

### **3.0 BOROUGH-WIDE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER PROFILES**

#### **3.1 General**

- 3.1.1 This section provides a detailed inventory and description of the Borough's landscape character types and areas.

#### **3.2 Landscape Character Types**

- 3.2.1 'Landscape Character Types' are broad tracts of land that share common characteristics of geology, landform, vegetation, land-use and settlement. They are generic landscapes which reoccur throughout the Borough.
- 3.2.2 The distribution of the seven Landscape Character Types defined within the Borough are shown on Figure 6, and their key characteristics are summarised below:

##### ***A - River Valley***

- V-shaped valley landform which dissects Boulder Clay/ Chalky Till plateau;
- Main river valley served by several tributaries;
- Flat or gently undulating valley floor;
- Intimate character in places;
- Wooded character in places.

##### ***B - Farmland Plateau***

- Elevated gently rolling Boulder Clay/ Chalky Till plateau landscape;
- Network of narrow winding lanes and minor roads;
- Medium to large-scale enclosed predominantly arable fields;
- Long distance views across valleys from certain locations;
- Well wooded in places (with several areas of semi-natural and ancient woodland), interspersed with orchards.

***C - Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats***

- Flat, low-lying and open landscape;
- Areas of saltmarsh, mudflats, shingle spits and tidal creeks adjacent to the coast;
- Generally tranquil and undisturbed character;
- Feeling of remoteness and wilderness on the open beaches and salt marshes;
- Visible sea walls separate drained former marshland and current saltmarsh/ mudflats;
- Lack of trees or hedgerows.

***D - Drained Estuarine Marsh***

- Areas of flat, artificially drained former salt marsh currently grassland and cultivated fields;
- Visible sea walls separate drained former marshland and current saltmarsh/ mudflats;
- Lack of large areas of trees or woodland;
- Network of visible drainage ditches.

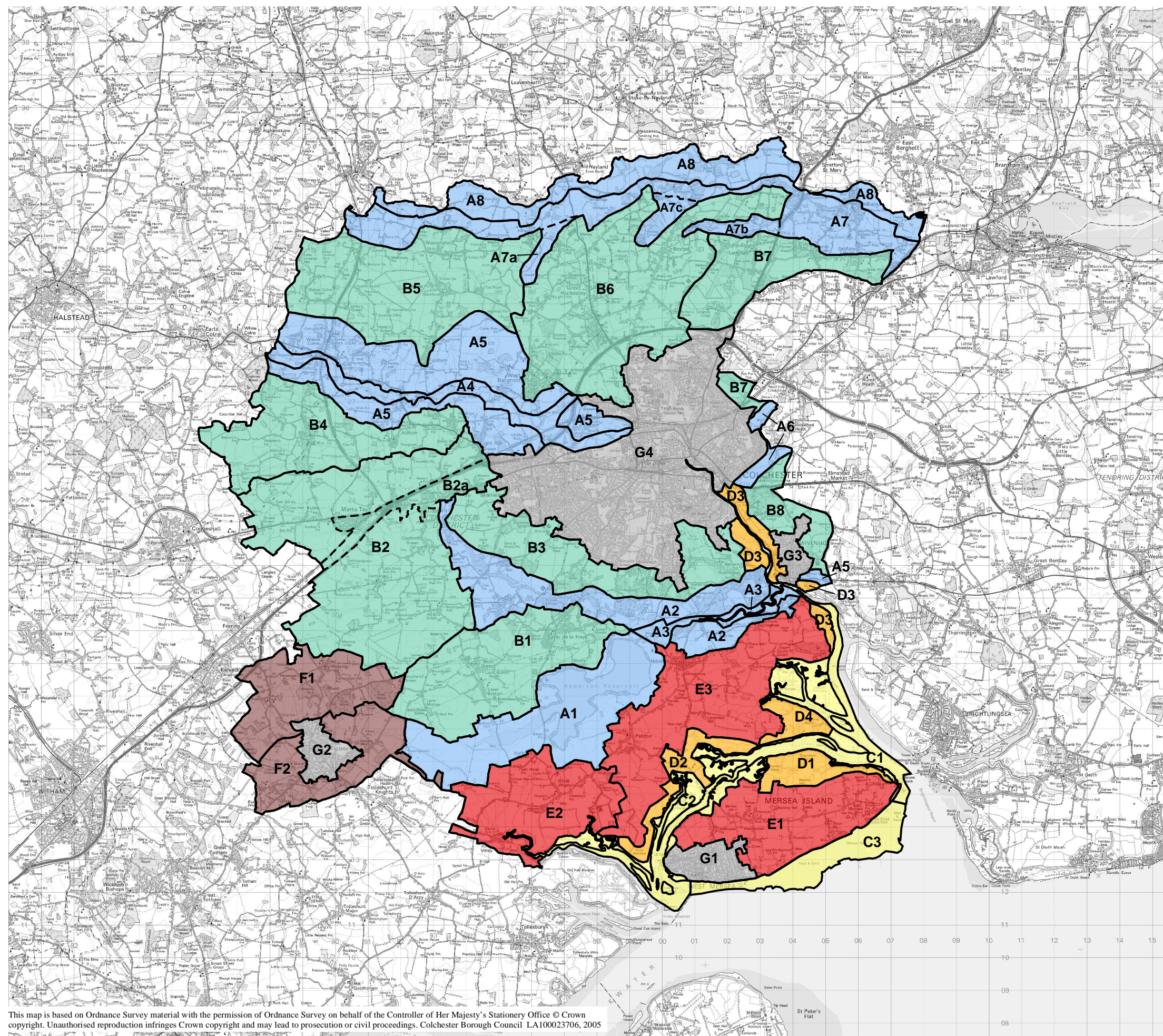
***E - Coastal Farmland***

- Predominantly flat, low-lying landscape, sloping gradually upwards to the north;
- Framed views of Blackwater Estuary and coastline from several locations;
- Arable farmland on underlying heavy clay soils;
- Lack of large patches/ areas of woodland;
- Sparse settlement pattern with small, relatively isolated settlements.

***F - Wooded Farmland***

- Elevated broad ridge landform (part of SW-NE aligned ridge);
- Mixture of arable and pasture farmland;
- Several nucleated settlements, with a clustered settlement pattern;
- Well wooded with woodland blocks (including areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland); copses and hedges;
- Framed views of the Blackwater Valley through gaps in hedgerows;
- Enclosed character in places.





KEY

Landscape Character Area

**A River Valley**

A1 Abberton Flooded River Valley
A2 Wooded Roman River Valley
A3 Roman River Valley Floor
A4 Colne River Valley Floor
A5 Colne River Valley Slopes
A6 Ardleigh River Valley
A7 Stour River Valley Slopes
A8 Stour River Valley Floor

**B Farmland Plateau**

B1 Layer Breton Farmland Plateau
B2 Easthorpe Farmland Plateau
B3 Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau
B4 Great Tey Farmland Plateau
B5 Rochfords Farmland Plateau
B6 Great Horkesley Farmland Plateau
B7 Langham Farmland Plateau
B8 Wivenhoe Farmland Plateau

**C Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats**

C1 Fingringhoe Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats
C2 Strood & Salcott Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats
C3 West Mersea Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats

**D Drained Estuarine Marsh**

D1 Mersea Island Drained Estuarine Marsh
D2 Feldy Drained Estuarine Marsh
D3 Colne Drained Estuarine Marsh
D4 Pyefleet Drained Estuarine Marsh

**E Coastal Farmland**

E1 Mersea Island Coastal Farmland
E2 Great & Little Wigborough Coastal Farmland
E3 Langenhoe Coastal Farmland

**F Wooded Farmland**

F1 Messing Wooded Farmland
F2 Tiptree Wooded Farmland

**G Principal Urban Areas**

G1 West Mersea Urban Landscape
G2 Tiptree Urban Landscape
G3 Wivenhoe Urban Landscape
G4 Colchester Urban Landscape

Colchester Borough Boundary

0 2 4 km

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## **E1 MERSEA ISLAND COASTAL FARMLAND**

### ***Key Characteristics***

- Flat, low-lying predominantly arable farmland;
- Mixture of small, medium and large arable fields with hedged field boundaries (gappy in places);
- Small fields generally located in close proximity to small farmsteads;
- Network of drainage ditches traversing the island;
- Lack of woodland cover, however several mature trees present in hedgerow field boundaries;
- Views of sea restricted by domed landform of the island.

### ***Overall Character***

3.3.102 Mersea Island consists of low-lying, predominantly arable farmland. The island is situated at the confluence of two River estuaries (the Colne Estuary to the east and Blackwater Estuary to the south) and the Strood Channel physically separates the island from the mainland at high tide. It is accessible via the Strood tidal causeway, which traverses open coastal estuarine marsh and connects with the mainland to the north. A mixture of small, medium and large regular arable fields enclosed by low to medium hedges are typical across the area. Small fields are generally situated in close proximity to groups of small farmsteads. Hedged field boundaries are gappy in places and interspersed with several mature deciduous hedgerow trees, however, there are no large areas of woodland within the character area. Pasture fields also contribute to the character of the area, enclosed by wooden post and rail fencing. A network of drainage ditches is visible across the character area, providing a constant reminder of the close inter-relationship that the landscape has with the surrounding coastal water. Settlement pattern consists of series of small farmsteads, halls and groups of houses, which extend from the main west-east road, connecting East and West Mersea. There are also a number of caravan parks spread along the southern edge of the island. West Mersea is the largest settlement on the island, and provides local shops and services. Diverse and interesting views over the Blackwater Estuary, Salcott and Strood channels are afforded from the southern and western edges of the town.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Open views of Langenhoe Coastal Farmland are visible on the skyline to the north of the island;
- Views of open sea from the character area are restricted by the dome shaped landform of the island.

### ***Historic Features***

- Visual remains of use of the landscape and as a food resource during the Romano-British period comprising a round barrow (Mersea Mount) at barrow hill and several red hills (visible at low tide) on the southern beaches, associated with the early salt-making industry;
- Evidence of Second World War defences includes pillboxes and gun emplacements at West Mersea and a decoy bunker at East Mersea.

### ***Ecological Features***

- 3.3.103 The ecological character of shore and grassland habitats bordering large open fields (mostly used for arable). Ecological interest is confined to the borders of the shore and in small areas of semi-natural grassland. There are only a few pockets of scrub and woodland. Cudmore Grove Country Park SINC which comprises species-rich coastal grassland with typical and uncommon species such as fenugreek *Trigonella foenum-graecum* and narrow-leaved bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus tenuis*. This is managed for wildlife purposes.
- 3.3.104 At West Mersea a county rarity (and uncommon in the UK) has been discovered; sea spurge *Euphorbia paralias* along with sea mayweed *Tripleurospermum maritimum*, which has a limited distribution in Essex. Also large populations of shrubby sea-blite *Suaeda vera* has been able to colonise unstable shingle along the drift line at West Mersea and Osea Island.
- 3.3.105 This area of farmland is included within the Blackwater Management Plan and the shoreline is designated under the Blackwater Estuary RAMSAR, Essex Estuaries cSAC, and Colne Estuary SPA, SSSI and NNR.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Pressure from expansion of the settlement edges or West Mersea and around East Mersea;
- Potential for the introduction of visually intrusive agricultural buildings within the coastal farmland landscape, which would be visible from several surrounding character areas;
- Vulnerable to sea-level rise and the potential effects of global warming;
- Pressure on minor roads, especially during peak tourist periods;
- Visually intrusive caravan parks along the edges of Mersea Island;
- Continuing loss of hedges and field boundary vegetation.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.106 Conserve and Enhance.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Consider the impacts of any new development in adjacent character areas avoiding visual intrusion and adverse impact on the generally undisturbed character;
- Conserve the open nature of some views across the coastal farmland;
- Consider the visual impact of any new small-scale development appropriate scale, form, design and use of materials appropriate to landscape character;
- Ensure any new small-scale development in or on the edges of West Mersea and East Mersea responds to the existing settlement pattern;
- Conserve and enhance the landscape setting of West Mersea;
- Ensure any new harbourside development at West Mersea avoids the introduction of suburban styles and materials and responds to landscape setting taking into account views to and from the adjacent areas of open and drained estuarine marsh;
- Prevent coalescence of tourist orientated development on the southern edge of the area.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Strengthen hedgerow management, particularly of elm;
- Conserve, manage and enhance areas of semi-natural grassland habitats;
- Seek to screen visually intrusive caravan parks using structure planting (appropriate to local landscape character);
- Conserve existing WWII heritage features.