

# **VALE OF WHITE HORSE LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT**

**ADVICE ON THE LANDSCAPE IMPACT OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENT AT  
BOTLEY in the POPLAR ROAD Area**

**Prepared for Vale of White Horse District Council**

**by**

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# **VALE OF WHITE HORSE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK**

### **CORE STRATEGY 2026**

#### **A study of the landscape impact of further development at Botley in the Poplar Road Assessment Area**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1** The purpose of this paper is to provide advice to the Council on the potential landscape implications of further development at Botley. In this paper the most appropriate areas for future development will be identified, purely from a landscape perspective. In accordance with Government policy, the Council's priority is to look first for sites within the existing built up area to accommodate future development, with green field sites on the periphery of existing settlements then being identified to ensure that the South East Plan housing requirements for the plan period can be met.

- 1.2** The Development Policy Team has divided the land on the edge of Botley into six areas for appraisal purposes.

This landscape assessment looks in detail at a part only of one of these areas.  
[Figure 1]

- 1.3** The results of this appraisal will be fed into the wider Core Strategy site appraisal work which will take into account a wide range of other factors in determining where development should be located. There will be sites where development may be appropriate from a landscape point of view although it may be inappropriate for other reasons.

- 1.4** The methodology used in this assessment is based on The Countryside Agency's Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland 2002. It is also based on The Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (second edition).

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Introduction**

- 2.1.1** Having established the purpose of this assessment in **1.1** a desk study was carried out followed by a field survey. Following further desk study and field survey work, the characterisation through classification and description of the area was carried out. Then finally judgements were made to inform conclusions.

### **2.2 Desk Study**

The desk study was concerned with gathering map based information as well as information from background reports and planning documents. The documents referred to in this study are listed in the Bibliography. On completion of the information gathering an initial attempt was made to identify areas of common character. From this work a draft landscape character area plan was drawn up.

### **2.3 Field Survey**

This study is looking at a small area of countryside so a comprehensive field survey was implemented. In carrying out the field survey all the publicly accessible points in and adjacent to the site were walked. All of the draft landscape character areas were visited and information on land use, hedgerows, trees, woodland, visibility into and out of the site and land management were recorded through photography, annotated maps and survey sheets based on The Countryside Commission's Landscape Assessment Guidance. 2002.

The field survey work was carried out by one surveyor.

### **2.4 Characterisation**

In this final stage the landscape was divided into areas of distinct, recognisable and consistent common character. This was done using professional judgement to identify the boundaries to landscape character areas following the Countryside Agency's character assessment methodology and by analysis of all the data collected. The landscape character type within which the landscape areas occur was identified. Each landscape area was named to ease identification. Having identified and mapped each landscape character area, a written description was drawn up.

## **BOTLEY**

### **3. Desk Study**

**3.1** Following the methodology described in section 2 the information detailed below and in Figure 1 (Public Rights of Way) was collated.

### **3.2 Geology**

The assessment area is formed from Oxford Clay. At the western end, to the north of Hazel Road, there is an area of landslip.

### **3.3 Soils**

The Agricultural Land Classification grades the site as 50% grade 2 and 50% grade 3b.

### **3.4 Contours**

Botley is located in a small valley between Wytham Hill and Cumnor Hill. The assessment area is located on the southern slopes of Wytham Hill. It is between 65 and 75 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The valley floor is at about 60 metres AOD while Wytham Hill reaches 148 metres AOD.

### **3.5 Flood Plain**

The elevated position of the assessment area means that it is free of any flooding problems.

### **3.6 Rivers**

There are no rivers within the assessment area. The nearest river is the Seacourt Stream which is about 1 kilometre to the east of the area.

### **3.7 Ecology**

An ecological assessment of the area would not need to be carried out because the whole area is under intensive arable agriculture.

### **3.8 Land Use**

There is a large field between Botley, the A 420 and Tilbury Lane of which the assessment area forms a small part on its southern side. The whole field is under intensive arable agriculture.

### **3.9 Public Rights of Way [Figure 1]**

There are no public rights of way within the assessment area. Just to the south of the area a short length of path connects Elms Road with Poplar Road.

### **3.10 Settlement Pattern**

The assessment area is located on the north side of Botley. Botley forms an almost separate western suburb of Oxford.

### **3.11 Archaeology**

There are no known archaeological constraints.

## **4. FIELD SURVEY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Following the Methodology described in section 2, the information detailed below and in Figure 2 (Botley. Poplar Road. Site and Photographic Survey) and Figure 3 (Botley. Poplar Road. Vegetation Survey) was collected. A site visit was carried out on October 1st 2008.

### **4.2 Vegetation Survey [Figure 3]**

**4.2.1** The assessment area has no trees or hedgerows.

**4.2.2** To the north and west of the area trees form important landscape features. There is an avenue of mature standard trees running along Tilbury Lane to the west of the area. There are areas of woodland and lines of trees on both sides of the A 420 to the north of the area. Dean Court Farm tree belt between Dean Court Farm and the A 420 mitigates the effect of development on the landscape. This tree belt will be extended eastwards when residential development is built on either side of Tilbury Lane.

### **4.3 Visibility Survey**

**4.3.1** With its slightly elevated position and treeless landscape there are views over Botley and the surrounding countryside from the assessment area.

**4.3.2** Most of the area is not visible from Arnolds Way open space. [Photo 9]. The eastern section of the area is visible from the end of Elms Road. [Photo 8]. The area is visible from the adjacent gardens and houses and from some houses in the Yarnells Hill and Cedar Road areas.

## **5. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES**

**5.1** In 1996 – 97 The Countryside Commission produced a plan and text describing 'The Character of England.' This plan identified the broad zones that had unifying landscape characters as a consequence of a range of factors such as geology, soil, topography, vegetation, agriculture, ecology, climate and human settlement.

This plan indicates that the area covered by the Vale of White Horse District Council falls into three Character Areas:



**108** The Upper Thames Clay Vales – This is split into two areas: i) Thames Valley and ii) Vale of White Horse

**109** The Midvale Ridge - the Corallian Ridge

**116** The Berkshire and Marlborough Downs - Berkshire Downs

These areas are described in detail in The Countryside Agency's publication 'Countryside Character Vol.7 South East and London.'

The area covered by the Vale of White Horse District Council forms part of the scarplands landscape that covers the whole of south east England. The grain of the land, with alternating bands of high and low land, runs from south west to north east. This is a consequence of the different weathering of the alternating tilted layers of hard and soft rock and gives the Vale an outstanding and high quality landscape. This has been largely unspoilt by twentieth century development. The District Council's planning policies for the North Vale Area of High Landscape Value aim to protect and enhance the Corallian Ridge and Thames Valley while similar policies for the North Wessex Downs of Outstanding Natural Beauty seek to safeguard the Berkshire Downs.

## **5.2 The Thames Valley (108)**

This forms the northern section of the Upper Thames Clay Vales.

The soft Oxford Clay in the Upper Thames Valley has been covered in parts by gravels and alluvium to give a broad, mostly flat valley floor at about 60 – 70 metres above sea level. The Thames meanders through an often remote and tranquil landscape of water meadows (which regularly flood), Large fields with hedges and pollarded willows. Woodlands are few. Historic and attractive stone bridges mark the few river crossing points. At and below Oxford the River Thames has cut a gap in the Corallian Ridge and is confined to a much narrower valley, the floor of which has been levelled with gravel deposits. The sky is always important in any view. There are glimpsed views of the Cotswold dipslope while the north west facing escarpment of the Corallian Ridge dominates the southern view with Wytham Woods, Boars Hill, Faringdon Hill, Badbury Hill and Coleshill as high points.

## **5.3 The Midvale Ridge – The Corallian Ridge (109)**

This is a narrow ridge of coral limestone and lower greensand forming a lovely hilly landscape between Kennington and Coleshill. It has a steep north west facing escarpment overlooking the Thames Valley and a gentle dipslope forming the northern side of the Vale of the White Horse. The ridge is characterised by woodland, iron age hillforts, large country houses and estates exploiting expansive views to north and south, limestone villages and towns such as Faringdon, whose older areas have many buildings constructed from the local coral ragstone, located within or on the higher parts of the ridge. The towns on the higher area of the ridge continue into Wiltshire. The highest parts of the ridge reach about 160 metres above sea level. The soil is generally light and sandy with arable fields prevailing. The acid sands in the Frilford area give rise to a heathland landscape where pines and gorse are common.

## **5.4 The Vale of the White Horse (108)**

This forms the southern section of the Upper Thames Clay Vales.

This is a broad valley formed in the Kimmeridge and Gault Clays that runs from Swindon to the River Thames at Abingdon at 60 – 70 metres above sea level. West of the White Horse Hill the valley is about three miles wide but to the east, as the Gault Clay becomes more extensive it widens to about six miles. The heavy wet soils have given rise to a pastoral landscape with moderate to large fields surrounded by hedgerows with standard trees and occasional copses. Since the loss of the elms, pollarded willows tend to be the dominant tree. At the eastern end of the valley a thin layer of gravel and alluvium covers the clays. Here the landscape is very open with few trees and very large fields.

The western section of the valley is dominated by the north west facing chalk escarpment culminating in the White Horse Hill, rising to 260 metres. The Corallian Ridge is visually weaker except where the lower greensand forms high points such as Folly Hill and One Tree Hill near Faringdon. The Berkshire Downs are visually more distant at the eastern end and the escarpment is fragmented into layers. The Corallian Ridge and Boars Hill and distant wooded hilltops are visible to the north. The area between West Hannay, Steventon and Marcham is a bleak and remote area.

East of the A 34 a thicker layer of gravel overlays the clay resulting in extensive gravel working between Abingdon and Sutton Courtney. Much of this landscape has a devastated appearance because of the extraction and restoration works.

Throughout the whole of the valley there are pretty villages of clay, tile and thatch with larger scale urban development only impinging at Grove and to the east of the A 34, at Abingdon, Didcot and Didcot Power Station.

## **5.5 The Berkshire Downs (The North Wessex Downs) (116)**

These form the northern edge of a huge area of chalk downland covering large areas of Berkshire, Wiltshire and Hampshire. The north facing escarpment dominates the Vale with a general height of about 200 metres above sea level. The escarpment forms a single slope west of the White Horse Hill but to the east, the upper greensand and the lower, middle and upper chalk split off to form their own escarpments and dipslopes thereby creating a more complex and beautiful landscape especially in the Ardington area.

The chalk has its own distinctive open landscape with vast panoramic views in all directions and a wonderful rolling landform. The highest land is windswept and the large fields are divided by tracks and shelter belts. Arable farming is widespread. Hilltop tree clumps mark the top of the escarpment. There is more woodland on the lower chalk. Fruit growing on the greensand has created an orchard landscape around Harwell.

Iron Age hillforts are numerous and many fields and parish boundaries can trace their origins back to that period. The Ridgeway track is even older. Along the spring line at the toe of the escarpment there is a string of beautiful spring line villages built of flint, chalk and brick with tile and thatch forming an integral part of the landscape.

## **6. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS (LCA) [Figure 4]**

### **6.1 Introduction**

- 6.1.1** Botley is situated in a gap in the Corallian Ridge to the west of Oxford where Wytham Hill has become separate from the main escarpment. Botley has developed across the northern side of Cumnor Hill and has also spread part way up the southern end of Wytham Hill. [Photo 9].
- 6.1.2** Botley is set in a rolling hilly landscape with well wooded countryside to the north and south. [Photo 9].
- 6.1.3** Immediately to the north of the assessment area the countryside is protected by the Oxford green belt. The adjacent countryside has also been designated as Area of High Landscape Value in the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2011.
- 6.1.4** The landform and the extensive woodland areas make an important contribution to Botley's character and setting. Any new development must recognise these important elements and contribute to their retention and improvement.
- 6.1.5** From a combination of the desk study and site visit the assessment area at Botley can through Characterisation be identified as a particular Landscape Character Area (LCA) with its own distinctive features.

### **6.2 LCA 1. Poplar Road**

An open field forms its western and northern boundaries while its eastern boundary follows the edge of development in Elms Road. The southern boundary follows development in Elms Road, Poplar Road and Hazel Road. [Photo 8]

This area is a gentle and open arable hillside which falls to the south. The adjacent development provides some enclosure. Further modest enclosure is provided by the rising ground to the north and by the embankment and tree planting along the A 420. [Photo 9]

## **7. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF POPLAR ROAD LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA 1**

- 7.1** Key characteristics of the Poplar Road landscape are:-
- open arable fields
  - intensive agriculture
  - views across Botley to the Corallian Ridge
- 7.2** The current condition of the landscape shows:-
- an exploited arable landscape
- 7.3** The evidence of change in the Poplar Road landscape is:-
- the gradual loss of hedgerows through neglect and by removal

- 7.4** Trends in land use that may cause future change are:-
- there are no agricultural changes that are expected to affect the area. It will remain under large scale intensive arable farming
- 7.5** Potential development pressures are:-
- for urban expansion in the period to 2026
- 7.6** Possible consequences of the area remaining under its current range of uses are:-
- that it will remain in its present condition
- 7.7** The consequences of the area being subjected to urban development would be:-
- the loss of an agricultural landscape to built development
  - the creation of new mitigating woodlands and tree belts within a public open space network
  - the loss of some views into the surrounding countryside
  - the intrusion of an urban area into the countryside that will have a visual impact on the Oxford green belt and on the Area of High Landscape Value.
- 7.8** The effects of the area remaining unchanged are:-
- that it will remain in its present condition
- 7.9** The effects of the area being developed are:-
- another step in the expansion of Botley that keeps it within its natural landscape setting and containment
  - the mitigating woodland and tree belts would be an extension of the wooded landscape to the north and west
- 7.10** The threats to Poplar Road's existing landscape character area's key characteristics as a result of the adverse consequences of change are:-
- the loss of its rural landscape
  - the loss of many views to the Corallian Ridge
- 7.11** The opportunities for enhancement following urban development where there is scope for beneficial change are:-
- planting new tree belts to mitigate the visual impact of the existing and future areas of residential development on the adjacent rural landscapes and to create a new landscape setting
  - planting the new tree belts with native species in order to increase the biodiversity of the area
  - enhancement of the public footpath network and the open space system

## **8. LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND STRATEGY**

- 8.1** The Poplar Road LCA 1 has a poor quality landscape. LCA 1 is typical of the adjacent arable landscape.

- 8.2** The strategy options that flow from **8.1** suggest that it would be possible to proceed in several directions.
- i. Retain and continue to manage the area under its current regime.
  - ii. Encourage the owners to carry out new tree and hedgerow planting where appropriate in order to conserve and enhance the quality of the landscape.
  - iii. Allow for development over the whole assessment area with mitigating forestry up to the A 420 on its northern side.

## **9. LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND CAPACITY**

### **9.1 Landscape Sensitivity**

The Poplar Road LCA 1 is a strong representative of the local landscape character. It has a low level of sensitivity to accommodating major changes.

### **9.2 Landscape Capacity**

The amount of change that the Poplar Road LCA 1 can accept without an adverse effect on its landscape character is high.

### **9.3 Landscape Robustness**

Combining its low landscape sensitivity with a high capacity for change, the Poplar Road LCA 1 has a high level of robustness.

## **10. CONCLUSION**

- 10.1** Following on from **9.3** above, the conclusion is that from a landscape character point of view Poplar Road LCA 1 is robust enough to accept the changes that would occur if development took place.
- 10.2** To ensue that any development in Poplar Road has a minimal impact on the adjacent landscape mitigating woodland to the north of the area, similar to woodland planted further west along the A 420 in Botley, must be implemented as part of the development.

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