

Appendix 4c: Theale Site Assessments

Spatial Area:	Eastern Area	Settlement:	Theale	Parish:	Theale
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Site ID:	THE1	Site Address:	Whitehart Meadow, High Street, Theale
Use(s) proposed by site promoter	Residential	Development Potential:	100 dwellings

Recommendation:

The site is recommended for allocation.

Justification:

The site is within the revised settlement hierarchy Theale is identified as a Rural Service Centre. Rural Service Centres are larger rural settlements which offer development potential appropriate to the character and function of the settlement. The site lies to the east of the town, on greenfield land between the existing built up area (Woodfield Way) and the M4, and is close to the existing amenities of the town, employment area at Arlington Business Park, and public transport nodes.

The site was assessed in the 2013 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (site ref was THE002) as 'potentially developable'. The site was subsequently assessed in more detail during the preparation of the Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document, whereby the site was not recommended for allocation due to the location of the site adjacent to the M4 (and resultant noise and air quality issues), and the location of a pylon in the centre of the site. In addition, the Environment Agency strongly recommended that the site was not allocated due to majority of it being in Flood Zone 2. A sequential test would have been required to allocate the site in the Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document. Other suitable sites with a lower risk of flooding were available in Theale and across the district, so the Council would have been unable to carry out the sequential test. There has been a successful flood risk challenge, and the area that is within Flood Zone 2 is concentrated to near a third of the site.

The site lies to the south-east of THE7, which is recommended for allocation. The site lies to the north-west of THE8 which is recommended as a designated employment site. Cumulatively, care will be needed to ensure that there is no harm to the character of the landscape and to the setting of the AONB. For the residential sites the pylons act as an edge to development, and provision of Green Infrastructure/biodiversity net gain in the buffer between the pylons and the edge of the site could enhance the area. The design and layout will be important to consider, and successful design should seek to ensure that a sense of separation between Theale and Calcot is maintained. Residential development should be avoided in Flood Zone 2.

Overall, the site is likely to have a neutral impact on sustainability, and the SA/SEA does not highlight any significant sustainability effects. The site is well connected to Theale which has a range of services and facilities, and there are opportunities to connect to the countryside beyond. Care is needed in design to not to adversely impact on the character of the area. Issues outstanding include assessments for air and noise quality, contamination, highways, ecology, flooding, and minerals. Further information is required to ascertain that the development can viably deliver affordable housing, given the evidence presented in a previous planning application.

Discussion:

Site description:

The site lies to the east of the town, on greenfield land between the existing built up area (Woodfield Way) and the M4. The whole site area is 8ha. The site has an extant permission for a hotel, and the access road has been constructed. A Public Right of Way (THEA/5/2) runs along part of the western site boundary and through a small part of the site, and there are connections to the countryside to the north. There is a small recreation ground to the west of the site, which contains a small play area.

HELAA conclusions:

Site has extant permission for hotel but is being promoted for alternative uses. Potentially developable in part. The site is adjacent to the AONB and landscape assessment required to determine the impact that development would have. Concern that development would not be appropriate in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and character of the landscape. A small part of the site is within Flood Zone 2. High voltage power lines transect the site. Assessment may be needed plus appropriate use of the land near powerlines. A Transport Assessment will be required with nearby junctions modelled to determine impact and capacity. Allocation would also be dependent on a review of the settlement boundary for Theale in the Local Plan Review.

Landscape:

The West Reading Landscape Sensitivity Study (2009) identifies that the northern half of the site is within the 'Englefield Wooded Farmlands', which has a medium sensitivity, whilst the southern half is within the 'Theale-Calcot Gap' which has a low sensitivity. West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2019) - the site forms part of the Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic LCA (WH4). The decreasing separation/coalescence between settlements together with the loss of gradation between settlement and countryside have been identified as key detractors in this area.

The site is fairly open land, with some tree belts and extensive areas of vegetation. The north-eastern edge of the site forms the south-western edge of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). There are high voltage pylons running diagonally across the site. The site would expand development into the existing buffer between village and the M4.

The Council's landscape assessment undertaken for planning application 16/03613/OUTMAJ considered that a sensitively designed scheme should not adversely impact on the AONB and still maintain a perception of separation between Theale and Calcot. These include layout of development, height, massing, scale, type of housing type and its location (i.e. apartment blocks), footpath links, wildlife corridor, amenity space, and open space.

Therefore, only part of the site is suitable for development. The pylons act as a 'natural' barrier to the edge of development, while providing a buffer between Theale, the M4 and the AONB. The buffer could enhance Green Infrastructure and potential biodiversity net gain. The existing green space between THE1 and THE7 should be retained and enhanced.

The AONB Unit and Natural England have advised that there is potential for development. The pylons form a good natural line for the edge of a built development with the North Easterly edge beyond acting as a buffer to the M4 and retaining a degree of separation from Tilehurst. This buffer can provide green infrastructure and potential biodiversity net gain which is designed and implemented correctly could improve the eastern edge of the settlement. Retain triangle of open space between THE1 and THE7, and design of development will be important in this area.

Flood risk:

Nearly a third of the site lies within Flood Zone 2 (recently revised following a challenge to the Environment Agency), with the rest in Flood Zone 1.

Medium risk of fluvial flooding in area within Flood Zone 2. Low probability of fluvial flooding in area within Flood Zone 1.

There are a few small cases of low risk surface water pooling, the majority of which are in the north east corner next to the watercourse. There is high ground water 0-0.25m below the surface. This will prevent use of infiltration for Sustainable Drainage Systems. Further information is required to fully assess the flood risk and mitigation at the site.

Highways / Transport:

No significant impact on access, aside from setting back the current road block facilities to allow access.

A Transport Assessment will be required with nearby junctions modelled to determine the highway impact and capacity. The site would access the very east end of the High Street where there are minimal traffic flows. There is a mini-roundabout at the nearby junction with Hoad Way that affords good access to the A4 and M4 J12. The capacity of the A4 near the M4 needs to be investigated further as part of the Transport Assessment.

There are regular bus and train services serving Theale.

The train station is located approximately a kilometre from the site, with services between Bedwyn, Reading and London Paddington, every 30-60 minutes bolstered in peaks. Bus stops are located on the High Street within 0.5km of the site, providing 30 minute services between Newbury and Reading.

There are opportunities for walking and cycling within Theale and to surrounding areas, with services within close proximity to the site.

Heritage:

Development would not impact upon designated heritage assets.

An archaeological assessment will be required (2004 evaluation of part of the site needs updating) to further understand archaeological potential and survival, as possible prehistoric settlement and ditches of former water meadow on site. External site boundaries follow course of pre-18th century fields. Features along their courses should be preserved (trees, hedges, banks, ditches).

Education:

The site is within the catchment of Theale CofE Primary School. The school has moved to the new site and will be able to absorb the impact of new housing already planned. It is likely therefore that, depending on the timing of additional development, that further provision may be required. It is important to note that were this development to go ahead without mitigation, existing families may be displaced and a burden to transport these families elsewhere placed upon the Council.

The site is within the catchment area of Theale Green secondary school. It is likely that this impact can be accommodated within the existing infrastructure.

Environmental Health:

The site is adjacent to the M4. Development could see a significant worsening of nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter. High risk of noise and vibration from M4 and pylons.

There is possibility of contamination due to the presence of the former sewage works to the north. Further investigation is required to identify any contamination and remediation measures.

Ecology:

There are priority habitats within the site and within a 500m radius; Ancient Woodland and Site of Special Scientific Interest within 500m of the site. The site is within a Biodiversity Opportunity Area. Up to date ecological surveys will be needed to establish current site conditions and recommend mitigation measures.

Medium risk of adverse nature conservation impact identified by the Thames Valley Environmental Research Centre.

Minerals and Waste:

The majority of the site is within an existing Mineral Safeguarding Area. Consideration of mineral sterilisation issues is required. The site is approximately 630 metres from a Minerals Preferred Area at south east of Theale, proposed for mineral extraction. A Minerals Resource Assessment will be required.

Utility Services*Water supply:*

Thames Water (*response for 300 odd dwellings*) have concerns regarding water supply services in relation to this site. Specifically, the water network capacity in this area is unlikely to be able to support the demand anticipated from this development. Upgrades to the existing water infrastructure are likely to be required to ensure sufficient capacity is brought forward ahead of the development.

Wastewater network:

The scale of development/s is likely to require upgrades to the wastewater network. A housing and infrastructure phasing plan. The plan should determine the magnitude of spare capacity currently available within the network and what phasing may be required to ensure development does not outpace delivery of essential network upgrades to accommodate future development/s.

Electricity distribution:

SSE noted that there is a network of existing HV overhead lines (OHLs) and underground cable in close proximity of the site. It is highly likely that HV network reinforcement and / or secondary substation upgrade will be required. This is also dependent on capacity required at the time of connection.

National Grid note that the site is crossed by National Grid high voltage electricity transmission overhead lines. National Grid prefers that buildings are not built directly beneath its overhead lines, due to protecting the amenity of potential occupiers and for maintenance reasons. Land beneath and adjacent to the overhead line route should be used to make a positive contribution to the development of the site and can for example be used for nature conservation, open space, landscaping areas or used as a parking court. National Grid, in association with David Lock Associates has produced 'A Sense of Place' guidelines, which look at how to create high quality development near overhead lines and offers practical solutions which can assist in avoiding the unnecessary sterilisation of land in the vicinity of high voltage overhead lines.

Other:

None

Parish / Town Council:

None received from Theale Parish Council.

SA/SEA summary:

Overall the site is likely to have a neutral impact on sustainability and the SA/SEA does not highlight any significant sustainability effects. The site is well connected to the settlement of Theale, which includes schools, shops, medical facilities, places of employment and access to public transport. Development of the site will seek to encourage healthy lifestyles and opportunities for walking, cycling and accessing public transport. Subject to high quality design and layout the site has potential to accommodate development with limited impact on the character of the area. This is subject to mitigation and ensuring development does not adversely impact on the space between Theale and the countryside beyond. Development of the site could potentially have negative impacts on environmental sustainability as it makes use of greenfield land. The site is adjacent to the M4 which presents issues of noise and impact on air quality; is located adjacent to a former sewage works and the site may therefore be contaminated; and has high voltage pylons intersecting the land. Further investigation is needed to ascertain the effects. There is a risk of flooding, and given the type of flood risk (surface water and ground water) this may impact on the successful implementation of SuDS. Further information is required to ascertain that the development can viably deliver affordable housing, given the evidence presented in a previous planning application. The development of the site for housing will have a neutral effect on economic sustainability. Whilst housing development contributes towards economic development in the short term through the construction of the site, it is not seen to promote key business sectors and business development in the longer term.

Availability:

The site is owned by a single developer and would be available in the next 1-5 years.

Achievability:

There are no known legal constraints at this time

Relationship to / in combination effects of other sites :

The site is directly adjacent to THE7 (former sewage works), and THE8 which is promoted for offices (designation of employment area). The in combination effects relate to the impact on the landscape and setting of the AONB; the capacity of the local highway network; and air and noise quality.

Spatial Area:	Eastern Area	Settlement:	Theale	Parish:	Theale
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Site ID:	THE7	Site Address:	Former Theale Sewage Treatment Works, Blossom Lane, Theale, RG7 5GB
Use(s) proposed by site promoter	Residential	Development Potential:	Up to 70 dwellings

Recommendation:

The site is recommended for allocation

Justification:

The site is within the revised settlement hierarchy Theale is identified as a Rural Service Centre. Rural Service Centres are larger rural settlements which offer development potential appropriate to the character and function of the settlement. The site lies to the north east of the town, on greenfield land between the existing built up area (north of Blossom Lane and Woodfield Way) and the M4, and is close to the existing services and facilities of the town.

The site was assessed in the 2013 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, whereby the site ref was THE001) as 'potentially developable'. During the preferred options stage significant concern was raised regarding access to the site, with limited scope for improvements to be made without acquiring third party land. Landscape assessment work indicated that the site would be suitable for development subject to various mitigation measures, including a buffer to separate the site from the existing village. As a result, There was concern that this buffer would mean that the site would then be poorly related to the existing settlement. The site was not recommended for allocation at the submission stage of the Housing Site Allocations DPD.

Development which seeks to be integrated effectively with the existing settlement, other proposed development (THE1 and THE8) and the setting of the AONB would be appropriate. The site planning (including density), design, layout, placement of open spaces, and provision of landscaping, will be key in successfully assimilating development in to the existing settlement form, pattern and character of the settlement. Limiting the developable area, so not to adversely affect the gap between Theale and Calcot and the setting of the AONB may also be appropriate. The eastern area of the site is located in Flood Zone 2, and is underneath high voltage power lines. Residential development should be avoided in this area, and could be used as Green Infrastructure and net gain for biodiversity.

Overall, the site is likely to have a neutral impact on sustainability, and the SA/SEA does not highlight any significant sustainability effects. The site is accessible to Theale which has a range of services and facilities, and there are opportunities to connect to the countryside beyond. Care is needed in the design and overall site planning so not to adversely impact on the character of the area, setting of the AONB and gap between Theale and Calcot. Issues outstanding include assessments for air and noise quality, contamination, highways, ecology, flooding, and minerals.

Potential for allocation for residential development on part of the site as long as the separate identities of Calcot and Theale can be maintained, development can be integrated into the existing settlement, and would not result in harm to the character of the area and setting of the AONB. Allocation would also be dependent on a review of the settlement boundary for Theale.

Discussion:

Site description:

The site lies to the north-east of Theale, on greenfield land (there is no evidence of built structures from the former sewage works). The site area is 4.93ha. There are public rights of way to the north and south of the site, with road connections towards the town centre, via Blossom Lane. There is a small recreation ground to the south of the site, which contains a small play area.

HELAA conclusions:

Potentially developable in part High voltage power lines transect the site. Assessment may be needed plus appropriate use of the land near powerlines. Further information required on a number of matters, including flood risk, highways and ecology, before a robust decision can be made. Allocation would also be dependent on a review of the settlement boundary for Theale in the Local Plan Review.

Landscape:

The Landscape Sensitivity Study (2009) - the site is located within the south eastern corner of LLCA16A Englefield Woodland Farmlands. The area provides a strong contrast and rural landscape setting to the village. It notes that part of this area might be acceptable if the existing landscape structure is used to integrate the development and is reinforced to maintain a perceptible gap between Theale and Calcot.

A Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) carried out in 2015 noted that the site contributes to the landscape and visual setting of the AONB Sulham escarpment. Development would expand Theale into the open countryside between Theale and Calcot. It concluded that development could potentially result in harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB if the built form was readily visible from the Sulham escarpment and increased perception of the urbanisation of the landscape setting of the AONB. The LCA recommended that the site may be suitable, but the extent of development should be limited.

West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2019) - the site forms part of the Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic LCA (WH4). The decreasing separation/coalescence between settlements together with the loss of gradation between settlement and countryside have been identified as key detractors in this area. The landscape strategy is therefore to retain the individual identity of settlements and to conserve elements that mark a transition between settlement and countryside.

The Council's landscape assessment for planning application 16/02850/OUTMAJ) did not raise any 'in principle' issues to development's impact on the AONB and coalescence between settlements, subject to mitigation. The landscape assessment advised the following: Limit the developable area; retain a landscape buffer to Blossom Lane; additional layers of tree planting to screen views from the AONB and to break up the roofscape; the density needs to reflect the semi-rural edge of Theale; connection to the public open space is needed; scale and massing to be considered. There is a relatively recently (2005/06) installed water main which affects the layout of development, by the existing triangular open space, due to maintenance access. This needs to be taken into account when designing development on site. Retaining as much of the boundary planting as possible is preferred.

AONB and Natural England: Concern that the site is detached from the character of Theale, and has a more rural feel than THE1 and THE8. The site forms an important gap within the setting of the AONB. Development in this location would be an oddly shaped extension, which would significantly alter the rural character of this part of Blossom Lane, and would be at odd with the townscape to the south.

Flood risk:

The eastern part of the site lies within Flood Zone 2. There is surface water and groundwater flood risk, and there is high ground water, preventing the infiltration for Sustainable Drainage Systems. Two low risk surface water pooling cases in the centre of the site. East of the watercourse a small amount of medium risk pooling occurs. Some 70% of site high ground water 0-0.25m below surface with a chance of emergence at significant rates. Therefore, further information is required to fully assess the flood risk and mitigation at the site. Residential development should be directed away from the highest flood risk areas.

Highways / Transport:

Access:

Improvements would be required to Blossom Lane to allow appropriate access to the site.

Local Highway Capacity:

Although both Blossom Lane and Crown Lane have restricted carriageway characteristics, subject to the improvements, the impact of the trips from the proposed development may not have an adverse impact on local highway capacity. There is concern regarding the impact on Blossom lane and into Theale, including the capacity of the A4 near the M4. A Transport Assessment is therefore required to evaluate traffic impact on the highway network.

Heritage:

Development would not impact upon designated heritage assets.

An archaeological assessment will be required to further understand archaeological potential and survival.

Education:

The site lies within the catchment area of Theale CofE Primary School. The school has moved to the new site and will be able to absorb the impact of new housing already planned. It is likely therefore that, depending on the timing of additional development, that further provision may be required.

The site lies within the catchment area for Theale Green Secondary School. It is likely that this impact can be accommodated within the existing infrastructure.

Environmental Health:

The site is adjacent to the M4, and development could see a significant worsening of nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter. High risk of noise and vibration from M4 and pylons. Appropriate assessments are needed for air quality and noise.

There is possibility of contamination due to the presence of the former sewage works. Appropriate assessments would be required to identify contamination and offer remediation measures.

Ecology:

There are priority habitats within the site and within a 500m radius; and Site of Special Scientific Interest within 500m of the site. The site is within a Biodiversity Opportunity Area. An area of Ancient Woodland abuts the north-eastern side of the site, with further areas of Ancient Woodland located within 500m of the site.

Up to date ecological surveys will be needed to establish current site conditions.

Medium risk of adverse nature conservation impact identified by the Thames Valley Environmental Research Centre.

Minerals and Waste:

Approximately half of site within existing Mineral Safeguarding Area. Consideration of mineral sterilisation issues is required.

The Site approximately 980m from Mineral Preferred Area: South East of Theale. A Minerals Resource Assessment will be required.

Utility Services*Water supply:*

Thames Water state that the supply required for the proposed scale of development is a significant additional demand in the Water Resource area. Currently the mains that feed the Water Resource area are running close to or at capacity.

Wastewater network:

The scale of development/s is likely to require upgrades to the wastewater network. A housing and infrastructure phasing plan. The plan should determine the magnitude of spare capacity currently available within the network and what phasing may be required to ensure development does not outpace delivery of essential network upgrades to accommodate future development/s.

Electricity distribution:

There is a network of existing HV underground cable in close proximity of the site. It is likely that HV network reinforcement and / or secondary substation upgrade will be required. This is also dependent on capacity required at the time of connection

National Grid note that the site is crossed by National Grid high voltage electricity transmission overhead lines. National Grid prefers that buildings are not built directly beneath its overhead lines, due to protecting the amenity of potential occupiers and for maintenance reasons. Land beneath and adjacent to the overhead line route should be used to make a positive contribution to the development of the site and can for example be used for nature conservation, open space, landscaping areas or used as a parking court. National Grid, in association with David Lock Associates has produced 'A Sense of Place' guidelines, which look at how to create high quality development near overhead lines and offers practical solutions which can assist in avoiding the unnecessary sterilisation of land in the vicinity of high voltage overhead lines.

Other:

None

Parish / Town Council:

None received

SA/SEA summary:

The effect is predominately neutral, with no significant sustainability issues with the site. The site is well connected to the existing settlement with access to public transport, walking and cycling, and close proximity to open countryside and a play area, all of which will promote a healthy active lifestyle, having a positive impact on sustainability. The design, layout, and landscaping measures are important components in the integration of development into the wider built and natural landscape. Whilst housing development contributes towards economic development in the short term through the construction of the site, it is not seen to promote key business sectors and business development in the longer term. The site's proximity to the M4 means there could be a negative impact in relation to air and noise pollution, and the site's former use could mean

there is contamination. These have a consequential impact on sustainability unless suitable assessments and mitigation measures are provided. There is a risk of flooding further assessment is required, and information on the compatibility of SuDS.

Availability:

The site is owned by a single private landowner. It is available in the next 1-5 years.

Achievability:

There are no known legal constraints at this time. There may be a high risk of contamination on the site which could affect viability.

Relationship to / in combination effects of other sites :

The site is directly adjacent to THE1 (Whitehart Meadow), and near to THE8 which is promoted for offices (designation of employment area). The in combination effects relate to the impact on the landscape and setting of the AONB; the capacity of the local highway network; and air and noise quality.