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**Crest Nicholson Operations Limited**

**Agricultural Land Quality**

at

**Land West of Gatesmead**

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# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd (RAC) is instructed by Crest Nicholson Operations Limited to review and report on the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) of land west of Gatesmead by means of a desk appraisal of soil and site characteristics.
- 1.2 Guidance for assessing the quality of agricultural land in England and Wales is set out in the Welsh Government and Defra guidelines for grading the quality of agricultural land<sup>1</sup>, and summarised in Natural England's Technical Information Note (TIN) 049<sup>2</sup>.
- 1.3 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 conditions and soil which, together with interactions between them, form the basis for classifying land into one of the five grades.
- 1.4 Grade 1 is excellent quality agricultural land with very minor or no limitations to agricultural use. Grade 2 is very good quality agricultural land, with minor limitations which affect crop yield, cultivations or harvesting. Grade 3 land has moderate limitations which affect the choice of crops, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield, and is subdivided into Subgrade 3a (good quality land) and Subgrade 3b (moderate quality land). Grade 4 is poor quality agricultural land with severe limitations which significantly restrict the range of crops and/or level of yields. Grade 5 is very poor quality land, with very severe limitations which restrict use to permanent pasture or rough grazing.
- 1.5 Land which is classified as Grades 1, 2 and 3a in the ALC system is defined in Annex 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF<sup>3</sup>) as best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land.
- 1.6 In a national context, paragraph 187 of the NPPF indicates that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
- protecting and enhancing soils; and

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<sup>1</sup>**Welsh Government and Defra (2025).** *Joint Publication 069 - Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales; Guidelines for grading the quality of agricultural land.*

<sup>2</sup> **Natural England (2012).** *Technical Information Note 049 - Agricultural Land Classification: protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land*, Second Edition.

<sup>3</sup> **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2024).** *National Planning Policy Framework.*

- recognising, amongst other matters, the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services, including the economic and other benefits of the BMV agricultural land.

1.7 Paragraph 188 goes on to state that plans should allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in the NPPF, and footnote 65 explains 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.

## **2 Site and climatic conditions**

### **General features, land form and drainage**

- 2.1 The site extends to approximately 4.8 hectares (ha) located to the north of Haywards Heath. Most of the site is under permanent grass. Non-agricultural land comprises a section of Gatesmead extending to the east. Woodland is present on the edges and rows of trees dissect the site into three parcels. A small stream flows to the north of the site in a west to east direction. To the north of the site is permanent grassland and woodland. The south of the site is bordered by Old Wickham Lane and the west by the Brighton Main Line railway. Residential properties and two fields are present to the east.
- 2.2 The topography is gently sloping from the south-west to north, from around 65 m above Ordnance Datum (AOD) to 50 m AOD.
- 2.3 Drainage of the site is through the soil profile and via runoff into the stream. A drain is present in the field to the east, which may also collect runoff via the gentle slope. There is no mapped flood risk at the site.

### **Agro-climatic conditions**

- 2.4 Agro-climatic data for the site have been interpolated from the Meteorological Office's standard 5 km grid point data set, and are given in Table 1. The climate at the site is wet and moderately warm. Moisture deficits are moderate to moderately large. The number of Field Capacity Days is larger than is typical for lowland England (150) and is slightly unfavourable for agricultural land working. There is however no climatic limitation to the agricultural land quality at the site.

**Table 1:** Local agro-climatic conditions

| Parameter                               | TQ331257 | TQ332255 |
|-----------------------------------------|----------|----------|
| Altitude (m)                            | 53       | 61       |
| Average Annual Rainfall (mm)            | 828      | 831      |
| Accumulated Temperatures >0°C (day°)    | 1469     | 1460     |
| Field Capacity Days (days)              | 175      | 176      |
| Average Moisture Deficit, wheat (mm)    | 105      | 104      |
| Average Moisture Deficit, potatoes (mm) | 97       | 96       |

### Soil parent material and soil type

- 2.5 The bedrock geology mapped by the British Geological Survey<sup>4</sup> across the south of the site is the Upper Tunbridge Wells Sand, which is interbedded sandstone and siltstone. The north of the site is mapped as the Lower Tunbridge Wells Sand, comprising sandstone, siltstone and mudstone. A thin band of head deposits is mapped in the north of the site.
- 2.6 The Soil Survey of England and Wales soil association mapping<sup>5</sup> (1:250,000 scale) shows the Curtisden association to be present across the site. The main Curtisden soils are characterised by silty soils over siltstone, with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging. Some soils are similar and well-drained and some with coarse loamy soils over sandstone are part of the association and these are also well drained. The main soils have slowly permeable and compact subsoils, which cause seasonal waterlogging in undrained land and are Wetness Class (WC) III. Where under-drained, the main soils are improved to WC II. Droughtiness is not considered significant risk where there is ample rain, but where the soils are shallow above siltstone, there can be an increased risk<sup>6</sup>.

### Agricultural land quality

- 2.7 The site was surveyed by ADAS on behalf of MAFF in 1993<sup>7</sup> as part of a detailed ALC survey carried out to inform the Mid Sussex Local Plan. The data logs of the five observation points that fall within the site boundary are available in Appendix 1, with the location of the observation points shown on Figure 1.
- 2.8 The soil at the site can broadly be described as one soil type, bar an outlier in the centre of the site (survey point 2), which has a sandy loam subsoil over sand. The topsoil is mostly brown

<sup>4</sup> **British Geological Survey (2026).** *Geology Viewer*, <https://www.bgs.ac.uk/map-viewers/bgs-geology-viewer/>

<sup>5</sup> **Soil Survey of England and Wales (1984).** *Soils of South East England (1:250,000), Sheet 6.*

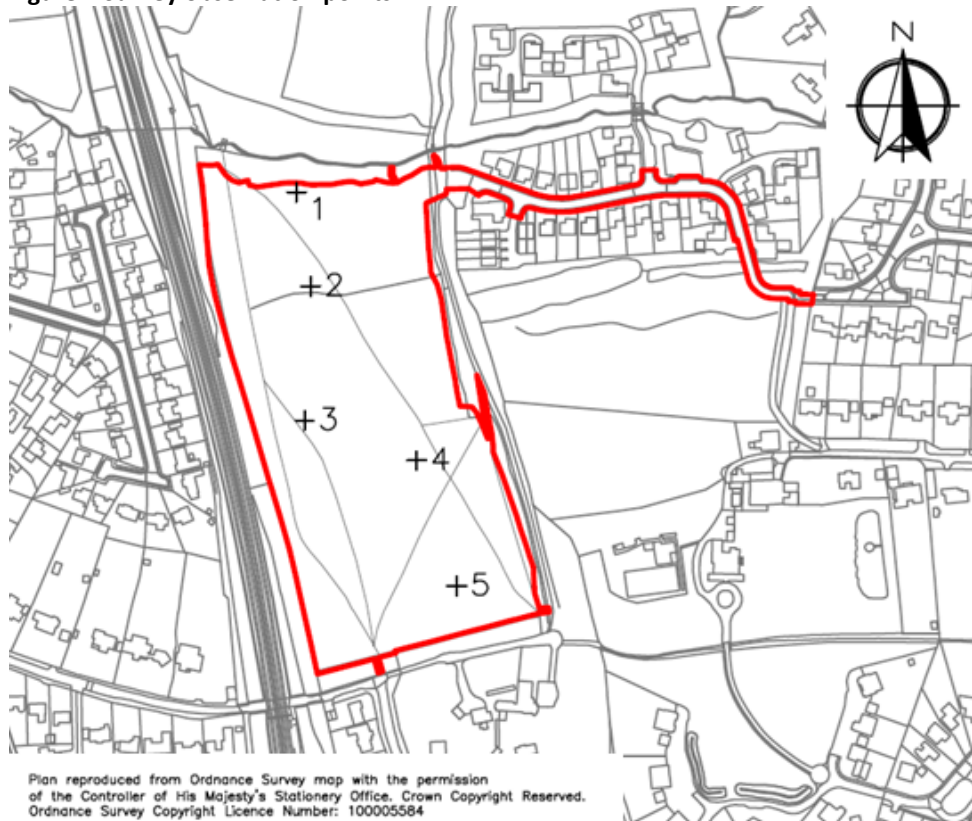
<sup>6</sup> **Jarvis et al (1984).** *Soils and Their Use in South East England.* Soil Survey of England and Wales Bulletin 15, Harpenden.

<sup>7</sup> **ADAS (1993).** *Agricultural Land Classification Report; Haywards Heath, South West. LP Site 3.* Ref. ALCR00393

(10YR5/3 in the Munsell soil colour charts<sup>8</sup>) medium clay loam and has an average depth of 30 cm.

- 2.9 Subsoils are light grey (2.5Y7/2) or yellowish brown (10YR5/4) medium clay loam, heavy clay loam or clay, with gleying and common or many mottles observed from shallow depths.
- 2.10 All profiles are mostly stoneless, except the northern profile which is developed on head deposits, and are all non-calcareous.

**Figure 1 Survey observation points**



- 2.11 The site is classified as mostly Subgrade 3a, with an area of Grade 2 and a small area of Subgrade 3b, as shown in Figure 2.

<sup>8</sup> **Munsell Color (2009).** *Munsell Soil Color Book*. Grand Rapids, MI, USA

**Figure 2: Agricultural Land Classification**



2.12 The Grade 2 land has slightly lighter textured profiles than most of the sites. Any evidence of wetness observed during the survey suggested these soils do not experience a significant degree of waterlogging, but are subject to a slight droughtiness limitation due to high stone content in the subsoil.

2.13 Most of the land classified as Subgrade 3a has medium clay loam topsoils overlying heavy clay loam and clay subsoils. Gleying was observed at shallow depths in these profiles. However, the subsoil structure was considered moderate and therefore the profiles were assigned WC II with no slowly permeable layer. With 175 FCD, there is a moderate limitation from wetness.

2.14 The Subgrade 3b land has similar profiles to those of Subgrade 3a, but with a heavier textured topsoil<sup>7</sup>.

2.15 The areas of each ALC grade are given in Table 2.

**Table 2: ALC areas**

| Grade       | Description        | Area (ha) | %    |
|-------------|--------------------|-----------|------|
| Grade 2     | Very good quality  | 1.3       | 28.5 |
| Subgrade 3a | Good quality       | 3.2       | 70.5 |
| Subgrade 3b | Moderate quality   | <0.1      | 1.0  |
|             | Total agricultural | 4.5       | 100  |
|             | Non-agricultural   | 0.3       | -    |

### **3 Summary**

- 3.1 The site west of Gatesmead extends to 4.8 ha, mainly of permanent grassland and a short section of Gatesmead extending to the east. The land was surveyed on behalf of MAFF in 1993 and classified as mostly Subgrade 3a, with some Grade 2 and some Subgrade 3b. The soil characteristics are non-calcareous, mostly stoneless profiles of medium clay loams over heavy clay loam or clay subsoils.
- 3.2 The main limitation to the agricultural land quality at the site is soil wetness.

## Appendix 1: Site and Soil ALC data

| Site ID | Grid reference | Texture | Colour       | Top depth (cm) | Bottom depth (cm) | CaCO3 | Stone >2cm | Total stones | Mottle colour | Mottle abundance | Gleyed | SPL | Subsoil structure | WC | Wetness Grade | MB wheat | MB potatoes | Drought | ALC Grade | Main limitation |
|---------|----------------|---------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|-------|------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|--------|-----|-------------------|----|---------------|----------|-------------|---------|-----------|-----------------|
| 1       | TQ33112 25767  | mCL     | 10YR5/3 5/4  | 0              | 30                | Non   | 0          | 0            | None          | -                | N      | N   | T/S               | I  | 2             | 4        | 5           | *3a     | 2         | Wetness         |
|         |                | mCL     | 10YR5/4 5/6  | 30             | 90                | Non   | 0          | 30 (MSST)    | None          | -                | N      | N   | Mod               |    |               |          |             |         |           |                 |
| 2       | TQ33112 25705  | mCL     | 2.5Y 5/3     | 0              | 30                | Non   | 0          | 0            | None          | -                | N      | N   | T/S               | I  | 2             | 40       | 22          | 1       | 2         | Wetness         |
|         |                | mCL     | 10YR5/4      | 30             | 65                | Non   | 0          | 0            | None          | -                | N      | N   | Mod               |    |               |          |             |         |           |                 |
|         |                | fSL     | 10YR7/2      | 65             | 75                | Non   | 0          | 0            | 7.5YR5/6      | C                | Y      | N   | Mod               |    |               |          |             |         |           |                 |
|         |                | LfS     | 10YR7/2      | 75             | 85                | Non   | 0          | 0            | 7.5YR5/8      | C                | Y      | N   | Mod               |    |               |          |             |         |           |                 |
|         |                | fS      | 10YR7/2      | 85             | 100               | Non   | 0          | 0            | None          | -                | Y      | N   | Mod               |    |               |          |             |         |           |                 |
| 3       | TQ33106 25619  | mCL     | 2.5Y 6/3 6/4 | 0              | 30                | Non   | 0          | 0            | 10YR5/6       | F                | N      | N   | T/S               | II | 3a            | 41       | 21          | 1       | 3a        | Wetness         |
|         |                | hCL     | 2.5Y 7/2     | 30             | 35                | Non   | 0          | 0            | 7.5YR5/8 5/6  | M                | Y      | N   | Mod               |    |               |          |             |         |           |                 |
|         |                | C       | 2.5Y 7/2     | 35             | 40                | Non   | 0          | 0            | 7.5YR5/6 5/8  | M                | Y      | N   | Mod               |    |               |          |             |         |           |                 |
|         |                | hCL     | 2.5Y 7/2     | 40             | 65                | Non   | 0          | 0            | 7.5YR5/8      | M                | Y      | N   | Mod               |    |               |          |             |         |           |                 |
|         |                | mCL     | 2.5Y 6/2 7/2 | 65             | 110               | Non   | 0          | 0            | 7.5YR5/6 5/8  | C                | Y      | N   | Mod               |    |               |          |             |         |           |                 |
| 4       | TQ33191 25590  | mCL     | 10YR5/3      | 0              | 34                | Non   | 0          | 0            | 10YR5/6       | F                | N      | N   | T/S               | II | 3a            | 32       | 22          | 1       | 3a        | Wetness         |
|         |                | hCL     | 2.5Y 6/3 6/4 | 34             | 50                | Non   | 0          | 0            | 7.5YR5/8      | C                | Y      | N   | Mod               |    |               |          |             |         |           |                 |
|         |                | hCL     | 2.5Y 6/3     | 50             | 100               | Non   | 0          | 0            | 7.5YR5/8 5/6  | M                | Y      | N   | Mod               |    |               |          |             |         |           |                 |
| 5       | TQ33212 25509  | mCL     | 10YR5/3      | 0              | 30                | Non   | 0          | 0            | 10YR5/6       | C                | N      | N   | T/S               | II | 3a            | 21       | 21          | 2       | 3a        | Wetness         |
|         |                | hCL     | 10YR5/2      | 30             | 40                | Non   | 0          | 0            | 7.5YR5/6      | C                | N      | N   | Mod               |    |               |          |             |         |           |                 |
|         |                | C       | 2.5Y 7/2     | 40             | 100               | Non   | 0          | 0            | 7.5YR5/8      | M                | N      | N   | Mod               |    |               |          |             |         |           |                 |
|         |                |         |              |                |                   |       |            |              |               |                  |        |     |                   |    |               |          |             |         |           |                 |
|         |                |         |              |                |                   |       |            |              |               |                  |        |     |                   |    |               |          |             |         |           |                 |
|         |                |         |              |                |                   |       |            |              |               |                  |        |     |                   |    |               |          |             |         |           |                 |