Landscape Review

for

Site Option GB1: Land North of Worts’ Causeway, Cambridge

On behalf of

Mr N and Mrs KM Parry-Jones
Mr JD and Mrs LC Lucraft

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## Appendix A

### Drawings

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Photographs A – K
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) confirmed by the Government in March 2012 states that local planning authorities with Green Belts in their area should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans, which set the framework for Green Belt and settlement policy. Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan (NPPF para 83).

1.2 Cambridge City Council has created a draft Local Plan for Cambridge, the Cambridge Local Plan 2014: Proposed Submission, with the Green Belt boundaries being reviewed, which is currently out to public consultation.

1.3 The NPPF states “The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Green Belt serves five purposes:

• to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
• to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
• to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
• to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
• to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.”

1.4 The review of the Cambridge Green Belt is underpinned by a number of studies, including:-

• Cambridge Green Belt Study 2002 (Landscape Design Associates);
• Cambridge Inner Green Belt Boundary Study 2002 (Cambridge City Council);
• Appraisal of the Inner Green Belt 2012 (Cambridge City Council); and
• Inner Green Belt Boundary Study 2012 (Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council).
Site Description

1.5 Site Option GB1 is located at the south-eastern edge of Cambridge within the Green Belt and sits within important views of the historic core of the City when viewed from the Gog Mogog Hills. The site is currently occupied by Netherhall Farm whose buildings have been designated as ‘Buildings of Local Interest’. The Farm buildings within the site are surrounded by mature stands of native trees. A floristically rich meadow which constitutes a County Wildlife Site lies to the south of the farm buildings but within the site. A large open arable field lies to the east of the farm buildings, and extends beyond the site’s eastern boundary up to Limekiln Road. Semi-improved grassland lies to the west and north of the farm buildings within the site. Site Option GB1 is defined by the following boundaries:-

1.6 The northern site boundary is clearly defined by the existing housing associated with Beaumont Road, their large rear gardens with well established trees and shrubs and housing partially visible.

1.7 The eastern boundary from the existing housing on Beaumont Road to Worts’ Causeway crosses a large open arable field and lacks any physical feature.

1.8 The southern boundary is defined by Worts’ Causeway and the associated native hedgerow, which varies in condition along its length, being a well maintained continuous dense mixed native species hedge of mainly hawthorn 4-5m high, which becomes lower, 3m high, and then very gappy towards the eastern end.

1.9 The western boundary is defined by established mature vegetation (trees and shrubs) within the rear gardens of existing housing associated with Field Way, Bowers Croft and Almoners’ Avenue.

1.10 Linking to the stands of mature native trees associated with the farm buildings are native hedgerows which define the more intimate field pattern characteristic of the western half of the site. These range from the tall mature native hedgerow which defines the western side of the County Wildlife Site, the sparse hedge to the east of the western farm access track and the well maintained predominantly hawthorn and ivy hedge to the western edge of the eastern farm track which is clipped to a height of 3m with mature hedgerow trees along it, which are mainly ash.

1.11 The site is predominantly flat at approximately 21m AOD.
2 REVIEW OF EVIDENCE

Inner Green Belt Study 2002

2.1 The Cambridge Green Belt Study prepared by LDA for SCDC in 2002 provides an overview of the Green Belt and its role for the City and the general area. The Inner Green Belt Study 2002 was carried out by the City Council to help identify sites that could be released from Green Belt for development without harm to the purposes of Green Belt or the setting of the City. The 2002 reports, which assessed the eastern fringe in detail, clearly identifies the area where Site Option GB1 is located as an important part of the setting of Cambridge and is a part of the ‘green chain’ around the City. Within the 2002 study the importance to Green Belt for the area which Site Option GB1 lies within was assessed as ‘Very High’.

2012 Appraisal of the Inner Green Belt

2.2 The ‘2012 Appraisal of the Inner Green Belt’ produced by Cambridge City Council, including ‘Plan 1: Areas of Significance to the Green Belt and the Setting of the City’ refers to ‘Zone 4 – Land south of Fulbourn Road and north of Worts’ Causeway’ where Site Option GB1 is located. The assessment for Zone 4, as stated within the 2012 report is as follows:

“The 2002 Study found that areas within this zone were medium to very high in terms of importance to the setting of the City and to Green Belt purposes. The land rises to the west and south of Fulbourn at the western end of the Gog Magog chalk hills. The highest point of these undulating hills, Wandlebury, is the highest point nearest to Cambridge City. Views therefore are mostly elevated with clear vistas over the City. Views of the Gog Magog Hills are also clearly seen from southern parts of the City. The urban edge of the City is often abrupt and clearly defined in this area resulting in a very direct relationship between the City and its surroundings.

The fact that the majority of the land in this zone is elevated with important views, accords it more importance to both the setting of the City and to Green Belt purposes in general.”

2.3 A desk-top and site assessment was undertaken by The Landscape Partnership in September 2013 and our findings corroborate the above. Site GB1 was found to form part of the view from the elevated and important viewpoints, contributing to the clearly defined urban edge of the city. It therefore contributes to the importance to the setting of the City and to Green Belt purposes and should be considered to be ‘Very High’ in terms of importance, consistent with the findings of the 2002 report. Specifically in relation to topography, views and urban edge:-
Topography and Views

- The elevated land to the south east gives significant clear views of the City and of the historic core of the City from the Gog Magog chalk hills, with site Option GB1 forming part of the view. These significant views of the historic core of the City include:
  - views from Wandlebury (Wandlebury Iron Age hill fort and Wandlebury Country Park), the highest point of the Gog Magog Hills
  - the view from the viewpoint adjacent to the tumulus within Magog Down (see Photograph A) and other viewpoints within the Mogog Hills

- Views from the A1307, which is a “Key Road”, as identified in the 2012 Appraisal of Inner Green Belt by Cambridge City Council, which approaches the City from the south east.

- The views from the elevated Worts’ Causeway (a Roman road and E2 Long Distance Route, a Recreational Path from Galway to Nice, which is one of eleven long distance paths criss-crossing the whole of Europe (see Photographs C and D) with clear vistas of the historic city, where potential residential development within GB1 would be clearly visible within the green fringe of Cambridge which currently forms the setting of the city.

GB1 site will be visible within all the above important and elevated views.

Urban Edge

- The boundary of Cambridge is well defined in the area of GB1 through:
  - established residential properties with generous rear gardens with mature trees and shrubs forming a well defined boundary with the built form visible beyond
  - Netherhall Farm, enclosed by substantial mature trees providing a well vegetated fringe to the City edge

The above ensures that the current boundary of the city is abrupt and clearly defined in the vicinity of Site GB1 with a very direct relationship between the city and its surroundings.

2.4 With Reference to the 2012 Appraisal of the Inner Green Belt produced by Cambridge City Council and ‘Plan 1: Areas of Significance to the Green Belt and the Setting of the City’ within the report, the plan shows Site GB1 as lying within Green Belt but does not attribute a value of importance to the
site as it does not lie either within an “Area of Higher Importance” or an “Area of Lower Importance”. It appears as a blank site without a value. An “Area of Higher Importance” lies immediately to the west of the site. There is no explanation in the text as to why this assessment has been made and appears arbitrary as there are no physical features on the ground which accord with the boundary. There is no perceptible difference/change between the “Area of High Importance” and Option Site GB1.

2012 Inner Green Belt Boundary Study

2.5 The 2012 Inner Green Belt Boundary Study is a joint review produced by Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council of the 2002 Inner Green Belt Study and builds on the broad 2012 ‘Appraisal of the Inner Green Belt’ produced by the City Council.

2.6 This study was produced “to provide an up to date evidence base for both Councils’ new Local Plans, in particular to help the Councils determine whether there are specific areas of land that could be considered for release from Green Belt and allocated for development to meet identified needs, without significant harm to Green Belt purposes”.

2.7 Plan 4: Areas of Significance of Development on Green Belt within this study indicates that Option land GB1 is located within Assessment Sector 11 and is identified as Area 1.

2.8 There are a number of concerns regarding the methodology and whether the outcomes are verifiable:-

- The 2012 Inner GB Boundary Study Methodology in 4.1 states that ‘Defining Character Areas’ are specifically excluded from the study but the characteristic of areas as to whether they are defining or supporting is referred to in the Inner Green Belt Assessment Tables under the heading of ‘Defining/Supporting’. The Guidance Notes in Table 2 states that “Defining Character areas are key resources at are essential to the special qualities of Cambridge and its setting. These areas are automatically retained as Green Belt”. Areas within the Assessment Tables are described as “Defining” or “Part defining”, so therefore are not excluded from the study, which is contrary to the methodology. This is considered misleading and influences the conclusions from the Significance Matrix. There are also inconsistencies as to how defining/supporting is described, with Area 6, Sector 4 being left blank and Areas 1-4 Sector 8 simply described as ‘Parts’. In relation to GB1 (Sector 11, Area 1) the characteristic described is "Part is Defining Character as views" and therefore as it is partly defining, the area should not be considered and should be excluded from the study.

- 2012 Inner GB Study 5.7 states that “To formulate the Significance Matrix, each area examined is assigned a judgement for its importance to the setting and character of Cambridge. Another
judgement is made on how great an effect development might have on an area should it be built.” It is unclear whether these judgements relate directly to those that appear in the Assessment Tables for the ‘importance to the setting’, ‘importance to the character’, ‘importance to separation and importance to physical separation, distribution, setting, scale and character of Green Belt Villages’ and whether there is an overall judgement for ‘Sensitivity for Immediate Setting and Character of Cambridge’ which is subsequently transferred to the Significance Matrix. This decision making process to arrive at the values of significance for the ‘importance to Green Belt’ and ‘significance of development on Green Belt’ and the conclusion from the Significance Matrix is poorly defined and is not verifiable.

- Within the “Importance to Green Belt” guidance notes, it states “an overall judgement of how important an Area is to the purposes of Green Belt, made from the base data and the assessments to setting, character and separation”. It is unclear as to how an overall judgement is arrived at. If, as it is assumed, the judgement is from an average of aggregated ‘significance’ values, for ‘importance to the setting’, ‘importance to the character’ and ‘importance to separation and importance to physical separation, distribution, setting, scale and character of Green Belt Villages’, it is unclear as to how some of the values for ‘importance to Green Belt are derived. For instance, with reference to Sector 1: Area 1 of the Assessment Tables, that the judgements which appear to relate to the importance of the area to the setting and character entered as High/Medium, Low, High, result in a conclusion of Very High for ‘Importance to Green Belt’. For Section 4 Area 5, how can the conclusion from the Sensitivity Matrix be very high when the values for setting, character and separation are Medium, Low and Low respectively. This process is unclear and is not verifiable.

- 2012 Inner GB Study 5.7 also states “the comparison results in a sensitivity score ranged from negligible to major”. This is not correct as the Assessment Tables does not include major and with values ranging from Negligible to Very High. For Section 1 Area 1, the conclusion from the Significance Matrix should use term ‘MAJOR’ rather than VERY HIGH. Again it makes the process of verifying the results very confusing.

- It is unclear as to which value within the Assessment Tables relates to ‘Magnitude of Effect for a Development Proposal’ as described in the ‘Significance Matrix’ and how it is assessed.

3.5 To summarise: It is unclear why areas contributing to defining character areas are not excluded from the study, how the judgements are arrived at; there does not appear to be a score for ‘Magnitude of Effect for a Development Proposal’ or how it is assessed; some of the averages of aggregated ‘significance’ values are incorrect or the method of obtaining these values is not defined, and the decision making process is not verifiable.
3 CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Having reviewed the documentation produced by the Councils, including the 2012 Appraisal of the Inner Green Belt and the 2012 Inner Green Belt Boundary Study, to provide up to date evidence for both Councils for their Local Plans and having carried out our own initial appraisal of Site Option GB1, we conclude that the Councils’ evidence base does not support the release of Site Option GB1 from Green Belt.

3.2 The 2002 reports, which assessed the Cambridge eastern fringe in detail, clearly identifies the area where Site Option GB1 is located as an important part of the setting of Cambridge, as a part of the green chain around the City lying within an area assessed to be of very high importance to Green Belt and concluded that it should not be released from Green Belt, which we agree with having visited the site in September 2013.

3.3 After reviewing the 2012 reports and having appraised the current condition of Site Option GB1 and its surroundings, we can find no evidence or material change to vary the importance to Green Belt from VERY HIGH in 2002 to MEDIUM in 2012.

3.4 The evidence to support each of the values provided for the sites in the 2012 Inner Green Belt Boundary Study is not robust with no definitions of the values provided. The methodology is inadequate and non-verifiable and there are apparent inaccuracies in the evidence base, including a number of concerns regarding the basis for judgements, which inform the outcomes of the Significance Matrix within the Assessment Tables. The decision making process is not clear or verifiable.

3.5 In September 2013 The Landscape Partnership carried out a visual appraisal of the site in order to assess Option Site GB1’s role in the setting of Cambridge and for the impact of a potential residential development on views locally and on views of the historic core of Cambridge City Centre from elevated viewpoints of the distinctive area of the Gog Magog Hills south of Cambridge.

3.6 We conclude that should Option Site GB1 be developed for housing, it would be clearly in the view from the Gog Magog Hills toward the historic core of Cambridge City Centre, including views from Wendlebury, Magog Down (see Photograph A), the A1307 ‘Key Route’ approach to Cambridge from the south-east, from Worts’ Causeway (E2 European Long Distance Route) (see Photographs C and D), and also from Granham’s Road (see Photograph B) which links Great Shelford to Cambridge, and would therefore harm the existing views by adding built form, reducing the green setting of
Cambridge and bringing the urban edge of Cambridge closer to the viewpoints in the south and closer to the Gog Magog Hills.

3.7 Potential residential development would have a significant visual impact on local views from Worts’ Causeway (see Photographs C and D) and Lime Kiln Road (see Photograph E) and from a large number of residential properties which overlook the northern, western and part of the southern site boundaries.

3.8 The existing boundary of Cambridge in the location of Option Site GB1 is clearly defined by existing well established housing with large rear gardens supporting mature trees and shrubs providing a well defined, but soft edge to Cambridge together with the mature trees associated with Netherhall Farm.

3.9 The eastern site boundary is located in a large open arable field with no physical features, which extends up to Lime Kiln Road (see Photograph K). Any built form within this currently featureless eastern boundary will have a major impact on the setting of the southern edge of Cambridge, which will be extremely difficult to mitigate in the short, medium and even longer term.

3.10 The evidence we have reviewed with regard to the Option Site GB1 does not provide justification for its release from Green Belt. The site as assessed in the 2002 reports is located in an important part of the setting of Cambridge, is part of the green chain around Cambridge and should be retained as Green Belt as there has been no evidence provided in the 2012 reports to change the original assessment. “The essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence”.

Retaining Site Option GB1 as Green Belt fulfils three of the five purposes attributed to Green Belt as follows:-

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns;

Our conclusion having reviewed the evidence and recently visited the site, is that Site Option GB1 should remain as Green Belt.