

Leicester Racecourse

11056_R02a Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge Review

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. This short report has been prepared by Tyler Grange to support representations to the Oadby and Wigston Local Plan Pre-submission consultation that are made by Turley and Landmark Planning on behalf of Leicester Racecourse Holdings Ltd. The representations relate to a parcel of land to the north of Palmerston Way that is currently included within the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge. The location of the site is illustrated on **Plan 1: Site Location, Landscape Planning Context and Viewpoint Locations (11056/P06)** at the rear of this report.
- 1.2. This report considers the site in relation to landscape and visual opportunities and constraints. Particular emphasis is placed upon the land's location within the 'Oadby/Leicester/ Wigston Green wedge that is currently being proposed for retention within the Pre-submission consultation Local Plan under Policy 42. The Local Plan Evidence Base that supports the Green Wedge designation has also been reviewed, including the following documents:
- Green Wedge Review, 2017; and
 - Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge Management Strategy, 2004
- 1.3 Having reviewed the requirements of draft Policy 42 and the supporting evidence base, the report identifies the landscape and visual context and gives consideration to the performance of the site and how it contributes to the aspirations of the Green Wedge Policy in retaining openness and preventing coalescence. The role within the landscape character and visual context is also considered. This review also includes consideration of views from within the University Botanical Gardens Conservation Area.
- 1.4. Finally, the report makes recommendations for the potential of the site for removal from the Green Wedge to accommodate future development and potential opportunities to provide wildlife and biodiversity enhancements.

2.0 Planning Context: Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge

Local Plan Pre-submission: Policy 42 - Green Wedges

- 2.1. The pre-submission Local Plan seeks to retain the site within the Green Wedge under Policy 42. The supporting text to Policy 42 states that:

"The purpose of the Green Wedges situated within the Borough is to protect important areas of open land which influence development form and have a positive effect on people's health and well being. The Green Wedge policy seeks to retain and where possible enhance important areas of open land that meet the criteria, as set out." (paragraph 10.6.1)

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2.2. The Policy wording states the objectives of the designation:

“Green Wedges protect important areas of Greenland within the Borough and seek to retain these areas as open and undeveloped.

The objectives of all Green Wedges situated within the Borough are to:

- *Prevent the merging of settlements;*
- *Guide development form;*
- *Provide a “green lung” between the urban area and the countryside; and*
- *Act as a recreational resource.”*

2.3. Acceptable uses within Green Wedges are those that are consistent with: agriculture / horticulture and allotments not accompanied by retail development; Outdoor leisure and sporting facilities; forestry and waterbodies; Public Rights of Way and burial grounds.

2.4. The policy also states that proposals that have an effect on the Green Wedge should provide appropriate mitigation measures to ensure any adverse effects are kept minimal.

2.5. In addition to guiding development, the supporting text to Policy 42 also considers the role of the Green Wedges as key areas within the Borough’s Green Infrastructure network, linking green areas to the countryside and supporting biodiversity.

2.6. Considering the above, when seeking to establish the contribution that the site makes to the Green Wedge it is therefore necessary to establish how the land performs in providing the physical and visual separation of settlements / built areas, and how the undeveloped nature of the site contributes to this function. In addition, the landscape and visual context within which the site is situated is important to the character and potential of the site to accommodate development.

2.7. The **Photoviewpoints (11056/P09)** contained at the rear of this report have been included to illustrate the limited role that the site plays in contributing to the openness of the Green Wedge when viewed from the A6 and Palmerston Way (**Photoviewpoints 1-6**), as well as from within the Botanical Gardens (**Photoviewpoints 7 and 8**).

Landscape Character

2.8. In recognition of the role that the Green Wedges play as part of the wider Green Infrastructure and character within the Borough, the supporting text to Policy 46 states that:

“Any development proposed that may have an effect on the Green Wedges within the Borough will also need to ensure that it conforms to the policy recommendations as set out in the Council’s latest Landscape Character Assessment. All development needs to respect the character of its surroundings and should be sympathetic to the local landscape.” (paragraph 10.6.8)

2.9. The Green Wedge Management Strategy and Borough Landscape Character Assessment are considered separately below.



Evidence Base and Supplementary Planning Documents

Green Wedge Review, 2017

- 2.10. The Council has undertaken the Green Wedge Review to assess the boundaries of the existing Green Wedge designation, assessing them against the functions as set-out in the 'Leicester and Leicestershire Green Wedge Review Joint Methodology' to establish whether the boundaries should be retained or amended.
- 2.11. The Review identifies the land to the north of the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge as 'Sub Area 1', which extends to include the land to the north and west of the racecourse. The review includes the following survey findings (paragraphs 5.4 – 5.10):
- Majority of land used as racecourse and former golf course;
 - Only built development comprises that relating to the racecourse and golf course;
 - Sub area divided by A563 Palmerston Way running though the northern tip;
 - Relatively flat topography;
 - Public right of way crosses the northern area, joining Oadby and Leicester;
 - Few development pressures. SHLAA site put forward proposing removal of majority of northern area.

Assessment

- 2.12. The Review has undertaken an assessment of the Green Wedge against each of the criteria, identifying whether the wedge meets these. The Review identifies the area to the north of the wedge as fulfilling all four roles of the designation, and performing an important function in separating the built edges. The distinct edge formed by development is also identified. The findings are summarised below:

Preventing the merging of settlements

- 2.13. The Review assessed the Green Wedge as meeting this criteria. Stating that: *"The most northern tip of the green wedge, for example the racecourse land and land north of Palmerston Way is key in preventing the merging of the relevant built up areas of Oadby with Leicester City."*

Guiding Development Form

- 2.14. The assessment identifies the Green Wedge as ensuring there is a continuous network of Green Infrastructure running from Leicester City to the countryside.
- 2.15. The urban edge / Green Wedge boundary is also considered by the Review to be distinctly defined, with urban one side and green wedge and associated infrastructure the other.

Providing a green lung into urban areas

- 2.16. The Green Wedge is identified as providing access to the countryside and part of the Green Infrastructure network providing benefits for wildlife. Public Rights of way are identified.



A Recreational Resource

- 2.17. The Review identifies recreational uses within the Green Wedge, including the former golf course, race course, allotments, sports pitches, country park and leisure facilities that cover over 60% of the Green Wedge area.

Summary

- 2.18. The assessment summarises that the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge fulfils all of the functions of the Green Wedge, providing access to a largely undeveloped area of open space, guide the form of development, provides a recreational resource and ensures that the urban areas do not merge into one, preventing them from losing their individual character and distinctiveness.

Recommendations

- 2.19. The Review does not recommend any revisions to the Green Wedge boundary to the north (Sub Area 1), stating at paragraph 5.43 that: *“The current green wedge functions well and has managed unsustainable and inappropriate development whilst allowing appropriate development for a number of years.”*
- 2.20. The Review proposed a second option which includes for the inclusion of the Lucas Marsh Local Nature Reserve in the Green Wedge. This would not affect the land north of the racecourse or the site.

Consistency of the Green Wedge Designation with the NPPF

- 2.21. At Appendix 2, the Review considers the conformity of the Green Wedge designation with the NPPF. Under the heading ‘Plan Making’ it is stated that the Green Wedges do not perform the same role as Green Belt, and do not seek to restrict the amount of development, but rather aim to ensure that open land is incorporated within the Green Wedge, preserving and enhancing links between urban areas and the countryside.

Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge Management Strategy

- 2.22. The Green Wedge Management Strategy forms part of the evidence base to the adopted and emerging Local Plans, and supports local policy as set-out above. The strategy provides an overview of ecology, land use, landscape character and provides management strategies and objectives for the different areas within the Green Wedge. The site is situated within the area defined by the strategy as “Green Wedge – North”. The overview and management strategies of particular relevance to the sites being considered are detailed below:

Ecological Survey

- 2.23. The strategy recognises that the northern part of the Green Wedge is dominated by large open expanses of managed, mown grassland comprising the racecourse and Oadby golf course.
- 2.24. More specifically in relation to the land north of the racecourse bounding the A6 / Oadby Road the strategy focusses upon the “Triangle” or “Racecourse Meadow”. This includes the area covered by the site.
- 2.25. The strategy states that the land within the site has been documented as being “ecologically significant”, including areas of species rich grassland and seasonally wet areas. Other ecological features identified by the strategy include a species rich hedgerow, mature boundary trees and a watercourse crossing the northern part of the site. Birch trees within the northern area of the site are identified as being used to provide material for horse jumps.



Usage

- 2.26. The Green Wedge Strategy also identifies issues relating to use of the land. The public footpath that crosses to the south of the site is mentioned as a link between adjacent housing areas, allowing access to the petrol station on the A6. The path is noted as having been truncated by the construction of the ring road (Palmerston Way). Access is noted within the southern area of the site which is used as a cut-through.

Landscape Character

- 2.27. Key characteristics and features identified for the 'Green Wedge – North' area within which the site is situated include the following:
- Although open the area has a strong sense of containment due to highly visible boundaries including strong linear features formed by housing and commercial premises as well as rising topography to the north, east and south;
 - Overall character of "recreational" uses, divided into a series of distinctive and self-contained compartments;
 - Cohesion is only visual, with limited through routes and access points;
 - Highly manicured landscapes of mown grass associated with the racecourse;
 - Little tree cover, with those that are present being of great landscape significance.
- 2.28. As illustrated on **Plan 2: Landscape Context (11056/P07)** and the **Photoviewpoints**, the site is well contained by existing tree belts and hedgerows, the ring road (Palmerston Way) and does not share the more open character of the manicured areas to the north of the racecourse.
- 2.29. It is of note that of the "typical views" contained within the Strategy document, there are none across the site either from the main roads (A6 and ring road) or the public footpath or roads crossing the racecourse.

Opportunities

- 2.30. Opportunities for the wedge identified within the Strategy include the following that may relate to the site;
- Increase connectivity creating linkages with surrounding areas and providing through-routes;
 - Use possible future development proposals as a means to secure, through planning agreements over the longer term, landscape, ecological and possibly recreation enhancements;

Management Objectives – Green Wedge North

- 2.31. Those management objectives identified by the Strategy that are of relevance to the land north of the racecourse include the following:
- Maintain and enhance the ecological quality and connectivity of existing hedges within the character area;
 - Increase the amount of tree planting within the local landscape character area;
 - Encourage less intensive management of amenity grassland and semi-improved grassland;
 - Increase accessibility of the character area to the public on foot and by bicycle; and
 - Improve and enhance the triangle (the site area).



- 2.32. The Strategy identifies that site is physically removed from the rest of the local landscape area, with the potential to be used more extensively for managed informal recreation and access improvements, as well as active management for biodiversity benefits.

Oadby & Wigston Landscape Character Assessment, March 2005

- 2.33. The site is situated within the *Oadby and Wigston Vales Landscape Character Type (Area A)*. The characteristics of this area are predominantly rural in nature, relating to the wider landscape of the south of the area, beyond the racecourse, and not reflecting the urban fringe nature of the landscape and townscape within which the sites are situated.
- 2.34. As a more localised level, the LCA identifies the *Landscape sub-area A(iv): Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge*. The sites lie to the north of this area. The LCA makes a number of recommendations on strategies for the Green Wedge, which are consistent with those contained in the management strategy, as detailed above.
- 2.35. The LCA also considers the character of the built area of Oadby, stating in the overview for the area that:

“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 southern fringe of the Botanic Gardens creating a break, or perceived break, in the urban fabric along the main A6 route into Oadby.”

3.0 Appraisal of the Site

- 3.1. This section assesses the site to consider opportunities and constraints to development and consider the suitability of the site for removal from the Green Wedge. This analysis provides a more detailed site-specific assessment than that provided in either the Green Wedge Review or Management Strategy. The assessment is supported by the accompanying **Photoviewpoints 1 – 8**, and the aerial image on **Plan 2**.
- 3.2. The table below assess the performance of the site against the function of the Green Wedge designation as set-out in Local Policy. Reference is made to the accompanying **Photoviewpoints** where applicable.

Role in Performing the function of the Green Wedge	
<i>Prevent merging of settlements</i>	<p>The site is well contained by mature hedgerows and trees to the boundaries with the A6 to the north and ring road to the east.</p> <p>As illustrated by the various Photoviewpoints, these trees create a backdrop to views across the open areas to the north, as well as when approaching Leicester along the A6.</p> <p>Whilst the site is undeveloped and lies adjacent to the residential edge and a petrol station on the western boundary, the trees and hedgerows bounding the site provide a physical and visual barrier that separates Leicester and Oadby.</p> <p>The enclosed nature of the site contrasts with the open land to the north of the racecourse that fronts onto the A6 and provides physical and visual separation between Oadby to the east and Leicester to the west.</p>



	<p>The ring road (Palmerston Way) further separates the site from the land to the north of the racecourse, tying the parcel to the built edge (residential) and adjacent development fronting the A6 (petrol station) on the edge of Leicester.</p>
<i>Guide development form</i>	<p>The bounding of the site to the southeast by Palmerston Way separates the site from the open land to the north of the racecourse and the built edge of Oadby beyond the racecourse to the east.</p> <p>Combined with the strong boundary vegetation that provides both physical and visual enclosure and separation, this strongly relates the site to Leicester formed by the residential edge at Shanklin Drive and the petrol station fronting Leicester Road.</p>
<i>Retain open and undeveloped character of Green Wedges</i>	<p>As described above and illustrated by Photoviewpoints 5 and 6, the site is well contained as viewed from the A6 and ring road and adjacent public vantage points.</p> <p>Whilst the land within the site is undeveloped and “open” with the grassland and trees along the watercourse and birch plantation forming part of its character, containment by adjacent development and boundary vegetation mean that the land plays a limited role in the openness and undeveloped character of the Green Wedge as whole.</p> <p>The contribution that the site makes to the character of the Green Wedge in this location is predominantly that of the well treed backdrop in views across the open amenity grassland to the north of the racecourse.</p>
<i>Act as a recreational resource, enhancing public access and creating green networks</i>	<p>The site is not publicly accessible at present.</p> <p>The use of the site, or part of it would be in keeping with the aspirations for the Green Wedge to perform as a recreational resource.</p> <p>There may also be opportunities for the management of the area around the brook and associated trees and vegetation as part of wider green networks and for landscape and ecological enhancements.</p>

Summary

- 3.3. The assessment set-out in the table above and as illustrated by the plans and photographs that accompany this report, the site makes a limited contribution to the Green Wedge. Its containment by mature trees, relationship with the existing built edge and development fronting the A6, combined with the separation from the open land north of the racecourse by Palmerston Way lead to the site being perceived as performing little or no role in maintaining a physical or visual sense of separation and openness in this location.
- 3.4. The boundary vegetation provides a positive feature in the landscape, creating a treed backdrop to views across the open land north of the racecourse when travelling along the A6 and Palmerston Way.
- 3.5. Within the site, the brook and tree belt and associated vegetation along it provide a positive feature with the potential for enhancement and management.



Opportunities

- 3.6. There are a number of opportunities for the removal of the site from the Green Wedge to accommodate development, whilst retaining the role and function of the designation, whilst also meeting the aspirations of the Green Wedge Management Strategy. These include the following:
- Retention of boundary vegetation to the northeast and east of the site to ensure the continued containment of the site and function of the trees as a backdrop in views across the Green Wedge, strengthening the physical and visual separation between settlements.
 - Opportunities to locate development of a store and car parking on the lower-lying land at the north of the site close to the existing petrol filling station. The location of the store in this location should also allow for the retention of the existing mature hedgerow and trees that provide containment and a backdrop to views across the open grassed areas of the Green Wedge north of the racecourse (south of Palmerston Way).
 - Opportunities to retain the land along the brook, including existing trees as an area managed for biodiversity and landscape enhancements. This may include the opening of the area for informal public access or educational purposes as part of a wildlife area.
 - Opportunities for sensitively designed development of an appropriate scale within the site subject to retention and enhancement of boundary vegetation.

Consideration of Views from the University of Leicester Botanical Gardens

- 3.7. As illustrated by **Photoviewpoints 7 and 8**, outward views towards the site are limited by intervening trees and planting within the gardens.
- 3.8. In views from the garden terraces on the higher land within the gardens (**Photoviewpoint 7**), there are no views out across the site when the trees are in leaf. Given the number of conifers within the gardens, these views are likely to remain limited year-round.
- 3.9. As illustrated by **Photoviewpoint 8**, there are glimpsed outward views between trees and understorey planting from paths within the gardens adjacent to the A6. In these heavily filtered views, the land north of the racecourse is visible beyond the intervening road, associated signage, acoustic fencing and traffic. The site is set behind the well treed boundary and therefore does not provide an open undeveloped aspect is therefore limited as seen from this location.

4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

- 4.1. Having assessed the contribution that the site makes to the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge, this report has found that the site does not contribute to the role of any of the four objectives of the Green Wedge policy. The site comprises an enclosed area of land to the west of the ring-road at Palmerston Way and has the potential to accommodate development that would not fundamentally impact upon the separation of settlements and openness of the Green Wedge in this location. Furthermore, there are opportunities for the development of the site to facilitate landscape and wildlife enhancements and recreational opportunities which were not realised under the previous local plan, despite being designated as a site for proposed informal recreation (Local Plan Policy R10.6).








- 4.2. The site is well contained by mature trees and hedgerows and does not play a significant role in providing an open aspect and separation within the Green Wedge. In fact, the trees provide a soft boundary along Palmerston Way that forms a backdrop to the open views across the land north of the racecourse. This contrasts with the physically and visually open land to the north of the racecourse.
- 4.3. The site is separated from the open land to the north of the racecourse by Palmerston Way and the trees to the site boundaries. This relates the site to the edge of Leicester, separated from the open land between Palmerston Way and the edge of Oadby to the east of the racecourse.
- 4.4. For these reasons, and based upon the site-specific assessment undertaken by Tyler Grange, it is concluded that the whole of the site makes a limited contribution to the Oadby and Wigston Green Wedge and could be removed from the designation without impacting upon its role in providing separation between Oadby and Leicester.
- 4.5. Appropriate and sensitive development of the site would retain the openness of the land to the north of the racecourse and offer opportunities for the retention and enhancement of existing landscape features, as well as the management the watercourse and trees within the site for biodiversity gain and potential for access for recreation and education.

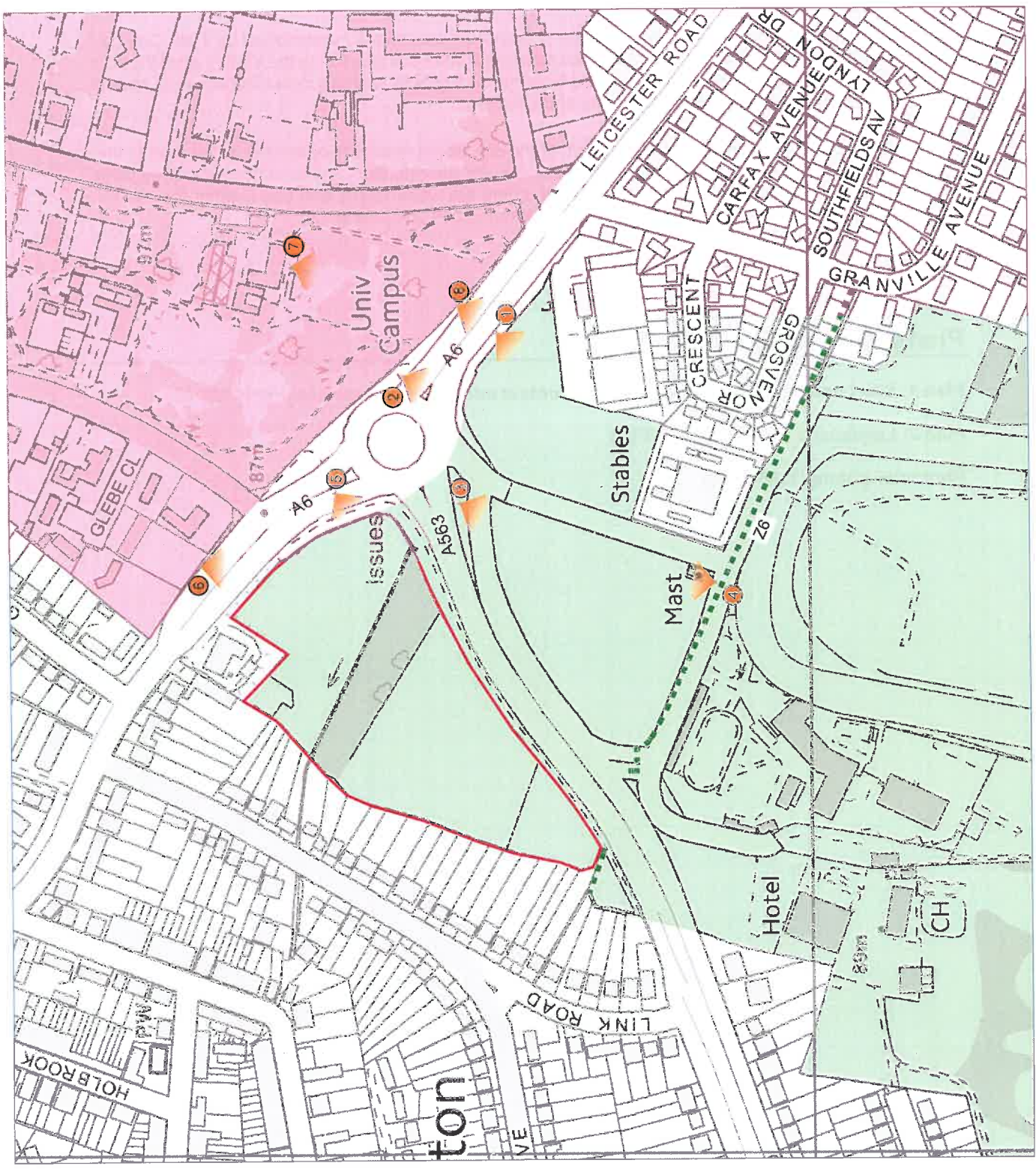
Plans and Appendices

Plan 1: Site Location, Landscape Planning Context and Viewpoint locations (11056/P06)

Plan 2: Landscape Context (11056/P07)

Photoviewpoints (11056/P09)

- Site Boundary 
- Focipaths 
- Viewpoints 
- Oadby Hill Top Conservation Area 
- Green Wedge Designation: Local Plan-
Pre-submission Consultation: Policy 4Z 'Green
Wedges' 



Project
 Leicestershire Racecourse
Drawing Title
 Plan 1: Site Location, Landscape
 Context and Viewpoint
 Locations
Scale
 Not to Scale
Drawing No.
 11056/P06
Date
 December 2017
Checked
 KJRH

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Site Boundary

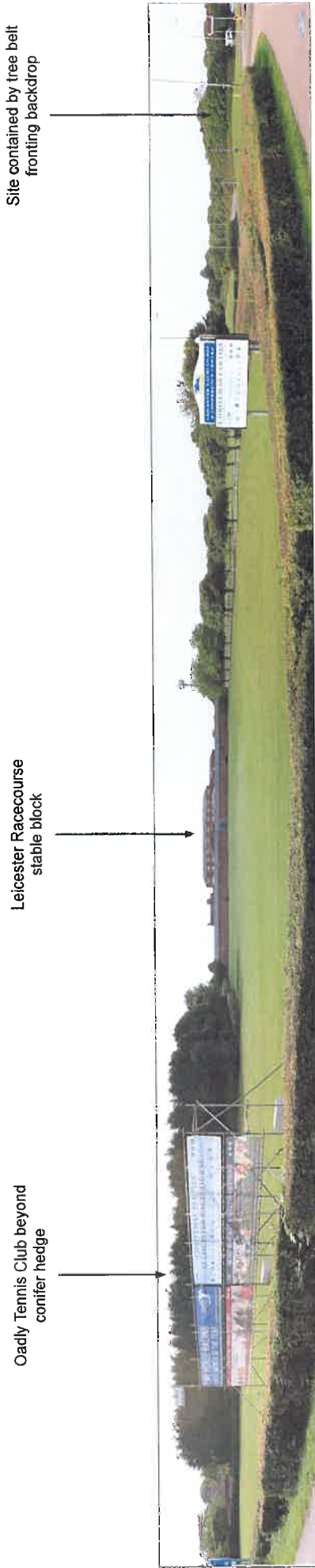


Project	Leicestershire Racecourse
Drawing Title	Plan 2: Landscape Context
Scale	Not to scale
Drawing No.	11056/P07
Date	December 2017
Checked	KJ/RH



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Photoviewpoints 1 and 2



Oadly Tennis Club beyond conifer hedge

Leicester Racecourse stable block

Site contained by tree belt fronting backdrop

Photoviewpoint 1: Taken from the pavement on Leicester Road.



Stable block

Open views across land north of the racecourse

Site contained by trees and tall hedgerows

Photoviewpoint 2: Taken from the pavement north of Leicester Road, adjacent to the Botanical Gardens.



Photoviewpoint 3: Taken from Ring Road opposite Leicester Racecourse entrance.

Views towards trees
bounding the site as a
backdrop



Leicester Racecourse
stable block

Photoviewpoint 4: Taken on public right of way Z6 at Leicester Racecourse.

Photoviewpoints 5 and 6

Mature hedgerow containing site and screening inward views to the site

Site Access

Petrol Station



Photoviewpoint 5: Taken on the grass verge adjacent to Glebe Road and Leicester Road.

Trees on roundabout limiting westward views

Views into the site limited by bounding vegetation



Photoviewpoint 6: Taken from pavement north of Leicester Road, opposite Site 3.

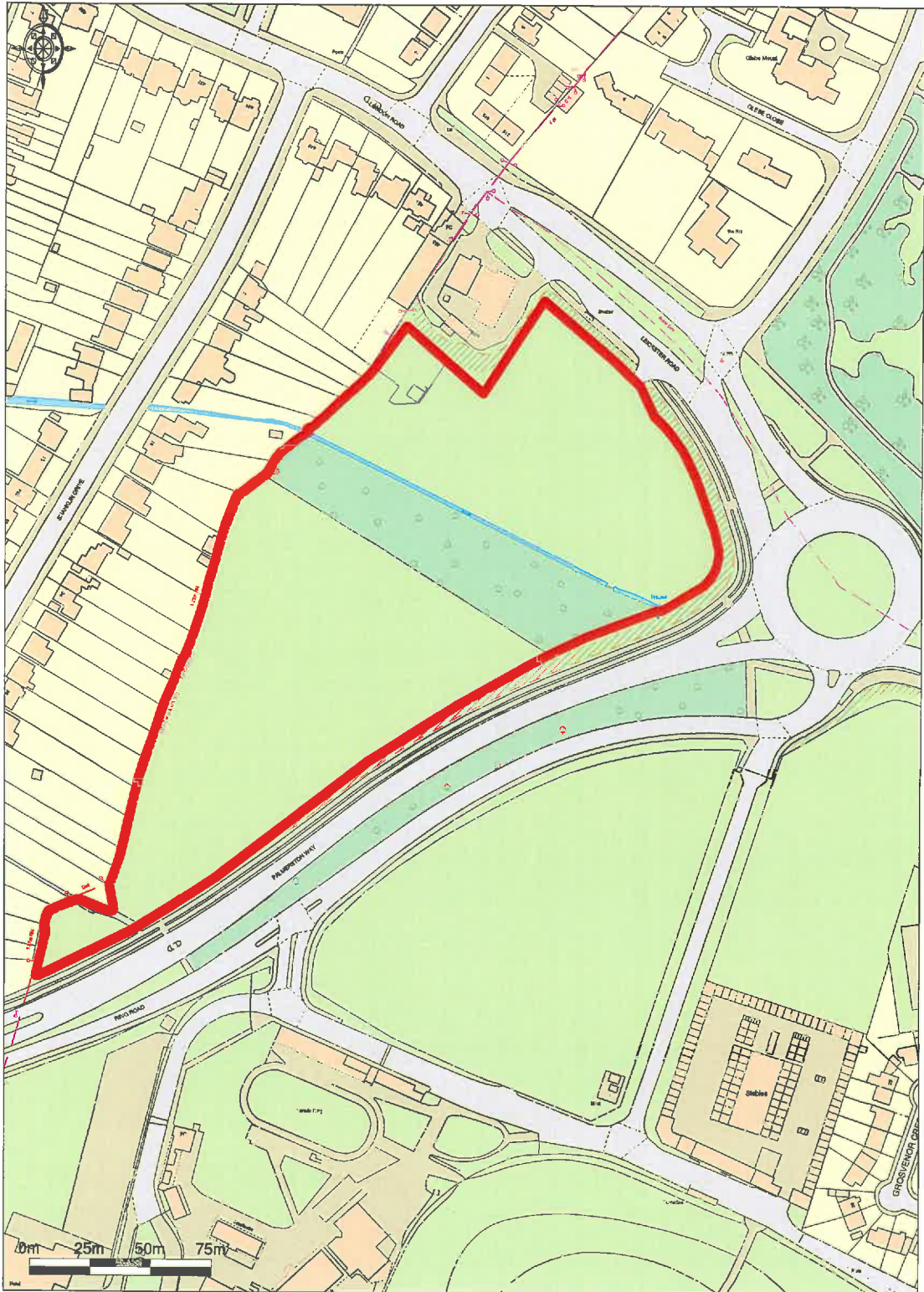


Photoviewpoint 7: Taken from within the Leicester botanical gardens on terrace south of greenhouses.



Photoviewpoint 8: Taken from within the Leicester botanical gardens, adjacent to Leicester Road.

Land at Palmerston Way and London Road, Oadby



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Drawing no. 001

