

TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1971  
COMPREHENSIVE RESIDENTIAL AND RECREATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF  
LAND AT MILTON HEIGHTS, MILTON, OXON

STATEMENT BY MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

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## 1. Introduction

1.1 The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was, on 27 September 1990, requested by the Vale of White Horse District Council to provide a statement with regard to proposed residential and recreational development of approximately 16 ha of agricultural land at Milton Heights, Oxon.

1.2 The need for this statement arises from the agricultural evidence submitted by Reading Agricultural Consultants on behalf of appellant.

## 2. Agricultural Land Classification

2.1 The Agricultural Land Classification provides a framework for classifying land according to the extent to which its physical or chemical characteristics impose long-term limitations on agricultural use. Revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land were published by MAFF in 1988.

2.2 The principle physical factors influencing agricultural production are climate, site and soil. A degree of variability in physical characteristics within a discreet area is to be expected. If the area includes a small proportion of land of different quality, the variability can be considered as a function of the mapping scale. Thus, small discreet areas of a different ALC grade may be identified on large scale maps, whereas on smaller scale maps it may only be feasible to show the predominant grade.

2.3 However where soil and site conditions vary significantly and repeated over short distances and impose a practical constraint on cropping and land management a 'pattern' limitation is said to exist. I have studied the soil survey submitted on behalf of the appellant and can find no evidence of this type of variation.

2.4 At paragraph 4 of his proof Mr Worthington gives consideration to the 'cropping of individual parcels'. I can see no basis for this particular approach be taken and it is specifically excluded in the Revised Guidelines referred to above. Land is graded and mapped without regard to present field boundaries, except where they coincide with permanent physical features. Therefore it is not appropriate to adopt a field by field method of grading as suggested at paragraph 5 of Mr Worthington's proof.

2.5 The size, structure and location of farms, the standard of fixed equipment and the accessibility of land do not affect grading, although they may influence land use decisions. Similarly a good but not outstanding standard of management is assumed. The distinction between the 'absolute' and 'practical' as referred to at paragraph 4 of Mr Worthington's proof is not a relevant consideration.

### 3. Irreversible Development

3.1 The comparisons that can be drawn between a golf course development and the current proposals for mixed residential and recreation use are only limited. In the former it would be expected that the majority of the site would not have roadways, buildings and other permanent features built upon it.

3.2 These particular proposals are sufficiently different from the above to raise doubts about the potential for any of the site to be returned to productive agricultural use in the future.