LAND AT
CHURCH FARM,
ST ATHAN

AGRICULTURAL LAND
QUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

October 2022

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KCC1 Welsh Government's Frequently Asked Questions, May 2021

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report considers the agricultural land quality issues relating to an area of 24 ha, at Church Farm, St Athan. The site is being proposed for non-agricultural development.

1.2 This area is shown on the Google Earth arial image, outlined in red and blue below.

Insert 1: The Area Under Consideration

1.3 The report:

(i) describes the site and the agricultural land quality in Section 2;

(ii) sets out planning policy of relevance in Section 3; and

(iii) provides an assessment in Section 4.

1.4 The assessment sets out conclusions in Section 5, providing separate conclusions for the red land and the blue land.

2 THE SITE AND LAND QUALITY

The Site

2.1 The site as a whole extends to approximately 24 ha of pasture. However, as can be seen from Insert 1, for the purpose of this development, the land is split into two sections. Within the red line lies 8 ha and within the blue line lies 16 ha. To the north – west of the site is an existing residential settlement with a school bordering the northern boundary of the site.

Land Quality

2.2 Agricultural land quality is measured by a system of Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) devised in the 1970s by MAFF, and last amended in 1988.

2.3 The system is described in the Welsh Government's "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ) booklet (May 2021), which has been reproduced in **Appendix KCC1**.

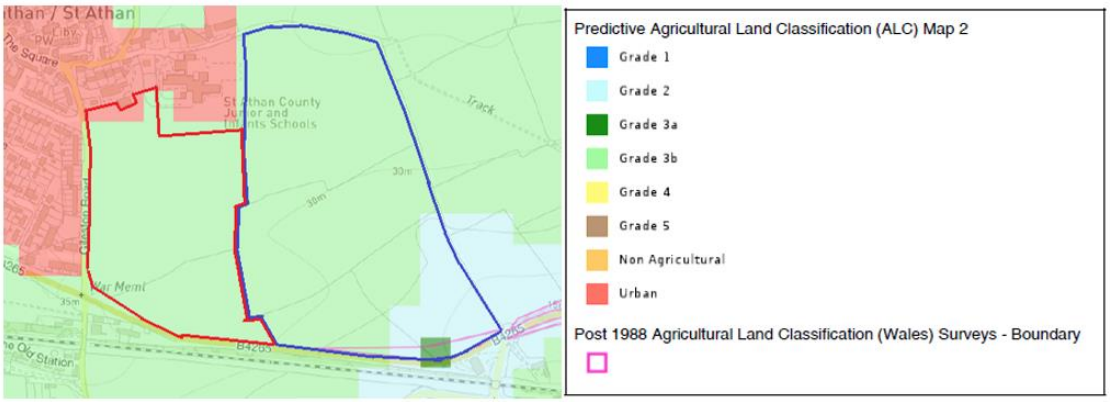
2.4 As described in the FAQ booklet, agricultural land is divided into five grades, with Grade 3 divided into two Subgrades: 3a and 3b.

2.5 The predictive Agricultural Land Classification map (version 2, 2020) provides the best available information to predict the grade of land.

2.6 The site within the red line is shown on the Predictive ALC as being Subgrade 3b, which is defined as "moderate quality" agricultural land and therefore, not best and most versatile land.

2.7 The site area within the blue line is shown on the Predictive ALC as predominately Subgrade 3b, with 1.5 ha in the south-eastern parcel showing as Grade 2, and a small area of Subgrade 3a, as shown below.

Insert 2: The Site and Predictive Grading



2.8 Grade 2 land is defined as “very good” quality land and Subgrade 3a is defined as “good” quality land. The site is shown as majority 3b, with a small percentage of Grade 2 and 3a. The predictive map plots land quality in 50m quadrants, hence the “blocky” nature of the mapping.

3 PLANNING POLICY

PPW

3.1 Planning Policy Wales (Edition 11, February 2021) sets out in paragraph 3.58 that agricultural land of Grades 1, 2 and 3a is the **"best and most versatile and should be conserved as a finite resource for the future "**.

3.2 Paragraph 3.58 notes that the best and most versatile agricultural land (BMV) should be conserved as a finite resource for the future.

3.3 Paragraph 3.59 sets out policy that seeks to develop land of poorer quality in preference to BMV land unless other considerations outweigh the agricultural considerations.

Local Plan

3.4 The Vale of Glamorgan Local Development Plan (June 2017) sets out that proposals should seek to avoid unnecessary loss of Best and Most Versatile agricultural land, as stated within the following policies:

- Policy MD1 Location of New Development states **"New development on unallocated sites should..**

  9. Have no unacceptable impact on the best and most versatile agricultural land"
- Policy MD7 Environmental Protection states **"Development proposals will be required to demonstrate they will not result in an unacceptable impact on people, residential amenity, property and/or the natural environment from either:..**

  7. The loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land"
- Policy MD19 Low Carbon and Renewable Energy Generation states **"Proposals for the generation of low carbon and renewable energy will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that there is no unacceptable impact on the interest of:**
  - **Best and most versatile agricultural land"**

3.5 Based on this, it is necessary to consider the extent of BMV land that the site contains and whether it will be affected by the proposal.

4 ASSESSMENT

Guidance

4.1 The Welsh Government Guidance Note v2.1 (May 2021) that accompanies the Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Maps is set out in **Appendix KCC2**. This describes the purpose of the Predictive Map.

4.2 The Guidance Note identifies that where land is shown on the predictive ALC as likely falling within Grades 1, 2 or 3a of the ALC, field surveys will be required. Such land is defined in Planning Policy Wales (Edition 11, 2021, Paragraph 3.58) as the **"best and most versatile agricultural land"**, and is afforded a degree of protection, as described above.

4.3 The Survey Decision Flowchart in the Guidance Note shows that, where land is shown on the Predictive Map as Grades 3b, 4 and 5 then **"Survey Not Required"**.

Assessment

4.4 Under the Guidance Note, it is necessary to assess the agricultural land quality and the implications of its development.

4.5 The site within the red line is shown to be wholly predictive ALC Subgrade 3b. This indicates that a survey is not required within this parcel.

4.6 The site within the blue line is shown to be predictive ALC Subgrade 3b, with a small section of Grade 2 and 3a in the south-eastern corner. The Grade 2 and 3a indicates that a field survey is needed for that part of the site to determine if that is indeed the grade (as the map is predictive).

4.7 Non-agricultural development within the red line is not constrained by agricultural land quality.

4.8 Non-agricultural development within the blue line could potentially affect up to about 1.5 ha of BMV land in the south-eastern corner. If proposals are advanced that would involve the non-agricultural development of that area, a field survey may be needed to confirm whether or not the land is of BMV quality.

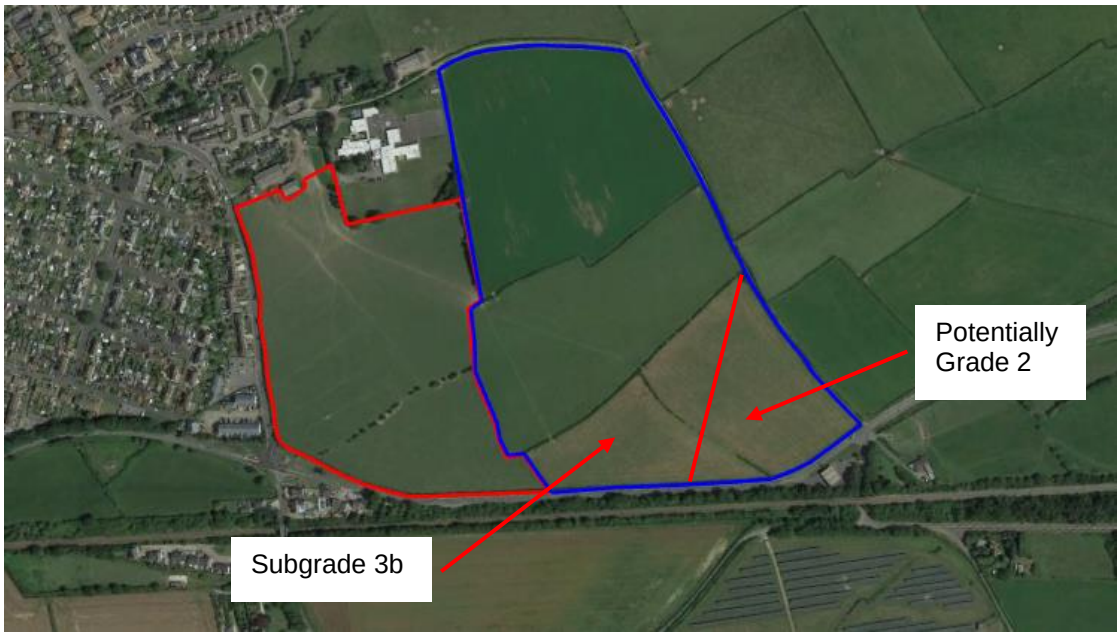
4.9 If that area was found to comprise BMV, it would then be necessary to consider whether or not there was an implication in terms of PPWE11 paragraph 3.58.

4.10 PPW edition 11 does not set a threshold for losses of agricultural land. Therefore, PPW e11 Paragraph 3.59 applies.

4.11 The Predictive Map shows approximately 1.5 ha as potentially BMV quality, in the far southeast parcel of land. If there was a small area of Grade 2 and 3a in an area of Subgrade 3b, it could not in any meaningful way be farmed differently and so would not be capable of being exploited as BMV.

4.12 This is evident when the area involved is marked on the aerial image, as below.

Insert 3: Area of Potential Grade 2 Marked



4.13 In such circumstances the potential to use the Grade 2, and therefore its agricultural benefits, is limited. If development of the blue land does need to take place, the existence of this small area of Grade 2 is not a constraint.

4.14 The quantum of potential BMV, at 1.5 ha, is very limited. The Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) guide "A New Perspective on Land and Soil in Environmental Impact Assessment" (February 2022) identifies losses of under 5 ha as "minor magnitude" development. The quantity of Grade 2 and 3a land on the site is 1.5 ha. Therefore, should the Grade 2 and 3a exist, this is about 30% of the threshold of what constitutes "minor" development and accordingly is at the lower end of the scale.

Conclusion

4.15 In these circumstances the loss of what is potentially BMV should be accorded at the most limited weight. It is anticipated that the development will take place on the land which is predicted to be Subgrade 3b resulting in no potential loss of BMV land.

4.16 Should the development be required to expand to the south-eastern part of the site, which is potentially Grade 2 and 3a land, then a detailed survey may then be required. However, it is noted that in the IEMA guide, the loss of BMV below 5 ha is considered as “minor magnitude”. Therefore, it would be considered that there would still be no requirement for a field survey.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Red Land

5.1 The 8 ha of land within the red line is wholly of Subgrade 3b. No ALC is therefore required.

5.2 There is no agricultural constraint to development of this area.

Blue Land

5.3 The 16 ha of blue land is mostly (circa 14.5 ha) Subgrade 3b, with potentially a small area of Grade 2 (1.5 ha) in the far south-eastern corner.

5.4 Were non-agricultural development to be considered for the blue land, it may be necessary, depending upon the proposals, to confirm by way of survey if the corner is Grade 2. Even it if is Grade 2, however, as a small area of Grade 2 forming only part of two larger agricultural fields, and mixed in fields of Subgrade 3b, the inherent quality is not capable of exploitation.

5.5 Development of that small area of BMV is not likely to be contrary to policy as a consequence.

APPENDIX KCC1

Welsh Government's Frequently Asked Questions, May 2021

Agricultural Land Classification
Frequently Asked Questions
May 2021.

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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General Background Questions

What is the ALC system?
The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) system provides a method for assessing the quality of farmland in England and Wales. The ALC system classifies land into five grades, with 1 being the best and 5 being the worst and Grade 3 subdivided into Subgrades 3a and 3b. The current grading methodology is described in The Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales Revised Guidelines and Criteria for Grading the Quality of Agricultural Land (MAFF 1988) sometimes referred to as 'The Blue Book'.

What is agricultural land?
Agricultural land is land which is capable of being used for agricultural purposes (e.g. cropping).The current use of the land does not affect the grade or agricultural potential of the land. Where the potential for agriculture has been irreversibly lost (e.g. through housing development) the land should no longer be classed as agricultural. For planning purposes, it is recommended that the Local Planning Authority is contacted to confirm the status of the land. Also see: Can land be high grade if it is not cropped or is used for grazing?

What is ALC used for?
The ALC is used to grade the quality of agricultural land so that informed decisions can be made over its future use within the planning system. The planning systems in England and Wales seek to conserve the 'Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land. Government policies in **Wales** with regard to BMV land can be found on the Welsh Government ALC webpages at: Welsh Government Web Topic - Agricultural Land Classification BMV policies in **England** are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

What is Best and Most Versatile agricultural land?
National planning policy defines the Best and Most Versatile agricultural land as land within grades 1, 2 and 3a. This is good to excellent quality land which can best deliver the food and non-food crops for the future.

How does the Agricultural Land Classification system grade land?
The criteria for grading are based on the long term physical limitations of land for agricultural use, such as **climate** (temperature, rainfall, aspect, exposure and frost risk), **site** (gradient, micro-relief and flood risk) **and soil** (texture, structure, depth and stoniness, and also chemical properties which cannot be corrected), and interactions between these factors such as soil wetness, droughtiness and erosion. Field survey to obtain site and soil data is required. The current grading methodology is described in: The Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales Revised Guidelines and Criteria for Grading the Quality of Agricultural Land (MAFF 1988)

What do the different grades mean?

Generalised Description of the Agricultural Land Classification Grades

Grade & standard colour notations	Description of agricultural land	Detail
1	Excellent quality	No or very minor limitations on agricultural use. Wide range of agricultural and horticultural crops can be grown. High yielding and consistent.
2	Very good	Minor Limitations on crop yield, cultivations or harvesting. Wide range of crops but limitations on demanding crops (e.g. winter harvested veg). Yield high but lower than Grade 1.
3 (subdivided)	Good to moderate	Moderate limitations on crop choice, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or level of yield. Yields lower and more variable than Grade 2.
3a	Good	Moderate to high yields of narrow range of arable crops (e.g. cereals), or moderate yields of grass, oilseed rape, potatoes, sugar beet and less demanding horticultural crops.
3b	Moderate	Moderate yields of cereals, grass and lower yields other crops. High yields of grass for grazing/ harvesting.
4	Poor	Severe limitations which restrict range and/or level of yields. Mostly grass and occasional arable (cereals and forage), but highly variable yields. Very droughty arable land included.
5	Very poor	Severe limitations which restrict use to permanent pasture or rough grazing except for pioneering forage crops.

A full description of the grades can be found in Appendix 1.

Can land be high grade if it is not cropped or is used for grazing?
The current land use does not affect the grade or longer term agricultural potential of the land. Land use is an economic and management choice of the land manager. The ALC grade describes what the land is potentially capable of, not what it is currently used for.

Can the ALC grading be changed by farming practices?
Normal agricultural land management will rarely, if ever, affect the ALC grading of land. The grading is based on the long term physical and chemical limitations of land for agricultural use. The current or historic agricultural management, or intensity of use, does not affect the ALC grade. ALC grading could potentially only be improved by very major and expensive interventions, well beyond the scope of normal agricultural works. Examples could include major new drainage schemes, new flood defence systems or infilling / levelling of highly uneven land. It is extremely unlikely that an ALC grading would drop because of neglect or poor agricultural management.

Will fertilizer improve the grade?
Applications of fertiliser or lime are part of the normal management of agricultural land and do not affect the grade. Normal fertiliser levels in the soil have no bearing on ALC grade. Chemical limitations in ALC relate to major long term problems that cannot easily be remediated. These can include extreme acidity, saline environments and presence of toxic elements.

What can I grow on my land? (Crop suitability)
The suitability of land for certain crops is determined by a variety of factors. The ALC Grade of the land doesn't determine what can be grown, but indicates the type of crops that are generally suited to land of that quality and versatility. Typical crops are given in Appendix 1.

Are land values determined by ALC grade?
The ALC system was developed to inform land use planning decisions. The use of the ALC system for land valuation has never been intended and should not be used for this purpose.

Grade and Map Questions

What is the grade of my land?
The only way to accurately determine the agricultural grade of land is by way of a detailed field survey in accordance with the current ALC 1988 guidelines. What does a detailed field survey involve?

In **Wales**, the Welsh Government holds detailed field survey information for selected areas and a predictive map which can be found at http://lle.gov.wales/map/alc2. For further information please contact LQAS@gov.wales.

The most up-to-date information on ALC Grades in **England** can be found on www.Magic.gov.uk/ (Landscape tab). Detailed field surveys (Post 1988 ALC layer on the Magic website) are available for selected areas. Also see: What about strategic maps showing the likely occurrence of best and most versatile land mentioned in TIN049?

Why do different maps show different grades for the same area?
ALC assessments became more field based and site specific from 1976, partly due to limitations of the Provisional mapping. On 1 January 1989, the current system of ALC grading was introduced: (*The Revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land*: MAFF 1988). The guidelines provide the most definitive ALC grading and normally supersede any earlier surveys. In some areas there will be several different levels of detail of ALC data. Soils are variable and the grade of the land can vary over small distances. The ability to map this variation depends on the scale of the survey and the associated scale of mapping. The most detailed survey will usually represent the most definitive grading.

What are the 'Revised Guidelines'?
The ALC was devised and introduced in the 1960s and Technical Report 11 (MAFF, 1966: Technical Report 11, Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales) outlined the national system. Following a review of the system, criteria for the sub-division of Grade 3 (3a, 3b & 3c) were published in 1976 and Technical Report 11/1 (MAFF, 1976: Technical Report 11/1, Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales. The definition and identification of Sub-grades within Grade 3) outlined the updated.

The new and most up-to-date guidance was issued in 1988 "The *Revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land*". This was implemented from 1 January 1989. The 1988 Revised guidelines were developed and tested with the aim of updating the system without changing the original concepts. This recognises two subgrades within in Grade 3: Subgrade 3a and Subgrade 3b, the latter being a combination of the previous Subgrades 3b and 3c. Consequently, modern ALC surveys are sometimes referred to as 'post 1988' or post revision. Any surveys carried out using the old guidelines (sometimes referred to as pre 1988 surveys or pre revision) would need to be reassessed under the current criteria.

Survey Related Questions

There is no detailed survey of my land, is a field survey required?
It depends why you want to know the grade of your land. For a planning purpose you should contact your local planning authority for advice.

What does a detailed field survey involve?
ALC surveys are undertaken, according to the published Guidelines by field surveyors using hand held augers to examine soils to a depth of 1.2 metres. This usually consists of one boring per hectare, supplemented by digging occasional small pits (usually by hand) to inspect the soil profile at representative locations to provide more detailed information about soil conditions to depths up to 1.2 metres. Information obtained by these methods is combined with climatic and other data to produce an ALC map and report, which will normally include individual soil profile and pit descriptions, and written explanations to support the grading applied. ALC maps are normally produced on an Ordnance Survey base at varying scales from 1:10,000 for detailed work to 1:50 000 for reconnaissance survey. It is important that ALC surveys are completed by an experienced ALC surveyor to ensure that the evidence is accurate and robust to inform planning decisions.

Can you recommend an ALC surveyor?
The Institute of Professional Soil Scientists (the professional body of the British Society of Soil Science) maintains a register of competent soil surveyors who have experience of carrying out ALC surveys. www.soils.org.uk. Other professional bodies may also maintain lists of their members who undertake ALC work. It is important that ALC surveys are completed by an experienced ALC surveyor to ensure that the evidence is accurate and robust to inform planning decisions.

Is urban land subject to ALC surveys?
Urban land may be shown on ALC survey maps. It will normally not be surveyed because the land has relatively little potential for return to agricultural use. The full definition of urban and other non-agricultural categories in the ALC system can be found in Appendix 1. You should contact your local planning authority for advice on whether an ALC survey is required to support a planning application.

Does the Welsh Government carry out ALC (detailed field) surveys?
Yes. The Welsh Government does carry out detailed Agricultural Land Classification (detailed field) surveys. These surveys are undertaken largely in response to requests from Local Planning Authorities for individual sites or areas at the urban edge which are being considered for development. The Welsh Government also holds copies of detailed individual Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) surveys carried out by them, as well as the former Welsh Office or Welsh Assembly Government. In addition the Welsh Government also provides a site survey validation service for Local Planning Authorities providing a technical assessment of submitted reports and enables them to fully consider land quality in the decision making process.

Does Natural England carry out ALC surveys?
Natural England provides advice to Local Planning Authorities on ALC matters, but does not carry out ALC field surveys. Natural England holds copies of detailed individual Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) surveys carried out by the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food until the late 1990s. These surveys were undertaken largely in response to requests from Local Planning Authorities for individual sites or areas at the urban edge which were to be considered for development; not all agricultural land was surveyed at the time. There is no longer a national programme to survey all areas in detail and since the late the 1990's, the Government no longer undertakes detailed field surveys itself. Specialist consultants are engaged by developers, Local Planning Authorities, landowners and others

to carry out detailed Agricultural land Classification surveys for local plans and other development proposals.

What sampling density should I use in my ALC field survey?
There is no prescribed guidance on the sample density of field surveys; however, most experienced ALC surveyors use an average density of 1 sample point per hectare (carried out on the Ordinance Survey 100m grid). Soil pits are also useful to obtain further information about soil structure, porosity and stone content, rock layers etc. to enable confirmation of the grading found on site. The number of soil pits is difficult to specify in advance of starting field survey work. In general, one soil pit is dug for each of the main grades or soil types on the site, though not necessarily for each map unit, but it should be left to the professional judgement of the surveyor as to the appropriate minimum number required.

Surveys at this detailed level can also enable an assessment of the soil resources in line with the Defra Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites and will allow users to present the land quality case to public inquiry level if required.

Depending upon the type of development, location, scale, purpose of the survey, availability of existing ALC data etc., less detailed surveys (or sometimes more detailed) surveys may be undertaken, but expert advice must be sought from a soil scientist or other practitioner experienced in undertaking ALC survey work. All data captured in ALC surveys is done to the same standard (i.e. standard recording of soil colour, texture etc. plus pits). The only difference in a less detailed survey is the grid spacing, not the quality or detail of data capture at the points examined.

It is important that ALC surveys are completed by an experienced ALC surveyor to ensure that the evidence is accurate and robust to inform planning decisions. The British Society of Soil Scientists run training courses and has a competency scheme, ***Working with Soil***, covering aspects of soil survey and the ALC system.

What climate data is used for ALC?

The definitive climatic data used for assessing the overall climatic limitation (and for the wetness and droughtiness limitations) are obtained from a series of grid point datasets compiled specifically for ALC (Meteorological Office 1989: Climatological Data for Agricultural Land Classification). They provide long term average values of the required variables on a 5km grid covering the whole of England and Wales. These variables are interpolated for the location (grid reference) and altitude for intermediate sites.

I am a consultant/soil scientist undertaking a detailed ALC site survey and the land benefits from irrigation. Should I be taking this into account in my grading assessment?
No. The advice that irrigation should be removed from the ALC assessment was expressed in a consultation on the ALC system in 1996.

APPENDIX 1: AGRICULTURAL LAND CLASSIFICATION (ALC)

Descriptions of the Grades and Subgrades

The ALC grades and subgrades are described below in terms of the types of limitation which can occur, typical cropping range and the expected level and consistency of yield. In practice, the grades are defined by reference to physical characteristics. The grading guidance and cut-offs for limitation factors in the MAFF (1988) Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales Revised Guidelines and Criteria for Grading the Quality of Agricultural Land enable land to be ranked in accordance with these general descriptions.

Descriptions are also given of other land categories which may be used on ALC maps.

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.

Descriptions of other land categories used on ALC maps

Urban
Built-up or 'hard' uses with relatively little potential for a return to agriculture including: housing, industry, commerce, education, transport, religious buildings, cemeteries. Also, hard-surfaced sports facilities, permanent caravan sites and vacant land; all types of derelict land, including mineral workings which are only likely to be reclaimed using derelict land grants.

Non-agricultural
'Soft' uses where most of the land could be returned relatively easily to agriculture, including: golf courses, private parkland, public open spaces, sports fields, allotments and soft-surfaced areas on airports/ airfields. Also active mineral workings and refuse tips where restoration conditions to 'soft' after-uses may apply.

Woodland
Includes commercial and non-commercial woodland. A distinction may be made as necessary between farm and non-farm woodland. Includes the normal range of agricultural buildings as well as other relatively permanent structures such as glasshouses. Temporary structures (e.g. polythene tunnels erected for lambing) may be ignored.

Open water
Includes lakes, ponds and rivers as map scale permits.

Land not surveyed
Agricultural land which has not been surveyed. Where the land use includes more than one of the above land cover types, e.g. buildings in large grounds, and where map scale permits, the cover types may be shown separately. Otherwise, the most extensive cover type will usually be shown.

Source: Section 2: MAFF (1988) Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales Revised Guidelines and Criteria for Grading the Quality of Agricultural Land.

APPENDIX KCC2

Welsh Government's Guidance Note

v2.1 (May 2021)

Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map (Wales)
The Hollington Map

Guidance Note
Version 2.1 - May 2021.

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Contents:

1. Introduction
2. Using the Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map
3. When to Commission a Survey
4. Survey Decision Flowchart
5. Map Creation and Use – Key Points

How to Determine the Grade of Agricultural Land:

1. Introduction:

Planning Policy Wales (PPW11) paragraph 3.58 and 3.59 outlines national policy towards conserving Wales' Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land. Further guidance is provided in Technical Advice Note (TAN) 6, including the consultation arrangements with the Welsh Government included at Annex B.

Best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land is defined in Planning Policy Wales as Grades 1, 2 and 3a. This is excellent to good quality land which is able to best deliver the food and non-food crops.

The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) provides a method for assessing the quality of farmland to enable informed choices to be made about its future use within the planning system. It is the only approved system for grading agricultural land quality in England and Wales.

The Agricultural Land Classification Grade should be determined in order to be able to apply Planning Policy in development management decisions. Wales does not have a national survey programme. To survey the whole of Wales at a detailed level is not a realistic prospect, due to cost and time restraints.

The drive for natural resource management and better evidence provision by the Welsh Government has provided the impetus to produce a Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map.

The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map uses the best available information to predict the Grade of land on national basis. It has been designed to help Local Planning Authorities, Developers, Surveyors and Land Use Managers make informed long term decisions over the use of land in the planning system and to target survey work to the most appropriate locations.

Further detail concerning the Agricultural Land Classification System can be found in the Frequently Asked Questions section of the Welsh Government website.

2. Using the Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map:

The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map is the first step in gathering evidence to inform the user as to whether or not Planning Policy Wales (PPW) paragraph 3.58 and 3.59 should to be taken into account.

Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map (Wales)
The Hollington Map

The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map is not intended to replace the need for Agricultural Land Classification survey work. The Map will assist the user in targeting survey work to the most appropriate locations.

It remains the case that the only way to determine the grade of land is by commissioning an agricultural land classification survey. Planning applications and Local Development Plans are expected to be supported by survey evidence where BMV agricultural land is an issue for consideration.

3. When to Commission a Survey:

In spatial assessments and development management decisions the grade of land must be known. The flowchart below sets out the decision process.

Where the Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map identifies grades 1, 2 or 3a, a survey will be required to determine Grades present and in what proportion.

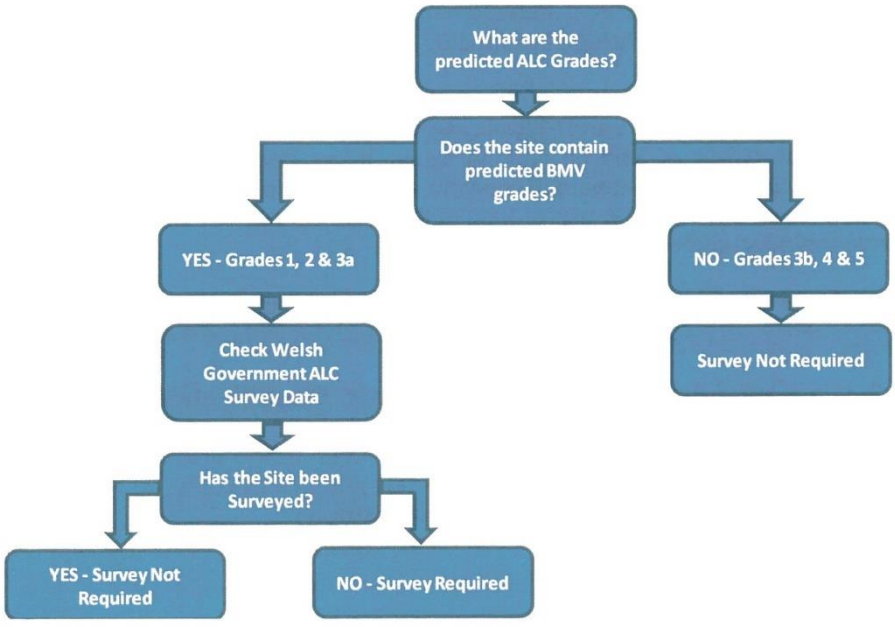
The Welsh Government has also published existing survey data. Before commissioning a survey, these records should be checked to see if the site(s) in question has already been assessed in detail.

If there is no survey record for the site(s) or part remains un-surveyed, an Agricultural Land Classification survey should be commissioned.

The Land Quality Advisory Service will provide advice on survey requirements and validate agricultural land classification surveys for Local Planning Authorities free of charge. This service allows the Authority to have confidence in the information being presented.

Should any party refuse or neglect to commission a survey, or the survey is not accepted by the Welsh Government, the Predictive Map Grade should be accepted as the best available information.

4. Survey Decision Flowchart:



Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map (Wales)
The Hollington Map

5. Map Creation and Use – Key Points:

- The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map replaces the Welsh 'Provisional' 1:250,000 Series of maps produced between 1967 and 1974.

- The 'Provisional' 1:250,000 Series maps were withdrawn in Wales on 27th November 2017 and should not to be used to support any planning proposal or as an evidence base for Local Development Plans (LDP)_.

- Should there be any confusion over which Agricultural Land Classification map to use, please contact LQAS@gov.wales for further guidance.

- The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map for Wales is based on the principles of the Agricultural Land Classification System of England & Wales, the Revised Guidelines & Criteria for Grading the Quality of Agricultural Land (MAFF 1988).

- Version 2 (released 2020) of the Predictive Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Map represents the first significant update since its launch in 2017. The developments are focused on 2 specific areas – inclusion of detailed soil series data were available and an updated ALC survey layer.

  Soil Data:

  Where more detailed mapped soil series information is available, it now replaces the 1:250,000 national soil map (Cranfield University). This represents approximately 50% of Wales' surface area with a focus on lowland areas and parts of the Brecon Beacons. The detailed mapping includes scales of 1:25,000; 1:50,000; and, 1:63,000.

  Where more detailed mapping is available, soil series phases have been include for shallow and rocky areas.

  Where evidence is available, the properties of some soil series have been amended. This is a result of survey work, auger samples, wetness class changes, surveyor knowledge, and recognised mistakes in the mapping digitisation / transcription process

  ALC Survey Layer:

  Surveys commissioned, validated and accepted by Welsh Government since 2017 have been added.

  The Welsh Government survey layer has been updated for surveys commissioned between 1988 and 2017 following a comprehensive file scanning exercise.

  Surveys include those completed by the Welsh Government, the Welsh Office Agricultural Department, ADAS Statutory and commercial organisations. Commercial surveys have only been included when validated by the Welsh Government.

Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map (Wales)
The Hollington Map

- The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map has been designed on a 50m raster (gridded squares). Please note the reliability of background data (especially soils) will vary. The map is a *modelled prediction and not definitive*, albeit based on best available data. For each 50m square the following individual criteria were assessed, and the most limited factor assigned:

  Agricultural Land Classification - Climate
  Agricultural Land Classification - Soil Depth
  Agricultural Land Classification - Slope
  Agricultural Land Classification - Soil Wetness
  Agricultural Land Classification - Drought
  Agricultural Land Classification - Stones
  Agricultural Land Classification - Wind Exposure
  Agricultural Land Classification - Other (Surveyor Experience)

- The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map does not take into account the following Agricultural Land Classification criteria.
  Flooding
  Pattern Limitation
  Micro-relief
  Frost
  Chemical Limitations

  Expert advice will need to be sought to assess the risk of these factors imposing a long term limitation on a site by site basis.

- The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map has **not** been designed for, and the Welsh Government does not approve of, the following uses:

  Valuing agricultural land
  Assigning agricultural rents
  Allocating financial support

- There are significant differences in the distribution of Agricultural Land Classification Grades between the 'Provisional' and 'Predictive' map products. This is because the Provisional Map is based on criteria pre-dating the introduction of the current 'Revised Guidelines and Criteria for Grading the Quality of Agricultural Land'. (MAFF 1988) and the National Soil Map. The 1988 guidelines are well established in planning, so the grading system used is not new.

- In cases where the predicted grade has been revised from that stated on the Provisional Map, and it is felt this has led to a financial disadvantage or otherwise, the Welsh Government accepts no liability. It is long established that the Agricultural Land Classification system forms the basis for advice given by the Welsh Government on land use planning matters; not for any other uses such as the valuation of land.

- The Welsh Government intends to review and update the Predictive ALC Map as better information becomes available.

- Should it be felt the predicted grade for an area does not fairly reflect agricultural land quality, the Welsh Government will only accept an Agricultural Land Classification survey as evidence the Grade should be changed. The

Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map (Wales)
The Hollington Map

Welsh Government shall not be liable for any cost incurred. Changes to the Predictive Map are at the discretion of the Welsh Government. Should the Welsh Government accept the proposed changes, these will follow when the Predictive Map is updated.

- The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map is available as a GIS layer showing Grades 1-5. This has been made available under Open Government Licence.

- The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Map is derived from soils data which remain the property of Cranfield University. (Soil data © Cranfield University (NSRI) and for the Controller of HMSO 2019).

- For further information, advice and survey validation, please contact the Land Quality Advice Service:

  Email: LQAS@gov.wales

  Web: Agricultural Land Classification Information

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