

Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for: Beenham Industrial Area - BEEN5

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL CAPACITY STUDY 2022 RECORD SHEET

Site	Beenham Industrial Area BEEN5
Date of site survey	16 th January 2022
Surveyors	LA
Weather/visibility	Low cloud
LCA	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

General visibility	Population	Mitigation potential
Views into the site from: A4 (Bath Road) and residential properties to the south on the northern edge of Aldermaston Wharf Pips Way, private road northwards adjacent south western site boundary	Types of viewers: Vehicle travellers on A4 Residents fronting A4 Users of adjacent PEA Users of adjacent businesses including adjacent vehicle forecourts	Opportunities for mitigation and landscape compatibility of mitigation: Semi enclosed landscape with wide tree/shrub planting area to SW and mature poplar trees fronting the A4. Additional planting could strengthen this and enhance the vegetation pattern of the area
Views out of the site to: Views to north across fields to the Kennet Valley side and Beenham Hill Filtered views south to residential ribbon development south of the A4	Magnitude of viewers (level of use and popularity): Busy A4 with vehicle travellers residents and front gardens	Impacts of mitigation: Additional mitigation planting within this area could help screen/integrate adjacent large buildings within PEA and vehicular compound
Does the site form part of a skyline? No	Visual perceptions (activity and expectations of local visual receptors): Although on boundary of AONB, views into the AONB are already compromised by adjacent PEA and vehicular compound– expectations high of rural landscape	
Panoramic views: Limited and channelled through row of poplar trees across to site, however landform limits views extending further into AONB		
Landmark features: None		
Sensitivity score: Medium	Sensitivity score: Low/Medium	Sensitivity score: Low
Visual sensitivity score: Medium/low		
Additional comments: Part of an area of restored, former quarries, with no remaining buildings or structures to suggest previous land use, little intervening tree/shrubs on site boundary with adjacent area of vehicular compounds, allows intervisibility between		

LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

Natural factors	Cultural factors	Perceptual features
Topography and landform: Mounded artificial landform made up ground from restoration of former quarry	Boundary features other than vegetation: None	Tranquillity – Noise levels: A4 to the south affects site with traffic noise.
Geological features: None	Historic landscapes: Nothing of significance	Tranquillity – Visual intrusion / detractors: sandwiched between vehicular compound and Protected Employment Area (PEA) which includes a large grey industrial building
Soil quality: Artificial restored landform, with made-up soil formation	Parkland features: None	Tranquillity – Light pollution/dark skies: Bright - 8-16 (Nanowatts/cm ² /sr) due to proximity to A4/residential development
Water features: None		
Landcover and land use: Originally hedged field with grassland, low intensity grazing as part of restoration for ex quarry. Circa 35m wide tree/shrub belt (circa 10 years old) inside SW site boundary Now southern area of the site has permission for scaffold hire depot (20/01895/COMIND), which is presently under construction The northern area of the site is not part of the above planning application area and will remain mainly as grassland with a narrow band on the north western edge forming part of an approved application 21/00885/COMIND, for a temporary change of use for a laydown facility for the storage of materials, light fabrication operations and the permanent provision of fencing, lighting and areas of hardstanding to provide for the future use of the land for the permitted composting activities	Conservation Area: None	

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

<p>Tree belts, individual trees and riverside trees: Line of mature poplars on SE site boundary adjacent A4 Wide (circa 27m) area of tree and shrub planting on low bund aligns south western site boundary Intermittent trees on north western site boundary</p>	<p>Landscape features of LCA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forms part of the nationally valued North Wessex Downs AONB landscape 	
<p>Hedgerows and hedgerow trees: Robust hedgerow aligns SE site boundary A4 site boundary hedgerows containing mature poplars</p>	<p>Built form: (20/01895/COMIND) – initial works for concrete hardstanding</p>	<p>Accessibility by public footpath: None</p>
<p>Woodland and copses: None</p>	<p>Setting of listed buildings: None</p>	<p>Open access areas: None</p>
<p>Wetland and meadow: Rough grassland character</p>	<p>Scheduled Monuments: None</p>	<p>Recreational areas: None</p>
<p>Common land: None</p>	<p>Pattern of Protected Employment Area Central PEA with two fragmented PEA areas. Separated by woodland, hedgerows and grass fields The site is separated from the main PEA by an access road and grass verge (circa 20m) and the wide shrub/tree planting on the low earth bund which exists within the site</p>	<p>Aesthetic sensitivity - Elements of openness/enclosure: Semi enclosed by planted bund along south west boundary, poplar trees on south east boundary with A4 and native hedgerow on north east site boundary. Intermittent trees align the track just beyond the north western site boundary permitting an open character with the landscape to the north east</p>
<p>Heathland: None</p>	<p>Contribution of private gardens to landscape character: N/A</p>	<p>Aesthetic sensitivity – landscape pattern: Part of restored rural agricultural landscape, contributing to agricultural field pattern of area, but now southern area of site undergoing construction for hard standing will contribute to a more industrial character</p>

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

<p>Other significant vegetation cover: Areas of regenerating scrub</p>	<p>Cultural associations: None</p>	
<p>BAP/Priority Habitats/ /Phase I records: None (woodland, grassland etc) registered – although site boundary hedgerows could qualify</p>	<p>Features of cultural importance: None</p>	
<p>Presence of SSSI/SINC/local wildlife designation/Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland: None</p>		
<p>Sensitivity score: Low/Medium</p>	<p>Sensitivity score: Low</p>	<p>Sensitivity score: Low</p>
<p>Landscape sensitivity score: Low</p>		
<p>Additional comments: Part of a restored extraction site, covered by two approved applications will alter this site to a low-level storage area dominated by open areas of hardstanding</p>		

Relationship with the wider landscape/Protected Employment Area

Adjacent Protected Employment Area (PEA)

The main area of the existing PEA is circa 20m to the south west of the site. Separated by a wide band of tree/shrub planting and Pips Way. Beyond this main PEA there are two other fragmented PEAs further to the west. The first to the NW 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)

The 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 and contains a newly built large grey industrial shed presently a Porsche Cars Distribution Centre

The two smaller fragmented PEA areas are described as follows:

NW part of the central PEA (beyond the lake) the 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. Originally this area was a woodland called Seven Acre Copse

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 originally restored grassland and hedged field character of the site would have connected with the wider agricultural landscape further to the north and north east. however, the recent approved planning application has altered the landscape character reducing this relationship

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 19th 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

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Historic links with the wider area if known:

None known

Ecological links with the wider area if known:

None known

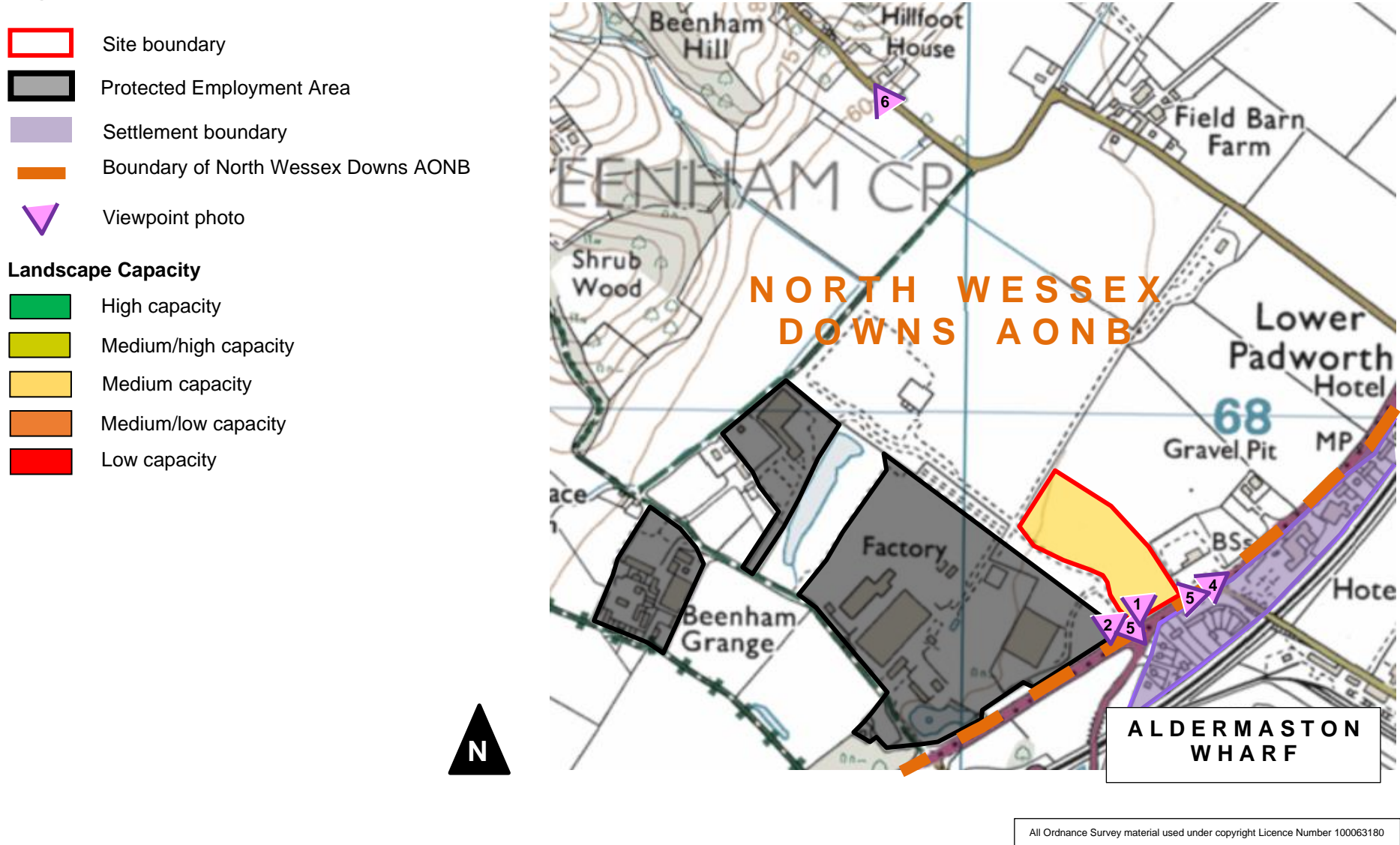
Recreational links with the wider area:

None known

VDS/Parish Plan – relevant extracts:

None known

Figure 1: Site: Beenham Industrial Area - BEEN5



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
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- 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 lies within the 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)

- 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 consisted of one grass field, however two recent approved applications; the first: (20/01895/COMIND) for a scaffold hire depot comprising open storage area, modular office building and car parking with access off Pips Way, which is also presently under construction will change the SE area from a grass field to a concrete yard. Further to the north, the second approved application (application 21/00885/COMIND), covering a small sliver of the most northern part of the site is for a temporary change of use for a laydown facility for the storage of materials, light fabrication operations and the permanent provision of fencing, lighting and areas of hardstanding to provide for the future use of the land for the permitted composting activities at Beenham Landfill Site. The site boundary adjacent Pips Way (south west) includes a wide low bund with native tree and shrub planting, further to the north this band of planting narrows. The eastern site boundary at the northern end is marked by a wide planted earth bund, which then changes in character to a narrow native hedgerow, which leads down to the western corner of the adjacent car compound. The site boundary adjacent the vehicle compound is also marked by the outer wall of the Anchor Vans maintenance shed building, some intermittent tree planting and a grey metal palisade fence. The southern site boundary is marked by a row of poplar trees and intermittent small trees and scrub

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 by Pips Way

Viewpoints



Photo 1: View across southern part of site to adjacent vehicular compounds. The adjacent van workshop dominates the southern part of the site



Photo 2: Similar to Viewpoint 1, but showing the row of poplars on the site boundary and buildings within the vehicular compounds beyond the site



Photo 3: View from the east along the A4 to the site, located behind the row of poplars. The Porsche building within the adjacent PEA is visible (blue/grey buildings) beyond



Photo 4: View along the A4, with the site to the right of the row of poplars and beyond the vehicular compound set in the foreground



Photo 5: View at junction with A4 and Pips Way, the site is behind the hedgerow to the right



Photo 6: View from Back Lane ascending Beenham Hill. The site is located to the far right set in the foreground of the row of polars but beyond the thick hedgerow and slighting domed landform

Please refer to section 3 methodology of the assessment process

1. Visual Sensitivity: Medium/low

- The site is semi screened by its landform and adjacent vegetation from the wider North Wessex Downs AONB
- The site is linked visibly to the adjacent PEA and the adjacent vehicular compound
- The site is not visible in the existing open rural view from Beenham Hill and the Kennet Valley side
- The site is visible from the A4, but in the context of the adjacent PEA and the adjacent vehicular compounds
- The site would be seen as continuation of ribbon development as already exists on the northern side of the A4, however the site has a short frontage with the A4 and already this frontage is compromised
- Mitigation planting could enhance this area and better integrate the adjacent land uses (PEA and vehicular compound) into the surrounding landscape

2. Landscape Sensitivity: Medium/low

- Located within the North Wessex Downs AONB
- An agricultural landscape, although part of a restored ex extraction site with now approved planning permission for storage facilities
- A domed landform making it particularly visible from areas to the south

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

4. Wider Landscape Sensitivity: Low

- The site is located within the AONB, however has strong physical and visual links with the adjacent Protected Employment Area (PEA) located across the private road of Pips Way further to the south west

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

6. Landscape Value: Medium/high

- Set within the North Wessex Downs AONB

7. Landscape Capacity: Medium (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 located adjacent the central PEA, where buildings within the PEA area visible from the site

Relationship with adjacent wider countryside

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

Potential impact on key landscape characteristics

- Loss of open rural character and part of grass field
- Introduction of more modern inclusions, including large scale buildings, noise and lighting as ribbon development along the A4, which it already suffers from. Although only a narrow site with a narrow frontage to the A4, with an area which could provide planting mitigation measures
- Adverse landscape effect on semi-rural setting of Aldermaston Wharf

Potential impact on key visual characteristics

- Adverse visual impact on views from the A4
- Adverse visual impact on views from the residential properties on the northern side of Aldermaston Wharf

Potential Impact on existing Protected Employment Area

- The site will extend the area of the existing central PEA northwards along the A4
- Proposed mitigation planting could also help integrate the existing buildings within the central PEA from long views within the AONB

Potential impact on the North Wessex Downs AONB

- Loss of open land including grassland and field area within the North Wessex Downs AONB, although already compromised by the two approved planning applications
- Limited loss of narrow view through poplars across farmland within the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Long term opportunity to introduce tree planting to enhance the woodland character of the area

Landscape mitigation and contribution to green infrastructure





- There is a potential to enhance the woodland character of the area, which would also help integrate the site and surrounding development (including the central PEA) into the landscape

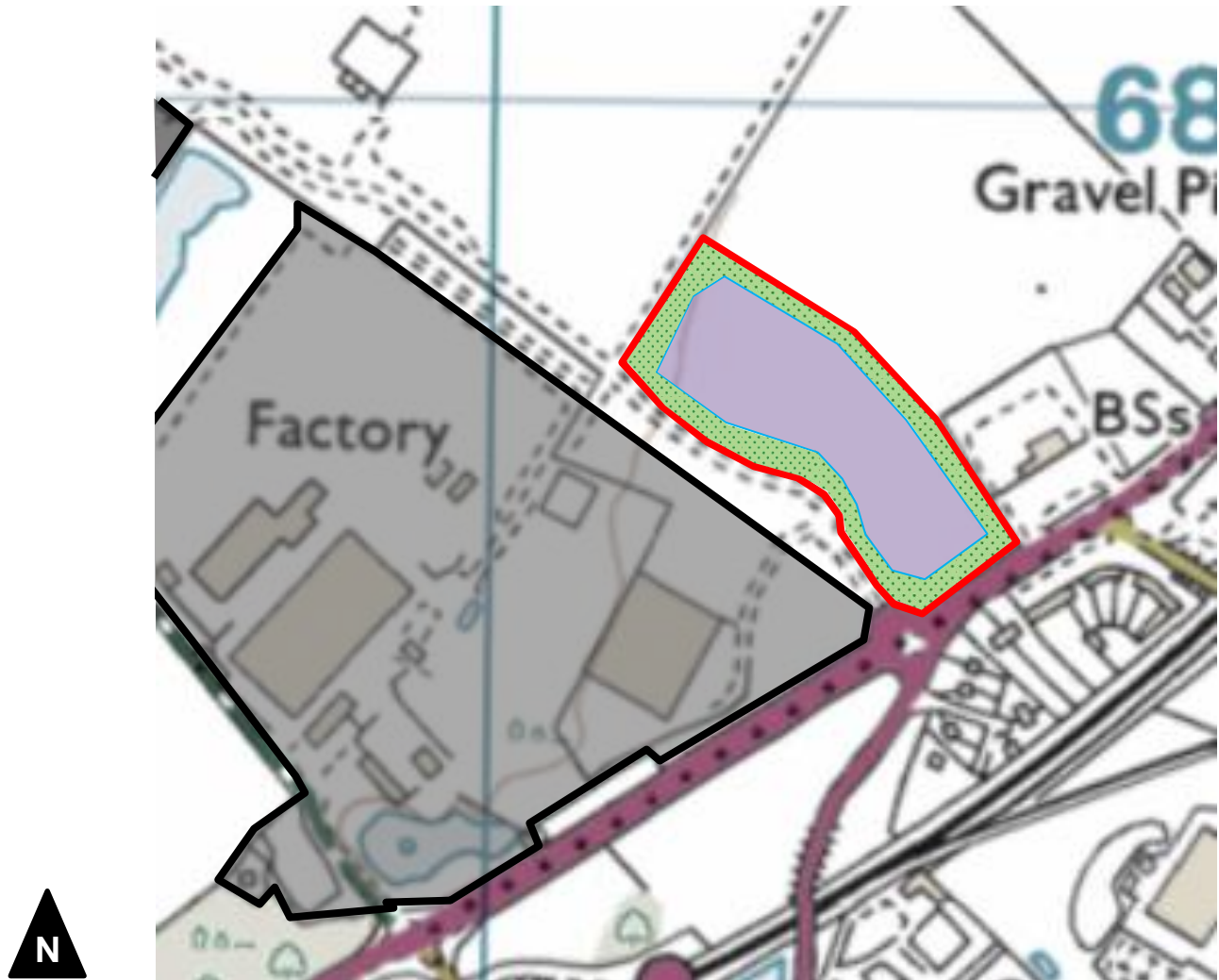
Conclusion and recommendations

Development across the site could be considered with the following mitigation measures:

- Retain a landscape buffer between the site and the A4, which should be planted as native woodland
- Retain and enhance the existing newly planted wooded bund along the SW edge of the site
- Propose a new landscape buffer to the wider AONB, along the NE and NW site boundary, which would also link with the existing wooded belt further to the NW
- Restrict and consider the scale of development to avoid an adverse visual effect on adjacent areas of the AONB, Aldermaston Wharf and the A4. This will include the proposed height of buildings, colour, architectural style and roof profile, the impact of external lighting and any other structures/features which could negatively impact on adjacent areas. The North Wessex Downs AONB: Guidance on the selection and use of colour in development should be used as guidance
- Avoid the use of close boarded fencing in areas visible from Public Rights of Way and in particular along the site boundary. The existing wire mesh fencing could be retained as a suitable fencing
- External lighting if required, should be minimal and avoid edge off site locations which could result in light pollution intruding into adjacent areas of the open countryside

Figure 2: Site: Beenham Industrial Area - BEEN5

-  The site
-  Protected Employment Area (PEA)
-  With potential for development
-  Landscape buffer



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JUNE 2022