

VALE OF WHITE HORSE LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

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

Prepared for Vale of White Horse District Council

by

**Martin Cobden BSc. Dip LA. MLI
Horseshoe Well
Bourton Close
Clanfield, Bampton
Oxon. OX18 2RU**

December 2008

CONTENTS

	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	5
2. METHODOLOGY	6
2.1 Introduction	
2.2 Desk Study	
2.3 Field Study	
2.4 Characterisation	
3. DESK STUDY	7
3.1 Introduction	
3.2 Geology	
3.3 Soils	
3.4 Contours	
3.5 Flood Plain	
3.6 Rivers	8
3.7 Ecology	
3.8 Land Use	
3.9 Public Rights of Way	
3.10 Settlement Pattern	9
3.11 Archaeology	
4. FIELD STUDY	9
4.1 Introduction	
4.2 Vegetation Survey	
4.3 Visibility Survey	10
5. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES	11
5.1 Introduction	
5.2 The Thames Valley	12
5.3 The Corallian Ridge	
5.4 The Vale of the White Horse	
5.5 The Berkshire Downs (North Wessex Downs)	13
6. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS (LCA)	13
6.1 Introduction	
6.2 LCA 1. Park Road	14
6.3 LCA 2. Folly View	
6.4 LCA 3. Sandshill	
6.5 LCA 4. Rogers Quarry	
6.6 LCA 5. Fernham Road	15
6.7 LCA 6. Steeds Farm	
6.8 LCA 7. Highden Hill	
6.9 LCA 8. Highden Farm	16

	Page
7. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS. SANDSHILL. LCA 1 – LCA 4.	16
8. LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND STRATEGY. SANDSHILL	17
9. LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND CAPACITY. SANDSHILL	18
10. CONCLUSION. SANDSHILL	19
11. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS. WEST FARINGDON. LCA 5 – LCA 8.	19
12. LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND STRATEGY. WEST FARINGDON.	20
13. LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND CAPACITY. WEST FARINGDON.	21
14. CONCLUSION. WEST FARINGDON.	21
15. CONCLUSION. FARINGDON.	22
16. BIBLIOGRAPHY.	23

APPENDICES

Figure 1.	Faringdon. Public Rights of Way
Figure 2.	Faringdon. Site and Photographic Survey
Figure 3.	Faringdon. Vegetation
Figure 4.	Faringdon. Landscape Character Areas
Figure 5.	Faringdon. Development Plan. Option 1
Figure 6.	Faringdon. Development Plan. Option 2
Figure 7.	Faringdon. Development Plan. Option 3
Figure 8.	Faringdon. Development Plan. Option 4
Figure 9.	Faringdon. Development Plan. Option 5
Photographs.	Faringdon. 10 - 21

VALE OF WHITE HORSE DISTRICT COUNCIL

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

CORE STRATEGY 2026

A study of the landscape impact of further development at Faringdon

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 Faringdon. 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 Faringdon into eight areas for appraisal purposes.

This landscape assessment looks in detail at four of these areas on the south east, southern and western sides. [Figure 4]

- 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.

FARINGDON

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

Faringdon sits on the top of the Corallian Limestone ridge with the highest hilltops such as Folly Hill and Galley Hill formed from Lower Greensand. In the Sandshill area of Faringdon there are rare deposits of Ferruginous Sandstone. To the north west of Faringdon the Thames Valley is formed from Oxford Clay while to the south east the Vale of the White Horse is formed from Kimmeridge and Gault Clay.

3.3 Soils

The Agricultural Land Classification grades the Sandshill area as partly grade 2, 3a and 3b and non agricultural. The Fernham Road area is mostly grade 3b with a small area of grade 3a. The Steeds Farm and Highden Farm area south of the B 4019 is mostly grade 3b with a small area of grade 3a. The Highden Farm area north of the B 4019 is mostly grade 3b with a small area of grade 2.

3.4 Contours

The assessment areas cover high ground in the Sandshill area on the south east side of Faringdon together with a lower broad valley either side of Coxwell Road on the south side of Faringdon. Then on the west side of Faringdon it covers the high ground at Highden Farm together with the Corallian escarpment below.

Along Park Road Sandshill is at around 110 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) rising to 125 metres AOD adjacent to Rogers Quarry. There is a small valley cut into the eastern corner of the hill adjacent to the A 420. The top edge of Rogers Quarry is just over 125 metres AOD but is slightly lower on its southern side against the A 420.

The two fields either side of the Coxwell Road are just below the highest land on the west side of Faringdon which is at 128 metres AOD. The fields are at 125 metres AOD on their Faringdon boundary falling southwards to below 120 metres AOD and forming a broad valley floor.

The two fields at Highden Farm occupy the top of the Corallian ridge and the upper section of the Corallian escarpment. The highest land is over 135 AOD and the lowest area alongside the Highworth Road is below 125 AOD.

To the north of Highworth Road the two fields fall from 125 metres AOD to below 90 metres AOD close to the bottom edge of the escarpment.

3.5 Flood Plain

There are no areas of flood plain within or adjacent to the assessment areas.

3.6 Rivers

There are no significant streams within the assessment areas.

3.7 Ecology

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

Ecological interest is expected to be concentrated in the hedgerows in all the assessment areas and in the pasture areas to the east of Coxwell Road and north of Highworth Road.

3.8 Land Use

The small fields between Sands Hill lane and the eastern end of Faringdon are used for pony grazing or are unused.

The former arable field to the east of Sands Hill lane and the small field adjacent to the A 420 roundabout are currently disused. The other three fields on Sandshill are under arable.

Rogers Quarry has a mixture of uses which includes the sale of garden products, a storage area for building and gardening materials, working and disused quarries and large storage buildings.

The field to the east of Coxwell Road is under pasture while the field on the west side is under arable.

The fields at Highden Farm are under arable while the fields to the north of the Highworth Road are under pasture.

3.9 Public Rights of Way [Figure 1]

Sands Hill lane runs from Park Road (A 417) south to where it crosses the A 420 and continues onto Galley Hill where it connects to a network of public footpaths. In the eastern corner of the fields east of Sands Hill lane a public footpath runs from Park Road at Oriel Cottages south eastwards to cross the A 420 on its way to Wickleshamlodge Farm.

Fernham Road goes up to the A 420 adjacent to the eastern boundary of the field to the east of Coxwell Road.

A public footpath runs north from the Highworth Road (B 4019) along the eastern edge of the fields north of the Highworth Road to join with a track in the area of The Pines which leads to the Lechlade Road (A 417). At this point another public footpath runs north west along the northern edge of the two fields towards the Coleshill Estate.

3.10 Settlement Pattern

Faringdon is a nucleated settlement situated on the crest of the Corallian Ridge. In the countryside around the town there is a string of small villages. Great Coxwell lies about 1.25 kilometres to the south west and Little Coxwell about 1 kilometre to the south. Fernham lies about 2.25 kilometres to the south and Shellingford about 2.75 kilometres to the south east. Stanford in the Vale lies about 4.5 kilometres to the south east with nearby Hatford 4 kilometres from the edge of Faringdon. To the north east Littleworth is about 2.5 kilometres away and Buckland about 5.5 kilometres away. The hamlet of Radcot on the River Thames is 4 kilometres to the north of Faringdon.

Within the assessment areas there are a small number of buildings. Oriel Cottages are located alongside Park Road to the east of Sands Hill lane. There is a derelict building at the north end of the area between Sands Hill lane and the edge of Faringdon.

Within the Highden Farm area there is the farmhouse and its farm buildings. In the adjacent field there is a disused highways depot.

3.11 Archaeology

In the Sandshill area there is a small group of ring ditches (SMR 12022) and a group of pits and enclosures (SMR 9577) that would require evaluation.

In the Highden Farm area south of the B 4019 there are various Romano British sites (SMR 16688, 16103, 16104) that would require evaluation.

4. FIELD SURVEY

4.1 Introduction

Following the Methodology described in section 2, the information detailed below and in Figure 2 (Faringdon. Site and Photographic Survey) and Figure 3 (Faringdon. Vegetation Survey) was collected. Site visits were carried out on April 12th and July 14th 2008.

4.2 Vegetation Survey [Figure 3]

- 4.2.1** In the Sands Hill lane assessment area to the east of Faringdon there are very few trees. Along the majority of the lane there are well managed hedgerows, with an unmanaged hedgerow following the east side of the lane opposite Rogers Quarry. The large field at Sandshill is divided by two unmanaged hedgerows running up the north slope of the hill. Hawthorn is the dominant species. An unmanaged hawthorn hedge runs along the south side of Park Road from Oriel Cottages to the A 420 roundabout. An avenue of young beech trees is developing along both sides of Park Road in the highway verges. The A 420 boundary of the field has a young woodland on the highway cutting. Adjacent to the higher parts of the field a line of trees to the east of the A 420 screens Wickleshamlodge Quarry.

- 4.2.2** In Rogers Quarry there is a small group of *Leylandii* adjacent to the lane on the east side of the site that form a strong visual feature.
- 4.2.3** Along the eastern side of Coxwell Road there is a very good well managed boundary hedgerow. There is a poor quality hedge along the Fernham Road boundary of the field. Along its southern boundary the A 420 is on an embankment which is covered in a young woodland and this forms a strong screen in the local landscape. To the south of the site there is a line of mature horse chestnut trees along the eastern side of Coxwell Road.
- 4.2.4** Along the western side of Coxwell Road there is an unmanaged hedgerow. To the north of the site there is a steep bank with a young woodland on it that screens the adjacent housing estate. This forms a strong edge to the town.
- 4.2.5** The fields on the south side of the Highworth Road (B 4019) have a managed hedgerow along their highway boundary. There is an unmanaged hedgerow along the eastern boundary against the western edge of Faringdon. This forms a strong screening edge to the town.
- 4.2.6** On the northern side of the Highworth Road the field adjacent to Faringdon has an unmanaged hedgerow. At the bottom of the escarpment the two fields have a managed hedgerow. To the north of the adjacent footpath there is a strong line of over mature pollarded willows that form a strong landscape feature.

4.3 Visibility Survey

- 4.3.1** The Sandshill assessment area is visible in varying degrees from the top of Folly Hill which is a very popular honey pot area for the local residents and visitors. The lower halves of the fields at Sandshill against Park Road have a low level of visibility. Above this there is a narrow band of moderate visibility while the whole of the hill top south to the A 420 has a high level of visibility. [Photo 10]

From the A 420 the highest part of the area has a high level of visibility but the northern slope cannot be seen. [Photo 14] The small field adjacent to the A 420 / Park Road roundabout is partially visible. [Photo 15, Photo 16]

From Galley Hill the highest part of the area has a high level of visibility.

From the northern side of Sandshill there are clear views of Folly Hill. [Photo 11, Photo 12]

From the top of Sands Hill there are panoramic views to the Cotswolds in the north, Folly Hill and the Chilterns in the north east and to the North Wessex Downs in the south east.

- 4.3.2** The main section of Rogers Quarry has a low level of visibility from Folly Hill and from the A 420. However the southern section of the quarry has a high level of visibility from the A 420. [Photo 17]
- 4.3.3** The field to the east of Coxwell Road is not visible from Folly Hill. It is visible from the A 420 through the screening tree belt in the winter. It is moderately visible from Fernham Road. The higher parts of the field are clearly visible from Coxwell Road and from footpaths around Great Coxwell. [Photo 18]

- 4.3.4** The field at Steeds Farm to the west of Coxwell Road is not visible from Folly Hill. It is clearly visible from some sections of Coxwell Road [Photo 19] and from footpaths around Great Coxwell. Existing trees along the A 420 would generally screen the site from the road.
- 4.3.5** The two fields at Highden Farm south of the B 4019 have a high level of visibility from Folly Hill except for a small area adjacent to the Highworth Road. The south western sections are visible from Coxwell Road [Photo 19] and from footpaths around Great Coxwell. The north east sections of the fields are visible from the Highworth Road [Photo 20] and from a section of the Thames Valley to the north.
- 4.3.6** Parts of the two fields to the north of the Highworth Road have a high level of visibility from Folly Hill. The eastern field has a small section at its southern end while about three quarters of the western field is visible. Both fields are visible from the Highworth Road [Photo 21] and the Lechlade Road (A 417). The higher southern sections of the fields are visible from many parts of the Thames Valley to the north.

5. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

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

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

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

109 The Midvale Ridge - the Corallian Ridge

116 The Berkshire and Marlborough Downs - Berkshire Downs

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

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

5.2 The Thames Valley (108)

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

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

5.3 The Midvale Ridge - The Corallian Ridge (109)

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

5.4 The Vale of the White Horse (108)

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

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

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

visible to the north. The area between West Hannay, Steventon and Marcham is a bleak and remote area.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The assessment areas at Faringdon are located on the Corallian Ridge between Swindon and Oxford.

6.1.2 The Corallian Ridge forms a narrow line of hills which reach to some of its highest points around Faringdon at Badbury Hill 160 metres AOD, One Tree Hill 135 metres AOD, Folly Hill 150 metres AOD and Galley Hill 140 metres AOD. Faringdon is located in a small break in the ridge with the higher ground to the south west and north east enclosing it and contributing to its landscape setting.

6.1.3 The landscape around Faringdon is generally diverse, rolling and hilly with small, medium and large scale fields of mixed arable, pastoral and woodland use. There are fine panoramic views from many points across the Thames Valley to the north west and the Vale of the White Horse to the south east. The general land level in the Thames Valley is about 70 metres AOD and in the Vale of the White Horse is

about 74 metres AOD at its lower levels. The Corallian escarpment forms an abrupt change in levels at its junction with the Thames Valley.

6.1.4 Faringdon's character partly derives from its valley setting which is cut into the crest of a ridge. New development must not intrude over the ridges and onto the adjacent hills where it would start to dominate the landscape.

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

6.2 LCA 1. Park Road

This is a long narrow strip of land between Sands Hill lane and the houses in Town End Road. Park Road forms its northern boundary and Faringdon Community College playing field its southern boundary.

This area is enclosed by a hedge along Sands Hill lane and by houses on its western side. It has an unkempt appearance as a result of pony grazing and disuse. It has a disused depot at its Park Road end and Sandshill Cottage with its collection of outbuildings partway up Sands Hill lane.

6.3 LCA 2. Folly View [Photo 10, Photo 11, Photo 12, Photo 15]

Park Road forms the northern boundary of this area, Sands Hill lane its western boundary and the Faringdon bypass (A 420) its south eastern boundary. The southern boundary lies close to the top of Sandshill where the enclosing north to south aligned hedgerows within the area stop. Most of this area is not visible from the A 420.

The character of this area is defined by its two substantial unmanaged hedgerows and its sloping landform which give it partial enclosure together with the spectacular views to Faringdon Folly which are strengthened and directed by the parallel hedgerows and landform.

6.4 LCA 3. Sandshill [Photo 10, Photo 13, Photo 14]

The western boundary is formed by Sands Hill lane and the south eastern boundary by the Faringdon bypass (A 420). Its north eastern boundary is open where the north to south aligned hedgerows in the Folly View Character Area (LCA 2) stop at their southern ends.

The character of this area is defined by its very open character because of a lack of vegetation and its elevation at 120 to 125 metres AOD. There is some enclosure from the hedge along Sands Hill lane. The area is very visible from the A 420 and from Galley Hill. There are panoramic views to the Cotswolds, Chilterns and the North Wessex Downs.

6.5 LCA 4. Rogers Quarry [Photo 17]

This vertical sided deep quarry was created many years ago. Its northern and western boundaries are formed by Faringdon Community College's playing field.

The south western boundary is formed by a field boundary and its southern boundary by the Faringdon bypass (A 420). The eastern boundary is formed by Sands Hill lane.

The character of this sand quarry to the north of Rogers Concrete is defined by its complicated range of level changes, its industrial buildings, its garden products outlet and concrete products storage area. The northern section is very enclosed by cliffs while the southern section is very enclosed on three sides by cliffs but very open to the A 420.

6.6 LCA 5. Fernham Road [Photo 18]

The eastern boundary is formed by Fernham Road, its north eastern boundary by residential development on the edge of Faringdon together with the Red house development site. Coxwell Road forms the western boundary and a change in levels forms the south western boundary. The southern boundary is formed by an embankment along the Faringdon bypass (A 420).

The character of this area is defined by its gently sloping south west facing hillside with a more open character in its higher section and its partial enclosure by hedgerows and by the tree belt alongside the A 420.

6.7 LCA 6. Steeds Farm [Photo 19]

This area lies on both sides of Coxwell Road. The eastern section has a south eastern boundary against the Faringdon bypass (A 420) embankment, a north eastern boundary marked by a change in levels, Coxwell Road forms the western boundary and a fence line forms the south western boundary. The western section has an eastern boundary along Coxwell Road, a north eastern boundary along the base of a steep wooded hillside on the southern edge of Faringdon, a western boundary along field boundaries and a south western boundary along the access track to Steeds Farm.

The character of this area is defined by its flat shallow valley floor which is enclosed by low hills to the west, north and east. The area is very open and is only a small part of a much larger character area that stretches to the edge of Great Coxwell. The valley floor has a level of about 120 metres AOD.

6.8 LCA 7. Highden Hill [Photo 19]

The eastern boundary of this area is formed by Coleshill Drive on the south west corner of Faringdon together with its mitigation woodland. Its north eastern boundary is the crest line of the Corallian escarpment to the south of Highden Farm. Its north western boundary is a field boundary and its south western boundary is a field boundary close to a change in levels.

The character of this area is defined by its elevated and very open hilltop location. Ground levels fall to the south west from a hilltop ridge above 130 metres AOD. There are panoramic views to the north across the Thames Valley and to the south across the Vale of the White Horse to Swindon.

6.9 LCA 8. Highden Farm [Photo 20, Photo 21]

This area lies both sides of the Highworth Road (B 4019). The south eastern boundary is formed by residential areas on Westland Road and Orchard Hill along the north western side of Faringdon, the south western boundary is formed by the crest line of the Corallian escarpment to the south of Highden Farm, the north western boundary is formed by field boundaries and the north eastern boundary is formed by a field boundary.

The character of this area is defined by its elevated, and in places steep hillside, forming part of the Corallian escarpment overlooking the Thames Valley. There is enclosure along the boundary with Faringdon and at the bottom of the hillside from a line of over mature pollarded willows. Otherwise there are panoramic views from much of the area across the Thames Valley to the Cotswolds. On the crest of the hill there are panoramic views to the south west across the Vale of the White Horse to Swindon.

7. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF SANDSHILL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS LCA 1 – LCA 4

7.1 Key characteristics of the Sandshill landscape are:-

- a valley hillside with an open elevated hilltop
- a partially concealed quarry with industrial and retail uses
- an area of urban fringe horse grazing
- a relatively treeless landscape
- low key arable agriculture
- panoramic views to the Thames Valley, Folly Hill, the Chilterns, and the North Wessex Downs from the highest parts of the site

7.2 The current condition of the landscape shows:-

- a partially neglected arable landscape
- a garden products outlet with a working and disused quarry

7.3 The evidence of change in the Sandshill landscape is:-

- the loss of a field boundary across the hilltop
- the creation of Rogers Sand Quarry and its after use

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

- that agricultural changes may bring the area back into intensive agriculture
- that the quarry might be abandoned or redeveloped

7.5 Potential development pressures are:-

- for urban expansion in the period to 2026
- for the quarrying of ferruginous sand

7.6 Possible consequences of the area remaining under arable may be:-

- that the general management of the area will continue to be minimal

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 the public open spaces on the hill top
 - the creation of a new edge to Faringdon where the planted open spaces will form a landscape setting for the town
 - a loss of some of the views into the surrounding countryside
 - a visible intrusion of an urban area into the countryside of the Vale of the White Horse, particularly when viewed from Folly Hill
 - the probable loss of some short lengths of hedgerow
- 7.8** The effects of the area remaining unchanged are:-
- that the main entry point into Faringdon will continue to have a run down appearance because of the unmanaged land on the southern side of Park Road.
- 7.9** The effects of the area being developed are:-
- a further expansion of Faringdon to the very limit of its landscape setting and containment
 - the open hill top area will become partially enclosed
 - a more wooded and treed edge to Faringdon
 - an extension of the open space network along the A 420 from Folly Park
- 7.10** The threats to Sandhill's existing landscape character area's key characteristics as a result of the adverse consequences of change are:-
- loss of its rural landscape
 - the creation of woodland areas
 - the very open hill top area becomes partially enclosed
 - most of the panoramic views are lost
 - the landform within the quarry would probably be significantly modified
- 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 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
 - the screening of Rogers Quarry

8. LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND STRATEGY. SANDSHILL

- 8.1** The Sandshill landscape character areas LCA 1 and LCA 4 are of poor quality while LCA 2 and LCA 3 are of moderate quality. The landscape character of LCA 1 and LCA 4 is not typical of the landscape around Faringdon. The landscape character LCA 2 and LCA 3 are more typical of the countryside around Faringdon. LCA 1 has a poor quality landscape because of its use for horsiculture and the disused building on Park Road. LCA 4 has a poor quality landscape because of its garden products retail and storage activity and its many unsightly industrial buildings. The western part of LCA 2 is of low quality while the eastern parts of LCA 2 and LCA 3 are high quality.

- 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/owners to plant new hedgerows, hedgerow trees and woodlands and allowing public access as part of the Great Western Community Forest while maintaining its overall arable use.
 - iii. Allow for urban development over LCA 1 and all of LCA 2 except for the highest ground. Land alongside the A 420 and the small field adjacent to the Park Road / A 420 roundabout. LCA 3 to become public urban space. [Figure 5]
 - iv. Allow for urban development as in **iii.** together with urban development in Rogers Quarry, LCA 4. [Figure 6]

9. LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND CAPACITY. SANDSHILL

9.1 Landscape Sensitivity

The Sandhill landscape character areas LCA 1 and LCA 4 are not strong representatives of the wider local landscape character areas. They have a low level of sensitivity to accommodating major changes. LCA 2 and LCA 3 are strong representatives of the wider local landscape character areas. LCA 2 has a moderate sensitivity and LCA 3 has a high level of sensitivity to accommodating major changes.

9.2 Landscape Capacity

The amount of change that the Sandhill landscape character areas 1 and 4 can accept without an adverse effect on their landscape character is high. If new residential areas were created they would have a minimal impact (including woodland mitigation in LCA 4) on the wider countryside.

The amount of change that landscape character area LCA 2 can accept without an adverse effect on its landscape character is moderate. The amount of change that LCA 3 can accept without an adverse impact on its landscape character is low. If new residential areas were created in LCA 2 with mitigation they would have a low impact on the wider countryside except for views from Folly Hill. If new residential areas were created in LCA 3 they would have a high impact on the wider countryside and on the landscape setting of Faringdon.

9.3 Landscape Robustness

Combining LCA 1's and LCA 4's low landscape sensitivity with a high capacity for change, they have a high level of robustness. Combining LCA 2's moderate landscape sensitivity with a moderate capacity for change it has a moderate level of robustness. Combining LCA 3's high level of sensitivity with a low capacity for change it has a low level of robustness.

10. CONCLUSION OF SITE ANALYSIS FOR SANDSHILL LCA 1 - LCA 4

- 10.1** Following on from 9.3 above, the conclusion is that from a landscape character area point of view Sandshill LCA 1 and LCA 4 are robust enough to accept the changes that would occur if large scale residential development took place as long as woodland and mounding mitigation took place in LCA 4.

Sandshill LCA 2 is robust enough to accept the changes that would occur if large scale residential development took place as long as this included major woodland mitigation in LCA 3.

Sandshill LCA 3 is not robust enough to accept the changes that would occur if large scale residential development took place. However it is robust enough to accept the changes that would occur if it were developed as a landscaped public open space.

- 10.2** All of the countryside around Faringdon is designated as an Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV) (Local Plan Policy NE7). Development within the AHLV around Sandshill would have a low to modest impact on the wider AHLV except in LCA 3 where it would have a significant impact. Therefore residential development is acceptable within LCA 1, LCA 2 and LCA 4 in the Sandshill area but only with mitigation.

11. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF THE WEST FARINGDON LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS LCA 5 – LCA 8

- 11.1** Key characteristics of the west Faringdon landscape are:-

- elevated hill top and hillsides
- open and level valley floor
- intensive agriculture on part of the area
- low key agriculture on part of the area
- panoramic views across the Thames Valley to the Cotswolds and across the Vale of the White Horse to Swindon

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

- some sections are well managed
- some sections receive minimal management
- neglect where the burnt out barn in LCA 6 has not been removed

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

- the relatively new hedgerow along the west side of Coxwell Road
- the new off site tree belt and woodland along the north side of LCA 6
- the developing tree belt alongside the A 420 on the south side of LCA 5 and LCA 6
- the decline in the offsite pollarded willows on the north side of area 8

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

- that agricultural changes are not expected to affect the area and that it will remain under a mix of arable and pastoral farming

- 11.4** Potential development pressures are:-

- for urban expansion in the period to 2026
- 11.5** Possible consequences of the area remaining under its current use are:-
- no changes
- 11.6** The consequences of the area being subjected to urban development would be:-
- the loss of an arable and pastoral 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 Faringdon into the countryside beyond its encircling and containing hills
- 11.7** The effects of the area remaining unchanged are:-
- no improvements in the landscape
- 11.8** The effects of the area being developed are:-
- an expansion of Faringdon beyond the limit of its landscape setting and containment
 - the open hilltop in LCA 8 will become woodland
 - a more wooded and treed edge to Faringdon
 - an extension of the modest public open space network in West Faringdon
- 11.9** The threats to Faringdon's existing landscape character area's key characteristics as a result of the adverse consequences of change are:-
- loss of its rural landscape
 - the area becomes enclosed
 - reduction and loss of panoramic views
- 11.10** 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 rural landscape
 - planting the new tree belts with native species in order to increase the biodiversity of the area
 - enhancement of the public footpath network within the open space system

12 LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND STRATEGY. WEST FARINGDON

- 12.1** The west Faringdon landscape character area LCA 6 is of moderate quality and LCA 5, LCA 7 and LCA 8 are of good quality. LCA 5, LCA 7 and LCA 8 with their hillsides, hilltops and escarpment are typical examples of the landscape character around Faringdon. The valley character of LCA 6 is not so typical of the landscape along the Corallian ridge but it is at the head of a valley that runs westward for about 5 kilometres to Coleshill.
- 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. Encourage and assist the current owners to improve the quality of the landscape where appropriate.

- iii. Allow for residential development only on the area between Fernham Road and Coxwell Road (LCA 5 and part of LCA 6) [Figure 7].
- iv. Allow for residential development only on the area between Coxwell Road and Steeds Farm (part of LCA 6). [Figure 8]
- v. Allow for residential development between Steeds Farm and Fernham Road (LCA 5 and LCA 6). Maintain the fields in LCA 7 and LCA 8 as countryside. [Figure 9]

13. LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND CAPACITY. WEST FARINGDON

13.1 Landscape Sensitivity

The west Faringdon landscape character areas are generally strong representatives of the wider local landscape character areas. LCA 6 has a high level of sensitivity to accommodating major change, while LCA 7 and LCA 8 have a very high level of sensitivity. LCA 5 and part of LCA 6 west of Fernham Road have a moderate level of sensitivity to accommodating major change.

13.2 Landscape Capacity

The amount of change that the west Faringdon LCA 6 can accept without an adverse effect on its landscape character is low, while LCA 7 and LCA 8 have a very low capacity to accept change. LCA 5 and part of LCA 6 west of Fernham Road have a moderate capacity to accept change. If residential development were to occur then the generally open landscape would be lost and Faringdon would have grown beyond its natural boundary of landscape containment. If residential development were to occur in LCA 8 then the changes would also impact on the upper River Thames landscape.

13.3 Landscape Robustness

Combining LCA 5's and part of LCA 6's moderate landscape sensitivity with a moderate capacity for change, they have a moderate level of robustness.

Combining LCA 6's high landscape sensitivity with a low capacity for change, it has a low level at robustness.

Combining LCA 7's and LCA 8's very high landscape sensitivity with a very low capacity for change, they have a very low level of robustness.

14. CONCLUSION OF SITE ANALYSIS OF WEST FARINGDON LCA 5 – LCA 8

- 14.1 Following on from 13.3 the conclusion is that from a landscape character point of view only LCA 5 is robust enough to accept the changes that would occur if residential development took place, as long as this included major woodland mitigation. However development is undesirable here because it would fall outside the ridge that visually contains Faringdon. West Faringdon LCA 6, LCA 7 and LCA 8 are not robust enough to accept the changes that would occur if large scale residential development were to take place.

15. CONCLUSION FOR FARINGDON STUDY AREA

15.1 Summary Table of Landscape Sensitivity, Capacity and Robustness

Landscape Character Areas	Sensitivity	Capacity	Robustness
LCA 1	low	high	high
LCA 2	moderate	moderate	moderate
LCA 3	high	low	low
LCA 4	low	high	high
LCA 5	moderate	moderate	moderate
LCA 6	high	low	low
LCA 7	very high	very low	very low
LCA 8	very high	very low	very low

15.2 All of the countryside around Faringdon and north to the River Thames is designated as an Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV) (Local Plan Policy NE7). From the table in 15.1 above it can be seen that the Sandhill landscape has a higher level of robustness than the west Faringdon landscape. Also development within the AHLV around west Faringdon will have a greater impact on the wider AHLV than it will in the Sandhill area. Therefore it is preferable to allow residential development in the Sandhill LCA 1, LCA 2 and LCA 4 in order to protect the AHLV in west Faringdon.

16. Bibliography

Colvin, B. (1970, 2nd ed) *Land and Landscape*. John Murray

Countryside Agency (1998) *Countryside Character Vol. 7 South East and London*

Countryside Agency (2002) *Landscape Character Assessment
Guidance for England and Scotland*

Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) 1:63,360. Sheet 236 Witney

Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) 1:63,360. Sheet 252 Swindon

Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) 1:63,360. Sheet 253 Abingdon

Ordnance Survey GIS Mapping System

Ordnance Survey Maps (1:25,000 Explorer Maps) Nos. 170

The Landscape Institute / Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2003, 2nd ed). *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*.

Vale of White Horse District Council. *Local Plan 2011*