

**SOUTH
CAMBRIDGESHIRE
INDEPENDENT
EXAMINATION
HEARING STATEMENT
FOR MATTER SC1 –
GREAT SHELFORD
ON BEHALF OF
SCOTSDALES GARDEN
CENTRE (17686)**

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Hearing Statement has been prepared by Bidwells on behalf of Scotsdales Garden Centre Ltd in response to Matter SC1 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan Examination.
- 1.2 Scotsdales are the freehold owner of Scotsdales Garden Centre, Cambridge Road, Shelford. The garden centre site comprises of a number of large buildings and covered spaces, outdoor sales and display areas, storage and car parking. A plan of the site is attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 1.3 Scotsdales' site at Cambridge Road, Great Shelford has been omitted from the Village Development Framework despite previous representations submitted to earlier stages of the Local Plan. This Statement draws on these previous submissions to respond directly to the questions raised by the Inspector within the Matters and Issues insofar as they relate to the Village Development Framework for Great Shelford.

2.0 Why the Plan is Unsound without the Inclusion of the Site within the Great Shelford Development Framework

- 2.1 Scotsdales Garden Centre objects to Policies S/4 and S7 (and their interpretation on Local Plan Policies Map Inset 45 for Great Shelford and Stapleford and the Major Developments Policies Map Inset E 'South of Addenbrookes') since it is considered that the Council has failed to review Green Belt and Village Development Framework boundaries having regard to their current nature and whether sites continue to meet the purposes of including land within the Green Belt and whether existing developed sites currently excluded from but adjoining Village Frameworks should be included within them.
- 2.2 In particular, it is considered that the inclusion of the Scotsdales Garden Centre site at Great Shelford within the Green Belt and its exclusion from the Development Framework for Great Shelford is no longer justified having regard to the objectives of the Green Belt. Consequently, the Policies are unsound as they are:
- not justified as it is not the most appropriate strategy; and,
 - not consistent with National Policy within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in relation to the Green Belt and building a strong, competitive economy.
- 2.3 The Scotsdales Garden Centre site in Great Shelford is currently excluded from the Village Development Framework for Great Shelford and included within the Green Belt. The site lies adjacent to the Village Framework boundary which is currently drawn very tightly to the rear of the residential properties along the Cambridge Road frontage, therefore excluding the whole Garden Centre site and its entry from Cambridge Road.
- 2.4 It is considered that the continued inclusion of the Garden Centre within the Green Belt is unreasonable and unjustified since it does not contribute to any of the five purposes of including

land in Green Belts as set out in paragraph 80 of the NPPF or any of the factors that define the special character of Cambridge listed in paragraph 2.30 of the Submission Local Plan.

- 2.5 Paragraph 79 of the NPPF confirms that 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.
- 2.6 The Garden Centre is a large and busy commercial business operating seven days a week. The Garden Centre site includes extensive areas of built development on the eastern side of Cambridge Road along with external storage and display areas and car parking.
- 2.7 As such, the site is clearly not part of the countryside or 'open' as required by Green Belt policy. Neither can it be regarded as a countryside use. Consequently, the inclusion of the site within the Green Belt therefore fails this fundamental test of Green Belt policy. Indeed, other development on Cambridge Road is excluded from the Green Belt boundary and included in the Village Framework.
- 2.8 In particular, with specific regard to the five purposes of including land within the Green Belt and the factors that define the special character of Cambridge listed in paragraph 2.30 of the Submission Local Plan the continued inclusion of the site within the Green Belt:
- Would not assist in preserving the unique character of Cambridge as a compact, dynamic city with a thriving historic centre given the nature and location of the site and that it is substantially developed;
 - Would not maintain or enhance the quality of its setting since it does not positively contribute to the quality of its setting in the first place;
 - Would not result in the communities in the environs of Cambridge from merging into one another and with the City given the separation of the site from the Cambridge built-up area and that the site is already substantially developed in any event;
 - Would not affect key views of Cambridge from the surrounding countryside;
 - Does not provide a soft green edge to the City given the nature of development within the site;
 - Does not provide a distinctive urban edge given the character of development within the site;
 - Does not sit within a Green corridor into the City;
 - Does not constitute a designated site or any other feature contributing positively to the character of the landscape setting;
 - Does not affect the physical separation, setting, scale or character of Great Shelford given that it is already substantially developed;
 - Does not fall within a landscape which retains a strong rural character and is substantially covered with development.
- 2.9 The continued inclusion of the site in the Green Belt does, however, have a severely detrimental and unreasonable effect on the operation of the business, placing an unnecessary restriction on the site. In particular, its inclusion unreasonably restricts Scotsdales' legitimate requirements to improve facilities at the site as part of the on-going development of the business and places them at a potential disadvantage to their competitors.

- 2.10 Indeed, many proposals for extensions to the existing buildings and for new buildings on the site have previously been considered to be 'inappropriate' having regard to Green Belt policy. A number of applications submitted in the past for very minor developments and advertisements for what would in other circumstances be perfectly acceptable and reasonable commercial development on the site, have been refused, principally on Green Belt grounds.
- 2.11 It is acknowledged that this approach has changed over recent years and the Council has recently approved an application (S/2475/16/FL) for a comprehensive range of improvements at the site on the basis of the needs of the business constituting Very Special Circumstances. However, given the further development now permitted and that the Council has accepted that development can be accommodated without harm and that the needs of the business constitute 'Very Special Circumstances' this further raises in to question the purpose of including the site within the Green Belt and excluding it from the Village Development Framework.
- 2.12 Whilst the Council may have decided to take a more permissive and positive approach to proposals for the Garden Centre in recent years there is no guarantee that this will continue and the continued inclusion of the site in the Green Belt adds uncertainty to the business and associated investment decisions.
- 2.13 Continuing to include the site within the Green Belt and thereby potentially restricting the development of the business is contrary to Government guidance within the NPPF which seeks to build a strong and competitive economy in order to create jobs and prosperity (paragraph 18) and requires that the planning system should do everything it can to support economic growth. In particular it emphasises that the planning system should support and not act as an impediment to growth (paragraph 19).
- 2.14 Scotsdales therefore consider that it is illogical, unreasonable and unnecessary to continue to include their Garden Centre at Great Shelford within the Green Belt boundary and to exclude it from the Great Shelford Village Development Framework. These are anomalies that should be addressed within the Local Plan.
- 2.15 In this context it is also important to stress that NPPF paragraph 83 states that land can be released from the Green Belt for development where very special circumstances are demonstrated through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. The continued inclusion of the site does not play any positive role in fulfilling the Green Belt objectives and therefore serves no useful planning purpose. It is considered that these constitute 'very special circumstances'.
- 2.16 Consequently, it is considered that the policies and the way that they have been applied to the Major Developments Policies Map Inset E 'South of Addenbrookes' and Villages Policies Map Inset 45 'Great Shelford and Stapleford' in continuing to include the Scotsdales Garden Centre site within the Green Belt boundary and to exclude the site from the Great Shelford Village Framework boundary is therefore unsound and changes to the Policies Maps should be made to reflect this.

3.0 Conclusions

- 3.1 Scotsdales object to Policies S/4 and S7 and Local Plan Policies Map Inset 45 for Great Shelford and the Major Developments Policies Map Inset E as the inclusion of the Scotsdales Garden Centre site at Great Shelford within the Green Belt and its consequential exclusion from the Village Development Framework is no longer justified or consistent with National Policy having regard to the purposes of the Green Belt. Consequently, the Policies are unsound.

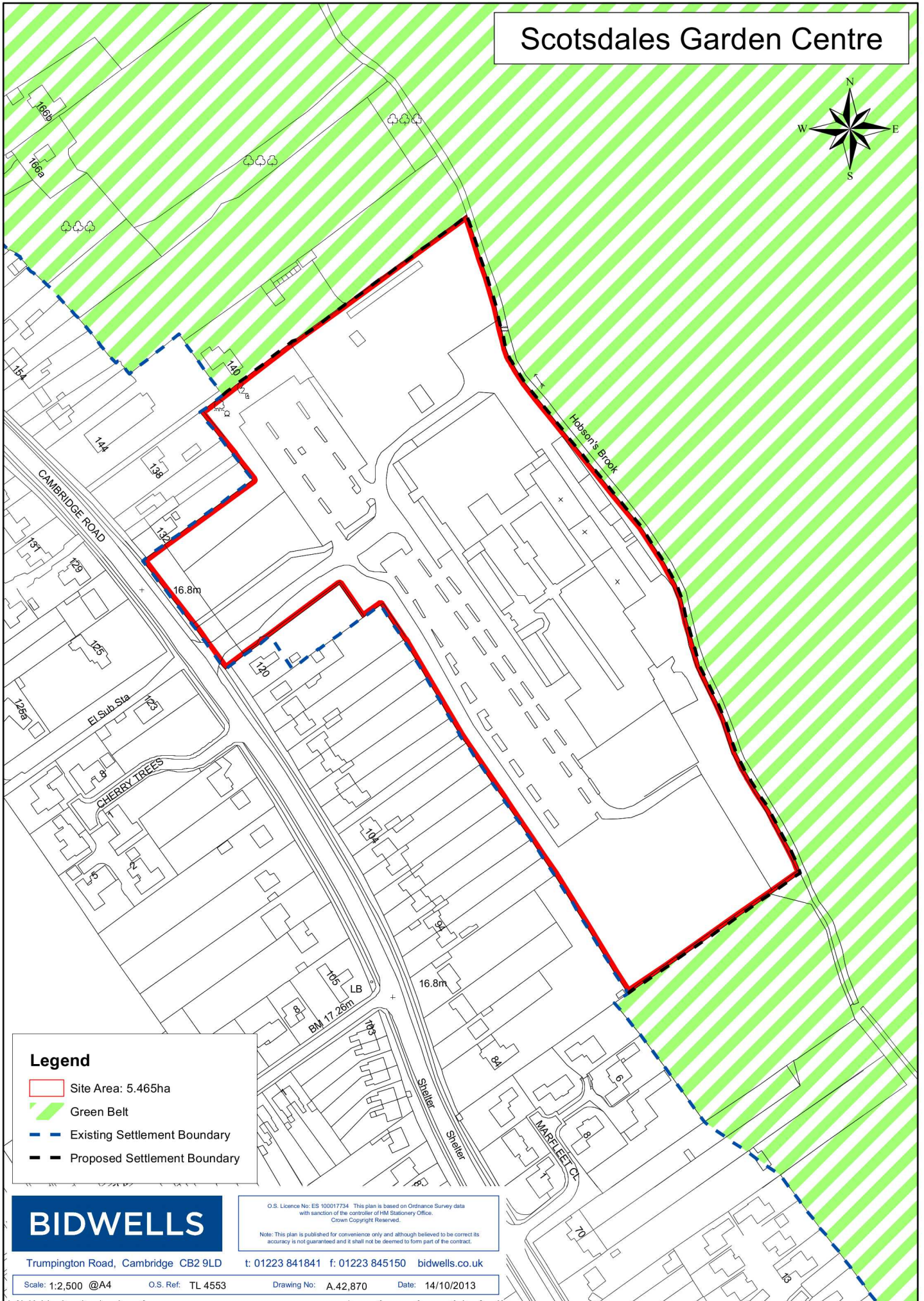
Changes Required to the Plan

- 3.2 Scotsdales therefore consider that changes should be made to the Local Plan Policies Map Inset 45 for Great Shelford and Stapleford (and the Major Developments Policies Map Inset E 'South of Addenbrookes' as necessary) to exclude the Scotsdales Garden Centre site from the Green Belt and to include the site within the Village Development Framework as illustrated on the attached plan.
- 3.3 This revised approach will ensure that the Policy as it is interpreted within the associated Policies Maps fully accords with Government guidance in the NPPF paragraphs 18, 19, 80 and 83. As such, this will ensure that the Plan is Sound. (1,637 words)

APPENDIX 1

GREAT SHELFORD SITE PLAN

Scotsdales Garden Centre



Legend

- Site Area: 5.465ha
- Green Belt
- Existing Settlement Boundary
- Proposed Settlement Boundary

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Scale: 1:2,500 @A4 O.S. Ref: TL 4553 Drawing No: A.42,870 Date: 14/10/2013

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