

**Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment for: Land at Whitehart Meadow, Theale**

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

<b>Site:</b>	Whitehart Meadow, Theale
<b>Date of site survey:</b>	12.02.2022 and 17.07.2021
<b>Surveyors:</b>	LA
<b>Weather/visibility:</b>	Clear
<b>LCA</b>	North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002 West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019
<p><b>West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019</b></p> <p>The site straddles two LCA's: <i>LCA WH4: Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic</i> and <i>LCA ROI: Kennet Lower River with Open Water</i></p> <p><i>LCA WH4: Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic</i> – to the north of the site</p> <p><i>Key Characteristics</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geologically and topographically varied with steep and gentle undulating slopes rising to a central ridge</li> <li>• Presence of surface water and small streams</li> <li>• Complex pattern of land cover, dominated by woodland and with remnant heaths</li> <li>• Varied field pattern with strong hedgerows</li> <li>• Parklands are a characteristic feature</li> <li>• Relatively densely settled, particularly along the ridge, but with woodland containment</li> <li>• A minor road network contained by the wooded landscape</li> <li>• An accessible landscape</li> <li>• Quiet, intimate and secluded character</li> </ul> <p><i>Valued Features and Qualities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB</li> <li>• The visual role of the wooded ridge crest and slopes</li> <li>• The varied land cover mosaic and important habitats</li> <li>• A very rural character away from major roads and urban edges</li> <li>• Recreational value</li> <li>• Historic landscape character</li> </ul>	

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

### *Detractors*

- Past hedgerow loss for arable farming
- Changing land use patterns resulting in gradual loss of landscape variation and biodiversity
- Increase in horse paddocks
- Impact of the M4 on character
- Decreasing separation/coalescence between settlements
- Increased suburbanisation
- Loss of gradation between settlement and countryside
- Increased traffic on the rural lane network

### *Landscape Strategy*

- Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Conserve and restore heathland characteristics
- Promote appropriate woodland management
- Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements
- Retain the distinction between and individual identity of settlements
- Conserve elements that mark a transition between settlement and countryside
- Conserve the existing character of rural lanes and public rights of way
- Maintain open views from routeways

*LCA ROI: Kennet Lower River with Open Water – to the south of the site*

### *Key Characteristics*

- Broad, open valley of the River Kennet, underlain by chalk geology with gravel and sand deposits
- Land use dominated by gravel pit lakes, industry and transport infrastructure
- Former gravel pits and flood plain habitats are locally important for wildlife
- A modern landscape dominated by transport corridors and gravel extraction with surviving small scale heritage features
- Settlement in the area is sparse, excepting the large historic village of Theale
- Transport links are a dominant feature, particularly the M4, railway and canal
- Destination for formal and informal recreation activity
- Often visually enclosed by woodland, with views opening out over the lakes
- Tranquillity is limited by the motorway and nearby urban development

### *Valued Features and Qualities*

- Semi-natural habitats associated with distinctive gravel pit lakes
- Sparse settlement pattern
- The historic village of Theale

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

- Important provision of recreational amenity
- Historic transport routes including the railway and canals

### *Detractors*

- Past and present gravel pit extraction resulting in an industrialised landscape
- Large-scale transport infrastructure
- Upgrading of rural roads
- Fragmented and degraded remaining agricultural land
- Pressure for new development
- Prominent large-scale buildings

### *Landscape Strategy*

- Continue to promote the appropriate restoration of former gravel pits
- Conserve and enhance hedgerows, woodland strips and remaining areas of pasture
- Respect the setting of historic features within the landscape
- Maintain distinction and sense of separation between the settlements of Theale and Calcot
- Mitigate the adverse influence of major transport infrastructure and maintain character of rural lanes

### **An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire - May 2009**

The site straddles two LLCA: LLCA20E: Theale – Calcot Gap and LLCA16A: Englefield Wooded Farmlands, described as follows:

#### **LLCA20E: Theale – Calcot Gap** (south of the stream which straddles the site on a NE-SW axis)

##### Key elements of landscape sensitivity

- Recent new landscapes (such as Arlington Park) have created a more positive, ornamental landscape setting
- Remnant fields and tree cover
- Several local landmarks, set within uncohesive built form
- Visually exposed to views from higher ground and settlement edge
- Geological SSSI
- Undulating topography falling to the valley floor which has been significantly altered by highway infrastructure
- Distinctive modern commercial built form
- Dominance of highway infrastructure
- Generally poor landscape structure

Wider landscape: The open landscape quarters of LLCA20E Theale – Calcot Gap link through to the Kennet Valley landscape of 8F in the east and the farmed landscape of 16A to the north west. There is a strong landscape and visual link between 16A and the north west quarter. The south east quarter has more in common with south 14J

from which it is separated by the A4 infrastructure but it has good visual links with 8F.

Setting to the urban form LLCA20E: Theale – Calcot Gap separates Theale from Reading but includes substantial areas of commercial development straddling the M4 junction. This differs in character from the residential townscape of both Theale and Calcot and together with the open space defines the gap. The open land retains the perception of separation between the two settlements

**LLCA16A: Englefield Wooded Farmlands** (north of the stream which straddles the site on a NE-SW axis)

Englefield Wooded Farmlands is characterised by its mixed agricultural and recreational land use. The area is well vegetated with a complex vegetation pattern in the north, typical, but naturalistic, golf course planting in the centre and little internal boundary treatment and neat roadside hedges in the south. The landscape structure in the south has been weakened and the character eroded through urban fringe elements.

Key elements of landscape sensitivity

- Part of the flat valley floor between the River Kennet and River Pang
- Extensive areas of woodland, pasture and amenity grassland
- Small to medium scale field pattern well defined by hedgerows and tree belts
- Good sense of seclusion in north
- Narrow winding rural road network
- Contained linear village at North Street
- Scattered farmsteads and other built form clusters
- Visually exposed to views from the escarpments, in particular Englefield
- Significant individual historic buildings and settlement at North Street
- Good level of recreational provision and public rights of way
- BAP woodlands and significant lengths of hedgerow
- Important approach to the model estate at Englefield
- Past inappropriate man-made landform on golf course and highway infrastructure
- Weakened landscape structure in the south west
- Some urban fringe elements such as pylons, sewage plant, lighting to school playing fields
- Tranquillity compromised by urban fringe elements and M4

Wider landscape: LLCA16A Englefield Wooded Farmlands has strong landscape links with land to the north and north west at the foot of the Englefield escarpment beyond the study area. It is a visually enclosed area but visible from the higher ground of the rural escarpments.

Setting to the urban form LLCA16A Englefield Wooded Farmlands abuts Theale village and 20E on its southern boundary. The built form of Theale is visually exposed but 16A provides a strong contrast and rural landscape setting to the village.

**Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of Potential Strategic Development Sites - May 2009**

The site is located in Area 11: East Theale which covers the south-eastern corner of LLCA16A and north-west quadrant of 20E. Although the landscape sensitivity is low in 20E, it is essential to maintaining the remaining physical and visual gap between Theale and Calcot. Its narrow width is reinforced by its link to the south-east quadrant and to 16A. 16A is of medium sensitivity but it is noted that the southern part has a weaker landscape structure and a lower landscape value. The option area however includes landscape features of merit and would close the gap down to 150m at this point. It is recommended that only a very small section of the north-west quadrant of 20E, north of Hoad Way and no further east than the current built form edge of Theale, be considered as a strategic option site if the gap is to be maintained. Part of 16A may also be acceptable if the existing landscape structure is used to integrate the development and is reinforced to maintain a perceptible gap.

**North Wessex Downs AONB LCA 2002** – The site is located adjacent the NWD AONB boundary to *LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons*

*Key management requirements:*

- The overall management requirement is conserve and enhance the quiet secluded character of the LCA 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons
- The aim also 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.

**LCA of potential housing sites within and adjacent to the North Wessex Downs AONB – Theale – August 2015**

Summary of the key characteristics of the settlement and landscape constraints on the extent and location of development - Theale lies on the valley floor on the slightly higher ground above the river Kennet. Commercial development is concentrated south of the A4 with housing and village facilities extending north of the A4 into the open landscape in the southern part of LLCA16A: Englefield Wooded Farmlands. A triangle of open countryside north of Theale, between the A340 to the west (at the foot of the Englefield AONB escarpment) to the M4 to the east (at the foot of the Sulham AONB escarpment), lies outside of the AONB but provides a rural setting to the AONB and interface between the two areas of the AONB.

**Landscape designations:** None – but adjacent North Wessex Downs AONB

**VISUAL SENSITIVITY**

<b>General visibility</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Mitigation potential</b>
<p><b>Views into the site from:</b>                      High Street, Theale                      Public Right of Way (west) THEA/5/1                      Public Right of Way (west) THEA/5/2                      Public Right of Way (bridge over M4) THEA/10/1                      Woodfield Park (west)                      Bath Street (south)                      Alderfield Close and public open space/footpath at end of the Close</p>	<p><b>Types of viewers:</b>                      Walkers, residents, users of park and vehicle travellers</p>	<p><b>Opportunities for mitigation and landscape compatibility of mitigation:</b>                      Strengthening and enhancing boundary trees and shrubs                      Strengthening native tree and shrub planting along north eastern edge of site to potentially screen any views of buildings(rooftops) from NWD AONB and PRow over M4 and access to Theale</p>
<p><b>Views out of the site to:</b>                      Wooded Sulham ridge and horizon to the north east within the AONB                      Open land and setting of Theale to the south, across to the Bath Road on embankment                      Housing (Alderfield Close and Rotherfield Close) to the south west and smaller open space areas of grass                      Within the leafless winter months, the distinctive ‘blue’ of the Ikea building is partly visible beyond the motorway and the intervening treed area</p>	<p><b>Magnitude of viewers (level of use and popularity):</b>                      High Street, Theale – (high), walking access across M4 to Calcot                      Public Right of Way THEA/5/1 (high)                      Public Right of Way THEA/5/2 (medium) overgrown at southern end                      Public Right of Way (bridge over M4) THEA/10/1 – views across towards site                      Woodfield Park - west (high) screened by site boundary trees                      Bath Road - south (high)                      Alderfield Close and open space/footpath at end of the Close (medium)</p>	<p><b>Impacts of mitigation:</b>                      Low</p>
<p><b>Does the site form part of a skyline?</b>                      No</p>	<p><b>Visual perceptions (activity and expectations of local visual receptors):</b>                      Rural setting of Theale and separate identity from Calcot</p>	
<p><b>Panoramic views:</b>                      Small part of a panoramic view from the ridge at Tilehurst within the AONB, part of the undeveloped setting of Theale which is dominated by woodland</p>		

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

<b>Landmark features:</b> None		
<b>Sensitivity score:</b> Medium	<b>Sensitivity score:</b> Medium	<b>Sensitivity score:</b> Medium
<b>Visual sensitivity score:</b> Medium		
<p><b>Additional comments:</b>                  The site has been left for a number of years resulting in scrub/trees encroaching around the periphery restricting views into the site from the west. However, the trees/wooded character of the site provides a back drop to housing within Theale and also contributes to the wooded character of the Kennet Valley floor as can be appreciated from views within the AONB</p>		



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

**LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY**

<b>Natural factors</b>	<b>Cultural factors</b>	<b>Perceptual features</b>
<p><b>Topography and landform:</b> Slightly dips down towards the centre, with watercourses/ditch forming landform features of sunken linear areas</p>	<p><b>Boundary features other than vegetation:</b> None, open</p>	<p><b>Tranquillity – Noise levels:</b> Traffic noise from M4</p>
<p><b>Geological features:</b> None</p>	<p><b>Historic landscapes:</b> No historic features on site</p>	<p><b>Tranquillity – Visual intrusion / detractors:</b> M4 well screened by intervening trees and shrubs. Overhead power lines detract from views looking towards the east</p>
<p><b>Soil quality:</b> Two different types of soil are found across the site, as follows: <i>North and main part of site:</i> Loamy soils with naturally high groundwater (Low fertility) <i>Small part on NE edge:</i> Slowly permeable seasonally wet slightly acid but base-rich loamy and clayey soils (Moderate fertility) Agricultural Classification: Grade 3 (Good to moderate)</p>	<p><b>Parkland features:</b> None</p>	<p><b>Tranquillity – Light pollution/dark skies:</b> As per CPRE England’s Light Pollution and Dark Skies map, the site is located between the brightest and one category down (32-16 Nanowatts cm<sup>2</sup>/sr) the darkest areas are measured as less than 0.25 cm<sup>2</sup>/sr</p>
<p><b>Water features:</b> None within site, although beyond site boundaries there are three watercourses. One flows NNW to SSE along the eastern boundary of the site. Another leads off from this one towards Theale and third aligns the northern site boundary. All part of a network of ditches/stream flowing south into the River Kennet</p>		
<p><b>Landcover and land use:</b> No present land use Bramble, scrub and regenerating trees throughout, with small areas of rough grassland A concrete road enters off the High Street. Overhead power lines</p>	<p><b>Conservation Area:</b> None</p>	

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

<p><b>Tree belts, individual trees and riverside trees:</b> Edge of eastern area of the southern part of the site contains trees which forms part of a wider area of woodland which continues across the site boundary adjacent the M4. Western area contains a further number of self-seeded trees, although small, but becoming larger towards the western site boundary aligning the current settlement boundary of Theale</p>	<p><b>Landscape features of LCA:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact of the M4 from noise,</li> <li>• Contains trees/woodland part of varied land cover mosaic</li> <li>• Surface water and streams (beyond site boundary) flowing into River Kennet</li> <li>• Accessible with PRoW along perimeter</li> <li>• Site is part of the setting and distinction of Theale separate from Calcot</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Hedgerows and hedgerow trees:</b> Old hedgerow/field boundary along western site boundary, now overgrown with a line of mature trees</p>	<p><b>Built form:</b> Concrete road as access to pylon</p>	<p><b>Accessibility by public footpath:</b> None</p>
<p><b>Woodland and copses:</b> Developing across the site, with a number of small groups of trees</p>	<p><b>Setting of listed buildings:</b> None</p>	<p><b>Open access areas:</b> None</p>
<p><b>Wetland and meadow:</b> Some areas of rough grassland Swamp vegetation with rushes and reeds</p>	<p><b>Scheduled Monuments:</b> None</p>	<p><b>Recreational areas:</b> None on site, adjacent PRoW to west and Park to the north west. Part of a wider panoramic view from The Folly and PRoW within the AONB to the north</p>
<p><b>Common land:</b> None</p>	<p><b>Settlement pattern and pattern of Protected Employment Area:</b> Outside but adjacent current settlement boundary of Theale Separated from PEA to the south by, High Street, open field and Bath Road on embankment</p>	
<p><b>Heathland:</b> None</p>	<p><b>Contribution of private gardens to landscape character:</b> N/A</p>	<p><b>Aesthetic sensitivity - Elements of openness/enclosure:</b> Semi enclosed</p>
<p><b>Other significant vegetation cover:</b> None</p>	<p><b>Cultural associations:</b> None known</p>	<p><b>Aesthetic sensitivity – landscape pattern:</b> Part of the open area separating Calcot and Theale Separate from Arlington Business Park by High Street, open field and the wooded embankment of M4 and Bath Road</p>

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

<p><b>BAP/Phase I records:</b> NE site boundary adjacent al part of a small woodland which then to a Priority Habitat Inventory Deciduous Woodland</p>	<p><b>Features of cultural importance:</b> None known</p>	
<p><b>Presence of SSSI/SINC/local wildlife designation/Semi-Natural Ancient Woodland:</b> Located within the Lower Pang Valley and Sulham Stream Biodiversity Opportunity Area</p>		
<p><b>Sensitivity score:</b> Medium</p>	<p><b>Sensitivity score:</b> Medium</p>	<p><b>Sensitivity score:</b> Low/Medium</p>
<p><b>Landscape sensitivity score:</b> Medium</p>		
<p><b>Additional comments:</b> The site has a part wasteland character; however, its undeveloped character contributes to the physical and perceptual separation of Theale from Calcot and to the historic setting of Theale</p>		

**Relationship with the wider landscape/townscape/ Protected Employment Area**

<p><b>Adjacent settlement:</b> Adjacent the current settlement boundary of Theale. Part of a wide sweep of open land on the eastern edge of Theale which contributes to Theale's separate physical and perceptual identity from Calcot located further to the east</p>
<p><b>Adjacent Protected Employment Area (PEA)</b> The site is not adjacent any Protected Employment Area (PEA)</p>
<p><b>Character of the settlement edge and Protected Employment Area (PEA)</b> Urban edge: Two storeys, semi-detached and linked properties, cul-de-sacs, good walking environment with paths leading to perimeter PRoW and small open space at the end of Alderfield Close, then onto the larger park containing Woodfield Way Play Area. Settlement edge characterised by mature trees adjacent site boundary</p> <p><b>Protected Employment Area (PEA)</b> The site is not set adjacent a PEA. The nearest PEA is to the south, and is accessed off Waterside Drive and known as Arlington Business Park. This PEA includes a central area with two lakes, areas of amenity grassland and tree planting; leading off from this central landscaped area are tree lined roads and car parking areas with further tree planting. Buildings are generally three storeys, business in usage, rather than industrial or shed like in style. To the west of Arlington Business Park, the PEA is more compact in density, with less tree planting and includes larger industrial style buildings. There is a big contrast in scale between the settlement of Theale and the Business Park</p>
<p><b>Presence in a floodplain:</b> The site boundary aligns the edge of Flood Zone 2 to the north and east and includes the stream which separates the two areas within the site</p>
<p><b>Relationship with adjacent wider countryside:</b> Continues with open countryside to the south and to the north, then across the M4 to the east and further to open countryside leading up Sulham Ridge within the AONB</p>

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

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

The settlement of Theale originally a linear settlement with development aligning the High Street. From the early 1900's development started to extend outwards, with ribbon development along the converging roads. From the late 19060's/early 1970's infill between these converging roads with housing estates started to take place. The housing development (Alderfield Close and Rotherfield Close off Woodfield Road) to the west of the site was built in the late 1980's, with the housing further to the west off Woodfield Way being built later in the 1990's.

This north eastern settlement edge of Theale in places relates poorly to the wider open countryside. Where it works well, as an example is at the end of Alderfield Close where a small open space characterised by grassland provides a transition to the adjacent area of countryside, while also allowing access with paths joining a Public Right of Way. Other parts of this housing estate, rear garden boundaries characterised by high timber close boarded fencing backing onto the public realm (in particular in this location a Public Right of Way), resulting in the Public Right Way being enclosed, narrow and unattractive to walk along

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

None known

**Ecological links with the wider area if known:**

Part of a Biodiversity Opportunity Area

**Recreational links with the wider area:**












The Public Right of Way which aligns along the western site boundary leads to the park (to the west) then Blossom Lane and beyond to a wider network of Public Rights of Way within the open countryside.

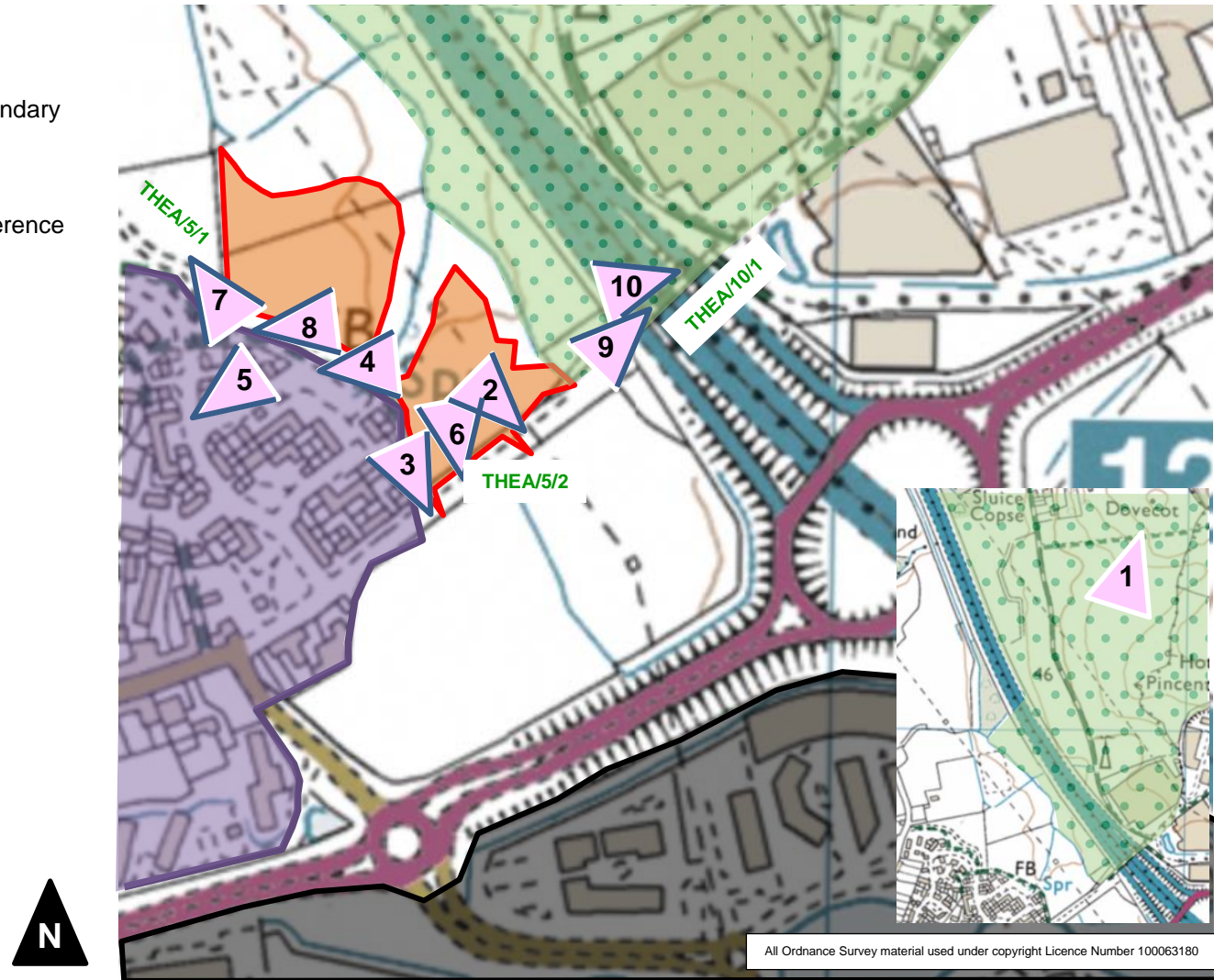
The High Street to the south leads to a Public Right of Way which crosses the M4 and leads to a network of PRoW further within the AONB

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

None known

**Figure 1: Site: Land at Whitehart Meadow, Theale**

-  Site boundary
  -  Theale Settlement boundary
  -  Protected Employment Area boundary
  -  North Wessex Downs AONB
  - THEA/5/1  Public Right of Way (PRoW) reference
  -  Viewpoint photo
- Landscape capacity**
-  High capacity
  -  Medium/high capacity
  -  Medium capacity
  -  Medium/low capacity
  -  Low capacity



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

The northern part of the site lies within the following LCA WH4: *Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic* and the southern part of the site lies within LCA ROI: *Kennet Lower River with Open Water*. The landscape strategy for both of these LCA's is set out below:

Landscape Strategy: LCA WH4: Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic:

- Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Promote appropriate woodland management
- Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements
- Retain the distinction between and individual identity of settlements
- Conserve elements that mark a transition between settlement and countryside
- Conserve the existing character of rural lanes and public rights of way
- Maintain open views from routeways

Landscape Strategy: LCA ROI: Kennet Lower River with Open Water

- Continue to promote the appropriate restoration of former gravel pits
- Conserve and enhance hedgerows, woodland strips and remaining areas of pasture
- Respect the setting of historic features within the landscape
- Maintain distinction and sense of separation between the settlements of Theale and Calcot
- Mitigate the adverse influence of major transport infrastructure and maintain character of rural lanes

### **An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire - May 2009**

The site lies within the following LLCA20E: Theale-Calcot Gap (south of stream which aligns on a NE-SW axis across the site) and the LLCA16A: Englefield Wooded Farmlands (north of stream which aligns on a NE-SW axis across the site) for which states:

Setting to the urban form LLCA20E: Theale – Calcot Gap separates Theale from Reading but includes substantial areas of commercial development straddling the M4 junction. This differs in character from the residential townscape of both Theale and Calcot and together with the open space defines the gap. The open land retains the perception of separation between the two settlements

Setting to the urban form LLCA16A Englefield Wooded Farmlands abuts Theale village and 20E on its southern boundary. The built form of Theale is visually exposed but 16A provides a strong contrast and rural landscape setting to the village.

## **Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of Potential Strategic Development Sites - May 2009**

The site is located in Area 11: East Theale which covers the south-eastern corner of LLCA16A and north-west quadrant of 20E. Although the landscape sensitivity is low in 20E, it is essential to maintaining the remaining physical and visual gap between Theale and Calcot. Its narrow width is reinforced by its link to the south-east quadrant and to 16A. 16A is of medium sensitivity but it is noted that the southern part has a weaker landscape structure and a lower landscape value. The option area however includes landscape features of merit and would close the gap down.

## **North Wessex Downs AONB LCA - 2002**

### North Wessex Downs AONB: Character Area 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons

*Key management requirements:*

- The overall management requirement is conserve and enhance the quiet secluded **character of the Hermitage Wooded Commons**.
- The aim also 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.

## **LCA of potential housing sites within and adjacent to the North Wessex Downs AONB – Theale – August 2015**

Summary of the key characteristics of the settlement and landscape constraints on the extent and location of development - Theale lies on the valley floor on the slightly higher ground above the River Kennet. Commercial development is concentrated south of the A4 with housing and village facilities extending north of the A4 into the open landscape in the southern part of LLCA16A: Englefield Wooded Farmlands. A triangle of open countryside north of Theale, between the A340 to the west (at the foot of the Englefield AONB escarpment) to the M4 to the east (at the foot of the Sulham AONB escarpment), lies outside of the AONB but provides a rural setting to the AONB and interface between the two areas of the AONB.

### **Site description:**

The site constitutes two areas on the north eastern edge of the main settled area of Theale. The site contains a mix of vegetation types, including trees and woodland around the periphery, areas of rough grassland and areas of swamp vegetation. The two areas are separated by a stream. Located to the south of the M4, traffic noise is apparent. The site also lies adjacent to the North Wessex Downs AONB.

Key landscape planning factors: **The site is located as follows:**

- Within the setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Adjacent the main settled area of Theale
- Within the setting of Theale and contributing to the physical and perceptual separation of Theale and Calcot
- Separate from and unrelated to the PEA at Arlington Business Park on the other side of the A4



**Viewpoints:**



**Photo 1:** Summer view from a Public Right of Way within the North Wessex Downs AONB, looking towards the site. The wooded character of the Kennet Valley screens/integrates the built development into the landscape preserving a wooded setting for the adjacent AONB and views from Folly Hill. The church at Theale is evident above the treeline (July 2021)



**Photo 2:** View from the High Street across the site to the dwellings on the settlement edge of Theale, characterised by mature trees (July 2021)



**Photo 3:** From the adjacent Public Right of Way which aligns the current settlement boundary of Theale. Site immediately to the right (July 2021)



**Photo 4:** From the small grassed open space within the adjacent housing development looking towards the site, marked by the pylon (July 2021)



**Photo 5:** Further back from the site looking along Alderfield Close towards the site



**Photo 6:** Looking north east across the site towards the wooded ridge (Sulham Ridge) within the North Wessex Downs AONB (July 2021)



**Photo 7:** From the adjacent park, where the site boundary is defined by a mature line of trees, marking the old field boundary (July 2021)



**Photo 8:** From the Public Right of Way looking east across the site towards Calcot, screened by the wooded M4 embankment (July 2021)



**Photo 9:** From the Public Right of Way on the M4 overbridge located on the boundary of the North Wessex Downs AONB, looking south west towards Theale, the site is screened by intervening trees/shrubs (March 2020)



**Photo 10:** From the Public Right of Way on the M4 overbridge located on the boundary of the North Wessex Downs AONB, looking west towards the site, which is screened by intervening trees/shrubs (March 2020)

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

1. **Visual Sensitivity: Medium**
  - Most of the site area is visible from adjacent public areas
  - The site forms part of key views out of Theale and part of the rural setting of the settlement from views in
  - The site is visible within the foreground of the North Wessex Downs AONB
  - A large number of people can see the site from the adjacent High Street (to the south) and the Public Right of Way, both located within the open land which separates Theale from Calcot
  
2. **Landscape Sensitivity: Medium**
  - Open area of scrubland with trees contributing to wooded character of the Kennet Valley and setting of the AONB
  - Traffic noise as in close proximity to M4
  - Visually intrusive pylon with overhead cables
  - Part of the open land in-between Theale and Calcot
  
3. Landscape Character Sensitivity: Medium (combines 1 and 2)
  
4. **Wider Landscape Sensitivity: Medium**
  - The site is partly influenced by urban fringe uses but shares many of the characteristics of the wider landscape, with good physical links
  
5. Overall Landscape Sensitivity: Medium (combines 3 and 4)
  
6. **Landscape Value: Medium**
  - Setting of North Wessex Downs AONB
  - Local importance as part of undeveloped land between Calcot and Theale which contributes to the separate identities of Theale and Calcot
  
7. Landscape Capacity: Medium (combines 5 and 6)

**Relationship of site to Theale**

- Adjoining housing within Theale is two storey semi-detached and linked. There is a network of footpaths providing links through this area of housing across to the site
- Important as part of the open setting to Theale and its physical separation from Calcot

**Relationship of site to Protected Employment Area (PEA)**

- The site is separated from Arlington Business Park by an open field, the Bath Road which is located on a partly treed embankment
- Due to the lack of intervisibility with the site and PEA, the landscape character of the site retains a more rural character, contributing to the setting and separate identity of the historic village of Theale

**Relationship with adjacent wider countryside**

- Part of a semi wooded/scrub and wetland area, which continues further to the north across into the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Continuation of an open area which separates Theale from Calcot and continues north and south of the site

**Potential impact on key landscape characteristics**

- Loss of scrubland/woodland which contributes to the wooded character of the area and screening of the adjacent M4
- Loss of surface water
- Development across the whole site would result in further dilution of the separate identities of Theale from Calcot
- Noise levels are already compromised by the proximity to the M4, however the introduction of lorries and heavy goods vehicles in closer proximity to Theale would exacerbate the noise levels
- The introduction of office or other large-scale buildings on this side of the A4 would be out of scale and keeping with the historic village character of Theale

**Potential impact on key visual characteristics**

- A visible site, so loss of the physical separation of Theale from Calcot
- Loss of open views from Public Right of Way which aligns western site boundary
- Loss of view of well wooded Kennet Valley with rooftops visible from the Public Right of Way set within the AONB to the north west

**Potential impact on key settlement characteristics**

- Expands Theale into the open landscape between Theale and Calcot
- Development over the whole site would create coalescence of Theale with Calcot and erode their separate settlement identities
- Introduction of large-scale industrial buildings on this settlement edge of Theale, would negatively impact on its semi-rural settlement character
- Loss of existing wooded setting as viewed out from Theale
- Potential opportunity to consider a more comprehensive approach to development in this part of Theale alongside the semi adjacent site THE7 (to the north)

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

- Loss of wooded setting of AONB
- Suburbanising the setting of the AONB

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

- Introduction of the urban form and loss of wooded views, as viewed from within the AONB
- Large scale buildings would be visible from locations within the AONB, resulting in an adverse effect on the setting of the AONB as well as views out from the AONB

**Landscape mitigation and contribution to green infrastructure**




- Not applicable

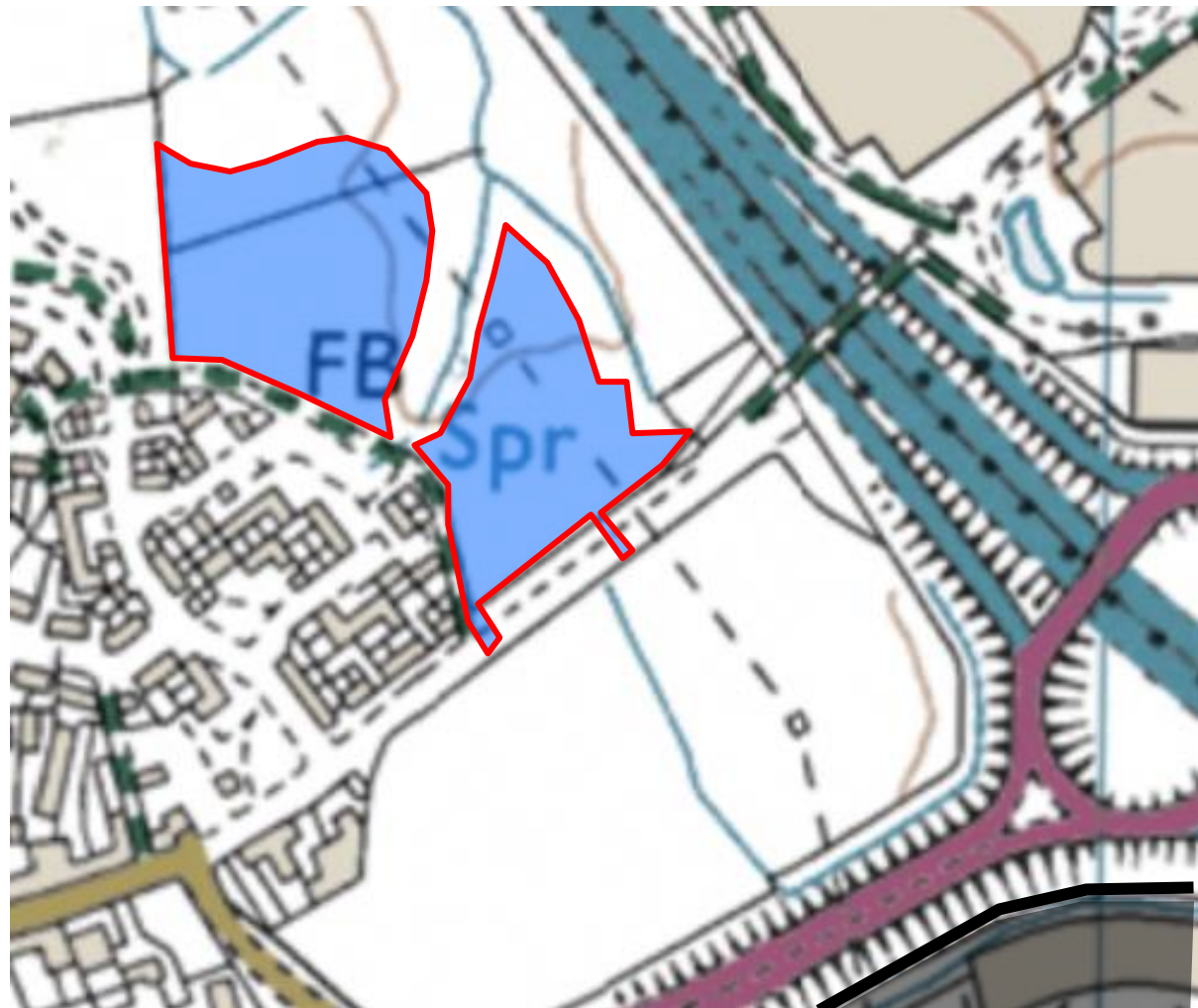
**Conclusion and recommendations**

- This site is not suitable for the development of office or other large-scale industrial buildings for employment uses.



**Figure 2: Site: Land at Whitehart Meadow, Theale**

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



All Ordnance Survey material used under copyright Licence Number 100063180