Tendring
District Council



Tendring
Landscape Character Assessment
2026



Tendring District
Landscape Character Assessment

Prepared for Tendring District Council

by

Place Services

June 2026

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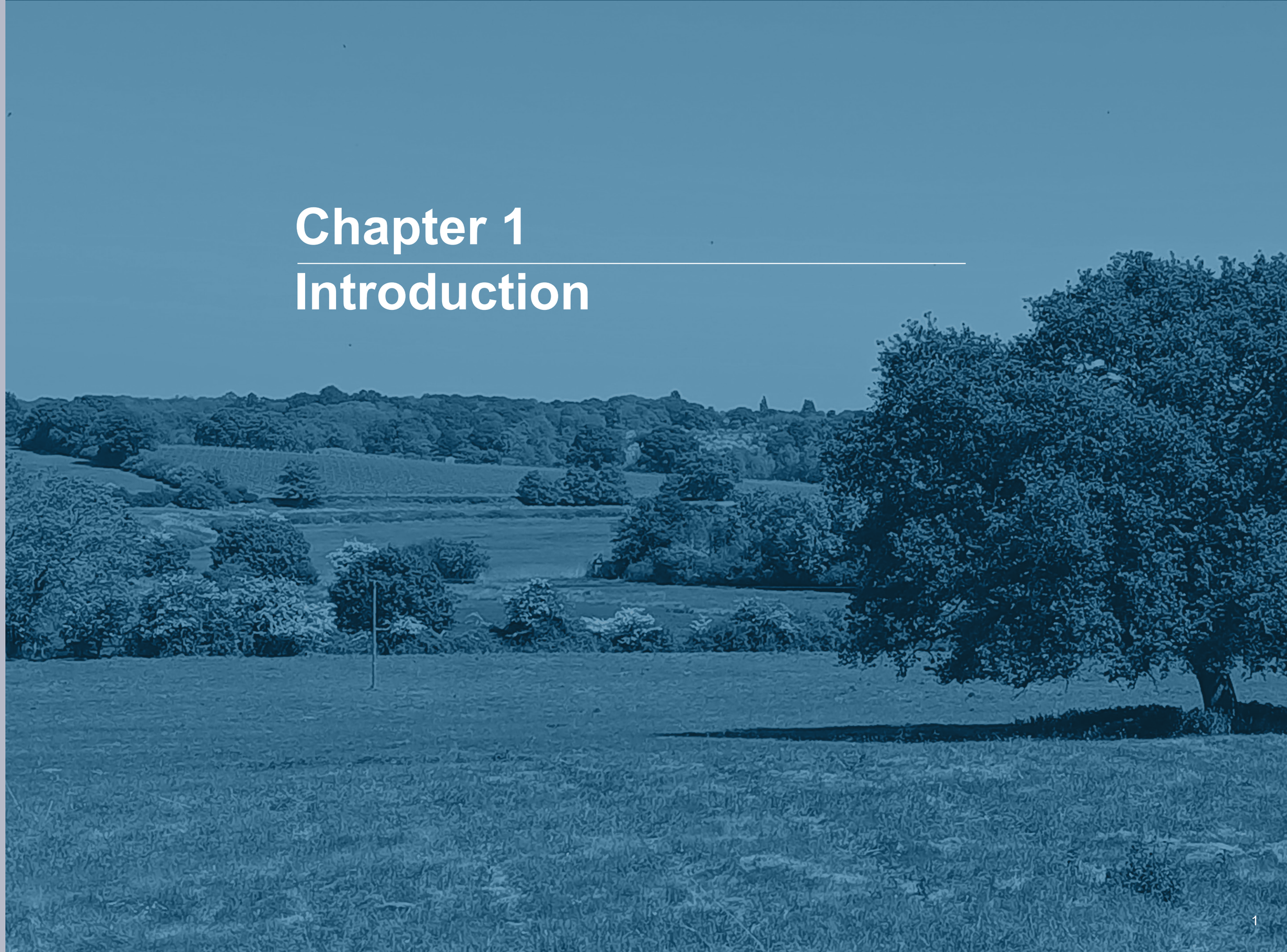
Chapter 1
Introduction



Introduction

1.1 The Tendring Landscape

The Tendring Peninsula lies within the administrative area of Tendring District Council. The Tendring Peninsula, the most easterly point of the county of Essex, is an irregular shaped peninsula, about 13 miles in length and width, and drained by many rivulets flowing to the sea (Figure 4). It is bounded on the north by the estuary of the River Stour, which separates it from Suffolk; on the east and south by the North Sea; and on the west by the estuary of the River Colne and the borough of Colchester. The port of Mistley/Manningtree is on the Stour, and that of Brightlingsea is on the Colne. The seafaring port of Harwich occupies the promontory of land which extends into the North Sea at the mouth of the Stour. About 5 miles to the south is the termination of the long promontory of the Naze. Sheltered between the two promontories is a wild and remote bay of winding creeks and saltmarsh known as Hamford Water.

Inland, the peninsula is a large-scale open plain, drained by a number of brooks that flow within hidden river valleys. These river valleys provide local landform interest. A little more than a century ago, a large portion of the land was covered with woodland, and full of swampy ground, but is now well drained and intensively cultivated. The loss of mature elm trees during the widespread outbreak of Dutch elm disease significantly reduced tree cover across the landscape, further contributing to the open character.

The long, curved coast along the south-east of the district is called the "Essex Sunshine Coast", having many clean sandy beaches and a dry climate. This coastline has been developed over the last hundred years, resulting in a string of small resorts, the most famous of which is Clacton-on-Sea, and many of which are accessible by train from Colchester or London Liverpool Street.

Tendring District is facing growing pressure to deliver new housing while also supporting the expansion of renewable energy, including solar developments. The adopted Tendring District Local Plan 2013–2033 and Beyond sets the framework for meeting housing needs across the district, and the current Local Plan Review (2025–2042) continues to identify future sites and policy approaches to meet rising housing requirements in a sustainable manner.



Figure 1: Remaining structure of the aerial runway leading to Alresford Creek.

At the same time, national planning policy emphasises the need to respond to climate change and support the transition to low-carbon energy, placing additional expectations on local authorities to plan positively for renewable energy infrastructure alongside housing delivery.

1.2 Landscape Character Assessment

Hierarchy of Assessment

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) sits within a long established hierarchy of landscape evaluation approaches that has evolved over decades, moving from early descriptive and scenic quality studies in the mid 20th century to today's structured, evidence-based framework. The Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note 02/21 *Assessing landscape value outside national designations* explains how this character-based approach grew out of earlier national work and now underpins how we describe, compare and evaluate different landscapes. It provides the basis for understanding value at all scales, from national frameworks to local studies.

Natural England has mapped the whole country into 159 separate, distinctive character areas. Each National Character Area (NCA) represents an area of distinct and recognisable character at the national scale. Their boundaries follow natural lines in the landscape, not county or district boundaries. Tendring District is covered by four different National Character Areas, although the majority of the district is covered by two of these: NCA 81: Greater Thames Estuary and NCA 111: Northern Thames Basin (see Figure 5).

Since Natural England (formerly the Countryside Agency) first published the NCA (then Countryside Character Areas) profiles, the context has shifted from static landscape description to a dynamic, evidence rich, policy-embedded system. Key changes include:

- A fully interactive digital platform (2024) replacing static PDFs.
- Alignment with national strategies such as Local Nature Recovery Strategies, nature recovery networks, and land use frameworks.
- Integration of climate resilience, natural capital, and environmental opportunity.
- Ongoing monitoring of landscape change using national datasets.
- Stronger stakeholder engagement and practical applicability.
- Retention of the original 159 area framework but with major modernisation.

While the former county-level landscape character assessment provided a useful contextual framework, its role today is primarily historical, as landscape planning responsibilities now lie at district level. Local planning authorities are now responsible for LCAs through the Local Plan evidence base gathering process, except in relation to minerals and waste.

The District assessment also takes account of the work contained in:

- Natural England (2020). Natural Beauty & Special Qualities of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB.
- Alison Farmer Associates (2016) *Dedham Vale AONB Natural Beauty and Special Qualities and Perceived and Anticipated Risks: Final Report. Prepared for the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Partnership.
- ADAS/MAFF (1994) The Essex Coast ESA: Landscape Assessment.
- Essex County Council (2002). Landscape Character Assessment of the Essex Coast. Chapter: Mid-Essex Coast.
- Tendring Geodiversity Characterisation Report (2009), Essex County Council.

The district assessment should, in turn, provide the framework for more detailed local studies such as Neighbourhood Plans, prepared by the local community. Neighbourhood Plans can prepare Local Landscape Character Studies, Settlement Character Appraisals, Key Views studies and Design Codes, but these might align with and build on the District LCA.

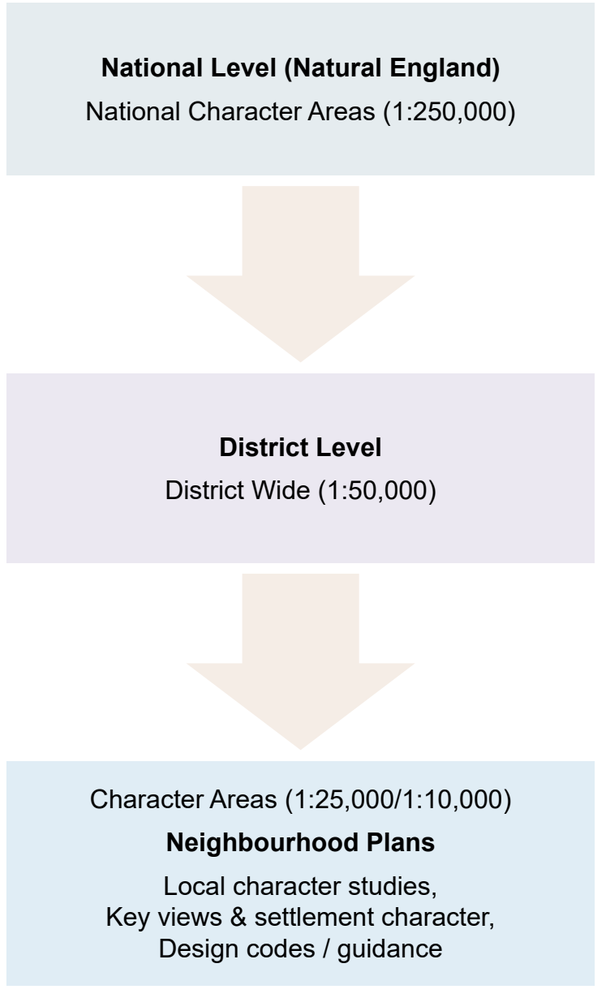


Figure 2: Hierarchy flow chart.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

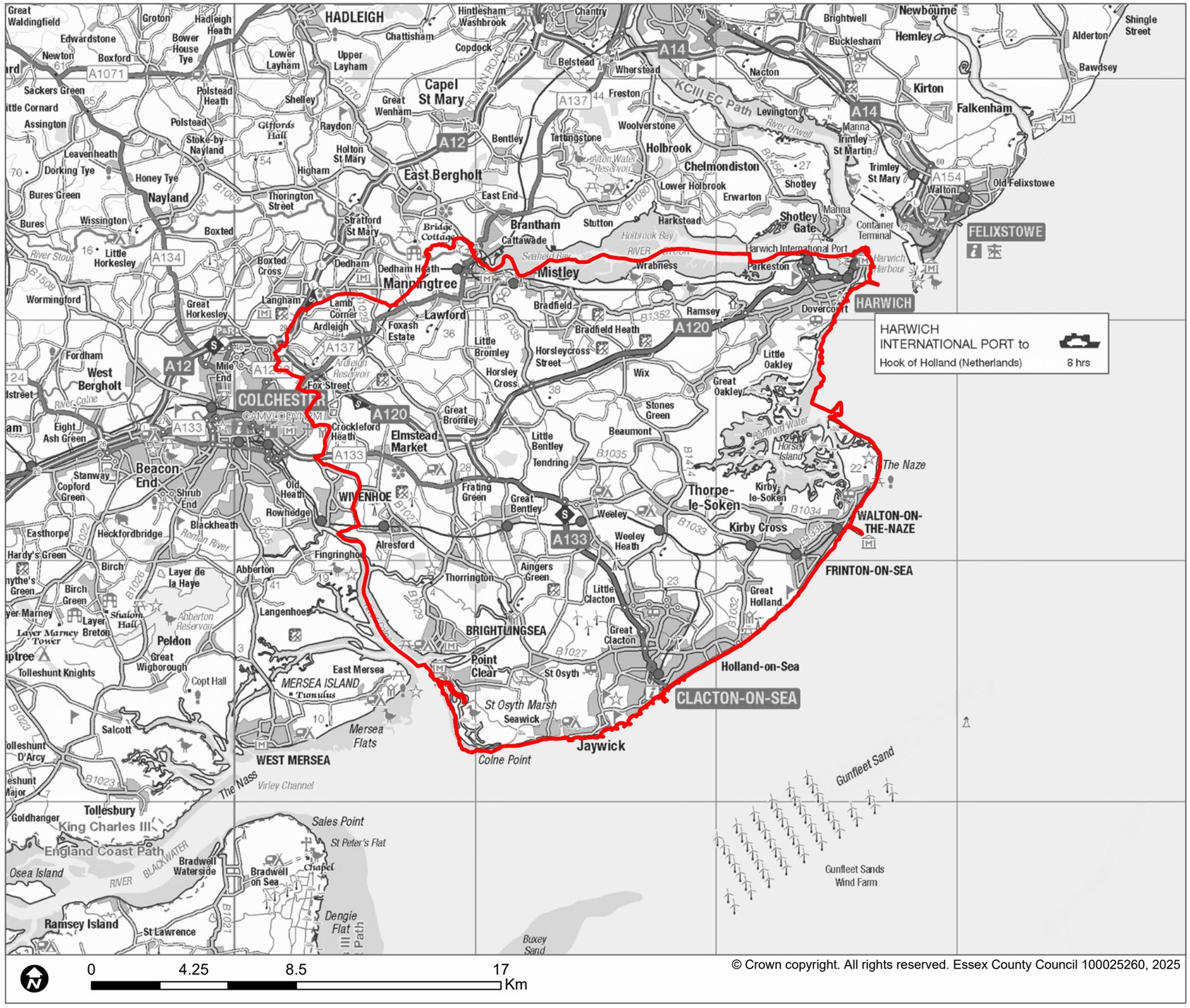
This study has five principal objectives:

- To inform policy formulation in the emerging Local Plan Review.
- To inform decision making in the development management process.
- To guide landscape management decision making so nature recovery networks are connected.
- To guide landscape conservation to increase adaptability and resilience to climate change, including areas that could form the basis for future 'valued landscape'.
- Highlight opportunities for landscape restoration to increase our ability to adapt to climate change.



Figure 3: Open landscape of the *Tendring and Wix Plateau* (LCA 8A).

1.3 Objectives of the Study



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Tendring District

Landscape Character Assessment

Key

District / Study Area Boundary

Place Services
County Hall, E4,
Chelmsford
Essex, CM1 1QH
www.placeservices.co.uk

Location of Tendring District

Version number
1.0
Date: 13/04/2026

Scale
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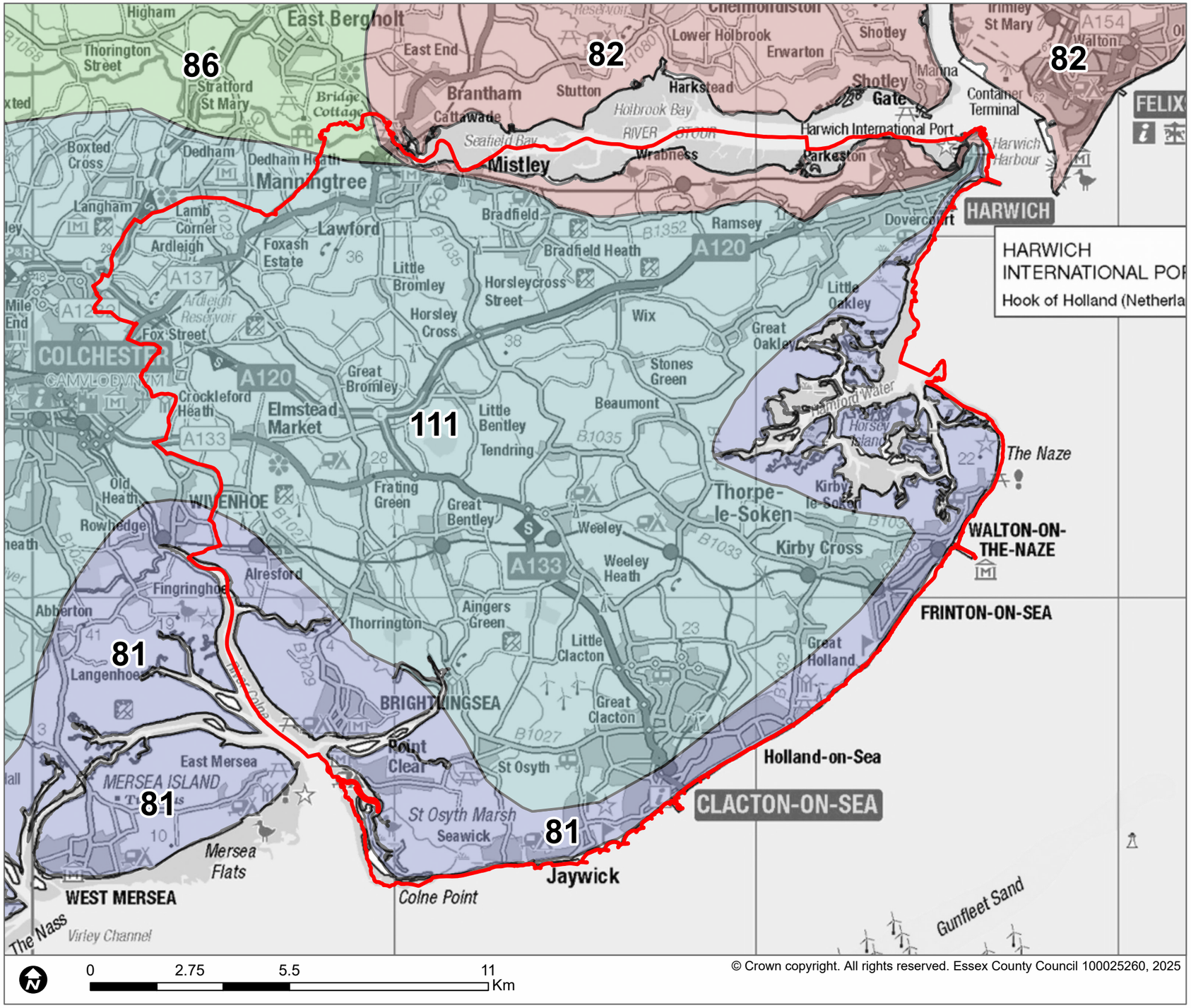
Figure 4: Location of Tendring District.

1.3 Objectives of the Study



Tendring District

Landscape Character Assessment

Key

- District / Study Area Boundary

National Character Areas

- 81 - Greater Thames Estuary
- 86 - South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland
- 82 - Suffolk Coast and Heaths
- 111 - Northern Thames Basin

Place Services
County Hall, E4,
Chelmsford
Essex, CM1 1QH
www.placeservices.co.uk

National Character Areas

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Figure 5: National Character Areas.

1.4 Methodology

The method for undertaking the landscape character assessment follows the accepted method promoted by Natural England's An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (October 2014). This is summarised in the below diagram (Figure 6).

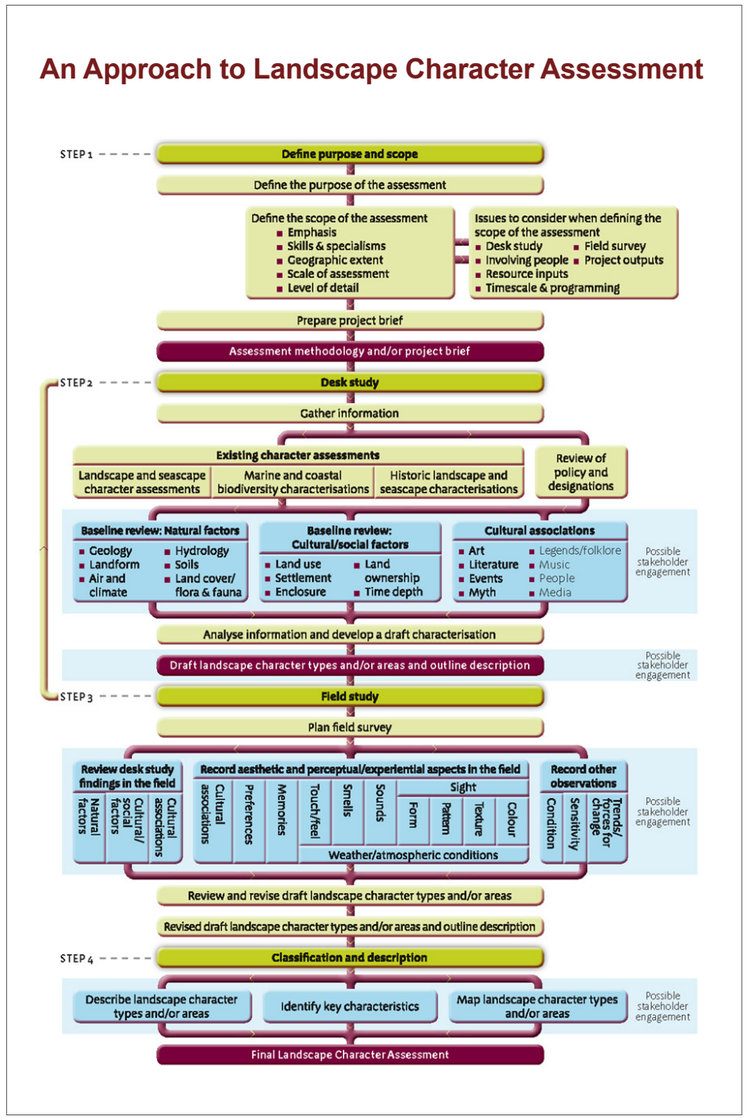


Figure 6: Extract from Natural England's “An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment” (October 2014).

The study has been prepared within the framework set by the Natural England National Character Areas as shown on the Character of England Map (see Figure 5).

The process for undertaking the study involved five main stages:

- Review data collation.
- Review and revise characterisation.
- Field survey to ground truth proposed changes.
- Consultation.
- Evaluation.

Data Collation

This stage involved a review and update of data and mapping of a wide range of existing information on the characteristics of Tendring, including physical, ecological, historic/cultural and planning information.

Physical: Geology, topography, soils, hydrology and agricultural land classification.

Ecological: Ramsar sites, Habitats (European) sites – includes Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Ancient Woodland, Priority Habitats, Priority Species, Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), and Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS), plus Local Nature Reserves and Essex Field Club records for threatened species – as listed in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Historic/Cultural: Conservation Area Appraisals, Historic England Historic Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Monuments (SM), Protected Wreck Sites, Registered Battlefields, World Heritage Sites (WHS), Listed Buildings, Local Heritage List.

ArcGIS was used throughout the study as a tool for collating, manipulating and presenting data.

Characterisation

The process of characterisation drew together all the information outlined above to develop a draft classification. The approach follows best practice as promoted by Natural England's An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (October 2014) in maintaining a clear distinction between landscape types and landscape character areas, and developing a hierarchical classification as follows:

Landscape Types: generic and share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation and human influences, e.g. River Floodplain or Open Coastal Marsh.

Character Areas: single and unique, discrete geographical areas of landscape type, e.g. Holland Brook Floodplain or Colne Estuary Marshes.

Any redrafts to the classification were presented and discussed at a steering group meeting.

Field Survey

The field survey will appraise any redrafts to the classification and collected additional data. A systematic and rigorous approach will be adopted, recording information on tailored field survey sheets (see Appendix 1) and a comprehensive revised photo record. This will allow verification and fine-tuning of the classification of landscape types and character areas, and recording of landscape characteristics, condition, key trends and forces for change visible in the landscape.

Boundaries: The boundaries of the Landscape Character Areas have been reviewed and updated from the original 2001 assessment using current digital mapping platforms to ensure greater accuracy and consistency. The original boundaries were mapped at a working scale of 1:25,000, with selected sensitive locations mapped to 1:10,000 scale. This more detailed scale would have applied to the upper boundary of the Hamford Coastal Slopes (3A) and the upper boundary of the Stour Valley System (6A). All boundaries should be understood as indicative rather than absolute, as many boundaries represent gradual transitions in landscape character rather than sharp changes on the ground, for example the boundary between the St

Osyth Coastal Ridge (4D) and Clacton and the Sokens Clay Plateau (8B). Narrative descriptions accompanying each area provide clarification on how these transitional boundaries have been interpreted.

Engagement

Engagement with Natural England was undertaken to inform the LCA at draft stage. No further engagement or consultation with other organisations, local parish or community groups was considered necessary for the update of this landscape character assessment.

Evaluation

The evaluation from the original assessment has been reviewed with consideration of the updated National Character Areas profiles, Natural England Future Landscapes, and the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (2025).

In line with the updated Natural England thinking, condition-based evaluation has been removed. The evaluation focuses on the strength of landscape character, its resilience, and its capacity to adapt to future change, and considers the thematic areas identified in *Landscape Futures*, which reflect the major forces for change acting on England's landscapes.

The landscape is changing as a result of our need to slow and adapt to climate change and reverse the biodiversity crisis, our demand for homes and infrastructure, including that of renewable technologies, and agricultural change due to the need for future food security. The many, often conflicting, demands on our landscape need to be considered together when we make decisions about landscape change in the future, and a multi-functional approach is key to making better decisions. These demands include:

Addressing the climate change and biodiversity crisis

There is an opportunity to deliver resilient and adaptable landscapes that help sequester carbon, are net carbon stores, alleviate the impacts of climate change, and address the biodiversity crisis while working with the grain of the landscape to strengthen character or create new character:

- Increasing climate resilience and adaptability through landscape conservation, e.g., of hedgerows.
- Increasing carbon sequestration through landscape change, e.g., through woodlands.
- Increasing climate adaptability through landscape restoration, such as floodplains.
- Responding to renewable energy development.
- Reversing the decline in habitat and species diversity through alignment with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Measuring outcomes, e.g., through an 'enhanced' LCA process, with links to data as well as details.

Addressing the wellbeing crisis

- Access to open space, e.g., through providing contact with nature and access to green infrastructure.
- Addressing agricultural and land use change.
- Informing Environmental Land Management outputs (paying farmers for environmental services and goods).
- Sustainable farming – the switch to more sustainable farming methods may change the current character of farmed landscapes.
- Changing land use, e.g., through influencing woodland planting and offsetting programmes in a way that strengthens landscape character.

Addressing development change

Through understanding of a site and its wider context to placemaking and the planning and design of new development.

Development location and design

The LCA process can help to identify the right site for the right development to prevent the loss of valued landscapes to development and infrastructure.

Addressing degraded landscapes

LCA can identify the character of damaged landscape, such as those on the urban fringe, and provide an understanding of time depth and the evolution of the landscape.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines have been included for each landscape character area. These guidelines integrate:

- Strengthening character.
- Enhancing resilience and adaptive capacity.
- Supporting climate and biodiversity outcomes.
- Maximising the landscape's ability to deliver multiple benefits for people, nature and climate.

Some of the Landscape Development and Management Guidelines fall outside the scope of Development Management and, in some cases, the planning system as a whole. Actions such as reducing pesticide use and wider agricultural management practices depend on voluntary landowner participation and environmental schemes rather than planning controls. These guidelines are therefore included as recommended best practice rather than measures that can be required through planning decisions.

1.5 Structure of the Report

This report presents the findings of the review and update of the landscape characterisation, including a description as well as landscape development and management guidelines for each character area. The structure is as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduces the objectives of the study and the methodology followed.

Chapter 2: Formative Influences

Establishes the factors that have influenced the character of the district as a whole, including physical, cultural and ecological characteristics.

Chapter 3: The Landscape Character of Tendring

This is the main body of the report and contains an introduction to each landscape type followed by the detailed assessments for each character area. These assessments consist of a description, list the ecological, historical, and landscape planning policy designations, list pressures for change, and provide landscape development and management guidelines.

The aim is to provide high-level bulleted landscape guidelines, but not a detailed guidance for built development.



Figure 7: Tendring contains historical sites such as the remains of St Peter's Church, a Scheduled Monument.

Chapter 2

Formative Influences

Formative Influences

The Tendring peninsula, like all landscapes, is a palimpsest of the various influences that have, over vastly different time-scales, acted upon it. The character of the landscape has evolved in response to the basic underlying geological characteristics of the land upon which natural processes and human activities have operated, in turn, influencing patterns of land use and ecological character.

2.1 Physical Influences

The basic structure of any landscape is formed by its underlying relief and geology. The action of weathering, erosion and deposition alter the form of the landscape, drainage, and soils, and can therefore affect patterns of vegetation and land use. The Tendring Peninsula is a lowland landscape, which occupies a coastal position in the north-east of Essex. It is bounded on the north by the estuary of the River Stour, and on the east and south by the North Sea. See Figure 8 for a map showing the simplified geology underlying the district and Figure 9 for a map illustrating the topography of the district.

Geology and Landform

The Tendring peninsula is situated on the edge of the London Basin, a plate of sedimentary rocks which were distorted into a broad basin, or syncline. This area of coastal lowlands has been submerged under the sea many times in geological history. A fault, running from Chelmsford to Colchester, was responsible for a powerful earthquake in 1884. The Colchester Earthquake reached 5.2 on the Richter scale and destroyed many houses in and around Colchester. Another fault, some 7 km beneath the sea bed, was responsible for an earthquake in 1994, indicating that these plates are still active.

The area for the most part forms a lowland plateau, the highest points of which are on the western edge of the district. From here the ground falls eastwards with comparative regularity, except for the valleys. The geological interest of the district lies in the glacial drift, which forms a veneer of sands and gravels over the clay. The formation, distribution and influence of the surface geology on the landscape is summarised below.

Mesozoic Era

The Mesozoic Era saw deposition of sedimentary rocks through three distinct stages in time: the Triassic, the Jurassic and the Cretaceous. There is no evidence of any rocks from the Triassic or Jurassic periods beneath Tendring. It is likely that any sediments laid down were removed by erosion before the next formation. The earliest solid geology in Tendring originated in the Cretaceous period.

Cretaceous Period: Between 100 and 70 million years ago, world sea levels began to rise and Tendring was submerged beneath a tropical sea. Water was remarkably pure and it was during this time that chalk was deposited on the sea bed. Silica nodules, or flints, were formed within the chalk. Much of the chalk formation was subsequently removed by erosion, with the flint nodules eventually eroding to form sand and pebbles. Although chalk is not exposed in Tendring, it lies beneath the more recent deposits.

Tertiary Era

Deposits from the Tertiary Era form the most widespread geological deposits in Tendring. This era may be spilt into the Eocene, Oligocene, Miocene and Pliocene periods of deposition.

Eocene Period: At the beginning of the Tertiary Era, some 60 million years ago, Tendring was submerged beneath a shallow, warm sea, similar to present day coastal areas of Indonesia or Malaysia. Rivers flowed into the sea, bringing mud and silt which settled to form London Clay, the most widespread geological formation in Tendring. The lower layers of the deposit are rich in volcanic ash, indicating volcanic activity at this time, and several hard beds of the resulting cement stone can be seen today within the clay along the River Stour and on the beach at Harwich. There are dramatic exposures at Walton-on-the-Naze with cliffs of London Clay overlain by Red Crag (The Naze SSSI).

Another feature of the London Clay are the 'septarian nodules' or 'copperas stones', produced as contraction cracks in the clay are filled with mineral calc-spar or pyrites. These nodules are hard-wearing and are popular as a building material in an area that lacks hard limestone or sandstone for building, for example as seen in the towers of Brightlingsea Church and the gatehouse of St Osyth Priory. The London Clay is exposed particularly in the eastern part of the district where it produces heavy, poorly drained soils.

Oligocene and Miocene Periods: During this period the sea became shallower with lagoons and estuaries. No deposits are evident from the Oligocene and Miocene periods in Tendring.

Pliocene Period: At the end of the Pliocene Period, Tendring once again underwent submergence by the sea. As the sea slowly advanced across Essex, shelly sand was deposited close to the shoreline. This is seen today as Red Crag, which remains in small, isolated pockets. The most spectacular exposure in Essex is seen at Walton-on-the-Naze where, in the cliffs to the north of the town, the red shelly sand can be seen resting on the blue-grey London Clay.

The Tendring Council Local Geological Sites report (2019) identifies the following sites as having the strongest representation as Local Geological Sites (LoGS):

- Walton-on-the-Naze Coastal Cliffs (part of The Naze SSSI) .
- Wrabness Cliffs (part of Stour Estuary SSSI).
- Harwich Foreshore SSSI.
- Copperas Industry Sites (Dovercourt / Harwich).
- Bagshot Sands / Claygate Beds (if exposed locally).

Quaternary Era

The landscape of Tendring is considerably influenced by Quaternary deposits, which overlie the simple solid geology of London Clay and Red Crag. These superficial deposits fall naturally into three divisions.

Pre-Glacial: The area between St Osyth and Clacton contains isolated deposits of Kesgrave Sands and Gravels, which were deposited by the early Thames/Medway approximately 500,000 years ago, when its course ran north out of London and passed through Tendring between St Osyth and Clacton. The study of gravels in a quarry in St Osyth have revealed how, at the onset of the Ice Age, the Thames suddenly ceased to flow on this course due to an ice blockage upstream in Hertfordshire. When eventually the Thames spilled over, it took a new course (the

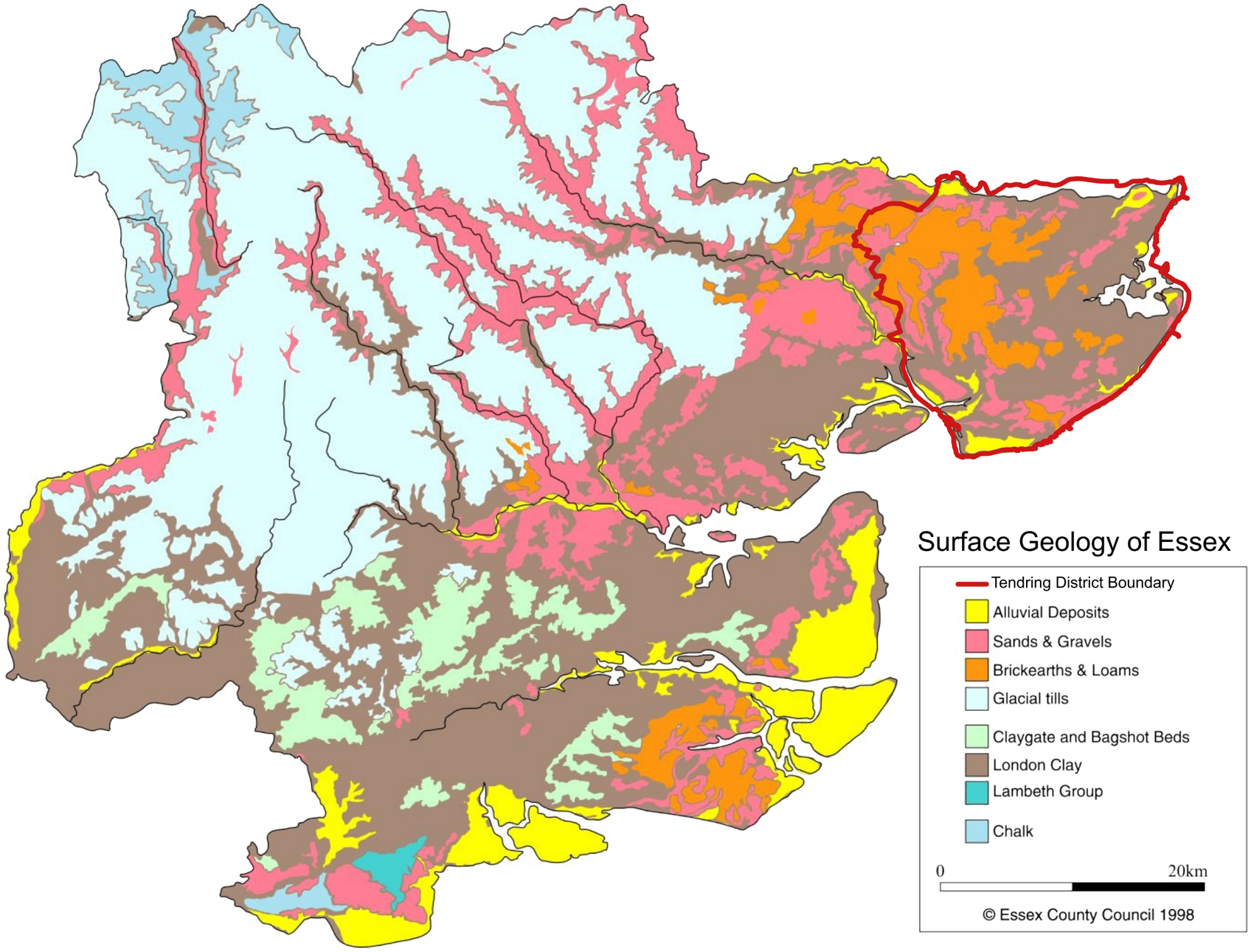
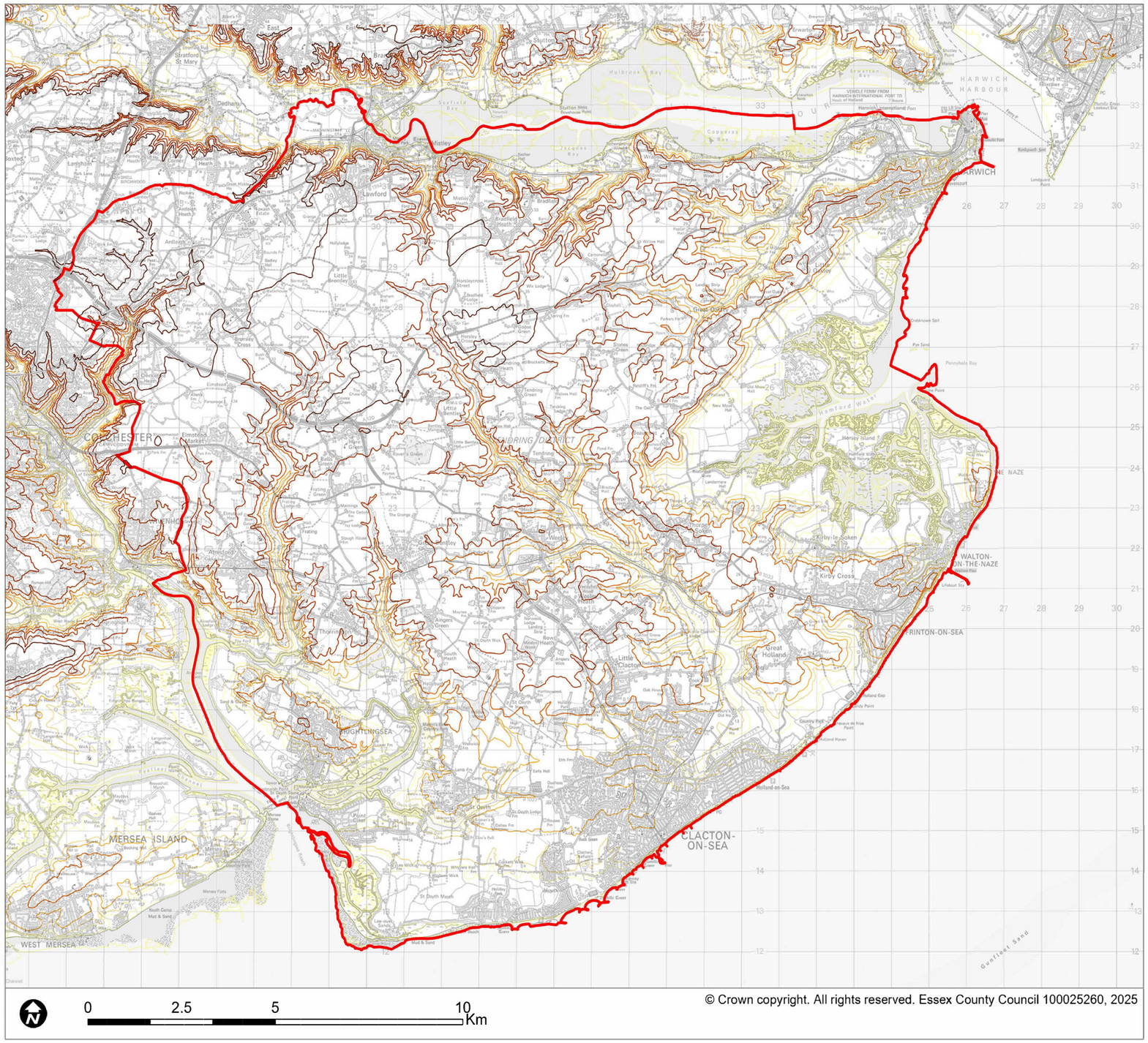


Figure 8: Extract – Essex County Council (1998) Surface Geology of Essex.



Tendring District

Landscape Character Assessment

Key

District / Study Area Boundary

Elevation (m)

- -1.820000 - 5.000000
- 5.000001 - 10.000000
- 10.000001 - 15.000000
- 15.000001 - 20.000000
- 20.000001 - 30.000000
- 30.000001 - 35.000000

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Topography

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Figure 9: Topography of Tendring.

present route) to the sea. These sands and gravels are often difficult to tell apart from the glacial sands and gravels, but are nonetheless distinct features of the landscape history of the Thames and its course through Tendring.

Glacial: During the Ice Age, some 450,000 years ago, the Anglian ice sheet did not reach as far south as Tendring so no boulder clay deposits are present in the district. However, glacial outwash deposited glacial loams, gravels and sands across much of the area, particularly in the west of the district. Glacial gravels and sands are found over the greater part of the higher ground and the sandy loams, covering most of the west of the district as far as Tendring, and have an influence on the soils and vegetation, resulting in some heathland communities to the north and east of Colchester.

Recent: The distinctive landscape of Tendring's coast is influenced by marine erosion and deposition. Intertidal deposits, sand and shingle beaches are all features of this dynamic on-going process. The most obvious example of the changing coastline is at Walton-on-the-Naze, where in AD 1300 the coastline extended some 8 km (5 miles) further out to sea than today and did not become a coastal region until the 1700s. Since then much of the town and church of Walton has been lost to the sea and the rate of coastal erosion currently tracks at a rate of 3-5m per year (The Naze Protection Society, 2026).

This erosion of the Naze cliffs is a twofold process: the slippage of upper parts of the cliff over the London Clay is lubricated by surface and ground water and the removal of material from the foot of the cliffs is a result of the sea's erosive action.

The Tendring Council LoGS Report (2019) identifies the following sites as having the strongest representation as Local Geological Sites (LoGS):

- Thames–Medway River Terrace Gravels (Multiple LoGS Sites Across Tendring).
- Colne Point Shingle Spit (part of the Colne Estuary SSSI).
- Clacton Cliffs and Foreshore (part of the Clacton Cliffs and Foreshore SSSI).

Drainage

During the Ice Age, most of East Anglia was covered by ice. As the ice sheet retreated northwards, the meltwaters drained east and south-east, eroding the river valleys that drain into the North Sea. Continuing subsidence and rising sea-levels subsequently drowned these glacially enlarged river valleys, creating the Stour and Colne Estuaries, which define the limits of the Tendring peninsula.

The drainage pattern of the area is determined in the north by the Stour catchment and in the south by the Colne catchment, both of which drain into the North Sea. These major catchments extend their influence far beyond the boundary of the district. In addition to these is Holland Brook, a more local system of ditches, which falls entirely within Tendring District and drains the central area of the peninsula into the North Sea. The underlying clay has influenced the poorly drained character of the soils.

Soils and Agricultural Capability

Soils which have developed over the geological base influence the natural or semi-natural vegetation of an area, as well as the nature and intensity of agricultural use. There are five soil associations found within the Tendring District, each having a direct relationship to the underlying landform and land use.

These are:

- Pelo-stagno gley soils.
- Pelo-alluvial gley soils.
- Stagnogleyic paleo-argyllic brown earths.
- Unripened gley soils.
- Gleyic argyllic brown earths.

Pelo-stagno Gley Soils: Pelo-stagno gley soils are found within the agricultural heartland of Tendring, including the agricultural plateau landscapes present in an area stretching from the River Stour to the north, Clacton to the south, Little Bentley to the west, and the coastal slopes of Hamford Water to the east. The soil is clayey and slowly permeable and causes seasonal waterlogging, although to a lesser degree on the slopes. The soils have a moderate agricultural capability, the dominant land use being dairy and arable farming interspersed with pockets of deciduous woodland.

Pelo-alluvial Gley Soils: Pelo-alluvial gley soils are found in scattered patches in low-lying coastal areas, moving inland alongside river corridors. Typical areas include the marshland abutting Hamford Water, marshland surrounding the mouth of the River Colne, Brightlingsea Creek and Colne Point, and the floodplain and marshland abutting Holland Brook. These are low-lying areas of flat land with deep calcareous and non-calcareous stoneless, clayey soils. These soils areas are prone to flooding and drainage is controlled by ditches and pumps.

Stagnogleyic Paleo-argyllic Brown Earths: Stagnogleyic paleo-argyllic brown earth is found in the extensive plateau landscapes of Tendring District, extending from the far western boundary of the district to the eastern half, abutting Harwich and Frinton. These soils are deep, coarse, loamy and often stoneless. Like the Pelo-stagno gley soils, they are slowly permeable causing seasonal waterlogging. These soils give rise to the best agricultural land in the district and support extensive arable farming, potato farming, and some horticultural cropping.

Unripened Gley Soils: Unripened gley soils occur at certain points along the coast, namely Hamford Water, Colne Point, the River Colne Estuary, and at the mouth of the Brightlingsea Creek. Here the soils are of variable texture, frequently calcareous, and are flooded by high tides. Land use is generally saltmarsh habitats, recreation and some summer grazing.

Gleyic Argyllic Brown Earths: Gleyic argyllic brown earths are associated with the coastal ridges and sloping sides of the valley systems such as the River Stour and Brightlingsea Creek. Here the soil is deeply permeable, coarse and loamy. It is associated with well-drained sandy soils, slowly permeable and seasonally waterlogged soils, and fine-loamy over clayey soils. This mix gives a patterned local land use of cereals, other arable crops and some grassland. There is some risk of water erosion in these areas.

2.2 Ecological Character

Tendring is highly regarded for its flourishing natural environment. It is internationally recognised for many of its habitats, but perhaps most particularly the habitats found along its backwaters and estuaries (see Figure 11).

Context

National Character Areas are land areas identified by Natural England as being unique on the basis of their physical, wildlife, land use and cultural attributes. Tendring covers four different National Character Areas highlighting the varied and, in some instances, ecologically rich landscape that occurs within the District (see Figure 5). These are:

- Area No. 81: The Greater Thames Estuary.
- Area No. 82: The Suffolk Coast and Heaths.
- Area No. 86: South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland.
- Area No. 111: The Northern Thames Basin.

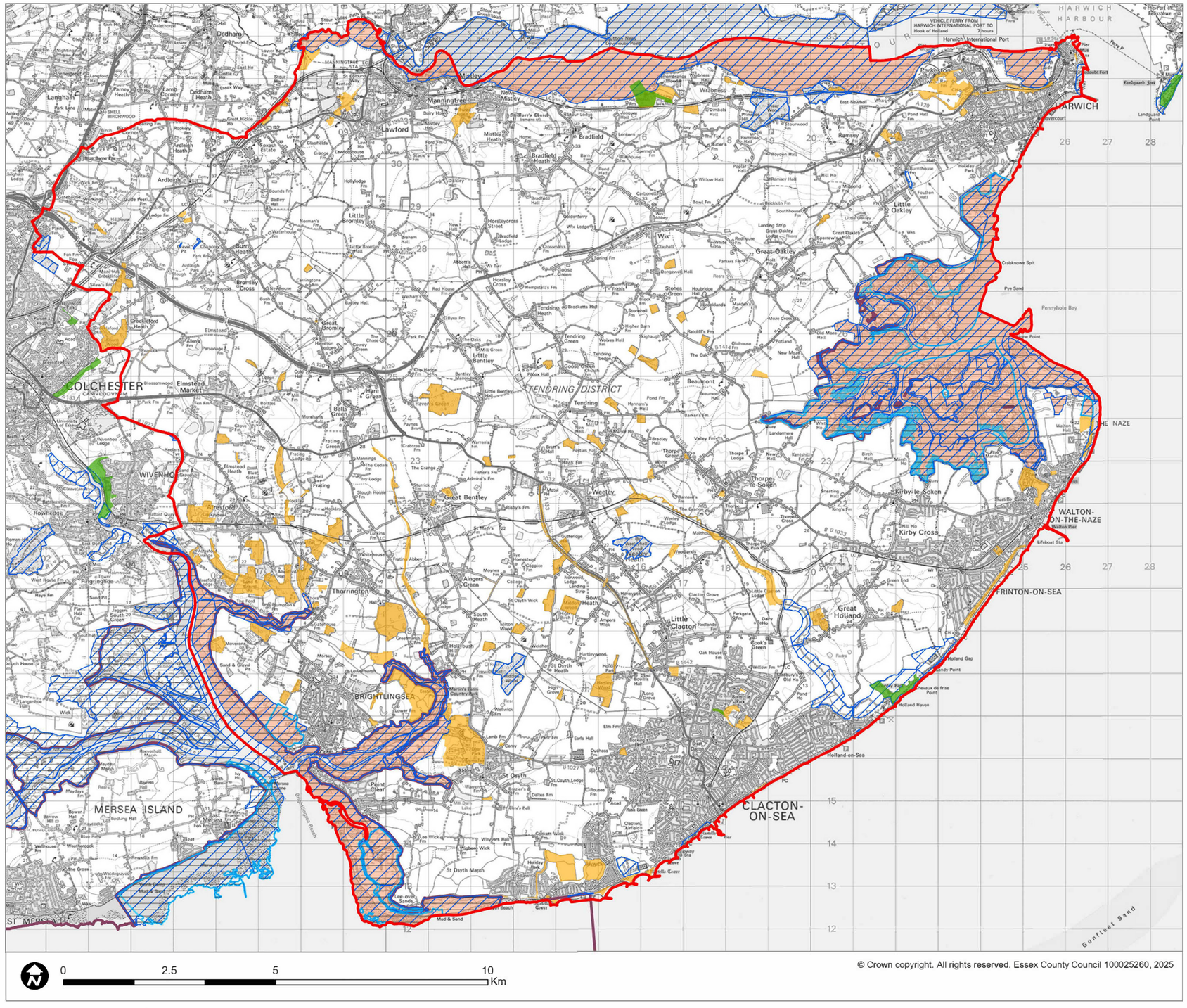
The majority of the district covers the Greater Thames Estuary and the Northern Thames Basin. The Northern Thames Basin is a large, trough-like basin which was formed around 50 million years ago, and is filled with mostly sands and clay sediments. In Tendring this appears as a central clay plateau dissected by valleys. This supports islands of semi-natural habitats including areas of ancient woodland, remnant heathland, acid grassland, freshwater habitats (including flooded gravel pits), streams, lowland meadows, grazing marshes, neutral grasslands and fens.

Surrounding the clay plateau of the Northern Thames Basin is the Greater Thames Estuary, comprising the coast and low-lying hinterland, indented by several estuaries. The intertidal zone is dominated by soft sediments, forming extensive saltmarshes and mudflats. These are separated from the low-lying land on alluvial soils by sea defences. Behind the sea defences is arable and pasture with some areas of grazing marsh.



Figure 10: The Hamford Water Marshes are of international ecological importance.

2.2 Ecological Character



Tendring District

Landscape Character Assessment

Key

- District / Study Area Boundary
- Local Nature Reserves
- RAMSAR
- Special Protection Areas SPA
- Special Areas of Conservation SAC
- SSSI
- National Nature Reserves
- Local Wildlife Sites LoWS

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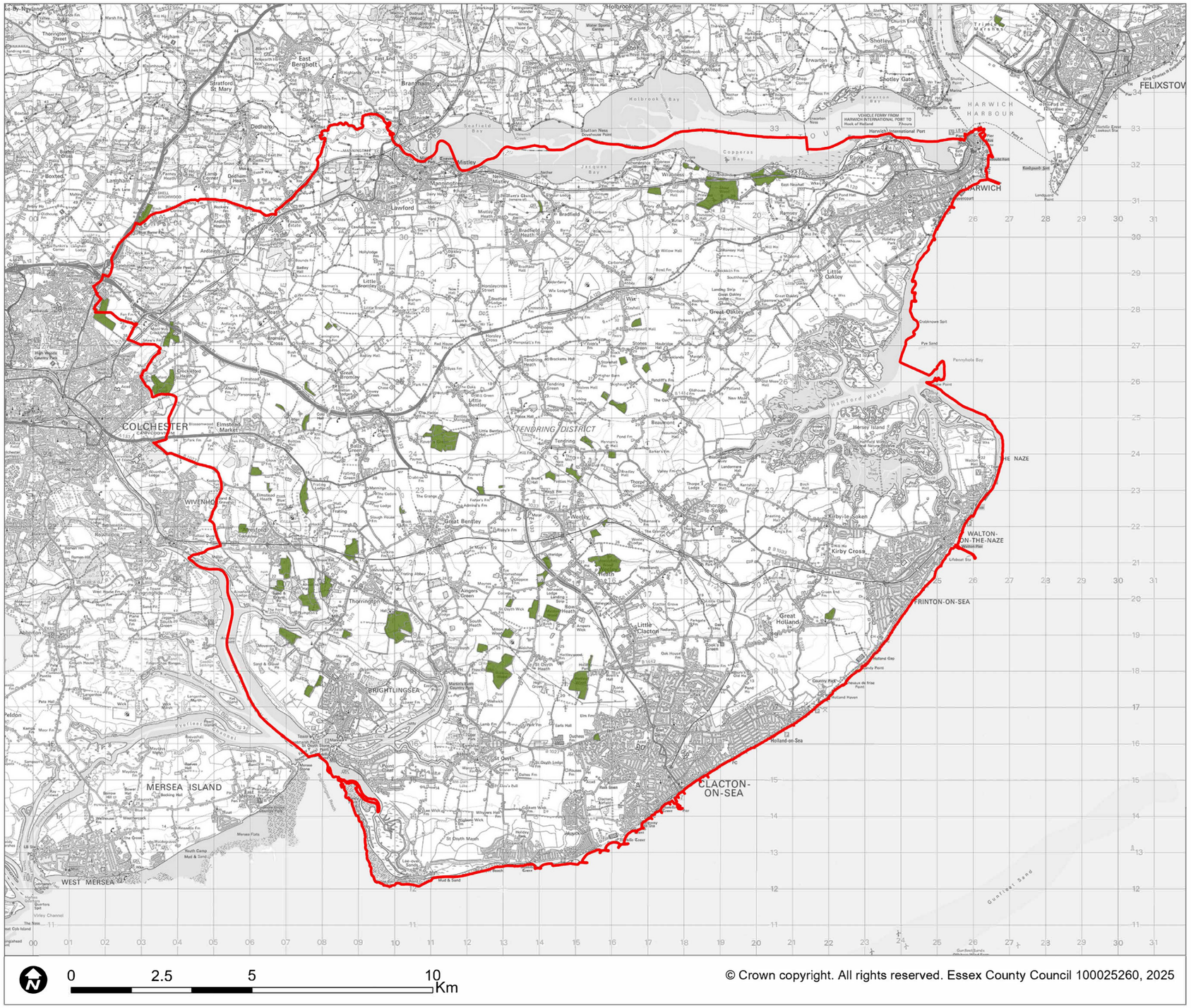
Figure 11: Map of Ecological Designations in Tendring District.



Tendring District

Landscape Character Assessment

Key

- District / Study Area Boundary
- Ancient Woodlands

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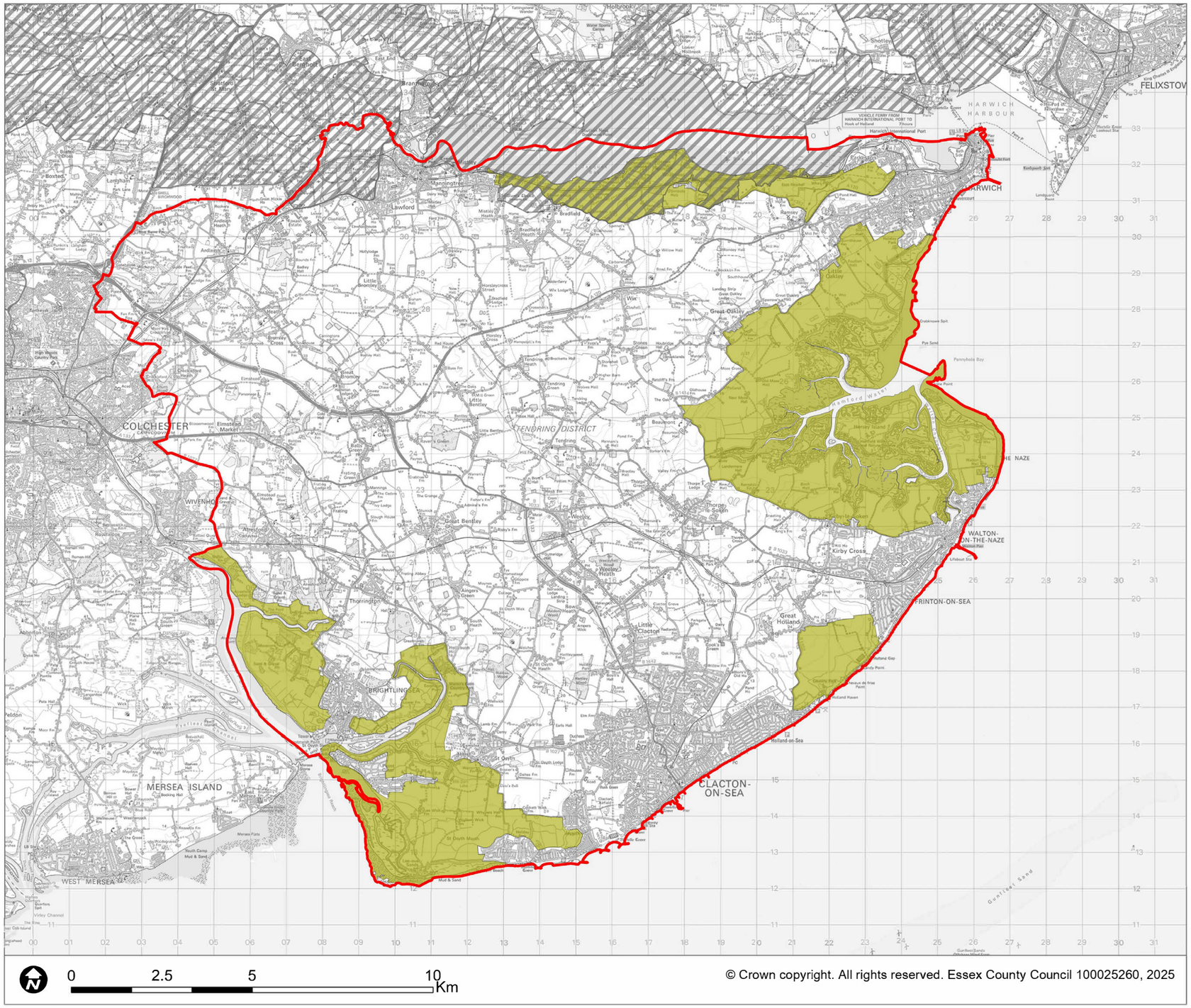
Figure 12: Map of Ancient Woodlands in Tendring District.



Tendring District

Landscape Character Assessment

Key

- District / Study Area Boundary
- National Landscapes (former AONB)
- Coastal Protection Belt

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Other Designations

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Figure 13: Map of 'Other Designations' in Tendring District.

2.3 Landscape Designation and Value

Tendring's Wildlife Habitats

The most important habitats within Tendring District, in terms of their wildlife value from a national and international perspective, are the estuarine and intertidal habitats of the Stour and Colne Estuaries and the tidal inlet of Hamford Water. All three sites are designated as Ramsar sites, and Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Habitats (European) sites on the basis of the wading birds and wildfowl they support.

The Colne Estuary also forms part of the Habitats (European) sites and Ramsar site designated as internationally important because of its extensive intertidal mudflats and sandflats.

As well as \n SPA, Hamford Water also has an area designated as a Special Area of Conservation, a Habitats site which is internationally important for habitats that support the rare Fisher's estuarine moth, only found in two areas in the UK. It is also a good place to spot common and grey seals.

Parts of the Essex Estuaries SAC also lie within the Tendring District (Seawick and parts of the Colne Estuary).

Internationally Important Sites

Stour Estuary: The Stour Estuary forms the eastern part of the Essex/Suffolk county boundary to the north of the district, and provides habitat for nationally important numbers of over-wintering wildfowl (shelduck, wigeon, pintail, brent geese and mute swan) and waders (redshank, grey plover and black-tailed godwit). Redshank, grey plover, black-tailed godwit and shelduck occur in flocks of internationally important numbers. The ornithological value of the Stour Estuary can be attributed to a number of factors, notably its rich inter-tidal mud invertebrate fauna which provides a food source for wading birds.

The saltmarsh vegetation of the estuary is also of national nature conservation value in its own right and supports plant species that are nationally rare.

Colne Estuary: The Colne Estuary is of national importance for breeding little terns, and five species of over-wintering waders and wildfowl. Brent geese and black-tailed godwit also over-winter in internationally important numbers. The area supports a diverse range of habitats including inter-tidal mud, saltmarsh, grazing marsh, sand and shingle spits, disused gravel pits and reed beds, which together are notable for their nationally significant assemblages of invertebrates and plants.

Hamford Water: Hamford Water is of international importance for breeding little terns and wintering brent geese and is of national importance for a variety of other bird species. Hamford Water is also noted for its range of marine habitats and coastal plant species that are rare or extremely locally distributed in the UK.

The salt and grazing marsh habitats that occur in the upper reaches of the Colne, Stour (Cattawade Marshes), and Holland Haven are also recognised as being of national importance for nature conservation. In general, these sites support a diverse mix of saltmarsh and coastal grazing marsh habitats of high ornithological value. The grazing marshes that occur in these areas also support networks of drainage ditches that provide habitats for distinct and diverse assemblages of aquatic plant and invertebrate species that reflect the prevailing water salinity, which often ranges from fresh to brackish across a single marsh.

Tendring District is also noted for its ancient broad-leaved woodland that occurs across a central belt within the district. Three of these woodlands are of national importance, and Stour and Copperas Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) together form, at 78ha, the largest area of broad leaf ancient woodland in north-east Essex. These woodlands are important for protected species of mammals, including Hazel Dormouse and a range of species of bats.

Regionally Important Sites

Aside from the sites of international importance, there are also many regionally important sites in the Tendring District. These are often fragments of once more widespread habitats and therefore provide a critical resource for the wildlife in the area and are a focus for conservation, enhancement and management. In particular the district supports good examples of ancient woodland, grassland and aquatic habitats such as ponds and reedbed margins which support a wide range of birds, amphibians and other wildlife.

There are over 50 woodlands in the district that have been identified as Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS), ranging from tiny remnants of 1 or 2ha to more substantial blocks such as Thorringtonhall Wood (48.5ha). The most common woodland type in this region is a hazel-ash-oak woodland. This type of wood is often managed on a coppice-with-standard rotation, a traditional method which encourages good structural and species diversity. Over recent years, however, many woodlands have suffered from a lack of management and in turn the wildlife has often experienced a decline. These sites remain important both for conservation and recreation, and provide good examples of where sensitive design and management can benefit wildlife and the local community.

Ancient woodland takes hundreds of years to establish and is defined as an irreplaceable habitat. It is a valuable natural asset important for:

- Wildlife (including rare and threatened species).
- Soils.
- Carbon capture and storage.
- Contributing to the seed bank and genetic diversity.
- Recreation, health and wellbeing.
- Cultural, historical and landscape value.

Ancient woodland is limited but significant in Tendring, with several small, long established woods identified in Natural England's Ancient Woodland Inventory (see Figure 12). These sites have been continuously wooded since at least 1600 and include a mix of ancient semi-natural woodland, replanted ancient woodland and areas of old wood pasture, reflecting the district's fragmented but historic woodland cover. Recent updates to the national inventory mean that many smaller woodland parcels – some less than two hectares – are now recognised, helping to capture Tendring's dispersed pattern of older woods more accurately. Veteran trees, also an irreplaceable habitat, form an important part of the local landscape, often surviving in field boundaries, parkland and former wood pasture, where they support specialist wildlife associated with old trees.

Of the other habitat types within the region, Tendring District supports notable examples of a range of grassland types, from coastal pasture to acid grassland. Some of the best examples are now found as protected roadside verges such as Beaumont Bridge Verge, now designated as a LoWS, which supports the nationally rare Hogs fennel (*Peucedanum officinale*). Some of these grasslands provide interesting mosaics, and where scrub has encroached onto the meadows this often provides an added structural element.

Freshwater habitats such as rivers, streams, ponds and lakes provide important habitat for aquatic and margin vegetation, aquatic invertebrates and birds. Opportunities for landscape enhancement exist where the gravel extraction industry creates ideal areas for wetland creation.

The farmland across the district is important for breeding and non-breeding priority farmland bird species including Skylark and Turtle Dove. The arable land near to the estuaries, which provides high tide as well as night-time roosting for many of the internationally important birds, is designated as a feature of the coastal Habitats sites.

The Importance of the Coastal Protection Belt in the Tendring District

The Coastal Protection Belt (see Figure 13) is a long-standing policy designation in Tendring District, aimed at safeguarding the character and openness of the undeveloped coast, protecting it from inappropriate development that could harm sensitive landscapes, estuarine habitats, or the district's distinctive coastal setting. The Belt is specifically retained in the Local Plan because it provides strong additional protection against unplanned or speculative development along the shoreline, where the landscape is highly vulnerable to visual intrusion and environmental impacts.

Tendring District Council's own review emphasises that, despite growing development pressures, the Coastal Protection Belt remains justified for preventing urban sprawl, maintaining separation of settlements, and conserving areas of high landscape and ecological sensitivity across the coastline. Appeal decisions reinforce this position: planning inspectors consistently treat the Coastal Protection Belt as a key factor in determining whether development is appropriate in coastal locations, citing its role in maintaining the area's character and safeguarding the shoreline from incremental harm.

National Landscapes

Tendring District is influenced by two National Landscapes (formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty), which are nationally designated for the conservation and enhancement of their natural beauty, wildlife, cultural heritage and distinctive landscape character (see Figure 13).

Dedham Vale National Landscape

The Dedham Vale National Landscape covers one of England's most cherished pastoral lowland environments along the Suffolk–Essex border, characterised by rivers, meadows, rolling farmland, ancient woodlands and traditional villages. It is a landscape renowned for its association with Constable Country and Gainsborough. The designated area extends upstream from Manningtree and represents a vulnerable and precious remnant of East Anglia's historic grassland and hedgerow landscape. Although the core designation lies west of Tendring, its setting clearly extends into north-west Tendring, especially around Ardleigh and the upper Stour Valley, where local landscape character and views contribute to the appreciation of the designated landscape.

Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape

Following a major boundary extension approved in 2020, the National Landscape now includes significant parts of Tendring District, notably Mistley, Manningtree, Bradfield, Wrabness, Ramsey, Parkeston, and coastal farmland and woodland along the southern edge of the Stour Estuary. This extension recognises the exceptional scenic quality, tranquillity, wildlife richness and cultural associations of these areas.

This National Landscape encompasses a diverse mosaic of low-lying coasts, shingle beaches, estuaries, marshes, heathlands, ancient woodland, valley meadowlands, forests, and historic towns and villages, forming one of England's most varied and dynamic coastal landscapes.

Within Tendring, this National Landscape plays a defining role in shaping the northern estuarine and coastal character, contributing to key views, biodiversity networks, historic



Figure 14: Significant parts of Tendring along the Stour, including at Wrabness, form part of the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape.

environment features and recreational value. Its presence significantly elevates the district's overall landscape sensitivity and reinforces the importance of conserving the character and qualities of the estuary margins and associated hinterland.

Summary

Tendring possesses an important range of grassland, woodland, marine and wetland habitats that support distinct assemblages of plant and animal species, many of which have high individual nature conservation value. Of especial importance are the estuary and intertidal habitats.

However, the ecological value of Tendring is likely to depend heavily upon the varied rural landscape, in particular the mosaics of arable and pasture fields, network of hedgerows, remnant heaths, roadside verges, ditches, old hedgerow trees and woodland. Together these agricultural habitats provide refuges for wildlife. Sustainable protection and enhancement of these habitats may be achieved through appropriate landscape management.

2.4 Human Influences

This section provides a very broad summary of the main phases in the evolution of Tendring's landscape and key events/processes that have influenced local character. It is based on a desk study of existing information, including a Historic Environment Characterisation of Tendring District published in 2008, which adds depth and detail to our understanding of the historic landscape, and provides detail on aspects such as the origin of fields and boundary patterns. Such information is vital for developing and refining landscape conservation, enhancement and management recommendations.

The historic designations within Tendring District are illustrated on Figure 15 (Map of the Heritage Designations in Tendring District).

Prehistoric Tendring 475,000 BC – AD 43

The Tendring peninsula was once covered by a wildwood of oak and native small-leaved lime with an understorey of hazel and alder in the damper valleys. Early hominid (Homo Erectus) activity has been identified at a site near Clacton which has given the name 'Clactonian' to a Palaeolithic industry of European flint tool manufacture that dates to 300,000 to 200,000 years ago. Sporadic finds of Mesolithic material dating to between 11,000 BC and around 5000 BC have been found across the district, attesting to the presence of groups of people whose lifestyle was transient and based on an economy of hunting and gathering. Farming communities gradually emerged after around 4000 BC, burning the wildwood to clear the better drained areas for crop cultivation.

Evidence for Neolithic activity is abundant across Tendring, with a wide variety of sites and monuments known, including cropmarks such as the St Osyth causewayed enclosure and possible cursus, and several long enclosures and mortuary enclosures. A Neolithic ring-ditch monument has been identified on the Brightlingsea peninsula, and an important Neolithic site lies under the sea off Walton-on-the-Naze, where flint tools are still washed ashore. Evidence of the Bronze Age, spanning c. 2000 – 750 BC, is particularly apparent within Tendring. Excavations near St. Osyth identified a pond barrow and distinctive collared urns typical of the Early Bronze Age.

The remains of ring ditches and cremation cemeteries dating to the Middle Bronze Age (1,500-1000BC) have been found at Ardleigh, Little Bromley and Brightlingsea. These cemeteries with their many earthwork barrows would have been important landmarks in a landscape of small farms and settlements.

Woodland clearance continued into the Iron Age with the emergence of a mixed pastoral and tilled landscape. Evidence of Iron Age enclosures and field systems can be found across Tendring as a series of cropmarks. Several Iron Age settlements are known from excavations at sites at Ardleigh and St. Osyth. The saltmarshes of Tendring were probably extensively used for grazing livestock, including cattle and sheep, and Tendring has a number of red hills along its coastline, which are the remains of salt production sites that almost certainly started in the Iron Age and grew in importance during the Roman period.

The Roman Era AD 43 – AD 400

The Emperor Claudius launched an invasion in AD43 and captured Camulodunum, close to modern Colchester, which was one of the largest and most important settlements in the country and tribal capital of the Trinovantes. Roman Colchester became the earliest and one of the most important towns in Roman Britain. Roads were built from Colchester into Tendring and the sites of Roman villas have been found around the Colne Estuary and Brightlingsea, St Osyth and on the edge of Harwich. These Roman villas were locally important centres of agriculture and part of an economy that was largely based on farming. The area was also important for a number of other industries, including the mining of Septaria in the Harwich area for building stone, and the production of sea salt, which continued on an increasing scale as demonstrated by the large number of red hills along the coast.

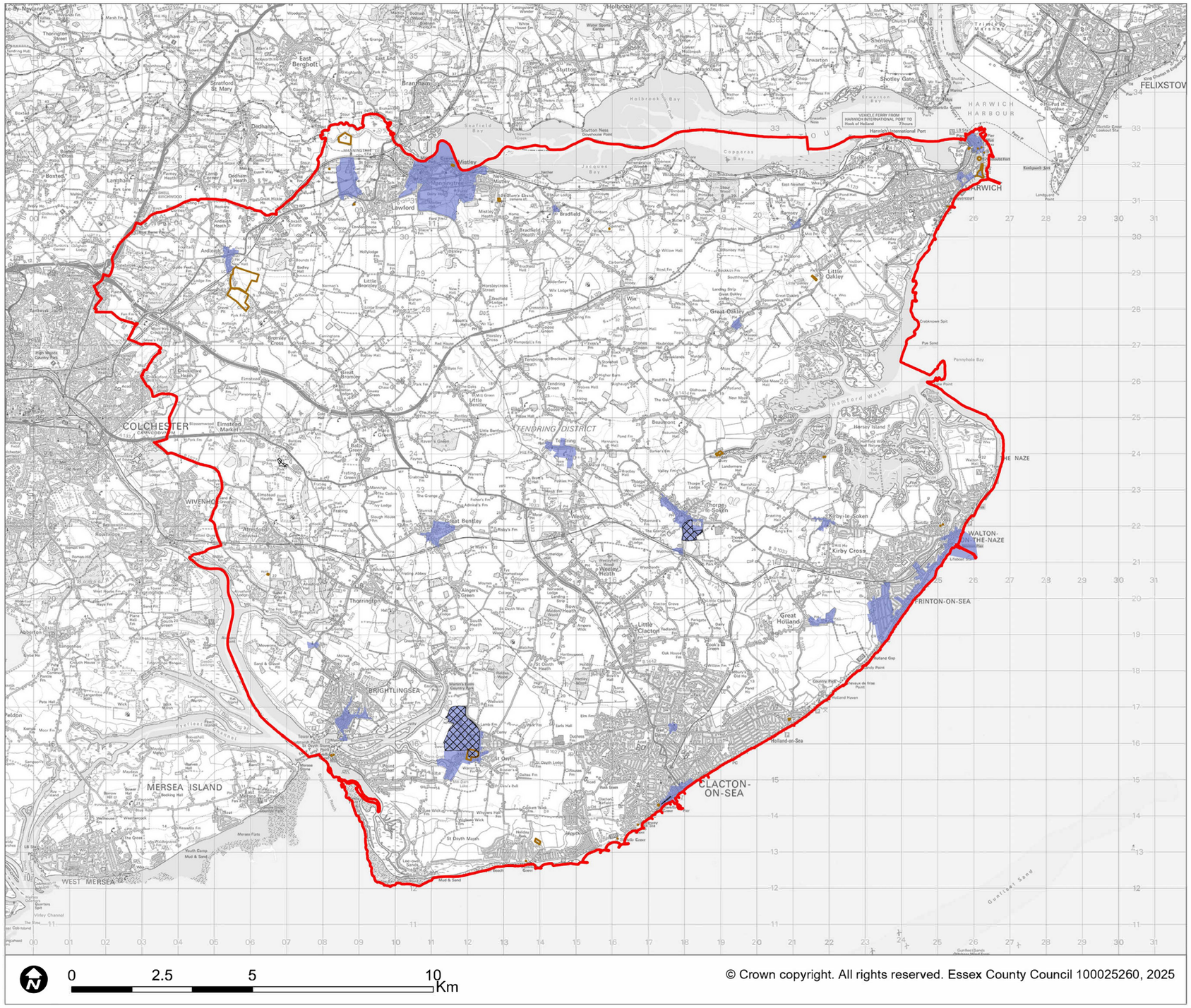
Saxon Tendring AD 400 – AD 1066

Evidence for the early Saxon period in Tendring is relatively sparse. Settlements were established on villa estates, such as at Moverons pit in Brightlingsea, which featured sunken floored huts that are characteristic of the period.

Christianity was reintroduced during the 7th century, resulting in changing patterns of settlement and the building of churches. There was a 7th-century minster church at St Osyth and a monastic establishment existed there from the 8th century. Saxon estates were major landholdings with control of large tracts of land. These were subdivided into manors and smallholdings. Manors of status had a church built near the hall, a feature of late Saxon Tendring. There was a royal manor at St Osyth, and Brightlingsea and Lawford were both important royal manorial landholdings. The Sokens also emerged at this time – Walton, Kirby and Thorpe – the word Soken deriving from the Old English 'sōcn' or the Danish 'soke', which could imply limited Viking settlement in the area towards the end of the Saxon period. From AD 640 onwards large grants of land across the Tendring peninsula were made to St Paul's Cathedral. In the early 11th century, the area around Clacton and St Osyth had been allocated to the Bishop of London who built a palace at Great Clacton.

Medieval Period AD 1066 – AD 1500

The medieval landscape of the Tendring peninsula is one of dispersed settlements, hamlets and individual farms, with focal points provided by church/hall complexes, greens and commons; linking the dispersed settlements there was an extensive network of lanes. The settlements were set within a variety of field types, including common-fields, which were mostly divided long before later parliamentary enclosure, former deer parks, and demesne fields that were divided and hedged in the late medieval and Tudor period. Domesday records describe sheep grazing the marshes – the grazing rights were owned by the inland manors abutting the marshland, and these areas of coastal saltmarsh continued to constitute an important element of pastoral farming throughout the period. The late medieval period saw the beginning of the reclamation of areas of saltmarsh with the construction of earthwork banks and ditches. By the 13th century, Tendring had an established manorial agricultural economy with a progressive conversion of uncultivated land to arable. The introduction and widespread adoption of mills symbolises medieval technological innovation. Two windmills excavated at Little and Great Bentley were in existence by the early 13th century. Farmsteads settled on the edges of greens, commons and heaths and these formed the



Tendring District

Landscape Character Assessment

Key

- District / Study Area Boundary
- Registered Parks and Gardens
- Scheduled Monuments
- Conservation Area

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Figure 15: Map of the Heritage Designations in Tendring District.

basis for the villages we see today, for example Great Bentley, Weeley Heath, and Frating Green. At the same time was the emergence of the towns of Manningtree, Brightlingsea and St Osyth; urban settlement was strongly tied to the coast and coastal trade. Harwich was founded in the early 13th century and was the main urban centre in Tendring. It developed as a medieval port at the northern tip of the peninsula, where trade, fishing and shipbuilding were important in the local economy.

St Paul's Cathedral continued to hold large estates around St Osyth and throughout Tendring. This period saw the growing influence of religious orders with many parishes containing monastic landholdings, for example St Osyth's Priory and Wix Abbey, both established in the 12th century. St Osyth's Priory contains probably the finest monastic remains in Britain and is a Scheduled Monument due to its national importance.

Post-Medieval Tendring AD 1500 – AD 1700

The 1530s saw the dissolution of the monasteries nationwide and the sale of their properties and lands into private hands. Wix Priory quickly succumbed, followed eventually by St Osyth. Lord D'Arcy's conversion and re-use of buildings at St Osyth has ensured that at least some medieval fabric survives along with a range of later buildings associated with the post-medieval mansion.

During the 16th century brick became the building material of fashion, baked from the fine London Clays of Tendring. This period saw a flourish of rebuilding including many churches. A good surviving example of an early brick building is Jacobes, Brightlingsea, whilst Beaumont Hall demonstrates a good example of 17th-century brick architecture, although the hall is actually earlier in origin.

The coast became even more important for shipbuilding, fisheries and trade and the towns continued to grow. The process of reclamation of the natural saltmarsh continued during the post-medieval period, the resulting land providing both important grazing and arable land. A good example is the loss of a large area at St Osyth Marsh south of Wigborough Wick and Jaywick, which was reclaimed in the post-medieval period and is associated with a string of marsh edge 'wick' (dairy) farms. Duck decoys, newly introduced within these areas, provided large numbers of wildfowl for consumption and sale.



Figure 16: Human influences on the landscape of Tendring District include the sea walls, Martello towers, and holiday parks.

A further important industry around Walton and Brightlingsea was that of copperas production. Iron pyrites in the form of 'copperas stones' eroded onto the beach were turned by a complicated process into copperas (ferrous sulphate) itself, a valuable chemical used in the dyeing and tanning industries and also in the production of ink, sulphuric acid and medicines.

The 18th and 19th Centuries

Enclosure Acts were passed by Parliament between 1750 and 1850 to modernise farming and increase crop productions. This resulted in the enclosure of large open medieval fields and common lands, and planting of many miles of hedgerows. The ancient system of common cultivation was thus brought to an end and a Golden Age of agriculture began. The average landholding was probably 150 acres but improved drainage techniques, increasing mechanisation, and the influence of the London market nearby spread throughout the area and brought new wealth.

The introduction of crop rotation, the improvement of farm implements and the building of sea defences to allow drainage and ploughing of marshes allowed increased productivity, and by 1800 half of London's wheat consumption came from Essex (*John Hunter (1999) The Essex Landscape: A Study of its Form and History. Essex Record Office Publications*). The latter half of the 18th century was a time of high opportunity for the millers and there was a rapid increase in windmills, tide mills and water mills. The 1777 map of Chapman and Andre included an accurate survey of the mills at this time - few of these have survived. One windmill remains at Ramsey Village, and there is a tide mill at Thorrington.

The Chapman and Andre map of 1777 also shows the settlement landscape dominated by largely dispersed farmsteads and halls closely associated with a network of roads established since at least the medieval period. Large settlements included: St Osyth, Thorpe le Soken, Walton, Great Clacton, Great Oakley and Great Bentley. Areas of heathland, originally common land providing pasture and fuel, are shown surviving from the medieval period.

Fishing and gathering shellfish was very important with the enclosure of oyster beds in the Colne Estuary in the 1700s. The development of navigable waterways and quays helped the

transport of the increasing amounts of cereal crop and shellfish in flat bottomed barges. For example, Beaumont Quay was developed in 1832 in Hamford Water and by 1855 it included a house, wharf, warehouses, yards, coal and lime kiln. However, until the early 19th century Tendring was almost entirely dependent upon agriculture.

By this stage brick was in general use, although timber boarding was used on domestic buildings as a cheaper alternative. The threat of French invasion led by Napoleon caused the building of Martello towers and the Harwich Redoubt in the early 19th century. These structures were constructed almost entirely of brick and based on the Torre della Mortella on the island of Corsica. Many of these still survive today and their importance is recognised through their designation as Scheduled Monuments (SMs) (see Figure 15 for locations of SMs in Tendring). Linked with the Martello towers, the Harwich Redoubt, Bathside BayBattery and Beacon Hill Battery are significant Napoleonic era defences emphasising the strategic importance of the naval facilities at Harwich.

There is relatively little in the way of designed landscapes in Tendring. Mistley Hall and St Osyth's Priory are shown on Chapman and Andre's map of 1777. Mistley Hall was demolished in 1835, although the lodges still survive. St Osyth's Priory is a good example of a mid-18th-century landscaped park with mature tree avenues, open lawns, ponds and woodland. Its importance as a designed landscape is recognised by its inclusion on English Heritage's register of Historic Parks and Gardens as a Grade II site. Thorpe Hall grounds are also on the register (as a Grade II site) for their early-20th-century formal and informal planting.

The 18th century saw the development of spa towns throughout Britain. Richard Rigby brought in the famous architect Robert Adam to help fulfil his grand vision of turning Mistley into a spa town. Unfortunately, the plans were never fully brought to fruition but the area acquired much of its Georgian character from this episode. Important architectural survivals include both Mistley Towers and the Swan Fountain.



Figure 17: A WWII pillbox in Holland Haven Country Park.

The 20th Century to the Present Day

The arrival of the steam-driven roller mill and improvements in sea, rail and road transport in the early to mid 19th century saw the decline of both wind and water mills. The effect of the arrival of steam and improvements in transport also resulted in an increase in travel and holidays, particularly seaside holidays. Walton was the first town to be adopted as a holiday destination, followed by Clacton and then Frinton. In 1866 permission was granted to extend the railway to Clacton-on-Sea and to build a pier so that paddle steamers could visit the new resort. By the mid 1880s Clacton had already become a busy seaside resort. The seaside resort of Frinton was also developed during the late 19th century. The new Colchester by-pass, which opened in 1933, encouraged the growth of Clacton, Frinton and Walton, which expanded to engulf the surrounding rural settlements and villages.

Changes in the inter-war years were brought about by the migration of farming families to Essex, attracted by the cheap plotland on the edges of towns. Many bungalows sprang up along the coasts and on the edges of villages during this time. The Foxash Land Settlement Association scheme, located near Manningtree on the Essex-Suffolk border, was a 1930s government-backed initiative designed to re-settle unemployed workers from industrial areas. Established around 1934–1935 during the Great Depression, it was part of a larger, national effort to provide "smallholdings" for individuals to live on and cultivate. Also significant during this period was typhoid poisoning associated with the Brightlingsea oysters. This brought an abrupt end to the trade until a cleansing plant was set up on the site of the present Brightlingsea Sailing Club.

During the Second World War the Tendring Coastline became the first line of defence and a series of 'stop lines' were constructed, supported by pillboxes, tank traps and gun pits. Many of these pillboxes have survived and may be seen scattered along the coast, for example on the Naze. A searchlight emplacement and 12 pounder casemate survive at Harwich. Beacon Hill Battery, now a Scheduled Monument, was also rearmed with powerful coastal artillery and continued in use for some time after the war had finished. A number of defensive structures are now protected as Scheduled Monuments.

Following the Second World War agriculture was intensified in Tendring in response to national policy. Mixed farming was



Figure 18: Rural policy now includes the Agriculture Transition Plan and Environmental Land Management schemes.

converted to arable production – meadows and pastures were ploughed, copses removed and fields enlarged. Many of the characteristic mills had been lost by this time and those which remained continued to decline. The result was a much more open landscape. In the 1960s housing growth was significant and resulted in the spread of the suburbs of places such as Clacton, Frinton and Harwich. Also in the 1960s a strain of Dutch elm disease struck Tendring and by the 1970s many elms were dead. This had a devastating effect on the landscape – the elm was a dominant tree on the London Clays of Tendring and its loss totally altered the character of the landscape. Also in the 1960s, disease struck the oyster beds again, resulting in the cessation of Brightlingsea oysters harvesting. Since 2023, oysters are being harvested for consumption at Brightlingsea again through the Essex Native Oyster Restoration Initiative (ENORI) formed in 2011. In 2013 The Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries MCZ was designated for the native oyster and their associated beds.

In 1972 Essex County Council published a valuable report titled *'Landscape in Decline?'*, in which it noted the danger that Essex would become 'bleak and ugly' if things continued the way they were. This was a very important publication for the Tendring landscape and for the first time it addressed the impact of built development and road improvements. The importance of historic hedgerows and lanes was noted and a tree planting programme put in place. In the 1980s there was a renewed interest in the countryside with the formation of many wildlife trusts and groups.

Recent rural policy in England has undergone major reform following the UK's departure from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The earlier European-funded programmes such as the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) have now been replaced by a domestic framework centred on the Agricultural Transition Plan and the Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes.

The ELM framework now comprises three principal components: the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), Countryside Stewardship (including Higher Tier), and Landscape Recovery, all of which reward actions that improve soil health, water quality, biodiversity, habitat creation, and climate resilience.

The shift towards nature recovery, low-carbon land management, and diversified rural economies, driven by prioritising regenerative agriculture, climate adaptation, and environmental enhancement, represents a significant opportunity to influence future landscape character, strengthen ecological networks, and support the long-term stewardship of the countryside.

The district landscape character assessment and its recommendations should guide and assist the implementation of rural policy within Tendring

Chapter 3

The Landscape Character of Tendring

3. The Landscape Character of Tendring

The Tendring landscape has evolved over thousands of years as the result of complex interactions between physical, natural and cultural forces. Some eight distinct landscape types divided into 29 character areas have been identified to represent the diversity of landscape within the district (see maps in Figures 19 and 20).

The boundaries of the Landscape Character Areas have been reviewed and updated from the original 2001 assessment using current digital mapping platforms to ensure greater accuracy and consistency. The original boundaries were mapped at a working scale of 1:25,000, with selected sensitive locations mapped to 1:10,000 scale. This more detailed scale would have applied to the upper boundary of the *Hamford Coastal Slopes* (3A) and the upper boundary of the *Stour Valley System* (6A). All boundaries should be understood as indicative rather than absolute, as many represent gradual transitions in landscape character rather than sharp changes on the ground, for example the boundary between the *St Osyth Coastal Ridge* (4D) and *North Clacton and the Sokens Clay Plateau* (8B). Narrative descriptions accompanying each area provide clarification on how these transitional boundaries have been interpreted. This assessment identifies urban landscape character types and areas; however, it does not consider or discuss their associated descriptions.

The Coast

Landscape Character Type	Landscape Character Area
1. Open Coastal Marsh	1A Brightlingsea Creek Marshes 1B Colne Estuary Marshes 1C Colne Point Marshes 1D Hamford Water Marshes 1E Stour Estuary Marshes
2. Drained Coastal Marsh	2A Brightlingsea Drained Marshes 2B St Osyth Drained Marshes 2C Holland Haven 2D Hamford Drained Marshes and Islands
3. Coastal Slopes	3A Hamford Coastal Slopes 3B Brightlingsea Coastal Slopes 3C St Osyth Coastal Slopes 3D Holland Coastal Slopes
4. Coastal Ridges and Peninsulas	4A The Oakley Ridge 4B The Naze Peninsula 4C Brightlingsea Peninsula 4D St Osyth Coastal Ridge

River Valleys

Landscape Character Type	Landscape Character Area
5. River Floodplains	5A Holland Brook 5B Ramsey Creek 5C Cattawade Marshes
6. Clay Valleys	6A Stour Valley System 6B Ardleigh Valley System 6C Alresford Valley System 6D Holland Valley System 6E Ramsey Valley System

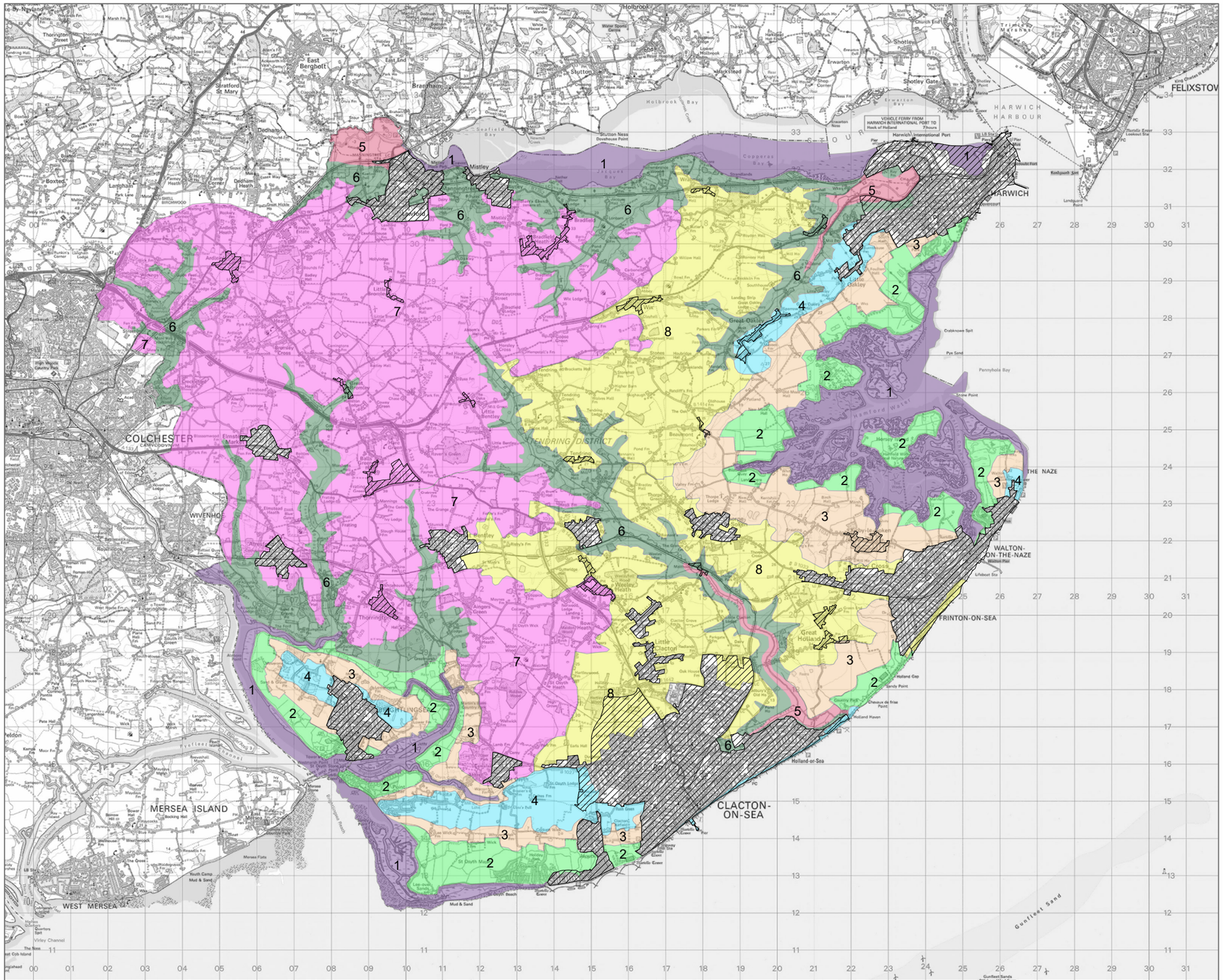
Agricultural Heartland

Landscape Character Type	Landscape Character Area
7. Heathland Plateaux	7A Bromley Heaths 7B St Osyth/ Great Bentley Heaths
8. Clay Plateaux	8A Tendring and Wix Clay Plateau 8B North Clacton and The Sokens Clay Plateau

Other

Landscape Character Type	Landscape Character Area
9. Urban	9A Alresford 9B Brightlingsea 9C Clacton-on-Sea 9D Dovercourt 9E Elmstead Market 9F Frinton-on-Sea 9G Great Bentley 9H Harwich 9J Jaywick 9K Little Clacton 9L Manningtree 9M Mistley 9N Parkeston 9O St Osyth 9P Thorpe-le-Soken 9Q Walton-on-the-Naze 9R Weeley

3.0 The Landscape Character of Tendring



Tendring District

Landscape Character Assessment

Key

Urban Areas

Urban Areas

Tendring Landscape Character Types

- 1: Open Coastal Marsh
- 2: Drained Coastal Marsh
- 3: Coastal Slopes
- 4,Coastal Ridges and Peninsulas
- 5: River Floodplains
- 6: Clay Valleys
- 7: Heathland Plateaux
- 8: Clay Plateaux

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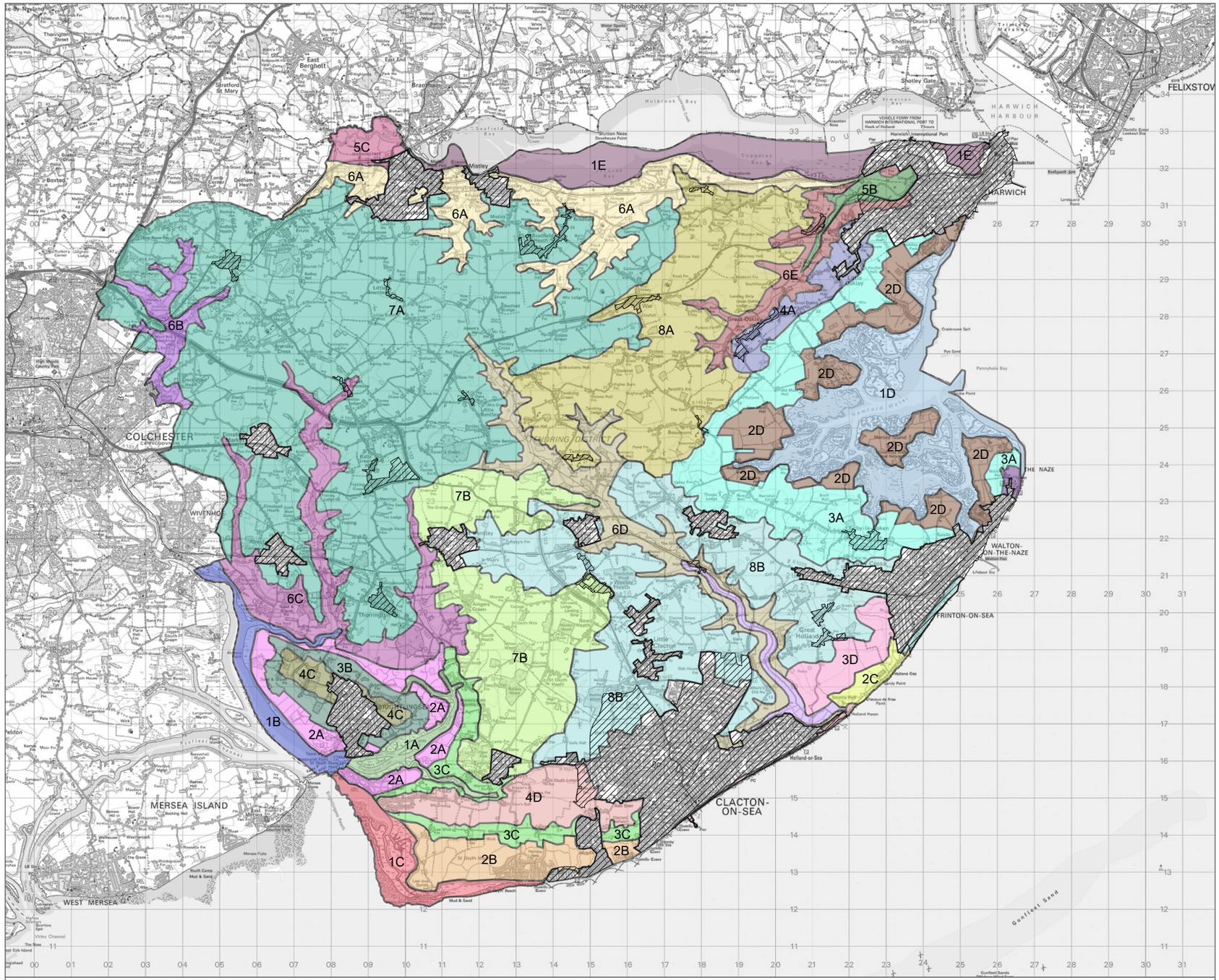
Figure 19: Landscape Character Types.

3.0 The Landscape Character of Tendring



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Tendring District

Landscape Character Assessment

Key

Urban Areas

- Urban Areas

Tendring Landscape Character Areas

- 1A: Brightlingsea Creek Marshes
- 1B: Colne Estuary Marshes
- 1C: Colne Point Marshes
- 1D: Hamford Water Marshes
- 1E: Stour Estuary Marshes
- 2A: Brightlingsea Drained Marshes
- 2B: St Osyth Drained Marshes
- 2C: Holland Haven
- 2D: Hamford Drained Marshes and Islands
- 3A: Hamford Coastal Slopes
- 3B: Brightlingsea Coastal Slopes
- 3C: St Osyth Coastal Slopes
- 3D: Holland Coastal Slopes
- 4A: The Oakley Ridge
- 4B: The Naze Peninsula
- 4C: Brightlingsea Peninsula
- 4D: St Osyth Coastal Ridge
- 5A: Holland Brook
- 5B: Ramsey Creek
- 5C: Cattawade Marshes
- 6A: Stour Valley System
- 6B: Ardleigh Valley System
- 6C: Alresford Valley System
- 6D: Holland Valley System
- 6E: Ramsey Valley System
- 7A: Bromley Heaths
- 7B: St Osyth/Great Bentley Heaths
- 8A: Tendring and Wix Clay Plateau
- 8B: Clacton and The Sokens Clay Plateau

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Figure 20: Landscape Character Areas.

LCT 1

Open Coastal Marsh

Introduction

The Open Coastal Marsh landscape type covers coastal areas extending to the low water mark where sheltered conditions allow sediment to accumulate. It includes saltmarshes, mudflats, shingle spits and tidal creeks, and is characterised by its lack of settlement and its open, remote character. Sea walls define the upper boundaries, separating the undrained open marsh from the drained marshes and mainland beyond.

Landscape Character Areas:

- 1A Brightlingsea Creek Marshes
- 1B Colne Estuary Marshes
- 1C Colne Point Marshes
- 1D Hamford Water Marshes
- 1E Stour Estuary Marshes

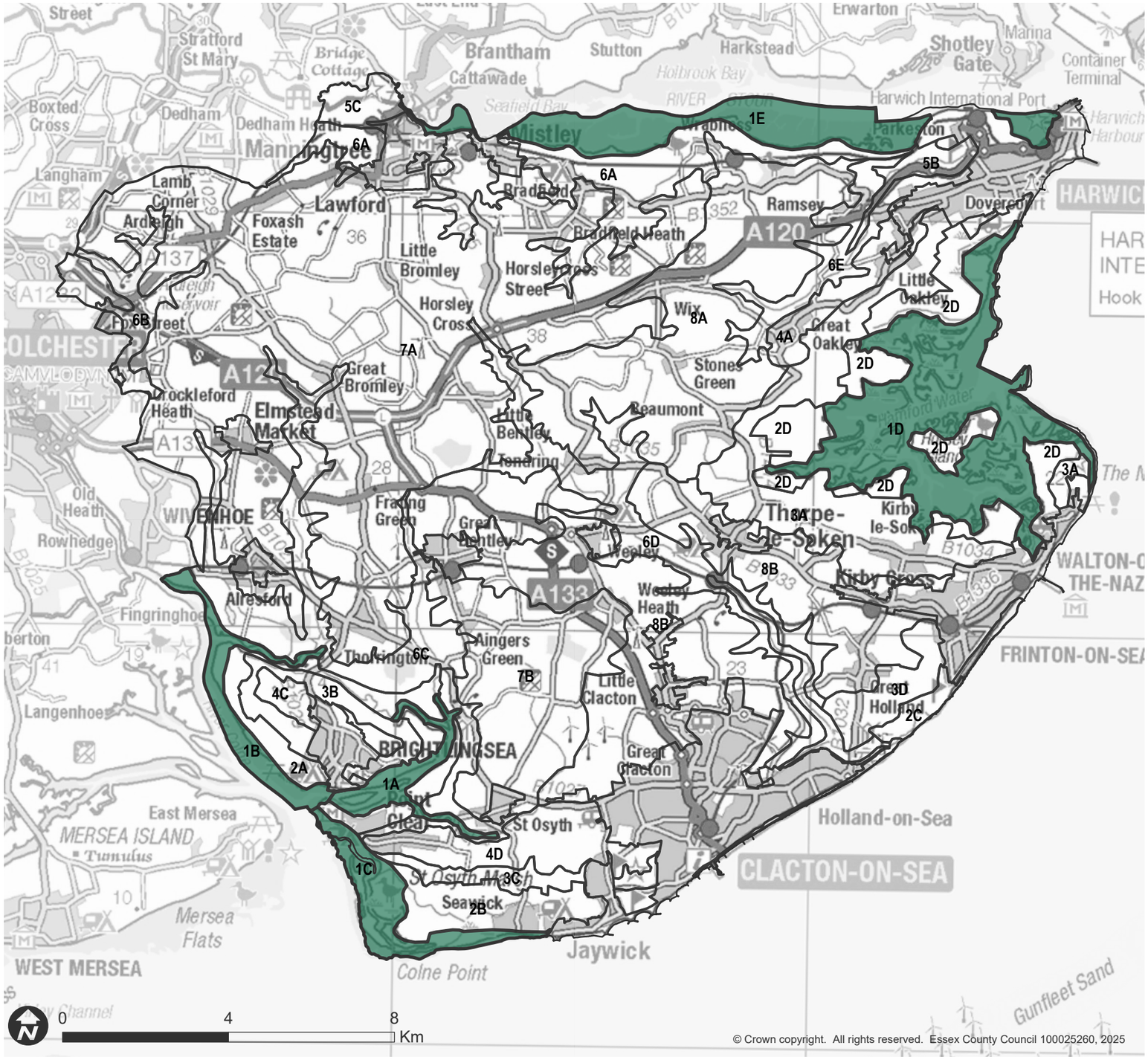

Figure 21: Locations of LCAs within LCT 1.

3.1 Landscape Character Type 1: Open Coastal Marsh

Physical Influences

Tendring's coastline has a distinctive character shaped by ongoing marine erosion and deposition. Intertidal deposits, together with sand and shingle beaches, forms the foundation of this fragile coastal environment. In sheltered locations, such as behind shingle spits or along inland creeks, sediment becomes trapped, creating mudflats that are gradually colonised by salt tolerant plants developing into saltmarsh. As the vegetation captures more silt, the marsh surface rises until it sits above the level of high tides. This is a constantly shifting landscape, where patterns of erosion and deposition continue to evolve over time.

Human Influences

During the Iron Age, the wool industry thrived, supported by flocks grazing on the marshes. Tendring's saltmarshes were regarded as ideal grazing land, as the saline environment reduced the risk of foot rot and liver fluke, although grazing on unenclosed saltmarshes is now rare. The Romans later established a salt-making industry on the unenclosed marshes of the Colne Estuary and introduced a trading culture that relied heavily on the area's waterways. By the 17th century, the coastline had become a hub for shipbuilding, fishing and trade, with oyster harvesting gaining prominence, especially after the enclosure of oyster beds in the Colne Estuary in the 1700s. Increasingly navigable waterways and new quays facilitated the transport of growing quantities of cereal crops and shellfish in flat-bottomed barges, evidenced by the construction of Beaumont Quay in 1832 on the edge of Hamford Water.

Settlement Form and Pattern

The open marshes are characterised by the absence of settlement, with only occasional small-scale jetties or landing stages extending from the mainland into the water providing the few built features within this character area.



Figure 22: Alresford Creek.

LCA 1A: Brightlingsea Creek Marshes

This open creek landscape retains a natural, undisturbed character of great importance for biodiversity, with importance historically as a working landscape. The open water, reed beds, mudflats and grazing marsh are seen as a cohesive visual unit and show good survival of characteristic features. There are few detracting features.

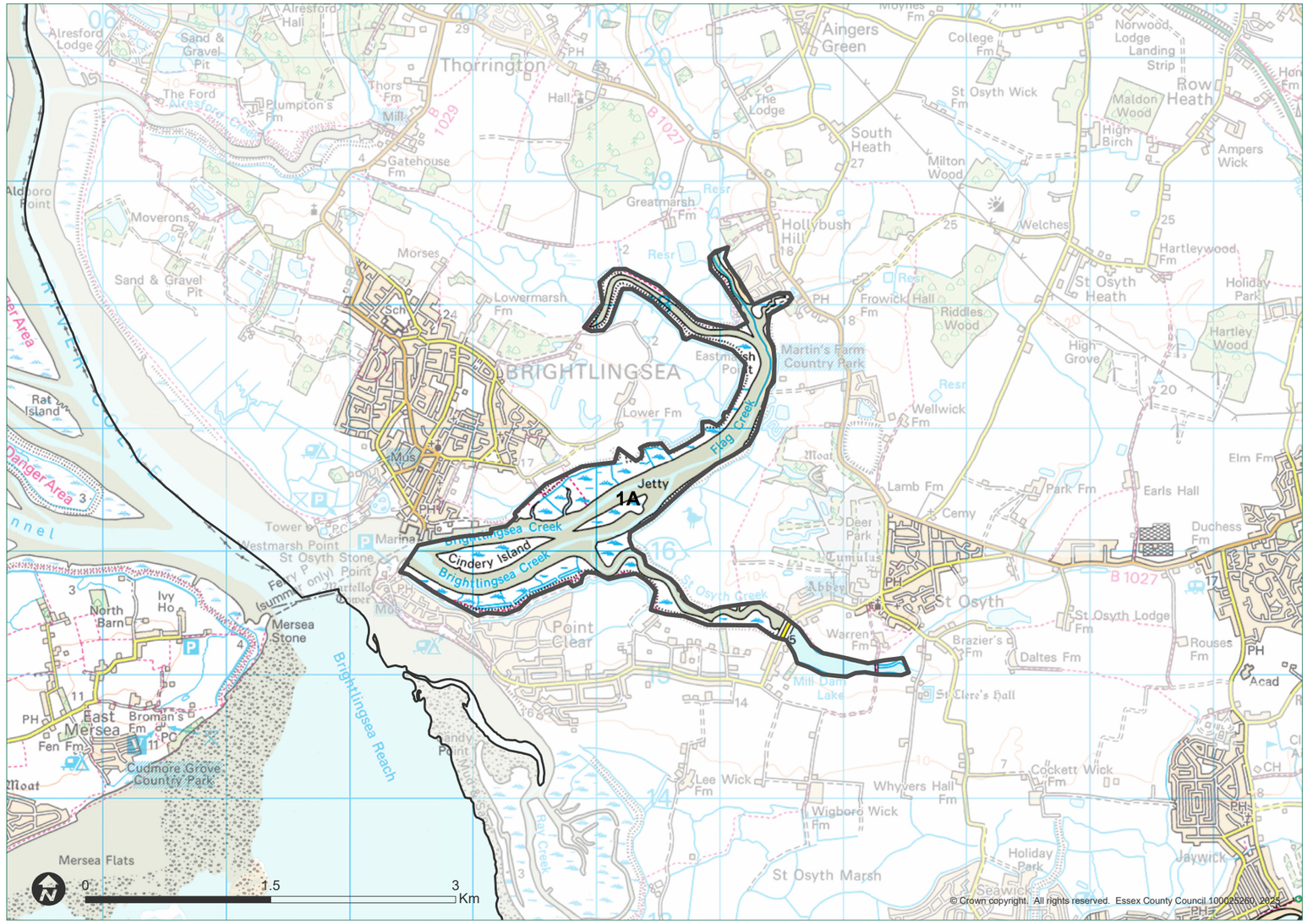

Figure 23: Location of LCA 1A.

Key Characteristics

- Tidal inlets of Brightlingsea Creek, Flag Creek and St Osyth Creek discharging into the Colne Estuary at Brightlingsea Reach.
- Open water, undrained saltmarshes, mudflats and reedbeds create an open, expansive landscape.
- Winding creeks and channels form intricate patterns in the open grazing marsh.
- Reedbeds provide important bird feeding grounds
- Disused oyster pits are features of Cindery Island and on the edge of Brightlingsea.
- Boats, stranded at low tide, are landmarks in the flat, open landscape.
- No settlements or communication routes through or over this area. Small-scale jetties and landing stages are the only built elements in this character area. Wood is the dominant material.
- Contains some well-preserved archaeological remains associated with the use of the estuary for transport and the exploitation of its resources
- A remote and peaceful landscape relatively undisturbed by humans. Enclosed by coastal slopes (to either side of inlets).
- Internationally important for nature conservation – rich in bird life.
- Long, uninterrupted views and large skies.

Description

Brightlingsea Creek and its tributaries form a tidal inlet formed of intertidal deposits, separating the towns of Brightlingsea and St Osyth, which discharges into the Colne Estuary at Brightlingsea Reach. The inlets are characterised by a flat, expansive landscape of open water, undrained saltmarshes, and mudflats dissected by sinuous branching tidal inlets and channels, with the natural saltings and large expanses of mudflat covered over at high water. The mudflats surround the larger Cindery Island and the smaller Pincushion Island.

The intertidal deposits can range from clays, silty clays and sandy clays and can often contain shells, organic and coarser-grained deposits reflecting periods of higher energy such as storms. There are patches of active/emergent saltmarsh areas where deposits built up over time in sheltered areas, which allows the colonisation of plants and formation of saltmarsh.

The growth of the saltmarsh vegetation provides a more stable environment beyond the influence of daily tidal inundation, while the creeks allow tidal waters into the saltmarsh landscape. The saltmarsh continues to develop above mean high water through the vegetational succession of salt-tolerant plants. Saltmarsh is being lost to erosion, though through accretion and human intervention there has also been gain. Brightlingsea Harbour Authority have been using silts dredged from the harbour to recreate saltmarsh, placing fine muddy sediment into disused oyster pits.

Reedbeds provide important bird feeding grounds and their importance for migrating birds is reflected in their designation as a Ramsar site and Special Protection Area (SPA). The Creek is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation, and National Nature Reserve for its extensive intertidal flats and diversity of wetland habitats. Identified as a 'Nationally Categorised' Area of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (APIB) in the 2025 Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), the characteristic intertidal habitats of Essex are mudflats and saltmarsh, and over the last 400 years, the Essex coast has lost 91% of its intertidal saltmarsh.

The units of the Colne Estuary SSSI in Landscape Character Area (LCA) 1A were assessed by Natural England in 2010 as 'Unfavourable – Recovering', mainly due to the erosion of saltmarsh and to habitat re-creation that has commenced within the estuary complex. Natural England further notes that beyond December 2010 further additional habitat re-creation would need to be delivered through Shoreline Management Plans and/or regional coastal habitat re-creation programmes for this unit to remain in 'Recovering' status.



Figure 24: Brightlingsea Creek with Cindery Island.

The Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) (2010) includes realignment of the sea defences in several places on the shoreline of LCA 1A, which will come at the expense of agricultural land, partly designated freshwater habitats (but they will also create new intertidal habitats), and could have a significant impact on heritage assets. There will be a need for mitigation by design and recording as part of the implementation of the Plan, particularly at Flag Creek (SMP action D2), which could take significant time and may influence the timing of the realignment.

At the eastern tip of this LCA is Reed Pond LoWS, a large freshwater pond at the eastern end of Mill Dam Lake and dominated by Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Bulrush (T*ypha latifolia)*. The site is important for reed-dependent birds and is likely to have an important invertebrate assemblage associated with the reed and aquatic habitats.

The St Osyth Conservation Area extends into this LCA at either side of the causeway at Mill Dam Lake, formed where the Creek has been dammed to form a large expanse of water, once used as a mill pond. To the west it remains tidal, forming a significant water course at high tide, and ebbing to a trickle between extensive mud flats at low tide. Winding channels form intricate patterns in the grazing marsh and boats, stranded at low tide, are landmarks in the flat, open landscape. Along most of its length, the edge of the open marshes is marked by a sea wall or line of vegetation associated with the adjacent drained lowlands. However, some of the tributaries of the main creek reach far inland, for example St Osyth and Flag Creeks, where they are hidden amongst the adjacent intensively farmed landscapes. The marshes were once grazed by sheep and cattle but are now empty.

There are no settlements or communication routes through or over this area. The only built features are landing stages and disused oyster pits scattered across Cindery Island and on the edge of Brightlingsea, a reminder of the importance of Brightlingsea for oysters between the 18th and 20th centuries. This zone would have been unsuitable for settlement but was a vital resource for fisheries and farming. The cheese-making and wool industries relied on the saltmarsh for summer grazing land. The broad expanse of the Colne estuary, and its associated creeks, has been a major artery for trade and transport, together with a source of fish, shellfish and wildfowl, for millennia. The name 'Cindery' is believed to derive from the Old English language, meaning "a low-lying piece of land". The inshore and deep-sea oyster smacks were often kept at moorings in Brightlingsea Creek. Brightlingsea Harbour Authority have been using silts dredged from the harbour to recreate saltmarsh, however dredged sediment was placed into disused oyster pits.

The tidal waters of the Colne Estuary have been shown to contain some well-preserved archaeological deposits and remains associated with the use of the estuary for transport and the exploitation of its resources. A stone macehead was recovered from Cindery Island but no prehistoric in situ features or land surfaces have been identified. Principal archaeological remains from the post-medieval period, mainly relating to industry and transport, are numerous wrecks of hulks, timber jetties, relict sea walls, and oyster pits.

The potential for palaeoenvironmental remains and deposits in this area is high and there are significant possibilities of archaeological remains directly related to these deposits including further timber structures

There is very little access into the area itself; there is one public footpath from East End Green, but the artificial sea walls around the edges provide a dry route for public footpaths. Many boats are docked at the quay on St Osyth Creek west of the causeway at St Osyth, where they are stranded at low tide. The King Charles III England Coastal Path runs along the edge, but just outside of this LCA. Mill Dam Lake is now used for water-based recreation including sailing and there is an 'Aqua Sports Park' with inflatables, but otherwise this is a tranquil, peaceful landscape relatively undisturbed by humans. The flat, open nature of the creek landscape allows long uninterrupted views.

This LCA provides a number of ecosystem services, as identified in National Character Area (NCA) 81, including Cultural services through a sense of place and inspiration, tranquillity, recreation, biodiversity, and geodiversity; Provisioning services through the activity of fishing, and Regulating services through carbon storage for climate regulation, and regulating coastal flooding and erosion by reducing wave action impact.



Figure 25: Boats stranded at low tide at St Osyth Creek.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Essex Estuaries	UK0013690	SAC
Colne Estuary	UK9009243	SPA
Colne Estuary	UK11015	Ramsar
Colne Estuary	1000666	SSSI
Reed Pond	Te60	LoWS

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Lee over Sands, Colne Point & Point Clear	Coastal Protection Belt

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
St Osyth	n/a	Conservation Area

Change

- Disused and derelict oyster pits reveal a disappearing cultural past but are at risk of loss themselves e.g. through man-made adaptations to climate change
- Absence of grazing animals on the saltmarsh has resulted in growth of scrub and change in character of the open grazing marsh.
- Risk of pollution run-off from adjacent areas including built development, car parks and holiday parks.
- Disturbance and erosion from water-based recreation, especially on Mill Dam Lake.
- Ongoing pressure from sea level rises leading to changes in coastal habitats; saltmarsh is being lost to erosion, though through accretion and human intervention there has also been gain.
- Vulnerability to impact of change on adjacent marshes, coastal slopes and ridges.



Figure 26: Inflatable water park on Mill Dam Lake, east of Point Clear Road at St Osyth.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the natural remote, undeveloped landscape of the Brightlingsea marshes. This area is not suitable for any built development except low-key structures for boat launching. The area is also particularly sensitive to development on the adjacent coastal slopes and ridges.
- Promote the conservation and enhancement of the natural marshland habitats through appropriate management, including reintroduction of grazing management to halt the encroachment of scrub and maintain the open, expansive landscape.
- Conserve important cultural links with the historic shellfish industry e.g. through promotion of the value of the disused oyster pits and their protection through development management.
- Encourage/promote additional research into the impact of sea level rises and increased temperatures on the important marshland habitats of the Essex coastline.
- Encourage/promote recreation management including the zoning of motorised boats and leisure craft to protect vulnerable habitats and maintain the peaceful character of the coastal edge.
- Consider the impacts of any development in adjacent LCAs, e.g. the *Brightlingsea Drained Marshes* (2A) and *Coastal Slopes* (3B), and resist the siting of large-scale commercial development on valley sides which would adversely affect landscape character and the perception of tranquillity, visually intruding on the sense of remoteness, and through the effect of changes/run-off on the sensitive marshland habitats.
- Any development (infrastructure, facilities) in association with increased recreational use has the potential to impact on the special sense of remoteness. This includes even small-scale changes such as interpretation boards.
- Encourage the exploration of Coast Specific Measures in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, such as the creation and restoration of coastal grazing marsh and saltmarsh, the creation of saline lagoons, the use of beneficially dredged material (BUDS) to create beach-nesting bird islands, and 'coir rolls' to restore saltmarsh.
- Wood is an appropriate material in this natural environment.
- Conserve open landscape within the Coastal Protection Belt in order to protect open, undeveloped coastline, prevent inappropriate development, and manage flood/erosion risk. Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCA 1B: Colne Estuary Marshes

The Colne Estuary retains a remote, peaceful character and shows good survival of features characteristic of this landscape type, including mudflats, saltmarsh, sand and shingle spits and old landing stages. It is of great importance for nature conservation, where the open marshes, reedbeds, mudflats and winding waterways display a cohesive visual and ecological unit and show good survival of characteristic features, despite erosion of some of the saltings.

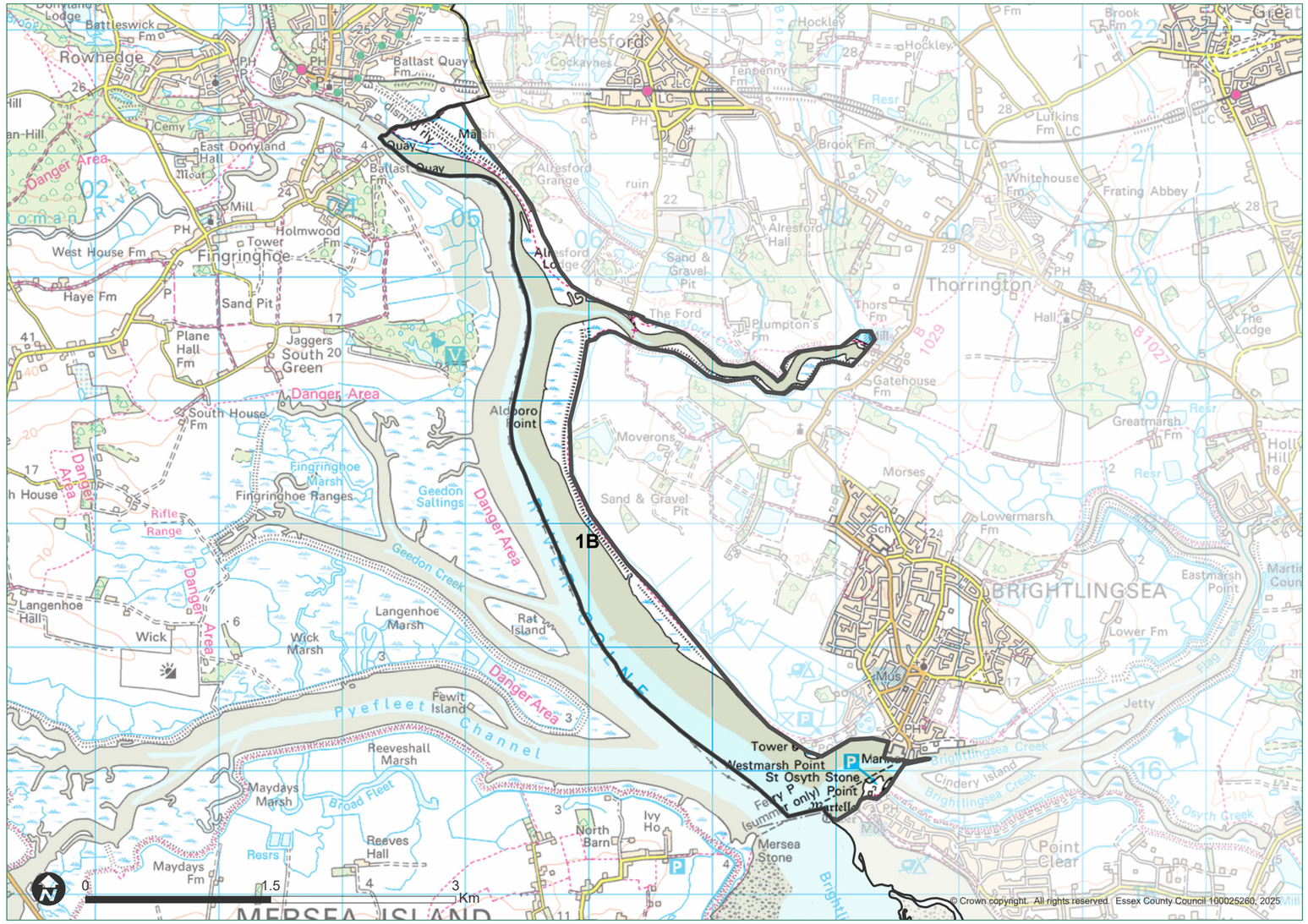

Figure 27: Location of LCA 1B.

Key Characteristics

- Remote, peaceful coastal mosaic of open water, saltmarshes, mudflats and reedbeds alongside the River Colne and its tributary, Alresford Creek.
- A continually changing, dynamic landscape due to the tides.
- Rich in bird life and internationally important for nature conservation.
- Boat masts stand out as prominent vertical elements.
- 20th-century mineral extraction has left a legacy such as the remainder of the aerial runway leading to Alresford Creek.
- Built development confined to Thorrington tidal mill, timber jetties and landing stages.
- Contains some well-preserved archaeological remains associated with the use of the estuary for transport and the exploitation of its resources.
- Wooded slopes of the adjacent coastal lowlands form a rural backdrop to the marshes.

Description

The Colne Estuary separates the Tendring peninsula from Colchester District and Mersea Island. This character area extends into Colchester District and, within Tendring District, includes fringes of the River Colne and Alresford Creek. The geology of the natural saltings and large expanses of mudflat covered over at high water consists of intertidal deposits.

The open, expansive area of marshes, reedbeds, mudflats and winding waterways is a dynamic landscape, constantly changing with the tides. The mudflats, saltmarsh, grazing-marsh, sand and shingle spits and reed beds support an important variety of invertebrates and plants, and the estuary is of international and national importance for over-wintering waders and wildfowl. Its importance for migrating birds is reflected in its designation as a Ramsar site and Special Protection Area (SPA). It is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and National Nature Reserve (NNR) for its extensive intertidal flats and diversity of wetland habitats.

The areas of the Colne Estuary SSSI that are part of Landscape Character Area (LCA) 1B were assessed by Natural England in 2010 as 'Unfavourable – Recovering', and the Colne Marsh Barrier – a unit of the Upper Colne Marshes SSSI in the northern tip of this LCA – as 'Favourable'. Natural England further notes that beyond December 2010 further additional habitat recreation would need to be delivered through Shoreline Management Plans and/or regional coastal habitat recreation programmes for this unit to remain in 'Recovering' Status.

Boat masts stand out as prominent vertical elements protruding above the low-lying vegetation and the wooded slopes of the adjacent coastal lowlands form a backdrop to the marshes.

The tidal waters of the Colne Estuary have been shown to contain some well-preserved archaeological deposits and remains associated with the use of the estuary for transport and the exploitation of its resources. The potential for palaeoenvironmental remains and deposits in this area is high and there are significant possibilities of archaeological remains directly related to these deposits including further timber structures.



Figure 28: Alresford Creek.



Figure 29: Remains of the aerial runway at Alresford Creek.

The Colne Estuary is important historically for its fisheries, maritime trade and distinctive sailing barges. The river is important for both commercial and leisure activities. The broad expanse of the Colne estuary and its associated creeks have been a major artery for trade and transport, together with a source of fish, shellfish and wildfowl, for millennia. The Colne estuary has had a chartered fishery since the 12th century. Historically the zone had a close relationship with adjacent dryland zones through the port at Brightlingsea. Narrow lanes lead down to the waterside where they end at small rough-surfaced parking areas, historic landing stages and riverside walks. An historic ford provides access to Brightlingsea peninsula across Alresford Creek.

Mineral extraction near Alresford in the adjacent character area (6C) has left a legacy of 20th-century industrial structures such as the aerial runway leading to Alresford Creek, with a large structure still standing though dilapidated.

The absence of through-roads or bridges results in a peaceful, isolated character which adds to the charm of the place. The tidal mill at Thorrington, timber jetties, and landing stages form the only built development. These buildings are closely linked, both visually and functionally, to the water. Thorrington Mill, a water-powered, timber-framed and weatherboarded structure with a brick plinth, was a corn mill and stands as the only remaining tide mill in Essex and one of only three remaining tide mills in the UK. A mill has stood at this site since the 17th century, with the existing mill built in 1831 which continued working until 1926. Owned by Essex County Council since 1974, the Grade II listed mill building itself is closed to the public due to its current condition. It remains a feature of the landscape in its historical setting at the head of Alresford Creek, and the Thorrington Tide Mill Trust is working with Historic England aiming to protect, restore, and ultimately reopen the mill to the public.

The water is well used recreationally. Smack racing on the Colne can be traced back to the 18th century and still continues today. A few yachts moor in Alresford Creek, and from April to September Brightlingsea Harbour runs a foot ferry service linking Brightlingsea, Point Clear and East Mersea. The Old Railway Walk at Brightlingsea follows the former Brightlingsea to Wivenhoe single-track branch line, now a path on the old, raised embankment that overlooks Brightlingsea Marsh. This LCA is framed by the route of the King Charles III England Coastal Path section Salcott to Jaywick, stretch 4: Wivenhoe Sailing Club to Brightlingsea Hard.

The overall intent of the Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) for the management for the Colne Estuary is to sustain and support the viability of communities, tourism and commercial activities while creating new intertidal habitats and focusing flood risk management on frontages. At St Osyth Creek, the defences are under pressure and a landward realignment at these frontages would create a more sustainable situation by reducing the pressure on defences and moving towards a more natural estuary and creek evolution with increase of tidal prism and intertidal area. Managed Realignment due to low-lying ground being at flood risk is proposed to take place in Epoch 2 (2025-2055).

This LCA provides a number of ecosystem services, as identified in National Character Area (NCA) 81, including Cultural services through a sense of place and inspiration; tranquillity; recreation; biodiversity; and geodiversity; Provisioning services through the activity of fishing; and Regulating services through carbon storage for climate regulation, and regulating coastal flooding and erosion by reducing wave action impact.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Essex Estuaries	UK0013690	SAC
Colne Estuary	UK9009243	SPA
Colne Estuary	UK11015	Ramsar
Colne Estuary	1001666	SSSI
Upper Colne Marshes	1006373	SSSI

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Colne Estuary, Brightlingsea & Alresford Creek	Coastal Protection Belt



Figure 30: Muddy creeks at Alresford Creek ford.

Change

- Drainage of adjacent drained marshes (LCA 2A) for agriculture, holiday parks and built development.
- Run-off (pollution) from adjacent areas - built development, car parks and holiday parks.
- Disturbance and erosion from water-based recreation.
- Lack of grazing of the marshes leading to reduction in vegetation diversity and encroachment of scrub.
- Ongoing impact of global warming and rising sea levels on the landscapes and habitats associated with the saltings.
- Vulnerability to impact of change on adjacent marshes, coastal slopes and ridges.



Figure 31: Views towards the Brightlingsea peninsula over Alresford Creek.



Figure 32: Opportunities for recreational activities.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the natural, undeveloped landscape of the Colne Estuary Marshes.
- Conserve and enhance the natural marshland habitats through appropriate management, including reintroduction of grazing management to halt the encroachment of scrub and maintain the open, expansive landscape.
- Encourage/promote recreation management including the zoning of motorised boats and leisure craft to protect vulnerable habitats and maintain the peaceful character of the coastal edge.
- Any development in association with recreational use must respect the remote/peaceful character of the area. The open marshes are not suitable for new car parks, holiday parks etc.
- Conserve natural habitats of the marshes that support the population of migrating birds. Consider providing board walks and wooden hides in certain areas to allow wildlife observation whilst minimising disturbance to wildlife.
- Encourage/promote additional research into the impact of sea level rises and increased temperatures on the important marshland habitats of the Essex coastline.
- Encourage the exploration of Coast Specific Measures in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, such as the creation and restoration of coastal grazing marsh and saltmarsh, the creation of saline lagoons, and the use of beneficially dredged material (BUDS) to create beach-nesting bird islands and 'coir rolls' to restore saltmarsh.
- Conserve historic links and vernacular character through the restoration of traditional dwellings such as mills.
- Built form should not weaken the sense of openness or introduce visual clutter. Any new buildings must be low-key and sympathetic to the local vernacular, using typical materials such as wood and glass; traditional buildings should be weatherboarded and finished in white or tar/black paint, while landing stages and jetties should be constructed from timber.
- The SMP policies include realignment of the sea defences at St Osyth Creek on the shoreline of LCA 1B.
- Consider the impacts of any development in adjacent character areas e.g. LCAs 2A, 3B, 4D, and 6C, and resist the siting of large-scale commercial development on valley sides which would adversely affect landscape character and the perception of tranquillity, visually intruding on the sense of remoteness, and through the effect of changes/ run-off on the sensitive marshland habitats.
- Conserve open landscape within the Coastal Protection Belt in order to protect open, undeveloped coastline, prevent inappropriate development, and manage flood/ erosion risk. Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCA 1C: Colne Point Marshes

Overall, the open marshes have remained undeveloped and exhibit good survival of natural coastal landscapes and habitats, with a particularly large area of saltings at Colne Point. Their natural, undisturbed character is of great importance for nature conservation. The open water, reed beds, mudflats and saltings are a cohesive visual unit and show good survival of characteristic features with few detracting features in this remote natural landscape.

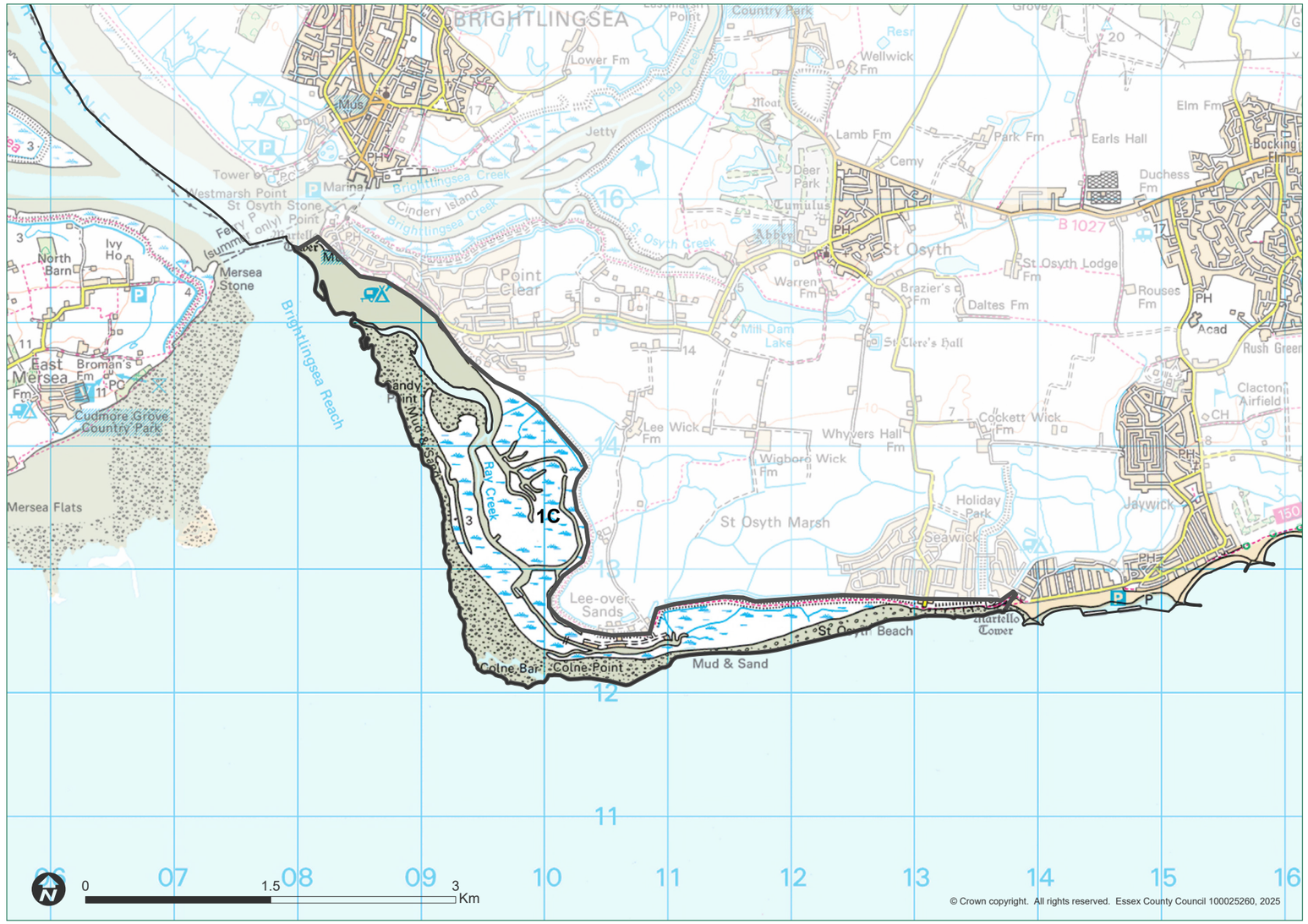

Figure 33: Location of LCA 1C.

Key Characteristics

- Low-lying, flat, open coastal landscape at the mouth of the Colne Estuary.
- Extensive undrained saltmarshes and mudflats carved by an intricate pattern of winding creeks and channels, featuring geomorphological features of importance such as saltpans and sand dunes.
- Shingle and sand ridges extend eastwards from Colne Point to form St Osyth beach and support rare plants and invertebrates, with the large shingle spit at Colne Point separated from the coast by Ray Creek.
- The saltings support many wildfowl and waders that add movement to the landscape, and the marshes have a high nature conservation value.
- Wild and remote landscape with limited access from land.
- Few built features, including landing stages and jetties. A small wooden bridge, Marsh Bridge provides access to the Colne Point Nature Reserve building, and several holiday cottages are present at Lee-over-Sands.
- Used for recreational boating.

Description

The C*olne Point Marshes* are remote and open in character, with long views and ecologically rich habitats. It is formed of a considerable area of mudflats and saltings, through which flows the Ray Creek, at the mouth of the Colne Estuary. The estuary and marsh are typically low-lying (usually lower than 5m AOD), and the flat landscape along the coastal edge consists of sandflats, beaches and beach ridges formed above mean high tide level. The narrow beach forms a barrier on the seaward-facing edge of the saltmarsh, and sandy mudflats and tidal ponds border the beach above low mean tide level, with large expanses of mudflat covered over at high water.



Figure 34: The remote Colne Point marsh with a low sand dune formation.

The geology is London Clay overlain by intertidal deposits which range from clays to silty clays and sandy clays and can often contain shells, organic deposits, and coarser-grained deposit. Much of the area is subjected to regular flooding and here there is no soil development, though in some areas on higher ground saline soils have formed upon the marine alluvium. The sediments are located within the sheltered reaches of estuary, separated from the sand ridges and shingle spit at Colne Point by Ray Creek, and form a large open flat landscape up to the sea wall.

The sandy spit between Colne Point and Sandy Point shelters a 2.5 km stretch of marsh that has formed in the lee of the spit. The spit shows a historical pattern of extension and shortening as well as destruction and reworking at the landward end of two older beach ridges, thought to have been formed over a thousand years ago. The area is of importance for several geomorphological features, including the saltpans of the salt marsh, and the sand dunes and shingle ridges at Colne Point which form one of the few dune systems in Essex.

The winding creeks and channels in the saltmarsh have carved an intricate pattern distinctive of a saltings landscape, and it supports large numbers of wildfowl and waders which add movement to this dynamic coastal environment. Its importance for migrating birds is reflected in its designation as a Ramsar site and Special Protection Area (SPA). It is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and Colne Point is a National Nature Reserve (NNR) for its extensive intertidal flats and diversity of wetland habitats. The areas of the Colne Estuary SSSI that are part of Landscape Character Area (LCA) 1C were assessed by Natural England in 2010 as 'Unfavourable – Recovering'. Natural England further notes that beyond December 2010 further additional habitat recreation would need to be delivered through Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) and/or regional coastal habitat recreation programmes for this unit to remain in 'Recovering' status.

The marsh is surrounded by shingle and sand ridges which extend eastwards from Colne Point to form St Osyth beach and feature one of the few dune systems in Essex. A large area of shell beds and shingle banks is only exposed at low tide.

The marsh is characterised by extensive marsh grasses and sea purslane *(Halimione portulacoides)*, with localised tracts of colourful sea lavender (*Limonium vulgare)*, golden samphire *(Limbarda crithmoides)*, small cordgrass *(Spartina maritima)* and scattered clumps of shrubby sea blight (*Suaeda maritima)*. Across the shingle and sand ridge, yellow horned poppy *(Glaucium flavum)*, sea bindweed *(Calystegia soldanella)* and sea spurge *(Euphorbia paralias)* thrive. The high salinity of the hollows or creeks makes them unsuitable for the colonisation of plants, though the exposed mudflats, shell banks and shingle pools of the Colne Point shingle and sand ridge support a huge diversity of invertebrates and highly localised plants, such as the nationally scarce sea heath, making the zone highly important in terms of the natural environment. Colne Point is one of the most important breeding sites in Essex for beach-nesting little terns, oystercatchers and ringed plovers. These birds nest on the ground along the upper course of the beach in the summer months, and visitors in summer months must avoid disturbing the birds and their nests.

The marshes are remote and unsettled with limited access from land. The saltmarsh is seaward of the sea wall so is subject to flooding, and this habitat is unsuitable for settlement and has remained undeveloped. Grazing was traditionally carried out upon the saltmarshes. There is an absence of built development apart from some landing stages and jetties, Marsh Bridge – a wooden bridge providing access to the Colne Point Nature



Figure 36: Rows of WW2 anti-tank obstacles at Lee-over-Sands.

Reserve building, and several small holiday cottages at Lee-over-Sands which are cut-off from access at high tide. The tidal waters of the Colne Estuary have been shown to contain some well-preserved archaeological deposits and remains associated with the use of the estuary for transport and the exploitation of its resources.

The Colne estuary and its associated creeks have been a major artery for trade and transport, together with a source of fish, shellfish and wildfowl, for millennia, and Roman pottery has been recovered from the saltings. The zone has had a chartered fishery since the 12th century and archaeological remains from this industry can be seen off Colne Point, where two parallel lines of timber posts indicate the location of a fish-trap. A thriving oyster industry during the 19th century is evidenced by oyster pits, including ones at Colne Point. Now mainly used by leisure craft, the estuary still has limited commercial and fishing traffic together with some oyster beds. The Colne Point Marshes have seen commercial sand and gravel extraction until 1964, with much of the sand and gravel used to build the Ford Factory and houses in Dagenham.

The Colne Point Nature Reserve (NR) at the mouth of the Colne Estuary consists of a shingle ridge enclosing a considerable area of saltmarsh. The shingle and sand are nearly all that remains of a much larger area between Walton-on-the-Naze and St Osyth that existed at the end of the 19th century but has now mostly been developed by the holiday industry. At Lee-over-Sands there are also extensive Second World War remains including rows of anti-tank obstacles and pillboxes. The Lower Colne is now extensively used for recreational boating, including sailing, windsurfing and powered craft.

This LCA provides a number of ecosystem services, as identified in NCA 81, including Cultural services through: a sense of place and inspiration; tranquillity; recreation; biodiversity; and geodiversity. Provisioning services through the provision of food through fishing, and Regulating services through carbon storage for climate regulation, and regulating coastal flooding and erosion by reducing wave action impact.

Access to LCA 1C is limited. Two Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) run along the sea wall at Point Clear. Another PRoW crosses the LCA at Lee-over-Sands. The Salcott to Jaywick (SCJ6) section of the King Charles III England Coastal Path frames this LCA at its northern edge, running from Stone Point in Point Clear to Lion Point in Jaywick. Lee Wick Road is the single access road to the coastline at Lee-over-Sands; however, this is a private road and consent for access needs to be sought by contacting the Essex Wildlife Trust. A small car park sits just inside the reserve on the seaward side of the sea wall and is liable to flood at very high tides. Point Clear provides a beach, and St Osyth Naturist Beach is a section between Lee-over-Sands and the Seawick Holiday Park.

Rising sea levels due to climate change form a threat to this low-lying landscape, and improvements to sea defences, such as the construction of the Seawick Sea Defences consisting of two separate rock revetments, are visible in the landscape. The Essex and South Suffolk SMP policy for this area is to 'Hold the Line', though managed realignment could be needed in the future due to the significant flood risk issue for communities and businesses at Seawick, Leewick and Jaywick (neighbouring urban LCA) as the area is very low-lying behind the defence. This could however impact the tourism infrastructure, agricultural land and important historic assets. At Jaywick the flood defences have recently been strengthened, but the sea defence is under considerable pressure and sustaining it in the medium and long term would require significant investment; therefore an integrated shoreline management approach is needed for the whole zone.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Essex Estuaries	UK0013690	SAC
Colne Estuary	UK9009243	SPA
Colne Estuary	UK11015	Ramsar
Colne Estuary	1000666	SSSI
Upper Colne Marshes	1006373	SSSI
Colne Estuary	n/a	NNR
Jaywick Beach	Te71	LoWS
Jaywick Marshes	Te78	LoWS
Colne Point Nature Reserve *(Essex Wildlife Trust)*	n/a	NR

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Lee-over-Sands, Colne Point & Point Clear	Coastal Protection Belt



Figure 35: Views towards Sandy Point from Point Clear.

Change

- Ongoing pressure for drainage of marshes for agriculture, holiday parks and built development, particularly in association with existing development at Seawick (character area 2B).
- Run-off (pollution) from adjacent areas - built development, car parks and holiday parks.
- Increased use of boats and leisure craft have resulted in interference with natural habitats, including bird overwintering grounds.
- Lack of grazing of the marshes leading to reduction in vegetation diversity and encroachment of scrub.
- Ongoing impact of global warming and rising sea levels on the landscapes and habitats associated with the saltings.
- The special perceptual qualities of remoteness of this LCA are highly vulnerable to impact of change on adjacent marshes, coastal slopes and ridges.
- Sea defences have been strengthened at Jaywick.



Figure 37: Remote holiday cottages at Lee-over-Sands.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the open, remote and undeveloped landscape of the Colne Point Marshes.
- Conserve natural habitats of the marshes that support the population of migrating birds.
- Encourage conservation and enhancement of the natural marshland habitats through appropriate management including reintroduction of grazing management to halt the encroachment of scrub and maintain the open; expansive landscape.
- The inaccessible nature of the area is a key characteristic and within this area any form of development for recreation (infrastructure, facilities) has the potential to impact on the special sense of remoteness. This would even include small-scale changes such as interpretation boards.
- Encourage and promote recreation management including the zoning of motorised boats and leisure craft to protect vulnerable habitats and maintain the peaceful character of the coastal edge.
- Encourage and promote additional research into the impact of sea level rises and increased temperatures on the important marshland habitats of the Essex coastline.
- Consider the impacts of any development in adjacent character areas e.g. the *Drained Marshes (*2A and 2B), *Coastal Slopes* (3C) and *Coastal Ridges* (4D). This could have an impact on the character of the marshes both visually intruding on the special perceptual qualities of remoteness and through the effect of changes/run-off on the sensitive marshland habitats.
- Support the re-routing of footpaths if the SMP policy to Hold the Line in this area becomes unsustainable and managed realignment becomes necessary in places.
- Identify opportunities in for the creation/expansion and conservation of existing habitats such as the Coast Specific Measures in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which include the creation and restoration of coastal grazing marsh and saltmarsh, the creation of saline lagoons, and the use of beneficially dredged material (BUDS) to create beach-nesting bird islands and 'coir rolls' to restore saltmarsh.
- Wood is an appropriate material in this natural environment.

LCA 1D: Hamford Water Marshes

Set within a shallow basin at the most easterly point in Essex, the *Hamford Water Marshes* has remained a remote and peaceful landscape and shows excellent survival of extensive areas of saltings and mudflats. It is open in character, with long views, ecologically rich habitats, and few detracting features in the natural landscape. The disused quays and landing stages indicate importance historically as a trade route, and the open water, reed beds, mudflats and saltings are seen as a cohesive visual unit and show good survival of characteristic features.

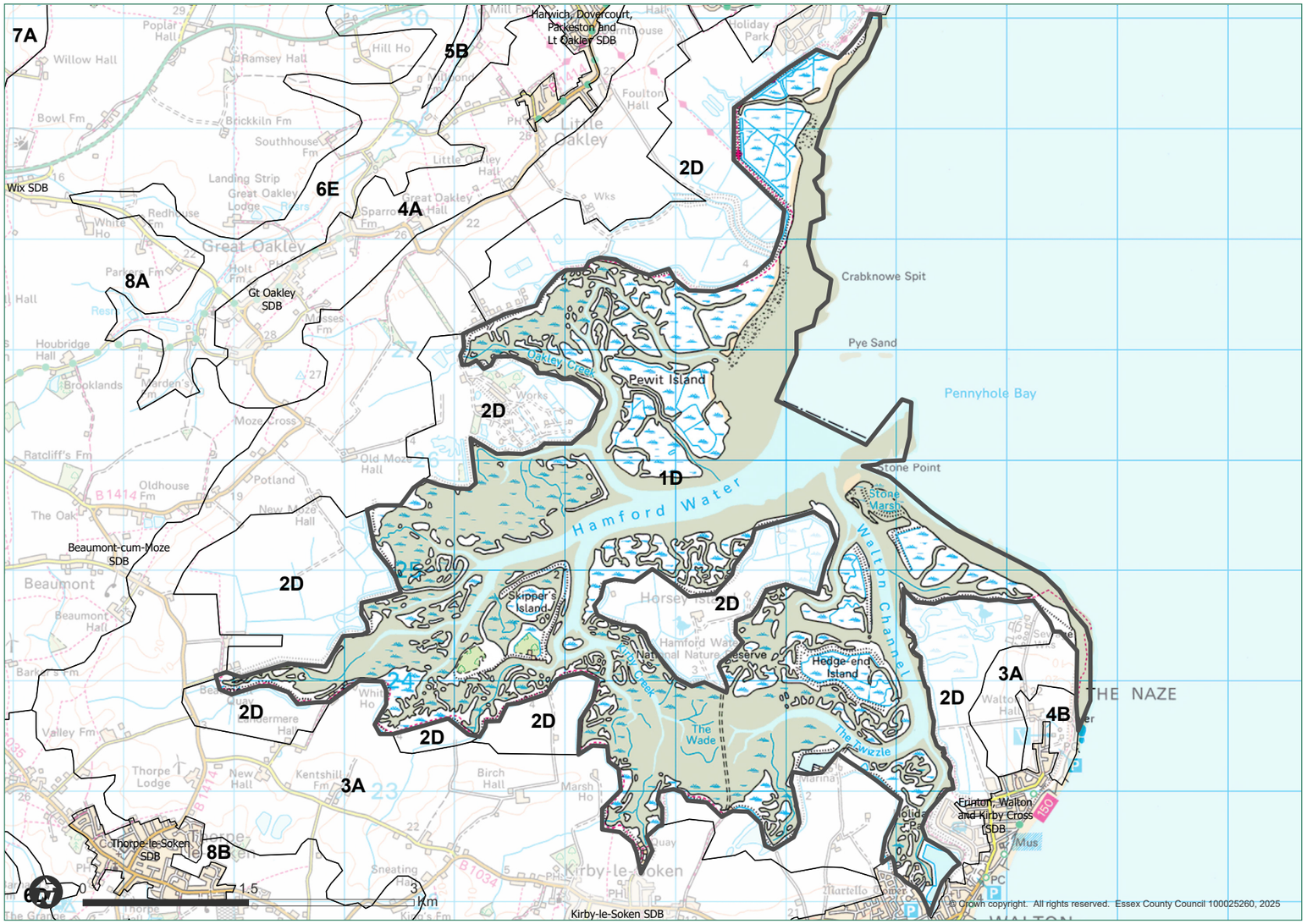

Figure 38: Location of LCA 1D.

Key Characteristics

- Large shallow estuarine basin of Hamford Water enclosed by gently shelving slopes.
- Extensive area of tidal creeks, intertidal mud, sand flats, saltmarshes, reed beds, islands, beaches and marsh grasslands.
- Remote and wild character, although sailing use of the channels and open water creates a busy active water-scape.
- A topographically very complex landscape comprising Skipper's Island, Pewitt Island, New Island, and Hedge-end Island.
- The saltings support many wildfowl and waders that add a dynamic element to the landscape, and have a high nature conservation value.
- Skipper's Island's thorn thickets provide shelter for breeding birds.
- The cluster of boat masts at Titchmarsh Marina is a feature of the open skyline
- Archaeological remains and historic landscape features such as prehistoric land surfaces, red hills, hulks, and relict sea walls.
- Absence of settlement.
- Wooden jetties, quays and landing stages are features of the coastal edge, many with historic connections to ancient trade routes.
- The surrounding sea walls afford long views across the estuarine basin.
- Literary associations with Arthur Ransome.

Description

The *Hamford Water Marshes* is a large, shallow estuarine basin enclosed by the gently shelving *Hamford Coastal Slopes* on the east of the Tendring peninsula. It is a remote, wild landscape of tidal creeks, intertidal mud, sand flats, undrained saltmarshes, islands, beaches and marsh grasslands that formed a setting for Arthur Ransome's 'Secret Water'. It is of national and international importance for over-wintering wildfowl and waders.

The interlocking dryland, marshland, mud and tidal waters create a topographically complex landscape, comprising Skipper's Island, Pewitt Island, New Island, and Hedge-end Island. The geology consists of intertidal deposits with an outcrop of London Clay forming the backbone of Skipper's Island.

Skipper's Island, which actually consists of three islands – Lodge, North and Herony – was formerly grazing marsh, but has reverted to saltmarsh following breaches in the sea wall and is only accessible by boat. It is a very open landscape, though semi-enclosed by higher land inshore. The island includes thorn thickets which provide shelter for many species of warbler. A small spinney of elm, also located on the island, is now mostly dead. Low dunes support distinctive flowering plants including Adder's-tongue fern (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*), Parsley Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe lachenalii*) and the tiny purple flowers of lax-flowered Sea-lavender (*Limonium humile*). It is one of only two places in the UK where Fishers Estuarine Moth occurs along with its foodplant, Sea Hogs Fennel (*Peucedanum officinale*).

Where field boundaries exist on these areas of short-lived reclamation, such as Pewitt Island, they comprise drainage ditches, some following the lines of creeks. The importance of the Hamford Water Marshes for resident and migrating water birds is reflected in its designation as a Ramsar site and Special Protection Area. Its diversity of wetland habitats is reflected in its designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserve (NNR).

The whole of Landscape Character Area (LCA) 1D is covered by the Hamford Water SSSI. Around a quarter of this SSSI was assessed by Natural England in 2010 as 'Favourable', with the remainder as 'Unfavourable/Recovering'. Potential pressures identified include 'Recreational Disturbance', 'Strandline Management', and 'Pollution'.



Figure 39: The open character affords long views.



Figure 40: The Hamford Water Marshes are of international importance for wildlife.



Figure 42: Beaumont Quay is a Scheduled Monument.



Figure 43: The edge of Beaumont Quay is formed of stones from Old London Bridge.



Figure 41: Lime kiln at Beaumont Quay.



Figure 44: The hulk from the Rose barge is visible at low tide.

Boat masts are prominent vertical elements in such a flat, open landscape. This is most notable at the remote Titchmarsh Marina where the cluster of masts forms a distinctive feature on the skyline and the distinctive sound of ropes clanging against masts in the wind heightens a sense of place. There is no settlement in this landscape, but wooden jetties and landing stages are features of the coastal edge, and the occasional derelict boat or wooden jetty struts loom mysteriously from the water at low tide. Modern development in the zone includes the Titchmarsh Marina.

LCA 1D has a range of archaeological remains and historic landscape features throughout, including prehistoric land surfaces, red hills, hulks, and relict sea walls. Archaeological deposits are likely to be very well preserved, with good survival of organic artefacts and environmental deposits. However, some features, such as buried land surface and hulks exposed at low tide, may be vulnerable to accelerated decay. Former sea walls, visible both as earthworks and as lines of exposed timbers, are dominant features of the landscape. WWII bomb craters have been identified from aerial photographs, and there are destroyed pillboxes along the beach to the south of Dovercourt, highlighting the proximity of the area to the naval base at Harwich.

Landermere Quay is a historic site that has connections with Roman trade. Beaumont Quay is a 19th-century quay in Landermere Creek with an adjacent lime kiln; together they form a Scheduled Monument. The kiln, which looks like a grass covered mound, was constructed in 1869 and is the only complete Victorian lime kiln surviving in Essex. The stones forming the edge of Beaumont Quay came from Old London Bridge, the first London Bridge to be built of stone which stood for over 600 years before being demolished in 1831, with some of the stone coming to Beaumont Quay. Hulks, such as from the Rose, a spritsail barge from 1880, at Beaumont Quay in Landermere Creek, and timber jetties also highlight the importance of access to and from the sea and the relationship between this zone and adjacent dryland areas.

This LCA provides several ecosystem services, as identified in National Character Area 81, including Cultural services through a sense of place and inspiration, tranquillity, recreation, biodiversity, and geodiversity; Provisioning services through the activity of fishing; and Regulating services through carbon storage for climate regulation, and regulating coastal flooding and erosion by reducing wave action impact.



Figure 45: View from the public footpath on the sea wall around the edge of Hamford Water.

Hamford Water is important for both commercial and leisure activities. The broad expanse of Hamford Water (and its associated creeks) has been a major artery for trade and transport, together with a source of fish, shellfish and wildfowl, for millennia. Now mainly used by leisure craft, the estuary still has limited commercial traffic and oyster beds.

The area is most easily accessed by water and the sheltered waters are popular for sailing. This area includes the former tidal millpond of Walton Mere, which was developed as a boating lake in 1921 and was a significant feature adjacent to the historic town of Walton.

There is very little access to the marshes from land except by informal tracks. One such track, Island Road, runs at low tide to Horsey Island, an area of enclosed grazing marsh within Hamford Water. A public footpath follows the sea wall around the edge from where there are great views across the estuarine basin, with the section 'Walton Mere to Beaumont Quay' of the Jaywick to Harwich stretch of the King Charles III England Coastal Path following the existing path over the sea wall. Arthur Ransome's eighth book in his Swallows and Amazons series, Secret Water, is set in and around Hamford Water. Skipper's Island can only be accessed with prior consent from the Essex Wildlife Trust and has no public access for habitat fragility and health and safety reasons.

Rising sea levels due to climate change will impact this low lying LCA, and changes to sea defences will likely mostly sit at the peripheries of adjacent LCAs. The policies in the 2010 Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) for this area have the overall intent to sustain and support the viability of communities, tourism and commercial activities while creating new intertidal habitats and focusing flood risk management on frontages where it is most needed. The intent is to maintain flood defence to the majority of the defended land, including all dwellings and key infrastructure at risk of flooding, whilst also allowing coastal and estuarine processes to act in a less constrained manner by realigning defences that are under pressure. The frontages where the existing flood defences will continue to be held at their current alignment are south Dovercourt, Oakley Creek and Titchmarsh Marina. However, at Little Oakley, Horsey Island, Devereux Farm and Walton Channel the defences are under pressure from coastal change, and a landward realignment will create a more sustainable situation by reducing the pressure from the channels on the defences and moving towards a more natural estuary with increase of tidal prism and intertidal area. Realignments can have a socio-economic benefit for navigation, sailing clubs and local marinas, but impact on tourism and recreation (including sailing) is difficult to quantify, and realignments can have both positive and negative impacts. The footpaths on top of the sea banks to be breached will need to be sustained, for example through re-routing.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Hamford Water	UK0030377	SAC
Hamford Water	UK9009131	SPA
Hamford Water	UK11028	Ramsar
Hamford Water	1001010	SSSI
Hamford Water	1006070	NNR
Skipper's Island Nature Reserve *(Essex Wildlife Trust)*	n/a	NR

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Walton Backwaters, Horsey Island & Irlams Beach	Coastal Protection Belt

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Beaumont Quay, Hamford Water: a 19th-century quay and lime kiln	1020688	Scheduled Monument

Change

- Pressure for drainage of marshes for agriculture, holiday parks and built development plus potential effects of associated changes in run off (pollution) on the natural habitats.
- Incremental change to edges of existing built development in adjoining character areas, e.g. *Hamford Coastal Slopes*, including marinas, such as the construction of a blasting bay at the Titchmarsh Marina.
- Interference with natural habitats, including bird overwintering grounds, by boats and leisure craft.
- Lack of grazing of the marshes leading to reduction in vegetation diversity.
- Ongoing impact of climate change including rising sea levels on the landscapes and habitats associated with the saltings, including erosion of the Naze promontory which contains and shelters the Hamford Waters.
- Vulnerability to impact of change on adjacent marshes, coastal slopes and ridges – this a particular threat for the Hamford marshes where development in association with Walton-on-the-Naze and Harwich could be very visible on the skyline of the surrounding coastal slopes. The impact of light pollution is also a concern.
- Potential impact of the development of offshore facilities such as renewable energy development, mineral extraction and effect on the view from the marshes and requirements for associated onshore infrastructure.
- The proposed route of onshore cable corridor for Tarchon (NSIP) project makes landfall in this LCA.
- Trends of overall saltmarsh loss and growth of the inner estuary creeks.
- Within Hamford Water saltmarsh is being lost through erosion. Estimates suggest that approximately 25% of the total area was lost between 1973 and 1998.



Figure 46: Titchmarsh Marina.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the wild, remote, undeveloped landscape of the Hamford Water Marshes.
- Conserve and enhance the natural marshland habitats through appropriate management, including reintroduction of grazing management.
- Encourage opportunities for sensitive provision of board walks and wooden hides in certain areas to allow wildlife observation whilst minimising disturbance to wildlife.
- Any development (infrastructure, facilities) in association with increased recreational use has the potential to impact on the special sense of remoteness. New or expansion of 'marina' developments would threaten this character.
- Encourage and promote recreation management including the zoning of motorised boats and leisure craft to protect vulnerable habitats and maintain the peaceful character of the basin.
- Consider the impacts of any development in adjacent character areas on the Hamford Water Marshes e.g. 2D and 3A. This could have an impact on the natural marshes through both visual intrusion, impacting on the sense of remoteness, and through the effect of changes/run-off on the sensitive marshland habitats.
- Conserve historic links and vernacular character through the conservation and restoration of historic quays, and provide information for the public to promote the historic links, such as the information board at Beaumont Quay. Wood and stone are appropriate materials in this natural coastal environment.
- Identify opportunities in documents such as the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the creation or expansion and conservation of existing habitats.
- Encourage and promote additional research into the impact of sea level rises and increased temperatures on the important marshland habitats of the Essex coastline. Loss of the Naze promontory through erosion would have an impact on the landscapes of Hamford Water which it shelters. Where any realignment of sea defences causes footpaths on top of the sea banks to be breached, these paths will need to be sustained, for example through re-routing.
- Support the re-routing of footpaths where a managed landward realignment becomes necessary to reduce the pressure from the channels on the sea defences.
- Ensure restoration of the landscape following construction works for Tarchon (NSIP) project onshore route.

LCA 1E: Stour Estuary Marshes

The *Stour Estuary Marshes* landscape character area is a large-scale working river landscape frequented by water-borne transport, which shows good survival of characteristic features such as the open intertidal muds, coastal grazing marshes and open views, and has a strong history of trade and industry. There are few detracting features in this remote natural landscape and overall the area has a strong visual unity which encompasses both sides of the estuary.

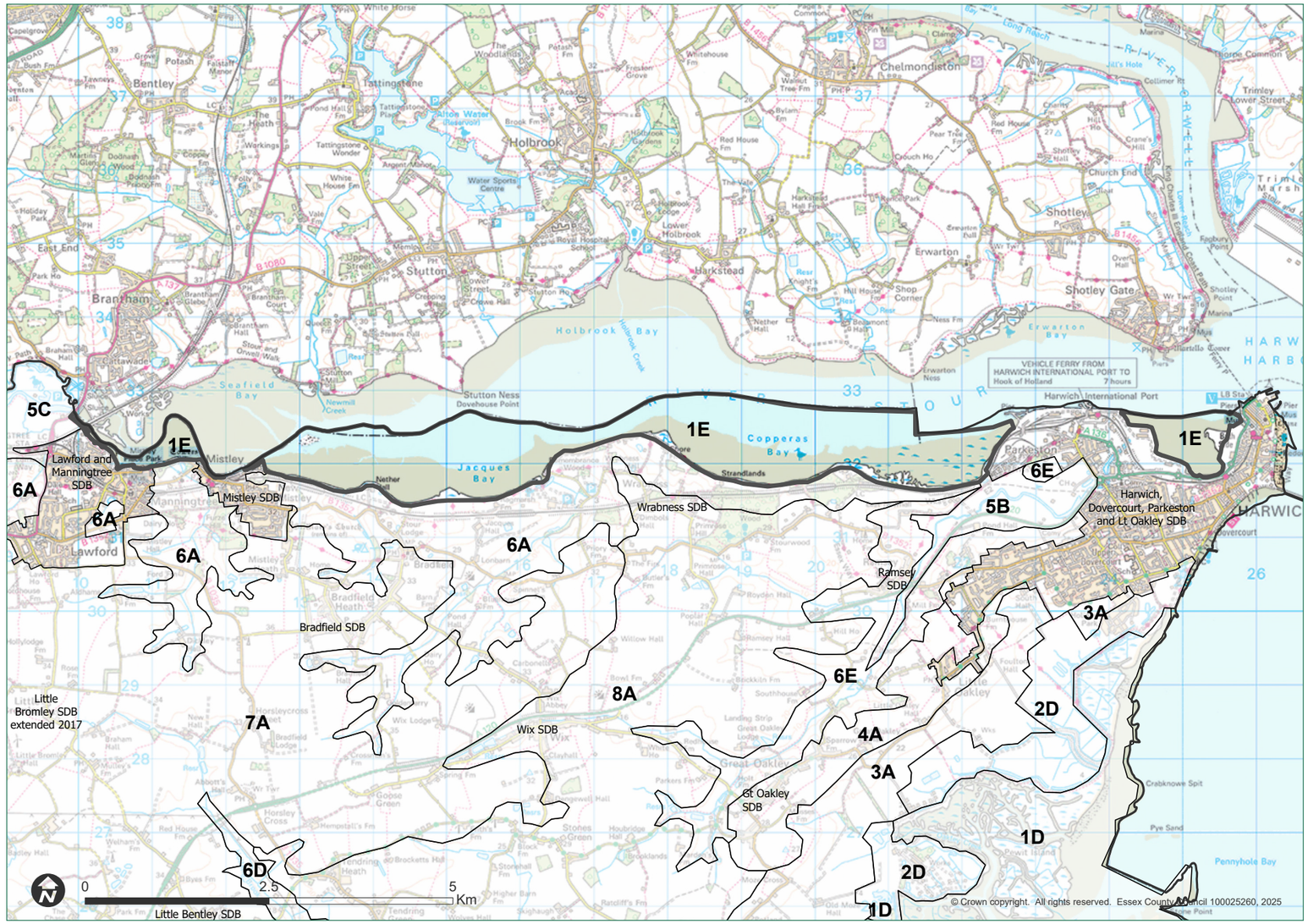

Figure 47: Location of LCA 1E.

Key Characteristics

- Tidal estuary of the River Stour forming a dynamic landscape, part of the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape.
- Extensive horizontal landscape of open water, intertidal mudflats, sandy bays and fringing saltmarsh.
- Intertidal muds are extremely rich in invertebrates, and the estuary is of international importance for wildfowl and wading birds.
- Large-scale working river landscape frequented by water-borne transport and bordered by historic ports of Mistley and Manningtree.
- Influenced by large-scale shipping and activity surrounding Harwich International Port.
- Characterised by its open, flat aspect and remoteness, and the absence of settlement or infrastructure within area.
- Dramatic views across the estuary to the Suffolk coast.
- Erosion in some areas due to sea level rise.
- Wooded Stour slopes, in Suffolk to the north and Essex to the south, form a setting to the open estuary marshes.
- Potential for likely deeply buried, well-preserved archaeological, palaeoenvironmental and organic deposits.

Description

The *Stour Estuary Marshes* landscape character area is located along the tidal estuary of the River Stour and includes the shallows of Jacques and Copperas Bays, and Bathside Bay, as well as some deeper water channels formed of alluvial deposits overlaying London Clay. The Stour Estuary forms the boundary between Essex and Suffolk and is relatively undisturbed, although the waters of the mouth of the Stour adjacent to Harwich International Port and Harwich town quays are busy with water-borne traffic. The *Stour Estuary Marshes* are also adjacent to the historic ports of Mistley and Manningtree and the beach at Wrabness.

It is a landscape dominated by deep water channels and open water, with long, narrow strips of tidal saltmarsh and intertidal mud flats between the high and low water mark and beaches outside the current sea walls. The mud flats extend over much of the estuary at low water in the Manningtree area, and the deep-water river channel approaches close to the shore at Mistley and Manningtree, and Wrabness point. Bathside Bay is an intertidal zone which has limited, very deeply buried peat deposits, a small area of which has been reclaimed in the south-west of the zone.

It is a scenic landscape which is highly important in terms of the natural environment and forms a setting to the wooded slopes to the south. Since 2020 the entire zone falls within the National Landscape of the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape. The Stour Estuary is one of five estuaries in this coastal National Landscape which are recognised as some of England's finest wildlife habitats, intertidal areas of mudflats and saltmarsh, and a dominant feature of this National Landscape.

The entire zone is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and falls within the Stour and Orwell Estuaries Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site. There is some important saltmarsh present on the coastal edge, for example at Mistley Walls where the saltings are common grazing land.

The intertidal muds are extremely rich in invertebrates and are of international importance for wildfowl and wading birds, which is reflected in its designation as a Ramsar site and SPA. At low tide many birds can be seen exploring the mudflats and at high tide the estuary comes to life with large numbers of swans. It is designated as a SSSI for its natural shoreline with rich intertidal flats and saltings.



Figure 48: Stour shoreline between Manningtree and Mistley.

The areas covered by LCA 1E have were assessed in 2010 by Natural England as being in 'Favourable' condition, with only the area just north-east of Manningtree being in 'Unfavourable-Declining' condition due to upper foreshore and saltmarsh erosion, and due to the likely impact on the area of 'coastal squeeze': the loss of natural shoreline habitats caused by the inability of these ecosystems to move landward in response to sea level rise. The SSSI unit between Mistley and Parkeston is specifically notified for littoral muds and vascular plants, with key vascular plant features represented in this unit including lax-flowered Sea-lavender (*Limonium humile*) and perennial glasswort *(Salicornia perennis)*.

At the Wrabness foreshore, it is noted that bands of volcanic ash are clearly exposed in the upper face of the cliff of the neighbouring LCA 6A. Wave action is eroding the cliff base leading to slumping. There are vegetated areas on the cliff face, but these are not extensive. Trees on the clifftop have become unstable and fallen onto the foreshore. The Wrabness Local Nature Reserve (LNR), managed by Essex Wildlife Trust, spills into LCA 1E from the larger LNR site on land, and is a valued bird habitat.

Between Wrabness and Parkeston, erosion around the Copperas Wood farm headland is starting to impact on the section of foreshore supporting an extensive area of marsh mallow (*Althaea officinalis*), and at Copperas Bay erosion steps are present on the seaward edges of both the saltmarsh and mudflats. There is a tyre revetment around the headland which may be exacerbating this process. The sea wall extends along a quarter of the coastline in this unit, with the remainder of the coastline a natural cliff bank. Coastal squeeze is considered here to be a localised risk factor and needs to be considered alongside other factors influencing erosion.

Bathside Bay, between Parkeston and Harwich, falls within the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and is proposed to be reclaimed for the expansion of Harwich International Port.

The 2010 Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) proposes 'Managed Realignment' of shore defences for areas of high ground at erosion risk at Wrabness beach and Copperas Bay. The intent is not to start holding the existing alignment, as it would not be sustainable to work against the natural estuary processes, however, local intervention to limit

erosion risk to features is acceptable if the impact on natural estuary evolution is minimised. This will require a localised assessment outside the SMP. Other parts of the Stour Estuary Essex shoreline have various SMP policies including 'Hold The Line', 'No Active Intervention' and 'Advance the Line'.

Active pressures with high risks for the Stour Estuary SSSI are identified as Coastal Impacts (2024) formed of Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Measures and Sediment Management; with other high risks including Recreational Disturbance (2017); and Agricultural Sources of Water Pollution (2010), and a potential medium risk of Water Level Changes (not Flood Risk Management or Abstraction related) (2010).

The intertidal zone has the potential for well-preserved archaeological, palaeoenvironmental and organic deposits and there is a possibility of prehistoric land surfaces, but where they occur, they are likely to be deeply buried. Struck flints and mammoth bones have been identified close to the high-water mark to the west of Wrabness Point and flint cores have been retrieved from the cliff at Copperas Bay.

Structures relating to quays and landing facilities may survive in the Mistley and Manningtree areas, with smaller jetties and pontoons along the estuary. Numerous hulks are known at Baltic Wharf in Mistley, and other wrecks are probable, particularly close to Mistley and Manningtree.

The broad expanse of the Stour Estuary and its associated creeks has been a major artery for trade and transport, together with a source of fish, shellfish and wildfowl, for millennia.



Figure 49: Geese on the Stour coast.

Place name evidence as at Copperas Bay is indicative of previous industrial activity, and the zone is a historic site of the quays and wharfs associated with the medieval port of Manningtree and post-medieval port of Mistley Thorn.

Ballast Hill near Manningtree is a site where ships dumped ballast as they entered the shallower water of the upper reaches or across the marshes to dock or unload goods along the Stour. The port at Mistley has a long tradition in handling grain and malt for the brewing industry, but over the years has continued to diversify and now handles a wide range of cargo. The concrete quayside at Mistley has been designated Village Green status, nonetheless, the fencing which has been installed on the quay edge due to health and safety concerns remains in place, though this has been branded an eyesore by locals and obstructs access. Although mainly used by leisure craft, the estuary still has commercial traffic with activity concentrated at Mistley.

The only built development in the marshes is formed of the distinctive holiday huts at Wrabness Point, raised above the water level on stilts, and the road and railway bridges which cross the Stour at Cattawade. There is no settlement or infrastructure in this landscape, although the character of the estuary is influenced by the proximity of industrial areas on the outskirts of Harwich and at Mistley Quays and the regular passing of ferries and boats. Existing pylons and large commercial shed with light coloured roofs (e.g. at Manningtree) form distracting features in the setting of the estuary marshes.

This LCA falls into National Character Area 82 – Suffolk Coast and Heaths, and brings several ecosystem services, including Cultural services through sense of place and inspiration provided by the dynamic low-lying coast with its sheltered estuaries, sweeping marshes and wetlands. Recreation services are provided by the estuaries which are a valued resource for water-based recreation, and Geodiversity services include the mineral resources of the sands and gravels present across the lower sides of the Stour which are excavated for use in construction.

There are excellent open views into and across the Stour Estuary from the adjacent settlements, footpaths and roads/rail line. Coastal access rights came into force along this stretch of coast on 16 October 2024, and the 44.67 km (27.76 miles) stretch of the King Charles III England Coast Path from Shotley Gate to Felixstowe Ferry is now open to the public.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Stour and Orwell Estuaries	UK9009121	SPA
Stour and Orwell Estuaries	UK11067	Ramsar
Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths	33	National Landscape
Stour Estuary	1004172	SSSI
Wrabness	n/a	LNR

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Stour Estuary, Wrabness & Ramsey Creek	Coastal Protection Belt

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Manningtree and Mistley	n/a	Conservation Area

Change

- Continuing interference with natural habitats, including bird overwintering grounds, by shipping and water-based recreation.
- Ongoing pressure for encroaching urban development and expansion of industrial/port areas, for example at Bathside Bay.
- Impact of global warming and rising sea levels on the landscapes and habitats associated with the saltings and intertidal mudflats.
- Impact of change of the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape.
- Forthcoming/Planned reclamation of Bathside Bay and construction of the quay wall creating up to 122 hectares of new port land using this temporarily – 15 years – for purposes relating to offshore wind turbines.



Figure 50: Views over the Stour towards Suffolk.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the natural character and open remote, undeveloped landscape of the Stour Estuary Marshes.
- Open views across the Stour from the adjacent settlements are a key feature. These important visual connections must be conserved.
- Conserve and enhance the natural marshland habitats through appropriate management, including reintroduction of grazing.
- Consider sensitive provision of boardwalks and wooden hides in certain areas to allow wildlife observation whilst minimising disturbance to wildlife. Wood is an appropriate material in this natural environment.
- Encourage and promote recreation management including the zoning of motorised boats and leisure craft to protect vulnerable habitats and maintain the peaceful character of the coastal edge.
- Encourage the exploration of Coast Specific Measures in the in Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
- Encourage and promote additional research into the impact of sea level rises and increased temperatures on the important marshland habitats of the Essex coastline.
- Consider the impacts of development in adjacent character areas on the *Stour Estuary Marshes* e.g. LCAs 2E, 6A, and 6E, and edges of the inland *Plateaux* 7A and 8A. This could have an impact on the Stour Estuary both through visual intrusion on the sense of remoteness and through the effect of changes/run-off on the sensitive Stour Estuary habitats.
- The King Charles III England Coastal Path is an important part of access to the National Landscape bringing health benefits and providing economic opportunities.
- Identify opportunities in the LNRS for the creation or expansion and conservation of existing habitat.
- Consider the impact of any proposed development within/adjacent to the estuary on the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape. Adjacent areas should have a similar high level of protection to maintain its unspoilt rural character and views from the National Landscape.
- Encourage increased access to the National Landscape; the impacts of greater access are mitigated by improving understanding of activity that can have a negative impact on area, while the Recreational Disturbance Avoidance Mitigation Strategies in Essex and Suffolk provide a mechanism to minimise these impacts and support engagement and understanding.
- Conserve open landscape within the Coastal Protection Belt in order to protect open, undeveloped coastline, prevent inappropriate development, and manage flood/erosion risk. Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCT 2

Drained Coastal Marsh

Introduction

The Drained Coastal Marsh landscape type covers areas that were once saltmarsh, typically lying adjacent to Open Coastal Marsh habitats. These landscapes are characterised by flat, low-lying alluvial farmland, criss-crossed by a network of drainage ditches and protected behind sea walls. Their inland extent is marked by a subtle rise in the surrounding landform.

Landscape Character Areas:

- 2A Brightlingsea Drained Marshes
- 2B St Osyth Drained Marshes
- 2C Holland Haven
- 2D Hamford Drained Marshes and Islands

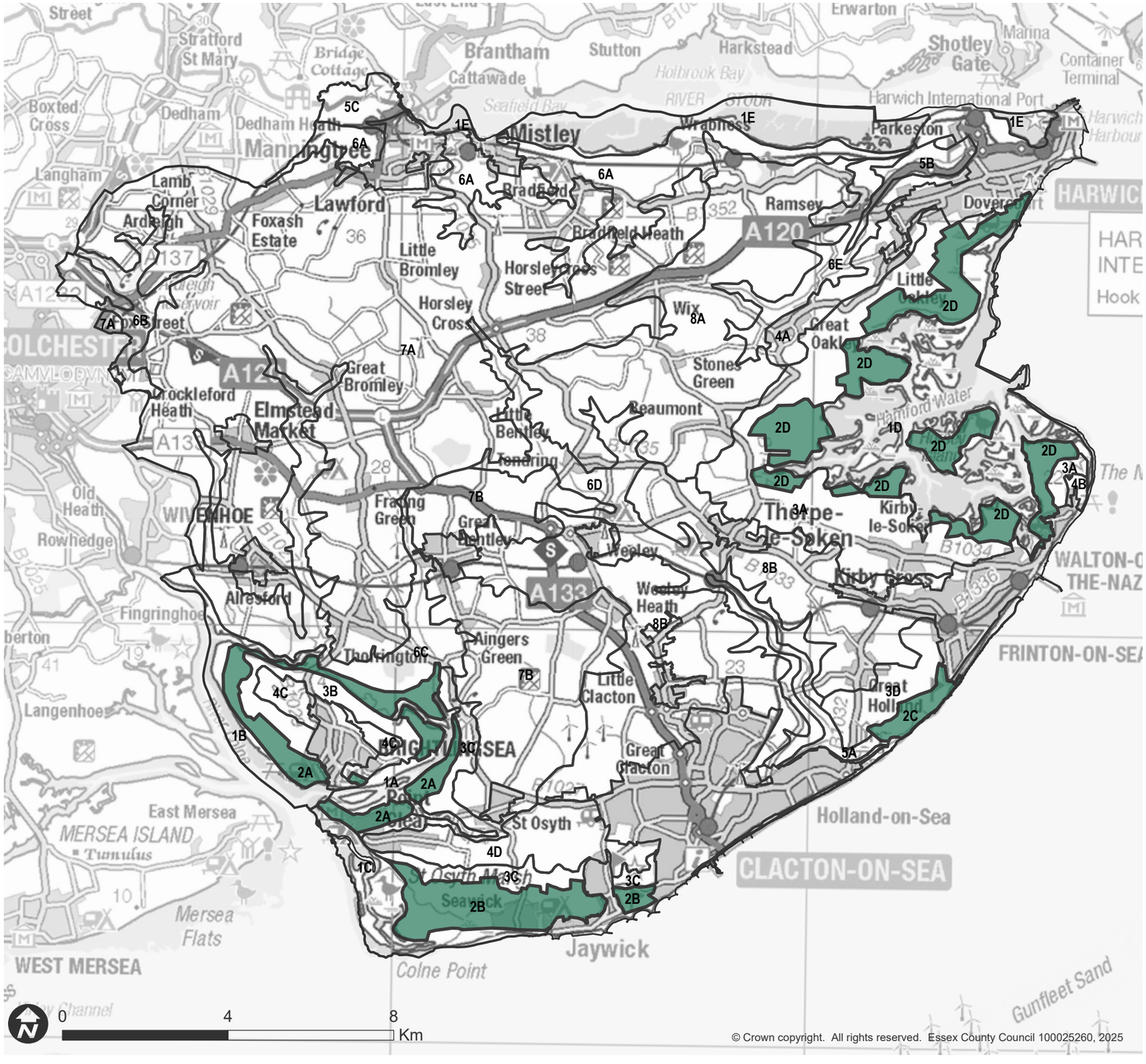

Figure 51: Locations of LCAs within LCT 2.

3.2 Landscape Character Type 2: Drained Coastal Marsh

Physical Influences

These marshes originally developed from open coastal marshes in sheltered estuarine settings, where alluvial deposits built up over time. Once enclosed and drained, they were separated from tidal processes and now form a landscape of managed grassland and cultivated fields, structured by drainage channels and dotted with occasional scrub. The sea walls, traditionally constructed from clay dug from adjacent ditches, safeguard the area from coastal erosion and deposition. These earthworks and ditches often support a range of important plant and insect communities.

Human Influences

During the Iron Age, the marshes supported a thriving wool industry, as the saline grazing conditions helped reduce diseases such as footrot and liver fluke in sheep. Clay embankments have encircled the Tendring marshes since at least the medieval period, though some may be considerably older. Early enclosures created small, irregular fields along tidal creeks and ditches. From the 17th century onwards, larger tracts of marsh were enclosed and drained following Dutch engineering methods, with extensive enclosure continuing through the 18th and 19th centuries. Over time, sea walls were raised and reinforced. Grazing marshes have since undergone significant drainage, levelling and cultivation, leading to substantial losses during the 1950s and 1960s. Today, a mixture of grazing land and arable cultivation is typical.

Wildfowling became popular in the 18th and 19th centuries, prompting the creation of decoy ponds, a few of which remain, for example, one pond to the west of Jaywick. Concerns about Napoleonic invasion in the early 19th century led to the construction of Martello towers as defensive structures along the coast.

Settlement Form and Pattern

Historically, the coastal marshes contained almost no built development. In the early 19th century, Martello towers introduced the first notable built structures along the coastline as coastal defences. More recently, development has expanded dramatically, including large holiday parks of static caravans, residential estates, industrial buildings, sewage treatment works, golf courses and associated facilities such as clubhouses and parking areas. Built development is concentrated into dense clusters with large expanses of open land remaining between them. Marinas, wharves and landing stages are also frequent features.



Figure 52: Beach huts at Brightlingsea.

LCA 2A: Brightlingsea Drained Marshes

Overall, the *Brightlingsea Drained Marshes* retain a remote, 'wild' character, illustrating good survival of features characteristic of the drained marsh landscape such as open horizons, long views and a sense of 'remoteness'. The coastal grazing marshes, reed-lined ditches and open water bodies provide a cohesive visual unit that forms an important setting to the adjacent open marshes. However, agricultural change has had an impact on the condition of the landscape, and the presence of built development in the form of caravan parks, holiday complexes, car parks, the golf course at Point Clear, and the disused ballast quay north of Flag Creek Marsh Local Wildlife Site, has introduced foreign urban elements and eroded the sense of remoteness and tranquillity.

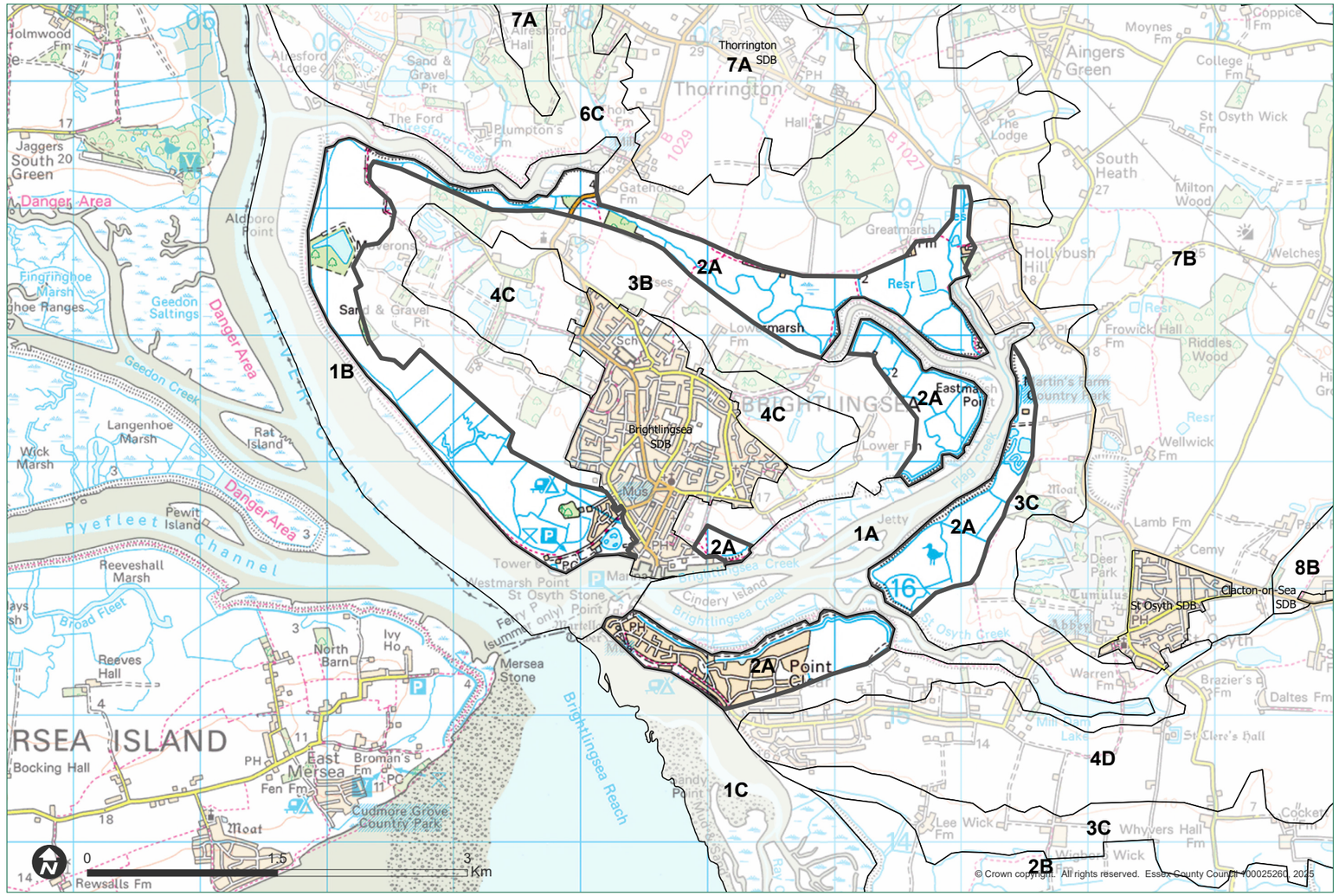

Figure 53: Location of LCA 2A.

Key Characteristics

- Low, drained grazed marshland enclosing Brightlingsea 'island' and forming the immediate backdrop and setting to Brightlingsea Creek and the Colne Estuary.
- Open alluvial meadows comprising low, hummocky grassland and reed-filled dykes behind a sea wall.
- Evidence of creeks that existed in the former saltmarsh before the sea wall was constructed is provided by depressions in the landscape.
- Open horizons, long views and a sense of 'remoteness'.
- Dense groupings of gorse known as 'furzes' punctuate the open landscape.
- Caravan parks, holiday complexes, car parks and golf course at Westmarsh Point and Point Clear.
- Disused ballast quay at Wellwick Wharf and associated slurry pools, industrial buildings and machinery.
- Sea walls are the dominant historic landscape feature and provide footpaths with wide views.
- Field boundaries consist of dykes and drainage ditches, many following the sinuous course of former creeks, together with modern post and wire fences.

Description

***Brightlingsea Drained Marshes* is an extensive flat area of drained marshes bordering Brightlingsea Creek and encircling Brightlingsea island. It is an expansive, open and flat landscape of former saltmarsh underlain by intertidal deposits, with an outcrop of river gravel terraces at Point Clear. Narrow ditches, some straight, others meandering, and some with names such as the 'Great Divide', drain these coastal grasslands. There are many bodies of standing water, including man-made ponds, which are fringed by a wide variety of water-loving species and provide important ornithological sites close to the Colne Estuary.**

The area west of Westmarsh Point, a headland on the River Colne at the entrance to Brightlingsea Creek known for the Grade II listed folly Bateman's Tower (built ca. 1880), falls within the Colne Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserve, as does the area of landscape character area (LCA) 2A north of Flag Creek. The SSSI units in this LCA have been assessed by Natural England (2010) as being in 'Favourable' condition. Its importance for migrating birds is reflected by its inclusion as part of the Colne Estuary Special Protection Area and Ramsar site, and the designation of several Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS).



Figure 54: Views to the Brightlingsea All Saints Church tower in LCA 3B.

The coastal grasslands were historically grazed, but this is becoming less common. Howlands Marsh, also part of the Colne Estuary SSSI, is a Nature Reserve managed by the Essex Wildlife Trust and one of the few coastal grazing marshes which still survives in Essex. Thorrington Marshes, a LoWS since 2008, is remnant grazing marsh of semi-improved grassland with a good network of ditches and additionally provides important habitat for many overwintering birds. The lower regions of the Bentley Brook LoWS, with its mosaic of habitats, extends into LCA 2A and supports water voles and overwintering birds. Flag Creek Marsh LoWS, on the south bank of Flag Creek, is formed of an interesting mosaic habitat incorporating areas of common reed *(Phragmites australis)* with rough grassland, scrub and silt ponds. Lower Farm Marshes LoWS, on the north-western bank of Flag Creek, is an area of former coastal grazing marsh now mainly managed for silage or hay. The inland-facing side of the sea wall features a strip of rough grassland with scattered scrub, providing an important high water roosting and resting site for wildfowl and waders feeding on the adjacent intertidal SSSI habitats, and the agriculturally improved grasslands provide nutritious forage for birds that feed mainly on land. Noah's Ark Pit LoWS, at the north-eastern side of this LCA, consists of a large lake with a small reed island, surrounded by scrub and grassland. It is also an important ornithological site, being close to the Colne estuary and providing a high-water roost and feeding area.

The landscape is one of open alluvial meadows comprising low, hummocky grassland and reed-filled dykes behind the sea wall. The dominant historic landscape feature within the zone is the sea wall. The natural saltings that formerly existed in the zone likely began to be enclosed during the medieval period, a process which was largely complete by 1777 when the Chapman and Andre map of Essex was published. Historically the marsh would have provided grazing for cattle and sheep, although parts of it may also have been used at times for crop production. This is evidenced in places by surviving ridges and furrows of 'stetch' cultivation earthworks, a significant regional cultivation method which was a method similar to 'ridge and furrow' but with much lower ridges that could be removed at each ploughing.

Field boundaries are mainly dykes and drainage ditches, some following the sinuous course of former creeks. Additionally, there are boundaries formed of post and wire field boundaries and intermittent scrub separating individual fields. Patches of scrub or tree groupings, located on sandy outcrops, punctuate the open landscape. Scots pine *(Pinus sylvestris)* and gorse *(Ulex europaeus)* are typical of these hillocks. At Point Clear, there are few surviving field boundaries in the zone, but elsewhere in LCA 2A there has been little boundary loss. Depressions provide evidence of fleets and creeks that existed in the former saltmarsh before the sea wall was constructed, and are visible as cropmarks on, for example, the golf course at Point Clear.



Figure 55: Open alluvial meadow.

Historically the coastal landscapes have been important for trade. The waterfront at Brightlingsea indicates signs of this, including shipbuildings yards, smithies, a copperas yard and the Cinque Port Warehouse. The development of the beach huts, caravan park and boating lake at Brightlingsea (Westmarsh Point), and at Point Clear, where the 20th-century development on the marsh took place after 1950, the caravan park, golf course and holiday complex, have brought with them access roads, car parks and associated facilities such as toilet blocks. These developments have affected the typically tranquil and 'wild' character of the Brightlingsea Drained Marshes LCA.

The older buildings on the Brightlingsea waterfront are two-storey brick buildings faced with white weatherboarding, of a simple form with double pitched roofs and gable ends, and often with balconies that look out to sea. Many of the roofs are slated in contrast to the clay roofs found inland. More modern buildings are constructed from a variety of materials and in simple styles, but traditionally wood has been the dominant material of the waterside. The coastal beach huts are constructed from wood, double pitched and brightly painted, but the modern holiday parks do not use local materials or styles.

The pattern of settlement is in dense clusters around key areas such as Westmarsh Point and Point Clear. Point Clear features a Scheduled Monument; a Martello tower and associated gun battery. The sea wall and visible sections of adjacent borrow dyke are the dominant historic landscape feature. Footpaths along the sea walls provide views over the open marsh in one direction and over the enclosed marsh in the other.

An area north of Flag Creek Marsh LoWS is occupied by the disused ballast quay at Wellwick Wharf and associated slurry pools, industrial buildings and machinery, which has a significant impact on the visual character. The quay was used for the loading of sand and gravel extracted from the nearby former quarry sites.

Recreational access to the wider landscape is limited to a few Public Rights of Way, which often follow the route over the sea walls, though the area provides amenity and tourist value through beach huts, caravan parks and a boating lake near Brightlingsea's Waterside Marina. A section of the Salcott to Jaywick stretch of the King Charles III Coastal Path follows the route along existing footpaths, including along the sea wall and dismantled former Wivenhoe to Brightlingsea branch railway line at the western edge of this LCA.

The siting of this LCA along the Colne Estuary leaves it vulnerable to sea level changes due to climate change. Shoreline Management Plan policies include frontages where the existing flood defences will continue to 'Hold the Line' at their current alignment for frontages at Point Clear and Brightlingsea with short frontages where the No Active Intervention approach will be continued. Managed Realignment for low-lying ground at flood risk is proposed for the section at the eastern side of the LCA, the frontage around Lower Marsh Farm LoWS, and south of St Osyth Creek.

This LCA provides a number of ecosystem services, as identified in National Character Area (NCA) 81, including; Cultural Services, such as a Sense of place/inspiration provided by the flat, open and expansive estuarine landscape where distinctive shallow creeks, drowned estuaries, low islands, mudflats and broad tracts of tidal salt marsh and reclaimed grazing marsh, with a strong sense of remoteness and skyscapes dominate the views. Other ecosystem services provided are Biodiversity through the internationally important grazing marsh, and Recreation through public footpaths.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Colne Estuary	UK9009243	SPA
Colne Estuary	UK11015	Ramsar
Colne Estuary	1000666	SSSI
Bentley Brook	Te50	LoWS
Flag Creek Marsh	Te54	LoWS
Lower Farm Marshes	Te51	LoWS
Thorrington Marshes	Te43	LoWS
Howlands Marsh Nature Reserve *(Essex Wildlife Trust)*	n/a	NR

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Colne Estuary, Brightlingsea & Alresford Creek	Coastal Protection Belt
Martin's Farm	Country Park

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Martello tower A and associated battery, Stone Point	1017052	Scheduled Monument

Change

- Ongoing pressure for built development on the edges of existing settlements, in prominent waterside locations and in key honeypot areas, including pressure for expansion of recreation and tourist development.
- Onshore development, such as moorings, launching areas, social facilities and parking, linked to offshore activities such as boating and jet-skiing.
- Continuing gradual urbanisation of the environment through piecemeal 'improvements' to roads, car parks and tourist facilities.
- Ongoing pressure for conversion of land to arable use.
- Erosion of diversity and distinctiveness of seaside beach huts with ubiquitous garden sheds replacing the eclectic mix of colours traditional of the water's edge.
- Vulnerability to impact of sea level rise and climate change.
- Absence of grazing management on the coastal marshland is resulting in growth of scrub and change in character of the open marshes.
- Loss of sea wall and ditch habitats through upgrading sea defences.



Figure 58: Beach huts at Brightlingsea.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the open, undeveloped character and valuable wetland habitats of the coastal marshes. Grazing marsh habitats are internationally important and help climate regulation by providing significant carbon storage.
- Encourage conservation of important habitats and landscapes through appropriate management, including grazing management of the marshes and reed cutting within the drainage dykes.
- Conserve clay sea walls and borrow dykes where possible, minimising interference with habitats when upgrading works to sea defences, and support the re-routing of footpaths in places where a managed landward realignment of sea defences becomes necessary.
- Seek opportunities for habitat enhancement to compensate for any loss of habitat through defence upgrading or management.
- There may be a long-term opportunity in some cases to restore a more natural character by encouraging relocation of facilities (e.g. caravan parks and holiday complexes) away from the most sensitive areas.
- Consider impact of change in adjacent landscapes such as the Open Marshes (1A, 1B and 1C).
- Conserve the eclectic mix of colours and styles of beach hut traditionally lining the water's edge.
- Wood is generally the most suitable construction material, with red brick also appropriate when its colour closely matches local examples and avoids contrasting shades on neighbouring buildings. Slate is commonly used for roofing along the waterfront, and there is scope for contemporary architecture in suitable locations provided it respects the scale of existing buildings and incorporates local materials; glass can also be fitting in a waterside setting. Overall, long, low-lying buildings are characteristic of the area.
- Seek to conserve the characteristics this LCA strongly displays that relate to several ecosystem services of NCA 81.
- Encourage restoration of areas affected by intensive agriculture, including the conversion of arable areas to pasture and reintroduction of grazing management by using programmes such as Farming in Protected Landscapes programme to help nature recover, reduce the impacts of climate change, protect and enhance cultural heritage and improve access to the landscape where appropriate.
- Conserve the remote rural character of the landscape by avoiding, or the sensitive managing of, road upgrades such as new signage, modern streetlamps, line painting, widening and other features that would result in gradual urbanisation. Visitor facilities, such as car parks, should retain a rural, informal design.
- Seek to conserve views to the local landmark that is the All Saints Church Brightlingsea. The long views to and across the open marshes, creeks and estuaries are also an important feature. New buildings along the water's edge should not obscure views.
- Encourage the exploration of the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the possible future restoration of the disused ballast quay by restoring its lost habitats such as coastal grazing marsh for a positive impact on the biodiversity, recreational potential and character of the landscape and its setting.
- Retain the open character of the marshes by restricting planting to low-growing scrubby species typically found in the local landscape. Screening using tall or ornamental species is not appropriate in this area.
- Conserve open landscape within the Coastal Protection Belt in order to protect open, undeveloped coastline, prevent inappropriate development, and manage flood/ erosion risk. Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCA 2B: St Osyth Drained Marshes

In general, the *St Osyth Drained Marshes* illustrate good survival of features characteristic of the drained marsh landscape such as open horizons, long views and a sense of 'remoteness', though its character has progressively been eroded and affected by the development of caravan parks, holiday villages, access roads, upgrading of sea defences and intensification of farming. The grazing marsh, reed-lined ditches and open water bodies provide a cohesive visual unit that form an important setting to the open marshes (LCA 1C).

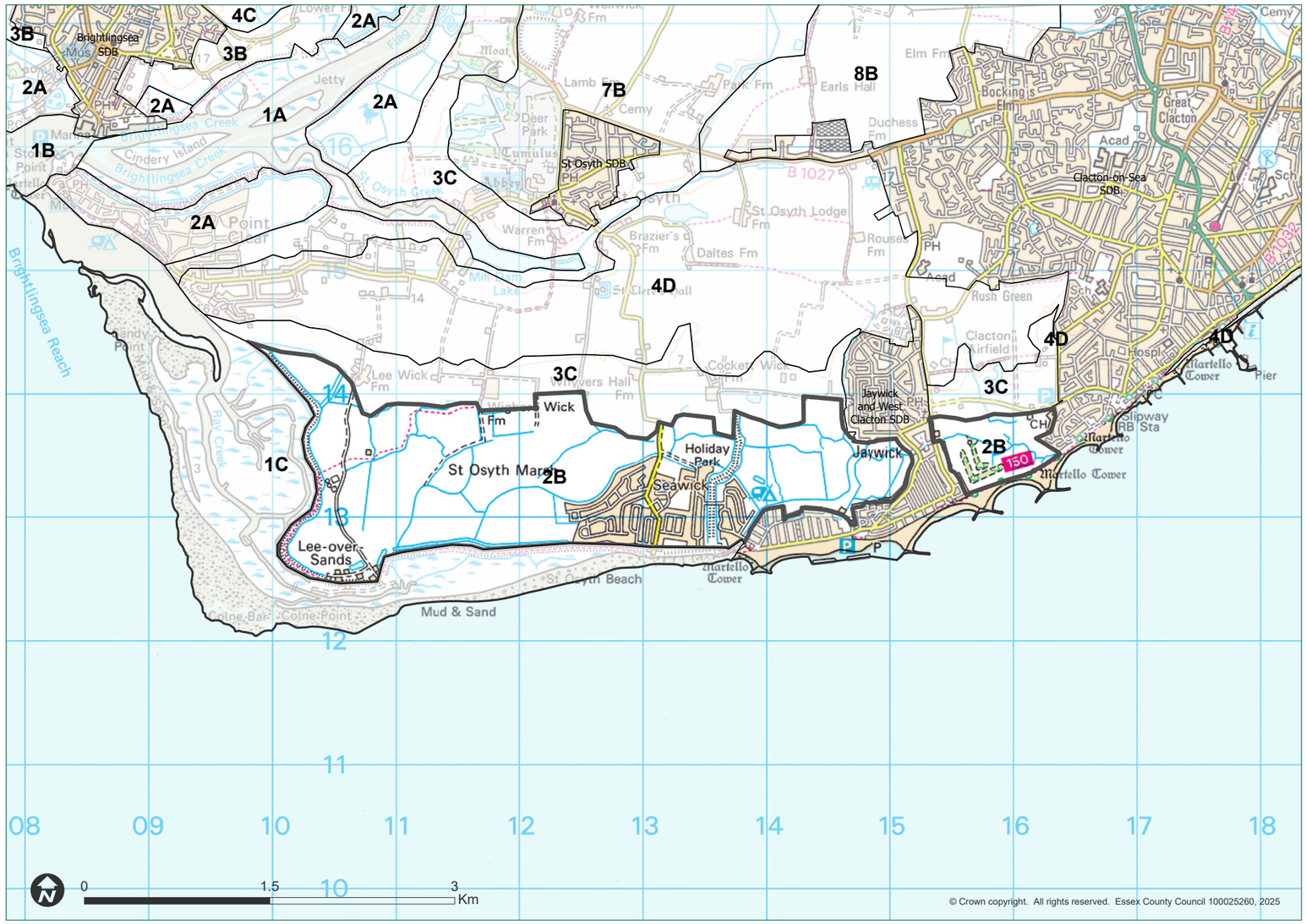

Figure 59: Location of LCA 2B.

Key Characteristics

- Extensive area of drained marshes between Colne Point and Clacton-on-Sea that is vulnerable to flooding and sea invasion.
- Open alluvial grassland and improved agricultural land divided by post and wire fences and reed-lined ditches.
- A series of groynes and breakwaters help to keep sandy beaches from eroding into the sea on this exposed coast.
- The Lion Point duck decoy pond to the west of Jaywick is one of the few surviving from the 19th century and designated a Scheduled Monument.
- Coastal grazing marsh at Jaywick is a remnant of once extensive grazing marshes.
- Development includes the unique settlement of Jaywick, Seawick holiday village, numerous caravan parks and a golf course.
- Three Martello towers line the coastal edge here; all are Scheduled Monuments as well as Grade II listed buildings.
- Expansive coastal views.

Description

***St Osyth Drained Marshes* is an extensive area of drained marshes between Colne Point and Clacton-on-Sea, formed of intertidal deposits. The area is exposed to the elements along this southern coast, and a sea wall protects the marshes from the open coast. The exposed nature of this area means there is little open marsh bordering the coast – the other side of the sea wall is exposed to the open sea. The remote character is illustrated at Lee-over-Sands from where there are dramatic windswept coastal views.**

The sea defences have been re-built many times and a series of groynes and breakwaters help to keep the sandy beaches from eroding into the sea. Jaywick Sands has been the recipient of a beach reconstruction / nourishment project to combat severe coastal erosion and flood risk where sand gets pumped or imported and deposited on the beach. It is estimated that renourishment of the beach will be needed every 20 years.

It is a landscape of open and flat alluvial grassland of surviving and former coastal grazing marshland improved agricultural land, much of which is in crop production. Evidence for at least four red hills has been noted within the zone, indicating its significance for the production of sea salt during the late Iron Age and Roman period. The natural saltings that formerly existed in the zone began to be enclosed within sea walls during the medieval period, a process largely complete by the time the Chapman and Andre map of Essex was published in 1777. Aerial photographs have recorded the location of a series of former sea walls on the west side of the zone, some of which are depicted as earthworks on the 1st edition OS map (c.1876), and which represent different stages of marshland reclamation. Farmers around the coast or river estuaries were able to utilise drained marshlands and adjacent saltmarshes to maintain more cattle and sheep than many inland farmers

The coastal grasslands were historically grazed, but this is becoming less common as a result of agricultural improvement, drainage and urban/industrial encroachment. The area of coastal grazing marsh at Jaywick is a remnant of once extensive grazing marshes in Tendring and is important for its grassland and wetland habitats. Fragments of grazing marsh survive on the eastern side of this LCA, containing fossilised fleets and other natural depressions which are evidence of former creeks and saltmarsh before the sea wall was built.



Figure 60: Open alluvial grassland and improved agricultural land divided by post and wire fences and reed-lined ditches is a key characteristic of this LCA.

Fields are divided by reed-filled drainage ditches and post and wire fences with intermittent scrub. Some field boundaries follow the sinuous course of former creeks. There has been significant boundary loss since the 1st edition OS map, most probably as a result of post-1950 rationalisation. No woodland and only a few trees are present. There are some bodies of standing water, including the post-medieval Lion Point duck decoy pond, which survives as a significant earthwork, to the east of Seawick. Designated a Scheduled Monument, the decoy pond is one of the few surviving from the 19th century when wildfowling was a popular activity. These water bodies are fringed by a wide variety of water-loving species and provide important wetland habitats.

The sea walls and borrow dykes on the western side of this LCA fall within areas of importance for nature conservation and are designated as Special Protection Area (SPA), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the Colne Estuary Ramsar. The western part of the golf course east of Jaywick, along with a coastal strip at Jaywick, form part of the Clacton Cliffs & Foreshore SSSI, which have been assessed by Natural England in 2025 as being in 'Favourable' condition. This geological SSSI contains internationally important geoarchaeological deposits associated with ancient courses of the Rivers Thames and Medway which contain artefact evidence for the Clactonian Palaeolithic industry.

The St Osyth Drained Marshes contain several Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS). Jaywick Marshes LoWS consists of coastal grazing marsh, connecting old sea walls and an area of grassland. Coastal grasslands have been severely depleted by agricultural improvement, drainage and urban/industrial encroachment and are of value for their characteristic and often scarce flora, including ditch flora and scattered scrub. This site is also likely to be an important site for invertebrates as well as a nesting, feeding, and resting site for coastal birds.

The marshes were historically devoid of development, except for the landmark coastal defence structures, the Martello towers,

built to defend the Tendring coast from Napoleonic invasion. Three Martello towers line the coastal edge of this LCA; all are Scheduled Monuments and Grade II listed buildings.

Jaywick was the first settlement in this windswept coastal environment, planned as a holiday village for residents of London. The first of the chalets was built in 1928 and, by 1931, 2000 chalets had been constructed. Today, Jaywick is a unique and very distinctive settlement, although suffering from neglect. Other built development along the coast, on an area formerly part of St Osyth Marsh, includes the Seawick holiday complex, consisting of chalets, caravan parks, and leisure facilities. Also present is a golf course, occupying the whole of the settlement gap between Jaywick and Clacton in this part of LCA 2B. The fringes of Clacton have also spread into the drained marshes towards its most easterly point. Other modern development includes holiday chalets at Lee-over-Sands, and a sewage treatment works at the western fringe of this LCA.

LCA 2B has a close relationship with LCA 3C (St Osyth Coastal Slopes) to the north via the line of 'Wick' farms which are located along the former marsh edge. Access to the coastal Lee-over-Sands, a small and isolated coastal hamlet, is restricted due to private roads from Wick Farms north of this LCA, though publicly accessible by Public Rights of Way (PRoWs). A section of the Salcott to Jaywick and the Jaywick to Harwich stretches of the King Charles III Coastal Path will follow a coastal route mostly along existing PRoWs, including along the sea wall along Seawick and Jaywick and the western edge of this LCA.

Coastal erosion and flood risk are significant issues for the local communities and businesses in this low-lying area. According to the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP), the Policy of 'Hold the Line' is set to remain until 2055 after which 'Managed Realignment' may be necessary. The frontage that includes the communities of Jaywick, Seawick and Leewick was severely flooded in 1953, and significant defence works have taken place to defend the area from flooding since then. Any managed realignment in this zone would significantly impact on tourism infrastructure at Seawick, Leewick and Jaywick due to the presence of large caravan and holiday parks which are important for the local economy. In addition, there is a significant amount of agricultural land and important historic assets including Scheduled Monuments. Any policy implemented should ensure continued appropriate flood defence for the communities and associated socio-economic features at Jaywick and ensure continued use of the area for leisure, recreation and tourism.

This LCA provides a number of ecosystem services, as identified for National Character Area 81, including Regulating services through climate regulation by carbon storage by salt marsh, reedbeds and mudflats and grazing marsh; Cultural services through a sense of place and inspiration: the flat, open and expansive estuarine landscape where distinctive shallow creeks, drowned estuaries, low islands, mudflats and broad tracts of tidal salt marsh and reclaimed grazing marsh provide a strong sense of remoteness and skyscapes dominate the views. Other cultural services include biodiversity and recreation through the internationally important grazing marsh and public footpaths.



Figure 61: Seawick holiday park, just behind the sea wall.



Figure 62: Martello Tower C at Seawick.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Clacton Cliffs & Foreshore	1003908	SSSI
Jaywick Marshes	Te78	LoWS

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Lee-over-Sands, Colne Point & Point Clear	Coastal Protection Belt

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Lion Point decoy, 810m south-east of Cockett Wick Farm	1016864	Scheduled Monument
Martello tower C, St Osyth Beach, Clacton-on-Sea	1018954	Scheduled Monument
Martello tower D, 450m SSW of the Club House, Clacton Golf Course	1016553	Scheduled Monument
Martello tower E, 300m south-west of junction of Marine Parade West and Wash Lane, Clacton-on-Sea	1016554	Scheduled Monument

Change

- Ongoing pressure for built development on the edges of existing settlements and in key honeypot locations, in particular pressure for further expansion of caravan parks.
- Onshore development, such as moorings, launching areas, social facilities and parking, linked to offshore activities such as boating and jet-skiing.
- Impact of the Gunfleet Sands Offshore Wind Farm on views out to sea, and potential impact of further development of offshore facilities such as additional renewable energy development and mineral extraction, and effect on the view from the marshes and requirements for associated onshore infrastructure.
- Neglect and gradual decline of properties and facilities associated with holiday villages such as Jaywick and replacement by buildings of a more suburban character, leading to loss of local distinctiveness.
- Climate change and vulnerability to impact of sea level rise.
- Piecemeal 'improvements' to roads, car parks and tourist facilities resulting in gradual urbanisation of the environment.
- Agricultural intensification to arable and urban development leading to loss of grazing marsh, plus lack of grazing animals for management.
- Pesticide run-off affecting ditch habitats and water quality.
- Loss of sea wall and ditch habitats through upgrading sea defences.
- Vulnerability to impact of change on adjacent LCAs that are visible from this open, flat landscape, such as the solar farm in the *St Osyth Coastal Slopes*, north of Seawick, and the windmills from the Earls Hall Windfarm in the *North Clacton and The Sokens Clay Plateau* further inland.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the open, undeveloped character and valuable wetland habitats of the coastal marshes, by resisting further encroachment of urban or suburban development. The long views from the open coastal edge are an important feature to preserve.
- Encourage appropriate management including grazing management and reed cutting.
- Conserve clay sea walls and borrow dykes where possible, minimising interference with habitats when upgrading works to sea defences, and support the re-routing of footpaths in places where a managed landward realignment of sea defences becomes necessary.
- Buildings in the open landscape should remain low-lying, except where taller structures are needed for navigation or as landmarks. Wood is the most suitable construction material in the drained marshes, and there is potential for contemporary architectural design in landmark or interpretive buildings, provided it incorporates locally sourced materials.
- Conserve the rural character of the landscape by avoiding, or the sensitive managing of, road upgrades such as new signage, modern streetlamps, line painting, widening and other features that would result in gradual urbanisation of the rural landscape. Visitor facilities, such as car parks, that are of a rural, informal design will have least impact on the remote nature of the landscape.
- Seek opportunities for habitat enhancement and restoration to compensate for any loss of habitat through defence upgrading or management and encourage the exploration of opportunities in the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Encourage restoration of areas affected by intensive agriculture by the re-establishment of grassland and reintroduction of grazing management, and encourage the use of opportunities identified in Environmental Land Management Schemes or Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Consider impact of change in adjacent landscapes such as the *Colne Point Marshes* (1C).
- Encourage restoration of derelict properties, particularly in Jaywick, which is a unique coastal settlement.
- Conserve the Martello towers and their open settings as historic landmarks.
- Seek to resist further expansion of holiday villages.
- Consider long-term plans to relocate caravan parks and holiday complexes to less sensitive areas.
- Protect the open gaps between Clacton, Jaywick and Seawick.
- Consider the impacts of sea defence upgrades and coastal erosion and implement appropriate flood defence for the communities and associated socio-economic features at Jaywick. This will also ensure continued use of the area for leisure, recreation and tourism, as per the SMP.
- Retain the open character of the marshes by restricting planting to low-growing scrubby species typically found in the local landscape. Screening using tall or ornamental species is not appropriate.
- Conserve open landscape within the Coastal Protection Belt in order to protect open, undeveloped coastline, prevent inappropriate development, and manage flood/erosion risk. Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCA 2C: Holland Haven

Overall, *Holland Haven,* historically a coastal grazing marsh with a remote and rural character, has retained this natural coastal character despite the reduction in grazing and development of a golf course across part of the area. This LCA illustrates good survival of features characteristic of the drained marsh landscape including open horizons, long views and a sense of 'remoteness'. The grazing marsh, reed-lined ditches and open water bodies provide a cohesive visual unit that form an important setting to Frinton and Holland-on-Sea.

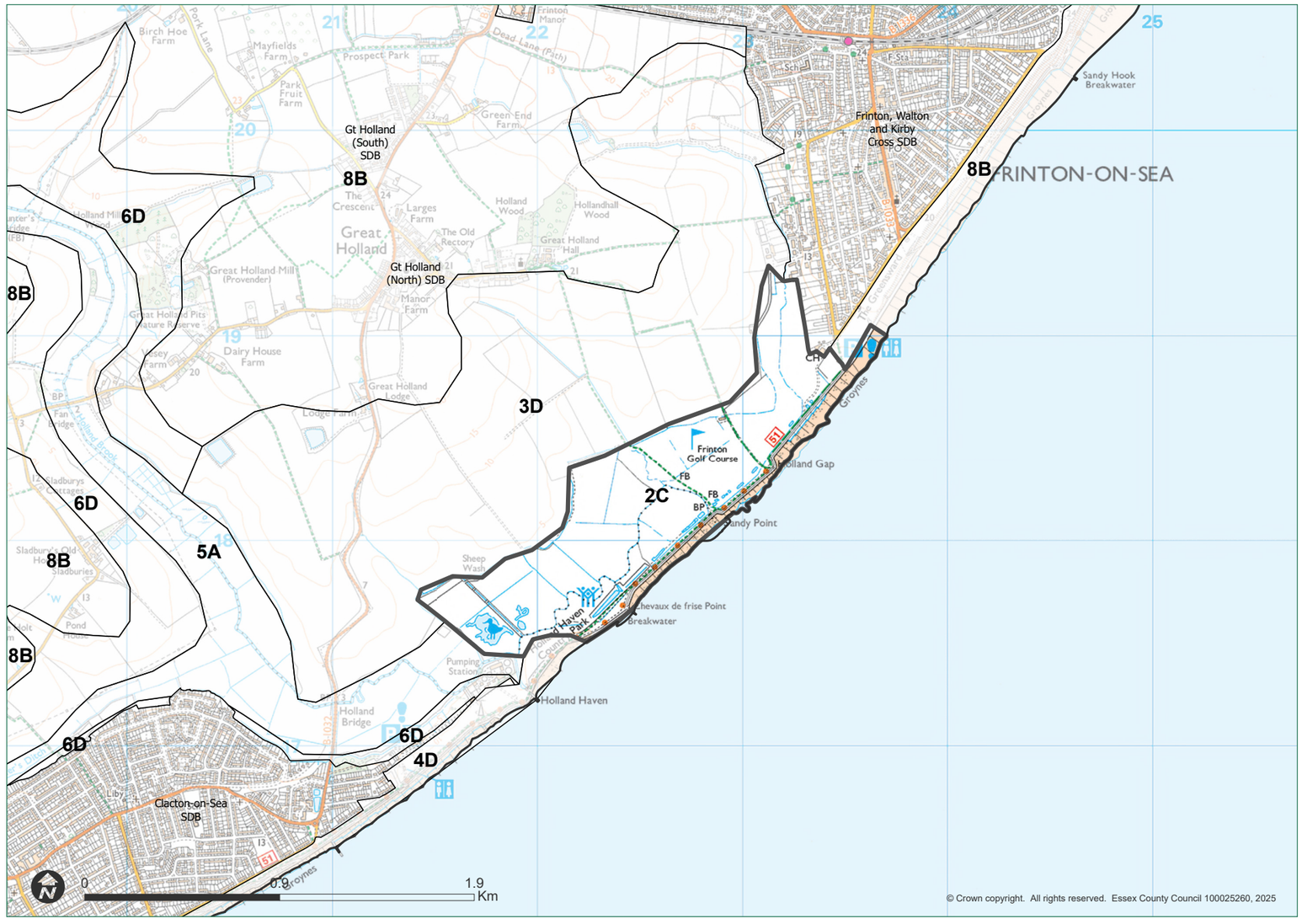

Figure 63: Location of LCA 2C.

Key Characteristics

- Small character area on the coastal edge separating Clacton and Frinton.
- Former open estuarine marsh associated with Holland Brook, enclosed by a sea wall in the 17th century.
- Concrete sea wall withstands the eroding forces of the sea and a series of groynes and breakwaters along the coastal side of the wall protects the sandy beach.
- Golf course occupies part of former grazing marsh, with straight ditches and meandering creeks remaining throughout the golf course.
- A golf club house along with a toilet block are the only built features, resulting in a remote and tranquil character.
- Water levels in Holland Haven Country Park have been raised in order to attract wildfowl and waders.
- Long views over the coastal landscape from the sea wall and from Great Holland.
- Known archaeological remains include a red hill and defensive structures.
- Most of this Landscape Character Area is covered by the Holland Haven Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Description

Originating as saltmarsh, *Holland Haven* is an area of drained coastal marshland between Clacton and Frinton. It was formerly open estuarine marsh associated with Holland Brook. This is an exposed length of coast where two lines of sea wall are visible, with the innermost probably representing the 17th-century reclamation line, built to withstand the eroding forces of the sea. A series of groynes and breakwaters along the coastal side of the sea wall help to keep the sandy beach from eroding into the sea.

The landscape comprises open grassland over intertidal deposits which was historically managed as grazing marsh. Bodies of open water lie within the marsh and parallel to the sea wall. *Holland Haven* consists of a series of coastal grasslands and willow-lined water courses which stand out as landscape features. Elements of the original creeks still survive within the landscape, coupled with straight drainage ditches.

The marshes are of enormous value for wildlife and have been recognised as a Biological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), with its previous designation as a Local Wildlife Site (LoWS) removed. This is a reclaimed estuarine saltmarsh and freshwater marsh representing an outstanding example of freshwater-brackish water transition. The site forms the southernmost grassland wildlife corridor of the Holland Brook stream valley. The SSSI's 'Ditches and Vascular Plant Assemblage' feature has been assessed by Natural England (2012) as being in 'Favourable' condition, though a pressure identified was 'Unknown Sources of Water Pollution'. The continuation of the grassland corridor into the upper reaches of Holland Brook increases its value as a habitat. Part of this area is still being grazed, and the eastern part of the former grazing marsh is now managed as a golf course, hiding the natural grassland character, though straight ditches and creeks remain.

The area between Holland Brook and the coastline in the south-east of this Landscape Character Area (LCA), is covered by Holland Haven Country Park as well as the SSSI. Water levels have been raised in order to attract wildfowl and waders to overwinter and breed. The Country Park features a large brackish pond surrounded by club rush and reeds, as well as a complex of dykes, contributing to aquatic insect life. The inland marshes are overlooked by bird hides and cattle graze on the coastal grasslands, which are cut for hay. It is managed to conserve the



Figure 64: There are long views over the open landscape from the sea wall.

landscape, coastal grazing marsh and wildlife quality of the area whilst providing for the quiet enjoyment of visitors.

Known archaeological remains consist of a red hill and defensive structures, reflecting the coastal nature of the locality. These structures include an early-20th-century gun emplacement at Chevaux de Frise Point, as well as a pillbox set into the sea wall, though these are located just outside of this character area.

The coastal location of this LCA makes it particularly vulnerable to sea level rise due to climate change. The Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan (2010) identifies that, at Holland Haven, existing coastal defences are under pressure. It notes that a landward realignment would provide a more sustainable long-term solution by reducing this pressure and allowing the coastline to evolve more naturally. However, the situation is complex and sensitive, and the short- and the medium-term policy is to maintain the existing frontline. Beyond 2055, some form of 'Managed Realignment' may be necessary, which would impact the Holland Haven Country Park and the Frinton-on-Sea Golf Course. The realignment would create new intertidal habitats and opportunities for new forms of tourism and recreation, although the impact on tourism and recreation is difficult to quantify.

The ecosystem services this LCA provides, as identified in National Character Area (NCA) 81, include Regulating services through climate regulation, as significant carbon storage is provided by extensive areas of salt marsh, reedbeds, mudflats



Figure 66: The Holland Haven Marshes are of enormous value for wildlife and have been recognised as a Biological SSSI.

and grazing marsh, and Cultural services through recreation and a sense of place or inspiration through the flat, open and expansive estuarine landscape where distinctive shallow creeks and reclaimed grazing marsh provide a strong sense of remoteness and skyscapes dominate the views.

There is good public access to this coastal area with a Public Right of Way (PRoW) and bridleway following ditches down to the coast, from where they run along the inner side of the sea wall. The PRoW along the sea wall can also be used by cyclists. There is also a footpath along the sea wall allowing views across the open landscape over the flat grassland, and with wide sea views. These estuarine marshes were historically devoid of development. This is still true today, except for the golf club house, the thatched toilet block, and a line of colourful beach huts along part of the coastal edge of the golf course at Frinton, This results in a landscape with a remote, tranquil character which contrasts with the adjacent urban areas.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Holland Haven Marshes	1006349	SSSI
Holland Haven	n/a	LNR

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Holland Brook, Marshes and Frinton on Sea	Coastal Protection Belt
Holland Haven Country Park	Country Park

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Frinton and Walton 2024	n/a	Conservation Area

Change

- Ongoing pressure for built development on the edges of existing settlements, for example on the edges of Frinton.
- Ongoing gradual urbanisation of the rural environment through piecemeal 'improvements' to roads, car parks and facilities.
- Onshore development, such as moorings, launching areas, social facilities and parking, linked to offshore activities such as boating and jet-skiing.
- Potential impact of the development of offshore facilities such as renewable energy developmen and mineral extraction, and effect on the view from the marshes and requirements for associated onshore infrastructure.
- Ongoing pressure from climate change and vulnerability to impact of sea level rise.
- Further agricultural intensification leading to loss of grazing marsh, plus impact of run-off from arable areas/ golf course on sensitive habitats.
- Built development - particularly encroachment of the urban edges of Clacton and Frinton leading to loss of habitats/landscape loss.
- Previous loss of sea wall and ditch habitats through the upgrading of sea defences.
- Potential impact of development on adjacent coastal slopes or skyline (3D: Holland Coastal Slopes) – visual impact on sense of remoteness plus effects of changes in hydrology/run-off and light pollution.
- Potential smell impact of the nearby sewage works, which are located to the south-west of this LCA.
- The tall London Port Authority Radio Tower, located south of the sewage works just outside LCA 2C, is widely visible in the surrounding open, flat landscape. It is a significant landmark which can be seen from Frinton.
- The proposed route of onshore cable corridor for the Five Estuaries/North Falls (VE/NF) projects makes landfall in this LCA.



Figure 67: London Port Authority Radio Tower.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the open, undeveloped character and valuable wetland habitats of the coastal marshes.
- Resist further small-scale, incremental recreational development by piecemeal upgrades to roads, car parks, and facilities, which would diminish the natural character.
- Promote the conservation of the remaining grazing marshes and consider extending this habitat through the re-establishment of grassland and reintroduction of grazing management where appropriate, and encourage the use of opportunities identified in Environmental Land Management Schemes or Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Encourage the management of golf course roughs to enhance value for nature conservation.
- Conserve the rural character of the landscape by resisting further encroachment of urban or suburban development and avoiding, or the sensitive managing of, road upgrades such as new signage, modern streetlamps, line painting, and widening that would result in gradual urbanisation of the rural landscape.
- Buildings in the open landscape should remain low-lying, except where taller structures are required for navigational aids or landmarks. In the drained marshes wood is the most appropriate construction material, with thatch providing a suitable roofing option.
- Retain the open character of the marshes by restricting planting to low-growing scrubby species typically found in the local landscape. Screening using tall or ornamental species is not appropriate.
- Consider impact of change in adjacent landscapes such as the Coastal Slopes (3D) and River Floodplains (5A).
- Seek to avoid the use of pesticides or herbicides that could affect water quality.
- Consider the impact of the potential realignment of sea defence upgrades on tourism and recreation.
- Conserve open landscape within the Coastal Protection Belt in order to protect open, undeveloped coastline, prevent inappropriate development, and manage flood/ erosion risk. Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCA 2D: Hamford Drained Marshes and Islands

Historically dominated by coastal grazing marsh, the *Hamford Drained Marshes and Islands* illustrate good survival of features characteristic of the drained marsh landscape including open horizons, long views with big skies and a sense of 'remoteness', though this rural, remote character has been progressively eroded by the gradual expansion of built development, particularly around Walton, and intensification of agricultural land use. The arable fields, grazing marsh, reed-lined ditches and open water bodies provide a cohesive visual unit that form an important setting to the open marshes of LCA 1D.

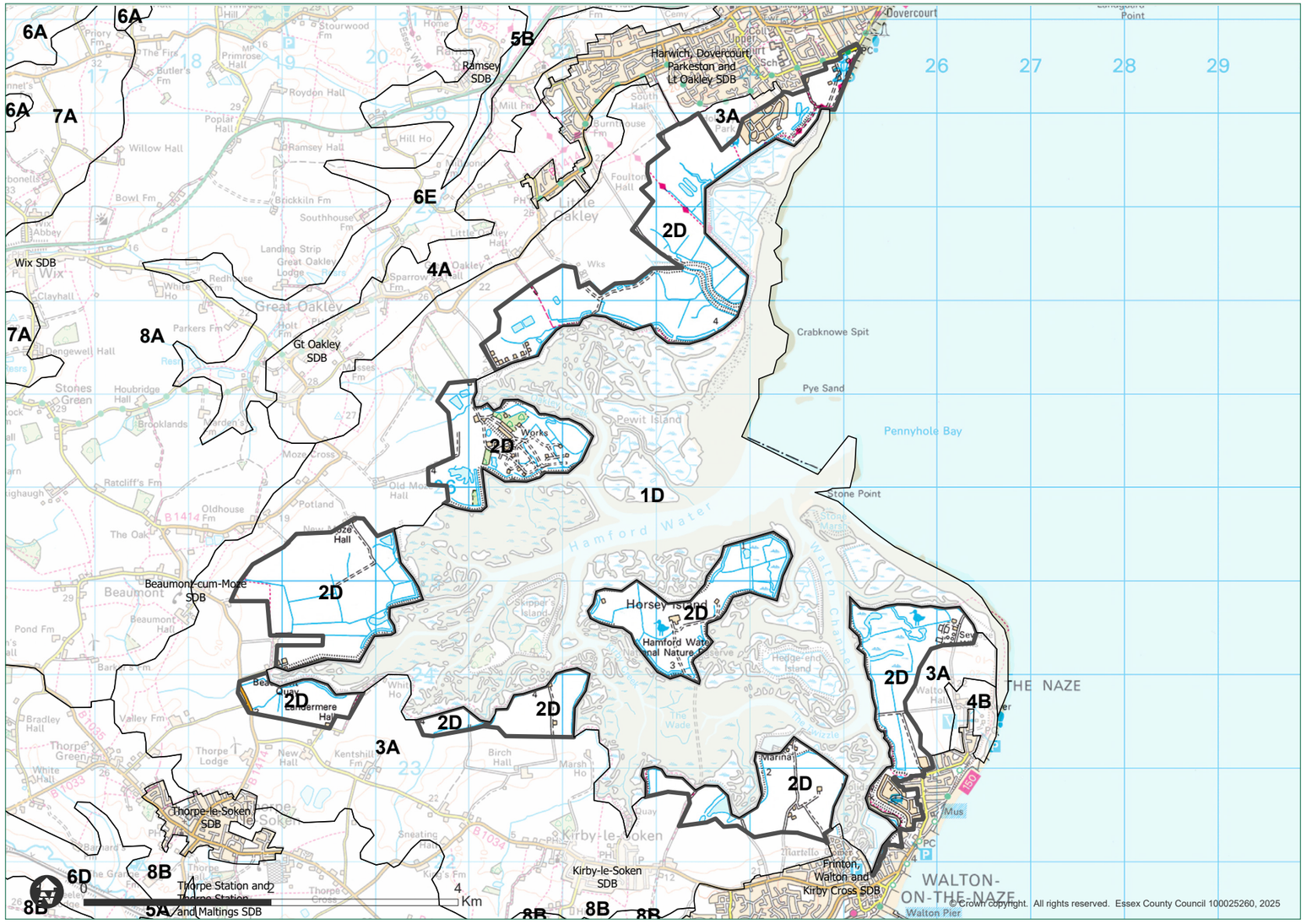

Figure 68: Location of LCA 2D.

Key Characteristics

- Drained and enclosed in the late 17th century, this former saltmarsh borders Hamford Water and incorporates the 'Walton Backwaters'.
- Enclosed by the gently shelving *Hamford Coastal Slopes*.
- Expansive landscape of flat alluvial grasslands intercepted by reed-lined drainage ditches and scattered patches of low-lying scrub. Land use is a mixture of improved grassland and large-scale arable cultivation.
- Strong sense of remoteness, with enclosure created by the surrounding coastal slopes forming a strong rural backdrop.
- Communication routes are formed by informal tracks which terminate at a quay, dock or landing stage.
- Distracting features on the edges of Walton and Harwich include caravan parks, sewage works and sports grounds.
- Includes Horsey Island, accessible by a causeway, and Bramble Island, now an island in name only.

Description

The Hamford Drained Marshes and Islands landscape character area (LCA) includes the drained marshes bordering Hamford Water, also known as the 'Walton Backwaters'. The geology comprises tidal mud flat deposits, with an outcrop of London Clay forming the backbone of Horsey Island. The marshes which form this character area are characterised by their flat, alluvial grasslands intercepted by reed-lined drainage ditches and scattered patches of low-lying scrub.

The field boundaries comprise drainage ditches, mainly without banks or hedges, some following the sinuous course of former creeks. There has been very little boundary loss since the 1950s, although wetland scrapes and reservoirs have been created for nature conservation on Horsey Island. Intensive agriculture is now the most common land use, with improved grassland and large-scale arable cultivation across much of the former saltmarsh. Large harvesters stir up great clouds of chaff and dust in these fields during late summer.

These marshes were drained and enclosed in the late 17th century by the excavation of a borrow dyke and construction of a continuous clay sea wall to eliminate the risk of flooding. The sea wall now forms a coastal footpath along much of its length, popular with walkers and birdwatchers. The remoteness of the Hamford Marsheshas made the area suitable for hazardous industrial activities, most notably the Great Oakley Works explosives factory on Bramble Island. Bramble Island is a spit of former salt marsh, now enclosed by sea walls and connected to the mainland. It has an open and flat aspect, although there is considerable scrub and tree cover around the modern buildings of the explosives factory on the north-west side of the island. A significant part of Bramble Island is covered by Hamford Water Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Horsey Island, accessible by a causeway, is a privately owned island with a single farmhouse. The island is grazed and managed for wildlife. Its improved grass fields provide feeding and roosting sites for the Hamford Water flock of Brent geese and for many other bird species. Horsey Island is included within the Hamford Water SSSI and National Nature Reserve, and its importance for birds is reflected in its inclusion within Hamford Water's Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar designations.



Figure 69: Views inland of the sea wall near Beaumont Quay.

The units of the Hamford Water SSSI within LCA 2D are comprised of Horsey Island and Bramble Island, and were assessed by Natural England in 2012 as being in 'Favourable' condition. On Horsey Island, areas of coastal grazing marsh and water-filled ditches are managed by grazing with sheep and water level control. Some areas are left ungrazed to provide diversity in sward structure. On Bramble Island, the unit is managed through rotational cutting of grassland areas, as agreed with Natural England. As identified by Natural England, the pressures that could affect Hamford Water SSSI are 'Recreational Disturbance', 'Strandline Management', and 'Unknown Sources of Water Pollution'.

Barnes Spinney LoWS, nestled between a caravan holiday park and the Walton urban area, is a former garden and forms a mosaic habitat of grassland, scrub with trees and a small pond near the western boundary. Beaumont Marsh LoWS, at the western side of this LCA, is a section of grassland currently grazed by sheep, and also contains a pond. It is the only remnant of grazing marsh in the area, although formerly all of the surrounding land would have been such a grassland. Shallow ditches and open grassland sward support various flora and fauna. Beaumont Bridge Verge at the furthest western edge of the LCA has been designated a LoWS due to its population of Hog's Fennel (*Peucedanum officinale*), which is nationally a very rare species.

Sea walls are the dominant historic landscape features around the fringes of Hamford Water. The landscape is marked by old jetties, quays and trackways, many of which terminate at



Figure 70: Looking south from the exposed road to Titchmarsh Marina, residential development on the northern edge of Walton is clearly visible on the crest of the Hamford Coastal Slopes.

a quay, dock or landing stage, highlighting the importance of access to and from the sea and the relationship between this and adjacent dryland areas. Most of the quays are now disused, but were important in the transport of grain, lime and coal before the arrival of the railway. They include Old Moze Dock, Great Oakley Dock and Kirby Quay.

The area has extremely high archaeological potential with recorded finds and features ranging from the Palaeolithic to modern, including prehistoric flint artefacts and around a dozen red hills. Medieval and post-medieval periods are represented by a variety of finds and features including ceramics, earthwork enclosures, decoys, hulks, and wharves. Two World War II bombing decoys on the southern shore of Hamford Water are Scheduled Monuments and evidence the area's extensive defences during WWII due to its proximity to the naval port at Harwich, which included heavy anti-aircraft gun batteries, bombing decoys, and anti-landing ditches.

The landscape of Horsey Island, particularly on the east side, contains fleets and other natural depressions that survive in areas of grassland and provide evidence of former creeks and saltmarsh prior to the construction of the sea wall. The sea walls are the dominant historic landscape feature on the island, but the well-preserved earthworks of a decoy pond on the east side of the island are also a significant feature. 'Stetch' cultivation earthworks are also present. On Bramble Island the dominant historic landscape feature are the sea walls, but the blast mounds and other earthworks of the early-20th-century explosive factory are also a significant visual feature. The complex of earthworks, structures and buildings are an important resource of industrial archaeology, although the site is still in use.

Accessibility to the landscape is limited and much of the shoreline of Hamford Water has restricted access due to an absence of footpaths, private land ownership, and industrial activity. The King Charles III England Coastal Path route follows most of the existing PRoW route over the sea wall, but significant lengths of the 'Walton Mere to Beaumont Quay' and 'Beaumont Quay to Dovercourt Sports Ground' stretches are further inland and off the sea wall. This is to protect sensitive features from disturbance, as well as for public safety, as significant areas of the coastal margin at and around Bramble Island's working industrial site are covered by the Explosive Regulations Act 2014 and currently not publicly accessible.

The proposal for the Harwich port expansion project 'Freeport East' includes a new 100 hectare Wildlife Sanctuary at Little Oakley (LCA 2D) to offset the reclamation of Bathside Bay, which comprises the creation of a fresh/brackish water habitat and managed realignment of coastal flood defences at Little Oakley on the edge of Hamford Water.

The boat masts at Titchmarsh Marina make it a landmark of the Walton Backwaters. The lines in the wind are an audible feature contributing to the sense of place of the area.

Although settlement across this LCA remains limited overall, recent development includes Titchmarsh Marina, a sewage treatment works on the Naze peninsula, isolated residential properties, and modern buildings associated with the explosives works on Bramble Island. The flat, open landscape of the drained marshes has seen expansion of urban development from towns such as Walton, across the former 'Walton Gap' to the Naze, resulting in the obstruction of views to the Walton Backwaters.



Figure 71: Expansive landscape with reed-lined drainage ditches.

The expansion of Walton has resulted in the merging of Walton and Frinton. Caravan parks, sewage works and sports grounds on the edges of Walton and Harwich are now typical of the drained marsh landscape. The expansion of residential development from Harwich has reached the northern edge of this LCA and, following the conversion of a caravan park to residential development in Walton, a small part of the southern side of this LCA now features housing.

The coastal location of this LCA makes it particularly vulnerable to sea level changes due to climate change. The Shoreline Management Plan's preferred policy for this area is to 'Hold the Line' in most places, though 'Managed Realignment' may be necessary at Little Oakley, Horsey Island and the Walton Channel where landward realignment would create a more sustainable solution by reducing the pressure from the channels on the defences and moving towards a more natural estuary, with increase of tidal prism and intertidal area. This potential realignment would however come at the expense of some agricultural land, and footpaths on top of the sea banks to be breached, particularly at Little Oakley, would need to be sustained, for example through re-routing. It would affect partly designated freshwater habitats on Horsey Island and at Walton Channel, but would also create new intertidal habitats. It would have some impact on heritage assets, particularly on Horsey Island, which will require mitigation by design and recording as part of the implementation of the plan. The impact of the potential realignments on tourism and recreation (including sailing) is difficult to quantify.

This LCA provides a number of ecosystem services, as identified in National Character Area (NCA) 81, including Cultural services through a sense of place and inspiration, tranquillity, recreation, and biodiversity, and Regulating services through carbon storage for climate regulation, and regulating coastal flooding and erosion by reducing wave action impact.



Figure 72: Solar panels between Titchmarsh Marina and Walton-on-the-Naze.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Hamford Water	UK0030377	SAC
Hamford Water	UK9009131	SPA
Hamford Water	UK11028	Ramsar
Hamford Water	1001010	SSSI
Hamford Water	1006070	NNR
Barnes Spinney	Te122	LoWS
Beaumont Bridge Verge	Te106	LoWS
Beaumont Marsh	Te108	LoWS
John Weston Nature Reserve *(Essex Wildlife Trust)*	n/a	NR

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Walton Backwaters, Horsey Island & Irlams Beach	Coastal Protection Belt

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
World War II bombing decoy HA2 Kirby-le-Soken	1019882	Scheduled Monument

Change

- Pressure for built development on the edges of existing settlements, for example on the edges of Walton and Harwich. Martello Caravan Park on the northern fringe of Walton has been demolished (2016) and replaced by modern residential and retail development.
- Pressure for future development, for example reservoirs, marina expansions, and industrial developments.
- Gradual urbanisation of the rural environment through piecemeal 'improvements' to roads, car parks, facilities, and the suburbanisation of boundaries.
- Agricultural intensification leading to loss of grazing marsh.
- Onshore development, such as moorings, launching areas, social facilities and parking, linked to offshore activities such as boating and jet-skiing.
- The proposed route of onshore cable corridor for Tarchon (NSIP) project makes landfall in this LCA.
- Development on the adjacent coastal slopes and skyline that impacts on the remote character of the marshes.
- Creation of nature conservation sites and areas of rewilding, including creation of scrapes, generation of scrub and less intensively managed field margins.
- Loss of sea wall and ditch habitats through upgrading sea defences.
- This LCA is vulnerable to sea level change and flood risks due to climate change. Policies in the Shoreline Management Plan could come at the expense of some agricultural land and impact PRoWs, designated freshwater habitats, and heritage assets.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Promote the conservation of the open, undeveloped character and valuable wetland habitats of the coastal marshes.
- Encourage restoration of areas affected by intensive agriculture by the re-establishment of grassland and reintroduction of grazing management.
- Ensure restoration of this landscape following construction works for Tarchon (NSIP) project onshore route.
- Conserve the rural character of the landscape by avoiding the use of concrete kerbs, streetlights, tarmac, and other features that would result in gradual urbanisation of the rural landscape. Visitor facilities, such as car parks, that are of a rural, informal design will have least impact on the remote nature of the landscape.
- Consider impact of change on adjacent landscapes such as the open Hamford Water Marshes (LCA 1D).
- Consider long-term plans to relocate caravan parks, holiday complexes and industrial works to less sensitive landscapes. This would restore views that have been obscured by development, e.g. in the 'Walton Gap'.
- Ensure that any development on the adjacent coastal slopes and skyline that form a setting of the marshes (LCA 3A) does not adversely affect the remote and peaceful character of Hamford Water. Looking south from the exposed road to Titchmarsh Marina, residential development on the northern edge of Walton is clearly visible on the crest of the Hamford Coastal Slopes and further development on the crest should be resisted.
- Conserve the distinctive character of the drained marshes by using wood and red brick as the primary building materials, and by retaining traditional local roofing materials such as clay tile or thatch.
- Retain the open character of the marshes by restricting planting to low-growing scrubby species typically found in the local landscape. Screening using tall or ornamental species is not appropriate.
- Conserve clay sea walls and borrow dykes where possible, minimising interference with habitats when upgrading works to sea defences.
- Conserve the ecosystem services this LCA provide, as outlined for NCA 81.
- Encourage/promote restoration of areas affected by intensive agriculture by the re-establishment of grassland and reintroduction of grazing management via Environmental Land Management schemes or similar.
- Seek opportunities for habitat enhancement and restoration to compensate for any loss of habitat through defence upgrading or management such as referred to in the Shoreline Management Plan.
- Encourage opportunities identified in the Local Nature Reserve Strategy such as the creation and restoration of coastal grazing marsh, and utilisation of hydrological grazing.
- Conserve open landscape within the Coastal Protection Belt in order to protect open, undeveloped coastline, prevent inappropriate development, and manage flood/erosion risk. Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCT 3

Coastal Slopes

Introduction

The Coastal Slopes landscape type forms the transition between the low-lying Drained Coastal Marsh and the higher ground of the Coastal Ridges and Peninsulas or Clay Plateaux. There are often magnificent views from the coastal slopes over the adjacent lowlands and seascape.

Landscape Character Areas:

- 3A Hamford Coastal Slopes
- 3B Brightlingsea Coastal Slopes
- 3C St Osyth Coastal Slopes
- 3D Holland Coastal Slopes

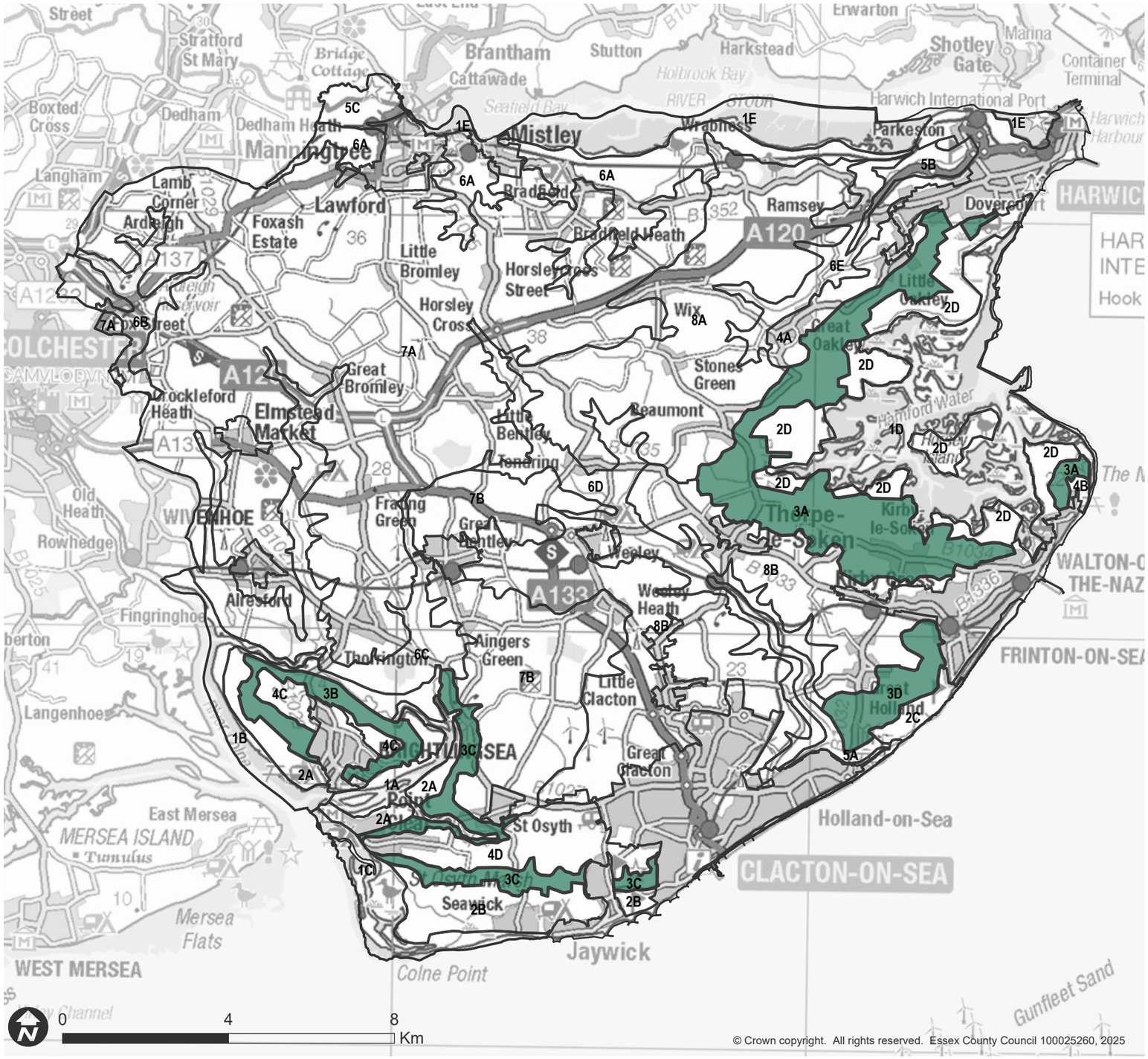

Figure 73: Locations of LCAs within LCT 3.

3.3 Landscape Character Type 3: Coastal Slopes

Physical Influences

The lower boundary of the coastal slopes marks the end of the flat marshland where the land begins to rise towards the 5m contour. The crest line of the slope forms the upper boundary at between 20 and 25m AOD, often forming a prominent skyline. The coastal slopes have been eroded from London Clay and have characteristic smooth, concave slopes, which descend to the flat marshes below. They frequently contain pockets of sands and gravels.

The virulent strain of Dutch elm disease that hit Tendring in the 1960s caused a major change in the local landscape character – many of the hedgerows on the slopes are now littered with skeletons of dead elm trees.

Human Influences

This landscape type is underlain by London Clay, sometimes overlain by Kesgrave sands and gravels, which slopes gently down to the marsh or former marsh edge, for instance, at Hamford Water. It is an agricultural landscape, open in aspect, with a fieldscape comprising a mix of rectilinear fields of ancient origin and some later enclosure described in Domesday records from 1086. It has suffered from moderate boundary loss, but the modern landscape retains much of this historic pattern which enhances the smooth concave topography of the slopes.

Settlement Form and Pattern

Settlement was historically dispersed with isolated manorial halls, cottages and farms (including the string of 'wick' farms on the dryland boundary with the former marshland at the head of dead-end tracks) but with some bigger nucleated villages such as Great Oakley and the Sokens. Great Holland has been formed by the gradual infilling of dispersed settlement in the older village and around the heath by the end of the 19th century. A network of narrow lanes connects the historic settlements and tends to follow the higher ground and ridges.



Figure 74: Brightlingsea Coastal Slopes (3B).

LCA 3A: Hamford Coastal Slopes

Overall, the *Hamford Coastal Slopes* exhibit characteristics typical of the *Coastal Slopes* landscape type, including the smooth concave landform, rural agricultural landscape with manor halls, and open panoramic view across Hamford Water and a sense of remoteness. The gently shelving slopes provide a cohesive visual unit that form an important setting to the Hamford Water marshes (LCAs 1D and 2D).

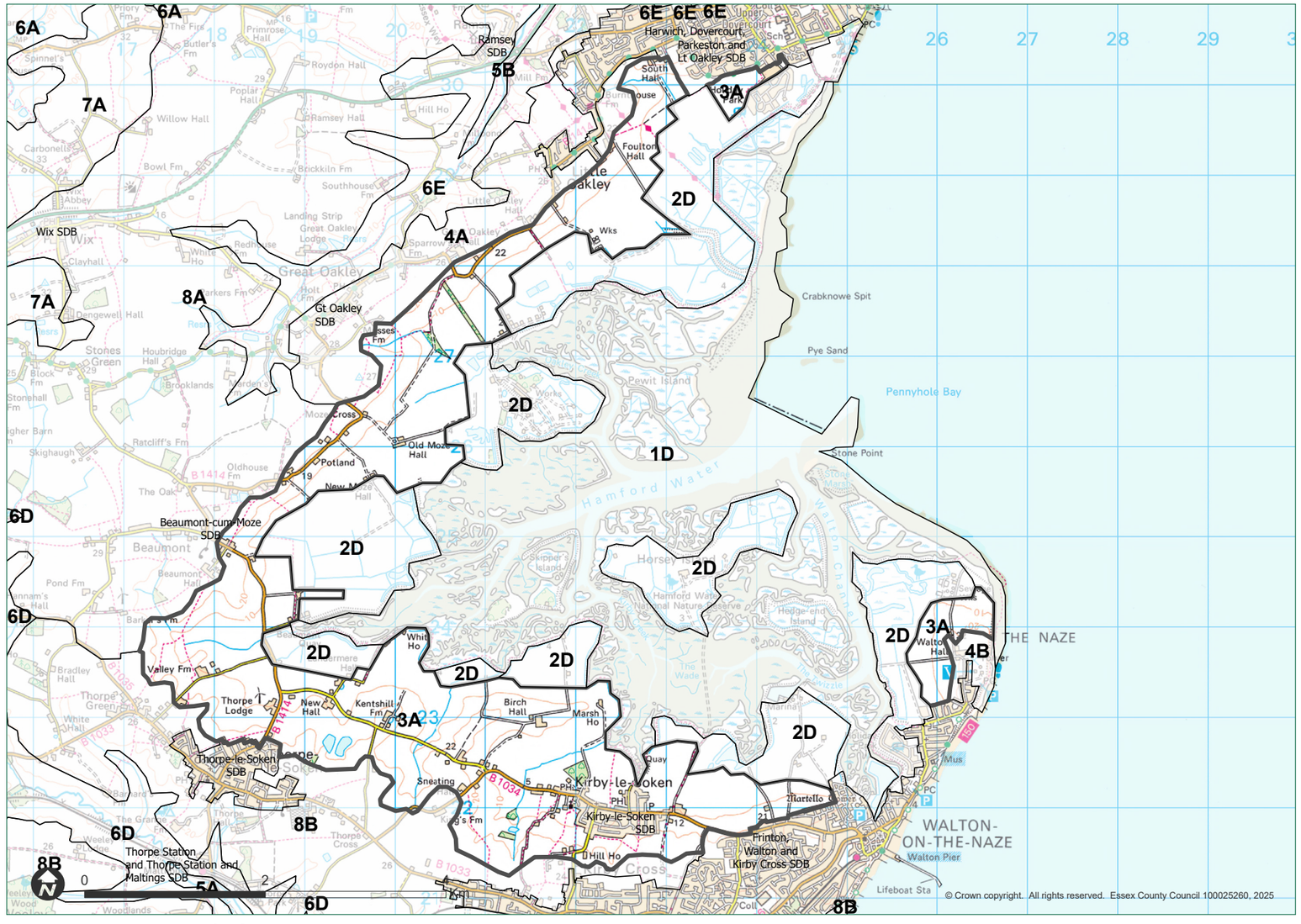

Figure 75: Location of LCA 3A.

Key Characteristics

- Gently sloping land encircling, and forming the setting of, the open marshes of Hamford Water.
- Large-scale regimented fields typical of late enclosure are divided by low, scrubby and intermittent hedgerows.
- The settlement pattern is dispersed and comprises scattered farmsteads and manorial halls.
- The historic settlement of Kirby-le-Soken is located along the southern edge of Hamford Water.
- The urban fringes of Harwich and Frinton have expanded onto the coastal slopes overlooking Hamford Water.
- Open and panoramic views over Hamford Water towards Harwich.
- Historic quaysides accessible by narrow lanes running downslope are found at the margin of the coastal marsh.

Description

The *Hamford Coastal Slopes* character area is a gently sloping landform encircling and forming the setting of the protected open marshes of Hamford Water. The boundary of the area is defined by the crest of the slope and is a visual boundary. Small streams flow between fields to drain into Hamford Water, and in flatter areas standing water has accumulated forming ponds. The underlying geology of London Clay gives rise to heavy, waterlogged soils which have been improved and intensively cultivated.

The landscape is open in aspect, sloping down to the marsh edge of Hamford Water. The fieldscape comprises a mixture of rectilinear fields of ancient origin and some later enclosure, which has suffered from moderate boundary loss, and enhances the smooth-sweeping landform and perspective of the slopes that encircle Hamford Water. The fields are predominantly arable and divided by low, scrubby and intermittent hedgerows. Tree cover is restricted to shelter belts and small mixed copses close to farms, with belts of poplar distinctive features. A small area of this Landscape Character Area (LCA), located on the Naze peninsula, is covered by several designations for Hamford Water: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA), National Nature Reserve (NNR), and Ramsar site.

The pattern of dispersed farms along the coastal slopes is distinctive. These farms are often on the sites of old manor halls, dating to the time when grazing rights were owned by the inland manors abutting the marshlands. Examples of such halls are Old Moze Hall, New Moze Hall, Landermere Hall, Birch Hall and Kirby Hall. Linear greens formed focal points. Kirby-le-Soken is an historic settlement, located along the southern edge of Hamford Water. The suffix 'Le Soken' dates from the Saxon period and was applied to villages granted special privileges of tenure. Kirby-le-Soken was the most important of these and contains some important buildings including Kirby Hall and its church, the tower of which is a landmark, as well as the now derelict 19th-century maltings.

The isolated halls and farmsteads are built in a great diversity of styles, but they are usually constructed from brick. Agricultural outbuildings are typically constructed from brick and weatherboarding and would have had clay tile roofs, although many have been replaced by modern buildings and cheaper



Figure 76: View to Kirby-le-Soken with long-distance views over Hamford Water towards the industrial port of Harwich.



Figure 77: View to new residential development.

materials. The village buildings of Kirby-le-Soken tend to be short terraces of cottages on the roadside and large houses set back from the road and rural terraces are typically one-and-a-half-storey cottages with dormer windows. Red brick or plastered brick are the dominant materials, gables are prominent, and roofs are usually clay tiled.

Narrow lanes, such as Quay Lane, lead down to the intertidal zone and small quaysides, for example Kirby, Beaumont and Landermere Quays, on the Walton Backwaters. From there, grain would have been transported out by Thames Barges and other traditional craft before the railway was brought to Tendring. A variety of medieval and post-medieval finds and features include ceramics, earthwork enclosures, decoys, hulks, wharves and industrial works such as the scheduled lime kiln and quay at the end of Beaumont Cut (in the neighbouring LCA 2D). Hamford Water is the setting for Arthur Ransome's Secret Water in which Island Road, which leads to Horsey Island, features.

The outskirts of Harwich, Walton and Frinton continue to expand onto the coastal slopes overlooking Hamford Water, including to the west of Low Road Dovercourt and at Elm Tree Avenue Kirby-Le-Soken. The north-east coastal corner of the character area from the 2001 assessment is judged not to fit within the general character of this LCA as it is within the settlement boundary of urban Harwich. The south-east corner is also judged not to fit as it is within the settlement boundary of urban Walton on the Naze. The boundary will be redrawn in these areas.

Roads, such as Landermere Road, tend to follow the contours of the coastal slopes, providing magnificent views over Hamford Water to Harwich and Felixstowe, both by day and night. Small lanes, such as Quay Lane, run perpendicular down the slopes to the old quays such as Beaumont Quay. Tranquillity is affected by noise from the B1034. A limited network of Public Rights of Way (PRoWs), including a small section of the Essex Way, crosses the character area near Foulton Hall, Little Oakley. The King Charles III England Coastal Path runs substantially along existing PRoWs or lanes, avoiding the marshland in the section from Beaumont Quay to Dovercourt Sports Ground, and runs along the sea wall from Walton Mere to Beaumont Quay.



Figure 78: Arable field north of Walton Road near Thorpe-le-Soken.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Hamford Water	UK9009131	SPA
Hamford Water	UK11028	Ramsar
Hamford Water	1001010	SSSI
Hamford Water	1006070	NNR

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Walton Backwaters, Horsey Island & Irlams Beach	Coastal Protection Belt

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Kirby-le-Soken	n/a	Conservation Area

Change

- Any changes in the landscape on the coastal slopes have the potential to be highly visible from Hamford Water e.g. south of Kirby and west of Walton.
- Expansion of residential built development onto the highly visible coastal slopes on the outskirts of Harwich, Walton and Frinton.
- Loss of elms in the past reducing sense of intimacy and enclosure.
- Intensification of agriculture creating potential run-off issues into the adjacent marshes.
- Loss of ecosystem services including biodiversity through built development.
- The proposed route of onshore cable corridor for Tarchon (NSIP) project makes landfall in this LCA.



Figure 79: Arable fields along a rural lane north of Walton Road near Thorpe-le-Soken.



Figure 80: Recent residential development on the outskirts of Walton-on-the-Naze.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the rural, tranquil character as a setting for Hamford Water by resisting further encroachment of built development into the setting of Hamford Water, including on the skyline at the crest of slopes.
- Promote conservation of the remaining hedgerows and copses and encourage management for biodiversity through land management and development control.
- Seek opportunities for enhancement of the hedgerow network and replanting of hedgerow trees including any actions identified in the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (2025) or subsequent document, or the Government's Environmental Land Management scheme.
- Conserve the ancient scattered rural settlement pattern by resisting and mitigating of urbanising elements such as lit approach roads or large areas of tarmac.
- Create, maintain and monitor new grassland habitats along road verges to create ecosystem services.
- Conserve the character of rural lanes and informal tracks that link dispersed farms and halls, ensuring new development uses existing roads and avoiding urbanising upgrades such as concrete kerbs or street lighting.
- The character and identity of the linear village of Kirby-le-Soken should be maintained. Incremental ribbon development would erode the rural village setting and result in a merger with the adjacent settlements of Kirby Cross and Walton.
- Conserve the traditional rural character by using red brick, black weatherboarding, and muted clay tiles, which are the typical materials for agricultural and rural buildings.
- Conserve the panoramic views across Hamford Water.
- Restrict use of pesticides and herbicides in areas that would result in polluting run-off into the adjacent marshes.
- Conserve open landscape within the Coastal Protection Belt in order to protect open, undeveloped coastline, prevent inappropriate development, and manage flood/erosion risk. Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.
- Restrict expansion of built development onto the highly sensitive crests of slopes, where it would be conspicuous on the skyline or restrict important views.
- Ensure restoration of the agricultural landscape, field hedgerows and other vegetation following construction works for Tarchon (NSIP) project onshore route.

LCA 3B: Brightlingsea Coastal Slopes

The *Brightlingsea Coastal Slopes* is a rural mixed farmland landscape with some remnants of ancient woodland which suffered severe loss of elms in the 1960s and has seen an intensification of agriculture. Overall, however, this LCA exhibits characteristics typical of the Coastal Slopes landscape type, including the gently sloping landform, rural agricultural landscape with manor halls and panoramic views. The gently shelving slopes provide a cohesive visual unit that form an important setting to the Colne Estuary and tributaries (LCAs 1A, 1B, 2A).

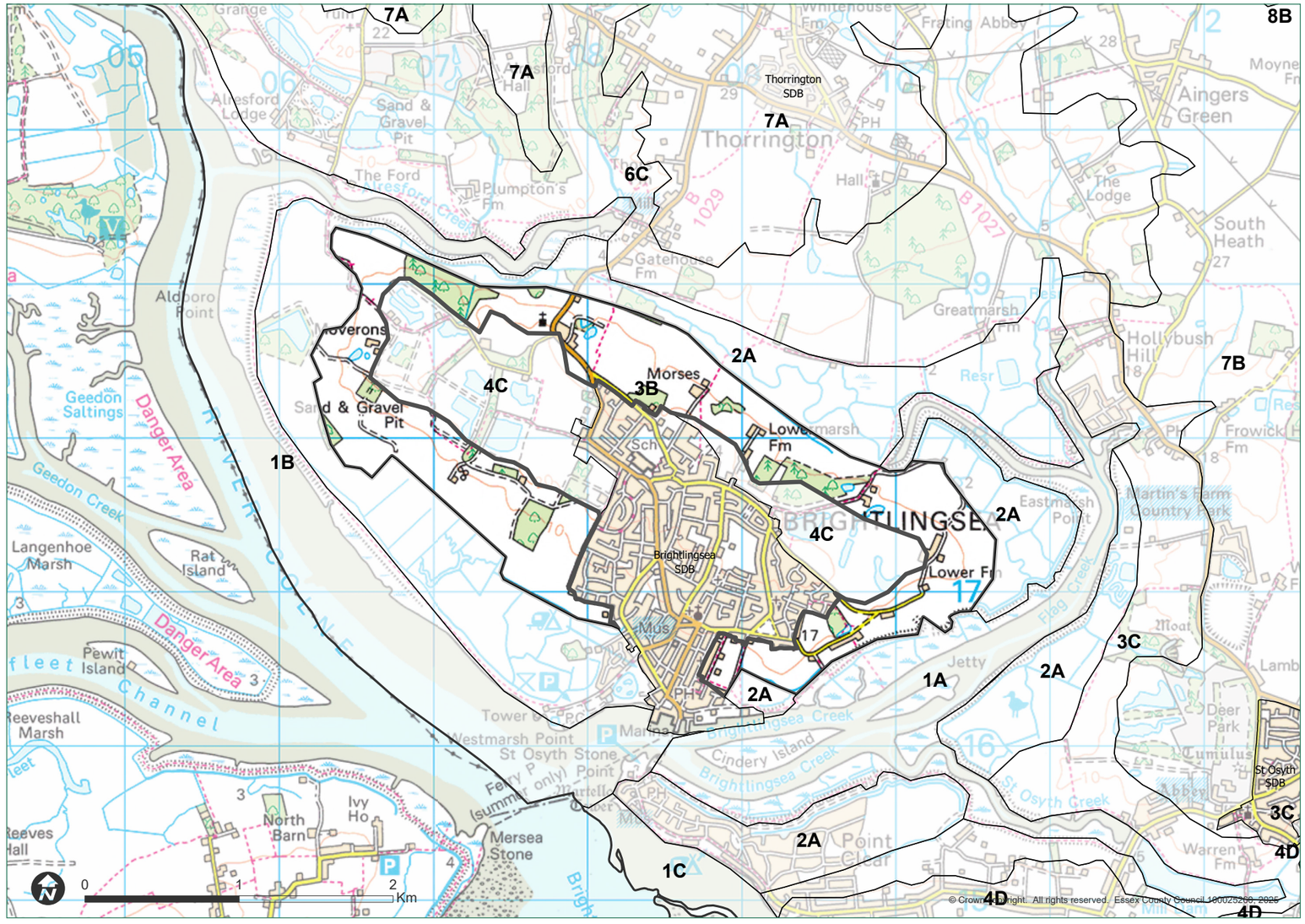

Figure 81: Location of LCA 3B.

Key Characteristics

- Coastal slopes surrounding Brightlingsea Island.
- Field pattern is dominated by a patchwork of large and small, often pastoral fields.
- Low-lying scrubby hedgerows interspersed by deciduous copses and areas of woodland.
- Dead-end lanes give access to scattered farms, some on the sites of old manor halls.
- Brightlingsea is a medieval settlement with historic links to the coast.
- Magnificent views over the Colne Estuary, Brightlingsea Creek, Flag Creek and Alresford Creek.
- Brightlingsea Church is a prominent historic landmark.
- Rural agricultural buildings are often long, low and constructed from red brick and black weatherboarding with muted clay tiles.

Description

The *Brightlingsea Coastal Slopes* are defined by the gently sloping land encircling *Brightlingsea Peninsula (*4C). The lower boundary is defined by the lower break in slope and borders the *Brightlingsea Drained Marshes* (2A). Small streams flow into the surrounding marshlands and ultimately into the River Colne. The underlying geology of London Clay gives rise to heavy, waterlogged soils which have been improved and cultivated.

The agricultural landscape is dominated by pasture, divided into fields which show great diversity in their size. The fieldscape to the north-east of Brightlingsea is largely irregular and of ancient origin. The slopes are also characterised by deciduous copses and mixed plantations, some associated with the designed landscape of Brightlingsea Hall, which provide a wooded backdrop to the marshes. Hedgerows are low-lying, scrubby and intermittent – typical of the exposed coastal slopes.

The pattern of dispersed farms of largely medieval origin along the coastal slopes is distinctive. Some of these farms are often on the sites of old manor halls, dating to the time when grazing rights were owned by the inland manors abutting the marshlands. Examples of such halls are Brightlingsea Hall and Lower Wapping Hall. Brightlingsea Hall and its Grade I 13th-century church are in a commanding position at the entrance to the Brightlingsea Peninsula. The church tower is a major landmark, visible from some 27km (17 miles) out to sea.

Thicks Wood and Wick's/Lodge Wood are designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) and classified as Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland and Ancient Woodland. The understorey has frequent blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and elder (*Sambucus nigra*) with an impoverished ground flora that would benefit from the resumption of coppicing, but does include Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*).

Increased urbanisation of Wick's and Lodge Woods LoWS should be avoided, as it would lead to greater disturbance to the woods even if access is not formally permitted. The construction of houses right up to the edge of a wood often leads to the tipping of garden waste, piecemeal moving of garden boundaries into the wood, vandalism and heavy trampling by trespassers.



Figure 82: Sloping fields of LCA 3B towards Brightlingsea Creek.



Figure 83: View over pastoral fields towards Alresford Creek, looking north from the All Saints Church churchyard, Brightlingsea.

Brightlingsea is an historic settlement with its core located to the south-east of the peninsula. It is a medieval town with a High Street flanked by ancient greens and lanes running from the High Street down the coastal slopes to the water's edge. These links with the water's edge were important for the trade of oysters, fish, salt, bricks and copperas (for use in dyeing textiles, manufacturing ink, creating medicines, and for use in gunpowder) before the advent of the railway. Most of the greens have been incorporated into the main fabric of Brightlingsea, although East End Green remains predominantly rural in character.

The south-east corner of the character area from the 2001 assessment does not fit within the general character of the LCA as it is essentially urban and within the settlement boundary of urban Brightlingsea. Built land within the settlement boundary is therefore no longer included within this LCA.

The outskirts of Brightlingsea continue to expand into the landscape of the coastal slopes overlooking the Colne Estuary, as well as into the adjacent landscape of the *Brightlingsea Peninsula* (4C). Recent development can be found along Robinson Road. A mixed-use development of retirement homes and lodges is proposed off East End Green but lies substantially in LCA 4C. There remain magnificent views over the Colne Estuary, Brightlingsea Creek, Flag Creek and Alresford Creek.

The Public Rights of Way network is very limited, except around the sea wall. The King Charles III England Coast Path skirts the character area in the south-east from Brightlingsea Hard to Stone Point. The route is not yet available for public use, however work to establish the route is currently taking place.

A substantial portion of the south and east of the character area lies within the Coastal Protection Belt. This is a local planning designation, designed to protect the open character of the undeveloped coastline but also prevent development in vulnerable coastal areas. Land to the west of Lodge Lane previously omitted from the designation has been reinstated in the adopted Tendring District Local Plan 2013-2033 and Beyond Section 2.



Figure 84: Local landmark All Saints Church, Brightlingsea.



Figure 85: View over 3B from near Moverons Farm.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
East End Green	Te46	LoWS
Robinson Road Ponds	Te47	LoWS
Thicks Wood	Te22	LoWS
Wicks/Lodge Wood	Te29	LoWS

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Colne Estuary, Brightlingsea & Alresford Creek	Coastal Protection Belt

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Brightlingsea Hall and All Saints Church	n/a	Conservation Area

Change

- Pressure for intensification of agricultural land including field expansion and hedgerow/tree loss.
- Loss of elms in the past reducing sense of intimacy and enclosure.
- Pressure for built development on the edges of Brightlingsea resulting in biodiversity and other ecosystem services loss.
- Loss of historic features such as greens, lanes and buildings through new residential development and infill, road upgrades and development of visitor facilities.
- Agricultural run-off into the adjacent coastal marshes.



Figure 86: Views from near Moverons Farm to the west over the slopes comprising open agricultural land. The River Colne and the Fingringhoe Wick Nature Discovery Park beyond are visible.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the existing rural character, historic features (including ancient woodlands) and panoramic views over adjacent landscapes.
- Conserve the biodiversity value and landscape character of the hedgerows and woodlands that provide important cover for wildlife and a backdrop to the Colne Estuary.
- Conserve the panoramic views across adjacent landscapes and consider providing more opportunities for views by creating viewpoints.
- Conserve the rural, tranquil character by resisting encroachment of built development into the setting of the quietest estuaries, particularly Alresford and Flag Creeks.
- Conserve the rural character of the lanes by resisting further road upgrades, such as straightening or lighting, wherever possible.
- Consider opportunities for restoration of the hedgerow network and replanting of hedgerow trees.
- Protect views to the tower of All Saints Church, which is an important landmark.
- Promote conservation of the remnant ancient deciduous woodland through e.g. the Government's current Environmental Land Management schemes.
- Promote opportunities identified in the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy through development management or partnership working.
- Seek to preserve historic links with the coast and conserve the setting of buildings along Brightlingsea seafront.
- Resist expansion of built development onto the highly sensitive crests of slopes where development would be conspicuous on the skyline or restrict important views.
- Conserve the rural built character by ensuring that agricultural buildings remain long, low structures constructed from red brick and black weatherboarding with muted clay tiles, while residential dwellings continue to use typical finishes such as red brick, coloured plaster, black or white weatherboarding, and clay roof tiles.
- Conserve open landscape within the Coastal Protection Belt in order to protect open, undeveloped coastline, prevent inappropriate development, and manage flood/ erosion risk. Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCA 3C: St Osyth Coastal Slopes

Suburbanisation on the outskirts of Clacton and Point Clear and hedgerow and tree loss due to agricultural intensification has impacted the rural mixed farmland landscape, which also contains some woodland remnants. However, overall, the *St Osyth Coastal Slopes* LCA exhibits characteristics typical of the *Coastal Slopes* LCT, including the gently sloping landform, rural agricultural landscape and coastal views. The gently shelving slopes provide a cohesive visual unit that form an important setting to the Drained Marshes LCAs 2A and 2B.

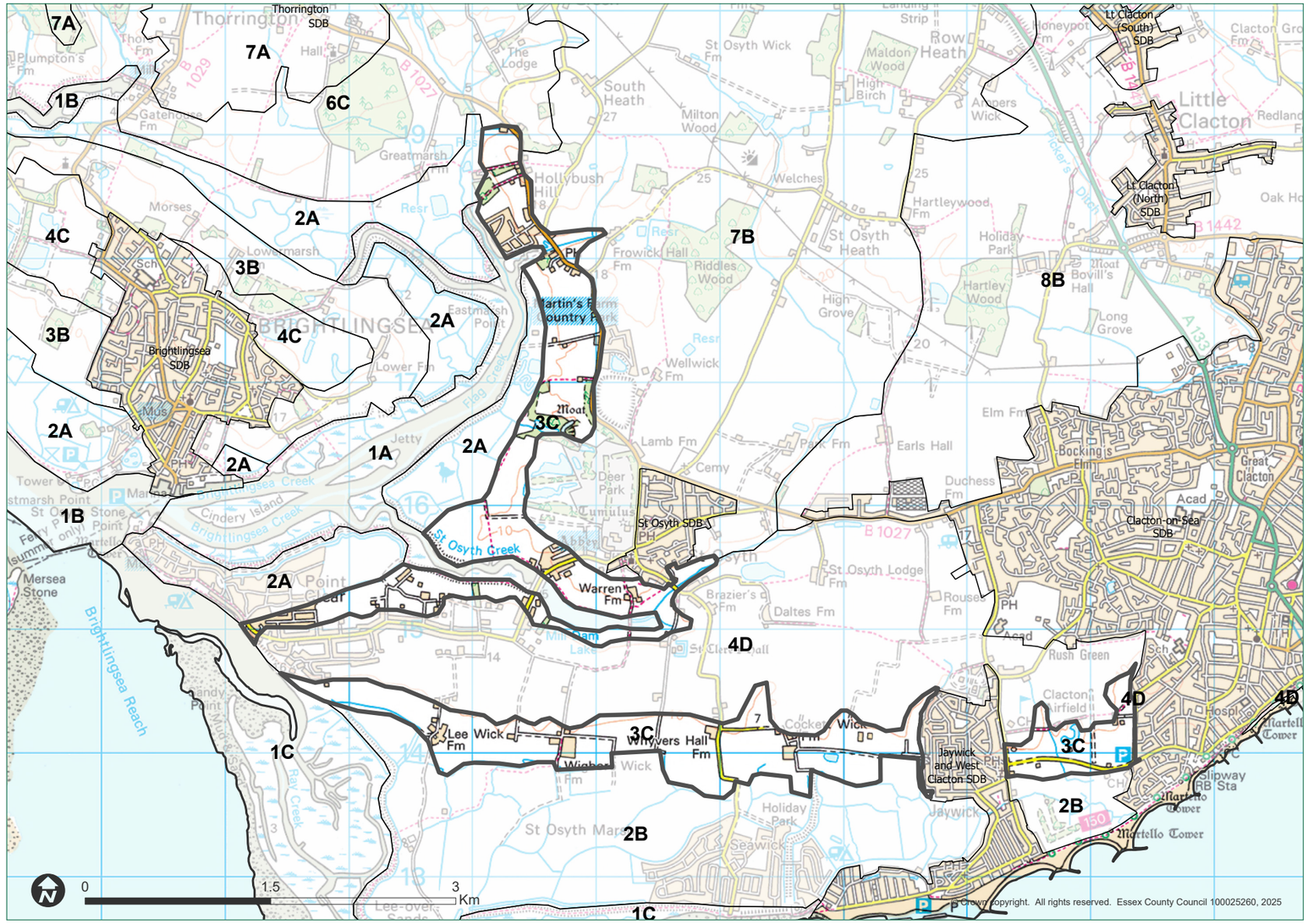

Figure 87: Location of LCA 3C.

Key Characteristics

- Narrow band of gently sloping land forming the setting to St Osyth and Brightlingsea Marshes.
- Rectilinear regular fields thought to be ancient in origin and divided by intermittent hedges dominate this largely open, arable landscape.
- Limited tree cover provided by shelter belts, small mixed farm copses and the designed landscape of St Osyth's Priory.
- The settlement pattern is distinctive, with isolated halls (many of them listed), farms ('Wicks') and cottages accessed via minor lanes often running down the slope.
- Rural agricultural buildings are often long, low and constructed from red brick and black weatherboarding with muted clay tiles.
- Suburbanisation on the outskirts of Clacton, Jaywick and Point Clear.
- The north of the zone features small-scale mineral extraction.
- Views over the adjacent marshes.

Description

The *St Osyth Coastal Slopes* is a narrow band of gently sloping land wrapping around the *St Osyth Coastal Ridge* (4D), forming the transition to the flat landscape of the *Brightlingsea Drained Marshes* (2A) and the *St Osyth Drained Marshes* (2B). Although the topography of this character area is relatively shallow, it does exhibit all the characteristics typical of the Coastal Slopes landscape type and provides an important setting to the lower lying marshes.

The landscape is dominated by rectilinear regular fields. There has been moderate post-1950 boundary loss throughout the area which has given rise to a large-scale regular field pattern previously thought to be indicative of late enclosure.

The underlying geology of London Clay gives rise to heavy, waterlogged soils which have been improved and cultivated, Kesgrave sands and gravels in the northern half, and river terrace gravels in the south. These are a sought-after resource and are extracted via large surface pits in the St Osyth area.

The St Osyth Pit is a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Consisting of only a small area (0.067 ha), it comprises an important sequence of Pleistocene deposits relating to the diversion of the Thames, assessed by Natural England in 2021 as 'Favourable', though noted to be mostly covered by brambles.

St Osyth Parkland Local Wildlife Site (LoWS) falls partially within landscape character area (LCA) 3C and is a rich and complex mosaic of marshy and semi-improved neutral and acid grassland, woodland, parkland, scrub and numerous ponds, including the following Essex BAP Priority Habitats: “Brownfield Sites”.

Martin's Farm Country Park was once a river route, then a gravel deposit, then a landfill, and now a country park with a gas collection system and views of Flag Creek.

Arable fields dominate the slopes, divided by low, scrubby and intermittent hedgerows. Tree cover is restricted to shelter belts and small mixed copses close to farms. The pattern of dispersed farms ('Wicks'), isolated halls (many of them listed), and cottages accessed via minor lanes often running down the slope, is distinctive. Many of the tracks in this LCA continue



Figure 88: Open views towards Jaywick and offshore wind turbines beyond.



Figure 89: Open views over agricultural fields.



Figure 90: Large agricultural buildings and associated structures such as wind turbines are visible; there is little tree cover.

into the adjacent St Osyth Drained Marshes to access what are now holiday parks and beaches. Residential areas of St Osyth, Jaywick and Clacton that fall within the settlement boundary and that have expanded onto the coastal slopes, where they disguise the underlying landscape pattern, will be omitted in the updated character area.

The scattered halls and farmsteads are built in a great diversity of styles, but they are usually constructed from brick. Agricultural outbuildings are typically constructed from brick and weatherboarding with clay tile roofs, although many have been replaced by modern buildings and cheaper materials. Residential dwellings are typically simple in design, two or two and a half storey, and have double pitched clay tile roofs. Red brick, often plastered or weatherboarded, is the dominant building material.

An airfield and its associated landscaping dominate the area between Jaywick and Clacton. This eastern part of the coastal slopes is therefore more suburban in character.

A section of the King Charles III England Coastal Path runs through this LCA along Flag Creek and at several points in Point Clear. Apart from the Coastal Path, Public Rights of Way are limited.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
St Osyth Pits	1002161	SSSI
St Osyth Parkland	Te57	LoWS

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Lee-over-Sands, Colne Point & Point Clear	Coastal Protection Belt
Martin's Farm Country Park	Country Park

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
St Osyth	n/a	Conservation Area
Beth Chatto Gardens	1468784	Registered Park and Garden

Change

- Intensification of agricultural land including field expansion and hedgerow/tree loss.
- Expansion of built development on the edges of Clacton, Jaywick, St Osyth and Point Clear leading to habitat loss and gradual suburbanisation.
- Extraction of river terrace gravels and formation of open water bodies.
- Loss of elms in the past reducing sense of intimacy and enclosure.
- Continued decrease in hedgerows and tree cover leading to visibility of farm storage and other intrusive land uses on the edges of farms.
- Impact of agricultural run-off into the adjacent coastal marshes.
- Pressure from solar farms.



Figure 91: Tall vertical structures on the crests are highly visible.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- The overall landscape strategy should be to conserve the existing rural character, hedgerows and panoramic views over the adjacent marshes and to restore its habitat diversity.
- Conserve the remaining rural, undeveloped setting to the *Brightlingsea* and *St Osyth Drained Marshes.*
- Seek to restore the wooded character of the coastal slopes to provide shelter for wildlife and to provide a contrast to the adjacent open marshes through programmes such as the Government's current Environmental Land Management scheme.
- Restore hedgerows that have been affected by the loss of elms and lack of management.
- Seek opportunities for habitat enhancement in line with the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (2025) or successor document, to compensate for any loss of habitat through built development and to screen unsightly storage yards.
- Conserve the strategic gap between Clacton and Jaywick to maintain the identity of these two settlements.
- Restore gravel pits to benefit nature conservation and recreation.
- Ensure expansion of built development does not intrude onto the highly sensitive crests of slopes, where development would be conspicuous on the skyline or restrict important views.
- Conserve the character of the rural lanes by restricting or mitigating road upgrades, such as introduction of concrete kerbs and lights or straightening.
- Conserve views across adjacent open marshes.
- Conserve open landscape within the Coastal Protection Belt in order to protect open, undeveloped coastline, prevent inappropriate development, and manage flood/ erosion risk. Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCA 3D: Holland Coastal Slopes

The gently shelving slopes provide a cohesive visual unit that form an important setting to *Holland Haven Drained Coastal Marsh* (2C). The *Holland Coastal Slopes* character area exhibits characteristics typical of LCT 3 *Coastal Slopes,* including the smooth descending landform, rural agricultural landscape and panoramic views. Hedgerow/tree loss due to Dutch elm disease and loss of historic features such as hedgerows and copses as a result of intensive agricultural practices has resulted in a declining landscape condition.

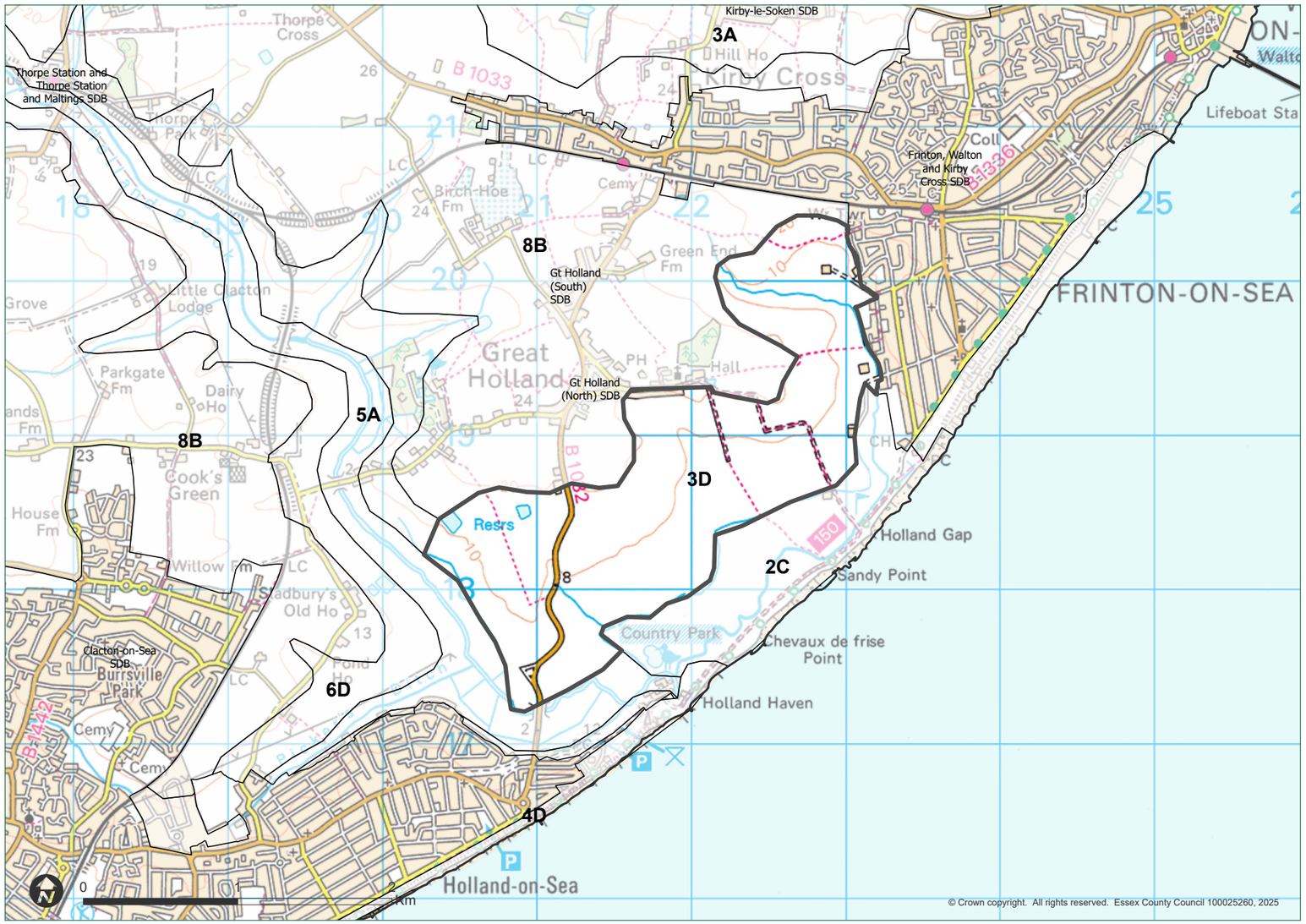

Figure 92: Location of LCA 3D.

Key Characteristics

- Coastal slopes between Clacton and Frinton descend, gradually and uniformly, to the flat marshes of the coastal edge.
- A mixture of rectilinear fields of ancient origin and some later enclosure, which enhance the smooth descending landform, form the fieldscape.
- Low, scrubby and intermittent hedgerows divide the arable fields. Occasional poplar belts, but little woodland.
- Remains of Second World War defences, including cropmarks.
- The low-density suburbs of Frinton expand onto the slopes.
- Extensive views south-east over Holland Haven Country Park.

Description

The *Holland Coastal Slopes* form the rural strategic gap between the settlements of Clacton and Frinton. It forms the setting to *Holland Haven Drained Coastal Marsh* (2C) and is dominated by rectilinear fields of ancient origin and some later enclosure that enhance the smooth-sweeping landform and perspective of the slopes.

The fields are predominantly arable and divided by low, scrubby and intermittent hedgerows. Tree cover is restricted to isolated hedgerow trees and occasional shelter belts, which stand out as features. Small streams flow between fields to drain into the Holland Haven. The underlying geology of London Clay gives rise to heavy, waterlogged soils which have been improved and intensively cultivated.

This character area is unusual for this type in that there are no farmsteads within it – the farm buildings are located on the ridge top on the clay plateau. One lane passes through the area, linking Great Holland at the top of the ridge to Clacton. It follows the field pattern, side-stepping down the slope. The substantially low-density suburbs of Frinton have expanded onto the sloping landscape neighbouring this LCA at its eastern end, but otherwise the landscape of this LCA is highly rural and intensively cultivated.

The Public Right of Way network is limited in this character area, generally running from the higher ground down the slope to the marshland, providing long views across the character area towards the marshland and coast.

Much of the central part of this character area lies within the Coastal Protection Belt, which is a local planning designation designed to protect the open character of the undeveloped coast and also prevent development in vulnerable coastal areas.

Designations

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Holland Brook, Marshes and Frinton-on-Sea	Coastal Protection Belt

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Frinton and Walton 2024	n/a	Conservation Area
Great Holland	n/a	Conservation Area



Figure 93: Views towards All Saints Church at Great Holland.



Figure 94: There is little woodland in this highly rural, intensively cultivated landscape.

Change

- The proposed route of onshore cable corridor for the Five Estuaries/North Falls (VE/NF) projects cut up the slope between Chevaux de Frise Point and Holland Gap with potential significant, although short-term impacts on the setting of the B1032 in this LCA.
- Loss of elm trees in the past has reduced the sense of intimacy and enclosure, which could be further compounded by concerns such as ash dieback.
- Further loss of hedgerows and trees as field boundaries become redundant with the increase in arable crop production.
- Pressure for expansion of built development on the edges of Frinton.
- Agricultural run-off into the adjacent coastal marshes.



Figure 95: Open views towards Holland Haven Country Park.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the undeveloped rural character of the character area as the setting for the drained coastal marsh and as an important strategic gap between Clacton and Frinton.
- Seek to restore the wooded character of coastal slopes in contrast to the open marshes below by replanting hedgerows, copses and shelter belts whilst maintaining strategic views to the coast.
- Conserve the rural, tranquil character by resisting encroachment of built development from the edges of Frinton or Clacton, maintaining a strategic gap.
- Ensure expansion of built development does not intrude onto the highly sensitive crests of slopes, where development would be conspicuous on the skyline or restrict important views.
- Conserve the existing rural character and panoramic views over Holland Haven and promote restoration of the habitat and landscape diversity through less intensive management practices and promoting diversity of field margins in line with the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (2025) or successor document, and support of government programmes such as the Government's current Environmental Land Management scheme, where relevant.
- Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak standards left to form future timber trees.
- Conserve the panoramic views across Holland Haven and explore opportunities for providing accessible viewpoints.
- Conserve views towards Great Holland Church and protect the quality of its setting.
- Ensure restoration of the agricultural landscape, field hedgerows and other vegetation following construction works for North Falls and Five Estuaries onshore cables.
- Conserve open landscape within the Coastal Protection Belt in order to protect open, undeveloped coastline, prevent inappropriate development, and manage flood/ erosion risk. Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCT 4

Coastal Ridges and Peninsulas

Introduction

The *Coastal Ridges and Peninsulas* landscape character type (LCT) is characterised by a series of pronounced ridges that sit along the coastline. From the ridge tops there are often wide, striking views in both directions, reinforcing the sense of height and exposure. These elevated areas frequently host landmark features, which can be seen from long distances across the surrounding landscape.

Landscape Character Areas:

- 4A The Oakley Ridge
- 4B The Naze
- 4C Brightlingsea Peninsula
- 4D St Osyth Coastal Ridge

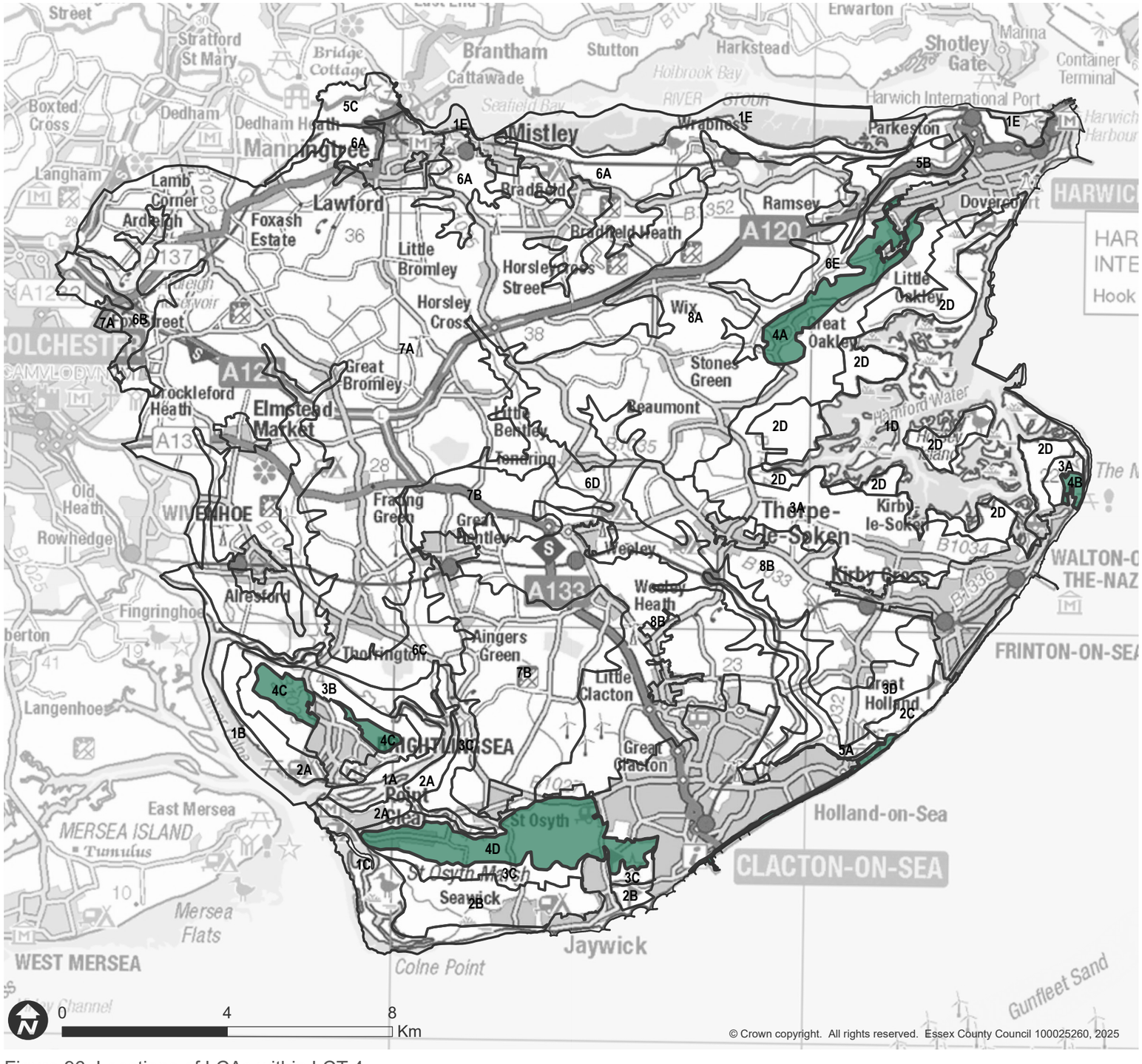

Figure 96: Locations of LCAs within LCT 4.

Physical Influences

This landscape is defined by its distinctive landform, with ridges typically rising to around 25m AOD. They are capped with sands and gravels, some formed as river terrace deposits and others laid down by glacial meltwaters. These materials shape both the topography and the vegetation that grows here.

The presence of these deposits has led to several active and former sand and gravel workings across the area. The flat-topped ridges are more resistant to erosion than the surrounding land, which is why they stand out so clearly. Where the coastline meets these ridges, such as at Clacton and The Naze, the sea has cut into them to form cliffs. These cliffs and their exposed gravel layers often reveal interesting geological features.

Human Influences

After the hunter gatherers, farming communities began clearing the naturally wooded landscape, taking advantage of the better drained areas. Compared with the heavier clays nearby, these coastal ridges offered more favourable conditions for agriculture. Evidence of early activity includes a Neolithic ring ditch monument identified on the Brightlingsea peninsula.

Woodland clearance continued into the Iron Age, leading to a mixed agricultural landscape. Roman villa remains have been discovered around Brightlingsea, St Osyth and the outskirts of Harwich. These villas were farming estates, usually with a partly masonry residence, and they formed the foundation for later Saxon estates, medieval farmsteads and, ultimately, the villages seen today. Many of these settled areas were located on ridge tops, making use of the commanding views across the surrounding lowlands.

Settlement Form and Pattern

The coastal ridges and peninsulas support a pattern of towns and villages, reflecting the practicality of developing on their relatively level, elevated landform. Many of these settlements date back to the medieval period and have grown over time into substantial towns. The area today is generally well-settled, with expanding suburbs often incorporating smaller historic villages as development spreads along the ridge tops.



Figure 97: Views over LCA 4A towards Hamford Water.

LCA 4A: The Oakley Ridge

Overall, *The Oakley Ridge* exhibits characteristics typical of the *Coastal Ridges and Peninsulas* landscape type. This includes the prominent ridge landform, historic ridge-top settlements and panoramic views. However, agricultural intensification has resulted in the progressive loss of historic field patterns, hedgerows and hedgerow trees, and the encroachment of urban fringe development, including garden centres, playing fields and factories, has begun to erode the character of the rural areas of the ridge.

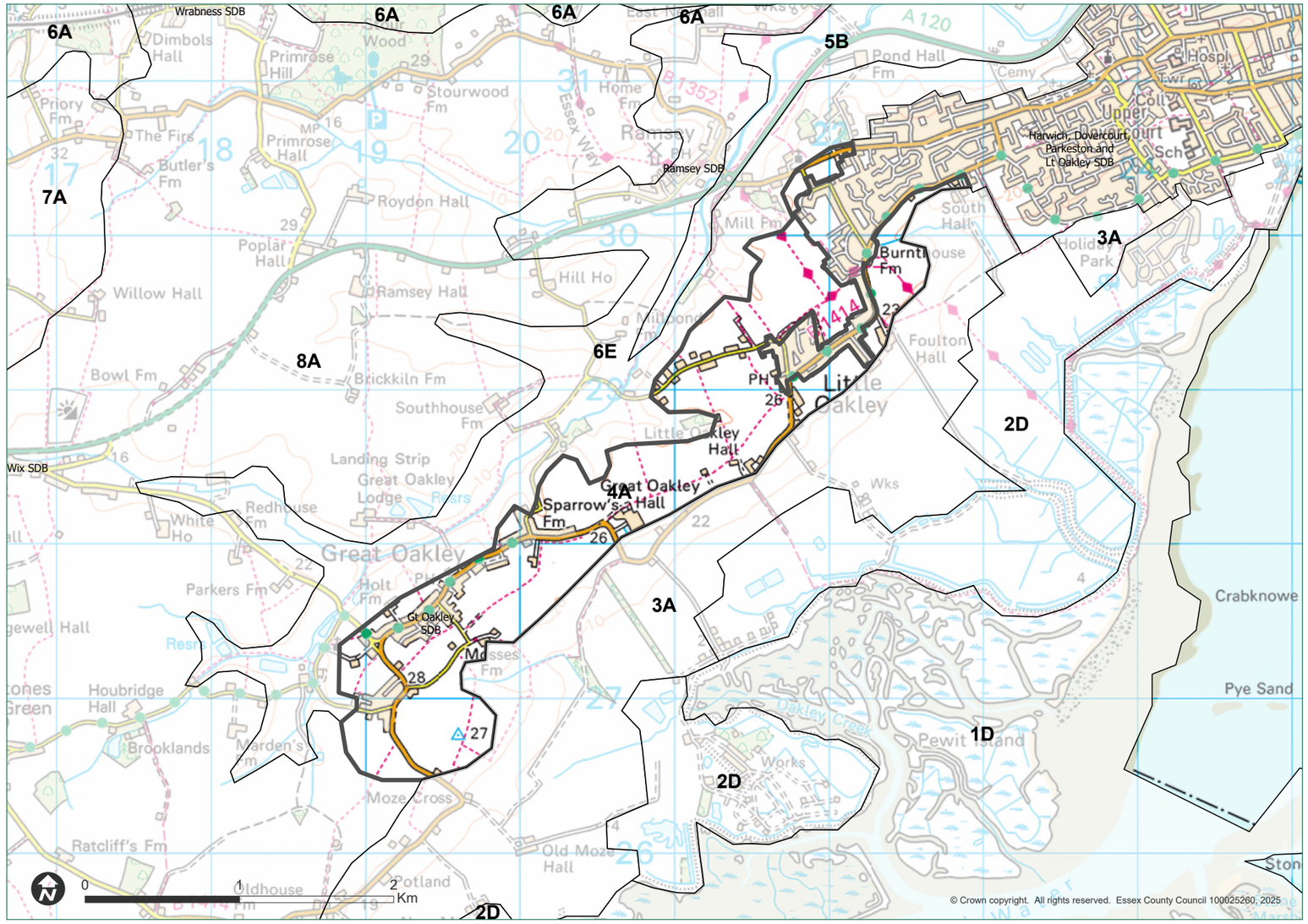

Figure 98: Location of LCA 4A.

Key Characteristics

- Prominent gravel-topped ridge between the Stour Estuary and Hamford Water with magnificent views in both directions.
- Ridge extends north-eastwards, forming a promontory with the medieval seafaring settlement of Harwich at its tip.
- High-grade agricultural landscape dominated by large-scale arable fields.
- Hedgerows are intermittent, few trees are present.
- Historic ridge-top settlement linked by the B1414 that runs along the top of the ridge.
- Great Oakley is a distinct nucleated village around a medieval market square.
- Rural agricultural buildings are often long, low and constructed from red brick and black weatherboarding with muted clay tiles.
- Manorial halls of Great and Little Oakley, as well as the private residence and former church St Mary's House, are features of the rural landscape.
- Historic rural lanes.

Description

The Oakley Ridge **is a distinct ridge between the Stour Estuary and Hamford Water. It extends north-eastwards, forming a promontory with the town of Harwich at its tip. It is a steep-sided ridge of London Clay, capped by post-glacial sands and gravels which have given rise to a flat-topped ridge. On top of the ridge there is a great sense of elevation and magnificent views, across Hamford Water in one direction and across the Stour Estuary in the other. Conversely, the skyline of the ridge is visible from Hamford Water and from the Stour Estuary.**

The well-drained ridge is dominated by a mixture of open fields and built development. The fieldscape is largely ancient in origin, but significant areas have been affected by post-medieval enclosure and post-war boundary loss, particularly around the eastern ridge. The agricultural landscape is dominated by large-scale arable fields divided by intermittent hedgerows and agricultural land quality is high. There is little vegetation cover, allowing long views across the open landscape. The settlements of Harwich, Dovercourt and Upper Dovercourt form part of Harwich and its suburbs.

The underlying historic landscape punctuates the urban fabric, for example at Allfields (Saxon fields survive) and Beacon Hill (site of an historic fort). The B1414 runs along the top of the ridge connecting adjacent settlements.

A network of narrow lanes connects the historic settlements, which were historically dispersed and polyfocal with isolated manorial halls, farms and cottages, and tends to follow the higher ground and ridges. The rural dwellings are typically simple, weatherboarded and two storey with clay tile roofs. Agricultural outbuildings are long, low and weatherboarded.

The village of Great Oakley, a nucleated village around a medieval market square, has retained its individual identity as a rural village. The Grade I listed Great Oakley All Saints church tower is a landmark on top of the ridge. The village contains vernacular buildings including red brick-built cottages with steeply pitched clay tiled roofs, and cottages, usually two storeys, often with coloured plaster, clapboarding and some thatch. Around this rural village are some older field patterns and historic lanes, such as Pesthouse Lane.



Figure 99: Clearly visible ridgeline near Little Oakley.



Figure 100: Open view to the north from Little Oakley towards Ramsey Windmill.



Figure 101: Views over agricultural fields at Little Oakley towards Hamford Water.

The place name of "Oakley" is an Anglo-Saxon word meaning 'oak clearing', which suggests that Great and Little Oakley were originally formed during woodland clearance. The manorial halls of Great and Little Oakley, which are medieval in origin, are now set apart from the village centres and are features of the rural landscape of the ridge, as is the former church, now private residence, of St Mary's House, which dates back to the 12th century, and is prominently located in between the manorial halls. At Little Oakley, there is evidence multi-period settlement, with evidence of Late Iron Age activity and the excavation of a Roman villa site.

South-west of Little Oakley is a Scheduled Monument consisting of a heavy anti-aircraft gun site. East of Little Oakley is a small area that has been designated as Little Oakley Channel Deposit Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It consists of an interglacial channel, part of the Kesgrave Sands and Gravels, containing numerous fossils and an extensive pollen record. This geological SSSI was most recently assessed by Natural England in 2024 to be in 'Favourable' condition.

A number of Public Rights of Way are present, and a section of the long-distance footpath the Essex Way crosses this LCA north-east of Little Oakley, where it joins a small segment of the Jaywick to Harwich section of the King Charles III England Coastal Path along the Harwich foreshore.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Little Oakley Channel Deposit	1001089	SSSI

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Walton Backwaters, Horsey Island & Irlams Beach	Coastal Protection Belt
Pesthouse Lane, Great Oakley	Protected Lane

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Great Oakley	n/a	Conservation Area
Heavy anti-aircraft gunsite, 350m NE of Little Oakley Hall	1468784	Scheduled Monument

Change

- Ongoing pressure for further built development along the B1414 and merging of individual villages.
- Encroachment of built development on the setting of historic landscapes and features.
- Obstruction of views by built development.
- Gradual loss of hedgerows and trees as field boundaries become redundant with the dominance of arable crop production.
- Road upgrades and widening creating a more urban character.
- The proposed route of onshore cable corridor for Tarchon (NSIP) project makes landfall in this LCA.



Figure 102: Views out to Hamford Water from the B1414, over LCA 3A and LCA 2D, with a poplar belt marking a field boundary.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Maintain strategic gaps between adjacent villages of Little Oakley and Great Oakley to conserve their individual character.
- Promote and encourage the conservation of the rural setting of the manorial halls, which are historic features of this landscape.
- Conserve an uncluttered skyline and ensure that new built development does not encroach onto the crest of the adjacent Hamford Coastal Slopes, which are visible as the skyline from Hamford Water and the Stour Estuary. Built development should be sited on the plateau top where it is not visible from surrounding sensitive areas, though development of large-scale or tall buildings on this flatter ridge should be resisted as these would have the potential to be highly intrusive.
- Protect the setting of historic landscapes, for example the Saxon field patterns at Allfields and historic fort site at Beacon Hill, now within the urban character area of Harwich.
- Maintain the distinct identity of the individual settlements along the ridge top by conserving their characteristic simple, gable-ended design, modest height of no more than two and a half storeys, typical mansard roof profiles, and traditional external finishes such as red brick, coloured plaster, and black or white weatherboarding.
- Preserve clear views from the ridge across Hamford Water and the Stour Estuary and consider providing more opportunities for views.
- Conserve the dark skies around Hamford Water by avoiding floodlighting and minimising any sources of light pollution that could disrupt this highly sensitive landscape.
- Enhance hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak standards left to form future timber trees, and consider opportunities identified in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy or the use of relevant Environmental Land Management Schemes.
- Conserve the historic rural lanes and avoid road upgrades that would erode their rural character, rich roadside verges and associated vegetation.
- Ensure restoration of the agricultural landscape, field hedgerows and other vegetation following construction works for Tarchon (NSIP) project onshore route.
- Conserve open landscape within the Coastal Protection Belt in order to protect open, undeveloped coastline, prevent inappropriate development, and manage flood/erosion risk. Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCA 4B: The Naze

The Naze **exhibits characteristics typical of the** ***Coastal Ridges and Peninsulas*** **landscape type (LCT 4), including the prominent ridge landform, heathy vegetation and panoramic coastal views. The open grassland and scrub are managed as public open space and as a result it retains its open coastal character, although some areas are intensively mown. Detracting factors are the encroachment of built development into the remote landscape, and the Naze is also vulnerable to erosion as a result of sea level rise.**

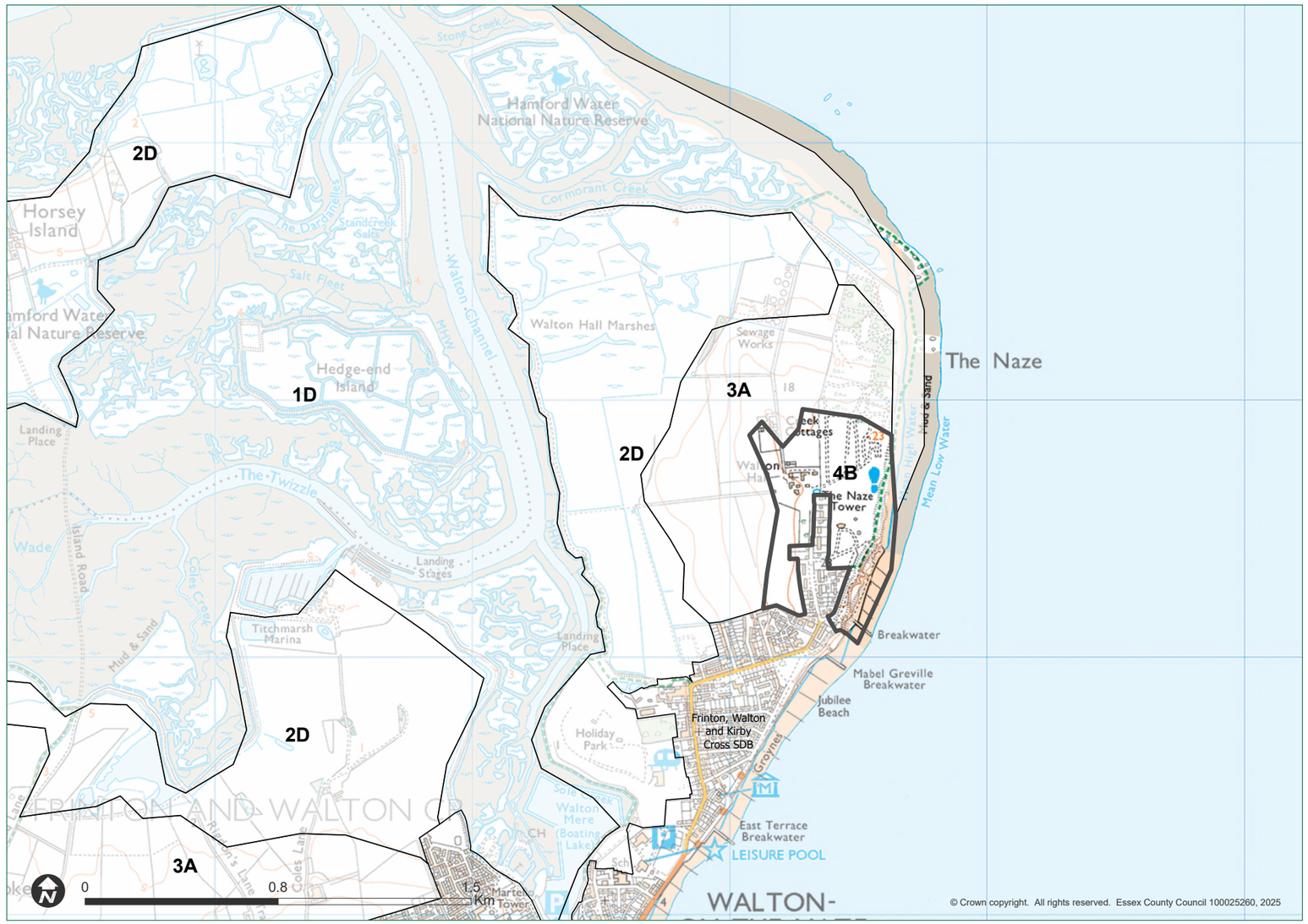

Figure 103: Location of LCA 4B.

Key Characteristics

- Distinct gravel-topped promontory sheltering Hamford Water from the North Sea.
- Rare Red Crag formation exposed in cliffs and designated as a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- Wave action and slippage is causing the Naze to erode at a rapid rate due to its exposed position to the North Sea.
- Rural buildings are typically long, low and constructed from red brick and black weatherboarding with muted clay tiles.
- The Naze Tower is a Grade II* listed building and a prominent landmark of the Naze.
- A public open space area consisting of rough grassland and scrub.
- Views across Hamford Water to Harwich.

Description

***The Naze* is an exposed, windswept plateau with dramatic views over Hamford Water and out to sea. It is a landscape rich in wildlife and history. The plateau is capped by a veneer of glacial gravel and sand, which give rise to acidic soils that support coastal grassland and heath. This is an area of public open space consisting of mown grass, rough grassland, and scrub including gorse, bramble, elder, hawthorn and hazel, and maritime cliffs.**

The Naze is a distinct peninsula which was historically separated from the mainland by the 'Walton Gap', an area of open marshland. This gap has now been reclaimed and a road built to join the Naze to the mainland. The Naze is of great geological interest as it exhibits the most spectacular exposure of Red Crag in Essex. Internationally recognised as providing valuable evidence of climatic deterioration at the beginning of the Ice Age, this area is designated as a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), assessed by Natural England in 2024 as 'Favourable'. This assessment notes that this is an extremely popular destination for tourists and geologists and there is a lot of pressure on the supply of beach-derived fossils, but there appears to be no end to the supply from cliff falls, with rare spectacular finds occasionally reaching the media.

Overlying London Clay and capped by sands and gravels, the Waltonian Red Crag is unique to Suffolk and Essex. Crag is characterised by shelly, friable sand and the red shelly sand can be seen resting on the blue-grey London Clay at the Naze cliffs. This combination of geology causes slippage of the upper parts of the cliff over the London Clay layer, lubricated by surface and ground water. This slippage, along with the wave action at the base of the cliffs, is causing the Naze to erode at an alarming rate of 1.8 metres a year. The ongoing erosion of the cliffs on the east side of the zone results in regular exposure of archaeological finds and deposits.

There is a visitor's centre, Essex Wildlife Trust Naze Nature Discovery Centre, and car park just south of the Naze Tower. An area north of the Naze Tower and along the cliffs is a Local Wildlife Site (LoWS), with the principal wildlife value being in the eroding cliffs. Here, invertebrate fauna includes some nationally rare species, and the rough clifftop grassland and scattered scrub provide foraging habitat for many of the flying insects nesting in the cliffs and shelter for birds.



Figure 104: The Grade II* listed Naze Tower.

The northern part of The Naze Landscape Character Area (LCA), north of the tower, is characterised by an absence of settlement. The Naze Tower was built as a navigational aid in 1720 by Trinity House, the General Lighthouse Authority. This Grade II* listed building is a prominent landmark of the Naze and is visible for many miles around. Now a visitor attraction, the structure itself was secured and removed from Historic England's 'Heritage at Risk' list following structural repairs and repointing. South of the tower, development has expanded onto the Naze from the edges of Walton, formed of a 20th-century residential development and a number of residential dwellings which line Old Hall Lane up to a cluster of buildings to the east of the Naze Tower. This group of buildings includes the 18th-century Grade II listed 'Navigation Tower at Walton Hall', and the historic farmstead Walton Hall Farm, which includes two listed barns.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Hamford Water	UK9009131	SPA
The Naze	1003949	SSSI
The Naze	Te124	LoWS

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Walton Backwaters, Horsey Island & Irlams Beach	Coastal Protection Belt

Change

- Intensive grassland management of coastal heath habitats.
- Ongoing pressure for further built development along the approach road from Walton.
- Continued erosion and slippage of the Naze cliffs which may lead to the loss of the Naze Tower, an important landmark and Grade II* listed building.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the remote, natural character of the peninsula by resisting further built development and promoting appropriate low-key use of the landscape through informal recreation.
- Seek to restore habitat diversity of the coastal grassland by promoting sympathetic management practices, for example grazing to the coastal grasslands, or opportunities identified in the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Conserve the clear views from the Naze across Hamford Water and out to sea by resisting ribbon development along the approach road from Walton.
- Conserve the coastal heath vegetation and rich wildlife habitats.
- Resist development that would erode the Naze's importance for the setting for Hamford Water, specifically on the crest of the slopes to the ridge.
- Conserve the Red Crag formations in the cliffs at the Naze as an important geological site.
- Conserve the Naze Tower as the prominent and historic landmark of the Naze and protect its setting from encroachment by built development.
- Conserve open landscape within the Coastal Protection Belt in order to protect open, undeveloped coastline, prevent inappropriate development, and manage flood/ erosion risk. Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.



Figure 105: The Naze Nature Reserve.

LCA 4C: Brightlingsea Peninsula

Overall, the *Brightlingsea Peninsula* landscape character area exhibits characteristics typical of the Open Coastal Marsh landscape character type. This includes the prominent ridge landform, sense of elevation and panoramic coastal views. However, the rural character has been greatly influenced by the extent of urban fringe development on the edges of Brightlingsea, which together with the large-scale gravel extraction and agricultural intensification has resulted in the progressive loss of landscape features. The landscape is marked by a history of quarrying, which is still ongoing, with open areas of disused workings and water.

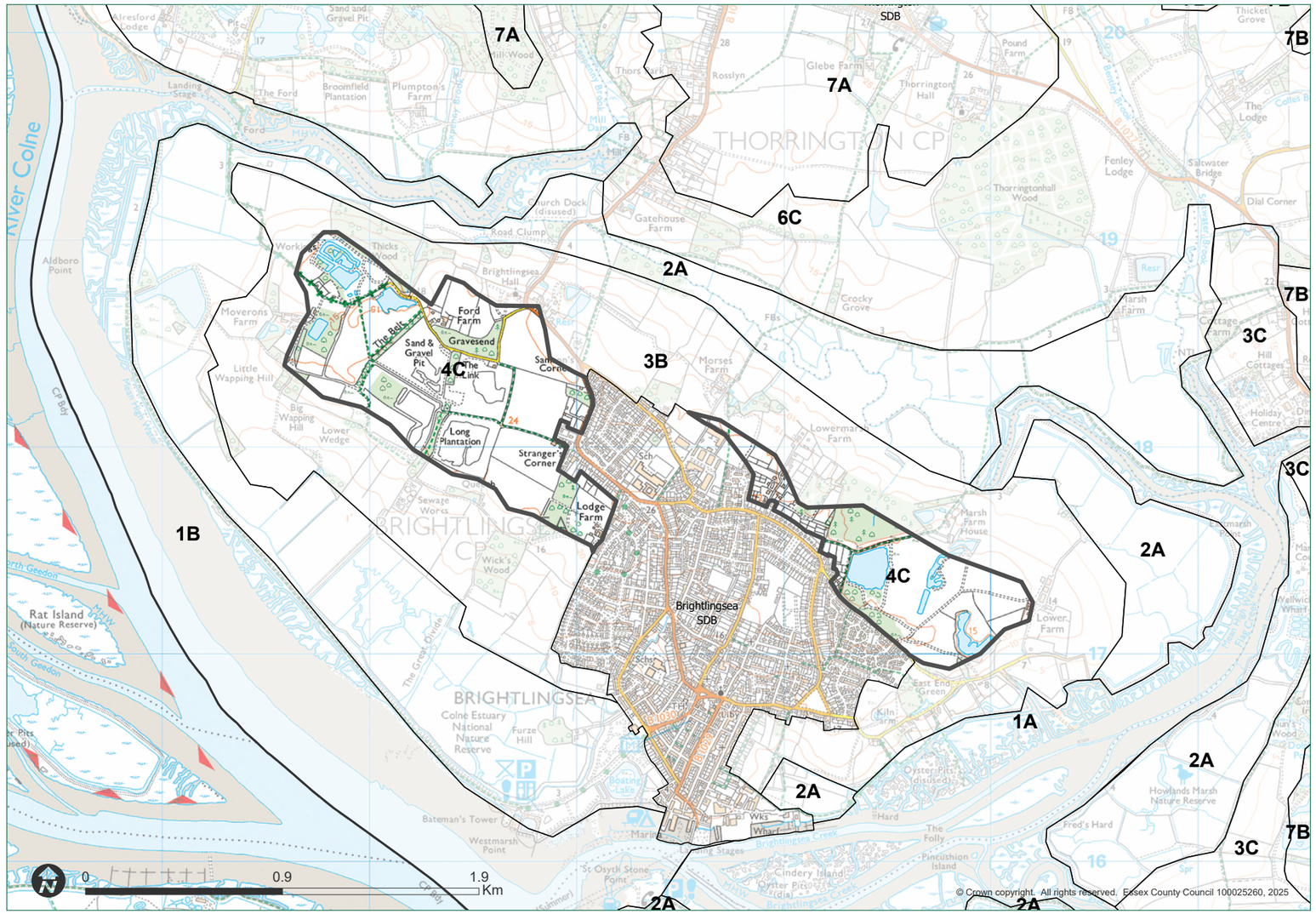

Figure 106: Location of LCA 4C.

Key Characteristics

- Distinct flat-topped 'island' separated from the mainland by the *Brightlingsea Drained Marshes*.
- Steep-sided ridge of London Clay, capped by glacial gravel and sand.
- Open fields, copses, mixed plantations and shelter belts create a patchwork in the landscape.
- Extensive quarrying of river terrace gravels locally has resulted in open water bodies which provide important wetland habitats.
- Extensive quarrying is affecting landscape features such as boundary loss, archaeological resource, habitats, and access to the countryside.
- The Brightlingsea suburbs markedly influence the character of the ridge.
- Sense of elevation and magnificent views across the Colne Estuary towards Mersea Island.

Description

The *Brightlingsea Peninsula* landscape character area (LCA) is a distinct flat-topped ridge located between the marshlands of the Colne Estuary and Flag Creek. It is a steep-sided ridge of London Clay, capped by glacial gravel and sand which has given rise to a flat-topped plateau. On top of the ridge there is a great sense of elevation and magnificent views, across the Colne Estuary towards Mersea Island in one direction and across the Ardleigh Valleys in the other.

The well-drained ridge is dominated by a mixture of open fields, copses, mixed and linear plantations, shelter belts, and extensive former and current quarry sites. The agricultural landscape is composed of large-scale arable fields, largely irregular with a fieldscape of ancient origin and divided by intermittent hedgerows. There are low levels of post-1950s boundary loss, but where boundary loss has occurred, it has largely been due to quarrying.

The sand and gravel resource has been exploited, and the former extraction pits became open water bodies that are characteristic features of the landscape today. For example, Robinson Road Ponds Local Wildlife Site (LoWS) consists of flooded ex-gravel pits which form a network of ponds with associated wet woodland, reedbeds, marginal vegetation, grassland and scrub. The ponds of the Robinson Road Ponds LoWS are exploited for fishing, but also provide wetland habitats important to large numbers of migratory and resident bird species.

Small, scattered areas of mixed deciduous woodland and linear plantations survive, such as Lodge Wood Ancient Woodland to the east of Brightlingsea.

There is limited access to the area, with several Public Rights of Way in the west. Access can be subject to quarrying for long periods of time and diversions may be put in place.

The area contains impressive cropmark complexes, though several have now been lost to mineral extraction. A large Roman trackway cut through earlier prehistoric field systems has been found. Excavation prior to quarrying at Moverons Pit (within LCA 4C and neighbouring LCA 3B) uncovered a large Early Neolithic ring ditch and a middle Bronze Age cemetery, forming a small element of a much larger multi-period landscape. Recent excavations at the Moverons Pit quarry have uncovered a significant and sizable Anglo-Saxon settlement, including remains of sunken feature buildings, known as *Grubenhäuser*.



Figure 107: Views to the west from LCA 4C, near Moverons Farm, over LCAs 3B and 2A towards 1B and the River Colne.

The character of the ridge is greatly influenced by the presence of built development. Historically, the settlement pattern was highly dispersed. The medieval core of Brightlingsea lies on the south-eastern Brightlingsea Coastal Slopes. However, the suburbs of Brightlingsea spread up onto the coastal ridge during a period of expansion in the 1960s, almost reaching the 13th-century Brightlingsea All Saints Church and Brightlingsea Hall which lie on the north-western Brightlingsea Coastal Slopes (3B). The grounds of the cemetery, however, extend into the *Brightlingsea Peninsula* LCA, which forms the setting for views to the church from the south. The tower of Brightlingsea All Saints Church is nearly 30 meters (100ft) high, acting as local landmark and navigational aid on the edge of the Coastal Slopes.

The expansion of Brightlingsea includes the Manor Estate, a residential development on the west side of Brightlingsea where a manor house was demolished in the 1960s and part of its former parkland was built over. The presence of residential estates, schools, sports centres and playing fields give the landscape a busy suburban character, though the only road on and off the peninsula limits movement. The continuing quarrying affects the tranquillity outside the urban areas.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Robinson Road Ponds	Te47	LoWS

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Colne Estuary, Brightlingsea & Alresford Creek	Coastal Protection Belt

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Brightlingsea Hall and All Saints Church	n/a	Conservation Area

Change

- Ongoing pressure for further built development on the outskirts of Brightlingsea.
- Loss of views as a result of built development.
- Pressure for continued intensification of agricultural land, including loss of key landscape and ecological features.
- Pressure from climate change on biodiversity loss and increased extreme events.
- Further extraction of river terrace gravels and creation of new wetland habitats.
- Loss of rural character with the gradual conversion of agricultural land to employment or residential land.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the remaining open, undeveloped character of the ridge top and the clear views from the ridge across the Colne Estuary and Flag Creek. Views to and from the peninsula should be retained.
- Promote the conservation of the strategic gap between the outskirts of Brightlingsea and All Saints Church/ Brightlingsea Hall.
- Enhance the wooded character of the ridge by managing existing plantations and ensuring tree planting is used to integrate new built development into the landscape.
- Ensure expansion of built development does not intrude onto the highly sensitive crests of slopes, where development would be conspicuous on the skyline or restrict important views.
- Conserve the local built character by keeping residential dwellings simple, gable-ended, no more than two and a half storeys high, and finished in traditional materials such as red brick, coloured plaster, or black or white weatherboarding.
- Encourage the enhancement of hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak standards left to form future timber trees. Consider the use of relevant Environmental Land Management schemes or opportunities identified in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Enhance habitat diversity through positive restoration and management of gravel pits as new wetland habitats. There are specific opportunities for enhancement and creation of new wetland habitats in connection with the mineral working sites. The quarry sites are subject to restoration plans and habitats and ecological features could be reinstated as well as created.
- Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt areas should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.



Figure 108: View to Brightlingsea's All Saints Church.



Figure 109: Open agricultural fields south of Brightlingsea's All Saints Church.

LCA 4D: St Osyth Coastal Ridge

In general, the *St Osyth Coastal Ridge* landscape character area exhibits characteristics typical of the *Coastal Ridges and Peninsulas* landscape character type, including a subtle ridge landform, sense of elevation and coastal views. However, urban fringe development on the outskirts of Clacton, such as glass houses, nurseries, garden centres, playing fields and caravan sites have begun to erode the rural character of the ridge, and severe loss of trees and hedgerows and agricultural intensification has resulted in the progressive loss of landscape features.

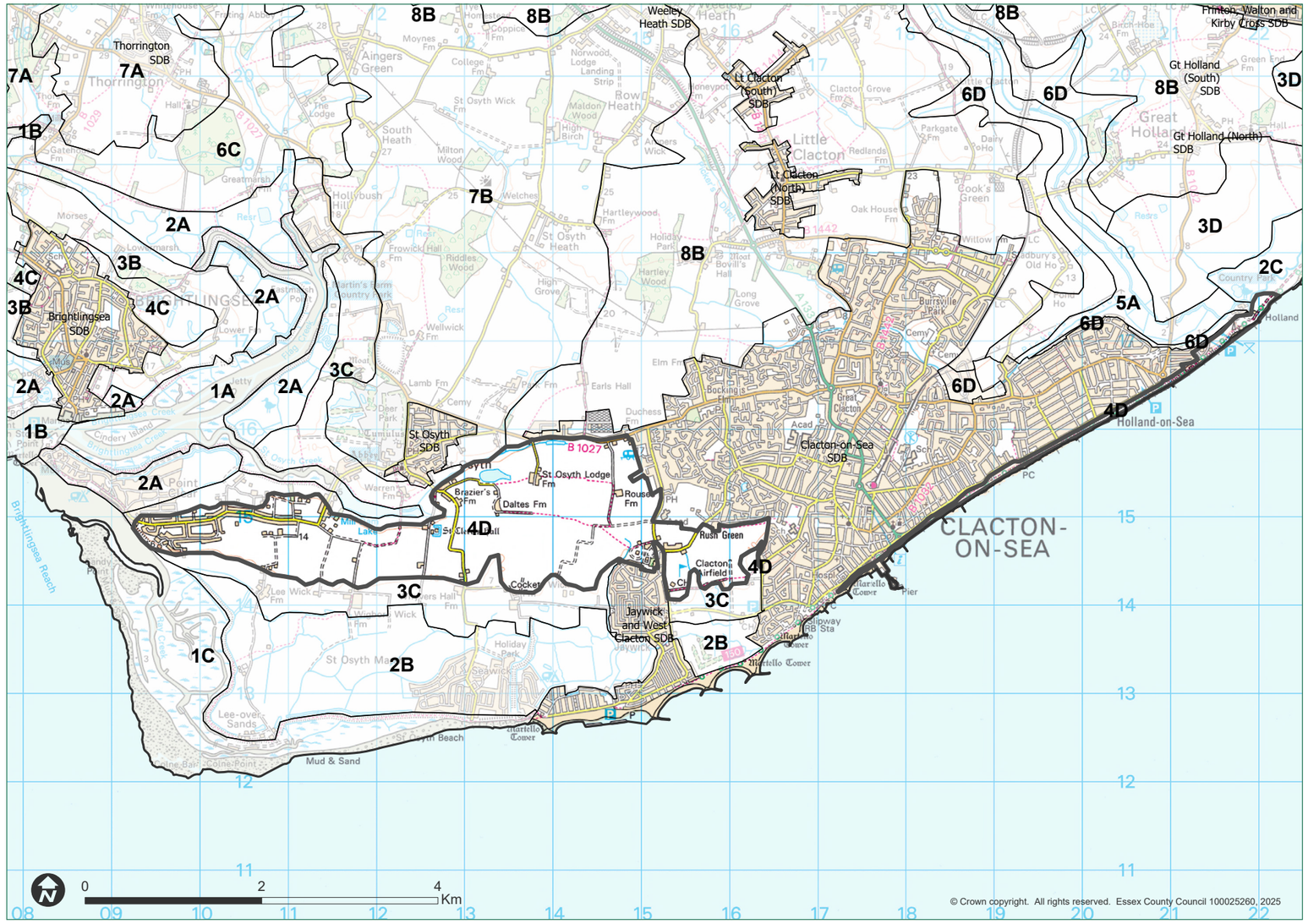

Figure 110: Location of LCA 4D.

Key Characteristics

- Gently rounded ridge that stretches from Point Clear eastwards to the Clacton Cliffs.
- Open, windswept landscape with little vegetation cover and views to the coast.
- Large-scale arable fields divided by low, intermittent scrubby hedgerows dominate this rural landscape
- Scattered farmsteads, often on the sites of former manorial halls, form the settlement pattern.
- Modern seaside settlements and holiday resorts of Point Clear, Jaywick and Clacton.
- Clacton Pier as a landmark.

Description

The *St Osyth Coastal Ridge* landscape character area (LCA) is a gently rounded ridge that stretches from Point Clear eastwards to the Clacton Cliffs. The Clacton Cliffs reveal a natural cross-section of the landform and illustrate the gently domed appearance of the ridge, rising to cliffs of 15m. The cliffs are of nature conservation interest for their maritime plants. They also reveal their underlying geology of London Clay capped by post glacial sand and gravels.

The geology is formed of Kesgrave sands and gravels in the northern half and river terrace gravels in the southern half over London Clay, which comes to the surface in the southern parts and supports good to moderate agricultural land.

Generally, it is a rural, flat, open, windswept landscape with little vegetation cover. The agricultural landscape is dominated by large-scale arable fields divided by low, intermittent scrubby hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees. The fieldscape is of ancient origin, largely consisting of rectilinear regular fields. Straight, hedged field boundaries remain intact, enclosing a pattern of rectangular arable fields. There has been moderate post-1950 boundary loss throughout the area.

Sackett's Grove was once the only remaining area of woodland, but it has since been developed, leaving only a few trees as remnants of the woodland. Across the character area, further tree loss has occurred as a result of agricultural intensification, built development, and the impacts of Dutch elm disease. New woodland planting has taken place within this LCA, but this is limited to a woodland block north-west of Cockett Wick Farm.

Standing water bodies occur in the Osyth Creek Valley and as part of the designed landscapes of the manorial halls, such as the moat of St Clere's Hall.

Archaeologically, the character of this LCA is dominated by extensive multi-period cropmark complexes, demonstrating the huge archaeological potential of this zone. Excavations at St Osyth Lodge Farm found an Early Neolithic causewayed enclosure, an Early Bronze Age pond barrow, a Middle Bronze Age barrow group, a Middle Iron Age settlement, Late Iron Age and Roman ditches, Early Saxon pits and a 13th-century croft. The mineral extraction has destroyed 4.5 hectares of the enclosure, although the rest is likely to remain largely intact.



Figure 111: Colourful verges and agricultural fields, beyond which the edge of Jaywick is visible.

The excavations at the site of the educational institution, to the west of Clacton, found evidence of Late Bronze Age, Roman, Saxon, and medieval activity.

Along the coastal edge, two geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) can be found. The smallest is the Holland-on-Sea Cliff SSSI, which was most recently assessed by Natural England in 2025 as being in 'Favourable' condition, due to no geology being visible as it is protected and stabilised by dense shrub, mostly tamarisk. The cliffs and foreshore west of Clacton Pier form part of the Clacton Cliffs & Foreshore SSSI, which contain internationally important geoarchaeological deposits associated with ancient courses of the Rivers Thames and Medway, which bear artefact evidence for the Clactonian Palaeolithic industry. This unit of the SSSI has been assessed by Natural England in 2025 as being in 'Favourable' condition, though the cliff face is obscured by bushes, crossed by paths and, at the base of the cliffs, there are many other permanent installations, making revealing of any exposures challenging.

The Clacton North Cliff Local Wildlife Site (LoWS), a section of sea-front scrubby grassland wedged in between the Clacton urban area and the beach, is of interest due to the presence of nationally notable maritime species Shrubby Seablite *(Suaeda vera)* and Golden Samphire *(Inula crithmoides)*. It is also noted to be an important site for invertebrates especially *Coleoptera* and *Hymenoptera* species, including the Small Velvet-ant *(Smicromyrme rufipes)*, the solitary wasp *(Ectemnius sexcinctus)*, and the beetles *Opatrum sabulosum*, *Cassida nobilis,* and *Podagrica fuscicornis.*

Historic lanes form the communication pattern in this rural landscape – these follow the field boundaries, side-stepping around field corners. The B1027, St Osyth Main Road, links the historic settlements of St Osyth and Great Clacton. Several single road access tracks lead to Point Clear and Seawick, as well as several Wick Farms further south; some tracks are private, and access is limited.



Figure 112: Large-scale open agricultural field near St Osyth.



Figure 113: The WWII pillbox at Holland Haven Country Park east of Clacton falls into LCA 4D.

The historic settlement pattern was both sparse and wide, with farmsteads on the ridge above the coastal slope where livestock was taken to graze on the marsh. The settlement pattern is now characterised by scattered farmsteads on the ridge, often on the sites of former manorial halls on the edge of valley slopes on lanes leading to marshland landscape. An example is the moated Grade I listed St Clere's Hall, a rare surviving example of an aisled hall dating to the early 14th century. Several other Grade II listed farmhouses are present in the vicinity, with many other former farms and manorial halls having been subsumed within the settlements of Point Clear, Jaywick and Clacton. Modern settlement is largely confined to ribbon development along the roads e.g. St Johns Road.

The unbuilt landscape away from the urban fringe is distinct and unified. There is limited access to the countryside with small number of Public Rights of Ways. A section of the Salcott to Jaywick stretch of the King Charles III England Coastal Path crosses this LCA along the coast near Point Clear, before continuing along existing footpaths which run along the seafront to Clacton. A large fishing lake was dug in 2005 south-east of St Osyth which is exploited by local fishing clubs. Clacton Airfield, a small grass-runway airfield, has a flight school.

Although outside of this LCA due to its urban context, Clacton-on-Sea is of influence on this LCA. The seaside town of Clacton began as a small village a little further inland, Great Clacton. During the early and mid-19th century permission was granted to extend the railway to Clacton-on-Sea and by the mid-1880s Clacton had already become a busy seaside resort. The new Colchester bypass which opened in 1933 encouraged the growth of Clacton, which expanded to merge with the rural settlements and villages surrounding Great Clacton, for example Magdalen Green, Rush Green, and Copings Green. Although the late 1940s and 1950s showed Clacton to be a very popular holiday resort, there were signs of decline in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Clacton is now a fairly quiet seaside resort.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Robinson Road Ponds	Te47	LoWS

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Lee-over-Sands, Colne Point & Point Clear	Coastal Protection Belt

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
St Osyth	n/a	Conservation Area
Clacton Seafront	n/a	Conservation Area

Change

- Loss of woodland, grassland and reed bed habitats through intensive agricultural management.
- Progressive loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees due to lack of management and reduction in need for stock-proof field boundaries.
- Pressure for further urban development. Large mixed use development site west of Clacton south of B1027 and residential north of Jaywick, and expansions of, as well as new, holiday caravan parks.
- Pressure of traffic on rural lanes, particularly in summer months.
- Rising sea levels due to climate change may affect the area where this LCA meets the estuarine waters of Brightlingsea Reach at Point Clear. The policy for this area in the Shoreline Management Plan is for No Active Intervention throughout all epochs.
- Changes in other LCAs that are visible from this elevated landscape, such as the windmills from the Earls Hall Windfarm in the *North Clacton and The Sokens Clay Plateau* (LCA 8B) to the north.



Figure 115: Clacton Pier is a landmark.


Figure 114: Open, windswept landscape with little vegetation cover south of St Osyth.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve remaining trees at Sackett's Grove and encourage planting of more coastal groves and woodlands, including enforcement as part of proposed development and the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Species typical of the area include pedunculate oak, sweet chestnut, wild cherry and birch.
- Use traditional management techniques such as coppicing on new woodland areas - many of the woodlands in this area would have had a coppice-with-standards structure.
- Enhance the hedgerow network by promoting the replanting of hedgerows, including through development management and promotion of the Essex LNRS and encouraging management for species diversity.
- Conserve the open skyline of the ridge as viewed from the rural coastal landscapes to the south - consider the important views and visual impact of any proposal for built development on the adjacent landscape character areas such ss 3C, 1A, 1C, 2A, and 2B.
- Support the conservation of the historic courses of rural lanes and protect and manage their verges for species diversity. Opportunities for this could be identified in the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Protect the Clacton Cliffs for their nature conservation interest and natural vegetation cover – conservation of the natural land cover of the coastal edge should be priority.
- Create and preserve a green gap in the remaining open landscape between Point Clear, St Osyth and Clacton to maintain their individual *sense of place* by restricting ribbon development along linking roads, for example along St Osyth Main Road, and major development, particularly west of Clacton. Development should not spread out along the ridge roads.
- Conserve the rural landscape setting and scattered settlement pattern of farms, manorial halls and rural settlements.
- Conserve the use of traditional external finishes such as red brick, coloured plaster, and black or white weatherboarding, noting that weatherboarding is also characteristic of local agricultural buildings. New residential areas should reflect the historic settlement pattern of small villages arranged around greens.
- Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt areas should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCT 5

River Floodplains

Introduction

The River Floodplains landscape type is defined by the flat, alluvial plains associated with the larger freshwater rivers within Tendring District.

Landscape Character Areas:

- 5A Holland Brook Floodplain
- 5B Ramsey Creek Floodplain
- 5C Cattawade Marshes

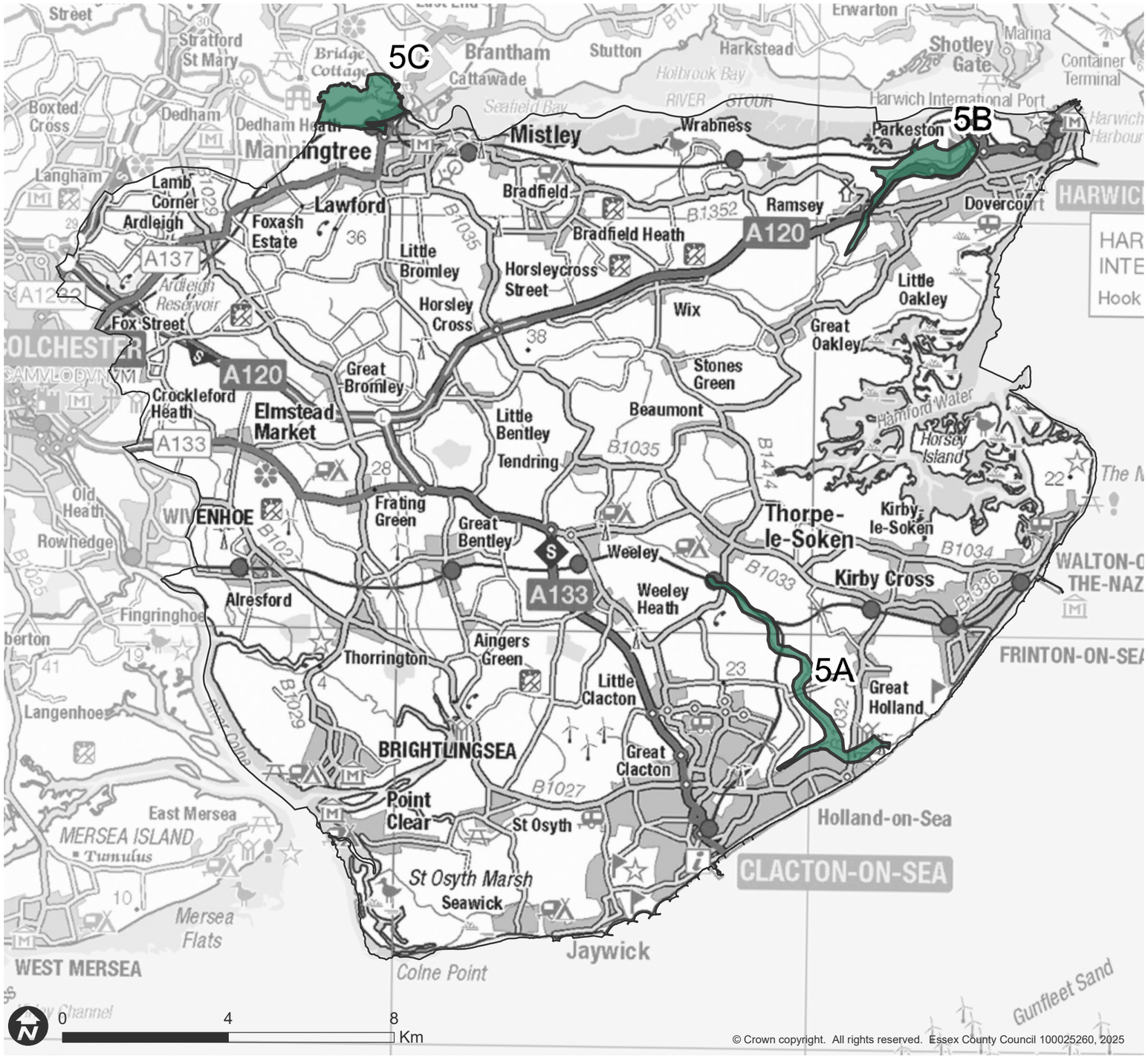

Figure 116: Locations of LCAs within LCT 5.

3.5 Landscape Character Type 5: River Floodplains

Physical Influences

The alluvial floodplains that characterise this landscape were shaped by erosion and deposition processes during the Quaternary period. Sediments eroded from higher areas of the river catchment were transported downstream and laid down along the valley floors as alluvium.

Valleys have often widened over time through the natural movement of river channels. Erosion typically occurs on the outer bends, while deposition takes place on the inner bends. These broad floodplains usually develop along larger rivers where gradients are gentle. Regular flooding supports a mosaic of wetland habitats, including riparian and marginal vegetation, reed beds, wet grassland and areas of wet woodland.

Human Influences

Because of the continual risk of flooding, the floodplains remained largely free of built development for much of their history. Traditionally, they were managed as seasonally grazed flood meadows.

The construction of flood banks and drainage schemes gradually made more intensive land use possible, first enabling permanent pasture and later allowing conversion to arable farmland. In recent years, however, the floodplains have experienced increasing pressure from infrastructure projects, sewage treatment facilities and industrial development.

Settlement Form and Pattern

Historically, settlement avoided the floodplains due to the risk of inundation and the shifting nature of river channels. As a result, these areas remained largely settlement free. More recent development, however, has introduced sewage works, industrial estates and other large-scale buildings into parts of the floodplain landscape, altering what was once an open and undeveloped corridor.



Figure 117: The floodbank divides LCA 5C *Cattawade Marshes,* with the River Stour and marshes to the north, and regimented fields of drained and improved grassland to the south.

LCA 5A: Holland Brook Floodplain

Overall, the *Holland Brook Floodplain* shows good survival of characteristic floodplain features. The floodplain's status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest has helped conserve the floodplain grasslands. The historic river crossing points remain intact, retaining their original form as narrow stone/brick bridges, which is a distinctive feature of this landscape character. The landscape features species-rich grasslands, floodplain trees and wet woodland and remains natural and rural, with mostly no encroachment of built development.



Figure 118: Location of LCA 5A.

Key Characteristics

- Lower reaches of Holland Brook and its alluvial floodplain in the south-east of Tendring.
- Cattle grazing in the shade of floodplain trees create a pastoral landscape.
- Damp grasslands are of high nature conservation importance.
- Drainage ditches or hedgerows divide fields of unimproved and semi-improved pasture.
- Some important wet valley floor woodland.
- Emergent marginal vegetation and bank-side willows discern the course of the river.
- Stone bridges mark historic river crossings.
- Narrow, and typically of stone or brick, bridge crossings of roads and railways are the only built elements in the floodplain.

Description

The *Holland Brook Floodplain* landscape character area (LCA) encompasses the lower reaches of Holland Brook and its adjacent alluvial floodplain in the south-east of Tendring, between Thorpe-le-Soken station and Holland Haven. It is a flat landscape underlain by London Clay and a mantle of floodplain alluvium which gives rise to waterlogged soils.

The floodplain is predominantly pastoral with cattle grazing in the shade of floodplain trees, typically oak and willow. The damp grass-rich rectilinear fields are divided by straight drainage ditches or hedgerows reinforced by post and wire fences. These landscape elements create an important wildlife corridor along the Holland Brook valley. Historically the landscape consisted of enclosed meadow pasture upstream, and grazing marsh downstream at the seaward end. The damp streamside grasslands are the largest continuous area of this type of herb-rich grassland in the district, and their importance is reflected in designated areas as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) .

Holland Haven Marshes SSSI covers the downstream part of the Holland Brook floodplain up until the railway bridge, just west of Hunter's Bridge, and includes a section of Pickers Ditch. Holland Haven Marshes SSSI was assessed in 2012 by Natural England as being in 'Favourable' condition with ditches intact, though noted to be overgrown with common reed. The upper reaches of the floodplain are part of the Upper Holland Brook Local Wildlife Site (LoWS) which contains floodplain grazing marsh and scrub woodland habitats. The open floodplain landscape also contains small pockets of valley floor woodland, for example at Hunter's Bridge crossing. These wet woodlands typically consist of alder and willow and provide valuable shelter for wildlife. The course of the river itself is identifiable by the emergent marginal vegetation and willows along its banks.

There is no public access to the floodplain landscape, except for a public footpath crossing at Picker's Ditch. Three historic river crossings by minor roads are marked by stone bridges at Rice Bridge, Fan Bridge (formerly known as Jefferies Bridge) and Holland Bridge, which are the only historic structures in this LCA. There are views up and downstream at the crossing points.

The area has high levels of tranquillity and is characterised by the absence of settlement, although the railway line intrudes across and into the valley in its central section, creating a barrier to movement in the central and upper section of the LCA.



Figure 119: Holland Brook at Holland Bridge, a historic river crossing.



Figure 121: View south from Holland Bridge towards the London Port Authority Radio Tower on the outskirts of Holland-on-Sea.



Figure 120: The damp grasslands are of high nature conservation importance.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Holland Haven Marshes	1006349	SSSI
Upper Holland Brook	Te98	LoWS

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Holland Brook, Marshes and Frinton-on-Sea	Coastal Protection Belt

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Thorpe-le-Soken Station and Maltings 2024	n/a	Conservation Area

Change

- Potential loss of species-rich grassland due to intensive grassland management.
- Potential loss of wet woodland and other wetland vegetation as a result of drainage schemes for agriculture.
- Fertiliser and pesticide run-off from adjacent agricultural landscapes affecting water quality.
- Lack of public access to the river.
- Thorpe Solar Park (Major application).
- Pressure for development north of Picker's Ditch.
- The Essex coast will be significantly impacted by climate change, with rising sea levels resulting in the 'coastal squeeze' of intertidal habitats and dry summers diminishing freshwater wetlands.



Figure 122: Emergent marginal vegetation and bank-side willows discern the course of Holland Brook.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the open, undeveloped nature of Holland Brook floodplain.
- Conserve the wet species-rich grasslands, maintaining grassland diversity through summer grazing.
- Encourage extending the areas of wetland habitat such as reedbeds and grazing marsh through reducing drainage of less valuable agricultural land and allowing regular flooding of the landscape.
- Promote the conservation of floodplain trees and encourage the replanting of trees in areas where natural regeneration is not occurring. Black poplar, once a distinctive feature of lowland river valleys, may be a suitable species for these floodplains.
- Conserve limited areas of scrub as landscape features and shelter for wildlife.
- Conserve the historic stone/brick bridges which are features of the landscape.
- Consider opportunities for creation of wet alder woods which would be beneficial for nature conservation as well as assisting with flood alleviation.
- Consider extending the areas of wetland habitat such as reedbeds and grazing marsh through reducing drainage.
- Encourage the exploration of opportunities through programmes such as the Government's Environmental Land Management schemes to receive available funding for managing and increasing floodplain meadows and wetland habitats, as well as woodlands.
- Promote the control of the use of pesticides and fertilisers in areas which run off into Holland Brook to help maintain water quality and key wetland/riparian habitats. Opportunities such as the creation and enhancement of green infrastructure to improve water quality can be identified in resources such as the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Seek opportunities to enhance public access by exploring further provision of riverside walks to enhance access to, and enjoyment of, the floodplain landscape.
- Resist further encroachment of settlement north of Picker's Ditch.
- Resist road widening and creation of new crossings, e.g. on embankments, as these would harm the remote rural character of the floodplain. Flood defence structures should also be designed carefully to avoid visual intrusion.
- Resist incursion of major developments at margins of adjoining character areas at the valley edge as these would be highly visually intrusive. Ensure that any minor residential development close to the valley edge is in keeping with local character, pattern and scale.
- Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt areas should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCA 5B: Ramsey Creek Floodplain

The *Ramsey Creek Floodplain* shows some survival of characteristic floodplain features including the flat topography, open views and a small area of wetland habitats around Delf Pond. The floodplain has been extensively drained and intensively farmed for arable crops, as well as subject to the encroachment of transport infrastructure and built development, including the golf course. This has resulted in the loss of the majority of its floodplain features and wetland habitats leading to a gradual erosion of the landscape character.

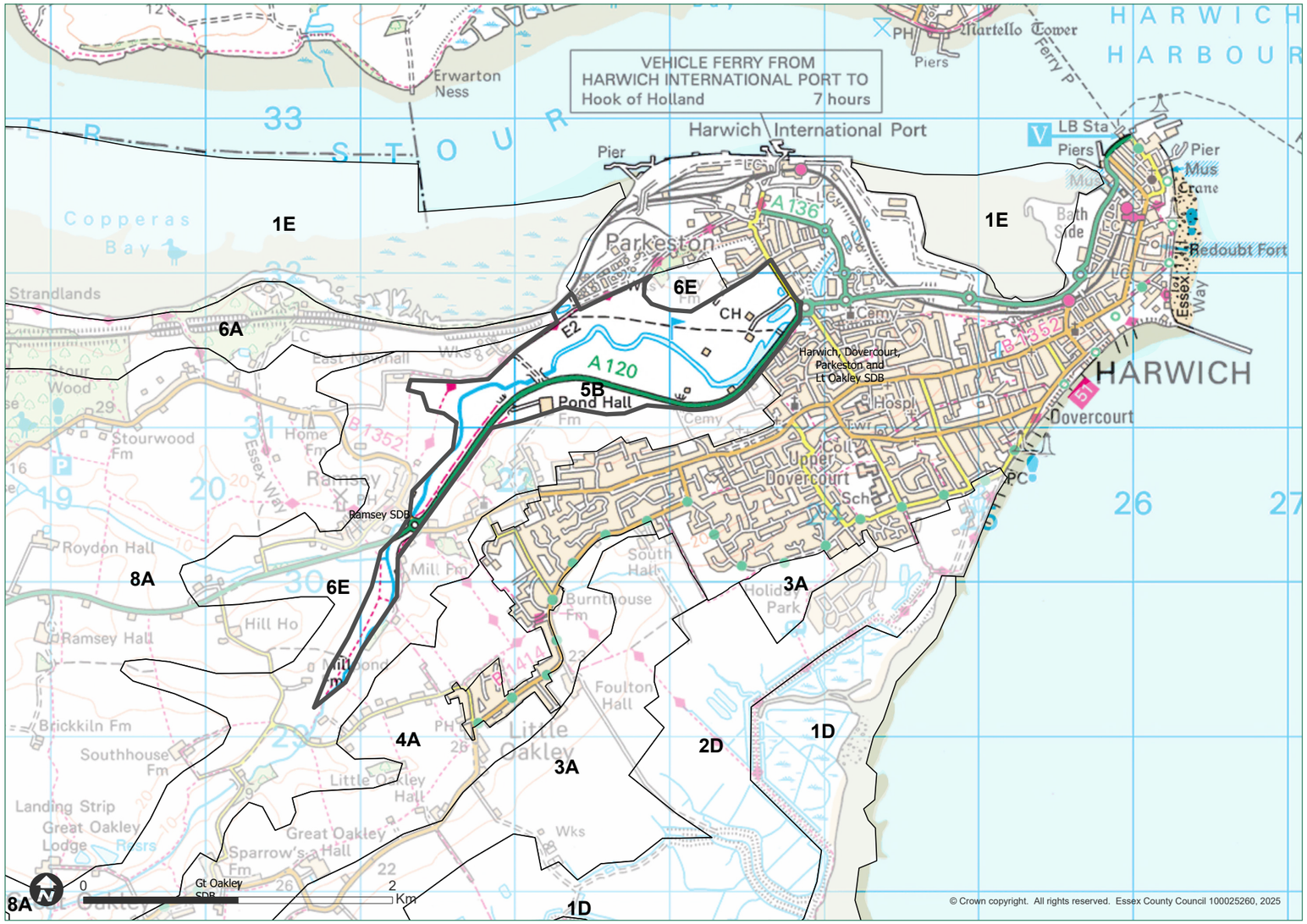

Figure 123: Location of LCA 5B.

Key Characteristics

- Flat alluvial floodplain containing the meandering course of Ramsey Creek.
- The upper section of the floodplain is a small-scale pastoral landscape of pastures and paddocks divided by straight drainage ditches and low hedgerows interspersed by floodplain trees.
- Lower section of the floodplain opens out into a wide, flat landscape dominated by large arable fields.
- The Delf Pond area has a diverse mosaic of open water, marginal reed beds, grazed species-rich grassland and scattered scrub.
- The river can be traced in the landscape by a line of reeds.
- Industry and built development form a backdrop to views.
- The embankment of a dismantled railway line crosses the floodplain.
- A120 to Harwich follows the edge of the floodplain.

Description

The *Ramsey Creek Floodplain* landscape character area (LCA) is a flat alluvial floodplain that contains the meandering course of the lower reaches of Ramsey Creek, located in north-east Tendring. The creek flows into the reclaimed land at Parkeston, where its name changes to Dovercourt Dock River, and follows a highly engineered course through an industrial landscape to the Stour Estuary.

The Ramsey Creek Floodplain is a flat landscape underlain by London Clay and with a veneer of alluvium which gives rise to waterlogged soils. The upper section of the floodplain is predominantly a small-scale pastoral landscape of pastures and paddocks, divided by straight drainage ditches, low hedgerows interspersed by floodplain trees, or post and wire fencing. The drainage ditches support wetland vegetation.

Historically there was a mill pond east of Millpond Farm, at the most southerly tip of this LCA, as marked on the Chapman and Andre map of 1777, but this has since been lost. The floodplain opens out into a wide, flat landscape of former coastal and freshwater marshes that was drained during the 19th century, and affected by boundary loss in the 20th century, to create a landscape of large arable fields, divided by gappy hedgerows and a golf course.

The lower section of the floodplain opens out into a wide, flat, open landscape of former coastal and freshwater marshes that was drained during the 19th century, and affected by boundary loss in the 20th century, to create a landscape of large arable fields. There are few trees, though a poplar belt and a line of trees along the creek planted on the golf course can be seen from the A120 over the embankment of the dismantled Manningtree-Dovercourt railway. The river can be traced through the landscape by the line of reeds growing on its embankment, though where and when these are cut back the river course is invisible in the landscape.

The easterly section of the floodplain, around the railway embankment and Delf Pond, is the most diverse in terms of its ecology, with a mosaic of open water, marginal reed beds, moderately species-rich riverside grassland, and scrub. The scrub is mostly scattered, but dense on the railway embankment, largely consisting of hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), with young pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), and locally dominant Broom *(Cytisus scoparius)*. This section forms part of the Ramsey Ray Local Wildlife Site (LoWS), which extends further north to incorporate the oak woodland of Raycliff Wood in the Stour Valley System LCA. The Ramsey Ray LoWS comprises a mixed landscape of open water, marginal reedbed, grazed riverside grassland, scrub and a disused railway embankment with dense scrub cover, and is adjacent to the unnatural and highly maintained landscaping of the golf course, forming a stark contrast.

The flat landscape creates a convenient route for transport; a dismantled railway line crosses the floodplain and the A120 to Harwich follows the edge of the floodplain. The railway embankments obstruct views across the floodplain. There is little public access to the floodplain landscape or the river, though a Public Right of Way follows the creek in the upper reaches. The floodplain is affected by the industry and built development of adjacent areas which forms a backdrop to views. The B1352 runs over a bridge at Ramsey, which is a historic crossing point of the river.



Figure 124: The reed-lined Ramsey Creek winds its way through the landscape.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Ramsey Ray	Te115	LoWS

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Stour Estuary, Wrabness & Ramsey Creek	Coastal Protection Belt

Change

- Continuing loss of species-rich grassland due to intensive grassland management and arable cultivation.
- Previous loss of wet woodland and ponds resulting from drainage schemes for agriculture.
- Dry summers resulting from climate change impact freshwater wetlands.
- Fertiliser and pesticide run-off from adjacent landscapes and road drainage run-off affecting water quality within the floodplain.
- Erosion of the natural river setting and limited visibility of the river.
- Continuing intrusion of industrial development and traffic into the tranquil floodplain landscape.
- Ongoing pressure for built development including industry.
- Separation of Ramsey Creek and its floodplain from the Stour Estuary by the reclaimed industrial land at Parkeston.



Figure 125: The A120 follows the edge of the floodplain.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the open, undeveloped character of the floodplain landscape.
- Enhance floodplain character and grassland diversity by considering reinstatement of a pastoral landscape with summer grazing. Opportunities may be identified in Environmental Land Management Schemes.
- Encourage extending the areas of wetland habitat, such as those seen in the Delf Pond area, to other areas of the floodplain, particularly alongside the river course. Opportunities can be identified in resources such as the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy, e.g. the creation and enhancement of green infrastructure to improve water quality.
- Conserve floodplain trees and encourage the planting of trees in areas where natural regeneration is not occurring. Black poplar, once a distinctive feature of lowland river valleys, may be a suitable species for these floodplains.
- Support the conservation of limited areas of scrub and hedgerows as landscape features and shelter for wildlife.
- Buffer the river from the impacts of development by ensuring there is land either side of the river which can be used by wildlife, which will help prevent pollution of the watercourse.
- Conserve water quality by controlling the use of pesticides and fertilisers in agricultural areas which run off into Ramsey Creek through encouraging farmers to use organic fertilisers and sustainable agricultural practices, and the maintenance of ditches.
- Consider providing wildlife, visual and physical links between Ramsey Creek Floodplain and the Stour Estuary by enhancing the course and setting of the creek as it flows through the reclaimed industrial land at Parkeston.
- Seek opportunities to enhance public access to the floodplain landscape by providing riverside walks.
- Promote the screening of industrial development and traffic that intrudes into the tranquil floodplain landscape with floodplain woodland and trees to enhance the visual context of the floodplain
- Promote opportunities identified in locally relevant environmental and nature recovery schemes.
- Conserve the small-scale narrow road and railway bridges finished in brick or stone, and conserve the rural character of access roads.
- Resist road widening and creation of new crossings, e.g. on embankments, as these would harm the remote rural character of the floodplain. Flood defence structures should also be designed carefully to avoid visual intrusion.
- Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt areas should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCA 5C: Cattawade Marshes

Overall, the *Cattawade Marshes* is a large-scale landscape of open water, marshes and grassland that shows good survival of characteristic floodplain features, including the flat topography and open views, species-rich grasslands and floodmeadows. It also provides a sense of remoteness and tranquillity, although the drainage and improvement of land south of the river and the encroachment of urban and industrial structures on the edge of Manningtree, including the station car park expansion and associated lighting, is eroding the remote and rural character of the floodplain.

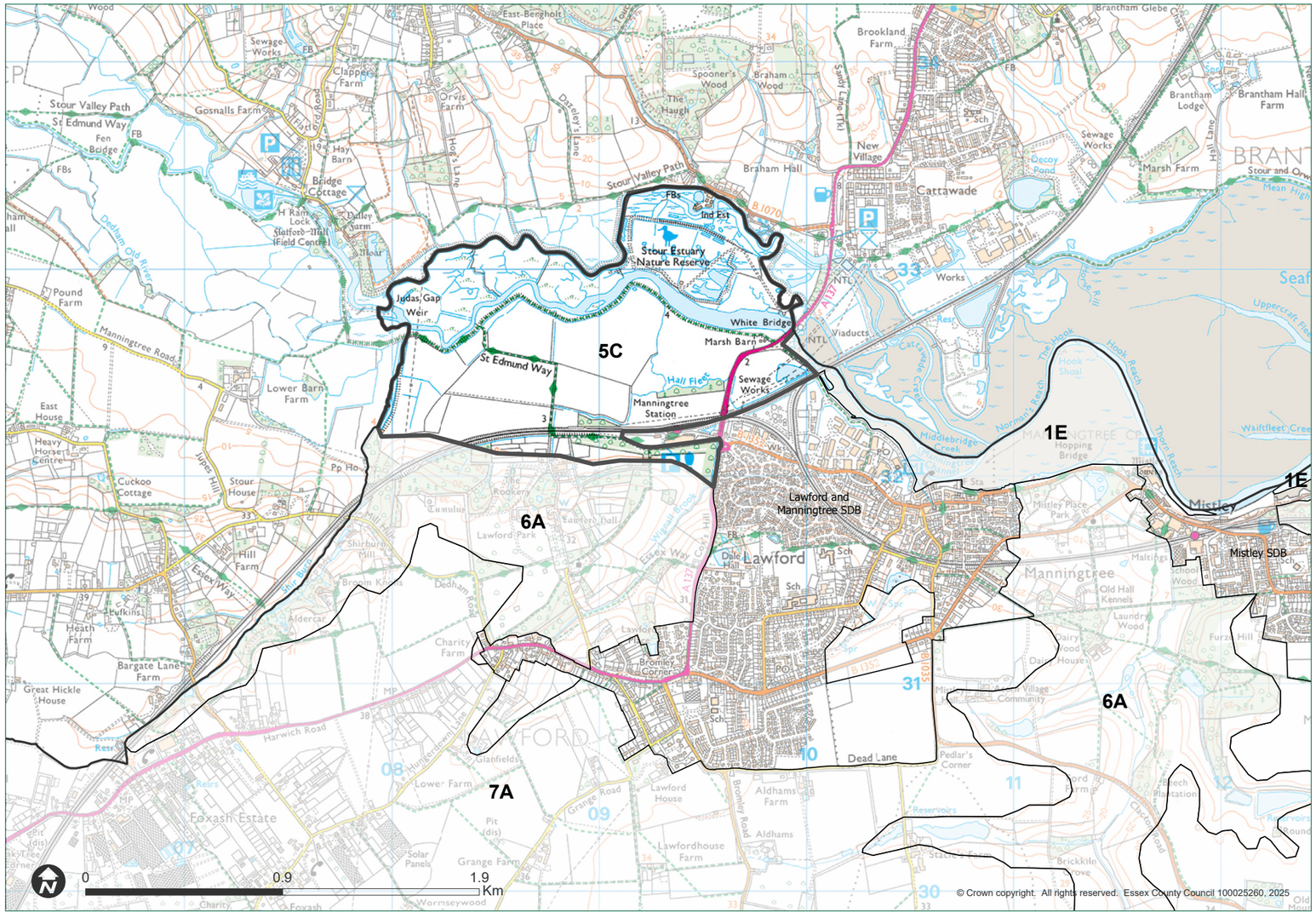

Figure 126: Location of LCA 5C.

Key Characteristics

- Tranquil floodplain upstream of Cattawade Bridge, forming part of the River Stour floodplain.
- North part of floodplain is characterised by grazing marshes and a mosaic of species-rich neutral grasslands, marshland, open water, fen and marginal vegetation.
- South part of floodplain is drained and improved grassland divided by scrubby hedgerows.
- Cattawade Marshes provides important bird nesting sites and for this reason is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.
- Long-distance footpath, St Edmund Way, from Manningtree to Flatford Mill.
- Forms part of the Dedham Vale National Landscape and has artistic associations with John Constable.
- Mainline railway on embankment. Manningtree Station and its associated well-lit car park are some of the few buildings within the setting of this character area.
- Industrial estate, sewage works, and electricity pylons characterise the edges of Manningtree.
- Agricultural buildings are typically red brick, partly clad with weatherboarding, and red clay tile roofs.

Description

The *Cattawade Marshes* landscape character area (LCA) forms part of the Stour floodplain upstream of Cattawade Bridge and weir, between the freshwater and tidal channels of the River Stour, with the meandering course of the lower reaches of the River Stour flowing through the floodplain landscape. The geology of the northern part of the area is formed of intertidal deposits, while the area south of the Stour consists of river terrace sand and gravel deposits.

This LCA forms part of the Dedham Vale National Landscape and is located on the outskirts of Constable Country, a swathe of landscape through the Stour Valley and Dedham Vale which inspired 18th-century English landscape painter John Constable. This cherished landscape is known for its beauty and vast skies and continues to draw visitors and walkers. Constable himself claimed that *"those scenes [on the banks of the Stour] made me a painter"*.

The presence of the flood bank along the south of the river channel has affected the landscape character of the areas north and south of the river course. The northern part of the floodplain is allowed to flood regularly and is characterised by a mosaic of species-rich neutral grasslands, marshland, open water, fen and marginal vegetation, including significant areas of reedbed, as well as estuarine grazing marsh. Field boundaries follow the winding former creeks, though straighter field ditches are also present. This area of the Cattawade Marshes provides important bird nesting sites and this ecological importance is reflected in its designation as a Ramsar site and as Special Protection Area. It is also designated as a biological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Cattawade Marshes SSSI was assessed in 2012 by Natural England as being in 'Unfavourable Recovering' condition for the western unit, and in 'Favourable' condition for the eastern unit.

The area of floodplain south of the river course is markedly different, with a valley floor pasture formed by drained and improved grassland. Regimented fields, indicative of late enclosure, are divided by scrubby hedgerows. Here the land is more intensively farmed and as a result is less diverse in the habitats and species it supports compared to the northern part of the area.



Figure 127: View from the floodbank over the Stour and marshes towards Suffolk.



Figure 128: View towards Manningtree over the colourful marshes.



Figure 129: The mainline railway cuts across the floodplain.



Figure 130: Scrubby hedgerow.

Judas Gap Marsh, at the eastern side of this LCA, is a Local Wildlife Site (LoWS) of coastal grazing marsh exhibiting both dry and wet grassland. These habitats have declined considerably in extent in Essex since the middle of the 20th century, with most lost to agriculture, while those remaining as grassland have often undergone agricultural improvement.

The sea walls and riverbanks are a distinctive historic landscape feature. Cropmarks displaying remnant channels of the Stour are visible, and these will retain well-preserved palaeoenvironmental deposits. The Scheduled Monument 'Ring ditches SW of Reed Island' is a ring ditch cemetery enclosed within a rectangular field just south of the flood bank.

A public footpath follows the flood bank along the south side of the river channel, from where there are views over the open marshes to the north and the enclosed fields to the south. A section of the St Edmund Way, a long-distance footpath that links with the Essex Way to the south and the Stour Valley Path to the north, connects Manningtree to Flatford Mill through a traditional pastoral landscape documented by the landscape painter John Constable.

The 'Harwich and Shotley Gate' section of the King Charles III England Coast Path will include a segment that passes through Manningtree and crosses the Cattawade Bridge to the north shore of the Stour.

The mainline railway line cuts across the floodplain outside Manningtree and Manningtree Station stands out as one of the few buildings in the floodplain. The station car park was extended to hold 800 cars in 2020, with the newly installed LED lighting being the subject of controversy due to light pollution within a National Landscape. The embankment of the railway line hides the industrial estate, sewage works and electricity pylons on the outskirts of Manningtree.

The Shoreline Management Plan includes the current 'Hold the Line' management approach to be held for Cattawade and along the Manningtree coast, though it is noted the standard of protection for Manningtree will need to be maintained or upgraded.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Stour and Orwell Estuaries	UK9009121	SPA
Stour and Orwell Estuaries	UK11067	Ramsar
Dedham Vale	9	National Landscape
Cattawade Marshes	1002194	SSSI
Judas Gap Marsh	Te34	LoWS

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Ring ditches SW of Reed Island	1002135	Scheduled Monument
Lawford	n/a	Conservation Area

Change

- Potential further loss of species-rich grassland due to drainage and grassland improvement.
- Potential further loss of wet woodland and other wetland vegetation due to drainage schemes for agriculture.
- Reduced management of hedgerow as a result of conversion to more arable cultivation and the lack of need for stock-proof boundaries on the floodplain.
- Ongoing fertiliser and pesticide run-off from agricultural landscapes and road drainage run-off affecting water quality.
- Intrusion of industrial development in and within the setting of this LCA, such as the station car park extension and associated lighting, and traffic into the tranquil floodplain landscape.
- Ongoing pressure for built development, including industry, on the edges of Manningtree.
- Impacts of climate change on rainfall and weather events.



Figure 131: Regimented fields in the southern part of LCA 5C.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the open, undeveloped character of the floodplain. Resist further industrial development, residential development or transport infrastructure as this would be highly visible in this open floodplain landscape.
- Ensure large-scale agricultural buildings are carefully sited and designed so they do not become dominant features in the open landscape.
- Promote the conservation of the remaining species-rich grassland by resisting drainage and grassland improvement schemes on the floodplain.
- Consider restoring floodplain wetland habitats including species-rich neutral grasslands, marshland, open water, fen and marginal vegetation.
- Consider restoration of areas of wet woodland on the floodplain in areas where it will not obstruct important views across the floodplain. This type of planting could be used to screen existing industrial development and traffic that intrudes into the tranquil floodplain landscape.
- Monitor fertiliser, pesticide and road drainage run-off from adjacent landscapes and their effect on water quality.
- Conserve wetland habitats. Wetland habitats can help mitigate the impacts of climate change, being one of the most effective carbon sinks on the planet, but wetland loss and degradation can transform wetlands from carbon sinks to carbon emitters.
- Promote the conservation of floodplain trees, replanting trees in areas where natural regeneration is not occurring. Black poplar, once a distinctive feature of lowland river valleys, may be a suitable species for the Stour floodplain. Opportunities can be identified through the Environmental Land Management scheme.
- 2012 Guidance from Natural England for improving the SSSI status states the wet grassland and marshy habitat would benefit from extra control for retaining increased winter water levels and reduced scrub cover.
- Wetlands can reduce flood risk by absorbing floodwater and regulating flows, and help to clean water by removing nutrients, pesticides and sediment from agricultural run-off, and filtering pollutants from industrial and urban run-off.
- Regulate water levels by mimicking natural flooding and drainage cycles characteristic of grazing marsh ecosystems. Concurrently introduce sustainable grazing practices and strategically rotate livestock to maintain vegetation structure and prevent overgrazing. Water level control is critical to effective site management, benefiting breeding waders and wintering waterbirds by means of the installation of an effective, fit-for-purpose sluice.
- Hydrological grazing and predator management improvements on grazing marsh to support the long-term conservation and management of grazing marsh habitats. Opportunities could be identified through the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Seek to conserve views up and down the river from road and railway bridges by ensuring bridge designs retain a good level of visual transparency.
- All development should adhere to the relevant guidance for the Dedham Vale National Landscape.

LCT 6

Clay Valleys

Introduction

The Clay Valleys are a series of steep-sided, often concealed valleys that cut down through the Quaternary deposits into the underlying London Clay. Many extend far inland, adding notable topographical variety to the otherwise flat Tendring Plateau.

Landscape Character Areas:

- 6A Stour Valley System
- 6B Ardleigh Valley System
- 6C Alresford Valley System
- 6D Holland Valley System
- 6E Ramsey Creek Valley System

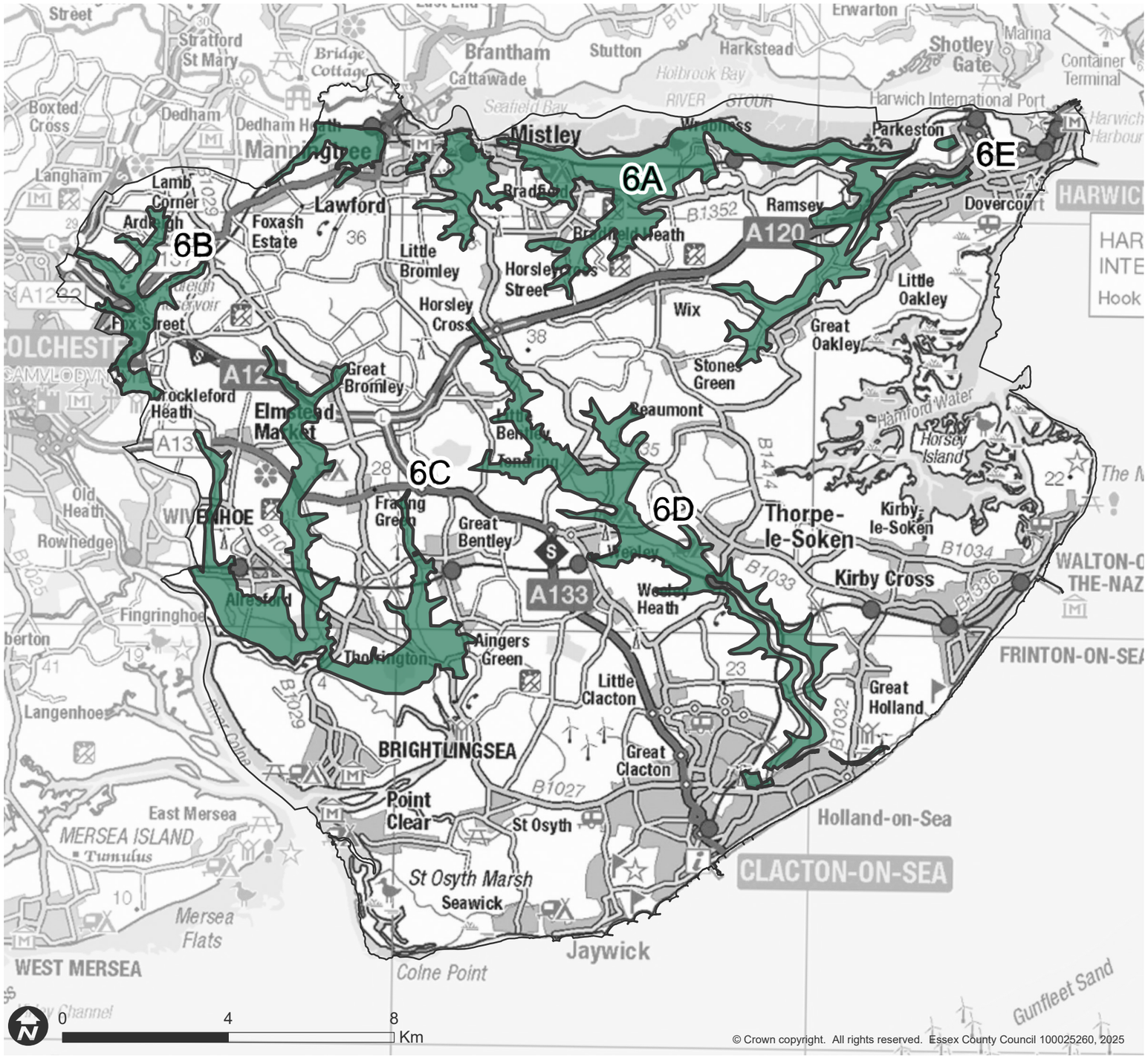

Figure 132: Locations of LCAs within LCT 6.

Physical Influences

Unlike the broader, glacially influenced valleys of the Colne and Stour, the inland clay valleys have been shaped by more recent erosion of the underlying clay, creating narrow, distinctive 'V' shaped profiles. The clay soils here are slowly permeable and prone to seasonal waterlogging, which supports areas of pasture and extensive deciduous woodland.

In contrast, some slopes and valley edges contain lighter, sandy soils washed down from the adjacent plateau. These provide pockets of more favourable agricultural land and produce variations in vegetation types across the valley sides.

Human Influences

Historically, the clay valleys saw little settlement and remained heavily wooded. Agriculture expanded onto the shallower slopes over time, creating larger open fields, while the steeper slopes retained their woodland cover.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the valleys' waterways were used for power, leading to the construction of watermills, mill ponds and stone bridges, many of which became characteristic valley features.

In more recent times, the rural character has been influenced by the introduction of railways, major roads, sewage works, reservoirs and some residential development. Localised gravel extraction has also shaped parts of the landscape through the creation of surface pits.

Settlement Form and Pattern

The Clay Valleys are typically sparsely settled, with small hamlets dispersed along minor lanes. These often comprise loosely grouped traditional buildings nestled within woodland. Mills and maltings were commonly located at river crossing points, while manor houses and large farm complexes tend to occupy the upper valley slopes, making the most of long views across the valley. More recent development has introduced sewage works, industrial units and new housing areas into parts of the valley, altering the previously quiet and rural character.



Figure 133: The valley form is visible from St Mary's Churchyard, Lawford.

LCA 6A: Stour Valley System

Overall, the *Stour Valley System* is rich in historic and ecological interest as well as valued for its scenic qualities. The valley sides form an important rural setting to the open waters of the Stour Estuary and are an intrinsic element of the character of the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape, and visible from the Suffolk coast and craft on the open water. The area has escaped the pressures of agricultural intensification and built development associated with the more easily accessible, flatter areas of the district, and the landscape shows good survival of characteristic features such as the steep wooded valley sides, historic lanes and impressive buildings associated with ancient ports.

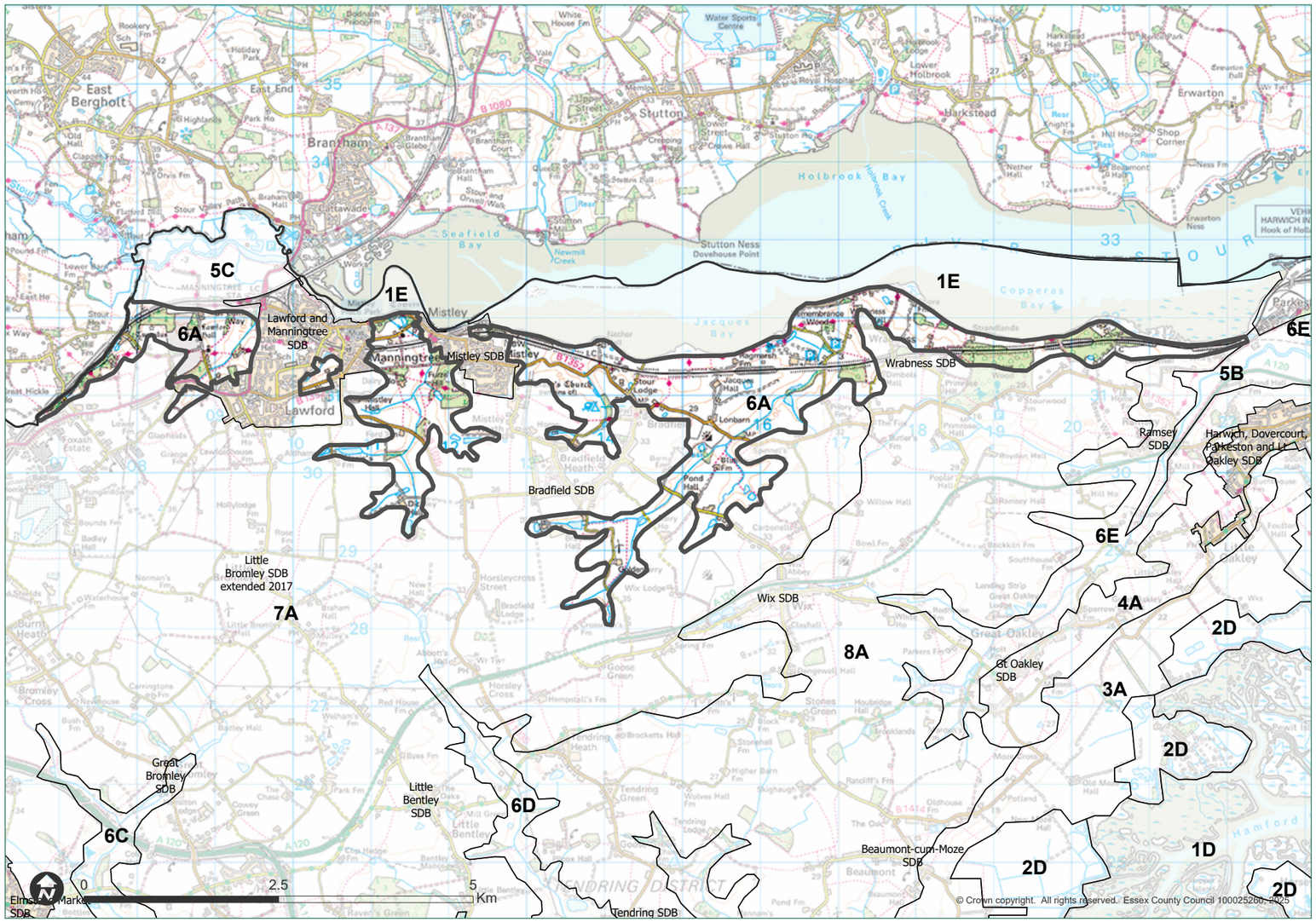

Figure 134: Location of LCA 6A.

Key Characteristics

- Southern slopes and scenic tributary valleys of the Stour, forming a setting to one of the most important wildlife estuaries in Europe.
- Since 2020 significant parts of the area fall within the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape.
- The area north-west of Lawford forms part of the Dedham Vale National Landscape.
- Steep wooded sides form a rural backdrop to the open waters of the Stour Estuary.
- The geology consists of brickearth with sands and gravels, London Clay on the valley sides and river terrace gravels and alluvium in the valley floor.
- Hidden landscapes are provided by tributary valleys, with fields of arable and pasture divided by thick hedgerows with hedgerow oaks.
- Dramatic buildings provide focal points along the river, including quayside warehouses, maltings, church spires and towers.
- Leafy lanes drop steeply down the valley sides.
- Outstanding views of the estuary and Suffolk shore from the mainline railway and B1352 road.
- Historic port of Manningtree and village of Mistley on the southern bank of the Stour Estuary face the Suffolk landscape across the mile-wide river.
- Within Furze Hill sits an ancient oak tree known as 'Old Knobbley', which dates from the 13th century.

Description

The Stour Valley marks the county boundary that separates Suffolk to the north from Essex to the south. The Stour Valley was enlarged by glacial meltwaters at the end of the Ice Age and then 'drowned' by subsequent subsidence and changing sea levels, giving rise to a characteristically wide estuary. It is one of the most important wildlife estuaries in Europe and supports a sizeable population of swans. The *Stour Valley System* landscape character area (LCA) within Tendring District is composed of the southern Stour slopes and its tributary valleys, the upper limits of the character area defined by the break in slope.

The southern Stour slopes are typically undulating, forming a wooded backdrop to the open waters of the Stour Estuary. The underlying clay and glacial loams give rise to a gleyic argyllic brown earth soil type which is deeply permeable, coarse, and loamy and supports medium-grade agricultural land. The principal mineral resources are the sands and gravels present along the lower sides of the Stour, which are excavated for use in construction.

The shallower valley sides support an agricultural landscape of arable fields and pasture divided by thick hedgerows with hedgerow oaks, with fields a mixture of later enclosure by agreement and irregular fields of ancient origin. Post-1950s boundary loss has been moderate. The steeper slopes support ancient deciduous woodland and have a coppice-with-standards structure where the sweet chestnut, hornbeam, hazel, and small-leaved lime form the coppice species and the ash, oak and wild cherry form the standards. The ground flora is typically bluebell and yellow archangel with scrubby species such as bramble in places.

The tributary valleys have an intimate, wooded character which contrasts with the adjacent expansive Stour Estuary and the large-scale arable landscapes of the plateau above. The slopes include an important cluster of ancient woodland, including West Grove and East Grove, both Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS), and the Stour Woods and Copperas Woods, as well as mixed plantation woodland. Alder and willow are also found in the woodlands that dominate streamlines.

Stour and Copperas Woods – together designated as the 'Stour and Copperas Woods, Ramsey' Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) – form the largest area of woodland in north-east Essex and represent the only location in the county where coastal and woodland habitats meet. Three out of four of the units of the Stour and Copperas Woods SSSI have been assessed by Natural England in 2022 as 'Favourable', though evidence of ash die-back was recorded in the canopy, with one unit north-west of the rail line being assessed as 'Unfavourable – Recovering' because of the loss of mature standard trees due to stabilisation works by Network Rail.



Figure 135: Lanes wind through the undulating landscape

To the west of Wrabness is Oakfield Wood, a green burial site that forms part of the Wrabness Local Nature Reserve (LNR). Together with its remembrance woodland, the site continues to be planted up with native species, resulting in a significant increase in native tree cover in this area. The Wrabness LNR is managed by the Essex Wildlife Trust and overlaps with the Wrabness Depot and Marsh LoWS. This LoWS is a former naval mine depot dating from 1921 and comprises grazed grassland, scrub wood, and ponds with marshy grassland that is flower rich and adds to the visual interest and texture of the landscape. To the north-east is an area of old grazing marsh, providing foraging opportunities for some coastal waders and supporting a network of ditches. Managed for wildlife by the Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT), this site is particularly important for Turtle Dove, Nightingale, Bullfinch, Linnet and Yellowhammer – all these species have seen a sharp decline in recent years in Tendring District. Wild plants such as Corn Mint (*Mentha arvensis*), Hairy Buttercup *(Ranunculus sardous*), Sea Aster (*Tripolium pannonicum*) and Ox-Eye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) can also be found.

Mistley Park, Furze Hill and Lawford Hall Park are areas of former and surviving parkland overlooking the Stour. The Furze Hill Complex LoWS has a variable topography resulting in a mosaic of different habitat types. The grassland components vary considerably: on the higher ground is dry acid grassland, and nearer the stream the sward is either tussocky or a damp meadow, though its most interesting assets are the many

'veteran' oak trees throughout the woodland. The oldest ancient oak tree here, known as Old Knobbley, dates from the 13th century and is a remarkable and locally well-loved oak, with its own social media page and a history rich in local folklore. These veteran trees can support a great diversity of invertebrate species, and with age become very important as bat roosting sites.

Ancient woodland is present in a number of the LoWS: Copperas Wood East, Brakey Grove, East Grove, and West Grove LoWS. Several LoWS contain the Lowland Grassland BAP Priority Habitat: Shir Burn Wood and Meadow is a well-managed broadleaved woodland with several spring-fed streams and a marshy meadow adjacent, whilst upslope the sward comprises acid grassland. Wignall Brook Grassland is formed of an extensive series of stream valley grasslands either side of Wignall Brook, Lawford and comprises dry semi-acid, through dry neutral to marshy grassland. Wignall Street Grassland is an undulating, west-sloping area of old grassland which includes Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*), a species very scarce in Tendring District and included in the Essex Red Data List of plants. The lower valley area has damp grassland. Key priority species identified in the 2025 Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and present in LCA 6A include Swift, Lapwing, Ringed Plover, Nightingale, Dormice, Western Barbastelle, and the Stag Beetle. Between Manningtree and Mistley Essex LNRS highlights an area of 'strategic marine habitat creation opportunities'. Along the stream running south from Mistley, further areas are identified as having potential importance for 'strategic' freshwater standing water creation opportunities, and such opportunities should be further explored.

Ancient leafy lanes drop steeply down the valley sides. Good examples are Wall Lane at Wrabness Point, which is Saxon in origin, and Church Hill towards Lawford Hall, which runs along the Grade I listed Parish Church of St Mary. Both are classed as 'Protected Lanes', as is Cansey Lane in Bradfield. The B1352 follows the Stour from Manningtree eastwards, bearing away from the coastal edge at Bradfield. This road emphasises the undulating nature of the area and provides outstanding views of the Suffolk shore across the Stour Estuary. The railway line follows the coastal edge more closely, passing through Stour and Copperas Woods, and the long-distance footpath the Essex Way also runs parallel with the Stour.



Figure 136: Wrabness foreshore.



Figure 137: Old Knobbley, a 13th-century oak tree near Mistley.



Figure 138: 'House for Essex' by Grayson Perry and FAT Architecture.

West of modern Lawford and Manningtree lies Grade I listed building Lawford Hall, a manor house set in the parkland grounds of Lawford Park. The Bronze Age round barrow adjacent to Lawford Park is a rare survival of an upstanding prehistoric earthwork in Essex and a Scheduled Monument. Cropmark evidence shows that it forms part of a larger barrow cemetery.

The Stour Estuary is famous for its trade in corn, coal, timber, and fish, and although Manningtree and Mistley are within an urban character type and outside of this LCA, they form part of the setting and history of this LCA. The historic port of Manningtree is located on the southern bank of the Stour Estuary facing the Suffolk landscape across the mile-wide river. Manningtree has retained its medieval and post-medieval street plan which, along with the quayside, lies parallel with the river course. A thriving port by Tudor times, it received its Charter in 1238 and the ancient site of the market, at the crossroads in the town centre, is still known as Market Cross. Today Manningtree is a small market town and sailing centre, with some fine Georgian buildings, historic pubs, and restaurants. The village of Mistley lies to the east of the town and port of Manningtree. It was built in the 18th century to include a quay, wharves, warehouses, and a large steam mill. In the latter part of the

19th century, local landowner Richard Rigby built many houses, with several granaries, warehouses, a large malting-house, and the spacious quay, which forms an extension of the port of Manningtree.

The Swan Fountain at Mistley represents the one surviving example of Richard Rigby's attempt to develop Mistley into a fashionable spa. The town instead developed into a centre for the malting industry. Mistley Towers, a Scheduled Monument (SM) and Grade I listed building designed by Robert Adam in 1776, still dominates the skyline – all that remains of the once grandiose 18th-century parish church. Mistley's quayside is a significant industrial landscape including 19th and 20th-century industrial buildings associated with the port and malt industry, including the brick English Diastatic Malt Extraction Company (EDME Co) chimney, built in 1929 and standing over 30m (100ft) tall, which provides a local industrial landmark.

Mistley remains an active port facility with docking at Mistley Quay and Baltic Wharf. Outside these towns the settlement pattern is typically one of scattered groups of farm buildings as well as dispersed halls, cottages, and the occasional hamlet. WWII defensive structures, mostly pillboxes, survive in the area, particularly along the line of the Stour. There is seasonal settlement in the area at Wrabness Point, where the only built development is formed of distinctive holiday huts, raised above the water level on stilts. The 'House for Essex', also known as 'Julie's House', designed by FAT Architecture and Grayson Perry (2015), is located just north of Wrabness and has become a landmark.

The farmsteads are often elegant buildings and are in a variety of grand designs and styles. Red brick and clay tile are locally sourced materials. The agricultural outbuildings are typically red brick and black clapboard with red clay tile roofs. They are long, low and of a simple design, their roofs highly visible in the landscape.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Stour and Copperas Woods, Ramsey	1004155	SSSI
Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths	33	National Landscape
Wrabness LNR	n/a	LNR
Brakey Grove	Te96	LoWS
Copperas Wood East	Te111	LoWS
East Grove	Te104	LoWS
Furze Hills Complex	Te58	LoWS
Shir Burn Wood and Meadow	Te25	LoWS
West Grove	Te102	LoWS
Wignall Brook Grassland	Te45	LoWS
Wignall Street Grassland	Te40	LoWS
Wrabness Depot and Marsh	Te90	LoWS
Copperas Woods Nature Reserve *(Essex Wildlife Trust)*	n/a	NR
Wrabness Nature Reserve *(Essex Wildlife Trust)*	n/a	NR

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Stour Estuary, Wrabness & Ramsey Creek	Coastal Protection Belt
Cansey Lane, Bradfield	Protected Lane
Church Hill, Lawford	Protected Lane
Wall Lane, Wrabness	Protected Lane

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Manningtree and Mistley	n/a	Conservation Area



Figure 139: Remaining parkland of Lawford Park.

Change

- Cessation of coppice management has resulted in the loss of structure and species diversity of the traditionally coppiced woodlands.
- Invasive/exotic species such as sycamore and rhododendron have spread into native deciduous woodland, threatening the locally distinctive species composition of the woodlands.
- Pressure for built development on the outskirts of Manningtree, Mistley and Lawford. For example, Summers Park, a modern residential estate in Lawford, which is visible over the valley from St Mary's Church.
- Ongoing pressure for road improvements and faster links along the estuary threatening the rural character of the minor roads and leafy lanes.
- Risk of erosion and release of carbon at Stour shoreline due to climate change and loss of marsh, which may need local intervention in areas near Wrabness and the shore of Copperas Bay. Carbon storage is provided by the high organic matter of the coastal levels, (flat coastal grazing land reclaimed from salt marsh, behind sea and river walls) intertidal flats and salt marshes.
- The proposed route of onshore cable corridor for Tarchon (NSIP) project makes landfall in this LCA.



Figure 140: Mistley Towers, a Scheduled Monument.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the ecological structure and landscape character of woodlands by re-introduction of traditional management techniques such as coppicing.
- Make use of programmes such as the 'Farming in Protected Landscapes' schemes to support nature recovery, reduce the impacts of climate change, protect and enhance cultural heritage and improve access to the landscape where appropriate.
- Encourage the conservation of the species diversity of the native woodlands of the Stour Valley by controlling invasive species such as sycamore and rhododendron and promoting monitoring and management of pests and diseases.
- Promote the conservation of historic industrial and quayside buildings as landmarks in the landscape by restoring to employment, residential or other appropriate uses.
- Support the historic quays of Manningtree and Mistley to conserve their activity and character as historic ports and their links to the sea.
- Conserve the rural character of the lanes and minor roads, such as the B1352 and the historic lanes, through avoidance or mitigation of road upgrades that would threaten this character.
- Conserve the traditional character of historic port settlements by ensuring that buildings are unified through the use of typical local materials such as red brick, lime plaster, weatherboarding, and clay tiles while retaining the variety in built form created by differing building heights, dormers, jetties, and weatherboarded elevations.
- Conserve the strategic gap between Manningtree and Mistley to maintain their individual identities and their rural settings.
- Conserve important views across the Stour, such as the views from Wrabness to Holbrook Bay and views from the B1352.
- Conserve the rural character of the Stour Estuary slopes by ensuring development remains limited to isolated country houses and farms.
- Ensure built development does not intrude onto the highly sensitive crests of slopes, where it would be conspicuous on the skyline or restrict important views.
- Consider the impact of any proposed development within or adjacent to the National Landscape, and ensure all development responds to and complies with the relevant guidance for the The Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape. Light pollution in night skies is an important considerations in this area.
- For most of the shoreline, the current management approach is to hold the current alignment where there are defences, with a 'No Active Intervention' approach for high ground frontages.
- Promote opportunities identified in the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy through development management or partnership working.
- Ensure restoration of the agricultural landscape, field hedgerows and other vegetation following construction works for Tarchon (NSIP) project onshore route.
- Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt areas should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCA 6B: Ardleigh Valley System

In general, the *Ardleigh Valley System* shows good survival of characteristic features such as the steep wooded valley sides, historic lanes and Spring Valley Mill. Hedgerows and woodlands, some of them ancient, as well as the overall pastoral character of the landscape remain. It has escaped the pressures of agricultural intensification and most of the built development associated with the more easily accessible, flatter areas of the district, however, the decline of traditional buildings, the incursion of new development in the valley bottom, and ongoing decline of native woodlands are continuing to degrade the character of this landscape.

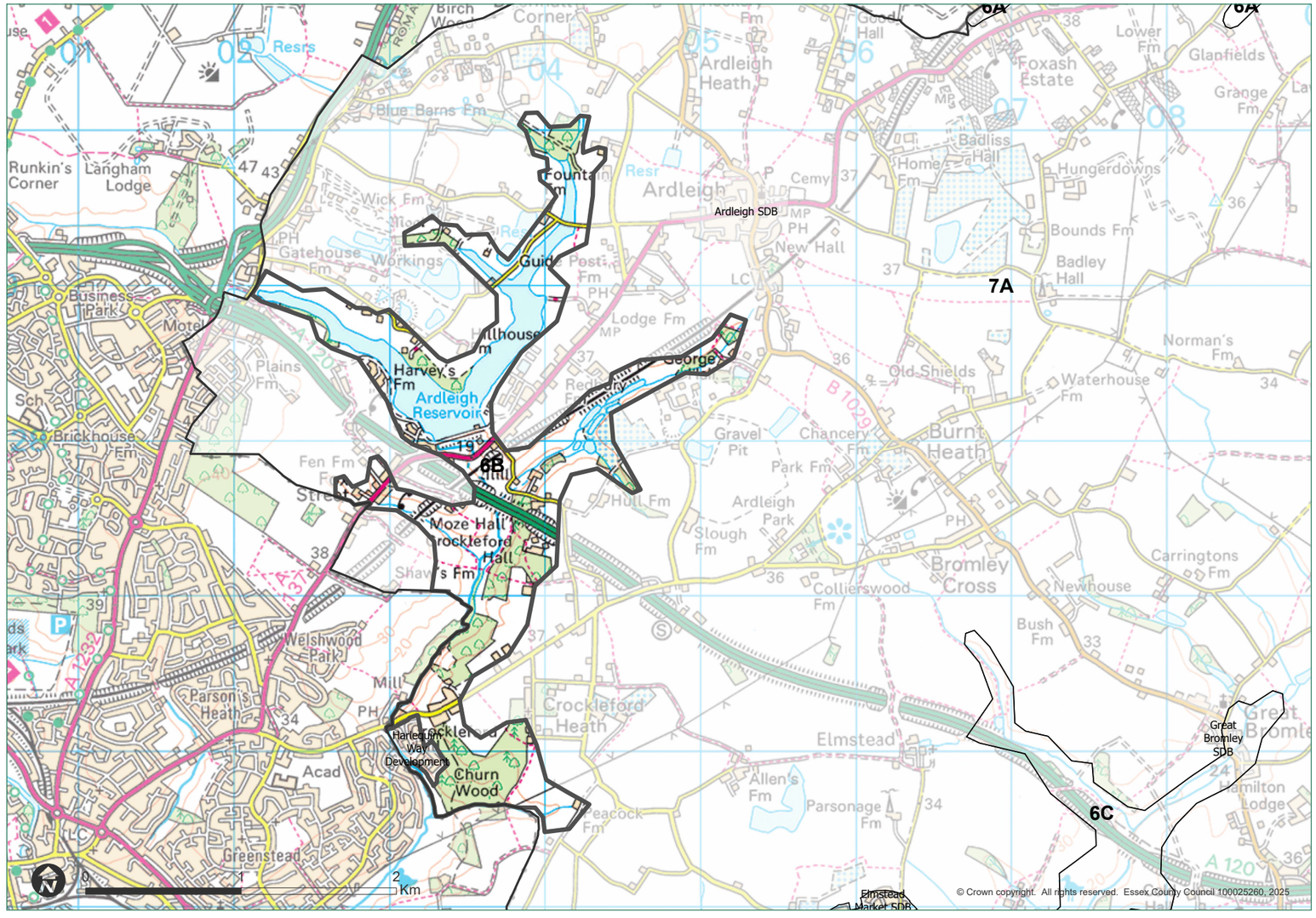

Figure 141: Location of LCA 6B.

Key Characteristics

- Steep-sided wooded valley hidden from the surrounding farmed plateau.
- The geology is largely Brickearth, with sands and gravels and London Clay revealed in the valley sides giving rise to seasonally waterlogged clay soils topped by sandy loams.
- Agricultural land typically of small-scale pasture framed by deciduous woodland and hedgerows.
- Ancient deciduous woodland clings to valley sides and alder and willow dominate streamlines.
- Leafy lanes drop steeply down the valley side and cross the streams on stone bridges e.g. Springvalley Lane.
- The A120 and railway line cut across the valley on embankments, fragmenting the valley both visually and physically.
- Traditionally a dispersed medieval settlement pattern of individual farmsteads and halls with the main settlement of Ardleigh on the plateaux landscape to the north-east. Spring Valley Mill is the only remaining example of a water mill in Tendring.
- Intrusive new settlement in valley bottoms that is out of scale and character with the landscape.
- Gravel extraction and the construction of Ardleigh Reservoir has disrupted the character and field pattern of the valley system in places.

Description

The *Ardleigh Valley System* landscape character area (LCA) is a series of steep-sided river valleys, forming part of the Colne catchment. They have been eroded through the Quaternary deposits of glacial loam into the basal London Clay and small, fast flowing streams are hidden amongst vegetation in the valley bottom.

These 'hidden' valleys retain an intimate, often tranquil wooded character which contrasts with the adjacent expansive, large-scale arable landscapes of the plateau above. The valley sides support small-scale fields of pasture divided by thick hedgerows with hedgerow oaks and deciduous oak woodland, such as Churn Wood Local Wildlife Site (LoWS), which clings to the steeper slopes. Churn Wood LoWS and Wall's Wood LoWS both contain ancient woodland. Ardleigh Reservoir Wood LoWS runs along the southern shore of the western arm of the reservoir and includes wet woodland habitat. Ardleigh Reservoir Grassland LoWS provides a mosaic habitat including grassland, scrub and a small alder wood.

The soils have an acidic character as a result of outwash from adjacent sandy/loamy soils on the plateau. This acidic character is visible in the vegetation it supports - deciduous woodland is dominated by oak, ash and hazel. Other trees include silver birch, rowan, sycamore and sweet chestnut. The understorey is typical of acid woodland soils and includes bramble and bracken, with a ground flora including foxglove and bluebell. Rhododendron is also present, dominating the understorey in places. Alder and willow dominate streamlines and old coppice stools are visible in many of the woodlands. The high deciduous tree cover means seasonal change is noticeable.

Leafy lanes are typical of the valley landscape, dropping steeply down the valley sides and crossing streams on stone bridges. Several are historic sunken lanes, for example Spring Valley Lane, which is designated as a Protected Lane. The A120 and railway line, in contrast, cut across the valley on embankments, fragmenting the valley both visually and physically and disrupting tranquillity. Built development is typically located at the top of the valley sides, on the edge of the adjacent plateau.

Within the valley, settlement is traditionally sparse, consisting of small cottages and mill buildings located at river crossing points. However, recent development at Hollytree Walk and Mill



Figure 142: Ardleigh Reservoir, looking north from Wick Lane.



Figure 143: Ardleigh Reservoir, looking south from Wick Lane.



Figure 144: Salary Brook running through Wall's Wood LoWS, an ancient woodland.

View in the valley bottom at Crockleford Hill, disrupt this pattern, creating intrusive built form that is out of scale and character with the valley landscape. Valley Mill, which is Grade II* listed building and the only remaining example of a water mill in Tendring, is now on the 'at risk' register.

Traditional materials are brick (historically from the locally available London Clay), timber cladding (white or black painted) and clay tiles. The valleys have a peaceful, 'hidden' character, but there is always the background noise of traffic from the A120.

Buildings are typically small-scale, two-storey buildings of a simple form. Materials are predominantly red brick, derived from the local London Clay, and often clad with timber boarding. The remaining mill building is finished with white timber boarding and has a distinctive shape typical of the many former mills in this part of Essex. Roofing materials are typically clay tile and roofs are most usually gabled. All colours are muted, although the white timber boarding stands out against the green foliage of the valley woodlands.

The Ardleigh Reservoir was formed by the damming of two of the former stream valleys in the late 1960s and is a significant modern feature in this LCA. The Ardleigh Reservoir has flooded the valley system along the Salary Brook north of the dam adjacent to the A137 and this part is now dominated by water and used as a private fishing lake and for sailing. Public access to its shores is restricted along most of its length and nature conservation interest is high.

Sensitive restoration of former and future gravel pits (e.g. nearby Martells Pits) to wetland habitats will have a positive impact on the biodiversity, recreational potential and character of the landscape and its setting.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Ardleigh Reservoir Grassland	Te3	LoWS
Ardleigh Reservoir Wood	Te1	LoWS
Churn Wood	Te5	LoWS
Churn Wood Meadow	Te4	LoWS
Wall's Wood	Te6	LoWS

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Crown Lane North, Ardleigh	Protected Lane
Spring Valley Lane, Ardleigh	Protected Lane

Change

- Reservoir has obscured the valley landform and former pattern of deciduous woodland on the valley sides.
- Pressure for built development on the outskirts of Colchester has caused incursions into the valley bottom at Crockleford Hill.
- Proposed Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community, located close to boundary at Crockleford Heath, could further impact valley landscape including its visual character and tranquillity.
- Increased pressure on woodland habitat through climate change, invasive species and diseases, as well as decline in woodland management.
- Proposed Norwich to Tilbury overhead lines and pylons north of Wick Lane would have potentially significant visual impact on the setting of the reservoir.
- A120 Colchester bypass and railway line cross the valley on embankment, obstructing visual and physical links up and downstream of the crossing point and affecting tranquillity.
- Dereliction and further loss of traditional dwellings leading to a loss of distinct architectural character within the valley.
- Increased traffic from proposed Garden Community leading to interventions to local lanes including signage, line painting and widening, which threaten the intimate rural character of the winding leafy lanes.
- Poor public access to informal recreational resources such as the reservoir shores.
- Ongoing pressures for gravel extraction.



Figure 145: View over agricultural fields framed by hedges from Footpath 17 Ardleigh, west of Wall's Wood.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the sense of remoteness/tranquillity within these rural valleys and limit further linear, infill development or major sites that would change the traditional settlement pattern.
- Mitigate and manage the potential impacts of the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community proposed on the plateau landscape to the east.
- Conserve clear visual and physical links along the valley by using road bridges rather than embankments to take roads across the valley.
- Conserve the local built character by ensuring that muted red brick and white timber cladding remain the primary building materials.
- Conserve and manage the character of the woodlands by controlling the spread of invasive species and mitigate the effects of climate change and diseases through species choice for restoration or extension.
- Seek to restore the ecological structure and landscape character of native woodlands through the re-introduction of traditional management techniques, supported where appropriate by Environmental Land Management Schemes and opportunities set out in the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
- Opportunity to enhance woodland access through planning agreements, potential compensation or community benefits associated with the Norwich to Tilbury (N2T) upgrade, or through enhancements delivered via the Essex LNRS.
- Conserve the intimate rural character of the winding leafy lanes by avoiding or sensitively managing road upgrades, such as new signage, street lighting, line painting and road widening.
- Consider opportunities to enhance public access to the valleys, for example by creating new circular walks – potentially incorporating the reservoir shores as part of the Colchester Orbital route – and by exploring links to the proposed Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community or community benefits arising from the proposed N2T upgrade.

LCA 6C: Alresford Valley System

Overall, the *Alresford Valley System* has maintained characteristic features such as a rural, undeveloped character, steep wooded valley sides, historic lanes and historic crossing points of the rivers, well-managed hedgerows, and woodlands. This character area has remained largely immune to the pressures of agricultural intensification, dense built development and road upgrades associated with the more easily accessible, flatter areas of the district. However, its character is under threat of erosion due to the progressive encroachment of built development along roadsides, mineral workings close by, the introduction of development such as sewage works, agricultural intensification and the decline in woodland management.

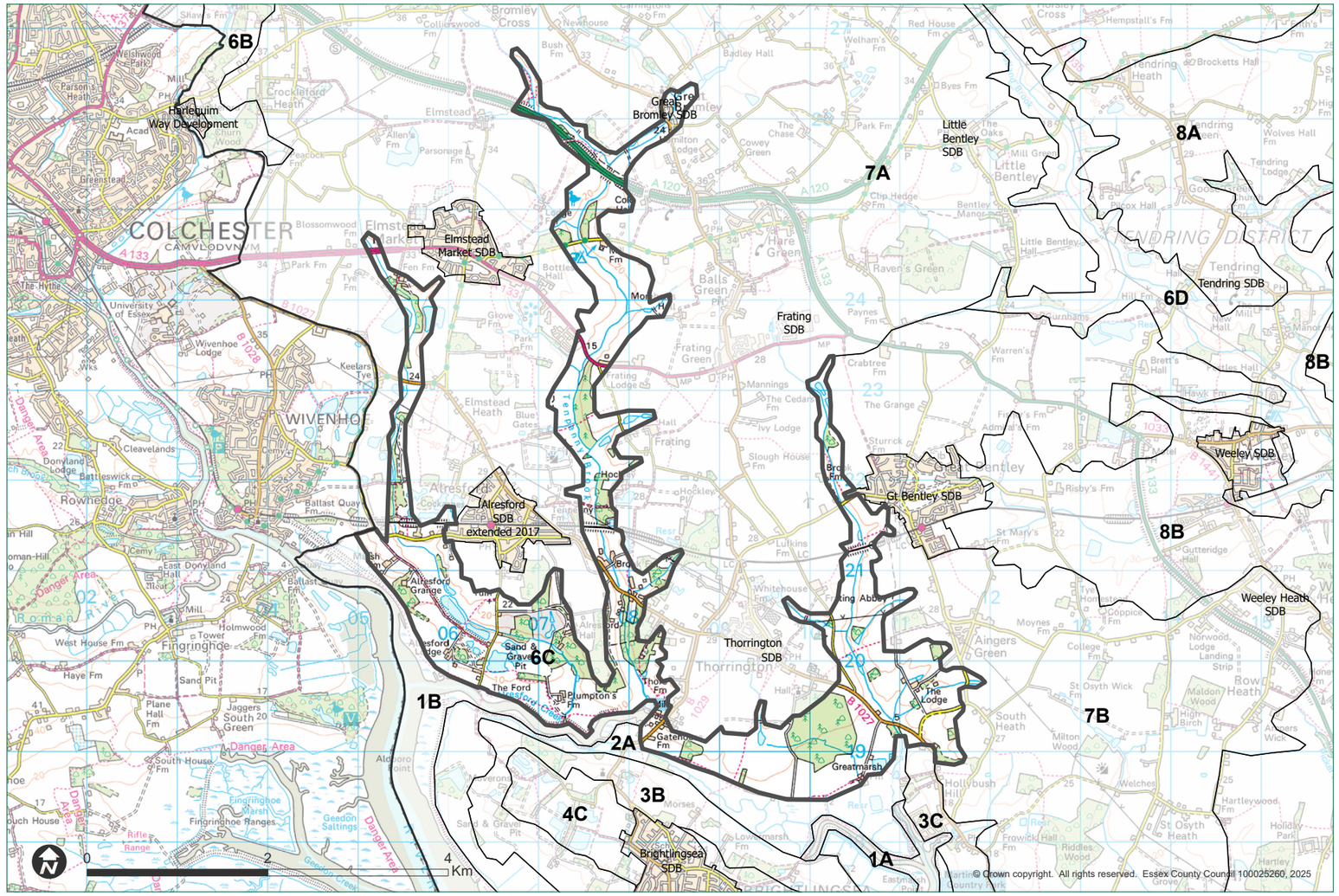

Figure 146: Location of LCA 6C.

Key Characteristics

- A series of distinct river valleys, steep sided in places, containing Sixpenny, Tenpenny and Bentley Brooks and slopes descending to the Colne Estuary.
- The intimate leafy character contrasts with the adjacent expansive open arable landscapes of the Heathland Plateaux.
- Large areas of deciduous woodland including Thorringtonhall Wood.
- Many woodlands evidence old coppice stools.
- The geology consists of brickearth on the ridges between the valleys, sands and gravels on the valley sides and London Clay in the valley floor.
- Historic lanes drop steeply down the valley side and cross the brooks at ancient crossing points.
- Scattered cottages and isolated farms create a sparse settlement pattern.
- Ribbon development on the edge of Thorrington Cross resulting from recent infill.
- Gravel pits and sewage works are present.
- Major mineral extraction works south of Alresford have resulted in loss of the archaeological resource.
- Legacy of 20th-century industrial structures visible at Alresford Creek.

Description

The *Alresford Valley System* landscape character area (LCA) forms part of the Colne catchment. It is a series of distinct river valleys, steep sided in places, which have been eroded, through the Quaternary deposits of glacial loam, into the basal London Clay. The underlying geology of clay and glacial drift gives rise to a range of soils, from clayey soils to deep permeable sandy and loamy soils.

These soils give rise to some good agricultural land and support arable crops, grassland and woodland, but have also led to sand and gravel extraction. The acidic character of the sandy loams is identifiable where gorse, bracken and broom appear in hedgerows.

The majority of the valley system has a 'hidden' character due in part to its wooded character, which contrasts with the adjacent expansive large-scale, open arable landscapes of landscape character type (LCT) 7: *Heathland Plateaux* . The steeper valley sides support small-scale fields of pasture divided by thick hedgerows with hedgerow oaks. The south-facing slopes below Thorrington are much less steep and unusual in that they support an area of large-scale arable land.

A small unit of the Colne Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies north of Thorrington Mill and includes Mill Dam, a freshwater lake surrounded by emergent vegetation in the form of common reed (*Phragmites australis*). This unit was assessed by Natural England in 2009 as being in 'Favourable' condition, though there was evidence of low water levels and algal blooms after hot and dry periods. Areas to the north shore of Arlesford Creek also fall within this SSSI and just reach into LCA 6. This unit was assessed by Natural England in 2009 as being in 'Unfavourable – Recovering' condition due to salt marsh erosion, with 'recovering' noted to relate to habitat re-creation within the estuary.

The valleys are characterised by a comparatively high proportion of woodland cover, with a significant number of ancient deciduous woodland often designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS). A great number of LoWS fall wholly or partially within this LCA and vary greatly in the habitats they support, including wet woodland and streamside vegetation along the brooks, ancient woodland, and former gravel pits that now form mosaics of ponds, grassland, woodland, and brownfield



Figure 147: Grazed fields on the northern bank of Arlesford Creek with backdrop evidence of past and ongoing mineral extraction.



Figure 148: Remains of the aerial runway to Arlesford Creek.



Figure 149: Ongoing mineral extraction near Arlesford.

habitats. Several of the LoWS support Dormice, a UK BAP priority species that is scarce in Essex.

Thorringtonhall Wood LoWS is one of the largest ancient woodlands in the district. Other LoWS containing ancient woodland include Fratinghall/Captains Wood, Alresford Hall Woods, Thorrington Plantation, Crestland Wood, parts of Church Road Wood, and Rook Wood. These woodlands are typically composed of sweet chestnut, hazel, birch or hornbeam coppice with oak, ash and poplar standards, with bramble and bracken often dominating the ground flora, although bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), wood anemone (*Anemonoides nemorosa*), dog's mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*) and wood sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) are present where conditions allow. Most of the woodlands are no longer actively coppiced, but old coppice stools are evident. The high deciduous tree cover means seasonal change is a feature of the valleys.

Small, fast flowing streams of Sixpenny, Tenpenny and Bentley Brooks are hidden amongst vegetation in the valley bottom, with alder and willow dominating streamlines. Old pollards of willow and poplar are also often found alongside streams. Damp meadows and unimproved neutral grasslands are found along the streams in the less well-drained areas, for example at the Tenpenny Brook LoWS. This site consists of 4.7 ha of damp meadow with areas of scrub and secondary woodland along the Tenpenny Brook, including some previously pollarded alder standards and willows at the perimeter. Bentley Brook LoWS comprises a mosaic of different habitats including grassland, woodland, scrub and ponds as well as the brook channel itself. Most of the grassland is damp and grazed by cattle.

Leafy lanes are typical of valley landscapes, dropping steeply down the valley side and crossing streams at historic crossing points often on stone bridges or newer bridges built in the place of historic fords. The Colchester to Clacton railway line, in contrast, cuts across the valley on embankments, fragmenting the valley both visually and physically. The area is also bisected by the modern A120.

Historically, the valleys have been devoid of built development as the farms and villages were located on the surrounding *Heathland Plateaux* (LCT 7). Farms are typically located at the top of the valley slopes where they overlook the valleys, for example Alresford Hall and Thorrington Hall. Within the valleys, settlement remains sparse and consists of scattered cottages and isolated farms, although more recent infill has resulted in ribbon development eroding the settlement pattern, for example on the edge of Thorrington Cross.

Rural dwellings are typically small-scale,one-and-a-half- or two-storey buildings of a simple form with gable ends. Steeply



Figure 150: Sixpenny Brook.



Figure 151: The remains of St Peter's Church are a Scheduled Monument.



Figure 152: View to the north from the grounds of St Peter's Church.

pitched roofs, sometimes with dormer windows, and end chimneys are typical. Materials are predominantly red brick, often semi-clad with timber boarding. Roofs are typically plain clay tile on residential dwellings or clay pantile on agricultural buildings. All colours are muted, although the white timber boarding stands out against the green foliage of the valley woodlands.

The remains of the medieval St Peter's Church, Alresford (Grade II listed and Scheduled Monument) at the top of Ford Lane is an important historic feature with magnificent views over the valleys towards the Colne Estuary. The church was destroyed by fire in 1971 and is now roofless, and its associated grounds are now designated a LoWS consisting of areas of grassland, both long sward and mown, with trees and shrubs.

The important post-medieval Thorrington Tide Mill (Grade II* listed) survives at the head of Alresford Creek.

Major mineral extraction works south of Alresford have resulted in extensive loss and truncation of the archaeological resource, but in most of the area survival has been shown to be good. Mineral extraction has left a legacy of 20th-century industrial structures such as the aerial runway leading to Alresford Creek.

The glacial sands and gravels that border the valleys have been exploited. Some extraction sites have been restored, such as Alresford Lodge Pits, resulting in the formation of new habitats and landscape features. The valleys have also been used as a location for the siting of sewage works and caravan sites, but overall, the valleys have a peaceful, rural character.

The King Charles III England Coastal Path section that runs from Salcott to Jaywick, which has been approved but not yet open for public use, is often based on existing Public Rights of Way along the sea wall or estuary edge, including along Alresford Creek.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Type	Number
Colne Estuary	1000666	SSSI
Alresford Grange	LoWS	Te11
Alresford Hall Woods	LoWS	Te26
Alresford Lodge Pits	LoWS	Te14
Bentley Brook	Te50	LoWS
Church Road Wood, Frating	LoWS	Te32
Crestland Wood	LoWS	Te21
Frating Abbey Farm Road Verge	LoWS	Te49
Fratinghall/Captains Wood	LoWS	Te24
Hockley Farm Woods	LoWS	Te28
Mill Dam Meadow	LoWS	Te35
Mill Wood	LoWS	Te27
Oldhall Wood	LoWS	Te19
Poplar Chase	LoWS	Te36
Rook Wood	LoWS	Te39
St. Peter's Church, Alresford	LoWS	Te16
Tenpenny Brook	LoWS	Te30
Thorrington Plantation	LoWS	Te31
Thorringtonhall Wood	LoWS	Te48
Villa Farm Quarry	LoWS	Te12

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Colne Estuary, Brightlingsea & Alresford Creek	Coastal Protection Belt

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Remains of St Peter's Church, 460m south of Church Farm	1019881	Scheduled Monument



Figure 153: View towards Rook Wood LoWS.

Change

- Further expansion of the coniferous content of woodlands would result in a change in character of the woodland and have a negative impact on the ground flora.
- Increased pressure on woodland habitat through climate change, invasive species and diseases, as well as decline in woodland management.
- Ongoing pressure for built development along roadsides resulting in ribbon development and the impression of dense development.
- Increased traffic leading to road upgrades to local lanes including signage, line painting and widening which threaten the intimate rural character of the historic rural lanes.
- Relatively little access along the majority of valleys.
- Ongoing pressure for gravel extraction.



Figure 154: Verdant banks of the Sixpenny Brook.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the rural, undeveloped character of the valleys and in particular limit further spread of linear development along roads.
- Sensitively locate any development on the outskirts of settlements such as Alresford, Great Bentley and Thorrington, ensuring it sits outside the Clay Valley landscapes. Native deciduous woodland within the valleys should provide a natural backdrop to built development, and any new proposals should include additional native tree planting.
- Conserve and manage the character of the woodlands by controlling the spread of invasive species, and mitigate the effects of climate change and biohazards such as plant diseases through species choice for restoration or extension.
- Seek to restore the ecological structure and landscape character of native woodlands by re-introducing traditional management techniques, making use of appropriate planning gain, Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes, or drawing on opportunities identified in the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
- Conserve the setting of historic features, for example the ruined church (St Peter's Church SM) on Ford Lane.
- Identify opportunities for restoring/extending native deciduous woodland, particularly on the edges of existing woodlands, to enhance the wooded character of the valleys e.g. through ELM schemes. Encourage natural regeneration or use of locally sourced native tree species for woodland creation.
- Identify opportunities to restore traditional management techniques such as pollarding of willows and poplars along stream courses to enhance local character e.g. through ELM schemes.
- Enhance public access and enjoyment of the valleys by exploring opportunities to improve connectivity, including links to the King Charles III England Coastal Path.
- Conserve the distinct character of sparse settlement pattern with cottages and isolated farms along minor lanes and resist development of residential dwellings along roadsides that would lead to continuous ribbon development and merging of adjacent settlements.
- Conserve the local built character by ensuring that muted red brick and white timber cladding remain the primary building materials.
- Seek the sensitive restoration of former and future gravel pits to maximise benefits for biodiversity, recreation, and landscape character, including opportunities to create wetland habitats as identified in the Essex LNRS.
- Encourage the conservation of the intimate rural character of the winding leafy lanes by resisting road interventions, such as new signage, installation of modern street lighting, line painting and road widening.
- Conserve clear visual and physical links along the valley by using road bridges rather than embankments to take roads across the valley.
- Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt areas should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCA 6D: Holland Valley System

The *Holland Valley System* is a peaceful, rural landscape that shows good survival of characteristic features including unimproved grassland, ancient field systems, well-managed hedgerows, and woodland, some of which is ancient. It has largely escaped the pressures of agricultural intensification, dense built development and road upgrades associated with the more easily accessible, flatter areas of the district. However, progressive agricultural improvement, encroachment of built development along roadsides and valley margins and the decline in woodland management is resulting in a gradual decline of the landscape character.

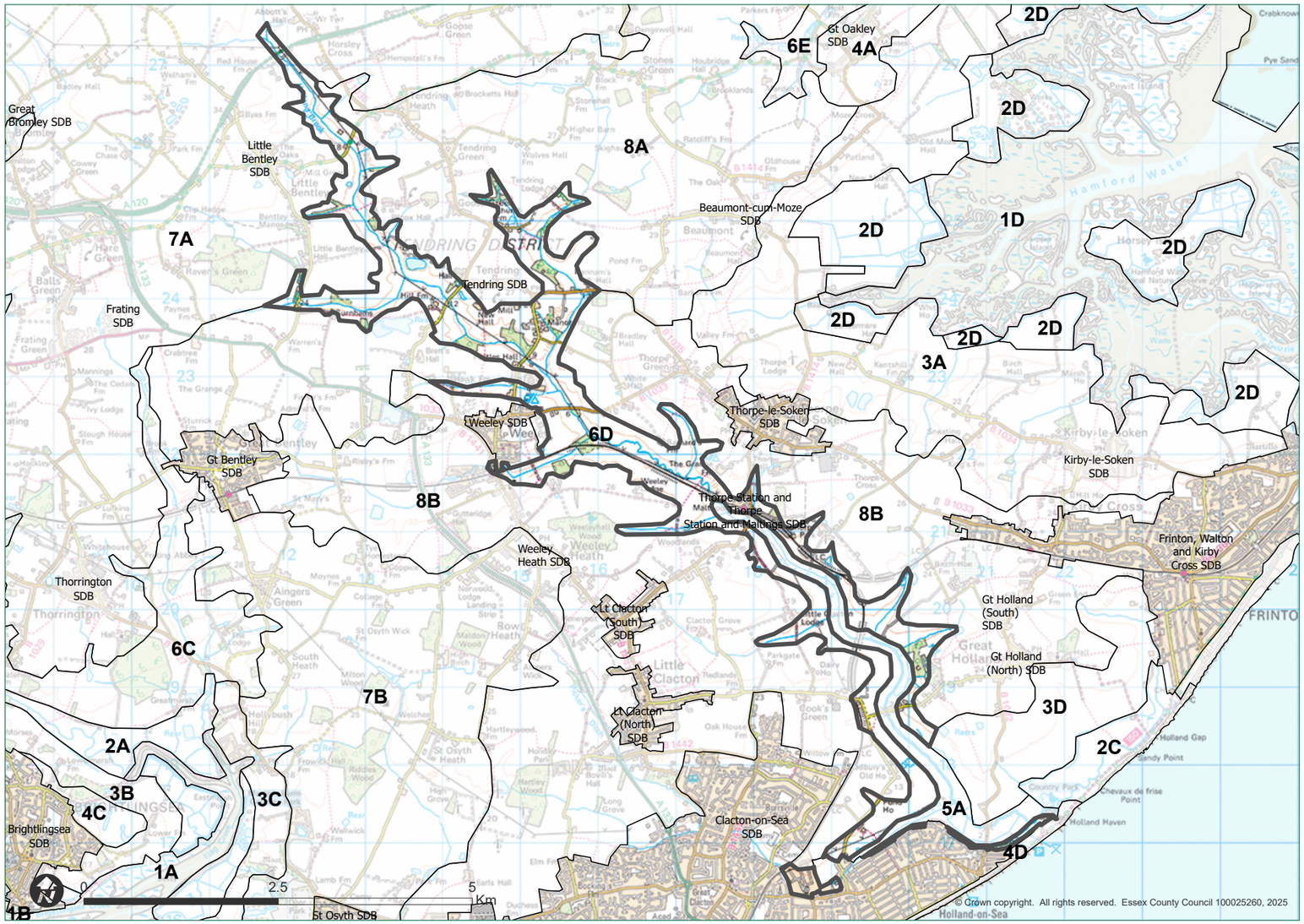

Figure 155: Location of LCA 6D.

Key Characteristics

- Steep-sided valley containing Holland Brook and its tributaries Tendring Brook, Wheeley Brook and Picker's Ditch.
- Contrast with the flat landscapes of the Tendring Plateau.
- Mixed wooded and pastoral landscape with rectilinear fields of ancient origin on the valley sides and later enclosure.
- Ancient woodlands, typically dominated by oak, ash and sweet chestnut, are located in the wetter areas and on the steeper slopes.
- Lanes drop down the valley sides, crossing streams on stone or brick bridges at historic crossing points.
- Typically devoid of built development except for isolated cottages, highly dispersed, and a former corn mill at Crow Bridge.
- Picker's Ditch has been encroached upon by residential development at Clacton. Centurion Business Park encroaches into Holland Brook at its northernmost end.
- Forms a setting to the Holland Haven Marshes SSSI.
- The 19th-century railway line to Frinton- and Clacton-on-Sea runs down into the valley from the north and crosses the Holland Brook close to Thorpe station.
- 20th-century agricultural development has resulted in the construction of numerous reservoirs.
- A former quarry at Great Holland has been converted into the Great Holland Pit Nature Reserve.

Description

The *Holland Valley System* includes the distinctive steep-sided Holland Brook Valley and its tributary valleys of Tendring Brook, Weeley Brook, and Picker's Ditch that provide relief from the flat landscapes of the Tendring plateau. The underlying geology of London Clay has given rise to slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged alluvial soils with brown subsoils. These soils support a wooded pastoral landscape which is distinct from the surrounding flat arable land.

The valleys typically support small-scale fields of pasture divided by thick hedgerows with hedgerow oaks, with a mix of rectilinear fields of ancient origin on the valley sides and later enclosure. The valleys have lost much of their woodland cover, but ancient woodlands are located in the wetter areas on the steeper slopes, with ancient woodlands making up several of the Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS), including Home Wood, Island and Roger's Grove, Tendring Grove, and Hillands Wood. The woodlands are typically dominated by oak, ash and sweet chestnut but also contain hazel, hornbeam, field maple and wych elm. Larch and yew are also present in Home Wood. Most of the woodlands are no longer actively coppiced, but old coppice stools remain visible. Alder, willow, sedges and reeds are present in the woodlands along the streamlines and around standing water.

There are extensive Local Wildlife Sites in this landscape character area (LCA) including the Great Holland Pits, a recolonised gravel works showing remnants of old woodland together with areas of heathy grassland, freshwater pools, and brownfield sites.

Holland Haven Marshes forms the valley floor habitat of LCA 5A *Holland Brook* between the valley sides of the LCA 6D *Holland Valley System* up as far as the railway bridge east of Little Clacton Lodge. The pattern of infrastructure is distinctive and has not changed since Chapman and Andre's map of 1777. Lanes drop down the valley sides and cross the streams on stone or brick bridges. Historic crossing points include Holland Bridge, Fan Bridge and Rice Bridge.

The 19th-century railway line to Frinton-on-Sea and Clacton-on-Sea runs down into the valley from the north and crosses the Holland Brook close to Thorpe-le-Soken station. It pays little attention to topography or landscape features, crossing the



Figure 156: View over the Holland Valley System on each side of the Holland Brook (in LCA 5A).



Figure 157: Great Holland Pits LoWS contains various habitats, including freshwater pools and remnants of old woodland.



Figure 158: View over LCAs 5A and 6D to the west of Great Holland Pits LoWS.

valley in several places on embankment and passing through the middle of Roger's Grove, an ancient woodland and part of the Island and Roger's Grove LoWS.

Historically, the valleys have been devoid of built development, except for the Tendring Mills (corn mill) at Crow Bridge and scattered cottages. Settlement remains sparse today and consists of scattered cottages and farms on the approach to bridge crossings. However, there are some hotspots for settlement along the valleys. There is a cluster of buildings, including Thorpe-le-Soken railway station, an industrial estate at Rice Bridge, and Thorpe Maltings, which is due to be redeveloped for housing with the frontage preserved. The conservation areas of Tendring Village, Thorpe-le-Soken (bothe the village and the station and maltings), reach into LCA 6D. A small section of the Thorpe Hall Registered Park and Gardens also falls in this LCA.

Changes to the settlement pattern include, perhaps most notably, the encroachment of the tributary valley of Picker's Ditch by residential development on the edges of Clacton. Development has extended the influence of urban character into the area, resulting in a corresponding reduction in the extent of this LCA.

Rural dwellings are typically positioned on the roadside and are small-scale, one-and-a-half- or two-storey buildings of a simple form with steeply pitched roofs of plain clay tile on dwellings, and clay pantile on agricultural buildings. Materials are predominantly red brick, often semi-clad with timber boarding.

The glacial sands and gravels on the edge of Great Holland give rise to some heathy grassland. Gravel has been extracted from this area leaving a mosaic of grassland, ancient woodland, pools and wet depressions which support varied flora, birdlife and insect populations. This site is now an Essex Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve. There is relatively little public access into the valleys, particularly in the lower reaches, resulting in a peaceful, rural character.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Great Holland Pits	Te109	LoWS
Hillands Wood	Te77	LoWS
Home Wood	TE79	LoWS
Island and Roger's Grove	TE84	LoWS
Lower Botany Farm	Te93	LoWS
Tendring Grove	TE81	LoWS
Upper Holland Brook	TE98	LoWS
Great Holland Pits Nature Reserve *(Essex Wildlife Trust)*	n/a	NR

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Holland Brook, Marshes and Frinton-on-Sea	Coastal Protection Belt

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Tendring Village	n/a	Conservation Area
Thorpe-le-Soken 2024	n/a	Conservation Area
Thorpe-le-Soken Station and Maltings 2024	n/a	Conservation Area
Thorpe Hall	1000521	Registered Park and Garden

Change

- Loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking woodland resource.
- Lack of traditional woodland and tree management such as coppicing and pollarding.
- Pressure for expansion of built development on the edges of Clacton/Holland-on-Sea, at Weeley and along roadsides.
- Pressure for commercial development such as large solar farms which would not be in keeping with landscape character or the perception of rurality.
- Dereliction and decline of historic buildings and features such as the maltings at Thorpe Station.
- Increased pressure on woodland habitat through climate change, invasive species and diseases, as well as decline in woodland management.
- Road interventions including signage, line painting and widening threaten the intimate rural character of the historic rural lanes and bridge crossing points.
- Lack of public access, particularly along the lower reaches of Holland Brook.
- Thorpe Solar Park (Major application).



Figure 159: Housing development on the outskirts of Weeley has encroached into this LCA.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the rural, undeveloped character of the valleys. Resist further encroachment of urban or suburban development into the valley.
- Resist the siting of large-scale commercial development on valley sides which would be inappropriate within the historic pastoral landscape, adversely affecting landscape character and the perception of rurality.
- Conserve and manage the character of the woodlands by controlling the spread of invasive species, and mitigate the effects of climate change and diseases through species choice for restoration or extension.
- Seek to restore the ecological structure and landscape character of native woodlands by re-introducing traditional management techniques, such as coppicing, making use of appropriate Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes or drawing on opportunities identified in the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) 2025 or subsequent document.
- Consider extending/restoring native deciduous woodland, particularly on the edges of existing woodlands, to enhance the wooded character of the valleys. Native deciduous woodland within the valleys should provide a natural backdrop for any built development.
- Encourage woodland creation through natural regeneration or use locally sourced native tree species when re-planting, making use of relevant ELM schemes or opportunities identified in the Essex LNRS.
- Seek opportunities to enhance public access and enjoyment of the valleys by exploring the creation of riverside walks for the large numbers of residents in Clacton and Frinton.
- Promote the conservation of the distinct character of sparse and scattered settlement pattern with loose knit groups of roadside cottages and isolated farms along minor lanes by resisting development of residential dwellings along roadsides that would lead to continuous ribbon development and merging of adjacent settlements.
- Conserve historic features by promoting restoration and re-use of features such as mills, maltings and bridges, such as the landmark building Thorpe Maltings.
- Conserve the intimate rural character of the winding leafy lanes by avoiding or sensitively managing road interventions such as new signage, the installation of modern streetlamps, line painting and widening.
- Use road bridges rather than embankments when taking roads across the valley, in order to conserve clear visual and physical links along the valley.
- Conserve the local built character by ensuring that muted red brick and white timber cladding remain the primary building materials.
- Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt areas should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCA 6E: Ramsey Creek Valley System

Overall, the *Ramsey Creek Valley System* is a peaceful, rural landscape that has maintained its historic landscape structure and shows good survival of characteristic features such as woodland, semi-improved grassland, historic lanes and bridges. Hedgerows are well managed and woodlands, some of them ancient, are features of the valley. Although progressive agricultural improvement, encroachment of built development on the edges of Harwich and Dovercourt and the loss of woodland are eroding the landscape in places, the valley sides have escaped the pressures of agricultural intensification and infrastructure associated with the more easily accessible, flatter floodplain.

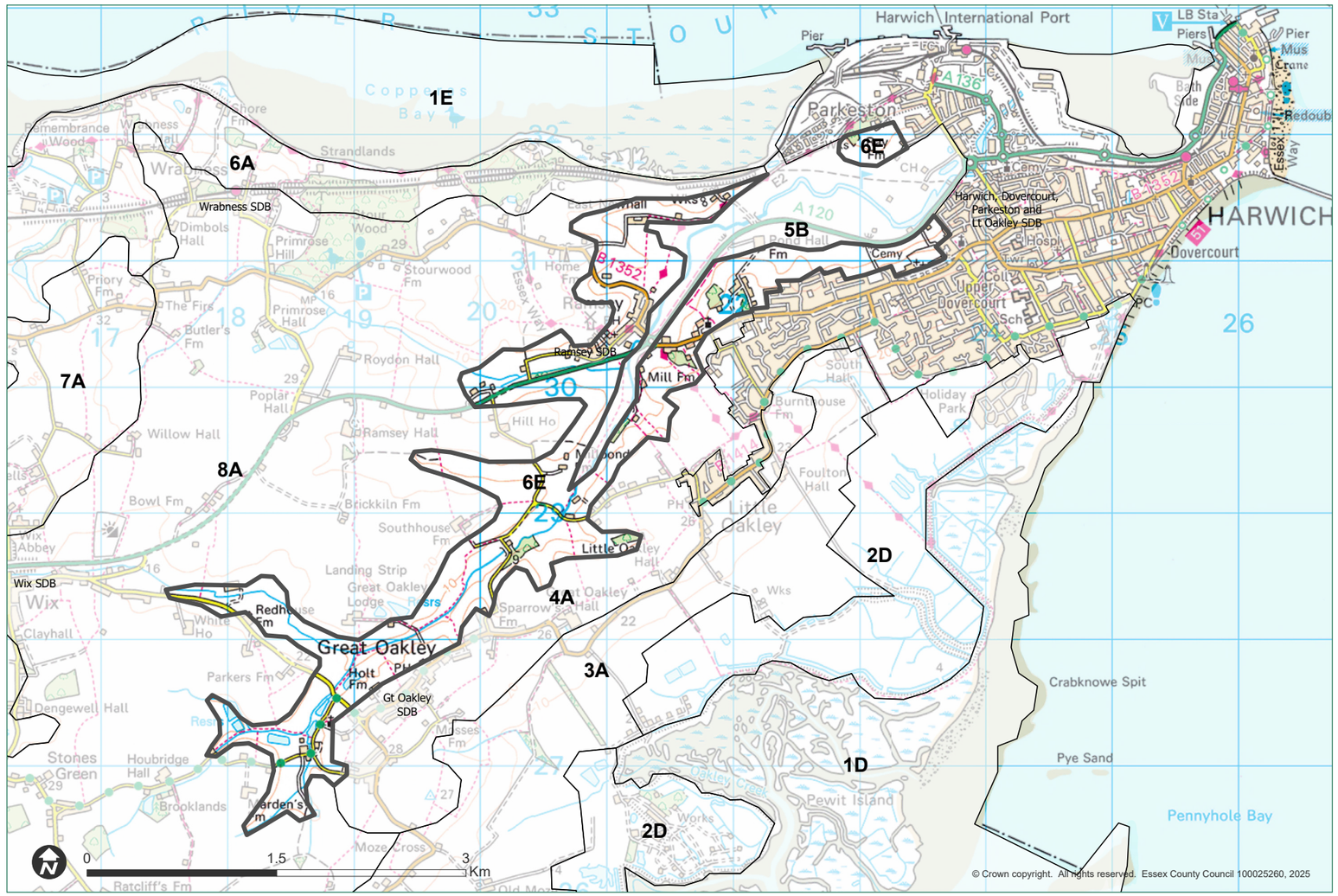

Figure 160: Location of LCA 6E.

Key Characteristics

- Distinctive steep-sided valley of Ramsey Creek and its tributaries, extending inland from Harwich.
- Small-scale pastoral fields divided by thick hedgerows with hedgerow oaks supported by wooded pastoral landscape with valley sides.
- Down the valley sides, historic green lanes wind their way through woodland.
- Historic river crossing points still survive; the Essex Way uses the historic route at Ramsey to cross the creek.
- A120 follows the contours on the floor of the valley.
- Farmsteads and halls along the rural lanes form a distinctive pattern of settlement, along with the small linear settlement of Ramsey Street.
- Michaelstowe Hall is a landmark building that overlooks the valley.
- Residential estates and large factory buildings have encroached into the rural valley landscape at Upper Dovercourt.

Description

The *Ramsey Creek Valley System* forms part of the Stour catchment and includes the distinctive steep-sided valley of Ramsey Creek and its tributaries. The underlying geology of London Clay overlain with alluvium has given rise to slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged soils which support a wooded pastoral landscape. The steeper valley sides support small-scale pastoral fields divided by thick hedgerows with hedgerow oaks.

The valley sides above Ramsey Creek have, to a greater extent, escaped the pressures of agricultural intensification. In contrast, the less steep slopes are often intensively farmed, supporting large-scale fields growing crops. The potential for palaeoenvironmental deposits is high.

The Ramsey Creek Valley System has relatively little woodland compared to the other clay valleys in Tendring. However, the thick hedgerows contribute to a wooded character. The woodlands in this part of the district are typically dominated by oak, ash and sweet chestnut but also contain hazel, hornbeam, field maple and wych elm. Alder, willow, sedges and reeds are present in the woodlands along the streamlines and around standing water.

Various Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) are present in this character area. Soils Wood LoWS, at Soilspond Bridge, comprises some ancient coppice woodland as well as old gravel works which provide additional habitat for Smooth Newts and frogs with winter-wet pools.

At Ramsey, the grounds of Michaelstowe Hall, also known as Ramsey Manor, comprise the mature parkland habitats of Michaelstowe Hall LoWS, a typical mix of mature trees and tall grassland. The LoWS review of 2008 notes the areas of open grassland are enriched acid grassland, which could be improved for wildlife with management and would benefit from a low intensity grazing regime to manage the sward. Just within this character area, the Dockfield Avenue Allotments LoWS on the urban edge of Dovercourt, together with an area of former allotments, provides habitat for Dormice, a very scarce mammal in Essex and a UK and Essex BAP priority species.

The northern section of this LCA forms an outcrop of this character area, comprising the original slumped cliff coastline of



Figure 161: Hedgerows with hedgerow oaks along Hill Road, which is part of 'The Soils, Great Oakley' Protected Lanes.



Figure 162: Grade I listed Parish Church of All Saints, Great Oakley.



Figure 163: Farm reservoir north of Great Oakley.



Figure 164: Cattle on the sloping valley sides.

Parkeston and containing Raycliff Wood, which forms part of the wider Ramsey Creek LoWS.

Settlement in the area was historically dispersed. However, the Ramsey Creek Valley System also contains more settlement than other valleys within Tendring. This is partly due to the proximity of Harwich and partly due to the presence of Ramsey Village, a small linear settlement formerly known as 'Ramsey Street', at an historic crossing point of Ramsey Creek.

The suburbs of Dovercourt within the character area have been omitted in this updated study as the character has been substantially changed. The windmill above Ramsey Village is an important feature in views across the valley. At Ramsey, Michaelstowe Hall, also known as Ramsey Manor and most recently in use as a care facility, is a Grade II-listed former manor with probable Late Saxon or medieval origins, and sits in a prominent position on the valley side overlooking the valley. At Upper Dovercourt, residential estates and large factory buildings have encroached into the rural valley landscape.

The scattered farmsteads and halls are typically red brick, sometimes rendered, and often of impressive scale and design. Agricultural buildings are long, low and constructed from red brick and weatherboarding with clay pantile roofs.

The rural dwellings of the hamlets and villages are small-scale and of a simple form, with materials predominantly being red brick, often plastered or semi-clad with timber boarding. Roofs are typically plain clay tile of a muted colour. The 20th-century suburban estates do not respond to the local vernacular.

The pattern of infrastructure is almost the same as shown on Chapman and Andre's map of 1777, except for the addition of the A120 which follows the contours at the bottom of the valley and the disused railway line whose cutting, known as 'The Hangings', is an important recreational and wildlife resource. At Great Oakley the Protected Lanes 'The Soils Great Oakley' and 'Great Oakley (Two Parts)' run through the centre, and Red Barn Lane runs through the southern tip of this LCA.

There are a number of farm reservoirs, particularly in the upper reaches of the valleys.

There is good public access into the valleys in the upper reaches, with many Public Rights of Way running up the valley sides onto the coastal ridge, including the long-distance footpath the Essex Way, which crosses the creek at Ramsey. The lower parts are however more inaccessible.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Dockfield Avenue Allotments	Te116	LoWS
Michaelstowe Hall	Te113	LoWS
Ramsey Ray	Te115	LoWS
Soils Wood	Te110	LoWS
Whinny Grove	Te112	LoWS

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Stour Estuary, Wrabness & Ramsey Creek	Coastal Protection Belt
Red Barn Lane, Great Oakley	Protected Lane
The Soils, Great Oakley	Protected Lane
Great Oakley (Two Parts)	Protected Lane

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Ramsey	n/a	Conservation Area

Change

- Continuing expansion of Harwich's ridge-top suburb of Upper Dovercourt, resulting in the encroachment of residential estates and large factory buildings into the rural valley landscape.
- Loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the woodland resource.
- Ongoing pressure on woodland habitat through climate change, invasive species and diseases, as well as decline in woodland management.
- Intrusion of traffic from the A120 into the rural landscape.
- Road interventions including signage, line painting and widening threaten the intimate rural character of the historic rural lanes and bridge crossing points.
- Expansion of farm enterprises giving rise to potential landscape character change.
- The proposed route of onshore cable corridor for Tarchon (NSIP) project makes landfall in this LCA.



Figure 165: Views towards Soils Wood LoWS.



Figure 166: Sparrows Corner, part of 'The Soils' Protected Lanes.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve the rural character of the river valley by maintaining a low density of settlement and ensuring built development does not intrude onto ridgelines.
- Avoid ribbon development and merging of adjacent settlements to conserve the sparse, low density settlement pattern and rural setting of settlements.
- Restore and extend native deciduous woodland, particularly along the edges of existing woodlands, to strengthen the wooded character of the valleys, drawing on opportunities identified in the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), and where relevant, Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes. Woodland creation should use natural regeneration or locally sourced native species.
- Seek to conserve views to landmark features such as Michaelstowe Hall, also known as Ramsey Manor, and Ramsey Windmill.
- Conserve the intimate rural character of the historic lanes and their associated vegetation by avoiding or sensitively managing road interventions such as new signage, the installation of modern streetlamps, line painting and widening.
- Use road bridges rather than embankments when taking roads across the valley, in order to conserve clear visual and physical links along the valley.
- Conserve the local built character by using simple, gable-ended buildings with steeply pitched roofs facing the road, while incorporating dormer windows and chimney stacks to add interest to the roofscape.
- Promote strategic opportunities for the creation of grassland, heathland, coastal and freshwater standing water, using opportunities identified in the Essex LNRS (2025) or subsequent document.
- Ensure restoration of the agricultural landscape, field hedgerows and other vegetation following construction works for Tarchon (NSIP) project onshore route.
- Manage expansion of agricultural landholdings to ensure conservation of landscape character.
- Any development proposals within the Coastal Protection Belt areas should align with the latest Shoreline Management Plan and be informed by an assessment of potential coastal change.

LCT 7

Heathland Plateaux

Introduction

The Heathland Plateaux form an extensive area of elevated, largely level farmland occupying much of the western half of the Tendring District. Sitting generally above 25m AOD, these plateaux are shaped by glacial deposits of loam and gravel which have created acidic soils. This underlying geology gives the area its characteristically heathy qualities and distinguishes it clearly from the heavier, clay-based plateau landscapes found further east.

Landscape Character Areas:

- 7A Bromley Heaths
- 7B St Osyth/Great Bentley Heaths

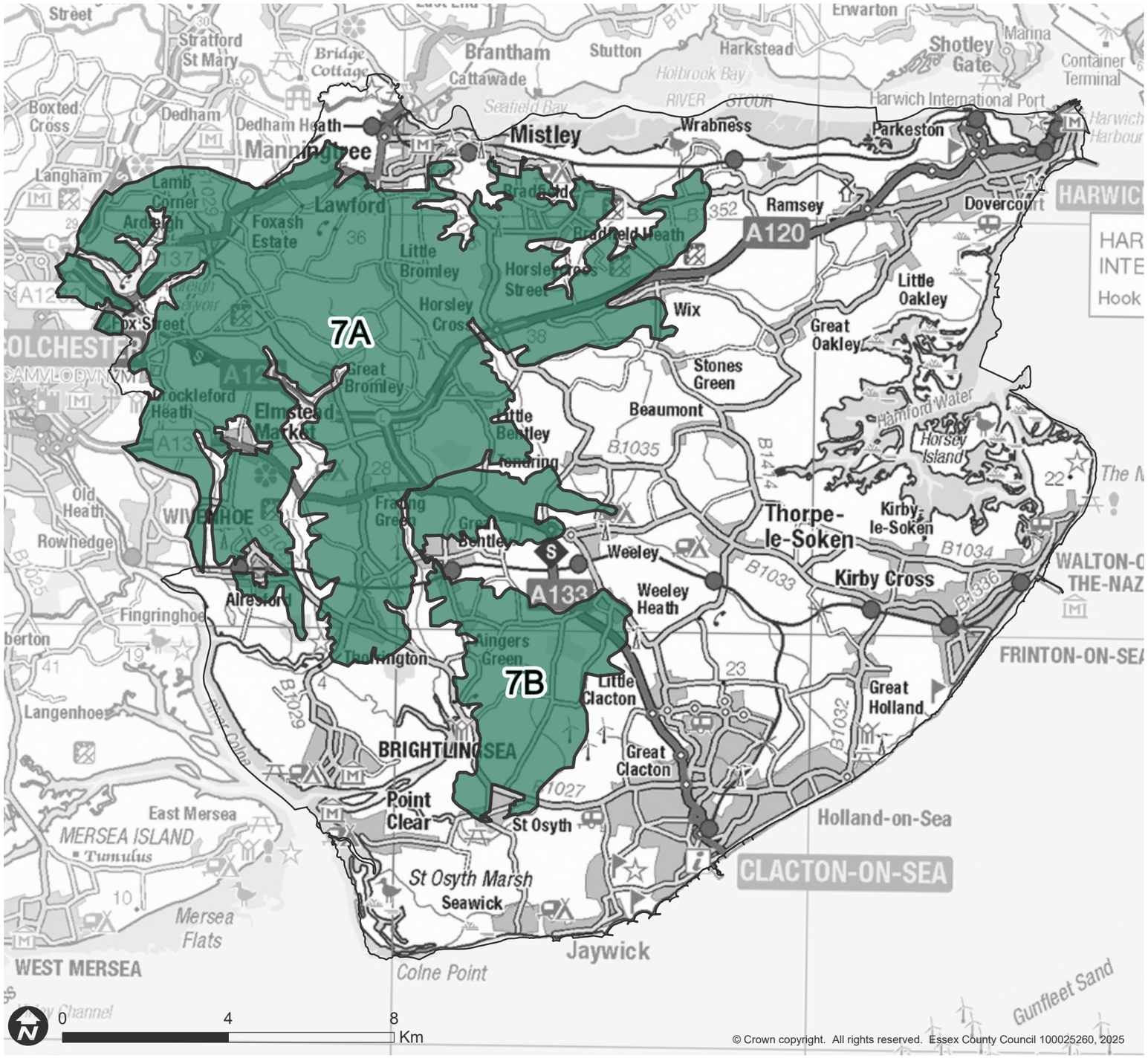

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Figure 167: Locations of LCAs within LCT 7.

3.7 Landscape Character Type 7: Heathland Plateaux

Physical Influences

Although the Anglian ice sheet of around 450,000 years ago did not extend as far south as Tendring, meltwater from the ice laid down broad spreads of loams, sands and gravels across the western part of the district. These lighter, sandy soils still dominate the higher ground and have had a strong influence on the vegetation, supporting remnants of former heathland communities.

Historic mapping, notably the 1777 Chapman and André survey, reveals the once widespread extent of heath across this area. In contrast, pockets of deeper loamy soils have long been attractive for agriculture and have been subject to intensive cultivation over many centuries.

Human Influences

The coarse, free draining loamy soils of the Heathland Plateaux have historically supported extensive arable farming. Early Saxon estates held and managed large areas, shaping much of the early landscape framework. With the shift to the medieval manorial system, common land was enclosed by estate owners, bringing significant change to the appearance and function of the landscape. Although the manorial parks that incorporated the heaths have largely disappeared, some woodland blocks and field boundaries dating from this period remain intact.

Monastic landholdings were also influential, with religious houses such as St Osyth's Priory and Wix Abbey, both founded in the 12th century, managing sizeable estates. From the 16th century onwards, increased use of locally fired brick, produced from the district's London Clay, led to widespread rebuilding, including many churches and halls.

The late-18th-century Enclosure Acts marked the final consolidation of the open medieval field structure. New farming techniques, including crop rotation and improved implements, enhanced productivity. At the same time, the exposed plateaux became favourable locations for windmills, which proliferated during this period. By this stage, brick had become the standard construction material, though timber boarding continued to be used as a more economical option. Today, remnants of heath survive mainly through hedgerow vegetation and place names, while orchards, copses, shelter belts and greenhouses reflective features of the productive landscape.

Settlement Form and Pattern

The Heathland Plateaux are typically characterised by scattered halls/churches, rural farms and villages. The pattern of halls/churches indicates an ancient settlement pattern and the feudal system. Agricultural barns act as recognisable features and often serve as landmarks within the open farmland.

Many villages evolved from the manors, while other villages developed as farmsteads settled on the edges of greens, commons and heaths. Over time, the loss of open heaths and the infilling of village greens have altered settlement character, but place names often continue to reveal their historic roots.



Figure 168: Arable farmland with hedges and hedgerow oaks.

LCA 7A: Bromley Heaths

Overall, the *Bromley Heaths* landscape character area has strong field patterns, a distinctive settlement character and supports areas of heathland, ancient woodland and apple orchards, with open and rural character and long views due to the geological plateau formation. The loss of landscape features such as heaths and commons, unimproved pastures, village greens, hedgerows and ancient woodlands as a result of agricultural intensification, development and Dutch elm disease means that the landscape character of this area has been eroded.



Figure 169: Location of LCA 7A.

Key Characteristics

- Exposed and windswept plateau corresponding to the highest north-west portion of the Tendring Peninsula.
- Flat or gently undulating in places, dissected by a number of stream valleys.
- Deep, coarse, loamy and often stoneless brown soils which support rich and fertile soils and therefore high-grade agricultural land.
- Large-scale productive arable fields divided by low, gappy hedgerows where hedgerow oaks stand out as silhouettes against the skyline.
- The remnants of the extensive horticultural industry with glasshouses and nurseries are a feature around Foxash located to the north-east of Ardleigh.
- Former heaths largely converted to smallholdings, including as part of the Foxash Estate, or regenerating as woodland. Small areas of remnant heath survive.
- Neglected oak/sweet chestnut coppice with ground flora typical of acidic woodland soils.
- Low density dispersed rural settlement pattern of scattered farms and halls, hamlets, villages and small market towns.
- Network of historic narrow lanes connects the scattered farms and villages with their working agricultural landscape, roadside verges often containing gorse and bracken.
- Dramatic, dominating skyscape.

Description

The *Bromley Heaths* is an elevated plateau that extends from Colchester to Wix in the east and Thorrington in the south. It corresponds to the highest part of the district and is underlain by a solid geology of London Clay capped by a veneer of glacial loam and gravels. These glacial loams have given rise to deep, coarse, loamy and often stoneless brown soils which support a high-grade agricultural land and areas of former heathland including Ardleigh Heath and Burnt Heath.

The sandy soils of the Essex heathlands, hills and ridges are susceptible to erosion. The large-scale, open plateau is dominated by a fieldscape of ancient origin comprising irregular enclosure, with some later enclosure of the former heathlands and greens. This provides a strong pattern in views, for example around Little Bentley. There has been moderate post-1950 boundary loss throughout the zone. These productive arable fields are divided by low, gappy hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees, usually oaks, which stand out as features in the open arable landscape. There are several surviving areas of ancient woodland, typically composed of sweet chestnut, hazel or hornbeam coppice with oak or ash standards in the Great Bentley Area. The colour and texture of the cultivated landscape changes with the seasons.

There were apple orchards in the sandy soils north and east of Ardleigh, established in the early 20th century, traditionally protected by shelterbelts of poplar or Leylandii. The remnants of the extensive horticultural industry are also a feature of the area especially around Foxash, with glasshouses and nurseries located to the north-east of Ardleigh. The Foxash estate was developed for horticultural purposes in the early 20th century, originating as a Land Settlement Association smallholding scheme set up by the UK Government in 1934 to resettle unemployed workers from depressed industrial areas, particularly from North-East England and Wales.



Figure 170: Arable fields west of Bradfield.

Two fragments of ancient woodland survive on the western boundary of the character area at Churn Wood and Bullock Wood. The latter is now classified solely as a biological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) formed of broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland, assessed by Natural England in 2015 as being in 'Favourable' condition. The other SSSI present in this landscape character area (LCA) is Ardleigh Gravel Pit SSSI, a geological SSSI which comprises a former quarry noted for its exposures of temperate and of cold stage organic beds within the Ardleigh Gravel, and most recently assessed by Natural England in 2025 as being in 'Favourable' condition.

The underlying sands and gravels have influenced land cover. Heathland still survives at Mistley Heath and Furze Hill, and the Beth Chatto Gardens, now a Grade II Registered Park and Garden, are an example of a garden that has been created on gravel soils. Many of the former heaths have been converted to smallholdings or appear as areas of regenerated woodland that form a backdrop to the arable landscape. Green Island, south of Ardleigh, is one such example of woodland that was formerly Goldstons Heath. A large amount of ancient woodland has been lost to cultivation. However, there are still some important woodland and copses, perhaps most notably Bentleyhall Wood, which is carpeted by bluebells in the spring, but also

Palegate Wood, Park Wood and Money Wood. Many of these woodlands are neglected oak and sweet chestnut coppiced woodlands. They also contain ash, hazel and birch and the ground flora is typical of acidic woodland soil, comprising species such as wood sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*), foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*), bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*).

The sandy nature of the soil is apparent in the hedgerows and roadside verges which often contain gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) and bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*). Some roadside verges form important grassland habitats with flora indicative of the acidic soils. Those at Crockleford Heath and Pyecats Corner are identified as Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS), with Chapel Lane Verge LoWS designated for its population of Polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*), an Essex Red Data List fern.

Villa Farm Quarry LoWS west of Alresford is a disused sand and gravel pit now comprising a mosaic of different habitats, including numerous ponds, acid grassland, exposed soil and cliff, scrub, and Cockaynes Wood Ancient Woodland, which has escaped quarrying.

Several LoWS comprise the BAP Priority Habitat 'Lowland Dry Acid Grassland', including Manor House Meadow, Springhead Corner Meadow, Great Bromley Churchyard, and Thors Park Meadow LoWS. Species-rich grassland of this type is particularly rare in the Tendring District and emphasis should be placed on the need to conserve all remaining sites.

The present-day settlement pattern and road infrastructure is historically dispersed based on the medieval system of farms and villages. It is a low density, rural settlement pattern of scattered cottages, farms and halls spread out along the greens and former heaths, such as Bradfield Heath, and of hamlets, villages and small market towns such as Elmstead Market. The farmsteads are large and form visible clusters of agricultural buildings in the open landscape. The villages are traditionally focussed around a village green, heath or common, although many of these, such as Hare Green, have been infilled by inter-war and post-war smallholdings or more recent housing so that their structure is no longer visible. Modern settlement such as that at Frating Green was formed in the early to mid-20th century by the piecemeal infilling of the greens with housing. A network of narrow lanes connects the scattered farms and villages. Many of these are ancient, were previously grazed, and have important roadside trees or verges that can serve as habitat corridors that connect fragmented habitats. Several are conserved through Protected Lane status such as Crown Lane North and Spring Valley Lane near Ardleigh, Little Bromley Road near Little Bromley, and Turnip Lodge Farm Lane near Elmstead Market. By contrast, the A120(T) cuts across the landscape on embankment or in cutting.



Figure 171: Large warehouses are visible in the open landscape, like at Horsley Cross.

The archaeology is dominated by extensive cropmark complexes, including the scheduled cropmark complex at Ardleigh comprising a Bronze Age cemetery and Iron Age and Roman activity. An extensive site north-west of Little Bromley is bisected by a Roman road leading towards Colchester. The Scheduled Monuments reflect multi-period occupation of the area, including Neolithic cropmarks, the remains of the medieval St Osyth Priory, and a World War II bombing decoy.

Modern housing is largely restricted to ribbon development along the roads. Several large residential sites have been or are being developed for housing around Elmstead Market and Lawford with commercial developments, many farm-based, including solar developments, around Burnt Heath, Bromley Cross and south of Bradwell Heath. The extensive Centurion Business Park stands out in the landscape at Horsley Cross. There has also been significant mineral extraction south of Ardleigh. Some of the large residential sites around Lawford could result in a character area boundary change in this area.

Mineral extraction is ongoing at the Sunnymead quarry between Wivenhoe and Alresford, and silica sand is extracted at Martells Quarry from the raw material in Ardleigh, along with gravel; an extension of the quarry to the west is planned. There are opportunities for the creation of various habitats once these sites are being restored when the quarrying terminates.

This area sits in National Character Area 111: Northern Thames Basin and provides a number of ecosystem services, including: Provisioning services such as food provision (arable crops – primarily wheat and oilseed) and genetic diversity (including remnant traditional orchards provide a genetic stock of old apple varieties); Regulating services through carbon storage in soils, woodland and hedgerows for climate regulation and regulation of soil erosion; and Pollination.

This is an exposed and windswept plateau where the sky dominates in any view and where landscape character is greatly affected by the state of the sky. As a result communication towers, pylons and other vertical structures, as well as larger commercial buildings and structures, stand out as prominent elements. Church towers provide visible landmark features.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths	33	National Landscape
Ardleigh Gravel Pit	1001947	SSSI
Bullock Wood	1003669	SSSI
Chapel Lane Verge	Te7	LoWS
Crestland Wood	Te21	LoWS
Great Bromley Churchyard	Te37	LoWS
Hockley Wood	Te41	LoWS
Little Bentleyhall Wood	Te53	LoWS
Little Bromley Churchyard	Te44	LoWS
Manning Grove	Te33	LoWS
Manor House Meadow	Te9	LoWS
Money Wood	Te20	LoWS
Palegate Wood	Te15	LoWS
Park Wood	Te17	LoWS
Pyecats Corner Special Roadside Verges	Te8	LoWS
Springhead Corner Meadow	Te10	LoWS
Thors Park Meadow	Te38	LoWS
Villa Farm Quarry	Te12	LoWS
Cockaynes Wood Nature Reserve *(Essex Wildlife Trust)*	n/a	NR

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Cropmark site south of Ardleigh	1002146	Scheduled Monument
Henge, round barrow cemeteries and enclosure cropmarks 510m south-west of St Mary's Church	1489898	Scheduled Monument
Neolithic enclosure 510m north-east of Lawford House	1002157	Scheduled Monument
Round barrow W of Lawford Hall	1002125	Scheduled Monument
Site of Old St Mary's Church	1002142	Scheduled Monument
World War 2 bombing decoy WRI Spinnels Farm	1019883	Scheduled Monument
Ardleigh	n/a	Conservation Area
Bradfield	n/a	Conservation Area
Lawford	n/a	Conservation Area
Manningtree and Mistley	n/a	Conservation Area
Beth Chatto Gardens	1468784	Registered Park and Garden

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Stour Estuary, Wrabness & Ramsey Creek	Coastal Protection Belt
Cansey Lane, Bradfield	Protected Lane
Crown Lane North, Ardleigh	Protected Lane
Little Bromley Road, Great Bromley	Protected Lane
Mary Lane North/Chase Road East Great Bromley	Protected Lane
Ravens Green Lane Ravens Green Great Bromley	Protected Lane
Turnip Lodge Farm Lane, Elmstead Market	Protected Lane
Wick Lane, Ardleigh	Protected Lane



Figure 172: Large-scale productive arable fields divided by low, gappy hedgerows.

Change

- Proposed Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community east of Colchester between the A133 and A120 lies almost wholly in this character area.
- Proposed A120/A133 link road, the first phase of which is due to be completed in 2026, lies to the east of the proposed Garden Community and is wholly within this character area.
- Proposed sub-stations for North Falls and Five Estuaries offshore wind farm Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPS) located south-east of Ardleigh, wholly within this character area.
- Proposed Norwich to Tilbury (N2T) NSIP East Anglian Connection Node (EACN) to be co-located with the onshore sub-stations for the offshore windfarms, wholly in this character area, with overhead line and pylons running from the EACN east of Ardleigh, west to the district boundary with the A12.
- Proposed route of onshore cable corridor for Tarchon (NSIP) project and converter station makes landfall in this LCA.
- Infilling of village greens and former heaths with built development leading to loss of settlement structure, communal areas and village focus.
- Loss of remaining acid grassland and heath habitats through proposed development and agricultural intensification.
- Further loss of ancient deciduous woodland due to development pressure, ongoing neglect of traditional management and climate change.
- Hedgerow loss associated with proposed development and ongoing agricultural intensification.
- Pressure for large-scale, built development at major road junctions and on some highly sensitive plateau edges with potential for a very high visual impact.
- Increasing pressure for expansion of built development on the fringes of settlements, contributing to the suburbanisation of the surrounding landscape, e.g. through features such as new road junctions, lighting and close-boarded fencing.
- Pressure for communication masts on high ground, particularly on the edges of the plateau.
- Pressure from solar farms.
- Road interventions including signage, line painting and widening threatening the intimate rural character of the historic lanes.
- Impact of light pollution on the landscape at night.



Figure 173: Little Bentleyhall Woods LoWS is formed of important ancient woodland.



Figure 174: The deep, coarse, loamy brown soils form high-grade agricultural land.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Consider opportunities, including through development management, to restore heathland and acid grassland on areas of former heathland.
- Conserve traditional shelter belts of native species such as oak and poplar, associated with the horticultural industry.
- Conserve all ancient woodland sites and promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species, and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
- Enhance the wooded character of the landscape by promoting the extension of existing ancient woodlands, the creation of new woodlands or new native shelterbelts in association with development management or, where relevant, through the Government's Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes.
- Restore and create new hedgerows across the landscape to reduce wind erosion.
- Promote management of hedgerows as coppice, particularly elm hedges which would be attacked by Dutch elm disease if left to grow, with oak and ash left to form standards.
- Maintain the historic lanes with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road interventions or widening that would threaten their rural character, heritage and biodiversity interest.
- Create new grassland habitats along road verges, including on proposed development sites, through long-term management strategies.
- Promote strategic grassland habitat creation opportunities as part of proposed developments and farmland management.
- Conserve the historic dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets and scattered farmsteads, and the identity of individual settlements through robust planning policy and development management.
- Promote 'strategic' freshwater standing water creation or 'ghost' pond restoration/recreation opportunities identified in the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) as part of proposed developments and farmland management.
- Resist the use of concrete kerbs, inappropriate lighting, close boarded fencing and ornamental landscape planting which have an urbanising impact on traditional villages and hamlets and the wider rural landscape.
- Promote the use of local materials and informal native planting in service facilities, commercial areas or employment sites which are likely to have less impact on landscape character.
- Conserve the rural character of agricultural buildings by ensuring roof design and materials are sympathetic to local tradition, and by incorporating local features of interest such as louvred panels.
- Ensure expansion of built development does not intrude onto the highly sensitive crests of slopes, where development would be conspicuous on the skyline or restrict important views.
- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape. This also applies for large-scale commercial or agricultural buildings.
- Promote opportunities for creation of some innovative landscapes and architecture that celebrate the scale of the landscape, utilise local materials and planting species, and maintain the scattered rural settlement pattern.
- Consider the effect of built development on the edge of the plateau on adjacent character areas.
- Promote the restoration of quarry sites to create various habitats and the identifying of relevant opportunities in the Essex LNRS (2025) or subsequent document.
- Use of full cut-off lights and sensitively designed lighting schemes can reduce the impact of light pollution on the rural environment and night skies.
- Conserve views to important landmarks such as manorial halls and church towers and conserve the setting of these features.
- Ensure restoration of the agricultural landscape, field hedgerows and other vegetation following construction works for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs).



Figure 175: Tall structures like phone masts are highly visible in the flat landscape.

LCA 7B: St Osyth/Great Bentley Heaths

Overall, the *St Osyth/Great Bentley Heaths* character area has distinctive field patterns, settlement character and vegetation types, and is intensively cultivated and well maintained. The plateau landscape is open and rural in character and affords long views. Progressive loss of landscape features such as heaths and commons, unimproved pastures, village greens, hedgerows and ancient woodlands as a result of agricultural intensification, development, and Dutch elm disease has eroded the landscape character. Remaining heaths, ancient woodlands, ancient lanes with diverse roadside verges, village greens and hedgerow oaks are features to protect.

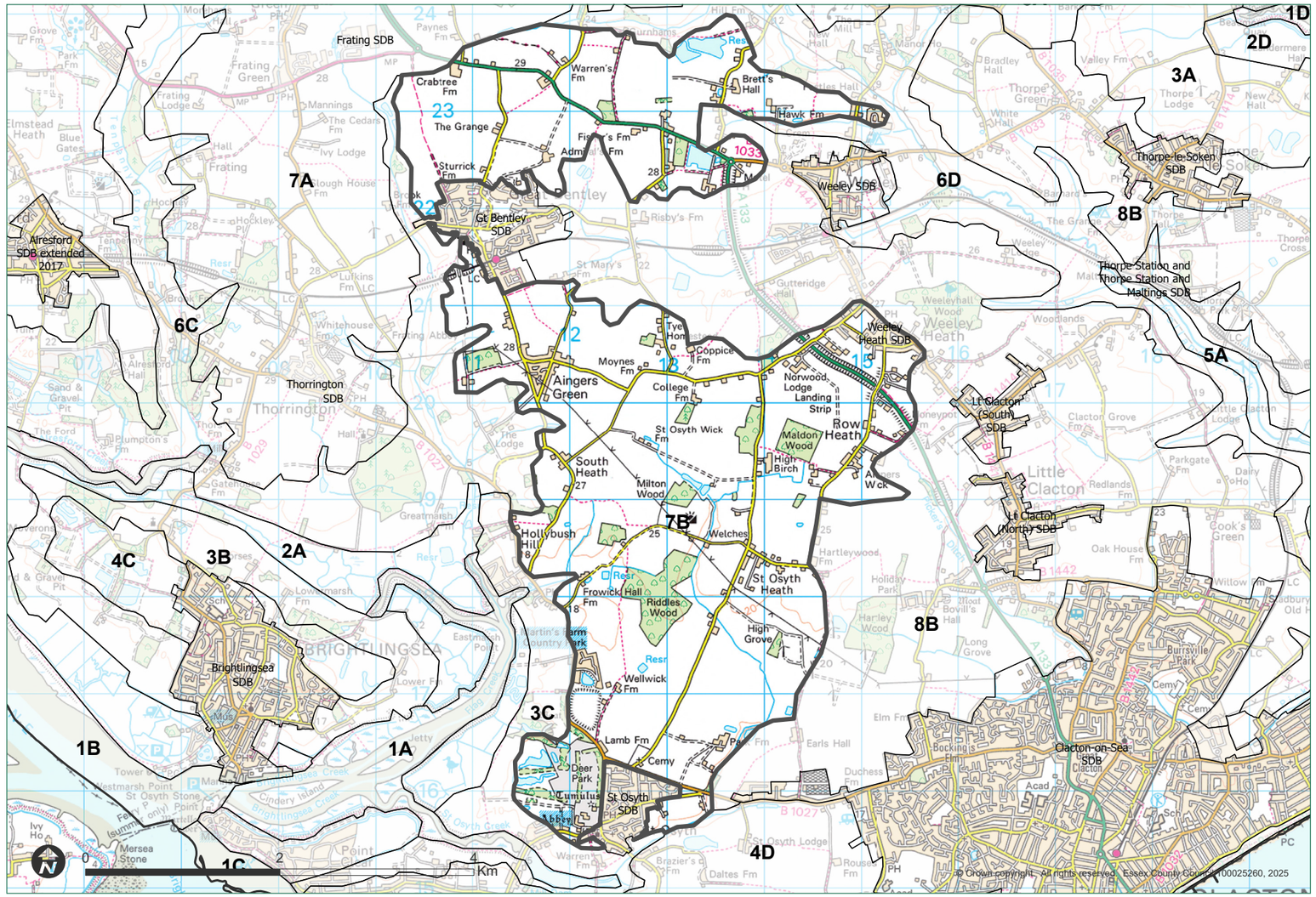

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Figure 176: Location of LCA 7B.

Key Characteristics

- Southern extension of the Bromley Heaths encompassing Great Bentley and St Osyth.
- Arable fields divided by low, gappy hedgerows with occasional hedgerow oaks form a highly productive open plateau.
- Ancient woodlands form backdrop to views and are typically composed of sweet chestnut, hazel or hornbeam coppice with oak or ash standards.
- The underlying sandy/acidic soils result in characteristic vegetation – now largely restricted to the hedgerows and roadside verges, which often contain gorse and bracken.
- Ancient settlement pattern of scattered church/hall complexes, cottages and farms spread out along the greens, former heaths or commons.
- Scattered farms and villages are connected by a network of narrow lanes, some with important roadside trees or verges.
- Church towers are important landmark features.
- Archaeologically the zone is dominated by extensive multi-period cropmark complexes.
- St Osyth's Priory and Park dominate the setting of the village.

Description

The *St Osyth/Great Bentley Heaths* is a southern extension of the Bromley Heaths encompassing Great Bentley and Osyth. It is underlain by a solid geology of London Clay and capped by a veneer of glacial loam and the deep, coarse, loamy brown soils that support good agricultural land.

The flat, open plateau is dominated by a fieldscape of ancient origin comprising irregular enclosure, with some later enclosure of the former heathlands and greens. There has been post-1950 boundary loss throughout the zone, at a high level in some areas. These productive arable fields are divided by low, gappy hedgerows with occasional hedgerow oaks. The colour and texture of the agricultural landscape changes with the seasons, resulting in a dynamic landscape.

Although much woodland cover has been lost over the years as a result of agricultural intensification, a number of ancient woodlands break the monotony of the intensively cultivated landscape. Riddles Wood is a biological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and an ancient woodland formed of sweet chestnut and hornbeam coppice stools and hornbeam and oak standards, along with some notable ground flora. This SSSI was most recently assessed by Natural England in 2025 as being in 'Unfavourable - Recovering' condition due to the presence of ash dieback and an underrepresented understorey of young saplings.



Figure 178: Tree-lined farm access lane.



Figure 177: Agricultural field bound by hedges with hedgerow oaks.

Several other ancient woodlands are also designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS), including High Barn Wood, Shair Wood, Martin's Grove, and Maldon Wood. These are sweet chestnut coppice with oak standards, some also including species such as hornbeam, birch, ash and hazel. Ground flora is typical of acidic woodland soil but can be poor due to overshading and resumption of coppicing would be beneficial. The sandy nature of the soil is also visible in the hedgerows and roadside verges which often contain gorse and bracken, with several verges designated as LoWS for their unusual acidic soil flora.

Groups of circular cropmarks unique to north-east Essex, and thought to be henges, are located at Little Bentley and Great Bentley, indicating early settlement in this area. The low density, rural settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads, hamlets and villages is an ancient one. The villages are traditionally focussed around a village green, heath or common, although many of these have been infilled by inter-war smallholdings or more recent housing so that their structure is no longer visible. Great Bentley, originally centred on common land, is a notable exception in that it was registered as a green in the 1960s and today boasts one of the largest village greens in England. A number of former heaths, including Weeley Heath, St Osyth Heath, South Heath and Angel Heath, have been converted to smallholdings or fields. For example, Angel Heath is now the settlement of Ainger's Green.

The rural farmsteads are often constructed from red brick and are ornate in their design. The agricultural outbuildings are typically red brick and black clapboard with red clay tile roofs. They are long, low and of a simple design, their roofs highly visible in the landscape. The rural hamlets and villages contain cottages, typically of a simple design and set directly onto the street. They are often plastered and painted or clad in weatherboard. The roofs are typically steeply pitched and traditionally clay tiled and the roofscape is enlivened by dormer windows and chimneys.

A network of narrow lanes connects the scattered farms and villages. Many of these are ancient, were previously grazed,

and have important roadside trees or verges. Some of these roadside verges have been identified as Local Wildlife Sites for their unusual acidic soil flora, such as the verges of the Wheely Bypass (Te83), Pump Hill Verges (Te67) and Aingers Green Verges (Te62).

This is an exposed and windswept plateau where the sky dominates in any view. As a result, landscape character is greatly affected by the state of the sky and communication towers, pylons and other vertical structures stand out as prominent elements. Its elevation allows good views from the edge of the plateau over surrounding landscapes, for example from Ainger's Green towards Brightlingsea and the coast. Church towers are important landmark features.

St Osyth has been identified as being of special archaeological importance, principally on account of the Grade I listed remains of the medieval priory of St Osyth and its historic parkland, which lie substantially within this character area. The Priory was at risk until recently but has now substantially been restored with the help of enabling development. St Osyth Parkland is a designated LoWS (and a Grade II Registered Park and Garden), and forms an extensive 18th-century park, including water gardens within Nun's Wood, a hermitage and 19th-century formal gardens set within 16th-century garden walls beside the medieval priory complex. It was identified as 'at risk' on the Heritage at Risk register of 2013. Post-medieval and modern mineral extraction within the park accounts for about half the total area and has had a considerable impact on the historic landscape, with the creation of a series of waterfilled extraction pits.

Some large residential developments have occurred around Great Bentley, extending the settlement boundary. Commercial development includes a solar farm near Milton Wood.

This area sits in National Character Area 111: Northern Thames Basin and provides a number of ecosystem services, including: Provisioning services such as food provision (arable crops – primarily wheat and oilseed) and genetic diversity (including remnant traditional orchards provide a genetic stock of old apple varieties); Regulating services through carbon storage in soils, woodland and hedgerows for climate regulation and regulation of soil erosion; and Pollination.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Riddles Wood	1002665	SSSI
Aingers Green Verges	Te62	LoWS
Dead Lane Verge	Te56	LoWS
Great Bentley Pumping Station	Te55	LoWS
High Barn Wood	Te59	LoWS
High Grove	Te73	LoWS
Maldon Wood	Te76	LoWS
Martin's Grove	Te61	LoWS
Milton Wood	Te65	LoWS
Pump Hill Verges	Te67	LoWS
Shair Wood	Te64	LoWS
Simplebirch and Bowshots Wood	Te69	LoWS
St Osyth Parkland	Te57	LoWS
St Osyth Cemetery	Te63	LoWS
Stockets Grove	Te66	LoWS
Violet Grove	Te68	LoWS
Wheely Bypass	Te83	LoWS

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Remains of St Osyth's Priory including the ruinous sections of a mid-C16 mansion	1002193	Scheduled Monument
St Osyth	n/a	Conservation Area
St Osyth's Priory	1000237	Registered Park and Garden



Figure 179: Tall structures are visible in the plateau landscape.

Change

- Further loss of ancient and other deciduous woodland as a result of development pressure, neglect of traditional management, disease and climate change.
- Infilling of village greens and former heaths with built development leading to loss of settlement structure, communal areas and village focus.
- Hedgerow loss associated with expansion of fields and agricultural intensification.
- Loss of remaining acid grassland and heath habitats through proposed development and agricultural intensification, and loss of areas of common land.
- Road interventions including signage, line painting and widening which threaten the intimate rural character of the historic lanes.
- Light pollution – impact on the night landscape.
- Pressure from solar and wind farms.



Figure 180: St Osyth Priory.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Consider opportunities, including through development management, and encourage the use of the 2025 Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) or subsequent document to support the restoration of heathland and acid grassland on former heathland areas.
- Promote the planting of new woodlands or extending existing woodlands to enhance the wooded character of the landscape in association with development management or, where relevant, through the Government's Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes. Woodland creation should be achieved through natural regeneration or by using species typical of the area including oak, sweet chestnut, hazel and birch.
- Conserve all ancient woodland sites and promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species, and the reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
- Enhance or create green infrastructure routes by identifying opportunities in available documents such as the Local Wildlife Site Review of 2008, where the opportunity to form an ecological link is identified by the proposal of an extension to Maldon Wood LoWS to link with Simplebirch and Bowshots Wood LoWS.
- Promote management of hedgerows as coppice, particularly elm hedges which would be attacked by Dutch elm disease if left to grow. Oak and ash standards should be left to form future timber trees.
- Maintain the historic lanes with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road interventions or widening that would threaten their rural character, heritage, and biodiversity interest.
- Promote strategic grassland habitat creation opportunities as part of proposed developments, including along road verges, and farmland management.
- Conserve the historic dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets and scattered farmsteads, and the identity of individual settlements through robust planning policy and development management.
- Promote 'strategic' freshwater standing water creation and/or 'ghost' pond restoration/recreation opportunities identified in the Essex LNRS, both within proposed developments and through farmland management.
- Conserve/maintain views to important landmarks such as manorial halls and church towers and conserve the setting of these features.
- Conserve the distinctive built character by maintaining the use of plastered or pastel-painted finishes and weatherboarding, alongside steeply pitched roofs in muted clay-effect tiles with simple dormers and chimneys to add vernacular interest. Ensure the form and roofscape of agricultural barns and other low buildings remain integral to their appearance, incorporating traditional features such as louvred panels to add features of interest.
- Consider the effect of built development on the edge of the plateau on adjacent character areas.
- Resist the use of concrete kerbs, inappropriate lighting, close boarded fencing and ornamental landscape planting, which have an urbanising impact on traditional villages and hamlets and the wider rural landscape. Promote the use of local materials and informal native planting in service facilities, commercial areas or employment sites which are likely to have less impact on landscape character. Ensure expansion of built development does not intrude onto the highly sensitive crests of slopes, where development would be conspicuous on the skyline or restrict important views.
- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape. This also applies to large-scale commercial or agricultural buildings. Promote opportunities for creation of some innovative landscapes and architecture that celebrate the scale of the landscape, utilise local materials and planting species, and maintain the scattered rural settlement pattern. Use of full cut-off lights and sensitively designed lighting schemes can reduce the impact of light pollution on the rural environment and night skies.
- Promote the restoration of quarry sites to create various habitats and the identifying of relevant opportunities in the Essex LNRS.

LCT 8

Clay Plateaux

Introduction

The Clay Plateaux comprise a broad expanse of gently undulating farmland formed on heavy clay soils, occupying the eastern part of the Tendring Plateau. These landscapes sit at generally lower elevations than the Heathland Plateaux, typically falling below 25m AOD.

Landscape Character Areas:

- 8A Tendring and Wix Clay Plateau
- 8B North Clacton and the Sokens Clay Plateau

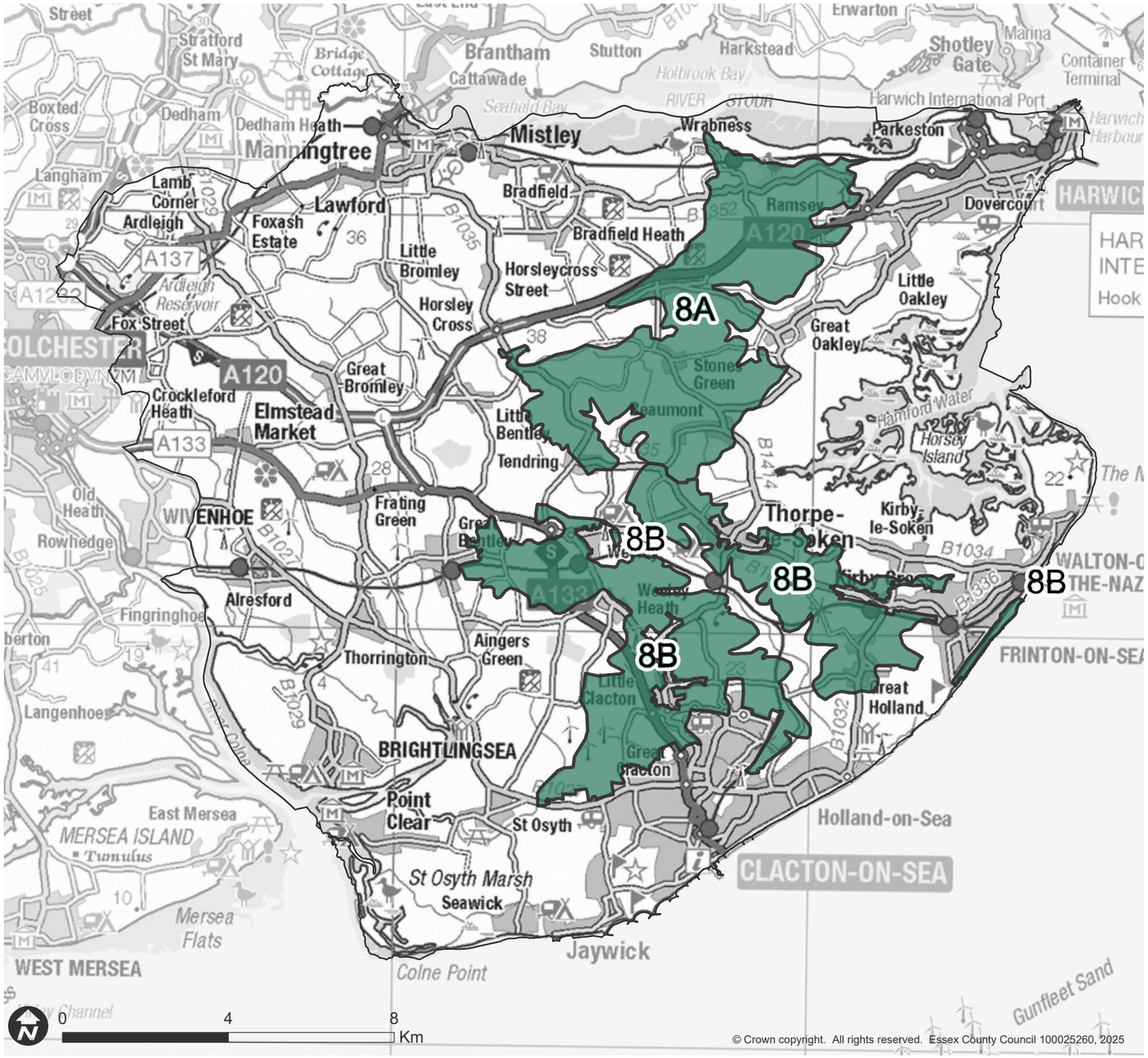

Figure 181: Landscape Character Type 8.

3.8 Landscape Character Type 8: Clay Plateaux

Physical Influences

Around 60 million years ago, at the start of the Tertiary Era, the area now known as Tendring lay beneath a shallow, warm sea, in conditions similar to present day coastal regions of Indonesia or Malaysia. Sediment delivered by rivers accumulated on the sea floor, forming the London Clay, which today remains the district's most widespread geological unit.

A characteristic feature of this clay is the presence of septarian nodules, locally known as “copperas stones”, produced as contraction cracks in the clay are filled with mineral calc-spar or pyrites. These hard-wearing nodules have traditionally been used as a building material in a landscape otherwise lacking hard stone such as hard lime or sandstone.

The plateaux are drained by a network of minor brooks and creeks creating small-scale undulations in the landform, contributing to its subtly rolling character.

Human Influences

The heavy clay soils and extensive oak woodlands would have presented challenges for early agricultural communities. Gradual woodland clearance during the Iron Age opened up the landscape, enabling mixed arable and pastoral farming to develop.

The Sokens (Walton, Kirby and Thorpe) emerged in the Saxon period. Their name stems from Old English 'sōcn' or the Danish 'soca', meaning privilege or immunity, reflecting their exemption from civil taxation.

By the 13th century, Tendring operated within a well established manorial agricultural system, marked by the expansion of arable land and the construction of mills, symbolising the technological innovation of the period. In the 16th century, brickmaking became widespread, drawing on the fine London Clay deposits of the district. The introduction of crop rotation and improved machinery in the post-medieval period further increased agricultural productivity. The later 18th century brought a surge in windmill construction across the exposed plateaux.

During the 19th century, the growing popularity of seaside holidays led to the development of Clacton, Frinton, and Walton along what became known as the "Essex Sunshine Coast".

Settlement Form and Pattern

The *Clay Plateaux* display an ancient settlement pattern of isolated farms, hamlets and villages interspersed within a patchwork of fields. The scattered halls are typically large, ornate country houses, often occupying the sites of earlier manorial halls and remodelled across successive periods. Scattered farmsteads are commonly large, with extensive outbuildings.

Rural villages are characteristic of this area, with cottages scattered along a short stretch of road, sometimes just on one side, allowing clear outward views across the surrounding landscape. Village greens remain a notable feature and would originally have acted as communal focal points before being gradually enclosed or infilled by later development.



Figure 182: Exposed plateau landscape.

LCA 8A: Tendring and Wix Clay Plateau

In general, the *Tendring and Wix Clay Plateau* is a highly rural, intensively cultivated agricultural landscape with an open character, long views, and a low-density pattern of settlement. It is arable dominated but includes intact remnants of ancient woodland. The loss of landscape features such as the village greens, roadside commons, hedgerows and ancient woodlands as a result of agricultural intensification and Dutch elm disease means that the landscape character and diversity of this area has been eroded.

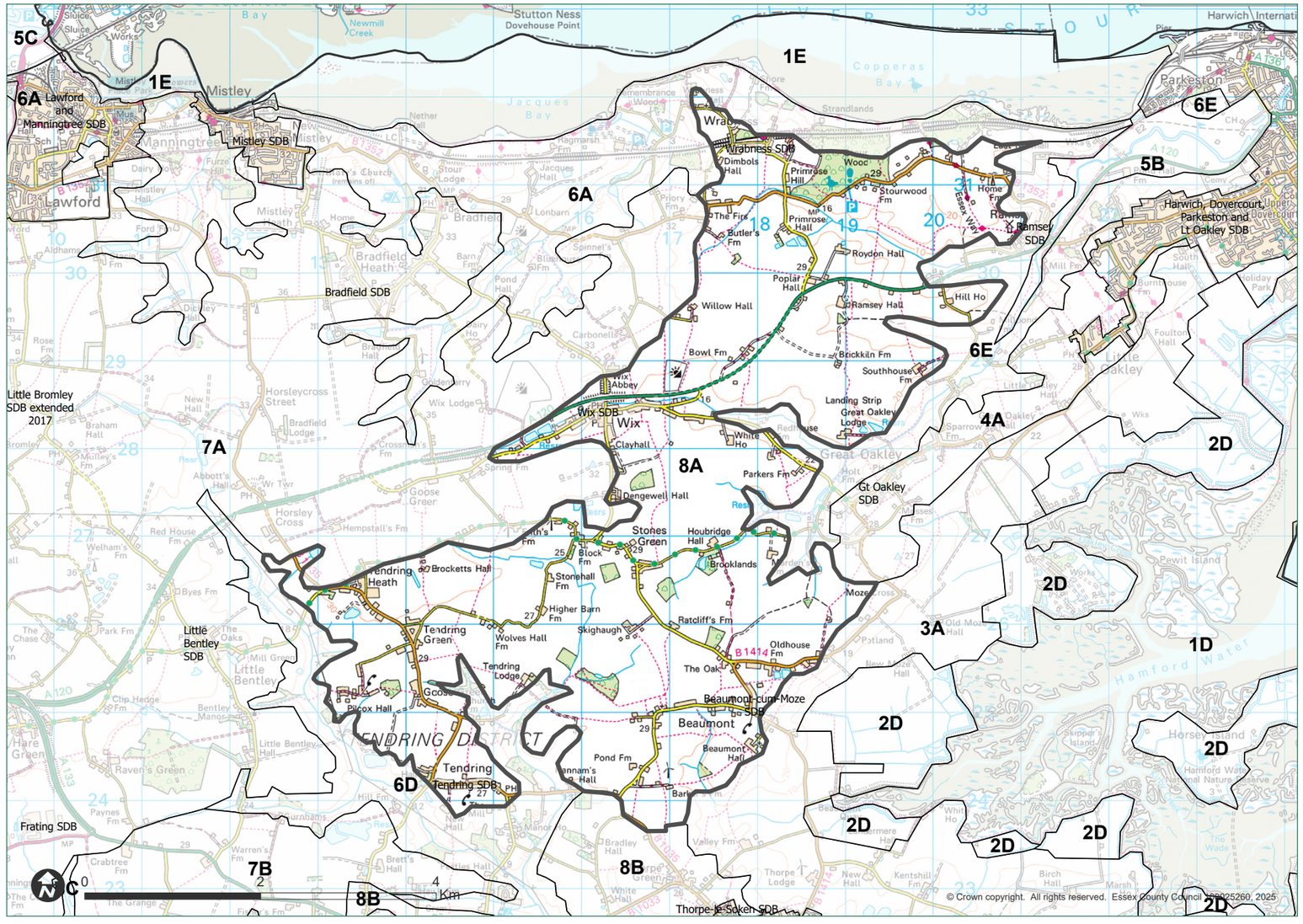

Figure 183: Location of LCA 8A.

Key Characteristics

- Gently undulating rural agricultural plateau in the north-east of Tendring underlain by London Clay.
- Large-scale, geometric fields divided by low, gappy hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees comprise a remote rural arable landscape.
- Small remnants of ancient woodlands have a neglected coppice-with-standards structure.
- Ancient settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads and villages.
- Village greens are typical, although many of these greens have been infilled by housing.
- Scattered farms and villages connected by a network of narrow lanes.
- Views of church towers and spires across the landscape.

Description

The *Tendring and Wix Clay Plateau* is in the north-eastern area of Tendring, roughly between the railway line to the north, Wrabness, Wix and Tendring Heath in the west, Tendring in the south, and Great Oakley and Beaumont in the east. This is a gently undulating rural agricultural plateau of London Clay, overlain to the west by Brickearth and to a lesser extent to the east by Kesgrave Sands and Gravels.

Topographical interest is provided by minor undulations resulting from the minor tributary streams, which flow south into Holland Brook or east into Ramsey Creek and Hamford Water. Standing water is a common feature in areas of poorest drainage. An outcrop of Red Crag, a geological formation and part of the same line as the Naze cliffs, provides the high ground upon which Beaumont Hall sits, overlooking Hamford Water to the east and the agricultural plateau to the west. Red Crag derives its name from its iron-stained reddish colour and crag, which is an East Anglian word for shells.

The rural agricultural landscape is predominantly arable, resulting in changes in colour and texture through the seasons. The fieldscape is largely ancient in origin, but significant areas have been affected by post-medieval enclosure and post-war boundary loss. The plateau is exposed to the easterly winds from the North Sea and rows of poplars are sometimes used as windbreaks. Elsewhere the arable landscape is divided by low hedgerows, which are often gappy due to the decline of elm in the late 20th century from Dutch elm disease, with occasional mature hedgerow oaks. There are some bushy hedgerows with hedgerow oaks that contain views, such as at Red House Farm near Great Oakley.

The Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (2025) estimates that Essex is home to over 5 million trees with the woodland cover of Greater Essex at 7%, of which 2.4% is defined as ancient woodlands. Although much woodland cover has been lost through agricultural intensification, several small remnants of ancient woodlands survive in the southern part of this Landscape Character Area (LCA). These are all designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) including Broadmeadow Woods, Dengewell Woods, and Killgrove Woods. This woodland cluster may act as a woodland corridor in this otherwise poorly wooded district for birds and some invertebrates between Stour and Copperas Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest



Figure 184: Large-scale fields in a remote, rural landscape.



Figure 185: Tall structures are highly visible in the plateau landscape.

(SSSI) and the woods of central Tendring. These woodlands typically have a coppice-with-standards structure, with sweet chestnut, hornbeam, hazel and small-leaved lime coppice and oak standards dominating the canopy. Pilcox Wood LoWS is a woodland that is probably very close to the natural climax vegetation type for the light soils of the Tendring plateau. Wrabness Siding LoWS is the only extant site in Essex for the presence of a population of Red-tipped Cudweed (*Filago lutescens*), a national Biodiversity Action Plan Species and listed in Schedule 8, Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981), classified as vulnerable.

In the northern part of this LCA is Stour Wood, an important area of lowland mixed deciduous ancient woodland, which forms part of the Stour and Copperas Woods, Ramsey SSSI that extends down onto the Stour Valley slopes where it adjoins the wetland habitats of the Stour coast.

The Stour Woods unit of the larger SSSI is dominated by sweet chestnut with some mature pedunculate oak and ash, and assessed by Natural England in 2022 as being in 'Favourable' condition due to the structural complexity remaining intact and no loss of notified features, though some evidence of ash dieback and drought stress was recorded. Stour Wood is one of the best ancient sweet chestnut woods in Essex and was worked as coppice until the 1970s, with coppicing now resumed on a long cycle.

There are a range of cropmarks across the zone representing multi-period settlement, including prehistoric ring ditches and ring ditch cemeteries; and these are most likely remains of individual Bronze Age round barrows and barrow cemeteries.

The present-day settlement pattern is a low density, rural settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads and villages.



Figure 186: The network of narrow lanes is a key characteristic of this LCA.

Several are listed and some, such as Wrabness Hall Barn in Wrabness and The White Hart Inn in Wix (both Grade II), have been placed on the Essex Heritage 'At Risk' register. Some hamlets have developed around a manor hall, for example Wrabness, Tendring and Beaumont, with the late-17th-century and Grade II* listed Beaumont Hall on the edge of Hamford Coastal Slopes. Other villages were built up around a village green, for example Bocking's Green, Wix Green, Stones Green, Tendring Green and Goose Green. Many of these greens have subsequently been infilled by housing or have been eliminated by road widening, although they have retained their names.

The windmill above Ramsey Village is an important historic feature in the landscape and sits in Ramsey Conservation Area, which just extends into LCA 8A. The village of Tendring is also covered by a Conservation Area. Wix is the largest village in the character area, developing from a crossing of two roads at 'Wick's Cross' close to the medieval monastic settlement of Wix Abbey. There are views of church towers and spires across the landscape.

A network of narrow lanes connects the scattered farms and villages, and at Great Oakley 'The Soils' is a Protected Lane that extends into this LCA. These lanes tend to follow ancient routes along ridges where there are good views over the landscape. The A120, by contrast, crosses the landscape on embankment and in cutting, bearing no relation to landscape structure or topography.

Access to the wider landscape is provided through an established network of Public Rights of Way near settlements. A section of the long-distance footpath the Essex Way cuts across the north-east corner of the LCA.

The landscape is visually sensitive as a result of its open and rural character and long views – here the inappropriate siting or location of any development such as a farm building or tall structures has the potential to have a high visual impact. However, the woodlands and gently undulating topography provide some opportunities to integrate development. Areas of particular sensitivity to built development are those on the edge of the plateau towards the *Hamford Coastal Slopes* (3A), and overlooking the *Stour Valley System* (6A), the *Holland Valley System* (6D) and *Ramsey Valley System* (6E).



Figure 187: Large agricultural sheds are visible in the open landscape.



Figure 188: Large-scale fields with an open character.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape	33	National Landscape
Stour and Copperas Woods, Ramsey	1004155	SSSI
Broadmeadow Wood	Te94	LoWS
Dengewell Wood	Te91	LoWS
Glebe Wood	Te97	LoWS
Gravel Wood	Te88	LoWS
Killgrove Wood	Te89	LoWS
Pilcox Wood	Te70	LoWS
Stonehall Wood	Te85	LoWS
Wrabness Siding	Te101	LoWS
Copperas Woods Nature Reserve *(Essex Wildlife Trust)*	n/a	NR

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Stour Estuary, Wrabness & Ramsey Creek	Coastal Protection Belt
Walton Backwaters, Horsey Island & Irlams Beach	Coastal Protection Belt
The Soils Great Oakley	Protected Lane

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Tendring Village	n/a	Conservation Area
Ramsey *(Ramsey Windmill)*	n/a	Conservation Area

Change

- Past loss of elms reducing sense of intimacy and enclosure. Some evidence of ash dieback in Stour Woods.
- Past loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the woodland resource.
- Hedgerow loss associated with expansion of fields and agricultural intensification.
- Loss of traditional permanent pastures, and now absence of grazing animals to maintain areas of grassland.
- Spread of invasive exotic species such as sycamore and rhododendron, displacing native species in the woodlands.
- Introduction of conifers into native deciduous woodlands, resulting in a change in character and loss of species diversity.
- Neglect of traditional woodland and tree management such as coppicing and pollarding and pressure through climate change and extreme weather events.
- Pressure for development and incremental extension/ enlargement of rural settlements leading to a loss of individual settlement identity.
- Road interventions including signage, line painting and widening, which threaten the intimate rural character of the historic lanes.
- Infilling of village greens with built development or road building leading to loss of settlement structure and focus.
- Pressure from solar farms, wind farms, communication masts, large agricultural buildings, distribution sheds etc., such as the development at Tree Stack Farm Oakley Lane near White House Farm, Great Oakley, and the solar farm north of A120 near Bowl Farm.
- Light pollution – effect on 'dark skies' and the night landscape.
- Proposed route of onshore cable corridor for Tarchon (NSIP) project makes landfall in this LCA.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Conserve all ancient woodland sites and promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species, and reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
- Increasing the extent of native deciduous woodland using natural regeneration or locally occurring native species would enhance the wooded character of the landscape.
- Opportunities to link existing woodland sites should be explored, including those identified in the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
- Consider opportunities for the creation of meadows and permanent pasture to restore grassland habitats lost to agricultural intensification, for example, the creation of grassland field margins, and opportunities highlighted in the Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes and the Essex LNRS.
- Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak standards left to form future timber trees. Consider opportunities for reinstatement of hedges, particularly where they have been lost from highly visible locations.
- Conserve the historic lanes with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges. Resist road interventions or widening that would threaten their rural character.
- Conserve the low density and historic dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets, the identity of individual villages and scattered farmsteads by resisting further infilling of village greens.
- Conserve the traditional character of hamlets and villages by using plastered or light-painted finishes and weatherboarding, and by retaining steeply pitched roofs in muted clay effect tiles, with simple dormers and chimneys to add interest to the roofscape. Roofs of agricultural barns and other low buildings are critical to the appearance of that building.
- Conserve the traditional rural street character by avoiding development on the open sides of village streets.
- Consider the impact of any development on the margins of the plateau landscape - ensure built development does not intrude onto the highly sensitive crests of slopes, where it would be conspicuous on the skyline or restrict important views. Ensure deep boundary woodland planting to create effective visual buffer and shelterbelt.
- Particular care should be taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape. This also applies to large-scale rural buildings e.g. for agriculture or commercial parks and distribution sheds.
- Look to restore hedgerows across the landscape to reduce the scale of wind erosion. The sandy soils of the Essex heathlands and hills and ridges are susceptible to erosion if high risk crops are cultivated on sloping ground and in dry summers will become increasingly prone to wind erosion if they are left.
- Use of full cut-off lights and sensitively designed lighting schemes can reduce the impact of light pollution on night skies.
- Maintain views to, and the settings of, important landmarks such as church towers and spires.
- Ensure restoration of the agricultural landscape, field hedgerows and other vegetation following construction works for Tarchon (NSIP) project onshore route.

LCA 8B: North Clacton and the Sokens Clay Plateau

Overall, the *North Clacton and the Sokens Clay Plateau* landscape is intensively cultivated, causing the loss of landscape features such as unimproved pastures, village greens, hedgerows and ancient woodlands, with Dutch elm disease also making a mark, eroding the landscape diversity and condition over many years. However, some ancient woodlands, village greens, historic lanes and hedgerow oaks remain features in the landscape. The presence of extensive areas of built development, urban fringe land uses around Clacton, and the merging of settlements have masked the rural character of the landscape and the historic settlement pattern. Development has frequently severed parcels of agricultural land and these marginal areas remain neglected or have been converted to amenity uses.

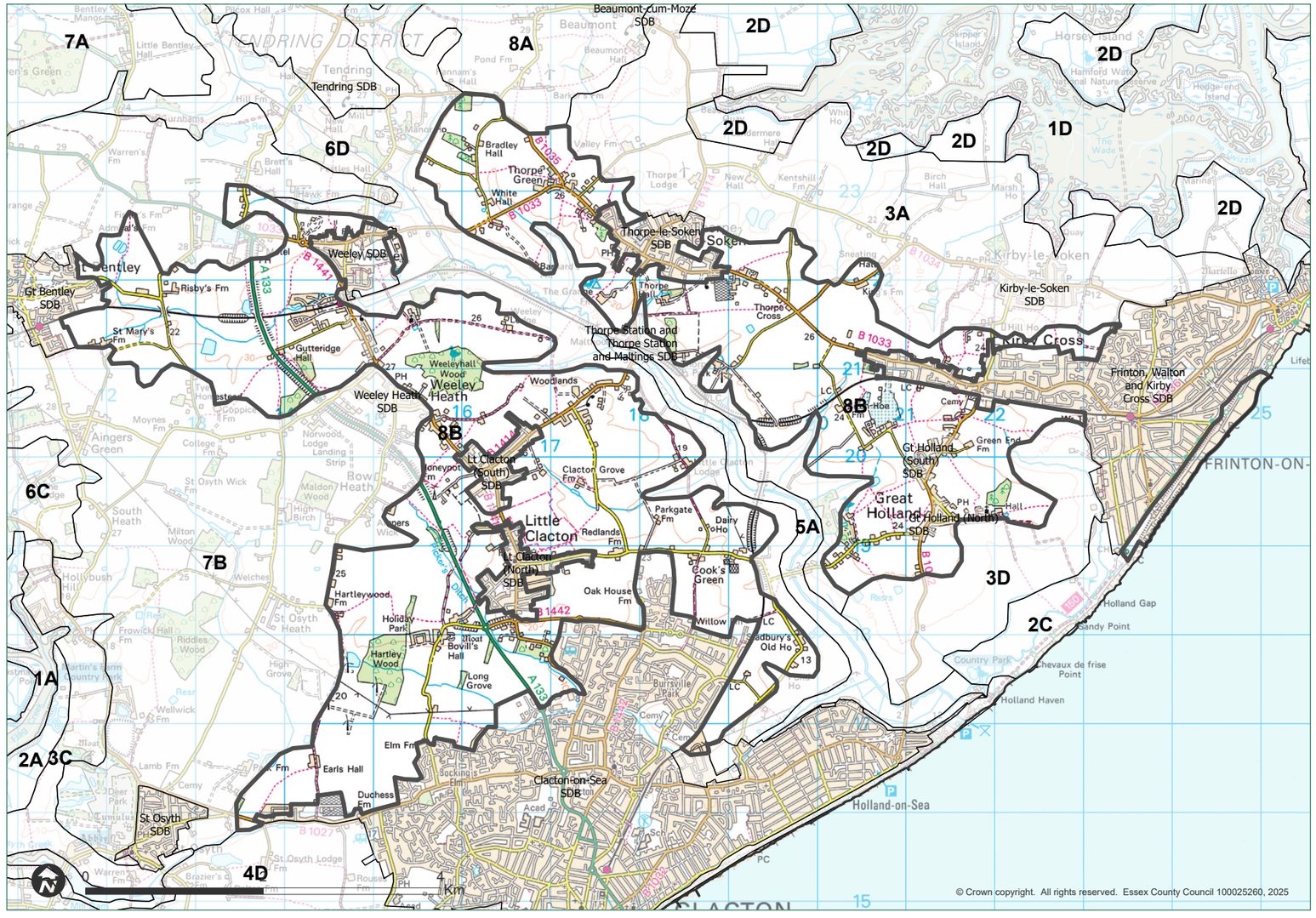

Figure 189: Location of LCA 8B.

Key Characteristics

- Open and gently undulating agricultural plateau in the south-east of Tendring, drained by the Holland Brook Valley System.
- Underlain by a solid geology of London Clay which gives rise to slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged clayey soils and standing water.
- Arable fields of various sizes and shapes are divided by low, gappy hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees.
- Remnants of ancient oak and sweet chestnut coppice woodland, including Weeleyhall Wood, one of the finest woods in the district.
- The A133, B1033 and B1441 provide good access and form a backbone for the ribbon development that dominates the areas around Clacton and Frinton.
- The presence of nurseries, caravan parks, paddocks, holiday parks and industrial estates on the edges of Clacton and Frinton enhance the urban fringe character.
- Thorpe-le-Soken is a rural settlement, important in medieval times, and has a wealth of historic buildings.

Description

The *North Clacton and the Sokens Clay Plateau* is an open and gently undulating agricultural plateau, divided in half by Holland Brook, in the south-east of Tendring. Topographical interest is provided by minor undulations as a result of minor tributary streams which flow into Holland Brook, such as Pickers Ditch which runs from south of Weeley Heath along the A133, before crossing the Clacton urban area to ultimately join Holland Brook east of Clacton.

The landscape is a rural agricultural landscape composed of fields of various sizes and shapes. There has been moderate boundary loss, and the landscape includes a mixture of rectilinear fields of ancient origin and later enclosure, as well as former heathlands such as Weeley Heath and Chisbon Heath, which were enclosed in the 19th century. It is predominantly an arable landscape with a great sense of space where colours and textures in the fields change through the seasons. Low, gappy hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees enclose the fields and small remnants of ancient woodland provide interesting features in an open arable scene.

Weeleyhall Wood is one of the finest woods in the district, an ancient wood and Essex Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve, and biological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) of sweet chestnut coppice with oak standards, and also Scots and Corsican pine plantation. It is notable for its base-poor springline Alder wood and its generally diverse flora, with Bluebells carpeting the woodland floor before Yellow Archangel takes hold in spring. Weeleyhall Wood SSSI was most recently assessed by Natural England (2023) as being in 'Unfavourable – Recovering' condition due to significant concerns around the impacts of climate change, water abstraction, and ash dieback. The wet woodland feature suffers from a lack of water and streams are often deficient of running water throughout their lengths, with water abstraction outside the SSSI likely a major issue together with extensive periods of dry weather. From April to mid-May this woodland is home to the Nightingale.

The Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) in this LCA mostly comprise ancient woodland, such as Oakhurst Wood, Gutteridge Wood, Hartley Wood, and Hollandhall Wood. Other LoWS are important areas of grassland such as Thorpe Green, Burcarts Meadow, and Lower Botany Farm. The verges of the A133 north of Clacton, along with a small woodland north of Dead



Figure 190: Weeleyhall Wood is an SSSI and an ancient woodland.



Figure 191: St Andrews Church near Weeley.

Lane, form the Weeley Bypass LoWS. Both support a diverse flora with a key habitat quality being the abundant gorse. A section of Great Holland Pits LoWS sits in 8B, an area of mosaic and brownfield habitats formed of recolonised gravel works showing remnants of old woodland together with areas of heathy grassland and freshwater pools.

The Frinton Cliffs LoWS comprises the altogether different habitat of maritime slope grassland, the flat top part of the cliff managed as amenity grassland, with scattered scrub adding to the habitat diversity. This LoWS is particularly important for a number of invertebrate species.

The cropmark and excavation evidence from the zone attests to a long history of occupation, including Bronze Age sites and medieval dispersed settlement. Excavation south of Little Clacton has revealed that quarrying may have taken place in the medieval period, possibly in association with pottery and tile making. There are a high number of identified brick and tile making works associated with the area. Clay would have been sourced locally from the surrounding fields and there is evidence possibly from medieval times.

There were extensive greens at Thorpe Green and Far Thorpe Green, portions of which survive, with Thorpe Green now a designated LoWS. The settlement pattern includes the medieval settlements of Kirby and Thorpe-le-Soken, dispersed farms and cottages, and several phases of inter-war development.

Just east of the Great Holland Pits LoWS, a mill is shown on the Chapman and André map of 1777, which is the earliest known depiction of a mill at this location. A circular smock mill and its associated buildings are visible on the Great Holland parish tithe map of 1839. The base of the mill is the only part of the windmill that survived a fire in 1985. The associated 19th-century Mill House is Grade II listed.

This area is relatively densely settled as a result of the popularity of the seaside resorts of Clacton and Frinton during the early and mid-19th century, and the good access provided by the A133, B1033 and B1441 along with the railway, with stations at Thorpe-le-Soken and Kirby Cross. The roads form a backbone for development today and the original village centres are often hidden within newer built development. For example, the village of Great Clacton has been completely subsumed within the suburbs of the 19th-century resort of Clacton-on-Sea. There are relatively dense settlements along roadways and mid-century bungalows are frequent. Ribbon development along the B1441 has almost totally joined the settlements of Great Clacton, Little Clacton, and Weeley, while ribbon development along the B1033 has merged Frinton with Kirby Cross.

The open clifftops provide important public open space where the underlying landscape shows through the urban fabric. Despite more recent development, there are still signs of the historic settlement pattern, for example at Great Holland where the hall and church are set aside from the village where they command views over Holland Haven. The modern landscape retains much of this historic pattern, although both Thorpe and Kirby-le-Soken have expanded considerably in size. Their expansion had its origin in the inter-war period, with the initial construction of streets for a planned 'New Town' at Thorpe (subsequently abandoned), as well as more piecemeal introduction of 'plotland style' development. These roads are still present within the modern street-plan but have been infilled with modern housing.



Figure 192: Residential development, such as here on the edge of Great Bentley, is encroaching into the LCA.



Figure 193: Arable fields of various sizes are divided by low, gappy hedgerows with occasional hedgerow trees.

The landscape beyond the main settlements has an urban fringe character, particularly in the south of the area, with the presence of nurseries, caravan parks, paddocks, holiday parks and industrial estates on the edges of Clacton and Frinton. The A133 also has an influence on the landscape, bringing with it embankments cuttings, roundabouts and service areas.

There is still a distinct rural gap between Kirby Cross and Thorpe-le-Soken. Thorpe-le-Soken was an important settlement in medieval times and has a wealth of historic buildings. The historic cores of Great Holland, Thorpe- and Kirby-le-Soken are protected as Conservation Areas. Thorpe Hall was situated on the south side of the village of Thorpe-le-Soken; the main residence was demolished but the gardens were preserved and now form the setting for a spa and hotel. The gardens are Grade II Registered Park and Gardens and were predominantly laid out between 1913 and 1945 by Lady Byng, with formal and informal features including lawns, pools and lakes, rock garden, rose garden and sunken garden, though there is a longer history of gardens existing on the site.

Access to the landscape is provided by Public Right of Ways, some running along woodlands where there are further footpaths. A stretch of the King Charles III England Coastal Path will run along the coastline from Jaywick to Frinton, from which there will be glimpsed views into this LCA from 3D Holland Coastal Slope and 2C Holland Haven.

The Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan (2010) notes that though the the coastal defences are under pressure, holding the line through all epochs is necessary to sustain the seafront which is essential to the viability of Frinton-on-Sea.

This area sits in National Character Area 111: *Northern Thames Basin* and provides a number of ecosystem services, including: Provisioning services such as food provision (arable crops – primarily wheat and oilseed) and genetic diversity (including remnant traditional orchards provide a genetic stock of old apple varieties); Regulating services through carbon storage in soils, woodland and hedgerows for climate regulation and regulation of soil erosion; and Pollination.

Designations

Ecological Designations

Name	Number	Type
Weeleyhall Wood	1004192	SSSI
Burcarts Meadow	Te92	LoWS
Far Thorpe Green	Te87	LoWS
Frinton Cliffs	Te117	LoWS
Great Holland Pits	Te109	LoWS
Gutteridge Wood	Te75	LoWS
Hartley Wood	Te80	LoWS
Hollandhall Wood	Te114	LoWS
Lower Botany Farm	Te93	LoWS
Oakhurst Wood	Te72	LoWS
Simon's Wood	Te86	LoWS
St. Michael's Churchyard	Te99	LoWS
Thorpe Green	Te95	LoWS
Weeley Bypass	Te83	LoWS
Great Holland Pits Nature Reserve *(Essex Wildlife Trust)*	n/a	NR
Weeleyhall Wood Nature Reserve *(Essex Wildlife Trust)*	n/a	NR

Landscape Planning Policy Designation

Area	Type
Holland Brook, Marshes and Frinton on Sea	Coastal Protection Belt
Brook Country Park	Country Park

Historical Designations

Name	Number	Type
Frinton and Walton 2024	n/a	Conservation Area
Great Holland	n/a	Conservation Area
Thorpe-le-Soken 2024	n/a	Conservation Area
Thorpe Hall	1000521	Registered Park and Garden



Figure 194: Open plateau with arable fields.

Change

- Past loss of elms reducing sense of intimacy and enclosure. There is the potential for further tree loss through diseases like ash dieback and climate change effects.
- Past loss of ancient deciduous woodland and general shrinking of the woodland resource.
- Neglect of traditional woodland and tree management such as coppicing and pollarding and pressure through climate change and extreme weather events.
- Spread of invasive exotic species such as sycamore and rhododendron, displacing native species in woodlands.
- Road upgrades including signage, line painting and widening which threaten the intimate rural character of the historic lanes.
- Loss of village greens.
- Loss of traditional permanent pastures, and now the absence of grazing animals to manage areas of grassland.
- Hedgerow loss associated with agricultural intensification and built development.
- Light pollution from, for instance, the suburbs of Clacton and Frinton, and the effects on the night sky.
- Pressure from further holiday park / caravan park development, solar farms, and industrial estates.
- Ribbon development along roads between settlements resulting in the merging of adjacent settlements into one continuous 'suburb' and loss of individual settlement identity.
- Decline and dereliction of historic buildings.
- Severance of agricultural land on the urban fringe of land held for future development, no longer being actively managed.
- Introduction of typical urban fringe land uses, such as horse paddocks.
- Impacts of climate change, such as the drought stress of trees in Weeleyhall Wood SSSI.



Figure 195: Views towards Weeley; this LCA is an open and gently undulating agricultural plateau.

Landscape Development and Management Guidelines

- Protect the strategic gaps between adjacent settlements.
- Conserve all ancient woodland sites and promote appropriate management through natural regeneration, control of non-native species, and the reintroduction of coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodlands.
- Promote an increase in native deciduous woodland to enhance the wooded character of the landscape by linking existing sites or through delivery of future development in line with a future strategic Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy or the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), and identify mechanisms for delivery e.g. the Government's Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme.
- Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of hedgerows as coppice, with oak standards left to form future timber trees.
- Consider opportunities for reinstatement of hedges, particularly where they have been lost from highly visible locations e.g. along roadsides or as otherwise identified in the Essex LNRS or using the ELM scheme if appropriate.
- Promote opportunities for the creation of meadows or permanent pasture to restore grassland habitats lost through agricultural intensification, for example the creation of grassland field margins and on proposed development sites e.g. through Biodiversity Net Gain.
- Maintain the historic leafy lanes with their ancient oaks and unimproved roadside verges and resist road upgrades or widening that would threaten their rural character.
- Conserve the open clifftops along the coastline, protecting the cliffs for their nature conservation interest, natural vegetation cover, public open space and views.
- Conserve views to historic features, for example Great Holland All Saints Church tower.
- Consider the impact of any development on the margins of the plateau landscape where it would have the potential to be highly visible on the adjacent character areas of the *Hamford Coastal Slopes* (3A), *St. Osyth Coastal Slopes* and overlooking the *Holland Valley System* (6D).
- Conserve the traditional built character by retaining the use of red brick, coloured plaster, and black or white weatherboarding on residential dwellings, noting that weatherboarding is also characteristic of local agricultural buildings. Maintain steeply pitched roofs finished in muted clay-effect tiles, with simple dormer windows and chimneys that add interest to the roofscape. Roofs of agricultural barns and other large, low buildings are critical to the appearance of the building.
- Promote creation of extensive native woodland buffers in areas identified for development e.g. in the urban fringe of Frinton and Clacton.
- Ensure particular care is taken in the siting of communication masts or other vertical elements – these have the potential to be highly visible in this open landscape. This also applies to large-scale rural buildings e.g. for agriculture.
- Simon's Wood LoWS is an ancient woodland which has been densely replanted with conifers, particularly pines (*Pinus spp.*) and scattered larch (*Larix decidua).* The impoverished ground flora would benefit from a more open canopy structure which would ideally involve the total removal of the majority of the coniferous species.
- Use of full cut-off lights and sensitively designed lighting schemes can reduce the impact of light pollution on night skies.
- Restrict further ribbon development and consider opportunities to strengthen and enhance the landscape setting to the villages through planting and enhancing, or creating new village greens, which could help to maintain the individual character of individual settlements.
- Strengthen the landscape character around existing urban settlements (Clacton and Frinton) e.g. by development of a strategic green infrastructure strategy for development zones. Ensure that development does not result in further severance and fragmentation of agricultural land and promote green buffers that align with and deliver the GI Strategy.
- There are considerable opportunities for woodland creation in urban fringe areas to create new character and provide screening.
- Seek to restore lost ponds ('ghost ponds') through opportunities found in the Essex LNRS.
- Seek to restore hedgerows across the landscape to reduce the scale of wind erosion.



Figure 196: Conserve views to historic features such as the Great Holland All Saints Church tower.

Chapter 4
Glossary

Glossary

4.1 Key Landscape Character Assessment Terms

Analysis – the process of dividing up the landscape into its component parts to gain a better understanding of it.

Approach – the step-wise process by which landscape assessment is undertaken.

Assessment – term to describe all the various ways of looking at, analysing, evaluating and describing the landscape.

Character – a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.

Characteristics – elements, or combinations of elements, which make a particular contribution to distinctive character.

Characterisation – the process of identifying areas of similar character, classifying and mapping them, and describing their character.

Elements – individual components which make up the landscape, such as trees and hedges.

Features – particularly prominent or eye-catching elements, such as tree clumps, church towers, or wooded skylines.

Land cover – combination of land use and vegetation that cover the land surface.

Landform – combination of slope and elevation that produce the shape and form of the land surface.

Landscape – primarily the visual appearance of the land including its shape, form and colours. However, landscape is not purely a visual phenomenon. The landscape relies on a range of other dimensions including geology, landform, soils, ecology, archaeology, landscape history, land use, architecture and cultural associations.

Objective – method of assessment in which personal feelings and opinions do not influence characterisation.

Subjective – method of assessment in which personal views and reactions are used in the characterisation process.

4.2 Other Technical Terms

Alluvium – sedimentary deposits resulting from the action of rivers, including those laid down in river channels, floodplains, estuaries and lakes.

Ancient woodland – land continuously wooded since AD 1600. It is an extremely valuable ecological resource, usually with a high diversity of flora and fauna.

Arable – land that is used for, or is suitable for, growing crops.

Bronze Age – (c. 2,500 – 750 BC) a cultural phase in humankind's evolution when alloying of copper and tin was perfected. Metalworking technology and new types of flint tool and pottery design were introduced at the start of this period. Changes in society were reflected in the emergence of new burial techniques, particularly round barrows. In the Middle Bronze Age, cremation replaced inhumations and in the late Bronze Age social and economic changes led to the abandonment of old funerary rights in favour of less traceable rites.

Clactonian – a Lower Palaeolithic culture represented by the flint implements found at Clacton, Essex.

Coastal Protection Belt – a planning policy designation designed to safeguard rural, undeveloped coastlines from inappropriate development.

Conservation Area – area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

Copperas – pyrite nodules (known as 'copperas stones') gathered from beaches in the 18th century, where they had been washed out of the London Clay, which were then allowed to oxidise for several months in open vats. This lengthy and hazardous industrial process converted the nodules to ferrous sulphate (green vitriol), which was an essential chemical for making dyes, ink, and several industrial chemicals such as sulphuric acid.

Coppicing – the traditional method of woodland management in which trees are cut down near to the ground to encourage the production of long, straight shoots that can be harvested.

Country Park – public green spaces often at the edge of urban areas which provide places to enjoy the outdoors and experience nature in an informal semi-rural park setting; most are owned and managed by Local Authorities.

Cropmarks – variations in the sub-soil caused by buried archaeological features resulting in differential crop growth visible from the air.

Demesne – area of land retained and managed by a lord of the manor under the feudal system for his own use.

Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes – agricultural support system in England, replacing EU-based subsidies.

Geodiversity – the variety of rocks, fossils, minerals, landforms and soils, and all the natural processes that shape the landscape.

Geology – the study of the origin, structure, composition and history of the Earth together with the processes that have led to its present state.

Glacial – term used to describe a cold phase during an ice age.

Green Infrastructure (GI) – a strategically planned, interconnected network of green (parks, woodlands, nature reserves) and blue (rivers, ponds, coastal features) spaces across the county. It is designed to provide environmental, social, and economic benefits, including biodiversity net gain, climate resilience (flood mitigation), improved public health, and enhanced quality of life.

Iron Age – (c. 750 BC – AD 43) a cultural phase of humankind's evolution when technical improvements in iron-working enabled iron tools and weapons to replace those of the preceding Bronze Age. Population growth led to competition for land and the development of a more territorial society. Improved farming

Glossary

technology and scarcity of land brought about the cultivation of heavier and poorer soils.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) – a statutory system of spatial strategies across England designed to drive nature recovery, enhance biodiversity, and connect habitats.

Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) – designated areas of land, identified locally for their significant nature conservation value, that host threatened or important species and habitats, acting as ecological networks, corridors, and stepping stones for wildlife in both countryside and urban settings.

Medieval – period between the Norman Conquest of England in AD 1066 and the dissolution of the monasteries in AD 1538.

National Landscapes – designated areas recognised for their high-quality, nationally important landscapes, protected to conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage. They were formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).

Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) – large-scale major development project in England or Wales which falls into the following categories: energy, transport, waste, waste water, and water.

Nature Reserve – a protected area of land or water managed for wildlife conservation, offering habitats for diverse species and opportunities for public engagement with nature. In Tendring they are often managed by Essex Wildlife Trust.

Neolithic – (c. 4,000 – 2,500 BC) an archaeological term used to describe the 'new stone' age. This applies to the culture achieved during the middle Post Glacial period when humankind had begun to polish and grind stone artefacts (a technological advance from the bashing and flaking of the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic). The Neolithic period also saw the introduction of agriculture.

Open Field – well established means of land management during the medieval period that was widespread across much of lowland England. The unit of cultivation was the strip (land or selion), which varied in length and width depending on local conditions. The strips were grouped together into furlongs and a number of furlongs formed the field. The up and down ploughing of the strips threw soil into the centre of the strip, and over time created the distinctive ridge and furrow landform which may be used to identify remnants of open fields in the landscape today. Ridge and furrow type landforms are also evident in water meadow landscapes and areas where steam ploughing was employed. Good examples survive where the open arable fields became permanent pasture following the black death in the 14th century and when arable land was enclosed in the late 18th and 19th centuries. Elsewhere, the act of enclosing the land, subsequent consolidation of the strips and continued ploughing for arable production obliterated the patterns of ridge and furrow.

Outcrop – the area where a particular rock appears at the surface.

Palaeoenvironmental – material which provides evidence of an environment at a period in the past.

Palaeolithic – period covering the time span from the initial colonisation of Britain, c. 700,000 years ago to the end of the last ice age c. 10,000 years ago.

Pastoral – relating to the countryside; an environment that is tranquil, idyllic, featuring harmonious interaction between agriculture and nature.

Post-medieval – period from AD 1538–1900.

Protected Lanes – historic, often sunken, rural lanes, typically defined by ancient hedgerows, grass verges, and narrow, winding layouts. They are protected from development due to their high archaeological, biodiversity, and aesthetic value, and are safeguarded against proposals that would damage their historic character, such as road widening.

Quaternary – the younger of the two geological periods of the Cainozoic. This was the era that saw the appearance of humankind. It comprises two epochs, the Pleistocene and the Holocene, and deposits consist largely of alluvium, tufa, head, head gravel and river terrace deposits.

Ramsar site – wetland of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention 1979.

Red Crag Formation – a fossil-rich, iron-stained red sand formation deposited in a shallow sea approximately 2 to 3 million years ago (Pliocene epoch). It is exposed at The Naze at Walton-on-the-Naze, and contains fossil shells, shark teeth, and phosphatic nodules. The name derives from its iron-stained reddish colour and "crag" which is an East Anglian word for shells.

Red Hill – archaeological term in Britain for a small mound with a reddish colour found in the coastal and tidal river areas of East Anglia and Essex. Red Hills are formed as a result of generations of salt making, deriving their colour from the rubble of clay structures used in the salt-making process that have been scorched red by fires used to evaporate sea water to make salt cakes. Red Hills date from the Bronze Age, Iron Age and into the Roman period.

Registered Park and Garden – a designed landscape deemed to be of special historic interest and included on a national register maintained by Historic England. These sites, including public parks, private gardens, and cemeteries, are designated as nationally important heritage assets to ensure their protection and to raise awareness of their value.

Riparian – riverbank habitats.

Scheduled Monument (SM) – a site of nationally archaeological importance protected under the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act. (Formerly Scheduled Ancient Monument).

Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – land designated under Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora.

Special Protection Area (SPA) – land classified under Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds.

Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI) – a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is the land notified as an SSSI under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), as amended. SSSI are the finest sites for wildlife and natural features in England, supporting many characteristic, rare and endangered species, habitats and natural features.

Topography – term used to describe the surface features of the earth's surface.

Vernacular – built in the local style, from local materials.

Chapter 5
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Appendices

Tendring District

Landscape Character Assessment

2026

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