

Colchester Landscape Character Assessment

Colchester City Council

Final report

Prepared by LUC

November 2024



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Chapter 1

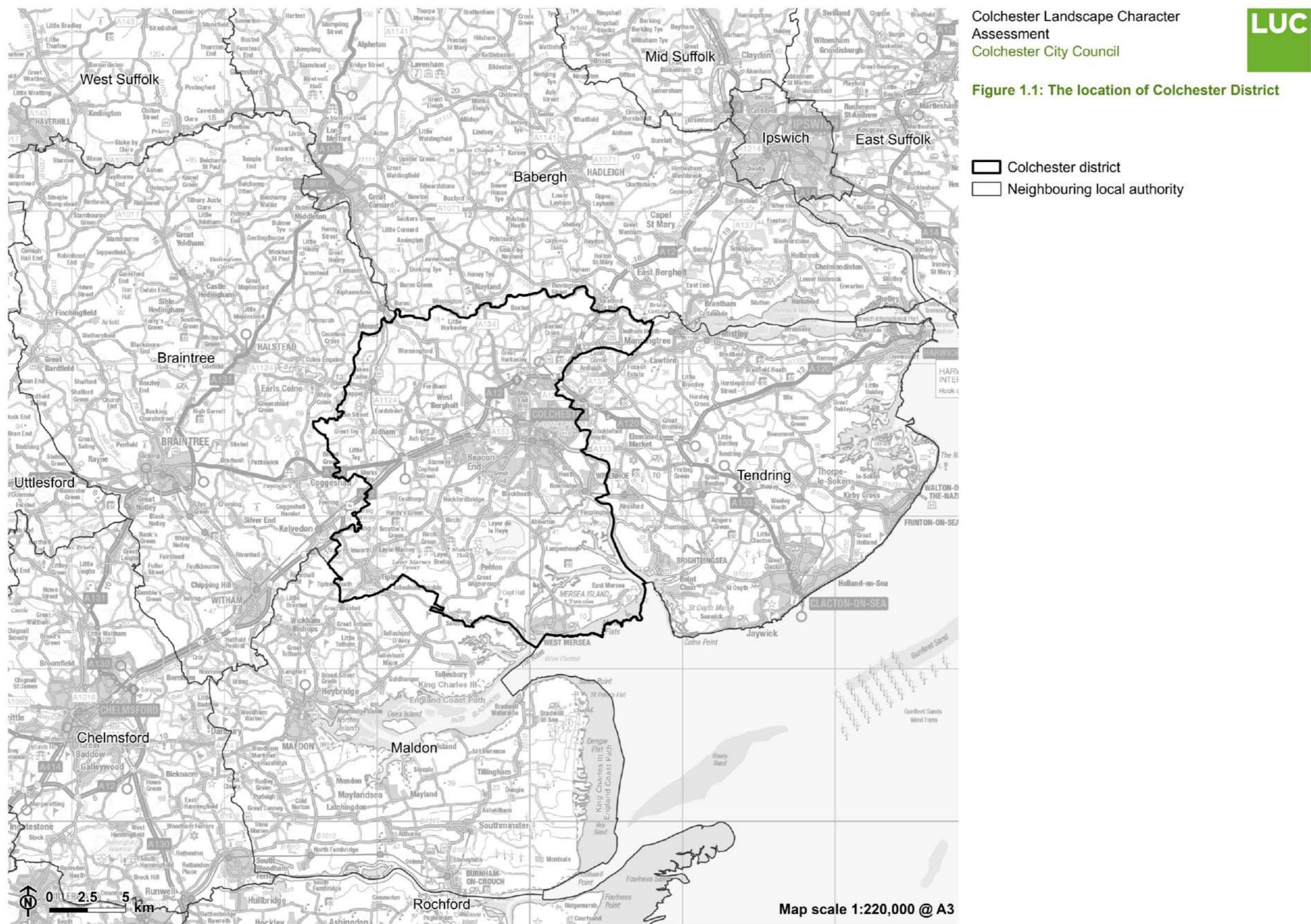
Introduction and Context

Background and Purpose of the Colchester Landscape Character Assessment

1.1 LUC was commissioned by Colchester City Council in July 2024 to prepare a Landscape Character Assessment for Colchester District, including land falling within the Dedham Vale National Landscape (formerly an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (formerly an AONB)). This study updates the Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment undertaken by Chris Blandford Associates in 2005 (herein referred to as the '2005 Study').

1.2 The location of Colchester District is illustrated on **Figure 1.1**. A map of the Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas is shown on **Figure 6.1** and **Figure 6.2**.

Figure 1.1: Location of Colchester District



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1.3 The aim is to create a comprehensive and up to date strategic-scale landscape evidence base to underpin the review of the Local Plan and to assist in the planning process. It is intended to both inform work on policy development and development management, guiding development that is sympathetic to local character and the qualities of the landscape. It can help inform locational policies for strategic development as well as appropriate design and mitigation, providing a framework for more detailed landscape studies and sensitivity assessments as well as baseline evidence for more detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).

1.4 Wider application of the Landscape Character Assessment may include land management, notably implementation of agri-environment schemes such as the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS); land use change to achieve net zero, including opportunities for woodland creation; and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) opportunities.

1.5 This study focuses entirely on rural and urban-fringe landscape and does not include the principal urban conurbations of Colchester, Tiptree, Wivenhoe and West Mersea.

1.6 In summary, the document can be used to consider landscape character when considering any type of change. This includes opportunities for conserving existing character and strengthening and enhancing character, as well as opportunities to create new character. A User Guide is provided in **Appendix B**.

The Role of Landscape Character Assessment

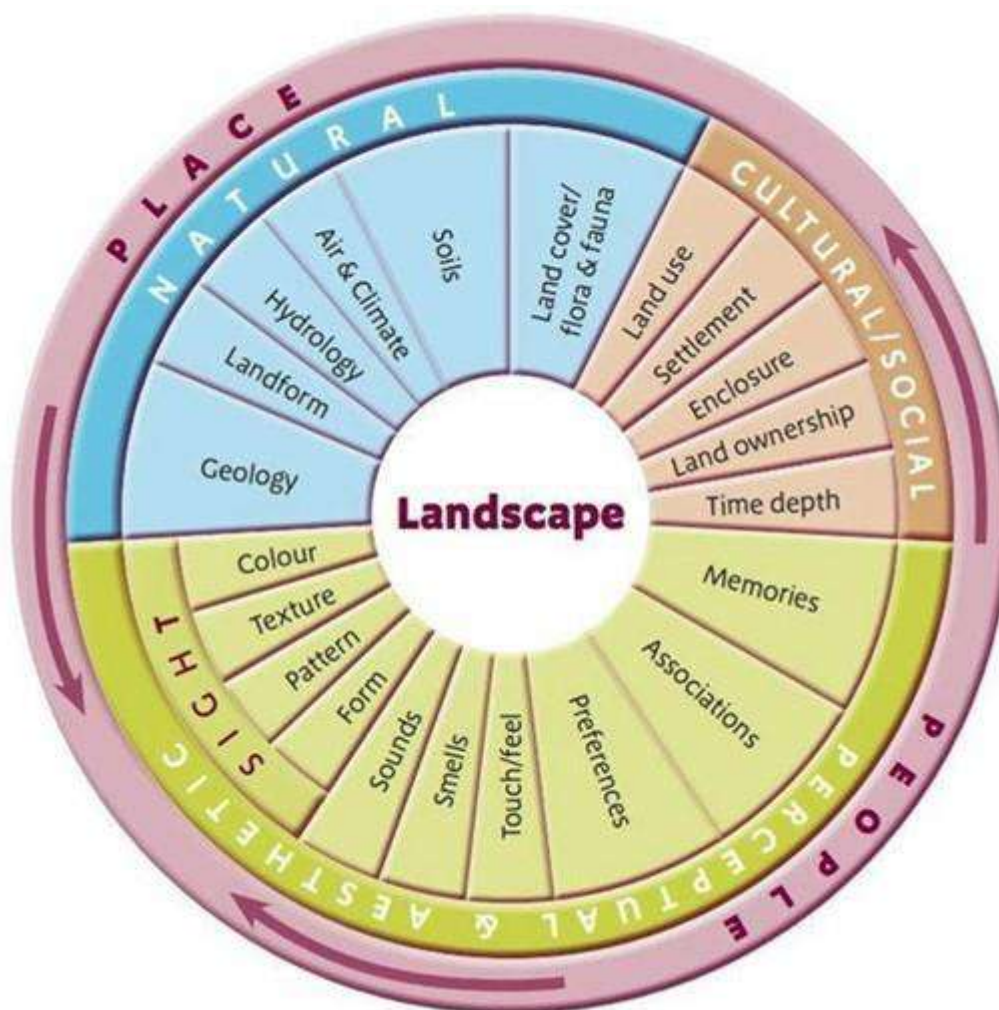
1.7 The process of Landscape Character Assessment is described in 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' (Natural England, October 2014) [[See reference 1](#)]. Within this document landscape character is defined as:

“a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse”.

1.8 Landscape Character Assessment is the process of identifying and describing such variations in character across a landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of features and attributes (characteristics) that make different landscapes distinctive. The landscape is the result of the interaction between people and place which gives an area a local identity. The ‘landscape wheel’ below (**Figure 1.2**) illustrates how the different natural, cultural, and perceptual attributes of a landscape combine to produce character.

1.9 Understanding the character of place and evaluating an area’s defining characteristics is a key component in managing growth sustainably and ensuring that the inherent character and qualities of the landscape can continue to be appreciated. Understanding of character can be used to ensure that any change or development does not undermine whatever is valued or characteristic in a particular landscape and help guide positive change that conserves, enhances, restores, or creates local character.

Figure 1.2: The 'Landscape Wheel' (Natural England, 2014)



The European Landscape Convention

1.10 The European Landscape Convention (ELC) came into force in the UK in March 2007. It establishes the need to recognise landscape in law; to develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and planning of landscapes; and to establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies. The ELC definition of 'landscape' recognises that all landscapes matter, be they ordinary, degraded, or outstanding:

“Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”.

1.11 The ELC puts emphasis on the whole landscape and all its values and is forward looking in its approach, recognising the dynamic and changing character of landscape. Specific measures promoted by the ELC of direct relevance to this study include:

- The identification and assessment of landscape; and
- Improved consideration of landscape in existing and future sectoral and spatial policy and regulation.

1.12 This updated Landscape Character Assessment will continue to make a key contribution to the implementation of the ELC in the district. It helps to reaffirm the importance of landscape, coordinate existing work and guide future work to protect, manage and plan the landscape.

Relationship to Published Landscape Studies

1.13 Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at a variety of scales and levels of detail. The Colchester Landscape Character Assessment is part of a hierarchy of landscape character assessment information cascading down from the national to the local level.

National Level

National Character Areas

1.14 At a national level, England is divided into 159 distinct National Character Areas (NCAs). Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, history, and cultural and economic activity. There are descriptive profiles available for each NCA setting out information on landscape character, changes in the landscape and an assessment of ecosystem services delivered (Natural England, 2014) [\[See reference 2\]](#).

1.15 Colchester District lies within the following NCAs:

- **NCA 81: Greater Thames Estuary**, a predominantly remote and tranquil landscape of shallow creeks, drowned estuaries, low-lying islands, mudflats and broad tracts of tidal salt marsh and reclaimed grazing marsh often protected behind sea defences. Relatively unsettled and retains a medieval pattern of small villages and hamlets on higher ground and the marsh edges. Historic military landmarks are characteristic features of the coastal landscape. The coastal habitats of the NCA are internationally important for their biodiversity interest. The vast majority of the coastline and estuaries are designated as Ramsar sites and Special Protection Areas, while the Essex Estuaries are a Special Area of Conservation.
- **NCA 86: South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland**, an ancient landscape of wooded arable countryside with a distinct sense of enclosure. It comprises a gently undulating chalky boulder clay plateau dissected by numerous small-scale valleys associated rivers and streams that flow eastwards. It features a complex network of old species-rich hedgerows, ancient woods and parklands and meadows. Traditional irregular field patterns are still discernible over much of the area, despite field enlargements in the second half of the 20th century.
- **NCA 111: Northern Thames Basin**, an area rich in geodiversity, archaeology and history and diverse landscapes ranging from the wooded Hertfordshire plateaux and river valleys, to the open landscape and

predominantly arable area of the Essex heathlands, with areas of urbanisation mixed in throughout. Urban expansion has been a feature of this area since the 16th century and increased dramatically from the mid-19th century. This has put increased pressure on the area in terms of extra housing developments, schools and other necessities for expanding populations, with a consequential reduction in tranquillity. Tranquil areas can still be found in parts of Hertfordshire and Essex in areas that have a more dispersed settlement pattern broken up by arable land and semi-natural habitats. There are a wide variety of semi-natural habitats that support many important species and there are many internationally and nationally designated sites.

Marine Character Areas

1.16 The Marine Management Organisation commissioned strategic-scale seascape assessments to produce a national seascape character map for all of England's inshore and offshore areas. This consists of individual Marine Character Areas (MCAs) which cross marine plan areas and administrative boundaries. The coastal edge and seascape to the south-east of Colchester District forms part of MCA 19: Essex and Suffolk Estuaries and Coastal Waters, as assessed within the Seascape Character Assessment for the South East Inshore marine plan area (2018) [\[See reference 3\]](#).

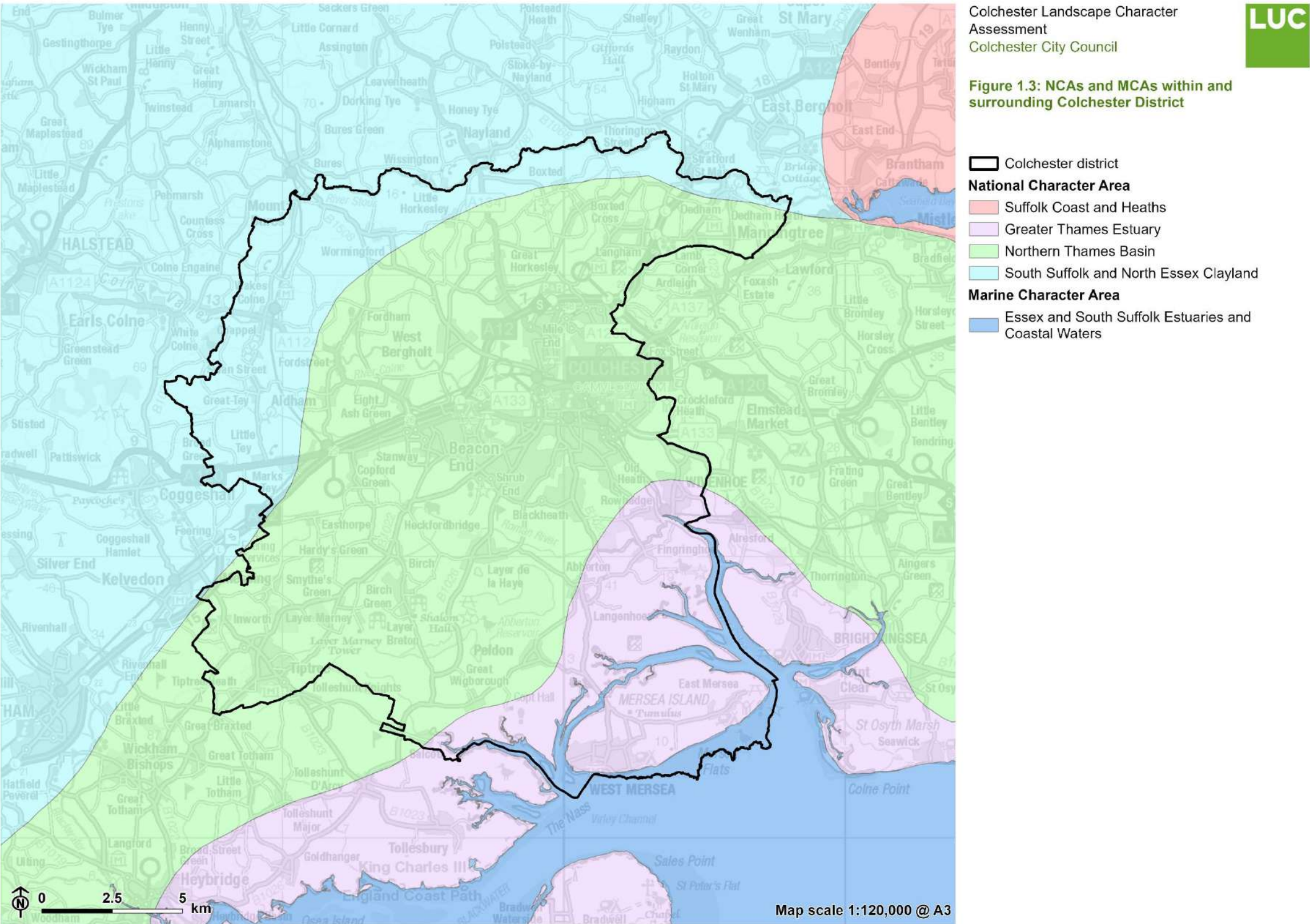
1.17 MCA 19 covers the shallow coastal waters of the Essex Coast, including the estuaries of the Rivers Colne and Blackwater. It is characterised by an intricate pattern of estuaries, rivers, branching tributaries, shallow creeks, extensive mudflats, low-lying islands and tidal salt marshes. Coastal habitats support large numbers of wetland birds, rare plant and invertebrate species and diverse marine wildlife, evidenced by the majority of the area being internationally and nationally designated coastline. The shallow coastal waters are also popular for recreation including boating and sailing. Much of the area is characterised by strong feelings of remoteness and wilderness on the extensive salt marshes, mudflats and reclaimed farmed marshland. Despite being on the Greater Thames estuary, it contains some of the least settled parts of the

Chapter 1 Introduction and Context

English coast, with small villages and hamlets on higher ground and marsh edges.

1.18 The NCAs and MCAs within and surrounding Colchester District are illustrated on **Figure 1.3**.

Figure 1.3: National Character Areas and Marine Character Areas



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County Level

1.19 At the county level, the Essex Landscape Character Assessment [\[See reference 4\]](#) was published in 2003. This identified the following 11 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) as falling wholly or partly within Colchester District:

- B3: Blackwater/Stout Farmland.
- B4: Gosfield Wooded Farmland.
- C6: Blackwater & Brain Valley.
- C7: Colne Valley.
- C8: Stour Valley.
- D4: Tiptree Ridge.
- E2: South Colchester Farmlands.
- E4: North Colchester Farmlands.
- F5: North Blackwater & Colne Coastal Farmlands.
- F6: Mersea Island.
- G4: Colchester & Environs.

1.20 Since the Landscape Assessment of Kent was published in 2003 the accepted methodology for landscape assessment has changed (see paragraphs 1.7 to 1.9 above). Therefore, whilst it provides a useful background and context, the updated Colchester District Landscape Character Assessment refines and updates this study at a local level.

Local Level

1.21 Landscape does not stop at administrative boundaries but continues seamlessly into surrounding districts/boroughs. This assessment therefore sits alongside the Landscape Character Assessments of the adjacent authorities of

Braintree District to the west, Maldon District to the south, Tendring District to the east and Babergh District to the north, which have been reviewed to inform this study.

1.22 The Landscape Character Assessment of Braintree District and Maldon District were undertaken in 2006 as part of the same study [\[See reference 5\]](#). The following LCAs are lie adjacent to the Colchester District boundary:

- Braintree District (Section 3):
 - A2: Stour River Valley.
 - A4: Colne River Valley.
 - A9: Blackwater River Valley (shared with Maldon District).
 - B6: Wickham Farmland Plateau.
 - B19: Langley Green Farmland Plateau.
 - F2: High Garrett/Markshall Wooded Farmland.
 - F3: Totham Wooded Farmland.
- Maldon District (Section 6):
 - D1: Old Hall Marshes and Tollesbury Wick Drained Estuarine Marsh.
 - E1: Tolleshunt Coastal Farmland.
 - F3: Totham Wooded Farmland.
 - F4: Tolleshunt Knights Wooded Farmland.

A.1 The Tendring District Landscape Character Assessment was undertaken in 2001 [\[See reference 6\]](#) and identified the following LCAs as lying adjacent to the Colchester District boundary:

- 1B: Colne Estuary Marshes.
- 6B: Ardleigh Valley System.
- 7A: Bromley Heaths.

A.2 The assessment for Babergh District was carried out as part of the Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment [\[See reference 7\]](#). The study also covered the parts of the Dedham Vale National Landscape falling within Essex. It identified the following Landscape Character Types (LCTs) as lying partly within and adjacent to the Colchester District boundary:.

- Rolling Valley Farmlands.
- Wooded Valley Meadowlands.
- Valley Meadowlands.

Dedham Vale AONB Landscape Assessment

1.23 The Dedham Vale National Landscape (formerly an AONB) extends into the north of Colchester District (see below). The nationally important landscapes in the Dedham Vale which are within Colchester are included within this study.

1.24 The Dedham Vale Landscape [\[See reference 8\]](#) assessment identifies the following five LCTs as falling wholly or partly within Colchester District:

- Stour Valley Sides.
- Upland Fringe.
- Open Valley Floor.
- Enclosed Valley Floor.
- Estuarine Valley Floor.

Historic Landscape Characterisation

1.25 Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) is about recognising the ways in which the present physical landscape reflects how people have exploited, changed and adapted it through time, with respect to different social, economic,

technological and cultural factors. It can enhance the traditional approaches to landscape characterisation by placing an emphasis on time-depth and on how different areas reflect varying patterns and rates of change.

1.26 The Essex Historic Landscape Characterisation (2013) [\[See reference 9\]](#) characterises the landscape into different Historic Landscape Types (HLTs), including field patterns, woodland, reclaimed marsh, downland and coastal. These are included within the analysis for each LCA in Chapter 7.

1.27 The HLC also identifies Historic Landscape Character Areas (HLCAs) across Essex which reflect the distinct combinations of HLTs and landscape character attributes. The following HLCAs cover Colchester District:

- 22: The Lower Colne Valley.
- 23: Colne-Stour watershed.
- 24: Lower Stour valley.
- 25: Boxted Heath area.
- 27: The Roman River valley.
- 28: Abberton area.
- 29: Tiptree Heath.
- 34: Mersea Island.
- 38: Ardleigh Heaths area.

Dedham Vale National Landscape

1.28 Land to the north and north-east of Colchester District falls within the Dedham Vale National Landscape. National Landscapes are precious landscapes whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard them.

1.29 In December 2023 a new duty came into force in Section 245 of the ‘Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023’ stating that ‘relevant authorities must seek to further the purposes’ of the designated landscape. This overrides and strengthens the previous duty to ‘have regard’ to the purposes.

1.30 Dedham Vale is made up of landscape components with special characteristics and qualities which together distinguish it as a landscape of national and international importance and underpin its significance and natural beauty. The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Stour Valley Project Area Management Plan 2021-2026 [See reference 10] provides a Statement of Significance which defines the natural beauty, character and special qualities of the area and provides the criteria against which potential impacts on the nationally designated landscape can be judged. These are:

- “... a predominately agricultural landscape that exhibits a subtle lowland river valley with an assemblage of features associated with this landscape still in place and intact. These features include a gently winding river and tributaries; gentle valley sides with scattered woodlands; sunken rural lanes; picturesque villages with imposing churches and historic timber framed buildings; scattered farmsteads and agricultural buildings; small fields enclosed by ancient hedgerows; riverside grazing meadows with associated drainage ditches and visible and hidden archaeology providing evidence of human habitation over previous millennia.
- ... remains mostly free of incongruous development and large scale industrial developments. Despite some intrusions of human activity in the twentieth and twenty first centuries, the area retains a rural charm and tranquillity and is largely free of infrastructure associated with modern life.
- The essential character ... was established in the middle of the previous millennium and has remained intact despite social, technological events. The fundamental beauty of the area and the scenes of a working landscape were captured by England’s finest landscape artist, John Constable. The sites of his paintings are still recognisable in the heart of what is now the AONB”.

1.31 Land to the north-west of Colchester District also falls within the Stour Valley Project Area. Whilst not benefiting from the same level of policy protection afforded to National Landscapes, significant parts of the Stour Valley project area are deemed to be ‘valued landscapes’ as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The area has been subject to a Management Plan since 2000 that has been recognised by the constituent local authorities in their local plans and/or historically been subject to a ‘Special Landscape Area’ status. The Statement of Significance for the Stour Valley Project Area sets out a number of valued qualities as follows:

- “... predominately an agricultural area that is a sparsely populated with most people living in village settlements that can trace their history back to the Saxon period and are listed in the Domesday Book of 1086.
- The valley slopes are gentle, forming shallow valleys which sit within wider undulating farmland. The junction between valley and wider farmland is transitional and subtle, the presence of a water courses, associated wetland vegetation, and small nucleated villages/hamlets, generally distinguishing the valleys from other landscape undulations.
- On the more elevated farmland above the valleys there is a high incidence of medieval moated farmhouses and small copses/blocks of ancient woodland. These features reflect the underlying clay soils found on the higher land. Despite woodland blocks, elevated farmland has a predominantly open character, affording long distance views over the shallow valleys.
- The expansive views and openness perceived from higher land contrasts with that of the more intimate valleys and small settlements. The lack of major transport infrastructure gives this landscape a relative tranquillity reinforcing perceptions of a rural backwater.
- The majority of the settlements have a distinctive settlement pattern with dwellings clustered around small angular greens or tyes. Medieval churches have often been built in prominent positions and knapped in flint reflecting the areas prosperity and the importance of religion during the time of construction.

- Villages show a rich heritage of building styles, reflecting changing building techniques, fashions and relative wealth over the centuries of development but many retain a core of medieval timber framed buildings. Beyond the villages there are a series of isolated farmsteads and manorial halls (often moated) reflecting the areas agricultural heritage and accumulated wealth.”

Coastal Protection Belt

1.32 The Essex Coast Protection Subject Plan, produced by Essex County Council in 1984, defined a county wide Coastal Protection Belt. This was subsequently reviewed and updated by the Local Planning Authority in 2016 and at the time of writing was defined under Policy ENV2: Coastal Areas of the Colchester Borough Local Plan 2017 – 2033.

1.33 The aim of the policy is to protect the rural and undeveloped coastline in the Borough. The policy states that “Within the Coastal Protection Belt and along the undeveloped coast an integrated approach to coastal management will be promoted and development will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that it: ... (iii) Will not be significantly detrimental to conserving important nature conservation, heritage assets, maritime uses and the landscape and seascape character of the coast ...”.

1.34 Supporting text for Policy ENV2 states that “the Coastal Protection Belt’s rural and undeveloped coastline is of international and national significance for its historic environment assets and nature conservation interest” and that “[it] has a unique character, which should be strongly protected and enhanced”.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Approach

2.1 The Landscape Character Assessment follows the method promoted by Natural England through ‘An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment’ (2014) which embeds the principles of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) within it.

Assessment Process

2.2 The process for undertaking the study involved three key stages as described below.

Stage 1: Desk Review and Pilot Study

- Inception;
- Review and baseline data collation;
- Classification; and
- Pilot study, for client comments.

Review and baseline data collation

2.3 The initial desk-based review involved the collation of a wide range of up to date mapped information to ‘sense-check’ the existing landscape classification and to update the baseline. Designations relating to cultural heritage, nature

conservation and landscape were checked for any changes since the 2005 Study.

2.4 Data used within the report, including data collated in the GIS database is shown in **Table 2.1**.

Table 2.1: GIS data

Name	Source
Base OS mapping at 1:25k and 1:50k (The base mapping used was from June 2024; development that was under way at the time, or that has taken place since, is therefore not shown).	Ordnance Survey
Terrain 50 Contour data	Ordnance Survey
Linear features, mass movement, artificial ground, superficial deposits, and bedrock geology 1:50K	British Geological Survey
Administrative boundaries	Colchester City Council
National Character Areas	Natural England
National Marine Character Areas	Marine Management Organisation
Existing Colchester Borough Landscape Character (2005) and Essex Landscape Character Assessment (2003). LCA data was provided by the council from the 2005 study; as part of this study only minor alternations have been made to LCA boundaries (where development has occurred since 2005).	Colchester City Council and Essex County Council
Landscape Character Assessment for neighbouring districts	Braintree, Maldon, Tendring and Babergh
Public Rights of Way (PRoW), and access land	Natural England

Name	Source
River features and flood zones	Environment Agency
Nature conservation designations	Natural England (national datasets) and Colchester City Council (local datasets)
Priority habitats	Natural England and Colchester City Council
Forestry	Forestry Commission
Historic Landscape Characterisation dataset	Essex County Council, Historic England
Heritage designations	Historic England (national datasets) and Colchester Council (local datasets)
Dark skies and tranquillity	CPRE
Infrastructure	Ordnance Survey
Local Plan designations and policy areas	Colchester City Council

Classification

2.5 Classification is concerned with dividing the landscape into areas of distinct, recognisable, and consistent common character and grouping areas of similar character together. This includes:

- Landscape Character Types (LCTs), which share broadly similar patterns of geology, topography, vegetation, and human influences in each area in which they occur (although not identical, they share a common pattern of elements).
- Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) – Each landscape type is divided into geographically specific character areas. These share generic characteristics with other areas of the same type but have their own particular identity or ‘sense of place’.

2.6 The update of the landscape classification for Colchester District is based on a review of the 2005 Study boundaries and new information on landscape change. Whilst some minor adjustments were made to LCA boundaries (for example where development has occurred since 2005), there were no changes made to the overall classification or wider LCA boundaries. As with the 2005 study there are six LCTs and 28 LCAs as shown on **Figure 6.1** and **Figure 6.2**.

Stage 2: Site Assessment

2.7 A systematic field survey was undertaken to review and refine the draft classification and descriptions. This involved:

- Verifying and fine-tuning the classification of the landscape types and areas identified including review of boundaries;
- Checking and identifying key characteristics;
- Checking aesthetic/perceptual characteristics;
- Taking photographs to provide a visual record of the landscape; and
- Providing more detailed guidance in relation to changes observed on the ground.

Stage 3: Reporting

- Completing draft Landscape Character Area profiles;
- Completing a landscape evaluation; and
- Submitting a draft for client review followed by a final report.

Landscape Character Area Profiles

2.8 The Landscape Character Assessment is presented at an LCA level and arranged by their respective LCT within the district in **Chapter 7**.

2.9 Each LCT section begins with an overview map showing the location of the LCT within Colchester District and its relationship with other LCTs and the component LCAs within it.

2.10 The individual LCA profiles are structured as follows:

Map and Summary of Location and Landscape Character

2.11 A location map (1:25,000 scale) which shows the extent of the LCA and its relationship with other LCAs, followed by a summary paragraph explaining its location and defining landscape character.

Landscape Description

2.12 This section provides a description of the landscape character of the LCA under each of the following headings:

- Key Characteristics in bullet point format, provides a summary explanation of the character of the LCA;
- Representative photos to help the reader appreciate the character of the LCA; and
- Formative Influences in bullet format, including for:
 - Natural Influences: The most significant natural influences in the landscape including designated habitats.
 - Cultural Influences: The most significant cultural influences in the landscape including designated cultural heritage assets.
 - Perceptual Influences: The most significant perceptual and aesthetic influences in the landscape (augmented by field survey).

Evaluation

2.13 The evaluation provides an understanding of what is important in each LCA and why, including:

- **Key Sensitivities and Values:** Identifies the qualities that are particularly valued for their contribution to landscape character (that is, if any one of these attributes ceased to exist, it would change the character to the detriment of the landscape).
- **Landscape Strategy:** Provides an overall strategy to guide the future direction of the landscape based on opportunities for conservation, restoration, enhancement, and creation.
- **Guidelines:** Provides guidance on how the strategy can be achieved to ensure future change respects local character. The guidelines can be considered as part of development management, for example guiding mitigation or enhancement or influencing wider land management decisions for the rural environment.

2.14 A high-level rating for inherent landscape value is provided in **Appendix A** to inform the Sustainability Appraisal, which was being undertaken at the same time as the Landscape Character Assessment to inform the Local Plan Review. This is a high-level appraisal of inherent value using a three-point scale of High, Medium and Low; it is not an assessment of landscape sensitivity to a specific development type / development scenario or other change.

Chapter 3

Formative Influences

3.1 This chapter summarises the main physical and cultural influences that have shaped the landscape of Colchester District. The detailed description of different LCAs, that appear in Chapter 7 of this report, highlight the key characteristics (both positive and negative) and valued attributes that are of most significance to the particular landscape concerned.

3.2 The landscape has evolved through the interaction of the natural environment and human activities, through the combination of physical and cultural influences. Physical influences such as geology and landform, together with the pattern of settlement and land use are key determinants of landscape character.

Physical Influences

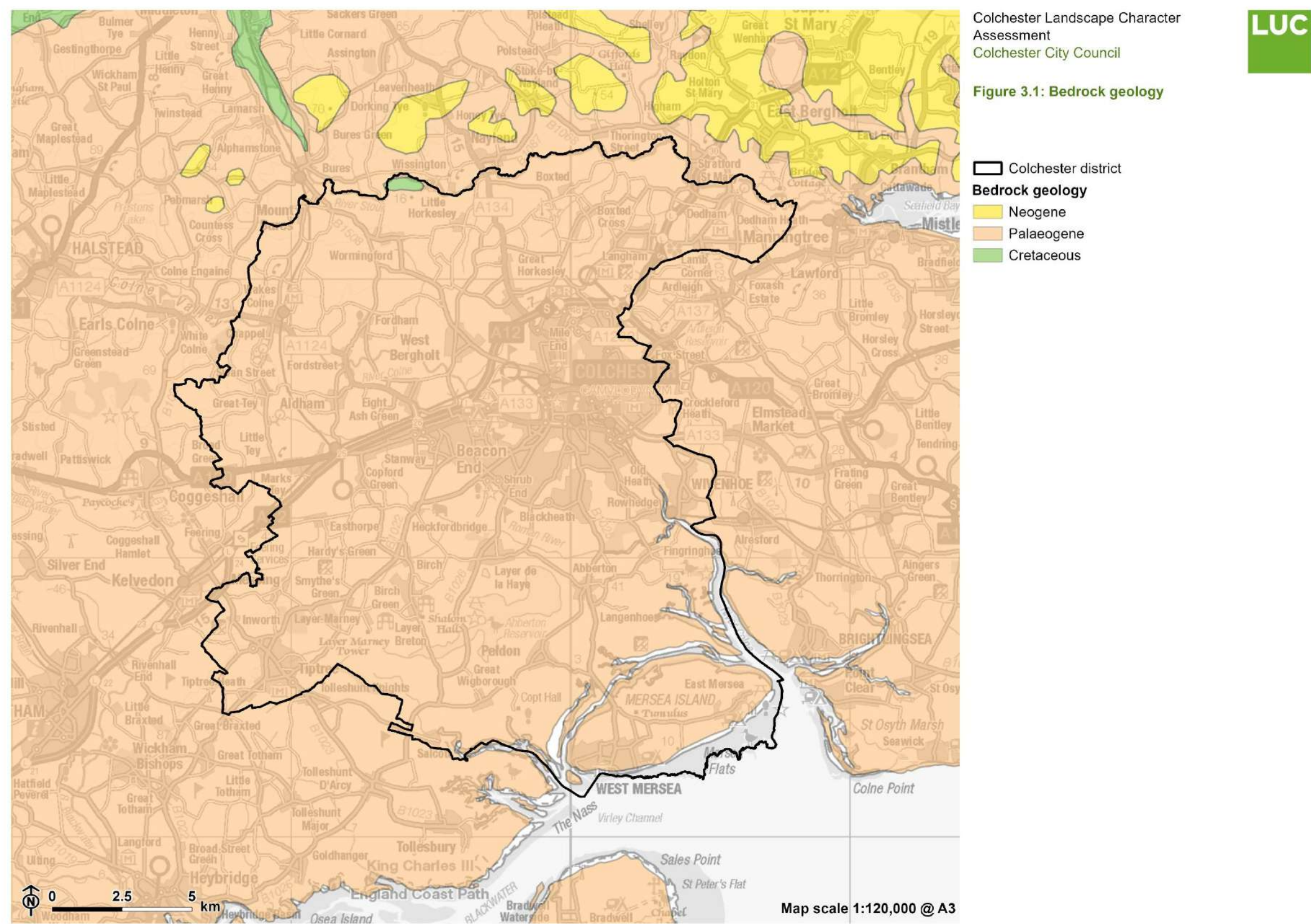
3.3 The physical components of the landscape have the most tangible and fundamental influences upon its character, being the most permanent and least changeable aspect of its appearance. The underlying geology creates the 'backbone' of the landscape. The actions of weathering, erosion and deposition alter the landform, consequently influencing hydrological patterns and affecting the nature of soil conditions. This influences the nature of the vegetation and fauna that the landscape can support, and affects how humans have used and continue to exploit the landscape for agriculture, settlement and industry.

Geology, Landform and Soils

3.4 **Figure 3.1** illustrates the solid (or bedrock) geology that underlies the area, and **Figure 3.2** shows the drift (or superficial) geology, which overlies the

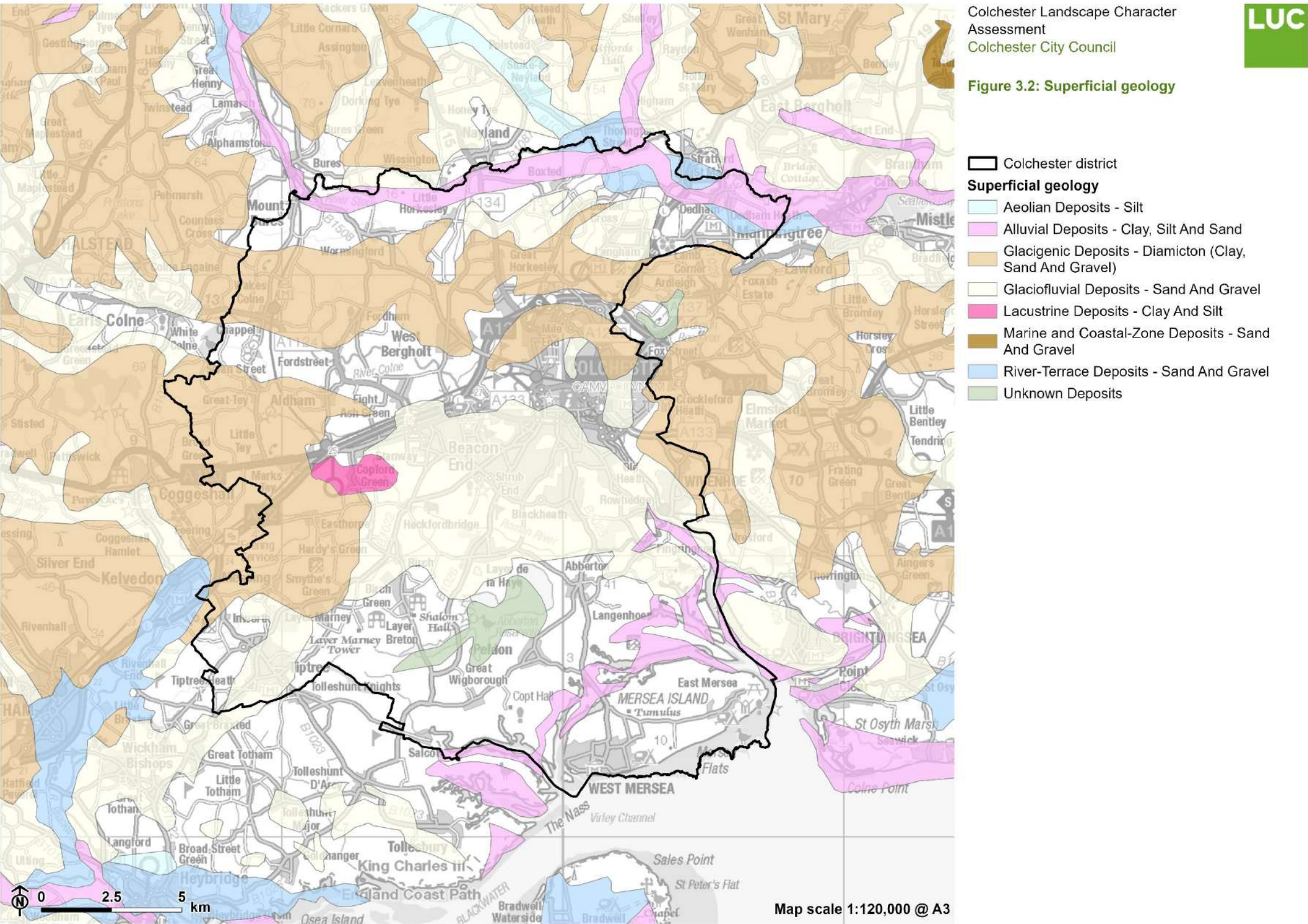
bedrock in places. **Figure 3.3** illustrates the topography and watercourses/hydrology, which relates closely to the underlying geology.

Figure 3.1: Bedrock geology



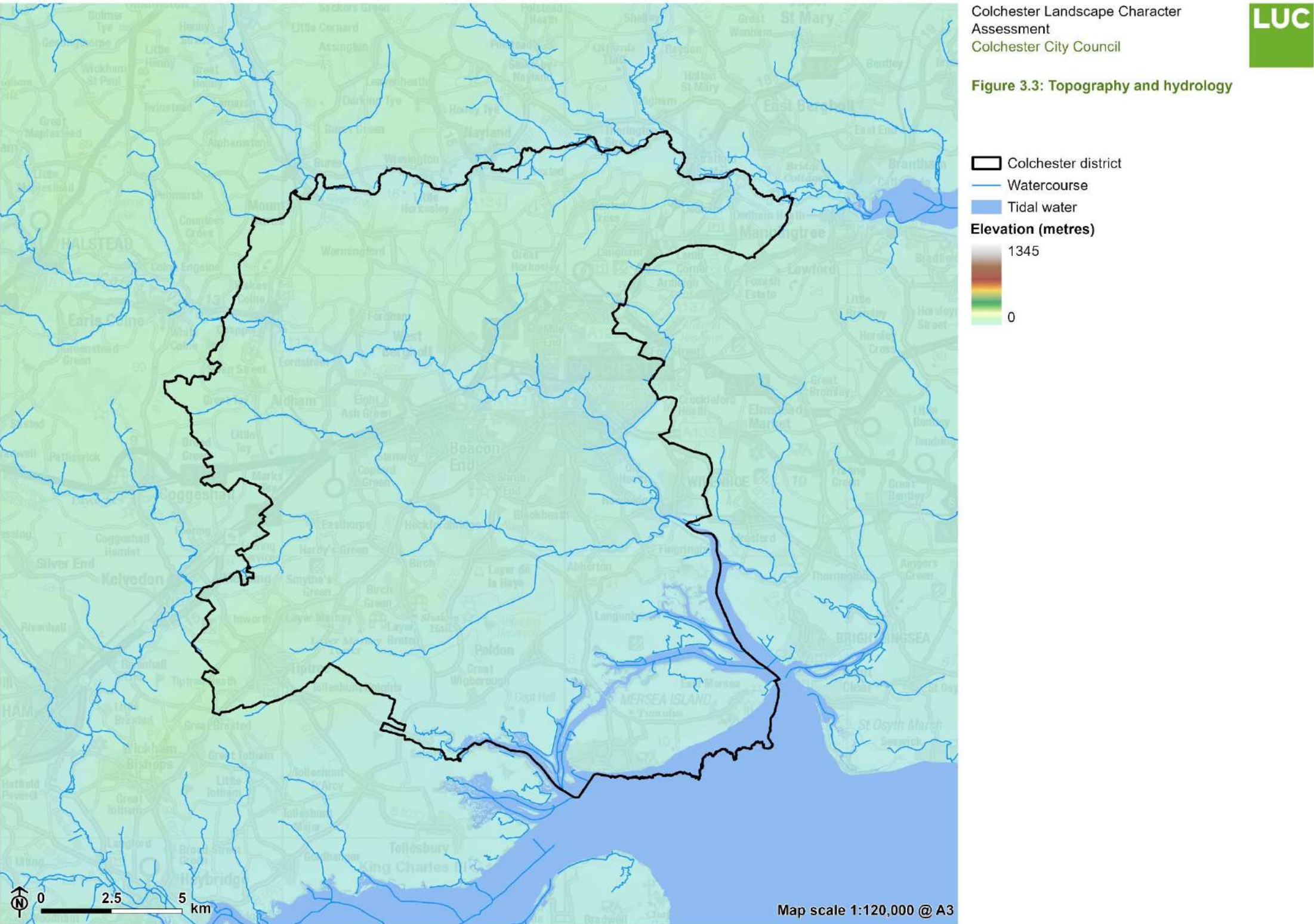
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Figure 3.2: Superficial geology



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Figure 3.3: Topography and hydrology



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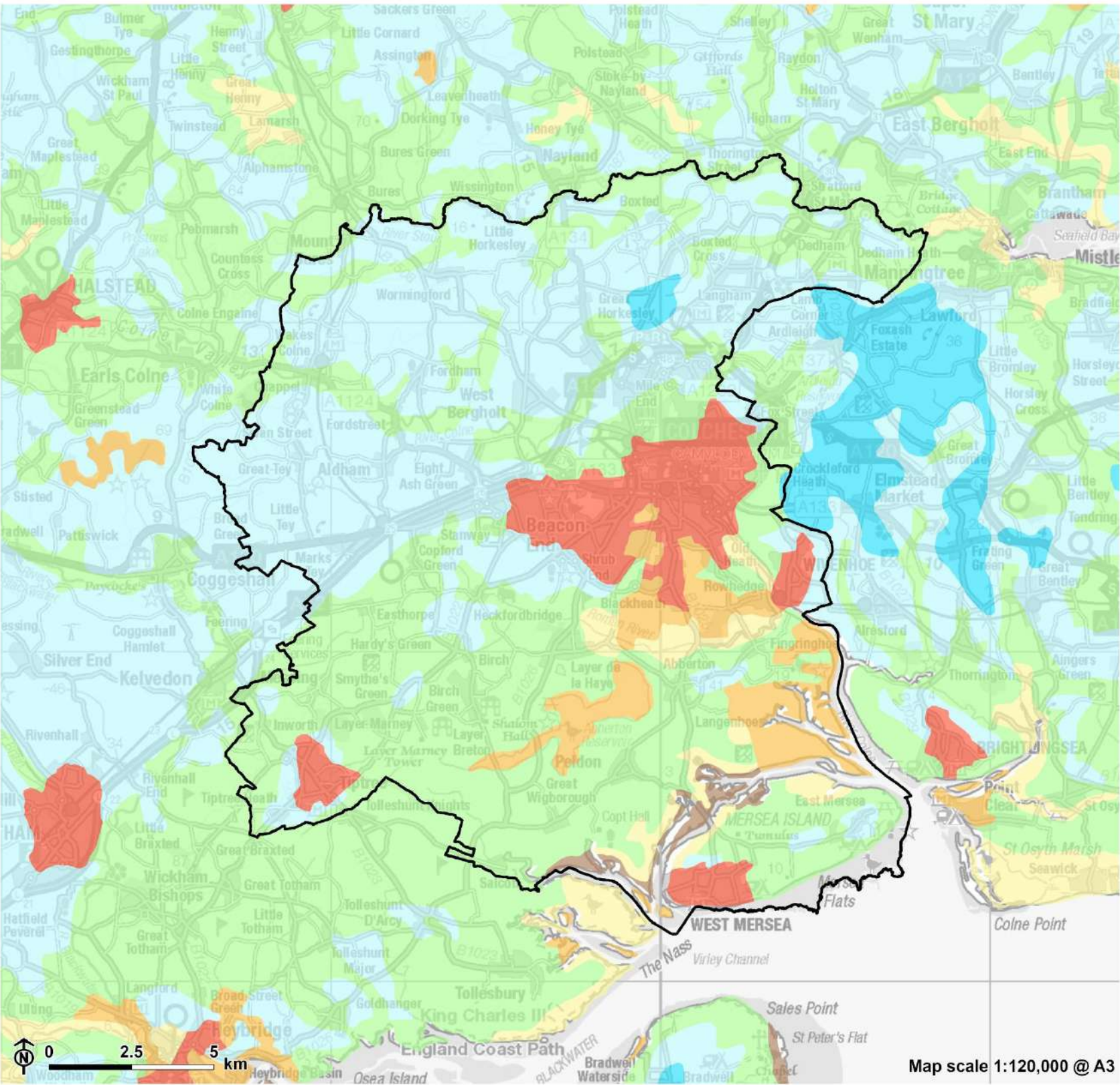
3.5 The bedrock geology of the area is dominated by the London Clay Formation, a sedimentary formation laid down in the Palaeogene period (between 56 and 47.8 million years ago) comprised of clay, silt and sand. This is overlain in large parts by superficial clay, sand, silt and gravel deposits of glacial origin laid down in the Quaternary period (between 480 and 423 thousand years ago). There are also some later superficial alluvial deposits along watercourses and intertidal deposits around coastal areas (laid down between 11.8 thousand years ago and the present).

3.6 The area is generally low-lying and comprises a gently undulating broad plateau, broken up by several watercourses. The main watercourses in the area are the River Stour, River Colne and Roman River which drain west to east towards the Stour and Blackwater Estuaries. Lower-lying coastal areas are intersected by a pattern of small intricate creeks and valleys which extend the coastal influence far inland. The river valleys range from narrow steep sided valleys to more gentle valleys with wider floodplains. The highest areas of land are found in the north, west and south-west of the district, where land rises to 115m OAD.

Landcover

3.7 **Figure 3.4** illustrates the quality of agricultural land, known as 'agricultural land classification'. Land use tends to reflect the topography and soil types.

Figure 3.4: Agricultural Land Classification



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Colchester Landscape Character
Assessment
Colchester City Council



Figure 3.4: Agricultural Land Classification

- Colchester district
- Agricultural Land Classification**
- Grade 1
 - Grade 2
 - Grade 3
 - Grade 4
 - Grade 5
 - Non Agricultural
 - Urban

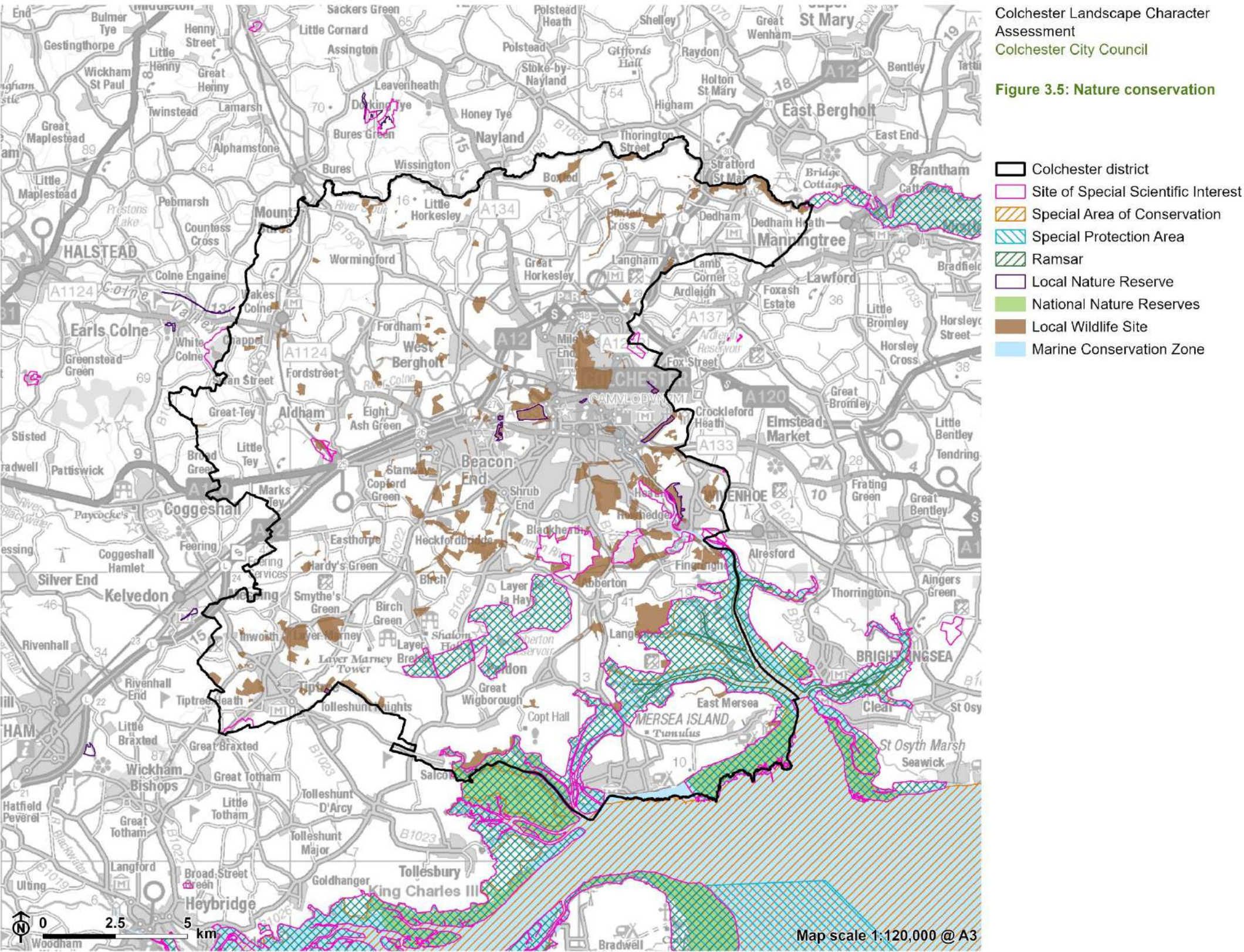
3.8 The Borough has a broad range of soils reflecting the underlying geology and which in turn have influenced the patterns of land use in the area. The north of the district (land north of the Roman River) is dominated by slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage with moderate to high fertility. These correspond broadly with areas of former heathland and are classified as Grade II (very good) agricultural soils. Land to the south predominantly comprises slowly permeable seasonally wet acid loamy and clayey soils of low fertility classified as being Grade 3 (good to moderate) agricultural soils. The relatively fertile soils support arable farming as well as some remnant orchard farming. The lower-lying coastal areas and River Colne valley within the tidal and fluvial floodplains tend to be of lower quality agricultural soils (identified as Grade 5 or as 'non-agricultural') and support more pasture farming.

Ecological Character

3.9 **Figure 3.5** illustrates the location of nature conservation designations and **Figure 3.6** illustrates the location and distribution of woodland and other habitats.

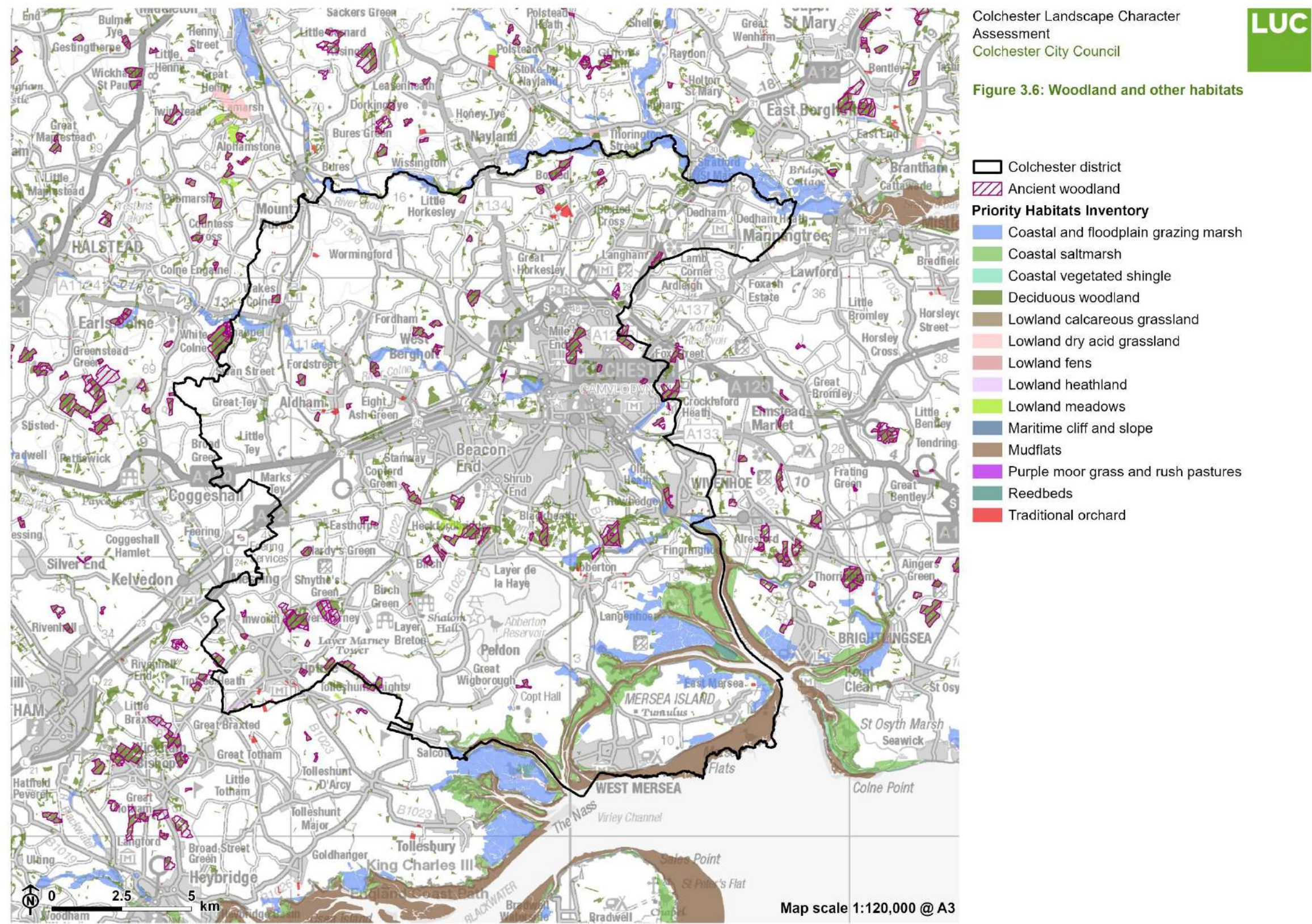
3.10 The area supports a wide range of habitats, including deciduous woodland, traditional orchards, heath, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, salt marsh and mud flats. Many of these habitats are of international, national or local importance, and are recognised through designation. This includes the Colne Estuary and Blackwater Estuary, which are covered by a Ramsar Site, Special Protection Areas (SPA), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserve (NNR) designation; the Stour and Orwell Estuaries, covered by SPA and SSSI; the Essex Estuaries, covered by Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designation; Abberton Reservoir, covered by Ramsar Site, SPA and SSSI designation; and Tiptree Heath SSSI which is the largest surviving fragment of heathland remaining in Essex. There are also numerous areas of woodland identified as Ancient Woodland. Ancient Woodland has been continuously present since at least 1600 and it tends to support nationally important woodland plant and animal species.

Figure 3.5: Nature conservation



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Figure 3.6: Woodland and other habitats



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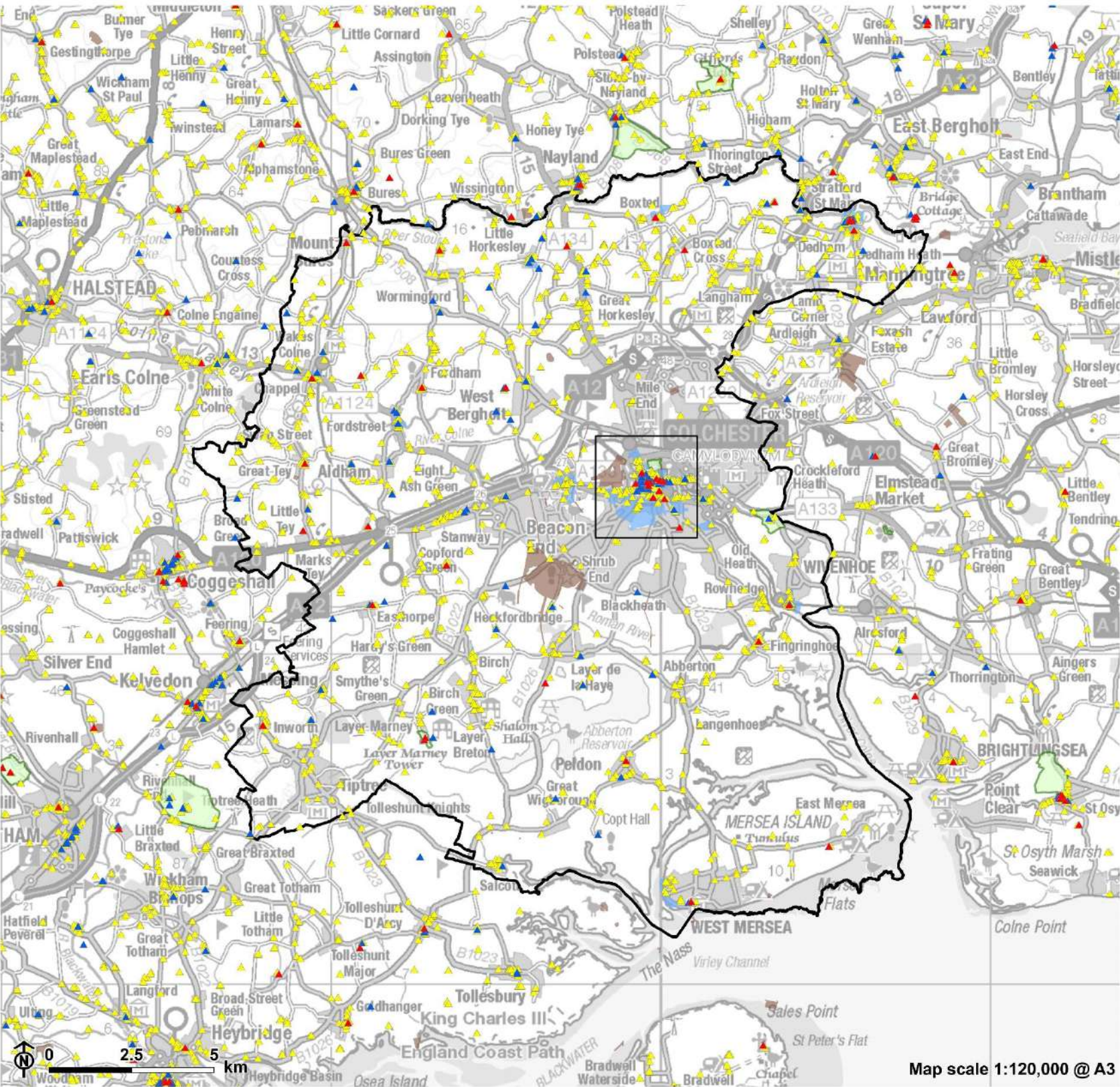
Cultural Influences

Historical Development

3.11 Colchester District contains a wealth of archaeological sites, monuments and historic assets that reflect a long history of human settlement. These assets, many of which are statutorily designated, play a large part in defining the character of the landscape and the individuality of particular settlements.

3.12 There are 47 Scheduled Monuments covering prehistoric to modern periods, 1559 listed buildings and 22 conservation areas within the district. These are illustrated on **Figure 3.7**.

Figure 3.7: Cultural heritage



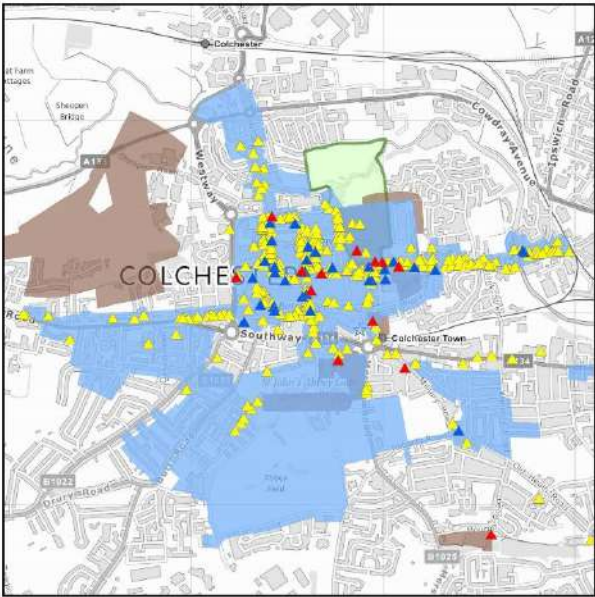
© Historic England 2024. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2024.

Colchester Landscape Character Assessment
Colchester City Council



Figure 3.7: Cultural heritage

- Colchester district
- Scheduled monument
- Registered Parks and Gardens
- Conservation area
- Listed building
 - Grade I
 - Grade II*
 - Grade II



3.13 This section has been informed by reference to the Essex HLC (2013). [See reference 11] and Colchester Heritage Explorer, the online Historic Environment Record for Colchester [See reference 12]. It does not attempt a comprehensive analysis of Colchester's history but draws attention to the role past uses have played in shaping the current landscape.

Prehistoric (700,000 BC – 43 AD)

3.14 The wider area of Essex has an extremely long record of occupation and activity by humans, including from the Palaeolithic (700,000 – 10,000 BC), the Mesolithic (10,000 – 4,000 BC), the Neolithic (4,000 – 2,500 BC), the Bronze Age (2,500 – 700 BC), and the Iron Age (700 BC – 43 AD).

3.15 During the last million years, there have been several separate Ice Ages in Britain, each lasting tens of thousands of years. During this period, the presence of humans would have varied depending the prevailing environmental and climatic conditions. People returned to Britain about 10,000 years ago in what is known as the Mesolithic after an absence during the extreme cold of the preceding glaciation. The main evidence that survives from the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic is generally stone tools which have been found at several sites across the district, including within the gravel deposits at the east end of Mersea Island. Mesolithic finds within the wider region have been made along several river valleys, and it is probable that the river valleys and estuaries within the district hold further evidence from this period.

3.16 During the Neolithic period land management practices dramatically altered, and involved increased clearance of woodland, adoption of arable and pastoral farming and more permanent settlement. The pattern of an expanding population and the clearance of woodland for agriculture continued and intensified during the Bronze Age and Iron Age, creating a landscape dominated by farming, with a widespread scatter of individual farms, hamlets and villages. Strongholds or hill-forts were also built on ridges or locally high ground during the Iron Age, such as at Pitchbury Ramparts (Scheduled Monument), and the increased focus on settlement resulted in the development of the first towns or 'Oppida'. Colchester was within the heart of the

'Trinovantes' tribal area with the site of the territorial Oppida situated at Gosbecks (Scheduled Monument), just to the west of modern Colchester. Surrounding this 'town' within the countryside were scatters of small farmsteads/enclosures.

Roman (43 – 410 AD)

3.17 The Roman occupation of Britain began in AD43, following the Claudian Invasion. The Romano-British period is extremely well represented in the region with the major town at Colchester (Camulodunum) built to the east of the earlier Oppida. Development and reuse of the earlier Iron Age settlement also occurred, including the building of a temple and theatre. The rebuilding of Colchester after Boudicca's sacking included the construction of 'fortified' walls which, along with other parts of the Roman town, are still in evidence (Scheduled Monuments).

3.18 The ensuing period of Roman rule saw a transformation of the geography of the region with the construction and modification of several roads, including that between Colchester and London which the modern A12 road largely follows, and that between Colchester and Braughing (Hertfordshire) which the modern A120 follows. Transport routes had a number of settlements develop along them, particularly around nodal points, and there were a number of isolated villas connected to the main settlements and roads by a network of smaller roads and trackways.

3.19 The marshland landscapes of the past were ideal in the production of salt. The manufacture of salt (which began in the Bronze Age) flourished in the Iron Age and early Roman period. By the end of the 1st century AD this production went into decline, possibly due to inland salt production sites. The red hills on Mersea Island are landmarks along the coast associated with early salt production.

Anglo-Saxon (410 – 1066 AD)

3.20 Following the withdrawal of the Roman legions in AD407, groups of Angles, Saxons and Jutes arrived in Britain in increasing numbers, first as raiders and later as settlers. By the end of the fifth century they had established the East Saxon Kingdom (from which Essex takes its name). These groups introduced the Old English language and judging from the place names it is likely that many of the settlements within Colchester District were established during the Anglo Saxon period, with many listed in Domesday Book of 1086.

3.21 In this period Colchester continued as an important regional centre and by the time of the Domesday Book it was a borough of some significance, with the status of a 'Hundred' (an administrative region) and possessing its own court, mint and several churches. The Blackwater estuary was a focus for middle Saxon settlement, with important estates existing at Mersea and evidence of fish traps and the construction of the Strood Causeway which links the island to the mainland.

Medieval (1066 – 1540 AD)

3.22 The principal elements of the landscape were already in place by the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066, including most of the towns, the principal and minor transport routes, and many of the manors. Granting of markets in the 13th and 14th centuries built on many of the earlier settlement structures, and created historic cores from which modern. Colchester became one of the most important towns in late medieval England, with prosperity being founded upon the woollen cloth trade. A port was established at the Hythe, which provided direct access to the flourishing markets of northern Europe.

3.23 Elsewhere in the area there was a pattern of small-nucleated hamlets and villages and widespread dispersed farmsteads which remains a familiar feature of today's landscape. Great and Little Horkesley and Great Tey owe their origins in the early medieval and medieval period. Moated manorial sites, which date from the 12-14th centuries, are also scattered throughout the landscape

especially on areas of high ground linking them with their estate land on the marsh. Many of the estates sat within medieval parkland, of which a number survive within the landscape today. Examples include Layer Marney Tower and parkland; Birch Hall and parkland, Kingsford Park, Berechurch Hall, Abberton House, east Donyland Hall, Wivenhoe Hall Park, West Bergholt Hall, and Westwood Park.

Post Medieval and Industrial (1540 AD – Modern)

3.24 Colchester maintained its regional importance during this period. By the 18th century, development of the communication network and later, the 19th century development of the railways, led to an increasingly urban landscape with the expansion of some of the small towns within the area. In the 20th century the pattern of new and expanding settlement in the district gained a new pace and direction with a number of new settlements, such as Horkesley Heath.

3.25 Changes to the landscape in this period included extensive drainage and embankment of the marshes in the 17th and early 18th century, and the remodelling of the remaining open fields in the first half of the 19th century under Enclosure Acts. Several manor houses were also erected, many of which built on the early estates of the medieval period. These were usually set within parkland landscapes, such as Copford Hall, and designed in formal styles influenced by the fashions of the Continent.

3.26 The World Wars, particularly the Second, have left a lasting effect on the landscape in the form of airfields and landing-strips. There are also several examples of defensive structures from this period, including pillboxes and anti-tank installations often sited along river valleys.

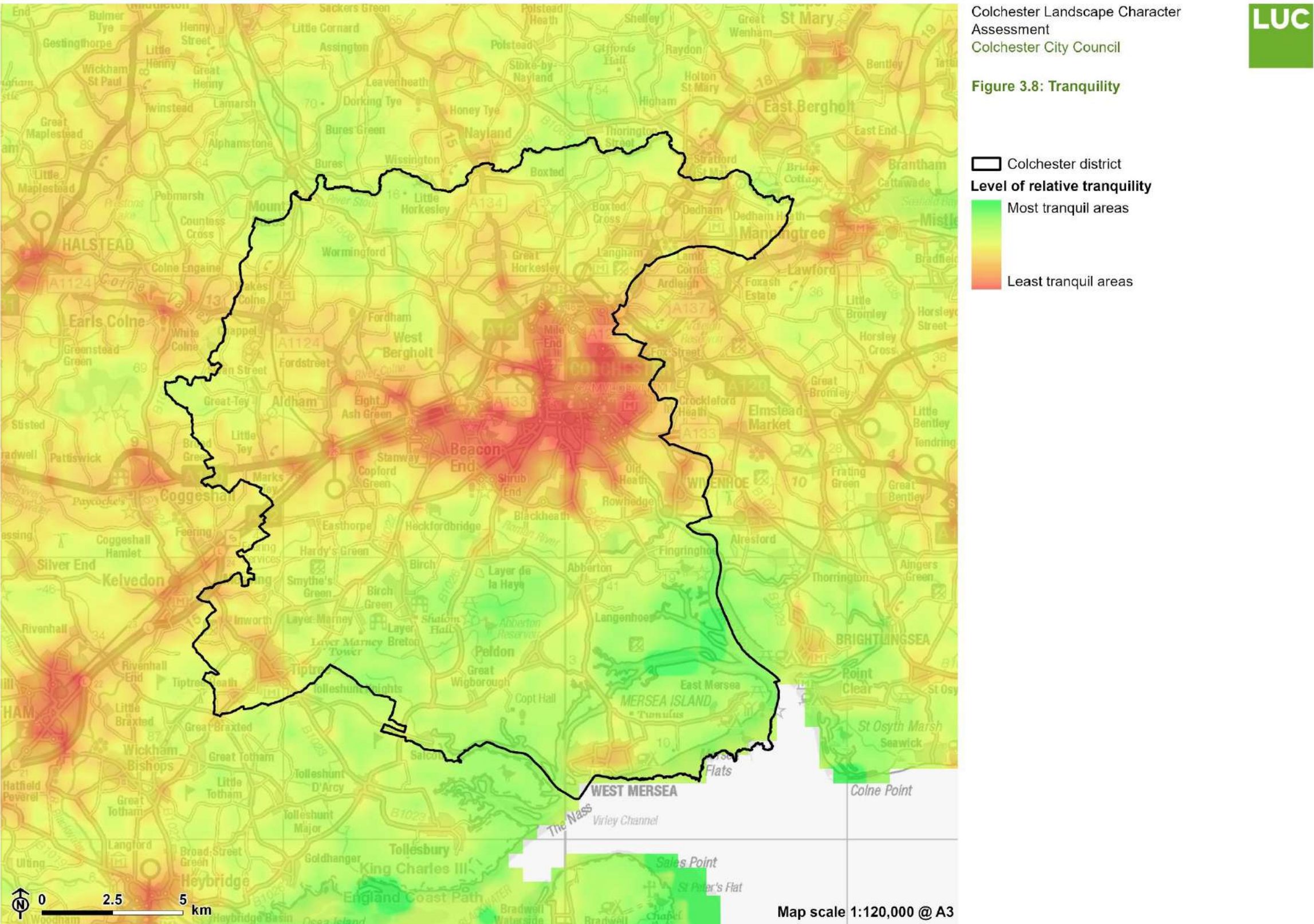
3.27 Post-war mineral extraction and leisure activities, particularly golf courses, have also had an effect on the landscape. As has post-1950s removal of field boundaries to accommodate modern agricultural machinery.

Perceptual Influences

Tranquillity

3.28 Colchester forms a large urban area that, along with transport corridors such as the A12 and other larger villages and towns, influences the character of the surrounding landscape. Away from the settlements and main roads, many parts of the district enjoy relatively higher levels of tranquillity. The areas of higher tranquillity are concentrated to the north (along the Stour Valley within the Dedham Vale National Landscape) and south within the coastal marshland areas. This is illustrated on **Figure 3.8**.

Figure 3.8: Tranquility

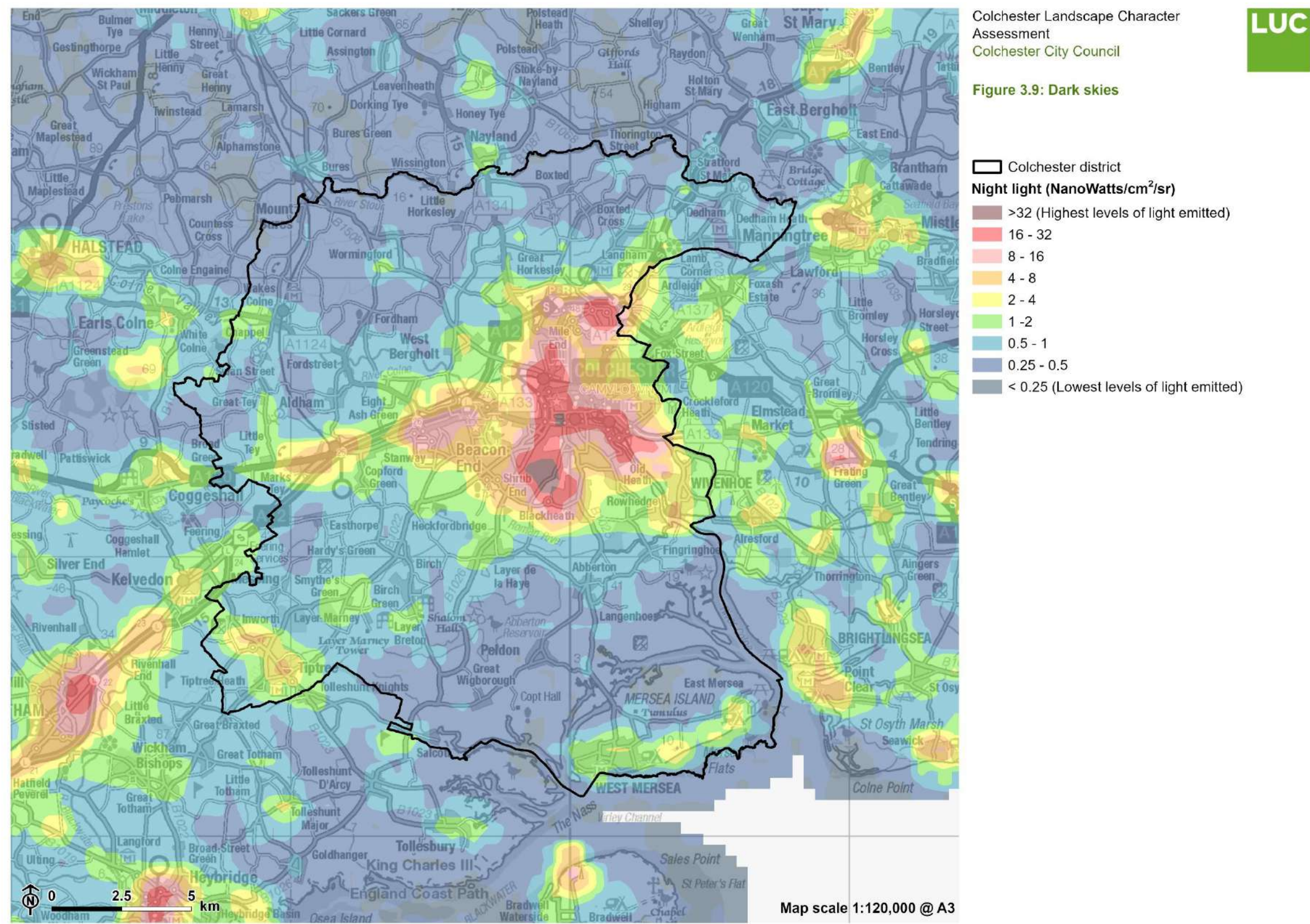


National Tranquillity Mapping Data 2007 developed for the Campaign to Protect Rural England and Natural England by Northumbria University. © Crown Copyright and database rights 2024.

3.29 The levels of light pollution and dark night skies within the district are illustrated on **Figure 3.9**. Light pollution decreases with distance from the main settlements, however there are only small pockets of dark night skies free from interference from artificial light within the area, typically in the north along the Stour Valley within the Dedham Vale National Landscape and south within the coastal marshland areas (away from West Mersea and other smaller coastal settlements and caravan parks).

3.30 Much of the Dedham Vale provides surprisingly tranquil and remote countryside. As noted in Chapter 2, the special characteristics and qualities of the National Landscape include 'relative wildness' and 'relative tranquillity'.

Figure 3.9: Dark skies



Earth Observation Group, NOAA National Geophysical Data Center. Data processed by LUC on behalf of CPRE. © Crown Copyright and database rights 2024.

Cultural Associations

3.31 The Vale of Dedham was an inspiration to John Constable who painted several scenes within area, and is now known as 'Constable Country'. Some of his most famous paintings are set within or in close proximity to the district, including Wivenhoe Park (1816), Dedham Vale (1828) and The Hay Wain (1821). Other works painted in the area include 'A Mill Near Colchester' (1833).

3.32 The area is also the setting for various novels, including the first part of Daniel Defoe's 'Moll Flanders' (1722) and more recently Sarah Perry's 'The Essex Serpent' (2016). The latter is set in Colchester and the fictional village of Aldwinter located on the edge of the Blackwater Estuary.

Chapter 4

General Issues and Changes

4.1 This chapter provides an overview of the main issues and changes (forces for change) affecting the landscape of Colchester District. It considers past, current and future forces for change that have, and will continue to, shape the landscapes seen today. Area-specific issues and changes are included in individual LCA profiles in Chapter 7.

4.2 The following issues and changes tend to recur across different LCTs and LCAs and enable a more holistic view to be taken. By assessing common themes at a broader scale allows local guidance to be applied to the wider landscape framework and applied more successfully to cross-cutting themes such as Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity, whilst still attending to the need to conserve and enhance local distinctiveness. Understanding the issues and changes which have affected, or will affect, the landscape has helped to shape the broad management guidelines which are provided in Chapter 6, as well as the area-specific guidelines set out in individual LCA profiles.

Development Pressure

4.3 Settlement expansion, introduction of industry, and increases in recreational and amenity facilities are the main drivers for landscape change:

- Suburbanisation, with the introduction of development and associated urban fringe pressures into the landscape; modern 20th and 21st century building styles are usually of different character to the rest of the settlement and often poorly reflect the local historic vernacular.
- Threat of further expansion of adjacent and surrounding urban edges into the landscape.
- Increased industrialisation and detracting influence of industrial development and associated infrastructure.

- The detracting influence of large scale or visually intrusive development within the more visually open parts of the landscape.
- The locally detracting influence of solar energy developments.
- Threat to international and national nature conservation designations from development and recreational pressures.
- Increased sub-urban influences; potential for ribbon development to result in a reduction in physical and perceived separation between distinct settlements/areas of development.
- Light pollution from roads, settlements and industry.
- The potential for the proposed National Grid Norwich to Tilbury Project, a new 400kv electricity transmission route that is currently proposed to dissect the administrative boundary, much of which will involve overhead power lines and 50m tall pylons with some undergrounding in the Dedham Vale National Landscape.

Changes in Agricultural Practices

4.4 Changes in agricultural practices reflect the need for farmers to diversify their operations to remain economically viable. In Colchester this has resulted in:

- Loss of traditional orchards and field patterns, and their respected arrangement patterns/ spacings, due to abandonment or conversion to arable, pasture or equine uses. However, in some cases traditional orchards are being replaced with more modern orchard growing methods with differing planting arrangement, form, and species variety.
- Replacement of traditional hedges with post and wire fencing and/or coniferous planting; this has contributed to the fragmentation of semi-natural habitats and reductions in biodiversity.
- An increase in the use of polytunnels and other crop protection structures, which are visually incongruous in the landscape.

- Increase in larger fields due to intensive arable farming and amalgamation, has changed the historic pattern and texture of the landscape.
- Changes in grazing practices have led to a loss or reduction in the diversity of grassland habitats, and scrub encroachment in places.
- Conversion from grazing marsh to cultivated land within marshland areas.
- An increase in equine land uses, particularly in proximity to the urban edges.
- Recent vineyard planting on former arable land has created change to the agricultural patterns of the landscape (for example at Carter's Farm west of Boxted).
- The introduction of larger-scale agricultural buildings and facilities as part of agricultural intensification.

Other

- Lack of formal access to parts of the landscape and severance and weakened links to/from the urban area due to presence of railways or busy roads.
- Increased recreational pressures and disturbance to areas of nature conservation value.
- Loss of salt marsh and other coastal and inter-tidal habitats due to reclamation and/or 'coastal squeeze'.
- The Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan [\[See reference 13\]](#) has shown that sections of the coastal frontage within the district are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and coastal processes. Proposed interventions include 'Hold the Line' (maintain/replace), 'Managed Realignment' (set back defence) and 'No Active Intervention' (no need to defend).
- A new coastal path is currently being planned around the whole of England's coastline - the King Charles III England Coast Path. The delivery of the England Coast Path is embedded in the Marine and Coastal

Access Act and Natural England is charged with its delivery by the end of 2024. Once completed, for the first time people will have the right of access around area of open coast. This includes – where appropriate – any land, other than the trail itself, which forms part of the Coastal Margin. The 'Salcott to Jaywick' and 'Mersea Island' stretches of the England Coast Path fall within Colchester District; at the time of writing these were not open to the public but have been considered within the assessment.

Climate Change

4.5 Climate change is a major pressure on rural landscapes and is likely to result in increasingly unpredictable weather with hotter drier summers and warmer wetter winters, more intense rainfall, and longer dry periods resulting in the need for agriculture to adapt to grow different crops and develop more flexible and responsive land management practices. Hotter summers and increases in temperatures could result in increased demands for agricultural irrigation.

4.6 Climate change resulting in more extreme weather could alter the species composition of existing species-rich woodlands and hedgerows, favouring species with lower water demand. Increasing incidences of pathogens may change the species mix of woodlands and higher temperatures and prolonged droughts are likely to put woodlands under further stress and increase the risk of wildfires. Drier summers and wetter winters could also cause changes in community composition of grassland habitats, and changing temperatures and extreme weather events are creating vulnerabilities in grassland landscapes, leading to increased soil erosion and run-off and fire risk.

4.7 Climate change is also likely to affect other important semi-natural habitats, particularly coastal and river marsh habitats. This will include water shortages in summer and increased water flows and flooding in winter, causing potential damage to habitats and species. These changes may manifest themselves within the natural environment through changes in habitats and a decline of flora and fauna which are unable to adapt quickly enough to the changing

habitat conditions. Longer drier summers may affect dry grassland and increase the risk of fire. The changing seasons may also disturb migrating birds and invertebrates, as there will be an increasing mismatch in timing of the arrival of migratory species and food sources, affecting grassland and woodland as well as intertidal habitats.

4.8 Climate change and greater levels of importation are increasing the impact of pests and diseases, including Ash dieback and acute Oak decline, and the increased spread of invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam. Ash dieback and acute Oak decline in particular could have a significant future impact on the coverage, character, and composition of woodland cover within the area.

4.9 Climate change is also likely to result in sea level rises which will impact coastal habitats, and river valleys are considered to be at high risk of flooding from watercourses. Measures to provide coastal and river flood protection may lead to conflict between defences and wildlife value. Increased frequency of flooding can also lead to increased runoff of pollutants from the land. Conversely, hotter and drier summers result in lower summer river flows, which means there is less water available for dilution and dispersion of pollutants such as nutrients and contaminated sediments. The risk of eutrophication and algal blooms increases the longer nutrients remain in a water body.

4.10 Colchester City Council declared a climate emergency in 2019, committing to a carbon neutral target for Council operations by 2030. The Council are working on several key projects and actions that aim to reduce emissions and produce positive environmental impacts for the city. This includes producing renewable energy; enhancing biodiversity and protecting the natural environment; supporting active travel and improving air quality; and working with others to take environmental action.

Chapter 5

Management Guidelines

5.1 This chapter presents general guidelines which apply to all landscape character types. These should be read in addition to the LCA-specific guidelines which are contained within the individual profiles in Chapter 7.

5.2 For those LCA that form part of the Dedham Vale National Landscape , or that lie within its setting, the relevant ‘natural beauty, character and special qualities’ of the National Landscape should be conserved and enhanced, having regard to the aims set out in the current AONB Management Plan and the duty to further the purposes of the designated landscape.

General Guidelines

Landscape Management

- Conserve and manage the Ancient Woodland to improve landscape character and encourage biodiversity; promote age and species diversity and structural heterogeneity and continue to keep coppice sites in active management.
- Consider the wider ecosystem services that woodlands provide; outside of designated sites and Ancient Woodland, changes in species composition may be acceptable if the services that the woodland provides (such as visual amenity or recreational opportunities) remain intact.
- Manage woodland appropriately, including to encourage and protect regeneration; to increase age structure and structural heterogeneity; and to reduce the impacts of pests and diseases.

- Plan and manage woodland to account for current and future impacts of ash dieback; refer to latest Forestry Commission guidelines on managing ash dieback in England.
- Explore opportunities to expand and connect existing woodland and tree cover through natural regeneration or small-scale planting where appropriate. This will strengthen landscape character, as well as bring benefits for biodiversity, soil quality and a reduction in soil erosion. Natural colonisation adjacent to existing woodland will allow locally native species to develop resilience to the pressures of climate change through natural processes.
- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions. This will help to strengthen characteristic patterns and structure in the landscape.
- Promote sustainable and wildlife-friendly land management practices that provide multiple landscape and biodiversity benefits. Create green corridors and networks linking to the important habitats.
- Manage arable land to enhance its biodiversity value and connectivity, by increasing the area of land available for uncultivated field margins; seek to maximise the diversity of margins to provide a range of habitats and to assist in the movement of species through the landscape and include species and cultivars that are able to tolerate and flower under hotter, drier summers.
- Manage semi-improved grassland and pasture to enhance its biodiversity value and appearance, particularly neglected areas.
- In tidal river and coastal areas work with the natural processes, seeking to conserve and enhance distinctive features and habitats that contribute to landscape character. Consider the strategies set out within the Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan (SMP 8) for Areas D (Colne Estuary) and E (Mersea Island).
- Encourage catchment-sensitive land management practices adjacent to watercourses to improve soil quality and prevent run off, ensuring it does not have an impact on water quality.

- Monitor potential changes in flora and increase in pests and diseases as a result of climate change, including spread of invasive plants and animals in water courses and woodlands.
- Seek to encourage traditional farming practices (including traditional orchards), retaining and enhancing sense of place whilst recognising the need to adapt to and mitigate against the effects of climate change.
- Monitor landscape impact of new forms of farming, including poly tunnels and larger agricultural buildings and facilities, seeking a balanced approach.
- Discourage an increase in equine related land uses, and encourage sensitive management and screening of existing equine related activities (this excludes bridleways).
- Consider opportunities for landscape and biodiversity enhancements as part of future restoration proposals on former industrial sites/complexes, including mineral workings and quarry sites.
- Enhance the visual characteristics and quality of the landscape, including through the preservation, enhancement and promotion of important views and vistas.
- Consider the role the landscape in the north plays in the setting of the Dedham Vale National Landscape, including views to and from it.
- Conserve the local distinctiveness of rural hamlets and villages and historic buildings by resisting inappropriate or unsympathetic development.
- Draw upon historic and cultural associations the area has and conserve the landscape setting of historic features (including Scheduled Monuments, listed buildings and conservation areas) and encourage further interpretation and understanding of these features within the landscape.
- Protect and manage the valued recreational use of the landscape, particularly along promoted routes, seeking opportunities to further enhance opportunities for access and enjoyment; consider opportunities to introduce new footpath and cycle routes where possible, including enhanced links to the nearby urban areas.

- Manage recreational routes and access to avoid/minimise disturbance to areas of nature conservation value.

Development Management

- Where conversion is required/deemed appropriate encourage the sympathetic conversion of traditional farm buildings to retain their rural character and as features of the agricultural landscape.
- Minimise the impacts of any new development through careful design, in terms of siting, form, scale, massing and materials.
- Encourage the use of traditional and locally distinctive building styles, colours and materials that are in keeping with the local vernacular (including the use of flint and weather boarding).
- Integrate any new development, through the use of locally characteristic woodland, shaws, hedgerows or shelter belts.
- Consider the role the landscape plays as an open buffer between settlements or areas of a settlement, and the resulting sense of separation and distinct identity.
- Consider opportunities for the removal of existing intrusive elements, such as pylons and the undergrounding power lines.
- Consider the impact on longer views of any proposed development. Where development is proposed tree screening, muted colours and non-reflective surfaces will help provide mitigation and integration.
- Any proposals for highway upgrading should aim to retain the rural character of the roads/lanes and their verges, and ensure that their character is not lost through unsympathetic highway works, unnecessary signage, lighting, or removal of hedgerows and trees.
- Utilise existing roads and tracks for site access wherever possible; for any new roads and tracks, consider how these can fit in with the grain of the landscape and complement the pattern of the existing roads.

- Consider how a proposed development fits with other similar proposals in the area in terms of cumulative effects and in-combination effects.
- Encourage sympathetic boundary treatments to development, particularly avoiding suburbanising gates and fences in more rural areas.
- Maintain the sense of openness by resisting proposals for new development that would impinge on landscapes identified as having a remote undeveloped quality; this includes intensification of existing uses.
- Seek to reduce lighting impacts through sensitive lighting design to avoid any reduction in tranquillity and perception of dark skies. For relevant areas refer to the Lighting Design Guide for the Dedham Vale National Landscape (July 2023) [\[See reference 14\]](#).

Chapter 6

Landscape Character of Colchester

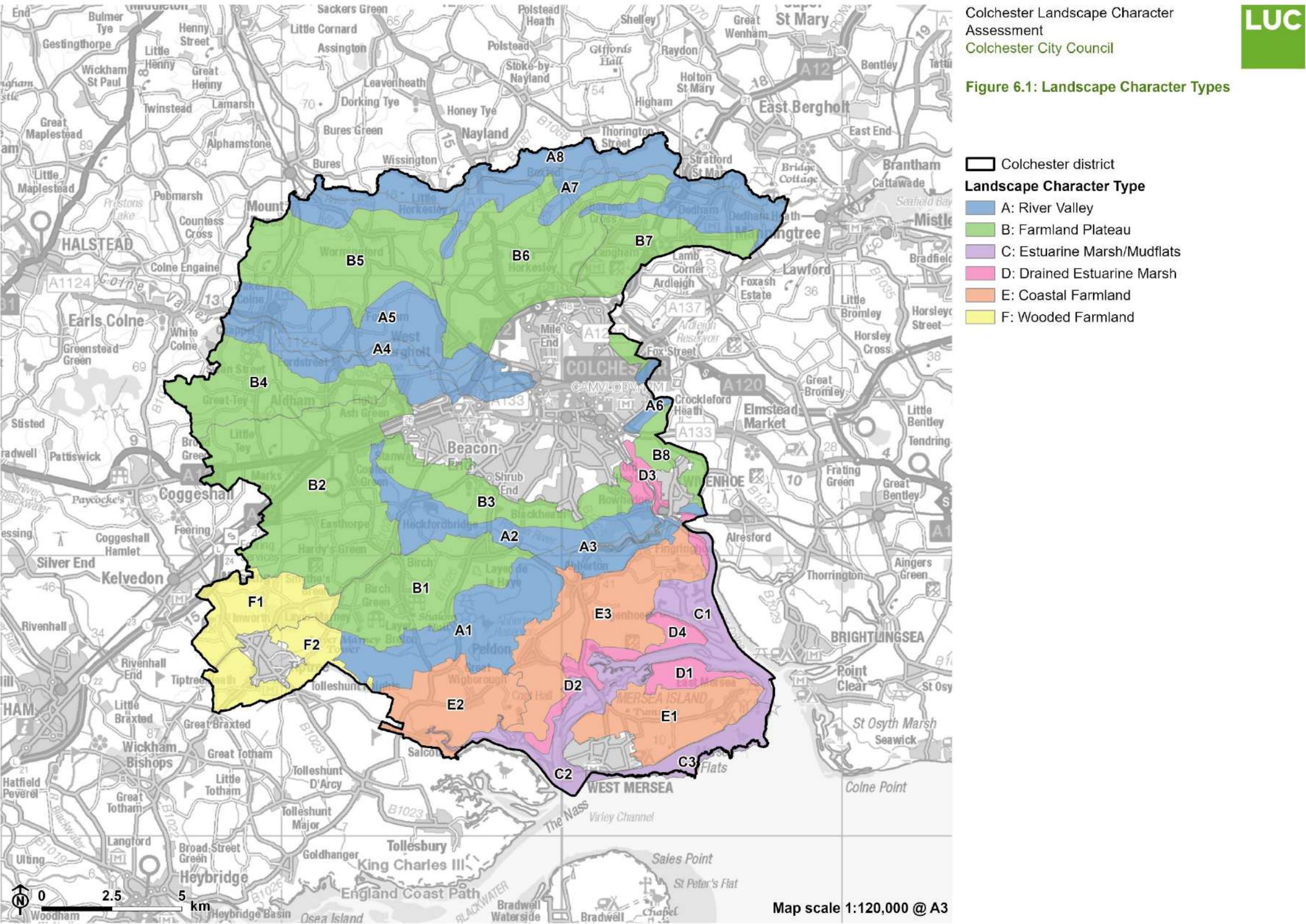
Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas

6.1 The landscape classification identifies six generic Landscape Character Types (LCTs), each representing a distinct identity and common geology, topography, land use and cultural pattern. These are shown on **Figure 6.1**.

6.2 The LCTs are subdivided into local Landscape Character Areas (LCAs), which are discrete geographic areas that possess the characteristics described for the landscape type but have a recognisable local identity. The classification identifies 28 LCAs, as listed below and shown on **Figure 6.2**.

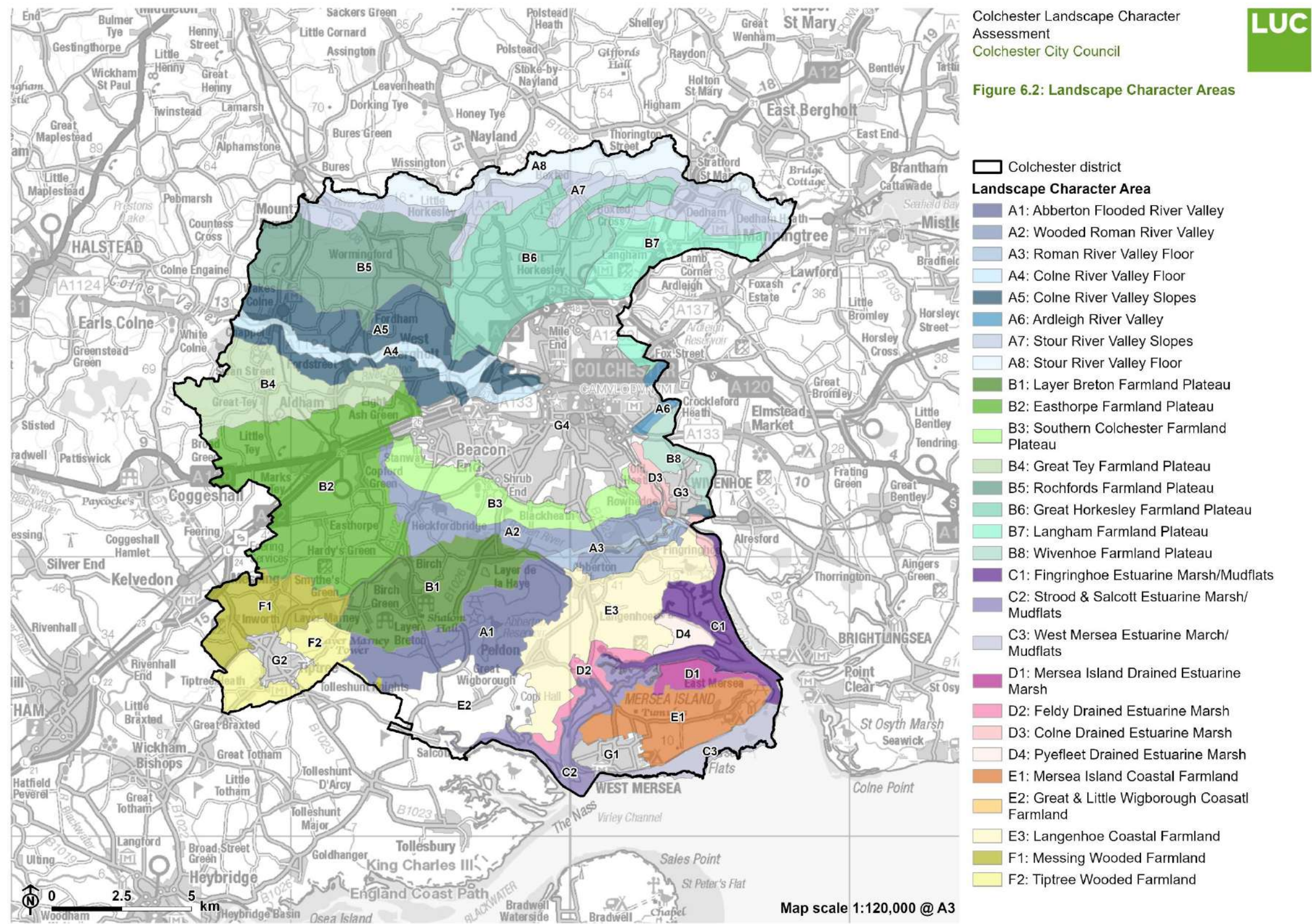
6.3 It is important to note that boundaries between one LCT or LCA and the next are transitional and there is rarely a clearcut change 'on the ground'. The assessment has been mapped at a scale of 1:25,000, which provides an appropriate level of detail for the landscape character assessment at the strategic scale. In considering any change in one character area the impact on views to/from and the character of neighbouring areas have also be considered.

Figure 6.1: Landscape Character Types



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Figure 6.2: Landscape Character Areas



Landscape Character Types and Areas

Landscape Character Type A: River Valley

- Landscape Character Area A1: Abberton Flooded River Valley
- Landscape Character Area A2: Wooded Roman River Valley
- Landscape Character Area A3: Roman River Valley Floor
- Landscape Character Area A4: Colne River Valley Floor
- Landscape Character Area A5: Colne River Valley Slopes
- Landscape Character Area A6: Ardleigh River Valley
- Landscape Character Area A7: Stour River Valley Slopes
- Landscape Character Area A8: Stour River Valley Floor

Landscape Character Type B: Farmland Plateau

- Landscape Character Area B1: Layer Breton Farmland Plateau
- Landscape Character Area B2: Eastthorpe Farmland Plateau
- Landscape Character Area B3: Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau
- Landscape Character Area B4: Great Tey Farmland Plateau
- Landscape Character Area B5: Rochfords Farmland Plateau
- Landscape Character Area B6: Great Horkesley Farmland Plateau
- Landscape Character Area B7: Langham Farmland Plateau
- Landscape Character Area B8: Wivenhoe Farmland Plateau

Landscape Character Type C: Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats

- Landscape Character Area C1: Fingringhoe Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats
- Landscape Character Area C2: Strood & Salcott Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats
- Landscape Character Area C3: West Mersea Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats

Landscape Character Type D: Drained Estuarine Marsh

- Landscape Character Area D1: Mersea Island Drained Estuarine Marsh
- Landscape Character Area D2: Feldy Drained Estuarine Marsh
- Landscape Character Area D3: Colne Drained Estuarine Marsh
- Landscape Character Area D4: Pyefleet Drained Estuarine Marsh

Landscape Character Type E: Coastal Farmland

- Landscape Character Area E1: Mersea Island Coastal Farmland
- Landscape Character Area E2: Great & Little Wigborough Coastal Farmland
- Landscape Character Area E3: Langenhoe Coastal Farmland

Landscape Character Type F: Wooded Farmland

- Landscape Character Area F1: Messing Wooded Farmland
- Landscape Character Area F2: Tiptree Wooded Farmland

Chapter 7

Colchester Landscape Character Profiles

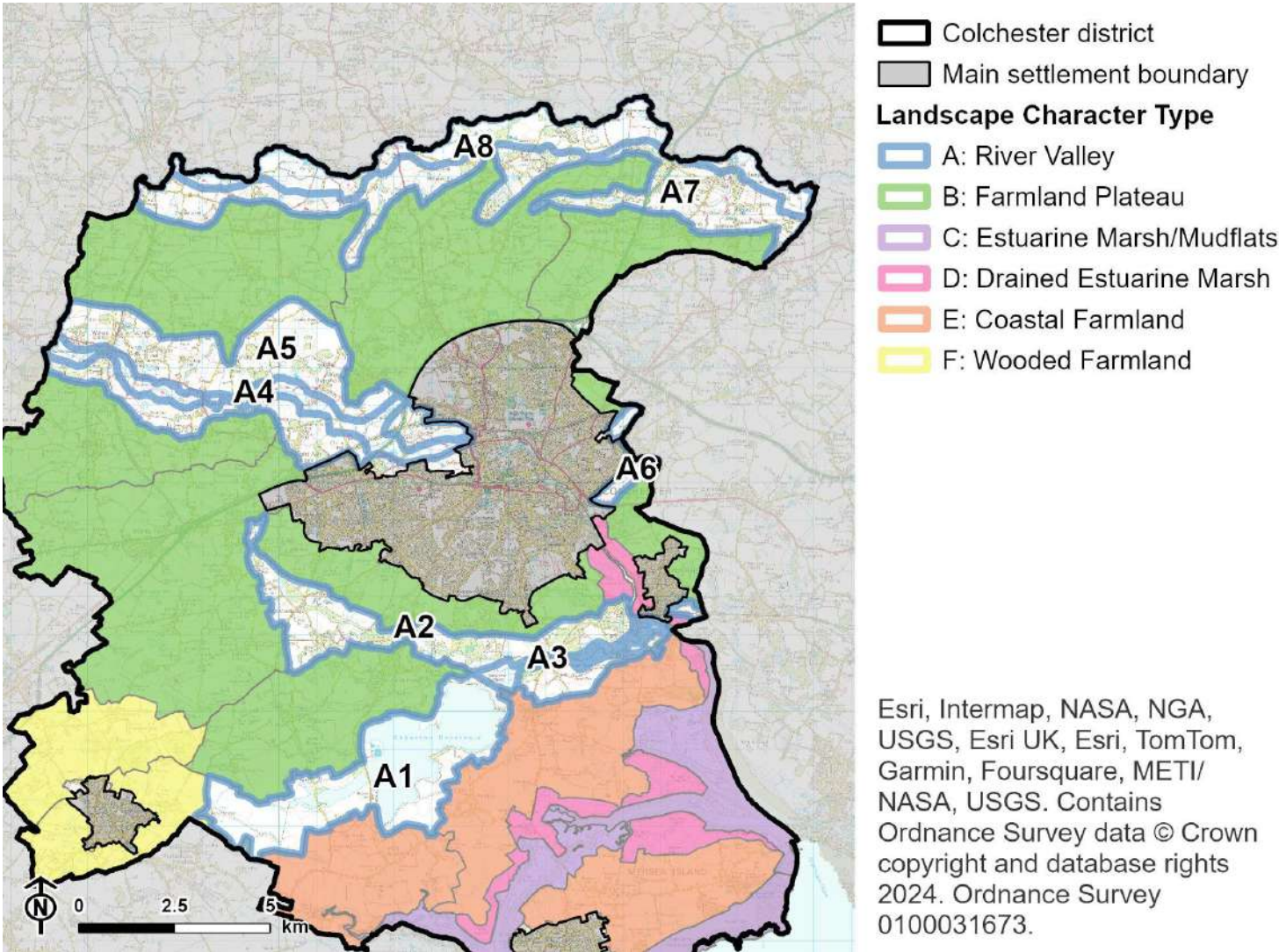
Landscape Character Type A: River Valley

Landscape Character Areas

7.1 The River Valley LCT is subdivided into eight LCAs as follows:

- Landscape Character Area A1: Abberton Flooded River Valley;
- Landscape Character Area A2: Wooded Roman River Valley;
- Landscape Character Area A3: Roman River Valley Floor;
- Landscape Character Area A4: Colne River Valley Floor;
- Landscape Character Area A5: Colne River Valley Slopes;
- Landscape Character Area A6: Ardleigh River Valley;
- Landscape Character Area A7: Stour River Valley Slopes; and
- Landscape Character Area A8: Stour River Valley Floor.

Figure 7.1: Location of the River Valley LCT and LCAs



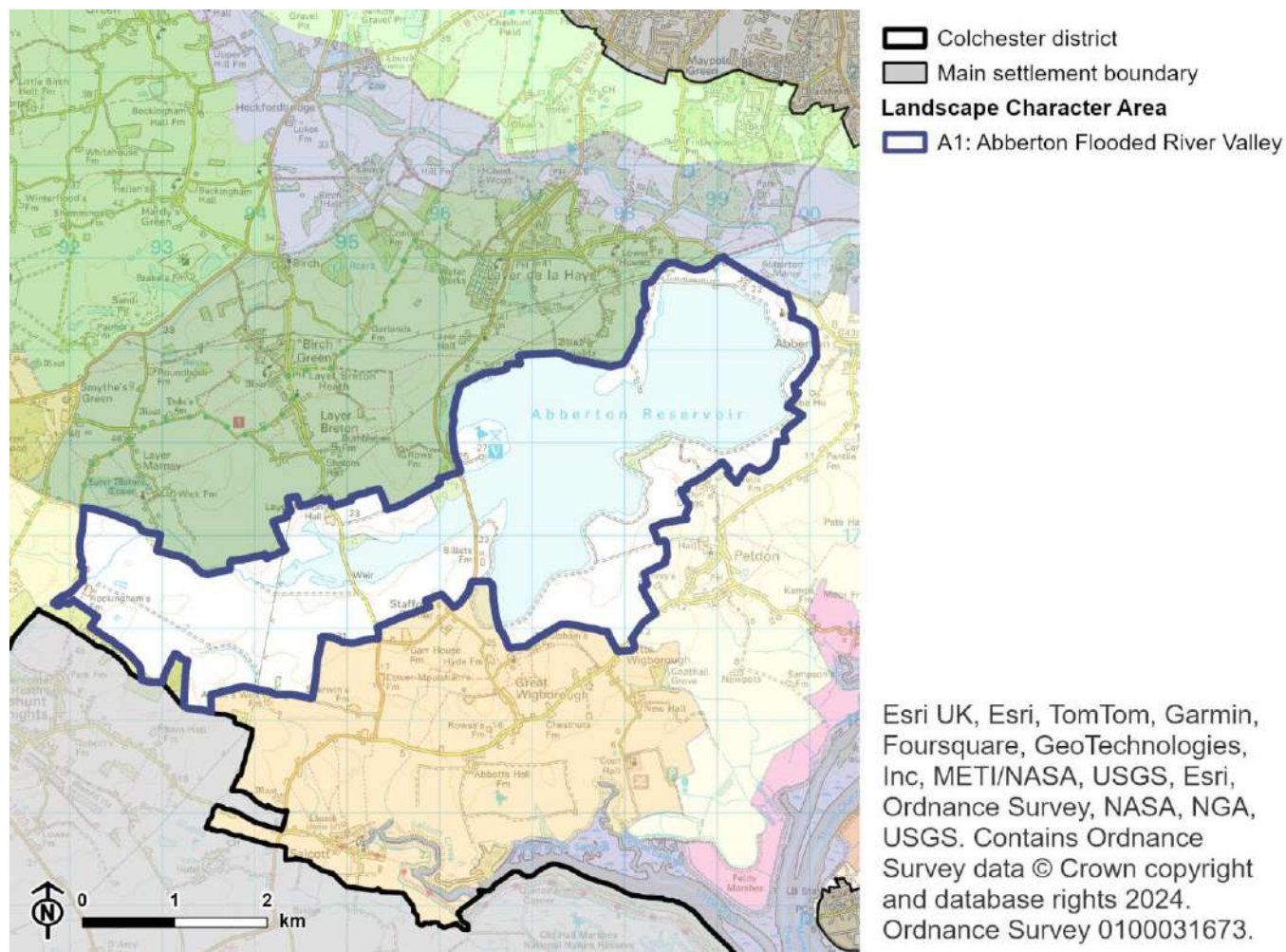
Landscape Character Area A1: Abberton Flooded River Valley

Description

Location and Summary

7.2 The LCA is located in the south of the district, to the south of Layer-De-La-Haye. It comprises the shallow valley of Layer Brook, which has been flooded to form Abberton Reservoir. The reservoir dominates the landscape, but elsewhere it is characterised by pattern of large-scale arable fields. This is a peaceful landscape with limited development and settlement limited to few scattered farmsteads.

Figure 7.2: Location of LCA A1



Key Characteristics

- The undulating bowl-shaped, shallow river valley of the Layer Brook, containing the expanse of Abberton Reservoir which dominates the landscape to the east.
- The reservoir is fringed with marginal vegetation, including reedbeds and woodland.
- An important wetland site for waterfowl, protected by international and national nature conservation designations.
- Elsewhere it is a predominantly arable landscape organised into an irregular pattern of large-scale fields defined by hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees or open boundaries.
- Historic character provided by the retained historic settlement pattern of dispersed farmsteads and church/hall complexes.
- Limited formal public rights of ways (PRoW), although there is a network of permissive footpaths and cycleways around the reservoir; access also provided by two north-south roads crossing the valley.
- A strong sense of visual openness, with wide uninterrupted views available across the reservoir from the surrounding valley sides, water's edge and crossing points.
- Views out are generally restricted by the gently sloping valleys sides, with surrounding settlement often visible on higher ground.
- A peaceful, rural landscape with minimal built development and few detractors; some influence from traffic along the B1026 and engineered reservoir banks and pumping station.

Photo 7.1: Open uninterrupted view west across the reservoir from Layer Breton Hill



Photo 7.2: Reservoir fringed by woodland and riparian vegetation



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.3 The LCA features sedimentary bedrock geology of clay, silt, sand, and gravel (Thames Group), within which the Layer Brook eroded a shallow valley. This provided positive conditions for the creation of Abberton Reservoir, which now dominates the area in the east. The remaining section of the Layer Brook winds its way through the western part of the landscape. The reservoir and Layer Brook are identified as falling within Flood Zone 2 and 3. The soils within the LCA are predominantly Grade 3 (good to moderate), which are under arable use, albeit some pasture around the reservoir edges.

7.4 The fields are bound by hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees, however in places sections of hedgerows have been lost, leaving some completely open boundaries. Pasture fields around the reservoir are delineated by wire and post-fencing. Mature tree cover lines the Layer Brook and the spring streams which feed it, and parts of the reservoir edge; much of this is Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland'. The reservoir edge also features riparian vegetation including a mosaic of Priority Habitat 'Reedbed'. Abberton Reservoir is the largest freshwater body in Essex, with an area of approximately 500 hectares. It is an internationally and nationally significant wetland site and one of Britain's most important reservoirs for wildfowl, reflected in its designation as a Ramsar Site, Special Protection Area (SPA) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Cultural Influences

7.5 Abberton Reservoir was constructed in 1936, formed by damming the Layer Brook. This led to the loss of agricultural fields, shifting the land use towards water management and conservation. Elsewhere the historic medieval (or potentially earlier) field pattern of 'pre-18th century irregular fields', and 'rectilinear co-axial fields', has been heavily eroded by 'post 1950 boundary

loss', as identified within the Essex HLC (2013). . The field pattern today is predominantly large-scale enclosure as a result of a reorganisation and /or merging of earlier fields to aid modern farming practices.

7.6 The historic pattern of dispersed farmsteads and church/halls complexes is largely retained, with the Grade II* Layer Breton Hall and Church of St Andrew in particular providing a sense of historic character. Abberton Reservoir was also an important site in World War II, when it was mined as a precaution against invasion by German sea planes. The reservoir was also used as a training site for RAF 617 Squadron, known 'the Dambusters'. While not overtly evident in the landscape, these stories associated with this landscape feature contribute to a sense of time depth.

7.7 Formal public access is limited to one PRow in the north-west that connects it to the adjacent Roman River valley, and two minor roads crossing the reservoir north-south - the B1026 and Layer Breton Hill. However, the Essex Wildlife Trust Abberton Reservoir Nature Discovery Park serves as a recreational site, with a car park, visitor centre, and café at its western edge , along with a permissive circular footpath, cycle tracks and bird hides around the reservoir edge.

Perceptual Influences

7.8 This is a peaceful, rural landscape with minimal built development and few detractors except for traffic on the B1026. This is reflected in CPRE tranquillity and dark skies mapping. The sense of tranquillity is further enhanced by the sound of bird song and the natural shoreline around much of the reservoir. However, the eastern edge of the reservoir consists of uniform and engineered concrete edges, which exert a strong localised human influence.

7.9 The open reservoir results in a strong sense of visual openness, with wide, uninterrupted views available from the water's edge and crossing points contributing to the reservoir's visual prominence in the landscape. Views are across the open, often shimmering, woodland-fringed reservoir. Examples

include from the vicinity of Abberton Hall Church to the west And from the Abberton Reservoir visitor centre. Views out of the area are generally restricted by the gently sloping valleys sides, with surrounding settlement on higher ground often visible; the Grade I listed Church of St John the Baptist and the Abberton Hall Church are landmarks in views to the north and east respectively.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Abberton Reservoir is a valued water resource contributing significantly to the distinct character and ecological integrity of the landscape.
- The reservoir is an internationally significant wetland site, reflected in its designation as a Ramsar site, SSSI and SAC, providing habitat for a range of migratory and over-wintering bird species.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity provided by marginal vegetation and woodland fringing the reservoir, including Priority Habitat 'Reedbed' and 'Deciduous Woodland'.
- Recreational value provided by permissive paths around reservoir which provides green infrastructure connections and recreational access to the countryside.
- The rural character of much of the landscape which provides a setting for public rights of ways and the reservoir.
- An open and largely unsettled landscape with expansive and dramatic views across the reservoir.
- Sense of tranquillity and remoteness, especially away from roads and engineered parts of the reservoir.
- The reservoir's historic association with 'the Dambusters', being used as a training site.

Issues and Changes

- Potential for fertiliser, pesticide and sediment run-off from adjacent agricultural area to pollute Abberton Reservoir and affect water quality and habitats.
- Expansion of Abberton Reservoir could result of agricultural land and could have potential effects on both landscape character and visual amenity.
- Field agglomeration since the 1950s has eroded the landscape structure, resulting in poorly managed hedgerows, both field and roadside, with gaps or missing sections entirely.
- Potential for the introduction of new visually intrusive farm buildings may disrupt the visual harmony of the river valley, altering its character and diminishing the sense of openness and rural integrity.
- Potential expansion of villages within adjacent character areas (Abberton, Peldon and Layer Breton) infringing upon the setting of the reservoir and affecting the generally open character of the area.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - More frequent and intense rainfall that could exacerbate the flooding of Layer Brook and Abberton Reservoir , which fall within Flood Zones 2 and 3, resulting in damages to both agricultural and natural habitats, particularly the Priority Habitats 'Reedbeds' and 'Deciduous Woodland'.
 - Fluctuations in temperature and rainfall may lead to changes in farming practices and reduced yields, impacting the viability of traditional crops in the predominantly arable landscape.
 - Wetter winters and drier summers may strain water resources, impacting irrigation for crops and livestock and threatening the health of Abberton Reservoir, Layer Brook and its spring-fed streams.
 - Drought may result in prolonged periods of the reservoir being very low and a subsequent a shift in the main habitat type to mudflats, altering the conditions for a variety of bird species.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Abberton Flooded River Valley LCA is to conserve and enhance the distinctive river valley landscape dominated by Abberton Reservoir. The quality of marginal vegetation and woodland habitats along the reservoir, including reedbeds and deciduous woodland, should be protected and enhanced, and the extent and quality of hedgerows in arable farmland should be increased. Additionally, recreational access to the reservoir should be promoted and enhanced whilst managing this appropriately to minimise ecological disturbance. New development should be avoided, including in the adjacent higher areas, to protect the open and unsettled character of the landscape.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Protect, manage, and restore wetland habitats, including reedbeds and other marginal vegetation around the reservoir.
- Monitor and manage agricultural practices to minimise their impact on water quality and valuable habitats surrounding Abberton Reservoir, particularly by controlling runoff, preventing overgrazing and encouraging sustainable farming practices.
- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of arable fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods.
- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.

- Protect and enhance existing deciduous woodland through appropriate management.
- Protect and manage various listed buildings to preserve the sense of time-depth and historic character.
- Enhance and promote existing panoramic and framed views across the reservoir, including from crossing points and the Abberton reservoir Nature Discovery Park.
- Encourage continued permissive access around the reservoir seeking opportunities to further enhance opportunities for access and enjoyment; consider opportunities for additional formal rights of way within the area.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of the area away from urban influences.

Development Management

- Ensure that any further expansion of the reservoir is sensitively managed and integrates naturalistic shorelines that provide varied habitat for waterfowl.
- Any large scale or visually intrusive development would be detrimental to the undeveloped rural character of the landscape.
- Retain the largely unsettled character by limiting new development.
- Encourage the integration of any new development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate hedgerows and woodlands to reflect and reinforce rural character.
- Resist development that would erode the rural character of the valley, such as intrusive lighting, road widening, new signage, and sources of noise disturbance.

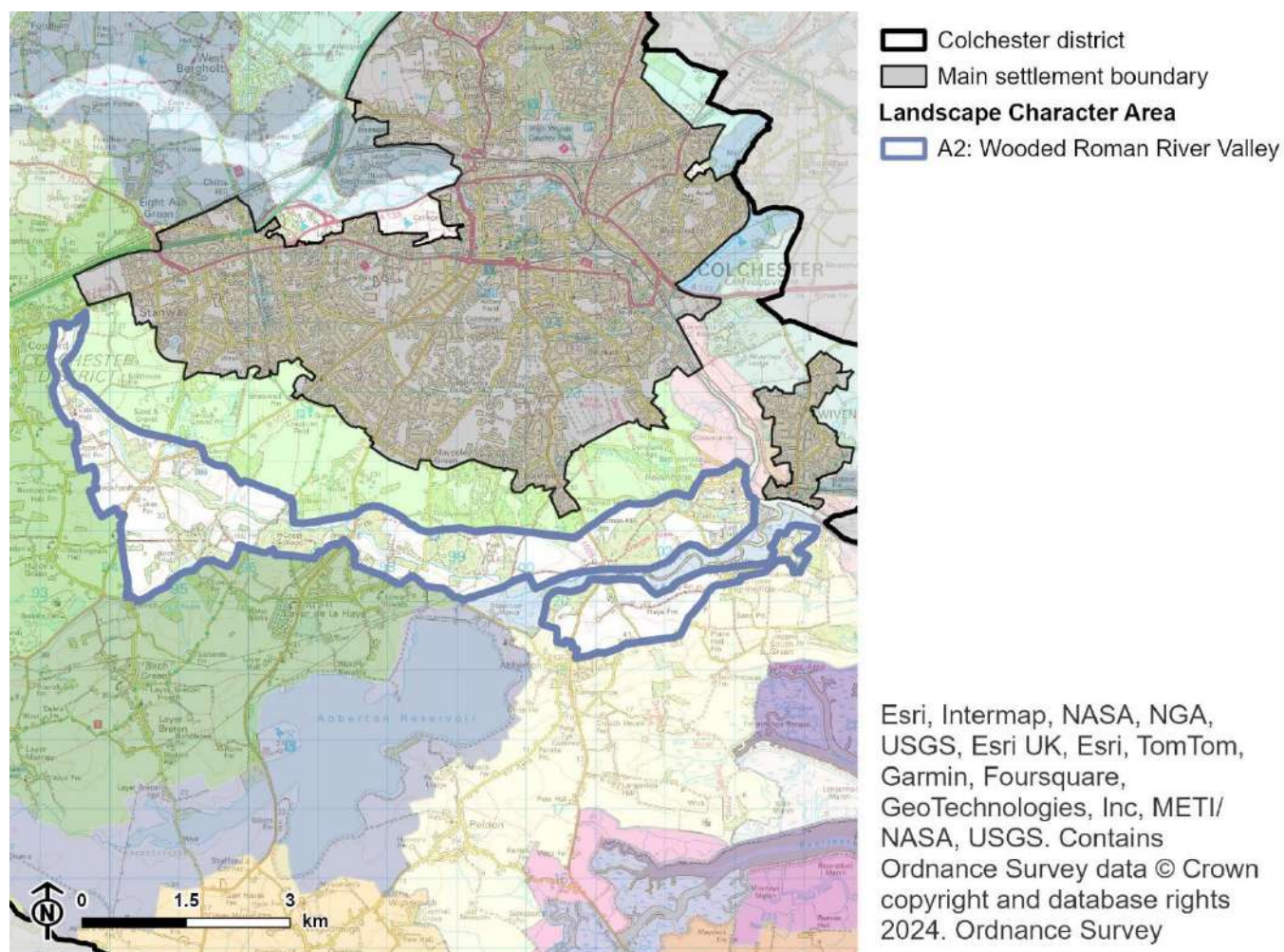
Landscape Character Area A2: Wooded Roman River Valley

Description

Location and Summary

7.10 The LCA is located to the south of Colchester and is divided into two separate areas by the Roman River valley floor (LCA A3) in the east. The area comprises the northern and southern valley slopes of the Roman River valley and features an expansive and well-connected woodland network, interspersed with areas of open farmland.

Figure 7.3: Location of LCA A2



Key Characteristics

- Relatively steep and sinuous V-shaped valley of the Roman River, enclosing its narrow floodplain, dissected by minor tributary streams.
- Blocks of deciduous and mixed woodland along the valley slopes and riparian woodland along the valley bottom, create a well-wooded landscape with strong seasonal interest.
- Interspersed between woodland blocks, a varied field pattern of arable and pasture fields defined by low-trimmed hedgerows; local concentrations of lowland meadows along the valley floor in the west.
- Rich evidence of Iron Age, Roman and Medieval history with an historic settlement pattern of church/hall complexes, farmsteads and small villages largely retained.
- Good levels of public access via a network of public rights of way (PRoW) along the valley slopes and extending into the surrounding farmland.
- Road network consisting of several north-south bridging points, including Maldon Road (B1022), Church Road (B1026), and Mersea Road (B1025), connected by winding local lanes.
- The landscape retains a strong rural character with tranquil, steep wooded valleys, with only limited urban influence from development and roads.

Photo 7.3: Public rights of way traverse mixed woodland on the valley sides



Photo 7.4: Open farmland set within an extensive network of woodland



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.11 The area is defined by the valley of the Roman River, a tributary of the River Colne. The bedrock geology of clay, silt, sand, and gravel (Thames Group) has been eroded by the river with a resulting steep, narrow and sinuous v-shaped valley, with heights ranging from 5m above ordnance datum (AOD) to 35m AOD. The valley slopes are dissected in places by a series of unnamed tributary streams, which have created an undulating topography. The Roman River and these tributary streams sit within narrow floodplains categorised as Flood Zone 2 and 3. Soils within the LCA are predominantly a mosaic of Grade 3 (good to moderate) and Grade 4 (poor) agricultural land, with smaller pockets of Grade 2 (good) soils, supporting a mix of pasture and arable farming. Additionally, large areas of non-agricultural land are found on the valley slopes above the floodplain, characterised by extensive woodland.

7.12 The fields are generally enclosed by mature hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees. However, to the west, larger fields are bounded by low-cut hedgerows. Both the valley sides and valley floor are dominated by Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland'. On the valley floor the river is fringed by riparian deciduous woodland, while on the valley sides there are large, concentrated blocks of mixed woodland including Friday Wood, Donyland Woods, and Chest Woods. Parts of these woodlands, in addition to Cook's Wood and Gol Grove, are identified as Ancient woodland. The river is also fringed with small localised pockets of Priority Habitat 'lowland meadows' to the west by Bay Mill. The collective ecological value of this woodland habitat is recognised various nature conservation designations, including the Roman River Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the Roman River Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and a series of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) which encompass much of the woodland network. On the higher valley sides in the south-east, there are also some small areas of Priority Habitat 'traditional orchard' along Haye Lane and Abberton Road.

Cultural Influences

7.13 The area has historically been characterised by woodland, either forming part of the immediate parkland or wider surrounds of a hall (such as Berechurch Hall and Copford Hall) or retained in locations less favourable for agriculture. Interspersed between woodland, are irregular pre-18th-century field systems likely of medieval origin or older. Some of these pre-existing earlier field systems were further subdivided by informal agreement in the 18th and 19th centuries and are identified as 'Piecemeal enclosure by agreement' within the Essex HLC (2013). In the west where the soils are of better quality, much of these earlier field systems have been lost due to 20th-century agriculture intensification (identified within the HLC as being 'post 1950's enclosure' and 'posy 1950 boundary loss'). Field agglomeration has also occurred to a lesser extent in the south-east. Today, this has resulted in a varied field pattern, consisting of irregular medium to large enclosures within the northern valley slopes and regular smaller-scale enclosures in the east.

7.14 The landscape has a long-standing history of human occupation. Evidence of earlier human activity includes earthworks south of Gosbecks and at Berechurch Hall (Scheduled Monuments) associated with the Iron Age territorial oppida and later Romano-British centre of Camulodunum (Colchester). Later in the Medieval period several hall/church complexes with associated parkland were introduced throughout the landscape, including East Donyland Hall, Birch Hall, Copford Hall and Stanway Hall (now the site of Colchester Zoo). Other evidence of Medieval activity in the landscape includes the moat at East Donyland Hall, the remains of All Saints Church and St Mary's Church at Birch Hall (all designated as Scheduled Monuments). A number of important buildings survive from these complexes, including the 12th-century Grade I listed Church of St Michael at Copford Hall and the Grade II* listed Church of St Mary at Birch Hall. Settlement in this period consisted of dispersed farmsteads, hamlets and small villages. This pattern remains largely intact today, with the linear village of Fingringhoe designated as a Conservation Area and containing several listed buildings. The historic character is further reflected by the presence of scattered listed buildings throughout the landscape.

7.15 The landscape features several PRow that traverse woodlands and valley slopes, connecting farms and settlements and providing cross-valley access. Access to the landscape is also possible by a network of roads and lanes crossing the river from north to south connecting opposite valley sides, including Maldon Road (B1022), Church Road (B1026), and Mersea Road (B1025). Modern recreation within the landscape is also provided by Colchester Zoo, located in the west.

Perceptual Influences

7.16 An overall rural landscape that retains a sense of tranquillity and remoteness. The dense woodland coverage, particularly on the northern valley slope, further enhances this perception. Rural character is influenced by modern suburban development at Fingfringhoe (High Park Corner), and ribbon development along Chappel Road/Abberton Road, which erodes the sense of tranquillity and rurality in the south-east. The relatively busy road routes heading south out of Colchester – Mersea Road, the B1026 and the B1022 – also have a localised impact on tranquillity as reflected in CPRE tranquillity mapping. The B1022 is the main route to Colchester Zoo which periodically increases traffic levels. In addition, the southern extent of the military training area at Donyland Heath (located primarily in LCA B3) has an intermittent effect on tranquillity.

7.17 The majority of the landscape is characterised by a sense of enclosure due to the large woodland blocks that restrict views and create an intimate, enclosed experience within the valley. This enclosure tends to limit intervisibility between the valley bottom and the surrounding valley sides. However, there are some longer views across the Roman River Floodplain (LCA A3) in the south-east, including from Haye Lane. There are also some longer views south towards Abberton Reservoir from elevated points on the valley slopes near Abberton and along Abberton Road near Malting Green.

7.18 Overall, this is a relatively enclosed landscape with predominantly wooded skylines, defined by the texture of dense mixed woodlands and mature hedgerows. The natural colour palette shifts seasonally, with shades of green

and brown prevailing throughout the year, accompanied by the soothing sound of the Roman River babbling in the background.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- The distinctive, sinuous, V-shaped valley of the Roman River, enclosing the river.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity is provided by the extensive and well connected woodland network, including Ancient Woodland and Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland', parts of which are also protected by SSSI, LNR and LWS designations.
- Sense of time depth and historic character provided by the surviving historic settlement pattern, remnant parklands, and several historic features and designations including British Iron Age dykes and earthworks (Scheduled Monuments) and Fingringhoe Conservation Area.
- Recreational value provided by PRoW which provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access from settlements, including the southern edge of Colchester.
- The rural, wooded character of much of the landscape which provides a setting for PRoW, small villages and hamlets.
- The texture and seasonal visual interest provided by the extensive and diverse woodland.
- Long views across the Roman River Floodplain (LCA A3) and of Abberton Reservoir from the valley slopes near Abberton in the south-east.

- Sense of tranquillity and remoteness away from settlements and roads, heightened by the dense woodland cover and the sound of the Roman River.

Issues and Changes

- Pressure for enlargement of arable fields and further loss of field boundaries in the west and east,
- Increased military training activity disrupts tranquillity, particularly on the northern slopes at and around Donyland Woods.
- Historic loss of orchards due to development or conversion to arable farmland on the valley sides in the south-east.
- An increase in equine-related land uses, including post and rail subdivision of larger fields and small structures, particularly around Fingringhoe (High Park Corner) in the south-east.
- Potential for further expansion of the village of Fingringhoe , particularly through increased ribbon development along Chappel Road/Abberton Road. There is also the potential for the expansion of neighbouring settlements to expand into the LCA, including Abberton to the south-east, Rowhedge to the north-east and Copford to the north-west
- Potential further expansion of Colchester Zoo, which could detrimentally effect the surrounding woodland.
- Potential for pollution of the Roman River from fertiliser and pesticide run-off from higher farmland areas.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to, especially Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland', and Ancient Woodlands, such as Friday Wood, Donyland Woods, Chest Woods, Cook's Wood and Gol

Grove may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.

- More frequent and intense rainfall resulting in increased flooding, especially along Roman River and its minor tributary streams, which fall within Flood Zones 2 and 3. This could result in damage to both agricultural and natural habitats, particularly the Priority Habitats and Roman River Complex LWS.
- Erosion of valley slopes and waterlogging of soils may also become more pronounced.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Wooded Roman River Valley LCA is to conserve and restore the wooded river valley landscape by managing and protecting Ancient Woodland, promoting natural regeneration to extend woodland areas where appropriate, and protecting and extending areas of lowland meadow on the valley floor. New development should be avoided, particularly visually intrusive or incongruous structures, to preserve the landscape's rural, wooded, and tranquil character.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Protect and enhance valued habitats including Ancient Woodland and Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland', 'traditional orchards' and 'lowland meadows' and improve linkages between them.

- Conserve, manage and restore deciduous woodland along valley sides. Ensure that new woodland planting is designed to enhance existing landscape character using species appropriate to climatic conditions.
- Enhance the quality of watercourses feeding into the Roman River, and in turn the River Colne, by increasing riparian vegetation to improve filtration, flood mitigation, and habitat diversity.
- Protect and manage the valued recreational use of the landscape, seeking opportunities to further enhance opportunities for access and enjoyment. Strengthen the recreational role of woodlands by ensuring well-maintained public rights of ways to promote visitor appreciation of natural resources without harming the ecology.
- Maintain and protect longer-range views, particularly across the Roman River Floodplain (LCA A3) and of Abberton Reservoir.
- Protect and manage historic features including, Iron Age and Roman earthworks (Scheduled Monuments), remnant parklands and listed buildings to preserve the sense of time-depth and historic character.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of the area, especially along the valley bottom and on the wooded valley slopes, away from urban influences.

Development Management

- Retain the settlement pattern of dispersed farmsteads, hamlets and villages. Conserve the local distinctiveness of the village of Fingringhoe, its historic buildings and its rural setting.
- Ensure that any new development on valley sides is small-scale, responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character including the local vernacular of weatherboarding and brick (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).
- Encourage the integration of any development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate hedgerows and woodlands to reflect and reinforce rural character.

- Limit further land use change for horse keeping such as fencing and floodlighting which erode landscape character and biodiversity value.
- Resist development that would erode the rural, wooded character of the valley, such as intrusive lighting, hedgerow removal, road widening, new signage, and sources of noise disturbance.
- Seek to reduce lighting impacts and avoid any further reduction in tranquillity along main transport routes.

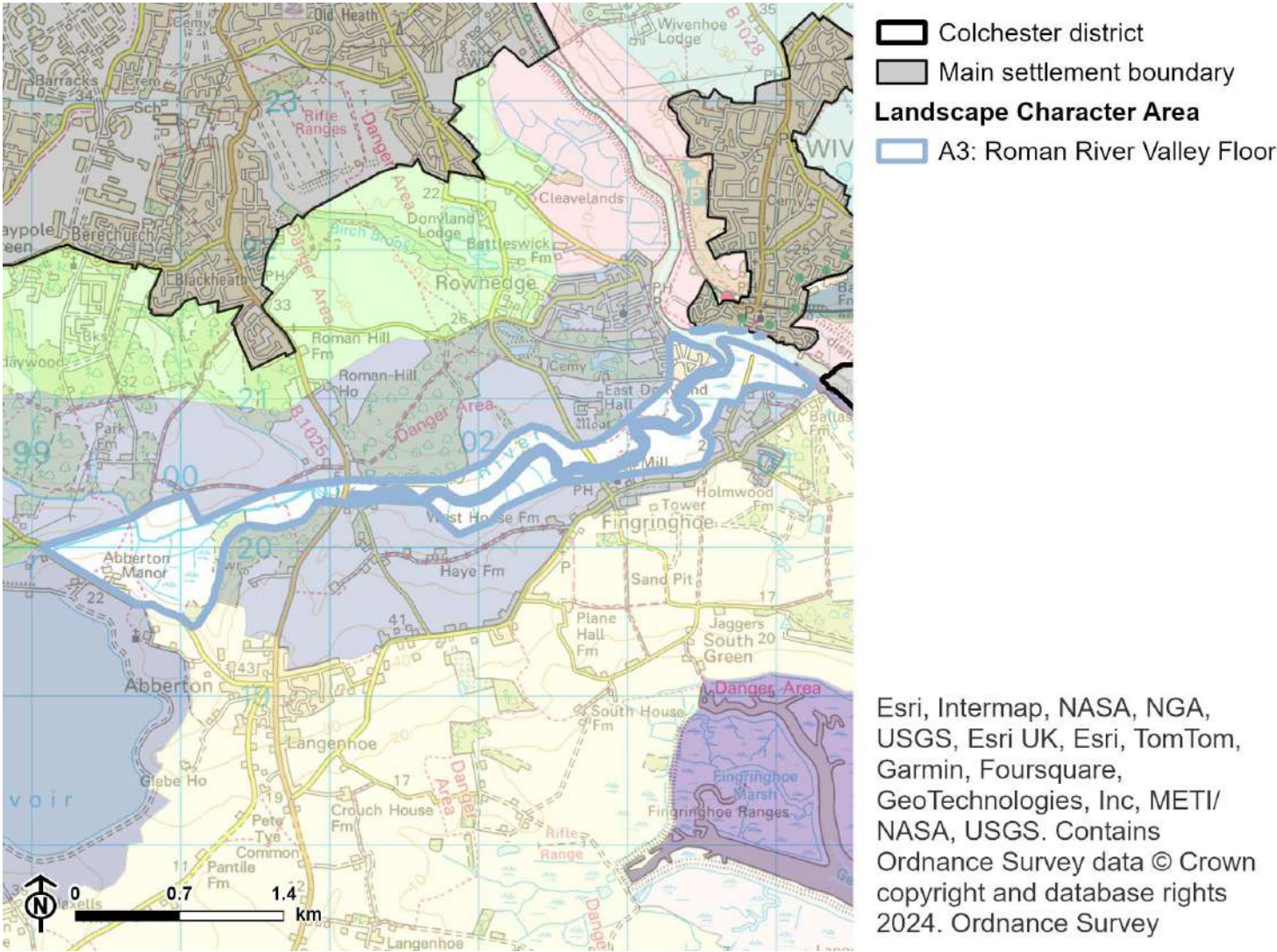
Landscape Character Area A3: Roman River Valley Floor

Description

Location and Summary

7.19 The LCA is located to the south-east of Colchester and comprises the valley of Roman River, which is a tributary of the River Colne. The area is characterised by the narrow, meandering course of the Roman River with its associated floodplain and lower valley slopes.

Figure 7.4: Location of LCA A3



Key Characteristics

- A flat floodplain containing the narrow, meandering channel of the Roman River. Both river and floodplain widen as it becomes tidal at its confluence with the River Colne in the east.
- A predominantly pastoral landscape organised into a pattern of small to medium-scale regular and irregular fields defined by a mix of ditches and earthbanks and hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees on the higher valley sides.
- A diverse mosaic of wetland and grassland habitats, including coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, coastal saltmarsh, and lowland heathland.
- Road access is limited to the north and south bridging points of Mersea Road (B1025) and Fingringhoe Road, and Ferry Road which provides access to the banks of the River Colne.
- Public rights of way (PRoW) provide good access to the valley sides, but much of the floodplain is inaccessible.
- Historic character reflected in the surviving field pattern of remnant enclosed meadows and drained enclosures, and Grade II listed Abberton Manor and Fingringhoe Mill.
- Generally, an open and undeveloped landscape with views along the river and across the floodplain towards adjacent wooded valley sides; some scattered woodland creates localised areas of enclosure on the upper valleys sides.
- An overriding rural and remote character, but with some influence from settlements in the east - Wivenhoe, Rowhedge and Fingringhoe (High Park Corner).

Photo 7.5: View across the river floodplain towards adjacent wooded valley sides



Photo 7.6: View east along the river from Fingringhoe Road towards Fingringhoe Mill



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.20 The area comprises the narrow, meandering channel and flat floodplain of the Roman River, which broadens to the east near its confluence with the River Colne. The LCA is primarily underlain by sedimentary bedrock of clay, silt, sand, and gravel (Thames Group), with significant deposits of superficial sand and gravel (Glaciofluvial) overlying much of the area. Localised clay, silt, sand (alluvial) deposits are present in eastern section near and around the confluence with the River Colne. The floodplain is largely flat between 2m to 4m AOD, whilst the lower valley sides surrounding it rise gently to between 5m to 20m AOD. The floodplain dominates the area and is identified as falling within Flood Zone 2 and 3. Soils within the LCA are predominantly Grade 4 (poor) with Grade 3 (Good – Moderate) on the eastern and western fringes. The poorer quality, waterlogged soil on the valley floor is predominantly used for grazing, while the higher ground on the valley sides supports some limited arable farming.

7.21 Fields are largely defined by linear drainage ditches and earth banks, with some hedgerows on the lower valley sides. The floodplain contains a diverse mosaic of habitats, including Priority Habitats such as 'lowland heathland,' 'deciduous woodland,' and extensive areas of 'coastal and floodplain grazing marsh' fringing most of the river's span. A range of intertidal habitats are present in the east of the LCA, including 'coastal saltmarsh', 'mudflats' and small pockets of 'reedbeds, coastal saltmarsh' along the strong meanders of the river. This rich array of habitats supports a wide variety of birds and invertebrates.

7.22 Parts of the LCA to the west are designated as part of the Roman River Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the eastern extent of the area by the Upper Colne Marshes SSSI. There are also several LWS located within the LCA protecting the various habitats present. This includes Roman River East LWS, comprising former grazing-marsh and adjacent pastures; and Barrage

Marsh LWS to the east, comprising rare grazing-marsh with saltmarsh . The Roman River flowing through the LCA is also designated as part of the 'Marine Conservation Zone - Blackwater, Crouch, Roach, and Colne Estuaries'.

Cultural Influences

7.23 Due to the tidal nature of the river, much of this area would have originally been marshland and meadow. The marshes along the river have been reclaimed at various times in the past, as identified within the Essex HLC (2013). Areas of earlier drained enclosure (18th century) with characteristic curved field boundaries are identified to the north-west of Fingringhoe, while areas of later drained enclosure (19th - 20th century) with more regular rectilinear boundaries are found at the confluence with the River Colne to the east. Some of these patterns have been eroded by 'post 1950's enclosure' potentially to rationalise the varied field pattern. The resulting field pattern consists primarily of small to medium-sized enclosures, with fields further divided for paddocks near the settlement edge of Fingringhoe (High Park Corner).

7.24 The floodplain's dynamic nature, with areas periodically submerged and exposed, has limited development and helped the preservation of historical features. The historic character of the area is reflected in the retained historic field pattern. Other historic features include the Grade II listed Abberton Manor and other associated listed buildings on the elevated valley side in the western part of the LCA, and the Grade II Fingringhoe Mill to the east. The landscape also provides a tidal river setting to the adjacent settlements of Rowhedge, Fingringhoe (High Park Corner) and Wivenhoe.

7.25 The landscape features several PRoW connecting Rowhedge to Fingringhoe in the east, and linking the LCA to the adjacent farmed and valley landscapes. Access to the landscape is also possible by a network of roads and lanes which cross the river north to south. In the east, Ferry Road provides access to the banks of the River Colne and a seasonal foot ferry on the site of a historic ferry crossing to Rowhedge and Wivenhoe.

Perceptual Influences

7.26 Water is a defining feature throughout the landscape, strongly influencing its character and sense of place. The tidal nature of the river in the east also results a sense of dynamism and movement, with tides periodically covering and uncovering the fringing marshes and mudflats. Much of the landscape has a sense of remoteness, although this is weakened to the east by the proximity of settlements - Rowhedge, Fingringhoe (High Park Corner) and southern edge of Wivenhoe. Rural character is also influenced to some extent by the busy Mersea Road (B10250) which is a main road connection to the south of Colchester.

7.27 Open panoramic views across the tidal areas at the confluence of the Roman River and River Colne are available from the northern end of Ferry Road, the southern edge of Rowhedge and the southern edge of Wivenhoe (including from within its Conservation Area). Open views are also available from Layer Road to the west as it traverses the lower valleys sides. There are also views of the meandering river and floodplain from roads and PRoW that cross the valley or run along the valleys sides, including the footpath running along the valley side south of East Donyland Hall. The adjacent wooded valley sides are visible from the floodplain, and tend to channel views along the valley and limiting views out.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- The distinctive character of the narrow, intimate valley enclosed by woodland, with its meandering river and textured floodplain of meadows and marshland.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity is provided by a mosaic of habitats, including areas of Priority Habitat 'Lowland heathland', 'deciduous woodland', 'Reedbeds, Coastal saltmarsh' as well as

extensive areas of 'coastal and floodplain grazing marsh' and 'coastal saltmarsh', some of which are designated as SSSI and LWS and protected by ESA and Marine Conservation Zone designations.

- Sense of time depth provided by remnant enclosed meadow pasture and drained enclosures along the valley floor, and listed buildings.
- Recreational value associated with the PRoW which provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access between settlements and the surrounding countryside.
- Tidal areas to the east provide a distinctive tidal river setting to the adjacent settlements including, Rowhedge, Fingringhoe (High Park Corner) and Wivenhoe.
- Visual interest and landscape variety provided by variety of wetland habitats, scattered woodland, earth banks and sea defences.
- Sense of tranquillity and remoteness along the floodplain, away from settlements and roads. Absence of settlements and development across the floodplain and marshes contributing to sense of isolation and remoteness.

Issues and Changes

- Recent residential development has replaced warehouses at the edge of Rowhedge in the east. However, the settlement edge is poorly integrated, leaving it exposed to the surrounding open landscape.
- An increase in equine-related land uses, including post and rail subdivision of larger fields and small structures, on the western edge of Fingringhoe (High Park Corner).
- Potential loss of ditches defining the historic field pattern, particularly close to the coast.
- Potential loss of species-rich riverside grassland, marshland, and pastures due to intensive grazing management and agricultural encroachment.

- Potential for pollution of the Roman River from fertiliser and pesticide run-off from higher farmland areas, affecting water quality and habitats.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - More frequent and intense rainfall that could exacerbate flooding in the floodplain and marshy areas, which fall within Flood Zones 2 and 3, resulting in damages to both agricultural and natural habitats, particularly the Priority Habitats and LWS.
 - Increasing river flow and storm intensity leading to heightened erosion and sedimentation impacting the stability of earth banks, linear drainage ditches, and the integrity of hedgerows with mature trees.
 - Rising sea levels and increased salinity may lead to habitat loss or shifts in vegetation within floodplain grazing marshes, saltmarshes, and reedbeds along the river.
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges, including Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland'.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Roman River Valley Floor LCA is to conserve and restore the river valley landscape by managing and enhancing distinctive wet meadows, marshland, coastal marshes and riparian vegetation. Furthermore, by maintaining the intricate pattern of drainage ditches and embankments, and restore where appropriate. Any new development should be avoided, and land use and management practices should be designed to enhance the area's capacity for flood attenuation.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Protect natural habitats, including wet meadows, marshland, salt marshes, reedbeds and mature riparian vegetation, and maintain flood management capacity.
- Conserve and enhance ecologically important wetland and coastal habitats, seeking to extend and further connect habitats where feasible.
- Monitor and manage agricultural practices to minimize their impact on water quality and habitat health, particularly by controlling runoff and preventing overgrazing.
- Protect and manage the valued recreational use of the landscape, seeking opportunities to further enhance opportunities for access and enjoyment; consider opportunities for additional rights of way along the valley floor and between Mersea Road and Fingringhoe Road.
- Enhance and promote existing panoramic views across tidal areas to the east and cross-valley views along the floodplain.
- Protect and manage historic features, including listed buildings. Preserve the historic land pattern of reclaimed enclosure to retain the sense of time-depth and historic character.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of the area away from urban influences.

Development Management

- Avoid visually intrusive and incongruous development within and adjacent to the area, particularly within or immediately adjacent to the floodplain. Any future development should be carefully designed, using materials and architectural styles that are appropriate to local landscape

character including the local vernacular (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).

- Seek to reduce lighting impacts and avoid any further reduction in tranquillity to the east.
- Discourage further equine related land uses; encourage sensitive management of related paraphernalia, including fencing and floodlighting which erode landscape character.
- Resist development that would erode the rural character of the river valley, such as intrusive lighting, hedgerow removal, road widening, new signage, and sources of noise disturbance.

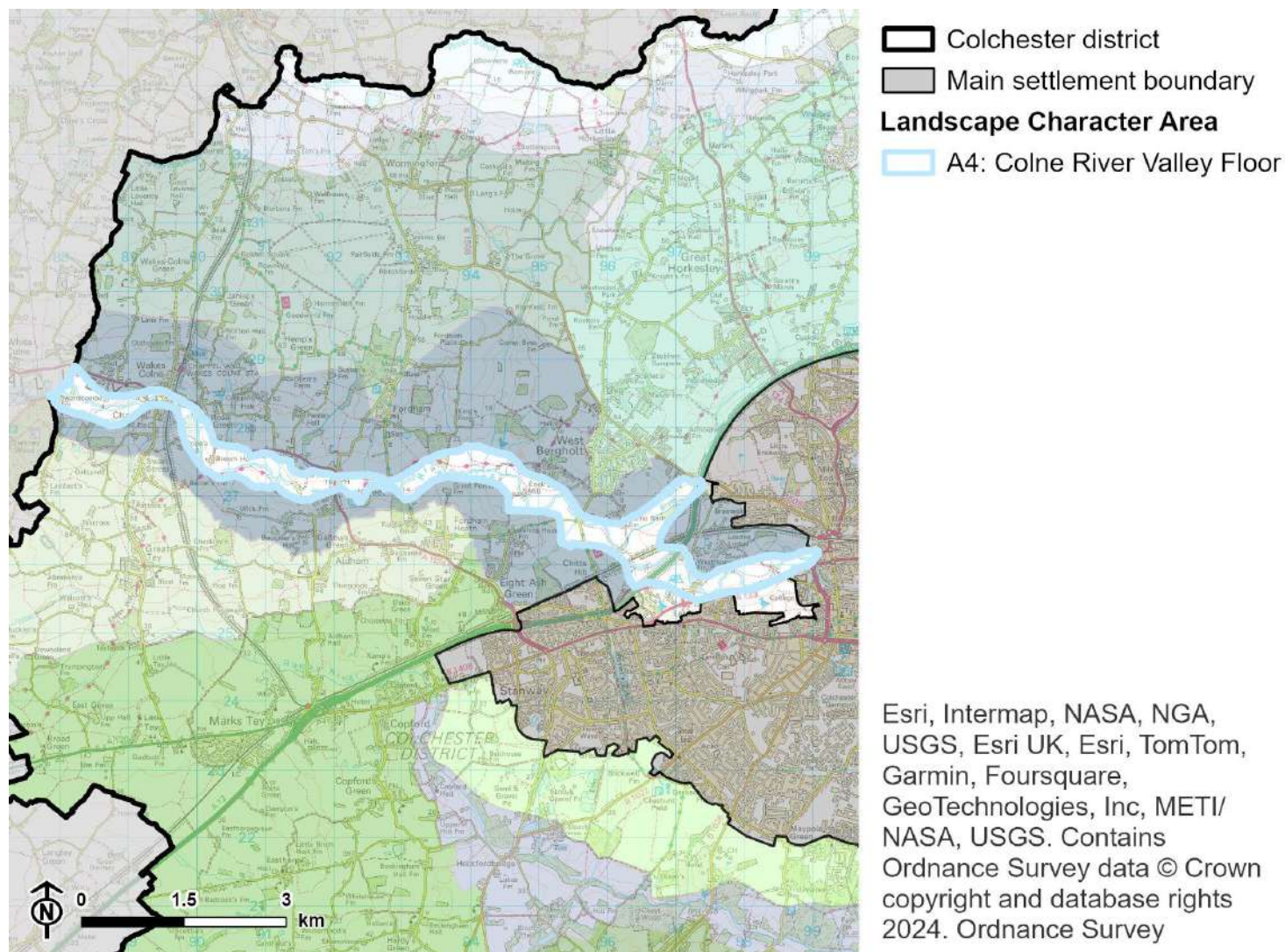
Landscape Character Area A4: Colne River Valley Floor

Description

Location and Summary

7.28 This LCA is located to the west of the Colchester and comprises the valley of the River Colne and its tributary, St. Botolph's Brook. The area is characterised by the narrow meandering course of the River Colne and its associated valley and flood plain. The LCA also includes the valley of St Botolph's Brook, a tributary of the River Colne, to the east.

Figure 7.5: Location of LCA A4



Key Characteristics

- Narrow meandering course and floodplain of the River Colne and its tributary, St. Botolph's Brook; the floodplain is relatively narrow but widens in the east as the river nears the Colne estuary.
- A predominantly pastoral landscape along the valley bottom, with some arable on valley sides; irregular pattern of medium to large-scale fields largely defined by low-trimmed hedgerows with occasional trees.
- Scattered woodland, ponds and wet meadows around meanders and mature deciduous trees fringing the river creates distinctive riparian character.
- Road access limited to several north-south bridging points, including the A1124 and A12, and other minor routes.
- Good levels of public access via several public rights of way, including the Essex Way long-distance path and Colne Valley path.
- Historic settlement pattern of dispersed small villages and hamlets along roads and farmsteads on the floodplain is largely retained.
- Historic character also provided by remnant enclosed meadow pasture along the valley floor, and the presence of several listed bridges, mills and weirs.
- Woodland along the river creates a sense of enclosure, but views are generally available east and west along the river valley corridor from bridging points; greater sense of openness to the east.
- The Chappel Viaduct is a landmark feature in many views from the surrounding Colne valley slopes in the west.
- An overriding rural character albeit with influence of adjoining urban area of Colchester and A12 to the east.

Photo 7.7: Wet meadows, aquatic vegetation and mature deciduous trees fringing the river



Photo 7.8: A predominantly pastoral landscape along the valley bottom



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.29 The area comprises the narrow, meandering course and floodplain of the River Colne, which broadens towards the east near Colchester. It also includes the valley of St. Botolph's Brook, tributary of the River Colne, to the east. The LCA consists predominantly of sedimentary bedrock geology made up of clay, silt, sand, and gravel (Thames Group), overlain in the north-west by further superficial clay, sand and gravel deposits. The floodplain has a largely flat and low-lying topography at between 10m and 15m AOD, whilst the valley sides rise gently up to between 20m and 30m AOD. The floodplain along the River Colne and St. Botolph's Brook are identified as falling within Flood Zone 2 and 3. Soils within the LCA are a mixture of Grade 2 (very good) and Grade 3 (good – moderate), which are predominantly in pasture use albeit with some arable on the higher valley sides.

7.30 Wet meadows are common along the river's more pronounced meanders, while arable fields and pasture dominate the land near its straighter stretches. Fields are typically defined by low-trimmed hedgerows interspersed with occasional hedgerow trees. However, some hedgerows are replaced by post and wire fencing around larger arable fields. Wet meadows/pastures are bounded by mature riparian vegetation, where hedgerow trees also become more frequent. Mature deciduous trees fringe the river, emphasizing its winding course and creating a distinctive landscape feature. There are several scattered areas of Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland' and 'lowland meadows' and extensive areas of 'coastal and floodplain grazing marsh' located along the river and floodplain. In addition, there are several LWS located within the LCA, protecting a variety of wetland, grassland and woodland habitats. This includes Wakes Colne Meadow and Chappel Ponds and Millennium Green to the west; and Spring Grove and Cymbeline Meadows to the east. Cymbeline Meadows is a large area that abuts the western settlement edge of Colchester, and features a mix of pastures, marshland, hedgerows, and aquatic vegetation, making it a valuable and increasingly scarce river floodplain habitat with rich riverside flora.

Cultural Influences

7.31 Historically the area was characterised by extensive tracts of enclosed meadow pasture along the valley floor, much of which was probably of medieval origin or earlier. Today, much of this earlier field pattern survives in the form of 'pre-18th century irregular enclosure' and 'enclosed meadow pasture' as identified within the Essex HLC (2011). Other areas of the river valley are identified in the HLC as 'post 1950's enclosure' or 'post 1950 boundary loss', reflecting later changes to the landscape. The field pattern today is predominantly one of medium and large-scale enclosure albeit with some smaller-scale fields and paddocks around the villages of Chappel and Fordstreet.

7.32 Earlier periods of human activity are evident within the area, including a 'Site of pre-Roman settlement' (Scheduled Monument) near the western edge of Colchester. Later settlement within the area was largely concentrated on the valley floor and historically comprised dispersed church/hall complexes, manors, farms, cottages and hamlets. This pattern is still largely evident today, with several scattered listed buildings and the villages of Chappel and Fordstreet designated as Conservation Areas. There are also a number of listed bridges, mills and weirs along the river which are evidence of historic importance of the area. The local vernacular predominantly comprises weatherboarding and brick. There are also several World War II defensive structures, including pillboxes along the river (Grade II listed buildings) and pillboxes and anti-tank structures as part of the Eastern Command line at Chappel Viaduct (Scheduled Monument).

7.33 The landscape features several public rights of way, including the Essex Way long-distance path and Colne Valley path, which traverses the middle of the LCA, roughly following the River Colne and passing through Fordstreet. Access to the landscape is also possible by a network of roads and lanes which cross the river predominantly north to south.

Perceptual Influences

7.34 An overall rural landscape that retains a sense of tranquillity and remoteness although weakened to the east in proximity to the western edge of Colchester and the busy A12 road. Rural character is also influenced to some extent by the busy A1124 that follows the northern valley side around Chappel .

7.35 Views from the floodplain and along the river are often limited by mature vegetation along the river. However, there is a greater sense of openness where fields are larger in size and or defined by low or gappy hedgerows. There are also engaging views along the river valley corridor, where footpaths and roads cross the river, including in the vicinity of the settlements of Chappel and Fordstreet. The Chappel Viaduct, a brick structure completed in 1849 with over 30 arches, is a landmark feature in many views from the surrounding Colne valley slopes. There are some more open longer range views into and across the river floodplain from the adjacent higher valley slopes (LCA A5), including from the A1124 to the north and from around Oak Road, Fordstreet Hill and Argents Lane to the south.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- The distinctive riparian character resulting from the narrow meandering watercourses, aquatic vegetation, floodplains, meadows, ponds and mature riparian vegetation.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity is provided by several scattered habitats, including areas of Priority Habitat such as 'deciduous woodland' and 'lowland meadows,' as well as extensive areas of 'coastal and floodplain grazing marsh'.
- Sense of time-depth provided by remnant pattern of enclosed meadow pasture along the valley floor, and the surviving historic settlement pattern reflected by several historic features and designations.

- Recreational value provided by several public rights of way, including the Essex Way long distance path and Colne Valley path, which provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access between settlements and the surrounding countryside.
- The rural character of much of the landscape, which provides a setting for the Essex Way and Colne Valley path, and other public rights of way, and small villages and hamlets.
- Visual interest and landscape variety provided by scattered woodland, ponds, and mature deciduous trees that highlight the winding course of the River Colne, creating distinctive features.
- Engaging views along the river valley corridor from bridging points.
- Sense of tranquillity and remoteness along the river corridors, away from settlement and roads.

Issues and Changes

- Hedgerows are generally actively managed; however, a limited number of hedges have been removed, especially around large arable fields.
- An increase in equine-related land uses, including post and rail subdivision of larger fields and small structures, particularly around settlement areas.
- Potential for loss of species-rich riverside grassland, marshland, and pastures due to intensive grazing management and potential agricultural encroachment.
- Pressure for future expansion of settlements in the area, including Chappel, Wakes Colne and Fordstreet, and the western edge of Colchester.
- Impact on the landscape associated with the proposed National Grid Norwich to Tilbury Project. Proposed overhead power lines and pylons crossing through the centre of the LCA near Fordstreet will cause a significant visual impact on the landscape if the DCO is approved.

- Disturbance to landscape character as a result of noise and movement associated with main A12 and A1124 road corridor, and development on the western edge of Colchester.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Increasing draughts and rising temperature could impact lowland meadows and floodplain grazing marshes, altering stream flows and species. Wetter winters and hotter summers could increase flooding risks in winter and drought in summer, affecting wetland and riparian habitats along River Colne.
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges, especially Priority Habitat such as 'deciduous woodland' and deciduous trees delineating the River Colne may be susceptible to damage from both storms and drought.
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Colne River Valley Floor LCA is to conserve and restore the river valley landscape by managing and enhancing distinctive wet meadows, marshland, and riparian vegetation, and by creating wildlife corridors to connect floodplain habitats. New development should be avoided, and land use and management practices should be designed to enhance the area's capacity for flood attenuation.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Protect wet meadows, marshland, ponds and mature riparian vegetation, to protect the landscape's natural habitats and maintain its flood management capacity.
- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.
- Protect and enhance valued habitats, including 'deciduous woodland', 'lowland meadows', 'coastal and floodplain grazing marsh' and grassland Priority Habitats and improve linkages between them.
- Encourage the reversion of arable land on the valley floor and lower valley sides to pasture, to help restore traditional landscape character.
- Enhance and promote existing engaging views along watercourses and maintain cross-valley views through careful consideration of development within the floodplain.
- Protect and manage the various historic features, including the various listed buildings and distinctive WWII defensive features, to preserve the sense of time-depth and historic character.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of the area away from urban influences, particularly along the tree fringed watercourses.

Development Management

- Avoid visually intrusive and incongruous development within the area, particularly along the floodplain. Any future development should be carefully designed to blend with the rural character, using materials and architectural styles that complement the surroundings.

- Any large scale or visually intrusive development would be detrimental to the open rural character of the landscape; consider opportunities for the undergrounding of any proposed power lines to avoid need for pylons, with landscape features reinstated following construction.
- Retain the settlement pattern of dispersed farmsteads and small hamlets. Conserve the local distinctiveness of historic buildings and their rural setting.
- Ensure that new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character including the local vernacular of weatherboarding and brick (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information);
- Encourage the integration of any development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate hedgerows and woodlands to reflect and reinforce rural character.
- Seek to reduce lighting impacts and avoid any further reduction in tranquillity to the east.

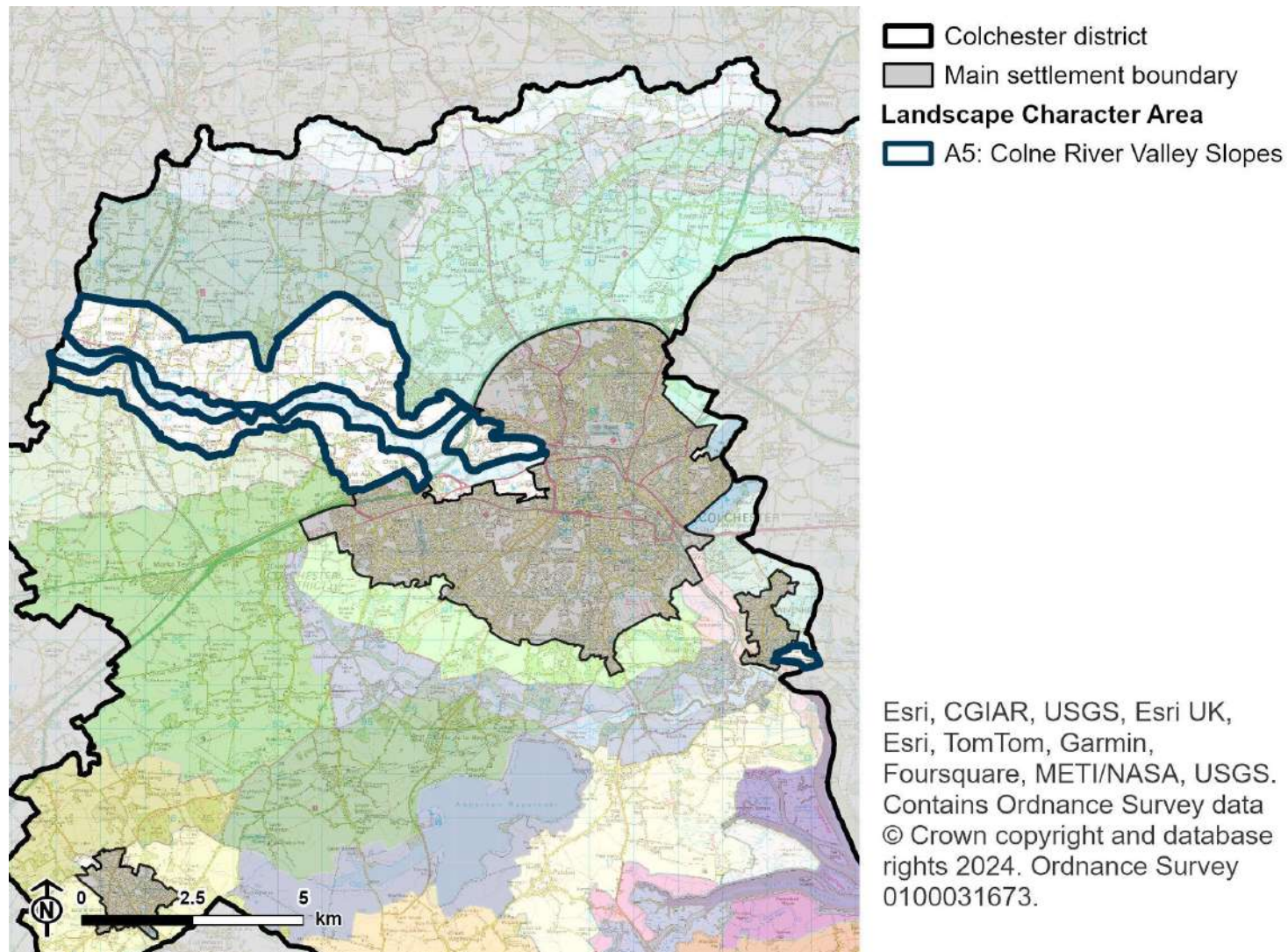
Landscape Character Area A5: Colne River Valley Slopes

Description

Location and Summary

7.36 This LCA is located to the west of the Colchester and comprises the valley slopes on either side of Colne River Valley Floor (LCA A4). The landscape features steep slopes that flank the meandering river and is characterised by a mix of woodlands, hedgerows, and arable farmland.

Figure 7.6: Location of LCA A5



Key Characteristics

- Steep valley sides lying to the north and south of the River Colne valley floor (LCA A4), incised by several smaller tributary streams.
- A predominantly arable landscape organised into a pattern of irregular and regular medium to large-scale fields defined by hedgerows with occasional mature hedgerow trees.
- Scattered woodlands on valley slopes, some of which is Ancient Woodland, create a varied and visually rich landscape.
- Traversed by a network of roads and lanes (some sunken), that connect the opposite valley sides; busier routes include the A12 and A1124.
- Good levels of public access via several public rights of way (PRoW), including the Essex Way and Colne Valley long distance paths.
- Historic settlement pattern of dispersed villages, hamlets and farmsteads located along the valley sides is largely retained.
- Historic character is also provided by the presence of numerous listed houses, halls, churches, barns, and farmhouses and Conservation Areas at Chappel and Fordstreet.
- Locally distinctive church towers provide skyline features in views across and along the valleys, and the Chappel Viaduct (located within LCA A4) is a prominent landmark in cross-valleys views to the west.
- Scattered woodlands along the valley slopes create localised enclosure, but views generally remain open across the valley slopes and along the meandering course of the River Colne and its floodplain (LCA A4).
- An overriding rural character albeit with influence of adjoining urban area of Colchester, the A12 and the Great Eastern Mainline railway to the east.

Photo 7.9: Arable valleys sides featuring scattered woodland blocks



Photo 7.10: Cross valley view towards the Church of St Barnabas Chappel Viaduct



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.37 The area comprises the steep valley sides to the north and south of the meandering course of the River Colne (within LCA A4). It also includes a small outlying area of the lower slopes of the valley at Ballast Quay Farm, to the south-east of Wivenhoe. The bedrock geology consists predominantly of sedimentary clay, silt, sand, and gravel (Thames Group) overlain by further superficial glacial till (clay, sand and gravel) deposits. The River Colne has eroded a broadly v-shaped valley ranging from 15m above ordnance datum (AOD) to 55m AOD. The valleys sides are incised by several tributary streams, predominantly on the northern side of the River Colne. The valley bottom (within LCA A4) and small sections of the lower valley slopes are identified as falling within Flood Zone 2 and 3. Soils within the LCA are mixture of Grade 2 (very good) and Grade 3 (good – moderate), which are under both arable and pasture use.

7.38 Fields are typically defined by low-cut hedgerows (sometimes elm hedges) interspersed with occasional hedgerow trees. Larger fields tend to have missing sections of hedgerow, of hedgerows in poor condition, while the smaller, regular fields tend to have mature hedgerows with hedgerows trees in better condition. The field pattern is interspersed with scattered woodland blocks, tree belts and there are local concentrations of woodland cover along the watercourses. Much of this woodland is classified as Priority Habitat ‘deciduous woodland,’ with Acorn Wood, Hillhouse Wood, and Spring/Grove Wood located on the northern valley slopes, and Fiddlers Wood on the southern valley side, all designated as Ancient Woodland.

7.39 There are several local wildlife sites (LWS) protecting a variety of wetland, grassland and woodland habitats. This includes Hickmore Fen and Chappel Ponds and Millennium Green to the west; Fordham Heath and Iron Latch Lane Woods and Meadow to the south; and Cymbeline Meadows and Lexden Dyke to the east. Cymbeline Meadows LWS is a large area that abuts the western

settlement edge of Colchester, and features a mix of pastures, marshland, hedgerows, and aquatic vegetation; and. Fordham Heath LWS features scrubby woodland, acidic grassland, and wetlands. There is also a local concentration of Priority Habitat 'traditional orchards' to the south-east of Wivenhoe.

Cultural Influences

7.40 Historically, the land use in the area was primarily agricultural, comprising a complex mix of irregular fields dating back to the medieval period or earlier, and the later enclosure of common land. Today, much of this field pattern survives in the form of 'pre-18th century irregular enclosure' as identified within the Essex HLC (2011). Elsewhere 'Post 1950's enclosure' or 'post 1950 boundary loss' reflect later changes to the landscape. There are also some areas of 'Ancient woodland' and some areas of '19th-20th century plantation' identified in the HLC.

7.41 Prehistoric activity is evident at 'Moat Farm Dyke' (Scheduled Monument) near the western edge of Colchester. Later settlements were largely concentrated on the valley sides, and comprised dispersed hamlets, church/hall complexes, manors, farms, and cottages. This pattern remains largely intact today, reflected in the presence of numerous Listed Buildings. Notable examples include the Grade I Crepping Hall, the Grade II Church of All Saints (Wakes Colne), the Grade I Church of St Barnabas (Chappel) and the Grade I Church of St Mary (West Bergholt). The villages of Chappel and Fordstreet are also designated Conservation Areas. The local vernacular predominantly comprises weatherboarding and brick. There are also several World War II defensive structures located at intervals along the valley sides, including pillboxes and anti-tank blocks.

7.42 The landscape features several PRow, including the Essex Way and Colne Valley long-distance paths, which traverses the LCA north-east to south-east. Access to the landscape is also provided by a network of roads and lanes, many sunken, that primarily run north-south across the valleys. Busier routes include the A12 and A1124.

Perceptual Influences

7.43 An overall rural landscape that retains a sense of tranquillity and remoteness, although weakened to the east in proximity to the western edge of Colchester and the busy A12 road and the Great Eastern Mainline railway line. The rural character is also affected by the busy A1124 running east to west, with ribbon development along the road further diminishing the sense of tranquillity and rurality.

7.44 The skyline on the valley slopes is softened by patches of woodland, creating localised enclosures that break up the open landscape and add a sense of intimacy and shelter. There are long-distance views across the valley slopes and along the meandering course and floodplain of the River Colne (LCA 4) from various vantage points. Church spires are key focal points in the landscape and contribute to the areas rural character. The Chappel Viaduct dominates views from both the northern and southern valley sides to the west, especially around Wakes Colne and Hill House Farm.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- The distinctive steep valley sides that enclose the narrow and meandering River Colne.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity is provided by several scattered habitats, including areas of Priority Habitat such as 'deciduous woodland' and 'traditional orchard'.
- Valuable and increasingly scarce river floodplain habitats, including a mix of pastures, marshland, hedgerows, and aquatic vegetation at Cymbeline Meadows LWS.
- Sense of time-depth provided by remnant pattern of pre-18th century irregular enclosure along the valley sides and the surviving historic

settlement pattern reflected by several historic features and designations.

- Recreational value provided by several PRoW, including the Essex Way long distance path and Colne Valley Path, which provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access between settlements and the surrounding countryside.
- Network of narrow, sunken lanes enclosed by hedgerows.
- The rural character of much of the landscape, which provides a setting for the Essex Way and Colne Valley long-distance paths, and other PRoW, and small villages and hamlets.
- Locally distinctive church towers provide notable skyline features, while scattered woodlands and orchards add visual interest and landscape variety.
- Attractive framed and panoramic views across the valley and along the meandering river channel and associated floodplain from elevated points along the valley sides.
- Sense of tranquillity and remoteness away from the urban influences and roads.

Issues and Changes

- The hedgerows vary in condition; some are poorly maintained with gaps or are completely missing.
- An increase in equine-related land uses, including post and rail subdivision of larger fields and small structures, particularly around settlements.
- Historic loss of orchards and heathland (at Fordham Heath) to development or conversion to arable farmland.
- Potential in decline of water quality of numerous streams and ponds on the valley sides, due to fertiliser and pesticide run-off.

- Potential for further expansion of settlements within and on the edge of the area, including Chappel, Wakes Colne, West Bergholt and the western edge of Colchester.
- Impact on the landscape associated with the proposed National Grid Norwich to Tilbury Project. Proposed overhead power lines and pylons crossing through the centre of the LCA near Fordstreet on the southern valley slopes and near Fordham on the northern valley slopes, will cause a significant visual impact on the landscape if the DCO is approved.
- Disturbance to landscape character as a result of noise and movement associated with A12 and A1124 road corridors, the Great Eastern Mainline railway, and development on the western edge of Colchester.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges, especially Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland', and Ancient Woodlands at Acorn Wood, Hillhouse Wood, Spring/Grove Wood and Fiddlers Wood.
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
 - Erosion of valley slopes and waterlogging of soils may also become more pronounced.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Colne River Valley LCA is to conserve and enhance the river valley landscape by managing and protecting Ancient Woodland and promoting natural regeneration to extend woodland areas where appropriate. Furthermore, strengthening the ecological value of LWS through the creation of wildlife corridors that connect priority habitats, and

re-establishing traditional orchards. New Development should be carefully managed to avoid visually intrusive structures that disrupt key views across the valley or diminish its rural character. Land use practices should support sustainable agriculture and habitat restoration while preserving the area's tranquillity and rural character.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows, especially failing elm hedges, and encourage their restoration or reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climate. Enhance the quality of watercourses feeding into the River Colne (where appropriate) by increasing riparian vegetation to improve filtration, flood mitigation, and habitat diversity.
- Protect and enhance valued habitats, including rare river valleys habitats at Cymbeline Meadows LWS and Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland' and 'traditional orchards' and improve linkages between them.
- Conserve, manage and restore patches of deciduous woodland along valley sides.
- Enhance and promote cross-valleys views from vantage points on the valley slopes.
- Protect and manage historic field patterns and historic features to preserve the sense of time-depth and historic character.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of the area away from urban influences, particularly on the remote valley slopes where woodlands dominate.

Development Management

- Any large scale or visually intrusive development would be detrimental to the semi-enclosed rural character of the landscape; consider opportunities for the undergrounding of any proposed power lines to avoid need for pylons, with landscape features reinstated following construction.
- Ensure any new development on valley bottom (LCA A4) and valley sides is small-scale and responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character including the local vernacular of weatherboarding and brick (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).
- Encourage the integration of development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate hedgerows and woodlands to reflect and reinforce rural character.
- Discourage further equine related land uses; encourage sensitive management of related paraphernalia, including fencing and floodlighting which erode landscape character.
- Resist development that would erode the rural character of the valley, such as intrusive lighting, hedgerow removal, road widening, new signage, and sources of noise disturbance.

Landscape Character Area A6: Ardleigh River Valley

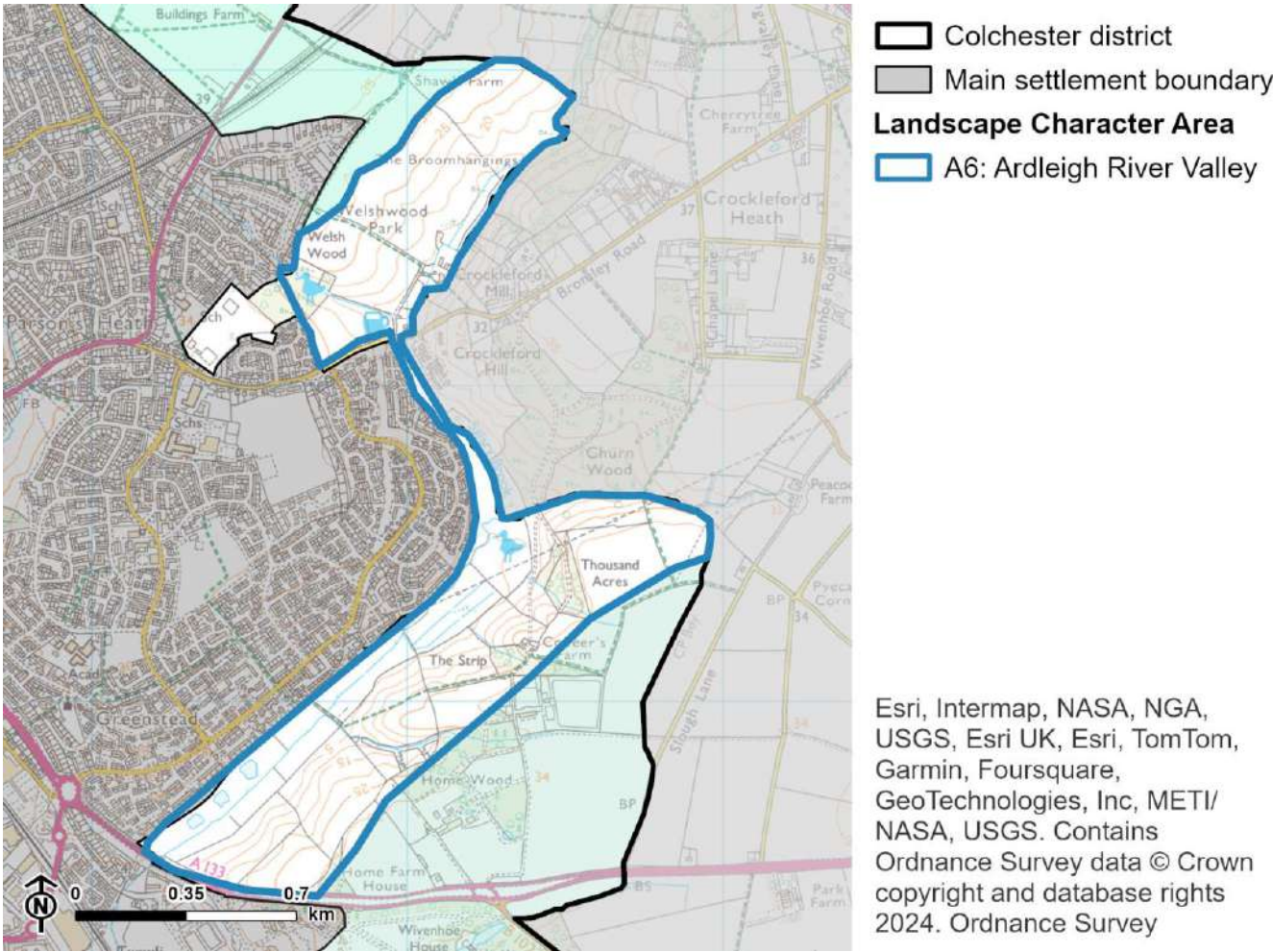
Description

Location and Summary

7.45 This LCA abuts the eastern edge of Colchester adjacent to the residential areas of Greenstead and Welshwood Park. It comprises the lower reaches of the small-scale Ardleigh River Valley, encompassing the Salary Brook on the valley floor and the steep northern and southern valley slopes.

7.46 The area is characterised predominantly by open agricultural fields, with medium to large arable fields on the northern slopes, smaller pasture fields and grazing marshes on the southern slopes and valley floor.

Figure 7.7: Location of LCA A6



Key Characteristics

- Narrow and steep sided valley of the Salary Brook, in the lower reaches of the Ardleigh Valley (lying predominantly outside of the LCA and district boundary).
- A farmed landscape, with medium to large-scale arable fields on the upper valley slopes and small-scale pastures on lower valley slopes and valley floor.
- Small, scattered deciduous woodland blocks, mainly of ancient origin, punctuate the valley sides.
- A diverse mosaic of wetland habitat concentrated along the Salary Brook in the south..
- Historic character is reflected in the surviving field pattern of remnant enclosed meadow pasture and pre-18th century irregular fields.
- Very limited road network with only a short section of Bromley Road briefly crossing the LCA, connecting Tendring District and Colchester.
- Two public rights of way (PRoW) and permissive paths along the valley floor in the south provide access from Colchester into the valley, extending eastward into the wider countryside.
- An enclosed, intimate landscape with views centred on nearby fields and Salary Brook, with a western skyline defined by the edge of Colchester, framed by hedgerows and mature riparian vegetation.
- An overall rural landscape albeit with tranquillity and dark skies affected by proximity to the eastern edge of Colchester.

Photo 7.11: Medium to large-scale arable fields on the upper valley slopes



Photo 7.12: Wetland habitats and riparian woodland along the valley floor of Salary Brook



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.47 The area is defined by the valley of the Salary Brook, a tributary of the River Colne. The bedrock geology of clay, silt, sand, and gravel (Thames Group) has been eroded by the Salary Brook resulting in a small-scale, narrow river valley with steep sides that rise up to 30m above ordnance datum (AOD). The small, narrow floodplain of Salary Brook falls within Flood Zone 2 and 3. Soils within the LCA are predominantly Grade 3 (good – moderate), with arable farming primarily on the upper valley slopes and pasture more common on the lower slopes and valley floor.

7.48 Fields are generally defined by thick, mature hedgerows with hedgerow trees, with some gappy sections. Mature riparian vegetation lines the Salary Brook and small scale woodland blocks are found on the higher valley slopes. Much of this woodland, including Home Wood, Welsh Wood and the eastern section of Thousand Acres woodland, is classified as Ancient Woodland. In addition Welsh Wood is designated as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS). In the south on the valley floor features a diverse range of wetland habitats including Priority Habitat 'Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh' pasture, grassland, fishing ponds and the Salary Brook itself. This area is designated as both a LWS and a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) due to this diverse wetland habitat mosaic.

Cultural Influences

7.49 Historically this was a sparsely settled agricultural area, with narrow strips of wet meadow pasture on the valley floor. As identified within the Essex HLC (2013), in the south along the valley slopes the original enclosure pattern of 'pre-18th century irregular fields' survives, as does the pattern of 'enclosed meadow' along the valley floor. However, some areas of '19th-20th century woodland plantation' along the south-eastern edge of the area have slightly altered the original field pattern. In the north, much of the original enclosure

pattern has been eroded with evidence of 'post-1950s boundary loss', where fields have been merged to aid modern farming practices. Today, the field pattern consists of remnant small-scale pasture in the south and medium to large-scale arable fields in the north.

7.50 Settlement in the area is sparse, consisting of a few dispersed farmsteads on the valley slopes. However, the area immediately abuts the densely populated Colchester suburbs of Greenstead and Welshwood Park to the west.

7.51 Two PRoW traverse the landscape, one in the north and one in the south, both connecting the eastern edge of Colchester to the wider countryside. Permissive paths within the Salary Brook LNR connect to these PRoW, and provide access to the valley floor. Bromley Road also provides access to the landscape passing briefly through the LCA running east to west across the valley.

Perceptual Influences

7.52 The landscape retains some rural character, consisting of agricultural fields, woodlands and valley bottom meadows. However, the sense of tranquillity is weakened by its proximity to the urban area of Colchester, as reflected in CPRE tranquillity and dark skies mapping. Despite the Salary Brook and Welsh Wood forming strong boundaries to the urban area in the south, the rising landform of the valley sides mean that the urban area is apparent from much of the landscape. The sense of tranquillity is further weakened locally by a series of pylons and overhead electricity power lines running parallel to the Salary Brook and the relatively busy Bromley Road.

7.53 Mature hedgerows and woodland cover limit longer-distance views and create a localised sense of enclosure and intimacy, including along the valley floor. There is a greater sense of openness on the higher valley slopes with views westward into and across the valley towards the urban edge of Colchester, including from the two PRoW. The wooded valley slopes and valley bottom provide a setting for the edge of Colchester, particularly in the north,

where the enclosure is less pronounced. Along the valley floor the Salary Brook LWS/LNR reserve provides a varied, visually engaging wetland landscape and green infrastructure buffer between the urban and rural areas.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- The distinctive, steep sided v-shaped valley of Salary Brook which provides topographical interest.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity are provided by scattered habitats, including Ancient Woodland at Home Wood, Thousand Acres and Welsh Wood, along with the mosaic of wetland and woodland habitat along Salary Brook and the valley floor including Priority Habitat 'Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh'.
- Some sense of time depth provided by remnant enclosed meadow pasture and pre-18th century irregular fields.
- Recreational value associated with the PRoW and permissive paths which provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access between Colchester and the surrounding countryside.
- Salary Brook and the wooded valley slopes form part of a wider rural valley setting that contains the eastern urban edge of Colchester.
- Visual interest and landscape variety provided by scattered woodland and wetland habitats of the Salary Brook.
- Undeveloped character of the landscape marked by only a few farmsteads.

Issues and Changes

- Widespread pressure for the future expansion of the edge of Colchester onto the valley sides.
- Further erosion of hedgerow network due to limited maintenance, particularly in arable areas in the north.
- Potential for water quality decline in the Salary Brook and fishing ponds from pesticide run-off from adjacent farmland including from the adjacent Wivenhoe Farmland Plateau (LCA B8).
- Disturbance to landscape character as a result of development on the eastern edge of Colchester and noise and movement associated with traffic using Bromley Road.
- Potential for the expansion of Colchester onto the valley side to the north of Bromley Road.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges, especially Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland', and Ancient Woodlands at Home Wood, Thousand Acres and Welsh Wood.
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species. Reduction in woodland cover would result in the increased visual prominence of the edge of Colchester.
 - More frequent and intense rainfall resulting in increased flooding, especially along Salary Brook which falls within Flood Zones 2 and 3. This could result in damage to both agricultural and natural habitats, particularly the Priority Habitats and Salary Brook Local Nature Reserve.
 - Erosion of valley slopes and waterlogging of soils may also become more pronounced.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for Ardleigh River Valley LCA is to conserve and enhance the natural and rural qualities of the valley by managing and protecting Ancient Woodland, extending woodland cover where possible and preserving the ecological value of the Salary Brook and associated wetland habitats along the valley floor. Any new development, particularly on the more open valley slopes in the north, should be carefully planned to prevent visual intrusion and preserve the rural setting to the east of Colchester.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Protect and enhance valued habitats such as Ancient Woodland at Home Wood, Thousand Acres and Welsh Wood and Priority Habitat 'coastal and floodplain grazing marsh' on the valley floor.
- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration or reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climate.
- Retain and enhance woodland blocks and riparian vegetation to help further integrate the edge of Colchester into the landscape.
- Monitor and manage agricultural practices to minimise their impact on water quality and habitat health, particularly by controlling runoff and preventing overgrazing.
- Preserve the historic landscape pattern of remnant enclosed meadows and pre-18th century irregular enclosures to retain the sense of time-depth and historic character.

- Protect the relative tranquillity of the valley sides away from urban influences.

Development Management

- Avoid visually intrusive and incongruous development within the area, particularly on the floodplain. Any future development should be carefully designed to blend with the rural character, using materials and architectural styles that complement the surroundings.
- Ensure that new development uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character including the local vernacular (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).
- Ensure that both existing settlement edges (Welshwood Park and Greenstead) and any new development edges are well-integrated into the landscape through appropriate boundary treatments that complement the local vernacular and character.
- Resist development that would erode the rural character of the valley, such as intrusive lighting, hedgerow removal, road widening, new signage, and sources of noise disturbance.

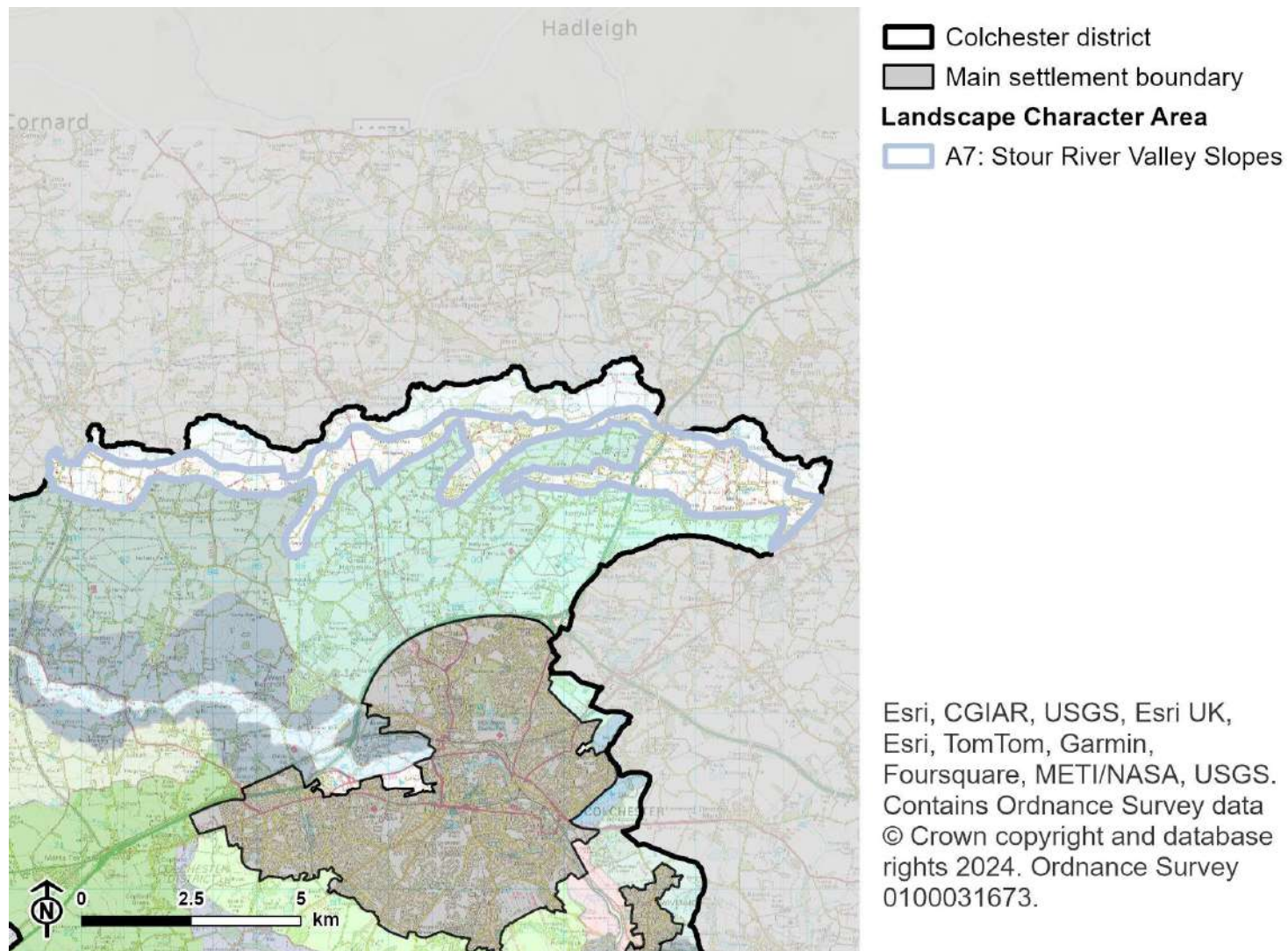
Landscape Character Area A7: Stour Valley Slopes

Description

Location and Summary

7.54 The LCA is located in the north of the district and almost entirely within the Dedham Vale National Landscape (formerly an AONB) with its western end within the Stour Valley Project Area. It comprises the gently sloping southern slopes of the Stour River Valley and several smaller tributary valleys. It features a patchwork of small to medium arable and pasture fields interspersed with frequent woodland blocks.

Figure 7.8: Location of LCA A7



Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating southern valley slopes of the River Stour, also featuring the steeper wooded valleys of three tributary streams including the Black Brook.
- Farmed landscape, with a pattern of irregular arable and pasture fields defined by low-trimmed hedgerows. Frequent mature hedgerow trees, including willows and veteran oak pollards, are distinctive features.
- Frequent scattered woodlands, including some areas of Ancient Woodland, create a varied and visually rich landscape.
- A concentration of traditional orchard in close proximity to Boxted Cross is a locally distinctive feature.
- Road network consisting of several north-south bridging points, including main roads such as the A12, A134, and Colchester Road (B1508), as well as smaller winding rural lanes.
- Good levels of public access via a dense network of public rights of way (PRoW), including the Stour Valley Path and the Essex Way long distance paths.
- Historic settlement pattern of dispersed small villages, hamlets and farmsteads on the valley sides. Some modern development on settlement edges and ribbon development along roads.
- Woodland, including that along valleys bottoms, provides a sense of enclosure, whilst the more open areas on the upper slopes offer framed views across the Stour Valley floodplain.
- The landscape retains a strong rural character with tranquil, steep wooded valleys, Ancient Woodlands, and traditional hedgerows, albeit with some influence from development and the main roads.

Photo 7.13: Open views across the arable farmland across the Stour Valley floodplain



Photo 7.14: Woodland creates localised enclosure along the skyline



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.55 The bedrock geology comprises sedimentary clay, silt, sand, and gravel (Thames Group). In the north this is overlain by alluvial and terrace deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel, deposited by the River Stour as it fluctuated within its floodplain. The area comprises the southern valley slopes of the River Stour, carved by the river and three steep tributary valleys, including the Black Brook. The valley sides rise from approximately 20m above ordnance datum (AOD) to 50m AOD. Slopes are generally steeper in the west but become more shallow in the east as the River Stour approaches the coast. The valley bottoms of the three tributary streams are identified as falling within Flood Zone 2 and 3. Soils within the LCA are a mixture of Grade 2 (very good) and Grade 3 (good – moderate) and are under a mixture of pastoral and arable use.

7.56 Fields are generally defined by low, trimmed hedgerows, occasionally pure elm hedgerows or grass banks, with frequent mature hedgerow trees, including willows, and veteran oak pollards. Large arable fields are generally open along the roads and lanes. Fields are interspersed with scattered woodland blocks, some of which combine to form larger areas of woodland, and there are local concentrations of woodland cover along the watercourses. Much of this is identified as Priority Habitat ‘deciduous woodland’, and Boxtedhall Great Wood, Boxtedhall Little Wood, Cophedge Farm Wood and Ash Wood in the centre of the LCA are identified as being Ancient Woodland.

7.57 There is also local concentration of Priority Habitat ‘traditional orchards’ in the vicinity of Boxted Cross, and Priority Habitat ‘pasture and parkland’ around Dedham and Boxted. In addition, there are several local wildlife sites (LWS) located within the LCA including Lodge Hills, which features grazed hillside grassland with a mix of acid and neutral semi-improved grassland; and the extensive Black Brook LWS, comprising a mosaic of Ancient Woodland, grassland, and wetland habitats.

Cultural Influences

7.58 Historically, the area has been characterised by a mix of arable farming and pasture, with 18th-century or later enclosures interspersed with irregular pre-18th-century field systems, likely of medieval origin or older. Today, much of the field pattern has been lost and is now identified as 'post-1950s enclosure' or 'post-1950s boundary loss,' as identified within the Essex HLC (2013) reflecting later changes to the landscape. The field pattern today is a varied mix of small, medium, and large-scale enclosures, with smaller scale fields found within the steep tributary valleys and around settlements, and large-scale arable fields found on the lower valley sides, closer to the floodplain.

7.59 A Roman road traverses the character area, following the route of the modern-day A12. Later Medieval activity is evident within the area, including 'Castle Mound' (Scheduled Monument) the remains of a motte and bailey castle in the village of Mount Bures at the western edge of the LCA. Later settlements within the area are primarily concentrated on the crest of the valley slopes and historically comprised dispersed church/hall complexes, manors, farms, cottages and hamlets. This pattern is still largely evident today, with villages like Dedham, Wormingford, Little Horkesley and Boxted. These villages retain their historic character and all contain Conservation Area designations and feature several listed buildings. The distinctive village of Dedham contains a mix of traditional colourful timber-framed buildings and Georgian brick houses along the high street, many of which are designated as Grade II Listed Buildings.

7.60 The landscape features several PRow, including the Stour Valley Path and the Essex Way long-distance paths. Access to the landscape is also facilitated by a network of roads and lanes that cross the area from north to south, linking with the adjacent River Stour floodplain to the north.

7.61 The wider Dedham Vale National Landscape is associated with John Constable's whose artwork prominently features Stour Valley, capturing its rural charm and tranquil landscapes.

Perceptual Influences

7.62 An overall rural landscape that retains a sense of tranquillity and remoteness, particularly away from road networks. However, the busy Ipswich Road (A12) and, to a lesser extent, the A134 and Colchester Road (B1508) introduce elements of urban influence. Rural character is also influenced by modern development on the edge of Dedham and ribbon development along Castle Hill/The Heath, which further erodes a sense of rurality and tranquillity in the eastern portion of the LCA.

7.63 The wooded steeper tributary valleys, such as that of the Black Brook, and scattered woodland blocks create a sense of enclosure. In contrast more open areas provide panoramic views across farmed landscapes towards a skyline that is defined by undulating valley slopes with scattered woodland. Churches are often built in prominent positions and form landmarks within the landscape. Examples include Dedham Church in the east and the Church of St John The Baptist in Mount Bures to the west. Wide, panoramic, and framed views of the Stour Valley floodplain are also possible from various vantage points along the valley slopes.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Most of the LCA lies in the Dedham Vale National Landscape, and demonstrates the following special qualities of the nationally designated landscape: gentle valley sides with scattered woodlands; sunken rural lanes; picturesque villages with imposing churches and historic timber framed buildings; scattered farmsteads and agricultural buildings; remains mostly free of incongruous development and retains a rural charm and tranquillity; and an association with the work of John Constable.

- The western end of the LCA lies within the Stour Valley Project Area and demonstrates the following valued qualities: a predominantly agricultural area that is a sparsely populated; part of a shallow valley that sits within wider undulating farmland, and the presence of small nucleated villages/hamlets; Medieval churches have often been built in prominent positions; expansive views and openness perceived from higher land and a sense of tranquillity; and villages with a rich heritage and isolated farmsteads and manorial halls.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity are provided by several scattered habitats, including Priority Habitats like 'traditional orchard' and 'deciduous woodland,' some of which are Ancient Woodlands . The site features multiple LWS, including an extensive mosaic of habitats along Black Brook which forms a valuable wildlife corridor.
- Sense of time-depth and landscape interest provided by the surviving historic settlement pattern and several historic features and designations.
- Recreational value provided by public rights of way, including the Essex Way and Stour Valley Path long distance paths, which provide connection between settlements and the surrounding countryside.
- Association with artist John Constable's whose work prominently features Stour Valley, capturing its rural charm and tranquil landscapes.
- The rural character of much of the landscape, which provides a setting for the Essex Way and Stour Valley path, and other public rights of way, and small villages and hamlets.
- Sweeping views across the valley from the vantage points on the relatively open upper valley slopes of the Stour Valley floodplain.
- Sense of tranquillity and remoteness, especially in steeper tributary valleys, away from settlements and roads.

Issues and Changes

- The condition of the hedgerows is mixed, some are poorly managed with gaps or are missing entirely.
- An increase in equine related land uses, including post and rail subdivision of larger fields, the introduction of visually intrusive features, such as white tape and small structures, particularly around areas of settlement and along main roads.
- Historic loss of orchards to development or conversion to arable farmland.
- Impact on the landscape associated with the proposed National Grid Norwich to Tilbury Project. Proposed underground cabling to east of the LCA will disturb the landscape structure due to woodland and hedgerow removal/disturbance if the DCO is approved.
- Disturbance to landscape character as a result of noise and movement associated with main A12 and A134 road corridor.
- Increased traffic roads during peak tourist periods, particularly those leading to key tourist destinations such as Dedham.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges, including Ancient Woodlands.
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
 - Changes in vegetation cover, including mature hedgerow trees, veteran oaks, and traditional orchards could face stress from shifting temperature and precipitation patterns.
 - More frequent and intense rainfall resulting in increased flooding, especially along the watercourses, including Black Brook, which fall within Flood Zones 2 and 3. This could result in damage to natural habitats.

- Erosion of valley slopes and waterlogging of soils may also become more pronounced.
- Changes to traditional agricultural practices including, increasing pressure for land conversion to alternative uses like bioenergy crops, solar farms. This could significantly alter the landscape character and diminish the area's rural tranquillity.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Stour River Valley Slopes LCA is to conserve and enhance the river valley landscape by managing and protecting Ancient Woodland and promoting natural regeneration to extend woodland areas where appropriate. Furthermore, strengthening the ecological value of LWS through the creation of wildlife corridors that connect priority habitats, preserve the lush lowland character of meadows and pasture. New development should be avoided, especially visually intrusive or incongruous structures, to protect the landscape quality and tranquillity of the Dedham Vale National Landscape and Stour Valley Project Area.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Ensure that relevant special characteristics and qualities of the Dedham Vale National Landscape and River Stour Project Area are conserved and enhanced, having regard for the aims set out in the current Management Plan.

- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.
- Protect and enhance valued habitats including Ancient Woodland, Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland' and 'traditional orchards' and improve linkages between them.
- Conserve, manage and restore patches of deciduous woodland along valley sides.
- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of arable fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods.
- Protect and manage the valued recreational use of the landscape, seeking opportunities to further enhance opportunities for access and enjoyment; manage recreational routes to avoid/minimise disturbance to areas of nature conservation value.
- Enhance and promote sweeping views from the vantage points on the upper valley slopes towards the Stour Valley floodplain.
- Protect and manage the various historic features to preserve the sense of time-depth and historic character.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of the area away from urban influences, particularly in the steep-sided, intimate tributary valleys.

Development Management

- Avoid visually intrusive and incongruous development within the area; consider opportunities for the undergrounding of any proposed power lines to avoid need for pylons, with landscape features reinstated following construction.
- Retain the settlement pattern of dispersed farmsteads, hamlets and villages. Conserve the local distinctiveness and rural setting of historic

buildings and settlements including Dedham, Wormingford, Little Horkesley and Boxted.

- If development is proposed look to minimise its impact through careful design, in terms of siting, form, scale, massing, materials including the local vernacular of colour buildings, weatherboarding and brick (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).
- Encourage the integration of any development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate hedgerows and woodlands to reflect and reinforce rural character.
- Discourage further equine related land uses; encourage sensitive management of related paraphernalia, including fencing and floodlighting which erode landscape character.
- Resist development that would erode the rural character of the valley, such as intrusive lighting, road widening, new signage, and sources of noise disturbance; refer to the Lighting Design Guide for the Dedham Vale National Landscape (July 2023).
- Manage recreational pressures along roads and PRow during peak tourist periods.

Landscape Character Area A8: Stour River Valley Slopes

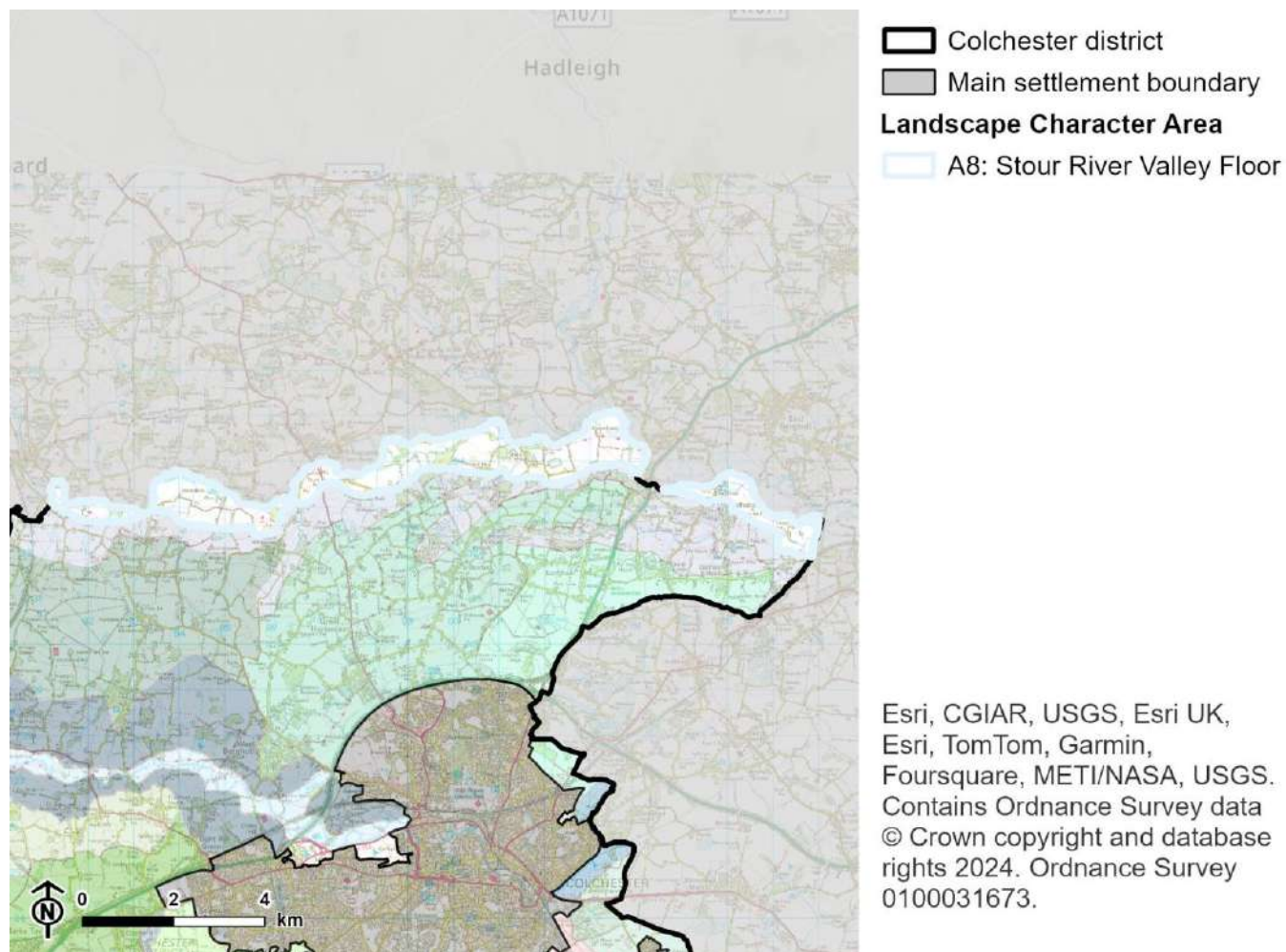
Description

Location and Summary

7.64 The LCA is located in the north of the district, and comprises the meandering floodplain and southern lower slopes of the River Stour Valley. The River Stour and its tributary, the Dedham Old River, define the northern extent of the area which coincides with the administrative boundary with neighbouring Babergh District.

7.65 The majority of the LCA falls within the Dedham Vale National Landscape (formerly an AONB) and the western end within the Stour Valley Project Area. It is characterised by an irregular pattern of pasture and arable fields, a mosaic of wetland and woodland habitats, and an historic settlement pattern of farmsteads and small villages.

Figure 7.9: Location of LCA A8



Key Characteristics

- Meandering channels of the River Stour and Dedham Old River set within a flat floodplain, with slopes rising gently to the south.
- A farmed landscape, with an irregular field pattern of pasture fields defined by drainage ditches and arable fields defined by hedgerows.
- Mosaic of wetland, grazing marshes and woodland habitats, including some Ancient Woodland, create a varied and visually rich landscape.
- Cricket bat Willow and Poplar plantations along rivers are striking features of the landscape.
- Road access is limited to north-south bridging points, including the A134, and several narrow winding rural lanes along the lower valley sides.
- Good levels of public access via several public rights of way (PRoW), including the Essex Way, Stour Valley Path, and St Edmund Way long distance paths.
- Historic settlement pattern of dispersed farmsteads, hamlets and small villages, including the idyllic village of Dedham.
- Historic character provided by remnant enclosed meadow pasture along the floodplain, and the presence of several listed mills and weirs.
- Generally, an open and undeveloped landscape with views along the river and across the floodplain to the adjacent valley slopes with scattered woodland creating localised areas of enclosure.
- The strongly rural and tranquil landscape with few modern intrusions.

Photo 7.15: Views along the river and across the floodplain towards adjacent valley slopes



Photo 7.16: Scattered woodland blocks break up arable fields on the lower valley slopes



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.66 The majority of the LCA comprises a sedimentary bedrock geology of clay, silt, sand and gravel (Thames Group), with a localised outcrop of chalk (White Chalk Subgroup) at Bowdens, in the west. The bedrock is predominantly overlain by alluvial deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel, with some river terrace deposits of sand and gravel in the east. The area defined by the River Stour and its tributary Dedham Old River, and comprises their floodplain and lower southern slopes of the River Stour Valley. The floodplain is largely flat and low-lying ranging between 2m above ordnance datum (AOD) to 5m AOD, while the valley sides slope gently up to between 10m AOD to 25m AOD. The floodplain is identified as falling within Flood Zone 2 and 3, and soils are a mosaic of Grade 2 (very good) and Grade 3 (good – moderate.) The river is fringed by extensive meadow pastures with arable land on the valley sides, although there has been some encroachment of arable land into the floodplain.

7.67 Pasture fields within the floodplain is typically delineated by drainage channels, which often feature riparian vegetation and occasional ancient Willow trees. Arable fields tend to be delineated by hedgerows with frequent hedgerow trees, although there has been some loss of hedgerows due to field amalgamation in places. Woodland cover includes narrow strips of riparian woodland and Cricket Bat Willow and Poplar plantations along the valley floor, as well as scattered woodland blocks which break up the fields on the lower valley sides. Much of this is identified as Priority Habitat ‘deciduous woodland’, and Creeks Grove, Boxted Hall Great Wood, and Cophedge Wood, are identified as Ancient Woodland.

7.68 Areas of Priority Habitat ‘coastal and floodplain grazing marsh’ along the river and floodplain adds to the mosaic of habitats in the landscape. In addition, there are several Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), protecting a variety of wetland, grassland and woodland habitats (including Ancient Woodland). This includes Dedham Old River Marshes and Bridges Farm to the east; Boxtedhall Great

Wood and Boxted Marsh located centrally; and Creak's Grove, Lodge Hills and Wormingford Meres in the west. Dedham Old River Marshes is the largest remaining area of floodplain grassland in north-east Essex, with wet ditches and hedgerows supporting important grassland, aquatic, and marginal vegetation.

Cultural Influences

7.69 Historically, the area was characterised by extensive tracts of enclosed meadow pasture along the floodplain, much of which was probably of medieval origin or earlier. Some of this earlier field pattern survives in the form of 'pre-18th century irregular enclosure' and 'enclosed meadow pasture' as identified within the Essex HLC (2013). The valley sides also feature a mix of '18th century or later enclosures', although much of the original enclosure pattern has been eroded due to '1950's enclosure' or 'post 1950 boundary loss', where fields have been either reorganised and /or merged to aid modern farming practices. The field pattern evident today is predominantly one of medium and large-scale enclosure albeit with some smaller-scale enclosure surviving in places along the river and paddocks around the village of Dedham.

7.70 Historically there was limited settlement in the area due to the extent of the floodplain. Dispersed church/hall complexes and farms were found either on higher ground, or alongside fords or bridges crossing the river. Scattered mills and weirs on the valley floor harnessed the power of the river and indicate the historic importance of the area. The distinctive village of Dedham, designated as a Conservation Area, contains a mix of traditional colourful timber-framed buildings and Georgian brick houses along the high street, many of which are designated as Grade II listed buildings. Additionally, canalising the river in the 18th century facilitated navigation and added to the historical fabric of the landscape.

7.71 The landscape features several public rights of way (PRoW), including the Essex Way long distance path, Stour Valley Path and St Edmund Way which cross the floodplain and connect it to the broader River Stour Valley landscape. Access to the landscape is also possible by a network of roads and small lanes which cross the river predominantly north to south, including the A134.

7.72 The wider Dedham Vale National Landscape is associated with John Constable's whose artwork prominently features Stour Valley, capturing its rural charm and tranquil landscapes. Several of his paintings were of locations along the river and valley floor, including 'Dedham Lock and Mill', 'Stratford Mill' and 'Leaping Horse'.

Perceptual Influences

7.73 A predominantly rural landscape that maintains a strong sense of peace and seclusion, serving as a prime example of the classic English lowland river valley. The A123, which passes north-south through the middle of the LCA, introduces localised elements of urban influence. The area's tranquillity is enhanced by the harmonious blend of natural elements, relatively few signs of development, and minimal noise and light pollution. The gentle flow of the Stour River contributes to the idyllic ambience, further complimented by nearby Dedham Village, known for its charming architecture and historic character. The strong sense of tranquillity is reflected in CPRE tranquillity and dark skies mapping.

7.74 . A generally open landscape with a number of picturesque views along the river corridor and across the floodplain and towards the adjacent valley slopes outside the LCA, including from footpaths and the promoted routes that cross the valley. Views along the river corridor and floodplain are particularly notable at Dedham, where the bridge and mill create an impressive gateway to Dedham Market Town. Views into the landscape are also possible from the adjacent higher valley slopes of River Stour (LCA A7). The church towers and spires within the villages perched on the valley sides (outside of the LCA) offer notable landmarks that punctuate the skyline. The riparian vegetation, Willow and Poplar plantations, woodlands, and hedgerow trees result in a localised sense of enclosure, forming a wooded horizon that foreshortens views.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Most of the LCA lies in the Dedham Vale National Landscape and demonstrates the following special qualities of the nationally designated landscape: a gently winding river and tributaries, gentle valley sides with scattered woodlands, picturesque villages, and riverside grazing meadows with associated drainage ditches; remains mostly free of incongruous development and retains a rural charm and tranquillity; an essential character that was established in the middle of the previous millennium, evident through historic features and field patterns; and an association with the work of John Constable.
- The western end of the LCA lies within the Stour Valley Project Area and demonstrates the following valued qualities: a predominantly agricultural area that is a sparsely populated; part of a shallow valley that sits within wider undulating farmland, and the presence of a water courses and associated wetland vegetation; and expansive views and openness and a sense of tranquillity.
- A flat, low-lying floodplain containing the meandering channel of the River Stour rising gradually to gentle valley slopes with a strong sense of place.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity are provided by wetland and grassland habitats associated with the river corridor and scattered woodland habitat, including areas of Ancient Woodland at Creeks Grove, Boxted Hall Great Wood and Cophedge Wood.
- Sense of time depth provided by remnant enclosed meadow pasture and drained enclosures along the valley floor, the historic village of Dedham and listed halls, farms and mills.
- Recreational value provided by several PRow, including the Essex Way, Stour Valley Path, and St Edmund Way long distance paths, which provide connection between settlements and the surrounding countryside.

- An association with the works of John Constable's, including the location of several of his paintings.
- The rural character the landscape, which provides a setting for the PRow and several surrounding villages including Dedham, Stratford St Mary, Boxted, Nayland, Wormingford and Bures St Mary.
- Far-reaching views across the floodplain and across the valley from lower valley slopes.
- Sense of tranquillity and remoteness is experienced across the floodplain, which is further enhanced by the gentle presence of water along the river, allowing peaceful walks with minimal noise or light intrusion.

Issues and Changes

- Changes to traditional agricultural practices including, conversion of grazing marshes/pasture on the valley floor to arable farming and increase in horse paddocks. This could significantly alter the landscape character.
- Loss of characteristic drainage ditches and associated riparian vegetation and Willow trees due to lack of maintenance.
- Changes in land use, such as introducing plantations within the valley floor, may alter the existing field pattern and create a greater sense of enclosure.
- Potential for pollution of the River Stour from fertiliser and pesticide run-off from surrounding valley side and farmland plateau agricultural areas.
- Potential expansion of Dedham could impact the village's historic character, altering its traditional layout, landscape setting, and views.
- The condition of the hedgerows in arable areas is mixed, some with gaps and some missing entirely.
- Disturbance to landscape character as a result of noise and movement of the A12 and A134 road corridors.

- Increased traffic roads during peak tourist periods, particularly those leading to key tourist destinations such as Dedham, and potential for increased river traffic as a result of tourism pressure.
- Impact on the landscape associated with the proposed National Grid Norwich to Tilbury Project. Proposed underground cabling to east of the LCA will disturb the landscape structure including woodland and hedgerows if the DCO is approved.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - More frequent and intense rainfall that could exacerbate flooding along the River Stour, the floodplain of which falls within Flood Zones 2 and 3, resulting in damages to both agricultural land and natural habitats, and listed buildings on the valley floor..
 - Increasing river flow and storm intensity leading to heightened erosion and sedimentation impacting the stability of drainage ditches, and the integrity of hedgerows with mature trees.
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges, and Ancient Woodland, such as Cophedge Wood, may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
 - Increased abstraction from the River Stour in periods of drought will potentially affect river ecology.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Stour Valley Floor LCA is to conserve and enhance the distinctive and nationally important lowland river valley landscape. The characteristic pattern of valley floor pasture and valley-side arable farming should be retained, historic settlements and their river-side

setting should be protected, and the wildlife corridor of the River Stour should be enhanced. New development should be avoided, especially visually intrusive or incongruous structures, to protect the landscape quality, rural charm and tranquillity of the Dedham Vale National Landscape == and Stour Valley Project Area.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Ensure that relevant special characteristics and qualities of the Dedham Vale National Landscape and River Stour Project Area are conserved and enhanced, having regard for the aims set out in the current Management Plan.
- Protect and enhance valued habitats within the river corridor, including Ancient Woodland, deciduous woodland and coastal and floodplain grazing marshes and improve linkages between them.
- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows on the valley sides and encourage their restoration/reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions. Maintain drainage ditches on the valley floor.
- Encourage the reversion of arable land to pasture on the valley floor to help restore traditional pastoral landscape character.
- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of arable fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods.
- Encourage the sensitive integration of Poplar and Willow plantations along the River Stour by maintaining a balance with naturalised vegetation, preserving open views, and ensuring the plantations do not

disrupt the natural floodplain or diminish the area's characteristic sense of place.

- Protect and manage the valued recreational use of the landscape, seeking opportunities to further enhance opportunities for access and enjoyment; manage recreational routes to avoid/minimise disturbance to areas of nature conservation value.
- Enhance and promote existing engaging views along the River Stour and maintain cross-valley views from the valley sides through careful consideration of development and woodland plantations within the floodplain.
- Protect and manage the various historic features to preserve the sense of time-depth and historic character.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of the area away from urban influences, particularly along the river and floodplain.

Development Management

- Avoid visually intrusive and incongruous development within the area; consider opportunities for the undergrounding of any proposed power lines to avoid need for pylons, with landscape features reinstated following construction.
- Retain the settlement pattern of dispersed farmsteads and small villages. Conserve the local distinctiveness, historic character and rural setting of historic buildings and settlements, including Dedham, Stratford St Mary, Boxted, Nayland, Wormingford and Bures.
- If development is proposed look to minimise its impact through careful design, in terms of siting, form, scale, massing, materials including use of the local vernacular colour buildings, weatherboarding and brick (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).
- Encourage the integration of any development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate hedgerows and woodlands to reflect and reinforce rural character.

- Resist development that would erode the rural character of the valley, such as intrusive lighting, road widening, new signage, and sources of noise disturbance; refer to the Lighting Design Guide for the Dedham Vale National Landscape (July 2023).
- Manage recreational pressures along roads and PRow during peak tourist periods.

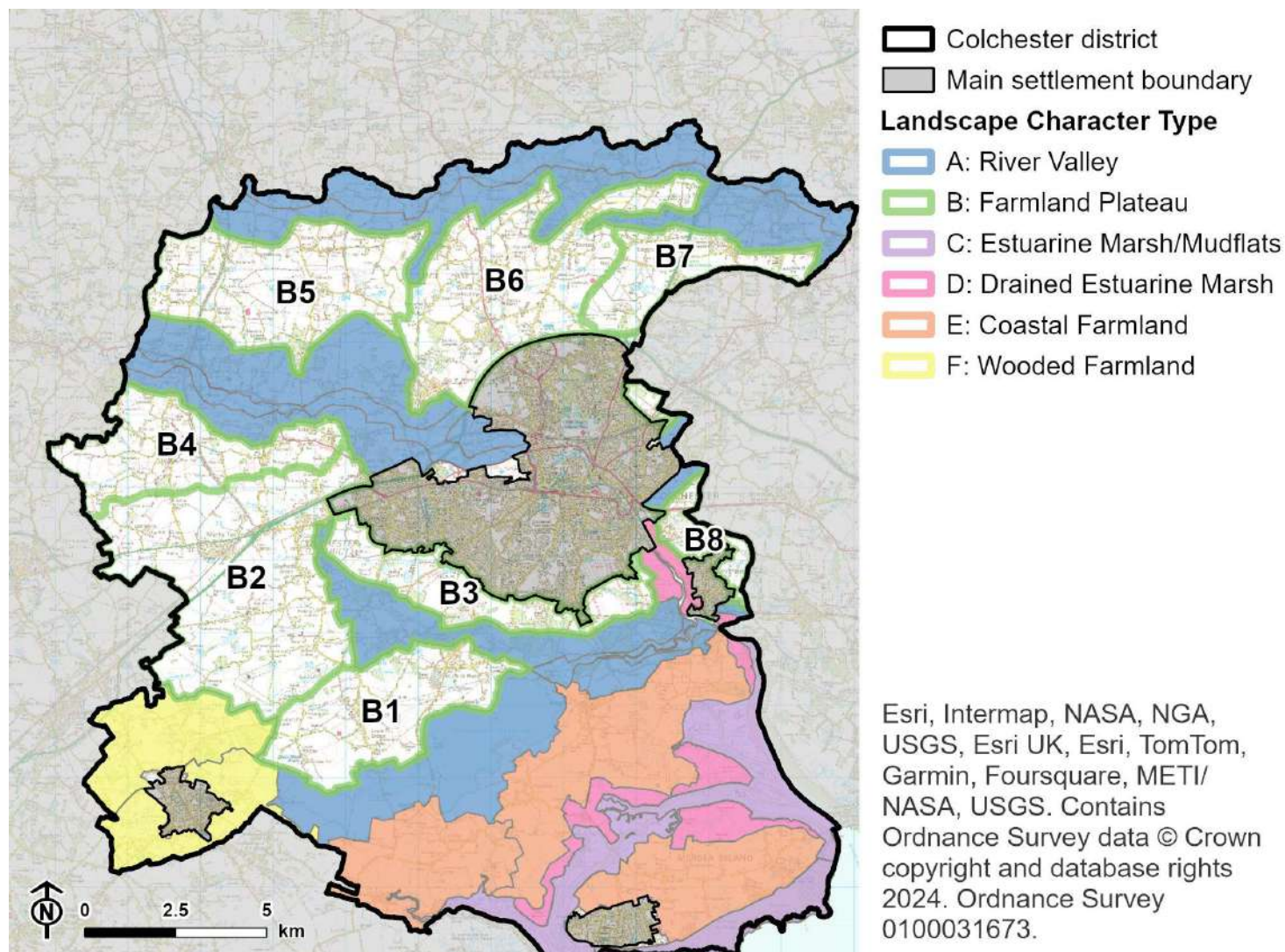
Landscape Character Type B: Farmland Plateau

Landscape Character Areas

7.75 The Farmland Plateau LCT is subdivided into eight LCAs as follows:

- Landscape Character Area B1: Layer Breton Farmland Plateau;
- Landscape Character Area B2: Easthorpe Farmland Plateau;
- Landscape Character Area B3: Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau;
- Landscape Character Area B4: Great Tey Farmland Plateau;
- Landscape Character Area B5: Rochfords Farmland Plateau;
- Landscape Character Area B6: Great Horkesley Farmland Plateau;
- Landscape Character Area B7: Langham Farmland Plateau; and
- Landscape Character Area B8: Wivenhoe Farmland Plateau.

Figure 7.10: Location of the Farmland Plateau LCT and LCAs



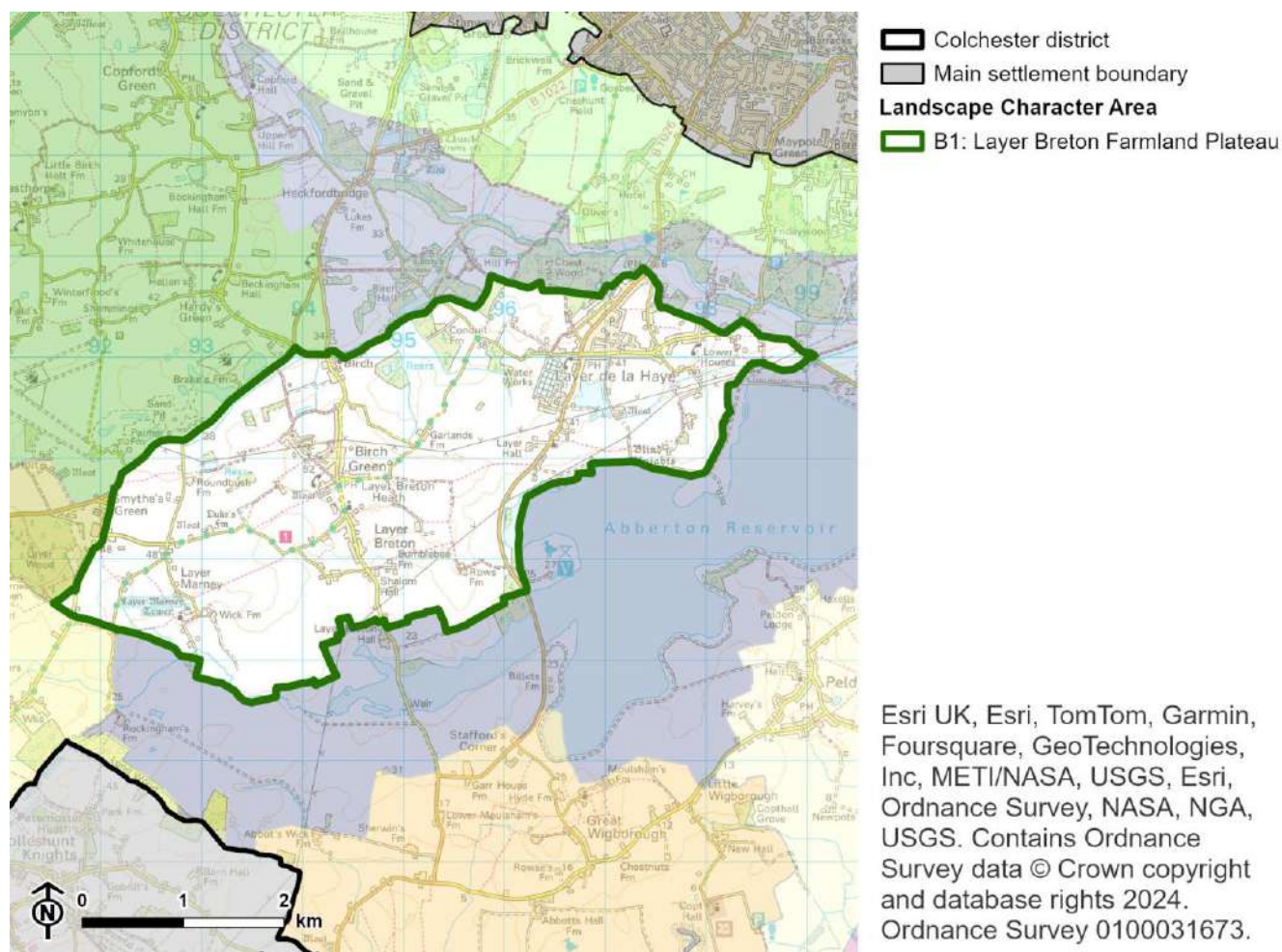
Landscape Character Area B1: Layer Breton Farmland Plateau

Description

Location and Summary

7.76 The LCA comprises a gently rolling plateau lying between the valley of the Roman River and one of its unnamed tributaries to the north and that of the Layer Brook and Abberton Reservoir to the south. It is a predominantly arable landscape characterised by a pattern of medium to large-scale fields interspersed with deciduous woodlands, commons and dispersed rural settlements.

Figure 7.11: Location of LCA B1



Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating plateau lying between the valley of the Roman River to the north and the Layer Brook to the south.
- A predominantly arable landscape organised into a pattern of medium to large-scale fields defined by low, often gappy hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees.
- Several blocks of deciduous woodland, including some Ancient Woodland, break up the arable landscape in the north and east.
- Several scattered ponds and small reservoirs, and remnant commons at Layer Breton Heath and Malting Green, are distinctive landscape features.
- Historic settlement pattern of dispersed small villages, hamlets and farmsteads is largely retained, albeit with some ribbon development along main roads.
- A network comprising narrow rural lanes and key routes such as B1026 that facilitate access to surrounding settlements.
- A network of public rights of ways (PRoW) and narrow rural lanes connect settlements and enable access to the landscape; also features National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 1.
- A generally open landscape with views available across the rolling arable landscape from roads and footpaths, particularly where hedgerows are missing.
- Greater sense of enclosure in the north and east where woodland cover provides a wooded horizon in many views.
- A rural and tranquil landscape with good experience of dark skies away from settlements; some influence from a large solar farm to the west of Layer-de-la-Haye.

Photo 7.17: Views across rolling arable farmland broken up by several woodland blocks



Photo 7.18: Distinctive remnant commons at Malting Green



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.77 The LCA features sedimentary bedrock geology of clay, silt, sand, and gravel (Thames Group), overlain in the north and east by sand and gravel deposits (Glaciofluvial Deposits). The landform comprises a gently rolling plateau, which lies between the lower-lying valleys of the Roman River and one of its unnamed tributaries to the north and the Layer Brook (featuring Abberton Reservoir) to the south. The landscape is punctuated by several scattered small ponds and reservoirs dotting the area which add some localised landform variation. The lower lying valley bottoms to the north and south are identified as falling within Flood Zone 2 and 3. Soils within the LCA are almost entirely Grade 3 (good – moderate), and are predominantly in arable use, albeit there is some pasture on the edge of settlements.

7.78 Fields are typically defined by low-cut, often gappy, hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees. However, smaller fields around the settlements of Birch Green and Layer Breton are enclosed by mature hedgerows with frequent, well-established hedgerow trees in better condition. The field pattern is also interspersed with several small to medium-sized woodland blocks, particularly along the plateau edge in the north and east. Much of this woodland is classified as Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland' and several areas are identified as being Ancient woodland, including Great Billet Wood, Cook's Wood, and Calves Pasture. There are also some small remnant areas of Priority Habitat 'traditional orchards' on the edge of Layer Breton and Layer-de-la-Haye and an area of 'lowland Heathland' at Layer Breton Heath. . Many of the wooded areas are also designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). Other distinctive habitats protected by LWS designation include relic acidic grassland/lowland Heathland at Layer Breton Heath and acidic grassland at Malting Green.

Cultural Influences

7.79 Historically, the landscape was enclosed during the Medieval period or earlier. Common land, including around the settlements of Malting Green, Birch Green and Layer Breton, were used for livestock pasturage. Over time, common this was enclosed through piecemeal agreements, especially around Layer Breton. Open common land survives at Layer Breton Heath and Malting Green but elsewhere Much of the earlier field systems have since been lost, with the majority of the landscape identified in the Essex HLC (2013) as ‘post-1950s enclosure’ or ‘post-1950s boundary loss’. This transformation is largely attributed to 20th-century agricultural intensification, which resulted in the merging of fields to accommodate modern farming practices. The field pattern today is predominantly one of medium and large-scale enclosure, albeit with a smaller-scale field pattern around Layer Breton and east of Layer de la Haye.

7.80 Archaeological evidence, such as pre-Roman Iron Age dyke of ‘Gosbecks Iron Age and Romano-British site’ (Schedule Monument) extending into the landscape to the north, suggests that human activity has been present in this area for a significant period of time. Later Medieval settlement comprised a pattern of dispersed church/hall complexes, small villages, hamlets and farmsteads which remains largely evident in the landscape today. This is reflected by several listed buildings including clusters within the villages of Birch, Birch Green, Layer Breton, and Layer de la Haye, and the hamlet of Layer Marney. The village of Birch is also designated as a Conservation Area. Medieval history is also reflected in the numerous moated sites throughout the landscape, as well as the remains of a Norman motte and bailey castle located south-west of Birch. The parkland landscape surrounding Layer Marney Tower is a Grade II Registered Park and Garden (RPG), and comprises the remains of a medieval deer park with early 20th-century gardens.

7.81 The landscape features a network of PRoW, connecting the scattered settlements and farmsteads. This is particularly dense in the central section around Birch, Birch Green, and Layer Breton. Access to the landscape is further enhanced by open access land at Layer Breton Heath and Malting Green and a network of rural lanes and NCN Route 1.

Perceptual Influences

7.82 An overall rural and tranquil landscape with a good experience of dark skies away from settlements, as demonstrated by CPRE tranquillity and dark skies mapping. However, the sense of tranquillity and rurality is reduced locally in the vicinity of the relatively large village of Layer-de-le-Haye and, to a lesser extent, by the villages of Birch Green and Layer Breton. Other detracting influences include the relatively busy Church Road (B1026), a large solar farm to the west of Layer-de-le-Haye, the geometric engineered design of the waterworks at Layer-de-la-Haye, and two lines of electricity pylons and overhead power lines which cross the landscape east to west.

7.83 There is generally a sense of openness due to the rolling landform and large to medium-sized arable fields defined by low, often gappy, hedgerows. Views are generally available across the rolling arable landscape from roads and footpaths, particularly where hedgerows are missing. There are also wide, expansive views across Abberton Reservoir (located within LCA A1) to the south, including from the B1026. The church towers at Layer-de-la-Haye, Layer Breton, Birch, and Layer Marney Tower serve as prominent landmarks in the views across the generally open, gently rolling plateau. However, there is a greater sense of enclosure in the north and east due to presence of scattered patches of woodland which tend to foreshorten views and provide a wooded horizon.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Rolling farmland plateau which contrasts with the surrounding lower-lying valleys to the north and south. The plateau is punctuated by numerous ponds and reservoirs which add topographical interest.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity are provided by several scattered habitats, including Ancient Woodland and Priority Habitat,

‘deciduous woodland’, ‘traditional orchard’ and ‘lowland Heathland’ at Layer Breton Heath, and relic acidic grassland and lowland Heathland at Layer Breton Heath and Malting Green.

- Sense of time-depth and landscape interest provided by the surviving historic settlement pattern of dispersed church/hall complexes, small villages, hamlets and farmsteads, and reflected in the presence of several historic features and designations. Layer Breton Heath and Malting Green are also important as a surviving area of unenclosed common land.
- Recreational value provided by open access land at Layer Breton Heath and Malting Green and a network of PRow and rural lanes which provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access between settlements and the surrounding countryside.
- The rural character of much of the landscape which provides a setting for PRow, and the settlements of Birch, Birch Green, Layer Breton, Layer-de-le-Haye, Malting Green and Layer Marney.
- Visual interest and landscape variety provided by scattered woodland blocks in the north and east.
- Relative sense of openness including long-distance views across Abberton Reservoir in the south.
- Sense of tranquillity and remoteness, especially in more enclosed areas and away from the settlement of Layer-de-la-Haye.

Issues and Changes

- Field agglomeration since the 1950s has eroded the pre-18th century landscape structure, with evidence of poorly managed hedgerows, both field and roadside, with gaps or missing sections entirely.
- An increase in equine-related land uses, including post and rail subdivision of larger fields and small structures, particularly around settlement areas and along main roads.

- Pressure for further expansion of the village of Layer-de-la-Haye to the north-east and Birch Green to the north.
- Historic loss of orchards to development or conversion to arable farmland.
- Recent solar farm development in the north to the west of Layer-de-le-Haye and potential for future solar energy developments, which may impact views and erode the agricultural character of the landscape.
- Potential for the introduction of new visually intrusive farm buildings.
- Disturbance to landscape character as a result of noise and movement of traffic along the B1026.
- Birch Conservation Area is included within Historic England's Heritage at risk register, and is assessed as having a 'poor' condition and 'deteriorating' trend.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges. The Ancient Woodland of Great Billet Wood, Cook's Wood, and Calves Pasture may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
 - Fluctuations in temperature and rainfall may lead to changes in farming practices and reduced yields, impacting the viability of traditional crops in the predominantly arable landscape.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Layer Breton Farmland Plateau LCA is to conserve and enhance its rural and wooded character by protecting and managing Ancient Woodlands, increasing woodland cover where appropriate, increasing the extent of traditional orchards, and improving the

extent and quality of field boundaries. Development should be carefully managed to avoid visually intrusive structures, especially in the open southern extent.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.
- Protect and enhance valued habitats, including Ancient Woodland at Great Billet Wood, Cook's Wood, and Calves Pasture, other deciduous woodland, traditional orchards, heathland at Layer Breton Heath, and improve linkages between them.
- Protect and enhance existing deciduous woodland through appropriate management and seek to increase its extent, using locally occurring native species to link to existing woodland. Seek to avoid the introduction of coniferous boundaries and/shelterbelts.
- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of arable fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods.
- Protect and manage historic features, including the pre-Roman Iron Age dyke/cropmark (Schedule Monument) and various listed buildings, to preserve the sense of time-depth and historic character.
- Protect the valued recreational use of the landscape, seeking opportunities to further enhance access and appreciation of the landscape.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of the area away from urban influences, particularly in the more enclosed areas to the north.

Development Management

- Any large scale or visually intrusive development would be detrimental to the open rural character of the landscape; consider opportunities for the undergrounding of existing power lines to avoid need for pylons with landscape features reinstated following construction.
- Ensure that new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character including the use of local vernacular of weatherboarding and brick where appropriate (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).
- Carefully consider any new development along Birch Street/School Hill to avoid a sense coalescence of the distinctive settlements of Birch Green and Birch.
- Seek to ensure any potential solar developments are appropriately sited and integrated into the landscape.
- Encourage the integration of any development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate hedgerows and woodlands to reflect and reinforce rural wooded character.
- Seek to reduce lighting impacts and prevent further loss of tranquillity in areas away from settlements, where higher levels of tranquillity remain.

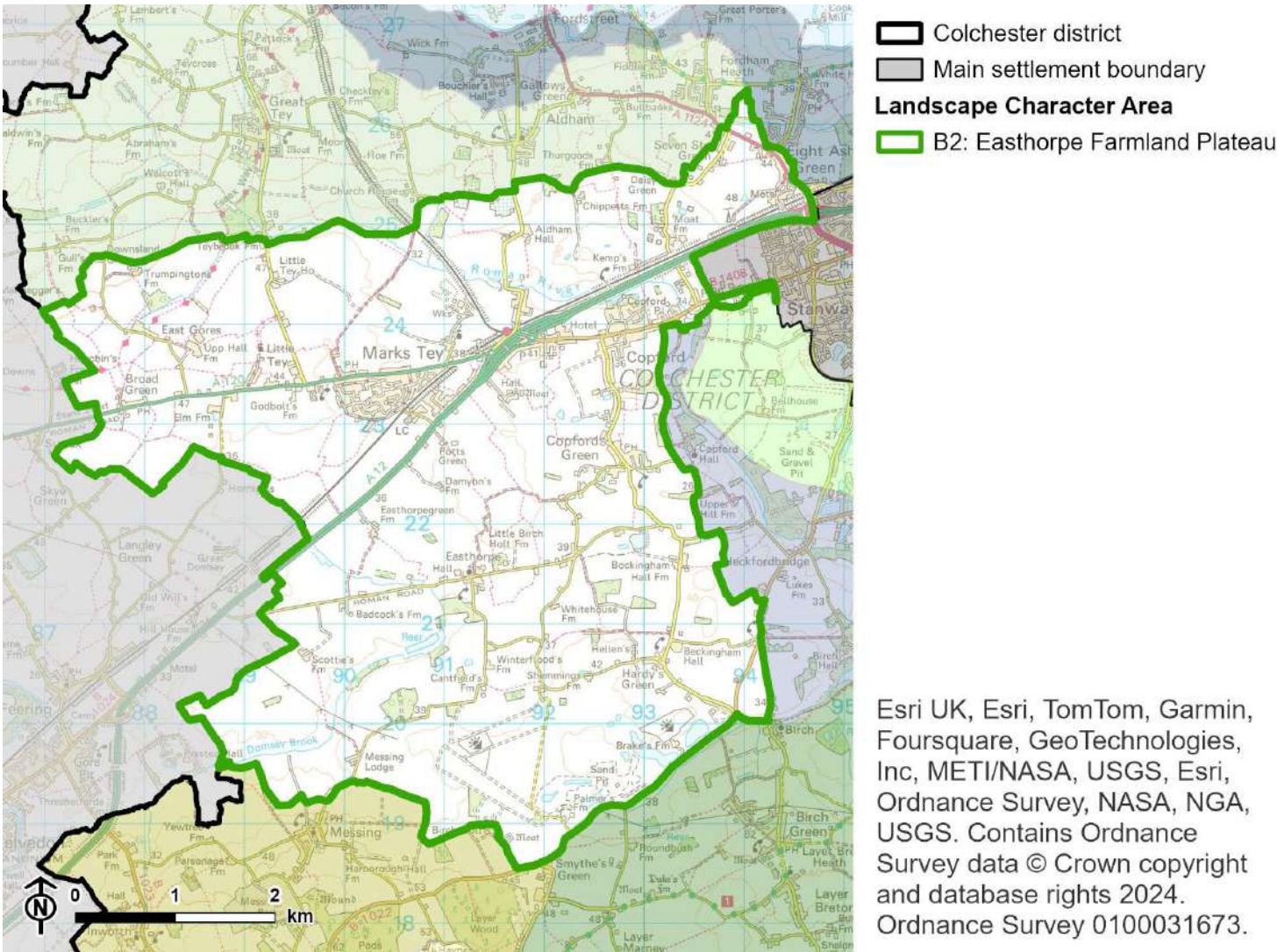
Landscape Character Area B2: Eastthorpe Farmland Plateau

Description

Location and Summary

7.84 This LCA is located to the west of Colchester and comprises a gently undulating plateau dissected by the shallow valleys of the Roman River to the north-east and the Domsey Brook to the west. It is predominantly arable landscape featuring a pattern of medium to large scale fields interspersed with occasional woodland blocks and orchards.

Figure 7.12: Location of LCA B2



Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating plateau dissected by the Roman River valley in the north-east and Domsey Brook in the south-west.
- A predominantly arable landscape organised into a mixture of medium and large fields; some smaller scale pasture fields in proximity to settlements and along valley bottoms.
- Field boundaries are largely defined by low trimmed hedgerows with occasional mature hedgerow trees; some boundary loss evident in places.
- Farmland interspersed with scattered woodland blocks, including several blocks of Ancient Woodland.
- Historic settlement pattern of dispersed small villages, hamlets and farmsteads along lanes, albeit with some modern development around settlements and ribbon development along roads.
- Traversed by a regular network of roads and lanes with a predominant north-south and east-west orientation, relating to the routes of former Roman Roads.
- Good levels of public access via multiple public rights of way (PRoW), including the Essex Way long distance path.
- A sense of visual openness across much of the landscape, with some longer-range views available in places; particularly open around the former Birch Airfield in the south.
- An overriding rural character albeit with influence of modern development and adjoining urban area of Colchester to the east, the A12 and A120 to the north, and solar farm development in the south and east.

Photo 7.19: Gently undulating arable landscape featuring scattered woodland blocks



Photo 7.20: Sense of visual openness around the former Birch Airfield



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.85 The majority of the LCA comprises a sedimentary bedrock geology of clay, silt, sand and gravel (Thames Group) overlain by further superficial clay, silt, sand and gravel deposits. This gives rise to a gently undulating landform with elevations ranging from around 25m AOD to 40m OAD. Roman River crosses the LCA in the north-east and Domsey Brook in the south-west, the valleys of which fall within Flood Zones 2 and 3. The small-scale valleys of these watercourses result in a more locally undulating landform. Soils within the LCA are largely Grade 2 (very good) in the north and Grade 3 (good to moderate) in the south and are primarily under arable cultivation.

7.86 Fields are generally defined by low-trimmed hedgerows or grass banks with occasional mature hedgerow trees. Fields are interspersed with several scattered woodland blocks, many of which are identified as Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland'. There are areas of Ancient Woodland at Seller Wood, Potash Wood, Fan Wood, Aldhamhall Wood and Church House Wood which are all also designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). There are some small areas of Priority Habitat 'traditional orchards' along the northern edge of the LCA and a SSSI of Marks Tey Brickpit designated for geological interest. Important grassland habitats in the LCA are designated as LWSs, including an area of rare acid grassland at Seven Star Green and an area of lime-enriched soil which supports a large number of bee orchids at Blind Lane Plantation to the east of Birch Airfield.

Cultural Influences

7.87 The majority of the landscape is identified in the Essex HLC (2013) as being '20th century agriculture' with post 1950s boundary loss. These are the result of later reorganisation of the landscape into larger fields due to agricultural intensification. There are also some scattered areas of remnant

‘pre-18th century irregular enclosure’, probably of medieval origin or earlier, and some areas of ‘18th – 19th century enclosure’ in the form of enclosed meadow pasture along the lower-lying valley bottoms. The field pattern today comprises predominantly medium and large irregular arable fields, with some smaller scale pasture fields and paddocks in proximity to settlements (including Easthorpe and Hardy’s Green) and along valley bottoms.

7.88 The routes of two main roman roads crossed the LCA – the route between London and Colchester, which the A12 and B1408 still largely follow; and the route between Colchester and Bishops Stortford (‘Stane Street’), which the A120 still largely follows. The settlements of Copford and Marks Tey are organised along these routes. The route of a minor roman road (now Easthorpe Road) also runs roughly parallel and to the south of the Colchester to Bishops Stortford road, upon which the settlement of Easthorpe is located. A network of smaller roads and lanes relates to these former roman roads, resulting in a distinctive regular road pattern with a predominant north-south and east-west orientation.

7.89 There is one Conservation Area within the LCA at Copford Green, which covers the western half of the village. However, the historic parts of Easthorpe, Copford Green and Copford are also indicated by the presence of several Listed Buildings. Outside of these settlements there are Listed Buildings scattered across the LCA which add to the rural character, including church/hall complexes, manors, farms and cottages . There is also one Scheduled Monument protecting a medieval moated site at Marks Tey Hall to the west of Copford.

7.90 RAF Birch Airfield is a former Royal Air Force station located within the south of the LCA which was in use during the Second World up until 1945. Today, the former airfield has a dominant influence on the landscape character in the south off the LCA with its large open fields and low broken hedgerow boundaries.

7.91 The landscape features many PRoW linking the historic settlements to each other and the local road network. This includes the Essex Way long

distance path to the north-west. Access to the landscape is also possible via the network of small lanes and tracks which often follow old field boundaries.

Perceptual Influences

7.92 An overall rural landscape, although this is weakened to the north in proximity to the busy A12. Rural character is also influenced by modern development at Marks Tey and Long Green south of the A120. The busy railway line linking Colchester to London also runs through this area alongside the A12. The corridor containing the A12, A120, B1404 and Marks Tey and Copford reflect an area in the north of the LCA with a much-diminished level of tranquillity and dark skies when compared to the south and the area around Easthorpe. In addition the rural character of the landscape is locally influenced by solar farm developments at RAF Birch, Birch Solar Farm and at Brake's Farm in the south of the LCA, and to the south of Copford Green in the east.

7.93 There is a sense of visual openness where hedgerow loss has occurred, with some longer-range views available across fields, such as at Rectory Road and Easthorpe Road. There is a noticeable sense of openness around the former Birch Airfield within the south of the LCA. Elsewhere views are limited and framed by hedged field boundaries and small patches of woodland.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Ecological value and landscape diversity is provided by scattered habitats, including Ancient Woodland at Seller Wood, Potash Wood, Fan Wood, Aldhamhall Wood and Church House Wood and grassland habitats at Claypit Heath and Well Lane Special Roadside verges along with acid grassland at Seven Star Green and Lime enriched soil at Blind Lane Plantation.

- Sense of time-depth and historic landscape interest provided by historic settlement pattern and several historic features, including Listed Buildings, the medieval moated site at Marks Tey Hall, the routes of Roman Roads, and the later Second World War airfield at Birch.
- Recreational value provided by a good network of public rights of way, including the Essex Way.
- Distinctive regular network of roads and lanes which radiate from the routes of former roman roads.
- The rural character of much of the landscape which provides a setting for the Essex Way and other public rights of way, and settlements/villages.

Issues and Changes

- The condition of the hedgerows is mixed, some are poorly managed with gaps or are missing entirely.
- Historic loss of orchards to development or conversion to arable farmland.
- Poorly integrated settlement edges at Marks Tey and Copford which are exposed in a relatively open landscape.
- Potential for further expansion of settlements within and on the edge of the area, including at Stanway, Copford and Marks Tey, and pressure for new residential, commercial and infrastructural development to the north, south, south-west and west of Marks Tey.
- Pressure road widening schemes, associated with increased residential development.
- Impact on the landscape associated with the proposed National Grid Norwich to Tilbury Project. Proposed overhead power lines and pylons within the north and west of the LCA will cause a significant visual impact on the landscape if the DCO is approved.
- Potential for future solar energy developments, which may impact views and erode the agricultural character of the landscape; recent examples in

the area is at RAF Birch, Birch Solar Farm, and at Brake's Farm in the south of the LCA.

- Disturbance to landscape character as a result of noise and movement associated within the A12, A120, B1404 road corridors and development on the western edge of Colchester.
- Potential for the introduction of new visually intrusive farm buildings.
- An increase in the connectivity of the 'necklace' woodland to the south of Colchester for biodiversity, recreational and other benefits was suggested within the Colchester Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011) for Zone 6: Southern Farmland Zone. This would form a substantial wildlife corridor across the area. This may change the relatively open character of the landscape as well as longer range views available in places.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges. Ancient woodlands at Seller Wood, Potash Wood, Fan Wood, Aldhamhall Wood and Church House Wood, may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
 - Effects of climate change resulting in wetter and warmer winters, and more frequent hot and dry periods, leading to increased risk of flooding in winter and increasing the risk of drought in summer, affecting river flow rates and impacting on riparian habitats and species.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Eastthorpe Farmland Plateau LCA is to conserve and enhance the rural landscape, by increasing woodland cover, increasing the extent and quality of field boundaries and re-introducing traditional orchards. Development should be sensitively integrated into the

landscape using appropriate boundary treatments. Visually intrusive and incongruous development should be avoided, particularly in the south of the area to protect the landscape quality and tranquillity around Easthorpe.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.
- Conserve and manage areas of Ancient Woodland as important landscape, historical and nature conservation features.
- Conserve and enhance the existing traditional orchards and seek to reintroduce them more widely within the landscape.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of area away from urban influences, particularly in the south around Easthorpe and Birch Airfield.

Development Management

- Any large scale or visually intrusive development would be detrimental to the rural character of the landscape; consider opportunities for the undergrounding of any proposed power lines to avoid need for pylons with landscape features reinstated following construction.
- New larger agricultural buildings and sheds should be sensitively located, avoiding prominent and more visually open areas.
- Maintain and enhance the character of the local network of rural lands and roads. Resist unsympathetic highway improvement that would threaten their rural character.

- Ensure that new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character including the local vernacular of weatherboarding and brick (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).
- Encourage the integration of development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate tree belts, hedgerows and woodlands to reflect and reinforce rural character.

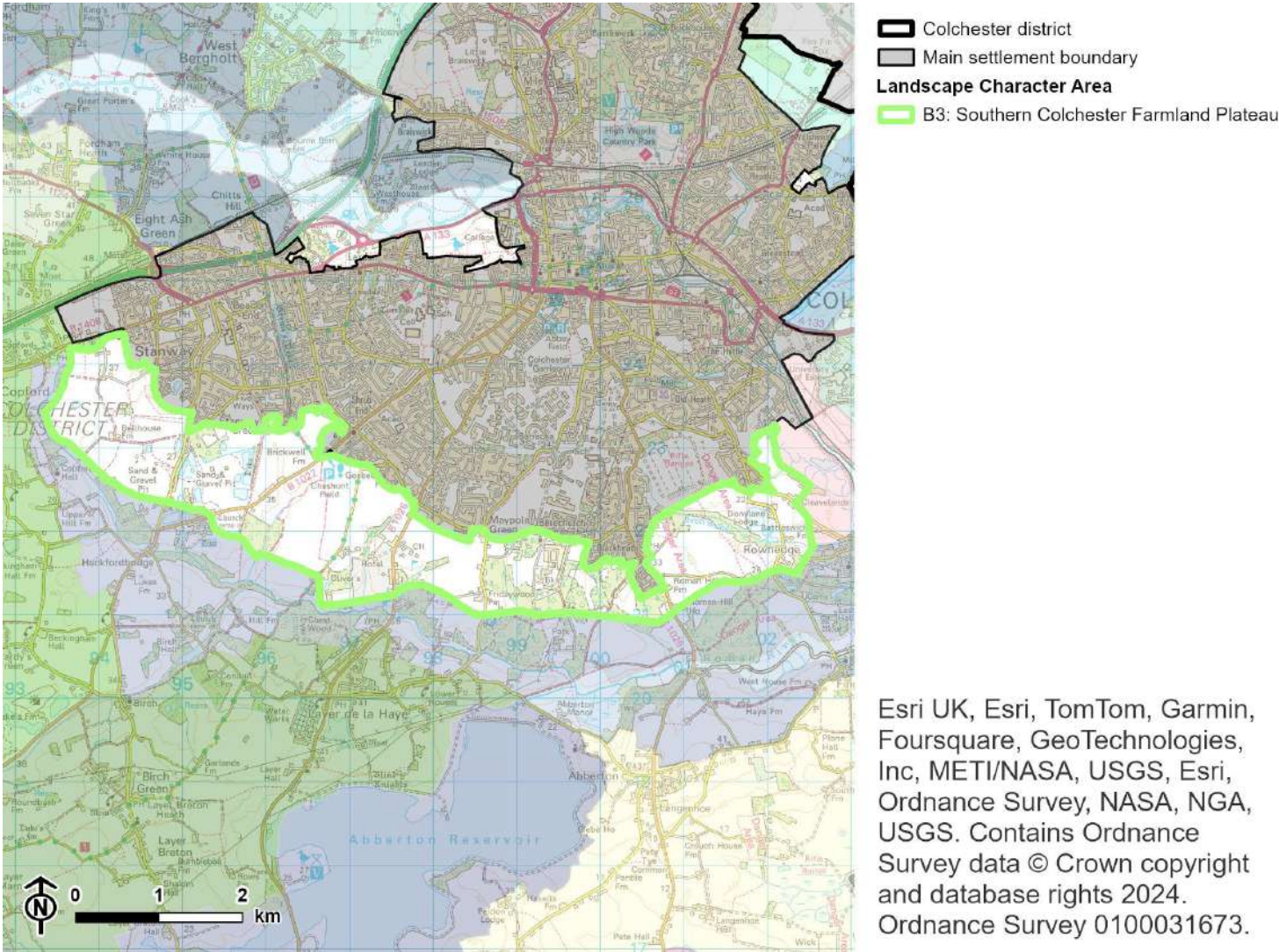
Landscape Character Area B3: Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau

Description

Location and Summary

7.94 This LCA lies to the south of Colchester and comprises a farmland plateau sloping down from the urban fringe of Colchester in the north to the Roman River Valley in the south. It is a fragmented landscape with numerous disparate land uses ranging from leisure in the west, to a large military areas in the east.

Figure 7.13: Location of LCA B3



Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating plateau, falling gradually from the urban edge of Colchester to the north towards the Roman River valley to the south.
- Predominantly arable landscape interspersed with some large areas of woodland including Ancient Woodland and more recent plantation.
- Field pattern of various sizes and shapes; boundaries are largely defined by low, unclipped, gappy hedgerows albeit with some taller hedgerows along roadsides.
- Frequent woodland belts, tree cover along watercourses and some larger woodland blocks.
- A landscape which displays rich history of inhabitation, including an Iron Age Oppida and later Roman theatre and temple at Gosbeck's, and later Medieval parkland at Berechurch Hall.
- The large area of remnant heath and Ancient Woodland at Friday Wood are distinctive landscape features.
- Crossed by a number of roads that radiate out from central Colchester.
- Good levels of public access via several public rights of way (PRoW), permissive paths, and National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 1. However, access is sometimes restricted in areas used for military training.
- A generally enclosed landscape with long distance views limited by mature woodland; some longer views in larger arable fields and/or where hedgerows missing or gappy.
- An overall rural landscape, particularly on lower-lying land to the south away from these urban influences; a peri-urban character in the west around Stanway and in the north adjoining urban edge of Colchester.

Photo 7.21: Localised undulations and longer views at Gosbeck's Archaeological Park



Photo 7.22: Remnant heath and woodland cover at Friday Wood



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.95 The LCA comprises a sedimentary bedrock geology of clay, silt, sand and gravel (Thames Group) overlain by a superficial layer of Glaciofluvial deposits of sand and gravel. The highest points on the plateau on the southern fringes of Colchester have elevations of up to approximately 40m AOD. The topography slopes down to the south towards the Roman River valley, at roughly 30m AOD. A number of streams, including Birch Brook, drain north to south into the Roman River. These have eroded incisions into the main mass of the plateau giving rise to localised undulations.. Soils within the LCA are mostly Grade 2 (very good), with some Grade 3 (good to moderate) in the west with most of the soil in the east classified as non-agricultural. The easternmost extent of the LCA forms part of the valleyside of the River Colne above Hythe Marshes (LCA D3).

7.96 The landscape is interspersed with frequent woodland blocks, many of which are identified as Priority Habitat ‘deciduous woodland’. Butchers Wood and part of Friday Wood are also identified as being Ancient Woodland. There are many Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) spread across the LCA, protecting varied habitats of acidic grassland, heathland, mature and ancient oak woodland and scattered shrub. Friday Wood, which also extends onto the Roman River valley floor (LCA A3) contains ancient oak woodland, heathland and acidic grassland and is an important part of the Roman River SSSI.

Cultural Influences

7.97 The landscape contains evidence of a rich history of inhabitation. The importance of the Colchester area as an Iron Age Oppida, and later as an important Roman centre, is evidenced in the remains of the Romano-British town of Camulodunum. These remains are protected by three Scheduled Monument designations, including the substantial Gosbecks Iron Age and Romano British remains straddling Maldon Road. This site contains the

earthwork remains of a roman temple, theatre, a stretch of roman road, evidence of field and trackways as well as an iron age dyke system. The importance of this area in Roman times is also referenced by some place names (Roman Hill Farm and Roman River to the south).

7.98 Historically the area would have been mostly heathland, as indicated by place names like Old Heath and Black Heath. The provenance of the field pattern is very varied as identified within the Essex HLC (2013), including areas of 'Pre-18th century 'irregular enclosure' followed by a later 'post 1950s boundary loss'. Berechurch Hall, (now a military training centre) is identified as 'informal medieval parkland' which is surrounded to the south by Friday Wood which contains both Ancient Woodland and '19th - 20th century plantation'. More recent changes to the landscape include military uses as at East Donyland training area in the east; .significant mineral extraction, which continues today, at Stanway Green in the west; and the introduction of horse paddocks in the vicinity of roads and urban edges.

7.99 Settlement in the area is sparse and has historically been limited to Berechurch Hall, occasional lodges, and scattered farmsteads. This is reflected in the scattering of Grade II listed farm buildings and Donyland Lodge in the east. Several roads run north to south through the area, which historically linked the higher ground to the north with the river valley to the south. This pattern is largely retained with some roads generally retaining a rural character (including Oliver's Lane, Bounstead Road and Fingringhoe Road).

7.100 The area is well covered by a network of PRow and permissive paths, including at Gosbeck's Archaeological Park, which connect the Roman River Valley (A3: Roman River Valley Floor) to the southern edge of Colchester. Access is periodically restricted in the East Donyland area when military training exercises are in operation. The area also contains a section of the NCN Route 1 which connects Layer Breton to the south, via Gosbecks Park, with Colchester to the north.

Perceptual Influences

7.101 An overall rural landscape although this is weakened to the north by the peri-urban edge of Colchester and the large sand and gravel quarry at Stanway Green. In the west of the area the sense of rurality is enhanced by the lack of settlement and major roads and the high level of woodland cover. Tranquillity and dark skies are mostly influenced by the edge of Colchester along the northern boundary of the area with tranquillity in the west being further degraded when the rifle range is in operation.

7.102 Fields are defined by low gappy hedgerows of varying thickness and many mature hedgerow trees. This, along with woodland cover, results in a sense of visual enclosure across much of the landscape, especially along roads lined on either side by hedgerows and within more well-wooded areas. However, in places where larger arable fields predominate and/or where hedges are missing or gappy there is a greater sense of openness with longer range views available. This includes within Gosbeck's Archaeological Park. Views to the south tend to be limited due to the presence of woodland along the Roman River valley.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- A diverse wooded landscape which provides a setting to the adjacent urban edge of Colchester, and a buffer between the urban area and the more rural Roman River valley to the south.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity provided by scattered habitats, including Ancient Woodland at Friday Wood and Butchers Wood; and woodland blocks and belts, scrub and grassland habitats at Birch Brook Wood, Donyland Wetlands, Black Heath, Ball Grove and at Friday Wood North. There are also areas of wood pasture and parkland at Sodoms Wood Pasture, Kingsford, and Berechurch Hall.

- Sense of time-depth and landscape interest provided by several historic features, including Iron Age and Romano-British remains, and relict parkland landscape surrounding Berechurch Hall.
- Recreational value provided by several PRow and permissive paths, particularly those at Friday Wood and at Gosbeck's Archaeological Park, which provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access between Colchester and the surrounding countryside.
- The wooded character of much of the landscape which provides a setting to public rights of way, and other recreational uses.
- Visual interest and landscape variety provided by areas of remnant heathland and ancient oak woodland at Friday Wood.
- Longer range views from more open areas of higher ground, including at Gosbeck's Archaeological Park.

Issues and Changes

- The condition of the hedgerows is mixed, some are poorly managed with gaps or are missing entirely.
- Potential pressure for further residential expansion and development of the southern fringes of Colchester which could be visually intrusive and have impacts upon landscape character.
- Pressure for road widening schemes, associated with increased residential development, which could impact the rural character.
- Potential pressure for further expansion and development of recreational complexes such as hotels and golf courses.
- An increase in equine related land uses, including post and rail subdivision of larger fields and small structures, particularly around immediately adjacent to the urban boundary.
- Pressure on areas of woodland as a result of military use.
- Increased recreational pressures along PRow and permissive paths connecting the urban area to the wider landscape.

- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges. Ancient woodlands, such as Butchers Wood and Friday Wood may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
 - Effects of climate change resulting in wetter and warmer winters, and more frequent hot and dry periods, leading to increased risk of flooding in winter and increasing the risk of drought in summer, affecting river flow rates and impacting on riparian habitats and species.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau LCA is to conserve and enhance the wooded and enclosed character of the landscape, by managing existing woodland, woodland cover and increasing the extent and quality of field boundaries. Recreational access to the landscape should be maintained and sensitively managed particularly around areas of nature conservation and archaeological value. Development should be sensitively integrated into the landscape using appropriate boundary treatments.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.
- Protect and enhance all valued habitats, including Ancient Woodland at Butchers Wood and Friday Wood, deciduous woodland, heathland and grassland, and improve linkages between them.
- Seek to expand the woodland network to enhance the character of the landscape and the setting of Colchester. Concentrate resources in the west where the woodland network is least extensive and there has been recent disturbance due to mineral extraction. Consider opportunities suggested within the Colchester Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011) for Zone 6: Southern Farmland Zone (Project 5.1) for increasing the connectivity of the 'necklace' of woodland to the south of Colchester.
- Maintain and Enhance longer range views from more open higher ground, particularly around Gosbeck's Archaeological Park.
- Protect and manage the Iron Age and Roman remains at Gosbeck's and Cheshunt Field, while seeking to maintain and improve interpretation of this important site.
- Protect and manage historic parkland pasture at Berechurch Hall to preserve the sense of time-depth and historic character.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of lower-lying areas away from urban influences along the southern boundary of the area.

Development Management

- Large scale or visually intrusive development would alter the overall rural character of the landscape, and should be avoided where possible, particularly in the south.
- Resist ribbon development along the numerous roads radiating from Colchester, particularly those that retain a rural character (including Oliver's Lane, Bounstead Road and Fingringhoe Road).
- Encourage the integration of development into the landscape through the use of locally characteristic tree belts and woodlands to reinforce wooded and enclosed character.
- Ensure that any development respects the setting of important heritage features and sites.
- Retain the settlement pattern of dispersed farmsteads. Conserve the local distinctiveness of historic buildings and their setting.
- Maintain and enhance the rural character of roads. Resist unsympathetic highway improvement that would threaten their rural character.
- Seek to reduce lighting impacts and avoid any further reduction in tranquillity from the urban edge of Colchester in the north.

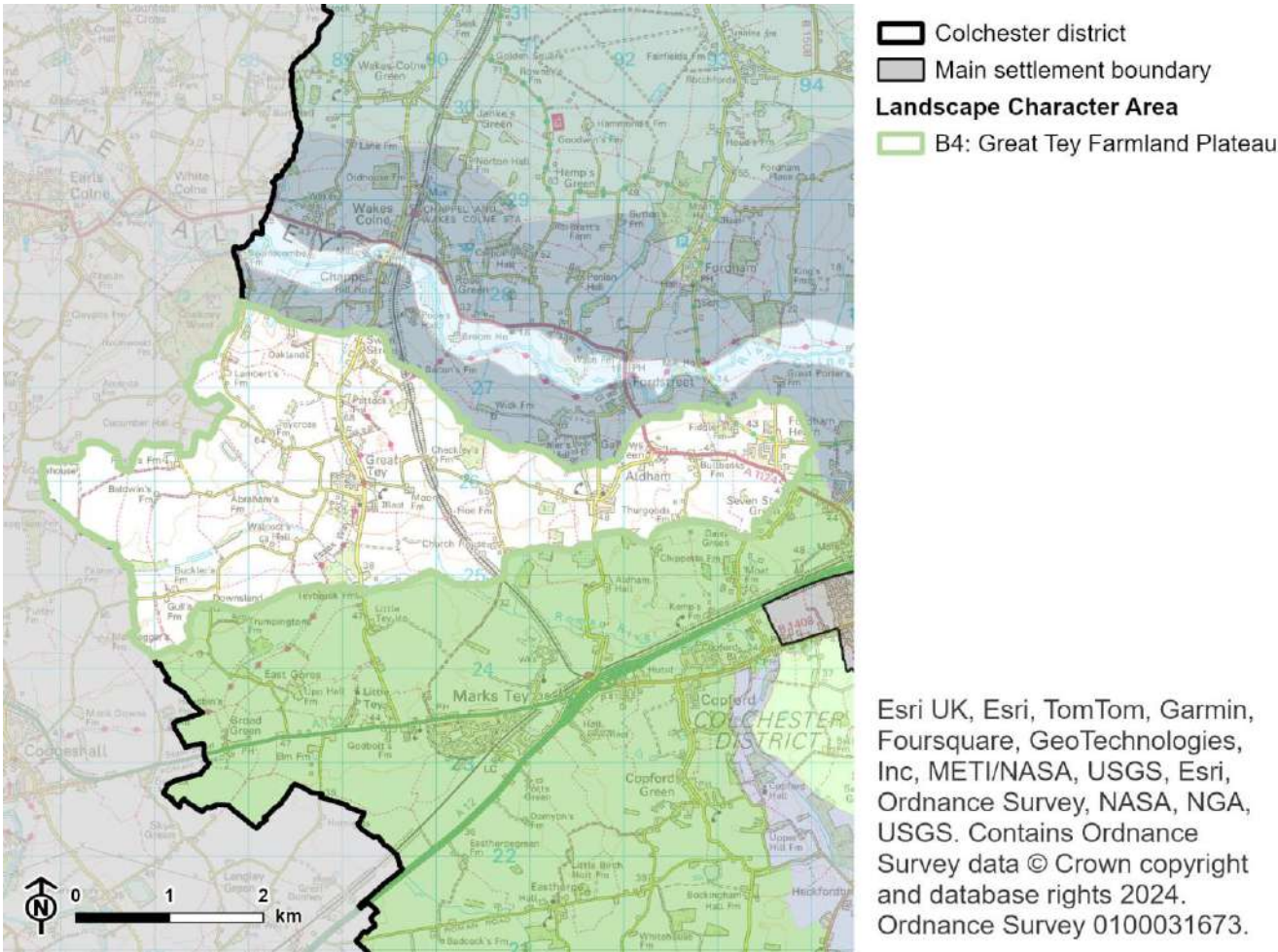
Landscape Character Area B4: Great Tey Farmland Plateau

Description

Location and Summary

7.103 This LCA is located in the west of the district and comprises a gently undulating plateau between the shallow valley of the Roman River Valley in the south of the LCA, and the edge of the River Colne valley to the north (LCA A5). It is a predominantly arable landscape, featuring a mix of small to medium sized fields in the east, transitioning to larger fields on the higher ground in the west.

Figure 7.14: Location of LCA B4



Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating plateau forming a watershed between the Roman River in the south and the River Colne in the north.
- Predominantly arable landscape organised into an irregular field pattern, with larger fields in the more elevated areas to the west, and small scale paddocks concentrated around villages.
- Field boundaries are largely defined by low-trimmed, dense hedgerows with frequent mature hedgerow trees; some boundary loss evident in places.
- Scattered woodland cover consisting of narrow tree belts, strips of riparian vegetation along watercourses, small traditional orchards and a few woodland blocks, including three areas of Ancient Woodland.
- A network of ditches and streams feeding either the Roman River and River Colne, as well as numerous ponds and moats.
- Good levels of public access via multiple public rights of way (PRoW), including the Essex Way long distance path and National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 13.
- Historic settlement pattern of dispersed small villages, hamlets and farmsteads on local lanes is largely retained, albeit with some modern development around settlements and ribbon development along roads.
- A generally open landscape with views available across surrounding arable fields; some localised sense of visual enclosure near woodland and along narrow lanes.
- An overriding rural character albeit with influence of modern development at the edges of settlements and from modern agricultural buildings.

Photo 7.23: Open views across arable fields punctuated by occasional woodland cover



Photo 7.24: Dense hedgerow lining winding lane between Great Tey and Aldham



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.104 The LCA comprises a sedimentary bedrock geology of clay, silt, sand and gravel (Thames Group), the majority of which is overlain by further superficial glacial till deposits of clay, sand and gravel. This gives rise to a gently undulating plateau landform, with elevations ranging from around 60m above ordnance datum (AOD) in the west at the plateau summit, to around 40m AOD in the north and south near the river valleys. There is more locally varied topography in the north and south, where the Roman River (in the south) and stream tributaries of the River Colne (in the north) have eroded incisions into the plateau. The lower reaches of the Roman River fall within Flood Zones 2 and 3. Soils within the LCA are largely Grade 2 (very good) and are primarily under arable cultivation with some localised fruit production.

7.105 Fields are generally defined by low-trimmed, dense hedgerows with frequent mature hedgerow trees, or by low grass banks. Occasional woodland blocks and strips punctuate the farmland, with more contiguous tree cover along the course of the Roman River in the south and lining the 'Marks Tey to Wakes Colne' railway line running north to south. Hoe Wood and Fiddlers Wood in the north, and the smaller Aldhamhall Wood in the south are identified as Ancient woodland and designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). There are some small areas of Priority Habitat 'traditional orchards' at Swan Street, Walcott's Farm, Church Ho Farm and on Tey Road to the west of Aldham. In addition to the Roman River and small tributaries of the River Colne in the north, aquatic habitats include the remains of moats and frequent small ponds on field margins.

Cultural Influences

7.106 This is a historic farming area, with evidence of agricultural in the Romano-British period in the form of the remains of a Roman Villa (Scheduled

Monument) situated on the northern valleyside of the Roman River, to the south of Great Tey. The later Medieval landscape pattern historic hamlets and farmsteads connected by a network of winding lanes and PRow. While the Essex HLC (2013) identifies much of the landscape as being 'pre-18th century irregular enclosure', many elsewhere there is evidence of 'post 1950 boundary loss' where fields have been merged during the last century to aid modern farming practices. Generally, the field pattern today is medium scale, with the largest fields located on the most elevated areas of the plateau. The field pattern is more intricate around settlements, where there is a concentration of small-scale pasture and paddocks.

7.107 The principal settlements within the landscape are the nucleated villages of Great Tey and , Aldham, the expanded hamlet of Eight Ash Green to the east and the hamlet of Swan Street to the north-west. The historic core of Great Tey is designated as a conservation area, and contains a cluster of listed buildings including the grade I St Barnabas Church, which is a Norman Church with Anglo-Saxon elements. The local vernacular is a mix of traditional black weatherboarded barns and more modern brick-built farm buildings and farmsteads.

7.108 There is a comprehensive network of PRow across the area, particularly surrounding the village of Great Tey where paths radiate from St Barnabas Church. These include the Essex Way long distance path which links Great Tey to Fordstreet in the east (within LCA A4) and to Coggeshall to the south-west (within Braintree District). NCN Route 13 also passes through the area in the east to the north of the A1124. The Ancient Woodland at Hoe Wood is also designated as Open Access Land providing further access to the landscape in the area.

Perceptual Influences

7.109 This is a predominantly farmed landscape with a strong sense of tranquillity and rurality as reflected by CPRE tranquillity mapping. This prevailing character is weakened locally by the influence of the relatively busy A1124 and the railway line which dissects the LCA running north to south. The

modern, suburban style development at Eight Ash Green in the east has further eroded rural character.

7.110 There is a sense of visual openness across much of the landscape, particularly where hedgerow loss has occurred. Some longer-range views are available across surrounding fields, such as from parts of Moor Road and Brook Road. There are also some framed views over the Roman River valley in the south-east and River Colne valley to the north.. views are more limited where there are more well-established hedgerow field boundaries with many mature hedgerow trees or around belts of woodland such as along the Roman River.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- The Roman River and a series of small scale streams and ponds which provide topographical variety and visual interest within the farmed landscape.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity are provided by the woodland network including Hoe Wood, Fiddlers Wood and Aldhamhall Wood Ancient Woodland and small areas of traditional orchard.
- Sense of time-depth and landscape interest provided by historic settlement pattern and several historic features, including Great Tey Conservation Area and numerous listed buildings such as the Grade I St Barnabas Church.
- Distinctive winding network of roads and lanes which link the various areas of settlement following old irregular field boundaries.
- Recreational value provided by several PRoW, including the Essex Way long distance path and NCN Route 13, which provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access between settlements and the surrounding countryside.

- The rural character of much of the landscape which provides a setting for the Essex Way and other PRoW, and settlements/villages.
- Sense of tranquillity and remoteness away from settlements and roads, heightened by the areas of woodland cover.

Issues and Changes

- The condition of the hedgerows is mixed, some are poorly managed with gaps or are missing entirely.
- Recent trends for change include vegetable crops under plastic and polytunnels.
- An increase in equine related land uses, including post and rail subdivision of larger fields and small structures, particularly around areas of settlement and along main roads.
- Potential for a decline of water quality in the Roman River, streams and scattered ponds from pesticide run-off from intensive arable farming.
- Historic loss of orchards to development or conversion to arable farmland.
- Poorly integrated settlement edges (for example the expansion of Eight Ash Green), which are exposed in the relatively open landscape.
- Potential for further expansion of settlements within and on the edge of the area, including Great Tey, Aldham, Eight Ash Green and Marks Tey.
- Potential ribbon development along Chappel Road which may erode the distinct identities of Great Tey and Swan Street.
- Pressure for road widening schemes, associated with increased residential development.
- Potential for future solar energy developments, which may impact views and erode the agricultural character of the landscape; a recent example in the adjacent LCA to the south (LCA B2) is at RAF Birch and Brake's Farm.
- Impact on the landscape associated with the proposed National Grid Norwich to Tilbury Project. Proposed overhead power lines and pylons

within the east of the LCA will cause a significant visual impact on the landscape if the DCO is approved.

- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges. Ancient woodlands at Fiddlers Wood, Hoe Wood and Aldhamhall Wood may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
 - Effects of climate change resulting in wetter and warmer winters, and more frequent hot and dry periods, leading to increased risk of flooding in winter and increasing the risk of drought in summer, affecting the Roman River flow rates and impacting on riparian habitats and species.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Great Tey Farmland Plateau LCA is to conserve and enhance the rural landscape, by increasing woodland cover, increasing the extent and quality of field boundaries and re-introducing traditional orchards. Development should be sensitively integrated into the landscape using appropriate boundary treatments. Visually intrusive and incongruous development should be avoided to protect the landscape quality and tranquillity around Great Tey.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.
- Conserve and manage areas of Ancient Woodland as important landscape, historical and nature conservation features.
- Conserve and enhance the existing traditional orchards and seek to reintroduce them more widely within the landscape.
- Preserve remaining pattern of pre-18th century irregular enclosures, preventing further field agglomeration to retain the sense of time-depth and historic character.
- Monitor and manage agricultural practices to minimise their impact on water quality and habitat health, particularly by controlling pesticide and fertiliser runoff.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of area away from settlements and roads.

Development Management

- Any large scale or visually intrusive development would be detrimental to the rural character of the landscape; consider opportunities for the undergrounding of any proposed power lines to avoid need for pylons with landscape features reinstated following construction.
- New larger agricultural buildings and sheds should be sensitively located, avoiding prominent and more visually open areas.
- Conserve the local distinctiveness of historic buildings and their rural setting.

- Maintain and enhance the character of the local network of rural lanes and roads. Resist unsympathetic highway improvement that would threaten their rural character.
- Ensure that new development responds to historic settlement pattern, particularly around the historic centre of Great Tey, and uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character including the local vernacular of weatherboarding and brick (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).
- Encourage the integration of development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate tree belts, hedgerows and woodland to reflect and reinforce rural character.
- Seek to reduce lighting impacts and avoid any further reduction in tranquillity to the south.

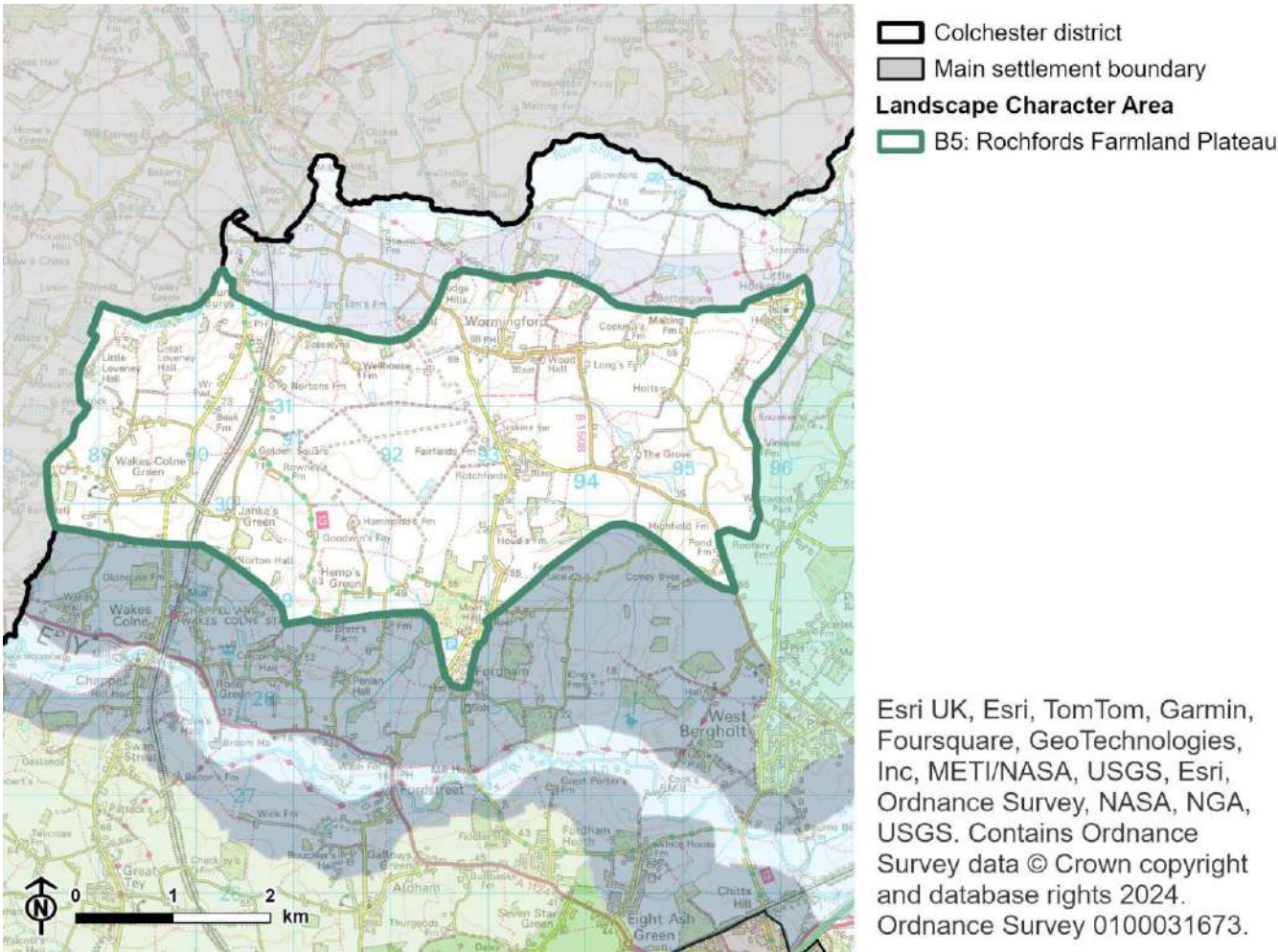
Landscape Character Area B5: Rochfords Farmland Plateau

Description

Location and Summary

7.111 This LCA is located in the north-west of the district between the Colne Valley to the south and the Stour valley to the north. The north-east of the area lies within the Dedham Vale National Landscape (formerly an AONB). It comprises an elevated, open predominantly arable plateau featuring an historic settlement pattern of scattered villages, hamlets and farmsteads. The former Second World War airfield at Wormingford occupies much of the centre of the LCA and increases the scale of the landscape by introducing large open fields onto the highest part of the plateau.

Figure 7.15: Location of LCA B5



Key Characteristics

- Undulating plateau forming a watershed between the River Stour and its tributary Cambridge Brook to the north and north-west, and the Colne River to the south.
- Predominantly arable landscape with a medium to large-scale, regular field pattern becoming smaller and more irregular around settlements.
- Field boundaries are predominantly defined by low hedgerows with occasional mature hedgerow trees; in some areas hedgerows are gappy or boundaries are entirely open.
- The arable farmland is interspersed with other locally distinctive habitats, including scattered deciduous woodland and traditional orchards, wetland habitats on lower ground and lowland dry acid grassland at Lodge Hills.
- The historic settlement pattern of small villages, hamlets and scattered farmsteads linked by a network of winding lanes is largely retained.
- Good levels of public access via a network of public rights of way (PRoW) and roads; access more restricted within the former airfield.
- A general sense of openness with views available across surrounding fields; a sense of exposure in the open expanse of the former Second World War airfield at Wormingford.
- Longer-range views available in places from the plateau edge across the Cole Valley to the south and Stour Valley to the north.
- An overall rural landscape, with few detracting features; some localised influences which reduce the sense of tranquillity, in particular development along Fordham Road in the east.

Photo 7.25: A sense of visual exposure within the former Second World War airfield at Wormingford



Photo 7.26: Views across arable fields towards a generally treed horizon



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.112 The majority of the LCA comprises a sedimentary bedrock geology of clay, silt, sand and gravel (Thames Group) overlain by further superficial clay, sand and gravel deposits. This gives rise to an undulating plateau landform, highest in the west at Wakes Colne Green where it reaches 70m above ordnance datum (AOD) and lowest in the east around The Grove at 40m AOD. The north and south a number of spring-fed brooks have eroded minor valleys which, along with a steep transition from the plateau to the adjacent river valleys, creates a more varied landform. The majority of the soils in the LCA are Grade 2 (very good) with a band of Grade 3 (good to moderate) running east to west along the slopes of the Stour River Valley to the north.

7.113 The area is predominantly arable interspersed with some areas of pasture on lower ground. Field boundaries are defined by low gappy hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees and steep sided drainage ditches. The farmland is interspersed with several small woodland blocks, including within the minor valleys to the north and south, many of which are identified as Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland'. There are also some areas of Priority Habitat 'traditional orchard', the largest being Sergeants Orchard, and areas of 'lowland fen' along Cambridge Brook to the north-west. There are several Local wildlife Sites (LWS) scattered across the area protecting the various habitats. This includes the fen and grassland habitat wetland at Cambridge Brook Marsh, lowland dry acid grassland at Lodge Hills, aldercar at Wormingford, and diverse habitats of trees and grassland in the churchyards at Fordham and Wormingford.

Cultural Influences

7.114 The Essex HLC (2013) indicates that much of the fieldscape comprises 'pre-18th century irregular enclosure' which is probably of medieval origin or possibly older. However, the vast majority of this shows signs of 'Post 1950's

boundary loss' with fields having been reorganised and merged to facilitate agricultural intensification in the 20th century. Additionally, in the centre of the area the original field pattern has been heavily disrupted by the construction of the Second World War airfield at Wormingford. As a result, the field pattern today is predominantly medium to large-scale, with some surviving smaller irregular field boundaries around settlements and farmsteads.

7.115 Historically the settlement pattern was one of dispersed church/hall complexes, manors, farmsteads and hamlets. This pattern largely retained in the landscape today, although there has been some ribbon development on the Fordham Road between Fordham and Wormingford. The area features numerous scattered listed buildings, which are predominantly halls, farmhouses and weather boarded barns. Other notable listed buildings include the Grade I Church of St Andrew in Wormingford, which dates from the Norman period, and late Medieval moats at Little Loveney Hall in the west and Wood Hall at Wormingford. Later periods are represented by the World War airfield and by pillboxes which adjacent to the Sudbury Branch line in the west.

7.116 The area is traversed by a network of winding lanes, with a predominant north to south orientation reflecting historic links between the plateau and the adjacent river valleys. The landscape features an extensive network PRow connecting the scattered farmsteads and hamlets. Access to the landscape is also possible via the network of small lanes and tracks. National Cycle Route (NCN) Route 13 passes through the area following the route of the local lane network and there is permissive access to the Fordham Hall Estate in the south.

Perceptual Influences

7.117 An overall rural landscape, with few detracting features. However, there are some localised influences which reduce the sense of tranquillity including the Sudbury Branch line in the west and development in the east including ribbon development along Fordham Road and light industrial development at Wormingford Airfield. This is reflected in CPRE tranquillity and dark skies mapping.

7.118 The majority of the landscape is made up of fields defined by low hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees. This allows views across fields hedgerows visually coalescing to form a treed horizon. However, in some areas hedgerows are gappy or boundaries are entirely open. This results in a stronger sense of visual openness with some longer-range views available. There are also some longer range views available from the plateau edge across the adjacent lower-lying river valleys. A notable example is the panoramic view across the Stour Valley from Lodge Hills near Wormingford in the north. The former Second World War airfield at Wormingford also has a dominant influence on the landscape, with large open fields on the highest part of the plateau giving rise to a sense of exposure.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- The north-east corner of the LCA lies within the Dedham Vale National Landscape, and the remainder of the LCA forms the immediate setting of this designation. The north of the LCA exhibits the following special qualities of the nationally designated landscape: gentle valley sides with scattered woodlands; remains mostly free of incongruous development and retains a rural charm and tranquillity; and a predominantly open character, affording long distance views over the shallow valleys.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity is provided by variety of habitats, including deciduous woodland; traditional orchards, most notably at Sergeants Orchard; fen and grassland habitat at Cambridge Brook Marsh; lowland dry acid grassland at Lodge Hills; aldercar at Wormingford; and diverse tree and grassland habitats at Wormingford and Fordham churchyards.
- Sense of time-depth and historic character provided by the surviving historic settlement pattern, with more recent history in the Second World War pillboxes near the railway line in the west and Wormingford Airfield.

- Recreational value is provided by the extensive network of PRoW and winding lanes, and by NCN Route 13, which provide green infrastructure connection between settlements.
- The rural character of much of the landscape which provides a setting to PRoW, NCN 13 and settlements/villages.
- Sense of visual openness, particularly around the airfield.
- Longer-range views from the plateau edge across the adjacent lower-lying river valleys, including panoramic view across the Stour Valley from Lodge Hills.

Issues and Changes

- The condition of the hedgerows is mixed, some are poorly managed with gaps or are missing entirely.
- Historic loss of orchards to development or conversion to arable farmland.
- An increase in equine related land uses, including post and rail subdivision of larger fields and small structures, particularly around areas of settlement (for example to the west of Middle Green) and along main roads.
- Potential for further expansion of settlements within and on the edge of the area, including Fordham and Lower Green.
- Potential for solar energy developments, particularly in the open area of the former airfield, which may impact views and erode the agricultural character of the landscape; recent examples in the area are at Boxted Airfield (LCA B7) to the east and at RAF Birch (LCA B2) to the south.
- An increase in tree planting was suggested within the Colchester Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011) for Zone 2: Northern Farmland Zone. Project 2.2 'Woodland Enhancement Zone' suggested that existing woodlands will be enhanced and new woodlands created throughout the zone and access improved to them. This may change the relatively open character of the landscape as well as longer range views available in places.

- Potential for the introduction of new visually intrusive farm buildings; development at the northern edge of the plateau may be visually intrusive within views from the adjacent Stour River Valley Floor LCA which lies within the Dedham Vale National Landscape.
- The impact on the landscape of the associated with the proposed Norwich to Tilbury Project. Proposed overhead power lines and pylons within the south-east of the LCA and proposed National Grid Cable Sealing End (CSE) compound west of Crabtree Lane in the east will cause a significant visual impact on the landscape if the DCO is approved.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
 - Effects of climate change resulting in wetter and warmer winters, and more frequent hot and dry periods, leading to increased risk of flooding in winter and increasing the risk of drought in summer, affecting river flow rates and impacting on riparian habitats and species.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Rochfords Farmland Plateau LCA is to conserve and enhance the rural landscape, by increasing woodland cover, increasing the extent and quality of field boundaries and re-introducing traditional orchards. The variety of natural habitats should be conserved and enhanced, seeking opportunities to increase and connect these. Development should be sensitively integrated into the landscape using appropriate boundary treatments. Visually intrusive and incongruous development should be avoided, particularly in the north-east of the area to protect the landscape quality and tranquillity of the Dedham Vale National Landscape.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Ensure that relevant special characteristics and qualities of the Dedham Vale National Landscape are conserved and enhanced, having regard for the aims set out in the current Management Plan.
- Enhance and promote existing longer-range views from the plateau edge across adjacent river valleys, including the Stour River Valley to the north.
- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.
- Protect and enhance valued habitats, including deciduous woodland, traditional orchards, fen, aldercar and grassland habitats, and improve linkages between them.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of area away from urban influences, particularly in the north-east within and close to the Dedham Vale National Landscape.

Development Management

- Avoid visually intrusive and incongruous development within the area, particularly in the north-east within and adjacent to the Dedham Vale National Landscape.
- Any large scale or visually intrusive development would be detrimental to the open rural character of the landscape; consider opportunities for the undergrounding of any proposed power lines to avoid need for pylons and CSE compounds, with landscape features reinstated following construction.

- Retain the settlement pattern of dispersed church/hall complexes, manors, farmsteads and hamlets. Conserve the local distinctiveness of historic buildings and their rural setting.
- Ensure that new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character including the local vernacular of weatherboarding (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).
- Encourage the integration of development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate hedgerows and woodlands to reflect and reinforce rural character.
- Seek to reduce lighting impacts and avoid any further reduction in tranquillity; for areas to the north-east refer to the Lighting Design Guide for the Dedham Vale National Landscape (July 2023).

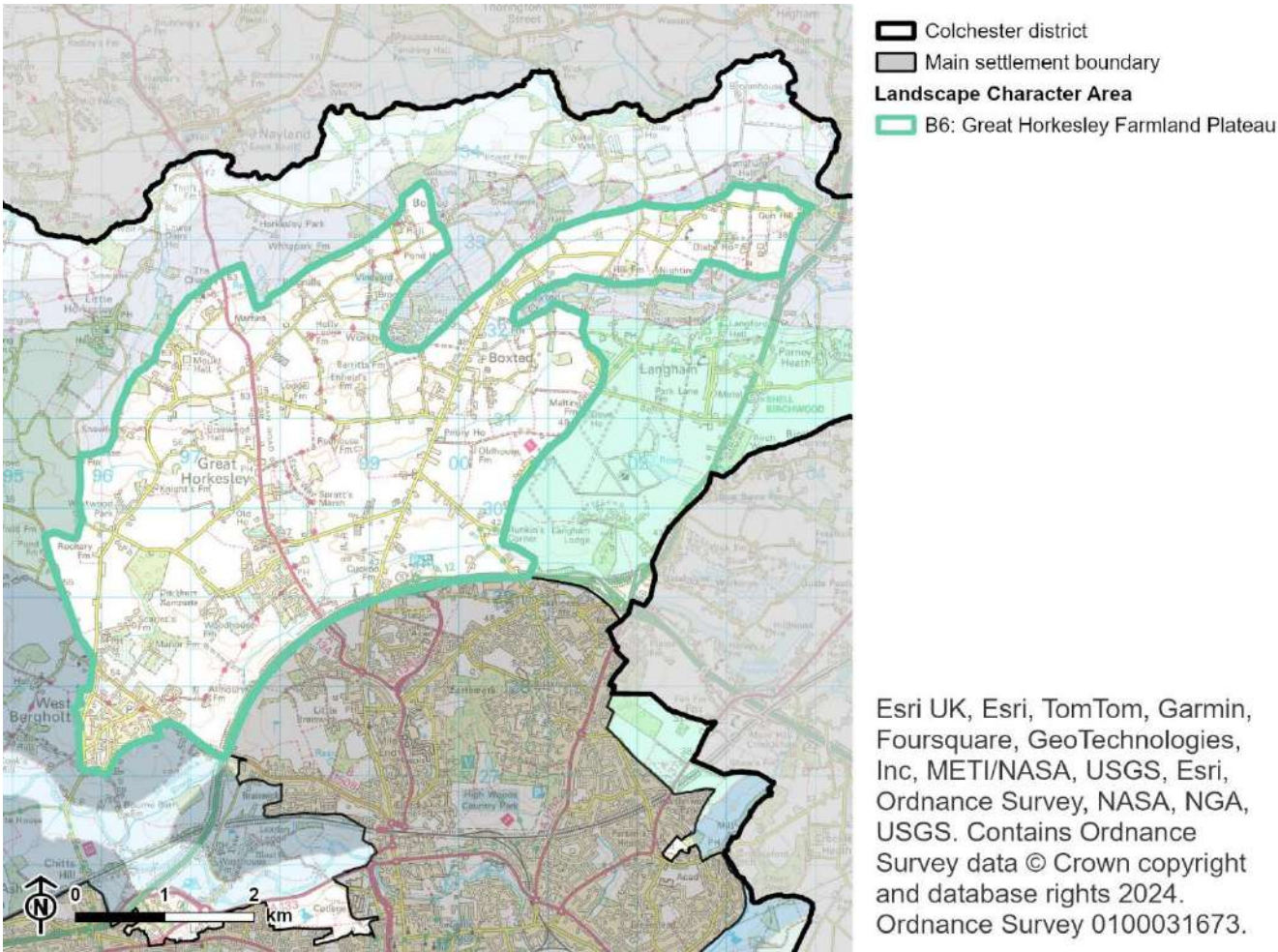
Landscape Character Area B6: Great Horkesley Farmland Plateau

Description

Location and Summary

7.119 This LCA is located to the north of Colchester and comprises a gently undulating plateau lying between the valleys of the Colne River to the south and River Stour to the north. Land to the north lies partly within the Dedham Vale National Landscape (formerly an AONB). It is a predominantly arable landscape featuring a pattern of medium to large-scale regular fields interspersed with occasional small woodland blocks, tree belts and orchards.

Figure 7.16: Location of LCA B6



Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating plateau forming a watershed between the River Stour to the north and Colne River to the south.
- Predominantly arable landscape organised into a regular pattern of medium to large scale fields of parliamentary enclosure origin with later amalgamations; some smaller scale field pattern in places.
- Field boundaries are largely defined by low trimmed hedgerows with occasional mature hedgerow trees.
- Scattered woodland and tree belts and tree cover along watercourses; poplar belts defining field boundaries are a striking features in the landscape.
- Large area of orchards in close proximity to Great Horkesley and West Bergholt are distinctive landscape features.
- Traversed by a regular network of roads and lanes radiating from two main routes – The Causeway (A134) and Straight Road/Boxted Road – which connect with the northern edge of Colchester.
- Good levels of public access via several public rights of way (PRoW), including the Essex Way long distance path.
- Historic settlement pattern of dispersed small villages, hamlets and farmsteads along lanes is largely retained although with some modern development around settlements and ribbon development along roads.
- A generally open landscape with occasional long distance framed views across the Stour Valley slopes to the north; some localised sense of visual enclosure near woodland and tree belts.
- An overriding rural character albeit with influence of modern development and adjoining urban area of Colchester and A14 to the south.

Photo 7.27: Arable farmland with scattered woodlands



Photo 7.28: Poplar belts defining field boundaries



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.120 The majority of the LCA comprises a sedimentary bedrock geology of clay, silt, sand and gravel (Thames Group) overlain by further superficial clay, silt, sand and gravel deposits. This gives rise to a gently undulating landform with elevations ranging from approximately 40m above ordnance datum (AOD) to 55m AOD. The area comprises part of a plateau of higher ground forming a watershed between the River Stour to the north and Colne River to the south. It features several small watercourses, including Salary Brook in the south-east, Black Brook and St Botolph's Brook in the south-west, and Black Brook in the north-west. The associated small-scale valleys result in a locally more undulating landform. Black Brook and St Botolph's Brook and their associated floodplain to the south-west are identified as falling within Flood Zone 2 and 3. Soils are almost entirely Grade 2 (very good) which are primarily under arable cultivation and support a mix of crops.

7.121 Fields are generally defined by low trimmed hedgerow or grass banks with occasional mature hedgerow trees. In some places field boundaries are defined by poplars which create striking features in the landscape. Fields are also interspersed with several scattered woodland blocks and tree belts and there are local concentrations of woodland cover along the watercourses. Much of this is identified as Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland' and Pitchbury Woods in the south-west is identified as being Ancient Woodland. There are several scattered Priority Habitat 'traditional orchards' across the landscape, often associated with dispersed old farmhouses and buildings, and larger orchards in the vicinity of Great Horkesley and West Bergholt. There are several Local Wildlife Sites designated across the landscape which predominantly cover areas of woodland. However, they also protect areas of grassland habitat at Langham Road, relict acidic grassland at Great Horkesley Churchyard, lowland heathland at West Bergholt Heath, and an extensive mosaic of habitats along the Black Brook.

Cultural Influences

7.122 Historically the area was characterised by large tracts of heathland used for rough pasture. These areas were enclosed in the early 19th century with a resulting parliamentary enclosure pattern of regular field boundaries and straight or angular roads characterising much of the landscape today. Whilst now largely an arable landscape, place names such as Horkesley Heath and Boxted Heath and relict areas of heath (for example at West Bergholt) indicate the former presence of heathland. The majority of the landscape is identified within the Essex HLC (2013) as being ‘18th – 19th century enclosure’, which represent parliamentary enclosure; and ‘20th century agriculture’, which are the result of later reorganisation of the landscape into larger fields as a result of agricultural intensification. The field pattern today is predominantly one of medium and large-scale enclosure albeit with a smaller scale field pattern evident to the east of Great Horkesley and along Straight Road to the south of Boxted Cross.

7.123 Settlement within the area is largely concentrated on the higher plateau, and historically comprised dispersed settlement of church/hall complexes, manors, farms, cottages and hamlets. This pattern is still largely evident today, particularly to the north of the area, although also now features the larger expanded settlements of Great Horkesley, Horkesley Heath and West Bergholt. Ribbon development has also been gradually introduced along roads during the 20th century, particularly on Straight Road and Langham Road and Horkesley Road to the south. The local vernacular predominantly comprises weatherboarding and brick.

7.124 The historic settlement pattern is also reflected by the presence of numerous Listed Buildings, the majority of which comprise Grade II listed farmhouses and other agricultural buildings associated with the later 19th century enclosure of the landscape. However, earlier periods of human activity are also evident within the area. This includes a Scheduled Monument to the south of Pitchbury Wood, protecting an Iron Age hillfort known as ‘Pitchbury Ramparts’; the route of a Roman road between Colchester and Nayland (Suffolk) running through Great Horkesley; visible architectural remains from the

medieval and post-medieval periods, including a Grade II* listed 15th century chapel and Grade II* listed 14th century house at Great Horkesley. There are also some areas of remnant former parkland, including at Westwood House, Old House and Langham Hall.

7.125 The landscape features several PRow including the Essex Way long distance path which passes through the area roughly south-west to north-east passing through the settlements of West Bergholt, Great Horkesley/Horkesley Heath and Boxted. Access to the landscape is also possible via a network of several small lanes and tracks; these are often angular in course, following field boundaries.

Perceptual Influences

7.126 An overall rural landscape, although this is weakened to the south in proximity to the northern edge of Colchester and the busy A14. Rural character is also influenced in the vicinity of modern development on the edge of Great Horkesley, Boxted Cross, Horkesley Heath and West Bergholt, and by busy roads including The Causeway (A134) and Straight Road/Boxted Road. The roads also feature ribbon development, particularly concentrated along Straight Road/Boxted Road to the east, which further erodes a sense of rurality and tranquillity. This is also reflected in greater level of tranquillity and dark skies to the north.

7.127 Fields are defined predominantly by low hedgerows which are gappy in places but with occasional hedgerow trees. This results in a sense of visual openness, with some longer range views available across fields. There are localised areas of greater visual enclosure, particularly around woodlands, poplar belts and orchards. Views from roads are often limited by hedgerow vegetation lining the routes, although views open up in places where hedgerows are missing. To the north there are occasional long distance framed views across the Stour Valley (for example from the junction of Dedham Road and Old Mill Road).

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- The north of the LCA lies partly within, and forms the immediate setting to the south, of the Dedham Vale National Landscape and demonstrates the following special qualities of the nationally designated landscape: gentle valley sides with scattered woodlands; remains mostly free of incongruous development and retains a rural charm and tranquillity; and a predominantly open character, affording long distance views over the shallow valleys.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity is provided by scattered habitats, including Ancient Woodland at Pitchbury Wood, woodland blocks and belts, grassland habitats at Langham Road and Great Horkesley Churchyard, and an extensive mosaic of habitats along the Black Brook which provides a valuable wildlife corridor.
- Sense of time-depth and landscape interest provided by historic settlement pattern and several historic features, including Listed Buildings, the Iron Age Pitchbury Ramparts Scheduled Monument, the route of a Roman Road, and remnant parklands.
- Recreational value provided by several PRoW, including the Essex Way long distance path, which provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access between settlements and the surrounding countryside.
- Distinctive angular network of roads and lanes which link the various areas of settlement and the northern edge of Colchester.
- The rural character of much of the landscape which provides a setting for the Essex Way and other PRoW, and settlements/villages.
- Visual interest and landscape variety provided by poplar belts and remnant orchards.

- Sense of visual openness; areas to the north are also inter-visible from parts the adjacent Stour River Valley Floor LCA which lies within the Dedham Vale National Landscape.

Issues and Changes

- The condition of the hedgerows is mixed, some are poorly managed with gaps or are missing entirely.
- Recent trends for change include the expansion of vegetable crops under plastic and polytunnels and introduction of vineyards (for example Dedham Vale Vineyard at Carter's Farm).
- An increase in equine related land uses, including post and rail subdivision of larger fields and small structures, particularly around areas of settlement and along main roads.
- Historic loss of orchards to development or conversion to arable farmland.
- Poorly integrated settlement edges (for example at Boxted Cross), which are exposed in the relatively open landscape.
- Potential for further expansion of settlements within and on the edge of the area, including Boxted Cross, Great Horkesley, Horkesley Heath, West Bergholt, and the northern edge of Colchester.
- Impact on the landscape associated with the proposed National Grid Norwich to Tilbury Project. Proposed overhead power lines and pylons and proposed Cable Sealing End (CSE) compound within the south-east of the LCA will cause a significant visual impact on the landscape, and proposed underground cabling to the west and north-east of the LCA will disturb the landscape structure due to the removal of hedgerows if the DCO is approved.
- Potential for future solar energy developments, which may impact views and erode the agricultural character of the landscape; a recent example in the area is at RAF Boxted to the east (located within LCA B7).
- Pressure road widening schemes, associated with increased residential development.

- Potential for the introduction of new visually intrusive farm buildings; development at the northern edge of the plateau may be visually intrusive within views from the adjacent Stour River Valley Floor LCA which lies within the Dedham Vale National Landscape.
- Disturbance to landscape character as a result of noise and movement associated within the main A12 road corridor and development on the northern edge of Colchester.
- An increase in tree planting was suggested within the Colchester Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011) for Zone 2: Northern Farmland Zone. Project 2.2 'Woodland Enhancement Zone' suggested that existing woodlands will be enhanced and new woodlands created throughout the zone and access improved to them. This may change the existing relatively open character of the landscape as well as longer range views available in places.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges. Ancient woodlands, such as Pitchbury Wood, may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
 - Effects of climate change resulting in wetter and warmer winters, and more frequent hot and dry periods, leading to increased risk of flooding in winter and increasing the risk of drought in summer, affecting river flow rates and impacting on riparian habitats and species.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Great Horkesley Farmland Plateau LCA is to conserve and enhance the rural landscape, by increasing woodland cover, increasing the extent and quality of field boundaries and re-introducing traditional orchards. Development should be sensitively integrated into the

landscape using appropriate boundary treatments. Visually intrusive and incongruous development should be avoided, particularly in the north of the area to protect the landscape quality and tranquillity of the Dedham Vale National Landscape.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Ensure that relevant special characteristics and qualities of the Dedham Vale National Landscape are conserved and enhanced, having regard for the aims set out in the current Management Plan.
- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.
- Protect and enhance valued habitats, including Pitchbury Wood Ancient Woodland, deciduous woodland and traditional orchards, heathland and grassland priority habitats, and improve linkages between them.
- Conserve and enhance the existing traditional orchards and seek to reintroduce them more widely within the landscape.
- Enhance and promote existing panoramic and framed views into the Stour River Valley corridor to the north of the character area.
- Protect and manage Pitchbury Ramparts Scheduled Monument, various listed buildings and undesignated remnant parklands to preserve the sense of time-depth and historic character.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of areas away from urban influences, particularly in the north within and close to the Dedham Vale National Landscape.

Development Management

- Avoid visually intrusive and incongruous development within the area, particularly in the north within and adjacent to the Dedham Vale National Landscape.
- Any large scale or visually intrusive development would be detrimental to the open rural character of the landscape; consider opportunities for the undergrounding of any proposed power lines to avoid need for pylons and CSE compound, with landscape features reinstated following construction.
- Retain the settlement pattern of dispersed farmsteads and small hamlets, particularly within the north of the area. Conserve the local distinctiveness of historic buildings and their rural setting.
- Ensure that new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character including the local vernacular of weatherboarding and brick (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).
- Maintain and enhance the character of the local straight and angular roads. Resist unsympathetic highway improvement that would threaten their rural character.
- Encourage the integration of development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate tree belts, hedgerows and woodlands to reflect and reinforce rural character.
- Seek to reduce lighting impacts and avoid any further reduction in tranquillity to the south; for areas to the north refer to the Lighting Design Guide for the Dedham Vale National Landscape (July 2023).
- Conserve the individual identity of West Bergholt and Horkesley Heath, by resisting further development between these settlements and the northern edge of Colchester.

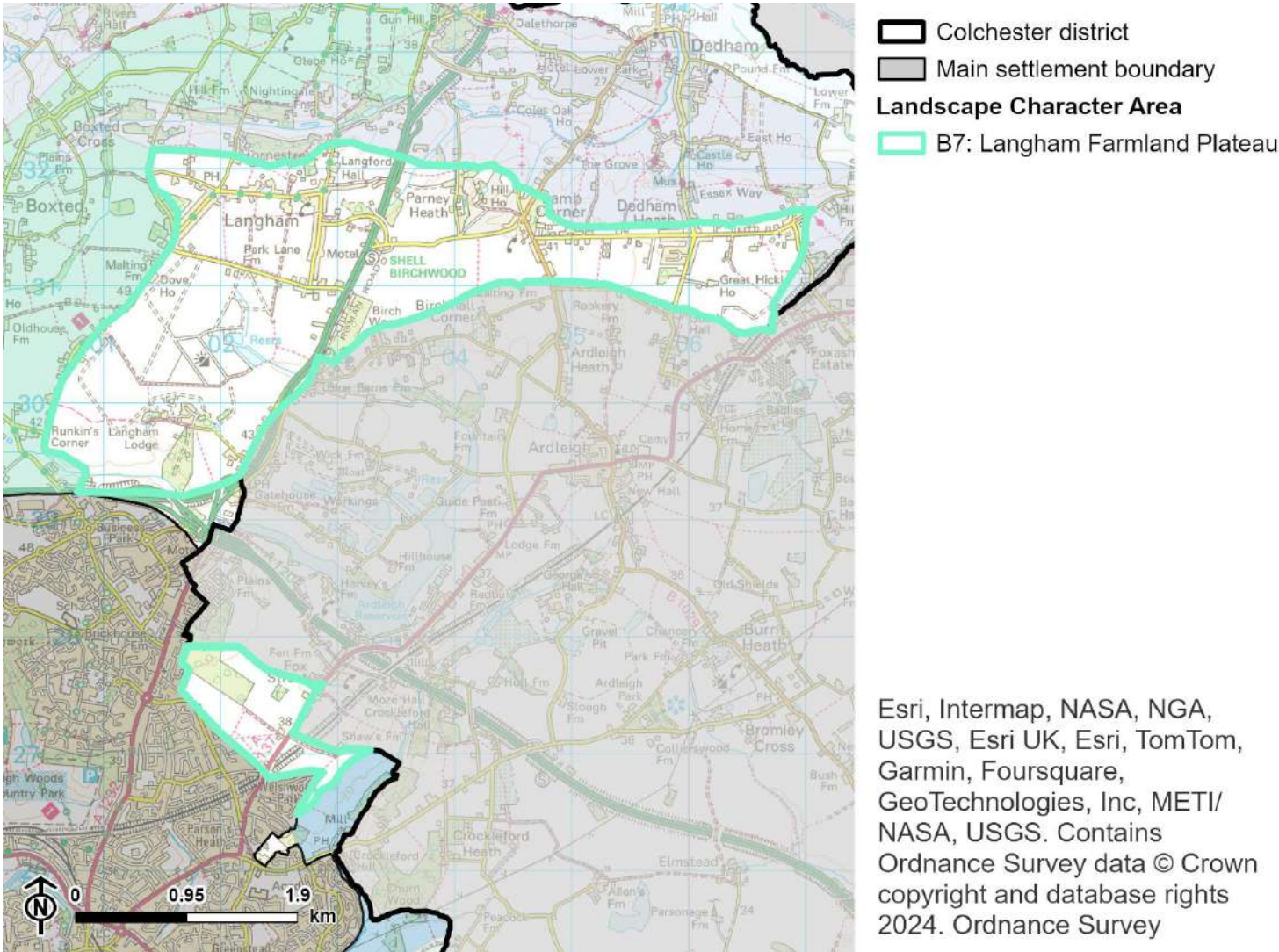
Landscape Character Area B7: Langham Farmland Plateau

Description

Location and Summary

7.128 The Langham Farmland Plateau LCA is located to the north-east of Colchester, bounded by the Stour River Valley to the north and Salary Brook and A12 corridor to the south. A smaller separate part to the LCA is located to the south-west of the A120 along the developed edge off Colchester. Land to the north-east lies partly within the Dedham Vale National Landscape (formerly an AONB). It is a predominantly arable landscape, featuring a mixed pattern of small to medium sized fields in the north and larger scale fields to the south interspersed occasional woodland blocks.

Figure 7.17: Location of LCA B7



Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating plateau forming a watershed between the Stour River to the north and the Salary Brook to the south.
- A predominantly arable landscape characterised by large open fields in the south and smaller more irregular fields in the north. Fields generally defined by low trimmed hedgerow or grass banks with occasional mature hedgerow trees.
- Scattered woodland cover, including Ancient Woodland at Birch Wood, Kiln Wood, and Bullocks Wood, and smaller patches of newer woodland around the settlements in the north.
- Settlement is concentrated along the northern edge of the plateau, with the three settlements of Langham, Lamb Corner, and Dedham Heath arranged east to west.
- Good levels of public access via a network of public rights of way (PRoW), with a notable concentration to the north linking settlements with the Stour River Valley.
- The A12 is a major road in the area connecting Colchester in the south to Ipswich in the north; this severs east-west links across the landscape and is a detracting influence.
- Historic settlement pattern of dispersed farmsteads and cottages is largely retained, often displaying the local vernacular of weatherboarding, brick and red roof tiles.
- A generally open landscape with occasional long distance framed views across the Stour Valley slopes to the north; some localised sense of visual enclosure near woodland and along tree-lined roads.
- An overall rural character with some urban influence from the edge of Colchester in the south and intrusion from the A12 running through the centre of the area.

Photo 7.29: Open arable landscape interspersed with woodland blocks



Photo 7.30: Sense of visual enclosure along tree-lined roads



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.129 The majority of the LCA comprises a sedimentary bedrock geology of clay, silt, sand and gravel (Thames Group) overlain by a mix of further superficial clay, sand and gravel deposits. This gives rise to a gently undulating plateau landform, with heights ranging from between approximately 30m above ordnance datum (AOD) and 50m AOD. Along the plateau edge to the north the landform begins to slope gently down towards the Stour River Valley and Black Brook, and towards the Salary Brook in the south. There is a secondary area to the LCA, south-east of Ardleigh Reservoir, which extends out from the edge of Colchester and also gently slopes down towards the Salary Brook to the east. Soils within the LCA are almost entirely Grade 2 (very good) and are primarily under arable cultivation with areas of Grade 3 (good to moderate) near to Salary Brook in the south and on the edge of the Stour River Valley in the north.

7.130 Fields are generally defined by low trimmed hedgerow or grass banks with occasional mature hedgerow oak trees. Roadside field boundaries tend to be higher and more complete like those seen along Park Lane and Long Road East. Fields are also interspersed with several woodland blocks and tree belts, including Ancient Woodland at Birch Wood, Kiln Wood, and Bullocks Wood. These three woodlands are also identified as Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland' and are designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS). Bullock wood, in the separate southern section of the LCA, consists of hazel and sessile oak with an understorey of coppiced hazel, bramble and bracken. This 23.3 ha mature coppice is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). There are also some scattered small areas of Priority Habitat 'traditional orchard' often close to settlements.

Cultural Influences

7.131 Historically this area was characterised by large tracts of heathland used for rough pasture and commons. Whilst now largely an arable landscape, place names such as Dedham Heath indicate the former presence of heathland. This landscape was enclosed in the early 19th century with a resulting parliamentary enclosure pattern of regular and straight field boundaries characterising much of the landscape today. This is reflected in the Essex HLC (2013) which identifies some '18th century and later enclosure' (representing parliamentary enclosure) but predominantly 'post 1950's enclosure' (the result of later reorganisation of the landscape into larger fields as a result of agricultural intensification). The HLC also identifies earlier field patterns and features, including some remnant areas of 'pre 18th century irregular enclosure' along the northern edge of the plateau and an area of 'informal medieval parkland' at Hill House. The former airfield of RAF Boxted and the land south of Birchwood Road are characterised by much larger, regular fields that often have completely open boundaries.

7.132 Settlement within the area today is focused mainly in the north, following plateau edge as it slopes towards the Stour River Valley. The villages of Langham, Lamb Corner and Dedham Heath extend in a line east to west. Elsewhere there is a pattern of dispersed farmsteads and cottages, a number of which are Grade II Listed Buildings, reflecting the historic settlement pattern. The local vernacular predominantly comprises weatherboarding, brick and red roof tiles.

7.133 Access to the landscape is provided through a network of PRow, with a notable concentration in the north around Langham where a several footpaths lead down to the Black Brook and Stour Valley (LCA A7) and the Essex Way. The NCN Route 1 also passes through this area, following the edge of the former airfield and continuing through Langham. The road network includes a number of notably straight roads which are the result of parliamentary enclosure. The A12 runs north through the area following the route of the old Roman road that linked Colchester to Ipswich.

Perceptual Influences

7.134 An overall rural landscape although this is influenced by proximity of urban edge of Colchester in the south. The busy A12 also reduces tranquillity as it passes through the centre of the area. Rural character is also influenced to some extent in the vicinity of modern development in Langham in the north and the Boxted Airfield Solar Farm. This is reflected in greater levels of tranquillity and dark skies to the north-west and north-east away from these influences.

7.135 Fields are defined predominantly by low trimmed hedgerow or grass banks with occasional mature hedgerow trees. This results in a sense of visual openness across much of the landscape, with medium range and some longer range views available across surrounding fields. There is also a notable sense of openness around the former RAF Boxted airfield. There are localised areas of greater visual enclosure, particularly around woodlands and where field boundaries contains more mature trees (such as around Dedham Heath). Views from roads are generally open (such as from Birchwood Road), but limited where hedgerow vegetation lines the routes (for example along Park Lane). To the north there are occasional long distance framed views across the Stour Valley from Long Road West and edge Dedham Heath and to the south there are some views towards the Bromley Heaths LCA (Tendring District Council LCA).

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- The north-east of the LCA lies partly within, and forms the immediate setting to the south, of the Dedham Vale National Landscape and demonstrates the following special qualities of the nationally designated landscape: gentle valley sides with scattered woodlands; remains mostly free of incongruous development and retains a rural charm and tranquillity; and a predominantly open character, affording long distance views over the shallow valleys.

- Ecological value and landscape diversity is provided by scattered habitats, including Ancient Woodland at Kiln Wood, Birch Wood, and Bullock Wood. Other woodland blocks are scattered around the edges of the settlements at Langham and Lamb Corner.
- Sense of time-depth and historic character provided by historic settlement pattern and several historic features, including listed farmhouses, cottages, the route of the Roman road (A12) and remnant medieval parkland at Hill House in the east of the LCA.
- Recreational value provided by a network of PRow which provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access between Langham, Lamb Corner and Dedham Heath to the Stour River Valley to the north.
- The rural character of much of the landscape which provides a setting for the public rights of way, and settlements/villages.
- Sense of visual openness; to the north there are occasional long distance framed views across the Stour Valley from Long Road West and edge Dedham Heath to the south there are some views towards the Bromley Heaths LCA (Tendring District LCA).

Issues and Changes

- The condition of the hedgerows is mixed, some are poorly managed with gaps or are missing entirely.
- Recent trends for change include the decline of smallholdings, often no longer farmed, and expansion of vegetable crops under plastic and polytunnels.
- Further ribbon development on the series of roads which connect Langham, Lamb Corner and Dedham Heath.
- An increase in equine related land uses, including post and rail subdivision of larger fields and small structures, particularly around areas of settlement and along main roads.
- Historic loss of orchards to development or conversion to arable farmland.

- Potential for further solar energy developments, which may impact views and erode the agricultural character of the landscape; a recent example in the area is at Boxted Airfield Solar Farm.
- Impact on the landscape associated with the proposed National Grid Norwich to Tilbury Project. Proposed overhead power lines and pylons within the south of the LCA will cause a significant visual impact on the landscape, and proposed underground cabling to the north-east of the LCA may disturb the landscape structure including hedgerows if the DCO is approved.
- An increase in tree planting was suggested within the Colchester Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011) for Zone 2: Northern Farmland Zone. Project 2.2 'Woodland Enhancement Zone' suggested that existing woodlands will be enhanced and new woodlands created throughout the zone and access improved to them. This may change the relatively open character of the landscape as well as longer range views available in places.
- Potential for the introduction of new visually intrusive farm buildings; development at the northern edge of the plateau may be visually intrusive within views from the adjacent Stour River Valley Floor LCA which lies within the Dedham Vale National Landscape.
- Disturbance to landscape character as a result of noise and movement associated within the main A12 road corridor and development on the northern edge of Colchester.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges. Ancient woodlands, such as Bullock Wood, may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
 - Effects of climate change resulting in wetter and warmer winters, and more frequent hot and dry periods, leading to increased risk of flooding in winter and increasing the risk of drought in summer, affecting river flow rates and impacting on riparian habitats and species.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Langham Farmland Plateau LCA is to conserve and enhance the rural landscape, by increasing woodland cover and the extent and quality of field boundaries and re-introducing traditional orchards. Development should be sensitively integrated into the landscape using appropriate boundary treatments. Visually intrusive and incongruous development should be avoided, particularly in the north to protect the landscape quality and tranquillity of the Dedham Vale National Landscape.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Ensure that relevant special characteristics and qualities of the Dedham Vale National Landscape are conserved and enhanced, having regard for the aims set out in the current Management Plan.
- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.
- Protect and enhance valued habitats, including Ancient Woodland habitat at Kiln Wood, Birch Wood, and Bullock Wood. Seek to improve linkages between scattered woodland blocks, whilst maintaining open views to the north.
- Conserve and enhance the existing traditional orchards and seek to reintroduce them more widely within the landscape.
- Enhance and promote existing panoramic and framed views into the Stour River Valley corridor to the north of the character area.

- Protect and manage listed buildings and the undesignated remnant parkland at Lamb Corner to preserve the sense of time-depth and historic character.
- Protect the relative tranquillity away from urban influences, particularly in the north within and close to the Dedham Vale National Landscape.

Development Management

- Avoid visually intrusive and incongruous development within the area, particularly in the north within and adjacent to the Dedham Vale National Landscape.
- Any large scale or visually intrusive development would be detrimental to the open rural character of the landscape; consider opportunities for the undergrounding of any proposed power lines to avoid need for pylons, with landscape features reinstated following construction.
- Conserve the local distinctiveness of historic buildings and their rural setting.
- Ensure that new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character including the local vernacular of weatherboarding and brick (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).
- Maintain and enhance the character of the local straight roads. Resist unsympathetic highway improvement that would threaten their rural character.
- Encourage the integration of development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate tree belts, hedgerows and woodlands to reflect and reinforce rural character.
- Seek to reduce lighting impacts and avoid any further reduction in tranquillity, particularly to the south; for areas to the north-east refer to the Lighting Design Guide for the Dedham Vale National Landscape (July 2023).

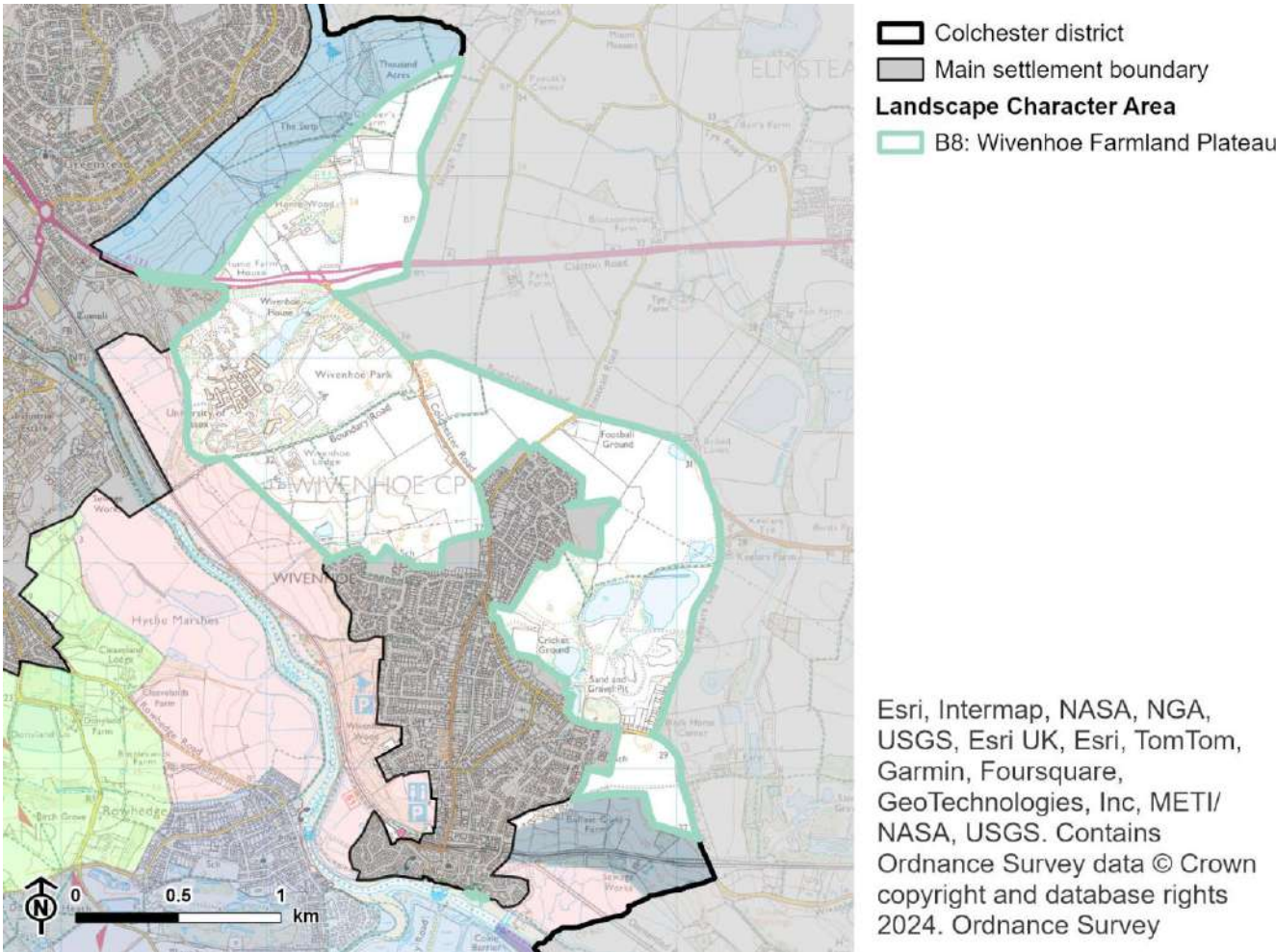
Landscape Character Area B8 : Wivenhoe Farmland Plateau

Description

Location and Summary

7.136 This LCA is located to the south-east of Colchester and comprises the western edge of the plateau to the east of the Colne River. It is a predominantly arable landscape interspersed with blocks of woodland, with some peri-urban influences throughout. The north of the LCA is dominated by historic parkland associated with Wivenhoe House which includes the Colchester campus of the University of Essex.

Figure 7.18: Location of LCA B8



Key Characteristics

- Flat to gently undulating farmland plateau which begins to slope gradually down towards the River Colne in the west.
- A predominantly arable landscape broken up by Wivenhoe Park and University of Essex Colchester campus and areas of former gravel extraction in the south.
- Wivenhoe Park and the university campus contain a mix of habitats including acidic grassland, scrub and lakes; and Wivenhoe Cross Pit, an area of former gravel extraction, contains open mosaic habitats.
- Field boundaries are generally defined by high hedgerows often with mature hedgerow trees which, along with areas of woodland cover, results in sense of visual enclosure across much of the landscape.
- Some longer views available from the plateau edge across the Colne River Valley to the west.
- A sense of time depth is provided by remnant medieval parkland at Wivenhoe Park, albeit with the later intrusion of the modern university campus to the west.
- Access to the landscape is provided by several public rights of way (PRoW) providing links with the adjacent urban areas of Wivenhoe and Colchester and the River Colne.
- An overall sense of being in an urban-fringe landscape, particularly around Wivenhoe, the university campus and the busy A133; a greater sense of rurality in the north with intervening woodland restricting views towards these urban influences.

Photo 7.31: View across arable fields towards Wivenhoe Park and University of Essex Colchester campus



Photo 7.32: Longer view across the River Colne Valley from the plateau edge



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.137 The majority of the LCA comprises a sedimentary bedrock geology of clay, silt, sand and gravel (Thames Group) overlain by further superficial clay, sand and gravel. The gravel here was deposited by the early River Thames, before it was diverted south by ice during the Anglian glaciation. The landform in this area consists of a flat to gently undulating plateau ranging from roughly 30 to 34m above ordnance datum (AOD) which begins to slope down towards the Colne River valley in the west. The plateau landform is punctuated by a number of water bodies, including ponds in Wivenhoe Park and flooded former sand and gravel pits in the south. The majority of the soils in the LCA are Grade 2 (very good) , with an area of Grade 3 (good to moderate) soil in the north, and are predominantly under arable cultivation.

7.138 The area is predominantly comprised of arable farmland albeit with a large area of remnant parkland at Wivenhoe Park and the adjacent University of Essex Colchester campus. Field boundaries are defined by high hedgerows with numerous mature hedgerow trees. Several woodland blocks and scattered mature parkland trees characterise land in and around Wivenhoe Park. There are further areas of woodland cover along the plateau edge to the north, including Ancient Woodland at Home Wood to the north; and around the former sand and gravel pits in the south. Wivenhoe Park also contains areas of acidic grassland, scrub and lakes which are protected by a local wildlife site (LWS). There is also an LWS covering parts of former sand and gravel extraction site at Wivenhoe Crosspit LWS, noted for its Open Mosaic Habitat; and covering Home Wood to the north of the A133. Wivenhoe Gravel Pit south of Brightlingsea Road is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designated for the importance of its geology.

Cultural Influences

7.139 The Essex HLC (2011) identifies much of the landscape as being ‘pre-18th century irregular enclosure’, which are probably of medieval origin and some maybe even older. However, some of this shows signs of ‘post 1950 boundary loss’, for example around the northern edge of Wivenhoe where larger fields with fewer hedgerows are apparent. The area around Wivenhoe Park and university campus is identified as ‘informal medieval parkland’ and there is an area of ‘mineral extraction’ around Wivenhoe Crosspit in the south.

7.140 The area contains the Grade II* Listed Building of Wivenhoe House along with several other associated structures including the gate lodge and stable block (both Grade II listed). Wivenhoe Park is a Grade II RPG and notably is the subject of the painting with the same name by renowned landscape painter John Constable.

7.141 The landscape features a network of PRoW, which connect with the urban areas of Wivenhoe and Colchester and the River Colne. Further access to the landscape is via roads and smaller country lanes. The A133 also passes through the area to the north of Wivenhoe Park, forming the main route between Colchester and Clacton-on-Sea in neighbouring Tendring District to the east. This tends to sever links between Wivenhoe Park and land to the north of the road.

Perceptual Influences

7.142 An overall urban-fringe character with limited sense of tranquillity and experience of dark skies. The landscape is influenced by the urban edge of Wivenhoe and the university campus, including some taller development visible from large parts of the landscape. The sense of rurality and tranquillity is further influenced by the busy A133 and overhead power lines and pylons along the northern edge of Wivenhoe. There is a greater sense of rurality and tranquillity to the north-east of Home Wood where intervening tree cover generally restricts views towards detracting elements.

7.143 Fields are generally defined by high hedgerows with numerous mature hedgerow trees, especially along roadsides, resulting in a sense of visual enclosure. Areas of woodland cover, including around Wivenhoe Park, add to a sense of enclosure. However, in places some longer range views are available, for example along the western edge of the plateau where the falling landform allows views across the Colne Valley (for example from Boundary Road, PRow 155-24 east of Wivenhoe and PRow 155_3 between Wivenhoe and Wivenhoe Park).

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Ecological value and landscape diversity provided by scattered habitats, including Ancient Woodland at Home Wood, open mosaic habitat at Wivenhoe Cross Pit, and a mix of habitats across Wivenhoe Park.
- Wivenhoe Gravel Pit SSSI is where Wivenhoe Gravel (laid down by the early course of the River Thames) was first identified, making it an important geological site and providing natural heritage value.
- The sense of time depth and historic character provided by remnant medieval parkland at Wivenhoe Park (RPG) and the Grade II* listed Wivenhoe House and associated structures.
- Longer views from the plateau edge west across the River Colne Valley.

Issues and Changes

- Potential for the further urban expansion of the northern and eastern edges of Wivenhoe.
- The northern part of LCA is within the 'South Neighbourhood' principal development area of the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community (TCBGC) area and so will be developed.

- Potential for poorly integrated settlement edges to the north of Wivenhoe, which would be exposed in this relatively more open part of the landscape.
- Potential for further development and/or urban-fringe land uses (such as sports pitches) within and around the University of Essex campus.
- Potential for future solar energy developments, which may impact views across the landscape: a recent example in the area is to the north-east of Alresford (located in neighbouring Tendring District).
- Disturbance to landscape character as a result of noise and movement associated within the A133 and presence of overhead power lines and pylons to the north of Wivenhoe.
- The A133 severs access between Wivenhoe Park and land to the north of the road.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges. Ancient woodlands at Home Wood and mature trees at Wivenhoe Park, may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
 - Effects of climate change resulting in wetter and warmer winters, and more frequent hot and dry periods, leading to increased risk of flooding in winter and increasing the risk of drought in summer, ponds and small lakes and impacting on their riparian habitats and species.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Wivenhoe Farmland Plateau LCA is to restore and enhance the rural landscape and protect and extend valued habitats, including at Wivenhoe Park and Wivenhoe Crosspit. Any new development

should be sensitively integrated into the landscape using appropriate boundary treatments. Visually intrusive and incongruous development should be avoided, particularly where it would impact the historic character at Wivenhoe Park.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Maintain boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement where they have been removed using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.
- Protect and enhance valued habitats at Wivenhoe Cross Pit, Ancient Woodland at Home Wood and grassland and scrub habitats at Wivenhoe Park, and improve linkages between them.
- Ensure that disused mineral workings are restored to benefit wildlife and enhance local amenity.
- Enhance and promote existing views across the Colne River Valley from the plateau edge, including from Boundary Road and PRoW 155-24 and 155_3.
- Protect and manage Wivenhoe Park RPG and associated listed buildings to preserve the sense of time-depth and historic character.
- Enhance recreational access to the landscape, in particular routes across the A133 north from Wivenhoe Park.

Development Management

- Avoid visually intrusive and incongruous development within the area, particularly in more rural areas to the north.

- consider opportunities for the undergrounding of existing power lines to the north of Wivenhoe with landscape features reinstated following construction.
- Encourage the integration of new development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate tree belts, hedgerows and woodlands.
- Development as part of the TCBGC (Southern Neighbourhood) should seek to use materials which are appropriate to local landscape character (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information) and consider opportunities to enhance connections across the A133 between Wivenhoe Park and land to the north of the road.
- Seek to reduce lighting impacts and avoid any further reduction in tranquillity, particularly around the urban edge of Wivenhoe and the university campus and proposed development of the TCBGC.

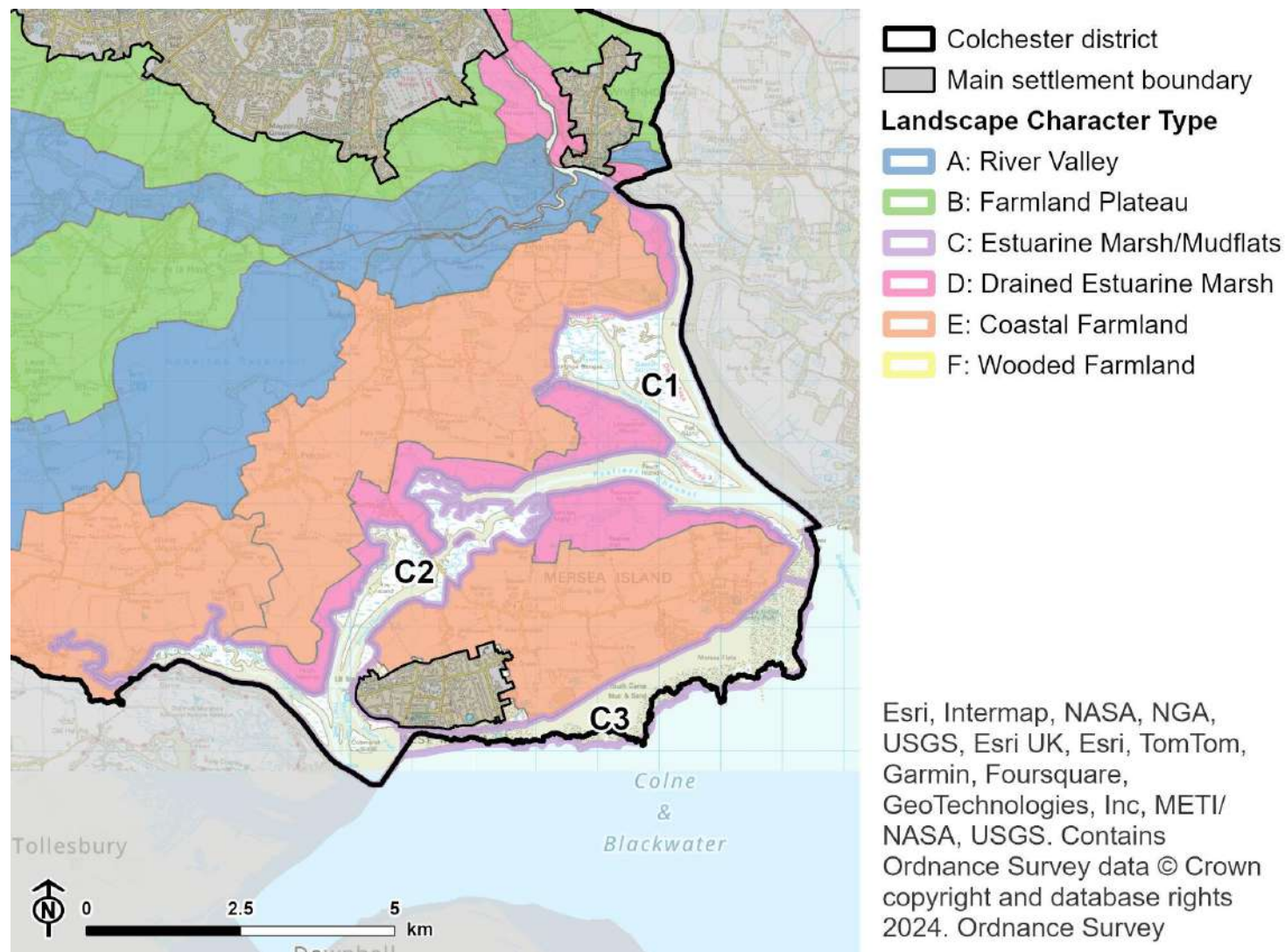
Landscape Character Type C: Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats

Landscape Character Areas

7.144 The Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats LCT is subdivided into three LCAs as follows:

- Landscape Character Area C1: Fingringhoe Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats;
- Landscape Character Area C2: Strood & Salcott Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats; and
- Landscape Character Area C3: West Mersea Estuarine March/Mudflats.

Figure 7.19: Location of the Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats LCT and LCAs



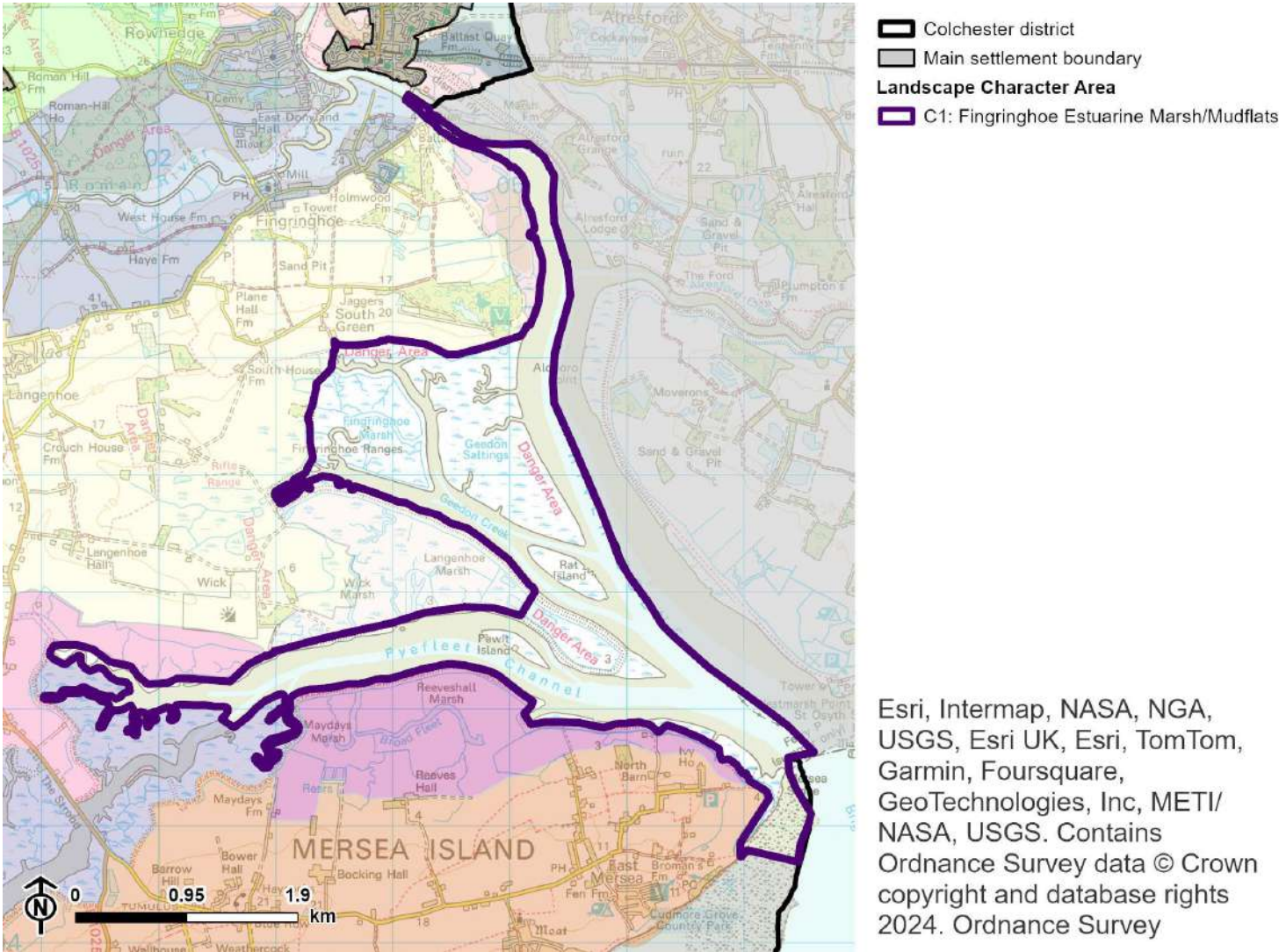
Landscape Character Area C1: Fingringhoe Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats

Description

Location and Summary

7.145 The LCA is located in the south-east of the district and comprises the estuarine landscape of the River Colne Estuary. It is a flat, low-lying landscape characterised by an intricate pattern of estuarine channels, creeks and islands and a mosaic of intertidal habitats protected under various international and national designations.

Figure 7.20: Location of LCA C1



Key Characteristics

- Flat, low-lying estuarine landscape along the River Colne and Pyefleet Channel, shaped by the erosion and depositional forces of the river.
- Distinctive intricate pattern of estuarine channels, dendritic drainage creeks and islands.
- Diverse mosaic of intertidal habitats, including open saltmarshes, mudflats, and reedbeds, supporting a rich array of wildlife and protected by international and national conservation designations.
- Undrained and unenclosed landscape and with minimal human impact, preserving its natural estuarine character.
- Largely inaccessible, with the only public access via the public right of way (PRoW) around Mersea Island sea wall; the river, creeks, and channels are used recreationally for water-based activities.
- An open and exposed landscape with panoramic views across it from the sea wall on the north-eastern edge of Mersea Island and adjacent areas of slightly higher coastal farmland.
- A remote coastal landscape with sense of wildness and tranquillity, with the sound of coastal birds and the wind dominant; enhanced by prominent sea walls which provide separation from adjacent coastal farmland.
- Water is a defining feature of the landscape, shaping its character and sense of place; the rhythmic ebb and flow of the tide creates a dynamic environment added to by the movement of boats and flocks of birds.

Photo 7.33: An open and exposed landscape with panoramic views



Photo 7.34: Estuarine channels, creeks and islands with a mosaic of inter-tidal habitats



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.146 The LCA comprises the inter-tidal landscape of the River Colne Estuary. A bedrock geology composed of clay, silt, sand, and gravel (Thames Group), overlain by significant alluvial deposits of clay, silt, and sand. A flat, low-lying topography, with elevations below 5 metres above ordnance datum (AOD) lying entirely within Flood Zones 2 and 3. The area has been shaped by the erosion and depositional forces of the river and associated tributaries, giving rise to a distinctive pattern of estuarine channels, dendritic drainage creeks and islands. Notable features include Pyefleet Channel, lying between Langenhoe Marsh and Mersea Island; South Geedon Creek and North Geedon Creek; and Rat Island and Pewit Island.

7.147 The LCA supports a diverse mosaic of intertidal habitats, including extensive areas of Priority Habitat 'coastal saltmarsh' at Geedon Saltings, Fingringhoe Marsh, Rat Island, and Pewit Island, alongside 'mudflats' fringing the River Colne, Pyefleet Channel, and North and South Geedon Creeks. Between South Geedon and Pyefleet Channel to the south-west, there is also a sizeable pocket of 'Reedbeds'. These habitats support an array of flora and fauna, including rare coastal species like sea heath *Frankenia laevis* and rock sea-lavender *Limonium binervosum* and nationally important breeding bird populations. The habitats within the estuarine areas protected by several international and national environmental and nature conservation designations on account of their rich diversity of bird, plant, and invertebrate species. This includes the Colne Estuary Ramsar Site, the Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the Colne Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA), the Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne estuaries Marine Conservation Area (MCA), the Colne Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and the Colne Estuary National Nature Reserve (NNR).

Cultural Influences

7.148 The majority of the landscape has remained undrained and unenclosed, which helps preserve its natural estuarine character. This is reflected in the Essex HLC (2013) which identifies the landscape as being a mix of ‘unimproved intertidal’, ‘unimproved marine marsh or brackish fen’ and ‘saltings’.

7.149 The marshland landscapes of the past were ideal for the production of salt in prehistoric and Roman times, and so it is possible that the area was utilised for this early coastal industry. Later periods of history are represented, including the intricate remains of post-medieval oyster pits on Pewit Island. And in more modern times a series of Second World War pillboxes were built along the coastal edges of Pyefleet Channel and the eastern edge of Mersea Island. The pillboxes serve as a visual reminder of the area’s past defensive role. Land north of Pyefleet Channel is today used by the MOD as part of Fingringhoe Ranges (marked as a ‘Danger Area’ on OS mapping).

7.150 The marshland to the north of Pyefleet Channel remains inaccessible to the public, particularly during firing exercises. The only public access is via the PRoW which follows the sea wall around the edge of Mersea Island. This forms part of the Mersea Island stretch of the King Charles III England Coast Path National Trail. Informal access to the marshes adjacent to the sea wall is also possible from the PRoW. The river and channels are also utilised recreationally for boating and other water-based activities.

Perceptual Influences

7.151 Water is a defining feature of the landscape, shaping its character and sense of place. The rhythmic ebb and flow of the tide creates a dynamic environment, with tides periodically filling the intricate patterns of winding creeks and channels and covering the fringing marshes and mudflats. Occasional glimpses of boats navigating the estuary add a dynamic feel to the landscape, as does the movement of flocks of birds. There is a strong sense of remoteness

and wildness, with wide open views across the estuaries and channels, heightened by the sounds of the wind and coastal birds.

7.152 There are expansive panoramic views north and east across the Pyefleet Channel and Colne Estuary from the PRow along sea wall on the north-eastern edge of Mersea Island. There are also long views across the landscape from adjacent areas of higher coastal farmland within LCA E3 to the north and east, including from the vicinity of Fingringhoe Wick Nature Discovery Park. The changing skies and weather conditions significantly influence the character of these views, and together with the open nature of the landscape, contribute to a strong estuarine character.

7.153 The coastal setting and absence of development result in relatively high levels of tranquillity and experience of dark skies, as reflected in CPRE tranquillity and dark skies mapping. However, there are views across the Colne Estuary towards development in Brightlingsea and the sense of tranquillity is periodically disrupted by the noise of firing exercises in Fingringhoe Ranges.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Distinctive estuarine character, defined by its intricate pattern of estuarine channels, dendritic drainage creeks and islands.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity is provided by a mosaic of intertidal habitats, such as Priority Habitat 'coastal saltmarsh', 'mudflats' and 'reedbeds' protected by international and national nature conservation designations.
- Sense of time depth provided by the landscape's unenclosed nature, as well as several Second World War pillboxes which serve as a visual reminder of the area's past defensive role.

- A strong sense of tranquillity and remoteness, enhanced by the general absence of development and the open expansive marshes, which together foster a strong feeling of isolation; heightened by the sounds of the wind and birds.
- A sense of visual openness, with long views across the estuary and fringing marshes.
- Visual interest in estuarine landscape, provided by the dominance of water and the sense of dynamism and movement due to the tidal movements.

Issues and Changes

- The strategy within the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) for Essex and Suffolk under the 'Landward Frontage E1' plan for is to maintain the flood defences at their current level, accepting that as seas levels rise the flood risk will increase. This lead to the potential for increased engineering of flood defences which would detract from the generally naturalistic quality of the area.
- Increased recreational pressures on the PRow along the Mersea Island seawall and potential disturbance to areas of nature conservation value.
- Potential for fertiliser, pesticide and sediment run-off from adjacent farmed landscapes (LCA E1, E3 and D1) to pollute the River Colne and surrounding marshland, affecting water quality and habitats.
- Periodic detracting influence of the MOD firing range exercises.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Sea level rise and loss of coastal salt marshes, reedbeds, and mudflats across areas like Geedon Saltings and Fingringhoe Marsh due to 'coastal squeeze,' where human activities stop the natural landward spread of coastal habitats as sea levels rise.
 - Tidal flooding has the potential to impact areas of nature conservation interest (such as Ramsar Sites and SSSI),and heritage features (such as the Second World War pillboxes).

- Higher winter rainfall and potential flooding may alter plant communities in reedbeds and salt marshes, threatening rare native coastal species, including sea heath and rock sea-lavender.
- Prolonged dry spells during hotter summers could increase the drying of marshlands and mudflats, affecting soil moisture levels and leading to changes in intertidal vegetation and invertebrate communities essential for bird populations.
- Frequent inundation from rising tides could result in expanded mudflat areas, making habitats more susceptible to invasive plants, accelerating erosion, and disrupting the balance of estuarine ecosystems.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Fingringhoe Estuarine Marsh Mudflats LCA is to conserve and enhance the character and strong sense of place of the remote, undeveloped, and open estuarine landscape. The distinctive pattern of channels, creeks and islands and mosaic of inter-tidal habitats should be preserved. Ecologically significant habitats should be conserved, enhanced, and extended wherever possible. New development within the area should be avoided.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Work with the natural estuary processes to conserve and enhance the estuarine landscape, including the distinctive pattern of channels, creeks and islands.

- Conserve and enhance ecologically important inter-tidal and estuarine habitats, including Priority Habitat ‘coastal saltmarshes’, ‘mudflats’, and ‘reedbed’ ; introduce new areas of intertidal habitats to counter effects of ‘coastal squeeze’ where opportunities arise.
- Manage coastal defences in line with the SMP for Essex and Suffolk to prevent inundation and erosion and to combat the increasing pressures from climate change, including coastal squeeze, flooding, and erosion; seek to avoid increased engineering of flood defences where possible.
- Monitor and ensure the control of potential invasive non-native species through effective biosecurity measures.
- Implement buffer zones to minimise fertilizer, pesticide, and sediment runoff from adjacent farmland, thus protecting water quality in the estuary.
- Manage recreational access, including along the PRow, to limit habitat disturbance; consider opportunities for low-impact activities such as guided nature and heritage walks, potentially building on The Deepenings Trail and the World War II Trail at nearby Cudmore Grove Country Park.
- Enhance the visual characteristics and quality of the England Coast Path, drawing upon the connections to historic features (such as those related to Second World War pillboxes), and through the preservation and enhancement of existing distinctive expansive views across the estuaries and channels.

Development Management

- Maintain the sense of openness by resisting proposals for new development that would impinge on the remote undeveloped quality of the marshland; where development is proposed consider siting and design and use locally characteristic planting to reduce any impacts.

- Conserve the skyline, avoiding visually intrusive development, both within the area and outside it, that impacts the characteristic large open skies and horizons.
- Seek to integrate any new flood defences sensitively into the landscape, using gently sloping embankments where possible and avoiding overly-engineered approaches and unsympathetic materials.
- Seek to manage signage and other features to strengthen and reinforce rural character.
- Coordinate with the MOD to minimise disturbances from firing exercises by reducing their frequency and timing during critical breeding and migratory periods. Explore alternative locations or adjusted schedules to preserve the landscape's remote and tranquil character.

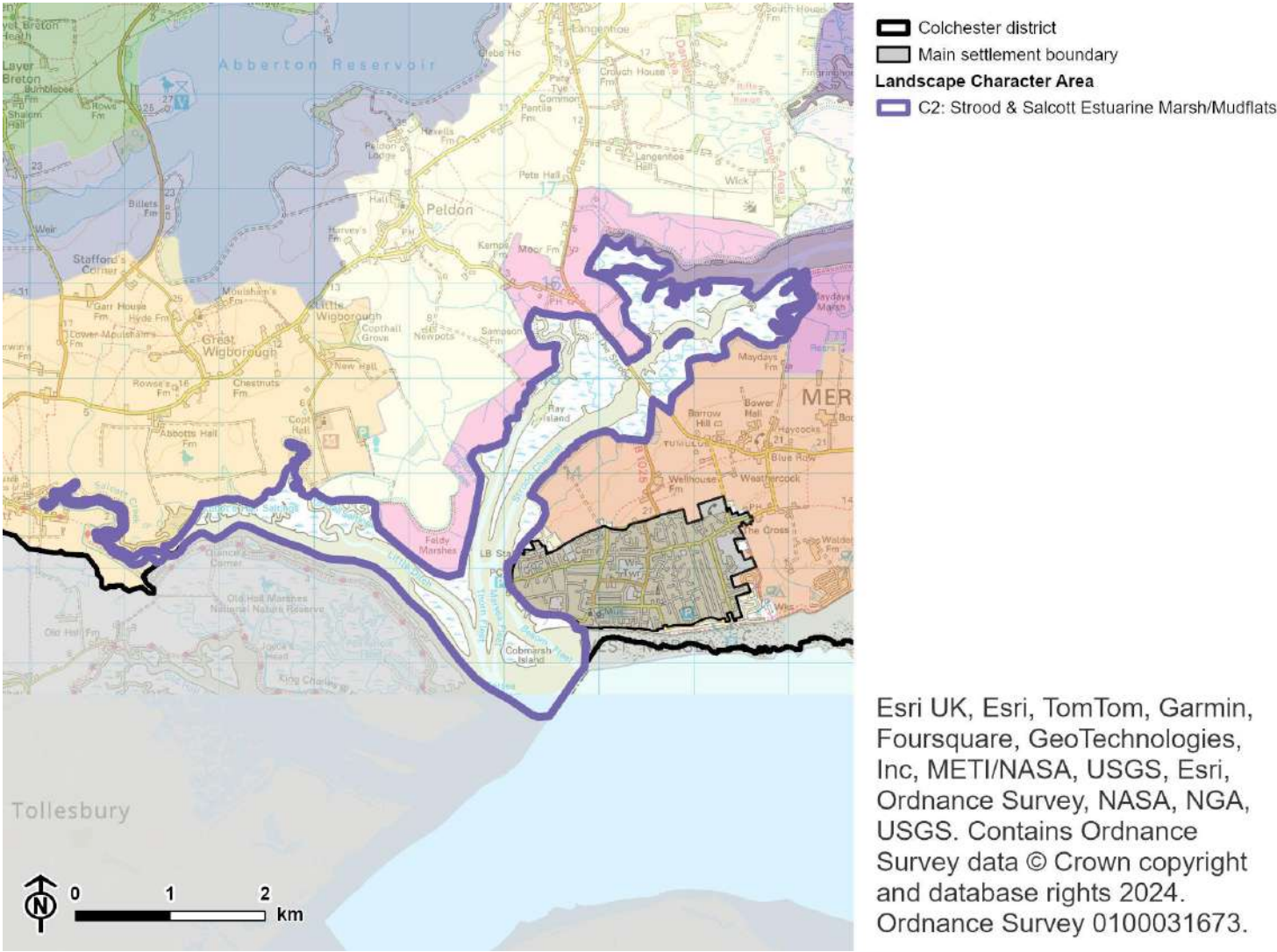
Landscape Character Area C2: Strood & Salcott Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats

Description

Location and Summary

7.154 The LCA is located in the south-east of the district and comprises the estuarine landscape of the Strood and Salcott Channels. It is a flat, low-lying landscape characterised by a complex network of winding channels, fleets, and creeks. It features a diverse mosaic of intertidal habitats protected by international and national conservation designations.

Figure 7.21: Location of LCA C2



Key Characteristics

- Flat, low-lying estuarine landscape of the Strood and Salcott Channels, defined by shaped by the erosion and depositional forces of water courses that flow into the Blackwater Estuary.
- Distinctive pattern of estuarine channels, fleets, creeks and islands with a diverse mosaic of intertidal habitats, including saltmarshes and mudflats.
- A largely undrained and unenclosed landscape and with minimal human impact, preserving its natural estuarine character.
- Public access via public rights of way (PRoW) following the sea walls; the channels are used recreationally for water-based activities.
- An open and exposed landscape offering panoramic views across the estuarine channels and out towards the Blackwater Estuary.
- A remote coastal landscape with a sense of wildness and tranquillity, with sounds of coastal birds and wind dominant; enhanced by prominent sea walls which provide separation from adjacent coastal farmland.
- Water is a defining feature of the landscape, shaping its character and sense of place; the rhythmic ebb and flow of the tide creates a dynamic environment added to by the movement of boats and flocks of birds.

Photo 7.35: Estuarine channels and creeks with a mosaic of inter-tidal habitats



Photo 7.36: Open views across channels and fleets with big open skies



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.155 The LCA comprises the inter-tidal landscape of the Strood and Salcott Channels. A bedrock geology composed of clay, silt, sand, and gravel (Thames Group), overlain with alluvial deposits of clay, silt, and sand. A flat, low-lying topography, with elevations below 5 metres above ordnance datum (AOD) lying entirely within Flood Zones 2 and 3. The area has been shaped by the erosive and depositional forces of several water courses that flow into the Blackwater Estuary, including the Besom Fleet, the Mersea Fleet and the Thorn Fleet. This has resulted in an intricate pattern of estuarine channels, creeks and islands. Notable features include the Strood Channel, Salcott and Ray Channels; and Sunken Island, Cobmarsh Island and the elevated Ray Island.

7.156 The LCA features a complex mosaic of intertidal habitats, including extensive areas of Priority Habitat 'coastal saltmarsh' and 'mudflats', primarily along the mainland coastline near Salcott Channel and Strood Channel, with additional pockets along the western edge of Mersea Island. Ray Island in the Strood Channel supports a small pocket of 'deciduous woodland' and is one of the few sites in Essex where saltmarsh transitions naturally into grassland without interruption from a sea wall. The habitats within the estuarine areas are protected by several international and national environmental and nature conservation designations on account of their rich diversity of bird, plant, and invertebrate species. This includes the Blackwater Estuary and Colne Estuary Ramsar Sites, the Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the Blackwater Estuary and Colne Estuary Special Protection Areas (SPA), the Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne estuaries Marine Conservation Area (MCA), the Colne Estuary and Blackwater Estuary Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and the Blackwater Estuary National Nature Reserve (NNR).

Cultural Influences

7.157 The majority of the landscape has remained undrained and unenclosed, which helps preserve its natural estuarine character. This is reflected in the Essex HLC (2013) which identifies the landscape as being predominantly 'unimproved intertidal'. Only a small area to the east of The Strood shows signs of enclosure and improvement, identified in the HLC as being 'drained reclamation' from the 18th century. The field pattern here is curvilinear in form and is defined by ditches.

7.158 The marshland landscapes of the past were ideal for the production of salt, and the Roman saltern (Scheduled Monument) along southern edge of the Strood Channel is a visible landmark which provides a link to this early industry. Later salt making also took place, as evidenced by the presence of various 'saltings' such as Bonner's Saltings, Copthall Saltings and Abbot's Hall Saltings. The village of Salcott (located within LCA E2) came into being when salt extraction began on the adjacent marshes. Later periods of history are represented by Second World War pillboxes along the northern of The Strood Channel, Pyefleet Channel and the western edge of Mersea Island. The pillboxes serve as a visual reminder of the area's past defensive role.

7.159 The only notable development extending into the estuarine landscape is that related to boating – jetties, pontoons and marinas at West Mersea – and The Strood bridge which carries the B1025 over the Strood Channel. Due to its estuarine nature the landscape contains no settlement. However, it forms the immediate coastal setting for the settlement of West Mersea located at the western end of Mersea Island. The historic core of the town lies along the coastal edge and a large part of its Conservation Area designation covers the intertidal area. In the west, Salcott Creek, which extends inland, also forms part of the tidal river setting to the village of Salcott.

7.160 The marshes are inaccessible to the public. The only PRow within the area are those following the sea walls – that to the north of Strood Channel, which connects The Strood bridge with Colchester Road; and that around the edge of Mersea Island, which forms part of the Mersea Island stretch of the

King Charles III England Coast Path National Trail. Informal access to the marshes adjacent to the sea walls is also possible from the PRow. The river and channels are also utilised recreationally for boating and other water-based activities.

Perceptual Influences

7.161 Water is a defining feature of the landscape, shaping its character and sense of place. The rhythmic ebb and flow of the tides creates a dynamic environment, with tides periodically filling the channels and creeks and covering the fringing marshes and mudflats. The movement of boats and flocks of birds along the channels and within the Blackwater Estuary add a dynamic feel to the landscape. The absence of development, combined with the landscape's natural qualities, fosters a wild and remote character. This is heightened by the sounds of the wind and coastal birds.

7.162 The flat topography and open landscape allows for expansive panoramic views which are dominated by water and large sky. There are generally views available across the channels and fringing marshes from PRow along sea wall and there are also long east-west views available along the Strood Channel from The Strood (B1025) as one approaches/leaves Mersea Island. There are also long views across the landscape from adjacent areas of higher coastal farmland (LCA E2 and E3) to the north. The changing skies and weather conditions significantly influence the character of these views, and together with the open nature of the landscape, contribute to a strong estuarine character.

7.163 The coastal setting and general absence of development result in relatively high levels of tranquillity and experience of dark skies, as reflected in CPRE tranquillity and dark skies mapping. However, this is influenced in the vicinity of West Mersea and by the relatively busy B1025). There are also long range views south across the Blackwater Estuary towards Bradwell Power Station which presents a large-scale industrial element.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Distinctive estuarine character, defined by an intricate network of channels, fleets, creeks and islands, at the mouth of the Blackwater Estuary.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity is provided by a mosaic of intertidal habitats, such as Priority Habitat ‘coastal saltmarsh’, ‘mudflats’ and ‘deciduous woodland’ protected by international and national nature conservation designations.
- Recreational value provided by PRow along the sea walls, including the King Charles III Coastal Path around the perimeter of Mersea Island.
- Sense of time depth provided by the landscape’s unenclosed nature, as well as remnants of Roman salt making and Second World War pillboxes.
- A strong sense of tranquillity and remoteness , enhanced by the general absence of development and the open expansive marshes and mudflats, which together foster a strong feeling of isolation; heightened by the sounds of the wind and birds.
- A sense of visual openness, with long-distance views across the channels and the Blackwater Estuary.
- Visual interest in estuarine landscape, provided by the dominance of water and the sense of dynamism and movement due to the tidal movements.
- Forms a distinctive coastal estuarine setting to the settlements of West Mersea and Salcott. A large part of the West Mersea Conservation Area designation extends into the LCA covering the intertidal area.

Issues and Changes

- The strategy within the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) for Essex and Suffolk under the 'North Mersea (Strood Channel) E4A' and 'Pyefleet Inner Channel E4B' plan is to maintain the flood defences at their current level, accepting that as sea levels rise the flood risk will increase. This could lead to the potential for increased engineering of flood defences which would detract from the generally naturalistic quality of the area.
- Increased recreational pressures along PRow and potential disturbance to areas of nature conservation value.
- Potential for damage to diverse, important saltmarsh and bird habitats with a potential increase in tourism and accessibility to visitors.
- Potential for fertiliser, pesticide and sediment run-off from adjacent farmed landscapes (LCA E1, E3 and D2) to pollute the channels and its surrounding marshland, affecting water quality and habitats.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Sea level rise and loss of coastal salt marshes and mudflats due to 'coastal squeeze,' where human activities stop the natural landward spread of coastal habitats as sea levels rise.
 - Tidal flooding has the potential to impact areas of nature conservation interest (such as Ramsar Sites and SSSI), and heritage features (such as the Roman Saltern Scheduled Monument and Second World War pillboxes).
 - Higher winter rainfall and potential flooding may alter plant communities in salt marshes, threatening native coastal species.
 - Prolonged dry spells during hotter summers could increase the drying of marshlands and mudflats, affecting soil moisture levels and leading to changes in intertidal vegetation and invertebrate communities essential for bird populations.
 - Frequent inundation from rising tides could result in expanded mudflat areas, making habitats more susceptible to invasive plants,

accelerating erosion, and disrupting the balance of estuarine ecosystems.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Strood & Salcott Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats LCA is to conserve and enhance the character and strong sense of place of the remote, undeveloped, and open estuarine landscape. The distinctive pattern of channels, creeks, fleets and islands and the mosaic of inter-tidal habitats should be preserved. Ecologically significant habitats should be conserved, enhanced, and extended wherever possible. New development within the area should be avoided.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Work with the natural estuary processes to conserve and enhance the inter-tidal landscape, including the distinctive pattern of channels, fleets, creeks and islands.
- Conserve and enhance ecologically important inter-tidal and estuarine habitats, including Priority Habitat 'coastal saltmarshes', 'mudflats', and 'deciduous woodland'; introduce new areas of intertidal habitats to counter effects of 'coastal squeeze' where opportunities arise.
- Manage coastal defences in line with the SMP for Essex and Suffolk to prevent inundation and erosion and to combat the increasing pressures from climate change, including coastal squeeze, flooding, and erosion; seek to avoid increased engineering of flood defences where possible.

- Monitor and ensure the control of potential invasive non-native species through effective biosecurity measures.
- Implement buffer zones to minimise fertilizer, pesticide, and sediment runoff from adjacent farmland, thus protecting water quality in the estuary.
- Manage recreational access, including along PRow to limit habitat disturbance; consider opportunities for low-impact activities such as guided nature and heritage walks, potentially building on The Deepenings Trail and the World War II Trail at nearby Cudmore Grove Country Park.

Development Management

- Maintain the sense of openness by resisting proposals for new development that would impinge on the remote undeveloped quality of the landscape; where development is proposed consider siting and design and use locally characteristic planting to reduce any impacts.
- Preserve long, open views and the wild, remote character of the estuary by minimising visual intrusions and avoiding new development in the adjacent (Mersea Island, Wigborough, Langenhoe) coastal farmland.
- Seek to integrate any new flood defences sensitively into the landscape, using gently sloping embankments where possible and avoiding overly-engineered approaches and unsympathetic materials.
- Seek to manage signage and other features to strengthen and reinforce rural character.
- Seek to reduce lighting impacts to avoid any further reduction in tranquillity around West Mersea.

Landscape Character Area C3 : West Mersea Estuarine Marsh

Description

Location and Summary

7.164 The LCA is located in the south-east of the district, along the southern edge of Mersea Island, and comprises the estuarine landscape of the Blackwater and Colne Estuaries. It is a flat, low-lying open landscape characterised by a diverse mosaic of intertidal habitats protected by international and national conservation designations.



Key Characteristics

- Flat, low-lying estuarine landscape of sands and mudflats along the Colne and Blackwater Estuaries, supporting a rich array of wildlife and protected by international and national conservation designations.
- Largely unchanged by human activity, preserving its natural estuarine character.
- Accessed informally along the beach and from adjacent public rights of way (PRoW) and Cudmore Grove Country Park.
- Water is a defining feature of the landscape, shaping its character and sense of place; the rhythmic ebb and flow of the tide creates a dynamic environment added to by the movement of boats and flocks of birds.
- A sense of wildness and tranquillity, with sounds of coastal birds and wind dominant; enhanced by prominent sea walls which provide separation from adjacent coastal farmland.
- An open landscape, dominated by water, mudflats and large skiescapes; expansive panoramic views south and south-east across the estuaries.
- Local influence from West Mersea and caravan parks along the coastal edge, as well as visual presence of development across the estuaries at Bradwell and Brightlingsea.

Photo 7.37: Sea cliffs at Cudmore are distinctive features along the coastal edge



Photo 7.38: Expansive views at low tide across mudflats and estuaries.



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.165 The LCA comprises the inter-tidal landscape of the Blackwater and Colne Estuaries. A bedrock geology of clay, silt, sand and gravel (Thames Group) overlain by extensive deposits of London Clay that form the Mersea Flats. A flat, low-lying topography, with elevations below 5 metres above ordnance datum (AOD) lying entirely within Flood Zones 2 and 3. Land rises to the north, marking a transition to the adjacent area of coastal farmland (LCA E1) with up to 5-metre-high cliffs at Cudmore Grove Country Park. These distinctive cliffs have exposed the layers of sand and gravel laid down by the combined Thames-Medway River 300,000 years ago.

7.166 The LCA comprises a large open area of open mud and sands featuring large areas of Priority Habitat ‘mudflats’ which are periodically submerged and exposed by tides. Other habitats include small pockets of saltmarsh fringing the southern edge of Mersea Island, sand dunes, shingle, shell and sand banks. The area is protected by several international and national environmental and nature conservation designations reflecting the landscape’s ecological importance. This includes the Colne Estuary Ramsar Site, the Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the Colne Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA), the Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne estuaries Marine Conservation Area (MCA), the Colne Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and the Colne Estuary National Nature Reserve (NNR) The habitats within the LCA are internationally and nationally recognised as vital for maintaining the rich diversity of bird, plant, and invertebrate species across the estuarine landscape.

Cultural Influences

7.167 Due to its nature the landscape has remained largely unchanged by human activity, which helps preserves its natural estuarine character.

7.168 However, relatively recent human activity is evident in the sea wall to the north, a series of coastal defence structures including revetments along the length of the coastline, timber wave breaks/groynes near West Mersea and the remains of the polder scheme near Cudmore cliffs. In addition there are the remains of Second World War defensive structures along the beach in the north, including pillboxes, searchlight emplacements and coastal battery points. Some of these near Cudmore Grove Country Park are no longer in their original positions due to coastal erosion.

7.169 Whilst there are no formal PRow within the LCA, the mud and sand flats can be accessed informally along the beach and from PRow and Cudmore Grove Country Park in the neighbouring Mersea Island Coastal Farmland (LCA E1).

Perceptual Influences

7.170 An expansive open landscape, dominated by water, mudflats and large skylscapes. The rhythmic ebb and flow of the tide creates a dynamic environment, with tides periodically covering and uncovering the mudflats. The movement of boats navigating the estuaries add a dynamic feel to the landscape, as does the movement of flocks of birds. There is a strong sense of remoteness and wildness, with wide open views across the estuaries, heightened by the sounds of the wind and coastal birds. The sea wall and shallow cliffs rise to provide separation from adjacent coastal farmland. However, the sense of remoteness is locally reduced in the west in the vicinity of West Mersea and in the north by a series of holiday parks lining the coast, as reflected in CPRE tranquillity and dark skies mapping.

7.171 There are expansive panoramic views south and south-east across the estuaries. The changing skies and weather conditions significantly influence the character of these views, and together with the open nature of the landscape, contribute to a strong estuarine character. However, the sense of remoteness is diminished by the visual presence of Brightlingsea to the east, wind farms at Bradwell to the south and the offshore windfarm at Gunfleet Sands to the east.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Distinctive estuarine character defined by extensive flat, open mudflats at low tide.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity is provided by Priority Habitat ‘mudflats’ protected by international and national nature conservation designations.
- Sense of time depth provided by the landscape’s natural character, as well as remnants of Second World War pillboxes.
- A strong sense of tranquillity and remoteness, enhanced by the general absence of development and the open expansive mudflats which together foster a strong feeling of isolation; heightened by the sounds of the wind and birds.
- A sense of visual openness, with long-distance views across the Colne and Blackwater Estuaries.
- Visual interest in estuarine landscape, provided by the dominance of water and the sense of dynamism and movement due to the tidal movements.

Issues and Changes

- The strategy within the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) for Essex and Suffolk along the coast of Mersea Island is for a mix of ‘No active intervention’ (new defences not encouraged), ‘hold the line’ (retain defences) and ‘managed realignment’. There is potential for increased engineering of flood defences which would detract from the generally naturalistic quality of the area.
- Increased recreational pressures along coast and disturbance to areas of nature conservation value.

- Further development, including caravan parks, to the north could erode the generally remote and undisturbed character of the area.
- Lack of management of scrub vegetation along the coastal edge.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Sea level rise threatens coastal mudflats due to 'coastal squeeze,' where human activities stop the natural landward spread of coastal habitats as sea levels rise.
 - Tidal flooding has the potential to impact areas of nature conservation interest (such as Ramsar Sites and SSSI), and heritage features (such as the Second World War defensive structures).
 - Prolonged dry spells during hotter summers could increase the drying of mudflats, affecting soil moisture levels and leading to changes in intertidal vegetation and invertebrate communities essential for bird populations.
 - Frequent inundation from rising tides could result in expanded mudflat areas, making habitats more susceptible to invasive plants, accelerating erosion, and disrupting the balance of estuarine ecosystems.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the West Mersea Estuarine Mudflats LCA is to conserve and enhance the character and strong sense of place of the remote, undeveloped, and open estuarine landscape. Ecologically significant inter-tidal mudflat habitats should be conserved, enhanced, and extended wherever possible and important geological features should be preserved. New development within the area should be avoided.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Work with the natural estuary processes to conserve and enhance the inter-tidal landscape, including the distinctive sand and mudflats.
- Conserve and enhance ecologically important inter-tidal and estuarine habitats, including Priority Habitat 'mudflats' as well as sand dunes, shingle, shell and sand banks; introduce new areas of intertidal habitats to counter effects of 'coastal squeeze' where opportunities arise.
- Protect and conserve the coastal geologic features for their distinctive character and natural heritage value.
- Manage coastal defences in line with the SMP for Essex and Suffolk; seek to avoid increased engineering of flood defences where possible.
- Where appropriate encourage 'No Active Intervention' policies and natural environmental solutions (such as the accretion of saltmarsh that provide a defence buffer) to allow for natural shoreline evolution; this will enhance adaptation and ecosystem service functioning, and simultaneously begin to move away from a focus on hard engineering solutions.
- Monitor and ensure the control of potential invasive non-native species through effective biosecurity measures.
- Manage recreational access to limit habitat disturbance; consider opportunities for low-impact activities such as guided nature and heritage walks, potentially building on The Deepenings Trail and the World War II Trail at nearby Cudmore Grove Country Park.

Development Management

- Maintain the sense of openness by resisting proposals for new development in the adjacent Mersea Island coastal farmland that would impinge on the remote undeveloped quality of the landscape; where development is proposed consider siting and design and use locally characteristic planting to reduce any impacts.
- Conserve the skyline, avoiding visually intrusive development, both within the area and outside it, that impacts the characteristic large open skies and horizons.
- Seek to integrate any new flood defences sensitively into the landscape, using gently sloping embankments where possible and avoiding overly-engineered approaches and unsympathetic materials.
- Seek to manage signage and other features along the coastal edge to the north to strengthen and reinforce rural character.
- Seek to reduce lighting impacts to avoid any further reduction in tranquillity around West Mersea and caravan parks.

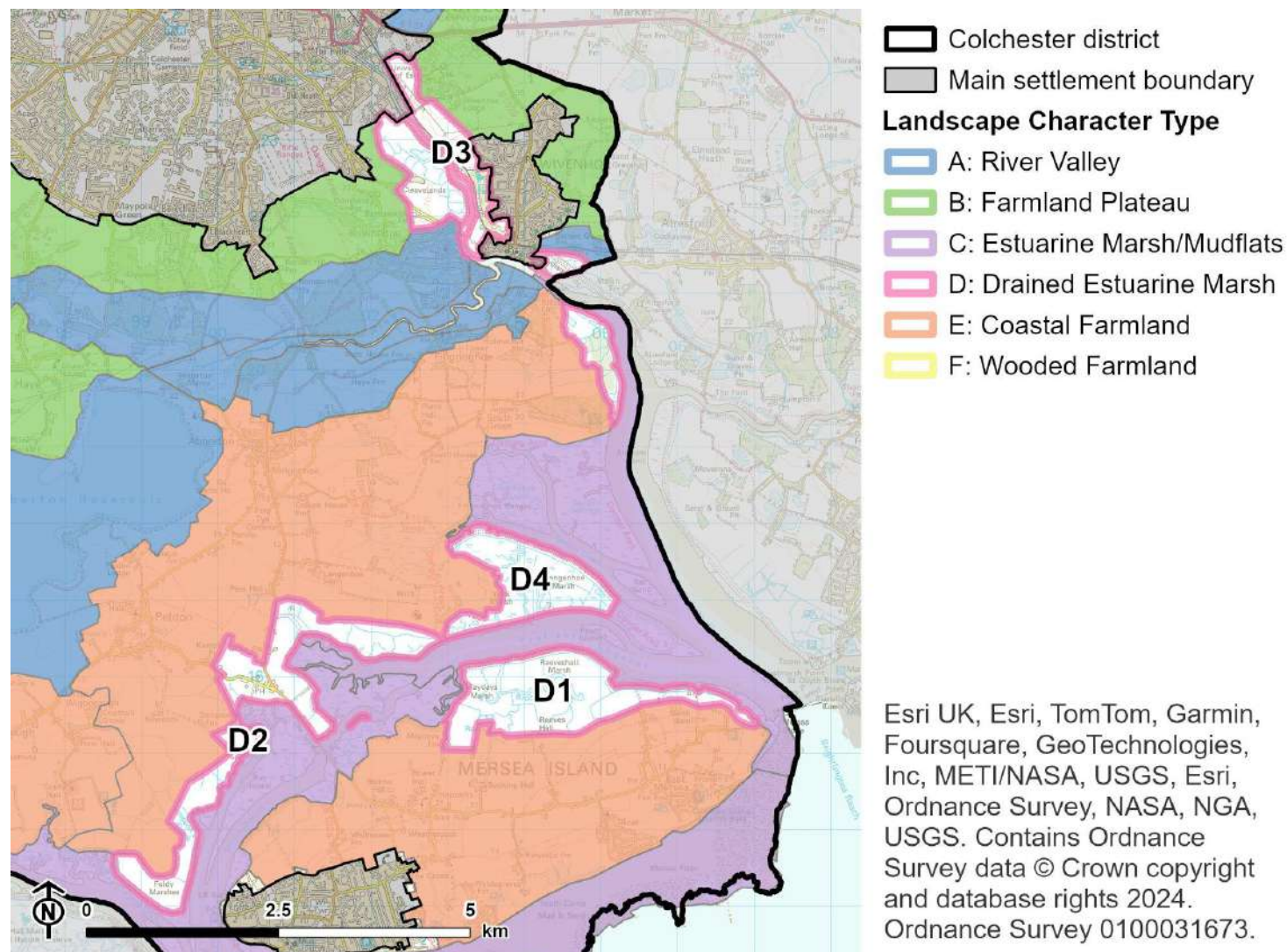
Landscape Character Type D: Drained Estuarine Marsh

Landscape Character Areas

7.172 The Drained Estuarine Marsh LCT is subdivided into four LCAs as follows:

- Landscape Character Area D1: Mersea Island Drained Estuarine Marsh;
- Landscape Character Area D2: Feldy Drained Estuarine Marsh;
- Landscape Character Area D3: Colne Drained Estuarine Marsh; and
- Landscape Character Area D4: Pyefleet Drained Estuarine Marsh.

Figure 7.23: Location of the Drained Estuarine Marsh LCT and LCAs



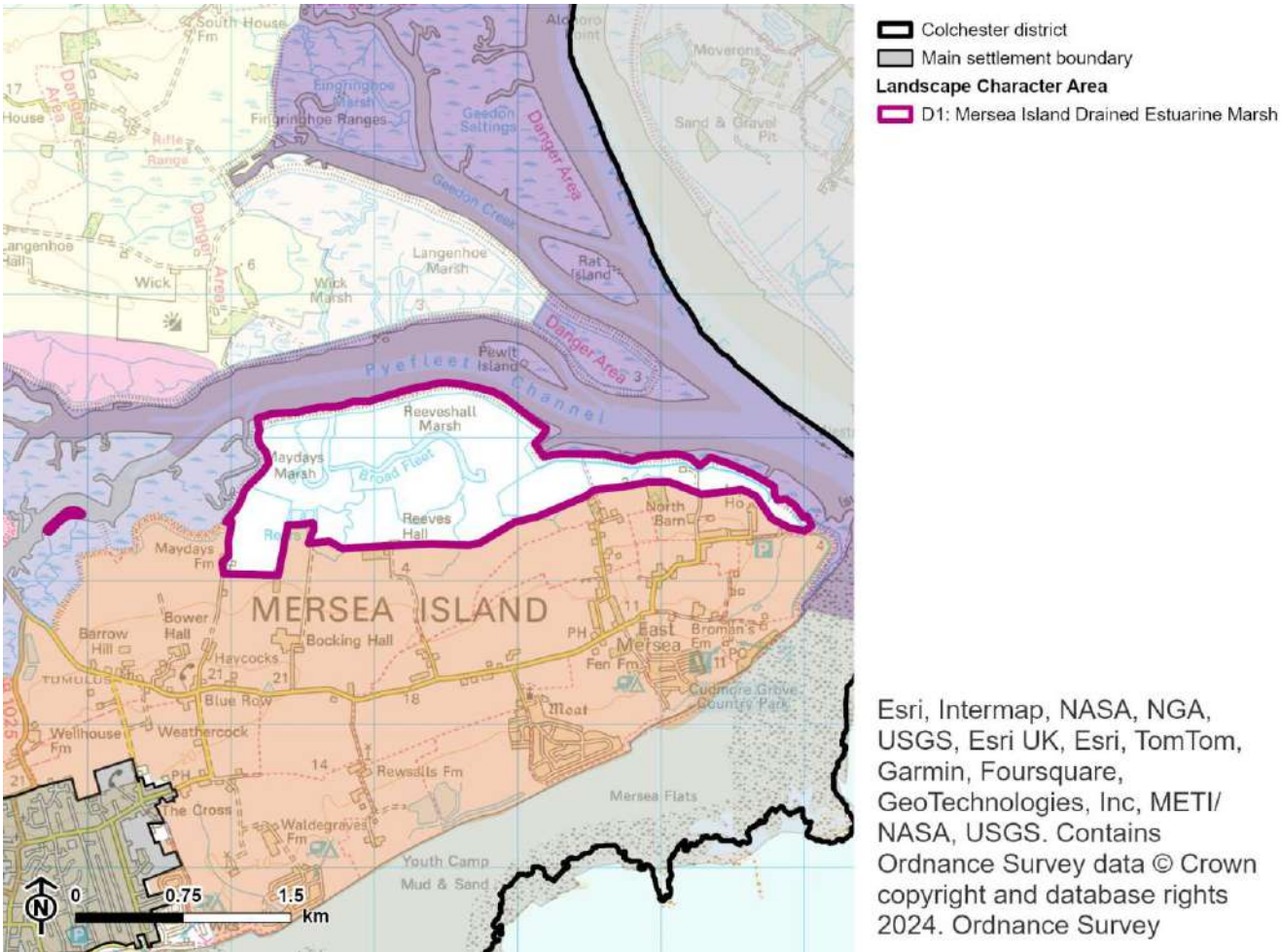
Landscape Character Area D1: Mersea Island Drained Estuarine Marsh

Description

Location and Summary

7.173 The LCA is located in the south-east of the district along the northern-eastern edge of Mersea Island, flanked by the Colne Estuary to the east and the Pyefleet Channel to the north. It is a flat, low-lying landscape of reclaimed former saltmarsh, featuring a mix of arable fields and grazing marshes. The area retains a sense of remoteness and tranquillity due to limited development, expansive views across the Colne Estuary, and a largely unspoiled coastal character.

Figure 7.24: Location of LCA D1



Key Characteristics

- A flat, open, low-lying area of former saltmarsh which has been drained and enclosed by a sea wall.
- A farmed landscape featuring a mix of arable fields and grazing marshes, organised into a pattern of curvilinear and rectilinear fields defined largely by drainage ditches.
- Ecologically diverse landscape with extensive areas of coastal and floodplain grazing marsh and reedbed habitat.
- Adjoining estuary and channels covered by several international and national nature conservation designations which feature important inter-tidal and estuarine habitats.
- Distinctive landscape features include sea walls, which define the coastal edge, and water features including Broad Fleet creek.
- Sparsely settled with isolated farmsteads located on slightly higher ground inland; historic character added to by the remnant pattern 18th to 20th century reclamation.
- Public access available around the coastal edge along seawalls; limited public access elsewhere.
- Retains an essentially rural character with a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity due to a general lack of built development, open views across the estuary, and the sounds of wind and birds.

Photo 7.39: Flat, open, low-lying farmed landscape featuring grazing marshes



Photo 7.40: Expansive views across surrounding estuary from the sea wall



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.174 A sedimentary bedrock geology of clay, silt, sand and gravel (Thames Group) overlain by superficial alluvial deposits of clay, silt and sand. A flat, low-lying topography, with elevation generally below 5 metres above ordnance datum (AOD). The area has been formed by tidal and fluvial processes and it lies entirely within Flood Zones 2 and 3. It features a network of drainage ditches and other water features, including the Broad Fleet (creek/channel and two small reservoirs, which contribute to the area's inter-tidal character. Soils within the LCA comprise Grade 3 (Good to Moderate) soils used for arable farming to the west and Grade 4 (Poor) soils utilised for pasture to the east.

7.175 Fields are defined by drainage ditches and scrub vegetation, with some larger fields marked by post-and-wire fencing and some smaller fields along the eastern coast bounded by mature hedgerows. The LCA includes extensive areas of Priority Habitat 'coastal and floodplain grazing marsh' interspersed with recently planted woodland copses. These habitats, combined with the designated Local Wildlife Site (LWS) of Reeveshall Reedbed, create a rich ecological mosaic. The reedbed, dominated by scarce Common Reed, attracts breeding birds and brackish open-water areas provide valuable feeding grounds for coastal waders. The adjoining inter-tidal areas of the Colne Estuary and the Pyefleet Channel are protected by several international and national environmental and nature conservation designations. This includes the Colne Estuary Ramsar Site, the Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the Colne Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA), the Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne estuaries Marine Conservation Area (MCA), and the Colne Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Cultural Influences

7.176 The marshland landscapes of the past were ideal for the production of salt in prehistoric and Roman times, and two red hills north-west of North Barn, bordering LCA E1, are a visible landmarks (at low tide) which provide a link to this early industry.

7.177 Historically, this area was once saltmarsh but has been reclaimed at various times in the past. The Essex HLC (2013) identifies the vast majority of the landscape as being 'drained reclamation', either curvilinear in form (18th century) or rectilinear (19th and 20th century) Areas of characteristic curved field boundaries are found at Reeveshall Marsh and in the east, while areas of more regular rectilinear boundaries are found at Maydays Marsh in the west. Some of these patterns have been eroded by 'post 1950's enclosure' and 'post 1950s boundary loss' potentially to rationalise the varied field pattern.

7.178 The area retains its historic sparse settlement pattern of isolated farmsteads at Maydays Farm and Reeves Hall located on slightly higher ground inland. Later development includes a Second World War decoy bunker and an oyster fishery along the northern coastal edge.

7.179 The landscape is largely inaccessible, although features a PRow which provides access to the coastal edge along the seawalls. This forms part of the Mersea Island stretch of the King Charles III England Coast Path National Trail which creates a complete ring around the perimeter of the island. Access is also available to Esat Mersea Flats nature reserve to the east. Road access is limited to two tracks which provide access to the oyster fishery and East Mersea Flats.

Perceptual Influences

7.180 This flat, open landscape, characterised by expansive skies and minimal built development. There is a strong sense of remoteness and wildness along the coastal edges, with wide open views across the surrounding estuaries and

channels, heightened by the sounds of the wind and birds. Occasional glimpses of boats navigating the estuary add a dynamic feel to the landscape.

7.181 The limited development and very sparse settlement contribute to high levels of tranquillity and experience of dark skies, as demonstrated by CPRE tranquillity and dark skies mapping. . However, there are views towards residential development along East Road to the south-east (with LCA E1) and across the Colne Estuary in Brightlingsea. in Brightlingsea and its drained marshes, while southward vistas reveal the agricultural expanses of Mersea Island (LCA E1).

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Flat, low-lying landscape of reclaimed coastal marsh defined by its network of drainage ditches and featuring distinctive creeks.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity of habitats such as the Priority Habitat 'coastal and floodplain grazing marsh,' woodland copses and scarce Common Reeds at Reeveshall Reedbed LWS.
- Ecologically important of inter-tidal and estuarine habitats lying within and adjacent to the area, reflected in their protection by several international and national nature conservation designations.
- Sense of time depth provided by the intact pattern of drained reclamation from the 18th and 19th and 20th centuries.
- Recreational value of the PRoW along the sea wall which provides access to the coastal edge.
- The rural character of much of the landscape provides the setting for the PRoW and scattered farmsteads.

- The strong sense of remoteness and wildness along the coastal edges, and wide open views across the surrounding estuaries and channels and the sound of wind and birds.
- Highly remote landscape with extremely limited development and high levels of relative dark night skies and tranquillity.

Issues and Changes

- The strategy within the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) for Essex and Suffolk under the 'Landward Frontage E1' plan is to maintain the flood defences at their current level, accepting that as seas levels rise the flood risk will increase. This could potentially lead to the potential for increased engineering of flood defences which would detract from the generally naturalistic quality of the area.
- Loss of characteristic drainage ditches due to lack of maintenance.
- Uncharacteristic boundary treatments, such as post and wire fencing of arable fields.
- An increase in equine land uses, particularly to the south in proximity to settlement on East Road within LCA E1.
- Increased recreational pressures on the PRow along the seawall and potential disturbance to areas of nature conservation value.
- Conversion of grazing marsh to cultivated land.
- Poorly integrated settlement edges along East Road, which are relatively exposed in the open landscape with clear views from the sea wall.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Rising sea levels threaten the low-lying coastal marshland and could lead to increased flooding across the entire LCA, which falls within Flood Zones 2 and 3.
 - Loss of coastal and floodplain habitats due to coastal squeeze may reduce vital areas of grazing marsh, reedbeds, and saline lagoons, impacting species that rely on these habitats.

- Frequent storm surges and tidal flooding pose risks to drainage systems and the stability of water features such as Broad Fleet Creek, potentially leading to accelerated erosion and compromised land quality for agriculture.
- Wetter winters and winter flooding may alter wetland plant communities and degrade the soil structure in grazing areas, impacting both agricultural use and local biodiversity.
- Hotter, drier summers could lead to the desiccation of marshland, and reservoirs, affecting critical breeding habitats and altering vegetation, potentially increasing the landscape's vulnerability to invasive species.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Mersea Island Drained Estuarine Marsh LCA is to conserve and enhance the character of this flat, low-lying landscape and its distinct sense of place shaped by its proximity to the Colne Estuary. Seek to conserve and expand characteristic coastal and floodplain habitats to enhance character and biodiversity, focusing on the protection and restoration of grazing marshes, reedbeds, and saline lagoons. Maintain and enhance recreational access to the landscape in balance with protecting the historic character of the marshes and avoiding/minimising disturbance to areas of nature conservation value.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Work with natural coastal processes to conserve and enhance the coastal landscape with its distinctive pattern of coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, drainage ditches and saline lagoons.
- Conserve, manage, and restore ecologically important habitats, including Priority Habitat 'coastal and floodplain grazing marsh,' with a focus on enhancing and maintaining low-lying grazing marsh areas.
- Manage coastal defences in line with the SMP for Essex and Suffolk to prevent inundation and erosion and to combat the increasing pressures from climate change, including coastal squeeze, flooding, and erosion; seek to avoid increased engineering of flood defences where possible.
- Monitor and ensure the control of potential invasive non-native species through effective biosecurity measures.
- Encourage traditional boundary treatments, such as hedgerows and ditches, in place of post-and-wire fencing to enhance landscape continuity.
- Promote sustainable land use practices for both arable and pasture lands to prevent soil degradation and support local hydrology.
- Protect and manage the valued recreational use of the landscape, seeking opportunities to further enhance opportunities for access and enjoyment; consider opportunities for additional rights of way in the west of the area including north-south connection to East Road (via LCA E1).
- Enhance the visual characteristics and quality of the England Coast Path, drawing upon the connections to historic features (such as those related to historic salt making), and through the preservation and enhancement of existing distinctive expansive views across the surrounding estuaries and channels.

Development Management

- Maintain the sense of openness by resisting proposals for new development that would impinge on the remote undeveloped quality of the marshland; where development is proposed consider siting and design and use locally characteristic planting to reduce any impacts.
- Conserve the skyline, avoiding visually intrusive development, both within the area and outside it, that impacts the characteristic large open skies and horizons.
- Consider the impact on longer views from the marshes and the coast of any proposed large scale or tall development; where development is proposed tree screening, muted colours and non-reflective surfaces will help provide mitigation and integration.
- Seek to integrate any new flood defences sensitively into the landscape, using gently sloping embankments where possible and avoiding overly-engineered approaches and unsympathetic materials.
- Seek to manage signage and other features to strengthen and reinforce rural character.

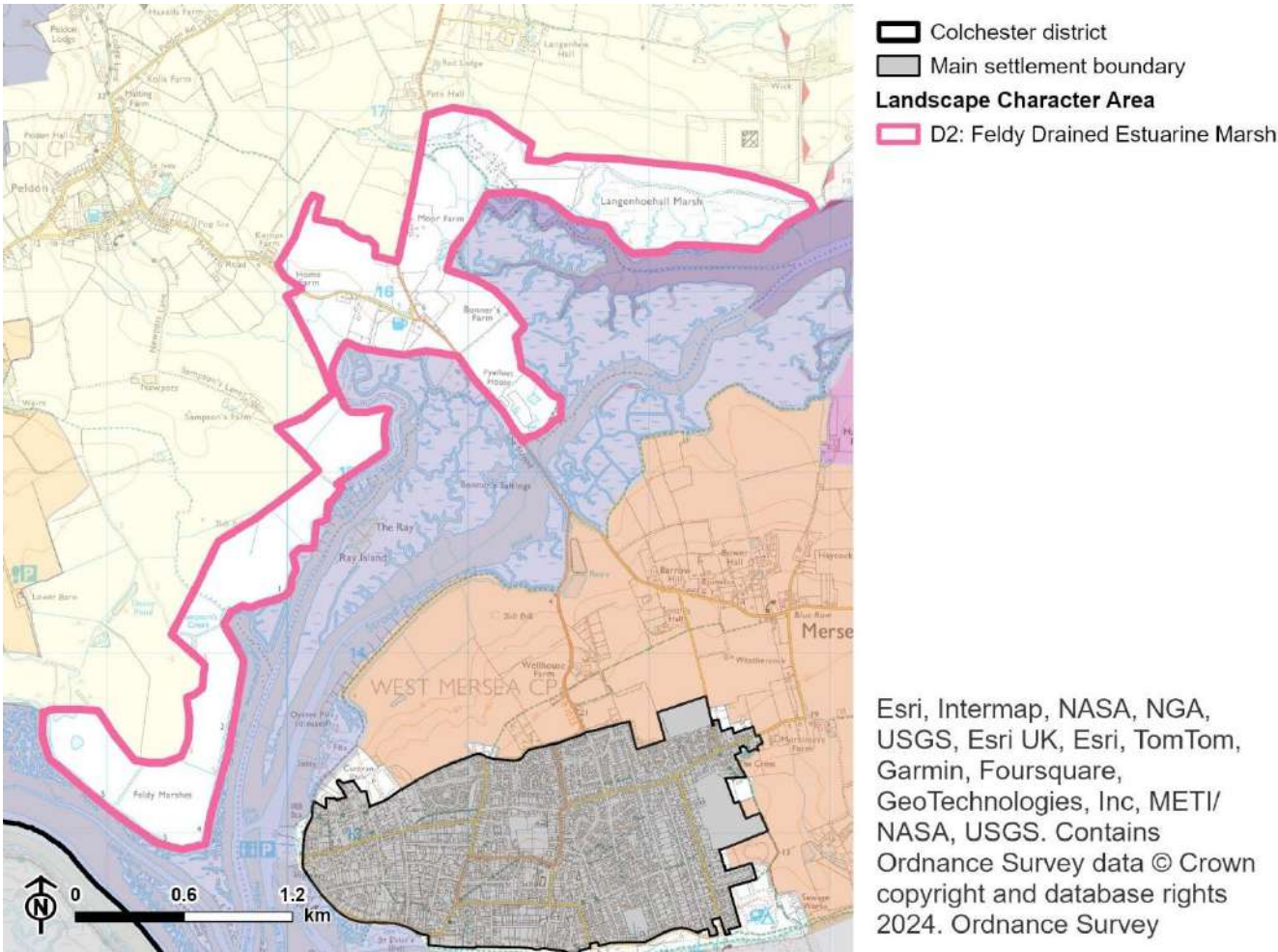
Landscape Character Area D2: Feldy Drained Estuarine Marsh

Description

Location and Summary

7.182 The LCA is located in the south of the district. This is a transitional landscape that separates the coastal farmland landscape to the west (LCA E3) from the estuarine landscape to the east (LCA C1 and C2). It comprises an area of flat reclaimed farmland, characterized by a mix of arable fields and grazing marshes, separated by drainage ditches. It maintains a sense of remoteness and tranquillity, owing to limited development, expansive views and its exposed coastal character.

Figure 7.25: Location of LCA D2



Key Characteristics

- A flat, low-lying landscape of reclaimed farmland set back behind a sea wall, which separates it from the estuarine landscape of Salcott, Ray, Strood, and Pyefleet Channels.
- A farmed landscape featuring a mix of arable fields and coastal grazing marshes, organized into a varied pattern of regular and irregular fields, defined largely by open drainage ditches.
- Sea walls, wide drainage ditches, and hedged boundaries contribute to the unique, compartmentalised landscape character.
- Grazing marshes at Langenhoe Hall and remnant estuarine habitat within the Ray Channel are covered by international and national nature conservation designations and support internationally important bird populations.
- Largely retains the historic settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads and hamlet, with a land-use pattern shaped by drainage and reclamation from the 18th to 20th centuries.
- Public rights of way (PRoW), including the King Charles III England Coast Path, provide recreational access the seawalls; informal access also available within Langenhoe Hall Marshes.
- Strong sense of visual openness with wide skies and long, uninterrupted views from the seawalls, including across the surrounding channels.
- Strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity, reinforced by the absence of significant built structures, the expansive open marshland, and panoramic estuary views.

Photo 7.41: Flat, low-lying landscape of reclaimed farmland defined by open drainage ditches



Photo 7.42: Strong sense of visual openness with wide skies and long, uninterrupted views from the seawalls



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.183 The area consists primarily of drained reclaimed farmland set back behind a sea wall, separating it from the estuarine landscapes along the Ray, Strood, and Pyefleet Channels. The bedrock geology consists of sedimentary clay, silt, sand, and gravel (Thames Group) which underpins flat, low-lying topography generally below 5 metres above ordnance datum (AOD). The land rises briefly to 5m AOD in the west, and this is the only area not within Flood Zones 2 and 3. Soils within the LCA form a mosaic of Grade 3 (Good to Moderate), Grade 4 (Poor), and, to a lesser extent, Grade 5 (Very Poor). The land is primarily used for arable farming, with intermittent areas of pasture.

7.184 The field pattern is typically defined by a network of drainage ditches. Drainage ditches following the sea walls are often wide and sinuous, resulting in a compartmentalized landscape. Smaller pasture fields are bounded by hedgerows, with varied management. Some fields are delineated by hedged ditches, or vegetative seawalls, as seen at Langenhoe Hall Marsh, Moor Farm, and around Feldy Marshes. Langenhoe Hall Marsh, and Sampson's creek retain a more naturalistic character, featuring an intricate network of drainage ditches and dendritic pattern of creeks.

7.185 The area supports extensive areas of the Priority Habitat 'coastal and floodplain grazing marsh', including a large area at Langenhoe Hall Marshes. Strood Marsh LWS contains a range of wetland habitats such as freshwater scrapes, rough grassland, tussocks, rushes, ditches, and wetlands, creating a rich ecological mosaic. Grazing marshes at Langenhoe Hall Marshes and parts of the Ray Channel are protected by several international and national conservation designations due to their rich diversity of bird, plant, and invertebrate species. These include the Blackwater Estuary and Colne Estuary Ramsar Sites, the Blackwater Estuary and Colne Estuary Special Protection Areas (SPA), and the Colne Estuary and Blackwater Estuary Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Cultural Influences

7.186 The marshland landscapes of the past were ideal for the production of salt, and the remains of Red Hills (small red mounds which are evidence of roman or earlier salt extraction) can be seen at New Hall and on Langenhoe Hall Marshes. In later periods the saltmarsh was largely drained and enclosed by a sea wall, and converted to arable land or grazing marsh. This occurred at various periods, as identified within the Essex HLC (2013). Areas with earlier drainage and characteristic curved field boundaries (18th century) can be found at Langenhoe Hall Marsh, Moor Farm, and the marshes south of Home Farm. In contrast, later drainage enclosures (19th–20th century) with more regular, rectilinear field boundaries are evident around Feldy Marsh to the south. Some earlier field patterns have been eroded due to 'post-1950s boundary loss,' potentially to rationalise the varied field patterns, especially around Bonners Farm and Pyefleet House. The resulting field pattern is of predominantly medium scale enclosures with smaller-scale enclosures around settlement.

7.187 Settlement is concentrated on the area of higher ground in the west, and consists of a small, unnamed hamlet at the junction of Colchester Road and Mersea Road and two isolated farmsteads.

7.188 Formal access to the landscape comprises the Salcott to Jaywick section of the King Charles III England Coast Path, which follows the seawalls from Feldy Marshes north to Moor Farm, and a PRoW that traverses the seawalls from Strood Bridge northwards to connect with Colchester Road. Access to the landscape is also possible via Mersea Road, Colchester Road and the Strood, which crosses the Strood Channel to Mersea Island. Langenhoe Hall Marshes to the north are also used for informal recreation, as evidenced by numerous well-used tracks.

Perceptual Influences

7.189 The landscape has a strong sense of openness, dominated by a wide sky and with a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity due to limited

development. The marshes, especially Langenhoe Marsh, which fringe estuarine habitat (LCA C2), contribute to this sense of remoteness, with the ever-changing colours of the sky and sea adding variety to the landscape character. The absence of tree cover and settlement creates an expansive, wild landscape in places. While the relatively busy B1025 has some localised impact, the area generally has high levels of tranquillity and experience of dark skies, as reflected in CPRE tranquillity and dark skies mapping.

7.190 The flat topography, lack of vertical elements, and open landscape allow for expansive panoramic views across the Strood and Salcott channels, fringing marshes (LCA C2), Mersea Island (LCA E1), and the Blackwater Estuary. Views across the channels and fringing marshes are generally available from the sea wall. Long east-west views are also available from The Strood (B1025). Additionally, there are long-distance panoramic views across coastal farmland (LCA E3) to the north. However, long-range views south towards Bradwell Power Station introduce a large-scale industrial element to the landscape.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Ecological value and landscape diversity provided by a mosaic of wetland habitats of national and international importance.
- Sense of time depth provided by the intact pattern of drained reclamation and Red Hills, providing visible link to historic salt making industry.
- Recreational value provided by PRow, including the King Charles III Coastal Path, which provide access to the sea wall and other informal access to coastline and marshland.
- Visual interest provided by remnant marshes and estuarine habitat, contributing to the coastal and exposed character of the landscape.

- Strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity, owing to limited development, expansive views and its exposed coastal character.
- The strong sense of visual openness with long, uninterrupted views from the sea wall across the surrounding estuarine channels.

Issues and Changes

- The strategy within the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) for Essex and Suffolk under the 'Langenhoe Hall Marsh D8C' plan is to maintain the flood defences at their current extent, accepting that as seas levels rise the flood risk will increase. This could lead to increased engineering of flood defences which would detract from the generally naturalistic quality of the area.
- Loss of characteristic drainage ditches which define the historic enclosure pattern due to lack of maintenance.
- Increased encroachment of scrub vegetation within marshland and drainage ditches.
- Damage to estuarine habitats due to pesticide, fertiliser and sediment runoff from adjacent farmland.
- Increased recreational pressures on the PRow, including the King Charles III Coastal Path, along the seawall and disturbance to areas of nature conservation value.
- Potential conversion of grazing marsh to cultivated land.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - More frequent and intense rainfall that could exacerbate flooding in the floodplain and marshy areas, which fall within Flood Zones 2 and 3, resulting in damage to natural habitats.
 - Increasing river flow and storm intensity leading to heightened erosion and sedimentation impacting the stability of earth banks and drainage ditches.

- Rising sea levels and increased salinity may lead to habitat loss or shifts in vegetation within marshes along the estuary.
- Wetter and warmer winters, and more frequent hot and dry periods, leading to increased risk of flooding in winter and increasing the risk of drought in summer, affecting flow rates and impacting on riparian habitats and species.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Feldy Drained Estuarine Marsh LCA is to conserve and enhance the character of this low-lying landscape with its distinct sense of place shaped by its proximity to the adjacent estuarine channels. Seek to conserve and restore grazing marshes to strengthen landscape character and biodiversity. Maintain and enhance recreational access to the landscape in balance with protecting the historic character of the marshes and avoiding/minimising disturbance to areas of nature conservation value.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Work with natural coastal processes to conserve and enhance the coastal landscape with its distinctive pattern of coastal and floodplain grazing marsh.
- Conserve, manage, and restore ecologically important habitats, including Priority Habitat 'coastal and floodplain grazing marsh,' with a focus on enhancing and maintaining grazing marsh areas.

- Manage and maintain the distinctive pattern of open drainage ditches for its cultural importance and the niche habitat they provide.
- Protect and manage the valued recreational use of the landscape, seeking opportunities to further enhance opportunities for access and enjoyment; consider opportunities for additional rights of way between the sea wall and adjacent coastal farmland landscape to the west .
- Enhance and promote existing longer-distance views from the sea walls over the adjoining channels.
- Manage coastal defences in line with the SMP for Essex and Suffolk to prevent inundation and erosion and to combat the increasing pressures from climate change, including coastal squeeze, flooding, and erosion; seek to avoid increased engineering of flood defences where possible.
- Monitor and ensure the control of potential invasive non-native species through effective biosecurity measures.
- Promote sustainable land use practices for both arable and pasture lands to prevent soil degradation and support local hydrology.

Development Management

- Maintain the sense of openness by resisting proposals for new development that would impinge on the remote undeveloped quality of the marshland; where development is proposed consider siting and design to reduce any impacts.
- Conserve the skyline, avoiding visually intrusive development, both within the area and outside it, that impacts the characteristic large open skies and horizons.
- Consider the impact on longer views of any proposed large scale or tall development outside the LCA (for example on the opposite side of Blackwater Estuary); where development is proposed tree screening, muted colours and non-reflective surfaces will help provide mitigation and integration.

- Seek to integrate any new flood defences sensitively into the landscape, using gently sloping embankments where possible and avoiding overly-engineered approaches and unsympathetic materials.
- Seek to manage signage and other features to strengthen and reinforce rural character.

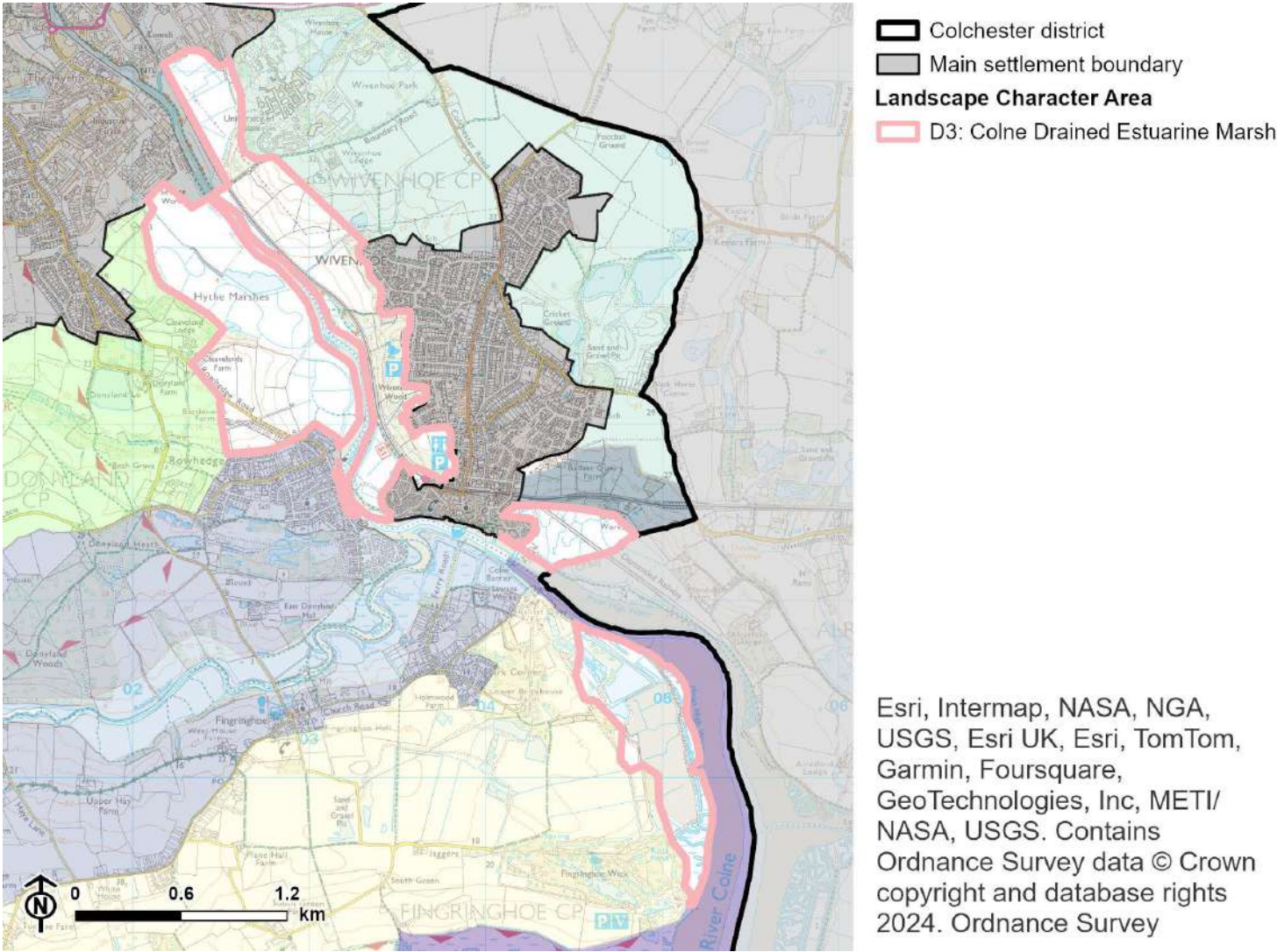
Landscape Character Area D3: Colne Drained Estuarine Marshland

Description

Location and Summary

7.191 This LCA is located between the south-eastern edge of Colchester and Wivenhoe. It comprises an area of drained marshland and gently sloping valley sides flanking the River Colne. It has a largely open character and features a variety of habitats, including grazing marshland, mudflats and woodland.

Figure 7.26: Location of LCA D3



Key Characteristics

- The tidal section of the River Colne and associated flat valley bottom flanked by gently rising valley sides.
- The valley floor is dominated by water, including the river, streams, drainage ditches and Hythe Lagoons; the latter is a distinctive landscape feature on the western side of the river.
- A pattern of reclaimed marshland, pasture fields and mudflats interspersed with patches of scrub and deciduous woodland; some arable fields and larger woodland blocks along the valley sides.
- Wivenhoe wood lies along the eastern valley side, forming a distinctive edge to the settlement of Wivenhoe.
- Features a variety of habitats typical of a tidal river valley, protected by several international, national and local nature conservation designations.
- Public rights of way (PRoW) provide access along either bank of the river and also connect to the neighbouring settlements of Colchester, Rowhedge and Wivenhoe.
- An largely open landscape dominated by water and reclaimed marshland which creates some sense of remoteness and allows long views along the river.
- Adjacent urban areas and other urbanising influences have a visual and aural influence.

Photo 7.43: Eastern seawall looking south with Hythe Marshes on the west bank



Photo 7.44: View north from Ferry Marsh towards Wivenhoe Woods



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.192 The bedrock geology comprises sedimentary clay, silt, sand and gravel (Thames Group) overlain by further superficial clay, sand and gravel deposits. This has been cut by the River Colne with a resulting flat valley bottom flanked by gentle valley sides rising to form the edge of a farmland plateau to the east and west (B3: Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau and B8: Wivenhoe Farmland Plateau respectively). The valley bottom identified as falling within Flood Zones 2 and 3 and features a pattern of drained marshland and pasture fields interspersed with small patches of scrub and deciduous woodland. The marshes often feature a pattern of streams and drainage ditches, and Hythe Marshes on the west bank of the Colne River contains Hythe Lagoon. Soils to the west of the River Colne are identified as Grade 4 (poor) and to the east of the river as Grade 3 (good to moderate) and with land on the higher valley sides supporting some arable cultivation.

7.193 The landscape features several wetland and grassland habitats, including Priority Habitat 'Coastal saltmarsh' and 'Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh', as well as some woodland predominantly located along the valley sides. The majority of the area is covered by several international and national natural heritage designations, including the 'Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries Marine Conservation Area (MCA)', which covers the tidal sections of the river; the 'Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC)'; the 'Upper Colne Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)'; and the 'Colne Local Nature Reserve (LNR)'. Wivenhoe Wood is a relatively large area of woodland on the eastern side of the river and is identified as Ancient Woodland. This was once managed as a sweet chestnut coppice, and is now a diverse woodland rich in wildlife. In addition there are several Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), including University Marshes, Hythe Lagoons, Wivenhoe Wood, and Ferry Marsh.

Cultural Influences

7.194 Due to the tidal nature of the river, much of this area would have originally been marshland and meadow. The marshes along the River Colne have been reclaimed at various times in the past. The Essex HLC (2013) identifies various stages of 'drained reclamation', including that of the 18th century (areas featuring intricate, sinuous drainage ditches such as the south of Hythe Marshes and at Ferry Marsh) and that of the 19th to 20th centuries (more rectilinear enclosure, for example at University Marsh). Some areas have also seen later modifications with evidence of 'post-1950 boundary loss' such as the north of Hythe Marshes. Earlier enclosure is generally found on the upper valley sides, identified by the HLC as being 'pre-18th century irregular enclosure', which are probably of medieval origin and some maybe even older.

7.195 The eastern valley side also features a small part of Wivenhoe Park, identified as 'informal medieval parkland'. The Wivenhoe Hall estate also once lay further south along the eastern side of the river but has now been largely lost to later development in Wivenhoe. The only notable remnant of the earlier parkland is Wivenhoe Woods and King George V Playing Field which today forms a distinctive edge to the west of settlement. The landscape provides a tidal river setting to the adjacent historic settlements of Wivenhoe and Rowhedge.

7.196 Access is provided by PRoW running along each bank of the river, with other footpaths connecting with the adjacent settlements – the south-eastern edge of Colchester, Rowhedge and Wivenhoe - as well as the University of Essex Colchester campus at Wivenhoe Park (within LCA B8). The eastern bank of the river also features National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 51, which links Colchester and Wivenhoe. The Colne LNR provides further recreational access to the landscape in the vicinity of Wivenhoe.

Perceptual Influences

7.197 A largely open landscape, dominated by water and reclaimed marshland which creates some sense of remoteness and allows long views along the river. There are distinctive panoramic views across the river and Ferry Marsh to and from Rowhedge. c The tidal nature of the river results a sense of dynamism and movement, with tides periodically covering and uncovering the fringing marshes and mudflats.

7.198 However, counter to this the open nature of the landscape also means that the adjacent urban areas and other urbanising influences (such as the railway line and overhead power lines and pylons which run to the east of the river) have a visual and aural influence, particularly industrial development on the south-eastern edge of Colchester. This is reflected in the lower levels of tranquillity and dark skies attributed to the area in CPRE mapping. There is further visual intrusion in the landscape from the university campus located on the plateau edge to the east (LCA B8).

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Ecological value and landscape diversity is provided by several important wetland, grassland and woodland habitats, protected by international, national and local nature conservation designations.
- Visual interest of the tidal river landscape, provided by water and distinctive marshland habitats and the sense of dynamism and movement due to the tidal movements.
- Provides part of a distinctive tidal river setting to the adjacent settlements of Rowhedge and Wivenhoe.
- The recreational value provided by the PRoW which provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access between settlements.

the Colne LNR provides further recreational access to the west of Wivenhoe.

- Some sense of time depth provided by a pattern of earlier pre-18th century irregular enclosure on the valley sides and later drained reclamation evident along the valley floor. Woodland along the eastern valley sides, including Wivenhoe Woods (Ancient Woodland), are remnant features of medieval parklands (Wivenhoe Park and the Wivenhoe Hall estate).
- A sense of visual openness, with long along the River Colne and across the fringing marshes.

Issues and Changes

- The strategy within the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) for Essex and Suffolk is to hold the current line of defence. This could lead to the potential for increased engineering of flood defences which would detract from the generally naturalistic quality of the area.
- Detracting influence of surrounding development, including industrial development on the south-eastern edge of Colchester, adjacent settlements, the university campus and railway line.
- Potential for further expansion of adjacent settlements into the area - Wivenhoe, Rowhedge and the south of Colchester.
- Increased recreational pressures along the river edge and disturbance to areas of nature conservation value.
- Lack of management of scrub vegetation.
- Potential for fertiliser, pesticide and sediment run-off from arable fields to pollute the River Colne and its surrounding marshland, affecting water quality and habitats.
- Potential loss of drainage ditches defining the historic enclosure pattern as a result of lack of maintenance.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:

- More frequent and intense rainfall that could exacerbate flooding in the floodplain and marshy areas, which fall within Flood Zones 2 and 3, resulting in damages to natural habitats.
- Increasing river flow and storm intensity leading to heightened erosion and sedimentation impacting the stability of earth banks and drainage ditches.
- Rising sea levels and increased salinity may lead to habitat loss or shifts in vegetation within marshes along the river.
- Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or (particularly) sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
- Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges. Ancient woodland at Wivenhoe Wood may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
- Effects of climate change resulting in wetter and warmer winters, and more frequent hot and dry periods, leading to increased risk of flooding in winter and increasing the risk of drought in summer, affecting river flow rates and impacting on riparian habitats and species.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Colne Drained Estuarine Marsh LCA is to conserve and restore the character and strong sense of place of the estuarine landscape. Distinctive wetland, marshland and woodland habitats should be managed and enhanced, and the intricate pattern of drainage streams, ditches and lagoons should be maintained. Seek to reduce the influence of existing development, particularly from Colchester to the north. Development within the area should be avoided, and land use and management practices should be designed to enhance the area's capacity for flood attenuation.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Conserve, manage and seek to restore areas of coastal saltmarsh and coastal and floodplain grazing marsh habitats at Hythe Marshes, University Marshes and Ferry Marsh, and maintain flood management capacity and help ensure climate resiliency.
- Manage small patches of scrub to maintain the open character of the marshland.
- Protect and enhance areas of valued broadleaved woodland habitat through appropriate management, including Wivenhoe Wood Ancient Woodland, and improve linkages between them.
- Manage coastal defences in line with the SMP for Essex and Suffolk to prevent inundation and erosion and to combat the increasing pressures from climate change, including coastal squeeze, flooding, and erosion; seek to avoid increased engineering of flood defences where possible.
- Manage and maintain the distinctive pattern of streams and drainage ditches for its cultural importance and the niche habitat they provide.
- Protect and manage the valued recreational use of the landscape, seeking opportunities to further enhance opportunities for access and enjoyment; consider opportunities for additional rights of way between the river and Colchester via Hythe Marshes.
- Manage arable land to benefit landscape character and biodiversity, by maintaining soil health and minimising erosion and run off through enhancement of biodiverse hedgerows, linear scrub and buffer strips.
- Conserve the distinctive landscape setting of Wivenhoe and Rowhedge historic settlements.
- Enhance and promote existing longer-distance views along the River Colne and distinctive panoramic views across the river and Ferry Marsh to and from Rowhedge and towards Rowhedge from Wivenhoe.

Development Management

- Avoid visually intrusive and incongruous development at the edges of Hythe, Greenstead, Wivenhoe and Rowhedge.
- Avoid additional visually intrusive development within the area; consider opportunities for the removal of intrusive elements, such as pylons and the undergrounding power lines with landscape features reinstated following construction.
- Maintain the sense of openness by resisting proposals for new development at the edges of Colchester, Wivenhoe and Rowhedge that would impinge on the undeveloped quality of the marshland. If development is proposed consider siting and design and the use locally characteristic planting to reduce any impacts.
- Seek to integrate any new flood defences sensitively into the landscape, using gently sloping embankments where possible and avoiding overly-engineered approaches and unsympathetic materials.
- Seek to reduce lighting impacts and avoid any further reduction in tranquillity around Wivenhoe, Rowhedge, and the south-eastern edge of Colchester.
- Avoid further intrusion of light and noise from further infrastructure development in the area.

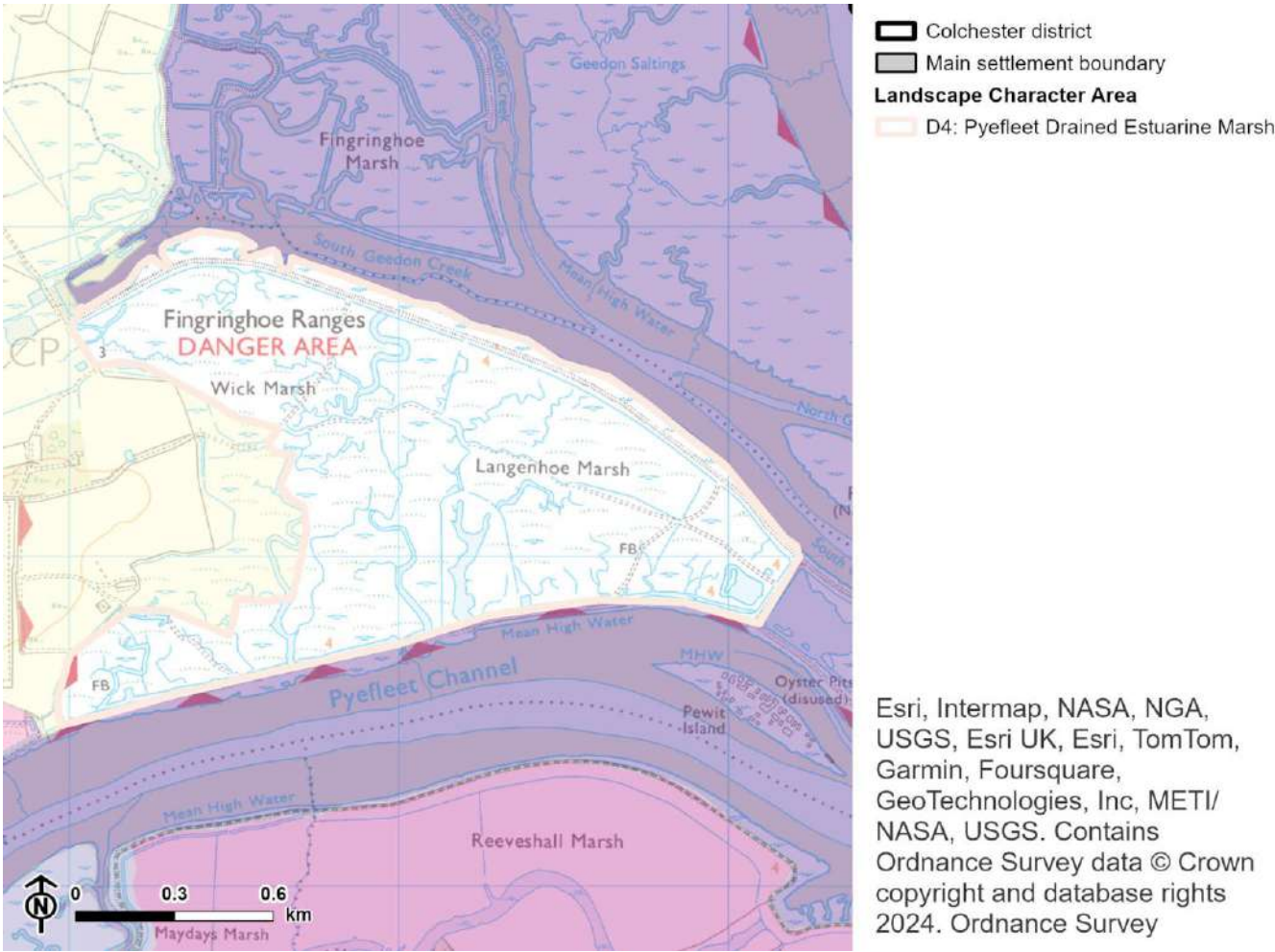
Landscape Character Area D4: Pyefleet Drained Estuarine Marshland

Description

Location and Summary

7.199 The LCA is located in the south-east of the district on the banks of the River Colne Estuary, lying between the Pyefleet Channel and South Geedon Creek. It comprises peninsula of low-lying, undeveloped drained marshland, featuring a pattern of meandering drainage ditches and a mosaic of intertidal habitats protected under various international and national designations.

Figure 7.27: Location of LCA D4



Key Characteristics

- A flat, open, low-lying peninsula of reclaimed marshland protruding into the Colne Estuary between Pyefleet Channel and South Geedon Creek.
- Uninterrupted expanse of reclaimed marshland, characterised by an intricate network of convoluted streams and drainage ditches.
- Large areas of coastal and floodplain grazing marsh and the surrounding estuarine habitats support important populations of birds and are protected by international and national nature conservation designations.
- A seawall partially contains the area and features a number of Second World War pillboxes along its length. These structures are the only vertical elements within the landscape.
- The entire area is utilised for the military for firing and test ranges, and as a result is inaccessible. Military activity periodically detracts from tranquillity.
- Strong sense of visual openness with panoramic views dominated by the surrounding river and channels and expansive skies.
- An untamed and wild landscape with limited human intervention, with a sense of physical remoteness being situated between two open channels and with restricted access.

Photo 7.45: Long views across the landscape from adjacent areas of higher coastal farmland to the north



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.200 The area consists primarily of drained marshland set back behind a sea wall, separating it from the estuarine landscapes the River Colne, Pyefleet Channel and South Geedon Creek. The bedrock geology comprises sedimentary clay, silt, sand and gravel (Thames Group) overlain by further superficial alluvial clay, sand and gravel deposits. This underpins a very low lying, flat landscape generally below 5m above ordnance datum (AOD). The entirety of the LCA falls within Flood Zones 2 and 3 and is periodically inundated. The marshes feature a convoluted pattern of streams and drainage ditches. Soils across the area are classed as 'Non-Agricultural', with the entire area forming part of the Fingringhoe firing range.

7.201 The landscape features a large area of 'Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh' with some low shrubs also scattered across the marsh. It also lies immediately adjacent to several important inter-tidal habitats within the adjacent estuarine channels and creeks. The ecological importance of the area is reflected in its protection, along with adjacent area, by several international and national designations. This includes the 'Colne Estuary' Ramsar Site, Special Protection Area (SPA) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Cultural Influences

7.202 Before the being drained and enclosed by the sea wall this area would have originally consisted of dynamic saltmarsh and mudflats interlaced with shifting channels of water. The marshes along the River Colne have been reclaimed at various times in the past. The Essex HLC (2013) identifies various stages of 'drained reclamation', and identifies Wick Marsh in the north-west as having been drained in the 18th century. Langenhoe Marsh, comprising the remainder of the LCA, is identified as 'unimproved intertidal', indicating that it

will have seen limited change since being enclosed by the surrounding sea walls.

7.203 A degree of time depth is created by the sea wall and a series of Second World War pillboxes that line its route. Additions to the sea wall have seen some of these pillboxes become semi submerged as it was made taller and wider during 1950s improvement works.

7.204 There is no formal public access to the landscape due to its use as part of the MOD Fingringhoe Ranges.

Perceptual Influences

7.205 The landscape has a sense of being a wild, untamed area with limited human intervention. It is physically remote, situated between two open channels and the restricted access enhances this quality. The landscape character is heavily influenced by the changing colour and pattern of sea and sky, and the sound of birds. The lack of any development or infrastructure in the area add to its sense of remoteness, tranquillity, and dark skies as reflected in CPRE tranquillity and dark skies mapping. However, this tranquillity is periodically interrupted when the area is in use as a firing range.

7.206 The flat nature of the landscape, in combination with the lack of vertical elements, creates wide views in all directions, dominated by the surrounding river and channels and expansive skies. Longer range views across the area and the neighbouring channels and creeks and are available from the sea wall around Mersea Island to the south (LCA D1). There are also long views across the landscape from adjacent areas of higher coastal farmland to the north and east (LCA E3), including from the vicinity of Fingringhoe Wick Nature Discovery Park.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Flat, low-lying landscape of reclaimed coastal marsh defined by its network of drainage ditches with a strong sense of openness and wide skies.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity are provided by the continuous expanse of coastal grazing marsh habitat.
- Sense of time depth provided by the intact historic patterns of early drained enclosures, with more recent visible history from several Second World War pillboxes that line the sea wall.
- Visual interest of the remnant marshes and adjacent estuarine landscapes, contributing to the wild and untamed character of the landscape.
- A sense of visual openness, with wide views available in all directions from the sea wall; views across the area are available from the sea wall around Mersea Island to the south and from adjacent areas of higher coastal farmland to the north and east.
- Highly remote landscape with extremely limited development and high levels of dark skies and tranquillity.

Issues and Changes

- The strategy within the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) for Essex and Suffolk under the 'Langenhoe Hall Marsh D8C' plan is to maintain the flood defences at their current extent, accepting that as seas levels rise the flood risk will increase. This could lead to the potential for increased engineering of flood defences which would detract from the generally naturalistic quality of the area.

- Potential increase in military use, placing pressure on habitats and further reducing tranquillity.
- Potential development of military infrastructure, such as hard surfacing and built form.
- Loss of characteristic drainage ditches due to lack of maintenance.
- Lack of management of scrub vegetation, resulting in the introduction of more vertical elements in the landscape.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - More frequent and intense rainfall that could exacerbate flooding in the floodplain and marshy areas, which fall within Flood Zones 2 and 3, resulting in damages to natural habitats.
 - Increasing river flow and storm intensity leading to heightened erosion and sedimentation impacting the stability of drainage ditches.
 - Wetter and warmer winters, and more frequent hot and dry periods, leading to increased risk of flooding in winter and increasing the risk of drought in summer, impacting on marshland habitats and species.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Pyefleet Drained Estuarine Marsh LCA is to conserve and enhance the character of this low-lying landscape with its distinct sense of place shaped by its proximity to the adjacent estuarine channels. Distinctive marshland habitats should be managed and enhanced, and the intricate pattern of drainage streams and ditches should be maintained. Development within the area should be avoided, and land use and management practices should be designed to enhance the area's capacity for flood attenuation. Consider opportunities to introduce recreational opportunities to the landscape which currently has restricted access, whilst minimising impacts on important habitats.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Conserve, manage and seek to restore areas of coastal floodplain grazing marsh habitats at Wick Marsh and Langenhoe Marsh and maintain flood management capacity.
- Manage small patches of scrub to maintain the open character of the marshland.
- Manage and maintain the distinctive pattern of streams and drainage ditches for its cultural importance and the niche habitat they provide.
- Manage coastal defences in line with the SMP for Essex and Suffolk to prevent inundation and erosion and to combat the increasing pressures from climate change, including coastal squeeze, flooding, and erosion; seek to avoid increased engineering of flood defences where possible.
- Monitor and ensure the control of potential invasive non-native species through effective biosecurity measures.
- Consider opportunities to introduce recreational routes along the sea wall.

Development Management

- Conserve the skyline, avoiding visually intrusive development, both within the area and outside it, that impacts the characteristic large open skies and horizons; where development is proposed consider siting and design to reduce any impacts.
- Maintain the sense of openness by resisting proposals for new development, including military development/infrastructure, that would impinge on the remote undeveloped quality of the marshland.

- Seek to integrate any new flood defences sensitively into the landscape, using gently sloping embankments where possible and avoiding overly engineered approaches and unsympathetic materials.

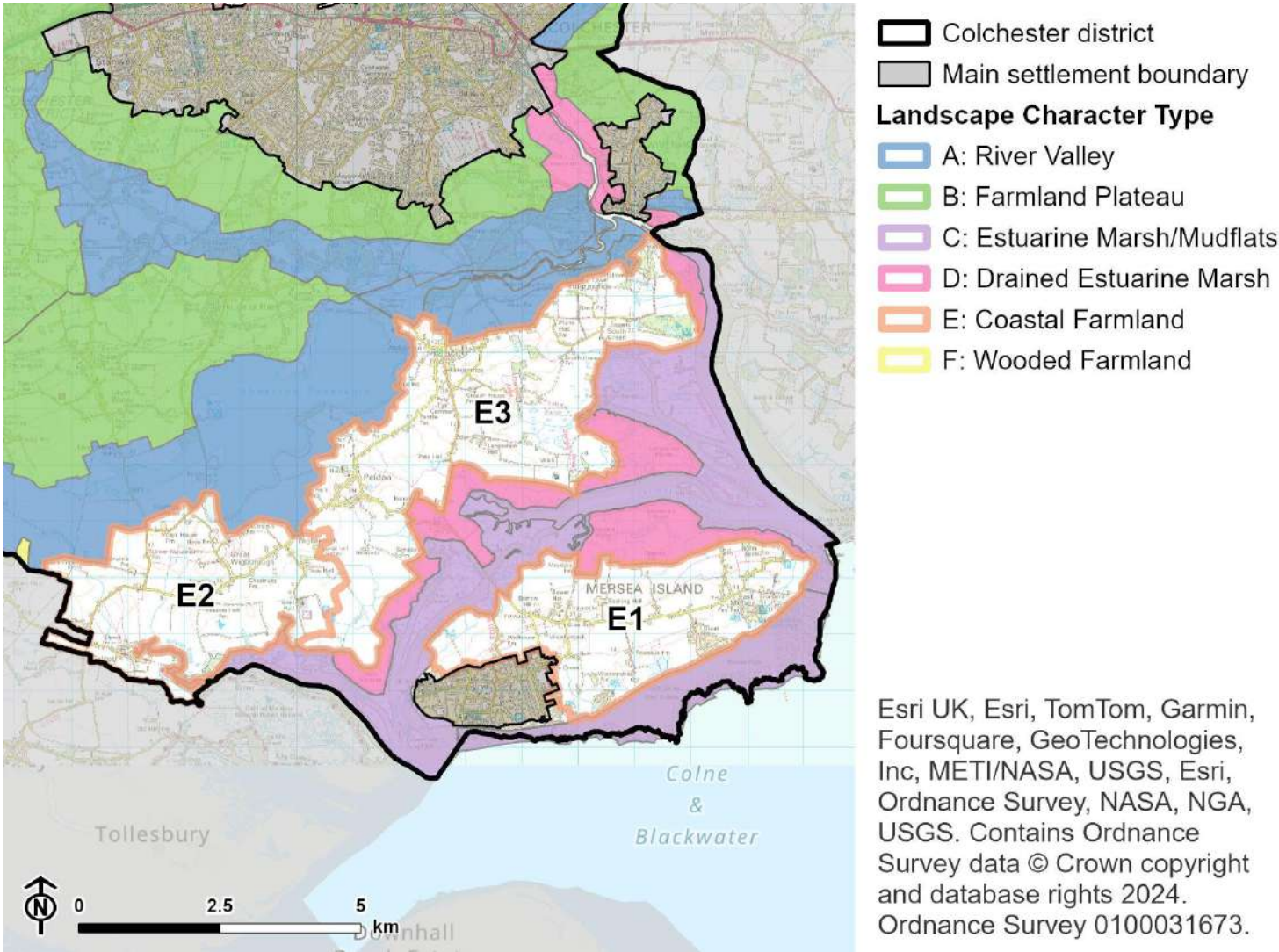
Landscape Character Type E: Coastal Farmland

Landscape Character Areas

7.207 The Coastal Farmland LCT is subdivided into three LCAs as follows:

- Landscape Character Area E1: Mersea Island Coastal Farmland;
- Landscape Character Area E2: Great & Little Wigborough Coastal Farmland; and
- Landscape Character Area E3: Langenhoe Coastal Farmland.

Figure 7.28: Location of the Coastal Farmland LCT and LCAs



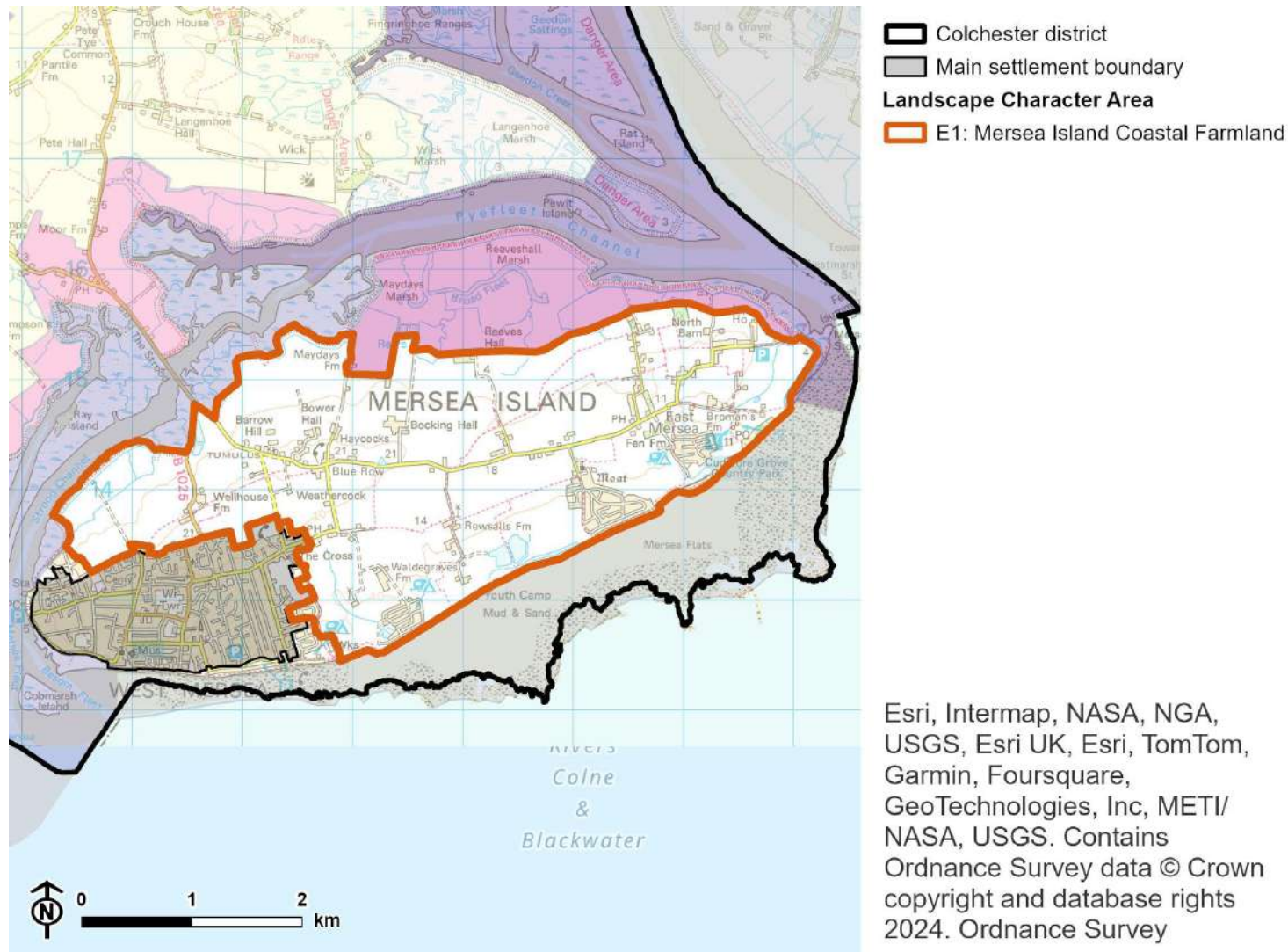
Landscape Character Area E1: Mersea Island Coastal Farmland

Description

Location and Summary

7.208 The LCA is located in the south of the district. The area is defined broadly by the Colne Estuary to the east, the Blackwater Estuary to the south, the edge of West Mersea to the south-west and a transition to drained estuarine marshes in the north-east (LCA D1). The landscape is characterised by arable farmland occupying land that rises gently from the surrounding coastal and marshland edges.

Figure 7.29: Location of LCA E1



Key Characteristics

- Gently rising domed island rising gently from the surrounding coastal edges and drained estuarine marshes.
- Predominantly open arable landscape organised into a pattern of medium fields defined by low gappy hedgerows or drainage ditches; some smaller scale field patterns around settlement, particularly in the east.
- The open farmland is interspersed with some small patches of woodland, with a greater concentration in the east, as well scattered mature oak trees which are largely stunted/dwarfed due to wind action.
- Good level of access via a network of footpaths, lanes and tracks including the King Charles III Coastal Path extending around the islands perimeter.
- Settlement comprises the main town of West Mersea to the south-west, and several scattered clusters of farms and cottages on higher ground. Several holiday caravan parks along the coastal edge to the south.
- A generally open landscape with longer range views available from higher ground and expansive wide open views along the coastline and out towards the surrounding estuaries and channels.
- A greater sense of enclosure to the east due to scattered woodlands and inland views north and south from lower ground tend to be limited by the domed landform in the centre of the island.
- A rural landscape albeit the sense of tranquillity is diminished in the vicinity of settlement and the holiday caravan parks.
- A strong sense of remoteness and wildness along the coastal edges, with wide open views across marshes and mudflats towards the surrounding estuaries and channels and the sound of wind and birds.

Photo 7.46: Expansive wide open views along the coastline and out towards the surrounding estuaries



Photo 7.47: View from East Mersea Road north over arable fields



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.209 Mersea Island is a gently domed area of clay, silt, sand and gravel overlain with some superficial river terrace deposits. The landform rises from the low marshes at its perimeter up to a low dome of up to approximately 20m above ordnance datum (AOD) in the centre of the island. Lower-lying areas around the edges of the island lie within Flood Zones 2 and 3. Soils in the area are classified as Grade 3 (good to moderate) and Grade 2 (very good) and predominantly support arable cultivation with some pasture on lower ground and in the vicinity of settlements.

7.210 The majority of the landscape is characterised by medium sized arable fields, often defined by gappy hedgerows and drainage ditches. There are some smaller-scale fields and paddocks nearer to the edges of settlement, particularly around East Mersea. The open farmland is interspersed with some small patches of woodland, with a greater concentration in the east. Many of these are identified as Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland' with some patches of 'traditional orchard' associated with scattered settlement. The landscape also features many scattered mature oak trees, which are largely stunted/dwarfed due to wind action. Elm trees were a dominant tree on the island prior to the 1970 however the arrival of Dutch Elm Disease led to the loss of many of these. Parts of the lower-lying areas along the coast and marshland edges also feature areas of Priority Habitat 'coastal and floodplain grazing marsh', 'maritime cliff and slope' and 'mudflats'.

7.211 There is one Local Wildlife Site (LWS) at Cudmore Grove Country Park in the south-east of the island noted for its floristically diverse grasslands, a small wildfowl wetland and the sandy cliffs topped by a grove of oak trees. The surrounding waters and coastal edges are also protected by several international and national environmental and nature conservation designations. This includes the Colne Estuary Ramsar Site, the Blackater Estuary Ramsar Site, the Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the Blackwater

Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA), the Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne estuaries Marine Conservation Area (MCA), the Essex Coast Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA), the Colne Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and the Blackwater Estuary SSSI.

Cultural Influences

7.212 The marshland landscapes of the past were ideal for the production of salt in prehistoric and Roman times, and the red hill in the west is a visible landmark which provide a link to this early industry. Later periods are represented by a Medieval decoy pond (Scheduled Monument) to the south, a Tudor Blockhouse (Scheduled Monument) to the east and a number of listed farm buildings scattered across the area which feature local vernacular style of black weatherboarding and red tiled roofs. There is also evidence of Second World War defences with pillboxes and the remains of gun emplacements at Cudmore Grove Country Park to the east and Monicah Park to the south.

7.213 The majority of the farmland on the island is identified within the Essex HLC (2013) as being originally 'pre-18th century irregular enclosure', but with much of this showing signs of 'post 1950 boundary loss'. The loss of a large amount of field boundaries across the area was to facilitate modern agricultural techniques, although the Dutch Elm Disease also further weakened the vegetated boundaries in the area. Some of the lower-lying land on the periphery of the island are identified as being 19th and 20th century 'drained reclamation'.

7.214 The main settlement on the island is West Mersea, which lies to the south-west of the island and has expanded substantially over the last century from its original coastal core. Elsewhere settlement comprises scattered clusters of farms and cottages on higher ground, and the more recent introduction of holiday caravan parks along the coastal edge to the south.

7.215 The area features a good level of access, particularly in the east, with a large number of PRoW. Access to the interior of the island is also provided by a network of rural lanes, tracks and permissive paths. Cudmore Grove Country

Park provides recreational access to the south-east and the Mersea Island stretch of the King Charles III England Coast Path National Trail creates a complete ring around the perimeter of the island. The Deepenings Trail and the World War II Trail at Cudmore Grove in the east of the island provides an educational experience as well as a sense of time depth linked to the pillbox and the remains of the once cliff top bunkers which now lie on the beach.

Perceptual Influences

7.216 A mostly rural landscape largely comprised of agricultural fields with sense of rurality and tranquillity. However, this is diminished in the vicinity of the northern and eastern edge of West Mersea and by the busy B1025 as reflected by CPRE tranquillity mapping. Experience of dark skies also increases to the north as you get further away from West Mersea and the holiday caravan parks.

7.217 There is a strong sense of remoteness and wildness along the coastal edges, with wide open views across marshes and mudflats towards the surrounding estuaries and channels and the sound of wind and birds.

7.218 This is a generally open landscape due to the pattern of large arable fields and the domed landform, with longer range views generally obtained from higher ground. Whilst views north and south from the peripheries of the area are limited by the domed landform, there are expansive views along the coastline and out towards the surrounding estuaries and channels. From the east of the area, there are views across to Brightlingsea and from the south-west the view stretches south across the Blackwater Estuary to Bradwell. There is also a greater sense of enclosure in the east due to the presence of several scattered woodland blocks and belts which tend to foreshorten views. Some of the woodland belts, such as that at Hall Farm, help to reduce the influence of holiday caravan parks.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- The strong sense of remoteness and wildness along the coastal edges, and wide open views across marshes and mudflats towards the surrounding estuaries and channels and the sound of wind and birds.
- Ecological value and landscape interest provided by various habitats, including coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, maritime cliff and slope, mudflats, deciduous woodland, traditional orchard and diverse grassland and grove of oak trees within Cudmore Grove Country Park.
- Ecologically important of inter-tidal and estuarine habitats lying within and adjacent to the area, reflected in their protection by several international and national nature conservation designations.
- Sense of time depth is provided by a remnants of Prehistoric and Roman salt making, a number of older vernacular weatherboarded farm buildings scattered across the interior of the island, and World War II coastal defensive structures.
- Recreational value provided by a network of footpaths, lanes and tracks, including the King Charles III Coastal Path around the perimeter of the island, and the Deepenings Trail and the World War II Trail at Cudmore Grove in the east.
- A sense of rurality and tranquillity across much of the landscape and strong sense of remoteness along the coastal edge which provides much of the setting for the King Charles III England Coast Path National Trail.
- Visual interest in the landscape is provided by scattered woodlands and stunted/dwarfed mature Oak trees.
- Sense of visual openness in coastal areas with wide open views towards the surrounding estuaries and channels.

Issues and Changes

- The strategy within the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) for Essex and Suffolk along the coast of Mersea Island is for a mix of 'No active intervention' (new defences not encouraged), 'hold the line' (retain defences) and 'managed realignment'. The latter may involve the creation of inter-tidal habitats but there is also the potential for increased engineering of flood defences which would detract from the generally naturalistic quality of the area.
- Potential effects on landscape character as a result of the introduction of new larger-scale agricultural buildings.
- Continuing loss of hedges and field boundary vegetation.
- Poorly integrated settlement edges to the north of West Mersea, which are exposed in the relatively open landscape.
- Potential for further expansion of West Mersea settlement into the area.
- Potential for future solar energy developments, which may impact views and erode the agricultural character of the landscape; a recent example in the surrounding area is Langenhoe Solar Farm to the north (located within LCA E3).
- Increased traffic on roads during peak tourist periods, particularly the B1025 which provides the main access route between Colchester and Mersea Island and East Road which connects to the holiday caravan parks.
- Visually intrusive holiday caravan parks along the coastal edges of Mersea Island.
- Increased recreational pressures along the coastal edge and potential disturbance to areas of nature conservation value.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.

- Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges. Ancient woodland at Wivenhoe Wood may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
- Effects of climate change resulting in wetter and warmer winters, and more frequent hot and dry periods, leading to increased risk of flooding in winter and increasing the risk of drought in summer, affecting river flow rates and impacting on riparian habitats and species.
- More frequent and intense rainfall that could exacerbate flooding in the floodplain and marshy areas, which fall within Flood Zones 2 and 3, resulting in damages to natural habitats.
- Rising sea levels and increased salinity may lead to habitat loss or shifts in vegetation within marshes along the river.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Mersea Island Coastal Farmland LCA is to conserve and enhance the rural character of the landscape by increasing the quality and extent of field boundaries and increasing the extent of scattered woodland, whilst maintaining characteristic long-range views. Maintain the strong sense of remoteness and wildness experienced along the coastal edges and protect the ecologically important coastal habitats, enhancing and extending them where possible. Development should be sensitively integrated into the landscape using appropriate boundary treatments. Visually intrusive and incongruous development should be avoided, particularly on more visually open areas of higher ground inland and the coastal edges.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Work with the natural estuary processes to conserve and enhance the intertidal and inland marsh landscape, including the distinctive pattern of coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, maritime cliff and slope and mudflats.
- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage the restoration/reinstatement of those lost using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.
- Protect and enhance areas of valued broadleaved woodland habitat through appropriate management, and improve linkages between them.
- Manage coastal defences in line with the SMP for Essex and Suffolk to prevent inundation and erosion and to combat the increasing pressures from climate change, including coastal squeeze, flooding, and erosion; seek to avoid increased engineering of flood defences where possible.
- Where appropriate encourage 'No Active Intervention' policies and natural environmental solutions (such as the accretion of saltmarsh that provide a defence buffer) to allow for natural shoreline evolution; this will enhance adaptation and ecosystem service functioning, and simultaneously begin to move away from a focus on hard engineering solutions.
- Protect and manage the valued recreational use of the landscape, seeking opportunities to further enhance opportunities for access and enjoyment; consider opportunities for additional rights of way in the west of the area and for north-south routes connecting East Road with the northern coastal edge (via LCA D1).
- Enhance the visual characteristics and quality of the England Coast Path, drawing upon the connections to historic features (such as those related to historic salt making), and through the preservation and

enhancement of existing distinctive expansive views from the coastal edge towards the surrounding estuaries and channels.

- Manage arable land to benefit landscape character and biodiversity, by maintaining soil health and minimising erosion and run off through enhancement of biodiverse hedgerows, linear scrub and buffer strips.

Development Management

- Visually intrusive and incongruous development should be avoided, particularly on more visually open higher ground and coastal edges.
- Ensure that new development responds to historic character and uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character including the local vernacular of black weatherboarding and red tiled roofs (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).
- Encourage the integration of existing and proposed development (including caravan holiday parks) into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate tree belts, hedgerows and woodlands to reflect and reinforce rural character.
- Retain the settlement pattern of dispersed clusters of farms and cottages along higher ground. Conserve the local distinctiveness of historic buildings and their rural setting.
- Seek to reduce lighting impacts and manage recreational pressures along roads and PRow during peak tourist periods to avoid any further reduction in tranquillity around West Mersea and the holiday caravan parks.

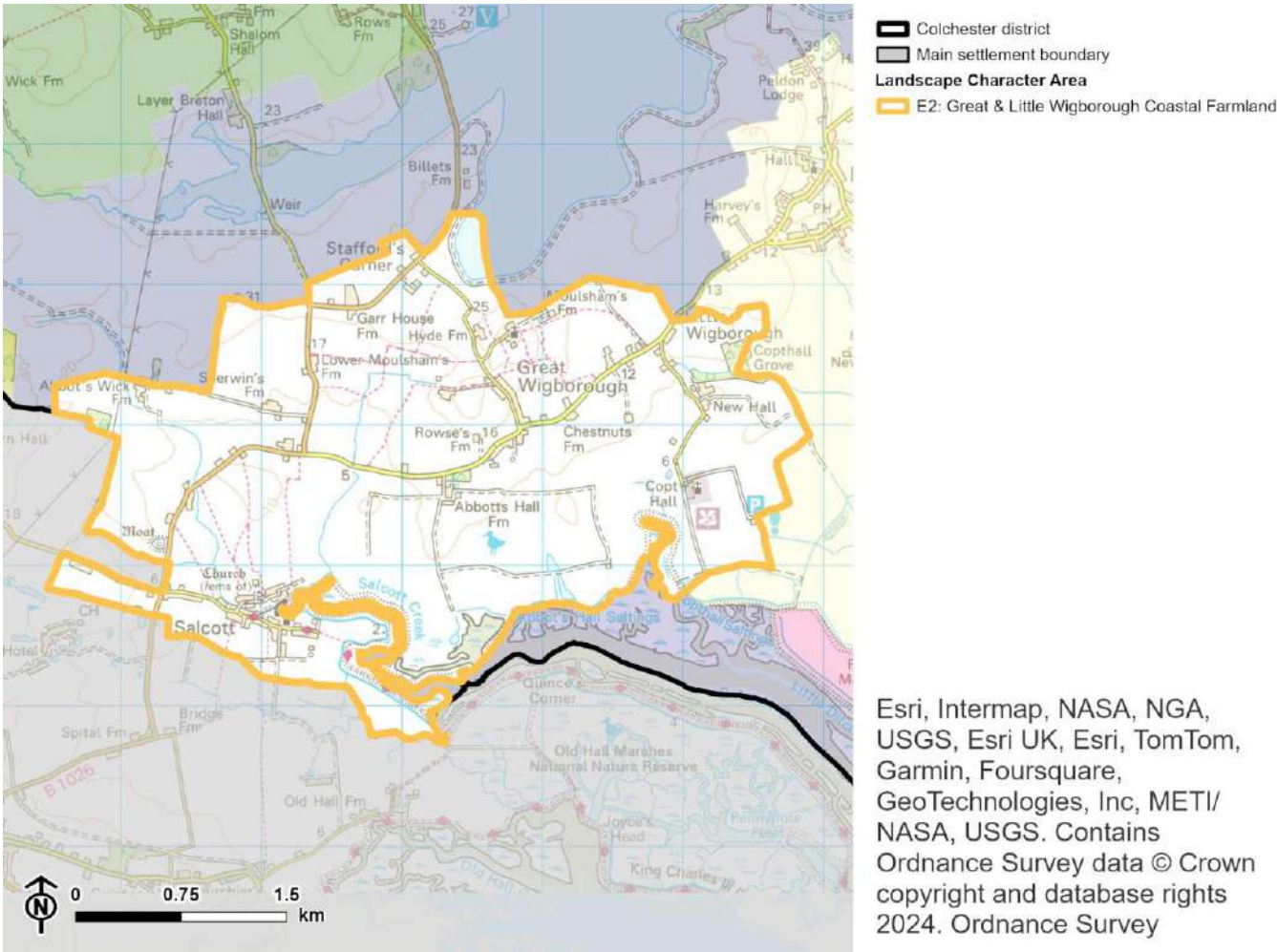
Landscape Character Area E2: Great & Little Wigborough Coastal Farmland

Description

Location and Summary

7.219 The LCA is located in the south of the district. It lies broadly between the Salcott Channel (LCA C2) to the south, the valley of the Layer Brook, encompassing Abberton Reservoir, to the north (LCA A1), and the district boundary with Maldon to the west. It comprises an open, rolling farmland landscape that slopes gently towards the coast edge in the south.

Figure 7.30: Location of LCA E2



Key Characteristics

- Gently rolling farmland landscape that slopes down to the drained estuarine marshes to the south; locally prominent knolls are distinctive features in the north.
- An open landscape with a medium to large-scale rectilinear field pattern, defined by low clipped hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees.
- Open fields interspersed with limited woodland copses and tree belts. Ancient woodland at Copthall Grove and some small areas of 'traditional orchard' on settlement edges.
- Coastal habitats such as saltmarshes and grazing marshes fringe the Salcott Creek and Salcott Channel in the south, adding ecological diversity and visual variety.
- Good levels of access via a network of public rights of way (PRoW), narrow rural lanes, and the King Charles III England Coast Path along the northern edge of Salcott Channel.
- Sense of time depth is provided by remnants of prehistoric and roman salt making, neolithic and bronze age archaeology and medieval church and church remains.
- A settlement pattern characterised by scattered farmsteads, historic halls and small nucleated villages, including Great Wigborough and Salcott.
- A landscape with long-range views across farmland towards the estuarine marshes to the south, and Abberton Reservoir to the north.
- A landscape of expansive skies with a strong sense of remoteness and wildness, dominated by bird calls.

Photo 7.48: Open landscape of gently undulating farmland with big open skies



Photo 7.49: View south across the coastal saltmarshes



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.220 The landform slopes gradually down from the north to the south, where it borders the Salcott Creek and Channel (which lies within LCA C2). To the north, the landscape features two distinctive raised knolls, at Great Wigborough, which rise to 38m and 40m above ordnance datum (AOD). The landform descends gently to the south, to roughly 5m AOD on the edge of the estuarine landscape of Salcott Channel. Much of this low lying area lies within Flood Zones 2 and 3. Soils within the LCA are classified as Grade 3 (good to moderate) and support both arable and pasture use, with pasture being more common toward the lower-lying areas in the south and arable land more prevalent in the north.

7.221 Fields typically form a medium- to large-scale rectilinear pattern bounded by low clipped hedgerows, with occasional hedgerow trees. Tree cover within the LCA is limited and consists of isolated in-field trees, tree belts and scattered woodland copses, all of which are identified as Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland'. Copthall Grove woodland to the north-east is designated as Ancient Woodland. Small areas of 'traditional orchard' are found near the settlements of Virley and Great Wigborough. The plateau punctuated by numerous small ponds, adding to the mosaic of habitats within the LCA.

7.222 The lower-lying areas to the south, fringing the Salcott Channel, contain large areas of Priority Habitat 'coastal saltmarsh' and 'grazing marshes', as well as transitional grassland and scrub vegetation. These habitats are protected by several international and national environmental and nature conservation designations on account of their rich diversity of bird, plant, and invertebrate species. This includes the Blackwater Estuary and Colne Estuary Ramsar Sites, the Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the Blackwater Estuary and Colne Estuary Special Protection Areas (SPA), the Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne estuaries Marine Conservation Area (MCA), the Colne Estuary and Blackwater Estuary Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and the Blackwater Estuary National Nature Reserve (NNR). The areas

on the northern bank of Salcott Channel are also part of the Abbots Hall Farm Nature Reserve, managed by the Essex Wildlife Trust, and are designated as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS). The reserve serves as a vital wildlife link along the Essex coast, transforming previously arable land into saltmarsh abundant with wildlife, particularly migrating birds. There is also a LWS at Copthall Grove, which protects woodland habitats.

Cultural Influences

7.223 The present-day field system is strongly rectilinear, largely being the result of informal and parliamentary field enclosures in the 18th and 19th centuries. This orderly field pattern has overridden the majority of what predated it, although there are isolated fields of 'pre-18th century irregular enclosure', often with more intricate field boundaries as identified with the Essex HLC (2013). Much of the landscape shows signs of boundary loss in later 20th century, when many of the fields were agglomerated to aid modern farm practices, resulting in a present-day field pattern consisting of medium- to large-scale fields.

7.224 The landscape displays evidence of a long history of human occupation. This includes the Late Neolithic ('Great Wigborough henge'), the Bronze Age (bowl barrow at Mill Mound) to the west, to the medieval period (remains of St Mary the Virgin's Church at Virley), all of which are designated as Scheduled Monuments. The historic pattern of small villages has been largely retained, with Great Wigborough located on the locally prominent knolls to the north, Little Wigborough to the east, and Salcott and Virley at the mouth of the Salcott Creek. Elsewhere there is a pattern of farmsteads and halls, many of which are listed buildings, scattered across the landscape connected by a network of winding narrow lanes.

7.225 The marshland landscapes of the past were ideal for the production of salt, and The village of Salcott developed in connection with salt extraction on the adjacent marshes (LCA C2). A number of small 'red hills' along the southern edge of the LCA, bordering the marshes, are the remnants of roman or earlier salt extraction, are a visible link the area to this ancient industry.

7.226 The landscape features a network of PRow that connects dispersed areas of settlement. The coastal margin, along with the existing England Coast Path along Salcott Creek provides access to the waterfront and views over the creek. The Salcott to Jaywick section of the King Charles III England Coast Path will traverse the southern part of the LCA, heading west across the Abbots Hall Farm Nature Reserve towards Copt Hall, further enhancing the PRow network. Access to the landscape is also possible via Colchester Road (B1026) and several small lanes and tracks.

Perceptual Influences

7.227 An open landscape of expansive skies, with a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity, particularly to the south and east, away from the larger settlements and the busy B1026. Ribbon development along Maldon Lane and Salcott Street, erodes the sense of tranquillity and rurality to an extent. Due to its remote nature, the LCA also offers abundant opportunities to experience dark skies, with the exception of in and around the settlement of Salcott where there is localised light pollution. This is reflected in the CPRE tranquillity and dark skies mapping.

7.228 A farmed landscape of low hedgerows and limited tree cover creates a sense of visual openness. From the more elevated areas around Great Wigborough, long-range views extend across farmland south toward the drained estuarine marshes (LCA C2). Panoramic views of Abberton Reservoir are also visible from the northern parts of the LCA around Great Wigborough. Some enclosure is provided by copses and tree belts, occasional hedgerow lined roads, and in areas of orchards. The rising topography also forms a green backdrop in views north from the adjacent marshes.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Locally distinctive knolls of higher ground rising above the surrounding rolling farmland, occupied by the settlement of Great Wigborough.
- Some ecological value and landscape diversity is provided by Ancient Woodland at Copthall Grove and mosaic of Priority Habitats 'deciduous woodland', 'coastal saltmarshes', 'coastal and floodplain grazing marshes' and 'traditional orchards'.
- Sense of time-depth and landscape interest provided by historic settlement pattern, and several historic features including prehistoric henge and bowl barrow, and medieval church remains (all Scheduled Monuments).
- The recreational value provided by the network of PRoW, including the King Charles III England Coast Path, and rural lanes which connect dispersed areas of settlement and provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access.
- The remote, rural character of the landscape which provides a setting for the settlements of Great Wigborough, Little Wigborough, Salcott and Virley.
- Strong sense of visual openness across much of the landscape, with long-range views across farmland towards adjacent estuarine marshes and Abberton Reservoir, particularly from higher ground.
- A distinctive rising green, backdrop in views from the adjacent estuarine marshes and mudflats (LCA C2).

Issues and Changes

- The strategy within the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) for Essex and Suffolk along Salcott Creek adjacent to Salcott-cum-Virley is to 'hold the

line' (maintain/replace defences) . This may result in increased engineering of flood defences which would detract from the generally naturalistic quality of the area.

- Potential effects on landscape character as a result of the introduction of new larger-scale agricultural buildings, particularly on visually prominent higher ground.
- Potential further loss and decline of remaining hedgerows due to intensive agricultural practice and lack of traditional management.
- Potential for future solar energy developments, which may impact views and erode the agricultural character of the landscape; a recent example in the surrounding area is Langenhoe Solar Farm to the east (located within LCA E3).
- Increased recreational pressures along PRoW, including the King Charles III England Coast Path, and potential disturbance to areas of nature conservation value.
- Potential for pollution of the Salcott Creek and Salcott Channel from fertiliser and pesticide run-off from the surrounding farmland.
- Pressure on roads within the area, especially the B1025 which provides access through the landscape.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges. Ancient woodland at Copthall Grove may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
 - Effects of climate change resulting in wetter and warmer winters, and more frequent hot and dry periods, leading to increased risk of flooding in winter and increasing the risk of drought in summer, affecting river flow rates and impacting on riparian habitats and species.

- More frequent and intense rainfall that could exacerbate flooding in the marshy areas, which fall within Flood Zones 2 and 3, resulting in damages to natural habitats.
- Rising sea levels and increased salinity may lead to habitat loss or shifts in vegetation within marshes along the river.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Great & Little Wigborough Coastal Farmland LCA is to conserve and enhance the mixed farming landscape by increasing the quality and extent of field boundaries and increasing the extent of scattered woodland, whilst maintaining characteristic long-range views.. The south of the area should be retained as a transition between the Salcott estuarine marshes to the south, and more intensive farmland in the north. The landscape's ecological diversity, including Ancient Woodland and coastal habitats, should be preserved and enhanced. Development should be sensitive to the landscape's rural character, avoiding intrusive buildings on visually prominent higher ground.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage the restoration/reinstatement of those lost using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.
- Enhance and promote existing long-range views across farmland towards the adjacent estuarine marshes to the south.

- Conserve and enhance ecologically important areas of Priority Habitat 'coastal saltmarsh', 'coastal and floodplain grazing marsh' and 'deciduous woodland'.
- Manage coastal defences in line with the SMP for Essex and Suffolk to prevent inundation and erosion and to combat the increasing pressures from climate change, including coastal squeeze, flooding, and erosion; seek to avoid increased engineering of flood defences where possible.
- Manage arable land to benefit landscape character and biodiversity, by maintaining soil health and minimising erosion and run off through enhancement of biodiverse hedgerows, linear scrub and buffer strips.
- Create green corridors and networks linking to the important habitats associated with the marshes including making room for 'roll back' of estuary habitats 'squeezed' by sea level rise by providing buffer zones.
- Protect and manage the valued recreational use of the landscape, seeking opportunities to further enhance opportunities for access and enjoyment.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of areas away from urban influences, particularly in the east and south.

Development Management

- Visually intrusive and incongruous development should be avoided, particularly on more visually open higher ground to the north. Maintain the role of this landscape as a green backdrop to the adjacent marshes, by resisting visually prominent development.
- Respect important archaeological features and ensure that development does not detract from their landscape setting.
- Ensure that new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character including the local vernacular of weatherboarding and brick (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).

- Retain the settlement pattern of small villages and dispersed farmsteads across the area.
- Encourage the integration of development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate tree belts, hedgerows and woodlands to reflect and reinforce rural character.
- Seek to integrate any new flood defences sensitively into the landscape, using gently sloping embankments where possible and avoiding overly-engineered approaches and unsympathetic materials.
- Seek to reduce lighting impacts and avoid any further reduction in tranquillity to the south.

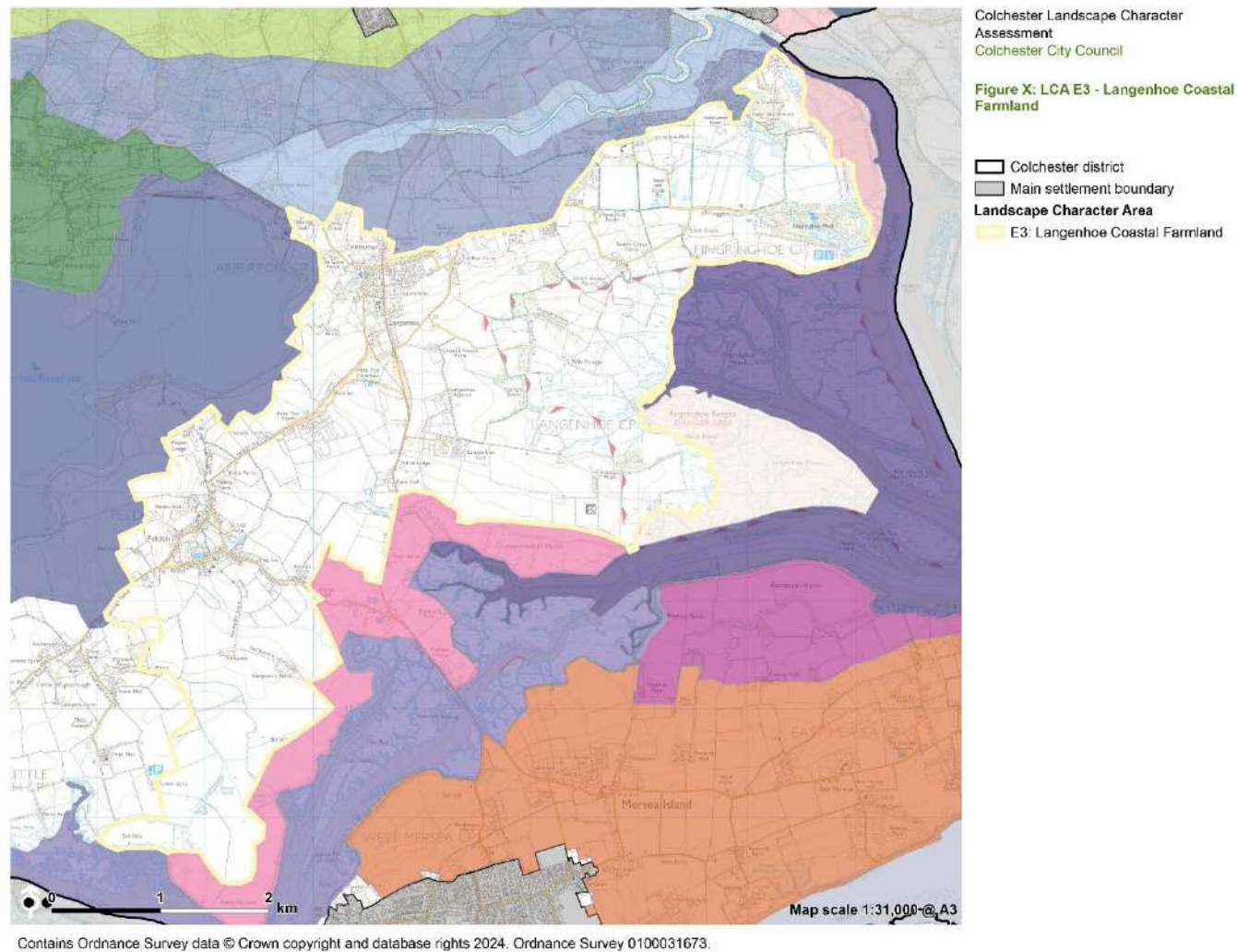
Landscape Character Area E3: Langenhoe Coastal Farmland

Description

Location and Summary

7.229 The LCA is located in the south of the district. It lies broadly between the River Colne to the east, Abberton Reservoir and the Roman River to the north, the district boundary with Maldon to the west and the coastal edge along the Pyefleet, Strood and Salcott Channels to the South. It comprises an open rolling predominantly arable landscape which slopes gently down towards the coastal edge.

Figure 7.31: Location of LCA E3



Key Characteristics

- Gently rolling arable landscape that slopes gently down towards adjacent drained estuarine marshes to the south, south-east and east; locally prominent knolls are distinctive features in the north.
- Predominantly open landscape with a large-scale field pattern defined by low gappy hedgerows, unvegetated drainage ditches or low berms.
- scattered woodlands and individual mature trees punctuate the open farmland, with more dense woodland cover to the east around Fingringhoe Ranges and former gravel extraction pits.
- Good levels of access via a network of footpaths and narrow lanes, and the King Charles III England Coast Path National Trail provides access to the edge of Salcott Channel in the south.
- Settlement pattern of small nucleated villages in the north and scattered farmsteads and halls elsewhere.
- Peldon and Abberton/Langenhoe occupy a slightly elevated location upon prominent knolls; Church of St Mary at Peldon is a prominent landmark visible from much of the surrounding landscape.
- A largely open landscape with long range views across farmland towards the adjacent marshes, particularly from higher ground in the north.
- An overriding rural character with a stronger sense of remoteness in the west and east away from larger settlements and the busy B1025.

Photo 7.50: Long range views across farmland from higher ground at Peldon



Photo 7.51: View from School Lane looking south across large open arable fields



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.230 The majority of the LCA comprises a sedimentary bedrock geology of clay, silt, sand and gravel (Thames Group) overlain by deposits of sand and gravel in the east and Alluvial deposits of clay, silt and sand in the south. The landform slopes gradually down from the north to the south, south-east and east where it borders a series of low-lying drained estuarine marshes (LCA D2, LCA D4, LCA C1 and LCA D3). To the north the landform features two distinctive raised knolls which rise up to between 35m and 40m above ordnance datum (AOD). Lower lying land below 5m AOD to the south, south-east and east lies partially within Flood Zones 2 and 3. Soils are predominately Grade 3 (good to moderate) and in arable use. A small area of Grade 2 (very good) soils to the east of Abberton/Langenhoe were formerly dominated by fruit production and orchards, although are now largely under arable cultivation.

7.231 The area is characterised mainly by large open arable fields defined by a mix of gappy hedgerow boundaries, drainage ditches and low berms. Roadsides and field boundaries also contain occasional mature trees which are sometime quite isolated in the west amongst the larger open fields. However, there are some scattered woodlands, often in and around settlements, including an area of Ancient Woodland at Copthall Grove south-west of Peldon. There is also some more dense tree cover in the east around the edges of the Fingringhoe Firing Ranges and around former gravel extraction pits at Fingringhoe Wick and Brickhouse Farm Pits.

7.232 The area contains several local wildlife sites (LWS), including Brickhouse Farm Pits in the north-east, Fingringhoe Ranges in the east, and Pete Tye Common and Langenhoe Lodge Churchyard just south of Langenhoe. Lower-lying land to the south-east and east (at Langenhoe Ranges and Fingringhoe Wick) also falls within the Colne Estuary (Mid-Essex Coast phase two) Ramsar Site, the Mid-Essex Coast Special Protection Area (SPA), the Essex Coast Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA), and the Colne Estuary Site of Special

Scientific Interest (SSSI). In addition, a small areas to the south falls within the Blackwater Estuary SSSI. The Fingringhoe Wick Nature Discovery Park (managed by the Essex Wildlife Trust) contains a mix of habitats including lowland dry acidic grassland, lowland heathland and an area of reedbed restoration.

Cultural Influences

7.233 The present-day field pattern is one predominantly of large-scale enclosures, which are notably large around Peldon. These areas are identified within the Essex HLC (2013) as exhibiting signs of post-1950s boundary loss which is likely the result of field amalgamation to facilitate modern agricultural techniques. However, there are some areas of earlier pre 18th century enclosure surviving in places and there are two areas of surviving commons at Pete Tye.

7.234 The historic pattern of small nucleated villages is largely retained today, with Abberton/Langenhoe and Peldon located on the locally prominent knolls and Fingringhoe located along edge of the Roman River valley (LCA A3) to the north. Elsewhere there is a pattern of farmsteads and halls scattered across the landscape along a network of winding narrow lanes, many of which are listed buildings. The Church of St Mary (Grade I Listed Building) at Peldon forms prominent landmark which is also visible from much of the surrounding landscape due to its location on a localised knoll.

7.235 The Salcott to Jaywick section of the King Charles III England Coast Path will pass through the LCA heading north from The Strood towards Langenhoe/Abberton then east to Fingringhoe Wick then north to High Park Corner. This will create some opportunities for access to the landscape and green infrastructure connections.

7.236 The landscape features a network of PRow that connect dispersed areas of settlement. Access to the landscape is also possible via several small lanes and tracks. Access is limited in the east of the area within Fingringhoe Ranges, which is identified as a 'Danger Area' on OS mapping.

Perceptual Influences

7.237 An overall open and rural landscape with a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity, particularly to the west and east away from the larger settlements and busy B1025. This is reflected by CPRE tranquillity mapping. Experience of dark skies also increases to the south as you get further away from the urban edge of Colchester.

7.238 The large, open arable fields defined by low gappy hedgerows and sometimes unvegetated boundaries results in a sense of visual openness. Long range views across farmland towards the lower-lying estuarine landscapes of the Strood and Pyefleet Channels are widely available, particularly from the higher ground to the north. Dramatic far-reaching views are also available from Fingringhoe Nature Discovery Park over the adjacent drained estuarine marshes and mudflats (LCA C1 and LCA D4) to the south and east.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Strong sense of visual openness across much of the landscape, with long-range views across farmland towards adjacent estuarine marshes particularly from higher ground.
- Locally distinctive knolls of higher ground rising above the surrounding rolling farmland, occupied by the settlements of Peldon and Abberton/Langenhoe.
- Visual interest provided by scattered woodland and occasional mature trees (within hedgerows or isolated within fields).
- The Church of St Mary (Grade I Listed Building) at Peldon forms prominent landmark which is also visible from much of the surrounding landscape due to its location on a localised knoll.

- Ecological value and landscape diversity is provided by Ancient Woodland at Copthall Grove and by the mix of habitats at Fingringhoe Wick Nature Discovery Park, Brickhouse Farm Pits LWS, Pete Tye Common LWS and Fingringhoe Ranges LWS.
- Sense of time-depth and landscape interest provided by historic settlement pattern.
- The recreational value provided by the network of PRoW, including the King Charles III England Coast Path, and rural lanes which connect dispersed areas of settlement and provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access to the landscape.
- The rural character of the landscape which provides a setting for the settlements of Peldon, Langenhoe/Abberton and Fingringhoe.

Issues and Changes

- Potential effects on landscape character as a result of the introduction of new larger-scale agricultural buildings, particularly on more visually prominent higher ground.
- Potential for future solar energy developments, which may impact views and erode the agricultural character of the landscape; a recent example in the area is the Langenhoe Solar Farm.
- Potential further loss and decline of remaining hedgerows due to intensive agricultural practice and lack of traditional management.
- Pressure on roads within the area, especially the B1025 which provides the main access route between Colchester and Mersea Island.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges.

- Effects of climate change resulting in wetter and warmer winters, and more frequent hot and dry periods, leading to increased risk of flooding in winter and increasing the risk of drought in summer, affecting river flow rates and impacting on riparian habitats and species.
- Lower-lying areas to the south, south-east and east are vulnerable to the potential effects of climate change including sea-level rise and resulting damage to natural habitats.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Langenhoe Coastal Farmland LCA is to conserve and enhance the rural landscape by increasing the quality and extent of field boundaries and increasing the extent of scattered woodland, whilst maintaining characteristic long-range views. Development should be sensitively integrated into the landscape using appropriate boundary treatments and to maintain the historic settlement pattern. Visually intrusive and incongruous development should be avoided, particularly on more visually open higher ground to the north.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage the restoration/reinstatement of those lost using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.
- Enhance and promote existing long-range views across farmland towards the surrounding estuarine marshes, and landmark views towards the Church of St Mary at Peldon.

- Protect and enhance valued habitats, including Copthall Grove Ancient Woodland and other scattered blocks of deciduous woodland, and improve linkages between them.
- Conserve and enhance lowland heathland and acidic grasslands as distinctive landscape features within Fingringhoe Wick Nature Discovery Park.
- Manage arable land to benefit landscape character and biodiversity, by maintaining soil health and minimising erosion and run off through enhancement of biodiverse hedgerows, linear scrub and buffer strips.
- Protect and manage the valued recreational use of the landscape, seeking opportunities to further enhance opportunities for access and enjoyment; consider opportunities for additional rights of way to the east within and around Fingringhoe Ranges.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of areas away from urban influences, particularly in the east and west.

Development Management

- Visually intrusive and incongruous development should be avoided, particularly on more visually open higher ground to the north.
- Ensure that new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character including the local vernacular of weatherboarding and brick (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).
- Retain the settlement pattern of small nucleated villages and dispersed farmsteads across the area. The individual identity of Peldon and Abberton/Langenhoe should be maintained, by resisting further development between these settlements along Peldon Road.
- Encourage the integration of development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate tree belts, hedgerows and woodlands to reflect and reinforce rural character.

Seek to reduce lighting impacts and avoid any further reduction in tranquillity to the north.

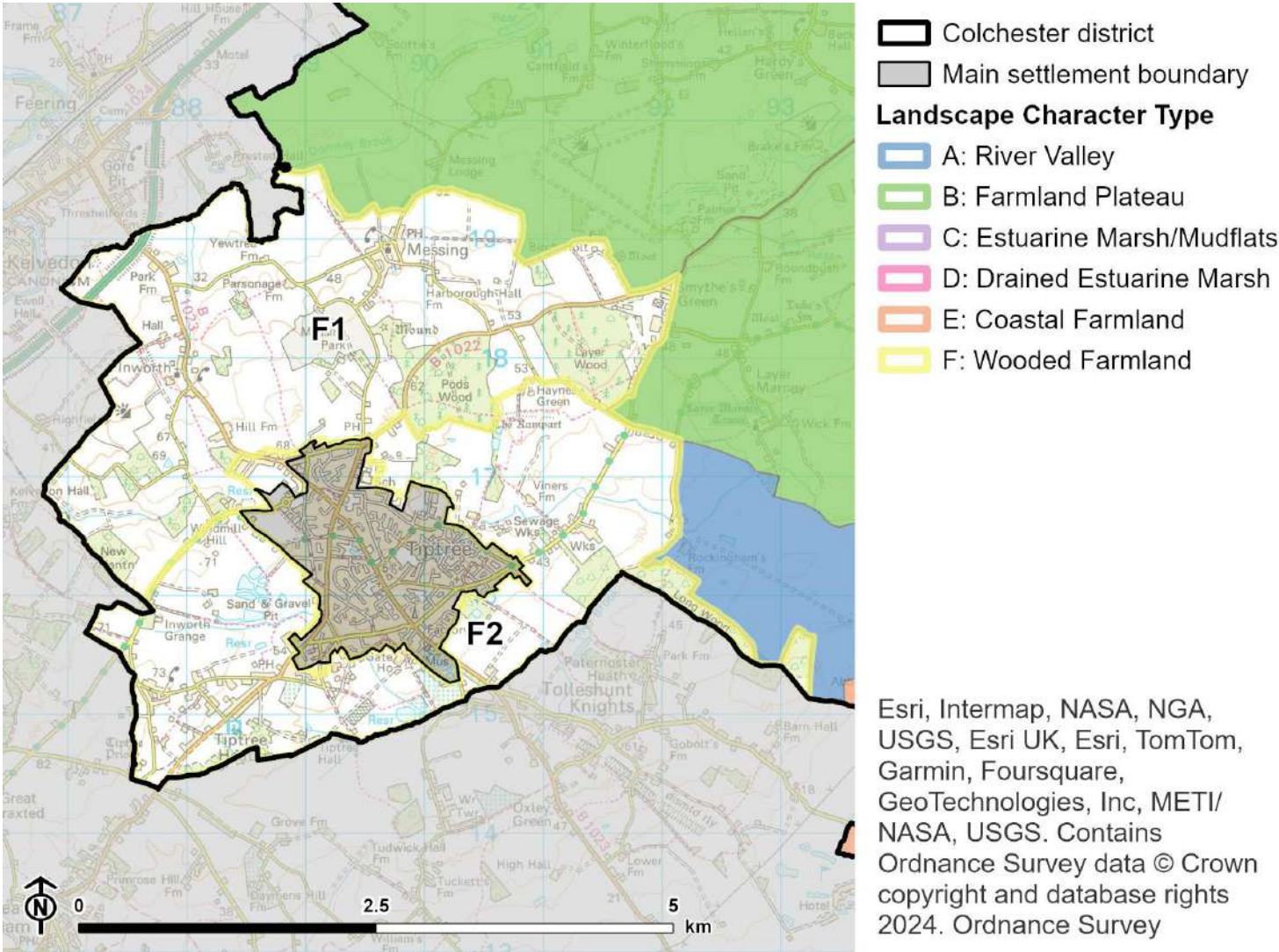
Landscape Character Type F: Wooded Farmland

Landscape Character Areas

7.239 The Wooded Farmland LCT is subdivided into two LCAs as follows:

- Landscape Character Area F1: Messing Wooded Farmland; and
- Landscape Character Area F2: Tiptree Wooded Farmland.

Figure 7.32: Location of the Wooded Farmland LCT and LCAs



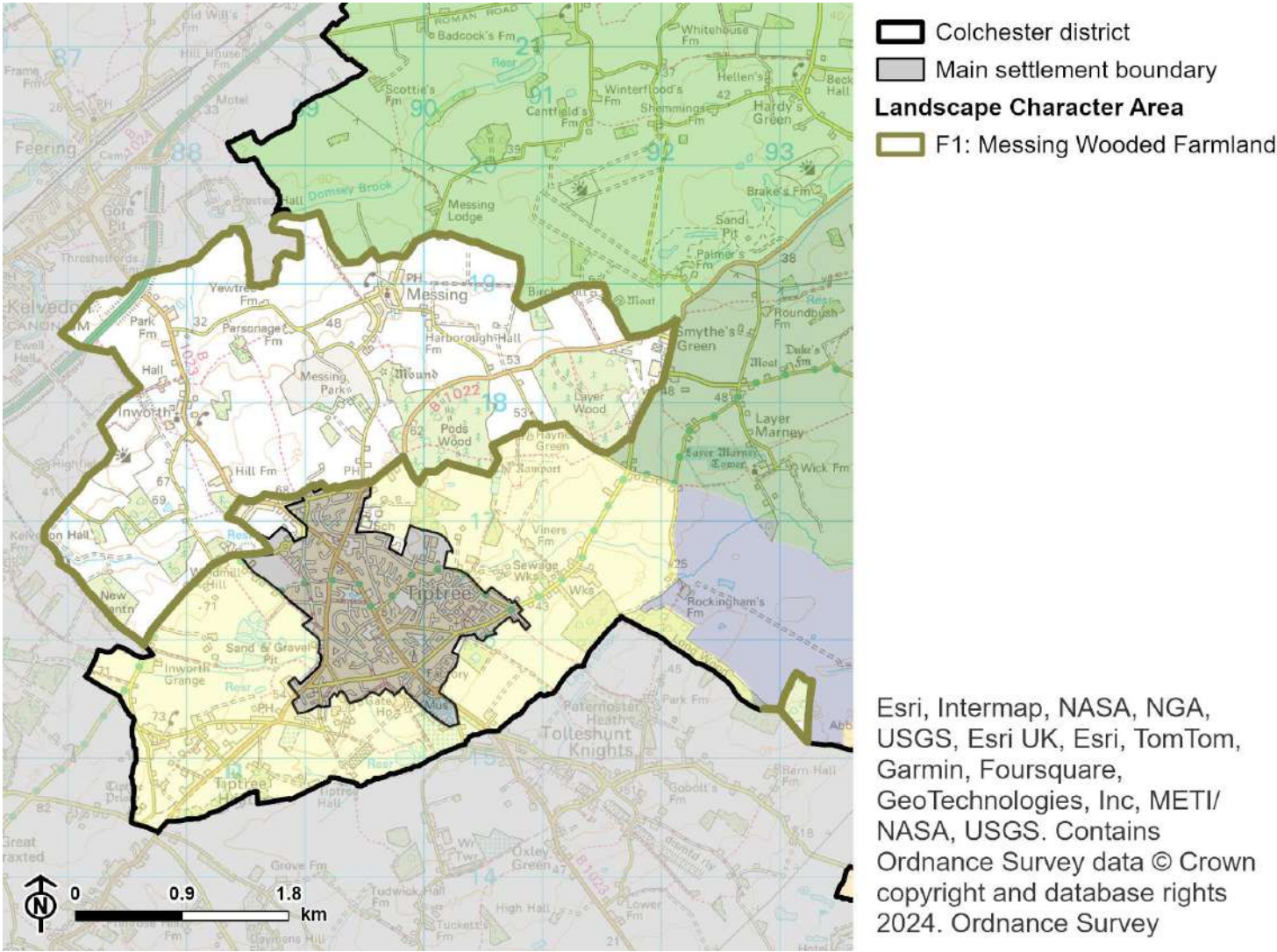
Landscape Character Area F1: Messing Wooded Farmland

Description

Location and Summary

7.240 This LCA is located to the north of Tiptree and comprises part of a gently undulating ridge that slopes to the west and north-west towards the River Blackwater and Domsey Brook. It is a predominantly arable landscape characterised by a pattern of medium to large-scale regular and irregular fields interspersed with deciduous woodlands and mature trees.

Figure 7.33: Location of LCA F1



Key Characteristics

- A broad, elevated ridge sloping to the west and north-west towards the River Blackwater and Domsey Brook.
- Dissected by several small streams that create undulations and give the appearance of a gently folded landscape.
- A predominantly arable landscape organised into a regular and irregular pattern of medium to large-scale fields defined by a combination of hedgerows and grass margins with intermittent mature field trees.
- Numerous blocks of deciduous woodland, some of ancient origin, punctuate the arable landscape on the upper slopes to the south.
- Scattered mature field boundary trees, in-field trees, the tree-lined Domsey Brook and spring-fed streams, and woodlands are distinctive landscape features.
- Historic settlement pattern of dispersed small villages, farms, and cottages is largely retained, although with some modern development on the northern edge of Tiptree and ribbon development along roads.
- Road network comprising winding rural lanes and key routes such as A12, B1022 and B1023 that facilitate access to surrounding settlements.
- Public rights of way (PRoW) connect the farms and villages, enabling access into the countryside.
- A landscape with varying enclosure, becoming more open to the north, where views extend to adjacent farmland and scattered woodland.
- An overriding rural character, albeit with some influence of the adjoining settlement of Tiptree.

Photo 7.52: Open arable farmland punctuated by deciduous woodland on upper slopes



Photo 7.53: Greater sense of openness to the north, with some longer-range views across adjacent farmland



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.241 The LCA features sedimentary bedrock geology throughout, comprising clay, silt, sand, and gravel (Thames Group), over which lie superficial glacial deposits of further Clay, Sand And Gravel. The landform comprises an elevated broad ridge that extends south-westward into neighbouring Malden District. The ridge has been incised by several small streams resulting in an undulating landform. The elevation ranges from 70m to 25m above ordnance datum (AOD), gradually falling west and north-west towards the River Blackwater and Domsey Brook. Domsey Brook and its narrow floodplain are identified as falling within Flood Zone 2 and 3. Soils within the LCA are predominantly Grade 3 (good – moderate), primarily under arable use albeit with some pasture near the settlement edge of Tiptree and along the Domsey Brook.

7.242 Fields are typically defined by grass margins, with earthbanks and hedgerows marking field boundaries along the roads, although hedgerows are often absent. The field boundaries also contain intermittent single mature trees, while some fields have occasional in-field trees. Mature trees line the Domsey Brook and its spring-fed streams. The landscape is punctuated by small ponds and lakes. The arable land on the upper slope to the south are punctuated by several woodland blocks. Woodland blocks to the south-east tend to be large, whilst those to the south-west tend to be smaller in size. This forms part of a continuous band of woodland extending south-westward into neighbouring Malden District. Most of the woodland blocks are classified as Priority Habitat ‘deciduous woodland,’ and several are identified as Ancient Woodlands and Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) including Pods Wood, Layer Wood, and New Wood.

Cultural Influences

7.243 Historically, the area comprised Tiptree Heath, a vast expanse of common rough pasture and wood-pasture shared between neighbouring parishes. Enclosure, which began in a piecemeal fashion during the medieval period and continued until the Enclosure Acts of the 19th century, gradually transformed the landscape. Today, much of the original enclosure pattern has been eroded due to post-1950s boundary loss, where fields have been merged to aid modern farming practices. Some of the earlier field patterns survive as 'Pre-18th Century Irregular Enclosure' along the Domsey Brook in the north of the LCA, with remnants of original wood pasture identified as 'Ancient Woodland' identified in the south-west and south-east. The field pattern today is predominantly one of medium and large-scale enclosure, albeit with a smaller-scale field pattern near the settlement edge of Tiptree.

7.244 There is evidence of Late Neolithic or Bronze Age occupation of the landscape in the form of a 'Bowl barrow' (Scheduled Monument) to the north-east of Messing Park Farm. Later settlement within the area was very dispersed and sparse, comprising isolated church/hall complexes, manors, farms, cottages and small hamlets. This pattern remains largely intact today and is reflected by the presence of several scattered listed rural buildings, often displaying the local vernacular of weatherboarding and brick. The village of Messing is designated as a Conservation Area and contains the Grade II* listed 13th century Church of All Saints (Messing), whilst the hamlet of Inworth is marked by a cluster of Listed Buildings including the Grade I listed 11th century Parish Church of All Saints. (Inworth) , To the south of Messing the Grade II* house at Messing Park sits within a remnant parkland landscape. The historic settlement pattern has been disturbed to some extent in places by modern ribbon development extending along roads, such as Lodge Road and School Road in Messing.

7.245 The landscape features several PRoW that connect the scattered settlement. Access to the landscape is enhanced by a network of roads, lanes, and tracks connecting it to nearby settlements, including winding narrow rural

lanes, the B1022 running north-south, the B1023 extending east-west, and the A12 traversing a small section in the north-west.

Perceptual Influences

7.246 The landscape has an overriding rural character, although this is eroded by the adjacent larger village of Tiptree to the south. In addition noise from the busy A12 to the north and light aircraft around RAF Birch Airfield outside the LCA also detract from a sense of tranquillity. A large solar farm west of Inworth (Highfield Solar Farm) also has a localised impact on the sense of rurality and tranquillity, being visible from higher ground to the south.

7.247 Levels of enclosure vary across the LCA. The landscape is more open in the north, offering longer-distance views north-west across the surrounding farmland and towards the village of Kelvedon and Gore Pit (outside of the LCA). The distinctive square tower of All Saints Parish Church in Messing is visible from several vantage points across the farmland plateau. Additionally, long-distance panoramic views extend across the adjacent rolling farmland (LCA B2) from the winding roads to the east and west of Messing. However, to the south scattered woodlands create a greater sense of visual enclosure, restricting long-distance views. These woodlands, along with infrequent tree boundaries, are prominent features often visible on the skyline which creates an overall sense of a wooded landscape. The wooded ridge is also visible from the wider lower-lying surrounding landscape to the north (LCA B2), forming a wooded backdrop in views.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Undulating sedimentary ridge incised by several streams provides topographical interest and contrasts with the surrounding lower-lying farmland and river valleys. Forms a wooded backdrop in views from parts the wider lower-lying surrounding landscape to the north.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity are provided by several scattered woodlands, most of which are Priority Habitats 'deciduous woodland' and some of which are Ancient Woodlands and LWS.
- Sense of time-depth and landscape interest provided by the surviving historic settlement pattern, remnant parkland at Messing Park and several historic features and designations, including Listed Buildings, and Conservation Area at Messing.
- Recreational value provided by several PRow which provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access between settlements and the surrounding countryside.
- The rural character of much of the landscape which provides a setting for PRow and settlements of Messing, Inworth and Tiptree.
- Relative sense of openness in the north, affording longer-distance views north-west across the wider landscape, with the distinctive All Saints Parish Church visible from multiple vantage points.
- Sense of tranquillity and remoteness, especially away from the northern settlement edge of Tiptree and the A12.

Issues and Changes

- Field agglomeration since the 1950s has eroded the landscape structure, resulting in poorly managed hedgerows, both field and roadside, with gaps or missing sections entirely.
- An increase in equine-related land uses, including post and rail subdivision of larger fields and small structures, particularly around settlement areas and along main roads.
- Historic loss of heathland to development or conversion to arable farmland.
- Disturbance to landscape character as a result of noise and movement associated with main A12 road corridor.
- Recent solar development at Highfield Solar Farm, located west of Inworth. Potential expansion of the current facility, or new future solar energy developments elsewhere in the landscape, may impact views and erode the agricultural character of the landscape.
- Potential for the introduction of new visually intrusive farm buildings may disrupt the visual harmony of the wooded farmland, altering its character and diminishing the sense of openness and rural integrity.
- Pressure road widening schemes, associated with increased residential development.
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.
 - Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges. Ancient woodlands, such as Pods Wood, Layer Wood, and New Wood, may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
 - Fluctuations in temperature and rainfall may lead to changes in farming practices and reduced yields, impacting the viability of traditional crops in the predominantly arable landscape.

- Wetter winters and drier summers may strain water resources, impacting irrigation for crops and livestock and threatening the health of spring-fed streams and Domsey Brook.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Messing Wooded Farmland LCA is to conserve and enhance its rural and wooded character by protecting and managing Ancient Woodlands, increasing woodland cover where appropriate, and improving the extent and quality of field boundaries. Development should be carefully managed to avoid visually intrusive structures, especially in the more open northern areas. The historic settlement patterns and notable landmarks like All Saints Parish Church should be preserved to maintain the landscape's sense of place and tranquillity.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of arable fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods.
- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.
- Protect and enhance the Ancient Woodland, including at Pods Wood, Layer Wood and New Wood, and other deciduous woodland, through appropriate woodland management.

- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, using locally occurring native species in order to link to existing woodland.
- Protect and manage the various historic features of the landscape, including Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and undesignated remnant parkland to preserve the sense of time-depth and historic character.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of the area away from urban influences, particularly from the northern fringes of Tiptree.

Development Management

- Ensure that new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character including the local vernacular of weatherboarding and brick (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).
- Ensure that the landscape continues to provide a rural setting to historic buildings, particularly within the Messing Conservation Area.
- Seek to ensure any potential future solar development is appropriately sited and integrated into the landscape.
- Encourage the integration of any development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate hedgerows and woodlands to reflect and reinforce rural character.
- Resist highway upgrade proposals to preserve the rural character of narrow lanes and protect grass verges, which serve as vital biodiversity resources within the intensively farmed arable landscape.
- Seek to reduce lighting impacts and avoid any further reduction in tranquillity to the south.
- Protect the valued recreational use of the landscape, seeking opportunities to further enhance opportunities for access and enjoyment.

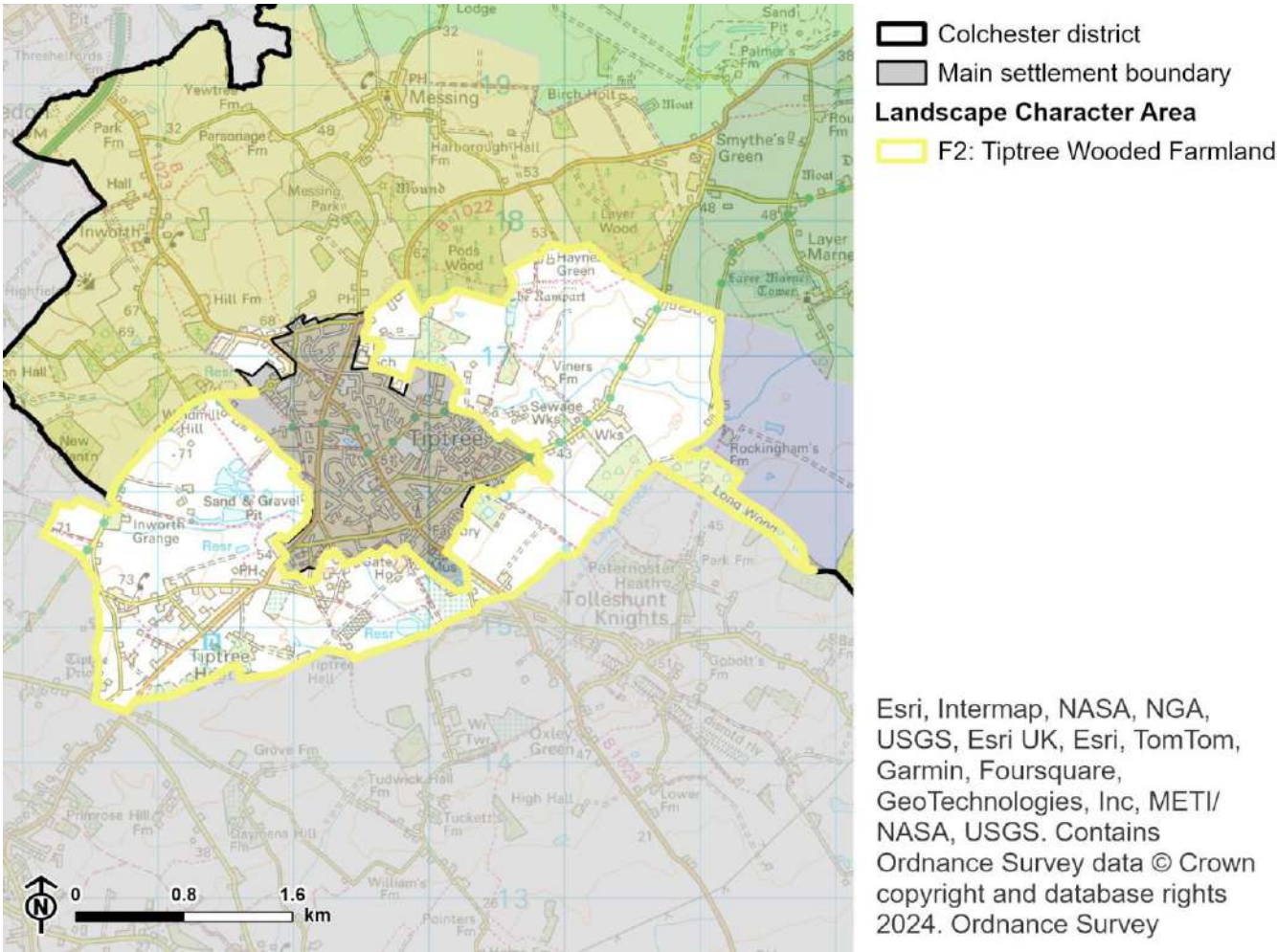
Landscape Character Area F2: Tiptree Wooded Farmland

Description

Location and Summary

7.248 The LCA encloses the large village of Tiptree and comprises part of a gently undulating ridge that slopes south towards the Layer Brook. It is a predominantly arable landscape characterised by a pattern of medium to large-scale regular and irregular fields interspersed with deciduous woodlands, orchards and small reservoirs and lakes.

Figure 7.34: Location of LCA F2



Key Characteristics

- The lower slopes of a broad, elevated ridge that extends south-westward into Maldon District; land gently slopes southwards towards Layer Brook, and dissected by several small streams.
- A predominantly arable landscape organised into a regular and irregular pattern of medium to large-scale fields defined by low hedgerows and occasional hedgerow trees.
- Numerous blocks of deciduous woodland, some of ancient origin, break up the arable landscape, which is also punctuated by several reservoirs and lakes.
- Several areas of orchards to the south and south-west of Tiptree and Tiptree Heath to the south-west are distinctive landscape features.
- Historic settlement pattern of farms and cottages is largely retained, although with some modern development on the edges of Tiptree and ribbon development along main roads out of the village.
- Road network comprising narrow rural lanes and key routes such as B1022 and B1023 that facilitate access to surrounding settlements.
- A network of public rights of ways (PRoW) enables access between Tiptree and the surrounding countryside; also features open access land at Tiptree Heath and National Cycle Network (NCN) route 1.
- A landscape with varying enclosure, becoming more open to the east and south where some views extend to adjacent farmland.
- A predominantly rural landscape, albeit with some influence of the adjoining settlement of Tiptree.

Photo 7.54: Open views from the east extending across adjacent farmland



Photo 7.55: Open access land at Tiptree Heath



Formative Influences

Natural Influences

7.249 The sedimentary bedrock geology comprises clay, silt, sand, and gravel (Thames Group) overlaid by superficial glacial deposits of sand and gravel. Land forms the eastern end of a broad ridge that extends south-westward into neighbouring Malden District. The landform is gently undulating and has been shaped by small streams. Elevations range from between approximately 70m to 30m above ordnance datum (AOD), sloping down towards Layer Brook in the south-west much of which lies within Flood Zone 2 and 3. The landscape is also punctuated by several reservoirs and man-made and natural lakes. The soils within the LCA are predominantly Grade 3 (good to moderate), with areas of Grade 2 (very good) around the edge of Tiptree. The land is primarily used for arable farming, although there is some pasture around settlements boundary, as well as orchards to the south and south-west of Tiptree.

7.250 Fields are generally defined by low, trimmed hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees, although hedgerows are sometimes absent. Some large arable fields are delineated by grass margins, while smaller fields and paddocks are sometimes defined by post-and-rail fencing. Mature trees line Layer Brook and the spring streams which feed it. There are several scattered woodlands of various sizes, most of which are classified as Priority Habitat 'deciduous woodland,'. There is also Ancient Woodlands identified at Ransome Grove, Cadgers Wood and Birch Wood. A mosaic of other Priority Habitats are also present, including several areas of 'traditional orchard' around the southern and south-western edge of Tiptree, 'lowland heathland' concentrated at Tiptree Heath, and a small area of 'lowland meadows' along the south-western edge of Tiptree. Tiptree Heath Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), recognises the ecological importance of the heathland and woodland at Tiptree Heath, which is the largest area of surviving lowland heathland in the county. Additionally, several Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are located within the LCA, including Inworth Grange Pit, a mosaic of marsh, grassland, scrub, woodland, and sandy cliffs with mature ponds and lakes supporting diverse flora; and Warriors Rest, which features acid grassland, scrub, and young woodland.

Cultural Influences

7.251 Historically, the area comprised Tiptree Heath, a vast expanse of common rough pasture and wood-pasture shared between neighbouring parishes. Enclosure, which likely began in a piecemeal fashion during the medieval period and continued until the Enclosure Acts of the 19th century, gradually transformed the landscape. Today, much of the original enclosure pattern has been eroded due to post-1950s boundary loss, where fields have been merged to aid modern farming practices. However, some of the earlier field patterns survive as 'Pre-18th Century Irregular Enclosure' scattered around the landscape, with remnants of original wood pasture identified as 'Ancient Woodland' in the south and common rough pasture identified as 'Commons with an Open Margin' in the south-west at Tiptree Heath. The field pattern today is predominantly one of medium and large-scale enclosure, albeit with a smaller-scale field pattern south-west of Tiptree.

7.252 Archaeological evidence, such as a prehistoric 'Rampart' (Scheduled Monument) south of Haynes Green, suggests that human activity has been present in this area for a significant period of time. Later settlement within the area is very dispersed and sparse, comprising isolated church/hall complexes, manors, farms, cottages and hamlets. This pattern remains largely intact today, with the hamlet of Tiptree Heath and several scattered Grade II listed halls and farmhouses throughout the landscape. Since the late 19th century, the village of Tiptree has expanded significantly, with modern ribbon development extending along Newbridge Road to the south-east. Additionally, the hamlet of Tiptree Heath has expanded along West End Road and Maldon Road (B1022) to the south-west.

7.253 The landscape features several PRoW that connect the area to nearby villages, including Messing to the north and Tolleshunt Knights to the south, as well as the wider countryside. Tiptree Heath, an open-access land, also provides recreational access to the landscape. Access to the landscape is further enhanced by a network of roads, lanes, and tracks connecting it to nearby settlements, with the B1022 running north-east to south-west, the B1023

extending north to south, and a network of narrow rural lanes in the south-west. NCN Route 1 also runs along Newbridge Road in the south-eastern section.

7.254 Tiptree is an internationally recognised brand of preserves manufactured in the village by Wilkin & Sons since 1885. The factory on the southern edge of the village has a relationship with several surrounding orchards, including surviving traditional orchards.

Perceptual Influences

7.255 The landscape is predominantly rural, although this is increasingly impacted by the expansion of Tiptree, including recent industrial development and ribbon development along roads. The landscape is also locally influenced by the Tiptree preserves factory to the south and sewage works to the east. Additionally, extensive areas of plastic polytunnels to the south-west of Tiptree are visually intrusive. The belt of heathland at Tiptree Heath, characterised by acidic grassland and dwarf shrub heath, forms a visually striking landscape feature, especially when the surrounding gorse is in bloom.

7.256 Levels of enclosure vary across the LCA. The landscape is more open in the east and south offering views of the undulating farmland. There are long-distance, framed views across adjacent rolling farmland (LCA B1) and agricultural valley (LCA A1) to the east and other farmland areas in Maldon district to the south. To the north and north-west several woodland blocks, including along the ridge top within the adjacent wooded farmland (LCA F1), tend to restrict longer-distance views. The high frequency of woodland in these areas creates an overall sense of a wooded landscape.

Landscape Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Values

- Undulating sedimentary ridge incised by several streams provides topographical interest and contrasts with the surrounding lower-lying farmland and river valleys.
- Ecological value and landscape diversity are provided by several scattered habitats, including Ancient Woodland and Priority Habitat 'traditional orchard', 'deciduous woodland' and 'lowland heathland' at Tiptree Heath. Tiptree Heath to the west is the largest area of surviving lowland heathland in the county, its ecological importance reflected in its SSSI designation.
- Sense of time-depth and landscape interest provided by the surviving historic settlement pattern of scattered halls and farms, reflected in the presence of several historic features and designations. Tiptree Heath is also important as a surviving area of unenclosed common land.
- Several orchards to the south and south-west of Tiptree are distinctive landscape features that also provide a historic link to Tiptree's internationally recognised brand of preserves.
- Recreational value provided by open access land at Tiptree Heath and several PRow which provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access between settlements and the surrounding countryside.
- The rural character of much of the landscape which provides a setting for PRow and the settlements of Tiptree and Tiptree Heath.
- Visual interest and landscape variety are created by reservoirs and lakes, tree-lined streams and scattered woodland blocks and orchards of varying sizes.
- Relative sense of openness in the east and south, affording long-distance views to adjacent farmed landscapes.

- Sense of tranquillity and remoteness, especially in more enclosed areas and away from the settlement of edges of Tiptree.

Issues and Changes

- Field agglomeration since the 1950s has eroded the pre-a8th century landscape structure, resulting in poorly managed hedgerows, both field and roadside, with gaps or missing sections entirely.
- Recent expansion of vegetable crops grown under plastic polytunnels, which are often visually intrusive.
- An increase in equine-related land uses, including post and rail subdivision of larger fields and small structures, particularly around settlement areas and along main roads.
- The settlement edge of Tiptree has further expanded due to recent residential developments, and there is pressure for further expansion of the village particularly along the southern and western edges. Development on the more open southern edge of the settlement (off Honey Lane and Raspberry Fields) is visually intrusive.
- Historic loss of heathland to development or conversion to arable farmland.
- Potential for the introduction of new visually intrusive farm buildings and polytunnels, which may disrupt the visual harmony of the wooded farmland, altering its character and diminishing the sense of openness and rural integrity.
- Potential for future solar energy developments, which may impact views and erode the agricultural character of the landscape; a recent example in the area is at Highfields Solar Farm to the north (located within LCA F1).
- The landscape is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, including:
 - Changes in woodland and tree species composition with the increase of pests and diseases such as ash dieback, acute oak decline or sweet chestnut blight, as well as invasive species.

- Increases in severe storms could result in wind damage to woodland edges. The Ancient Woodland of Long Wood, Ransome Grove, Cadgers Wood and Birch Wood, may be particularly susceptible to damage from storms and drought.
- Fluctuations in temperature and rainfall may lead to changes in farming practices and reduced yields, impacting the viability of traditional crops in the predominantly arable landscape.
- Wetter winters and drier summers may strain water resources, impacting irrigation for crops and livestock and threatening the health of spring-fed streams, reservoirs, lakes and Layer Brook.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the Tiptree Wooded Farmland LCA is to conserve and enhance its rural and wooded character by protecting and managing Ancient Woodlands, increasing woodland cover where appropriate, increasing the extent of traditional orchards, and improving the extent and quality of field boundaries. Development should be carefully managed to avoid visually intrusive structures, especially in the open eastern and southern areas.

Guidance

Landscape Management

- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of arable fields by encouraging the creation of uncultivated field margins and other wildlife-friendly farming methods.

- Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.
- Protect and enhance valued habitats, including Ancient Woodland at Long Wood, Ransome Grove, Cadgers Wood and Birch Wood, other deciduous woodland, traditional orchards, heathland at Tiptree Heath, and improve linkages between them.
- Protect and enhance existing deciduous woodland through appropriate management and seek to increase its extent, using locally occurring native species to link to existing woodland. Seek to avoid the introduction of coniferous boundaries and/shelterbelts.
- Protect and manage The Rampart (Scheduled Monument) and various Listed Buildings to preserve the sense of time-depth and historic character.
- Protect the relative tranquillity of the area away from urban influences, particularly in the more enclosed areas to the north and west.

Development Management

- Ensure that new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character including the use of local vernacular of weatherboarding and brick where appropriate (refer to the Essex Design Guide (2018) for further information).
- Carefully consider any new development at the junction between Tiptree Heath and Tiptree to avoid further coalescence of these distinct settlements.
- Seek to ensure any potential solar developments or polytunnels are appropriately sited and integrated into the landscape.
- Encourage the integration of any development into the landscape through the use of locally appropriate hedgerows and woodlands to reflect and reinforce rural wooded character.

- Seek to reduce lighting impacts and prevent further loss of tranquillity in areas of the LCA away from the village of Tiptree, where higher levels of tranquillity remain.
- Protect the valued recreational use of the landscape, seeking opportunities to further enhance access and appreciation of the landscape.

Appendix A

Inherent value and sensitivities

A.1 The following provides a high-level rating on inherent value for each Landscape Character Area (LCA). The aim of this was to inform the Sustainability Appraisal which was being undertaken, at the same time as the Landscape Character Assessment, as part of the Local Plan Review.

A.2 This is a high-level appraisal of inherent value; it is not an assessment of landscape sensitivity to a specific development type / development scenario or other change. Natural England guidance on Landscape Sensitivity Assessment [See reference 15] describes landscape sensitivity as “a measure of the resilience, or robustness, of a landscape to withstand **specified change**... without undue negative effects on the landscape and visual baseline and their value” (LUC highlight).

A.3 The appraisal has considered the key sensitivities and values identified for each LCA and provides a high-level inherent value rating based on the following:

- **Higher value** – The LCA has a multiple sensitive attributes and values relating to natural, and/or cultural and/or perceptual factors; or has one or more sensitive attributes and values that are particularly important (for example it represents a nationally rare landscape type, or forms part of a nationally designated landscape/area).
- **Medium value** – The LCA has some sensitive attributes and contains some values relating to natural, and/or cultural and/or perceptual factors.
- **Lower value** - The LCA has limited sensitive attributes and contains limited values relating to natural, and/or cultural and/or perceptual factors.

Landscape Character Type A: River Valley

Landscape Character Area A1: Abberton Flooded River Valley

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. Abberton Reservoir is an internationally significant wetland site, reflected in its designation as a Ramsar site, SSSI and SAC; a series of permissive paths around reservoir provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access; the landscape is open and largely unsettled landscape with expansive and dramatic views across the reservoir; there is sense of tranquillity and remoteness, especially away from roads and engineered parts of the reservoir; and the reservoir has an historic association with 'the Dambusters', being used as a training site.

Landscape Character Area A2: Wooded Roman River Valley

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It comprises a distinctive sinuous and steep wooded valley of the Roman River; the ecological value of the extensive network of woodland, which includes Ancient Woodland and is protected by SSSI, LNR and LWS designations; it has a sense of time depth and historic provided by the surviving historic settlement pattern, remnant parklands, and several designated Iron Age and Romano-British earthworks; it provides recreational access and green infrastructure connections from settlements, including the southern edge of Colchester; and it has a sense of tranquillity and remoteness particularly within the dense woodland cover and along the river.

Landscape Character Area A3: Roman River Valley Floor

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It has a distinctive character of a narrow, intimate valley enclosed by woodland, with its meandering river and textured floodplain of meadows and marshland providing ecological and landscape diversity; it has a sense of time depth provided by remnant enclosed meadow pasture and drained enclosures along the valley floor; it provides a distinctive tidal river setting to the adjacent settlements including, Rowhedge, High Park Corner and Wivenhoe; and there is a sense of isolation and remoteness along the floodplain, away from settlement and roads.

Landscape Character Area A4: Colne River Valley Floor

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It has a distinctive riparian character with narrow meandering watercourses, floodplains, meadows, ponds and mature riparian vegetation providing ecological value and landscape diversity; it has a strong sense of time-depth, provided by remnant pattern of enclosed meadow pasture along the valley floor and several historic features; it contains several public rights of way, including the Essex Way long distance path and Colne Valley path, which provide green infrastructure connections; it has a sense of tranquillity and remoteness, particularly experienced along the river and away from settlement and roads; and it provides engaging views along the valley and river from bridging points.

Landscape Character Area A5: Colne River Valley Slopes

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It is a distinctive steep valley that encloses the narrow and meandering River Colne; ecological value and landscape diversity is provided by deciduous woodland, traditional orchard and scarce river floodplain habitats, including pastures, marshland, hedgerows, and aquatic vegetation; a strong sense of time-depth provided

by a remnant pattern of pre-18th century irregular enclosure along the valley sides and the surviving historic settlement pattern; recreational value provided by several PRoW, including the Essex Way long distance path and Colne Valley Path; visual interest provided by scattered valley-side woodlands and locally distinctive church towers which provide skyline features in cross-valley views; and a sense of tranquillity and remoteness

Landscape Character Area A6: Ardleigh River Valley

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It comprises the steep sided valley of Salary Brook which provides a distinctive setting to the east of Colchester; scattered habitats, including Ancient Woodland and wetland habitats along the valley floor, provide ecological value and visual interest; a sense of time depth provided by remnant enclosed meadow pasture and pre-18th century irregular fields; and recreational value associated with the PRoW and permissive paths which provide access between the eastern edge of Colchester and the surrounding countryside.

Landscape Character Area A7: Stour River Valley Slopes

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It lies within the Dedham Vale National Landscape, and demonstrates several of its special qualities, including gentle valley sides with scattered woodlands; sunken rural lanes; picturesque villages with imposing churches and historic timber framed buildings; scattered farmsteads and agricultural buildings; remains mostly free of incongruous development and retains a rural charm and tranquillity; and an association with the work of John Constable. In addition, scattered habitats provide ecological value and landscape diversity; the surviving historic settlement pattern and historic features provide a strong sense of time-depth; a network of public rights of way provide recreational value; there are sweeping cross-valley views; and there is a sense of tranquillity and remoteness, especially in steeper tributary valleys, away from settlements and roads.

Landscape Character Area A8: Stour River Valley Floor

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It lies within the Dedham Vale National Landscape, and demonstrates several of its special qualities, including a gently winding river and tributaries, gentle valley sides with scattered woodlands, picturesque villages, and riverside grazing meadows; remains mostly free of incongruous development and retains a rural charm and tranquillity; and an association with the work of John Constable. In addition, scattered woodland, wetland and grassland habitats provide ecological value and landscape diversity; the surviving historic settlement pattern and remnant enclosed meadow pasture along the valley floor provide a strong sense of time-depth; a network of public rights of way provide recreational value; there are far-reaching views across the valley and floodplain; and there is a sense of tranquillity and remoteness experienced across the floodplain.

Landscape Character Type B: Farmland Plateau

Landscape Character Area B1: Layer Breton Farmland Plateau

- The LCA has some sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **medium** value. It contains some habitats and features that provide ecological value and landscape interest, including Ancient Woodland, traditional orchards and lowland heathland; it has some historic character and sense of time-depth, provided by an historic settlement pattern and several historic features; it contains a network public rights of way providing green infrastructure connections and recreational access to the countryside; and it has a predominantly open character, with long distance views across Abberton Reservoir in the south.

Landscape Character Area B2: Easthorpe Farmland Plateau

- The LCA has some sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **medium** value. It contains some habitats and features that provide ecological value and landscape interest; it contains several public rights of way providing green infrastructure connections and recreational access to the countryside; it has some historic character and time-depth; and it has a distinctive network of roads and lanes radiating from the routes of Roman Roads.

Landscape Character Area B3: Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau

- The LCA has some sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **medium** value. It comprises a diverse wooded landscape which provides a setting to the adjacent urban edge of Colchester; contains scattered habitats and features that provide ecological value and landscape interest, including areas of Ancient Woodland, heathland, scrub, grassland and wetland habitats; has a sense of time depth provided by several historic features, including Iron Age and Romano-British remains, and relict parkland landscape surrounding Berechurch Hall; and has recreational value provided by several public rights of way and permissive paths, particularly those at Friday Wood and at Gosbeck's Archaeological Park.

Landscape Character Area B4: Great Tey Farmland Plateau

- The LCA has some sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **medium** value. The Roman River and a series of small scale streams and ponds provide topographical interest; It contains some habitats and features that provide ecological value and landscape interest, including Ancient Woodland and traditional orchards; it has some sense of time-depth and landscape interest provided by historic settlement

pattern and several historic features; a distinctive pattern of winding roads and lanes; several PRow, including the Essex Way long distance path and NCN Route 13, provide recreational value; and there is a sense of tranquillity and remoteness away from settlements and roads, heightened by the areas of woodland cover.

Landscape Character Area B5: Rochfords Farmland Plateau

- The LCA has some sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **medium** value. It lies partly within, and forms the immediate setting of, the Dedham Vale National Landscape in the north-east; it contains some habitats and features that provide ecological value and landscape interest, including Ancient Woodland, traditional orchards and grassland habitats; it has some historic character and time-depth, provided by an historic settlement and more recent Second World War pillboxes; it contains a network of PRow and NCN Route 13 which provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access to the countryside; and it has a sense of visual openness with long views from the plateau edge across the adjacent lower-lying river valleys.

Landscape Character Area B6: Great Horkesley Farmland Plateau

- The LCA has some sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **medium** value. It lies partly within, and forms the immediate setting of, the Dedham Vale National Landscape in the north; it contains some habitats and features that provide ecological value and landscape interest, including Ancient Woodland and grassland habitats; it has some historic character and time-depth, provided by an historic settlement pattern and several historic features; it contains several public rights of way providing green infrastructure connections and recreational access to the countryside; it has a distinctive angular network of roads and lanes; and it has a predominantly open character, affording long distance views over the shallow valleys.

Landscape Character Area B7: Langham Farmland Plateau

- The LCA has some sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **medium** value. It lies partly within, and forms the immediate setting of, the Dedham Vale National Landscape in the north; scattered habitats provide ecological value and landscape diversity; a sense of time depth and historic character provided by historic settlement pattern and several historic features; it contains several public rights of way providing green infrastructure connections and recreational access to the countryside; and a sense of visual openness, with some occasional long distance framed views across the Stour Valley in the north.

Landscape Character Area B8: Wivenhoe Farmland Plateau

- The LCA has some sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **medium** value. It has some sense of time depth and historic character provided by remnant medieval parkland at Wivenhoe Park (RPG) and the Grade II* listed Wivenhoe House; scattered habitats provide ecological value and landscape diversity; Wivenhoe Gravel Pit SSSI provides natural heritage value; and there are some longer views from the plateau edge west across the River Colne Valley.

Landscape Character Type C: Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats

Landscape Character Area C1: Fingringhoe Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It has a distinctive estuarine character, defined by an intricate pattern of channels, dendritic drainage creeks and islands; the mosaic of inter-tidal habitats provides ecological value and are protected by international and national nature conservation designations;

sense of time depth provided by the landscape's unenclosed nature and several Second World War pillboxes; a strong sense of tranquillity and remoteness, enhanced by the general absence of development and the open expansive marshes; a sense of visual openness, with long-distance views across the channels and fringing marshes.

Landscape Character Area C2: Strood & Salcott Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It has a distinctive estuarine character, defined by an intricate network of channels, fleets, creeks and islands; the mosaic of inter-tidal habitats provides ecological value and are protected by international and national nature conservation designations; the recreational value of PROW, including the King Charles III Coastal Path, which provide recreational access to the coast; sense of time depth provided by remnants of Roman salt making and Second World War pillboxes; a strong sense of tranquillity and remoteness, enhanced by the general absence of development and the open expansive marshes and mudflats; a sense of visual openness, with long-distance views across the channels and the Blackwater Estuary.

Landscape Character Area C3: West Mersea Estuarine March/Mudflats

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It has a distinctive estuarine character, defined by extensive flat, open mudflats; mudflat habitats provides ecological value and are protected by international and national nature conservation designations; a sense of time depth provided by provided by the landscape's natural character, as well as remnants of Second World War pillboxes; a strong sense of tranquillity and remoteness, enhanced by the general absence of development and the open expansive sands and mudflats; a sense of visual openness, with long-distance views across the across the Colne and Blackwater Estuaries.

Landscape Character Type D: Drained Estuarine Marsh

Landscape Character Area D1: Mersea Island Drained Estuarine Marsh

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It is a distinctive low-lying landscape of reclaimed coastal marsh; it contains a mosaic of habitats that provide ecological value and it lies immediately adjacent to important inter-tidal and estuarine habitats protected by several international and national nature conservation designations; there is a sense of time depth provided by the intact pattern of drained reclamation from the 18th and 19th and 20th centuries; PRow along the sea wall provides recreational value; and a strong sense of remoteness and wildness along the coastal edges, and wide open views across the surrounding estuaries and channels.

Landscape Character Area D2: Fildes Drained Estuarine Marsh

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It contains a mosaic of wetland habitats which provide ecological value and are protected by several international and national conservation designations; there is a sense of time depth provided by the intact pattern of drained reclamation and Red Hills which provide a visible link to historic salt making industry; recreational value provided by PRow, including the King Charles III Coastal Path, along the sea wall; a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity, owing to limited development, expansive views and its exposed coastal character; and the strong sense of visual openness with long, uninterrupted views from the sea wall across the surrounding estuarine channels.

Landscape Character Area D3: Colne Drained Estuarine Marsh

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It contains several important wetland, grassland and woodland habitats that provide landscape interest and are of ecological value, reflected in their protection by international, national and local nature conservation designations; the tidal river landscape provides visual interest with a sense dynamism and movement and a distinctive setting to the settlements of Rowhedge and Wivenhoe; PRoW provide important recreational access to the landscape, including along either side of the river; and a sense of visual openness with long views along the river and fringing marshes.

Landscape Character Area D4: Pyefleet Drained Estuarine Marsh

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It contains important coastal grazing marsh habitats that provide landscape interest and are of ecological value, reflected in their protection by international, national and local nature conservation designations; there is a sense of time depth provided by the intact historic patterns of early drained enclosures and several Second World War pillboxes; a strong sense of visual openness with wide views across the marshes and surrounding estuarine channels and creeks; and strong sense of remoteness.

Landscape Character Type E: Coastal Farmland

Landscape Character Area E1: Mersea Island Coastal Farmland

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It has a strong sense of remoteness and

wildness along the coastal edges, and wide open views across marshes and mudflats towards the surrounding estuaries and channels; It contains several important inter-tidal and estuarine habitats that provide landscape interest and are of ecological value, reflected in their protection by international, national and local nature conservation designations; it has a sense of time depth through the presence of several historic features including remnants of prehistoric and roman salt making; recreational value provided by a network of footpaths, lanes and tracks, including the King Charles III Coastal Path around the perimeter of the island; and a sense of rurality and tranquillity across much of the landscape.

Landscape Character Area E2: Great & Little Wigborough Coastal Farmland

- The LCA has several sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It has locally distinctive landforms; ecological value of Ancient Woodland and mosaic of other habitats, including coastal saltmarshes and coastal and floodplain grazing marshes along the edge of Salcott Channel; a sense of time-depth and landscape interest provided by historic settlement pattern, and several historic features; recreational value provided by the network of PRoW, including the King Charles III England Coast Path; and a strong sense of visual openness across much of the landscape, with long-range views across farmland towards adjacent estuarine marshes.

Landscape Character Area E3 Langenhoe Coastal Farmland

- The LCA has some sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **high** value. It has locally distinctive landforms; ecological value of Ancient Woodland and mosaic of other habitats, including at Fingringhow Wick Nature Discovery Park; a sense of time-depth and landscape interest provided by historic settlement pattern; recreational value provided by the network of PRoW, including the King Charles III England Coast Path; a strong sense of visual openness across

much of the landscape, with long-range views across farmland; and visual interest provided by scattered woodland and the landmark of Church of St Mary at Peldon which forms prominent landmark visible from much of the surrounding landscape.

Landscape Character Type F: Wooded Farmland

Landscape Character Area F1: Messing Wooded Farmland

- The LCA has some sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **medium** value. The undulating ridge of higher ground provides topographical interests and contrasts with the surrounding lower-lying farmland and river valleys; it forms a wooded backdrop in views from parts the wider lower-lying surrounding landscape to the north; scattered woodlands provide ecological value and landscape diversity; there is a sense of time-depth provided by the surviving historic settlement pattern, remnant parkland at Messing Park and several historic features and designations; the network of public rights of way provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access; and a relative sense of openness in the north, affording longer-distance views north-west across the wider landscape; and a sense of tranquillity and remoteness, especially away from the northern settlement edge of Tiptree and the A12.

Landscape Character Area F2: Tiptree Wooded Farmland

- The LCA has some sensitive attributes and values and overall is considered to have a **medium** value. The undulating ridge of higher ground provides topographical interests and contrasts with the surrounding lower-lying farmland and river valleys; scattered habitats provide ecological value and landscape diversity, including Ancient Woodland, traditional orchards and remnant heathland at Tiptree Heath; there is a sense of time-depth provided by the surviving historic settlement pattern of scattered halls and farms and surviving area of unenclosed common land at Tiptree Heath; the network of public rights of way provide green infrastructure connections and recreational access; and a relative sense of

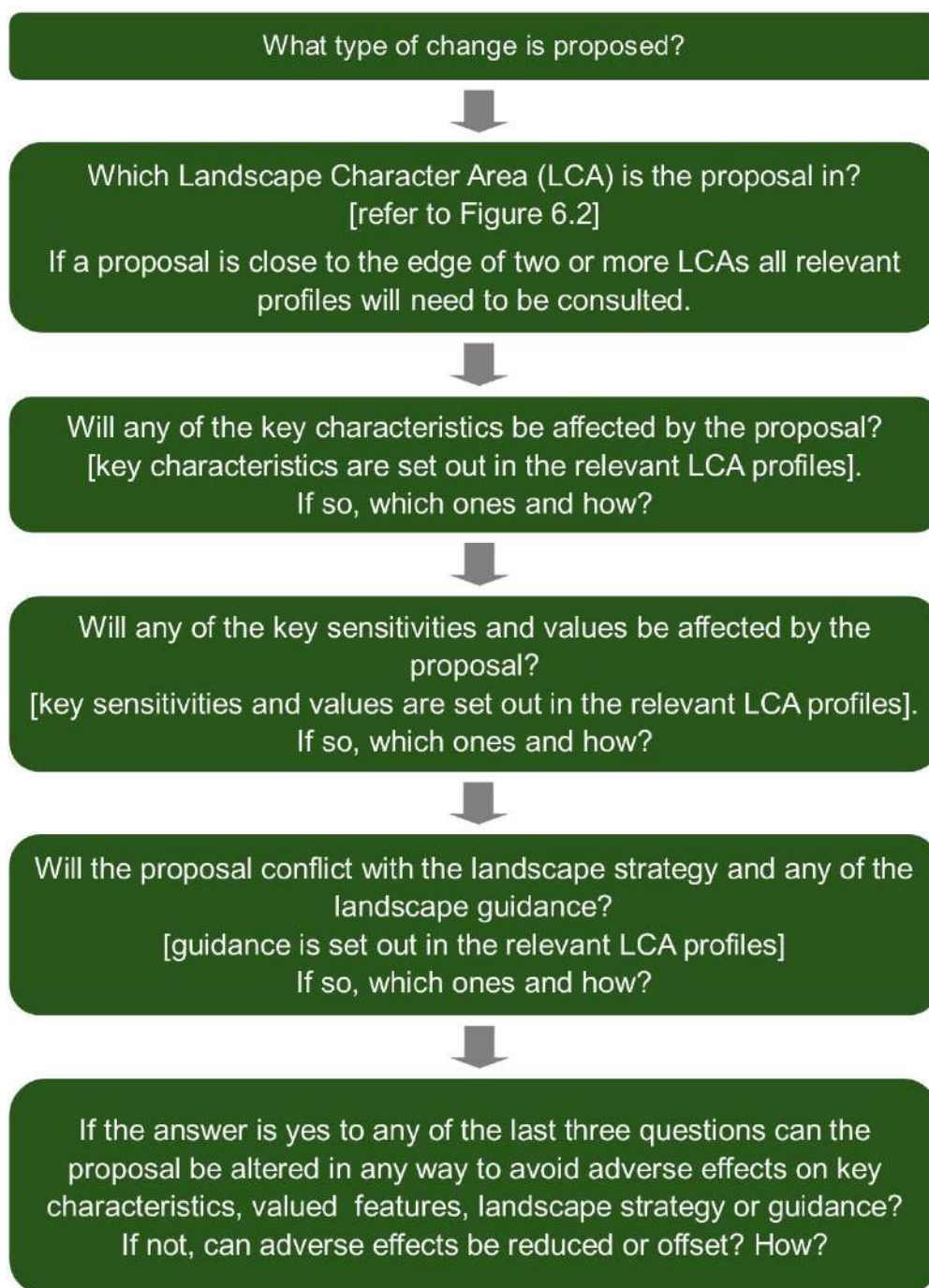
Appendix A Inherent value and sensitivities

openness in the east and south, affording long-distance views to adjacent farmed landscapes.

Appendix B

User Guide

Figure B.1: User Guide



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