

**SHROPSHIRE STRUCTURE PLAN
WHITCHURCH
LAND AT THE LAURELS**

**Agricultural Land Classification
ALC Map and Report**

June 1999

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AGRICULTURAL LAND CLASSIFICATION REPORT

SHROPSHIRE STRUCTURE PLAN WHITCHURCH, LAND AT THE LAURELS

INTRODUCTION

1. This report presents the findings of a detailed Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) survey of 8.4 ha of land at The Laurels, to the north of Whitchurch. The survey was carried out in June 1999.
2. The survey was undertaken by the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA)¹ on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF). This survey was carried out in connection with MAFF's statutory input to the Shropshire Structure Plan, and supersedes any previous ALC information for this land.
3. The work was conducted by members of the Resource Planning Team in the Northern Region of FRCA. The land has been graded in accordance with the published MAFF ALC guidelines and criteria (MAFF, 1988). A description of the ALC grades and subgrades is given in Appendix I.
4. At the time of survey the site was under grass. The area marked as 'Other Land' comprises a small plot of land adjacent to the road, on which a house has been built. As access to several fields in the south of the site was not obtained, this area is mapped as 'Agricultural Land Not Surveyed'.

SUMMARY

5. The findings of the survey are shown on the enclosed ALC map. The map has been drawn at a scale of 1:10 000. It is accurate at this scale but any enlargement would be misleading.
6. The area and proportions of the ALC grades and subgrades on the surveyed land are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Area of grades and other land

Grade/Other land	Area (hectares)	% Total agricultural land area	% Total survey area
1	-	-	-
2	-	-	-
3a	-	-	-
3b	4.8	100	57
4	-	-	-
5	-	-	-
Agricultural land not surveyed	3.5	-	42
Other land	0.1	-	1
Total agricultural land area	4.8	100	-
Total survey area	8.4	-	100

¹ FRCA is an executive agency of MAFF and the Welsh Office

7. The fieldwork was conducted at an average density of 1 boring per hectare of agricultural land. In total 5 borings and 1 soil pit were described.
8. The agricultural land on this site has been classified as Subgrade 3b (moderate quality). The main limitations to the agricultural use of this land are soil wetness, gradient and microrelief.

FACTORS INFLUENCING ALC GRADE

Climate

9. Climate affects the grading of land through the assessment of an overall climatic limitation and also through interactions with soil characteristics.
10. The key climatic variables used for grading this site are given in Table 2 and were obtained from the published 5km grid datasets using the standard interpolation procedures (Met. Office, 1989).

Table 2: Climatic and altitude data

Factor	Units	Values
Grid reference	N/A	SJ538424
Altitude	m, AOD	110
Accumulated Temperature	day°C (Jan-June)	1351
Average Annual Rainfall	mm	742
Field Capacity Days	days	169
Moisture Deficit, Wheat	mm	90
Moisture Deficit, Potatoes	mm	77
Overall climatic grade	N/A	Grade 1

11. The climatic criteria are considered first when classifying land as climate can be overriding in the sense that severe limitations will restrict land to low grades irrespective of favourable site or soil conditions.
12. The main parameters used in the assessment of an overall climatic limitation are average annual rainfall (AAR), as a measure of overall wetness, and accumulated temperature (AT0, January to June), as a measure of the relative warmth of a locality.
13. The combination of rainfall and temperature at this site means that there is no overall climatic limitation. The site is climatically Grade 1.

Site

14. The site lies at an altitude of 95-110m AOD, and slopes eastward. In places slopes exceed 8° and impose a gradient limitation to the agricultural use of the land. The site

is bounded to the north by a dismantled railway line, to the west by the A49, and to the east and south by agricultural land.

Geology and soils

15. Upper Keuper Saliferous Beds comprise the solid geology underlying this area (BGS, 1967a). The overlying drift comprises glacial and post-glacial sand and gravel in the south, and boulder clay in the north of the site (BGS, 1967b).
16. The most detailed published soils information (SSEW, 1983 & 1984) maps the 'typical brown earths' of the Wick 1 association in the south, and the 'typical stagnogleyic soils' of the Salop association in the north of the site.
17. Upon detailed field examination, soil profiles closely matching descriptions of the Salop association were found on the areas surveyed.

AGRICULTURAL LAND CLASSIFICATION

18. The details of the classification of the site are shown on the attached ALC map and the area statistics of each grade are given in Table 1, page 1.

Subgrade 3b

19. Land of moderate quality occupies 4.8 ha (57%) of the total survey area, and occurs across the north of the site. The main limitation to the agricultural use of this land is soil wetness.
20. Within the Subgrade 3b mapping unit, soils comprise a very slightly stony medium clay loam topsoil, over sandy clay loam, medium clay loam and clay upper subsoils. These overlie sandy clay loam, heavy clay loam and clay lower subsoils. Depths to gleying and slowly permeable layers in relation to the local climatic regime, place these soils into Wetness Class IV.
21. To the south-west of The Laurels, slopes in excess of 8° impose a gradient limitation, consistent with land of Subgrade 3b quality. Gradient has a significant effect on mechanical farm operations and the safe and efficient use of machinery. To the north-west of The Laurels, complex changes in slope angle and direction occur over short distances, imposing a microrelief limitation on a small area of land consistent with Grade 3b.

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SOURCES OF REFERENCE

British Geological Survey (1967a) *Sheet No. 122, Nantwich, Solid Edition, 1:63360 scale.*
BGS: London.

British Geological Survey (1967b) *Sheet No. 122, Nantwich, Drift edition, 1:63360 scale.*
BGS: London

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1988) *Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales: Revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land.*
MAFF: London.

Met. Office (1989) *Climatological Data for Agricultural Land Classification.*
Met. Office: Bracknell.

Soil Survey of England and Wales (1983) *Sheet No. 3, Soils of Midland and Western England. 1:250 000 scale.*
SSEW: Harpenden.

Soil Survey of England and Wales (1984) *Soils and their use in Midland and Western England.*
SSEW: Harpenden.

APPENDIX I

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE GRADES AND SUBGRADES

Grade 1: Excellent Quality Agricultural Land

Land with no or very minor limitations to agricultural use. A very wide range of agricultural and horticultural crops can be grown and commonly includes top fruit, soft fruit, salad crops and winter harvested vegetables. Yields are high and less variable than on land of lower quality.

Grade 2: Very Good Quality Agricultural Land

Land with minor limitations which affect crop yield, cultivations or harvesting. A wide range of agricultural or horticultural crops can usually be grown but on some land of this grade there may be reduced flexibility due to difficulties with the production of the more demanding crops such as winter harvested vegetables and arable root crops. The level of yield is generally high but may be lower or more variable than Grade 1 land.

Grade 3: Good to Moderate Quality Land

Land with moderate limitations which affect the choice of crops, the timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield. When more demanding crops are grown, yields are generally lower or more variable than on land in Grades 1 and 2.

Subgrade 3a: Good Quality Agricultural Land

Land capable of consistently producing moderate to high yields of a narrow range of arable crops, especially cereals, or moderate yields of a wide range of crops including cereals, grass, oilseed rape, potatoes, sugar beet and the less demanding horticultural crops.

Subgrade 3b: Moderate Quality Agricultural Land

Land capable of producing moderate yields of a narrow range of crops, principally cereals and grass, or lower yields of a wider range of crops or high yields of grass which can be grazed or harvested over most of the year.

Grade 4: Poor Quality Agricultural Land

Land with severe limitations which significantly restrict the range of crops and/or the level of yields. It is mainly suited to grass with occasional arable crops (e.g. cereals and forage crops) the yields of which are variable. In moist climates, yields of grass may be moderate to high but there may be difficulties in utilisation. The grade also includes very droughty arable land.

Grade 5: Very Poor Quality Agricultural Land

Land with severe limitations which restrict use to permanent pasture or rough grazing, except for occasional pioneer forage crops.