

# **Summary and Overview of Potential for Further Employment Development at Beenham Industrial Area**

## 1.0 Introduction

1.1 Liz Allen EPLA was requested by West Berkshire Council to look at the sensitivity and capacity of the landscape surrounding the Protected Employment Areas (PEA) at Beenham Industrial Area with regard to its location within the North Wessex Downs AONB. The object of the report was to consider whether there was any potential, in landscape terms, for further employment development within this area. Eight sites were assessed in detail, which are located adjacent and within close proximity of the existing Protected Employment Areas at Beenham. The findings of these individual assessments are set out within the following reports:

- BEEN 3 -
- BEEN 4 -
- BEEN 5 -
- BEEN 6 -
- BEEN 10 - Land north east of Beenham Grange
- BEEN 11 Parcel 1- Land south of Beenham Grange
- BEEN 11 Parcel 2 – Land south of Grange Lane
- BEEN 12 - Land north west of Beenham Grange

1.2 The PEA at Beenham has been considered in a holistic way. All the potential sites have been studied both individually and together and as part of that process, an assessment made of the potential cumulative impact of the development. This overview considers the overall landscape of the area, as set within the landscape character assessments for this area. In this context it then sets out a series of recommendations and more detailed guidance for any further development at Beenham Industrial Area.

## 2.0 Landscape Character Areas

2.1 Beenham Industrial Area and the surrounding area is set within the North Wessex Downs AONB and the following landscape character areas:

- North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002 *Character Area: 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons*
- West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019: *LCA: WH4 Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic* and *LCA: LV1 Kennet Lower River Valley*

### North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002

The survey area lies within the within *Character Area 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons*

#### *Key Characteristics:*

- Lowland area at the base of the chalk dip slope, underlain by clays, silts, sands and gravels of the Reading and Bagshot Beds and London Clay, giving rise to nutrient poor, often acidic, soils
- A broad undulating plateau falling towards the Kennet Valley to the south east and dissected by River Pang
- Variable land cover forming an intricate mosaic of woodland, pasture and small areas of remnant heathland. Some more open areas of arable land can be found on the slopes that drop to the Pang Valley and to the south east near Beenham
- Large, interconnected woodland blocks and strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees restrict views and create an enclosed and intimate character. Low wooded horizons are a feature
- Numerous semi-natural woodlands of ancient origin, with some large commercial plantations. Wooded commons and small areas of remnant heath are a distinctive element
- Many features of biodiversity interest including heathland, dry and wet woodland, bog and areas of wet meadow
- Dominated by small irregular fields of informal and piecemeal enclosures, of medieval and post-medieval date with some larger, more regular and straight edged, formal Parliamentary enclosure on flatter terrain in the south-east and west
- Dispersed pattern of settlement characteristic of encroachment into areas of common and woodland. Includes large nucleated villages, lines of estate cottages, loose roadside settlements as well as many dispersed farmsteads and residential country houses
- Intricate network of rural lanes, many sunken and overhung by woodland plus more intrusive road infrastructure
- Historic parkland based on medieval deer parks and manor houses with associated ornamental parklands with gardens, rides and plantings are a particular feature

#### *Key Management Requirements:*

The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, secluded character of the Hermitage Wooded Commons. This includes conservation and enhancement of the key assets, namely: ancient and semi-natural woodlands, pasture, field patterns and hedgerows, remnant heathland commons, historic parkland and the rural lane network. There are opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration of the hedgerow network and diversification of some of the plantations to include a broadleaved element. In the longer term, as part of a wider initiative, it may be appropriate to consider restoration of former areas of heathland to link existing sites. The aim should be to maintain the distinctive pattern of settlement with its small hamlets and loose linear settlements and prevent the gradual merging and coalescence that will result in a more suburban character. Consideration should be given to measures that could lessen the impact of the road infrastructure and reduce high traffic levels on the rural lanes.

### North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019-2024

Key development issues with the potential to have significant influence on the special qualities of the AONB

- The loss of rural character through suburbanising influences from new development (new fencing, lighting, signage, parking areas, paved footpaths, loss of native hedgerows and creation of new garden areas)
- Impact on dark skies and tranquillity of high-powered external lighting, especially where poorly directed or in an exposed location (not usually subject to planning control)
- Potential for certain forms of development to intrude on the wider landscape, including masts, pylons, wind turbine developments, photovoltaic schemes, and minerals and waste schemes, threatening the landscape quality, heritage assets, and the sense of remoteness and tranquillity
- Unsuitable development of redundant previously developed and part-developed sites within the North Wessex Downs, especially redundant airfields and military sites (e.g., Wroughton), and the impact upon landscape quality and heritage assets
- New developments at the junction of the M4 and A34 or along their corridors which spread the impact from development yet further into the undeveloped parts of the AONB
- Development that results in a material loss of tranquillity and/ or impact on the dark night skies within the North Wessex Downs or its setting.
- Development that does not provide for or support existing Green Infrastructure

### West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019

The survey area lies on the southern edge of *LCA: WH4 Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic*, but mainly within *LCA: LVI Kennet Lower River Valley*  
The key characteristics, valued features and qualities, detractors and landscape strategy for each of these LCAs are as follows:

*LCA: WH4 Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic:*

#### *Key Characteristics*

- Geologically and topographically varied with steep and gentle undulating slopes rising to a central ridge
- Presence of surface water and small streams
- Complex pattern of land cover, dominated by woodland and with remnant heaths
- Varied field pattern with strong hedgerows
- Parklands are a characteristic feature
- Relatively densely settled, particularly along the ridge, but with woodland containment
- A minor road network contained by the wooded landscape
- An accessible landscape
- Quiet, intimate and secluded character

*Valued Features and Qualities*

- Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB
- The visual role of the wooded ridge crest and slopes
- The varied land cover mosaic and important habitats
- A very rural character away from major roads and urban edges
- Recreational value
- Historic landscape character

*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
- Conserve the existing character of rural lanes and public rights of way
- Maintain open views from routeways
- Retain the distinction between and individual identity of settlements

*LCA: LV1 Kennet Lower River Valley:*

*Key Characteristics*

- Distinctive flat and open lowland landscape, created by the River Kennet and associated channels and drainage ditches
- Principally pasture farmland used for cattle grazing, with some larger arable fields. Woodland occurs along the river corridor.
- Internationally and nationally important wetland habitats along the valley floor
- Sense of time-depth with visible heritage features and historic settlements

- Sparsely settled, although influenced by Newbury and Thatcham in the west of the area, modern urban development and industry within Newbury and Thatcham
- Many public rights of way, particularly along the river
- Transportation routes, often parallel to the river corridor
- Visually semi-enclosed, with strong rural qualities away from large settlements

*Valued Features and Qualities*

- Forms part of the nationally valued North Wessex Downs AONB landscape
- Ecologically valuable habitats along the river corridor
- Numerous heritage assets and historic landscape features give the landscape a sense of time-depth
- Strong rural and sparsely settled character
- Valued destination for recreation
- Distinctive visual character

*Detractors*

- Impacts of improvements and intensification of the railway line
- Increasing development pressures
- Changes in farming practices including a reduction in the viability of livestock grazing
- Past and present impacts of industrial use
- Nutrient enrichment of the river from agricultural run-off and water vessels
- Increased risk of more frequent and severe flooding due to climate change
- Development of large infrastructure such as solar farms and waste management facilities

*Landscape Strategy*

- Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated AONB landscape
- Conserve and restore the traditional valley landscape
- Restore, extend and manage wetland habitats that occur along the floodplain
- Conserve the valley floor woodland
- Conserve and enhance heritage features in the landscape
- Manage recreational pressure
- Conserve the distinct identities of individual settlements

### **3.0 Potential for further development at Beenham Industrial Area**

3.1 The PEA at Beenham has been considered in a holistic way. All the potential sites have been studied individually and together, as part of that process, an assessment made of potential cumulative impact of development. This has concluded that there is potential for development on the following sites as set out within Figure 3:

- BEEN 3
- BEEN 5
- BEEN 10 – Land north east of Beenham Grange

3.2 Where a suitable site is identified as appropriate for development in landscape terms, landscape buffers are proposed to ensure development would fit with the existing pattern of the landscape as well as to bring landscape enhancements to this area of the AONB. Any further employment development in this area on the sites assessed would be considered unacceptable in landscape terms.

### **4.0 Recommendations and guidance**

4.1 In order to ensure the conservation and enhancements of the AONB, when considering any further development at Beenham Industrial Area, it is important that the following guidance is followed. Further site-specific requirements can also be found within the individual site reports.

#### Development:

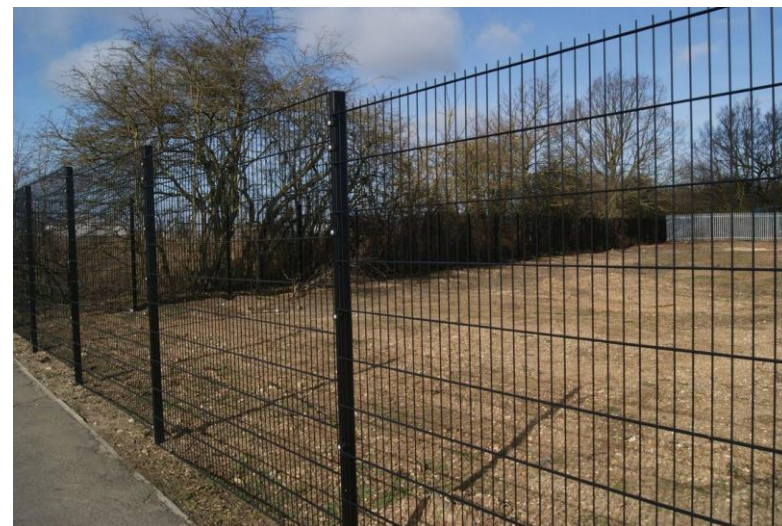
- The visibility of new development needs to be carefully considered, in order to be successful in not causing any adverse visual effects on this area of the AONB.
- The location of tall structures/masts need to be carefully contained and not extend above the height of adjacent trees
- The colouring of new building facades should be restricted with the use of an agreed palette of colours which help mitigate the buildings to blend into the surrounding landscape. The North Wessex Downs AONB: Guidance on the Selection and Use of Colour in Development should be used to inform any proposed development
- The scaling, massing and outline of buildings also needs to be considered. Curved roofs, or a multiple of curved roofs would work well with the outline of tree canopies



- The access and routes for HGV will need to be considered to avoid an adverse effect on the landscape character of adjacent rural roads and the adjacent landscape. This will include any widening, the requirement for sight lines and the increase in traffic noise

Access, driveways and landscaping - Additional suburbanising influences must be avoided as follows:

- New fencing should avoid any type of close boarded fencing in visible locations, and where possible use traditional agricultural fencing, for example chestnut cleft fencing. Where needed for security the use of black coloured mesh fencing should be used.
- Entrances and driveways need to be rural in character and avoid overly large signage. The height of new signage in open areas, should not stand alone, but be set into a planted backdrop
- The additional overuse of extra signage should be avoided on public highways to avoid the littering of signage within the area
- The impact of light pollution should be carefully considered. The North Wessex Downs AONB: A Guide to Good External Lighting should be used to inform any proposed development
- Where sight lines are required, hedgerows should be reinstated along the new location, with areas required for sight lines managed as native grassland



**Chestnut cleft fencing enhances the rural character. Black mesh fence for a security fence can also be used in less visible locations**

Green infrastructure:

- Positively manage all existing native woodland without any development encroaching into the root protection zone of existing trees. In addition,



- buildings need to be sited to allow retained and new trees to grow and attain their full potential.
- Propose areas of new woodland to link with existing woodland to positively expand these areas
  - Use only native tree and shrub species within new planting areas
  - Include landscape and woodland management plans to positively manage trees and woodland within area

**Figure 3: Beenham Industrial Area - potential for further development**

**Site Areas**

**BEEN 3**

**BEEN 4**

**BEEN 5**

**BEEN 6**

**BEEN 10** – Land north east of Beenham Grange

**BEEN 11 - Parcel 1**  
– Land south east of Beenham Grange

**BEEN 11 - Parcel 2**  
– Land south west of Grange Lane

-  Protected Employment Area
-  With potential for development
-  Not suitable for development
-  Landscape buffer
-  Boundary of North Wessex Downs AONB

