

LEGEND

- Local Plan Residential Boundary
- North Growth Area & Stanway Growth Area Boundaries
- High
- Medium
- Low

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ASSESSMENT OF OPEN COUNTRYSIDE BETWEEN SETTLEMENTS IN BOROUGH OF COLCHESTER

COLCHESTER - EIGHT ASH GREEN FIGURE 6.3 : CONTRIBUTION TO SEPARATION OF SETTLEMENTS PLAN



Photograph 6.1
View along A1124 from looking north towards Eight Ash Green.



Photograph 6.2
View along A1124 from looking south towards Colchester.



Photograph 6.3
View southwards from Argent's Lane toward Colchester.



Photograph 6.4
View southwards toward Colchester from footpath at north-east corner of Eight Ash Green.



Photograph 6.5
View north towards Eight Ash Green from Halstead Road (near Bridge Farm)

7.0 COLCHESTER TO LAYER-DE-LA-HAYE

7.1 Landscape Context

- 7.1.1 The village of Layer-de-la-Haye is situated approximately 1.6km to the south of Colchester. The two settlements are separated by a belt of open countryside, which includes the Roman River Valley (see Figure 7.1). Housing within Colchester abuts the northern edge of this area.
- 7.1.2 The north-south B1026 road connects the two settlements. Layer-de-la-Haye forms a linear village along the road as it rises up out of the river valley, but expands to a larger nucleated form further to the south and fills much of the space between the B1026 and Malting Green Road.

7.2 Baseline Review

Topography

- 7.2.1 The south-western parts of Colchester are located on a plateau, lying at an elevation of approximately 35m AOD. The plateau continues as relatively flat land for approximately 0.85km south of Colchester's boundary, before descending to the Roman River, which passes to the south of Colchester in a south-easterly direction (see Figure 7.2). The river valley width varies, but for much of the area between Colchester and Layer-de-la-Haye it is around 0.6km in width.
- 7.2.2 Layer-de-la-Haye straddles a ridge south of the Roman River, and is bordered to the northwest by a small side valley of the river. The northern boundary of the village is situated at approximately 25m AOD, and the main part of the village is located at about 35m AOD.

Land Use

- 7.2.3 Land use in the area between Colchester and Layer-de-la-Haye is mixed, consisting of an Iron Age archaeological site, agricultural fields, the Birch Grove Golf Club, medium and large blocks of woodland, the well-wooded Roman River valley, and a few isolated farmsteads.
- 7.2.4 Two roads extend out from Colchester to Layer-de-la-Haye in a southerly direction – the B1026 and Oliver's Lane (see Figure 7.1). The B1026 connects the two settlements. Although Oliver's Lane does not connect to Layer-de-la-Haye, it provides access to the countryside northwest of the settlement. Both roads contain scattered houses and some farmsteads along

their routes. At the northern boundary of Layer-de-la-Haye, a side road—the Folly— heads south through an area of predominantly small-scale agricultural fields, with occasional farmsteads, and is bordered by a small grouping of houses.

- 7.2.5 In the northern part of the area, built development along Cunobelin Way, Gosbecks Road and Berechurch Hall Road form the southern boundary of Colchester. At the B1026/Berechurch Hall Road junction, Colchester's built-up edge extends 150m south along the B1026 and 300m east along Berechurch Hall Road.
- 7.2.6 South of Cunobelin Way and west of the B1026 lies Gosbeck's Archaeological Park and Cheshunt Field. The open fields in these areas are believed to be the site of an important Iron Age settlement, and a portion of this area is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Medium to large-scale arable fields lie to the east of the B1026.
- 7.2.7 South and south-east of Gosbeck's Park lie a mixture of small and medium-scale agricultural fields and farmsteads delineated by hedgerows, the well-wooded Birch Grove Golf Club, and blocks of woodland. The Roman River passes through this area, and portions of its corridor are lined with mature woodland. Several small arable and pasture fields are interspersed with this woodland in the river valley. South of the river and northwest of Layer-de-la-Haye lies a large woodland—Chest Wood. East of the village lies a group of small-scale agricultural fields and a cluster of housing along The Folly.

Vegetation

- 7.2.8 Vegetation in the Gosbeck's Archaeological Park and the Cheshunt Field areas (see Figure 7.2) are dominated by rough grassland. South and east of the area, agricultural field boundaries are delineated by mature deciduous hedgerows, with occasional mature deciduous trees.
- 7.2.9 Fields southwest of Layer-de-la-Haye and those located within the Roman River corridor are bounded by robust hedgerows.
- 7.2.10 There are several significant blocks of woodland and tree belts in the area, which include a prominent tree belt alongside the Roman River, Chest Wood, Olivers Wood and a large block of woodland south of Birch Grove Golf Club (see Figure 7.3). In addition to this, there are smaller groups of woodland interspersed within fields north of Chest Wood, and within the golf course.
- 7.2.11 The B1026 is lined by a mature treebelt along much of its route between the two settlements, which enhances the well-wooded appearance of the area and screens most views into the

surrounding countryside. Likewise, Bounstead Road, south of Berechurch Hall Road, is bordered by mature trees that screen views into the adjacent agricultural fields.

- 7.2.12 The southern edges of Gosbecks Road and Berechurch Hall Road are edged by belts of mature trees and hedgerows. However, the Gosbecks Archaeological Park and Cheshunt Field areas are devoid of mature vegetation near the settlement edge.

Settlement Edges

- 7.2.13 The northern edges of Layer-de-la-Haye are generally softened or screened by robust belts of mature deciduous trees and hedgerows, and woodland that surround the settlement (see Figure 7.1).
- 7.2.14 The Colchester settlement edges along Gosbeck Road and Berechurch Hall Road are substantially softened by rear garden vegetation, and by mature hedgerows and treebelts that line nearby fields and roads. To the north of the Gosbeck Archaeological Park and Cheshunt Field, the Colchester settlement edge generally presents a visually harsh edge when viewed from areas south of Cunobelin Way due to a lack of mature vegetation in this area.

Public Rights of Way

- 7.2.15 A number of public footpaths pass through the countryside between Layer-de-la-Haye and Colchester. Two public footpaths head west and north from Layer-de-la-Haye, passing through Chest Wood and then converging into one path. This path and one other proceed north through Cheshunt Field to Colchester.
- 7.2.16 Two footpaths lead east from the north-eastern edge of Layer-de-la-Haye, then converge and the combined path heads west, north and west again to meet the B1026 north of the Roman River valley.

Landscape Character

- 7.2.17 This area of landscape is situated within the Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau (B3), the Wooded Roman River Valley (A2) and the Layer Breton Farmland Plateau (B1) Landscape Character Areas, as identified within the Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment (November 2005). The key characteristics of each area are listed below:

Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau (B3)

- An area of sloping farmland plateau (with a mixture of small, medium and large, predominantly arable fields) bordered by Colchester settlement fringes to the north and the wooded Roman River Valley to the south;
- Influence of the military (East Donyland military training areas and Middlewick Rifle Ranges) – disturbs tranquillity whilst firing is taking place;
- Several large patches of woodland extend from the northern slopes of the Roman River valley, onto the plateau;
- Several small lakes and ponds, within disused sand and gravel works;
- Provides physical and visual separation between Colchester urban areas and the Roman River Valley;
- Fragmented and sometimes chaotic landscape structures with numerous unrelated land uses.

Wooded Roman River Valley (A2)

- Relatively steep and wooded slopes of narrow v-shaped Roman River valley (tributary of the Colne River);
- Large areas of deciduous and coniferous (mixed) woodland on the valley slopes (e.g. Donyland Wood, Friday Wood and Chest Wood);
- Small patches of ancient woodland on the valley sides;
- Large regular fields on northern valley slopes with a concentration of smaller irregular fields at High Park Corner;
- Several areas of historic parkland, often associated with halls, overlooking the valley floor;
- Views across and within the valley restricted by large woodland areas.

Layer Breton Farmland Plateau (B1)

- Gently rolling arable farmland plateau landscape;
- Variation in field sizes, with smaller fields associated with the villages of Layer de-la-Haye and Layer Breton; and larger, more open fields to the south of Layer Marney;
- Small patches of woodland in the north of the character area;
- A series of halls and moats associated with the settlements;
- Landmark Layer Marney brick gatehouse with four towers flanked by square turrets.

7.2.18 The character of the landscape between the settlements has been examined in further detail as part of this study to ascertain the degree to which variation in landscape character contributes to the separation of settlements. In general, this area has a predominantly rural character

despite its proximity to settlement edges in places. Tree belts and blocks of deciduous and coniferous woodland provide an intermittent sense of enclosure. Large blocks of deciduous and coniferous woodland contribute to an intimate, roughly textured and diverse character along the slopes of the river valley.

Inter-visibility

- 7.2.19 There is no inter-visibility between Colchester and Layer-de-la-Haye. Views between settlements are enclosed by mature field hedgerows and blocks of woodland, including the woods alongside the Roman River and northwest of Layer-de-la-Haye. Views from Layer-de-la-Haye towards Colchester are enclosed by trees lining the river valley, the upper slopes of the valley and by trees along the B1026 (see Photograph 7.1).

Intra-visibility

- 7.2.20 Intra-visibility (i.e. the ability to see both settlement edges from a single point) is difficult to perceive between Layer-de-la-Haye and Colchester, due to the distance between the settlements and the screening effects of intervening woodland and field boundary hedgerows.
- 7.2.21 Whilst views of Colchester's edge may be obtained from the public footpath that heads north from Oliver's Lane, as well as from points along Oliver's Lane (see Photograph 7.6), views back to Layer-de-la-Haye are enclosed by intervening hedgerows, by trees in the Roman River valley and by Chest Wood.
- 7.2.22 Views from the B1026 towards the northern edge of Layer-de-la-Haye and/or the southern edge of Colchester are generally enclosed by mature hedgerows and trees lining the road corridor, by trees at the golf course, by trees associated with farmsteads, by small groups of houses in the intervening landscape, and, in the case of southward views, by deciduous and coniferous woodland lining the valley of the Roman River (see Photograph 7.4).

7.3 Evaluation

- 7.3.1 There is a lack of inter-visibility and very limited intra-visibility between Layer-de-la-Haye and Colchester, which helps achieve a strong sense of separation between the settlements. This is due mainly to the screening effects of intervening landform, woodland, and trees/hedgerows.
- 7.3.2 The distance between the settlements and the topographical variation provided by the Roman River valley provides a strong sense of separation between settlements. When travelling between the settlements, either on foot or via car, the experience of leaving one plateau,

crossing the river valley and entering another plateau heightens this sense of separation. There is a particularly distinct sense of arrival in Layer-de-la-Haye when travelling along the B1026, because the edge of the settlement is encountered upon climbing out of the Roman River valley.

- 7.3.3 When travelling southwards out of Colchester along the B1026, there is a gradual sense of leaving the settlement and entering a rural landscape on account of housing along the northern section of this road. Open fields on either side of the road support the feeling of leaving the settlement, and a curve in the road and roadside trees serve to enclose views of Layer-de-la-Haye beyond.
- 7.3.4 The open land associated with the Gosbeck's Park creates an area of transition between Colchester and the rural landscape south of the urban area, and contributes to a sense of separation between settlements. When walking southwards along the footpath through the Park, views of the built development on the edge of Colchester fade into the distance and result in a sense of being in a rural area.
- 7.3.5 The contribution made by various areas of land between Colchester and Layer-de-la-Haye to the separation of settlements has been assessed below according to whether they provide a high, medium, or low contribution. These assessment findings have been mapped on Figure 7.3.

High Contribution

- 7.3.6 The open countryside south of Cunobelin Way, which encompasses Gosbeck's Archaeological Park, contributes highly to the sense of separation between Layer-de-la-Haye and Colchester. The edge of Colchester in this area ends abruptly at Cunobelin Way, and users of both footpaths and Oliver's Lane experience an immediate transition into an open landscape with middle distance views that contribute to a sense of separation between the two settlements. This sense of separation is heightened by the trees and blocks of woodland that surround the Roman River Corridor. These enclose views towards Layer-de-la-Haye, and substantially restrict intra-visibility between the two settlements.
- 7.3.7 The woodland and numerous field hedgerows in the countryside between the two settlements provide the perception of multiple layers of vegetation and a strong sense of rural character. When travelling through this landscape, particularly along the B1026, the strong contrast between the area's rural character with scattered farmsteads and clusters of housing set within either wooded areas or agricultural fields, and the built up nature of the settlements helps to establish a strong sense of separation between them. The topographic change of the river

corridor and the experience of leaving one plateau, crossing another landscape type and entering another plateau, heightens this sense of separation. The lack of inter-visibility between the settlements helps to protect the setting and separate identity of the settlements.

Medium Contribution

- 7.3.8 None of the assessed land is considered to provide a medium contribution to the separation of settlements.

Low Contribution

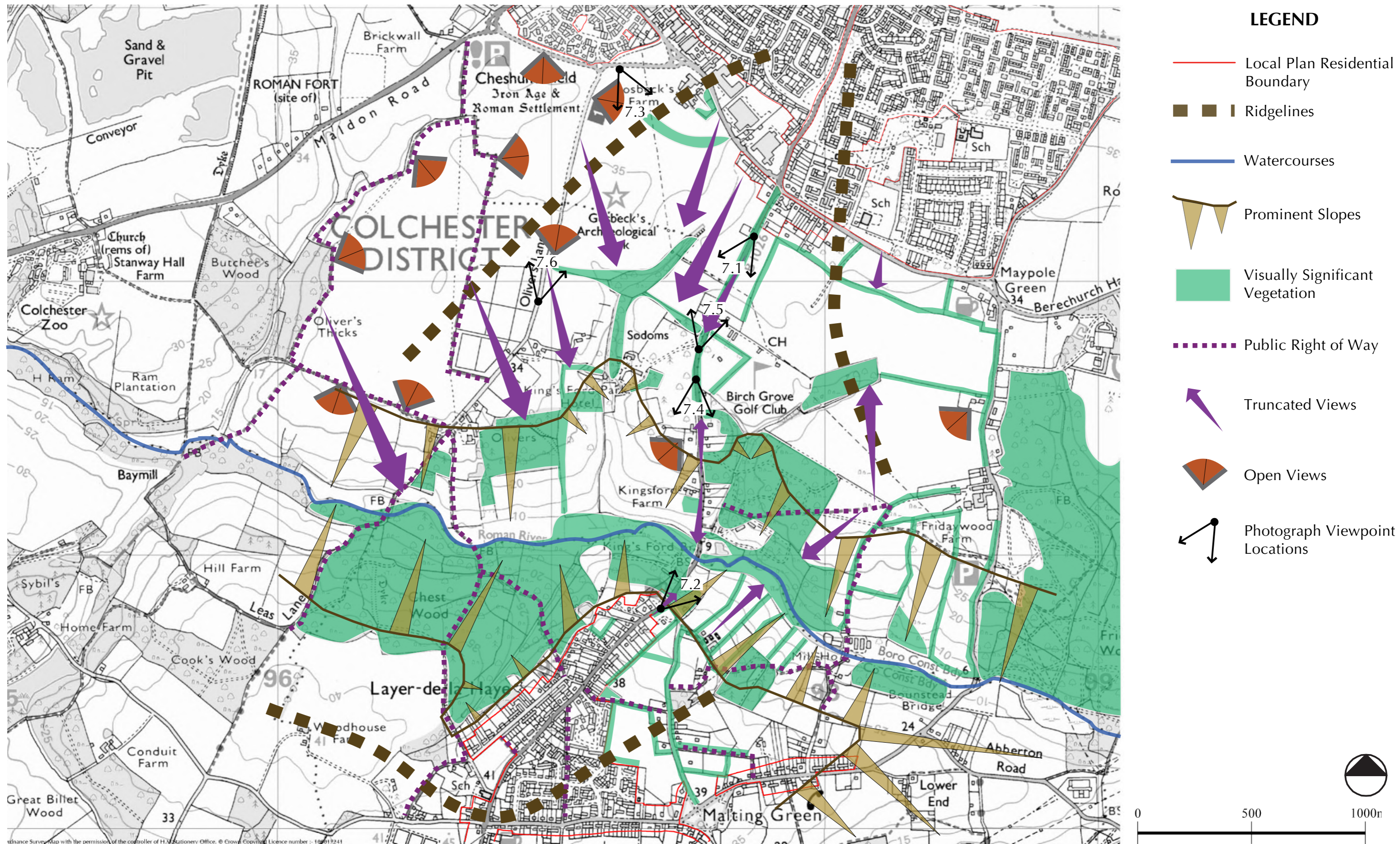
- 7.3.9 As indicated on Figure 7.3, fields south of Berechurch Hall Road between the B1026 and Bounstead Road provide a low contribution to the physical and visual separation between settlements. These fields are surrounded by built development on three sides: a group of buildings on the B1026/Berechurch Hall Road junction lie to the west, buildings on the northern side of Berechurch Hall Road lie to the north and homes at the Berechurch Hall Road/Bounstead Road junction lie to the east. There is a strong level of visual separation between these fields and the landscape further to the south and west, because they are in a location where views of Colchester's settlement edges are generally difficult to perceive. In addition, mature hedgerows along the southern edges of these fields provide some visual enclosure in views from arable fields to the south. There is also no inter-visibility between Layer-de-la-Haye and these fields, further adding to their low contribution to physical and visual separation.
- 7.3.10 Land north of Cunobolin Way, on the north side of Gosbeck's Archaeological Park, is considered to have a low contribution to the separation between Colchester and Layer-de-la-Haye. The land is under a strong urban influence and appears to form part of Colchester when viewed from the rural landscape to the south.
- 7.3.11 Land on the eastern edge of Layer-de-la-Haye is considered to make a low contribution to the visual and physical separation between the two settlements. It is surrounded on three sides by existing built development at Layer-de-la-Haye and at the adjacent settlement of Malting Green. The land relates physically and visually to Layer-de-la-Haye and Malting Green as users of roads and public footpaths in this area have distinct views of the edge of Layer-de-la-Haye, the edges of which are not well-screened by vegetation. Furthermore, the Roman River corridor to the north of this area provides a strong visual and physical barrier between this land and the rural landscape north of the river. Vegetation within the river valley, as well as hedgerows and blocks of woodland to the north serve to prevent inter-visibility and intra-visibility between this land and Colchester.

7.4 Conclusions

- 7.4.1 The distance between the settlements, the topographical variation provided by the Roman River valley and the strong structure of trees and hedgerows in the intervening landscape provide a strong sense of separation between settlements. When travelling between the settlements, either on foot or via car, the experience of leaving one plateau, crossing the river valley and entering another plateau heightens this sense of separation. There is a particularly distinct sense of arrival in Layer-de-la-Haye when travelling along the B1026, because the edge of the settlement is encountered upon climbing out of the Roman River valley. Any new built development, as defined, on the land identified as providing a high contribution to the separation of settlements, may result in visual coalescence with existing built development along the B1026 and is likely to seriously undermine the sense of settlement separation and the strong rural character of this farmland.
- 7.4.2 Two parcels of land on the southern edge of Colchester and one land parcel on the eastern edge of Layer-de-la-Haye, identified as providing low contributions to the separation of settlements, have the most potential in relative terms to accommodate new built development, as the land is either under a strong influence from existing built development and/or has a high degree of visual containment. Any new built development on these land parcels would not significantly diminish the sense of separation between the settlements or the rurality of the remaining undeveloped land.

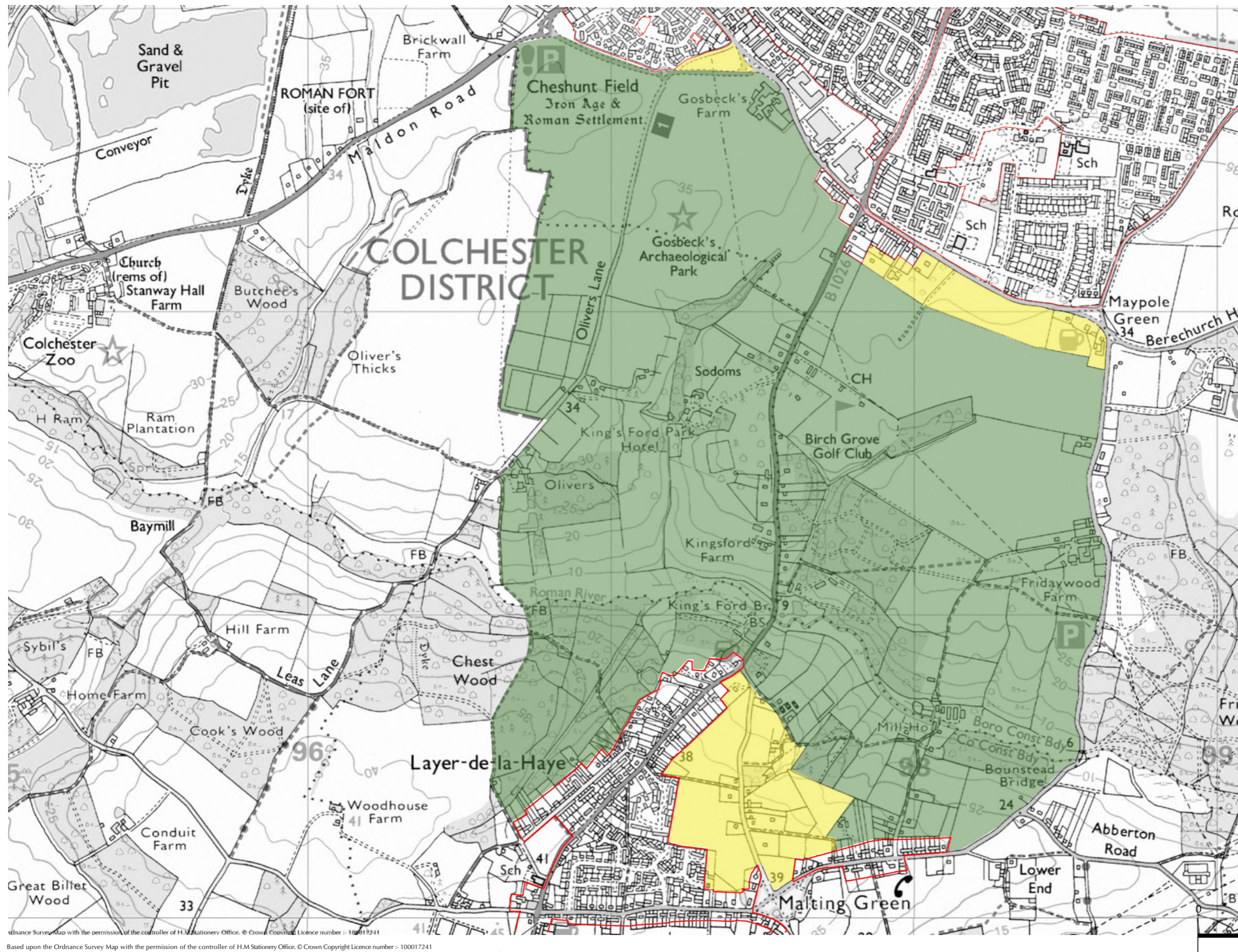


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ASSESSMENT OF OPEN COUNTRYSIDE BETWEEN SETTLEMENTS IN BOROUGH OF COLCHESTER

COLCHESTER-LAYER-DE-LA-HAYE FIGURE 7.3 : CONTRIBUTION TO SEPARATION OF SETTLEMENTS PLAN

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Photograph 7.1
View from edge of Colchester looking south towards Layer-de-la-Haye along the B1026.



Photograph 7.2
View from edge of Layer-de-la-Haye looking north toward Colchester along the B1026.



Photograph 7.3
View from edge of Colchester looking south across Gosbeck's Archaeological Park from Oliver's Lane near Cunobelin Way .



Photograph 7.4
View next to Birch Grove Golf Club along the B1026 looking toward Layer-de-la-Haye.



Photograph 7.5
View from Birch Grove Golf Club along the B1026 looking toward Colchester.



Photograph 7.6
View from Gosbecks Archaeological Park toward Colchester.