



TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

**SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO THE VALE
OF WHITE HORSE – CONSULTATION ON
PART ONE SITE ALLOCATIONS:**

CLOSING DATE 19TH DECEMBER 2014

**LAND NORTH WEST OF ABINGDON-ON-
THAMES**

**ON BEHALF OF:
CATESBY ESTATES LTD**

DECEMBER 2014

REF: PJF/GM/3700(1073)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Catesby Estates Ltd control the land edged red as shown on the enclosed plan and are working jointly with Green & Co to promote an adjacent parcel of land in order to ensure that comprehensive master planning takes place.

1.2 The land in question is presently undeveloped and forms part of the Oxford Green Belt (GB). The Council commissioned Kirkham Landscape Planning to undertake a comprehensive green belt review in 2013/4 to identify land which does not contribute fully to the five purposes of the green belt, as detailed in para 80 of the Framework. These findings in turn informed the decision to include said land in policy Core Policy 13 (CP13) at page 63 of chapter 5.

1.3 The illustrative masterplan contained within the delivery document, which will form part of a planning application in 2015, indicatively shows how the site could be developed to deliver a minimum of 200 new homes. No planning application has presently been submitted, due to the greenbelt status of the land.

1.4 The purpose of this representation is two fold

1) to ensure the LPA are clear that the site remains deliverable, is available now and can be readily delivered, subject to respective constraints being reflected in proposals.

2) that to be fully sound, that the removal of the whole planning unit from the GB be accepted, rather than a GB de-allocation based on outdated and inaccurate Environment Agency mapping.

1.5 The proposed modifications allocate the site for residential development (page 7, site three). The reason for the modification is “*deliver a high quality sustainable urban extension to Abingdon-on-Thames which is integrated with Abingdon-on-Thames so residents can access existing facilities in the town.*”. The decision to remove this land from GB and allocate for housing is supported by Catesby Estates Ltd. Indeed the policy test for GB boundary revision has not changed since clarified by the Gallagher Estates in its legal challenge (April 2014) against Solihull MBC, where circumstances surrounding a revision (of GB) are not exceptional unless the GB requires revision. In this instance, the GB boundary in question has been made redundant by a number of factors including the erection of homes to it boundary, the A34 construction and the pressing need to deliver a great many homes in and around the most sustainable centers in the district. The Framework Guidance supports the notion that meeting an OAN is one such exceptional circumstance, noting that development within the GB must be Plan Led. To this end we support the decision to remove this, and other sites from the GB as per Core Policy 8.

Catesby will ensure the most efficient use of the site at the planning application stage however, in the interim, and for the avoidance of doubt, we consider the

proposed allocation is *positively prepared, effective, justified and consistent with National Policy*:

1.6 The continued allocation of the land will:

- deliver housing in one of the top 5 most sustainable locations in the district;
- assist the District's housing need, including a diversity of housing stock for both market and affordable housing;
- assist in the vitality and viability of smaller, and to a lesser extent, larger businesses and services within Abingdon;
- deliver new public open space;
- enhance the biodiversity credentials on the site;
- retain and enhance existing vegetation on the site;

1.7 Catesby support the decision to fully accommodate the independently assessed housing need for the plan period, as detailed in the 2014 SHMA (1028 new homes per annum to 2031). Furthermore the findings of Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd

are supported; specifically that the site does not contribute to the openness or other objectives of the Green Belt, noting that the A34, which constitutes one boundary to the site, was constructed many years after the Green Belt designation. This fact alone demonstrates that the site visually relates to Abingdon's urban fringe far more closely than the Green Belt proper.

- 1.8 Paras 156 and 157 of the framework lend further weight to the balance of planning considerations in supporting the continued allocation of the land (albeit encompassing whilst the area alleged to be a "flood zone") for housing to enable a comprehensive planned development to be achieved and to deliver new housing. The combination of complimentary factors such as Oxford city's unmet housing need, the recent GB review conclusions and the pressing need for housing in the district are considered to constitute the exceptional circumstances to warrant the site being allocated.

2.0 THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL PLAN

- 2.1 The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development (National Planning Policy Framework 2012 (the Framework) paragraph 6). For plan making this means that local planning authorities should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of the area. Local plans should meet objectively assessed need, with sufficiently flexibility to adapt to rapid change (the Framework paragraph 14).
- 2.2 One of the core objectives of the Framework, as set out in paragraph 47, is to “*boost significantly the supply of housing.*”
- 2.3 In order to achieve this aim, Local Planning Authorities should: “*Use their evidence base to ensure that their Local Plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area, as far as is consistent with the policies set out in this Framework, including identifying key sites which are critical to the delivery of the housing strategy over the plan period.*”
- 2.4 The core land-use planning principles require the planning system to ‘proactively’ drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local communities the country needs. As stated in the Framework (paragraph 17): “*every effort should be made objectively to identify and meet the housing business and other development needs*

to the area, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth.” Plans therefore should take account of market signals and set out a clear strategy for allocating sufficient land which is suitable for development in their area (Framework paragraph 17). It is clear to Catesby that the Vale have taken this obligation seriously. Indeed in commissioning Kirkham Landscape Planning to undertake a full GB review during 2013/2014, the LPA have clearly identified the need for a comprehensive review, rather than piecemeal. Catesby Estates Ltd fully endorse this rational and holistic approach.

- 2.5 Furthermore, the Framework requires Local Planning Authorities to “*ensure that the Local Plan is based on adequate up-to-date evidence and relevant evidence about the economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area.*” . In this regard, Kirkham Landscape Planning have satisfied this requirement as far as this site is concerned.

3.0 THE MERITS OF THE SITE - LAND NORTH WEST OF ABIGNDON-ON-THAMES

3.1 It is submitted that the continued allocation of the land identified in the attached OS extract, to the north west of Abingdon is necessary in order to deliver sufficient housing within Vale of White Horse, noting the positive attributes of the site as detailed below.

The Site and Surroundings

3.2 The area of land proposed for allocation for housing is shown on the attached plan. The land is available, suitable and achievable for a housing development to form a sustainable form of development as advocated by the Framework. The land is undeveloped and can be developed in a viable manner; it does not have significant development costs associated, aside from drainage matters and noise constraints on certain parts of the site. Equally the site is free from aggravating factors such as contamination or protected trees.

3.3 The whole site is under the control of two developers who are committed to working together. It would therefore be well positioned to contribute to developer contributions, including CIL payments, if they are justified and considered by the LPA to be necessary to offset the impact of development.

- 3.4 The site in question measures 8.13 hectares and is located to the western edge of Abingdon. The site is adjacent to the flood plain, but no part of the site is impacted by this and indeed no new homes would or could be delivered in this area. However, for completeness and ease of identification, we request that **the entire parcel of land be removed from the Green Belt.**
- 3.5 Exclusion of the area of land from the Green Belt would represent a missed opportunity and will unduly complicate and delay the delivery of housing. The south western edge of the site has a history of surface water flooding, due in part to the elevated section of the A34, which will pose as manmade barrier to natural drainage.
- 3.6 The site adjoins the settlement boundary but does not sit within the existing settlement boundary and is therefore classified as open countryside. It is reasonable therefore to assume that the only barrier to the site's development in previous decades has been the GB designation, rather than any other Development Management consideration or constraint. Indeed, the site is not classified as 'a significant gap' and has no other special landscape consideration which would preclude development.
- 3.7 The site can be accessed by pedestrians off Copenhagen Drive and the Wootton Road (B4017) and Dunmore Road. There are presently no public footpaths that traverse the site.

- 3.8 The site primarily consists of arable farmland and around its edges are trees and hedgerows of limited value.
- 3.9 The site is in a suburban location within an established residential area. To the south of the site are residential properties from the 1980s and 90s. To the north is open countryside, beyond the visual barrier of the A34, and to the east lies the Tilsley Park, an athletics facility run by Abingdon School. Based on this developed and sub-urban setting and with made-made enclosure to the north, the site remains eminently suitable for housing and green belt removal.
- 3.10 There are no listed buildings within a range that could constrain and shape development.

Accessibility

- 3.11 The site is well located for residents to benefit from walking and cycling and public transport. Although few formal PROWs and walking routes are close to the site, the sub-urban setting makes for excellent pavements and cycle friendly roads. VoWH also offer secure cycle parking in the Abingdon town Centre in various locations. These recommended cycling routes, and other local roads, provide a connection to National Cycle Routes and other leisure routes.

3.12 The closest bus stop to the site is located on main Abingdon Road B4017, and offers connections to Oxford and the Town centre. The bus service is quick and a popular way of connecting to London to avoid the congestion of Oxford City. Didcot railway station is located approximately 6.5m south of the site.

Local Facilities

3.13 A detailed assessment has been undertaken to include local schools, shops, employment, transport and sports facilities. The full findings can be found attached within section 2 of the Housing Delivery Document, however in summary;

3.14 The site offers the opportunity to create a sustainable extension to Abingdon that is integrated with the existing urban fabric. The site is well positioned to access the town. Being a town with a population of circa 40,000 a wide range of facilities can be accessed in a sustainable manner as all the facilities are conveniently situated to the site. Most such facilities are accessible within a reasonable walking/cycling distance.

3.15 Overall the site is considered to be in a sustainable location within Vale, The illustrative masterplan also demonstrates how new linkages could be created to integrate the proposal into the settlement, which will have a knock on impact of making the settlement more sustainable.

Proposed Layout

- 3.16 The illustrative masterplan has been prepared which show how a development of a minimum of 200 dwellings could be accommodated on the overall site.
- 3.17 The illustrative masterplan shows a gross density of around 18 dwellings per hectare (gross) and 35 Net. Various types of open space could be designed, as can be seen from the illustrative plan. These will be in the form of landscaped areas, ecological areas and Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS) features, and inclusion of formal play space benefitting both residents and the community. The play space will be located so as to be ‘naturally’ overlooked by new properties and on site pedestrian links. The scheme would provide informal on site open space, and Local Area of Play (LAP).
- 3.18 There is adequate space within the site to accommodate the proposed number of dwellings, alongside the necessary roads, parking, landscaping and open spaces, to safeguard the residential amenities of the occupiers of nearby residential properties and future residents of the development.

Heritage

- 3.19 The site is not within a Conservation Area and does not contain any Listed Buildings.
- 3.20 The nearest Listed Buildings to the site are located on Northcourt Road. The indicative concept plan will not pose any impact whatsoever on the setting of this cluster of heritage assets.

Landscape

- 3.21 The site has been the subject of a landscape assessment undertaken by EDP, and can be found attached. The land is predominantly agricultural, and is bounded on the north, south and east by hedgerows of varying age and size, and to the west by the prominent line of the elevated A34, which itself has a significant vegetated buffer. The site is a uniformly flat. In the eastern corner of the site, adjacent to the B4017/Dunmore Road junction, there is an area used as an informal football pitch, which is set within an area demarcated by two lines of mature trees.
- 3.22 The site is within the 'Lowland Vale' (Policy NE9). This policy is considered 'fully consistent' with the NPPF, as it is positively worded and allows for development provided its impact does not detract from the wider landscape. The policy is essentially concerned with protecting the "long and open views" across the Vale between the AONB and the North Vale Corallian Ridge. This policy designation is

an *over washing* policy, which is less relevant where proposals are set against a context of existing housing or civil engineering (such as the A34). Given the juxtaposition of the site, the existing settlement of Abingdon and the North Wessex AONB (which lies nearly 10km to the south, beyond Abingdon), it is considered that development upon the site would not serve to materially detract from distinctive or attractive long range views, primarily due to the inability to distinguish the site from the rest of the settlement.

3.23 In terms of adverse effects upon landscape character, NE9s policy wording states:

‘Insensitively located or designed proposals could have an adverse impact on these open vistas and on the intrinsic qualities of the Lowland Vale. Particular account will be taken of the colour, texture, height and scale of development proposals and their impact on the local landscape’.

3.24 With an appropriate masterplan design, which respects the existing character and potential for longer range views this development, as with scores of others in the same policy designation, would be entirely consistent with this policy.

3.25 The site is currently located within the Oxford Green Belt, and is therefore covered by Policy GS3. This policy is worded in the standard way for a policy for Green Belt, and is concerned with ensuring the long term openness of the Green Belt is preserved in order to protect the setting of historic settlement. Whilst not a

landscape protection policy per se, it is an important aspect of the site that it is well contained visually, particularly from the open areas to the north of the A34, and as such development would not result in a conspicuous form of development as viewed from within the most sensitive Green Belt areas. This would further support the removal of the site from the Green Belt.

3.26 The Local Plan 2031 is currently at consultation stage, with this finishing on 19th December 2014. The new plan contains generic Core Policies relating to Landscape (44) and Green Infrastructure (45), with the former setting out those ‘*key features*’ of the Vale of White Horse which any new development should avoid harming, and where possible, should enhance. This enhancement should be undertaken by incorporating landscape proposals ‘*that reflect the character of the area through appropriate design and management*’ and that ‘*preserve and promote local distinctiveness and diversity and, where practical, enhance damaged landscape areas*’.

3.27 These key features include trees, hedgerows, woodlands, field boundaries, etc. and any masterplan for the site could easily be accommodated without harm to such structural elements, and furthermore, mitigation could provide enhancement to such features.

3.28 Any planning application will clearly include a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and a master plan must be designed to reflect and reinforce the character of the area noting

- Greenbelt aside, the Site does not lie within a national, regional or local landscape designation, nor does it lie within a Significant Gap and/or adjoin any such areas;
- The Site is well related to the northern urban fringe of Abingdon and benefits from being enclosed on one of its boundaries by existing residential settlement and one by the A34;
- The proposed development will create a mid-scale, low density, high quality residential extension to Abingdon on land immediately adjacent to the residential settlement edge. The scheme is of a scale proportionate to the needs of the Towns growth.
- The Illustrative masterplan allows for the retention and strengthening of the hedgerows and boundary vegetation on the central section to ensure that an appropriate and sympathetic edge is maintained to the road and as part of the proposed Landscape Framework. ;

- 3.29 Given the presence of the existing housing development and the schemes density, it is concluded that it would not cause any significant or demonstrable harm in respect of landscape impact.

Site Access

- 3.30 Site access will be from Dunmore Road. The primary pedestrian and cycle access point to the site will be via the vehicular accesses with further pedestrian access opportunities likely to be on the B4017 where suitable. New footways (to OCC spec) will be provided either side of the carriageway and these will tie into the existing footway network. The site access will also provide a connection to the public footpath which currently runs through the site. This integrates with the existing 'public right of way' network which has been retained and safeguarded.
- 3.31 Without prejudicing the outcomes of future surveys, the road network in this part of Abingdon appears to be operating under its capacity. Consequently there is little realistic prospect of a new "severe" highways impact (NPPF para 32) being resultant from the proposed development. Any proposals would accord with current local parking standards including visitor parking.

Ecology

- 3.32 The ecological interest at the site was investigated by EDP during 2014 through a desk-based records search, Extended Phase 1 survey and detailed bat activity and reptile surveys.
- 3.33 The desk study has confirmed that there are no statutory or non-statutory designated wildlife sites sufficiently close to the site as to be at risk of development impacts or pose a constraint to the development layout.
- 3.34 The site primarily comprises a large arable field of very limited ecological interest, with vegetation on the site boundaries providing some linear habitats of local value only. Any losses of habitat to make for development, such as loss of trees or shrubs to allow access into the site, could be readily mitigated through new planting in appropriate locations which compliments the existing green infrastructure.
- 3.35 EDP consultants conclude “*Owing the paucity of valuable habitats, opportunities for protected or notable species within the site are generally very limited. Bat activity surveys recorded low numbers of common and widespread species, and the reptile survey did not record any reptiles in the limited areas of suitable habitat present*”.

- 3.36 Nonetheless, to comply with paragraph 125 of the National Planning Policy Framework, the development should incorporate measures to limit the impact of light pollution on bats.
- 3.37 Impacts on protected species could be easily avoided or mitigated, following further arboricultural investigation, with enhancements achieved through sensitive construction measures and new habitat creation as part of sensitive masterplan and green infrastructure strategy.
- 3.38 In addition, development on the site presents the opportunity to deliver ecological *enhancements* within the development, through the provision of a network of green infrastructure and new habitat creation as well as specific enhancements in respect of fauna such as bats and birds. On this basis, and without prejudice to future surveys it can be reasonably be concluded that the site is highly deliverable for housing in ecological terms.

Flood Risk and Surface Water Drainage, Utilities and Ground Investigation

- 3.39 Due to the scale of the proposed development, a Flood Risk Assessment will be submitted as part of the application. The site is, on face value, located within Flood Zone 1 as defined by the Environment Agency's Flood Map. Flood Zone 1 is defined as a low flood risk zone with a risk of flooding less than 1 in 1000 years or 0.1%. However, the site also abuts Flood Zone two, meaning that special

consideration may be needed to ensure that the site is protected from adverse flooding.

3.40 Catesby question the accuracy of the Flood Zone mapping provided by Environment Agency, which is a common situation in Vale. The mapping at the very least appears to be out-of-date. Site surveys will reinforce the landowners experience that the area identified as being within Flood Zone 2, is no more prone to flooding than much of the rest of the site. An engineering solution will ensure that this remains so, however this must not be a barrier to its removal. The LPA will still retain full control of the type and form of development that occurs on this land; its exclusion from the Green Belt merely provides flexibility.

3.41 The drainage for the development will be designed in line with current legislation including Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) such as permeable paving attenuation swales/basins which will in turn drain into an attenuation pond and will be utilised to attenuate surface water back to Greenfield Runoff Rates, ensuring that the risk of flooding does not increase.

3.42 The Utilities Assessment will accompany a planning application and determine the extent to which the site is considered suitable for development and can be serviced by utilities.

- 3.43 Initial Ground Investigation work for the site indicates that there are no significant contamination issues on the site.

Constraint Conclusions

- 3.44 It is considered that the site has the capacity to accommodate change and could support a residential development as part of an appropriate extension to Abingdon, adhering to local design guidelines (both existing and emerging).
- 3.45 It is acknowledged that the release of land from the green belt would necessarily result in the encroachment of hitherto undeveloped land into said green belt, however, such a consequence is severely mitigated by the physical barrier of the A34 and in any event is almost inevitable with development on greenfield land surrounding an existing settlement. This is supported by the conclusions of the Green Belt review which can “*find no information regarding how the GB boundary was decided in this part of Abingdon.*” (para 5.24). The review echoes our analysis and concludes that the land makes no contribution to the objectives of the GB.
- 3.46 The enclosed delivery document confirms in more detail that there are no constraints which preclude delivery of housing in this location. It is not an unreasonable assertion that were it not for the GB status, this land would have likely been the subject of development already.

3.47 In conclusion, it is submitted that the allocation of the land for housing will help to meet housing needs, whilst having a marginal impact on the Town and the Green Belt proper.

4.0 PLANNING CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Release of the land from the Green belt and its continued allocation for residential development, will bring the delivery of housing and its associated infrastructure to support future growth. Catesby concur with the conclusions of the LPA that the site is in a highly sustainable location. The allocation of the site:

- is necessary to provide housing that is needed within the local housing market;
- is of sufficient scale to secure the delivery of new infrastructure including public open space,
- will result in housing that can be viably constructed at an appropriate density to safeguard the setting of the settlement;
- will increase public access through the formation of areas of open space and public footpaths and a new childrens play area

4.2 In summary the allocation of entire parcel of land, rather than a constraint-led green belt removal will:

- Allow for more flexibility when formulating masterplans

- result in a more deliverable residential development (to assist in meeting the Council's housing targets) in a sustainable location resulting in efficient use of the site;
- the provision of a range and mix of dwellings to meet housing needs, allowing provision of a balanced a mixed community. A wide range of high quality and well designed housing will contribute to existing communities and enhance local facilities;
- assist the District's housing need, including a diversity of housing stock for both market and affordable housing;
- achieve development in a sustainable location, with easy access to pedestrian routes, local facilities and amenities and close to public transport including bus routes;
- assist in the vitality and viability of small businesses and services within the settlement;
- deliver new public open space;

- enhance the ecology of the site including an increase in tree planting, the ecological enhancements will support a range of species, in particular bats, birds and invertebrates;
- retain and enhance existing vegetation on the site;
- a substantial area of open space, creating a green network through the site, including a Local Play Area (LAP) and areas of ecological enhancement are proposed;
- the public footpaths shall be improved on site to improve existing permeability; and
- benefits via a S106 agreement in the form of contributions to local social infrastructure, such as; education, leisure, public art and affordable housing.