Comments from the Wivenhoe Society on the Green and Blue Spaces consultation

It is not clear what the purpose of this consultation is. It is being conducted at the same time as a call for sites so is it partly to discover what sites are important to people to inform decision making on site allocations or is it to give feedback on how those sites owned by the Council could be improved?

The Wivenhoe Society wished to respond to this consultation but found it difficult to make general comments. Hence we are commenting via email.

There is ambiguity in what is meant by a Public Open Space. This could mean a space open to the public or it could mean a publicly owned open space. However sites shown on the consultation maps include areas which do not meet either of these criteria. For example in Wivenhoe the site labelled Broadfield Public Open Space is neither publicly owned nor does it currently have any formal public access. In the Wivenhoe Neighbourhood Plan Policies map this area is shown partly as open space and partially as a site for potential playing fields. The consultation map also shows a site at Wivenhoe Cross Pit which is described as a Wildlife Site and Public Open Space. Only a small part of this is publicly owned (The Henrietta Close recreational land). Apart from two public footpaths there is no formal access for the public for the remainder of the site though there are currently some permissive paths on part of it. The land off Ferry Marsh is shown as Public Open Space and Nature Reserve. Some of this land is owned by the City and some is owned by the Crown. Some of it is, or rather was before the flooding on the site, open to the public. The Nature Reserve area is subject to covenant signed by Colchester that it should be a Public Open Space.

If the aim is to acquire information about views on which currently undeveloped spaces, i.e. open spaces but not necessarily publicly owned, should remain as such then this should be explained. The Wivenhoe Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) has various policies about where development should not be permitted, or be permitted only if certain conditions are satisfied, including a general policy about development outside the settlement boundary and a policy about the protection of currently open spaces within the settlement boundary (some of which are privately owned). The WNP also includes a separation break between the settlement area and the University. This does not have public access, except for a public footpath across it. However the intention of the WNP is that this should remain as undeveloped land and it would seem to be of a similar status to say the Broadfields site which **is** shown as public open space in the consultation maps and is also shown as such on the Local Plan map for Wivenhoe. We consider the settlement break should be described as Open Space to make it clear this is not suitable for development. The WNP also has a designation ‘The River Colne Special Character Area’ and a policy (WIV 5) restricting what development may take place. We recommend this should also be designated as Open Space. The two areas above are shown on the WNP policies map (page 107 of the WNP)

Because of the ambiguity about what is meant by a Public Open Space, in the updated Local Plan we suggest it would be more helpful to distinguish between those open spaces which do and those which do not have formal public access and between sites which are owned by a public body (City, EEC, WTC) and those which are not. It would also be helpful to distinguish identify playing fields/sports facilities as a separate subcategory of Opens Space. School Playing fields should also be a separate subcategory. In Wivenhoe, for example, some of the school land might be needed if Millfields were to be expanded to provide for a two form entry so it is not necessarily sensible to have a blanket ban on any development.

The questions ask about possible improvements to the sites include such things as places to sit and accessibility enhancement. Presumably such improvements can only be made for sites which the Council actually owns. Better management of Council owned sites would not seem to be a Local Plan matter. The Local Plan cannot deem that public access should be provided to land it does not own though presumably it could include proposals for acquiring additional sites to be used as public open space and have a policies on the provision of accessible open space for any new developments.

On the issue of the management of open spaces owned by Colchester the Society considers that access to the Ferry Marsh Nature Reserve should be restored. (The path across the Reserve was closed subsequent to severe flooding and has remained closed after the Marsh was drained despite a public notice welcoming people to the Reserve). At one time the information posted by Colchester stated that the whole of the Nature Reserve was open to the public (though with a warning about not falling in ditches). The public mainly kept to the path provided across the Marsh (though the working party did on one occasion have to remove cannabis plants which had been planted on one of the less accessible bits). We would also like to see the Council acquiring that part of Ferry Marsh which is currently Crown property (subsequent to the liquidation of the company which previously owned it). This would allow for proper maintenance of the whole area including a part which falls within the SSSI. At present Colchester does do some maintenance of the track known as Rowhedge Ferry Road which crosses the site to the east of the Nature Reserve though it does not actually own this track. A small strip adjacent to Old Ferry Road is Council owned and is poorly maintained in that trees which died have not been replaced.

With regard to Blue spaces there is concern that the Colne is silting up. Improvements to footpath surfaces adjacent to the river would be desirable (including the unadopted parts of the Quay).