

Colchester Coastal Protection Belt Review

Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) was appointed by Colchester Borough Council to undertake a review of the existing Coastal Protection Belt (CPB) boundary and policy to inform the new Colchester Local Plan (2017-2032). The review involved the following tasks:

1. Review of existing CPB boundary.
2. Identify CPB mapping criteria.
3. Map proposed updated CPB boundary.
4. Recommend a revised coastal areas policy.

1. Review of Existing Coastal Protection Belt Boundary

The existing CPB boundary considered by this review is shown on **Figure 1**¹. This is the CPB boundary referred to within Policy DP23 (Coastal Areas) of the Colchester Local Development Framework adopted in 2010².

The current CPB boundary used in Colchester Borough is based on the CPB defined in 1984 by Essex County Council in the Essex Coast Protection Subject Plan³, as subsequently refined to a degree by Colchester Borough Council in successive local plans. The Subject Plan recognised the rural and undeveloped character of the Essex coastline as a unique, finite and irreplaceable resource in its own right. The Subject Plan set out a coastal protection policy, the main objective of which was to protect the coastline outside built-up areas from development that would adversely affect the open and rural character or wildlife within an area known as 'The Coastal Protection Belt'.

A broad study area was selected as a starting point for defining the CPB area from first principles in the 1984 Subject Plan. The study area used the tidal influence of river estuaries as the inland cut-off point. The criteria used to determine whether land within the study area should be included or not within the CPB boundary is documented in detail within the Subject Plan.

The criteria can be summarised as follows:

¹ Existing CPB boundary provided digitally by Colchester Borough Council, August 2015

² Colchester Local Development Framework - Adopted Development Policies (Colchester Borough Council, October 2010)

³ Essex Coast Protection Subject Plan - Written Statement and Proposals Map (Essex County Council, Adopted 14th December 1984)

- A. **Areas of open, undeveloped and rural character with coastal/estuary views** – the areas excluded included urban coastline, larger towns/villages and industrial areas (with the exception of small villages and areas of development that retain their open quality such as minerals extraction sites).
- B. **Areas of high landscape value** – as defined by a landscape quality appraisal undertaken in 1976-78 that formed the basis for Special Landscape Areas in the Essex County Structure Plan.
- C. **Areas of designated nature conservation value** – Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Nature Conservancy Zones associated with coastal habitats such as saltings, marshes and mudflats.

In defining tracts of land to be included in the CPB, the Subject Plan placed greatest weight upon the first criterion in line with the main objective to protect the open, undeveloped and rural character of the coast. In addition, the Subject Plan required that the CPB boundary be delineated in detail along permanent physical features on the ground that were readily identifiable and defensible (such as roads, field boundaries and rights of way for example).

2. Coastal Protection Belt Mapping Criteria

The proposed approach to mapping the updated CPB is based on the principles and criteria established by the 1984 Essex Coast Protection Subject Plan. In addition, the approach has been informed by a brief review of the current legislative and policy framework for the protection and management of coastal areas in England. In line with the 1984 Subject Plan's main objective to protect the open, undeveloped and rural character of the coast, the proposed approach also draws on the latest available evidence in relation to landscape character.

European Landscape Convention

The European Landscape Convention (ELC), a Europe-wide agreement supported by the Council of Europe ratified in 2006, is the first international treaty specifically relating to landscape⁴. It aims to promote co-operation on improving approaches to the planning, management and protection of landscapes throughout Europe. The ELC came into force in the UK on 1 March 2007.

The ELC defines landscape as '*an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors*'. The ELC adopts a broad and inclusive definition of landscape embracing landscapes, seascapes and townscapes, as well as all forms of rural landscape. Article 2 states: '*the Convention...covers natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas. It includes land, inland water and marine areas. It concerns landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as everyday or degraded landscapes.*'

⁴ European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe ETS No. 176, Ratified 2006)

National Planning Policy

Section 10 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)⁵ sets out the Government's policy on meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change. The accompanying Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) on Flood Risk and Coastal Change⁶ provides guidance to Local Planning Authorities (LPAs).

The aim of the policy on coastal change, as set out in paragraphs 105-108 of the NPPF, is to reduce risk from coastal change by avoiding inappropriate development in vulnerable areas or adding to the impacts of physical changes to the coast. LPAs should apply Integrated Coastal Zone Management, a joined-up and participative approach towards the planning and management of land and marine elements in coastal areas.

LPAs should also identify Coastal Change Management Areas in their Local Plans where rates of physical changes to the shoreline through erosion, coastal landslip, permanent inundation or coastal accretion are likely to be significant over the next 100 years, taking into consideration shoreline management plans. The current Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan⁷ identifies policies for managing the flood and coastal erosion risks to the coastline within Colchester Borough. The policies for the Colne Estuary (Unit D), Mersea Island (Unit E) and the Blackwater Estuary (Unit F) include managed realignment of the coastal defences between 2025 and 2055. The landscape in these areas of the coast are therefore likely to experience significant physical changes as the shoreline is restored to a more natural coastal and estuarine character during the lifetime of the new Colchester Local Plan.

LPAs are expected to be clear what development will be appropriate in Coastal Change Management Areas and make provision for development and infrastructure that needs to be relocated away from Coastal Change Management Areas. When assessing applications in such areas, LPAs should consider the degree to which the character of the coast, including its environmental designations (natural and historic) may be compromised, and also the implications for provision of a continuous recreational route along the coast.

Landscape Character Evidence Base

The 2005 Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment⁸ was prepared in accordance with the 2002 Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland⁹, which is widely acknowledged as good practice for assessing landscape character in England and Scotland. The Landscape Character Assessment reflects the principles of the European Landscape Convention, and is also generally consistent with Natural England's 2014 advice on landscape character assessment and evaluation¹⁰.

⁵ National Planning Policy Framework (DCLG, March 2012)

⁶ Planning Policy Guidance - Flood Risk and Coastal Change (DCLG, ID: 7, Updated: 15/04/2015)

⁷ Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan 2 (Environment Agency, Final Version, 15th October 2010)

⁸ Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment (Chris Blandford Associates for Colchester Borough Council, 2005)

⁹ Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (The Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002)

¹⁰ An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England, 2014)

The Landscape Character Assessment identifies a range of generic Landscape Character Types (LCTs) throughout the Borough. These are broad tracts of land that share common characteristics of geology, landform, vegetation, land-use and settlement. In relation to the definition of the CPB, the following LCTs represent areas of coastal/estuarine landscape character within the Borough:

- Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats (LCT C)
- Drained Estuarine Marsh (LCT D)
- Coastal Farmland (LCT E)

Criteria

The following criteria have been used to validate the existing CPB boundary as shown on **Figure 1**:

- A. Coastal Character** – inclusion of open, undeveloped and rural areas (terrestrial and inter-tidal) that have a distinctive coastal/estuarine character and sense of place as defined by the Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment. This criterion is in line with NPPF objectives to protect the open, undeveloped and rural character of the coast.
- B. Coastal Designations** – inclusion of designated sites of nature conservation value associated with coastal habitats such as saltings, marshes and mudflats; and designated sites of cultural heritage value associated with the Borough's coastal/maritime history. This criterion is in line with NPPF objectives to protect natural and historic environment designated assets in coastal areas.
- C. Coastal Change Areas** – inclusion of coastal areas that are likely to experience significant physical changes as a result of permanent/temporary inundation. This criterion is in line with NPPF objectives for management of coastal change.

In determining whether to include areas in the CPB or not, the area should wholly or predominantly meet criterion A; or meet criteria B and/or C. In this way, greatest weight is given to criterion A in line with the main objective to protect the open, undeveloped and rural character of the coast.

Table 1 provides details of the evidence used to inform the CPB boundary mapping process.

The following factors were used in the detailed delineation and digitisation of the CPB boundaries:

- **Exclude built-up urban areas that are not predominantly rural, undeveloped and open** – as determined by reference to the latest available Ordnance Survey MasterMap data (date?) and settlement boundaries from the Colchester Local Plan (date?).

- Follow the administrative boundary of Colchester Borough where appropriate – as determined by reference to the latest available Ordnance Survey MasterMap data (date?)
- Wherever possible, follow permanent physical features on the ground that are readily identifiable and defensible (such as roads, field boundaries and the low-water mark in inter-tidal areas) – as determined by reference to the latest available Ordnance Survey MasterMap data (date?) and aerial photographs (source: Bing maps website accessed January 2016).

Table 1: CPB Boundary Definition Criteria Evidence

Criteria	Evidence
A. Coastal Character	<p>Open, undeveloped and rural areas (terrestrial and inter-tidal) that have a distinctive coastal/estuarine character and sense of place defined by the Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2005) as represented by the following Landscape Character Types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats (LCT C) • Drained Estuarine Marsh (LCT D) • Coastal Farmland (LCT E)
B. Coastal Designations	<p>Designated sites of nature conservation value associated with coastal habitats such as saltings, marshes and mudflats as represented by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ramsar Sites (source: MAGIC website accessed January 2016) • Special Protection Areas (source: MAGIC website accessed January 2016) • Special Areas of Conservation (source: MAGIC website accessed January 2016) • Sites of Special Scientific Interest (source: MAGIC website accessed January 2016) • National Nature Reserves (source: MAGIC website accessed January 2016) • Local Wildlife Sites (source: supplied by EECOS July 2015) <p>Designated sites of cultural heritage value associated with the Borough's coastal/maritime history as represented by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheduled Monuments (source: Historic England website accessed January 2016) • Conservation Areas (source: CBC website & Historic Environment Record accessed January 2016) • Registered Historic Parks and Gardens (source: Historic England website accessed January 2016)

Criteria	Evidence
C. Coastal Change Areas	<p>Areas that are likely to experience significant physical changes as a result of permanent and/or temporary inundation as represented by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coastal areas within the Borough identified for managed realignment of coastal defences between 2025 and 2055 - the Colne Estuary (Unit D), Mersea Island (Unit E) and the Blackwater Estuary (Unit F). <i>(source: Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan, 2010)</i> Coastal areas within Flood Zone 3 <i>(source: Environment Agency website accessed January 2016)</i>

3. Mapping of Proposed Updated CPB Boundary

The proposed changes to the existing Coastal Protection Belt are shown on **Figure 2** and detailed in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Schedule of Proposed Changes to the CPB Boundary

Appraisal Sections	Proposed Additions	Proposed Deletions	Comments
1	Addition of a coastal Scheduled Monument in accordance with Criteria B.	Deletion of sea area below low-water mark as it does not meet criterion A; or B and/or C.	None
2	None	None	The existing CPB boundary follows the administrative boundary between Colchester Borough and Maldon District. NB. there is no reference to a CPB policy in the Maldon Submission Local Plan 2014.
3	Addition of land to encompass the full extent of the Coastal Farmland LCT E as defined by the Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment.	None	None
4	<p>Addition of an estuarine grazing marsh Local Wildlife Site in accordance with Criteria B.</p> <p>Addition of land to encompass the full extent of the Drained Estuarine Marsh LCT D as defined by the Colchester</p>	Deletion of three areas of land that do not meet criterion A; or B and/or C.	None

Appraisal Sections	Proposed Additions	Proposed Deletions	Comments
	Borough Landscape Character Assessment.		
5	None	None	The existing CPB boundary follows the administrative boundary between Colchester Borough and Tendring District. NB. the Tendring District Local Plan Strategic Green Gaps and Coastal Protection Belt Review (September 2015) makes reference to the intention to subsume the existing CPB policy into a new combined Coastal and Strategic Green Gaps policy/designation.

The proposed CPB boundary is shown on **Figure 3**. The proposed CBP boundary has been digitised in using Ordnance Survey MasterMap data and provided as an ESRI GIS shapefile.

4. Revised Coastal Areas Policy

In light of this review, it is recommended that consideration is given to the proposed revisions to the current adopted Policy DP23 on Coastal Areas of the Colchester Local Development Framework¹¹ set out in **Appendix A** in order to align it with national planning policy and guidance for the protection and management of coastal areas in England.

¹¹ Colchester Local Development Framework - Adopted Development Policies (Colchester Borough Council, October 2010)

Appendix A

Revised Coastal Areas Policy

Policy DPXX: Coastal Areas

Within the Coastal Protection Belt including undeveloped sections of the coast an integrated approach to coastal management will be promoted and, development will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that it:

- (i) Requires a coastal location and is located within the developed area of the coast;*
- (ii) Will be safe from flooding over its planned lifetime and will not have an unacceptable impact on coastal change;*
- (iii) Will not be significantly detrimental to conserving important nature conservation, historic environment assets, maritime uses and the landscape character of the coast;*
- (iv) Will deliver or sustain social and economic sustainability benefits considered important to the well-being of the coastal communities;*
- (v) Provides opportunities and scope for adaptation to climate change; and*
- (vi) Will not hinder the potential future creation and maintenance of a continuous signed and managed coastal access route.*

In exceptional circumstances, development may be permitted where it is proven that the proposal provides an overwhelming public or community benefit that outweighs all other material considerations. In such instances applications must demonstrate that the site is the only available option and be acceptable in terms of its other planning merits.

Proposals for all development and change of use on both the landward and seaward sides of Coast Road, West Mersea will be expected to enhance the existing traditional maritime character of the West Mersea Waterside Area of Special Character, and its role as a major yachting, fishing and boating centre. Proposals which result in the development of existing undeveloped areas of foreshore will be refused.

New moorings for permanent residential houseboats will not be permitted in coastal areas because of their landscape and environmental impact. Applications for infrastructure to support existing houseboats including jetties, sheds, platforms and fences and for those replacement houseboats or houseboat alterations considered to result in material alterations will be considered on the basis of their scale and impact on surrounding amenity, environment and landscape.

Explanation

The open, undeveloped and rural landscape character of the coastal area of Colchester Borough is an extremely rich, diverse and irreplaceable natural asset in terms of its natural and cultural features. It includes substantial parts of the Colne and Blackwater Estuaries. The ecological importance of the Colne and Blackwater Estuaries is reflected by the variety of international and European designations covering them i.e. Ramsar sites, Special Protection Areas (Birds Directive), and the Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated

under the Habitats Directive. There are also a number of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Wildlife Sites designated around the estuaries.

The Borough's coastline is also home to a number of sizeable communities in West Mersea Rowhedge, and Wivenhoe. As a consequence there are a number of diverse and competing interests which all need to be managed in an integrated way within the Borough's coastal belt. These include internationally important habitats, land and water-based recreation, fishing, archaeological and historic environment assets. Obligations to protect the important natural and cultural assets have to be balanced against the wider socio-economic needs of the Borough's coastal communities. Climate change including sea level rise is likely to present increasing pressure on the management of coastal habitats and coastal communities along Colchester's coastal fringe. The National Planning Policy Framework highlights the need to identify 'Coastal Change Management Areas'. The Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan (October 2010) has shown that the coastal frontage within the Borough is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and coastal processes. It will be important that future land uses and developments along this frontage, in particular built-up frontages, can demonstrate a high level of resilience in response to changing local climatic conditions.

In 1984, Essex County Council produced the Essex Coast Protection Subject Plan. This defined the a Coastal Protection Belt, which was reviewed and updated in 2016 by the Borough Council. The Coastal Protection Belt aims to protect the rural and undeveloped coastline from inappropriate development that would adversely affect its rural, undeveloped and open character and irreplaceable assets, landward and marine sites of nature conservation importance, and buildings and areas of special architectural, historic or archaeological importance. The Belt's rural and undeveloped coastline is of international, national and regional significance for its historic environment assets, and nature conservation interest. These multiple assets are strongly focussed and interrelated within the defined area, including between the coastline and adjoining inland areas. The Belt has a unique and irreplaceable character which should be strongly protected and enhanced.

Because the Coastal Protection Belt has a unique and irreplaceable character, there is a local need for greater priority to be given to the restraint of potentially damaging development than is normally possible under national planning policies. The Coastal Protection Belt adopts the precautionary principle and seeks to restrict development to within the built up areas of the coast. Some developments however require a coastal location and cannot be located elsewhere or are needed to help sustain the socio-economic base of a coastal area or serve the needs of the local coastal community. This may include sustainable tourism or leisure related developments, where they meet the requirements of policies elsewhere in the Plan.

The majority of the estuarine frontage of West Mersea comprises the West Mersea Conservation Area and is shown on the Proposals Map. The western end of Coast Road was designated as the West Mersea Waterside Area of Special Character in the Local Plan due to the unique character of this part of Mersea which has been strongly influenced by maritime, fishing and boating uses. This is carried forward in the Site Allocations DPD.

The Council is keen to conserve and improve the character of West Mersea Waterside. Proposals for the expansion, development, redevelopment of, or change of use of existing premises/sites used for boating/marine related uses will only be permitted where they remain compatible with the special traditional maritime character of the area, and there is a related need for the use to be located within the West Mersea Waterside Area of Special Character.

The Borough contains areas of houseboat development at West Mersea and East Colchester. These small scale developments are accepted as part of the character of these areas, but any further extension of houseboat development would be considered to have an unacceptable impact on these sensitive coastal/estuarine areas. Appropriately scaled and located development essential to the maintenance and sustainability of existing houseboats will be supported to the extent it addresses impact and design criteria as contained in national and local planning policy and guidance.