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CHERWELL DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN REVIEW Land East of Skimmingdish Lane Bicester Oxfordshire

Agricultural Land Classification ALC Map and Report

November 1998

Resource Planning Team Eastern Region FRCA Reading RPT Job Number 3301/075/98 MAFF Reference EL 33/01588

#### AGRICULTURAL LAND CLASSIFICATION REPORT

# CHERWELL DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN REVIEW LAND EAST OF SKIMMINGDISH LANE BICESTER OXFORDSHIRE

#### INTRODUCTION

- This report presents the findings of a detailed Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) survey of approximately 20 hectares of land east of Skimmingdish Lane north east of Bicester Oxfordshire. The survey was carried out during November 1998.
- The survey was undertaken by the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA)<sup>1</sup> on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF) The survey was carried out in connection with MAFF s statutory input to the Cherwell District Local Plan Review This survey supersedes any previous ALC information for this land
- The work was conducted by members of the Resource Planning Team in the Eastern Region of FRCA. The land has been graded in accordance with the published MAFF ALC guidelines and criteria (MAFF 1988). A description of the ALC grades and subgrades is given in Appendix I.
- At the time of survey all the agricultural land on the site was in oilseed rape. The areas mapped as. Other land include trackways woodland and two derelict former access runways of Bicester aerodrome.

#### **SUMMARY**

- The findings of the survey are shown on the enclosed ALC map The map has been drawn at a scale of 1 10 000. It is accurate at this scale but any enlargement would be misleading
- The area and proportions of the ALC grades and subgrades on the surveyed land are summarised in Table 1

Table 1 Area of grades and other land

Grade/Other land	Area (hectares)	% surveyed area	% site area				
3a	31	18 1	16 2				
3b	140	81 9	72 9				
Other land	2 1	N/A	10 9				
Total surveyed area	17 1	100	89 1				
Total site area	19 2		100				

The fieldwork was conducted at an average density of 1 boring per hectare of agricultural land. In total 20 borings 3 soil pits and 3 sieve measurements were described

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> FRCA is an executive agency of MAFF and the Welsh Office

- The agricultural land on this site has been classified as Subgrade 3a (good quality) and Subgrade 3b (moderate quality) The principal limitations to land quality include soil wetness and soil droughtiness
- Good quality land is located in two separate areas. Soils are typically calcareous throughout and comprise fine loamy topsoils overlying lighter stony sandy subsoils with some clays at depth. This combination of soil properties interacting with the local climate results in land which experiences a soil droughtiness limitation. The effect of a soil droughtiness limitation may cause a reduction in crop yield and limit the flexibility of the land particularly in drier years. In addition, other land in this mapping unit comprises soils with moderately deep slowly permeable clayey subsoils. This results in a combined soil wetness and droughtiness limitation.
- Moderate quality land is classified over most of the site and is of two contrasting types. To the south the land suffers from a significant soil wetness limitation. The soils are calcareous with fine loamy or fine silty topsoils passing to slowly permeable clays at shallow depth which impede the movement of water down the profile. This limitation will affect the range and yield of crops that can be grown on this land as well as restricting the number of days when the land is in a suitable condition for cultivation trafficking by machinery or grazing by livestock. Along the north western boundary, the remainder of the soils rest over limestone and suffer from a significant soil droughtiness limitation. The soils are calcareous and comprise slightly to moderately stony fine loamy or fine silty topsoils over similar textured but very stony subsoils. These pass to solid limestone at shallow to moderate depth. These soils hold only small reserves of available water which in the prevailing climate combine to cause a soil droughtiness limitation. Crop growth and yield may be adversely affected especially in drier years.

#### FACTORS INFLUENCING ALC GRADE

#### Climate

- 11 Climate affects the grading of land through the assessment of an overall climatic limitation and also through interactions with soil characteristics
- The key climatic variables used for grading this site are given in Table 2 and were obtained from the published 5km grid datasets using the standard interpolation procedures (Met Office 1989)
- The climatic criteria are considered first when classifying land as climate can be overriding in the sense that severe limitations will restrict land to low grades irrespective of favourable site or soil conditions
- The main parameters used in the assessment of an overall climatic limitation are average annual rainfall (AAR) as a measure of overall wetness and accumulated temperature (ATO January to June) as a measure of the relative warmth of a locality

Table 2 Climatic and altitude data

Factor	Units	Values					
Grid reference	N/A	SP 601 236	SP 603 241				
Altıtude	m AOD	70	72				
Accumulated Temperature	day C (Jan June)	1423	1421				
Average Annual Rainfall	mm	676	681				
Field Capacity Days	days	145	146				
Moisture Deficit Wheat	mm	104	104				
Moisture Deficit Potatoes	mm	96	95				
Overall climatic grade	N/A	Grade 1	Grade 1				

The combination of rainfall and temperature at this site mean that there is no overall climatic limitation. Local climatic factors such as exposure and frost risk do not affect land quality at this location. The site is climatically Grade 1. However, climatic factors do interact with soil properties to influence soil wetness and soil droughtiness. At this locality, the climate is about average in regional terms.

#### Site

The site is relatively flat lying at an altitude of approximately 70 m AOD. It is not affected by any site restrictions such as gradient or microrelief. However, there is evidence of localised ponding along ditch margins to the south and seepage from a spring adjoining the airfield to the north which indicate significant drainage problems. As such land with this wetness problem cannot be graded higher than Subgrade 3b.

## Geology and soils

- 17 The most detailed published geological information for the site (GS of Gt Britain 1863) maps the eastern half of the site as Oxford Clay and the western half as Cornbrash
- The most detailed published soils information covering the area (SSEW 1983) maps most of it as soils of the Aberford association. These soils are described as shallow locally brashy well drained calcareous fine loamy soils over limestone. Some deeper calcareous soils in colluvium (SSEW 1983). To the south of the site soils of the Wickham 2 association are mapped. These are described as slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged fine loamy over clayey fine silty over clayey and clayey soils. Small areas of slowly permeable calcareous soils on steeper slopes. (SSEW 1983). Soils consistent with these descriptions were observed across the site with soils of the Wickham 2 type more prevalent. In addition, fine loamy over stony medium sandy or similar over slowly permeable clay was observed on the better quality land.

#### AGRICULTURAL LAND CLASSIFICATION

The details of the classification of the site are shown on the attached ALC map and the area statistics of each grade are given in Table 1 page 1

The location of the auger borings and pits is shown on the attached sample location map and the details of the soils data are presented in Appendix II

# Subgrade 3a

- Land of good quality is mapped over the central area of the site with a smaller tract located along the north eastern boundary. It appears to be roughly coincident with the junction of the underlying Oxford Clay and Cornbrash lithologies.
- 22 All of the land classified as Subgrade 3a is affected by a soil droughtiness limitation often in combination with a less severe wetness limitation. Soils comprise calcareous medium clay loam topsoils which may contain up to 8% total hard limestone by volume (1-4% >2 cm in size) Topsoils overlie loamy medium sand or pass through a thin horizon of heavy clay loam to loamy medium sand (LMS) beneath Stone content in this coarser horizon is estimated to be 15% total hard limestone and proved to be impenetrable to the soil auger from 60 to 71 cm Pit 2 (see Appendix II) is typical of these soils and proved the existence of stony subsoils which were measured at 27% increasing to 42% total hard limestone with depth Due to the high stone content soil structure could not be determined. Consequently a moderate assessment of structural conditions has been assumed At 85 cm the LMS passed to a slowly permeable clay which was also present at some of the auger borings in this unit from 68-100 cm. This results in this pit and most of the auger borings being assigned to Wetness Class II Moisture balance calculations which assume rooting to 120 cm at this location take account of soil texture structure depth and stone content interact with the local climate to result in land with a slight to moderate soil droughtiness limitation. The resulting drought stress may cause the level and consistency of yields to be depressed Subgrade 3a is therefore appropriate Within this mapping unit there is some better less droughty land which could not be distinguished separately

## Subgrade 3b

- 23 Land of moderate quality has been mapped over most of the site. It occurs in conjunction with two main soil types
- Much of the land classified as Subgrade 3b suffers from a significant soil wetness limitation 24 Soils comprise calcareous medium or heavy silty clay loam or medium clay loam topsoils Topsoil stone estimates were calculated to be in the region 2-5 % hard limestone by volume These overlie stoneless slowly permeable clay subsoils Pit 1 (see Appendix II) confirmed the existence of these poorly structured clay horizons. These profiles all exhibited evidence of severely impeded drainage in the form of gleying within 40 cm. The depth to these slowly permeable subsoils (between 24 and 33 cm) results in soils being assigned to Wetness Class IV This combination of poor drainage topsoil texture and the prevailing field capacity level (145 days) gives rise to a land classification of Subgrade 3b Excessive soil wetness adversely affects seed germination and survival partly by a reduction in soil temperature and partly because of anaerobism. It also inhibits the development of a good root system all of which can affect the range of crops that can be grown and the level of yield Soil wetness also influences the sensitivity of the soil to structural damage and is therefore a major factor in determining the number of days when the soil is in a suitable condition for cultivation trafficking by machinery or grazing by livestock

- 25 The remainder of the Subgrade 3b land is affected by a significant soil droughtiness limitation and is located along the north western boundary. Soils are calcareous throughout and typically comprise medium or heavy silty clay loam topsoils Topsoil stone measurements were estimated to be in the region 12-15% total hard limestone by volume (4-6% >2 cm in size) Additional sieve measurements (see S1-S3 Appendix II) confirmed the estimates From 29 to 33 cm soil profiles were impenetrable to the soil auger. Pit 3 (see Appendix II) is typical of this subgrade and proved the existence of very stony subsoils From 28 to 35 cm the pit revealed a heavy clay loam with up to 55% hard brashy limestone by volume This passed to a medium silty clay loam from 35 to 55 cm with a similar stone content This gave way to a gritty sandy clay loam with up to 28% total hard limestone by volume it is believed that this layer is weathered limestone in which few roots were observed From 69 cm solid limestone was encountered and rooting into this was considered to be limited and the drought assessment stopped at this point. The soils are typically well drained (WC I) but the stony subsoils restrict the amount of available water in the soil profile and the combination of these soil properties interacting with the local climate results in a significant soil droughtiness limitation. This will affect the consistency and level of yields particularly in drier years
- A significant soil wetness problem associated with ponding was seen in two areas at the time of survey. Along the south eastern boundary waterlogged profiles caused surface water problems adjacent to a drainage ditch. Surface water was also observed close to a spring along a short section of the north western boundary. These flat lying areas may be difficult to be effectively drained and it is therefore considered that this land cannot be classified any better than Subgrade 3b.

Colin Pritchard Resource Planning Team Eastern Region FRCA Reading

#### **SOURCES OF REFERENCE**

Geological Survey Of Great Britain (1863) Sheet No 45 S E (Old Series) Banbury 1 inch to 1 mile Solid Edition
London

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (1988) Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales Revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land MAFF London

Met Office (1989) Climatological Data for Agricultural Land Classification Met Office Bracknell

Soil Survey of England and Wales (1983) Sheet 6 Soils of South East England 1 250 000 SSEW Harpenden.

Soil Survey of England and Wales (1984) Soils and their Use in South East England SSEW Harpenden

#### APPENDIX I

#### DESCRIPTIONS OF THE GRADES AND SUBGRADES

#### Grade 1 Excellent Quality Agricultural Land

Land with no or very minor limitations to agricultural use. A very wide range of agricultural and horticultural crops can be grown and commonly includes top fruit soft fruit salad crops and winter harvested vegetables. Yields are high and less variable than on land of lower quality.

# Grade 2 Very Good Quality Agricultural Land

Land with minor limitations which affect crop yield cultivations or harvesting. A wide range of agricultural or horticultural crops can usually be grown but on some land of this grade there may be reduced flexibility due to difficulties with the production of the more demanding crops such as winter harvested vegetables and arable root crops. The level of yield is generally high but may be lower or more variable than Grade 1 land.

# Grade 3 Good to Moderate Quality Land

Land with moderate limitations which affect the choice of crops the timing and type of cultivation harvesting or the level of yield. When more demanding crops are grown yields are generally lower or more variable than on land in Grades 1 and 2

## Subgrade 3a Good Quality Agricultural Land

Land capable of consistently producing moderate to high yields of a narrow range of arable crops especially cereals or moderate yields of a wide range of crops including cereals grass oilseed rape potatoes sugar beet and the less demanding horticultural crops

## Subgrade 3b Moderate Quality Agricultural Land

Land capable of producing moderate yields of a narrow range of crops principally cereals and grass or lower yields of a wider range of crops or high yields of grass which can be grazed or harvested over most of the year

## Grade 4 Poor Quality Agricultural Land

Land with severe limitations which significantly restrict the range of crops and/or the level of yields. It is mainly suited to grass with occasional arable crops (e.g. cereals and forage crops) the yields of which are variable. In moist climates, yields of grass may be moderate to high but there may be difficulties in utilisation. The grade also includes very droughty arable land.

## Grade 5 Very Poor Quality Agricultural Land

Land with severe limitations which restrict use to permanent pasture or rough grazing except for occasional pioneer forage crops

# APPENDIX II

# **SOIL DATA**

# Contents

Sample location map

Soil abbreviations explanatory note

Soil pit and soil boring descriptions (boring and horizon levels)

# SOIL PROFILE DESCRIPTIONS EXPLANATORY NOTE

Soil pit and auger boring information collected during ALC fieldwork is held on a computer database. This uses notations and abbreviations as set out below

#### **Boring Header Information**

- 1 GRID REF national 100 km grid square and 8 figure grid reference
- 2 USE Land use at the time of survey The following abbreviations are used

ARA	Arable	WHT	Wheat	BAR	Barley
CER	Cereals	OAT	Oats	MZE	Maize
OSR	Oilseed rape	BEN	Field beans	BRA	Brassicae
POT	Potatoes	SBT	Sugar beet	FCD	Fodder crops
LIN	Linseed	FRT	Soft and top fruit	FLW	Fallow
PGR	Permanent	LEY	Ley grass	RGR	Rough grazing
	pasture				
SCR	Scrub	CFW	Coniferous woodland	OTH	Other
DCW	Deciduous	BOG	Bog or marsh	SAS	Set Aside
	woodland				
HTH	Heathland	HRT	Horticultural crops	PLO	Ploughed

- 3 GRDNT Gradient as estimated or measured by a hand held optical clinometer
- 4 GLEY/SPL Depth in centimetres (cm) to gleying and/or slowly permeable layers
- 5 AP (WHEAT/POTS) Crop adjusted available water capacity
- 6 MB (WHEAT/POTS) Moisture Balance (Crop adjusted AP crop adjusted MD)
- 7 DRT Best grade according to soil droughtiness
- 8 If any of the following factors are considered significant Y will be entered in the relevant column

MREL Microrelief limitation	FLOOD Flood risk	EROSN Soil erosion risk
EXP Exposure limitation	FROST Frost prone	DIST Disturbed land
CHEM Chemical limitation		

9 LIMIT The main limitation to land quality The following abbreviations are used

OC	Overall Climate	ΑE	Aspect	ST	Topsoil Stoniness
FR	Frost Risk	GR	Gradient	MR	Microrelief
FL	Flood Risk	TX	Topsoil Texture	DP	Soil Depth
CH	Chemical	WE	Wetness	WK	Workability
DR	Drought	ER	Erosion Risk	WD	Soil Wetness/Droughtiness
EX	Exposure				

### Soil Pits and Auger Borings

1 **TEXTURE** soil texture classes are denoted by the following abbreviations

S	Sand	LS	Loamy Sand	SL	Sandy Loam
SZL	Sandy Silt Loam	CL	Clay Loam	ZCL	Silty Clay Loam
ZL	Silt Loam	SCL	Sandy Clay Loam	C	Clay
SC	Sandy Clay	ZC	Silty Clay	OL	Organic Loam
P	Peat	SP	Sandy Peat	LP	Loamy Peat
PL	Peaty Loam	PS	Peaty Sand	MZ	Marine Light Silts

For the sand loamy sand sandy loam and sandy silt loam classes the predominant size of sand fraction will be indicated by the use of the following prefixes

- Fine (more than 66% of the sand less than 0 2mm)
- M Medium (less than 66% fine sand and less than 33% coarse sand)
- C Coarse (more than 33% of the sand larger than 0 6mm)

The clay loam and silty clay loam classes will be sub divided according to the clay content

- M Medium (<27% clay) H Heavy (27 35% clay)
- 2 MOTTLE COL Mottle colour using Munsell notation
- 3 MOTTLE ABUN Mottle abundance expressed as a percentage of the matrix or surface described

F few <2% C common 2 20% M many 20 40% VM very many 40% +

- 4 MOTTLE CONT Mottle contrast
  - F faint indistinct mottles evident only on close inspection
  - D distinct mottles are readily seen
  - P prominent mottling is conspicuous and one of the outstanding features of the horizon
- 5 PED COL Ped face colour using Munsell notation
- 6 GLEY If the soil horizon is gleyed a Y will appear in this column. If slightly gleyed an S will appear
- 7 STONE LITH Stone Lithology one of the following is used

HR	all hard rocks and stones	FSST	soft fine grained sandstone chalk gravel with porous (soft) stones gravel with non porous (hard)
ZR	soft argillaceous or silty rocks	CH	
MSST	soft medium grained sandstone	GS	
SI	soft weathered	GH	
	igneous/metamorphic rock		stones

Stone contents (>2cm >6cm and total) are given in percentages (by volume)

8 STRUCT the degree of development size and shape of soil peds are described using the following notation

Degree of development	WK ST	weakly developed strongly developed	MD	moderately developed
Ped size	F C	fine coarse	M	medium
Ped shape	S GR SAB PL	single grain granular sub angular blocky platy	M AB PR	massive angular blocky prismatic

9 CONSIST Soil consistence is described using the following notation

L loose FM firm EH extremely hard
VF very friable VM very firm
FR friable EM extremely firm

10 SUBS STR Subsoil structural condition recorded for the purpose of calculating profile droughtiness

G good M moderate P poor

- 11 POR Soil porosity If a soil horizon has less than 0.5% biopores >0.5 mm a Y will appear in this column
- 12 IMP If the profile is impenetrable to rooting a Y will appear in this column at the appropriate horizon
- 13 SPL Slowly permeable layer If the soil horizon is slowly permeable a Y will appear in this column
- 14 CALC If the soil horizon is calcareous a Y will appear in this column
- 15 Other notations

APW available water capacity (in mm) adjusted for wheat APP available water capacity (in mm) adjusted for potatoes

MBW moisture balance wheat MBP moisture balance potatoes

SAMP	LE	AS	PECT				WETI	NESS	WHI	EAT	PO	TS	М	I REL	EROSN	FROST	CHEM	ALC	
NO	GRID REF	USE		GRDNT	GLEY	SPL	CLASS	GRADE	AP	MB	AP	MB	DRT	FL00D	EX	P DIS	T LIMIT		COMMENTS
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١	SP60302410				•		2	2	54	50	54	-42	38				DR	3A	DRCALC N/3P
2	SP60402410				31		2	2	78	26	82	14	3B				DR	3A	DRCALC N/2P
3	SP60202400				•	20		20	47	57	47	-49	4				DR	3B	AT 3P
4	SP60302400				26	26	4	3B	93		101	5	3A				WE	3B	SEE 1P
5	SP60402400	OSR			28		1	1	63	31	65	31	3B				DR	ЗА	DRCALC N/2P
5	SP60402400	OSR			28		2	2	63	31	65	31	3B				DR	3A	DRCALC N/2P
6	SP60202390	OSR	NH	1					51	53	51	-45	4				DR	3B	DRCALC N/3P
7	SP60302390				33	33	4	38	87	17	92	-4	3A				WE	3B	SEE 1P
8	SP60402390	OSR			27	27	4	3B	84	20	90	6	3A				WE	38	SEE 1P
9	SP60102380				41	50	3	2	106	0	114	18	3A				WD	2	DRCALC N/1P
10	SP60202380	OSR			22		1	1	60	-44	63	33	38				DR	3A	AT 2P
11	SP60302380				26	66	3	2	125	19	96	0	2				WD	2	DRCALC N/2P
12	SP60102370	OSR			26	26	4	3B	96	-8	104	8	3A				WE	38	SEE 1P
13	SP60202370	OSR			85	85	2	2	101	3	80	16	3A				DR	3A	DRCALC N/2P
15	SP60102360	OSR			27	27	4	3B	87	17	93	3	3A				WE	3B	SEE 1P
16	SP60202360	OSR			24	24	4	38	87	17	93	3	3A				WE	3B	SEE 1P
17	SP60102350	OSR			28	28	4	38	109	3	116	20	3A				WE	3B	SEE 1P
18	SP60202350	OSR			29	29	4	38	102	2	107	11	3A				WE	38	SEE 1P
19	SP60202340	OSR			27	27	4	38	95	11	103	7	3A				WE	3B	SEE 1P
20	SP60042390	OSR							51	53	51	45	4				DR	38	DRCALC N/3P
1P	SP60202360	OSR			27	27	4	3B	91	13	103	7	3A				WE	3B	AT AB16
18	SP60042390	OSR								0		0						1	4% 2 CM
2P	SP60202390	OSR			31	68	2	2	85	19	79	22	3A				DR	<b>3</b> A	3ADR TO1200M
28	SP60182381	OSR								0		0					TS	2	8% 2 CM
3P	SP60202400	OSR					1	1	74	30	81	15	3B				DR	38	AT AB3
3\$	SP60263397	OSR								0		0					TS	2	7% 2 CM

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	26 47	HCL	10YR51	10YR46		D		Y			0	0	M		Y	
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17	0 28	MZCL	10YR42						0	O HE					Y	
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18	0 29	MZCL	10YR42						0	0 H	2				Υ	
	29 46	С	10851	10YR58	3 м	D		Υ	0	0	0		Р	Y		PLASTIC
	46 80	С	10851					Y	0	0	0		Р	Y		WATER LEVEL 46CM
19	0 27	MZCL	10YR42						0	0 HF	2				Y	WATER LEVEL 250M
	27 60	С	25Y64	10YR58	3 C	Ð		Y	0	0	0		M	Y		STR SEE1P
20	0 28	MCL	10YR43						4	O HE					Υ	
	28 32	HCL	10YR5456						0	O HE	2		М		Υ	IMP HARD LMST
1P	0 27	WCI	10YR42						_	O 115					.,	
ir.	27 52	MCL C	25Y63	25Y66	М	n		Υ	0	0 HF	4 0	MDCAB	E0 M		Y	DIACTIC
	52 70	C	10B51	25Y68	M			Y		0	0	MDCAB	FR M FM P	Y Y Y Y		
	JE 70	•	10031	23100	"	·		•	Ū		v	HUCAD		' '	•	PEASTIC
2P	0 31	MCL	10YR42						0	O HE	4				γ	
	31 42	LMS	25Y62	10YR56	5 C	D		γ	0	O HE		WK	L M		Υ	
	42 52	LMS	75YR53						0	O HE		WK	L M		Υ	
	52 68	LMS	75YR54						0	о ня	42		М		Y	
	68 100	С	10YR6451	75YR58	3 M	D		Y	0	O HE	35	MASS	FM P	Y Y	Y	WATER LEVEL 790M
3P	0 28		10YR44								15				Υ	
	28 35		10YR68							O HR					Υ	
	35-55		10YR68							O HA		MDCSAB			Y	
	55-69	SCL	25Y64						0	O HR	28	WKCSAB	FRM		Y	FEW ROOTS/IMP LMS