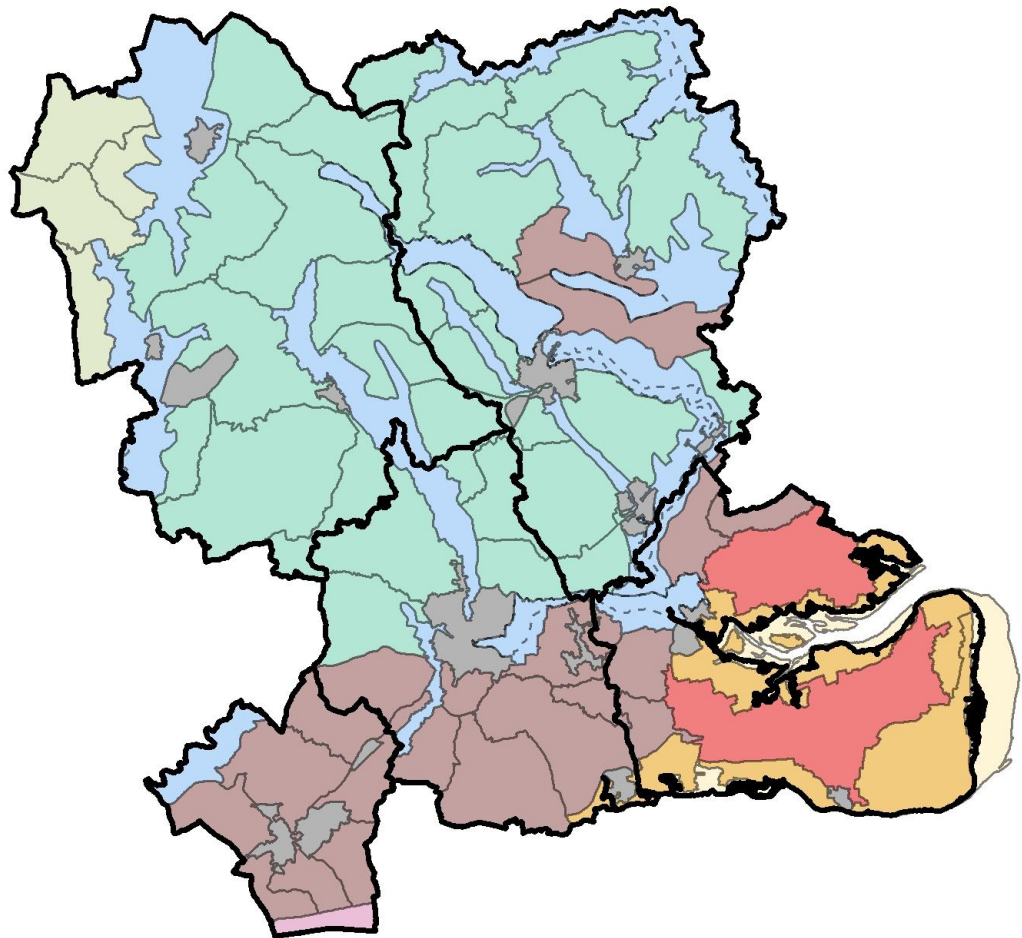




**BRAINTREE, BRENTWOOD, CHELMSFORD,
MALDON AND UTTLESFORD
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENTS**




September 2006

CHRIS BLANDFORD ASSOCIATES

Environment Landscape Planning

**Braintree DC, Brentwood BC, Chelmsford BC,
Maldon DC & Uttlesford DC**

**BRAINTREE, BRENTWOOD, CHELMSFORD,
MALDON AND UTTLESFORD
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENTS**

Approved By: D Watkins
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Position: Director
Date: 27 September 2006

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PREFACE

This Technical Study was commissioned jointly by Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Chelmsford Borough Council, Maldon District Council and Uttlesford District Council.

The Study provides a baseline inventory of the landscape character of the five authority areas. It also sets out recommendations for the application of the Study for consideration and action as appropriate by the local authorities. The need to protect and enhance landscape character is recognised by Government planning policy on the delivery of sustainable development through the planning system. To ensure that full account is given to landscape character in planning decisions, this Study is commended to the local authorities for use as an evidence base for informing the preparation of Local Development Frameworks and in development control.

The preparation of the Study was steered by officers from the five local authorities. We are grateful for the advice and guidance provided by the Steering Group, namely:

- Melvyne Crow– Braintree District Council
- Melanie Jones and Sarah Nicholas – Uttlesford District Council
- Paul McBride and Derek Stebbing – Chelmsford Borough Council
- Geoff Boyton – Brentwood Borough Council
- Chris Bailey and Zyuoya Ling – Maldon District Council

In addition, we appreciate the help of other Council officers and individuals from other organisations who willingly assisted in the provision of data and information for the Study. We would also like to acknowledge the representatives of organisations who attended the three stakeholder consultation workshops held during the course of the Study (see Appendix A for details). The information gained from these stakeholders provided an important input to the Study.

The Consultant Team comprised:

- Dominic Watkins
- Emma Clarke
- Marian Cameron
- Alison MacDonald
- Darina Williams

Chris Blandford Associates
September 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In October 2005 Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Chelmsford Borough Council, Maldon District Council and Uttlesford District Council jointly commissioned Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) to undertake Landscape Character Assessments of their respective areas.

The aim of the Study is to provide a comprehensive Borough/District-wide assessment of landscape character within the Study Area to inform land use planning and land management decisions. The Landscape Character Assessment will be specifically used as a technical evidence base to inform the Local Development Frameworks currently being prepared by the respective local planning authorities.

The overall aim of landscape planning, design and management should be to achieve ‘sustainable landscapes’ that are as visually, biodiverse and culturally rich as possible to meet all of society’s social, economic and environmental needs. A better understanding of landscapes provided by Landscape Character Assessments – their diversity, character and distinctiveness, evolution, sensitivity to change and their management needs – is essential to help to work towards this goal.

Methodology

The overall approach to the study is based on *Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland* (Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002), the latest published guidance, and takes into account current best practice. Landscape Character Assessment addresses both the relatively objective process of landscape characterisation, which involves identifying, mapping, classifying and describing ‘landscape character’, and the more subjective process of evaluating landscape character to inform planning and land management decisions. In summary, the main stages involved in the study process were:

- Desk Study Research
- Field Survey
- Characterisation
- Evaluation
- Preparation of the Study Report

Consultation with key stakeholder organisations at three main stages of the above process was an important and integral element of the Study. The purpose of the stakeholder consultation was to strengthen the evidence base by gathering opinions about landscape character from the key stakeholders, and to promote the value of the Study as a tool for informing planning and land management decisions in rural areas. As a technical study, local community and special interest groups were not consulted on the Study at this preparatory stage. However, it is anticipated that community involvement in the future application of the Landscape Character Assessment will be encouraged through development of character-based design guidance at the local level (e.g. Village Design Statements, Town Design Statements, Parish Plans etc.).

Content of the Report

Section 1.0 sets out the context for the Study. It explains the background to the Study, its aims and objectives, and highlights the importance of landscape character. It also describes the planning policy framework for the Study, and outlines the approach and process behind the assessment methodology.

Section 2.0 provides an overview of the Study Area. It describes the physical and historical influences on the landscape, and identifies the key forces for change affecting landscape character today. This section also provides an overview of landscape character across the Study Area as a whole in its national and county context.

Eight separate Landscape Character Types were defined at 1:25,000 scale within the Study Area. Landscape Character Types are generic and have broadly similar patterns of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, settlement and field systems. The eight Landscape Character Types have been broken down into seventy Landscape Character Areas that reflect distinctive variations in local character based on visual analysis of how different combinations of physical features and perceptual qualities such as scale, pattern, tranquillity, cultural associations, etc. create areas of distinctive landscape character.

Sections 3.0 to 7.0 of the report provide the detailed ‘profiles’ of the Landscape Character Areas identified within Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon and Uttlesford respectively. The profiles are structured as follows:

- Key characteristics
- Overall character description
- Visual characteristics
- Historic land use
- Ecological features
- Key planning and land management issues
- Sensitivities to change
- Proposed landscape strategy objectives
- Suggested landscape planning guidelines
- Suggested land management guidelines

The evaluation of indicative landscape sensitivity for each Landscape Character Area took into account the area’s intrinsic landscape qualities, biodiversity value, visual characteristics (intervisibility and visual prominence), historic integrity and its re-creatability. The sensitivity analysis, together with the proposed strategy objectives and suggested guidelines for each Landscape Character Area, can be used to inform:

- the identification of spatial development options within the District/Borough Local Development Frameworks.
- Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment of Local Development Framework site allocations.
- the highlighting of landscape issues that may need to be considered in greater detail in relation to development control decisions for major schemes.
- the application of criteria-based landscape protection and enhancement policies within Local Development Frameworks.

Section 8.0 sets out the consultant’s recommendations to the commissioning authorities for their consideration and action as appropriate. Recommendations are provided for the application of the Landscape Character Assessment including its use in relation to informing Local Development Framework policies for protecting and enhancing landscape character, and in providing a baseline and framework for monitoring landscape change. Recommendations for further work required to enhance the evidence base on the landscape and settlement character of the Study Area are also included.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Study Area

1.1.1 In October 2005 Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Chelmsford Borough Council, Maldon District Council and Uttlesford District Council jointly commissioned Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) to undertake Landscape Character Assessments of their respective areas.

1.1.2 The Study Area is shown on Figure 1.1. Situated in the County of Essex, the Study Area comprises the following administrative areas:

- Braintree District
- Brentwood Borough
- Chelmsford Borough
- Maldon District
- Uttlesford District

1.1.3 The areas characterised by this Study include all the rural area up to and including the urban edge and, where they exist, river valleys and other green corridors extending into urban areas.

1.1.4 The Study Area borders Babergh District and St Edmundsbury District in Suffolk, and South Cambridgeshire District in Cambridgeshire to the north; the Districts of North and East Hertfordshire and Epping Forest District in Essex to the west; the Borough of Havering in Greater London, and Thurrock and the Districts of Basildon and Rochford in Essex which form the southern border of the Study Area. The eastern border of the Study Area is provided by the North Sea and by Colchester Borough in Essex.

1.2 Study Aims and Objectives

1.2.1 The aim of the Study is to provide a comprehensive Borough/District-wide assessment of landscape character within the Study Area to inform land use planning and land management decisions.

1.2.2 The Landscape Character Assessment will be specifically used to inform the Local Development Frameworks currently being prepared by the respective local planning authorities.

1.2.3 The key objectives of the Study are to:

- Provide a baseline inventory and description of landscape character by Type and Area at a scale of 1:25,000.
- Identify key issues, sensitivities to change and management strategy objectives/guidelines for each Character Area.
- Ensure that Landscape Character Areas and Types join up seamlessly across administrative boundaries, including with existing character assessment studies carried out by neighbouring authorities outside of the Study Area.
- To liaise with and understand the issues and concerns of the key stakeholder organisations in relation to the landscape characterisation process.

1.3 The Importance of Landscape Character

1.3.1 The UK Government signed the European Landscape Convention¹ on the 24 February 2006. The Convention aims to encourage public authorities within member states to adopt policies and measures for the protection, management and planning of all landscapes, both outstanding and ordinary, that determine the quality of people's living environment. The Convention specially encourages local authorities to introduce exemplary and long lasting policies or measures to protect, manage and plan landscapes.

1.3.2 The European Landscape Convention defines landscape as:

'an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.'

1.3.3 The term landscape is typically synonymous with the countryside; however, landscape is everywhere and may comprise rural landscapes, urban landscapes or townscape, urban fringe landscapes, coastal landscapes or seascapes, etc.

1.3.4 The European Landscape Convention defines 'landscape character' as:

'a distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occur consistently in a particular type of landscape.'

1.3.5 In England and Scotland, Landscape Character Assessment² is a tool that allows landscape character to be understood, explained and described in a transparent and robust way. It does this by mapping and describing the variations in physical, natural and cultural attributes and experiential characteristics that make one area distinctive from another at a range of spatial scales. Landscape Character Assessment also recognises how landscapes have changed over time, and acknowledges the changing influences of human activities and the impacts of economic development.

1.3.6 The overall aim of landscape planning, design and management should be to achieve *sustainable landscapes* that are as visually, biodiverse and culturally rich as possible to meet all of society's social, economic and environmental needs. A better understanding of landscapes provided by Landscape Character Assessments – their diversity, character and distinctiveness, evolution, sensitivity to change and their management needs – is essential to help to work towards this goal.

1.4 Planning Policy Framework

1.4.1 National Planning Policy relating to landscape character is contained in PPS1³ and PPS7⁴.

Planning Policy Statement 1 : Delivering Sustainable Development

1.4.2 PPS1 sets out the Government's overarching planning policies on the delivery of sustainable development through the planning system. It states that one of the Government's objectives for the planning system is that planning should facilitate and promote sustainable urban and rural development by protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment and the quality and character of the countryside (para 5). In its key principles, PPS1 states that 'a

¹ The European Landscape Convention opened for signature in Florence on 20 October 2000. Jim Knight, Minister for Rural Affairs, Landscape and Biodiversity announced the UK signing of the European Landscape Convention on 24 February 2006.

² Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland (Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002).

³ Planning Policy Statement 1 : Delivering Sustainable Development (ODPM, 2005).

⁴ Planning Policy Statement 7 : Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (ODPM, 2004).

spatial planning approach should be at the heart of planning for sustainable development' (para 13.iii) and *'design which fails to take the opportunities for improving the character and quality of an area should not be accepted'* (para 13.iv). When preparing development plans *'planning authorities should seek to enhance as well as protect biodiversity, natural habitats, the historic environment and landscape and townscape character'* (para 27). PPS1 also requires new design to be integrated into the existing urban form and natural and built environments (para 35).

Planning Policy Statement 7 : Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

- 1.4.3 Landscape Character Assessment, along with Village or Town Design Statements and Village or Parish Plans, is recommended by PPS7 as a tool to assist Local Authorities in the preparation of policies and guidance that encourages good quality design throughout rural areas (para 13). Landscape Character Assessment is also recommended by PPS7 as a tool for creating carefully drafted, criteria-based policies in Local Development Documents to protect valued landscapes outside nationally designated areas without the need for rigid local designations, which may restrict sustainable development and the economic vitality of rural areas. PPS7 advises that local landscape designations should only be maintained or, exceptionally, extended where it can be clearly shown that criteria-based policies cannot provide the necessary protection (paras 24 and 25).

The East of England Regional Spatial Strategy

- 1.4.4 The East of England Plan : Draft Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the East of England was published by the East of England Regional Assembly for consultation in December 2004. An Examination in Public (EIP) into the draft RSS was held between November 2005 and March 2006. The EIP Panel Report was published in June 2006, which included recommended changes to the draft RSS.
- 1.4.5 The Draft RSS is based on the principles of sustainable development and specifically identifies landscape character as a key consideration in the spatial development of the region. Taking into account the recommended changes of the EIP Panel, draft Policy ENV2 Landscape Conservation states:

'Planning authorities and other agencies in their plans, policies and programmes and decision-making will, in accordance with statutory requirements, afford the highest status of protection to the East of England's nationally designated landscapes – the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads (having status equal to a National Park) and the Chilterns, Norfolk Coast, Dedham Vale and Suffolk Coast and Heaths Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)s. Within the Broads priority will be given to the statutory purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, promoting public enjoyment and protecting the interests of navigation. Within the AONBs priority over other considerations will be given to conservation of the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage.

Throughout the East of England planning authorities and other agencies in their plans, policies, programmes and decision-making will aim to recognise, protect and enhance the diversity and local distinctiveness of the countryside character areas indicated on Map 9.1 by:

- *developing area-wide strategies, based on landscape character assessments, setting long-term goals for landscape change, targeting planning and land management tools and resources to influence that change, and giving priority to those areas subject to most growth and change;*

- *developing criteria-based policies, informed by the area-wide strategies and landscape character assessments, to ensure that all development, wherever possible respects and enhances local landscape character; and*
- *providing/requiring appropriate mitigation measures where avoidance of damage to local landscape character is unavoidable.'*

The Essex Structure Plan

- 1.4.6 The Essex and Southend on Sea Replacement Structure Plan was adopted in April 2001. Under the *Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004*, the Structure Plan will remain the operative development plan for Essex from 2004-2007. The Structure Plan and its policies are therefore saved for three years, unless the East of England Regional Spatial Strategy is adopted sooner. Once the East of England Plan is adopted, the Structure Plan policies will be repealed and will have no effect.
- 1.4.7 The need to protect landscape character has been recognised by Essex County Council, and policies to protect the distinctive character of the towns, villages, countryside and coast of the County is set out in the Structure Plan. The Structure Plan specifically encourages District and Borough Councils in Essex to prepare Landscape Character Assessments to inform land use planning and land management in their areas.

Local Planning Context

- 1.4.8 The five local planning authorities within the Study Area have prepared and adopted Local Plans for the whole of their areas to guide development and to protect and enhance the environment. These will eventually be replaced by Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) under the arrangements set out in the *Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004*. LDFs comprise a series of Local Development Documents (LDDs) that will set out proposals for the future development use and conservation of land and buildings.
- 1.4.9 The new LDFs will normally comprise the following main LDDs of relevance to landscape planning objectives:
- *Statement of Community Involvement* – sets out how the community will be consulted during the production of LDDs and in development control.
 - *Core Strategy* – establishes the overarching vision for development in local authority areas and sets out the key planning objectives as a basis for policies. It contains a spatial strategy, strategic policies and proposals for promoting and controlling development in accordance with the principles of sustainable development, and includes a monitoring and implementation framework.
 - *Development Control Policies* – comprise a suite of policies to be used in development control to ensure that all development meets the vision and strategy set out in the Core Strategy.
 - *Site Specific Allocations* – this identifies site-specific land allocations for different types of development, and land to which specific policies apply.
 - *Area Action Plans* – are developed, where necessary, for particular sites or areas identified for significant change or conservation. They focus on implementation, setting out the measures needed to deliver development or conservation initiatives.

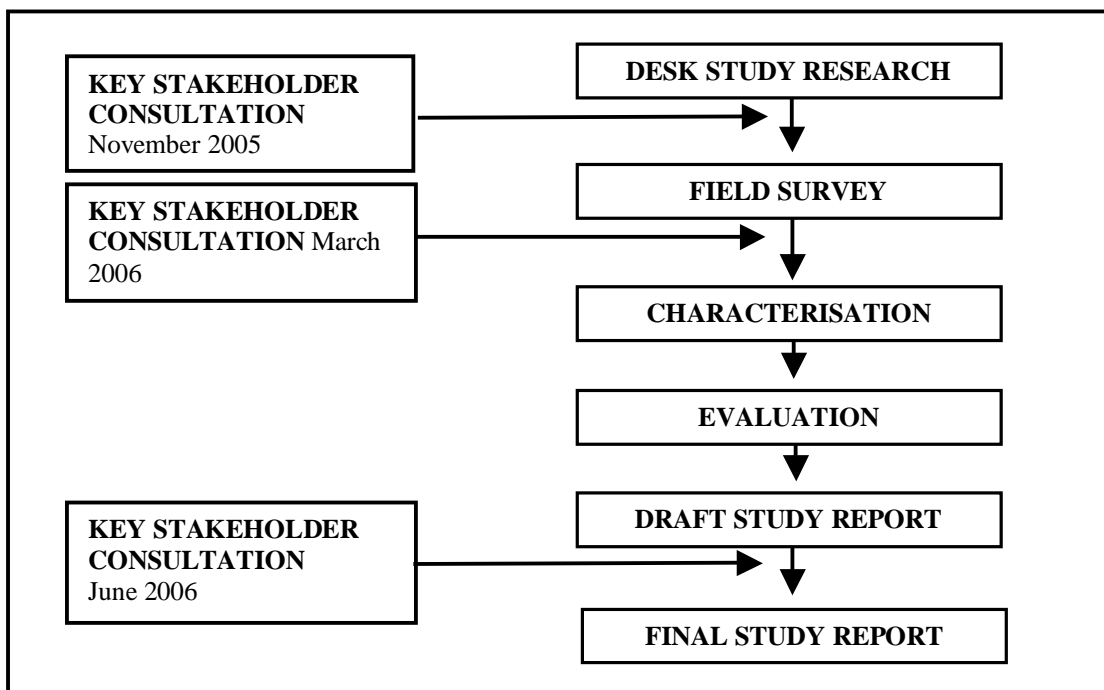
- *Proposals Map* - expresses geographically the adopted development plan policies, including locations and sites for particular land use and development proposals, and areas of protection.
- *Supplementary Planning Documents* – provide detailed guidance to elaborate upon the core policies and proposals, e.g. design guides, site development briefs or topic based guidance. SPDs are capable of being updated regularly making them more able to respond to changing circumstances. They do not have Development Plan Document status, but are a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

- 1.4.10 The Core Strategy, Development Control Policies, Site Specific Allocations, Proposals Map and any Area Action Plans, together with the RSS, comprise the statutory Development Plan Documents against which all planning decisions will normally need to be made. It is intended that this Landscape Character Assessment will be used as part of the evidence base of technical studies to inform the preparation of the LDFs within the Study Area.
- 1.4.11 The current local planning situation in each of the respective authority areas is set out in Appendix E.

1.5 Approach and Methodology

- 1.5.1 The overall approach for undertaking the Landscape Character Assessment is based on the latest guidance published by the Countryside Agency⁵, taking into account current best practice. Landscape Character Assessment addresses both the relatively objective process of landscape characterisation, which involves identifying, mapping, classifying and describing ‘landscape character’, and the more subjective process of evaluating landscape character to inform planning and land management decisions.
- 1.5.2 The study process is illustrated in Box 1, and described below.

Box 1 – Landscape Character Assessment Process



⁵ Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland (Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002).

Desk Study Research

- 1.5.3 This stage involved desk-based research to identify physical and historical factors that have influenced the shape and use of the landscape. This work drew on a variety of documents and maps that describe the physical geography and cultural history of the Study Area (see Appendix C for details). The desk research also identified the forces for change affecting the character of the landscape within the Study Area.
- 1.5.4 In summary, the desk work involved:
- A review of existing national and local character assessments relating to the Study Area, including the Countryside Agency's Character of England Map/Countryside Character descriptions and National Landscape Typology; Essex Landscape Character Assessment; and existing assessments for neighbouring areas in Essex, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Thurrock.
 - Production and analysis of map overlays of surface geology, landform and drainage, and nature conservation designations.
 - Analysis of air photos.
 - Identification of draft Landscape Character Types and draft Landscape Character Areas.
- 1.5.5 In recognition of the important contribution that historic patterns and features make to the character of the current landscape in this part of Essex, information from the Essex Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) Study dataset was incorporated into the Landscape Character Assessment using a methodology developed and agreed with Essex County Council Historic Environment Unit and English Heritage (see Appendix D for details). 'Historic Landscape Character Areas' were derived from amalgamation of the HLC typology, and used to (i) inform the definition of the Landscape Character Areas defined in this report, and (ii) to identify the key historic land use features in the present-day landscape (see the Landscape Character Area profiles in Sections 3.0 to 7.0).

Field Survey

- 1.5.6 Field surveys were undertaken between November 2005 and April 2006 to allow consideration of seasonal variations. The aim of the surveys was to undertake a visual analysis of how different features and elements combined to create distinctive patterns in the landscape. The surveys were undertaken from key viewpoints within each draft Landscape Character Area by a team of field assessors. The checklist included:
- Landform
 - Rivers/drainage
 - Land cover
 - Field pattern and field boundaries
 - Communication routes
 - Settlement form/pattern
 - Building styles
 - Scale
 - Texture
 - Enclosure
 - Stimuli
 - Sense of tranquillity
 - Movement

- View types and composition
- Landmarks

1.5.7 The survey information (including photographs) was used to (i) inform the descriptions of landscape character and (ii) to test and refine the draft Landscape Character Area boundaries.

Characterisation

1.5.8 The characterisation stage involved the combination of the desk study research and field survey analysis to identify and map generic Landscape Character Types and geographically unique Landscape Character Areas at 1:25,000 scale (see Section 2.5 for details).

1.5.9 For each generic Landscape Character Type, its boundaries were mapped and its key characteristics described. For each unique Landscape Character Area, its boundaries were mapped and the following characterisation information was recorded:

- Key Characteristics
- Overall Character Description
- Visual Characteristics
- Historic Land Use
- Ecological Features

Evaluation

1.5.10 This stage involved making the following judgements about each Landscape Character Area:

- Key Planning and Land Management Issues
- Sensitivities to Change
- Proposed landscape Strategy Objectives
- Suggested Landscape Planning Guidelines
- Suggested Land Management Guidelines

Evaluation of Landscape Sensitivity

1.5.11 The methodology for evaluating the intrinsic sensitivities of each Landscape Character Area to change is based on the criteria for judging sensitivity set out in an accompanying paper to the *Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland*⁶, taking into account current best practice.

1.5.12 It should be noted that the evaluation is based on the relatively broad-brush analysis undertaken at 1:25,000 scale for this Study. The degree of sensitivity is not absolute. It is likely to vary according to the nature of change under consideration, and is therefore only indicative. This evaluation should be read in conjunction with the more strategic evaluation of landscape sensitivity set out in the Essex Landscape Character Assessment⁷.

1.5.13 The criteria used to evaluate the relative sensitivities of each Landscape Character Area are defined in Box 2.

⁶ Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland : Topic Paper 8 – Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity (Swanwick, 2004).

⁷ Essex County Council and Southend-on-Sea Borough Council (July 2002).

Box 2 - Landscape Sensitivity Evaluation Criteria

Intrinsic Landscape Qualities

- The number and contribution of positive visual qualities/characteristics to landscape value/sense of place.

Biodiversity Value

- The contribution of positive ecological elements or features to landscape value/sense of place.

Visual Characteristics (Intervisibility and Visual Prominence)

- The degree to which an area is widely visible from, and positively influences the character of, surrounding areas.

Historic Integrity

- The contribution of positive visible historic elements within the area, taking into account the intactness and integrity of historic landscape patterns and the presence of valued historic features within the area.

Re-creatability

- The degree to which the *intrinsic landscape qualities*, *biodiversity value* and *historic integrity* of an area can be re-created if eroded or lost.

Landscape Strategy Objectives and Guidelines

- 1.5.14 This stage also involved identifying proposed broad strategy objectives and suggested guidelines for each Landscape Character Area. Taking into account the condition and sensitivities of the particular Landscape Character Area, one or more of the following strategy objectives was identified:

- **Conserve** - seek to protect and enhance positive features that are essential in contributing to local distinctiveness and sense of place through effective planning and positive land management measures.
- **Enhance** - seek to improve the integrity of the landscape, and reinforce its character, by introducing new elements where distinctive features or characteristics are absent.
- **Restore** - seek to reinforce and/or reinstate historic landscape patterns and features that contribute to sense of place and time depth, by repairing distinctive elements that have been lost or degraded.

- 1.5.15 The sensitivity analysis, together with the proposed strategy objectives and suggested guidelines for each Landscape Character Area, can be used to inform:

- the identification of spatial development options within the District/Borough Local Development Frameworks.
- Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment of Local Development Framework site allocations.

- the highlighting of landscape issues that may need to be considered in greater detail in relation to development control decisions for major schemes.
- the application of criteria-based landscape protection and enhancement policies within Local Development Frameworks.

Key Stakeholder Consultation

- 1.5.16 Consultation with key stakeholder organisations was an important and integral element of the Study. The purpose of the stakeholder consultation was to strengthen the evidence base by gathering opinions about landscape character from the key stakeholders, and to promote the value of the Study as a tool for informing planning and land management decisions in rural areas.
- 1.5.17 The first stage of consultation in November 2005 involved a workshop to explore stakeholder's views on what gives different places within each of the authority areas their local identity and distinctive character (see Appendix A for further details). This information was fed into the desk study research and field survey stages of the Study to refine and validate the preliminary draft mapping of Landscape Character Types and Areas by the Consultant Team.
- 1.5.18 The second stage of consultation in March 2006 involved a further workshop to: explore stakeholder's views on the refined Landscape Character Types and Areas identified following field survey work; identify key threats to valued landscape characteristics/areas; and identify opportunities to enhance landscape character and sense of place (see Appendix A for further details). This information was fed into the characterisation and evaluation stages of the Study to inform: (i) the descriptions of landscape character; (ii) judgements about the sensitivities of different Landscape Character Areas to change; and (iii) the development of strategy objectives and guidelines for guiding change within different areas.
- 1.5.19 The findings of the Draft Report were presented to and discussed with the key stakeholders at a third workshop held in early June 2006, and their comments incorporated into the final version.
- 1.5.20 As a technical study, local community and special interest groups were not consulted on the Study at this preparatory stage. However, it is anticipated (see Section 8.0) that community involvement in the future application of the Landscape Character Assessment will be encouraged through development of character-based design guidance at the local level (e.g. Village Design Statements, Town Design Statements, Parish Plans etc.).

1.6 Structure of the Report

- 1.6.1 The study report is structured as follows.
- 1.6.2 **Section 1.0** sets out the context for the Study. It explains the background to the Study, its aims and objectives, and highlights the importance of landscape character. It also describes the planning policy framework for the Study, and outlines the approach and process behind the assessment methodology.
- 1.6.3 **Section 2.0** provides an overview of the Study Area. It describes the physical and historical influences on the landscape, and identifies the key forces for change affecting landscape character today. This section also provides an overview of landscape character across the Study Area as a whole in its national and county context. The descriptions of individual Landscape Character Areas in Sections 3.0 to 7.0 (see below), should be read in conjunction with this information to ensure that the contextual relationship with the wider landscape is understood.

1.6.4 **Sections 3.0 to 7.0** of the report provide the detailed ‘profiles’ of Landscape Character Areas within Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon and Uttlesford respectively. The profiles are structured as follows:

- Location of character area (map)
- Boundaries of character area (map)
- Photograph
- Key characteristics
- Overall character description
- Visual characteristics
- Historic land use
- Ecological features
- Key planning and land management issues
- Sensitivities to change
- Proposed landscape strategy objectives
- Suggested landscape planning guidelines
- Suggested land management guidelines

Where Landscape Character Areas fall within two or more adjacent District/Borough areas included within this Study report, the same profile has been included within the respective section. For example, the profile for Landscape Character Area *B16 – Felsted Farmland Plateau* is ‘shared’ by Braintree District (Section 3.0), Chelmsford Borough (Section 5.0) and Uttlesford District (Section 7.0). In such instances, a cross-reference is noted in the respective Character Area profile(s). References to other studies in neighbouring authority areas is facilitated by signposts to relevant documents as appropriate within each Section.

1.6.5 **Section 8.0** sets out the consultant’s recommendations to the commissioning authorities for their consideration and action as appropriate. Recommendations are provided for the application of the Landscape Character Assessment including its use in relation to informing Local Development Framework policies for protecting and enhancing landscape character, and in providing a baseline and framework for monitoring landscape change. Recommendations for further work required to enhance the evidence base on the landscape and settlement character of the Study Area are also included.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY AREA

2.0 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY AREA

2.1 General

- 2.1.1 This section provides an overview of the Study Area. It describes the physical and historical influences on the landscape, and identifies the key forces for change affecting landscape character today. This section also provides an overview of landscape character across the Study Area as a whole in its national and county context.

2.2 Physical Influences on the Shaping of the Landscape

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

Geology, Landform and Drainage

- 2.2.3 The oldest rocks were laid down between 440 and 360 million years ago. They mainly consist of hard, slaty shales, mudstones and sandstones. Overlying this base are a number of different geological layers that have formed and undergone erosion through marine, fluvial and glacial processes between 135 million years ago to the present to form the rock structure of the Study Area today.
- 2.2.4 The surface geology of the Study Area (see Figure 2.1) is dominated by the deposition of glacial tills laid down during the Quaternary Period when the area was subjected to periodic ice advances and retreats as the climate cooled and warmed. This led to a complex mix of glacial, proglacial and periglacial deposits overlying each other, forming a generally flat landscape near the coast developing into gently undulating hills and valleys in the northwest with a corresponding mixture of soils and vegetation cover.
- 2.2.5 In the coastal plains of the Study Area, alluvial mud deposits laid down on the floor of a subtropical sea 50 million years ago overlay the London Clay. This forms the extensive area of low flat land in the southeast near to the coast at an altitude of 0-20m AOD (see Figure 2.2).
- 2.2.6 Overlying the alluvial deposits, soils along the coastline are derived largely from intertidal alluvial muds, which give rise to reclaimed coastal marshes with stoneless, clayey, silty and loamy soils. The soils on the saltmarshes are heavy gleys that undergo periodic waterlogging from fluctuations in the ground water table. Good arable yields have resulted from under-draining, levelling and liming.
- 2.2.7 Inland from the coastal marshes, the soils on the London Clay are seasonally water-logged slowly permeable heavy clay soils. There are some lighter soils on foot slopes. Generally the soils shrink and crack on drying, swelling on rewetting. When wet the soils become very sticky and plastic, they are not easy to cultivate requiring drainage to grow arable crops. Along the river courses alluvial sand and gravels provide well-drained fertile soils on undulating valleys. Surrounding the valleys are low hills and ridges the highest of which is Danbury Hill at 116m AOD.

- 2.2.8 On the hills above the London Clay, the capping of the fine sands of the Bagshot Beds by the pebbly clay drifts have led to acidic soils with low natural fertility that are easily cultivated.
- 2.2.9 In the northwest of the Study Area, the geology changes to glacial tills composed of sands and gravels overlain by the most extensive soils in the area, pelosols. These are heavy acidic soils often prone to waterlogging in winter months and to shrinking and cracking in summer resulting in a predominance of pasture fields on the low hills and ridges.
- 2.2.10 In the northwest of Uttlesford, the altitude reaches just over 130m AOD to the west of Saffron Walden. In this area the chalk is exposed at the surface and has given the area its characteristic rolling topography and free draining poor alkaline soils that support widespread cereal farming.
- 2.2.11 The Study Area has a large intricate network of rivers and streams. These are an important component of the area's topography, character and identity and are frequently of landscape, nature conservation and heritage value. To the north the valleys become steeper and more deeply cut.
- 2.2.12 Most of the rivers flow towards either the Thames or the North Sea (see Figure 2.2). Only the Cam flows northward. Principal rivers within the Study Area are the Stour, Colne, Blackwater, Chelmer and Crouch. The Colne, Blackwater, Chelmer and tributaries rise in the plateau to the north and flow south where their estuaries are extensive and contribute to the deeply indented coastline. The Crouch flows east across the undulating lowland to the south of the plateau and when joined by the Roach forms an estuary complex that includes the islands of Wallasea, Pottton and Foulness.
- 2.2.13 The coastline is mainly marshland and is characterised by a maze of winding shallow creeks, drowned estuaries, mudflats and broad tracts of tidal salt-marsh with sand and shingle beaches along the coast edge. The relatively permanent, branching, meandering creeks, dissect the salt marshes.

Landcover and Ecological Character

- 2.2.14 The rural landscape of the Study Area is predominantly used for arable or improved pasture, particularly on the flat or gently undulating land. The rich soils are intensively cultivated and large cereal fields are a major feature of the landscape. The cereal field margins occasionally support uncommon plants such as cornflower, broad-leaved cudweed, corn cleavers and shepherd's needle.
- 2.2.15 There are significant areas of remaining semi-natural habitat that make an important contribution to the area's distinctive character. The presence and distribution of these habitats is strongly influenced by geology and landform, and include woodland, grassland, heath, estuary, saltmarsh and mudflat and freshwater and open water habitats. Many sites where these habitats occur are designated as Ramsar Sites, candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSAC), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)¹, Special Protection Areas (SPA), National Nature Reserves (NNR) and/or Local Nature Reserves (LNR). The distribution of these areas designated for their nature conservation value are shown on Figure 2.3 and described below in relation to key habitat types.

¹ SINCs are also referred to as County Wildlife Sites, which will become known as Local Wildlife Sites in due course.

Woodland

- 2.2.16 There are areas of lowland beech and yew woodland scattered in the west of the Study Area on the pelosols overlying glacial tills. This type of woodland includes a variety of vegetation types reflecting soil and topographical differences. The canopy can include mixtures of beech, ash, sycamore, yew and whitebeam. Some of these woods are former pasture woodland, where grazing as well as wood production was practised.
- 2.2.17 Ancient Woodland, practically all of which have been coppiced since medieval times or earlier, are found throughout the Study Area on the various soil types. Examples of the ancient woodland include Bovingdon Hall Woods SSSI (north of Braintree), West Wood, Little Sampford SSSI (northeast of Thaxted), Nunn Wood SSSI (west of Ashdon). Many of the areas of ancient woodland are ancient Pedunculate Oak-Hornbeam coppice-with-standards woodland. They provide valuable habitats for invertebrates, dormouse and breeding birds.

Grassland

- 2.2.18 There are a number of broad types of grassland determined by the plant species which are largely influenced by the soil type and underlying geology. However within the Study Area a lot of the grassland has been drained and agriculturally improved for pasture, but some grasslands of conservation importance remain. For example there are two small areas of calcareous grassland on the chalk hills at Debden Water SSSI near Newport in the northwest of the Study Area and a further small area of calcareous grassland as well as unimproved neutral grassland at Ashdon Meadows SSSI near Saffron Walden.
- 2.2.19 Wet grasslands are also common in the Study Area. Of particular importance are the floodplain marshes of the Thames and Cam, where areas of permanent grassland are deliberately flooded to prevent rivers over-topping.

Heath

- 2.2.20 The largest remaining fragments of heath within the Study Area are located around Danbury east of Chelmsford on the brown calcareous earths. Danbury Common SSSI is one of the largest areas of heathland remaining in Essex and shows various stages in the succession from open heath, through bracken and gorse scrub, to birch and oak woodland. The upper parts of the site are located on the glacial gravels capping Danbury Ridge. Lower down, spring lines and flushes at the junction between the gravels and the underlying clay give rise to boggy areas of heath and moist woodlands. Unimproved meadows adjacent to the Common support a rich grassland flora including a number of uncommon species. There are also other smaller fragments found in the south and in the northeast corner.

Estuary, Saltmarsh and Mudflat

- 2.2.21 The Essex Coast is among the top five coastal wetlands in the UK. Grazing marshes dominate the southeast corner of the Study Area along the coast of the Greater Thames Estuary such as at Sandbeach Meadows SSSI located on the intertidal alluvial muds. The estuaries, floodplain and coastal marshes are important for the invertebrate fauna of both the wet grasslands and their associated ditches, and support internationally important populations of wintering waterfowl. These areas along the coast of the Study Area are of international significance and designated as candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), or Ramsar sites as well as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves (NNRs).

- 2.2.22 The Essex Estuaries cSAC is a large estuarine site forming the eastern coastal boundary of the Study Area. It is a typical, undeveloped, flat low lying coastal plain estuarine system with associated open coast mudflats and sandbanks. The site comprises the major estuaries of the Blackwater, Crouch and Roach rivers and is important as an extensive area of contiguous estuarine habitat. Essex Estuaries also contains a very wide range of characteristic marine and estuarine sediment communities and some diverse and unusual marine communities in the lower reaches.
- 2.2.23 Blackwater Estuary is the largest estuary in Essex north of the Thames and one of the largest estuarine complexes in East Anglia. Fringed by saltmarsh, its mudflats, on the upper shores, support internationally and nationally important numbers of over wintering waterfowl. The seawall, ancient grazing marsh, associated fleet and ditch systems and semi-improved grassland are all of high conservation interest.
- 2.2.24 Dengie SPA is located on the coast. It is a large remote area of tidal mud-flats and saltmarshes at the eastern end of the Dengie Peninsula, between the adjacent Blackwater and Crouch Estuaries. The saltmarsh is the largest continuous example of its type in Essex. Foreshore, saltmarsh and beaches support an outstanding assemblage of rare coastal flora.
- 2.2.25 The Crouch and Roach Estuaries SPA are located on the southeast coast of the Study Area. The River Crouch occupies a shallow valley between two ridges of London Clay, whilst the River Roach is set predominantly between areas of brick earth and loams with patches of sand and gravel. The intertidal zone along the Rivers Crouch and Roach is 'squeezed' between the sea walls along both banks and the river channel. Unlike more extensive estuaries elsewhere in Essex, there is only a relatively narrow strip of tidal mud which, nonetheless, is used by significant numbers of birds.

Fresh Water and Open Water Habitats

- 2.2.26 A complex of rivers and streams flow across the Study Area, many of which have been modified for flood alleviation or drainage. The rivers support a varied aquatic and emergent flora and scarce plants such as along the River Ter SSSI, west of Terling. Chalk rivers in the northwest of the Study Area are particularly rich in species.
- 2.2.27 A number of animal species occur in the rivers, including the freshwater pea mussel, the white clawed crayfish, otters and water voles. The river corridors also provide rich foraging habitats for many of the ten species of bat recorded in East of England.
- 2.2.28 There are flooded gravel pits, clay pits and reservoirs in the Study Area, forming significant landscape features. The artificial water bodies have a wide range of water and substrate types, with a corresponding variety of aquatic plants. One example is Glemsford Pits SSSI comprising a series of water-filled disused gravel workings and a length of the River Stour on the Essex/Suffolk border.
- 2.2.29 Hanningfield Reservoir SSSI, approximately 5 miles south of Chelmsford, is the second largest reservoir in Essex. Its main scientific interest lies in its breeding and wintering wildfowl.
- 2.2.30 Most natural bodies of open water in the Study Area are eutrophic (rich in nutrients) or mesotrophic/eutrophic (medium – rich in nutrients). Small ponds and lakes are also abundant.

2.3 Historical Influences on the Landscape

Settlement of the Landscape

- 2.3.1 The landscape of the Study Area has long been subject to episodes of settlement, abandonment and reuse, evolving into the present day rich tapestry.
- 2.3.2 People have transformed the landscape of this area from their first appearance in the Palaeolithic (500,000 – 10,000BC). The wildwood forests that covered the Study Area were slowly cleared as people began to inhabit and use the area. Favoured areas for the early hunter-gatherers of the Palaeolithic and the Mesolithic (c.10, 000 to c.4, 000 BC) were the rich and fertile river valleys. A few flint artefacts, dating from the Palaeolithic have been found in the gravels of the river valleys. However, from at least the Mesolithic (c.8000 BC), the diverse landscapes within the boundaries of the modern Boroughs and Districts of Brentwood, Braintree, Chelmsford, Malton and Uttlesford has attracted continuous human occupation. The presence of human groups, whose economy was based entirely on hunting and gathering is attested by flint scatters, which are widespread. These collections of flint tools and waste flakes concentrate on the sands and gravels of the river valleys and wooded hills, with a major site at Great Baddow. One of the most important and extensive sites is in the far south-east of Chelmsford District, around the junction of Fenn Creek and the Crouch at South Woodham Ferrers. This site, like many others around the coast of Maldon District, is now within the estuarine intertidal zone, however, during the Mesolithic it would have occupied a location adjacent to freshwater streams, and probably represents a ‘base camp’. This would have operated for quite lengthy periods during particular seasons and was reoccupied year on year over many generations.
- 2.3.3 As agriculture was adopted in the Neolithic period (4000 – 2200 BC), at first only augmenting rather than replacing the existing hunter-gather economy, land management practices dramatically altered, and probably involved increased clearance of woodland and more permanent settlement. Investigation over the last twenty years has revealed a sophisticated social and economic system operating throughout parts of the region, if not the entirety of it. In some area, for example Chelmsford, major ceremonial monuments were built. The Springfield Cursus, a kind of processional way defined by a large ditch and internal bank with a circular setting of upright posts within the eastern terminal, was constructed just above the floodplain of the Chelmer. A Causewayed Enclosure was constructed at Springfield Lyons commanding wide views of the valley. This site was defined by a deep ditch broken by many gaps, or causeways (hence the name) which cut off a neck of land between two small streams. Both the Springfield monuments lie close to the edge of the Boulder clay plateau. They thus occur at a transitional point in the landscape for people passing to and from the river valleys up on to the boulder clays, and may have been gathering places, at particular times of year, for normally dispersed communities.
- 2.3.4 This process continued and intensified during the Bronze Age (2200 – 700 BC). Numerous cropmark ring-ditches, the remains of early and middle Bronze Age barrows, are known throughout the area. By the Late Bronze Age (c 1000BC) the economy was fully agricultural, and some locations within the area were densely occupied, for example the area of the present Chelmsford Borough. At this time a landscape of farms or small groups of buildings was dominated by circular enclosures like those found at Great Baddow and Springfield Lyons. The latter site besides being strategically placed within the landscape was located at a place already hallowed by traditional ancestral associations represented by the remains of the Neolithic causewayed enclosure. Extensive excavations of the Springfield site revealed that it had a deep ditch, rampart and impressive gate structure. The largest quantity of clay moulds for casting bronze swords ever found at a Bronze Age site in Britain were recovered during excavation of the enclosure ditch. Other settlements have been excavated throughout Brentwood, Braintree, Chelmsford, Maldon and Uttlesford Boroughs and Districts

and have been found to have been either enclosed by small fairly shallow ditchers of unenclosed. In addition the site excavated at Boreham Interchange contained small post-built structures, which appear to have been shrines.

- 2.3.5 In addition to the evidence of bronze casting at Springfield Lyons, finds of Bronze Age metalwork are widespread throughout the region. The raw materials for this all had to be imported, and the river valleys and estuaries, were crucial routes. Fenn Creek and the Crouch Estuary, which by this stage was fully tidal, provide evidence of the economic importance of estuarine areas; the earliest saltern in Essex, of later Bronze Age date has been recorded here. Salt would have played a vital role as flavouring, preservative and valuable commodity for trade.
- 2.3.6 The Iron Age (800 BC – AD 45) brought an increased focus to settlement as the first ‘towns’ or ‘*Oppida*’ began to develop. Hillforts, such as that established at Danbury which commands wide views to the south across the Crouch valley towards the distant Thames, were also an iconic monument of the time. In general there is more Iron Age settlement evidence from the boulder clay areas than other areas within the region. Rectilinear fields of Iron Age/Romano-British date exist within the landscape. Towards the end of the Iron Age coinage was first introduced into Britain and recently a number of Iron Age gold coin hoards have been recovered.
- 2.3.7 Examples of prehistoric sites in this area include:
- Slight univallate hillfort, in Brentwood, dating between the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age, at the crest of a ridge of sands.
 - Ring Hill Camp in the parish of Littlebury, Uttlesford. An oval hillfort on a summit of the hill overlooking the River Cam.
- 2.3.8 Roman settlement (c.43 to 410 AD) was generally built along the Roman roads from the coast and into Colchester, or other economic centres. In addition to Colchester other small towns or significant settlements include Chelmsford, Heybridge, Wickford, Braintree and Great Dunmow. Forts within the region may have been established after AD60 in the aftermath of the Boudican rebellion. The rural hinterland was densely settled, with some Iron Age settlements being formalised, such as at Little Waltham. Villas, bathhouses, Temples, administrative centres and also supporting farming systems have all been recorded within the region. Environmental evidence recovered from alluvium and peat in the intertidal zone of the Crouch estuary near Fenn Creek has also revealed largely freshwater sedimentation perhaps the result of constriction of the tidal flow by bridges at Hullbridge and/or Fambridge.
- 2.3.9 Examples of Roman sites in the area include:
- Roman barrow, in the Parish of Elmdon Langley, Uttlesford. Circular in plan and 50m in diameter. Ploughing over the years has reduced the mound, but there is still a significant amount left to make it a prominent landmark.
 - Roman Villa, in Rivenhall, Braintree. This site comprises of the remains of at least four major Roman building and associated characteristics including Roman burials that have been built on a previous Iron Age settlement.
- 2.3.10 As the Saxons settled in the Study Area they reused earlier settlements but also created new ones. Settlement also tends to lie around, but at a distance from, the former Roman towns, which is probably not an accident. It seems to be an acknowledgement of the strategic importance of river confluences and the significance of the former Roman town, together with a desire to keep at a distance from them. Pollen evidence from peat deposits recorded in the valley of the Chelmer and Sandon Brook in advance of construction of the A12 bypass,

showed continuous cereal production from the Iron Age throughout the Roman period and into the Saxon period.

- 2.3.11 The principal towns of the Study Area were market towns by the Domesday Book (1086). They each had their own church, and in Maldon and Uttlesford there were several. In around 1100, the Bishops of London built a new bridge at Chelmsford which stimulated growth and attracted traffic back to the more direct route between London and Colchester. Brentwood was founded as a small market town by the monks of St Osyth in 1177.
- 2.3.12 Sizes of communities started to change and many of the estates were laid within medieval parkland, of which a number survive within the landscape today. The settlement pattern was essentially dispersed, with numerous farmsteads and moated sites, and church/hall complexes and greens forming focal points. Even villages which today are strongly nucleated were originally polyfocal. The complex landscape of Writtle Forest with its compartmentalised coppice woodland surrounded by banks and ditches, commons, and green lanes is a fine example of a medieval forest of national significance and comparable with the better known Hatfield Forest in northwest Essex. The complex landscape of woods and heaths at Danbury and Little Badow preserves many boundary banks of medieval origin defining areas of woodland and common. Much ancient woodland survives but the area is now significantly more wooded than in the medieval period with much former common and heathland colonised by secondary woodland. Many of the sites of present day farms and villages occupy the sites of their medieval predecessors, and of course timber framed buildings of medieval origin survive in use throughout the region. However, settlement though broadly occupying the same location have often shifted slightly over the centuries and the 13th century a time of great prosperity and agricultural expansion, saw medieval rural settlement at its most widespread. The 14th century was beset by economic and social unrest, poor harvests, wars, epidemics and rebellion, with many more marginal settlements being abandoned never to be re-occupied.
- 2.3.13 Some of the most striking features of the medieval landscape whether urban or rural were monastic establishments and religious houses of various kinds. These included the college of canons established at Pleshey and the Dominican friary at Chelmsford. Some elements of the medieval priory itself survive although most of the buildings which can be seen today are the remains of the post-medieval brick mansion built by Richard Rich, earl of Warwick in the second half of the 16th century.
- 2.3.14 Examples of medieval sites in these areas include:
- Cressing Temple, Cressing, Braintree. Although with its origins in prehistory, Cressing Temple developed during the medieval period with barns and a farmhouse that the Knights Templar built in the 12th century.
 - Old Thorndon Hall and Gardens, in the parish of Herongate and Ingrave, Brentwood. The remains of this medieval hall and gardens dating back to the Domesday survey, the 17th century saw the rebuilding of this hall using as much of the old masonry as possible.
 - Leez Augustinian Priory, fishponds and Tudor mansion, in the parish of Felsted, Great and Little Leighs. The remains of one of the 11 Augustinian houses in Essex until the dissolution in 1532. The mansion built by Lord Rich, is one of the best examples of a monastic house being turned into domestic use. This kind of conversion is very rare and of national importance.
 - Canfield motte and bailey castle and moated site in the parish of Great Canfield. Flat-topped motte with the eastern side filled with water, double rampart and ditch around the bailey.

- Medieval settlement, in the parish of Ashdon. The remains of a medieval settlement, terraces and platforms spreading 100m across the field immediately east to All Saints Church.

2.3.15 The 17th century brought the manor house, many of which were built on the early estates of the medieval period. These were usually set within parkland landscapes, such as Audley End House and designed in formal styles influenced by the fashions of the Continent. By the 18th century the Study Area towns were expanding with new trade, the prosperity of which can be seen in some of the buildings such as the churches and the Town Halls. This wealth came from wool and silk, however much of the trade and wealth went to neighbouring Colchester.

2.3.16 The diverse economic base of the rural economy in the region in the late 16th century is reflected by a 1582 survey of the manor of Woodham Ferrers which emphasises the presence of woodland arable and pasture, including grazing marsh, the proximity both to Chelmsford and London, ease of water transport via the Crouch estuary and the value of salt production from the saline water of the estuary. Mounds and earthworks which are the remains of such salt production can still be seen in Marsh Farm Country Park, and more extensive and better preserved examples lie just across Clements Green Creek at Stow Maries.

Utilisation of the Marshes and Mudflats

2.3.17 As unreclaimed environments, the marshes provide an important interface between the land and water, and historically have been an important resource for the area's residents, not only providing a rich and varied source of food, including fish, eels, oysters and wildfowl, but also serving as the location for important early industrial activity such as salt making and pottery production. The unreclaimed marshes also provided protection. It is within Maldon that this evidence can be found in its 96.54 kilometres (60 miles) of coastline, including salt marshes and archaeological evidence of an Iron Age port among other sites.

2.3.18 Rivers and marshes became the ideal place for industry to grow from as early as the Roman period. The retention of the marshes and reclamation of the marshland within the area dates back from the Roman period and has continued through to present day. By the 12th century, wool was one of Britain's most important exports. This led to increased pressure on reclamation of the marshlands. Key sites of historical interest in the landscape include:

- Rat Island: Saltings at the mouth of the Geedon Creek.
- Abbots Hall farm: 25km of Essex coast and wildlife land.
- Roman River valley; marsh and woodland fed by springs.
- Stow Marie's Halt: Nature reserve on the disused Maldon to Woodham Ferrers railway line.
- Tollesbury Wick: Salt marsh land and wildlife habitat.
- Fingringhoe Wick: West shore of the Colne estuary, land and animal conservation area.

2.3.19 The marshland landscapes of the past were ideal in the production of salt. The manufacture of salt (which began in the Bronze Age) flourished in the early Roman period, turning most of the coastline at certain times into a smokey landscape. By the end of the 1st century AD this production went into decline, possibly due to inland salt production sites. Tollesbury Wick, in Malden, shows us the extent of this production with 242.81 hectares (600 acres) of salt marsh land.

2.3.20 Fishing and hunting would have been the earliest forms of industry dating from the Palaeolithic to the present day. Fishing in the later periods became more complex as the creeks and estuaries were used to catch fish.

Parks

- 2.3.21 During the late 16th and 17th centuries, Essex became a key area for wildfowl. The marshes were an ideal landscape for the wildfowl hunters of the past as they are for the bird watchers of the present. Key sites of interest include:
- Weald Country Park, 202.34 hectares (500 acres) of parkland, which had a deer park from 1063 along with Remains of an Iron Age settlement dating back to the 1st century BC.
 - Thorndon Park, Comprising of 142.85 hectares (353 acres), smaller now than when it was first recorded before the Norman Conquest. At the heart of the park is an ancient deer enclosure.
 - Hylands Estate, The house is surrounded by 242.81 hectares (600 acres) of parkland, ancient woodland and lakes.
 - Marine Lake. Europe's largest marine lake, formally opened in 1905, but having many additions to it throughout the 20th century.

Agriculture

- 2.3.22 The adoption of agriculture and its development from the Neolithic to today has been a significant influence on the character of the landscape. Prehistoric agricultural practices took place in a variety of field systems and open landscapes, where people used, reused and abandoned areas across generations. Prehistoric and Roman field systems are very difficult to detect, however it is possible that fields retain some or all of their early pattern and form.
- 2.3.23 Both during and after the medieval period, much of the landscape underwent piecemeal enclosure, whereby the land had been rationalised into consolidated private ownership through a series of private land exchanges and through gradual enclosure of woodland, forest, heath and common. This is also true for parkland such as Thorndon Park, which although not imparked until 1414, it had been a park since before the Norman Conquest.

Communications

- 2.3.24 People have always moved within the landscape for activities such as hunting, trading and social meetings. Trackways, rivers and the coastal shores formed the earliest forms of communication networks from prehistory onwards. Historic routeways are important as the precursors of the modern communication system, but also as a significant influence on the sitting of later settlement and other features within the landscape. Key historical communication routes in the Study Area include:
- Blackwater River in Maldon.
 - Roman roads from Maldon to Colchester.
 - Railway.
 - Routes of modern roads (M11, A12, A120 and A131 for example).

Historic Landscape Character

- 2.3.25 The historic land use features in the present day landscape within the Study Area are mapped on Figure 2.4, taken from the Essex Historic Landscape Characterisation Study². This shows the extent and distribution of historic field systems and settlements, and other features, that together create the cultural dimension of the existing landscape character.

² Essex County Council and Southend-on-Sea Borough Council (July 2002).

Historic Environment Designations

- 2.3.26 A variety of historic environment sites and features within the Study Area are protected in recognition of their historical, archaeological and/or architectural value. These are described below:

Scheduled Monuments

- 2.3.27 There are 145 nationally important archaeological sites within Study Area (compared to 297 in Essex as a whole), which are protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979). These include:

- Braintree - 36 Scheduled Monuments
- Brentwood - 12 Scheduled Monuments
- Chelmsford - 13 Scheduled Monuments
- Maldon - 15 Scheduled Monuments
- Uttlesford - 72 Scheduled Monuments

Conservation Areas

- 2.3.28 There are 122 Conservation Areas of special architectural or historical interest within the Study Area (compared to 209 in Essex as a whole) protected under the *Listed Building and Conservation Areas Act 1990*. These include:

- Braintree - 39 Conservation Areas
- Brentwood - 13 Conservation Areas
- Chelmsford: 24 Conservation Areas
- Maldon - 11 Conservation Areas
- Uttlesford - 35 Conservation Areas

Registered Historic Parks and Gardens

- 2.3.29 There are 27 designed landscapes with the Study Area (compared to 37 in Essex as a whole), which are included on the English Heritage non-statutory national Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. These include:

- Braintree - 9 Registered Historic Parks and Gardens (Belchamp Hall, Faulkbourne Hall, Glazenwood, Gosfield Hall, Hatfield Priory, Saling Grove, Saling Hall, Spains Hall and Terling Place).
- Brentwood - 3 Registered Historic Parks and Gardens (Thorndon Park, Warley Place and Weald Park).
- Chelmsford - 6 Registered Historic Parks and Gardens (Boreham House, Danbury Park, Hylands Park, Langleys, New Hall, Boreham and Riffhams).
- Maldon - 1 Registered Historic Parks and Garden (Braxted Park).
- Uttlesford - 7 Registered Historic Parks and Gardens (Audley End, Bridge End Gardens, Down Hall, Easton Lodge, Quendon Park, Shortgrove Park and The Maze, Saffron Walden).

2.4 Key Forces for Change in the Landscape

- 2.4.1 Use of land for housing, minerals, recreation, energy generation and other activities have resulted in some places in a general erosion of the character, quality and diversity of the landscapes within the Study Area since the mid-twentieth century. The cumulative effects of

small-scale and incremental changes have had a particularly marked effect on the character of the landscape.

- 2.4.2 The pace, mixture, and scale of landscape will continue to change in the future, which may impact, positively or negatively, upon those qualities that make the landscape special. A key challenge is to understand, manage and direct future positive change in the landscape in ways that conserve and enhance its essential characteristics and valued attributes, whilst enabling sensitively designed development to be accommodated to meet social and economic needs.
- 2.4.3 The key global, national and local forces for change that affect the character of the Study Area's landscapes are considered under the following main headings:
- Agriculture, Land Management and Diversification
 - Socio-Economic Characteristics
 - Infrastructure, Transport and Traffic
 - Built Development
 - Recreation and Tourism
 - Mineral Extraction and Waste
 - Climate Change

Agriculture, Land Management and Diversification

- 2.4.4 Agricultural activity is a vital aspect of the rural environment within the Study Area and is a primary factor in shaping the character of the landscape. Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon and Uttlesford Districts form a highly productive arable farming area. Pasture is not extensive, except in the river valleys where drainage is a constraint on cultivation.
- 2.4.5 Agriculture has the ability to substantially enhance and detract from the character of the landscape in a relatively short period of time, primarily due to an increase in mechanisation and intensive practices. These have, over the last fifty years, contributed to the changes in the rural environment through intensive cropping, loss of field boundaries, introduction of a larger-scale field pattern, drainage of marshes/wetlands, and the introduction of new farm buildings. Pastures and coastal grazing marshes are dependent on appropriate livestock grazing practices. On some coastal grazing marshes scrub encroachment is becoming a problem due to lack of grazing/management.
- 2.4.6 Changes in farming practice and fluctuations in the agricultural economy have an important impact and these changes will only increase, as global markets become a major influencing factor. Whilst the effects of post-1945 agricultural change on landscape character are well understood, future changes may result from increasing competition in a global market place, ongoing from the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and the proposals of the Government Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food, including proposed Entry-Level Agri-Environment Scheme (ELS) and Higher Tier Scheme, are yet to become clear. There may be ongoing adverse effect on character, as well as important opportunities to enhance and restore character as a result of changes in policy.
- 2.4.7 The area was affected by Dutch Elm disease and there has been a gradual decline in traditional hedge-laying and coppicing creating more fragmented and gappy hedgerows.
- 2.4.8 Historically the marshes on the coastal fringe of Maldon District (aligning the Blackwater Estuary) were utilised for purposes other than agriculture. The diverse saltmarshes provided a rich food resource (oysters) and were also utilised in early industrial activity (salt-making). With gradual agricultural and industrial change, there was pressure for more pasture and agricultural land within the coastal margins. This led to the enclosure of areas of saltmarsh

and drainage of other coastal wetland areas (through installation of a sea wall) to create areas of grazing marsh behind the sea wall. There is future pressure for further intensification of the coastal grazing marsh habitat, however, there is also possible future potential for saltmarsh habitat creation and restoration through managed realignment along certain stretches of the coastline (with regard to information set out within the Shoreline Management Plan and the Colne and Blackwater Estuary Flood Management Strategy).

2.4.9 There is also potential through agri-environmental schemes such as Environmental Stewardship to encourage farmers to make changes to their farming practices that would help restore the loss of important habitats and features within the landscape.

2.4.10 The key issues affecting landscape character include:

- Decrease in woodland and tree cover.
- Continuing decline/loss of landscape features such as hedgerows, field margins and farm ponds as a result of maximising field size, lack of appropriate management and spray drift.
- Loss of elms in past reducing sense of intimacy and enclosure.
- Soil erosion as a result of autumn cultivation of arable crops.
- Increased pressure for new uses of 'marginal' land, including small holdings, leisure uses and pony paddocks.
- Increase in pony paddocks giving rise to poor hedgerow and grassland management and intrusive post and wire fencing/ranch fencing, stable facilities and ménages.
- Loss of grazing marsh in past through arable conversion.
- Potential loss of limited grazing marsh back to salt marsh through managed retreat.
- Loss of salt marsh through coastal squeeze.
- Increase in large arable farm units which may lead to further homogenisation of the landscape, reduction in biodiversity and potential demand for more centralised and large-scale buildings such as grain storage facilities.
- Farm diversification such as the adoption or reuse of farm buildings for commercial, industrial and storage uses which may conflict with historical/architectural character and the introduction of new industrial crops.

Socio-economic characteristics

2.4.11 The social and economic characteristics of the towns in the Study Area, including Chelmsford, Braintree, Maldon, Brentwood, Witham, Great Dunmow and Saffron Walden play an important role in the process of future change and regeneration within the region. In recent years there has been a change in the structure and type of employment away from traditional manufacturing and agriculture to the service industries including retail, office employment and the high tech sector. Tourism is also a source of rural employment especially in the river valleys of the Colne, Blackwater, Chelmer and Brain. Commuting out of the Study Area, including to London and to Stansted Airport for employment, is also significant.

2.4.12 The town centres, local centres within urban neighbourhoods and village shops provide the social economic focus of their communities. The last ten to fifteen years have seen many changes in retailing, including the growth of regional shopping centres, the growth of out-of-town retail parks, extended opening hours and Sunday trading, and more recently internet shopping. All of these changes have had an effect on existing town and local centres. In particular employment opportunities have increased significantly in the East Braintree area following the success of the Single Regeneration Budget project. This has revitalised the whole area, modernising the infrastructure, building new roads, bridges and cycleways, achieving environmental improvements and creating over 1,000 new jobs including those at the Freeport Designer Outlet.

2.4.13 Key socio-economic characteristics of the districts include:

Braintree District

- In mid-2003 there was an estimated 134,900 residents with a population structure of 49% male and 51% female, which was about average for the East of England region.
- The population density in 2002 averaged 220 people per square kilometre which is below average for the region.
- In 2001 there was an unemployment rate of 2.3% of all economically active people aged 16-74.

Brentwood Borough

- In mid-2003 there was an estimated 69,500 residents with a population structure of 49% male and 51% female which is average for the East of England Region.
- The population density of Brentwood in 2002 averaged 448 people per square kilometre which is higher than the average for the region.
- An unemployment rate of 1.9 per cent of all economically active people aged 16-74.

Chelmsford Borough

- In mid-2003 Chelmsford had an estimated 158,500 residents with a population structure of 49% male and 51% female which is average for the East of England Region.
- The population density of Chelmsford in 2002 averaged 465 people per square kilometre which is higher than the average for the region.
- An unemployment rate of 2.1 per cent of all economically active people aged 16-74.

Maldon District

- In mid-2003 Maldon had an estimated 60,000 residents with a population structure of 50% male and 50% female which is similar to the average for the East of England Region.
- The population density of Maldon in 2002 averaged 168 people per square kilometre which is below the average for the region.
- An unemployment rate of 2.2 per cent of all economically active people aged 16-74.

Uttlesford District

- In mid-2003 Uttlesford had an estimated 70,000 residents with a population structure of 50% male and 50% female which is similar to the average for the East of England Region.
- The population density of Uttlesford in 2002 is below average for the region with an average of 108 people per square kilometre.
- An unemployment rate of 1.7 per cent of all economically active people aged 16-74.

2.4.14 Key issues affecting landscape character include:

- The expansion of regional and out of town shopping centres into the surrounding countryside with the associated loss of characteristic farmland.
- Increase in congestion surrounding routes to key employment and residential areas..

Infrastructure, Transport and Traffic

2.4.15 Reflecting the national trend, the Study Area has seen increasing levels of car usage. This is leading to major congestion, pollution problems, and pressures for new road schemes in the countryside between the towns and road improvements that significantly affect landscape

character. Upgrading of the rail network may create new types of pressure and the building of new multi-modal transport interchanges.

- 2.4.16 Throughout the Study Area there is a comprehensive network of major roads, which provide connections between the towns in the area including Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Uttlesford and Maldon and also outside the area including London, Harlow and Cambridge. The A12 (two lane dual carriageway) connects Witham, Chelmsford and Brentwood with the M25, the City (city airport) and Central London to the west. Further north the A120 (two lane dual-carriageway) crosses the Study Area connecting Braintree with Stansted Airport and the M11. The A12 and A120 and several of the minor roads can also become congested during peak periods especially around the towns of Braintree, Brentwood and Chelmsford.
- 2.4.17 There are several cycle trails within the Districts with more being planned in and around the towns. In Braintree, Uttlesford and Chelmsford districts cycleways are proposed to be constructed as segregated footways and cycleways separated by a raised white line or kerb, thereby making walking a more attractive option.
- 2.4.18 There are also rail links between the towns and linking the districts with London and beyond. The opportunities for travelling to work by rail have recently increased since the opening of the new station at Braintree Freeport. The train links between the towns in the Study Area and London take less than one hour and can be as little as 20 minutes from Shenfield Station in Brentwood. Significant traffic build-up frequently occurs during peak times around the stations.
- 2.4.19 The Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership has been established to enhance patronage and the long-term future of branch lines. The proposal for Shenfield Station in Brentwood as the eastern terminus for Crossrail will increase the frequency of services into London.
- 2.4.20 The key issues affecting landscape character include:
- Construction of new roads, bypasses and service stations, include the introduction of new structures, lighting, and earthworks into the landscape.
 - Road improvements that can have an urbanising effect, especially on rural lanes, by road widening, straightening and introduction of features such as kerbs, paving, highway lighting, visibility splays and signage.
 - Increased requirement for parking provision in villages and towns popular with tourists, such as Chelmsford, Coggeshall and Maldon.

Built Development

- 2.4.21 The pressures of development are a result of locally generated needs for requirements such as a strong housing market, jobs and transport. They are also a product of externally generated growth factors such as Stansted Airport and the M25/M11 corridor. Urban development has placed an increasing pressure on all aspects of the landscape over the last fifty years in particular. This has resulted in urban expansion into undeveloped rural areas, redevelopment and intensification of urban areas, increasing urbanisation and development of rural villages. The urban fringe is often used to locate access roads, sewage works, waste disposal facilities and intensive recreation uses. However the urban fringe also provides a setting for urban areas, and often contains important landscape features/habitats.

2.4.22 Relatively high levels of development have been absorbed by Braintree, Chelmsford and Brentwood and the surrounding rural landscape over the last thirty years but there is a constant need for the provision of new houses and services. However, Green Belt policy has helped to constrain development and control the expansion of settlements in the south-west of the Study Area. Some scope for new development can be accommodated through the re-use of industrial sites and brown field sites within the towns such as along the River Pant river bank to the north of Braintree. Other key potential development areas include the settlements of Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden, Stansted Mountfitchet and A120 corridor.

2.4.23 The key issues affecting landscape character include:

- Quality of built environment.
- Loss/erosion of urban open spaces and of tree cover.
- Night-time remoteness damaged by lighting at urban fringes.
- Decline in the condition of landscapes in the urban fringe, with problems such as lack of management of hedgerows/trees, poorly managed horse paddocks and fly-tipping.
- Housing growth at the periphery of towns can extend the urban character of these areas into the landscape, as increased noise and light pollution and development leads to an urbanising effect on the rural landscape and loss of tranquillity.
- New strategic initiatives to maintain and enhance existing green spaces and corridors and to create new provision of green infrastructure, as an integral part of new development.

Recreation and Tourism

2.4.24 In recent years there has been a substantial increase in the number and proportion of people playing sport and taking part in recreational activities. Tourism, leisure and the boating industry make a vital contribution to local employment. In addition the many ‘traditional’ villages and the countryside in the Study Area are an attraction in their own right. The Rivers Brain, Colne, Blackwater, and Chelmer and their valleys are important for informal recreation such as angling, canoeing, cycling and walking along set routes. Other key facilities for informal recreation include Country Parks within the Study Area – such as Thorndon and Weald in Brentwood Borough for example.

2.4.25 The key issues affecting landscape character include:

- Disturbance of habitat by inappropriate recreation.
- Increased desire for public access to the coast which would potentially lead to increased disturbance and truncation of habitats such as salt marsh.
- Increased desire for water-based activities, including boat trips.
- Pressure from tourism to increase the capacity and size of caravan and camping areas and their associated facilities.
- Continued demand for golf courses, driving ranges and associated facilities.
- Increased desire for public access to river valleys and ‘traditional’ valleys would potentially lead to creation of footpaths and cycleways that cause scarring and erosion to the landscape.
- Localised fence clutter through management for recreation.

Mineral Extraction and Waste

2.4.26 Mineral extraction occurs in Chelmsford and Braintree Districts as the area is rich in deposits of sand and gravel. Essex as a whole is the largest producer of sand and gravel in the South East Region, regularly producing over 20% of the Regions output. Clary, brickearth and small quantities of silica sand are also extracted. The extent to which mineral extraction continues to impact on the landscape may depend upon whether more recycled aggregates or

alternative sources from outside the area are used. Once the sand and gravel pits are closed, restoration of the landscape occurs in places such as surrounding Hatfield Peverel Gravel pits where they have been filled with water and the surroundings planted with trees and landscaped. With regard to waste, despite moves away from landfill as the primary means of waste disposal, this is likely to continue for some time, such as at Rivenhall disused airfield, and other methods of waste management may create new pressures on the landscape.

2.4.27 The key issues affecting landscape character include:

- The effects of minerals/landfill operations including changes to field pattern, loss of landscape features, introduction of alien landforms, land raising, haulage routes and lighting.
- The effects of restoration schemes depending on restoration to agriculture, woodland or other uses, and whether these are sympathetic to landscape character.
- Extensive quarrying and inappropriate restoration causing loss of hedgerow pattern and uncharacteristic landform.

Climate Change

2.4.28 It is widely acknowledged that global climate change is inevitable, and that it is likely to have significant physical impacts on the landscape. The South East region including Essex is particularly sensitive to the effects of climate change. Changes in the form of increased temperatures, wetter winters, and more extreme weather events have been identified in the last 10 years. The scenarios produced by the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP02) suggests by 2080 the UK is likely to experience:

- Annual temperature rises by between 2 and 3.5°C.
- More frequent high summer temperatures and very cold winters becoming increasingly rare.
- Winters becoming wetter and summers becoming drier.
- More frequent summer droughts, winter flooding and storms.
- Sea-levels rising between 26 and 86 cm above the current level in South East England.

2.4.29 Whilst there are still uncertainties regarding exact changes at regional and local levels, it is clear there could be both direct and indirect impacts on landscape character. The coastal area is a critical and irreplaceable natural asset supporting diverse internationally important habitats. The potential implications for landscape character includes changes in habitats, and species composition, habitat fragmentation, water resources, soils, agricultural land use, recreation and tourism and cultural heritage.

2.4.30 There is future pressure for further intensification of the coastal grazing marsh habitat, however, there is also possible future potential for saltmarsh habitat creation and restoration through managed realignment along certain stretches of the coastline (with regard to information set out within the Essex Estuarine Strategy). This strategy (commissioned by the Environment Agency) states that, whilst there will *'always be locations that must be protected by traditional hard defences, Managed Realignment can also be seen as important in terms of creating new habitats, providing new recreational areas, and producing local economic gain.'*

2.4.31 The key issues affecting landscape character include:

- Increases in sea levels, especially if coupled with increases in storm activity, may cause greater erosion of habitats such as intertidal mudflats and salt marsh.

- Rising sea level may also affect agricultural land which is currently located on reclaimed marshland.
- Rich agricultural land below 5m AOD is at risk of saline intrusion from rising sea levels. There may be an increased requirement for irrigation reservoirs to store winter rainfall and for use of sprinkling equipment etc. in summer. Traditional arable crops may also be replaced by more summer drought tolerant species such as sunflowers and maize.
- Damage to historic landscapes and archaeological sites may occur through erosion from sea level rise and flooding, as well as through changes in farming practice and soil desiccation.
- Transference of water via the River Stour due to reduced rainfall.
- Creation of reservoirs such as at Halstead which may involve loss of agricultural land.

2.5 Landscape Character in The Study Area – An Overview

- 2.5.1 This section describes the context for the Borough/District Landscape Character Assessments provided by the hierarchical classification of Landscape Character Areas and Types defined at the national and county levels.

National Level

- 2.5.2 The national context for defining the boundaries of the different Landscape Character Units within the Study Area is provided by the Joint Character Areas from the Character of England Map³ and the National Landscape Typology⁴ – as illustrated on Figures 2.5 and 2.6 respectively.

National Joint Character Areas

- 2.5.3 The Study Area contains part of the following three national Joint Character Areas defined at 1:250,000 scale (see Figure 2.5):
- South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland (86)
 - East Anglian Chalk (87)
 - Northern Thames Basin (111)

- 2.5.4 The character of these Joint Character Areas is described in Countryside Character Volume 6, published by the Countryside Agency⁵.

National Landscape Typology

- 2.5.5 The National Landscape Typology is a hierarchical classification of Landscape Character Types being developed by the Countryside Agency and English Nature. The Typology has produced a national classification of ‘Level 1’ Landscape Character Types⁶ defined at a 1:250,000 scale. These are homogenous units of land with a uniform character that are distinct from each other on the basis of definitive natural and cultural attributes.

- 2.5.6 The Study Area contains part of the six national Landscape Character Types shown on Figure 2.6, each of which share similar physiography, landcover and cultural patterns.

³ Character of England Map (Countryside Agency, English Nature, Rural Development Service, English Heritage, updated 2006).

⁴ National Landscape Typology (Living Landscapes Project for the Countryside Agency & Partners, 2002).

⁵ Countryside Character Volume 6 – East of England (Countryside Agency, 1999).

⁶ Level 1 Landscape Character Types – 1:250,000 Scale (Developed for the Countryside Agency/English Nature by Steven Warnock/the Living Landscapes Project/Entec Ltd, 2002).

- 2.5.7 Together with the Joint Character Areas, the national Landscape Character Types provide the contextual framework within which more detailed classifications of Landscape Character Units at 1:50,000 and 1:25,000 scale can be defined.

County Level

- 2.5.8 Within the framework provided by the Joint Character Areas, the Essex Landscape Character Assessment⁷ identifies Landscape Character Types and Areas defined at 1:50,000 scale. The definition of these landscape units was not informed by the National Landscape Typology classification.
- 2.5.9 The distribution of the County Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas within the Study Area is illustrated on Figure 2.7.

District/Borough Level

- 2.5.10 The County Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas provides the framework for the more detailed classification Landscape Character Assessments of the District/Borough within the Study Area at 1:25,000 scale.
- 2.5.11 The distribution of the eight separate Landscape Character Types defined at 1:25,000 scale within the Study Area are shown on Figure 2.8. Landscape Character Types are generic and have broadly similar patterns of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, settlement and field systems. Their key characteristics are summarised below:

A - River Valley Landscapes

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

B - Farmland Plateau Landscapes

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

C – Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats Landscapes

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

⁷ Essex Landscape Character Assessment (Essex County Council & Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, July 2002).

D – Drained Estuarine Marsh Landscapes

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

E – Coastal Farmland Landscapes

- Predominantly flat, low-lying landscape, sloping gradually upwards to the north
- Views of river estuaries and coastline from several locations
- Arable farmland on underlying heavy clay soils
- Lack of large patches/areas of woodland
- Relatively sparse settlement pattern

F – Wooded Farmland Landscapes

- Elevated undulating hills or ridges and slopes
- Mixture of arable and pasture farmland
- Pockets of common and pasture
- Views to wooded horizons
- Well wooded with blocks of mature mixed and deciduous woodland (including areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland); copses, hedges and mature single trees
- Mature field boundaries
- Framed views to adjacent character areas
- Enclosed character in places
- Network of quiet, often tree-lined narrow lanes

G – Fenland Landscapes

- Level relief
- Open, exposed landscape
- Large-scale arable and pasture farmland
- Gappy hedges
- Linear roads on causeways

H – Chalk Upland Landscapes

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

2.5.12 Within the eight generic Landscape Character Types, seventy Landscape Character Areas have been identified at 1:25,000 scale within the Study Area (see Figure 2.8). The Landscape Character Areas reflect distinctive variations in local character within each Landscape Character Type based on visual analysis of how different combinations of physical features and perceptual qualities such as scale, pattern, tranquillity, cultural associations, etc. create areas of distinctive landscape character.

2.5.13 The seventy Landscape Character Areas are:

A - River Valley Landscapes

- A1 - Cam River Valley
- A2 - Stour River Valley
- A3 - Stort River Valley
- A4 - Colne River Valley
- A5 - Pant River Valley
- A6 - Upper Chelmer River Valley
- A7 - Lower Chelmer River Valley
- A8 - Can and Wid River Valley
- A9 - Blackwater River Valley
- A10 - Brain River Valley
- A11 - Roding River Valley
- A12 - Pods Brook River Valley

B - Farmland Plateau Landscapes

- B1 - Ashdon Farmland Plateau
- B2 - Hempstead Farmland Plateau
- B3 - Bumpstead Farmland Plateau
- B4 - Belchamp Farmland Plateau
- B5 - Yeldham Farmland Plateau
- B6 - Wickham Farmland Plateau
- B7 - Debden Farmland Plateau
- B8 - Thaxted Farmland Plateau
- B9 - Stambourne Farmland Plateau
- B10 - Broxted Farmland Plateau
- B11 - Lindsell & Bardfield Farmland Plateau
- B12 - Hatfield Forest Farmland Plateau
- B13 - Rayne Farmland Plateau
- B14 - Roding Farmland Plateau
- B15 - Pleshey Farmland Plateau
- B16 - Felsted Farmland Plateau
- B17 - Terling Farmland Plateau
- B18 - Silver End Farmland Plateau
- B19 - Langley Green Farmland Plateau
- B20 - Writtle Farmland Plateau
- B21 - Boreham Farmland Plateau

C - Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats Landscapes

- C1 - Tollesbury Fleet Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats
- C2 - Blackwater Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats
- C3 - Dengie Flats Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats
- C4 - Fleet Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats
- C5 - Bridgemarsh Island Estuarine Marsh/Mudflats

D - Drained Estuarine Marsh Landscapes

- D1 - Old Hall Marshes and Tollesbury Wick Drained Estuarine Marsh
- D2 - Maldon Drained Estuarine Marsh
- D3 - Northey Island Drained Estuarine Marsh
- D4 - Osea Island Drained Estuarine Marsh

D5 – Mundon Drained Estuarine Marsh
 D6 - Ramsay Drained Estuarine Marsh
 D7 - Bradwell Drained Estuarine Marsh
 D8 - Dengie Drained Estuarine Marsh
 D9 - Farnbridge Drained Estuarine Marsh

E - Coastal Farmland Landscapes

E1 - Tolleshunt Coastal Farmland
 E2 - Tillingham and Latchingdon Coastal Farmland

F - Wooded Farmland Landscapes

F1 - Gosfield Wooded Farmland
 F2 - High Garrett/Markshall Wooded Farmland
 F3 - Totham Wooded Farmland
 F4 - Tolleshunt Knights Wooded Farmland
 F5 - Little Baddow and Danbury Wooded Farmland
 F6 - Woodham Wooded Farmland
 F7 - Blackmore Wooded Farmland
 F8 - Doddinghurst Wooded Farmland
 F9 - Little Warley Wooded Farmland
 F10 - Heybridge Wooded Farmland
 F11 - South Hanningfield Wooded Farmland
 F12 - East Hanningfield Wooded Farmland
 F13 - Great Warley Wooded Farmland
 F14 - Ingrave and Herongate Wooded Farmland
 F15 - Weald Wooded Farmland
 F16 - Galleywood Wooded Farmland

G – Fenland Landscapes

G1 – Horndon Fenland

H - Chalk Upland Landscapes

H1 - Elmdon Chalk Upland
 H2 - Arkesden Chalk Upland
 H3 - Langley Chalk Upland
 H4 - Berden and Farnham Chalk Upland

- 2.5.14 As acknowledged by the Countryside Agency's guidelines, landscape is a continuum and character does not in general change abruptly on the ground. More commonly, the character of the landscape will change gradually rather than suddenly, and therefore boundaries drawn between Landscape Character Types and Areas shown on Figure 2.8 should be considered to reflect zones of transition in many cases. In addition, the boundaries drawn around Landscape Character Types and Areas has been defined and mapped at a scale of 1:25,000, and the assessment is therefore only suitable for use at this scale. This should be taken into consideration when the assessment is being used to inform decision making in relation to development and land management proposals.

5.0 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF CHELMSFORD BOROUGH

5.0 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF CHELMSFORD BOROUGH

5.1 General

5.1.1 This section of the report provides the detailed ‘profiles’ of Landscape Character Areas within Chelmsford Borough, structured as follows:

- Location of character area (map)
- Boundaries of character area (map)
- Photograph
- Key characteristics
- Overall character description
- Visual characteristics
- Historic land use
- Ecological features
- Key planning and land management issues
- Sensitivities to change
- Proposed landscape strategy objectives
- Suggested landscape planning guidelines
- Suggested land management guidelines

The profiles should be read as a whole when used to inform decision making. Where Landscape Character Areas fall within two or more adjacent District/Borough areas included in this Study report, the same profile has been included within the respective section. In such instances, a cross-reference is noted in the respective Character Area profile(s).

5.1.2 The following Landscape Character Types and Areas have been identified within Chelmsford Borough (see Figure 5.1), and are described in the following sections:

A - River Valley

A6 - Upper Chelmer River Valley
 A7 - Lower Chelmer River Valley
 A8 - Can and Wid River Valley

B - Farmland Plateau

B15 - Pleshey Farmland Plateau
 B16 - Felsted Farmland Plateau
 B17 - Terling Farmland Plateau
 B20 - Writtle Farmland Plateau
 B21 - Boreham Farmland Plateau

D - Drained Estuarine Marsh

D9 - Fambridge Drained Estuarine Marsh

F - Wooded Farmland

F5 - Little Baddow and Danbury Wooded Farmland
 F6 - Woodham Wooded Farmland
 F7 - Blackmore Wooded Farmland
 F10 - Heybridge Wooded Farmland
 F11 - South Hanningfield Wooded Farmland
 F12 - East Hanningfield Wooded Farmland
 F16 - Galleywood Wooded Farmland

5.2 River Valley Landscapes

5.2.1 The key characteristics of this Landscape Character Type are:

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

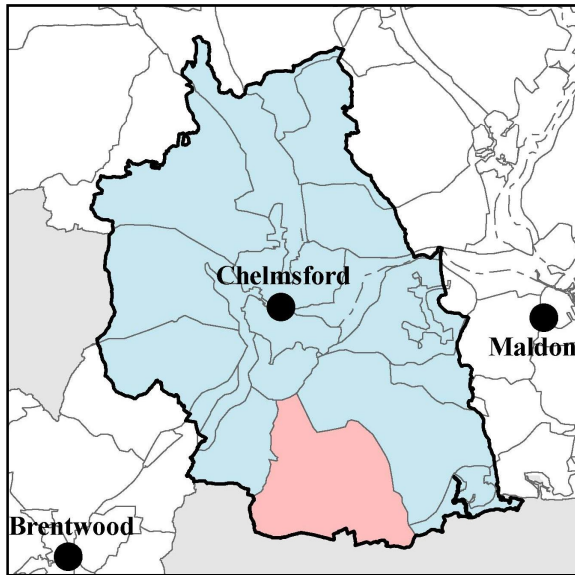
5.2.2 This Landscape Character Type contains the following Landscape Character Areas:

A6 - Upper Chelmer River Valley

A7 - Lower Chelmer River Valley

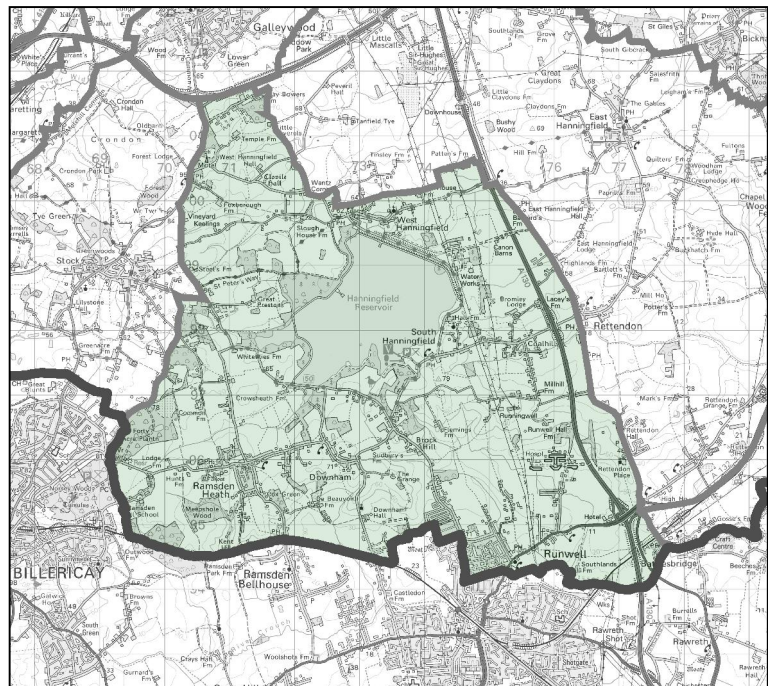
A8 - Can and Wid River Valley

F11 SOUTH HANNINGFIELD WOODED FARMLAND



Key Characteristics

- Undulating mature wooded farmland.
- Vast expanse of Hanningfield reservoir.
- Mixed woodland and a patchwork of diverse habitats surrounding the reservoir.
- Small-scale linear settlement pattern.
- Medium to large-scale arable fields with hedged and treed field boundaries.
- Views to wooded horizons both within the character area and within adjacent character areas.
- Network of quiet, narrow rural lanes traverse the area.



Overall Character

This character area is situated to the south of Chelmsford and north of Billericay and Wickford (to the south of the Study Area). Undulating arable wooded farmland (delineated by mature hedgerows with several hedgerow trees) covers the area. The area slopes (relatively steeply in places) downwards from north to south, affording spectacular views across the Thames valley in places. At the centre of the area, character is dominated by the vast expanse of Hanningfield reservoir. The large body of water is surrounded by a mixed woodland reserve (including Peninsula Wood, Well Wood, Chestnut Wood and Hawks Wood, a visitors centre and nature reserve) and contains diverse habitats for wildlife (especially wildfowl). Flocks of swifts, swallows and martins swooping onto the reservoir during the summer, provide a visually interesting and dynamic character. The uniform and engineered concrete edges of the reservoir exert a strong human influence upon the surrounding landscape, whilst certain stretches of the reservoir exhibit more natural shorelines and have well-developed marginal vegetation. Settlement pattern consists of several small linear hamlets and villages (including South and West Hanningfield

and Ramsden Heath). Church towers within these villages are visible landmarks from the surrounding landscape. There is some sense of enclosure and tranquillity within woodland clearings and away from settlements. A network of quiet, rural and often tree-lined lanes also crosses the character area.

Visual Characteristics

- Open and framed views to wooded horizons, both within the character area and also within adjacent LCA.
- Spectacular panoramic views into the Thames valley from certain locations.
- Open, panoramic views across Hanningfield reservoir dramatically influenced by changing weather and colours of the sky.

Historic Land Use

Evidence of historic land use within the Character Area is dominated by irregular fields mixed, with the predominant co-axial fields of ancient origin. The commons were mostly enclosed by the 19th century, but part of their extent can be seen in the surviving field boundary pattern. Historically, the settlement pattern was dispersed, some of it being focussed on commons. There were also scattered farmsteads. This pattern has survived with more recent nucleations of settlement at East Hanningfield and Rettendon.

Ecological Features

This Character Area is dominated by widespread arable agriculture and pasture with frequent woodland. The area contains Hanningfield Reservoir SSSI (c. 400 ha) and 32 CWSs, comprising ancient and semi-natural woodland, unimproved grassland and wetland habitats.

Key Planning and Land Management Issues

- Pressure of increased traffic on rural, minor lanes.
- Potential future expansion of Hanningfield reservoir.
- Potential for fertiliser and pesticide run-off from adjacent agricultural farmland to pollute Hanningfield reservoir and affect water quality and habitats.
- Potential for visually intrusive development at the fringes of small villages and also Wickford and Billericay.
- Noise and visual intrusion associated with A127 road corridor.
- Potential major road improvements to the A127.
- Potential visually intrusive development of new farm buildings.
- Deterioration and eventual loss of mature woodland, single trees and hedgerows.

Sensitivities to Change

Sensitive key characteristics and landscape elements within this character area include mature hedged and treed field boundaries and a patchwork of diverse woodland and other habitats surrounding Hanningfield reservoir (which are sensitive to changes in land management). The overall sense of tranquillity within parts of the character area (away from main road corridors) and the network of narrow tree-lined lanes is also sensitive to change and potential new development, or increases in traffic flow associated with such development. Open views to wooded horizons are sensitive to potential new development, which may interrupt or block such views. There is a sense of historic integrity, resulting from a dispersed historic settlement pattern and the presence of several areas of co-axial fields (of ancient origin). There are also several important wildlife habitats consisting of 22 areas of ancient woodland. Overall, this character area has relatively high sensitivity to change.

Proposed Landscape Strategy Objectives

Conserve - seek to protect and enhance positive features that are essential in contributing to local distinctiveness and sense of place through effective planning and positive land management measures.

Enhance - seek to improve the integrity of the landscape, and reinforce its character, by introducing new and/or enhanced elements where distinctive features or characteristics are absent.

Suggested Landscape Planning Guidelines

- Conserve and enhance the landscape settings of small settlements within the character area and also Wickford and Billericay.
- Ensure that any appropriate new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials, which are appropriate to local landscape character. Such development should be well integrated with the surrounding landscape.
- Conserve the mostly rural character of the area.
- Conserve existing views across the area and to adjacent Landscape Character Areas.
- Seek to screen visual detractors (such as A127 road corridor, for example with planted shelter belts).
- Conserve the open, undeveloped character and valuable wetland habitats associated with Hanningfield Reservoir.

Suggested Land Management Guidelines

- Conserve and manage the existing mature hedgerow network.
- Conserve, manage and enhance patches of woodland (consider the use of traditional methods, such as coppicing and pollarding where appropriate to locality and local landscape character).
- Conserve historic lanes and unimproved roadside verges.
- Plant half-standard trees within field hedgerow boundaries to succeed over mature trees.
- Introduce arable field margins as a means of ensuring that mature trees within hedgerows are not disturbed by ploughing.
- Conserve and enhance areas of semi-natural and ancient woodland as important heritage, nature conservation and landscape features.
- Seek to minimise potential impacts from agricultural practices (such as run off) on valuable habitats within and fringing Hanningfield Reservoir.