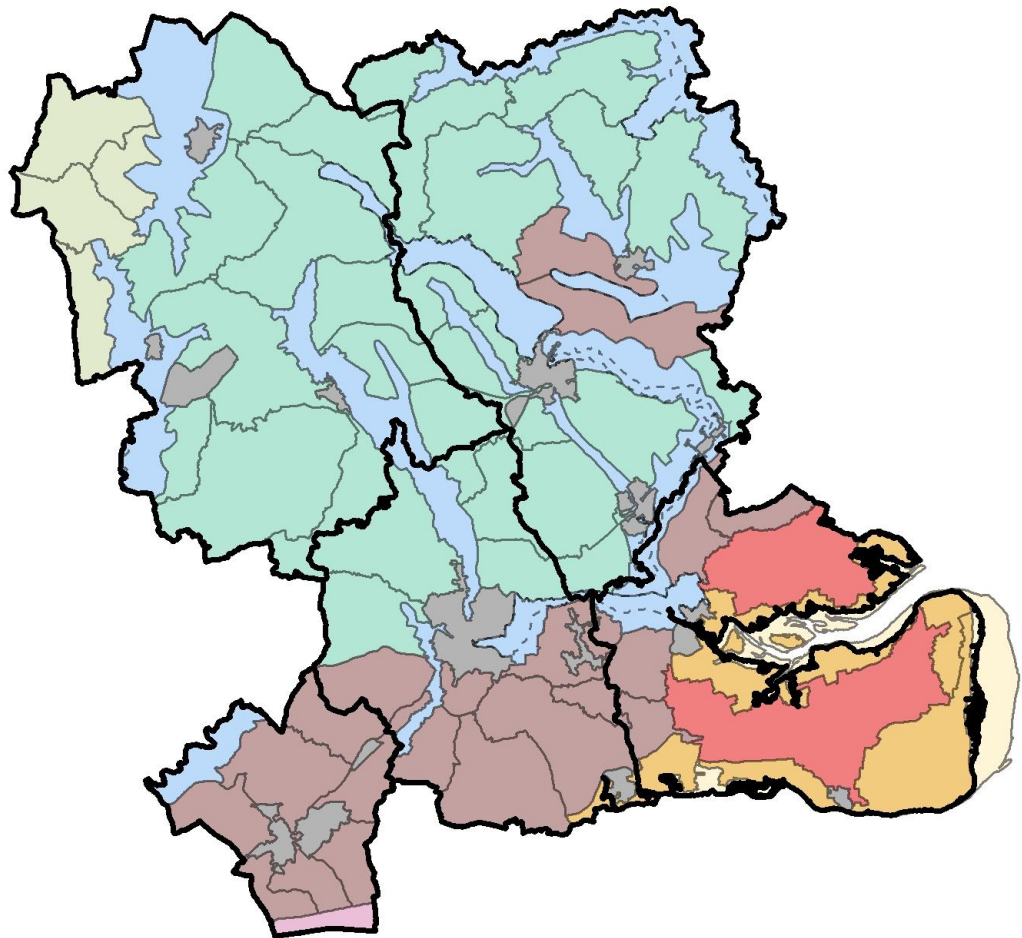




**BRAINTREE, BRENTWOOD, CHELMSFORD,
MALDON AND UTTLESFORD
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENTS**




September 2006

CHRIS BLANDFORD ASSOCIATES

Environment Landscape Planning

**Braintree DC, Brentwood BC, Chelmsford BC,
Maldon DC & Uttlesford DC**

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Position: Director
Date: 27 September 2006

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PREFACE

This Technical Study was commissioned jointly by Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Chelmsford Borough Council, Maldon District Council and Uttlesford District Council.

The Study provides a baseline inventory of the landscape character of the five authority areas. It also sets out recommendations for the application of the Study for consideration and action as appropriate by the local authorities. The need to protect and enhance landscape character is recognised by Government planning policy on the delivery of sustainable development through the planning system. To ensure that full account is given to landscape character in planning decisions, this Study is commended to the local authorities for use as an evidence base for informing the preparation of Local Development Frameworks and in development control.

The preparation of the Study was steered by officers from the five local authorities. We are grateful for the advice and guidance provided by the Steering Group, namely:

- Melvyne Crow– Braintree District Council
- Melanie Jones and Sarah Nicholas – Uttlesford District Council
- Paul McBride and Derek Stebbing – Chelmsford Borough Council
- Geoff Boyton – Brentwood Borough Council
- Chris Bailey and Zyuoya Ling – Maldon District Council

In addition, we appreciate the help of other Council officers and individuals from other organisations who willingly assisted in the provision of data and information for the Study. We would also like to acknowledge the representatives of organisations who attended the three stakeholder consultation workshops held during the course of the Study (see Appendix A for details). The information gained from these stakeholders provided an important input to the Study.

The Consultant Team comprised:

- Dominic Watkins
- Emma Clarke
- Marian Cameron
- Alison MacDonald
- Darina Williams

Chris Blandford Associates
September 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In October 2005 Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Chelmsford Borough Council, Maldon District Council and Uttlesford District Council jointly commissioned Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) to undertake Landscape Character Assessments of their respective areas.

The aim of the Study is to provide a comprehensive Borough/District-wide assessment of landscape character within the Study Area to inform land use planning and land management decisions. The Landscape Character Assessment will be specifically used as a technical evidence base to inform the Local Development Frameworks currently being prepared by the respective local planning authorities.

The overall aim of landscape planning, design and management should be to achieve ‘sustainable landscapes’ that are as visually, biodiverse and culturally rich as possible to meet all of society’s social, economic and environmental needs. A better understanding of landscapes provided by Landscape Character Assessments – their diversity, character and distinctiveness, evolution, sensitivity to change and their management needs – is essential to help to work towards this goal.

Methodology

The overall approach to the study is based on *Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland* (Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002), the latest published guidance, and takes into account current best practice. Landscape Character Assessment addresses both the relatively objective process of landscape characterisation, which involves identifying, mapping, classifying and describing ‘landscape character’, and the more subjective process of evaluating landscape character to inform planning and land management decisions. In summary, the main stages involved in the study process were:

- Desk Study Research
- Field Survey
- Characterisation
- Evaluation
- Preparation of the Study Report

Consultation with key stakeholder organisations at three main stages of the above process was an important and integral element of the Study. The purpose of the stakeholder consultation was to strengthen the evidence base by gathering opinions about landscape character from the key stakeholders, and to promote the value of the Study as a tool for informing planning and land management decisions in rural areas. As a technical study, local community and special interest groups were not consulted on the Study at this preparatory stage. However, it is anticipated that community involvement in the future application of the Landscape Character Assessment will be encouraged through development of character-based design guidance at the local level (e.g. Village Design Statements, Town Design Statements, Parish Plans etc.).

Content of the Report

Section 1.0 sets out the context for the Study. It explains the background to the Study, its aims and objectives, and highlights the importance of landscape character. It also describes the planning policy framework for the Study, and outlines the approach and process behind the assessment methodology.

Section 2.0 provides an overview of the Study Area. It describes the physical and historical influences on the landscape, and identifies the key forces for change affecting landscape character today. This section also provides an overview of landscape character across the Study Area as a whole in its national and county context.

Eight separate Landscape Character Types were defined at 1:25,000 scale within the Study Area. Landscape Character Types are generic and have broadly similar patterns of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use, settlement and field systems. The eight Landscape Character Types have been broken down into seventy Landscape Character Areas that reflect distinctive variations in local character based on visual analysis of how different combinations of physical features and perceptual qualities such as scale, pattern, tranquillity, cultural associations, etc. create areas of distinctive landscape character.

Sections 3.0 to 7.0 of the report provide the detailed ‘profiles’ of the Landscape Character Areas identified within Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon and Uttlesford respectively. The profiles are structured as follows:

- Key characteristics
- Overall character description
- Visual characteristics
- Historic land use
- Ecological features
- Key planning and land management issues
- Sensitivities to change
- Proposed landscape strategy objectives
- Suggested landscape planning guidelines
- Suggested land management guidelines

The evaluation of indicative landscape sensitivity for each Landscape Character Area took into account the area’s intrinsic landscape qualities, biodiversity value, visual characteristics (intervisibility and visual prominence), historic integrity and its re-creatability. The sensitivity analysis, together with the proposed strategy objectives and suggested guidelines for each Landscape Character Area, can be used to inform:

- the identification of spatial development options within the District/Borough Local Development Frameworks.
- Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment of Local Development Framework site allocations.
- the highlighting of landscape issues that may need to be considered in greater detail in relation to development control decisions for major schemes.
- the application of criteria-based landscape protection and enhancement policies within Local Development Frameworks.

Section 8.0 sets out the consultant’s recommendations to the commissioning authorities for their consideration and action as appropriate. Recommendations are provided for the application of the Landscape Character Assessment including its use in relation to informing Local Development Framework policies for protecting and enhancing landscape character, and in providing a baseline and framework for monitoring landscape change. Recommendations for further work required to enhance the evidence base on the landscape and settlement character of the Study Area are also included.

