

SALDEN CHASE
OUTLINE PLANNING APPLICATION

Chapter 6: Agricultural Land

6.0 AGRICULTURAL LAND

Introduction

- 6.01 This chapter formally assesses the potential significant effects of the proposed development of Salden Chase, North East Aylesbury Vale, upon agriculture. It follows the guidance provided by Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (August 2004). Consequently, this assessment initially considers the quality of the agricultural farmland lost due to the development and secondly, the impacts of the proposal on farm businesses.
- 6.02 The Salden Chase study area extends to approximately 280 hectares of predominately agricultural land which at the current time is in mixed arable and grassland use. The site is occupied by a number of separate farm businesses. These businesses occupy the land on a variety of different tenures, including owner-occupiers, secure long-term tenancies and short-term non-secure arrangements. There are several ranges of farm buildings across the site.

Policy Context

- 6.03 Policy relating to development in rural areas was previously set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 7 (PPG7): The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development (Feb 1997), as amended in March 2001. This has now been superseded by Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7): Sustainable Development in Rural Areas.

6.04 Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7) Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, closely reflects much of the previous PPG7 guidance and to a lesser extent the newly published PPS4. With regard to development in relation to Best and Most Versatile land, agricultural land classification grades 1, 2 and 3a are still recognised as the key categories. PPS7 includes some new advice on the identification of any major areas of agricultural land that are planned for development in the Local Plan. PPS7 advocates that Local Planning Authorities may wish to include policies in their plan to protect specific areas of best and most versatile land from speculative development.

6.05 As set out in PPS7 paragraph 28, the occurrence of higher grade agricultural land is recognised as an important factor, but needing to be reviewed alongside other sustainability considerations:

“The presence of best and most versatile agricultural land (defined as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification), should be taken into account alongside other sustainability considerations (e.g. biodiversity: the quality and character of the landscape; its amenity value or heritage interest; accessibility to infrastructure, workforce and markets; maintaining viable communities; and the protection of natural resources, including soil quality) when determining planning applications. Where significant development of agricultural land is unavoidable, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land (grades 3b, 4 and 5) in preference to that of a higher quality, except where this would be inconsistent with other sustainability considerations. Little weight in agricultural terms should be given to the loss of agricultural land in grades 3b, 4 and 5, except in areas (such as uplands) where particular agricultural practices may themselves contribute in some special way to the quality and character of the environment or the local economy. If any

undeveloped agricultural land needs to be developed, any adverse effects on the environment should be minimised.”

6.06 Paragraph 29 goes on to say:

“Development plans should include policies that identify any major areas of agricultural land that are planned for development. But local planning authorities may also wish to include policies in their LDDs to protect specific areas of best and most versatile agricultural land from speculative development. It is for local planning authorities to decide whether best and most versatile agricultural land can be developed, having carefully weighed the options in the light of competent advice.”

6.07 Local Plan policy on the development of best and versatile agricultural land was set out in the Aylesbury Vale Local Plan (Adopted 2004). Policy RA9 stated that:

“In assessing proposals for the development of greenfield sites, the Council will take into account information on agricultural land quality. Development involving the loss of agricultural land should seek to use poorer quality land (grades 3b, 4 and 5 of the Agricultural Land Classification) unless other sustainability considerations suggest otherwise.”

6.08 However this policy expired on 28th September 2007 and has not been saved as it was felt that **“sufficient guidance is provided by PPS7 (para 28)”**

Scope and Method of Assessment

Impact Assessment Criteria

- 6.09 The assessment of impact on land resources has been carried out in three stages. Firstly the importance / sensitivity of the receptor has been considered. Secondly the magnitude of the potential impact has been considered. Secondly the importance / sensitivity of the receptor has been considered. Thirdly the significance of impact has been determined by the interaction of magnitude and sensitivity. The effects have been determined by the thresholds set out in Tables 6.1-6.3 below.
- 6.10 There are no defined thresholds for assessing the impacts of non-agricultural development on agricultural soil resources. Planning Policy Statement 7 (2004) states that it is for Local Authorities to decide whether “best and most versatile agricultural land” (BMV) can be developed. BMV land is identified in PPS 7 as worthy of protection. Accordingly the existence of BMV land is a measure of impact.
- 6.11 EIA requires various thresholds to be set and in consultation with other consultants and various agricultural departmental officers from DEFRA over time, the thresholds set out in this chapter have been adopted by Kernon Countryside Consultants for EIA purposes.
- 6.12 The sensitivity of the receptor has been assessed against the criteria set out in Table 6.1.
- 6.13 The magnitude of impact against the criteria in Table 6.2 and the significance of the impacts has been assessed against the criteria set out in Table 6.3.

Table 6.1: Methodology for Determining Sensitivity

Sensitivity	Examples of Receptors
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High	Land Resources are matters of potentially national importance. There are no defined criteria against which to set thresholds. National planning policy towards the development and protection of agricultural land is at paragraphs 28 and 29 of Planning Policy Statement 7 (2004). The effect on land resources is a combination of the quantum and quality of agricultural land affected, relative to both the national resource and the relative availability of land of that quality locally. Land resources should therefore be classified as being of high environmental value (sensitivity).
Medium	No receptors identified.
Low	Farm businesses are of potentially local importance. The way that farms are operated will vary over time according to ownership, local and international economic factors. Farm businesses are tolerant of some change without detriment to their character.

Table 6.2: Impact Magnitude Definitions

Impact Magnitude	Definition	
	Impact on Soils	Impact on Local Agriculture
Substantial	The proposed development would directly lead to the loss of over 50 hectares of "best and most versatile agricultural land" (Grades 1 / 2 / 3a).	The impact of the development would render a full-time agricultural business non-viable.
Moderate	The proposed development would directly lead to the loss of between 20 and 50 hectares of "best and most versatile agricultural land" (Grades 1 / 2 / 3a).	The impact of the development would require significant changes in the day-to-day management of a full-time agricultural business.
Slight	The proposed development would directly lead to the loss of less than 20 hectares of "best and most versatile agricultural land" (Grades 1 / 2 / 3a) or would directly lead to the loss of any quantity of non "best and most versatile agricultural land" (Grades 3b / 4 / 5).	Land take would require only minor changes in the day-to-day management / structure of a full-time agricultural business or land take would have significant effects on a part-time business.
Negligible	No direct impact upon agricultural land.	Land take would require only negligible changes to an agricultural business.

Table 6.3: Impact Significance Matrix

Sensitivity of Receptor	Magnitude of Effect			
	Substantial Effect	Moderate Effect	Slight Effect	Negligible Effect
High	Severe	Major	Moderate	Not Significant
Medium	Severe	Major/Moderate	Moderate/Minor	Not Significant
Low	Moderate/Minor	Minor	Negligible	Not Significant

Land Quality Methodology

- 6.14 On behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA) undertook an Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) survey across approximately 190 hectares in 1998 (Appendix 6.1). The additional land (approximately 90 hectares) was the subject of a detailed survey carried out by KCC in August 2008 (Appendix 6.2) and has been graded according to the current guidelines and criteria (MAFF 1988). These two surveys make up the study area. The ALC classification for the whole area is shown on Figure 6.1.
- 6.15 The MAFF ALC system of measuring land quality for land use planning purposes divides farmland into five grades according to the degree of limitation imposed upon land use by the inherent physical characteristics of climate, site and soils. Grade 1 land is of excellent quality, whilst Grade 5 is very poor.
- 6.16 MAFF revised guidelines and criteria for ALC of October 1988 require that the following factors be investigated:

Climate:	Average Annual Rainfall (AAR) and Accumulated Temperature above 0° between January and June (ATO);
Site:	Gradient, micro-relief and flooding;
Soils:	Texture, structure, depth, stoniness and chemical toxicities;
Interactive:	Soil wetness and liability to factors such as drought and erosion.

Methodology for assessment of farming circumstances

- 6.17 An appraisal of farming circumstances has been undertaken. This assessment has involved an inspection of the site and discussions either by telephone or face-to-face with the occupying farmers, to ascertain information on the nature and extent of farming businesses currently occupying the land and the current land use.

Existing Baseline Conditions

Land Quality

The Study Area

- 6.18 The area surveyed by KCC covers approximately 93 hectares of agricultural land between Broadway Wood and a line east of Chase and Salden Farm, with the railway line marking the southern boundary. The land is in both arable and long-term grassland use. (Appendix 6.2).

Climate

- 6.19 Climate affects the grading of land through the assessment of an overall climatic limitation and also through the interaction with soils. The Met Office (1989) provides the key climatic variables for this site. The figures are taken from a site near the eastern boundary are given in the table below.

Table 6.4: Climate and altitude data for Land at Milton Keynes

Grid reference	SP 820 320
Altitude	110 m AOD
Average annual rainfall	659 mm
Accumulated temperature > 0° C (Jan-June)	1369 degree days
Field capacity period	103mm
Moisture deficit, Wheat	98 mm
Moisture deficit, Potatoes	139 days

6.20 The combination of rainfall and temperature at this site imposes no direct climatic limitation upon land quality over this ground.

Relief and Drainage

6.21 The landscape is typical of the drift covered Oxford Clay of this part of the Midlands and presents a gently rolling aspect with gentle slopes that contribute no gradient limitation to land quality.

6.22 Soil wetness is a limitation to land quality over parts of the site with some soils exhibiting evidence of seasonal wetness by way of ochreous mottles and grey soil matrix colours over clearly defined slowly permeable layers.

6.23 There is a high plant water demand and in an area of low rainfall droughtiness is locally slightly limiting.

- 6.24 Heavy textured topsoils (heavy clay loams and clays) will give trafficability problems and in some areas the lack of general winter access to the fields will be limiting to land quality.

Soils and Parent Materials

- 6.25 Published geological information is available on the 1:25,000 scale geological map of an area around Milton Keynes (BGS 1971) and shows most of the land to be covered with boulder clay derived from the underlying Oxford Clay formation. A narrow strip of clayey alluvium is mapped along the thin floodplain of the stream running across the north western part of the site, and small areas of head and sands and gravels are also recognised in the low ground adjacent to the floodplain.
- 6.26 The detailed soil survey recognises clayey, often calcareous chalky till over much of the ground. The floodplain has clayey alluvium and there are patches of loam and clayey drift over parts of the fields in the north.
- 6.27 The small-scale soil map (SSEW 1983) shows calcareous clayey soils of the Hanslope Association over all the land. This association includes seasonally wet non-calcareous and calcareous soils in chalky till.
- 6.28 The detailed soil survey, undertaken for this study, reveals predominately slowly permeable, seasonally wet clayey soils over the land. Top soils are dominantly non-calcareous, but there are areas, particularly on convex slopes, where materials contain more than 2 percent calcium carbonate.

Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) of the Study Area

- 6.29 Sub grades 3a and 3b are represented across the study area shown in Appendix 6.2 which illustrates the distribution of grades across the site.
- 6.30 **Sub-Grade 3a** land covers about 20 percent of the KCC survey area. Soils are predominately seasonally wet (Wetness Class II or III) calcareous clays with wetness the principal limitation to land quality. The presence of free carbonate in the topsoil is generally considered to be beneficial allowing better access to the ground than might otherwise be the case and for that reason these soils are placed in the “Good Quality” category. The calcareous soils are often associated with narrow convex ridges where erosion, over a period of time, has removed the soils and the very calcareous chalky bolder clay is often immediately below the topsoil.
- 6.31 In a few areas on the northern side of the stream, top soils are of medium loamy texture but with impeded drainage in the slowly permeable clay subsoil. These seasonally wet (Wetness Class III) soils are also in to the same 3a category.
- 6.32 **Sub-grade 3b** land covers the bulk of the land (approximately 71 hectares of the additional survey area Appendix 6.2) and comprises seasonally wet clayey soils with non-calcareous surface layers. The heavy topsoils give access problems from late autumn to early spring and there are periods when the soils cannot be trafficked without damaging the topsoil and creating compaction. The soils occur widely over level ground and on the southern fields are a feature of the concave valley sites that cut into the plateau of the main area of land.

6.33 On the northern margins of the surveyed land a narrow strip of wet alluvial soil along the stream is under permanent grassland and floods for short periods during the year. These soils are included in the “Moderate” category.

6.34 Areas of non-agricultural land (1 hectare) are mapped at Weasel’s Lodge and the recycling centre.

The FRCA Agricultural Survey Data

6.35 The land classification survey carried out by MAFF in 1998 covers approximately 190 hectares of land on the eastern side of the site. The survey shows mainly sub-Grade 3b land with small areas of better quality (3a). The moderate quality land is limited by soil wetness and significant wetness / workability problems. The better quality land is described with lighter textures or having soils with calcareous top soils.

6.36 The findings of the FRCA survey are attached at Appendix 6.2 and are set out in the table below.

6.37 Table 6.5 below sets out the results of the combined Agricultural Land Classification Surveys.

Table 6. 5: Combined ALC Results for the Site

ALC Grade	Description	FRCA Results	KCC Results	Total (Ha)	Total (%)
1	Excellent				
2	Very Good				

3a	Good	17	22.5	39.5	14
3b	Moderate	168	71.1	239	85.5
4	Poor				
5	Very Poor				
Urban			1	1	0.4
Non-Surveyed		0.2		0.2	0.1
TOTAL		188	94.6	280.6	100

Overall Farmability of all the Land

6.38 Although parts of the site comprise of Grade 3a land the distribution of this “Good” quality land is patchy and accordingly it cannot be fully exploited. Therefore all the land has to be farmed as Grade 3b. (The combined ALC for the two study areas is shown on Figure 6.1)

Farming Circumstances

6.39 The site was inspected in August 2008. Interviews, either face to face or by telephone were held with the farming occupiers to gain information about the current farming operations across the site. Table 6.6 sets out a list of the farming occupations across the site. These are illustrated at Figure 6.2. Grassland to the south of Weasel Lodge is grazed by horses. It does not form part of an agricultural business and accordingly has not been included in this assessment.

Table 6.6: Farming Businesses Currently Occupying Land at Milton Keynes

Farm	Area of Site	Tenure
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Dagnall Farm	20 hectares	Tenanted
Part of Hurdlesgrove Farm	113 hectares	Part Tenanted on a 2 year FBT part owned
Leys Ground Farm	36 hectares	Owner Occupied
Land off Bottle Dump Roundabout	23 hectares	Owner Occupied
Land north of Weasel Lane	13 hectares	Tenanted on an AHA Tenancy
Lower Salden Farm	42 hectares	Part Owned part rented back from the developer and sub-let on an informal tenancy.
Messers Cook	16 hectares	Rented on a 2 year Farm Business Tenancy

6.40 We set out below an overview of the occupying farm businesses.

Dagnall Farm. Land at Dagnall Farm comprises a single arable field extending to approximately 20 hectares. The field is rented by a local farmer on a short-term, non-secure arrangement. In total he farms some 260 hectares within the local area. The buildings at Dagnall Farm, which are outside the site area, are no longer used for agricultural purposes.

Part of Hurdlesgrove Farm: Hurdlesgrove Farm is a mixed arable and livestock unit (60 Suckler Cows) which extends to approximately 485 hectares. The farm comprises a mix of owner occupied and rented land. The land farmed at Salden Chase comprises of approximately 113 hectares, of which 72 hectares are owned and the remainder rented on a 2 year Farm Business Tenancy. The farmer also contract farms an additional 8 hectares on the site. The land at Salden Chase has been in arable production for a number of years. There is one grain store located on the site, which depending on the cropping of the site can store the majority of the grain produced on the site. Any excess has to be hauled approximately 12 miles to the main farm near Whitchurch.

Leys Ground Farm. Leys Ground Farm extends to approximately 36 hectares of permanent pasture land. The owners run a small part-time farm business comprising of 25 Suckler Cows and 30 breeding ewes. The owners also keep a number of horses which they breed and show. There are a range of equine and agricultural buildings, adjacent to the farmhouse; these are excluded from the study area. Leys Ground Farm rents an additional 20 hectares (50 hectares) of land.

Land off Bottle Dump Roundabout. A block of permanent pasture land extending to approximately 23 hectares. The owner runs a small part-time farm enterprise comprising approximately 25 head of cattle and 100 breeding ewes. The owner also operates a DIY livery enterprise, catering for up to 10 horses. There are two sets of buildings on the unit. The northerly block of buildings is occupied by the DIY livery enterprise and the southerly block by the agricultural enterprises.

Land north of Weasel Lane. A block of permanent pasture land extending to 13 hectares. The land is rented on an Agricultural Holdings Act Tenancy with two successions remaining. The land forms part of a farm enterprise operated from 54 Westbrook End, Newton Longville. In total the farm unit extends to approximately 48 hectares (120 acres) of permanent pasture. The majority of which is rented on a variety of agreements. The occupier is now semi-retired and operates a part-time farm enterprise comprising approximately 70 breeding ewes. Approximately 40 hectares (100 acres) of hay are produced each year. Hay is stored at Westbrook End and sold / delivered in small quantities to local horse owners.

Lower Salden Farm. A mixed arable and grassland farm extending to 86 hectares (214 acres). Approximately 58 hectares (145 acres) of the farm is arable land, which in conjunction with the modern farm buildings is rented out on an informal basis to a local farmer who farms in excess of a 1000 acres in the local area. The remaining land is permanent pasture land which is used for hay production and grazing. The farm operates a DIY Livery enterprise comprising of 20 stables. Approximately 43 hectares of the farm is included within the site area. The farm buildings sit outside this area.

Messers Cook. A block of land comprising of approximately 16 hectares rented on a 2 year Farm Business Tenancy. The land forms part of a small part-time farming business which is operated from Newton Longville. In total the farm business extends to 19.5 hectares. The remaining 3.5 hectares, which are located off the site, are owned and comprise grazing land and farm buildings. On site approximately half of the block of land is grassland which is used for hay production and / or the grazing of sheep. The remaining land is in arable production and is currently contract farmed by Hurdlesgrove Farm. There are a range of brick and timber buildings within the holding. However these have fallen into a state of disrepair and as a consequence are no longer used for agricultural purposes.

Potential Impacts

6.41 Two key areas of impact have been identified:

- Impacts on agricultural land quality, i.e. the effects of the loss of agricultural land as a national resource; and
- Impacts on farm businesses. The effects of non-agricultural development on the viability of farm businesses operating within the study area.

6.42 In line with the phasing proposed in the Design and Access Statement these impacts have been split down into the individual construction impacts and post construction impacts.

6.43 Construction phase impacts, which may also continue through the operational life of the scheme, have been identified as:

- effects on the national resource of agricultural land;
- effects on farm size and structure; and
- effects on field drainage and water supplies, both during the construction phase and long term.

6.44 The following post construction phase impacts have been identified:

- trespass onto surrounding agricultural land.

Construction Phase Impacts

Effects on the National Resource of Agricultural Land

- 6.45 The site comprises predominately of Grade 3b land with patches of good quality grade 3a land. Based on the combined FRCA and KCC survey results (Figure 6.1) the site comprises of 39.5 hectares of “best and most versatile agricultural land”. The magnitude of impact on the national resource of agricultural land as a result of the irreversible development of this quantity of “bmv” land is deemed to be moderate negative. The significance of impact is moderately adverse.
- 6.46 In accordance with advice set out in paragraph 29 of PPS7 it is for local authorities to decide whether best and most versatile agricultural land can be developed, having given consideration to other sustainability considerations.

Effects on Farm Size and Structure

- 6.47 During the phased development of the site the proposal will involve the loss of land from seven agricultural holdings. I summarise the impacts on the holdings below.
- 6.48 In summary the eventual long term effects (after the completion of the entire development) on farm size and structure are deemed to be:
- Dagnall Farm.** The land at Dagnall Farm comprises a single arable field which is occupied on a short term non-secure arrangement. The field comprises approximately 7% of the total area farmed. However, as the land is only occupied on a short term non-secure arrangement the magnitude of impact on the farm business as a result of this loss can at worst only be slightly negative.

Part of Hurdlesgrove Farm. The land farmed at Salden Chase comprises of approximately 113 hectares, of which 72 hectares is owned with the remainder being rented on a 2 year Farm Business Tenancy . It represents approximately 23% of the total area farmed. The loss of this land will significantly reduce the area of land that is farmed by the business. However the loss of this land will not prejudice the continued viability of the livestock enterprise, which is not dependent on the land at Salden Chase, or the arable enterprise. The buildings on the site are only used to store crops grown on site accordingly their loss will not affect the farm business. In summary the magnitude of impact of the proposal on Hurdlesgrove Farm is slightly negative.

Further the release of this land for development will provide the farm with a much needed cash injection enabling them to clear their debts and purchase additional land closer to the main farm holding, which will be more economical to farm due to its closer proximity to the main holding.

Leys Ground Farm. All of the owner occupied land associated with holding will be lost to development. As the land forms part of a part-time farm business the magnitude of impact is deemed to be slightly negative.

Land off Bottle Dump Roundabout. All of the owner occupied land associated with this holding will be lost to development. As the land forms part of a part-time business the magnitude of impact is deemed to be slightly negative.

Land north of Weasel Lane. This land forms part of a part-time farm business operating from off the site. As the land forms part of a part-time business the magnitude of impact is deemed to be slightly negative.

Lower Salden Farm. Approximately 43 hectares will be lost to development. A large part of this land (30 hectares) is in arable production and rented on a non-secure basis by a local farmer. The grazing land that will be lost is used in conjunction with the DIY livery enterprise. There will still be sufficient grazing land on the holding to support the livery enterprise; however the Cross Country Course that has been constructed in the northerly pasture field adjacent to the brook will need to be relocated. As the arable land is rented on a non-secure basis and the livery enterprise will only have to adapt minor changes the magnitude of impact is deemed to be slightly negative.

Messers Cook. Approximately 16 hectares of land will be lost to development. This represents a significant proportion of the farm business (82%). However the farm business is only a small part time business which involved the rearing of relatively small numbers of store lambs. Furthermore, only approximately 40 % of the land occupied by the business is farmed in hand with the arable land being contract farmed. Although the land which will be lost to development has been occupied by the current tenants for a number of years it is only occupied on a short term non-secure tenancy arrangement. Due to the part-time nature of the occupying farm business and the short-term tenancy arrangements the magnitude of impact on the farm business is deemed to be slightly negative.

Effects on Field Drainage and Water Supplies

- 6.49 Parts of the site are known to be under drained. However the proposed development affects whole fields accordingly there will be no severance of individual field drains. There are field water supplies to some of the permanent pasture fields which will be severed. However the scheme involves whole fields so there will be no fields that will be left without water. The magnitude of impact on field drainage and water supplies is neutral.

Post Construction Phase Impacts

- 6.50 Once in operation the non-agricultural use of sites can lead to the spread of trespass onto neighbouring agricultural land. The spread of such trespass can prohibit the full agricultural exploitation of adjacent land.
- 6.51 The proposed development boundary has strong physical boundaries on three of its four boundaries, abutting existing residential development on the east, the railway line on the south and the A421 of the north. The western boundary adjoins farmland. Accordingly there is potential for the spread of trespass. Careful consideration needs to be given to the design and planting of the landscaped western boundary to ensure that it prevents the spread of trespass onto the neighbouring agricultural land.
- 6.52 Without an appropriately designed boundary there is the potential for impacts on adjoining land. The potential magnitude of impact of trespass is deemed to be slightly negative.

Mitigation

- 6.53 It is not possible to mitigate against the loss of agricultural land.
- 6.54 However, to minimise the impact where soils are to be retained for use within the development soil handling and conservation should be undertaken in accordance with the relevant chapters in "The Good Practice for Handling Soils" (MAFF 2000).

Residual Effects

6.55 As set out above there is little that can be done to mitigate against the loss of agricultural land or the effects on farm businesses. Therefore, in this case, the residual impacts are the same as those set out above i.e. the effects before mitigation.

6.56 In summary the residual effects of the development on soil resources and farm businesses are:

Magnitude of Impact on Soil Resources:	Moderately Negative
Magnitude of Impact on Farm Businesses:	Slightly Negative on the 7 occupying farm businesses
Significance of Impact on Soil Resources:	Moderately Adverse
Significance of Impact on Farm Businesses:	Negligible