

North Wessex Downs AONB

West Berkshire Core Strategy Examination

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)

**Response to Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Potential Impact
of the Scale and Distribution of Development in the North Wessex
Downs AONB**

Prepared by:

**David Withycombe BSc, MSc, MLI
Land Management Services Ltd**

**On behalf of:
The North Wessex Downs AONB Office**

March 2011

North Wessex Downs AONB

West Berkshire Core Strategy Examination

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)

**Response to Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Potential Impact of the
Scale and Distribution of Development in the North Wessex Downs AONB**

Contents

	Page
1. Introduction	1
2. Policy Context	2
3. The January 2011 Kirkham/Terra Firma Report	2
4. Land Management Services Report	5
5. Site Assessments	6
5.1 Hungerford	6
5.2 Lambourn	26
5.3 Pangbourne	44
5.4 Hermitage	53
5.5 Compton	63
5.6 Kintbury	72
5.7 Chieveley	95
5.8 Great Shefford	115
6. Conclusions	122

1. Introduction

1.1 Land Management Services Ltd was commissioned by the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to prepare a response to the report entitled 'Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Potential Impact of the Scale and Distribution of Development in the North Wessex Downs AONB' prepared by Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd and The Terra Firma Consultancy Ltd for West Berkshire dated January 2011, referred to hereafter as the Kirkham/Terra Firma report.

1.2 The Kirkham/Terra Firma report was prepared in response to the Inspector's requirement in Hearing Note 2, which identified a number of matters requiring further work. Paragraph 4.1 of Hearing Note 2 states:

'.. the proportion of overall housing assigned to the AONB and the potential scale of development in different locations had not specifically taken into account the potential landscape impact.'

1.3 In preparing this response we have also made close reference to the following reports:

- 'Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment' (February 2011) prepared by West Berkshire Council, referred to hereafter as the 2011 SHLAA report;
- 'An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire' (May 2009) prepared by Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd, hereafter referred to as the Kirkham Report (2009). Particular reference is made to the Summary Report for Hungerford (May 2009).

1.4 The Purpose of this report is:

- To review the scope and methodology of the Kirkham/Terra Firma report in order to assess whether this addresses the requirements of Hearing Note 2;

- To review the recommendations of the Kirkham/Terra Firma report as to the impacts associated with each of the SHLAA sites, including cumulative impacts;
- To evaluate whether proposals would meet the requirements of Area Delivery Plan Policy 5 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy to 'conserve and enhance the special landscape qualities of the AONB', and PPS 7 Paragraph 21 with regard to the 'conservation of the natural beauty and the countryside'.

Policy Context

- 2.1 Area Delivery Plan Policy 5 of the Draft Changes to the Core Strategy for West Berkshire includes the following:

Development

- 'The North Wessex Downs AONB will have appropriate and sustainable growth that conserves and enhances its special landscape qualities'

Environment

- 'Recognising the area as a national landscape designation, development will conserve and enhance the local distinctiveness, sense of place and setting of the AONB.'

3. The January 2011 Kirkham/Terra Firma Report – Scope and Methodology

- 3.1 The January 2011 Kirkham/Terra Firma report takes as its baseline the sites put forward as part of the November 2010 SHLAA. The desk top Assessment of Settlement in the report establishes the baseline for each settlement in terms of key landscape, visual and settlement characteristics drawn primarily from the North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (2002), and also the following:

- Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2003)

- Newbury District Landscape Character Assessment (1993)
 - West Berkshire Historic Landscape Characterisation (2004-2007)
- 3.2 The summary to this desk top evaluation for each settlement provides an overview of the key characteristics and landscape constraints associated with each settlement.
- 3.3 The individual site assessments comprise an analysis of the relationship between each of the SHLAA sites with the adjacent settlement and the wider countryside and the anticipated impacts of development on key landscape, visual and settlement characteristics. Conclusions are then drawn as to whether development would comply with the requirements of PPS 7 Paragraph 21 and whether the site should be considered for development and taken forward as part of the SHLAA. In relation to sites where it is considered development would not result in harm to the natural beauty of the AONB, recommendations are made in order to conserve specific landscape features or characteristics and minimise landscape, visual and settlement impacts. It should be noted that Area Delivery Plan Policy 5 includes the additional requirement that development should 'enhance' the special landscape qualities of the AONB.
- 3.4 In 2009 Kirkham Landscape Planning Ltd were commissioned to prepare 'An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion in West Berkshire'. This study evaluated the landscape sensitivity for one kilometre width belts around the settlement boundaries for four settlements: Hungerford; Newbury; Reading and Thatcham. A methodology statement describes the scoring system for the evaluation of landscape sensitivity against eight principal themes. Individual reports and supporting maps were produced for each of the settlements, with conclusions drawn as to the landscape sensitivity of the 1 kilometre belt around each settlement. This report does not take account of the AONB designation and states that this was not 'factored in' in relation to the landscape sensitivity assessment for Hungerford.
- 3.5 The 2011 Kirkham/Terra Firma report includes reference to the landscape sensitivity findings for Hungerford from the 2009 report.

- 3.6 There are similarities between the methodologies used in the January 2009 and 2011 reports, but the 2011 Kirkham/Terra Firma report does not draw conclusions as to the overall landscape sensitivity around each settlement. Whilst the desk top review sets out the key characteristics of each settlement and the surrounding countryside by reference to Landscape Character Assessments and Village Design statements, the site assessments are confined to consideration of the SHLAA sites. This assessment should be landscape led and not simply restricted to a review of the sites put forward as part of the SHLAA. The assessment should comprise an overall evaluation of the landscape sensitivity and character of both the settlement and the surrounding countryside, which would inform an evaluation of potential locations to accommodate development. This approach is recommended in the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan (2009 – 2014) which states:

‘The development of individual settlements should be guided by an assessment of local landscape character that takes account of the historical evolution, architecture and current community needs of individual settlements, including those of affordable housing’

(North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan p.62 ‘Built Environment’)

- 3.7 Reliance on the existing landscape character assessments prepared at a County, AONB or District level does not provide the depth of assessment recommended in the AONB Management Plan.
- 3.8 The findings and recommendations of the Kirkham/Terra Firma report are presented predominantly on a site by site basis. There is reference to the cumulative impact of development on the settlement as a whole in the Conclusions to each Site Assessment.
- 3.9 The Kirkham/Terra Firma assessments for each site describe the key characteristics and anticipated impacts associated with development. Photographs are included but the locations for each photograph are not identified on the Settlement Maps. The assessments also do not include an evaluation of the zone of visual impact or visual envelope associated with each SHLAA site.

4. Land Management Services Report

- 4.1 Although we have reservations on the overall approach taken to this assessment (as described in Paragraph 3.6 above), we have set out our response to the individual site assessments in a format consistent with the Kirkham/Terra Firma report, on a site by site basis to enable ease of comparison. Where we are in agreement with the observations, findings or recommendations of the Kirkham/Terra Firma Report we have simply stated 'agree'.
- 4.2 As part of each site assessment (Section 5) we have also included some additional photographs in order to illustrate particular points. We have also included copies of the original Settlement Maps, which identify the location of the SHLAA sites on which we have annotated:
- Our recommendations where these are not consistent with those set out in the Kirkham/Terra Firma Report
 - Location of viewpoints for any photographs included in our report
- 4.3 We have set out our observations and conclusions, with particular reference to cumulative impacts at the end of each Settlement Site Assessment.
- 4.4 We have also included Tables comparing the net number of potential dwellings at each settlement as identified in the Kirkham/Terra Firma and the Land Management Services Ltd reports. These Tables draw on figures set out in the February 2011 SHLAA Report.
- 4.5 In Section 6 we present our overall conclusions, which include a comparison of the total numbers of net dwellings which could potentially be taken forward under the Kirkham/Terra Firma and Land Management Services Ltd Assessments, based on the figures from the February 2011 SHLAA report.