

**Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for: Beenham Industrial Area - BEEN4**

**WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL CAPACITY STUDY 2022 RECORD SHEET**

<b>Site</b>	Beenham Industrial Area BEEN4
<b>Date of site survey</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> January 2022
<b>Surveyors</b>	LA
<b>Weather/visibility</b>	Slight fog
<b>LCA</b>	North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002: West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019:

**West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019:** The site is located within *LCA LVI: Kennet Lower River Valley*

*Key Characteristics*

- Distinctive flat and open lowland landscape, created by the River Kennet and associated channels and drainage ditches
- Principally pasture farmland used for cattle grazing, with some larger arable fields. Woodland occurs along the river corridor.
- Internationally and nationally important wetland habitats along the valley floor
- Sense of time-depth with visible heritage features and historic settlements
- Sparsely settled, although influenced by Newbury and Thatcham in the west of the area, modern urban development and industry within Newbury and Thatcham
- Many public rights of way, particularly along the river
- Transportation routes, often parallel to the river corridor
- Visually semi-enclosed, with strong rural qualities away from large settlements

*Valued Features and Qualities*

- Forms part of the nationally valued North Wessex Downs AONB landscape
- Ecologically valuable habitats along the river corridor
- Numerous heritage assets and historic landscape features give the landscape a sense of time-depth
- Strong rural and sparsely settled character
- Valued destination for recreation
- Distinctive visual character

*Detractors*

- Impacts of improvements and intensification of the railway line

- Increasing development pressures
- Changes in farming practices including a reduction in the viability of livestock grazing
- Past and present impacts of industrial use
- Nutrient enrichment of the river from agricultural run-off and water vessels
- Increased risk of more frequent and severe flooding due to climate change
- Development of large infrastructure such as solar farms and waste management facilities

#### *Landscape Strategy*

- Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated AONB landscape
- Conserve and restore the traditional valley landscape
- Restore, extend and manage wetland habitats that occur along the floodplain
- Conserve the valley floor woodland
- Conserve and enhance heritage features in the landscape
- Manage recreational pressure
- Conserve the distinct identities of individual settlements

**North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002:** The site is located within *Character Area 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons*

#### *Key Characteristics*

- 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

- 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
- Intricate network of rural lanes, many sunken and overhung by woodland plus more intrusive road infrastructure
- Historic parkland based on medieval deer parks and manor houses with associated ornamental parklands with gardens, rides and plantings are a particular feature

#### *Key Management Requirements*

- The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, secluded character of the Hermitage Wooded Commons. This includes conservation and enhancement of the key assets, namely: ancient and semi-natural woodlands, pasture, field patterns and hedgerows, remnant heathland commons, historic parkland and the rural lane network. There are opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration of the hedgerow network and diversification of some of the plantations to include a broadleaved element. In the longer term, as part of a wider initiative, it may be appropriate to consider restoration of former areas of heathland to link existing sites.
- The aim 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. Consideration should be given to measures that could lessen the impact of the road infrastructure and reduce high traffic levels on the rural lanes.

#### **North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019-2024**

Key development issues with the potential to have significant influence on the special qualities of the AONB

- The loss of rural character through suburbanising influences from new development (new fencing, lighting, signage, parking areas, paved footpaths, loss of native hedgerows and creation of new garden areas)
- Impact on dark skies and tranquillity of high-powered external lighting, especially where poorly directed or in an exposed location (not usually subject to planning control)
- Potential for certain forms of development to intrude on the wider landscape, including masts, pylons, wind turbine developments, photovoltaic schemes, and minerals and waste schemes, threatening the landscape quality, heritage assets, and the sense of remoteness and tranquillity
- Unsuitable development of redundant previously developed and part-developed sites within the North Wessex Downs, especially redundant airfields and military sites (e.g., Wroughton), and the impact upon landscape quality and heritage assets
- New developments at the junction of the M4 and A34 or along their corridors which spread the impact from development yet further into the undeveloped parts of the AONB
- Development that results in a material loss of tranquillity and/ or impact on the dark night skies within the North Wessex Downs or its setting.
- Development that does not provide for or support existing Green Infrastructure.

#### **Landscape Designations**

North Wessex Downs AONB

**VISUAL SENSITIVITY**

<b>General visibility</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Mitigation potential</b>
<b>Views into the site from:</b> A4 (Bath Road) and residential properties to the south Back Lane, although not adjacent, views are from the valley side Public Right of Way (BEEN/18/1) Public Right of Way (BEEN/4/1) – Beenham Hill	<b>Types of viewers:</b> Vehicle travellers Walkers/ cyclists and equestrians Residents fronting A4 Residents/workers at Field Barn Farm Workers/customers of adjacent vehicle dealership	<b>Opportunities for mitigation and landscape compatibility of mitigation:</b> Large open rural landscape typical of Kennet Valley base/side, woodland planting could link to existing vegetation pattern The elevated landform is visible from surrounding area and with development would be very visible As key views are looking down onto the site from the Kennet valley side, mitigation planting would not be effective in screening views of development
<b>Views out of the site to:</b> To the north Beenham Hill and Kennet Valley side Residential ribbon development south of the A4	<b>Magnitude of viewers (level of use and popularity):</b> High, as within AONB and local viewpoint for Beenham village	<b>Impacts of mitigation:</b> Extensive tree planting would screen views from the A4 and Aldermaston Wharf west across to the Kennet Valley side and Beenham Hill resulting in the loss of the open agricultural landscape adjacent A4 and as part of setting of Aldermaston Wharf
<b>Does the site form part of a skyline?</b> Yes, from the A4	<b>Visual perceptions (activity and expectations of local visual receptors):</b> AONB – expectations high Local viewpoint of open agricultural landscape – high	
<b>Panoramic views:</b> Yes - Setting of Kennet Valley side and Beenham Hill part of agricultural landscape		
<b>Landmark features:</b> None		
<b>Sensitivity score:</b> Medium/High	<b>Sensitivity score:</b> Medium/High	<b>Sensitivity score:</b> Medium
<b>Visual sensitivity score:</b> Medium/high		
<b>Additional comments:</b> Restored, area of extraction, with no remaining buildings or structures to suggest previous land use, therefore reads as agricultural landscape of small fields Visually separate from adjacent area of car compounds to the south east and local PEA		

**LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY**

<b>Natural factors</b>	<b>Cultural factors</b>	<b>Perceptual features</b>
<b>Topography and landform:</b> Artificial landform formed by landfill of ex quarry, domed in shape	<b>Boundary features other than vegetation:</b> None	<b>Tranquillity – Noise levels:</b> A4 to the south affects southern area of site with traffic noise.
<b>Geological features:</b> None	<b>Historic landscapes:</b> None	<b>Tranquillity – Visual intrusion / detractors:</b> Adjacent car dealership detracts from the rural quality of the site
<b>Soil quality:</b> Artificial restored landform, with made-up soil formation	<b>Parkland features:</b> None	<b>Tranquillity – Light pollution/dark skies:</b> Brightness increases to the south with a broad range from 8-16 (Nanowatts/cm2/sr)
<b>Water features:</b> None		
<b>Landcover and land use:</b> Grassland, low intensity grazing Woodland copse on NE corner	<b>Conservation Area:</b> None	
<b>Tree belts, individual trees and riverside trees:</b> Tree belt forms barrier with adjacent car sales businesses to south Line of mature poplars south east site boundary adjacent to the A4	<b>Landscape features of LCA:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forms part of the nationally valued North Wessex Downs AONB landscape</li> <li>• Visually semi-enclosed, with strong rural qualities away from large settlements</li> <li>• Principally pasture farmland used for cattle grazing</li> </ul>	

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

<p><b>Hedgerows and hedgerow trees:</b> Two robust hedgerows align across the site in a north west to south east direction South west site boundary hedgerow North west site boundary hedgerow Back Lane and A4 site boundary hedgerows</p>	<p><b>Built form:</b> None</p>	<p><b>Accessibility by public footpath:</b> None</p>
<p><b>Woodland and copses:</b> Small woodland copse south west of A4/ Back Lane junction</p>	<p><b>Setting of listed buildings:</b> None</p>	<p><b>Open access areas:</b> None</p>
<p><b>Wetland and meadow:</b> Meadow character due to low intensity grazing</p>	<p><b>Scheduled Monuments:</b> None</p>	<p><b>Recreational areas:</b> None</p>
<p><b>Common land:</b> None</p>	<p><b>Pattern of Protected Employment Area</b> Separated from PEA by intervening field which now has approved planning permission for a scaffold hire depot comprising open storage area, modular office building and car parking with access off Pips Way</p>	<p><b>Aesthetic sensitivity - Elements of openness/enclosure:</b> Domed shaped landform limit views across the site from south east site boundary to north west site boundary, the two internal hedgerows also limit views from the north east to the south west</p>
<p><b>Heathland:</b> None</p>	<p><b>Contribution of private gardens to landscape character:</b> N/A</p>	<p><b>Aesthetic sensitivity – landscape pattern:</b> Restored as three small hedged fields, typical of Kennet Valley lower side, contributing to agricultural field pattern of area</p>
<p><b>Other significant vegetation cover:</b> Small areas of regenerating scrub</p>	<p><b>Cultural associations:</b> None</p>	

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<p><b>BAP/Priority Habitats/ Phase I records:</b> None (woodland, grassland etc) registered – although internal and boundary hedgerows could qualify as Priority Habitats</p>	<p><b>Features of cultural importance:</b> None</p>	
<p><b>Presence of SSSI/SINC/local wildlife designation/Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland:</b> None</p>		
<p><b>Sensitivity score:</b> Medium</p>	<p><b>Sensitivity score:</b> Low</p>	<p><b>Sensitivity score:</b> Low/Medium</p>
<p><b>Landscape sensitivity score:</b> Medium/Low</p>		
<p><b>Additional comments:</b> Restored extraction site, with three fields which contribute to rural landscape of local area</p>		



## Relationship with the wider landscape/Protected Employment Area

### Adjacent Protected Employment Area (PEA)

The main area of the existing PEA is circa 125m to the south west of the site. Separated by a grass field (although planning permission has been approved for outdoor storage) and a wide band of tree/shrub planting (adjacent Pips Way). Beyond this main PEA there are two other fragmented PEA further to the west. The first to the north west is located beyond a narrow lake enclosed by woodland; this PEA contains a metal recycling plant, waste management and a Porsche dealership. The third PEA is south of Grange Lane and contains a mix of businesses as well as the residential redbrick Beenham Grange and a single -storey building containing flats.

### Character of the Protected Employment Area (PEA)

This main (largest) PEA includes an extensive open area with a compacted gravel base, which is presently used for storage of recycled materials; towards the south of this area located adjacent Grange Lane are a number of large industrial shed buildings. There is very little tree planting within this part of the PEA. Within the southern corner of this PEA, located beyond a mature belt of trees, which then leads to a woodland copse, also containing a lake just north of the junction of the A4 and Grange Lane, is an area in contrast with the open landscape containing a newly built large grey industrial shed presently a Porsche Cars Distribution Centre.

The two smaller fragmented PEA areas are described as follows:

North west of the main PEA (beyond the lake) this smaller PEA is compact and enclosed by mature boundary trees, linking with more mature trees existing within the site. These semi mature trees help screen the site from the wider AONB to the north.

The other smaller PEA area is located further to the south east and is characterised by a higher density of buildings with very little internal tree planting and also open to the wider surrounding landscape. Originally Beenham Grange farmstead, the north east side of this PEA retains a semi 'historic grounds' character with a number of mature parkland style trees (also TPO's), which probably would have been part of the historic Beenham Grange grounds. The southern edge of this PEA contains a row of residential properties which fronts and is accessed off Clay Lane.

### Presence in a floodplain:

No

### Relationship with adjacent wider countryside:

The restored grassland and hedged field character of the site connects with the wider agricultural landscape further to the north east beyond Back Lane and to the north west leading across to the Kennet Valley side, Beenham Hill and the settlement of Beenham

### Character of adjacent village(s)/towns:

Beyond the southern site boundary and the A4 is the settlement boundary of Aldermaston Wharf. Aldermaston Wharf developed around the Kennet and Avon Canal. The settlement is characterised by a mix of residential development leading off from the lock on the Canal. A Conservation Area covers the historic part of Aldermaston Wharf. The settlement extends to the north east as a long linear area of mainly residential ribbon development sandwiched between the A4 and the railway line further to the south. The urban fabric and building character of this settlement area is characterised by a mix of late 19<sup>th</sup> bungalows with infill residential development of a higher density semidetached and detached two storey dwellings. The properties along the northern edge across the road from the site can appreciate the long views across the site to Beenham Hill and the Kennet Valley side

### Historic links with the wider area if known:

None known

**Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for potential employment areas within West Berkshire****Ecological links with the wider area if known:**

None known












**Recreational links with the wider area:**

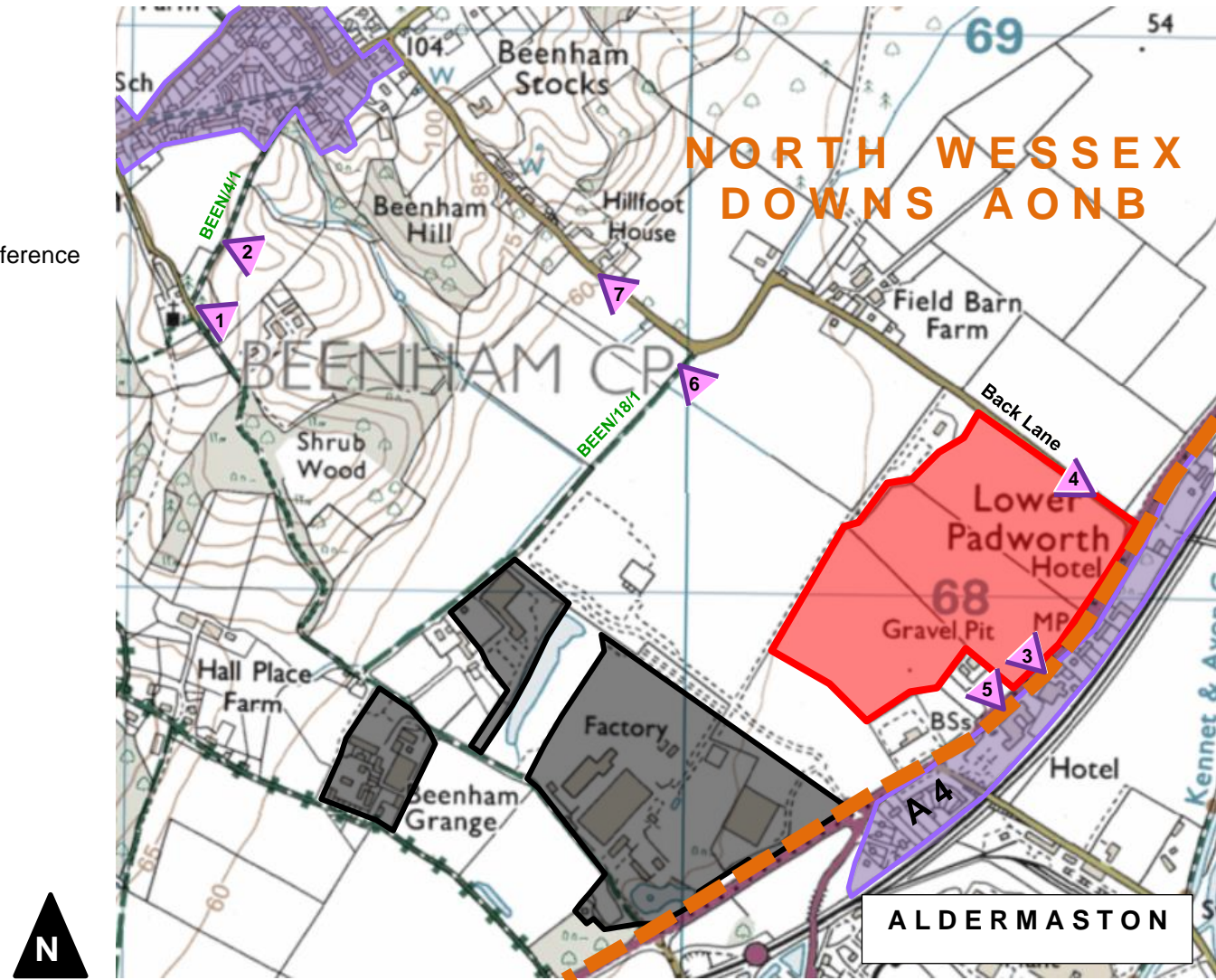
Part of a wider view of the Kennet Valley floor as can be seen from Beenham Hill

**VDS/Parish Plan – relevant extracts:**

None known

**Figure 1: Site: Beenham Industrial Area - BEEN4**

-  Site boundary
  -  Protected Employment Area
  -  Settlement boundary
  -  North Wessex Downs AONB
  -  Public Rights of Way (PRoW) reference
  -  Viewpoint photo
- Landscape Capacity**
-  High capacity
  -  Medium/high capacity
  -  Medium capacity
  -  Medium/low capacity
  -  Low capacity



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### **West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019**

The site lies within the following *LCA LVI: Kennet Lower River Valley* for which the key requirements are set out below:

*Landscape Strategy:*

- Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated AONB landscape
- Conserve and restore the traditional valley landscape
- Restore, extend and manage wetland habitats that occur along the floodplain
- Conserve the valley floor woodland
- Conserve and enhance heritage features in the landscape
- Manage recreational pressure
- Conserve the distinct identities of individual settlements

### **North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002**

The site is located within *Character Area 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons*

*Key Management Requirements:*

The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, secluded character of the Hermitage Wooded Commons. This includes conservation and enhancement of the key assets, namely: ancient and semi-natural woodlands, pasture, field patterns and hedgerows, remnant heathland commons, historic parkland and the rural lane network. There are opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration of the hedgerow network and diversification of some of the plantations to include a broadleaved element. In the longer term, as part of a wider initiative, it may be appropriate to consider restoration of former areas of heathland to link existing sites. The aim 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. Consideration should be given to measures that could lessen the impact of the road infrastructure and reduce high traffic levels on the rural lanes.

### **North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019-2024**

Key development issues with the potential to have significant influence on the special qualities of the AONB

- The loss of rural character through suburbanising influences from new development (new fencing, lighting, signage, parking areas, paved footpaths, loss of native hedgerows and creation of new garden areas)
- Impact on dark skies and tranquillity of high-powered external lighting, especially where poorly directed or in an exposed location (not usually subject to planning control)

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- Potential for certain forms of development to intrude on the wider landscape, including masts, pylons, wind turbine developments, photovoltaic schemes, and minerals and waste schemes, threatening the landscape quality, heritage assets, and the sense of remoteness and tranquillity
- Unsuitable development of redundant previously developed and part-developed sites within the North Wessex Downs, especially redundant airfields and military sites (e.g., Wroughton), and the impact upon landscape quality and heritage assets
- New developments at the junction of the M4 and A34 or along their corridors which spread the impact from development yet further into the undeveloped parts of the AONB
- Development that results in a material loss of tranquillity and/ or impact on the dark night skies within the North Wessex Downs or its setting.
- Development that does not provide for or support existing Green Infrastructure.

### Site description:

The site consists of three grass fields separated by internal agricultural native hedgerows. The site boundary also includes native hedgerows, with a row of mature poplar trees on the SE site boundary adjacent the A4. There is also a small woodland copse on the eastern corner of the site. The site area was originally extracted for sand and has been restored with waste to a new landform, which is slightly domed. There is little evidence remaining of the previous land use

### Key landscape planning factors:

The site is located as follows:

- Set within the North Wessex Downs AONB
- The site is separate from the main PEA within this area by circa 125m



## Viewpoints



**Photo 1:** View from the graveyard of Grade I listed Church on Beenham Hill, looking down onto the site, which forms part of a rural landscape within the AONB



**Photo 2:** View from Beenham Hill from looking down onto the site, as part of a wider rural undeveloped landscape and within the setting of a panoramic view



**Photo 3:** View from A4 looking directly into the site of the slightly domed landform



**Photo 4:** View from Back Lane, where the north east site boundary robust hedgerow screens views into the site





**Photo 5:** View from the A4, with the site visible beyond car sales forecourt. Visible as a slightly elevated domed landform, with Kennet Valley side visible beyond (all within AONB)



**Photo 6:** Long view from PRoW: BEEN/18/1 across agricultural landscape to site as part of wider field matrix and rural view





**Photo 7:** View from Back Lane across agricultural landscape down onto site. The location and the site are all located within the AONB

**Please refer to section 3 methodology of the assessment process**

1. **Visual Sensitivity: Medium/High**
  - The site is visible from Beenham Hill at key viewpoints, visible as part of the open agricultural landscape of the Kennet valley floor (within AONB)
  - The site is visible as part of the open rural view across to Beenham Hill and the Kennet Valley side from the A4 and residential properties on the northern edge of Aldermaston Wharf
  - The site is not visibly connected to the PEA located further to the south west
  - Mitigation planting along the south east site boundary would block views into the AONB including the Kennet Valley side and Beenham Hill as appreciated from the south
  - As there are views down onto the site from the Kennet Valley side and Beenham Hill, it would not be possible to mitigate the visual effect of development within the site
  
2. **Landscape Sensitivity: Medium/low**
  - Located within the North Wessex Downs AONB
  - A rural landscape, including three hedged fields of grassland and a small woodland copse. Although a restored former extraction site, no structures remain to indicate this past activity
  - A domed landform, slightly non characteristic of Kennet Valley floor although increasing its visibility from areas to the south
  - Forms part of the wider agricultural landscape as can be appreciated from views from within the AONB
  
3. Landscape Character Sensitivity: Medium/high (combines 1 and 2)
  
4. **Wider Landscape Sensitivity: High**
  - The site has strong physical and visual links to the wider landscape to the north west, north, north east with no strong visual links with the Protected Employment Area located 130m further to the south west
  
5. Overall Landscape Sensitivity: High (combines 3 and 4)
  
6. **Landscape Value: Medium/high**
  - Set within the North Wessex Downs AONB
  
7. Landscape Capacity: Low (combines 5 and 6)

**Relationship of site to Protected Employment Area**

- Beenham Industrial Area (PEA) is made up of a central area and two fragmented smaller outlying areas. The site is separated from the central area by the car sales forecourts (not PEA) and a hedged field, now with planning permission for open storage area, modular office building and car parking

**Relationship with adjacent wider countryside**

- The site has an established visual and landscape connection with the open landscape area further to the north west, north and north east

**Potential impact on key landscape characteristics**

- Loss of open rural character and area of fields of grassland
- Loss of hedgerows and small woodland copse
- Introduction of more modern inclusions, including large scale buildings, noise and lighting; all as ribbon development along the A4, which the area already suffers from
- Adverse landscape effect on semi-rural setting of Aldermaston Wharf

**Potential impact on key visual characteristics**

- Adverse visual impact on views from Beenham Hill and the Kennet Valley side
- Adverse visual impact on views from Back Lane, in particular from the hillside
- Adverse visual impact on views from the A4
- Adverse visual impact on views from the residential properties on the northern side of Aldermaston Wharf
- Visual impact on rural character of Back Lane

**Potential Impact on existing Protected Employment Area**

- The existing central PEA is well contained beyond a wide tree belt adjacent the A4, mitigating its visual effect on the A4 and Aldermaston Wharf. The proposed site if developed will result in another fragmented area, increasing widening the area of the impact of PEAs on this landscape and within the AONB
- The site area would extend the fragmented PEA character to the north east into the wider open agricultural landscape of the Kennet Valley floor

**Potential impact on the North Wessex Downs AONB**

- Loss of open land including grassland and fields within the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Loss of open views across farmland from within the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Loss of rural views into the AONB
- Loss of quiet rural character and rural character of Back Lane

**Landscape mitigation and contribution to green infrastructure**




- Although there is a potential to enhance the woodland character of this area, this would also block views into the AONB and across the area to the Kennet Valley side and Beenham Hill. New mitigation measures would therefore be visually damaging to this area
- Landscape mitigation measures would also not be able to successfully screen development within the site as viewed from Beenham Hill and the Kennet Valley side within the AONB

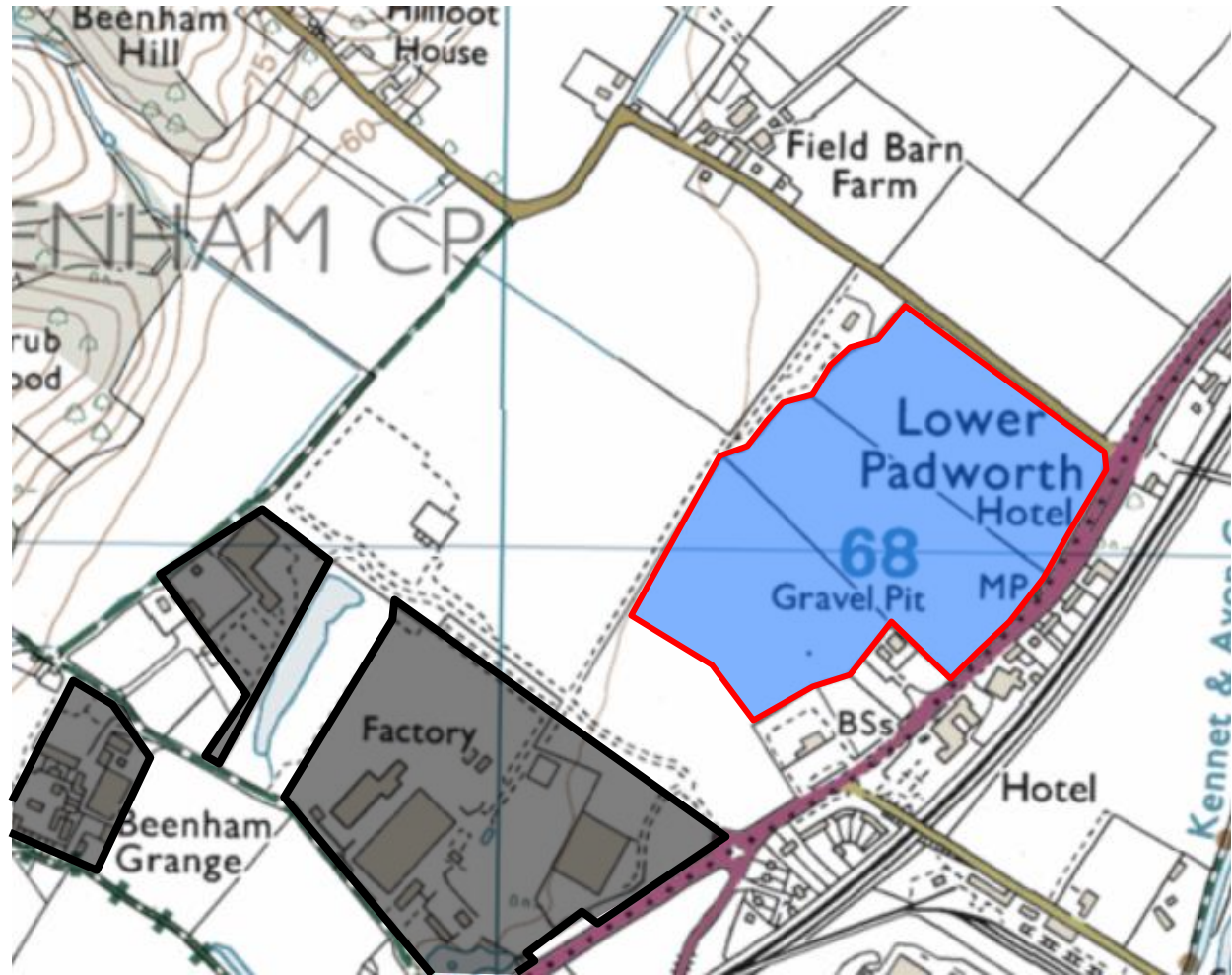
**Conclusion and recommendations**

It is recommended that no part of the site is developed



**Figure 2: Site: Beenham Industrial Area: BEEN4**

-  The site
-  Protected Employment Area (PEA)
-  Not suitable for development



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