

## INTRODUCTION



West Mersea Town Council strongly objects to the proposal in Draft Local Plan to put 300 dwellings at West Mersea because the Draft Local Plan does not recognise that Mersea is an Island with restricted access due to its single tidal road with poor public transport. Also the limited room for expansion for future generations (NPPF), with the whole Island lying within the **Coastal Protection Belt and some seven other conservation areas**.

## Mersea Island, Water Quality, and Biodiversity Constraints

Mersea Island is an **ecologically sensitive and legally protected tidal island** at the confluence of the Blackwater and Colne estuaries, connected to the mainland only by the tidal causeway, The Strood. It supports **internationally important estuarine habitats**, including saltmarshes, mudflats, and shingle beaches, and is covered by multiple environmental designations, including a **Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ)**. The island is also renowned for its **native oyster fishery**, a key part of the local economy, tourism, and cultural heritage.

A recent river survey undertaken by Anglian Water and commissioned by the Environment Agency highlighted the **high frequency and volume of discharges from the West Mersea Water Recycling Centre (WRC)**. The survey identified a long-term deterioration in water quality. Despite upgrades, 2025 bathing waters recorded the **highest bacterial spike on record**, with human sewage identified as the source, demonstrating ongoing risks to sensitive marine habitats.

**Native oysters and other Priority/irreplaceable habitats** are recognised as highly threatened globally. Restoration efforts through the Essex Native Oyster Restoration Initiative are underway. The **Food Standards Agency** has confirmed that further housing on Mersea Island will have a measurable effect on water quality and **protected oyster beds**, increasing nutrient and bacterial loading. **Natural England (Feb 2023)** has requested evidence that additional development will not harm **designated marine sites**. The Plan, however, **does not reference the MCZ, nor does it assess cumulative wastewater impacts** from existing or proposed development.

The **original Dawes Lane and Brierley allocations** were approved without any consideration of the MCZ, despite functional links to sensitive habitats, and the Plan now proposes **an additional 300 dwellings at Dawes Lane**, raising the total development pressure on West Mersea to **approximately 600 homes**. The **Sustainability Appraisal** fails to assess these allocations **in combination**, contrary to SEA and Habitats Regulations, and ignores potential **significant harm** to the MCZ, SPA, Ramsar site, SAC, and Priority/irreplaceable habitats.

Critical other constraints and infrastructure issues are also omitted: transport impacts have not been adequately considered, and **healthcare provision is insufficient**, with nearly one full-time doctor per 2,800 patients and closed patient lists. While building extensions for medical staff are proposed, there is no evidence of increasing the number of doctors to meet demand.

Accordingly, the Plan **raises serious concerns regarding compliance** with Policies **EN1, EN3, ST7, NZ3, CS5, CS6, LC1/LC3**, and site-specific allocations including **PP23 (West Mersea)**, particularly in relation to **cumulative environmental impacts, MCZ protection, and potential significant harm to Priority and irreplaceable habitats**.



Crossing onto Mersea Island just as the tide meets in the middle of the roadway B1025.

Photo by Chrissie Westgate

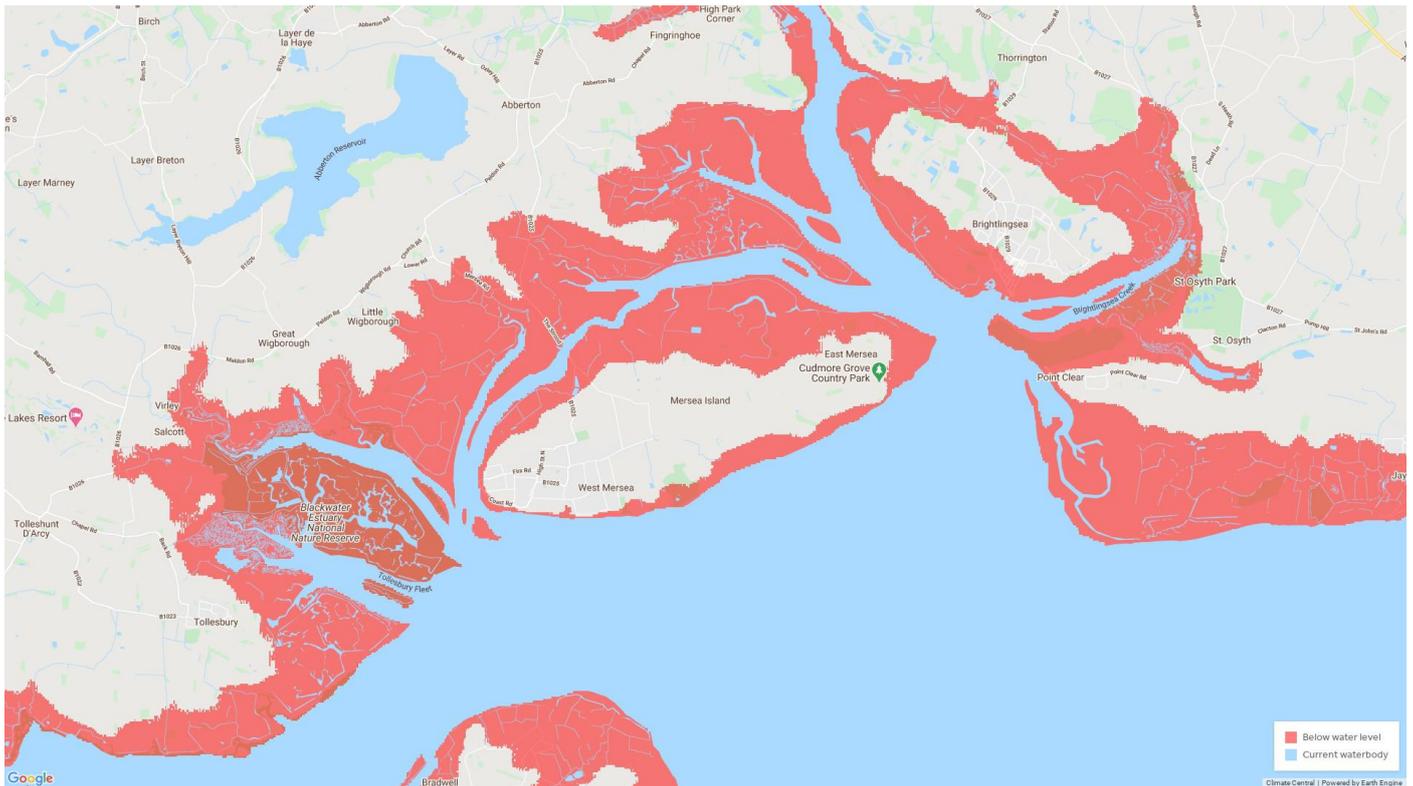


A big Spring Tide at the bottom of The Lane - Coast Road West Mersea



A moderately High Tide situation at the Strood

Red area indicates areas flooded to the 5m Ordnance Datum Level this would be equivalent to about **7.2 m** surge high tide which overtops the seawalls, Lidar maps later showing the slump of seawalls



MONEY | DEAR DEIDRE | TECH | TRAVEL | MOTORS | PUZZLES | SUI

morning.



**Two cars got stuck in a High Spring tide at the Strood, Mersea Island, Essex**

Credit: Stephen Huntley/HVC