

Colchester City Council Preferred Options Local Plan Topic Paper

Environment

July 2025



Colchester
Local Plan



Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction and Purpose	3
Background	4
Legislation	4
National Policy	6
Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).....	6
Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)	7
Local environment	8
Engagement Feedback.....	10
Evidence Base and Approach to the Local Plan	12
Overview of the Approach to the Local Plan.....	12
Emerging Allocations Biodiversity Assessment	13
Approach to the Local Plan.....	14
Strategic Biodiversity Assessment.....	15
Approach to the Local Plan.....	16
Habitat Regulations Assessment.....	18
Screening	18
Appropriate Assessment.....	21
Conclusion and next steps.....	25
Approach to the Local Plan.....	27
Next steps.....	30
Landscape Character Assessment Review	30
Approach to the Local Plan.....	34
Local Wildlife Sites Review	35
Approach to the Local Plan.....	37
Local Geological Sites	37
Approach to the Local Plan.....	40
Colchester Green Network and Waterways Guiding Principles	40
Vision.....	41
Approach to the Local Plan.....	44

Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy	45
Approach to the Local Plan.....	46
Local Green Spaces.....	48
Appendix. Proposed designation of land used as village green as Local Green Space in Mount Bures (justification provided by Mount Bures Parish Council)	49
Appendix. Proposed designation of Middlewick Ranges as Local Green Space.....	53

Executive Summary

Environment policies are included in the Environment, Landscape and Coast, and Green Network and Waterways chapters of the Local Plan. The evidence base for the Environment policies includes:

- Biodiversity Assessment of emerging allocations
- Strategic Biodiversity Assessment
- Habitat Regulations Assessment
- Landscape Character Assessment Review
- Local Wildlife Sites Review
- Local Geological Sites (not commissioned by the Council)
- Colchester's Green Network and Waterways Guiding Principles

The Biodiversity Assessment of emerging allocations considered all sites that passed the first sieve of the SLAA. An assessment was made of whether development of the site would harm biodiversity (significant harm, harm, little/no harm) and recommendations for mitigation, enhancement and biodiversity net gain measures were made. The emerging site allocations were assessed in greater detail. This assessment has been used to consider sites and assess the likely relative significant harm to biodiversity and incorporate mitigation, enhancement and BNG measures into Place policies where appropriate.

The Strategic Biodiversity Assessment assessed the priorities for strategic promotion of biodiversity focussed on the urban area of Colchester City and highlighted those areas in and around the city in which biodiversity enhancement and creation would provide the greatest benefits. These areas are shown in the Local Plan as strategic biodiversity areas. This work also included an analysis of the sites put forward as part of the offsite BNG call for sites.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) refers to the assessment of the potential effects of a plan on sites afforded the highest level of protection in the UK, known collectively as habitats sites. The overall purpose of the HRA is to conclude whether or not the plan would adversely affect the integrity of habitats sites. This is judged in terms of the implications of the plan for a site's qualifying features and is based on the precautionary principle. With the exception of air pollution on the Stour and Orwell Estuaries, all likely significant effects have been screened out or it has been concluded that mitigation and policy safeguards exist to conclude no Adverse Effect on Integrity. The conclusion of potential adverse effect on integrity is highly precautionary and traffic modelling of the A137 will be undertaken to inform the HRA of the submission plan.

The Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) review creates a comprehensive and up to date strategic-scale landscape evidence base to underpin the Local Plan and inform

the development management process, guiding development that is sympathetic to local character and the qualities of the landscape. As with the 2005 LCA, there are six Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and 28 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs). The LCA is presented at a landscape character area level and arranged by their respective LCT. The individual LCA profiles include a map and summary of location and landscape character; key characteristics, which provides a summary explanation of the character of the LCA; representative photos to help the reader appreciate the character of the LCA; formative influences; key sensitivities and values - the qualities that are particularly valued for their contribution to landscape character; landscape strategy to guide the future direction of the landscape based on opportunities for conservation, restoration, enhancement, and creation; and guidelines on how the strategy can be achieved to ensure future change respects local character. A high-level rating for inherent landscape value using a three-point scale of high, medium and low is provided in Appendix A to inform the Sustainability Appraisal.

The partial review of Colchester's Local Wildlife Sites includes the assessment of 26 existing LoWS located within 50 metres of emerging site allocations and three potential LoWS, which were identified as part of the previous LoWS Review (2015). The LoWS identifies likely impacts from growth in the Local Plan and considers opportunities, including through management, to create resilience and enhance each LoWS and the wider network.

GeoEssex prepared a report on Local Geological Sites (LoGS) in Colchester and whilst not commissioned by the Council, this report forms part of the evidence base. Geodiversity is the link between geology, landscape, nature and people. A Local Geodiversity Action Plan has been produced for Essex. Three LoGS have been selected in the Colchester district, these are CoG1 Church Lane Gravel Cliff, CoG2 Fingringhoe Wick Nature Reserve and CoG6 Lexden Springs Nature Reserve. The report includes a list of other sites which are potential LoGS and notes that other sites may be identified in the future.

Guiding Principles for Colchester's Green Network and Waterways were developed through a cross-service group of Officers. The Green Network and Waterways Guiding Principles document summarises the baseline and public engagement that took place; summarises relevant green infrastructure studies and strategies; and sets out a vision, character, and guiding principles that are specific to Colchester.

The draft Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is also very relevant to the environmental policies. The role of the LNRS is to provide a county-wide, practical solution to driving action for nature recovery on the ground. It is a material planning consideration.

Introduction and Purpose

To help with the consideration, interpretation and consultation on the Preferred Options Regulation 18 Plan and later stages of plan making, a series of Topic Papers have been prepared which summarise the evidence base and details how this evidence has helped shape the policies in the Preferred Options Local Plan. These Topic Papers are 'live' documents and will be updated as the plan making process progresses.

This is the Environment Topic Paper. It provides the context for the environmental policies in the Environment, Landscape and Coast and Green Network and Waterways chapters of the Preferred Options Local Plan.

This Topic Paper summarises the relevant evidence base documents, which are:

- Biodiversity Assessment of emerging allocations
- Strategic Biodiversity Assessment
- Habitat Regulations Assessment
- Landscape Character Assessment Review
- Local Wildlife Sites Review
- Local Geological Sites (not commissioned by the Council)
- Colchester's Green Network and Waterways Guiding Principles

These documents provide recently prepared, comprehensive and robust evidence sources that are drawn on at various points throughout the paper and have informed the Plan. Much of the evidence is lengthy, technical, and in part complex. The Topic Papers aim to help make the evidence clearer where necessary and also bridge the gap between the evidence and how it has informed the plan.

Other relevant Topic Papers include:

- Net zero and embodied carbon
- Water
- Heritage

Background

Legislation

There are numerous legislation and Conventions of relevance to the environment and the policies in the environment chapters of the Local Plan. European Directives are listed below. The Trade and Co-operation Agreement includes reciprocal commitments not to reduce the level of environmental or climate protection or fail to enforce its laws in a manner that has an effect on trade.

- Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora aims to promote the maintenance of biodiversity, taking account of economic, social, cultural and regional requirements (the Habitats Directive).
- The Birds Directive, which is the oldest piece of EU legislation on the environment (amended in 2009) and aims to protect all of the 500 wild bird species naturally occurring in the EU.
- The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive, which requires the integration of environmental assessment into plans and programmes at the earliest stages to lay down the groundwork for sustainable development.
- The Water Framework Directive, which aims to improve EU water legislation by expanding on the scope of water protection to all waters and sets out clear objectives with specified dates.
- The Convention on Biological Diversity, signed by 150 government leaders at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and is dedicated to promoting sustainable development and translates the principles of Agenda 21.
- The European Landscape Convention, which provides a people centred and forward looking way to reconcile management of the environment with the social and economic challenges of the future and aims to help people reconnect with place.
- The Wildlife and Countryside Act, which provides national protection for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and protected species, in addition to a range of other measures. There have been numerous amendments to the Act, most significantly through the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 and Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC). It implements the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats and Council Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds.
- The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW Act), which provides for public access on foot to certain types of land, amends the law relating to public rights of way, increases measures for the management and protection for SSSIs, strengthens wildlife enforcement legislation, and provides for better management of National Landscapes (formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). The Act

places a duty on government departments to have regard for the conservation of biodiversity.

- The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC), which was designed to help achieve a rich and diverse natural environment and thriving rural communities. The Act implements key elements of the government's Rural Strategy (2004). Section 40 places a duty on public authorities to have regard to conserving biodiversity.
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, which consolidate the 2010 regulations with amendments and transpose Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora and elements of the EU Wild Birds Directive into national law. The Habitat Regulations provide for the designation and protection of European Sites. Under the Habitat Regulations, Councils may only give consent to a plan or project where it can be ascertained that it will have no adverse effect on the integrity of a European Site, unless the exceptional requirements set out in the Regulations can be met.
- The Flood and Water Management Act 2010, which requires flood and coastal erosion risk management authorities to aim to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development when exercising their flood and coastal erosion risk management functions.
- The Hedgerow Regulations, which protect countryside hedgerows.
- The Environment Act, includes targets, plans and policies for improving the natural environment. It includes details on creating a new governance framework for the environment, a new direction for resources and waste management, improving air quality, securing water services, enhancing green spaces and updating laws on chemicals. It introduces mandatory biodiversity net gain. The Environment Act 2021 establishes mechanisms including a strengthened biodiversity duty on public authorities. The strengthened biodiversity duty states that public authorities who operate in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England.
- The 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) was published in 2018, whilst this is not legislation it is an important national document. The Environment Plan sets out the government's goals for improving the environment within a generation. It aims to leave the environment in a better state and details how government will work with communities and businesses to do this over the next 25 years. It sets out long-term goals and targets for various aspects of environmental conservation, including biodiversity, air and water quality, and climate change mitigation. Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRs) are aligned with and support the objectives of the 25YEP at a local level. They translate the

overarching goals and principles of the 25YEP into actionable plans and initiatives tailored to specific regions or localities.

- The Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 (EIP) is the government's delivery plan for the environment, building a green, more prosperous country. One of the main goals of the EIP is to "enhance beauty, heritage, and engagement with the natural environment". There are 10 Goals of the EIP, which provide the overarching basis for LNRs.

National Policy

The NPPF (paragraph 187) states:

'Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;
- c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;
- d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures and incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs;
- e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and
- f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

The Planning Practice Guidance refers to Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006 and refers to the duty to have regard to conserving biodiversity: 'a key purpose of this duty is to embed consideration of biodiversity as an integral part of policy and decision making

throughout the public sector, which should be seeking to make a significant contribution to the achievement of the commitments made by government in its 25 Year Environment Plan.’ (8-009-20190721)

Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

Nature in Essex has suffered significantly over the last century, and continues to suffer - from species loss, habitat loss and increased habitat fragmentation. There are multiple causes to this loss and increased isolation of habitats across our landscape, including land use change, invasive species, pollution, overexploitation and climate change. Therefore, it is crucial that nature recovery is at the centre of future action for the environment, to create new habitats and recover and enhance space for nature that has been lost or degraded. The role of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) is to provide a county-wide, practical solution to driving action for nature recovery on the ground. The government has established a nationwide network of 48 Responsible Authorities, each being required to create a LNRS for its area. Essex County Council is the Responsible Authority for the Greater Essex LNRS. The primary purpose of the LNRS is to identify locations to create or improve habitat most likely to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment.

The LNRS includes Areas of particular importance for biodiversity (APIBs), which includes national conservation sites; local nature reserves; and ‘other areas of particular importance for biodiversity’. APIBs cover 14% of the Greater Essex LNRS region in total.

The key for nature recovery, and the essence of the LNRS, is to provide more space for nature and ensure it is better connected – “bigger, better and more joined up”, as Professor John Lawton has called it. The LNRS contains opportunity maps, showing where and how to deliver the Lawton principles for our most important habitats.

The strategic creation opportunity maps highlight the top locations for nature recovery, indicating where efforts will be most beneficial for nature and the wider environment. For most habitats, it’s the top 25% but for others it’s higher, including 100% for marine habitats. While the strategic opportunity maps focus on these priority areas, actions to create or enhance nature outside these areas are also encouraged. The strategic creation opportunity maps do not contain areas of particular importance for biodiversity.

The Environment Act 2021 establishes mechanisms including a strengthened biodiversity duty on public authorities. The strengthened biodiversity duty states that public authorities who operate in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England. This means that public authorities must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity, agree policies and specific objectives based on their considerations, and act to deliver policies and achieve

objectives. Local Authorities are to consider how their organisation complies with LNRSs under their biodiversity duty. LNRS guidance, released by DEFRA March 2023, states that all public authorities should have regard to relevant LNRSs under the strengthened biodiversity duty.

The Essex LNRS offers local authorities:

- Help in determining locations for off-site potential for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).
- Assistance in aligning local plan green and blue infrastructure delivery with LNRS goals, contributing to an Essex-wide, collaborative plan between local authorities.
- Aid in planning and site allocation decisions through data-driven site identification for nature recovery.
- Help in identifying sites for green and blue space delivery, assisting in meeting local targets.

Local environment

Although sitting within a basin of London Clay, most of Colchester City sits on a plateau of higher ground formed from silts, sands and gravels deposited by a former route of the River Thames, through which the River Colne, the Roman River and Salary Brook have since cut their valleys.

The hydrology of the city is dominated by the River Colne, which flows through the middle of the city, and its tributaries. Downstream of a sluice at East Mill, the river is tidal and its ecological character changes as a result. Roman River, the largest tributary of the River Colne, which is also tidal in its lower reaches, joins the Colne Estuary at Rowhedge. In contrast to the banks of the Colne, the Roman River valley is largely undeveloped. Salary Brook and St Botolph's Brook are located to the north and flow in opposite directions either side of Horkesley Heath, just outside of the A12. Salary Brook flows through Ardleigh Reservoir and then down the eastern edge of the City, joining the Colne near the University. St Botolph's Brook joins the Colne just upstream of the railway. Birch Brook arises at Mersea Road and flows across through the military land at Middlewick and then between Old Heath and Rowhedge, before joining the Colne estuary. The nearby Bourne Brook is a short, modified water course, flowing through a series of artificial, former mill ponds from Mersea Road towards The Hythe, where it is piped into the estuary at low tide.

Colchester's natural environment is extremely diverse and important. The countryside provides the attractive landscape setting that defines and characterises Colchester's villages and rural communities. The countryside and coastal areas also provide important agricultural, tourism and recreational opportunities that support local economies and communities.

There are numerous sites designated for nature conservation within Colchester. These designations are shown on the policies map and can be viewed on Defra's interactive nature on the map: [Magic Map Application \(defra.gov.uk\)](https://defra.gov.uk/magic-map-application). These designations are explained below.

Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are sites designated under the Birds Directive by the member states where appropriate steps are taken to protect the bird species for which the site is designated. In Colchester there are the Colne Estuary, Blackwater Estuary and Abberton Reservoir SPAs. These SPAs are also designated as Ramsar sites, which are wetlands of international importance.

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are sites of European Community importance designated by the member states, where necessary conservation measures are applied for the maintenance or restoration, at favourable conservation status, of the habitats and/or species for which the site is designated. In Essex we have the Essex Estuaries SAC, which includes numerous SPAs, including those SPAs within Colchester.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is land notified under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as an ecosystem of flora and/or fauna considered by Natural England to be of significant national value and interest to merit its conservation and management. There are nine SSSIs in Colchester. Roman River SSSI includes the mosaic of acid grassland and woodland that makes up Friday Woods, the ancient woodland of Donyland Woods and the more recent woodland of Donyland Heath, derived from wooded heath. The woodland community present is dry oak woodland, which is typical of woodland on more acidic soils. The SSSI also includes acid grassland on the upper valley slopes and flood plain grassland, reedbed and fen along the river itself. The Upper Colne Marshes SSSI consists of saltmarsh at the mouth of the Roman River with remnant grazing marsh upstream of Rowhedge and on either side of Wivenhoe. This includes a sizable block of reedbed at Ferry Marsh. Bullock Wood SSSI is also dry oak woodland but includes some particularly rare community types including plateau Alder woodland, and Sessile Oak-Hazel-Ash woodland.

National Nature Reserves (NNRs) were established to protect some of our most important habitats, species, and geology, and to provide 'outdoor laboratories' for research. Local authorities can create local nature reserves (LNRs). LNRs are important for biodiversity and nature conservation at the local level. The local authority must control the LNR land - either through ownership, a lease or an agreement with the owner. The natural features of the LNR must be cared for and it must be made accessible for visitors. The following LNRs are located in Colchester:

- Lexden Park is an area of open space comprising unimproved grassland and dry oak woodland that was once part of a larger expanse of old Parkland. It is also part of LoWS Co90.

- Spring Lane Meadows – also known as Lexden Springs LoWS (Co91) – is a valley slope grassland, with acidic grassland at the top grading into marshy grassland lower down where a spring emerges onto the floodplain of the River Colne.
- Hilly Fields - This site takes up most of the Hilly Fields LoWS (Co101) and is another valley slope site, once part of Sheepen Farm, and in an area previously known as The Warrens and Broom Heath. Acid grassland at the top of the slope gives way to neutral floodplain grassland at the bottom, with areas of lowland fen and willow woodland in the wettest parts. Scrub and secondary woodland have developed over parts of the site.
- Salary Brook LNR is the publicly owned bit of the LoWS of the same name (Co146) and consists of the watercourse itself together with marshy grassland and fen communities, scrub and trees in the river corridor.
- Welsh Wood is a small area of Ancient Woodland, a surviving fragment of a larger block of woodland and wood pasture lost to housing development. It is also a LoWS (Co143) and supports Pedunculate Oak-Ash-Maple woodland with a rich ground flora.
- Colne LNR includes parts of the Upper Colne Marshes SSSI with the adjacent Ancient and secondary woodland of Wivenhoe Woods and grassland at Lower Lodge Farm.

Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) are sites that have substantive nature conservation value and are considered to be of county importance in the geographic hierarchy. They are selected using a published set of criteria largely based upon the NERC Act Section 41 lists of habitats and species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity, also known as Priority Habitats and Species. LoWS help to buffer and connect areas of natural and semi-natural habitat, contributing to ecological networks and increasing the resilience of biodiversity to pressures of land use and climate change.

Engagement Feedback

The Council carried out an iterative Issues and Options engagement, which included a series of themed engagements between October 2023 – July 2024. Details of the Issues and Options engagement are included on the Council's [website](#) and summarised in a collated [report](#). The engagement themes were:

- Green network and waterways
- Call for Sites, including offsite biodiversity net gain (BNG) sites
- Vision for the city district
- Net zero carbon homes and buildings
- Placemaking
- Health and wellbeing

The response to the Green networks and waterways engagement demonstrated the importance of the green network for multiple reasons, including for the natural environment and biodiversity.

The engagement work on the vision resulted in many comments about the importance of the environment, one of the vision themes is healthy, vibrant and diverse places. Protect, maintain and enhance the environment, protect the undeveloped countryside, enhance the quality of the natural environment, deliver biodiversity net gain, develop strong multifunctional green networks, and sustainable water infrastructure were common messages from the vision engagement.

The Placemaking questionnaire feedback emphasised the importance of protecting the natural environment. Planting wildflowers/trees in the correct places, protecting and restoring the natural environment, water conservation, and creating inclusive functional natural environments were referred to. The highest-ranking environment to be protected and enhanced was the countryside, followed closely by National Landscapes. The least favoured environment for protection and enhancement was archaeological sites.

The Health and Wellbeing engagement work included consideration of Essex Planning Officers Association Healthy Places Guidance, which identified that active and sustainable environments, access to open green and blue spaces, and environmental sustainability are all key to health and wellbeing.

Nine sites were put forward for offsite BNG in the BNG call for sites. Four of these sites are high significance.

Evidence Base and Approach to the Local Plan

Environmental policies are included in the Environment, Landscape and Coast, and Green Network and Waterways chapters. Also relevant is strategic policy ST2 - Environment and the Green Network and Waterways, which seeks to ensure that all proposals conserve and enhance the natural and historic environment, safeguard the landscape character of Colchester and that major residential proposals deliver contextually responsive, high quality open spaces to enhance Colchester's green network and waterways.

This chapter summarises the evidence base and explains how the findings and recommendations from each of the evidence base documents have been incorporated into the Preferred Options Local Plan. The chapter begins with an overview of the environment and how the key objective of creating a better environment has informed the Local Plan.

Overview of the Approach to the Local Plan

Planning reform, the Environment Act, the Environmental Improvement Plan, and the government's broader consideration of land use in England provide significant opportunities for planning to play a key role in meeting the government's aspiration to create a better environment for future generations. Responding to the increasing environmental agenda in plan making requires a more coherent and streamlined approach to developing policy objectives in relation to the environment. Officers proposed using the green network and waterways and the 'creating a better environment' agenda as the starting point and key priority of the new Local Plan. This was agreed by Local Plan Committee in [October 2023](#).

This approach complements the complex environmental agenda requiring integrated, coordinated approaches to achieve multifunctional benefits from the use of land supporting the principle of 'creating a better environment'. The environmental planning topics listed below are the topics which LPAs need to consider.

- Air quality
- Biodiversity net gain
- Biodiversity reporting
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation and net zero
- Conservation covenants
- Design
- Enhanced biodiversity duty

- Environmental assessment
- Finance, delivery and environmental markets
- Flooding and coastal erosion
- Green and blue infrastructure
- Greenspace provision
- Habitat Regulations
- Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Natural capital and environmental net gain
- Protected land
- Protected sites and species strategy
- Water quality and resources

A key priority for the Plan, including the spatial strategy and indeed the whole Plan, is enhancing the green network and waterways and the linked consequential benefits of achieving this, including for health and wellbeing. This has been done by protecting the existing green network and waterways and including policies requiring the creation of linkages between open spaces and public rights of way and enhancing the green network through the creation of new open spaces.

The green network and waterways has multiple benefits including for wildlife, active travel, health and wellbeing, climate change adaptation, air quality, flood and water management. Putting these considerations at the heart of the Local Plan will result in multiple benefits across areas that planning must take into account, including the topics listed above.

The Plan must deliver housing and employment allocations to meet Colchester's growth needs but this needs to be balanced with creating a better environment as a key objective of the Local Plan. New housing allocations will facilitate new open spaces, biodiversity net gain, delivery of the Essex LNRS strategic opportunities and wider environmental enhancements. The Local Plan also shows the Council's preferred strategic biodiversity net gain sites and protects strategic biodiversity areas.

Emerging Allocations Biodiversity Assessment

Place Services were commissioned to prepare a Biodiversity Assessment (the Biodiversity Protection and BNG Study). There are two strands to this work – an assessment of emerging allocations and a strategic biodiversity assessment.

The emerging allocations biodiversity assessment initially considered all sites that passed the first sieve of the SLAA. An assessment was made of whether development of the site would harm biodiversity (significant harm, harm, little/no harm) and recommendations for mitigation, enhancement and biodiversity net gain measures were made. This work evolved as the list of emerging allocations was refined for consideration. These emerging site allocations were assessed in greater detail and the assessment of each site is included in the [Colchester City Council Emerging Allocations Biodiversity Assessment report](#). The results of the initial assessment are included as Appendix A.

The emerging allocations biodiversity assessment considered each of the emerging allocations from the point of view of any discernible ecological constraints that may affect the delivery of the expected numbers of dwellings identified. This included an assessment of the likely biodiversity net gain (BNG) requirements and the capacity of the sites to achieve them. Each of the emerging allocations is represented by a table that presents information to assist the further consideration of the sites. The following information is included:

- Site name and reference number
- Site map
- Harm scoring (significant harm, harm, little/ no harm) based on agreed criteria
- Description of habitats present on site
- Condition assessment – estimated in line with the Biodiversity Metric criteria
- Likely mitigation/ compensation requirements – based on best practice in ecological survey and impact assessment
- Potential for delivering BNG onsite (habitat enhancement or creation)
- Strategic relevance – high, moderate or low
- Any factors that could suggest that more than 10% net gain is necessary

Approach to the Local Plan

The emerging allocations biodiversity assessment was used when considering preferred site allocations. Sites identified as likely to significantly harm biodiversity were not included as preferred allocations in the Preferred Options Local Plan.

For all preferred site allocations, the recommended biodiversity mitigation and compensation requirements and potential for delivering BNG onsite measures recommended in the Biodiversity Assessment have been included as policy criteria in the Place policies. This will help to ensure the best outcomes for biodiversity. Where preferred site allocations were identified as likely to harm biodiversity, this is largely because of the proximity to Local Wildlife Sites, and a requirement for a buffer to the adjacent LoWS has been written into the relevant Place policy.

Strategic Biodiversity Assessment

The second element of the Place Services commission was to consider the best sites for offsite BNG and prepare a [Strategic Biodiversity Assessment](#). The Strategic Biodiversity Assessment assessed the priorities for strategic promotion of biodiversity within the planning system focused on the urban area of Colchester City and highlighted those areas in and around the city in which biodiversity enhancement and creation would provide the greatest benefits.

The Strategic Biodiversity Assessment considered the principles that should underpin an approach to conserving and enhancing biodiversity, summarised the environmental characteristics of the city, described the existing biodiversity resource in terms of habitats and species leading to some proposed priorities for the management, restoration and creation of habitats for the purpose of conserving and enhancing biodiversity, and provided reference to the wider area to provide context to the study.

The principles that should form the core focus of a biodiversity strategy are measures to:

- Protect and enhance the ecological network of existing sites with statutory and non-statutory nature conservation designations.
- Recognise and improve the connections between such sites.
- Create new habitats for biodiversity.
- Where possible, enhance the biodiversity value of land outside of recognised ecological networks.

The Strategic Biodiversity Assessment explains that BNG can be achieved by creating new green infrastructure, buffering an adjacent LoWS, enhancing a nearby LoWS or green space, planting street trees, or incorporating biodiverse roofs or other onsite measures. Consideration should be given to where the best gains can be achieved in each case and what measures would provide the most added value to the existing biodiversity resource of the area around the site. BNG measures should be appropriate to the environmental factors that apply to the site, particularly soils and geology, and the habitat and species priorities expressed in the Strategic Biodiversity Assessment. These factors have all been considered as part of the Biodiversity Assessment for emerging allocations ensuring site specific and added value to the existing biodiversity resources for all site allocations.

Place Services carried out a strategic analysis of the nine offsite BNG sites submitted to the BNG call for sites. This analysis considered existing habitat on site, potential for enhancement, potential for habitat creation, strategic significance and strategic ranking. Strategic ranking was high, moderate or low with high strategic ranking meaning a large

site or sites that are well connected to the surrounding landscape, sites of known biodiversity value in poor condition especially where Priority Habitats or Species are present, sites within or adjacent to nationally designated sites (although BNG is not possible on SSSIs), sites suitable for the creation of Priority Habitat or other high or very high distinctiveness habitats, and sites most likely to provide a significant net gain for biodiversity at a district or county level.

Approach to the Local Plan

The Strategic Biodiversity Assessment explains that the presence of clusters of designated sites and, in some cases, older landscapes that aren't designated but that have the potential to make a significant contribution to biodiversity, has been used to identify areas of significance for the conservation of biodiversity. These strategic biodiversity areas present the best opportunities for habitat creation and enhancement aimed at improving biodiversity. The figure below (Figure 3 in the Strategic Biodiversity Assessment) illustrates these areas, which attempt to link sites with related or complimentary habitats or other ecological features. Each of the strategic biodiversity areas has an inherent degree of coherence and connectivity. Strategic biodiversity areas outlined in the Strategic Biodiversity Assessment are shown on the policies map and protected through Policy ST2, which states "Strategic areas that present the best opportunities for habitat creation and enhancement aimed at improving biodiversity are shown on the policies maps as 'strategic biodiversity areas'. These strategic biodiversity areas will be protected, and support will be given to strengthening and enhancing connections between habitats to improve their contribution to the biodiversity network".

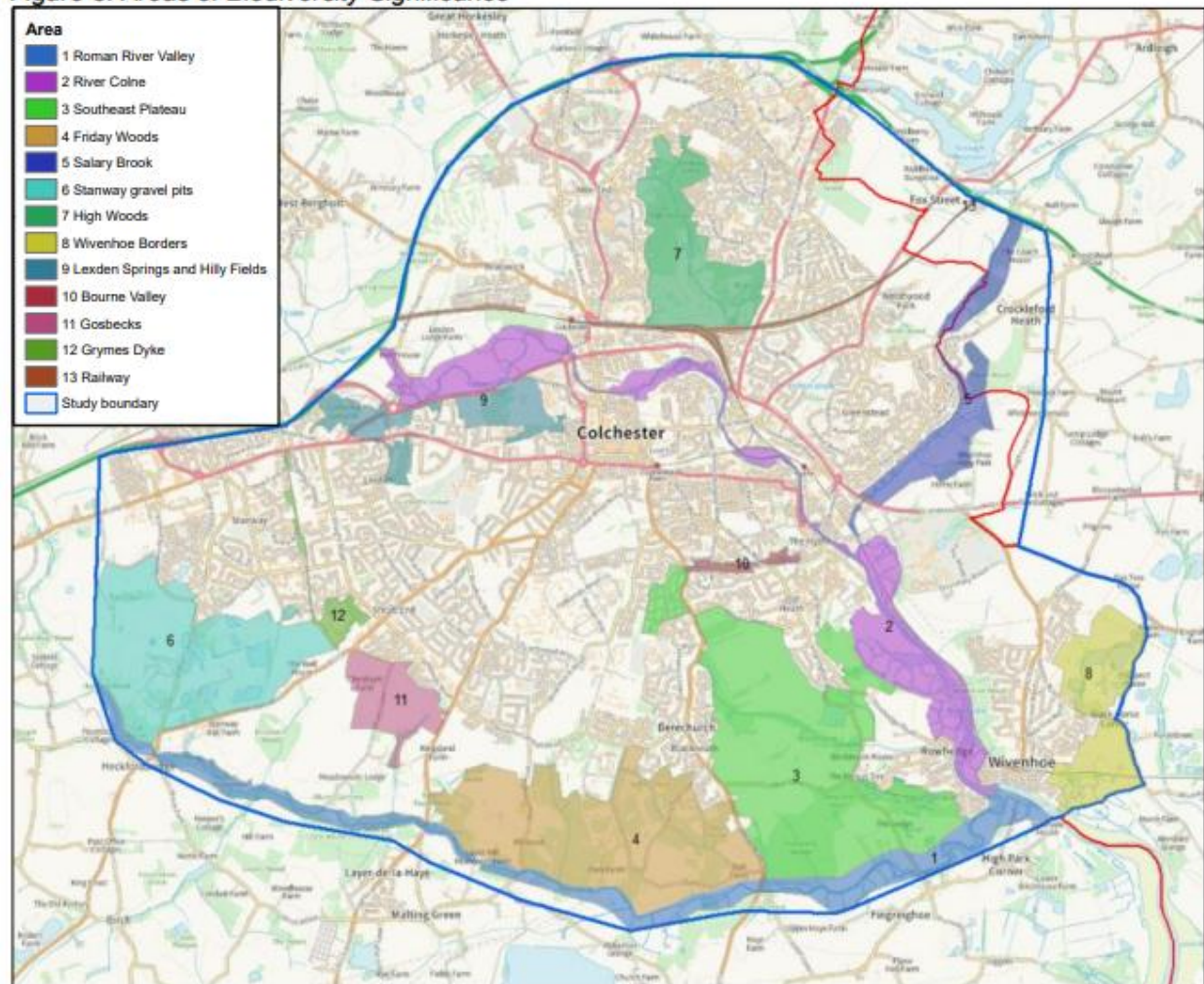
Protecting, strengthening and enhancing habitats and corridors within the strategic biodiversity areas can be achieved through broadening connections and improving the condition of the habitats, as well as creating more links with nearby LoWS through the design of green infrastructure and mitigation habitats within development sites as well as through compensation measures and biodiversity net gain in the wider landscape.

As explained in the Strategic Biodiversity Assessment (Spatial Prioritisation, paragraphs 6.43-6.45), applicants should explore the best opportunities in the immediate proximity as a first option for achieving BNG, or any other environmental obligations. The Council's preferences for the prioritisation of BNG delivery is reflected in Policy EN2 – Biodiversity net gain and environmental net gain, to effectively guide what developers do on their sites, whilst recognising a degree of consensus may be achievable through the pre-application process. Policy EN2 sets out the Council's preference for onsite BNG and lists the Council's preferred sites for offsite BNG where 10% BNG cannot be achieved onsite (Abbots Hall Farm, Maydays Farm, Chipping Farm and Brook Meadow). The Biodiversity Assessment assessed the offsite BNG sites submitted through the BNG call for sites. The preferred offsite BNG sites were found to have strategic significance for biodiversity. Policy EN2 is clear that these sites can be

assigned a score of 'high' in the strategic significance category in the Biodiversity Metric. At the time of plan preparation, it is understood that none of these sites are yet registered, and it may take some time until applicants can purchase units. However, they are included in this policy as recommendations, not requirements, due to their high strategic ranking and benefits to biodiversity.

Policy EN3 – Biodiversity and geodiversity, supports the principles that the Strategic Biodiversity Assessment recommends should form the core focus of a biodiversity strategy: Protect and enhance the ecological network of existing sites with statutory and non-statutory nature conservation designations; Recognise and improve the connections between such sites; Create new habitats for biodiversity; and Where possible, enhance the biodiversity value of land outside of recognised ecological networks.

Figure 3. Areas of Biodiversity Significance



Habitat Regulations Assessment

The requirement to undertake a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) of development plans was confirmed by the amendments to the Habitats Regulations published for England and Wales in 2007; the currently applicable version is the Habitats Regulations 2017, as amended. When preparing the Colchester Local Plan, Colchester City Council is therefore required by law to carry out an HRA. The Council can commission consultants to undertake HRA work on its behalf. Land Use Consultants (LUC) were commissioned to undertake HRA work and the HRA report documents the work undertaken and has been considered by the Council as the 'competent authority'.

HRA refers to the assessment of the potential effects of a development plan on one or more sites afforded the highest level of protection in the UK: SPAs and SACs. These were classified under European Union (EU) legislation but since 1 January 2021 are protected in the UK by the Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended). The HRA report and the Local Plan use the term 'habitats site' to refer to all types of designated site for which government guidance requires an HRA.

The overall purpose of the HRA is to conclude whether or not a proposal or policy, or whole development plan would adversely affect the integrity of the habitats site in question. This is judged in terms of the implications of the plan for a site's 'qualifying features', i.e. characteristics for which the site has been designated. Significantly, HRA is based on the precautionary principle. Where uncertainty or doubt remains, an adverse effect should be assumed.

Screening

The screening stage of HRA identifies potentially affected habitat sites and assesses likely significant effects alone or in combination with other plans and projects prior to the consideration of avoidance or mitigation measures. Policies not expected to result in development will not result in significant effects on habitats sites and were screened out of further consideration. Likely significant effects could not be ruled out at the screening stage for policies that were highlighted as having potential to result in development.

Screening considered the following impacts:

- Physical damage and loss (onsite) – screened out as no likely significant effect (LSE) predicted.
- Physical damage and loss functionally linked land (offsite) - potential for likely significant effects upon Abberton Reservoir, Blackwater Estuary, Colne Estuary and Stour and Orwell Estuaries and therefore requires further consideration at the Appropriate Assessment stage. This impact was screened out in relation to the Dengie SPA and Ramsar as there are no site allocations proposed within a

2km buffer. Likely significant effects in relation to invertebrates was screened out from further assessment.

- Non-physical disturbance – screened out as no likely significant effect (LSE) predicted.
- Non-physical disturbance functionally linked land (offsite) - potential for likely significant effects upon Abberton Reservoir, Blackwater Estuary, Colne Estuary and Stour and Orwell Estuaries and therefore requires further consideration at the Appropriate Assessment stage.
- Non-toxic contamination (dust) – screened out as no likely significant effect (LSE) predicted.
- Air pollution (vehicle emissions) - potential for likely significant effects upon Stour and Orwell Estuaries and therefore requires further consideration at the Appropriate Assessment stage.
- Air pollution (vehicle emissions) functionally linked land – screened out as no likely significant effect (LSE) predicted.
- Recreation - potential for likely significant effects upon Abberton Reservoir, Blackwater Estuary, Colne Estuary, Dengie, Stour and Orwell Estuaries, Essex Estuaries and Outer Thames Estuary and therefore requires further consideration at the Appropriate Assessment stage.
- Water quantity – potential for likely significant effects upon Abberton Reservoir, Blackwater Estuary, Colne Estuary, Stour and Orwell Estuaries and Essex Estuaries and therefore requires further consideration at the Appropriate Assessment stage.
- Water quality – potential for likely significant effects upon Abberton Reservoir, Blackwater Estuary, Colne Estuary, Dengie, Stour and Orwell Estuaries, Hamford Water and Essex Estuaries and therefore requires further consideration at the Appropriate Assessment stage.

The table, below, summarises the screening conclusions.

Habitats site	Physical damage and loss	Non-physical disturbance	Non-toxic Contamination	Air Pollution	Recreation	Water Quantity	Water Quality
Abberton Reservoir SPA and Ramsar site	Potential LSE (Offsite only)	Potential LSE (Offsite only)	No LSE	No LSE	Potential LSE	Potential LSE	Potential LSE

Habitats site	Physical damage and loss	Non-physical disturbance	Non-toxic Contamination	Air Pollution	Recreation	Water Quantity	Water Quality
Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar site	Potential LSE (Offsite only)	Potential LSE (Offsite only)	No LSE	No LSE	Potential LSE	Potential LSE	Potential LSE
Colne Estuary SPA and Ramsar site	Potential LSE (Offsite only)	Potential LSE (Offsite only)	No LSE	No LSE	Potential LSE	Potential LSE	Potential LSE
Crouch & Roach Estuaries SPA and Ramsar site	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE
Dengie SPA and Ramsar site	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	Potential LSE	No LSE	Potential LSE
Essex Estuaries SAC	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	Potential LSE	Potential LSE	Potential LSE
Foulness Estuary SPA and Ramsar site	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE
Hamford Water SPA and Ramsar site	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	Potential LSE
Hamford Water SAC	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	Potential LSE

Habitats site	Physical damage and loss	Non-physical disturbance	Non-toxic Contamination	Air Pollution	Recreation	Water Quantity	Water Quality
Outer Thames Estuary SPA	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	No LSE	Potential LSE	No LSE	No LSE
Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar site	Potential LSE (Offsite only)	Potential LSE (Offsite only)	No LSE	Potential LSE	Potential LSE	Potential LSE	Potential LSE

Appropriate Assessment

Following the screening stage, the plan-making authority is required under Regulation 105 of the Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended) to make an 'Appropriate Assessment' of the implications of the plan for habitats sites, in view of their conservation objectives. The Appropriate Assessment stage, also referred to as the integrity test, predicts likely impacts, evaluates the impacts of the plan on habitat sites in light of their conservation objectives and where impacts are likely, identifies how impacts can be avoided or mitigated. Appropriate Assessment determines whether the plan will result in 'Adverse Effects on Integrity'. It also considers the potential for in-combination effects from development proposed in neighbouring authorities' Local Plans or from major infrastructure projects. Consideration was given to mitigation measures that may be included in the Local Plan to reduce the likelihood and significance of effects on habitats sites. If impacts remain after all alternatives and mitigation measures have been considered the HRA must proceed to the imperative reasons of overriding public interest.

Physical damage and loss to functionally linked land (offsite)

A desk-based study was undertaken to identify potential impacts from site allocations on offsite habitat used by the qualifying bird species, the results are included in Appendix D of the HRA report. Sites were given a habitat suitability rating of high, moderate, low or negligible. The potential for the loss of offsite habitat to adversely affect qualifying bird species relates primarily to the cumulative effect of reducing the extent of feeding areas. To provide certainty that the loss of offsite functional habitat will not adversely affect the integrity of Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar site, Colne Estuary SPA and Ramsar

site and Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar site, the Appropriate Assessment recommended that wintering bird surveys (a safeguard measure) is implemented at the project level for sites with high and moderate suitability to support qualifying bird species. A commitment to mitigation is required within the Local Plan dependent on the findings of bird surveys. Policy wording has been included in all Place policies with high and moderate suitability. This approach was used in the adopted Local Plan, Sections 1 and 2. The Appropriate Assessment also records that Policy EN1 outlines protection for habitats sites and will ensure that no development is supported where there is potential for adverse effects to integrity to arise and policies ST2, GN1, GN5, LC3, E3, E5, CS5 and CS6 provide safeguards and mitigation measures to prevent physical damage and loss of habitats.

Non-physical disturbance to functionally linked land (offsite)

Site allocations within 500m of possible functionally linked land, identified in relation to the SPA and Ramsar sites, have potential to result in adverse effect on qualifying bird species as a result of disturbance from noise and vibrations and from increased light spill. For these sites, the same mitigation as was identified in the assessment of physical damage and loss of functionally linked land, is required. In addition to the other policy safeguards and mitigation measures listed above, policy EN9 is also relevant to this impact. Policy EN9 will ensure that development will avoid pollution (including air, light, noise, and water pollution) and sets out requirements to demonstrate no risk to health or the environment due to contamination.

Air pollution (vehicle emissions)

The Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar site is located immediately adjacent (within 200m) to the A137. A review of the bird species which comprise the SPA was undertaken to inform understanding of the species sensitivity to pollutants. Saltmarsh habitat is sensitive to impacts from air pollution with varying critical loads dependant on the location within the saltmarsh, whether upper, mid or lower.

Further consideration is required in relation to nitrogen, nutrient nitrogen and acid deposition for the relevant qualifying features. To fully understand the impacts of increased development resulting from the Local Plan in-combination with other plans and projects, Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) traffic modelling data, which calculates the change in trips that would result from the Local Plan, over the plan period is required of the A137 to inform the Appropriate Assessment. If AADT exceeds the threshold of 1,000 AADT, air quality modelling will be required to understand whether the Local Plan will result in adverse effect on integrity and whether avoidance and mitigation measures can be applied which ensure that impacts are prevented. This approach is considered to be highly precautionary, given the nature of the habitats present within the SPA and Ramsar site, which support intertidal habitats that are

subject to regular flushing by the tides and as such typically resilient to localised affects relating to air pollution.

Recreation

Key threats from recreational pressure to the SPAs include impacts from direct physical damage and loss of habitat from trampling and erosion and disturbance of wetland birds from recreational activities, such as walking, dog walking, exercise, wildlife watching and watersports. Key threats to the SAC, which is designated for qualifying coastal and inter-tidal habitats include impacts from physical damage caused by trampling and erosion associated with terrestrial recreation and wave damage from water-based recreational activities. The SAC is also vulnerable to impacts from localised nutrient enrichment and other negative factors associated with recreation such as littering, fire and vandalism.

The Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS), which has the brand name Bird Aware Essex Coast, has been developed to avoid and mitigate recreational impacts to the habitats sites along the Essex Coast. The RAMS project includes 12 partner Councils, Essex County Council, Natural England, Essex Wildlife Trust and RSPB. The RAMS identifies a detailed programme of strategic mitigation measures which are funded by developer contributions from residential development schemes within the zone of influence. A review of the Essex Coast RAMS is underway, which will secure funding in perpetuity. The delivery of the RAMS is supported by Policy EN1, which outlines the requirement for development to secure contributions towards the strategy and is further supported by Policy ST2.

Provision of open spaces is considered to provide an additional mechanism to contribute to reducing recreational pressure to habitats sites. This is supported by Policies GN5 and EN1, with policies GN2, GN3 and GN6 also providing a degree of safeguarding.

Water quantity

Anglian Water Services and Affinity Water have prepared Water Resources Management Plans for 2024 (WRMP24), which will ensure that a sufficient supply of water can be secured, and that the environment will be protected over at least a 25-year planning period. WRMPs are updated every five years and reviewed by regulators, such as Environment Agency. WRMPs take into account growth within the supply area, including growth within Colchester as part of the Local Plan.

The published AWS WRMP plans to overcome predicted deficit in the South Essex WRZ through a demand management strategy (reducing water use by the existing users in the WRZ) as well as new or changes to existing water supply sources. The AWS WRMP shows that the combined impact of the proposed demand management

measures and current and future raw water improvements in the Essex South WRZ results in a forecast balance of supply and demand by the end of the Local Plan period (and beyond to 2050). The Affinity Water WRMP shows that current and future demand management and changes to supply volume from Ardleigh Reservoir would enable the current surplus of supply to continue beyond the Local Plan period. HRAs were undertaken for both water companies WRMPs, which concluded that with proposed mitigation measures, the WRMPs will have no adverse effects on any habitats sites, alone or in combination.

Policy EN1 provides safeguarding by ensuring that development related impacts resulting in Adverse Effect on Integrity of habitats sites and SSSIs is avoided and/ or appropriately mitigated. Policy NZ3 provides safeguarding and mitigation by setting out the requirements for adequate water supply and wastewater infrastructure to serve new development, allocating land for the extension of Colchester Water Recycling Centre (WRC) and promoting the efficient use of water by setting the water efficiency standard of 80 litres per person per day.

The Appropriate Assessment acknowledges that the WCS is in development and will be reviewed as part of the HRA of the Regulation 19 submission Local Plan. However, the findings and recommendations in the WCS Technical Note and recommendations of the AWS WRMP enables a conclusion of no Adverse Effect on Integrity in relation to water quantity.

Water quality

Colchester WRC was identified to have Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO) where baseline (before growth) spill frequency exceeds the long-term improvement plan targets. AWS are considering measures to address this in order to meet the future target and a policy is recommended as mitigation. With regards to the future upgrades of the Colchester WRC, the capacity in the sewer network will be assessed as part of the updated WCS document.

Copford WRC, Eight Ash Green WRC, Fingringhoe WRC, Great Tey WRC and Langham WRC were identified to be at risk of water quality non-compliance due to future capacity exceedance. However, improvement works are planned towards the end of the AMP8 period (2025-2030) to accommodate both water quality improvements and flow compliance to meet the early phase of growth expected in the Local Plan period. The detailed WCS will confirm any solutions for water quality required for the end of the Local Plan period.

Policy NZ3 provides safeguarding and mitigation by setting out the requirements for adequate water supply and wastewater infrastructure to serve new development, allocating land for the extension of Colchester Water Recycling Centre and promoting

the efficient use of water by setting the water efficiency standard of 80 litres per person per day. Expansion of Colchester WRC aims to increase the capacity of the wastewater treatment facility which will be important in providing increased capacity to treat wastewater demand as a result of growth within the Local Plan.

The Appropriate Assessment states that an additional policy is required to be incorporated within the Local Plan, as informed by the WCS Technical Note, for allocated development in the Colchester WRC's drainage catchment to significantly reduce the volume of surface water generated from sites being discharged to the combined sewer network (to enable CSO spills to be managed in the long-term). A policy is required to prevent surface water generated from sites being discharged to the foul sewer network for sites within the catchment areas of Copford WRC, Eight Ash Green WRC, Tiptree WRC and West Bergholt WRC. A policy is required which requires developers located within the catchments of Dedham WRC, Fingringhoe WRC, Great Tey WRC, Langham WRC and West Bergholt WRC to demonstrate they have agreed available capacity at the WRC (and the associated sewer network) with AWS prior to submitting planning applications. These policies have all been incorporated into the Local Plan.

The Appropriate Assessment acknowledges that the WCS is in development and will be reviewed as part of the HRA of the Regulation 19 submission Local Plan. However, the impacts of proposed growth and potential for water quality impacts as a result of water treatment and discharge on habitats sites can be concluded as not having Adverse Effects on Integrity provided the recommendations outlined in the WCS Technical Note are incorporated within the Local Plan policy and implemented successfully.

Direct pollution/ run off

Policy EN9, which will ensure that development will avoid pollution (including air, light, noise, and water pollution) and sets out the requirements for developments to demonstrate no risk to health or the environment due to contamination; and Policy EN1, which will ensure that development related impacts with the potential to result in Adverse Effects on Integrity of habitats sites and SSSIs will be avoided, provide policy protection to conclude that there will be no Adverse Effect on Integrity.

Conclusion and next steps

The table, below, summarises the conclusions of the Appropriate Assessment.

Habitats site	Physical damage and loss	Non-physical disturbance	Non-toxic Contamination	Air Pollution	Recreation	Water Quantity	Water Quality
Abberton Reservoir SPA and Ramsar site	No AEol	No AEol	Screened out	Screened out	No AEol	No AEol	No AEol
Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar site	No AEol	No AEol	Screened out	Screened out	No AEol	No AEol	No AEol
Colne Estuary SPA and Ramsar site	No AEol	No AEol	Screened out	Screened out	No AEol	No AEol	No AEol
Crouch & Roach Estuaries SPA and Ramsar site	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out
Dengie SPA and Ramsar site	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	No AEol	Screened out	No AEol
Essex Estuaries SAC	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	No AEol	No AEol	No AEol
Foulness Estuary SPA and Ramsar site	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out
Hamford Water SPA and Ramsar site	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	No AEol

Habitats site	Physical damage and loss	Non-physical disturbance	Non-toxic Contamination	Air Pollution	Recreation	Water Quantity	Water Quality
Hamford Water SAC	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	No AEoI
Outer Thames Estuary SPA	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	Screened out	No AEoI	Screened out	No AEoI
Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar site	No AEoI	No AEoI	Screened out	Potential Adverse Effect on Integrity	No AEoI	No AEoI	No AEoI

The only potential Adverse Effect on Integrity is in relation to the effect of air pollution on the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar site either alone or in-combination. This conclusion of no Adverse Effect on Integrity is highly precautionary and traffic modelling of the A137 will be undertaken to inform the assessment. HRA is an iterative part of planmaking and will continue as work progresses on the submission plan. Whilst no Adverse Effects on Integrity was concluded in relation to impacts on water quantity and water quality, the WCS will be reviewed as part of the HRA of the submission plan.

Approach to the Local Plan

Recreational disturbance was screened into the Habitat Regulations Assessment. The Appropriate Assessment concluded that providing the Essex Coast RAMS and policy protection measures are implemented and delivered successfully, no adverse effects on integrity are concluded in relation to recreational pressure as a result of increased development resulting from the Local Plan in relation to Blackwater Estuary Ramsar site and SPA, Colne Estuary SPA and Ramsar site, Dengie SPA and Ramsar site, Essex Estuaries SAC, Stour and Orwell SPA and Ramsar site, Abberton Reservoir SPA and Ramsar site and Outer Thames Estuary SPA.

The Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS), which has the brand name Bird Aware Essex Coast, has been developed to avoid and mitigate recreational impacts to the habitats sites along the Essex Coast. The RAMS project includes 12 partner Councils, Essex County Council, Natural England, Essex Wildlife Trust and RSPB. The RAMS identifies a detailed programme of strategic

mitigation measures which are funded by developer contributions from residential development schemes within the zone of influence. A review of the Essex Coast RAMS is underway, which will secure funding in perpetuity.

Policy ST2 refers to the Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) and Policy EN1 requires contributions to be secured from qualifying residential development within the zones of influence. This ensures compliance with the Essex Coast RAMS.

Policy EN1 requires reference to Bird Aware Essex Coast on any signage or interpretation that relates to Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG). This is to help promote Bird Aware and the message of responsible recreation and ultimately to help with the success of Bird Aware as a mitigation measure. The requirement for nature based welcome packs for schemes of 100 dwellings or more will further help promote Bird Aware and safeguard local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of designated sites, wildlife corridors and stepping stones and areas identified by local partnerships (e.g. Bird Aware or LNRS) for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation.

To provide certainty that the loss of offsite functional habitat will not adversely affect the integrity of Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar site, Colne Estuary SPA and Ramsar site and Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar site, the Appropriate Assessment recommended that wintering bird surveys (a safeguard measure) are implemented at the project level for sites with high and moderate suitability to support qualifying bird species. A commitment to mitigation is required within the Local Plan dependent on the findings of bird surveys. Policy wording has been included in all Place policies with high and moderate suitability as listed below.

High suitability:

PP17: Land South of Marks Tey Village (arable fields with reservoir in adjacent land)

PP19: Land North Oak Road (arable fields with woodland within eastern boundary)

PP23: Land east Dawes Lane (arable fields and grassland)

Moderate suitability:

PP10: Land south of Berechurch Hall Road (arable and grassland)

PP24: Land North of the Fire Station (arable fields)

PP36: Land at Earls Colne Road (an arable field)

PP48: Land at Kelvedon Road (an arable field)

PP32: Land North of Halstead Road and west of Fiddlers Wood (an arable field)

PP9: North East Colchester (arable fields with a pocket of woodland in north-east corner)

PP29: Land East of School Road (two arable fields separated by a house and garden)

PP18: Land North of A120, Marks Tey (arable fields with a small pocket of woodland within western boundary)

PEP5: Land South of A12 and north of proposed new route of A12, Marks Tey (arable fields)

PP26: Land North Boxted Straight Road (an arable field)

PP37: Land north of Park Lane (arable fields)

The Appropriate Assessment stated that an additional policy is required to be incorporated within the Local Plan, as informed by the Water Cycle Study Technical Note, for allocated development in the Colchester Water Recycling Centre (WRC) drainage catchment to significantly reduce the volume of surface water generated from sites being discharged to the combined sewer network (to enable combined sewer overflow spills to be managed in the long-term). A policy is required to prevent surface water generated from sites being discharged to the foul sewer network for sites within the catchment areas of Copford WRC, Eight Ash Green WRC, Tiptree WRC and West Bergholt WRC. A policy is required which requires developers located within the catchments of Dedham WRC, Fingringhoe WRC, Great Tey WRC, Langham WRC and West Bergholt WRC to demonstrate they have agreed available capacity at the WRC (and the associated sewer network) with AWS prior to submitting planning applications. These policy requirements have all been incorporated into the Preferred Options Local Plan. Policy wording has been included in relevant Place policies and Policy NZ3 states:

‘Proposals within the catchments of the following Water Recycling Centres: Dedham, Fingringhoe, Great Tey, Langham and West Bergholt must demonstrate they have confirmed with Anglian Water Services that treatment capacity at the Water Recycling Centre (WRC) is available to serve the development at the point of anticipated connection and where appropriate phasing triggers to support development to be agreed.

Development within the Colchester WRC drainage catchment must discharge attenuated surface water to a receiving waterbody and not to the combined sewer network, unless it can be demonstrated that there is no other option.

Development within the drainage catchments of Copford, Tiptree and West Bergholt WRCs must not discharge surface water to the foul sewer network.’

Finally, the HRA recognised that safeguards and policy protection will also be provided in the Local Plan, including Policies EN1, EN9, ST2, GN1, GN5, LC3, E3, E5, CS5 and CS6.

Next steps

HRA is an iterative part of plan making and will continue as work progresses on the submission plan.

The Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) identified air pollution on the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar site either alone or in-combination as a potential Adverse Effect on Integrity. This approach is highly precautionary, given the nature of the habitats present within the SPA and Ramsar site, which support intertidal habitats that are subject to regular flushing by the tides and as such typically resilient to localised effects relating to air pollution. Traffic modelling of the A137 will be undertaken to inform the assessment. If AADT (calculates the change in trips that would result from the Local Plan) exceeds the threshold of 1,000 AADT, air quality modelling will be required to understand whether the Local Plan will result in adverse effect on integrity and whether avoidance and mitigation measures can be applied which ensure that impacts are prevented.

Whilst no Adverse Effects on Integrity was concluded in relation to impacts on water quantity and water quality, the Water Cycle Study will be reviewed as part of the HRA of the submission plan. The Appropriate Assessment acknowledged that the Water Cycle Study (WCS) is in development and will be reviewed as part of the HRA of the Regulation 19 submission Local Plan. However, the findings and recommendations in the WCS Technical Note and recommendations of the AWS Water Resources Management Plan enabled a conclusion of no Adverse Effect on Integrity in relation to water quantity. The impacts of proposed growth and potential for water quality impacts as a result of water treatment and discharge on habitats sites was concluded as having no Adverse Effects on Integrity provided the recommendations outlined in the WCS Technical Note are incorporated within the Local Plan policy and implemented successfully.

Landscape Character Assessment Review

LUC was commissioned by Colchester City Council in July 2024 to prepare a [Landscape Character Assessment](#) (LCA) for Colchester district, including land falling within the Dedham Vale National Landscape [formerly an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (formerly an AONB)]. This study updates the Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment undertaken by Chris Blandford Associates in 2005.

The LCA creates a comprehensive and up to date strategic-scale landscape evidence base to underpin the Local Plan and to assist in the development management process.

It has informed work on policy development - the Place policies include relevant landscape guidance from the LCA. The LCA will inform detailed planning proposals at the development management stage by guiding development that is sympathetic to local character and the qualities of the landscape through appropriate design and mitigation and providing a framework for more detailed landscape studies and sensitivity assessments including Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIA).

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) defines landscape as ‘an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors’. The LCA defines landscape character as ‘a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse’ (paragraph 1.7).

Landscape Character Assessment is the process of identifying and describing such variations in character across a landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of features and attributes (characteristics) that make different landscapes distinctive. This provides an important baseline and understanding of the characteristics of an area and why it is special. Understanding landscape character can ensure that development does not undermine whatever is valued or characteristic in a particular landscape and help guide positive change that conserves, enhances, restores, or creates local character.

Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at a variety of scales and levels of detail. At a national level, England is divided into 159 distinct National Character Areas (NCAs). Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, history, and cultural and economic activity. Colchester lies within three NCAs:

1. NCA 81: Greater Thames Estuary
2. NCA 86: South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland
3. NCA 111: Northern Thames Basin

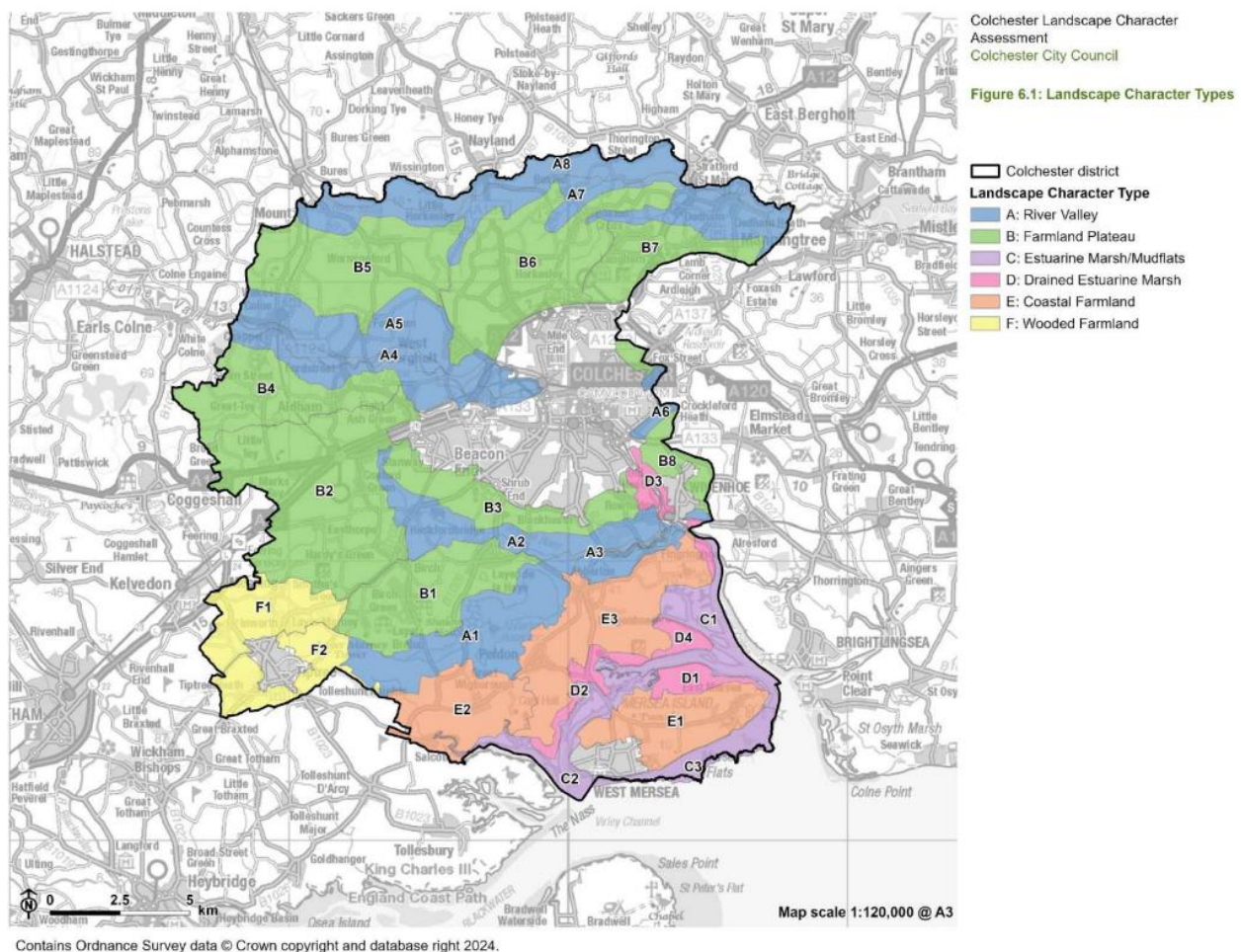
The coastal edge and seascape to the south-east of Colchester district forms part of Marine Character Area 19: Essex and Suffolk Estuaries and Coastal Waters, as assessed within the Seascape Character Assessment for the South East Inshore marine plan area (2018).

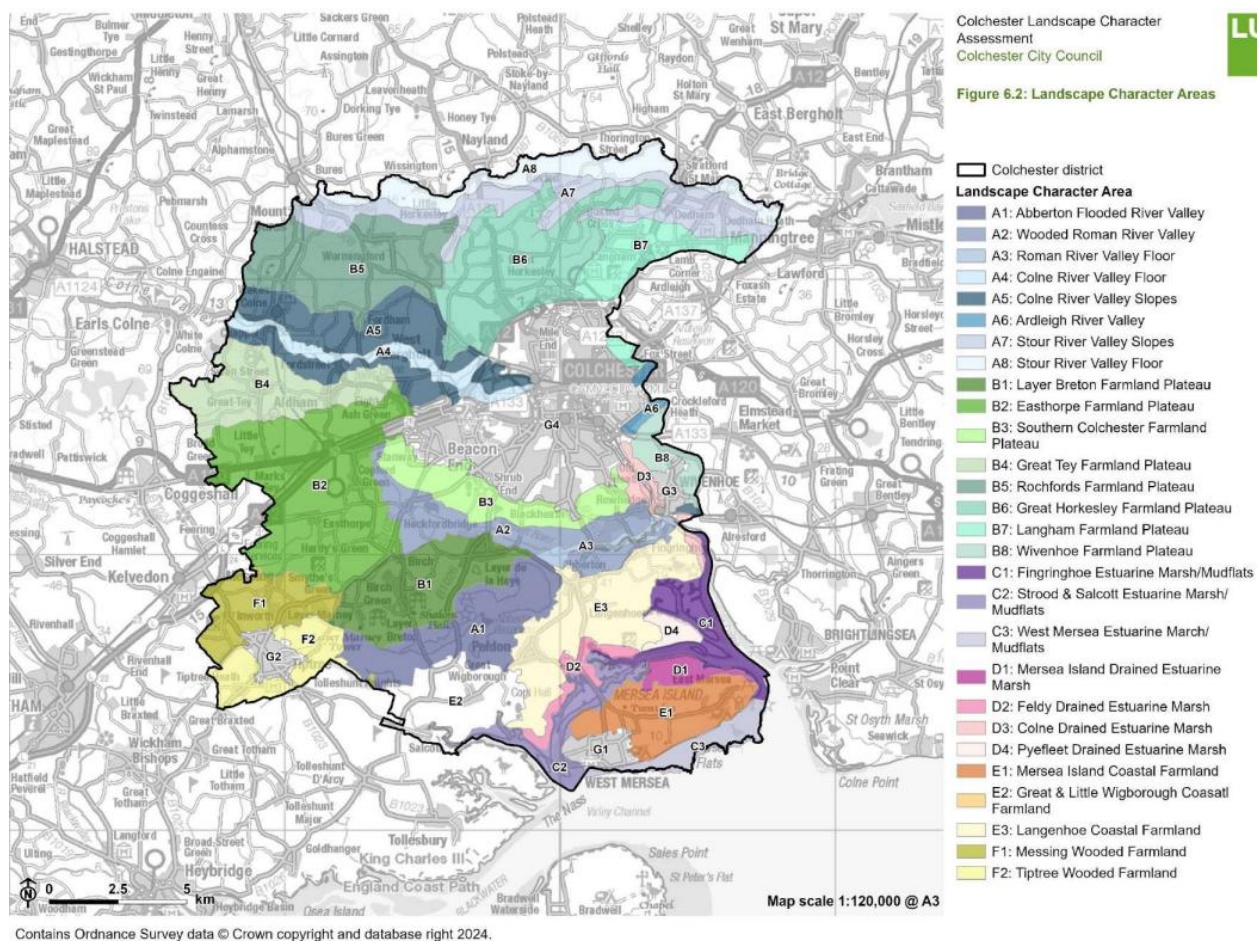
The approach to the LCA followed the method promoted by Natural England through An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (2014) which embeds the principles of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) within it. Chapter 2 of the LCA report describes the methodology.

Chapter 4 of the LCA provides an overview of the main issues and changes (forces for change) affecting the landscape of Colchester district. It considers past, current and

future forces for change that have, and will continue to, shape the landscapes seen today. Chapter 5 presents general guidelines which apply to all landscape character types. Assessing common themes at a broader scale allows local guidance to be applied to the wider landscape framework and applied more successfully to cross-cutting themes such as green infrastructure and biodiversity, whilst still attending to the need to conserve and enhance local distinctiveness.

The landscape classification identifies six generic Landscape Character Types (LCTs) in Colchester district, each representing a distinct identity and common geology, topography, land use and cultural pattern. These are shown on the figure below. Each LCT is subdivided into local Landscape Character Areas (LCAs), which are discrete geographic areas that possess the characteristics described for the landscape type but have a recognisable local identity. The classification identifies 28 LCAs in Colchester, as shown in the second figure below.





The detailed description of different LCAs, that appear in Chapter 7 of the LCA report, highlight the key characteristics (both positive and negative) and valued attributes that are of most significance to the particular landscape concerned. The LCA provides a section for each of the Landscape Character Areas, organised by Landscape Character Type. Each section includes the following information:

- Location and summary
- Key characteristics
- Formative influences – natural, cultural and perceptual
- Landscape evaluation - key sensitivities and values
- Issues and changes
- Landscape strategy
- Guidance – landscape management and development management

Appendix A (Inherent value and sensitivities) of the LCA provides a high-level rating on inherent value for each Landscape Character Area (LCA). The aim of this was to inform the Sustainability Appraisal. It is a high-level appraisal of inherent value; it is not an

assessment of landscape sensitivity to a specific development type / development scenario or other change.

Natural England guidance on Landscape Sensitivity Assessment describes landscape sensitivity as ‘a measure of the resilience, or robustness, of a landscape to withstand specified change... without undue negative effects on the landscape and visual baseline and their value’. The appraisal has considered the key sensitivities and values identified for each LCA and provides a high-level inherent value rating based on the following:

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

Approach to the Local Plan

The issues and general guidelines in chapter 5 of the LCA have been incorporated into local plan policies and used when developing the spatial strategy and selected preferred site allocations, e.g. the guideline: conserve the local distinctiveness of rural hamlets and villages and historic buildings by resisting inappropriate or unsympathetic development. Policies that address the issues and incorporate the general guidelines include policies LC1, LC2, LC3, ST1, GN1, GN2, EN1, EN3, EN4, EN5, EN6 and PC6.

Policy LC1 will help to ensure that the LCA is used in planning decisions, which will help to conserve landscape character and ensure that development is sympathetic to landscape setting. An understanding of character can ensure that development does not undermine whatever is valued or characteristic in a particular landscape and can help guide positive change that conserves, enhances, restores, or creates local character. Policy LC1 helps to guide positive change. The policy states ‘All development should take into account the sensitivity of the particular landscape to accommodate change. Development, or associated land use change or land management, which does not significantly adversely affect the landscape character of an area, will normally be allowed. Development must have regard to the Colchester Landscape Character Assessment 2024 to identify the character areas and features of the affected landscape. Development must take into account the general guidelines and landscape character area specific guidelines.’

Policy LC1 sets out necessary design principles in criteria (a)-(c), with a link to ecological and geological features. The requirement in the policy to take into account the general guidelines and landscape character area specific guidelines allows the policy to be

applied to the wider landscape framework and incorporate cross-cutting themes such as green infrastructure and biodiversity.

The NPPF refers to valued landscapes ‘Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes...’ [paragraph 187 (a)]. The NPPF does not define valued landscapes. The Landscape Institute’s [Landscape value and valued landscapes Technical Guidance Note](#) defines valued landscapes as ‘an area identified as having sufficient landscape qualities to elevate it above other more everyday landscapes’, with the note that ‘everyday landscapes’ will nevertheless have value to people. The Landscape value and valued landscapes Technical Guidance Note states ‘Where possible, the value placed on a landscape should be defined in development plan documents adopted for that area.’

The high-level appraisal of inherent value carried out to inform the Sustainability Appraisal (appendix A) highlights which LCAs are of the highest value – those LCAs with multiple sensitive attributes and values or one or more sensitive attributes and values that are nationally important. The Council considers that those LCAs of higher value are valued landscapes, and this is stated in Policy LC1. This is not a local landscape designation and not a presumption against development, but an identification and clarification about the landscapes that are ‘valued landscapes’ in Colchester district. The policy requires development within valued landscapes to protect and enhance the characteristics that contribute towards its character. This does not mean that sites located within those LCAs of medium and lower value do not have any value. When undertaking a LVIA/LVA, landscape value should be determined through a review of existing assessments, policies, strategies and guidelines and, where appropriate, by new survey and analysis.

Local Wildlife Sites Review

The partial review of Colchester’s Local Wildlife Sites includes the assessment of 26 existing LoWS located within 50 metres of emerging site allocations. In addition, the potential LoWS that were identified as part of the previous LoWS Review (2015) are included. Cymbeline Meadows, a large LoWS owned by the Council, is also included within the review. It is recognised that this is not a full assessment of the LoWS network but rather a targeted review as part of the wider Local Plan evidence base.

The aims of the LoWS Review are to:

- Provide a desk-based review of ecological assets to determine the existing baseline, including statutory and non-statutory designated sites, ancient woodland and priority habitats.

- Align with the emerging Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and consider where there may be opportunities to expand the existing LoWS network, and its role in relation to the climate emergency declared by the Council in 2019.
- Collate a baseline for the sites subject to review in accordance with the published Essex LoWS Selection Criteria. This will inform recommendations for designation of each of the LoWS subject to site survey.
- Identify likely impacts from growth in the Local Plan and consider opportunities, including through management, to create resilience and enhance each LoWS and the wider network.

The first step of the LoWS Review involved the review of the draft Essex LNRS and identification of key aspects in relation to Colchester. Statutory and non-statutory designated nature conservation sites, ancient woodland inventory, ancient and veteran tree data, priority habitat inventory, rivers, streams canals, lakes, ponds and other waterbodies were mapped to establish the baseline.

A systematic review of the baseline information for each LoWS selected for site survey was conducted using the 2015 LoWS review. Additional information, where available, such as survey data and site management plans, was reviewed to supplement baseline information for each LoWS. Site surveys were undertaken in April and May 2025. This timeframe is during the early flowering season to allow for optimal opportunities for floral identification, particularly for rare and notable woodland species. It is recognised that late summer flowering may be less readily identifiable during the survey and as such the survey focused on the assessment against the criteria rather than full data lists and is not considered a constraint to the outputs of this review. This survey was undertaken in accordance with the LoWS Selection Criteria.

The review found that the existing LoWS network was overall in good status. A single site - Rowhedge Pits - was identified to be At Risk due to the presence of a significant amount of human disturbance within the site including litter, fly tipping, fires and biking. Prompt positive remedial action could return this site to a favourable condition and secure its ecological value in the long term. Two further sites – Wivenhoe Park and Stanway Pit – have been recommended for partial de-designation (i.e. boundary change) due to recent development within those respective parts of each site. Donyland Wetlands was identified as an Opportunity site. Donyland Wetlands has potential, through habitat management and creation, to significantly increase the ecological value of the site and to provide resilience to the network.

The review recommended extension to the following eight LoWS:

- Gosbecks's Park
- Hythe Lagoons
- Seven Star Green

- Birch Brook Wood
- Middlewick Ranges
- Pits Wood
- Cymbeline Meadows
- Wivenhoe Park

The LoWS report explains the rationale for the recommendation to extend each of these LoWS and in most cases, the recommendation to extend the LoWS boundary is supported by desk study alone and so further survey work and full assessment against the criteria will be required to justify extension.

Approach to the Local Plan

The Strategic Biodiversity Assessment states that up-to-date information on the condition of habitats on LoWS and other green spaces suitable for biodiversity enhancement will be important in guiding the prioritisation of BNG. The Strategic Biodiversity Assessment and partial LoWS Review will be used as development comes forward, to secure biodiversity gains and prioritise BNG on a site-by-site basis.

Overall, Colchester's LoWS network is good and a new LoWS is designated through the Local Plan (Messing Park). Further survey work will justify extensions to LoWS, which will be made through the Local Plan. The draft Preferred Options Local Plan already included criteria requiring biodiversity mitigation and enhancement and recommended BNG measures. Where appropriate and relevant to planning, additional requirements will be included in Place policies to reflect the recommendations in the LoWS Review. For example, the proposal for the extension to Colchester Water Recycling Centre (WRC) includes a requirement to protect and enhance Hythe Lagoons; a requirement for contributions towards relevant measures in the Pits Wood management plan; tree planting between the two woodland parcels of Eden Wood LoWS to create a larger, more valuable woodland habitat; woodland creation adjacent to Stonefield Strip LoWS; and creation of a woodland edge to Lexden Dyke LoWS.

Local Geological Sites

GeoEssex prepared a report on Local Geological Sites in Colchester and whilst not commissioned by the Council, forms part of the evidence base. GeoEssex is the primary source of information about the geology and physical landscape of Essex and consists of professional and amateur geologists, geological and natural history societies and Natural England.

Geodiversity is an integral part of the natural environment. It is the variety of rocks, fossils, minerals, landforms and soil, and all the natural processes that shape the landscape. The diversity of the geology is what shapes the landscape, influencing soils, and in turn influencing all of our habitats and species. It provides mineral resources

such as sand, gravel, chalk and clay and influences the character of built environments, helping to define our sense of place. It is the link between geology, landscape, nature and people.

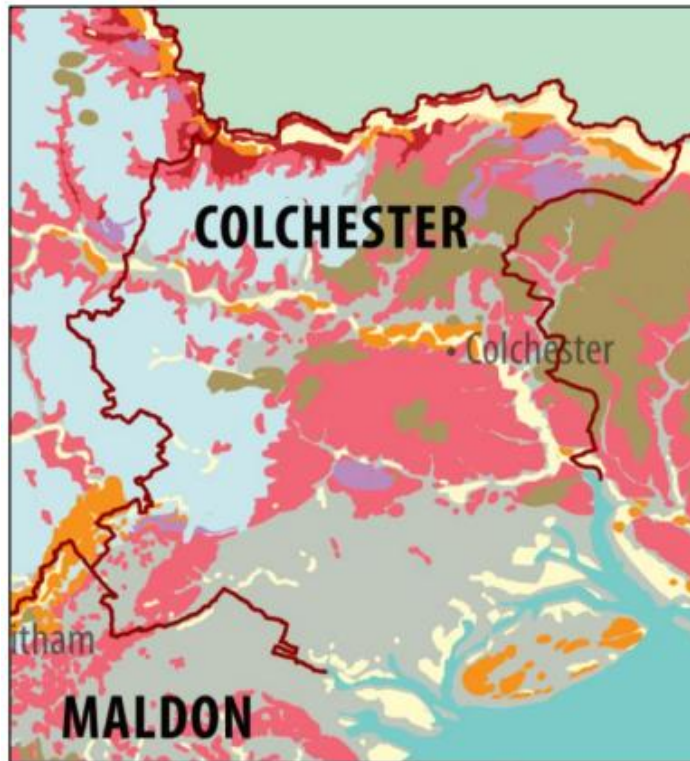
The Colchester LCA explains that the underlying geology creates the backbone of the landscape. The actions of weathering, erosion and deposition alter the landform, consequently influencing hydrological patterns and affecting the nature of soil conditions. This influences the nature of the vegetation and fauna that the landscape can support and affects how humans have used and continue to exploit the landscape for agriculture, settlement and industry.

The Local Geodiversity Action Plan aims to:

- Identify, conserve and enhance the best sites that represent the geological history of an area in a scientific, educational, recreational and cultural setting.
- Promote geological sites and make geoconservation relevant to people.
- Provide a local geodiversity audit (an audit of sites and skills).
- Influence local planning policy.

Essex is an area of predominantly subdued relief with gentle slopes, the result of its underlying geology of soft, relatively young rocks. These generally yield fertile soils. The result is an attractive 'lived in' landscape dominated by arable agriculture, but still retaining forested and heathland areas, particularly where gravels and sands, many of glacial and fluvial origin, have yielded poorer soils.

The geology of the Colchester area is shown below.



Recent alluvium	
Coversand/Brickearth	Ice Age deposits
Post-Anglian river deposits	
Glacial Till	
Kesgrave sand and gravel	
London Clay	Eocene 54 million years ago

The pre-Ice Age (bedrock) geology of the district is London Clay which is seen at the surface in the south of the area. It was laid down on the floor of a subtropical sea 54 million years ago and forms characteristic heavy soils and muddy river foreshores. South of Colchester itself, there is an extensive area of Kesgrave sands and gravels, which were originally laid down by the ancestral river Thames that flowed across the area before the river was diverted to the south by the Anglian ice sheet 450,000 years ago. These gravels were subsequently reworked by glacial meltwater to form layers of glacial outwash deposits. These sands and gravels are the basis of aggregate extraction in the Stanway and Birch areas. The Anglian ice sheet spread its load of till across the western part of the district, providing fertile soils based on this chalky boulder clay. In the north of the district, the fertility of the soil is due to the spread of cover sand from storms around the ice sheet during the last glacial period some 11,000 years ago.

The most important geodiversity sites have been declared as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) which are statutorily protected for their scientific importance. The next tier of geodiversity sites is known as Local Geological Sites (LoGS). These have replaced the earlier 'Regionally Important Geological Sites' (RIGS) terminology in line with government guidance. Local Geological Sites (LoGS) are broadly equivalent to Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) but have a broader remit as they can be designated for their scientific, educational, historical and recreational benefits. Typical Essex LoGS include quarries, pits, walls, boulders, cliffs, springs, and river meanders. Local Wildlife Sites

and Local Geological Sites are both designed to provide a system of locally-valued, non-statutory sites.

Approach to the Local Plan

The site selection process for LoGS is based on clearly defined criteria and includes scientific, educational, historical and aesthetic values. Geological SSSIs include Coopers Beach (Restaurant site) Colne Estuary SSSI, Cudmore Grove Cliffs and Foreshore SSSI, and Marks Tey Brick Pit SSSI. The report includes a list of other sites which are potential LoGS and notes that other sites may be identified in the future, occasioned by housing or other development and restoration following mineral extraction. The list of LoGS is therefore subject to further review.

The three local geological sites (CoG1 Church Lane Gravel Cliff, CoG2 Fingringhoe Wick Nature Reserve, CoG6 Lexden Springs Nature Reserve) are safeguarded on the policies map. Policy LC1 requires proposals to consider ecological and geological features and policy EN2 provides protection.

Colchester Green Network and Waterways Guiding Principles

Guiding Principles for Colchester's Green Network and Waterways were developed through a cross-service group of Officers. Green and blue infrastructure is the term used in planning to describe the green network and waterways. However, green and blue infrastructure is not always understood by the public and so the Local Plan uses the term green network and waterways. To be clear, this encompasses the definition of green infrastructure in the 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 Green Network and Waterways Guiding Principles document summarises the baseline and public engagement that took place; summarises relevant green infrastructure studies and strategies; and sets out a vision, character, and guiding principles specific to Colchester. The following relevant studies and strategies were reviewed:

- Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework

- Essex Green Infrastructure Standards
- Colchester Borough Council Open Space Report
- Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy: Strategy and Action Plan
- Colchester Woodland and Biodiversity Project
- Essex Climate Focus Area
- University of Essex River Colne Project
- Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy

The public 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 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.

The vision, character and guiding principles are set out below.

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 connected¹.

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 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 are 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 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.

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.

Approach to the Local Plan

Policy ST2 includes a requirement for a Green Network and Waterways Plan for all major residential development and incorporation of open spaces into other strategies and plans for the site. Policy ST2 reflects the vision for Colchester's Green Network and Waterways that there are opportunities through the new Local Plan to improve linkages, corridors and connections and follow Lawton's principles of bigger, better, more, and better connected². Colchester's special and diverse green network and waterways will

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.

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.

Policies ST2 and GN1, which requires that 10% of the gross site area is included as open space, will contribute towards meeting the guiding principles. For example, gaps in provision will be addressed to create a coherent green network across the city linking urban and rural areas; and 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. The policies 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).

Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Whilst not an evidence base document as such, the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is relevant to the Local Plan and has been taken into account as part of the plan making process. Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (as amended by the Environment Act 2021) places a duty on all public authorities who operate in England to consider how they can conserve and enhance biodiversity. In complying with this duty all public authorities must 'have regard' to any relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

The Council is a Supporting Authority in the Essex LNRS. The role of LNRS' is to provide a county-wide, practical solution to driving action for nature recovery on the ground. The primary purpose of the Essex LNRS is to identify locations to create or improve habitat most likely to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment. The Council has had regard to the Essex LNRS throughout plan preparation and the Place policies include criteria to deliver habitat where sites are within or close to strategic opportunity areas. Three of the 10 priorities in the LNRS are relevant to planning and a shared priority, these are:

- To create networks of bigger, better, more connected habitats.
- To have green and blue habitats covering 25% of the county by 2030, with an ambition to achieve 30%, compared to 14% coverage today.

To ensure that new development of all kinds, of all scales and in all locations prioritises the incorporation of green spaces in its planning and management strategies and is consistent with the Essex LNRS.

Approach to the Local Plan

Policy ST2 – Environment and the green network and waterways, refers to the Essex LNRS and states that proposals must have regard to delivering its aims and objectives. Policy GN2 – Strategic greenspaces and nature recovery, supports the delivery of the Essex LNRS and encourages delivery of the strategic opportunity areas.

The PPG states ‘LPAs should be aware of those areas mapped and identified in the relevant LNRS and the measures proposed in them and consider how these should be reflected in their local plan. In doing so, they should consider what safeguarding would be appropriate to enable the proposed actions to be delivered, noting the potential to target stronger safeguarding in areas the local planning authority considers to be of greater importance. This will enable local planning authorities to support the best opportunities to create or improve habitat to conserve and enhance biodiversity, including where this may enable development in other location.’ (Paragraph: 046 Reference ID: 8-046-20250219)

Policy GN2 supports the delivery of the strategic opportunities outlined in the LNRS and requires all proposals to have regard to achieve the LNRS principles for restoring and enhancing biodiverse and well-functioning ecological networks and contribute towards creating and restoring habitats in strategic opportunity areas. Relevant Place policies have criteria referring to the LNRS strategic opportunity areas where these opportunity areas are within or close to a site allocation.

The Roman River corridor nature recovery area is specifically referred to in Policy GN2 and shown on the policies map. This area is identified in the draft Essex LNRS as a strategic opportunity area for woodland, grassland, freshwater standing water and freshwater river buffers. A proposal for a multi-parish nature green space / local nature recovery corridor was submitted to the Council by Aldham, Great Tey and Marks Tey Parish Councils as part of the Green Network and Waterways engagement. The corridor includes mature hedgerows and trees, pastureland, floodplain, a reservoir and some arable land. Much of the Roman River is followed by a public right of way. Just to the north of the river is the ‘Gainsborough Line’, which is also a linear habitat, with trees the length of it. Marks Tey Brick Pit SSSI, Local Wildlife Sites and ancient woodland are located within the proposed corridor. Marks Tey’s Neighbourhood Plan includes a ‘green corridor’ which brings in the Roman River.

The policy safeguarding of the Roman River corridor nature recovery area is in accordance with the PPG, which states that LPAs should consider what safeguarding would be appropriate to enable the proposed actions to be delivered, noting the

potential to target stronger safeguarding in areas the LPA considers to be of greater importance. The Council considers the Roman River corridor nature recovery area to be of great importance.

The Strategic Biodiversity Assessment (paragraph 5.8) states in relation to the Roman River Valley strategic biodiversity area 'Although the A12 and mainline railway corridor forms something of an ecological barrier, the ecological value of the Roman River Valley continues beyond the study area to its origin in Great Tey, passing through flood plain grasslands and woodland Priority habitat. That section has been proposed as a nature recovery area by the Parish Councils of Aldham, Marks Tey and Great Tey.'

Local Green Spaces

The NPPF (paragraphs 106 – 108) allows for land to be designated as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans. Policies and decisions for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with national policy for Green Belts. Local Green Spaces should only be designated when a plan is prepared or updated and be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period. The Local Green Space designation should only be used where the green space is:

- a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- b) demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
- c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

Policy GN3 designates two Local Green Spaces: land at Middlewick Ranges and Mount Bures village green and draws attention to the Local Green Spaces designated in some of Colchester's adopted neighbourhood plans.

Mount Bures Parish Council provided justification for the designation of the Mount Bures village green as Local Green Space. The justification explains how the criteria in NPPF paragraph 107 are met.

Land at Middlewick Ranges is in close proximity to the community it serves, being surrounded on three sides by housing; local in character and not an extensive tract of land; and demonstrably special to the local community with a particular local significance because of its recreational and wildlife value.

Justification for both local green spaces is included as appendices to this Topic Paper.

Appendix. Proposed designation of land used as village green as Local Green Space in Mount Bures (justification provided by Mount Bures Parish Council)

Introduction

The draft settlement profile for Mount Bures produced as part of the Colchester City Council Local Plan Review in 2024 highlights the lack of public open space within the Parish. In fact, however, the Parish has been using and maintaining an area of green space within the settlement area as a village green for 40 years or more. Given the long period of use, and its importance to the Parish, the Parish Council would wish to see this land designated as 'Local Green Space' in the Local Plan.

Background

The only significant settlement in the predominantly rural Parish of Mount Bures is the collection of approximately 30 houses grouped around Hall Road and Craig's Lane close to the railway level crossing.

This settlement includes the old parish school, now used by the local community as a village hall, and a small area of previously agricultural land left after the road to the level crossing was re-routed at some time in the 1970s. This area of land has been used by the residents of Mount Bures as a village green for 40 or more years since the road was moved.

The location and extent of the land used as village green is shown in the plan below.



Land used as village green, Mount Bures.



Village green showing course of old road and parish boundary

(Course of old road from conveyance dated 5 January 1967 covering boundary from O.S. map)

The land comprises a section of the old road (long since grassed over) and larger areas that are the remnants of what was agricultural land presumably acquired by the Highway Authority at the time the road was moved. The Parish Council understands that all of the land continues to belong to Essex County Council and that highway rights continue to apply to that part of the land that formed the old road. The majority of the land lies within the Parish of Mount Bures. An element approaching the level crossing lies just within the Parish of Bures Hamlet.

Value and Use by the Local Community

From NPPF:

Local Green Space designation should only be used where the green space is:

- a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;*
- b) demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and*
- c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.*

Proximity

The village green lies predominantly within the settlement boundary adjacent to a number of houses and within 400 metres of all the houses in the settlement.

Beauty



The green provides an attractive centre to the settlement and has been planted with a mixture of ornamental and native trees by local residents. It also offers extensive views over the Bures valley and towards Sudbury. There are two benches on the green for use by residents and passers by. The presence and beauty of the green was a central element of the settlement's success in winning merit awards in the Essex Best Small Village competition in a number of years.



Best Kept Small Village Award 1990s

Local significance

The green appears to have been adopted by the local community soon after the road was moved and the land became available. It is the site of the village sign, the village war memorial - placed there in 1995 - and the old telephone kiosk, now owned by the Parish Council and now used as a book exchange. There is documented evidence of local residents maintaining the green back to 1983 when the cost of maintenance was being borne by the Parish Council. The Parish Council is still paying for major maintenance on the green, including cutting the trees when required.

Over the years the green has been used for a variety of purposes. A yearly remembrance service is held on the green at the war memorial. It is used by residents and passers-by for picnicking, rest and recreation and walking dogs. Local children have used the green and trees as a play area. It has also been used for Morris dancing and other activities often linked to the annual Mount Bures Flower festival centered on the church. The green remains a central and much appreciated feature of the settlement.





Character

The green is associated with a small settlement of housing and is entirely local in character. It covers a relatively small area of around 0.5 hectare which is sufficient for the needs of a small settlement.

Appendix. Proposed designation of Middlewick Ranges as Local Green Space

Land at Middlewick Ranges is in close proximity to the community it serves, being surrounded on three sides by housing; local in character and not an extensive tract of land; and demonstrably special to the local community with a particular local significance because of its recreational and wildlife value.

Middlewick Ranges was allocated for residential development in the adopted Local Plan and the strength of public feeling demonstrates how special the site is to the local community. Part of the site was designated as an Asset of Community Value in July 2025. All of the Issues and Options engagements included comments about the importance of Middlewick Ranges. Many of the comments received to the Green Network and Waterways engagement, both about existing spaces and suggesting new spaces, related to Middlewick Ranges. Middlewick Ranges was put forward by several members of the public as a green use as part of the call for sites. 23 of the 43 respondents to the net zero carbon homes and buildings in Greater Essex engagement said they supported the policy but objected to the allocation of Middlewick Ranges. Before work began on the Local Plan and throughout the plan making process, including at Local Plan Committee meetings, there were comments from councillors, members of the public, Essex Wildlife Trust, Colchester Natural History Society and other nature conservation groups about the quality of the site for wildlife and for recreation. Many interested parties suggested that Middlewick Ranges should be designated as a Country Park/Nature Reserve.

As part of the assessments and considerations to inform the Preferred Options Plan, additional ecological evidence was produced which does not support an allocation of any scale at Middlewick. The extensive evidence, from a wide range of sources, including botanical and invertebrates surveys commissioned by the Council, has been reviewed, and shared with Natural England. Natural England commented 'We note that both reports highlight the presence of considerable ecological interest across the whole area, especially with regards the extent of the acid grassland communities to the north of the site, and the value of these areas for invertebrates. The long-standing value of the remainder of the site had been previously recognised by the Council. These reports further validate that view. The independent assessments correspond to other information in the public domain which highlights the considerable ecological value of the whole site with regard to acid grassland, invertebrates, fungi, breeding birds and other notable species. We are aware that your Authority is in the process of reviewing and updating your Local Plan and will be assessing potential site allocations as part of that process. Further to our advice and based on the suite of evidence now available, Natural England would strongly advise against the inclusion of Middlewick Ranges as a site allocation in the emerging revision of the Colchester Local Plan.'

Middlewick Ranges is included within the Southeast Plateau strategic biodiversity area. The Strategic Biodiversity Assessments states 'This is the largest remaining section of semi-natural habitat on the Colchester plateau, free from large-scale development or aggregate extraction because of its history of military ownership. It comprises a broad wedge of land reaching from the Roman River in the south most of the way to the city centre. The southern section slopes down towards the river, but most of this area is broadly level, bisected by the narrow valley of Birch Brook. This area is closely linked to the Roman River Valley (Area 1), River Colne (Area 2) and Friday Woods (Area 4), with which it shares a nationally important population of Nightingale. The Bourne Valley (Area 10) is just to the north. The habitat is predominantly acid, or acidic neutral, grassland, some of which has been cultivated in the past and much of which is now managed agriculturally. The grasslands within the Co122 Middlewick Ranges are unimproved, and those on the valley slopes at the southern end of the area have a long history of grazing. Middlewick Ranges is known to support diverse grassland habitat with a significant diversity of invertebrates, including many that are nationally rare. The grasslands on either side of Weir Lane sit within the strongest hedgerow network still present within the study area.'