



**Borough of Oadby and Wigston
Local Plan 2020 – 2041**

Countryside Topic Paper

Winter 2024

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COUNTRYSIDE TOPIC PAPER

Has the Council achieved the correct balance between meeting housing needs and protecting the setting of settlements within the Borough?

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

- 1.1 This paper only considers land designated as Countryside. There is a separate document which reviews the Green Wedge designations within the Borough.
- 1.2 The Borough of Oadby and Wigston is a relatively compact highly urbanised Borough (approximately 2,400 hectares in size) that lies directly adjacent to and shares boundaries with the City of Leicester, Harborough District and Blaby District. The urban areas of the Borough share a strong spatial relationship with the City of Leicester. The Borough plays an important role in providing residents of the City with a link to the surrounding countryside due to its position, 'sandwiched' between the City and the countryside beyond.
- 1.3 Paragraph 7 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) suggests that Local Plans should be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF's definition of sustainable development has three dimensions: economic, social and environmental.
- 1.4 The Council seeks to achieve a balance between:
 - meeting needs for development,
 - managing land uses outside the Built-Up Area,
 - protecting and enhancing countryside and landscape character, and
 - avoiding the coalescence (and therefore loss of individual distinctive character) of settlements within the Borough.
- 1.5 The Council considers that its approach is consistent with the NPPF's definition of sustainable development and that its approach to the countryside in the draft Local Plan meets the soundness tests set out in the NPPF (para 35) for Local Plan preparation in that:
 - The Plan has been positively prepared and is consistent with achieving sustainable development in Oadby & Wigston;
 - The approach set out in the Local Plan is the most appropriate for the Borough and justified, considering its physical size, settlement pattern and constraints,
 - The approach is effective and is deliverable over the Local Plan period, and,
 - The approach will enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the NPPF.
- 1.6 Policy 1 of the draft Local Plan sets out the overall spatial strategy for the delivery of development in the Borough over the Plan period to 2041. It describes how new development will be distributed within the Borough of Oadby and Wigston. Realistic options for locating development are extremely limited due to the compact size of the Local Plan area and its constrained location. There are few real choices in terms of different locations if

the Plan is to balance meeting objectively assessed needs for development whilst seeking to safeguard the Countryside and avoid the coalescence of settlements.

- 1.7 Due to the need to meet objectively assessed needs for development in the Borough, it has been necessary to allocate greenfield land for development on sites formerly within the Borough's Countryside, as designated (most recently) in the currently adopted Local Plan (2019).
- 1.8 To inform the policies and allocations in the currently adopted Local Plan (2019), the Council updated its Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2018), which established a series of landscape character types and sub-areas, as illustrated in Appendix 1. As part of the Call for Sites consultations in preparation of this draft Local Plan, site options have been submitted in most of the less developed character areas in the Borough, specifically Oadby Grange (east of Oadby) and Wigston East (east of Wigston).
- 1.9 Allocations are also proposed within the Green Wedges, but they are not discussed in this paper, therefore, see the Green Wedge Review for further information. No allocations are proposed in the character areas of Wigston South, the Sence Valley or the Upper Soar (South).

Oadby Grange

- 1.10 Paragraph 2.2.52 the LCA, 2018 notes that '*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.*'
- 1.11 The Assessment recommends (para 2.2.52) an objective for this area, and a series of measures to deliver on the objective. The objective is 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, and
 - Public rights of way with a predominantly exposed nature.
- 1.11 A recently granted outline planning permission which is subject to an, as yet, unsigned S106 agreement, seeks to provide around 147 dwellings, a care home and a country park. The approved Masterplan for this site shows the retention of part of the site for ongoing agricultural use, the retention and enhancement of public rights of way, and, the retention and enhancement of features of nature conservation and interest such as the four ponds and the wildflower meadow.
- 1.12 Therefore, whilst it is accepted that development will impact on the existing field pattern and its boundaries, the scheme has sought to deliver on the objectives of the LCA through the low density of the scheme; the concentration of development within the centre of the site; allowing open space to either side minimizing its impact; the extensive areas of planting and nature conservation features retained / proposed; allowing access to the countryside through the site; the retention of an agricultural area with its existing field pattern; and, by ensuring that most of the objectives for this character area will be met.

- 1.13 Taken together, the recent application at Oadby Grange and the potential cross-boundary allocation with Harborough District Council will have an impact on the countryside at Oadby Grange. Further west, another potential allocation in Oadby (AP6) would, if brought forward, take built development from the existing edge of the existing residential development in Oadby, northwards up to the Gartree Road. It would be difficult to then argue that having accepted the principle of residential expansion up to the Gartree Road on this allocation (AP6) that further northward expansion here - further east - would be unacceptable.
- 1.14 This would take development up to and beyond the Borough boundary to the north as the borough boundary is not as far north as the Gartree Road in this location. However, through the retention of core features such as field boundaries and mature hedgerows, the provision of public rights of way, and, the enhancement of nature conservation interest such as ponds and spinneys, this again enables such development proposals to be considered more favourably. As such, a number of the features of this character area will be retained.

Wigston East

- 1.15 In paragraph 2.2.80, the LCA 2018 notes that '*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.*'
- 1.16 The assessment recommends (para 2.2.81) an objective for this area, and a series of measures to deliver on the objective. The objective is 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.
- 1.17 The promoters of this potential allocation site have illustrated via an interim Masterplan for this allocation following features for the retention of existing and the reinstatement of former hedgerow field boundaries which would recreate a series of rectangular, regular fields. They have also demonstrated an interest in the enhancement of the watercourse that runs south / north-east through the centre of the site, a large tract of land to the north of the site to contribute to the Green Wedge will retain the undulating landscape. The now mandatory requirement to provide Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), preferably on-site, should mean existing and new nature conservation interests are delivered within the allocation. As such, a number of features of this character area will be retained and potentially enhanced.

- 1.18 Policy 34 in the draft Local Plan relates to the Countryside. It sets out those forms of development which will be acceptable within the Countryside. It addresses the management of land uses outside the built-up area, as well as the protection and enhancement of landscape character. Given the limited amount of Countryside remaining in the Borough, it is important that those uses allowed in such areas genuinely require a countryside location and cannot be located elsewhere. Paragraph 180b of the NPPF requires Local Planning Authorities to contribute to and enhance the natural environment by *'recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.'*
- 1.19 Whilst the Green Wedge is the mechanism to separate Oadby from Wigston, the Countryside plays a role in defining the boundaries of all three settlements. For South Wigston and Wigston, land to the south beyond the Borough boundary is open countryside so here its role in defining settlement boundaries is less significant. In Oadby, on the south side of the A6, the Glen Gorse Golf Course provides a gap between the borough boundary and the settlement of Oadby. The golf course is not a proposed allocation in the local plan review.
- 1.20 On the north side of the A6, development abuts the borough boundary so it is the designation of countryside within Harborough District that provides a visual settlement boundary when viewed from the A6. If the proposed allocations are implemented then the eastern boundary of the settlement of Oadby will move eastwards to the borough boundary. However, the illustrative Masterplan being prepared for the cross-boundary site shows fields between new development in Oadby and development within Harborough District, so there is an intention to retain that separation between Oadby and development within Harborough District.

2. CONCLUSION

- 2.1 In conclusion, the Council considers that it has struck an appropriate balance between seeking to meet objectively assessed housing needs and protecting the setting of settlements within the Local Plan area. The Council considers that the prevention of the coalescence of settlements is a reasonable objective, justified by the evidence base. Policies 1 and 34 seek to deliver key components of the Local Plan's vision and objectives and forms an integral part of the plan's overall spatial strategy.

APPENDIX 1 – LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES AND SUB-AREAS IN THE BOROUGH (LCA, 2018)

