

# **Earls Colne Parish Council**



# **Earls Colne Neighbourhood Plan 2023-2033**

**Regulation 16 Consultation version September 2024**





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# 1 Introduction

## What is neighbourhood planning?

- 1.1 The 2011 Localism Act gives local communities powers to produce neighbourhood plans which can be used to guide and shape future development in an area. Once made, a neighbourhood plan forms part of the development plan for the area. It will be used alongside the Braintree District Local Plan to determine planning applications.
- 1.2 Neighbourhood plans must be subject to public consultation, examination, and local referendum prior to adoption. Policies contained within a neighbourhood plan should be supported by documented evidence and assessment of their sustainability as necessary. Neighbourhood plans must have regard to national policy, contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), particularly in relation to supporting and promoting sustainable development.
- 1.3 Where a Neighbourhood plan is aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area in Braintree district, neighbourhood planning can provide a powerful set of tools for local people to ensure that they get the right types of future development for their community.
- 1.4 It is important to emphasise that Braintree District Council (BDC) through its Local Plan establishes the quantity of new development that Earls Colne is to take. The minimum number of new homes to be built in the village is therefore non-negotiable but, with a neighbourhood plan in place, the community can have influence over a range of matters that it cares about and affects the daily lives of its residents and businesses.
- 1.5 Any Neighbourhood Plan must meet the basic conditions set out below:
  - the Neighbourhood Plan has regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
  - the making of the Neighbourhood Plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development;
  - the making of the Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area;
  - the making of the Neighbourhood Plan does not breach and is otherwise compatible with EU obligations;
  - prescribed conditions are met in relation to the Neighbourhood Plan and prescribed matters have been complied with in connection to proposals within the Neighbourhood Plan.

## Purpose of the plan

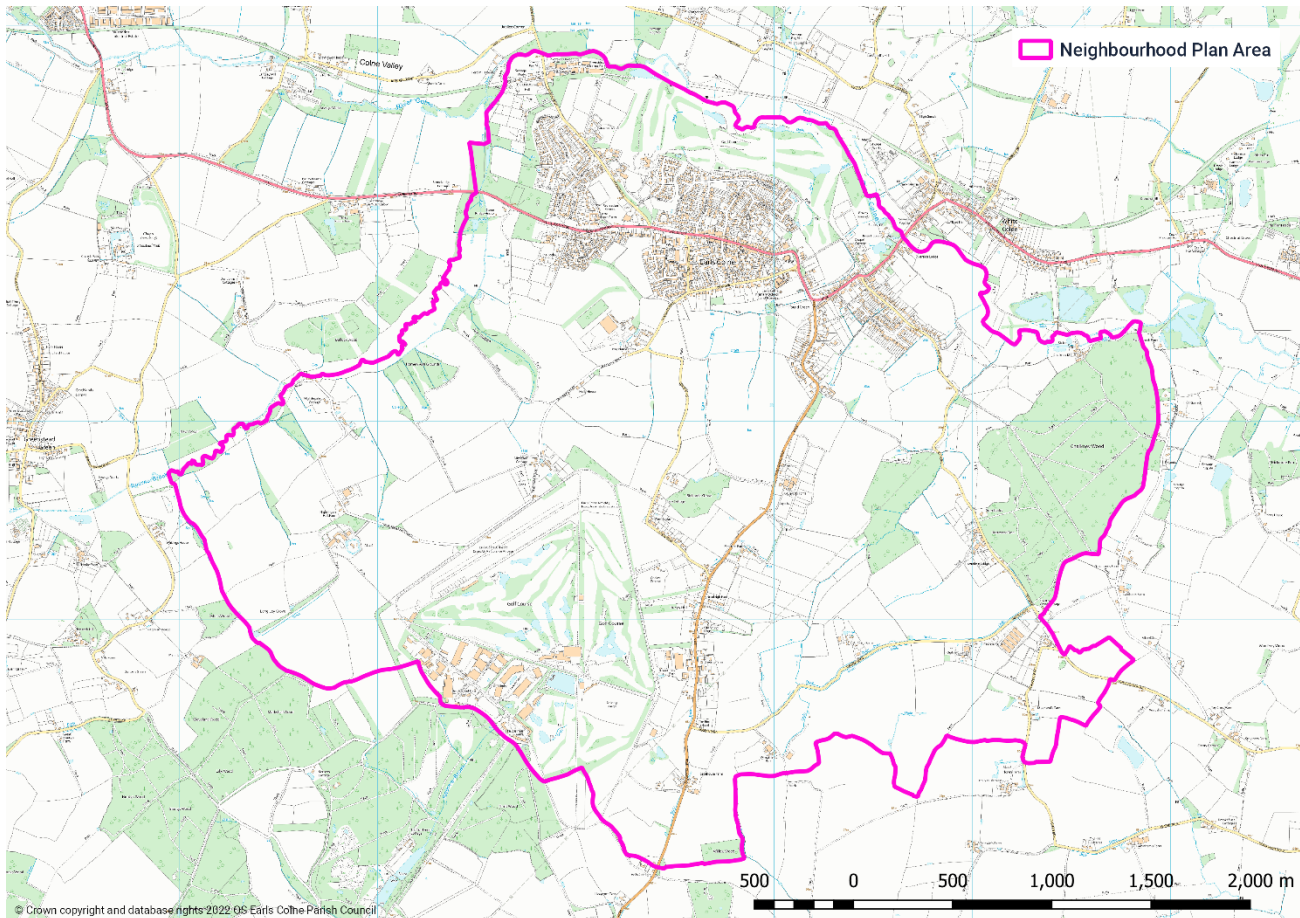
- 1.6 This document represents the Neighbourhood Plan for Earls Colne for the period 2023 to 2033. The Plan contains a vision for the future of Earls Colne and sets out clear planning policies to realise this vision.

- 1.7** The principal purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan is to guide development within Earls Colne. It also provides guidance to anyone wishing to submit a planning application for development within the parish. The process of producing a plan has sought to involve the community as widely as possible. The different topic areas are reflective of matters that are of considerable importance to Earls Colne, its residents, businesses and community groups.
- 1.8** Some of the Neighbourhood Plan policies are general and apply throughout the Plan area, whilst others are site or area-specific and apply only to the appropriate areas illustrated on the relevant map. Nevertheless, in considering proposals for development, Braintree District Council will apply all relevant policies of the Plan. It is therefore assumed that the Plan will be read as a whole, although some cross-referencing between Plan policies has been provided.
- 1.9** The process of producing the Neighbourhood Plan has identified a number of actions which have not been included in the policies' sections. This is because these are not specifically related to land use matters and therefore sit outside the jurisdiction of a Neighbourhood Plan. These actions will be addressed by Earls Colne Parish Council outside of the Neighbourhood Plan process.

## Policy context

- 1.10** Once 'made', the Neighbourhood Plan will form part of the development plan for the area alongside the Braintree District Local Plan 2022, Essex Minerals Local Plan (2014) and the Essex and Southend-on-Sea Waste Local Plan (2017). Policies within these Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plan should therefore be considered collectively in the determination of development proposals in the area. It is a requirement that the Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan.
- 1.11** Essex County Council is the Minerals and Waste Authority for the Plan area and is responsible for the production of mineral and waste local plans. The Development Plan in Earls Colne therefore also comprises the Essex Minerals Local Plan 2014 (MLP) and the Essex and Southend-on-Sea Waste Local Plan 2017 (WLP). These plans set out the policy framework within which minerals and waste planning applications are assessed. They also contain policies which safeguard known mineral bearing land from sterilisation, and existing, permitted and allocated mineral and waste infrastructure from proximal development which may compromise their operation.
- 1.12** Braintree District Council, as the local planning authority, designated the Earls Colne Neighbourhood Area in March 2019 to enable Earls Colne Parish Council to prepare the Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan has been prepared by the community through the Earls Colne Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.
- 1.13** The Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Town & Country Planning Act 1990, the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Localism Act 2011 and the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 (which were amended in 2015). The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group has prepared the plan to establish a vision for the future of Earls Colne parish and to set out how that vision will be realised through planning and controlling land use and development change over the plan period.

- 1.14** The map in Figure 1.1 below shows the boundary of the Neighbourhood Plan area, which is the same as the administrative boundary of Earls Colne parish.



**Figure 1.1 Earls Colne neighbourhood plan area**

## Monitoring the Plan

- 1.15** Earls Colne Parish Council, as the responsible body, will be responsible for maintaining and periodically revisiting the Plan to ensure relevance and to monitor delivery.

## 2 Local Context

- 2.1** Earls Colne is situated near the Essex and Suffolk border, and is surrounded by mixed farmlands punctuated by ancient, mainly broadleaved woodlands. From several footpaths, there are many attractive views across the river valley and open fields; it is the type of scenery depicted by local artists Gainsborough and Constable, now considered to be the very essence English, rural landscape. The High Street has many ancient timber framed buildings giving an impressive and distinctive roof-scape; along the length of the main road is a rich variety of fine buildings from all periods of history that make our village visually interesting and a place its inhabitants are rightly proud of.

### History of Earls Colne

- 2.2** Earls Colne has a long history. There is archaeological evidence of settlement during both the Stone Age and Roman times. It is mentioned in the Domesday Book, compiled under William the Conqueror from the 11th century, and has remained inhabited since.
- 2.3** During Norman times, the parish was given to the Earls of Oxford. Two prominent buildings, the church and the Priory, were founded by the family in the 12th century. The stars on the Church tower, built in the 16th century, relate to the family's coat of arms and participation in the crusades. Other religious buildings include a Baptist Chapel and the Quaker Meeting House: dating from the 17th century, the latter still contains one of the oldest galleries in the country.
- 2.4** Earls Colne also had its own Grammar School, founded in 1520 by the Reverend Swallow. This was closed in 1975 but the handsome buildings remain a feature of York Road. They were built in 1904 with generous funds donated by the Hunt family who owned the Atlas Works foundry. Other equally impressive Edwardian buildings, given to the village by the Hunt family, include the Village Hall and Library and numerous, late Victorian, worker's cottages. Along with agriculture, the foundry provided much employment for the population from 1824 until the 1980s. The site has now become a new housing development with some larger buildings having been preserved and converted to housing, workshops, a local museum and health centre.
- 2.5** Other industrial estates are situated on the edges of the village, on the sites of the old wartime airfield (still used as an airfield and base for Essex Air Ambulance) and disused railway station.

### Profile of the community today

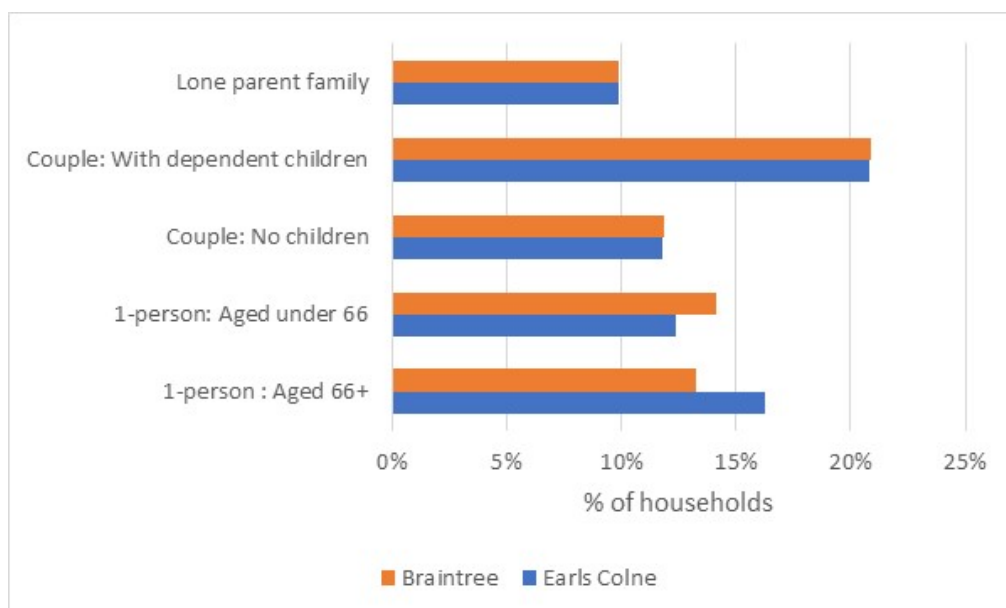
- 2.6** In 2021, the population of Earls Colne parish was 3,974 persons. This represented an increase of 281 persons over the 10-year period since 2011 (source: 2011 and 2021 Census). Based on the amount of development with planning permission or under construction, this is expected to rise significantly over the early years of the plan period (see Figure 5.1).
- 2.7** Figure 2.1 shows how the age profile of Earls Colne has changed over the period 2011 to 2021.



**Figure 2.1 Change in age profile, 2011-2021 - Source: 2011 and 2021 Census**

**2.8** This shows that the population of young adults aged between 15 and 35 has grown whereas the number of middle-aged people (between 40 and 55) has fallen. However by far the highest level of growth has been in those who, either now or at some point over the plan period, will be of retirement age (i.e. in 2021 they were people between 50 and 85 years of age). Therefore whilst Earls Colne has an ageing population, it also has seen a growth in the young adult population.

**2.9** This is supported by the composition of households in Earls Colne parish in 2021.



**Figure 2.2 Household composition, 2021 - Source: 2011 and 2021 Census**

- 2.10** Figure 2.2 shows that whilst growth in the older population has been strong, accounting for over 16% of all households in Earls Colne (well above the Braintree district figure of 12.4%), the largest proportion of households are couples with dependent children, at just under 21%.

## Transport links

- 2.11** The village is situated on the main road between Halstead and Colchester (A1124) which, at times during the day, is extremely busy with something in the order of 1,000 vehicular movements per hour being recorded at peak times. The road has a 30 mph speed limit within the Earls Colne parish boundaries. It passes through the village centre which is lined with shops and businesses and includes bus stops and pedestrian crossings. There are two major junctions on this road within the village:

- Station Road which provides access to Colne Engaine and Pebmarsh.
- Coggeshall Road (B1098) which connects to the main Colchester to Braintree road (A120) and to Coggeshall village.

- 2.12** A particular feature of Earls Colne are the limited number of roads that link the main residential areas in the village with the High Street (A1124). On the north side of the High Street, access is provided predominantly from Queens Road, with some areas served by Burrows Road. To the south of the High Street, the residential areas are also served by just two roads – Massingham Drive (leading in to Foundry Lane) and York Road. As a result, these residential routes are used by a large amount of traffic.



**Junction of Queens Road and High Street**

- 2.13** The closest mainline railway station, which is on the Norwich to London Liverpool Street Line, is situated in Kelvedon which is 7½ miles from the village centre with a journey time by car of approximately 15 minutes. There is also a station at Chapel & Wakes Colne which is around 3½ miles from the centre of Earls Colne, this station is on the Sudbury to Marks Tey branch line.

- 2.14** A bus service operates along the A1124 between Halstead and Colchester providing a half-hourly service from 06.00 to 23.00 each weekday and Saturday with a reduced service on Sundays.
- 2.15** Car ownership adds to transport links. Due to limited bus services, people are very dependent upon personal transport and car ownership in the village is very high. In 2021, households in Earls Colne parish had access to an average of over 1.5 cars (source: 2021 Census). Lack of parking and road congestion are a major concern of residents.
- 2.16** Cycle routes are limited but are being improved. The Earls Colne to Marks Hall Business Park and Coggeshall cycle route is being promoted as a cycle route by Greenway North Essex, a project to create safe cycleways between villages in the north of Essex. There is also a cycle route being created between Earls Colne to Halstead which runs along the line of the old railway line.

## Village facilities

- 2.17** The village has a wide range of local facilities and amenities including:
- Three centres of worship (Church of England Church, Baptist Church and Quaker Hall)
  - A modern doctor's surgery with four resident GPs and a range of support staff
  - A pharmacy
  - A primary school with a capacity of up to 420 children
  - A post office/hardware store.
  - A thriving high street which includes a supermarket, butchers, several hairdressers, estate agencies and a range of other, mostly independent, specialist shops
  - Two public houses, a small hotel/restaurant and three social clubs
  - A large hotel with function facilities (on Airfield site)
  - Two golf courses, fitness centres and a recreation club
  - A public park area (Millennium Green) and various children's playgrounds in residential areas
  - A dental practice located on the Earls Colne Airfield Industrial Site.
- 2.18** A Community Facilities Plan, prepared in late 2021<sup>(1)</sup> shows that most of the facilities serving the parish are less than an 800-metre straight line distance from the centre of the village. Whilst actual walking distances will often be longer, it is still the case that most facilities are within easy walking distance for most people.
- 2.19** The Earls Colne Airfield is situated on the southern edge of the parish. It is available for the flying of light aircraft and is home to the Herts and Essex Air Ambulance. It has a large industrial estate on its boundary which is home to a number of industrial and warehousing companies that take advantage of its proximity to the A120.

1 <https://earlscolne-pc.gov.uk/uploads/Community%20Facilities%20Plan.pdf>

## Main issues and challenges in Earls Colne

**2.20** Table 1 below details the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) that Earls Colne faces in its future development. This is based on feedback from the community at engagement events to inform the Neighbourhood Plan.

<p><b><u>STRENGTHS</u></b></p> <p>Rich history. Lots of services. Walking distance to centre. Community spirit. Pretty (not chocolate box) but still functional village. Place to be proud of. Plenty of employment for village size. Good leisure facilities. Proximity to countryside/walks, especially Chalkney Woods. Mix of people/demographics. Good school.</p>	<p><b><u>WEAKNESSES</u></b></p> <p>Traffic – main route from Halstead to Colchester, both growing rapidly and adding traffic. Parking – streets crowded because older houses were not designed for car ownership. Services overstretched with limited capacity – struggling to cope with increasing demand of growing population. Lack of youth facilities/young family services. Lack of real power for Parish Council and understanding of their role. Lack of public transport (at times for commuters). No connection to airfield industrial site, Coggeshall, Braintree or mainline stations at Kelvedon, Marks Tey or Braintree.</p>
<p><b><u>OPPORTUNITIES (for Neighbourhood Plan)</u></b></p> <p>Influence what is built/developed and where. Make a list of historic buildings and features to be preserved, not lost sight of or over shadowed. Influence village/ town planning. Increase environmental sustainability. Develop better transport communication in the village and between other local communities. Have a say over how new developments link/integrate with existing ones. Enable village to grow organically without being swamped by insensitive developments. Give greater clarity on what local residents desire and allow the village to participate democratically in decisions about its future.</p>	<p><b><u>THREATS</u></b></p> <p>Sudden large increase in population that outstrips the capacity of schools, medical services and other infrastructure. Type of housing not specific to meet local demand. Demographics determined by new housing built not needs of the existing community. Village loses its character and becomes impersonal. Losing village feel re size. Loss of identity and loyalty to the community, a place less cherished. Loss of greenfield land. Additional stress on the environment and contributors to climate change such as pollution from extra traffic, building on green space that may increase flood risk, destruction of wildlife habitat, litter and wear on foot paths and other amenities.</p>

**Table 1 SWOT analysis of Earls Colne**

## 3 Vision and Objectives

### Vision for Earls Colne

**3.1** The vision for Earls Colne over the plan period to 2033 is as follows:

**To enhance...**

the village of Earls Colne as a residential and business community offering wide ranging housing stock, good employment opportunities, local sport and leisure facilities within an attractive, safe and friendly environment.

**To protect and secure...**

the rich history, natural and historic environment and community spirit of our village.

### Neighbourhood Plan Objectives

**3.2** The objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan as identified through engagement with the community are as follows:

#### Design and character

- i. Ensure high quality design that reflects the character of Earls Colne.
- ii. Preserve and enhance the high quality natural and historic landscape of the parish.

#### Housing

- iii. Ensure that development meets the specific housing needs of the local community.

#### Environment and climate change

- iv. Preserve and enhance wildlife by protecting habitats and providing measures such as wildlife corridors.
- v. Require new development to deliver a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain and maximise the protection and enhancement of biodiversity.
- vi. Maximise the adoption of renewable energy technologies.
- vii. Protect shared green spaces that are special to the community.

#### Movement

- viii. Improve the quality, condition and signage of existing footpaths as an amenity in the wider environment, and develop further a network of footways, footpaths and cycle routes to prioritise active and sustainable modes above vehicles.

- ix. Maximise the potential for residents and businesses to have safe, direct and convenient walking and cycling access to most village facilities/amenities.

## **Economy**

- x. Support the continuing vibrancy of Earls Colne village centre, reflecting the changing future of our high streets.

## 4 Design and Character

### Design and Character

- 4.1** The character of Earls Colne was identified by the local community as a strong positive feature of the built environment and its surroundings. People value how attractive Earls Colne is and want new development to fit in with this.
- 4.2** The Earls Colne Design Codes report<sup>(2)</sup> was commissioned in order to provide a clear understanding of the nature of design issues that new development must consider to assemble high quality schemes. This identified a series of character areas focused on the village (see Figure 4.1).
- 4.3** From this, a set of design principles that are specific to Earls Colne parish were created. In total, 29 design 'codes' have been identified under five themes:

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2 AECOM (2022) Earls Colne Design Codes report, for Earls Colne Parish Council

Theme	Code	Title
DC.01 In keeping with local character	1	Heritage, views and landmarks
	2	Development affecting heritage assets
	3	Patterns of growth within the rural landscape
	4	Set in rural landscape/development edges
	5	Social and community infrastructure
DC.02 Access and movement	6	Accessible and attractive footpath network / access to the countryside
	7	Prioritise walking and cycling
	8	People friendly streets
	9	Parking and servicing (Electric vehicle charging points)
	10	Cycle parking
DC.03 Green and blue infrastructure	11	Create a green network
	12	Biodiversity
	13	Water management
	14	Trees
	15	Open spaces
DC.04 Built form	16	Housing mix
	17	Building lines and roofline
	18	Legibility and wayfinding
	19	Continuity and enclosure
	20	Building scale and massing
	21	Corner treatment
	22	Boundary lines and boundary treatment
	23	Materials and architectural details
	24	Hard landscaping, materials and street furniture
	25	Street lighting
DC.05 Public realm	26	Minimising energy use
	27	Lifetime and adaptability
	28	Minimising construction waste
	29	Recycling materials and buildings

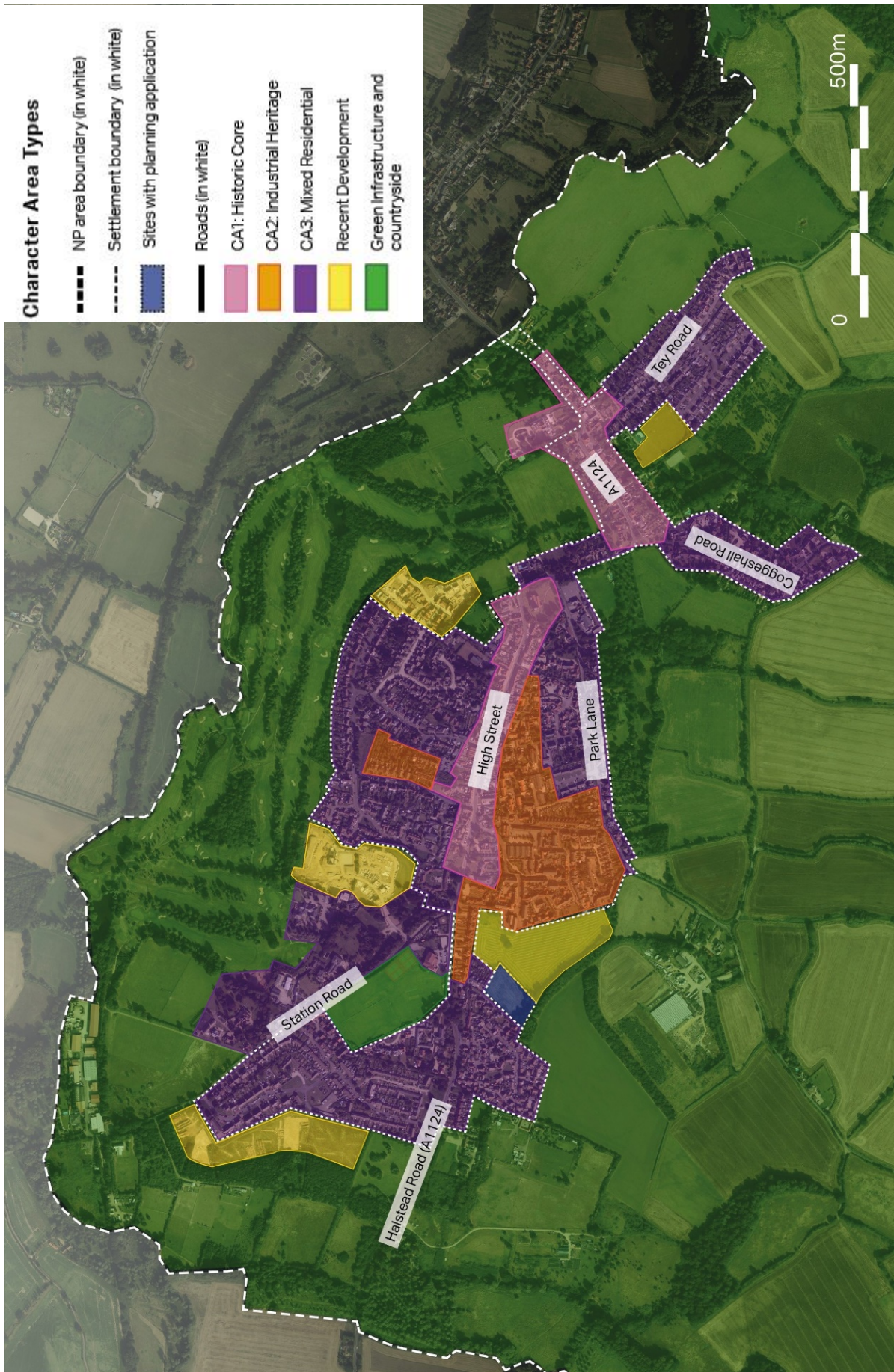


Figure 4.1 Character areas in Earls Colne

- 4.4** Some of the matters related to design are further addressed in other policies in the Neighbourhood Plan. However, in respect of ensuring high quality design, it is important that development proposals – and particularly major developments (as defined by the NPPF) – actively demonstrate how they have been informed by these design codes. Their purpose is not to expect all development to slavishly adhere to all codes in all circumstances; rather it is to inform development so that what is built represents high quality development in the context of Earls Colne.

## **POLICY ERCOL 1**

### **DESIGN AND CHARACTER**

- A. Development should demonstrate high quality design and layout which respects the local character of Earls Colne. Development within the specific Character Areas identified in Figure 4.1 must have regard to the guidance in the Earls Colne Design Codes report and the Essex Design Guide.
- B. In delivering high quality design, development proposals must demonstrate the appropriate use of design, layout, materials and features. The following principles should be considered as part of design proposals which will be addressed through a Design and Access Statement:
  - i. Development should integrate with and enhance the form of its existing surroundings, with all connections including road patterns ensuring permeability for cyclists and pedestrians.
  - ii. A range of densities, house types (where appropriate) and plot layouts should be used.
  - iii. Building heights and rooflines should provide diversity of frontage, scale and form, with building heights that reflect the prevailing height of surrounding buildings unless it can be demonstrated that a taller building could complement or enhance the local character.
  - iv. Parking to support residential uses should be provided within the development and should include a proportion of well-designed on-street parking provisions, having regard to the Essex Planning Officers Association (EPOA) parking standards.

In all cases, development proposals are expected to have regard to the relevant guidance contained in the Earls Colne Design Codes report and the Essex Design Guide.

- C. All major residential development proposals should include a proportionate statement and illustrations demonstrating how the principles and guidance in the Earls Colne Design Codes report have been addressed.

## **Landscape Character**

- 4.5** Earls Colne parish and the village in particular sit within a high quality, highly valued landscape.

- 4.6** The Colne River Valley wraps around the village and covers the majority of the parish. This area is characterised by the tranquillity and open nature of the valley which has remained intact over a long period of time with relatively few intrusions. It has a shallow river valley with relatively steep valley sides. The stream banks are well defined by scrub and trees, surrounded on both sides by arable fields that are defined by hedgerows and hedgerow trees. The valley topography restricts views to some extent, creating intimate to medium-scale landscapes. The scale opens up on higher land as longer views across the valley are possible. The Earls Colne Landscape Character Assessment 2022<sup>(3)</sup> considered that appropriate sites for development are limited due to the visibility across the valley. It was therefore assessed as a landscape with high sensitivity. This was supported by the community, which holds these views and this landscape as one of the most important features of Earls Colne.



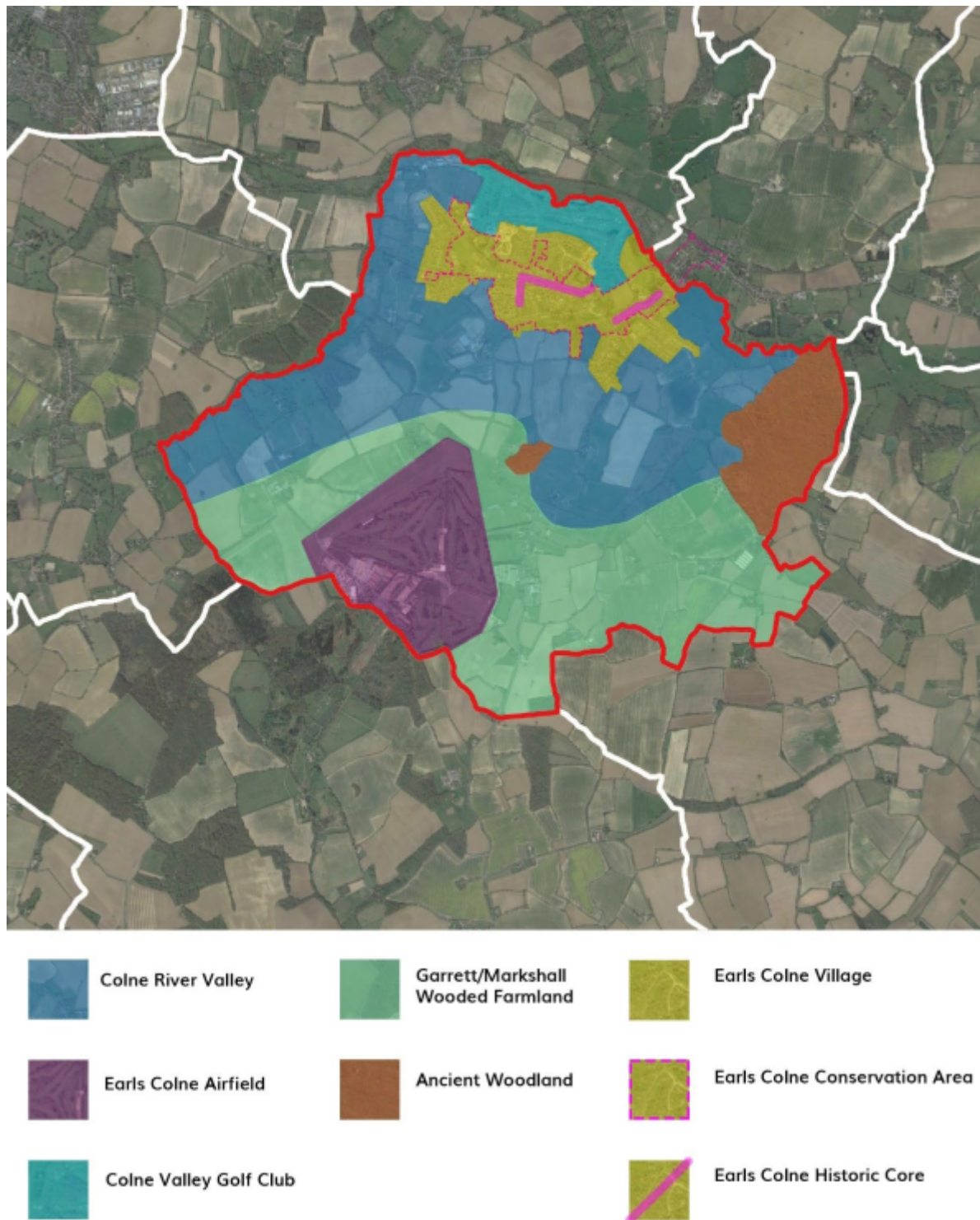
**Cross valley views from higher ground in the Colne Valley character area**



**Colne Valley character area at the settlement edge**

Source: Earls Colne Landscape Character Assessment 2022

3 Wynne-Williams Associates (2022) Earls Colne Landscape Character Assessment, for Earls Colne Parish Council



**Figure 4.2 Earls Colne parish Landscape Character Area map**

Source: Earls Colne Landscape Character Assessment 2022

**4.7** The Landscape Character Assessment 2022 also considered that the Chalkney Wood and Richards Grove ancient woodland in the east of the parish was a highly sensitive landscape; its ancient woodland designation gives it strong protection from development. Also highly

sensitive is the Earls Colne Conservation Area although again, development in this area is guided by heritage policies. Of medium/high sensitivity are the Earls Colne Outer Village (the areas of the village outside the Conservation Area) and the Colne Valley Golf Club to the north of the village. Whilst the impact of development in these locations was considered capable of mitigation, this was only on the basis of it being small scale development.

- 4.8** It is considered particularly important that these high and high/medium sensitivity landscapes are retained and that development does not cause a change to their character. Any development proposals in these locations – and particularly in the Colne Valley River Landscape Character Area – are appropriate for their setting and fully and demonstrably consider their impact on the landscape. Development that has an unacceptable impact on these landscapes should be refused.

## POLICY ERCOL 2

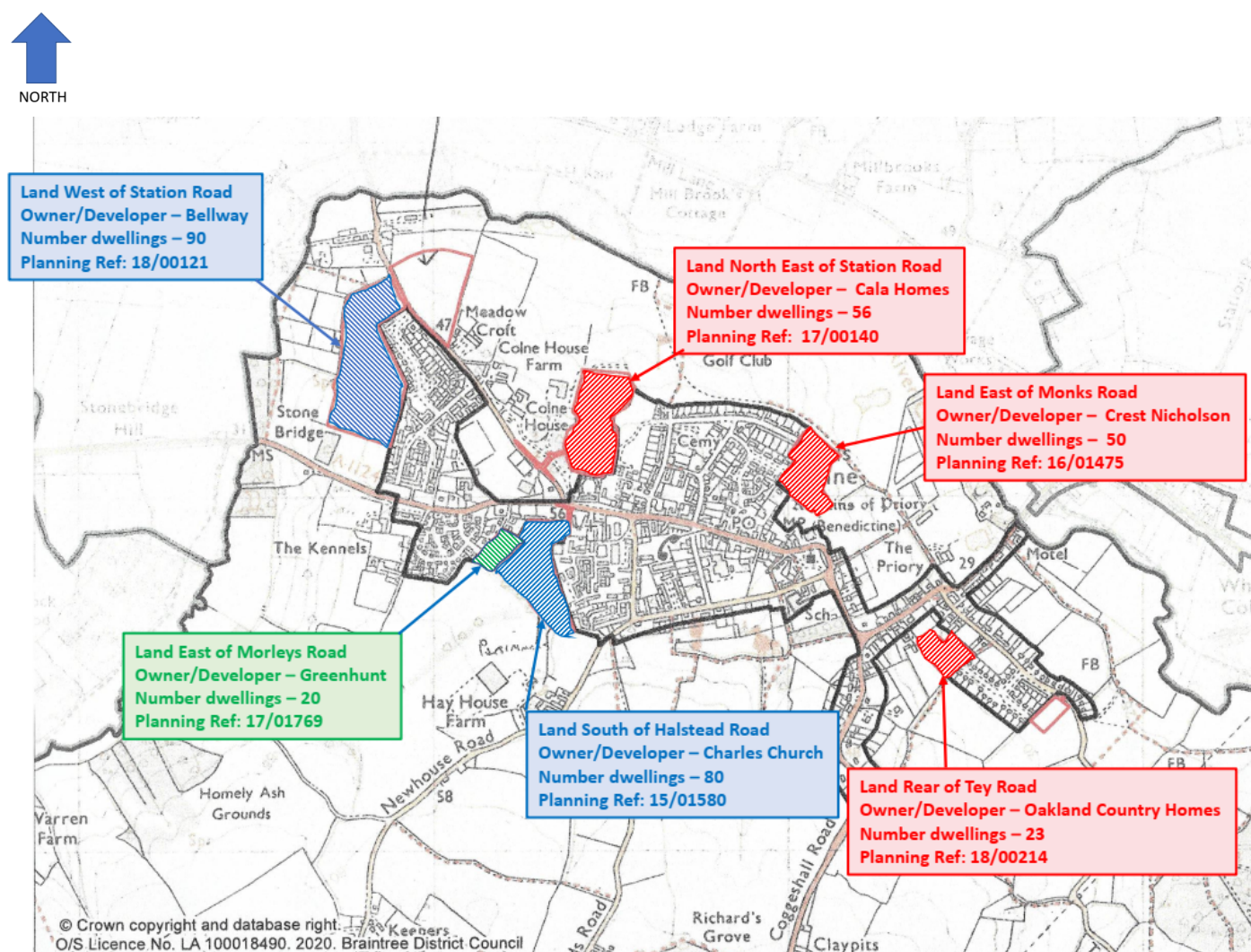
### LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

- A. Where development is proposed outside the existing development boundary of Earls Colne, it is expected to have regard to the findings and recommendations set out in the Earls Colne Landscape Character Assessment 2022. All proposals should demonstrate that:
  - i. the scale and character of the proposal respects the landscape, landscape features, streetscape, heritage assets and important spaces and views into and out of Earls Colne village (and particularly the Conservation Area);
  - ii. they will make a positive contribution to the local character of the area.
- B. In areas outside the Earls Colne development boundary that are of high or medium/high landscape sensitivity (as identified in the Earls Colne Landscape Character Assessment 2022), a landscape and visual impact appraisal will be required where necessary and appropriate<sup>(4)</sup>. This must demonstrate due regard to the particular sensitivities identified in the Landscape Character Assessment and ensure effective mitigation against likely harm.

4 Based on the nature, scale and design of the proposals

## 5 Housing

**5.1** Earls Colne has seen a significant amount of new housing development either delivered or granted planning permission since 2016 (see Figure 5.1). All the sites allocated in the Braintree District Local Plan have come forward for development.



**Figure 5.1 Map of Major housing developments granted planning permission since 2016 (as at August 2023)**

### KEY TO DEVELOPMENTS

Completed & Occupied

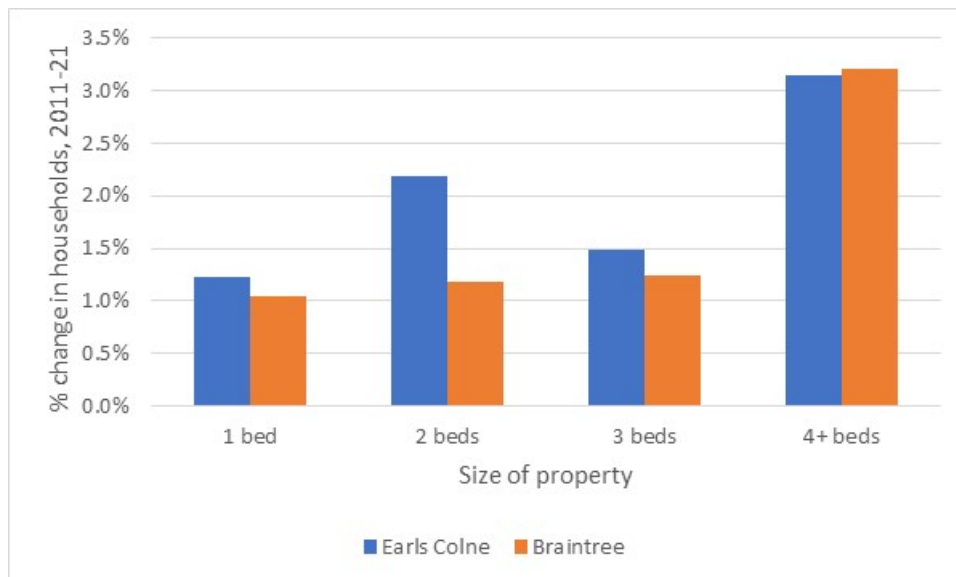
Under Construction

Approved but not started

**5.2** Over the period between 2011 and 2021, an additional 121 households were created in the parish, largely due to new development. Figure 5.2 shows that when compared with the existing housing stock, the largest proportionate growth was in very large houses (4 beds or larger), which accounted for approximately 50% of this growth. Growth of 2-bed properties was relatively

high, and much higher as a proportion of growth than across the district. It should be noted that this growth is only 40% of the total amount of housing in the planning pipeline, as shown in Figure 5.1. A significant amount of further growth will increase the stock of properties of all sizes.

- 5.3** Whilst this housing has provided a range of sizes and tenure types, there are still particular housing needs that are not being met by the housing stock in Earls Colne. The 2021 Census identified that over 75% of the housing stock in Earls Colne parish was under-occupied, i.e. had at least one spare bedroom based on the size and composition of the household. Braintree District Local Plan Policy LPP35 says the housing mix must follow the 2015 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). This considers that, district-wide, the requirement is for 4% of units to be one-bed properties, 31% two-bedroom, 45% three-bedroom and 20% four-bedroom. The need in Earls Colne mirrors this, with the Earls Colne Housing Needs Survey 2021<sup>(5)</sup> identifying a predominant need in the market sector for two- and three-bed properties and in the housing association/Council rented sector for one- and two-bed properties.



**Figure 5.2 Change in property by size, 2011-2021**

Source: 2011 and 2021 Census

- 5.4** Local estate agents have added more context to this, with the principle need they identify being housing for older people to downsize to and housing for first-time buyers on relatively low incomes. The older downsizers – both single occupants and couples – often are looking for properties close to village amenities. Whilst bungalows are popular, they are in short supply as they are not attractive to developers due to the comparatively large land take.

5 RCCE (2021) Earls Colne Housing Needs Survey, for Earls Colne Parish Council

- 5.5** The first-time buyer market is also seeing increasing numbers of such buyers preferring to find long term rental properties due to the challenges of saving for a deposit to buy. The Earls Colne Housing Needs Assessment 2020<sup>(6)</sup> concurred, recommending that the Neighbourhood Plan support the delivery of housing developments that are suitable and affordable for younger people. This includes affordable forms of renting and entry level market sale homes (or affordable home ownership).



#### Housing Needs Survey

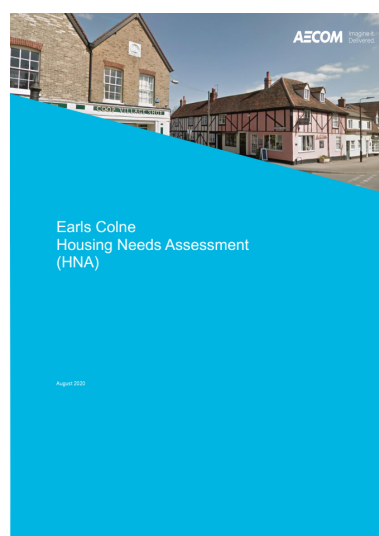
Earls Colne

May 2021

Laura Atkinson  
Rural Housing Enabler

RCCE (Rural Community Council of Essex) is an **independent charity** helping people and communities throughout rural Essex build a sustainable future.

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Registered Company No. 4609624



- 5.6** With comparatively less growth expected over the remainder of the plan period, it is important that this focuses as much on the housing needs of the community as possible. Ideally this is done through the use of mechanisms to ensure that housing is offered to those with local connections and ideally held in perpetuity for such people. In smaller rural communities this is commonly done through the identification of rural exception sites. Unfortunately Earls Colne does not qualify because it is not a 'designated area'<sup>(7)</sup>. However, there is still the potential for a similar mechanism called a 'First Homes exception site' which is aimed at first time buyers or renters. For such a site to come forward, it must be demonstrated that the need of such occupiers is not being met – the evidence from the local estate agents, the SHMA, the Earls Colne Housing Needs Assessment 2020 and the Earls Colne Housing Needs Survey 2021 supports this.
- 5.7** Whilst no site has been identified through the development of the Neighbourhood Plan, policy support is given to such sites coming forward. Such sites should be adjacent to the settlement boundary of Earls Colne, deliver First Homes (with a small number of market homes only permitted on the site at the local authority's discretion, typically to enable the delivery of First Homes without grant funding), not compromise the protection given to areas or assets of particular importance in the NPPF (e.g. ancient woodland, local wildlife sites, etc), and comply with local design policies and standards.

6 AECOM (2020) Earls Colne Housing Needs Assessment, for Earls Colne Parish Council

7 Designated under Statutory Instrument 2009/2098 – The Housing (Right to Enfranchise) (Designated Protected Areas) (England) Order 2009

## POLICY ERCOL 3

### FIRST HOMES EXCEPTION SITES AND COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING

- A. Proposals for the development of small scale housing schemes on First Homes exception sites adjacent to the settlement boundary of Earls Colne, where housing would not normally be permitted by other policies, will be supported provided all of the following requirements are met:
  - i. It delivers solely or predominantly First Homes<sup>(8)</sup>, is in keeping with the appearance and character of the surrounding area and satisfactorily mitigates the potential impact on residential amenity and highway safety.
  - ii. It is for first-time buyers or renters that are in housing need because they are unable to buy or rent properties in Earls Colne village at open-market prices.
  - iii. It is offered, in the first instance, to people with a demonstrated local connection, as defined by the Braintree Choice Based Lettings Scheme. Where there is no local connection, a property should then be offered to those with a demonstrated need for such housing in neighbouring villages.
- B. The restrictions in clause A.iii should be secured through a legal agreement attached to the planning consent for the housing.
- C. Proposals for community-led housing to specifically address local housing needs will be strongly supported, subject meeting the requirements of other policies.

8 As stated in the Affordable Homes Update Written Ministerial Statement, dated 24<sup>th</sup> May 2021: 'A small proportion of market homes may be allowed on the site at the local authority's discretion, for example where essential to enable the delivery of First Homes without grant funding.'

## 6 Environment and Climate Change

### Preserving and enhancing wildlife habitats and biodiversity

- 6.1** Sitting in the Colne Valley, Earls Colne has a natural environment of high quality with a number of highly valued features and habitats. Together this forms a network of spaces and areas where biodiversity can thrive. Given the extent and severity of the global environmental crisis, it is vital that these wildlife and biodiversity habitats are protected and given the opportunity to thrive.
- 6.2** The Neighbourhood Plan has been informed by a biodiversity audit undertaken by the Essex Wildlife Trust<sup>(9)</sup>. The purpose of this audit is to highlight important biodiversity features within the parish which should be conserved.
- 6.3** The parish contains a network of important wildlife habitats, with a reasonable degree of connectivity between them. The key sites are the ancient woodland of Chalkney Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the primarily woodland and grassland Local Wildlife Sites, the network of hedgerows and the River Colne and its riparian corridor (see Figure 6.1).
- 6.4** There are several notable mammals and birds, including Otters, Water Voles, Barbastelle Bat, historical records of Dormice, Barn Owl and Kingfisher. Slow Worms, Common Lizards and Grass Snakes are present and are known to occur in several areas of good rough grassland habitat, including the Millennium Green and Brickfield and Long Meadow Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS). Great Crested Newts are present, including in Chalkney Wood, while Smooth Newts and Common Toads are present elsewhere in the parish.
- 6.5** Notable protected invertebrates include Stag Beetle and Purple Emperor butterfly.
- 6.6** The flora of the parish includes a number of protected and uncommon plant species, including Violet Helleborine and Herb Paris, and also has 27 veteran/notable trees, some of which are within the village itself.

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9 Essex Wildlife Trust (2023) Earls Colne Biodiversity Audit, for Earls Colne Parish Council

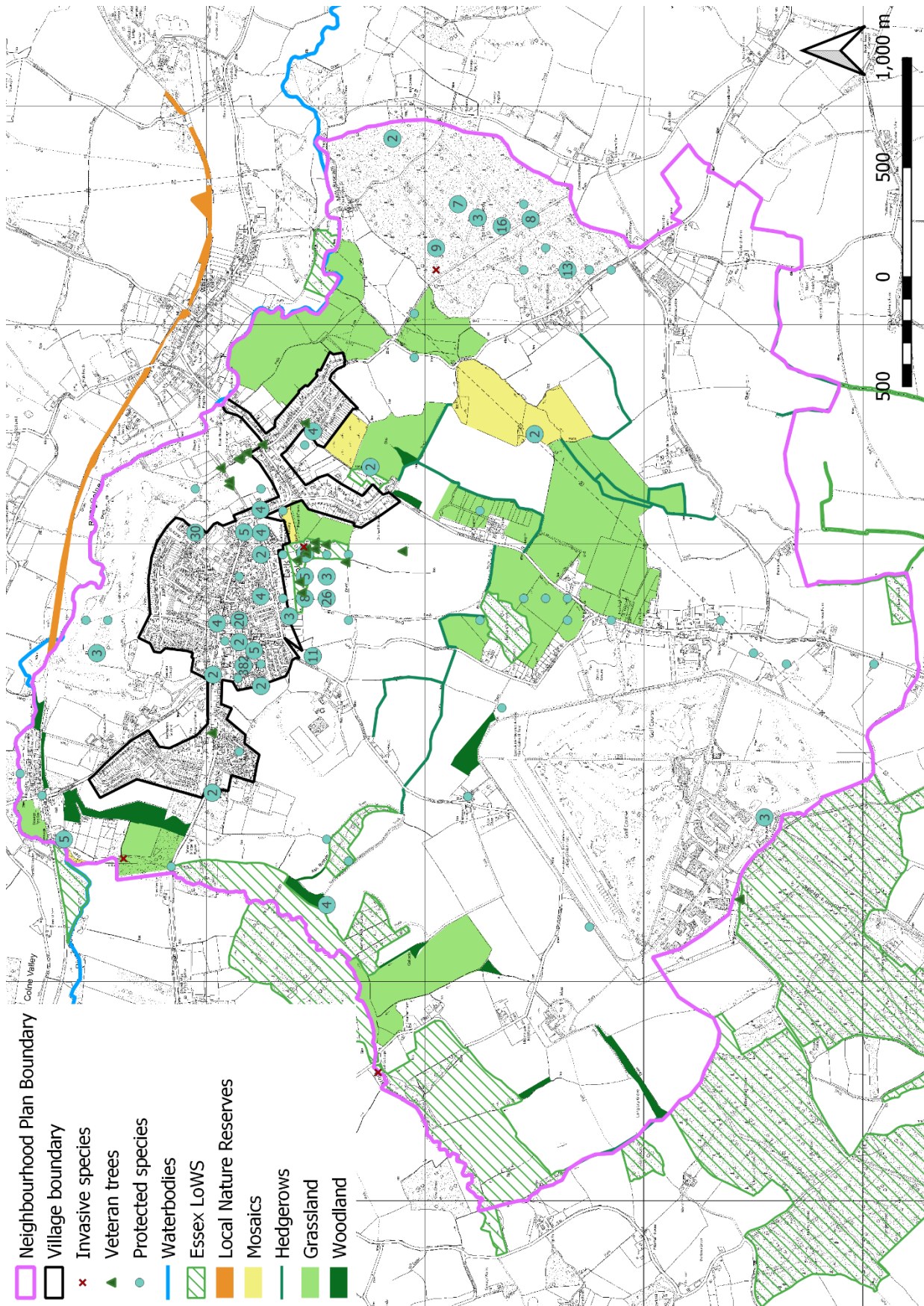


Figure 6.1 Habitats and biodiversity features within Earls Colne parish

## POLICY ERCOL 4

### GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND BIODIVERSITY

- A. New developments will be required to improve connectivity to the current green infrastructure network for all through measures such as providing new or enhanced footpaths, Public Rights of Way, cycle routes, bridleways and public open spaces connecting to the wider countryside.
- B. Development will be required, where appropriate, to contribute towards the delivery of new green and blue infrastructure which develops and enhances a network of multi-functional spaces and natural features.
- C. The Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) shown on the Policies Map are locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity and are protected accordingly. Development proposals must meet the requirements of Braintree Local Plan Policy LPP64 (Protected Sites) and any proposals that have adverse effects on the integrity of existing habitats (either alone or in-combination) will not be supported.
- D. In order to address the requirement for a minimum of 10% net gain in biodiversity, development proposals will be required to take a 'biodiversity-first' approach and maximise the delivery of biodiversity net gains on site. If on-site delivery has clearly been demonstrated not to be possible then applicants are encouraged to consider off-site provision. Such off-site provision should explore a wide range of opportunities throughout the parish including:
  - a. enhancing ecological networks and the migration and transit of flora and fauna, particularly between green spaces;
  - b. restoring and re-creating wildlife habitats, particularly to enable priority species to flourish;
  - c. designing Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to maximise the potential for biodiversity to thrive.

## Wildlife-friendly design

- 6.7** The design of individual buildings and of neighbourhood scale green and open spaces, including private gardens, will help to ensure that existing habitats present in Earls Colne can thrive and a range of new habitats can be created. This is in line with the requirement of the Environment Act 2021 for all new development (excluding small householder proposals) to achieve net biodiversity gain of at least 10%.
- 6.8** Planting is an important aspect of development and habitat creation. Not only does a well-considered planting scheme provide high quality landscaping, it is a fundamental aspect of enhancing biodiversity that otherwise would be lost. Planting schemes should ensure that

tree species should be carefully selected to be responsive to landscape and historic character and to suit the planting location<sup>(10)</sup>. Planting should not simply consist of trees but a range of shrubs and grasses too and should seek to include native species.

- 6.9** Other creative ways of providing habitats can be designed easily into developments of any size (see image below).



**A bin store with green roof and habitat.  
Credit: Green Roof Shelters**

- 6.10** Protecting species present in the area is also important. Examples of the simple solutions that well-thought out design can easily incorporate are:

- Integral bird and bat boxes under the eaves of the new houses, or artificial nests sited in places away from windows and doors, can create vital new roosting sites to support populations of birds and bats.
- Boundaries between dwellings can be made hedgehog friendly by including pre-cut holes for hedgehogs to more effectively move across neighbourhoods to forage.
- New planting schemes can support bees and other pollinators by including nectar-rich plants.

10 See 'Right Tree in the Right Place for a Resilient Future' by Forest Research - <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/urban-tree-manual/>



**Bricks that allow birds to nest -  
Credit: Pinterest**



**Hedgehog-friendly fencing - Credit: Pinterest**

**6.11** Development is encouraged to be informed by the full list of considerations in Natural England's 'Green Infrastructure Framework 2023'<sup>(11)</sup>.

## **POLICY ERCOL 5**

### **WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY DEVELOPMENT**

- A. All development proposals must protect existing habitats and species, including hedgerows and mature trees and deliver net gain in biodiversity in accordance with Policy ERCOL4D.
- B. The incorporation of design features into new development that encourages local wildlife and biodiversity to thrive will be supported.
- C. As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should be designed to retain trees, shrubs and hedgerows of arboricultural, habitat and amenity value on-site and to conserve and enhance connectivity to the wider multifunctional green and blue infrastructure networks. Where practicable, any new planting should consist of species of trees, shrubs and grasses that will be resilient to the changing climate and can be incorporated in a way that would allow their use as stepping stones for wildlife.

## **Sustainable design**

**6.12** The Climate Change Act 2008 committed the UK to an 80% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2050. In June 2019, an announcement was made by Government to reduce this further to almost 100% by 2050. This will be a major task that will require everyone to be engaged, from households and communities, to businesses and local and national government.

11 <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/Home.aspx>

- 6.13** In 2016, the residential sector alone accounted for over 16% of the UK's annual greenhouse gas emissions (source: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy). The total emissions from all building types will therefore be much greater. Standards for ecologically sustainable homes and developments are established through Building Regulations and Braintree Local Plan Section 2 policies. Specifically Policy LPP72 (Resource efficiency, energy generation and energy efficiency) requires new residential dwellings to include renewable and low carbon energy technology to provide at least a 19% improvement in energy performance over the requirements of the 2013 Building Regulations. However, in order for built development to make a meaningful contribution towards achieving net zero by 2050, development needs to go further.
- 6.14** New development is therefore encouraged to exceed the requirements of Local Plan Section 2 Policy LPP72 or, at very least, to ensure that new properties are designed so that they are ready to receive the technologies that are crucial to minimising their energy use, e.g. underfloor heating to increase the effectiveness of heat pumps, orientated south to maximise the potential from solar panels if installed, etc. Braintree District Council provides guidance on this in its Sustainability Statement Guidance Note<sup>(12)</sup>.

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12 Braintree District Council (2023) *Sustainability Statement Guidance Note: for new Residential and Non-residential buildings*

## POLICY ERCOL 6

### LOW ENERGY AND ENERGY EFFICIENT DESIGN

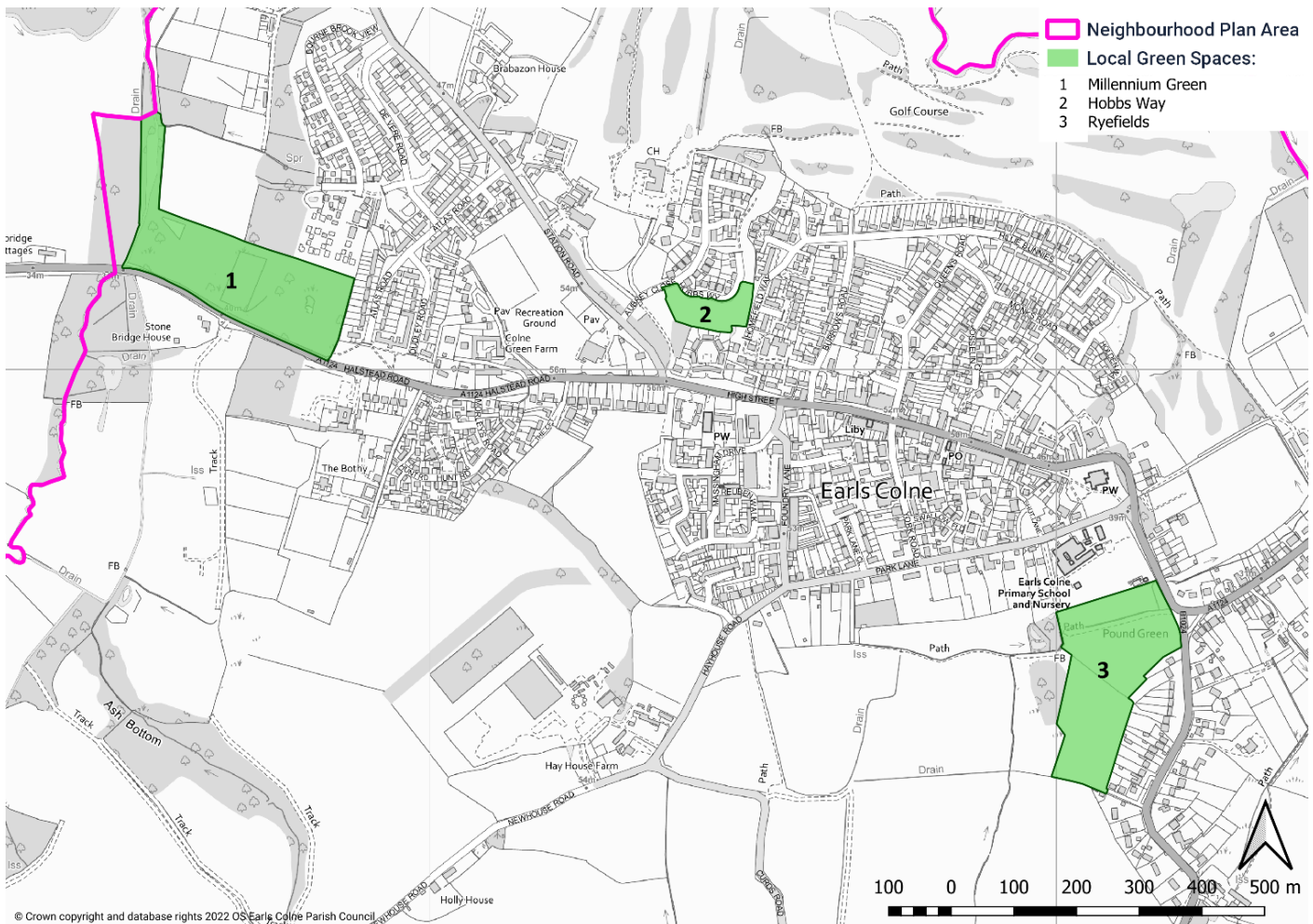
- A. Proposals for new development, including the construction of new buildings and the redevelopment and refurbishment of existing building stock, must demonstrate how the design of buildings and site layouts minimise consumption of energy, water, minerals, materials and other natural resources in order to minimise its contribution to greenhouse gas emissions.
- B. All developments will be required to demonstrate how they have been designed to incorporate measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The following measures shall be incorporated into development:
  - i. Wherever possible, new buildings shall be orientated to maximise the opportunities for both natural heating and ventilation, reducing exposure to wind and other elements and energy from solar installations on roofs;
  - ii. Proposals involving both new and existing buildings shall demonstrate how they have been designed to maximise resistance and resilience to climate change for example by including measures such as solar shading, thermal mass, heating and ventilation of the building and appropriately coloured materials in areas exposed to direct sunlight, green and brown roofs, green walls, etc;
  - iii. Use of trees and other planting, where appropriate as part of a landscape scheme, to provide shading of amenity areas, buildings and streets and to help to connect habitat, designed with native plants that are carefully selected, managed and adaptable to meet the predicted changed climatic conditions.
  - iv. the design of a suitable SuDS-based drainage system, and where possible incorporate mitigation and resilience measures for any increases in flood risk that may occur due to climate change; and
  - v. Where possible and appropriate, residential development is encouraged to meet the highest standards of water efficiency (85 litres per person per day) through the inclusion of rainwater harvesting and greywater systems. Non-residential development of 1,000m<sup>2</sup> gross floor area or more is encouraged to meet the BREEAM 'excellent' standard for water consumption.
- C. Planning applications for residential development are encouraged to exceed the energy performance requirements in Braintree Local Plan Section 2 Policy LPP72 (Resource efficiency, energy generation and energy efficiency).

## Local green spaces

**6.15** Under the NPPF, Neighbourhood Plans have the opportunity to designate Local Green Spaces which are of particular importance to them. This will afford protection from development other than in very special circumstances. Paragraph 106 of the NPPF says that the Local Green Space designation should only be used where the green space is:

- in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
- local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

**6.16** There are three spaces considered to meet the criteria – the Millennium Green, the Hobbs Way public open space and Ryefields (see Figure 6.2 for their location).

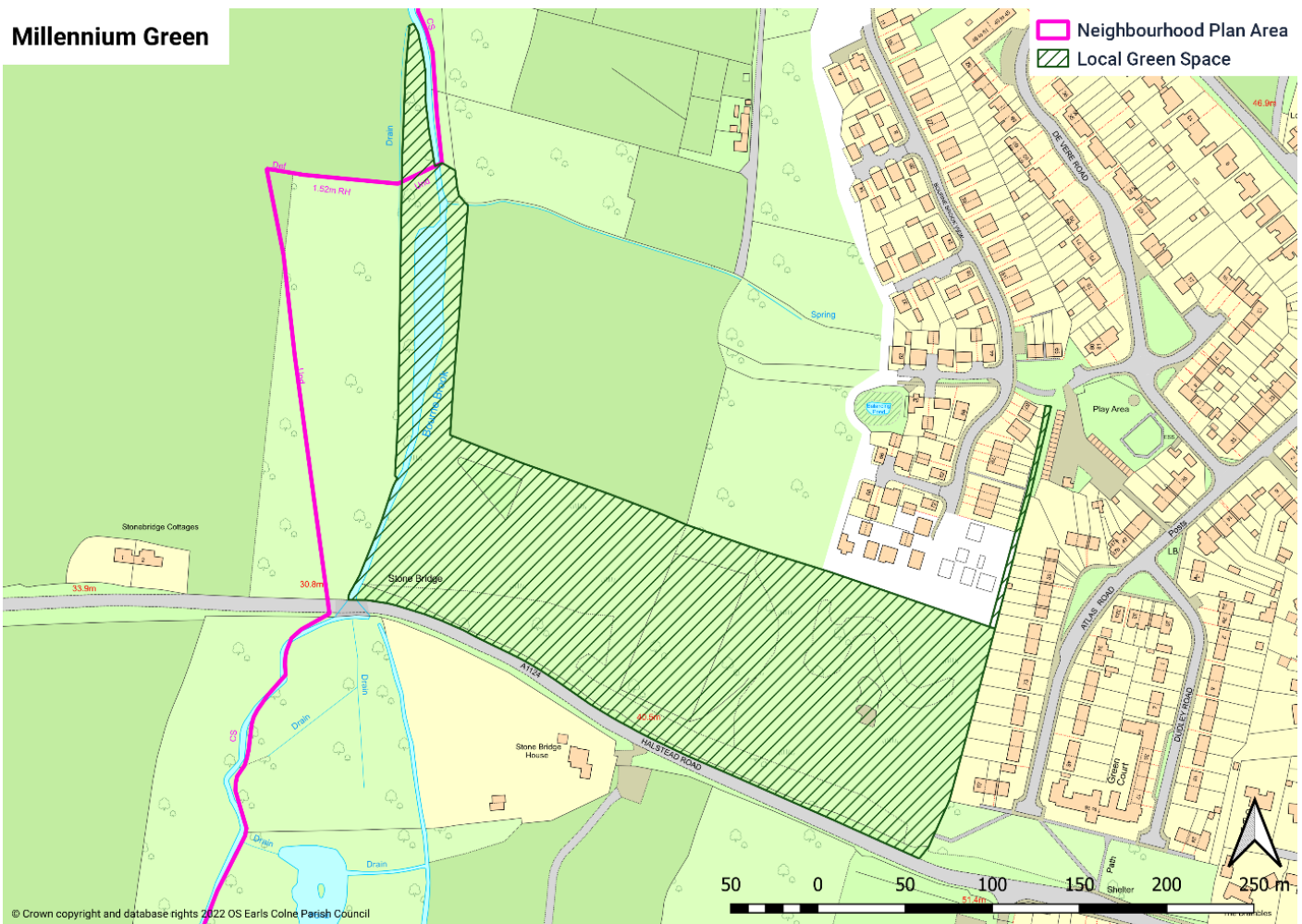


**Figure 6.2 Local Green Spaces**

## Millennium Green



- 6.17** Earls Colne Millennium Green was the first of its kind to be opened in Essex. The 4.9-hectare site commands fine views over the valley towards Halstead and slopes down to Bourne Brook at the bottom. All the trees are native and the grass is full of wildflowers. It is a place for people of all ages to visit for quiet enjoyment, to play or explore. It also provides a valuable habitat for wildlife.



**Figure 6.3 Earls Colne Millennium Green**

- 6.18** With the exception of the Recreation Ground, the Millennium Green is the only large, publicly accessible open space in the village. It has been used for village events and public celebrations – most recently for the Queen’s Jubilee. It is used as the site for temporary beacons during national celebrations. Day-to-day it is used by dog walkers, families and ramblers. The green also has a children’s adventure play area which is well used.

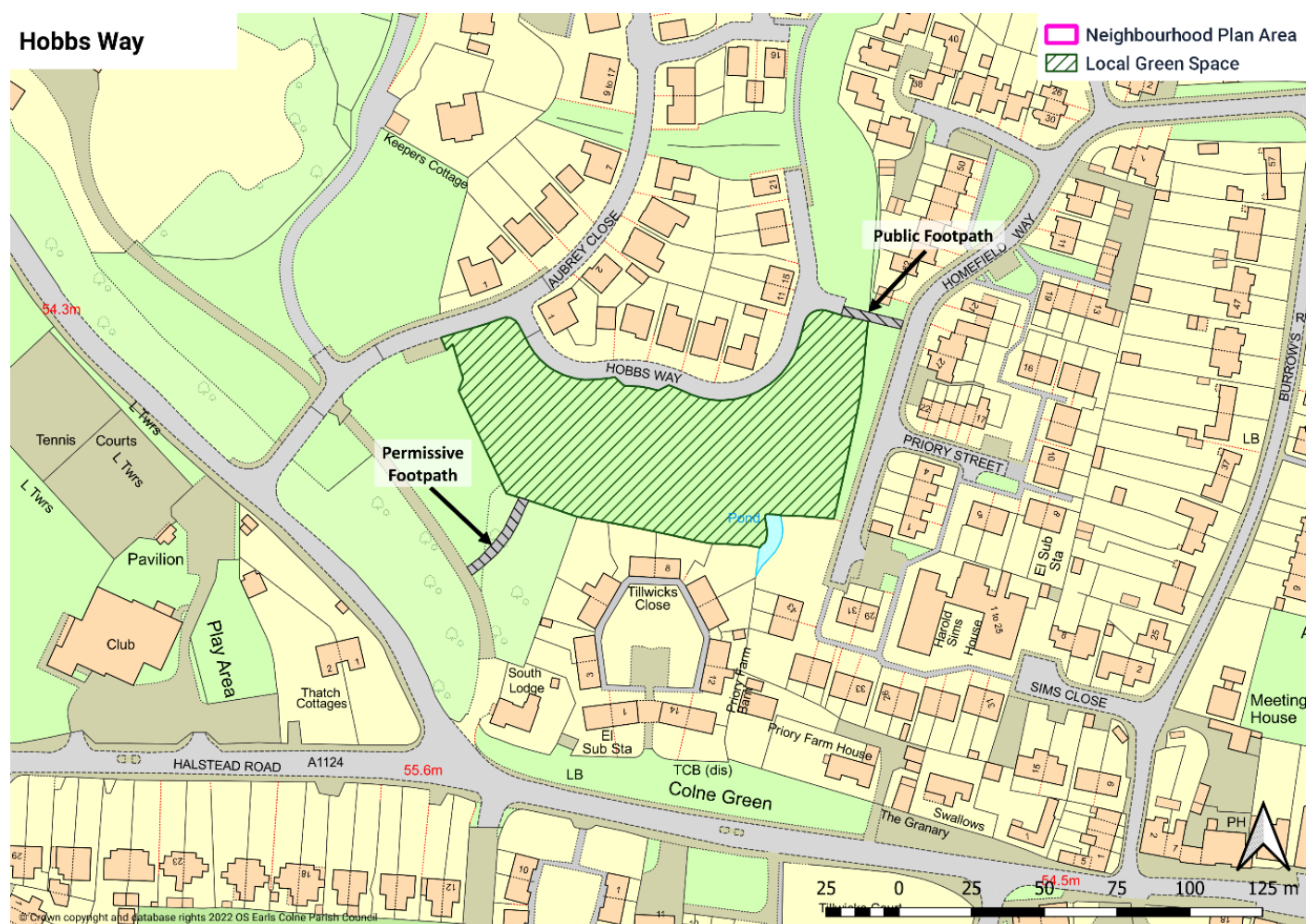
### **Hobbs Way public open space**

- 6.19** As a condition of the planning permission for the housing development to the east of Station Road that was completed in 2023, it was agreed between the developer, the local planning authority and Earls Colne Parish Council that 0.69 hectares of land on the south side of the development would be provided as a public open space. Ownership would be transferred to the Parish Council which agreed to maintain and protect the area as a public amenity.
- 6.20** This space is important for the community of Earls Colne because it provides a well located, safe space of a good size for informal recreation. at present it only has two public open spaces that are not given over for regular formal sporting activity (the Village Green and the Millennium Green). Moreover, the Village Green is a narrow space that is located directly on the busy Halstead Road (A1124), so is unsuitable for ball games and, being unfenced, is potentially

dangerous for younger children. The Millennium Green is located on the western edge of the village so is a reasonable walking distance from many of the residential areas, particularly those to the east of the village. It is also accessed from the busy Halstead Road and requires pedestrians walking from the village centre to negotiate a crossing of the extremely busy Halstead Road / Station Road junction.

**6.21** The open space off Hobbs Way site is centrally located on the northern side of the village and can be easily accessed by the majority of village residents either on foot or cycle without using the High Street (A1124). The site is bordered to the north, east and west by minor residential roads and can also be accessed from the south side using a permissive footpath.

**6.22** The site will provide a safe and quiet play area for informal games, picnics and family gatherings. It is also of sufficient size for small village events to be organised.

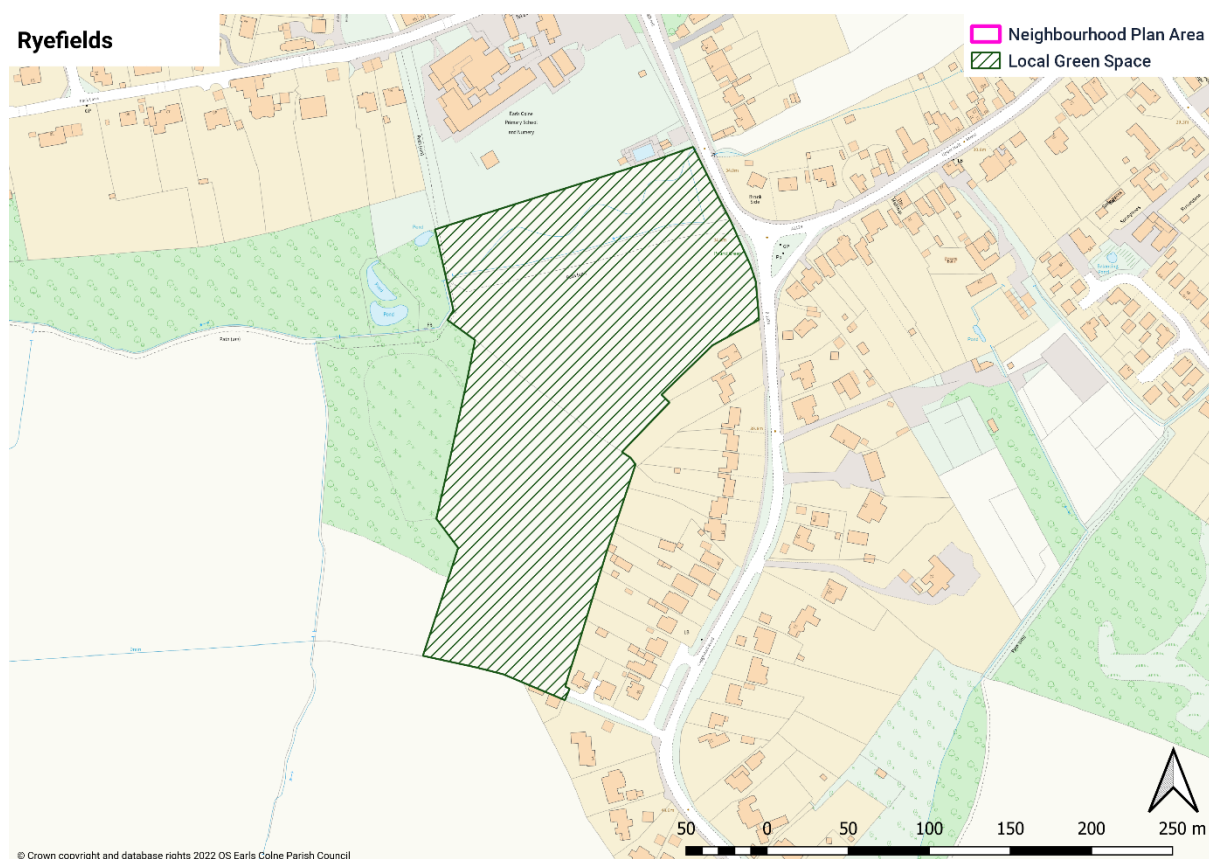


**Figure 6.4 Hobbs Way public open space**

## Ryefields



- 6.23** Ryefields are 4 hectares of meadowland which were left in trust for the village to enjoy for recreational and leisure purposes. They have historical significance as they are part of the William Hunt legacy, land acquired by the village from the Hunt family after the closure of Hunts Foundry. The wet area by the stream was the site of the Colne Priory fishponds dating back to the medieval period.
- 6.24** The two meadows are extensively used by residents and provide a large green space at the eastern end of the village. The lower meadow also hosts the annual school firework display.
- 6.25** The site consists of a lower wet area along a stream which has a number of Black Poplars; a native tree in decline and becoming increasingly rare. The land rises to the two grass and wildflower meadows which are bordered by thick hedgerows and mature oaks and other native trees. There are very attractive views across the valley to the church.
- 6.26** The area abounds with wildlife and provides a tranquil area for walkers to enjoy, with easy access to the Local Nature Reserve and the wider countryside beyond. Fruit trees, forming part of the scattered community orchard are planted along the northern boundary and the lower meadow hosts the annual school firework display.
- 6.27** It should be noted that the Local Green Space does not include the adjacent land called Brick Meadows. This is because Brick Meadows is designated as a Local Nature Reserve and is already protected from inappropriate development,



**Figure 6.5 Ryefields Local Green Space**

## **POLICY ERCOL 7**

### **LOCAL GREEN SPACES**

- A. The following areas shown on the Policies Map and in Figures 6.1-6.3 are designated as Local Green Spaces:
  - a. Millennium Green
  - b. Hobbs Way public open space
  - c. Ryefields
- B. Proposals for built development on these Local Green Spaces will not be permitted unless the proposal is for an ancillary feature, and it can be clearly demonstrated that it is required to support or enhance the role and function of the identified Local Green Space.

# 7 Movement

## Countryside access

- 7.1** Access into the countryside is considered to be one of the most valued features of living in a rural community such as Earls Colne. The need for access as a means of exercise, to walk dogs and for general wellbeing is vital. Without this, the community becomes reliant on use of the private car to access leisure opportunities elsewhere, which creates lots of short distance car trips that do not contribute positively to sustainability.
- 7.2** The NPPF states that ‘planning policies should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks’ (paragraph 100).
- 7.3** As shown in Figure 7.1, Earls Colne parish is currently reasonably well served with Public Rights of Way (PROWs) which cross the parish.

### POLICY ERCOL 8

#### ACCESS INTO THE COUNTRYSIDE

- A. Access to the countryside will be promoted through protection, maintenance and enhancement of the existing Public Rights of Way (PROW) network (see Figure 7.1), bridleways and the safety of users of rural roads and lanes.
- B. The existing PROW network will be safeguarded, where affected by development, ensuring that it remains protected and open for use by the public. Proposals to divert PROWs or cycleways must be approved as being convenient and suitable and be constructed to current standards. Where possible, development should retain and enhance existing PROWs improving between the development and the wider countryside

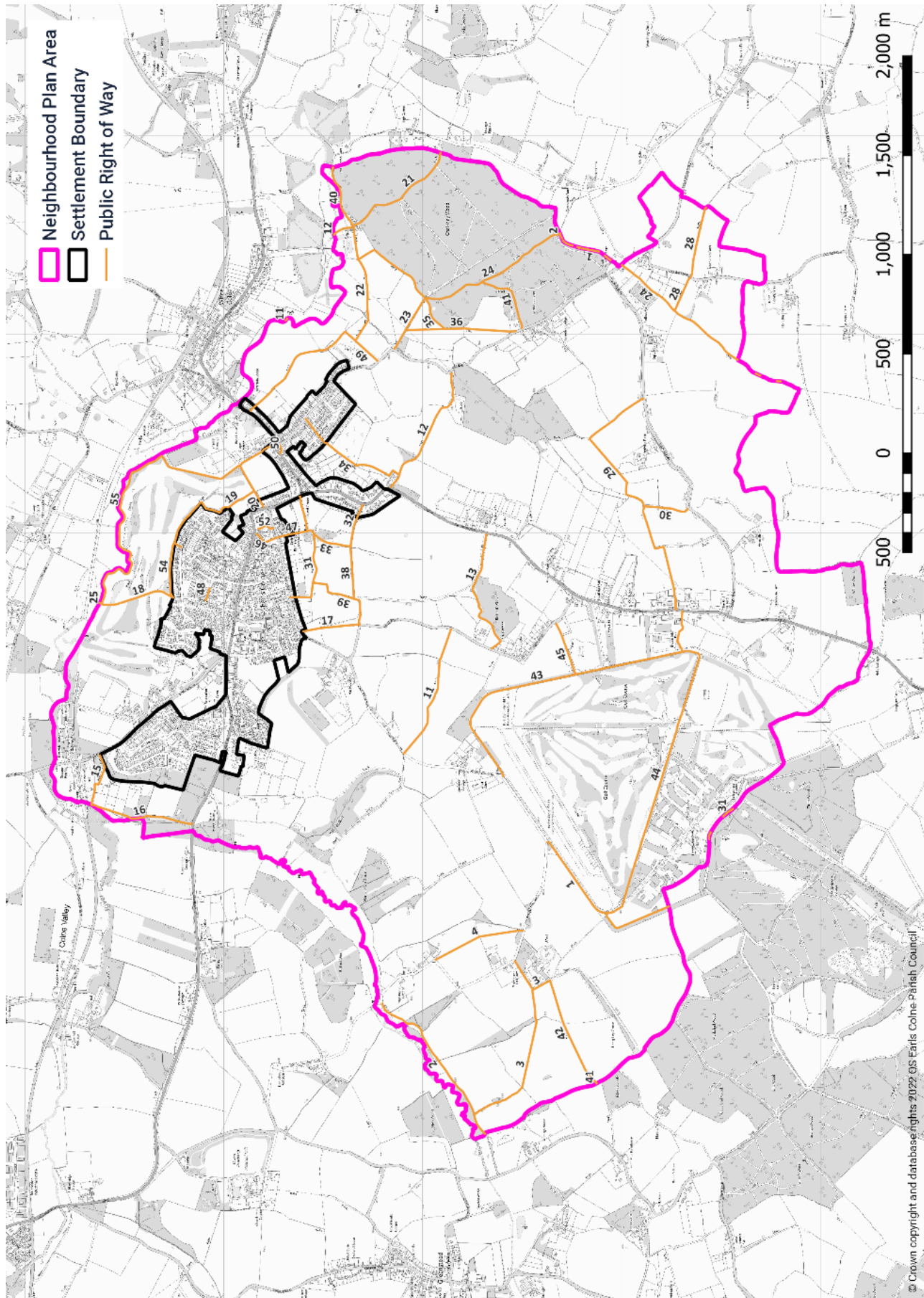


Figure 7.1 Public Rights of Way

## Key movement routes

- 7.4** In terms of trying to positively influence future patterns of movement into and around Earls Colne and particularly within the village, the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to focus on making improvements for pedestrians and cyclists in order to encourage more walking and cycling from the residential areas. Linking residential areas into the network of walkways and safest cycling routes is vital to encourage more walking and cycling and less use of the private car. Such improvements have a range of benefits including:
- Providing genuine alternatives to the private car as a means of accessing the village centre, primary school, medical and other community facilities;
  - Providing health benefits through increased walking and cycling;
  - Facilitating less congestion and reducing air pollution at busy times by encouraging children to walk to and from school and people to walk to the shops rather than 'jumping in the car' for a short journey;
  - Providing a safer environment for the community of Earls Colne, including for vulnerable users.
- 7.5** To help address this, the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to improve access to safe and high-quality walking and cycling routes. A series of Key Movement Routes have been identified where improvements will have the greatest potential to increase levels of walking and cycling and at the same time reduce pollution and improve road safety for pedestrians and cyclists. Figure 7.2 shows the Key Movement Routes and how they link up the important, regular destinations that residents make regular local journeys to, where appropriate traffic calming and improvements to enhance pedestrian and cyclist priority will be supported.
- 7.6** As identified in the Essex Design Guide<sup>(13)</sup>, footways and cycleways should ideally be kept separate. If a shared route is deemed appropriate or necessary, then it should be at least 3 metres wide.
- 7.7** Figure 7.2 also shows the issues that need to be resolved to make walking and cycling safer along with the routes where improvements to facilitate walking and cycling are likely to have the greatest benefit. A commentary is provided below. The numbers in the commentary correspond with those shown on the map in Figure 7.2.

### ***Station Road to Village Primary Route (Bourne Brook View to Halstead Road)***

- 7.8** This is not a particularly welcoming route. If walking between Halstead Road and Bourne Brook View, two crossings of a 40mph road are required and one of a 30mph road. There is also a considerable amount of very narrow footway (less than one metre).

13 <https://www.essexdesignguide.co.uk/>

### ***Crossing Station Road at Halstead Road junction (location 1)***



- 7.9** The crossing point is not easy to negotiate safely. The view of traffic turning from Halstead Road into Station Road is no more than four metres, a matter of just a few seconds. When crossing from west to east even the most vigilant and mobile can and do get caught out. The crossing from east to west is less hazardous but vehicles failing to indicate their intentions add to the difficulty.
- 7.10** The crossing point is two metres from the commencement of a 40mph zone and the speed of the traffic turning into Station Road often reflects drivers' wish to avail themselves of the ability to drive faster.
- 7.11** The hazards at location 1 support the identification of the aspirational route across the newly created Hobbs Way public open space as an alternative route into the village centre via Homefield Way (location 6).



**Safer walking route via Hobbs Way public open space (location 10)**

- 7.12** This route would run from Station Road, via Aubrey Close and across the public open space beside Hobbs Way to Homefield Way and along Burrows Road to the High Street. It would eliminate the hazardous crossing at the junction of Station Road and Halstead Road. The almost complete absence of footways on the first section of Burrows Road off the High Street (location 7) is considered less risky than the Station Road/Halstead Road junction.

***Station Road - oak tree pinch point (location 3)***



- 7.13** The hard surface at this point is only a matter of 75cm wide which is a particular hazard beside a 40 mph road.

***Crossing Station Road at Aubrey Close junction (location 2)***



- 7.14** Dropped kerbs are already in place to allow a crossing from Aubrey Close on the east side of Station Road but this is a 40mph road.

***Crossing Station Road north of Atlas Road (location 4)***



**7.15** This is necessary because the pavement ceases. This is a 40mph road where crossing from west to east takes pedestrians onto a narrow footway (less than 1 metre).

***Crossing Station Road near to De Vere Road junction (location 5)***



**7.16** Access to the Station Road footpath from Bourne Brook View is across a 40mph road to a narrow footway.

### ***Hunt Estate to Village Primary Route (Halstead Road) – location 8***



- 7.17** The footpath via The Spinney has safety barriers that are difficult for some mobility scooters. The alternative route directly to Halstead Road has a pinch point created by an oak tree whose roots further obstruct the walkway and have created a sloping surface. That slope is even more hazardous during wet and icy weather.
- 7.18** Both of the above make this route unattractive to wheelchair and mobility scooter users because they are uncomfortably close to traffic.

### ***Crossing at Tey Road and Holt Street junction and Primary Route to High Street (location 9)***



- 7.19** The final few metres of Tey Road is narrow with no footway. Whilst there is a footway around Oxford House through the existing car park, this is not clearly marked.
- 7.20** The route to the west along Holt Street is narrow and uncomfortably close to traffic on the corner of Church Hill and Upper Holt Street (location 10). An alternative route via a footpath beside the Priory and The Avenue (Causeway) takes pedestrians away from traffic but is unlit and unoverlooked (location 12). Also the road crossing on Church Hill is hazardous (location 13).
- 7.21** The footway on the north side of Holt Street frequently has parked cars that further restrict access. Whilst not illegal, it does represent another disincentive to walking.

## POLICY ERCOL 9

### KEY MOVEMENT ROUTES

- A. New development proposals will be required to retain and expand the network of safe and convenient cycling and walking routes and be accessible by all users. In particular, provision of segregated cycle and pedestrian routes will be strongly supported. Such routes should also ensure that access by disabled users, the blind and deaf and users of mobility scooters is secured.
- B. To ensure that residents can access public transport facilities, schools, leisure and other important facilities serving Earls Colne, where practicable development proposals should ensure safe and continuous pedestrian routes that connect to the Key Movement Routes shown on the Policies Map.
- C. Development proposals will be required to demonstrate and mitigate their impact on pedestrian and cycle movements at and along the identified Key Movement Routes shown on the Policies Map, where relevant.
- D. Developers will be required to contribute where appropriate to the Earls Colne to Coggeshall via Marks Hall Estate cycleway project.

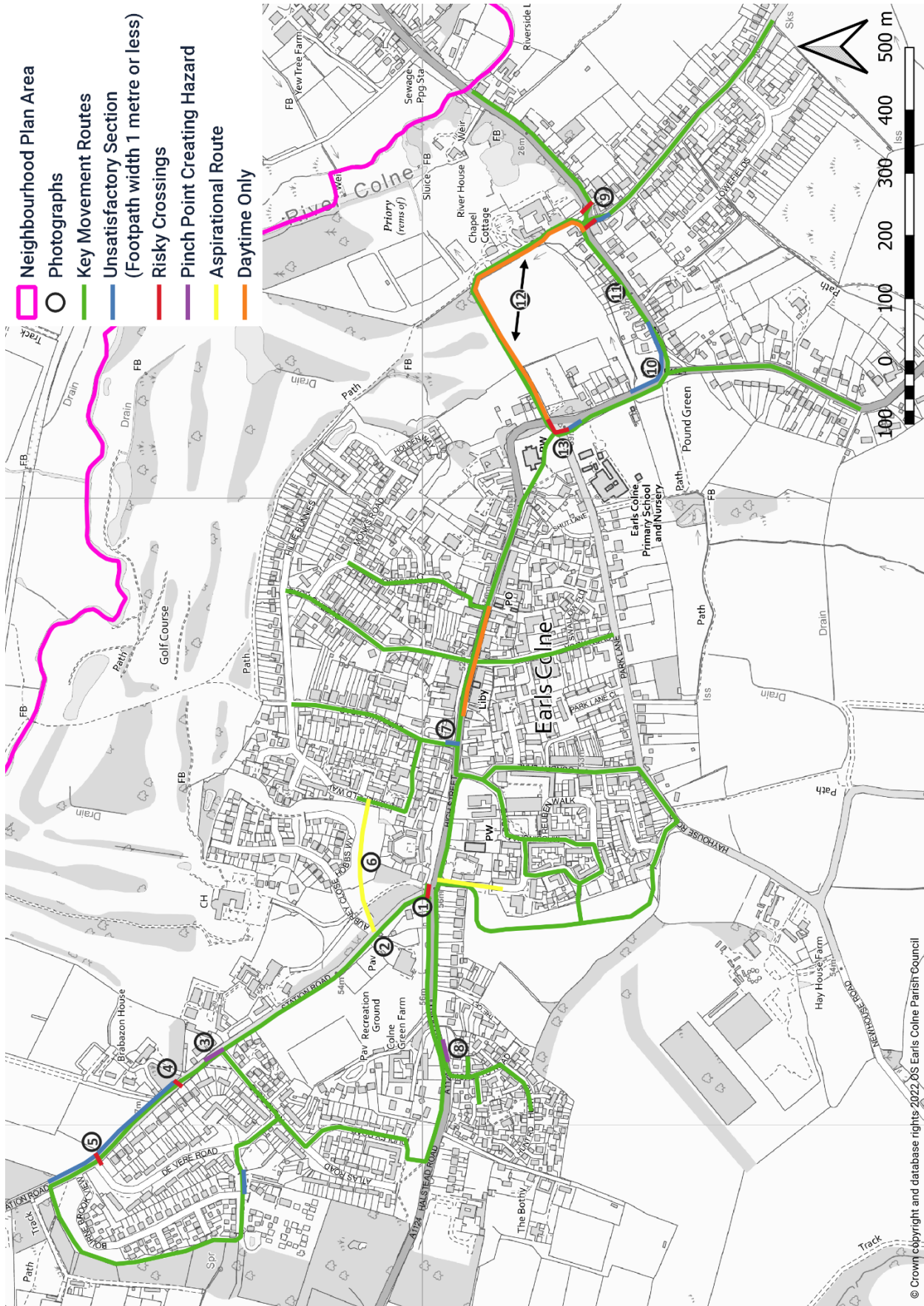


Figure 7.2 Walking and cycling route improvements and needs

## 8 Economy

- 8.1** The High Street in Earls Colne village is seen as the lifeblood of the community. It is home to a range of shops, including many independent stores, and has arguably been more successful than others in the face of a declining market for bricks-and-mortar shops in the face of online retailing. It is supported and complemented by the Earls Colne Business Park which provides employment and leisure facilities on the outskirts of the village.



*Earls Colne High Street*

- 8.2** Another feature of the High Street is the range of styles of shop units and frontages. Being at the heart of the Conservation Area, it is very much the face of Earls Colne and the listed buildings which house many of its shops are one of the reasons why it has endured as a place that people like to come to shop. Whilst this helps to ensure that new shopfronts do not detract from the setting of the Conservation Area, it is vital that the right balance is struck so that new retail businesses continue to be attracted to Earls Colne to fill empty units when they inevitably arise.
- 8.3** The changing nature of high streets does need to be recognised. In particular, changes to the Use Classes Order and Permitted Development Rights mean that retail units can be lost to other 'main town centre uses' including residential through prior approval. As such, protection can only be provided by policy for changes to uses that are not within this definition<sup>(14)</sup>. For the High Street to continue to thrive it needs to be a place that people want to come – with a high quality public realm – and needs to be flexible with the ways in which empty shop units are filled – including temporary uses.

**14** The NPPF classifies main town centre uses as retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres); leisure, entertainment and more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls); offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities).



***Indicative examples of high quality shopfronts in Earls Colne***

## POLICY ERCOL 10

### RETAINING AND ENHANCING THE VITALITY AND VIABILITY OF EARLS COLNE VILLAGE CENTRE

- A. To secure the ongoing vitality of Earls Colne Local Centre, proposals which protect, enhance and promote a diverse range of town centre uses – including retail, leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural and community - will be supported, subject to the other policies in this Neighbourhood Plan.

#### Shopfronts

- B. Proposals for new shopfronts or signage should be in sympathy with the character and appearance of the upper storeys of the building and adjoining facades. The use of traditional materials such as timber with sign-written titles rather than plastic, externally illuminated signs will be supported for both shopfronts and protruding signs.

#### Temporary uses

- C. The use of premises for main town centre uses on a temporary basis will be supported in the Earls Colne Local Centre. Such uses include 'pop up' shops and cultural, creative and leisure uses introduced on a temporary basis or for specific events.
- D. Such uses must demonstrate that they will not have a detrimental impact on the amenity of neighbouring uses, particularly residential through excessive noise and pollution.
- E. Such uses will be required to encourage access via active and sustainable modes in the first instance and the need for large amounts of vehicle parking will be required to minimise its impact on the safety and operation of the highway network.

#### Public realm

- F. Proposals which enhance the quality and accessibility (specifically for pedestrians and disabled users) of the public realm in Earls Colne Local Centre will be supported.

## 9 Matters Outside the Scope of the Neighbourhood Plan

**9.1** Over the period since the Neighbourhood Plan was commenced in 2019, the Neighbourhood Plan team has reached out to existing local residents on several occasions to obtain a better understanding of the most important issues and concerns villagers have in terms of protecting and enhancing different aspects of life in Earls Colne. Although it is clear, overall, that most residents greatly value the benefits of living in our very pleasant rural community there are a whole range of issues which are widely considered as concerning and requiring further discussion and possible action. However many of these issues fall outside the scope and remit of Neighbourhood Plan planning policies and therefore cannot be directly addressed in the Plan. In order to ensure they are duly recorded they have been included in this additional section of the Neighbourhood Plan document together with suggestions for possible further investigation.

### Widely raised issues

**9.2** Various activities including Open Days, Neighbourhood Plan representation at village events as well as surveys and questionnaires sent to all residents have been used to ascertain residents' views on the issues and concerns they feel are most important to them. Some of the most frequently raised are summarised below:

- a. The ever increasing levels of through traffic in the High Street and the health, safety and environmental risks this represents.
- b. The high number of new homes built in recent years plus those currently under construction is concerning many residents particularly with respect to the additional pressures this places on existing local health and educational services and recreational facilities.
- c. The lack of car parking in the village centre and the increase in local traffic partly attributed to the new housing developments on the extreme fringes of the village.
- d. The failure of housebuilders to address the specific future housing needs of existing local residents.
- e. The inadequacy of pedestrian footpaths and dedicated cycleways to enable residents to walk and cycle freely and safely around the village. Also accessibility issues to public open spaces for people with disabilities.

### Local health and educational services

#### Primary School

**9.3** The Earls Colne Primary School has a maximum capacity of 420 pupils (two 30-pupil maximum classes per year) and, as at 2023/24, is currently quite close to that capacity. Following informal discussions with the head teacher, it is clear there is not enough space on the current site for enlarging the capacity to the next level, i.e. 630 pupils (three classes per year). In the short to medium term the proportion of pupils from outside the village could be reduced to free up more

spaces for the children of Earls Colne residents. However this is a slow process as clearly existing pupils and their siblings from outside the village must be allowed to continue their progress through the seven years of primary education.

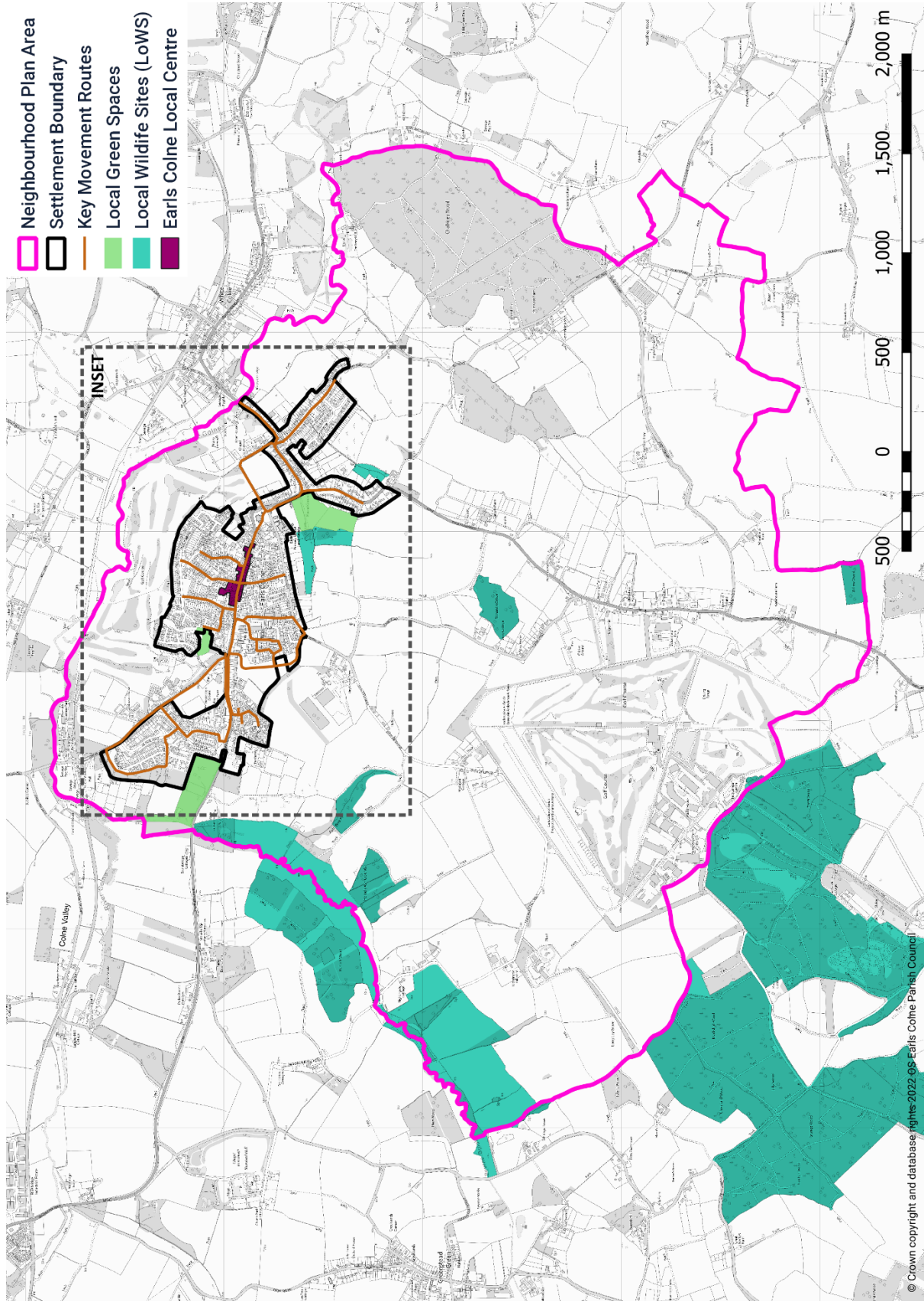
- 9.4** It is understood that some spare capacity exists at Colne Engaine Primary School which for some residents, particularly those living on the north west fringes of the village, is geographically closer than the Earls Colne Primary School.
- 9.5** In the longer term, if further significant housing developments are approved in the village, it would be necessary to consider re-siting the primary school in order to provide a larger facility or possibly constructing a second primary school. Such decisions are ultimately made by Essex County Council, as education authority, and it is hoped that a constructive dialogue can be had with the local community and Braintree District Council as planning authority.

### **General Practice Surgery**

- 9.6** The village is served by the Pumphouse Surgery NHS practice which also serves the surrounding villages (Colne Engaine, White Colne, Wakes Colne, Great Tey and Pebmarsh). As at 2023, there are four doctors and a team of nurses, support staff and administrators.
- 9.7** Following informal discussions with the senior partner at the practice we understand that the recent increase in the local population is not sufficient to trigger recruitment of another doctor. However the Pumphouse facility is large enough to allow the practice to grow in the future should significant further housing sites be allocated by Braintree District Council. In the interim it may be possible to review and adjust the current catchment area to provide more capacity for Earls Colne residents, however we believe this is not considered by the practice to be necessary at present.

### **Possible next steps**

- 9.8** Solutions to effectively overcome some of the above areas of concern are not only beyond the scope of Neighbourhood Plan policies but can, by their very nature, be extremely complex and are likely to ultimately require strategic justification at district/county level.
- 9.9** As a first step, it is suggested that more consultation with village residents will be required to determine if there is general support for continuing with the consideration of possible solutions for issues such as the increasing volume of through traffic using the High Street and meeting the specific future housing needs of existing local residents.





# 11 Evidence Base

**Evidence Base Documents for the Earls Colne Neighbourhood Plan are available on the Parish Council Website: <https://www.earlscolne-pc.gov.uk>**

- Braintree Chelmsford, Colchester & Tendring Councils HMA Strategic Housing Market Assessment Update 2015
- Earls Colne Housing Needs Assessment 2020 (AECOM)
- Earls Colne Housing Needs Survey 2021 (RCCE)
- Earls Colne Biodiversity Report 2023 (Essex Ecology)
- Earls Colne Design Codes Report 2022 (AECOM)
- Earls Colne Landscape Character Assessment 2022 (Wynne-Williams Associates)
- Earls Colne Parking Report 2020 (Cottee Transport Planning)
- Earls Colne Community Facilities Plan 2021 (Carter Jonas)
- Right Tree in the Right Place for a Resilient Future (Forest Research)
- Sustainability Statement Guidance Note: for new Residential and Non-residential buildings 2023 (BDC)
- Essex Design Guide

