



LAND NORTH OF HALSTEAD
ROAD, EIGHT ASH GREEN, ESSEX

**SUMMARY LANDSCAPE
APPRAISAL**

Prepared for

BELLWAY
JANUARY 2024
Ref: A360-AS-01A

Land North of Halstead Road, Eight Ash Green, Essex

Summary Landscape Appraisal

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File Ref: A360-AS01a

Client: Bellway
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Introduction and Planning Background

1. This report has been prepared to provide supplementary information in respect of Colchester City Council's 'call for sites'. It sets out an initial, summary landscape and visual appraisal relating to the potential effects of future residential development on land to the north of Halstead Road, Eight Ash Green to the west of Colchester. It should be read in conjunction with the planning statement by Carter Jonas and other accompanying technical notes.
2. The report, commissioned by Bellway, has been prepared by Vanessa Ross FLI, a Chartered Landscape Architect and Director of Arc Landscape Design and Planning Ltd., who has extensive experience in undertaking landscape and visual impact assessments and appraisals. Whilst the report is not a full Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (LVA), it does draw on best practice guidance as set out in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA3). The report does, however seek to summarise the anticipated likely effects resulting from any future development on the site and identify areas for further consideration in respect of mitigation and overall landscape strategy.
3. The note is based on a desk based assessment with a site and local context which included a review of mapping and existing documents including relevant planning policy context and the Landscape Character Assessments for the area.
4. The village of Eight Ash Green is located approximately 5km from the centre of Colchester and lies to the north of junction 26 of the A12 that connects London and Ipswich and which runs around the northern part of Colchester. The village falls within the planning jurisdiction of Colchester Council.
5. The site is located adjacent to the existing settlement boundary and is not covered by any statutory or local landscape designation, nor does it fall within the setting of any such designation.
6. There are no heritage designations within the site, and there is one Grade II listed building within the village. There are no ecological designations within the site however there are a number of Local Wildlife Sites located beyond the village, the closest of which is Co55 Seven Star Green, which runs along Turkey Cock Lane to the south of Halsted Road. Open space at Fordham Heath to the north-west of the village is locally designated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation.
7. There are a number of public rights of way within the area including a footpath (Essex County Council ref Eight Ash Green 24 and) which runs along the eastern boundary of the site from Halstead Road in the south to Huxtables Lane some 330m to the north. Other routes are discussed below.
8. The site comprises two broadly rectangular arable fields located to the north of Halstead Road along with a strip of woodland (Choat's Wood) to the north. A single private property is located off Halstead Road on a plot of land that sits along the junction of the two fields but falls outside the site boundary.



Figure 1 - Site Location – (site shown in red) ©Google Maps

Planning Policy – Summary of Relevant Policy

9. This section summaries the planning policy relevant to this study and it is noted that there will be a wide range of other policies that would need to be addressed within any future planning application.

National Planning Policy Framework - December 2023

10. The NPPF, which sets out national policy, has recently been updated with the most recent iteration being published on 19th December 2023. For the purposes of this note, a summary of the relevant parts of the NPPF are considered below.
11. At a national level the NPPF at para 8, sets out the three ‘overarching objectives’ which are required to achieve sustainable development, namely economic, social and environmental, with the latter two of particular relevance.
 - **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, social and cultural well-being; and
 - **an environmental objective** – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

12. Whilst the NPPF must be read as a whole, Paragraphs 131-141 provide guidance on ensuring the delivery of well-designed buildings and places, with paragraph 131 stating *“The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities”*. Paragraph 132 stresses the need for design policies should be *‘grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each areas defining characteristics’*.”.
13. Paragraphs 133 and 134 introduce the need for councils to provide clarity about design expectations early on and introduce the (new) requirement for councils to prepare *“design guides or codes consistent with the principles set out in the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code, and which reflect local character and design preferences. Design guides and codes. These provide a local framework for creating beautiful and distinctive places, with a consistent and high quality standard of design”*.
14. Paragraph 135 is of particular relevance to this appraisal and sets out 6 elements that: *“Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:*
 - a. *will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
 - b. *are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*
 - c. *are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
 - d. *establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;*
 - e. *optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and*
 - f. *create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.*
15. Paragraph 139 states that *“Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to”*:
 - a) *development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or*
 - b) *outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.*

16. Section 15, (paragraphs 180-194) of the NPPF focuses on **conserving and enhancing the natural and local environment**. Paragraph 180, again of relevance to this report, states that planning policies and decisions should do this by:
- a. *protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
 - b. *recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;*
 - c. *maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;*
 - d. *minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;*
 - e. *preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and*
 - f. *remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.*

Colchester City Local Plan

17. At the time of undertaking this initial assessment, the current planning policy is found within the Local Plan which is set out in two parts. Section 1, adopted in February 2021 is a strategic plan prepared by a number of Local Authorities in North Essex. Section 2 was adopted in July 2022 and provides the policy framework, site allocations and development management policies for Colchester City up to 2033. It is noted however that were the site to be allocated, this would be in the context of a future local plan. Notwithstanding this, the relevant landscape policies are listed as follows:
18. **Policy ENV1: Environment** – states: *“The Local Planning Authority will conserve and enhance Colchester’s natural and historic environment, countryside and coastline. The Local Planning Authority will safeguard the Borough’s biodiversity, geology, history and archaeology, which help define the landscape character of the Borough, through the protection and enhancement of sites of international, national, regional and local importance. The Local Planning Authority will require development to be in compliance with, and contribute positively towards, delivering the aims and objectives of the Anglian River Basin Management Plan”.*
19. ENV1 is subdivided into several sections. Part A addresses Designated Sites and Part B addresses the ‘East Coast RAMS’ neither of which are of relevance to this study. Part C covers ‘Biodiversity and Geodiversity’ and includes a requirement to achieve “at least 10% biodiversity net gain”. Part C covers ‘Countryside’ and states the following:

“The local planning authority will carefully balance the requirement for new development within the countryside to meet identified development needs in accordance with Colchester’s spatial strategy, and to support the vitality of rural communities, whilst ensuring that development does not have an adverse

impact on the different roles, the relationship between and separate identities of settlements, valued landscapes, the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and visual amenity.

The intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside will be recognised and assessed, and development will only be permitted where it would not adversely affect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and complies with other relevant policies. Within valued landscapes, development will only be permitted where it would not impact upon and would protect and enhance the factors that contribute to valued landscapes”.

20. **Policy SS5: Eight Ash Green states:** *“All development proposals in Eight Ash Green parish will be determined against and be required to comply with policies in the Eight Ash Green Neighbourhood Plan and any relevant Local Plan policies”.*

Eight Ash Green Neighbourhood Plan

21. The Eight Ash Green Neighbourhood Plan is dated November 2019 and sets out the neighbourhood policy until 2033. The ‘Vision for Eight Ash Green’ is stated as follows:

“that it should remain a small village located in a rural setting, mainly consisting of residential dwellings interspersed with open farmland but also containing some small business premises. Eight Ash Green should continue to enjoy wide open spaces within the village with uninterrupted views of the countryside. It should remain clearly separated from other nearby villages - it is not and should not become a suburb of either Stanway, Colchester or the proposed West Tey Garden Community/New Town”.

22. In addition, the Neighbourhood Plan identifies other ‘key issues’ which, whilst not all relevant to this study are listed as follows:

- *encouraging the domestic use of green energy*
- *looking after the biodiversity present in the village*
- *jobs – encouraging local employment/businesses and the best use of land*
- *having effective and convenient transport links in the village*
- *valuing the local heritage*
- *the provision of effective wired broadband*

23. At the time of publication, the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) referred to Colchester’s Settlement Boundary Review (see below) which formed part of the evidence base for the current local plan.

24. The NP Policy VSB1:Village Settlement Boundaries states that *“The Village Settlement Boundary includes Fiddlers Field (formerly known as Site 226) and excludes land south of Seven Star Green, to the south of the A1124, as shown on the Village Boundary Map. On land outside the Village Settlement Boundary, there will be a general presumption against new development, unless it accords with the special circumstances set out in the Development Plan or the National Planning Policy Framework”.*

25. NP Policy DH1 states that – Residential development proposals other than at Fiddlers Fields should

- *Be of a density, design, and layout that respects and responds to the local character of the village and the location/site's context and not extend more than two storeys above ground level*
- *Provide a mix of dwelling size, type and tenure that reflects the housing needs of the Parish as indicated in the Technical Report 2017.*
- *Provide appropriate wiring within each property for charging for electric cars/vehicles and demonstrate that the design and layout of the dwelling(s) on the site has the potential for the effective installation of sustainable battery pods to store energy from renewable resources.*
- *Provide suitable connections for the installation of high quality telecommunications infrastructure including ducting for the provision of superfast broadband.*

26. Environment Policy EP1 States: *“Development beyond the settlement boundary of Eight Ash Green as defined on the Village Settlement Boundary Map resulting in coalescence between Eight Ash Green and neighbouring and existing and proposed settlements in adopted plans will not be supported”.*

27. Policy EP2 seeks to protect areas of green space identified on the policies map, none of which are located on or adjacent to the site. Policy EP3 seeks to protect hedgerows and states

“Development proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan Area resulting in the destruction and/or removal of existing hedgerows will only be supported if replaced, on the same site”.

28. Policy EP 4 addresses public rights of way and states:

“Existing footpaths, cycleways and bridleways shown on the Eight Ash Green Neighbourhood Areas Policies Map provide a high level of amenity value and will be protected. New developments which integrate with the current green infrastructure network improving the connectivity between local wildlife sites and green spaces improving and extending the existing footpath and cycle path network, allowing greater access to housing and retail facilities, green spaces, public open spaces and the countryside will be supported, including reference to matters such as open space, sustainable drainage and boundary planting”.

29. Other policy that will be relevant to the design development of any layout include national policy in respect of housing eg the National Model Design Code along with supplementary guidance such as the 1997 Essex Design Guide. Additionally, local SPD's including the 'Provision of Open Space, Sport and Recreational Facilities' – July 2006 will apply as will the requirement for any future development proposed on the site to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain of a minimum of 10%, with an aim to achieve this on-site wherever possible. Detailed local guidance of this is provided in the Colchester City Council Biodiversity SPD.

Assessment of Open Countryside between Settlements in the Borough of Colchester- 2009

30. In 2008 Colchester Borough Council commissioned Chris Blandford Associates to prepare the above report to inform the emerging Core Strategy; it also, subsequently formed part of the evidence base for the current local plan. Due to the date of publication it refers to now out of date planning policy statements, however notwithstanding this, it's findings are of relevance to this appraisal. The executive summary noted that in 2008-9, *“that the existing pattern of settlements in the Borough is strongly valued by local people”* and went on to state that the study *“considers that protection of this open countryside is essential to the maintenance of the distinct character of the above settlements”.*

31. The site formed part of Section 6 of the Assessment which considered land between ‘Colchester to Eight Ash Green’. At paragraph 6.2.15, notes that *“Eight Ash Green has a strong character, with a historic core of buildings and is located on top of a plateau overlooking the River Colne. It is set within a mosaic of small to medium-sized predominantly arable fields, some of which are bounded by hedgerows with mature trees. The countryside at the narrowest point between the settlements retains a degree of separation between the village and Colchester, but existing development within this area of countryside means that the effective separation is vulnerable”*.

32. The conclusion re-iterates the points above and at paragraph 6.4.1 states:

“Any new built development between Eight Ash Green and Colchester is likely to seriously undermine the sense of settlement separation and the rural character of the intervening land, as perceived by people moving along the A1124 or along public rights of way between Eight Ash Green and Colchester. Any such development is likely to result in visual coalescence with Colchester and/or Eight Ash Green and also visual coalescence with either the existing houses located on the northern edge of Halstead Road or the hotel and housing to the west of the A1124. This visual coalescence is likely to seriously undermine the already precarious sense of settlement separation and the predominantly rural character of this land. The sense of leaving one settlement and entering another would also be significantly diminished”.

33. Whilst the focus of the Assessment was on land between Eight Ash Green and Colchester, the accompanying mapping includes land to the north of Halstead Road located between the two parts of of Eight Ash Green, including the site. The following extract shows that the site (hatched in red) sits within the green area identified as making a ‘High Contribution to Separation of Settlements’.

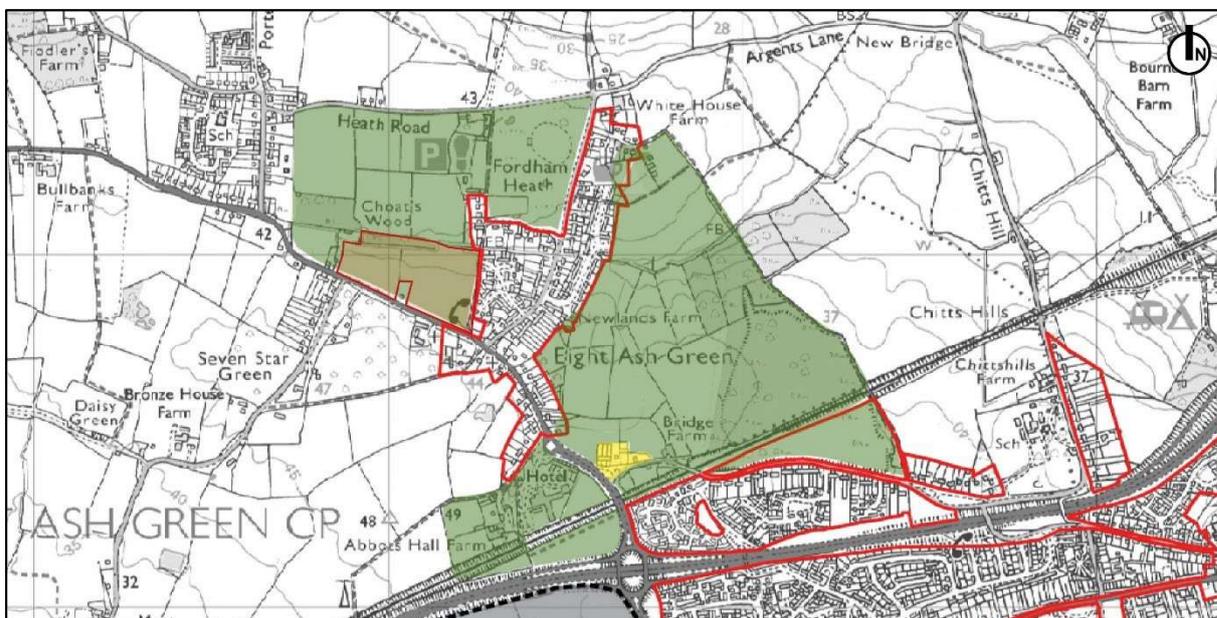


Figure 3 Extract from Figure 6.3: Contribution to Separation of Settlements Plan (Chris Blandford Associates 2009)

34. The focus of the study and its conclusions are that Eight Ash Green should remain as a distinct and separate settlement from Colchester and other areas including Stanway to the south of the A12. It is therefore considered that land highlighted in green (in Figure 3) to the east and south of Eight Ash Green

makes the most significant contribution to preserving the separation between the village and Colchester, and that the land, including the site, to the north of Halstead Road, less so. Were development to occur within the site, the separation would be maintained as would the ‘predominantly rural character’ between the village and Colchester. It is, however, acknowledged that residential development within the site would inevitably impact on the rural character of the site itself, however this would not result in an overall loss of rural character as land to the south of Halstead Road and beyond would remain unchanged.

Settlement Boundary Review 2017 Update

35. The above report, published in 2017 and pre-dated the publication of the Neighbourhood Plan which at that time was still being developed. Reference is made within the boundary review to housing within land to the north of Halstead Road (which includes the site) having the potential to ‘help link the two parts better’. Identified as RNW02, the site, is identified in the review as being capable of delivering up to 177 dwellings including the retention of the woodland to the north.
36. The boundary review, did however defer decisions on locations for additional development outside the settlement boundary to the Neighbourhood Plan which, when published identified land for development at Fiddlers Field and did not include the land identified as RNW02.

The Site and its Landscape Context

37. As noted above, the site is currently in agricultural use and comprises two arable fields with an area of woodland (Choat’s Wood) to the north. Much of the southern boundary is formed by a ditch that runs along Halsted Road (A1124) with low hedges in places to the west. The exception is the garden boundary of the property that sits between the two fields which comprise taller, managed hedges of both native and coniferous species.
38. The eastern boundary comprises a shallow ditch and the public right of way, a tarmac footpath, which is bounded by domestic garden fences to the east, with houses visible beyond.
39. The majority of the northern boundary is formed by Choat’s Wood, a linear strip of deciduous woodland. The eastern section of the northern boundary comprises some garden boundary vegetation and a ditch with low scrub/hedge. The western boundary is formed by an access drive serving Nimrod Cottages.
40. The site is generally flat, though has a gentle slope down from south to north. The land within the immediate surroundings has a similar topography of gentle shallow changes in level, however to the north, beyond Heath Road, land drops down forming the valley of the river Colne. Other smaller valleys exist along the tributaries of the River Colne contributing to the gently undulating topography of the wider area.
41. The parish of Eight Ash Green includes several areas of housing along with areas of agricultural fields. The main part of the village, to the north of junction 26 of the A12 is a predominantly linear settlement with the southern end of the village served off Halstead Road and the remainder served off Spring Lane, with Heathfields and Searle Way running parallel to the east and with small lanes of houses to the west off The Walk. Whilst there are some older properties to the south of the village, the majority of houses

date back to the mid-late 20th century with properties being predominantly two storeys of traditional form with architectural style reflecting the period in which they were built.

42. A further area of housing, to the north of Halstead Road (and west of the site) comprises a broadly rectangular area of housing and a primary school. Again properties generally date back to the mid-late 20th century along with the more recent housing development at Fiddlers Field. Seven Star Green is a small linear cluster of properties to the south of Halstead Road.

Landscape Character

43. Landscape Character Assessments are published at different scales from National through to Local. The Local Level Landscape Character Assessment published by Colchester Borough Council in 2005, is therefore the most detailed available. Whilst there have been some changes as a result of development since the publication of the report, the broad findings in respect of the site remain valid.
44. The site falls within the Council's Landscape Character Area – B2 Easthorpe Farmland Plateau however it is located on land immediately adjacent to two other Landscape Character Areas (LCA) and therefore shares some of the characteristics of LCA B4 Great Tey Farmland Plateau and A5 Colne River Valley Slopes. The relevant descriptions sections are included below and the character areas are shown on Figure 2.

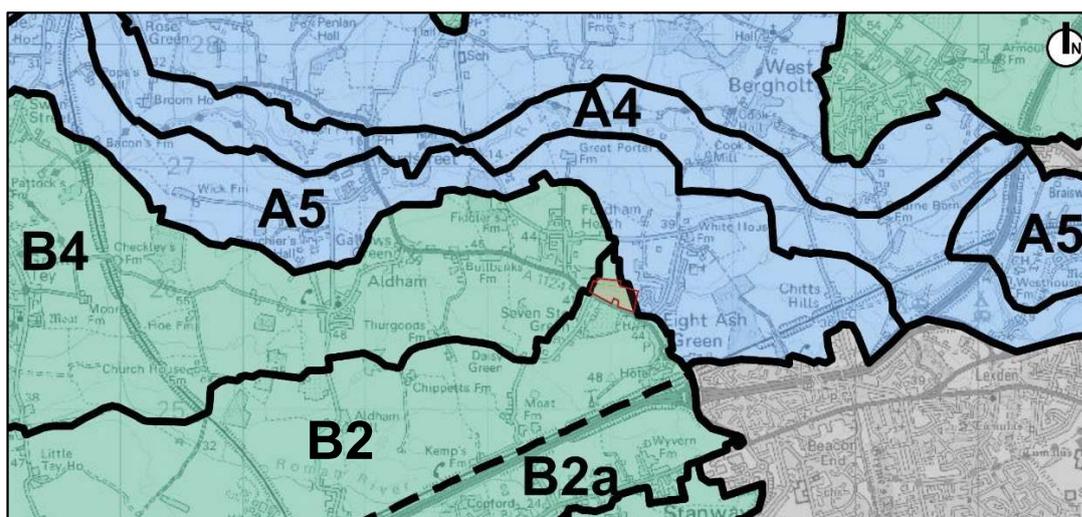


Figure 2 - Extract of Landscape Character Area Map (Chris Blandford Associates. 2005).

45. The 'Key Characteristics' for LCA B2 Easthorpe Farmland Plateau are described as
 - *Raised farmland plateau, dissected by the wooded Roman River valley in the east;*
 - *A mixture of small, medium and large irregular, predominantly arable fields;*
 - *Small patches of deciduous woodland and several ponds/ reservoirs;*
 - *Area crossed by a network of narrow, sometimes winding lanes;*
 - *Airfield, surrounded by large open fields has a dominant influence on the landscape character in the south of the area;*
 - *Settlement pattern consists of small villages and hamlets with scattered farmsteads amongst predominantly arable agricultural land.*

46. Visual characteristics are described:

- Views across the farmland plateau from roads and public rights of way are limited and framed by hedged field boundaries and small patches of woodland; however, it is generally possible to obtain medium-range views across arable farmland;
- An attractive cluster of buildings consisting of Easthorpe church, a timber-framed house opposite and Easthorpe Hall to the west, are landmarks with views on approach to Easthorpe and along the Roman Easthorpe Road;
- The spire of Copford church ('the most remarkable Norman parish church in the county'- Pevsner, 1954:149) on the upper slopes of the Roman River valley is another prominent landmark in views from approach roads to the south and east.

47. Key Planning and Land Management Issues are described as follows:

- Potential pressure for further expansion of and improvements to the linear communications and settlement corridor (sub character area B2a) into the surrounding farmland plateau landscape;
- Pressure from potential visually intrusive expansion of Marks Tey settlement;
- Potential for erection of new farm buildings, which may be conspicuous on the skyline;
- WWII airfield is an important historical and cultural resource.

48. The 'Proposed Landscape Strategy Objective' is to 'Conserve and enhance' and the 'Suggested Landscape Planning Guidelines' are to:

- Conserve the mostly rural character of the area;
- Ensure that any appropriate new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials, which are appropriate to landscape character (refer to the Essex Design Guide for Residential and Mixed Use Areas, Essex Planning Officer Association, 1997, for further information). Such development should be well integrated into the surrounding landscape;
- Ensure that any development on the edges of Marks Tey and Copford responds to traditional settlement patterns and uses design and materials, which are appropriate to local landscape character;
- New farm buildings such as sheds should be sensitively located within the landscape to respect local character and avoid the skyline.

49. And the 'Suggested Land management Guidelines' for LCA B2 are:

- Consider the introduction of new structure planting to shield/ mitigate the visual effects on the A12 / railway and settlement corridor (B2a);
- Strengthen and enhance hedgerows with hawthorn where gappy and depleted;
- Conserve and manage areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland (for example to the north east of Messing Lodge) as important landscape, historical and nature conservation features;
- Conserve historic lanes and unimproved roadside verges.

50. The 'Overall Key Characteristics' for **LCA B4 Great Tey Farmland Plateau** are described as:

- Gently sloping farmland plateau consisting of a mixture of medium to large-scale enclosed, predominantly arable fields;
- Linear belts and small patches of predominantly deciduous woodland;
- Small nucleated settlements and scattered farmsteads;
- Comprehensive network of footpaths and winding lanes;
- Peaceful and tranquil atmosphere.

51. The Visual characteristics are described:

- *There are no visually prominent structures and although pylons and telegraph poles are visible, they are not dominant;*
- *Views within the character area are strongly influenced by sky, which accentuates the linear woodland belts on the skyline;*
- *The church tower at Great Tey is visible from several locations within the area;*
- *Attractive views across the Colne Valley slopes and into the valley floor can be gained from several locations (to the south of Chappel and north of Aldham) along the northern edge of the plateau.*

52. Key Planning and Land Management Issues are described as follows:

- *Pressure for expansion on the edges of Aldham settlement;*
- *Decline in hedgerow management;*
- *Pressure from increased traffic on minor roads;*
- *Pressure from potential expansion of village settlements within adjacent character areas (Fordham Heath, Chappel Hill), impacting on landscape character;*
- *Potential changes in farmland management and expansion of horse paddocks, impacting upon landscape character;*
- *Redundant rural buildings that are important to the character of the area are deteriorating in condition as they fall into disuse.*

53. The 'Proposed Landscape Strategy Objective' is to 'Conserve and enhance' and the 'Suggested Landscape Planning Guidelines' are to:

- *Conserve the mostly rural character of the area;*
- *Encourage the screening of visually intrusive modern farm buildings by using tree belts;*
- *Ensure that any appropriate new development responds to historic settlement pattern and uses materials, which are appropriate to local landscape character (refer to the Essex Design Guide for Residential and Mixed Use Areas, Essex Planning Officers Association, 1997, for further information);*
- *Conserve open views to landmark churches;*
- *New farm buildings such as sheds should be sensitively located within the landscape to respect local character and avoid the skyline.*

54. And for LCA **A5 Colne River Valley Slopes** the 'Overall Key Characteristics'

- *Relatively steep v-shaped valley slopes facilitate attractive and open views across and along the River corridor;*
- *Principal road network consisting of narrow tree-lined (sometimes sunken) lane traversing the valley sides to the north and south;*
- *A mosaic of medium to large-sized irregular and regular, predominantly arable fields with medium hedgerows containing semi-mature/ mature hedgerow trees;*
- *Some larger semi-enclosed arable fields to the west of Wakes Colne; and concentrations of smaller fields with intact hedge boundaries adjacent to settlements;*
- *Settlement pattern consists of small linear village settlements such as Wakes Colne and Eight Ash Green, adjacent to the north-south roads, which cross the River Valley; small hamlets and farmsteads.*

55. Visual characteristics are described:
- *Attractive framed and panoramic views of the meandering river channel and associated floodplain from higher points along the valley sides, such as Hill House Farm to the south of Chappel;*
 - *The church and viaduct at Chappel (within character area A4 Colne Valley Floor) are dominant landmarks in views from both the southern and northern valley sides around Wakes Hall Farm, Old Hall Farm and Wakes Colne;*
 - *The spire of All Saints Norman church at Wakes Colne is a prominent landmark within the landscape, which is intervisible with the church at Chappel (also with a spire) in views from the east;*
 - *Views along the river valley corridor.*
56. Key Planning and Land Management Issues are described as follows:
- *Potential pressure from urban expansions on the edge of West Bergholt, Fordham,*
 - *Wivenhoe and Colchester;*
 - *Localised intrusion from modern farm buildings;*
 - *Potential creation of new woodland in Woodland Trust land to west of Fordham.*
57. The 'Proposed Landscape Strategy Objective' is to 'Conserve and enhance' and the 'Suggested Landscape Planning Guidelines' are to:
- *Ensure any new small-scale development in, or on the edges of Fordham, Wivenhoe, West Bergholt and Colchester is of an appropriate scale, form and design and uses materials which respond to historic settlement pattern, landscape setting and locally distinctive building styles and materials. (Development opportunities are limited around Fordham due to the Woodland Trust site);*
 - *Ensure any new development on valley sides is small-scale, responds to historic settlement pattern, form and building materials;*
 - *Maintain cross-valley views;*
 - *Conserve views of the river and floodplain;*
 - *Ensure that new woodland planting is designed to enhance existing landscape character and species composition reflects local provenance.*

Summary of Potential Effects on Landscape Character

58. The introduction of residential development within the site would result in a change in land use and landscape character of the site itself. Whilst outside the current settlement boundary, development on the site would front onto Halstead Road and have the potential to better connect the different parts of the Eight Ash Green. As a result of the current agricultural land use and its surrounding context there will be an inevitable loss of the rural landscape character of the site, and a limited and localised impact on to the surrounding landscape including the LCAs within which the site is located and indirectly, the two adjoining LCAs. Land to the south of Halstead Road would remain undeveloped and the wider rural character would be retained.
59. In order to reduce the effects and any resultant impact, mitigation should be included that will assist in reducing the visual impact of the development on the surrounding countryside (see below), which will in turn assist in both assimilating the development into it's rural setting as well as integrating it into the

village Eight Ash Green. Mitigation is recommended in two key areas: i) layout and design and ii) landscape buffer areas including planting to the boundaries of the site.

60. Layout and design should draw from the local architectural styles and whilst not precluding contemporary features, traditional building forms with pitched roofs will be most appropriate in respect of integrating new development within the existing setting. Layout should apply best practice urban design principles drawing on the Essex Design Guide and any future local Design Code that may apply for the area.
61. It is not envisaged that development would take up the whole of both fields as landscape buffers incorporating new planting, offsets to the existing woodland and attractive pedestrian connections should be included. In respect of additional planting, whilst it is not considered that the new housing on the site would be out of character with the area, additional tree planting would assist in assimilating development into the surrounding area . Landscape buffers with planting to the west and appropriate off-sets of any new built form should respond to the existing properties at Nimrod Cottages. Similarly offsetting development with a landscape buffer to the east, will assist in integrating any new development with adjacent properties and the existing public right of way. Planting should be focused on native species and contribute towards creating new habitats, enhancing biodiversity and contribute to the wider, existing green infrastructure. The frontage along Halstead Road should be considered to retain the rural character, with new hedge planting and a sensitively designed access into the development.

Views and Visual Amenity

62. The site is visually prominent in views from both directions when travelling along Halstead Road and due to the existence of pavements is experienced by people walking as well as those driving. Similarly, the site is prominent in views from the public footpath that runs along the eastern site boundary and from the driveway towards Nimrod Cottages.



Views looking south and west from the public footpath along the site's eastern boundary

63. Due to intervening vegetation and some properties to the south of Halstead Road, views towards the site from public rights of way to the south are limited or screened, however for those travelling north along Turkey Cock Lane, the western end of the site becomes visible on the approach to the junction with Halstead Road. It is likely that the eastern part of the site is partially visible in some views looking south from The Bridleway where it is seen through gaps in existing houses.
64. In respect of overall contribution to visual amenity, the site, as two agricultural fields and linear strip of woodland makes a positive, albeit local contribution to the visual amenity relating to the generally rural character of the immediate surrounding area. Views to the site do, however take in surrounding built form and are influenced by the traffic travelling along Halstead Road which in addition to effecting the visual amenity, creates noise.



Left – View looking north into western field from Halstead Road. Right – View looking west along Halstead Road with site to the left of the view.

65. In considering the potential effects on public views and visual amenity were the site to be developed for housing, there would be an inevitable change from open views of the two fields and woodland to the north, to houses and associated infrastructure. The effects, however, would be local and experienced only by those passing the site along Halstead Road or seen from the site boundaries including the public right of way to the east.
66. There would also be some localised change in views for the those living in properties that immediately look out on to the site, including from Nimrod Cottages and properties to the south of Halstead Road.
67. As with the recommendations for reducing the impact on landscape character, landscape buffers to the boundaries and good quality design of any new housing will be important considerations in respect of achieving mitigation for the effects on views and visual amenity.

Conclusion

68. In summary, this initial appraisal has been undertaken in order to consider the potential effects of future residential development on the site, which currently comprises two agricultural fields and a strip of woodland, located adjacent to the settlement of Eight Ash Green, near Colchester, Essex. Whilst not a full LVIA, the appraisal follows industry best practice guidance and has been undertaken to separately

consider effects on both landscape and visual amenity along with consideration in respect of the contribution the site makes to the separation of the settlements of Eight Ash Green and Colchester.

69. Having considered potential development on the site it is considered that with appropriate mitigation, in the form of landscape buffers to the perimeter along with good design of both the layout and architecture, new homes of 2-2.5 storeys in height would not result in any undue harm to the site, the surrounding landscape character or the character of the settlements of Eight Ash Green. Whilst it is acknowledged that any development on a green field will result in some landscape harm, the introduction of additional green infrastructure that integrates existing and new tree planting, sustainable drainage, play and open space has the ability to provide multi-functional landscape benefits as well as meeting bio-diversity net gain requirements.
70. In visual terms whilst visible from some locations in the immediate surrounding area much of the site and any future development would be screened by the existing woodland and built form. Where visible, new housing would be seen as an extension of the existing settlement and with the addition of appropriate green infrastructure and high quality design has the potential to sit comfortably in the wider landscape setting.
71. Views from close proximity such as from the footpath alongside the site would change, however it is considered that with appropriate offsets and additional planting, any perceived visual harm will be reduced.
72. With respect the impact on the separation of settlements, development on the site whilst increasing the settlement of Eight Ash Green, would not, to any notable degree reduce the separation between the village and Colchester, both would remain clearly defined settlements. The gap between the different parts of Eight Ash Green would be reduced, however development could facilitate better connectivity between facilities in the different parts of the village and reinforced green infrastructure around the boundaries of the site would provide additional amenity and contribute wider benefits to wildlife and biodiversity on and beyond the site.
73. In overall conclusion it is acknowledged that there would be an inevitable change in both the landscape of the site itself and the views towards it, were the site to be allocated and developed for housing in the future. Whilst outside the existing settlement boundaries, the site is not designated nor does it form part of the setting to any such landscape. There would be a localised loss to the small area of agricultural land however the prevailing rural character beyond the village would remain as would the sense of a distinct settlement and clear separation between Eight Ash Green and Colchester.



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