

**APPENDIX KCC6**  
**Guide to Assessing Development**  
**Proposals on Agricultural Land**



(<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england>)

Guidance

# Guide to assessing development proposals on agricultural land

Updated 5 February 2021

## Applies to England

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# 1. Policies to protect agricultural land and soil

Developers and local planning authorities (LPAs) should refer to the following government policies and legislation when considering development proposals that affect agricultural land and soils. They aim to protect:

- the best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land from significant, inappropriate or unsustainable development proposals
- all soils by managing them in a sustainable way

Natural England uses these policies to advise on development proposals as a [statutory consultee](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/consultation-and-pre-decision-matters#Statutory-consultees) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/consultation-and-pre-decision-matters#Statutory-consultees>) in the planning process.

## 1.1 A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to improve the Environment 2018

[A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>) sets out the government's 25-year plan to improve the health of the environment by using natural resources more sustainably and efficiently. It plans to:

- protect the best agricultural land
- put a value on soils as part of our natural capital
- manage soils in a sustainable way by 2030
- restore and protect peatland

## 1.2 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

LPAs should use the NPPF to make decisions about the natural and local environment to:

- protect and enhance landscapes, biodiversity, geology and soils
- recognise soils as a natural capital asset that provide important ecosystem services
- consider the economic and other benefits of BMV agricultural land, and try to use areas of poorer quality land instead of higher quality land
- prevent soil, air, water, or noise pollution, or land instability from new and existing development

Read [Chapter 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/15-conserving-and-enhancing-the-natural-environment) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/15-conserving-and-enhancing-the-natural-environment>) for full details.

### 1.3 Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure (England) Order) (DMPO) 2015

Planning authorities must consult Natural England on all non-agricultural applications that result in the loss of more than 20 hectares (ha) of BMV land if the land is not included in a [development plan](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/3-plan-making) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/3-plan-making>). For example, this includes the likely cumulative loss of BMV land from the proposed development if it's part of a phased development.

This is required by [schedule 4\(y\) of the Order](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/595/schedule/4/made) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/595/schedule/4/made>).

### 1.4 Planning Practice Guidance for the Natural Environment

[Paragraphs 001 and 002: Planning Practice Guidance for the Natural Environment](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#brownfield-land-soils-and-agricultural-land) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#brownfield-land-soils-and-agricultural-land>) explain why planning decisions should take account of the value of soils and [agricultural land classification \(ALC\)](#) to enable informed choices on the future use of agricultural land within the planning system.

## 2. LPAs: consult Natural England

You must consult Natural England for development proposals that are both:

- likely to cause the loss (or likely cumulative loss) of 20ha or more of BMV land
- not in accordance with an approved development plan

Natural England will advise you on the level of impact the proposal may have on BMV agricultural land. Natural England will take into account the type of development and its likely long-term effects.

Email [consultations@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:consultations@naturalengland.org.uk) or write to:

Natural England consultation service  
Hornbeam House  
Electra Way  
Crewe Business Park  
Crewe  
Cheshire  
CW1 6GJ

### **3. LPAs: how to use agricultural land classification (ALC)**

You can use ALC to help inform decisions on the appropriate sustainable development of land.

ALC uses a grading system to enable you to assess and compare the quality of agricultural land in England and Wales.

A combination of climate, topography and soil characteristics and their unique interaction determines the limitation and grade of the land. These affect the:

- range of crops that can be grown
- yield of crop
- consistency of yield
- cost of producing the crop

### **4. About ALC grades**

ALC is graded from 1 to 5.

The highest grade goes to land that:

- gives a high yield or output
- has the widest range and versatility of use
- produces the most consistent yield
- requires less input

BMV agricultural land is graded 1 to 3a.

#### **4.1 Grade 1 – excellent quality agricultural land**

Land with no or very minor limitations. A very wide range of agricultural and horticultural crops can be grown and commonly includes:

- top fruit, for example tree fruit such as apples and pears
- soft fruit, such as raspberries and blackberries
- salad crops
- winter harvested vegetables

Yields are high and less variable than on land of lower quality.



## **4.2 Grade 2 – very good quality agricultural land**

Land with minor limitations that affect crop yield, cultivations or harvesting. A wide range of agricultural and horticultural crops can usually be grown. On some land in the 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.

## **4.3 Grade 3 – good to moderate quality agricultural land**

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

## **4.4 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 crops including:

- cereals
- grass
- oilseed rape
- potatoes
- sugar beet
- less demanding horticultural crops

## **4.5 Subgrade 3b – moderate quality agricultural land**

Land capable of producing moderate yields of a narrow range of crops, principally:

- cereals and grass
- lower yields of a wider range of crops
- high yields of grass which can be grazed or harvested over most of the year

## **4.6 Grade 4 – poor quality agricultural land**

Land with severe limitations which significantly restrict the range of crops or level of yields. It is mainly suited to grass with occasional arable crops (for example 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 using the land. The grade also includes arable land that is very dry because of drought.

## 4.7 Grade 5 – very poor quality agricultural land

Land with very severe limitations that restrict use to permanent pasture or rough grazing, except for occasional pioneer forage crops.

## 5. LPAs: carry out ALC assessments to support your planning decisions

For an overview of ALC use:

- [1:250,000 scale regional ALC maps](http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/5954148537204736) (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/5954148537204736>) (grade 3 land is not divided into subgrades 3a and 3b)
- [1:250,000 scale regional maps predicting the likelihood of BMV agricultural land](http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/5208993007403008) (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/5208993007403008>)

These maps are not at a scale suitable or accurate for assessment of individual fields or sites.

You can assess if a development proposal is likely to affect BMV agricultural land by using the [post 1988 ALC Magic map](http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx?chosenLayers=dudleystampIndex,backdropDIndex,backdropIndex,europelIndex,vmlBWIndex,25kBWIndex,50kBWIndex,250kBWIndex,miniscaleBWIndex,baseIndex&box=449447:459357:467834:470294&useDefaultbackgroundMapping=false) (<http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx?chosenLayers=dudleystampIndex,backdropDIndex,backdropIndex,europelIndex,vmlBWIndex,25kBWIndex,50kBWIndex,250kBWIndex,miniscaleBWIndex,baseIndex&box=449447:459357:467834:470294&useDefaultbackgroundMapping=false>) and [detailed site survey reports](http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/6249382855835648) (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/6249382855835648>).

If no site survey reports are available, a [new detailed survey](#) may be necessary.

## 6. Use ALC to support your planning decisions

Use ALC survey data to assess the loss of land or quality of land from a proposed development. You should take account of smaller losses (under 20ha) if they're significant when making your decision. Your decision should avoid unnecessary loss of BMV land.

### 6.1 Protect soil

You should make sure development proposals include plans to:

- [manage soils in a sustainable way during construction](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-for-the-sustainable-use-of-soils-on-construction-sites) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-for-the-sustainable-use-of-soils-on-construction-sites>)



- avoid peat extraction
- protect soils from contamination
- [reclaim land after mineral working or landfilling](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reclaim-minerals-extraction-and-landfill-sites-to-agriculture)  
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reclaim-minerals-extraction-and-landfill-sites-to-agriculture>)

## 6.2 Carry out new surveys

If there's not enough information from previous data, you may need to have a new field survey to plan for development or to inform a planning decision. You should use soil scientists or experienced soil specialists to carry out new surveys. They should be:

- members of the British Society of Soil Science, the British Institute of Agricultural Consultants or similar professional body
- knowledgeable about the [ALC 1988 guidelines](http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6257050620264448)  
(<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6257050620264448>)
- experienced in soil description and ALC assessments

## 6.3 Survey requirements

For a detailed ALC assessment, a soil specialist should normally make boreholes:

- every hectare on a regular grid on agricultural land in the proposed development area
- up to 1.2m deep using a hand-held auger

They should:

- dig small inspection pits by hand to a minimum depth of 1m to add supporting evidence to the borehole data
- dig pits where there's a change in main soil type and ALC grade to provide a good depiction of the site
- combine the survey results with local climate and site data to plot on an Ordnance Survey (OS) base map
- use a base map at an appropriate scale for detailed work, such as 1:10,000 scale

## 7. Developers: check if your proposal affects agricultural land

Use the [post 1988 ALC Magic map](http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx?chosenLayers=dudleystampIndex,backdropDIndex,backdropIndex,europaIndex,vmlBWIndex,25kBWIndex,50kBWIndex,250kBWIndex,miniscaleBWIndex,baseIndex&box=449447:459357:467834:470294&useDefaultbackgroundMapping=false) (<http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx?chosenLayers=dudleystampIndex,backdropDIndex,backdropIndex,europaIndex,vmlBWIndex,25kBWIndex,50kBWIndex,250kBWIndex,miniscaleBWIndex,baseIndex&box=449447:459357:467834:470294&useDefaultbackgroundMapping=false>) and detailed [site survey reports](http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/6249382855835648) (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/6249382855835648>) to help you assess whether a development proposal is likely to affect BMV agricultural land. If no suitable data exists, you may need to carry out a [detailed survey](#) to support your planning application.

### 7.1 Free and chargeable advice

Natural England offers advice for proposals. Some initial advice is free. More [detailed advice is chargeable](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/developers-get-environmental-advice-on-your-planning-proposals#when-you-can-pay-for-agency-advice) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/developers-get-environmental-advice-on-your-planning-proposals#when-you-can-pay-for-agency-advice>), for example if your proposal is 20ha or more and requires more detailed advice.

Email: [consultations@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:consultations@naturalengland.org.uk)

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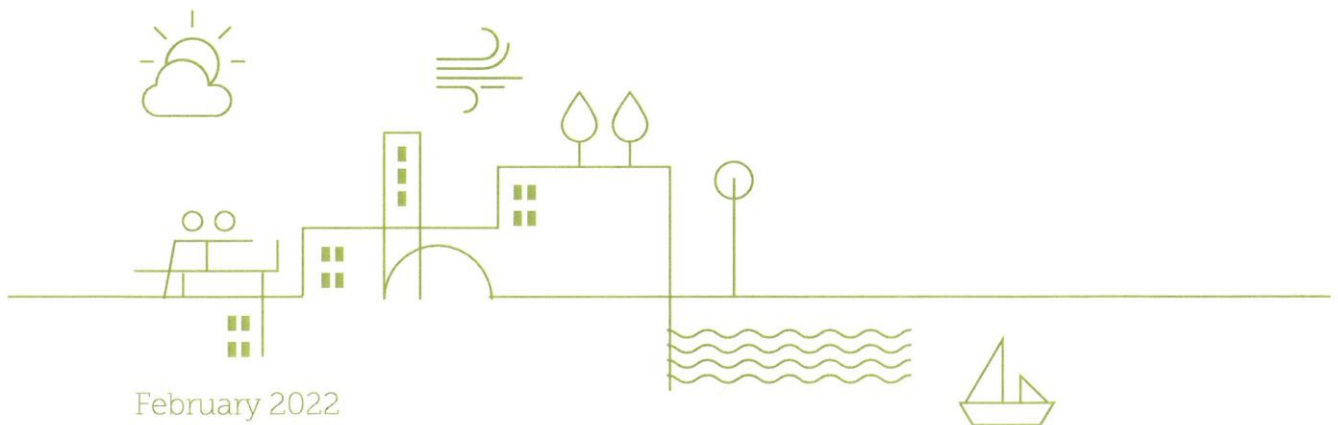
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**APPENDIX KCC7**  
**Extracts from the IEMA Guide**

Institute of Environmental Management  
& Assessment (IEMA) Guide:

# A New Perspective on Land and Soil in Environmental Impact Assessment

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February 2022

# 9 Assessing Impacts on Land and Soil

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## 9.1 Considering the Sensitivity of Receptor and Magnitude of Effect

Existing sources of guidance do not provide a complete evaluation methodology for the assessment of impacts on land and soil. In addition to the current methodologies focussed on assessing the significance of developments on the biomass soil function, this guidance extends the assessment to consider the effects of development on all soil functions. Where appropriate, the proposed methodology incorporates current evaluation methodologies.

According to the DMRB guidance (see Box 3) the relevant questions are whether:

- the project is likely to affect the function or quality of soil as a resource; and
- the project is likely to affect agricultural land classified as BMV or prime quality land;

The second question is already largely covered by the DMRB and ICE guidance, but the first question can be more fully addressed by supplementing the existing guidance within a wider soil function-based methodology. Tables 3.11 and 3.12 in DMRB LA109 can be supplemented and used with Tables 3.7 and 3.8.1 in LA104, and ICE Table 7.2 to support such a methodology. The process is set out in Tables 2 to 6.

The sensitivity of soil functions to development impacts following mitigation is determined with reference to effects of proposed land uses, as determined by changes in soil properties including:

### Physical Properties

Soil depth, texture, structure, porosity, drainage, infiltration, water retention, storage capacity, stone content and hydraulic conductivity etc

### Chemical Properties

Soil organic matter, stored carbon, nutrient, and pH levels

### Biological Properties

Soil biota diversity and population.

The gradation of sensitivities from very high to negligible is not necessarily one of discrete categories for all of the soil functions, and it is not possible to anticipate all possible permutations of soil resources and soil functions in Table 2. Therefore, this process involves an element of professional judgement.

Within the UK nations, different circumstances and priorities may be recognised and have a bearing on the criteria set out in Table 2. For example, in Wales, the Predictive ALC maps indicate a small proportion of BMV agricultural land nationwide, and because of this the policy guidance requires Grades 1, 2 and Subgrade 3a to be considered a receptor of 'Very High Sensitivity'.



Table 2: Guidance on Proposed Receptor Sensitivity and Typical Soil Resource/Functions Descriptions (Developed from Table 3.11 in DMRB LA109)

Receptor Sensitivity (in-situ soils)	Soil Resource and Soil Functions
Very High	<p><b>Biomass production:</b> ALC Grades 1 &amp; 2 or LCA Classes 1 &amp; 2 (for Wales all BMV (Grade 1, 2 and 3a) is considered Very High*)</p> <p><b>Ecological habitat, soil biodiversity and platform for landscape:</b> Soils supporting protected features within a European site (e.g., SAC, SPA, Ramsar); Peat soils; Soils supporting a National Park, or Ancient Woodland</p> <p><b>Soil carbon:</b> Peat soils Soils with potential for ecological/landscape restoration</p> <p><b>Soil hydrology:</b> Very important catchment pathway** for water flows and flood risk management</p> <p><b>Archaeology, Cultural heritage, Community benefits and Geodiversity:</b> SAMs and adjacent areas; World Heritage and European designated sites; Soils with known archaeological interest; Soils supporting community/recreational/educational access to land covered by National Park designation</p> <p><b>Source of materials:</b> Important surface mineral reserves that would be sterilised (i.e., without future access)</p>
High	<p><b>Biomass production:</b> ALC Grade 3a (for Wales all BMV is considered as Very high*), or LCA Grade 3.1</p> <p><b>Ecological habitat, soil biodiversity and platform for landscape:</b> Soils supporting protected features within a UK designated site (e.g., UNESCO Geoparks, SSSI or AONB, Special Landscape Area, and Geological Conservation Review sites); Native Forest and woodland soils; Unaltered soils supporting semi-natural vegetation (including UKBAP Priority habitats or Section 6 habitats in Wales)</p> <p><b>Soil carbon:</b> Organo-mineral soils (e.g., peaty soils)</p> <p><b>Soil hydrology:</b> Important catchment pathway** for water flows and flood risk management</p> <p><b>Archaeology, Cultural heritage, Community benefits and Geodiversity:</b> Soils with probable but as yet unproven (prior to being revealed by construction) archaeological interest; Historic parks and gardens; RIGS; Soils supporting community/recreational/educational access to RIGS and AONBs</p> <p><b>Source of materials:</b> Surface mineral reserves that would be sterilised (i.e. without future access)</p>
Medium	<p><b>Biomass production:</b> ALC Grade 3b or LCA Grade 3.2</p> <p><b>Ecological habitat, soil biodiversity and platform for landscape:</b> Soils supporting protected or valued features within non-statutory designated sites (e.g. Local Nature Reserves (LNR), Local Geological Sites (LGSs), Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs), Special Landscape Areas; Non-Native Forest and woodland soils</p> <p><b>Soil carbon:</b> Mineral soils</p> <p><b>Soil hydrology:</b> Important minor catchment pathway** for water flows and flood risk management</p> <p><b>Archaeology, Cultural heritage, Community benefits and Geodiversity:</b> Soils with possible but as yet unproven (prior to being revealed by construction) archaeological interest; Soils supporting community/recreational/educational access to land</p> <p><b>Source of materials:</b> surface mineral reserves that would remain accessible for extraction</p>

<b>Low</b>	<p><b>Biomass production:</b> ALC Grades 4 &amp; 5 or LCA Grades 4.1 to 7 or Urban soils</p> <p><b>Ecological habitat, soil biodiversity and platform for landscape:</b> Soils supporting valued features within non-designated notable or priority habitats/landscapes. Agricultural soils</p> <p><b>Soil carbon:</b> Mineral soils</p> <p><b>Soil hydrology:</b> Pathway** for local water flows and flood risk management</p> <p><b>Archaeology, Cultural heritage, Community benefits and Geodiversity:</b> Soils supporting no notable cultural heritage, geodiversity nor community benefits; Soils supporting limited community/recreational/educational access to land</p> <p><b>Source of materials:</b> Surface mineral reserves that would remain accessible for extraction</p>
<b>Negligible</b>	As for low sensitivity, but with only indirect, tenuous, and unproven links between sources of impact and soil functions
<p>*All BMV in Wales is considered 'Very High' sensitivity due to the PPW wording '...significant weight to protect [BMV] from development'. Only if a development can demonstrate 'overriding need' would BMV grades need to be considered for the sequential test.</p> <p>**As defined by the site and catchment characteristics according to the professional judgement of a catchment hydrologist</p>	

Guidance on identifying the magnitude of impacts following mitigation is set out in Table 3.

**Table 3: Guidance on Identifying Magnitude of Impact on Soil Resource and Soil Function (Developed from Table 3.12 in DMRB LA109)**

Magnitude of Impact (Change)	Description of Impacts Restricting Proposed Land Use
soil functions or soil volumes	<p>Permanent, irreversible loss of one or more soil functions or soil volumes (including permanent sealing or land quality downgrading), over an area of more than 20ha or loss of soil-related features set out in Table 2 above, as advised by other topic specialists in EIA team (including effects from 'temporary developments'*)</p> <p>or</p> <p>Potential for permanent improvement in one or more soil functions or soil volumes due to remediation or restoration over an area of more than 20ha, or gain in soil-related features set out in Table 2 above, as advised by other topic specialists in EIA team (including effects from 'temporary developments'*)</p>
<b>Moderate</b>	<p>Permanent, irreversible loss of one or more soil functions or soil volumes, over an area of between 5 and 20ha or loss of soil-related features set out in Table 2 above, as advised by other topic specialists in EIA team (including effects from 'Temporary Developments'*)</p> <p>or</p> <p>Potential for improvement in one or more soil functions or soil volumes due to remediation or restoration over an area of between 5 and 20ha, or gain in soil-related features set out in Table 2 above, as advised by other topic specialists in EIA team</p>
<b>Minor</b>	<p>Permanent, irreversible loss over less than 5ha or a temporary, reversible loss of one or more soil functions or soil volumes), or temporary, reversible loss of soil-related features set out in Table 2 above, as advised by other topic specialists in EIA team</p> <p>or</p> <p>Potential for permanent improvement in one or more soil functions or soil volumes due to remediation or restoration over an area of less than 5ha or a temporary improvement in one or more soil functions due to remediation or restoration or off-site improvement, or temporary gain in soil-related features set out in Table 2 above, as advised by other topic specialists in EIA team</p>



Magnitude of Impact (Change)	Description of Impacts Restricting Proposed Land Use
<b>Negligible</b>	No discernible loss or reduction or improvement of soil functions or soil volumes that restrict current or proposed land use

\* Temporary developments can result in a permanent impact if resulting disturbance or land use change causes permanent damage to soils

Table 3 has been supplemented by adapting the ICE EIA Handbook, paragraph 7.11.4, on magnitude which states that the permanent loss, or reduction in quality, of more than 20ha of agricultural land due to development is of very high magnitude, 5 to 20ha is of high magnitude, and low magnitude is for the permanent loss of less than 5ha of agricultural land. The derivation of these definitions is related to previous guidance in England and Wales that referred to 20ha as a single magnitude threshold. Currently in Wales 20ha or more is considered a nationally significant loss, with less than 20ha usually considered a local matter for the LPA to consider on a case-by-case basis.

Having determined the sensitivity of land and soil to development impacts in the wider environmental context in Table 2, it is also recognised that some soils are more sensitive to damage when handled during construction than others. This impact occurs during the implementation of mitigation and Table 4 provides a summary of broad soil types and their sensitivity to structural damage, as set out in the ICE guidance.

**Table 4: Sensitivity of Soil Receptors (Table 7.2 Reproduced from the ICE Environmental Impact Assessment Handbook – A Practical Guide for Planners, Developers and Communities (3rd Edition)).**

Sensitivity of Topsoil and Subsoil	Soil Texture, Field Capacity Days and Wetness Class
High sensitivity (low resilience to structural damage)	Soils with high clay and silt fractions (clays, silty clays, sandy clays, heavy silty clay loams and heavy clay loams) and organo-mineral and peaty soils where the Field Capacity Days (FCD) are 150 or greater. Medium-textured soils (silt loams, medium silty clay loams, medium clay loams and sandy clay loams) where the FCDs are 225 or greater. All soils in wetness class (WCV or WCVI).
Medium sensitivity (medium resilience to structural damage)	Clays, silty clays, sandy clays, heavy silty clay loams, heavy clay loams, silty loams and organo-mineral and peaty soils where the FCDs are fewer than 150. Medium-textured soils (silt loams, medium silty clay loams, medium clay loams and sandy clay loams) where FCDs are fewer than 225. Sands, loamy sands, sandy loams and sandy silt loams where the FCDs are 225 or greater or are in wetness classes WCIII and WCIV.
Low sensitivity (high resilience to structural damage)	Soils with a high sand fraction (sands, loamy sands, sandy loams and sandy silt loams) where the FCDs are fewer than 225 and are in wetness classes WCI to WCII.

## 9.2 Understanding and Communicating Significance

Impact significance for loss of soil functions/volumes and soil-related features following mitigation can be assisted using a significance matrix such as the one provided in Table 5. However, many situations may not neatly fall within the definitions provided in Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5, and in all cases these tables should not replace professional judgement by experienced professionals based on the specifics and context of the EIA being undertaken.

**Table 5: Significance Matrix (Adapted from Table 3.8.1 in LA104 and Figure 3.2 in ICE EIA Handbook)**

		Nature of impact (magnitude/probability/reversibility)				
		No Change	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major
<b>Nature of Receptor (sensitivity/ value/ importance)</b>	<b>Very high</b>	Neutral	Slight	Moderate or large	Large or very large	Very large
	<b>High</b>	Neutral	Slight	Slight or moderate	Moderate or large	Large or very large
	<b>Medium</b>	Neutral	Neutral or slight	Slight	Moderate	Moderate or large
	<b>Low</b>	Neutral	Neutral or slight	Neutral or slight	Slight	Slight or moderate
	<b>Negligible</b>	Neutral	Slight	Neutral or slight	Neutral or slight	Slight

Furthermore, when using the above matrices within an ES, the terminology of the tables may need to be adapted to align with a wider EIA reporting terminology framework used within a specific ES. Noting that different EIAs may apply different terminologies regarding the description of effects, for example adverse/beneficial or negative/positive. Likewise, EIAs may refer to impact or effects<sup>95</sup> within ranges using different descriptive scales for example:

- no change/neutral/none
- insignificant/negligible/slight
- low/minor
- moderate/medium
- large/very large/high/major.

<sup>95</sup> Some EIAs define effects and impacts as separate terms, others use one term or the other exclusively or use them interchangeably. Each EIA should seek to define their use and strive for consistency in language. For the purpose of this guide, effects and impacts are used interchangeably.

One of the key focuses of EIA is on the identification and mitigation of 'significant' effects. Some EIAs define significant effects/impacts as those effects identified as moderate/medium and above. However, all effects, even those identified as minor and below should still be mitigated where possible and may also contribute to cumulative effects and, through interactions with other factors, may result in additional significant effects or contribute to the magnitude of other identified effects.

Significance can be described as a judgement based on the<sup>96</sup>:

- context in which the impact is likely to occur (inc. the nature of the sensitivity/value/importance of the receptor)

- intensity or severity of the impact (inc. taking account of magnitude/probability/reversibility of the impact)
- reference to published standards (inc. thresholds), case law and expert judgement.

Table 6 (derived from Table 3.7 from LA104) sets out further the theoretical relationship between EIA 'significance' and 'material considerations' in planning terms. A material consideration is a matter that should be taken into account in deciding a planning application or on an appeal against a planning decision. However, it is important not to confuse significance or materiality with 'acceptability'. Acceptability is a separate concept to significance and can include public opinion, political decisions and decisions made 'on balance' of a wide range of planning policy considerations.

**Table 6: Significance Categories and Typical Description (Table 3.7 in LA104)**

Significance Category	Typical Description
Very Large	Effects at this level are material in the decision-making process
Large	Effects at this level are likely to be material in the decision-making process
Moderate	Effects at this level can be considered to be material in the decision-making process
Slight	Effects at this level are not material in the decision-making process
Neutral	No effects or those that are beneath levels of perception, within normal bounds of variation or within the margin of forecasting error

Note 1 Where relevant, individual environmental factors can set out variations in significance description requirements.

Note 2 The approach to assigning significance to effect relies on reasoned argument, the professional judgement of competent experts and using effective consultation to ensure the advice and views of relevant stakeholders are taken into account.

96 Adapted from the ICE (2020) EIA Handbook, page 46, paragraph 3.4.2.



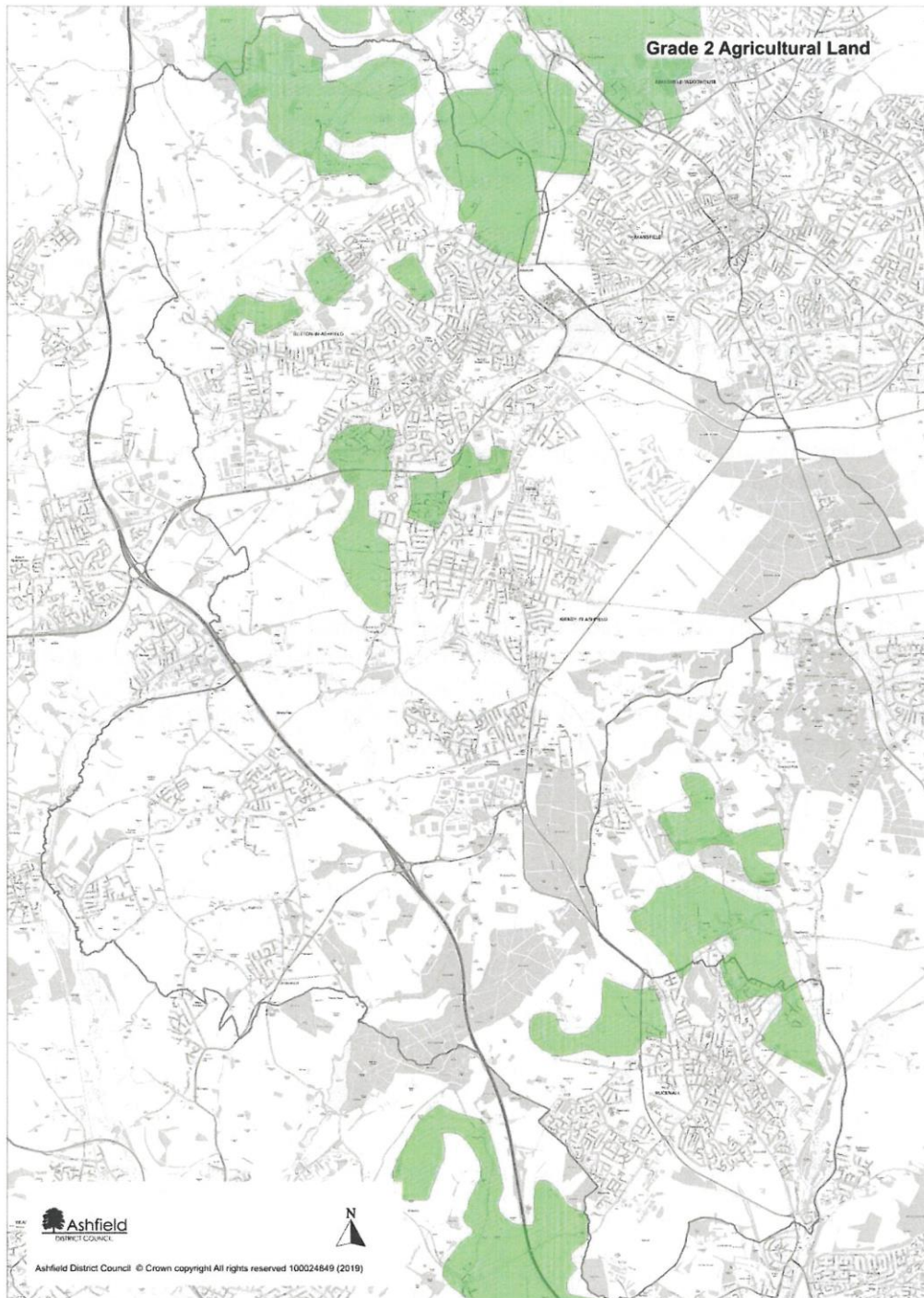
**Appendix KCC8**  
**Extracts from Analysis of Constraints,**  
**August 2023**

## 7.0 Agricultural Land

- 7.1 The NPPF recognises the importance of agricultural land. Footnote 58 of the NPPF states that *'Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality.'* The best and most versatile agricultural land is identified as land in grades 1, 2, and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification<sup>3</sup>.
- 7.2 The Regional classification maps do not currently distinguish between grade 3a and 3b in Ashfield. As such, for the purposes of the constraints study, only land identified as Grades 1 and 2 are considered. Using the provisional 1980's Agricultural Land Classification Map, it has been possible to identify varying qualities of agricultural land within the district. There is no Grade 1 land in Ashfield. Areas designated as Grade 2 is shown on figure 6.
- 7.3 The maps indicate a large concentration of highest quality agricultural land north of the urban edge of Hucknall, in farmland to the west of Kirkby in Ashfield and in sections of open countryside north of Skegby, with smaller pockets of higher quality land located elsewhere in the district.
- 7.4 The use of agricultural land to meet identified development needs will need to be balanced against agricultural issues, as well as impacts upon landscapes and the established character of an area. Given the relatively limited quantity of best and most versatile land, there is likely to be a greater importance of limiting development of these areas, in accordance with the Framework.

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<sup>3</sup> National Planning Policy Framework, Annex 2: Glossary, page 65



**Figure 6: Agricultural Land Grade Two Approximate Location**

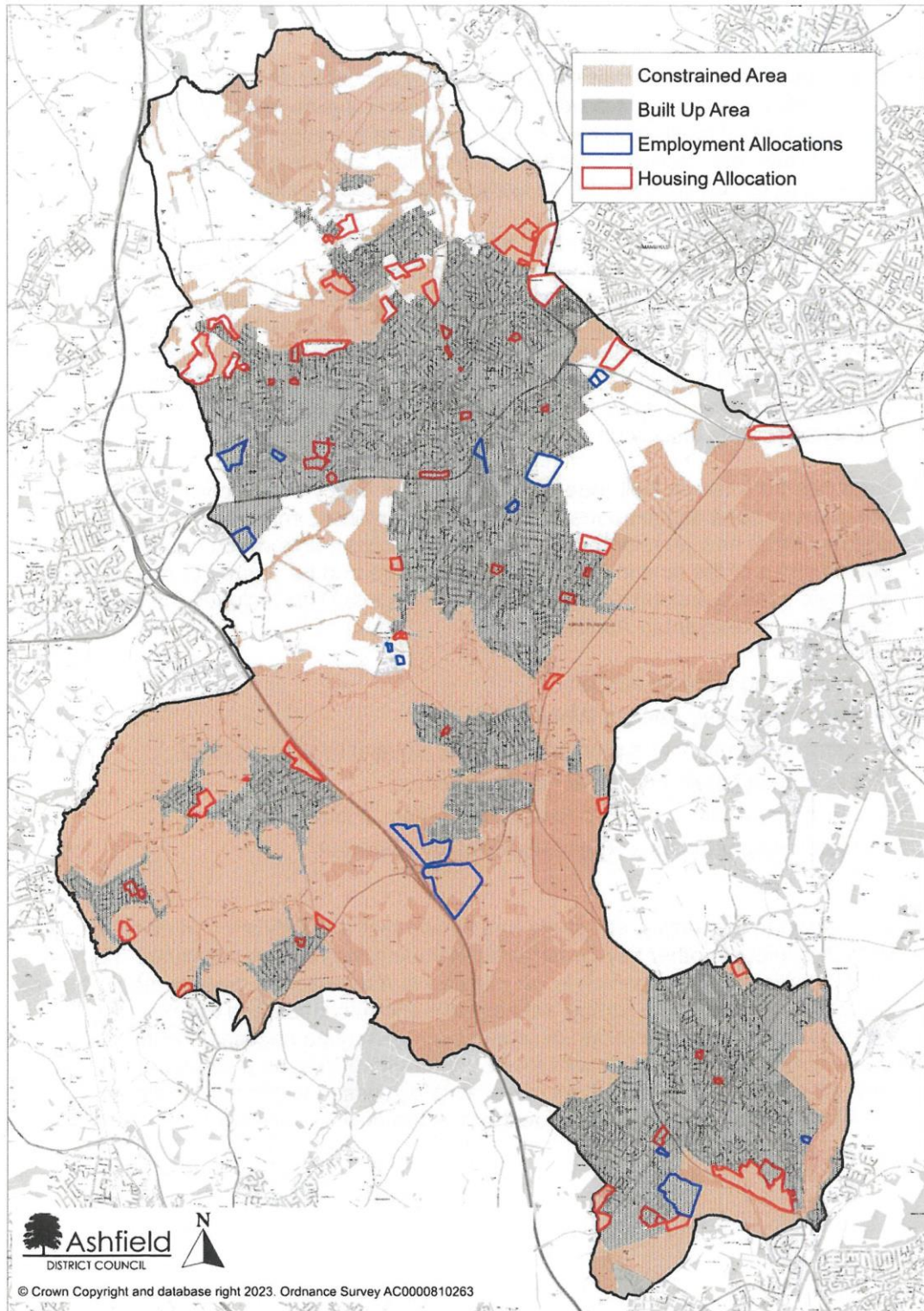
Source: Natural England – Agricultural Land Classifications Provisional (England)

N.B. The map does not subdivide Grade 3 land into sub classifications. It is stressed by Natural England that these maps are not sufficiently accurate for use in assessment of individual fields or sites.

## 8.0 Conclusion

- 8.1 This study has identified that Ashfield District possesses several key constraints which limit the quantum of development that can be reasonably achieved across the District. Many of these constraints are located on the edge of, or outside of the Main Urban Areas and Named Settlements of Ashfield and are comprised of large areas of designated Green Belt, as well as undesignated countryside.
- 8.2 As previously noted, approximately 41% of the total District area is designated as Green Belt, which due to national policy requirements, should only be altered in exceptional circumstances. The circumstances justifying the release of Green Belt land are discussed in Background Paper 1: Spatial Approach and Site Selection. Areas of countryside not designated as Green Belt and situated outside of the main urban areas and named settlements account for approximately 26% of the total District area, however not all of this area is likely to be suitable for development, due to the constraints discussed elsewhere in this study.
- 8.3 Separate from Green Belt (due to its nature as a policy-based constraint), there are other land-based designations which have a significant impact on the spatial distribution of new development. This includes constraints which heavily restrict the possible use of the land in question and therefore can be argued to rule out larger strategic-scale development as a matter of principle. This includes the following designations relevant to Ashfield:
- Land designated as a SSSI
  - Land containing Ancient Woodlands
  - Land designated as a possible potential Special Protection Area
  - Land designated as a Local Nature Reserve
  - Land that is within the Functional Flood Plain (Flood Zone 3b)
  - Land designated as a Registered Park and Garden
- 8.4 In addition to the above, this study has shown that a significant portion of the District area is subject to other key constraints, including the need to safeguard the best quality agricultural land which is very limited in Ashfield. Any development of these areas is likely to require further assessment and mitigation and may restrict the quantity that can be delivered. In other cases, it may be necessary to redirect development to other areas with fewer constraints. With the exception of landscape areas discussed in section 6, all constraints discussed within this study are illustrated on figure 7, alongside the site allocations in the draft Local Plan.





**Figure 7: Combined constraints, site allocations and built up areas**





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