

Agricultural Land Note

Note on Agricultural Land To accompany Section 62A Planning Application Reference: S62A/2024/0045

This Note has been prepared by DLP Planning on behalf of Endurance Energy Wickham Hall Ltd, in support of the Section 62A Planning Application at the Land at Wickham Hall Estate, Bishops Stortford, Uttlesford, CM23 1JG, for the 'Erection of a Solar Photovoltaic Farm with supporting infrastructure and battery storage, inverters and transformers, fencing, landscaping works and connecting cable' (Reference: S62A/2024/0045) and in response to the Planning Inspector's request for further information in relation to the proposed use of agricultural land and specifically with regard to the extent of Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land (BMV or BMVAL) within Uttlesford District and within proximity of the Application Site.

A related Note, prepared by Sworders Chartered Surveyors (land agents and advisors to the owners of Wickham Hall Estate), has been provided to the Planning Inspector, and is concerned with an assessment of the relative quality of the land within the Application Site in the context of the Estate's land as a whole, and information on the current and recent cropping of the Application Site – being used wholly for the production of animal feed, including that specifically used for horses.

This Note explores the quality of agricultural land in Uttlesford, in East Hertfordshire and at the Application Site, respectively.

Uttlesford District

See Appendix 1: Agricultural Land Classification Map, Uttlesford

Uttlesford District covers an area of approximately 64,118 hectares. Of this area, approximately 62,545 hectares is agricultural land. This agricultural land is all graded 2 and 3, as per the table below. For reference, the Application Site area is 33.59 hectares.

Table 1: Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) in Uttlesford (Source: DEFRA)

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Urban	Other
Uttlesford	0%	80.4%	17.1%	0%	0%	0.5%	2%

Over 80% of the District, 51,551 hectares, is Grade 2, the second highest grade for agricultural land. Over 17% of the District, amounting to 10,964 hectares, is Grade 3, composed of both Grade 3A (BMV) and 3B (non-BMV).

According to DEFRA's ALC assessment, there is no Grade 1, Grade 4 or Grade 5 agricultural land in Uttlesford District.

Land classed as 'Other' includes uses such as Hatfield Forest, Stansted Airport, military facilities, golf courses and other non-agricultural uses.

It is not possible to disaggregate Grade 3 land into the sub-grades A and B as this data is not held at a national level where Grade 3A is BMV and Grade 3B is not. Nor is it possible to test land that is not in the Applicant's control.

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The Applicant is of the opinion that a substantial proportion of the land identified as Grade 3 is likely to be Grade 3A.

The Applicant corroborates this opinion by reference to a selection of comparable solar farms subject to applications to Uttlesford Council where ALC information has been provided. These are as follows:

Table 2: Comparable Solar Farms in Uttlesford District

	G1	G2	G3A	G3B	G4	G5	Other
Willows Green UTT/22/0007/FUL			8%	91%			1%
Pelham Spring UTT/22/2624/PINS		53.8%	27.5%	16.5%			2.2%
Berden Hall UTT/22/2046/PINS		37%	35%	28%			
Cutlers Green UTT/21/1833/FUL		37%	49%	14%			
Wimbish UTT/21/0688/FUL				100%			
Thaxted UTT/19/1864/FUL		99.5%					0.5%

The above table demonstrates that the majority of these solar farm schemes have utilised land of BMV quality and where Grade 3 has been identified, a large proportion of this tends to be Grade 3A (with the exception of Willows Green and Wimbish). Overall, this generally reflects that Uttlesford is largely comprised of BMV land and is certainly comprised almost entirely of Grade 2 and Grade 3 land (97.5% of the total).

East Hertfordshire District

See Appendix 2: Agricultural Land Classification Map, East Hertfordshire

East Hertfordshire District covers an area of approximately 47,567 hectares. Of this area, approximately 43,899 hectares is agricultural land. This agricultural land is all graded 2, 3 and 4 as per the table below.

Table 4: Agricultural Land Classification in East Hertfordshire (Source: DEFRA)

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Urban	Other
East Herts	0%	37.3%	54%	0.9%	0%	3.5%	4.8%

Over 37% of the District, 17,743 hectares, is Grade 2, the second highest grade for agricultural land. Over 54% of the District, amounting to 25,729 hectares, is Grade 3, composed of both Grade 3A (BMV) and 3B (non-BMV). Less than 1%, or 427 hectares, is Grade 4.

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There is no Grade 1 or Grade 5 land in the District.

As illustrated in Appendix 2, there are three small parcels of Grade 4 land as follows:

1. Land along the A119, Waterford, along the River Beane (circa 17.5km from Point of Connection)
2. Land running west from Hertford, north of A414 along the River Mimram (circa 20km from Point of Connection)

Parcels 1 and 2 are within Green Belt. Data from the Environment Agency Mapping indicates that the above sites are within Flood Zone 3, and are subject to severe flooding, having a 'high probability of flooding from rivers and the sea' (Appendix 3). Development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk.

3. Land between White Stubbs Lane and Pembridge Lane (circa 20km from Point of Connection)

Parcel 3 is within Green Belt. The above site, partly composed of Hertfordshire Zoo, woodland, rough grassland and scrub, is subject to Tree Preservation Orders and is associated with Broxbourne Woods (EHDC TPO Ref: 9-W16), which is categorised as ancient woodland (Appendix 4). This site is therefore unsuitable for solar farm development.

Furthermore, connection to the grid is an essential material consideration, and the three Grade 4 land sites' distance from the available grid capacity would make them unviable.

Application Site

The agricultural land classification assessment for the Application Site is as follows:

Table 3: Agricultural Land Classification at Application Site (Source: ALC Report, Soil Environment Services Limited (January 2024))

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3A	Grade 3B	Grade 4	Grade 5	Urban	Other
Application Site		20.59%	79.41%					

Of the site's 33.59 hectare extent, approximately 20.59%, or 6.9 hectares, is Grade 2. Approximately 79.41%, 26.7 hectares, is Grade 3A.

The proportion of Grade 2 land in relation to the current Uttlesford application is lower than that for the consented scheme in East Hertfordshire.

The proportion of land in Grade 2 is generally lower than that of the comparable Uttlesford solar schemes identified above, albeit that the proportion of Grade 3A land is correspondingly higher.

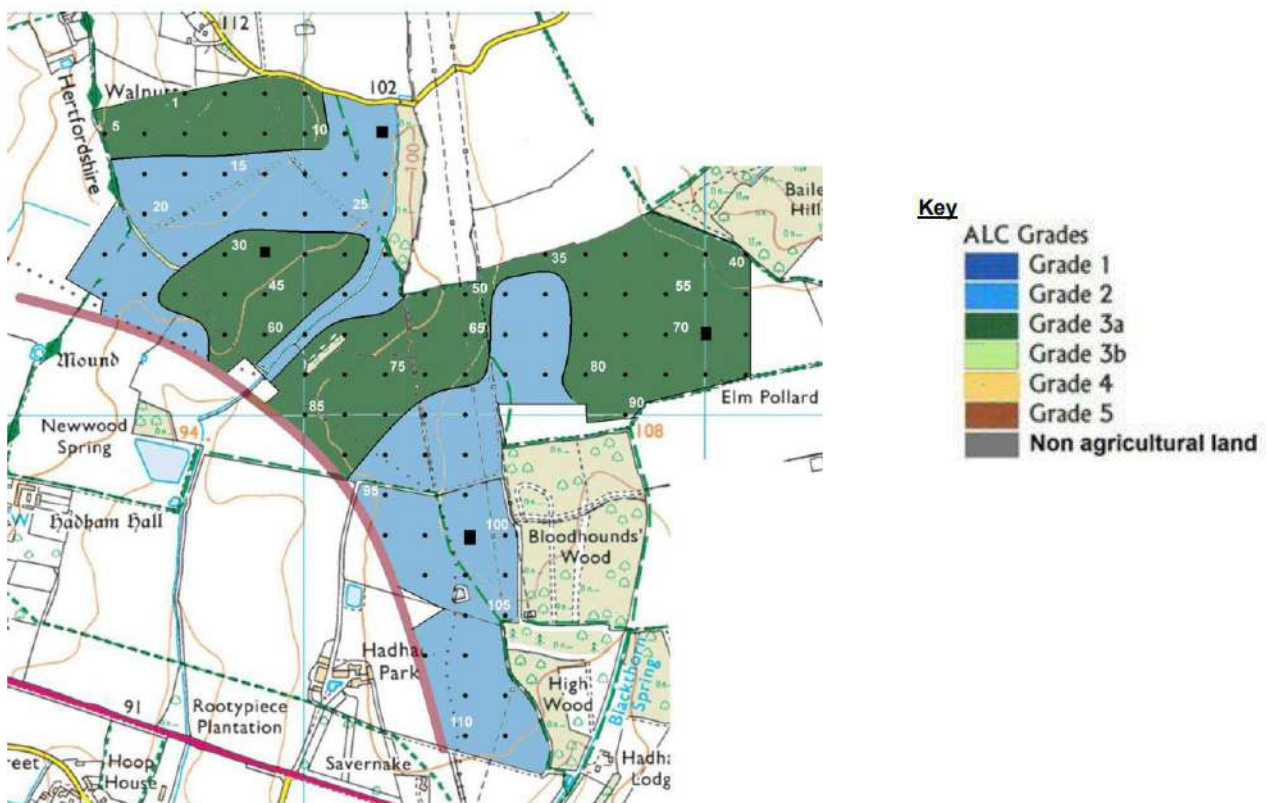
The site's use of Grade 2 land, 6.9 hectares, equates to 0.01% of Uttlesford District's Grade 2 land.

The site's use of Grade 3 land, 26.7 hectares, equates to 0.24% of Uttlesford District's Grade 3 land (no data is available to separate Grades 3A and 3B for the District).

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The ALC assessment submitted with the application does not seek to provide a contextual analysis and is confined to a factual assessment of the Application Site. To provide further context, the ALC assessment submitted in respect of the 2021 application provided an assessment of the land across the original application areas within Uttlesford and East Hertfordshire (including the land on which permission has been granted for a solar farm). The plan of this original, wider ALC assessment, is reproduced below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: ALC for Selected Land at Wickham Hall Estate



Overall, whilst this application falls on land classed as best and most versatile, within the Wickham Hall Estate it represents land of lower value than the Estate as a whole and significantly lower value than the average for Uttlesford District which otherwise comprises more than 80% Grade 2 land.

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Conclusion

Whilst the development is proposed on land of higher agricultural quality, the proposal will have a limited effect on the overall productivity of the Estate.

Land within the whole of Uttlesford District is of similar quality to the Application Site.

Land of lower quality is present in the adjacent District of East Hertfordshire. However, this land is subject to higher flood risk, Green Belt designation and partially subject to environmental classification.

Given the availability of a suitable grid connection for export of electricity generated by a solar farm at the Application Site, it can be concluded that suitable alternative sites of materially lower agricultural quality are unlikely to be available.

Attached:

Appendix 1: Agricultural Land Classification Map, Uttlesford

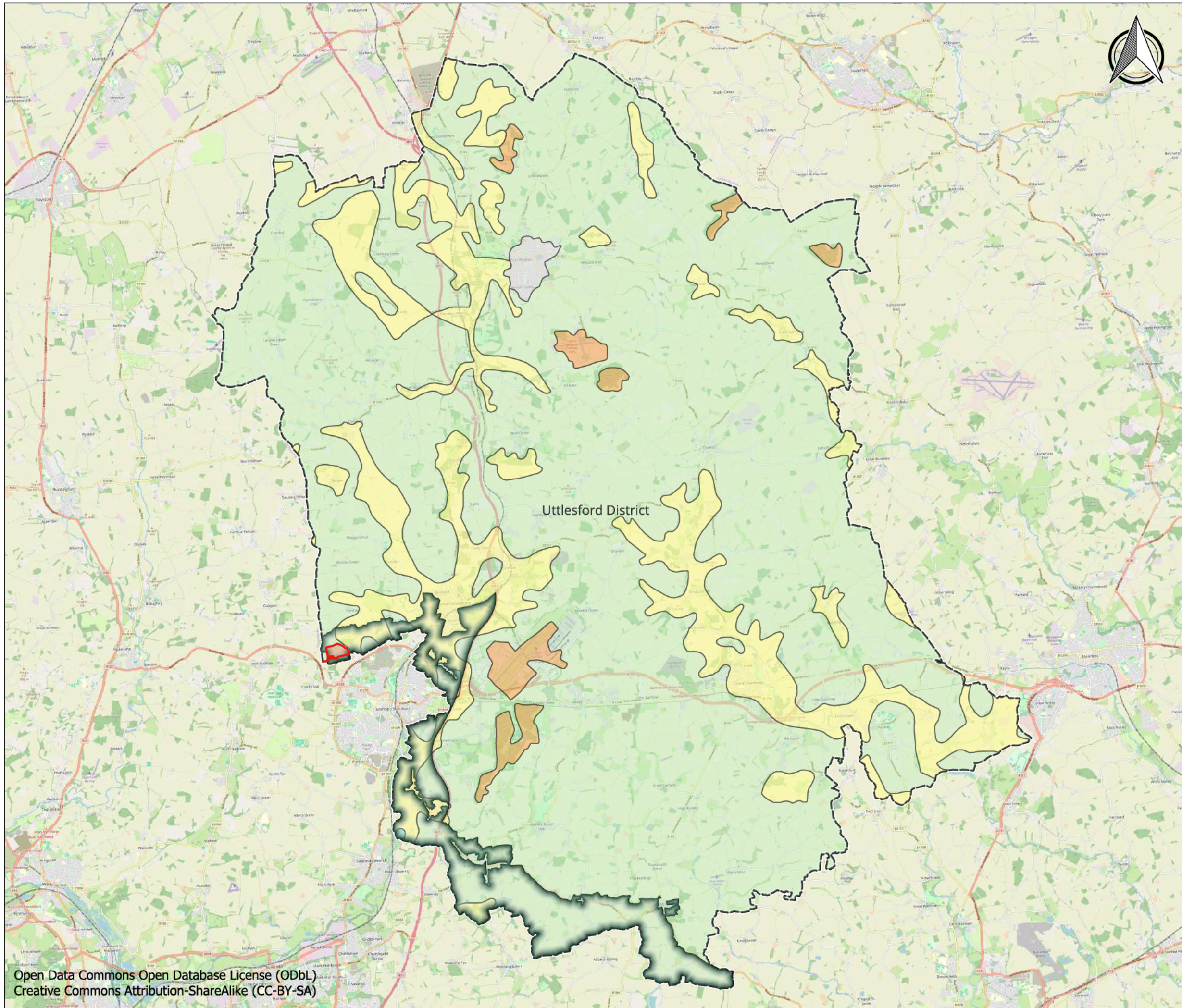
Appendix 2: Agricultural Land Classification Map, East Hertfordshire








Appendix 3: Environment Agency Flood Risk Map

Appendix 4: EHDC TPO Cover

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Appendix 1 Agricultural Land Classification Map, Uttlesford

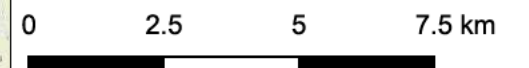


-  Uttlesford District Boundary - 64118.281 ha
-  Greenbelt
- ALC - Uttlesford**
-  Grade 2 - 51577.68 ha
-  Grade 3 - 10955.34 ha
-  Grade 4 - 11.93 ha
-  Non Agricultural - 1272.76 ha
-  Urban - 302.53 ha

Proportion of ALC Grades as % of Total Land Area

- Grade 1 (excellent) = 0
- Grade 2 (very good) = 80.4
- Grade 3 (good to moderate) = 17.1
- Grade 4 (poor) = 0.01
- Grade 5 (very poor) = 0
- Non Agricultural = 2
- Urban = 0.5

Scale: 1:140,000



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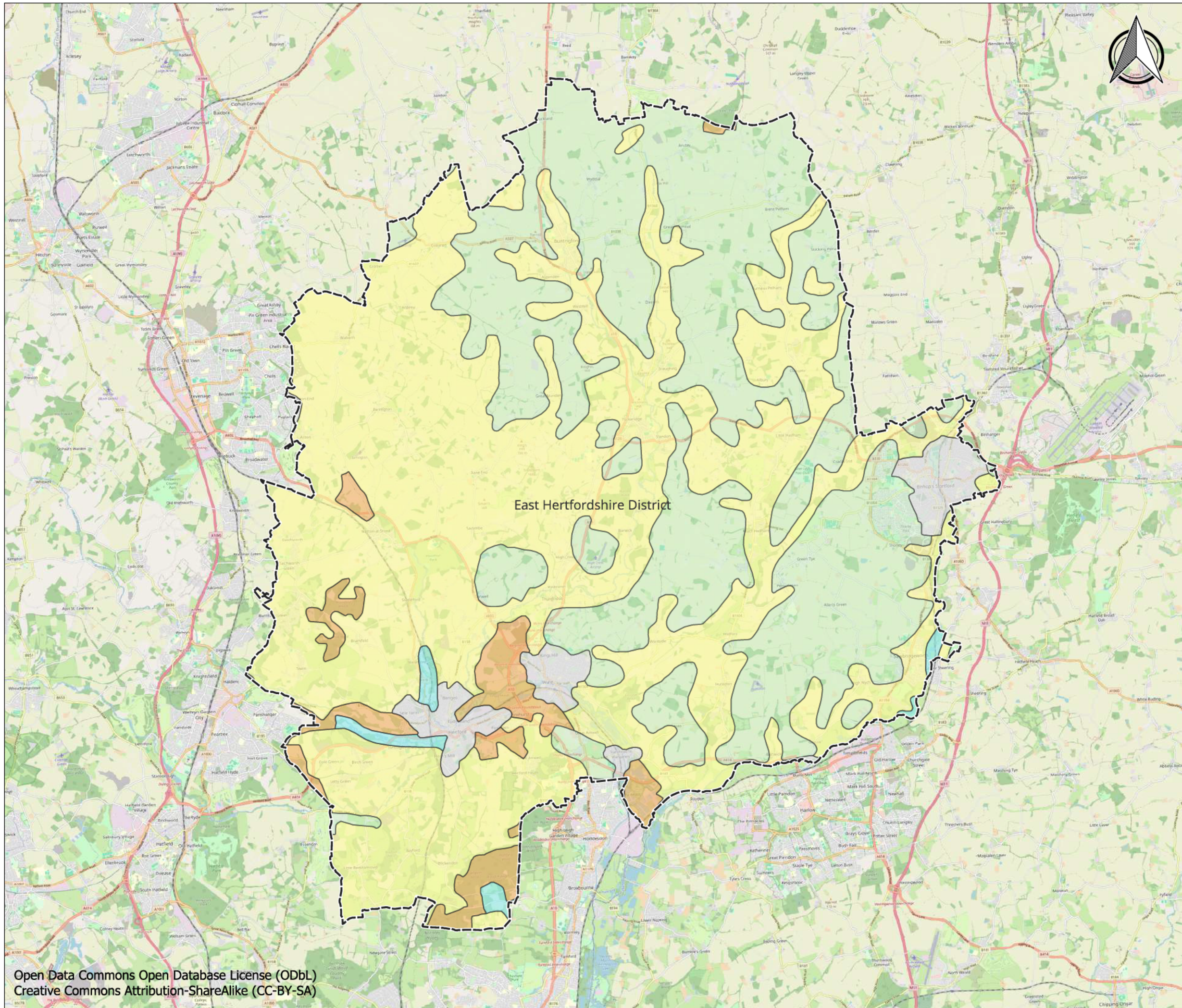
PROJECT
 Wickham Hall Estate, Bishops Stortford


DRAWING TITLE
 Agricultural Land Classification

Date	07.08.2024	OS Ref:	Drawn By
Scale	1:140,000 @ A3	Drawing No:	PMG
Job No:	H5234-6	Rev:	Checked By
			NO

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Appendix 2 Agricultural Land Classification Map, East Hertfordshire





 East Hertfordshire District Boundary - 47566.922 ha


Greenbelt


ALC - East Herts

 Grade 2 - 17742.52 ha

 Grade 3 - 25729.18 ha

 Grade 4 - 426.73 ha

 Non Agricultural - 2035.19 ha

 Urban - 1648.13 ha

Proportion of ALC Grades as % of Total Land Area

Grade 1 (excellent) = 0

Grade 2 (very good) = 37.3

Grade 3 (good to moderate) = 54.1

Grade 4 (poor) = 0.9

Grade 5 (very poor) = 0

Non Agricultural = 4.8

Urban = 3.5

Scale: 1:125,000

0 2.5 5 7.5 km

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			NO

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Appendix 3 Environment Agency Flood Risk Map

BETA This is a new service – your [feedback \(/feedback\)](#) will help us to improve it.

[< Back](#)

This location is in flood zone 3

What flood zone 3 means

Land within flood zone 3 has a high probability of flooding from rivers and the sea.

You need to carry out a flood risk assessment (FRA) as part of the planning application for this development.

Find out more about [flood zones and what they mean \(/flood-zone-results-explained?zone=FZ3\)](#).

There is a risk of flooding from surface water at this site. You should check one of the following:

- [the surface water map on the check your long term flood risk service \(https://check-long-term-flood-risk.service.gov.uk/map?easting=531588&northing=214223&map=SurfaceWater\)](https://check-long-term-flood-risk.service.gov.uk/map?easting=531588&northing=214223&map=SurfaceWater)
- [the risk of flooding from surface water dataset on the data services platform \(https://environment.data.gov.uk/dataset/51a5c4e7-10d3-4f34-bb0e-558835ab8c85\)](https://environment.data.gov.uk/dataset/51a5c4e7-10d3-4f34-bb0e-558835ab8c85)

To find out about other factors that might affect the flood risk of this location, you should also check:

- [groundwater and reservoir flood risk \(https://check-long-term-flood-risk.service.gov.uk\)](https://check-long-term-flood-risk.service.gov.uk)
- Stevenage planning authority's strategic flood risk assessment (SFRA), which includes future flood risk

Flood map showing the flood zone your site is in

The map shows the flood risk to your site and the surrounding area.





► [What the flood map shows](#)

Download the flood map for this location

The flood map is suitable for a local planning authority to use when checking a planning application to see if a development is:

- in flood zone 1, 2 or 3
- within 20 metres of a main river or a flood defence
- a water storage area (also likely to be flood zone 3b in the SFRA)

► [Add a reference to the flood map and set the scale](#)

[Download this flood map \(PDF\)](#)

Decide what you need for your planning application

You should:

- contact Stevenage local planning authority to check their planning requirements
- get an FRA, you'll normally need to pay a flood risk specialist to carry it out

Order flood risk data for rivers and the sea

To order flood risk data for this site, contact the Environment Agency team in Hertfordshire and North London at hnlquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

Your email should say that you are ordering flood risk data and include:

- the address
- a map showing the site boundary

We aim to email you the data within 20 working days.

Depending on the information that's available, your flood risk assessment data could include:

- a flood zone map (flood map for planning)
- historic flood outlines
- relevant modelled flood levels and extents
- flood defence locations and attributes

We recommend that you check the relevant local planning authority's strategic flood risk assessment (SFRA) as part of your work to prepare a flood risk assessment.

Get help deciding what flood risk information you need

Email the Environment Agency team in Hertfordshire and North London at:
hnl-enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk.

Change the location

- [Redraw the boundary of your site](#)
- [Search for a different location](#)

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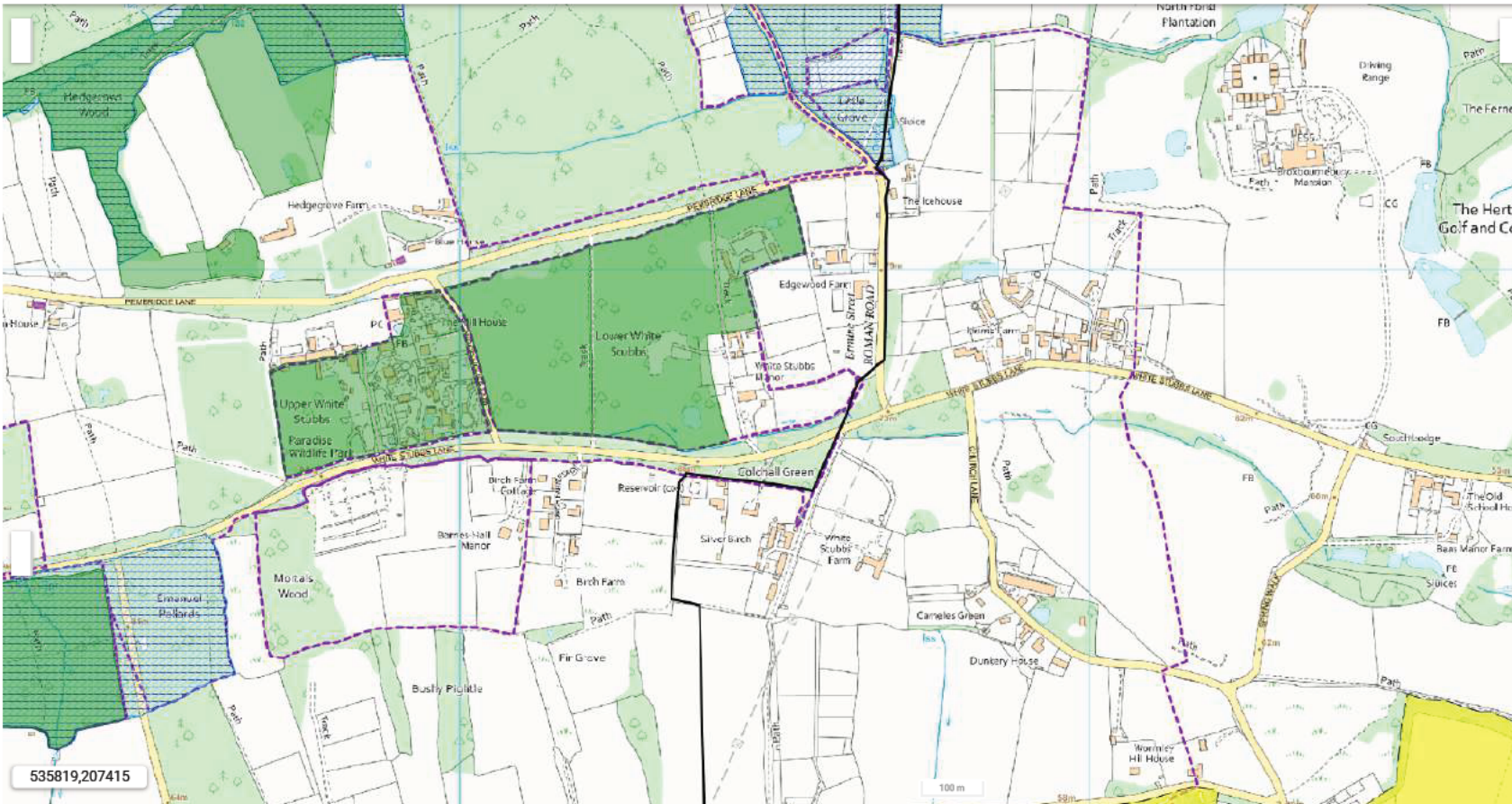
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Appendix 4 EHDC TPO Cover



Colour OS Data

Opacity

- Special Areas of Conservation
- SSSI
- SSSI
- Tree Preservation Orders
- Tree Preservation Orders
- Planning Applications and Enforcement
- Toggle all layers



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