

**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: HUNGERFORD**

## HUNGERFORD

<b>Settlement</b>	<b>Hungerford</b>
<b>North Wessex Downs AONB Character areas:</b>	LCA 3A Savanake Plateau, LCA 7A Kennet Valley, LCA 8D Hungerford Farmland
<b>Date of site survey</b>	7 May 2014
<b>Surveyor</b>	AG

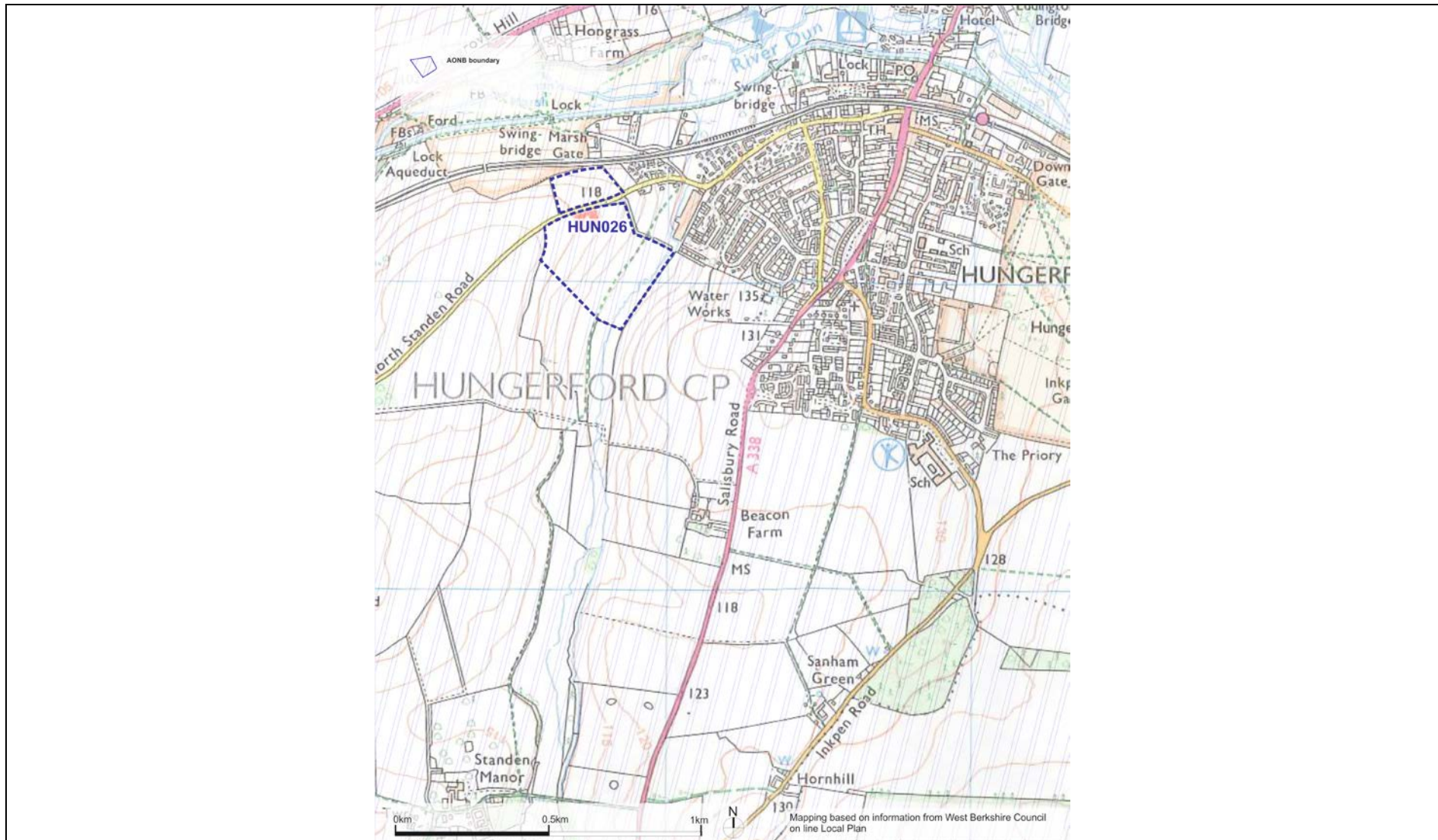


Figure HUN.1: Hungerford potential housing sites

**Key landscape characteristics of LCA3A**

- Semi-natural woodland blocks
- Area of open arable farmland
- Remnant chalk grassland confined to scarp slopes
- Kennet and Avon Canal
- Quiet rural secluded area generally

**Key visual characteristics of LCA3A**

- Open landscape

**Key settlement characteristics of LCA3A**

- Distinct settlement pattern with uninhabited plateau with villages concentrated in the east and in the River Dun valley

**Key landscape characteristics of LCA7A**

- Narrow valley floor with a strong sense of enclosure, widening east of Hungerford
- Dominated by pasture, with some arable use east of Hungerford
- Diverse vegetation including lush pasture, marsh, reedbeds, lines of pollarded willow and poplars
- Varied field pattern with hedgerow boundaries
- Historic parkland
- Sinuous belts of woodland and blocks on the valley floor
- Important chalk river and several streams (often braided); numerous ditches
- Kennet and Avon Canal
- Freeman's Marsh is an area of common grazing and only surviving area of common meadow in the district. (HECZ Hungerford Common – Freeman's Marsh)
- An intimate, small-scale and tranquil pastoral rural valley
- Series of roads cross the valley (NDLCA LCT 8)
- Transport corridor (NDLCA LCT 8)
- Contrast with the adjoining built up areas (NDLCA LCT 8)
- East of Hungerford the area is part of the designed parkland to Hungerford Park (to the south). A mixed area of parkland, recent and historic fields and small areas of ancient and other old woodlands. Ornamental woodlands are surviving parkland features. (HECZ Kennet Valley South-Western Parklands)

### **Key visual characteristics of LCA7A**

- Views from A4 over unspoiled parts of the valley (NDLCA LCT 8)
- Visually rich valley floor landscape (NDLCA Map 61)

### **Key settlement characteristics of LCA7A**

- Attractive nucleated valley settlements at regular intervals, typically on the south side of the valley as at Hungerford
- Historic features reflecting long period of settlement
- Small scale housing areas, mostly historic (Vernacular to Georgian/Regency) within Conservation Area and late 20<sup>th</sup> century/post 2000 on the fringes (Quality Design SPD)

### **Key landscape characteristics of LCA8D**

- Open undulating landform rising above the Kennet valley
- Mainly arable land use
- Transitional lowland landscape between the higher chalk downland and lower valley bottoms
- Large rectangular fields with lack of good hedge boundaries
- Woodland blocks, with narrow coniferous shelterbelts south of the settlement
- Strips of arable fields between river valleys and upland chalk (NDLCA LCT 2)
- Banks and grass verges to roads (NDLCA LCT 2)
- Some shallowly incised dry valleys (NDLCA LCT 2)
- Significant common grazing land and important earthworks crossed by roads lined with avenues of trees at Hungerford Common – Port Down, with parkland character (NDLCA LCT 2 and HECZ Hungerford Common – Port Down)
- Grander residences with parkland on gentle spurs taking advantage of views over the valley, as at Denford Park (BLCA G3)
- Linear shelter belts north of the valley (BLCA G1)
- Little settlement growth and historic character largely intact (HECZ Kennet Valley North-West)
- Some relatively unaltered areas of early enclosure fields between Hungerford Newtown and Avington (HECZ Kennet Valley North-West)
- Areas of relatively unaltered historic fields south of Standen Manor and Farm (HECZ Kennet Valley South-West)
- Earthworks of watermeadow channel system survive in pasture fields of Dun valley sides (HECZ Kennet Valley South-West)
- Quiet open rural character

### **Key visual characteristics of LCA8D**

- Blocks of woodland form visual enclosure and frame views (NDLCA LCT 2)
- Hedgerows with some trees form the skyline (NDLCA LCT 2)
- Open farmland giving extensive views over valley, particularly from ridgelines (NDLCA Map 61)
- High level of inter-visibility between each side of the valley

### Key settlement characteristics of LCA8D

- Medieval origins to historic Hungerford
- Sparsely settled but including expanded areas of Hungerford
- Settlement strongly influenced by topography with settlement in the valleys (NDLCA LCT2)
- Soft boundary between the town and its rural surroundings (Hungerford 2010 +)
- Compact settlement (Hungerford 2010 +)
- Southern area: Complex mix of older housing in Conservation Area. Much larger estates from Post War onwards with a group of semi-rural housing on Salisbury Road (Quality Design SPD)
- Some large open areas around the southern edge of Hungerford, mostly comprising playing fields and recreational areas (HECZ Hungerford Suburban Area – South)
- North of A4: Small scale housing areas, mostly historic (Vernacular to Georgian/Regency) within Conservation Area with semi rural, Victorian Small scale housing areas, mostly historic (Vernacular to Georgian/Regency) within Conservation Area and late 20<sup>th</sup> century/post 2000 on the fringes (Quality Design SPD)
- Prior to development the area around the hamlet of Eddington was a mix of irregularly-shaped early enclosure field and meadows. 1980s business development in some of these areas, followed by small housing developments since 1990s (HECZ Eddington)

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

The potential housing site in Hungerford lies within the North Wessex Downs AONB 8D Hungerford Farmland. Two previous studies inform this capacity study: *'An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire'* (LSS) (2009) and *Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Scale and Distribution of Development in the North Wessex Downs AONB* (2011) (LSA 2011). This capacity report builds upon the work in the previous assessments by examining the west of Hungerford 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 town of Hungerford and its hinterland lie in two main landscape character areas LCA 7A Kennet Valley and LCA 8D Hungerford Farmlands (which includes Hungerford Common). These are closely linked both visually and historically, and through the merging of Hungerford and Eddington, but are very different in character. A third character area LCA3A lies to the west and is part of a large area extending westwards to beyond Marlborough, although the area nearest to Hungerford is not typical. Hungerford is a town with a strong distinctive character, with a historic core, and extensive 20<sup>th</sup> century expansion to the south. The form of the settlement has been heavily influenced by the river valley of the River Kennet, River Dun and their floodplains and of the River Shalbourne; the surrounding topography; common land to the west and east; and parkland to the east. Development is typically on the lower slopes, above the valley floor, or spreading up the north-west to north-east facing slopes up to the top of the ridgeline which extends southwards to Beacon Farm at 130m AOD. The southernmost part of Hungerford just reaches the highest point of this ridgeline.

Hungerford is noted for its still relatively compact nature with key landscape features comprising the unspoilt diverse character of the Kennet valley; the rising valley sides of open countryside which contain the town, where the slopes facing the town remain predominantly unsettled; and the high level of intervisibility between different parts of the surrounding countryside and to and from the town. Eddington, north of the river valley, has a different settlement character to the main town and is distinguished by its existing small scale pattern and of its lack of modern expansion over the open sided slopes.

The area is also noted for the historic and cultural importance of Freeman's Marsh, Hungerford Common, Hungerford Park and more minor parkland such as Denford Park and Chilton Lodge which should be protected from any inappropriate and intrusive development. The character of the gateways into Hungerford and Eddington are a key feature of the settlement and in many cases a single feature will mark the settlement edge or reinforce the rural character of the hinterland.

Although Hungerford has seen modern expansion up the hillsides to the south of the town centre, further major expansion, particularly on the north side of the river, would detract from the special qualities of the AONB and of the settlement. Where some development may be recommended, great care will still be needed to minimise the impact on the landscape character of the surrounding AONB, through limitations on development and generous provision of Green Infrastructure. In some cases, in order to mitigate the existing harm to the AONB landscape from existing built form such as modern housing on the edge of the town, some new development may be advantageous. The sensitivity of the river valley landscapes and those at Hungerford Common and surrounding parkland however preclude any development in these areas. Due to the high level of intervisibility, the potential cumulative impact of development on several sites is potentially considerable. Even where the landscape is slightly less sensitive, as on the south side of the town, an accumulation of sites under development would have a significant adverse impact on the AONB.

**Sources:**

North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002: and An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire (LSS) 2009: Hungerford

Additional information from:

- Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2003 (BLCA)
- Newbury District Landscape Character Assessment 1993 (NDLCA)
- Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC)
- Historic Environment Character Zoning (HECZ)
- Quality Design SPD- Part 3
- Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of the Scale and Distribution of Development in the North Wessex Downs AONB (2011) (LSA 2011)

**A. Assessment of Potential Housing Site: HUN026: Land at North Standen Road**

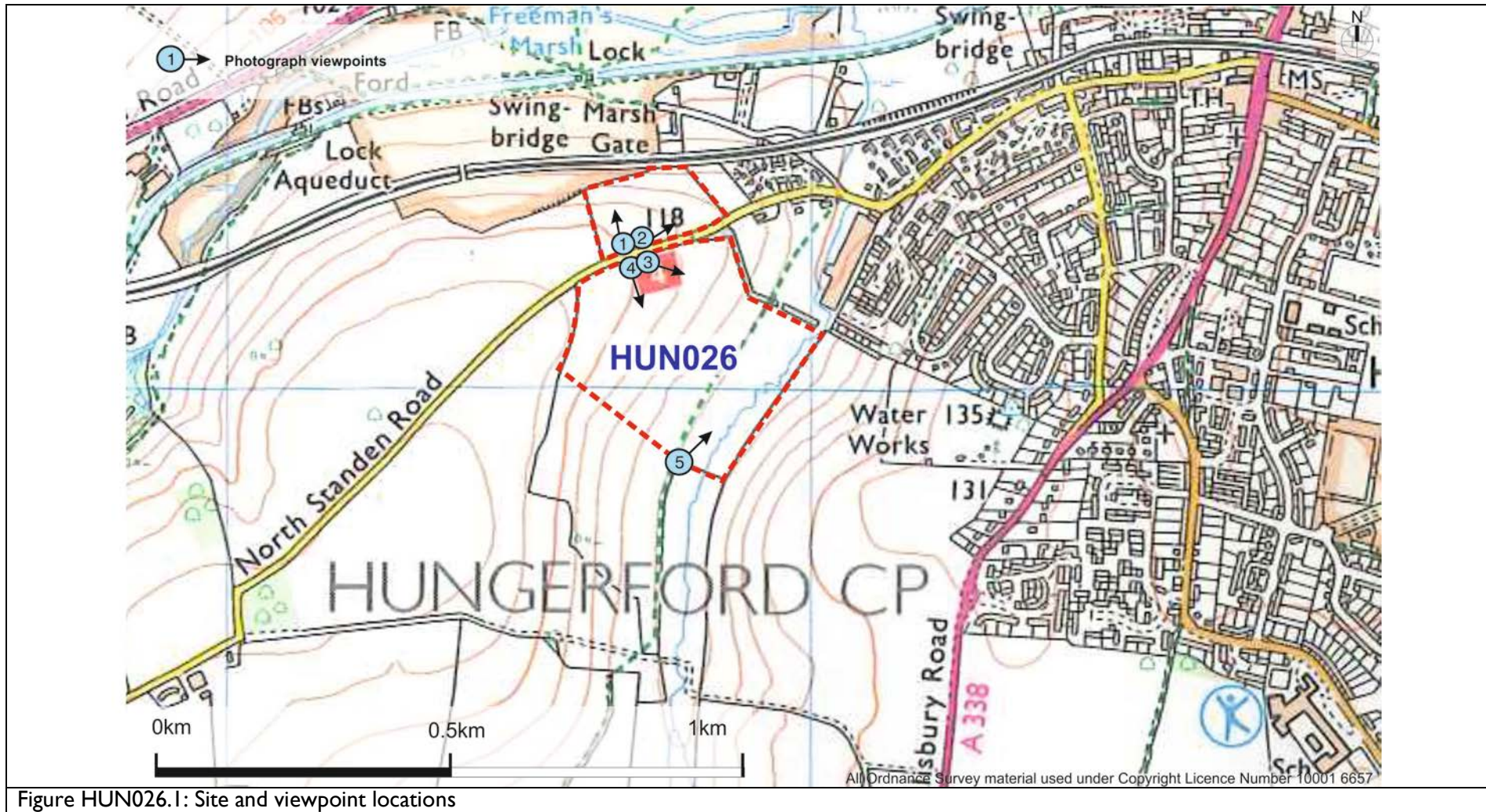


Figure HUN026.I: Site and viewpoint locations



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**An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire (LSS) 2009: LLCA2D: Standon Chalk Lowlands**

**LLCA2D: Standon Chalk Lowlands** has an overall sensitivity of *medium*.

LLCA2D is characterised by its rolling open agricultural landscape with few landscape boundaries. It has strong character links with the adjacent areas of farmed downland and visual links with the town.

The key elements of landscape sensitivity are:

- Rolling and folding landscape closely linked to adjacent farmed landscapes
- Grade 2 and 3 agricultural
- Sparse settlement pattern
- Long views and intervisibility with adjacent more sensitive areas
- Fairly tranquil
- Complex and sensitive historic landscape
- Good potential ecological links with Kennet Valley
- River Shalbourne floodplain

Other landscape sensitivity interests are:

- Mixed land use
- Good relationship to, and open boundary with, the town
- Sparse hedgerows and weak internal boundaries
- Lack of seclusion with some visual intrusion from housing and floodlighting in Hungerford
- Few distinctive landscape and historic features or landmarks
- Valued by the local community
- Accessible landscape with some recreational value

Wider landscape:

LLCA2D Standon Chalk Lowlands forms part of the open farmed landscape which extends southwards and westwards up to a belt of scattered woodlands around the town. The area subtly differs from LLCA2C and the landscape to the east which are characterised by the more designed parkland landscapes.

Setting to the urban form:

LLCA2D Standon Chalk Lowlands closely abuts the south western edge of town which is clearly visible on the hill top. There is very little vegetation to separate the area from the town edge, resulting in a rather raw urban edge.

**PHOTOGRAPHS**



Viewpoint 1: Long views north to the wider AONB from the high ground



Viewpoint 2: Short section of eastern boundary adjacent to settlement



Viewpoint 3: Parts of Hungerford very visible from high ground within site.



Viewpoint 4: Long views available from exposed high ground within site.



Viewpoint 5: Lower parts of site are more visually contained and Hungerford is less visible.

### Site description

Site HUN026 lies to the west of Hungerford, entirely within the North Wessex Downs AONB. The site is split into two parts by North Standen Road, bounded by hedgerows. The small northern field is defined on its short eastern edge by the settlement, with the railway along part of the northern boundary, which is also adjacent to Freeman's Marsh open access nature area, and with open countryside to the west. The land slopes down northwards from the road to the railway and river beyond. The larger, southern part of the site is separated from the settlement edge by a triangular field which itself is separated from the site by a strong tree belt. The ground slopes down towards a stream which forms the eastern boundary, and the western boundary is formed by a hedgerow with trees. The southern boundary does not follow any hedgerow or other landscape feature, but is open. A public right of way crosses the large field, linking the town with the wider countryside. Both fields are currently under arable crops. From the high ground on the western side of the site there are long views across the AONB to the north and south, and high intervisibility with the Chilton Way area of Hungerford. The low ground in both parts of the site is more visually contained.

<p><b>Relationship with adjacent settlement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only a short section of the north eastern boundary is adjacent to the settlement</li> <li>• The rest of the site is separated by a triangular field</li> <li>• Much of the site extends well beyond the settlement envelope and up the slopes of the surrounding farmland</li> <li>• Intervisibility with the town only from the higher ground</li> </ul>
<p><b>Relationship with adjacent wider countryside</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong relationship with the wider AONB landscape to the south and west</li> <li>• Part of the large scale, rolling and folding agricultural landscape to the south of Hungerford</li> <li>• Open landscape with few hedgerows</li> </ul>
<p><b>Impact on key landscape characteristics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of landscape setting of Hungerford which has strong links with the wider area</li> <li>• Topography would require major modification to enable housing development</li> <li>• Loss of visual and aural tranquillity</li> <li>• Potential impact on stream corridor to the eastern boundary</li> <li>• Potential impact on Freeman’s Marsh nature area to north</li> <li>• Impact on rural character of North Standen Road</li> <li>• Impact on footpath crossing site</li> <li>• South eastern edge of site is within flood zones 2 and 3</li> </ul>
<p><b>Impact on key visual characteristics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower parts of site are largely well screened from Hungerford</li> <li>• Intervisibility with Hungerford from the high ground</li> <li>• Potential visual impact on a wide area south and west of the site within the AONB</li> <li>• Potential visual impact on the River Dun valley to the north of the site within the AONB</li> <li>• Impact on the skyline in views from the north eastern edge, the footpath, the road and possibly the railway line</li> </ul>
<p><b>Impact on key settlement characteristics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of the site would extend the settlement beyond the existing envelope and up the east-facing slopes to the west of Hungerford</li> <li>• Development on slopes facing the town which are predominantly and characteristically unsettled</li> </ul>
<p><b>Summary of compliance with NPPF</b></p> <p>Development on this site would result in significant harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB.</p>
<p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <p>The site should not be pursued further as a potential housing site on landscape grounds.</p>