



**Colchester Borough Council**

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**COLCHESTER BOROUGH  
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT**



**November 2005**

***CHRIS BLANDFORD ASSOCIATES***

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*Environment   Landscape   Planning*

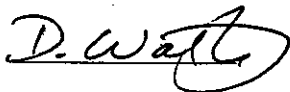


**Colchester Borough Council**

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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT**

**November 2005**

**Approved By:** D Watkins  
**Signed:**   
**Position:** Associate Technical Director  
**Date:** 25 November 2005

***CHRIS BLANDFORD ASSOCIATES***

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*Environment   Landscape   Planning*  
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## **PREFACE**



## **PREFACE**

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

This Landscape Character Assessment undertaken by Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) provides a baseline inventory and description of the Borough's landscape character types and areas. Landscape Character Assessment improves our understanding of landscapes through better appreciation of the composition and distribution of landscape types, their evolution, the pressures for change that they experience, the likely effects of change, and how change may be positively managed to sustain or enhance distinctive character.

In addition to assisting in the preparation of the Council's Local Development Framework, and providing a useful tool for informing development control decisions, the study will also inform other strategies and plans concerned with environmental protection and land management.

To ensure that full consideration is given to landscape character in the planning process, we commend this study to the Council for approval as a Supplementary Planning Document.

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

- Landscape Capacity of Settlement Fringes in Colchester Borough
- Review of Countryside Conservation Areas in Colchester Borough



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

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

We would also like to acknowledge the input provided by key stakeholders at the Consultation Workshops. These include representatives from the following organisations:

- Essex County Council
- Suffolk County Council
- Tendring District Council
- Braintree District Council
- Maldon District Council
- Babergh District Council
- Dedham Vale & Stour Valley Countryside Project
- DEFRA
- English Nature
- The Countryside Agency
- The Environment Agency
- Essex Estuaries Initiative
- River Colne Countryside Project, Colchester Borough Council

The CBA project team comprised:

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



## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**



## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

1.1.1 In September 2004, Colchester Borough Council commissioned Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) to prepare this borough-wide assessment of landscape character. The need to conserve and enhance the distinctive character of Colchester Borough's countryside and its settlements is recognised by the adopted Local Plan. This report will help inform the review of landscape policies as part of the new Local Development Framework (LDF) preparation process, and provide a useful context for planning decisions and land management activities in the Borough.

1.1.2 The general study area and context is shown on Figure 1. The area characterised by this study includes all the rural parts of the Borough (and the Dedham Vale AONB), up to and including the urban edge but excluding the principal urban conurbations (Colchester, Tiptree, Wivenhoe and West Mersea). A townscape characterisation study of these settlements is being undertaken as a separate exercise.

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

- Landscape Capacity of Settlement Fringes in Colchester Borough;
- Review of Countryside Conservation Areas in Colchester Borough.

### **1.2 The Importance of Landscape Character**

1.2.1 'Character' is defined as a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements that make each landscape or townscape different. Character is influenced by particular combinations of visual, ecological, historical, settlement, built components, and other intangible aspects such as tranquillity and sense of place.

1.2.2 The distinctive character of our surroundings has a fundamental impact on our quality of life. Identifying, protecting and enhancing those natural, historic and cultural elements that contribute to character are key aspects of achieving sustainable development (meeting the needs of today without compromising the needs of tomorrow). A 'character approach' to sustainable planning and land management is therefore about accommodating change in

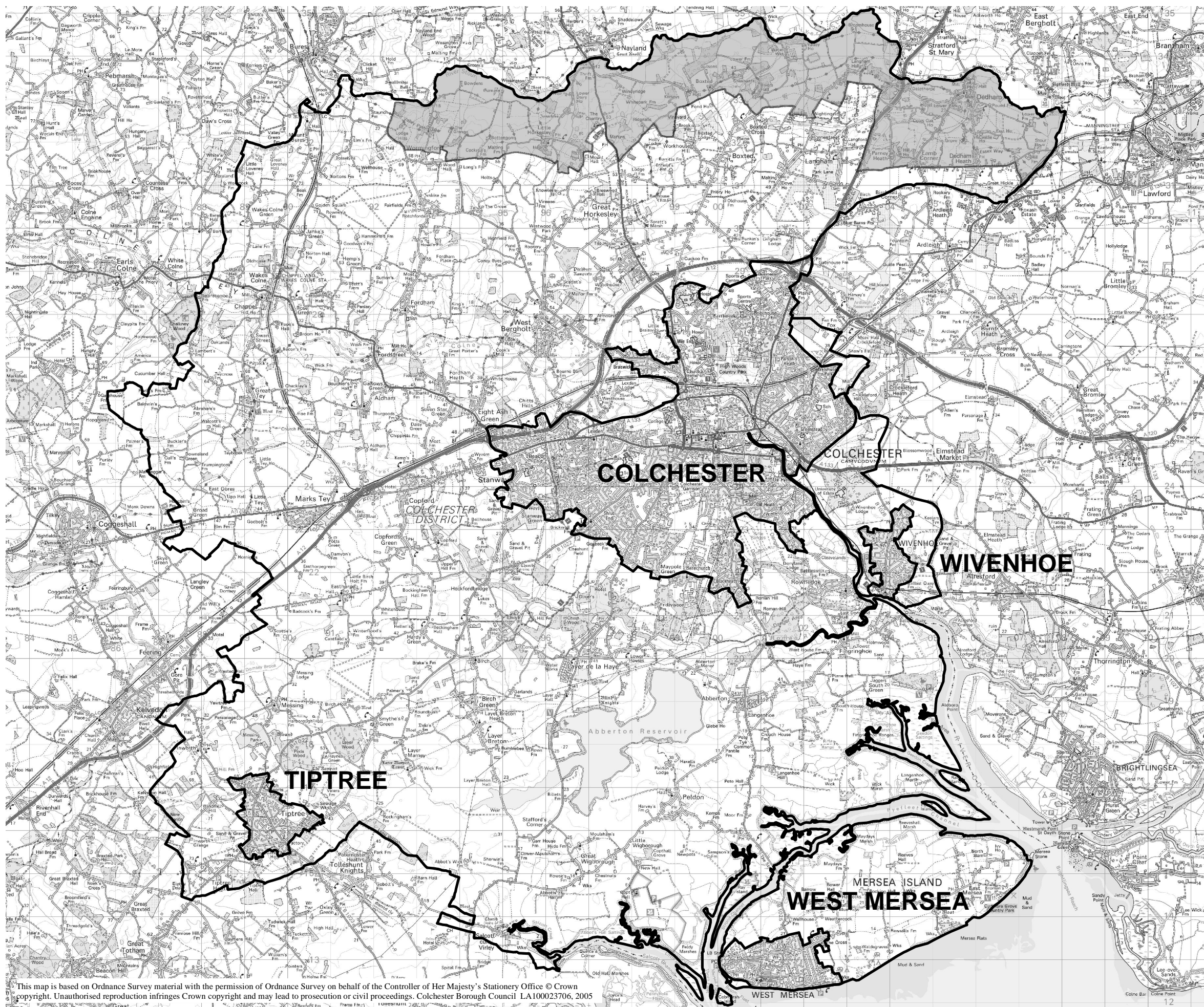
ways that reflect the opportunities, constraints and conditions posed by the character of places where change is planned.

### **1.3 Planning Context**



- 1.3.1 Much of the advice contained in national Planning Policy Guidance and Statements are concerned with character. In particular, the new *Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7): Sustainable Development in Rural Areas* recommends the character approach as a means of accommodating necessary change without sacrificing local character. There are strong links to the Government's design agenda which sees good quality design as critical to fostering local distinctiveness and sense of place.
- 1.3.2 The need to protect landscape character has been recognised by Essex County Council, and the need to protect the distinctive character of the towns, villages, countryside and coast of the County is set out in the Structure Plan. The Structure Plan specifically encourages district and borough councils in Essex to prepare Landscape Character Assessments to inform land use planning and land management in their areas.

### **1.4 Purpose and Objectives of the Study**

- 1.4.1 The key purpose of the study is to inform the preparation of wider planning policies and proposals within the new development plan, and other strategies and plans concerned with environmental protection and land management.
- 1.4.2 The key objectives of the study are to:
- Provide a consistent 'database' of landscape character information across the Borough;
  - Provide a robust basis for underpinning justification for retaining existing/updated CCAs within the new development plan (see separate technical report);
  - Provide planning guidelines to inform decisions about the potential scale and location of urban expansion around the fringes of Colchester and other identified settlements;
  - Provide landscape management guidelines to inform land management actions by farmers, estate owners and other major land owners/managers;
  - Incorporate the issues and concerns of key stakeholder organisations.



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**KEY**  
 Dedham Vale AONB  
 Colchester Borough Boundary

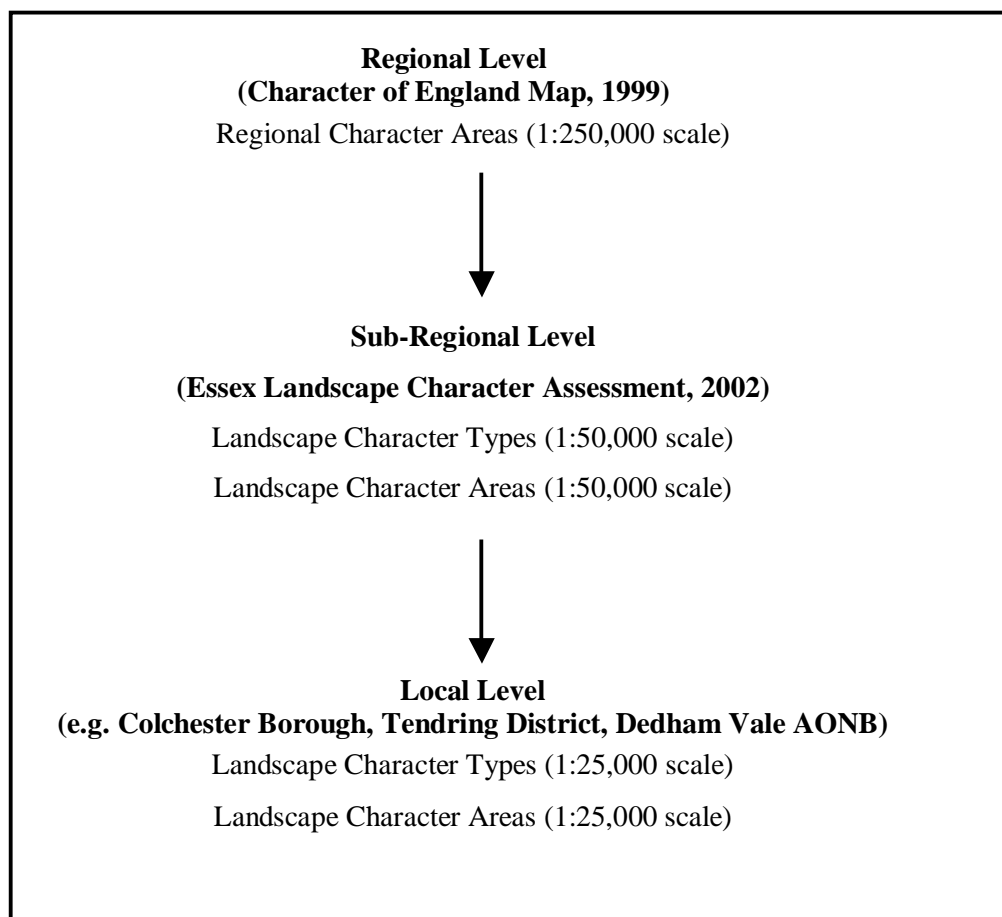
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**Figure 1**  
Study Area and Context



## 1.5 Relationship to Other Character Assessments

- 1.5.1 The Colchester Borough Landscape Character Areas have been developed to nest within the national and county assessments, and to coincide with assessments of neighbouring authorities where these exist.
- 1.5.2 The Countryside Agency and English Nature, with support from English Heritage have produced the Joint Character of England Map. This combines English Nature's Natural Areas and the Countryside Agency's Countryside Character areas into a map of joint character areas for the whole of England ('Regional Character Areas').
- 1.5.3 Colchester Borough is covered by three Regional Character Areas, namely the South Suffolk and North Essex Claylands, Northern Thames Basin and the Greater Thames Estuary. These provide a broad framework for the county level assessment contained within the Essex Landscape Character Assessment (CBA, 2002).
- 1.5.4 In turn, the county assessment provides a framework for local level assessments, of which Colchester is one. The relationship of the assessment hierarchy is shown in the box below.



- 1.5.5 This Landscape Character Assessment also supports and complements the Essex Biodiversity Action Plan which seeks to conserve and enhance the diversity of wildlife habitats and species.

## 1.6 Approach and Methodology

### *Approach*

- 1.6.1 This Landscape Character Assessment addresses both the relatively objective process of landscape characterisation, which involves identifying, mapping, classifying and describing 'landscape character', and the more subjective process of evaluating landscape character to inform the development of a range of planning and land management tools. This approach is in line with the guidance published by the Countryside Agency in conjunction with Scottish Natural Heritage - *Landscape Character Assessment - Guidance for England and Scotland* (2002). An outline of the key methodological stages in the process are summarised below. Where appropriate, further details are described in the respective sections of the report.

### *Desk Research and Characterisation*

- 1.6.2 This comprised:
- A review of the most recent national and local character assessments relating to the study area, including the Countryside Agency's Countryside Character descriptions, the framework provided by Essex County Council's county-wide landscape character types and landscape character areas; existing assessments for neighbouring areas (Tendring); and AONB assessments (Dedham Vale).
  - Production and analysis of map overlays using OS 1:25,000 base data. This included overlays of simplified surface geology, landform, drainage, soils, land use, vegetation and habitats, field patterns and types, settlement pattern, communications, historic landscape features/types.
  - Analysis of air photos and documentary evidence in order to identify the main current/historical influences on landscape character.

1.6.3 The process of characterisation drew together the information outlined above to develop a draft classification at a scale of 1:25,000 of:

- Landscape Character Types : which are generic and share combinations of geology, topography, vegetation, settlement pattern etc.
- Landscape Character Areas : which are unique geographically specific areas of the landscape type/s.

1.6.4 In recognition of the important contribution historic character makes to the character of the Borough, the above draft classification was additionally informed and refined by a review of the Essex Historic Landscape Characterisation Mapping.

1.6.5 The draft landscape character classification was discussed with the Client Project Group to highlight boundaries that required refinement and appraisal during the field survey.

### ***Field Survey***

1.6.6 The field survey work was undertaken between October 2004 and April 2005 to allow consideration of the influence of seasonal variations on landscape character. This comprised:

- Testing the draft character type/area boundaries, identifying their key characteristics.
- Completion of field surveys and taking of photos. Survey checklists were used to ensure a structured assessment of visual landscape attributes was undertaken, including landform, tree cover, field enclosure, settlement/street patterns, setting and aesthetic factors, and variations in condition and evidence of pressure for change.

### ***Stakeholder Consultation***

1.6.7 In accordance with current guidance from the Countryside Agency, key stakeholders were encouraged to become actively involved in the assessment. These included representatives from the following organisations:

- Essex County Council
- Suffolk County Council
- Tendring District Council
- Braintree District Council
- Maldon District Council
- Babergh District Council
- Dedham Vale & Stour Valley Countryside Project
- DEFRA
- English Nature
- The Countryside Agency
- The Environment Agency
- Essex Estuaries Initiative
- River Colne Countryside Project, Colchester Borough Council

1.6.8 Two consultation workshops session were held to:

- Discuss the draft classification of landscape character types and areas.
- Review consistency of character area boundaries with neighbouring authorities.
- Identify key issues affecting landscape character.
- Discuss types of planning and land management guidelines needed to address different character issues.

1.6.9 The comments made then informed the characterisation process, and helped to build local understanding of the process of character assessment, its value and applications.

1.6.10 As a technical study, community groups were not consulted on the assessment at this preparatory stage. However, it is anticipated that community involvement in the future application of the Landscape Character Assessment will be encouraged through:

- public consultation on the completed Landscape Character Assessment to enable its possible adoption by the Council as a Supplementary Planning Document to the new development plan.

- development of character-based design guidance at the local level by Parish Councils (e.g., Village Design Statements, Town Design Statements, etc).

### ***Evaluation***

- 1.6.11 This stage comprised the identification of landscape strategy objectives and landscape planning and land management guidelines for each landscape character area.



## **2.0 OVERVIEW**



## **2.0 OVERVIEW**

### **2.1 General**

- 2.1.1 This section of the report gives an overview of the landscape within Colchester Borough, providing information on the regional landscape context, key forces for change in the Colchester landscape, and the physical and historical influences on the landscape. A review of the landscape policy context is also provided.

### **2.2 Regional Landscape Context**

- 2.2.1 The Regional Character Areas identified on the Character of England Map (Countryside Agency, English Nature and English Heritage, 1999), provide the context for understanding variations in landscape character at a sub-regional (i.e. County) and local (i.e. Borough) level.
- 2.2.2 Colchester Borough is covered by three Regional Character Areas (see Figure 2). The general characteristics of these Areas are described in Countryside Character Volume 6: East of England published by the Countryside Agency in 1999.
- 2.2.3 Within this context, the Essex County Landscape Character Assessment (Essex CC, 2002) defines 12 County Character Areas. These are shown on Figure 2.

### **2.3 Physical Influences on the Shaping of the Landscape**

#### ***General***

- 2.3.1 The Colchester Borough landscape has evolved as a result of an interaction of the physical structure of the landscape and the vegetation and land uses that cover it. To understand what makes a place distinctive, it is useful to identify the key physical influences that have shaped the Borough's landscape over time.
- 2.3.2 The basic structure of the landscape is fundamentally influenced by its underlying rocks and relief. Geology and the processes of weathering, erosion and deposition influence the shape and form of the landscape and its drainage and soils. In turn, these influence patterns of vegetation and land use.

### ***Geology***

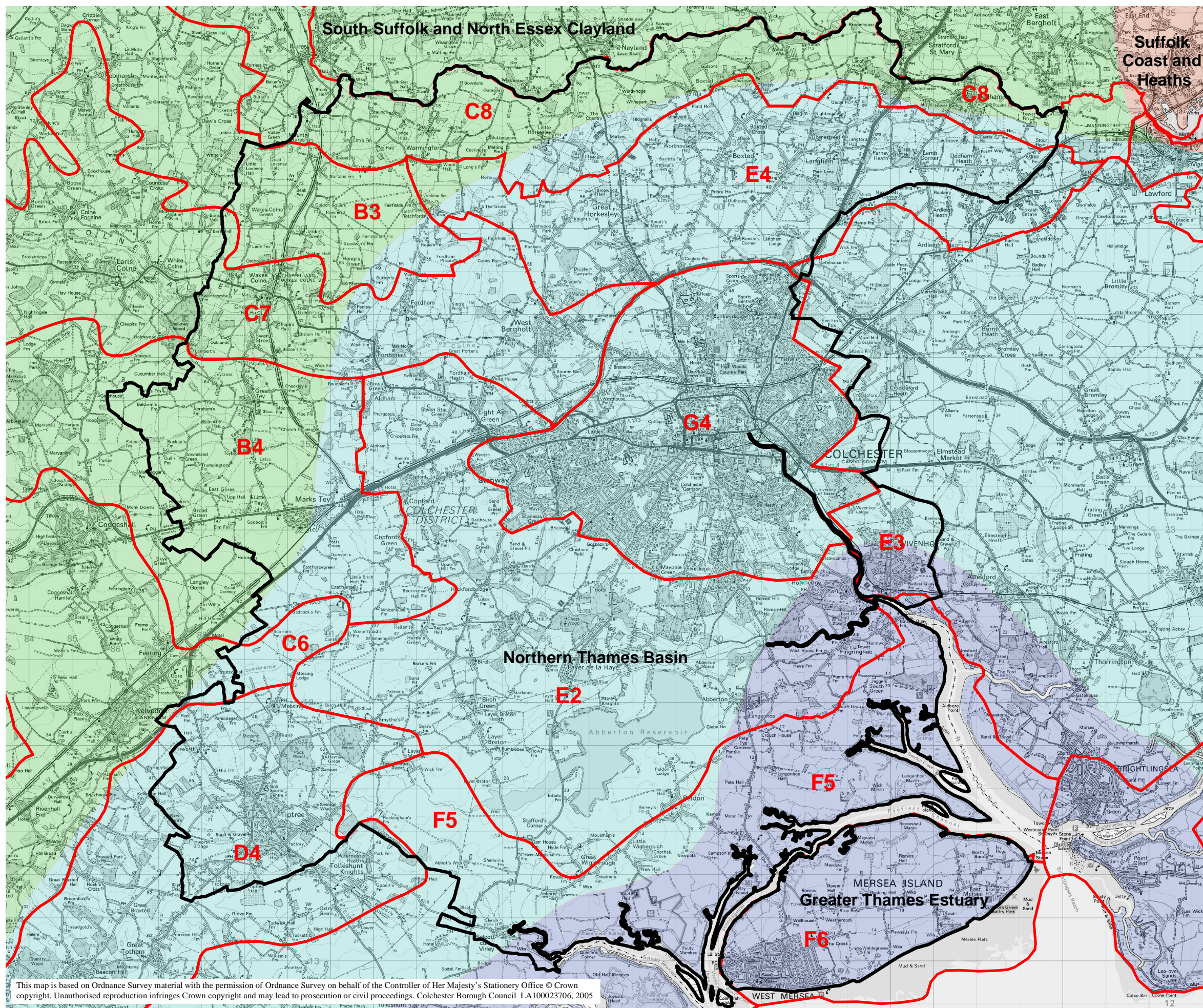
- 2.3.3 The oldest rocks were laid down between 440 and 360 million years old. They mainly consist of hard, slaty shales, mudstones and sandstones. Overlying this base are a number of different geological layers formed between 135 million years ago to the present. The basic stratigraphy of this geology is as follows:

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| • Brick Earth           | Quaternary Period (1.8 million years ago to present day) |
| • Lowestoft Till        | } Tertiary period (66-1.8 million years ago)             |
| • Thanet Sand Formation |  |
| • Bulhead Bed           | } Cretaceous Period (135-65 million years ago)           |
| • Bagshot Sand          |  |
| • Claygate Beds         |  |
| • London Clay           |  |
| • Reading Beds          |  |
| • Upper Chalk           |  |
| • Upper Greensand       |  |
| • Gault Clay            |  |

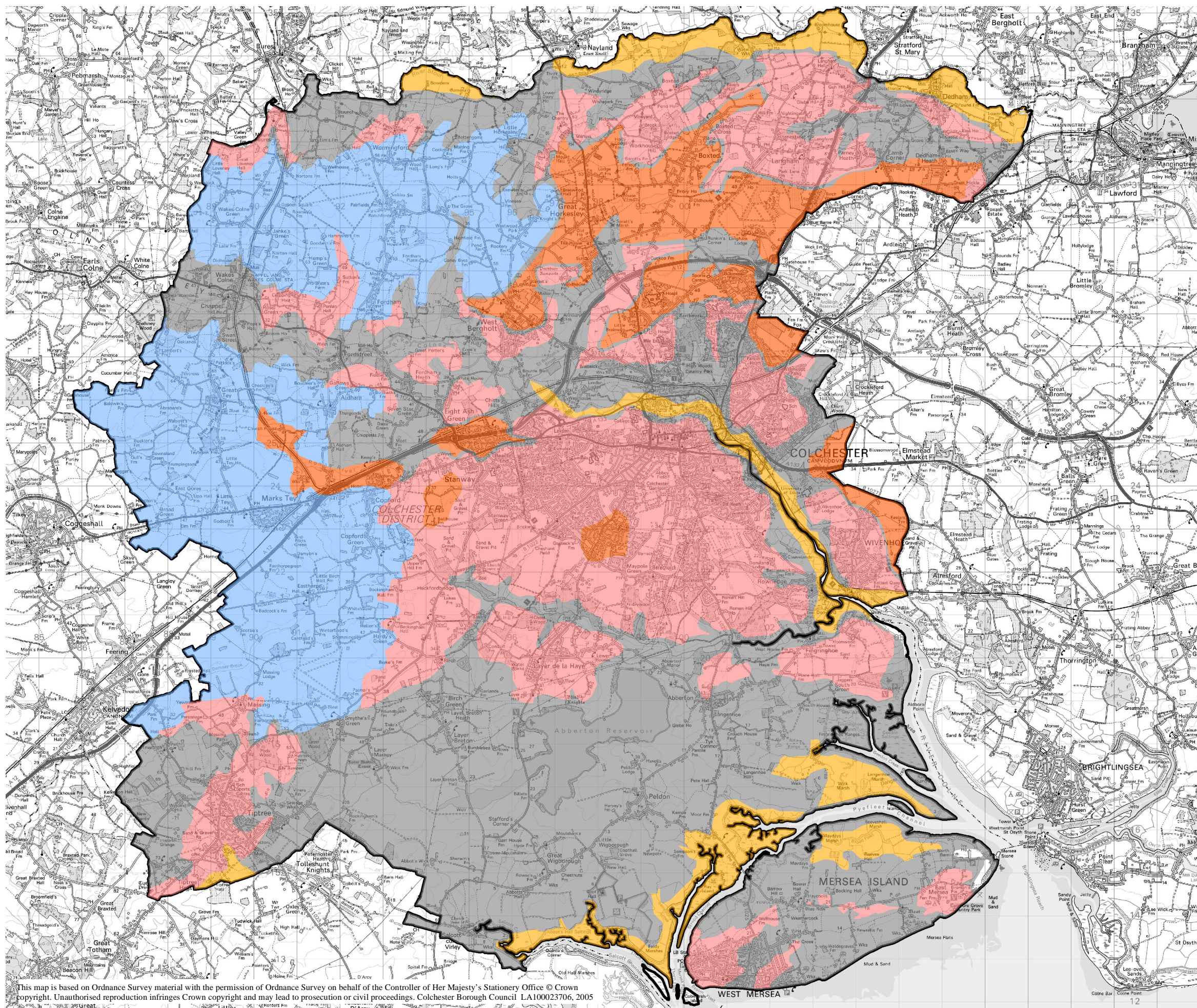
- 2.3.4 The surface drift geology of Colchester Borough (see Figure 3) is dominated by the deposition of London Clay, a mud laid down on the floor of a subtropical sea 50 million years ago. In the north of the Borough, sands and gravels tend to overly the London Clay. In places fragments of river terraces yield patches of gravel and floodplain brickearth and loams.

- 2.3.5 The rivers and their valleys lie on alluvium composed of clay, silt, sand and gravel; products of subsequent post-Anglian fluvial erosion by the rivers and the diversion of the river Thames from through the Mid-Essex Depression and Colchester to its present location. There are also areas of alluvial deposits found along the coastal floodplain in the south of the borough and on the northern side of Mersea Island. In the eastern and western extents of Mersea Island, there are areas of sands and gravels.

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







**Key**

- Alluvial Deposits
- Sands & Gravels
- Brickearths & Loams
- Claygate and Bagshot Beds
- London Clay
- Colchester Borough Boundary

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- 2.3.6 Colchester Borough is generally low-lying and comprises a gently undulating broad plateau, intersected by a pattern of small intricate creeks and valleys that break up the plateau edges where the land falls gently towards the coast (see Figure 4). These creeks and valleys extend the coastal influence far inland. The river valleys range from narrow steep sided valleys to more gentle valleys with wider floodplains. The highest areas of land are found in the north, west and south west of the Borough, where land rises to 115m ODN.

### ***Soils***

- 2.3.7 The Borough has a broad range of soils reflecting the underlying geology and which in turn have influenced the patterns of land use in the area. The most extensive soils in the area are brown soils mostly in agricultural use found predominantly overlying sands and gravels. They are slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage and moderate to high natural fertility.
- 2.3.8 The area south of the Roman River is dominated by slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged, slightly acid but base-rich loamy and clayey soils overlying London Clay. The lowlying coastal areas and River Colne valley within the tidal and fluvial floodplains have deep stoneless non-calcareous and calcareous clayey and loam soils with naturally high groundwater overlying alluvial deposits. There are also areas of saltmarsh soils around the coast.
- 2.3.9 There is an area of pelosols to the southwest of Colchester overlying sands and gravels. These are slowly permeable non-calcareous clayey and loamy soils with impeded drainage.
- 2.3.10 The majority of the soil on Mersea Island is slightly deep acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage but moderate to high natural fertility. The lower lying coastal flats to the north of the island comprise loamy and clayey soils with naturally high groundwater and lime rich to moderate fertility. Although the land is generally just above sea level, it is dependent on the sea walls for protection from flooding. The land lying within the coastal floodplain contains areas of slowly permeable/seasonally wet, slightly acid and base-rich loam and clayey soils.

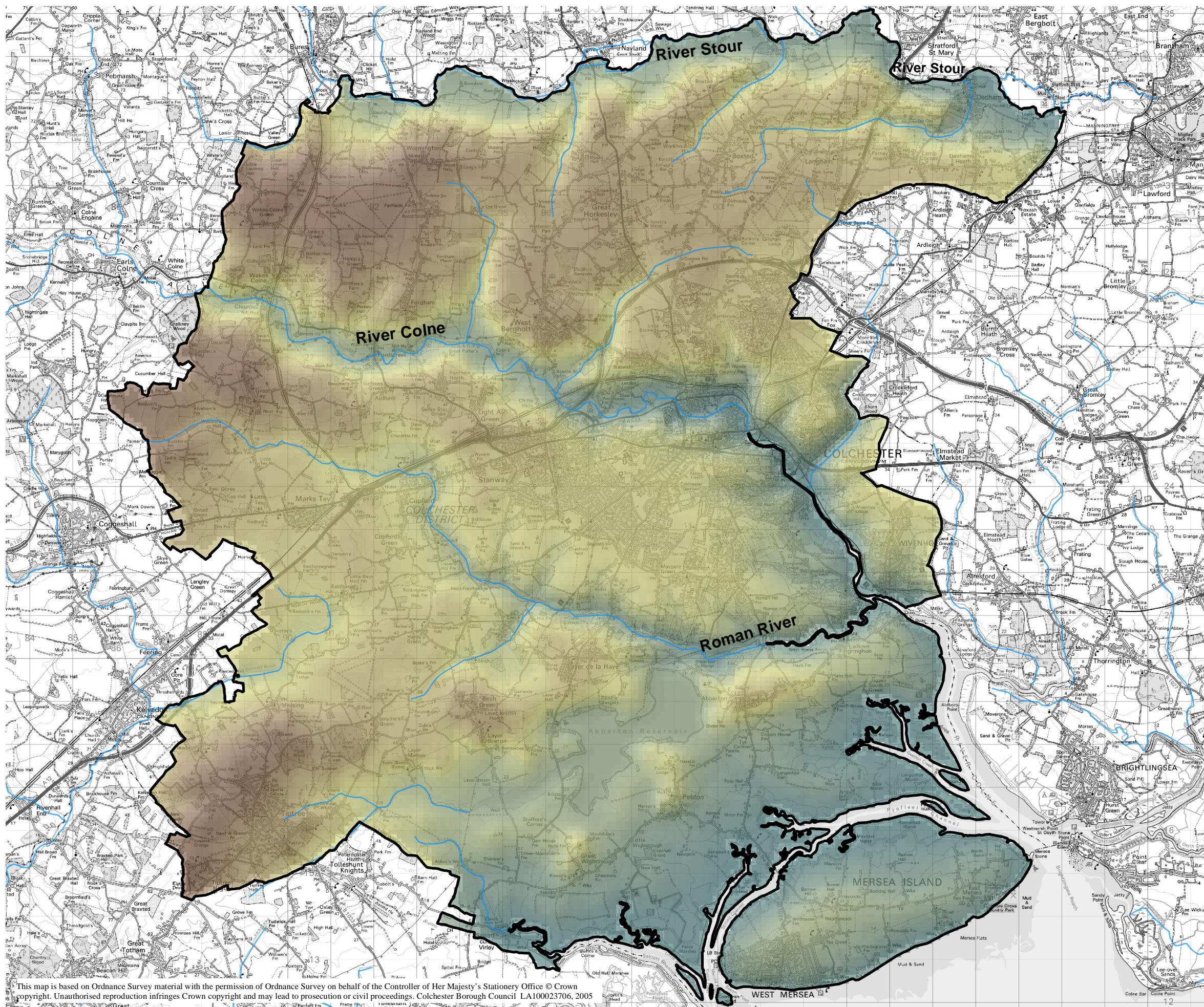
### ***Ecological Character***

- 2.3.11 The rural landscape of Colchester Borough is predominately used for arable or improved pasture. However there are also significant areas of remaining semi-natural habitat that make a very important contribution to the Borough's distinctive character. The presence and distribution of these habitats is strongly influenced by geology and landform, and include woodland, grassland, heath, estuary, saltmarsh and mudflat and freshwater and open water habitats. Many sites where these habitats occur are designated as Ramsar Sites, candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSAC), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI), Special Protection Areas (SPA), National Nature Reserves (NNR) and/or Local Nature Reserves (LNR). The distribution of these areas designated for their nature conservation value are shown on Figure 5.

#### *Woodland*


- 2.3.12 There are small patches of woodland scattered throughout the Borough most frequently found above 18m ODN. To the south of Colchester, blocks of woodland are found along the course of the Roman River on both sides of the river valley from Copford to its confluence with the River Colne. Some of the woodland is included within the Roman River SSSI. It is classified as ancient woodland mainly comprising high forest with the remains of a coppice-with-standards structure. Other areas of scrub woodland lie on the lower slopes of larger streams and in narrow tributary valleys.
- 2.3.13 Most of the remainder of ancient and more recent woodland are found in close proximity to settlement such as Bullock Wood SSSI. It is situated on an almost level plateau with acidic soils developed over Brickearth, and lies within the former Royal Forest of Kingswoode. Woodland becomes scarce south of Abberton Reservoir on the low-lying coastal flats or on Mersea Island.
- 2.3.14 There are also several orchards situated to the north of Colchester around West Berghott, Great Horkesley and Langham.


#### *Grassland*




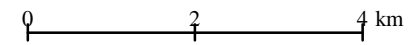
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**KEY**

 Principal Rivers

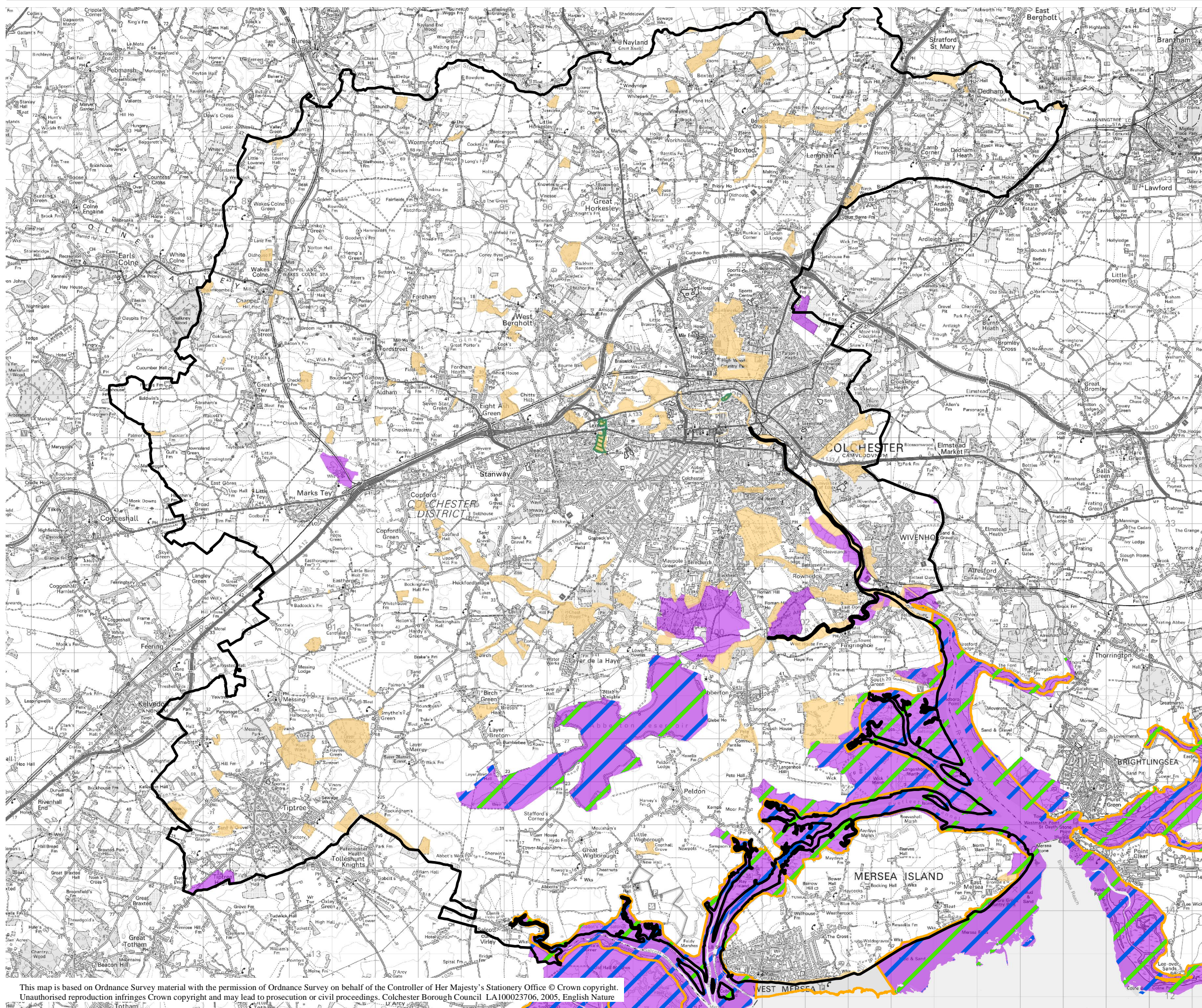
 High : 115m  
Low : 1m

 Colchester Borough Boundary



**Figure 4**  
 Topography and Drainage





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- KEY**
- Special Protection Area
  - Ramsar Site
  - Special Area of Conservation
  - Site of Special Scientific Interest
  - Local Nature Reserve
  - Site of Importance for Nature Conservation
  - Colchester Borough Boundary

0 2 4 km



- 2.3.15 Within Colchester Borough there are several examples of acidic grassland associated with heathland. Tiptree Heath SSSI and Roman River SSSI contain two of the few sizeable area of unimproved acid grassland remaining in Essex.
- 2.3.16 Areas of drained grassland are found within the marshes situated within internationally and nationally designated Blackwater Estuary and Colne Estuary. The grazing marshes and sea walls comprise neutral grassland, much of which is species rich, providing good feeding and breeding grounds for waterfowl and waders.
- 2.3.17 The alluvial floodplains of the Thames and its tributaries also supports fragments of species rich damp neutral grasslands of national significance.

#### *Heath*

- 2.3.18 Tiptree Heath SSSI to the southeast of Colchester is the largest surviving fragment of heathland remaining in Essex. It is situated on a ridge of glacial deposits and gravel. Layer Brook flows through the heath supporting the habitats found such as acidic grassland and dwarf shrub heath through to secondary woodland.

#### *Estuary, Saltmarsh and Mudflat*

- 2.3.19 Along the coast there is a mixture of saltings, mudflats, sand and shingle beaches that extend beyond the sea walls providing an important habitat for a range of wildfowl. Extensive areas of saltmarsh are located along the Borough's Coastline including the northern coast of Mersea Island and the tributaries of the River Colne. In addition many miles of mudbanks fringe the tidal creeks outside the sea walls. There are two main estuaries which border the borough (Blackwater Estuary and Colne Estuary) that have been internationally and nationally designated for their nature conservation importance. Both these estuaries are designated Ramsar, SPA, SSSI and parts are also NNRs.
- 2.3.20 Blackwater Estuary is the largest estuary in Essex north of the Thames and one of the largest estuarine complexes in East Anglia. Its mudflats, fringed by saltmarsh on the upper shores, support internationally and nationally important numbers of over wintering waterfowl. The seawall, ancient grazing marsh, associated fleet and ditch systems and semi-improved grassland are all of high conservation interest.

- 2.3.21 The other important estuary is the Colne Estuary of international and national importance for breeding and wintering waders and wildfowl. It is a comparatively short and branching estuary with five tidal arms that flow into the main channel. Within the estuary there are a large variety of habitats including mudflats, saltmarsh, grazing marsh, sand and shingle spits, disused gravel pits and reedbeds that support outstanding assemblages of invertebrates and plants.

#### *Fresh Water and Open Water Habitats*

- 2.3.22 Abberton Reservoir SSSI, SPA is the largest freshwater body in Essex with a water area of about 500ha. It lies approximately four miles south of Colchester and is of national significance as one of the most important reservoirs in Britain for wildfowl and one of Europe's most renowned wetland sites. Approximately 30,000 birds visit annually.
- 2.3.23 Rivers form the other main freshwater habitat within Colchester Borough. Within the Borough, as described previously, there are two main rivers: Roman and Colne. The Colne is of local significance. There are also many tributaries that dissect the landscape contributing to more variation in habitats.
- 2.3.24 Overall Colchester Borough has a varied range of habitat types, which strongly influence the character of the landscape.

## **2.4 Historical Influences on the Landscape**

### *Settlement of the Landscape*

- 2.4.1 The landscapes of Colchester Borough have long been subject to episodes of settlement, abandonment and reuse, evolving into the present day rich tapestry.
- 2.4.2 People have transformed the landscape of the Colchester Borough from their first appearance in the Palaeolithic (500,000-8,500 BC). The wildwood forests that covered the Borough were slowly cleared as people began to inhabit and use the area. Favoured areas for the early hunter-gatherers of the Palaeolithic (500,000 to c.10,000 BC) and Mesolithic (c.10,000 to c.4,500 BC), were the rich and fertile river valleys. Evidence of these low-lying landscapes has been buried beneath the North Sea as a result of sea-level change, however some land surfaces are visible at low tide. As agriculture was adopted in the Neolithic land management practices dramatically altered, and probably involved increased clearance of woodland and

more permanent settlement. This process continued and intensified during the Bronze Age and Iron Age. The Iron Age brought an increased focus to settlement as the first 'towns' or 'Oppida' began to develop. Colchester was one of many kingdoms of which Iron Age Britain was composed, set within the heart of the 'Trinovantes' tribal area. The site was situated at Gosbecks, just to the west of modern Colchester. Surrounding this 'town' within the countryside were scatters of small farmsteads/enclosures. Examples of prehistoric sites include:

- Mersea Island – buried Palaeolithic and Mesolithic remains exist within the gravel deposits at the east end of the island. Although not permanent settlement, remains of early activity are revealed at low tide including bones of hippopotamus and elephant;
- Colchester Oppida (Camulos); and
- Pitchbury Ramparts (hillfort).

2.4.3 Roman settlement (c.43 to 410AD) was centred on the then new town of Colchester (Camulodunum) that they built to the east of the old. Development and reuse of the earlier Iron Age settlement occurred, as the site developed with the building of a temple and theatre. Transport routes leading from Colchester to other national centres had a number of settlements develop along them, particularly along crossroads or passing points such as 'fords'. A number of isolated villas also occurred within the area and a network of roads led them to the first 'Capital of England'. The rebuilding of Colchester after Boudicca's sacking of the capital left huge 'fortified' walls from which the surrounding countryside is still visible. Examples of Roman sites include:

- Colchester Roman Town;
- Stanway;
- Fordstreet;
- Fordham; and
- Wormingford.

2.4.4 As the Saxons settled in the Colchester borough, they re-used many of the earlier settlements such as Colchester, but also appear to have created new ones. Colchester still remained an important regional stronghold and, by the time of the Domesday Book in 1086, it was a borough of some significance, with the status of a hundred, its own court, a mint and several churches. Granting of markets in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries built on many of the earlier Saxon and Norman settlement structures, and created historic cores from which modern

settlement has developed. Settlement densities and population levels fluctuated widely throughout the medieval period and across the borough with a number of towns and villages abandoned, expanded and contracted. In the medieval period the settlement pattern consisted of a small number of market towns, small-nucleated villages and hamlets, and widespread dispersed settlement in the form of farms and cottages. Moated manorial sites, which date from the 12-16th centuries, are scattered throughout the landscape especially on areas of high ground linking them with their estate land on the marsh. Many of the estates were laid within medieval parkland, of which a number survive within the landscape today. medieval settlement is a familiar feature of today's landscape. Examples of medieval sites include:

- Great and Little Horkesley and Great Tey owe their origins in the early medieval and medieval period;
- Development of settlement in the medieval period includes; East Mersea, West Bergholt, and Rowhedge;
- The towns and villages with fairs and markets within the Colchester Borough include: Colchester which had markets and fairs, first recorded in 1104, Earls Colne which was granted a market and fair in 1250 AD and Salcott which was granted a market in 1221;
- Colchester was important as a medieval port and its position gave itself easily to early medieval raiders; and
- Layer Marney Tower and parkland; Birch Hall and parkland, Kingsford Park, Berechurch Hall, Abberton Hall, east Donyland Hall, Wivenhoe Hall Park, West Bergholt Hall, and Westwood Park.

2.4.5 The seventeenth century brought the manor houses, many of which built on the early estates of the medieval period. These were usually set within parkland landscapes, such as Copford Hall, and designed in formal styles influenced by the fashions of the Continent. Colchester maintained its regional importance when the population gradually increased. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, development of the communication network and later, the 19<sup>th</sup> century development of the railways, led to the expansion of some of the small towns within the area. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century this pattern of new and expanding settlement in the Colchester Borough gained a new pace and direction with a number of new settlements.

#### *Utilisation of the Marshes and Mudflats*

2.4.6 As unreclaimed environments, the marshes provide an important interface between the land and water, and historically have been an important resource for the area's residents, not only

providing a rich and varied source of food, including fish, eels, oysters and wildfowl, but also serving as the location for important early industrial activity such as salt making and pottery production. The unreclaimed marshes also provided an important area for sheep grazing, the salt in the rich coastal marshes providing protection. Never reclaimed, Fingringhoe marshland has been described as one of the most interesting yet delicate environments of the Essex coastline. Remains of 19<sup>th</sup> century oyster production can be found at Pewitt Island.

2.4.7 As the marshes became the perfect area for pasture, the textile industry of the area gained in importance from as early as the Roman period. By the 12<sup>th</sup> century, wool was one of Britain's most important exports. This led to increased pressure on reclamation of the marshlands. Salt marshes have an advantage over the inland pasture for sheep husbandry: they are less susceptible to drying out in summer, and the salt content limits the risk of foot rot and liver fluke. It has also been suggested that the meat from these animals is superb, although mutton may have been regarded as a by-product. As sea levels lowered in the early Roman period, increased run off created higher tide levels and more susceptible flooding. The red-hills provided well drained, high refuges for Shepherd's and their sheep. The retention of the marshes and the reclamation of the marshland within the area dates back from the Roman period and has continued through to present day. Key sites of historical interest in the landscape include:

- Feldy Marshes;
- Salcott Marshes;
- Maydays Marsh;
- Fingringhoe sea walls; and
- East Mersea Sea Walls.

2.4.8 The marshland landscapes of the past were ideal in the production of salt. The manufacture of salt (which began in the Bronze Age) flourished in the early Roman period, turning most of the coastline at certain times into a smokey industrial landscape. By the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD this production went into decline, possibly due to inland salt production sites. The red hills on Mersea Island are landmarks along the coast associated with salt production.

2.4.9 Fishing and hunting would have been the earliest forms of industry dating from the Palaeolithic to the present day. Fishing in the later periods became more complex as the creeks and estuaries were used to catch fish. As farming began bounding the landscape new features were created. Parks began in the medieval period. Owned by royalty they

traditionally held stocks of deer, which would be hunted within a bounded wood. Deer were not the only favoured delicacy, during the late 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries Essex became a key area for wildfowl. The marshes were an ideal landscape for the wildfowl hunters of the past as they are for the bird watchers of the present. Key sites of interest include:

- Layer Marney parkland, which originated as a deer park in 1266, however very little of the early landscape survives;
- East Mersea duck decoy pond, a star-fish shape which was constructed to lure wildfowl; and
- River Colne estuary where at low tide the upper relicts of an early fishing traps are visible in the mudflats.

### *Agriculture*

- 2.4.10 The adoption of agriculture and its development from the Neolithic to today has been a significant influence on the character of landscape today. Prehistoric agricultural practices took place in a variety of field systems and open landscapes, where people used, reused and abandoned areas across generations. Prehistoric and Roman field systems are very difficult to detect, however it is possible that fields retain some or all of their early patterns and forms. For example, at the beginning of the Roman period, much of the Gosbecks area was revised and redeveloped as farmland around the Temple and Theatre and the old town centre.
- 2.4.11 Both during and after the medieval period, much of the landscape underwent piecemeal enclosure, whereby the land had been rationalised into consolidated private ownership through a series of private land exchanges and through gradual enclosure of woodland, forest, heath and common. This is mostly evident with the areas of heath, which previously formed a necklace around Colchester from Wivenhoe to the River Colne and from Tiptree Heath to Wigborough. The Chapman and Andre Map of 1777 shows an area of smallholdings abutting the heath much like common land and possibly depicts the limits of cultivation reached during the Black Death surviving since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the French Wars increased the price of corn and the heaths were cleared for agriculture. For example, only a fragment of heath survives at Tiptree Heath to the south of the village, which itself did not survive in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Later Enclosure dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries has occurred on a small scale at Great and Little Wigborough, south of Fordham and north of Boxted.

- 2.4.12 In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, changes in agricultural practice brought about by the Common Agricultural Policy led to a further rationalisation of fields within the landscape through the stripping out of field boundaries to create extensive field systems. For example, fields to the north of Colchester lost their boundaries post the 1950s, leading to the characteristic large fields seen today.

### *Communications*

- 2.4.13 People have always moved within the landscape for activities such as hunting, trading and social meetings. Trackways, rivers and the coastal shores formed the earliest forms of communication networks from prehistory onwards. Historic routeways are important as the precursors of the modern communication system, but also as a significant influence on the sitting of later settlement and other features within the landscape. Key communication routes in the Borough include:

#### *Key Sites*

- River Colne and the Roman River;
- Trackways and Roman Roads such as Stane Street which led to London;
- Sea routes along the Thames Estuary; and
- Railway.

### *Defence*

- 2.4.14 The walls of the fortified town of Roman Colchester and a number of later defensive monuments that survive within the landscape are distinctive features in the Borough. WWII sites have an extensive impact on the landscape, in the form of defence lines and airfields such as White Colne, Tiptree and Langham.

### *Historic Environment Designations*

- 2.4.15 A variety of historic environment features are protected by both formal and informal designations in recognition of their historical and archaeological value, both locally and nationally. These include:
- Scheduled Monuments – there are 20 nationally important archaeological sites within the Borough protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979);

- Conservation Areas – there are 21 historical centres of towns and villages in the Borough of special architectural or historic interest protected under the Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act (1990);
- Listed Buildings – 41 Grade I and 97 Grade II\* buildings of national architectural significance, plus 1, 412 Grade II buildings of local architectural merit, are listed and protected under the Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act (1990) within the Borough; and
- Registered Historic Parks and Gardens – there are 3 historic designed landscapes within the Borough included on the English Heritage non-statutory national Register of parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest.

## **2.5 Key Forces for Change in the Colchester Landscape**

### ***General***

- 2.5.1 The landscape, ecological and historic character of the Borough is dynamic and constantly changing in response to natural processes and human activities. Historically, changes in agriculture, the socio-economic structure of local communities, and industrialisation have all had important impacts. The landscape will continue to change in the future, however, the pace and nature of change is accelerating and likely to be of a larger scale than before, which may impact upon those qualities that make the landscape special. A key challenge is to understand, manage and direct future positive change in the landscape in ways that conserve and enhance its essential characteristics and valued attributes, whilst enabling sensitively designed development of be accommodated to meet social and economic needs.
- 2.5.2 The key global, national and local forces for change that affect the character of Colchester are considered under the following main headings:
- Agriculture, land management and diversification;
  - Socio-economic characteristics;
  - Infrastructure, transport and traffic;
  - Built development;
  - Tourism and water-based recreation;

- Climate Change.

### ***Agriculture, Land Management and Diversification***

2.5.3 Agricultural land use predominates within a large proportion of Colchester Borough and is therefore a key force for change. Continual progression and improvement in agricultural techniques and practices has led to changes in the rural landscape character of the area. Post-war agricultural policy affected smaller-scale farming methods (involving the use of labour-intensive techniques and manual skills) resulting in the intensification of farming practices (such as cropping, monoculture and intensive livestock rearing) and introduction of a larger-scale field pattern. The area was affected by Dutch Elm disease and there has been a gradual decline in traditional hedge-laying and coppicing. These forces have brought about the following key changes to the character of the landscape:

- Decrease in woodland and tree cover;
- Loss of peripheral boundary fences such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees;
- Introduction of large modern farm buildings;
- An increase in pony paddocks giving rise to poor hedgerow and grassland management and intrusive post and wire fencing/ ranch fencing, stable facilities and exercise rings.

2.5.4 Historically the marshes that fringe the south of Colchester Borough (aligning the Blackwater and Colne Estuaries) were utilised for purposes other than agriculture. The diverse saltmarshes provided a rich food resource (oysters) and were also utilised in early industrial activity (salt-making). With gradual agricultural and industrial change, there was pressure for more pasture and agricultural land within the Borough. This led to the enclosure of areas of saltmarsh and drainage of other coastal wetland areas (through installation of a sea wall) to create areas of grazing marsh behind the sea wall. There is future pressure for further intensification of the coastal grazing marsh habitat, however, there is also possible future potential for saltmarsh habitat creation and restoration through managed realignment along certain stretches of the coastline (with regard to information set out within the Shoreline Management Plan and the Colne and Blackwater Estuary Flood Management Strategy).

2.5.5 Whilst the effects of post-1945 agricultural change on landscape character area are well understood, future changes may result from increasing competition in a global market place, ongoing from the reform of the CAP, and the proposals of the Government Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food, including proposed Entry-Level Agri-Environment Scheme

(ELS) and Higher Tier Scheme, are yet to become clear. There may be ongoing adverse effect on character, as well as important opportunities to enhance and restore character as a result of changes in policy. The potential scenarios include:

- A further increase in large arable farm units which may lead to further homogenisation of the landscape, reduction in biodiversity, and potential demand for more centralised and large-scale buildings such as grain storage facilities. However, large units may also have the resources, labour and capital to respond to environmental initiatives and carry out landscape and biodiversity enhancement with productive agriculture; and
- Increased pressure for new uses of ‘marginal’ land, including smallholdings, leisure uses and expansion of horse paddock.

2.5.6 Recently, rural farm diversification has brought greater job opportunities to the area, however, this potentially creates the following key changes to the landscape character of the Borough:

- Conversion of traditional vernacular farm buildings (such as the black timber barns which are familiar features in the area) into new uses such as offices and restaurants;
- Introduction of new modern buildings and associated small-scale infrastructure.

2.5.7 There is also potential for the further introduction of the concept Countryside Stewardship to encourage farmers to make changes to their farming practices that would help restore the loss of important habitats and features within the landscape.

### ***Socio-Economic Characteristics***

2.5.8 The social and economic characteristics of Colchester play an important role in the process of future change and regeneration within the Borough. Colchester is situated approximately 60 miles from Central London (journey time by car via the A12 is approximately 1.5 hours and by train approximately 1 hour), within the eastern region. In recent years there has been a change in the structure and type of employment away from traditional manufacturing and agriculture to the service industries. Tourism is also a source of new rural employment.

2.5.9 Key socio-economic characteristics of Colchester Borough include:

- An estimated population (based upon the 2001 census) of 155,796;

- A population structure similar to the UK average, with higher than average 50-54 year-old women and slightly higher than average 20-29 year old men and women;
- A lower than average unemployment rate (2.85%, based upon 29 April 2001 census) with locally based employment in Wivenhoe, West Mersea and Tiptree; and
- Unemployment rates are significantly lower in Tiptree (2% in April 1998), compared with the Borough average (3.1% 1998).

### ***Infrastructure, Transport and Traffic***

2.5.10 Colchester Borough is connected to a comprehensive network of major roads, which provide connection with London, the Southeast, Harlow and Cambridge. The A12 (main dual carriageway) connects Colchester with the M25 (approximately 40 miles), the City (city airport) and Central London to the west. Colchester Borough is also easily accessible from the north and east via the M11 and A120 link (which connects Colchester with Stanstead airport). Mersea Island, to the south of the Borough, is connected to the mainland by a road causeway (The Strood) which can become covered during high tides. There are several cycle trails within the Borough, including the Dedham to Bures cycle route and the River Colne Valley cycle trails and cyclists are also given priority on several of the main roads. Wivenhoe is also situated in close proximity to the Sustrans National Cycleway. The Borough lies in close proximity (approximately 40 miles) to the major seaport of Harwich, which provides ferries to Cuxhaven and Esbjerg. A fast (1 hour) train link connects Colchester with Central London (run by 'One Railway'). Out-commuting can generate significant traffic build-up during peak times, and therefore there is a need to reduce this. The main A12 and several of the minor roads to the south of Colchester can also become congested during peak periods. The main impacts on landscape character include:

- Erosion of road edges and verges with local road improvements by kerbing, paving, highway lighting, visibility splays and signing, creating a more urban character; and
- Increased requirement for provision of parking in popular tourist villages (such as Dedham) and coastal locations (such as Mersea Island).

### ***Built Development***

2.5.11 Relatively high levels of development have been absorbed by Colchester and the surrounding rural landscape over the last thirty years and there is a constant need for the

provision of new houses and services. Colchester, the principal town within the Borough, is a medium-sized market town (of great historic and archaeological importance), which has expanded. The town centre, now a conservation area, is built on a hill allowing views out over the open countryside. It is also a sub-regional centre for employment, shopping, recreation and education. The smaller towns of Tiptree, West Mersea and Wivenhoe provide a range of local shops and services and are also local employment centres, including fishing and shellfisheries. Wivenhoe, Rowhedge and East Mersea are also riverside settlements. West Mersea is the principal settlement on the island and has a local economy, which is based upon an important yachting and boat-building centre. Several principal villages surround Colchester and the smaller towns, including Abberton, Langenhoe, Great Horkesley and Dedham (which is of historic and architectural interest). Other smaller villages, such as Layer Breton, Aldham and Little Horkesley are scattered throughout the rural landscape. Colchester has an interwoven relationship with the MOD. The garrison extends from the town centre down to the coast, with training areas at Friday Wood, Fingringhoe and Middlewick.

2.5.12 There is constant need for the provision of new housing and services within the Borough. Some scope for new development can be accommodated through the re-use of institutional sites within Colchester Town Centre and also brownfield sites at Cook's Shipyards and also the Moler works on Rowhedge Wharf. Redevelopment is also being considered within the East Colchester Regeneration Area (East Colchester and the Hythe). In January 2004, the 'Colchester 2020 town' group was set up as a Local Strategic Community Partnership (<http://www.colchester2020.com>). The vision of this initiative is to '*develop Colchester as a prestigious regional centre*' with four proposed regeneration areas (North Colchester, East Colchester, St. Botolph's and the Garrison), determining potential for new housing, community facilities and employment.

2.5.13 The key forces for change arising from built development within the landscape are:

- Housing growth at the periphery of existing towns can extend the urban character of these areas into the landscape, as increased noise and light pollution and development leads to an urbanising effect on the rural landscape and loss of tranquillity;
- New strategic initiatives to maintain and enhance existing green spaces and corridors and to create new provision of green infrastructure, as an integral part of new development, are likely to be a positive force for change in the landscape.

### ***Tourism and Water-based Recreation***

2.5.14 Tourism, leisure and the boating industry make a vital contribution to local employment; however, the following factors create pressure on the landscape:

- Increased desire for public access to the coast;
- Increased desire for water-based activities, including boat trips;
- Pressure from tourism to increase the capacity and size of caravan and camping areas and their associated facilities (several areas of static caravans, campsites and chalets are already clustered along the coastline of Mersea island, which are visibly intrusive in some locations);
- Potential for increased boating traffic on the river if new riverside developments such as marinas were to occur along the Colne Estuary.

2.5.15 These pressures create conflicts between human use of the landscape (walkers, tourist and visitors) and important habitats (wildlife, birds, and saltmarshes) in locations along the northern shore of the Blackwater Estuary and around Mersea Island. Similar conflicts of use and pressures occur at Wivenhoe and Rowhedge wharf, where conservationists, fishermen, yachtspeople, residents and visitors are all competing for use of the coastal resource.

### *Climate Change*

2.5.16 Climate change is a worldwide issue, and evidence of it is growing in the UK with trends towards increased temperatures, wetter winters, and more extreme weather events in the last ten years already identified. The scenarios produced by the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP02) suggests that the UK could experience by 2080:

- An increase of current average temperatures by 2-3.5°C;
- Drier summers and wetter winters;
- More frequent summer droughts, winter flooding and storms; and
- A rise in the average level of the sea.

2.5.17 Whilst there are still uncertainties regarding exact changes at regional and local levels, it is clear there could be both direct and indirect impacts on landscape character. The Borough's coastal area is a critical and irreplaceable natural asset supporting diverse internationally important habitats. The potential implications for landscape character in Colchester Borough

include changes in habitats and species composition, habitat fragmentation, water resources, soils, agricultural land use, recreation and tourism and cultural heritage:

- Increases in sea levels, especially if coupled with increases in storm activity, may cause greater erosion of habitats such as intertidal mudflats and saltmarsh;
- Rising sea level may also affect agricultural land which is currently located on reclaimed marshland;
- Rich agricultural land below 5m AOD is at risk of saline intrusion from rising sea levels. There may be an increased requirement for irrigation reservoirs to store winter rainfall and for use of sprinkling equipment etc. in summer. Traditional arable crops may also be replaced by more summer drought tolerant species such as sunflowers and maize;
- Damage to historic landscapes and archaeological sites may occur through erosion from sea level rise and flooding, as well as through changes in farming practice and soil desiccation.

### *Summary*

2.5.18 The key issues arising from current and anticipated forces for change in the Colchester landscape are:

- Arresting the further dilution of landscape character resulting from current farming practices;
- Ensuring that any potential new peripheral urban developments do not adversely affect landscape character;
- Ensuring that conflicts of use within coastal areas are managed and organised to protect and enhance natural diverse habitats along the coastline.

## **2.6 Landscape Policy Context**

2.6.1 Policy support for the preparation and use of Landscape Character Assessment studies by local authorities to inform planning and management of landscapes is provided for at a range of levels.

### *European Level*

- 2.6.2 This study and the use of landscape character assessment as a tool is supported by the overarching aims of the *European Landscape Convention*, which are ‘*to promote landscape protection, management and planning*’ as part of the Council of Europe’s work on natural and cultural heritage, spatial planning, environment and local self-government.

#### ***National Level***

- 2.6.3 At a National Level, *PPS 7 (Sustainable Development in Rural Areas)* advocates the use of Landscape Character Assessment as a tool to ‘*encourage good quality design throughout rural areas.*’
- 2.6.4 In relation to historic landscapes, *PPG 15 (Planning and the Historic Environment)* states that ‘*plans should protect its most important components and encourage development that is consistent with maintaining its overall historic character.*’

#### ***Regional Level***

- 2.6.5 The new East of England Plan (RSS14) will provide the statutory framework within which local authorities will produce LDDs. The draft East of England Plan outlines principles for the management of the region’s natural, built and historic environment that planning authorities should seek to implement through their plans, policies and programmes. The principles include:
- Protect, for their own sake, all important aspects of the countryside, including individual features, special sites and the wider landscape;
  - Conserve and enhance, whenever possible, regional and local distinctiveness and variety, based on a thorough assessment of local character scrutinised in depth through the local plan system; and
  - Restore damaged and lost environmental features wherever possible.
- 2.6.6 Policy ENV1 of draft RSS14 states that ‘*the diversity and local distinctiveness of landscape character throughout the East of England should be protected and enhanced*’, and that ‘*Planning authorities and other agencies within their plans, policies and programmes will conserve and enhance landscape character by:*

- *Developing area-wide strategies based on character assessments, to set long-term goals for landscape change by targeting planning and land management tools and resources to influence change;*
- *Developing criteria-based policies informed by landscape character assessment to ensure that all development, wherever possible respects and enhances local landscape character;*
- *Providing appropriate mitigation measures where avoidance of damage to local landscape character is unavoidable.'*

### ***County Level***

- 2.6.7 The *Essex and Southend-on-Sea Replacement Structure Plan* (April 2001) includes a Policy NR4 (Landscape Character Assessment) which states that '*Landscape Character areas 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.'*

### **3.0 BOROUGH-WIDE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER PROFILES**



### **3.0 BOROUGH-WIDE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER PROFILES**

#### **3.1 General**

- 3.1.1 This section provides a detailed inventory and description of the Borough's landscape character types and areas.

#### **3.2 Landscape Character Types**

- 3.2.1 'Landscape Character Types' are broad tracts of land that share common characteristics of geology, landform, vegetation, land-use and settlement. They are generic landscapes which reoccur throughout the Borough.
- 3.2.2 The distribution of the seven Landscape Character Types defined within the Borough are shown on Figure 6, and their key characteristics are summarised below:

##### ***A - River Valley***

- V-shaped valley landform which dissects Boulder Clay/ Chalky Till plateau;
- Main river valley served by several tributaries;
- Flat or gently undulating valley floor;
- Intimate character in places;
- Wooded character in places.

##### ***B - Farmland Plateau***

- Elevated gently rolling Boulder Clay/ Chalky Till plateau landscape;
- Network of narrow winding lanes and minor roads;
- Medium to large-scale enclosed predominantly arable fields;
- Long distance views across valleys from certain locations;
- Well wooded in places (with several areas of semi-natural and ancient woodland), interspersed with orchards.

***C - Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats***

- Flat, low-lying and open landscape;
- Areas of saltmarsh, mudflats, shingle spits and tidal creeks adjacent to the coast;
- Generally tranquil and undisturbed character;
- Feeling of remoteness and wilderness on the open beaches and salt marshes;
- Visible sea walls separate drained former marshland and current saltmarsh/ mudflats;
- Lack of trees or hedgerows.

***D - Drained Estuarine Marsh***

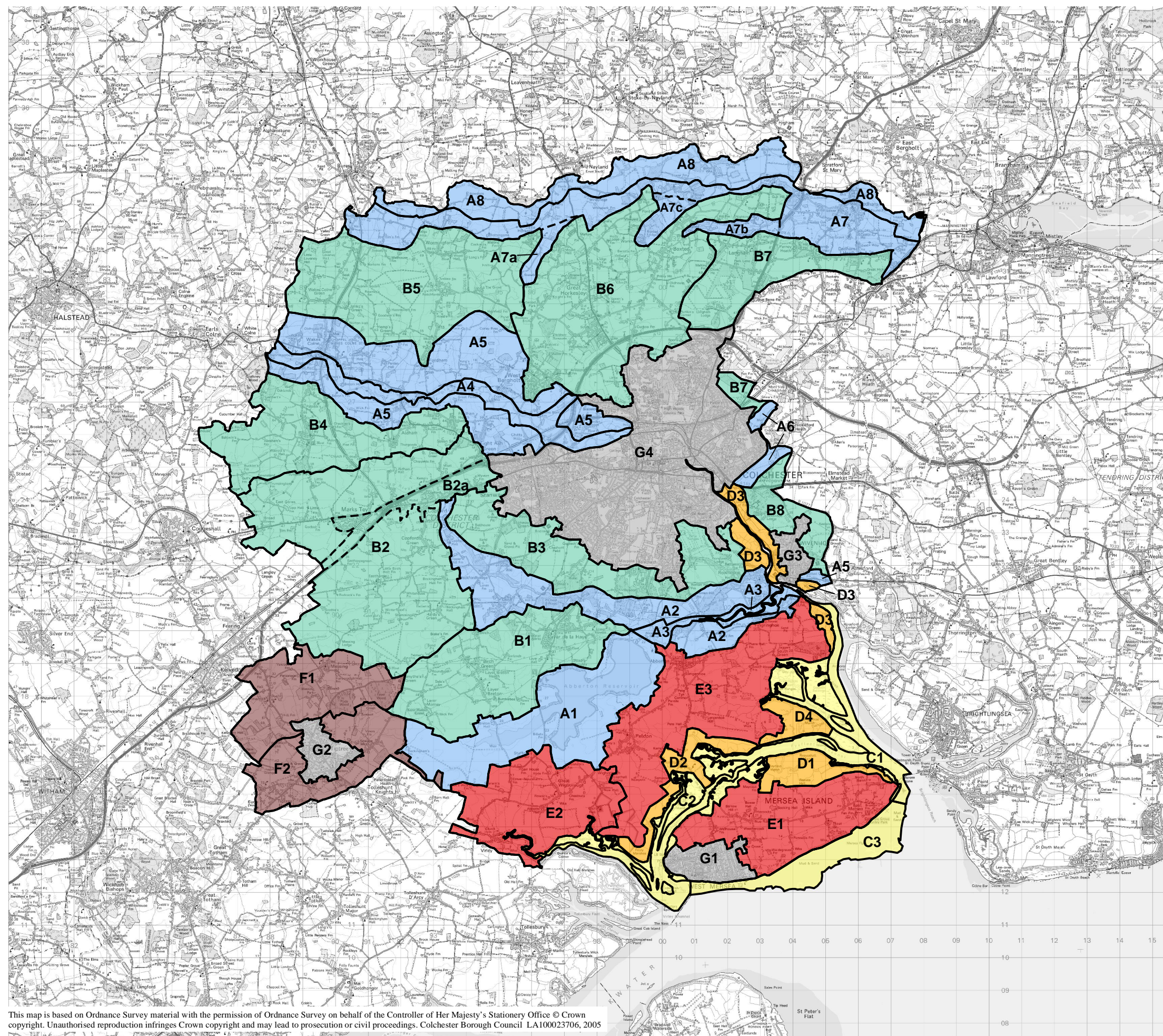
- Areas of flat, artificially drained former salt marsh currently grassland and cultivated fields;
- Visible sea walls separate drained former marshland and current saltmarsh/ mudflats;
- Lack of large areas of trees or woodland;
- Network of visible drainage ditches.

***E - Coastal Farmland***

- Predominantly flat, low-lying landscape, sloping gradually upwards to the north;
- Framed views of Blackwater Estuary and coastline from several locations;
- Arable farmland on underlying heavy clay soils;
- Lack of large patches/ areas of woodland;
- Sparse settlement pattern with small, relatively isolated settlements.

***F - Wooded Farmland***

- Elevated broad ridge landform (part of SW-NE aligned ridge);
- Mixture of arable and pasture farmland;
- Several nucleated settlements, with a clustered settlement pattern;
- Well wooded with woodland blocks (including areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland); copses and hedges;
- Framed views of the Blackwater Valley through gaps in hedgerows;
- Enclosed character in places.



KEY

Landscape Character Area

**A River Valley**

A1 Abberton Flooded River Valley
A2 Wooded Roman River Valley
A3 Roman River Valley Floor
A4 Colne River Valley Floor
A5 Colne River Valley Slopes
A6 Ardleigh River Valley
A7 Stour River Valley Slopes
A8 Stour River Valley Floor

**B Farmland Plateau**

B1 Layer Breton Farmland Plateau
B2 Easthorpe Farmland Plateau
B3 Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau
B4 Great Tey Farmland Plateau
B5 Rochfords Farmland Plateau
B6 Great Horkesley Farmland Plateau
B7 Langham Farmland Plateau
B8 Wivenhoe Farmland Plateau

**C Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats**

C1 Fingringhoe Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats
C2 Strood & Salcott Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats
C3 West Mersea Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats

**D Drained Estuarine Marsh**

D1 Mersea Island Drained Estuarine Marsh
D2 Feldy Drained Estuarine Marsh
D3 Colne Drained Estuarine Marsh
D4 Pyefleet Drained Estuarine Marsh

**E Coastal Farmland**

E1 Mersea Island Coastal Farmland
E2 Great & Little Wigborough Coastal Farmland
E3 Langenhoe Coastal Farmland

**F Wooded Farmland**

F1 Messing Wooded Farmland
F2 Tiptree Wooded Farmland

**G Principal Urban Areas**

G1 West Mersea Urban Landscape
G2 Tiptree Urban Landscape
G3 Wivenhoe Urban Landscape
G4 Colchester Urban Landscape

Colchester Borough Boundary

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## ***G – Principal Urban Areas***

- These areas are excluded from the study.

### **3.3 Landscape Character Areas**

- 3.3.1 ‘Landscape Character Areas’ are geographically unique areas with a recognisable pattern of landscape characteristics, both physical and experiential, that combine to create a distinct sense of place.
- 3.3.2 The distribution of the 28 Landscape Character Areas defined within the Borough are shown on Figure 6.
- 3.3.3 For each Landscape Character Area, a detailed ‘profile’ has been prepared. These profiles are structured as follows:

***Title:*** Name of the Character Area as shown on Figure 6;

***Key Characteristics:*** Summary of key attributes that make the area distinctive;

***Overall Character:*** Description of the area’s general character;

***Visual Characteristics:*** Brief description of views;

***Historic Features:*** Brief description of visible historic features that contribute to landscape character;

***Ecological Features:*** Brief description of the ecological attributes that contribute to the landscape character of the area;

***Key Planning and Land Management Issues:*** Brief description of local forces for change that are influencing landscape character;

***Landscape Strategy Objective:*** Identification of the most appropriate strategy for managing the area to sustain local character. Strategy objectives can include one or more of the following:

- *Conserve* – conservation of existing character and appropriate management of features that contribute to this character;
- *Enhance* - where large scale change is impractical for reasons of ownership, or conflicting land uses, enhancement of the areas that make greatest contribution to the landscape;
- *Restore* – where there is sufficient evidence of a degraded landscape of particular quality, appropriate conservation measure, e.g. parklands;

***Landscape Planning Guidelines:*** Suggested guidelines for informing development proposals and planning; and

***Land Management Guidelines:*** Suggested guidelines for informing land management proposals.

- 3.3.4 As acknowledged by the Countryside Agency's guidelines, landscape is a continuum and character does not in general change abruptly. More commonly, the character of the landscape will change gradually rather than suddenly, and therefore boundaries drawn between character areas shown on Figure 6 should be considered to reflect zones of transition in most cases.

## **A1      ABBERTON FLOODED RIVER VALLEY**

### ***Key Characteristics***

- Large artificial water body (Abberton Reservoir) fringed in places with linear plantation woodlands;
- Previous river valley landform, now flooded and encapsulating Abberton Reservoir;
- Large arable fields with hedged field boundaries;
- Small-scale settlement pattern; a few small farmsteads;
- Expansive and dramatic views across the reservoir from surrounding roads and footpaths.

### ***Overall Character***

- 3.3.5      The broad, open character area consists of a bowl shaped agricultural valley containing Abberton Reservoir. The reservoir is a dominant feature within the area and was formed by damming the Layer Brook, a tributary of the Roman River in 1936. At the head of the valley the reservoir consists of a narrow finger of water crossed by two causeways, which widens east of the causeways before narrowing again opposite the pumping station. The reservoir then widens again at its eastern extremities at the dam head (a mass concrete structure). The large open reservoir is fringed in places by linear patches of coniferous plantation woodland and also patches of scrub to the south and east. Partially submerged deciduous woodland characterises the western fringes of the reservoir. Large arable fields with hedge field boundaries surround the reservoir. At the eastern end, the uniform and engineered concrete edges of the reservoir exert a strong human influence upon the surrounding river valley landscape, whilst the western segments of the reservoir exhibit more natural shorelines and have well-developed marginal vegetation. The reservoir is of national importance for wintering wildfowl and also of international importance for its waterfowl population (including wild duck and swans). Settlement pattern consists of a few small-scale farmsteads, which, in juxtaposition with the broad expanse of the reservoir accentuate the open character of the area. At the south-western end of the reservoir, there is a sense of tranquillity and remoteness.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Large expanse of open water dominant in views from the higher (Layer Breton) farmland plateau to the north;

- Framed close views of the reservoir from several of the roads and narrow lanes in the vicinity, creating a sense of intrigue and surprise as the water body, emerges from within the folds of this gently undulating landscape;
- Dramatic panoramic views across the open, often shimmering, woodland-fringed reservoir close to the elevated Abberton Hall church;
- Long views west along Abberton Reservoir from the causeways.

### ***Historic Features***

- Woodland Plantation dating from the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century is found along the edges of Abberton Reservoir, providing a sense of enclosure in places;
- To the north of Abberton Reservoir on the western edge of Abberton village are the remains of Abberton Hall and its associated pre-18<sup>th</sup> century irregular field systems;
- Visible remains of the Medieval moated site of White House Grove to the west of Abberton Reservoir and south of Layer Breton.

### ***Ecological Features***

- 3.3.6 The ecological character of the flooded river valley is dominated by Abberton Reservoir (approximately 500 hectares in size), which is of international importance, designated as a Ramsar Site, SPA and an SSSI. The reservoir is surrounded by farmland. The reservoir is designated as a Ramsar Site for supporting internationally important numbers of over-wintering birds; gadwall *Anas strepera*, red-breasted merganser *Mergus serrator* and shoveler *Anas clypeata*. A further 13 nationally important species including ruff *Philomachus pugnax* are included under the reservoir's SPA designation. It is also important for its marginal vegetation communities that provide feeding, nesting and shelter for birds, including reed beds that are a 'priority habitat' within the Essex Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). An Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT) Reserve is situated on a well-protected bay of the reservoir. It is only nine acres but is a great ecological asset to the area with a large pond, a wide range of native trees and shrubs, which support many species of small birds such as warblers, yellow hammer *Emberiza citrinella* and linnet *Carduelis cannabina*.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Potential for fertiliser and pesticide run-off from adjacent agricultural to pollute Abberton Reservoir and affect water quality and habitats;

- Pressure from potential expansion of villages within adjacent character areas (Abberton, Peldon, Layer Breton), infringing upon the setting of the reservoir and affecting the generally open character of the area;
- Expansion of Abberton Reservoir could potentially affect both landscape character and visual amenity.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

#### **3.3.7 Conserve and Restore.**

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Ensure that new farm buildings are sited carefully to avoid breaking the skyline to the south of the character area;
- Consider the visual impact of existing farm buildings on the character of the area and seek ways of integrating new farm buildings using materials which reflect local landscape character;
- Consider the landscape character and visual impact of proposed extensions to Abberton Reservoir and possible landscape mitigation strategies;
- Ensure that buildings associated with the expansion are sensitively designed using materials that respond to local character;
- Consider the visual impact of the new development within surrounding farmland plateau and coastal farmland areas and the potential affects on views to and from the reservoir;
- Conserve the open, undeveloped character and valuable wetland habitats associated with Abberton Reservoir.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Seek to minimise potential impacts from agricultural practices (such as run off) on valuable habitats within and fringing Abberton Reservoir;
- Manage, and where appropriate to character, restore hedged field boundaries.

## A2 WOODED ROMAN RIVER VALLEY

### *Key Characteristics*

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

### *Overall Character*

- 3.3.8 This character area encompasses the moderately steep v-shaped slopes of the narrow Roman River Valley, which are swathed in large areas of deciduous and coniferous woodland (encompassing Donyland Wood, Friday Wood and Chest Wood, alongside smaller patches of ancient woodland). The northern valley slopes are characterised by large fields, with their long axis at right angles to the west-east valley corridor. Bordered to the north by large patches of woodland, the field boundaries are substantially hedged. Land-use consists of a mixture of arable farmland and patches of rough grassland. At the confluence of the Colne and Roman rivers there is a concentration of smaller irregular fields, which are associated with and provide the setting to the small hamlet of High Park Corner. The small nucleated riverside settlement of Rowhedge, at the eastern edge of the character area, was of an intricate street pattern related to historical access to the river harbour. The western, upper part of the Roman River Valley corridor consists of regular fields with hedged field boundaries and large blocky areas of woodland. The wooded, enclosed nature of the valley sides, contributes to an intimate, roughly textured and diverse character along the valley slopes. The valley slopes are connected by a series of intricate north south running narrow lanes, which connect Colchester in the north to smaller villages within coastal farmland to the south.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Large woodland blocks restrict views across the valley and intervisibility between the valley floodplain and surrounding areas of coastal farmland and farmland plateau;
- Patches of woodland within adjacent farmland plateau to the north limit views towards the settlement edges of Colchester from northern river valley slopes;
- Expansive panoramic views over Abberton Reservoir can be gained from higher points on the valley slopes close to Abberton;
- Views along the length of the valley from the valley floor;
- Intimate views of Wivenhoe harbour across the River Colne from Rowhedge.

### ***Historic Features***

- A small, tiled 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century weatherboarded water mill to the south of Layer/Mushroom Farm provides a visual link with past utilisation of the river as an important resource;
- Prominent landmark churches - 12<sup>th</sup> century church of St Michael at Copford with Norman wall paintings and vaulted apse and Church of St. Lawrence (built 1837) at Rowhedge – a replica of the chapter house at York Minster;
- Example of stately Georgian architecture at Copford Hall, built from red brick with 7 bays;
- Visible remains of utilisation of the landscape during the medieval period, provided by:
  - medieval fishponds at Stanway Hall to the east of Colchester zoo;
  - medieval moat at East Donyland Hall, surrounded with landscaped gardens and cedar trees;
  - medieval church of St. Andrew at Fingringhoe.

### ***Ecological Features***

3.3.9 The ecological character of this area is dominated by wetland and woodland habitats within a farming landscape. There is much ecological interest in pockets of woodland and small areas of marsh, fen and heathland along the River Roman with eleven SINC's including:

- The Roman River Valley SINC (Site of Importance for Nature Conservation) of Fingringhoe, approximately 30 hectares comprising of a band of former grazing marsh

with characteristic flora of this declining habitat, including species such as grass vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia*;

- Other small areas of marsh include SINCs Barrage Marsh and Cambridge Brook Marsh;
- Roman River SINC is also an EWT reserve with important fen and woodland habitats; and
- Kingsford Wood SINC has an area of relic acidic heathland (an Essex BAP habitat).

#### 3.3.10 Woodland SINC include:

- Haye Grove, Inworth Wood, Cook's Wood and Chest Wood all consisting of oak *Quercus robur* and sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* ancient woodland;
- Copfordhall Woods; and
- part of Donyland Wood comprising ancient woodland with some conifer replanting.

#### 3.3.11 All of these woods have canopies dominated with oak and a species-rich ground flora including bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*. Ancient woodland is also a 'priority habitat' within the Essex BAP.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Potential decrease in hedgerows and tree cover due to pressure from adjacent agricultural land use;
- Potential for erection of new farm buildings, which would be conspicuous on the skyline.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

#### 3.3.12 Conserve and Restore.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the historic quay at Rowhedge, which makes a positive contribution to local landscape character;
- Consider the landscape pattern and structure of large woodland areas, and the role that they have in the composition of views to and from the area.

***Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve and manage areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland as important landscape, historical and nature conservation features;
- Conserve and manage the ecological structure of woodland, copses and hedges within the character area;
- Strengthen the recreational role of the woodland resource.

### **A3      ROMAN RIVER VALLEY FLOOR**

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

- Narrow, meandering floodplain of the Roman River, becoming slightly broader at its confluence with the River Colne;
- Several marshy areas adjacent to the river, supporting riparian/ wetland vegetation within the enclaves created by meanders;
- Single mature deciduous trees adjacent to and as landscape features on the edge of marshy areas adjacent to Ferry Road at the confluence of the Roman and Colne Rivers;
- Views across the open river mouth to High Park corner in the south and Wivenhoe in the north;
- Rowhedge Warehouses as a dominant landmark on the edge of the floodplain to the south of Wivenhoe.

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

- 3.3.13 This character area encompasses the narrow, intricate meandering channel and flat floodplain of the Roman River in the lower reaches of the river valley. The floodplain becomes broader at its confluence with the River Colne and as the river corridor widens, several areas of marshy grassland (supporting riparian and wetland vegetation have established). An interesting and relatively remote region of wet marshland, dotted with single mature oak trees has developed to the east of Ferry Road. Although three-storey modern flats at the southern edge of Wivenhoe and the large warehouse buildings at Rowhedge overlook this marshland area, a sense of remoteness, tranquillity and inaccessibility is experienced where Ferry Road terminates opposite Wivenhoe. Water has a dominant presence within the landscape throughout the entirety of this intimate and enclosed character area. Settlement is absent along the Roman River valley floor; however, a group of relatively large warehouses (located to the south of Rowhedge) assert a human influence and the valley floor is overlooked by development at Wivenhoe Quay.

#### ***Visual Characteristics***

- When accessible, panoramic diverse views along the Colne valley corridor and along the Roman River Valley can be obtained from the northern end of ferry road;

- A public footpath runs along the lowest part of the northern Wooded Roman River valley slopes, just to the south of East Donyland Hall. Views of the diverse meandering Roman River floodplain (containing patches of marshland) can be obtained from this footpath. To the south, the footpath crosses the Roman River, allowing views along the widening River corridor towards confluence with the River Colne;
- The heavily wooded Roman River valley sides are visible in views from within the floodplain of the River corridor;
- The southern riverside frontage of the Wivenhoe Conservation Area forms a strong visual focus with views to the north from the lower reaches of the valley.

### ***Historic Features***

- Due to the nature of this character areas encompassing the floodplain, parts of which are constantly being covered and uncovered by water, few visible links with past-use of the area remain;
- There are, however, remains of Post-Medieval timber wharf to the south of the current Rowhedge Wharf, showing that this area was utilised in the past.

### ***Ecological Features***

- 3.3.14 The ecological character of this small area based at the head of the River Roman, is defined by the floodplain and associated habitats designated as Manwood Chase SINC and the river itself, which is designated as SSSI.
- 3.3.15 Manwood Chase contains riverside grassland and marsh with little agricultural improvement acting as a wildlife corridor between Abberton Reservoir and the river. The River Roman SSSI comprises a mosaic of habitats including heath, ancient woodland and marshy grassland and Donyland Woodland, which are of national importance for wildlife.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Potential loss of species-rich riverside grassland and marshland due to intensive grazing management;
- Potential for pollution of the Roman River from fertiliser and pesticide run-off from higher farmland areas such as the Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau;

- Potential new development and loss of existing woodland areas on the valley sides could lead to a loss of the undeveloped character and setting to the floodplain.

***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.16 Conserve and Restore.

***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the undeveloped and generally open nature of the floodplain;
- Consider the visual impact on the floodplain of new development at Wivenhoe;
- Seek opportunities for habitat restoration along the floodplain.

***Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve, and manage (where necessary), diverse floodplain habitats such as riverside grassland and marsh;
- Seek to manage and control potential fertiliser run-off from nearby farmland.

## A4 COLNE RIVER VALLEY FLOOR

### *Key Characteristics*

- Floodplain of the Colne River – relatively narrow in the upper reaches of the river valley and broader as the River moves eastwards towards Colchester and the Colne estuary;
- Meandering River Colne is narrow in comparison with the broad spread of the floodplain across which the river flows;
- Colne River is bridged by several roads and lanes, which connect the north and south valley slopes and facilitate views along the river corridor to the east and west;
- Floodplain corridor sprinkled with mills and weirs;
- Striking landmark viaduct crossing the river corridor at Chappel.

### *Overall Character*

- 3.3.17 This character area encompasses the narrow meandering course and floodplain of the River Colne and St. Botolph's Brook tributary within the upper reaches of the river valley. The valley becomes broader in the east towards Colchester. Land use within the river valley floor is influenced by the meandering river course. The valley is also an important wildlife corridor. Where meanders are strongest wet meadows are prevalent, whereas adjacent to less sinuous stretches of the river, land use consists predominantly of arable fields and pasture. Distinct areas of plantation woodland fringe the river in close proximity to disused workings to the east of Fordstreet. To the south of Fordham, the river is particularly sinuous, with many small meanders. Fringing the river, and delineating its course, are many mature deciduous trees that emphasise its winding nature and create a distinctive landscape feature. The river is crossed by a series of roads and lanes, which allow access to it and facilitate diverse and interesting views along the river corridor. Chappel Viaduct (brick-built in 1847 with more than 30 arches) is a striking landmark structure, and central within many views from the surrounding Colne valley slopes. Several bridges, mills and weirs scattered along the river corridor are evidence of the importance of the Colne as an area of settlement and industry. An interesting weatherboarded – late Georgian example of a three-storey mill is located adjacent to a small church with a little spire at Chappel. There is a sense of remoteness and tranquillity within the valley floodplain.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Dramatic and interesting panoramic views to the east and west along the river valley corridor, from footpaths and small settlements such as Chappel within the floodplain;
- The Essex Way (promoted route and recreational path) follows the flat valley floor through part of the Colne Valley, providing opportunities to view and experience the intimate and diverse river valley corridor. The Colne Valley Path (to be launched summer 2005) will follow a route from Great Yeldham (Braintree District) through Chappel to Colchester.

### ***Historic Features***

#### 3.3.18 Visible evidence comprises:

- Prehistoric upstanding rampart and ditch at Moat Farm;
- Late 18<sup>th</sup> century/ 19<sup>th</sup> century milestone at Rose Green (suggesting a major transport route);
- Visible WWII defensive features: Several WWII pillboxes dotted along the western bank of the River Colne; WWII Pillboxes surrounding Seven Arches farm as part of the Eastern Command line; WWII Spigot Mortar emplacements at New Bridge and Fordham Bridge; WWII anti-tank pimples and ditches at Fordstreet.

### ***Ecological Features***

#### 3.3.19 The ecological character of the area is dominated by the winding Colne River with five designated SINC's including:

- The River Colne SINC is near to Colchester highlighted here to emphasise its importance as a wildlife corridor, resulting in many coastal birds being seen in the town park areas adjacent to the river;
- Further east, near Colchester, the Central Colne SINC (approximately 35 hectares) consists of marshland, pastures and mature hedgerows as well as marginal river vegetation. This SINC as a whole is of value as part of a network of wildlife corridors running through urban Colchester;

- Swanscombe Lakes SINC is a former gravel pit supporting willow woodland fringing fishing lakes. The lakes are adjacent to Chalkney Wood SINC that has a notable dragonfly fauna that likely depend on the lakes; and
- Wakes Colne Meadow SINC nearby supports a range of wet meadow flora such as ragged robin *Lynchnis flos-cuculi* and marsh woundwort *Stachys palustris*.

3.3.20 Bordering this area within the urban extents of Colchester, is EWT Reserve Lexden Gathering Grounds which comprises woodland, marsh, acidic grassland and meadow. Uncommon species in Essex found here include climbing corydalis *Ceratocarpus claviculata* and moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina*. This valley (approximately 20 hectares) is an important wildlife corridor between the urban and rural fringes of Colchester.

#### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Visual intrusion of road traffic in undeveloped floodplain landscape, particularly where the main railway line and A12 cross the area;
- Potential loss of riverside marshland and pastures due to agricultural encroachment;
- Potential for pollution of the Colne River from fertiliser and pesticide run-off from adjacent farmland plateau areas (e.g. Great Tey Farmland Plateau).

#### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.21 Conserve and Restore.

#### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the open character of the floodplain;
- Maintain cross valley views through careful consideration of development within the floodplain;
- Protect and conserve the distinctive WWII defensive features within the area (particularly anti-tank pimples).

#### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve and manage marshland and pasture;
- Encourage the reversion of valley floor arable land to pasture;

- Seek opportunities for habitat restoration along the floodplain;
- Protect mature deciduous trees as landscape features;
- Conserve and manage wet meadows within the floodplain.

## A5 COLNE RIVER VALLEY SLOPES

### *Key Characteristics*

- Relatively steep v-shaped valley slopes facilitate attractive and open views across and along the River corridor;
- Principal road network consisting of narrow tree-lined (sometimes sunken) lanes traversing the valley sides to the north and south;
- A mosaic of medium to large-sized irregular and regular, predominantly arable fields with medium hedgerows containing semi-mature/ mature hedgerow trees;
- Some larger semi-enclosed arable fields to the west of Wakes Colne; and concentrations of smaller fields with intact hedge boundaries adjacent to settlements;
- Settlement pattern consists of small linear village settlements such as Wakes Colne and Eight Ash Green, adjacent to the north-south roads, which cross the River Valley; small hamlets and farmsteads.

### *Overall Character*

- 3.3.22 The v-shaped, relatively steep valley sides enclose the meandering course of the River Colne. The area also includes the lower slopes of the valley at Ballast Quay Farm, to the east of Wivenhoe. Woodland cover consists of a mixture of small patches and large regular blocks of woodland (for example Acorn Wood) which are spread across the valley slopes. Many of the narrow (sometimes sunken) lanes, which traverse the valley slopes in a north-south direction, are enclosed by hedges, which are generally in reasonable condition. Several single mature deciduous trees are also present in field boundaries (for example within fields to the south of Eight Ash Green). Small to medium-sized arable fields directly align the river whilst a mosaic of large regular arable fields cover the upper parts of the slopes. A patch of very regular (rectangular, subdivided) orchards, to the east of Wakes Colne Green (close to Rose Green) provide variety and assert regularity over the surrounding arable sloping valley sides. Settlement pattern within the area consists of small linear roadside village, such as Wakes Colne and Eight Ash Green, combined with a number of small hamlets and farmsteads, dispersed across the character area.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Attractive framed and panoramic views of the meandering river channel and associated floodplain from higher points along the valley sides, such as Hill House Farm to the south of Chappel;
- The church and viaduct at Chappel (within character area A4 Colne Valley Floor) are dominant landmarks in views from both the southern and northern valley sides around Wakes Hall Farm, Old Hall Farm and Wakes Colne;
- The spire of All Saints Norman church at Wakes Colne is a prominent landmark within the landscape, which is intervisible with the church at Chappel (also with a spire) in views from the east;
- Views along the river valley corridor.

### ***Historic Features***

- Visible remains of defensive WWII features within the landscape, including:
  - Anti-tank blocks and Spigot mortar emplacements and several WWII pillboxes (with a cluster to the south of Fordstreet);
- Fragmentary remains of a moat at Crepping Hall;
- West Bergholt Hall – Georgian town house;
- Church of St.Mary at West Bergholt with early 14<sup>th</sup> century nave, lower chancel, belfry and southern aisle.

### ***Ecological Features***

3.3.23 The ecological character of these slopes is combined within a woodland, heath and farmland mosaic. The northern slopes are predominantly farmland with a few pockets of woodland of ecological interest. Woodland SINC's (six on the northern slopes) include:

- Acorn and Hillhouse Woods which are both ancient oak-ash *Fraxinus excelsior* woodland;
- Spring and Grove Woods which are both ancient oak woodland with inter-planted Scot's pine *Pinus sylvestris*;
- alder carr woodland at West Bergholt;
- Stitching Wood which has a mixed canopy and open glades of bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*; and

- West Bergholt Heath, Fordham Heath and other public open spaces which are managed for wildlife and access (such as Chappel Millennium Green) are situated within the character area.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Potential pressure from urban expansions on the edge of West Bergholt, Fordham, Wivenhoe and Colchester;
- Localised intrusion from modern farm buildings;
- Potential creation of new woodland in Woodland Trust land to west of Fordham.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.24 Conserve and Enhance.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Ensure any new small-scale development in, or on the edges of Fordham, Wivenhoe, West Bergholt and Colchester is of an appropriate scale, form and design and uses materials which respond to historic settlement pattern, landscape setting and locally distinctive building styles and materials. (Development opportunities are limited around Fordham due to the Woodland Trust site);
- Ensure any new development on valley sides is small-scale, responds to historic settlement pattern, form and building materials;
- Maintain cross-valley views;
- Conserve views of the river and floodplain;
- Ensure that new woodland planting is designed to enhance existing landscape character and species composition reflects local provenance.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve and manage existing hedgerows (especially failing elm hedges);
- Restore hedgerows using hawthorn and plant new hedgerow trees, particularly in areas of arable farmland;
- Conserve and manage existing valley-side woodlands;
- Encourage the planting of native alder and willow riverside trees where appropriate.

## **A6      ARDLEIGH RIVER VALLEY**

### ***Key Characteristics***

- Lower reaches of a small narrow river valley encompassing the Salary Brook and steep valley sides;
- Wooded western valley slopes (patches of ancient deciduous woodland);
- Small regular fields on the valley sides in proximity to Salary Brook, becoming larger adjacent to the south;
- Connects to the large Ardleigh reservoir and remainder of the character area outside the borough boundary to the north.

### ***Overall Character***

3.3.25 This character area encompasses the lower reaches of the Ardleigh River Valley at confluence with the River Colne, which includes the Salary Brook and steep v-shaped southern valley slopes. The area also includes the northern valley slopes to the south east of Welshwood Park, to the north of Crockleford Hill. The river valley corridor abuts the southeastern settlement edge of Colchester (at Greenstead). Narrow, rectilinear fields are aligned to the brook, with their field boundaries comprising thick, mature vegetation, which are gappy in places. Further to the south, a series of medium to large-scale regular arable fields extend from the corridor. The river valley is fringed and overlooked to the east by a number of large woodland areas, which are located on the top of the valley slopes and within the adjacent Bromley Heaths Plateau defined in the Tendring District Landscape Character Assessment.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Gaps in woodlands on top of the eastern valley slopes (Home Wood, the Strip, Thousand Acres and Churn Wood) frame views into the valley from the east;
- Views along the river valley corridor from the southern edge of Colchester and farmland plateau forging the town.

### ***Historic Features***

- Crockleford Mill (first recorded in 1588), shows use of Salary Brook for industrial activity;
- The Bromley to Colchester Road which crosses Salary Brook to the south of the mill, was bridged in 1586, until which point there was a ford.

### ***Ecological Features***

- Small-scale pastures on the valleysides;
- Deciduous woodland patches consisting predominantly of oak.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Potential pressure for expansion of the southern edge of Colchester settlement (at Greenstead and to the east of Welshwood Park) onto the valleysides;
- Potential for pollution of Salary Brook from pesticide run-off from adjacent Wivenhoe Farmland Plateau.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.26 Conserve and Enhance.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve views into the valley from the east;
- Consider the impact of any new development on the southern edge of Colchester (Greenstead and Welshwood Park), which would be visually intrusive if sited on the valley sides;
- Screen visually intrusive urban-edge development within Colchester (Greenstead and Welshwood Park) with selective tree planting.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve and manage areas of semi-natural and ancient woodland on the valleysides as important historical, landscape and nature conservation features;

- Conserve and manage existing valley side woodland;
- Seek to manage and control potential fertiliser run-off from nearby farmland;
- Seek to enhance existing floodplain habitats.

## **A7 STOUR RIVER VALLEY SLOPES**

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

- Sloping valley side – topography;
- Patches of deciduous woodland;
- Mixture of irregular arable and pasture fields;
- Field boundaries comprising pure elm hedges and veteran oak pollards;
- Small farmsteads and halls (with associated ponds and parkland);
- Minor roads and narrow lanes which run down the valley sides to crossing points;
- Sense of remoteness and tranquillity away from road network;
- The attractive small town of Dedham.

### ***Sub Area A7a Key Characteristics***

- Steep-sided narrow, intimate valley containing a small southern tributary of the River Stour;
- Small woodland groves and farmsteads on the valley sides;
- Pasture fields on lower valley slopes where tributary meets the main river Stour.

### ***Sub Area A7b Key Characteristics***

- Intimate, tranquil, relatively steep-sided river valley which is narrow in places and has the narrow meandering Black Brook running through the floodplain;
- Damp pasture and willows;
- Dominant electricity lines running along the valley floor;
- Small farmsteads;
- Mixture of woodland and plantation types, including cricket bat plantations and pine on sandy soils.

### ***Sub Area A7c Key Characteristics***

- Narrow, steep-sided valley to the east of Boxted and west of Boxted Cross containing a tributary of the River Stour;
- Large patches of mixed woodland (the majority of which is ancient) on the valleysides;
- Network of public footpaths crossing the valley and running along the valley floor;

- Small, linear dammed lakes contained within floodplain and running along the valley floor;
- Small farmsteads, orchards and a vineyard (Carter's Farm) to the north of Workhouse Hill.

### ***Overall Character***

- 3.3.27 *'The beauty of the surrounding scenery, the gentle declivities, the luxuriant meadow flats sprinkled with flocks and herd, and well cultivated uplands, the numerous scattered villages and churches, with farms and picturesque cottages, all impart their particular spot and amenity and elegance hardly to be found elsewhere.'* (John Constable describing the Dedham Vale (Hunter, 1999:164)).
- 3.3.28 The majority of this area is included in the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), designated in 1970 as an exceptional example of a lowland river valley. The character area encompasses the gently rounded sloping sides of the Stour River Valley and includes several small intimate tributary valleys (classified as sub character areas), which feed the main Stour Valley river system. A mosaic of small to medium-sized irregular arable and pasture fields are located on the valley slopes. Fields are interspersed with small to medium-sized patches of predominantly deciduous woodland, giving an intimate character in places. Settlement pattern is dominated by a number of small farmsteads and halls. The halls are often associated with small ponds and parkland. The distinctive small town of Dedham also lies partly within this character area. Dedham has a wide main high street, with Mill Lane branching off it towards the River Stour. A large church, with a tower faced with knapped flint, dominates the high street and was described by Pevsner (1965:157) as *'one of the most prosperous Perpendicular churches of Essex.'* Dedham church is a landmark, which is depicted in several of John Constable's paintings. Constable (who was born in East Bergholt) is famous for his paintings and views and landscapes of the Dedham Vale. Several traditional colourful timber-framed buildings, nested beside early Georgian brick houses, line the high street. The town gained prosperity from its close geographical affiliation with the River Stour through cloth trade that started in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Minor roads and lanes (sometime sunken) traverse the character area, crossing the Stour Valley floodplain and connecting the valley slopes to surrounding areas of farmland plateau. There is also a sense of seclusion away from the road network providing a sense of remoteness and tranquillity within certain pockets of the character area. The major A12 is a source of visual intrusion.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Dedham church is visible as a landmark from the Stour River Valley floor and also from the northern sides of the Stour Valley;
- Wide, panoramic and also framed views of the Stour Valley floodplain can be obtained from several locations on the valley slopes.

### ***Historic Features***

- Visual evidence of utilisation of the landscape throughout several different time periods;
- The path of a Roman road crosses the character area;
- Surviving mound of a Norman castle (situated on a hill overlooking Bures and the River Stour) which would have commanded views along the River Valley;
- Built evidence of settlement within the landscape during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century: Southfields medieval house (Dedham); Josselyn's large timber-framed house and Marlborough Head Inn half-timbered house (corner of Dedham high street);
- Group of two Early Georgian brick houses at Dedham Grammar School;
- Visual remains of defence of WWII pillbox to the southeast of Mount Bures and east of the Railway line.

### ***Ecological Features***

3.3.29 The ecological character of this area is dominated by the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (designated for its lowland landscape features) and throughout by small areas of woodland. The sandy slopes support groups of Scot's pine *Pinus sylvestris*, plantations, mixed woodland and semi-natural woodland, with areas of bracken on the lane verges. There are the following eight woodland SINC's:

- Creak's Grove SINC consisting of an oak, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and ash canopy with a mixed understorey;
- Little Wood SINC comprised of oak standards and sweet chestnut and hazel *Corylus avellana* coppice;
- Borted Great Wood SINC is a large area of ancient oak woodland (21 hectares);
- Part of Cophedge Wood West SINC and Cophedge Wood East SINC which are ancient oak-hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* -field maple *Acer campestre* woodlands;
- Ash Wood SINC also ancient oak woodland with some planted conifers;

- Slough Grove West and East SINC comprised of mature oak, ash and elder and some new planting.

3.3.30 The groundflora of all the semi-natural woodlands are typical of mature woodland (W8 NVC community type) with bluebell, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and violet species *Viola* spp.

3.3.31 Other habitats of ecological interest include a vineyard, acidic and neutral grassland, road verges, arable margins, hedgerows and old walls. SINC with grassland habitat include:

- Wormingford Mere SINC which is a large mere surrounded by mature woodland and is primarily of ornithological interest;
- Great Horkesley Churchyard SINC comprised of acidic grassland including species such as harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*;
- Wormingford to Bures Species Roadside Verge SINC recognised for their general floristic interest;
- Bridges Farm SINC managed by The National Trust comprised of alluvial floodplain pastures and ditches and the banks of the River Stour;
- Dedham Churchyard SINC comprising relict acidic grassland with a fern flora also of interest on the walls and gravestones.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Increasing traffic on minor roads, especially during busy tourist periods;
- Potential development pressure on Dedham, Boxted and Horkesley Park;
- Pressure for change of arable land to horse paddocks, with associated potentially visually intrusive features such as white tape.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.32 Conserve and Enhance.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the tranquil undeveloped character of the intimate tributary valley of the River Stour (e.g. Black Brook);

- Consider the visual impact of new farm buildings upon valley slopes;
- Ensure that the scale, siting and materials used for new farm buildings responds to local landscape character;
- Conserve the landscape setting of historic settlements such as Dedham and Boxted;
- Maintain cross-valley views and conserve characteristic views along the valley;
- Ensure any new small-scale development in or on the edges of historic villages of the area is of an appropriate scale, form, design and uses materials which respond to historic settlement character;
- Ensure any new development on valley sides is small-scale, responding to historic settlement pattern, landscape setting and locally distinctive building styles.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve and manage areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland as important historical, landscape and nature conservation features;
- Conserve, manage and restore patches of deciduous woodland along valley sides;
- Encourage the planting of native alder, willow, ash, oak and Black Poplar in groups along the riverside where appropriate;
- Conserve and restore pastures;
- Conserve and manage the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting and coppice rotation of failing elm.

## **A8 STOUR RIVER VALLEY FLOOR**

### ***Key Characteristics***

- Meandering River Stour and associated wet floodplain consisting of several areas of damp pasture and meadows and ponds;
- Cricket bat willow and remnant poplar plantations following the alignment of the River Stour;
- Numerous mills, weirs, water works and pumping stations (human influences) associated with the River;
- Large areas of open grazed grassland within the valley floodplain, traversed by a ditch network;
- Intimate small fields enclosed by tall hedges and/ or wet ditches, in places these have been removed to create large, open arable expanses;
- Willow pollards lining the River Stour.

### ***Overall Character***

3.3.33 This character area contains the narrow, gently meandering River Stour and its broad associated floodplain to the north and south. Within the floodplain, an extensive network of drainage ditches (and buried land drains) into the main River. A hotchpotch of damp pasture and meadows cover the floodplain, interrupted in some places by ponds adjacent to the river. Cricket bat willow plantations run along the valley floor, following the course of the river. There are also large areas of open and tranquil grassland within the floodplain. Numerous mills, weirs, waterworks and pumping stations are associated with the river, relate to its use for power, navigation and water supply. The Stour Valley Path and Essex Way promoted regional routes cross the character area.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Picturesque views along the river corridor and floodplain, with highlights at Dedham, where the bridge and mill provide an impressive gateway to Dedham Market Town;
- Views to landmark church towers and spires within villages situated on the valley sides;
- Attractive views along the River Stour and floodplain from locations within the valley floor;
- Views out of the area to the valleys sides are framed by hedges and willow plantations.

### ***Historic Features***

- Visual evidence of settlement within and use of the landscape during the Post-Medieval period: - Garnons, two-storied timber-framed building at Wormingford and decoy pond at Wormingford Mere;
- 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial waterworks at Langham suggesting use of the river for water supply;
- 18<sup>th</sup> century canalisation of the river shows use of the River for navigation.

### ***Ecological Features***

3.3.34 The ecological character is dominated by a network of mixed and elm hedgerows linking marsh and willow plantations amongst an arable landscape. Habitats include marsh and flood meadows with small patches of wet woodland composed of willow, alder and blackthorn. There is a network of wet drainage ditches and there are several mature willow pollards in the valley. The Rivers Stour and Brett maintain species diversity, with marginal vegetation on the riverbank and an interlacing network of ditches over the floor with narrow reed fringes.

3.3.35 Much of this area is included in the Dedham Vale AONB and the River Stour and surroundings are included in the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Countryside Project, which has initiated many wildlife and biodiversity enhancements. Otter holts for example have been placed along the River Stour. The area is also designated as an Environmental Sensitive Area (ESA), and contains the following SINC:

- The Fenn House Marsh SINC is recognised for its ground flora which includes several uncommon species such as golden dock *Rumex maritimus* and meadow rue *Thalictrum flavum*;
- Part of Cophedge Wood West and Cophedge Wood East SINC of ancient oak-hornbeam-field maple woodland;
- Dedham Bridge Banks SINC supports diverse marginal river vegetation now scarce along the River Stour;
- Dedham special roadside verge SINC for its floristic interest;

- Langham Lakes SINC which includes swamp, scrub, woodland and grassland as well as aquatic habitats with uncommon species found such as greater dodder *Cuscuta europaea* (Nationally Scarce, Preston *et al.*, 2002) and marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*;
- Judas Gap Reedbed SINC which comprises a mixture of coastal reed beds, a scarce and declining habitat in Essex supporting many bird species and a number of reed-feeding moths.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Possibility for loss of livestock and the end of the ESA scheme in order to maintain the current level of grassland;
- Potential for pollution of the Stour River from fertiliser and pesticide run-off from surrounding valley side and farmland plateau areas;
- Pressure for increased use of narrow and minor lanes, especially during peak tourist periods;
- Visual intrusion of road and railway in undeveloped floodplain landscape, particularly where the main railway line and A12 cross the area;
- Potential pressure from urban development at the settlement edges of Dedham;
- Potential for visual intrusion into landscape character due to pressure from future possible need for new river crossing points;
- Potential impact on water quality, flooding and water availability for wetland habitats and recreation schemes from the Ely Ouse transfer scheme;
- Potential for increased river traffic;
- Potential for increased bat willow plantations to dominate the landscape.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.36 Conserve and Enhance.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the generally undeveloped nature of the floodplain;
- Consider the visual impact of any new small-scale development within the floodplain and consider the appropriate scale, form, design and use of materials appropriate to landscape character and respect the historic unsettled nature of the valley floor;

- Maintain open views along the valley floor and consider the visual impact of new farm buildings within the floodplain on these views;
- Ensure any new small-scale development in or on the settlement edges of Dedham responds to historic settlement pattern, landscape setting and locally distinctive building styles;
- Encourage the use of alternative methods of transport when visiting popular tourist attractions.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve and seek to restore marginal riverside habitats such as marshland and pasture, reed-bed and off-stream wetlands;
- Seek to control and manage pesticide and fertiliser run-off from surrounding farmland areas using buffer areas/strips;
- Seek the visual integration of mills, bridges and weirs as distinctive landscape elements along the course of the River corridor;
- Encourage the reversion of valley floor arable land to pasture and wetland habitats;
- Conserve and restore the historic hedgerow pattern, ditch system and willow pollards;
- Conserve willow pollards and further define river and tributaries with appropriate planting of bankside trees;
- Restrict new willow plantations to conserve the valley landscape;
- Improve mitigation planting to screen the A12.

## **B Farmland Plateau Landscapes**

### **B1 LAYER BRETON FARMLAND PLATEAU**

#### *Key Characteristics*

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

#### *Overall Character*

3.3.37 This character area is situated upon gently rolling plateau, which forms a higher tract of land between the Roman River valley to the north and the dammed Layer Breton River valley to the south. Birch Green, Layer Breton and Layer de la Haye are the main settlements situated at higher points within the plateau. Woodland cover is generally sparse, with some very small patches to the west of Birch Green. This leads to a generally open feel, particularly when experiencing views to the south across the expansive open water of Abberton Reservoir. There is a sense of enclosure in the northern parts of the character area created by large patches of woodland on the southern slopes of the Roman River Valley. Overall field pattern comprises a mix of medium to large regular and irregular predominantly arable fields with field boundaries, consisting of mature hedges. Associated with the settlement of Layer Breton and east of Layer de la Haye, there are concentrations of smaller regular fields, with hedges field boundaries, gappy in places. The geometric, engineered nature of the waterworks at Layer-de-la Haye exerts a human influence over the surrounding landscape. Settlement pattern consists of several small linear villages (Birch; Birch Green; Layer Breton and Layer de la Haye), the hamlets of Layer Marney; and farmsteads. A number of halls and moats are associated with these settlements. The Layer Marney Tower – a brick-built gatehouse with four towers flanked by square turrets, is a dominant and impressive landmark and is also a Registered Park and Garden. The tower is part of the landscape of a farm and deer park, at Layer Marney, which has been owned by the Marney family from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Pevsner (1954:263) noted the importance of this landmark: ‘*Lord Marney’s showpiece is a gatehouse with four towers, higher than any of other Tudor mansions that had preceded his. These gatehouses were the ambition of the ages.*’

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Wide, open and expansive views across Abberton Reservoir to the south;
- Church towers Layer de la Haye, Layer Breton, Birch and Layer Marney Tower provide prominent landmarks within views across the generally open, gently rolling plateau.

### ***Historic Features***

- medieval moated sites south of Layer Breton;
- Visible remains of utilisation of the landscape during the medieval period: Layer Marney Tower, moat at Dukes Farm, incomplete moat at Rye Farm;
- Post Medieval ruins of 16<sup>th</sup> century and 17<sup>th</sup> century house at St. Catherine's Hall Farm;
- 1930's water works (visible landmark) to north of Abberton Reservoir at Layer de la Haye.

### ***Ecological Features***

3.3.38 The ecological character is dominated by woodland, heath and grassland habitats. This area north of Abberton Reservoir has pockets of woodland interest with two woodland SINC's plus quality grassland and heathland scattered near villages and found in four SINC's. Woodland SINC's include:

- Needles Eye Wood South which comprises ancient woodland with an oak - sweet chestnut canopy and species-rich ground flora;
- Part of Hather Fields which is mixed woodland and part of the larger complex of woodland north of Layer-de-la-Haye.

3.3.39 Grassland SINC's include:

- Grassreasons SINC comprising 16 hectares of oak woodland and damp grassland;
- Layer Breton Heath is predominantly relic acidic grassland;
- Smythe's Green of rough species rich grassland;
- Birch Church and Valley, which has a range of dry to damp grassland.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Past loss of hedgerows;
- Decline in hedgerow management;
- Pressure of traffic on rural lanes and increasing traffic eroding verges;
- Pressure from potential expansion of Layer de la Haye, Birch Green and Layer Breton village settlements, detrimental to landscape character;
- Potential for erection of new farm buildings, which may be conspicuous on the skyline.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.40 Conserve and Enhance.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the mostly rural character of the area;
- Ensure that any appropriate new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials, which are appropriate to local landscape character (refer to the Essex Design Guide for Residential and Mixed Use Areas, Essex Planning Officers Association, 1997, for further information). Such development should be well integrated with the surrounding landscape;
- Encourage the planting of tree groups around visually intrusive modern farm buildings;
- Small scale development should be carefully sited in relation to existing farm buildings.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve and manage areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland (to the east of Birch) as important landscape, historical and nature conservation features;
- Conserve and restore hedgerows where gappy and depleted, and manage elm;
- Conserve historic lanes and unimproved roadside verges;
- Establish arable field margins.

## **B2 EASTHORPE FARMLAND PLATEAU**

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

- Raised farmland plateau, dissected by the wooded Roman River valley in the east;
- A mixture of small, medium and large irregular, predominantly arable fields;
- Small patches of deciduous woodland and several ponds/ reservoirs;
- Area crossed by a network of narrow, sometimes winding lanes;
- Airfield, surrounded by large open fields has a dominant influence on the landscape character in the south of the area;
- Settlement pattern consists of small villages and hamlets with scattered farmsteads amongst predominantly arable agricultural land.

### ***Sub Area B2a - Key Characteristics***

- Linear settlement corridor extending from the western edge of Colchester Urban Area, including the western edges of Stanway, Copford village and Marks Tey in the west;
- Northern boundary delineated by main A12 and railway corridor which is a dominant visual feature within the character area;
- Visually dominant major road junctions/ roundabouts within the character area;
- Landscape character is disturbed by the visual, movement and noise intrusion of cars on the A12 and also by frequent trains on the main railway line.

### ***Overall Character***

- 3.3.41 Rolling boulder clay plateau underlies this character area, which is dissected in the east by the upper reaches of the wooded Roman River valley. The open, expansive large triangular World War II airfield at Birch dominates the southern half of the area, with several large open arable fields adjacent. To the south east of the airfield, a large sand and gravel workings (Birch Pit) introduces further human influence to this area of the plateau landscape. The dominant enclosure pattern on the largely arable farmland plateau is one of medium-sized irregular fields with gappy-hedged field boundaries and small to medium-sized patches of woodland (e.g. Fan Wood). Enclosure pattern is smaller and more intricate, with more intimate thickly vegetated field boundaries consisting of overmature hedges with hedge trees, in close proximity to settlements such as Copford. Settlement pattern consists of a combination of linear (Marks Tey) and nucleated (Copford) small settlements, alongside

small hamlets (Hardy's Green; Easthorpe; Copford Green) and small farmsteads. Settlements are connected via a network of narrow, sometimes winding lanes, enclosed by hedges in places. Roads running in an east-west direction tend to be straighter (such as the Roman Easthorpe Road) and the Main A12. A number of halls, small reservoirs and ponds are dispersed across the character area.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Views across the farmland plateau from roads and public rights of way are limited and framed by hedged field boundaries and small patches of woodland; however, it is generally possible to obtain medium-range views across arable farmland;
- An attractive cluster of buildings consisting of Easthorpe church, a timber-framed house opposite and Easthorpe Hall to the west, are landmarks with views on approach to Easthorpe and along the Roman Easthorpe Road;
- The spire of Copford church (*'the most remarkable Norman parish church in the county'* - Pevsner, 1954:149) on the upper slopes of the Roman River valley is another prominent landmark in views from approach roads to the south and east.

### ***Historic Features***

- Evidence of Roman activity within the landscape provided by the path of a Roman road which crosses the character area to the west of Easthorpe;
- Evidence within built heritage of Norman presence within the landscape (comprising Norman doorways within St. Andrew's Church – Mark's Tey);
- Varying forms of remaining visual evidence of medieval use of the landscape for settlement- sub rectangular moat at Florie's Farm (West of Great Tey), Easthorpe Hall; Incomplete rectangular moat at Marks Tey Hall;
- Layout and surface of WWII airfield to the southwest of Hardy's Green and south of Easthorpe.

### ***Ecological Features***

- 3.3.42 The ecological character is defined by pockets of woodland and grassland within an open field landscape, and an old clay pit designated as an SSSI of national geological interest. There are nine woodland SINC's:

- Fan Wood – ancient oak-ash-field maple woodland;
- Potash wood - ancient hornbeam-oak woodland;
- Aldhamhall Wood ancient oak-ash woodland;
- Church House Wood;
- Eastthorpe Hall Wood of willow woodland and fen flora;
- Seller's Lane (hedgerow with ancient woodland species);
- Seller's Wood;
- Gravelpit Wood;
- Part of Aldercar at Copford.

3.3.43 Much of the canopies of the semi-natural woodland are comprised of oak and ash with a species-rich ground flora of bluebell, violet and dog's mercury.

3.3.44 There are four grassland SINC's including;

- Claypit Heath and Well Lane Special Roadside Verges for their floristic interest;
- Seven Star Green comprising species-rich relict acidic grassland which is extremely rare in Essex and included within the Essex Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP);
- Blind Lane Plantation, which is a unique site of lime-enriched soil that supports large numbers of bee orchids *Ophrys apifera* and swathes of grass vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia* (Local within Essex, Jermyn, 1974).

Also within this area is Marks Tey Brickpit SSSI, which is designated for geological interest comprised of Pleistocene sediments, which have yielded a continuous pollen record through the entire Hoxnian Interglacial.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Potential pressure for further expansion of and improvements to the linear communications and settlement corridor (sub character area B2a) into the surrounding farmland plateau landscape;
- Pressure from potential visually intrusive expansion of Marks Tey settlement;
- Potential for erection of new farm buildings, which may be conspicuous on the skyline;
- WWII airfield is an important historical and cultural resource.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

#### 3.3.45 Conserve and Enhance.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the mostly rural character of the area;
- Ensure that any appropriate new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials, which are appropriate to landscape character (refer to the Essex Design Guide for Residential and Mixed Use Areas, Essex Planning Officer Association, 1997, for further information). Such development should be well integrated into the surrounding landscape;
- Ensure that any development on the edges of Marks Tey and Copford responds to traditional settlement patterns and uses design and materials, which are appropriate to local landscape character;
- New farm buildings such as sheds should be sensitively located within the landscape to respect local character and avoid the skyline.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Consider the introduction of new structure planting to shield/ mitigate the visual effects on the A12 / railway and settlement corridor (B2a);
- Strengthen and enhance hedgerows with hawthorn where gappy and depleted;
- Conserve and manage areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland (for example to the north east of Messing Lodge) as important landscape, historical and nature conservation features;
- Conserve historic lanes and unimproved roadside verges.

## **B3 SOUTHERN COLCHESTER FARMLAND PLATEAU**

### ***Key Characteristics***

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

### ***Overall Character***

- 3.3.46 This area forms the southern extent of a broad area of plateau upon which Colchester is situated, to the north of the v-shaped Roman River valley. The northern boundary of the character area is formed by the southern edge of Colchester Urban Area. The fragmented enclosure pattern consists of medium-sized irregular arable fields (some with hedged field boundaries) interspersed with other land uses, including pockets of land in semi-derelict condition. Several large sand and gravel pits (some of which are flooded) are situated to the south of Stanway Green and north of Colchester zoo. An area of small, regular orchards diversifies the field pattern and landscape to the south of Stanway Green. Within the eastern half of the character area there are large area of woodland (e.g. Friday Wood), which extend across the northern Roman River valley slopes to the south. These patches of woodland are interspersed with and lie within Middlewick and Friday woods military training area, which includes firing ranges. Military influence on the landscape is further emphasised by the presence of Berechurch Camp (where emergency barracks were constructed in 1939). As well as having a visual presence within the landscape, military activities can disturb the tranquillity of the area during firing sessions. When firing is not in action, a number of Public Rights of Way, including footpaths and bridleways, cross this part of the area giving access to the woodlands. The character of the landscape within this area is fragmented and

strongly influenced by the diversity of land-uses within it: including agriculture, horticulture, recreation, gravel extraction and military activities. The area is crossed by roads, which radiate southwards from the centre of Colchester.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Large areas of woodland on the northern Roman River valley sides generally block views southwards into the valley;
- Views encompassing the varying land-uses within the area can be gained from several locations in the southern settlement fringes of Colchester;
- Views across the character area in an easterly direction are generally open or framed by small patches of woodland.

### ***Historic Features***

- This character area contains and is crossed by earthworks and some visible remains of an Iron Age dyke system, The dykes are the only surviving standing structures from the Iron Age settlement of Camulodunum;
- Gosbecks archaeological park contains earthwork remains of a Roman temple, theatre, a stretch of a Roman road and substantial evidence of fields and trackways of Iron Age and Roman date, however only the theatre is clearly visible.

### ***Ecological Features***

3.3.47 This area borders the southern urban fringe of Colchester and its ecological character is dominated by farmland with many remaining pockets of ecological interest including nine woodland SINCS:

- Gol Grove and Hanging Wood, both ancient oak woodland with sweet chestnut coppice;
- Friday Wood North comprised of ancient oak woodland and Berechurch both part of the Roman River SSSI;
- Butcher's Wood and Oliver's Thicks;
- Sodom Wood;
- Birch Brook Wood;
- part of Donyland Wood.

3.3.48 Many of the semi-natural woodland canopies are comprised of oak and ash with a species-rich ground flora including bluebell and violet species.

3.3.49 Other designated sites include:

- Part of Roman River SSSI is notified for its complex mosaic of woodland, scrub, heath, grassland and fen. There is a large area of acidic grassland, scarce in Essex and overall the site supports a diverse breeding bird population and an exceptionally diverse moth and butterfly fauna including over 30 notable species of moths such as hornet moth *Sesia apiformis*;
- Hythe Marshes SINC, adjacent to the Upper Colne Marshes SSSI, which is comprises woodland, species rich grassland and ponds;
- Middlewich Ranges SINC (approximately 70 hectares) of acidic scrub and grassland habitats supporting numerous rare Essex spiders, ants and butterflies, being the only Essex site for Grayling *Hipparchia semele* (Local Status in UK and on the Essex Red Data List); and
- Donyland Snipe Field SINC comprised of rush pasture, a scarce habitat in Essex that is of note for its breeding snipe *Gallinago gallinago* (on the RSPB Amber List of Species of Conservation Concern BoCC, 2002 and on the Essex Red Data List) and a colony of great green bush-cricket *Tettigonia viridissima* (Local Status within the UK and on the Essex Red Data List, [www.essexfieldclub.org](http://www.essexfieldclub.org)).

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Potential pressure for further expansion and development of the southern fringes of Colchester which could be visually intrusive and have impacts upon landscape character;
- Pressure on the landscape from urban-fringe related activities, such as sand and gravel extraction and horse paddocks;
- Pressure on areas of woodland for military use;
- Pressure on minor roads within the area, with potential increased expansion of Colchester settlement;
- Decline in hedgerow management;
- Potential increase in recreational users of the urban fringe with the construction of new housing developments.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

#### 3.3.50 Conserve and Enhance.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- The reuse of redundant agricultural buildings, particularly black timber-framed and boarded barns, should be encouraged;
- Ensure any new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials which are appropriate to landscape character;
- Screen existing visually intrusive modern housing development along the southern edges of Colchester (adjacent and north of Gosbecks archaeological park) with new structure planting;
- Conserve and manage small patches of woodland which play an important role in framing views within and into/ out of the area;
- Ensure any extensions to existing housing developments avoid visual intrusion.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Protect and manage areas of archaeological importance, including Gosbecks Park and the Iron-Age dyke system;
- Strengthen and restore hedgerows where gappy and depleted;
- Seek ways to restore sand and gravel pits in ways which enhance local landscape character (for example, creation of nature parks and diverse wildlife areas);
- Avoid the use of visually intrusive tape fences surrounding and dividing horse paddocks;
- Review the condition and use of existing PROWs within the character area, and prioritise action to repair and review footpaths.

## **B4 GREAT TEY FARMLAND PLATEAU**

### ***Key Characteristics***

- Gently sloping farmland plateau consisting of a mixture of medium to large-scale enclosed, predominantly arable fields;
- Linear belts and small patches of predominantly deciduous woodland;
- Small nucleated settlements and scattered farmsteads;
- Comprehensive network of footpaths and winding lanes;
- Peaceful and tranquil atmosphere.

### ***Overall Character***

- 3.3.51 The character area is situated on gently sloping plateau forming some of the highest ground in the Borough that is dissected by the Colne River valley to the north. The enclosure pattern on the plateau consists of a mixture of medium to large-scale enclosed, irregular predominantly arable fields. Gappy, unmanaged hedgerows delineate field boundaries. Other hedges are low and clipped but there are also frequent hedgerow trees. A concentration of small regular fields adds intimacy to the field pattern around Great Tey. Woodland is predominantly deciduous and arranged in small patches and linear belts, creating a strong and interesting landscape pattern. In the northwestern corner of the character areas, woodland cover is more frequent and includes the eastern most extent of the large Chalkney Wood that straddles the Borough boundary. The small regular forms of orchards are also dotted across the landscape. A comprehensive network of footpaths (including the Essex way recreational path) and narrow winding lanes covers the character area and main north-south railway corridor has a dominant influence upon the landscape. Settlement pattern consists of a number of small-nucleated settlements (Aldham; Great Tey) alongside a mixture of vernacular (including some brick and black timber-faced barns) and modern farm buildings/ farmsteads, which are scattered throughout the area. The atmosphere is peaceful and there is a strong sense of tranquillity within several parts of the character area.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- There are no visually prominent structures and although pylons and telegraph poles are visible, they are not dominant;

- Views within the character area are strongly influenced by sky, which accentuates the linear woodland belts on the skyline;
- The church tower at Great Tey is visible from several locations within the area;
- Attractive views across the Colne Valley slopes and into the valley floor can be gained from several locations (to the south of Chappel and north of Aldham) along the northern edge of the plateau.

### ***Historic Features***

- Visible architecture which shows Norman use of the landscape – Norman crossing tower at St Barnabas' church (Great Tey), built from flint and brick rubble (of Roman origin and re-used in the medieval period);
- Visible architecture which shows late medieval use of the landscape – Aldham Hall, which is timber framed.

### ***Ecological Features***

3.3.52 The ecological character is found in fragments of semi-natural habitat within a landscape dominated by large fields. There is one SSSI and five SINC's in this area including:

- Little Tey Churchyard SINC for its floristic interest;
- Gallows Green SINC of acidic grassland and shallow ponds;
- Hoe Wood SINC has a mixed oak-ash canopy and species of note include wild service tree *Sorbus torminalis* and small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata*; and
- Woolfney Wood SINC and part of Fiddlers Wood, which are both parts of remnant ancient woodland.

3.3.53 To the west, outside this area, is Chalkney Wood SSSI, which will be important for wildlife within the Great Tey Farmland Plateau area, as it lies adjacent to it and offer a good resource of species and habitat to its surroundings. The SSSI encompasses a large area of woodland supporting many plant, invertebrate and bird species. It is ancient woodland of acid birch-ash lime and acid pedunculate oak-lime but also with base influence alder and pedunculate oak-hornbeam canopies. It has a diverse ground flora due to the wide range of the acidic and basic habitat types including two rare plants of Essex; violet helleborine *Epipectis purpurata* (also uncommon in the UK) and thin-spiked wood-sedge *Carex strigosa*.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Pressure for expansion on the edges of Aldham settlement;
- Decline in hedgerow management;
- Pressure from increased traffic on minor roads;
- Pressure from potential expansion of village settlements within adjacent character areas (Fordham Heath, Chappel Hill), impacting on landscape character;
- Potential changes in farmland management and expansion of horse paddocks, impacting upon landscape character;
- Redundant rural buildings that are important to the character of the area are deteriorating in condition as they fall into disuse.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.54 Conserve and Enhance.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the mostly rural character of the area;
- Encourage the screening of visually intrusive modern farm buildings by using tree belts;
- Ensure that any appropriate new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials, which are appropriate to local landscape character (refer to the Essex Design Guide for Residential and Mixed Use Areas, Essex Planning Officers Association, 1997, for further information);
- Conserve open views to landmark churches;
- New farm buildings such as sheds should be sensitively located within the landscape to respect local character and avoid the skyline.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve and enhance orchards as distinctive landscape features;
- Encourage sensitive conversion of vernacular barns which respect traditional materials and built fabric and landscape character;
- Conserve and manage the ecological structure of woodland, copses and hedges within the character area;

- Conserve and manage areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland as important landscape, historical and nature conservation features;
- Strengthen existing hedgerows through planting of hawthorn and management of elm.

## **B5 ROCHFORDS FARMLAND PLATEAU**

### ***Key Characteristics***

- Mixture of medium and large rolling arable fields interspersed with small woodland patches;
- Fields enclosed by gappy hedges, with occasional mature trees within field boundaries;
- Landscape feels more open and exposed in places than the adjacent Great Horkesley farmland plateau to the west;
- Large weatherboarded vernacular barns (for example at Fordham);
- Settlement pattern consists of villages with varying forms, small hamlets and scattered farmsteads.

### ***Overall Character***

3.3.55 This character area is situated on higher plateau, which slopes upwards to the north of Wakes Colne Green (70m+) leading to the slopes of the Stour River Valley to the north. The enclosure pattern of small to medium sized irregular and regular fields with steep/ truncated drainage ditches at the corners of some fields. Field boundaries consist of hedges, with some small deciduous woodland belts. A number of small hamlets are scattered across the landscape, associated with which are small regular fields particularly at Wood Hill and Queens Wood Farms. A large disused airfield to the west of Rochfords and south of Wormingford Hall, with some associated large arable fields to the east, introduces larger scale elements into the otherwise medium-scale landscape. Settlement pattern is mixed, combining linear (Fordham) and nucleated (Little Horkesley) forms. Large weatherboarded vernacular barns (for example at Fordham) are found throughout the area. A mainline railway dissects the character area in the west and narrow roads cross the area, running in a predominantly north-south direction.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Attractive views across the Colne Valley from the south of the character area;
- Open and interesting views across the Stour Valley slopes into the meandering floodplain corridor from Little Horkesley, Wormingford and northern edges of the farmland plateau.

### ***Historic Features***

- Visible Norman built heritage/ architecture - tower at the church of St. Andrew – Wormingford;
- Moats at Little Loveney Hall and Wood Hall (dated to the Late medieval period/ late 16<sup>th</sup> century) which provide evidence of settlement within the landscape at this time;
- Visible remains of WWII defensive features consisting of a line of pillboxes along the western side of the railway, west of the WWII airfield.

### ***Ecological Features***

3.3.56 The ecological character is defined by the woods and hedgerows amongst the farmland. This area comprises an airfield, large arable and pasture fields, with ecological interest found in the plentiful hedgerows and small pockets of woodland. There are four SINC's including:

- Wormingford and Fordham Churchyards comprising trees and grassland with good diversity including species such as lesser calamint *Clinopodium calamintha* (Nationally Scarce in the UK, Preston *et al.*, 2002) and wild clary *Salvia verbenaca* (uncommon in Essex, Jermyn, 1974);
- Aldercar SINC which consists of streamside woodland of alder and oak with a groundflora typical of damp conditions including ramsons *Allium ursinum* and marsh horsetail *Equisetum palustre*; and
- Cambridge Brook Marsh designated for its fen communities and wet grassland.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Potential for the introduction of new visually intrusive farm buildings;
- Dominant railway corridor crossing the area;
- Increased traffic pressure on minor roads and rural lanes;
- Potential loss of hedgerows and field pattern due to the further introduction of intensive agricultural practices;
- Potential changes in farmland management and expansion of horse paddocks, impacting upon landscape character.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.57 Conserve and Enhance.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the traditional dispersed settlement pattern and generally undeveloped character;
- Conserve the landscape setting of existing small settlements such as Rotchfords, Wormingford and Wakes Colne Green;
- Conserve the mostly rural character of the area;
- Ensure that any appropriate new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials, which are appropriate to local landscape character (refer to the Essex Design Guide for Residential and Mixed Use Areas, Essex Planning Officers Association, 1997, for further information);
- Conserve the setting to villages, e.g. Wormingford, by control of expansions to these settlements.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve and enhance linear deciduous woodland belts;
- Seek ways to mitigate the visual impact of the railway corridor, for example shelter belt planting;
- Conserve and enhance existing hedgerow network by planting with hawthorn and holly;
- Establish arable field margins as important nature conservation habitats;
- Conserve historic/ sunken lanes and unimproved roadside verges.

**B6 GREAT HORQUESLEY FARMLAND PLATEAU***Key Characteristics*

- Small to medium scale arable fields with concentrations of mature trees at field boundaries;
- Interesting field pattern consisting of small, regular fields to the south of Boxted and also to the east of Great Horkesley;
- Orchards in close proximity to Great Horkesley;
- Farmland plateau crossed in a north-south direction by two straight roads, which connect with Colchester's northern settlement fringe. Linear settlement pattern extends from the layout of these roads;
- A network of narrow lanes (sometimes sunken), which are lined by trees and hedges connect the remainder of the character area with the two main north south roads;
- Hedgerows are diverse and well managed/ clipped in most places.

*Overall Character*

3.3.58 This character area is located on an area of gently rolling plateau to the north of the Colne River valley. Parliamentary field enclosure pattern is visible within the predominantly post 1950's arable farmland landscape. A very small-scale, regular linear field pattern, to the south of Boxted, extends from the straight, branch-like arrangement of roads. Linear, regular fields abut Colchester's northern settlement edge to the north of Myland. A patchwork of small, medium and large-scale fields align these concentrations of regular fields. Small patches of deciduous woodland (e.g. Hill House wood) are found across the area, with some more linear mature belts at field boundaries. Generally, hedged field boundaries appear to be well managed and clipped in places. Poplars are prevalent within parts of the character area where they create striking field boundaries. Settlement pattern consists of a mixture of linear and nucleated settlements. Great Horkesley is an expanded linear settlement, whilst Horkesley Heath has a squarer, more nucleated form. West Bergholt, a large nucleated village, is fringed by fragmented orchards to the north. The area is traversed by several, relatively straight roads, which are closely related to field and settlement pattern. To the south of the area, a diverse and interesting landscape corridor (High Woods Country Park) links Colchester's settlement fringe with more open plateau to the north. The Country park includes areas of woodland, grassland, farmland and wetland.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Views from roads within the character area are limited by hedgerow vegetation;
- From several locations in the north of the character area, panoramic and framed views across the Stour Valley slopes and into the Black Brook river valley can be obtained.

### ***Historic Features***

- Visible surviving remains of a possible Iron Age encampment at Woodhouse Farm (Pitchbury Ramparts – in the form of a double rampart and ditch);
- Line of Roman road to the north of Great Horkesley, providing evidence that the landscape was utilised for access and communications during this time period;
- Visible architectural remains of settlement and use of the landscape during the medieval period, comprising perpendicular church at Great Horkesley;
- Post-Medieval architecture - large 17<sup>th</sup> century 2 storey brick house and Milestone along London Road (opposite Yew Cottage);
- Distinctive Georgian architecture at (3 storey house) at West Bergholt Hall.

### ***Ecological Features***

3.3.59 The ecological character is defined by woodland and grassland found within a mosaic of small villages and farmland including High Woods Country Park. There are three SINC's designated for grassland habitats and six woodland SINC's including:

- Friars Grove SINC which is actively managed hornbeam coppice within ancient woodland;
- High Wood SINC which is one of the largest ancient woods in the borough approximately 46 hectares;
- Pitchbury SINC;
- Harrow Corner SINC; and
- East Wood SINC.

3.3.60 High Wood SINC has a dominant canopy of oak, sweet chestnut with overgrown coppice of hazel, sweet chestnut, hornbeam and lime with a species-rich ground flora of bluebells and wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*. The other woodlands also predominantly have a mixed canopy including oak and ash and a species-rich ground flora of bluebell.

### 3.3.61 SINC with grassland habitats include:

- Black Brook SINC (part of) which has a variety of habitats forming a wildlife corridor between Boxted and Langham. There is oak and willow woodland with a ground flora of common reed *Phragmites australis* in the wetter parts, pasture and the brook itself, with the aquatic plants in this section being at its richest north of Langham including species such as marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre* and water forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides* (Occasional status in Essex, Jermyn, 1974);
- High Woods Grasslands SINC is also a Country Park and comprised of woodland and a mosaic of grasslands, scrub, lakes and also two areas of marsh with bulrush *Typha latifolia* swamp. The habitats support a wide variety of birds, invertebrates and amphibians; and
- West Bergholt Heath SINC comprises acidic grassland, which is rare in Essex, and is of note for the presence of heath grass *Danthonia decumbens* (Uncommon status in Essex, Jermyn, 1974) and harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Potential pressure from expansion of Boxted, Great Horkesley and West Bergholt settlements;
- Increased pressure on minor roads and rural lanes;
- Potential for the introduction of new visually intrusive farm buildings;
- Potential for new development at the northern edge of the plateau which would be visually intrusive within views from the adjacent Stour Valley slopes landscape character area;
- Potential loss of small-scale rectilinear field pattern from modern agricultural farming practices;
- Visual intrusion from existing glasshouses;
- Disturbance to landscape character as a result of noise and movement associated within the main A12 road corridor which crosses the character area

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

### 3.3.62 Conserve and Enhance.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Ensure that any appropriate new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials, which are appropriate to local landscape character (refer to the Essex Design Guide for Residential and Mixed Use Areas, Essex Planning Officers Association, 1997, for further information;
- Conserve the landscape setting of existing settlements, such as Boxted, Great Horkesley and West Bergholt, ensuring where appropriate that infill development does not cause linkage with the main Colchester settlement;
- Conserve panoramic and framed views into the Stour River Valley corridor to the north of the character area;
- Encourage screening, using tree belts of visually intrusive modern farm buildings.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Replace field hedgerow poplars in due time, or when new trees are necessary, with hawthorn and other species, which reflect local vegetation composition and landscape character;
- Seek ways to mitigate the visual impact of the railway A12 corridor through introducing new and strengthening existing parallel shelter belts;
- Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow network by planting hawthorn and holly;
- Conserve historic/ sunken lanes and unimproved roadside verges.

**B7 LANGHAM FARMLAND PLATEAU***Key Characteristics*

- Langham airfield – clipped straight hedges adjacent to Park Lane;
- Silver birches within field boundaries to the east of disused Langham airfield;
- Large-scale arable fields with some remnant orchards now cover the large expanse of airfield;
- Paddocks, surrounded by wooden post and rail fences;
- Airfield dominates field pattern.

*Overall Character*

3.3.63 This plateau is bounded by the Stour River valley to the north and also includes an area of plateau to the east of Parson's Heath, overlooking the Ardleigh Valley to the south. Once covered by orchards, many of the regular fields contained within the outline of the former airfield at Langham, have been/or are in the process of being converted into crops, such as strawberries. Paddocks, enclosed by post and rail fences also contribute to the mixed landscape character within this area. Field boundaries comprise clipped straight hedges (for example those adjacent to Park Lane). A smaller-scale more intricate field pattern, comprising regular small fields, enclosed by hedgerows containing mature deciduous trees is evident in proximity to small settlements such as Langham, Lamb's Corner and Dedham Heath. The settlement pattern of these small hamlets and villages coincides with the crossing points of minor roads across the River Stour. Small farmsteads are scattered throughout the landscape. Overall landscape character within this area is diverse and interesting combining both large and small-scale attributes. This character area extends to the east, into Bromley Heaths plateau (Tendring District Council Landscape Character Assessment). East of the A12(T) a series of very large prairie fields to the south of Birchwood Road create an expansive open landscape in contrast to wooded areas to the north.

*Visual Characteristics*

- Panoramic, long-range open and framed views across the Stour Valley slopes into the floodplain from several locations along the northern edge of the plateau at Dedham;

- Framed views into the intricate narrow valley containing the Black Brook (tributary of the River Stour).
- Views into the Ardleigh Valley from the southern edge of the plateau to the north east of Welshwood Park.

### ***Historic Features***

- medieval architecture which shows use of the landscape during this period - St. Mary's church with late 13<sup>th</sup> century tower and 14<sup>th</sup> century aisle;
- Post-Medieval milepost next to the A12, which suggests evidence of earlier use of this section of the modern road alignment.

### ***Ecological Features***

3.3.64 The ecological character is defined by woodland fragments in this small area dominated by farmland and a large area of plantation woodland. Ecological interest is found within two woodland SINC:

- Kiln Wood comprising ancient oak-ash woodland with some conifer replanting; and,
- Birch Wood, Langham also ancient oak-ash woodland with wood sage *Teucrium scorodonia* and honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Visual intrusion from A12 corridor;
- Increased pressure on historic lanes and minor roads, especially during peak tourist periods;
- Potential expansion of Langham, Lamb's Corner and Dedham Heath settlements;
- Further visual intrusion from fencing surrounding horse paddocks in close proximity to Langham;
- Pressure from expansion of Welshwood Park in the south and Parson's Heath in the west.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.65 Conserve.

***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Ensure that the design of new agricultural buildings reflects the local vernacular style, and uses materials which are appropriate to local landscape character;
- Conserve the mostly rural character of the area;
- Ensure that any appropriate new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials, which are appropriate to local landscape character (refer to the Essex Design Guide for Residential and Mixed Use Areas, Essex Planning Officers Association, 1997, for further information);
- Ensure that development upon the northern edge of the plateau is not visually prominent within views from the Stour River Valley Corridor to the north;
- Ensure that development upon the southern edge of the plateau is not visually prominent within views from the Ardleigh River Valley Corridor to the south.

***Land Management Guidelines***

- Seek ways to mitigate the visual impact of the railway A12 corridor through introducing new and strengthening existing parallel shelter belts;
- Conserve and manage areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland (such as Birch Wood to the east of the Roman Road) important historic, landscape and nature conservation features;
- Seek to replace poplars when required with hawthorn, holly and other species, which are appropriate to landscape character;
- Conserve and strengthen the existing hedgerow pattern and network by planting hawthorn and holly managing elm.

## **B8 WIVENHOE FARMLAND PLATEAU**

### ***Key Characteristics***

- Small, irregular patches of woodland;
- Plateau, predominantly arable farmland consisting of medium to large arable irregular fields with gappy field boundaries;
- Well-connected network of lanes and footpaths traversing the area;
- Distinctive Wivenhoe Park and Lodge adjacent to the University of Essex site.

### ***Overall Character***

- 3.3.66 This plateau character area rises gently to the east, and encompasses the eastern slopes of the Colne River Valley extending eastwards outside the Borough boundary into Bromley Heaths plateau (Tendring District Council LCA). Predominantly arable farmland encircles Wivenhoe Urban Area and is interspersed with features such as Wivenhoe Park (on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens) and Lodge. Disused workings to the east of Wivenhoe provide a contrast with the surrounding arable landscape. Enclosure pattern consists of medium-sized irregular fields, interspersed in places with small, irregular patches of woodland. Wivenhoe Woods is a distinctive larger linear area of deciduous woodland that separates the western boundary of Wivenhoe settlement from the beginning of the Colne Valley estuary to the east. Field boundaries are gappy, with some single mature trees. The Sixpenny Brook runs north south through the area, feeding the Colne to the south and providing diversify to the farmland landscape. A network of well-connected lanes and footpaths cross the plateau and link with Wivenhoe settlement edge in the north.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Views of the Colne Estuary from the western edge of the settlement are limited by Wivenhoe woods;
- Open views of the diverse and intriguing Colne River as it reaches its estuary, can be gained from the sloping eastern valley sides and from eastern parts within the farmland plateau.

### ***Historic Features***

- Visible structure of ditch and bank surrounding medieval deer park within the University of Essex campus.

### ***Ecological Features***

3.3.67 The ecological character is of marsh and woodland adjacent to urban areas. This is a small area bordering both towns of Colchester and Wivenhoe dominantly farmland with pockets of marsh and woodland. There are three SINC:

- Home Wood comprising ancient oak woodland with a species rich ground flora;
- Cambridge Brook Marsh SINC comprised of fen, wet grassland and scrub with a rich flora including common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*; and
- the grounds of Essex University (approximately 30 hectares) that support relict acidic grassland, scrub and lakes that form a complex mosaic of habitats with an extremely rich invertebrate fauna. These include white letter hairstreak *Strymonidium-w-album* (has undergone decline when its foodplants were reduced by Dutch Elm Disease, but it seems to be recovering in some areas (Asher *et al.* 2001: The Millennium Atlas of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland purple hairstreak and numerous bumble-bees and cuckoo bees).

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Pressure from expansion of Colchester settlement along the urban fringe (at Greenstead) and also from the northern edge of Wivenhoe;
- Pressure from expansion of the University of Essex Campus;
- Potential changes in farmland management and expansion of horse paddocks, impacting upon landscape character;
- Visual intrusion from the railway corridor and pylons running through the adjacent Colne Valley corridor;
- Visual intrusion from the tall tower blocks associated with the University of Essex campus.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.68 Restore and Enhance.

***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the landscape setting of Wivenhoe and southern Colchester (Greenstead);
- Ensure that any appropriate new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials, which are appropriate to local landscape character (refer to the Essex Design Guide for Residential and Mixed Use Areas, Essex Planning Officers Association, 1997, for further information;
- Conserve open views along the Colne Valley and towards Wivenhoe.

***Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve and enhance existing hedgerow network by planting hawthorn and strengthening elm;
- Establish arable field margins as an important nature conservation habitat;
- Seek ways to mitigate the visual impact of the railway corridor, for example introducing shelter belt planting;
- Seek ways to reduce the visual impact of tall tower block buildings within the campus, through structure planting;
- Ensure that disused mineral workings are restored to benefit wildlife and enhance local amenity.

## **C1 FINGRINGHOE ESTUARINE MARSH/MUDFLATS**

### ***Key Characteristics***

- Mosaic of open saltmarshes, mudflats, narrow winding creeks and channels, adjacent to the River Colne;
- Inter-tidal landscape, constantly washed by the sea which provides movement;
- Separated from a backdrop of drained coastal marshes and open coastal farmland by prominent sea walls;
- Remote, inaccessible character accentuated by the sounds of gulls and other birds.

### ***Overall Character***

3.3.69 This flat and open area of intertidal habitats, comprising a mixture of diverse saltmarsh, mudflats and reedbeds (including Rat Island and Pewit Island) align the western edge of the Colne estuary channel. Landscape Character is influenced by the wide, dominant skies and the constant ebb and flow of the tide, which facilitates a dynamic landscape. To the south of Fingringhoe nature reserve, the character is peaceful and tranquil. Overall tranquillity however is disturbed by the sound of practice gunshots at the Fingringhoe firing ranges (adjacent west) during training. Parts of the marshland to the east of Fingringhoe ranges are inaccessible to the public during firing. The distinctive saltmarsh landscape consists of winding creeks and channels which have carved an intricate landscape pattern that is periodically inundated by the sea at high tide.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Long, open panoramic views across the Colne estuary and south to Mersea Island;
- Changing skies and weather conditions strongly influence character of views;
- Open views across the Colne estuary channel to the horizon of development at Brightlingsea.

### ***Historic Features***

- Several WWII pillboxes align the sea wall (which separates open estuarine marshes from drained marshes to the west), provide a visual link with past defensive use of this area of landscape;

- Intricate remains of Post-Medieval oyster pits on Pewit Island provide clues to a previously utilised abundant food-rich landscape.

### ***Ecological Features***

- 3.3.70 This area borders much of the coastline in the Colne Estuary including Fingringhoe, Marshes, Rat Island (designated as an SSSI) and Geedon Saltings. The ecological character of these areas is defined by open coastal marsh which includes the shore down to the low water mark where sheltered conditions have led to the build up of sediment and habitats include saltmarsh, mudflats, shingle spits and tidal creeks. The ecological interest in this area is of national interest including bird populations and invertebrates and uncommon plants.
- 3.3.71 The EWT reserve at Rat Island is designated as SSSI for its breeding bird populations. It has one of the county's largest nesting colonies of black-headed gulls *Larus ridibundus* and visiting sandwich terns *Sterna sandvicensis*.
- 3.3.72 Saltmarsh has colonised a large proportion of the estuary at Geedon Saltings and the Strood. Much of this is high level saltmarsh dominated by typical species such as saltmarsh grass *Puccinellia maritima*, sea purslane *Atriplex portulacoides* and annual sea-blite *Suaeda maritima*. Lower saltmarsh in the creeks include typical species such as glasswort *salicornia* spp. sea aster *Aster tripolium* and cord grass *Spartina* spp. Uncommon plants include sea heath *Frankenia laevis* (Nationally Scarce and very rare in Essex) and rock sea-lavender *Limonium binervosum* (Nationally Scarce, Preston *et al.*, 2002 and localised in Essex, Jermyn, 1974) in transitional habitats.
- 3.3.73 This area of marsh is included within the designations of Blackwater Estuary RAMSAR site, cSAC Essex Estuaries, Colne Estuary SPA and SSSI. The Colne Estuary SPA qualifies under the Bird's Directive as supporting nationally important breeding populations of an Annex 1 species, the little tern *Sterna albifrons*. It also has nationally important breeding populations of two regularly occurring migratory species; pochard *Aythya farina* and ringed plover *Chararius hiaticula* and nationally important wintering bird populations of over 20,000 waterfowl. The area includes internationally important habitats under the cSAC designation including mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide, *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand, *Spartina* swards (Small cord-grass *Spartina maritima*), and Atlantic salt-meadows. At a national level the Colne Estuary SSSI has

nationally important intertidal muds and saltmarsh, sea walls, grazing marsh, grassland and scrub and outstanding assemblages of invertebrates and plants.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Sea-level rise and erosion could lead to the loss of existing saltmarsh within the Colne Estuary channel;
- Risk of erosion due to wash from motorised craft;
- Potential for damage to diverse, important saltmarsh and bird habitats with a potential increase in tourism and accessibility to visitors.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.74 Conserve.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the open nature of the mosaic of saltmarsh and mudflats;
- Conserve the mostly undisturbed, undeveloped character;
- Consider the impact on views from the area to potential areas of new development within adjacent (Langenhoe) coastal farmland.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Manage recreational use of the Colne Estuary channel by motorised craft to prevent erosion of saltmarsh;
- Continue to liaise with the MOD to ensure sensitive management of use and access to the areas from adjacent Fingringhoe Ranges;
- Conserve and protect the natural habitats that support colonies of black-headed gulls and saltmarsh grasses.

## **C2 STROOD AND SALCOTT ESTUARINE MARSH/ MUDFLATS**

### ***Key Characteristics***

- Large areas of mudflat saltmarsh, traversed by an intricate network of small meandering drainage creeks and ditches;
- Crossed by the Strood raised causeway, which allows vehicle access to Mersea Island from the mainland;
- Important habitats for wildlife and biodiversity.

### ***Overall Character***

3.3.75 This intricate mosaic of saltmarsh and mudflats, fringed with reed beds and a raised reinforced earthbank sea wall, aligns the Strood and Salcott channels at the mouth of the Blackwater Estuary (to the seaward side of the sea wall). This area includes Ray Island and Cobmarsh Island, which are isolated within the channels; and small areas to the west of Mersea Island. Areas of this open marsh lie adjacent to the Strood causeway (which provides access to Mersea Island) and are therefore accessible and visible from this crossing point via the sea wall. To the south of Copt Hall, the marshes are accessible to walkers via an organised trail from Copt Hall car-park (National Trust). The movement of boats within the channels occasionally disturbs remoteness and tranquillity. Weather conditions and the changing colour of sea and sky have a dramatic affect upon landscape character within the area.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Open, panoramic views of the seascape dominated by sky with flurries of movement from flocks of estuarine waders and sea birds;
- Long Distance views to Bradwell Power Station on the opposite side of the estuary;
- Open, short-range views from the dividing sea wall to visually obtrusive caravan parks on the north-western shore of Mersea Island;
- Long-distance panoramic views across Mersea Island and to the open sea beyond.

### ***Historic Features***

- Post-Medieval oyster pits on the saltmarsh create a remaining visible link with the past use of the landscape as an important food resource area;
- Remains of Red Hills at Copt Hall, provides clues to use of this landscape for early industrial saltmaking.

### ***Ecological Features***

- 3.3.76 This area borders much of the mainland coastline and the ecological character is dominated by saltings and mudflats, of Salcott Channel and Strood Channel, and old grazing-marsh at Salcott. There are also pockets on the western edge of Mersea Island near West Mersea. Open coastal marsh includes the shore down to the low water mark where sheltered conditions have led to the build up of sediment and habitats include saltmarsh, mudflats, shingle spits and tidal creeks. Mudflats are highly productive and support huge numbers of invertebrates as well as supporting habitats of eel grass *Zostera* spp. (Nationally Scarce, Preston *et al.*, 2002) beds. Bonner's Salting is also managed by the EWT.
- 3.3.77 Ray Island in the Strood Channel is managed by EWT and within the Blackwater Estuary SSSI. It is one of the few sites in Essex where the transition from saltmarsh to grassland has not been truncated by the imposition of a sea wall with a wide range of saltmarsh plants including lax-flowered sea lavender *Limonium humile* and golden samphire *Inula crithmoides* (both Nationally Scarce, Preston *et al.*, 2002). Other habitats include shingle beach, ponds and extensive rough grasslands and scrub that provide habitat for a wide range of birds.
- 3.3.78 This area of marsh is included with the designations of Blackwater Estuary RAMSAR site, cSAC Essex Estuaries, Blackwater and Colne Estuaries SPA's, part of the Blackwater National Nature Reserve (NNR) and a SINC. There are important populations of wildfowl and waders as well as nationally restricted populations of coastal plants.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Sea-level rise and erosion could lead to the loss of existing saltmarsh within the Colne Estuary channel;
- Risk of erosion due to wash from motorised craft;

- Potential for damage to diverse, important saltmarsh, bird habitats and archaeological remains with a potential increase in tourism and accessibility to visitors;
- Further development, including caravan parks Mersea Island Coastal Farmland, could erode the generally undisturbed character of the area and adversely affect saltmarsh.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.79 Conserve.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the open nature of the mosaic of saltmarsh and mudflats;
- Conserve the mostly undisturbed, undeveloped character;
- Consider the impact on views from the area to potential areas of new development within adjacent (Mersea Island, Wigborough, Langenhoe) coastal farmland;
- Ensure that proposals for tall structures in the landscape do not adversely affect the character of views to the south and east.

### ***Landscape Management Guidelines***

- Manage recreational use of the Blackwater Estuary channel by motorised craft to prevent erosion of saltmarsh;
- Conserve and protect the natural habitats that support colonies of black-headed gulls and saltmarsh grasses;
- Conserve sea walls and where possible minimise the interference involved with the maintenance, replacement and repair of them;
- Manage and control possible levels of sewage and pollution released from adjacent caravan parks and development on Mersea Island.

### **C3 WEST MERSEA ESTUARINE MARSH/ MUDEFLATS**

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

- Large area of mudflats (including Mersea flats) with small pockets of saltmarsh fringing the southern edge of Mersea Island;
- Inter-tidal landscape, is constantly washed by the sea which provides movement;
- Sense of remoteness and tranquillity;
- Important habitat for wildlife and biodiversity.

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

3.3.80 At high tide the mudflats are submerged. This area of flat, open inter-tidal mudflats fringes the southern edges of Mersea Island. The changing tides constantly affect landscape character. Shortly after the water has receded at low tide, the mudflats glisten with moisture before darkening in colour and drying in the sun. Wide, sweeping skies strongly influence character which is further influenced by weather conditions. At times the area can seem tranquil but at other times much wilder and windswept. Incoming rain showers accentuate the open expansive character of this area. An intricate network of channels and ditches meander across parts of the area at low tide.

#### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Wide, open panoramic views across the Blackwater estuary, with sea and sky dominant on the horizon;
- Views north to the colourful and striking line of beach huts which fringe the southern beaches along Mersea Island;
- Long-distance views across Mersea Island to the north and to higher landmark churches within (Peldon, Abberton) within Langenhoe Coastal Farmland to the north.

#### ***Historic Features***

- Remains of a Red Hill at low tide, providing evidence of use of the landscape as part of an early salt-making industry;
- Remains of a medieval fish trap, providing clues that the landscape was perhaps once a useful food resource.

### ***Ecological Features***

- 3.3.81 This area borders much mainland coastline and the ecological character is dominated by mudflats. Mudflats are highly productive and support huge numbers of invertebrates as well as supporting habitats of eel grass *Zostera* spp. (Nationally Scarce, Preston *et al.*, 2002) beds. Bonner's Salting is also managed by the EWT.
- 3.3.82 This area of marsh is included with the designations of Blackwater Estuary RAMSAR site, cSAC Essex Estuaries, Blackwater and Colne Estuaries SPA's, part of the Blackwater National Nature Reserve (NNR) and a SINC. There are important populations of wildfowl and waders as well as nationally restricted populations of coastal plants.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Sea-level rise and erosion could lead to the loss of existing saltmarsh and mudflats;
- Risk of erosion due to wash from motorised craft;
- Potential for damage to diverse, important bird habitats and archaeological remains with a potential increase in tourism and accessibility to visitors;
- Further development, including caravan parks Mersea Island Coastal Farmland, could erode the generally undisturbed character of the area and adversely affect mudflats.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

- 3.3.83 Conserve.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the open nature of the mosaic of mudflats;
- Conserve the mostly undisturbed, undeveloped character;
- Consider the impact on views from the area to potential areas of new development within adjacent Mersea Island coastal farmland.

*Landscape Management Guidelines*

- Manage recreational use of the Blackwater Estuary channel by motorised craft to prevent erosion of mudflats;
- Conserve and protect the natural habitats that support colonies of black-headed gulls;
- Manage and control possible levels of sewage and pollution released from adjacent caravan parks and development on Mersea Island.

## **D1 MERSEA ISLAND DRAINED ESTUARINE MARSH**

### ***Key Characteristics***

- Area of former saltmarsh which has been drained and enclosed by a sea wall;
- Mixture of arable cultivation and coastal grazing marsh;
- Scattered patches of low-lying scrub;
- Criss-cross of drainage ditches creating an intimate yet large-scale landscape pattern;
- Meandering channel traversing the area.

### ***Overall Character***

- 3.3.84 A former area saltmarsh and mudflats, this landscape character area consists of level, low-lying drained coastal marsh, upon which, patches of grazing marsh and arable cultivation exist. The landscape is criss-crossed with a network of drainage ditches and punctuated by patches of low-lying scrub which are often weather-beaten by the coastal elements. Away from the main urban settlement on Mersea Island (West Mersea), the marshes are peaceful and tranquil, although accessible from Mersea Island coastal farmland to the south. A lack of settlement and tree cover leads to an extensive landscape scale and pattern.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Open, panoramic views across the mouth of the Colne Estuary and to Brightlingsea drained marshes (Tendring District Council LCA) on the opposite side of the estuary;
- Open views across Mersea Island to the south;
- Panoramic views of adjacent mudflats, salt marshes and reed beds;
- Open, short-range panoramic views across the Strood channel to Fingringhoe drained coastal estuarine marshes to the north and gently sloping Langenhoe coastal farmland to the northwest.

### ***Historic Features***

- 2 red hills (only visible at low tide) to the north west of North Barn, on the border with Mersea Island coastal farmland (E1);
- WWII decoy bunker to the north west of North Barn.

### ***Ecological Features***

- 3.3.85 The ecological character of this area is defined by drained coastal marsh including all areas of former saltmarsh, found adjacent to areas of open coastal marsh. The drained marsh is criss-crossed with ditches and with fertile alluvium protected from the sea by large sea walls dug from adjacent ditches. These walls hold much ecological interest in particular populations of invertebrates and plants.
- 3.3.86 This area of marsh is included with the designations of Blackwater Estuary RAMSAR site, cSAC Essex Estuaries, Colne Estuary SPA, NNR and SSSI. It is managed within the Blackwater Estuary Management Plan. The Colne Estuary SPA qualifies under the Birds Directive 1979, as supporting nationally important breeding populations of an Annex 1 species, the little tern *Sterna albifrons*. It also has nationally important breeding populations of two regularly occurring migratory species; pochard *Aythya farina* and ringed plover *Chararius hiaticula* and nationally important wintering bird populations of over 20,000 waterfowl. The area includes internationally important habitats under the cSAC designation including mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide, *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand, *Spartina* swards (Small cord-grass *Spartina maritima*), and Atlantic salt-meadows. At a national level the Colne Estuary SSSI has nationally important intertidal muds and saltmarsh, sea walls, grazing marsh, grassland and scrub and outstanding assemblages of invertebrates and plants.

### ***Key Landscape and Land Management Issues***

- Vulnerable to sea-level rise and potential effects of global warming;
- Pressure for further conversion of land-use to arable;
- Pressure from development within adjacent character areas.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

- 3.3.87 Conserve and Restore.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the open, undeveloped character of the area;
- Consider the impacts of any development in adjacent character areas avoiding visual intrusion and adverse impact on undisturbed character;

- Conserve the largely undisturbed and tranquil nature of the area.

***Land Management Guidelines***

- Consider the potential for creation of new inter-tidal habitats (such as saltmarsh) through managed realignment (with regard to information set out within the Shoreline Management Plan and the Colne and Blackwater Estuary Flood Management Strategy);
- Seek improvements to the visual appearance of existing sea defences (in consultation with the Environment Agency);
- Conserve, manage and restore low lying grazing marsh.

## **D2 FELDY DRAINED ESTUARINE MARSH**

### ***Key Characteristics***

- Low, drained landscape located immediately behind the sea wall and consisting of a mixture of arable cultivation and coastal grazing marsh;
- Situated behind the sea wall, separated from adjacent areas of saltmarsh and mudflats;
- Open, undeveloped character with a sense of remoteness and tranquillity;
- Scattered patches of low-lying scrub;
- Network of sinuous and straight drainage ditches;
- Simple large-scale landscape pattern.

### ***Overall Character***

3.3.88 This area of flat, drained former saltmarsh aligns the coastline at the confluence of the Strood and Salcott channels and Feldy marshes form a peninsula, which is fringed by a tip of saltmarsh and mudflats (Strood and Salcott Open Estuarine Marsh/ Mudflats). Land-use within the area consists of a mixture of coastal grazing marsh and arable farmland, which is criss-crossed in places by an intricate network of drainage ditches. Drainage ditches are wide and often sinuous creating a compartmentalised landscape. March grasses provide feeding habitat and cover for raptors and other bird species. There is a sense of remoteness and tranquillity on the marshes and the ever-changing colours of the sky and sea add diversity to landscape character. The relative absence of tree cover and settlement creates an expansive landscape that is wild in places.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Open, panoramic views over the Strood and Salcott channels and Blackwater Estuary;
- Long-distance views to the landmark Bradwell power station on the opposite side of the Blackwater estuary;
- Dramatic, open panoramic views from the sea wall across areas of open estuarine marsh and mudflats, influenced by changes in weather conditions affecting the colour of the sea and sky;
- Long distance panoramic views across coastal farmland (to the north) and the raised settlements of Peldon and Abberton;

- Short-distance, open views to visually prominent caravan park developments along the northern edge of Mersea Island Coastal Farmland.

### ***Historic Features***

- Remains of Red Hills at New Hall and also a Red Hill on Langenhoe hall marshes providing a visual link with earlier use of this landscape as part of early salt-making industry;
- Modern visual evidence of changes in alignment and repairs to the sea wall.

### ***Ecological Features***

- 3.3.89 This area is found on the mainland shore of Byfleet channel and the ecological character is defined by drained coastal marsh including all areas of former saltmarsh, found adjacent to areas of open coastal marsh. The drained marsh is criss-crossed with ditches and with fertile alluvium protected by the sea by large sea walls dug from adjacent ditches. These walls hold much ecological interest in particular populations of invertebrates and plants.
- 3.3.90 This area of marsh is included with the designations of Blackwater Estuary RAMSAR site, cSAC Essex Estuaries, Colne and Blackwater Estuaries SPA and SSSI. The Colne Estuary SPA qualifies under the Birds Directive 1979, as supporting nationally important breeding populations of an Annex 1 species, the little tern *Sterna albifrons*. It also has nationally important breeding populations of two regularly occurring migratory species; pochard *Aythya farina* and ringed plover *Chararius hiaticula* and nationally important wintering bird populations of over 20,000 waterfowl. The area includes internationally important habitats under the cSAC designation including mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide, *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand, *Spartina* swards (Small cord-grass *Spartina maritima*), and Atlantic salt-meadows. At a national level the Colne Estuary SSSI has nationally important intertidal muds and saltmarsh, sea walls, grazing marsh, grassland and scrub and outstanding assemblages of invertebrates and plants.
- 3.3.91 Grazing marsh (designated within the Blackwater Estuary RAMSAR) survives landward of the sea wall, often have species indicative of relict grassland and transitional plants of estuarine grazing marsh including hairy buttercup *Ranunculus sardous*, bird's-foot-clover *Trifolium ornithopodioides* and the Nationally Scarce divided sedge *Carex divisia* and sea clover *T. squamosum*. The ditch systems within the Blackwater's coastal marshes have a diverse range of plant species that mark the transition from saline to freshwater including a

number of Nationally Scarce species; brackish water-crowfoot *Ranunculus baudotii* and soft hornwort *Ceratohyllum submersum* (Preston *et al.*, 2002).

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Vulnerable to sea-level rise and the potential effects of global warming;
- Pressure for further conversion of land-use to arable;
- Pressure from development within adjacent (Langenhoe/ Great and Little Wigborough) Coastal Farmland, which may have a visually intrusive impact on landscape character.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.92 Conserve and Restore.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the open, undeveloped character of the area;
- Conserve long-distance panoramic views;
- Consider the impacts of any new development in adjacent character areas, seeking to avoid visual intrusion and adverse impact on the open and undisturbed character;
- Conserve the largely undisturbed and tranquil nature of the area;
- Avoid significant adverse impacts on existing important habitats such as coastal grazing marsh.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Manage, conserve and restore sea walls to ensure protection of the landscape from encroachment from the sea;
- Consider the potential for creation of new inter-tidal habitats (such as saltmarsh) through managed realignment (with regard to information set out within the Shoreline Management Plan and the Colne and Blackwater Estuary Flood Management Strategy);
- Seek visual improvements to the visual appearance of existing sea defences (in consultation with the Environment Agency);
- Conserve, manage and restore low-lying grazing marsh;
- Encourage use of ESA management options to offset potential losses from sea level rise.

### **D3 COLNE DRAINED ESTUARINE MARSH**

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

- Corridor of rough grassland and grazing marsh lines the River Colne;
- Scattered patches of low-lying scrub;
- Network of drainage ditches in places;
- Visual influence of main railway line which runs through parts of the area.

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

- 3.3.93 This area of flat, drained landscape forms a corridor, which aligns both sides of the course of the River Colne within its tidal reaches towards its confluence with the Blackwater Estuary and sea to the south. The area is fringed to the east by areas of coastal farmland and small patches of woodland (at Cleveland and to the east of Hyde Park corner). This landscape provides visual and physical separation between southern Colchester and Rowhedge to the west and the University of Essex and Wivenhoe to the east. The landscape has a generally open character and large-scale pattern, which is less intricate than that within other areas of drained estuarine marsh to the south. There is a sense of remoteness and tranquillity within parts of the character area, however, this is frequently disturbed to the east of the Colne by visual and noise intrusion associated with the railway line which crosses the character area.

#### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Open, panoramic views across the River Colne to Wivenhoe waterfront development/ Conservation Area and farmland plateau to the east;
- Open, panoramic views to the historic harbour at Rowhedge from Wivenhoe, the River Colne, south of Colchester and the University of Essex;
- Direct short distance views of the 1960's visually dominant landmark tower blocks on the University of Essex campus.

#### ***Historic Features***

- Post-Medieval Deer Park at Wivenhoe House;
- Part of the University of Essex is a Registered Park and Garden (Wivenhoe Park);

- Evidence of Second World War defences includes an anti-tank obstacle within the drained area.

### ***Ecological Features***

- 3.3.94 This marshland area is found adjacent on the west side of the Colne Estuary and the ecological character is defined by drained coastal marsh including all areas of former saltmarsh, found adjacent to areas of open coastal marsh. The drained marsh is criss-crossed with ditches and with fertile alluvium protected by the sea by large sea walls dug from adjacent ditches. These walls hold much ecological interest in particular populations of invertebrates and plants.
- 3.3.95 There is much ecological interest within this area including three SINC's and Upper Colne Marshes SSSI. The SINC's include:
- Hythe lagoons are of importance for a variety of local birds and notable invertebrate populations;
  - University marshes are relict grazing marsh which has common reed beds and populations of the Nationally Scarce divided sedge; and
  - Wivenhoe wood comprises of ancient oak-ash woodland with sweet chestnut coppice with species-rich ground flora of bluebell and dog's mercury.
- 3.3.96 The Upper Colne Marshes SSSI consists of grazed marshes with associated ditch and open water habitats, saltmarsh and mudflats. It supports an outstanding assemblage of nationally scarce plants and an unusual diversity of brackish ditch-types, plus a diverse range of invertebrates and birds are found here. Nationally Scarce plants include sea barley *Hordeum marinum*, stiff saltmarsh grass *Puccinellia rupestris*, divided sedge, slender hare's-ear *Bupleurum tenuissimum* and dittander *Lepidium latifolium*. There are further uncommon saltmarsh and aquatic plants and the nationally scarce Roesel's Bush-cricket *Metrioptera roeselii* is abundant here.
- 3.3.97 This area of marsh is included with the designations of Blackwater Estuary RAMSAR site, cSAC Essex Estuaries, Colne Estuary SPA and SSSI. The Colne Estuary SPA qualifies under the Birds Directive 1979, as supporting nationally important breeding populations of an Annex 1 species, the little tern *Sterna albifrons*. It also has nationally important breeding populations of two regularly occurring migratory species; pochard *Aythya farina* and ringed plover *Chararius hiaticula* and nationally important wintering bird populations of over

20,000 waterfowl. The area includes internationally important habitats under the cSAC designation including mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide, *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand, *Spartina* swards (Small cord-grass *Spartina maritima*), and Atlantic salt-meadows. At a national level the Colne Estuary SSSI has nationally important intertidal muds and saltmarsh, sea walls, grazing marsh, grassland and scrub and outstanding assemblages of invertebrates and plants.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Potential pressure for expansion or new development at the University of Essex and the Southern edges of Colchester;
- Pressure for new harbourside development at Wivenhoe and Rowhedge;
- Tower blocks at the University of Essex are dominant within views to the north-east;
- Pressure for further conversion of grassland to land use;
- Visual and noise intrusion associated with the railway corridor and boats using the River Colne.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.98 Conserve and Restore.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the distinctive landscape setting of Wivenhoe and Rowhedge historic settlements;
- Ensure any new buildings and infrastructure, or any other redevelopment is of an appropriate scale, form, design, materials and uses colours that respond to landscape setting and landscape character;
- Avoid reduction in the extents of adverse impacts on existing important habitats such as coastal grazing marsh;
- Conserve open views across the river and character area and ensure that new development does not detract from views.

***Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve and manage small patches of scrub;
- Conserve, manage and seek to restore areas of coastal grazing marsh;
- Seek improvements to the visual appearance of existing sea defences (in consultation with the Environment Agency);
- Encourage use of ESA management options to maintain grassland habitats.

## **D4 PYFLEET DRAINED ESTUARINE MARSH**

### ***Key Characteristics***

- Intricate network of meandering drainage ditches;
- Area of predominantly ungrazed marshland which is utilised for firing ranges;
- Sense of remoteness, tranquillity;
- Open, undeveloped and generally inaccessible;
- Lack of tree cover and settlement pattern.

### ***Overall Character***

3.3.99 This flat, low-lying character area is criss-crossed by an intricate network of meandering drainage ditches. Lack of publicly accessible footpaths contributes to a sense of remoteness and tranquillity. Parts of the area, however, are used for firing ranges, which causes periodic disturbance. There are no settlements within the area and there is a lack of tree cover. The area forms a peninsula, which protrudes into the Colne estuary and is fringed to the north by Geedon Creek and south by Pyefleet channel. A small tip of open estuarine saltmarsh and mudflats are located adjacent to the drained area at the tip of the peninsula. Landscape character within the area is heavily influenced by the changing colour and pattern of sea and sky.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Open, panoramic views along the Colne, towards the mouth of the river and estuary;
- Dramatic views across areas of adjacent saltmarsh and mudflats, strongly influenced by changes in sea and sky;
- Short-distance views across Pyefleet channel to Mersea Island drained estuarine marshes (including Mayday Marsh and Reeveshall Marsh).

### ***Historic Features***

- Evidence of Second World War defences includes the remains of several pillboxes aligning the border (sea wall) with Fingringhoe open estuarine marsh/ mudflats;
- Remains of a Red Hill to the south of Fingringhoe ranges providing a visual link with Roman use of this landscape as part of early salt-making industry.

### ***Ecological Features***

- 3.3.100 Ungrazed marsh at Fingringhoe Ranges supports much invertebrate interest including the Nationally Scarce Emerald damselfly *Lestes dryas* (UK RDB2 and on the Essex RDB list as Regionally Important/threatened) that occurs at the disused gravel pits at Fingringhoe Wick Nature Reserve. This reserve encompasses over 100 acres of habitat developed from disused gravel workings with habitats including saltmarsh, foreshore and inter-tidal mudflats. The area supports a diverse range of flowering plants, invertebrates, amphibians and birds. Brown hare *Lepus europaeus* has been seen here and is included as a priority species in the Essex BAP.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Potential pressure for conversion of grassland to arable land-use;
- Pressure from development within adjacent coastal farmland landscape (Langenhoe);
- Vulnerable to sea-level rise and potential effects of global warming;
- Potential damage to important habitats from military activities associated with the firing ranges.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

- 3.3.101 Conserve and Restore.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the open, undeveloped character of the area;
- Consider the impacts of any development in adjacent character areas avoiding visual intrusion and adverse impact on undisturbed character;
- Conserve the largely undisturbed and tranquil nature of the area;
- Conserve long-distance panoramic views.

***Land Management Guidelines***

- Consider the potential for creation of new inter-tidal habitats (such as saltmarsh) through managed realignment (with regard to information set out within the Shoreline Management Plan and the Blackwater Estuary Flood Management Strategy);
- Conserve and restore ungrazed drained marshes;
- Manage, conserve and restore sea walls to ensure protection of the landscape from encroachment from the sea;
- Encourage use of ESA management options to maintain grassland habitats.

## **E1 MERSEA ISLAND COASTAL FARMLAND**

### ***Key Characteristics***

- Flat, low-lying predominantly arable farmland;
- Mixture of small, medium and large arable fields with hedged field boundaries (gappy in places);
- Small fields generally located in close proximity to small farmsteads;
- Network of drainage ditches traversing the island;
- Lack of woodland cover, however several mature trees present in hedgerow field boundaries;
- Views of sea restricted by domed landform of the island.

### ***Overall Character***

3.3.102 Mersea Island consists of low-lying, predominantly arable farmland. The island is situated at the confluence of two River estuaries (the Colne Estuary to the east and Blackwater Estuary to the south) and the Strood Channel physically separates the island from the mainland at high tide. It is accessible via the Strood tidal causeway, which traverses open coastal estuarine marsh and connects with the mainland to the north. A mixture of small, medium and large regular arable fields enclosed by low to medium hedges are typical across the area. Small fields are generally situated in close proximity to groups of small farmsteads. Hedged field boundaries are gappy in places and interspersed with several mature deciduous hedgerow trees, however, there are no large areas of woodland within the character area. Pasture fields also contribute to the character of the area, enclosed by wooden post and rail fencing. A network of drainage ditches is visible across the character area, providing a constant reminder of the close inter-relationship that the landscape has with the surrounding coastal water. Settlement pattern consists of series of small farmsteads, halls and groups of houses, which extend from the main west-east road, connecting East and West Mersea. There are also a number of caravan parks spread along the southern edge of the island. West Mersea is the largest settlement on the island, and provides local shops and services. Diverse and interesting views over the Blackwater Estuary, Salcott and Strood channels are afforded from the southern and western edges of the town.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Open views of Langenhoe Coastal Farmland are visible on the skyline to the north of the island;
- Views of open sea from the character area are restricted by the dome shaped landform of the island.

### ***Historic Features***

- Visual remains of use of the landscape and as a food resource during the Romano-British period comprising a round barrow (Mersea Mount) at barrow hill and several red hills (visible at low tide) on the southern beaches, associated with the early salt-making industry;
- Evidence of Second World War defences includes pillboxes and gun emplacements at West Mersea and a decoy bunker at East Mersea.

### ***Ecological Features***

- 3.3.103 The ecological character of shore and grassland habitats bordering large open fields (mostly used for arable). Ecological interest is confined to the borders of the shore and in small areas of semi-natural grassland. There are only a few pockets of scrub and woodland. Cudmore Grove Country Park SINC which comprises species-rich coastal grassland with typical and uncommon species such as fenugreek *Trigonella foenum-graecum* and narrow-leaved bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus tenuis*. This is managed for wildlife purposes.
- 3.3.104 At West Mersea a county rarity (and uncommon in the UK) has been discovered; sea spurge *Euphorbia paralias* along with sea mayweed *Tripleurospermum maritimum*, which has a limited distribution in Essex. Also large populations of shrubby sea-blite *Suaeda vera* has been able to colonise unstable shingle along the drift line at West Mersea and Osea Island.
- 3.3.105 This area of farmland is included within the Blackwater Management Plan and the shoreline is designated under the Blackwater Estuary RAMSAR, Essex Estuaries cSAC, and Colne Estuary SPA, SSSI and NNR.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Pressure from expansion of the settlement edges or West Mersea and around East Mersea;
- Potential for the introduction of visually intrusive agricultural buildings within the coastal farmland landscape, which would be visible from several surrounding character areas;
- Vulnerable to sea-level rise and the potential effects of global warming;
- Pressure on minor roads, especially during peak tourist periods;
- Visually intrusive caravan parks along the edges of Mersea Island;
- Continuing loss of hedges and field boundary vegetation.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.106 Conserve and Enhance.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Consider the impacts of any new development in adjacent character areas avoiding visual intrusion and adverse impact on the generally undisturbed character;
- Conserve the open nature of some views across the coastal farmland;
- Consider the visual impact of any new small-scale development appropriate scale, form, design and use of materials appropriate to landscape character;
- Ensure any new small-scale development in or on the edges of West Mersea and East Mersea responds to the existing settlement pattern;
- Conserve and enhance the landscape setting of West Mersea;
- Ensure any new harbourside development at West Mersea avoids the introduction of suburban styles and materials and responds to landscape setting taking into account views to and from the adjacent areas of open and drained estuarine marsh;
- Prevent coalescence of tourist orientated development on the southern edge of the area.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Strengthen hedgerow management, particularly of elm;
- Conserve, manage and enhance areas of semi-natural grassland habitats;
- Seek to screen visually intrusive caravan parks using structure planting (appropriate to local landscape character);
- Conserve existing WWII heritage features.

## **E2 GREAT AND LITTLE WIGBOROUGH COASTAL FARMLAND**

### ***Key Characteristics***

- Regular square and rectilinear field pattern;
- Small-scale settlements situated in close proximity to one road major road which crosses the character area;
- Lack of tree cover and small woodlands;
- Fringed to the south by areas of open estuarine marsh and Salcott channel;
- Generally open and undeveloped character.

### ***Overall Character***

3.3.107 This character area slopes down gradually towards the coast in the south, with Great Wigborough settlement situated on a higher knoll overlooking open farmland to the south. Field pattern consists of regular square and rectilinear fields, which are enclosed by gappy hedges in generally poor condition. The changing colours of the sky dramatically influence landscape character of the area with expansive views southwards towards the coast. Land-use consists primarily of arable farmland, with intermittent patches of rough grassland and shrub. Isolated farmsteads are also dotted across the landscape.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Open, panoramic views across coastal farmlands to the south from Great Wigborough raised settlement across open and drained estuarine marshes to the south of the area;
- Panoramic views to Abberton Reservoir from northern parts of the coastal farmland around Great Wigborough.

### ***Historic Features***

- Evidence of earlier (Roman) use of the landscape for early industrial saltworking survives in the form of Red Hills at Salcott (which are visible at low tide);
- medieval architecture within the church at Copt Hall.

### ***Ecological Features***

- 3.3.108 Coastal habitats and additional areas of woodland dominate the ecological character. This area comprises of farmland bordering the Blackwater estuary and Salcott estuarine marsh. There is one large area of ecological interest at Abbotts Hall managed by EWT. This farm (over 700 acres) is internationally important for wildlife, part of Blackwater Estuary SPA, SSSI and cSAC and acts as a wildlife link off land along the Essex coast. By coastal realignment work in 2002 over 200 acres of mudflat, pioneer saltmarsh and coastal grassland have been created.
- 3.3.109 Other ecological interest is confined to small pockets of woodland including part of Copthall Grove, designated as a SINC for ancient woodland comprised of mature oak/ash canopy and with uncommon midland hawthorn *Crataegus laevigata* scrub falls in this area.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Potential visual intrusion from new development within adjacent character areas;
- Potential affects on landscape character as a result of the introduction of new agricultural buildings;
- Views to visually intrusive caravan parks on the edge of Mersea Island;
- Pressure on minor roads from avoiding the B1026 during rush hour and peak tourist seasons;
- Potential further loss and decline in hedgerows due to intensive agricultural practice and lack of traditional management.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

- 3.3.110 Conserve and Restore.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Consider the impacts of any new development in adjacent character areas avoiding visual intrusion and adverse impact on the generally undisturbed character;
- Ensure any new small-scale development in or on the edges of Great Wigborough (which may be particularly visually intrusive to the north) and Salcott responds to the existing settlement pattern;

- Conserve and enhance the landscape setting of Great Wigborough and Salcott;
- Conserve the generally undeveloped character of the area;
- Conserve panoramic, long distance views adjacent areas of drained and open estuarine marsh to the south;
- Ensure development avoids skyline locations.

***Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve and restore the existing hedgerow network with particular emphasis placed on the planting and management of elm;
- Conserve historic lanes and unimproved roadside verge;
- Encourage use of ESA management options.

### **E3      LANGENHOE COASTAL FARMLAND**

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

- Area of gently sloping open coastal farmland with distinctive topographical knolls housing Peldon and Abberton/ Langenhoe settlements;
- Predominantly arable farmland with patches of rough grassland and small patches of woodland;
- Generally undeveloped character and large-scale field pattern;
- Isolated farmsteads situated along narrow lanes;
- Rifle ranges to the east of Langenhoe.

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

3.3.111 This area of open, coastal farmland slopes down gradually towards to the coast in the south. Settlement pattern is unusual, consisting of small farmsteads and also village settlements such as Peldon and Abberton/ Langenhoe, which are situated on prominent knolls overlooking the coastal farmland. The area has a generally open feel and large-scale landscape pattern, which is traversed by a winding network of minor roads and lanes. Fingringhoe nature reserve at the eastern edge of the character area is an important landscape and nature conservation feature. The area is generally swathed in a mosaic of large-scale arable farmlands, which are interspersed with small patches of rough grassland. Single deciduous trees punctuate the skyline. The expansive rolling character of the landscape is accentuated by expansive and sweeping skylines, particularly seaward.

#### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Open, panoramic views across coastal farmland towards Pyefleet channel and drained/ open marshes to the south;
- Open, panoramic views from Fingringhoe nature reserve across areas of open estuarine marsh and mudflats to the east and along the Colne river corridor;
- Landmark churches at Peldon and Abberton are visible within most views from surrounding character areas, due to their raised position.

### ***Historic Features***

- Use of the landscape during the medieval period exists in the form of architecture at St. Mary's church (Peldon), the Peldon Rose Inn (to the south east of the church) and St. Andrew's church overlooking Abberton Reservoir.

### ***Ecological Features***

3.3.112 This area comprises of farmland bordering the saltmarsh adjacent to the Byfleet channel and has three SINC's as follows:

- Langenhoe Marshes partly falls in this area, formerly grazing marsh is now a military range and consists of a mosaic of grassland, ditches and scrub habitats;
- There is also part of Copthall Grove SINC which is ancient woodland comprised of mature oak/ash canopy and with uncommon midland hawthorn *Crataegus laevigata* scrub falls in this area; and
- Pete Tye Common SINC which comprises relic grassland indicated by large ant hills present within the mixed sward of dry and damp grassland and scrub.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Potential visual intrusion from new development within adjacent character areas;
- Potential affects on landscape character as a result of the introduction of new agricultural buildings;
- The eastern part of the character area is vulnerable to sea-level rise and the potential effects of global warming;
- Views to visually intrusive caravan parks on the edge of Mersea Island;
- Pressure on minor roads within the area, especially the B1025, which provides the main access route between Colchester settlement in the north, Mersea Island and other coastal farmlands to the west.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.113 Conserve and Restore.

***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Potential visual intrusion from new development within adjacent character areas;
- Potential affects on landscape character as a result of the introduction of new agricultural buildings;
- The eastern part of the character area is vulnerable to sea-level rise and the potential effects of global warming;
- Potential disturbance of sense of remoteness and tranquillity caused by the movement of boats within Pyefleet channel and Colne River channel;
- Views to visually intrusive caravan parks on the edge of Mersea Island;
- Pressure on minor roads on the B1026 during rush hour and peak tourist seasons;
- Potential further loss and decline in hedgerows due to intensive agricultural practice and lack of traditional management.

***Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve and restore the existing hedgerow network with particular emphasis placed on the management of elm;
- Conserve historic lanes and unimproved roadside verges;
- Encourage use of ESA management options.

## **F1 MESSING WOODED FARMLAND**

### ***Key Characteristics***

- Sparse settlement pattern consisting of the small village of Messing, and a number of small isolated farmsteads;
- Elevated plateau landform which is situated on a broad ridge and dissected by small streams, providing undulations in topography;
- Large areas of mixed woodland (for example Layer Wood and Pods Wood);
- Number of small ponds and lakes;
- Single mature trees at field boundaries or standing within fields.

### ***Overall Character***

3.3.114 This plateau landscape is situated on a broad, elevated ridge, dissected by a number of small streams, providing undulations and giving the appearance of a gently folded landscape. Large areas of mixed woodland (Layer Wood and Pods Wood) punctuate areas of predominantly arable farmland, consisting of large rolling arable fields. Smaller regular patches of woodland are a characteristic feature of the southwestern corner of the area, extending from a band of similar landscape pattern, which extends across the Borough boundary into areas of landscape to the southwest. The network of minor roads is lined with mature hedges. Single mature trees in field boundaries and standing within fields create distinctive landscape features, which contribute to a unique sense of place. There is a sense of tranquillity within the area, away from the fringes of Tiptree settlement.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Framed views to the distinctive square tower of All Saints Parish Church (Messing) from several locations within the farmland plateau;
- Large patches of woodland are distinctive landscape features which are always visible on the skyline;
- Long-distance panoramic views across adjacent (Easthorpe Farmland Plateau) from winding roads to the east and west of Messing.

### ***Historic Features***

- Evidence of human presence in the landscape during the medieval period (architecture at All Saints Church – Messing);
- Post-Medieval visible architecture within All Saints Church (Inworth – which also contains 13<sup>th</sup> century wall paintings) and moat at Inworth Hall;
- Later examples of 1930's architecture exhibited at Tiptree pumping station and water tower.

### ***Ecological Features***

- 3.3.115 The ecological character is defined by deciduous woodland within a network of small fields. Much of the woodland has been designated as SINC's (seven in all) including New, Perry's, Inworth, Conyfield, Pods, Fan and Layer Woods, and part of The Rampart woodland.
- 3.3.116 The woods include ancient oak/ash canopy mixes and hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* with a species rich ground flora of bluebell and wood anemones *Anemone nemorosa* and also some conifer plantation with a more acidic floral representation of species such as foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*. The Rampart SINC is an extension of Pod's wood and comprises coppiced hornbeam.

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Potential for visually intrusive development on the northern fringes of Tiptree;
- Pressure of increased traffic on rural and minor lanes;
- Potential visually intrusive development of new farm buildings;
- Existing visually intrusive and sometimes derelict farm buildings.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

- 3.3.117 Conserve and Enhance.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve the mostly rural character of the area;

- Ensure that any appropriate new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials, which are appropriate to local landscape character (refer to the Essex Design Guide for Residential and Mixed Use Areas, Essex Planning Officers Association, 1997, for further information). Such development should be well integrated with the surrounding landscape;
- Encouraging restoration of redundant rural buildings;
- Encourage screening, through tree planting, of visually intrusive modern farm buildings;
- Maintain panoramic views across farmland plateau to the north;
- Ensure that new farm buildings are sensitively designed and located within the landscape to accord with existing landscape character.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve and restore the existing hedgerow network where gappy and depleted;
- Conserve, manage and enhance large areas of woodland such as Pods Wood and Layer Wood (consider the use of traditional methods, such as coppicing and pollarding in keeping with existing landscape character);
- Conserve and enhance areas of semi-natural and ancient woodland as important heritage, nature conservation and landscape features;
- Conserve, manage and enhance smaller patches of woodland, taking into consideration the role that they play in the creation of a distinctive landscape pattern to the north west of Tiptree;
- Conserve historic lanes and unimproved roadside verges;
- Introduce arable field margins as a means of ensuring that mature trees within hedgerows are not disturbed by ploughing;
- Plant half-standard trees within field hedgerow boundaries to succeed over mature trees.

## **F2      TIPTREE WOODED FARMLAND**

### ***Key Characteristics***

- Located at the eastern end of a broad, ridge that extends west into Braintree District;
- Many small patches of woodland;
- Character area influenced by nucleated Tiptree settlement within the centre of the area;
- Mosaic of small to medium-sized, predominantly arable fields, with a predominantly small-scale field pattern;
- Tiptree Heath as an important landscape feature of nature conservation importance;
- Linear settlement pattern, consisting of Tiptree Heath and the northern extent of Tolleshunt Knights, which extends outside the character area to the southeast.

### ***Overall Character***

3.3.118 This area of wooded farmland encapsulates the south, east and western edges of Tiptree settlement and extends outside the Borough boundary to the southeast. A mosaic of small to medium-sized arable fields create predominantly small-scale field pattern, which is interspersed with many small patches of mixed woodland. Settlement pattern is predominantly linear, including Tiptree Heath and the northern extent of Tolleshunt Knights, which extends to the southeast of the Borough boundary. Farmsteads are also scattered throughout the area. To the south of the village of Tiptree Heath, a large area of remnant heathland, containing areas of acidic grassland and dwarf shrub heath, provides a visually distinctive landscape belt, particularly when gorse, surrounding the edges of the heathland, is in bloom. Land-uses within Tiptree's fringes (such the orchards at Tiptree preserves factory and sewage works to the east) assert a human influence over landscape character in this area. The landscape pattern is more fragmented and chaotic than in other parts of the area. Although woodland cover is not as extensive as within Messing Wooded farmland, the high frequency of small patches of woodland, leads to an overall wooded feel within the character area.

### ***Visual Characteristics***

- Short distance, framed views across Tiptree Heath from roads leading out of the settlement;

- Long-distance framed views across adjacent Abberton flooded river valley to the east and other farmland areas to the south;
- Views to the north restricted by large areas of woodland (Pods Wood and Layer Wood within Messing Wooded farmland);
- Short-range views to Layer Marney tower from the eastern edge of the character area.

### ***Historic Features***

- Remains of prehistoric rampart to the south of Haynes Green (consisting of double banks).

### ***Ecological Features***

- 3.3.119 The ecological character of this area is held within small pockets of woodland, heathland and a former gravel pit interspersed within farmland. The pits are known as Tiptree Lakes SINC and have an excellent complex of habitats for wildlife including acidic grassland, bare sandy cliffs and emergent flora.
- 3.3.120 Tiptree parish field is also designated as a SINC for its composition of grassland and scattered oak trees and scrub. Tiptree heath SSSI is the largest surviving fragment of heathland in the County shows the complete succession from acidic grassland and dwarf shrub heath. Rare plants of Essex found here include all-seed *Radiola linoides* (and uncommon in the UK) and uncommon plants in Essex include heath spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*, yellow sedge *Carex viridula* subsp. *oedocarpa* and bristle sedge *Isolepis setacea*.
- 3.3.121 Woodland designated as SINC include Birch Wood, Ransomes Grove, Cadger's Wood and part of The Rampart. Much of the woodland contains a hornbeam, oak and ash canopy, coppiced hornbeam with overall species-rich ground flora of bluebell and in wetter woodlands pendulous sedge *Carex pendula*.
- 3.3.122 Green Lane, Tiptree to Paternoster Heath SINC is an ancient lane with many native trees such as small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata*, Midland hawthorn *Crateagus laevigata* and field maple *Acer campestre* as well as oak *Quercus robur* and *Q. petraea*. There is also a ground flora of bluebell and species such as primrose *Primula vulgaris*).

### ***Key Planning and Land Management Issues***

- Potential for visually intrusive development within adjacent character areas;
- Potential for visually intrusive expansion to the settlement edges of Tiptree and Tiptree Heath;
- Pressure of increased traffic on rural and minor lanes;
- Potential visually intrusive development of new farm buildings;
- Existing visually intrusive farm buildings.

### ***Landscape Strategy Objective***

3.3.123 Conserve and Enhance.

### ***Landscape Planning Guidelines***

- Conserve and enhance the landscape setting of Tiptree and Tiptree Heath settlements;
- Ensure that any appropriate new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials, which are appropriate to local landscape character (refer to the Essex Design Guide for Residential and Mixed Use Areas, Essex Planning Officers Association, 1997, for further information). Such development should be well integrated with the surrounding landscape;
- Encourage the planting and of tree groups around visually intrusive modern farm buildings;
- Small scale development should be carefully sited in relation to exiting farm buildings;
- Introduce measures to ensure restoration of gravel workings maximises benefits to wildlife and provides areas for recreation.

### ***Land Management Guidelines***

- Conserve and restore the existing hedgerow network;
- Conserve, manage and enhance smaller patches of woodland;
- Conserve historic lanes and unimproved roadside verges;
- Safeguard Tiptree Heath SSSI from encroachment of development.

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## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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