

Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for: Junction 13 - CHI24 - Land east of Chieveley Services

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL CAPACITY STUDY 2022 RECORD SHEET

Site	Junction 13 – CH124 – Land East of Chieveley Services
Date of site survey	12 th February 2022
Surveyors	LA
Weather/visibility	Clear
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: *FC4 Winterbourne Farmed Chalk Mosaic*

Key Characteristics

- Open and gently rolling landform, rising from the Lambourn Valley
- Presence of surface water and small streams
- Diverse land use of large rolling arable farmland and extensive woodland, plus areas of heathland and parkland
- Generally sparse and dispersed settlement pattern in the wider rural area
- Busy major roads contrast with rural road network
- Historic and archaeological landscape relating to strategic position at intersection of east west and north south routes.
- An accessible landscape
- Low wooded horizons contrast with open rural landscape

Valued Features and Qualities

- Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Snelsmore Common
- Woodlands and strongly wooded horizons
- Rural character away from major roads and urban edges
- Winding rural roads and sunken lanes
- Historic landscape character

Detractors

- Decline in extent of heathland
- Lack of appropriate management of woodland
- Changes to farming practice
- Mineral extraction
- Intrusive influence of major road network
- Increasing development pressures

Landscape Strategy

- Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Conserve and restore heathland characteristics
- Conserve and extend existing mixed woodland
- Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements
- Opportunities for restoration of completed extraction sites
- Mitigate the adverse influences of the major roads and maintain character of rural lanes
- Maintain the rural settlement character
- Seek to promote enhanced management of horse paddocks, and particularly boundary associated elements
- Actively manage and conserve features of historic significance

North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment: The site is located within LCA8A: *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
<p>Views into the site from: Chieveley Service Area M4 A34 Priors Court Road PRoW: CHIE/36/2 CHIE/37/1 CHIE/49/1 CHIE/49/2 CHIE/49/6 CHIE/31/1 CHIE/49/7</p>	<p>Types of viewers: Road users Users of Chieveley Services Walkers, cyclists, horse riders</p>	<p>Opportunities for mitigation and landscape compatibility of mitigation: Adjacent to a wooded landscape, could offer opportunities for new tree belts/woodland which could tie in with these areas of woodland. However, the open agricultural landscape, which the site forms part of provides a contrast with these wooded areas, which is a feature of the landscape character area and would therefore be compromised</p>
<p>Views out of the site to: West of site: Across the A34 to the opposite valley side including the wooded horizon which includes the ancient woodlands: High Wood, Bean Hill Copse and Beech Copse East of site: The area of ancient woodland including Copyhold Copse, Southfield Pightie, Smithy Copse, Langlee Copse, Spring Copse, Breach Copse and other woodlands including Malthouse Wood, Littledeans Wood Filtered views of services and adjacent Highway compound Short adjacent section of M4 on embankment</p>	<p>Magnitude of viewers (level of use and popularity): High. The site and periphery include a good network of Public Rights of Way which are well used Visitors to services M4</p>	<p>Impacts of mitigation: Loss of views from PRoW across landscape and wider longer views Loss of open agricultural valley character which the site forms part of</p>
<p>Does the site form part of a skyline? No</p>	<p>Visual perceptions (activity and expectations of local visual receptors): High as located within AONB</p>	
<p>Panoramic views: Yes, as seen from the western valley side and from Priors Court Road</p>		

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

Landmark features: Woodlands, mature oak trees, wooded horizons		
Sensitivity score: High	Sensitivity score: High	Sensitivity score: Medium
Visual sensitivity score: High		
Additional comments: Chieveley Services is set at a slightly lower level, enclosed by a robust tree lined hedgerow/tree belt, which limits visibility between the services and the site. The A34 aligns the valley floor, allowing long uninterrupted views across the valley		

LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

Natural factors	Cultural factors	Perceptual features
<p>Topography and landform: Undulating gentle valley side, from 120m AOD on eastern site boundary down to 105m AOD on western site boundary</p>	<p>Boundary features other than vegetation: Timber post and rail fence adjacent Chieveley Services</p>	<p>Tranquillity – Noise levels: Adjacent M4/A34 creates constant background traffic noise</p>
<p>Geological features: None</p>	<p>Historic landscapes: None</p>	<p>Tranquillity – Visual intrusion / detractors: M4: at the northern end part of the site aligns the M4 which is on an embankment A34: The A34 occupies the lowest part of the valley floor, not permitting any visibility with the site The adjacent services is also set low in the landscape in a slight cutting, with the periphery trees/shrub vegetation and landform around the services, limiting any visibility to just the triangular roof of the main building and lamp columns. Overall, the adjacent infrastructure has a very low visual impact on the site</p>
<p>Soil quality: Agriculture Land Classification: Small part of site adjacent northern site boundary classified as Grade 2 (Very good), rest of site is Grade 3 (Good-moderate) Soil Quality: along the western and northern site boundary a band of Free Draining slightly acid but base rich soils with High fertility. Rest and main part of the site is Slowly permeable seasonally wet slightly acid but base rich loamy and clayey soils with moderate fertility</p>	<p>Parkland features: None</p>	<p>Tranquillity – Light pollution/dark skies: As per CPRE England's Light Pollution and Dark Skies map, the site is located between 16-32 Nanowatts cm2/sr adjacent Chieveley services across to 2-4 Nanowatts cm2/sr within the east of the site.</p>
<p>Water features: None of landscape significance</p>		

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

<p>Landcover and land use: Agriculture: Grassland fields within north east of site (restored ex quarry area) arable fields to the south, woodland belts and hedgerows</p>	<p>Conservation Area: None</p>	
<p>Tree belts, individual trees and riverside trees: Southern part of site contains a tree belt with sections also having group Tree Preservation Orders and individual TPO's, all Oak Individual oak tree within arable field Northern part of site: wide tree belt linking with enhanced highway planting adjacent M4</p>	<p>Landscape features of LCA: Forms part of the nationally valued North Wessex Downs AONB landscape</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gentle rolling landform of arable fields • Large, interconnected woodland blocks and strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees restrict views and create an enclosed and intimate character. • Low and strongly wooded horizons contrast with open rural landscape • An accessible landscape containing PRow, linking to wider area • Numerous semi-natural woodlands of ancient origin 	
<p>Hedgerows and hedgerow trees: NE area of site: new hedgerows with trees as part of restoration agreement middle section of site adjacent track from services, this track is aligned with a hedgerow</p>	<p>Built form: None</p>	<p>Accessibility by public footpath: Numerous Public Rights of way cross and around the periphery of the site further leading to a wider network of PRow</p>
<p>Woodland and copses: Northern part of the site includes a wide belt of trees which widens at the junction with the woodland planting adjacent the M4 and also widens at the southern end, adjacent the track. Small woodland copse injecting into site from SE woodland area New areas of woodland towards eastern site boundary</p>	<p>Setting of listed buildings: None</p>	<p>Open access areas: None</p>
<p>Wetland and meadow: None</p>	<p>Scheduled Monuments: None</p>	<p>Recreational areas: None</p>

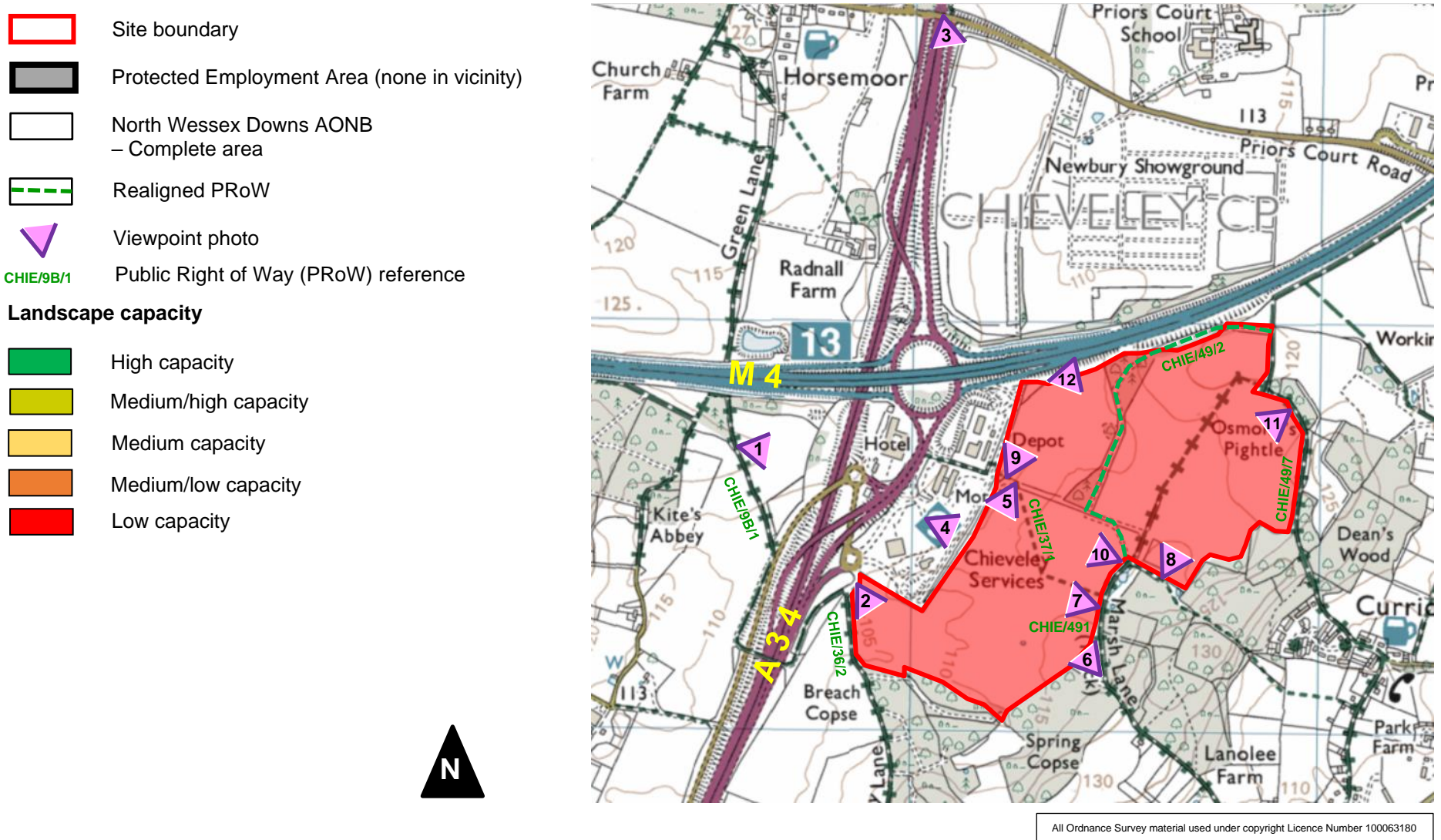
Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for potential employment areas within West Berkshire

Common land: None	Pattern of Protected Employment Area (PEA) None within locality	Aesthetic sensitivity - Elements of openness/enclosure: Area of agricultural land, with the northern area now restored is well intact. The site is enclosed along its southern and eastern edge by a continuous wooded area which is mainly ancient woodland. Part of a non-developed valley side which contributes to the undeveloped area around Junction 13
Heathland: None	Contribution of private gardens to landscape character: N/A	Aesthetic sensitivity – landscape pattern: Characteristic pattern of fields, hedgerows within a mosaic of woodland typical of the landscape character area of this part of the AONB
Other significant vegetation cover: None	Cultural associations: None known	
BAP/Phase I records/Priority Habitats: Small woodland on western edge is a Priority Habitat – Deciduous woodland Boundary hedgerow adjacent Chalky Lane would qualify as Priority Habitats: Hedgerows	Features of cultural importance: None	
Presence of SSSI/SINC/local wildlife designation/Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland: Woodlands adjacent to the site are ancient woodland and also a Local Wildlife Site: Upper Grange and Smithy Copses, Deans Wood		
Sensitivity score: Medium/high	Sensitivity score: Medium/high	Sensitivity score: High
Landscape sensitivity score: Medium/high		
Additional comments: After years of quarrying within the site, the area now shows no evidence of this previous history of quarrying		

Relationship with the wider landscape/Protected Employment Area

<p>Adjacent Protected Employment Area (PEA) No PEA within locality</p>
<p>Character of the Protected Employment Area (PEA) Not applicable</p>
<p>Presence in a floodplain: No</p>
<p>Relationship with adjacent wider countryside: The site forms part of the wider countryside, with views across to the west with open fields and a corresponding low wooded horizon. The PRoW which crosses and aligns the periphery of the site provide further links into the wider countryside/AONB</p>
<p>Character of adjacent village(s)/towns: N/A. Nearest settlement is Curridge, located circa 270m from the site boundary, with the intervening area shown as woodland</p>
<p>Historic links with the wider area if known: None</p>
<p>Ecological links with the wider area if known: Adjacent Local Wildlife site: Upper Grange and Smithy Copses, Deans Wood</p>
<p>Recreational links with the wider area: Contains a number of Public Rights of Way which link further into the wider countryside The site is located adjacent the Local Wildlife Site: Upper Grange and Smithy Copses, Deans Wood</p>
<p>VDS/Parish Plan – relevant extracts: Chieveley Parish: None known</p>

Figure 1: Site: Junction 13 – CHI24 – Land east of Chieveley Services



West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019

The site lies within the following *LCA FC4: Winterbourne Farmed Chalk Mosaic* for which the key requirements are set out below:

Landscape Strategy

- Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Conserve and restore heathland characteristics
- Conserve and extend existing mixed woodland
- Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements
- Opportunities for restoration of completed extraction sites
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- Maintain the rural settlement character
- Seek to promote enhanced management of horse paddocks, and particularly boundary associated elements
- Actively manage and conserve features of historic significance

North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Character Assessment 2002

The site lies within the North Wessex Downs AONB 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 occupies part of the eastern valley side which contains the M4/A34 Junction 13. The site consists of a number of large grass fields and smaller arable fields. Tree cover within the site includes a wide tree belt located on a north south alignment, a row of mature oak trees within the southern part of the site and new field hedgerows and recently planted woodlands located across the north eastern part of the site. This newer planting formed part of the restoration proposals for the ex-quarry within this area. The site boundary to the east aligns a continuous area of woodland, including the ancient woodlands: Breach Copse, Spring Copse, Littledeans Wood, Soughfield Pightie and a number of other woodlands including Smithy Copse and Osmond's Pightie. The site in the past had been extensively quarried for sand, but now post restoration the site area has been returned to farmland. The site is crossed by two Public Rights of Way, allowing open views across the site; additionally, there are PRow along the periphery, again which permit open views across the site. The Public Rights of Way within this area are well used by walkers and horse riders. Overall, the site is part of an accessible landscape and contributes to a matrix of fields and woodland typical of the landscape character of this area of the North Wessex Downs AONB

Key landscape planning factors:

The site is located as follows:

- Set within the North Wessex Downs AONB

Viewpoints:



Photo 1: View towards site (green sliver), over Chieveley Services and A34 (out of view)



Photo 2: View into site from PRow (CHIE/36/2) across site to ancient woodland: Breach Copse



Photo 3: Long view from Priors Court Road to site, just visible as open field below wooded horizon



Photo 4: Filtered view into site from adjacent Chieveley Services



Photo 5: View south from PRoW: CHIE/37/1 across site, with site boundary adjacent (wide hedgerow to left of photo), location of Chieveley Services indicated by single lamp column. Breach Copse (ancient woodland) encloses the view



Photo 6: View across site from PRoW: CHIE/49/1 (Marsh Lane) over A34 (which is not visible) to opposite valley side with the traditional red brick rural dwellings: Kite's Abbey and Snelsmore Farm Cottages just visible below a wooded horizon



Photo 7: View across site towards Junction 13, (which is not visible). With the red roof of the hotel (Travelodge) just visible below the wooded horizon. Chieveley Services is just about screened by site boundary hedgerow, with only the top of the roof of the main service building just visible as a white triangle. The grey building to the right is the Highways Service Yard



Photo 8: View across the most northern part of the site, originally quarried, now restored, with a gentle concave landform, new hedgerows and newly planted woodlands are just evident. This part of the site is very visible from the adjacent PRow: CHIE/49/2 and CHIE/49/7



Photo 9: View from PRoW: CHIE/37/1 across site to the M4 on embankment



Photo 10: View south across site to isolated tree and row of trees with TPO's on southern part of site, before being enclosed by the woodland: Spring Copse and Breach Copse, which are both ancient woodland. The view extends across the wooded western valley side. The triangular roof of the building at Chieveley Services is visible to the right



Photo 11: View west through the restoration planting down across the site, with wooded horizon on the western side of the valley enclosing the view



Photo 12: View from the M4 Junction 13 slip road into the site

Please refer to section 3 methodology of the assessment process

1. Visual Sensitivity: High

- The site is visible from a number of Public Rights of Way which cross and align the periphery of the site. These PRow are well used by walkers and horse riders and provide views to all parts of the site
- The upper part of the site, is visible from Priors Court Road beyond the M4 to the north
- There are long views from the west across the valley to the site where the A34, occupying the lower valley floor is not visible.
- The triangular roof of the Chieveley Services in some views, but is mainly screened by adjacent trees and landform
- The open character of the site contributes to the long views across the site, tree planting mitigation measures could shorten these views
- The site forms part of a panoramic view from a number of locations

2. Landscape Sensitivity: Medium/high

- Located within the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Part of a semi open valley side of fields, enclosed by woodland on the higher slopes
- Enclosed along its eastern side by a number of ancient woodlands. The open and undeveloped character of the site contributes to their setting
- The site includes a row of oak trees which some have TPOs
- PRow cross the site and also align the periphery of the site. These PRow are well used by walkers and horse riders
- Northern part of the site contains young woodlands and new hedgerows, which were planted as part of restoration for the previous quarry. This area has now been restored with no evidence of its previous land use of quarrying remaining
- Traffic noise from the A34 and M4 is apparent, however bird song is also apparent from the adjacent woodlands
- There are no PEA areas within the locality
- Adjacent Local Wildlife site: Upper Grange and Smithy Copses, Deans Wood
- The adjacent road infrastructure does not visually detract from the overall landscape character of this area

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

4. Wider Landscape Sensitivity: High

- The site is an important part of the wider landscape with which it has strong visual and landscape links. The nearby road infrastructure, services, hotels have little impact on the site

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)

<p>Relationship of site to Protected Employment Area (PEA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No PEA within vicinity
<p>Relationship with adjacent wider countryside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong relationship with wider landscape to the south and east and west across the valley to the corresponding valley side• The site contributes to the open setting of the adjacent ancient woodlands• The site contributes to the landscape pattern of open farmland within the valleys contrasting with the upper wooded valley sides
<p>Potential impact on key landscape characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loss of open character and area of grassland, woodland and individual trees• Introduction of more modern inclusions including large scale buildings, noise and lighting eroding the traditional and rural landscape character of the area
<p>Potential impact on key visual characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adverse visual impact on a number of PRoW which cross and align the periphery of the site, by introducing views of modern buildings eroding the rural character of the area• Visible from across the valley side and from the north from Priors Court Road, resulting in an adverse effect on longer views within the wider AONB
<p>Potential Impact on Existing Protected Employment Area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not applicable
<p>Potential impact on the North Wessex Downs AONB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loss of open land including grassland, trees and woodland within the North Wessex Downs AONB• Loss of open setting of adjacent woodlands, including ancient woodlands• Loss of amenity value of a number of PRoW which cross and align the periphery of the site• Adverse impact on the rural character of the Marsh Lane which partly aligns the eastern boundary of the site and Chalky Lane which partly aligns the western boundary of the site• Increased level of development will erode the rural qualities and the open character of the area• Increased external lighting resulting in further light pollution on the site and adjacent areas• Increased noise levels and traffic levels on local area
<p>Landscape mitigation and contribution to green infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not applicable
<p>Conclusion and recommendations</p> <p>It is recommended that the site is not considered for development</p>

Figure 2: Site: Junction 13 – CHI24 – Land east of Chieveley Services

