the steepening of slope and a greater than average height.
- 2.3.2 Although the landscape character typology has been washed over the urban areas of Wigston and South Wigston to include them within the Upper Soar (North) Landscape Character Type, any distinctive landscape features characteristic of the type, other than topography and landform, are mostly lost and are not apparent.
- 2.3.3 Consequently, the description and assessment of this character area concentrates on its urban characteristics and can be found in Part 3 of this report.

2.4 DESCRIPTION OF THE RIVER SENCE VALLEY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE (AREA C)

See Appendix 1.2.



Pasture fields in the floodplain of the River Sence with generally well-vegetated field boundaries.



The calm rural ambience of the Grand Union Canal with its wetland vegetation, brick arched bridges and reflections in the water.

- 2.4.1 The River Sence Valley extends from the boundary with the Oadby and Wigston Vales landscape character type in the north to beyond the Borough boundary in the south. It cuts through and separates the Upper Soar (North) and Upper Soar (South) landscape character types in the south-west of the Borough.

- 2.4.2 This landscape character type extends along the whole of the southern boundary of the Borough, either side of the River Sence which flows from east to west to eventually join the River Soar in Leicester.
- 2.4.3 This landscape type has similar characteristics throughout the area, and thus has not been further sub-divided into smaller landscape sub-areas. Therefore the following description applies to the whole of the area.

Landscape Characteristics

- 2.4.4 The well-vegetated railway embankment slopes provide a definite northern boundary to the central part of this area, either side of Kilby Bridge. Where the canal has limited the expansion of South Wigston, the edge of built development forms the northern boundary here. In between, the northern boundary is less clear but is defined by the change of gradient where south-facing slopes which are important to the setting of the river valley are included within the area. Thus the sloping ground south of Kilby Bridge Farm and Ivanhoe Farm rising to around 85m AOD is included, as are the south and west facing slopes to the west of Tythorn Hill, in the extreme south-eastern corner of the borough, which rise to over 90m AOD.
- 2.4.5 Both the Grand Union Canal and the River Sence lie within this landscape area. The relatively flat, low lying grassland meadows between the canal and river gradually fall east to west from around 80m AOD to 70m AOD. The small to medium sized, irregularly shaped fields are grazed by sheep and cattle despite regularly flooding. Field boundaries are generally well vegetated with low hedgerows, hedgerow trees and tree clumps, although sporadic hedgerows are a feature of this landscape. Hedgerows are generally species-rich, including Hawthorn, Elder, Field Maple and Rose, with Ash the dominant tree. There is a distinctive group of 20 mature Poplar trees close to the bend in the River Sence just south of South Wigston, which are designated a Local Wildlife Site (LWS). The overall impression is of a lush, well vegetated landscape.
- 2.4.6 Some pasture fields are bounded by post and wire fences where traditional hedgerows have broken down or where larger fields have been sub-divided. Landuse becomes more mixed and predominantly arable south of the river in Blaby district.
- 2.4.7 The section of canal east of Kilby Bridge is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) because of its importance as a wetland site due to its fringes of emergent vegetation on both banks, floating wetland species and mature riparian trees, particularly Willow and Ash, with characteristic exposed roots and over hanging branches. A flooded area of the former Kilby Bridge Quarry (also known as Lime Delves) and its surroundings on the north bank of the canal, west of Clifton's Bridge, is also SSSI. The section of canal west of Kilby Bridge is designated as a LWS.
- 2.4.8 Two paddocks in the extreme western end of this landscape area, in between the canal and river, regularly flood and are designated as a LWS due to the species-rich wet grassland. Similarly, two wetland meadows either side of the canal at Clifton's Bridge, west of Tythorn Hill, are SINCS.
- 2.4.9 New housing at Pochins Bridge on the eastern edge of South Wigston, includes three-storey buildings which provide a visual boundary to the river valley. Some have

balconies overlooking the canal and river valley which must offer attractive views to the rising countryside beyond.

- 2.4.10 The river itself is not a conspicuous feature in the landscape, its meandering course being highlighted only by its bankside vegetation. In places the river side banks are steep and fall around 2m from the level of the surrounding ground. On the more open banks, rough grassland, Nettles and other low scrubby vegetation contrasts with the grazed meadows or arable fields, and provide corridors attractive for wildlife.
- 2.4.11 Tall pylons and overhead power lines are obvious features in the flat landscape. Other features of note are those associated with the canal, in particular the numerous steeply arched red brick bridges taking farm tracks from one side to the other, and the black and white lock gates (paddles).

Kilby Bridge

- 2.4.12 The small settlement of Kilby Bridge is the only other settlement outside the main built up areas of Oadby, Wigston and South Wigston. It lies either side of the busy A5199 in the middle of this landscape character area, on the north side of the canal where The Navigation pub is located. Half a dozen or so white or cream painted houses lie either side of the road close to the canal, and canal-side moorings and a maintenance yard add an air of suburbanisation with its cranes, toilets, dredging barges, urban-type fencing and golden conifers.
- 2.4.13 Two large warehouse-type buildings on the northern edge of Kilby Bridge dominate the street scene and detract from the otherwise small scale, rural surroundings. Bird song and the low hum of slow moving canal boats are regularly interrupted by noise from the A5199 and railway. Fast flowing water is a noisy feature at the lock gates which contrasts with the otherwise calm waters in the canal where reflections appear to double the size of the brick arched bridges and locks.
- 2.4.14 The canal-side towpath allows access through this area, and is used by walkers, dog walkers and anglers in particular. A public footpath passes over the railway to join the canal at Clifton's Bridge, and another passes over the canal at Double Rail Lock from Wigston and continues westwards across the river and beyond.

Strengths

- 2.4.15 The distinctive landscape of the river valley and the canal are the main strengths of this area. Despite being close to the urban edge it has a distinct 'sense of place' unlike any other area within the Borough.
- 2.4.16 The canal towpath allows good access to the canal.

Weaknesses

- 2.4.17 Development at Pochins Bridge, east of South Wigston, has altered the northern edge and has changed the character of this part of the river valley.
- 2.4.18 Although there is some public access along the canal, links into the built up areas to the north and the countryside to the south are limited.

- 2.4.19 The Grand Union Canal was designated a Conservation Area in October 2000, which promotes a level of statutory protection to part of the ALLV. A detailed study of the ALLV and its surroundings, particularly the canal, should highlight those features worthy of protection to enable a decision to be taken as to how that protection can be achieved.
- 2.4.20 The southern boundary of the River Sence Valley lies within Blaby District and Harborough District and therefore out of the control of the Borough Council. Close liaison with the local authorities is necessary to ensure that the character of the landscape is protected.

Opportunities

- 2.4.21 Opportunity should be taken where possible to improve public access. This should provide circular routes between town and country, with the agreement of local land owners. Re-use of existing bridges over the canal should be encouraged, although some are in a poor state of repair and will require maintenance. The possibility of grant aiding this work should be looked in to.
- 2.4.22 Field boundaries could be enhanced with new native hedgerow and tree planting.
- 2.4.23 Perhaps a greater appreciation and understanding of the landscape and history of the canal could be encouraged to a wider audience, for example by the use of leaflets and information boards.
- 2.4.24 The mixed use, suburban character of Kilby Bridge and its location alongside the canal provides the opportunity for small-scale development that would not adversely affect, and could improve, the character of this part of the River Sence valley. There could perhaps be some form of small-scale tourist related development, with appropriate signing and interpretation facilities.

Threats

- 2.4.25 This is an urban fringe landscape with some public access. Potential problems in the form of vandalism, waste and rubbish tipping etc are not apparent at the moment but could become a problem in the future if access is improved.
- 2.4.26 Many of the bridges over the canal are in a poor state of repair and are worthy of protection. Loss of these structures would significantly affect the character of the canal and its surroundings.

LANDSCAPE OBJECTIVES

To conserve and enhance the characteristic features to retain the unique 'sense of place' of the river valley including the canal and its surroundings, part of which is designated an Area of Local Landscape Value, and to improve public access through the area. Particular characteristic features to be conserved and enhanced are:

- **Flat grassland meadows, some of which are of nature conservation interest**

- **Small to medium sized, irregular, grazed meadows**
- **Field boundaries of varying size and condition**
- **Wetland vegetation along the canal, part of which is SSSI**
- **Wetland vegetation in the flooded quarry which is SSSI**
- **The calm rural ambience of the canal and its brick arched bridges, locks and reflections in the water**

2.5 DESCRIPTION OF THE UPPER SOAR (SOUTH) LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE AND SOUTH WIGSTON CLAYS LANDSCAPE SUB-AREA (AREA D)

See Appendix 1.2.



Arable fields of boulder clay and underlying lower lias clays, predominantly with hedgerow boundaries and occasional mature hedgerow trees.

- 2.5.1 This landscape character type lies in the extreme south-western corner of the Borough. It is a small area of land rising up from the River Sence Valley and extending into Blaby District.
- 2.5.2 This area lies within the Upper Soar landscape character area as identified in the County Council's county-wide Landscape and Woodland Strategy. Given its size and location it remains in the Upper Soar landscape area in this study but it has been named as a separate landscape sub-area, South Wigston Clays, to identify it as an area distinct from the Upper Soar (North) landscape character type.

Landscape Characteristics

- 2.5.3 The land rises gradually from the edge of the River Sence Valley at around 75m AOD to the south-west to a high point of around 87m AOD at Rose Farm on the Borough boundary. This forms part of a much wider area of greater undulating landscape extending to the south.
- 2.5.4 A drift cover of sand and gravel and outcrop of boulder clay mark the increase in height above the underlying lower lias clays.
- 2.5.5 This is a rural area predominantly in arable use with medium sized, regular rectangular fields with predominantly low sporadic hedgerow boundaries with occasional mature hedgerow trees. There are larger blocks of woodland close to the Sewage Works. Ash is the main tree species. Except the field immediately to the west, which is now a Solar Farm, fields around the Sewage Works appear to have

been used as settling fields and have been allowed to establish a natural cover of local weed species.

- 2.5.6 A bridleway passes through the area from the Countesthorpe Road eastwards to a tributary of the River Sence, before continuing south-eastwards across the countryside beyond. There are extensive views available from the bridleway northwards across the area towards Wigston and South Wigston. There are views into this area from the canal and from the Countesthorpe Road where gaps in the roadside vegetation allow views through.

Strengths

- 2.5.7 This is a distinctly rural area with a strong tradition of farming.
- 2.5.8 Public access through the area links it to the river valley and the built up area of South Wigston.

Weaknesses

- 2.5.9 Some field boundaries are sporadic with a weakening of landscape character.

Opportunities

- 2.5.10 Field boundaries could be enhanced with native hedgerow and tree planting.
- 2.5.11 Encouragement could be given to landowners to create species-rich grassland to increase the amount of this landscape feature. This could include extending the margins of arable fields, and should include agreement for future maintenance.
- 2.5.12 The possibility of improving the wildlife value of field ponds and the creation of new ponds could be explored with local landowners.

Threats

- 2.5.13 The further weakening of field boundaries could see their removal and the enlargement of arable fields, which would be un-characteristic.
- 2.5.14 Further development and extension of the Sewage Works and/or Solar Farm could be a possibility. Further planting around any extension would help it to be assimilated into the landscape.

LANDSCAPE OBJECTIVES

To conserve the distinctive rural character by:

- **maintaining field sizes and improving field boundaries**
- **continuing the strong tradition of farming whilst allowing continued public access on designated rights of way to and from the urban edge**
- **protecting extensive views from the urban edge across the canal and river to the gently rising countryside beyond to the south**

2.6 CONCLUSIONS ON LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

- 2.6.1 The character of the landscape is derived from a combination of natural factors, such as geology, landform, drainage, soils and landcover/vegetation. Cultural/social factors such as land use, settlement, enclosure and changes over time are also important in giving an area a distinctive character or 'sense of place'. This assessment has been undertaken at a detailed, local Borough-wide scale to fine tune previous county-wide and national landscape character assessments, to identify where these natural and cultural/social factors combine to provide areas with similar landscape characteristics.
- 2.6.2 This assessment has found that, in keeping with previous larger scale assessments, differences in the character of the landscape across the Borough are very subtle. Four landscape character areas have been identified, but the boundaries between them are not sharply defined as the character of adjoining areas shade into one another. In essence the Borough is a transition zone between the more distinct plateau and steep sided valley landscapes to the north and east and the more open, rolling landscapes to the south and west.
- 2.6.3 The transitional character of the landscape is largely due to the topography across the Borough, which is less varied than other parts of the county surrounding it. Thus the boundary between Area A (Oadby & Wigston Vales) and Area B (Upper Soar – North) is defined by the steepening of slope from Area B to Area A.
- 2.6.4 Area A (Oadby and Wigston Vales) covers the majority of the Borough, and includes the whole of Oadby, three quarters of Wigston and the Borough's Green Wedge in between. Beyond these areas, Area A is sub-divided into a further 5 landscape character sub-areas due primarily to the subtle variations in landform and landcover/vegetation.
- 2.6.5 Area B (Upper Soar – North) is wholly urban, comprising the western half of Wigston and the whole of South Wigston. Consequently the assessment of this area is included in the urban landscape character assessments of South Wigston (Part 4) and Wigston (Part 5).
- 2.6.6 Area C (Sence Valley) is the most distinctive landscape character area in the Borough, due to the flatter topography and land use of flood meadows, the River Sence and Grand Union Canal. Parts of its northern boundary with Area A and Area B are well defined by the railway line and the built edge of South Wigston respectively. Other parts of its northern edge and its southern boundary with Area D (Upper Soar – South) are defined by a more subtle change of slope.
- 2.6.7 Area D (Upper Soar – South) is a small area in the extreme south-west of the Borough, defined by the gradual steepening of slope and change in landcover from the flood meadows of the Sence Valley to the arable claylands of the Upper Soar (South).
- 2.6.8 Natural factors such as geology, landform, drainage, soils and landcover/vegetation appear to have had little effect in limiting the spread of urbanisation into the countryside. Only the canal and railway have limited the southern expansion of South Wigston and Wigston respectively. Elsewhere built development has occurred on some of the highest ground in the Borough (125m+ in the east, in Oadby), and

across watercourses (for example Oadby straddles Wash Brook). Landcover/vegetation has similarly had no impact in halting the spread of development. It is unlikely that any natural or cultural/social factors would prevent further expansion of the settlements.

- 2.6.9 Having said this, for the most part the urban edge is well integrated into the landscape. Generally, hedgerows, trees and subtle changes in landform help to limit views of the urban edge from the countryside. This is considered to be an important positive characteristic of the rural-urban fringe in the Borough, and one which should be protected and strengthened where necessary.
- 2.6.10 Parts of the urban edge on the fringe of sub-areas A(ii) Thurnby and Oadby Green Wedge and A(iii) Oadby Grange are the most obvious. The lack of vegetation and landform allow views in from the north and north-east, primarily from outside the Borough. Despite this, further limited residential development may be appropriate alongside the urban edge in sub-area A(ii) if detailed design respects the sensitive features and characteristics of the landscape (see 2.2.24 - 2.2.37).
- 2.6.11 Any further development within sub-area A(iii) would be on relatively high ground and thus visible over an extensive area. It would adversely affect the exposed nature of the countryside. New planting is unlikely to successfully integrate new development into the landscape (see 2.2.38 – 2.2.52).
- 2.6.12 Sub-area A(v) Wigston East has the capacity to accommodate some further development, where vegetation and landform would enable the successful integration into the countryside. (see 2.2.55 – 2.2.81).
- 2.6.13 Any further development within sub-area A(vi) Wigston South would either breach the current barrier provided by the railway, which could adversely affect the sensitive character of the Sence Valley, or would result in the coalescence of South Wigston and Wigston. This should be avoided and an open Green Area maintained between the two settlements (see 2.2.82 – 2.2.100)
- 2.6.14 The Sence Valley has a distinctive character which remains largely undeveloped. The small settlement of Kilby Bridge lies in this landscape character area where further small-scale development, for example tourist-related, may be appropriate (see 2.4.1 – 2.4.26).
- 2.6.15 Within the South Wigston Clays landscape sub-area D, only further development associated with the Sewage Works or Solar Farm is likely to be acceptable. This is a distinctive rural area with a strong tradition of arable farming and which forms a small part of a much wider landscape character area extending beyond the Borough boundary into Blaby District (see 2.5.1 – 2.5.14).
- 2.6.16 This part of the assessment has highlighted that the new Local Plan should include policies to conserve and, where necessary, enhance the characteristic features as identified for each landscape sub-area. The overriding aim should be to retain a predominantly open, natural, rural transitional area between town and country, which is well integrated with the countryside and which allows good public access to it and through it. In particular the distinctive character of Oadby Grange (landscape sub-area A (iii)) and the Sence Valley (landscape character type C) should be protected. The separation between settlements should be maintained.

PART 3 URBAN LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT: OADBY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 Parts 3,4 and 5 of the Report cover the urban character assessments for Oadby, South Wigston and Wigston respectively. Each section is introduced by a description of how the urban form of the settlement has grown and developed since the late 19th Century. The urban character areas are then individually described. The description includes: a summary of the key characteristics of the urban character area, an overall description of the defining characteristics, a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis, identification of the likely development pressure for the area and the potential impact of development on the area. Based on these characteristics and the SWOT analysis, an overall urban character objective is developed for each area. Finally urban character policy guidance is given for each urban character area. The policy guidance is intended to support the achievement of the overall urban character objective. The final part of each section gives an overall review of the urban character of the towns.

3.2 REVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OADBY URBAN AREA SINCE 1885



Oadby District Centre showing the retention of the older character

3.2.1 The review has been undertaken using the ordnance survey map extracts from 1886-1888, 1904-1905, 1914-1915, 1929-1930, 1950 and a contemporary plan of Oadby. The full ordnance survey maps are included in the report as Appendix 2.1-2.5, at the end of the main Report. On the first edition ordnance survey map of 1886-1888 Oadby appears as a small village settlement just north of the Washbrook. The settlement is surrounded by and separated from Leicester by a landscape of medium sized fields. The village has a simple linear form along what is now The Parade, Leicester Road and London Road. A smaller network of streets is seen to the east around St Peter's Church, which formed the focus of the settlement. It appears that there may have been a small village square to the south of St Peters, which later became incorporated into a widened Wigston Road. The main streets of New Lane, Stoughton Lane, and the through routes to the north-west to Leicester and out to the south-east are already in existence. On the outskirts of the village a number of larger houses are shown: Oadby Hill which still exists, Oadby Frith which stood on

the Asda site and Brocks Hill which still remains. To the north of the village the Stoughton Grange Estate is shown. A number of small woodlands or spinneys are shown of which only Stackyard and Half Moon remain. It is possible that some of the groups of Oak trees in the Arboretum area are remnants of these spinneys. The racecourse is already in existence to the west of the village beyond fields. The first signs of expansion of the settlement can be seen to the north of the settlement at the junction of what is now Leicester Road (formerly Main Street) and Stoughton Road. A planned small-scale grid street pattern is shown with some terrace houses starting to be developed along the streets.

- 3.2.2 The 1904-1905 Ordnance Survey map shows little change from 1886-1888. The main change is the start of the encroachment of Leicester towards Oadby with expansion out from South Knighton through development along Knighton Grange Road.
- 3.2.3 The 1929-1930 Ordnance Survey map shows that Oadby had merged with the main Leicester conurbation. The expansion of South Knighton, started earlier in the century, had continued in the form of a planned development of large houses e.g. along Granville Avenue, Glebe Road, Knighton Rise and Knighton Grange Road. At this time the large houses and grounds would have been taking advantage of what was then the desirable urban fringe.
- 3.2.4 The main change by 1929-1930 is that a new by-pass is built to take the main A6 to the north of the old route through the village centre. It is likely that the road was constructed to facilitate new development and for commuting into Leicester from the new 'suburbs'. The new road appears to have stimulated the infill and expansion around the core of Oadby village e.g. along the south of Stoughton Road and Uplands Road including the construction of the Cottage Homes and Disabled Warriors Homes (now known as the Framework Knitters Cottages and North Memorial Homes). At this time development appears to have been on a field by field basis, the plots reflecting and respecting the old underlying field pattern. The majority of development appears to have been detached or semi-detached residential, and taken the form of ribbon development or small estate developments of a group of streets. The only area where mixed employment and residential uses are found is around Cross Street where terrace houses and small-scale workshops can still be seen. To the south of Oadby, on what is now the northern fringe of Wigston, are houses along the Oval. Based on similarities of the street pattern, tree planting and house styles to those in Oadby, the Oval may have originally been an extension of Oadby rather than Wigston.
- 3.2.5 The 1950 Ordnance Survey map shows that Oadby is now a fully integrated urban area rather than just ribbon development along Manor Road and Stoughton Lane. The area now occupied by the University playing fields still appears as an open space within the urban fabric. Development now begins to the south of Oadby along Wigston Road, and the public housing estate around Brabazon Road starts to be developed. Between 1950 and 2017 Oadby saw continued expansion, the old centre being enveloped with a series of housing estates. The first, in the 1950s and 1960s, are located to the north and south of the town, the later estates in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000's have grown on the edge of the town out to the north-east, east and south-east.
- 3.2.6 In conclusion, Oadby has developed as a commuter town for Leicester with land use in the settlement now being almost entirely housing. The main employment uses are

to be found in identified estates and in the 1970s office developments in the town centre, although these are gradually declining and being converted to mainly residential use. The town appears to have grown not by natural expansion outwards from the original core but by the development of new estates around the settlement that have eventually been built up to the fringe of the old centre.

3.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE URBAN LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES OF OADBY AND POLICY GUIDANCE

Appendix 3.1 shows the urban character areas of Oadby.

Urban Character Area O(i): Oadby Centre

It must be noted that when there is a reference to 'Oadby Centre' it is referring to the area illustrated in the Oadby Character Area map. This is different to 'Oadby District Centre', as defined in the Council's Local Plan.

Defining Characteristics

3.3.1 The defining characteristics of Urban Character Area O(i) are:

- Covers the area occupied by the original pre 20th Century settlement;
- Retention of some of the original street pattern;
- Inter-action of two distinct townscape characters;
- Number of older local vernacular buildings to the south-eastern part of the centre;
- 1970s re-development to the western end of the centre;
- Mixed uses include retail, employment, civic, health, residential and religious uses;
- High activity level – pedestrian and vehicular shared space.
- Commitment to modern, high quality public realm and open community space.



Oadby District Centre showing the two distinct townscape characters of the pre 20th Century settlement and the late 20th Century development.

Townscape Characteristics

3.3.2 This character area includes not only the core retail and service provision that is expected of a settlement centre area, but also areas of housing adjacent to the centre, and three supermarkets, Asda to the north-west and Waitrose and

Sainsburys to the east. The town centre provides a good range of services, has a high level of pedestrian and vehicular activity and appears to be thriving.

3.3.3 The centre still retains its place at the physical centre of the settlement. It is now bounded on all sides by the earlier residential estates developed in the 1950s and early 1960s, although there is also evidence of more recent infill developments or conversions of buildings that have previously been in use for other purposes. The centre is easily accessible both by car and by foot, although to the north and east the main A6 may form a physical and psychological boundary for pedestrians. The main streets of Leicester Road and London Road run diagonally across a gentle south facing slope that runs down to the Washbrook. The level change is not evident in the centre but steeper sections are evident on the north of the town along New Street and to the south, for example on Churchill Close.

3.3.4 Due to the gently undulating topography there are generally limited views into Oadby centre. There are some views in from the housing estates on the higher ground to the south-east, from where buildings in the settlement are softened due to the level of tree cover in and around the centre. Internal views within the centre are mainly linear, focusing along the main street, with the spire of St Peter's Church dominating views. Stoughton House, the recently converted apartment block and the recently developed Waitrose supermarket at the top of New Street and on Harborough Road are visible from along the A6 and within the central section of the town centre —Through the planting of trees and implementation of the recent public realm improvements to The Parade, visitors to Oadby enjoy a pleasant shopping environment. This, together with the trees on the edges, give a sense of some enclosure and provides a green background to many views. Within the London Road and St Peter's Conservation Area there are visual envelopes that retain a strong historical character, such as views up along the terraces along Church Street and back down to St Peter's Church.



View to St Peters Church from the higher Ground of Waitrose Carpark.

3.3.5 As described in section 3.2, it is likely that the original settlement of Oadby was focused around St Peter's Church and then extended linearly to the south-east and north-west. The area immediately around the Church, including the northern section of Wigston Road, Church Street and Albion Street, retains some of the character of a smaller scale settlement. This character has unfortunately been eroded by the

overlay of larger scale blocks, with the loss of the connection between Church and High Street, for example. The 1886-1888 ordnance survey map shows a small open space to the south of St Peter's Church, which has been lost to a new section of Wigston Road. The modern centre though has developed its own structure with informal gateways. There is a gateway to the north-west of the centre at the junction near Asda where The Parade joins Leicester Road. To the east of the centre, there is a gateway where London Road meets with Glen Road. An inner gateway is formed on the east by Leicester Road narrowing near St Peter's Church and by the grouping of the church and mature trees in the churchyard. The dominance of the main street formed by The Parade, Leicester Road and London Road gives the centre a linear form with only smaller roads leading off it. Though the western end of the centre has been redeveloped in the 1970s, the old main street has been maintained which provides a linkage to and some continuity with, the older part of the centre to the south-east. Areas to the rear of this modern redevelopment have not maintained this linkage, being opened out to form car parks and service delivery yards. The centre has a defined central point at the junction of The Parade and Chestnut Avenue where the roads widen out and 'The Old Library' building, currently a restaurant but formerly a civic building, forms a positive focus.



The view up Albion Street gives an idea of the original character of the settlement and shows the impact of inappropriate development.

- 3.3.6 Oadby centre generally still maintains a small and human scale. This is due to the limited size and well-defined boundaries of the centre, the small block size, the simplicity of the street pattern and narrow street width together with a general building height of two storeys. The retention of a residential element provides smaller scale details and boundary treatments. The main street has a good sense of enclosure with a positive break at the junction of The Parade and Chestnut Avenue. This enclosure breaks down, though, on roads leading off the main shopping streets, with areas such as Churchill Close and the car parks to the east and west of the The Parade.
- 3.3.7 The centre has an interesting character due to the intermingling of two quite distinct eras. There is that of the small-scale late 19th early 20th Century street pattern and buildings e.g. traditional housing, small-scale employment and shops and pubs, with a red/orange brick or render and with slate or tile roofs. A number of interesting buildings and groups of buildings ensure the centre retains some of this character e.g. St Peter's Church and the Methodist Church, the terraced houses along Church

Street, terraces along London Road and individual older buildings such as the restored former school building. There are also some runs of terraces in the eastern section of the centre and the remnant of a Lime Avenue, which adds character. This is contrasted with a major phase of development in the 1970s, which involved the re-development of the much of The Parade in the centre of Oadby. This development consisted of flat roofed two-storey 1970s-style shop units. Features of the units are a pale brown/yellow brick, large picture windows and the use of white timber boarding. The buildings are of a larger scale, have more emphasis on the horizontal and lack the depth and detail found in older buildings. A number of larger scale taller buildings were also developed, including: two (one former office) buildings along The Parade, a former high rise office building on New Street (now residential) and low rise residential blocks on Churchill Close. This later phase of development does not relate to the earlier street pattern or building style. The south-eastern end of The Parade has wide pavements, which give a comfortable relaxed feel and are being used for some street cafes. The open spaces enhance the centre e.g. The Cemetery, the small pocket park opposite St Peter's Church and St Peter's Churchyard contribute to the overall character.

- 3.3.8 The eastern section of Oadby centre is designated as the London Road and St Peter's Conservation Area. This area also includes an area of archaeological potential around St Peter's Church. The Parade through its recent public realm refurbishment is promoted as an area where pedestrian preference is encouraged, with the raised platform road on The Parade and Chestnut Avenue offering traffic calming measures to provide that mix.
- 3.3.9 Oadby centre is active and pleasant and retains some sense of place and local distinctiveness but it, like so many shopping destinations continues to be considerably diluted by modern development patterns. The centre is likely to see pressure for development on infill sites or on open spaces. Any further development or intensification through windfall sites should benefit the centre by being designed to restore and enhance a more locally distinctive character as well as complement the vitality and viability of the settlement centre.

Summary of Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities

3.3.10

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <p>Attracts national and local retailers. Retention and unity given by main shopping area. Clear structure. Attractive public realm. Comfortable scale/enclosure. Number of distinctive buildings. Retains some historical character.</p>	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <p>Subtlety of local vernacular style easily lost. Insufficient mass to influence the overall character strongly.</p>
<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <p>Continued creation of central focal space. Traffic calming/ semi-pedestrianisation. Further improvements to the public realm.</p>	<p><u>Threats</u></p> <p>Further differentiation between the 'old' and 'new' centre areas. Loss of fringe trees and remaining trees in the centre. Further dilution of remaining character. Homogenisation of use. Poor infill design with no positive impact on character. Further erosion of street pattern.</p>

URBAN CHARACTER OBJECTIVE

Conserve quality historical elements and enhance overall character.

Urban Character Area O(i): Oadby Town Centre – Policy Guidance

3.3.11 Oadby centre maintains some of its historic and distinctive character but it is much diluted by mid-late 20th Century retail and residential development and some taller buildings of an inappropriate scale. Recent investment in the centres public realm indicates a strong sense of place.

Policy guidance O(i)/ 1 Retain and enhance the quality of Oadby centre

3.3.12 The quality of Oadby centre should be maintained and any developments should look to enhance that quality. The quality can be retained and enhanced through the following; a unifying public realm including street furniture, use of the same tree species throughout the centre, encouraging the design of new development to support and enhance the older character and ensuring that the length of the centre maintains activity generating uses.

Policy guidance O(i)/ 2 Improvements to public realm and streetscape

3.3.13 Oadby centre has a subtle structure of gateways and a central focus area. The gateways are of an appropriate distinctiveness for the size of the centre and do not need any obvious device to draw attention to them. They would however benefit

from any public realm works that differentiated the town centre area through a change in paving material or use of street furniture.



Northern gateway to the town centre at the junction of The Parade and Leicester Road

3.3.14 The central spine of The Parade, Leicester Road and moving out of the centre towards 'old' Oadby along London Road provides the centre with unity despite the differences in function and building styles. The new public realm within much of the centre is currently of excellent quality, however, further enhancement and expansion to include Leicester Road and London Road would be a positive step for the future.

3.3.15 The junction of Chestnut Avenue and The Parade has further potential to provide an even more pleasant, low key public space for the centre and enhance its current role as a focal point.

3.3.16 The Oadby and Wigston Town Centre Area Action Plan (2013) indicates that The Parade section of the centre is preserved for continued public realm improvements that favour the pedestrian. This approach supports the existing character of the centre rather than full pedestrianisation, as well as retailers benefiting from passing trade of vehicular traffic, particularly those using public transport. The recent public realm improvements have helped to give pedestrian priority through the traffic-calming scheme at Chestnut Avenue and The Parade, involving increased width of footways, reduced kerb heights, level crossing points and improved material quality. All public realm improvements could be guided by the principles set out in the Council's Public Realm Strategy.

Policy guidance O(i)/ 3 Protect street pattern and retain plot size

3.3.17 The settlement centre appears to have suffered from some loss of street pattern and plot amalgamation. Future development should aim to restore or recreate finer detail within the street pattern and maintain the small to medium plot size.

Policy guidance O(i)/ 4 New development should reinforce and support remaining local distinctiveness through enhancing vitality and viability

- 3.3.18 The remnants of the local vernacular are to be seen in the London Road and St Peter's Conservation Area. New district centre developments should seek to support and enhance the local distinctiveness, as well as enhance the vitality and viability of Oadby centre.

Urban Character Area O(ii): Oadby Arboretum Area

Defining Characteristics

3.3.19 The defining characteristics of the Urban Character Area O(ii) are:

- Large plot sizes; large single dwelling plots with no sub-division,
- High level of tree cover from structured tree planting along streets;
- High level of specimen tree planting along streets and in gardens;
- Dominant but attractive roads and street pattern;
- Impressive building frontages and strong boundary treatments;
- Large houses/University use set in landscaped grounds;
- Individually designed historic buildings;
- Sports grounds and playing fields – open and landscaped;
- Remnant spinneys;
- Rationally structured townscape with strong sense of enclosure;
- Low vehicle presence.



Typical view of the Arboretum along Southmeads Road



Typical view of the Arboretum along Woodfield Road

Townscape Characteristics

- 3.3.20 The area lies to the north of Oadby centre and appears to have developed as an extension of Stoneygate rather than of Oadby. The street pattern retains those linkages to the west via routes such as Knighton Grange Road. The area is predominately a low-density residential area with private homes and some halls of residence for the University. Associated with the University area are sports grounds, buildings and other associated facilities. The area has good vehicular and pedestrian access with wide unspoilt roads. The Arboretum character area is very distinct, only fading towards the eastern edge. The northern boundary is on the edge of the Leicester Principle Urban Area, where the urban fringe is well integrated due to the high level of trees both on the edge and within the area. The landform slopes gently down from the east towards the south-west and north-west and this reads strongly on the ground. The characteristic internal views are ones of long tree lined avenues with medium to high boundaries to large detached properties. The view is repeated across the area, though it is found on a smaller scale in some sections. Cherries and other smaller trees, smaller house and plot sizes replace the London Planes and larger trees and larger house and plot sizes. From the north of the area there are views out to the rural fringe across Leicestershire Golf Course, which are lush and green due to the high level of vegetation and mature trees
- 3.3.21 There is a well-defined road hierarchy with Stoughton Drive South acting as an access road into the area, north to south. Other main roads are Knighton Grange Road and Manor Road, which are long, wide and relatively straight roads with avenue tree planting. Townscape is in large regular blocks with a relatively small number of properties on large landscaped plots. To the east of the area, this structure breaks down with a more informal and smaller scale 'Close' type pattern of the Cottage and Memorial homes and infill development such as The Yews. The scale feels large for a predominantly residential area due to the large plot sizes, impressive house frontages and boundary treatments; road width; avenue planting of large trees; and the large open areas of the University sports grounds. There is a medium/low density and strong sense of enclosure due to the tree planting, boundary height and high profile house frontages. The University playing fields and sports grounds provide a break within the urban fabric and despite their relatively large size retain a sense of enclosure due to the level of tree cover.
- 3.3.22 There is a large Conservation Area in the west of the area, Oadby Hill Top, and two smaller ones, Meadowcourt in the south and the Framework Knitters Cottages and North Memorial Homes to the east. The reserved route for the Potential Transport Route (PTR) runs through the area. There is a small area of archaeological potential along Ringer's Spinney.
- 3.3.23 The historic character and unity for the area is created by the high levels of mature tree cover through street and garden trees, wide roads and large individually designed early 20th Century properties in a mixture of styles. Many of the buildings have impressive frontages including gable, window and entrance features. The main material is brick but render is also used. Boundary treatments are impressive with walls, brick pillars, gates, ornate railings, fencing and hedging. Gardens and grounds are large with shrub and tree planting, which, together with relatively high boundaries, give privacy. The area feels lush and green. This is especially true within the core area of the Arboretum in the western Conservation Area, Oadby Hill Top. Here the historic character has been retained with the majority of the original

buildings still present, (many of which are on the Locally Listed Buildings List), which have large frontages, surrounded by large gardens, mature hedging and trees. Here, the historic built environment greatly adds to the character of the area and steps should be taken to retain, not just the large plot sizes and green environment but, the built environment too as the redevelopment of plots would be detrimental to the character of the area.

- 3.3.24 North of Oadby Hill Top, around The Fairway and The Broadway, some of this historic character has been lost as plots have been redeveloped. Whilst these plots still retain the large size and lush feel typical of the Arboretum Area, the historic character of the built environment is diluting and this is changing the feel of the area. In recent years, there has been an increased pressure to sub-divide or overdevelop these plots by utilising backland development opportunities. Where historic buildings still remain and offer group value, these should be retained. The open spaces within the area, for example, The Botanic Gardens, contribute to the overall character giving the area a campus or estate feel.
- 3.3.25 This area forms one of the most distinctive and high quality landscapes within the Borough. The area does not have indigenous local distinctiveness, as there are no features that link it to the local landscape or a strong local building style. The area does though have a strong sense of place in feeling like a campus or private estate or part of a homogenous planned and managed townscape. The level of trees and vegetation give a lush feel but also give the area the impression of being slightly darker and cooler than other areas. The area has a strong sense of recent history with the early 20th Century Botanic Gardens and strong connections with the University of Leicester.
- 3.3.26 Due to the quality and desirability of the area, open space and large plot and property sizes the area is likely to come under increasing pressure from development. There has been some relatively recent housing development in the east of the area which has taken the form of standard detached and semi-detached residential properties and this has weakened the character in this area and begun to homogenise it with the rest of Borough. Any further development would need to retain key character features and be carefully planned and managed. The majority of the northern boundary of the area runs along the Borough boundary but there is a small area to the east of the proposed PTR where the rural fringe, currently designated green wedge, is within the Borough boundary.

Summary of Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities

3.3.27

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <p>Large, impressive plots and buildings. Distinctive high quality townscape. Level and diversity of tree cover. High biodiversity potential. High value landscape historically and aesthetically.</p>	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <p>Low in social and land use sustainability.</p>
<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <p>Potential for managed change or maintaining existing character. Tree planting opportunities to enhance open space and create a pleasant ambiance.</p>	<p><u>Threats</u></p> <p>Road development, (PTR). Decline in tree cover and variety, particularly in private gardens. Flat conversions could change character negatively and increase infrastructure requirements. Inappropriate infill building and sub-division of large plots, in particular tandem development. Loss of green lung areas to development. Over development of sites to accommodate excessive and that are often out of historic character.</p>

URBAN CHARACTER OBJECTIVE

Conserve distinctive high quality character and large plot sizes by managing sub-division, backland division and over development of sites.

Urban Character Area O(ii): Oadby Arboretum Area – Policy Guidance

Policy guidance O(ii)/ 1 Development of a management plan for the trees in the area

3.3.28 The quality, quantity and variety of tree cover are exceptional for an urban area. In order to maintain this distinctive and exceptional quality, retention of tree cover and species variety is critical.

Policy guidance O(ii)/ 2 Retain plot size, building size to plot ratio, open space and manage sub-division of plots

3.3.29 A characteristic of many parts of the area is relatively large-scale historic buildings, in terms of residential buildings, in spacious plots. Any proposals for the sub-division of plots, infill, backland or tandem development, or loss of open space are likely to dilute the overall character and should not be allowed.

Policy guidance O(ii)/3 Seek to retain the historic built environment in the Oadby Hill Top Conservation Area.

3.3.30 Within the Oadby Hill Top Conservation Area, the built environment greatly adds to the character of the area and steps should be taken to retain, not just the large plot sizes and green environment but, the built environment too as loss of the historic buildings would be detrimental to the character of the area.

3.3.31 Policy guidance O(ii)/4 Seek to retain pockets of historic buildings where there is still a valid group value.

North of the Oadby Hill Top Conservation Area, the historic character of the area has been diluted. Where pockets of historic buildings remain and offer group value, these should be retained.

Policy guidance O(ii)/ 5 Conserve landscaped gardens and grounds and boundary treatments

3.3.32 Strong and complex boundary treatments including walls, fences, verges, garden trees and shrubs, and gates are a key feature and should be conserved.

Policy guidance O(ii)/ 6 Ensure off-street parking and screening of parking provision

3.3.33 The loss of grounds, gardens, street or garden trees to provide parking would be detrimental to the area. If any off-street parking is to be considered as part of a proposal it should be screened and be required to show that it does not have a detrimental impact on the area.

Policy guidance O(ii)/ 7 Ensure integration of new development

3.3.34 The design of any new development in the area, or beyond it which has an impact on the area, should be designed to reflect and enhance the current landscape characteristics, including, structured tree planting, large plot size to building size ratio, well landscaped gardens and grounds, quality treatment of boundaries and off street parking or well screened parking provision. The hospital development to the north of this area has achieved this.

Policy guidance O(ii)/ 8 Building design contribution to urban landscape character

3.3.35 The character of the area is derived from the diversity and individuality of building design, scale of the buildings and the high quality. Any new development in the area should contribute to this diversity and quality. Small scale, standardised and innocuous building design would dilute the character of the area.

Policy guidance O(ii)/ 9 Urban fringe development

3.3.36 Though the rural areas on the urban fringe of the Arboretum are in a designated Green Wedge and they may still come under pressure for development. The impact of any development would not in principle be detrimental to the character of the

Arboretum area (the impact of such development on the rural fringe is a separate issue).

- 3.3.37 If at any time in the future any of the rural fringe on the Arboretum edges were to be designated for development, such development should be designed to be consistent with the urban character of the area.

Policy guidance O(ii)/ 10 Highways Development

- 3.3.38 The route of the Potential transport Route (PTR) through the area will have the potential to have a considerable negative impact on the character of the area and cause fragmentation. The scheme will require sensitive design and a high level of mitigation measures.

Urban Character Areas O(iii north and iii south): Oadby Early Estates North and South

Defining Characteristics

3.3.39 The defining characteristics of the Urban Character Areas O(iii) are:

- Structured streetscape laid off key feeder roads;
- Expansion of earlier ribbon development;
- Long straight or medium straight streets or use of strong shallow curves or crescents;
- Regular street frontage formed by building lines;
- Some regular verges;
- Post War housing styles dominate;
- Defined front gardens with low boundary treatments;
- Some small street and garden trees;
- Regular plot shapes - Medium plot sizes in relation to house size;
- Mixture of residential building types – detached/semi-detached/bungalows;
- Limited long range views ;
- Reasonable sense of enclosure given by building lines;
- Uniform plot/building size/height due to unvaried residential use.



Typical streetscape view of mid 20th Century housing along Rosemead Drive.

Townscape Characteristics

3.3.40 This character area consists of two areas geographically, one to the north of the A6 and the other to the south. The area represents the first stage of post war residential expansion. The areas surround the centre of Oadby with the earliest areas of the estate innermost. The areas are close to and have good vehicular and pedestrian links with the centre though the A6 does form a barrier. Both areas have a short section of boundary that forms the urban boundary. In the southern part of the area this is along the Green Wedge between Oadby and Wigston and in the northern section a short stretch adjacent to the University playing fields, which is also in a designated Green Wedge. A path runs along the northern section giving access into the rural fringe. The urban edge is well integrated along both sections due to trees and hedges and landform.

3.3.41 The characteristic view of the area is of a medium range, linear streetscene with a regular building line and some street trees, verges and/or garden vegetation. Views are restricted to internal views, though there are some glimpses into the Green Wedge in the south (see Part 2, photograph above paragraph 2.2.53). Within the southern area there are some views back over the town centre and beyond as the land rises to the east. Throughout the area trees are present on the skyline and in the background.

3.3.42 The street pattern within the area appears planned and formal. There is a hierarchy of long feeder roads either linear or in shallow crescents eg Uplands Road and Rosemead Drive. The feeder roads support a network of medium length roads creating a network of medium block sizes. A sense of enclosure is given by the houses forming a strong line generally parallel to the street and the presence of some street and garden trees. There are small to medium front gardens either open or with medium height walls or hedges as boundaries. The density is medium due to reasonable plot sizes for the size of properties, street length and width.



Streetscape showing the mid 20th Century character starting to be influenced by later design features.

3.3.43 Character is primarily defined by the age of the houses, which is the most dominant element. Houses are predominantly detached or semi-detached two storey with small to medium front gardens and medium sized back gardens. Brick colour is mixed with some orange/red through to paler buff/yellow and there is some use of render. Roofs are pitched and finished in tile. Generally, houses along a street are very similar, or there are small groups of similar houses. Some areas have verges and street trees, and gardens even to the front are generally planted with shrubs. Detail is added to the houses through the use of bay windows, front facing eaves, storm porches and ornate entrances.

3.3.44 There are a number of identifiable sub areas. One is in the Pelham Street area with an earlier denser planned rectilinear street pattern. There is a wider range of housing types ranging from late 19th and early 20th Century terraced housing to recent infill and some small-scale employment use buildings. The Brabazon Road area has a distinct feel, with wide verges with street trees and the use of hedges for boundaries. There is also a small area of housing to the north of Glen Road, adjacent to Gorse Lane, that developed separately from the other early estates, and only became joined to Oadby when later development infilled along the Glen Road.



View along Spencer Street showing the first expansion of Oadby in the late 14th Century.

- 3.3.45 Generally open space in the form of parks or school playing fields does not make a major contribution to the character of the area. This is because it is often enclosed between houses and has no active frontages eg playing fields off Uplands Road and Fludes Lane path, though the later is open at one point. A small number of open spaces do have a prominence, though, and add character.
- 3.3.46 In the north of the area, the Fludes Lane path is designated as a LWS. There is also a smaller fragmented network of urban lanes in the area. In the south there are two areas of archaeological potential, one along Ash Tree Road and the other around Rosemead Drive.
- 3.3.47 This area is a pleasant sub-urban environment providing family housing but it lacks any distinctive character. Linkages to the underlying landscape discernible in the area is the gently undulating landform, and some of the earlier estate street patterns which are based on the old field boundaries. Historical associations appear to be with street names for example, Brocks Hill Drive, Gorse Lane and Glen Gorse. Due to the plot size and land ownership patterns there is likely to be little pressure for development. The area does abut the rural fringe along its northern and southern boundaries but the majority of rural fringe bounding on to the area is designated as Green Wedge so further development is currently unlikely.

Summary of Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities

3.3.48

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <p>Good supply of well maintained family housing with gardens. Some tree cover. Generally streets carrying local residential traffic. Some areas close to town centre. Well kept public realm.</p>	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <p>Lack of local distinctiveness. A6 dissects the area. Air quality along the A6. Traffic congestion on primary routes.</p>
<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <p>Tree cover could be increased through tree planting schemes.</p>	<p><u>Threats</u></p> <p>Decline in tree cover would decrease landscape quality and air quality of the area. Loss of tree cover along urban fringe would impact negatively.</p>

OVERALL URBAN CHARACTER OBJECTIVE
Maintain and enhance current suburban character.

Urban Character Area O(iii): Oadby Early Estates North and South – Policy Guidance

3.3.49 These are mature residential areas and have little capacity to accommodate new development. There is no specific urban landscape character policy that needs development apart from those detailed below and the blanket policies for the urban area in the next section. The character should be maintained through the application of planning policy through the development control system.

Policy guidance O(iii)/ 1 Urban fringe development

3.3.50 Any development on the urban fringe of this character area would not have to reflect the existing character of the urban area but could develop a new local distinctiveness.

Policy guidance O(iii)/ 2 Infill development

3.3.51 Due to plot size, land ownership pattern and the homogenous residential nature of the area there is unlikely to be pressure for a high level of infill development. It is worth noting though, that from an urban landscape character perspective infill in the area could be detrimental. The area, though a pleasant residential environment, does not have a strong character and relies on order, repetition, predictability, and low key design to provide the character. If infill disrupts these elements then it could be detrimental and risk setting an unattractive precedent.

Urban Character Area O(iv): Oadby Later Estates North and South

Defining Characteristics

3.3.52 The defining characteristics of Urban Character Area O(iv) are:

- Breakdown of street structure with loss of hierarchy;
- Short street runs with the use of loops and curved roads;
- Breakdown in street frontages due to short runs and non traditional street structure i.e. cul-de-sacs built at right angles to streets;
- Buildings address street in different ways e.g. at angles to the street, right angles to the street, use of wide and narrow verges, loss of private front garden space;
- Variety of frontage treatments including verges, shared open frontages as well as gardens defined by low boundaries;
- Some small garden trees;
- Increasing use of irregular plot shapes;
- Late 20th Century housing types dominate;
- Wide variety of house types from terrace/detached/semi-detached and some flats;
- Medium plot sizes in relation to house size but reducing;
- Loss of sense of enclosure;
- Increased views out due to being on higher ground including views towards Oadby centre and out of the urban fringe.



Typical streetscape view of later 20th Century housing along Coombe Rise.



Streetscape view showing later 20th Century housing with some remaining mid 20th Century influences along Severn Road.

Townscape Characteristics

- 3.3.53 These areas consist of some of the latest phases of urban expansion and they are some way from Oadby centre. These estates have started to encroach on the higher ground to the east of the settlement and have long stretches of boundaries with the rural fringe. The boundary between these areas and character area O(iii) Early Estates can be subtle with both areas having some shared characteristics as well as some streets where the character differences are clear. Vehicular access is good within the areas but there is the feeling of being out on the fringe and away from facilities. The distance from the centre and lack of street pattern linkages makes connection to the centre weak. There are generally good connections though to the earlier estates.
- 3.3.54 The characteristic view is of a medium to short streetscape or cul-de-sac with a staggered building line and low or non-existent front boundaries. There is generally a lower level of trees and vegetation than in character area O(iii). There are some longer range views due to the area being on the higher ground, especially from the urban/rural fringe, e.g. from Severn Road over the Washbrook Valley and from Briar Walk down to the town centre.



The Washbrook Valley from Severn Road.

- 3.3.55 A key characteristic of the area is the breakdown in traditional street pattern, with the use of short runs, informal curves and loops, cul-de-sacs, closes and clusters and wide verges. Some areas have a main loop road, others have no road hierarchy. Often houses are staggered along the street, arranged around closes, or are at right angles to the street. The density feels higher than it is due to smaller plot sizes in relation to house size and the lack of regularity, which gives the area a busy feel. The sense of enclosure is often lost due to the lack of a defined building line to the street, use of verges, and low or non-existent boundaries to frontages. In some areas where vegetation levels are low and house design is very functional this can give a bleak feeling.
- 3.3.56 The character of the area is derived from the late 20th Century house styles. The 1960s and 1970s areas have a mixture of housing types including bungalows, terraced, semi-detached and detached houses. The houses have tiled pitched roofs and are built of paler colour bricks than traditionally used in the area, including pale orange, brown and buff brick colours. Building details include large picture windows, the use of pale render sections and white timber boarding, large eaves with boarding and flat roofed porches. Plot sizes are relatively small and frontages are open verges or are designated by low wooden fences. The lack of strong boundary treatments appears to deter residents from planting to front gardens, which contributes to the open character of the area. The later 1980s, 1990s and contemporary house styles, however, show a return to more traditional housing types. Features include smaller windows, slightly stronger brick colours and the re-introduction of earlier generic period details e.g. porches, steps, wooden railings and bays. Some of this contemporary housing is of three storeys. There is a green skyline and background within the area, which is created by the few larger garden trees and hedgerow vegetation and trees along the urban fringe.
- 3.3.57 Open space does not make a major contribution to the character of the area. The larger scale of the later estate development means that the underlying field pattern has been lost and is not reflected in the street pattern.
- 3.3.58 This character area provides a relatively pleasant suburban area, but lacks local distinctiveness and sense of place. The only historical references and links to the underlying landscape left are the Washbrook corridor, Oadby Grange Farm, now a Public House and small spinney remnants now enclosed within the urban area.



View along Briar Walk showing a reducing exposure of housing from the higher ground in the south of the area.

3.3.59 The urban edge of the area abuts the rural fringe along considerable stretches but as the rural fringe along these stretches is designated as Green Wedge or is very close to the Borough boundary then there is little potential for adjacent new development. Within the urban areas themselves there is unlikely to be any pressure other than for small infill plots.

Summary of Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities

3.3.60

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <p>Good supply of well maintained family housing with gardens. Some tree cover. Generally streets carrying local residential traffic. Sense of and access to the urban/rural fringe.</p>	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <p>Lack of local distinctiveness. Lack of local open/green space to break the suburban expanse.</p>
<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <p>Tree cover could be increased especially in more exposed areas to the east.</p>	<p><u>Threats</u></p> <p>Decline in tree cover would decrease landscape quality of the area. Loss of tree cover along urban fringe would impact negatively. Loss of access to rural fringe. Disparate boundary treatments.</p>

URBAN CHARACTER OBJECTIVES

Maintain and enhance maturing suburban estate character.

Urban Character Area O(iv): Oadby Later Estates North and South – Policy Guidance

3.3.61 These are maturing residential areas. Due to the variety of street pattern, plot shape and size and diversity of building design there would be some capacity to accommodate small-scale new development. There is no specific urban landscape character policy that needs development apart from those detailed below and the blanket policies for the urban area in the next section. The character should be maintained through the creation of planning policy and its application through development management.

Policy guidance O(iv)/ 1 Urban Fringe Development

3.3.62 Both the northern and southern parts of this character area have a boundary with the edge of the rural area. Any development on this fringe would not have to reflect the existing character of the urban area but could develop a new local distinctiveness.

3.3.63 As identified above this character area could accommodate some small-scale infill development. The design of any infill development should reflect some of the varied features of the existing character as appropriate to the site and surroundings.

Urban Character Area O(v): Oadby Industrial Estate

Defining Characteristics

3.3.64 The defining characteristics of Urban Character Area O(v) are:

- Predominantly Employment and light industrial use;
- Medium block size;
- Generally 2 to 3 storeys;
- Wide forecourt frontages used for parking and some work activities;
- Strong horizontal appearance to buildings;
- Lack of tree cover.

3.3.65 This character area consists of a small area of employment and light industrial use called Oadby Industrial Estate. The location of the estate is not ideal as it is situated behind a residential area containing Langmoor Primary School. The estate is isolated from major transport links and there is only one access that does not pass through the residential area. The employment area is, however, on the edge of the urban area, adjacent to the eastern side of the Green Wedge and Racecourse, so people do not have to pass through to reach residential areas. Due to the slightly undulating topography, no major views into the area have been identified from the wider urban area and views into the area are limited to short-range views from the residential streets immediately adjacent to the estate. Internal views are of buildings and forecourts and are not unpleasant considering the use of the area.

3.3.66 The area has a regular grid street pattern with a small central spine road, which creates medium sized blocks. For an area of light industrial and employment uses the area has a low to medium scale and density. This is due to the street pattern, the medium scale of the buildings and the limited size of the area. The density and sense of enclosure are low due to the relatively low height of buildings for their function and the wide frontages. The majority of the buildings appear to date from the middle to the end of the 20th Century. Some are in brick and others are clad and all have a strong horizontal emphasis to them. The level of signage and advertisements is reasonable and not too intrusive.

3.3.67 The character of this area is both practical and functional, deriving from the uses of the buildings, but the forecourt areas give a sense of shared space and activity and connectivity to the area. This compares favourably with the design of some industrial estates that have larger car parking areas to the frontages and high boundaries to each unit isolating physically the individual businesses. The area does not have a distinctive character, but due to the forecourts acting as an extension of the work areas, it does have some sense of communality, giving the area animation and character. The businesses occupying the estate range from light construction and food to IT and it shares a boundary with the rugby training ground in the Green Wedge. None of the traditional industries associated with the area such as textiles were noted on the estate.

3.3.68 From an urban landscape character view, the estate provides a reasonably pleasant environment and new development should seek to maintain this. The merging of block sizes or increases in height should be avoided

Summary of Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities

3.3.69

<u>Strengths</u> Functional but pleasant employment area.	<u>Weaknesses</u> Proximity to housing. Lack of off-street parking for some units.
<u>Opportunities</u> Extension of area into previously developed land.	<u>Threats</u> On street car parking. Increase in scale and boldness of signage and advertisements. Increase in scale of plots and buildings. Loss of characteristic frontages. Changes of use to non-employment uses.

URBAN CHARACTER OBJECTIVES
Maintain employment character.

Urban Character Area O(v): Oadby Industrial Estate – Policy Guidance

3.3.70 This character area provides a practical but attractive environment for small to medium sized businesses.

Policy guidance O(v)/ 1 Maintain current plot sizes

3.3.71 The current building stock appears in reasonable condition but there may be pressure in the future to amalgamate plots and increase the scale of the buildings. This would not be appropriate in this location due to the proximity of the racecourse, the Green Wedge and residential areas.

Policy guidance O(v)/ 2 Maintain active frontages

3.3.70 The feature that gives the area a unity and positive character is the wide frontages to buildings that provide parking and external workspace. To maintain this character new development should provide a similar space rather than retreating behind car parking or heavily landscaped frontages.

Policy guidance O(v)/ 3 Long term use

3.3.71 In urban landscape character terms the use of the area as an industrial estate is acceptable as long as the accommodation stays at the same scale. If any of the plots on the site came up for re-development in the future then any increase in the scale of the development in terms of plot amalgamation or building height should be resisted.

3.4 OVERALL REVIEW OF OADBY

- 3.4.1 Though now merged with the main urban area of Leicester, Oadby still retains a separate identity. This is due to the northern edge of the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge and the southern fringe of the Botanic Gardens creating a break, or perceived break, in the urban fabric along the main A6 route into Oadby. To the south-west, the Green Wedge also creates a break in the urban area between Oadby and Wigston, distinguishing the two settlements.
- 3.4.2 The settlement retains a good urban structure with a clearly defined centre area as a focus, providing shops and services and some historical reference. Oadby centre is relatively central within the wider settlement. The centre itself has a good structure with appropriately subtle gateways, and has a focus area where The Parade meets Chestnut Avenue. As detailed above there is a risk that Oadby centre could split into two character areas and this should be avoided.
- 3.4.3 Oadby centre is surrounded by housing estates. Apart from the Arboretum and the old part of the centre area these estates do not have distinct characters other than that given by street patterns and house age. However, they do provide a pleasant residential environment and are unlikely to see a high level of change for some considerable time. These estates generally retain some sense of connection to the settlement but the newer areas of estates on the eastern fringe are starting to feel disconnected from Oadby centre. This is due to the distance from the centre, the lack of mature tree cover and being situated on higher ground.
- 3.4.4 Oadby does not have a distinctive or high quality townscape apart from within the Arboretum and some fragmented areas of good townscape within the eastern section of the settlement centre. The majority of Oadby consists of a reasonable quality suburban environment that lacks in distinctiveness.
- 3.4.5 Oadby has good transport corridors that have attractive frontages and tree planting. Even the A6 is not unpleasant considering the size of road, and offers a glimpse of the underlying landform. There are a number of green gateways into the settlement which provide visitors with a pleasant entrance and help differentiate Oadby from other settlements.
- 3.4.6 The edge of the urban area (i.e. the actual edge of the built development) is abrupt, distinctive and generally well integrated into the urban fringe (i.e. the wider band of built environment on the fringes of the urban area) by hedgerows with trees, garden trees and vegetation. This benefits the rural fringe in screening the urban edge and the urban fringe in providing a source of greenery.
- 3.4.7 The development of the settlement from a small village into a commuter suburb is reflected in the townscape today with the predominance of detached and semi-detached houses with gardens and the low level of other land uses. The development of the area as one reliant on private transport is also apparent, with high levels of off street parking, town centre car parks and the lack of local facilities such as local shops.