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05/01/2018

MELTON LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

MATTERS AND QUESTIONS

(I have used the same numbers used in the questions to reference and number my paragraphs below)

Matter 5: Other Housing Allocations (Policy C1(A) and Appendix 1) and Reserve Sites (Policy C1(B) and Appendix 1)

5.1 Site assessment is not robust because the sustainability appraisal is flawed, No account taken of Gd II listed building, it's setting, setting of the Conservation area in SOM3. Response by MBC says that there was a recommendation to refuse planning permission, so why is SOM3 still in the Plan as a reserve site? It should be removed from the Plan.

5.1.1 An assumption in the Sustainability assessment was made that 1-2 hourly bus service deserved a positive rating, even though the bus service from Somerby to Oakham (nearest town) only runs between 10am and 4:30pm. Ineffective bus service is as bad as no bus service for sustainability reasons.

5.1.2 There is a potential site, brownfield, previously in the 2012 SHLAA, farm owned by LCC, the tenancy of which will likely be ending within the next 5 years, LCC showed interest in developing. This site is Cream House Farm in Somerby, not considered or assessed by MBC. This would have been an ideal site with less damaging factors than those selected by MBC.

5.1.3 Some rejected sites in Somerby were rejected for less valid reasons than the selection of others, there was apparently no comparative assessment between sites, one site was rejected for being too far out of the village, but in actuality only 1 field away from the selected site, the selected site has major flood issues and the others major heritage issues. The rejected site would have had far less constraints but was rejected outright on a more minor issue. The level of importance given to some factors is arbitrary and ill considered- like connectivity to village seemingly being more important than flooding or heritage. It seems that site location was prioritised first before any other factor were considered or assessed.

5.1.4 The site allocation number at 69 bears no relationship to the residual requirement of 44. It is not a reasonable balance and there is no need to take the figure to this level by developing more

than one large site in Somerby, there have been planning permissions already approved that take the number closer to 44 if SOM1 is developed and if SOM 2 only is developed it will deliver 42.

5.2 Unlikely, due to inappropriate sites being selected and fought by NP groups in Committee hearings on good evidence based planning objections.

5.2.1 How should it be changed? More flexibility should be built into the Plan to enable smaller sites in villages close to Service centres to deliver some of the numbers required by the Service centre, this would also help to get closer to the residual requirement. Most villages wish to deliver the residual requirement but feel they have been railroaded into mass village development without justification. Flexibility should be built in so that sites that take the numbers disproportionately over the residual requirement do not have to be developed. A sequential approach so that sites can be removed from the plan if the residual number has been achieved with planning permissions granted.

5.3 Absolutely not. The evidence for Somerby has shown that the allocations here are all unsustainable and not in accordance with National Planning Policy. The entire basis of the plan is flawed due to the selected criteria for sustainability of villages and insufficient grounds to prefer developing villages first on large scale rather than concentrating in and around Melton including large scale sites with facilities and services built in.

5.4 No because sites that should be ruled out of the SHLAA altogether due to overwhelming constraints are simply being put in the reserve category by the Plan.

5.5 SOM 3 currently reserve, should not be developed, other sites in the village and the number of houses that have already been built and approved since 2016 should be taken into account. Focussed changes says it was but that only reduced the residual requirement from 49 to 44 and there have been many more approvals (at least 16). The reduction to 44 is irrelevant as the Plan still gives Somerby 69 so MBC in using this reduction to answer questions on the consultation is nonsensical.

Somerby: Rural Tourism & Unique Village Character

Response to the Melton Local Plan

April 2016

By Ros Freeman

14 Burrough Road
Somerby



The Argument

This document will outline the concerns that I have as a local resident of Somerby about the Melton Local Plan; specifically, the proposed developments on the edges of the village.

Site numbers: MBC/048/13 – Land off Burrough Road
MBC/146/14 – Land Off Oakham Road
(Subject to Planning Application: 16/00100/OUT)

I intend to show how Somerby has a potentially **underestimated value** to the Borough due to its **tourism economy** from visitors, cyclists, walkers and equestrianism; and how this is directly attributable to the unique character, heritage and landscape of the village and its surroundings.

It is clear from my findings that this will be severely harmed by **inappropriate development**, particularly on sites located at village entrances.

This report is structured as follows:

1. Why is Somerby a Hub for Rural Tourism?
2. Why the Village Landscape needs to be protected.
3. Why the Character of the Village is unique.
4. Negative Impact of the proposed sites.
5. Relationship to Melton Local Plan.
6. Conclusions

1. Why is Somerby a Hub for Rural Tourism?

Somerby is a **major tourism destination** in its own right and also serves as a hub supporting other tourism destinations around the Parish and further afield. It is valuable for our Heritage assets and Estate Parklands, important local and National history.

It is well situated as a starting point or through point to visit other **local attractions**; Burrough Hill is only 200 yds. from the village and as an iron age fort and country park, draws thousands of visitors. There are numerous other visitor venues around this area of **HIGH LEICESTERSHIRE**.

WALKING & CYCLING:

There are numerous **footpaths** radiating from and around the village including:

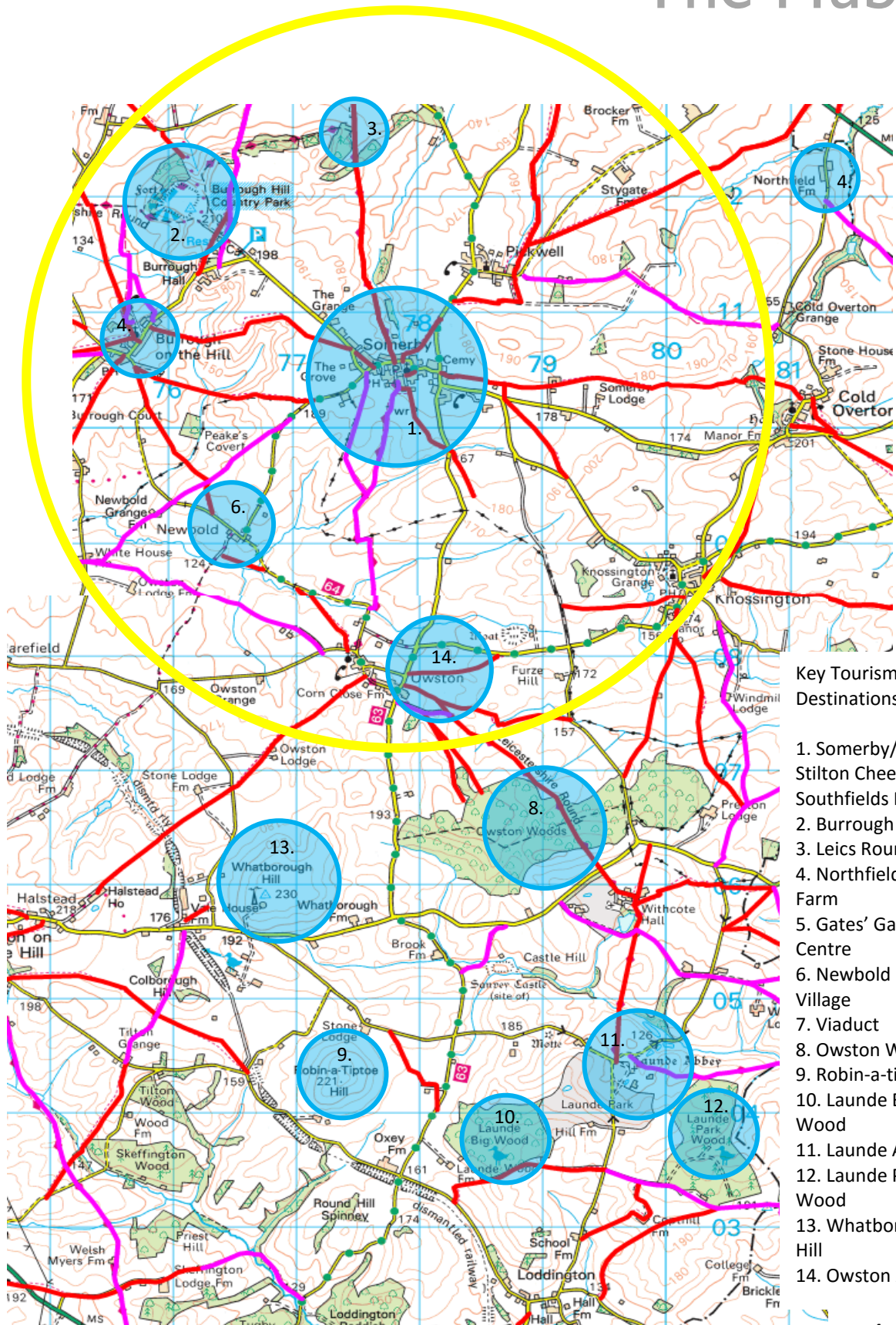
- The Leicestershire Round
- National Cycle Route 63
- National Cycle Route 64

We not only have clubs using the area but also **cycle** races including the international 'Cicle' race through the village every year. This area *is* renowned nationally for its cycling due to its topography and quiet country roads and lanes. Insofar as drawing in cyclists and enthusiasts from all over the Country.

Many organised groups of cyclists and walkers, and individuals use Somerby as a starting and finishing point or stop off to use the local businesses.

The Map on the following page (*sourced from rowmaps.com*) shows the footpaths (red) bridleways (pink) and National cycle routes (dotted green) in the area.

The Hub



Key Tourism Destinations:

1. Somerby/
Stilton Cheese/
Southfields Farm
2. Burrough Hill
3. Leics Round
4. Northfields
Farm
5. Gates' Garden
Centre
6. Newbold Lost
Village
7. Viaduct
8. Owston Woods
9. Robin-a-tiptoe
10. Launde Big
Wood
11. Launde Abbey
12. Launde Park
Wood
13. Whatborough
Hill
14. Owston Abbey



Images Highlighting the Leicestershire Round and a Cycle Club using the Village.

LOCAL BUSINESSES

The Stilton Cheese Pub. Renowned and rated by CAMRA 2015 as Regional Pub of the year and again in 2016, best Pub in Melton area. This pub is popular and draws visitors.

There is also thriving bed and breakfast accommodation for those wishing to stay in the village and a small village shop, as well as the ever popular Gates's Garden Centre situated just outside the village.

Southfields Farm in the village centres takes visitors and school children on tours of its operations regularly.

There are people ready to start up other businesses like a cycle café, cycle repair etc. If the High Street can accommodate them.

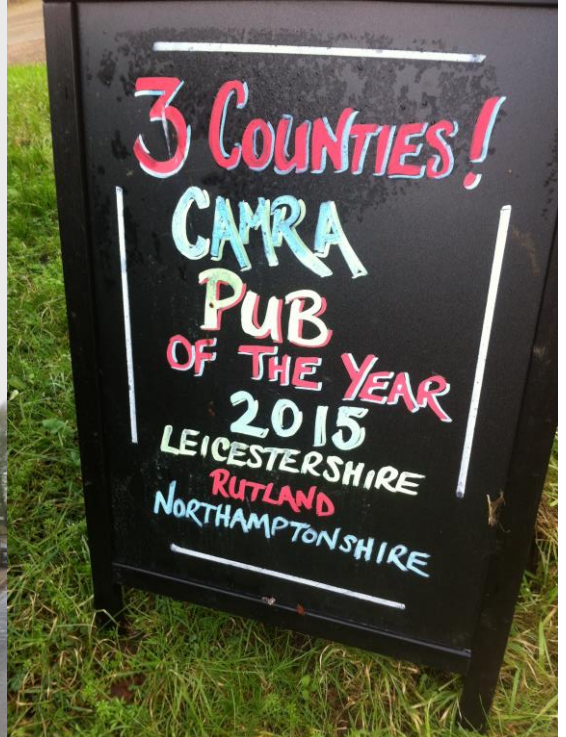
EQUESTRIANISM

The village has been humorously named "Dodge city" because "**Everyone has a horse**", this is the impression one gets when walking through the village and this is what makes it so unique. There are two **equestrian centres** in the village and another close by near Marefield. There are a number of yards and stables connected to homes and farms in the village centre, and **dozens of horses use the main road through the village contributing to its character**. This is a draw for visitors both riding and those wishing to experience the atmosphere.

The **Cottesmore Hunt** and its many followers come to the village regularly to watch them ride over the surrounding fields.

The England Strategic Action Plan for Tourism 2010-2020 wants to encourage rural communities and economies to benefit from the value of Rural Tourism by taking ownership for the development, management, protection and conservation of rural assets and locations.

(see appendix i)



Images Showing the pub and equestrian activity through the village lanes.

2. Why the Village Landscape needs to be protected.

Somerby is contained within a National Character Area Profile called **High Leicestershire**.

The Melton borough Landscape & Historic Urban Character Assessment report states:

*“3.1.2 - **The quality of the natural environment is perhaps one of the Borough’s most important assets.** It is traditional English countryside at its best.”*

The National Character Area profile, produced by Natural England describes High Leicestershire as having *“remote, empty, sparsely settled, dispersed rural sense of place... This landscape of broad rolling ridges and secluded valleys has a quiet remote and rural character with small villages and scattered farms. The predominantly rural character of the area comprises undulating fields with a mix of pasture on the higher sloping land and arable farming on the lower, flatter land. Fields are divided by well-established hedgerows, with occasional mature hedgerow trees. A network of narrow country lanes, tracks and footpaths connect across the landscape interspersed by small thickets, copses and woodlands. Extensive views from the higher ground reveal a pattern of small attractive villages, hamlets and farm buildings set within an agricultural landscape, with traditional churches acting as distinctive features of the settlements.”*

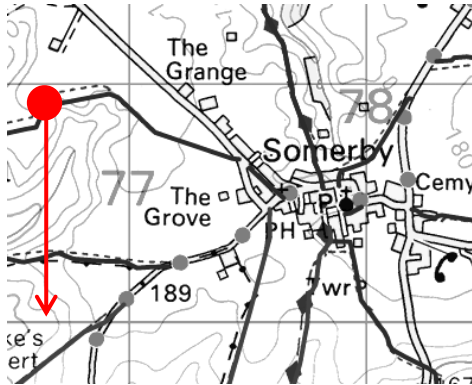
“There is a strong historic and cultural connection to the keeping and riding of horses and field sports. The long history of countryside management for game has done much to preserve the character of the area.”

The 'Statements of Environmental Opportunity' outlined in the document say:

“SEO 1: Protect and appropriately manage the strong visual and historic character of this varied and sparsely settled rural landscape of broad rolling ridges and wide secluded valleys – maintaining the settlement pattern and features of High Leicestershire, in particular its areas and features of archaeological and heritage interest, including the field patterns, ridge and furrow, ancient woodlands, country houses and village churches – to enhance sense of place and history so that the area can be enjoyed by all for its tranquillity.

'For Example by:

- Protecting and maintaining the long-distance views of historic villages and their prominent church spires and the panoramic vistas across the NCA, enjoyed from the prominent ramparts of Burrough Hill and the centrally elevated plateau around Billesdon and Tilton on the Hill.**
- Protecting and maintaining the overall remote, empty, sparsely settled, dispersed rural sense of place, particularly the characteristic small historic villages, hamlets and farmsteads, their setting and their distinctive local vernacular.**
- Conserving more remote areas from inappropriate development by working to ensure that the historic settlement pattern is retained and the relatively high levels of tranquillity are maintained.**



Walking along the footpath adjacent to the Burrough Road site and through a stile into the mesotrophic grasslands (pictured below) shaped by ancient quarrying of stone. Looking across the valley towards Robin-a-tiptoe and Tilton-on-the-hill; to the right is Burrough on the hill, and to the left, Owston. These villages, including Somerby, behind us, encircle a large unspoilt valley.





Returning to Somerby, looking from the footpath across the site towards the centre of the village, you can see the buildings of The Grove on the right and the Water Tower of the Grove Stud on the left.

English Heritage states that the preservation of Historic Intervisibility amongst heritage assets must be considered because intervisibility was likely purposeful and contributes to understanding the significance of assets.

This photograph shows the connection between the Grove, its paddocks and the Grove stud (stables).



3. Why the Character of the Village is Unique?

Most of Somerby is contained within its **conservation area**. Many of the buildings here are constructed from golden iron stone which was quarried locally. There is a **Grade 1 listed** Church and 22 Grade II Listed buildings, homes and monuments. In a small village that was once a thriving commercial centre with 3 butchers, a general store, drapers and bakers; signs of which can still be seen in the architecture of the buildings. One can experience walking through the past along the High street with the **architecture**, window structure and details of the old shops and businesses that used to fill the village. There is only one through road, traversing the centre of the village taking traffic between Leicester and Oakham.

The **Burrough Road entrance** (adjacent to site number MBC/048/13) is attractive and has a **uniquely recognisable vista** which immediately makes a statement about Somerby's historical National horse breeding history. Travelling to the village this way, passing Burrough Hill on the left, the village starts to emerge, then the Water tower of the Victorian stable block comes into view and on the right are the beautiful horse paddocks with the Grove sitting just behind and open landscape is to the right past the paddocks.

In the images on page 14 are Grove Stables (sensitively converted to housing – whilst retaining original character) and its relationship to the Grove and paddocks (proposed site number MBC/048/13)

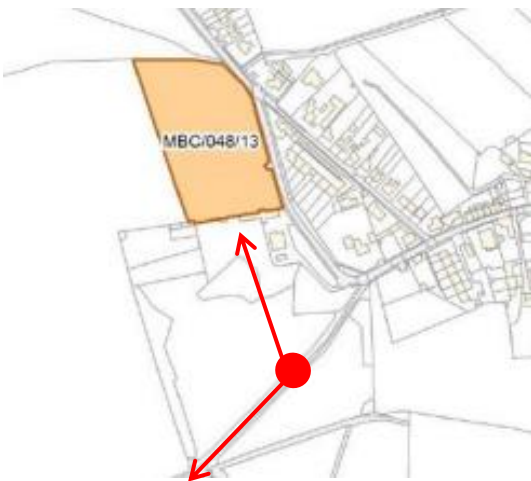


Riders passing through the village and Victorian shop frontage on High Street



Views of Grove Stables, adjacent to The Grove's paddocks.

Somerby has extremely attractive quiet lanes, such as Newbold Lane (below), which come directly off the central High Street. This photograph shows Newbold Lane with the grounds of the Grove on both sides; affording unobstructed views to open country beyond; also linking the village centre with the riding school and stables. Views taken at red dot.



The National Character Area profile, produced by Natural England, here advises:

“Protecting and maintaining the fine examples of country houses such as Quenby Hall and Noseley Hall and ensuring sustainable management of their parkland settings, veteran trees and associated medieval features.”

The Grove is such a country house and as stated in the **LCC Historic Environment Record**:

“It was a one of three Landed Estates in Somerby. It survives in a comparatively preserved state with regard to the completeness of its historic character and appearance; the spatial relationship of surviving buildings and landscape with the village and open countryside, including the dwelling, parkland, service buildings and gardens. It is currently visually prominent in the rural setting, with pasture land immediately to the North and South West, and arable fields to the West. It is an example of a medium scale, edge of village working estate from the C18 to early C20 period.”



This particular house and its stables have connections to **Royal** visitors such as Edward VIII

4. Negative Impact of the Proposed Sites

Site number MBC/146/14 – Land off Oakham Road, is situated on the entrance to the village when entering from Rutland. This development, if approved, would be the first visual impression of Somerby from Rutland and a new housing estate of 30+ houses would not help to preserve or enhance the historical character of the village in any sense. **The harm that this can do can be seen in the previous developments of social housing already present which have totally detracted from the character.**

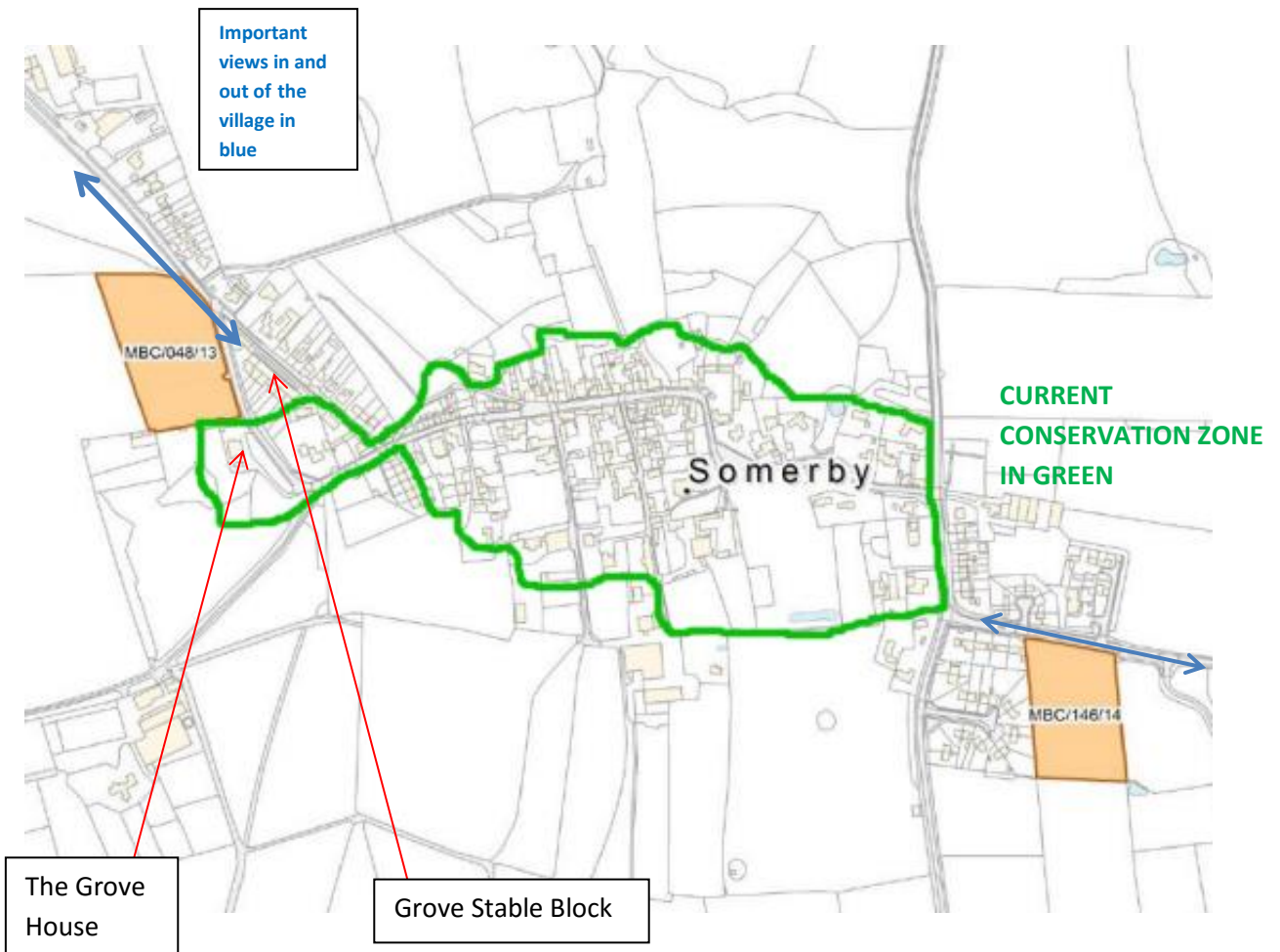
Site MBC/048/13 – Land Off Burrough Road; this is the only entrance to the village which still shows the vernacular style of the architecture here in Somerby. **It is so distinctive and recognisable to people visiting the village that it could even be used as a visual brand for developing further tourism opportunities.**

This site currently is a **major zone of visual influence** to understanding the significance of the Grove. It provides a setting in which the Grove buildings, landscape, Grove stables and Water Tower opposite it, are preserved and with historic character largely unchanged. It also provides an overall visual statement about the village of Somerby on its entrance which signifies the historical character and purpose of the village and its estates. In this case, horse breeding and hunting pursuits. It is also key that it is situated adjacent to the historical hunting Countryside beyond.

If this housing development were to go ahead (regardless of any sensitivity in design) this would be **totally detrimental** and this important visual history would be damaged forever.

Conservation area.

The Map shows the current **conservation area** in relation to the proposed sites. It can be seen how the Burrough Road Site (MBC/048/13) obscures and obstructs the important **views in and out** of the village and this conservation area.



The lack of amenities to support numbers of additional cars.

Distance from local Towns (7 miles) and NO HOURLY BUS SERVICE. Service irregular and under threat.

Congestion & Road Safety:

The village High Street is already very busy with through traffic to Oakham and Leicester, large agricultural vehicles, horse boxes, beer lorries, animal feed lorries, coaches for schools, Horses, and cyclists.

If these sites were built there would be consequent increase in village traffic in an already congested High Street, in addition to road safety considerations, the impact of so many additional local cars would harm and even destroy any future for the development of Tourism in the village.

There are existing residents who are interested in developing small businesses to grow the tourism economy. If new houses are needed in the village, the High Street and the entrances to the village should be protected.

5. Relationship to the Local Plan

VISION AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES Chapter 4

YOU SAY-

“We will facilitate a sustainable pattern of high quality development which:

- Retains the character of the countryside whilst supporting land-based industries and tourism opportunities;**
- Meets the needs of businesses to provide a diverse, competitive and innovative economy with high levels of local employment and good opportunities for training”**
- Meets the housing needs of the whole community;**
- Respects the individual character and distinctiveness of Melton Borough’s town and villages preserving their heritage and promoting good design;”**

Somerby has been wrongly categorised as sustainable as a Secondary Service Centre, also, the NPPF states that” Local Planning Authorities may make an allowance for windfall sites if they have compelling evidence that such sites have consistently become available in the local area and will continue to provide a reliable source of supply”.

Since 2011 Somerby has continued to build in small scale:
25 built, (7 social/affordable) 10 currently approved and 6 are pending status (see appendix ii)

EC2 Employment growth in the Rural area. This could be helped by Somerby being helped to grow tourism.

EN6 Settlement Character, and EN13 Heritage Assets would not support development on Burrough Road. The initiated Neighbourhood Plan would be looking to protect this important fringe area on village entrance.

6. Conclusions

Somerby has grown over the years and has a good proportion of social housing. It has already achieved the numbers which the Local Plan wanted it to so it is not necessary to approve these sites with potentially 60+ more houses.

The negative effects of these sites will substantially outweigh the benefits of additional housing. There are other, better suited sites that we know will come forward, that are not on the entrances to the village, that could supply any future local housing needs.

Somerby needs reclassification to Rural Support Centre.

Serious consideration should be given to designating Somerby Special Tourism status, which we believe is a category which the MBC are considering in the future.

Somerby residents and the Parish Council are in the process of developing a Neighbourhood Plan and would be actively looking into growing the village in a sustainable way and developing its further tourism potential. There are willing and enthusiastic people here in the village who are keen to help with this but if the long term plan is to develop Somerby as a new Asfordby in the South of the Borough, then this valuable asset and economic potential will be lost.

Ros Freeman

Sources

2. Ordnance Survey (Maps)
3. Somerby Conservation Area Map MBC
4. Melton Local Plan –MBC
5. National Area Character Profile –Natural England
6. England. Rural Tourism Action Plan

Appendices

i England. Rural Tourism Action Plan

ii list of new properties built in Somerby since 2011