



Colchester Borough Council

**REVIEW OF COUNTRYSIDE CONSERVATION
AREAS IN COLCHESTER BOROUGH**



Final Report

August 2005

CHRIS BLANDFORD ASSOCIATES

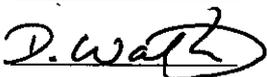
Environment Landscape Planning

Colchester Borough Council

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Position: Associate Technical Director
Date: 24 August 2005

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Environment Landscape Planning
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PREFACE

This Review of Countryside Conservation Areas is one of a series of technical studies commissioned by Colchester Borough Council to provide the evidence base for the preparation of the new Local Development Framework.

The report assesses the validity of existing landscape designations within the current Local Plan, taking into account the value of these landscapes.

In addition to this report, the following separate technical reports have also been prepared by CBA:

- Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment
- Landscape Capacity of Settlement Fringes in Colchester Borough

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the advice and guidance provided by the Client Project Group who steered the study. The Project Group comprised:

- Dave Cookson, Planning Policy Manager
- Emma Quantrill, Principal Planning Officer
- Adam John, Principal Landscape Architect
- Ruth Noble, Planning Officer

The CBA project team comprised:

- Dominic Watkins
- Emma Clarke
- Ross Allan
- Katy Stronach
- Jonathan Webb
- Marian Cameron

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 In September 2004, Colchester Borough Council commissioned Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) to prepare a borough-wide assessment of landscape character to inform the review of landscape policies as part of the new Local Development Framework (LDF) preparation process. As a discrete part of this work, CBA prepared this review of the existing Countryside Conservation Areas (CCAs) designated in the adopted Colchester Borough Local Plan. This report should be read in conjunction with the Landscape Character Assessment.

1.1.2 The *Colchester Borough Local Plan Inspector's Report 2003* recommended a thorough review of the CCAs in line with national and structure plan guidance, and that this should form part of or result from the Landscape Character Assessment. Government guidance within *Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7): Sustainable Development in Rural Areas* states that landscapes outside nationally designated areas cannot always be protected by criteria based policies within Local Development Documents (LDDs). Where a local authority proposes to introduce or retain a local landscape designation within their LDDs, PPS7 requires that these should be fully justified through a formal and robust assessment to evaluate the qualities of the landscapes that require protection.

1.1.3 This report reviews the boundaries of the existing CCAs. It sets out the criteria used to evaluate the Borough's landscapes, and describes the variations in the value of the landscape character areas defined by this Study. The report concludes by making a recommendation for a revised landscape designation to be adopted in the new LDF.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

1.2.1 The key purpose of the study is to assess the validity of the existing landscape designations within the current Local Plan, taking into account the value of these landscapes.

1.2.2 The key objective of the study is to:

- Provide a robust basis for underpinning justification for retaining existing/updated CCAs within the new development plan, based on the Countryside Agency's methodological guidance published in 2002.

1.3 Approach and Methodology

- 1.3.1 The review is based on a thorough assessment of the relative value of the landscape character areas defined in the Landscape Character Assessment, using criteria recommended by the Countryside Agency in conjunction with Scottish Natural Heritage in *Landscape Character Assessment - Guidance for England and Scotland* (2002), in particular Chapter 7 *Making Judgements Based on Landscape Character*.
- 1.3.2 Variations in landscape value are mapped and supporting statements provided to give justification for each evaluation. Features visible in the landscape such as field boundaries, roads, ridgelines, woodland etc have been used to delineate the boundaries of areas of differing landscape value.
- 1.3.3 As acknowledged by the Countryside Agency's guidelines, landscape is a continuum and the boundary of landscape character areas are often transitional in nature. The same applies to the areas of landscape value as they are based on the underlying landscape character.
- 1.3.4 The evaluation of the Borough's landscapes excludes the Dedham Vale AONB. The AONB is currently afforded statutory protection in recognition of its national value as one of England's finest landscapes; additional recognition through a local landscape designation is thus considered unnecessary.
- 1.3.5 The assessment is 'relative' to Colchester Borough, in that it considers local landscape value by comparing landscapes in the Borough with each other, and not by reference to landscapes of national, regional or county importance.

2.0 LANDSCAPE EVALUATION CRITERIA

2.1 General

2.1.1 This section sets out the criteria used to evaluate the value of the landscapes that form the basis of the review.

2.2 Evaluation Criteria

2.2.1 The evaluation criteria are described below.

Landscape Quality - the intactness of the landscape and the condition of features and elements. Condition is influenced by visual unity and functional integrity. Visual unity results from an analysis of the pattern of vegetation, enclosure, settlement and the relationship of these to landform weighted against the number of detracting features in the landscape. Functional integrity is an evaluation of how the landscape functions as a habitat for wildlife and the condition of cultural elements such as enclosure, built elements and roads.

Scenic Quality - the way in which landscapes appeal primarily to the visual senses.

Rarity - the presence of rare features and elements in the landscape, or the presence of a rare landscape character type.

Representativeness - whether the landscape contains a particular character, and/or features and elements, which is felt by stakeholders to be worthy of representing. For example, black timber framed barns, intimate wooded valley landscapes, small hilltop hamlets, flint clad churches with spires or towers visible across open fields.

Conservation Interests - the presence of features of particular wildlife, earth science or archaeological, historical and cultural interest can add to the value of landscape as well as having a value in their own right. For example a Ramsar site or a local nature reserve.

Wildness/Tranquillity - the presence of wild (or relatively wild) character in the landscape which makes a particular contribution to sense of place. Wildness is closely associated with the concept of tranquillity, i.e. (i) low levels of disturbance and detracting features and elements such as built development, industry, traffic, noise, movement, the presence of

people and artificial lighting, and (ii) the presence of positive features such as the naturalness of the landscape, presence and visibility of rivers and sea and the presence and visibility of woodland.

Associations – the extent of cultural associations of the landscape with particular people, artists, writers or other media, or events in history.

2.3 Categories of Landscape Value

2.3.1 The categories of landscape value developed for this review are described below.

Highest Value Landscapes - Landscapes within the Borough that afford the highest level of visual amenity. Distinguishing features and harmonious arrangement of features and elements create a strong sense of place, whilst the rarity of some features, relative to other parts of the Borough, contribute to the highest value. In relation to the criteria, landscapes of highest value are evaluated as follows:

- *Landscape Quality* - The condition of features and elements that contribute to landscape character is consistently very high giving a strongly unified landscape that contributes to a strong sense of place. Diverse range of large and continuous habitats of very high importance to wildlife provide strong structure within the landscape. Numerous cultural elements such as buildings and monuments are intact and in very good condition.
- *Scenic Quality* - There is an absence of detracting features visible within the landscape. Sometimes dramatic variation in topography and a diversity of contrasting landforms. A colourful, diverse and interesting combination of features and elements are arranged in aesthetically pleasing patterns that stamp their identity on the Borough as a whole. Prominent and distinctive landmark features within the landscape provide orientation and sense of place.
- *Rarity* - There are nationally/regionally distinctive, rare features or elements present within the landscape that contribute to a strong sense of place.
- *Representativeness* - The landscape character area is of an exceptional example of its kind and the combination of features and elements.

- *Conservation Interests* - Within the landscape there are numerous and/or extensive international or nationally important features or elements of wildlife, earth science, archaeological, historical and cultural interest that have a value in their own right.
- *Wildness/Tranquillity* - Within the context of the Borough parts of the landscape are wild in character where a sense of remoteness or isolation is experienced that contributes to a strong sense of place. Human influence on the landscape is negligible. There is an absence of disturbance and detracting features or elements within the landscape and a relative abundance of positive features or elements that contribute to an experience of tranquillity
- *Associations* - The landscape is strongly associated with prominent people, artists or writers, or important events in local history.

High Value Landscapes - Landscapes within the Borough that afford a high level of visual amenity. Distinguishing features and balanced arrangement of features and elements create a distinct sense of place, whilst the rarity of some features, relative to other parts of the Borough, contribute to high value. In relation to the criteria, landscapes of high value are evaluated as follows:

- *Landscape Quality* - The condition of features and elements that contribute to landscape character is high but not uniform throughout the landscape giving a partly interrupted character but localised sense of place. A range of habitats of high value are important structural components in the landscape. Many cultural features in good condition.
- *Scenic Quality* - There are occasional detracting features visible within the landscape. Variation in topography and landforms. Variation in natural colour within the landscape and an interesting combination of features and elements arranged in an aesthetically pleasing pattern. Occasional prominent landmark features provide orientation and a sense of place.
- *Rarity* - There are some rare features or elements present within the landscape that are unique to the Borough and contribute to a strong sense of place.
- *Representativeness* - The landscape character area is a good example of its kind and the combination of features and elements.

- *Conservation Interests* - Within the landscape there are frequent features or elements (some nationally or internationally important) of wildlife, earth science, archaeological, historical and cultural interest that have a value in their own right.
- *Wildness/Tranquillity* - Secluded parts of the landscape are wild in character and a sense of remoteness or isolation is experienced that contributes to a sense of place. Human influence on the landscape is evident but does not dominate the landscape. Settlement is sparse consisting of scattered dwellings and farmsteads. There is some disturbance from noise and movement and the presence of detracting features or elements within the landscape. There are some positive features or elements that contribute to an experience of tranquillity.
- *Associations* - The landscape is strongly associated with nationally prominent people, artists or writers. The landscape might also be associated with locally important events in history such as a famous battle.

Moderate Value Landscapes - Landscapes within the Borough that afford a moderate level of visual amenity. Some distinguishing features and organised arrangement of features and elements create a localised sense of place. The scarcity of rare features and the increasing presence of detracting features and erosion of tranquillity contribute to moderate value. In relation to the criteria, landscapes of moderate value are evaluated as follows:

- *Landscape Quality* - The condition of features and elements that contribute to landscape character is good but there is evidence of deterioration throughout the landscape. Some habitats of value to wildlife, though small and/or fragmented, are important features within the landscape. Some cultural features are in good condition but there is evidence of decline or abandonment. There is a localised sense of place.
- *Scenic Quality* - There are some detracting features visible within the landscape. Localised variation in topography and some diversity of landform. Some variation in colour within the landscape with some interesting combinations of features and elements. Some locally distinctive landscape patterns interrupted by fairly common patterns that occur widely throughout the Borough. Few prominent landmark features within the landscape.

- *Rarity* - Few rare features or elements present within the landscape contributing to a sense of place.
- *Representativeness* – The landscape character area's contribution of features and elements are not particularly unique.
- *Conservation Interests* - Some locally important features or elements of wildlife, earth science, archaeological, historical and cultural interest.
- *Wildness/Tranquillity* - Settlement consists of scattered villages with some intrusive modern development. Due to the intrusion of detracting features a wild character to the landscape is absent. However there is a localised sense of seclusion from other parts of the Borough. There is frequent disturbance and some detracting features or elements within the landscape. There are some positive features or elements that contribute to an experience of tranquillity.
- *Associations* - The landscape is associated with locally prominent people such as landowners, artists or writers and locally important events in history.

Low Value Landscapes - Landscapes within the Borough where the level of visual amenity is compromised by intrusive features or elements such as pylons or roads. Very few distinguishing features having no relationship to the surrounding landscape. Fragmented arrangement of features and elements create a weak sense of place. The absence of rare features and the increasing dominance of detracting features and erosion of tranquillity contribute to low value. In relation to the criteria, landscapes of low value are evaluation as follows:

- *Landscape Quality* - The condition of features and elements that contribute to landscape character is poor throughout the landscape. Wildlife habitats are fragmented and dispersed. Few cultural features present and mostly in poor condition or abandoned. There is a weak localised sense of place.
- *Scenic Quality* - There are many detracting features visible within the landscape. Little variation in topography and landform. Colours within the landscape are muted. Combinations of features and elements tend to be very localised creating a fragmented

landscape pattern that detracts from scenic quality. Some minor local landmark features within the landscape.

- *Rarity* - Absence of rare features or elements present within the landscape.
- *Representativeness* – The landscape character area’s combination of features and elements are not unique.
- *Conservation Interests* - Few locally important features or elements of wildlife, earth science, archaeological, historical and cultural interest.
- *Wildness/Tranquillity* - Settlement is present throughout the landscape and other human influences on the landscape are strong. Due to the increasing dominance of detracting features a wild character to the landscape is absent. There is frequent disturbance and many detracting features or elements within the landscape that erode a sense of tranquillity. There are small-scale secluded areas within the landscape where with a few positive features or elements that contribute to an experience of tranquillity.
- *Associations* - The landscape has some association with locally prominent people such as landowners and minor local events in history.

3.0 VARIATIONS IN VALUE OF LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS

3.1 General

3.1.1 This section describes the variations in landscape value across the Borough in the context of the landscape character types and areas defined in the Landscape Character Assessment. This section should be read in conjunction with Figure 1.

3.2 River Valley Landscapes

A1 Abberton Flooded River Valley

3.2.1 Most of the character area coincides with landscape of **high value**. The south west of the area coincides with landscape of **moderate value**. Abberton Reservoir, and the fringe habitats associated with it, is of international importance for over wintering waterfowl being designated a Ramsar site. The undesignated landscapes within the character area provide the setting to the reservoir and consist of open arable fields with clipped hedge field boundaries across which the water body can be glimpsed.

3.2.2 The very strong character and sense of place combined with the conservation interest of Abberton Reservoir and the long views afforded across it, sometimes to landmark buildings such as the pumping station and Layer marney Tower, contribute to a landscape of **high value**.

3.2.3 The south-western part of the character area coincides with **moderate value** landscapes consisting of expansive prairie fields with limited boundary vegetation. Whilst there is a sense of remoteness and sparse settlement pattern there is deterioration of landscape structure which has been driven by agricultural intensification.

A2 Wooded Roman River Valley

3.2.4 The character area coincides with predominantly **high value** landscapes. The unifying element within the landscape is woodland which is extensive in places. Views of the Roman River itself are thus largely restricted by vegetation. Minor roads and lanes cross the character area in a north-south direction. The routes climb steeply in and out of the valley winding through woodlands. Country inns in vernacular style, situated at cross roads within the valley are features providing orientation. There is an intimate character to the landscape

and a sense of tranquillity is experienced due to the relative absence of detracting features and the distance from main roads and urban development. There are many Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and some SSSI within the character area that contribute to its **high value**.

- 3.2.5 The busy B1022 in the vicinity of Heckford Bridge at the western end of the Roman River Valley detracts from the rural character of the area. Colchester Zoo interrupts the unifying character of the landscape in this part of the area. These factors contribute to the evaluation of the western part of the character area as being of **moderate value**.

A3 Roman River Valley Floor

- 3.2.6 The valley floor landscape is characterised by wetland and riparian vegetation within an area enclosed by wooded valley sides. Human influence within the character area consists principally of agricultural land use with levees having been constructed in the lower part of the valley floor. Industrial buildings to the south of Rowhedge intrude into the lower valley but on the whole there are few detracting features within the landscape. There is a strong sense of place and remoteness particularly in the lower valley where there are views towards the picturesque southern fringes of Wivenhoe. Overall, this area is considered to be of **high value**.

A4 Colne River Valley Floor

- 3.2.7 The Colne River Valley Floor Landscape Character Area coincides with landscapes of **high value** with the exception of eastern part of the character area in close proximity to the A12(T) and mainline railway. The north-west fringes of Colchester further enclose eastern parts of the character area which are evaluated as **moderate value** landscapes.
- 3.2.8 Within the Colne valley floor there are several small SINCs but no large areas designated for nature conservation interest. The unifying characteristic of the valley is the level floor across which the River Colne meanders. Land use along the length of the valley floor varies from wetland within the meanders to orchards and pasture in the wider parts of the valley. Settlement is sparse with the hamlets of Chappel and Fordstreet being the only concentration of settlement until Colchester itself is reached. Despite close proximity to the A1124 which skirts to the north of the western extents of the valley floor, there is a tranquil character to the area which is accentuated by the sparsely populated partially wooded backdrop of the Colne River Valley Slopes Landscape Character Area. Vernacular buildings within the hamlets

and the impressive viaduct at Chappel stamp their identity upon the valley floor landscape contributing to a strong sense of place and a landscape considered to be of **high value**.

- 3.2.9 Whilst the eastern part of the character area contains some important features and elements, the close proximity of major roads and the fringes of Colchester reduces landscape to **moderate value**.

A5 Colne River Valley Slopes

- 3.2.10 The valley slopes coincide with landscapes evaluated as both **high and moderate value** with some highest value landscape to the south west of Chappel. The convex valley slopes are incised by tiny tributaries of the Colne which produce variations in topography along the length of the valley. This factor combined with the sinuous nature of the valley restricts views along the valley slopes within the character area itself but affords long views up and down the valley and across it. The valley slopes are partly wooded and criss-crossed by numerous winding and sunken lanes that cut down between hedgebanks and cross the Colne on stone arched bridges. Settlement pattern consists of dispersed and isolated farmsteads connected to the lanes by narrow tracks. Whilst intensive agriculture practises have reduced the proportion of woodland and caused deterioration of field boundaries, there are many relict enclosure patterns existing in the landscape.

A6 Ardleigh River Valley

- 3.2.11 The character area is small and hence there is limited diversity in landform within it. Landscape structure is strong with the small river valley being the unifying feature. The character area is hidden from view from locations within the farmland plateau to the east by a combination of topography and thick woodland at the boundary between character area it and Wivenhoe farmland plateau landscape character area. Within the Greenstead area of Colchester the character area is visible as an area of wooded countryside with extensive areas of unimproved grassland which impart a rough texture to the landscape and create interest within views from this residential area. Large parts of the character area are of importance for nature conservation as they form extensive grassland habitats. A sense of wildness and tranquillity are largely absent from the character area due to the close proximity of urban development and roads. However, there is a strong sense of place and the character area is a distinctive river valley landscape which is considered to be of **high value**.

A7 Stour River Valley Slopes

- 3.2.12 A large proportion of this character area coincides with the Dedham Vale AONB. Those parts of the character area are therefore excluded for the evaluation.
- 3.2.13 The western most extent of the character area and parts of the sub character areas situated outside the AONB boundary are considered to be of **high value**. Those parts of the character area not included within the AONB consist of incised valley slopes or intimate minor tributary valleys of the River Stour. The varied topography of the incised valley slopes creates an intimate small-scale landscape with a strong structure. The aesthetically pleasing arrangement of features and elements contrasts with the rather monotonous landscapes of the plateaux to the south. Conservation interests are largely absent from the high value landscapes however, the integrity of the landscape and diversity of habitats enhances the potential of the area for wildlife. Intensive agriculture and a dispersed settlement pattern consisting mostly of farmsteads combined with the presence of a mainline railway within western parts of the character detracts from a sense of wildness. However, the area is relatively peaceful and tranquil in parts.

A8 Stour River Valley Floor

- 3.2.14 Most of this character area coincides with the Dedham Vale AONB, and is therefore excluded from the evaluation.

3.3 Farmland Plateau Landscapes

B1 Layer Breton Farmland

- 3.3.1 The character area consists of elevated open plateau situated between Abberton Reservoir and the Roman River Valley. The southern part of the area, approximately 50% of the total, is evaluated as landscape of **high value**. The area contains an important area of remnant heath that separates Layer Breton and Birch Green. There are also number of landmark buildings including Layer Marney Tower which is visible within long distance views from many points within the character area and a number of moats. From the edge of the plateau the extensive Coastal Farmland landscape is visible. By comparison the northern part of the character area is more heavily settled with fewer features of interest. The presence of minor detracting features such as the small reservoirs and a more extensive network of lanes and roads reduces the sense of openness experienced in the south of the area.

B2 Easthorpe Farmland Plateau

- 3.3.2 The character area coincides with landscape evaluated as **moderate value**. There is little variation in landform across this gently undulating plateau area. Intensive agricultural practises have resulted in increased field sizes and deterioration in the condition and amount of boundary vegetation. Small clumps of woodland and shelterbelts are dispersed irregularly across the area. These factors combine to give a fairly weak landscape structure. There are some sites important to nature conservation but these are mostly small and widely dispersed across the landscape.
- 3.3.3 The A12 Corridor sub character area cuts across the main character area in an east-west direction. The landscape is considered to be of **low value**. The landscape is dominated by the A12(T) road, the A120 and the mainline railway which introduce noise and movement into the landscape. The sub areas is heavily settled and land use is fragmented. The sub character area also fragments the generally uniform character of the main B2 area.

B3 Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau

- 3.3.4 This character area coincides with landscapes of **low, moderate and high value**. The character of the area as a whole is typical of urban fringe landscapes being fragmented and chaotic consisting of a number of unrelated land uses including mineral works, orchards, woodland, farmland, recreation, MOD land. Landscape in the eastern parts of the character area are of **high value** due to the presence of large areas of woodland such as Friday Wood and sites of national and local nature conservation interest that provide a degree of seclusion and separation from the urban edge of Colchester. Remaining parts of the character area are predominantly of **low value** consisting of partly reclaimed and operating mineral works and other unrelated land uses. There is no coherent structure to the landscape and sense of place is weakened by the absence of defining features that enable orientation within the character area.

B4 Great Tey Farmland Plateau

- 3.3.5 This character area forms a distinctive ridge between the northern extents of Easthorpe Farmland Plateau landscape character area, which slopes away to the south, and the Colne River Valley to the north. The ridge landform is the unifying feature within the character area. The north of the area coincides with landscape evaluated as **high value**. There is a marked difference between the integrity of landscape structure on the north facing slopes of

the ridge compared to south facing slopes. The south facing slopes consist of large prairie fields that rise up to the ridge crest. Intensive agricultural practises have reduced the amount and condition of field boundary vegetation which consists mainly of clipped and gappy hedges. The area of **high value** is characterised by more varied topography than the area of **moderate value** to the south and by a smaller scale enclosure pattern and higher proportion of woodland. Black timber-framed and boarded barns are a feature of the character area.

B5 Rochfords Farmland Plateau

3.3.6 The character area coincides with **moderate and high value** landscape. **Moderate value** landscape is associated with gently undulating plateau landform which is characterised by intensive agricultural land. Field boundaries consist of clipped hedges with a lack of hedge trees. This landscape pattern occurs fairly widely throughout the Borough. A large disused airfield on the highest part of the plateau in the centre of the character area has a strong influence on its open and windswept character. Part of the disused airfield is used as gliding strip by a local club. There are few prominent landmarks within the character area and sense of place is weak in **moderate value** areas.

3.3.7 The topography of landscape within those areas evaluated as being of **high value** is more varied and coincides with the headwaters of small tributaries of the Colne and Stour rivers. Orchards and woodland are more prevalent than in the **moderate value** areas. There are also long views out from the edge of the plateau into the Stour Valley and across the Colne valley to the wooded ridge beyond. In the north east corner there is a very distinctive landscape consisting of a lodge house and estate buildings with a series of large ponds enclosed by woodland. There is a distinctive network of winding tree lined lanes separating the large open fields and connecting with hamlets such as Little Horkesley and Great Horkesley.

B6 Great Horkesley Farmland Plateau

3.3.8 The unifying characteristic of this plateau area is the presence of orchards and the regular, rectilinear enclosure pattern. The area is also characterised by straight roads adjacent to which there are scattered nursery buildings, residential properties and farm buildings. Whilst there is a distinct sense of place and strong character the structure of the landscape is essentially fragmented. There are few features or elements of nature conservation value which when combined with frequent disturbance from traffic and the presence of buildings and detracting features give most of the area a **moderate value**.

- 3.3.9 A large proportion of the western half of the area contiguous with part of Rochfords Farmland Plateau character area is considered to be of **high value**. The area has a strong landscape structure characterised by scattered farmsteads with associated clumps of woodland. Rectilinear fields are enclosed by sinuous ditches that separated the field margins from narrow lanes. Some lanes are fringed with tall hedges containing mature trees. Vegetation restricts views out from the area giving a sense of tranquillity and remoteness.

B7 Langham Farmland Plateau

- 3.3.10 This character area coincides with landscapes of predominantly **moderate value**. Level topography accentuates the open structure of the landscape created by very large rectilinear fields enclosed by low or gappy hedges. The arrangement of features and elements is not consistent across the character area creating a somewhat fragmented structure. Settlement is concentrated beside the lattice of roads and lanes that cross the area. The concentration of settlement and intensively farmed character of the landscape and the presence of detracting features such as the greenhouses associated with numerous nurseries give mean that tranquillity and wildness are largely absent but some secluded pockets of countryside remain.

B8 Wivenhoe Farmland Plateau

- 3.3.11 This relatively small character area contains landscapes of **low, moderate and high value**. **High value** landscapes coincide with the University of Essex Campus and an area of woodland designated as a SINC to the north of the A133. The University Campus has a distinctive, mature, formal landscape character providing the setting to the modern high-rise landmark University buildings which are prominent within views from parts of adjacent character areas. There are detracting features within this landscape. It has a very distinctive character and strong sense of place accentuated by the landmark University buildings.
- 3.3.12 To the south of the University campus the landscape character is typical of the farmland plateau landscape type. The plateau dips gently down towards Wivenhoe and the Colne Valley to the south. Landscape pattern consists of prairie fields enclosed by clipped and gappy hedges. There are views westwards to the wooded slopes of the Colne Valley. There are no sites of nature conservation interest within the area immediately to the north of Wivenhoe. Pylons are detracting features in the southern part of the area. It is therefore considered to be a landscape of **moderate value**.

- 3.3.13 Areas of **low value** landscape coincide with mineral workings and farmland to the east and south of Wivenhoe. The mineral works introduce major detracting features into the landscape that alter landscape character by changing landform and introducing new features and elements within the character area. Farmland slopes to the south east of Wivenhoe are in poor condition being given over predominantly to rough pasture. Landscape structure of the farmland area is weak due to the deterioration of field boundary vegetation. The relationship with landscape to the north of Wivenhoe Road is also weak.

3.4 Estuarine Marsh/Mudflat Landscapes

C1 Fingringhoe Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats

- 3.4.1 This character area is broken up across many islands and peninsular land masses separated by large channels and penetrated by small creeks and inlets. There is a very strong landscape structure, saltmarsh being the unifying feature of consistently high condition across the character area. Saltmarsh and creek landscape is regionally distinctive and typical of the Essex coast. Expansive sweeping skies strongly influence landscape character. Changing light conditions alter the appearance of vegetation and water creating dramatic panoramic seascapes within which very few detracting features are visible. Human influence on the landscape is negligible consisting of seawalls or boats moored in the estuary or within the small creeks. Where present the human influence contributes to landscape character and preserves a sense of wildness and isolation. The absence of detracting features and remoteness from disturbance due to noise or movement preserves a strong sense of tranquillity. The character area coincides with internationally important sites for nature conservation including Ramsar site and SPA. Landscapes within the character area have been evaluated as being of **highest value**.

C2 Strood and Salcott Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats

- 3.4.2 The dominant characteristics of this area are similar to those of C1. However, it is more strongly influenced by the close proximity of Mersea Island and detracting features such as the caravan park to the north of West Mersea and the causeway that dissects part of the area in the north of Mersea Island. The non-operational Bradwell Nuclear Power Station in Maldon District is a detracting feature visible on the southern horizon from this character area. The character area coincides with internationally important sites for nature conservation including Ramsar site and SPA. Landscapes within the character area have been evaluated as being of **highest value**.

C3 Mersea Island Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats

- 3.4.3 The character area consists of tidal mudflats and sand banks off the south coast of Mersea Island. Whilst there is intrusive holiday development and other detracting features on the southern coastal edge of the island detracting features and development are largely absent on the seaward side. At low tide the sand banks and mudflats are extensive providing an accessible area of wide open space next to the sea and exposed to the elements. These factors preserve a wild character at low tide. Despite the presence of a developed coastal edge to the north of the tidal flats, and the popularity of the area to holiday makers, a sense of tranquillity is preserved by the absence of disturbance from noise and movement. The tidal flats are important nature conservation features that contribute to the diversity of habitats along this part of the Essex coast. These factors contribute to the evaluation of this landscape as being of **highest value**.

3.5 Drained Estuarine Marsh Landscapes

D1 Mersea Island Drained Estuarine Marsh

- 3.5.1 The character area is located in the north of Mersea Island and is separated from the Pyefleet Channel by a seawall. Landscape structure has been modified by the severance of a major channel (now known as Broad Fleet) and the creation of embankments adjacent to it. A small reservoir in the south west exerts a further human influence on the character area. The area is without designated sites of nature conservation interest. The Essex Coast Environmentally Sensitive Area designation covers the character area. There is an absence of settlement and other significant structures within the area. However, noise disruption from Fingringhoe firing ranges to the north reduces the sense of tranquillity experienced within the area. The landscape has been evaluated as being of **high value**.

D2 Feldy Drained Estuarine Marsh

- 3.5.2 The character area consists of level grazing marshes protected by a seawall on the seaward side and partially enclosed by embankment on the landward side. The seawall restricts views towards the sea from within the character area. A network of wide, sinuous ditches separates areas of grazing marsh creating discrete field units. The area is generally open in character with trees and other vertical landscape features largely absent giving a horizontal landscape. Expansive sweeping skies strongly influence character. There is a simple but

strong landscape structure, which is largely intact. An absence of disturbance from noise and movement and absence of detracting features preserve a sense of tranquillity. Whilst the landscape character of the area has been shaped by man, there is a sense of wildness that is preserved by the remoteness and isolation that is experienced and is accentuated by the broad sweeping skies and simple structure of the landscape. The character area coincides with internationally important sites for nature conservation. Landscapes within the character area have been evaluated as **highest value**.

D3 Colne Drained Estuarine Marsh

3.5.3 The character area consists of four areas of drained estuarine marsh within the confines of the upper Colne Estuary. The area is generally of **high value**. However, the northernmost part adjacent to the University of Essex is of **moderate value**. It is in close proximity to urban development, transport and electricity generation infrastructure which adversely affect the integrity of landscape structure and scenic quality. The human influence on the landscape further reduces sense of wildness and tranquillity.

3.5.4 Those parts of the character area that have been evaluated as **high value** include Hythe Marshes, parts of Upper Colne Marshes SSSI to the south west of Wivenhoe and an area to the north of Fingringhoe Wick nature reserve. Whilst there are some detracting features including a sewage works, reservoir and a dismantled railway in close proximity or within these parts of the character area, they are generally of **high value**. The level topography with a network of ditches are unifying features across the character areas. Although simple, this landscape structure provides a strong sense of place. Conservation interests include SINC's and part of the Upper Colne Marshes SSSI which supports an outstanding assemblage of nationally rare plants and an unusual diversity of brackish ditch-types.

D4 Pyefleet Drained Estuarine Marsh

3.5.5 The character area coincides with landscape of **high value**. A sense of remoteness and tranquillity and lack of tree cover, combined with dramatic views along the Colne and across adjacent saltmarshes and mudflats, contribute to a strong sense of place. An intricate network of meandering drainage ditches on Langenhoe and Wick marshes provide interesting landscape features. Designation of the whole area as a SSSI further contributes to its high value. There is an absence of settlement and other significant structures within the area, however, noise disruption from the firing ranges within the area, reduces the sense of tranquillity experienced at times.

3.6 Coastal Farmland Landscape Type

E1 Mersea Island Coastal Farmland

- 3.6.1 The entire character area coincides with landscapes evaluated as being of **moderate value**. Mersea Island is an elliptical low lying island with a convex slope profile, rising to a height of 21m AOD. After crossing the causeway and gaining the higher ground the sensation of being on an island is lost as the coastline of the island itself is obscured by intervening topography. Variations in topography tend to be localised and coincide with the courses of a few streams present on the island. Intensive agricultural practises have created very large prairie fields with very gappy unmanaged hedges. Features designated for their nature conservation interest are generally absent within this character area, although the area does coincide with the Essex Coast Environmentally Sensitive Area under which there are management options available to farmers to improve grassland habitats. Settlement pattern is scattered and dispersed and there are some intrusive tourist developments in the west and south of the character area. The area is also criss-crossed by many roads and lanes that leave few parts of it inaccessible by motor vehicle. Therefore, a sense of wildness is absent. Whilst infrastructure is of a relatively small scale within the character area there is nevertheless a reduced sense of tranquillity. This is due in part to the absence of positive features that contribute to tranquillity and to moderate levels of disturbance concentrated within a relatively small area.

E2 Great and Little Wigborough Coastal Farmland

- 3.6.2 Within the character area landscapes have been evaluated as **moderate, high and highest value**. Those parts of the area evaluated as **highest value** coincide with a small-scale intimate wooded landscape with vernacular buildings and associated ponds and ditches. There is a strong landscape structure and sense of place which combined with the high aesthetic qualities of the area and the sense of tranquillity give highest value landscape.
- 3.6.3 Most of the character area coincides with **high value** landscapes. These consist of level to undulating grazing marsh which is broken up by hedgerows in good condition and by small patches of scrub and woodland. The grazing marsh landscape is striking in its simplicity yet shows a strong landscape structure that is well preserved and scenically attractive. Detracting features are largely absent from the area from which there are uninterrupted long distance views out of the character area to prominent hill top landmark features such as

Peldon church and Great Wigborough Church. Whilst features and elements designated as being of nature conservation importance are absent from the area, it does coincide with the Essex Coast ESA under which there are management options available to farmers to improve grassland habitats. A sense of wildness is largely absent due to human influence of agriculture on the landscape. However, a sense of tranquillity is preserved by the absence of disturbance from noise and movement and the absence of detracting features present within the landscape.

- 3.6.4 The areas evaluated as **moderate value** coincide with intensively farmed landscapes where landscape structure has deteriorated and field boundaries are delineated by gappy hedges in poor condition. The landscape has a fragmented structure consisting of large prairie fields and small enclosed fields. This pattern contrasts with the regular size and shape of the level pasture in the south of the character area. There are no nature conservation designations within the landscapes evaluated as moderate. A sense of wildness is largely absent due to the presence of settlement and a network of roads and lanes. However, there is a level of tranquillity due to the relative remoteness of the area.

E3 Langenhoe Coastal Farmland

- 3.6.5 Langenhoe coastal farmland character area is an extensive area of rolling coastal slopes with hilltop settlements of Abberton and Peldon. The majority of the area coincides with landscapes evaluated as being of **high value**. There is a distinctive and coherent structure to the landscape consisting of a mosaic of large prairie fields and medium sized rectilinear fields separated linear shelter belts and thick hedges. Linear clumps of woodland are concentrated in the east of the area near the firing ranges. Despite the large size of the character area there is an absence of detracting features within it. Topography varies throughout with the unifying features being the two low hills or knolls on which the villages of Peldon and Langenhoe are situated. Peldon church is a prominent landmark visible from many parts of the character area providing orientation within it and a sense of place. Outside the two main villages, settlement pattern is sparse and dispersed consisting of isolated farmsteads connected by tracks and minor lanes. Firing practice at Fingringhoe firing ranges in the east of the area introduces noise and disturbance into eastern parts of the character area. However, generally a sense of tranquillity is afforded within the character area at locations away from the main roads.

- 3.6.6 The area of **moderate value** is typical of many landscapes throughout the Borough consisting of very large and large prairie fields with low clipped hedges. Landscape structure is also fragmented within this area due to the presence of gravel pits.

3.7 **Wooded Farmland Landscapes**

F1 Messing Wooded Farmland

- 3.7.1 Within this character area landscape structure is strong with features and elements within the landscape largely intact. The majority of the area is considered to be of **high value**. Woodland is the unifying feature within the landscape with single mature trees located in field boundaries or standing within fields. Field boundaries are in good condition. Hedges are continuous with very few gaps. Adjacent to the lanes lush grassy verges support flowering plants and provide habitat for small mammals. Topography is complex consisting of a low plateau dissected by numerous streams and pitted with ponds and small lakes. The abundance of woodland and the irregularly shaped fields between creates an intimate and scenic landscape. Conservation interest includes several SINC's consisting mainly of ancient woodland. Sense of place is strong within the character area but this does not contribute to a sense of wildness. However, the sparse settlement pattern combined with the few roads crossing the area contributes to a sense of tranquillity that is accentuated by the number of positive features and elements within the landscape.

- 3.7.2 **Moderate value** landscapes are present in the north of the character area and adjacent to the north western edge of Tiptree. Topography is less varied and the landscape of prairie fields and clipped hedges is common to the Borough. Nature conservation designations are also absent.

F2 Tiptree Wooded Farmland

- 3.7.3 The character area coincides with landscapes of **moderate and high value**. Areas of **high value** are located at Tiptree Heath in the south west of the character area and to the east of Tiptree itself. The high quality landscape within the Messing Wooded Farmland landscape character area continues to the east of Tiptree. However, there is less woodland immediately to the east of Tiptree but a small scale field pattern combined with intact field boundaries gives strong landscape structure. The sparse settlement pattern combined with the few roads crossing the area contributes to a sense of tranquillity that is accentuated by the number of positive features and elements within the landscape.

3.7.4 Areas of **moderate value** coincide with fragmented landscapes to the west and south of Tiptree. These landscapes are characterised by mineral extraction, reservoirs, industrial and agricultural land uses. There is an urban fringe character to the landscape and hence a reduction in the visual appeal of the landscape. Conservation interests include several SINC's that consist of ancient woodland and gravel pits. Due to the human influence on the landscape a sense of wildness is largely absent and tranquillity is also compromised by the high levels of activity within these parts of the character area.

4.0 SUMMARY OF LANDSCAPE EVALUATION

4.1 General

4.1.1 This section provides a summary of the landscape evaluation process.

4.2 Summary

4.2.1 The evaluation of landscapes outside the AONB shows a strong correlation between areas of low and moderate value and the Farmland Plateau landscape type and to a lesser extent the Coastal Farmland landscape type. The Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats and Drained Estuarine Marsh landscape types are considered to be of the highest value within the context of the Borough as a whole. These landscapes, in addition to being internationally important for nature conservation, are very distinctive with a strong sense of place and tranquillity and are amongst the few landscapes within the Borough where a sense of wildness can be experienced due to minimal human influence. These landscapes should continue to be conserved as they contribute immeasurably to the biodiversity of the Borough and are sanctuaries of tranquillity within close proximity to densely populated areas.

4.2.2 The River Valley landscape type is also evaluated as high and considered to be worthy of conservation. These landscapes show strong surviving time depth and a richness in both natural and man made landscape features that contribute to the diverse landscape character and enhance scenic condition. The diversity of these landscapes should be celebrated as, not only are they important in their own right, they have the potential to function as building blocks for improving the landscape structure of the less highly valued plateau landscapes beyond. Three of the river valleys link with open spaces within the fringes of Colchester and are thus important recreational corridors via which the wider countryside can be accessed. The river valley landscape framework should continue to be conserved and enhanced to maintain a diversity of landscapes within the Borough and to accommodate the recreational needs of adjacent populations.

4.2.3 Wooded Farmland landscapes are present across a small proportion of the Borough in the south west. There is also an important area of heathland within this area. The relative rarity of this landscape type combined with the prevalence of ancient woodland merits the high value attached to these landscapes. The richness and robust structure of these landscapes should be conserved and enhanced as they contribute to the diversity of the Borough's landscapes and continue into the neighbouring District.

4.2.4 The Coastal Farmland landscape type, with the exception of an area on Mersea Island, coincides with landscapes evaluated as high. The coastal farmland landscape is distinctive and localised to southern parts of the Borough. The landscapes coincide with important nature conservation sites and with extensive areas of the Essex Coast ESA. The landscape value of the Mersea Island character area is considered to be of **moderate value**. However, with the application of appropriate landscape planning and management guidelines a stronger landscape structure could be achieved thus improving the value of this area.

5.0 PROPOSED AREAS OF LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE

5.1 General

5.1.1 Based on the findings of the evaluation process set out in Sections 3.0 and 4.0, this section sets out the study's recommendation.

5.2 Recommendation

5.2.1 Those areas outside of the AONB evaluated as being of 'highest' or 'high' value are considered to represent the most important parts of the Borough in landscape terms. In general, they reflect:

- landscapes with the strongest visual and scenic qualities;
- rare landscape features and elements that are exceptional within the Borough context;
- areas with extensive and/or numerous sites of conservation interest;
- landscapes with a strong sense of wildness, remoteness and tranquillity;
- places with strong cultural associations with important events in local history.

5.2.2 These areas are shown on Figure 2 as proposed 'Areas of Landscape Conservation Importance' (ALCIs). It is recommended that this designation is adopted for use in the new LDF as a replacement for the existing Countryside Conservation Areas. The ALCIs are based on an independent assessment of landscape value undertaken in line with the Countryside Agency's guidelines, and this report provides the detailed justification of the particular qualities of these landscapes through the Council's LDF policies, in accordance with Government policy set out in PPS7.