

**WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL**

**LANDSCAPE CAPACITY ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL HOUSING SITES WITHIN AND  
ADJACENT TO THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY IN  
WEST BERKSHIRE**

**FINAL PHASE 2 REPORT: COLD ASH**

## COLD ASH

<b>Settlement</b>	<b>Cold Ash</b>
<b>North Wessex Downs AONB Character areas:</b>	
LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons	
<b>Date of site survey</b>	12 June 2014
<b>Surveyor</b>	AG

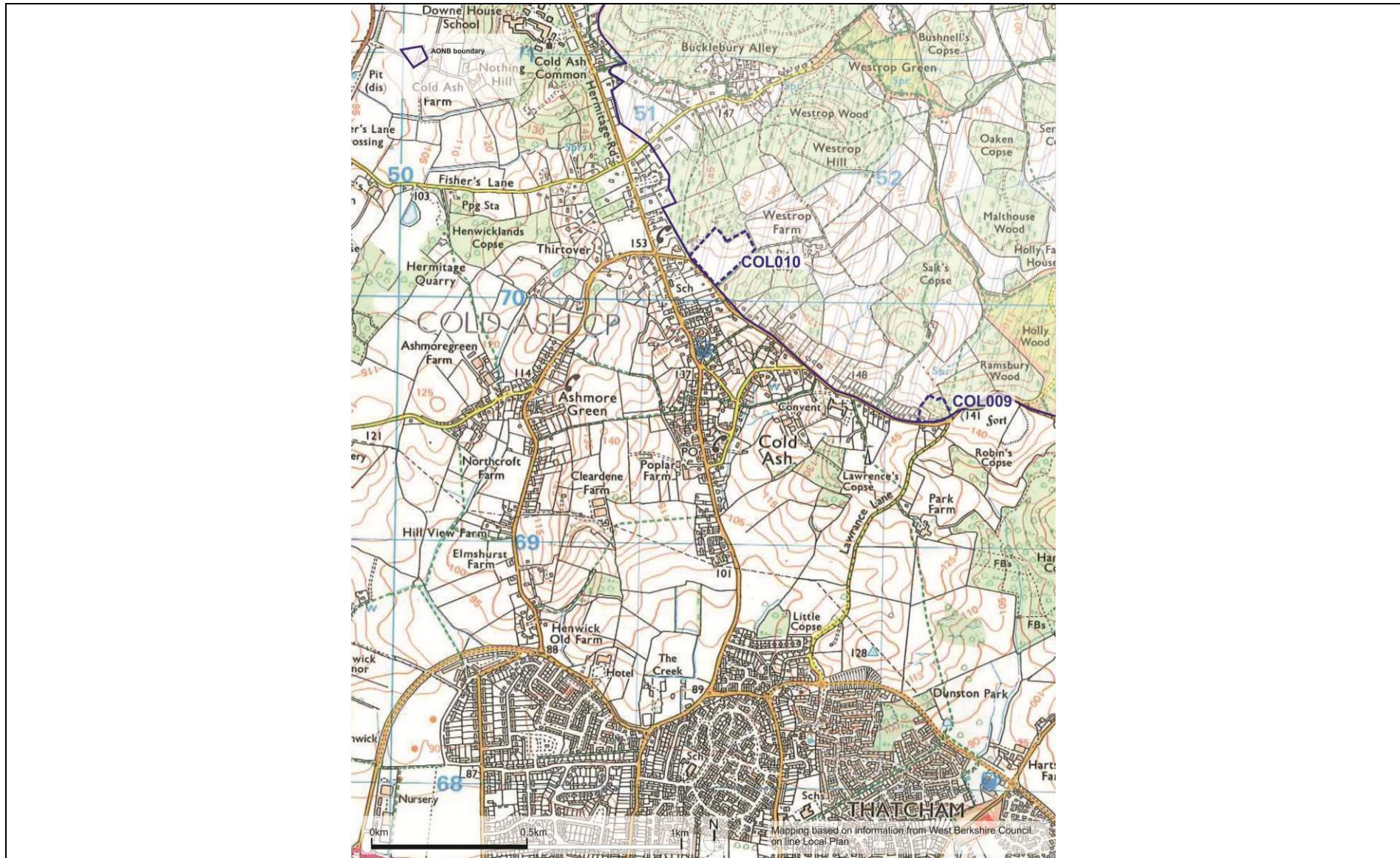


Figure COL.1: Cold Ash potential housing sites

### Key landscape characteristics of LCA8A

- lowland area at the base of the chalk dip slope, underlain by clays, silts, sands and gravels of the Reading and Bagshot Beds and London Clay, giving rise to nutrient poor, often acidic, soils;
- a broad undulating plateau falling towards the Kennet Valley to the south east and dissected by River Pang;
- variable land cover forming an intricate mosaic of woodland, pasture and small areas of remnant heathland. Some more open areas of arable land can be found on the slopes that drop to the Pang Valley and to the south east near Beenham;
- large, interconnected woodland blocks and strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees restrict views and create an enclosed and intimate character. Low wooded horizons are a feature;
- numerous semi-natural woodlands of ancient origin, with some large commercial plantations. Wooded commons and small areas of remnant heath are a distinctive element;
- many features of biodiversity interest including heathland, dry and wet woodland, bog and areas of wet meadow;
- dominated by small irregular fields of informal and piecemeal enclosures, of medieval and post-medieval date with some larger, more regular and straight edged, formal Parliamentary enclosure on flatter terrain in the south-east and west;
- intricate network of rural lanes, many sunken and overhung by woodland plus more intrusive road infrastructure;
- historic parkland based on medieval deer parks and manor houses with associated ornamental parklands with gardens, rides and plantings are a particular feature;
- flat to undulating plateau, generously scaled rolling landscape with some pronounced wooded ridges (VDS);
- a complex pattern of landscape, dominated by woodland; coniferous, or mixed with beech and birch (VDS);
- pastures; remnant heathlands and commons (VDS);
- heathland and woodland habitats – deciduous and mixed woodland to pasture and arable (VDS);
- the area abounds with natural drains, issues and sinks, all of which help to ensure natural drainage and control the run-off of excessive rainfall. These are particularly evident in the local gaps between Cold Ash and the neighbouring parishes (VDS);
- woodland is a dominant natural feature in this area with a typical landscape of pine and birch. The area along and round Hermitage Road in particular is densely treed and provides a contrast to the more open oak dominated landscape of the clay soils which surround The Ridge (VDS);
- the older parts of the villages are more wooded and have larger and more mature species than the newer parts (VDS);
- in the future, the lack of large trees could have an adverse effect on the village as a whole if sufficient open space is not provided in new developments to allow for planting larger trees (VDS);
- the parish is served with a network of well-used public footpaths, which lead from Ashmore Green via Cold Ash Hill to The Ridge and across wooded areas (VDS);

**Key visual characteristics of LCA8A**

- mainly enclosed landscape;
- notable view from The Ridge across Westrop Farm and Westrop Gulley to Frilsham and Yattendon should be taken into consideration in future development, with efforts made to conserve or enhance it (VDS);
- new development should be designed to conserve and enhance the views of the village within the wider landscape and to conserve and enhance views of the wider countryside from the two villages (VDS);

**Key settlement characteristics of LCA8A**

- dispersed pattern of settlement characteristic of encroachment into areas of common and woodland;
- includes large nucleated villages, lines of estate cottages, loose roadside settlements as well as many dispersed farmsteads and residential country houses;
- well settled area with rising population due to proximity to accessibility to Reading;
- linear settlements within wooded areas; clustered farmsteads and private residences (VDS);
- road pattern with complex winding side lanes with banks and hedgerows and a bridleway network (VDS);
- where appropriate, any proposed development should conserve the diversity and mix of landscape character types in the parish, eg the wooded setting of Cold Ash (VDS);

## Summary of the key characteristics of the settlement and landscape constraints on the extent and location of development

The village of Cold Ash sits on the southern edge of the North Wessex Downs AONB, with much of the village just outside the boundary and only the houses to the east of The Ridge within the boundary (including both sites assessed below). This area is within AONB landscape character area LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons. The linear eastern part of the village extends along a low ridge at 140 to 150m AOD above the river Pang valley to the north east. The eastern countryside edge is generally wooded, with ribbon residential development between woodland blocks and few views over the countryside to the north framed by woodland. The settlement is largely based along the two forked main roads Cold Ash Hill and The Ridge which are joined by Collaroy Road making a loose triangular form. To the north of the main settlement, Hermitage Road becomes even more wooded. Much of the eastern settlement edge along The Ridge is defined by woodland, with one part at the northern end more open. The western edge is more fragmented and less defined by woodland. The village has few open views; with occasional framed views into adjacent fields. The settlement developed following the enclosure of common heathland and none of the existing buildings pre-date 1800. The village has no Conservation Area. The majority of houses have been built since 1940 with some small estates and a number of modern houses along roads leading down to the valleys. Post-war development in the wider area has been intense and spread along the roads between the older settlements of Cold Ash, Longlane, Curridge, Hermitage and Little Hungerford.

The village still largely maintains its ridge top character and linear pattern. The lack of large or medium sized estates helps to retain the distinctive character. The approach to the village at the southern end of The Ridge is clearly defined and the village would benefit from a similar definition to the main approach from Thatcham along Cold Ash Hill.

### Sources:

North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002

Additional information from:

- Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2003 (BLCA)
- Newbury District Landscape Character Assessment 1993 (NDLCA)
- Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC)
- Historic Environment Character Zoning (HECZ)
- Cold Ash and Ashmore Green Village Design Statement 2002 (VDS)



A. Assessment of Potential Housing Site: COL009: Beggars Folly, The Ridge, Cold Ash

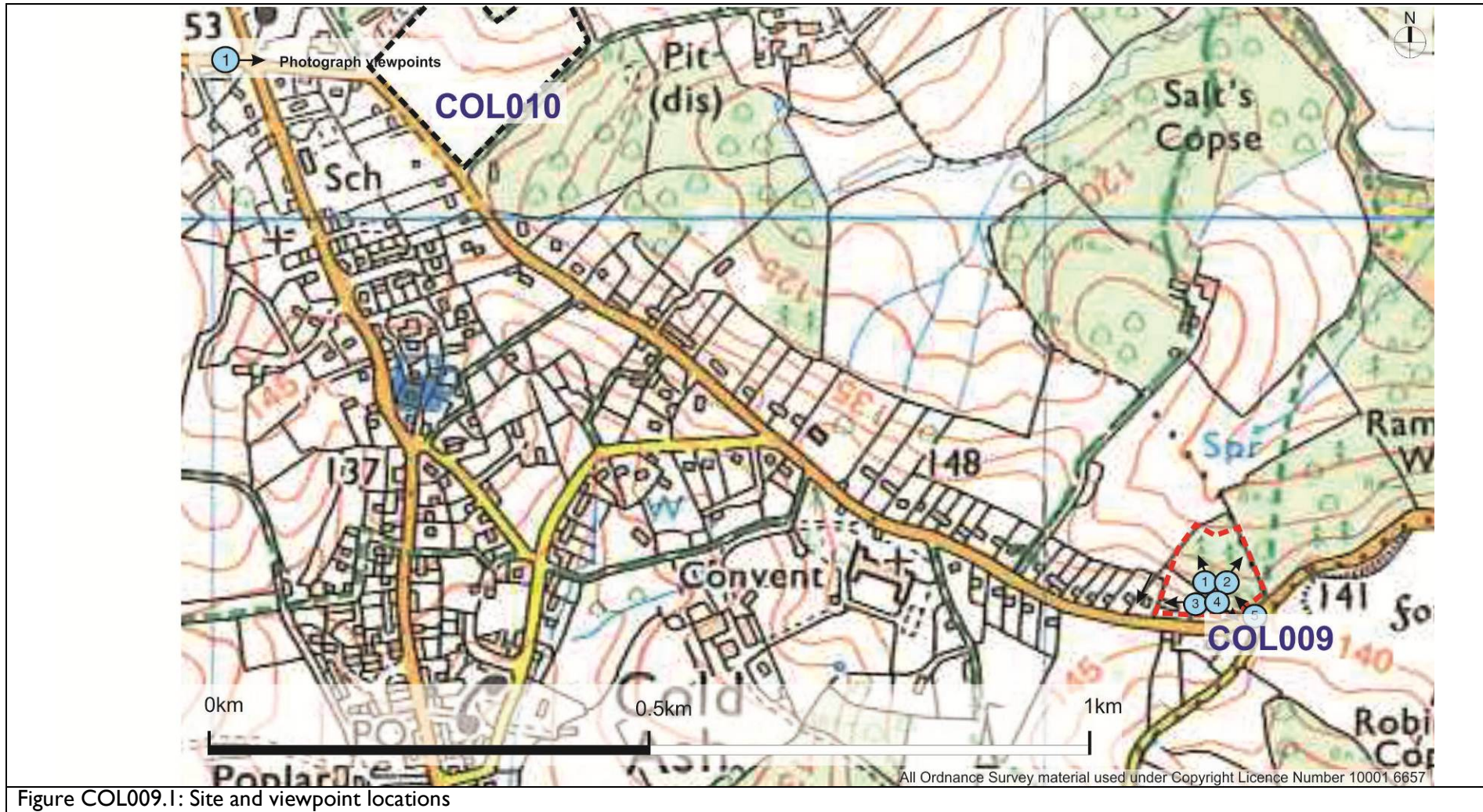


Figure COL009.I: Site and viewpoint locations



**PHOTOGRAPHS**



Viewpoint 1: Sloping north west part of site with glimpsed views north to the wider AONB through the conifer tree belt



Viewpoint 2: Sloping north east part of site enclosed by adjacent Ramsbury Wood (Ancient Woodland and Local Wildlife Site)



Viewpoint 3: Front garden with driveway accessed off of The Ridge



Viewpoint 4: Glimpses of wider countryside to south east through open eastern boundary along the road



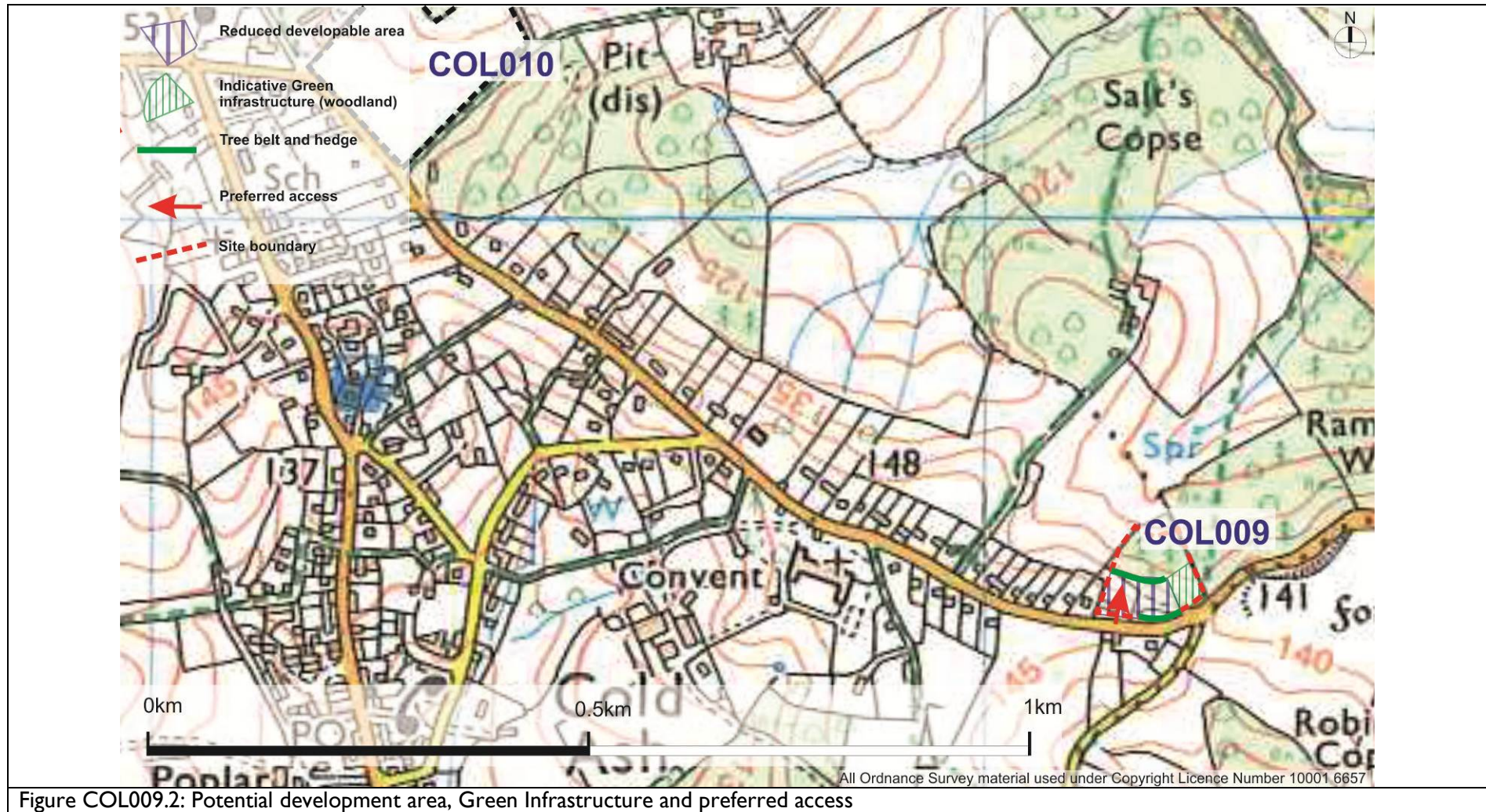


Viewpoint 5: South eastern part of site openly visible from The Ridge approaching the village

### Site description

Site COL009 lies at the eastern extremity of Cold Ash, within the southern boundary of the North Wessex Downs AONB. The site forms the end of the ribbon residential development on the north side of The Ridge. The north part of the site slopes steeply away off of the ridge to a conifer tree belt along the north western boundary and Ramsbury Wood Ancient Woodland and Local Wildlife Site on the north eastern side. The site contains the house (Beggar's Folly) accessed off The Ridge with a small front garden and drive. To the east of this there is an area sub-divided by fences into enclosures and with small outbuildings where a number of animals are kept, including donkeys, pigs, geese, turkeys and chickens. The northern section contains conifer trees and rough grassland on a steeply sloping hillside and is enclosed by the adjacent woodland and tree belt. The tree belt is formed of conifers with high canopies, affording views of open countryside to the north from the lower slope. There is a hedgerow along The Ridge in front of the house with a more open boundary to the east. Views of the village and the wider countryside are generally limited by woodland and landform, though there are glimpses from the centre of the site through the open eastern boundary.

<p><b>Relationship with adjacent settlement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The site is at the eastern extremity of the ribbon of residential built form along the north side of The Ridge which extends beyond the main settlement</li> <li>• The site is part of the rural approach to the village from the east</li> </ul>
<p><b>Relationship with adjacent wider countryside</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The site is surrounded by countryside to north, east and south, adjacent to house and garden to west</li> <li>• Part of the intricate mosaic of woodland and fields to the north and east of Cold Ash</li> <li>• Enclosed, domestic landscape</li> </ul>
<p><b>Impact on key landscape characteristics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of matrix of woodland and fields which has links with the landscape north and east of Cold Ash</li> <li>• Topography in north part of site would require major modification to enable housing development</li> <li>• Potential impact on adjacent Ramsbury Wood Ancient Woodland and Local Wildlife Site on the north eastern edge of site</li> <li>• Impact on rural approach to Cold Ash from the east</li> </ul>
<p><b>Impact on key visual characteristics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site is largely well screened from within the village, but the eastern end is visible on the rural approach to Cold Ash from the east</li> <li>• Potential visual impact on PRoW and the AONB to the north west</li> </ul>
<p><b>Impact on key settlement characteristics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of the whole site would extend the settlement off the ridge and down the slope to the north</li> <li>• Development of the site would extend the settlement beyond its eastern limit and affect the rural approach to the village from the east</li> <li>• Poor landscape and visual connections with the main built form of the settlement</li> </ul>
<p><b>Summary of compliance with NPPF</b></p> <p>Development of the whole of this site would result in harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB. Development on the south western part of the site as shown in CLO009.2 could be accommodated without harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB due to being partly visually contained and previously developed, subject to the recommendations below.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation</b></p> <p>It is recommended that only part of the site is considered further as a potential housing site to avoid affecting the linear settlement pattern and open landscape setting at the eastern end of the village. The development should be contained on the edge of the low ridge on which the village sits and not extend down the valley side, as indicated in Figure COL009.2. Development should be subject to the provision of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a tree belt and hedgerow along the road</li> <li>• a woodland block in the south east corner to mitigate effects on views from the rural lane and a tree belt and hedge along the northern boundary, linking to the existing tree belt and adjacent Ancient Woodland</li> <li>• The preferred access is from The Ridge, via the existing driveway access</li> <li>• A full detailed landscape and visual impact assessment will be required to inform the final capacity of the site</li> <li>• Any further development along The Ridge on the eastern edge of Cold Ash would be heavily constrained by woodland, landform and the linear pattern of development</li> </ul>









**PHOTOGRAPHS**



Viewpoint 1: Long views north across AONB



Viewpoint 2: View west across undulating slope to wooded north western boundary. Houses beyond are screened by trees.



Viewpoint 3: View south-west from PRoW towards well vegetated edge of settlement.

## Site description

Site COL010 is an undulating meadow located on the north eastern side of Cold Ash, east of The Ridge and just within the AONB boundary. The site is defined on the southern and northern sides by woodland (partly designated as a Local Wildlife Site), with The Ridge forming the western boundary and the settlement beyond. The eastern edge is open to the wider countryside with long views across the valley which slopes away from the low ridge on which Cold Ash sits. A public right of way runs just outside the south eastern boundary with open views across the site. One of the notable views included in the VDS is looking east across the site from The Ridge. The boundary along The Ridge has a belt of TPO trees and a partial hedge, with a field gate access.

### Relationship with adjacent settlement

- Site is contained on the western edge by the settlement
- Much of site extends well beyond the characteristic narrow, linear development along the east side of The Ridge
- Very little intervisibility with the urban edge

### Relationship with adjacent wider countryside

- The site has a strong relationship with the wider AONB landscape to the north, east and south
- The site extends down the slope towards the River Pang tributary valley
- Part of the woodland/field mosaic on the north and east sides of Cold Ash
- Semi-enclosed landscape
- The site is surrounded by countryside to north, east and south
- The site is the only opportunity along The Ridge where views across open fields and the countryside beyond are possible
- Part of the tranquil landscape east of Cold Ash
- Public right of way along the south eastern boundary linking to the wider countryside

### Impact on key landscape characteristics

- Potential loss of significant tree belt, including TPO trees
- Loss of matrix of woodland and open fields which has links with the wider landscape
- Topography would require modification to enable housing development
- Loss of visual and aural tranquillity
- Impact on adjacent Local Wildlife Site (woodland)

### Impact on key visual characteristics

- The site is not widely visible from within Cold Ash
- Loss of glimpses across open fields and beyond from The Ridge – the only place where this is possible and a view noted in the VDS as important
- Visual impact on views from the adjacent PRow and the wider AONB to the north



**Impact on key settlement characteristics**

- Development of the site would extend the settlement down the slope towards the Pang valley
- Development of the site would result in the erosion of the linear pattern of development along the eastern side of The Ridge
- Development of the site would result in an uncharacteristically large housing estate
- Poor landscape and visual connections with the existing built form

**Summary of compliance with NPPF**

Development of this site would result in significant harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB

**Recommendations**

The site is not recommended for further consideration as a potential housing site on landscape grounds.

**Conclusion**

Only one of these two sites is recommended, in part, as a potential housing site. This small amount of development could be achieved without harm to the wider AONB, the settlement characteristics and without extending beyond the existing settlement envelope. The recommended green infrastructure would strengthen the countryside edge at the southern end of The Ridge.