

## Welcome

This study report is one of a series commissioned by Essex County Council and Southend on Sea Borough Council, the Joint Structure Plan Authorities (JSPAs). Whilst every effort has been made to ensure that the report is factually accurate, its contents, opinions, conclusions and recommendations are entirely those of the consultant who carried out the study. The content should not be held to represent the views of the JSPAs. It is therefore being made available solely for information purposes as a background technical document.

This CD contains Adobe Acrobat file of the Essex Landscape Character Assessment. For ease of access the contents of the document are split into 3 separate files. Within those files bookmarks have been established to guide the user within the files and to various sections. To show these, click the Show/Hide Navigation Pane button , and then click the Bookmarks tab.

- **Section One** introduces the Landscape Character Assessment, explains its purpose, and describes the general approach and methodology for the study;
- A summary of the physical and cultural evolution of the landscape and an overview of the historic landscape can be found in **Section Two**, which also reviews the current planning policy framework for guiding change in the plan area;
- For those wishing to understand how this assessment fits into the hierarchy of landscape character assessments in England, **Section Three** explains the relationship of the national classification defined by the Character of England Map with the county-scale classification, and its relationship to more detailed District or other local assessments;
- Descriptions of the Landscape Character Areas and their sensitivity are provided in **Section Four**;
- A summary of the key issues for the planning and management of the landscape in the plan area can be found in **Section Five**.

Other Files reproduce

- the Assessment's cover and frontispiece
- [the Preface Summary and Contents](#).
- and a series of better quality image files of the individual character areas

These documents require Adobe Acrobat Reader installed on the users computer. If you do not have this installed you can go to the Adobe Web site ([www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)) for the downloadable Reader software.

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February 2003



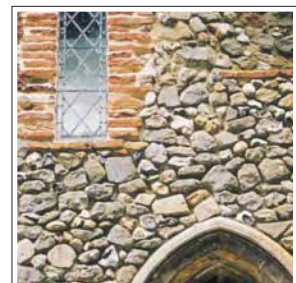
# Essex & Southend-on-Sea Replacement Structure Plan Review

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## ESSEX LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Final Report

2003



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**CHRIS BLANDFORD ASSOCIATES**

*Environment Landscape Planning*



## **PREFACE**

This study report is one of a series commissioned by Essex County Council and Southend on Sea Borough Council, the Joint Structure Plan Authorities (JSPAs). Whilst every effort has been made to ensure that the report is factually accurate, its contents, opinions, conclusions and recommendations are entirely those of the consultant who carried out the study. The content should not be held to represent the views of the JSPAs. It is therefore being made available solely for information purposes as a background technical document.

The Steering Group was chaired by Martin Wakelin (Landscape and Ecology Manager, Essex CC) and included:

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*July 2002*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Essex County Council and Southend-on-Sea Borough Council commissioned Chris Blandford Associates to prepare an assessment of the character of the landscape within the area covered by the Replacement Structure Plan.

Based on the Countryside Agency's guidance, the Landscape Character Assessment focussed on establishing a 'baseline' of the existing character of the Essex landscape. The assessment involved a broad review of the landscape based on written sources, existing local assessments and an extensive survey in the field. The study identified thirty-five 'Landscape Character Areas' - geographical areas with a recognisable pattern of landscape characteristics, both physical and experiential, that combine to create a distinct sense of place (e.g. the *Brentwood Hills*). The emphasis of current landscape policy is on managing change through guiding necessary development to landscapes where the type and degree of change can best be accommodated without significant effects on the intrinsic character. Following the identification of distinctive Landscape Character Areas, an evaluation of the relative sensitivity of these areas to change was undertaken to inform strategic planning decisions.

It is intended that this study will provide a strategic understanding of the character and sensitivity of landscapes throughout the plan area to underpin landscape policies in the Adopted Replacement Structure Plan (April 2001). For example, the assessment identifies the particular character of the landscape to inform Policy NR1 (Landscape Conservation) and Policies NR2 and NR3 (Dedham Vale AONB and Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB). It also provides the framework for the more detailed landscape character assessments of District areas to help inform the preparation of Local Plans encouraged by Policy NR4 (Landscape Character Assessment).

It is expected that this study will be of particular interest to elected members and officers in Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council and the District Councils, and other statutory and non-statutory partnership organisations. Representatives of many of these stakeholders participated in the landscape assessment process through discussion workshops.

## USER'S GUIDE

The assessment can be read as a whole, or alternatively specific sections can be consulted as required. A general outline of the report is provided below to guide the user to the relevant information:

- **Section One** introduces the Landscape Character Assessment, explains its purpose, and describes the general approach and methodology for the study;
- A summary of the physical and cultural evolution of the landscape and an overview of the historic landscape can be found in **Section Two**, which also reviews the current planning policy framework for guiding change in the plan area;
- For those wishing to understand how this assessment fits into the hierarchy of landscape character assessments in England, **Section Three** explains the relationship of the national classification defined by the Character of England Map with the county-scale classification, and its relationship to more detailed District or other local assessments;
- Descriptions of the Landscape Character Areas and their sensitivity are provided in **Section Four**;
- A summary of the key issues for the planning and management of the landscape in the plan area can be found in **Section Five**.

	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>Preface</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>User's Guide</b>	<b>iii</b>

## CONTENTS

<b>1.0</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2</b>	<b>Study Context</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.3</b>	<b>Study Objectives</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.4</b>	<b>Approach and Methodology</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>EVOLUTION OF THE LANDSCAPE</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Physical and Cultural Influences</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Historic Landscape</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2.4</b>	<b>Planning Policy Framework</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>LANDSCAPE CLASSIFICATION</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Regional Character Areas</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Landscape Character Types</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Landscape Character Areas</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>3.5</b>	<b>District Level Assessments</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>LANDSCAPE CHARACTER PROFILES</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Chalk Upland Landscapes (A)</b>	<b>38</b>
	North West Essex Chalk Farmland (A1)	
<b>4.3</b>	<b>Glacial Till Plateau Landscapes (B)</b>	<b>45</b>
	Central Essex Farmlands (B1)	
	North Essex Farmlands (B2)	
	Blackwater and Stour Farmlands (B3)	
	Gosfield Wooded Farmlands (B4)	
<b>4.4</b>	<b>River Valley Landscapes (C)</b>	<b>67</b>
	Cam Valley (C1)	

	Stort Valley (C2)	
	Lee Valley (C3)	
	Roding Valley (C4)	
	Chelmer Valley (C5)	
	Blackwater/Brain/Lower Chelmer Valleys (C6)	
	Colne Valley (C7)	
	Stour Valley (C8)	
<b>4.5</b>	<b>Wooded Hill and Ridge Landscapes (D)</b>	<b>111</b>
	Epping Forest and Ridges (D1)]	
	Brentwood Hills (D2)	
	Danbury Hills (D3)	
	Tiptree Ridge (D4)	
<b>4.6</b>	<b>London Clay Landscapes (E)</b>	<b>134</b>
	South Essex Farmland (E1)	
	South Colchester Farmlands (E2)	
	Tendring Plain (E3)	
	North Colchester Farmlands (E4)	
<b>4.7</b>	<b>Coastal Landscapes (F)</b>	<b>155</b>
	Thames Estuary (F1)	
	Crouch & Roach Farmland (F2)	
	Dengie and Foulness Coast (F3)	
	Blackwater Estuary (F4)	
	North Blackwater/Colne Coastal Farmlands (F5)	
	Mersea Island (F6)	
	Brightlingsea-Clacton-Frinton Coast (F7)	
	Hamford Water (F8)	
	Stour Estuary Slopes (F9)	
	Stour Estuary (F10)	
<b>4.8</b>	<b>Urban Landscapes (G)</b>	<b>206</b>
	Harlow and Environs (G1)	
	Chelmsford and Environs (G2)	
	South Essex Coastal Towns (G3)	
	Colchester and Environs (G4)	
<b>5.0</b>	<b>LANDSCAPE ISSUES IN ESSEX</b>	<b>229</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>229</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Countywide Landscape Issues</b>	<b>229</b>
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Landscape Character Type Issues</b>	<b>236</b>
<b>5.4</b>	<b>Landscape Character Area Issues</b>	<b>237</b>



**APPENDICES**

- A. Record of Stakeholder Involvement**
- B. Summary Matrix of Sensitivity Evaluations**

**FIGURES**

- 1. Study Area & Context**
- 2. Topography & Drainage**
- 3. Geology**
- 4. Soils**
- 5. Planning Context**
- 6. Regional Character Areas**
- 7. Landscape Character Types**
- 8. Landscape Character Areas**
- 9. Tranquil Areas**

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

1.1.1 This study is one of a series informing the review of the Essex and Southend-on-Sea Replacement Structure Plan (RSP), leading to a First Alteration to be prepared in 2002 by Essex County Council & Southend-on-Sea Borough Council (the Joint Structure Plan Authorities – JSPAs). Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) was commissioned in April 2001 by the JSPAs to undertake this study.

1.1.2 The study area is shown on Figure 1. It comprises the area covered by the Replacement Structure Plan, namely the administrative areas of Essex County Council and Southend on Sea Borough Council. For the avoidance of any doubt, this area excludes Thurrock Council.

1.1.3 The study area borders Suffolk and Cambridgeshire to in the north, Hertfordshire to the west and Greater London to the southwest. The Thames estuary marks the boundary with Kent to the south. The coast forms the eastern boundary of the study area, extending from the Thames in the south to the Stour Estuary in the north.

### **1.2 Study Context**

1.2.1 Following the Countryside Agency/English Nature/English Heritage *Character Map of England* produced in 1997, Government policy set out in PPG7 *The Countryside; Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development* has supported the use of landscape character assessment as a tool for understanding the intrinsic character of the countryside, identifying areas where conservation or restoration of existing character should be given high priority and guiding sustainable development.

1.2.2 The *Character Map of England* identifies five broad character areas in which the study area falls: the Greater Thames Estuary, the South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland, the Northern Thames Basin, the East Anglian Chalk and the Suffolk Coast and Heaths. The scale of this national study is useful as a regional planning tool but lacks the detail to feed into county-level strategies.

1.2.3 Character studies of parts of the study area have already been produced at a greater level of detail than the *Character Map of England*. These studies do not, however, necessarily use the same methods, nor are they at the same level of detail. This county-wide study provides the framework for future District and single-purpose studies, while providing a landscape character assessment in greater depth than the Countryside Agency's.



Figure 1 Study Area and Context

### **1.3 Study Objectives**

1.3.1 The purpose of the study is to:

- provide a landscape character assessment input into the structure plan process and to provide baseline information for sustainability appraisal;
- clarify issues for a subsequent landscape strategy for the County and Southend-on-Sea, including its enhancement;
- guide landscape management decisions by forming a basis for guidelines that allow the targeting of resources and actions to areas of greatest need;
- provide information for the promotion of public awareness of landscape character;
- provide a consistent landscape character assessment framework for more detailed assessments at the District level.

1.3.2 The key objectives of the study are to:

- provide a description of the landscape character of Essex and Southend-on-Sea, including its historic character, and cultural and local perceptions;
- identify key characteristics and appraise the condition of each character area, including the factors that influenced landscape change in the past, affect it now and that will affect it in the future;
- identify key issues arising from the landscape character assessment and discuss the options for policy development;
- identify and map the landscape's sensitivity to accommodating change by identifying the vectors of change and their potential impact within each landscape character area.

### **1.4 Approach and Methodology**

1.4.1 The assessment methodology is based on that promoted by the Countryside Agency through their *Interim Landscape Character Assessment Guidance* (1999). It is expected that final guidance will be published by the Agency in 2002. Landscape character assessment usually takes the form of two separate but related stages; *characterisation* and *evaluation*.

### ***Landscape Characterisation***

- 1.4.2 Characterisation involves identifying, classifying and describing areas of distinctive character, i.e. what makes one landscape “different” from another. A landscape can be assessed by disassembling and analysing its component parts. Such an assessment makes it easier to subsequently evaluate what is important in a landscape, why it is important and how best to accommodate change and identify enhancement needs for the future.
- 1.4.3 The landscape includes visible, physical components (e.g. landform, vegetation, land use, settlement), visible, spatial components (e.g. scale, pattern, texture) and non visible components (e.g. sound and cultural associations). Whilst these do not lend themselves to accurate measurement, they can be easily described to give descriptions that are both relatively objective and are meaningful, avoiding value judgements.
- 1.4.4 From an understanding of the component parts of the landscape, it is possible to identify how particular combinations of these interact to create distinctive character. This then allows the classification of the landscape into areas that share common combinations of components (Landscape Character Types), and single, unique areas which are discrete geographical areas of a landscape type (Landscape Character Areas).

### ***Landscape Evaluation***

- 1.4.5 *Evaluation* of the landscape is associated with making informed judgements about the landscape. For the purposes of this study, this is related to the evaluation of the ‘sensitivity’ of the landscape to change.

### ***Assessment Methodology***

- 1.4.6 The landscape assessment involved the following elements: desk study, field survey, stakeholder involvement, characterisation and evaluation. In practice, the desk and field survey elements are undertaken iteratively to allow each activity to inform the other.

#### ***Desk Study***

- 1.4.7 The desk study took into account existing relevant background reports, data and mapped information. In defining draft Landscape Character Areas, consideration was given to:

- *Physiography*: geology, soils, topography, flora, fauna and climate;
- *Human activity*: land use, settlement patterns, field enclosure type and patterns, landscape history, archaeology, the built heritage, industrial features;

More detailed existing and emerging classifications and descriptions of the landscape within specific District and other specific areas also informed the preliminary classification.

- 1.4.8 A series of map overlays were prepared to assist in defining areas of common character. The desk study resulted in a draft map of *Landscape Character Types* and *Landscape Character Areas* assessed at a scale of 1:50,000, and produced in a digital format fully compatible with GIS.

#### *Field Survey*

- 1.4.9 Field surveys were undertaken to test, validate and refine the preliminary/draft Landscape Character Areas identified through the initial desk studies. This involved two assessors systematically assessing each draft Landscape Character Area in the field from publicly accessible locations in sufficient detail for the purposes of the County-level assessment. In some areas, it was necessary to observe the landscape from a number of ‘checkpoints’ prior to the completion of a field survey sheet in order to adequately assess the draft Landscape Character Area. Further desk studies were undertaken as required during this period to inform the ongoing field surveys. As the field survey work was conducted during July and August, the influence of seasonal and meteorological variations on the character of the landscape was limited to references in existing literature.
- 1.4.10 The field survey information was systematically recorded on structured field survey sheets (included as Appendix B – see separately bound report). The survey sheets were structured to include:
- description of overall character
  - checklist of dominant landscape elements
  - checklist of characteristic features (landform, land use, field boundaries, historic features, vegetation cover)
  - checklist of aesthetic/perceptual factors (views, scale, enclosure, variety, movement, unity)
  - description of land use and settlement
  - description of tree cover and field pattern
  - description of recreation and amenity
  - description of sensitivity to change/management issues.
- 1.4.11 In addition to the survey form, the field surveyors also recorded their observations on a map to show refinements to draft Character Areas, identify key visual relationships within and between areas, and the location of survey points.

### *Stakeholder Involvement*

1.4.12 In accordance with current guidance from the Countryside Agency, stakeholders have been encouraged to become involved in the Landscape Character Assessment. It is expected that this study will be of interest to elected members and officers in Essex County Council and Southend-on-Sea Borough Council (the JSPAs), the District Councils, and other partnership organisations. Representatives of many of these stakeholders participated in the landscape assessment process through commenting on draft documentation and participation in two workshops. The purpose of the initial workshop held in June 2001 was to:

- identify key sources of relevant information for informing the study
- develop a common understanding of variations in the character of the landscape
- discuss and comment on the draft classification of landscape divisions/character areas
- identify the key agents of landscape change that are (or are likely to) erode the character, quality and distinctiveness of different landscape units.

1.4.13 A second stakeholder workshop was held to discuss the final draft report. Comments made informed the final report. Further details about the stakeholder involvement can be found in Appendix A. Promotional activities are planned in the future by the JSPAs to raise public awareness of the Landscape Character Assessment.

### *Characterisation*

1.4.14 The desk top analysis, field work and input from the stakeholder workshop were reviewed and combined to produce a final classification and description of the landscape. This is presented in Sections 3.0 and 4.0.

### *Evaluating Sensitivity of Landscape*

1.4.15 Following the characterisation stage, a general assessment of the relative sensitivity of the character areas to the impacts of development/change was carried out. Landscape sensitivity is the degree to which a particular landscape character area can accommodate change without adverse consequences. Sensitivity is not absolute but is likely to vary according to the type/scale of change being considered. The sensitivity analysis was carried out principally to guide and facilitate subsequent work at County level. It is intended to inform:

- the identification of spatial options at a strategic level
- sustainability analysis of the structure plan proposals
- development of strategic design guidelines and initiatives

It also highlights issues that could be considered in greater detail at a local level or in relation to large scale development control issues.

1.4.16 An approach to defining sensitivity levels based upon good practice, adapted to the circumstances of Essex, is set out below. These were then applied in a sensitivity matrix to provide an indication of the sensitivity of each character area to different types/scales of

LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY LEVEL	SENSITIVITY CRITERIA	ABILITY OF THE LANDSCAPE TO ABSORB IMPACTS OF DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER CHANGE
HIGH	<p>The landscape is very sensitive to this type/scale of development/change due to the potential for very adverse impacts on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Distinctive physical and cultural components or key characteristics</li> <li>● Strength of character/condition of the landscape.</li> <li>● AONB Landscape</li> <li>● Landscape of high intervisibility/visual exposure</li> <li>● Tranquil area</li> </ul> <p>with very limited opportunities for mitigation.</p>	<p>Unlikely to be capable of being absorbed. Presumption against development unless over-riding need.</p>
MODERATE	<p>The landscape is sensitive to this type/scale of development/change due to the potential for some adverse impacts on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Distinctive physical and cultural components, or key characteristics</li> <li>● Strength of character/condition of the landscape</li> <li>● Landscape of moderate intervisibility/visual exposure.</li> <li>● Area of fragmented tranquillity</li> </ul> <p>but there may be more opportunities to overcome these through appropriate siting, design and other mitigation measures.</p>	<p>May be capable of being absorbed. Developments to be considered on their individual merits.</p>
LOW	<p>The landscape is less sensitive to this type and scale of development/change due to the potential for only slight, or no damaging impacts on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Distinctive physical and cultural components or key characteristics</li> <li>● Strength of character/condition of the landscape</li> <li>● Landscape of low intervisibility/visual exposure</li> <li>● Area with an absence of tranquillity</li> </ul> <p>and there are likely to be considerable opportunities for mitigation and/or landscape enhancement.</p>	<p>Likely to be capable in principle of being absorbed.</p>



development/change. In order to make it useful it is necessary to identify, in broad terms, different categories of development pressure and land use change. To analyse sensitivity without such differentiation would have been less meaningful. The levels of sensitivity identified, rather than defining policy for a particular character area, are generalised statements that provide a pointer to issues that would need to be addressed in any development control or landscape planning context in that area. It is expected that further analysis would need to be carried out at a district level, in relation to a specific application with significant landscape or visual effects, or where there are cumulative impacts of several developments. The summary matrix in Appendix B allows the relative sensitivities of the character areas to different types of development/change to be compared.

1.4.17 The following types/scales of development/change were considered:

- Major urban extensions (>5ha) and new settlements
- Small urban extensions (<5 ha)
- Major transportation developments/improvements
- Commercial/warehouse estate/port development
- Developments with individual large/bulky buildings (e.g. large farm buildings, industrial plant)
- Large scale 'open uses' (e.g. golf courses, water bodies, major agricultural change, forestry, marinas, caravan parks)
- Mineral extraction/waste disposal
- Incremental small scale developments (e.g. minor highway improvements, small landform changes, farmstead intensification)
- Utilities development, i.e. masts, pylons
- Decline in traditional countryside management.

## **2.0 EVOLUTION OF THE LANDSCAPE**

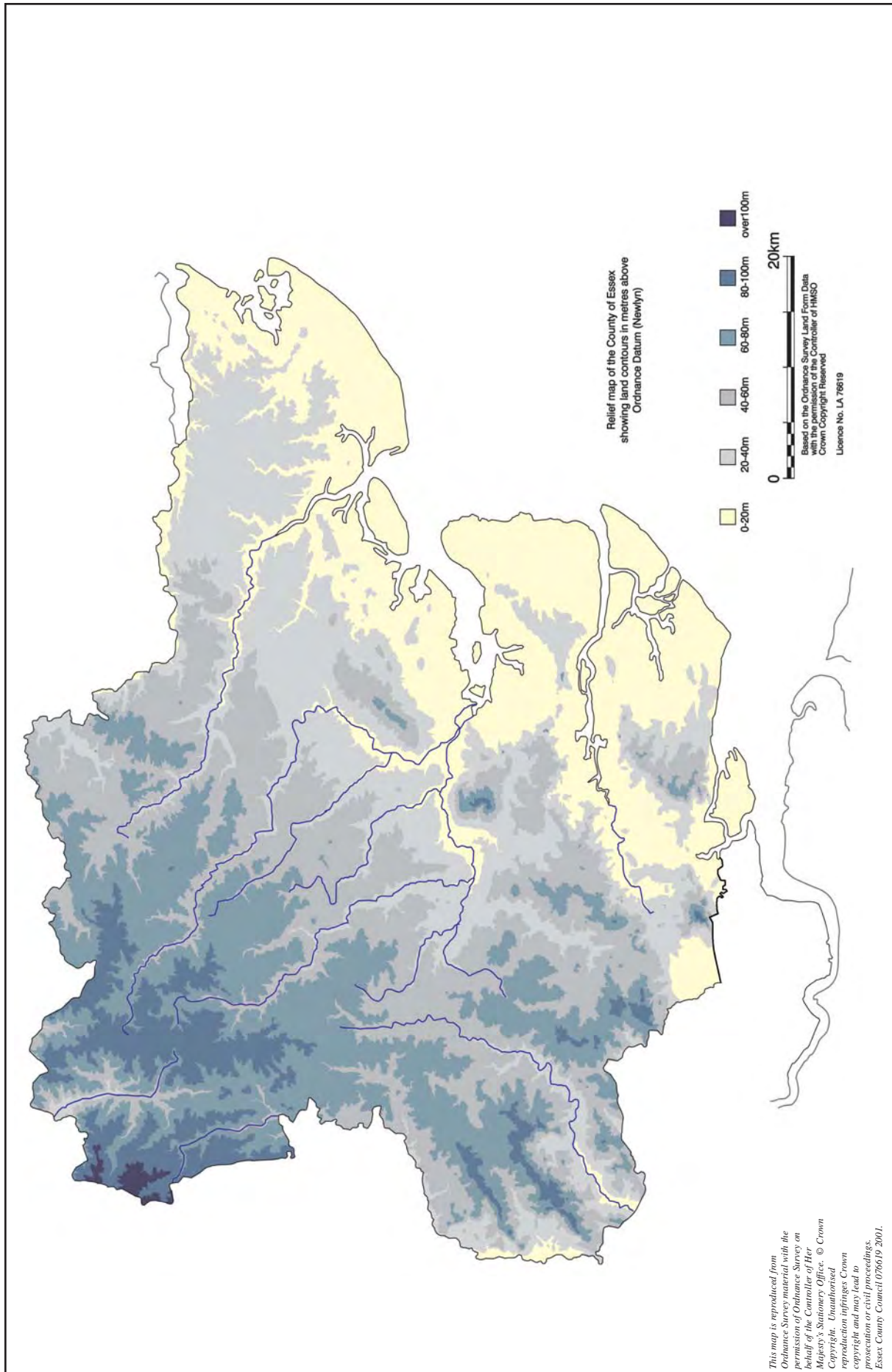
### **2.1 Introduction**

- 2.1.1 Since the end of the last ice-age over 10,000 years ago, the processes and patterns of landform, land cover and land use change have combined to create the contemporary appearance of the Essex landscape. Successive phases of human activity and settlement have influenced the development and character of the landscape in different ways. In particular, changes in the landscape since the war reflect the demands placed by society on land for agriculture and forestry, for housing, transport and minerals, and increasingly for recreation and leisure.
- 2.1.2 This section provides a summary of the physical and cultural influences on the evolution of the Essex landscape. A list of key references suitable for further reading can be found in the bibliography. Of particular relevance is *The Essex Landscape - A Study of its Form and History* (Hunter, 1999).
- 2.1.3 As this study has not attempted to pre-empt the results of the forthcoming *Essex Historic Landscape Characterisation Study*, only a brief overview of the historic landscape is provided in this section. The Historic Landscape Characterisation Study will provide detailed documentation of the influence that patterns of historical land use have had on the present character and development of the entire study area. It is expected that the study will be completed in late 2001/early 2002.
- 2.1.4 This section also reviews the current planning policy framework for landscape protection, conservation and enhancement within the plan area.

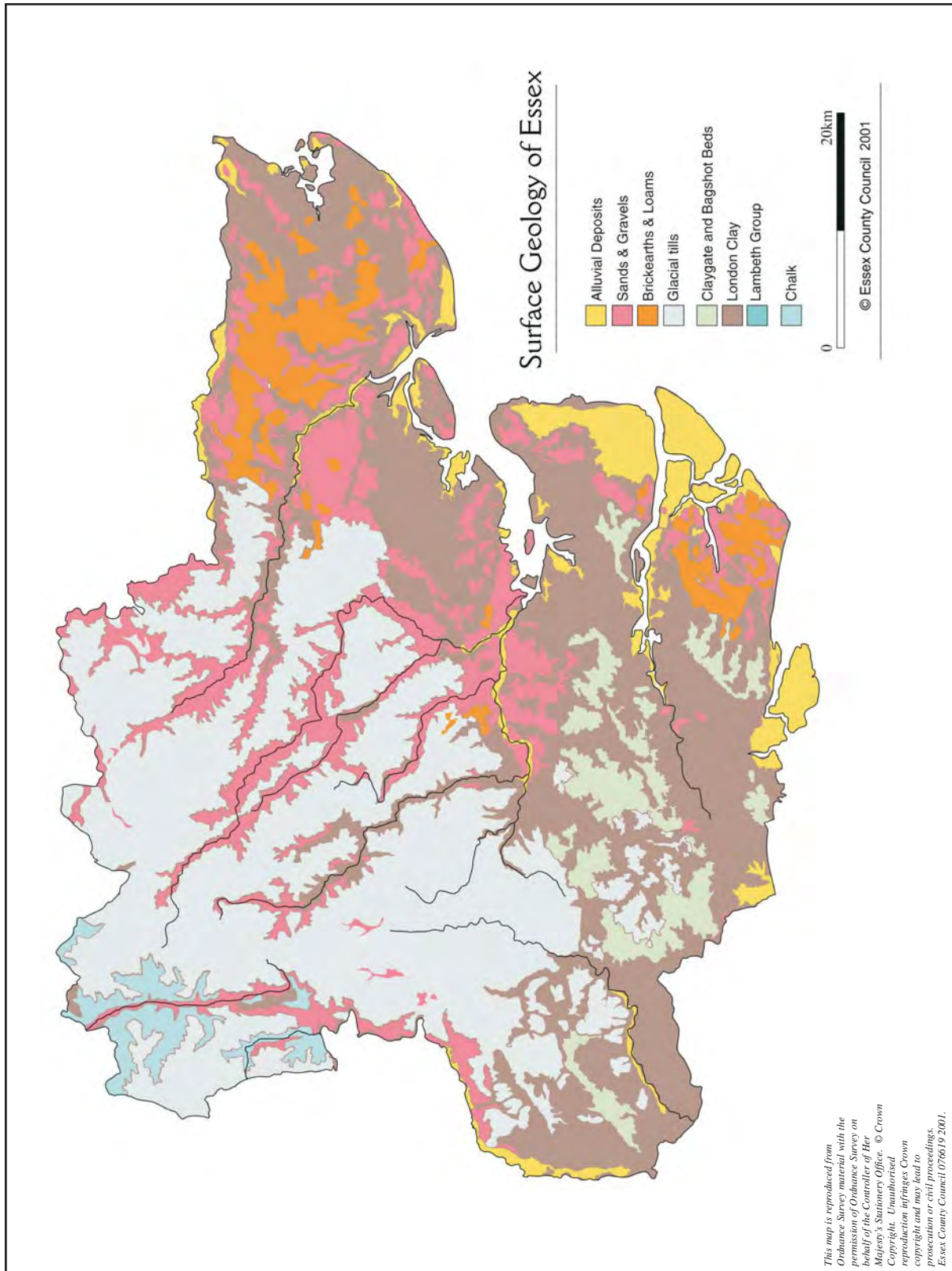
### **2.2 Physical and Cultural Influences**

#### ***Topography and Drainage***

- 2.2.1 Essex is a county of low hills and undulating valleys, with extensive areas of low flat land near to the coast (see Figure 2). The altitude rises very gently from the coast towards the north-west, reaching about 30m around Chelmsford and just over 130m to the west of Saffron Walden. This gentle rise is interrupted by a series of low hills and ridges, the highest of which is Danbury Hill at 116m. The county has a large number of rivers, largely as a consequence of the proportion of clay soils. They are an important component of the county's topography, character and identity. The river corridors are frequently of landscape, nature conservation and heritage value, as well as providing public access opportunities and the focus of other recreational activities. The valleys to the north are steeper and more deeply cut.



**Figure 2 Topography and Drainage**



**Figure 3 Geology**

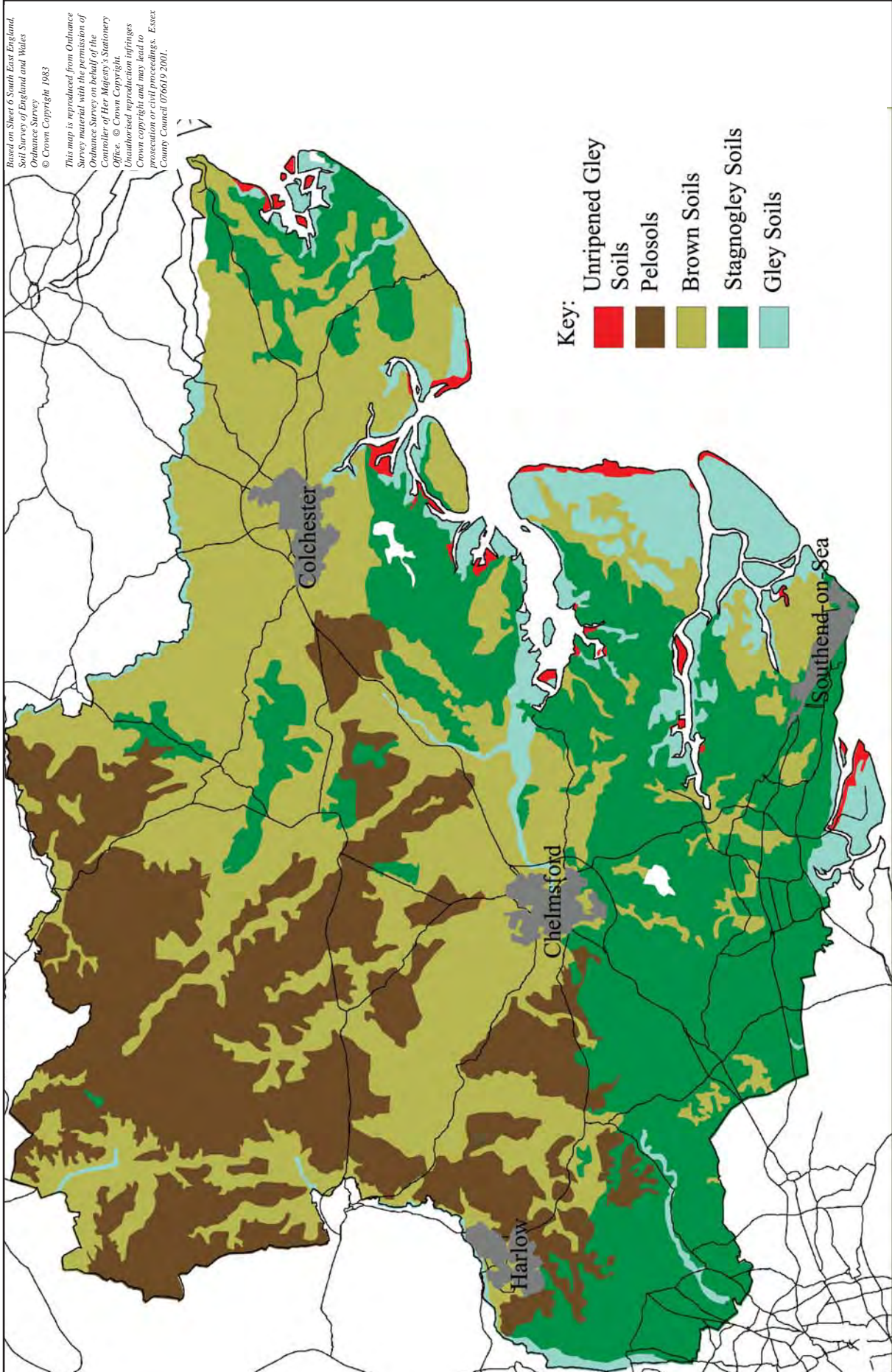


Figure 4 Soils

- 2.2.8 In the Anglian period, ice from the north covered Essex to a line running from Brentwood to Billericay to Colchester. Upon melting the ice left the vast sheet of Boulder Clay, which contains clay, flints and chalk, over central and northern Essex. The climatic fluctuations that followed led to periods of vegetation establishment, first woodland and then heathland, interrupted by colder periods with sea level falling. The ground has been disturbed by solifluction and windblown silts accumulated to form the brickearths and loam deposits.
- 2.2.9 Following the periods of glacial advance and retreat there have been continuous periods of sea level rising, with the rate fluctuating. Extensive deposits of sand and gravel are known to have come from former courses of the Rivers Thames and Medway. There are eight terraces of these sand and gravel deposits known as the Kesgrave Formations. Three further diversions of these rivers left the high-level East Essex Gravels on the Dengie peninsula, the low-level East Essex Gravels at Rochford and Shoeburyness and the lower Thames Terraces at Orsett Heath, Little Thurrock and Mucking. It is thought that sea levels stabilised in the medieval period.
- 2.2.10 In general, it is the nature and the quality of the Essex soils that has contributed to the success of the county in agricultural terms. Over half of the agricultural land in Essex is of 'best and most versatile' quality (Grade 1, 2 or 3A).
- 2.2.11 On the coastal marshes much of the land has been reclaimed. The soils are heavy gleys that undergo periodic waterlogging from fluctuations in the ground water table. Good arable yields have resulted from under-draining, levelling and liming. Grazing has been important on these soils, although problems can arise when the soils are wet in winter.
- 2.2.12 Inland from the marshes the soils that occur on the river terraces make up some of the best agricultural land in Essex. They are easy to work and naturally free draining brown soils, especially where Brickearth is present.
- 2.2.13 Soils on the London Clay are seasonally water-logged slowly permeable heavy clay soils. There are some lighter soils on foot slopes. The soils shrink and crack on drying, swelling on rewetting. When they are wet they are very sticky and plastic. They are not easy soils to cultivate; drainage is needed to grow arable crops.
- 2.2.14 On the hills that rise above the London Clay the capping of the fine sands of the Bagshot Beds by the pebbly clay drifts have led to soils that are easily cultivated, but they are acidic with low natural fertility. The soils on the boulder clay plateau to the north range from wet acidic clay soils to dry neutral/alkaline soils. All of these require under-draining for modern arable farming, making valuable corn land. The valley soils are complex but tend to be better

drained and were popular with early settlers. Those soils that fall on the chalk in the north west of the county are alkaline and free draining and cereal farming is widespread.

### ***Land Use, Farming Pattern and Vegetation***

- 2.2.15 Essex is one of the largest and most densely populated counties in England. In spite of this 75% of the county is farmed and agriculture is the major land use in rural areas. This means that farming practices have considerable influence on landscape character and natural habitats. With over half of the agricultural land being on high-grade soils there is an emphasis on cereal production in favour of livestock farming. Winter wheat is the main crop, but in recent years oil seeds and pulses have grown in importance. Dairy farming has declined to 80 herds with beef and other livestock also in the decline. Sheep farming has however increased by 25%. The change toward arable farming accelerated during the 1950's and 1960's.
- 2.2.16 The pattern of the Essex landscape is complex and varied. The changes can be subtle, influenced by the changes in soil or geological structure as much as by the land use. There is a rich legacy of ancient woodlands, hedgerows, tracks and archaeological sites, due to early enclosure in Essex. The only substantial area where this was not the case is in the chalk lands to the north west of the county, with its large fields and intermittent hedgerows.
- 2.2.17 There are rich corn growing areas on the boulder clays, with intersecting river valleys, woodlands and hedgerows. Ancient royal forests are still dominant at Epping, Hatfield and Writtle. The hills of Danbury and Little Baddow Ridge are well wooded.
- 2.2.18 There are also degraded areas of the county where excessive removal of trees, woodlands and hedgerows has opened the landscape wide. Intrusive man-made features, such as overhead power lines, industrial complexes and oil refineries are a major element in the landscapes of South Essex and the Lee Valley and in between Brightlingsea and Clacton.
- 2.2.19 There have been several initiatives aimed at encouraging farmers and landowners to plant up small woodlands and tree belts, through grant aid. This is particularly the case in the Thames Chase Community Forest area where the aim is to provide extensive opportunities for forestry and farming activities, outdoor recreation, education, new habitats for wildlife and a visually interesting landscape. So far 115ha of new woodland, 245ha access land, 214ha non woodland habitats have already been created, as well as 14km of new hedgerows.

2.2.2 Most Essex rivers flow towards either the Thames or the North Sea. Only the Cam flows northward. The rivers Stour in the north, Lea and Stort in the west and the Thames to the south, form the county boundary. Principal rivers within the county are the Colne, Blackwater, Chelmer, Crouch, Mardyke and Roding. The Colne, Blackwater, Chelmer and tributaries rise in the plateau to the north and flow south where their estuaries are extensive and contribute to the deeply indented coastline. The Crouch flows east across the undulating lowland to the south of the plateau and when joined by the Roach forms an estuary complex that includes the islands of Wallasea, Potton and Foulness. The Mardyke and Roding flow southwards into the River Thames estuary.

2.2.3 The coastline is mainly marshland with short stretches of cliff between the Colne and Stour estuaries and at Southend. Shingle spits and shellbanks are also a feature of the estuaries.

### *Geology and Soils*

2.2.4 The underlying geology of the Essex landscape has been dominated by the events in the Quaternary period, primarily by the Pleistocene Ice Age, but also by the climatic oscillations that have occurred before and since. These have generated deposits that have a strong influence on the landscape and overly much of the area. The geology and soils in the study area are shown on Figures 3 and 4 respectively.

2.2.5 The solid geology of Essex forms part of the eastern sector of the London Basin chalk syncline. Chalk outcrops in the north west of the county, near Saffron Walden. Tertiary deposits such as the Thanet Sands, Woolwich and Reading Beds and the Blackheath Beds (known as the Lambeth Group) are buried by Quaternary deposits. London Clay is the thickest Tertiary deposit, with an extensive outcrop across the centre of the county running east west, capped locally by the loamy Claygate and sandy Bagshot Beds. This is a stiff, dark, bluish-grey clay that weathers, on exposure, to brown and shrinks and cracks in dry weather.

2.2.6 Throughout the Quaternary Essex has been subjected to periodic ice advances and retreats as the climate has cooled and warmed. This has led to a complex mix of glacial, proglacial and periglacial deposits overlying each other.

2.2.7 Extensive sands and gravels were deposited in the Pleistocene ice age. Succeeding deposits have overlaid these, but exposures are common on the valley sides and on the Tendring plateau. Soil forming processes in the succeeding interglacial left the upper part of the sands and gravels reddened and clay enriched. Periglacial structures commonly disturb the layers.



### *Settlements, Buildings and Communications*

- 2.2.20 The county is primarily characterised by a pattern of dispersed settlement, primarily of medieval origin, with only limited nucleation and urbanisation. The principal towns tend to have identifiable historic cores and in the case of Colchester, and other smaller settlements, these can be traced back to at least the Roman Period. The study area contains many historic buildings and this is reflected in the 14,000 plus listed structures currently identified within the area.
- 2.2.21 Up until the 19th century, the principal building material in Essex was timber, and timber frame buildings are of great importance in the development of the county's buildings. Timber frames were typically infilled with wattle and daub, and later often coated with limewash plaster. In the south east weatherboarding was more common. The predominant building material today is brick, and London Clay still provides a source of red bricks and tiles. Other important historic building materials include clay lump, puddingstone in coastal areas and clunch and flint from the chalk in the north west of Essex.
- 2.2.22 The proximity of Essex to London and to the coast, with the natural harbours of Harwich and Ipswich bringing trade and goods to the region has meant that for centuries the communications across the county have been of great importance. The road that runs from London to Ipswich, via Chelmsford and Colchester represents a travel route that dates at least to the roman period and may be earlier. The line of the road has altered, but the communication corridor remains an important one. Other major connections with London include those to Southend and to Cambridge. A number of trunk roads in Essex across the county. The A12 runs past Brentwood, Chelmsford and Colchester and out of the county through Dedham Vale. The A120 runs across the northern centre of the county from Stansted Airport through Colchester to Harwich. The motorways of the M25 and the influence of the M11 cut a band through the western edge. An extensive network of railway lines also crosses the county. This busy network of transport corridors stands in contrast to the more tranquil character of the Essex countryside.

## **2.3 Historic Landscape**

- 2.3.1 The study area has an extremely rich historic environment, which has revealed evidence for human occupation stretching back nearly 250,000 years. This depth and continuity of occupation has led to the development of a diverse landscape that contains elements of all major periods of British prehistory and history.

- 2.3.2 The study area contains a diverse and substantial resource of archaeological deposits ranging from 250,000 year old stone and wood tools from Clacton, through extensive prehistoric and roman remains, on to Saxon and Norman settlement and military sites, through numerous deserted medieval and later settlements to the industrial remains from the last 200 years. This diversity reflects the full range of human occupation in the British Isles and is realised in both sub-surface and above ground remains.
- 2.3.3 Particularly notable elements include the vast cropmark landscapes of the sand and gravel soils in places such as the Stour Valley and Tendring plain; the Roman city of Colchester with its early '*colonia*' and associated pre-roman Iron Age settlement is of international significance, whilst the coastal regions contain buried archaeological evidence relating to human occupation stretching back prior to the end of the last glaciation. Other notable features include the 900 or so medieval moated sites across the Glacial Till aream (chalky boulder clay), the extensive remains of salt making and wildfowl management features in the coastal zone and the numerous roman villa sites found throughout the study area.
- 2.3.4 The landscape of Essex is best described, for the most part, as 'ancient countryside' characterised by small irregular fields interspersed with commons, woods and a generally dispersed settlement pattern. This a complete contrast to the medieval open field landscapes of the Midlands with their nucleated and centralised village settlement systems. This ancient countryside has been well studied and documented by authors such as Hunter (2001) and Rackham (1976).
- 2.3.5 Essex contains areas of ancient managed woodland such as Hatfield Forest and Epping Forest. It also contains a diverse range of designed landscapes such as parks and gardens from a range of periods, including the exceptional Audley End. Another, often neglected, element of the historic landscape is the marshland grazing landscapes of the coastal zone. These have severely reduced in extent and it has been estimated that since the 1930's almost 60 per cent of marshes have been lost in Greater London, the Thames Estuary and adjacent coastal areas of Kent and Essex.
- 2.3.6 Despite the effects of agricultural intensification and urban development over the last 50 years, it is the overall complexity and intricate nature of the ancient countryside that gives the Essex landscape its distinctive character.
- 2.3.7 Particularly noticeable built elements of the historic landscape within the study area include dispersed rural post-medieval and medieval farmsteads, historic centres of many towns and villages, coastal heritage features including harbours and boatyards, industrial sites such as Waltham Gunpowder Works, and the Second World War defence networks, such as the General Headquarters Defensive line.

## **2.4 Planning Policy Framework**

2.4.1 This section provides an overview of the planning policy framework relevant to the study area and the Landscape Character Assessment. Relevant policy designations within the study area are shown on Figure 5.

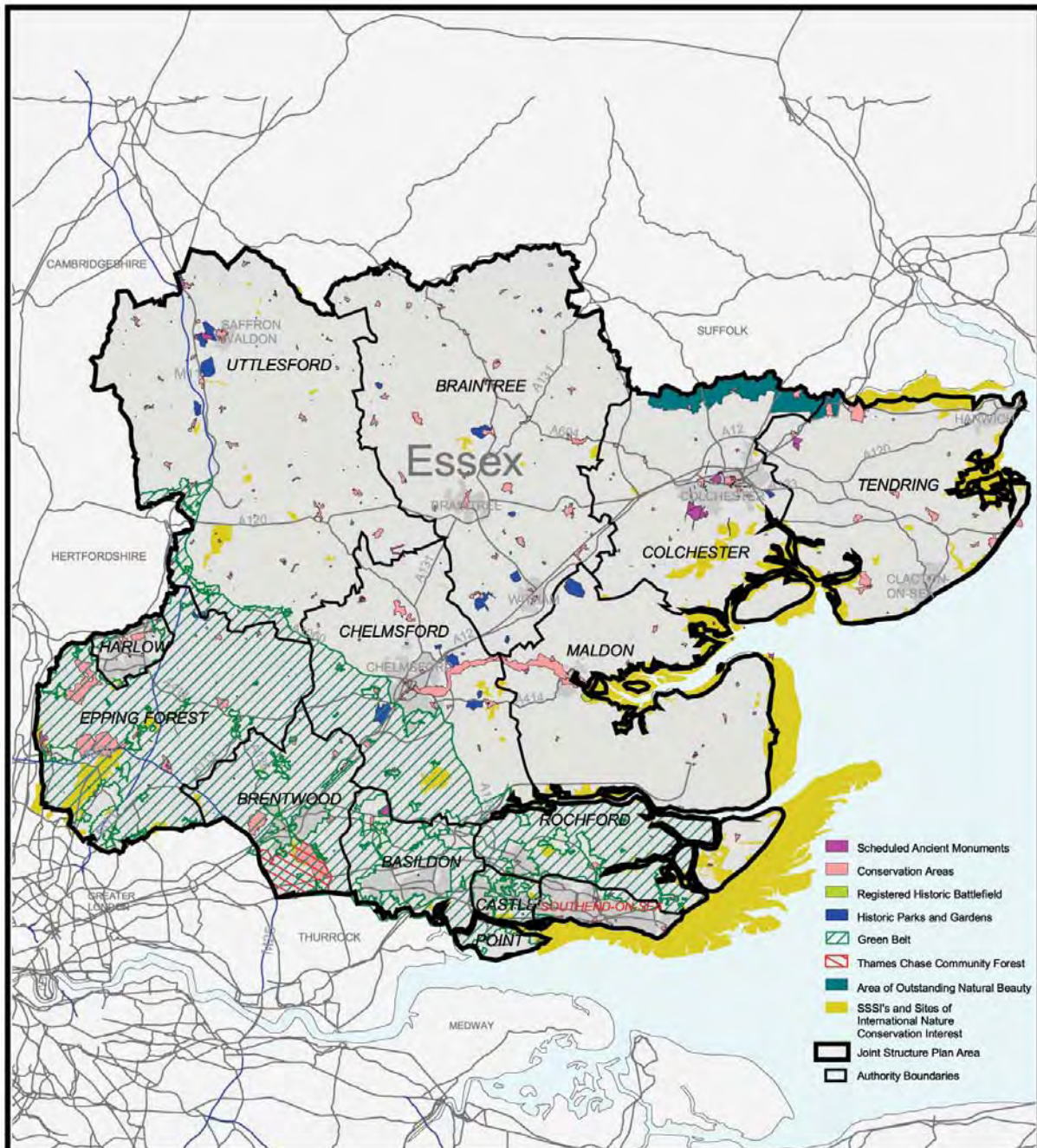
### ***Landscape Planning Context***

2.4.2 Attractive landscape settings, where a strong sense of place and local distinctiveness is maintained and enhanced, are essential to economic and social development and prosperity. Balancing the demand for land for housing, economic activity, transport infrastructure and recreation with the long term sustainable maintenance of natural resources, including landscape character, is a key role of the planning system.

2.4.3 The Government is committed to the protection of the countryside and sees it as a vital part of our environmental heritage, to be passed down to future generations. This is reflected in the placement of the concept of sustainable development firmly at the heart of the UK approach to planning. The foundations of Britain's approach to sustainable development was set out in 'This Common Inheritance' in 1990, and developed into a clearly defined policy framework in 'Sustainable Development - The UK Strategy' (1994). Practical guidance as to how to implement sustainable development through the planning system is given in 'Planning for Sustainable Development - Towards Better Practice', DETR, 1998.

2.4.4 In 'special areas' of the countryside with valued features of conservation interest, new development is often constrained by land use planning policies within development plans. Conservation and development may be compatible where the potential for conflict can be reduced through policies that encourage sensitive development (in terms of location, scale and design), minimising landscape impacts whilst also maximising countryside benefits. In both urban fringe and rural areas, new development can provide the opportunity to regenerate and enhance severely degraded landscapes through land rehabilitation and the creation of new or improved landscapes and habitats, with access arrangements for public enjoyment where appropriate.

2.4.5 Designating 'special areas' in development plans in the absence of positive policies for managing change in the wider countryside is increasingly regarded as an unsatisfactory way in which to meet sustainability aims and objectives (see PPG7 below). Local landscape designations may not necessarily ensure the enhancement or restoration of landscape character, and can often lead to the devaluation of other non-designated landscapes elsewhere in the plan area. Increasingly, the challenge is to develop policies that recognise and respect



Produced by Chris Blandford Associates

Data Source:  
 Joint Structure Plan Area, Authority Boundaries, Major Towns,  
 and Transport Network based on Ordnance Survey Mapping.

AONB provided by Countryside Commission  
 Nature Conservation designations provided by English Nature  
 Registered Historic Parks & Gardens, Battlefields, Conservation Areas,  
 and Scheduled Ancient Monuments provided by Essex County Council  
 and Southend Borough District.

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Figure 5 Planning Context

the distinctive character of *all* landscapes, and not just those considered to be ‘special’.

***PPG 7 The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development***

- 2.4.6 Planning Policy Guidance Notes set out the Government’s policies on planning issues and the operation of the planning system. PPG7, *The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development* (February 1997; as amended March 2001) gives guidance on how the Government’s objectives for rural areas should be reflected in development plans and planning decisions. It aims to ensure both rural prosperity, and protection and enhancement of the countryside. PPG7 places emphasis upon safeguarding the countryside for its own sake, and as a national asset, whilst acknowledging that different areas exhibit different characteristics and abilities to accommodate essential change.
- 2.4.7 PPG7 requires a fundamental reassessment of local countryside designations (such as *Special Landscape Areas*). The guidance indicates that designations should only be maintained or extended where there are good reasons to believe that normal planning policies cannot provide the necessary protection. In reviewing development plans, PPG7 advises that the function and justification of existing local countryside designations should be rigorously considered, and where these are retained, planning authorities should ensure that they are soundly based on a formal assessment of the qualities of the countryside or the contribution of such areas to urban form.
- 2.4.8 The need for planners and other policy makers to be more proactive in managing change, rather than simply trying to prevent it, is reinforced by PPG7, and in *Planning for Sustainable Development: Towards Better Practice* (DETR, 1998 para. 4.3.2). This states that the priority now is to find new ways of enriching the quality of the whole countryside whilst accommodating appropriate development, in order to complement the protection that designations offer. This guidance is in line with the ‘character approach’ to planning advocated by the Countryside Agency (*Planning Tomorrow’s Countryside*, 2000).

***RPG9 Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (March 2001)***

- 2.4.9 Regional Planning Guidance provides a regional framework for the preparation of local authority development plans, and other regional strategies and programmes. RPG9 is the Regional Planning Guidance for the South East, which includes the Shire County, Unitary and District Councils for Essex. RPG9 covers the period up to 2016.

- 2.4.10 In its Environmental Strategy and the Countryside, RPG9 states that ‘a high quality environment is essential to the future prosperity of the South East’. Furthermore, the Guidance notes that ‘the effective protection of the environment and prudent use of natural resources are fundamental aspects of the vision for this Region which is highly urbanised and subject to development pressures.’ In this context, RPG9 encourages ‘positive planning’ for the care and maintenance of the Region’s environment.
- 2.4.11 In addition to nationally and internationally designated areas, RPG9 specifically recognises that ‘the wider countryside of the South East is valuable in providing countryside around and between towns, undeveloped coast, extensive open space and river corridors.’ Protection and enhancement of the region’s landscape, biodiversity and the built and historic heritage is a core principle of the Guidance in this respect.

#### *Structure Plan Policy*

- 2.4.12 The current strategic planning policies of the JSPAs for the development and use of land in Essex County Council and Southend-on-Sea Borough Council are set out in the Adopted Replacement Structure Plan (April 2001). The Written Statement contains specific landscape policies that focus on identifying areas, characteristics and features that are considered to require protection and/or enhancement; other key sectoral and area-based policies elsewhere in the JSP that provide the framework for development also include landscape issues as a key consideration.
- 2.4.13 The overall approach of the Adopted RSP to landscape protection and enhancement is discussed below.

#### *Statutory Landscape Designations*

- 2.4.14 The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designation recognises the national importance of the scenery, and indicates that priority should be given to the conservation and enhancement of its natural beauty. Large scale industrial or commercial development is considered to be inconsistent with the objectives of designation, although regard should be given to the economic and social development needs of local communities and rural industries. This is reflected in Policy NR2 (Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) which states:

*The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is of national importance and will be subject to the most rigorous protection from inappropriate development. Conservation, enhancement and management measures will be carried out by the local authorities to promote its natural beauty and special character. Within the Area:-*

- 1. Development will not be allowed unless it is compatible with conserving and enhancing the Area's landscape character and the quiet enjoyment of the countryside;*
- 2. Development located outside but near to Dedham Vale AONB will not be permitted if it would seriously detract from views into or out of the Area.*

A similar policy also applies in relation to the proposed extension of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Policy NR3).

2.4.15 Whilst not strictly a landscape designation, the statutory protection afforded by the Green Belt provides a large area in which development on greenfield sites in the countryside outside of existing urban areas is strictly controlled. Two of the principal functions of the Green Belt in Essex are (Policy C1):

- assist in safeguarding the open countryside surrounding London from encroachment by urban development;*
- preserve the setting and special character of historic towns located within the Belt.*

2.4.16 Both of these statutory Green Belt functions are of benefit in protecting the character of the countryside in this area.

#### *Landscape Conservation and Enhancement Policies*

2.4.17 The Adopted RSP places a strong emphasis on the character of the landscape. This is clearly reflected in the policy framework developed under the heading of 'Natural Resources' which is concerned with the protection and enhancement of the landscape in the round, including nationally designated landscapes, historic landscape features, nature conservation and biodiversity, and the urban fringe. This approach is further supported by the eight objectives for the area's natural and built environment set out in Policy CS2 of the Core Strategy (Protecting the Natural and Built Environment). Policy CS2 seeks to maintain and conserve the quality of the natural and built environment by:

1. *Safeguarding and enhancing the character and townscape of the urban environment;*
2. *Giving priority to protecting and enhancing areas designated as having intrinsic environmental quality at international, national and strategic level;*
3. *Sustaining and enhancing the rural environment, including conserving the countryside character and the protection of the countryside for its own sake;*
4. *Protecting and enhancing the landscape, wildlife and heritage qualities of the coastline;*
5. *Enhancing and managing by appropriate use, land in the Metropolitan Green Belt and urban fringe;*
6. *Retaining the best and most versatile land for agriculture;*
7. *Preserving and enhancing the biodiversity of the area;*
8. *Managing the demand for water resources by controlling the location, scale and phasing of development so as to protect environmental and nature conservation interests.*

2.4.18 The Adopted RSP advocates the need for District Authorities to develop a better understanding of their local landscape character to allow essential change to be positively managed and planned for. Formal landscape character assessments are an essential pre-requisite for the identification of the particular landscape characteristics that need to be protected, conserved and enhanced. Policy NR4 (Landscape Character Assessment) states:

*Landscape character assessments should be prepared of District areas, identifying the particular character of different areas of the countryside, to help inform the preparation of Local Plans. Development will not be allowed which would detract from the visual quality of these areas. Until such assessments have been completed, Special Landscape Areas, where they are currently defined in adopted local plans, will be taken to identify areas where conservation or restoration of existing character should be given high priority.*

2.4.19 Policy NR1 (Landscape Conservation) sets out a general policy which seeks to ensure that:

*The natural beauty, amenity and traditional character of the landscape will be protected, conserved and enhanced. Development must respect its landscape setting and will not be permitted if it would cause permanent destruction or damage to the character of the landscape. Development will not be permitted which would have a material adverse impact, even of limited duration, on the character and appearance of the landscape, including specific landscape features of identified importance.*



- 2.4.20 In addition, the Adopted RSP gives specific attention to the historic dimension of the landscape in Policy NR5 (Historic Landscape Features) which states:

*Development will not be permitted which would have a materially adverse impact upon the historic and archaeological importance, existing landscape character, and physical appearance of Ancient Landscapes, Ancient Woodlands, Registered Parks and Gardens, Registered Battlefields and Protected Lanes. Conservation, enhancement and management measures will be encouraged and implemented within these defined areas so as to retain and promote their historic and landscape interest. Any proposals which would give rise to a material increase in the amount of traffic using Protected Lanes will not be permitted.*

- 2.4.21 The importance of protecting and enhancing woods, trees and hedgerows is reflected in Policy NR9 (Woodland and Tree Cover), which states:

*The landscape will be enhanced by increasing the coverage of woodland and hedgerows using locally native species in ways which are in keeping with the character of the landscape, through such measures as grant-aided schemes and taking opportunities provided by the consideration of new development proposals. Where appropriate existing woods, trees and hedgerows will be protected for their wildlife and historic importance.*

- 2.4.22 The Adopted RSP also includes two area specific policies which seek strategic landscape improvements. These include:

*Policy NR10 (Thames Chase Community Forest)*

*The establishment of a Community Forest at Thames Chase is supported for the purposes of landscape improvement, outdoor recreation, nature conservation, forestry and farming. Any development proposals within the Forest area will be subject to other policies in this Plan for controlling development in the Metropolitan Green Belt.*

*Policy NR11 (The Urban Fringe)*

*The local planning authorities will work together and with other agencies to provide opportunities for the enhancement and effective management of land in the urban fringe through, for example, such measures as landscape improvement, habitat creation, enhanced public access and improving damaged or degraded land. Any development proposals will be subject to other policies in this Plan for controlling development in the Metropolitan Green Belt and the rural areas beyond the Green Belt.*

2.4.23 The Adopted RSP also contains strategic policies that seek to conserve and enhance features of heritage value in the landscape. These include policies for:

- Historic Settlements (Policy HC1)
- Conservation Areas (Policy HC2)
- Listed Buildings (Policies HC3/HC4)
- Archaeological Sites (Policies HC5/HC6)

2.2.24 Policies CC1 – CC2 provide appropriate protection in relation to the conservation of the natural and heritage values of the undeveloped coast.

2.4.25 Policy NR6 (Nature Conservation Sites) includes reference to the protection, conservation and enhancement of ‘natural features’ of local value, and encourages the ‘appropriate management of all sites and features of the landscape that are of defined importance for nature conservation’. These features are likely to include landscape elements such as hedgerows, trees, stream corridors, woodlands, field ponds, etc. Policy NR6 also includes reference to Policy BE5 (Planning Obligations) in relation to securing management agreements or other compensatory provisions for necessary development adversely impacting on designated sites. There is not currently a similar policy in relation to landscape enhancement and compensatory measures in the RSP.

#### *Summary*

2.4.26 When read as a whole, the strategic policies in the Adopted RSP generally provide a robust framework within which District authorities can develop appropriate landscape policies for guiding change and development in the landscape. In addition, the classification and assessment of the county landscapes will provide an essential tool for informing appropriate change and new development within this policy framework.



## 3.0 LANDSCAPE CLASSIFICATION

### 3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 This section explains the relationship of the national classification of 'Regional Character Areas' defined by the Character of England Map with the county-scale classification, and its relationship to more detailed District or other local assessments.

### 3.2 Regional Character Areas

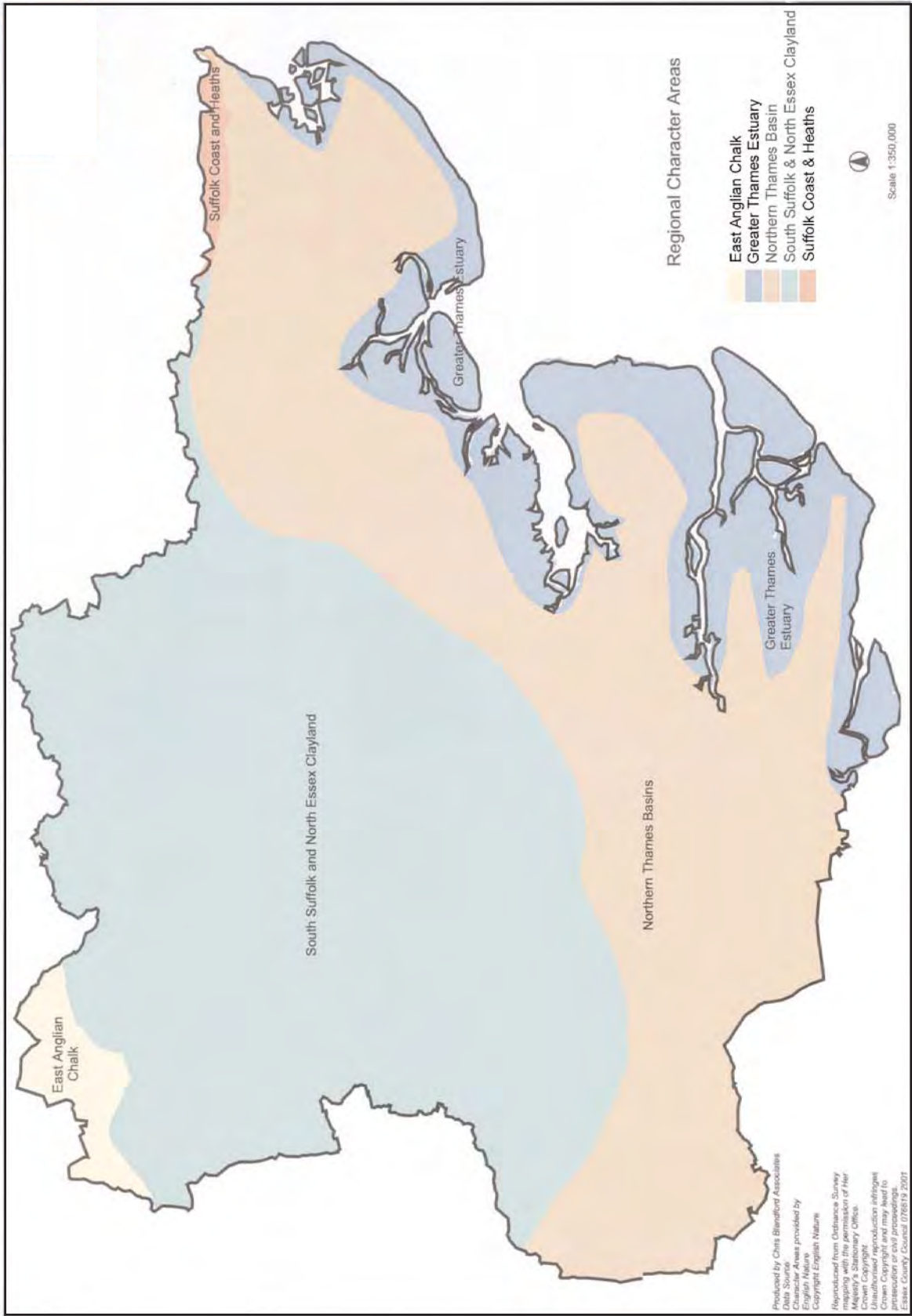
3.2.1 The Countryside Agency/English Nature/English Heritage *Character Map of England* identifies five broad 'Regional Character Areas' in which the study area falls (see Figure 6):

- Greater Thames Estuary (81);
- Suffolk Coast and Heaths (82).
- South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland (86);
- East Anglian Chalk (87);
- Northern Thames Basin (111);

3.2.2 These Regional Character Areas are at the top of the hierarchy used to describe landscape character, and provide the framework for the assessment of more detailed character areas within Essex. The Regional Character Areas are illustrated in Figure 8, and their key characteristics are summarised below:

#### *Greater Thames Estuary*

- Extensive open spaces dominated by sky within low-lying landscape. Numerous coastal estuaries extend the maritime influence inland.
- Strong feeling of remoteness. Mudflats populated by a large and varied bird population.
- Traditional unimproved wet pasture grazed with sheep and cattle. Extensive drained and ploughed productive arable land protected from floods by sea walls, with some areas of more mixed agriculture on higher ground.
- Open grazing pastures patterned by a network of ancient and modern reed-fringed ditches and dykes, numerous creeks and few vertical boundaries such as hedges or fences.
- Hedgerows and trees absent from large, rectilinear fields with trees on the higher, drier pockets of ground near farmsteads and dwellings.
- Distinctive military heritage on the coastline.
- Low steep clay cliffs facing towards Essex across the Thames estuary.



**Figure 6 - Regional Character Areas**

- Numerous small villages and hamlets related to the coastal economy of fishing (at Mersea), boatbuilding and yachting.
- Pressure on major estuaries, from urban, industrial and recreational developments.
- Thames edge marshes subject to major developments including ports, waste disposal, marine dredging, urbanisation, mineral extraction, prominent power stations and petrochemical complexes.

### *Suffolk Coast and Heaths*

- Distinct topography and land cover caused by crag deposits forming free draining and easily worked acidic sands and gravels.
- Largely unspoilt mosaic of estuaries, saltmarsh, grazing marsh, reedbed, river valleys, arable, heath and woodland with strong coastal influence.
- Large commercial ports including Harwich and seasonal influx of yachts provide interest and a variety of scale along the estuaries.
- Large conifer plantations, closely associated with heathland and birch scrub.
- Small nucleated villages and isolated farmhouses. Brick buildings with colour washed walls and pantiles.
- Coastal towns and villages combined with sailing are a tourist attraction.
- String of landscaped parkland along A12 in the west and along the Stour estuary.

### *South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland*

- Flat, chalky, boulder clay plateau dissected by undulating river valley topography.
- Predominantly arable with wooded appearance. Some pasture in valley floors. Irregular field pattern; remnant Ancient Countryside.
- Scattered farmsteads, deep ditches and moats, parishes with scattered, small settlements around commons with isolated hamlets. Concentration of isolated moated sites.
- Timber-framed and colour-washed houses, sometimes faced with Georgian red brick. Impressive churches. Large villages and frequent towns most with medieval street plans and timber-frame houses. Rich heritage of barns. Fewer settlements and more 20<sup>th</sup> century development towards coast, with several large estates.
- Cultural association with Constable and tourist attraction of preserved, archetypal, lowland pastoral Dedham Vale with historic vernacular buildings.
- Hedgerow trees are elm with hornbeam. Woods rarely large but some of ancient coppice. Typical pattern of copses connected by hedgerow. Skyline mostly wooded with some bare ridgelines.
- Winding road pattern with wide verges and strong hedgerows although impact of Dutch Elm disease apparent. Sunken hollow lanes a feature.

### *East Anglian Chalk*

- Distinctive, open, variable topography of the Chalk, a continuation of the Chilterns.
- Large-scale rolling downland, mainly arable, with distinctive beech belts along roads and in hilltop clumps and ash-dominated woodland.
- Long straight roads, open grass tracks, isolated 19<sup>th</sup> century white or yellow brick farmhouses and distinctive nucleated villages, generally within valleys.
- Few large towns and influence of Cambridge on major transport routes; enlarged commuter villages which still retain their rural character.
- Generally muted colour range with distinctive pale soils and building materials.
- Significant linear ancient or Roman earthworks.

### *Northern Thames Basin*

- Diverse plateau landscape divided by a series of broad river valleys and extensive areas of broadleaved woodlands.
- Large towns of Hertfordshire, M25 and M1 motorways, railway line and prominent electricity pylons.
- Arable floodplain land with hedgerow-deficient field boundaries. Open grazing land in certain areas.
- Many river valleys extensively modified by reservoirs, gravel pits, artificial wetlands, river realignment and canals.
- Red brick villages in the smaller valleys contrast with the heavily developed larger valley floodplains. Organic field boundaries defined by water courses and woodland clearances.
- Plateau areas used for arable agriculture with regular field shape of 18<sup>th</sup> century enclosures.

## **3.3 Landscape Character Types**

3.3.1 Within the framework provided by the Regional Character Areas, the study area has been further classified into 'Landscape Character Types' - broad tracts of landscape with similar characteristics that may re-occur in different parts of the County. These generic landscape divisions have been defined from analysis of geological, soils, topographical and land cover maps, informed by key references such as Hunter (1999).

3.3.2 At its simplest level, the study area comprises three broad zones of landscape. Inland from the coastal plain lies a zone of wooded hills and London Clay, which in turn gives way to the extensive plateau of glacial till that dominates much of the study area. In the extreme northwest of the study area, chalk landscapes more characteristic of Cambridgeshire are

evident. River valleys cut across and dissect these areas, many of which form significant estuaries where they meet the coast. Overlaying this physiographic pattern are large areas dominated by urban land uses to the extent that they create distinct landscape types in their own right.

3.3.3 The distribution of the Landscape Character Types are shown on Figure 7, and described in Section 4.0. The seven Landscape Character Types are:

- Chalk Upland Landscapes
- Glacial Till Plateau Landscapes
- River Valley Landscapes
- Wooded Hill and Ridge Landscapes
- London Clay Landscapes
- Coastal Landscapes
- Urban Landscapes

3.3.4 As hedgerows make a very important contribution to the character of Essex an indication of the hedgerow species associated with the broad landscape types is provided to accompany the description of their key characteristics. However, it must be emphasised that there may be significant local variations in species depending on the age of hedgerows and local soil types. It is therefore suggested that as and when district character assessments are carried out, that hedgerow species associated with local landscape types are looked at in more detail.

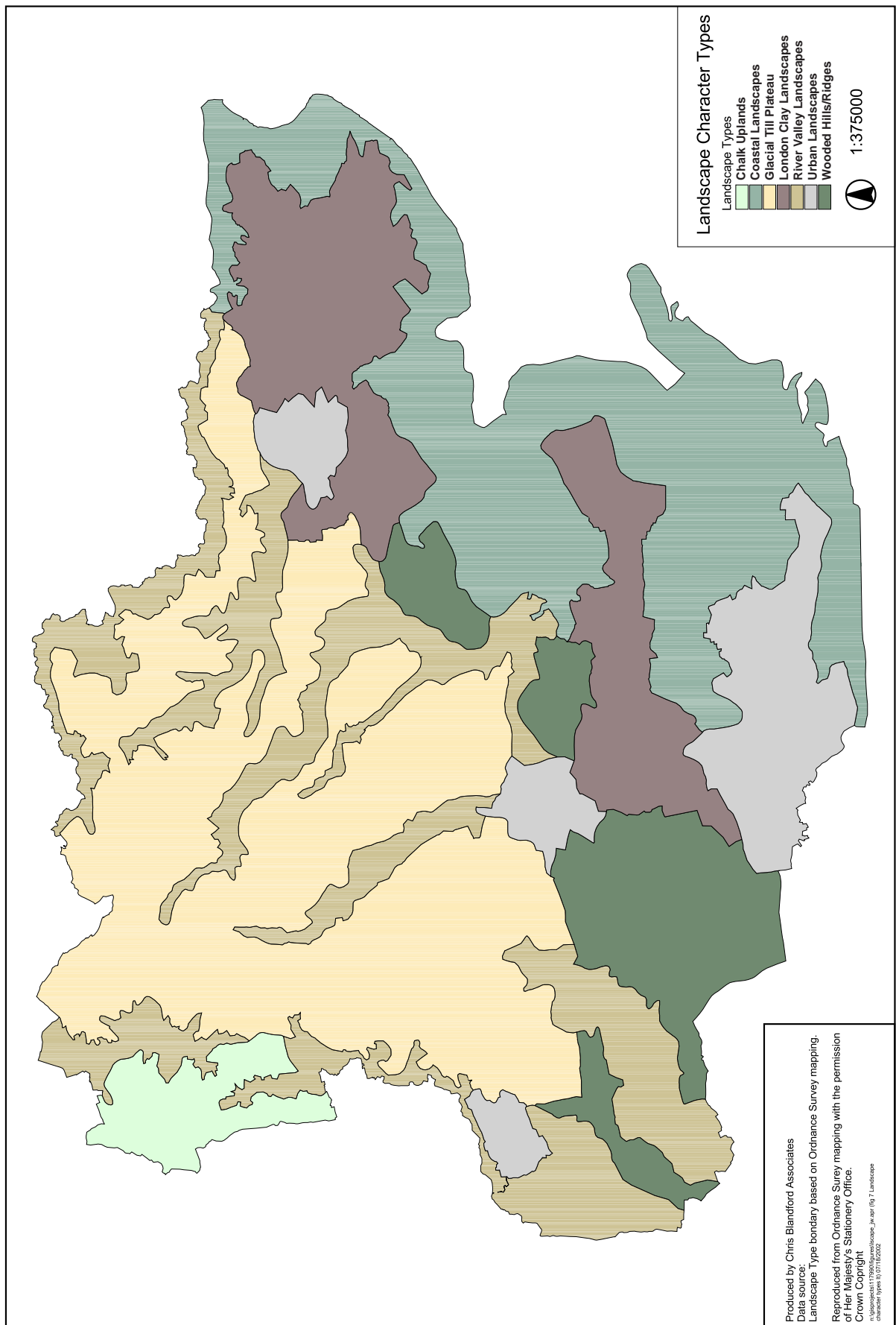
### **3.4 Landscape Character Areas**

3.4.1 The study has identified thirty-five different 'Landscape Character Areas' - geographical areas with a recognisable pattern of landscape characteristics, both physical and experiential, that combine to create a distinct sense of place. The distribution of the Landscape Character Areas are shown on Figure 8, and described in Section 4.0.

3.4.2 As the table below shows, the Landscape Character Areas are sub-divisions of the seven generic divisions of the landscape:



Landscape Character Types	Landscape Character Areas
(A) Chalk Upland Landscapes	North West Essex Chalk Farmlands (A1)
(B) Glacial Till Plateau Landscapes	Central Essex Farmlands (B1) North Essex Farmlands (B2) Blackwater/Stour Farmlands (B3) Gosfield Wooded Farmlands (B4)
(C) River Valley Landscapes	Cam Valley (C1) Stort Valley (C2) Lee Valley (C3) Roding Valley (C4) Chelmer Valley (C5) Blackwater/Brain/Lower Chelmer Valleys (C6) Colne Valley (C7) Stour Valley (C8)
(D) Wooded Hill and Ridge Landscapes	Epping Forest & Ridges (D1) Brentwood Hills (D2) Danbury Hills (D3) Tiptree Ridge (D4)
(E) London Clay Landscapes	South Essex Farmlands (E1) South Colchester Farmlands (E2) Tendring Plain (E3) North Colchester Farmlands (E4)
(F) Coastal Landscapes	Thames Estuary (F1) Crouch & Roach Farmland (F2) Dengie & Foulness Coast (F3) Blackwater Estuary (F4) North Blackwater/Colne Coastal Farmlands (F5) Mersea Island (F6) Brightlingsea-Clacton-Frinton Coast (F7) Hamford Water (F8) Stour Estuary Slopes (F9) Stour Estuary (F10)
(G) Urban Landscapes	Harlow & Environs (G1) Chelmsford & Environs (G2) South Essex Coastal Towns (G3) Colchester & Environs (G4)



**Figure 7 - Landscape Character Types**

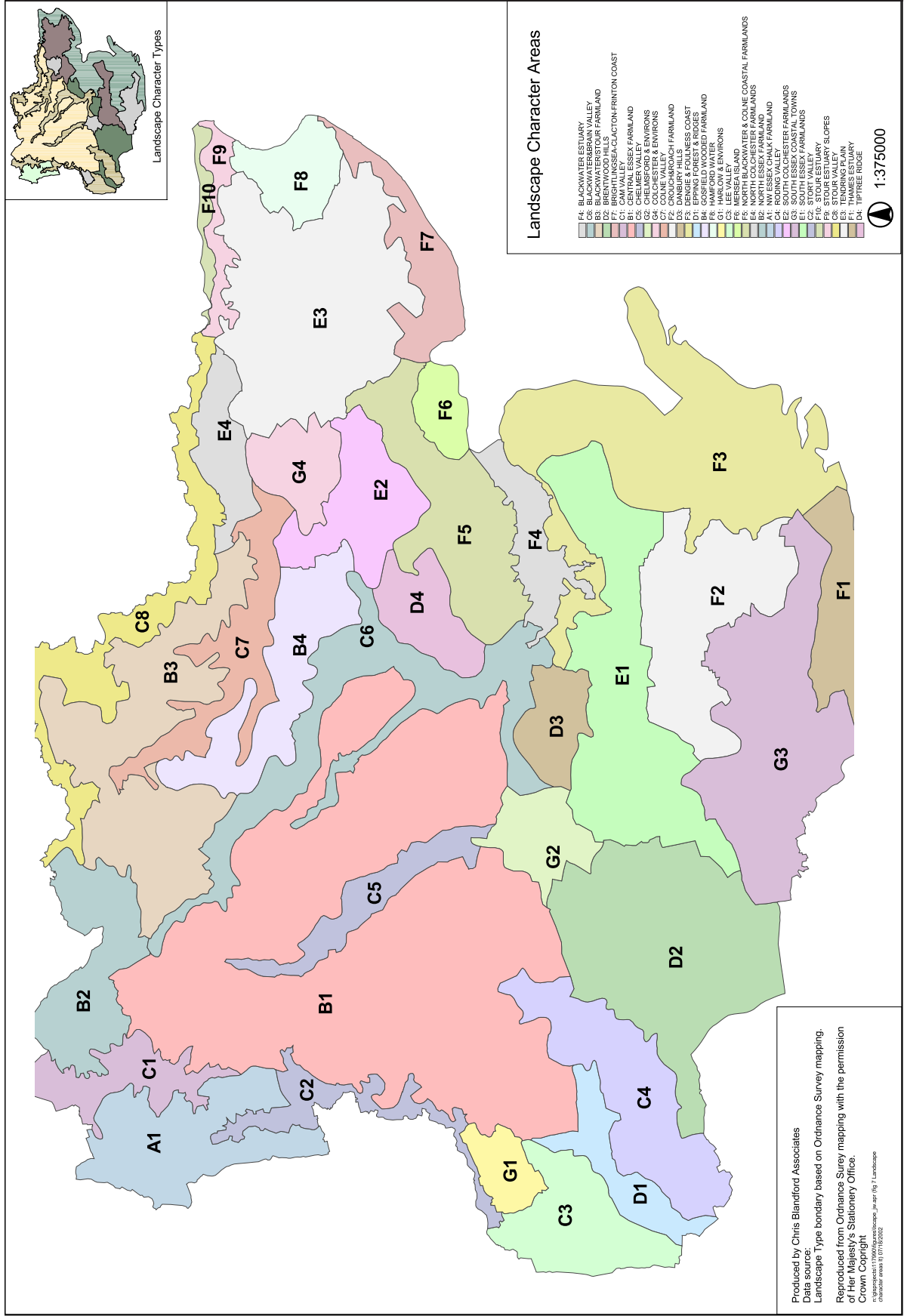


Figure 8 - Landscape Character Areas



### **3.5 District Level Assessments**

3.5.1 This county-level classification of Landscape Types and Landscape Character Areas provides the framework for more detailed landscape character assessments of District areas as required by the Adopted RSP Policy NR4 (Landscape Character Assessment) to help inform the preparation of Local Plans. A district assessment completed is:

- Tendring District Landscape Character Assessment (Land Use Consultants for Tendring DC, November 2001);

3.5.2 This study also provides a framework for other 'sub-county' assessments. These include for example:

- The Dedham Vale Landscape: An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Landscape Design Associates for the Countryside Commission, 1997);
- Thames Chase Landscape Assessment (Landscape Design Associates for the Thames Chase Community Forest Unit, 1995);
- Mid-Essex Coast Landscape Assessment ('SAIL' Project, Draft, 2001);
- Essex Coast Environmentally Sensitive Area Landscape Assessment (ADAS for MAFF, 1994);
- London-Stansted-Cambridge Potential Growth Area Study - Landscape Appraisal (Essex CC Landscape Consultancy, Internal Draft, 2001).

## **4.0 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER PROFILES**

### **4.1 Introduction**

4.1.1 This section describes the character of the Landscape Character Areas identified by the assessment. Following an introduction to the Landscape Character Types within which it is located, each Character Area 'profile' is structured thus:

- key characteristics
- summary of overall character
- landscape condition
- past, present and future trends for change
- sensitivity evaluation.

4.1.2 A selection of photographs are also included to illustrate relevant aspects of the landscape represented by particular Character Areas.

4.1.3 It is important to note that the boundaries between the Landscape Character Areas may not always represent an abrupt change in character. In contrast to the well-defined lines depicted on the maps, the character of an area may be more clear and distinctive in the centre, with transitions at the edges where the influences of land cover, land use, settlement and field pattern may be less consistent. So that the landscape merges with that of adjacent character areas sharing characteristics with them as part of a continuum. This does not imply that the landscape character of transition areas is any less important.

4.1.4 A summary matrix of the sensitivity evaluations for all the character areas is provided in Appendix B. This should be read in conjunction with paragraphs 1.4.15 - 1.4.17.

## 4.2 Chalk Upland Landscapes (A)

- 4.2.1 The Chalk Uplands in north west Essex are a small part of the more extensive East Anglian Chalk that forms a narrow continuation of the chalk ridge, extending from the Chilterns to south west Norfolk.



- 4.2.2 Typical hedgerow species are Hawthorn and Ash, with occasional Blackthorn, Elderberry, Dogwood, Hazel, Beech, Field Maple, Oak, Dog rose, Spindle, Wayfaring tree.
- 4.2.3 The Chalk Uplands comprises one Landscape Character Area within the study area:

North West Essex Chalk Farmland (A1)

#### 4.2.4 *North West Essex Chalk Farmland (A1)*



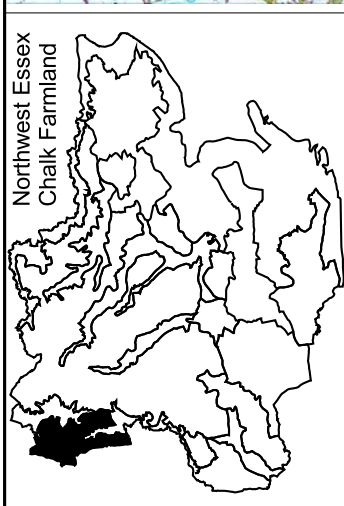
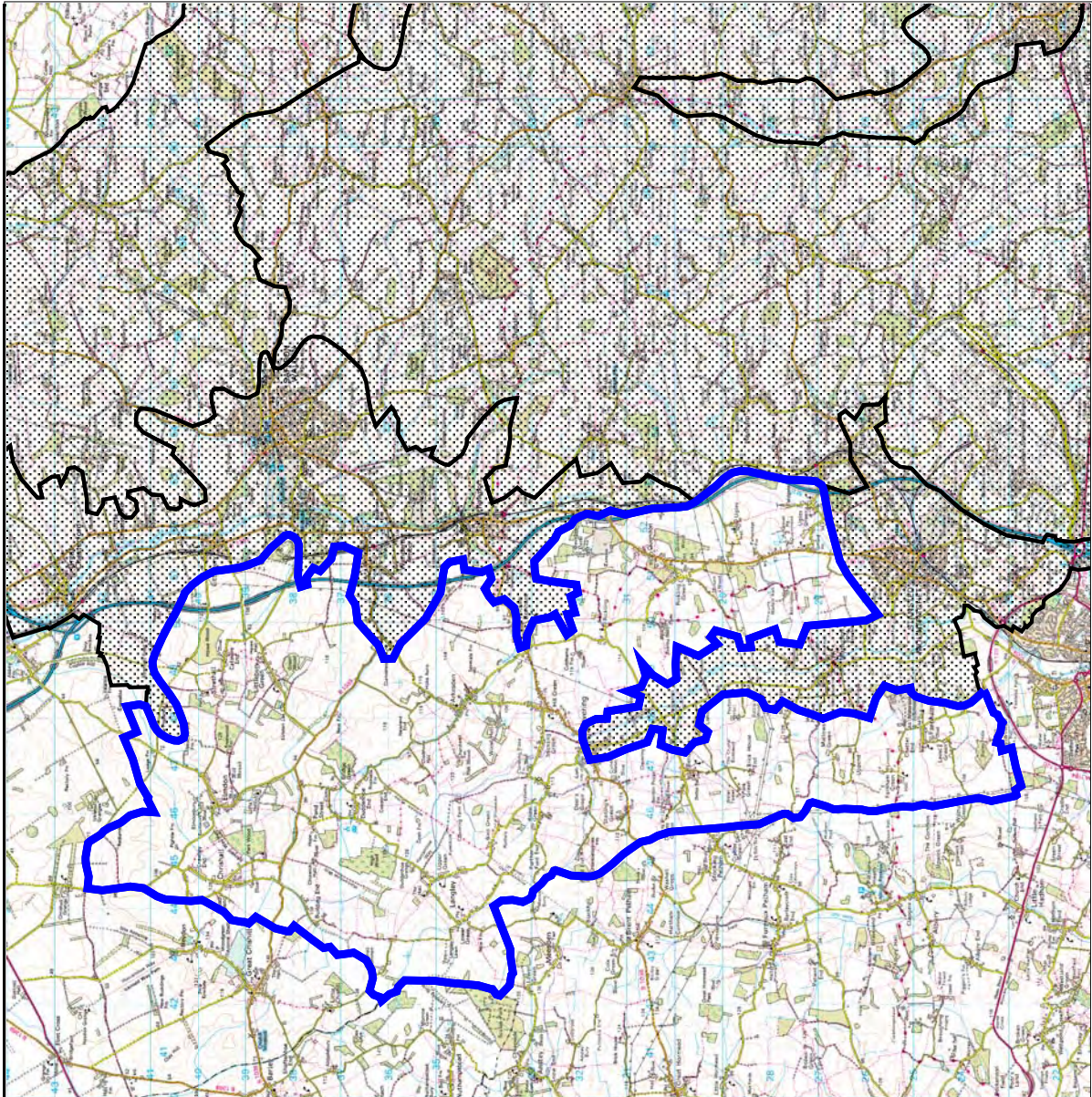
##### *Key Characteristics*

- Strongly rolling landform of broad roundbacked ridges.
- Large scale arable farmland.
- Distinctive elevated, expansive and generally open character.
- Panoramic views from ridgetops.
- Dispersed blocks of woodland and isolated copses.
- Sparse settlement pattern, small linear villages alongside stream courses, and hamlets with greens.
- Mostly tranquil and remote character.

##### *Overall Character*

The North West Essex Chalk Farmland is a strongly rolling landscape of broad ridges, separated by valleys with small narrow streams. Large to very large arable fields are defined by broken hedgelines, drainage ditches or grassy tracks. Relatively few hedgerows, and widely spaced blocks of woodland and copses result in a generally open character. Sweeping views across the undulating arable farmland are punctuated by dispersed woods and copses, in the south and west partly interrupted by power lines. Panoramic views occur from the higher ground of the broad ridgetops. Villages are widely spaced in the valleys, and smaller





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hamlets are focused around greens on higher ground. A sparse dispersed settlement pattern and narrow lanes with few major roads crossing the area, other than the M11 on the eastern fringes, help to create a largely remote and tranquil character.

### ***Character Profile***

#### *Geology*

- Upper/Middle Chalk and Glacial Till (chalky boulder clay). The chalk is much overlain by the till, but is exposed on the northerly escarpment, and on some of the valleysides.

#### *Soils*

- Heavy clay soils on the broad ridgetops, freer draining chalky soils on the valleysides and on the escarpment.

#### *Landform*

- Strongly rolling landform. A moderately sloped escarpment occurs near the northern boundary of the area, but the landform predominantly comprises broad, roundbacked, undulating ridges, divided by valleys with small streams such as Wicken Water and Bourne Brook.

#### *Semi-natural vegetation*

- Remnant pockets of chalk grassland associated with road verges/tracks. A few small calcareous meadows.
- Ancient ash/maple/hazel woodland.

#### *Pattern of field enclosure*

- A large scale field pattern with straight boundaries, associated with parliamentary enclosure, some more organic in shape to the south. Small-medium size fields in valleys and around settlements. Field boundaries defined by low fragmented hedges, drainage ditches and grass verged tracks.

#### *Farming pattern*

- Predominantly arable landuse, with small pockets of pasture around settlements.

#### *Woodland/tree cover*

- Deciduous/mixed woodlands, some large widely dispersed, isolated small copses and coniferous plantations. Localised concentrations of woodland around Strethall, Quendon and Elmdon. Bare northern escarpment.
- Hedgerow trees, small and scattered mainly hawthorn and ash.
- Small groups of trees or copses around many of the settlements which contribute to their setting and tree lined narrow streams.

#### *Settlement pattern and built form*

- A sparse (relative to many other areas of Essex), and a mixed settlement pattern. Small linear villages in stream valleys. Dispersed hamlets typically with greens on the higher ground. A few isolated farmsteads.
- Typical historic vernacular of clunch and colour washed plastered buildings with thatch roofs, some flint and brick buildings. Limited modern development.

#### *Communications*

- Mainly winding lanes, with some straight 'enclosure' roads.
- M11 cuts through parts of the eastern side of the character area.

#### *Other landscape features*

- Small historic parks of Quendon (Deer Park), Woodhall and Waterside.
- Windmills at Roast Green, and Castle mound at Clavering.
- Farm ponds/moats.
- Chalk quarry at Ugley.

#### *Landscape Condition*

- The relatively small number of farmland hedgerows are in poor condition due to lack of management, and tend to be fragmented. Thicker, better managed hedgerows are locally associated with settlements.
- Woodlands are in moderate condition. There is evidence of neglected coppice in some.
- Streamside vegetation is a strong feature of some valley bottoms, but in others it has been lost or eroded by intensive farming practices.

### *Past, Present and Future Trends for Change*

- Cartographic evidence indicates that unusually in Essex open field systems were the subject of late 'enclosure'.
- Intensification of arable farming since the Second World War, has led to the removal of hedgerows or their fragmentation due to a lack of management. Pylon routes in the south and west of the area are a visual intrusion. 1960s/1970s infill has occurred in the villages and hamlets out of keeping with the vernacular.
- Small scale village infill and expansion if not sensitively sited and designed, could further erode local distinctiveness. Pressure for telecommunication/radio masts, particularly along the M11, may be difficult to absorb in this landscape because of its openness.
- The most significant factor shaping the future of the landscape is likely to continue to be agricultural. Changing subsidy regimes may bring opportunities for landscape restoration of chalk grassland, and for hedgerow and woodland management. Pressure for new features such as irrigation reservoirs and larger farm buildings, will require very sensitive siting and design if they are to be successfully absorbed into this landscape.

**NORTH WEST ESSEX CHALK FARMLAND (A1)  
SENSITIVITY EVALUATION**

TYPE/SCALE OF DEVELOPMENT/CHANGE	KEY LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND ACCOMMODATION OF CHANGE ISSUES	LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY LEVEL
1. Major urban extensions (>5 ha) and new settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visually exposed landscape.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil.</li> <li>• Distinctive settlement pattern/form/character.</li> </ul>	H
2. Small urban extensions (<5 ha)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visually exposed landscape.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil.</li> <li>• Distinctive settlement pattern/form/character.</li> </ul>	H
3. Major transportation developments/improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visually exposed landscape.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil.</li> <li>• Landform character.</li> </ul>	H
4. Commercial/warehouse estate/port development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visually exposed landscape.</li> <li>• Landform character.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil.</li> </ul>	H
5. Developments with individual large/bulky buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visually exposed landscape.</li> <li>• Landform character.</li> </ul> <p><i>Appropriate siting in relation to landform, existing settlement, as well as massing form and colour are critical.</i></p>	M
6. Large scale 'open uses'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally open character.</li> <li>• Visually exposed landscape.</li> <li>• Widely dispersed woodland pattern.</li> </ul> <p><i>Important to respond to large scale open character, use of woodlands as focal points on ridgetops. (May be opportunities for habitat restoration of open chalk grassland.)</i></p>	M
7. Mineral extraction/waste disposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landform character.</li> <li>• Visual exposed landscape.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil.</li> </ul>	H
8. Incremental small scale developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinctive character and setting of settlements.</li> <li>• Character of the lanes.</li> </ul>	H
9. Utilities development, i.e. masts, pylons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visually exposed landscape.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil.</li> </ul> <p><i>Location/route alignment in relation to landform is critical.</i></p>	M
10. Decline in traditional countryside management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hedgerowed field pattern.</li> <li>• Woodland condition.</li> <li>• Chalk grassland road verges.</li> </ul>	M

Note:

- (a) *Very visually exposed ridgetops/sides in the landscape have a high sensitivity level to categories 5, 9.*  
(b) *With regard to Category 3, online improvement of the M11 would be of moderate sensitivity.*

Table to be read in conjunction with paragraphs 1.4.15 – 1.4.17

### 4.3 Glacial Till Plateau Landscapes (B)

4.3.1 The Glacial Till Plateau dominates the north and west of the study area, and is part of the extensive claylands that stretch from north Essex into south Suffolk and beyond. It is heavily dissected by the River Valley landscapes that cut into the boulder clay.



4.3.2 The key characteristics of this division can be summarised as:

- Gently undulating, glacial boulder clay ('till') plateau dissected by major river valleys.
- Predominantly arable, with some wooded areas and an irregular field pattern.
- Scattered farmsteads, hamlets and large villages, and relatively few towns.
- Historic buildings are frequent features in the landscape – these include timber-framed and colour-washed houses, and a rich selection of historic barns.
- Woodland blocks and hedgerows visually link together to form an often wooded skyline.
- Winding road pattern away from major routes, with verges and strong hedgerows.

4.3.3 Typical hedgerow species are Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Ash and Field Maple, with occasional Elm, Oak, Hazel, Dogwood, Elderberry.

4.3.4 The Glacial Till Plateau comprises four Landscape Character Areas within the study area:

- Central Essex Farmlands (B1)
- North Essex Farmlands (B2)
- Blackwater Farmlands/Stour Farmlands (B3)
- Gosfield Wooded Farmlands (B4)

#### 4.3.5 *Central Essex Farmlands (B1)*

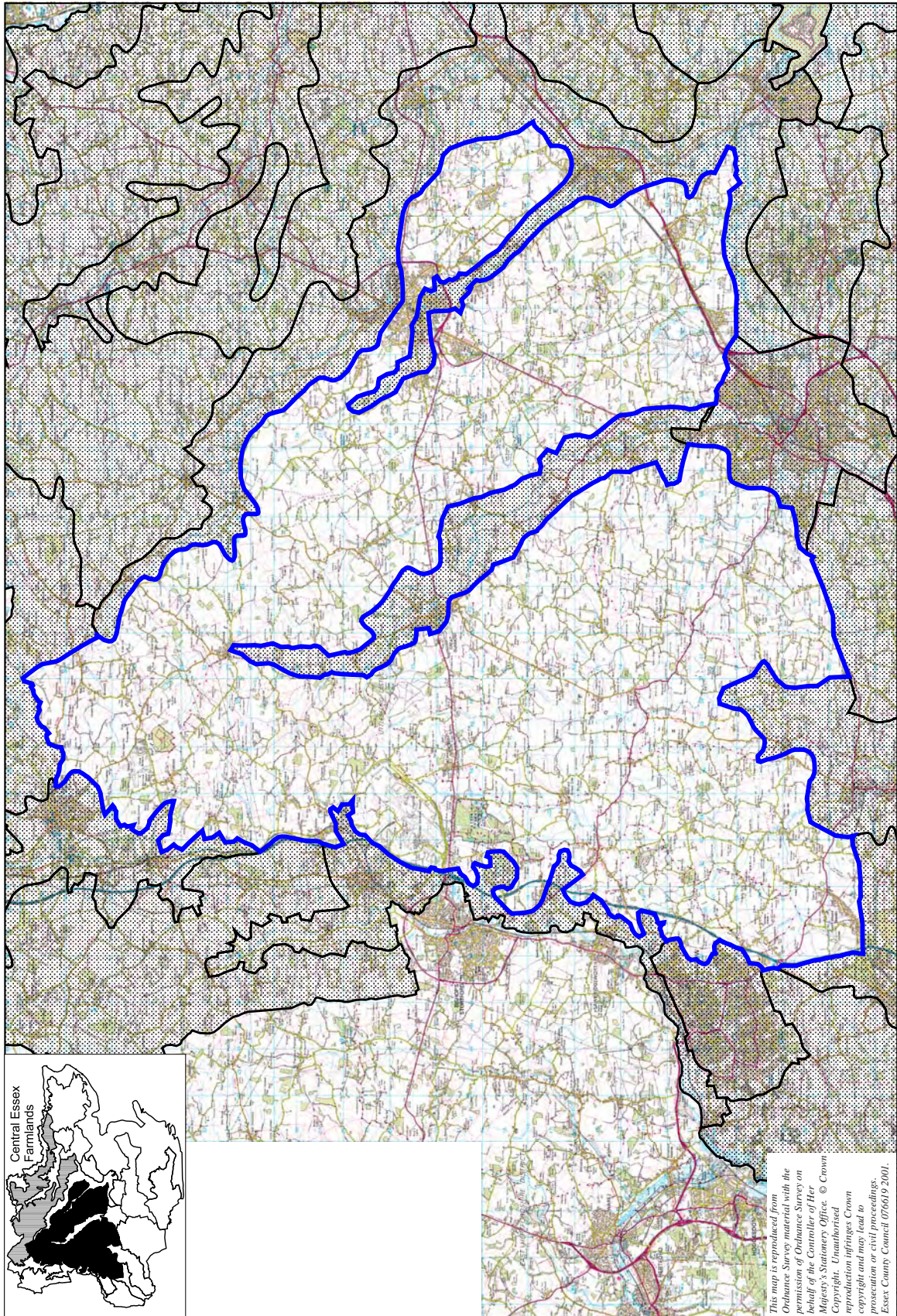


##### ***Key Characteristics***

- Irregular field pattern of mainly medium size arable fields, marked by sinuous hedgerows and ditches.
- Many small woods and copses provide structure and edges in the landscape.
- Scattered settlement pattern, with frequent small hamlets, typically with greens and ponds.
- A concentration of isolated moated farmsteads.
- Network of narrow, winding lanes.
- Mostly tranquil character away from major roads and Stansted Airport.

##### ***Overall Character***

The Central Essex Farmlands is an extensive area of gently undulating arable farmland bisected by the Chelmer Valley. Irregular fields are enclosed by thick but intermittent hedgerows, or just marked by grassy banks and ditches. In long views scattered small woods and copses, and hedgerow trees coalesce to sometimes create the illusion of a wooded horizon. The dispersed settlement pattern is characterised by small isolated hamlets and farmsteads, often straggling along lanes, with a few widely separated towns and larger villages. Narrow strip greens and moated farmsteads are distinctive features of the area. Away from the A120, A130, A12, M11 road corridors/Stansted Airport and its flightpaths,





large parts of the area have a tranquil character, embracing tracts of fairly secluded countryside.

### ***Character Profile***

#### *Geology*

- Glacial Till (Chalky Boulder Clay).

#### *Soils*

- Slowly permeable calcareous clay soils. Some deep well drained calcareous clay and fine loamy soils.

#### *Landform*

- Gently undulating plateau 30-90 m in height.
- Locally more rolling, where dissected by small shallow valleys of streams and brooks.
- Some areas to the south almost flat, e.g. around Boreham.

#### *Semi-natural vegetation*

- Ancient ash-maple woodland with hazel coppice, also oak-hornbeam woodland.
- Pockets of calcareous/neutral meadows and marsh.
- Alder-carr in some river/stream valleys.

#### *Pattern of field enclosure*

- Irregular field pattern. Predominantly medium size fields, but small fields occur around settlements. Localised areas with large fields where hedgerows have been removed.
- Fields bounded by thick hedgerows or solely by banks and ditches.

#### *Farming pattern*

- Mainly arable, small areas of pasture, associated with settlements.

#### *Woodland/tree cover*

- Scatter of small-medium size woodlands and small copses with irregular indented outlines.
- Occasional poplar tree belts and small mixed plantations of regular shape.
- Some areas where woodland cover is more sparse.
- Hatfield Forest is a large important area of ancient coppice and wood pasture with pollarded trees.
- Intermittent hedgerow trees of oak, ash, hornbeam. Localised areas with more frequent hedgerow trees, e.g. around Terling/Fairstead, and the northern Roding villages.

### *Settlement pattern and built form*

- Frequent hamlets (ends, greens, tyes) and farmsteads with only a few villages and towns.
- Rich historic architectural detail in market towns such as Thaxted, as well as in many of the smaller settlements.
- Typical historic vernacular of half timber, colour wash plaster, thatch and pegtile roofs, some decorative pargetting.
- Some villages near A12 corridor have more modern suburban development.

### *Communications*

- Many small, narrow winding lanes, sometimes taking dramatic right angled turns. Variable width grass verges. Lanes are often sunken where valleys are crossed.
- Major A120, A130 and M11 roads cross parts of the area.

### *Other landscape features*

- High density of moated farmsteads.
- Spire of Thaxted church is a local landmark in the north.
- Large castle mounds at Pleshey, Gt Canfield.
- A few small historic parklands, e.g. Terling Place and New Hall Boreham.
- London Stansted Airport - extensive flat runways and large buildings.
- Various small active and disused airfields e.g. North Weald, Boreham.
- Two locally visually prominent pylon routes cross east-west in close proximity north of Thaxted, and another route runs north-south between Braintree and Chelmsford.
- Sand and gravel pits near Boreham and Chigwell St James.
- Small irrigation reservoirs are common.

### *Landscape Condition*

- The condition of the hedgerows and woodlands overall is moderate. In some parts many hedges have been lost, or are very fragmented. In others, such as around Terling they are well managed.
- Localised erosion of character occurs due to sand and gravel workings.
- The condition of the small settlements overall is good. However, some farmsteads have large visually intrusive modern sheds and/or conifer planting out of character.

### *Past, Present and Future Trends for Change*

- The landscape was subject to early enclosure and then evolved gradually.
- However, significant change has occurred since the Second World War with rationalisation of field pattern and loss of hedgerows associated with agricultural intensification. This is now considered to have peaked.
- Future trends for change may include increasing urban and transportation developments especially associated with the major road corridors. This may include pressure related directly or indirectly to Stansted Airport expansion and potential growth area in RPG9.
- The main influence on the landscape will probably continue to be agricultural. Pressures could include larger farm buildings, irrigation reservoirs, forestry and various recreational uses near urban areas. Equally changes in the agricultural subsidy regime could bring opportunities for conservation and restoration of hedgerow pattern, and improved management of woodlands.

**CENTRAL ESSEX FARMLANDS (B1)  
SENSITIVITY EVALUATION**

TYPE/SCALE OF DEVELOPMENT/CHANGE	KEY LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND ACCOMMODATION OF CHANGE ISSUES	LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY LEVEL
1. Major urban extensions (>5 ha) and new settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate intervisibility.</li> <li>• Integrity of hedgerow and woodland pattern.</li> <li>• Tranquil character away from existing major road corridors/Stansted.</li> <li>• Distinctive settlement pattern/form.</li> </ul> <p><i>Possible opportunities for landscape enhancement in areas of poorer landscape condition and/or weaker strength of character e.g. westside of Chelmsford, northside of Boreham, east of Hatfield Peveral. Could create new landscape frameworks that respect traditional character/pattern of hedgerows, woodlands and linear greens in settlements.</i></p>	M
2. Small urban extensions (<5 ha)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate intervisibility of the landscape.</li> </ul> <p><i>Possible opportunities to improve some existing visually poor urban edges.</i></p>	L
3. Major transportation developments/improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Woodland/hedgerow pattern.</li> <li>• Irregular grain of the landscape.</li> <li>• Tranquil character away from existing major road corridors/Stansted.</li> </ul> <p><i>Selection of appropriate route alignments and responding to woodland form/pattern in design of mitigation planting is critical.</i></p>	M
4. Commercial/warehouse estate/port development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate intervisibility of the landscape.</li> <li>• Integrity of hedgerow and woodlands pattern.</li> </ul> <p><i>Appropriate siting, massing, form and colour as well as strong landscape frameworks respecting traditional character are important.</i></p>	M
5. Developments with individual large/bulky buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate intervisibility.</li> </ul>	M
6. Large scale 'open uses'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrity of hedgerow pattern.</li> <li>• Woodland shape and character.</li> <li>• Moderate intervisibility.</li> </ul>	M
7. Mineral extraction/waste disposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrity of hedgerow and woodland pattern.</li> <li>• Moderate intervisibility.</li> <li>• Tranquil character away from existing major road corridors/Stansted.</li> </ul>	M
8. Incremental small scale developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Character and setting of small settlements/farmsteads.</li> <li>• Distinctive character of the lanes.</li> </ul>	M
9. Utilities development, i.e. masts, pylons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate intervisibility of the landscape.</li> <li>• Tranquil away from existing major road corridors/Stansted.</li> </ul>	M
10. Decline in traditional countryside management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hedgerow condition/pattern.</li> <li>• Woodland condition.</li> </ul>	M

Note:

(a) *Some areas in good condition and/or with strong strength of character, e.g. Terling/Fairstead area would have a high sensitivity to most types of development/change.*

Table to be read in conjunction with paragraphs 1.4.15 – 1.4.17

#### 4.3.6 *North Essex Farmlands (B2)*

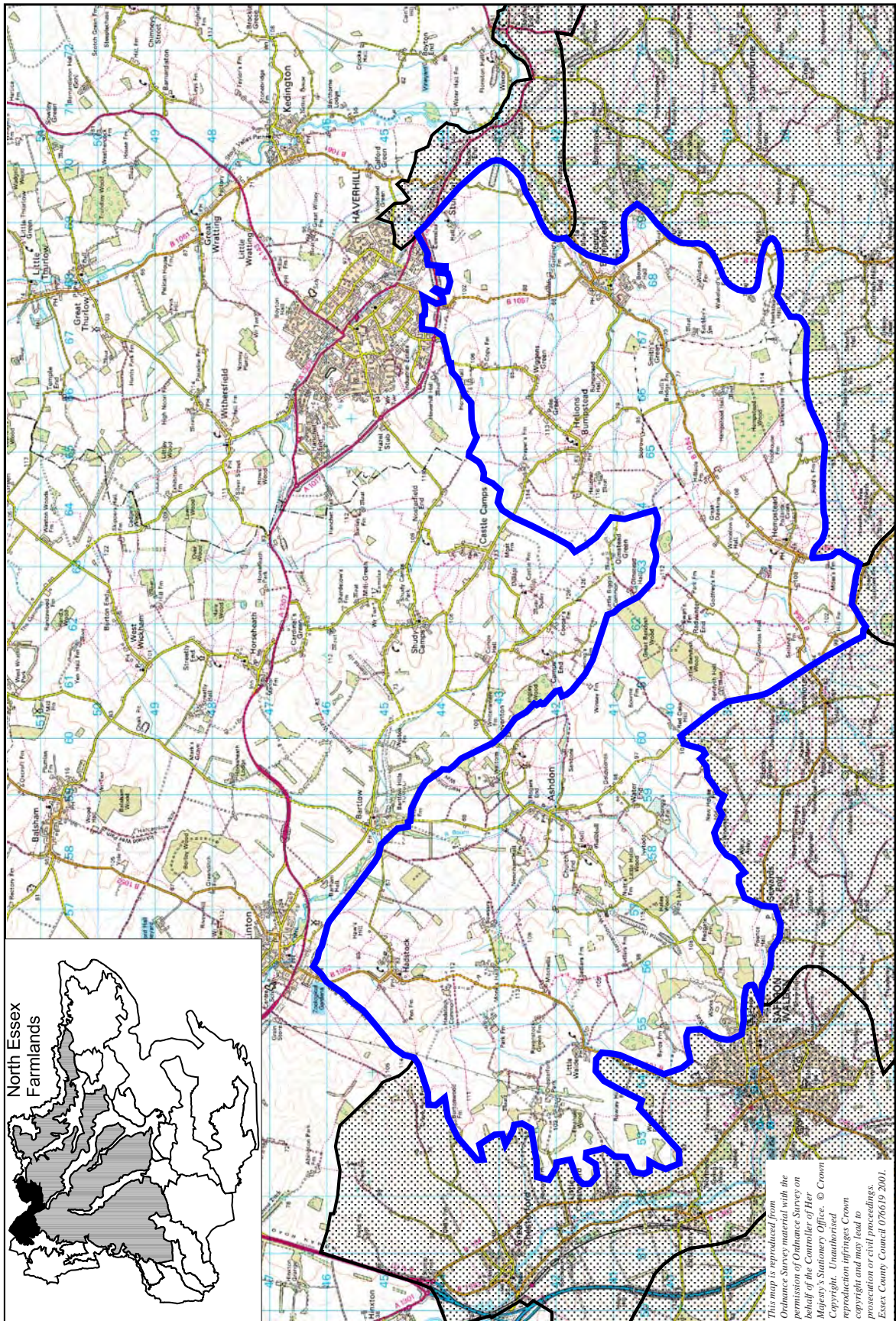


##### *Key Characteristics*

- Strongly undulating landform dissected by small valleys. Distinctive, elevated broad flat topped ridges.
- Medium to large scale arable field pattern.
- Sense of openness and space on high ground with wide views.
- Contrasting semi-enclosed character of some valleys.
- Relatively low density of small villages, hamlets and farmsteads.
- Mostly remote/tranquil character.

##### *Overall Character*

The North Essex Farmlands is a large scale arable landscape which compared with other areas of the glacial till plateau is more rolling. The highest land has large or very large arable fields which form strong bands of colour across the landscape, and wide views are possible from the open roads. Occasional trees and hedgerows stand out against the simple unified background but woodlands are infrequent. This contrasts with a more enclosed character in the valleys. Small nucleated and linear villages/hamlets nestle in the valleys, with only a few large farmsteads dotted on the higher ground. These all tend to have a very traditional character in which the local vernacular dominates.



## *Character Profile*

### *Geology*

- Glacial Till (Chalky Boulder Clay), small area of chalk near Bartlow.

### *Soils*

- Slowly permeable calcareous clay soils, small areas of well drained coarse and fine loamy soils, and calcareous soils.

### *Landform*

- Undulating landform.
- Broad flat topped ridges up to 130 m elevation.
- Narrow valleys with small streams.

### *Semi-natural vegetation*

- Ancient ash/maple woodland with nationally rare oxlip.
- Small calcareous meadows.

### *Pattern of field enclosure*

- Large regular and irregular fields. Some very large fields. Bounded by low trimmed hedgerows, banks and ditches.
- Medium size fields in the valleys with a stronger hedgerow pattern.

### *Farming pattern*

- Dominated by arable farmland.
- Some pasture associated with small settlements.

### *Woodland/tree cover*

- Sparse woodland cover in the north east of the area.
- Scatter of small deciduous woodlands, mixed copses in the valleys. A few large blocks of woodland extending onto higher ground, e.g. Hempstead Wood, Little Bendysh Wood.
- Mixed tree belts near Bartlow.

### *Settlement pattern and built form*

- Small nucleated and linear villages/hamlets strung out along lanes, mainly in the valleys or along spring lines.
- Relatively low density of settlement compared with other areas of the glacial till plateau.
- Vernacular of half timber and colour wash plaster, thatch and pegtile. Some brick and flint.

### *Communications*

- Mainly narrow winding lanes, a few straight roads.
- No major roads cross the area.

### *Other landscape features*

- Occasional moated farmsteads.
- Prominent radio mast on high ground near Herkstead Hill Farm.
- North-south pylon route is visually prominent in the landscape north of Little Walden.

### ***Landscape Condition***

- Hedgerows are often fragmented in poor condition.
- The character of small settlements and farmsteads is good with few incongruous features.
- Agricultural/light industrial buildings are locally intrusive south of Hadstock.

### ***Past, Present and Future Trends for Change***

- It appears parts of the area were subject to late enclosure of open field system with creation of large fields with straight boundaries.
- Intensification of arable farming since the Second World War has led to further rationalisation of field pattern and creation of some very large fields with loss of hedgerow boundaries.
- There may be some pressure in future for additional masts on high ground which would be very difficult to absorb and could have a damaging cumulative impact.
- The main future influence on the landscape will probably remain agricultural. Any change will need to respond to the simple large scale character of the landscape.



**NORTH ESSEX FARMLANDS (B2)  
SENSITIVITY EVALUATION**

TYPE/SCALE OF DEVELOPMENT/CHANGE	KEY LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND ACCOMMODATION OF CHANGE ISSUES	LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY LEVEL
1. Major urban extensions (>5 ha) and new settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> <li>• Visual exposure of ridgetops/ridgesides.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil/remote character.</li> </ul>	H
2. Small urban extensions (<5 ha)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> <li>• Visual exposure of ridgetops/ridgesides.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil/remote character.</li> </ul>	H
3. Major transportation developments/improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> <li>• Visual exposure of ridgetops/ridgesides.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil/remote character.</li> </ul>	H
4. Commercial/warehouse estate/port development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> <li>• Visual exposure of ridgetops/ridgesides.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil/remote character.</li> </ul>	H
5. Developments with individual large/bulky buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual exposure of ridgetops/ridgesides.</li> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> <li>• Distinctive settlement character.</li> </ul> <p><i>Siting, massing, form and colour are critical.</i></p>	M
6. Large scale 'open uses'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> <li>• Woodland pattern.</li> </ul> <p><i>Any change would need to respond to simple large scale character of the landscape.</i></p>	M
7. Mineral extraction/waste disposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> <li>• Visual exposure of ridgetops/ridgesides.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil/remote character.</li> </ul>	H
8. Incremental small scale developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting and character of small settlements.</li> <li>• Simple undisturbed character of the lanes.</li> </ul>	H
9. Utilities development, i.e. masts, pylons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> <li>• Visual exposure of ridgetops/ridgelines.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil/remote character.</li> </ul>	H
10. Decline in traditional countryside management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coppice management in woodlands.</li> <li>• Hedgerow condition.</li> </ul>	M

Table to be read in conjunction with paragraphs 1.4.15 – 1.4.17

#### 4.3.7 *Blackwater and Stour Farmlands (B3)*

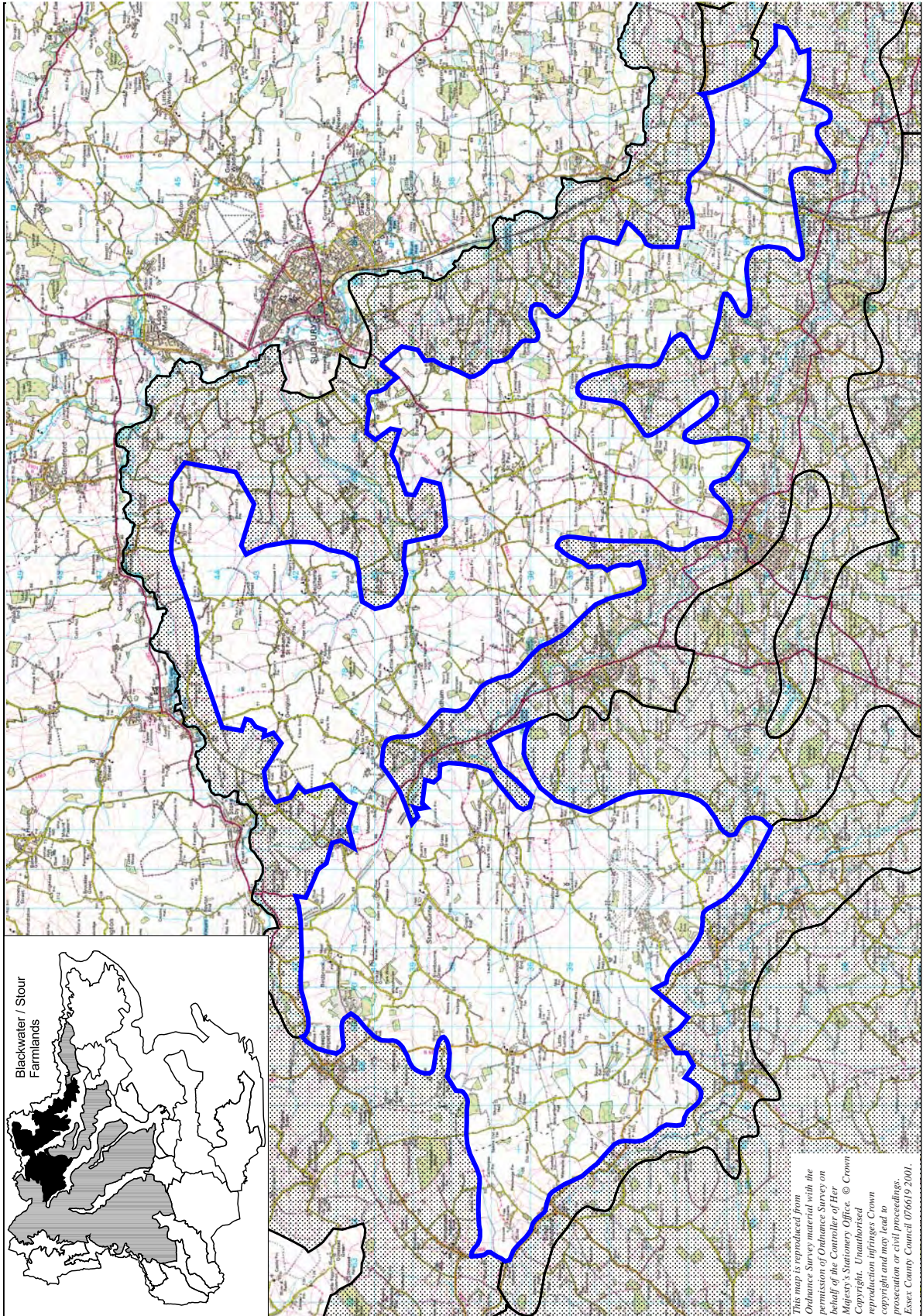


##### *Key Characteristics*

- Very gently undulating or flat landform.
- Large scale arable field pattern.
- Infrequent small blocks of woodland, some mature hedgerow trees on field boundaries.
- Wide views across the farmland.
- Small villages, hamlets with a wealth of historic buildings.
- Tranquil character.

##### *Overall Character*

The Blackwater and Stour Farmlands is a landscape dominated by large arable fields with relatively few hedgerows and woodlands, except in localised areas, resulting in an open character. Continuous views are common across the farmland to low horizons punctuated by intermittent lines of mature trees. Electricity pylons and telegraph poles are the only other strong vertical features in the flat to gently undulating landscape. Small villages, hamlets and isolated farmsteads make up the settlement pattern with no towns in the area contributing to a remote tranquil character.



## ***Character Profile***

### *Geology*

- Glacial Till (Chalky Boulder Clay)

### *Soils*

- Mostly slowly permeable calcareous clay soils, some fine loamy soils.

### *Landform*

- Very gently undulating or flat.

### *Semi-natural vegetation*

- Ancient ash-maple and oak-hornbeam woodlands. Some small leafed lime woods.

### *Pattern of field enclosure*

- Medium to large regular and irregular fields. Localised areas with very large fields.
- Fragmented/remnant hedgerow boundaries.
- Some small fields with a stronger hedgerow pattern in the south east.

### *Farming pattern*

- Arable farmland is the dominant land use.
- Only very small areas of pasture.
- A few orchards in the south east.

### *Woodland/tree cover*

- Large areas with very few woodlands.
- Locally more frequent woods around Alphamstone/Pebmarsh and north west of Finchingfield.
- Occasional broken lines of mature hedgerow trees in field boundaries.
- Settlements often have a tree'd setting.

### *Settlement pattern and built form*

- Mainly linear hamlets and isolated farmsteads along lanes.
- A few nucleated villages, e.g. Finchingfield, Toppesfield.
- Limited modern development associated with settlements.
- Typical historic local vernacular of colourwash plaster, decorative pargetting, half timber, thatch and pegtile roofs.

### *Communications*

- No major roads cross the area.
- Sparse network of narrow, winding lanes.

### *Other landscape features*

- Spains Hall historic parkland.
- Visually prominent east-west pylon route in the north of the area.
- Wethersfield Airstrip.

### *Landscape Condition*

- The condition of many of the farmland hedgerows is poor, but sometimes are more intact in the vicinity of woodland blocks.
- The condition of the small settlements is good with limited out of character modern development.

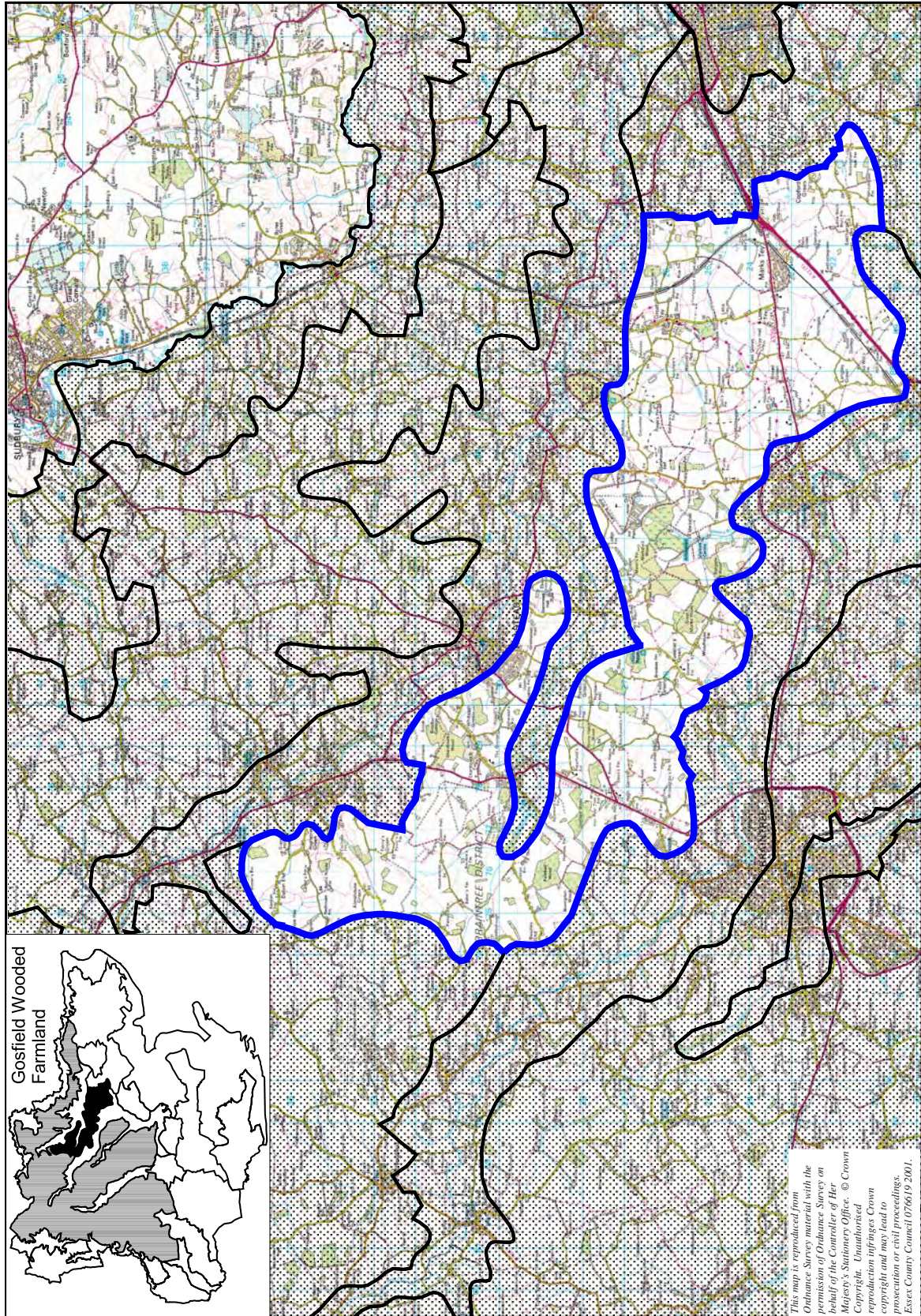
### *Past, Present and Future Trends for Change*

- Since the Second World War there has been extensive hedgerow loss. This is now considered to have reached its peak.
- Future influences on change are likely to be mainly agricultural. New farm buildings, irrigation reservoirs may be particular pressures. Changes in subsidy regimes may bring opportunities for restoration of hedgerows and woodlands.

**BLACKWATER AND STOUR FARMLANDS (B3)  
SENSITIVITY EVALUATION**

TYPE/SCALE OF DEVELOPMENT/CHANGE	KEY LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND ACCOMMODATION OF CHANGE ISSUES	LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY LEVEL
1. Major urban extensions (>5 ha) and new settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil character.</li> <li>Settlement pattern/character.</li> </ul> <p><i>May be opportunities to absorb change with strong woodland, hedgerow frameworks.</i></p>	M
2. Small urban extensions (<5 ha)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil character.</li> <li>• Settlement pattern and character.</li> </ul>	M
3. Major transportation developments/improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> </ul>	M
4. Commercial/warehouse estate/port development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil character.</li> </ul>	H
5. Developments with individual large/bulky buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> </ul> <p><i>Siting, massing, form and colour are critical.</i></p>	M
6. Large scale 'open uses'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> </ul> <p><i>Possible opportunities for restoration of hedgerows and woodlands</i></p>	M
7. Mineral extraction/waste disposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil character.</li> </ul>	M
8. Incremental small scale developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> <li>• Settlement character.</li> </ul>	M
9. Utilities development, i.e. masts, pylons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate to high intervisibility.</li> <li>• Mostly tranquil area.</li> </ul>	M
10. Decline in traditional countryside management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very intermittent hedgerow pattern, infrequent woodlands.</li> </ul>	L

Table to be read in conjunction with paragraphs 1.4.15 – 1.4.17



## *Character Profile*

### *Geology*

- Glacial Till (Chalky Boulder Clay)

### *Soils*

- Slowly permeable calcareous clay or fine loamy soils.

### *Landform*

- Flat to very gently undulating.

### *Semi-natural vegetation*

- Ancient lime woods, e.g. Great and Little Monks Wood and Grange Wood.

### *Pattern of field enclosure*

- Medium size irregular hedged fields, some small.

### *Farming pattern*

- Mainly arable farmland.

### *Woodland/tree cover*

- Relatively high tree cover.
- Numerous blocks of deciduous/mixed woodland, some interlocking, concentrated in the centre of the area. More dispersed in the south and north.
- Both large and small woods.
- Mature hedgerow trees particularly ash/oak.

### *Settlement pattern and built form*

- Fairly sparse settlement pattern.
- Many scattered small farmsteads along lanes.
- A few hamlets and small villages. Some 20th century ribbon development along A1017, B1024.
- Large village of Marks Tey on the main A120.
- Typical vernacular of white/pink colour wash plaster buildings, some examples of brick, half timber and weatherboarding.



### *Communications*

- Narrow sinuous lanes.
- Few major roads cross the area apart from the A120/A12(T) in the south.

### *Other landscape features*

- Historic parklands of Gosfield Hall /Markshall.
- Small airstrip near Horneywood Farm and disused airfield north of Gosfield Hall Park.
- Radio masts near Gosfield and Colne Road.

### ***Landscape Condition***

- The condition of the hedgerows and woodlands is generally good.
- Some localised visual intrusion is caused by masts.
- The condition of the settlement is moderate. Settlements on the main roads tend to have more out of character modern development

### ***Past, Present and Future Trends for Change***

- Unlike other character areas in the glacial till plateau division, there is little evidence of significant recent change in the landscape. Some introduction of conifers into areas of ancient woodland has occurred.
- Some pressure for urban development at the edge of Halstead and larger scale development on the edge of Braintree is possible in the future.

**GOSFIELD WOODED FARMLANDS (B4)  
SENSITIVITY EVALUATION**

TYPE/SCALE OF DEVELOPMENT/CHANGE	KEY LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND ACCOMMODATION OF CHANGE ISSUES	LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY LEVEL
1. Major urban extensions (>5 ha) and new settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrity of pattern of woodlands and hedgerows.</li> <li>• Strong strength of character/good condition of much of the landscape.</li> <li>• Tranquil character of much of the area.</li> </ul>	H
2. Small urban extensions (<5 ha)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low to moderate intervisibility.</li> </ul>	L
3. Major transportation developments/improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low to moderate intervisibility.</li> <li>• Tranquil character of much of the area.</li> </ul>	M
4. Commercial/warehouse estate/port development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrity of pattern of woodlands and hedgerows.</li> <li>• Tranquil character of much of the area.</li> <li>• Strong strength of character/good condition of much of the landscape.</li> </ul>	H
5. Developments with individual large/bulky buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low to moderate intervisibility.</li> <li>• Intrinsic character of the settlements.</li> </ul> <p><i>Siting, massing, form and colour are critical.</i></p>	M
6. Large scale 'open uses'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrity of hedgerow field pattern.</li> <li>• Woodland pattern/character.</li> </ul>	M
7. Mineral extraction/waste disposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrity of pattern of woodlands/hedgerowed fields.</li> <li>• Tranquil character of much of the area.</li> </ul>	M
8. Incremental small scale developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intrinsic character of small settlements/lanes.</li> </ul>	M
9. Utilities development, i.e. masts, pylons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low to moderate intervisibility.</li> <li>• Tranquil character of much of the area.</li> </ul>	M
10. Decline in traditional countryside management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hedgerow condition.</li> <li>• Woodland condition.</li> </ul>	M

Table to be read in conjunction with paragraphs 1.4.15 – 1.4.17

#### 4.3.8 *Gosfield Wooded Farmlands (B4)*



##### *Key Characteristics*

- Flat to gently undulating landform.
- Strong pattern of large and small woods, including distinctive ancient limewoods.
- Irregular medium size arable fields, bounded by thick hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees.
- Enclosed character.
- Many small farmsteads, occasional hamlets and villages.

##### *Overall Character*

The Gosfield Wooded Farmland is a gentle and well wooded landscape. Medium size, irregular fields are set within a mostly strong structure of woodland blocks and wide hedgerows, with frequent hedgerow trees giving a strong sense of enclosure. However, occasional long views across the farmland are possible where hedgerows permit. The settlement pattern is particularly characterised by scattered small farmsteads, nestling into field corners, and the woodland edges. Away from the edge of Braintree and the A120/A12, the area has a tranquil character.

#### 4.4 River Valley Landscapes (C)

4.4.1 The River Valleys are a significant component of the county's topography, character and identity. The valleys to the north are steeper and more deeply cut, becoming shallower as the rivers flow either south into the Thames or east into the North Sea. Only the Cam flows northwards. The Stour, Colne, Blackwater, Chelmer and their tributaries rise in the Glacial Till Plateau to the north, and flow east to form extensive estuaries at the coast. The Crouch flows east across the south of the county, and joins the Roach to form a further estuary. The Rivers Lee, Mardyke and Roding flow southwards into the River Thames estuary. The valleys contain river corridors that are frequently of landscape, nature conservation and heritage value.



4.4.2 The key characteristics of this division can be summarised as:

- The river valleys dissect the boulder clay plateau. They are smaller and steeper in the upper valley reaches, revealing underlying gravel and sand deposits on the valley sides.
- Parts of the valleys are extensively modified by reservoirs, current and reclaimed gravel pits, landfill sites, artificial wetlands, river realignments and canals.
- Smaller, intimate tree-lined valleys with small rural settlements contrast with the more developed major river valley floodplains.

- Organic field shapes are common as they are defined by the valley topography.
- The high ground of the plateau allows ‘tunnelled’ views through deciduous woodland to the valley bottom.
- The river courses are often marked by their associated vegetation.
- Settlements along the valleys reflect the historic use of them for access into the county.

4.4.3 Typical hedgerow species are Hawthorn, Oak, Ash, with occasional White Poplar, Crack Willow, White Willow, Alder, Oak, Field Maple, Goat Willow, Black Poplar, Elm.



4.4.4 The River Valleys comprise eight Landscape Character Areas within the study area:

- Cam Valley (C1)
- Stort Valley (C2)
- Lee Valley (C3)
- Roding Valley (C4)
- Chelmer Valley (C5)
- Blackwater & Brain Valley (C6)
- Colne Valley (C7)
- Stour Valley (C8)

#### 4.4.5 *Cam Valley (C1)*

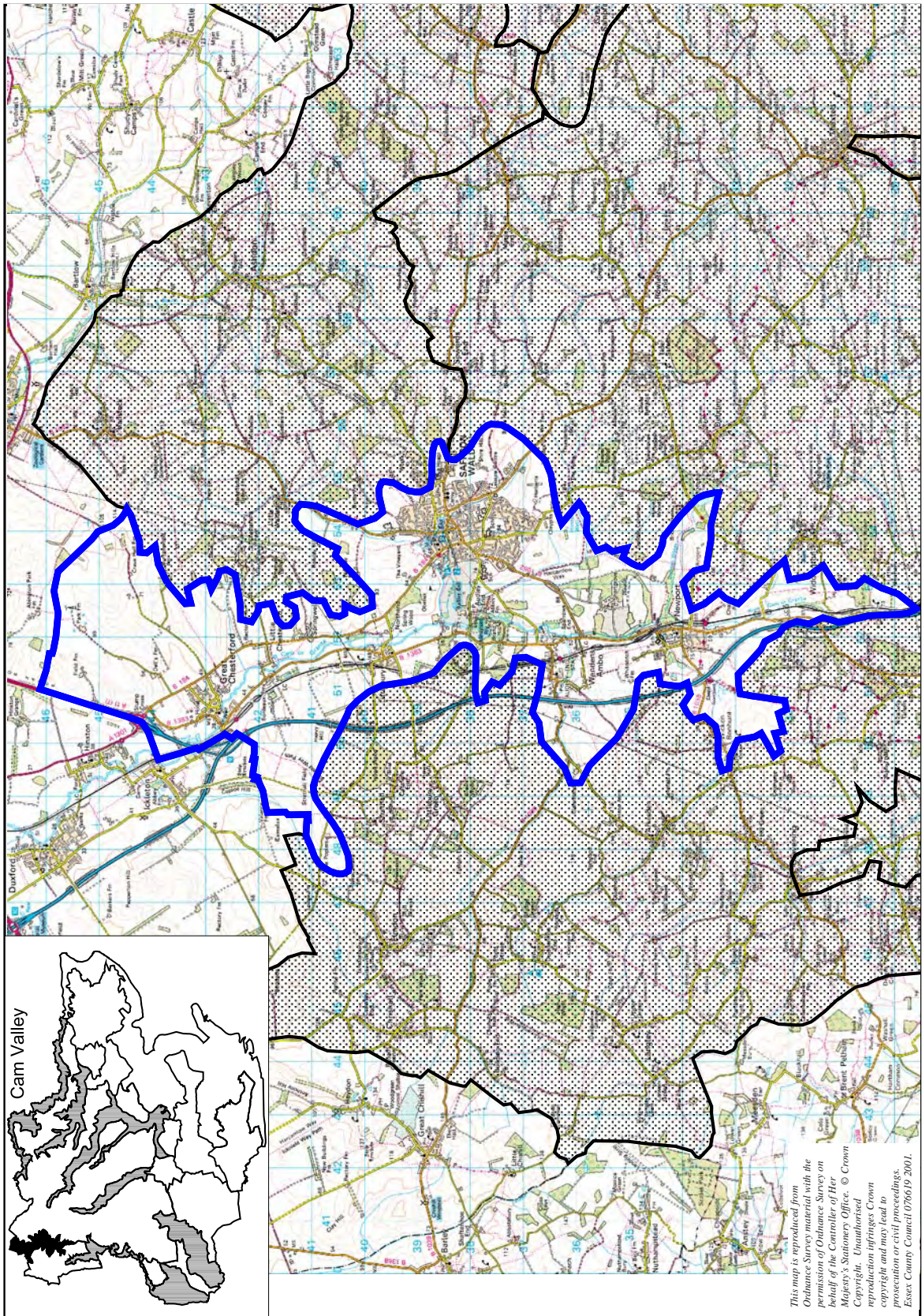


##### *Key Characteristics*

- Broad valley. Strongly rolling valleysides in the north, gentler slopes to the south.
- Predominantly large scale, open arable farmland on the valley slopes.
- Enclosed character of the valley floor with lush riverside vegetation
- Nucleated settlement pattern.
- Extensive historic parkland between Littlebury and Newport.

##### *Overall Character*

The Cam Valley is a wide and relatively deep valley, with distinctive smooth undulating chalkland hillslopes in the north, becoming shallower and gentler to the south. Large regular arable fields on the valleysides are divided by very broken hedgerows with few hedgerow trees. In contrast, the valley floor has a more enclosed intimate character with dense riverside trees/woodland and small fields. Historic parks such as Audley End and Shortgrove introduce a strong pastoral character to the valley between Littlebury and Newport with sweeping grasslands studded with parkland trees, as well as boundary woods and treebelts following the contours. A string of small villages are situated along the lower slopes of the main valley, and the small town of Saffron Walden occupies a tributary valley to the west. The M11 and a pylon route are locally visually prominent in the landscape.



## ***Character Profile***

### *Geology*

- Upper/Middle Chalk, Sand and Gravels.

### *Soils*

- Well drained brown calcareous soils and flinty sandy loams. Seasonally waterlogged alluvial soils.

### *Landform*

- Broad valley up to 1.5 km wide/65 m amplitude of relief. Strongly rolling valleysides with a flat valley floor in the north. Tributary valleys create marked spurs and ridges. Gentler slopes south of Newport with a narrow valley floor.

### *Semi-natural vegetation*

- Remnant chalk grassland in roadside verges on the valleysides. Calcareous fen/marsh, alder carr woodland on the valley floor.

### *Pattern of field enclosure*

- Large scale mostly regular field pattern on the valleysides, and low trimmed or fragmented hedges. Small linear fields on the valley floor divided by drainage ditches or hedges.

### *Farming pattern*

- Arable land use on the valleysides, pasture and arable on the valley floor.

### *Woodland/tree cover*

- Typically open valleysides, with a few isolated plantations and treebelts. However, between Littlebury and Newport a much higher tree cover associated with parkland woods/treebelts.
- Strongly vegetated river course with strips of wet alder/willow woodland and poplar plantations.

### *Settlement pattern and built form*

- Strong nucleated settlement pattern (unusual in Essex). Small to medium size villages, single small town of Saffron Walden, and only a few isolated farms on the valleysides.
- Historic vernacular varies from brick and flint, more common in the north, to pink, white and green colour wash plastered timber frame buildings, some with decorative parquetry.
- Wealth and variety of architectural detail in the historic core of Saffron Walden.



### *Communications*

- Historic roads and lanes skirt the edge of the floodplain/lower valleysides, only crossing the valley at a small number of bridging points.
- The present day M11 follows higher parts of the western valleysides and crosses the valley in the far north.

### *Other landscape features*

- Two very large historic parks of Audley End and Shortgrove Park (18th Century Capability Brown landscapes) occupy the valley between Littlebury and Newport.
- Saffron Walden Church tower/spire is an important local landmark dominating the town and the surrounding landscape.
- Large common with maze in Saffron Walden.
- Iron Age hillfort of Ring Hill.
- A few disused chalkpits. Active chalk quarry near Newport. (Sand and gravel workings near Little/Great Chesterford).
- Pylon route crossing the valley near Littlebury is visually prominent.

### ***Landscape Condition***

- Hedgerows on some valleysides are in poor condition due to lack of management and intensive arable farming practices.
- Some valley floor pastures are in poor condition due to overgrazing.
- The extensive areas of historic parkland are in good condition.
- The condition of the settlements is good.
- Gravel workings, chalk pits, pylons and the M11 currently create some localised visual intrusions in the landscape.

### ***Past, Present and Future Trends for Change***

- Significant past influences on the development of the landscape include its early use as a communications route, late enclosure of the valleyside open fields, and the establishment of large, parkland estates.
- Intensification of arable farming since the Second World War has led to the loss/fragmentation of hedgerows on the valleysides.

- Commons, meadows, parkland and visually prominent chalkland slopes surrounding Saffron Walden are an important part of its setting and character, and would be vulnerable to large scale development.
- Small scale infill and expansion of the smaller settlements is also a likely pressure for change, and respect for their landscape setting and character is an important issue.
- Continuing decline in traditional grazing of riverside meadows due to expansion of horsiculture is a current and likely future trend.

**CAM VALLEY (C1)  
SENSITIVITY EVALUATION**

TYPE/SCALE OF DEVELOPMENT/CHANGE	KEY LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND ACCOMMODATION OF CHANGE ISSUES	LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY LEVEL
1. Major urban extensions (>5 ha) and new settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some visually exposed valleysides.</li> <li>• Integrity of undisturbed valley floor and of historic parklands.</li> <li>• Coalescence of small settlements.</li> </ul>	H
2. Small urban extensions (<5 ha)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landscape setting of towns.</li> </ul>	M
3. Major transportation developments/improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some visually exposed valleysides.</li> <li>• Integrity of valley floor and of historic parklands.</li> </ul> <p><i>Alignment and appropriate design of landform would be critical.</i></p>	M
4. Commercial/warehouse estate/port development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some visually exposed valleysides.</li> <li>• Integrity of undisturbed valley floor and of historic parklands.</li> </ul>	H
5. Developments with individual large/bulky buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some visually exposed valleysides.</li> </ul> <p><i>Siting, massing, form and colour are critical.</i></p>	M
6. Large scale 'open uses'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some visually exposed valleysides.</li> <li>• Integrity of valley floor.</li> </ul> <p><i>May be opportunities for restoration of hedgerows and chalk grassland.</i></p>	M
7. Mineral extraction/waste disposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visually exposed valleysides.</li> <li>• Landform character.</li> <li>• Integrity of undisturbed valley floor and of historic parklands.</li> </ul>	M
8. Incremental small scale developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Character and setting of the smaller settlements.</li> <li>• Some visually exposed valleysides.</li> </ul>	M
9. Utilities development, i.e. masts, pylons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some visually exposed valleysides.</li> </ul>	M
10. Decline in traditional countryside management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Condition of valley floor meadows and valley side hedgerows.</li> </ul>	M

Table to be read in conjunction with paragraphs 1.4.15 – 1.4.17

#### 4.4.6 *Stort Valley (C2)*



##### ***Key Characteristics***

- Shallow and narrow valley with moderately sloping arable valleysides.
- Fairly enclosed character due to the frequency of hedgerows/hedgerow trees, small woods/copses and riverside trees.
- Small pastures and large floodplain meadows on the valley floor.
- Numerous small estates and parklands.
- Substantially undeveloped character.

##### ***Overall Character***

The Stort Valley is shallow and fairly narrow for much of its length, only opening out north west of Harlow where large floodplain meadows extend over the valley floor. A patchwork of pasture and wetland vegetation along the course of the river contrasts with the arable fields of the valleysides, but thick hedgerows, small woods and tree belts provide a sense of enclosure. Views are mostly confined and urban development and major roads are only occasionally visible. Church spires are an occasional feature appearing above wooded skylines.

##### ***Character Profile***

###### *Geology*

- Sands and Gravels, Alluvium, Upper Chalk and Glacial Till (Chalky Boulder Clay).