

Summary and Overview of Potential for Further Employment Development at Junction 13

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 Junction 13 on the M4 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 employment development within this area. Six sites were assessed in detail, which border Junction 13, the A34 and the M4. The findings of these individual assessments are set out within the following reports:

- CHI3 Parcel 1 - Land south of the M4
- CHI3 Parcel 2 - Land west of the Oxford Road
- CHI3 Parcel 3 - Land west of Chalky Lane
- CHI24 - Land east of Chieveley Services
- CHI26 - Newbury Showground
- CHI27 - Land north of Priors Court Road

1.2 Potential employment development at this location has been considered in a holistic way. All the potential sites have been studied individually and together and, as part of that process, an assessment made of the potential cumulative impacts of the development. This overview considers the landscape character assessments for this area. It then sets out a series of recommendations and more detailed guidance for any further development.

2.0 Landscape Character Areas

2.1 Junction 13 and the surrounding survey area is set within the North Wessex Downs AONB and the following landscape character areas:

- North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002: To the north of the M4, the survey area is located within: *LCA 2A: Brightwalton Downs* and to the south of the M4: *LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons*
- West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019: To the north of the M4 the survey area is located within *LCA WD2: Peasmore Wooded Downland*, and to the south *LCA FCA4: Winterbourne Farmed Chalk Mosaic*

North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002:

The survey area to the north of the M4 is located within Landscape Type 2 *Downland with Woodland* and the Character Area 2A: *Brightwalton Downs*

Key Characteristics

- Chalk dipslope overlain with a capping of Clay-with-Flint creating a more subdued landform pattern. Excellent views can be obtained to the north, east and west
- Large scale, undulating, mixed farmed landscape of pasture and arable fields enclosed by hedgerows with frequent mature oak and ash hedgerow trees and woodlands
- Diverse pattern of woodland cover including recent mixed plantations, summit tree clumps, and shelterbelts as well as semi-natural woodlands of ancient origin on the steeper slopes of the dry valley sides
- Varied field patterns including some sinuous boundaries reflecting medieval or post medieval 'ladder' fields, particularly in Chaddlesworth and Beedon parishes. Generally large regular fields created by Parliamentary enclosure. Extensive boundary loss with very large-scale open fields
- Chalk pits and dew ponds are a distinctive feature
- A settled landscape comprising a large number of individual farmsteads, houses and manors, a regular distribution of small villages in dry valleys and linear settlements on ridges. Vernacular building materials include red brick and clay tile with thatch and weatherboard
- Extensive network of interconnected rural lanes, often deeply incised and overhung by grass banks, hedges and mature hedgerow trees contributing to the richness and intimate scale of the landscape
- Recreational opportunities are characterised by a high density of footpaths, bridleways and byways which provide a high degree of permeability;
- A quiet rural landscape

Key Management Requirements

The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the quiet, rural character of the Brightwalton Downs. Key features to be conserved and enhanced are the open downland summits and views, archaeological sites and the historic field pattern. The wooded pattern and character of the landscape is a key characteristic and there are opportunities for reintroduction of management (coppicing) to the ancient and semi-natural woodlands, hedgerow restoration, and blending the regular linear shelterbelt planting into the landscape. The pattern of settlements with scattered villages and small hamlets and interconnected network of rural lanes should be maintained.

The survey area to the south of the M4 is located within Landscape Type 8: *Lowland Mosaic* and Character Area 8A: *Hermitage Wooded Commons*:

Key Characteristics

- Lowland area at the base of the chalk dipslope, 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 are as follows:

- 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 to the south of the M4 lies within the following LCA: *FC4 Winterbourne Farmed Chalk Mosaic*. The key characteristics, valued features and qualities, detractors and landscape strategy are as follows:

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

The survey area to the north of the M4 lies within the following *LCA WD2: Peasemore Wooded Downland*. The key characteristics, valued features and qualities, detractors and landscape strategy are as follows:

Key Characteristics

- A vast, open landscape with strong rolling topography underlain by a chalk plateau
- Patchwork of large arable and pasture fields divided into a mixed field pattern
- Well-wooded landscape, with some ancient semi-natural woodlands
- Historical features include evidence of medieval settlements and historic churches
- Settlement pattern of small villages and scattered farms
- Dense networks of rural lanes and public rights of way
- Views are extensive, although woodland restricts visibility in places
- A strongly rural landscape, with high levels of tranquillity

Valued Features and Qualities

- Nationally valued landscape which forms part of the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Frequent woodlands including some with ancient semi-natural origin
- Variety of historic features which create a sense of time-depth
- Strong rural character with sparse settlement
- Recreational value
- Presence of long wooded views

Detractors

- Intensification of arable farming
- Historic loss of hedgerow boundaries
- Lack of appropriate woodland management in some areas
- Ongoing pressure for development
- Increased levels of traffic on minor roads
- Localised intrusions from the M4 and A34

Landscape Strategy

- Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB
- Conserve and enhance areas of woodland
- Conserve the sense of time-depth in the landscape
- Conserve the overall sparsely settled and rural character of the landscape
- Conserve characteristic winding lanes and extensive public rights of way
- Conserve the perceptual qualities of the landscape and key views

3.0 Potential for development around Junction 13 on the M4

3.1 Potential for development at this location has been considered in a holistic way. All the potential sites have been studied individually and together, and as part of that process an assessment made of the potential cumulative impact of development. This has concluded there is potential for development on only part of one of the sites as set out in Figure 3.

CHI26 – Newbury Showground

3.2 Where a suitable site is identified as being 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 enhancement of the AONB, it is considered that only a small area within the centre of the Newbury Showground site is considered to have potential for employment development. As only one site is considered potentially suitable in this area, both general and site-specific requirements are set out within that individual report.

Figure 3: Junction 13 potential for further development

Site Areas

- CHI3 Parcel 1**
Land south of the M4
- CHI3 Parcel 2**
Land west of the Oxford Road
- CHI3 Parcel 3**
Land west of Chalky Lane
- CHI24**
Land east of Chieveley Services
- CHI26**
Newbury Showground
- CHI27**
Land north of Priors Court Road

-  Protected Employment Area (none in vicinity)
-  With potential for development
-  Not suitable for development
-  Landscape buffer

