

# **VALE OF WHITE HORSE LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT**

**ADVICE ON THE LANDSCAPE IMPACT OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

**SOUTH OF ABINGDON**

**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 south of Abingdon

#### 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 Abingdon. 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 Abingdon into nine areas for appraisal purposes.

This landscape assessment looks in detail at two of these areas adjacent to the south west edge of Abingdon. [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 [Figure 2]**

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.

## **ABINGDON**

### **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 study area is formed from Kimmeridge Clay. To the north and west of the area there are extensive alluvial deposits from the River Ock. The eastern edge of the area follows an old river cliff of the River Thames. To the east of this there are extensive gravel and alluvial deposits from the River Thames.

### **3.3 Soils**

The Agricultural Land Classification grades the study area as partly grade 2, partly moderate grade and partly low grade.

### **3.4 Contours**

The study area is occupied by a low rounded hill to the west of the B 4017 and a slightly lower and gently undulating landform to the east of the B 4017. The highest part of the hill forms a plateau at about 64 – 65 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The northern side of the hill falls to about 55 metres AOD on the disused Wilts and Berks Canal line. A small valley has been cut into the eastern side of the hill with a low point of 57 metres AOD at the B 4017.

This small valley continues eastwards on the south side of Stonehill Farm with a low point of 50 metres AOD on the eastern edge of the area. The Thames Valley flood plain is generally at around 50 metres AOD. The northern part of the area around Stonehill House is at a high point of about 57 metres AOD with levels then falling gently to about 55 to 53 metres AOD on the southern edge of Abingdon.

### **3.5 Flood Plain**

The flood plain of the River Thames abuts the eastern boundary of the area at the bottom of Oday Hill. The flood plain of the River Ock abuts the northern boundary of the area on the north side of the disused Wilts and Berks Canal. There is no flood plain within the assessment area.

### **3.6 Rivers**

There is a very small stream that runs east in the small valley at the southern end of the area. After passing Stonehill Farm it joins a ditch line on the Thames flood plain. The River Ock runs through New Cut Mill just north of the northern boundary of the area. The River Thames runs about 1 kilometre to the east of the area.

### **3.7 Ecology**

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

In the area to the west of the B 4017 wildlife habitats are restricted because of the large scale arable farming and the low level of hedgerows and trees. The flood plain of the River Ock is expected to be a substantially more important habitat.

In the area to the east of the B 4017 there are more diverse and extensive tree, woodland, hedgerows and stream habitats where a larger and more diverse range of wildlife should be found.

### **3.8 Land Use**

Virtually the whole of the area to the west of the B 4017 is used for arable agriculture. There is a small park, Masefield Crescent open space, on the south west corner of Abingdon. There is a small mature woodland just south of Abingdon adjacent to the B 4017. The fields are mostly moderate to large scale. The fields to the west of the A 34 are generally very large scale.

To the east of the B 4017 the fields are all pastoral except for the most southerly one which is arable. The fields are mainly small to moderate in scale. There are some small areas of young woodland to the west of Stonehill House and some small mature woodlands to the east of Stonehill House.

The housing estates of southern Abingdon abut the northern edge of the assessment area.

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

In the area to the west of the B 4017 Mill Road runs along the northern boundary. A public footpath follows the line of the old Wilts and Berks Canal from Mill Road back into Abingdon. A restricted byway runs from Mill Road due south to the B 4017. From the northern end of this byway a bridleway runs to and along the A 34 to the overbridge. From the overbridge a restricted byway runs south to Drayton along the south west boundary of the area. A footpath runs from Mill Road along the River Ock to Tesco.

In the area to the east of the B 4017 Oday Hill Lane is designated as a bridleway. A small public footpath runs through the field on the south side of Stonehill House from Oday Hill Lane. A public footpath from Drayton to south Abingdon passes through the south east corner of the area.

### **3.10 Settlement Pattern**

The area is located adjacent to the south west corner of Abingdon. Drayton is located just outside the area boundary to the south. In the area to the west of the B 4017 there are no buildings within the area. New Cut Mill is just beyond the northern boundary. In the area to the east of the B 4017 there is Stonehill House with its group of historic listed farm buildings. Nearby is Stonehill Farm with its house and semi-derelict group of farm buildings. There is a group of

several houses at Oday Hill in the south east corner of the site. There are no settlements to the north or east of the area in the flood plains of the River Thames and River Ock.

### **3.11 Archaeology**

There is a large Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 242) on the west side of the B 4017 just south of Abingdon.

## **4. FIELD SURVEY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Following the Methodology described in section 2, the information detailed below and in Figure 2 (Site and Photographic Survey) and Figure 3 (Abingdon Vegetation Survey) was collected. Site visits were carried out on May 20<sup>th</sup> and July 14<sup>th</sup> 2008.

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

**4.2.1** The B 4017 broadly divides the existing vegetation into two contrasting areas.

**4.2.2** To the west of the B 4017 the whole area is under arable farming. The very large fields are partially enclosed by a few managed hedgerows. The main hedges on both sides of the track that bisects the area in a north – south direction and on the highest land between the track and the A 34. An unmanaged hedgerow follows the line of the disused Wilts and Berks Canal along the northern boundary of the area. There are very few trees. There is a small L-shaped woodland close to the west side of the B 4017, a scatter of trees in the public open space on the edge of Abingdon and trees lining the River Ock beyond the northern boundary of the area.

**4.2.3** To the east of the B 4017 the whole area is under pasture except for the large southern field. At the northern end of the area an important line of mature lime trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order runs along the east side of the B 4017. A mature tree line continues along the southern and eastern sides of the field. There is a line of trees along the drive to Stonehill House with areas of young woodland in the grounds of the house. To the south of Stonehill Farm there is a scatter of trees along the ditch line and a small woodland in the field to the east. There is a tree belt along the southern boundary of the arable field. The main hedgerows follow the eastern side of the B 4017 and the north side of Stonehill Lane.

### **4.3 Visibility Survey**

**4.3.1** Again the B 4017 broadly divides the area's visibility into two contrasting areas. To the west of the B 4017 the low hill with very few trees is very open while to the east the slightly lower lying and well treed landscape is much more enclosed.

**4.3.2** In the area to the west of the B 4017 the edge of the hilltop plateau is visible from part of the footpath network to the west of the A 34. It is also visible from

the northern edge of Drayton, from the B 4017 and from Mill Road. There are panoramic views from the flat hill top plateau that runs east to west through its central area. To the south there are clear views to Didcot Power Station and a long section of the Berkshire Downs. Draycot is also visible. To the east the heavily wooded hills of Culham Ridge can be seen. To the north there are views of a long section of the heavily wooded Corallian Ridge.

- 4.3.3** To the north of the plateau the levels fall gently to the disused Wilts and Berks Canal. Here views to the south are restricted by the hillside and by the vegetation along the canal line. The area is visible from the adjacent housing on the south east edge of Abingdon and from Mill Road.

To the south of the plateau the levels drop gently into a small east to west valley to the north of Drayton which results in partially restricted views into the area. To the west of the track bisecting the area the whole field is completely open to views from the west and south including Drayton. To the east of the track the south facing slope forms a small valley which together with the boundary hedges creates a less open landscape.

The southern slope is visible from the network of footpaths in the Ock valley to the west of the A 34.

- 4.3.4** To the east of the plateau there is a short moderately steep hillside sloping down to the B 4017 from which it is visible.
- 4.3.5** The area is not generally visible from the A 34 because it is in a cutting along the western boundary of the site. The exceptions are in the north west corner of the site where the A 34 is in an embankment over the River Ock, and to the south of the site where the realigned Wilts and Berks Canal will cross the A34.
- 4.3.6** In the area to the east of the B 4017 the landscape is lower and flatter. The fields are on a much smaller scale with several important tree belts which has created a more enclosed landscape.
- 4.3.7** The field at the northern end of the area adjacent to housing on the southern edge of Abingdon is partially visible from the B 4017 through the lime trees along its western boundary. The southern and eastern boundaries are screened by tree belts. The field is fully visible from the southern edge of Abingdon.
- 4.3.8** The small fields to the north of Oday Lane including the grounds of Stonehill House have strong boundary hedges and tree groups and areas of new woodland planting. This has created a small scale and enclosed landscape which is well screened on all sides. There are restricted views from Oday Lane.
- 4.3.9** The moderate scale fields to the south of Oday Lane are more open and are all fully visible from the lane but not visible from Drayton. They are not visible from the B 4017.
- 4.3.10** To the east of Oday Lane the field north of Oday Hill is fully visible from the lane and from parts of the countryside to the east.

## **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 dip slope 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 dip slopes 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** The site at Abingdon is located at the junction of the Thames Valley and the eastern end of the Vale of the White Horse and the River Ock.

**6.1.2** Abingdon is sited on gravel river terraces and alluvial deposits laid down by the River Thames and River Ock on top of Kimmeridge clay. Any low hills, such as one in the study area, are formed from the Kimmeridge clay protruding through this layer.

**6.1.3** The landscape is generally flat to the south and west of the town. East of the Thames the Culham ridge and its forestry dominates the skyline. [Photo 2]. To the north the land gradually rises up the dip slope of the Corallian ridge.

**6.1.4** The lower land is sparsely wooded and the fields are generally large. In some areas hedgerows are absent. Agriculture is mixed. Around Abingdon and south to Sutton Courtney and Didcot major areas of the Thames gravels have been worked. Restoration of the gravel pits is progressing. Didcot Power Station begins to dominate the open landscape southwards from southern Abingdon. [Photo 3]. The general land level is around 50 metres AOD.

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

### **6.2 LCA 1. Mill Road**

The disused Wilts and Berks Canal forms the north west boundary, housing on the western edge of Abingdon forms the eastern boundary and Mill Road forms the southern boundary.

This is a small scale level field enclosed by hedgerows and houses.

### **6.3 LCA 2. Clay Hill North Slope** [Photo 1]

The disused Wilts and Berks Canal forms the northern boundary, housing on the western edge of Abingdon together with associated public open space forms the eastern boundary, the A 34 forms the western boundary and the top of the north facing hillside forms the southern boundary.

This is part of a very large scale treeless arable landscape where the monotony is broken by an occasional hedgerow. The northern edge has a large hedgerow backed up by mature trees in the grounds of New Cut Mill.

### **6.4 LCA 3. Clay Hill Plateau** [Photo 2]

The northern edge of the plateau defines the northern boundary, the eastern edge of the plateau defines its eastern boundary, the southern edge of the plateau defines its southern boundary and the A 34 forms its western boundary.

This forms part of the same large scale treeless arable landscape found in the landscape character areas 2 and 4 where the monotony is broken by an occasional hedgerow. This is a very exposed area visually and climatically. There are 360 degrees long distance panoramic views of all the surrounding countryside from the broadly level hilltop site.

### **6.5 LCA 4. Clay Hill South Slope and Valley** [Photo 3, Photo 4]

The southern edge of the plateau defines its northern boundary. The woodland at the eastern end of Clay Hill and the B 4017 form the eastern boundary, field hedgerows form the southern boundary, the Drayton to Marcham byway forms the south western boundary and the A 34 forms the western boundary.

This forms part of the same large scale treeless arable landscape found in LCA 2 and LCA 3 where the monotony is broken by an occasional hedgerow. The northern and western sections of this area are high enough to be very exposed visually and climatically. There are panoramic views south west to the Berkshire Downs. The southern section is more enclosed because of a small valley east to west.

### **6.6 LCA 5. Clay Hill East Slope**

The small triangular park on the western edge of Abingdon forms its northern boundary, the B 4017 forms the eastern boundary and a small woodland and the eastern edge of the plateau forms its western boundary.

Although this area forms part of the large scale Clay Hill arable landscape it is much more enclosed because of the mature woodland, its relatively steep slope down to the B 4017 and the mature belt of lime trees on the east side of the B 4017.

### **6.7 LCA 6. Masefield Crescent Open Space**

The housing on the south western edge of Abingdon forms its north eastern boundary and a fence and tree line form its southern and western boundaries.

This is an informal local park with mown grass and mature standard trees creating its character.

#### **6.8 LCA 7. Stonehill House [Photo 7]**

Housing on the southern edge of Abingdon forms the northern boundary, hedgerows and tree belts form the eastern boundary, Oday Hill Lane forms the south western boundary and the B 4017 forms the western boundary.

The character of the area is created by the small scale pastoral fields, the rural grounds of Stonehill House and the extensive network of trees and hedgerows. This generally creates a very enclosed and secret landscape full of interest which is enhanced by the historic barns adjacent to Stonehill House. This character is in complete contrast to that on the west side of the B 4017.

#### **6.9 LCA 8. Stonehill Farm [Photo 5, Photo 6]**

Oday Hill Lane forms the north eastern and eastern boundary, a tree line and field boundary form the southern boundary while the B 4017 forms the western boundary.

The character of this area is created by the moderate scale arable and pastoral fields, the partial enclosure due to the small valley landform and surrounding fields and hedgerows.

#### **6.10 LCA 9. Oday Hill**

A small copse forms the northern boundary, a tree line and the edge of the Thames flood plain forms the eastern boundary and Oday Hill Lane forms the western boundary.

The character of this pastoral area is created by its short and very steep hillside, its enclosing trees and the extensive views across the Thames Valley. The field is visible from the Thames Valley and Oday Hill Lane.

### **7. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF CLAY HILL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS 1 – 6**

#### **7.1 Key characteristics of the Clay Hill landscape are:-**

- low rounded hill landform
- open, treeless arable fields
- intensive agriculture
- managed hedgerows
- panoramic views to the Corallian Ridge to the north, the Culham Ridge to the east, the Berkshire Downs and Didcot Power Station to the south.

#### **7.2 The current condition of the landscape shows:-**

- an exploited arable landscape
- moderately well managed hedgerows

- 7.3** The evidence of change in the Clay Hill landscape is:-
- loss of several hedgerows in the recent past in the area between the byway and the A 34
- 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 arable may be:-
- further loss of hedgerows to create even larger and more efficient fields
  - that the management of the hedgerows is modified or reduced
- 7.7** The consequences of the area being subjected to urban development would be:-
- the loss of an arable landscape to built development
  - the creation of new woodlands and tree belts within a public open space network
  - the general loss of most views into the surrounding countryside
  - a visible intrusion of an urban area into the countryside of the Vale of the White Horse
  - the loss of some hedgerows
- 7.8** The effects of the area remaining unchanged are:-
- if hedgerows are removed the landscape becomes more open
  - if the management of the hedgerows is modified they could develop into tree lines creating a partially enclosed landscape
- 7.9** The effects of the area being developed are:-
- another step in the wider urbanisation of the Drayton – Abingdon area
  - virtual coalescence with Drayton if the whole area were to be developed
  - the very open landscape on a low exposed hill will become a built up residential extension of Abingdon
  - a more wooded and treed urban landscape
  - the new access road would impact on the Ock Valley's landscape
- 7.10** The threats to Clay Hill's existing landscape character area's key characteristics as a result of the adverse consequences of change are:-
- loss of its rural landscape
  - a substantial increase in woodland areas which changes its character
  - the very open landscape becomes completely enclosed
  - the low rounded hill appears to become higher as a result of the woodland and built structures
  - the panoramic views are generally 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

- planting the new tree belts with native species in order to increase the biodiversity of the area
- creation of wetland areas as part of SUDS including a new section of the realigned Wilts and Berks Canal
- enhancement of the public footpath network and the open space system

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

**8.1** The Clay Hill landscape character areas (LCA 1 – LCA 6) are of moderate quality. Their landscape character is not typical of the very flat, low lying (typically around 54 – 57 metres AOD) and flood prone landscape of the River Ock. It is not typical of the adjacent section of the River Thames landscape. It has a low rounded hill, very few trees, a fragmented hedgerow network, arable agriculture and panoramic views. The area is in poor to moderate condition.

**8.2** The strategy options that flow from **8.1** suggest that it would be possible to proceed in several directions.

- i. Continue to manage the area under its current regime.
- ii. Encourage the owner to plant new hedgerows, hedgerow trees and woodlands while maintaining its overall arable use.
- iii. Allow for urban development only in the northern section of the area in LCA1 and LCA 2. Figure 5. Development Plan. Option 1.
- iv. Allow for urban development up to the line of the realigned Wilts and Berks Canal in LCA 1, LCA 2, LCA 3, part of LCA 4 and LCA 5. Figure 6. Development Plan. Option 2.
- v. Allow for urban development to extend to the south of the realigned Wilts and Berks Canal in LCA 1, LCA 2, LCA 3, LCA 4 and LCA 5. Figure 7. Development Plan. Option 3.

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

### **9.1 Landscape Sensitivity**

The Clay Hill landscape character areas are not strong representatives of the wider local landscape character areas. They have a low level of sensitivity to accommodating major changes.

### **9.2 Landscape Capacity**

The amount of change that the Clay Hill landscape character areas can accept without an adverse effect on their landscape character is low. If new tree belts and residential areas were created then the existing treeless and open character would be lost. These changes would not have a direct effect on the River Thames landscape because it is hidden from view. However the new residential areas would be an extension of the existing urban area to the north east of Clay Hill.

There would be a modest impact on the open, low lying Vale of the White Horse to the west of the A 34. The new development would be visible initially but the mitigating tree belts would eventually create a new landscape setting for the residential development.

### **9.3 Landscape Robustness**

Combining their low landscape sensitivity with a low capacity for change, the Clay Hill LCA 1 – LCA 6 have a moderate level of robustness.

## **10. CONCLUSION OF SITE ANALYSIS FOR CLAY HILL LCA 1 – LCA 6**

**10.1** Following on from **9.3** above, the conclusion is that from a landscape character area point of view Clay Hill is robust enough to accept the changes that would occur if moderate or large scale residential development took place as long as this includes major woodland mitigation.

**10.2** Around the southern and south western sides of Abingdon there are no special landscape designations such as Green Belt or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Therefore in the National hierarchy of importance, this landscape is of a lower quality.

## **11. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF STONEHILL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS 7 – 9**

**11.1** Key characteristics of Stonehill landscape are:-

- part of the area has extensive tree cover in a matrix of tree lines and small woodlands
- closed or semi-closed predominately pastoral fields
- non intensive agriculture
- managed hedgerows
- small to moderate scale fields
- very restricted views
- historic farm buildings at Stonehill House
- generally a very gently undulating landform but with a steep hillside at Oday Hill

**11.2** The current condition of the landscape is:-

- a gently managed landscape
- well managed hedgerows

**11.3** The evidence of change in its landscape is:-

- the loss of a hedgerow in the recent past in the southern field
- new woodland planting in the grounds of Stonehill House

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

- that agricultural changes are not expected to affect the area

**11.5** Potential development pressures are:-

- for urban expansion in the period to 2026

**11.6** Possible consequences of the area remaining under its current use are:-

- that the landscape will remain as it is

- 11.7** The consequences of the area being subjected to urban development would be:-
- the loss of a pastoral small scale landscape to built development
  - the creation of new woodlands and tree belts within a public open space network
  - possible loss of many of the trees if the housing is too extensive within the individual fields
  - loss of the rural setting of Stonehill House barns
  - loss of Oday Hill Lane as part of the local rural recreational routes network
- 11.8** The effects of the area remaining unchanged are:-
- that this attractive small scale landscape will retain its important role as a countryside area
  - that it will continue to act as a buffer between Abingdon and Drayton
- 11.9** The effects of the area being developed are:-
- virtual coalescence of Abingdon and Drayton
  - further development towards the wider urbanisation of the Drayton – Abingdon area
- 11.10** The threats to Stonehill's existing landscape character area's key characteristics as a result of the adverse consequences of change are:-
- the area becomes more enclosed
  - loss of its rural landscape
- 11.11** The opportunities for enhancement following urban development where there is scope for beneficial change are:-
- planting of new tree belts to mitigate the impact of development on the adjacent landscapes
  - planting the new tree belts with native species in order to increase the biodiversity of the area
  - creation of wetland areas as part of SUDS including a new section of the realigned Wilts and Berks Canal
  - enhancement of the public footpath network within the open space system

## **12 LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND STRATEGY. STONEHILL**

- 12.1** The Stonehill LCA 7 - LCA 9 are of good quality. Its landscape character is not typical of the very flat, low lying and flood prone landscape of the River Ock with its large scale fields. It is not typical of the adjacent section of the River Thames landscape. It has a gently undulating landform, small scale fields, a substantial tree cover and enclosed landscape. The area is in good condition.
- 12.2** The strategy options that flow from **12.1** suggest that it would be possible to proceed in several directions.
- i. Continue to manage the area under its current regime.
  - ii. Allow for urban development only in the northern field adjacent to the southern edge of Abingdon. (part of LCA 7)

- iii. Allow for urban development only in the northern field and the small field to its south west. (part of LCA 7) Maintain the remaining fields around Stonehill House as countryside. (the remaining part of LCA 7)
- iv. Allow for urban development in **iii.** above plus the two fields adjacent to Stonehill Farm. (part of LCA 8)
- v. Allow for urban development in **iv.** above plus the southern field. (the remaining part of LCA 8). Maintain the field in LCA 9 as countryside.

## **13. LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND CAPACITY. STONEHILL**

### **13.1 Landscape Sensitivity**

The Stonehill landscape character areas are not a strong representative of the wider local landscape character areas. They have a high level of sensitivity to accommodating major change.

### **13.2 Landscape Capacity**

The amount of change that the Stonehill landscape character areas can accept without an adverse effect on their landscape character is low. If residential development were to occur then the historic small field landscape would be lost. These changes may have some impact on the River Thames landscape.

### **13.3 Landscape Robustness**

Combining its high landscape sensitivity with a low capacity for change, the Stonehill LCA 7 – LCA 9 have a low level of robustness.

## **14. CONCLUSION OF SITE ANALYSIS FOR STONEHILL LCA 7 – LCA 9**

- 14.1** Following on from **13.3** above the conclusion is that from a landscape character point of view Stonehill is not robust enough to accept the changes that would occur if moderate or large scale residential development took place.

## 15. CONCLUSION FOR ABINGDON

### 15.1 Summary Table of Landscape Sensitivity, Capacity and Robustness

Landscape Character Areas	Sensitivity	Capacity	Robustness
LCA1	low	low	moderate
LCA 2	low	low	moderate
LCA 3	low	low	moderate
LCA 4	low	low	moderate
LCA 5	low	low	moderate
LCA 6	low	low	moderate
LCA 7	high	low	low
LCA 8	high	low	low
LCA 9	high	low	low

**15.2** Around the southern and south western sides of Abingdon there are no special landscape designations such as Green Belt or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. From the table in 15.1 above it can be seen that the Clay Hill landscape has a higher level of robustness than the Stonehill landscape. Therefore residential development should be directed to the Clay Hill area.

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