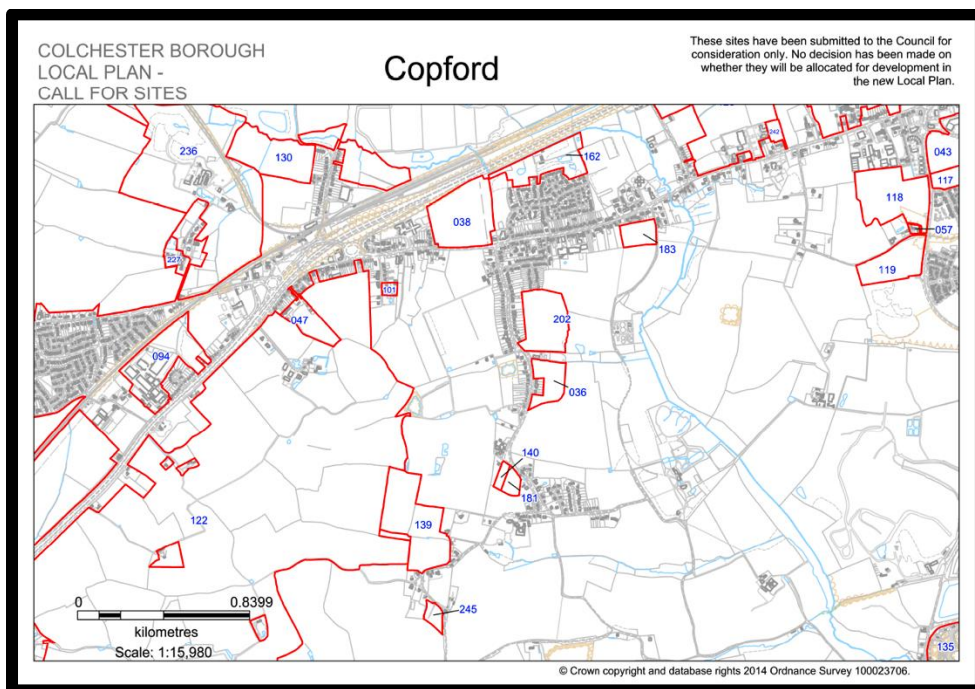


Copford with Easthorpe

The case for more careful selection of development sites in the parish

Evidence for Local Plan Hearings April 2021



Context

This report has been prepared by the Copford with Easthorpe Neighbourhood Development Planning Group. It addresses the Borough Council's intention, in Local Plan 2, to allocate 120 new homes to be built in the Parish of Copford with Easthorpe, by allocating 50 houses to land off Hall Road and 70 houses to land at the eastern end of Queensberry Avenue. The Neighbourhood Plan group is building its plan based in part, on earlier work in 2017 under the title VOICE. We wish to bring to the attention of inspectors, circumstances and plans which have changed since that submission to Colchester Borough Council. In particular, we wish to highlight the ways in which developments not possible in 2017, could now enable a significant contribution to the housing numbers required, without recourse to the Council's inappropriate and unpopular proposals. It reflects detailed local knowledge, with a concern that development in the parish must be guided by an understanding of its key historic and rural features.

Copford with Easthorpe is positioned with direct connections to road and rail infrastructure. It straddles ancient roads, has 44 listed buildings and an eclectic mix of housing which provides a distinct built environment. A varied natural environment includes ancient fieldscape and natural features, important to the landscape of North Essex. This makes the villages both appealing, yet vulnerable, with an absolute need for careful, sensitive planning. Residents are realistic about the need to consider expansion, which can bring benefits, but determined to ensure that location, infrastructure and density of development are appropriate.

CBC preferred sites

The previous selection of two preferred option sites by Colchester Borough Council is considered to be flawed. One of the sites at Hall Road lies within a much valued, ancient lane with unsafe access for pedestrians and poor connection to its primary school. The second, at Queensberry Avenue would see the doubling of a 1980s residential area, despite poor access for construction and the imposition of unacceptable density. In preferring these two poorly judged sites, CBC has given too little consideration to more viable and sustainable alternatives, despite some of those options being offered by landowners during the call for sites.

What has changed?

Since 2017, two sites in particular now have concrete proposals with substantial support of residents which will contribute 100 homes:

1. The proposed regeneration of historic Copford Place which will produce some 40 households.
2. A plan to build around 60 homes and country parkland on the large car-boot sale field bordering Copford with Easthorpe and Marks Tey Parishes. The land owner is keen to proceed in developing the site, which was previously barred from development by planners, as it was reserved as having a potential role in the failed plan to build a new Garden Community; West Tey.

The proposals for these sites may currently be considered by planners to be outside the plan period for discussion. However, the Neighbourhood Planning group, along with many residents would urge inspectors and planners to embrace these genuine proposals within the plan period in question. The 100 homes could readily be built within the plan period, contributing strongly to the totals required.

The contribution of smaller scale development including zero carbon homes

In order to meet the 120 homes needed to meet the parish total, smaller scale proposals have emerged totalling almost 20 homes which would, together with the proposals above, provide a significant balance of the 120 homes asked for by planners within this parish.

These small developments are likely to include innovative, zero carbon homes, which would have the double advantage of providing much needed affordable dwellings with very low running costs, while also meeting the urgent commitment of our neighbourhood development plan and stated Colchester Borough Council Policy, to face the challenge of the climate emergency head-on.

Appraisal of Colchester Borough Council Preferred Options

The sites preferred by planners have issues and problems which make these sites unsound, while there are compelling arguments to support the alternatives.

Hall RoadCBC suggested up to 50 houses

A key issue is inadequate access and sight-lines at the bell-mouth junction with London Road, for the residential development envisaged. This raises safety concerns for the increased number of pedestrians and vehicles which development would create. Hall Road is a narrow country lane, flanked by private garden land, historic banks and retaining walls, with little scope for alteration. Access to the local primary school is poor. The isolated location would make the site car-dependent at a time when planning should encourage sustainable transport and connectivity, favouring pedestrians and cycling in particular. Inclusion of this site would require major, damaging changes for relatively small gain of up to 50 dwellings.

Safety, Access and Sustainability of the location are poor

The inclusion of a site on this narrow lane would require an unsafe shared surface within the available space, based on a carriageway of 4.3m and pavement of 1.2 m to serve up to 50 houses. This contravenes Essex Design Guide safety and design standard of a minimum of 6m and would fail to meet the legal protections and entitlement of access for all pedestrians including wheelchair users and pushchairs, under the Equalities Act. The carriageway will not support access for the likely 1-2 cars per household in addition to existing Hall Road residents. In addition, farms in the lane require frequent, legitimate access for vehicles of 2.45-3.5 metre width and Anglian Water vehicles servicing the small treatment plant further down the lane, which are 2.45m wide.

The location is isolated from Copford Primary School and distant from secondary schools. The primary school is not in safe walking distance and would generate a

large number, perhaps of 30 + twice-daily car journeys. These will in many cases be coupled to onward journeys to work or to commuter parking at Marks Tey Station, which is not within realistic walking distance (2.4km) though commuters without children may use cycles. The mix of pedestrians, cycles, rush hour traffic and large vehicle access on inadequate shared surfaces will cause frequent safety hazards and air pollution at the busy junction with London Road. This may contravene CBC policy SP6, requiring development to “create well-connected places which prioritise the needs of pedestrians and cyclists”

Adverse effects on Landscape and Conservation

Hall Road is an ancient route, running from the Old London Road (Stane Street) to the nationally significant Church and Hall, after which it is named. Hall Road has ancient origins with archaeological significance. Local residents wish that it remains intact throughout its length, maintaining its historic integrity, which planners may not fully recognise and thus properly prioritise.

“Hall Road is of at least Roman origin, being part of a link between Roman Roads 3 and 320. A Roman settlement of some kind lay on Copford Plains, more or less at the midpoint of this link, with access to western and northern Colchester along Road 3 via Hall Road, and southern Colchester along the Easthorpe spur road, Road 320, via Aldercar Road or perhaps via the footpath running from Copford Plains to Gol Grove. Road 320 joins Road 321 on the approach to Colchester”

Hall Road in Copford’s Archaeological landscape N Crummy 2017

CBC’s own account of the Roman River valley, which includes Hall Road describes the area as...

“a fieldscape which is ancient in origin” *with* “an intimate character to the landscape and a sense of tranquillity”. “These landscapes show strong surviving time depth and a richness in both natural and man-made landscape featuresThe river valley landscape framework should continue to be conserved and enhanced....”

Adverse effects on the setting of historic and Listed Buildings

Brewers Cottage is a Grade II Listed Building C17th Century, set within a built environment of ribbon distribution, bordering “the ancient fieldscape”. Its setting would be seriously compromised by development in Hall Road.

“A development which can be seen within a view of a Listed Building lies within the setting of that Listed Building. It cannot therefore be disputed that such a development could potentially affect the setting of the Listed Building.....it is necessary not only to consider the Listed Building itself but also the nature and appearance of the existing surroundings of the Listed Building...”

<http://planninglawblog.blogspot.co.uk/2013/03/listed-buildings-and-their-setting.html>

In addition, Keepers Cottage in Hall Road, which has 16th century origins, while not listed, is important to the village, having been significant as a picturesque, valued feature in the landscape setting, which would be damaged by development, as its walls directly abut the roadway of the lane where building is proposed.

Adverse Effect on Local amenity and Wildlife Site (LoWS)

The Hall Road site is surrounded on the roadside by hedgerows, which are important habitats for wildlife (5.4 in Local Plan). European protected species such as certain species of bats are likely to use the Hall Road site for foraging within the Pits Wood Local Wildlife Site. Arable hedge margins are also a Biodiversity Action Plan habitat. The site needs to be seen in conjunction with nearby Pits Wood which, as a LoWS, is protected within the local planning system. Such areas are a “material consideration” in the determination of planning applications. It is argued that development of the Hall Road site will have an adverse effect on this LoWS. But also that Hall Road, which leads to Pits Wood, is itself a distinct, unique amenity which is highly prized and enjoyed by very many local people as a precious, ancient country walkway”

“together with statutory protected areas, LoWS represent the minimum habitat we need to protect in order to maintain the current levels of wildlife in Essex”

<http://www.essexwt.org.uk/protecting-wildlife/local-wildlife-sites>

Queensberry Avenue..... CBC suggested 70 homes

Major concerns have been raised by residents, about the 70 homes proposed for this 1980s development, including density and access for construction. The proposed site was not in the call for sites but was identified through the Strategic Land Assessment. This has left residents worried about the extent to which their concerns are understood.

Adverse effects on traffic flow and safety, including access to Copford primary school

The single access road through the existing development is 5.5m wide, classed as a ‘Type 3’ feeder road with a design capacity to serve 200 homes. There are 156 houses, leaving theoretical capacity for 44 additional homes, rather than the 70 proposed. For more than 44 homes to be allocated to this site, further road access would be needed, which is not available. In addition, there is major concern for the safety and prolonged disruption which construction traffic would pose unless alternative access is provided. The long term impact of traffic congestion at the junction with London Road is a further, major concern. The addition of a significant number of new homes using Queensberry Avenue for access will seriously exacerbate this problem.

Adverse effects on wildlife

The wooded land and pasture adjacent to and included within the proposed site are directly connected to the Roman River. The concerns raised over the proposed Hall

Road site are shared for the Queensberry proposal. In particular, this site is a wildlife corridor of the kind that is widely accepted to be essential for the protection of the natural environment. Proper review of impact on woodland habitat and adjacency to the Roman River need to be properly assessed and residents consulted about impact.

Alternative Sites

Evidence collected through local surveys, open meetings and dialogue shows recurring themes based on the need to seek alternative sites beyond the preferred sites identified and to ensure a high quality of design and environment.

Varied occupancy and tenure

The evidence referred to above shows varied needs, including young families and older people downsizing within the parish, along with families wishing to move into this ideally situated parish. Both of the major proposals outlined offer varied size and tenure including affordable homes. Crucially, both sites embody safe, self-contained environments, ideally suited to provide the opportunity for older people to down-size, thus freeing up larger homes for occupation within the parish. The proposed sites will provide a supportive, sheltered environment for older residents as well as the safety and leisure space needed for young families to thrive.

Alternative site one: Car boot sale site

National planning policy highlights the need to develop brownfield land such as this site before resorting to other spaces. For this reason alone, it is to be preferred to the Hall Road and Queensberry sites. The landowner has commissioned feasibility studies and outline design proposals to develop this site which is likely to be supported by the Parish Council in forthcoming discussions, along with widespread local enthusiasm for the regeneration of this site. Earlier planning applications were rejected as part of the overall demands of the recently rejected proposal for a Garden Village at West Tey. This land is therefore available for development as proposed by the landowner.

The landowner is proposing some 60 houses arranged in two groups, one in each of the two adjacent villages: Copford and Marks Tey, or all 60 on the Copford side, dependent on final decision making (see attached layout and landscape drawings). This arrangement respects rural separation by establishing a parkland area between the village boundaries and a sound-reducing bund where the site meets the A12. The proposal would fulfil a significant proportion of the overall development requirement, while considerably improving the visual landscape and leisure amenity of the area. Additionally, the development of this currently empty site would balance the proportion of development between the East and West of the Parish, ensuring a less dense environment which respects its rural character.

The quality of the soil on the former sand and gravel extraction site is not good enough to support any agricultural use. Unless it is developed, it will remain as it is, offering nothing of benefit to either the Parish, or Borough Council. Development of this site therefore offers a positive benefit to the Parish, in contrast to the Hall Road and Queensberry Avenue sites, both of which would be damaging to the Parish.

Alternative site two: Copford Place

Copford Place is a late 17th century manor house with grade 2 listed status and high local significance. Its adjacent stable block is also listed. The fabric of the building is in a poor state of repair but is the subject of an ambitious planning proposal which would rescue this important building for residential use, while adding a significant number of additional houses of mixed character and size within its grounds. The proposal could contribute to the housing numbers required, while securing this important historic site. Copford place would further balance the scale of development across the village.

Commitment to the support of Low Carbon homes

The neighbourhood plan now in preparation has a deep commitment to and understanding of sustainability and seeks to actively favour development which is designed to establish a low carbon footprint. This will enable suitable plots for such development to be identified and applications supported as they come forward, to contribute in an intelligent way to the twin objectives of contributing to the numbers of homes required, as well as being based on responsible, sustainable design principles

Such ‘Sustainable Buildings’ will adapt to the future challenge of living without resort to fossil fuels for power, transportation and heating. Such transition of home building to operate free of their reliance on fossil-fuels involves decarbonising both at the construction phase and when occupied.

Decarbonising the construction process involves reviewing the ‘chain-of-custody’ of a building’s supply chain. Responsible sourcing of materials, processes and labour can significantly reduce a building’s carbon footprint before it becomes operational.

Responsible design decisions include eradicating reliance on fossil fuels (no gas, oil or coal) while building in the use of renewable energy (solar, wind and biomass) and accommodating energy storage facilities (batteries)

The improvement of energy efficiency by design will be achieved by adopting passive solar design techniques. A southerly orientation of these homes within the parish will supplement heating loads, reduce reliance on artificial light and assist natural ventilation. Increased levels of insulation, including triple glazing play their part in reducing energy use for both heating and cooling.

These design principles and constraints make the location and density of such sites for ‘Sustainable homes’ important. They therefore require the support which the Neighbourhood Plan and its Parish Council provides. Realistically, this may in the short term, limit the number of homes built to true zero carbon specifications within the mix in the parish. Nevertheless, their introduction is an important imperative which deserves patient support and must figure in the projected housing numbers. The reward for the Parish and for Colchester Borough Council, in line with its climate emergency policy, is an exciting opportunity to evolve communities which reflect the changing economic, climatic and physical environment of the twenty first century.



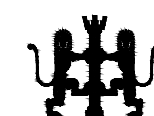
client
granville developments

project
london road, marks tey,
colchester, essex.

title
feasibility proposal

john finch partnership

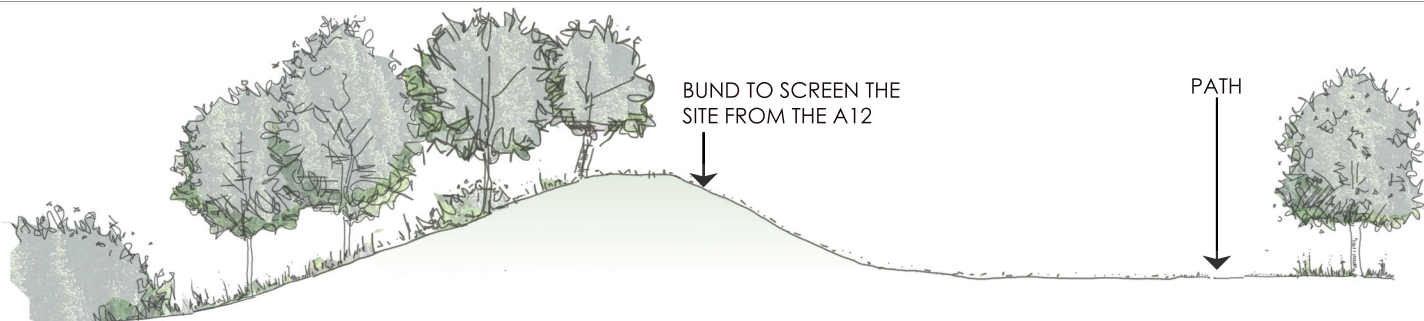
chartered architects & town planning consultants



88 broomfield road
chelmsford cm1 1ss
01245 354319/250780
admin@johnfinchpartnership.co.uk

www.johnfinchpartnership.co.uk

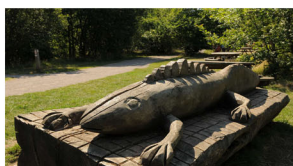
date	23:07:16	scale	1:1250
drawn	sc	checked	rjh
dwg no	3044:002	revision	.



The bund on the northern edge of the Site would form a visual and physical separation between the Site and the A12.



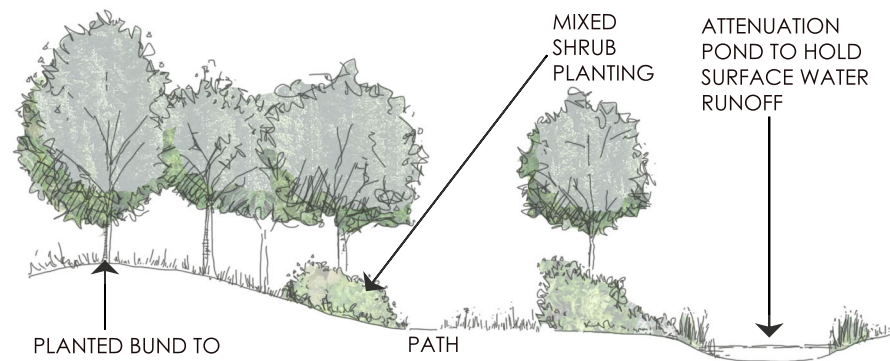
Circular walks and cycle routes would help link the spaces and improve the amenity value of the park. The accessibility of the whole park will make it feel safer.



Community woodland area with open spaces for activities like forest school. Mixed canopy levels and swathes of bulb planting would add interest and improve biodiversity.



Existing hedge retained.



Nature area with shallow attenuation area for surface water run-off which could be used as a wildlife feature.

Wild scrubby vegetation on the edge of the park allowed to grow and form soft edges, linking the different habitat areas.

Community orchard created to highlight role of fruit production locally and as a historical reference to local species. Also important as a source of pollen for wildlife.

Feature trees to add height and interest

ACCESS INTO ADJACENT PARK

Wildflower meadow areas left to grow unchecked and mown twice a year to improve biodiversity.

Hedges with standard trees used to define the edge of the park and also used to create wildlife corridor links between different areas. Hedges also used to define the different spaces and uses.

Mixed canopy layers with species like hazel, dogwood, spindle and guelder rose. This would increase habitat variety within the woodland and coppice material could also be used to create log/brush wood heaps for wildlife.



Small wildlife ponds created through use of attenuation areas dug to take surface water run off. These may seasonally hold water and dry out in summer months.



© This drawing remains the copyright of Kirsten Bowden.

REVISION		DESCRIPTION
REV	DATE	
A	27.03.2021	Layout changes.
B	29.03.2021	Bund and acoustic fence changes.

Kirsten Bowden
CHARTERED LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
T: 07790 907241
E: kirsten.bowden@hotmail.co.uk
W: www.kirstenbowden.co.uk

Site
Land to the north of London Road, Rev Marks Tey, Colchester.

Client
Granville Developments

Drawing Title
Landscape Strategy

Drawn by:
KB

Purpose of issue:
Planning

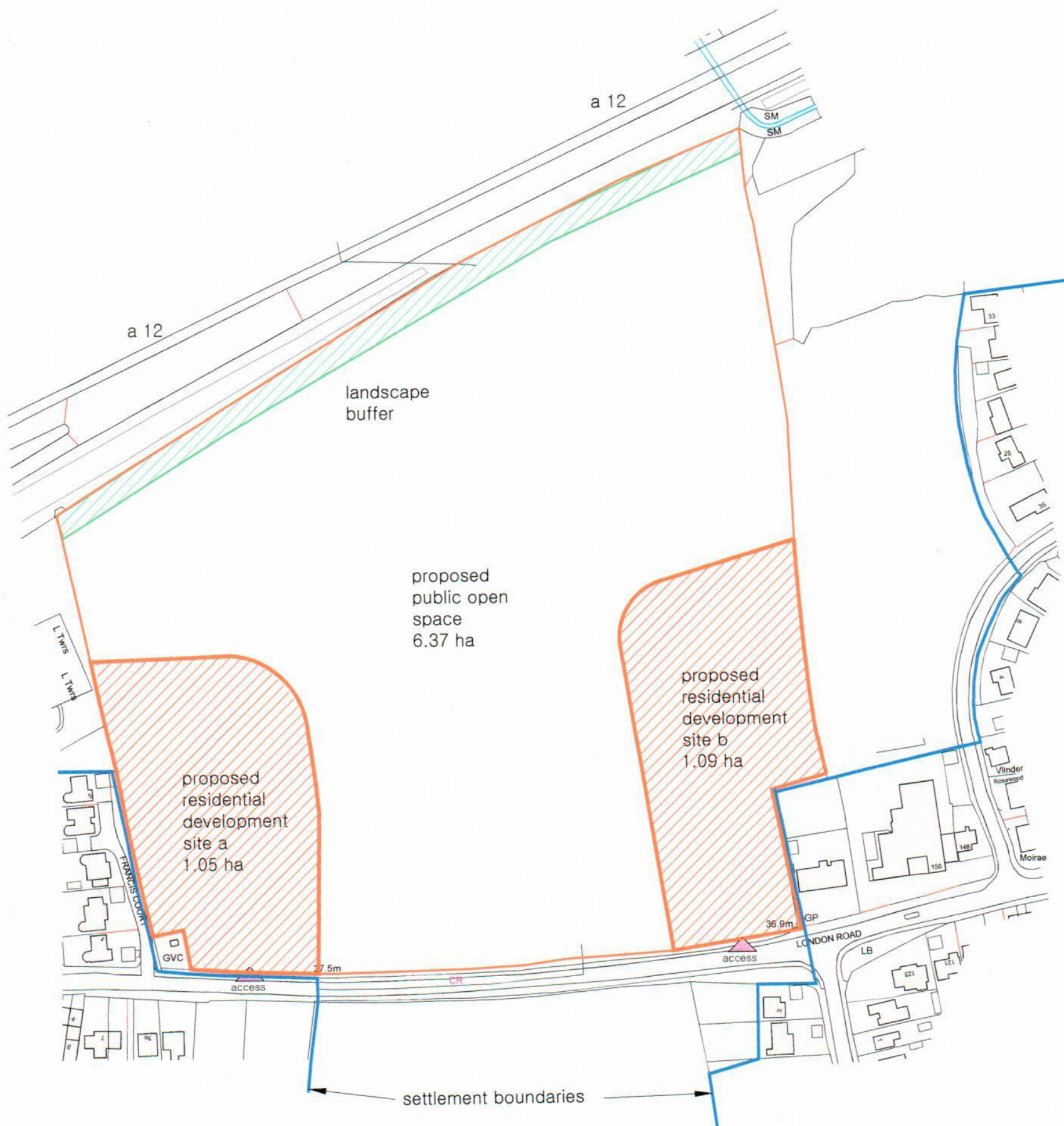
Date
30.03.2021

Scale
1:500 @ A2

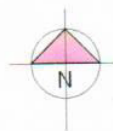
Job Number
2021_23

Drawing No.
001

B



site a = 1.050ha
 site b = 1.090 ha
 p.o.s. = 6.37ha
 total site area = 8.51ha



client
 granville developments

project
 london road, marks tey,
 colchester, essex.

title
 feasibility proposal

john finch partnership

chartered architects & town planning consultants



88 broomfield road
 chelmsford cm1 1ss
 01245 354319/250780
 admin@johnfinchpartnership.co.uk

www.johnfinchpartnership.co.uk

date	23:09:14	scale	1:1250
drawn	dcc	checked	rjh
dwg no.	3044:002		