

Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for: THE8: Land off Hoad Way, Theale

Methodology

Basis of methodology

- 1.1 The methodology and assessment criteria used for this assessment are detailed below. The key texts on which methodology is based are the Scottish Natural Heritage and Natural England's *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment* (2017) and subsequent *Topic Paper 6 Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity* (2006) as well as the Landscape Institute / IEMA *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* (2013) (GLVIA).
- 1.2 As in current best practice, sensitivity should be assessed against a specific change, and for this study, a development scenario based on employment use as offices and/or B2 and/or B8, has been assumed for each site as a guide against which sensitivity has been assessed.
- 1.3 Best practice guidance also recognises that a landscape with a high sensitivity does not automatically mean that landscape has a low capacity for change, but that 'capacity is all a question of the interaction between the sensitivity of the landscape, the type and amount of change and the way that the landscape is valued' (*Topic Paper 6, 2006, p12*). The sites have been assessed with the development scenario above in mind. Recommendations and comments have been added regarding the appropriate development of particular sites and to ensure raised awareness of potential unacceptable adverse effects on landscape character.
- 1.4 Proposals for any development would need to include appropriate, detailed and specialist input into siting, layout and design, and a full landscape and visual impact assessment should accompany a specific planning application relating to any site. Other studies including ecology, archaeology, arboriculture, traffic, soils may also be required to accompany specific proposals.
- 1.5 Details of the landscape and visual attributes for each site and an assessment of landscape and visual sensitivity (based on desk top studies and field surveys) are to be found on the Record Sheets

Assessment process

- 1.6 The assessment methodology is a staged process. Landscape attributes (Table 3), and visual attributes (Table 4), are considered separately in accordance with the guidance in GLVIA. These attributes are used to identify the **intrinsic landscape and visual sensitivity** (Stages 1 and 2) of the site, or its sub-areas, on a scale of 5 levels from low to high as set out under the Matrix 1 and 2 below. Then the landscape and visual sensitivity of the site, or its sub-area, are merged to identify the **landscape character sensitivity** (Stage 3) as set out under Matrix 3 below.
- 1.7 The Study goes on to classify the **sensitivity of the site in its wider context** (Stage 4) into five categories. Then in Stage 5 the landscape character sensitivity is combined with the wider sensitivity as set out in Matrix 4 to identify the **overall landscape sensitivity** (Stage 5).
- 1.8 The **landscape value** (Stage 6) of each site, or sub-area, is assessed separately on a scale of 5 levels as set out under Table 5 below. Finally, the overall landscape character sensitivity is merged with the landscape value on a scale of 5 levels to give an assessment of **landscape capacity**

(Stage 7) on a scale of 5 levels as set out under Matrix 5 below. This 'bottom up' process is tested against the five criteria for landscape capacity (Stage 7) based on professional judgement and an overall full understanding of the sites.

Assessment abbreviations and colour code:



– Low Capacity



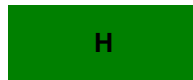
– Medium / Low Capacity



– Medium Capacity



– Medium / High Capacity



– High Capacity

Stage 1: Determination of Visual Sensitivity

- 1.9 This assessment is set out in the Record Sheets and Reports for each site, or sub-division.
- 1.10 The assessment considers the types of **views**, the nature of the **viewers** and the **potential to mitigate** visual impact on the identified viewpoints. The more viewpoints, the more exposed the site, the greater the sensitivity of the viewers (based on GLVIA) and the greater difficulties in screen planting to mitigate the impact without harm to the landscape and visual attributes of the site, the higher the sensitivity. As a final test all the sites were reviewed to assess the relative visual sensitivity of the sites and ensure that professional judgements have been consistent along the way. At this stage each level has been given a score from low = 1 to high = 5 and the scores are added up. Total scores for the site, or sub areas, are grouped as shown.

Matrix 1: Visual sensitivity

General visibility	L (1)	L/M (2)	M (3)	M/H (4)	H (5)
Population	L (1)	L/M (2)	M (3)	M/H (4)	H (5)
Mitigation	L (1)	M/L (2)	M (3)	M/H (4)	H (5)
OVERALL VISUAL SENSITIVITY	3-4 = low; 5- 7 = Med/low; 8-10 = Med; 11-13 = Med/high; 14-15 = High				

Table 3: Notes on Visual Sensitivity Assessment

Factor	Higher sensitivity	Lower sensitivity
General Visibility	Sequenced and exposed views toward site	Fleeting and limited views
	Most of site area visible	Little of site area visible
	Site is a key focus in available wider views	Site is an incidental part of wider views
	Site includes prominent and key landmarks	No landmarks present
	Important vistas or panoramas in/out of area	Unimportant or no vistas
	Prominent skyline	Not part of skyline
Population	Large extent or range of key sensitive receptors	Lack of sensitive receptors
	Large number of people see site	Few can see site
	Key view from a sensitive receptor	Views of site are unimportant
	Site is part of valued view	Site does not form a part of a valued view
	Site in key views to/across/out of town	Not part of setting of settlement view
Mitigation	Mitigation not very feasible	Mitigation possible
	Mitigation would interrupt key views	Would not obscure key views
	Mitigation would damage local character	Mitigation would not harm local character

Stage 2: Determination of Landscape Sensitivity

- 1.11 This assessment is set out in the Record Sheets and Reports for each site or sub-division.
- 1.12 The assessment considers the **natural** physical factors which make up the landscape character of the site, the **cultural** and built form aspects and the **perceptual** features. The greater the incidence of landscape interest and diversity, historically important features and cultural associations, and the greater the levels of access and perceptions of tranquillity and strong landscape pattern, the greater the sensitivity. As a final test all the sites were reviewed to assess the relative landscape sensitivity of the sites and ensure that professional judgements have been consistent along the way. At this stage each level has been given a score from low = 1 to high = 5 and the scores are added up. Total scores for the site, or sub areas, are grouped as shown.

Matrix 2: Landscape sensitivity

Natural factors	L (1)	L/M (2)	M (3)	M/H (4)	H (5)
Cultural factors	L (1)	L/M (2)	M (3)	M/H (4)	H (5)
Perceptual features	L (1)	M/L (2)	M (3)	M/H (4)	H (5)
OVERALL LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY	3-4 = low; 5- 7 = Med/low; 8-10 = Med; 11-13 = Med/high; 14-15 = High				

Table 4: Notes on Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

Factor	Higher sensitivity	Lower sensitivity
Natural	Native woodland	Plantation
	Significant tree/groups	Insignificant/young trees
	Strong hedgerow structure with hedgerow trees	Weak structure and no trees
	Species rich grassland	Arable field
	Significant water feature(s)	No water feature(s)
	Varied landform and distinctive feature of the area	Uniform landform and lack of topographical features
	Pronounced Geology	Lack of geological features
	Soils significantly contribute to landscape features	Soils are not an important feature
	Complex and vulnerable landcover	Simple robust landcover
	Presence of other significant vegetation cover	Absence of other significant vegetation
	Presence of valued wildlife habitats	Absence of valued wildlife habitats
	Significant wetland habitats and meadows	Poor water-logged areas
	Presence of common land	No common land
	Presence of good heathland	Lost heathland
Cultural	Distinctive good quality boundary features	Generic or poor boundary features
	Evidence of surviving part of an historic landscape	No evidence
	Complex historic landscape pattern with good time depth	Simple modern landscape
	Evidence of historic park	No evidence
	Important to setting or in a Conservation Area	No relationship
	Includes a Scheduled Ancient Monument or Important to setting	No relationship
	Locally distinctive built form and pattern	Generic built form
	Important to setting of a Listed building	No relationship
	Distinctive strong settlement pattern	Generic or eroded pattern
	Locally significant private gardens	Poorly maintained gardens erode the character
	Evidence of visible social cultural associations	Lack of social cultural associations
Perceptual	Quiet area	Noisy area
	Absence of intrusive elements	Intrusive elements present
	Dark skies	High levels of light pollution
	Open exposed landscape	Enclosed visually contained landscape
	Unified landscape with strong landscape pattern	Fragmented/'bitty' or featureless landscape
	Well used area or appreciated by the public	Inaccessible by public
	Important rights of way	None present
	Well used and valued open air recreational facilities	None present
	Open access land	None present

Stage 3: Determination of Landscape Character Sensitivity

1.13 The landscape sensitivity and visual sensitivity are combined, as shown in Matrix 3, to give the **landscape character sensitivity**. The results of the assessment are set out in the Reports for each site or sub-division.

Matrix 3: Landscape character sensitivity

VISUAL SENSITIVITY	High	M	M/H	M/H	H	H
	Med/High	M/L	M	M/H	M/H	H
	Medium	M/L	M/L	M	M/H	M/H
	Med/Low	L	M/L	M/L	M	M/H
	Low	L	L	M/L	M/L	M
	Low	Med/Low	Medium	Med/High	High	
LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY						

Stage 4: Determination of Wider Sensitivity – The Contribution of the Site to the Wider Landscape and adjacent Employment Uses and Settlement Edge Pattern

1.14 Stages 1 to 3 have led to a comprehensive assessment of the intrinsic landscape sensitivity of the individual sites. However, the sensitivity of each site to development is also affected by its importance, and contribution, to the adjacent wider rural landscape, its contribution to the setting and form of existing settlement - and the influence of, and pattern of uses adjacent. The relative wider sensitivity of each site is assessed as follows:

Low wider sensitivity – The site is heavily influenced by the built form of adjacent employment uses and existing settlement and is not an important part of the adjacent wider landscape

Medium/Low wider sensitivity – The site is heavily influenced by the existing settlement and has views of some parts of the adjacent employment sites but shares some of the characteristics of the adjacent wider landscape

Medium wider sensitivity – The site is partly influenced by the existing settlement and adjacent employment uses but shares many of the characteristics of the wider landscape, with good physical and visual links to the wider landscape

Medium/High wider sensitivity – The site has strong physical and visual links to the wider landscape and these outweigh any minor impacts from the existing settlement and adjacent employment uses

High wider sensitivity – The site is an important part of the wider landscape with which it has strong visual and landscape links. Nearby settlement and employment uses have little impact on the site.

1.15 The results of the assessment are set out in the reports for each site or sub-division.

Stage 5: Determination of Overall Landscape Sensitivity

1.16 The **overall landscape sensitivity** is determined by combining the landscape character sensitivity with the wider sensitivity as shown in Matrix 4. The results of the assessment are set out in the Report Sheets for each site or sub-division.

Matrix 4: Overall landscape sensitivity

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER SENSITIVITY	High	H	H	M/H	M/H	M
	Med/High	H	M/H	M/H	M	M/L
	Medium	M/H	M/H	M	M/L	M/L
	Med/Low	M/H	M	M	M/L	M/L
	Low	M	M	M/L	M/L	L
		High	Med/High	Medium	Med/Low	Low
WIDER SENSITIVITY						

Stage 6: Determination of Landscape Value

1.17 The model for this work follows GLVIA 2013.

Table 5 - LANDSCAPE VALUE CRITERIA

Value	Typical criteria	Typical scale	Typical examples
High	Very High importance (or quality) and rarity. No or limited potential for substitution	International	World Heritage Site SAC
Medium/high	High importance (or quality) and rarity. Limited potential for substitution	National	National Park/ AONB SSSI EH Register of Parks and Gardens Grade I and II* listed buildings and their settings National recreational route or area e.g. Chiltern Way
Medium	Medium importance (or quality) and rarity. Limited potential for substitution	Regional	Setting of AONB / National Park Regional Park (i.e. Colne Valley) Local landscape designation Landscape value identified in the Local Plan SINC/Conservation Areas and their setting Grade II listed buildings and their setting Local Wildlife sites Regional recreational route/area e.g. South Bucks Way
Medium/low	Local importance (or quality) and rarity. Limited potential for substitution	Local	Undesignated but value expressed through publications such as Village Design Statements Local buildings of historic interest and their settings Local recreational facilities of landscape value
Low	Low importance (or quality) or rarity		Area of little value and identified for improvement

Designations: The location of the site within a designated area, or the presence of a designated area within the site, is an important measure of the value society gives to the landscape of the site. These include landscape, historic and ecological designations and recreational routes at a national/international level, regional or district level, or at the local level.

Local Associations: These are included as far as possible using available data. In addition to the more formal designations above, sites may sometimes have special scenic value, associations or meanings to the local community and therefore make a contribution to the value of the local landscape. This has

been assessed through a review of readily available evidence of community value. Further research may be required as part of any detailed landscape and visual impact assessment.

Stage 7: Determination of Landscape Capacity

1.17 Landscape capacity is the ability, or otherwise, of the sites to accommodate a certain amount of development. The landscape capacity is determined by combining the overall landscape sensitivity with the landscape value as shown in Matrix 5. The results of the assessment are set out in the Report Sheets for each site or sub-division.

Matrix 5 LANDSCAPE CAPACITY

OVERALL LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY	High	M	M/L	L	L	L
	Med/High	M/H	M	M/L	L	L
	Medium	H	M/H	M	M/L	L
	Med/Low	H	H	M/H	M	M/L
	Low	H	H	H	M/H	M
	Low	Med/Low	Medium	Med/High	High	
	LANDSCAPE VALUE					

1.18 The results from the matrix are subsequently tested against the following classifications for each level of landscape capacity, building on classifications used by the authors of this Report for other capacity studies.

Low capacity – The landscape could not accommodate areas for employment uses without a significant and adverse impact on the landscape character and visual amenity. Occasional, very small-scale employment uses may be possible, providing it has regard to the setting and form of existing settlement and the character and the sensitivity of adjacent landscape character areas.

Medium / Low capacity – A low amount of development for employment uses can be accommodated only in limited situations, providing it has regard to the setting and form of existing settlement and the character and the sensitivity of adjacent landscape character areas.

Medium capacity - The landscape could be able to accommodate areas of new development for employment uses in some parts, providing it has regard to the setting and form of existing settlement and the character and sensitivity of adjacent landscape character areas. There are landscape and visual constraints and therefore the key landscape and visual characteristics must be retained and enhanced.

Medium/ High capacity – The area is able to accommodate larger amounts of development for employment uses, providing it has regard to the setting and form of existing settlement and the character and the sensitivity of adjacent landscape character areas. Certain landscape and visual features in the area may require protection.

High capacity – Much of the area is able to accommodate significant areas of development for employment uses, providing it has regard to the setting and form of existing settlement and the character and the sensitivity of adjacent landscape character areas.

Stage 8: Determination of Landscape Capacity within the Site

- 1.19 Each site report contains an overall plan showing the landscape capacity classification of the site at the beginning of the site report; and an overall plan showing the extent of the site recommended for further consideration as a site and the recommended location
- 1.20 Each site is examined in detail to determine the potential area for development for employment uses in the light of the landscape capacity and landscape and visual constraints on the site. In some cases, the whole site will be ruled out for development. In others the whole site will be included as a potential site, subject to the provision of Green Infrastructure. However, in many cases we recommend a 'reduced area' which identifies a part of the site that could be considered further as a potential site subject to the provision of Green Infrastructure. The 'reduced area' is that part of the site that could be developed whilst conserving (and potentially in some cases indirectly enhancing) the key landscape and visual characteristics of the site and its landscape setting; and whilst conserving and reinforcing the influence of the underlying landscape on the settlement pattern of the adjacent town or village. The policy constraints affecting sites within the AONB have also been taken into account.
- 1.21 Study Constraints
1. The sites have largely been assessed from publicly accessible viewpoints including the local road network, public rights of way, public open space and other publicly owned land. There was no access to the sites.
 2. Site photographs included in this study are representative of key views of the site.
 3. Views from the surrounding countryside or urban areas have been assessed by noting intervisibility from within or adjacent to the site, but the Study does not include an assessment of the potential zone of visual influence of any development on each site.
 4. The majority of study fieldwork was undertaken in July 2021 with summer vegetation.
 5. A development scenario of employment uses - offices and/or B2 and/or B8 has been assumed,
 6. Time limitations have meant that no public consultation has taken place during the Study.

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL CAPACITY STUDY 2021 RECORD SHEET

Site:	THE8: Land off Hoad Road, Theale
Date of site survey:	17.07.2021
Surveyors:	LA
Weather/visibility:	Clear

LCA:

West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019 *LCA RO1: Kennet Lower River with Open Water*

Key Characteristics

- Broad, open valley of the River Kennet, underlain by chalk geology with gravel and sand deposits
- Land use dominated by gravel pit lakes, industry and transport infrastructure
- Former gravel pits and flood plain habitats are locally important for wildlife
- A modern landscape dominated by transport corridors and gravel extraction with surviving small scale heritage features
- Settlement in the area is sparse, excepting the large historic village of Theale
- Transport links are a dominant feature, particularly the M4, railway and canal
- Destination for formal and informal recreation activity
- Often visually enclosed by woodland, with views opening out over the lakes
- Tranquillity is limited by the motorway and nearby urban development

Valued Features and Qualities

- Semi-natural habitats associated with distinctive gravel pit lakes
- Sparse settlement pattern
- The historic village of Theale
- Important provision of recreational amenity
- Historic transport routes including the railway and canals

Detractors

- Past and present gravel pit extraction resulting in an industrialised landscape
- Large-scale transport infrastructure
- Upgrading of rural roads
- Fragmented and degraded remaining agricultural land
- Pressure for new development
- Prominent large-scale buildings

Landscape Strategy

- Continue to promote the appropriate restoration of former gravel pits
- Conserve and enhance hedgerows, woodland strips and remaining areas of pasture
- Respect the setting of historic features within the landscape
- Maintain distinction and sense of separation between the settlements of Theale and Calcot
- Mitigate the adverse influence of major transport infrastructure and maintain character of rural lanes

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

LLCA20E: Theale – Calcot Gap is divided into 4 unequal quarters, two of which comprise open land and two of which are covered by commercial development.

Key elements of landscape sensitivity

- Recent new landscapes (such as Arlington Park) have created a more positive, ornamental landscape setting
 - Remnant fields and tree cover
 - Several local landmarks, set within un-cohesive built form
 - Visually exposed to views from higher ground and settlement edge
 - Geological SSSI
 - Undulating topography falling to the valley floor which has been significantly altered by highway infrastructure
 - Distinctive modern commercial built form
 - Dominance of highway infrastructure
 - Generally poor landscape structure
-
- Wider landscape: The open landscape quarters of LLCA20E Theale – Calcot Gap link through to the Kennet Valley landscape of 8F in the east and the farmed landscape of 16A to the north west. There is a strong landscape and visual link between 16A and the north west quarter. The south east quarter has more in common with south 14J from which it is separated by the A4 infrastructure but it has good visual links with 8F.
 - Setting to the urban form: LLCA20E: Theale – Calcot Gap separates Theale from Reading but includes substantial areas of commercial development straddling the M4 junction. This differs in character from the residential townscape of both Theale and Calcot and together with the open space defines the gap. The open land retains the perception of separation between the two settlements.

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. 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.

North Wessex Downs AONB LCA 2002: Character Area 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons

The site is located within the setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB

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:

The site is located within the setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB
The site is located partly within and adjacent Theale Conservation Area

VISUAL SENSITIVITY

<i>General visibility</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Mitigation potential</i>
<p>Views into the site from: Bath Road to the south Western part of Junction 12 of the M4 Hoad Way to the west High Street to the north Public Right of Way to the north Open space to west of junction of Woodfield Way and High Street (within Conservation Area)</p>	<p>Types of viewers: Walkers, residents and vehicle travellers</p>	<p>Opportunities for mitigation and landscape compatibility of mitigation: Screen planting or site boundary planting could compromise the open character of the site and subsequent settlement setting and identity of Theale from Calcot</p>
<p>Views out of the site to: The settlement edge of Theale Bath Road on embankment M4 wooded embankment (M4 not visible) Wooded Sulham Ridge within the AONB Winter views include to fragmented parts of the buildings east of the M4 including Ikea</p>	<p>Magnitude of viewers (level of use and popularity): Bath Road to the south - High Western part of Junction 12 - high Hoad Way to the west - high High Street to the north, which provides access across the M4 to Calcot - medium Public Right of Way to the north – medium Open space to west of junction of Woodfield Way and High Street (within Conservation Area) - medium</p>	<p>Impacts of mitigation: High – Would screen view of setting of Theale and wider views to Sulham Ridge within the AONB to the north east</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: Open view across whole site from Junction 12 roundabout</p>		
<p>Landmark features: None</p>		
<p>Sensitivity score: High</p>	<p>Sensitivity score: High</p>	<p>Sensitivity score: High</p>
<p>Visual sensitivity score: High</p>		
<p>Additional comments: The site is in a prominent location, visible from the north, south and east on the approach into Theale</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: Highway timber post and rail fence along the western and southern site boundary Boundary walling and gable ends of adjacent properties within north west corner of site</p>	<p>Tranquillity – Noise levels: Traffic noise from M4 and Bath Road</p>
<p>Geological features: None</p>	<p>Historic landscapes: 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 east Bath Road semi screened PEA-Arlington Business Park screened from view, by Bath Road embankment/tree planting</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 Light Pollution and Dark Skies map the site is located within the brightest category (>32 nanowatts/cm2sr)</p>
<p>Water features: Field ditch across site as part of a network of ditches/stream flowing south into the River Kennet as shown on the OS map, although probably realigned underground</p>		
<p>Landcover and land use: Fallow grassland – presently ungrazed</p>	<p>Conservation Area: Site slightly within but mainly adjacent to Theale Conservation Area to the west</p>	
<p>Tree belts, individual trees and riverside trees: Groups of trees within southern corner of site, which then continue beyond the site boundary onto the embankment of the Bath Road</p>	<p>Landscape features of LCA: The site is a pocket of isolated agricultural grassland Impact of the M4 from noise, however not visible from site. Overhead electricity infrastructure and pylon visible within site Adjacent historic town of Theale and Conservation Area, where the site is visible from Located within open landscape between Theale-Calcot, highlighted as an area where pressure for new development is ongoing</p>	

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

<p>Hedgerows and hedgerow trees: Northern boundary adjacent the High Street aligns a mature field hedgerow Southern boundary adjacent Hoad Way is aligned with a wide hedgerow</p>	<p>Built form: Pylon Telecommunication Mast fenced off</p>	<p>Accessibility by public footpath: None</p>
<p>Woodland and copses: Small woodland copse within southern corner of site adjacent Bath Road and Hoad Way roundabout</p>	<p>Setting of listed buildings: Nearest (125m) listed building is No 49 the High Street</p>	<p>Open access areas: None</p>
<p>Wetland and meadow: The fallow grassland has a meadow character The area within the southern corner had a damp grassland character indicated by reeds and standing water in March 2020</p>	<p>Scheduled Monuments: None</p>	<p>Recreational areas: None</p>
<p>Common land: None</p>	<p>Settlement pattern: Adjacent settlement boundary of Theale. Also, partly within and adjacent to Theale Conservation Area, where the open character contributes to Theale's historic setting Separated from PEA (Arlington Business Park) by Bath Road embankment</p>	
<p>Heathland: None</p>	<p>Contribution of private gardens to landscape character: N/A</p>	<p>Aesthetic sensitivity - Elements of openness/enclosure: Open character</p>
<p>Other significant vegetation cover: None</p>	<p>Cultural associations: None known</p>	<p>Aesthetic sensitivity – landscape pattern: Part of the open setting of Theale and key to its separate identity from Calcot and Reading Separate from Arlington Business Park by wooded embankment of M4 and Bath Road embankment</p>

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

<p>BAP/Phase 1 records: Northern hedgerow would qualify as a Habitat of Principle Importance as stated within the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal undertaken in September 2019 on the site by Middlemarch Environmental</p>	<p>Features of cultural importance: None known</p>	
<p>Presence of SSSI/SINC/local wildlife designation/Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland: None known</p>		
<p>Sensitivity score: Medium</p>	<p>Sensitivity score: High</p>	<p>Sensitivity score: Medium</p>
<p>Landscape sensitivity score: Medium/high</p>		
<p>Additional comments: The site forms an important open area, which relates to Theale contributing to its open setting. Physically and visually separated from the nearest PEA by treed road embankments</p>		

Relationship with the wider landscape/Protected Employment Areas

Adjacent Protected Employment Area and Settlement:

A small length of the site boundary is located against the settlement boundary of Theale. Also, a small part of the site is located within Theale Conservation Area, but mainly the site is set adjacent. The site forms part of the open landscape character and open setting for Theale and the Conservation Area as well as contributing to the separate identity of Theale from Calcot to the east

The PEA, Arlington Business Park - on the southern side of the Bath Road is separated from the site by the road embankment, which also contains areas of trees further contributing to this embankment as a visual barrier

Character of the PEA and settlement edge:

The character of this PEA off Waterside Drive known as Arlington Business Park includes a central area with two lakes, areas of amenity grassland and tree planting; leading off from this central landscaped area are tree lined roads and car parking areas with further tree planting. Buildings are generally three storeys, business in usage, rather than industrial or shed like in style. To the west of Arlington Business Park, the PEA is more compact in density, with less tree planting and includes larger industrial style buildings

In contrast to this large scale, in Theale itself residential properties north of the High Street front the site, sitting behind a grass verge with trees and hedgerows contributing to a soft settlement edge. The settlement edge character of the properties south of the High Street and adjacent the site in part creates a hard edge with boundary walls and buildings

Presence in a floodplain:












Flood Zone 2: except for a small area on the northern boundary where the mast is located, the site is covered by Flood Zone 2

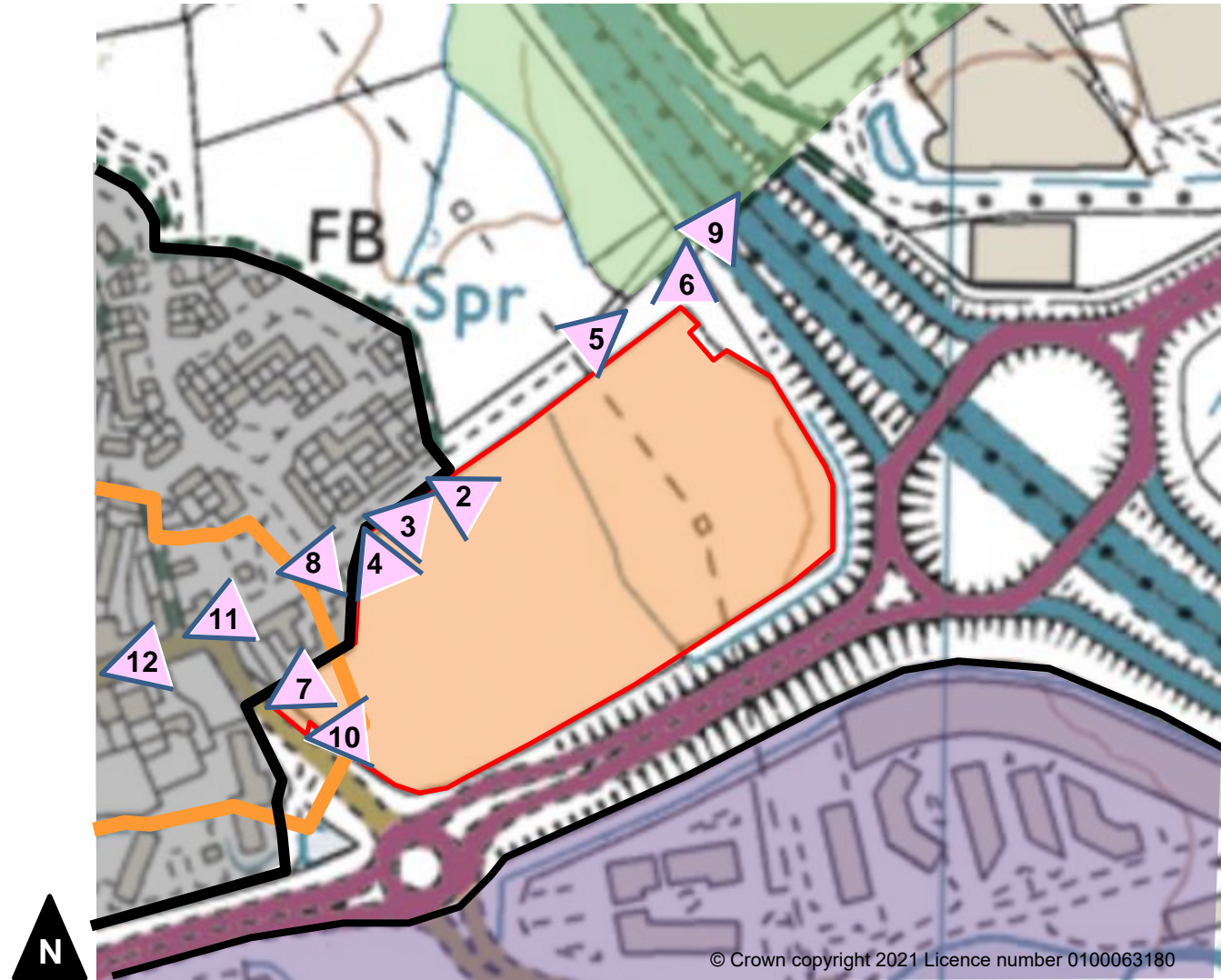
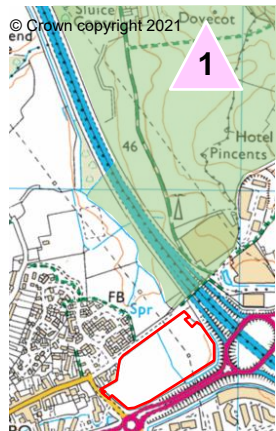
Relationship with adjacent wider countryside:

From the eastern part of the site, open countryside continues to the north across the High Street and into the North Wessex Downs AONB

<p>Character of adjacent village(s)/towns:</p> <p>The settlement of Theale was originally a linear settlement aligning along the High Street in a NNE SWW direction. From the late 1960's ribbon development characterised a number of the northern approach roads to the High Street. From the late 1970's infill housing development between these approach roads changed the character of Theale to a more nucleated form. However, the High Street still retains a strong historic character, which forms the present Conservation Area containing a high concentration of Listed Buildings</p> <p>The eastern end of the High Street has always been characterised by the open countryside which contributes to the open setting of the Conservation Area. This open setting can be appreciated as one approaches Theale from the Bath Road, down onto Hoad Way and onto the High Street</p>
<p>Historic links with the wider area if known:</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Ecological links with the wider area if known:</p> <p>Part of a Biodiversity Opportunity Area</p>
<p>Recreational links with the wider area:</p> <p>The High Street which aligns with the northern boundary of the site continues onto a Public Right of Way (by bridge over the M4) located within the North Wessex Downs AONB</p>
<p>VDS/Parish Plan – relevant extracts:</p> <p>None</p>

Figure 1: Site: THE8: Land off Hoad Way, Theale

-  Site boundary
 -  Protected Employment Area
 -  Theale Conservation Area
 -  North Wessex Downs AONB
 -  Theale settlement boundary
 -  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 *LCA RO1: Kennet Lower River with Open Water*. The landscape strategy for this LCA is set out below:

Landscape Strategy

- Continue to promote the appropriate restoration of former gravel pits
- Conserve and enhance hedgerows, woodland strips and remaining areas of pasture
- Respect the setting of historic features within the landscape
- Maintain distinction and sense of separation between the settlements of Theale and Calcot
- Mitigate the adverse influence of major transport infrastructure and maintain character of rural lanes

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

The site lies within the following LLCA20E: Theale-Calcot Gap for which states:

Setting to the urban form LLCA20E: Theale – Calcot Gap separates Theale from Reading but includes substantial areas of commercial development straddling the M4 junction. This differs in character from the residential townscape of both Theale and Calcot and together with the open space defines the gap. The open land retains the perception of separation between the two settlements.

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. 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.

North Wessex Downs AONB LCA-2002: Character Area 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons

The site is located within the setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB

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.

Site description:

The site constitutes a large grass field which has been left fallow. At the southern end of the site are areas of regenerating scrub with some small trees. A hedgerow aligns its north western boundary. Other site boundaries are defined by a highway timber post and rail fence. A small part of the site is set within Theale Conservation Area, but the site is mainly set adjacent. Part of the site boundary also aligns the settlement boundary of Theale. The site is separated from the Arlington Business Park to the south by the Bath Road which is located on an elevated embankment. The embankment and tree planting visually and physically separate the site from this Protected Employment Area. The site is visible in its entirety for a range of visitors and residents as they approach Theale.

Key landscape planning factors:

The site is located as follows:

- Within the setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Partly within and within the setting of Theale Conservation Area
- Within the setting of Theale
- Outside and separate from the Protected Employment Area to the south

Viewpoints:

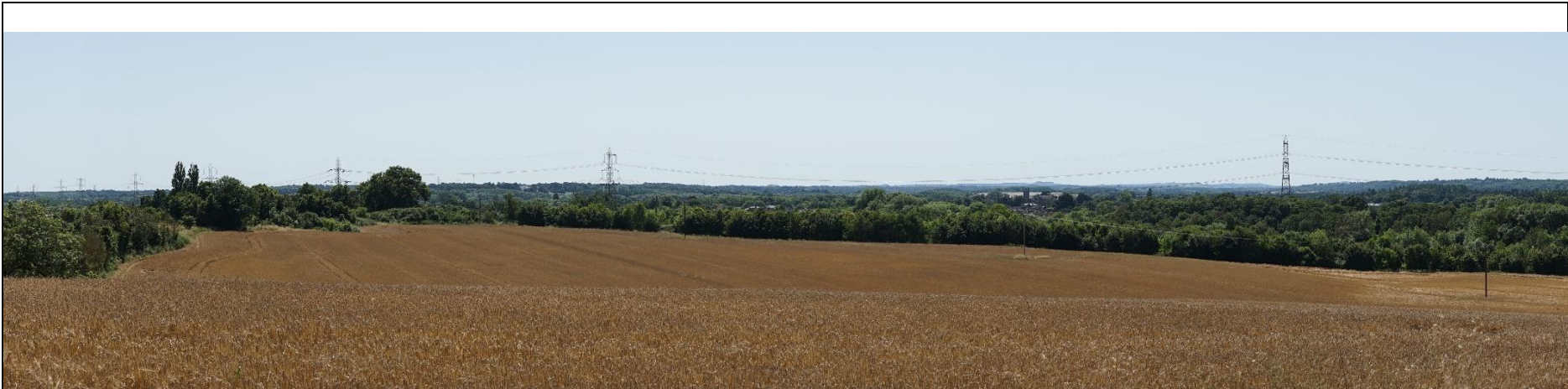


Photo 1: Summer view from a Public Right of Way within the North Wessex Downs AONB, looking towards the site. The wooded character of the Kennet valley screens/integrates existing built development into the landscape preserving a wooded setting for the adjacent AONB and views from Folly Hill. The church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



Photo 2: View from the High Street across the site to the Bath Road, located on an embankment. Arlington Business Park is located further to the south of the Bath Road, which is not visible from this location (July 2021)



Photo 3: From the High Street looking east across the site to Junction 12 (M4) on embankment (July 2021)



Photo 4: From the High Street looking south across the site to the Bath Road screened by highway trees on the embankment (July 2021)



Photo 5: From the High Street looking west towards Theale with the site boundary hedgerow to the left (July 2021)



Photo 6: From the Public Right of Way on the M4 overbridge, looking towards the site, visible as an open field, enclosed by the treed embankment of the Bath Road



Photo 7: From the pedestrian pavement adjacent Hoad Way, looking across the site to the wooded embankment which contains the M4 and provides a visual link to the wooded Sulham ridge within the AONB. The open grassed part of the embankment (to the right) allows views back across the site from Junction 12 (July 2021)



Photo 8: From the Conservation Area and edge of open space west of Woodfield Way looking towards the site (July 2021)



Photo 9: From the Public Right of Way on the M4 pedestrian overbridge looking across to the site to the left (March 2020)



Photo 10: From Hoad Way looking across the site to the eastern site boundary and the wooded Sulham Ridge beyond within the North Wessex Downs AONB, parts of the 'blue' Ikea building (east of the M4) are just visible within the trees (March 2020)



Photo 11: From the High Street within the Conservation Area, looking towards the site (March 2020)



Photo 12: From the High Street within the Conservation Area, looking towards the site (March 2020)

Please refer to section 3 methodology of the assessment process

1. **Visual Sensitivity: High**
 - Most of the site area visible from public adjacent areas
 - Within the summer months there is no intervisibility with the site and Arlington Business Park to the south of the Bath Road, due to the intervening embankment which along with its tree planting creates a screen
 - The site forms part of key views out of Theale and part of the setting of settlement views
 - Visible from Theale Conservation Area
 - Large number of people, as visitors, travellers and residents to Theale can see the site
 - Although the site itself might not be visible from areas within the AONB, large scale development would be partly visible from areas adjacent Wilders Folly and areas to the west around Englefield Park, both within the AONB
2. **Landscape Sensitivity: Medium/High**
 - Open area of fallow grassland contributing to the setting and separation of Theale from Calcot
 - A small part is located within Theale Conservation Area, but mainly aligns, therefore contributing to the setting of the Conservation Area and listed buildings
 - Traffic noise as in close proximity to M4
 - Visually intrusive pylon with overhead cables
3. Landscape Character Sensitivity: High (combines 1 and 2)
4. **Wider Landscape Sensitivity: Medium**
 - The site is part of the open land between Calcot and Theale, although influenced by the adjacent settlement of Theale, the open character of the site and its connection to the wider undeveloped landscape is important to the setting of Theale and its separate identity to Calcot
5. Overall Landscape Sensitivity: Medium/high (combines 3 and 4)
6. **Landscape Value: Medium**
 - A small part is located within, but mainly forms part of the setting of Theale Conservation Area
 - Setting of North Wessex Downs AONB
 - Local importance as part of undeveloped land forming a physical and perceptual separation between Calcot and Theale
 - Visually and physically separate from the Protected Employment Area south of the Bath Road
7. Landscape Capacity: Medium/low (combines 5 and 6)

Relationship of site to Theale

- The site contributes to an important part of the remaining open countryside and the subsequent separation of Theale from Calcot
- The site is visible from within Theale (and the Conservation Area), where the open character of the site contributes to Theale's historic character and setting
- Only a small part of the site aligns the settlement boundary of Theale
- A small part of the site is located within Theale Conservation Area, with the rest adjacent and within the setting of Theale Conservation Area
- The site is visible in its entirety on the eastern approach road (Hoad Way) into Theale

Relationship of site to Protected Employment Area (PEA)

- The site is separated from Arlington Business Park by the Bath Road which is located on a partly treed embankment
- Due to the lack of intervisibility with the site and PEA, the landscape character of the site retains a more rural character, contributing to the setting and separate identity of the historic village of Theale

Relationship with adjacent wider countryside

- The site is part of the open countryside which continues further to the north and across the M4 into the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Continuation of an open area which separates Theale from Calcot

Potential impact on key landscape characteristics

- Loss of agricultural grassland - pasture
- Loss of surface water and streams
- Development across the whole site would result in coalescence with Calcot and loss of separate identity of the historic village of Theale from Calcot
- Noise levels are already compromised by the proximity to the M4, however the introduction of lorries and heavy vehicles in closer proximity to Theale will exacerbate the noise levels
- The introduction of offices and/or other large-scale buildings on this side of the A4 would be out of scale and keeping with the historic village character of Theale

Potential impact on key visual characteristics

- A visible site, where views of the separate loss of separate identity of Theale from Calcot would be experienced by a large number of travellers (walkers, vehicle users)
- Loss of separate identity and open setting of Theale as experienced and viewed from the Public Right of Way set within the AONB to the north west

Potential impact on key settlement characteristics

- Development over the whole site would create the perception of coalescence of Theale with Calcot and the loss of their separate settlement identities
- Loss of semi-rural setting as viewed from within Theale
- Large-scale buildings on this prominent site would have a detrimental impact on the settlement edge character of Theale and its Conservation Area

Potential impact on the North Wessex Downs AONB




- There are some close-range views from the Public Right of Way on the M4 overbridge set within the AONB
- Development including large scale buildings would be visible from elevated areas within the AONB to the north of the site (Wilders Folly) and west of the site (Englefield Park)

Landscape mitigation and contribution to green infrastructure

- Not applicable

Conclusion and recommendations

If this site was developed, either in whole or in part, it would compromise the setting of Theale and its separate identity and character from Calcot. It is therefore recommended the site is not developed for employment uses. Although not considered suitable for employment uses, opportunities could be explored through green infrastructure on the site to see if it could make a positive contribution towards enhancing the setting of Theale in conjunction with any development on THE1.

-  The site
-  With potential for development
-  Considered inappropriate for development

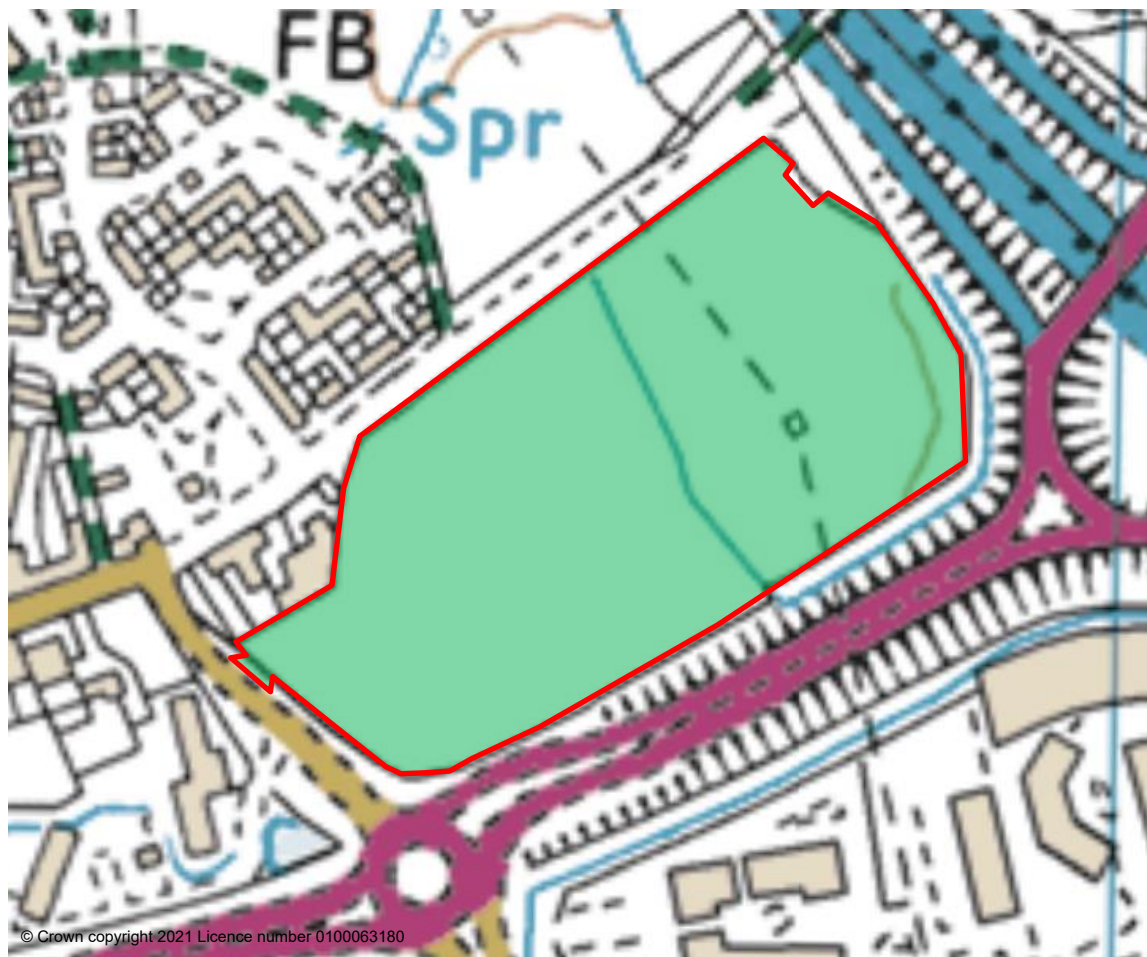


Figure 2: Site: THE8 : Land east of Hoad Way: Recommended developable site area