



Winterbourne Fields

Agricultural Land Classification

Availability of agricultural land for food production

The current landowner bought Foresters Lodge Farm in 1978 when it was a, predominantly, dairy farm with approx. 10 acres of old apple orchards, which were grubbed out in 1980, and a small area of soft fruit grown on marginally better ground on the northern side of the A2.

The Landowner has farmed many different types of land ranging from heavy marsh land at Reculver, Grade 1 and 2 land at Hoath and Blean through to chalk land at Bridge. Foresters Lodge land is classified as Grade 4 with it being a shallow loam over a heavy clay subsoil and having farmed this land under an arable system it is consistently the most challenging farming area that he has been involved in and is a true Grade 4 classification.

The land is very wet lying due to the clay subsoil and this makes cropping very restrictive. If the crop was not planted by the end of September the ground was at risk of becoming too wet to carry heavy machinery. The ground is also slow to dry out in the Spring making Spring cropping impossible. In the early 1980's there was an attempt to grow potatoes on this ground and failed to harvest the crop due to the wet conditions and lost the entire crop.

Crops husbandry throughout the season is also challenging because of the inability to travel on the land causing a lack of timeliness of input applications.

The land is also 'hungry' land requiring an increase in inputs of fertiliser and chemicals with a much higher risk of losses through leaching. In today's economic climate this land has become more and more marginal for the growing of combinable crops, particularly as there is an inherent black grass and rye grass problem on this type of land which has no available chemistry to combat the problem. Farmers are relying almost entirely on crop rotations, particularly spring cropping and the use of glyphosate herbicide which is, in itself, at high risk of being withdrawn.

The yields on this land are hugely variable but have consistently been in the region on 25% less than better land which when combined with the increase of inputs makes this land predominantly uneconomical with the exception of the few 'halcyon' years. In today's current agricultural economy where farmers are struggling even on the best land the returns on poorer land is even more marginal.

The cropping for the last 7 years has been for producing energy and has been a mixture of Triticale and Maize and although Maize is planted in the Spring it is planted much later than a standard Spring crop. **As a result of the economic margins, due to its grade 4 status, the site has not been used for food production for nearly a decade.**

Key Factors

- This land is mainly suited to grass with occasional arable crops - the yields of which are variable.
- The Land suffers severe limitations that significantly restrict the range and yield of crops to be grown.
- The Land has not been used for food production for 7 years.
- The land requires a significant addition of pesticides to be applied to maximise the limited food yields.
- Increased leaching into the ground and surrounding biodiversity, damaging local wildlife and invertebrates
- The current farming edge is 2m from the boundary, which can lead to both airborne particles and run off from spraying being dispersed into the ancient woodland. The potential deleterious effects of this necessary agricultural process will be eliminated with the development of Winterbourne Fields.

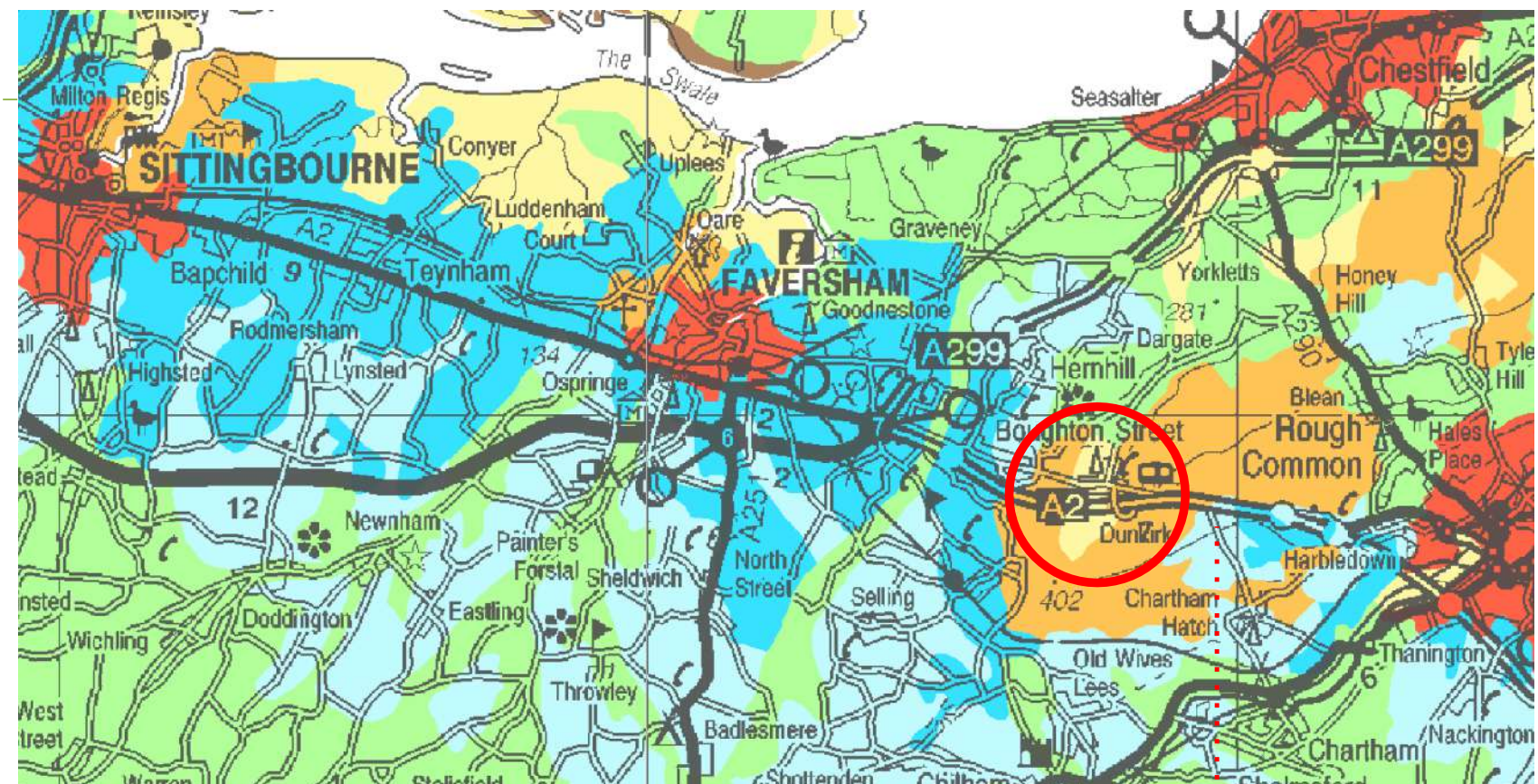
Grade	Description
1	Excellent
2	Very Good
3	Good to Moderate
4	Poor
5	Very Poor

Best and Most Versatile Land

Non-Agricultural Land

- Other land primarily in non-agricultural use
- Land predominantly in urban use

The site comprises of grade 4 Land as identified Regional Agricultural Land Classification Map reference 2011/11/18 (London and south east region) produced by natural England.



Winterbourne Fields

- Entirely Grade 4 agricultural land - poor quality
- Entirely excluded from fruit belt landscape



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