



STANFORDS
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Coalescence Impact Assessment Statement

Land south of Colchester Road, West Bergholt

October 2025

Contents

Purpose and Scope.....2

West Bergholt Neighbourhood Plan Context..3

The Site.....7

Views into the Site.....9

Sense of Arrival into West Bergholt.....10

Sense of Settlement Identity.....12

Visual Separation of the Villages.....13

Cumulative Impact.....14

Conclusion.....15

Purpose and Scope

Primary aim

This assessment supports the allocation for the site at land south of Colchester Road, West Bergholt by determining whether up to 25 dwellings at land south of Colchester Road, West Bergholt, either alone or cumulatively with other development, can avoid creating physical or perceived coalescence between West Bergholt and Braiswick, and preserve the separate identities and legibility of both villages.

The assessment is anchored to the West Bergholt Neighbourhood Plan, specifically in regards to the identified Coalescence Zone and the relevant policy.

Objectives

The assessment will consider the coalescence risk by explicitly considering:

- Sense of arrival to each settlement,
- Sense of settlement identity,
- Visual separation of the villages, and
- The cumulative impact of development along Colchester Road.

Study Area

The study area covers West Bergholt, Braiswick, and the intervening land between them, including the Colchester Road corridor, Albany Road within West Bergholt, Westhouse Wood adjacent to Braiswick, and public rights of way (PRoWs) surrounding both settlements.

West Bergholt Neighbourhood Plan Context

West Bergholt Neighbourhood Plan

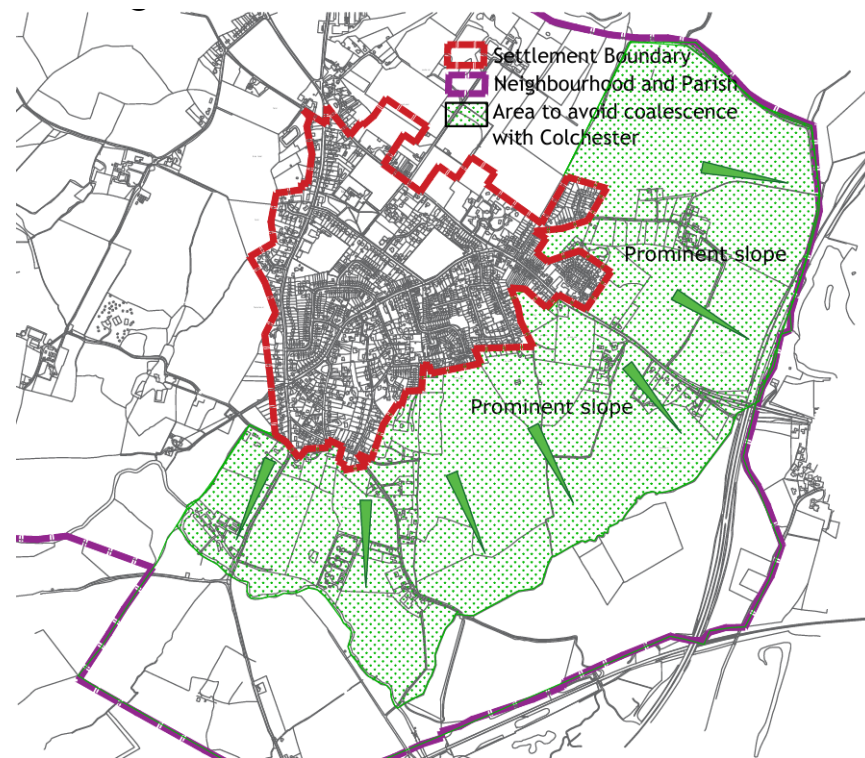
Policy PP12 (Coalescence) of the West Bergholt Neighbourhood Plan seeks to prevent the coalescence of West Bergholt and Braiswick by ensuring proposals do not erode the physical or perceived gap or blur the distinct identities of the two settlements. It is not a blanket prohibition on development within the mapped coalescence zone; rather, it is a development management test: schemes can be acceptable where they preserve separate identities and a perceptible break.

The site is located within the mapped coalescence zone but that does not mean it cannot be developed but rather the question becomes whether the development of this site would materially reduce the physical or perceptual separation and/or diminish settlement identities along key public approaches (especially Colchester Road which is identified as a “Distinctive Approach” by the Parish).

West Bergholt Neighbourhood Plan Maps Coalescence Zone Map

The map to the right is Map PP12 that forms part of the Neighbourhood Plan, setting out the area to avoid coalescence with Colchester and should be read in conjunction with policy PP12. Although the site is within the identified area, the map does clearly depict how well the site is contained on three sides by existing village built form and would make an obvious infill development.

Furthermore, the maps highlights how the site does not protrude any closer to Colchester (and Braiswick) than the existing settlement boundary.



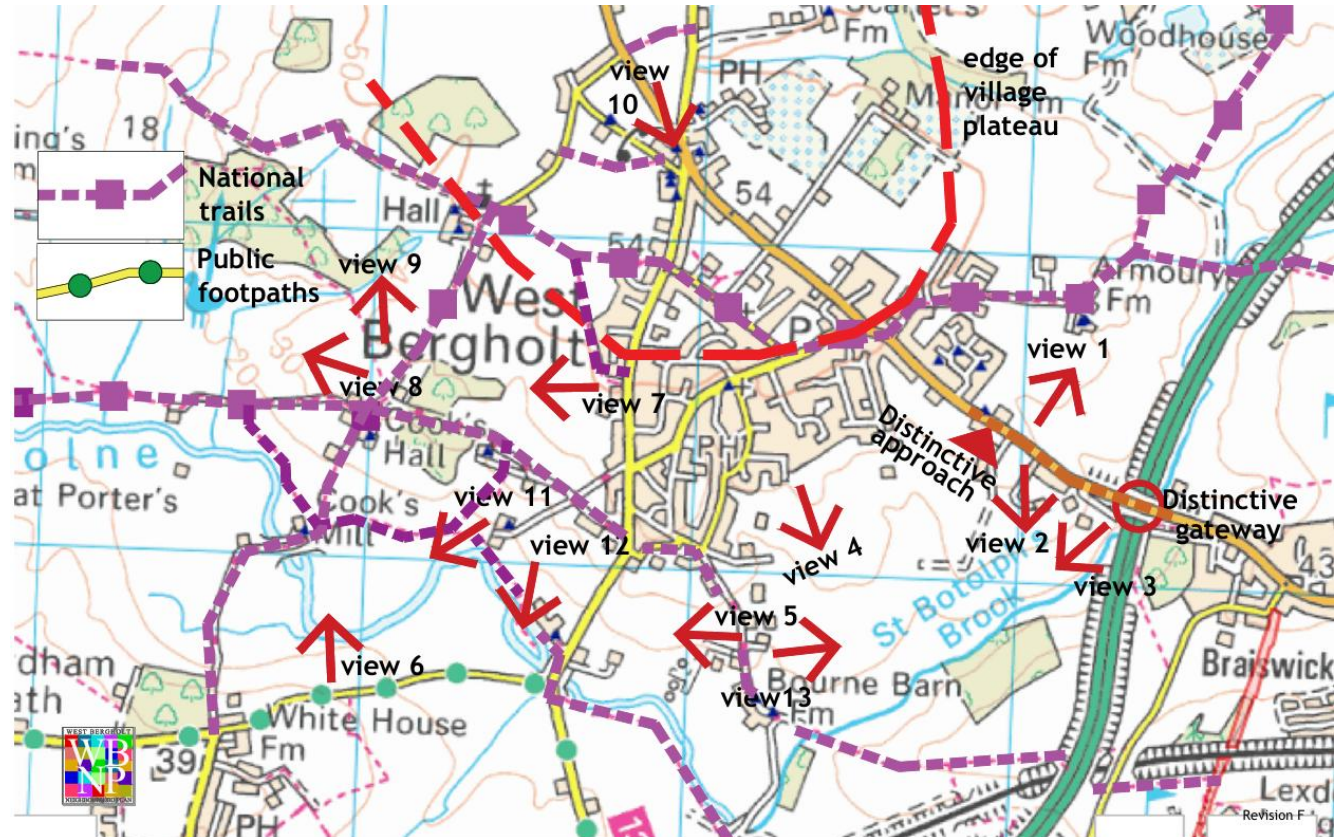
West Bergholt Neighbourhood Plan Context

West Bergholt Neighbourhood Plan Maps

Key Views Map

The map to the right is Map CA7 that forms part of the Neighbourhood Plan, setting out the Key Views of West Bergholt, recognising the importance of the rights of way around the village and highlighting the distinctive gateway out of Colchester (from Braiswick) and the distinctive approach into West Bergholt.

None of the Key Views look across the site nor can the site be seen from the marked gateway or approach into the village. Notably is that the site's entrance is over 100m past the village's distinctive approach meaning that the site would be read as being contained and part of the West Bergholt settlement.



West Bergholt Neighbourhood Plan Context

How PP12 should be applied to the site

In practical terms, decision-makers should ask:

1. Does the site push the built edge closer to Braiswick or impact the existing recognized distinctive gateway and approach to West Bergholt? There are already established and durable intervening features (A12, Westhouse Wood, St Botolph's Brook, the "blue bridge") that already anchor separation; the Site does not undermine these. Furthermore, the site is not visible from the gateway or approach.

2. On Colchester Road, Albany Road, the PRowS and vantage points in/around the villages, will a distinct green break still be read between the two villages? The proposed scheme will not bring the built form of West Bergholt closer to Braiswick, this site does not contribute to providing a distinct green gap between the two villages. Of note, the site cannot be seen from the PRowS and offers only limited views from Colchester Road and Albay Road.

3. Could development on the site retain West Bergholt's separate identity? The site is well contained and read clearly as being within the village envelope, the reserved matters should include design that responds and enhances the West Bergholt identity by using architectural design features from surrounding buildings.

Development Parameters that enable policy compliance

The parameters for developing the site could be framed to comply to PP12

- Built form to be focused north and center of the site, with public open space and enhanced landscaping to west, south and east to maintain the perceived break toward Braiswick.
- Lower-order typologies (e.g., chalet/bungalow forms) on falling ground to reduce skyline effects on key approaches.
- Retention and enhancement of mature vegetation, including at the Colchester Road entrance and along the eastern boundary, to sustain a filtered edge and reinforce the sense of enclosure of the site.

The Site

As discussed in the previous section, the site falls within the coalescence zone identified by Neighbourhood Plan Policy PP12 but the site's physical characteristics mean it does not contribute to the purpose of that designation. The land is immediately adjacent to the settlement boundary and is visually contained by existing residential development of the village and established, mature vegetation.

The Google Earth extract below, site outlined in red, depicts the location of the site in the wider context of West Bergholt, Braiswick and the land between.



The Site

The images to the right are further extracts taken from Google Earth with the site broadly outlined in red, the settlement boundary broadly in yellow and the “distinctive approach” as per the Neighbourhood Plan is in dashed orange.

These images clearly show the enclosed nature of the site by both the existing village built form and the mature vegetation boundaries.

The distinctive approach is over 100m in distance to the site, with the journey from the entrance to the village to the site’s entrance taking the traveller past a dense estate to the north-east and to the south-west, mature hedgerows before passing a three-storey large detached house.



Views into the Site

As established in the Policy Section, none of the identified Key Views within the Neighbourhood Plan look towards the Site and there are no opportunities to see the Site from the footpath network or countryside, however there are some limited opportunities to see into the Site from the public realm along Colchester Road and Albany Road within West Bergholt.

The only view into the Site from Colchester Road is the passing glimpse when travelling past the existing access. Whilst a residential development would introduce built form, the existing vegetation would be enhanced and the eye would remain naturally drawn to the mature trees which would remain dominating the site with their height. Likewise, the converted 4-storey brewery would remain the dominant feature when looking towards the Site from Albany Road due to the proposed 1-1.5 storey parameters for the site.

Given the restricted views of the Site and how the Site can only be views in the context of West Bergholt, developing the Site would not contribute to the coalescence of West Bergholt and Braiswick nor would it erode West Bergholt's separate identity to Braiswick nor impact the arrival into West Bergholt.



Left, view towards site from access on Colchester Road.

Above, view from Albany Road looking eastwards towards the site.

Sense of arrival into West Bergholt

Map CA7 that forms part of the Neighbourhood Plan indicates that there is a section of Colchester Road that is “distinctive” in regards to the “gateway” and “approach” into West Bergholt.

The gateway is the blue bridge that allows Colchester Road to cross the A12 which provides travel between West Bergholt and Braiswick via foot as well as pedestrian with the pavement that runs the whole length between the two villages. The bridge is distinctive with the blue colour and curved arched design.

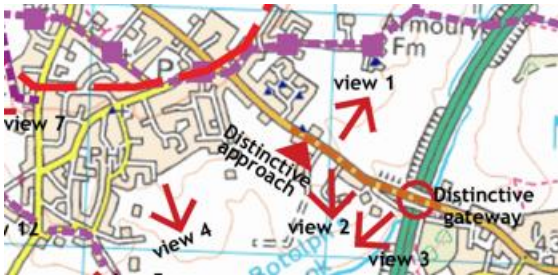
The top image, taken from Google Earth, clearly shows the rural nature of this bridge and the dense vegetation that surrounds it, along with the agricultural fields on the West Bergholt side.

The middle image is taken in Braiswick, looking towards the bridge with West Bergholt in the far distance. The bottom image is taken the West Bergholt side, travelling along Colchester Road towards Braiswick. These images demonstrate the different character immediately either side of the bridge and how this acts as a gateway feature.



Sense of arrival into West Bergholt

The distinctive approach is marked out on Map CA7 using orange dashes, extract below;



This section of area is described as follows in the Neighbourhood Plan;

...strong rural character of the land between these settlements, the topographical variation, the distinct sense of departure and arrival at the settlement edges and the lack of intra-visibility and inter-visibility between the settlements that results in this land having a high overall contribution to the separation of settlements...

The images to the right provide a visual journey from the blue bridge Gateway along the approach to the settlement boundary of West Bergholt. The site is not visible at all during this journey and so does not impact upon the sense of arrival into the village.



Sense of Settlement Identity

Policy PP12 of the Neighbourhood Plan states that development in the coalescence zone must not blur the distinct identities of the two villages of West Bergholt and Braiswick. West Bergholt has a Village Design Statement (VDS), a guidance document that forms part of the local development framework, which “gives a detailed description of the existing character” of the village. This can be used to understand what the Parish believes to be the Settlement’s identity and whether any development of the site would impact that identity.

The VDS describes the village as having a “woody feel” due to the mature vegetation within and bordering the village and that the setting outside of the village can be described as open landscape with long raging views. The top image highlights how the Site cannot be viewed as contributing to the open landscape with long raging views due to its enclosed nature. However, the bottom image demonstrates how this enclosed nature, due to the mature trees and hedges, would contribute to the “woody feel” and align with the prevailing pattern of the village estates being enclosed by mature vegetation.

Therefore the development of the site would reinforce the settlement’s identity and not cause coalescence between West Bergholt and Braiswick.



Visual Separation of the Villages

The development of the Site will retain the visual separation of the villages, West Bergholt and Braiswick. The previous sections already set out how the Site does not contribute to the sense of arrival and has limited visual impact and does not impact any key views of the villages.

Furthermore to the analysis already undertaken, the top image demonstrates the distance between the Site and Braiswick is significant and that there is clear separation.

The middle image is taken on the outskirts of Braiswick looking towards the blue bridge which acts as the gateway out of Braiswick and towards West Bergholt. The Site is not visible from this perspective and so the separation would remain intact.

The bottom image demonstrates that on the approach to West Bergholt, travelling from Braiswick, there is a rural character and the Site is not visible so visual separation would be intact on the journey between the two villages.

For avoidance of doubt, the roofscape of the proposed development would not be visible either due to the existing intervening features.



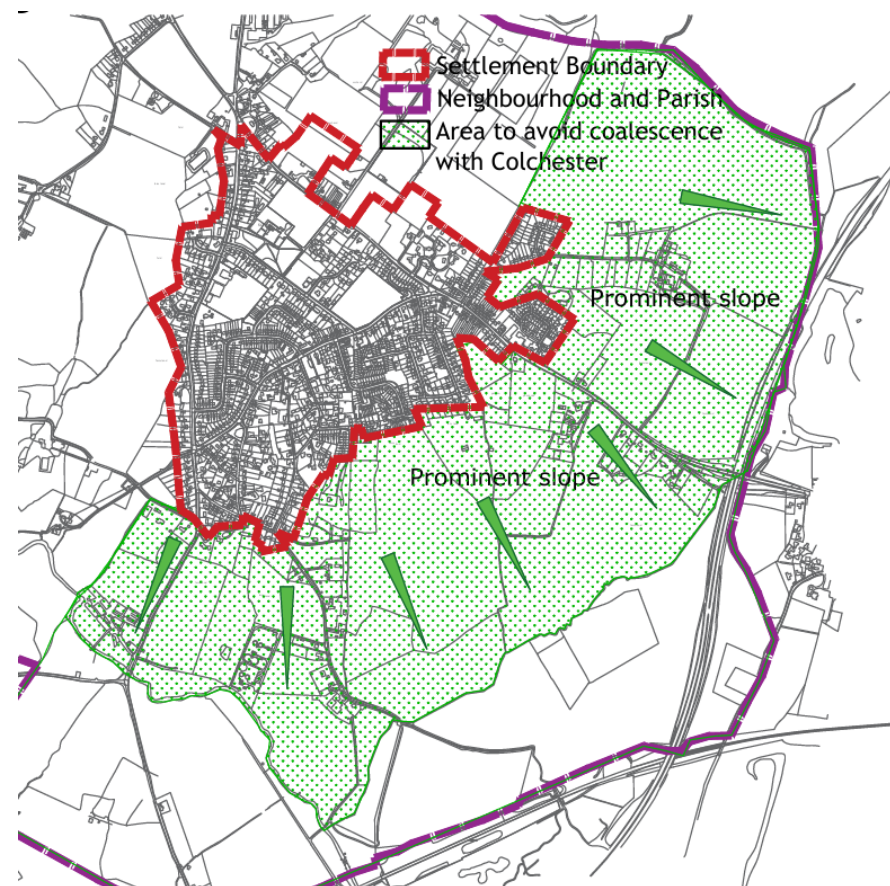
Cumulative Impact

The Neighbourhood Plan clearly states that development in the Coalescence zone will not be supported “if individually or cumulatively it would result in increasing the coalescence between West Bergholt village and Braiswick,” therefore the proposal of developing the Site must be viewed with the potential of other sites coming forward within that zone. To the right, for ease of reference, is the map PP12 that shows the zone in green.

The analysis of the Site on the previous sections does set out how this Site is well enclosed and its physical characteristics mean that it is best read as part of the village of West Bergholt and certainly not read as being part of the wider landscape outside of the village.

The views into the site are limited and cannot be viewed at the same time as adjacent fields and certainly not alongside Braiswick. The site is not visible until once inside the village’s settlement boundary and does not contribute at all to the Village’s sense of arrival. Furthermore, any long distance views of the village would have very limited views of the roofscape of any proposed development on the Site due to the enclosed nature of the site from the mature trees and hedges.

This means that, although other sites may progress within the Coalescence Zone, the Site’s enclosed character, limited intervisibility and landscape-led disposition mean it would not contribute to any cumulative increase in coalescence.



Conclusion

This assessment finds that the site sits within the mapped Coalescence Zone but, owing to the site's enclosed character, limited intervisibility and landscape-led character, it would not increase physical or perceived coalescence between West Bergholt and Braiswick. The site reads as part of West Bergholt's settlement area, is not visible on the distinctive gateway/approach along Colchester Road and does not feature in the Neighbourhood Plan's key views; consequently it does not impact the sense of arrival or the distinct identity of either settlement. With development focused to the north and centre along with proposed public open space and enhanced planting to west, south and east and lower-order typologies on falling ground the proposed development will not cause an increase to the coalescence between the two villages, neither individually or cumulatively. Furthermore, the proposed landscape-led scheme will compliment the West Bergholt's identity, namely its "woody feel".

Accordingly, development of the site could comply with Policy PP12 both individually and cumulatively and is consistent with the Local Plan's design/amenity framework for safeguarding settlement character. There would be no impact to coalescence or blurring of settlement identities by developing this Site.