

Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for: THE7 Former Sewage Treatment Works, Theale

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL CAPACITY STUDY 2021 RECORD SHEET

Site:	THE7: Former Sewage Treatment Works, Theale
Date of site survey:	17.07.2021
Surveyors:	LA
Weather/visibility:	Clear

LCA:

West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019 *WH4: Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic*

Key Characteristics

- Geologically and topographically varied with steep and gentle undulating slopes rising to a central ridge
- Presence of surface water and small streams
- Complex pattern of land cover, dominated by woodland and with remnant heaths
- Varied field pattern with strong hedgerows
- Parklands are a characteristic feature
- Relatively densely settled, particularly along the ridge, but with woodland containment
- A minor road network contained by the wooded landscape
- An accessible landscape
- Quiet, intimate and secluded character

Valued Features and Qualities

- Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB
- The visual role of the wooded ridge crest and slopes
- The varied land cover mosaic and important habitats
- A very rural character away from major roads and urban edges
- Recreational value
- Historic landscape character

Detractors

- Past hedgerow loss for arable farming
- Changing land use patterns resulting in gradual loss of landscape variation and biodiversity
- Increase in horse paddocks
- Impact of the M4 on character
- Decreasing separation/coalescence between settlements
- Increased suburbanisation
- Loss of gradation between settlement and countryside

- Increased traffic on the rural lane network

Landscape Strategy

- Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Conserve and restore heathland characteristics
- Promote appropriate woodland management
- Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements
- Retain the distinction between and individual identity of settlements
- Conserve elements that mark a transition between settlement and countryside
- Conserve the existing character of rural lanes and public rights of way
- Maintain open views from routeways

An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire - May 2009

The site is located within **LLCA16A: Englefield Wooded Farmlands**

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

Key elements of landscape sensitivity

- 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
- Past inappropriate man-made landform on golf course and highway infrastructure
- 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

Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of Potential Strategic Development Sites - May 2009

The site is located in Area 11: East Theale which covers the south-eastern corner of LLCA16A and north-west quadrant of 20E. Although the landscape sensitivity is low in 20E, it is essential to maintaining the remaining physical and visual gap between Theale and Calcot. Its narrow width is reinforced by its link to the south-east quadrant and to 16A. 16A is of medium sensitivity but it is noted that the southern part has a weaker landscape structure and a lower landscape value. The option area however includes landscape features of merit and would close the gap down to 150m at this point. It is recommended that only a very small section of the north-west quadrant of 20E, north of Hoad Way and no further east than the current built form edge of Theale, be considered as a strategic option site if the gap is to be maintained. Part of 16A (where the site is located) may also be acceptable if the existing landscape structure is used to integrate the development and is reinforced to maintain a perceptible gap.

North Wessex Downs AONB LCA 2002 – The site is located adjacent the NWD AONB boundary to *LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons*

Key management requirements:

- The overall management requirement is conserve and enhance the quiet secluded character of the LCA 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons
- The aim also should be to maintain the distinctive pattern of settlement with its small hamlets and loose linear settlements and prevent the gradual merging and coalescence that will result in a more suburban character.

LCA of potential housing sites within and adjacent to the North Wessex Downs AONB – Theale – August 2015

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

Landscape designations:

None – but adjacent North Wessex Downs AONB

VISUAL SENSITIVITY

<i>General visibility</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Mitigation potential</i>
<p>Views into the site from: Blossom Lane (west) Public Right of Way (south) THEA/5/1 Public Right of Way (north) THEA/14/1 open space north of Woodfield Way (south)</p>	<p>Types of viewers: Walkers, residents and users of open space</p>	<p>Opportunities for mitigation and landscape compatibility of mitigation: Strengthening boundary hedgerows with native tree and shrub planting Additional tree planting within eastern edge of site to any potential views of buildings from NWD AONB Good compatibility</p>
<p>Views out of the site to: Wooded horizon (Sulham ridge) to the north east within the NWD AONB</p>	<p>Magnitude of viewers (level of use and popularity): Blossom Lane (west) - High Public Right of Way (south) - High Open space north of Woodfield Way (south) - High</p>	<p>Impacts of mitigation: Low – would build on existing vegetation pattern of area</p>
<p>Does the site form part of a skyline? No</p>	<p>Visual perceptions (activity and expectations of local visual receptors): Rural setting of Theale and separate identity from Calcot</p>	
<p>Panoramic views: Small part of a panoramic view from the Sulham Ridge within the AONB, part of the undeveloped setting of Theale</p>		
<p>Landmark features: None</p>		
<p>Sensitivity score: Medium</p>	<p>Sensitivity score: Low/Medium</p>	<p>Sensitivity score: Low</p>
<p>Visual sensitivity score: Medium/Low</p>		
<p>Additional comments: Due to the flat landform of the site, this limits views to the immediate adjacent areas. Although the part wooded character of the site is part of the wooded view of the Kennet valley as visible from elevated areas within the NWD AONB</p>		

LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

<i>Natural factors</i>	<i>Cultural factors</i>	<i>Perceptual features</i>
<p>Topography and landform: Flat at around 45m AOD</p>	<p>Boundary features other than vegetation: Ex security mesh fence along southern and western boundary</p>	<p>Tranquillity – Noise levels: Traffic noise from M4</p>
<p>Geological features: None</p>	<p>Historic landscapes: Ancient and semi-natural woodland adjacent the site to the north. No historic features on site</p>	<p>Tranquillity – Visual intrusion / detractors: M4 well screened by intervening trees and shrubs. Overhead power lines detract from views</p>
<p>Soil quality: Natural England: <i>Grade 3 Good to moderate</i></p>	<p>Parkland features: None</p>	<p>Tranquillity – Light pollution/dark skies: As per CPRE England’s Light Pollution and Dark Skies map, the site is located within the second brightness category (16-32 Nanowatts cm²/sr). The darkest areas are measured as less than 0.25 cm²/sr</p>
<p>Water features: Two field ditches. One flows NS down from the overhead power lines to the southern boundary. The other aligns the eastern site boundary as part of a network of ditches/stream flowing south into the River Kennet</p>		
<p>Landcover and land use: Rough grassland and regenerating trees and shrubs to the east</p>	<p>Conservation Area: None</p>	

Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for potential housing sites within West Berkshire

<p>Tree belts, individual trees and riverside trees: Eastern area of the site contains trees which forms part of a wider area of woodland beyond the site boundary within the NWD AONB adjacent the M4. Western area contains a number of self-seeded trees, although small</p>	<p>Landscape features of LCA: Impact of the M4 from noise, not visual Contains trees/woodland part of varied land cover mosaic Adjacent NWD AONB</p>	
<p>Hedgerows and hedgerow trees: Western, northern and southern boundary defined by hedgerows. The western boundary contains a number of dead elms. The northern boundary extends into the site forming a wide hedgerow with trees. The southern boundary is defined by a line of mature hawthorn trees</p>	<p>Built form: Remains of waterworks, including central areas of concrete plinths</p>	<p>Accessibility by public footpath: None</p>
<p>Woodland and copses: Beyond the N-S field ditch across the site is a small copse at the southern end. Further to the east the site includes part of a broadleaved woodland which then extends beyond the site boundary further to the east as an area of linear/ part intermittent woodlands within the NWD AONB adjacent the M4</p>	<p>Setting of listed buildings: None</p>	<p>Open access areas: None</p>
<p>Wetland and meadow: Central area to the west has a rough grassland character</p>	<p>Scheduled Monuments: None</p>	<p>Recreational areas: None on site, adjacent open space with play area to the south</p>
<p>Common land: None</p>	<p>Settlement pattern: Outside settlement boundary of Theale and separated from the main settled area of Theale by open space</p>	
<p>Heathland: None</p>	<p>Contribution of private gardens to landscape character: N/A</p>	<p>Aesthetic sensitivity - Elements of openness/enclosure: semi enclosed from wider landscape due to site boundary vegetation</p>
<p>Other significant vegetation cover: None</p>	<p>Cultural associations: None known</p>	<p>Aesthetic sensitivity – landscape pattern: Wasteland character disjointed from wider pattern of fields set further to the west and separated by golf driving range and golf course. To the</p>

Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for potential housing sites within West Berkshire

		east the M4 and adjacent semi wooded areas forms boundary to wider farmed landscape of the AONB
BAP/Phase 1 records: The woodland outside the site boundary to the north is Priority Habitat Inventory Deciduous woodland	Features of cultural importance: None known	
Presence of SSSI/SINC/local wildlife designation/Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland: Adjacent Ancient and semi natural woodland to the north		
Sensitivity score: Medium	Sensitivity score: Low	Sensitivity score: Low/Medium
Landscape sensitivity score: Medium/Low		
Additional comments: The site has a part wasteland character, however as is separated from the main settled area of Theale by an open space, it currently poorly connects with Theale's built character		

Relationship with the wider landscape/townscape

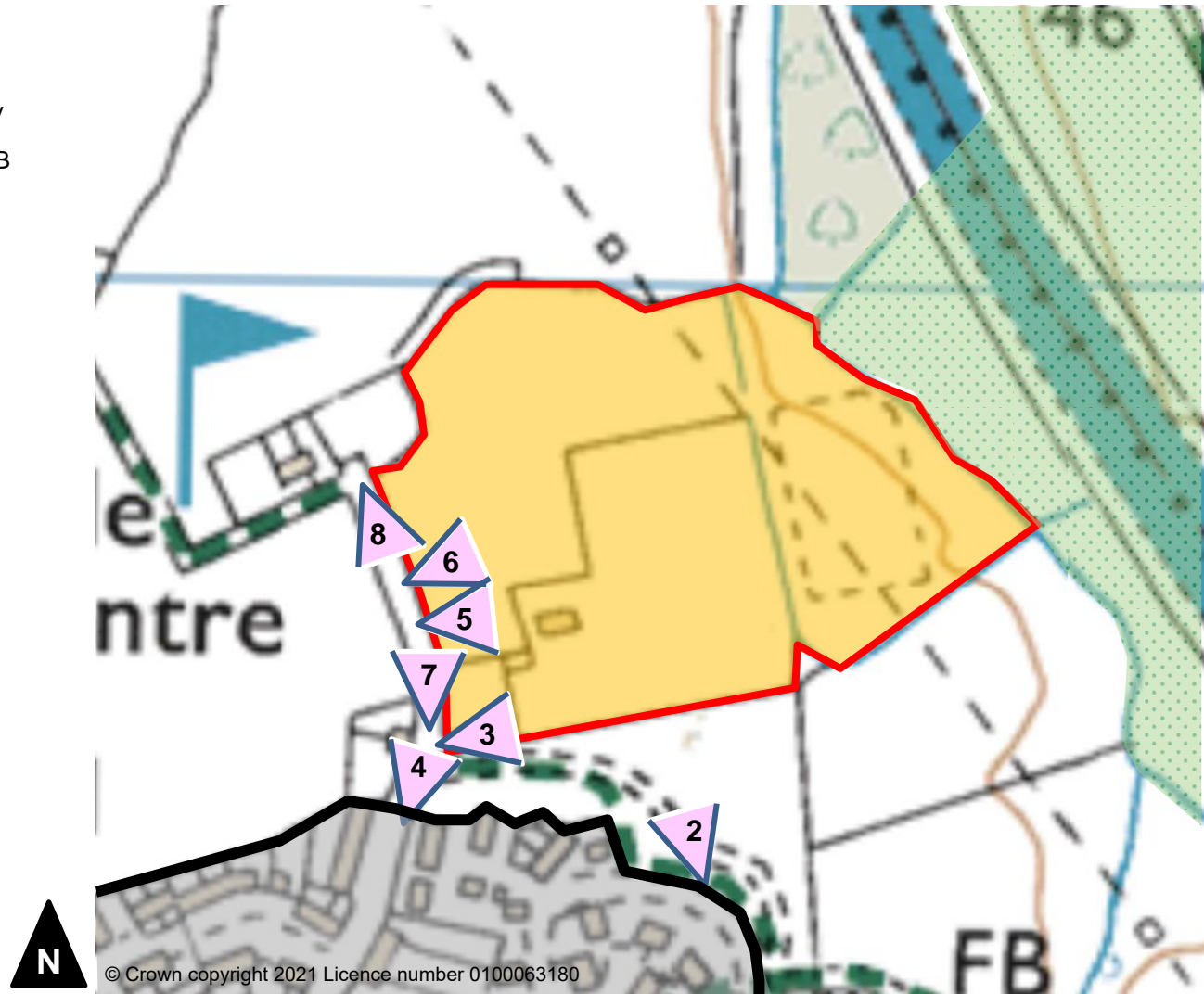
Adjacent settlement: Not located adjacent the existing settlement boundary of Theale. Set beyond an existing open space on the edge of Theale One semi-detached property (built circa late 1800's) on the western side of Blossom Lane (outside Settlement Boundary) has a rural character
Character of the urban edge: The existing open space north of Woodfield Way provides a transition to the wider countryside
Presence in a floodplain: Flood Zone 2: eastern part of the site beyond the N-S field ditch

Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for potential housing sites within West Berkshire

<p>Relationship with adjacent wider countryside: Continues with open countryside to the east, across the M4 and further to open countryside leading up to Sulham Ridge Continues with semi-open countryside to the west, across Blossom Lane to the driving range of Theale Golf Course To the north is Theale Golf Course a large expanse of drives, separated by trees and small woodland copses</p>
<p>Character of adjacent village(s)/towns: The settlement of Theale grew out from the High Street with ribbon housing development lining along Blossom Lane from the 1960's onwards. Infill housing development then spread west from the High Street, eventually extending across to Blossom Lane, which also included the open space north of Woodfield Way, creating a buffer to the wider area of open countryside. The nearest part of the settlement edge is less than 30 years old</p>
<p>Historic links with the wider area if known: None</p>
<p>Recreational links with the wider area: Blossom Lane leads to a Public Right of Way just beyond the northern site boundary. This footpath then extends to a further network of PRow</p>
<p>VDS/Parish Plan – relevant extracts: None</p>

Figure 1: Site: THE7: Former Sewage Treatment Works, Theale

-  Site boundary
-  Theale settlement boundary
-  North Wessex Downs AONB
-  Viewpoint photo
- Landscape capacity**
 -  High capacity
 -  Medium/high capacity
 -  Medium capacity
 -  Medium/low capacity
 -  Low capacity



West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019

The site lies within the following LCA *WH4: Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic* for which the key requirements are set out below:

Landscape Strategy:

- Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Promote appropriate woodland management
- Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements
- Retain the distinction between and individual identity of settlements
- Conserve elements that mark a transition between settlement and countryside
- Conserve the existing character of rural lanes and public rights of way
- Maintain open views from routeways

An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire LDF- May 2009

The site lies within the following LLCA16A: Englefield Wooded Farmlands

- 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 LLCA20E on its southern boundary. The built form of Theale is visually exposed but LLCA16A provides a strong contrast and rural landscape setting to the village.

Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of Potential Strategic Development Sites - May 2009

The site is located in Area 11: East Theale which covers the south-eastern corner of LLCA16A and north-west quadrant of 20E.

Although the landscape sensitivity is low in 20E, it is essential to maintaining the remaining physical and visual gap between Theale and Calcot. Its narrow width is reinforced by its link to the south-east quadrant and to 16A. 16A is of medium sensitivity but it is noted that the southern part has a weaker landscape structure and a lower landscape value. The option area however includes landscape features of merit and would close the gap down to 150m at this point. It is recommended that only a very small section of the north-west quadrant of 20E, north of Hoad Way and no further east than the current built form edge of Theale, be considered as a strategic 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.

North Wessex Downs AONB: Character Area 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons

Key management requirements:

The overall management requirement is conserve and enhance the quiet secluded character of the Hermitage Wooded Commons. The aim also should be to maintain the distinctive pattern of settlement with its small hamlets and loose linear settlements and prevent the gradual merging and coalescence that will result in a more suburban character.

LCA of potential housing sites within and adjacent to the North Wessex Downs AONB – Theale – August 2015

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

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.

A site assessment was also undertaken for this site (ref THE001) and concluded it may have potential for development in part.

Site description:

The site constitutes an area of mainly rough grassland with some self-seeded small trees located mainly towards the periphery. Within the central western part of the site there is an area of concrete plinths which are surface remains of the ex-sewage treatment works. Towards the east beyond the overhead power lines (which cross the site) the rough grassland is replaced with woodland and areas of scrub, this then continues beyond the site boundary which is marked by a ditch. This ditch also marks the boundary to the AONB, to the east. The southern site boundary is marked by a row of mature hawthorn trees within an overgrown hedgerow, beyond this hedgerow further to the south is the open space, containing open grassland, paths and a play area. The western site boundary is marked by the Blossom Lane roadside hedgerow. The northern site boundary is demarcated within the landscape by a narrow belt of scrub and mature trees.

Key landscape planning factors:

The site is located as follows:

- Within the setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Outside the main settled area of Theale

Viewpoints:

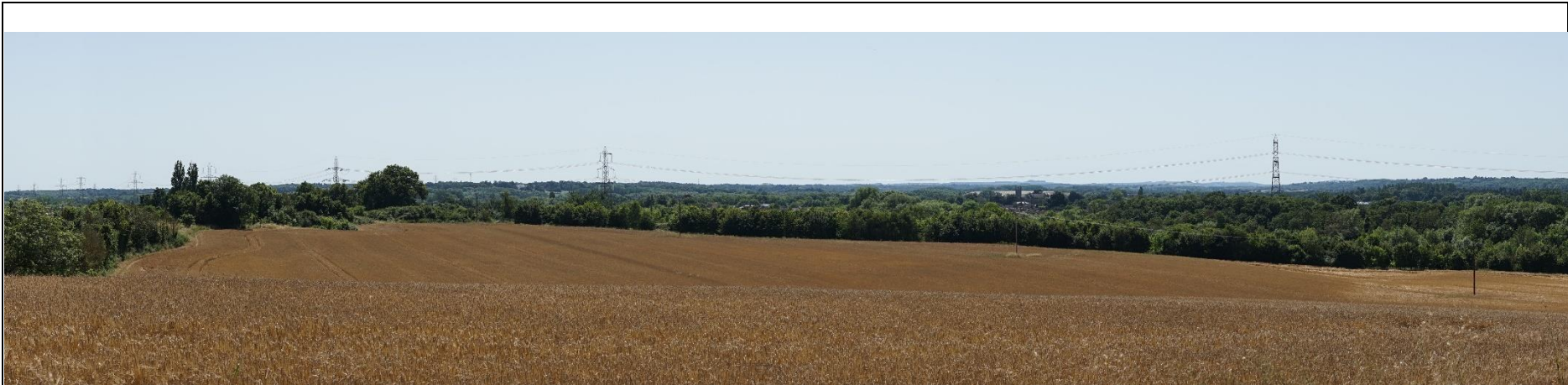


Photo 1: Summer view from a Public Right of Way within the North Wessex Downs AONB, looking towards the site. The wooded character of the Kennet valley screens/integrates the existing built development into the landscape preserving a wooded setting for the adjacent AONB and views from Folly Hill. The church at Theale is evident above the treeline (July 2021)



Photo 2: View across the park (to the south of the site) to the southern site boundary, marked by an overgrown hedgerow with a line of mature hawthorn trees (July 2021)



Photo 3: Looking into the site, where remains of the sewage treatment infrastructure is still visible. Wooded Sulham ridgeline within the AONB visible beyond (July 2021)

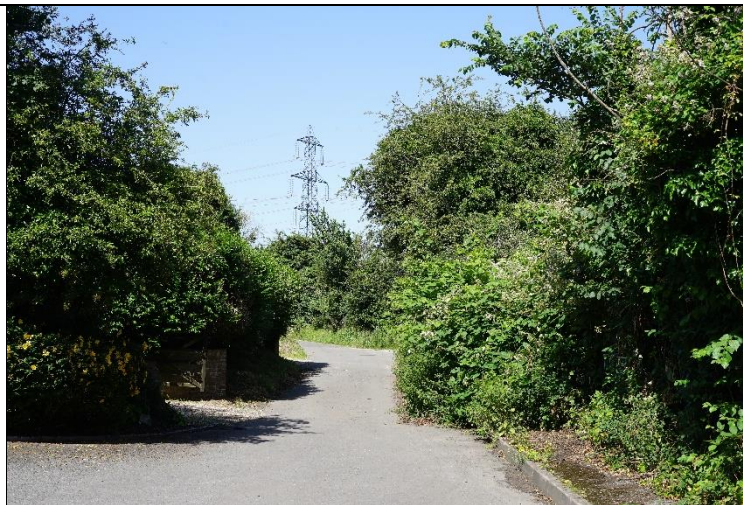


Photo 4: From Blossom Lane looking towards the site. The pylon visible is located just beyond the northern site boundary (July 2021)



Photo 5: Through a gap within the hedgerow from Blossom Lane looking across the site, with the wooded Sulham ridge within the AONB visible beyond (July 2021)



Photo 6: From Blossom Lane looking through the semi dead (elms) hedgerow into the site. Remains of the ex-security mesh fence is visible (July 2021)



Photo 7: From Blossom Lane with the site hedgerow boundary to the left (July 2021)



Photo 8: From Blossom Lane, with the site boundary to the left (July 2021)

Please refer to section 3 methodology of the assessment process

1. Visual Sensitivity: Medium/low

- Within the summer months there is limited visibility of the site, when trees and shrubs within the site and boundary hedgerows are in full leaf. The site will be more visible within the winter months from the adjacent Blossom Lane and the open space to the south of the site
- The mature wooded belt of trees on the northern boundary restricts views of the site within the summer months from the adjacent Public Right of Way (THEA/14/1)
- The sites' undeveloped character forms part of the rural setting for the adjacent Public Right of Way (THEA/5/1) and the open space north of Woodfield Way
- There are views across the site to the wooded Sulham ridgeline within the AONB
- Wooded character of eastern part of the site contributes to the screening of the M4 and the setting of the AONB
- Visually separate from Theale, with intervening open space forming a buffer, although adjacent properties on Woodfield Way are visible from open space

2. Landscape Sensitivity: Medium/low

- A flat area of land with a stream cutting across the eastern part of the site
- Within the western part of the site, mainly rough grassland and some hardstanding from ex facilities
- Semi wooded character on the eastern part of the site, abutting an Ancient Semi Natural Woodland further to the north
- Traffic noise as in close proximity to M4
- Visually intrusive overhead cables, but no pylons within the site
- Blossom Lane retains a rural character, providing access to the wider rural landscape
- Defined hedgerows along northern, western and southern site boundary
- Physically separate from the main settled area of Theale

3. Landscape Character Sensitivity: Medium/low (combines 1 and 2)

4. Wider Landscape Sensitivity: Medium/high

- The site has strong physical and visual links to the wider landscape and these outweigh any minor impacts from the adjacent settlement

5. Overall Landscape Sensitivity: Medium (combines 3 and 4)

6. Landscape Value: Medium

- Setting of North Wessex Downs AONB
- Local importance as part of rural setting for Theale village

7. Landscape Capacity: Medium (combines 5 and 6)

Relationship of site to *Theale*

- The site is separate and feels disconnected from the main settled area of Theale by the linear open space north of Woodfield Close
- Due to its separation, the site seems semi-isolated from Theale
- The undeveloped character of the site forms part of the rural setting to Theale

Relationship with adjacent wider countryside

- Part of a semi wooded/scrub and wetland area, which continues further to a wider area to the east, north and south and across into the North Wessex Downs AONB
- The site contributes to the landscape and visual setting of the AONB Sulham escarpment
- The site is well contained by site boundary hedgerows and trees

Potential impact on key landscape characteristics

- Loss of open character
- Loss of scrub/woodland which contributes to the wooded character of the Kennet valley
- Loss of surface water and streams
- Noise levels are already compromised by the proximity to the M4, therefore additional noise from cars would not have a significant impact, however additional traffic on Blossom Lane would impact on the rural character of this area
- Potential to retain boundary hedgerows/vegetation

Potential impact on key visual characteristics

- Potential visual impact on views from the AONB and resulting perception of Theale extending towards the AONB and developed Kennet valley floor
- Visual impact on rural character of views from Blossom Lane and the open space north of Woodfield Close
- Visual impact on the northern and southern Public Right of Way

Potential impact on key settlement characteristics

- Expands Theale into the open landscape between Theale and Calcot
- Potential loss of the separate identity of Theale and Calcot if the whole site were developed
- Potential loss of existing wooded settlement setting as viewed out from Theale
- Potentially poor relationship with existing settlement form and pattern when site considered in isolation
- Potential opportunity with THE1 to create a more comprehensive development which could be integrated into the main settlement area of Theale

Potential impact on the North Wessex Downs AONB

- Increased perception of the urbanisation of the landscape setting to the AONB
- Potential harm to the natural beauty of the AONB if the built form were readily visible from the Sulham escarpment

Landscape mitigation and contribution to green infrastructure

- Significant buffer planting along the north eastern edge would be necessary and should be designed to maintain the wooded view as visible from the AONB, as well as screening the adjacent M4
- Development should be of a low density to allow significant tree planting within the development to allow a softer settlement edge character
- Adequate space would need to be provided adjacent the watercourse to retain as a feature within the development
- The existing Public Right of Way along the northern boundary should be enhanced, with space and links to new footpaths across the site
- Development should be designed as a positive extension to the settlement pattern of Theale, by providing an attractive façade to the public open space to the south. This should also include pedestrian links through the development to the open space, in particular from the eastern part of the site

Conclusion and recommendations

Development across the western part of the site could be considered further subject to the following requirements, as originally set out within the LCA August 2015:

- Limit the developable area to that shown in Figure THE07.2
- 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 2: THE7 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
- Reduce density to reflect semi-rural edge of Theale

In order to facilitate a positive extension to Theale, the following requirements would also be necessary:

- Footpath access through southern boundary at eastern end linking to existing Public Right of Way (THEA/5/1)
- Footpath access through northern boundary linking to existing Public Right of Way (THEA/14/1)
- Buildings should be restricted to two storeys and be no higher than the adjacent dwellings as found on the outer settlement edge of Theale
- The creation of positive green infrastructure links with the existing open space, potential development on site THE7 and the existing settlement edge of Theale

Conclusion and cumulative effect of THE1 and THE7

There is a potential opportunity to consider a more comprehensive approach to development in this part of Theale and so the cumulative impact of THE1 and THE7 have also been considered.

Development on both sites and the creation of a positive interface with the existing park could help integrate this area well into the existing settlement form and pattern of Theale. Exploring opportunities through green infrastructure to link site THE1 with THE7, would also help. The undevelopable areas of both sites beyond the pylons and to the south of the developable area of THE1 present an ideal opportunity to design and create a positive buffer to the adjacent AONB, while at the same time retaining the open character of the setting of Theale and ensuring the continued retention of the separate identities of Theale and Calcot.

