

Layer Road, Colchester

Landscape Note



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1 Introduction

Introduction

- 1.1 This Landscape Note has been produced by Cornus Landscape Planning and Design on behalf of LandVest and Harding Homes to provide initial landscape advice relating to the re-development of land at Layer Road, Colchester.
- 1.2 The proposals are for new residential development and associated infrastructure.
- 1.3 The report provides high level technical advice to inform the proposals and pre-application advice being sought. This does not comprise a full LVIA or LVA which will be prepared to support the subsequent application.
- 1.4 The report reviews the landscape and visual baseline and provides recommendations to inform the development of the site to ensure the proposals are accommodated sensitively and respond to the landscape character and visual context.
- 1.5 This report is structured as follows:
 - 1. Introduction
 - 2. Landscape Context
 - 3. Visual Context
 - 4. Design Recommendations

Site Location and Context

- 1.6 The site is located at grid reference TL 97726 22041 and is found on the southern edge of the City of Colchester. Its location and context are illustrated on **Plan 1: Site Location and Context (CLPD 245 P01)**.
- 1.7 It is located on a single narrow parcel of land which is approximately 2.5 hectares and located to the east of Layer Road.

Local Planning Policy Designations

- 1.8 The site falls within the local authority of Colchester City Council, and the relevant adopted local plan is the Colchester Borough Local Plan 2013-2033.
- 1.9 Any future development should accord with the adopted policies and those relevant to landscape matters are identified as:

- Policy SP 7 Place Shaping Principles

- Policy ENV1: Environment
- Policy ENV3: Green Infrastructure
- Policy PP1: Generic Infrastructure and Mitigation Requirements

Local Designations

- 1.10 The site is not within any designations but to the immediate west is Gosbecks Archaeological Park which is Scheduled Ancient Monument and Designated Public Open Space.
- 1.11 This is identified on the extracted local plan map below found at **Figure 1**.

Emerging Local Plan

- 1.12 The land to the east of the site is identified within the emerging Colchester Local Plan as a draft allocation (Policy PP10: Land South of Berechurch Hall Road, Colchester). Its location, along with the site boundary is overlaid on **Figure 1** below.
- 1.13 This draft allocation site is identified as having the capacity to accommodate 875 new dwellings.

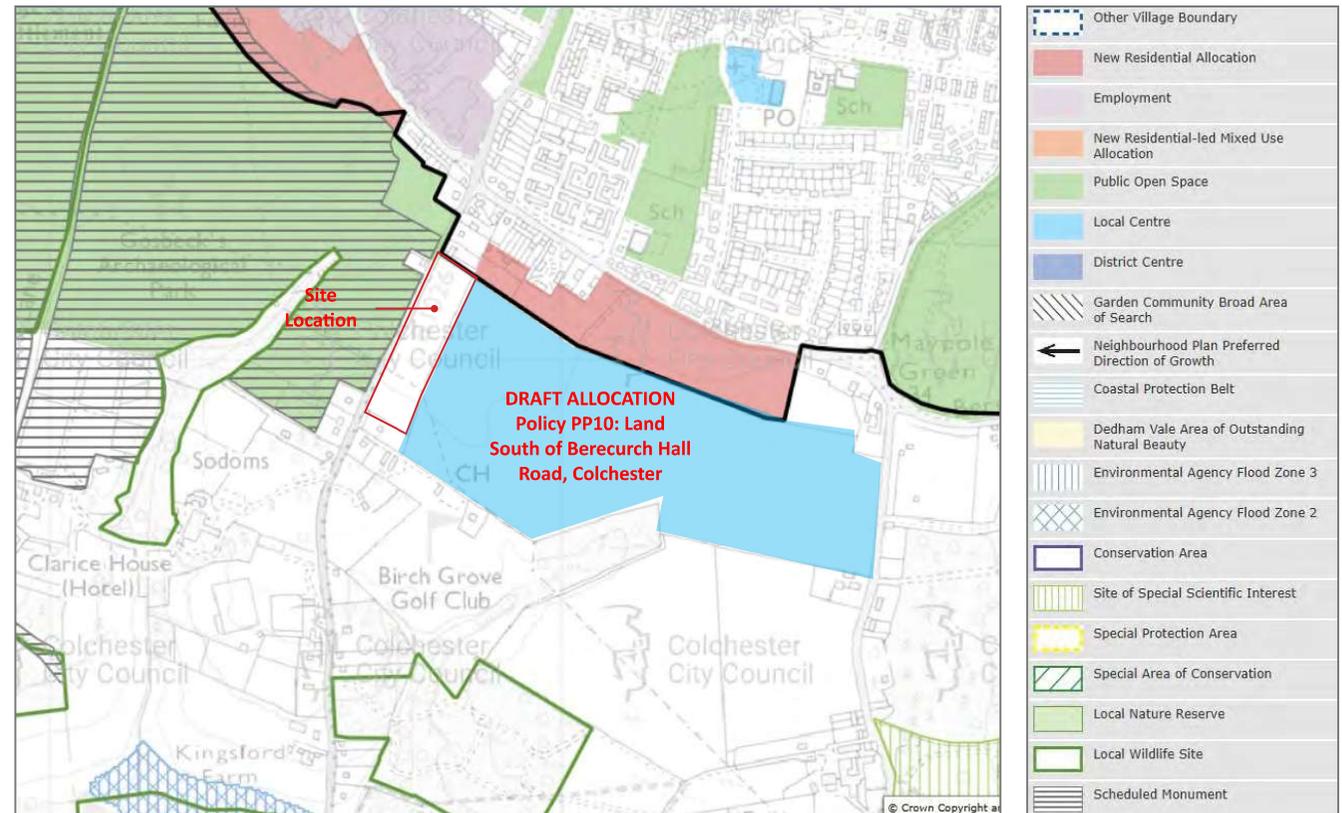


Figure 1: Extract from policies map, Colchester City Council Local Plan, overlaid with site location and location of Draft Allocation Site Policy PP10.





- Legend
- Site Boundary
 - DRAFT ALLOCATION
Policy PP10: Land South
of Berechurch Hall Road,
Colchester

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Plan Name	Site Location and Context
Plan Number	CLPD 245 P01
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Date	19.06.2025

Not to scale



2 Landscape Context

Landscape Context and Character

- 2.1 A review is provided of the site specific and local landscape character and the relevant published landscape character assessment.

Local Landscape Character

- 2.2 An assessment of the site specific character has been completed and this is illustrated on **Plan 3: Landscape Context and Character (CLPD 208 P02)**. This is supported by **Images A-E** to describe the site.

Local site context

- 2.3 The site is located on the southern edge of Colchester on a linear parcel of land which extends along Layer Road. Its current land use is for horse paddocks and enclosures (**Image A**).
- 2.4 To the north is the existing settlement edge and residential dwellings which extend to the wider settlement of Colchester (**Image D**).
- 2.5 To the south are a collection of residential dwellings and Birch Road Golf Club. The site and its surroundings are influenced by the settlement edge, with residential dwellings overlooking the northern and southern boundaries (**Image A**).
- 2.6 The site is not located within a landscape which is devoid of human activity and is influenced by its peri-urban setting and context.
- 2.7 To the west is Gosbecks Archaeological Park which is Scheduled Ancient Monument and Designated Public Open Space. A number of permissive recreational routes are located within this local landscape, and access to these can be gained off Layer Road.
- 2.8 To the east, agricultural land is found between the site and Boundstead Road, and these field parcels are identified as a draft allocation for 875 dwellings within the emerging Colchester City Local Plan.

Topography

- 2.9 The landform of the site is flat, and the local landscape around the site is also relatively flat with some gentle undulations to the south and west.

Site Features

- 2.10 Boundary trees found along Layer Road provide a contained character to the site, with mature trees contributing to the vegetated frontage along Layer Road (**Images A and C**).

2.11 The eastern boundary is also well contained, and formed by mature trees and scrub. This boundary has some gaps in places and as such there are glimpsed visual connections to the adjacent parcels of land to the east (**Image A**).

2.12 The southern boundary is formed by trees and fencing which separates the site from the adjacent residential property. This boundary affords a more open edge and character (**Image B**).

2.13 The tree survey information provided as part of the pre-application process identifies that the boundary trees comprise a mix of Category A, B, C and U. These mature trees provide a positive contribution to the local landscape and route along Layer Road, and provide the site with a contained and secluded character (**Images C and E**).

Published Landscape Character

2.14 The Landscape Character Assessment relevant to the site is the Colchester Landscape Character Assessment (November 2024).

2.15 The site falls within the Farmland Plateau Landscape Character Type and locally within LCA B3 Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau. The extent of this character area is indicated on the extracted map below as **Figure 2**, and the site is located centrally within this LCA.

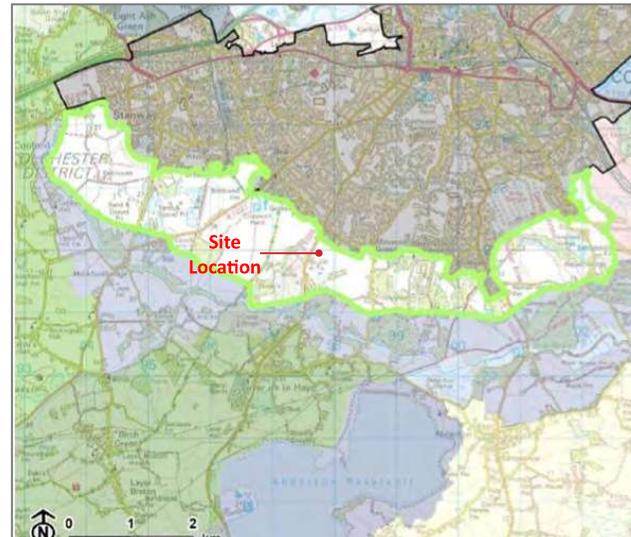


Figure 2: Extract from Colchester Landscape Character Assessment

2.16 The key characteristics of this LCA are identified as:

- *Gently undulating plateau, falling gradually from the urban edge of Colchester to the north towards the Roman River valley to the south.*
- *Predominantly arable landscape interspersed with some large areas of woodland including Ancient Woodland and more recent plantation.*
- *Field pattern of various sizes and shapes; boundaries are largely defined by low, unclipped, gappy hedgerows albeit with some taller hedgerows along roadsides.*
- *Frequent woodland belts, tree cover along watercourses and some larger woodland blocks.*
- *A landscape which displays rich history of inhabitation, including an Iron Age Oppida and later Roman theatre and temple at Gosbeck's, and later Medieval parkland at Berechurch Hall.*
- *The large area of remnant heath and Ancient Woodland at Friday Wood are distinctive landscape features.*
- *Crossed by a number of roads that radiate out from central Colchester.*
- *Good levels of public access via several public rights of way (PRoW), permissive paths, and National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 1. However, access is sometimes restricted in areas used for military training.*
- *A generally enclosed landscape with long distance views limited by mature woodland; some longer views in larger arable fields and/or where hedgerows missing or gappy.*
- *An overall rural landscape, particularly on lower-lying land to the south away from these urban influences; a peri-urban character in the west around Stanway and in the north adjoining urban edge of Colchester.*

2.17 The site shares some of the characteristics of the Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau LCA, these are specifically the woodland belts found to the boundaries of the site, and the enclosed landscape.

2.18 It is also located within close proximity to Gosbecks Geological Park, although there is limited intervisibility between this designated area and the site.

2.19 The site is peri-urban in its character due to the proximity and relationship with the existing residential dwellings and settlement edge found along Layer Road.



2 Landscape Context

2.20 The LCA states the following with regard to the landscape strategy for the area:

- *The overall strategy for the Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau LCA is to conserve and enhance the wooded and enclosed character of the landscape, by managing existing woodland, woodland cover and increasing the extent and quality of field boundaries.*
- *Recreational access to the landscape should be maintained and sensitively managed particularly around areas of nature conservation and archaeological value. Development should be sensitively integrated into the landscape using appropriate boundary treatments.*

2.21 Specific guidelines relating to landscape management are as follows:

- *Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of remaining boundary hedgerows and encourage their restoration/reinstatement using species appropriate to the local character and climatic conditions.*
- *Protect and enhance all valued habitats, including Ancient Woodland at Butchers Wood and Friday Wood, deciduous woodland, heathland and grassland, and improve linkages between them.*
- *Seek to expand the woodland network to enhance the character of the landscape and the setting of Colchester. Concentrate resources in the west where the woodland network is least extensive and there has been recent disturbance due to mineral extraction. Consider opportunities suggested within the Colchester Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011) for Zone 6: Southern Farmland Zone (Project 5.1) for increasing the connectivity of the 'necklace' of woodland to the south of Colchester.*
- *Maintain and Enhance longer range views from more open higher ground, particularly around Gosbeck's Archaeological Park.*
- *Protect and manage the Iron Age and Roman remains at Gosbeck's and Cheshunt Field, while seeking to maintain and improve interpretation of this important site.*
- *Protect and manage historic parkland pasture at Berechurch Hall to preserve the sense of time-depth and historic character.*
- *Protect the relative tranquillity of lower-lying areas away from urban influences along the southern boundary of the area.*

2.22 Specific guidelines relating to development are as follows:

- *Large scale or visually intrusive development would alter the overall rural character of the landscape, and should be avoided where possible, particularly in the south.*

- *Resist ribbon development along the numerous roads radiating from Colchester, particularly those that retain a rural character (including Oliver's Lane, Bounstead Road and Fingringhoe Road).*
- *Encourage the integration of development into the landscape through the use of locally characteristic tree belts and woodlands to reinforce wooded and enclosed character.*
- *Ensure that any development respects the setting of important heritage features and sites.*
- *Retain the settlement pattern of dispersed farmsteads. Conserve the local distinctiveness of historic buildings and their setting.*
- *Maintain and enhance the rural character of roads. Resist unsympathetic highway improvement that would threaten their rural character.*
- *Seek to reduce lighting impacts and avoid any further reduction in tranquillity from the urban edge of Colchester in the north.*

Landscape Context Summary

2.23 The site is located on the edge of Colchester and exhibits peri-urban characteristics. It is well screened and contained from the wider landscape by established mature belts of trees which run along Layer Road at the western boundary and along the eastern boundary with the adjacent landscape.

2.24 The land use is currently horse paddocks and there are no internal landscape features within the site. The site lies within close proximity to the Gosbecks Archaeological Park and there is limited intervisibility between this designated area and the site due to the established belt of vegetation found to Layer Road.

2.25 The following recommendations are provided in order for the site to respond to its local landscape character and context, and to respond to the key characteristics identified within the Colchester Landscape Character Assessment (November 2024), and specifically those characteristics identified within LCA B3 Southern Colchester Farmland Plateau.

- Retain boundary vegetation to maintain ecological and landscape connectivity and contained character;
- Provide appropriate offsets to boundary vegetation and enhance boundaries with additional native species;
- Seek opportunities to provide additional internal characteristic tree and hedgerow planting within the site to reinforce wooded character and provide additional landscape and ecological connectivity.
- Protect the setting of the adjacent Gosbecks Archaeological Park through offsets and retention of vegetation;
- Avoid visually intrusive structures and development;
- Increase the diversity of species and habitat types within the site; and
- Provide a soft transition at the southern edge of the site along Layer Road and integrate development with additional trees to maintain wooded context and character.





- Site Boundary
- DRAFT ALLOCATION
Policy PP10: Land South
of Bereurch Hall Road,
Colchester

Base mapping sourced from Google Earth Pro.

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Plan Name	Landscape Context and Character
Plan Number	CLPD 245 P02
Revision	-
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Not to scale





3 Visual Context

Visual Survey

- 3.1 A site visit was completed on the 29th April 2025 March 2025, where photographs were taken from selected viewpoints with a digital camera with a 50mm focal length lens at eye level (approximately 1600mm above ground). Photos were taken in late spring when trees were in full leaf.
- 3.2 The selected photos assist in providing an initial overview of the visual context of the site and provide a high level assessment of the likely visual context and likely impact on views.
- 3.3 A full visual analysis will be completed as part of the application process, and this will include the preparation of Zone of Theoretical Visibility mapping to provide a comprehensive assessment of the likely viewpoints and subsequent identification of people (visual receptors) likely to experience a change in their view as a result of the proposed development.
- 3.4 Potential public views are illustrated on **Photosheets 1-6** and the associated **Plan 3: Viewpoint Location Plan (CLPD 208 P03)**. This does not include views from private residential properties, although reference is made to these where relevant (eg at the southern and northern boundaries of the site).

Local views Layer Road (Photoviewpoints 1-4)

- 3.5 From Layer Road when travelling north towards Colchester, glimpsed views of the site can be seen across the southern boundary where the adjacent residential property overlooks this edge. Within these views, a small part of the site can be seen and views are partial (**Photoviewpoint 4**).
- 3.6 Travelling further north, views become more filtered and screened by the dense boundary vegetation which flanks Layer Road (**Photoviewpoint 3**). The site is contained from view along the majority of this route and the mature trees provide a vegetated context and approach along Layer Road. Fleeting views can be seen at the existing field gate, and where vegetation is lower, glimpses can be seen of the existing paddock stables within the site.
- 3.7 Views from the northern edge of Colchester looking south along Layer Road are filtered by the dense belt of boundary vegetation (**Photoviewpoints 1 and 2**), and within these views the settlement edge of Colchester can be seen.

Views from within the Golbecks Archaeological Park (Photoviewpoint 5)

- 3.8 From footpath routes within the Golbecks Archaeological Park, views of the site of filtered by the boundary vegetation found along Layer Road. Within these views, glimpses can be seen of existing residential dwellings along Layer Road.

Views from the east (Photoviewpoint 6)

- 3.9 From the east, views are filtered by the boundary vegetation found along the eastern edge of the site. This vegetation is gappy in places, and glimpses are likely through gaps along this edge.
- 3.10 Glimpsed views can be seen of the houses to the south of the site off Layer Road and the new development located to the north east of the site which are seen within a vegetated context.
- 3.11 The visual context within these views is likely to change if the draft allocation on the land to the east of the site is taken forward, with residential built form seen within closer proximity within the foreground of these views.

Views from private residential properties overlooking the site boundaries.

- 3.12 The boundaries to the north and south of the site are formed by private residential dwellings and these residential will likely experience short distance and direct views of the site.

Wider views

- 3.13 The built form around the settlement of Colchester to the north of the site, combined with the presence of dense vegetation and the gently undulating landform to the south limits visibility.
- 3.14 To the south and west, the dense blocks of woodland around Layer-de-la-Haye and Friday Wood are also likely to limit visibility.

Visual Context Summary

- 3.15 Views of the site are localised and limited due to the presence of dense boundary vegetation found to the eastern and western edges of the site, and the flat landform which also has an impact on visibility.
- 3.16 Where views of the site are seen from the south they are glimpsed and partial and views are fleeting for users travelling along Layer Road.
- 3.17 There will be direct views of the site for residents who overlook the southern and northern edges.
- 3.18 Views from within Golbecks Archaeological Park are filtered by the intervening boundary vegetation which screens the site from these local recreational routes.
- 3.19 Within the wider landscape, views are filtered by the built form around Colchester and the blocks of woodland found to the south and east.
- 3.20 If adopted, the visual context of the site is also likely to change as a result of the draft allocation Policy PP10: Land South of Berechurch Hall Road, Colchester, with additional built form and urbanising features influencing the site and its local context.
- 3.21 The following recommendations are made to allow the proposed redevelopment to be accommodated in relation to the visual context of the site:
 - Visually intrusive structures should be avoided;
 - The existing mature boundary vegetation should be maintained and enhanced with additional native species along the eastern and southern boundaries to maintain the contained context and visual screening;
 - Offsets should be provided at the southern edge of the site to provide a soft transition within glimpsed views along Layer Road from the south;
 - Any removal of vegetation to accommodate vehicular access points along Layer Road should be carefully planned and landscape mitigation provided to filter views into the site;
 - Additional native planting and bolstering of the vegetation along the eastern boundary will assist in enhancing the visual screening effects of this edge; and
 - The northern and southern edges of the site should be enhanced to assimilate development within views from private residential properties overlooking the site.





- Site Boundary
- 1 ▶ Public viewpoints with potential visibility

Base mapping sourced from Googlemaps.co.uk

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Plan Name	Viewpoint Locations
Plan Number	CLPD 245 P03
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Not to scale





Description: Taken from Layer Road looking south, adjacent to the existing residential properties to the north of the site

Photoviewpoint 1



Description: Taken from Layer Road looking south.

Photoviewpoint 2





Description: Taken from Layer Road at access point into Gosbecks Archaeological Park.

Photoviewpoint 3



Description: Taken from southern edge of the site overlooking the southern boundary from the adjacent residential property

Photoviewpoint 4





Description: Taken from footpath route within Gosbecks Archaeological Park to the west of the site.

Photoviewpoint 5



Description: Taken from Bounstead Road to the east of the site.

Photoviewpoint 6



4 Design Recommendations

Design Recommendations

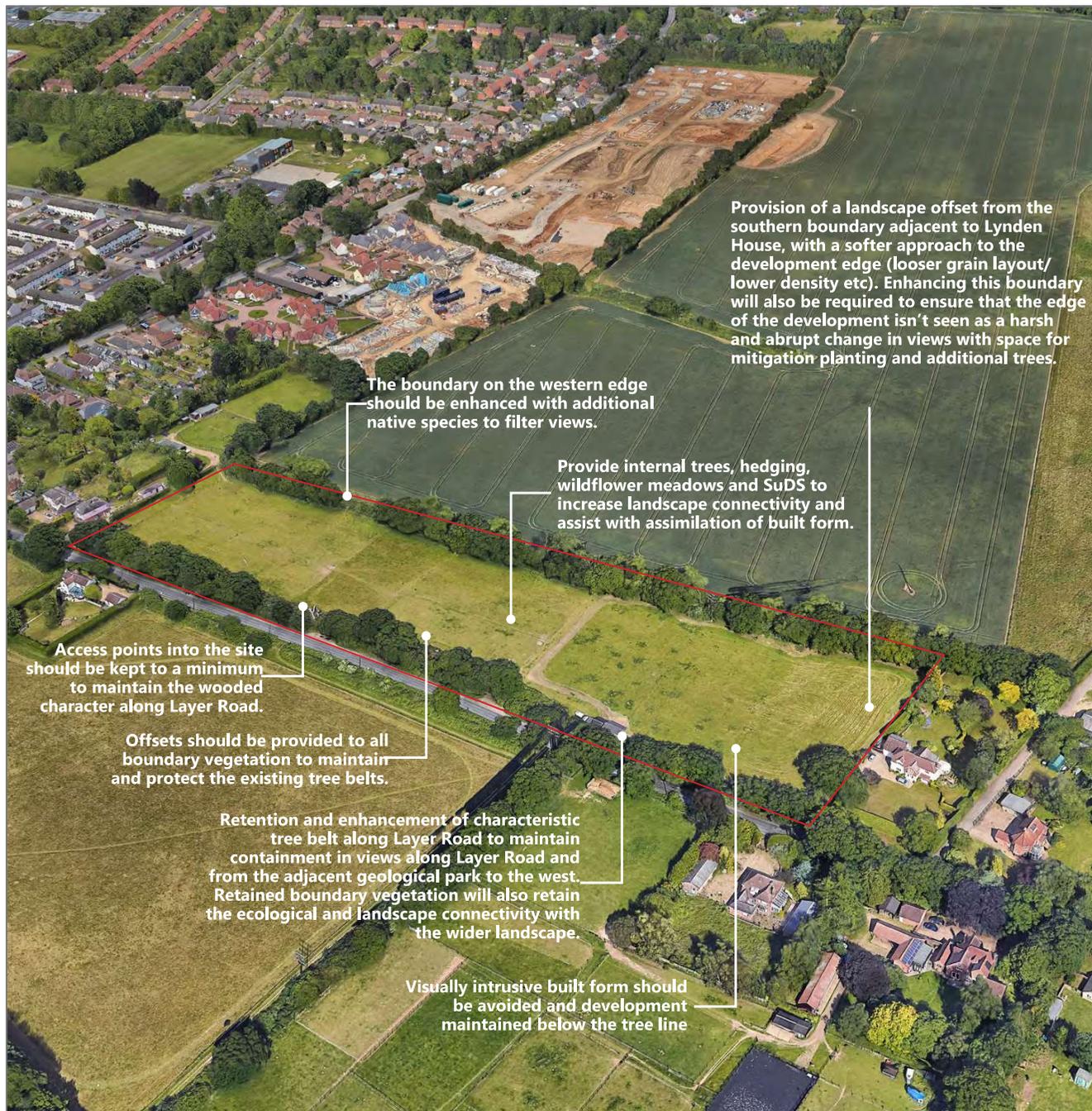
- 4.1 The initial assessment of the landscape and visual context has provided the following recommendations which are illustrated on the associated **Plan 4: Design Recommendations Plan (CLPD 208 P04)**.
- 4.2 These recommendations provide initial observations on how the development of the site can be accommodated into the landscape sensitively to provide benefits to landscape character, and visual amenity.
- The boundary vegetation found along Layer Road provides a dense screen for people travelling along this route, and within views from Golbecks Archaeological Park to the west. This characteristic boundary vegetation should be retained and enhanced to maintain visual containment and reflect the wider landscape character and connected green infrastructure.
 - Landscape offsets should be provided to all boundary vegetation to maintain and protect the existing tree belts.
 - Access points should be kept to a minimum to reduce tree loss and maintain the wooded character along Layer Road, with any loss replaced and mitigated elsewhere within the site.
 - The access into the site should be located as close to the existing settlement edge of Colchester as possible.
 - The southern boundary with Lynden House is relatively open compared to the other boundaries, and as such views into the site can be seen both from this residential property and at the approach along Layer Road, therefore the provision of a landscape offset from the southern boundary is recommended, and a softer approach to the development edge should also be considered (looser grain layout/lower density etc).
 - Enhancements should be made along this boundary with new native planting, hedging to screen views
 - The western boundary of the site should be maintained and enhanced with additional native tree and scrub to increase landscape connectivity and visual containment
 - A diverse mix of habitats should be provided within the site to increase the ecological and landscape connectivity, provide an attractive environment and assist with assimilation of built form. The proposed landscape scheme should include a diverse mix of trees, scrub, hedgerows, SuDS and meadow grassland and should be incorporated into multi-functional green corridors.
 - Provide recreational access to link to the wider network of routes to the west.
 - Avoid visually intrusive built form and maintain development below the tree line.

Summary

- 4.3 This Landscape Note has analysed the baseline landscape and visual context of the site and provided recommendations for how the site can be accommodated into the receiving landscape.
- 4.4 It demonstrates that the site has the potential to accommodate residential development and built form and provides opportunities to enhance the existing landscape setting and context, with scope for benefits to ecology, recreation and character.



4 Design Recommendations



Site Boundary

Base mapping sourced from Google Earth Pro.

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Plan Name	Design Recommendations
Plan Number	CLPD 245 P04
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