

# Land at Hall Place Farm, Tilehurst: Landscape and Visual Appraisal

Prepared on behalf of The Sulham Estate

February 2021



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Landscape and Visual Appraisal

The Sulham Estate

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Barton Willmore Landscape Planning and Design (BWLPD) was instructed, in October 2020, to undertake an additional landscape and visual appraisal of the Hall Place Farm Site, HELAA Ref: TIL 18, (TIL 18) adopting the methodology as set out in the West Berks Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Potential Impact of the Scale and Distribution of Development in the North Wessex Downs AONB (January 2011) and Landscape Capacity Assessment of Potential Housing Sites within and adjoining the North Wessex AONB (July 2014), to provide a landscape and visual assessment of the Hall Place Farm Site that can be compared with the findings of the assessments of potentially competing sites, in the terms of consistent reference to that set out in the Local Plan evidence base.
- 1.2 The additional landscape and visual appraisal (LVA 2021) has been prepared to support representations for the allocation of the Site, TIL 18, for housing, as part of the Regulation 18 Consultation Draft of the emerging West Berkshire Local Plan.
- 1.3 The (LVA 2021) refers to the previous Landscape and Visual Appraisal, prepared in 2018, in support of the allocation of The Site, TIL 18, for housing as part of the previous consultation round of the emerging West Berkshire Local Plan.

### Background

- 1.4 Barton Willmore Landscape Planning and Design (BWLPD) was commissioned in July 2018 by The Sulham Estate to undertake a landscape and visual appraisal of land at Hall Place Farm in Tilehurst (The Site), in West Berkshire, immediately adjoining the settlement of Tilehurst, Reading, and on the edge of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB), to support its promotion for residential development, for approximately 80 dwellings and the conversion and refurbishment of existing buildings into small workshop units and a farm shop with associated open space and landscaping, for submission to West Berkshire as part of the Regulation 18 Consultation for the Local Plan Review, undertaken between November and December 2018.
- 1.5 The Landscape and Visual Appraisal prepared in December 2018, (LVA 2018), assessed the potential of the Site, TIL 18, to accommodate residential development, and identified the opportunities and constraints associated with the Site, TIL 18, and the surrounding area.
- 1.6 The LVA 2018 was submitted to West Berkshire Council as part of representations to the West Berkshire Local Plan in support of a housing allocation for the Site, TIL 18; and is included in **Appendix 2**.

- 1.7 The LVA 2018 was undertaken with regard to best practice guidelines within GLVIA3<sup>1</sup>, with reference to shaping the design of development that may bring about change in the landscape and in visual amenity, and to identifying the potential landscape and visual effects arising from proposed development, to support its allocation for housing.
- 1.8 The following illustrative material supported the LVA 2018, and is included in **Appendix 2**:
- Figure 1: Site Context Plan
  - Figure 2: Site Appraisal Plan
  - Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan
  - Figure 4: Topographical Features Plan
  - Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan
  - Figure 6: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan
  - Site Appraisal Photographs A – F
  - Site Context Photographs 1 – 21
- 1.9 Subsequently, West Berkshire published their **Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment** (HELAA) in January 2020. The Hall Place Farm Site is covered by HELAA references: TIL5, TIL6, TIL7 and TIL18. The first three references are sub areas which form the overall site area reference: TIL18, as illustrated on **Figure 1A: Site Context Plan**.
- 1.10 The West Berkshire HELAA Interactive Map defined these as:
- TIL5 - 1.2ha currently Hall Place Farm Equestrian Centre, proposed use residential, specialist residential, retail and small offices (within the historic buildings on site)
  - TIL6 – 1.35ha currently grazing land (Area 1), proposed use residential consider specialist residential
  - TIL7 – 2.2ha currently grazing land (Area 2), proposed use residential consider specialist residential
  - TIL18 – 4.69ha currently grazing land, proposed residential, small workshop units and farm shop
- 1.11 All four HELAA sites covering the Hall Place Farm Site were not previously considered in the **Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment** (2013), nor the **Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document**; and are therefore not assessed in the **West Berks Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Potential Impact of the Scale and Distribution of Development in the North Wessex Downs AONB** (January 2011) or **Landscape Capacity Assessment of Potential Housing Sites**



**within and adjoining the North Wessex AONB** (July 2014), which form part of the evidence base for the emerging West Berkshire Local Plan.

- 1.12 All four HELAA sites covering the Hall Place Farm Site are recorded in the HELAA as not being developable in the next 15 years, as illustrated on the West Berkshire HELAA Interactive Map.
- 1.13 However, the HELAA notes, in the supporting assessment tables, that potential harm to the North Wessex Downs AONB could be mitigated/overcome if the Site, is developed as one larger site in a holistic way, that is as TIL18. The HELAA also recommends that Landscape Sensitivity Assessment is undertaken for the Hall Place Farm Site, TIL18.
- 1.14 However, the LVA 2018, submitted in support of the allocation of the Hall Place Farm Site, TIL 18, was not referred to, although it addressed these recommendations.

### **LVA 2018**

- 1.15 Firstly, the LVA 2018 considered the Site, TIL 18, as a whole, that is holistically, as recommended.
- 1.16 Secondly, as set out in the objectives of the LVA 2018, in Paragraph 1.4 of the LVA 2018, a Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Site, TIL18, was provided as part of representations to the November to December 2018 Reg 18 Consultation of the Local Plan; but has not been acknowledged or referred to in the findings of the HELAA. Paragraph 1.4 is set out for reference:

1.4 *"The objectives of the landscape and visual appraisal are:*

- *To identify, evaluate and describe the existing landscape character and quality of the site and its surroundings, and its context within the wider landscape, and also any notable landscape elements and features, and in relation to existing designations and policies;*
- *To appraise the visibility of the Site and the nature and quality of existing views towards the Site, and to identify potential visual receptors;*
- ***To determine the sensitivity of the landscape and visual context of the Site and its surroundings to the type of development proposed; and the suitability of the Site to accommodate the potential development being considered;***
- *To identify the landscape and visual opportunities constraints to development to inform development proposals;*

- *Make recommendations for a suitable landscape strategy which assists with absorbing the development within the landscape and providing a network of green infrastructure; and limit the likely effects upon landscape character and visual amenity that would arise as a result of the proposed development on the Site."*

1.17 Furthermore, the LVA 2018 also appraised the Site, TIL 18, to establish the existing landscape and visual context in terms of:

- **Landscape Policy Context**, at Paragraphs 2.19 to 2.50, with reference to:
  - National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (March 2012)
  - West Berkshire Core Strategy (2012)
  - West Berkshire Council Local Plan 1991-2006 (Saved policies 2007)
  - North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan, 2014 – 2019
  - North Wessex Downs Position Statement: Housing (October 2012)
- **Landscape Character of the Site, TIL 18, and its surroundings**, at Paragraphs 2.51 to 2.108, with reference to:
  - National Character Area (NCA) 115: Thames Valley
  - North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Landscape Character Assessment, including reference to Landscape Character Type (LCT) 8: Lowland Mosaic, Landscape Character Area (LCA) 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons
  - Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, in particular LCT N: Elevated Wooded Chalk and LCA N2: Sulham
  - **Landscape Sensitivity Study: West Reading, in particular Local Landscape Character Area (LLCA) 13E: Little Heath Gravel Plateau**
  - Topography and Water features
  - Vegetation Cover, and Ancient Woodland
  - Land Use and Settlement Pattern
  - Designations, including the North Wessex Downs AONB, Listed Buildings, Public Rights of Way
- **Visual Context of the Site, TIL 18, and its surroundings**, at Paragraphs 3.1 to 3.64, including:
  - Views of the Site from the immediate surroundings, with reference to Site Context Photographs 1 to 9 and 12 to 15, with Site Context Photographs 7,8 and 9 being from within the North Wessex Downs AONB

- Views from the wider context, from within the North Wessex Downs AONB, with reference to Site Context Photographs 10, 11, 17, 18 and 21
- Views from the wider context, from the Chilterns AONB, with reference to Site Context Photograph 20

1.18 The LVA 2018 then identified the **Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints of the Site, TIL 18**, concluding, at Paragraphs 4.4 to 4.6 that:

4.4 *"In considering the Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints, it is considered that the Site provides the opportunity to sensitively accommodate residential development, reflecting the distribution of existing and consented residential development on the western edge of Tilehurst, at Little Heath, The Ridings, and Chapel Hill; containing settlement within a well-wooded context related to the existing settlement edge, as is characteristic of the North Wessex Downs LCT8: Lowland Mosaic, and within that, LCA8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons; the Berkshire LCT N: Elevated Wooded Chalk and the LCA N2: Sulham; and the West of Reading Local Landscape Character Area LLCA13E: Little Heath Gravel Plateau.*

4.5 *Development would be set within a Landscape Framework, based on the existing retained boundary vegetation, and supplemented and enhanced with reference to the guidance in the relevant landscape character assessment. This would contribute to a comprehensive network of Green Infrastructure and multi functionals spaces; and would provide links with the existing PROW network to the north and west of the Site; and assist in strengthening the western settlement edge of Tilehurst.*

4.6 *Development within the Site would be contained within the robust existing and enhanced boundary vegetation and would form a strong relationship to recent development and consented development at the edge of the settlement; and would form an appropriate robust and defensible extension to the settlement of Tilehurst, on the edge of Reading. Whilst not outside the North Wessex AONB, being on the very eastern edge of the AONB, and adjoining Reading, residential development in this location would broadly reflect the approach promoted in the North Wessex Downs Position Statement on Housing; and would be in a location where the AONB is already characterised by settlement."*

1.19 The LVA 2018 also considered the potential landscape and visual effects of developing the Site, TIL 18, for residential development, with **Potential Visual Effects** addressed

in Paragraphs 4.7 to 4.14; **Potential Landscape Effects** addressed in Paragraphs 4.15 to 4.22; and a consideration of **Landscape Character** set out in Paragraphs 4.23 to 4.30; and a response to **Landscape Policy** set out in 4.31 to 4.35.

### Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

- 1.20 With regard to a Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Site, TIL 18, reference to the Landscape Sensitivity Study: West Reading 2009 is set out in Paragraphs 2.79 – 2.81. The purpose of the Landscape Sensitivity Study: was to identify strategic development sites for the West Berkshire Planning Strategy, which would shape future development to build upon the existing settlement pattern, without having significant effects upon the character of the area. The Study focusses on the urban fringe areas and provides an assessment of the sensitivity of the landscapes around the main towns.
- 1.21 The Site, TIL 18, is identified as being within the Local Landscape Character Area (LLCA) 13E Little Heath Gravel Plateau, the Key Elements of Sensitivity of which are set out in Paragraph 2.82, and Other Landscape Sensitivities set out in Paragraph 2.83.
- 1.22 The value, susceptibility and sensitivity of the Site, TIL 18, with reference to the Landscape Sensitivity Study: West Reading, and LLCA 13E: Little Heath Gravel Plateau, are described in Paragraphs 4.15 to 4.17 of the LVIA 2018, setting out that:

*“4.15 The Site is located in the nationally designated North Wessex Downs AONB. However, it is located on the very eastern edge of the North Wessex Downs AONB, immediately adjoining, and influenced by, the settlement of Reading, and in a landscape character type which is recognised as being densely settled with a rising population due to the proximity and accessibility to Reading. Unlike other areas of the AONB, the Site does not exhibit a sense of remoteness or tranquillity, and being light, there is a reduced appreciation of dark skies. Therefore, whilst located within the North Wessex Downs AONB, which is of high landscape value, the Site is of **medium value**.*

*4.16 Again, the interconnected woodland blocks and strong hedgerow surrounding the Site, which are characteristic of the immediately surrounding landscape, in combination with the topography of the level plateau and the sloping valley sides, restrict views and create an enclosed character to the Site, and physically and visually separate it from the countryside, and the wider North Wessex Downs AONB, to the west.*

*4.17 The **susceptibility** of the Site, which is in part previously developed, to accommodate change is considered to be **low**, as the proposal would replace one*

*type of built development, that of an existing Equestrian Centre comprising barns, stables and car parking, and mènage, and an existing residential dwelling, to that of another, that is an area containing residential development and associated landscaping and open space, which would be contained within a high level of physical and visual enclosure. A medium value and a low susceptibility combine to give a medium-low sensitivity to change. This correlates with the findings of the West of Reading Landscape Sensitivity Study, which identified that the Local Landscape Character Area LLCA13E: Little Heath Gravel Plateau, in which the Site is located, had an **overall medium to low sensitivity** to accommodate residential development."*

1.23 The relationship of the Site, TIL 18, to the LLCA 13E: Little Heath Gravel Plateau are set out in Paragraphs 5.14 to 5.18:

5.14 *"The Little Heath Gravel Plateau is described as having a distinct landscape pattern which differs from the wider plateau and escarpment landscape and is characterised by a pattern of small pasture fields, copses and mixed types of development along the plateau top at the western edge of Tilehurst.*

5.15 *Therefore, the landscape within the vicinity of the Site generally has a settled wooded context with extensive areas of woodland and copses enclosing the landscape, and tall hedgerows bounding the small to medium scale fields, and creating varying degrees of enclosure.*

5.16 *The Site relates strongly to, and is set within, the settlement edge of Tilehurst and the western edge of Reading. The existing settlement of Tilehurst adjoins the Site on its eastern and southern boundaries, with recently constructed residential development at The Ridings to the immediate east of the Site, and the residential area of Little Heath to the immediate south and south-east of the Site. The context of the Site is therefore heavily influenced by the existing surrounding development of Tilehurst which lies to the north east, east, south east, south, and south west of the Site. The Site and its immediate surroundings are, therefore, settled in character."*

1.24 The LVA 2018 concluded at Paragraphs 5.30, 5.31, 5.33 and 5.34 that:

5.30 *"The character of the North Wessex Downs AONB to the west of the Site would be respected by enhancing the strong western boundary of the Site to form a robust edge to the settlement of Tilehurst, and increase the physical and visual enclosure,*

*and thus separation between the AONB landscape to the west, and the settled developed edge of Reading to the east.*

*5.31 The proposed development would also positively integrate into the landscape character of the area without affecting landscape character or important local features, in line with the West Berkshire Core Strategy Area Delivery Plan Policy Area 5: North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), with regard to the criteria that "Development will respond positively to the local context, and respect identified landscape features and components of natural beauty."*

*5.33 There is also the opportunity to respond positively to the policies for Landscape, as set out in the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan, by responding to and reflecting the existing characteristics of the LCA8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons; and taking account of the relevant management objectives. There is also the opportunity to respond to the policies for development; having had regard for potential landscape and visual impact from the outset; and through adopting a high standard of design, providing comprehensive landscaping and enhancing Green Infrastructure, and making reference to traditional building styles; and respecting the settlement pattern and distinctive character of the North Wessex Downs AONB.*

*5.34 The proposed development would therefore be successfully accommodated within the Site, being set within a strong landscape framework, based on the existing retained boundary vegetation, and supplemented and enhanced with reference, to the guidance in the relevant landscape character assessments, and in accordance with landscape policy."*

## **Summary**

1.25 Whilst the above findings were not referred to in the HELAA, they demonstrate that when considering the landscape sensitivity of the Site, TIL18, and its landscape and visual context, the Site, TIL18, could successfully accommodate residential development that relates well to its settlement edge location, focussing development in an existing urban fringe/edge of town location, and which would be in keeping with the character of LLCA 13E Little Heath Gravel Plateau; whilst respecting the wider adjoining landscape; without having significant effects upon the character of the area, a key objective set out within the Landscape Sensitivity Study: West Reading.

- 1.26 To further assist West Berkshire in identifying sites suitable for allocation for housing, and to further support the Hall Place Farm Site, HELAA TIL18 for allocation for housing through the Regulation 18 Consultation Draft of the Local Plan, BWLPD has undertaken an additional landscape and visual appraisal (LVA 2021) of the Hall Place Farm Site, HELAA TIL 18, adopting the methodology set out in the West Berks Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Potential Impact of the Scale and Distribution of Development in the North Wessex Downs AONB (January 2011) and Landscape Capacity Assessment of Potential Housing Sites within and adjoining the North Wessex AONB (July 2014), to provide a Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Site, TIL 18, so that it can be compared with the findings of the assessments of potentially competing sites, in the terms of consistent reference to that set out in the Local Plan evidence base.
- 1.27 The assessment methodologies for the West Berkshire Landscape Sensitivity Assessment, 2011 and the Landscape Capacity Assessment of Potential Housing Sites within and adjacent to the North Wessex Downs AONB, West Berkshire, July 2014, have been reviewed, and the approach set out in **Appendix 1**.
- 1.28 In addition, subsequent to the preparation of the LVA 2018, a West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment was published in August 2019, which provides an updated and consolidated Landscape Character Assessment for West Berkshire. Also, the North Wessex Downs AONB, in 2019, has published an updated AONB Management Plan (2019 – 2024).
- 1.29 Therefore, the LVA 2021 provides an update to the existing landscape and visual baseline with regard to the publication of the NPPF (2019), the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2019) and the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan (2019 – 2024)

## 2.0 UPDATED SITE CONTEXT AND SITE APPRAISAL

- 2.1 **Figure 1A: Site Context Plan**, provides an overview of the location of the Site, TIL 18, located to the immediate west of Reading, within West Berkshire. As illustrated on **Figure 1A: Site Context Plan**, the Site, TIL 18, is located on the western edge of Tilehurst, part of the western edge of Reading, directly to the north of Little Heath Road and to the west of Sulham Hill, outwith but immediately adjoining the settlement boundary of Reading.
- 2.2 The Site, TIL 18, is located on the very eastern edge of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which extends to the west from Reading and north to the River Thames. The Chilterns AONB adjoins the North Wessex Downs AONB to the north of the River Thames.
- 2.3 The Site, TIL 18, is set to the immediate north of Little Heath residential area, and to the immediate west of The Ridings residential area. The wider settlement of Reading lies to the east and south of the Site, TIL 18, and the existing residential development characterises the settled fringe context that encompasses the Site, TIL 18, and the surrounding area.
- 2.4 **Figure 1A: Site Context Plan** also identifies the potential sites that have been promoted within representations to the Local Plan, in the immediate locality of the Site, TIL 18, and which have been assessed in the West Berkshire Landscape Capacity Study for Housing Sites within and adjacent to the North Wessex Downs AONB (2014). It should be noted that no sites of the edge of Reading, comparative to the location of the Site, TIL 18, were assessed in the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Potential Impact of the Scale and Distribution of Development in the North Wessex Downs AONB (2011).

### *The Site and Surrounding Area*

- 2.5 A description of the Site, TIL 18, and the area surrounding the Site, TIL 18, is described in Section 2.0, Paragraphs 2.4 to 2.18, in the LVA 2018 included in **Appendix 2**.

### **Landscape Policy Context**

- 2.6 The relevant landscape policy context for the Site, TIL 18, as set out in LVA 2018, Paragraphs 2.19 to 2.50, makes reference to:
- The National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012);
  - The West Berkshire Core Strategy (2012);
  - The West Berkshire Council Local Plan 1991-2006 (Saved policies 2007);
  - North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan, 2014 – 2019; and



- North Wessex Downs Position Statement: Housing (October 2012).

2.7 However, as noted above, the NPPF has subsequently been updated, in February 2019; and the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan, published in 2019, has been replaced with an updated AONB Management Plan (2019 – 2024). Detailed consideration of the landscape policy context can be found at Appendix 3.

### **Site Appraisal**

- 2.8 The Site, TIL 18, is located within the settled wooded plateau landscape of Little Heath, at the edge of, and immediately adjoining the settlement boundary of, Tilehurst, which forms the settled edge of Reading. The Site, TIL 18, relates strongly to, and is set within, the settlement edge of Tilehurst. The existing settlement of Tilehurst adjoins the Site, TIL 18, on its eastern and southern boundaries, with recently constructed residential development at The Ridings to the immediate east of the Site, TIL 18, and the residential area of Little Heath to the immediate south and south-east of the Site, TIL 18.
- 2.9 Part of the Site, TIL 18, is developed, comprising an existing equestrian centre with associated barns, stables, shop, car parking, and all-weather ménage and arenas, and associated lighting; and an existing residential property, Hall Place Farmhouse, within its eastern part. The western and northern parts comprise relatively level grazed paddocks.
- 2.10 The Site, TIL 18, is enclosed by substantial vegetation along the northern, western and southern boundaries, which visually and physically separates the Site, TIL 18, from the wider North Wessex Downs AONB landscape to the north and west of the Site, TIL 18.
- 2.11 The context of the Site, TIL 18, is therefore heavily influenced by the existing surrounding development of Tilehurst which lies to the north east, east, south east, south, and south west of the Site, TIL 18; and the Site, TIL 18, and its immediate surroundings are, therefore, settled in character.

### **Visual Appraisal**

- 2.12 The Site, TIL 18, is enclosed by substantial vegetation to the north, west and south, and being immediately adjacent to the residential development at The Ridings to the east, and Little Heath to the south, and the wider settlement of Tilehurst to the south east.
- 2.13 From the limited number of locations, generally in close proximity to the Site, TIL 18, views towards and of the Site, TIL 18, are set within the context of, and already influenced by, the existing surrounding development that forms the northern and western extents of Tilehurst.

- 2.14 Visibility into the Site, TIL 18, is largely restricted to immediate close range views from the east and west. As a result of the combination of the generally flat topography of the Little Heath Gravel Plateau, and the existing vegetation that immediately surrounds the Site, TIL 18, and that which is present in the surrounding area within the wooded slopes, the entirety of the Site, TIL 18, is only seen from a short length of PROW TILE/8/1 to the west of the Site, TIL 18, where there is a gap in the boundary vegetation of the Site, TIL 18.
- 2.15 Glimpses of the Site, TIL 18, are not readily obtained from the wider surrounding area and from the surrounding North Wessex Downs AONB, or Chilterns AONB, landscapes, with the majority of views into and of the Site, TIL 18, limited and contained by intervening layered vegetation combined with the flat topography of the plateau, and by the sloping, wooded, valley sides.
- 2.16 From the PROW network to the north and west of the Site, TIL 18, within the North Wessex Downs AONB, views are contained by the substantial tall and dense woodland and lines of trees that form strong field boundaries and shelter belts, which combined with the gently undulating topography, contain views to the immediate field boundaries.
- 2.17 There are no elevated views towards the Site, TIL 18, from the valley slopes at Mapledurham to the north east due to the limited locations where an open view can be obtained, due mainly to the combination of the gently sloping topography and the barriers to views created by vegetation and built form.
- 2.18 From the elevated areas in the western part of the surrounding area around Little Heath to the south west, the layers of vegetation and characteristic roadside hedges combine to restrict views across the landscape.
- 2.19 To the south west of the Site, TIL 18, towards Chapel Hill and the wider extent of Reading, there is limited intervisibility between these areas and the Site, TIL 18, due to the combination of extensive existing built form and the sloping topography of the valley sides.
- 2.20 Most of the views in and around the Pang River Valley floor to the west of the Site, TIL 18, are characterised by linear vegetation lining roads and fields and containing views.
- 2.21 Long views are infrequent and are limited by the combination of existing vegetation and woodland, and flat topography.

### 3.0 DESIGN CONSIDERATION AND LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

3.1 Following the landscape and visual appraisal of the Site, the following Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints for the development on the Site, TIL 18, have been identified in LVA 2018, as illustrated on **Figure 6: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan**, in Appendix 2, and include:

#### Site Opportunities and Constraints

##### Opportunities

3.2 Opportunities for development within the Site include:

- The Site contains existing built form at the Hall Place Farm Equestrian Centre, comprising barns, stables, car parking areas and a mènage;
- The Site contains existing residential development at Hall Place Farmhouse;
- The Site relates well to adjacent residential development on the northern and western edges of Tilehurst;
- The Site is contained by dense boundary vegetation, which physically and visually separates the Site from the wider countryside and North Wessex Downs AONB; and
- The established vegetation on the boundaries of the Site offers visual screening and makes a strong contribution to Green Infrastructure.

##### Constraints

3.3 Constraints to development within the Site include:

- The Site lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- A Public Right of Way PROW TILE/7/1 lies outside the Site but immediately adjacent to the western boundary, which forms part of The Berkshire Circular Route; and
- Hall Place Farmhouse, within the Site, is a Grade II Listed Building.

3.4 In considering the Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints, it is considered that the Site provides the opportunity to sensitively accommodate residential development, reflecting the distribution of existing and consented residential development on the western edge of Tilehurst, at Little Heath, The Ridings, and Chapel Hill; containing settlement within a well-wooded context related to the existing settlement edge, as is characteristic of the North Wessex Downs LCT8: Lowland Mosaic, and within that, LCA8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons; the West Berkshire LLCA WC2 Sulham Elevated Wooded

Chalk with Slopes; and the West of Reading Local Landscape Character Area LLCA13E: Little Heath Gravel Plateau.

- 3.5 Development would be set within a Landscape Framework, based on the existing retained boundary vegetation, and supplemented and enhanced with reference to the guidance in the relevant landscape character assessment. This would contribute to a comprehensive network of Green Infrastructure and multi functionals spaces; and would provide links with the existing PROW network to the north and west of the Site; and assist in strengthening the western settlement edge of Tilehurst.
- 3.6 Development within the Site would be contained within the robust existing and enhanced boundary vegetation and would form a strong relationship to recent development and consented development at the edge of the settlement; and would form an appropriate robust and defensible extension to the settlement of Tilehurst, on the edge of Reading. Whilst not outside the North Wessex AONB, being on the very eastern edge of the AONB, and adjoining Reading, residential development in this location would broadly reflect the approach promoted in the North Wessex Downs Position Statement on Housing; and would be in a location where the AONB is already characterised by settlement.

## 4.0 LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 To further assist West Berkshire in identifying sites suitable for allocation for housing, and to further support the Hall Place Farm Site, HELAA TIL18 for allocation for housing through the Regulation 18 Consultation Draft of the Local Plan, further landscape and visual appraisal of the Site, TIL 18, has been undertaken, adopting the methodology set out in the West Berks Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Potential Impact of the Scale and Distribution of Development in the North Wessex Downs AONB (January 2011) and Landscape Capacity Assessment of Potential Housing Sites within and adjoining the North Wessex AONB (July 2014), to provide a Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Site, TIL 18, so that it can be compared with the findings of the assessments of potentially competing sites, in the terms of consistent reference to that set out in the Local Plan evidence base.
- 4.2 The assessment methodologies for the West Berkshire Landscape Sensitivity Assessment, 2011 and the Landscape Capacity Assessment of Potential Housing Sites within and adjacent to the North Wessex Downs AONB, West Berkshire, July 2014, have been reviewed, and the approach set out in **Appendix 1**.
- 4.3 Phase 1 of the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment has the objective of identifying overriding constraints based on the presence of environmental designations; on the contribution that a site makes to local landscape character and the wider landscape; on visual prominence; and on the relationship of the site to the settlement pattern, as defined by the local landscape. The Phase 1 Landscape Capacity Assessment makes reference to the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan (2014-2019) and the North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002.
- 4.4 Phase 2 then provides a more detailed assessment of the sites with regard to the landscape character, and for the purposes of the Regulation 18 Consultation Draft of the West Berkshire Local Plan, with reference to the Landscape Sensitivity Study: West Reading, 2009. For completeness the LVA 2021 Landscape Sensitivity assessment also makes reference to the updated evidence base, and therefore also makes the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019.
- 4.5 The Phase 1 and Phase 2 Landscape Sensitivity Tables follow:

**LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY/CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TO SUPPORT POTENTIAL ALLOCATION OF HALL PLACE FARM, SITE TIL 18 FOR HOUSING REPRESENTATIONS TO WEST BERKSHIRE REGULATION 18 CONSULTATION DRAFT OF THE LOCAL PLAN PHASE 1 ASSESSMENT SUMMARY**

### Landscape Sensitivity/Capacity Assessment: Phase 1

**With reference to:**

North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019 - 2024

North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002:

Landscape Character Type 8: Lowland Mosaic and Landscape Character Area 8a Hermitage and Wooded Commons

Site ref	Settlement	Designations and landscape strategy	Relationship with the wider landscape	Visual prominence	Relationship with settlement pattern	Initial recommendation – subject to more detailed review in Phase 2
TIL 18: Hall Place Farm	<p>Eastern Urban Area</p> <p>Tilehurst/Little Heath/Reading</p> <p><b>ADP4:</b> The individual identities of Purley on Thames, Tilehurst and Calcot will be maintained and enhanced, as will the quality of the built environments. This area will have a close functional relationship with the Reading area and will benefit from the facilities and services that Reading offers. The high quality landscape and environmental assets in this part of West Berkshire, which includes the Thames</p>	<p>North Wessex Downs AONB</p> <p>Converse and Enhance</p> <p><b>ADP5:</b> The North Wessex Downs AONB will have appropriate and sensitive growth that conserves and enhances its special landscape qualities.</p> <p>Recognising the area as a national landscape designation, development will conserve and enhance the local distinctiveness, sense of place and setting of the AONB whilst preserving the strong sense of remoteness,</p>	<p>Located on the edge of Landscape Character Type 8: Lowland Mosaic and Landscape Character Area 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons, as set out in the North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002.</p> <p>Located on the very edge of both the AONB and LCA8A. Surrounding woodland to the west and north of the Site physically and visually contains both the Site, and the adjoining settlement of Reading from the wider landscape to the west and north. Therefore, combined with the partly</p>	<p>Not visually prominent. Whilst on elevated rising land on the eastern edge of the North Wessex Downs AONB, substantial woodland visually encloses the Site to the north and west, such that the Site and existing development on it, is screened from the wider North Wessex Downs AONB</p>	<p>The Site is located on the western edge of Tilehurst, part of the western edge of Reading, directly to the north of Little Heath Road and to the west of Sulham Hill.</p> <p>The Site is partly developed, and is set to the immediate north and north-west of Little Heath residential area, to the immediate west of the recently constructed residential development, The Ridings, Chapel Hill, Clements Mead, with scattered existing residential development on the western side of Little</p>	<p>Possible potential for housing on Site TIL 18, supported by more detailed landscape and visual appraisal</p>

	National Path and the adjoining North Wessex Downs AONB will be protected and enhanced as a resource for the local population and for green tourism.	tranquillity and dark night skies, particularly on the open downland. Development will respect identified landscape features and components of natural beauty.	developed nature of the Site, and the recent residential development to the north-east, the Site, and the immediate locality, is more influenced by development than characteristic of the wider landscape.		Heath Road, to the south of the Site. Therefore the Site relates well to the existing settlement edge	
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## NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN 2019 – 2024

### *Vision:*

***“Vast, dramatic, undeveloped and distinct chalk downlands with nationally significant areas of semi-natural chalk grassland, contrasting with well-wooded plateaux, arable lands and intimate and secluded valleys, all rich in wildlife and cultural heritage; a high quality landscape of national and international significance which persists in increasingly urbanised surroundings; where people live, work and relax; where visitors are welcomed and contribute to a vibrant rural economy; and access to which supports the health and wellbeing of local residents and visitors alike.”***

### *Special Qualities:*

- Landscape
- Rural Land Management
- Biodiversity
- Historic Environment
- Natural Resources
- Development
- Communities
- Tourism, Leisure and Access

**NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT 2002:****Landscape Character Type 8: Lowland Mosaic and Landscape Character Area 8a Hermitage and Wooded Commons*****Key Characteristics:***

- Broad undulating plateau
- Intricate mosaic of woodland, pasture and small areas of remnant heathland
- Large interconnected woodland blocks
- Strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees
- Enclosed and intimate character
- Small irregular fields of informal and piecemeal enclosures
- Intricate network of rural lanes, many sunken and overhung with woodland
- Historic parkland
- Ancient and semi-natural woodland

Landscape Character Area	Site	Landscape Character Type	Key Characteristics	Key Issues
8A Hermitage and Wooded Commons	Eastern Urban Area TIL 18: Hall Place Farm	8: Lowland Mosaic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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;</li> <li>• <u>A broad undulating plateau</u> falling towards the Kennet Valley to the south east and dissected by River Pang;</li> <li>• 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;</li> <li>• <u>Large, interconnected woodland blocks and strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees restrict views and create an enclosed</u> and intimate <u>character</u>. Low wooded horizons are a feature;</li> <li>• <u>Numerous semi-natural woodlands of ancient origin</u>, with some large commercial plantations. Wooded commons and small areas of remnant heath are a distinctive element;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decline in the extent of heathland vegetation through conversion to forestry or lack of management leading to scrub invasion and development of woodland;</li> <li>• Lack of <u>appropriate management of woodlands particularly ancient and semi-natural woodlands</u> formerly managed by coppicing and areas of wood pasture;</li> <li>• <u>Loss of hedgerows boundaries and mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows</u>;</li> <li>• Localised intrusion of road infrastructure with the M4 cutting through the area with visual and noise impacts; increased traffic on the lane network (rat runs from main routes) and <u>improvements to the lanes including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, in places create a more 'urban' character</u> and are particularly</li> </ul>



			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many features of biodiversity interest including heathland, dry and wet woodland, bog and areas of wet meadow;</li> <li>• 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;</li> <li>• 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;</li> <li>• Intricate network of rural lanes, many sunken and overhung by woodland plus more intrusive road infrastructure;</li> <li>• Historic parkland based on medieval deer parks and manor houses with associated ornamental parklands with gardens, rides and plantings are a particular feature.</li> </ul>	<p>damaging to the character of the sunken lanes;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• comparative accessibility resulting in development pressures, particularly for new residential development including <u>suburbanising influence of built development (e.g. fencing, lighting and paddocks)</u>;</li> <li>• <u>Loss of tranquillity.</u></li> </ul>
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**Summary**

**Key Characteristics**

The Site exhibits the key characteristics to a limited extent insofar as it is located on the broad plateau on the eastern extent of the LCA 8A Hermitage and Wooded Commons, to the east of a large, interconnected woodland block, and set within a strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees which restrict views and create an enclosed character, surrounding and enclosing the Site. Ancient woodland immediately adjoins the Site. Potential development could be accommodated on the Site, replacing in part the existing development on the Site, within the existing landscape framework with very limited effect the key characteristics of LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons.

**Key Issues**

Potential development on the Site would be set back from, and allow for a buffer to, the adjoining Ancient Woodland; and loss of boundary vegetation would be limited, with the opportunity to supplement and enhance the retained boundary vegetation. The Site is partly developed, any additional access would be carefully considered to limit further urbanisation. It is located on the very edge of the AONB, in an area already subject to a high level of urbanising influence, from adjoining residential development and the existing equestrian development, paddocks and associated fencing and lighting on the Site; and with more limited tranquillity and remoteness than is characteristic of the wider LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons.

**LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY/CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TO SUPPORT POTENTIAL ALLOCATION OF HALL PLACE FARM,  
SITE TIL 18 FOR HOUSING  
REPRESENTATIONS TO WEST BERKSHIRE REGULATION 18 CONSULTATION DRAFT OF THE LOCAL PLAN  
PHASE 2 ASSESSMENT SUMMARY**

## **Landscape Sensitivity/Capacity Assessment: Phase 2**

### **With reference to:**

Landscape Sensitivity Study: West of Reading, 2009  
West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, 2019

### **Site Description**

Site TIL 18, within the Eastern Urban Area, is located to the immediate west of Reading. The Site is located on the western edge of Tilehurst, part of the western edge of Reading, directly to the north of Little Heath Road and to the west of Sulham Hill, outwith but immediately adjoining the settlement boundary of Reading. (Refer to Figure 1: Site Context Plan).

The Site is located on the very eastern edge of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which extends to the west from Reading and north to the River Thames.

Part of the Site is developed, comprising an existing equestrian centre with associated barns, stables, shop, car parking, and all-weather ménage and arenas, and associated lighting; and an existing residential property, Hall Place Farmhouse, within its eastern part. The western and northern parts comprise relatively level grazed paddocks. (Refer to Figure 2: Site Appraisal Plan).

The Site is located in Local Landscape Character Area LLCA 13E Little Heath Gravel Plateau, as identified in the Landscape Sensitivity Study 2009 and Landscape Character Area LCA WC2: Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes, as identified in the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019. (Refer to Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan)

## **Landscape Sensitivity Study: West Reading 2009: Local Landscape Character Area (LLCA) 13E: Little Heath Gravel Plateau**

Little Heath Gravel Plateau is characterised by its pattern of small pasture fields, copses and mixed types of development in the plateau top.

LLCA13E: Little Heath Gravel Plateau have an overall sensitivity of *medium to low*.

LLCA13E: Little Heath Gravel Plateau is characterised by its pattern of small pasture fields, copses and mixed types of development in the plateau top. The key elements of landscape sensitivity are:

- Pattern of small fields of pasture with copses
- Hedgerows and lines of trees
- Listed Late 16th century farmhouse at Hall Place, and 17th century Kiln Cottage
- Good public access
- Value of woodland habitat links with adjacent woodlands on the escarpment

Other landscape sensitivity interests are:

- Plateau top to escarpment
- Scattered mixed development broken up by small open areas
- Good level of visual enclosure
- Mostly low to medium historic landscape sensitivity
- Recreational provision
- Medium to low biodiversity

**Wider landscape:** LLCA21 Upper Sulham Dipslopes has a distinct landscape pattern which differs from the wider plateau and escarpment landscape of large fields and woodland blocks. Views are generally contained by the adjacent woodland.

**Setting to the urban form:** LLCA21: Upper Sulham Dipslopes influenced by its close proximity to Little Heath, resulting in fragmentation and domestic land uses. A thin belt of trees and hedgerows separates the settlement from the LLCA.

**Relationship with Adjacent Settlement**

- On elevated plateau adjoining the western edge of Reading, at the same elevation as the adjoining settlement of Tilehurst and Little Heath (Refer to Figure 4: Topographical Features Plan)
- Located to the immediate north and north-west of Little Heath residential area, to the immediate west of the recently constructed residential development, The Ridings, Chapel Hill, Clements Mead. The wider settlement of Reading lies to the east and south of the
- Located on the western side of Little Heath Road, along with other scattered residential development along the length of Little Heath Road to the south of the Site
- Influence of the western edge of Reading, such as Tilehurst and Little Heath, and including the Site and other scattered development along the western side of Little Heath Road, is limited to the immediate locality, by the substantial woodland that runs north-south through LCA WC2: Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes, on the edge of the western edge of the elevated plateau, and the substantial woodland to the north of the Site (Refer to Figure 4: Topographical Features Plan)
- Relates well to, and is set within, the settlement edge of Little Heath and Tilehurst and the western edge of Reading, with the existing context influenced by the existing surrounding development of Tilehurst and Little Heath which lie to the north east, east, south east, south, and south west of the Site, with a settled fringe context that encompasses the Site and the surrounding area. The Site and its immediate surroundings are, therefore, settled in character, and reflect the existing settlement characteristics of the Little Heath Gravel Plateau which is described mixed types of development along the plateau top at the western edge of Tilehurst.

**Relationship with adjacent wider countryside**

- Located in North Wessex Downs AONB; but being located on the very eastern edge of the North Wessex Downs AONB, it immediately adjoins, and is influenced by, the settlement of Reading, and is in a landscape character type which is recognised as being densely settled with a rising population due to the proximity and accessibility to Reading. Unlike other areas of the AONB, the Site does not exhibit a sense of remoteness or tranquillity, adjoining Tilehurst and Little Heath; and being lit, there is a reduced appreciation of dark skies.
- Interconnected woodland blocks and strong hedgerows surrounding the Site to the north and west, which are characteristic of the immediately surrounding landscape, in combination with the topography of the level plateau and the sloping valley sides, restrict views and create an enclosed character to the Site, and physically and visually separate it from the countryside, and adjoining LLCA21 Upper Sulham Dipslopes, and the wider North Wessex Downs AONB, to the west.

**Impact on key landscape characteristics**

- Potential development would be accommodated within the boundaries of the Site, on the plateau, without alteration to the existing field pattern
- Existing boundary vegetation, such as hedgerows and trees would be retained and enhanced (Refer to Figure 6: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan)
- Listed Hall Place Farmhouse would be retained, along with its immediate grounds, within any potential development; with removal of the all-weather ménage and arena being removed, and replaced with domestic scale development set within amongst further retained red brick barns (Refer to Figure 6: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan)
- Kiln Cottage is located to the south west of the Site

- Existing PROW TIL/7/1, which forms part of the Berkshire Circular Route, runs along, but outside, the south-western boundary of the Site; this would be retained, with the adjoining boundary vegetation enhanced, and any proposed development set back from the route to provide a buffer to the PROW (Refer to Figure 6: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan)
- Ancient Woodland adjoins the northern boundary of the Site, which would be retained, with development set back from, and allowing for a buffer to, the adjoining Ancient Woodland (Refer to Figure 6: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan)
- Potential development would be set within a landscape framework, which would contribute to the existing network of vegetation, and provide multifunctional open space and habitat enhancement
- Key historic features would be retained, with potential to enhance their immediate setting
- Existing PROWs would be retained, with potential development linking into the existing PROW network to the north and west, with the wider network unaffected

#### **Impact on key visual characteristics**

- Existing level of enclosure provided by existing boundary vegetation would be retained and enhanced, which combined with the substantial woodland to the west and north of the Site, much of which is Ancient Woodland, would also maintain the limited visibility of the Site and existing development, and any potential development on it

#### **Impact on key settlement characteristics**

- In keeping with pattern of development on the plateau
- Immediately adjoining residential development to the north-east, east and south-east, with scattered residential development on the western side of Little Heath Road to the south
- Settlement edge would be well contained by woodland

#### **Summary of compliance with NPPF**

Potential development could be successfully accommodated within the Site, being set within a strong landscape framework, based on the existing retained boundary vegetation, and supplemented and enhanced with reference to the guidance in the relevant landscape character assessments, and in accordance with landscape policy, providing important measures to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB

#### **Recommendations**

The site is recommended for further consideration as a potential housing site, subject to consideration of the following:

- Retention and enhancement of boundary vegetation
- Consideration of Hall Place Farm and Kiln Cottage Listed Buildings
- Provision of buffer to Ancient Woodland
- Provision of buffer to PROW/Tile/7/1
- A full detailed landscape and visual impact assessment will be required to inform the final capacity of the Site

## LCA WC2: Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes

### Summary Description

*"This small area on the western edge of Reading has an undulating chalk topography with a steep slope dropping from the east to the west of the area. The slope is densely wooded, while on flatter ground there is extensive arable agriculture with larger fields; elsewhere smaller pasture fields remain. The area is sparsely settled, with the small village of Sulham and scattered farms. An out of town retail centre is located adjacent to the M4 and A4 at the southern edge of the character area. Where the ground is elevated it provides extensive views, but overall the wooded character make it feel enclosed."*

### Key Characteristics of Landscape Character Area WC2: Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes

#### ***1) Steeply sloping landform, underlain by upper chalk geology***

***The area is characterised by a steep slope running north-south, with more elevated land in the east. Elsewhere, the landform is gently undulating. The geology of the area is upper chalk, overlain in parts by Reading beds and London clay."***

The Site is located on the more elevated flatter land to the east, to the west of the densely steep slope running north to south. (Refer to Figure 4: Topographical Features Plan)

#### ***2) Land use is primarily mixed farmland and woodland, with some historic parkland***

***Arable farming has created larger fields, with occasional smaller fields retained as pasture. A large band of interconnected mixed woodland runs in a broad dense strip along the steeper ground. Some woodlands are commercially managed conifer plantations. Field origins are medieval or post-medieval assarting of woodland; creating enclosed irregular pasture or arable fields. In the west of the character area field amalgamation has created larger fields. Purley Park introduces a historic estate character in the west of the area.***

Much of the Site is developed, comprising an existing equestrian centre with associated barns, stables, shop, car parking, and all-weather ménage and arenas, and associated lighting; and an existing residential property, Hall Place Farmhouse, within its eastern part. The western and northern parts comprise relatively level grazed paddocks. (Refer to Figure 2: Site Appraisal Plan)

The Site is enclosed by substantial vegetation along the northern, western and southern boundaries, which visually and physically separates the Site from the wider North Wessex Downs AONB landscape to the north and west of the Site. Therefore, whilst the remnant field structure is partially evident, the Site does not exhibit any farmland, woodland or parkland.

#### ***3) Semi-natural grassland and woodland along the ridgeline contribute to natural character***

***Woodland concentrated along the central ridge slope includes areas of ancient semi-natural woodland, a number of which are designated as Local Wildlife Sites. Within the farmed landscape there are areas of lowland calcareous grassland. The network of hedgerows and occasional in-field ponds also contribute to the natural character of the area.***

The woodland concentrated on the central ridge slope, along with substantial woodland to the immediate north and west of Site physically and visually contain the Site from the wider landscape to the west and north, with the settlement of Reading to the immediate south and east. Combined with the partly developed character of the Site, including the predominantly equestrian use of the Site, the natural character of the Site is more limited, than characteristic of the wider LCA WC2.

#### ***4) Time-depth given by the estate landscape of Purley Park and historic farms***

***The estate at Purley Park Registered Park and Garden (Grade II\*) is an 18th century formal landscape park which contains a number of Listed Buildings. Elsewhere, there is a scattering of historic farm buildings constructed in a traditional vernacular, a number of which are Listed Buildings.***

The Site comprises Hall Place Farm, a collection of former historic farm buildings, of which Hall Place Farmhouse is Grade II Listed, with Kiln Cottage, 100m to the south west of the Site also Grade II Listed.

However, there is potential for proposals for the Site to retain the Hall Place Farmhouse Listed Building, along with its grounds, which could be enhanced by the removal of the all-weather ménage and arena, providing an improved setting to the Listed Building. There is also the potential for several existing red brick barns to also be retained and incorporated into the any potential development. (Refer to Figure 6: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan).

#### ***5) Sparsely settled with scattered farms and houses and the village of Sulham***

***Settlement is limited to the village of Sulham which is nucleated around a flint church, manor houses (including the Grade II\* Purley Hall) and scattered historic farms. Red brick is the principle building material here. Surrounding the east of the character area are the outskirts of Reading and Purley on Thames, which sometimes encroach into the area including. There is an out of town retail and employment area at the Calcot M4/A4 junction.***

The historic buildings on the Site are of the characteristic red brick, the majority of which would be retained. However, the Site is located on the immediate western edge of Tilehurst, part of the western edge of Reading, directly to the north of Little Heath Road and to the west of Sulham Hill, outwith but immediately adjoining the settlement boundary of Reading.

The Site relates strongly to, and is set within, the settlement edge of Tilehurst, which adjoins the Site on its eastern and southern boundaries, with recently constructed residential development at The Ridings to the immediate east of the Site, and residential development at Little Heath, located to the immediate south and south west of the Site. Existing residential development is also scattered along the western side of Little Heath Road, along within the development on the Site. However, this is prevented from encroaching into the wider countryside to the west by the substantial woodland running north-south through

LCA WC2: Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes, along with further substantial woodland on elevated land to the immediate west and north of the Site.

The context of the Site is therefore influenced by the existing surrounding development of Tilehurst which lies to the north east, east, south east, south, and south west of the Site, to a much greater extent than the wider LCA WC2. The Site and its immediate surroundings are, therefore, settled in character.

#### ***6) Access via occasional rural lanes and a dense network of public rights of way***

***Roads are limited to occasional rural lanes which cross the character area. A good network of footpaths and bridleways provide access, many of which are based historic routes and form part of the Berkshire Circular Routes. The M4 runs along the south west of the character area and introduces movement and noise.***

The Site is located immediately adjoining Little Heath Road which is on the western edge of the settlement Reading, and on the edge of LCA WC2 and, therefore in comparison, is located on a more urbanised road within the LCA WC2 than is characteristic of the rural lane network. The Site also fronts onto Sulham Hill; however, the lane in this location is characterised by the Hall Place Farm Equestrian Centre and associated buildings, and the recently constructed residential development, The Ridings, which front directly onto the lane to the south-west and north-east respectively. Again, the length of Sulham Hill, in the immediate locality of the Site, is therefore less rural than characteristic of the wider rural lane network.

Public Right of Way TILE/7/1 runs along the south-west boundary of the Site, which forms part of the Berkshire Circular Routes. The south-western boundary of the Site is enclosed in part by a substantial hedgerow. There is potential to supplement and enhance the boundary vegetation to increase the enclosure and screening provided by the boundary vegetation, and for any potential development to be set back from the PROW.

#### ***7) There are expansive views from elevated areas, although woodland can create a sense of enclosure***

***Extensive views are experienced from some vantage points and are particularly prominent from the western edge of Sulham Wood, which looks out over the Pang Valley. Other areas have a sense of enclosure due to the densely wooded character. The wooded skylines are prominent above the adjacent valley landscapes. There are views north across the Thames to prominent ridges including Boze Down.***

From the network of Public Rights of Way to the west of the Site, within the AONB, substantial tall and dense hedgerows and lines of trees form strong field boundaries, which contain and shorten views in combination with the generally flat topography of the elevated plateau; as a result, there are limited locations from which the potential development on the Site would be visible. There is the potential to incorporate supplementary boundary landscaping along the western edge of the Site which would further reduce and filter visibility potential development throughout the year, where visible.

From the sloping valley sides to the north and west of the Site, within the North Wessex Downs AONB, the strong layers of vegetation and gently sloping topography continue to combine to restrict and obscure views of the Site and limit views of the Site and potential development on it.

There are no expansive views to or from the Site. The immediate locality of the Site has a wooded enclosed character, with limited intervisibility with the North Wessex AONB to the west of the Site, such that the Site which could successfully accommodate residential development, with very limited visual effect.

#### ***8) Strong rural character despite close proximity of urban development***



***An aesthetically pleasing rural landscape with a strong sense of tranquillity, although there can be urban fringe influences immediately adjacent to the urban edge or major infrastructure including the M4***

The Site is on the very edge of LCA WC2 immediately adjoining existing residential development on the north eastern and south eastern boundaries, with the substantial swathe of settlement of Tilehurst, Little Heath and Reading to the north, east and south. The Site is therefore in a location where urban influences are significantly more prevalent than most locations within the wider LCA WC2 to the further west of Reading.

### **Valued Features and Qualities**

#### ***1) Part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB.***

***The majority of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation include the presence of country houses and landscaped parks and gardens, broadleaved woodland and wood pasture habitat and a sense of remoteness and tranquillity***

The Site forms a very small part of the wider North Wessex Downs AONB, on the very edge of the AONB; on the immediate edge of Tilehurst/Little Heath/Reading, with adjoining residential development to the north-east and east, with the wider settlement extending to the north-east, east, south and south-west. Combined with the existing development on the Site, particularly that related to the equestrian centre, the Site is located in an area of the AONB already subject to urban influences, and does include features such as landscape parkland, wood pasture habitat and has a reduced sense of remoteness and tranquillity.

#### ***2) Strong wooded character, including ancient woodland***

***The dense woodland along the ridge includes many areas of woodland which are designated as Local Wildlife Sites for their conservation value. The wooded skylines of the ridge provide a setting and prominent backdrop to settlements within the adjacent Pang Valley, including the village of Sulham.***

The dense wood along the central ridge through LCA WC2 assists in containing the western edge Reading, and preventing the settlement encroaching further west into the Pang Valley and the wider North Wessex Downs AONB. The wooded skyline visible from and containing the Pang Valley would be maintained, continuing to screen both the western edge of Reading and any potential development on the Site.

#### ***3) Valued area for recreation***

***Extensive public rights of way connect the landscape to nearby centres of population, providing opportunities for informal recreation. These include the Berkshire Circular Routes trail.***

Public Right of Way TILE/7/1 runs along the south-west boundary of the Site, which forms part of the Berkshire Circular Routes. The south-western boundary of the Site is enclosed in part by a substantial hedgerow. There is potential to supplement and enhance the boundary vegetation to increase the enclosure and screening provided by the boundary vegetation, and for any potential development to be set back from the PROW.

#### ***4) Strong rural character and sense of tranquillity and wooded setting***

***This is especially valued given the close proximity of the urban edges of Reading. The sense of enclosure provided by the frequent woodland and the winding rural lanes which cross the landscape result in the perception of the area being far removed from the nearby urban environment. The wooded slopes provide an important setting to the wider urban area help integrate Reading within its landscape context.***

The location of the Site on the immediate edge of Reading results in a significantly reduced sense of remoteness and tranquillity, being both located on Little Heath Road, one of the busier and more urbanised roads within the LCA WC2, and with surrounding residential development visible in the immediately vicinity of the Site, on both sides of Little Heath Road and with the recently constructed residential development of The Ridings, to the north-east, on Sulham Hill. The substantial woodland to the west and the north of the Site contain not only the Site, but the western edge of Tilehurst/Little Heath/Reading. Once west of this woodland, the landscape has a much greater sense of rural character, remoteness and tranquillity.

#### ***5) Historic features including parkland***

***Historic features in the landscape contribute to the sense of time-depth experienced in this area. The designed parkland of Purley Hall originates from the early 18th century and introduces a historic estate character to the landscape. Fields are generally medieval in origin, although many have been modified to accommodate modern agriculture, diluting historic field patterns.***

The Site does not exhibit any parkland feature. The existing field pattern would be largely retained and form the framework within which to accommodate potential development.

#### ***6) Extensive views from vantage points***

***Where woodland cover allows, there is inter-visibility with other areas of high ground within the AONB including Boze Down to the north***

There are no expansive views to or from the Site. The immediate locality of the Site has a wooded enclosed character, with limited intervisibility with the North Wessex AONB to the west of the Site, such that the Site which could successfully accommodate residential development, with very limited visual effect.

**Relationship with Adjacent Settlement**

- On elevated plateau adjoining the western edge of Reading, at the same elevation as the adjoining settlement of Tilehurst and Little Heath (Refer to Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan)
- Located to the immediate north and north-west of Little Heath residential area, to the immediate west of the recently constructed residential development, The Ridings, Chapel Hill, Clements Mead. The wider settlement of Reading lies to the east and south of the Site and the existing residential development characterises the settled fringe context that encompasses the Site and the surrounding area.
- Located on the western side of Little Heath Road, along with other scattered residential development along the length of Little Heath Road to the south of the Site
- Influence of the western edge of Reading, such as Tilehurst and Little Heath, and including the Site and other scattered development along the western side of Little Heath Road, is limited to the immediate locality, by the substantial woodland that runs north-south through LCA WC2: Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes, on the edge of the western edge of the elevated plateau, and the substantial woodland to the north of the Site (Refer to Figure 2: Topographical Features Plan)
- Relates well to the existing immediately adjacent settlement.

**Relationship with adjacent wider countryside**

- The context of the Site is influenced by the existing surrounding development of Tilehurst and Little Heath which lie to the north east, east, south east, south, and south west of the Site. The Site and its immediate surroundings are, therefore, settled in character, which combined with the partly developed character of the Site, including the predominantly equestrian use of the Site, the natural character of the Site is more limited, than characteristic of the wider LCA WC2.
- Whilst the Site lies on the very edge, but within, the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, there is limited intervisibility with the LCA WC2: Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes to the north and west of the Site, the North Wessex Downs AONB landscape to the west of the Site, due to the substantial woodland vegetation that encloses the Site to the north and west, and visually and physically separates the Site from the countryside beyond. Once west of this woodland, the landscape has a much greater sense of rural character, remoteness and tranquillity.

**Impact on key landscape characteristics**

- Impact on Key Characteristics of Landscape Character Area WC2 set out above 1) to 8)
- Valued Features and Qualities set out above 1) to 6)

**Impact on key visual characteristics**

- Key Characteristics of Landscape Character Area WC2 set out above 1) to 8)
- Valued Features and Qualities set out above 1) to 6)

**Impact on key settlement characteristics**

- The Site relates strongly to, and is set within, the settlement edge of Tilehurst, which adjoins the Site on its eastern and southern boundaries, with recently constructed residential development at The Ridings to the immediate east of the Site, and residential development at Little Heath, located to the immediate south and south west of the Site. Existing residential development is also scattered along the western side of Little Heath Road, along within the development on the Site. However, this is prevented from encroaching into the wider countryside to the west by the substantial woodland running north-south through LCA WC2: Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes, along with further substantial woodland on elevated land to the immediate west and north of the Site.
- The context of the Site is therefore influenced by the existing surrounding development of Tilehurst which lies to the north east, east, south east, south, and south west of the Site, to a much greater extent than the wider LCA WC2.

**Summary of compliance with NPPF**

Potential development could be successfully accommodated within the Site, being set within a strong landscape framework, based on the existing retained boundary vegetation, and supplemented and enhanced with reference to the guidance in the relevant landscape character assessments, and in accordance with landscape policy, providing important measures to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB

**Recommendations**

The site is recommended for further consideration as a potential housing site, subject to consideration of the following:

- Retention and enhancement of boundary vegetation
- Consideration of Hall Place Farm and Kiln Cottage Listed Buildings
- Provision of buffer to Ancient Woodland
- Provision of buffer to PROW/Tile/7/1
- A full detailed landscape and visual impact assessment will be required to inform the final capacity of the Site

## 5.0 SUMMARY

- 5.1 The Site, TIL 18, is located on the western edge of Tilehurst, directly to the north of Little Heath Road and to the west of Sulham Hill; outwith, but immediately adjoining, the settlement boundary of Reading. The Site is set to the immediate north of Little Heath residential area, and to the immediate west of The Ridings residential area. The wider settlement of Reading lies to the east and south of the Site, TIL 18, and the existing residential development characterises the settled fringe context that encompasses the Site and the surrounding area, and in particular the settlement characteristics of the West Reading LLCA 13E Little Heath Gravel Plateau, which is described mixed types of development along the plateau top at the western edge of Tilehurst.
- 5.2 The Site, TIL 18, is partly developed, comprising an existing equestrian centre with associated barns, stables, shop, car parking, and all-weather ménage and arenas, and associated lighting, within the eastern part; and relatively level grazed paddocks to the western and northern parts, associated with the equestrian centre. There is one existing residential property within the Site at Hall Place Farmhouse, which is Grade II Listed.
- 5.3 The Site, TIL 18, therefore, relates strongly to, and is set within, the settlement edge of Little Heath, Tilehurst and the western edge of Reading. The context of the Site is influenced by the existing surrounding development of Little Heath; and the Site, TIL 18, and its immediate surroundings are, therefore, settled in character.
- 5.4 The Site, TIL 18, is enclosed and contained by dense woodland along the northern and north western boundaries, and by tall robust hedgerows along the western and southern boundaries, and is set within the wooded slopes and gravel plateau, at the urban edge of Tilehurst; therefore, there are limited locations from which the Site can be seen due to the screening provided; with the Site, and existing development on it, not visible from the wider North Wessex Downs AONB beyond the woodland to the north and west.
- 5.5 The Site, TIL 18, provides the opportunity to sensitively accommodate residential development, reflecting the distribution of existing and recent residential development on the western edge of Tilehurst, at Little Heath, The Ridings, and Chapel Hill, and scattered residential development on the western side of Little Heath Road to the south; containing settlement within a well-wooded context related to the existing settlement edge, as is characteristic of the North Wessex Downs AONB LCT8: Lowland Mosaic, and within that, the LCA8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons; the West Berkshire LCA WC2: Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk Slopes; and the West of Reading Local Landscape Character Area LLCA13E: Little Heath Gravel Plateau.

- 5.6 The Site, TIL 18, generally exhibits few of either the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs AONB; or the LCA8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons and LCA WC2: Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk Slopes.
- 5.7 With regard to the North Wessex Downs AONB LCA8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons, the Site, TIL 18, exhibits its key characteristics to a limited extent insofar as it is located on the broad plateau on the eastern extent of the LCA 8A Hermitage and Wooded Commons, to the east of a large, interconnected woodland block, and set within a strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees which restrict views and create an enclosed character, surrounding and enclosing the Site, TIL 18. Potential development could be accommodated on the Site, replacing in part the existing development on the Site, within the existing landscape framework with very limited effect the key characteristics of LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons.
- 5.8 Potential development on the Site, TIL 18, would be set back from, and allow for a buffer to, adjoining Ancient Woodland; and loss of boundary vegetation would be limited, with the opportunity to supplement and enhance the retained boundary vegetation. The Site, TIL 18, is partly developed, and is located on the very edge of the AONB, in an area already subject to a high level of urbanising influence, from adjoining residential development and the existing equestrian development, paddocks and associated fencing and lighting on the Site; and therefore with more limited tranquillity and remoteness than is characteristic of the wider LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons.
- 5.9 Potential development within the Site, TIL 18, would be contained within the robust existing and enhanced boundary vegetation and would form a strong relationship to existing and recent development at the edge of the settlement; and would form an appropriate robust and defensible extension to the settlement of Tilehurst, on the edge of Reading. Whilst not outside the North Wessex AONB, being on the very eastern edge of the AONB, and adjoining Reading, residential development in this location would broadly reflect the approach promoted in the North Wessex Downs Position Statement on Housing; and would be in a location where the AONB is already characterised by settlement.
- 5.10 The character of the North Wessex Downs AONB to the west of the Site, TIL 18, would be respected by enhancing the strong western boundary of the Site, TIL 18, to form a robust edge to the settlement of Tilehurst, and increase the physical and visual enclosure, and thus separation between the AONB landscape to the west, and the settled developed edge of Reading to the east.
- 5.11 The potential development would also positively integrate into the landscape character of the area without affecting landscape character or important local features, with reference

to North Wessex AONB LCA8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons; the West Berkshire LCA WC2: Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk Slopes; and the West of Reading Local Landscape Character Area LLCA13E: Little Heath Gravel Plateau, in line with the West Berkshire Core Strategy Area Delivery Plan Policy Area 5: North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), with regard to the criteria that "*Development will respond positively to the local context, and respect identified landscape features and components of natural beauty.*"

- 5.12 There is also the opportunity to respond positively to the policies for Landscape, as set out in the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan, by responding to and reflecting the existing characteristics of the LCA8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons; and taking account of the relevant management objectives. There is also the opportunity to respond to the policies for development; having had regard for potential landscape and visual impact from the outset; and through adopting a high standard of design, providing comprehensive landscaping and enhancing Green Infrastructure, and making reference to traditional building styles; and respecting the settlement pattern and distinctive character of the North Wessex Downs AONB.
- 5.13 Both the LVIA 2018 and the Updated LVA 2021 demonstrate that when considering the landscape sensitivity of the Site, TIL18, and its landscape and visual context, the Site, TIL18, could successfully accommodate residential development that relates well to its settlement edge location, focussing development in an existing urban fringe/edge of town location, and which would be in keeping with the character of LLCA 13E Little Heath Gravel Plateau; whilst respecting the wider adjoining landscape; without having significant effects upon the character of the area, a key objective set out within the Landscape Sensitivity Study: West Reading.
- 5.14 Residential development would therefore be successfully accommodated within the Site, TIL 18, being set within a strong landscape framework, based on the existing retained boundary vegetation, and supplemented and enhanced with reference, to the guidance in the relevant landscape character assessments, and in accordance with landscape policy, and the Site, TIL 18, should therefore be considered positively for allocation for housing, in the West Berkshire Regulation 18 Local Plan Draft Consultation.

## REFERENCE

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<sup>i</sup> Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Landscape Institute and IEMA, 2013



## APPENDIX 1

### Review of West Berkshire Landscape Sensitivity/Capacity Assessment Methodologies

## 1.0 ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

- 1.1 The assessment methodologies for the West Berkshire Landscape Sensitivity Assessment, 2011 and the Landscape Capacity Assessment of Potential Housing Sites within and adjacent to the North Wessex Downs AONB, West Berkshire, July 2014, have been reviewed, and the approach set out below.

*West Berkshire Landscape Sensitivity Assessment, 2011*

- 1.2 The Assessment Methodology for the West Berkshire Landscape Sensitivity Assessment, 2011, is set out as:

***“Stage 1: Introduction and summary of policy and AONB context.***

***Stage 2: An overall assessment of each settlement and its setting to determine the over-riding landscape constraints on development:***

- *Identification of key landscape characteristics of the relevant landscape character areas and their settlements within AONB.*
- *Desk top assessment using published sources*
- *Identification of key characteristics of each settlement and its landscape and visual context;*
- *Identification of key development constraints.*

***Stage 3: Assessment of individual SHLAA sites:***

- *Sites tested against findings in Stage 2;*
- *Site visit to SHLAA sites;*
- *Brief summary of landscape impact of each SHLAA;*
- *Brief summary of visual impact of each SHLAA;*
- *Brief summary of impact of each SHLAA on settlement pattern;*
- *Review of potential cumulative effect;*
- *Compliance with PPS7 paragraph 21;*
- *Recommendations for each settlement: location; scale of development; and design implications.*

***Stage 4: Summary conclusion.”***

- 1.3 The methodology provides the following commentary on Policy Context, making reference to the West Berkshire Core Strategy Area Delivery Plan Policy ADP4: Eastern Area, the Vision for which is stated as:

*“The individual identities of Purley on Thames, Tilehurst and Calcot will be maintained and enhanced, as will the quality of the built environments. This area will have a close functional relationship with the Reading area and will benefit from the facilities and services that Reading offers. ...*

*The high quality landscape and environmental assets in this part of West Berkshire, which includes the Thames National Path and the adjoining North Wessex Downs AONB will be protected and enhanced as a resource for the local population and for green tourism.”*

1.4 The methodology then goes on to make reference to the West Berkshire Core Strategy Area Delivery Plan Policy ADP5, which stated that:

- *The North Wessex Downs AONB will have appropriate and sensitive growth that conserves and enhances its special landscape qualities.*
- *Recognising the area as a national landscape designation, development will conserve and enhance the local distinctiveness, sense of place and setting of the AONB whilst preserving the strong sense of remoteness, tranquillity and dark night skies, particularly on the open downland. Development will respect identified landscape features and components of natural beauty.*

1.5 With regard to the potential for the AONB to accommodate future housing development, the methodology notes that *“It is an over-riding principle that any development within the North Wessex Downs should not result in harm to the special qualities and natural beauty of the AONB. Major development should not take place in the AONB, except in exceptional circumstances”.*

1.6 The methodology then refers to the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2010, which sets out the defining special features of the AONB as:

*“Vast, dramatic, undeveloped and locally distinct chalk downlands with extensive areas of semi-natural chalk grassland, contrasting with well wooded plateaux, arable lands and intimate and secluded valleys, all rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage; a national landscape that stands apart from the increasing urban pressures that surround it; where people live, work and relax; and where visitors are welcomed and contribute to a vibrant rural economy.”*

1.7 This remains relevant, although the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan (2019 – 2024) has been expanded, as set out later.

- 1.8 The methodology then notes that *“the North Wessex Downs is a visibly ancient landscape of great diversity. The area is divided into eight landscape types which reflect this diversity”*, which are defined in the North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002.
- 1.9 The Site falls within the Lowland Mosaic Landscape Character Types and, more specifically, Landscape Character Area (LCA) 8A: Heritage Wooded Commons, the latter of which sets out the local distinctiveness and special landscape qualities relevant to the LCA.
- 1.10 The methodology sets out the key qualities and issues which relate to development around settlements within the North Wessex Downs AONB, as identified in the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan at the time, which are:

*“Special qualities*

- *The sense of remoteness and tranquillity.*
- *All landscapes sensitive to change.*
- *Distinctive and ancient settlement patterns.*
- *Architectural styles vary throughout the AONB, dependent on availability of building materials.*
- *The built environment forms an integral part of local character and distinctiveness and adds to the diversity of the AONB landscape as a whole.*

*Key Issues*

- *Unsympathetic incremental expansion of the settlements of and adjacent to the AONB, detracting from the surrounding countryside.*
- *Potential for major development to intrude onto open downland, including masts, pylons, major wind turbine developments, and mineral extraction and waste management, threatening the senses of remoteness and tranquillity.*
- *The future use of redundant ‘brown field’ sites within the AONB, especially redundant airfields and military sites (as at Wroughton), and the impact upon landscape.*
- *Lack of knowledge about the boundaries of the current pools of tranquillity and dark night skies within the AONB and the implications of light spillage from development in and around the AONB.”*

- 1.11 The Assessment Methodology for the West Berkshire Landscape Sensitivity Assessment, 2011, then considers the extent to which each site conserves the special qualities and addresses the key issues, as well as those specific to the relevant LCA, which for the Site is LCA 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons.

1.12 However, as noted, no sites considered were located on the edge of Reading, with the sites considered located on the edges of the following settlements:

- Rural Service Area: Hungerford
- Rural Service Area: Lambourn
- Rural Service Area: Pangbourne
- Service Village: Hermitage
- Service Village: Compton
- Service Village: Kintbury
- Service Village: Chieveley
- Service Village: Great Shefford
- Service Village: Bradfield Southend

1.13 Within the West Berkshire Landscape Sensitivity Assessment, 2011, the most relevant site assessments are those which fall within LCA 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons; however, these are sites which were located around Hermitage, which is over 13km from the edge of Reading, and has a very different settlement character, being a service village set well within the North Wessex Downs AONB, unlike the Site which immediately adjoins Tilehurst, part of the extensive settlement town of Reading. However, the key landscape and visual characteristics, predominantly based on the AONB Character Areas, are set out as below, with those relevant to the Site TIL 18, and its immediate locality, underlined:

***"Key landscape characteristics***

- *Broad undulating plateau*
- *Intricate mosaic of woodland, pasture and small areas of remnant heathland*
- *Large interconnected woodland blocks*
- *Strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees*
- *Enclosed and intimate character*
- *Small irregular fields of informal and piecemeal enclosures*
- *Intricate network of rural lanes, many sunken and overhung with woodland*
- *Historic parkland*
- *Ancient and semi-natural woodland"*

*Landscape Capacity Assessment of Potential Housing Sites within and adjacent to the North Wessex Downs AONB, West Berkshire, July 2014*

1.14 The Landscape Capacity Assessment examines the potential landscape impact of a number of potential housing sites that fall within and adjacent to the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The sites were identified through the West Berkshire Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA); and includes sites in comparable

locations to the of the Site, that is on the edges of the settlement boundary for the Eastern Urban Area, which includes the settlements of Calcot, Purley on Thames, Tilehurst and Theale.

1.15 At Paragraph 1.4, the assessment notes that *“the methodology used is the same as that for the West Berkshire Council Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Potential Impact of the Scale and Distribution of Development in the North Wessex Downs AONB that was prepared for West Berkshire Council in January 2011”*.

1.16 The Landscape Capacity Assessment identifies the Key Characteristics of the LCA 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons (within the LCT 8: Lowland Mosaic) as:

- *“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.”*

1.17 The Landscape Capacity Assessment sets out the Key issues for the LCA 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons as:

- *Decline in the extent of heathland vegetation through conversion to forestry or lack of management leading to scrub invasion and development of woodland;*
- *Lack of appropriate management of woodlands particularly ancient and semi-natural woodlands formerly managed by coppicing and areas of wood pasture;*
- *Loss of hedgerows boundaries and mature hedgerow trees, plus poor management of remaining hedgerows;*
- *localised intrusion of road infrastructure with the M4 cutting through the area with visual and noise impacts;*
- *Increased traffic on the lane network (rat runs from main routes) and improvements to the lanes including kerbing, widening, signing and visibility splays which, in places create a more 'urban' character and are particularly damaging to the character of the sunken lanes; comparative accessibility resulting in development pressures, particularly for new residential development including suburbanising influence of built development (e.g. fencing, lighting and paddocks);*
- *loss of tranquillity."*

1.18 Phase 1 of the Landscape Capacity Assessment has the objective of identifying over-riding constraints based on the presence of environmental designations; on the contribution that a site makes to local landscape character and the wider landscape; on visual prominence; and on the relationship of the site to the settlement pattern, as defined by the local landscape. The Phase 1 Landscape capacity Assessment makes reference to the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan (2014-2019) and the North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002.

1.19 With regard to the **Relationship with the Wider Landscape**, it is noted, at Paragraph 5.2, that *"each site has been assessed for its importance, and contribution, to the adjacent wider rural landscape and the degree to which it shares common characteristics with the wider landscape"*.

1.20 With regard to **Visual Prominence**, it is noted at Paragraph 5.3, that *"each site has been assessed for its level of visual prominence in the landscape. At this stage this is based on views out from the site and nearby views into the site (with some exceptions where more distant views into the site were particularly noted). Some sites were noted as widely prominent, others locally prominent"*.

1.21 With regard to the **Relationship to Settlement**, it is noted at Paragraph 5.4, that "each site has finally been assessed for the level of urbanising influence from the adjacent built

form, the degree of enclosure by the existing settlement, and the pattern of uses and development within the settlement”.

1.22 With regard to the **Recommendations**, as noted in Paragraph 5.5, *“the recommendations are based on an initial assessment of each site following site visits, a review of the relevant landscape character assessment and a preliminary assessment of potential visual impacts. All of the sites are subject to more detailed studies under Phase 2”*.

1.23 Phase 2 then provides a more detailed assessment of the sites with regard to the landscape character, and for the purposes of the Regulation 18 Consultation Draft of the West Berkshire Local Plan, with reference to the Landscape Sensitivity Study: West Reading, 2009. For completeness the LVA 2021 Landscape Sensitivity assessment also makes reference to the updated evidence base, and therefore also makes the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019.

1.24 Therefore, the LVA 2021 provides:

- An update to the landscape and visual baseline with reference to:
  - NPPF 2019
  - North Wessex Downs Management Plan 2019 – 2024
  - West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019
- Updated Design Considerations and Landscape Strategy
- Landscape Sensitivity Assessment
- Updated Summary and Conclusions



## APPENDIX 2

### Landscape and Visual Appraisal for Hall Place Farm, 2018 (**LVA 2018**)

Figure 1: Site Context Plan

Figure 2: Site Appraisal Plan

Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan

Figure 4: Topographical Features Plan

Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan

Figure 6: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan

Site Appraisal Photographs A - F

Site Context Photographs 1-21

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# Land at Hall Place Farm, Tilehurst: Landscape and Visual Appraisal

Prepared on behalf of The Sulham Estate

December 2018



Land at Hall Place Farm, Tilehurst:  
Landscape and Visual Appraisal

The Sulham Estate

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## **ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL**

Figure 1: Site Context Plan

Figure 2: Site Appraisal Plan

Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan

Figure 4: Topographical Features Plan

Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan

Figure 6: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan

Site Appraisal Photographs A - F

Site Context Photographs 1-21



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Barton Willmore Landscape Planning and Design (BWLPD) were commissioned in July 2018 by The Sulham Estate to undertake a landscape and visual appraisal of land at Hall Place Farm in Tilehurst, in Berkshire, to support its promotion for residential development, of approximately 80 dwellings and the conversion and refurbishment of existing buildings into small workshop units and a farm shop with associated open space and landscaping.

1.2 The landscape and visual appraisal assesses the potential of the Site to accommodate residential development, and identifies the opportunities and constraints associated with the Site and the surrounding area.

1.3 The location of the Site has been identified on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan**.

1.4 The objectives of the landscape and visual appraisal are:

- To identify, evaluate and describe the existing landscape character and quality of the site and its surroundings, and its context within the wider landscape, and also any notable landscape elements and features, and in relation to existing designations and policies;
- To appraise the visibility of the Site and the nature and quality of existing views towards the Site, and to identify potential visual receptors;
- To determine the sensitivity of the landscape and visual context of the Site and its surroundings to the type of development proposed; and the suitability of the Site to accommodate the potential development being considered;
- To identify the landscape and visual opportunities constraints to development to inform development proposals;
- Make recommendations for a suitable landscape strategy which assists with absorbing the development within the landscape and providing a network of green infrastructure; and limit the likely effects upon landscape character and visual amenity that would arise as a result of the proposed development on the Site.

1.5 This appraisal has been undertaken with regard to best practice guidelines within GLVIA3<sup>1</sup>, with reference to shaping the design of development that may bring about change in the landscape and in visual amenity, and to identifying the potential landscape and visual effects arising from proposed development.

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<sup>1</sup> Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Landscape Institute and IEMA, 2013



1.6 This appraisal was undertaken during July 2018.

1.7 The following illustrative material supports the landscape and visual assessment:

- Figure 1 Site Context Plan
- Figure 2 Site Appraisal Plan
- Figure 3 Landscape Character Plan
- Figure 4 Topographical Features Plan
- Figure 5 Visual Appraisal Plan
- Figure 6 Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan
- Site Appraisal Photographs A - F
- Site Context Photographs 1 – 21

## 2.0 SITE CONTEXT AND SITE APPRAISAL

- 2.1 **Figure 1: Site Context Plan** provides an overview of the location of the Site, located to the immediate west of Reading, within West Berkshire. As illustrated on **Figure 1**, the Site is located on the western edge of Tilehurst, part of the western edge of Reading, directly to the north of Little Heath Road and to the west of Sulham Hill, outwith but immediately adjoining the settlement boundary of Reading.
- 2.2 The Site is located on the very eastern edge of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which extends to the west from Reading and north to the River Thames. The Chilterns AONB adjoins the North Wessex Downs AONB to the north of the River Thames.
- 2.3 The Site is set to the immediate north of Little Heath residential area, and to the immediate west of The Ridings residential area. The wider settlement of Reading lies to the east and south of the Site and the existing residential development characterises the settled fringe context that encompasses the Site and the surrounding area.

### *The Surrounding Area*

- 2.4 The area surrounding the Site is strongly influenced by the settlement of Reading and the network of roads that cross the area. The area comprises a mixture of residential development which forms the area of Tilehurst, and settled wooded farmland, as illustrated on **Figure 1: Site Context Plan**.
- 2.5 The western edge of Reading, and in the immediate vicinity of the Site within Tilehurst, comprises residential development at Little Heath to the immediate south and south west of the Site, and Chapel Hill, Clements Mead, and The Ridings to the immediate east and south east of the Site.
- 2.6 There is a high degree of enclosure by large woodland and copses and dense linear vegetation which contains views across the landscape to the west, and by the dense roadside vegetation, which sets the Site within a small scale and enclosed character. The settlement of Tilehurst characterises the settled residential fringe landscape and comprises a developed context to the immediate east and south of the Site.

- 2.7 The area surrounding the Site is crossed by a network of local roads, with the M4 motorway to the south west, and several A roads, including the A340 Tidmarsh Road to the west. Sulham Hill road lies immediately to the east of the Site and there are two existing access points off this road into the Site, and Little Heath Road lies to the immediate south of the Site.
- 2.8 The adjacent townscape has a settled residential context with residential development set along local roads at Little Heath Road, Sulham Hill, and Chapel Hill, within the Tilehurst area of Reading. The existing built form within the Site forms part of the settled urban fringe context of Tilehurst.
- 2.9 Clay Copse woodland to the north and north west of the Site is a substantial area of woodland which physically and visually contains the Site, and the settlement edge of Tilehurst, and provides separation between the settled residential area and the wider North Wessex Downs AONB to the north west.
- 2.10 The North Wessex Downs AONB landscape to the north and west of the Site has a well wooded context with a diverse range of settlements linked by narrow rural lanes, set within an undulating valley side landscape. There are large areas of woodland, linear vegetation and copses which enclose the landscape and contain and obscure views.
- 2.11 The surrounding area is diverse; and is characterised by a number of dispersed settlements at Tidmarsh, Sulham and Pangbourne to the west of the Site, and Purley-on-Thames to the north, and by the urban edge of Reading to the east and south of the Site.

#### *The Site*

- 2.12 As illustrated on **Figure 2: Site Appraisal Plan** and **Site Appraisal Photographs A – F**, the Site comprises an existing equestrian centre with associated barns, stables, shop, car parking, and all-weather ménage and arenas, and associated lighting, within the eastern part; and relatively level grazed paddocks to the western and northern parts. There is one existing residential property within the Site at Hall Place Farmhouse, which is Grade II Listed.
- 2.13 The Site is located at the edge of the settlement of Tilehurst and is set within a wooded context. The existing red brick barns within the Site lie adjacent to the Sulham Hill road and form characteristic built elements of the settlement surrounding the Site, as illustrated by **Site Appraisal Photographs A** and **B**.

- 2.14 The Site is enclosed by substantial vegetation along and within the Site boundaries to the north, west and southern extents. The southern boundary of the Site is formed by a tall hedgerow with trees that runs adjacent to Little Heath Road, as illustrated by **Site Appraisal Photograph B**.
- 2.15 The majority of the western boundary of the Site is formed by dense, tall, vegetation that runs along the eastern edge of Public Right of Way (PROW) Berkshire Circular Route as illustrated by **Site Appraisal Photograph C**. The rest of the western boundary of the Site is formed by wooden and post and rail fencing along the southern extent.
- 2.16 To the east, there is a wooden post and rail fence forming the northern extent of the boundary adjacent to Sulham Hill, and the southern extent of the boundary with Sulham Hill is formed by the existing barns and stables, and the existing car park area, as illustrated by **Site Appraisal Photograph D**.
- 2.17 To the north, the Site boundary is formed by a large copse of Ancient Woodland, Clay Copse, immediately abutting the Site to the north, as illustrated by **Site Appraisal Photograph E**.
- 2.18 The existing built form within the Site is located at the highest point of the Site immediately adjacent to the settlement edge of Tilehurst, as illustrated by **Site Appraisal Photograph F**.

### **Landscape Policy Context**

- 2.19 The relevant landscape policy context for the Site makes reference to:
- The National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012);
  - The West Berkshire Core Strategy (2012);
  - The West Berkshire Council Local Plan 1991-2006 (Saved policies 2007);
  - North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan, 2014 – 2019; and
  - North Wessex Downs Position Statement: Housing (October 2012).

#### *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2018*

- 2.20 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was first published in March 2012; and revised in July 2018. The NPPF promotes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, defined as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”, applying the presumption in favour of sustainable development as set out in Paragraph 11 of the NPPF.

- 2.21 Paragraphs 96-98 focus on promoting access to areas of open space and recreation; and seek to protect existing rights of way and provide better facilities for users.
- 2.22 In relation to conserving and enhancing the natural environment, Paragraph 170 notes that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes. Paragraph 171 requires a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of green infrastructure.
- 2.23 Paragraph 172 addresses National Parks and Areas of Outstanding National Park, and states that:

*“Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited. Planning permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:*

- a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
- b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
- c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.”*

*The West Berkshire Core Strategy (2012)*

- 2.24 The Core Strategy is a development plan document which sets out the overall planning strategy for West Berkshire to 2026. It explains the vision for the area, and how it will be delivered. It also provides a framework for more detailed policies which will be contained in future development plan documents prepared as part of the Local Plan.
- 2.25 The Site falls within Area Delivery Plan **Policy Area 5: North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)** which states that “The AONB will have appropriate sustainable growth throughout the plan period to support the local communities and rural economy”.

2.26 With reference to 'Environment', the Policy text states that:

*"Recognising the area as a national landscape designation, development will conserve and enhance the local distinctiveness, sense of place and setting of the AONB whilst preserving the strong sense of remoteness, tranquillity and dark night skies, particularly on the open downland. Development will respond positively to the local context, and respect identified landscape features and components of natural beauty."*

2.27 The general Core Strategy policies that apply to the Site, include **Policy CS18 Green Infrastructure**, which states that:

*"The District's green infrastructure will be protected and enhanced. The Council will work with partners, including Parish Councils and the community to address the District's green infrastructure needs and deficiencies as set out in the forthcoming Green Infrastructure SPD."*

*New developments will make provision for high quality and multifunctional open spaces of an appropriate size and will also provide links to the existing green infrastructure network. Specific standards for provision within new developments will be identified in the Site Allocations and Delivery DPD and through the masterplanning for strategic sites."*

*Developments resulting in the loss of green infrastructure or harm to its use or enjoyment by the public will not be permitted. Where exceptionally it is agreed that an area of green infrastructure can be lost a new one of equal or greater size and standard will be required to be provided in an accessible location close by."*

2.28 **Policy CS19 Historic Environment and Landscape Character**, states that:

*"In order to ensure that the diversity and local distinctiveness of the landscape character of the District is conserved and enhanced, the natural, cultural, and functional components of its character will be considered as a whole. In adopting this holistic approach, particular regard will be given to:*

- (a) The sensitivity of the area to change.*
- (b) Ensuring that new development is appropriate in terms of location, scale and design in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and character.*
- (c) The conservation and, where appropriate, enhancement of heritage assets and their settings (including those designations identified in Box 1).*
- (d) Accessibility to and participation in the historic environment by the local community.*

*Proposals for development should be informed by and respond to:*

- (a) *The distinctive character areas and key characteristics identified in relevant landscape character assessments including Historic Landscape Characterisation for West Berkshire and Historic Environment Character Zoning for West Berkshire.*
- (b) *Features identified in various settlement character studies including Quality Design - West Berkshire Supplementary Planning Document, the Newbury Historic Character Study, Conservation Area Appraisals and community planning documents which have been adopted by the Council such as Parish Plans and Town and Village Design Statements.*
- (c) *The nature of and the potential for heritage assets identified through the Historic Environment Record for West Berkshire and the extent of their significance."*

*The West Berkshire Local Plan 1991-2006 (Saved policies 2007)*

2.29 The saved policies that are relevant to the Site are set out below:

2.30 **Policy ENV1 The Wider Countryside**, states that:

*"The Council in considering proposals for development will seek to conserve and enhance the special features and diversity of the different 'landscape character areas' found within West Berkshire."*

2.31 **Policy ENV18 Control of Development in the Countryside**, states that:

*"The nature and scale of development in rural areas should seek to encourage and sustain balanced rural communities. Development outside of settlements, allocated sites and other defined areas (Local Plan policies HSG.1, HSG.5, ECON.1, ECON.6, ECON.7, ECON.9, TRANS.3, and ENV.27 refer) will be permitted only where:-*

- (a) *it will benefit the rural economy in accordance with Structure Plan policy C2 and Local Plan policies ENV.16, ENV.19 and ENV.20; or*
- (b) *it will provide beneficial use of a brownfield site in accordance with Structure Plan policy BU3 and Local Plan policies OVS.1, and OVS.2; or*
- (c) *it is within the permissible categories of housing development in the countryside; and provided it will maintain or enhance the environment and is appropriate in scale, form, impact, character and siting to its location in the countryside."*

***The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan (2014-2019)***

2.32 The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan sets out the Vision for the AONB, identifies the Special Qualities that underpins its designation, and the Key issues, Objectives and Policies for managing these Special Qualities. The Vision for the North Wessex Downs AONB is described as:

***“Vast dramatic, undeveloped and distinct chalk downlands with nationally significant areas of semi-natural chalk grassland, contrasting with well-wooded plateaux, arable lands and intimate and secluded valleys, all rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage; a national landscape that stands apart from the increasing urban pressures that surround it; where people live, work and relax; and where visitors are welcomed and contribute to a vibrant rural economy.”***

2.33 The Special Qualities that underpin the AONB designation are defined as Landscape, Land Management, Biodiversity, Historic Environment, Natural Resources, Development, Communities and Leisure and Tourism; with Landscape and Development being most relevant to the Site.

2.34 With regard to Landscape, the Site falls within:

- ***“The LOWLAND MOSAIC, curving around Newbury and the lower Kennet valley has a varied geology of clays, silts and sands giving rise to a diverse mix of soils and, in turn, a mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations, remnant heathland and more open farmland areas where sunken lanes heighten the sense of seclusion.”***

2.35 Key issues for Landscape include:

- ***“The potential for development beyond the AONB boundary to visually damage or undermine the scale and critical qualities of landscape character areas. ...***
- ***Conserving and enhancing the remote, secluded and relatively undeveloped character of more enclosed and intimate landscapes, including the character of the lanes. ...***
- ***The dominance of roads, in particular the impact of traffic noise, external lighting, road signs, insensitive materials and clutter on landscape character and people’s experience of the landscape as they travel through it. ...***



- *Conserving and enhancing the small-scale, secluded and rural character of the lowland mosaic, including the fragile lowland heaths.*
- *Intense pressure for development throughout the AONB and its setting that threatens the character and quality of its landscape and risks merging of small settlements or encroachment by larger settlements.*
- *The need to protect and enhance historic sites, buildings and landscapes and their setting."*

2.36 The Objectives for Landscape are:

- *"To maintain and enhance the distinctive landscape character of the North Wessex Downs.*
- *To raise the profile of the North Wessex Downs AONB."*

2.37 Relevant Policies for the Landscape include:

- *... "Wherever possible seek to identify and address the main factors that threaten the special qualities of the AONB landscape: e.g. water abstraction, agricultural practices; woodland neglect; damage to historic sites, built development.*
- *Use the North Wessex Downs Integrated Landscape Character Assessment to inform policy and decision making across the AONB and its setting.*
- *Support, encourage and promote good practice across all sectors that conserves and enhances the character and qualities of the North Wessex Downs landscape. ...*
- *Ensure that all development in or affecting the setting of the AONB conserves and enhances the character, qualities and heritage of the North Wessex Downs landscape. ... "*

2.38 With regard to Development, relevant to the Site is:

- *The sense of remoteness and tranquility that comes from an undeveloped and rural quality with only limited human intervention, containing typically modest villages with distinctive and ancient settlement patterns.*
  - *The Lowland Mosaic remains one of the most densely settled landscape types, with a diverse range of settlements ranging from large manor houses, villages, numerous hamlets and lines of houses along the roads and lanes.*

- *Distinctive architectural styles that vary throughout the AONB but within specific areas create a sense of place and vernacular local character due to the availability of local building materials and traditional building styles. This includes traditional knapped flint and brick, timber framed farm buildings, thatch and tiled roofs, use of Sarsen Stone, blue flint and tile and clunch and cobb walls.*
- *A sparse road network, but there is good access from a number of economically significant towns such as Swindon, Andover, Whitchurch, Basingstoke, Reading, Devizes, Newbury and Didcot resulting in an economy that is largely 'outward looking' towards these 'boundary towns' and beyond.*
- *Within the North Wessex Downs, the traditional land based and rural economy contrasts with a growing high tech and creative sector."*

2.39 With regard to Key Issues, the AONB Management Plan states that:

*In responding to planning applications...within the North Wessex Downs AONB and its setting, the following key issues highlight examples of development which, if harmful, would be opposed by the AONB Unit subject to detailed consideration. As well as the following, the AONB Unit's Position Statements also contain further detailed advice on specific forms of development and should therefore also be considered. ...."*

2.40 The following Key Issues are relevant to the Site:

- *"The threat of expansion of the main urban areas just beyond the boundary of the North Wessex Downs, including the main centres of Swindon, Wantage, Didcot, Reading, Newbury, Basingstoke, Andover, and Devizes for example creating urban fringe pressures and impact on the setting 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).*
- *New housing developments on greenfield sites. ...*
- *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).*
- *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, where relevant, that does not provide for or support existing Green Infrastructure. ...*
- *Impact of road signage, street lighting and other highway clutter on landscape character, including within settlements. Measures which have an urbanising effect on AONB character and are thus generally inappropriate include: oversized, multiple and yellowbacked road signs; new street lighting in previously unlit locations; lighting that allows spillage or glare; road markings; concrete kerbing; illuminated bollards; fencing; and elaborate traffic-calming schemes. ... "*

2.41 Relevant Policies for Development include:

- *"Encourage all proposals for new development, redevelopment and re-use to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs. Oppose forms of development that fail to conserve and enhance the character and quality of the AONB and its setting and to make reference to the AONB's published guidance.*
- *Encourage high standards of design, comprehensive landscaping where required, traditional building styles, energy conservation and innovation that respect historic settlement patterns and the distinctive character of the North Wessex Downs. ...*
- *Encourage the consideration of landscape impacts at the earliest opportunity in the planning process and the provision of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments and Environmental Impact Assessments where required.*
- *Avoid and reduce light pollution, including control of lighting schemes or other developments that threaten the integrity of dark night skies within the North Wessex Downs.*
- *Encourage, support and promote good practice in the design and management of roads in the AONB and its setting that conserves and enhances the character of the landscape and settlements. ...*
- *Encourage the use of planning briefs or master plans which guide developments within and on the edge of the North Wessex Downs and take account of AONB purposes.*
- *Encourage the retention of existing and provision of new 'Green Infrastructure'. Ensure that 'Green Infrastructure' (including new or enhanced biodiversity assets) is incorporated within the area of all "major developments", both within and near the AONB. ... "*

***North Wessex Downs AONB Position Statement: Housing***

2.42 The Position Statement: Housing, with regard to 'Planning for Housing' notes that the North Wessex Downs AONB *"is a living and working landscape and new accommodation may be needed to meet specific local needs in specific locations"*; but that *"it is essential that the primary purpose of AONB designation remains paramount in the decision making process. It is not, for instance, considered appropriate that the AONB should be used as a location to site significant strategic housing allocations which go beyond the identified local housing needs appropriate for the AONB and where such development results in landscape harm and loss of character."*

2.43 It goes on to note that:

***"Its natural beauty largely emerges from the characteristic open downland landscapes, with long views of beautiful landscapes, with little visual or noise disturbance to their tranquillity. As such, the AONB is particularly sensitive to developments that are visually prominent, that results in an urbanising influence, result in loss of amenity or generate significant levels of traffic. This is a highly pressured and very fragile environment where inappropriate development can have a disproportionate effect on character."***

2.44 With regard to the provision of housing, it identifies that the approach needs to be based on, with regard to landscape and visual matters, an assessment of *"the capacity of the landscape to accommodate development without undermining the purposes of designation"*; and that *"accordingly, where new housing development does occur within the AONB it needs to be in the best possible location and of the very best design..."*

2.45 With regard to "Proposed Housing Allocation Considerations", the Position Statement: Housing notes that :

***"Use of previously developed land within built-up areas inside the AONB (provided it is consistent with landscape and settlement character policies and protects essential services and employment) is likely to be acceptable, and a modest level of housing supply within the AONB is therefore quite normal and desirable and can contribute to the continuing viability of these settlements."***

2.46 The Position Statement: Housing advocates that the largest primary settlements outside the ANOB, of which Reading is one, should be considered first in terms of proposed housing allocations.

2.47 With regard to location in terms of Settlement Hierarchy, the Site is located on the very edge of the North Wessex AONB, and immediately adjoins the major settlement of Reading, which is outwith the AONB; it is also in part previously developed, being an existing equestrian centre, with associated barns, stables, shop, carparking and arenas.

2.48 With regard to Greenfield Sites for Housing, the Position Statement: Housing states that *"the release of greenfield land for housing allocations will always need specific justification because of the AONB. In many cases loss of countryside on the edges of the main AONB settlements will not be consistent with the primary purpose for AONB designation, being to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape. However, there may be some exceptions, where landscape impact and loss of character would be minimal"*; and that:

*"any proposal for greenfield housing development would also need to demonstrate:*

*i) That it would give rise to no or minimal adverse impact on the qualities for which the area has been designated as an AONB; ... "*

2.49 In terms of bringing forward the design of proposals for housing, such as in considering planning applications, The North Wessex Downs AONB would:

*"... expect the specific guidance for each Landscape Character Area found in the Landscape Character Assessment and information in the Management Plan to be used to guide assessment of the siting and suitability of development. These documents should also be used in conjunction with any more detailed guidance developed by individual local authorities, including Village Design Statements, Conservation Area Appraisals and Design Codes and Parish and Town Plans."*

2.50 The Position Statement then sets out criteria for considering with regard to planning applications for residential development, and those which are of relevance include:

*i)"Developments should integrate well into the historical pattern and character of the settlement. This will vary depending on the landscape and built character type and needs to be determined on a case-by-case basis. Specific consideration should also be given to the established density, scale, building height, roof pitches and layout of a area in designing new proposals."*

- ii) *Building style should respect the local tradition. Inappropriate, particularly suburban styles, layouts and materials should be avoided. Where new building is required, it should be to a high standard of design as befits a nationally designated landscape. Innovative schemes based on sustainable construction principles are to be supported though should still respect local styles and materials.*
- iii) *External building materials should respect and reflect the locally occurring rock types, brick, and roofing materials to ensure the finished design relates to the landscape that surrounds it. Locally sourced materials are also encouraged, to reduce long travel-to-site distances as well as the use of reclaimed materials.*
- iv) *Developments must respect and conserve and not obstruct public views to higher slopes, skylines, or sweeping views across the landscape or landmark views within the settlements.*
- v) *Existing buildings built of traditional materials and of architectural merit should be restored and re-used in preference to new building. Existing buildings should be carefully conserved and proposals for conversion to new uses must retain their historic integrity and functional character. Sound conservation advice and principles must be sought and implemented at all times during this process to achieve the right balance for individual projects.*
- vi) *Traditional agricultural buildings of merit and good condition should be retained in their current use or, if shown to be genuinely redundant, preferably converted to employment/social use or possibly holiday accommodation. Conversion to residential use may result in landscape, sustainable development and design concerns. However, subject to schemes according with Government and local planning policies, residential conversions in certain circumstances may be supported.*
- vii) *Particular care should be taken in new housing development to ensure external lighting is minimal and any that is installed is designed to be downlighting with no light spillage, discreet and “dark night sky compliant” . Preferably external lighting (including street lighting) should not be installed where it does not already exist. Where lighting is essential it should be minimised and only used for short periods in limited locations. Paragraph 125 of the NPPF states “By encouraging good design, planning policies and decisions should limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation.”*

- viii) Care should be taken in designing new access roads to avoid suburban designs which would be alien to local character and historic street scenes or where they result in intrusion into the landscape. Highly engineered road layouts typical to larger urban areas with pavements, kerbing, sign posting and street lighting often look out of place when added to small rural settlements where road design has evolved in a far more informal and low-key style. The Manual for Streets 2007 (and its companion guide 2010) highlights a change in approach to residential street design to in particular take into consideration existing local character.*
- ix) Brownfield land use for housing within existing urban areas in the AONB is supported where there is no loss of viable local services, facilities or employment. (Accordingly brownfield land use within the countryside of the AONB outside settlements and away from services, facilities and employment should be strictly controlled).*
- x) All new housing should include measures to save energy and resources and should meet or exceed relevant Government targets in this respect.*
- xi) All new housing should be located and designed to take account of and protect existing landscape features such as trees and hedges of value and where appropriate to provide new landscaping to frame or soften new developments and to increase biodiversity. Soft landscaping can also hold rainfall and reduce water run-off, avoiding unsustainable drainage options. ...*
- ... ..*
- xiv) Proposals for affordable housing where local need has been demonstrated are positively supported though should still also meet the above design, materials, location and landscaping requirements."*

#### Landscape Character Context

##### National Landscape Character Assessment

- 2.51 National Character Areas (NCAs) were originally prepared by the former Countryside Agency but the assessments are now prepared by Natural England. These landscape character assessments identify a number of key landscape characteristics for broad areas covering England, and wash over urban areas, towns, villages and areas of settlement.
- 2.52 The Site is located at the western extent of NCA 115: Thames Valley, and is also adjacent to two other Character Areas; 110: Chilterns, and 129: Thames Basin Heaths, as shown on **Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan**.

- 2.53 The full description of the NCA 115 Thames Valley can be accessed here: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/3865943>
- 2.54 The NCA 115 Thames Valley is formed by a low-lying area extending east from Reading, and including Slough, Windsor, the Colne Valley and the south west London fringes. The Site lies within the western part of the character area where the gently rolling valley sides form steeper slopes.
- 2.55 Woodland characterises the western extent of the character area immediately around the Site, with the wooded character forming wooded ridges and extending up to the southern edge of the Chiltern Hills.
- 2.56 Field boundaries in the area are noted within the Character Assessment as predominantly hedgerows, although these are identified as being somewhat neglected; there is therefore an opportunity to enhance and increase this resource throughout the NCA.
- 2.57 The presence of water is identified in the Character Area as being a key feature, in the form of rivers, streams, lakes, canals and open water bodies. The River Thames and other watercourses form unifying features through a very diverse landscape of urban and suburban settlements, infrastructure networks, fragmented agricultural land, historic parks, commons, woodland, reservoirs, and extensive minerals workings.
- 2.58 The character assessment describes a number of key characteristics which comprise:
- *Flat and low-lying land, rising to low, river-terraced hills, which include the prominent local outcrop of chalk on which Windsor Castle sits.*
  - *The underlying geology is dominated by the London Clay which, over much of the area, is overlain by river-lain sands and gravels.*
  - *The numerous hydrological features provide unity to an area which otherwise lacks homogeneity; these features include the River Thames and its tributaries, streams, lakes, canals and open waterbodies (the result of restored gravel workings).*
  - *Woodlands characterise the north-western area, with the wooded character extending up to the southern edge of the Chiltern Hills.*
  - *Farming is limited. Where it survives, grazed pasture is the major land use within a generally open, flat and featureless landscape. The field pattern is medium-scale and irregular, with smaller fields to the west. Localised areas of species-rich hay meadows provide a splash of colour in summer.*



- *Although densely populated and developed, pockets of woodland, open grassland, parkland, wetlands and intimate meadows provide escape and tranquillity, and include a variety of habitats supporting important populations of many species, notably stag beetle, shoveler, gadwall and other invertebrates and wildfowl.*
- *Towards London in the east, the natural character of the area is overtaken by urban influences: a dense network of roads (including the M25 corridor), Heathrow Airport, railway lines, golf courses, pylon lines, reservoirs, extensive mineral extraction and numerous flooded gravel pits.*
- *There are small but biologically important areas of lowland heathland – especially on higher sandy ground in the north – and a small area to the south falls within the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) buffer zone.*
- *To the south, the open Thames flood plain dominates, with its associated flat grazing land, becoming characterised by a number of formal historic landscapes on higher ground. Between Hampton and Kew, the River Thames forms the focus of a series of designed landscapes.*
- *The area has an urban character, and there are very few villages of more traditional character, although almost half of the area is greenbelt land and development has been restricted in areas like Crown Estate land and Eton College grounds.*
- *The river is closely associated with numerous historic places and cultural events, such as the signing of Magna Carta at Runnymede. Tourists from all over the world are drawn to the rich heritage of the area, flocking to attractions like Hampton Court Palace and Windsor Castle.*
- *The area is important for recreation, both for residents and visitors. Historic parkland and commons provide access to green space, the Thames Path National Trail runs the length of the NCA, and a variety of activities are enjoyed on the river and other waterbodies.*

2.59 The Site and its immediate surroundings lie within the immediate context of the National Character Area 115 Thames Valley, and on the edge of NCA 110 Chilterns, the full descriptions of which can be accessed here: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/3865943> and here: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4977697>

- 2.60 The NCA 115 Thames Valley is described as having an urban character, densely populated and developed, with a significant amount of woodland in the Thames Valley, and that the area in the south west of the NCA, around Reading, reflects the rolling hills of the nearby Chilterns. The NCA Thames Valley is dissected by major transport routes including the M4 motorway, and many A roads which link the main urban areas.
- 2.61 Water is described as being the unifying characteristic of the Character Area, and the River Pang lies 2km to the west of the Site, and the River Thames lies approximately 2.1km to the north east of the Site, at the edge of Reading.
- 2.62 The NCA 110 Chilterns is described as extensively wooded with hedged boundaries, and as "one of the most wooded lowland landscapes in the country". Large woods, dominated by beech, are found on the plateau and as hanging woods on the valley slopes. With regard to the landscape character of the Chilterns, the NCA states that the area is unified by the enclosed and intimate valley landforms, the sunken lanes, and woodland. Hedgerows and woodland are described as creating a sense of intimacy and enclosure throughout the character area.

#### North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Landscape Character Assessment

- 2.63 The Site lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and within Landscape Character Type LCT 8: Lowland Mosaic, further subdivided into Landscape Character Area LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons. The Lowland Mosaic has an intimate and enclosed character, with a strong wooded character and is described within the Landscape Character Assessment as being one of the most densely inhabited parts of the North Wessex Downs.
- 2.64 The key characteristics of the LCT 8: Lowland Mosaic are described as:
- ***"Underlain by a geology of clays, silts, sands and gravel, in strong contrast to the chalk. The pattern essentially comprises clay on the lower land, separated by gravel ridges***
  - ***A low lying undulating area enclosed by the chalk to the north, south and west and forming a part of the Thames Basin Heaths which extend to the east of the AONB***
  - ***A mosaic of landcover including fragments of remnant heathland, extensive woodlands and pasture, as well as more open areas of arable land***

- *Ecologically important habitats including: Ancient Woodland, wood pasture, parkland, ancient hedgerows, neutral grassland, hay meadows, heathland, acid grassland, bogs, fens and open water*
- *Parklands, including many originating as medieval deer parks, with subsequent designed landscape schemes, are a particular feature of the area*
- *Varied field pattern with irregular fields, interspersed with parcels of woodland and commons indicative of medieval and post medieval assarts. Fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries predominate and represent 'ladder' fields probably resulting from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century informal enclosure. Plus large regular fields of Parliamentary enclosure*
- *One of the most densely settled landscape types, with a diverse range of settlements ranging from large manor houses, villages, numerous hamlets and lines of houses along the roads and lanes*
- *Varied settlements with villages often having a clear nucleus, typically associated with a village green or church. A more dispersed pattern may derive from 'squatter' settlement of disafforested areas. The principal building material is red brick*
- *An intricate network of wooded rural lanes, plus a large number of footpaths, bridleways, and byways form an excellent resource for informal recreation. Visitor attractions include a number of historic houses and parklands*
- *Well settled landscape with a rising population due to proximity and accessibility to centres such as Reading, Newbury and Basingstoke – manifest in pressures for residential development, commuter villages and an increase in traffic on the rural lanes."*

2.65 The LCT 8: Lowland Mosaic is identified as being a "diverse and complex landscape" with a "strong woodland character" and is "well settled".

2.66 The Site lies within the subdivision LCA 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons, of which the key characteristics are described as:

- *"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 planting are a particular feature."*

2.67 The LCA 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons is described as forming a broad undulating lowland plateau with highly variable landcover, which "retains a considerable woodland cover". The Character Assessment text states that "the large, inter-connected woodland blocks and strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees, restrict views and create a very enclosed landscape". Low, wooded horizons are identified as a key feature of the character area along with numerous woodlands of ancient origin.

2.68 Within the Key management Requirements section, with regard to the key issues affecting the character area, the loss of hedgerow boundaries and mature hedgerow trees is identified as a concern. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the character of the Hermitage Wooded Commons through the conservation and enhancement of ancient and semi-natural woodlands, field patterns and hedgerows, and the rural lane network. Opportunities are identified to restore the hedgerow network to enhance the landscape, and that the pattern of settlement should be maintained.

Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2003)

2.69 The Site lies within the Landscape Character Type (LCT) N: Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes, and within Landscape Character Area (LCA) N2: Sulham. The Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes is described within the Character Assessment as a distinctive chalk-based landscape which includes areas of steep incised slopes and significant areas of woodland, with the landscape being influenced by adjoining urban areas, including the town of Reading.

2.70 The key characteristics of the LCT N: Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes are described as:

- *Varied geology with the underlying upper chalk mantled by deposits of gravels and clays*
- *Varied settlement form and pattern including linear and nucleated villages, small riverside towns*
- *Presence and influence of adjacent urban areas (including Reading and Maidenhead)*
- *Mixed land use of deciduous and mixed woodland, arable fields, pasture and paddocks*
- *Wooded context created by distinctive wooded slopes and ghyll valleys and occasional hill top woodlands*
- *Presence of naturalistic open 'downland' sheep pastures within a wooded context with more angular and regular medium sized formal paddocks and medium sized arable fields*
- *Deeply incised dry valleys and seasonal streams*
- *Valley-edge country houses set within extensive historic parkland estates*
- *Winding, sometimes sunken, rural lanes and green lanes with intimate character*
- *Important calcareous grassland and woodland habitats*

- 2.71 The LCT N: Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes is identified as being "*characterised by the presence of woodlands*" and being a "*diverse landscape type with a mixed land use pattern.*" The wooded context and the rolling and undulating landform, combined with the variety of settlement patterns, creates a diverse and variable area, enclosed by woodland and connected by sunken lanes.
- 2.72 The settlement of Reading borders parts of this landscape type, and the character assessment text states that Reading would once have had the character of the Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes.
- 2.73 Forestry and woodland is identified as a significant land use, and there are large blocks of woodland present throughout the Landscape Character Type, including mixed woodland, conifer plantations and deciduous woodlands. There are also large parkland areas and ornamental planting on the valley edges.
- 2.74 The Character Assessment notes that the "*wooded context created by ridge and hill top woodlands and wooded slopes and valleys*" is a feature of key significance within the Landscape Type and that generally the condition of the landscape is good.
- 2.75 Landscape Character Area LCA N2: Sulham, is described in the Character Assessment as a "*small area around Tilehurst in which the landscape is influenced by the adjoining area of Reading*" and that the residential estates located on the outskirts of Reading affect the character of the area. The Character Assessment text further describes the wooded context of the upper slopes and plateau, and states that this woodland is "*important in integrating Reading into its landscape context*".
- 2.76 The Landscape Strategy section of the Character Assessment is to conserve this landscape, with particular emphasis on the conservation of the mixed woodland horizons and slopes, and the retention of the traditional settlement pattern and form.
- 2.77 The Landscape Management objectives, relevant to the Site, include:
- ***Conserve the character of the wooded skylines***
  - ***Ensure that new woodland planting follows the existing pattern of wooded ridges, wooded steep slopes and wooded dry valleys***
  - ***Ensure that new woodland boundaries are sensitive to landform***

- ***Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements, seek to prevent further loss or decline of boundary hedgerows, and undertake selective replanting of hedgerows in denuded arable landscapes***
- ***Conserve the rural character of the road network***

2.78 The Landscape Character Assessment states that the condition of LCA N2 Sulham is declining, and that the restoration and enhancement of key features such as boundary woodland, hedgerows, and copses are identified as important for the future conservation and enhancement of the area, and to strengthen the character of the area.

Landscape Sensitivity Study: West Reading (April 2009)

2.79 The West Reading Landscape Sensitivity Study was commissioned by West Berkshire Council for the purpose of identifying strategic development sites for the West Berkshire Planning Strategy, which would shape future development to build upon the existing settlement pattern, without having significant effects upon the character of the area. The Study focusses on the urban fringe areas and provides an assessment of the sensitivity of the landscapes around the main towns.

2.80 The Site lies within Local Landscape Character Area LLCA13E Little Heath Gravel Plateau, which has an overall sensitivity of medium to low. The sensitivity study states that views within the LLCA13E Little Heath Gravel Plateau are generally contained by the adjacent woodland in LLCA14I Purley Plateau Edge and LLCA14J Tilehurst Plateau Edge, and that the character area is influenced by its close proximity to Little Heath, which has resulted in fragmentation and domestic land uses.

2.81 The Little Heath Gravel Plateau is described as having a distinct landscape pattern which differs from the wider plateau and escarpment landscape and is characterised by a pattern of small pasture fields, copses and mixed types of development along the plateau top at the western edge of Tilehurst.

2.82 The key elements of landscape sensitivity are described as:

- ***“Pattern of small fields of pasture with copses***
- ***Hedgerows and lines of trees***
- ***Listed Late 16<sup>th</sup> Century farmhouse at Hall Place, and 17<sup>th</sup> century Kiln Cottage***
- ***Good public access***

- *Value of woodland habitat links with adjacent woodlands in LLCA14I and 14J*

2.83 And other landscape sensitivity interests are identified as:

- *“Plateau top to escarpment*
- *Scattered mixed development broken up by small open areas*
- *Good level of visual enclosure*
- *Mostly low to medium historic landscape sensitivity*
- *Recreational provision*
- *Medium to low biodiversity”*

#### *Topography and Hydrology*

2.84 The River Pang flows through the landscape to the west of the Site, and the River Thames flows through the landscape and townscape of Reading to the north and east of the Site. The wider valley landscape is characterised by the presence of the meandering watercourses and numerous waterbodies. The valley floor landscape is intimate and contained by the undulating landscape and intervening tree belts. **Figure 4: Topographical Features Plan** illustrates the local land form.

2.85 The sloping valley sides to the west of the Site at Sulham and Tidmarsh, and to the north east at Mapledurham, illustrate the difference in the change in character from the intimate valley floor, to the valley sides, and to the plateau at the higher levels.

2.86 The Site is located within the wooded plateau at the top of the sloping valley sides, at approximately 95m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), and is generally flat.

#### *Vegetation*

2.87 The Little Heath Gravel Plateau is enclosed and contained by extensive strong woodland blocks and copses, that separate the plateau landscape from the sloping valley sides and valley floor to the west and north west: and provide the context of a small scale and intimate landscape.

2.88 There are substantial areas of Ancient Woodland within the wider context of the study area; with Clay Copse on the northern boundary of the Site being Ancient Woodland. Other areas of Ancient Woodland are located 350m to the west of the Site at Sulham Wood; 230m to the west at Beals Plantation; and 175m to the south west of the Site at Pinks



Grove and Pinkclose Plantation. Vicarage Wood Ancient Woodland is located 370m to the north of the Site, and Cornwell Copse Ancient Woodland is located to the immediate the north east of the Site, separate from the site by Sulham Hill.

- 2.89 The landscape within the vicinity of the Site generally has a settled wooded context with extensive areas of woodland and copses enclosing the landscape, and tall hedgerows bounding the small to medium scale fields, and creating varying degrees of enclosure.
- 2.90 The Site comprises an irregular parcel of land enclosed by tall hedges and forming strong field boundaries, although there are areas of fragmentation and loss within these boundary features.

#### *Land Use and Settlement*

- 2.91 The settlement of Tilehurst surrounds the Site to the north, east and south; and comprises residential development of varying size and scale, with the Site being located within a parcel of land between residential development to the east and south.
- 2.92 Although the Site is partially formed by grazed paddocks, the character of the Site is fragmented and disturbed by a variety of features such as the existing built form within the Site, and the adjacent residential development at Little Heath, The Ridings and Chapel Hill. These elements combine to create a developed context to the Site and its immediate surroundings.
- 2.93 There are scattered settlements within the wider landscape at Purley-on-Thames, Pangbourne, and Whitchurch-on-Thames to the north of the Site, Tidmarsh and Sulham to the west of the Site, and the extensive urban edge of Reading immediately to the east and south of the Site formed by the neighbourhoods of Tilehurst, Calcot and Norcot.
- 2.94 The landscape pattern is formed by small regular sized fields at the edge of Tilehurst, enclosed by woodland at Clay Copse, Sulham Wood, Pinks Grove and Boxgrove Wood, beyond which, to the north and west, the agricultural land slopes down to the valley floor associated with the River Pang. Contained within the woodland belt that separates Tilehurst from the countryside beyond, there are several residential properties to the north side of Little Heath Road; Kiln Cottage is located 110m to the west of the Site, Kiln Corner, and Brambleways approximately 90m to the south west of the Site, and Beal's Cottage approximately 370m to the further south west.

- 2.95 Within the sloping valley sides, there are several farms and cottages scattered within the valley floor. The Mud House lies 340m to the north of the Site, and Stoneham's Farm lies approximately 630m to the further north of the Site beyond Vicarage Wood. Sulham House lies approximately 1km to the west of the Site, and Coltmoor Cottages are located approximately 960m to the south west of the Site.
- 2.96 The Ridings, the consented residential development of 35 dwellings at Sulham Hill, is located at an elevated position immediately to the east of the Site, adjoining the settlement boundary of Tilehurst.

### **Designations**

- 2.97 The Site is located within the easternmost extent of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- 2.98 The North Wessex Downs AONB is described as extending from the western tip at Calne in Wiltshire, reaching across the southwest and southeast of England in a broad arc through Swindon, Berkshire and Oxfordshire. They lie next to the Chilterns AONB along the River Thames, before sweeping south, encircling Newbury, to encompass the northern reaches of the rolling chalk hills of the Hampshire Downs. They then reach back towards Devizes, across the high chalk upland of Salisbury Plain and the low-lying Vale of Pewsey. The area is noted as the third largest AONB in the country, covering 1730 sq km, or 668 sq miles.
- 2.99 The Site therefore forms a very small part of the North Wessex Downs AONB, on the very eastern most extent of the AONB, where it adjoins the western edge of Reading.

### *Listed Buildings*

- 2.100 Hall Place Farmhouse, within the eastern part of the Site, is Grade II Listed. Kiln Cottage, also Grade II Listed, is approximately 100m to the south west of the site.

### *Public Rights of Way*

- 2.101 No Public Rights of Way (PROW) cross the Site. There is a network of public rights of way throughout the valley sides and extending into the valley floor, which are generally contained by vegetation. The network is generally well connected.

- 2.102 PROW TILE/8/1 lies adjacent to the western boundary of the Site, separated from the Site by a tall and dense hedgerow, and connects Little Heath Road with the countryside to the north west of the Site, providing a link to Sulham and Tidmarsh. The footpath runs through an agricultural field which is enclosed by strong woodland which obscures and contains views to the wider area.
- 2.103 To the south of the Site, PROW TILE/9/1 and TILE10/1 run from westward from Little Heath Road, connecting with Beals Copse and Boxgrove Wood, and beyond to Sulham in the west. The footpaths are enclosed by tall and dense vegetation and views are largely contained.
- 2.104 To the west, beyond the extensive tract of Sulham Wood, there are several PROW that run along the valley floor and are similarly contained by woodland and linear vegetation forming field boundaries.

### **Site Appraisal**

- 2.105 The Site is located within the settled wooded plateau landscape of Little Heath, at the edge of, and immediately adjoining the settlement boundary of, Tilehurst, which forms the settled edge of Reading. The Site relates strongly to, and is set within, the settlement edge of Tilehurst. The existing settlement of Tilehurst adjoins the Site on its eastern and southern boundaries, with recently constructed residential development at The Ridings to the immediate east of the Site, and the residential area of Little Heath to the immediate south and south-east of the Site.
- 2.106 Part of the Site is developed, comprising an existing equestrian centre with associated barns, stables, shop, car parking, and all-weather ménage and arenas, and associated lighting; and an existing residential property, Hall Place Farmhouse, within its eastern part. The western and northern parts comprise relatively level grazed paddocks.
- 2.107 The Site is enclosed by substantial vegetation along the northern, western and southern boundaries, which visually and physically separates the Site from the wider North Wessex Downs AONB landscape to the north and west of the Site.
- 2.108 The context of the Site is therefore heavily influenced by the existing surrounding development of Tilehurst which lies to the north east, east, south east, south, and south west of the Site; and the Site and its immediate surroundings are, therefore, settled in character.

### 3.0 VISUAL APPRAISAL

- 3.1 A visual appraisal of the Site was undertaken in July 2018 to illustrate the visual context of the Site, and to demonstrate the nature of the views towards the Site from publicly accessible viewpoints including roads, Public Rights of Way, and other relevant public areas.

#### Baseline Appraisal

- 3.2 The Site is enclosed and contained by dense woodland along the northern and north western boundaries, and by tall robust hedgerows along the western and southern boundaries; and is set within the wooded slopes and gravel plateau, at the settlement edge of Tilehurst, on the western edge of Reading; therefore, there are limited locations from which the Site can be seen due to the screening provided.
- 3.3 There is a network of Public Rights of Way to the west and north of the Site; however, a high degree of woodland and vegetative cover within this area restricts visibility of the Site, in combination with the sloping topography of the valley sides.
- 3.4 A series of **Site Context Photographs 1-21** have been selected to provide a representation of the views available towards and around the Site. The location of **Site Context Photographs 1-21** are indicated on **Figure 5: Visual Appraisal Plan**.
- 3.5 **Site Context Photograph 1** is taken from Sulham Hill to the immediate east of the Site, at the existing access to the Equestrian Centre car park, looking west.
- 3.6 The existing farm buildings at Hall Place Farm, within the eastern part of the Site, are visible in the foreground of the view, along with the existing car parking area within the northern part of the Site, and floodlights associated with the outdoor arena in the middle distance to the west. The existing residential development on Little Heath Road to the south of the Site, and the consented and under construction development at The Ridings to the east of the Site, is visible being located immediately adjacent to Hall Place Farm.
- 3.7 The vegetation that bounds the Site to the north at Clay Copse obscures views to the wider landscape to the north and west, within the North Wessex Downs AONB; and restricts views of the sloping valley sides and more rural countryside to the immediate west of the Site, also within the AONB.
- 3.8 **Site Context Photograph 2** is taken from Sulham Hill at the entrance to the Equestrian Centre, looking west.

- 3.9 The Site is located in the foreground of the view being situated immediately adjacent to the Sulham Hill road. The existing barns and farm buildings that bound the Site along the eastern boundary dominate the view, and Hall Place Farmhouse is visible in the middle distance. Existing residential development on Little Heath Road to the south and at The Ridings to the east, sets the Site within the context of settlement fringe development at the edge of the settlement of Tileshurst.
- 3.10 The wider North Wessex Downs AONB landscape to the west of the Site is obscured from view by the existing built structures and intervening strong vegetation to the west and to the north of the Site.
- 3.11 **Site Context Photograph 3** is taken from the junction of Little Heath Road and Sulham Hill, at the south east corner of the Site, looking north west.
- 3.12 The view is dominated by the built form at Hall Place Farm in the foreground, being set within a strong framework of vegetation that forms the southern boundary of the Site. The existing residential development along Little Heath Road is visible to the south of the Site, and The Ridings is visible to the immediate east of the Site, beyond which there are glimpsed views of the vegetation associated with Clay Copse.
- 3.13 The linear vegetation that runs along the southern boundary of the Site, combined with the topography of the wooded slopes and gravel plateau, restricts and contains views to the farmed landscape to the west of the Site. There is no visibility into the majority of the Site from this location, which is largely obscured from view by the boundary vegetation; however, there would be glimpses into the Site, when the deciduous boundary vegetation was devoid of leaves in winter. The existing built structures obscure views into the Site, and beyond to the wider AONB to the north and west, setting the Site within the context of the settlement fringe landscape.
- 3.14 **Site Context Photograph 4** is taken from Little Heath Road, adjacent to the southern boundary of the Site, at the access to Hall Place Farmhouse, looking west.
- 3.15 The strong tall hedgerow that forms the southern boundary of the Site largely obscures views into the Site, which are glimpsed through the existing access to Hall Place Farmhouse, which would increase in winter. The existing residential development along Little Heath Road is visible to the south of the Site, and characterises the context of the settlement fringe environment.
- 3.16 **Site Context Photograph 5** is taken from further west along Little Heath Road, to the south of Hall Place Farmhouse, looking north.

- 3.17 The view is characterised by the residential development along Little Heath Road to the south of the Site, and the existing and developing residential development at Clements Mead and The Ridings to the east of the Site. The existing buildings at Hall Place Farm Equestrian Centre are glimpsed through a gap in the vegetation along the southern boundary of the Site, however generally, views of and into the Site are largely obscured by the existing vegetation, although there would be more open views into the Site in winter.
- 3.18 The view is of the settled residential fringe at the edge of Tilehurst, and there are no views of the wider North Wessex Downs AONB landscape to the north and west of the Site.
- 3.19 **Site Context Photograph 6** illustrates the view gained from Little Heath Road to the south of the Site, looking east.
- 3.20 The context of the settled residential fringe and residential development at Little Heath Road is evident and informs the view. The Site is not readily perceptible due to the screening provided by the tall, dense, linear vegetation along the southern boundary of the Site, in combination with the generally level topography; however, there would be greater views into the western part of the Site in winter.
- 3.21 **Site Context Photograph 7** is taken from PROW TILE/7/1, to the west of the Site, looking east, from within the North Wessex Downs AONB.
- 3.22 The Site is visible in the foreground of the view, contained by robust vegetation forming the northern and southern boundaries of the Site, and forming the majority of the western boundary of the Site. This viewpoint is located at the southern end of the PROW where the existing boundary vegetation is fragmented, and affords a framed view of Hall Place Farmhouse, the existing built form within the Hall Place Farm Equestrian Centre and associated floodlights, and a glimpsed view of the existing residential development and street lighting along Little Heath Road to the south of the Site, from a short length of the PROW, where the Site boundary is open. The consented development under construction at The Ridings to the immediate east of the Site on Sulham Hill, is glimpsed beyond and between the existing Hall Place buildings.
- 3.23 The backdrop of vegetation formed by Clay Copse to the north of the Site, and Sulham Woods to the north west, form wooded horizons and contain and obscure views towards the further north west and of the sloping valley sides of the Pang Valley, within the wider AONB.

- 3.24 **Site Context Photograph 8** is taken from further north on PROW TILE/7/1, within the AONB, at the north west corner of the Site, looking south.
- 3.25 The Site does not form a notable element within the view from this location, being set behind and within a framework of vegetation, which in combination with the generally level topography, restricts and obscures views into the Site. There is a small framed view into the Site through an existing gateway set within the vegetation along the western boundary of the Site, which affords a glimpsed view towards Hall Place Farmhouse; however, there would be greater views into the western part of the Site and across to the existing buildings on the eastern part of the Site, in winter. Kiln Cottage to the west of the Site is clearly visible set within a backdrop of vegetation.
- 3.26 **Site Context Photograph 9** is taken from the northern edge of Clay Copse on PROW TILE/7/1, from within the AONB, looking south east towards the Site.
- 3.27 This view illustrates the dense woodland to the immediate north of the Site and which obscures and contains the Site. There is no visibility of the Site from this part of the PROW, in both summer and winter, due to the depth and density of the woodland vegetation.
- 3.28 **Site Context Photograph 10** is taken from further north on PROW TILE/7/1, in the AONB, to the south of The Mud House, looking south.
- 3.29 The view is characterised by the dense woodland at Clay Copse, Beal's Plantation, and Sulham Wood, which form dense wooded horizons and encloses the farmed landscape. The Site is obscured from view, both in summer and winter, being located behind the dense woodland at Clay Copse, and is not visible from this location. Kiln Cottage to the west of the Site is glimpsed in the distance, and is framed by vegetation.
- 3.30 **Site Context Photograph 11** illustrates the view from PROW TILE/8/1 to the north of Sulham Wood, looking south east.
- 3.31 Views of the Site are not discernible, in summer or winter, due to the layered screening elements of dense woodland within the wooded slopes and gravel plateau landscape, formed by Clay Copse, Vicarage Wood, Beal's Plantation and Sulham Wood, combined with the gently undulating topography. Existing development on the settlement edge of Tilehurst is not visible due to the dense layers of woodland which contains and curtails views across the farmland landscape.
- 3.32 **Site Context Photograph 12** illustrates the view from Home Croft to the east of the Cornwell Recreation Ground within Tilehurst, looking west.

- 3.33 Within the settlement of Tilehurst, this view is characterised by the existing residential development at Home Croft and Clements Mead, and the new development at The Ridings to the east of the Site. The development under construction at The Ridings, and the Cornwell Centre building within the recreation ground, largely obscures the existing built form at Hall Place Farm from view.
- 3.34 There are glimpsed views of the existing boundary vegetation at Clay Copse, and the tall hedgerow forming the southern boundary of the Site, however the Site itself is not perceptible within the view from this location.
- 3.35 **Site Context Photograph 13** is taken from further west, within the Cornwell Recreation Ground, looking west.
- 3.36 Views of the Site are largely obscured by the residential development at The Ridings to the east of the Site, in combination with the generally level topography. The car parking area towards the north eastern edge of the Site is glimpsed beyond the boundary vegetation of the recreation ground, and the curved roof of the metal barn is glimpsed beyond the housing under construction, however the rest of the Site is not readily perceptible.
- 3.37 **Site Context Photograph 14** is taken from Sulham Hill, on the boundary of the AONB, to the north east of the Site, looking south towards Tilehurst.
- 3.38 This view is a framed view along the Sulham Hill road through a gap in the dense woodland present either side of the road, at Clay Copse and Cornwell Copse. There is a glimpsed view available of the existing barns at the eastern edge of the Site adjacent to Sulham Hill, in the centre of the view, which would be more visible in winter; however, the rest of the Site is obscured from view by the woodland of Clay Copse and the sloping landform of the valley sides.
- 3.39 **Site Context Photograph 15** illustrates the view from Chapel Hill at the junction with Clements Mead, looking west.
- 3.40 The context of the view is characterised by the existing residential development abutting Chapel Hill, and the consented development at The Ridings, currently under construction, which comprise the urban form of Tilehurst.
- 3.41 The existing built form within the Site is generally obscured from view by the combination of the gently sloping topography, and the layers of vegetation and built form in the intervening landscape. The vegetated southern boundary is visible being located adjacent to Little Heath Road.



- 3.42 **Site Context Photograph 16** is taken from PROW TILE/11/1 to the south of the Little Heath School within Tilehurst, looking north.
- 3.43 The view is set within the context of Little Heath, and is characterised by the existing residential development and the Little Heath School buildings and grounds. The flat topography, in combination with the intervening built form, obscures views towards the Site.
- 3.44 **Site Context Photograph 17** is taken from PROW TILE/10/1, within the AONB, to the west of Little Heath Road, looking north east.
- 3.45 The view is set within the context of the wooded slopes and gravel plateau landscape, amongst the dense linear vegetation and generally flat topography. Views are curtailed and contained by the existing dense woodland and vegetation within the plateau.
- 3.46 The layered vegetation and flat topography combine to obscure views of the Site itself from this location, in both summer and winter.
- 3.47 **Site Context Photograph 18** is taken from Little Heath Recreation Ground, within the AONB, to the south west of the Site, looking north.
- 3.48 This viewpoint illustrates the view from the recreation ground to the north of PROW TILE/12/1 which links Little Heath Road into Harefield Copse. The footpath itself is bounded by dense vegetation which restricts views towards the Site.
- 3.49 The view from the recreation ground is characterised by the flat landform of the Little Heath gravel plateau which is bounded and contained by the dense large blocks of woodland that form wooded horizons, and restrict longer distance views to the sloping valley sides beyond. The framework of vegetation contains views and obscures visibility of the Site from this location, in both summer and winter.
- 3.50 **Site Context Photograph 19** is taken from Chapel Hill between Hildens Drive and School Road, looking north west.
- 3.51 The context of the view is characterised by the residential development within Tilehurst situated on Chapel Hill, and the undulating landform which informs the strong character of the residential area of Tilehurst. From this location at the highest point of Chapel Hill, views of the Site are obscured by the intervening built form and associated garden vegetation, and there are no views into the AONB.

- 3.52 **Site Context Photograph 20** illustrates the view from Sandy Hill on PROW 292/14/20, within the Chilterns AONB, to the north east of the Site to the north of the River Thames, looking south west, across to the North Wessex Downs AONB.
- 3.53 The context of the settled farmland landscape of the Thames Valley is characterised by the sloping valley sides and the extensive woodland and vegetation. The built form of Reading is visible in the middle distance being located on the rising ground above the river Thames corridor, and framed by wooded horizons. The Site is indistinguishable in the view, being at a distance and obscured by built form and vegetation.
- 3.54 **Site Context Photograph 21** is taken from the junction of PROW TILE/5/2 and PROW TILE/6/2, within the North Wessex Downs AONB, to the north of the Site, and to the west of Long Lane, looking south.
- 3.55 This view is taken from within the wooded slopes and gravel plateau and illustrates the substantial dense woodland that obscures and contains views to the south. The Site is located beyond Vicarage Wood which obscures views of the Site from this location.

#### Visual Appraisal Baseline Summary

- 3.56 The Site lies to the immediate west and north of the settlement of Tilehurst, and comprises the existing built form of equestrian centre and related facilities, such as barns, stables, shop, car parking, and all-weather ménage and arenas, and associated lighting; and the residential dwelling Hall Place Farmhouse; with three grazed paddocks. The Site is enclosed by substantial vegetation to the north, west and south, and being immediately adjacent to the residential development at The Ridings to the east, and Little Heath to the south, and the wider settlement of Tilehurst to the south east.
- 3.57 From the limited number of locations, generally in close proximity to the Site, views towards and of the Site are set within the context of, and already influenced by, the existing surrounding development that forms the northern and western extents of Tilehurst.
- 3.58 Visibility into the Site is largely restricted to immediate close range views from the east and west. As a result of the combination of the generally flat topography of the Little Heath Gravel Plateau, and the existing vegetation that immediately surrounds the Site and that which is present in the surrounding area within the wooded slopes, the entirety of the Site is only seen from a short length of PROW TILE/8/1 to the west of the Site, where there is a gap in the boundary vegetation of the Site, as illustrated by **Site Context Photograph 7**.

- 3.59 Glimpses of the Site are not readily obtained from the wider surrounding area and from the surrounding North Wessex Downs AONB, or Chilterns AONB landscapes, with the majority of views into and of the Site limited and contained by intervening layered vegetation combined with the flat topography of the plateau, and by the sloping, wooded, valley sides.
- 3.60 From the PROW network to the north and west of the Site, within the North Wessex Downs AONB, views are contained by the substantial tall and dense woodland and lines of trees that form strong field boundaries and shelter belts, which combined with the gently undulating topography, contain views to the immediate field boundaries.
- 3.61 There are no elevated views towards the Site from the valley slopes at Mapledurham to the north east due to the limited locations where an open view can be obtained, due mainly to the combination of the gently sloping topography and the barriers to views created by vegetation and built form.
- 3.62 From the elevated areas in the western part of the surrounding area around Little Heath to the south west, the layers of vegetation and characteristic roadside hedges combine to restrict views across the landscape.
- 3.63 To the south west of the Site, towards Chapel Hill and the wider extent of Reading, there is limited intervisibility between these areas and the Site, due to the combination of extensive existing built form and the sloping topography of the valley sides.
- 3.64 Most of the views in and around the Pang River Valley floor to the west of the Site are characterised by linear vegetation lining roads and fields and containing views. Long views are infrequent and are limited by the combination of existing vegetation and woodland, and flat topography.

## 4.0 DESIGN CONSIDERATION AND LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

4.1 Following the landscape and visual appraisal of the Site, the following Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints for the development on the Site, as illustrated on **Figure 6: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan**, have been identified:

### Site Opportunities and Constraints

#### Opportunities

4.2 Opportunities for development within the Site include:

- The Site contains existing built form at the Hall Place Farm Equestrian Centre, comprising barns, stables, car parking areas and a ménage;
- The Site contains existing residential development at Hall Place Farmhouse;
- The Site relates well to adjacent residential development on the northern and western edges of Tilehurst;
- The Site is contained by dense boundary vegetation, which physically and visually separates the Site from the wider countryside and North Wessex Downs AONB; and
- The established vegetation on the boundaries of the Site offers visual screening and makes a strong contribution to Green Infrastructure.

#### Constraints

4.3 Constraints to development within the Site include:

- The Site lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- A Public Right of Way PROW TILE/7/1 lies outside the Site but immediately adjacent to the western boundary; and
- Hall Place Farmhouse, within the Site, is a Grade II Listed Building.

4.4 In considering the Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints, it is considered that the Site provides the opportunity to sensitively accommodate residential development, reflecting the distribution of existing and consented residential development on the western edge of Tilehurst, at Little Heath, The Ridings, and Chapel Hill; containing settlement within a well-wooded context related to the existing settlement edge, as is characteristic of the North Wessex Downs LCT8: Lowland Mosaic, and within that, LCA8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons; the Berkshire LCT N: Elevated Wooded Chalk and the LCA

N2: Sulham; and the West of Reading Local Landscape Character Area LLCA13E: Little Heath Gravel Plateau.

- 4.5 Development would be set within a Landscape Framework, based on the existing retained boundary vegetation, and supplemented and enhanced with reference to the guidance in the relevant landscape character assessment. This would contribute to a comprehensive network of Green Infrastructure and multi functionals spaces; and would provide links with the existing PROW network to the north and west of the Site; and assist in strengthening the western settlement edge of Tilehurst.
- 4.6 Development within the Site would be contained within the robust existing and enhanced boundary vegetation and would form a strong relationship to recent development and consented development at the edge of the settlement; and would form an appropriate robust and defensible extension to the settlement of Tilehurst, on the edge of Reading. Whilst not outside the North Wessex AONB, being on the very eastern edge of the AONB, and adjoining Reading, residential development in this location would broadly reflect the approach promoted in the North Wessex Downs Position Statement on Housing; and would be in a location where the AONB is already characterised by settlement.

#### Potential Visual Effects

- 4.7 The Site comprises an existing residential property, Hall Place Farmhouse, an existing equestrian centre, existing barns and stables, an all-weather ménage and arena with lighting, car parking areas, and areas of paddocks set within a strong landscape framework of vegetation including hedgerows and woodland. The immediate context of views close to the Site are of the settled residential fringe of Tilehurst, characterised by existing residential areas at Little Heath, Chapel Hill, Clements Mead, and The Ridings. Strong linear vegetation is evident along roads and forming field boundaries at the edge of the settlement; containing long distance views.
- 4.8 Within the Little Heath Gravel Plateau and the wooded slopes, the presence of significant vegetation around the Site boundaries, the intervening built form of Tilehurst, and the relatively level topography of the plateau, generally combine to restrict and obscure visibility into the Site.
- 4.9 Open views into of proposed development would be limited to a very short length of PROW TILE/7/1, from the very eastern extent of the AONB, where the PROW runs immediately adjoining the western boundary of the Site, where there is a gap in the boundary vegetation. Views of proposed development would replace views of the existing development on the Site, seen across the paddocks in the western part of the Site.

However, views of proposed development could be readily mitigated through the reinstatement of the boundary vegetation, through hedge and tree planting, to screen views of the proposed development.

- 4.10 From Tilehurst to the east and south, high levels of built form and a combination of undulating topography and layered vegetation restricts views towards the proposed development. The new development at The Ridings immediately to the east of the Site, obscures the Site and existing built form from view in views from Chapel Hill, The Ridings being located on rising ground and screening proposed development within the Site from view.
- 4.11 From the network of Public Rights of Way to the west of the Site, within the AONB, substantial tall and dense hedgerows and lines of trees form strong field boundaries, which contain and shorten views in combination with the generally flat topography of the Little Heath Plateau; as a result, there are limited locations from which the proposed development would be visible. The proposed supplementary boundary landscaping along the western edge of the Site would further reduce and filter visibility of the proposed development throughout the year, where visible.
- 4.12 From the sloping valley sides to the north and west of the Site, the strong layers of vegetation and gently sloping topography continue to combine to restrict and obscure views of the Site and limit views of proposed development.
- 4.13 From the scarp slopes associated with Mapledurham and the Chilterns AONB to the north and north east of the Site, there is no intervisibility with the Site or to proposed development, even during the winter, due to the screening elements of the existing built form, extensive woodland, linear vegetation, shelter belts and copses, and the robust framework of vegetation surrounding the Site.
- 4.14 Therefore, overall, there are very limited locations where the entirety of proposed development on the Site would be seen from within the surrounding area, and wider North Wessex Downs AONB, due to the density and massing of the tall vegetation and woodland within the wider area which surrounds and contains the Site throughout the year, even in the winter.

#### Potential Landscape Effects

- 4.15 The Site is located in the nationally designated North Wessex Downs AONB. However, it is located on the very eastern edge of the North Wessex Downs AONB, immediately adjoining, and influenced by, the settlement of Reading, and in a landscape character type

which is recognised as being densely settled with a rising population due to the proximity and accessibility to Reading. Unlike other areas of the AONB, the Site does not exhibit a sense of remoteness or tranquillity, and being light, there is a reduced appreciation of dark skies. Therefore, whilst located within the North Wessex Downs AONB, which is of high landscape value, the Site is of medium value.

- 4.16 Again, the interconnected woodland blocks and strong hedgerow surrounding the Site, which are characteristic of the immediately surrounding landscape, in combination with the topography of the level plateau and the sloping valley sides, restrict views and create an enclosed character to the Site, and physically and visually separate it from the countryside, and the wider North Wessex Downs AONB, to the west.
- 4.17 The susceptibility of the Site, which is in part previously developed, to accommodate change is considered to be low, as the proposal would replace one type of built development, that of an existing Equestrian Centre comprising barns, stables and car parking, and ménage, and an existing residential dwelling, to that of another, that is an area containing residential development and associated landscaping and open space, which would be contained within a high level of physical and visual enclosure. A medium value and a low susceptibility combine to give a medium-low sensitivity to change. This correlates with the findings of the West of Reading Landscape Sensitivity Study, which identified that the Local Landscape Character Area LLCA13E: Little Heath Gravel Plateau, in which the Site is located, had an overall medium to low sensitivity to accommodate residential development.
- 4.18 The proposed development would result in the loss of the grazed paddocks limited to within the Site itself; however, the existing boundary vegetation would be retained and enhanced, with a buffer provided to the Ancient Woodland on the northern boundary of the Site, to create a strong landscape framework within which to accommodate the proposed development.
- 4.19 Additional infill planting within the western boundary of the Site provides the opportunity to improve and enhance the vegetated framework along the PROW TILE/7/1; and reinforce the physical and visual enclosure surrounding to the Site.
- 4.20 Hall Place Farmhouse would be retained within the proposed development, along with its immediate grounds, which would be enhanced by the removal of the all-weather ménage and arena, providing an improved setting to the listed building. Several existing red brick barns would also be retained and incorporated into the development.

- 4.21 Considering the physically and visually contained nature of the Site; that the Site is not currently undeveloped; that there would be no significant loss of boundary vegetation; and changes arising from the proposed development would not be uncharacteristic for the locality, and would be largely contained within the Site; whilst there would be a medium magnitude of change on the Site, there would be a negligible change to the wider landscape, of negligible adverse significance.
- 4.22 The proposed development would therefore be successfully accommodated within the Site, being set within a strong landscape framework, based on the existing retained boundary vegetation, and supplemented and enhanced with reference to the guidance in the relevant landscape character assessments.

### **Response to Landscape Character**

- 4.23 The Site relates strongly to, and is set within, the settlement edge of Tilehurst. The existing settlement of Tilehurst, as defined by the Settlement Boundary, adjoins the Site on its eastern and southern boundaries, with recently constructed residential development at The Ridings to the immediate east of the Site, and residential development at Little Heath, located to the immediate south and south west of the Site. The context of the Site is therefore heavily influenced by the existing surrounding development of Tilehurst which lies to the north east, east, south east, south, and south west of the Site. The Site and its immediate surroundings are, therefore, settled in character.
- 4.24 The Site lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and there is limited intervisibility with the AONB landscape to the west of the Site due to the substantial vegetation that encloses the Site to the north and west, and visually and physically separates the Site from the countryside beyond. Within the North Wessex Downs AONB, the Site lies within the 'Hermitage Wooded Commons' character area, for which the overall landscape strategy is to conserve and enhance the enclosed character of the landscape, and to restore the hedgerow network to enhance the landscape.
- 4.25 Within the Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, and the West Reading Sensitivity Study, the Site lies within the character area 'N Elevated Wooded Chalk Slopes', and within the 'Little Heath Gravel Plateau', which forms the western settlement edge of Tilehurst and Reading. The key characteristics of the LCT N Elevated Wooded Chalk Slopes and LCA N2 Sulham, as described in the Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, would be retained and would be unaffected by the proposed development. There is an opportunity to "conserve and restore" the hedgerows and copses through additional planting to the western and eastern boundaries of the Site, and individual tree planting within the Site, in accordance with the strategy for the future change to the Elevated Wooded Chalk



Slopes; and would reflect the overall Landscape Strategy for the LCAs which is to conserve the mixed woodland horizons and slopes, and retain the traditional settlement pattern and form, and the sunken lanes, which are characteristic of the area immediately surrounding the Site.

- 4.26 Additional hedgerow planting along the eastern boundary of the Site is proposed to enhance the character of Sulham Hill, which is in keeping with the aspirations of the Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment to retain and enhance the character of the sunken lanes. The proposed boundary planting would also enhance the character of the wooded slopes and would integrate the edge of Tilehurst into the adjacent landscape context.
- 4.27 The proposed development would create a positive landscape character and sense of place to the Site through additional planting which would strengthen the Site boundaries, increase the amount of woodland and hedgerow present; and improve and enhance connectivity with the existing vegetative framework, which is in line with the aspirations of the Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment.
- 4.28 The Site is generally well contained by dense and tall hedgerows and woodland blocks, although there are small areas of fragmentation and loss within the western boundary of the Site, and the eastern boundary is largely open. The Landscape Strategy for development of the Site would reflect the land management objectives set out within the Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment for character area N: Elevated Wooded Chalk Slopes, and within the West Reading Sensitivity Study Character Area Little Heath Gravel Plateau.
- 4.29 The landscape strategy for the development of the Site is to create a stronger landscape structure within the edge of Tilehurst, and to respect the character of the Elevated Wooded Chalk Slopes, through the restoration of hedgerows and field boundaries to help the existing and proposed development at the edge of Tilehurst integrate into the landscape, and to retain and enhance the wooded horizons.
- 4.30 The character of the North Wessex Downs AONB to the west of the Site would be respected by enhancing the strong western boundary of the Site to form a robust edge to the settlement of Tilehurst, and increase the physical and visual enclosure, and thus separation between the AONB landscape to the west, and the settled developed edge of Reading to the east.

### Response to Landscape Policy

- 4.31 The design considerations identified in **Figure 6: Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan**, would enable development to positively integrate into the landscape character of the area without affecting landscape character or important local features, in line with the West Berkshire Core Strategy Area Delivery Plan Policy Area 5: North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), with regard to the criteria that *"Development will respond positively to the local context, and respect identified landscape features and components of natural beauty."*
- 4.32 Additionally, the retention and enhancement of existing vegetation, supplemented with a comprehensive Landscape Framework and Green Infrastructure Strategy on the Site, would comply with Policy CS18 Green Infrastructure, through the proposals to create 'multifunctional green spaces' within a robust landscape framework.
- 4.33 The Landscape Strategy for the Site would also comply with Policy CS19 Historic Environment and Landscape Character, through responding to the distinctive wooded slopes and plateau context, by retaining and enhancing the Site boundary vegetation, and creating a robust edge to the settlement of Tilehurst; and by retaining Hall Place Farmhouse, in an improved setting.
- 4.34 There is also the opportunity to respond positively to the policies for Landscape, as set out in the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan, by responding to and reflecting the existing characteristics of the LCA8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons; and taking account of the relevant management objectives. There is also the opportunity to respond to the policies for development; having had regard for potential landscape and visual impact from the outset; and through adopting a high standard of design, providing comprehensive landscaping and enhancing Green Infrastructure, and making reference to traditional building styles; and respecting the settlement pattern and distinctive character of the North Wessex Downs AONB.
- 4.35 The proposed development would therefore be successfully accommodated within the Site, being set within a strong landscape framework, based on the existing retained boundary vegetation, and supplemented and enhanced with reference, to the guidance in the relevant landscape character assessments, and in accordance with landscape policy.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

- 5.1 Barton Willmore Landscape Planning and Design (BWLPD) were commissioned in July 2018 by The Sulham Estate to undertake a landscape and visual appraisal of land at Hall Place Farm in Tilehurst, in West Berkshire to support its promotion for residential development, of up to 80 dwellings and the conversion and refurbishment of existing buildings into small workshop units and a farm shop with associated open space and landscaping.
- 5.2 The Site is located on the western edge of Tilehurst, directly to the north of Little Heath Road and to the west of Sulham Hill, outwith but adjoining the settlement boundary of Reading. The Site is set to the immediate north of Little Heath residential area, and to the immediate west of The Ridings residential area. The wider settlement of Reading lies to the east and south of the Site and the existing residential development characterises the settled fringe context that encompasses the Site and the surrounding area.
- 5.3 There is a high degree of enclosure by large woodland and copses and dense linear vegetation which contains views across the landscape to the west, and by the dense roadside vegetation, which sets the Site within a small scale and enclosed character. The settlement of Tilehurst characterises the settled residential fringe landscape and comprises a developed context to the immediate east and south of the Site.
- 5.4 Clay Copse woodland to the north and north west of the Site is a substantial area of woodland which physically and visually contains the Site, and the settlement edge of Tilehurst, and provides separation between the settled residential area and the wider North Wessex Downs AONB to the north west.
- 5.5 The North Wessex Downs AONB landscape to the north and west of the Site has a well wooded context with a diverse range of settlements linked by narrow rural lanes, set within an undulating valley side landscape. There are large areas of woodland, linear vegetation and copses which enclose the landscape and contain and obscure views.
- 5.6 The Site comprises an existing equestrian centre with associated barns, stables, shop, car parking, and all-weather ménage and arenas, and associated lighting, within the eastern part; and relatively level grazed paddocks to the western and northern parts. There is one existing residential property within the Site at Hall Place Farmhouse, which is Grade II Listed.
- 5.7 The Site is located at the edge of the settlement of Tilehurst and is set within a wooded context. The existing red brick barns within the Site lie adjacent to the Sulham Hill road and form characteristic built elements of the settlement surrounding the Site.

- 5.8 The Site is enclosed by substantial vegetation along and within the Site boundaries to the north, west and southern extents, and the immediate adjacent townscape has a settled context with residential development set along local roads at Little Heath Road, Sulham Hill, and Chapel Hill, within the Tilehurst area of Reading. The existing built form within the Site forms part of the settled fringe context of Tilehurst.
- 5.9 The Site is located within the easternmost extent of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and has an intimate and enclosed character, with a strong wooded character. The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Landscape Character Assessment describes the Site and immediate area as lying within the Landscape Character Type LCT8: Lowland Mosaic, and being a *"diverse and complex landscape"* with a *"strong woodland character"* and is *"well settled"*.
- 5.10 Within LCT 8: Lowland Mosaic, the Site is located within LCA8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons, which is described as having the key characteristics of *"large, inter-connected woodland blocks and strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees, [which] restrict views and create a very enclosed landscape"*; *"low, wooded horizons"*; and *"numerous woodlands of ancient origin"* as being a distinctive element. The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the character of the Hermitage Wooded Commons through the conservation and enhancement of ancient and semi-natural woodlands, field patterns and hedgerows, and the rural lane network. Opportunities are identified to restore the hedgerow network to enhance the landscape, and that the pattern of settlement should be maintained.
- 5.11 The Site lies within the Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Character Type (LCT) N: Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes, which is described as a distinctive chalk-based landscape which includes areas of steep incised slopes and significant areas of woodland, with the landscape being influenced by adjoining urban areas, including the town of Reading. The area is *"characterised by the presence of woodlands"* and being a *"diverse landscape type with a mixed land use pattern."* The wooded context and the rolling and undulating landform, combined with the variety of settlement patterns, creates a diverse and variable area, enclosed by woodland and connected by sunken lanes. The Character Assessment notes that the *"wooded context created by ridge and hill top woodlands and wooded slopes and valleys"* is a feature of key significance within the Landscape Type.

- 5.12 Landscape Character Area **LCA N2: Sulham**, a sub area of the Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes, is described in the Character Assessment as a "*small area around Tilehurst in which the landscape is influenced by the adjoining area of Reading*" and that the residential estates located on the outskirts of Reading affect the character of the area. The Character Assessment further describes the wooded context of the upper slopes and plateau, and states that this woodland is "*important in integrating Reading into its landscape context*".
- 5.13 The West Reading Landscape Sensitivity Study was commissioned by West Berkshire Council for the purpose of identifying strategic development sites for the West Berkshire Planning Strategy, which would shape future development to build upon the existing settlement pattern, without having significant effects upon the character of the area. The Study focusses on the urban fringe areas and provides an assessment of the sensitivity of the landscapes around the main towns. The Site lies within Local Landscape Character Area LLCA13E, Little Heath Gravel Plateau, which has an overall sensitivity of medium to low; with views within the Little Heath Gravel Plateau generally contained by the adjacent woodland in the adjoining LLCAs; and with the character area being influenced by its close proximity to Little Heath, which has resulted in fragmentation and domestic land uses.
- 5.14 The Little Heath Gravel Plateau is described as having a distinct landscape pattern which differs from the wider plateau and escarpment landscape and is characterised by a pattern of small pasture fields, copses and mixed types of development along the plateau top at the western edge of Tilehurst.
- 5.15 Therefore, the landscape within the vicinity of the Site generally has a settled wooded context with extensive areas of woodland and copses enclosing the landscape, and tall hedgerows bounding the small to medium scale fields, and creating varying degrees of enclosure.
- 5.16 The Site relates strongly to, and is set within, the settlement edge of Tilehurst and the western edge of Reading. The existing settlement of Tilehurst adjoins the Site on its eastern and southern boundaries, with recently constructed residential development at The Ridings to the immediate east of the Site, and the residential area of Little Heath to the immediate south and south-east of the Site. The context of the Site is therefore heavily influenced by the existing surrounding development of Tilehurst which lies to the north east, east, south east, south, and south west of the Site. The Site and its immediate surroundings are, therefore, settled in character.

- 5.17 The Site is enclosed and contained by dense woodland along the northern and north western boundaries, and by tall robust hedgerows along the western and southern boundaries, and is set within the wooded slopes and gravel plateau, at the urban edge of Tilehurst; therefore, there are limited locations from which the Site can be seen due to the screening provided.
- 5.18 From the limited number of locations, generally in close proximity to the Site, views towards and of the Site are set within the context of, and already influenced by, the existing surrounding development that forms the northern and western extents of Tilehurst.
- 5.19 Overall, there are very limited locations where the entirety of the proposed development would be seen from within the Study Area, due to the density and massing of the tall vegetation and woodland that is present throughout the surrounding area and that which surrounds and contains the Site throughout the year, even in the winter.
- 5.20 The proposed development would result in the loss of the grazed paddocks limited to within the Site itself; however, the existing boundary vegetation would be retained and enhanced, with a buffer provided to the Ancient Woodland on the northern boundary of the Site, to create a strong landscape framework within which to accommodate the proposed development.
- 5.21 Additional infill planting within the western boundary of the Site provides the opportunity to improve and enhance the vegetated framework along the PROW TILE/7/1; and reinforce the physical and visual enclosure surrounding to the Site.
- 5.22 Hall Place Farmhouse would be retained within the proposed development, along with its immediate grounds, which would be enhanced by the removal of the all-weather ménage and arena, providing an improved setting to the listed building. Several existing red brick barns would also be retained and incorporated into the development.
- 5.23 Considering the physically and visually contained nature of the Site; that the Site is not currently undeveloped; that there would be no significant loss of boundary vegetation; and changes arising from the proposed development would not be uncharacteristic for the locality, and would be largely contained within the Site; whilst there would be a medium magnitude of change on the Site, there would be a negligible change to the wider landscape, of negligible adverse significance.

- 5.24 The Site provides the opportunity to sensitively accommodate residential development, reflecting the distribution of existing and consented residential development on the western edge of Tilehurst, at Little Heath, The Ridings, and Chapel Hill; containing settlement within a well-wooded context related to the existing settlement edge, as is characteristic of the North Wessex Downs LCT8: Lowland Mosaic, and within that, LCA8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons; the Berkshire LCT N: Elevated Wooded Chalk and the LCA N2: Sulham; and the West of Reading Local Landscape Character Area LLCA13E: Little Heath Gravel Plateau.
- 5.25 Development would be set within a Landscape Framework, based on the existing retained boundary vegetation, and supplemented and enhanced with reference to the guidance in the relevant landscape character assessment. This would contribute to a comprehensive network of Green Infrastructure and multi functionals spaces; and would provide links with the existing PROW network to the north and west of the Site; and assist in strengthening the western settlement edge of Tilehurst.
- 5.26 Development within the Site would be contained within the robust existing and enhanced boundary vegetation and would form a strong relationship to recent development and consented development at the edge of the settlement; and would form an appropriate robust and defensible extension to the settlement of Tilehurst, on the edge of Reading. Whilst not outside the North Wessex AONB, being on the very eastern edge of the AONB, and adjoining Reading, residential development in this location would broadly reflect the approach promoted in the North Wessex Downs Position Statement on Housing; and would be in a location where the AONB is already characterised by settlement.
- 5.27 The Site also responds positively to the overall landscape strategy for LCA 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons in terms of conserving and enhancing the enclosed character of the landscape, and restoring the hedgerow network to enhance the landscape.
- 5.28 The key characteristics of the LCT N Elevated Wooded Chalk Slopes and LCA N2 Sulham, as described in the Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, would be retained and would be unaffected by the proposed development. There is an opportunity to “conserve and restore” the hedgerows and copses through additional planting to the western and eastern boundaries of the Site, and individual tree planting within the Site, in accordance with the strategy for the future change to the Elevated Wooded Chalk Slopes; and would reflect the overall Landscape Strategy for the LCAs which is to conserve the mixed woodland horizons and slopes, and retain the traditional settlement pattern and form, and the sunken lanes, which are characteristic of the area immediately surrounding the Site.

- 5.29 The proposed development would create a positive landscape character and sense of place to the Site through additional planting which would strengthen the Site boundaries, increase the amount of woodland and hedgerow present; and improve and enhance connectivity with the existing vegetative framework, which is in line with the aspirations of the Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment.
- 5.30 The character of the North Wessex Downs AONB to the west of the Site would be respected by enhancing the strong western boundary of the Site to form a robust edge to the settlement of Tilehurst, and increase the physical and visual enclosure, and thus separation between the AONB landscape to the west, and the settled developed edge of Reading to the east.
- 5.31 The proposed development would also positively integrate into the landscape character of the area without affecting landscape character or important local features, in line with the West Berkshire Core Strategy Area Delivery Plan Policy Area 5: North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), with regard to the criteria that "*Development will respond positively to the local context, and respect identified landscape features and components of natural beauty.*"
- 5.32 Additionally, the proposed development would comply with both Policy CS18 Green Infrastructure, through the proposals to create 'multifunctional green spaces' within a robust landscape framework; and Policy CS19 Historic Environment and Landscape Character, through responding to the distinctive wooded slopes and plateau context, by retaining and enhancing the Site boundary vegetation, and creating a robust edge to the settlement of Tilehurst; and by retaining Hall Place Farmhouse, in an improved setting.
- 5.33 There is also the opportunity to respond positively to the policies for Landscape, as set out in the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan, by responding to and reflecting the existing characteristics of the LCA8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons; and taking account of the relevant management objectives. There is also the opportunity to respond to the policies for development; having had regard for potential landscape and visual impact from the outset; and through adopting a high standard of design, providing comprehensive landscaping and enhancing Green Infrastructure, and making reference to traditional building styles; and respecting the settlement pattern and distinctive character of the North Wessex Downs AONB.
- 5.34 The proposed development would therefore be successfully accommodated within the Site, being set within a strong landscape framework, based on the existing retained boundary vegetation, and supplemented and enhanced with reference, to the guidance in the relevant landscape character assessments, and in accordance with landscape policy.

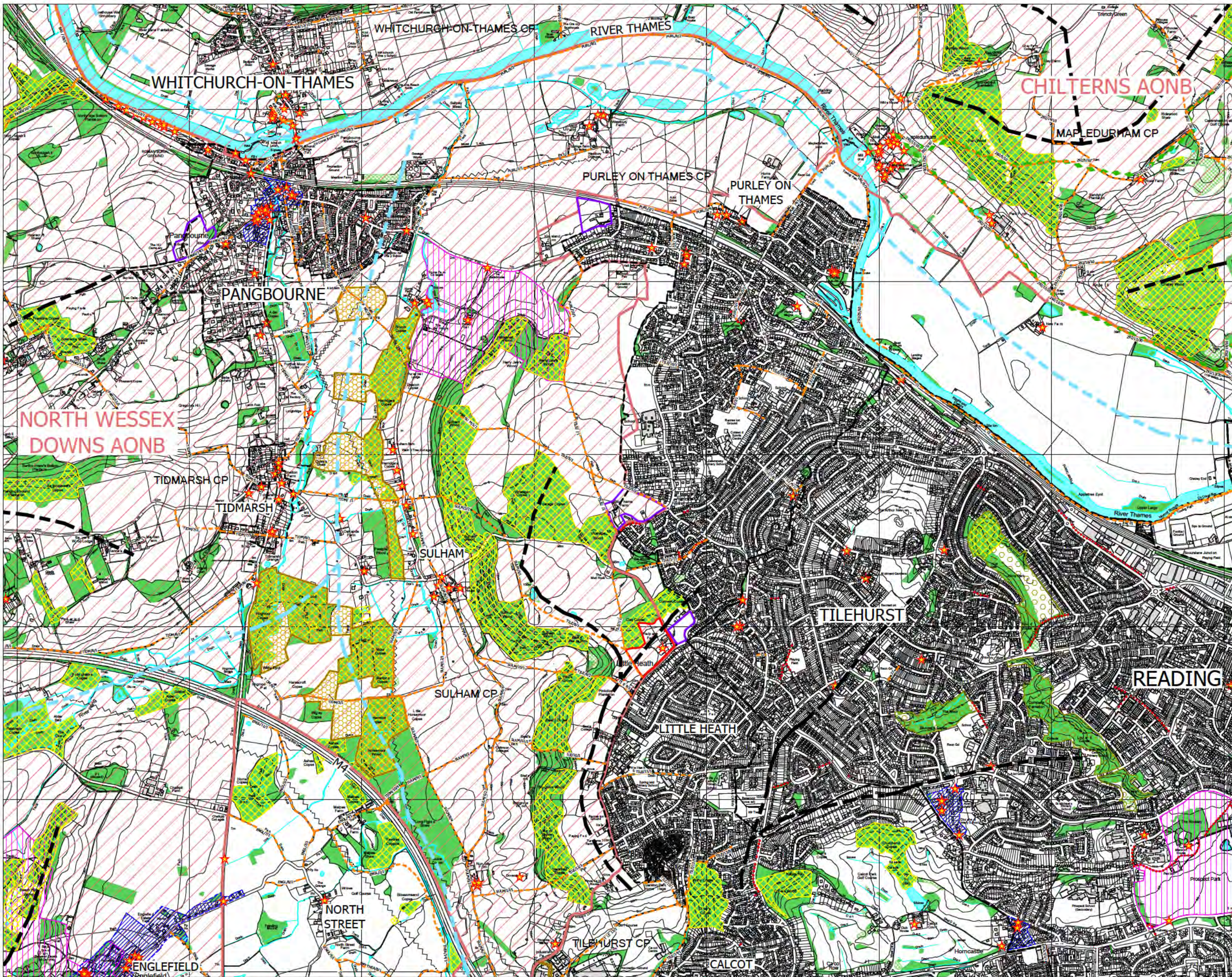




## **Figure 1**

Site Context Plan





The scaling of this drawing cannot be assured  
 Revision: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Dm: \_\_\_\_\_ Cld: \_\_\_\_\_

- ### Legend
- Site Boundary
  - Ancient Woodland #
  - Existing Woodlands, Copses and Tree Belts ^
  - Existing Scrub ^
  - Existing Water Courses and Features ^
  - Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD) ^
  - Ridgelines
  - Valleys
  - Public Rights of Way \*
  - National Trails / Long Distance Walks #
  - Sustrans Cycle Route +
  - Cycle Route
  - ★ Listed Buildings ~
  - Conservation Area \*
  - Registered Parks and Gardens ~
  - Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty #
  - Sites of Special Scientific Interest #
  - Local Nature Reserve #
  - Settlement Boundary #
  - Housing Allocation #



**Sources:**  
 \* OS Mapping  
 \* Natural England GIS Data Set  
 \* Historic England National Monument Record (OS Data Set)  
 \* West Berkshire District Council and Reading Borough Council Definitive Maps  
 \* Sustrans National Cycle Network (OS Data)  
 \* Department of Transport Cycle Network Model  
 \* Department for Communities and Local Government (OS Data)  
 \* Reading Borough Council Submission Draft Local Plan March 2016  
 \* West Berkshire Council Development Plan July 2012

Data collected for this site and analysis mapping is based on publicly available sources at the time of preparation or derived using the British National Grid and may therefore not be accurate. Barton Willmore shall not be liable for the accuracy of data derived from external sources.

**FIGURE 1**  
 Project: Land at Hall Place Farm, Tilehurst  
 Drawing Title: Site Context Plan

Date: 27.06.2018	Scale: 1:10,000 (QA1) 1:20,000 (QA3)	Drawn by: LH	Check by: LT
Project No: 28776	Drawing No: RG-LP-01		Rev skin: -

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## **Figure 2**

Site Appraisal Plan





The scaling of this drawing cannot be assured

Revision	Date	Drn	Ckd

**LEGEND**

- Site Boundary
- Public Rights of Way \*
- Location of Photographic Viewpoints (Site Appraisal Photographs: A-F)

SOURCES:  
\* West Berkshire District Council Definitive Map

**FIGURE 2**  
 Project  
 Land at Hall Place Farm,  
 Tilehurst  
 Drawing Title  
 Site Appraisal Plan

Date 07.12.2018	Scale 1:2,000 @A3	Drawn by LH	Check by LT
Project No 28776	Drawing No RG-LP-06	Revision -	

0 20 40 60 80 100m



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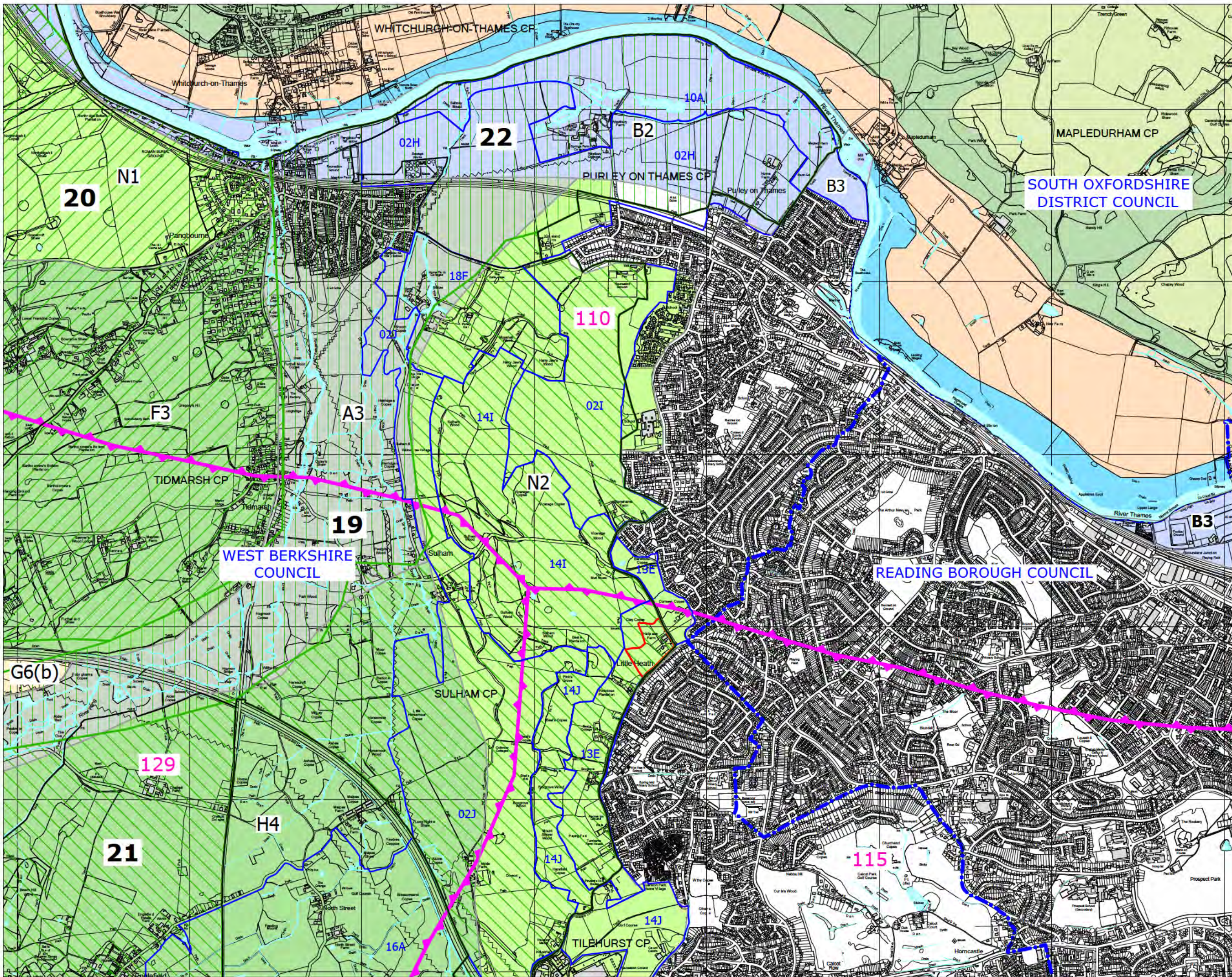




**Figure 3**

Landscape Character Plan





### Legend

- Site Boundary
- Local Authority Boundary

- National Landscape Character Areas #**
- Character Area 110: Chilterns
  - Character Area 115: Thames Valley
  - Character Area 129: Thames Basin Heaths

- Berkshire Landscape Character Areas #**
- Landscape Type A: Upper Valley Floor  
Character Area A3: Pang
  - Landscape Type B: Lower Valley Floor  
Character Area B2: Pangbourne Thames  
Character Area B3: Reading Thames
  - Landscape Type C: Lower River with Open Water  
Character Area C1: Kennet
  - Landscape Type F: Wooded Downland  
Character Area F3: Ashampstead
  - Landscape Type G: Farmed Chalk Mosaic  
Character Area G6: Yattendon
  - Landscape Type N: Elevated Wooded Chalk Slopes  
Character Area N2: Sulham  
Character Area N3: Cookham Dean

- West Reading Local Landscape Character Areas #**
- Character Area 2H: Lower Purley Chalk Lowlands
  - Character Area 2J: Lower Sulham Dipslopes
  - Character Area 2K: Lower Kennet Meadows
  - Character Area 10A: Purley River Valley
  - Character Area 13E: Little Heath Gravel Plateau
  - Character Area 14I: Purley Plateau Edge
  - Character Area 16A: Englefield Wooded Farmlands
  - Character Area 17A: Englefield Open Farmland
  - Character Area 18E: Englefield Park
  - Character Area 18F: Purley Hall
  - Character Area 20E: Theale - Calcot Gap
  - Character Area 20F: West Theale

- North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Types ++**
- Landscape Type: Downland with Woodland  
Character Area 2B: Ashampstead Downs
  - Landscape Type: River Valley  
Character Area 7D: Pang Valley
  - Landscape Type: Lowland Mosaic  
Character Area 8A: Heritage Wooded Commons

- North Wessex Downs AONB Historic Landscape Character Areas #**
- Character Area 19: Pang Valley and Sulham Gap
  - Character Area 20: Pang-Thames Plateaux
  - Character Area 21: Kennet Valley East
  - Character Area 22: Thames Valley South

- DWLS Landscape Character Areas #**
- Landscape Type: River Meadowlands
  - Landscape Type: Terrace Farmland
  - Landscape Type: Wooded Estate Slopes and Valley Sides
  - Landscape Type: Wooded Farmland

- Sources**
- CS Mapping
  - Natural England GIS Data Set
  - Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment - Oct 2003
  - West Berkshire Local Development Framework: Landscape Sensitivity Study - Nov 2009
  - North Wessex Downs AONB Historic Landscape Character Areas Report - March 2012
  - Chilterns W of R and Landscape Study GIS Data Set
  - North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2011-2013

**FIGURE 3**  
 Project:  
 Land at Hall Place Farm,  
 Tilehurst  
 Drawing Title:  
 Landscape Character Plan

Date: 09.07.2018	Scale: 1:10,000 (A1) 1:20,000 (A3)	Drawn by: LH	Check by: LT
Project No: 28776	Drawing No: RG-LP-03	Rev No: -	Rev skin: -

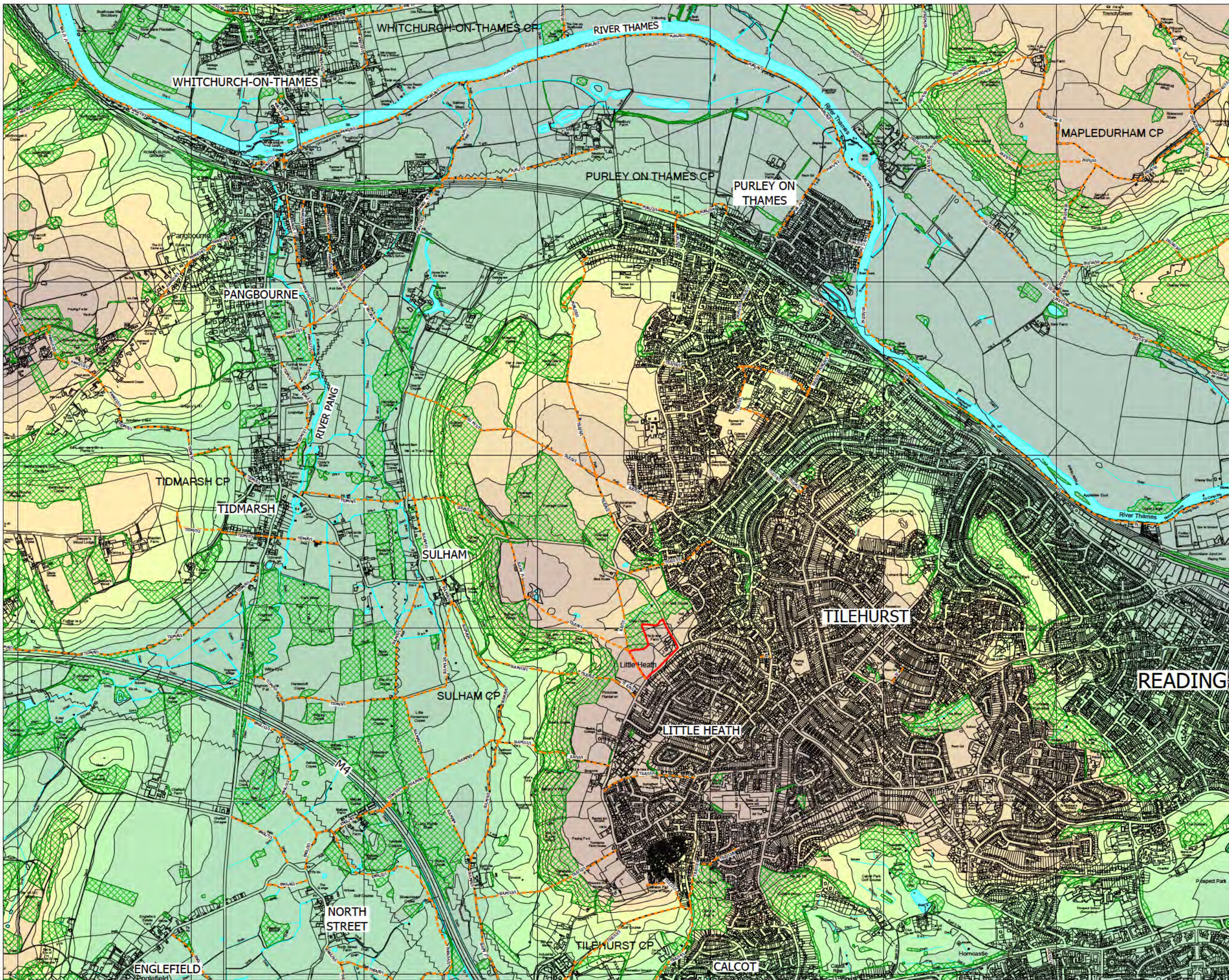
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**Figure 4**

Topographical Features Plan

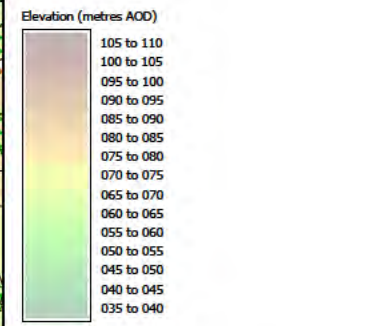




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 Revision \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Dm \_\_\_\_\_ Cld \_\_\_\_\_

### Legend

- Site Boundary
- Existing Water Courses and Features
- Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD)
- Existing Woodlands, Coppes and Tree Belts
- Public Rights of Way



Sources:  
 - OS Mapping  
 - West Berkshire District Council and Reading Borough Council Definitive Maps  
 Data collected for contours and analysis mapping is based on publicly available sources at the time of preparation - contour lines and analysis mapping is not itself to be accurate. Station numbers shall not be taken as the accuracy of data derived from external sources.

### FIGURE 4

Project:  
 Land at Hall Place Farm,  
 Tilehurst  
 Drawing Title:  
 Topographic Features Plan

Date 27.06.2018	Scale 1:10,000 (A1) 1:20,000 (A3)	Drawn by LH	Check by LT
Project No 28776	Drawing No RG-LP-02		Rev skin -

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3/28801 - 28999,28776 - 28799,28776 - Land at Hall Place Farm(A4 - Design & Reg.ans/Landscape/28776 RG-LP-02 Topographic Features Plan.dwg - A1





## **Figure 5**

Visual Appraisal Plan







**Figure 6**

Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan



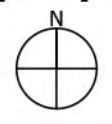


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Revision	Date	Drn	Ckd

**LEGEND**

-  Site Boundary
-  Ancient Woodland #
-  Existing Woodlands, Copses and Tree Belts
-  Existing Hedgerows
-  Public Rights of Way \*
-  Residential development under construction



Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints

-  Developable Area
-  Visually sensitive edge
-  15m Ancient Woodland buffer
-  Potential New Access
-  Potential green link through Site
-  Proposed planting

SOURCES:  
 # Natural England GIS Data Set  
 \* West Berkshire District Council Definitive Map

**FIGURE 6**

Project  
**Land at Hall Place Farm, Tilehurst**  
 Drawing Title  
**Landscape and Visual Opportunities and Constraints Plan**

Date 01.08.2018	Scale 1:2,000 @A3	Drawn by LH	Check by LT
Project No 28776	Drawing No RG-LP-04	Revision -	



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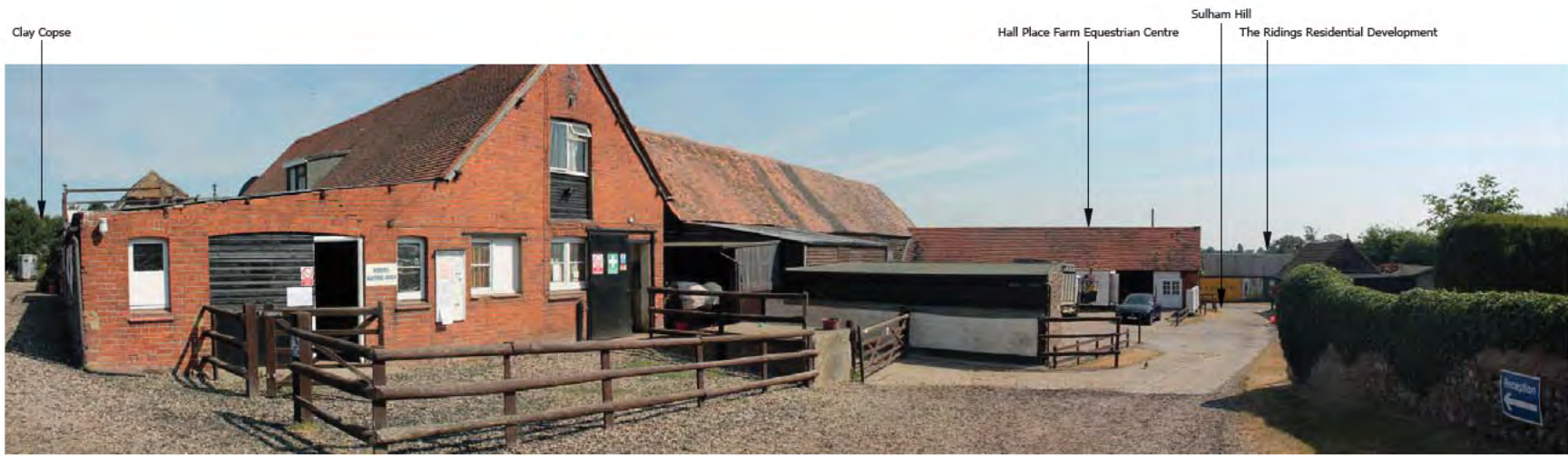
Offices at Birmingham Bristol Cambridge Cardiff Ebbwfleet Edinburgh Glasgow Leeds London Manchester Newcastle Reading Southampton



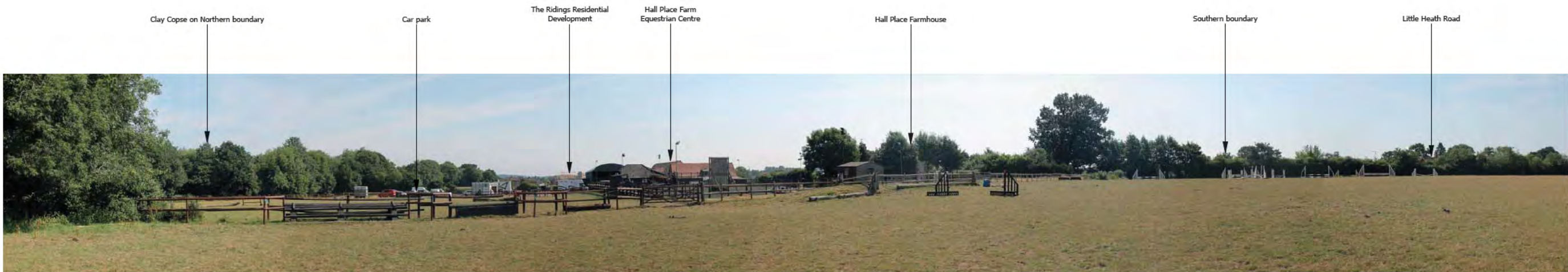


**Site Appraisal Photographs A - F**





SITE APPRAISAL PHOTOGRAPH A:



SITE APPRAISAL PHOTOGRAPH B:



SITE APPRAISAL PHOTOGRAPH C:

LAND AT HALL PLACE FARM,  
TILEHURST

SITE APPRAISAL  
PHOTOGRAPHS: A - C

RECOMMENDED VIEWING  
DISTANCE: 20CM @A1

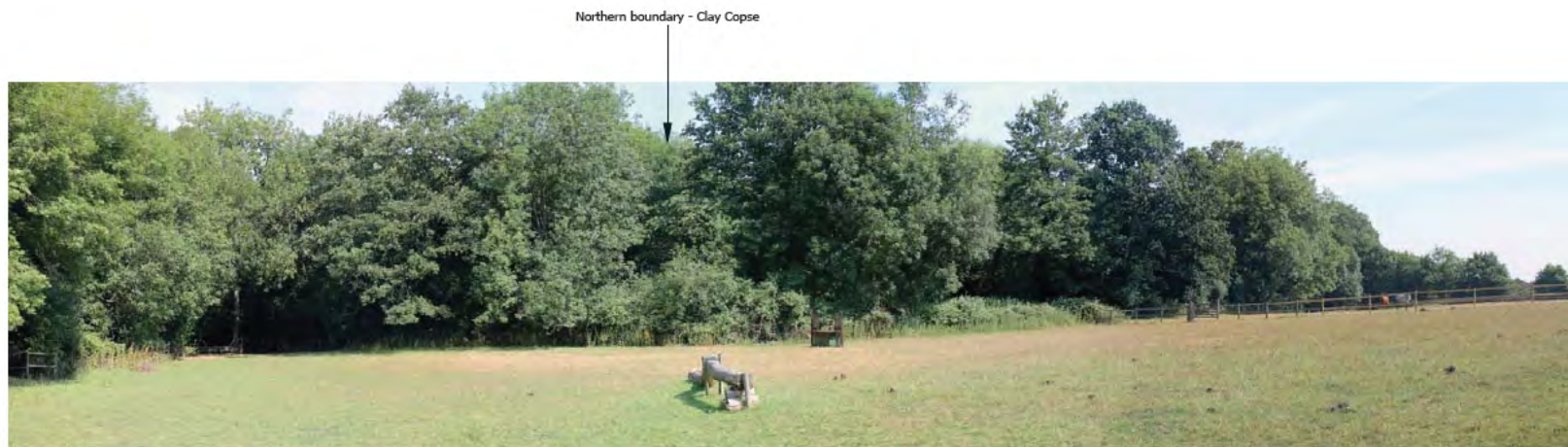
DATE TAKEN: JULY 2018

PROJECT NUMBER: 28776

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SITE APPRAISAL PHOTOGRAPH D:



SITE APPRAISAL PHOTOGRAPH E:



SITE APPRAISAL PHOTOGRAPH F:

LAND AT HALL PLACE FARM,  
TILEHURST

SITE APPRAISAL  
PHOTOGRAPHS: D - F

RECOMMENDED VIEWING  
DISTANCE: 20CM @A1

DATE TAKEN: JULY 2018

PROJECT NUMBER: 28776

**Site Context Photographs 1-21**





**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 1: FROM SULHAM HILL AT THE EXISTING ACCESS TO THE SITE, LOOKING WEST**  
Distance: 15m



**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 2: FROM SULHAM HILL AT THE ENTRANCE TO HALL PLACE FARM EQUESTRIAN CENTRE, LOOKING WEST**  
Distance: 15m



**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 3: FROM THE JUNCTION OF LITTLE HEATH ROAD AND SULHAM HILL, LOOKING WEST**  
Distance: 54m

LAND AT HALL PLACE FARM

SITE CONTEXT  
PHOTOGRAPHS: 1 - 3  
RECOMMENDED VIEWING  
DISTANCE: 20CM @A1  
DATE TAKEN: JULY 2018  
PROJECT NUMBER: 28776





Existing residential development along Little Heath Road

Existing access to Hall Place Farmhouse



SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 4: FROM LITTLE HEATH ROAD AT THE ACCESS TO HALL PLACE FARMHOUSE, LOOKING WEST

Distance: 15m

Hall Place Farm Equestrian Centre

Residential development at Clements Mead

Residential development along Little Heath Road



SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 5: FROM LITTLE HEATH ROAD TO THE SOUTH OF HALL PLACE FARMHOUSE, LOOKING NORTH

Distance: 17m

Vegetation along the Southern boundary of the Site

Existing residential development at Clements Mead

Residential development along Little Heath Road



SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 6: FROM LITTLE HEATH ROAD TO THE SOUTH OF THE SITE, LOOKING NORTH EAST

Distance: 13m

Elevation: 101.2m AOD

LAND AT HALL PLACE FARM

SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPHS: 4 - 6

RECOMMENDED VIEWING DISTANCE: 20CM @A1

DATE TAKEN: JULY 2018

PROJECT NUMBER: 28776

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**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 7: PROW TILE/7/1 ADJACENT TO THE WESTERN BOUNDARY OF THE SITE, LOOKING EAST**

Distance: 2m  
Elevation: 92.2m AOD



**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 8: FROM PROW TILE/7/1 AT THE NORTH WEST CORNER OF THE SITE, LOOKING SOUTH**

Distance: 11m  
Elevation: 92.5m AOD



**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 9: FROM PROW TILE/7/1 AT THE WESTERN EDGE OF CLAY COPSE, LOOKING SOUTH EAST**

Distance: 103m

LAND AT HALL PLACE FARM

SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPHS: 7 - 9

RECOMMENDED VIEWING DISTANCE: 20CM @A1

DATE TAKEN: JULY 2018

PROJECT NUMBER: 28776

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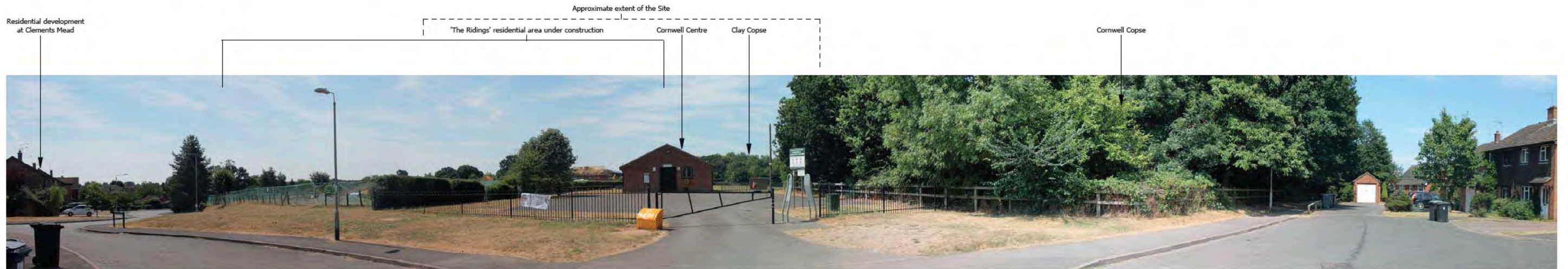
**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 10: FROM PROW TILE/7/1 TO THE SOUTH OF THE MUD HOUSE, LOOKING SOUTH**

Distance: 282m  
Elevation: 92.7m AOD



**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 11: FROM PROW TILE/8/1 TO THE NORTH OF SULHAM WOOD, LOOKING SOUTH EAST**

Distance: 552m  
Elevation: 95.8m AOD



**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 12: FROM HOME CROFT TO THE EAST OF CORNWELL RECREATION GROUND, LOOKING WEST**

Distance: 201m

LAND AT HALL PLACE FARM

**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPHS: 10 - 12**

**RECOMMENDED VIEWING DISTANCE: 20CM @A1**

**DATE TAKEN: JULY 2018**

**PROJECT NUMBER: 28776**

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**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 13: FROM THE CORNWELL CENTRE WITHIN CORNWELL RECREATION GROUND, LOOKING WEST**

Distance: 126m  
Elevation: 93.8m AOD



**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 14: FROM SULHAM HILL TO THE NORTH OF THE SITE, LOOKING SOUTH**

Distance: 19m  
Elevation: 90.2m AOD



**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 15: FROM CHAPEL HILL AT THE JUNCTION WITH CLEMENTS MEAD, LOOKING WEST**

Distance: 107m  
Elevation: 88.7m AOD

LAND AT HALL PLACE FARM

SITE CONTEXT  
PHOTOGRAPHS: 13 - 15

RECOMMENDED VIEWING  
DISTANCE: 20CM @A1

DATE TAKEN: JULY 2018

PROJECT NUMBER: 28776

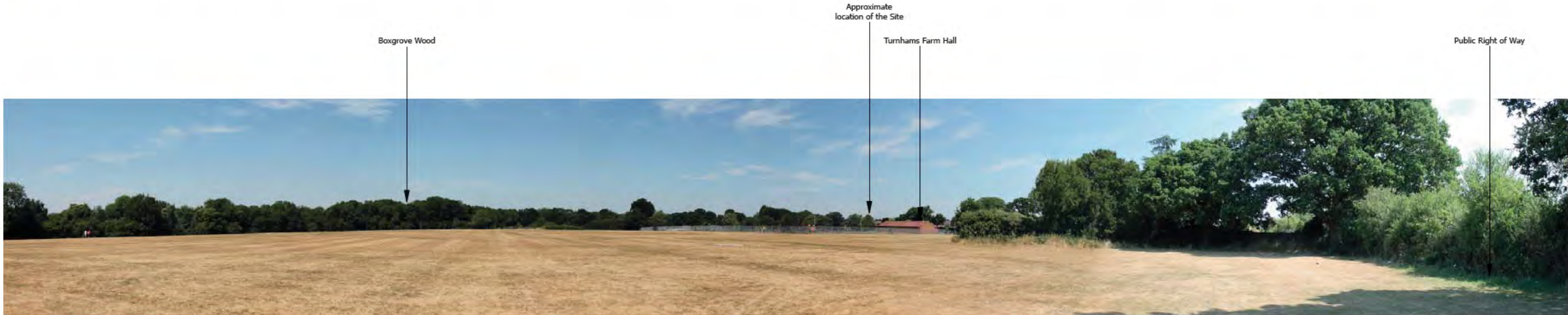
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**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 16: FROM PROW TILE/11/1 SOUTH OF LITTLE HEATH SCHOOL, LOOKING NORTH**  
 Distance: 560m  
 Elevation: 95.4m AOD



**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 17: FROM PROW TILE/10/1 TO THE WEST OF LITTLE HEATH ROAD, LOOKING NORTH EAST**  
 Distance: 592m  
 Elevation: 102.4m AOD



**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 18: FROM LITTLE HEATH PARK RECREATION GROUND, LOOKING NORTH**  
 Distance: 678m  
 Elevation: 100.5m AOD

LAND AT HALL PLACE FARM

SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPHS: 16 - 18  
 RECOMMENDED VIEWING DISTANCE: 20CM @A1  
 DATE TAKEN: JULY 2018  
 PROJECT NUMBER: 28776



Approximate location of the Site



**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 19: FROM CHAPEL HILL BETWEEN HILDENS DRIVE AND SCHOOL ROAD, LOOKING NORTH WEST**

Distance: 678m  
Elevation: 93.2m AOD

Chazey Wood

King's Hill

Grain Store

New Lodge

Water tower at Norcot Road

Approximate location of the Site

The Roebuck Hotel



**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 20: FROM SANDY HILL, PROW 292/14, LOOKING SOUTH WEST TOWARDS TILEHURST**

Distance: 3.2km  
Elevation: 63.5m AOD

PROW TILE/5/2

Stoneham's Farm

PROW TILE/6/2

Approximate extent of the Site

Vicarage Wood

Vicarage Copse



**SITE CONTEXT PHOTOGRAPH 21: FROM JUNCTION OF PROWS TILE/5/2 AND TILE/6/2 TO THE WEST OF LONG LANE, LOOKING SOUTH**

Distance: 877m  
Elevation: 98.2m AOD

LAND AT HALL PLACE FARM

SITE CONTEXT  
PHOTOGRAPHS: 19 - 21

RECOMMENDED VIEWING  
DISTANCE: 20CM @A1

DATE TAKEN: JULY 2018

PROJECT NUMBER: 28776

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## **APPENDIX 3**

NPPF, AONB Management Plan and West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment

## **UPDATED NPPF, AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN AND WEST BERKSHIRE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT**

### ***National Planning Policy Framework (2019)***

- 2.1 Updated reference to the NPPF (2019) is set out below.
- 2.2 The NPPF aims to provide one concise document that sets out the Government's planning policies for England by replacing previous Planning Policy Guidance (PPGs) and Planning Policy Statements (PPSs). It aims to provide a planning framework within which the local community and local authorities can produce distinctive local plans which respond to local needs and priorities.
- 2.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) promotes a presumption in favour of sustainable development, defined as ***"meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"***, and providing it is in accordance with the relevant up-to-date Local Plan, and policies set out in the NPPF including those identifying restrictions with regard to designated areas, such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Green Belt.
- 2.4 In relation to conserving and enhancing the natural environment, Paragraph 170 notes that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
- a) "protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);***
  - b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;***
  - c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;***
  - d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;***
  - e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and***
  - f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate".***



2.5 Paragraph 171 sets out that plans should: *“distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries”*.

2.6 Paragraph 172 states:

*“Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited. Planning permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:*

*the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*  
*the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*  
*any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.”*

2.7 In order to ensure that it promotes good design, the NPPF sets out at Paragraph 127 that policies and decisions should make sure that developments:

- a) “will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;*
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and*

- other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and*
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.”*

- 2.8 Paragraph 98 requires that planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.
- 2.9 With regard to the Site, TIL 18, and its location within the North Wessex Downs AONB, there is no significant difference between the NPPF 2019 and the 2012.

#### ***North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019 – 2024***

- 2.10 Updated reference to the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan is Set out below.
- 2.11 The Landscape and Visual Appraisal (December 2018), included in **Appendix 2**, makes reference to the North Wessex AONB Management Plan (2014-2019), at Paragraphs 2.32 to 2.41. Since then, the updated North Wessex AONB Management Plan (2019 – 2024) has been adopted setting out the objectives and policies to help conserve and enhance the nationally important landscape. The main updates and differences between these two management plans in relation to landscape are set out below.
- 2.12 Thematic chapters describe and explain the special qualities that make the North Wessex AONB landscape unique, are similar to the 2014-2019 Management Plan version, and include: Landscape; Rural Land Management; Biodiversity; Historic Environment; Natural Resources; Development; Communities; and Tourism, Leisure and Access; with the addition of 'Rural' with reference to Land Management, and the introduction of 'Access' to the Leisure and Tourism aspect.
- 2.13 The Vision for the North Wessex Downs 2019-2024 also has some new additions which are underlined below:

*“Vast, dramatic, undeveloped and distinct chalk downlands with nationally significant areas of semi-natural chalk grassland, contrasting with well-wooded plateaux, arable lands and intimate and secluded valleys, all rich in wildlife and cultural heritage; a high quality landscape of national and international significance which persists in increasingly urbanised surroundings; where people live, work and relax; where visitors are welcomed and contribute to a*

**vibrant rural economy; and access to which supports the health and wellbeing of local residents and visitors alike.**

2.14 Chapter 2 addresses Theme 1 Landscape. The updated AONB Management Plan still defines the Landscape Character Types as per the 2014-2019 version, and these Landscape Character Types are identified as special qualities of the AONB Landscape. The Site, TIL 18, still sits within: The Lowland Mosaic, with the descriptions for this area remaining the same as set out in Paragraph 2.34 of the LVA 2018.

2.15 The Landscape Special Quality of The Lowland Mosaic are set out as:

***“The Lowland Mosaic, curving around Newbury and the lower Kennet Valley has a varied geology of clays, silts and sands giving rise to a diverse mix of soils and, in turn, a mosaic of ancient semi-natural woodlands, plantations, remnant heathland and more open farmland areas where sunken lanes heighten the sense of seclusion.”***

2.16 The Key Issues, Objectives and Policies for the AONB Landscape remain largely unchanged.

2.17 The Key Issues, relevant to the Site, TIL 18, as set out are:

***“Key issues with the potential to have significant influence on the AONB’s Landscape Special Qualities:***

***The potential for development beyond the AONB boundary to visually damage or undermine the scale and critical qualities of landscape character areas.***

***g) The need to conserve and enhance the remote, secluded and relatively undeveloped character of more enclosed and intimate landscapes, including the character of the lanes.***

***The need for appropriate woodland management, including the viable use of timber products, particularly for fuel.***

***Encouraging restoration of wood pasture landscapes, husbandry and ecology and ensuring future veteran tree succession.***

***The dominance of roads, in particular the impact of traffic noise, external lighting, road signs, insensitive materials and clutter on landscape character and people’s experience of the landscape as they travel through it.***

***The need to maintain the pattern of discrete villages set within a quiet rural landscape, ensuring that the views to the surrounding dramatic scarps are undamaged.***

***o) Intense pressure for development throughout the AONB and its setting that threatens the character and quality of its landscape and risks merging of small settlements, encroachment by larger settlements and changes to the scale and nature of development boundaries.***

***The need to protect and enhance historic sites, buildings and landscapes and their setting."***

2.18 For the Key issues, with regard to development pressure, this has been expanded as follows:

***"intense pressure for development throughout the AONB and its setting that threatens the character and quality of its landscape and risks merging of small settlements or encroachment by larger settlements and changes to the scale and nature of development boundaries."***

2.19 With regard to Objectives for Landscape, Objective S.01 has been expanded to reference tranquillity, setting and focus, as follows:

***"S.01 Maintain and enhance the tranquillity and distinctive landscape character of the North Wessex Downs and its setting with a focus on the contribution from agriculture and forestry, development and infrastructure."***

2.20 In Chapter 7, Theme 6 Development, the updated AONB Management Plan makes reference to the NPPF (2018) and stresses that 'great weight' should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB, and that these designated areas have the highest status of protection in relation to these attributes.

2.21 The Special Qualities relevant to Development are set out as:

***The sense of remoteness and tranquillity that comes from an undeveloped and rural quality with only limited human intervention, containing typically modest villages with distinctive and ancient settlement patterns:***

***The Lowland Mosaic remains one of the most densely settled Landscape Character Types, with a diverse range of settlements ranging from large manor houses, villages, numerous hamlets and lines of houses along the roads and lanes.***

***Distinctive architectural styles that vary throughout the AONB but within specific areas create a sense of place and vernacular local character due to the availability of local building materials and traditional building styles. This includes traditional knapped flint and brick, timber-framed farm buildings, thatch and tiled roofs, use of Sarsen Stone, blue flint and tile, and clunch and cobb walls.***

***A sparse road network, but with good access from a number of economically significant towns such as Swindon, Andover,***

*Whitchurch, Basingstoke, Reading, Devizes, Newbury and Didcot, resulting in an economy that is largely 'outward looking' towards these 'boundary towns' and beyond.*

*Within the North Wessex Downs, the traditional land based and rural economy contrasts with a growing high tech and creative sector.*

2.22 The Key Issues relevant to potential development on the Site, TIL 18, as set out, are:

- a) *"The threat of expansion of the main urban areas just beyond the boundary of the North Wessex Downs – including the main centres of Swindon, Wantage, Didcot, Reading, Newbury, Basingstoke, Andover and Devizes, for example – creating urban fringe pressures and impact on the setting of the AONB.*
  - d) *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).*
- New housing developments on greenfield sites.*
- g) *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).*
  - h) *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.*
  - j) *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.*
  - m) *Impact from equestrian uses and structures generally where new development is expansive in area, in greenfield locations, poorly designed and/or located on exposed sites."*

2.23 Within this chapter there is expanded text on remoteness, tranquillity and special perceptual qualities, at Paragraph 7.15 and 7.16, setting out that:

*"7.15 The sense of remoteness and tranquillity is fundamental to the character of the North Wessex Downs AONB. It is central to the enjoyment and appreciation of the landscape. Dark night skies in the AONB contrast dramatically with surrounding urban areas. The absence of artificial light allows the full majesty of the night skies and stars to be appreciated unimpeded by the night time glow of our major urban areas. Light pollution can impact on wildlife, such as foraging bats. In some parts of the area there is already an ambient level of noise associated with transport networks and machinery. A certain level of activity and noise will always be*

*expected within a largely farmed landscape and within the urban areas of the region.*

*7.16 These special perceptual qualities are fragile and under threat from a combination of factors, including major development, such as wind turbines, intruding into the open downland. Concerns raised by local residents and users of the landscape over loss of these special perceptual qualities will inform decisions on particular development proposals. New uses or new developments that individually or cumulatively result in a material increase in lighting, noise and or activity into the countryside are likely to be opposed."*

- 2.24 In addition, the Green Infrastructure Section 7.22 has been expanded and reworded, with the additions and changes underlined, stating as follows:

*"Green Infrastructure' (GI) is the network of multi-functional open spaces and other environmental features, including parks and gardens, woodlands, green corridors, watercourses and water bodies ('blue spaces'), street trees and open countryside. There is an opportunity for new development to secure and enhance the area's GI network, including through the CIL. This will support the sustainable management of natural resources; the delivery of sustainable development; biodiversity enhancement through habitat connectivity; local flood management; and the provision of opportunities to improve health and wellbeing through access to green and blue spaces. Schemes that improve links, including in particular public rights of way, for walkers, cyclists, riders, and carriage drivers, as well as securing biodiversity and landscape enhancements, will be supported. Where appropriate, new and existing GI features should provide the greatest range of functions possible to maximise benefits for people and wildlife."*

- 2.25 With reference to the AONB Special Qualities: Development, the text remains the same, as set out in Paragraph 2.38 of the LVA 2018 included in **Appendix 2**; as do the Key Issues relevant to the Site, TIL 18, as referred to in Paragraph 2.40 of the LVA. The relevant Policies for Development also remain largely unchanged with only minor adjustments to the wording to those set out in Paragraph 2.41 of the LVA 2018.

- 2.26 An additional policy, Policy DE 06, is included, and is relevant to, stating the following:

*"Encourage, support and promote the expansion of 'net gain' principles developed for biodiversity, to apply to wider natural capital assets, including in particular to landscape and natural beauty."*

2.27 In Chapter 9, Theme 8 Tourism, Leisure and Access, much of the general text referring the Rights of Way and Access is the same with a new headline referring to Strategic Development in Relation to the 'London City Region' added. In para 9.15 it states:

***"The North Wessex Downs is a partner in SEPLG, sharing the seven key objectives in the Group's 25 year vision in relation to the protected landscapes of the London City Region to:***

***conserve their intrinsic value;**  
***recognise their ecosystem value;**  
***maintain natural buffers;**  
***improve access and connections;**  
***promote appropriate jobs and industry;**  
***support physical and mental health and wellbeing; and**  
***engage stakeholders and work together."*********

2.28 Those above with relevance to landscape matters and which can be accommodated or demonstrated within the Hall Place Farm proposals are underlined.

2.29 With regard to Tourism, Leisure and Access, a new policy, Policy TLA 16, has been included which states:

***"Recognise and protect those areas which are too sensitive to intrusion or disturbance, for example archaeologically or ecologically, for the promotion of public access."***

2.30 This is relevant to the Ancient Woodland on the Site, TIL 18, which requires a buffer for protection, and any proposals should be designed so as not to increase or encourage unmanaged public access into the Ancient Woodland, as this can be harmful to the ground flora of the Ancient Woodland.

Landscape Character Context

#### National Landscape Character Assessment

2.31 The Site, TIL 18, is located at the western extent of NCA 115: Thames Valley, with NCA 110: Chilterns in close proximity to the north, and NCA 129: Thames Basin Heaths in close proximity to the west, as shown on **Figure 3: Landscape Character Plan**.

2.32 A summary description of the NCA 115 Thames Valley is set out in Section 2.0, Paragraphs 2.51 to 2.57, in the Landscape and Visual Appraisal included in **Appendix 2**, with the identified key characteristics set out in Paragraph 2.58.

- 2.33 Brief summaries of NCA 110: Chilterns and NCA 129: Thames Basin Heaths are provided in Paragraphs 2.59 to Paragraph 2.62.

West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, August 2019

- 2.34 The West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment, August 2019, prepared by Land Use Consultants (LUC) provides a review of, and an update and consolidation of, West Berkshire's existing landscape evidence base with reference to:

Newbury District Council District-Wide Landscape Assessment  
(Landscape Design Associates, 1993).

North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Integrated  
Landscape Character Assessment (LUC, 2002).

Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (LUC, 2003).

- 2.35 The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Integrated Landscape Character Assessment and the Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment have been referred to in the Landscape and Visual Appraisal included in **Appendix 2**, at Paragraphs 2.63 to 2.68 and 2.69 to 2.78 respectively.

- 2.36 With regard to the purposes of the updated Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) for West Berkshire, it:

*“Provides a comprehensive and up to date landscape character assessment for all land outside defined settlement boundaries in West Berkshire;*

*Ensures that an understanding of the character of the landscape can be used as a positive tool to manage change by providing a framework for informed decisions to be made;*

*Provides a robust evidence base for more detailed site specific landscape sensitivity and capacity studies;*

*Facilitates the protection and enhancement of valued landscapes in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework;*

*Forms a sound evidence base for the implementation of the West Berkshire Local Plan to 2026, and for the review of the West Berkshire Local Plan to 2036 and supporting the landscape character policies within it.”*

- 2.37 The Site, TIL 18, is located within, but on the very eastern edge of Landscape Character Type WC: Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes, and specially within Landscape Character Area (LCA) WC2:



Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes, as illustrated on **Figure 3A: Landscape Character Plan**.

2.38 However, the Landscape Character Assessment notes, at Paragraph 5.3, that *“in reality landscape character often does not change abruptly at the boundaries, but displays some degree of transition from one Character Area or Type to another. When using the assessment to consider a location with some proximity to a boundary it is therefore important to also look at the assessment for the neighbouring area”*.

2.39 LCA WC2: Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes is summarised as:

*“This small area on the western edge of Reading has an undulating chalk topography with a steep slope dropping from the east to the west of the area. The slope is densely wooded, while on flatter ground there is extensive arable agriculture with larger fields; elsewhere smaller pasture fields remain. The area is sparsely settled, with the small village of Sulham and scattered farms. An out of town retail centre is located adjacent to the M4 and A4 at the southern edge of the character area. Where the ground is elevated it provides extensive views, but overall the wooded character make it feel enclosed.”*

2.40 It is noted that *“the majority of the character area is within the North Wessex Downs AONB, excepting some areas immediately adjacent to the urban edge of Reading. To the west, the land flattens into the valley bottom of the River Pang (LCA A3). The edge of Reading forms the eastern boundary. The valleys of the River Thames and the River Kennet form the northern and southern boundaries respectively”*.

2.41 The Site, TIL 18, is on the very edge of LCA WC2: Sulham Wooded Chalk with Slopes, immediately adjacent to Reading; with land to the south being within both LCA WC2 and the North Wessex Downs AONB, and land to the North Wessex Downs, and land to the immediate north and east being within LCA WC2 but outwith the North Wessex Downs AONB.

2.42 The key characteristics are set out as:

*“1) Steeply sloping landform, underlain by upper chalk geology. The area is characterised by a steep slope running north-south, with more elevated land in the east. Elsewhere, the landform is gently undulating. The geology of the area is upper chalk, overlain in parts by Reading beds and London clay.*

*2) Land use is primarily mixed farmland and woodland, with some historic parkland*

*Arable farming has created larger fields, with occasional smaller fields retained as pasture. A large band of interconnected mixed woodland runs in a broad dense strip along the steeper ground. Some woodlands are commercially managed conifer plantations. Field origins are medieval or post-medieval assarting of woodland; creating enclosed irregular pasture or arable fields. In the west of the character area field amalgamation has created larger fields. Purley Park introduces a historic estate character in the west of the area.*

*3) Semi-natural grassland and woodland along the ridgeline contribute to natural character*

*Woodland concentrated along the central ridge slope includes areas of ancient semi-natural woodland, a number of which are designated as Local Wildlife Sites. Within the farmed landscape there are areas of lowland calcareous grassland. The network of hedgerows and occasional in-field ponds also contribute to the natural character of the area.*

*4) Time-depth given by the estate landscape of Purley Park and historic farms*

*The estate at Purley Park Registered Park and Garden (Grade II\*) is an 18th century formal landscape park which contains a number of Listed Buildings. Elsewhere, there is a scattering of historic farm buildings constructed in a traditional vernacular, a number of which are Listed Buildings.*

*5) Sparsely settled with scattered farms and houses and the village of Sulham*

*Settlement is limited to the village of Sulham which is nucleated around a flint church, manor houses (including the Grade II\* Purley Hall) and scattered historic farms. Red brick is the principle building material here. Surrounding the east of the character area are the outskirts of Reading and Purley on Thames, which sometimes encroach into the area including. There is an out of town retail and employment area at the Calcot M4/A4 junction.*

*6) Access via occasional rural lanes and a dense network of public rights of way*

*Roads are limited to occasional rural lanes which cross the character area. A good network of footpaths and bridleways provide access, many of which are based historic routes and form part of the Berkshire Circular Routes. The M4 runs along the south west of the character area and introduces movement and noise.*

*7) There are expansive views from elevated areas, although woodland can create a sense of enclosure*

*Extensive views are experienced from some vantage points and are particularly prominent from the western edge of Sulham Wood, which looks out over the Pang Valley. Other areas have a sense of enclosure due to the densely wooded character. The wooded skylines are prominent above the adjacent valley landscapes. There are views north across the Thames to prominent ridges including Boze Down.*

*8) Strong rural character despite close proximity of urban development*

*An aesthetically pleasing rural landscape with a strong sense of tranquillity, although there can be urban fringe influences immediately adjacent to the urban edge or major infrastructure including the M4"*

2.43 With regard to Valued features and Qualities, the following is noted:

*"1) Part of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB.*

*The majority of this character area forms part of the nationally designated landscape of North Wessex Downs AONB. Special qualities of the landscape which underpin the designation include the presence of country houses and landscaped parks and gardens, broadleaved woodland and wood pasture habitat and a sense of remoteness and tranquillity<sup>30</sup>.*

*2) Strong wooded character, including ancient woodland*

*The dense woodland along the ridge includes many areas of woodland which are designated as Local Wildlife Sites for their conservation value. The wooded skylines of the ridge provide a setting and prominent backdrop to settlements within the adjacent Pang Valley, including the village of Sulham.*

*3) Valued area for recreation*

*Extensive public rights of way connect the landscape to nearby centres of population, providing opportunities for informal recreation. These include the Berkshire Circular Routes trail.*

*4) Strong rural character and sense of tranquillity and wooded setting*

*This is especially valued given the close proximity of the urban edges of Reading. The sense of enclosure provided by the frequent woodland and the winding rural lanes which cross the landscape result in the perception of the area being far removed from the nearby urban environment. The wooded slopes provide an important setting to the wider urban area help integrate Reading within its landscape context.*

**5) Historic features including parkland**

*Historic features in the landscape contribute to the sense of time-depth experienced in this area. The designed parkland of Purley Hall originates from the early 18th century and introduces a historic estate character to the landscape. Fields are generally medieval in origin, although many have been modified to accommodate modern agriculture, diluting historic field patterns.*

**6) Extensive views from vantage points**

*Where woodland cover allows, there is inter-visibility with other areas of high ground within the AONB including Boze Down to the north”*

2.44 With regard to Detractors, these are noted as:

**“1) Ongoing development pressure**

*Due to its proximity to Reading the character area is under continued development pressure. New development in the north of the area near Purley on Thames and in the south adjacent to the A4 has encroached into the character area. Land uses associated with the urban area, including recreation grounds, schools and retail areas can create an urban fringe character in the otherwise strongly rural landscape.*

**2) Changes in farming practices**

*Intensification of arable agriculture has led to change in character, with the removal or alteration of field boundaries and other features such as in-field ponds. Reduction of livestock numbers can result in an increase in scrub encroachment and poorly managed field boundaries. Close to the urban area, there is likely to be ongoing pressure for hobby farms and horse paddocks.*

**3) Lack of appropriate woodland management in some areas**

*Some woodlands are lacking in appropriate management. This is a particular issue for those with ancient semi-natural origin which*

*would traditionally be coppiced or managed as wood pasture. The clear felling of plantations has had a negative impact on the visual qualities of the area.*

**4) Increase in traffic on rural roads**

*There is pressure on the network of rural lanes from traffic using them to access the urban area which creates noise pollution and a loss of tranquillity in the rural landscape. As a result, there may be a possible need for road improvements (e.g. road widening or increased signage) that could degrade the character of the area.*

**5) Intrusion of the M4 and large commercial buildings on rural and tranquil qualities**

*The M4 runs along the south west edge of the character area and creates noise and visual disturbance in the landscape. Large structures within a retail park also occupy the southern part of the character area and introduce urbanising features into the landscape."*

2.45 With regard to a Landscape Strategy, the following objectives are set out:

**1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB**

*Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its historic parklands and dense woodland. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.*

**2) Protect and enhance important semi-natural habitats**

*Protect and enhance areas which are valued for nature conservation, including the numerous Local Wildlife Sites. Conserve and enhance other features which contribute positively to the natural character of the area, including in-field ponds, hedgerows and hedgerow/in-field trees.*

**3) Promote appropriate woodland management and creation**

*Seek to manage woodlands using traditional practices such as coppicing. Diversification of plantation woodlands and planting of native broadleaved trees and mixed stands also serve as good opportunities to enhance the woodland character of the area. Selective tree felling rather than clear felling should be encouraged*

*in plantations to avoid cleared areas that are discordant with the surrounding area.*

**4) Conserve rural character and role as wooded setting to Reading**

*The sparse and dispersed settlement nature of the area should be conserved where possible, to avoid gradual merging and coalescence with the nearby suburban areas. The visual impact of urban fringe areas on the character area should be screened using existing features including the woodland. Any new development should be in-keeping with the existing settlement pattern and vernacular.*

**5) Conserve the valued historic features of the landscape**

*Conserve parkland areas by continuing their active management, including the planting of new parkland trees. Views of parkland should also ideally remain visible from the surrounding area as a positive feature of the landscape. Ensure that any modifications to historic farm buildings within the landscape do not detract from their character.*

**6) Conserve characteristic winding lanes and extensive public rights of way**

*Maintain extensive public rights of way to allow the continued recreational use of the area and minimise road improvements that may degrade the rural quality of the area. Avoid the use of standardised and intrusive urban materials, street furniture, lighting and signage whenever appropriate.*

**7) Conserve important views and vantage points and role as wooded setting to Reading and the Pang valley**

*Ensure that important views and vantage points are not obstructed, in particular those areas which allow inter-visibility with other high points in the North Wessex Downs AONB and consider change in the context of its role as a wooded setting to the Pang Valley and Reading, e.g. conserving undeveloped skylines."*

Landscape Sensitivity Study: West Reading (April 2009)

- 2.46 The West Reading Landscape Sensitivity Study was commissioned by West Berkshire Council for the purpose of identifying strategic development sites for the West Berkshire Planning Strategy, which would shape future development to build upon the existing settlement pattern, without

having significant effects upon the character of the area. The Study focusses on the urban fringe areas and provides an assessment of the sensitivity of the landscapes around the main towns.

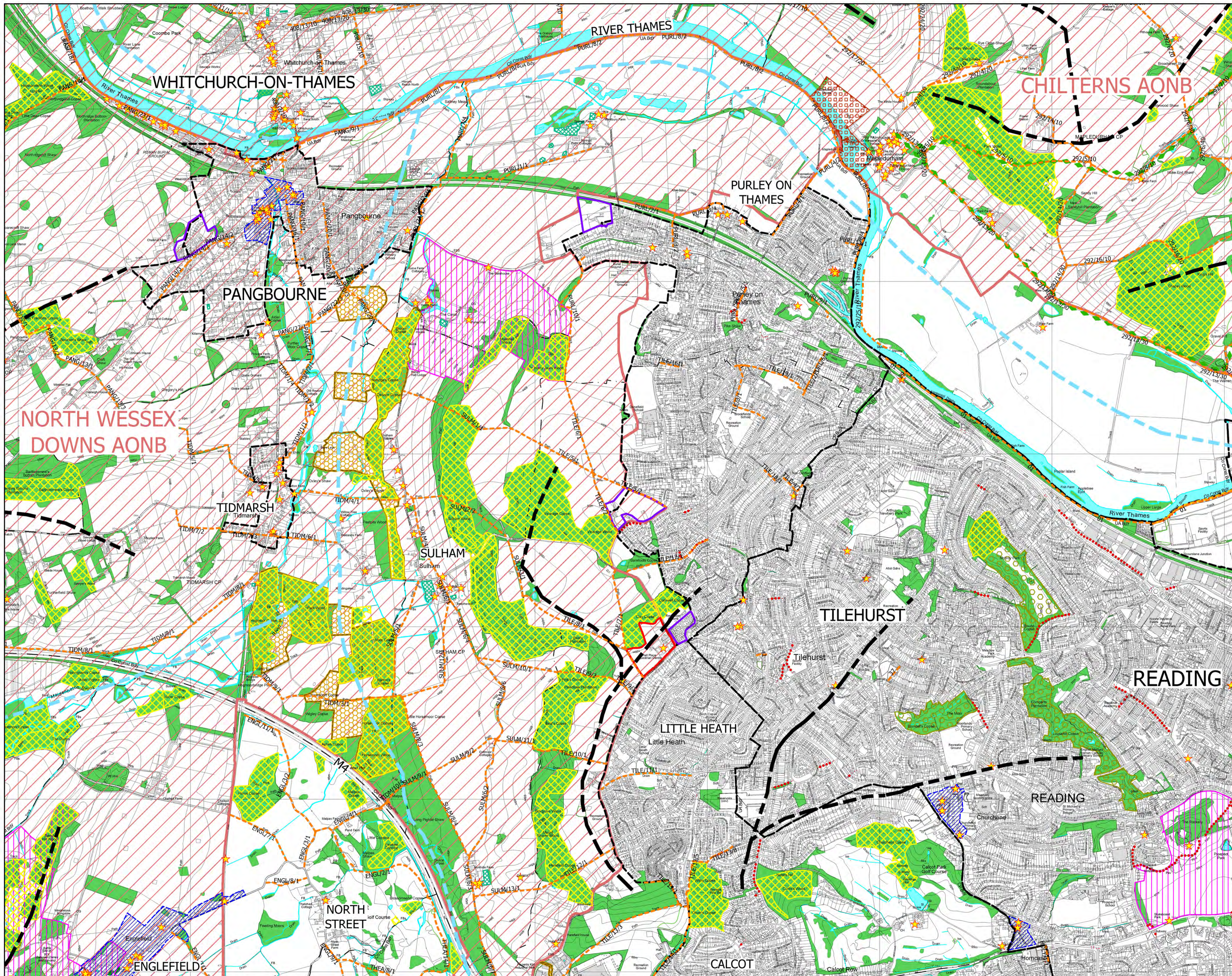
- 2.47 The Site, TIL 18, lies within Local Landscape Character Area LLCA13E Little Heath Gravel Plateau, which has an overall sensitivity of medium to low. The sensitivity study states that views within the LLCA13E Little Heath Gravel Plateau are generally contained by the adjacent woodland in LLCA14I Purley Plateau Edge and LLCA14J Tilehurst Plateau Edge, and that the character area is influenced by its close proximity to Little Heath, which has resulted in fragmentation and domestic land uses.
- 2.48 The Landscape Sensitivity Study: West Reading (April 2009) is set out in the LVIA Section 2.0, Paragraphs 2.79 to 2.83.

**ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL**

Figure 1A: Site Context Plan

Figure 3A: Landscape Character Plan





### Legend

- Site Boundary (HELA TIL 18)
- Ancient Woodland #
- Existing Woodlands, Copses and Tree Belts ^
- Existing Scrub ^
- Existing Water Courses and Features ^
- Contours/Spot Heights (Metres AOD) ^
- Ridgelines
- Valleys
- Public Rights of Way \*
- National Trails / Long Distance Walks #
- Sustrans Cycle Route +
- Cycle Route
- ★ Listed Buildings ~
- Conservation Area \*
- Registered Parks and Gardens ~
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty #
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest #
- Local Nature Reserve #
- Settlement Boundary #
- Housing Allocation #

Sources:  
 # OS Mapping  
 # Natural England GIS Data Set  
 # Historic England National Measurement Record GIS Data Set  
 # West Berkshire District Council and Reading Borough Council Definitive Maps  
 # Sustrans National Cycle Network GIS Data  
 # Department of Transport Cycle Network Model  
 # Department for Communities and Local Government GIS Data  
 # Reading Borough Council Submission Draft Local Plan March 2018  
 # West Berkshire Council Development Plan July 2012

Data collected for constraints and analysis mapping is based on publicly available sources at the time of preparation inserted using the British National Grid and may itself not be accurate. Barton Willmore shall not be liable for the accuracy of data derived from external sources.

### FIGURE 1A

Project:  
 Land at Hall Place Farm,  
 Tilehurst

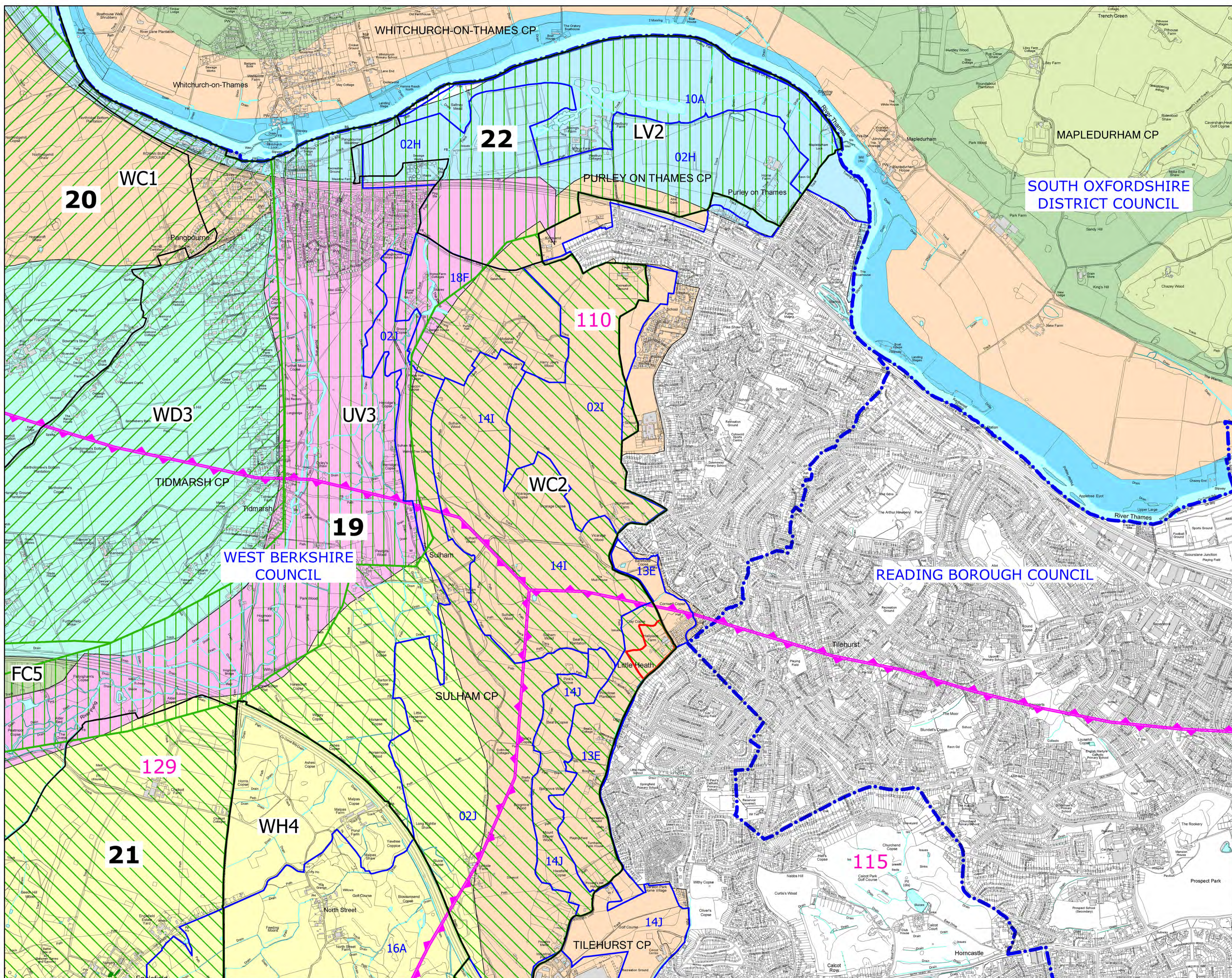
Drawing Title:  
 Site Context Plan

Date	04.02.2021	Scale	1:10,000 @A1 1:20,000 @A3	Drawn by	LH	Check by	LT
Project No	28776	Drawing No	RG-LP-01	Revision	A		

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### Legend

- Site Boundary
- Local Authority Boundary
- National Landscape Character Areas #**
  - Character Area 110: Chilterns
  - Character Area 115: Thames Valley
  - Character Area 129: Thames Basin Heaths
- West Berkshire Character Areas**
  - Landscape Type FC: Famed Chalk Mosaic
  - Character Area FC5: Yattendon Famed Chalk Mosaic
  - Landscape Type LV: Lower River Thames
  - Character Area LV2: Pangbourne Thames Lower River Valley
  - Landscape Type UV: Upper Valley Floor
  - Character Area UV3: Pang Upper Valley Floor
  - Landscape Type WC: Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes
  - Character Area WC1: Basildon Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes
  - Character Area WC2: Sulham Elevated Wooded Chalk with Slopes
  - Landscape Type WD: Elevated Downland
  - Character Area WD3: Ashampstead
  - Landscape Type WH: Woodland and Heathland Mosaic
  - Character Area WH4: Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic
- West Reading Local Landscape Character Areas +**
  - Character Area 2H: Lower Purley Chalk Lowlands
  - Character Area 2I: Upper Sulham Dispslopes
  - Character Area 2J: Lower Sulham Dispslopes
  - Character Area 8F: Lower Kennet Meadows
  - Character Area 10A: Purley River Valley
  - Character Area 13E: Little Heath Gravel Plateau
  - Character Area 14I: Purley Plateau Edge
  - Character Area 16A: Englefield Wooded Farmlands
  - Character Area 17A: Englefield Open Farmland
  - Character Area 18F: Purley Hall
  - Character Area 20E: Theale - Calcot Gap
  - Character Area 20F: West Theale
- North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Types ++**
  - Landscape Type: Downland with Woodland
  - Character Area 2B: Ashampstead Downs
  - Landscape Type: River Valley
  - Character Area 7D: Pang Valley
  - Landscape Type: Lowland Mosaic
  - Character Area 8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons
- North Wessex Downs AONB Historic Landscape Character Areas #**
  - Character Area 19: Pang Valley and Sulham Gap
  - Character Area 20: Pang-Thames Plateaux
  - Character Area 21: Kennet Valley East
  - Character Area 22: Thames Valley South
- OWLS Landscape Character Areas ~**
  - Landscape Type: River Meadowlands
  - Landscape Type: Terrace Farmland
  - Landscape Type: Wooded Estate Slopes and Valley Sides
  - Landscape Type: Wooded Farmland

**FIGURE 3A**  
 Project: Land at Hall Place Farm, Tilehurst  
 Drawing Title: Landscape Character Plan  
 Wet Berkshire 2019 Update  
 Date: 02.02.2021 Scale: 1:10,000 @A1 / 1:20,000 @A3 Drawn by: ML / LT  
 Project No: 28776 Drawing No: RG-LP-107 Check by: ML / LT  
 Revision: A

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