

GREEN NETWORK & WATERWAYS GUIDING PRINCIPLES

May 2024



Colchester
Local Plan Review



Colchester City Council's Green Network and Waterways Guiding Principles

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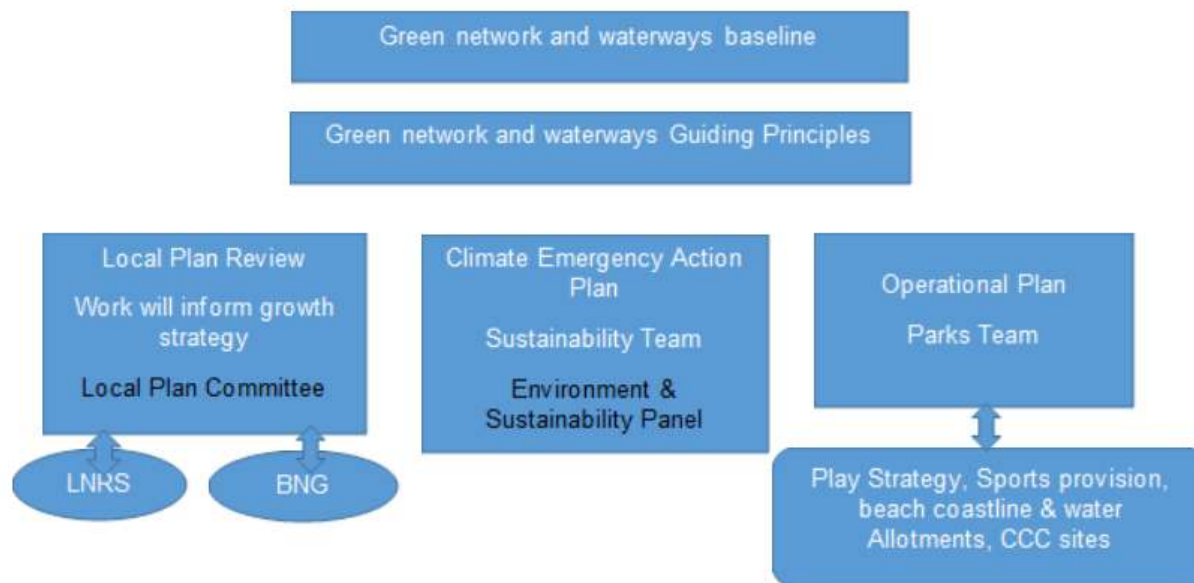
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Introduction

The Planning Policy Team, Sustainability Team and Parks and Open Spaces Team (all part of Place and Prosperity) have worked together to create Guiding Principles for Colchester City's green network and waterways. These guiding principles will be taken forward by all teams as part of their work on the Local Plan Review, addressing the climate emergency and managing the city's open spaces. This document sets out the Guiding Principles for the city's green network and waterways.

The Guiding Principles were developed through an audit of the city's green network and waterways baseline; public engagement on the condition of the green network and waterways and opportunities to improve the network; and a review of Natural England's Green Infrastructure Principles, Essex County Council's Green Infrastructure Standards, the objectives of the Colchester Woodland and Biodiversity Project and open space and playing pitch strategies.

The diagram, below, sets out the outputs of the overall project and explains the various steps and how the outputs relate to one another. The Guiding Principles will be used by the Planning Policy, Sustainability, and Parks and Open Spaces teams for different work projects. There is potential for interest from other Council teams and for further work not outlined in this document using these Guiding Principles.



Green and blue infrastructure is the term frequently used in planning to describe the green network and waterways. However, green and blue infrastructure is not always understood by the public and so we will be using the term green network and waterways. To be clear, this encompasses the definition of green infrastructure in the

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which is: *“A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity.”*

The definition of open space is wide ranging. The national planning practice guidance for open space, sports and recreation facilities states that open space includes all open space of public value and can take many forms, from formal sports pitches to open areas within a development, linear corridors and country parks. Open space can have an ecological value as well as being an important part of the landscape and setting of built development.

The diagram above, indicates that work on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and biodiversity net gain (BNG) will inform the Local Plan Review and visa versa. Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are spatial strategies that will establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature’s recovery and provide wider environmental benefits. LNRS aim to actively restore the natural world and halt the decline in species abundance by 2030. LNRS will apply at county level. Colchester City Council is a Supporting Authority and will continue to work with Essex County Council (the Responsible Authority) to ensure that we influence the LNRS and that relevant Council work is taken into account as part of the LNRS.

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is an approach to development, and/or land management, that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. BNG requires developers to deliver for nature, setting a minimum requirement to increase biodiversity by 10% compared to the baseline (net gain). The idea behind BNG is that the environment does not suffer as a result of development, and that there will be more higher-quality places for wildlife to thrive and for people to enjoy. There is a policy requirement in the adopted Local Plan for 10% BNG and on 12 February 2024, it become mandatory for major development¹ to deliver a minimum of 10% BNG. This mandatory requirement will extend to minor development in April 2024.

¹ “major development” means development involving the provision of dwellinghouses where the number of dwellinghouses to be provided is 10 or more; or the provision of a building or buildings where the floor space to be created by the development is 1,000 square metres or more; or development carried out on a site having an area of 1 hectare or more. “minor development” means development under the above thresholds.

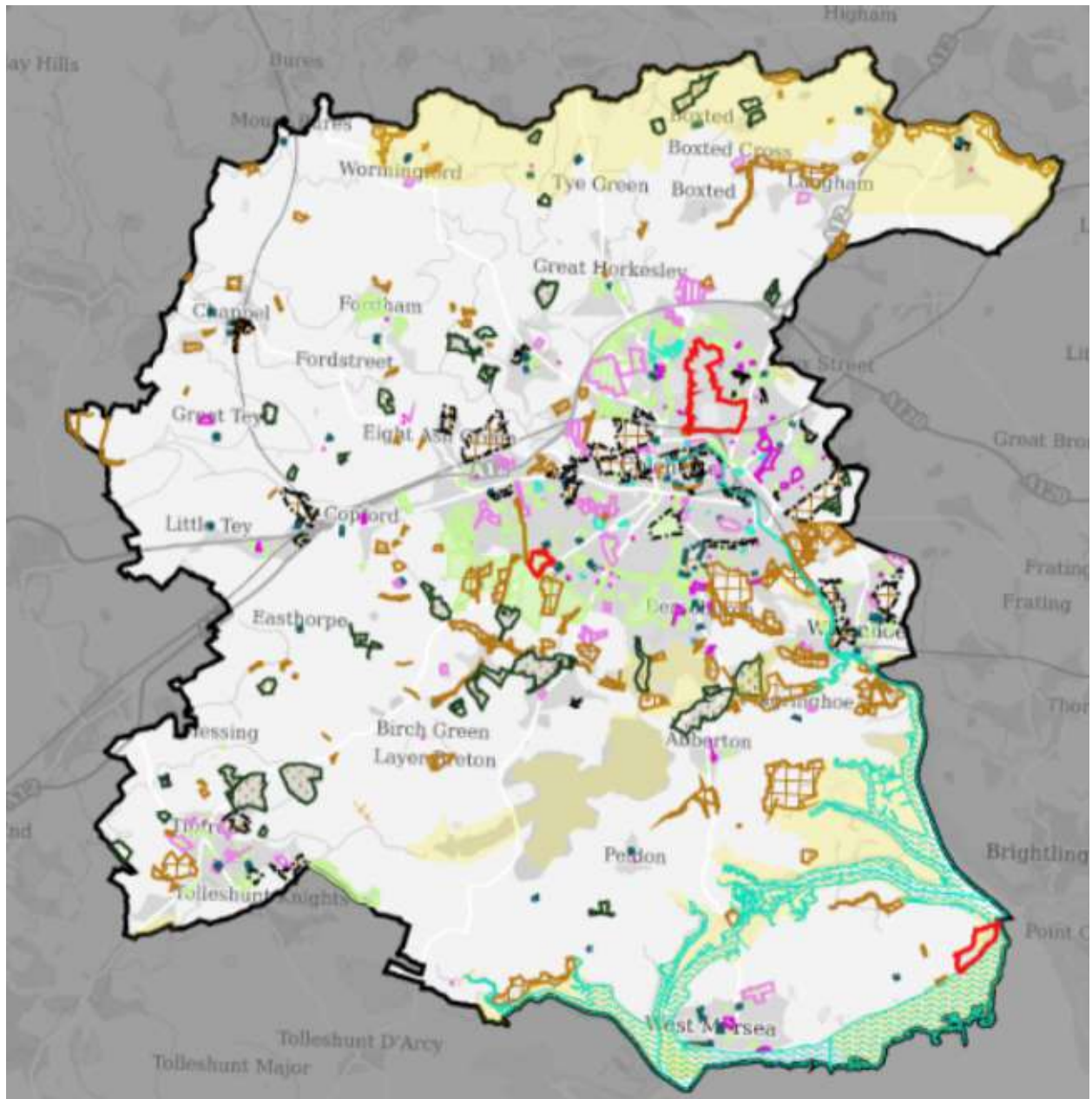
Green Network and Waterways Baseline

As a starting point, an accurate spatial understanding of Colchester's existing green network and waterways was developed. The following typologies are included, which reflect the typologies included in the [Natural England GI Map](#):

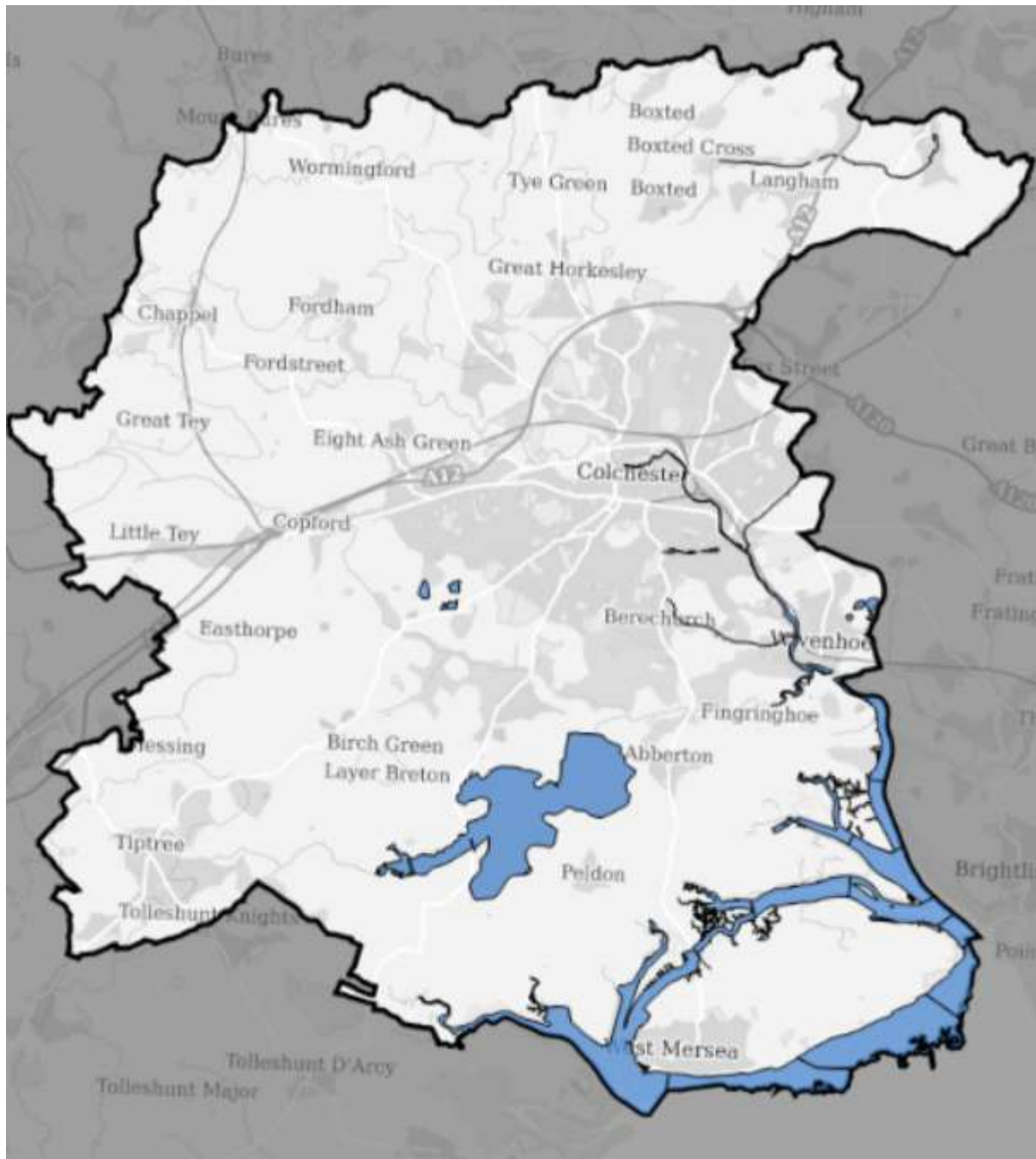
- Public park - general
- Public park - country park
- Local nature reserve
- National nature reserve
- Playing fields
- Other sports facilities
- Woodland
- Water courses and surface water features
- Allotments and community growing spaces
- Cemeteries and religious grounds
- Golf courses
- Play space provision.

Local green spaces (designated in neighbourhood plans); nature conservation designations (SPA, SAC, Ramsar, SSSI, local wildlife sites); and the Dedham Vale National Landscape were also mapped.

Officers prepared a [map of the green network and waterways](#) and published this on the Council's website for public engagement from 9 November 2023 – 5 January 2024. We asked the public and stakeholders for their comments on the condition of the existing green network and waterways and opportunities for new open spaces. The purpose of the engagement was to understand, map and know what matters most to our residents. The Council wants to work collaboratively, towards a greener, more vibrant, and environmentally conscious future for Colchester, despite the pressures of a growing population, to keep the best we have and improve what we have where we can, to ensure that Colchester remains a sustainable and thriving city for generations to come. The maps below highlight the green network and waterways, but due to the size of the Colchester district and extent of the network, are best viewed online.



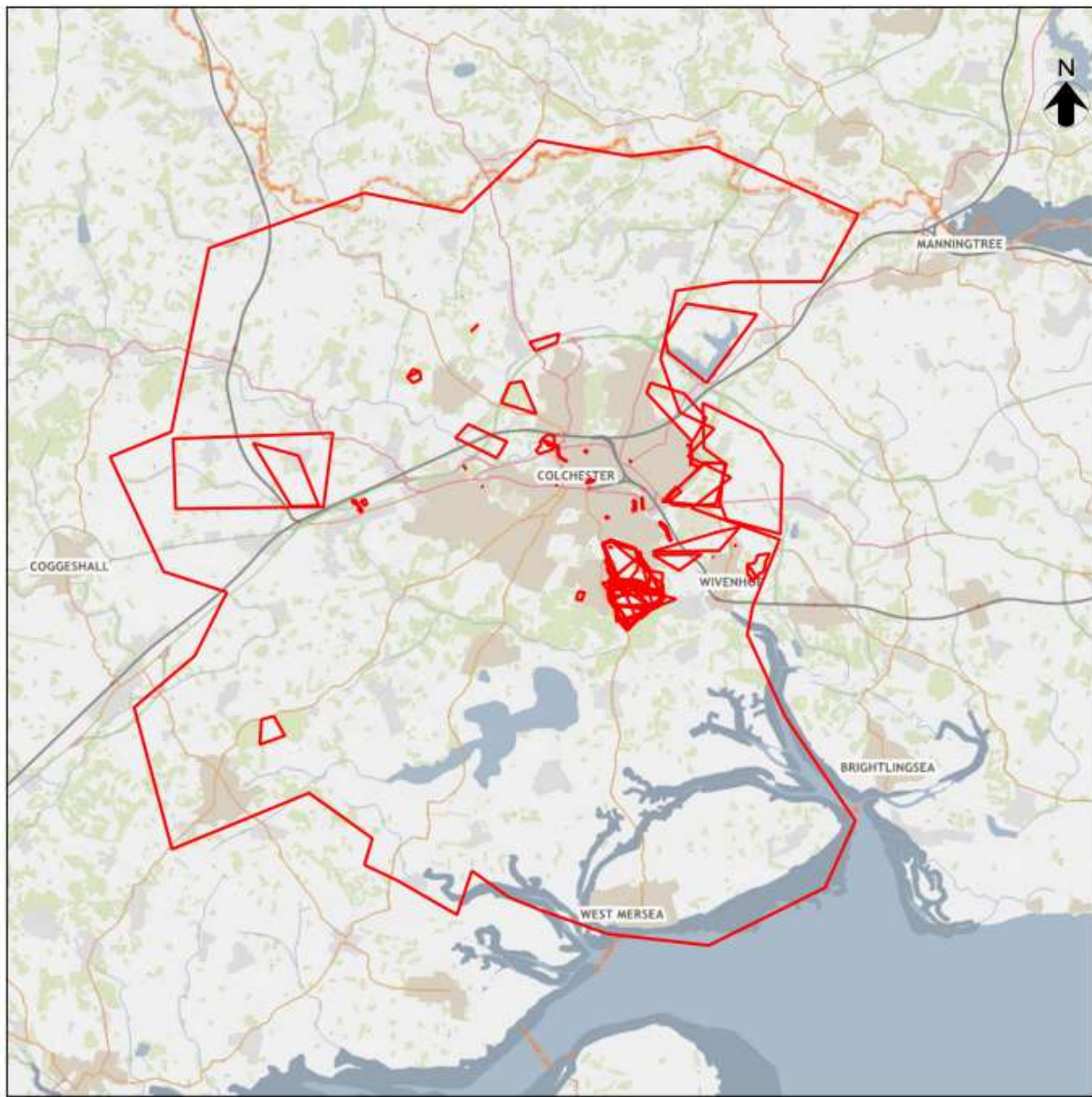
Map of Colchester's green spaces



Map of Colchester's waterways

In accordance with recommendations from the Companion Guidance to PPG17, a size threshold of 0.2 hectares was applied. It would be impractical to capture every piece of land that could be classed as open space. They are often too small to provide any meaningful leisure and recreational opportunities to warrant a full site assessment. However, the Council recognises that spaces smaller than 0.2 hectares can provide amenity to local neighbourhoods and stepping-stones for wildlife and all spaces are important.

The majority of comments (373 comments) received were about the existing green network. 13 comments were made about waterways. 82 comments were made suggesting ideas for new green spaces. Many of the comments received, both about existing spaces and suggesting new spaces, related to Middlewick Ranges and the adjacent Birch Brook Wood and Weir Lane grasslands. Middlewick Ranges is a local wildlife site and is a residential allocation in the adopted Local Plan. A report has been drafted as part of the Local Plan Review Issues and Options which summarises this engagement. The report will be available to view on the Council's website once finalised. A map of each idea and why it should become part of Colchester's green network can be viewed [online](#) and a map showing all ideas is set out below.



Map of ideas for new green spaces

The green network and waterways engagement highlighted how important the green network is. Many positive comments were received and the comments about existing open spaces the Council own are being considered by the Parks and Open Spaces team and will be looked at when management plans for sites are reviewed. There were many comments about how sites could be improved, for example, more signage (both to inform users of the features and ecology of the site and locational signage), enforcement of dogs on leads, more seating and suggestions for new play and sports equipment. All additions such as these would be subject to funding and maintenance costs.

It is clear that our residents really value the green network and that connections are important, both for people in terms of having a safe active travel route and also for wildlife. Many comments raised the importance of the green network for biodiversity. Numerous comments were received detailing the wildlife people had observed on sites, details of how sites should be managed to enhance biodiversity and comments about how important nature is for health and wellbeing.

There was confusion from some about why private open spaces are shown on the map. The National planning practice guidance for open space, sports and recreation facilities states that open space includes all open space of public value and can take many forms, from formal sports pitches to open areas within a development, linear corridors and country parks. Open space can have an ecological value as well as being an important part of the landscape and setting of built development. The definition of open space is wide ranging, and benefits are not limited to whether the space is in public or private ownership. To avoid confusion, the Local Plan Review policies maps will show all open space as 'open space' rather than distinguish between what is privately and publicly owned.

Access to Natural Greenspace Standards

Natural England's [Green Infrastructure Map](#) includes the layer: Access to Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt).

These standards are as follows:

- The Doorstep ANGSt is a greenspace of at least 0.5 ha within 200m.
- The Local ANGSt is a natural greenspace of at least 2 ha within 300m.
- The Neighbourhood ANGSt is a natural greenspace of at least 10 ha within 1km.
- The Wider Neighbourhood ANGSt is a natural greenspace of at least 20km within 2km.
- The District ANGSt is a natural greenspace of at least 100 ha within 5km.
- The Sub-Regional ANGSt is a natural greenspace of at least 500 ha within 10km.

This layer is useful to gain an understanding of access to different scales of open space across the city. Provision of the doorstep standard (greenspace of at least 0.5 ha within 200m) is mixed, with gaps in doorstep provision across the city. The local standard (natural greenspace of at least 2 ha within 300m) is met within central Colchester and in

the west. It is met, in part, in some of Colchester's towns and villages. There is a gap in the local standard in the south of Colchester. The neighbourhood standard (natural greenspace of at least 10 ha within 1km) is met within central Colchester, east and west. Like the local standard, there is a gap in provision in south Colchester. The neighbourhood standard is met, in part, in some of Colchester's towns and villages. The wider neighbourhood standard (natural greenspace of at least 20km within 2km) is well met within the Colchester built up area, and within the larger settlements of Wivenhoe and Tiptree, although with gaps to the south and west of Colchester. The district standard (natural greenspace of at least 100 ha within 5km) is met within most of the Colchester built up area. Nowhere in Colchester, or indeed the whole of Essex, meets the sub-regional standard (greenspace of at least 500 ha within 10km).

Existing Green Infrastructure Frameworks and Standards and related projects

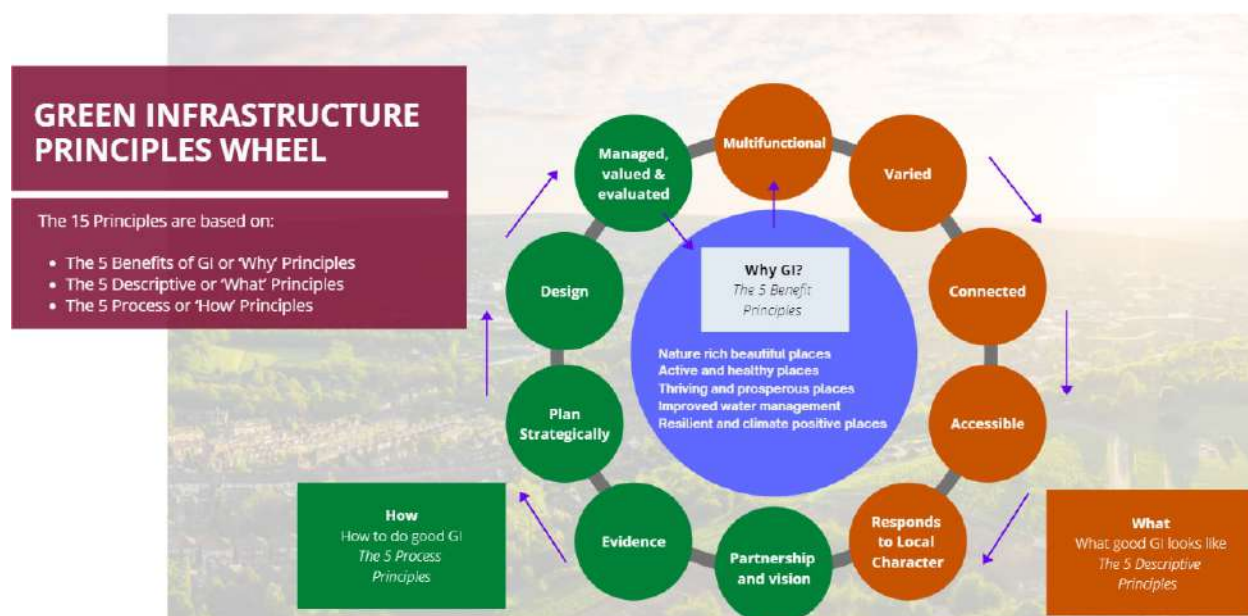
In addition to an audit of the city's green network and waterways baseline, the Guiding Principles have been developed through a review of Natural England's Green Infrastructure Principles, Essex County Council's Green Infrastructure Standards, and relevant projects and studies as summarised in this section.

Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework

In January 2023, Natural England launched the new Green Infrastructure Framework. This includes principles, standards, maps, a planning and design guide and process journeys.

Natural England's Green Infrastructure Principles

Natural England's [Green Infrastructure Principles](#) underpin their Green Infrastructure Framework. The principles were developed by studying other Green Infrastructure Principles, analysing feedback from trials and discussions and consultation. There are 15 Principles, which each include a one-sentence summary, detailed description, and more information about what it's seeking to achieve at a strategic and local level. The Principles are categorised as why, what and how. They are shown in the Green Infrastructure Principles Wheel and summarised below.



Natural England's Green Infrastructure Principles Wheel [Green Infrastructure Principles](#) (naturalengland.org.uk)

1. Nature rich beautiful places - GI supports nature to recover and thrive everywhere, in towns, cities and countryside, conserving and enhancing natural beauty, wildlife and habitats, geology and soils, and our cultural and personal connections with nature.

2. Active and healthy places - Green neighbourhoods, green / blue spaces and green routes support active lifestyles, community cohesion and nature connections that benefit physical and mental health, wellbeing, and quality of life. GI also helps to mitigate health risks such as urban heat stress, noise pollution, flooding, and poor air quality.
3. Thriving and prospering places - GI helps to create and support prospering communities that benefit everyone and adds value by creating high quality environments which are attractive to businesses and investors, create green jobs, support retail and high streets, and to help support the local economy and regeneration.
4. Improved water management - GI reduces flood risk, improves water quality and natural filtration, helps maintain the natural water cycle and sustainable drainage at local and catchment scales, reducing pressures on the water environment and infrastructure, bringing amenity, biodiversity, economic and other benefits.
5. Resilient and climate positive places - GI makes places more resilient and adaptive to climate change and helps to meet zero carbon and air quality targets. GI itself should be designed to adapt to climate change to ensure long term resilience.
6. GI delivers multiple functions and benefits - GI should deliver a range of functions and benefits for people, nature and places, address specific issues and to meet their needs. Multifunctionality (delivering multiple functions from the same area of GI) is especially important in areas where provision is poor quality or scarce.
7. GI includes a mix of types and sizes that can provide a range of functions and benefits to address specific issues and needs - Varied: GI should comprise a variety of types and sizes of green and blue spaces, green routes, and environmental features (as part of a network) that can provide a range of different functions, benefits and solutions to address specific issues and needs.
8. GI connects as a living network for people and nature at all scales, connecting provision of GI with those who need its benefits - Connected: GI should function and connect as a living network for people and nature at all scales (e.g., within sites; and across regions/ at national scale). It should enhance ecological networks and support ecosystems services, connecting provision of GI with those who need its benefits.
9. GI creates green, liveable places where everyone has access to good quality green and blue spaces, routes and features - GI should create and maintain green liveable places that enable people to experience and connect with nature, and that offer everyone, wherever they live, access to good quality parks, green spaces, recreational, walking and cycling routes that are inclusive, safe, welcoming, well-managed and accessible for all.
10. GI should respond to an area's character - GI should respond to an area's character so that it contributes to the conservation, enhancement and/or restoration of

landscapes; or, in degraded areas, creates new high-quality landscapes to which local people feel connected.

11. Partnership working, collaboration and stakeholder engagement; create a vision for GI - Work in partnership, and collaborate with stakeholders from the outset to co-plan, develop and deliver a vision for GI in the area. Engage a diverse and inclusive range of people and organisations including citizens, local authorities, developers, landowners, communities, green space managers, environmental, health, climate, transport, and business representatives.

12. Use evidence, sound science and good land use practices to underpin plans, projects, programmes and policies - Use scientific evidence, and good land use practices when planning and enhancing green and blue infrastructure. Understand the evidence for the benefits of current GI assets; and data on environmental, social, and economic challenges and needs in the area.

13. Plan GI strategically to secure GI as a key asset in policies to create and maintain sustainable places - Plan strategically and secure GI as a key asset in local strategy and policy, at all scales. Fully integrate and mainstream GI into environmental, social, health and economic policy. Create and maintain sustainable places for current and future populations and address inequalities in GI provision.

14. Design GI to create beautiful, well-designed places - Understand an area's landscape/townscape, natural, historic, and cultural character, to create well-designed, beautiful, and distinctive places.

15. Managed, valued, monitored and evaluated. Establish good governance, funding, management, monitoring and evaluation of GI - Plan good governance, funding, management, monitoring, and evaluation of green infrastructure as a key asset from the outset and secure it for the long-term. Make the business case for GI. Engage communities in stewardship where appropriate. Celebrate success and raise awareness of GI benefits.

Natural England's Green Infrastructure Standards

Natural England's [Green Infrastructure Standards](#) define what good green infrastructure looks like and how to plan it strategically to deliver multiple benefits. The Standards combined will help to deliver the 15 Green Infrastructure Principles. There are five Standards, which include recommendations for major development and area wide applications. The Standards are:

- S1: Green Infrastructure Strategy Standard
- S2: Accessible Greenspace Standard
- S3: Urban Nature Recovery Standard
- S4: Urban Greening Factor Standard
- S5: Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard

The first standard is local authorities, working in partnership with stakeholders including local communities, assessing and strategically planning their green infrastructure provision, for example as part of a Green Infrastructure Strategy. In preparing a Green Infrastructure Strategy, the 15 Principles should be applied and local authorities should set green infrastructure policies, proposals and development requirements in development plans and local design codes.

Natural England have set Accessible Greenspace Standards (AGS), which the second Standard relates to. This Standard is about everyone having access to good quality green and blue spaces close to home for health and wellbeing and contact with nature, to meet the AGS size and proximity criteria, with an initial focus on access to green and blue spaces within 15 minutes' walk from home. Local authorities should have at least 3 hectares of publicly accessible greenspace per 1,000 population.

The third Standard is about nature recovery. The proportion of green infrastructure that is designed and managed for nature recovery should be increased by an agreed percentage based on a locally defined baseline and taking into account local needs, opportunities and constraints. This includes the creation and restoration of wildlife rich habitats, which can contribute to the delivery of local nature recovery objectives.

Urban greening is a way of increasing green spaces in urban areas. Targets for increasing tree canopy cover and BNG can lead to a small increase in urban areas where the baseline is low. Natural England's Standard is at least 40% average green cover in urban residential neighbourhoods where they do not already meet that standard and no net loss of green cover in urban neighbourhoods. For individual sites, Natural England recommend a National Urban Greening Factor of at least 0.3 for commercial development, 0.4 for residential development, (and, where appropriate, 0.5 for residential greenfield development).

The fifth Standard is to increase Urban Tree Canopy Cover by an agreed percentage based on a locally defined baseline and taking into account local needs, opportunities and constraints. New and existing trees should be incorporated into new developments and new streets should be tree lined.

Natural England's Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide

The purpose of the [Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide](#) is to provide evidence based practical guidance on how to plan and design good green infrastructure. It complements the National Model Design Code and National Design Guide and can be used to help planners and designers develop local design guides and codes with multifunctional green infrastructure at the heart. This will help to inspire the creation of healthier, nature-rich, climate resilient and thriving places to live, learn, work and play.

Natural England's Green Infrastructure Process Journeys

Natural England has created Process Journeys to help embed Green Infrastructure informed decision making across and between organisations. The [Process Journey for Local Authorities](#) has been designed for local authority planners to use the Green Infrastructure Framework to develop green and blue infrastructure strategy and policy.

There are 6 steps to preparing Green Infrastructure strategies:

1. Partnerships – build strong partnerships at the outset and work in partnership at all stages
2. Vision – create a high level vision informed by the strategic context
3. Evidence – gather evidence on local green infrastructure delivery, needs and priorities
4. Plan strategically and develop green infrastructure policy – set standards and targets
5. Integrating the green infrastructure strategy – ensure green infrastructure is included in plans and policies
6. Managed and valued monitored evaluated – ensure long term funding, monitor and evaluate progress

The approach taken by the Council is consistent with Natural England's process journey.

Essex Green Infrastructure Standards

The [Essex Green Infrastructure Strategy](#), steered by the Essex Green Infrastructure Partnership, describes the need for green infrastructure in the county and sets a vision and objectives for the delivery of green infrastructure. This strategy provides a clear plan to guide the future planning and delivery of green infrastructure in Essex in light of increased development and population growth.

The Essex Green Infrastructure Strategy defines green infrastructure as a carefully planned network of high quality natural and semi-natural assets and habitat types, of green and blue spaces, and other strategic planned environmental features that maintain and delivers our ecosystem services. It provides multi-functional benefits integral to the health and wellbeing of our communities and to the ecology and economy of the county. Green infrastructure is often referred to as a network of these natural and semi-natural assets and spaces, which are joined together connecting urban and rural areas and are habitually strategically planned.

Key elements of the Strategy are a vision, objectives, evidence, delivery, and implementation, action plan and monitoring.

The vision is: 'we will protect, develop and enhance a high quality connected green infrastructure network that extends from our city and town centres, and urban areas to

the countryside and coast and which is self-sustaining and is designed for people and wildlife’.

The objectives are:

- Protect existing green infrastructure, especially designated sites.
- Improve existing green infrastructure so it is better functioning for people and wildlife.
- Create more high-quality multi-functional green infrastructure, especially in areas of deficiency.
- Improve the connectivity of green infrastructure for people and wildlife.
- Increase use and inclusivity of green infrastructure across all user groups, social groups and abilities.
- Provide green infrastructure facilities to promote health and wellbeing.
- Working with partners to build and secure funding, effective governance and stewardship for new and existing green infrastructure to ensure their long-term sustainability.

In 2022, [Green Infrastructure Standards](#) were published. There are nine standards, and these have been developed to support policy and development management in the planning and delivery of multifunctional green infrastructure for placemaking and placekeeping. These standards are written as a form of assessment criteria to enable policy and development management to go beyond the statutory requirements, to create great places for people and wildlife to thrive. As part of work on the Local Plan Review, planners will review the specific guidance for Policy.

The Essex principles and standards have built upon and adapted the Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework to ensure the principles and standards for Essex are suitable and locally oriented to meet the needs of our county. It follows that the principles for Colchester will build upon and adapt the Natural England and Essex County Council principles to ensure that our principles are suitable for Colchester. Some of the Essex principles are met through the Council’s work on mapping the baseline, developing guiding principles and embedding these principles into various Council plans.

The Essex principles and standards are as follows:

Green infrastructure principle	Green infrastructure standard
Mainstreaming and Integration	The Placemaking and Place-keeping policies in Local Plans recognise GI as a key delivery mechanism. GI functions and associated benefits are recognised and valued in key strategic documents and policies, beyond those with an environmental scope.
Evidence led	The planning, design and delivery of GI is evidence-led using natural capital and ecosystem service assessments,

	and GI GIS mapping to ensure appropriate place-based GI interventions are being implemented and enhanced.
Multifunctionality	GI interventions are designed, planned and delivered to enhance multifunctionality and deliver multiple benefits to people and biodiversity in both rural and urban areas.
Early engagement	There is early collaboration and engagement with all relevant stakeholders, partners and communities to support the delivery of effective and connected GI.
Managing different expectations	Differing views need to be identified early and managed effectively and in a transparent manner to secure both short and long-term outcomes.
Health, Wellbeing and Social Equity	GI is designed to meet different people's needs (including physical and mental health), providing accessibility to GI, green spaces and local amenities, while ensuring GI is inclusive to all. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeting GI interventions to those groups and areas most in need as part of a place-keeping agenda. • Reducing health and wellbeing inequalities between different populations e.g. access to green space and ecosystem service benefits.
Connectivity	GI interventions are designed, planned and delivered and connected across multiple scales; from the wider landscape scale network to more local and neighbourhood scales including green corridors habitat and nature recovery networks to enhance connectivity for people, wildlife and habitats.
Strong Policy Wording and Commitment	Policy for GI is strongly worded with a commitment to positive action(s) as reflected in statutory plans and industry/local guidance and supported by incentives and clear guidance about what success looks like.
Stewardship	The long-term management and stewardship plans are identified at the early stage with the necessary funding and monitoring components in place.

Colchester Borough Council Open Space Report

The Council commissioned Knight, Kavanagh & Page Ltd (KKP) to prepare an [Open Space Report](#), the report is dated April 2023. The purpose of an Open Space Study is to recognise the role of open space provision as a resource across Colchester. It is vital for local authorities to know what provision currently exists and what the priorities and requirements are for the future.

The following typologies are included in the study:

- Parks and gardens
- Natural and semi natural greenspaces
- Amenity greenspace

- Provision for children and young people
- Allotments

The study looked at the quality, quantity and accessibility of open space and the study report lists the criteria used for each. The city was split into different areas to assess the quality, quantity, and accessibility of open space by typology. An online community survey was hosted on the Council website and promoted via social media and the Council's communication team. Popular forms of open space provision to visit most often are nature and semi-natural greenspace (77%), coasts and riversides (71%), country parks (71%) and parks and gardens (70%). The main reasons for visiting open space are to go for a walk or stroll (95%) for fresh air (95%), and for peace and quiet/to relax (85%). Individuals generally walk to access provision of play areas for young children (84%), parks (82%), amenity greenspace (82%), natural and semi-natural greenspace (76%), allotments (72%), cemeteries (71%), outdoor networks (55%) and civic space (46%). The exception to this is for coasts and riversides (78%), country parks (55%) and teenage provision (55%) which individuals are more willing to travel by car to access. In general, respondents consider the amount of open space provision where they live to be quite satisfactory with nearly half (45%) stating they are quite satisfactory. Less than a quarter of respondents (23%) rate availability of open space provision as very satisfactory. Only small proportions of respondents view quality as quite unsatisfactory (7%) or very unsatisfactory (2%). Respondents to the survey were asked what they thought would improve open space provision. The most common answers include more wildlife/habitat promotion (76%), better maintenance and care of features (39%) and greater attractiveness (36%). Overwhelmingly, more wildlife/habitat promotion gained the majority of votes.

The audit captured a total of 440 sites equating to approximately 954 hectares of open space. The largest contributor to provision is natural/semi-natural greenspace (604 hectares) accounting for 63%.

Several quantity shortfalls in the open space typologies are highlighted. However, the report states that creating new provision to address these shortfalls (particularly any quantity shortfalls) is often challenging (as significant amounts of new forms of provision would need to be created). A more realistic approach is to ensure sufficient accessibility and quality of existing provision. The current provision levels could also be used to determine the open space requirements as part of new housing developments. In the first instance, all types of provision should look to be provided as part of new housing developments.

One of the recommendations in the study is to prioritise opportunities for enhancement at the sites listed in the table, below. These sites help or have the potential to help serve areas identified as having gaps in catchment mapping.

Site ID	Site name	Typology	Helps to serve provision gap in:
1	Abbey Field	Amenity	Parks
15	Berechurch Road (a)	Amenity	Parks
36	Camulodunum Way	Amenity	Natural
39	Cassino Road	Amenity	Natural
42	Catherine Hunt Way	Amenity	Natural
55	Chesthunt Field	Natural	Parks
78	Cymbeline Meadows	Natural	Amenity
93	Elmwood Avenue	Amenity	Natural
106.2	Glebe View Sports Ground AGS	Amenity	Parks
129	High Woods Country Park	Natural	Parks
133	Hilly Fields Nature Reserve	Natural	Amenity
147	King George V Playing Fields	Amenity	Parks
157	Layer Road	Amenity	Natural
161	Lexden King George Field	Amenity	Parks
167	Lilianna Road	Amenity	Parks
189	Mile End Recreation Ground	Amenity	Parks
207	Old Heath Recreation Ground	Amenity	Parks
232	Reed Hall Avenue	Amenity	Natural
241	Saint John's Playing Field	Amenity	Parks
246	Sandmartin Crescent	Amenity	Parks
258	Spring Lane Park	Amenity	Parks
296	West Mersea Park	Amenity	Parks
299	Westlands Country Park	Natural	Parks

The second recommendation is to ensure that the sites listed in the table, below, which were identified in the study as low quality/value sites, are prioritised for enhancement as they help to serve identified gaps.

Site ID	Site name	Typology	Helps to serve provision gap in:
36	Camulodunum Way	Amenity	Natural
39	Cassino Road	Amenity	Natural
167	Lilianna Road	Amenity	Parks
232	Reed Hall Avenue	Amenity	Natural
258	Spring Lane Park	Amenity	Parks
299	Westlands Country Park	Natural	Parks

The third recommendation is to recognise areas with sufficient provision in open space and how they may be able to meet other areas of need, e.g. for an area with a sufficiency in one type of open space, and where opportunities allow, a change of primary typology could be considered for some sites of that type.

Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy: Strategy and Action Plan

The Council and Tendring District Council commissioned Knight, Kavanagh & Page Ltd (KKP) to undertake an assessment of all formal playing pitch and outdoor sport facilities across each individual authority area to assist it to strategically plan for the future. The output is provision of an [Assessment Report](#) and Strategy for each authority.

The [Strategy and Action Plan](#) report provides the Strategy for Colchester. Building upon the Assessment Report, it provides a clear, strategic framework for the maintenance and improvement of existing playing pitch and accompanying ancillary facilities up to 2033. It has been developed to provide:

- A vision for the future improvement and prioritisation of playing pitches and outdoor sports facilities.
- A number of aims to help deliver the recommendations and actions.
- A series of strategic recommendations which provide a strategic framework for the improvement, maintenance, development and, as appropriate, rationalisation of the playing pitch and outdoor sport facility stock.
- A series of sport by sport recommendations which provide a strategic framework for sport led improvements to provision.
- A prioritised area-by-area Action Plan to address key issues on a site-by-site basis.

Colchester Woodland and Biodiversity Project

Whilst this project, which launched in 2019, has now reached its end, the objectives of the Colchester Woodland and Biodiversity Project are useful to consider. The project aimed to bring about improvements in three areas: our communities, our wildlife, and our environment and was a unique opportunity for everyone to work together and develop a legacy of a greener city for future generations. The objectives were split into health and wellbeing, develop, enhance and diversify our wildlife within Colchester and reduce the environmental impact of the Council and influence others to follow our lead, and are set out below.

To improve the health and wellbeing of our communities and help people connect with our natural environment:

- make it easier for everyone to access green spaces
- help more people to get involved in outdoor activities that will improve physical and mental health
- help communities to benefit from urban planting
- help families create precious memories and stories

To develop, enhance and diversify our wildlife within Colchester:

- create new woodlands
- recover and improve wildlife corridors and networks

To reduce the environmental impact of the Council and influence others to follow our lead:

- help residents and businesses to make informed decisions about their impact on the environment in Colchester
- conserve and enhance biodiversity
- contribute to the reduction in drought and flood risk

Essex Climate Focus Area

Much of the city falls within the Essex Climate Action Commission's recommended Climate Focus Area, which is formed of the Blackwater and Colne River catchment areas. The objective of this recommendation is for the Climate Focus Area to: *"accelerate [climate] action and provide exemplars, for learning and innovation: adopting Sustainable Land stewardship practices: 100% by 2030 and Natural Green Infrastructure: 30% by 2030"*. Among the objectives of the Climate Focus Area are to achieve net zero carbon, biodiversity net gain, improve soil health and air quality, reduce flooding and urban heat island effect, and enhance amenity, liveability and wellbeing of Essex communities.

University of Essex River Colne Project

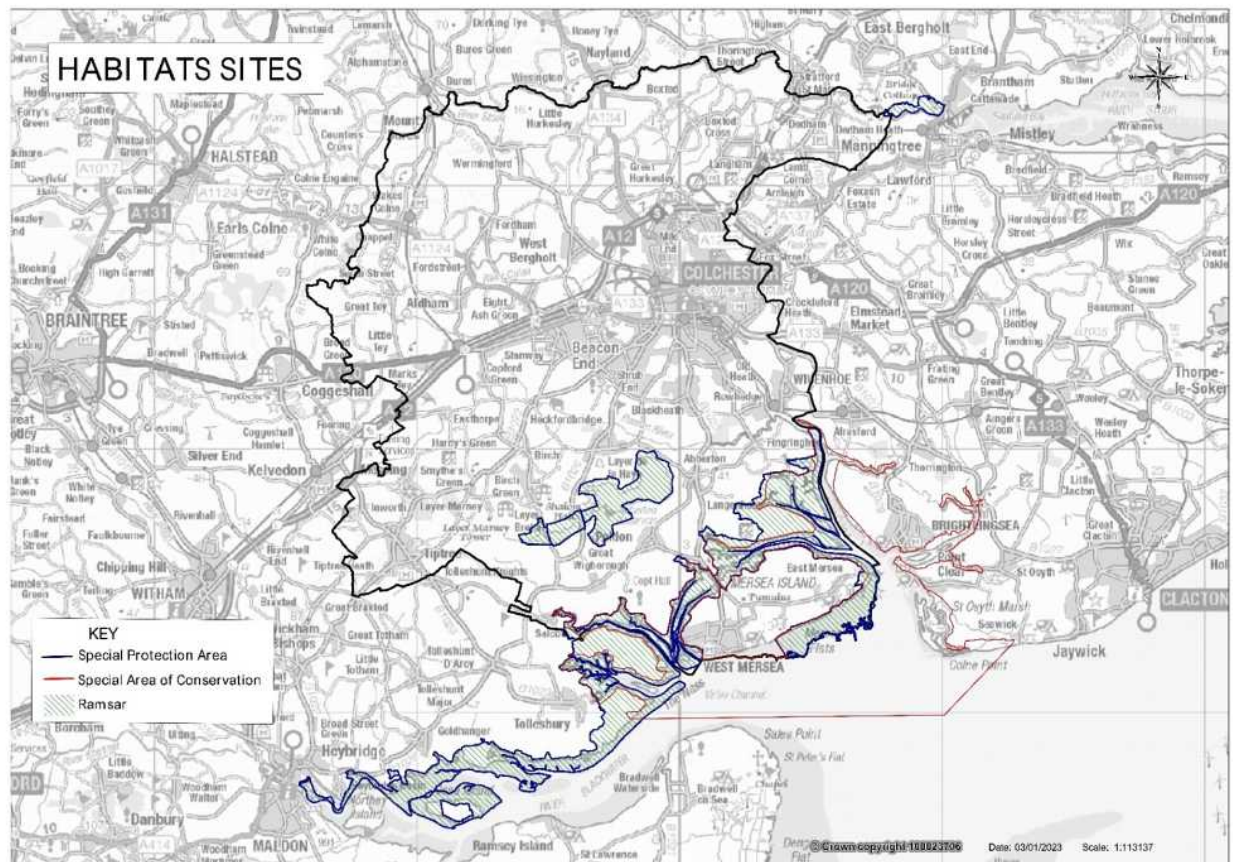
The University of Essex undertook a River Colne pilot for the Council (December 2022). The aims of the workshops undertaken as part of the project were to identify stakeholders' key priorities for the River Colne and to identify mechanisms to shift from consultation to co-production of the strategy. The project recommended four key areas participants identified in the University of Essex River Colne project:

1. protect existing green-blue infrastructure
2. enhance and restore green-blue infrastructure assets
3. create linkages between green-blue infrastructure to promote connectivity for nature and people
4. enhance the network through the creation of new green-blue infrastructure, in locations where it is most needed.

Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy

The coast is a valuable part of Colchester's green network and waterways. The coast is of international importance for breeding and wintering birds and is covered by the following international environmental designations: Colne Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA), Blackwater Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA), Abberton Reservoir Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA) and the Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The three SPAs are also Ramsar sites, which are wetlands of international importance. The Essex Estuaries SAC includes the Colne and Blackwater estuaries and extends along the Essex coast.

These SPAs, SACs and Ramsars are defined collectively as 'habitats sites' in the [NPPF](#)² and can be viewed on the map, below.



Through the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) of Colchester's adopted Local Plan and other HRAs of plans across Essex, it was recognised that population growth in Essex is likely to significantly affect habitats sites through increased recreational disturbance in combination with other local plans. Consequently, in partnership with Natural England, the government's advisor on the natural environment, and other Council's in Essex, the Council has prepared a [Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy \(RAMS\)](#) for the Essex Coast. The RAMS identifies necessary measures to avoid and mitigate likely significant effects from recreational disturbance in combination with other plans and projects. All residential proposals within the Colchester district should pay the RAMS tariff to avoid and mitigate adverse effects from increased recreational disturbance or deliver bespoke mitigation. The table, below, sets out the RAMS toolkit. At the time of writing, the RAMS is being reviewed.

Table 7.1 – The Essex coast RAMS toolkit

Action area	Examples
Education and communication	
Provision of information and awareness raising	<p>This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on the sensitive wildlife and habitats • A coastal code for visitors to abide by • Maps with circular routes away from the coast on alternative footpaths • Information on alternative sites for recreation <p>There are a variety of means to deliver this such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through direct engagement led by rangers/volunteers • Interpretation and signage • Using websites, social media, leaflets and traditional media to raise awareness of conservation and explain the Essex Coast RAMS project. • Direct engagement with clubs e.g. sailing clubs, ramblers clubs, dog clubs etc and local businesses.
Habitat based measures	
Fencing/waymarking/screening	Direct visitors away from sensitive areas and/or provide a screen such that their impact is minimised.
Pedestrian (and dog) access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning • Prohibited areas • Restrictions of times for access e.g. to avoid bird breeding season
Cycle access	Promote appropriate routes for cyclists to avoid disturbance at key locations
Vehicular access and car parking	Audit of car parks and capacity to identify hotspots and opportunities for "spreading the load"
Enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish how the crew operating the river Ranger patrol boat could be most effective. It should be possible to minimise actual disturbance from the boat itself through careful operation. • Rangers to explain reasons for restricted zones to visitors
Habitat creation	Saltmarsh recharge, regulated tidal exchange and artificial islands may fit with Environment Agency Shoreline Management Plans
Partnership working	Natural England, Environment Agency, RSPB, Essex Wildlife Trust, National Trust, landowners, local clubs and societies.
Monitoring and review	Birds and visitor surveys with review of effectiveness of measures with new ideas to keep visitors wanting to engage

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Paragraph 20 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states: "Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places, and make sufficient provision for: conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation."

Paragraph 175 of the NPPF states: "Plans should: take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries."

Colchester's Guiding Principles

All of the work outlined above has been taken into account to create a Vision and Guiding Principles for Colchester that can be applied to all Council work related to the green network and waterways.

Vision

Colchester's special and diverse green network and waterways will form a coherent, high quality network providing connections for people and for wildlife. Colchester's green network will be multifunctional and provide benefits for nature, health and wellbeing, prosperity, water management and climate resilience. The existing network will be protected, developed, and enhanced and gaps in provision will be addressed. We will improve what we have where we can, to ensure that Colchester remains a sustainable, thriving, and greener city for future generations.

Colchester is a unique place with a rich heritage and diverse environment and character that includes the city, countryside, and coast. The green network and waterways enables Colchester to be a healthy, vibrant, green and diverse place where people can live active lifestyles.

There are plentiful green spaces and waterways throughout Colchester with linkages, corridors, and connections between them. There are opportunities through the Council's various workstreams, including the Local Plan Review, and work of the Parks and Open Spaces team, to improve linkages, corridors and connections and follow Lawton's principles of bigger, better, more, and better connected².

Character of Colchester's green network and waterways

Colchester's green network is multifunctional – there are many green spaces that provide a recreational and amenity value and at the same time are important for biodiversity. There are large sites that attract tourists and visitors and small sites such as roadside verges that provide an important habitat and green lung in the middle of built development.

Castle Park is arguably the jewel in the heart of Colchester's green network and an important part of Colchester's distinctive heritage. Castle Park is a Victorian Park of national importance, designated Grade II on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England. It contains evidence of 2000 years of history and

² This refers to an independent review of England's wildlife sites and the connections between them led by Professor Sir John Lawton. The review was set up to look at our wildlife sites and whether they are capable of responding and adapting to the growing challenges of climate change and other demands on our land.

is a landscape moulded by the people of Colchester over many eras. It provides multiple uses and is a venue for big events.

Green spaces have a role to play in enhancing and conserving the historic environment. Likewise, the historic environment can help contribute to the quality, character, and distinctiveness of green spaces by helping to create a sense of place and a tangible link with local history. Other important spaces with importance to the historic environment include Layer Marney Tower, Wivenhoe Park, and the Roman Wall.

Colchester's green network and waterways is important for biodiversity and nature recovery. The network includes Special Protection Areas (SPA), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS), local nature reserves, country parks, and non-designated areas that are rich in biodiversity. Examples include Abberton Reservoir SPA, the Roman River Valley SSSI, High Woods LoWS, Salary Brook local nature reserve, Cudmore Grove country park and recreation grounds. Throughout Colchester there is a range of different habitats and sites that include open mosaic habitats, which provide benefits for biodiversity, climate change mitigation, amenity, carbon capture, and flood attenuation. There are local groups, such as Colchester Natural History Society and Wivenhoe Green Spaces project, that have been recording wildlife at many sites over the years.

Guiding Principles

1. Colchester's green network and waterways will be multifunctional and help to create greener, beautiful, healthier, and more prosperous neighbourhoods, with a thriving nature network that can reduce air and water pollution, contribute to the reduction in drought and flood risk, providing cooler areas through shade provision and overall helping places adapt to climate change.
2. Gaps in provision will be addressed to create a coherent green network across the city linking urban and rural areas. The Essex LNRS will provide evidence of gaps where improvements will benefit wildlife. Public and stakeholder engagement, including with Town and Parish Councils, will provide evidence of gaps where improvements will benefit people.
3. Colchester's green network and waterways will connect as a living network for people and nature across multiple scales from the wider landscape to more local and neighbourhood scales, connecting provision of green spaces with those who need its benefits. It will recover and improve wildlife corridors and networks, including nature recovery networks and support ecosystems services (the benefits we get from nature such as food, clean air, water, regulation of floods, recreation).
4. The green network will include a varied mix of types and sizes that can provide a range of functions and benefits to address specific issues and needs and provide

a range of functions. It will include the following 'building blocks' as described in the National Model Design Guide:

- sustainable drainage systems,
- green and blue roofs,
- green walls,
- rain gardens,
- swales,
- features for species,
- trees in hard landscapes,
- street furniture and utility structures,
- traffic-free routes,
- allotments,
- orchards,
- private domestic gardens,
- green spaces (including parks and burial grounds),
- more natural spaces (including woodlands, grassland, scrub, and hedgerows),
- heritage features and the historic environment,
- blue spaces (including wetlands).

5. Green, liveable places will be created that enable people to experience and connect with nature, and that seek to offer access to good quality parks, green spaces, recreational, walking and cycling routes that are inclusive, safe, welcoming, well-managed, accessible and encourage active travel. The green network will help families create precious memories and stories.

6. Colchester's green network should improve equity where possible by making it easier for everyone to access quality green spaces. New green spaces should be designed to be accessible and inclusive to a wide range of ages and abilities appropriate to the nature and status of the site.

7. Improvements to the green network and waterways will respond to the area's character so that it contributes to the conservation, enhancement and/or restoration of the historic environment and landscapes and creates new high-quality landscapes and a strong place identity to which local people feel connected. Green spaces can be used to improve the condition and setting of heritage assets and to improve access to them. It should give people a role in public space, help to create a sense of place and a tangible link with local history, and create a sense of ownership and pride.

8. Colchester's green network and waterways will be protected and improved through partnership working, collaboration and stakeholder engagement and through the use of evidence, placemaking and good land use practices.

9. Colchester's green network and waterways will be managed, valued, monitored, and evaluated in a collaborative manner. Our community should be able to get to know, love and use our green network and waterways. Our community can help monitor the value

of green spaces, e.g. through ecological surveys. We want everyone to enjoy the environmental, health and wellbeing, and societal benefits the green network and waterways bring.

Next Steps

The green network and waterways Guiding Principles will inform all Council work related to green spaces and waterways. In the immediate future, the Guiding Principles will inform work on the new Local Plan and the work of the Sustainability, and Parks and Open Spaces teams. A summary of how the Guiding Principles will influence the work of these teams is set out below.

Local Plan

Colchester's green network and waterways and the 'creating a better environment' agenda will be used as the starting point and key purpose of the new Local Plan. This priority will form the backbone of the Plan. All allocations and policies will be developed having regard to the question: will it create a better environment?

Green spaces and waterways have multiple benefits including for wildlife, active travel, health and wellbeing, climate change adaptation, air quality, flood and water management. Putting the green network and waterways at the heart of the Plan will result in multiple benefits across areas that planning must take into account.

The Plan must deliver housing allocations to meet Colchester's housing need but rather than this be the starting point and driving force of the Plan this will be one of the Plan's objectives. New housing allocations can facilitate new green spaces and biodiversity net gain (BNG) and we will seek to prioritise allocating sites that will create a better environment. It is often difficult to justify the selection of a preferred housing site on the edge of a village when other sites put forward by landowners would deliver the same benefits. Focussing on the green network and waterways and BNG will help to justify the selection of sites.

It is also intended to allocate strategic BNG sites and BNG corridors/ stepping stones. This could define sites that would deliver the greatest opportunities for BNG (the strategic BNG sites) and BNG corridors/ stepping stones that will enhance connections between existing and new wildlife sites. This will inform decisions on the spatial strategy. Through this approach, consideration to local supply and demand for BNG may be given. Developing the green network and waterways as a key priority, with housing delivery enabling the facilitation of improvements to the network, will enable the highest gains for biodiversity by considering the location of strategic housing sites and how this relates to sites that have the potential to deliver the highest gains for biodiversity. We can seek to ensure that there is a sufficient local supply of biodiversity units and reduce the risk of net gains delivered outside of the city.

As part of the call for sites, we asked for BNG offsite sites, green spaces and improvements to waterways, housing and employment sites and any other land uses as appropriate. Traditionally a call for sites focusses on housing and employment sites, broadening this has demonstrated to stakeholders that the green network and

waterways is fundamental to the Plan. It was hoped that this would provide the Council with intelligence of potential BNG offsite sites at an early stage of plan making.

The provision of environmental benefits and green spaces has always been a recognised “trade-off” for development. Identifying the optimum opportunities for the environmental enhancements through the green network and waterways and BNG which provide benefits to local communities, health and wellbeing, wildlife and climate change and link that to the strategy for development can help enable its delivery. The green network and waterways baseline and Guiding Principles provide the best starting point for the Plan.

This approach responds directly to the growing demands linked to the green agenda enabling delivery on climate change, health and wellbeing and biodiversity requirements as well as delivering growth requirements in a way which has planning for a better environment at the heart.

Parks, Countryside and Open Spaces Operational Plan

A report was presented to the November 2022 meeting of the Policy Panel outlining proposals for a Colchester Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy. It was proposed that the Panel set direction for the strategy which would include open spaces, natural assets, waterways and coastline, using a series of workshops to produce ideas to bring to a future meeting of the Panel for formal consideration and recommendations to be considered for making to Cabinet. This related to a pilot project undertaken with the University of Essex on participatory strategic development.

Moving forward, the Guiding Principles referred to in this report will be used in planning for any new open spaces and also in the management of existing CCC owned or managed sites. These principles will be considered in the development of any management or work plans for the sites. These principles will need to be considered in balance alongside other ecological factors, such as protected site designations, protected or locally endangered species and habitats and also the landscape, aspect and geology of the site and its surrounding land. These plans will also be affected by what budget is available for capital works and ongoing revenue funding for maintenance of these sites. The principles will be considered and implemented where possible. The Operational Plan includes annual projects for the cyclical writing/updating and also implementation of the management plans alongside strategic development work on policies pertaining to the different aspects of the teams work, covering areas such as parks, play parks, allotments and trees and grounds maintenance. This work is then implemented by the Parks and Open Spaces team on the ground with the assistance of contractors and volunteers. The Climate Emergency Plan also influences the priority areas of work for the team which is reviewed annually.

Climate Emergency Action Plan

These principles will be considered as part of work the team delivers on the Council's [Climate Emergency Action Plan](#). Currently the themes of the Action Plan of 'Enhance biodiversity and protect our environment' and 'Facilitate sustainable and active travel and improve air quality' will be of particular relevance to these principles.

Much of the work carried out by the team is linked to active travel, and so considerations for providing active travel options that can travel through the green network will be noted, alongside trying to facilitate the connecting up of public footpaths and cycleways through the green network. This has already been considered through working with the community on various projects such as the development of the Colchester Orbital and improvements along the Wivenhoe Trail. The team is also developing a cycling map of Colchester showing cycle routes, many of which will cut through areas of green space.

The Council is also looking to understand climate risk and approaches to climate adaptation, and it is recognised that the provision of green network will be valuable for this. Opportunities for green space creation/enhancement will be considered as part of adapting to a changing climate.