

Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for: Junction 13 – CHI3 parcel 1 – Land south of M4

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL CAPACITY STUDY 2022 RECORD SHEET

Site	Junction 13 – CHI3 parcel 1 – Land south of M4
Date of site survey	11 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 2002: The site is located within CA8A: *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 key 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
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VISUAL SENSITIVITY

General visibility	Population	Mitigation potential
<p>Views into the site from: Oxford Road, which provides access to the Hilton Hotel Short length of M4 and A34</p> <p>PRoW: CHIE/9B/1 (originally part of Green Lane) Marsh Lane (CHIE/49/1) – opposite side of A34</p>	<p>Types of viewers: Road users 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 link 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 strong feature of this landscape character area and would therefore be compromised</p>
<p>Views out of the site to: East of site: wooded highway embankment West of site: woodland, and a few glimpsed views of adjacent arable field Eastern side of valley and wooded horizon of Spring Copse, Griggs Copse and Dean's Wood Views of short section of vehicles on adjacent M4</p>	<p>Magnitude of viewers (level of use and popularity): High. The adjacent Public Rights of Way forms part of a good network of Public Rights of Way within the area</p>	<p>Impacts of mitigation: Loss of open agricultural valley character which the site forms part of Loss of views from PRoW across landscape and wider longer views</p>
<p>Does the site form part of a skyline? Yes, from the Oxford Road and in other locations, just below skyline, but also forms the open setting of the wooded skyline</p>	<p>Visual perceptions (activity and expectations of local visual receptors): High as located within AONB</p>	
<p>Panoramic views: Yes, from the adjacent PRoW CHIE/9B/1 across the site From the eastern side of the valley from PRoW (CHIE/49/1)</p>		
<p>Landmark features: None</p>		
<p>Sensitivity score: High</p>	<p>Sensitivity score: High</p>	<p>Sensitivity score: Medium</p>
<p>Visual sensitivity score: High</p>		
<p>Additional comments:</p>		

LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

Natural factors	Cultural factors	Perceptual features
<p>Topography and landform: Undulating gentle valley side, with gentle protruding spur landform across the site in an east -west alignment. Levels increasing up from around 110m AOD on eastern site boundary to just above 115m AOD on western site boundary</p>	<p>Boundary features other than vegetation: Highway timber post and rail along the northern and eastern site boundary</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: Ex- highway compound is a visual detractor A34 on overbridge and embankment with motorway service building beyond</p>
<p>Soil quality: Agriculture Land Classification: Grade 3 (Good-moderate) Soil Quality: 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 at 8-16 Nanowatts cm2/sr. The adjacent Hilton Hotel and Chieveley Services is measured at 16-32 Nanowatts cm2/sr</p>
<p>Water features: None</p>		
<p>Landcover and land use: Agriculture: Single arable field, enclosed by a treed hedgerow to the south west, highway woodland planting to the north and east. Within the southern corner of the site is a fenced compound (compacted hardcore) originally ex highways</p>	<p>Conservation Area: None</p>	
<p>Tree belts, individual trees and riverside trees: None</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 	

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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An accessible landscape containing PRow, linking to wider area Numerous semi-natural woodlands of ancient origin 	
<p>Hedgerows and hedgerow trees: Only field and site boundary</p>	<p>Built form: Electric wire with timber posts crosses site on a SW-NE alignment Ex- contractor's compound for the A34/M4 junction within southern corner adjacent the Oxford Road</p>	<p>Accessibility by public footpath: Green Lane which aligns the eastern site boundary is also a Public Right of Way</p>
<p>Woodland and copses: None on the site, but adjacent to the site within the NW corner is a woodland which continues further to the west to a large ancient woodland, known as Bussock Wood Adjacent to the site to the north and east are maturing highway planting: woodlands (25 years) located on the Highway embankments</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>
<p>Common land: None</p>	<p>Pattern of Protected Employment Area (PEA) None within locality</p>	<p>Aesthetic sensitivity - Elements of openness/enclosure: Field of arable land bound by hedgerows and woodland. The site is enclosed along its eastern and northern edge with highway planting associated with the M4 and A34 and western site boundary by the treed hedgerow containing a track (PRow) originally part of Green Lane linking north across to Chieveley</p>
<p>Heathland: None</p>	<p>Contribution of private gardens to landscape character: N/A</p>	<p>Aesthetic sensitivity – landscape pattern: Part of the pattern of fields, hedgerows, lanes and woodlands, key characteristics of this landscape character area of this part of the AONB</p>

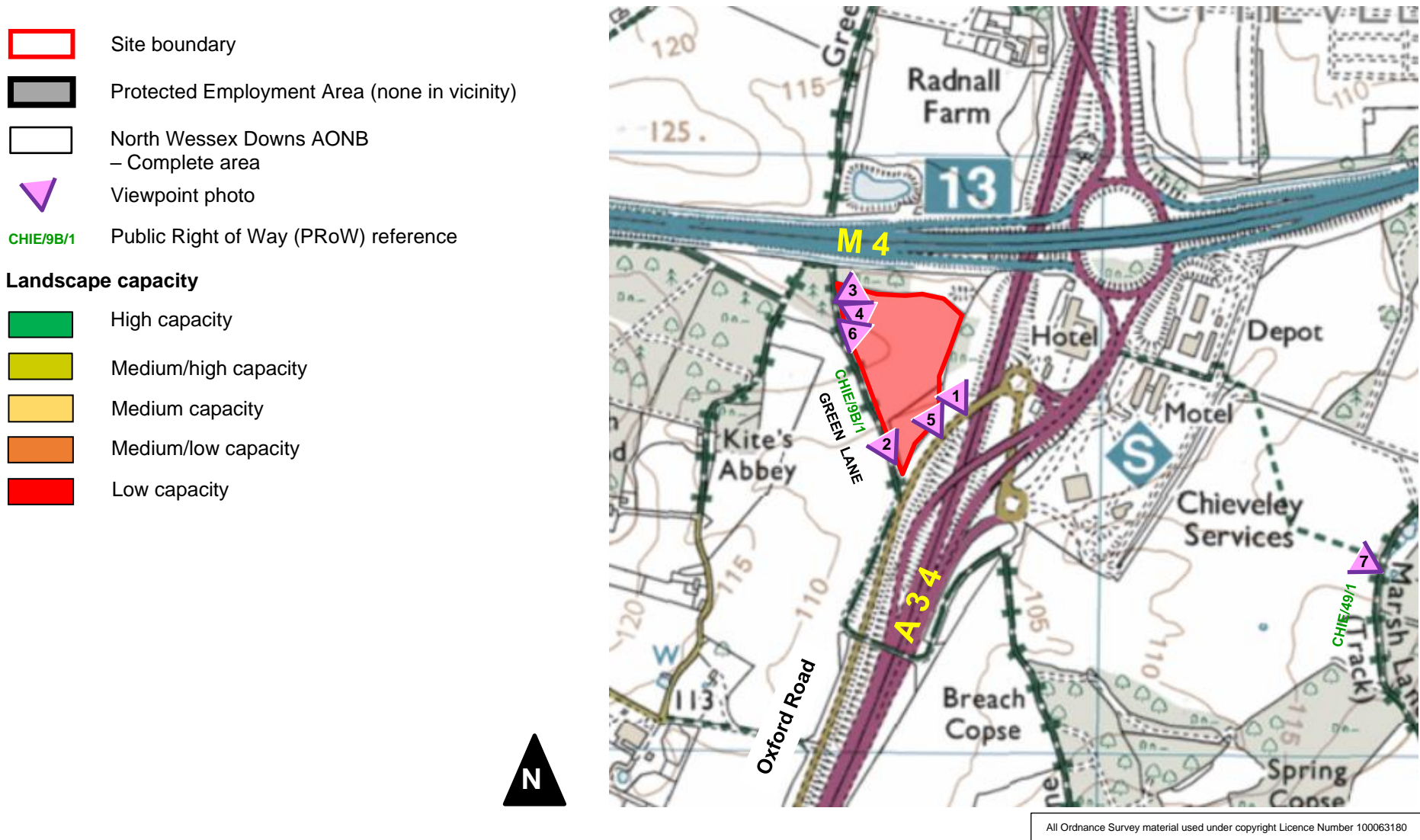
Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for potential employment areas within West Berkshire

<p>Other significant vegetation cover: None</p>	<p>Cultural associations: None known</p>	
<p>BAP/Priority Habitats//Phase I records: None Boundary hedgerow adjacent Green Lane would qualify as Priority Habitat: Hedgerow</p>	<p>Features of cultural importance: None</p>	
<p>Presence of SSSI/SINC/local wildlife designation/Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland: The area is characterised by ancient woodlands. Closest one to the site boundary is to the west at circa 100m</p>		
<p>Sensitivity score: Medium</p>	<p>Sensitivity score: Medium</p>	<p>Sensitivity score: Medium</p>
<p>Landscape sensitivity score: Medium</p>		
<p>Additional comments: Although in close proximity to the M4 and A34, the site contains key characteristics of AONB and forms part of the wider open landscape of the AONB</p>		

Relationship with the wider landscape/Protected Employment Area

<p>Adjacent Protected Employment Area (PEA) None 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 mosaic of fields enclosed by woodland to the west which continues to the south and provides an open rural setting for the A34 and M4 within this area of the AONB</p>
<p>Character of adjacent village(s)/towns: N/A. Nearest settlement is Curridge, located circa 1.25km from the site boundary, with the intervening area containing the A34, woodland and arable land</p>
<p>Historic links with the wider area if known: None</p>
<p>Ecological links with the wider area if known: None known</p>
<p>Recreational links with the wider area: PRoW (CHIE/9B/1) provides a link to the multi recreational bridge across the A34 to the east, linking both sides of the AONB with each other</p>
<p>VDS/Parish Plan – relevant extracts: Chieveley Parish: None known</p>

Figure 1: Site: Junction 13 - CHI3 - Parcel 1 - Land south of the M4



West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019

The site lies within the following *LCA FCA4: 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
- 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 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 an arable field and a wire mesh fenced enclosed originally highway compound area. The site is located south of the M4, where the adjacent section of highway is located elevated on an embankment. The site boundaries are well defined and are to the north and east the highway timber post and rail fence with highway woodland planting beyond. To the west of the site, the boundary is defined by a tree/hedgerow lined track (originally the southern part of Green Lane), which is also a PRoW (CHIE/9B/1). At the northern end the site boundary is defined by the western edge of High Wood, a large woodland containing a number of areas of ancient woodland and the Scheduled Monument: Bussocks Camp. The southern area, where the ex-highway compound is located, there is a double hedgerow and beyond the Oxford Road, now realigned as part of the infrastructure at Junction 13.

The site is located on a valley side, with the landform sloping down from the western corner (circa 115m AOD) down to the east at around 110m AOD. The site forms part of a mosaic of fields which align the valley and are enclosed by low wooded horizons. From the PRoW which aligns the western periphery of the site, there are views across the site, over the A34 to the opposite valley side, which is enclosed by a low wooded horizon.

Overall, the site is part of an accessible landscape and contributes to a patchwork of fields which occupy the lower valley sides of this undulating landform, typical of the landscape character of this area within 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 from the Oxford Road across to the southern end of the site



Photo 2: View along old Green Lane, which is a PRow (CHIE/9B/1) which aligns the western site boundary, providing framed and filtered views into and across the site



Photo 3: Open view from Green Lane, which is a now a PRow (CHIE/9B/1) which aligns the western site boundary. The view is across the site to the M4 nearly screened by woodland planting on its highway embankment



Photo 4: Open view from Green Lane, which is a now a PRow (CHIE/9B/1) which aligns the western site boundary. The view is across the site to the Hilton Hotel, with the roof is just visible above the tree line. Low wooded horizons enclose the view



Photo 5: Open view from the Oxford Road into and across and up across the site. The ex-highway compound is visible to the left. The line of trees within the centre of the photo marks the alignment of the PRow: CHIE/9B/1 and western site boundary. Another arable field is visible beyond



Photo 6: View across site to A34 on slight embankment, Chieveley Services building beyond and opposite valley side, enclosed by low wooded horizon



Photo 7: View from the east across Chieveley Services to the open western valley side which contains the site - the pale brown area below the wooded horizon

Please refer to section 3 methodology of the assessment process

1. Visual Sensitivity: High

- The site is visible from the adjacent PRoW which aligns the western boundary of the site. This PRoW is also a characterful lane (Green Lane) a feature of this area of the AONB
- The site is visible from a short section of the adjacent section of the Oxford Road to the south
- There are also long views across the landscape from the east (PRoW CHIE/49/1), where the site forms part of the open agricultural landscape, which characterises the valley side and enclosed by the continuous low wooded horizon further to the west
- There are some filtered views from a short section of the adjacent M4 and views from the A34
- The adjacent road infrastructure does not visually detract from the overall landscape character of this area

2. Landscape Sensitivity: Medium

- Located within the North Wessex Downs AONB
- A single arable field which forms part of a wider area of fields which occupy the lower valley landscape
- Enclosed by a low wooded horizon to the west, a key landscape characteristic of this area
- 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
- 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: Medium/high

- The site is an important part of the wider agricultural landscape with which it has strong visual and landscape links. There is some intervisibility with the nearby services and hotels

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




6. Landscape Value: Medium/high

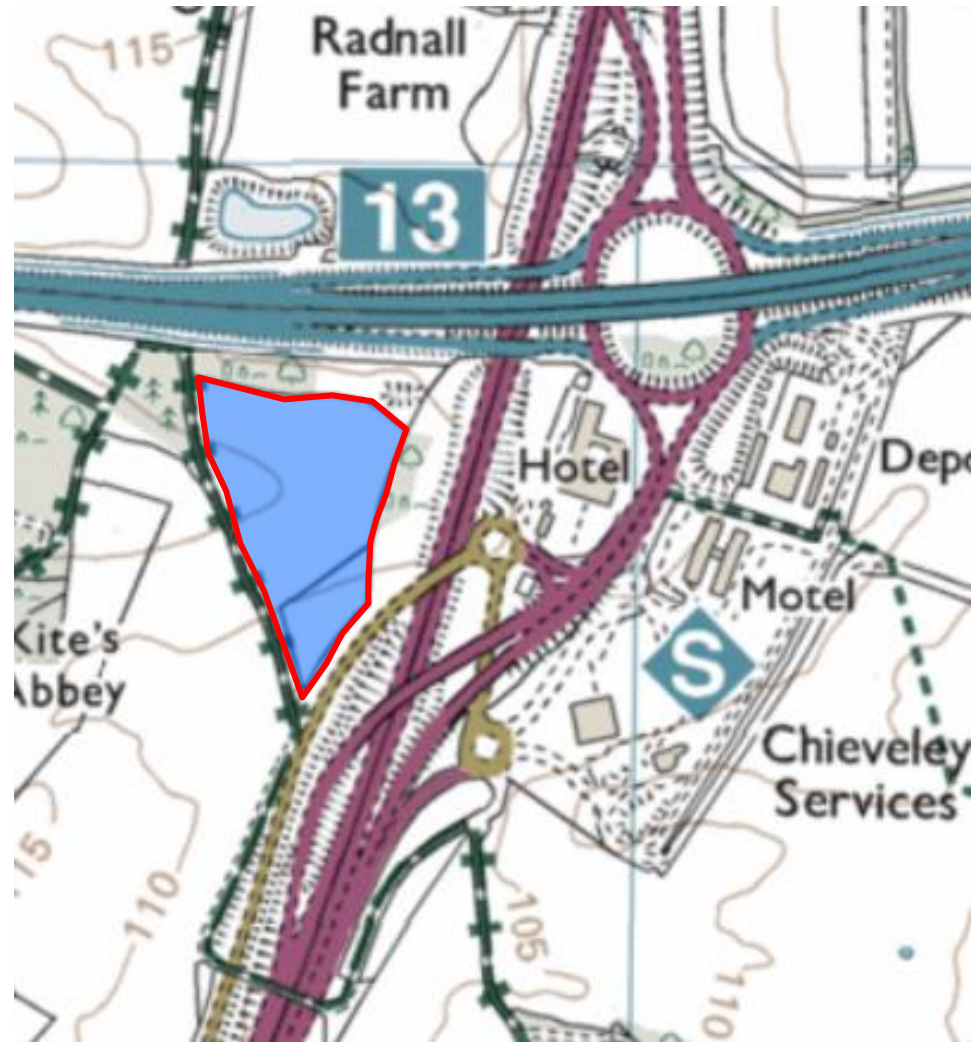
- Set within the North Wessex Downs AONB

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

Relationship of site to Protected Employment Area (PEA) <ul style="list-style-type: none">No PEA within vicinity
Relationship with adjacent wider countryside <ul style="list-style-type: none">Strong relationship with the wider landscape to the south and east across the valley to the corresponding valley sideThe site forms part of the open agricultural valley landscapeThe site contributes to the open setting of the adjacent woodland
Potential impact on key landscape characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none">Loss of open character and an arable field which forms part of the mosaic of fields within this areaLoss of open setting of adjacent woodlandErosion of rural character of Green LaneIntroduction of more modern inclusions including large scale buildings, noise and lighting eroding the traditional and rural landscape character of the area
Potential impact on key visual characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none">Adverse visual impact on a PRoW (Green Lane) which aligns the western site boundary, by introducing views of modern buildings eroding the rural character of the areaVisible from across the valley side, resulting in an adverse effect on longer views within the wider AONB
Potential Impact on Existing Protected Employment Area <ul style="list-style-type: none">Not applicable
Potential impact on the North Wessex Downs AONB <ul style="list-style-type: none">Loss of open land within the North Wessex Downs AONBLoss of open setting of adjacent woodlandsLoss of amenity value of a PRoW which aligns the periphery of the siteAdverse impact on the rural character of Green Lane which aligns the western boundary of the siteIncreased level of development will erode the rural qualities and the open character of the areaIncreased external lighting resulting in further light pollution on the site and adjacent areasIncreased noise levels and traffic levels on local area
Landscape mitigation and contribution to green infrastructure <ul style="list-style-type: none">Not applicable
Conclusion and recommendations <p>It is recommended that the site is not considered for development</p>

Figure 2: Site: Junction 13 - CHI3 - Parcel 1 - Land south of the M4

-  The site
-  Protected Employment Area (PEA) – none in vicinity
-  Not suitable for development



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