

VALE OF WHITE HORSE LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

**ADVICE ON THE LANDSCAPE IMPACT OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENT AT
WANTAGE AND GROVE**

IN

**THE CHAIN HILL AREA SOUTH OF WANTAGE
THE CROWN, CORK AND SEAL AREA NORTH WEST OF WANTAGE
THE ELMS FARM AREA NORTH EAST OF WANTAGE
THE AREA NORTH OF GROVE**

Prepared for Vale of White Horse District Council

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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 Wantage and Grove

in

**the Chain Hill Assessment Area south of Wantage
the Crown, Cork and Seal Area north west of Wantage
the Elms Farm Area north east of Wantage
the Area North of Grove**

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 Wantage and Grove. 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 Wantage and Grove into fifteen areas for appraisal purposes.

This landscape assessment looks in detail at part of eight of these areas adjacent to the edges of Wantage and Grove.

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 small areas 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.

3. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

- 3.1** 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.

3.2 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.

3.3 The Midvale Ridge - The Corallian Ridge

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.

3.4 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.

3.5 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.

THE CHAIN HILL AREA SOUTH OF WANTAGE

4. Desk Study

4.1 Following the methodology described in section 2 the information detailed below and in Chain Hill. Figure 1 was collated.

4.2 Geology

This assessment area is located at the base of the Lower Chalk escarpment on the south side of Wantage. The northern half of Manor Road Recreation Ground is located on the Upper Greensand.

4.3 Soils

The Agricultural Land Classification grades are 3a for all the agricultural land except for a small area of 3b on the east side of Chain Hill (B 4494).

4.4 Contours

The landform of the assessment area is a steeply sloping north west facing hillside on the lower slopes of Chain Hill. The hillside is overlooking the Letcombe Brook valley and its Manor Road tributary. Manor Road Recreation Ground ranges from 95 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) in its north west corner to 120 metres AOD at its south east corner. Chain Hill then rises to about 140 metres AOD at Chain Hill Farm. The land to the east of Chain Hill (B 4494) ranges from 105 metres AOD on the south edge of Wantage to about 115 metres AOD on the southern edge of the assessment area.

4.5 Flood Plain

None of the assessment area is liable to flooding.

4.6 Rivers

There are no rivers within the assessment area. The nearest river is a small tributary of Letcombe Brook on the west side of Manor Road (A 338).

4.7 Ecology

An ecological assessment of the area would need to be carried out before any development is approved.

The whole area is either under intensive arable cultivation or a managed recreation ground so there are very limited opportunities for wildlife.

4.8 Land Use

As a result of the well drained chalk soils the whole of the assessment area outside Manor Road Recreation Ground is under intensive arable cultivation. The recreation ground has large areas of mown grass with recreational facilities such as tennis courts, a playground and a paddling pool.

4.9 Public Rights of Way [Chain Hill. Figure 1]

There are no public rights of way within the assessment area. There is full public access to Manor Road Recreation Ground.

4.10 Settlement Pattern

The assessment area is located on the southern edge of Wantage. Grove and its western expansion area lie to the north. Because Wantage and Grove are located so close together they increasingly operate as a single settlement. There is a ring of villages around Wantage and Grove. To the south west is Letcombe Regis, to the west is East Challow, to the north west is Denchworth, to the north are West and East Hanney and to the south east are Ardington, East Lockinge and West Lockinge.

4.11 Archaeology

The area to the east of the B 4494 has no known archaeological features while the area to the west has two areas of crop marks.

5. FIELD SURVEY

5.1 Introduction

Following the Methodology described in section 2, the information detailed below and in Chain Hill. Figure 2 and Chain Hill. Figure 3 was collected. Site visits were carried out on May 24th and 31st, and July 14th 2008.

5.2 Vegetation Survey [Chain Hill. Figure 3]

5.2.1 The assessment area has the majority of its trees within the Manor Road Recreation Ground.

5.2.2 Chain Hill (B 4494) has an unmanaged hedgerow along its western side that has developed into a line of small trees. Chain Hill Cemetery at the bottom of Chain Hill has a line of mature trees along the northern boundary of the assessment area.

5.2.3 There is a strong line of trees on the north side of the house half way up the east side of Chain Hill (B 4494). They are outside the assessment area.

5.2.4 Manor Road Recreation Ground has a very strong line of mature standard trees along its western, southern and eastern boundaries. [Photo 22, Photo 23] There is also a strong line of trees across the northern half of the park. Lime trees are the dominant species.

5.3 Visibility Survey

5.3.1 The assessment area to the east of Chain Hill (B 4494) is not visible from the B 4494 because the road is in a cutting on the hillside. The trees around the house halfway up Chain Hill also screen the area. This area is visible from the residential area of Wantage on its northern boundary.

5.3.2 The large field on the west side of Chain Hill (B 4494) is not generally visible from the road because it is in a cutting on the hillside and because of hedgerows alongside the road. This assessment area is partially visible from Chain Hill Cemetery. It is fully visible from the upper footpath in Manor Road Recreation Ground. It is visible from a long length of the Chalk escarpment to the west of Wantage which forms part of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

5.3.3 Manor Road Recreation Ground is visible from Manor Road.

6. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS (LCA) [Chain Hill. Figure 4]

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 Wantage is sited on a gap cut by Letcombe Brook into the greensand ridge that runs west to east on the northern side of the chalk escarpment of the Berkshire Downs. The greensand ridge is often very open. To the north lies the wide valley of the River Ock which is formed from Gault and Kimmeridge Clay. To the north of Wantage erosion has left a block of slightly higher land at Grove Airfield. Grove is located on the eastern side of this higher ground and, like Wantage, on the Letcombe Brook.

6.1.2 From a combination of the desk study and site visits, the assessment area on the southern edge of Wantage can now through Characterisation be broken down into two Landscape Character Areas (LCA), each one with its own distinctive features.

6.2 LCA 1. Manor Road

A school and its playing field forms the northern boundary while the open downland countryside of Chain Hill forms the eastern and south boundaries. Housing also abuts the southern boundary and Manor Road (A 338) runs along the western boundary.

This recreation ground has a parkland character, particularly at its southern end [Photo 22] with large areas of grassland enclosed by lines of mature trees along the boundaries. At the northern end the area is more urban in character with a bandstand, a paddling pool, car parks and several buildings. [Photo 23]

6.3 LCA 2. Chain Hill

This area is divided by Chain Hill road (B 4494). The eastern section is bounded on its west side by Chain Hill road and by residential areas along its northern and part of its eastern sides. [Photo 25] A line across open AONB downland forms the southern boundary. The western section is bounded by Chain Hill road on its north eastern side and by Chain Hill Cemetery on its northern side. Its north western boundary is formed by Manor Road Recreation Ground while a line across open AONB downland forms its southern boundary. [Photo 24]

These two areas form a small part of a very large chalk downland landscape character area. The whole area is under large scale arable cultivation with few trees or hedgerows. The character of the area is derived from the bleak and

open rolling landform. The section to the east of Chain Hill is partially enclosed on three sides by development in Wantage and by the property on the hillside above.

7. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF CHAIN HILL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS LCA 1 and LCA 2

7.1 Key characteristics of the Chain Hill landscape are:-

- a well treed landscape in the recreation ground
- part of a large scale rolling downland
- an open and bleak downland
- a relatively treeless downland dominated by arable agriculture

7.2 The current condition of the landscape shows:-

- an exploited agricultural area
- no hedgerows and a few tree groups
- a well managed treed recreation ground

7.3 The evidence of change in the Chain Hill landscape is:-

- the loss of hedgerows and trees
- the loss of field boundaries

7.4 Trends in land use that may cause future change are:-

- that agricultural changes are not expected to affect the area and 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 there will be no change in the landscape

7.7 The consequences of the area being subjected to urban development would be:-

- the loss of a productive agricultural landscape to built development
- the creation of new woodlands and tree belts within a public open space network
- the intrusion of an urban area into the countryside
- the loss of an important local recreation ground
- a negative impact on the North Wessex Downs AONB

7.8 The effects of no change in land use are:-

- that there would be no new tree or hedgerow planting

7.9 The effects of the area being developed are:-

- the expansion of Wantage into a sensitive open landscape
- the loss of an area of countryside and the loss of an established and well used recreation ground
- the adverse visual and physical impact of development on the adjacent North Wessex Downs AONB

7.10 The threats to Chain Hill's existing landscape character area's key characteristics as a result of the adverse consequences of change are:-

- the loss of a rural open landscape
- the loss of an urban park landscape
- the loss of downland views

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 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 Chain Hill landscape character areas, LCA 1 and LCA 2, vary from good to excellent quality. The landscape character of LCA 1 is typical of a recreation ground but not of the wider landscapes around Wantage. The landscape character of LCA 2 is typical of the open chalk downland of the North Wessex Downs AONB.

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. Develop the recreation ground and build a replacement in the adjacent countryside. Retain the open downland.
- iii. Develop the downland area east of Chain Hill road (B 4494) and retain the open downland west of Chain Hill road. Also retain the recreation ground.

9. LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND CAPACITY

9.1 Landscape Sensitivity

The Chain Hill landscape character area LCA 1 is not a strong representative of the wider local landscape character areas. LCA 2 is a very strong representative of the wider local landscape character area. LCA 1 has a moderate level of sensitivity to accommodating major changes while LCA 2 has a high level of sensitivity.

9.2 Landscape Capacity

The amount of change that Chain Hill LCA 1 can accept without an adverse effect on its landscape character is high. The residential areas would be contained within the existing tree matrix and would be generally hidden from view in the wider landscape. The amount of change that LCA 2 can accept is low.

9.3 Landscape Robustness

Combining its moderate landscape sensitivity with a high capacity for change, the Chain Hill LCA 1 has a moderate level of robustness.

LCA 2 has a high level of sensitivity and a low capacity for change. It therefore has a low level of robustness.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1** Following on from **9.3** above, the conclusion is that from a landscape character area point of view Chain Hill LCA 1 is robust enough to accept the changes that would occur if moderate scale residential development took place. LCA 2 is not robust enough and should remain as countryside.
- 10.2** However Manor Road Recreation Ground (LCA 1) is a well used public open space with a well developed infrastructure. It is in an accessible location and creates a buffer between Wantage and the open AONB downland. The downland area east of Chain Hill (B 4494) is enclosed on three sides by existing development in Wantage together with the vegetation in the property half way up Chain Hill providing some screening on the south side. Therefore residential development in this area would have a muted impact on the wider AONB downland landscape particularly if there were substantial woodland mitigation on its southern side.
- 10.3** Therefore if for other reasons it is deemed necessary to allow residential development on the southern side of Wantage then the area east of Chain Hill (B 4494) could be developed while protecting the open downland west of Chain Hill and the Manor Road Recreation Ground.

THE CROWN, CORK AND SEAL AREA NORTH WEST OF WANTAGE

4. Desk Study

4.1 Following the methodology described in section 2 the information detailed below and in Crown, Cork and Seal. Figure 5 was collated.

4.2 Geology

To the south of the Wilts and Berks Canal the small escarpment running east to west is formed from greensand. To the north of the canal the Woodhill Brook valley and the small hillside beyond occupied by Crown, Cork and Seal is formed from Gault Clay.

4.3 Soils

The Agricultural Land Classification grades the hillside to the north of Stockham Park as a mixture of grades 3a and 3b with a small area of grade 2. The fields to the south, west and east of Crown, Cork and Seal are grade 3b. The land around Stockham Farm is grade 3a which is classified as best and most versatile farmland.

4.4 Contours

The landform of the assessment area has the head of a small west facing valley in its middle section between 80 and 85 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). To the south of the Wilts and Berks Canal the greensand escarpment rises to about 100 metres AOD at Stockham Park. To the north of Woodhill Brook valley the hill rises to about 85 metres AOD. It then levels off to the north across Grove Airfield. To the east of the Woodhill Brook valley the contours rise gently from about 85 metres AOD to about 90 metres AOD around Stockham Farm. A section of the disused Wilts and Berks Canal is in a deep cutting through part of this area.

4.5 Flood Plain [Photo 27]

Woodhill Brook valley floor is the only part of the assessment area that may be liable to minor flooding.

4.6 Rivers

Woodhill Brook flows east to west from its source at Stockham Farm. There are a number of springs and small streams that run down the greensand escarpment and into the Wilts and Berks Canal. The Wilts and Berks Canal runs east to west through the area. It has been restored between East Challow and Stockham Park and remains full of water all year because it is fed by the springs from the greensand escarpment above. There are long term plans to restore the canal eastwards to the A 417 and beyond.

4.7 Ecology

An ecological assessment of the area would need to be carried out before any development is approved.

The disused Wilts and Berks Canal, Woodhill Brook valley, the greensand escarpment and the young woodland areas north of Stockham Farm are the areas where the most important wildlife habitats would be most likely to occur.

4.8 Land Use

As a result of the varied geology and landform there is a complicated land use pattern. The hillside in the north of the assessment area is occupied by Crown, Cork and Seal for industrial purposes. The field to the west of this is under arable while the field on the east side is used as pasture. On the valley floor of Woodhill Brook there are two small, unmanaged fields. To the west of these is the eastern end of a very large arable field that extends to East Challow. The greensand hillside below Stockham Park is under pasture and has a minimal level of management. To the north of Stockham Farm the field is under grass together with a significant area of scattered groups of young trees creating a parkland setting for the farm. To the east of Stockham Farm are the playing fields of Fitzwaryn School.

4.9 Public Rights of Way [Crown, Cork and Seal. Figure 5]

There is a public footpath running east to west through the assessment area along the tow path of the disused Wilts and Berks Canal. There is a second public footpath that runs from the Wilts and Berks Canal path to the west of Stockham Farm past Stockham Park towards Belmont. The track on the south side of Crown, Cork and Seal is well used as a footpath along the Woodhill Brook valley.

4.10 Settlement Pattern

The assessment area is located on the north west corner of Wantage. Grove and its western expansion area together with its strategic break lie to the north. Because Wantage and Grove are located so close together they increasingly operate as a single settlement. There is a ring of villages around Wantage and Grove. To the south west is Letcombe Regis, to the west is East Challow, to the north west is Denchworth, to the north are West and East Hanney and to the south east are Ardington, East Lockinge and West Lockinge.

4.11 Archaeology

There are no known archaeological constraints within this area.

5. FIELD SURVEY

5.1 Introduction

Following the Methodology described in section 2, the information detailed below and in Crown, Cork and Seal. Figure 6 and Crown, Cork and Seal.

Figure 7 was collected. Site visits were carried out on May 24th and 31st, and July 14th 2008.

5.2 Vegetation Survey [Crown, Cork and Seal. Figure 7]

5.2.1 The assessment area has a very good general tree cover.

5.2.2 The Crown, Cork and Seal site has a mature woodland along its eastern boundary and a narrow belt of trees along its southern boundary which weakens along the western side. There are groups of over mature poplars to the north of the site. To the west a poplar woodland runs along the top of the hillside following the line of Downsview Road round to Grove Technology Park.

5.2.3 A band of mature trees dominated by willows and ash follows the line of Woodhill Brook before turning south to join the Wilts and Berks Canal. There are lines of mature trees on both sides of the Wilts and Berks Canal from East Challow to below Stockham Farm.

5.2.4 The large field to the north of Stockham Farm has a mature tree belt along its eastern and south western boundaries. Within the field extensive tree planting has been carried out during the last five to seven years and the development of these trees is beginning to have a positive impact on adjacent areas. There are two small mature woodlands to the south east of Stockham Farm. Tree planting associated with the northern edge of Stockham Park has matured to form an important feature.

5.3 Visibility Survey

5.3.1 The buildings on the Crown, Cork and Seal site are substantially concealed by boundary tree belts except on the northern boundary where they are visible from Downsview Road.

To the west of Crown, Cork and Seal the upper section of the hillside to the south of the tree belt is clearly visible from East Challow, West Challow Field and west Wantage. The lower section of the hill is partially screened from views from the south west by the tree belt along Woodhill Brook.

5.3.2 The two small valley bottom fields south of Crown, Cork and Seal are very enclosed by all the surrounding trees and higher ground. The large field to the west is very open to views from the west but is well screened along its southern and northern boundaries by large scale tree belts.

5.3.3 The field to the east of Crown, Cork and Seal is very open on its northern side to Downsview Road.

5.3.4 The field to the north of Stockham Farm is very enclosed by all its trees particularly by the mature tree belt along its eastern boundary. There are some glimpses into the field from the canal towpath.

6. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 Wantage is sited on a gap cut by Letcombe Brook into the greensand ridge that runs west to east on the northern side of the chalk escarpment of the Berkshire Downs. The greensand ridge is often very open but in the Crown, Cork and Seal area it is unusually well treed. To the north lies the wide valley of the River Ock which is formed from Gault and Kimmeridge clay. To the north of Wantage erosion has left a block of slightly higher land at Grove Airfield. Grove is located on the eastern side of this higher ground and, like Wantage, on the Letcombe Brook.

At the Crown, Cork and Seal site Woodhill Brook has cut a small valley between the block of higher clay and the greensand escarpment.

6.1.2 From a combination of the desk study and site visits, the assessment area on the north west corner of Wantage can now through Characterisation be broken down into six Landscape Character Areas (LCA), each one with its own distinctive features.

6.2 LCA 1. Crown Hill [Photo 26]

Downsview Road forms the northern boundary, Crown, Cork and Seal forms the eastern boundary and Woodhill Brook forms the southern boundary. To the west the boundary crosses the open field.

This is part of a much larger character area that extends west and north to Woodhill Farm. It is a south facing arable hillside topped by a substantial belt of poplar trees alongside Downsview Road. At the bottom of the hillside a tree belt along Woodhill Brook gives some enclosure. Buildings and a fragmented scatter of trees provide enclosure to the east. In spite of the enclosing tree belts the area has an open character with panoramic views to the south and west from the higher ground.

6.3 LCA 2. Downsview Road [Photo 30]

The disused Wilts and Berks Canal forms the south eastern boundary, Downsview Road forms the northern boundary and Crown, Cork and Seal forms the western boundary.

This generally level grass field is very open along its northern boundary but a strong woodland and tree belts enclose the other sides. The old cutting for the disused Wilts and Berks Canal has been filled and lost except at its western end where it remains as a strong wooded landscape feature. This character area is an extension of Grove Airfield character area.

6.4 LCA 3. Canal Side

The disused Wilts and Berks Canal forms the southern boundary, a field boundary forms the eastern boundary and Woodhill Brook forms the northern boundary. To the west the boundary crosses the open field.

This is part of a much larger character area that extends west to East Challow. It is a very large level arable field that is enclosed on its southern, eastern and northern sides by lines of mature trees. In contrast it is very open to the west. It is a rural landscape.

6.5 LCA 4. Woodhill Brook [Photo 27]

The disused Wilts and Berks Canal forms the southern boundary, Crown, Cork and Seal forms the north eastern boundary and a field boundary forms the western boundary.

These two small level fields at the head of the Woodhill Brook valley are enclosed on all sides by lines of mature trees. They have a rough character because they are not managed. There is a neglected pond on the western boundary. Hedgerows divide the fields.

6.6 LCA 5. Stockham Park [Photo 28]

The disused Wilts and Berks Canal forms the north western boundary, the north eastern boundary runs close to Stockham Farm and the southern boundary follows Stockham Park residential area on the edge of Wantage. To the west the boundary crosses a small field.

This is part of a larger character area that extends west to East Challow. The area is very enclosed by lines of mature trees along its north western and southern sides. The greensand escarpment falls short and steep down to the canal. It is divided into small pastoral fields with hedges running up and down the slope. It is a damp hillside with several springs and small streams. There is an area of allotments on the north side of Saxon Place.

6.7 LCA 6. Stockham Farm [Photo 29]

The disused Wilts and Berks Canal forms the north western boundary, the A 417 forms the eastern boundary, a track to Stockham Farm forms the southern boundary and a fence line behind Stockham Farm forms the south western boundary.

The character of this area is changing quickly from an open field ten years ago into an enclosed and semi-wooded area. A large number of tree groups have been planted in recent years and they are growing fast. The eastern boundary is enclosed by a mature tree belt while enclosure along parts of the canal boundary is formed by a block of mature trees and hedgerow remnants. The large group of farm buildings create enclosure along the south west side of the area. At the southern end of the area there is a block of mature trees and the Fitzwaryn School playing fields. There are very few views into this area.

7. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF CROWN, CORK AND SEAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS 1 – 6

7.1 Key characteristics of the Crown, Cork and Seal landscape are:-

- a well treed landscape
- a small scale valley enclosed by hillsides to the north and south

- a small scale plateau in the eastern section
 - low key urban fringe agricultural use
 - the disused Wilts and Berks Canal
 - the low key impact of the residential and employment areas within and adjacent to the area
- 7.2** The current condition of the landscape shows:-
- about 50% of the area is unmanaged or poorly managed
 - unmanaged hedgerows
 - a carefully managed new landscape at Stockham Farm
- 7.3** The evidence of change in the Crown, Cork and Seal landscape is:-
- the restoration of part of the Wilts and Berks Canal
 - the lack of hedgerow maintenance
 - that Stockham Farm is no longer a working farm
 - the decline or cessation of agriculture in four of the six character areas
 - the new woodland areas at Stockham Farm
- 7.4** Trends in land use that may cause future change are:-
- that agricultural changes are not expected to affect the area and it will remain under low key agricultural use
- 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:-
- a further withdrawal from agriculture and its associated landscape management
 - further increases in trespass by the local residents
 - the development of the young woodland areas at Stockham Farm
- 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 woodlands and tree belts within a public open space network
 - the loss of most of the young woodland at Stockham Farm
 - the intrusion of an urban area into the countryside
 - the loss of a good quality and diverse landscape in a locally accessible location
 - the restoration of the Wilts and Berks Canal
- 7.8** The effects of no change in the land use are:-
- a further decline in the management of the landscape
 - an increasing number of footpaths
 - a new mature woodland area

- 7.9** The effects of the changes in 7.7 are:-
- outward expansion of Wantage
 - another step towards the reopening of the Wilts and Berks Canal
 - a decline in the area of local woodland
- 7.10** The threats to Crown, Cork and Seal'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 young woodland at Stockham Farm
 - the small scale valley is lost under the impact of comprehensive development
 - the springs feeding the restored Wilts and Berks Canal from the greensand escarpment could be lost
- 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 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
 - creation of a new section of the realigned Wilts and Berks Canal
 - enhancement of the public footpath network and the open space system
 - improved management of the existing tree belts

8. LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND STRATEGY

- 8.1** The Crown, Cork and Seal landscape character areas LCA 1 - LCA 6 vary from good to excellent quality. Their landscape character is not typical of the wider open landscape of the Vale of the White Horse or the more open and elevated sections of the greensand ridge. It has a small scale and enclosed valley landscape with a considerable level of tree cover.
- 8.2** The strategy options that flow from **8.1** suggest that it would be possible to proceed in several directions.
- iv. Retain and continue to manage the area under its current regime.
 - v. Encourage the owners to carry out some new tree and hedgerow planting where appropriate and to increase its agricultural use.
 - vi. Allow for residential development only on the Stockham Farm and Downsvie Road character areas LCA 2 and LCA 6. Restore the eastern section of the Wilts and Berks Canal through the area and develop Woodhill Brook character area LCA 4 as public open space. Retain Crown Hill, Canal Side and Stockham Park character areas LCA 1, LCA 3 and LCA 5 as countryside. [Crown, Cork and Seal. Figure 9]

9. LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND CAPACITY

9.1 Landscape Sensitivity

The Crown, Cork and Seal landscape character areas are not strong representatives of the wider local landscape character areas. They have a high level of sensitivity to accommodating major changes except for LCA 2 and LCA 6 which have a moderate level of sensitivity.

9.2 Landscape Capacity

The amount of change that the Crown, Cork and Seal landscape character areas LCA 1, LCA 3, LCA 4 and LCA 5 can accept without an adverse effect on their landscape character is low. Landscape character area LCA 2 has a high capacity while LCA 6 has a moderate capacity.

9.3 Landscape Robustness

Combining their high landscape sensitivity with a low capacity for change, the Crown, Cork and Seal landscape character areas LCA 1, LCA 3, LCA 4 and LCA 5 have a low level of robustness.

LCA 2 has a moderate level of sensitivity and a high capacity for change. It therefore has a moderately high level of robustness. LCA 6 has a moderate level of sensitivity and a moderate capacity for change. It therefore has a moderate level of robustness.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1** Following on from **9.3** above, the conclusion is that from a landscape character area point of view Crown, Cork and Seal is robust enough to accept the changes that would occur if moderate scale residential development took place in LCA 2 and LCA 6 and if LCA 4 were developed as public open space. LCA 1, LCA 3 and LCA 5 would remain as countryside. [Figure 9]

THE ELMS FARM AREA NORTH EAST OF WANTAGE

4. Desk Study

- 4.1** Following the methodology described in section 2 the information detailed below and in Elms Farm. Figure 10 was collated.

4.2 Geology

The assessment area is formed from Greensand and is located on the dip slope of the Greensand ridge on the north eastern edge of Wantage. To the west Letcombe Brook runs northwards cutting a gap in the Greensand ridge. To the north the Greensand escarpment falls away into the Vale of the White Horse with its Gault Clay. To the east the Greensand ridge continues towards Didcot while to the south the chalk escarpment rises above Wantage.

4.3 Soils

The Agricultural Land Classification grades the whole of the assessment area as grade 2 apart from a strip along the north side of Port Way which is grade 3a and the hillside below Elms Farm which is grade 3b. Therefore most of the area is classified as the best and most versatile farmland.

4.4 Contours

The crest of the Greensand ridge forms an extensive plateau around the north east corner of Wantage at about 100 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). This plateau runs from Elms Farm eastwards to Port Way (A 417). From Elms Farm the hillside drops steeply down to Letcombe Brook at about 80 metres AOD. Along Mably Way westwards the ground rises very slightly to about 85 metres AOD at the Grove Airfield roundabout. Between Elms Farm and the northern edge of Wantage the hillside gets gradually less steep. Close to the edge of Wantage there is a small east to west valley running into the plateau area.

To the north the Greensand escarpment falls to between 75 and 80 metres AOD at its base. Then the Vale of the White Horse falls very gradually to about 60 metres AOD at the River Ock. To the east of the site the crest of the Greensand ridge at New Barn rises to about 110 metres AOD. To the south of Port Way (at about 100 metres AOD) the ground is level for about half a kilometre before rising to about 140 metres AOD at Lark Hill. To the south of the assessment area the ground levels in east Wantage fall to about 90 metres AOD in a small valley running east to west.

4.5 Flood Plain

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

4.6 Rivers

There are no rivers within the assessment area. The nearest river is the Letcombe Brook which is immediately west of the area.

4.7 Ecology

An ecological assessment of the area would need to be carried out before any development is approved.

Nearby the whole area is under intensive arable agriculture. Consequently the only wildlife habitats remaining are an area of young woodland, two areas of mature woodland and a small length of hedgerows.

4.8 Land Use

As a consequence of flat landform and light soils virtually the whole of the assessment area is under intensive arable agriculture in large scale fields. The only exceptions are a small unmanaged grass field on the north side of Charlton and three small fields on the south side of Charlton next to the cricket ground which are grazed. Beyond the assessment area the countryside to the south, east and north is under arable. On the west side the steep hillside is grazed apart from an area of allotments.

4.9 Public Rights of Way [Elms Farm. Figure 10]

There is a byway open to all traffic running due north from Charlton down to Grove. About half a kilometre along this byway from Charlton there is a footpath that runs in a north westerly direction to Grove. Just north of Charlton there is a footpath that runs south east from the byway to Port Way (A 417) and on to West Lockinge.

4.10 Settlement Pattern

The assessment area is located on the north east corner of Wantage. Grove is located some distance away to the north west. Because Wantage and Grove are located so close together they increasingly operate as a single settlement. There is a ring of villages around Wantage and Grove. To the south west is Letcombe Regis, to the west is East Challow, to the north west is Denchworth, to the north are West and East Hanney and to the south east are Ardington, East Lockinge and West Lockinge.

4.11 Archaeology

There are no known archaeological constraints within this area.

5. FIELD SURVEY

5.1 Introduction

Following the Methodology described in section 2, the information detailed below and in Elms Farm. Figure 11 and Elms Farm. Figure 12 was collected. Site visits were carried out on May 24th and 31st, and July 14th 2008.

5.2 Vegetation Survey [Elms Farm. Figure 12]

5.2.1 The assessment area has a very low level of trees and hedgerows.

- 5.2.2** The Crab Hill area is an almost treeless plateau. [Photo 36] At its western end there is a well managed hedgerow running along the skyline south of Elms Farm. Further east the southern end of a young tree belt within the assessment area runs north down the escarpment. Along the byway north from Charlton there are hawthorn trees intermittently on either side of the track. From the edge of the assessment area, north down the escarpment, new and well managed hedgerows have been planted on both sides of the byway.
- 5.2.3** At the eastern end of the assessment area the small field on the north side of Charlton has a broken line of hawthorn trees along its northern boundary. These continue eastward along another field boundary to a mature tree belt that continues eastward towards New Barn. From this area of trees two unmanaged hedgerows of intermittent hawthorn trees run south towards Port Way. [Photo 37] There is a major mature tree belt along the eastern side of Charlton village down to Port Way. To the north east of the assessment area there are several mature tree belts on the escarpment. There are also several mature tree lines and tree belts to the east of the assessment area.
- 5.2.4** At the western end of the assessment area there is a skyline tree group partially screening Elms Farm and there is a line of young trees on the east side of the roundabout at the junction of Mably Way and the A 338.

5.3 Visibility Survey

- 5.3.1** With its elevated position and largely treeless landscape there are panoramic views over Wantage, Grove and the surrounding countryside. [Photo 34, Photo 35]
- 5.3.2** The steep hillside below Elms Farm is visible from the A 338 and from Mably Way. [Photo 31, Photo 32]
- 5.3.3** The elevated plateau area is not visible from the lower levels to the north in the Vale of the White Horse. It is visible from the south from the edge of the residential areas of Wantage. [Photo 36] To the east of Wantage the eastern end of the plateau area is visible from Port Way (A 417) and from the Berkshire Downs to the south. [Photo 37]
- 5.3.4** From the hilltop just south of Elms Farm there are panoramic views of large areas of Wantage. This must be one of the best aerial views of the town. From here there are also views of the Berkshire Downs from the White Horse Hill in the west to the Harwell area in the east. [Photo 34, Photo 35]
- 5.3.5** From Crab Tree Lane there are panoramic views across the Vale of the White Horse to the Corallian Ridge. Further east and just to the north of Charlton there are panoramic views to the Corallian Ridge, to the enclosing hill at New Barn and round to the Berkshire Downs to the south.
- 5.3.6** The small enclosed fields on the south side of Charlton can be seen from the A 417, the cricket field and the adjacent houses.

6. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS (LCA)

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 Wantage is sited on a gap cut by Letcombe Brook into the greensand ridge that runs west to east on the northern side of the chalk escarpment of the Berkshire Downs. The assessment area includes the eastern side of the gap at Elms Farm and the elevated plateau on the crest of the ridge to the east round to Port Way. The greensand escarpment falls away to the north into the Vale of the White Horse.

6.1.2 From a combination of the desk study and site visits, the assessment area on the north east corner of Wantage can now through Characterisation be broken down into four Landscape Character Areas (LCA), each one with its own distinctive features. [Elms Farm. Figure 13]

6.2 LCA 1. Elms Farm Hillside [Photo 31, Photo 32, Photo 33]

The A 338 forms its western boundary while its northern boundary is a hedgerow by Grove Bridge Farm. Its eastern boundary follows the hedgerows located on the skyline at the top of the hillside to the north and south of Elms Farm. The southern boundary is formed by part of the residential area on the northern edge of Wantage.

This area has a steep and very visible open pastoral hillside that is dominated by the large group of farm buildings and trees on the skyline at Elms Farm. Cows are often seen dotted across the fields. Towards the southern end of the area the land use changes to allotments followed by two small pastoral fields with a barn.

6.3 LCA 2. Crab Hill [Photo 34, Photo 36]

The northern boundary follows the track that runs east from Elms Farm along the very highest point of the ridge. Where the track ends the eastern boundary runs south along a hedgerow. The southern boundary follows a field boundary back to and along the northern edge of Wantage. The western boundary follows the skyline hedgerow to the south of Elms Farm.

This area has a very open, bleak and elevated plateau landscape with light sandy soil. It has very few trees and is very exposed to the wind. There are no buildings. There are panoramic views of Wantage from the hilltop at the western end together with panoramic views of the Berkshire Downs and Corallian Ridge. Close to the southern boundary there is some enclosure because of the adjacent residential areas.

6.4 LCA 3. Port Way [Photo 37]

The northern boundary follows field boundaries and a mature tree belt from the edge of Wantage before crossing a field to New Barn. The eastern boundary follows the farm track from New Barn to the A 417. The southern boundary follows Port Way (A 417) and the western boundary follows a mature tree belt and the northern edge of Charlton.

This area has an open level landscape but there is some enclosure from boundary tree belts and fragmented unmanaged hedgerows. The area is also enclosed on its eastern side by higher ground. There are panoramic views to the Berkshire Downs.

6.5 LCA 4. Charlton Fields

The northern boundary follows residential development in Charlton while the eastern boundary follows a large mature tree belt. The southern boundary follows Port Way (A 417) and the western boundary follows the cricket field and residential development in Charlton.

This area is very enclosed by the houses in Charlton and by the large tree belt. On the southern side visibility into the site is restricted because Port Way is at a lower level.

7. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF ELMS FARM LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS 1 – 4

7.1 Key characteristics of the Elms Farm landscape are:-

- bleak elevated plateau
- open, almost treeless, sandy arable fields
- intensive agriculture
- dominant hillside at Elms Farm
- panoramic views to the Corallian ridge, the Berkshire Downs and Wantage from part of the site

7.2 The current condition of the landscape shows:-

- an exploited arable landscape

7.3 The evidence of change in the Elms Farm landscape is:-

- the gradual loss of hedgerows through neglect and by removal
- the planting of a new tree belt

7.4 Trends in land use that may cause future change are:-

- that agricultural changes are not expected to affect the area and 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:-

- further loss of hedgerows and trees to create even larger and more efficient fields

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 North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- 7.8** The effect of no change in land use is:-
- a further decline in the management of the landscape. It will become more open if more hedgerows are lost
- 7.9** The effects of development are:-
- outward expansion of Wantage which takes it up to its natural landscape setting and containment
 - the mitigating woodland and tree belts would be an extension of the more wooded landscape around West and East Lockinge
 - the introduction of traffic noise into a quiet area of countryside along the new Wantage relief road
 - reduction of traffic noise along Port Way
- 7.10** The threats to Elms Farm'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 possible loss of the hillside below Elms Farm to a road cutting for the Wantage relief road
 - the possible loss of many views particularly over Wantage and Grove from the Elms Farm hilltop area
- 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
 - to locate the new Wantage relief road to join the A 338 between the existing allotments and the northern edge of Wantage where it can follow a small natural valley up onto the higher ground. [Photo 33]
 - the creation of a large open space on the hill top area south of Elms Farm which will open up unseen aerial views of Wantage. [Photo 34, Photo 35]

8. LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND STRATEGY

- 8.1** The Elms Farm landscape character areas LCA1, LCA 2, LCA 3 and LCA 4 vary in the quality of their landscape. LCA 1 is a good quality landscape while LCA 2 and LCA 3 are excellent quality. LCA 4 is of moderate quality. The landscape character of LCA 1, LCA 2 and LCA 3 is typical of the greensand ridge landscapes to the east and west of Wantage. LCA 4 is not typical of small scale urban fringe fields because they are being managed.

- 8.2** The 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 residential development in the small enclosed area south of Charlton and retain the rest of the area as a productive agricultural landscape. [Elms Farm. Figure 14]
 - iv. Allow for large scale residential development over the southern half of the assessment area so that it is held back from the crest of the escarpment and that the new Wantage relief road forms a permanent northern boundary to Wantage. This development boundary would be reinforced with large scale mitigation forestry for climatic and visual reasons. Other areas of large scale forestry would be needed to mitigate the development from the AONB. At the western end the Wantage relief road would follow the line of a small valley and join the A 338 south of the allotments in order to have a minimal landscape impact. The hill top south of Elms Farm and the steep hillside down to the A 338 would remain in agricultural use or be developed as public open space in order to retain this locally very important landscape that makes a big contribution to the character of Wantage and Grove.
[Elms Farm. Figure 15]

9. LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND CAPACITY

9.1 Landscape Sensitivity

The Elms Farm landscape character areas LCA 1, LCA 2 and LCA 3 are strong representatives of the wider local landscape character areas. LCA 2 and LCA 3 have a moderate level of sensitivity to accommodating major changes. LCA 4 has a low level of sensitivity to accommodating major changes. LCA 1 has a high level of sensitivity to accommodating major changes.

9.2 Landscape Capacity

The amount of change that the Elms Farm landscape character areas LCA 2 and LCA 3 can accept without an adverse effect on their landscape character is moderate. LCA 4 can accept a high level of change. LCA 1 can only accept a low level of change.

9.3 Landscape Robustness

Combining their moderate landscape sensitivity with a moderate capacity for change, the Elms Farm landscape character areas LCA 2 and LCA 3 have a moderate level of robustness. LCA 4 has a low level of sensitivity and high level of capacity for change. It therefore has a high level of robustness. LCA 1 has a high level of sensitivity and a low level of capacity for change. It therefore has a low level of robustness.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1** Following on from **9.3** above, the conclusion is that from a landscape character area point of view Elms Farm is robust enough in LCA 2, LCA 3 and LCA 4 to accept the changes that would occur if moderate or large scale development took place. LCA 1 is not robust enough for development to take place.
- 10.2** There are no special landscape designations around north east Wantage north of the A 417 (Port Way). The North Wessex Downs AONB lies on the south side of the A 417. However LCA 1 (Elms Farm Hillside) is of higher quality than LCA 2, LCA 3 and LCA 4. Therefore development should be directed to these three areas as shown in Elms Farm Development Plan. Option 2. Figure 15. It is very important to keep the impact of the development on the surrounding landscape areas to a minimum, particularly the North Wessex Downs AONB by not exceeding the limits shown in Elms Farm. Figure 15 and by implementing the required mitigation.

THE AREA NORTH OF GROVE

4. Desk Study

4.1 Following the methodology described in section 2 the information detailed below and in North of Grove. Figure 16 was collated.

4.2 Geology

The assessment area is formed from Gault Clay overlain with alluvial deposits. The Gault Clay with varying amounts of alluvial deposits extends to the east, west and south around the assessment area forming the broad valley floor of the Vale of the White Horse. To the north of the railway the valley floor is formed from Kimmeridge Clay overlain with alluvial deposits.

4.3 Soils

The Agricultural Land Classification grades the majority of the land around Monk's Farm is grades 2 and 3a which is classified as the best and most versatile farmland. All of the land at the northern end of Grove Airfield is grades 3b and 4.

4.4 Contours

This assessment area has a very slight fall from south west to north east. The western half on the northern end of Grove Airfield is generally just above 75 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) but around Grove Cemetery falls to just below 75 metres AOD. The eastern half north of Grove is between 70 and 75 AOD with the area south of the Williams factory being level.

4.5 Flood Plain

A combination of a nearly level landform with an impervious Gault Clay subsoil means that the whole area has poor drainage. There is frequently standing water in the ridge and furrow area at the north end of Grove Airfield and in the low flat area to the south of the Williams F1 Centre. Letcombe Brook has a flood plain corridor that varies between 200 and 400 metres in width between Grove and the Great Western railway line.

4.6 Rivers

The main river in the assessment area is Letcombe Brook. This is a chalk stream that flows from the base of the main chalk escarpment at Letcombe Bassett northwards to the River Ock.

4.7 Ecology

An ecological assessment of the area would need to be carried out before any development is approved.

Most of the area is under grass and is grazed to a greater or lesser extent except in the area south of the Williams factory where it is not grazed. The

habitats most likely to be of potential interest are the grassland, hedgerows and the Letcombe Brook corridor.

4.8 Land Use

As a consequence of the nearly level landform and the impervious Gault Clay subsoil nearly the whole area is under pasture which is grazed by cattle and horses. The pasture is generally of poor quality. The fields to the south of the Williams F1 Centre have been unmanaged for some time. At the north end of Grove Airfield, Grove Parish Council has built a small cemetery which suffers from high water table problems.

4.9 Public Rights of Way [North of Grove. Figure 16]

There is a footpath running north from the northern edge of Grove following Letcombe Brook. It crosses the Great Western railway line on its way to West Hanney and East Hanney. From the north western corner of Grove a byway open to all traffic runs in a north easterly direction crossing the Great Western railway line over a bridge on its way to East Hanney. A bridleway runs north from the lane at the north end of Grove Airfield across the Great Western railway line on its way to Denchworth. In the north west corner of Grove Airfield there is an 'other routes' right of way along a short length of a track leading to the middle of Grove Airfield.

4.10 Settlement Pattern

The assessment area is located on the northern edge of Grove and its planned urban expansion. Wantage lies just to the south of Grove. Because Grove and Wantage are located so close together they increasingly operate as a single settlement. There is a ring of villages around Wantage and Grove. To the south west is Letcombe Regis, to the west is East Challow, to the north west is Denchworth, to the north are West and East Hannay and to the south east are Ardington, East Lockinge and West Lockinge.

4.11 Archaeology

There are no known major archaeological constraints on the north side of Grove Airfield. There are well preserved ridge and furrow earthworks to the west of Letcombe Brook. Early maps suggest that the field boundaries in the area around Monk's Farm survive unaltered from before the Enclosure. There are three grade II listed buildings at Monk's Farm and one grade II listed building at Grove Wick Farm. To the south of the garage on the A 338 there are late Bronze Age and early Iron Age remains.

5. FIELD SURVEY

5.1 Introduction

Following the Methodology described in 2.3, the information detailed below and in North of Grove. Figure 17 and North of Grove. Figure 18 was collected. Site visits were carried out on May 24th and 31st, and July 14th 2008.

5.2 Vegetation Survey [North of Grove. Figure 18]

- 5.2.1** The assessment area has some sections with few hedgerows and trees while other sections have a large number of hedgerows.
- 5.2.1** The northern end of Grove Airfield is broadly open with few trees and hedgerows. There is a group of trees in the middle that are from unmanaged hedgerows that predate the airfield. The field to the south of Denchworth railway bridge has a good hedgerow on all sides except on the northern boundary where it has developed into a line of trees. The cemetery on the north side of the Denchworth Road has a number of young trees. Behind the cemetery there is a field with a substantial unmanaged hedgerow on all its boundaries. [Photo 39] The Cow Lane byway on the north west corner of Grove has a substantial unmanaged hedgerow on both sides up to the Great Western railway bridge.
- 5.2.2** The small fields around Monk's Farm generally have fragmented hedgerows. Along Letcombe Brook there are trees on both sides of the river.
- 5.2.3** To the south of the Williams F1 Centre there are two fragmented hedgerows running east to west. There is a mature tree belt around three sides of the garage on the A 338. The substation on the A 338 has a group of leylandii that are in decline.

5.3 Visibility Survey

- 5.3.1** The northern end of Grove Airfield is very open when viewed from the Denchworth Road on its northern edge because of the relatively level landform and low level of vegetation. [Photo 38] Views from Newlands Drive on the west side of Grove are limited by the well stocked hedge on its western side. There are no views into the field at the western end of the airfield because of its enclosing hedgerows. Immediately to the west of this field the elevated levels provide wide ranging views across the Vale of the White Horse. The Great Western railway is partly in a cutting on the north side of Grove Airfield.
- 5.3.2** In the fields around Grove Cemetery the outer field is very open from the Denchworth Road and from the Great Western railway while the inner field is completely enclosed by its hedgerows. [Photo 39]
- 5.3.3** In the Monk's Farm area visibility into the assessment area from the north and east is limited by all its hedgerows and trees. The northern edge of Grove limits visibility from the south. The site is not visible from Cow Lane on its western edge, other than occasional glimpses, due to the dense hedgerows up to 8 metres in height. From the bridge over the railway, again there are only glimpsed views across the assessment site with Grove Wick Farm and Monk's Farm visible among the surrounding hedgerows and trees.
- 5.3.4** From the footpath parallel with Letcombe Brook to the north of Grove houses in Grove are clearly visible between the intervening hedgerows and trees. Monk's Farm and Grove Wick Farm are both clearly visible. [Photo 41, Photo 42]
- 5.3.5** From Cow Lane to the north of the site and from the public footpaths to the south of West Hanney there are no views south towards Grove because of the

flat landscape and intervening vegetation. There are glimpsed views from the Great Western railway into the northern part of the area. [Photo 38]

5.3.6 From the A 338 there are open views into the area south of the Williams F1 Centre but the trees around the garage provide some screening. [Photo 40] There are open views from the access road to the Williams F1 Centre and from the residential area on the northern edge of Grove along the southern edge of the site.

5.3.7 There are only glimpsed views east from the public footpath to the west of Letcombe Brook because of the tree line along the river. There are no views into the area from the Great Western railway because of the Williams F1 Centre buildings.

6. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS (LCA)

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 Grove is situated on Letcombe Brook north of Wantage. It is built on Gault Clay where it is overlain with silts and alluvium.

6.1.2 From a combination of the desk study and site visits, the assessment area to the north of Grove can now through Characterisation be broken down into Landscape Character Areas (LCA), each one with its own distinctive features. [North of Grove. Figure 19]

6.2 LCA 1. Denchworth Field

The Great Western railway forms its northern boundary. Denchworth Road runs along the northern edge. The eastern boundary follows two hedgerows and the south eastern boundary follows another hedgerow. The western boundary follows a hedge line that is located at the crest of a small west facing hillside that runs down to Childrey Brook.

This slightly elevated pastoral area on the edge of Grove Airfield is enclosed by thick hedgerows. There are no views into or out of the area. The ground is generally flat at around 78 metres AOD.

6.3 LCA 2. Denchworth Road [Photo 38]

The Great Western railway and Denchworth Road form its curving northern boundary. The southern boundary cuts across the open landscape of Grove Airfield from the north west corner of Grove following the northern edge of the of Grove Airfield allocation. The western boundary follows two hedgerows.

This forms part of the very open landscape of the former Grove Airfield. There are panoramic views south to the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This section of the airfield is poorly drained and under pasture. There are very few trees or hedgerows.

6.4 LCA 3. Cemetery Field [Photo 39]

The Great Western railway forms the northern boundary of this area while the south eastern boundary follows the hedgerow along Cow Lane byway. The curving Denchworth Road forms the south western boundary.

The character of this area derives from an outer narrow field which is open to the Denchworth Road and the Great Western railway and an inner very enclosed field surrounded by thick hedgerows. This area has poorly drained pasture. Grove Cemetery occupies part of the outer field.

6.5 LCA 4. Monk's Farm [Photo 41, Photo 42]

The Great Western railway forms its northern boundary, Letcombe Brook its eastern boundary and the northern edge of Grove its southern boundary. Cow Lane byway forms its north western boundary.

The character of this area derives from its historic pattern of small hedged fields, its resulting enclosed landscape and the grade II listed buildings at Monk's Farm and Grove Wick Farm. This is a reasonably well drained pastoral area.

6.6 LCA 5. Williams [Photo 40]

The Williams F1 Centre forms its northern boundary and the A 338 and a garage its eastern boundary. The north eastern edge of Grove forms its northern boundary and Letcombe Brook its western boundary.

The character of this area derives from its open, very badly drained and generally unmanaged landscape. Development begins to dominate the area in particular the Williams F1 Centre.

7. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF NORTH OF GROVE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS 1 – 4

7.1 Key characteristics of the North of Grove landscape are:-

- bleak and very open landscape at Grove Airfield
- very enclosed small scale fields with some strong hedgerows at Monk's Farm
- low key grassland management
- wet and poorly drained grassland
- Great Western railway
- Grade II listed buildings
- panoramic views to the North Wessex Downs

7.2 The current condition of the landscape shows:-

- A poorly managed / neglected pastoral landscape

7.3 The evidence of change in the North of Grove landscape is:-

- the gradual loss of hedgerows through neglect and by removal
- the removal of the Grove Airfield infrastructure

- the construction of Grove Cemetery
 - urbanisation at Williams F1 and the garage on the A 338
- 7.4** Trends in land use that may cause future change are:-
- that agricultural changes are not expected to affect the area and it will remain neglected
- 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:-
- further loss of hedgerows through neglect
- 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 replanting of fragmented hedgerows
 - the loss of formal and informal countryside walks for the local residents
 - the loss of a rural setting for the four grade II listed buildings
 - the loss of some lengths of hedgerows
- 7.8** The effects of no change in the land use are:-
- a further decline in the management of the landscape. It will become more enclosed as unmanaged hedgerows grow taller
 - the landscape will become more open where hedges and trees are lost
- 7.9** The effect of development is:-
- a contained expansion of Grove into the adjacent rural landscape
- 7.10** The threats to North of Grove 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 the views from Grove Airfield
 - the loss of the rural setting of the grade II listed buildings
 - the loss of the small scale historic fields landscape around Monk's Farm
- 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 residential development on the adjacent rural landscapes and to create a new landscape setting
 - planting 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
 - enhancement of the management of the Letcombe Brook flood plain for recreation and wildlife

- planting a new tree belt to mitigate the impact of the Great Western railway on the adjacent development

8. LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND STRATEGY

8.1 The North of Grove landscape character areas LCA 1 - LCA 5 vary in the quality of their landscape. LCA 1 and LCA 3 are moderate quality landscapes while LCA 2 and LCA 5 are poor quality landscapes. LCA 4 is a good quality landscape. The landscape character of LCA 1 is typical of the local vale landscape. The landscape character of LCA 2 is not typical of the vale landscape because of its large scale and lack of trees and hedgerows. LCA 3 has an unusual field pattern and together with Grove Cemetery this is not typical of the local vale landscape. LCA 4 is very typical of parts of the vale landscape where numerous small historic fields are associated with farms and settlements. LCA 5 is not typical of the vale because of its neglect and the close proximity of existing urban fringe development.

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 residential development on LCA 2 up to Denchworth Road and west into LCA 1 and retain LCA 3, LCA 4 and LCA 5 as countryside. [North of Grove. Figure 20]
- iv. Allow for residential development as in **iii** plus in LCA 3 and LCA 5. Retain LCA 4 as countryside. [North of Grove. Figure 21]
- v. Allow for residential development as in **iii** plus LCA 3 but with industrial development in LCA 5. Retain LCA 4 as countryside or open space. [North of Grove. Figure 22]
- vi. Allow for residential development in LCA 1, LCA 2 and LCA 4 and open space in LCA 3 with industrial development in LCA 5. [North of Grove. Figure 23]
- vii. Allow for development as in **v** plus in LCA 4. [North of Grove. Figure 24]

9. LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND CAPACITY

9.1 Landscape Sensitivity

The North of Grove landscape character areas LCA 1 and LCA 4 are strong representatives of the wider local landscape character areas. LCA 4 has a high level of sensitivity to accommodating major changes while LCA 1 has a moderate level of sensitivity. LCA 2, LCA 3 and LCA 5 are poor representatives of the wider local landscape character areas and they have a low level of sensitivity to accommodating major changes.

9.2 Landscape Capacity

The amount of change that the north of Grove landscape character areas LCA 1, LCA 2, LCA 3 and LCA 5 can accept without an adverse effect on their landscape character is high. LCA 4 can only accept a low level of change.

9.3 Landscape Robustness

Combining their low level of sensitivity with a high capacity for change, the North of Grove landscape character areas LCA 2, LCA 3 and LCA 5 have a high level of robustness. LCA 1 has a moderate level of sensitivity and a high level of capacity for change and therefore has a moderate level of robustness. LCA 4 has a high level of sensitivity and a low capacity for change and therefore has a low level of robustness.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1** Following on from **9.3** above, the conclusion is that from a landscape character area point of view North of Grove is robust enough in LCA 1, LCA 2, LCA 3 and LCA 5 to accept the changes that would occur if large scale development took place. LCA 4 is not robust enough for development to take place. If it were developed as a major open space then together with the flood plain of Letcombe Brook it would help to maintain the landscape setting for north Grove. [North of Grove. Figure 21 or Figure 22]
- 10.2** If for other reasons it is deemed necessary to develop on LCA 4 then this needs to be at a level that maintains the setting of the four listed buildings and reflects the small scale and historic field pattern. [Figure 24]

11. OVERALL CONCLUSION FOR WANTAGE and GROVE

11.1 Summary Table of Landscape Sensitivity, Capacity and Robustness

| Area | Landscape Character Area | Sensitivity | Capacity | Robustness |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|----------|-----------------|
| Chain Hill | LCA 1 | moderate | high | moderate |
| Chain Hill | LCA 2 | high | low | low |
| | | | | |
| Crown, Cork & Seal | LCA 1 | high | low | low |
| Crown, Cork & Seal | LCA 2 | moderate | high | moderately high |
| Crown, Cork & Seal | LCA 3 | high | low | low |
| Crown, Cork & Seal | LCA 4 | high | low | low |
| Crown, Cork & Seal | LCA 5 | high | low | low |
| Crown, Cork & Seal | LCA 6 | moderate | moderate | moderate |
| | | | | |
| Elms Farm | LCA 1 | high | low | low |
| Elms Farm | LCA 2 | moderate | moderate | moderate |
| Elms Farm | LCA 3 | moderate | moderate | moderate |
| Elms Farm | LCA 4 | low | high | high |
| | | | | |
| North of Grove | LCA 1 | moderate | high | moderate |
| North of Grove | LCA 2 | low | high | high |
| North of Grove | LCA 3 | low | high | high |
| North of Grove | LCA 4 | high | low | low |
| North of Grove | LCA 5 | low | high | high |
| | | | | |

11.2 From the summary table in 11.1 above it can be seen from the robustness column that from a landscape point of view further development should be directed to the North of Grove area. This is because the majority of this area has a landscape that is robust enough to accept major development.

11.3 If for other reasons it is considered to be inappropriate to direct further development to the North of Grove then the next most appropriate area from a landscape robustness point of view is the Elms Farm area.

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