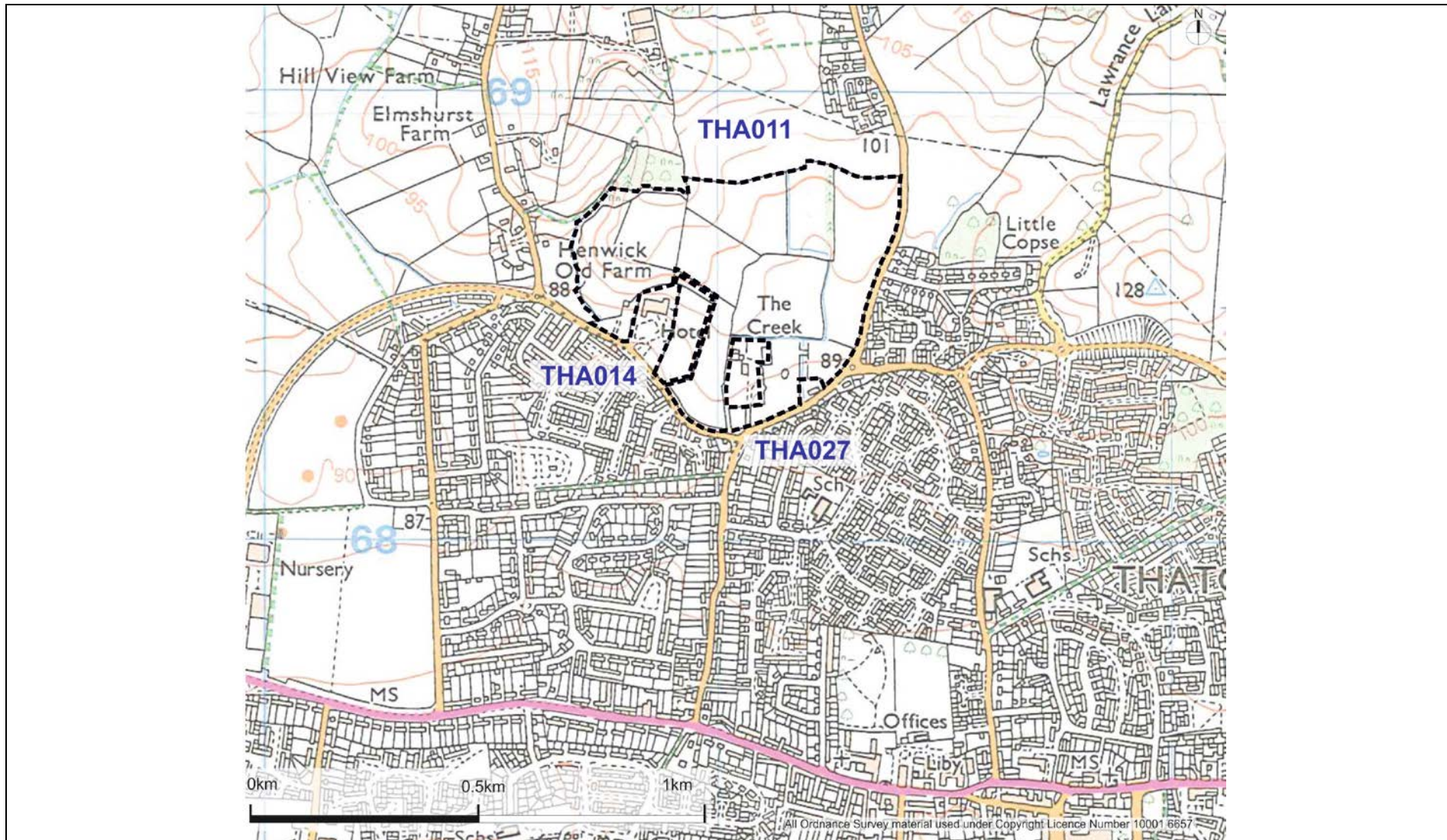


THATCHAM



FigureTHA.1: Thatcham potential housing sites

Assessment of Settlement

Settlement	Thatcham
North Wessex Downs AONB Character areas closest to Thatcham sites : Adjacent to LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons	
Date of site survey	1 May 2015
Surveyor	BK

Key landscape characteristics of LCA8A and landscape setting

- 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
- Small to medium scaled transition from plateau to lower open farmland (NDLCA LCT14)
- Lanes traversing the slopes (NDLCA LCT14)
- Valued countryside of a mix of woodlands, pasture and open farmland (NDLCA LCT14)

Key visual characteristics of LCA8A and landscape setting

- Visually intrusive horse paddocks (NDLCA LCT14)
- Valued views of parklands (NDLCA LCT14).

Key settlement characteristics of LCA8A and landscape setting

- Interconnected small hamlets and scattered farmsteads above the valley settlement of Thatcham (NDLCA LCT14)
- Historic routes linking settlements (NDLCA LCT14)
- Thatcham characterised by large estates of inter-war housing, post-war suburban housing and late 20th century private housing development with an older town centre (Quality Design SPD- Part 3)

An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire (LSS) 2009: LLCA14A: Ashmore Green and Lower Cold Ash Plateau Edge

LLCA14A Ashmore Green and Lower Cold Ash Plateau Edge has an overall *medium sensitivity*.

Ashmore Green and Lower Cold Ash Plateau Edge is characterised by a mix of small and complex field pattern and modern linear settlement. There are good landscape links with the adjacent parts of the escarpment and there is a well defined edge to Thatcham. The Key elements of landscape sensitivity *are*:

- Complex rolling topography part of the long escarpment along the southern edge of the AONB
- Mosaic patchwork of small fields with woodlands
- Locally important hedgerows and tree lines in southern part
- Roadside trees
- Long views from east part across the Kennet Valley
- Woodland BAP habitat
- Strong linear settlement pattern
- Poor internal boundary definition in some parts
- Generally a moderate level of tranquillity
- Mixed age and style built form with older farmsteads scattered, closest to Thatcham

Wider landscape: LLCA14A: Ashmore Green and Lower Cold Ash Plateau Edge has good landscape links with I5A to the west and I4F to the east. Intervisibility between these areas is good if broken up by the landform and vegetation. I4A contrasts with the character of I3C with the boundary marked by the change of slope.

Setting to the urban form: LLCA14A: Ashmore Green and Lower Cold Ash Plateau Edge abuts Thatcham and is separated from it by the perimeter road and tree planting along the road edge. The settlement edge follows the contours, with older farmsteads hugging the road.

West Berkshire Core Strategy: Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of Potential Strategic Development sites 2011

Area 8 North Thatcham Recommendation: Extension of Thatcham onto the more prominent higher ground of the shallow ridgeline should be avoided. However, provided that the extant vegetation and the setting of the historic farmhouses is retained and used to break up the site, the lower fields in the south-east part of the area may be suitable for urban expansion. Built development on the small scale steeply sided valley near Henwick Old Farm should be avoided.

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

A detailed strategic assessment of the landscape sensitivity around Thatcham has already been undertaken in the previous landscape sensitivity study, 'An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire' (LSS) (2009) (<http://info.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=36263&p=0>). This assessment builds upon the work in that assessment by examining the northern part of Thatcham and its landscape setting in greater detail, specifically concentrating on the special qualities and key characteristics which contribute to the natural beauty of the AONB. The sensitivity classification and key landscape and visual aspects of each LLCA are considered within each potential housing site report.

The landscape pattern, the exposure and character of the adjacent built form and the visual qualities of the AONB all vary along its edge and so there is some subsequent variation in the landscape sensitivity of the open land on the urban edge of Thatcham. This is reflected in the findings of the LSS. The three additional potential housing sites in this area all fall within LLCA14A with a *medium* sensitivity.

The main part of Thatcham sits on the valley floor of the Kennet Valley, between 70m and 95m AOD, below the rising slopes up to the plateau edge which in turn lies below the plateau ridge which characterises the AONB. The built form has expanded northwards from the A4 and the town centre but rarely extends above 90m AOD, only locally above 90m AOD at Cold Ash Hill and the Regency Park Hotel, and is largely contained by the peripheral road along Bowling Green Road and Floral Way. This gives Thatcham a generally very well defined northern boundary which separates the town from the AONB.

To the north of Thatcham the slopes start gently and then steepen with incised valleys and higher bluffs running in a general north-south direction. This landform is reinforced by the pattern of woodland which often follows the landform. The North Wessex Downs AONB is distinguished here by medium sized woodlands along the plateau edge which restrict views from the AONB southwards to Thatcham. However there are many rural lanes and footpaths which drop down the slopes giving views to Thatcham and back up to the edge of the AONB. The settlement is at times softened by tree planting in the hedgerows and copses in the open landscape, or tree planting and woodland within the urban area and by planting along the peripheral road. Elsewhere, where such tree cover is absent, the housing is exposed.

The town is flanked to the south by the Greenham/Crookham escarpment which rises steeply from the valley floor allowing vistas across the valley to the town and open countryside to the north above the settlement edge. In these views Thatcham is prominent but contained within the valley floor. Individual properties on higher ground 100m AOD and above, such as Colthrop Manor and Henwick Manor, are prominent within the open countryside, illustrating the prominence of these rural slopes.

Although Thatcham has expanded northwards towards the AONB, further major expansion may impact on the landscape setting of the AONB. Where some smaller scale development may be recommended, great care will still be needed to minimise the impact on the landscape character of the surrounding AONB and its landscape setting, through limitations on development and generous provision of Green Infrastructure. Particular care will be needed to avoid intrusion from the built form on the wider AONB landscape, especially where the open panoramic views are a notable valued feature and a key constraint on development.

Sources:

North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002; and An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire (LSS) 2009: West Reading

Additional information from:

- Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2003 (BLCA)
- Newbury District Landscape Character Assessment 1993 (NDLCA)
- Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC)
- Quality Design SPD- Part 3

A. Assessment of Potential Housing Site: THA011

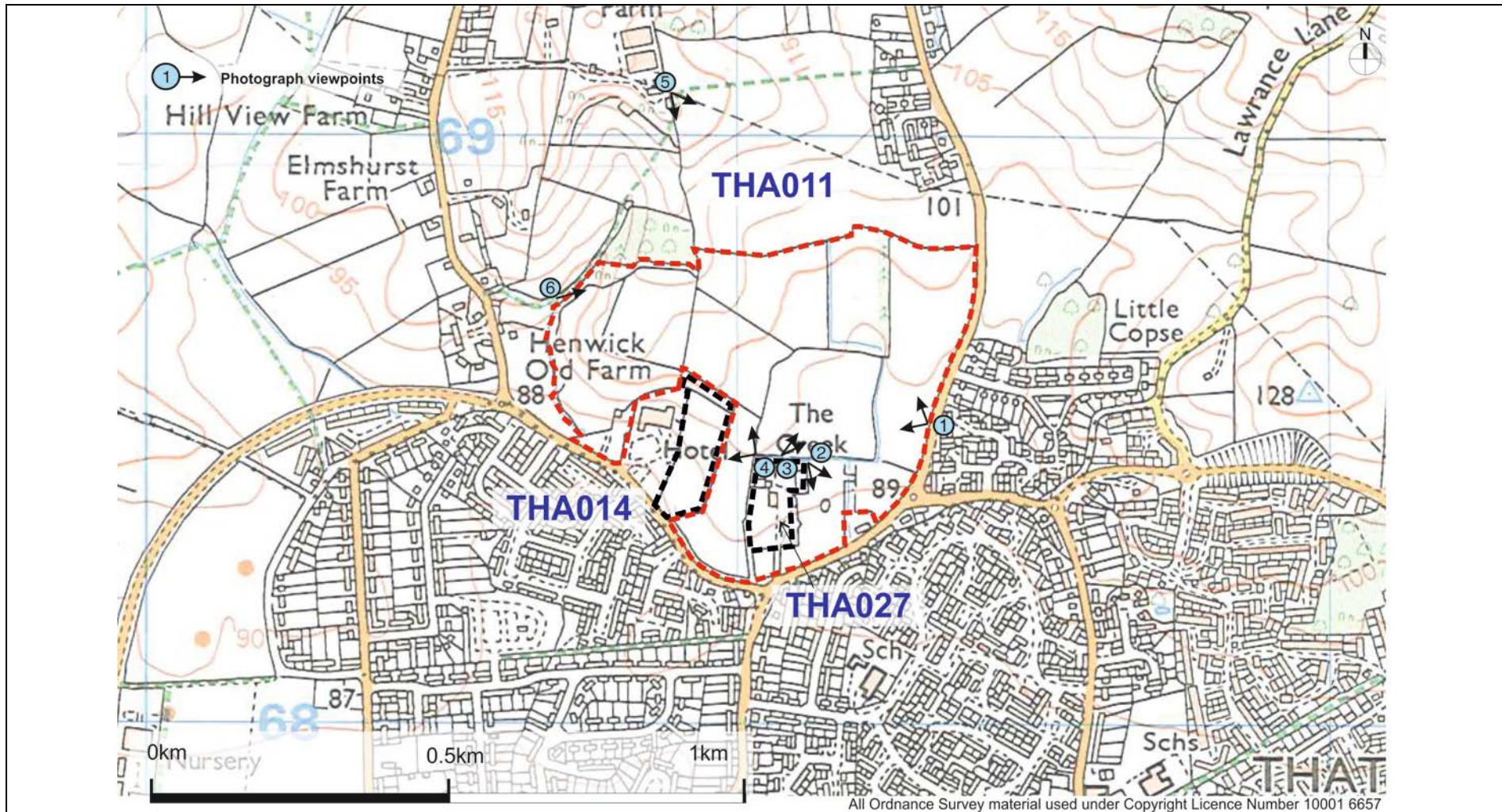


Figure THA011.1: Site and viewpoint locations

PHOTOGRAPHS



Viewpoint 1: View over site from Cold Ash Hill looking west and north with houses on southern edge of Cold Ash visible in the distance to the north



Viewpoint 2: View over site from the garden of THA027 looking east over fields with tree cover along Bowling Green Road to the far right



Viewpoint 3: View from garden of THA027 looking north north-east to tree cover up the hillside and houses along Cold Ash Hill



Viewpoint 4: View from gardens to THA027 looking westwards over fields towards THA014



Viewpoint 5: View from the footpath running from Henwick Old Farm to Cold Ash Hill south of Poplar Farm. The site is visible through the tree line at the far end of the open field in the foreground and extends across the view. View to Greenham-Crookham escarpment on the horizon. Glimpses of Thatcham in the valley



Viewpoint 6: View from footpath from Henwick Old Farm looking up the steep landform of the western edge of the site

Site description

Site THA011 forms a large area of open countryside under grass to the north of Bowling Green Road and Heath Lane. It is bounded to the east by Cold Ash Hill. The southern part of this eastern boundary is open with housing opposite, to the east of Cold Ash Hill, below the lower slopes 95m AOD contour. The north part of the Cold Ash Hill is defined by a hedge with open fields to the east of Cold Ash Hill. To the south, the site is bounded by the well defined edge of Thatcham along Heath Lane and Bowling Green Road and the dense mature tree cover to the north side of these roads. To the west lies Henwick Old Farm, a listed building with its own grounds. North of Henwick Old Farm is a footpath which runs through a shallow but pronounced valley and up the hillside to cross over to Cold Ash Hill, north of the site. The northern boundary follows a tree lined field boundary between woodland north-west of the site and Cold Ash Hill. The site is surrounded on three sides by open countryside and forms the major part of the open countryside between Cold Ash and Thatcham. The site wraps around THA014 and THA027 which are considered later in this report.

<p>Relationship with adjacent settlement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Southern part of the site adjoins modern housing off Bowling Green road, Heath Lane and Cold Ash Hill • The site lies beyond the well defined edge of Thatcham which is delineated by the roads and the mature tree cover along the northern boundary of the highway • The south eastern part of the site lies on the lower slopes below the 95m AOD contour • The larger part lies on the rising middle slopes up to 105m well away from the valley floor
<p>Relationship with adjacent wider countryside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The open fields are an important part of the open wider landscape above Thatcham • The landscape pattern of well defined field boundaries with hedgerows, trees and either tree belts or copses is typical of the local landscape character • The site is an important part of the open landscape between Cold Ash and Thatcham • The upper parts of the site are also an important part of the landscape (rather than visual) setting of the AONB • There are no views from the AONB • Visual links with the wider landscape are visible from the footpath and Cold Ash Hill
<p>Impact on key landscape characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of open field network • Landscape features on the site would be absorbed into development • Potential loss of tree cover • Urbanisation of upper slopes of the site • Loss of open countryside separation between Cold Ash and Thatcham
<p>Impact on key visual characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual impact on views from the footpath through open countryside
<p>Impact on key settlement characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of Thatcham above its valley floor location • Potential expansion above the current limit of development in this area at 95m AOD • Potential urbanisation of the rural setting of Henwick Old Farm listed building • Expansion north of the current strong boundary • Potential erosion of the separate identities of Thatcham and Cold Ash
<p>Summary of compliance with NPPF</p> <p>Development on the whole of this site would result in harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB. Cold Ash is an AONB settlement and although it has expanded southwards out of the AONB and down the slope towards Thatcham, it retains a distinctive separate identity. The development of the whole of this site would lead to the perception of a merging of the two settlements and would therefore have an adverse impact on the AONB settlement pattern.</p>

Recommendations

It is recommended that only part of the site should be pursued further as a potential housing site as shown in Figure THA011.2. subject to the following requirements to conserve and enhance the AONB and to maintain the character of the land north of Thatcham:

- The potential development area is in two main areas, wrapping around THA027 to the west, south and east, and limited to land on the lower slopes lying below the 95m AOD contour
- Development should not extend into the central 'square' field or north of the road named Southend off Cold Ash Hill in order to maintain the separate identities of Cold Ash and Thatcham
- This limitation of the potential development area would also soften the Cold Ash Hill approach into Thatcham; and provide an opportunity to retain the agricultural fields whilst providing a good sized area of Green Infrastructure to the north of the potential development area
- The extent of the potential development area is also limited by the need to protect the rural setting of Henwick Old Farm and the small scale distinctive landscape north-east of the listed building
- Retention of the agricultural fields on the middle slopes above 95m AOD as shown in Figure THA011.2
- Creation of a generous area of Green Infrastructure to the north of the potential development area as shown in Figure THA011.2 to act as a transition between the built up area and retained open countryside; to screen views from the north; and to contribute to the environmental assets of the area
- Existing tree belts to be retained and supplemented with new tree belts along Cold Ash Hill and along the boundaries with the adjacent open countryside, THA027 and THA014
- Green Infrastructure to break up the built form
- Preferred access is from the more urban sections of the road network as shown on figure THA011.2

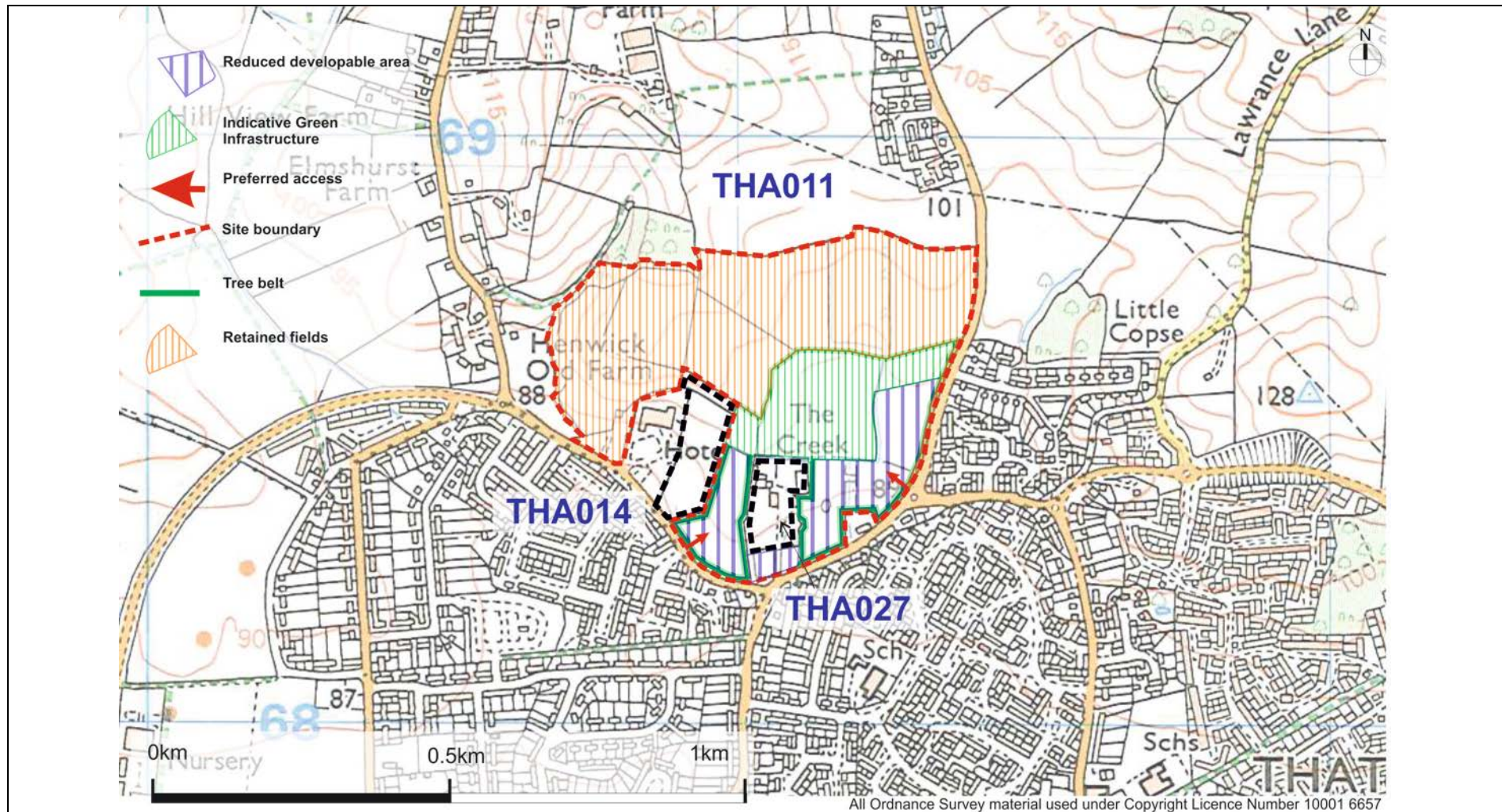


Figure THA011.2: Potential development area, Green Infrastructure and preferred access

B. Assessment of Potential Housing Site: THA014

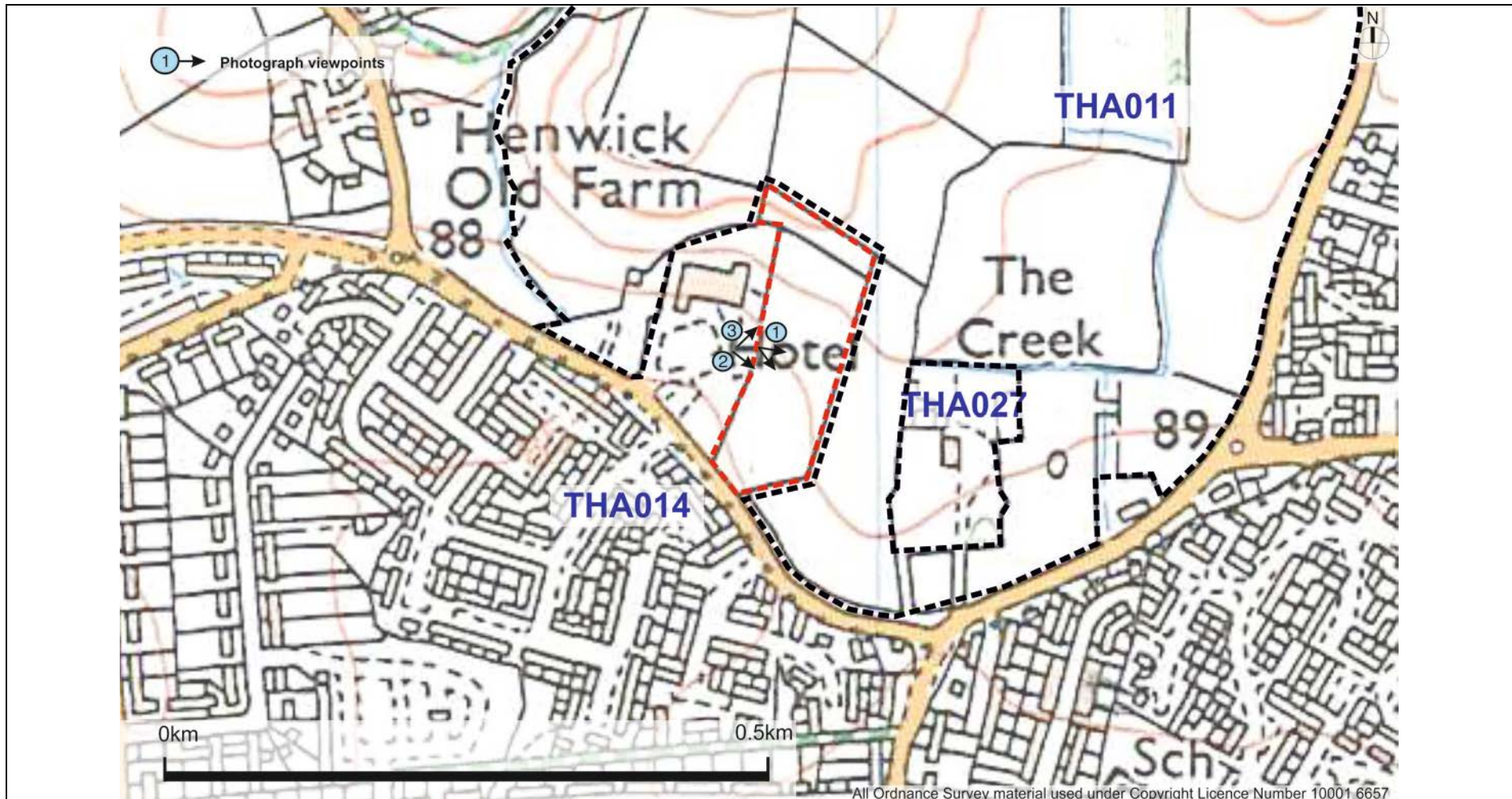


Figure THA014.1: Site and viewpoint locations

PHOTOGRAPHS



Viewpoint 1: View from the car park at the Regency Park Hotel looking south-east to the trees along Bowling Green Road



Viewpoint 2: View from hotel parking into the south-east corner of the site with planting along Bowling Green Road to right

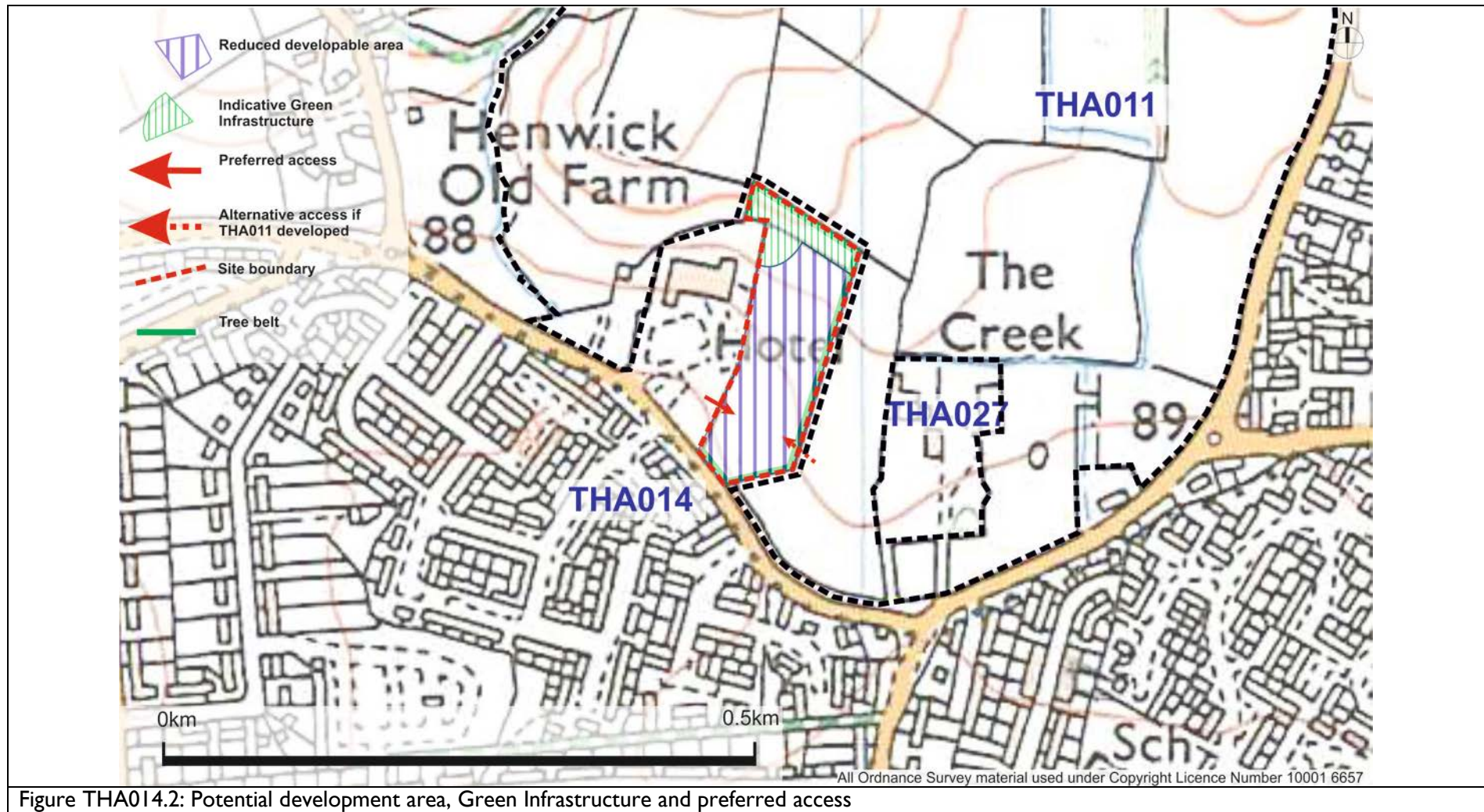


Viewpoint 3: View from hotel car park to north end of site adjacent to hotel building

Site description

Site THA014 forms a large area of amenity grassland immediately to the east of the Regency Park Hotel. The boundary of the site with an area of car parking and hotel buildings is open. Dense hedgerow encloses the site along the northern, southern and eastern boundaries with glimpses through to the fields within THA011 to the east.

<p>Relationship with adjacent settlement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The site lies beyond the well defined boundary of Thatcham formed by Bowling Green Road and its tree and hedgerow cover between the site and the road • The site is separated by open fields from the modern housing on Heath Lane and Cold Ash Hill • A large part of the site lies below 95m AOD which forms the limit of development up the hillside to the east • The site is separated from the older settlement at Henwick Old Farm by the hotel grounds • The site is influenced by the built form of the hotel
<p>Relationship with adjacent wider countryside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The character of the site contrasts with the open landscape to the west, north and east • The site is largely separated from the wider landscape by the surrounding vegetation • The site is not visible from the wider landscape
<p>Impact on key landscape characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential loss of boundary vegetation • Loss of open land to the north of Bowling Green Road within the open countryside
<p>Impact on key visual characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited visual impact provided the boundary vegetation is retained
<p>Impact on key settlement characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of Thatcham north of a well defined boundary formed by Bowling Green Road and its vegetation • Development could be largely below the current northerly limit in this area at 95m AOD • Development could be contained as an adjunct to the hotel
<p>Summary of compliance with NPPF</p> <p>Development on this site would not result in harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB.</p>
<p>Recommendations</p> <p>It is recommended that this site should be considered further as a potential housing site as shown in Figure THA014.2. subject to the following requirements to conserve and enhance the AONB; and to maintain the character of the land north of Thatcham:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The potential development area should be retained below the 95m AOD contour as shown in THA014.2 • Retention of the tree cover and incorporation into an area of Green Infrastructure in the north of the site • Reinforcement of existing tree line along the Bowling Green Road, eastern and northern boundaries • Green Infrastructure to break up the built form • Preferred access is from within the southern part of hotel grounds or, if THA011 is developed, from the western portion of the potential development area in Figure THA001.2



C. Assessment of Potential Housing Site: THA027

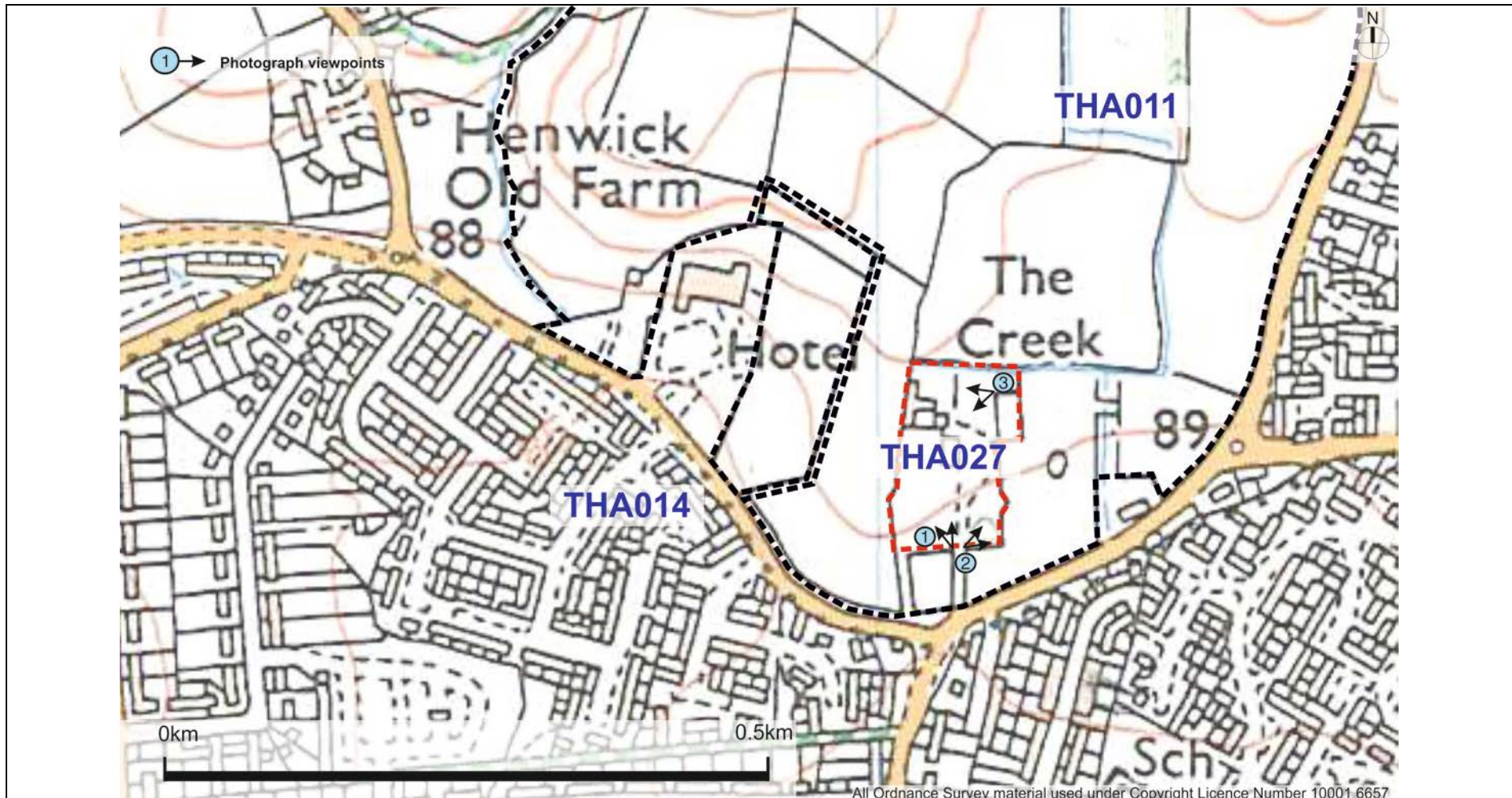


Figure THA027.1: Site and viewpoint locations

PHOTOGRAPHS



Viewpoint 1: View north north-west from entrance to site off Bowling Green Road towards the house over former lawn tennis courts



Viewpoint 2: View north north-east from entrance to site off Bowling Green Road towards the house over former lawn tennis courts - with land within THA011 to the east



Viewpoint 3: View west from edge of hard tennis courts to house, cottage and stables

Site description

Site THA027 forms a house and grounds which include the main house, a cottage, stables and hard tennis court with lawns, mature trees and ornamental planting. It is surrounded by the open fields under pasture of THA011 which are visible through post and rail fences around the site. To the south lies an area of open land, part of THA011, which separates the site from Bowling Green Road. There are only filtered views into the site.

<p>Relationship with adjacent settlement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The site lies beyond the well defined boundary of Thatcham formed by Bowling Green Road and its tree and hedgerow cover between the site and the road • The site is separated by open fields from the modern housing on Heath Lane and Cold Ash Hill • The site lies below 95m AOD which forms the limit of development up the hillside
<p>Relationship with adjacent wider countryside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The character of the site contrasts with the open landscape to the west, north and east • However it is typical of more isolated properties set within the hillsides leading up to the AONB and Cold Ash • The site is not visible from the wider landscape
<p>Impact on key landscape characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential loss of good trees • Loss of very low density developed site which contributes to the transition from the town to the open countryside
<p>Impact on key visual characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential views from Bowling Green Road, Heath Lane and Cold Ash Hill depending on the form of the development
<p>Impact on key settlement characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of Thatcham north of a well defined boundary formed by Bowling Green Road and its vegetation • Development would be below the current northerly limit in this area at 95m AOD
<p>Summary of compliance with NPPF</p> <p>Development on this site would not result in harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB.</p>
<p>Recommendations</p> <p>It is recommended that the site could be considered further as a potential housing site in conjunction with THA011, as shown in THA027.2 and THA011.2. Any development would be subject to the following requirements to conserve and enhance the AONB; and to maintain the character of the land north of Thatcham:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The potential development area would be below the 95m AOD contour and form the northern limit of development off Bowling Green Road as shown in THA027.2 • Most of the site would be suitable for development subject to a narrow belt of Green Infrastructure along the southern edge as shown in Figure THA027.2 to retain the character of the Bowling Green Road at this point • Tree belts to be provided to the boundaries with open countryside or to the adjacent THA011 potential development area • Green Infrastructure to break up the built form • Preferred access from either the existing access point or from THA011 if this is considered further.

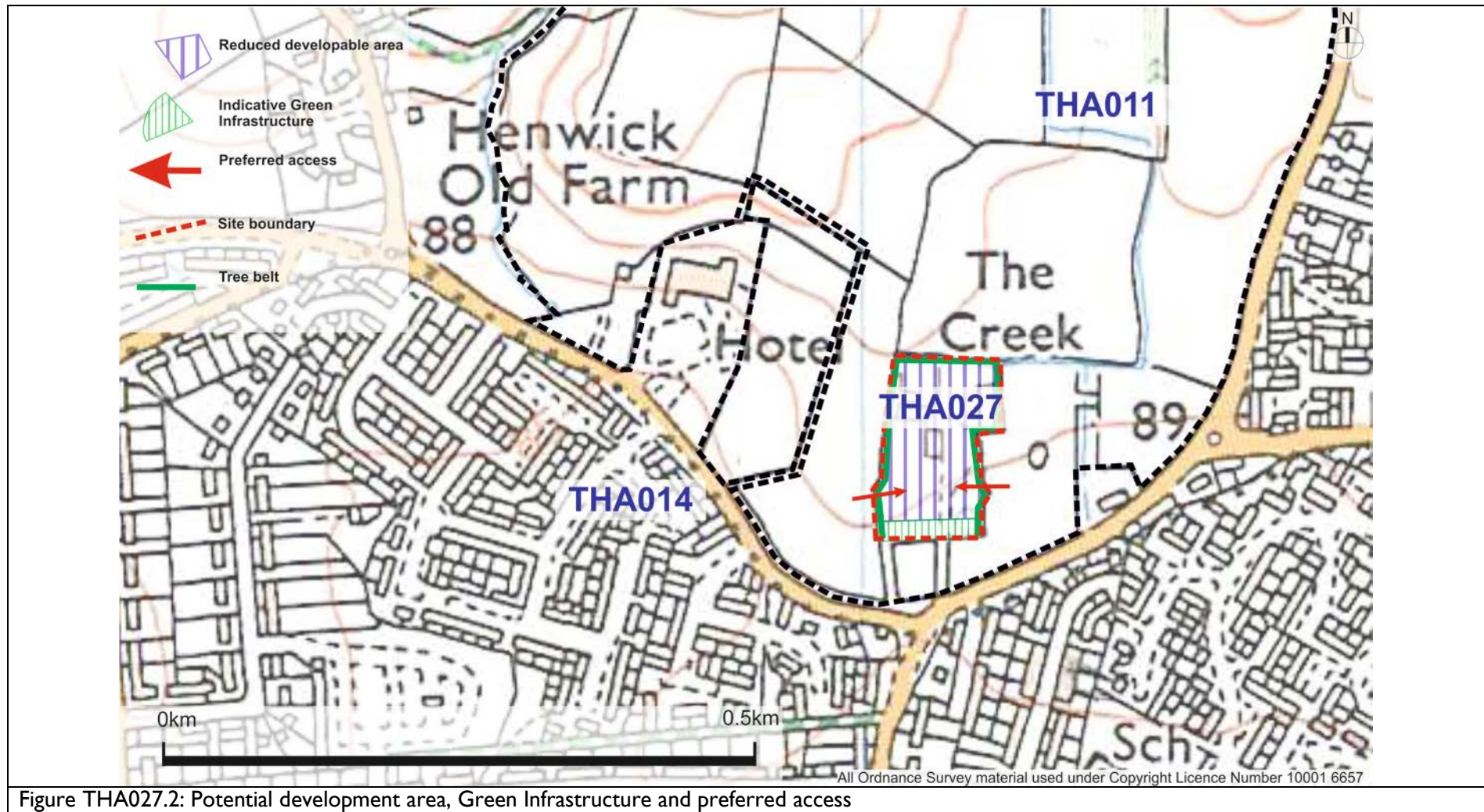


Figure THA027.2: Potential development area, Green Infrastructure and preferred access

Conclusion and cumulative effect of all THA sites (THA011, THA014 and THA027) and the potential cumulative impact on Thatcham and Cold Ash

It is recommended that the above three sites should only be considered further as a whole, limiting development to the slopes below 95m AOD. If any one of the sites were to be developed in isolation this would result in an unacceptable level of expansion of Thatcham north of the well defined settlement boundary along Bowling Green Road and Heath Lane. In the light of modern housing along the lower slopes of Cold Ash Hill, the low visibility of those parts of the sites close to the settlement and the more suburban character of these particular areas, the recommended reduced developable areas shown in THA0011.2, THA014.2 and THA027.2 could be justified in landscape and visual terms. However it is particularly important to limit the northern expansion of this area in order to retain the separate identities of Cold Ash and Thatcham, to retain the open rural character of the open countryside between the two settlements and to prevent further intervisibility between the built forms of each settlement.

Figures THA011.2, THA014.2 and THA027.2 all show individual access points in accordance with the study methodology but the preferred access would be to as shown in Figure THA011.2 with access points into the adjacent sites, as shown as alternative access points on Figures THA014.2 and THA027.2.