

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL

**LANDSCAPE CAPACITY ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL HOUSING SITES WITHIN AND ADJACENT TO THE
NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY IN WEST BERKSHIRE**

FINAL PHASE 2 REPORT: HERMITAGE

HERMITAGE

Settlement	Hermitage
North Wessex Downs AONB Character areas: LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons	
Date of site survey	17 June 2014
Surveyor	AG

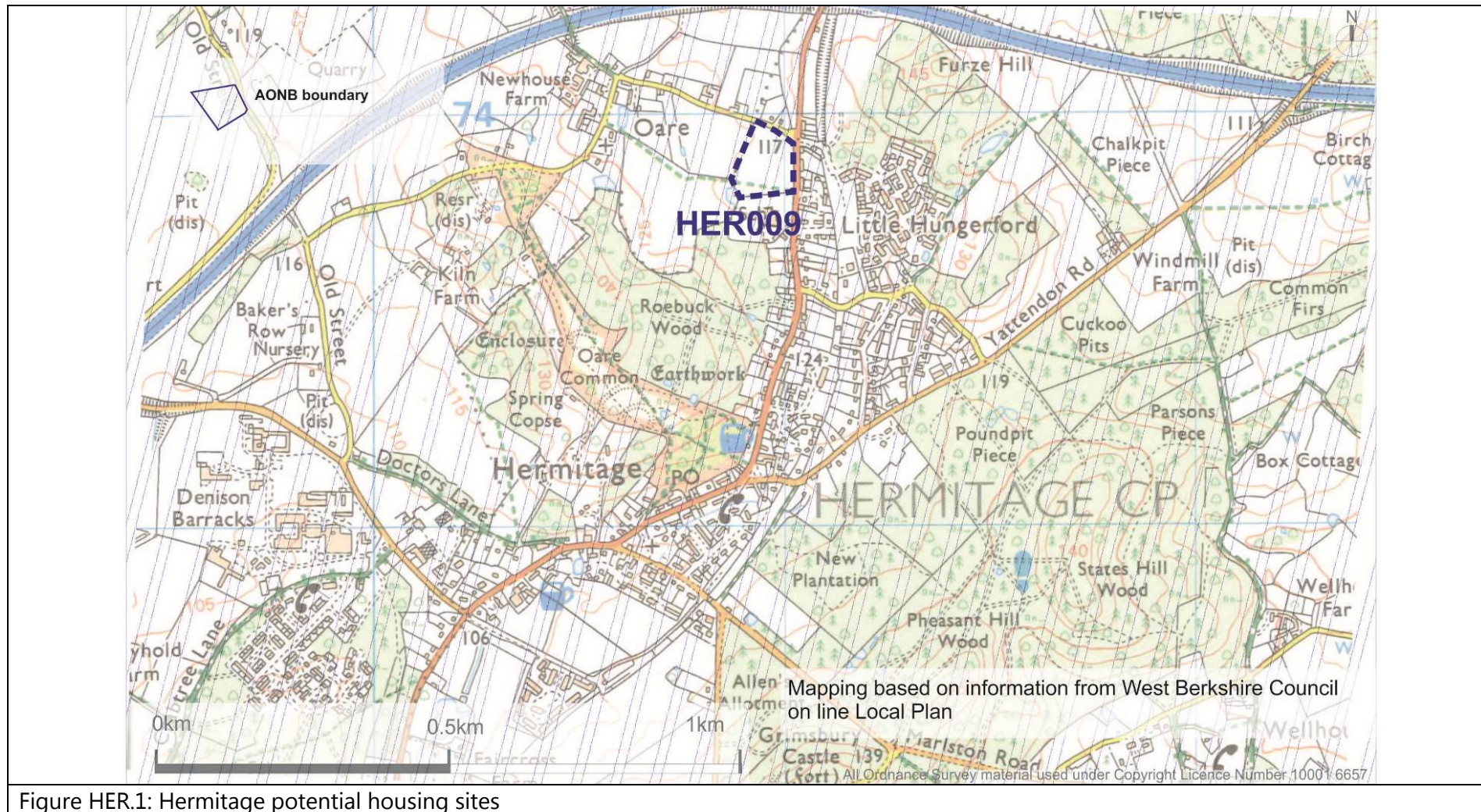


Figure HER.1: Hermitage potential housing sites

Key landscape characteristics

AONB LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons (unless source noted otherwise)

- Broad undulating plateau
- Intricate mosaic of woodland, pasture and small areas of remnant heathland
- Large interconnected woodland blocks
- Strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees
- Enclosed and intimate character
- Small irregular fields of informal and piecemeal enclosures
- Intricate network of rural lanes, many sunken and overhung with woodland
- Historic parkland
- Ancient and semi-natural woodland
- Mixed well managed woodland to east in Fence Wood, Grimsbury Wood and Pheasants Hill Wood (VDS)
- Substantial tree groups at gateways to the village (VDS)
- Reorganised fields, formerly pre18th C irregular fields (HLC): HER 004 and 007

Key visual characteristics

AONB LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons (unless source noted otherwise)

- Low wooded horizons
- Fine views over the AONB
- Views out of the village to the wooded skylines (VDS)

Key settlement characteristics

AONB LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons (unless source noted otherwise)

- Dispersed settlement pattern characteristic of encroachment into woodland and commons
- Large nucleated settlement (Hermitage) and loose roadside settlements
- Hermitage is a good sized settlement (NDLCA LCT11)
- Settlements have a sense of long establishment (NDLCA LCT11)
- Development has extended beyond the settlement boundary
- Original settlement centred on two drove roads
- Linear settlement with residential growth post WWII and a number of non residential developments (eg Cementation site; depots and barracks) (VDS)
- Recent settlement growth, formerly pre18thC irregular fields (HLC): HER 001
- Military establishment, formerly pre18thC irregular fields (HLC): HER 006
- Development has been so intense that it has spread along the roads between historic nuclei: Cold Ash, Longlane, Curridge, Hermitage and Little Hungerford from an almost uninterrupted belt of settlement. The small surviving agricultural areas consist of modern fields created by rationalisation of historic enclosures through boundary removal and reorganisation. (HECZ Curridge, Hermitage, Cold Ash Settlements)
- Most housing has been constructed around historic settlement nuclei on areas of former common heathland. Small areas of ancient woodland have also been lost to housing development on the edge on Hermitage (HECZ Curridge, Hermitage, Cold Ash Settlements)

Summary of the key characteristics of the settlement and landscape constraints on the extent and location of development

The potential housing site in Hermitage lies within the North Wessex Downs AONB 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons. This capacity report builds upon the previous study: *Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Potential Impact of the Scale and Distribution of Development in the North Wessex Downs AONB* (2011) (LSA 2011) by examining the north part of Hermitage and its landscape setting in greater detail, specifically concentrating on the special qualities and key characteristics which contribute to the natural beauty of the AONB.

The whole of Hermitage and its hinterland lies within the AONB landscape character area LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons. This is a well populated landscape which has been subject to development pressures as a consequence of the area's relative accessibility. This has resulted in the linear spread of development out from the nucleated settlements. However although Curridge and Longlane lie close to Hermitage, these settlements are separated by open countryside and woodland which are particularly important in retaining the rural character and identity of

Hermitage itself. Hermitage is noted for its wooded setting, with many woodlands adding height to the surrounding low hills that contain the village. Most of the settlement lies on lower flat ground at 105 – 115m AOD, either side of the B4009. Any proposed development which would result in the loss of woodland cover, would extend up onto higher ground, or would lead to the loss of open countryside between Hermitage and the adjacent settlements is likely to have a detrimental effect on the special qualities of the AONB and the settlement of Hermitage.

The area is also noted for its small scale landscape mosaic, its fine views of this particularly wooded part of the AONB, its rural winding lanes and the pattern of hedgerows and tree lines. Any proposed development needs to respect these characteristics and avoid suburbanising the rural character through unsympathetic hard landscape features such as kerbs, grand site entrances, or ornamental planting on the perimeter of the countryside.

Although Hermitage has large sites on the edge of the settlement which have long been under some form of development, the development of large and homogeneous estates would detract from the special qualities of this area. Great care will also be needed to minimise the impact on the landscape character of the surrounding AONB, through limitations on development and generous provision of Green Infrastructure, and to mitigate the existing harm to the AONB landscape from intrusive built form as at Dennison barracks.

Sources:

North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002

Additional information from:

- Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Potential Impact of the Scale and Distribution of Development in the North Wessex Downs AONB (2011) (LSA 2011)
- Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2003 (BLCA)
- Newbury District Landscape Character Assessment 1993 (NDLCA)
- Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC)
- Historic Environment Character Zoning (HECZ)
- Hermitage VDS

A. Assessment of Potential Housing Site: HER009: Land north of primary school, Hampstead Norreys Road

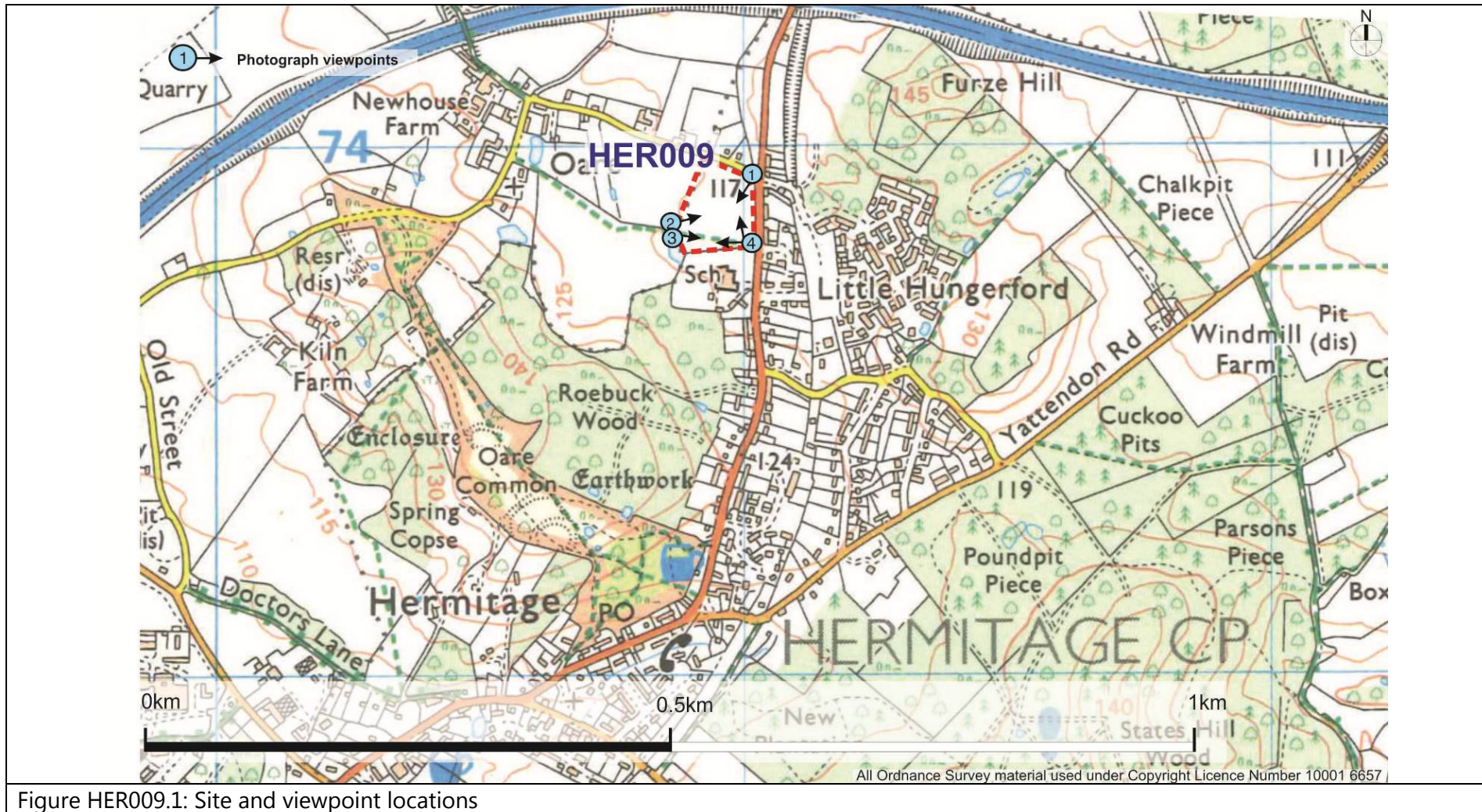


Figure HER009.1: Site and viewpoint locations

PHOTOGRAPHS



Viewpoint 1: The eastern edge of site (right of the photograph) is adjacent to the settlement with a mature hedge. The school is visible (centre, right) to the south



Viewpoint 2: Characteristic view of wooded skyline viewed from the footpath crossing the site. The settlement edge is largely well vegetated



Viewpoint 3: Mature oaks and gappy hedge along southern boundary with the school



Viewpoint 4: Sparsely settled Manor Lane (right – centre) leading to the small hamlet of Oare (centre – left) – from the public footpath crossing the site. Glimpses of the wider AONB and M4 corridor to the west – north west

Site description

Site HER009 lies at the north end of Hermitage, entirely within the North Wessex Downs AONB. The site comprises the eastern part of an arable field bounded by the rural Manor Lane to the north and busier Hampstead Norreys Road to the east side and with a primary school to the south. Both these boundaries are hedged (the eastern hedge being tall), and the western boundary does not follow any hedgerow or other landscape feature, but is open. The southern boundary with the school has a gappy hedge with a belt of mature oak trees. The land slopes gently down eastwards towards Hampstead Norreys Road. The northern edge of the site is approximately level with the northernmost extent of Hermitage to the east with more scattered development along Manor Lane towards the small hamlet of Oare. Much of the settlement is east of Hampstead Norreys Road, with just a narrow band of settlement on the west side. A public right of way crosses the site, linking Hermitage with Oare. The site is locally prominent but largely visually contained beyond the immediately adjacent areas, with no long or panoramic views. Built development in the north part of Hermitage is visible from the site against a wooded backdrop. There is some limited visual connection with the M4 corridor to the north and traffic noise is audible from the site.

Relationship with adjacent settlement

- Eastern boundary is adjacent to the settlement
- Northern edge of site is level with the northern extent of the settlement and adjacent to sparsely settled Manor Lane
- Settlement on the west side of Hampstead Norreys Road generally comprises a line of single properties in a narrow band
- Intervisibility with the village

Relationship with adjacent wider countryside

- Strong relationship with the landscape immediately to the north and west but cut off by the M4 corridor from the wider AONB beyond
- Part of the intricate mosaic of woodland, pasture and larger arable fields
- Strong pattern of hedgerows and woodland

Impact on key landscape characteristics

- Loss of landscape setting of Hermitage which has strong links with the wider landscape
- Impact on rural character of Manor Lane
- Impact on footpath crossing site
- Impact on tree belt and hedges to site boundaries

Impact on key visual characteristics

- Site is locally prominent but largely well screened from wider AONB
- Good intervisibility with Hermitage
- Impact on views from the footpath and roads

Impact on key settlement characteristics

- Development of the whole site would widen the otherwise narrow settlement on the west side of Hampstead Norreys Road
- Development of the site would not extend further northwards than the existing northern edge of Hermitage

Summary of compliance with NPPF

Some development on this site, subject to the recommendations below, could be accommodated subject to important measures to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB.

Recommendations

It is recommended that only part of the site is considered further as a potential housing site subject to the retention of boundary vegetation and the careful consideration of the footpath route. Development should be contained in the eastern part of site as indicated in Figure HER009.2. Development would be subject to:

- The provision of substantial woodland planting to contain the western side of the settlement
- The preferred access is via the existing gap in the hedgerow on Hampstead Norreys Road subject to assessment of impacts on the remaining hedgerow
- Containment of the settlement within a linear pattern and on the lower ground
- Sensitive design to mitigate any impacts, particularly on the rural character of Manor Lane and on the footpath through the site
- The retention and enhancement of existing tree belts and hedgerows as well as extensive new woodland planting to contain the western edge of the settlement
- A full detailed landscape and visual impact assessment will be required to inform the final capacity of the site.

Cumulative effect of development with sites identified in the LSA 2011 as having potential for development in Hermitage

Two sites were assessed in the LSA 2011 as having potential for development. Both of these sites were in the south and west side of Hermitage with no physical or visual connection with HER009. Therefore there would be no cumulative effect. Any further development in the north part of Hermitage would be heavily constrained by woodland, landform and the character of the landscape and settlement pattern.



Figure HER009.2: Potential development area, Green Infrastructure and preferred access