

Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for: Junction 13 – CHI3 parcel 2 – Land west of Oxford Road

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL CAPACITY STUDY 2022 RECORD SHEET

Site	Junction 13 – CHI3 Parcel 2 – Land west of Oxford Road
Date of site survey	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 *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: Oxford Road (partly on an embankment), which provides access to the Hilton Hotel and lies adjacent the eastern site boundary Unmarked lane aligning site to the west Residential properties on unmarked lane to west of site</p> <p>PRoW: CHIE/9B/1 CHIE/46/1 (which cuts across the site) CHIE/51/1, CHIE/9/1, CHIE/9/2 CHIE/36/2 (western side of A34) CHIE/49/1 (western side of A34)</p>	<p>Types of viewers: Road users, local and on the Oxford Road Walkers, cyclists, horse riders Residents west of site</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 become compromised</p>
<p>Views out of the site to: East of site: Tree and hedgerow planting on highway embankment and cutting, including the Oxford Road West of site: Woodland, and a few glimpsed views of adjacent arable field and dwellings on unmarked Lane South of site: Long views south to wooded horizons</p>	<p>Magnitude of viewers (level of use and popularity): High. The site is crossed by a Public Right of Way (CHIE/46/1. The PRoW CHIE/51/1 and CHIE/9B/1 align part of the eastern boundary and provide access across the A34 to a network of PRoW further to the east</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? Just below skyline, but 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 unmarked lane across the site area From the overbridge (CHIE/51/1)</p>		
<p>Landmark features: None</p>		
<p>Sensitivity score: High</p>	<p>Sensitivity score: High</p>	<p>Sensitivity score: Low</p>
<p>Visual sensitivity score: High</p>		
<p>Additional comments: Although in close proximity to the M4 and A34, both roads do not dominate views from the site and views of the site</p>		

LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

Natural factors	Cultural factors	Perceptual features
Topography and landform: Undulating gentle valley side. Levels increasing up from around 100m AOD on south eastern site boundary across to just above 115m AOD on western site boundary by Kite's Abbey	Boundary features other than vegetation: Highway timber post and rail along the eastern site boundary	Tranquillity – Noise levels: Adjacent M4/A34 creates constant background traffic noise
Geological features: None	Historic landscapes: None	Tranquillity – Visual intrusion / detractors: The M4, A34 and services do not dominate views in relation to the site, even within the leafless winter months
Soil quality: Agriculture Land Classification: Mainly Grade 3 (Good-moderate), with a slither along the eastern edge classified as Grade 2 (Very good) Soil Quality: the western area of the site is classified as Slowly permeable seasonally wet slightly acid but base rich loamy and clayey soils, with moderate fertility, while to the east (adjacent the Oxford Road) the soil is free draining slightly acid but base rich soils with a high fertility	Parkland features: None	Tranquillity – Light pollution/dark skies: As per CPRE England's Light Pollution and Dark Skies map, the site is located between at 8-16 Nanowatts cm2/sr (eastern side) across to 2-4 Nanowatts cm2/sr on the western edge. The semi- adjacent Hilton Hotel and Chieveley Services is measured at 16-32 Nanowatts cm2/sr
Water features: None		
Landcover and land use: Agriculture: Two large linear arable fields and an area of woodland (Beech Copse) which is also an ancient and semi natural woodland. To the south of this woodland is also an area of grassland Enclosed by a treed hedgerow to the NE, Highway tree and hedgerow planting adjacent the Oxford Road adjacent the site's eastern boundary Tree line track and also PRow cuts across the site on an east -west alignment Southern arable field is semi enclosed by field hedgerows	Conservation Area: None	

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

<p>Tree belts, individual trees and riverside trees: Row of mature trees aligns PRow (CHIE /46/1) which cuts across the site Individual trees are also evident adjacent the NW site boundary</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: There are no hedgerows within the site, however hedgerows are a feature of the site boundaries</p>	<p>Built form: Electric wire with timber posts crosses northern part site on a SW-NE alignment The PRow (CHIE/46/1) which crosses the site is tarmacked</p>	<p>Accessibility by public footpath: CHIE/46/1 crosses the site CHIE/51/1 and CHIE/9B/1 align the site</p>
<p>Woodland and copses: Small area adjacent north west boundary and within the site is an ancient woodland which forms part of large ancient woodland, known as Bussock Wood</p>	<p>Setting of listed buildings: None</p>	<p>Open access areas: None</p>
<p>Wetland and meadow: Adjacent and to the south of Beech Copse is an area of grassland</p>	<p>Scheduled Monuments: None on the site Nearest is Bussock Camp fort 440m to the west</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: Two fields of gently sloping arable land bound by hedgerows and woodland. Enclosed along its western side by woodland, hedgerows, but a lot more open along the site's southern boundary to adjacent arable fields. The site also is semi open to the adjacent arable field to the north Separated from the adjacent Oxford Road by a highway hedgerow</p>

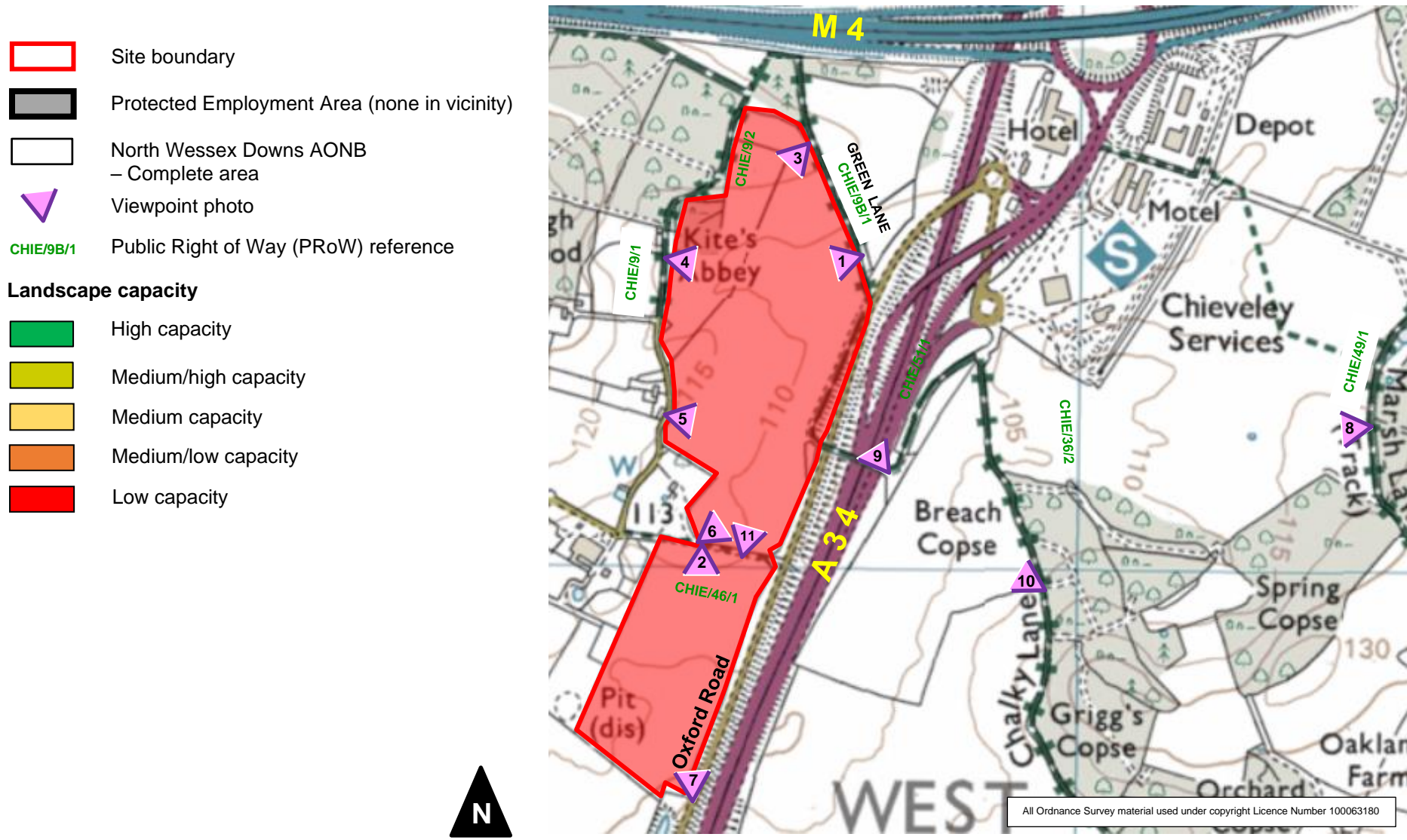
Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for potential employment areas within West Berkshire

Heathland: None	Contribution of private gardens to landscape character: N/A	Aesthetic sensitivity – landscape pattern: Part of the pattern of fields, hedgerows, lanes within a mosaic of woodland, key characteristics of this landscape character area of this part of the AONB
Other significant vegetation cover: None	Cultural associations: None known	
BAP/Phase I records/ Priority Habitats: Beech Copse is a Priority Habitat deciduous woodland Site boundary hedgerows could also qualify as Priority Habitats	Features of cultural importance: None	
Presence of SSSI/SINC/local wildlife designation/Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland: The local area is characterised by ancient woodlands, including part of the ancient woodland: Beech Copse located within the site A small part of the site lies within Local Wildlife Site: Bussock Wood and Philip Hill, additionally the rest of the site would also contribute to its open setting		
Sensitivity score: High	Sensitivity score: Medium	Sensitivity score: Medium
Landscape sensitivity score: Medium/high		
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. The traffic noise of the M4 and A34 have affected its score. However, the low visibility of the A34, reduces the adverse effect on tranquillity		

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 and hedgerows to the west which continues to the south and provides an open rural landscape 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: Part of the site contains a small part of a larger adjacent ancient woodland</p>
<p>Ecological links with the wider area if known: Part of the site lies within the Local Wildlife Site: Bussock Wood and Philip Hill, North western part of the site is covered by Biodiversity Opportunity Area</p>
<p>Recreational links with the wider area: PRoW (CHIE/9B/1 and CHIE/51/1) provides a link to the multi recreational bridge across the A34 to the east, linking both sides of the valley and beyond within the AONB with each other</p>
<p>VDS/Parish Plan – relevant extracts: Chieveley Parish: None known</p>

Figure 1: Site: Junction 13 – CHI3 - Parcel 2 – Land West of Oxford Road



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 Landscape Character Assessment 2002

The site is located 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 two large linear arable fields and a small area of woodland, located on the western side of the Oxford Road, south of the M4. The landform of the site forms part of a shallow valley side and slopes down from the north west from a highpoint of around and above 115m AOD, down to the south eastern corner just below 100m AOD. Across the site, the landform also gently undulates. The site boundaries are well defined and are to the east the highway hedgerow/timber post and rail fence which aligns the Oxford Road and the PRow bridge. The site boundary to the north is defined by the edge of the adjacent woodland. From this location, the site boundary continues along the western edge adjacent the ancient woodland (High Wood) and Local Wildlife Site: Bussock Wood and Philip Hill. The site boundary then continues along the single lane roadside hedgerow down to the cluster of properties of Snelsmore Cottages. The site boundary then encircles the Snelsmore House along the garden boundary, crosses the PRow CHIE/46/1, then aligns along the hedgerow, down to the southern site boundary hedgerow. Overall, the site is part of an accessible landscape and contributes to a mosaic of fields which occupy the lower valley side 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 down into and onto the site from adjacent PRoW (CHIE/9B/1)



Photo 2: View across the site from adjacent PRoW (CHIE/9B/1). The Oxford Road is just visible, with the adjacent A34 aligning in a cutting screened from view. The view extends to close and far wooded horizons



Photo 3: View across the site from adjacent PRoW (CHIE/9B/1). The PRoW overbridge is just visible to the left. A gentle rolling landform is characteristic of the site. The site extends across to the open agricultural landscape on the eastern side of the valley, which is further enclosed by the contrasting low wooded horizons



Photo 4: View through site periphery trees into site. The view extends across the valley, with the roof of Chieveley Services just visible with the open landscape beyond, then enclosed by the low wooded horizon



Photo 5: View across site, with Chieveley Services just visible within this winter view



Photo 6: View across site, with the PRoW bridge just visible beyond the site. The A34 is screened by adjacent highway planting. The view extends across the valley and is then enclosed by the low wooded horizon



Photo 7: View from the elevated section of the Oxford Road down and across the site



Photo 8: View (PRoW CHIE/49/1) from the east across to the site over the A34 (not in view). The open character of the site is seen extending up the valley side then enclosed by a low wooded horizon



Photo 9: View from the eastern side of the PRoW bridge across the A34 (located down below in cutting) to the north western part of the site, which extends up to and enclosed by the woodland on the horizon



Photo 10: View across the A34 to the site, where as shown the A34 is in cutting adjacent the site. The site forms part of the open agricultural landscape which aligns the valley floor and lower valley sides, which is further enclosed by woodland on the upper valley sides as shown



Photo 11: View looking north across the site from PRow (CHIE/46/1), the PRow bridge is visible to the right

Please refer to section 3 methodology of the assessment process

1. Visual Sensitivity: High

- The site is visible from the adjacent PRoW (CHIE/9B/1) which aligns the north eastern boundary of the site. This PRoW is also a characterful lane (Green Lane) a feature of this area of the AONB
 - There are long extensive views south across and beyond the site to low wooded horizons
 - The site is visible from the adjacent Oxford Road, which is partly located on an embankment, providing views down across the site
 - There are also panoramic views from the PRoW across the A34 from the east, where the site forms part of the open agricultural landscape, enclosed further to the west by the continuous low wooded horizon
 - The site is visible as part of a setting of an ancient woodland
- The site is visible from the eastern side of the PRoW bridge, where the adjacent section of the A34 lies in a cutting
- Mitigation measures would compromise the character of the landscape

2. Landscape Sensitivity: Medium/high

- Located within the North Wessex Downs AONB
- The site's landform gently undulates and forms part of an open lower valley side which is further characterised by arable farmland
- The site includes two large arable fields, and a small area of woodland and grassland
- The area of woodland (Beech Copse) within the site is ancient woodland, where the rest of the site contributes to its open setting
- Beech Copse is also a Priority Habitat deciduous woodland
- The site's open agricultural character contrasts with the low wooded horizon to the west, a key landscape characteristic of this area
- The site also contributes to the rural character of the adjacent Green Lane (PRoW: CHIE9B/1)
- Part of the site is a Local Wildlife Site: Bussock Wood and Philip Hill, the rest of the site contributes to its open setting
- Traffic noise from the A34 is apparent, however bird song is also apparent from the adjacent woodlands
- The adjacent road infrastructure does not visually detract from the overall landscape character of this area
- There are no Protected Employment sites (PEA) areas within the locality

3. Landscape Character Sensitivity: High (combines 1 and 2)



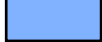
4. Wider Landscape Sensitivity: Medium/high

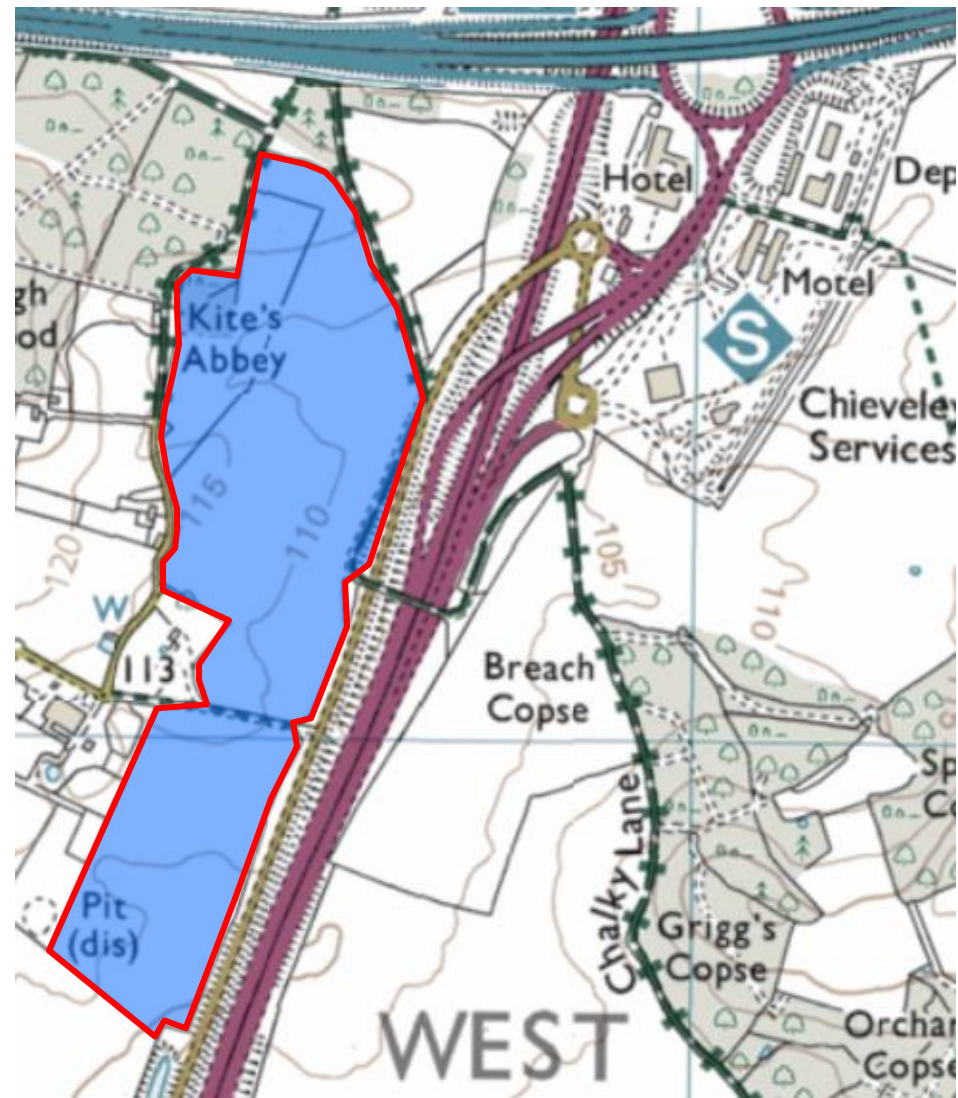
- The site is an important part of the wider agricultural landscape with which it has strong visual and landscape links

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 the wider landscape to the south and east and across the valley to the corresponding valley side The site forms part of the open agricultural valley landscape The site forms part of and contributes to the open setting of the adjacent ancient woodland The site's forms part of the adjacent Local Wildlife Site and would contribute to its open setting
<p>Potential impact on key landscape characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of open character and arable fields which forms part of the mosaic of fields within this area Loss of ancient woodland and open setting of ancient woodland Erosion of rural character of Green Lane and a number of PRoW within locality 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 PRoW (Green Lane) which aligns the north eastern site boundary, by introducing views of modern buildings eroding the rural character of the area Visible from, a large number of PRoW, which will result in an adverse visual effect Visible from across the valley side, 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 within the North Wessex Downs AONB Loss of open setting of adjacent woodlands, including ancient woodlands and the low wooded horizons Loss of amenity value of a number of PRoW which align the periphery of the site, cross the site and located away from the site on the opposite valley side Adverse impact on the rural character of Green Lane which aligns the north eastern 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 - CHI3 - Parcel 2 - Land West of Oxford Road

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



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