

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY ASSESSMENT OF THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THE SCALE AND DISTRIBUTION OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB



**KIRKHAM LANDSCAPE PLANNING LIMITED
THE TERRA FIRMA CONSULTANCY LIMITED
WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL**

JANUARY 2011

CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	2
1.1.	Background to study	2
1.2.	Study context.....	2
1.3.	Methodology	4
1.4.	Policy context	5
1.5.	Potential for the AONB to accommodate future housing development.....	5
1.6.	Overall Summary	7
2.	Site Reports	8
2.1.	Rural Service Area: Hungerford – HUN 001, HUN 003, HUN 005, HUN 006, HUN 007, HUN 015, HUN 020, HUN 022	8
2.2.	Rural Service Area: Lambourn – LAM 002A East, LAM 002B West, LAM 003, LAM 004, LAM 005, LAM 006, LAM 007, LAM 009 36	
2.3.	Rural Service Area: Pangbourne – PAN 001, PAN 002	59
2.4.	Service Village: Hermitage – HER 001, HER 004, HER 006	71
2.5.	Service Village: Compton – COM 001, COM 002A, B and C combined, COM 004.....	83
2.6.	Service Village: Kintbury – KIN 001, KIN 004, KIN 005, KIN 006, KIN 007, KIN 008, KIN 009, KIN 011, KIN 013, KIN 015	97
2.7.	Service Village: Chieveley – CHI 001, CHI 002, CHI 003, CHI 006, CHI 007, CHI 008, CHI 009, CHI 010, CHI 011, CHI 012 ...	124
2.8.	Service Village: Great Shefford – GSH 001, GSH 002	149
2.9.	Service Village: Bradfield Southend – No SHLAA sites	159

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to study

This Report is in response to the EIP Inspector's requirement in Hearing Note 2 to further assess the potential landscape impact of the scale, distribution and location of housing assigned to the AONB in the Core Strategy and to explicitly demonstrate that sufficient weight has been given to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside.

1.2. Study context

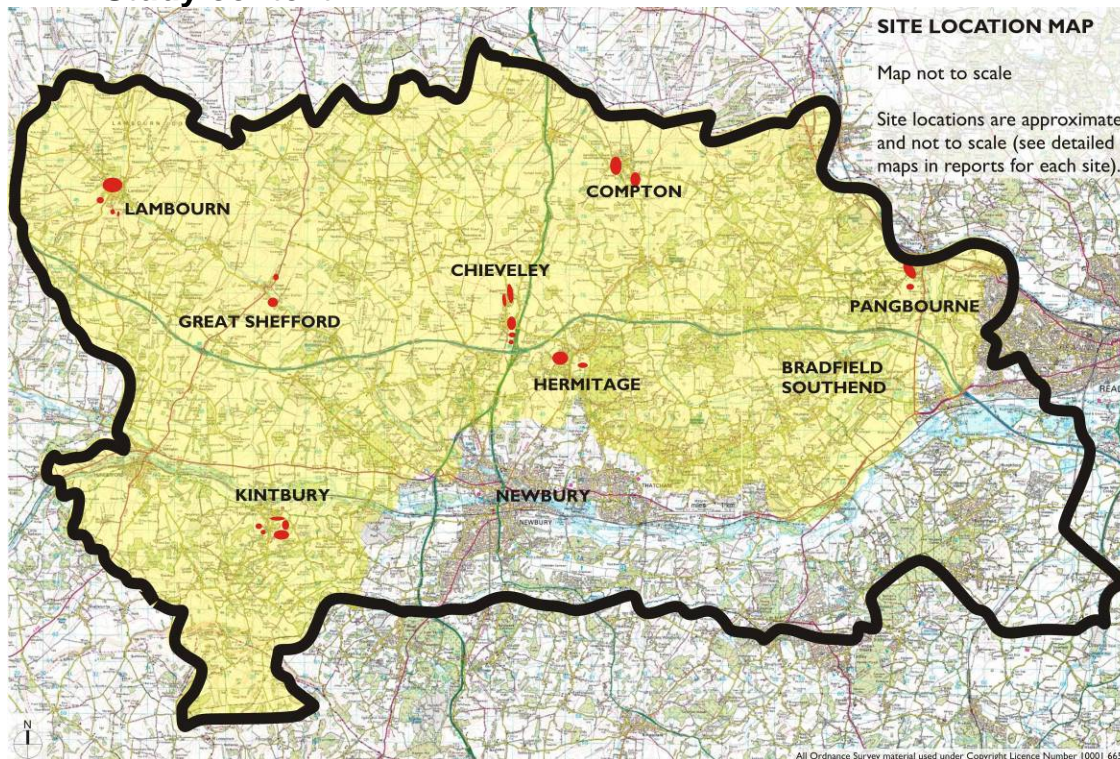


Figure 1 - Assessment area and SHLAA site locations

The settlement hierarchy developed as part of the Core Strategy directs most new development to the existing urban areas of Newbury, Thatcham and the settlements in the east of the District close to Reading. Rural Service Centres have also been identified which contain a range of facilities which can provide services to a wider area and where some development could potentially enhance or strengthen their role. Below that a series of Service Villages have also been identified, which offer a more limited range of services and limited development potential. The Core Strategy identifies three Rural Service Areas and six Service Villages within the AONB. These settlements are:

Rural Service Areas

1. Hungerford
2. Lambourn
3. Pangbourne

Service Villages

4. Hermitage
5. Compton
6. Kintbury
7. Chieveley
8. Great Shefford
9. Bradfield Southend

A detailed strategic assessment of the landscape sensitivity around Hungerford has already been undertaken within the Landscape Sensitivity Study (An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire 2009 (CD09/38)). This Report examines the nine settlements and their landscape setting in greater detail, specifically concentrating on the special qualities and key characteristics which contribute to the natural beauty of the AONB.

The Report draws on the following source documents:

- North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2010
- North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002
- Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2003
- Newbury District Landscape Character Assessment 1993
- Historic Landscape Characterisation
- Historic Environment Character Zoning
- An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire 2009
- Quality Design SPD- Part 3
- Lambourn Parish Plan
- Pangbourne Village Plan
- Hermitage Village Design Statement
- Compton Village Design Statement
- Compton Parish Plan (CPP)

-
- Chieveley Village Design Statement
 - Great Shefford Parish Plan
 - Hungerford 2010+
 - Kintbury Parish Plan

As part of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) (CD09/51) a number of sites have been put forward by developers within or adjacent to these settlements. This Report examines a short list of these sites following the exclusion of some sites by West Berkshire Council for other non-landscape reasons.

1.3. Methodology

Stage 1: Introduction and summary of policy and AONB context.

Stage 2: An overall assessment of each settlement and its setting to determine the over-riding landscape constraints on development:

- Identification of key landscape characteristics of the relevant landscape character areas and their settlements within AONB.
- Desk top assessment using published sources
- Identification of key characteristics of each settlement and its landscape and visual context;
- Identification of key development constraints.

Stage 3: Assessment of individual SHLAA sites:

- Sites tested against findings in Stage 2;
- Site visit to SHLAA sites;
- Brief summary of landscape impact of each SHLAA;
- Brief summary of visual impact of each SHLAA;
- Brief summary of impact of each SHLAA on settlement pattern;
- Review of potential cumulative effect;
- Compliance with PPS7 paragraph 21;
- Recommendations for each settlement: location; scale of development; and design implications.

Stage 4: Summary conclusion.

1.4. Policy context

PPS7 paragraph 21 states that AONBs have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty and sets out the requirement to give great weight in planning policies to the conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside.

The West Berkshire Core Strategy Area Delivery Plan Policy ADP5 reflects this guidance and states:

- *The North Wessex Downs AONB will have appropriate and sensitive growth that conserves and enhances its special landscape qualities.*
- *Recognising the area as a national landscape designation, development will conserve and enhance the local distinctiveness, sense of place and setting of the AONB whilst preserving the strong sense of remoteness, tranquillity and dark night skies, particularly on the open downland. Development will respect identified landscape features and components of natural beauty.*

1.5. Potential for the AONB to accommodate future housing development

It is an over-riding principle that any development within the North Wessex Downs should not result in harm to the special qualities and natural beauty of the AONB. Major development should not take place in the AONB, except in exceptional circumstances.

The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2010 (CD10/18) sets out the defining special features of the AONB:

Vast, dramatic, undeveloped and locally distinct chalk downlands with extensive areas of semi-natural chalk grassland, contrasting with well-wooded plateaux, arable lands and intimate and secluded valleys, all rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage; a national landscape that stands apart from the increasing urban pressures that surround it; where people live, work and relax; and where visitors are welcomed and contribute to a vibrant rural economy.

The North Wessex Downs is a visibly ancient landscape of great diversity. The area is divided into eight landscape types which reflect this diversity. The settlements in this study fall within the following landscape character types:

Open Downland	Lambourn (part); Compton; Great Shefford (part)
River Valley	Lambourn (part); Pangbourne (part); Kintbury; Great Shefford (part)
Downland with Woodland	Pangbourne (part); Chieveley;

	Bradfield Southend
Lowland Mosaic	Hermitage

Each of these landscape types is subdivided into landscape character areas to reflect local distinctiveness and each has its own special landscape qualities. These are examined in greater detail in the rest of this Report. The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan however sets out the key qualities and issues which relate to development around these settlements (NWD AONB Management Plan pages 62/63).

Special qualities

- *The sense of remoteness and tranquillity.*
- *All landscapes sensitive to change.*
- *Distinctive and ancient settlement patterns.*
- *Architectural styles vary throughout the AONB, dependent on availability of building materials.*
- *The built environment forms an integral part of local character and distinctiveness and adds to the diversity of the AONB landscape as a whole.*

Key Issues

- *Unsympathetic incremental expansion of the settlements of and adjacent to the AONB, detracting from the surrounding countryside.*
- *Potential for major development to intrude onto open downland, including masts, pylons, major wind turbine developments, and mineral extraction and waste management, threatening the senses of remoteness and tranquillity.*
- *The future use of redundant 'brown field' sites within the AONB, especially redundant airfields and military sites (as at Wroughton), and the impact upon landscape.*
- *Lack of knowledge about the boundaries of the current pools of tranquillity and dark night skies within the AONB and the implications of light spillage from development in and around the AONB.*

Using currently available information and site visits to the SHLAA sites, this Report analyses the extent to which each potential SHLAA site conserves the special qualities and addresses the key issues.

It is not anticipated that any of the SHLAA sites in themselves individually would constitute major development but the cumulative effect of two or more sites in one settlement may be significant. This will affect the distribution of SHLAA sites within the AONB.

1.6. Overall Summary

The Study has shown that there is some potential for residential development within the AONB without causing unacceptable harm to the special qualities and natural beauty of the area, providing that development is limited to the areas shown on the plans and incorporates the landscape mitigation measures included under the Recommendations.

The Study also found that each and every settlement has the potential to accommodate some of this development. The amount of development is however limited by the need to protect the existing settlement pattern, usually in small estates developed sequentially over time. In some cases there is also a need to mitigate the impact of existing large areas of housing and the visual impact of exposed and intrusive built form.

Whole or parts of sites have been ruled out where they will have an adverse impact on areas of tranquillity, distinctive settlement patterns, the character of adjoining and wider AONB landscape, and the special features such as topography, woodland, or open fields. Sites were also ruled out where the development would be unacceptably intrusive visually.

In all cases any development will need to be of the highest standard and in keeping with the character of the settlement in accordance with PPS1, PPS3 and PPS7.