

WEST BERKSHIRE CORE STRATEGY: LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT SITES

Introduction

Areas 1 to 13 are areas being considered as potential strategic development sites as part of the West Berkshire Planning Strategy. As part of assessing the relative sustainability of these areas a strategic level assessment of their landscape sensitivity has therefore been undertaken. Areas 1 to 3 (West Newbury) are shown in attached Figure 3A; areas 4 to 6 (North and East Newbury) in figure 3B; areas 7 (West Greenham) in figure 3C; areas 8 and 9 (North and East Thatcham) in Figure 3D; areas 10 and 11 (West Reading) are shown on attached Figure 3E; area 12 (South Reading) is shown on attached Figure 3F; and area 13 (Hungerford) is shown on attached Figure 3G.

Each area has been assessed against the results of the landscape sensitivity study, taking into account the characteristics of each local landscape character area (LLCA) that each site selection option falls into. The results of this assessment are set out below. Full details of the landscape sensitivity of each relevant LLCA are set out in the four summary reports produced for Newbury, Thatcham, West Reading and Hungerford as part of 'An Integrated Landscape Sensitivity Approach to Settlement Expansion within West Berkshire' April 2009.

AREA 1: WEST NEWBURY

Northern part of local landscape character area 11A, plus one small field to the south in 15B.

The overall sensitivity of this area (LLCA11A) is medium, but its wider landscape sensitivity is medium to high, due to its strong relationship with the Kennet valley and visibility from the northern side of the valley, including from the A34. This area, which is visually exposed, is under consideration as a potential strategic development site. The area to the south of Enborne Road forms a part of the lower slopes of the valley side, while the area north of Enborne Road reads very much as part of the valley floor landscape. The visual score for the area is reduced by its low tranquillity due to the proximity of the A34, but its underlying character is of an exposed area with a good level of visual connectivity with the wider landscape. The urban edge is hard at present, and some housing near the canal intrudes into the valley landscape (LLCA8E).

Recommendation: due the area's exposed character and strong connectivity with the surrounding landscape none of the areas shown would be appropriate for development.

AREA 2: ENBORNE VALLEY

Southern part of local landscape character area 15B

The southern part of this LLCA is strongly related to the small scale rural Enborne valley, and the housing at Enborne Row is clearly separated at present from the Wash Common area of Newbury. The topography is rather complex and steeply sloping, with minor valleys running down to the Enborne. The area feels very secluded on the lower ground, but there are very long views from places on the higher ground. The area has medium to high overall sensitivity, principally due to landscape, visual, historic and cultural factors.

Recommendation: any large scale development would subsume Enborne Row within Newbury and would have significant landscape impacts and is therefore not recommended.

AREA 3: SANDLEFORD PARK

Local landscape character area 18D.

The majority of the LLCA would be affected by this site selection. The overall sensitivity of this area is medium, with a medium to high wider landscape sensitivity. It is significantly affected visually by development on the higher ground within it and just outside, but retains elements of seclusion within the valleys, and woodland blocks some near views. Further development on the higher ground could be highly visible both on the approaches to Newbury and from further away to the south, while development on the lower ground would have a significant impact on the remaining areas of seclusion. The complex topography in the centre of the area would be difficult to develop without having significant local landscape impact.

Recommendation: no further large scale developments should be located in this area, though some smaller scale development might be able to be accommodated where closely related to the settlement edge, in association with new woodland edge planting.

AREA 4: NORTH NEWBURY

Southern parts of local landscape character areas 2F, 11B and 14B.

Area 2F has a medium to low overall landscape sensitivity, and medium wider sensitivity. It has a poor landscape structure, and its character of open countryside in contrast to the built up area to the south is rather diminished by the presence of the large Vodafone headquarters and undistinguished and prominent development to the west of Oxford Road. However, its openness is important in helping to maintain the character of Donnington village as separate from Newbury, and Shaw Farm Road in the east of the area has more features of seclusion and stronger rural character.

The overall sensitivity of 14B is at the upper end of medium, and with high wider landscape sensitivity. The area being considered for development is part of the

prominent wooded ridge (though woodland is not directly affected by the proposals) which encloses Newbury to the north. The wood within 14B, and that just outside in 13A, are local landmarks.

Area 11B has medium to low overall sensitivity, with medium to high wider landscape sensitivity again due to the area as a whole being part of the wooded ridge north of Newbury. The area is relatively open, especially to the west of Long Lane (Hermitage Road), and the busy road detracts from the tranquillity of the area. However, the area included in the site selection is on relatively low ground, and would have a strong landscape edge to the east, assuming that the tree line along the disused railway line is retained and augmented. A strong landscape edge would need to be provided west of Long Lane should the site be selected.

Recommendation: development in Area 2F could be acceptable provided that the integrity of Donnington village can be maintained, and that the character of Shaw Farm Road can be protected. Development within Area 14B would encroach onto the wooded ridge and is not recommended. Development, as shown within Area 11B, could be acceptable within a strong landscape framework, as it would occupy only the lower ground within the area.

AREA 5: BETWEEN NEWBURY AND THATCHAM

Part within local landscape character area 02E and part within Thatcham settlement boundary.

The whole of LLCA2E would be affected by this site selection. Although the landscape sensitivity is medium-low, it is essential to maintaining the physical and visual gap between Newbury and Thatcham. Both urban edges are highly visible and the LLCA is very open and exposed. North of Turnpike Road the landscape and settlement character continues into 15A, with the pattern of fields, trees and farmsteads a significant asset to the landscape quality of 2E.

Recommendation: Only that part of Area 2 within the settlement boundary to Thatcham should be considered as a potential strategic housing site due to the importance of 2E in maintaining the separation and the individual identities of Newbury and Thatcham.

AREA 6: NORTH OF NEWBURY RACECOURSE

North-eastern part of local landscape character area 20C

The northern part of 20C where it abuts the commercial development along Hambridge Road would be affected by this site selection. The landscape sensitivity is medium due to its importance culturally, the value of this open land on the eastern edge of Newbury and its visibility, despite its low landscape, ecological, built form and historic interest.

The site selection is however located in the least visible part of the site and has the least impact on the integrity of the racecourse landscape.

Recommendation: The site selection of only this part of 20C would not have a significant adverse impact on the landscape qualities of 20C and so could be acceptable.

AREA 7: WEST GREENHAM

Local landscape character area 20B, plus a small part of the north of LLCAs 13B and the west of LLCA 14E

Area 20B is in a ridge top location, but is surrounded on three sides by development. Its overall sensitivity is medium to low, though it has a function as part of a small gap between Newbury, Pinchington Lane and Greenham, and wider landscape links with Area 13B. Its population of Great Crested Newts gives it a high biodiversity interest.

Area 13B as a whole has medium to high overall sensitivity, and is a high plateau with long views to north and south from the open edges. The northern part of the LLCA, which is included within the site allocation, is open, and overlooks Newbury. The small fields are part of a small and important gap between Newbury and Greenham.

Area 14E as a whole has medium overall sensitivity, but its strong links with the wider landscape raise its importance and sensitivity. The small field and wood included in the allocation are part of the visually prominent steep north facing valley side. The area is part of the setting of Greenham, including the landmark church, and part of the small gap between Newbury and Greenham, maintaining the integrity of Greenham as a separate settlement.

Recommendation: Potential development as suggested within LLCAs 13B and 14E should be avoided, due to the landscape value and visual prominence of the areas, and their important function as a gap between Greenham and Newbury. LLCA 20B is less visually prominent, and could potentially be developed without significant adverse impact on the surrounding areas provided that no excessively tall structures are proposed.

AREA 8: NORTH THATCHAM

Southern part of local landscape character area 14A

The site selection would affect a number of small square fields close to Thatcham and two of the older farmsteads of historic interest. The site extends across the grain of the land, no longer respecting the flow of the 90m AOD contour as at present found along the northern edge of Thatcham and sits on the headland of the shallow ridge which rises north. The eastern side of the small valley east of Henwick Old Farm is very steep. The site selection area is well defined by hedgerows, tree lines and woodland. The woodland is however of local importance to the area. The watercourse east of Henwick Old Farm is marked by a strong tree line and the surrounds of the farmstead are also well treed. The site selection is not the most visually prominent part of 14A.

This LLCA, of medium to low sensitivity, is less sensitive than others for a number of reasons (as described in this report) and this particular part, relatively low in the landscape, is less sensitive than other parts of the LLCA. The site selection does, however, include the minor, steeply sided valley and treed area around Henwick Old Farm, one of the historic farmsteads in the LLCA, and the LLCA is a key part of the wider landscape of North Thatcham.

Recommendation: Extension of Thatcham onto the more prominent higher ground of the shallow ridgeline should be avoided. However, provided that the extant vegetation and the setting of the historic farmhouses is retained and used to break up the site, the lower fields in the south-east part of the area may be suitable for urban expansion. Built development on the small scale steeply sided valley near Henwick Old Farm should be avoided.

AREA 9: NORTH OF COLTHROP, EAST THATCHAM

South-eastern part of local landscape character area 14F

LLCA14F is of medium sensitivity but is a key part of the wider landscape north east of Thatcham. The site selection covers the landscape that forms the setting to Colthrop Manor and Siege Cross Farm. It is enclosed in part to the north by major blocks of woodland but at its western end is part of a wider field pattern which continues north west. The selection site is constrained by Ancient Woodland, the historic settlement at Siege Cross Farm and Colthrop Manor, its visual prominence as the site rises up the prominent ridge side, and importance as a rural setting to Thatcham. However it is not otherwise constrained by its historic or bio-diversity sensitivity, and value as a cultural and recreational resource.

Recommendation: The scale of the proposed strategic site would have a major adverse landscape impact on the landscape but there may be some scope for limited urban expansion on the lower part of the site in close proximity to the crematorium. Such limited expansion would require a very strong landscape edge, designed to avoid altering the character of the open, smooth valley side. Key features of interest would need to be retained within a suitable landscape setting. A scaled down site may be achievable within these constraints.

AREA10: TILEHURST

Includes the most southerly field in LLCA13E and the larger southern part of 14J. Lies in the current Theale-Calcot strategic gap but avoids the AONB, which lies immediately to the north side of Pincents Lane.

The overall sensitivity of 14J is medium, with 13E medium to low. The higher sensitivity of 14J is largely due to greater connectivity with the wider landscape, and greater visual exposure. 14J also has greater bio-diversity value, however the site selection does not include the wooded WHS areas of 14J.

The proposed strategic site has landscape features of interest, such as the mature trees, and the public rights of way, which could be retained through the design of the site should it be developed. The main constraints to potential development are its visual impact and the loss of panoramic views which contrast with the enclosed views from the urban area and are enjoyed by the local residents. Extensive development would, both visually and physically, merge Tilehurst with Calcot. This would erode the current strategic gap between West Reading and Theale but could have the advantage, if well designed, of better integrating the Pincent Lane development into the urban fabric.

Recommendation: Some development within this potential strategic site could be acceptable provided that it is well designed with substantial green infrastructure. The development would need to provide a buffer to the AONB, maintain landscaped links between the wider landscape and the open landscapes of the strategic gap, and better integrate the urban form into the landscape. It would also need to enhance the urban form which is currently fragmented in this area. Although the southern part of 13E is not in the AONB, it shares landscape characteristics with the rest of 13E, which does lie in the AONB. This field should be excluded from any site selection.

See additional comments on the cumulative effect under area 12.

AREA 11: EAST THEALE

Covers the south-eastern corner of LLCA16A and north-west quadrant of 20E.

The whole of the north-west quadrant of 20E would be affected by the option. Although the landscape sensitivity is low, this area is essential to maintaining the remaining physical and visual gap between Theale and Calcot. Its narrow width is reinforced by its link to the south-east quadrant and to 16A.

16A is of medium sensitivity but it is noted that the southern part has a weaker landscape structure and a lower landscape value. The option area however includes landscape features of merit and would close the gap down to 150m at this point.

Recommendation: It is recommended that only a very small section of the north-west quadrant of 20E, north of Hoad Way and no further east than the current built form edge, be considered as an option site if the gap is to be maintained. Part of 16A may also be acceptable if the existing landscape structure is used to integrate the development and is reinforced to maintain a perceptible gap.

See additional comments on the cumulative effect under area 12.

AREA 12: KENNET VALLEY

Includes the substantial parts of LLCA8F and 9A east of the M4.

Overall sensitivity of 8F is medium to high and 9A is medium. This site selection would affect a landscape that is of significant landscape, biodiversity and recreational value and a potentially much greater landscape, biodiversity and recreational resource

to serve the existing Reading and Theale communities. Although it has been badly disturbed in the past, the disturbance is now localised. This area is substantially different to the area east of the railway line where no such resource has developed and the undeveloped land is much degraded.

The whole area is within the floodplain. Measures to provide a substitute flood accommodation area would have a considerable knock on effect on the surrounding landscapes and the topography of the area.

The area suffers from disturbance from heavy through traffic which is damaging the extant rural character of the road network. This network character contributes to the area as a landscape, biodiversity and recreational resource.

The settlement pattern lacks cohesion and has a weak landscape structure. Within the area of the settlement, away from the key landscape features, there may well be scope for some development.

Part of the option lies beyond the study area. This includes the motorway service area (MSA) which is unlikely to be redeveloped; the waste recycling area at Knight's Farm which is of little landscape value and abuts the M4; and Kirton's Farm which is similar in its landscape, bio-diversity and recreational value to 9A.

Recommendation: None of 8F should be included in the site selection. Only that part of 9A outside of the wetland landscapes should be considered for development. Outside of 9A, Knight's Farm, although not part of this study area but considered as part of a much earlier waste application, might also be suitable for development. A good well-designed scheme may bring benefits to Burghfield village provided it is set within a strong landscape setting.

Cumulative effects: Any site selection within this part of the open land south and south-west of Reading should be considered in conjunction with the effect of site selection options 10 and 11 on the Theale-Calcot gap if the separate identity of the two settlements, Reading and Theale, is to be retained in any meaningful way. The open landscape link from the north-west to the south east quadrants of 20E is key to maintaining this separate identity.

AREA13: SOUTH OF HUNGERFORD

Central northern part of local landscape character area 2D. The whole of the area lies in the AONB.

LLCA2D has an overall medium sensitivity. It is particularly noted for its visual exposure and importance as part of the wider rolling landscape all of which lies in the AONB. The eastern part of the option is grade 2 agricultural land and the most visually exposed. However the site option has few landscape, historic and ecological features and the current edge of Hungerford is exposed.

Recommendation: A limited part of the west of the area could be considered for urban expansion. Any development would need to provide a green infrastructure buffer to

the AONB, maintaining landscaped links with open landscapes of the AONB, and to provide better integration of the urban form into the landscape.

WEST BERKSHIRE PLANNING STRATEGY - POTENTIAL STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT SITES

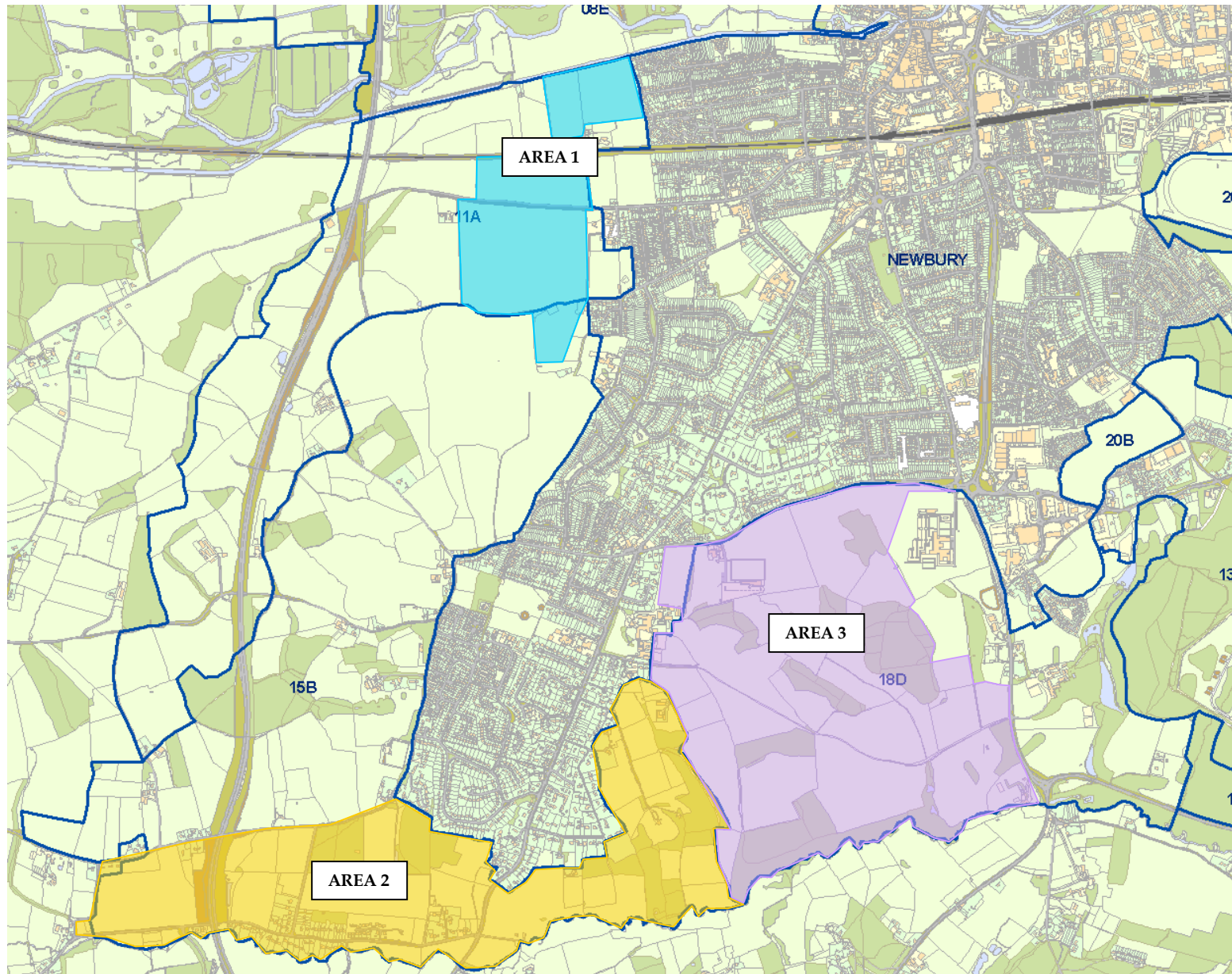


FIGURE 3A

WEST NEWBURY

AREAS 1, 2 AND 3 SHOWN
IN RELATION TO LOCAL
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER
AREAS IN THE
LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY
STUDY MAY 2009

WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL
DEVELOPMENT
FRAMEWORK

KIRKHAMLANDSCAPE
PLANNING LTD/WESSEX
ARCHAEOLOGY

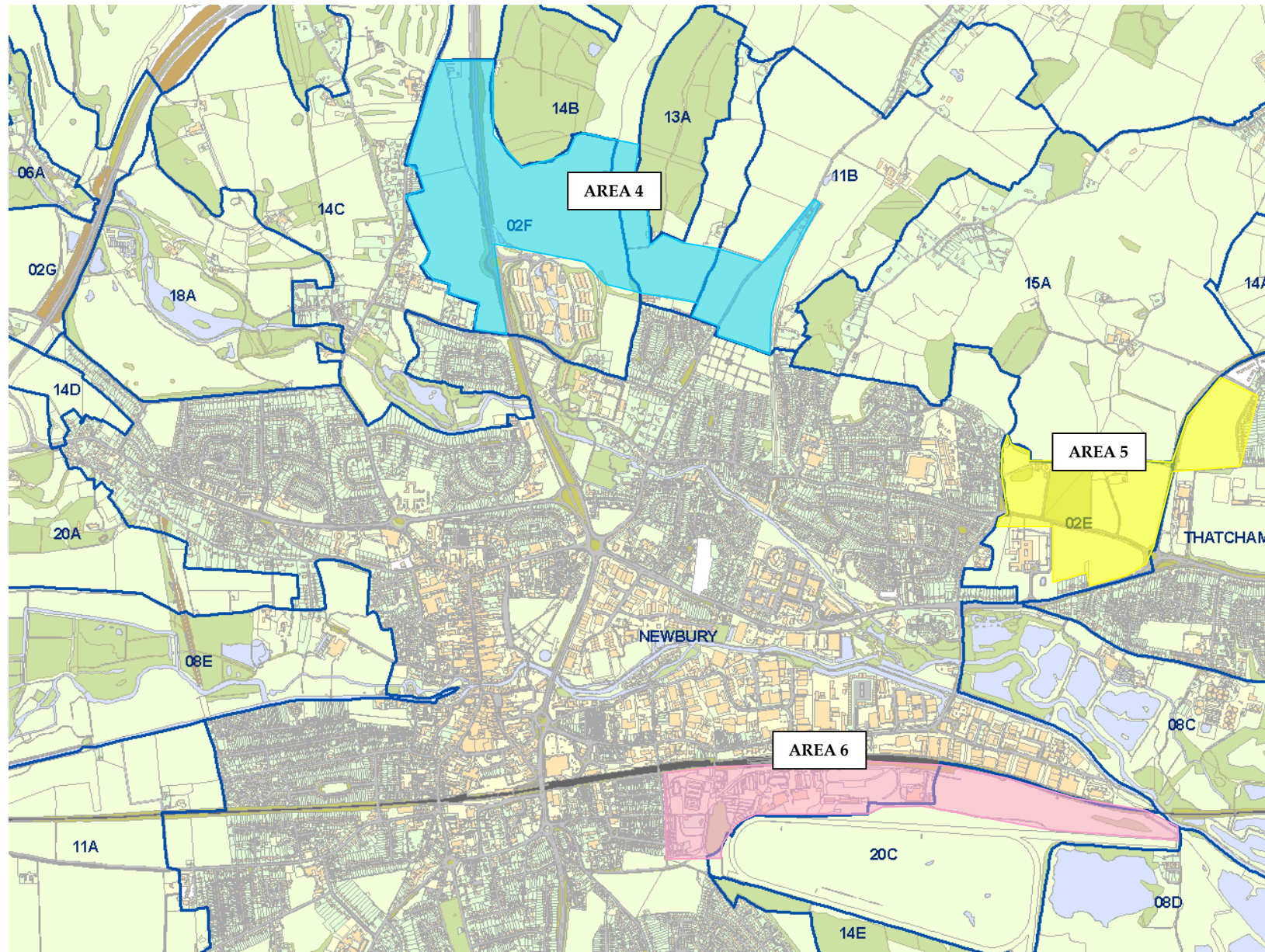
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WEST BERKSHIRE PLANNING STRATEGY - POTENTIAL STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT SITES

FIGURE 3B

NORTH AND EAST NEWBURY

AREAS 4, 5 AND 6 SHOWN IN RELATION TO LOCAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS IN THE LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY STUDY MAY 2009



WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

KIRKHAMLANDSCAPE PLANNING LTD/
WESSEX ARCHAEOLOGY

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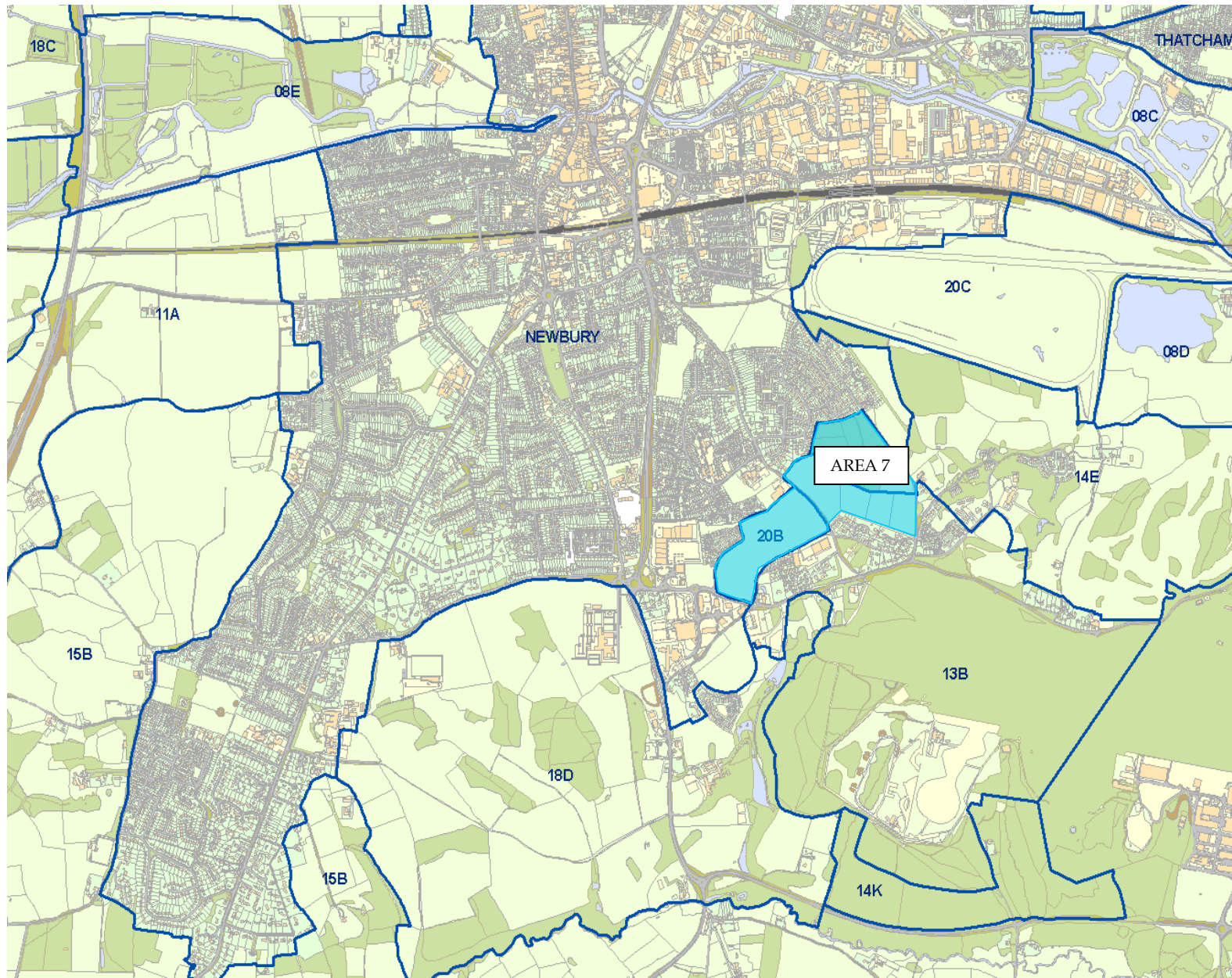


FIGURE 3C

WEST GREENHAM

AREA 7 SHOWN IN RELATION TO LOCAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS IN THE LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY STUDY MAY 2009

WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

KIRKHAMLANDSCAPE PLANNING LTD/
WESSEX ARCHAEOLOGY

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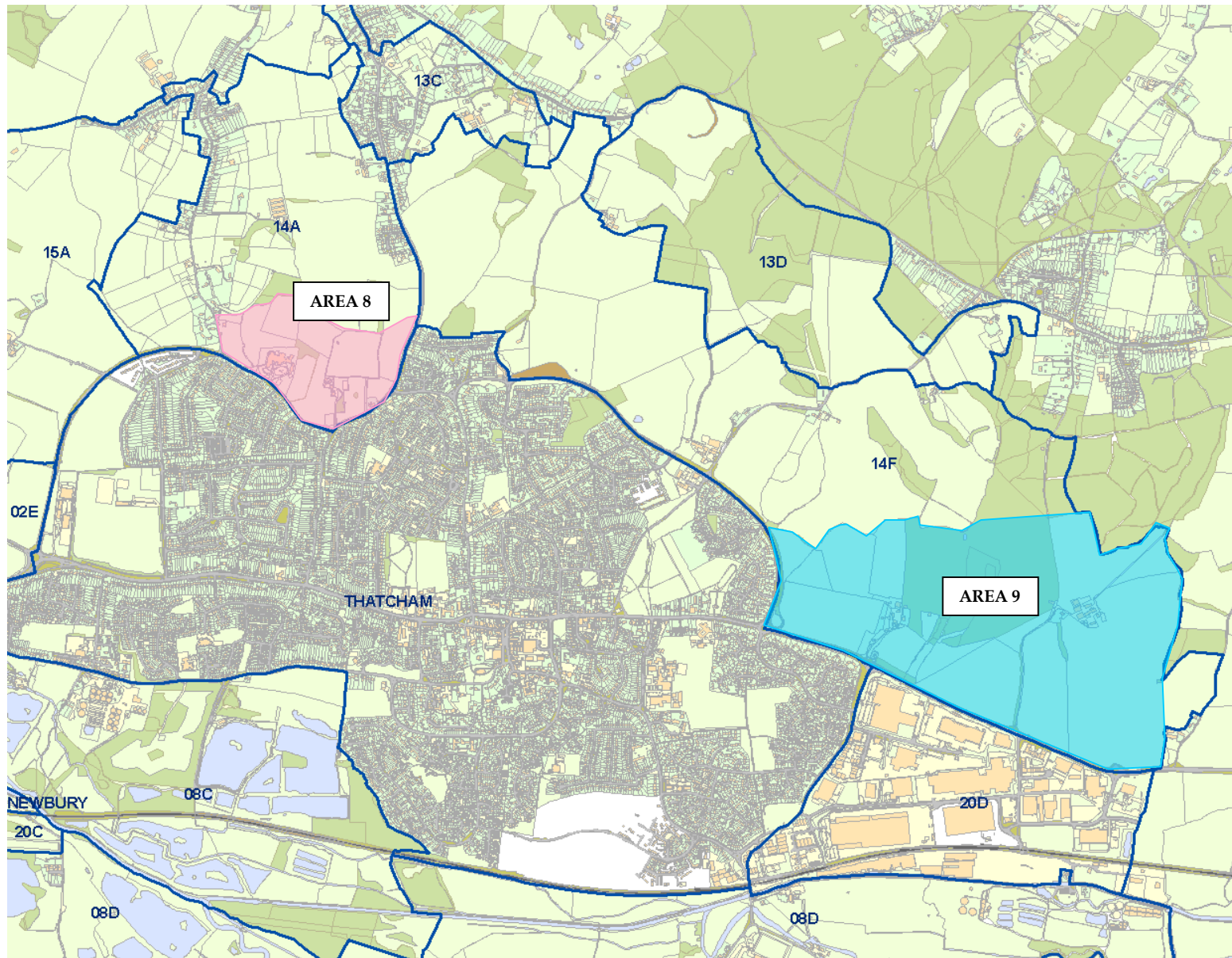


FIGURE 3D

**NORTH AND EAST
THATCHAM**

AREAS 8 AND 9 SHOWN IN
RELATION TO LOCAL
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER
AREAS IN THE LANDSCAPE
SENSITIVITY STUDY MAY 2009

WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL
DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

KIRKHAMLANDSCAPE
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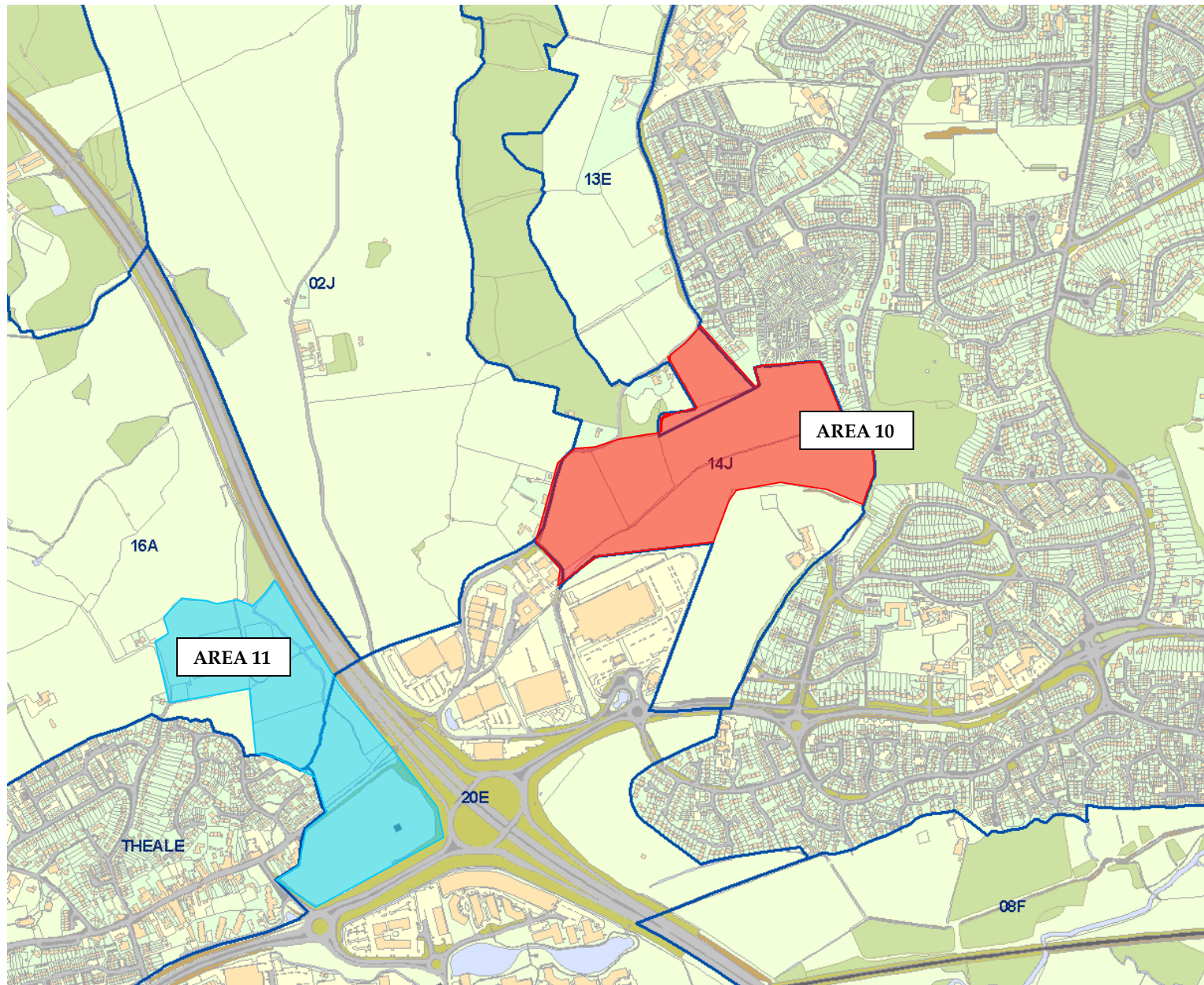


FIGURE 3E

WEST READING

AREAS 10 AND 11 SHOWN IN
RELATION TO LOCAL
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER
AREAS IN THE LANDSCAPE
SENSITIVITY STUDY MAY 2008

WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL
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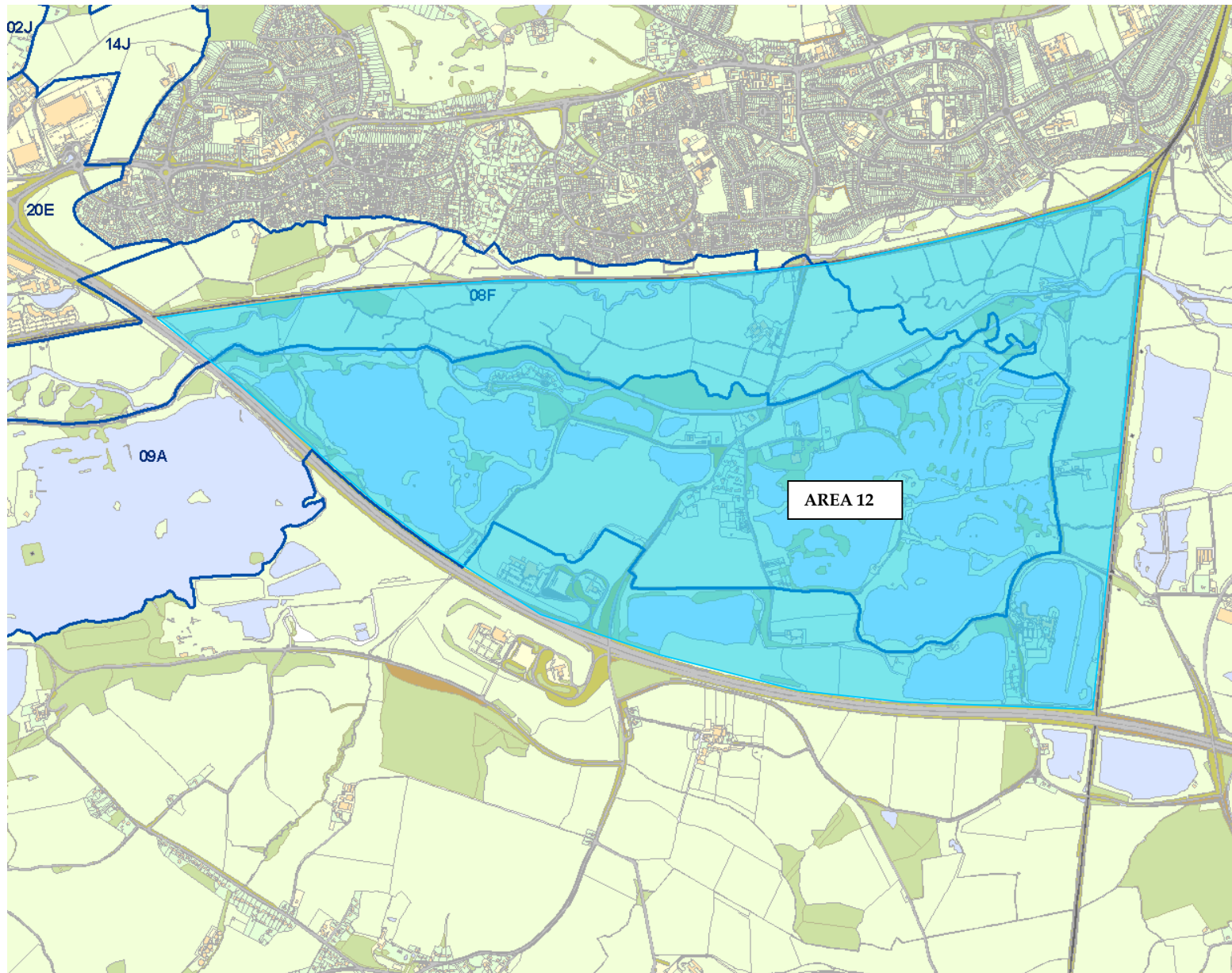


FIGURE 3F

SOUTH READING

AREA 12 SHOWN IN
RELATION TO LOCAL
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER
AREAS IN THE
LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY
STUDY MAY 2009

WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL
DEVELOPMENT
FRAMEWORK

KIRKHAMLANDSCAPE
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WEST BERKSHIRE PLANNING STRATEGY - POTENTIAL STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT SITES

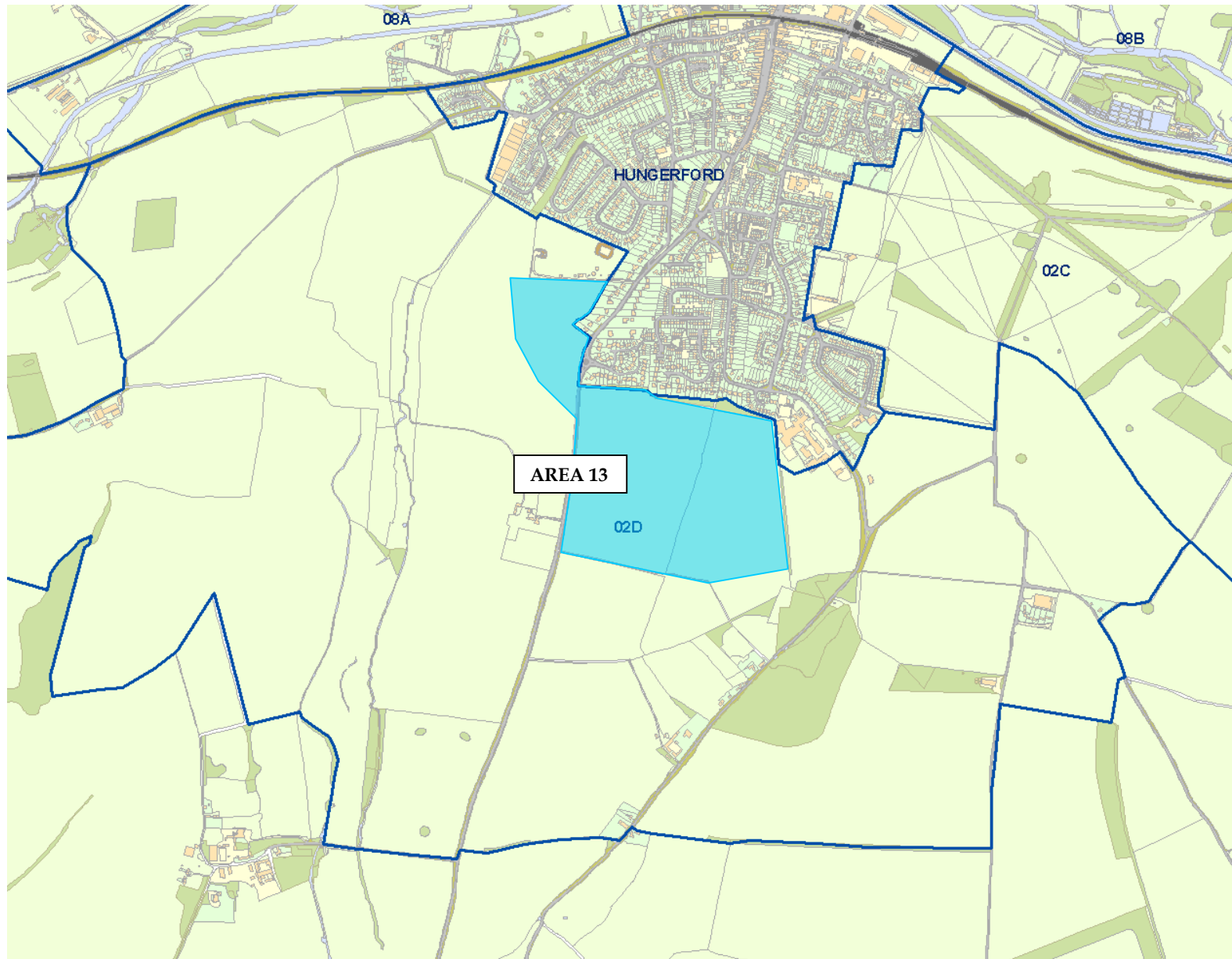


FIGURE 3G

HUNGERFORD

AREA 13 SHOWN IN
RELATION TO LOCAL
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER
AREAS IN THE
LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY
STUDY MAY 2009

WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL
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