

## **Chapter 7            Land use**

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### **Introduction**

- 7.1 Terence O'Rourke has assessed the impact of the development proposals on the land uses at and surrounding the site. Consideration has been given to existing and possible future land uses and the potential effects arising during the construction and post-construction phases.
- 7.2 Land use was initially scoped as an issue of secondary significance for examination in the EIA. However, following the scoping consultation exercise it was raised to an issue of primary significance due to the scale of the change arising from the development proposals. The key issue is the change from a greenfield site to a mixed use built development.
- 7.3 This chapter covers the potential effects arising from a change to land uses at the site. For issues such as a change to local views, disturbance from the construction work, and the impact of traffic during construction and operation, reference should be made to the landscape and visual, traffic and transport, noise and air quality chapters. Changes to the social and community mix of the area and effect on local businesses arising from the proposals have been examined in the social and community effects chapter.

### **Legislation, policy and guidance**

- 7.4 The national planning policy framework for the development proposals is summarised in chapter 1, with further detailed information included in the supporting statement. Within the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016 Revised Deposit Draft Local Plan (proposed modifications (May 2005)), Bicester is highlighted as one of the main locations for new housing with about 3,300 dwellings proposed during the plan period.
- 7.5 The site itself is covered by policy H13 of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011 Revised Deposit Draft (July 2004). Policy H13 makes provision for a mixed use development on-site with a range of land uses including open market and affordable housing, a hotel, a local centre, a primary school, land for a secondary school, 17.29 hectares of formal sports provision, social and recreation facilities for community use, medical facilities, a nursing home, local shopping, a transport interchange and a perimeter road. The proposed land uses for the site have been developed with consideration to national, regional and local policy.
- 7.6 Cherwell Local Plan 2011 Revised Deposit Draft (July 2004) also includes a policy which relates to land resources and development on agricultural land. Policy EN16 states that:

*'Development on greenfield land including the best and most versatile (grades 1, 2 and 3a) agricultural land will not be permitted unless there is an overriding need for the development and opportunities have been assessed to accommodate the development on previously developed sites and land within the built-up limits of settlements.'*

*If development needs to take place on agricultural land, then the use of land in grades 3b, 4 and 5 should be used in preference to higher quality land except where other sustainability considerations suggest otherwise.'*

## Methodology

### *Baseline*

- 7.7 The impact of the proposed development on the baseline land uses has been considered at the following three geographic levels:
- the application site (where the most significant direct changes will take place as a result of the development proposals)
  - the areas immediately adjacent to the application site
  - the rest of Bicester.
- 7.8 The baseline land uses were identified following a visit to the site and surrounding areas in June 2005. This work was supplemented by a review of local plan documentation, Ordnance Survey maps and aerial photographs. The future baseline situation has been determined following consideration of national, regional and local plan policies.
- 7.9 Baseline information on existing and likely future land uses at and surrounding the site has been established using the data sources identified in figure 7.1.

Cherwell District Council, Cherwell Local Plan 2011 Revised Deposit Draft, July 2004.
Oxfordshire County Council, Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016 Revised Deposit Draft Local Plan (proposed modifications (May 2005))
Agricultural land classification, MAGIC website, <a href="http://www.magic.gov.uk">www.magic.gov.uk</a>
Agricultural land classification, Defra, Rural Development Service

Figure 7.1 Data sources and references

- 7.10 The quality of the agricultural land at the site has been assessed. The agricultural land classification system classifies land into five grades with grade 3 subdivided into grade 3a and grade 3b. 'Best and most versatile' land is defined as grade 1, 2 or 3a by Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable development in rural areas. This is the land that is most flexible, productive and efficient in response to inputs and which can best deliver future crops for food and non-food uses such as biomass, fibres and pharmaceuticals.
- 7.11 General agricultural land quality data has been downloaded from the MAGIC website, an interactive map bringing together information on key environmental schemes and designations. These data were obtained from reconnaissance field surveys in the 1960s, to provide general strategic guidance on land quality for planners. General agricultural land data are available for the whole site area.
- 7.12 Since 1976, selected areas have been resurveyed in greater detail and to revised guidelines and criteria. The northern section of the site was resurveyed and this information has been received from the National Land Management Team at the Defra's Rural Development Service. These more detailed data have also been reviewed with respect to this section of the site.

### *Assessment of potential effects*

- 7.13 Prior to assessing the effect of the proposed development on land uses in the area, it is important to identify, and have a clear understanding of, what constitutes a 'potential effect' on land use. A potential effect on a land use depends on factors such as whether the existing land use will be able to continue as a direct or indirect consequence of the proposals, whether there will be a noticeable change to how the land use operates and whether a new land use will be introduced.
- 7.14 Issues for consideration include whether the proposed development would lead to restrictions on the future use of other land in the area and place restrictions on the form of development permissible in terms of height, density, and processes carried out. Where there are recreational areas or tourism attractions, the impact on local amenity would be a key issue, as this could materially affect the land use of these areas.
- 7.15 Potential effects may be positive, negative or neutral, direct or indirect, permanent or temporary, quantitative or qualitative, and may be significant or insignificant departures from the baseline situation.

### *Assessment of significance*

- 7.16 The assessment of the significance of effects has been determined using criteria developed by Terence O'Rourke. These have been based on best practice techniques and expert knowledge gained over a number of years. The final determination of significance has been derived from measures of the magnitude of change (or scale of the effect) and the importance or sensitivity of the resource affected. In the case of land use, the sensitivity of the receptor and magnitude of change are defined as shown in figures 7.2 and 7.3.
- 7.17 There are no known published 'standard' criteria for assessing the significance of effects on land use. Cross-referencing the two sets of criteria (magnitude and sensitivity) against the potential significance matrix provides the generic definitions of potential effects shown in figure 7.4.

### **Baseline conditions**

#### *Land uses at the site*

- 7.18 The key land uses at and surrounding the site are shown on figure 7.5. The site principally consists of agricultural land, primarily a mixture of arable land and pasture, mostly grazed by cattle. The general data obtained from Defra show that the site is predominantly grade 3 quality with a band of grade 4 adjacent to the A41, as shown on figure 7.6.
- 7.19 A detailed agricultural land survey undertaken on the northern area of the site was able to classify the land into grade 3a or grade 3b quality. The results of this report are shown on figure 7.7. The majority of the area surveyed has been classed as grade 3b, with a small pocket of grade 4 in the area surrounding Pingle Brook and a small area of grade 3a adjacent to the A41.
- 7.20 This is a slight contradiction between the two data sets. The area of the site to the west of the A41 was identified as grade 4 in the general survey, but as grade 3b with a small area of

grade 3a following the more detailed survey. The more detailed survey is more accurate than the initial general survey and it is these results that have been examined in this assessment.

- 7.21 These datasets have confirmed that the majority of the site is grade 3b and is therefore not classed as best and most versatile agricultural land.
- 7.22 Whitelands Cottages are included within the boundary of the site. These two residential properties are situated along the access track that extends from Middleton Stoney Road to the Whitelands Farm complex. The farm complex itself is outside the application boundary.
- 7.23 The site also includes **four** small areas of woodland, the most notable of which is Foxey Leys Copse located to the east of Whitelands Farm. Pingle Brook lies in the north-east corner of the site and several drainage ditches cross the site following field boundaries.
- 7.24 There are two footpaths that cross the site. One links the A4095 at Bignell House to the centre of Bicester and the other crosses the south-eastern corner of the site. These footpaths are shown on figure 7.8. Both footpaths currently cross open agricultural land.

***Land uses immediately surrounding the planning application site***

- 7.25 The northern boundary of the site abuts Middleton Stoney Road. This road forms the southern boundary of the town and there is a residential area to the immediate north, known as the Highfields Estate. The A41, Oxford Road borders the site to the east.
- 7.26 There is a petrol station and restaurant to the north-east which is outside the site boundary but immediately adjacent to the application area. Further to the north-east of the site, on the other side of the A41, is a Tesco superstore, public house, the Bicester Village Outlet Shopping Area and the Bicester town football and rugby clubs.
- 7.27 To the west of the application site is the Whitelands Farm complex, which includes the farmhouse and outbuildings and retained agricultural land.
- 7.28 To the west of the perimeter road is the A4095, a rural road that links Chesterton to Bicester. Bignell Park lies west of this road, which includes Bignell House and Lodge set in parkland with some woodland. To the south-west of the site is Bignell Park Hotel.
- 7.29 To the south of the site is an area of retained agricultural land and Gagle Brook. South of Gagle Brook lies the village of Chesterton.

***Other land uses in Bicester***

- 7.30 Bicester is the second largest town in Cherwell District and includes a wide range of non-residential land uses. The main business and industrial areas of Bicester can be found to the east of the town, where there are two business parks (Chaucer and Bicester Business Park) and a number of industrial estates accessed off the bypass (A4095 Charbridge Lane).
- 7.31 There are two main retail areas; Bicester town centre, which is focused around Sheep Street and includes the Crown Walk Shopping Centre, and the Bicester Village Outlet Shopping Area, located south of the town centre, adjacent to the A41.

- 7.32 Education facilities in Bicester comprise nine primary schools and two secondary schools, all of which are located within 1.5 km of the site. The main leisure and recreational facilities are provided at the Bicester and Ploughley Sports Centre and Coopers School.

*Future baseline conditions*

- 7.33 In the absence of the proposals, it is likely that site will remain in agricultural use for the foreseeable future. The site is allocated for mixed use development and no alternative land use proposals are considered likely at this stage.
- 7.34 It is difficult to identify accurately the future baseline land use situation off-site. There are no planning applications proposed for the area immediately surrounding the site. The local plan includes an allocation for employment land east of the A41 immediately south of Bicester Village Outlet Shopping Area. There is therefore the potential for a planning application for employment use to come forward in the future.
- 7.35 The local plan also includes an allocation for committed formal sports provision to the north-west of the site. The site is located north of the B4030 and east of the existing built up area of Bicester.

*Assessment of sensitivity*

*Land uses on-site*

- 7.36 The site is currently in agricultural use and predominantly grade 3b agricultural land with a small area of grade 3a. The majority of the site is not classified as best and most versatile agricultural land and is of local significance and low sensitivity.
- 7.37 The other land uses at the site include the woodland areas and Pingle Brook. These land uses are considered to be of local significance and value with respect to their landscape and nature conservation interest and of low sensitivity.
- 7.38 The two residential properties known as Whitelands Cottages are considered to be of only very local significance and therefore of low to negligible sensitivity.
- 7.39 The two public rights of way that cross the site are considered to be of local importance and therefore of low sensitivity.

*Adjacent land uses*

- 7.40 Whitelands Farm and the retained agricultural land to the south and west of the site is considered to be of local importance and low sensitivity. This agricultural land is predominantly of grade 3 quality.
- 7.41 Given the nature of the adjacent land uses (i.e. housing, hotel, petrol garage, garden centre, Bicester Village Outlet Shopping Area), none is particularly sensitive to the development proposals. It is considered that, collectively, adjacent land uses are of low sensitivity.

- 7.42 Bicester as a whole possesses a wide and varied range of land uses and is considered to be relatively self-sufficient in terms of the facilities that it offers. The land uses in the town are therefore considered to be of low sensitivity.

*Future land uses*

- 7.43 There are two allocated areas in close proximity to the site. These include an employment area to the east of the A41 and committed formal sports provision area to the north-west of the site. These future land uses are considered to be of local importance and of low sensitivity.

**Potential effects**

- 7.44 The assessment of potential land use effects arising from the proposed development has been undertaken at three levels relating to changes arising to:

- the application site
- land uses adjacent to the site
- Bicester as a whole.

***During construction***

*The application site*

- 7.45 The majority of the changes to existing land uses will occur as soon as the site preparation work commences.
- 7.46 The proposals will lead to a loss of a large area of agricultural land. The majority of the site is grade 3b and is not classed as the best and most versatile agricultural land. Local plan policy supports the use of lower quality agricultural land for new development. This land is of local importance and of low sensitivity in land use terms.
- 7.47 Approximately 60 ha will be irreversibly lost due to the proposed new development. This covers the areas affected by the new built development and infrastructure. This permanent loss of agricultural land will result in a large change in land use terms. This long term adverse effect is considered to be of moderate significance.
- 7.48 The area of formal sports provision, informal open space and playing fields will not result in a permanent loss of agricultural land. The soil quality will remain and this land could be returned to agriculture if the need arose. This loss is considered to be reversible, the magnitude is negligible and no significant effects have been predicted.
- 7.49 Whitelands Cottages will be demolished result of the development proposals. This land use is considered to be of low to negligible sensitivity. The loss of these residential properties will result in a large change in land use terms. This long term adverse effect is considered to be of slight significance.
- 7.50 Two footpaths currently cross the site. During construction, there may be temporary diversions and possibly the temporary closure of the footpaths to allow the construction of the residential development, infrastructure and secondary school to be carried out. The

temporary closure and diversion of a public right of way is considered to be a small change. These public rights of way are of low sensitivity and this short term adverse effect is of slight significance.

- 7.51 The woodlands will remain and will be incorporated into the development proposals. No change to this land use is proposed and therefore no significant effects have been predicted.
- 7.52 There will be a minor realignment to Pingle Brook as it flows through the site, although the length of this section of the brook will be maintained. The minor realignment of Pingle Brook will be a small change that will not materially affect the continuation of this land use. Pingle Brook is of low sensitivity and this change is of slight significance. This effect is considered to be neutral, neither adverse nor beneficial in land use terms.

*Land uses immediately surrounding the site*

- 7.53 The construction work will potentially affect the surrounding land uses through disturbance arising from traffic, noise, dust and changes to local views. These issues have been discussed in the traffic, noise, air quality and landscape and visual chapters.
- 7.54 From a land use perspective, it is considered that there are only two land uses in the surrounding area that may be affected by the construction work. These are Whitelands Farm and Bignell Park Hotel.
- 7.55 Whitelands Farm and the agricultural land to the west and south of the site will be retained and this land use will continue. However, the farm land holding will be reduced as a result of the loss of agricultural land associated with the development proposals. The potential impact on the Whitelands Farm business has been examined in the community and social effects chapter. In land use terms, the farm will continue in the future, albeit with a change to the area of land holding which could affect profitability. The magnitude of the land use change is considered to be medium and the sensitivity of receptor is low. This land use change represents a long term adverse effect of moderate significance.
- 7.56 The operation of Whitelands Farm may be disrupted during construction of the perimeter road as this will dissect the retained agricultural land, which forms the revised Whitelands Farm land holding. The initial preparatory work for the road will mark the area of land affected by the road. Following this, the adjacent retained agricultural land should not be affected by the construction work. The scale of the construction work associated with the road will be limited. It is considered unlikely that the construction of the perimeter road will impact on the farm's operations, therefore no significant land use effects have been predicted. The construction work associated with the rest of the mixed use development will have no impact on the revised farm holding and no significant impact on the farm in land use terms.
- 7.57 The amenity of the Bignell Park Hotel could potentially be affected by the construction of the perimeter road and the mixed use development. The construction of the mixed use development will take place at least 0.5km from the hotel and is unlikely to have an impact on the operation of the hotel. The construction of the perimeter road will be closer to the hotel but the scale of work is likely to be limited. The magnitude of change is negligible and no significant land use effects have been predicted.

*Other land uses in Bicester and future land uses*

7.58 From a land use perspective, the construction of the proposed development will have no impact on the other land uses in Bicester or future land uses. The magnitude of change is negligible and no significant effects have been predicted.

***Post-construction***

*The application site*

7.59 The new proposal will result in the addition of the following land uses to the site:

- up to 1,585 residential dwellings, 30% of which will be affordable
- 2 hectares of employment land to be located in the north-east of the site, with a further 1000m<sup>2</sup> within the local centre
- outdoor playing space including formal outdoor sports, sports pavilion and changing facilities, children's play areas and informal open space
- a primary school and land for a second primary school
- land for a secondary school
- a local centre including a community centre, and land reserved for a children's day nursery, retail area, a family pub and office space
- 1ha reserved for a hotel
- a safeguarded site for a health village, which will include a nursing home and could include a community hospital, GP surgery and complementary uses which will revert to employment uses if not taken up
- a perimeter road
- access to a potential site for park and ride.

7.60 The development proposals will result in a large change at the site in land use terms. There will be a change from a greenfield site to a mixed use development. The development is important at the local and regional level as it is defined by planning policy. It is therefore of low to medium sensitivity. This change in land use is considered to be a long term effect of moderate significance. The development proposals are supported by local plan policy and are therefore considered to be a beneficial change in land use terms.

7.61 The two public rights of way that currently cross the site will be retained but there will be a change to the nature and setting of these footpaths. Currently both footpaths cross open agricultural land. Post-construction, footpath 7 (Bicester) will cross through the residential area and footpath 6 (Bicester) will go along side the grounds of the secondary school, through an area of formal open space and along the edge of an area of informal open space. The change to the setting of the footpaths and the views has been examined in the landscape and visual chapter. It is not considered that these changes will affect these footpaths in land use terms. Therefore no significant land use effects have been predicted.

*Land uses immediately surrounding the site*

7.62 After construction, the mixed use development will have no significant land use impact on Whitelands Farm and its revised land holding.



- 7.63 None of the other land uses adjacent to the site is considered to be sensitive to the proposed development. The nature of the development, i.e. residential development, education, open space and community facilities, is consistent with surrounding land uses in Bicester and Chesterton. Therefore, no change is predicted to occur to the other existing adjacent land uses as a result of the proposals. The magnitude of change is negligible and no significant effects have been predicted.

*Other land uses in Bicester*

- 7.64 The proposed development is unlikely to have any land use impact on the wider residential areas of the town, retail, employment or industry. No significant land use effects have been identified. The effect on local businesses has been examined in the community and social effects chapter.

*Future land uses*

- 7.65 There are two allocated areas in close proximity to the site. These include the area of employment east of the A41 and an area of committed formal sports provision to the north east of the site. The development proposals will have no impact on these future land uses. The magnitude of change is negligible and no significant effects are considered likely.

**Mitigation**

- 7.66 As the application site is largely greenfield, it is inevitable that the development proposals will bring about a wholesale change of land use at the application site. However, the proposals are compatible with the surrounding land uses and they have been devised to have minimal impact upon the host community of Bicester. As a result, no land use mitigation measures are considered necessary.

**Residual effects**

- 7.67 The residual effects arising from the development proposals are set out in figure 7.9. The long term residual effects relate to the irreversible loss of agricultural land associated with the proposals, the loss of Whitelands Cottages, the change to the land holding of Whitelands Farm, the realignment of Pingle Brook, and the introduction of new land uses at the site.
- 7.68 There will also be a short term residual effect associated with the possible temporary closure or diversion of the public rights of way that cross the site during the construction work.

Topic	Residual effects	Importance of receptor	Magnitude of change	Duration	Nature	Significance	Level of certainty
<b>Land use</b>	Irreversible loss of agricultural land	Low	Large	Long term	Adverse	Moderate	Absolute
	Loss of Whitelands Farm Cottages	Low to negligible	Large	Long term	Adverse	Slight	Absolute
	Change to the land holding of Whitelands Farm	Low	Medium	Long term	Adverse	Moderate	Absolute
	Possible temporary closure and diversion of the two public rights of way on-site	Low	Small	Short term	Adverse	Slight	Uncertain
	Realignment of Pingle Brook	Low	Small	Long term	Neutral	Slight	Absolute
	The introduction of a proposed mixed use development and associated highway works	Low to Medium	Large	Long term	Beneficial	Moderate	Absolute

Figure 7.9 Land use residual effects

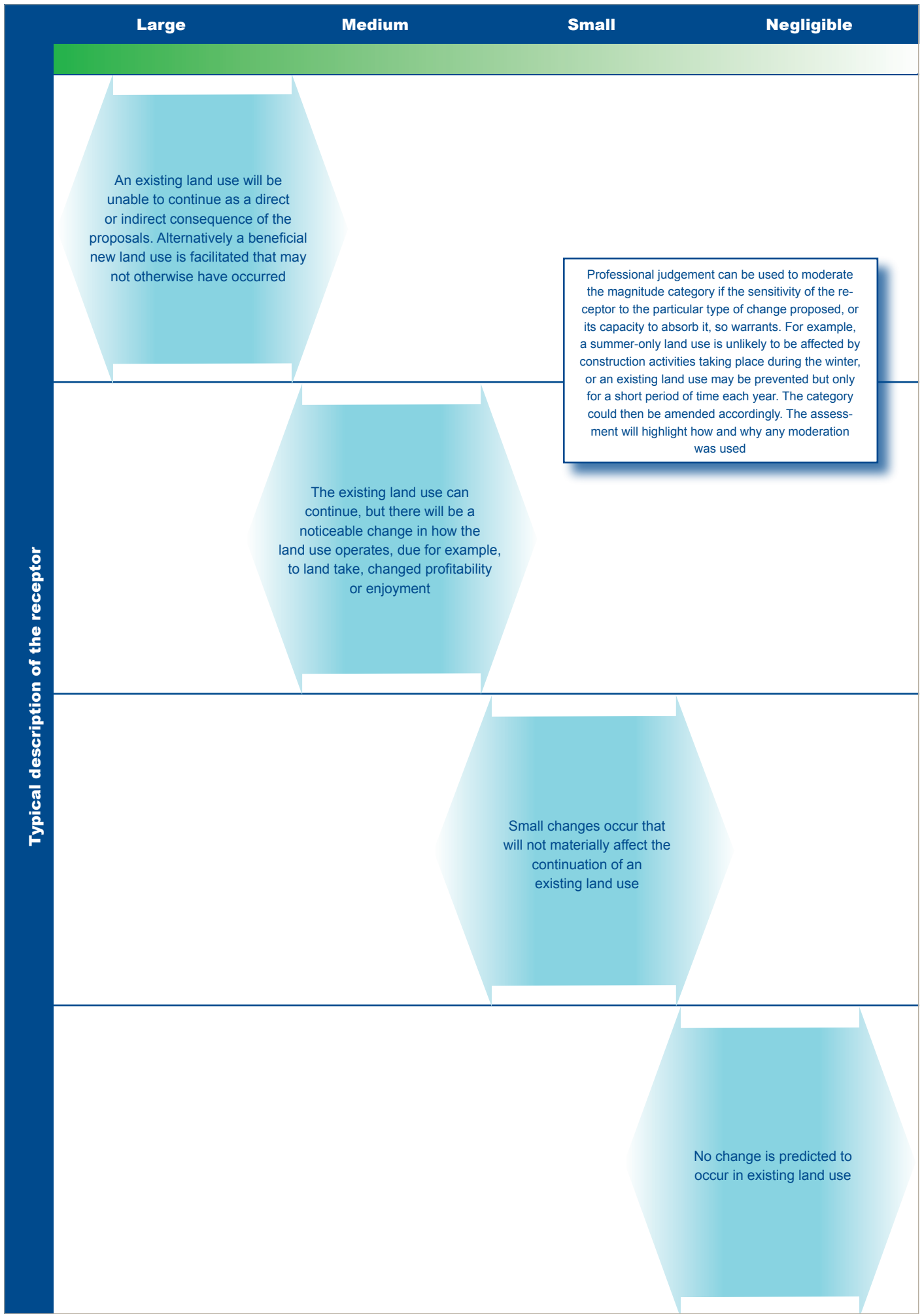


Figure 7.2 Land use: magnitude of change

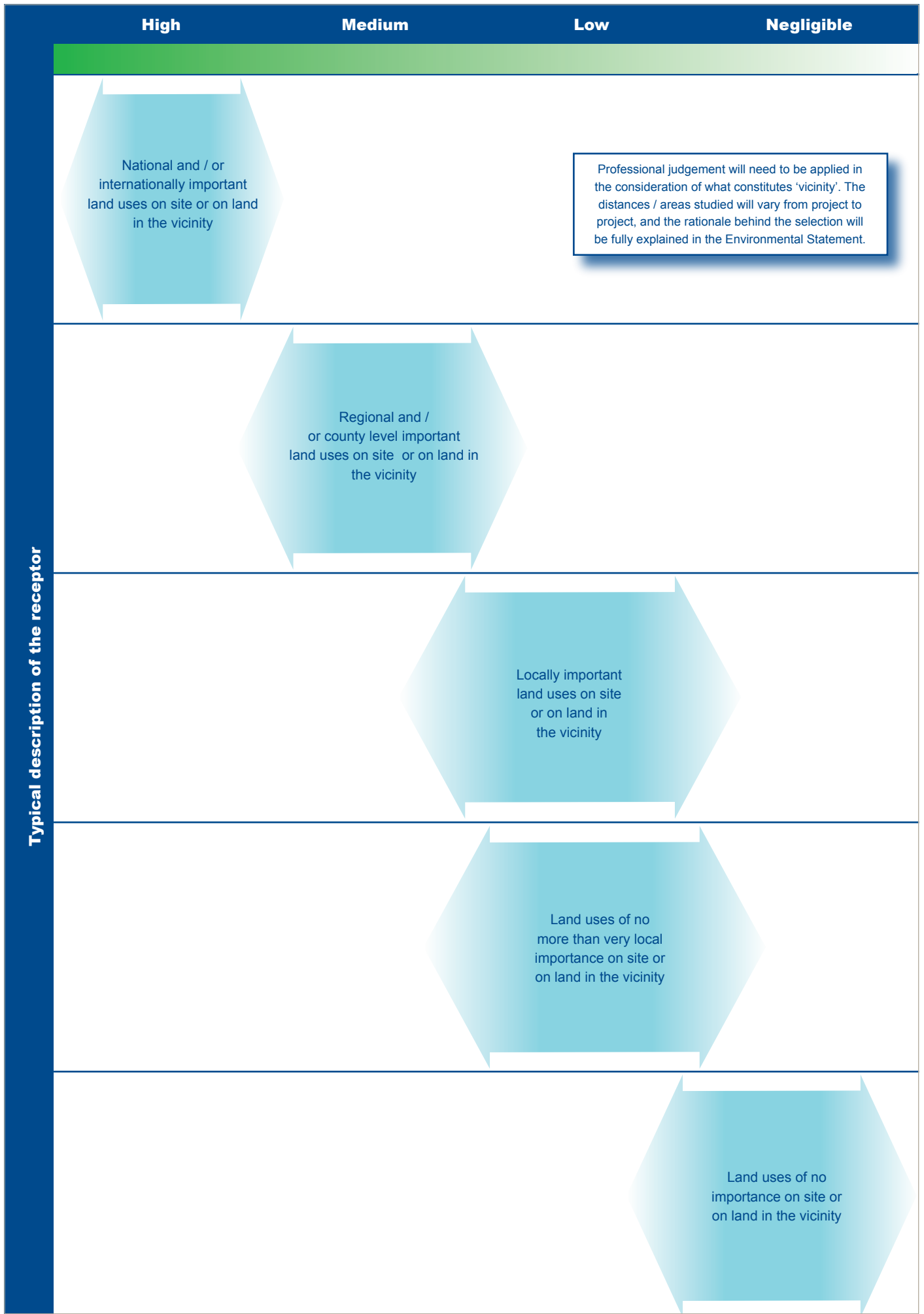


Figure 7.3 Land use: sensitivity or importance of receptor

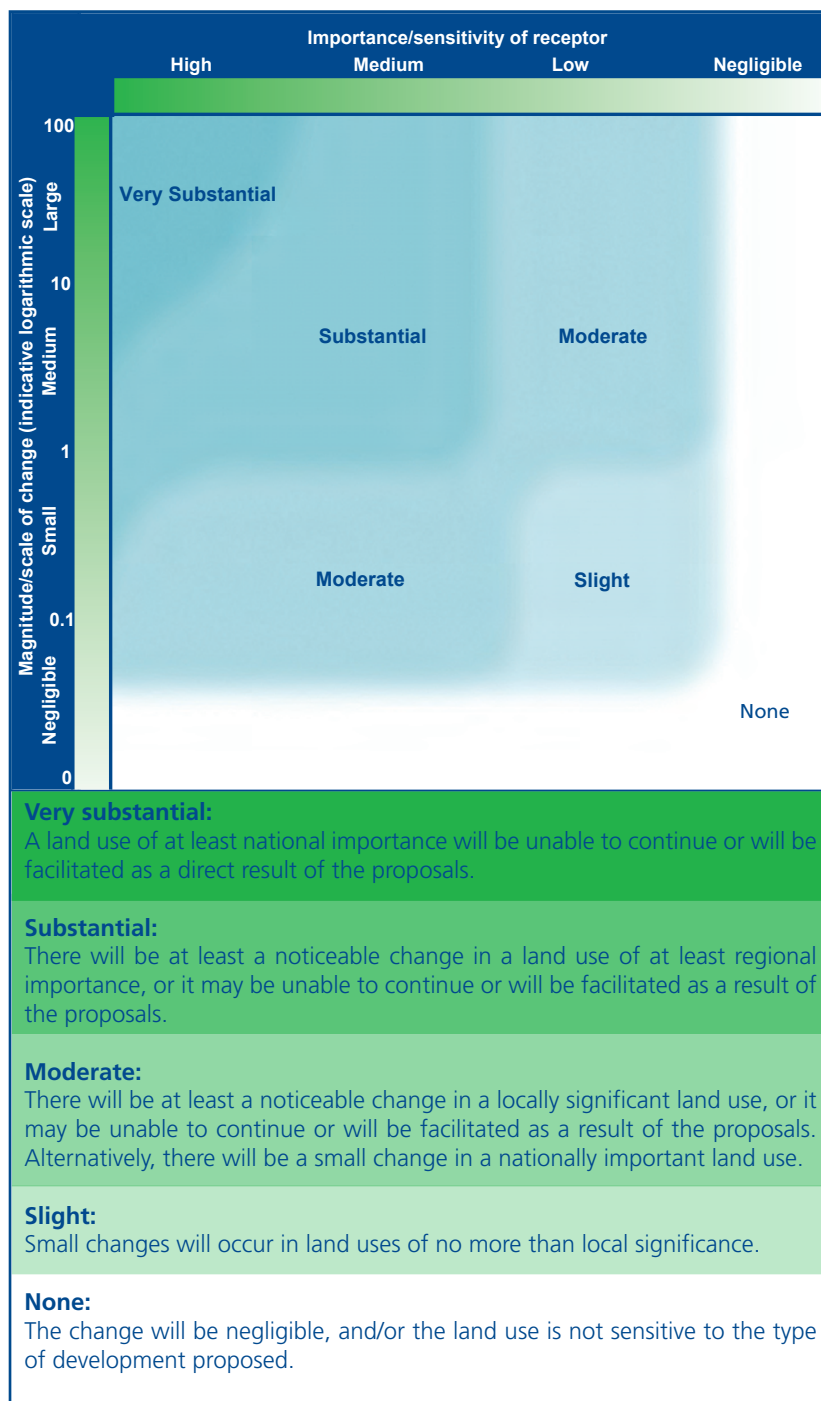


Figure 7.4 Land use significance matrix



- Application site
- Hospital/medical
- Informal recreation/open space
- Caravan park
- Bignell Park
- Industrial/employment
- Allotment
- Agricultural
- Nature reserve
- Education, school grounds
- Retail
- Leisure/recreation grounds
- Places of worship/cemetery
- Car parks
- Civil buildings
- Woodlands
- Residential areas and gardens
- Farm house/agricultural building
- Ministry of Defence
- Train station
- River/water feature
- Footpaths

Figure 7.5 Key land uses at and surrounding the site

0 200m