

COLD ASH: ADDITIONAL SITES

Assessment of Settlement

Settlement	Cold Ash
North Wessex Downs AONB Character areas: LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons	
Newbury District Landscape Assessment Landscape Character Types: 13 Gravel plateau woodlands with pastures and heaths 14 Plateau Edge Transitional Matrix	
Date of site survey	7 May 2015
Surveyor	AG

PLAN OF SETTLEMENT AND SITES COL 002, 006, 011

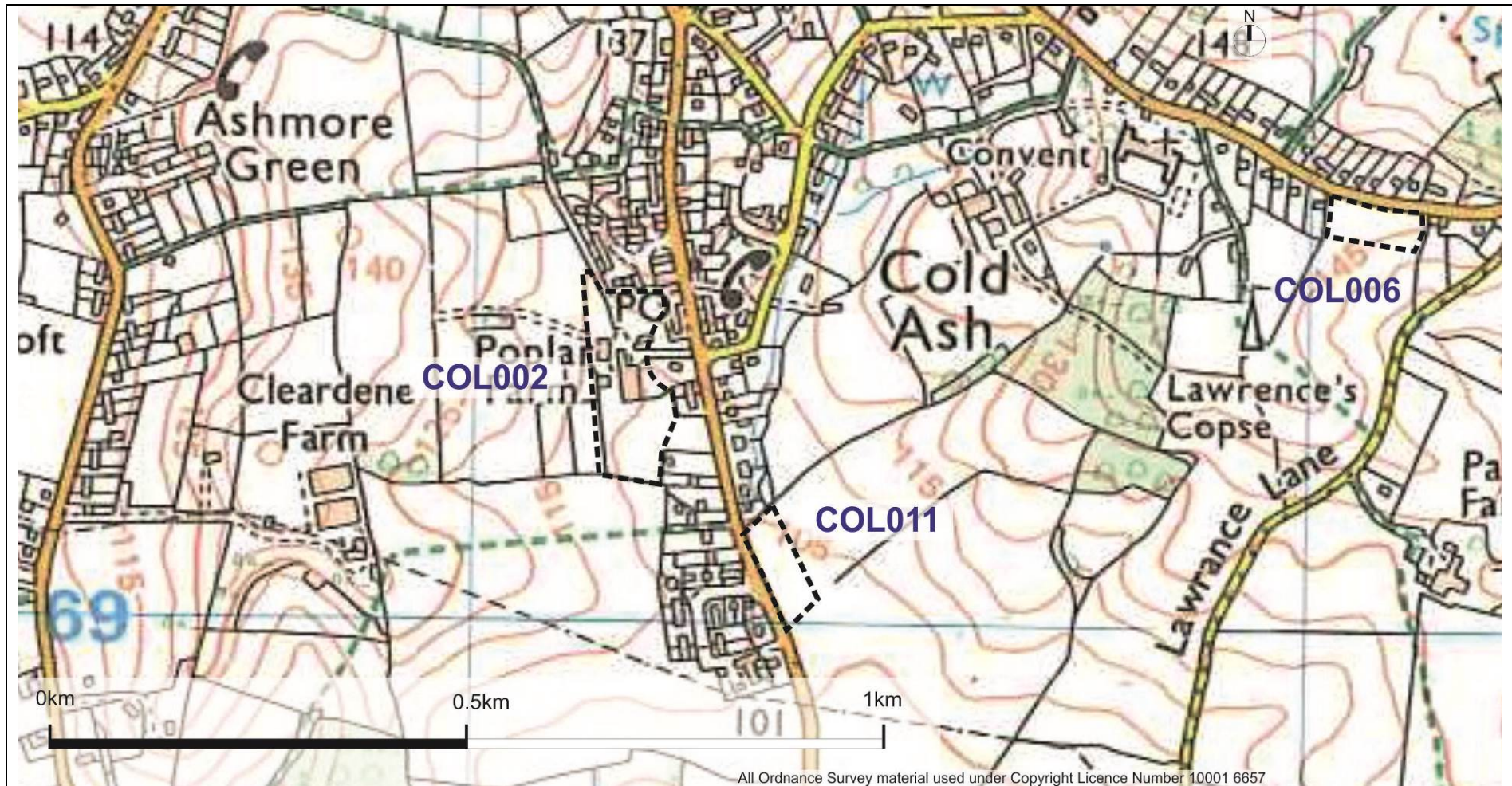


Figure COL.1: Cold Ash potential housing sites

Key landscape characteristics of LCA8A

- lowland area at the base of the chalk dip slope, underlain by clays, silts, sands and gravels of the Reading and Bagshot Beds and London Clay, giving rise to nutrient poor, often acidic, soils;
- a broad undulating plateau falling towards the Kennet Valley to the south east and dissected by River Pang;
- variable land cover forming an intricate mosaic of woodland, pasture and small areas of remnant heathland. Some more open areas of arable land can be found on the slopes that drop to the Pang Valley and to the south east near Beenham;
- large, interconnected woodland blocks and strong hedgerow pattern with mature trees restrict views and create an enclosed and intimate character. Low wooded horizons are a feature;
- numerous semi-natural woodlands of ancient origin, with some large commercial plantations. Wooded commons and small areas of remnant heath are a distinctive element;
- many features of biodiversity interest including heathland, dry and wet woodland, bog and areas of wet meadow;
- dominated by small irregular fields of informal and piecemeal enclosures, of medieval and post-medieval date with some larger, more regular and straight edged, formal Parliamentary enclosure on flatter terrain in the south-east and west;
- intricate network of rural lanes, many sunken and overhung by woodland plus more intrusive road infrastructure;
- historic parkland based on medieval deer parks and manor houses with associated ornamental parklands with gardens, rides and plantings are a particular feature;
- flat to undulating plateau, generously scaled rolling landscape with some pronounced wooded ridges (VDS);
- a complex pattern of landscape, dominated by woodland; coniferous, or mixed with beech and birch (VDS);
- pastures; remnant heathlands and commons (VDS);
- heathland and woodland habitats – deciduous and mixed woodland to pasture and arable (VDS);
- the area abounds with natural drains, issues and sinks, all of which help to ensure natural drainage and control the run-off of excessive rainfall. These are particularly evident in the local gaps between Cold Ash and the neighbouring parishes (VDS);
- woodland is a dominant natural feature in this area with a typical landscape of pine and birch. The area along and round Hermitage Road in particular is densely treed and provides a contrast to the more open oak dominated landscape of the clay soils which surround The Ridge (VDS);
- the older parts of the villages are more wooded and have larger and more mature species than the newer parts (VDS);
- in the future, the lack of large trees could have an adverse effect on the village as a whole if sufficient open space is not provided in new developments to allow for planting larger trees (VDS);
- the parish is served with a network of well-used public footpaths, which lead from Ashmore Green via Cold Ash Hill to The Ridge and across wooded areas (VDS);

Key visual characteristics of LCA8A

- mainly enclosed landscape;
- notable view from The Ridge across Westrop Farm and Westrop Gully to Frilsham and Yattendon should be taken into consideration in future development, with efforts made to conserve or enhance it (VDS);
- new development should be designed to conserve and enhance the views of the village within the wider landscape and to conserve and enhance views of the wider countryside from the two villages (VDS);

Key settlement characteristics of LCA8A

- dispersed pattern of settlement characteristic of encroachment into areas of common and woodland;
- includes large nucleated villages, lines of estate cottages, loose roadside settlements as well as many dispersed farmsteads and residential country houses;
- well settled area with rising population due to proximity to accessibility to Reading;
- linear settlements within wooded areas; clustered farmsteads and private residences (VDS);
- road pattern with complex winding side lanes with banks and hedgerows and a bridleway network (VDS);
- where appropriate, any proposed development should conserve the diversity and mix of landscape character types in the parish, eg the wooded setting of Cold Ash (VDS);

Key landscape characteristics of LCT 13

- Intimately scaled, flat to undulating plateau with abrupt edge escarpments and small incised valleys with streams;
- Complex pattern of landscape dominated by woodland; coniferous or mixed with beech and birch; pastures, paddocks remnant heathlands and Commons with acid soil indicators;
- Important heathland and woodland habitats;
- Road pattern often with dominant straight ridge top roads and complex winding side lanes and bridleway network.

Key visual characteristics of LCT 13

- Outward views are limited by tree cover

Key settlement characteristics of LCT 13

- Dispersed, linear settlements within wooded areas and some sub-urban areas;
- Large private houses and private education establishments;

Key landscape characteristics of LCT 14

- A small to medium-scaled complex occurring on escarpments and forming a transition between plateau woodlands and lower open farmland;
- Clearly defined plateau edge with upper slopes often concave with hummocks and the lower slopes often with streams and springs with a convex, rounded slope profile;
- Gradation of land use closely associated to underlying geological sequence of Tertiary beds; deciduous and mixed woodland to pasture to arable;
- Coniferous woodland and heathland of adjacent Gravel Plateaux often found at edges of LCT 14, making the transition between the two undifferentiated;
- Poor pasture is often found on the upper slopes, with oak trees a constituent of both woods and hedgerows;
- Areas of clay are often made up of pasture typified by rounded landform and a rich patterning of mature oak trees;
- Small streams draining the escarpments are marked by irregular linear woodlands;
- Lower slopes often arable, with larger fields;
- The variety of vegetation provides a rich area for wildlife;
- An interesting and varied landscape where the mixture of woodlands, pasture and open farmland includes some of the ‘most delightful’ countryside which is easily accessible by foot.

Key visual characteristics of LCT 14

- Quite dense mixed woodland often occurs on the upper slopes, giving a sense of enclosure;

Key settlement characteristics of LCT 14

- Clustered farmsteads, private residences and small villages marked by churches;
- Settlements interconnected by an irregular network of lanes which rarely traverse the slopes;
- Many footpaths and bridleways preserve historic routes linking settlements.

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

The village of Cold Ash sits on the southern edge of the North Wessex Downs AONB, with much of the village just outside the boundary and only the houses to the east of The Ridge within the boundary. This area is within AONB landscape character area LCA 8A Hermitage Wooded Commons. The rest of the village sits within the Newbury District Landscape Character Types 13 Gravel plateau woodlands with pastures and heaths and LCT 14 Plateau Edge Transitional Matrix.

The linear eastern part of the village extends along a low ridge at 140 to 150m AOD above the river Pang valley to the north east. The eastern countryside edge is generally wooded, with ribbon residential development between woodland blocks and few views over the countryside to the north framed by woodland. The settlement is largely based along the two forked main roads Cold Ash Hill and The Ridge which are joined by Collaroy Road making a loose triangular form. To the south of the village core Cold Ash Hill and The Ridge move further apart with the land dropping down from 140-150m AOD along The Ridge to Cold Ash Hill which sits in a valley at around 100-105m AOD.

To the north of the main settlement, Hermitage Road becomes heavily wooded. Much of the eastern settlement edge along The Ridge is defined by woodland, with one part at the northern end more open. The western edge is more fragmented with less woodland. The village has few open views; with occasional framed views into adjacent fields, though south along Cold Ash Hill the landscape is more open.

The settlement developed following the enclosure of common heathland and none of the existing buildings pre-date 1800. The village has no Conservation Area. The majority of houses have been built since 1940 with some small estates and a number of modern houses along roads leading down to the valleys. Post-war development in the wider area has been intense and spread along the roads between the older settlements of Cold Ash, Longlane, Curridge, Hermitage and Little Hungerford.

The village still largely maintains its ridge top character and linear pattern. The lack of large or medium sized estates helps to retain the distinctive character. The approach to the village at the southern end of The Ridge is clearly defined and the village would benefit from a similar definition to the main approach from Thatcham along Cold Ash Hill.

Sources:

North Wessex Downs AONB Integrated Landscape Character Assessment 2002

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)
- Cold Ash and Ashmore Green Village Design Statement 2002 (VDS)

A. Assessment of Potential Housing Site: COL002: Poplar Farm, Cold Ash Hill, Cold Ash
B.

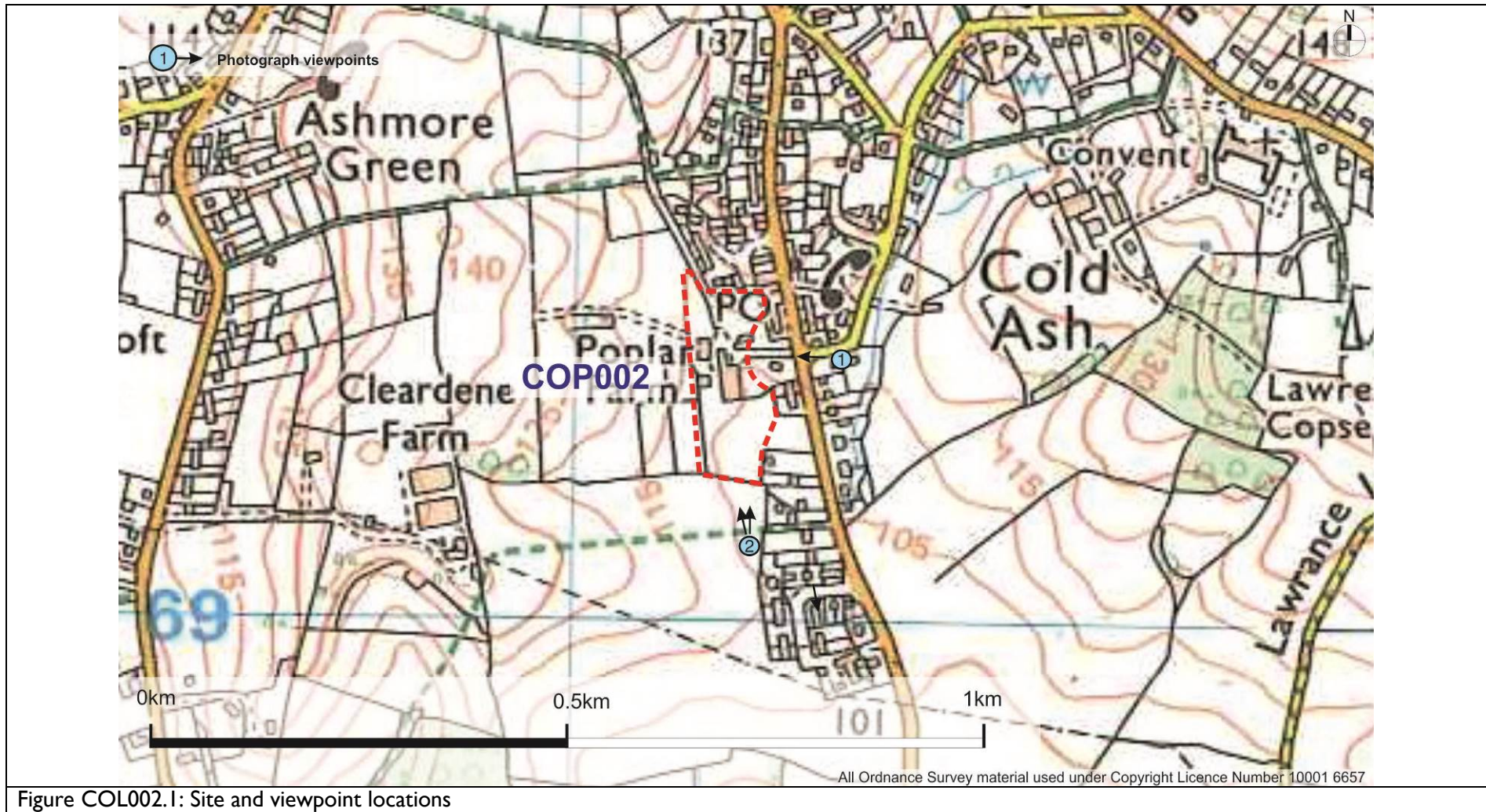


Figure COL002.1: Site and viewpoint locations

PHOTOGRAPHS



Viewpoint 1: View along farm access road from Cold Ash Hill

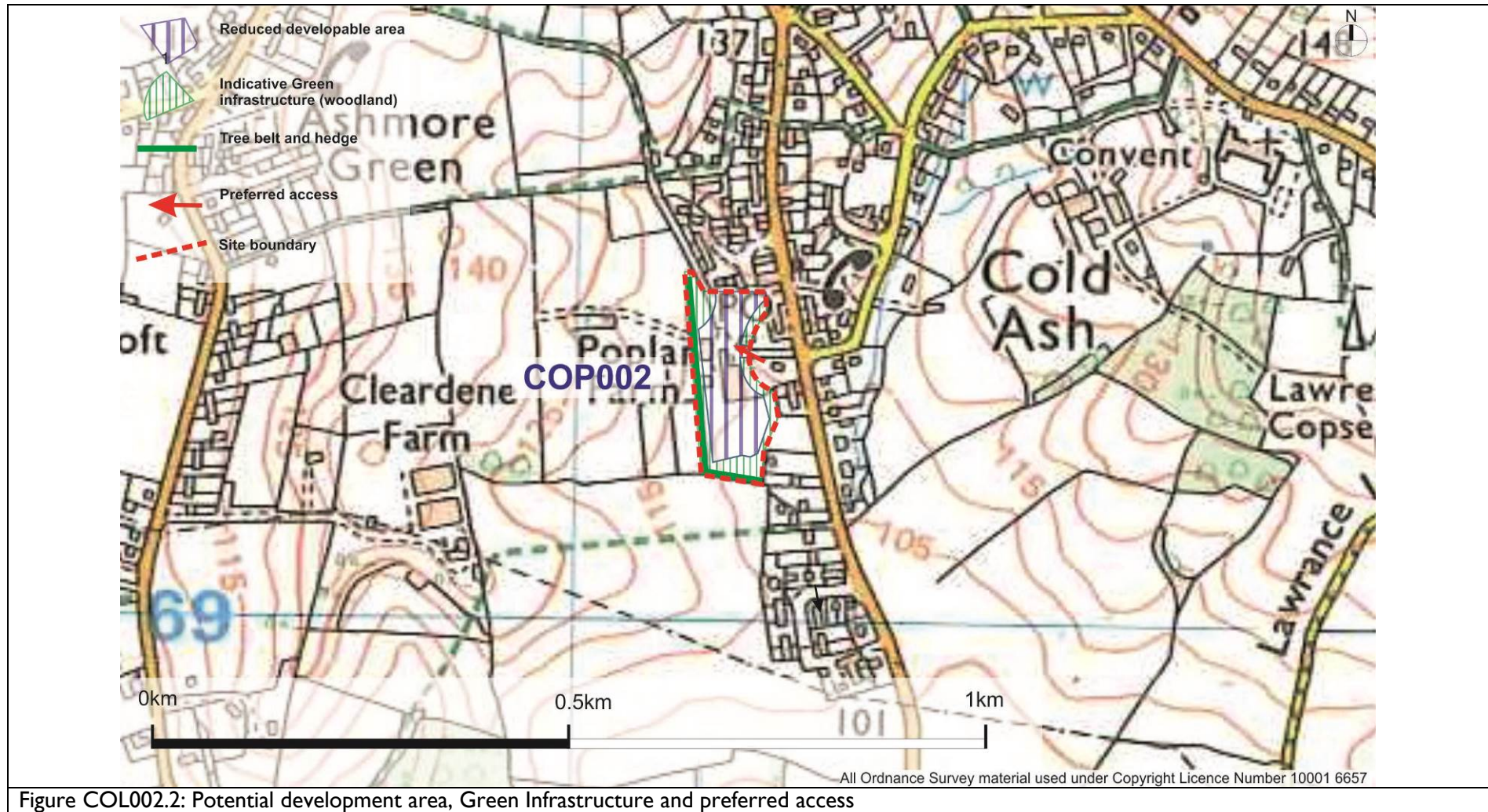


Viewpoint 2: View from footpath to south of site

Site description

Site COL002 lies on the south west side of Cold Ash, outside of the boundary of the North Wessex Downs AONB. The site is set behind the ribbon residential development on the west side of Cold Ash Hill extending further into the countryside and up the hill than the housing, with the western boundary open (not defined by hedgerow or other boundary treatment). The site contains a number of barns within the open, grazed field and is accessed via a track off Cold Ash Hill. The access track is outside the site boundary. The southern boundary is marked by a gappy hedgerow and the site contains a number of trees.

<p>Relationship with adjacent settlement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The site is set behind the ribbon of residential built form along the west side of Cold Ash Hill• The site is part of the rural approach to the village from the south
<p>Relationship with adjacent wider countryside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The site is surrounded by countryside to west and south, adjacent to houses and gardens to parts of the east• Part of the open, valley landscape south of the village
<p>Impact on key landscape characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loss of valley side landscape which has links with the landscape south and west of Cold Ash• Impact on rural approach to Cold Ash from the south
<p>Impact on key visual characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Site is not widely visible from within the village, but the southern part can be glimpsed from the rural approach to Cold Ash from the south• Visual impact on PRoW to the south and south west and north west, including from a viewpoint on high ground noted in the Cold Ash and Ashmore Green Village Design Statement• Not visible from the AONB
<p>Impact on key settlement characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Development of the whole site would extend the settlement off the valley floor up the slope to the west• Development of the whole site would widen the linear nature of the built form to the south
<p>Summary of compliance with NPPF on AONB</p> <p>The site could be developed without harm to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB.</p>
<p>Recommendation</p> <p>It is recommended that only part of the site is considered further as a potential housing site to avoid affecting the linear, valley bottom settlement pattern and open landscape at the southern end of the village. The development should be contained on the lower ground in the north east of the site and only extend up the valley side in the area already containing the barns, as indicated in Figure COL002.2. Development should be subject to the provision of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a tree belt and hedgerow along the western and southern boundaries;• woodland block in the north western corner to mitigate effects on views from the PRoW to the north west;• woodland block along the southern edge to mitigate effects on views from the PRoW to the south;• a hedgerow and trees along the eastern edge• The preferred access is from Cold Ash Hill, via the existing farm track access;• A full detailed landscape and visual impact assessment will be required to inform the final capacity of the site



B. Assessment of Potential Housing Site: COL006: south of The Ridge, Cold Ash

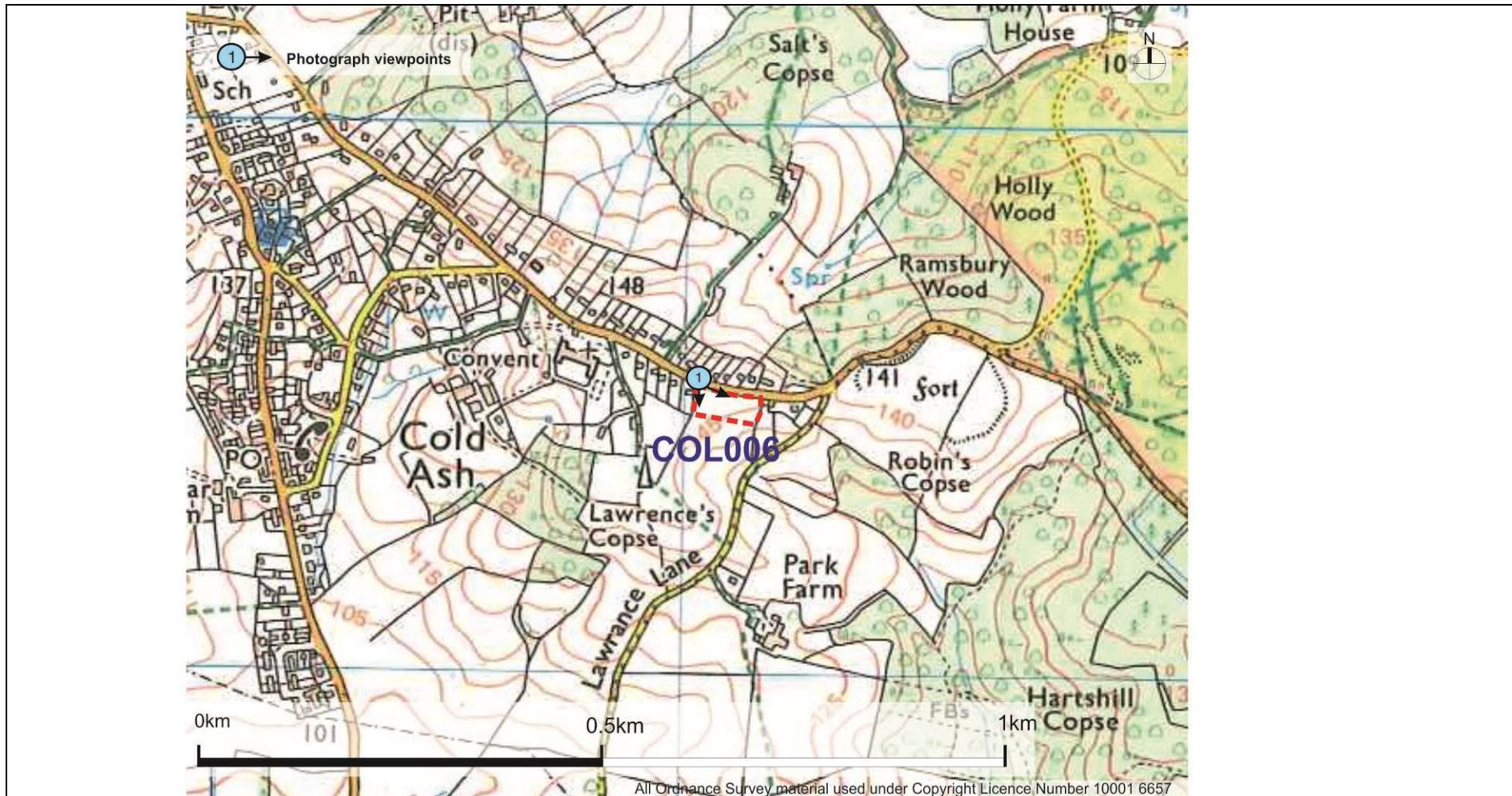


Figure COL006.1: Site and viewpoint locations

PHOTOGRAPHS



Viewpoint 1: View south east from The Ridge through a field gate – a rare, elevated view across the Kennet Valley

Site description

Site COL006 lies at the eastern edge of Cold Ash, adjacent to the southern boundary of the North Wessex Downs AONB. The site forms an open gap at the east end of the residential development on the south side of The Ridge, with two houses in large plots further to the east of the site and isolated from the settlement. The linear residential development continues on the north side of The Ridge opposite the site. The site forms the northern part of a much larger arable field with no hedgerow to the south west. A field hedge runs along the northern boundary with The Ridge and houses and gardens contain the site to the east and west. The field drops away to the south east off of the ridge and panoramic views of the wider countryside to the south east are possible from the site and through the field gate from The Ridge.

Relationship with adjacent settlement

- The site forms an open gap at the east end of residential built form along the south side of The Ridge, with two further residential plots to the east
- The site is part of the rural approach to the village from the east and by its openness and rare long views is important in reducing the density of linear development towards the edge of the settlement

Relationship with adjacent wider countryside

- The site is somewhat typical of LCA 8A and LCTs 13 and 14 and strongly linked to the rolling countryside to the south and south east, with no hedged boundary separating it, and which is part of the setting of the AONB (though not widely visible)

Impact on key landscape characteristics

- Potential loss of rolling fields dropping down from the plateau which have links with the landscape south and east of Cold Ash, and which are part of the setting of the AONB
- Impact on rural character of the approach to Cold Ash from the east and to the AONB from Cold Ash
- While not widely visible from the road (only visible through the field gate), the absence of built form gives a strong perception of connection with the countryside and being at the edge of the settlement

Impact on key visual characteristics

- The site is visible from the rural approach to Cold Ash from the east
- Loss of a rare elevated view over the countryside to the south and east from The Ridge. Though the road edge is hedged the glimpsed view is important as it gives a strong perception of visual and physical connectivity with the wider landscape, on the approach to the AONB
- Potential visual impact on PRoW to the south, which forms an approach to the AONB

Impact on key settlement characteristics

- Development of the whole site would extend the settlement off the ridge and down the slope to the south east
- The presence of the two residential properties east of the site does not affect the importance of the site providing connections with the wider landscape as there is still a perception of being at the edge of the village, close to open countryside and the AONB, which would be lost if the settlement was extended to close the open gap
- Potential introduction of modern estate housing which will be out of character with the linear arrangement of low density, detached housing which faces onto the road
- A new linear development reflecting the existing built form and not extending down the slope might be acceptable provided gaps are available between new buildings to allow occasional views through and to soften the impact of the development

Summary of compliance with NPPF

Development of this site may be possible without harm to the setting of the AONB provided an opportunity to retain views southwards towards the Kennet valley is included within the development layout and the rural character of this approach to Cold Ash is conserved and enhanced.

Recommendation

It is recommended that only part of the site is considered further as a potential housing site to avoid affecting the setting of the AONB and retain the rural character and pattern of linear ribbon development along The Ridge. The development should be contained on the higher ground along the road, as indicated in Figure COL006.2. Development should be subject to the provision of:

- A gap in the built form to allow views through the development to the open landscape to the south;
- Individual driveway access onto The Ridge in keeping with the local pattern;
- A soft edge to the southern boundary of the site with tree planting;
- Retention of the hedgerow front boundary treatment;
- A density to reflect that of the adjoining houses on The Ridge;
- A full detailed landscape and visual impact assessment which will be required to inform the final capacity of the site

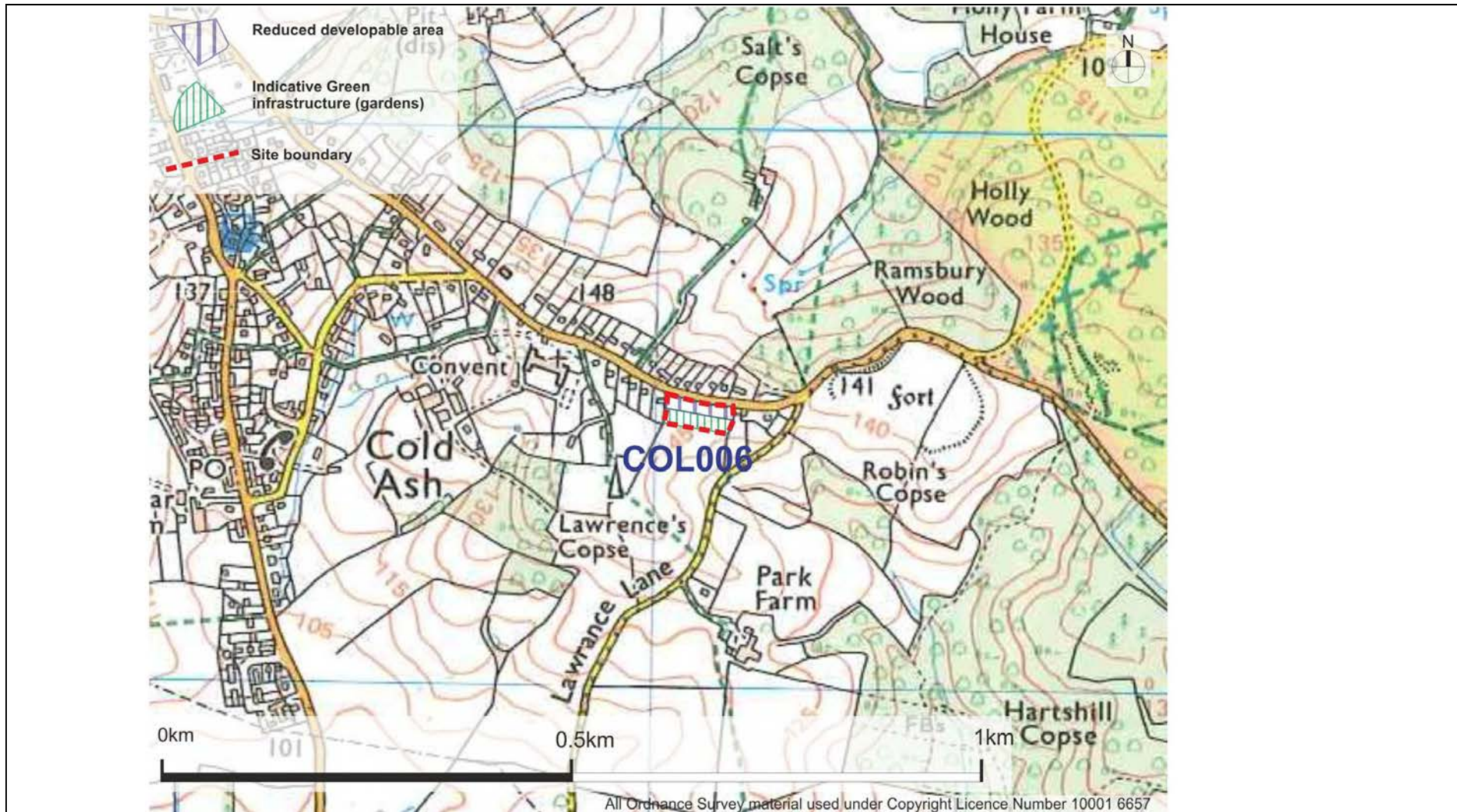
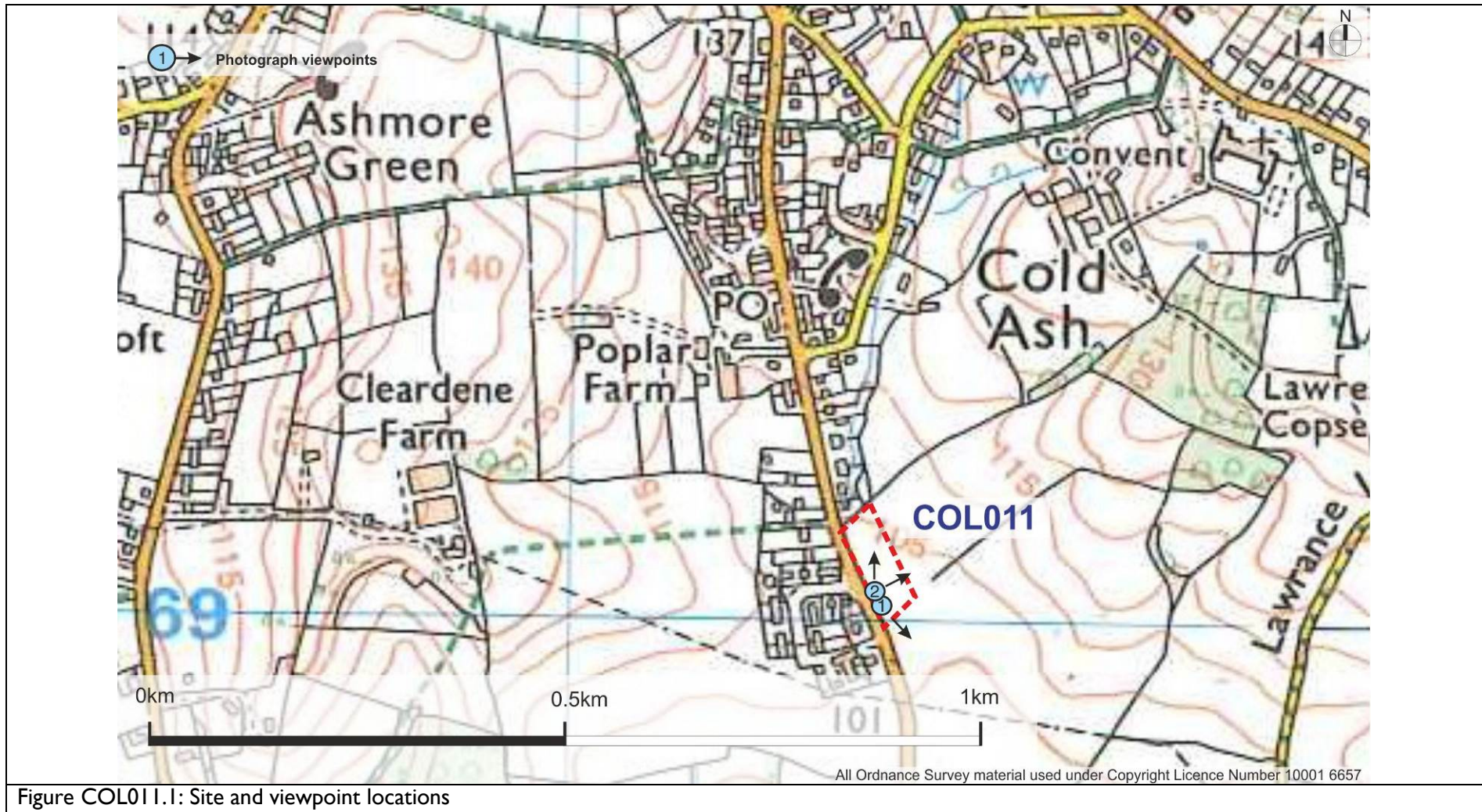


Figure COL006.2: Potential development area and Green Infrastructure

C. Assessment of Potential Housing Site: COL011: east of Cold Ash Hill, Cold Ash



PHOTOGRAPHS



Viewpoint 1: View south east across open countryside from field gate off Cold Ash Hill. The site extends only a short way in this direction, with the south eastern boundary partly formed by a hedge (to left of photo) and partly open.



Viewpoint 2: View north east from field gate off Cold Ash Hill. The settlement is off to the left and is largely well hidden by vegetation. The site is part of a large, arable field extending up the hill to Lawrence's Copse.

Site description

Site COL011 lies on the southern side of Cold Ash, less than 1km south west of the boundary of the North Wessex Downs AONB. The settlement extends from its core south along Cold Ash Hill, stopping just north of the site on the east side of the road and extending just to the south of the site west of the road. Between the southern-most point of the village and the northern built up edge of Thatcham there is an open gap of approximately 250m. The site's north western and south western boundaries and part of the south eastern boundary are formed by field hedges. There are mature hedgerow trees in the hedge to the south east. The north eastern boundary is open to the remainder of a large field which extends up the hill to the north east towards Lawrence's Copse. The field is in use for arable farming.

Relationship with adjacent settlement <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The site is part of the open, rural approach to the village from the south and by its openness and views is important in reducing the density of linear development at the southern edge of the settlement
Relationship with adjacent wider countryside <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The site is somewhat typical of LCA 8A, more typical of LCT 14, and strongly linked to the rolling countryside to the north east, east and south east, with no hedged boundary separating it from the rising ground to the north east and which is part of the setting of the AONB (though not widely visible)
Impact on key landscape characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loss of valley side landscape which has links with the landscape south of Cold Ash• Impact on rural character of the approach to Cold Ash from the south• Loss of open countryside separation between Cold Ash and Thatcham
Impact on key visual characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The site is visible from the rural approach to Cold Ash from the south and approach to the AONB via Cold Ash• Visual impact on PRoW on rising ground to the west, including potentially from a viewpoint on high ground noted in the Cold Ash and Ashmore Green Village Design Statement
Impact on key settlement characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Development of the whole site would contain built form on the valley floor which is typical for this part of Cold Ash• The presence of built form further south on the west side of Cold Ash Hill does not affect the importance of the site being part of the wider landscape as there is still a perception of being at the edge of the village, within open countryside. This would be lost if the settlement was extended on both sides of the road, though the settlement edge could benefit from increased planting to create a softer urban edge and better define the approach to the village• Potential erosion of the separate identities of Cold Ash and Thatcham• Poor landscape and visual connections with the main built form of the settlement
Summary of compliance with NPPF <p>Development of this site would result in harm to the setting of the AONB by introducing more built form into views approaching the village and AONB via the village</p>
Recommendation <p>It is recommended that this site should not be pursued further as a potential housing site.</p>

Conclusion

The above analysis recommends only parts of COL 002 and CLO006 as potential areas for housing on landscape and visual grounds. Development would be locally visible but seen within the context of and well related to the settlement. These two sites lie on either side of the village and therefore development would not result in a cumulative adverse impact on the AONB. Other areas are heavily constrained by the following:

- The need to retain local landscape features,
- The need to avoid land that lies above or below the local settlement pattern in terms of the topographical spread
- The need to avoid any landscape intrusion on or into the wider landscape
- The need to avoid the creation of an exposed urban edge
- The need to avoid the erosion of open countryside between settlements
- The need to conserve and enhance landscape links and patterns that are characteristic of the AONB
- The need to seek the opportunity to mitigate existing visual intrusion from the settlement where this is not in conflict with the above.