AGRICULTURAL LAND CLASSIFICATION (ALC)
LIKELIHOOD OF BMV AGRICULTURAL LAND - STRATEGIC SCALE MAP (DEFRA, 2001)

1. Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Strategic Map information is based on predicting the likelihood of 'best and most versatile' agricultural land (ALC Grades 1, 2 and 3a) when surveyed at the local level. This is important in a land use planning context as described in the National Planning Policy Framework[1], particularly where large tracts of Grade 3 land are indicated on published Provisional ALC maps and the extent of 'best and most versatile' agricultural land is currently uncertain. The predictions use soil associations (which are the mapping unit[2] of the published 1:250 000 scale national soil map) as the main basis of the assessment. The map is intended for strategic planning purposes only and is **not** suitable for use below scale 1:250 000 or for the definitive classification of any local area or site.

2. The methodology involves each soil association being systematically assessed on a regional basis in accordance with the current classification criteria (MAFF, 1988[3]) using a combination of ALC data derived from site surveys (post 1988), provisional ALC map data, climatic data and published Soil Survey and Land Research Centre (now National Soil Resources Institute) information, to give an assessment for each of the likely proportion of 'best and most versatile' agricultural land to be encountered, according to the following categories

- Areas where more than 60% of the land is likely to be 'best and most versatile' agricultural land.

(High likelihood of 'best and most versatile' agricultural land)

- Areas where 20-60% of the land is likely to be 'best and most versatile' agricultural land.

(Moderate likelihood of 'best and most versatile' agricultural land)

- Areas where less than 20% of the land is likely to be 'best and most versatile' agricultural land.

(Low likelihood of 'best and most versatile' agricultural land)

3. In order to maintain consistency with the published series of 1:250,000 scale Provisional ALC maps land shown as Grades 1 and 2 are automatically placed in the high likelihood category. Land which cannot be 'best and most versatile' agricultural land due to overall climatic limitations is placed in the low likelihood category.

[1] National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012) .

[2] There are 296 soil associations in England and Wales. These are shown on a series of 6 regional soil maps produced in 1983 by the Soil Survey of England and Wales (now National Soil Resources Institute, Cranfield University)

[3] *Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales* (MAFF, 1988)

4. The resulting assessments are mapped using GIS techniques to produce predictive land quality information at 1:250000 scale. The method is designed to allow improvements to the predictions as new data becomes available, for instance new digital datasets (e.g. geology or topography) or ALC site data. It should therefore be viewed as an evolving GIS based system rather than a single one-off map**.**

5. The data can be used as a companion to the published provisional ALC map series, as the latter will provide a guide to individual ALC grades within each category.

6. The Strategic Map data has a number of limitations which make it best suited for strategic planning rather than detailed site assessment purposes. These are:

- The soil association data at 1:250,000 scale is a relatively crude indicator of agricultural land quality

- The relative lack of (post 1988) ALC site data for some soil associations and its uneven spatial distribution means the allocation to 'best and most versatile' agricultural land categories cannot be completely objective.

- The combination of different data in the production of the Strategic Map, some with different resolutions, means that there may be some compromises with the presentation

7. Where post 1988 field survey data is available, allocation to one of the three categories of 'best and most versatile' agricultural land likelihood is depicted on the basis of actual grades determined from the field survey work. In these areas the 'best and most versatile' agricultural land category is not a prediction of the likelihood of 'best and most versatile' agricultural, but a generalised representation of the actual land quality in the surveyed area.

8. Where recent (post 1988) MAFF ALC field survey data is available[4], this is the most reliable source of information on land quality. Where this is not available the predictive data provides the best available information on land quality. The data will be most useful at national and regional levels for indicating the general disposition of land quality within that region (e.g. comparing counties and districts with each other.) It will also enable an appreciation of the relative land qualities within districts and around major settlements at a crude level. **It is not suitable for site specific appraisals.** Site specific studies, including new ALC field surveys, will be needed to obtain definitive information on ALC grades for individual sites.

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[4]or reliable third party ALC data