

THEALE:

Settlement	Theale
North Wessex Downs AONB Character areas closest to Theale sites : Adjacent to LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons	
Date of site survey	15 April 2015
Surveyor	BK

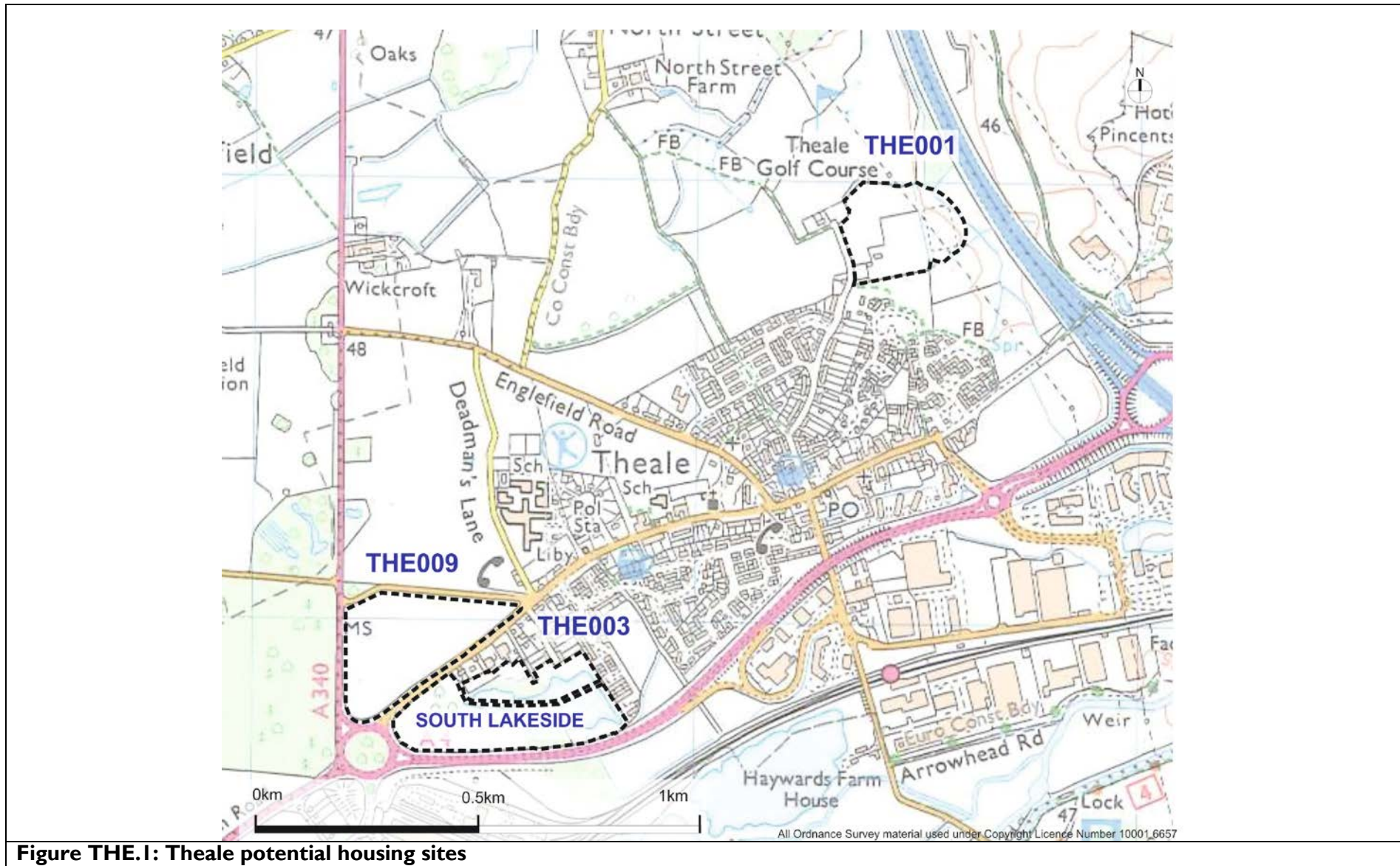


Figure THE.1: Theale potential housing sites

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
- Expansive flat valley floor (NDLCA LCT17)
- historic parkland based on medieval deer parks and manor houses with associated ornamental parklands with gardens, rides and plantings are a particular feature – for example Englefield Park Grade II Registered Park and Garden north of Theale

Key visual characteristics of LCA8A and landscape setting

- Open views over large arable fields (NDLCA LCT17)
- Open landscape visible from the AONB escarpment (NDLCA LCT17).

Key settlement characteristics of LCA8A and landscape setting

- 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 and accessibility to Reading
- Theale characterised by its linear Conservation Area with pre-War development to the north and scattered along Church Street. Post war suburban development in large areas encloses the historic core to the north, west and south with Late 20th century private housing development to the north-east and south along the A4. (Quality Design SPD- Part 3)
- Open landscape valued as a setting to Theale (NDLCA LCT17)
- Linear settlement patterns traditionally along the A4 (NDLCA LCT17)

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

The additional potential housing sites in Theale all lie in close proximity to and within the setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB. A detailed strategic assessment of the landscape sensitivity around Theale has already been undertaken in a 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 Study identified local landscape character areas (LLCAs) and describes the landscape sensitivity of each LLCA. This addendum builds upon the work in that assessment by examining Theale and its landscape setting in relation to three sites THE001; THE003; and THE009 in greater detail, specifically concentrating on the special qualities and key characteristics which might 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 all vary along this edge of the AONB and there is some subsequent variation in the landscape sensitivity of the open land on the urban edge. This is reflected in the findings of the LSS. The three additional potential housing sites in this area fall within LLCAs in that study which vary from *low* to *medium* sensitivity.

The lower levels of sensitivity reflect the influence of large scale commercial development as at Foster Yeoman, major highway infrastructure and derelict sites such as South Lakeside and the influence of modern development at Theale. Theale lies on the valley floor on the slightly higher ground above the river Kennet. Commercial development is concentrated south of the A4 with housing and village facilities extending north of the A4 into the open landscape in the southern part of LLCA16A: Englefield Wooded Farmlands. A triangle of open countryside north of Theale, between the A340 to the west (at the foot of the Englefield AONB escarpment) to the M4 to the east (at the foot of the Sulham AONB escarpment), lies outside of the AONB but provides a rural setting to the AONB and interface between the two areas of the AONB. All three sites lie in the flat valley floor to the north and west of the village.

Further expansion of Theale has to be considered carefully to avoid undermining the value of the open land in maintaining an attractive landscape setting to the AONB and avoid harming the special qualities of, and views to and from, the AONB escarpments west of Reading. 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. In order to retain the village character, the balance of development and open space within any new village envelope is an important factor in considering any future 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: THE001 Former Sewage Works, Theale

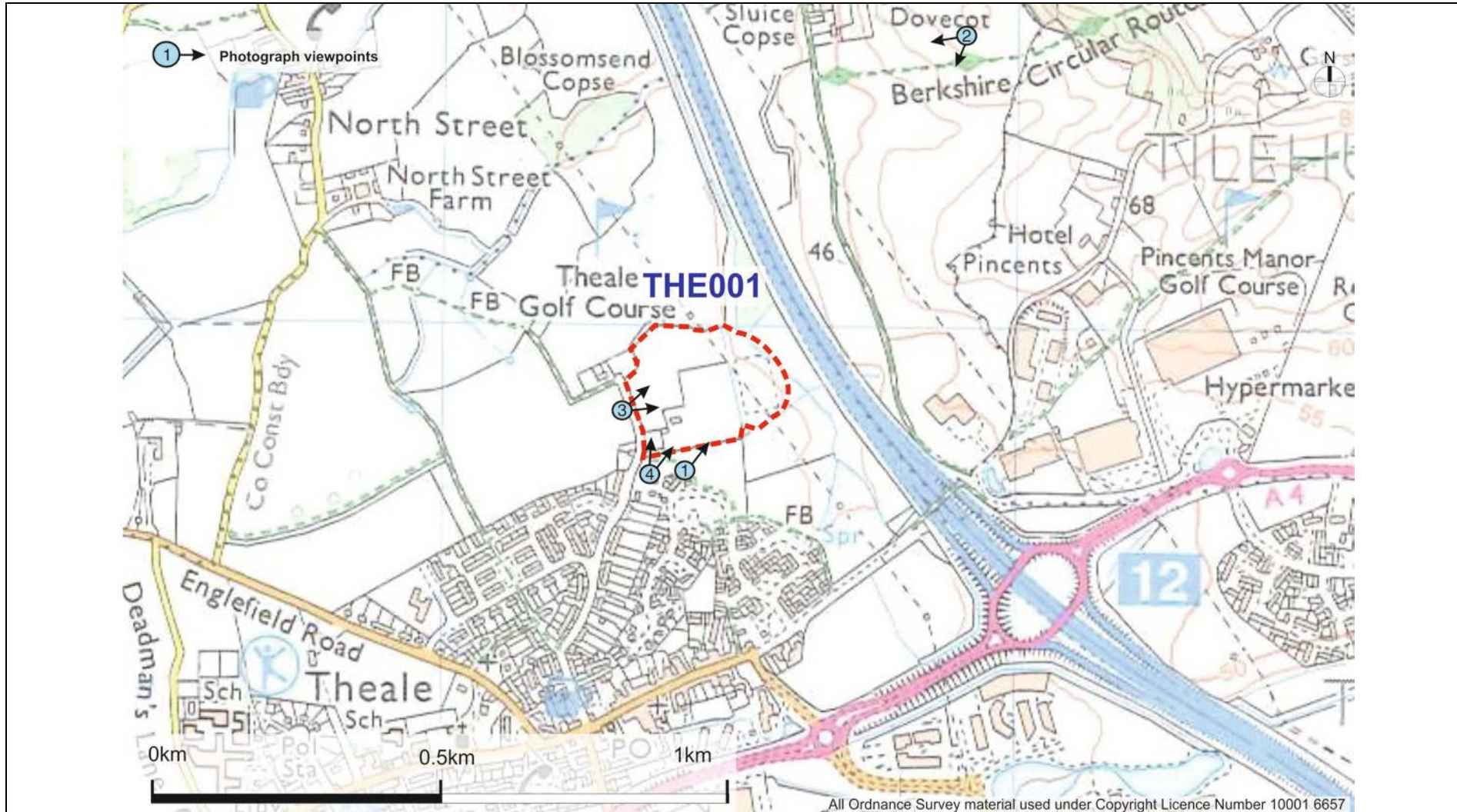


Figure THE001.I: Site and viewpoint locations

An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire (LSS) 2009: LLCA16A: Englefield Wooded Farmlands

LLCA16A: Englefield Wooded Farmlands has an overall *medium sensitivity*.

Englefield Wooded Farmlands is characterised by its mixed agricultural and recreational land use. The area is well vegetated with a complex vegetation pattern in the north, typical, but naturalistic, golf course planting in the centre and little internal boundary treatment and neat roadside hedges in the south. The landscape structure in the south has been weakened and the character eroded through urban fringe elements. The key elements of landscape sensitivity are:

- Part of the flat valley floor between the river Kennet and river Pang
- Extensive areas of woodland, pasture and amenity grassland
- Small to medium scale field pattern well defined by hedgerows and tree belts
- Good sense of seclusion in north
- Narrow winding rural road network
- Contained linear village at North Street
- Scattered farmsteads and other built form clusters
- Visually exposed to views from the escarpments, in particular Englefield
- Significant individual historic buildings and settlement at North Street
- Good level of recreational provision and public rights of way
- BAP woodlands and significant lengths of hedgerow
- Weakened landscape structure in the south west
- Some urban fringe elements such as pylons, sewage plant, lighting to school playing fields
- Tranquillity compromised by urban fringe elements and M4

Wider landscape: LLCA16A Englefield Wooded Farmlands has strong landscape links with land to the north and north west at the foot of the Englefield escarpment beyond the study area. It is a visually enclosed area but visible from the higher ground of the rural escarpments.

Setting to the urban form: LLCA16A Englefield Wooded Farmlands abuts Theale village and 20E on its southern boundary. The built form of Theale is visually exposed but 16A provides a strong contrast and rural landscape setting to the village.

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

Area 11 East Theale Recommendation: Area 11 covers the south-east corner of LLCA16A (including THE001) and north-west quadrant of LLCA20E. This Study recommended that only a very small section of the north-west quadrant of 20E (to the south of the site), north of Hoad Way and no further east than the current built form edge, be considered as an option site if the gap is to be maintained. Part of 16A may also be acceptable if the existing landscape structure is used to integrate the development and is reinforced to maintain a perceptible gap.

PHOTOGRAPHS





Viewpoint 3: View east over site from Blossom Lane with the tree cover along the M4 and within the AONB visible on the horizon



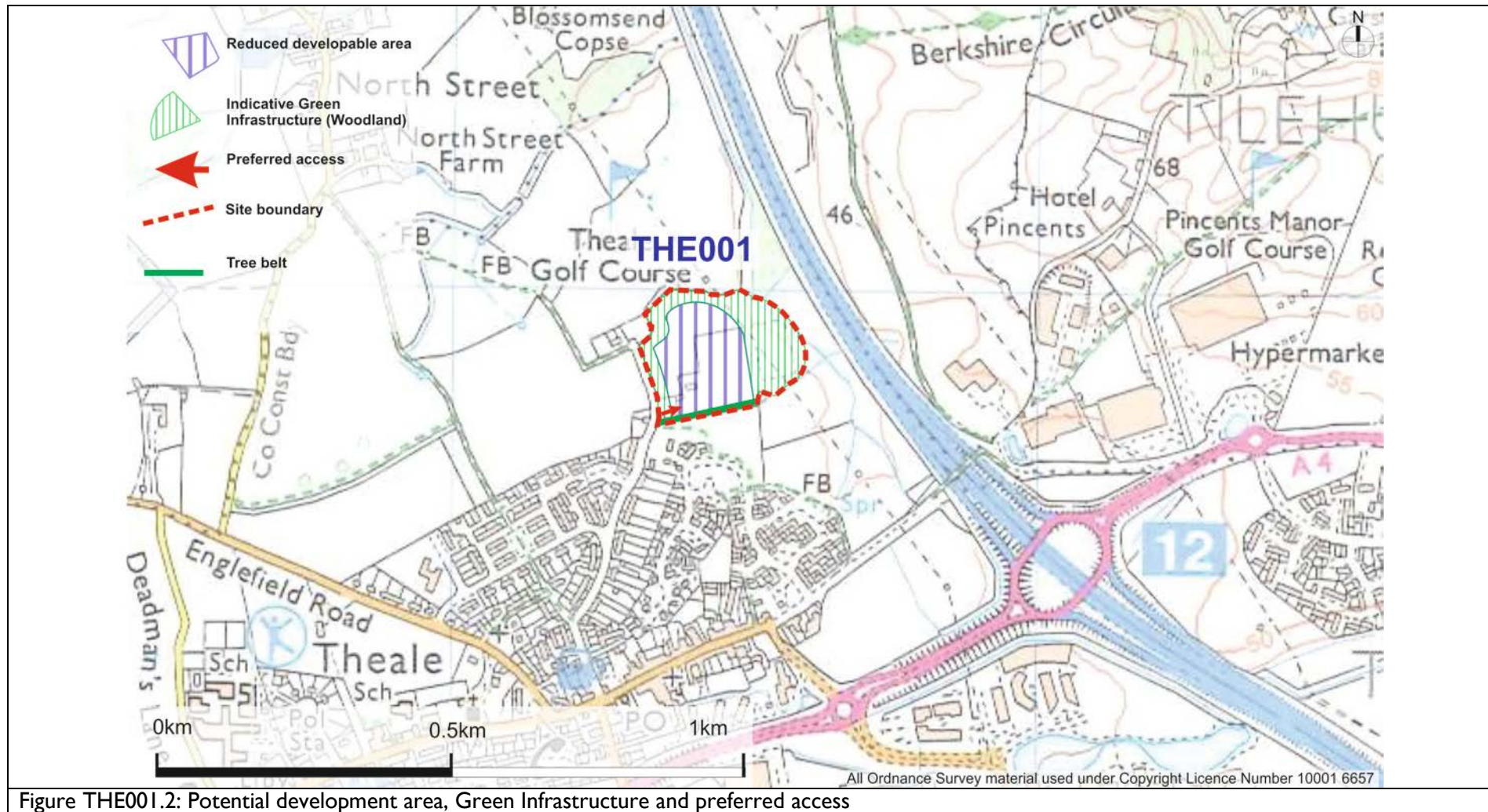
Viewpoint 4: View from open space north of Woodfield Way north into the site. The hedgerow forms the southern boundary of the site.

Site description

Site THE001 forms a flat parcel of land which has formerly been in use as sewage works and is now mainly rough grassland with some hardstandings. A single building in the south of the site has been removed. The site is enclosed by poor fencing and a mature hedgerow with hedgerow trees with gaps in this cover allowing views in from the open space north of Woodfield Close and Blossom Lane. The site is surrounded by a mix of recreational uses (Theale golf course lies to the north and west and the open space at Woodfield Close to the south) and a mix of rough grassland and woodland along the western

M4 corridor to the east. Properties immediately adjacent to the site are rural in character although the site is in close proximity to the housing estates to the south.

<p>Relationship with adjacent settlement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The site is separated from Theale by the narrow open space north of Woodfield Close • Settlement around the site is otherwise rural in character • Site is rather isolated from the existing built up area of Theale
<p>Relationship with adjacent wider countryside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although not in a good condition, the landscape of the site is typical of the open land west of the M4 which contributes to the rural setting of Theale • The site contributes to the landscape and visual setting of the AONB Sulham escarpment • Site is well screened by surrounding tree and hedgerow cover
<p>Impact on key landscape characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of open character • Potential to retain and enhance existing boundary vegetation
<p>Impact on key visual characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential visual impact on views from the AONB and resulting perception of Theale expanding towards the AONB • Impact on rural character of views from Blossom Lane and the open space north of Woodfield Close • No impact on adjoining footpaths
<p>Impact on key settlement characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expands Theale into the open landscape between Theale and Calcot
<p>Summary of compliance with NPPF</p> <p>Development on this site could potentially result in harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB if the built form was readily visible from the Sulham escarpment and increased the perception of urbanisation of the landscape setting to the AONB.</p>
<p>Recommendations</p> <p>The site may be suitable for further consideration as a potential housing site but the extent should be limited as shown in Figure THE001.2 and would be subject to the following requirements to conserve and enhance the AONB; and to maintain the character of the land north of Theale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit the developable area to that shown in Figure THE001.2 • Retain a landscape buffer of a minimum of 15m to Blossom Lane and footpath to retain the immediate open planted landscape setting • Additional layers of tree planting to be included in area shown as Green Infrastructure in Figure THE001.2 to screen views from the AONB • Orientate development to face onto open space off Woodfield Close whilst retaining the majority of the boundary planting • Break up built form with substantial areas of tree planting to break up the roofscape • Preferred access off existing access point • Reduce density to reflect semi-rural edge of Theale



B. Assessment of Potential Housing Site: THE003 North Lakeside Theale

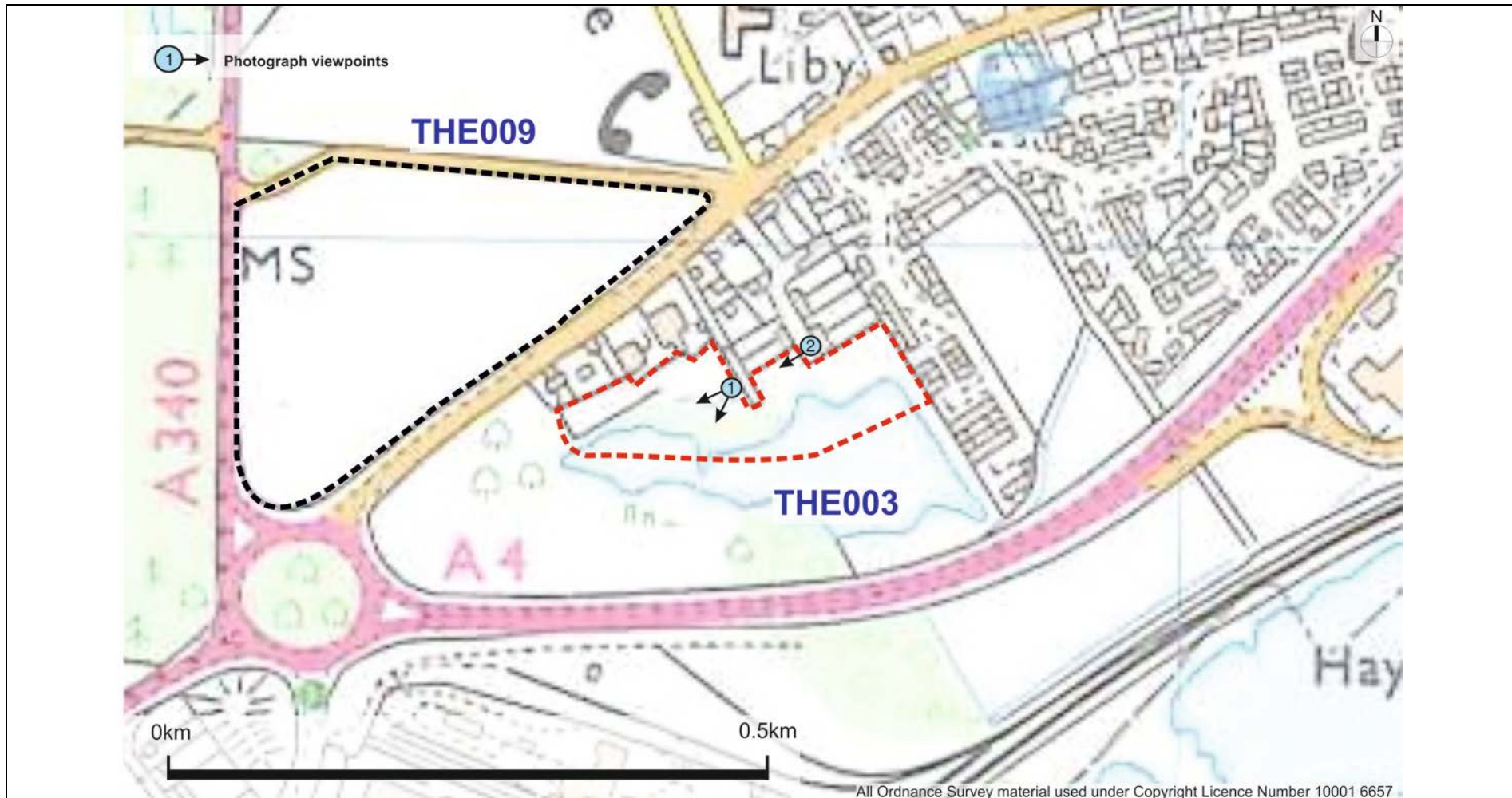


Figure THE003.I: Site and viewpoint locations

An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire (LSS) 2009: LLCA20F: West Theale

LLCA20F: West Theale has an overall *low sensitivity*.

West Theale is characterised by a mix of intense commercial activity at Foster Yeoman and derelict land at Theale Lakeside. Set within this, are the woodlands and a lake, which have either resulted from former older gravel pits or highway planting. These make an important contribution to the area and the western approach to Theale. The Foster Yeoman building is a landmark feature. The key elements of landscape sensitivity are:

- Theale lake and its surrounding woodland
- Some historic interest
- Generally medium to low biodiversity interest but with some BAP habitats
- Flat valley floor significantly modified by man made landform
- Mix of commercial and derelict land with some important tree screening
- Major large scale commercial buildings abut low rise residential development
- Major communication routes
- Informal public access

Wider landscape: LLCA20F West Theale is a self contained area which contrasts considerably with the adjacent Kennet valley landscape of 8G and the farmed landscapes of 16A and 17A. It is visually enclosed except for along its western and northern boundaries.

Setting to the urban form: LLCA20F: West Theale forms the western edge of Theale but its built form characteristics are very different. It forms an important transition zone between the AONB to the west and the village and setting and approach to Theale.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Viewpoint 1: View from the entrance to the anglers' car park looking west into the centre of the site



Viewpoint 2: View from the end of St Ives Close looking west into the centre of the site

Site description

Site THE003 forms an area of mixed shrubs and trees and rough grassland with a boundary with the northern bank of the lake. To the north and east the site is bounded by the private gardens of adjoining houses, mainly demarcated by garden fencing. To the west and south the land is within South Lakeside development area which has planning permission for large scale residential development, with an access off The Green which has already been constructed. THE003 (North Lakeside) is separated from South Lakeside by the lake.

<p>Relationship with adjacent settlement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The site lies between the existing built up area in the village and the approved South Lakeside development • The open landscape of THE003 acts as a contrasting open setting to the approved large mass and scale of the South Lakeside development • The site also acts as a landscape buffer between the approved South Lakeside development and the existing properties
<p>Relationship with adjacent wider countryside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The site does not share the predominant open arable landscape characteristics of the wider area • However it is similar in character to the well vegetated landscape buffer between the existing houses and the A4 • It forms an important setting to the open lake and its vegetated banks which provide a potentially valuable local landscape asset
<p>Impact on key landscape characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of tree cover and mixed vegetation • Loss of landscape buffer and well vegetated setting to Theale • Impact on the undeveloped natural tree lined character of the lake and its banks
<p>Impact on key visual characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited to mainly private views from the adjacent properties
<p>Impact on key settlement characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development on the site would be set within the context of the approved development at South Lakeside and the existing houses and would not extend the village westwards beyond its existing and permitted boundaries • Development would merge the approved South Lakeside development with the existing houses with the loss of a potentially beneficial landscape setting to both areas
<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>Part of the site may be suitable for further consideration as a potential housing site but the extent should be limited as shown in Figure THE003.2 and would be subject to the following requirements to conserve and enhance the setting of Theale and the approved development of South Lakeside; and to maintain the natural undeveloped character of the lake:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit the developable area to that shown in Figure THE003.2 to the south of the commercial premises and car parking to the blocks of flats • Retain a landscape buffer of a minimum of 10m to the lake • Provide new tree planting to the western and eastern boundaries to screen views from the existing dwellings • Create accessible open space on the remainder of THE003 as shown in THE003.2 to enhance the landscape, arboricultural and ecological benefit of the area • Retain tree and shrubs as far as possible to retain a well vegetated open space with open grassland • Access the site through the existing access to the anglers car park • The density should reflect the semi-rural edge of Theale

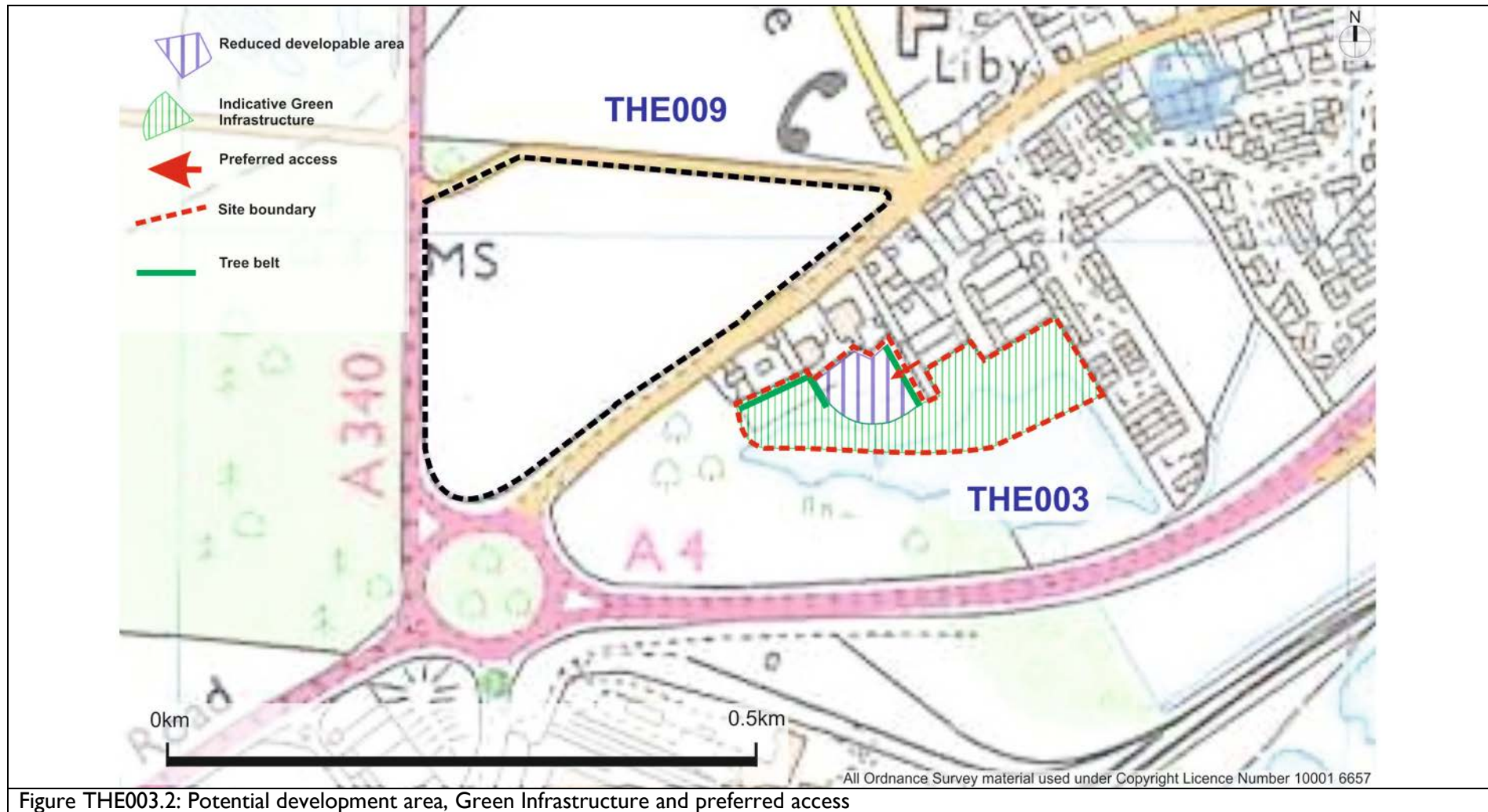


Figure THE003.2: Potential development area, Green Infrastructure and preferred access

C. Assessment of Potential Housing Site: THE009 Land between A340 & The Green

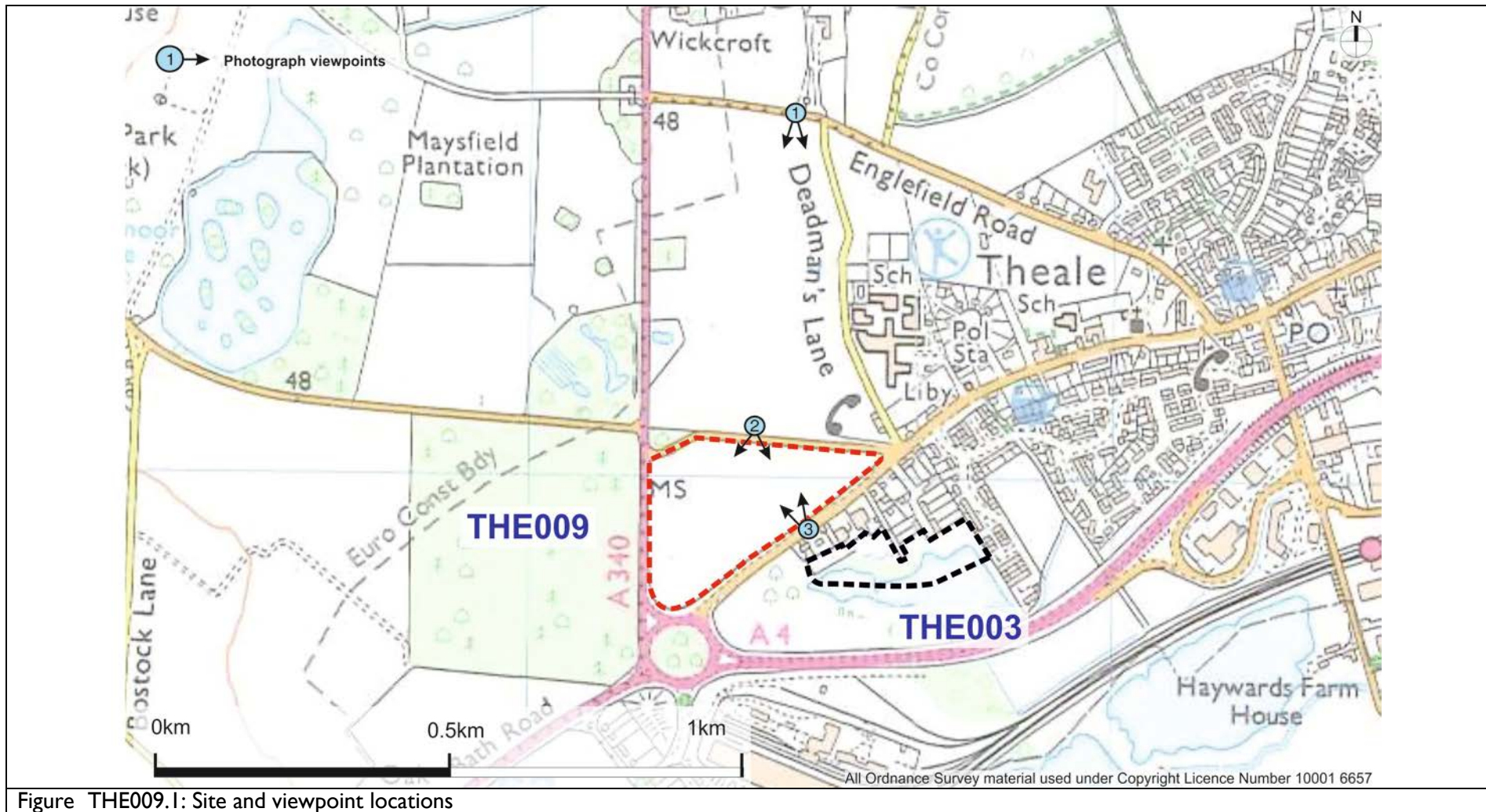


Figure THE009.I: Site and viewpoint locations

An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire (LSS) 2009: LLCA16A: Englefield Wooded Farmlands

LLCA16A: Englefield Wooded Farmlands has an overall *medium sensitivity*.

Englefield Wooded Farmlands is characterised by its mixed agricultural and recreational land use. The area is well vegetated with a complex vegetation pattern in the north, typical, but naturalistic, golf course planting in the centre and little internal boundary treatment and neat roadside hedges in the south. The landscape structure in the south has been weakened and the character eroded through urban fringe elements. The key elements of landscape sensitivity are:

- Part of the flat valley floor between the river Kennet and river Pang
- Extensive areas of woodland, pasture and amenity grassland
- Small to medium scale field pattern well defined by hedgerows and tree belts
- Good sense of seclusion in north
- Narrow winding rural road network
- Contained linear village at North Street
- Scattered farmsteads and other built form clusters
- Visually exposed to views from the escarpments, in particular Englefield
- Significant individual historic buildings and settlement at North Street
- Good level of recreational provision and public rights of way
- BAP woodlands and significant lengths of hedgerow
- Important approach to the model estate at Englefield
- Weakened landscape structure in the south west
- Some urban fringe elements such as pylons, sewage plant, lighting to school playing fields
- Tranquillity compromised by urban fringe elements and M4

Wider landscape: LLCA16A Englefield Wooded Farmlands has strong landscape links with land to the north and north west at the foot of the Englefield escarpment beyond the study area. It is a visually enclosed area but visible from the higher ground of the rural escarpments.

Setting to the urban form: LLCA16A Englefield Wooded Farmlands abuts Theale village and 20E on its southern boundary. The built form of Theale is visually exposed but 16A provides a strong contrast and rural landscape setting to the village.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Viewpoint 1: View from Englefield Road across open fields to site in the middle distance with Foster Yeoman building to the right beyond the site and school buildings to the left



Viewpoint 2: View over the site from lane along the northern boundary of the site with (left to right) school buildings, housing and Foster Yeoman building and A340/A4 roundabout and woodland cover visible beyond



Viewpoint 3: View from The Green on the southern boundary of the site looking north to the wooded park and escarpment at Englefield and the AONB and to Wickcroft Farm

Site description

Site THE009 forms a triangle of open arable land on the western edge of Theale. The boundaries are hedged beyond which the open landscape north of Theale extends northwards between the M4 and the A340 up to the boundary of the AONB to the west, north and north-east of these two roads. Englefield Park, within the AONB, lies to the north-west of the site. To the west lies the A340 beyond which lies a wooded area and then the flat open arable fields of the AONB. To the south-west is the large roundabout at the junction of the A340 and A4. South of this junction the landscape is dominated by the Foster Yeoman building. Immediately south of the site and The Green lies a linear group of houses which front onto The Green. South of these houses lie two open areas: North Lakeside THE003 and South Lakeside. These are described under the assessment of THE003. Views into the site, despite its open character, are limited to the local road network. No views have been identified to date from public viewpoints within the AONB but this would have to be verified through any detailed landscape and visual impact assessment as the AONB is visible from views out from the site.

<p>Relationship with adjacent settlement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The eastern part of the site is heavily influenced by the adjacent school buildings and houses on The Green • The western part is influenced by the presence of the existing Foster Yeoman building and will also be influenced eventually by the development at South Lakeside • The approved South Lakeside development will extend the settlement westwards as far as the east side of the roundabout • Foster Yeoman already gives the appearance of built form west of the roundabout but this area is separated from the village by the A4, local tree cover, and open fields and by the contrast in character between the Foster Yeoman area and the village
<p>Relationship with adjacent wider countryside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The site shares common characteristics with the open arable land to the north and west • However the site has little in common with the special qualities of the AONB and the parkland character of Englefield Park
<p>Impact on key landscape characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of open arable land • Loss of part of the open setting to Theale
<p>Impact on key visual characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential visual impact on views from the edge of Englefield Park and the AONB • Local impacts on views from the surrounding road network, houses on The Green and local farmsteads
<p>Impact on key settlement characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential over expansion of Theale to the west • The western limits of South Lakeside are an influence on the potential for housing in this area
<p>Summary of compliance with NPPF</p> <p>Development on the eastern part of this site would not result in harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB.</p>
<p>Recommendations</p> <p>The site may be suitable for further consideration as a potential housing site but the extent should be limited as shown in Figure THE009.2 and would be subject to the following requirements to conserve and enhance the AONB; and to maintain the character of the land west of Theale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The western extent of the developable area is limited as shown on THE009.2 to prevent over expansion westwards (tying in with the outer extent of the school grounds and the approved South Lakeside development); to limit the western edge of the settlement; and importantly to retain an open landscape buffer between the edge of the village and Englefield Park and the boundary of the AONB • Creation of open space and Green Infrastructure in the western part of the site as shown in THE009.2 to enhance the gateway to the village; and to assist in screening the Foster Yeoman building and approved development at South Lakeside in the views from the north of Theale • Woodland copses and open grassland to be provided within the above open space • To retain and enhance tree planting along the road network around the site, in particular to help soften and screen the development in views from the north • Preferred access from a point opposite the existing South Lakeside access point

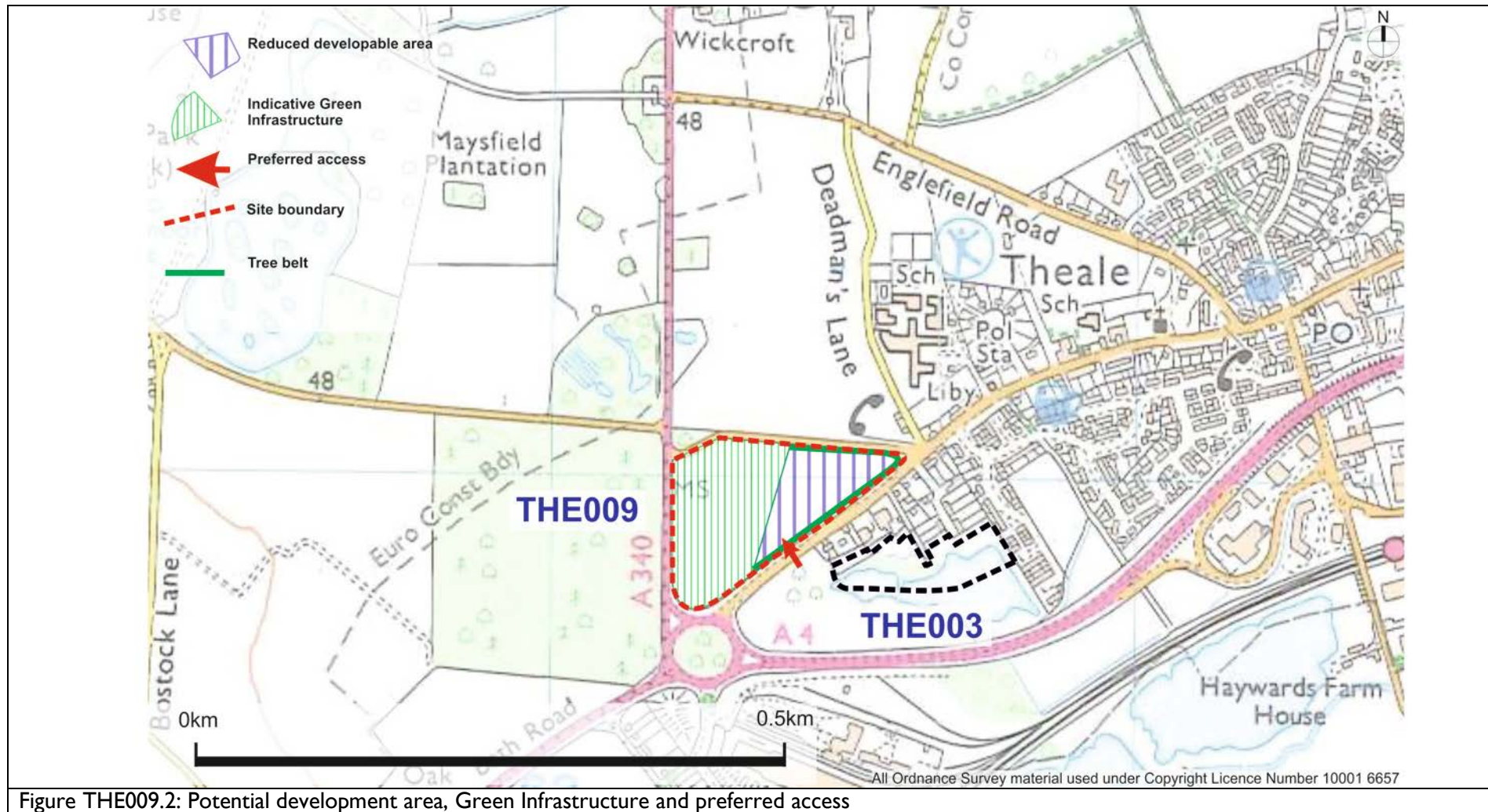


Figure THE009.2: Potential development area, Green Infrastructure and preferred access

Conclusion on cumulative effect of THE001 in conjunction with THE003, THE009 and South Lakeside

THE001 is located on the north side of the village and is separated from THE003, THE009 and South Lakeside by existing settlement at Theale. Development at THE001 therefore would not result in a cumulative landscape impact in conjunction with development as recommended on these other sites.

Conclusion and cumulative effect of THE009 in conjunction with South Lakeside and/or THE003 on Theale and the AONB

The development of THE009, in conjunction with South Lakeside and THE003, as shown in the figures above, would give rise to a significant level of development in the west of Theale. However, in the light of the approved footprint of development at South Lakeside and the limit of the current development at Theale Green Community School, THE 009 would not result in a substantial extension into the open land north of Theale. It also has the potential to provide an improved landscape buffer between the settlement and the commercial buildings; and the AONB. In order to avoid damage to the character of the settlement and of the open landscape, it will be important that any development here should be in scale with the existing houses. Development of the scale of the approved scheme at South Lakeside would result in significant harm to the local character contrary to Core Strategy policy CS19.

THE003 is small and contained and would not have a cumulative landscape impact with THE009.

Should all three areas come forward for development there should not be an adverse impact on the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB, provided the constraints identified in the above recommendations are observed. The potential impact on the character of Theale will depend on the scale of development on THE003 and THE009 within the areas identified above. There is a risk, given the approved scale of development at South Lakeside, of changing the character of west Theale, its landscape setting and its relationship with the AONB. It is therefore important that the mass and scale of the approved scheme at South Lakeside is not continued into THE003 and THE009 and that future development is in keeping with the low density pattern along The Green.