**Stanmore Garden Village, Bridgnorth**
**Agricultural Land Classification Technical Note**
**edp5653_r011**

1.1. A desk study has been undertaken and the land has been walked over but intrusive sampling has not been undertaken.

1.2. The Apley land included in the 'Village' proposal forms part of the Estate's 'in-hand' holding, and its loss to development would not be prejudicial to the agricultural viability of the remaining holding. Some land lying to the north and east of Stanmore Business Park, proposed to be designated for employment use, is part of the former RAF station and has not been in agricultural use since about 1939.

1.3. Guidance for assessing the quality of agricultural land in England and Wales is set out in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land (1988[1]) and summarised in Natural England's Technical Information Note 049[2].

1.4. Agricultural land in England and Wales is graded between 1 and 5, depending on the extent to which physical or chemical characteristics impose long-term limitations on agricultural use. The principal physical factors influencing grading are climate, site and soil, which together with interactions between them, form the basis for classifying land into one of the five grades.

1.5. Grade 1 land is excellent quality agricultural land with very minor or no limitations to agricultural use, and Grade 5 is very poor-quality land, with severe limitations due to adverse soil, relief, climate or a combination of these. Grade 3 land is subdivided into Subgrade 3a (good quality land) and Subgrade 3b (moderate quality land). Land, which is classified as Grades 1, 2 and 3a in the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) system is defined as best and most versatile agricultural land.

1.6. Paragraph 170 of the National Planning Policy Framework[3] states that Local Planning Authorities should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, Local Planning Authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality.

[1] MAFF (1988). Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales. Revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land. MAFF Publications.
[2] Natural England (2012). Technical Information Note 049 - Agricultural Land Classification: protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land, Second Edition 19th December 2012.
[3] Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019) National Planning Policy Framework.

1.7. As explained in Natural England's Technical Information Note 049, the whole of England and Wales was mapped from reconnaissance field surveys in the late 1960s and early 1970s, to provide general strategic guidance on agricultural land quality for planners. This Provisional series of maps was published on an Ordnance Survey base at a scale of one inch to one mile (1:63,360). The Provisional ALC map shows the site as Grade 2 land in common with other land to the east of Bridgnorth. However, Technical Information Note 049 explains that:

"*These maps are not sufficiently accurate for use in assessment of individual fields or development sites, and should not be used other than as general guidance. They show only five grades: their preparation preceded the subdivision of Grade 3 and the refinement of criteria, which occurred after 1976. A 1:250 000 scale map series based on the same information is available. These are more appropriate for the strategic use originally intended'.*

1.8. A review of the A1:250 000 scale maps identifies the site as Grade 2, but again cautions:

"*This map forms part of a series at 1:250 000 scale derived from the Provisional 1" to one mile ALC maps and is intended for strategic uses. These maps are not sufficiently accurate for use in assessment of individual fields or sites and any enlargement could be misleading. The maps show Grades 1-5, but Grade 3 is not subdivided."*

1.9. Apley's Land Agent observes that the land, while reasonably fertile, is formed on sandstone and, being sandy, dries out very quickly in the absence of rain. Typically, this would infer a classification of 3(a), or 3(b) is likely to be established if a fuller sampling survey is undertaken.

1.10. It is therefore proposed that a definitive ALC grading should be obtained by undertaking a detailed survey according to the published guidelines, at an observation density of one boring per hectare. The intention will be to survey the site in detail in accordance with the established guidelines to support a planning application.