



Colchester Borough Council

**West Colchester
Growth Area Option**

Environmental Audit



Colchester Borough Council

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Environmental Audit

Approved

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'D. Watkins'.

Dominic Watkins

Position

Director

Date

17 November 2015

Revision

Final

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The Borough of Colchester covers an area of 324 square kilometres in North East Essex. It is located approximately 60 miles North East of London and also lies in close proximity to the seaport of Harwich (20 miles) and Stansted Airport (30 miles). It borders Babergh District in Suffolk to the north and the districts of Tendring, Braintree and Maldon to the east, west and south west respectively. Colchester's population is currently estimated at 180,420 (ONS Mid-Year Population estimates, 2014) however it is increasing more quickly than any other Borough in Essex, with the exception of Uttlesford.
- 1.1.2 Colchester's population is projected to grow significantly over the next 20 years. To plan for this population growth, Colchester Borough Council is producing a new Local Plan to guide development in the Borough to 2032 and beyond. The new Local Plan will plan for the delivery of approximately 1,000 new houses per year over the plan period, running from 2017-2032. The new Local Plan will set out a strategy for the growth of the Borough including the amount of development needed, the types of development needed, the most sustainable locations for new development and the timescale for delivering planned growth. Choices about the location of new development will need to be made in the context of an overall vision of how the Borough can accommodate growth and change in the most sustainable way. The new Local Plan will set out the Council's long term aims and aspirations for the Borough and will include policies and land allocations to help deliver these.
- 1.1.3 In January 2015 Colchester Borough Council published an Issues and Options Paper for consultation which set out a number of potential options for growth. The Issues and Options Paper identified potential options for major growth in the form of Garden Settlements, identifying a number of potential locations including land to the East and land to the West of Colchester. In addition to these, an additional growth option has come forward which lies to the North East of Colchester near Langham. To support the production of the new Local Plan, the Council is developing a new evidence base; Environmental Audits of the potential locations for growth in West Colchester, East Colchester and North East of Colchester form part of this evidence base. The Environmental Audits will help guide future masterplanning and development in and around any future garden settlements taken forward in Borough.
- 1.1.4 Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) was commissioned by Colchester Borough Council to undertake an Environmental Audit of the land to the west of Colchester (the 'Site'), which comprises two discrete areas around Marks Tey and Eight Ash Green, and includes land within

Braintree District. The location of the Site is shown on **Figure 1.1**, and the Site boundary is illustrated in more detail on **Figure 1.2**.

1.1.5 In accordance with the Council's requirements, the purpose of the Environmental Audit is to provide a preliminary appraisal of the constraints and opportunities for development of the Site in respect of the following environmental considerations:

- Ecology and Nature Conservation.
- Landscape/Townscape Character and Visual Amenity.
- Water Quality and Flood Risk.

1.1.6 Other environmental considerations that may present constraints to development on the Site, such as cultural heritage or agricultural land use for instance, are beyond the scope of this Environmental Audit.

1.1.7 In line with the purpose of the Environmental Audit, the appraisals are largely based on review of currently available desk-top information, supplemented by targeted field surveys as appropriate. While full access to private land within the Site was not possible within the timescales of this Environmental Audit, it is considered that this was not a significant limitation on the robustness of the preliminary appraisals due to the extensive network of public rights of way through the Site.

1.1.8 Where further more detailed investigations are required to inform Site masterplanning, environmental assessment and mitigation, these are recommended in the respective sections.

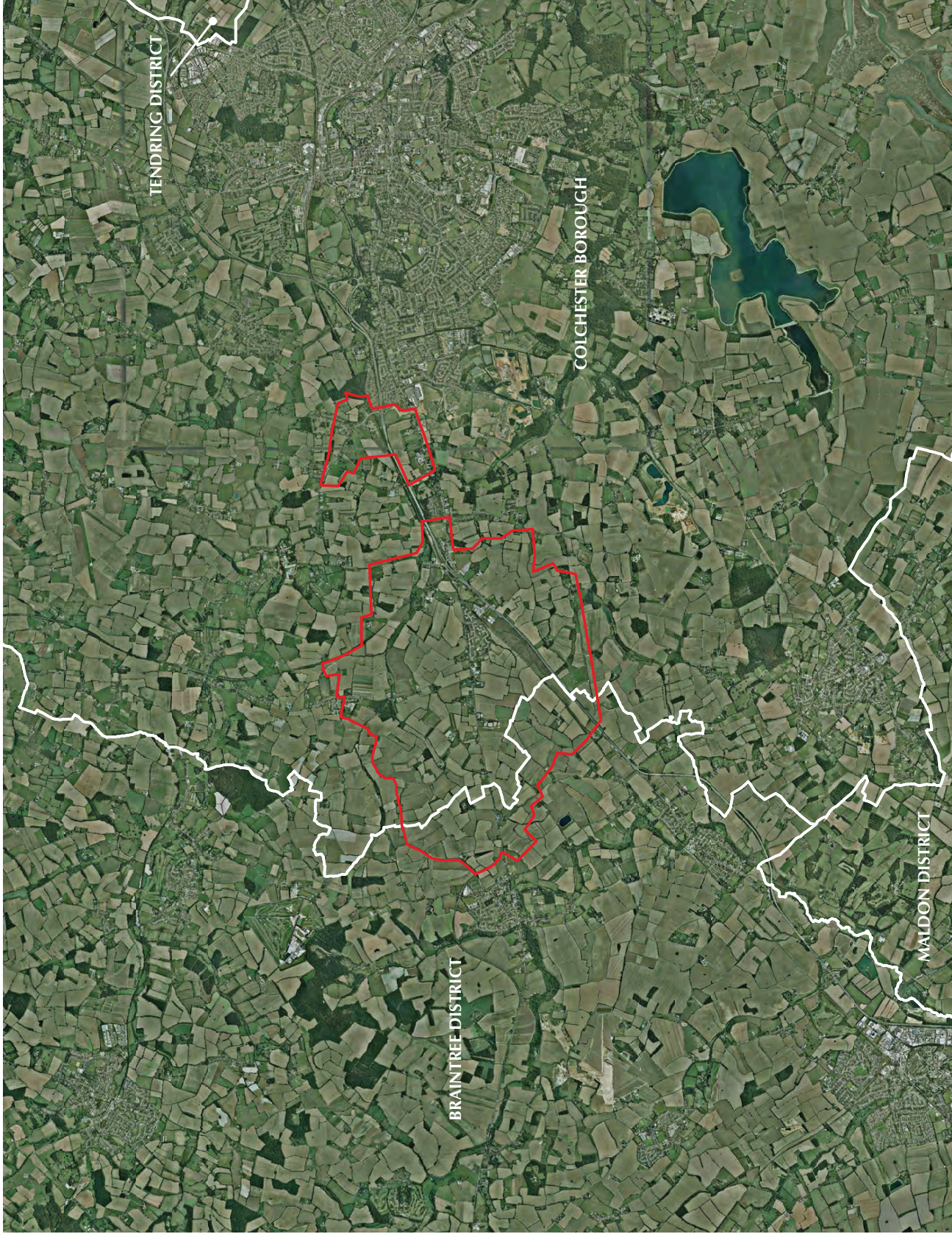
1.2 Structure of the Environmental Audit

1.2.1 The Environmental Audit is structured as follows:

- Ecology and Nature Conservation
- Landscape/Townscape Character and Visual Amenity
- Water Quality and Flood Risk

1.2.2 Each of the above sections provides:

- a general introduction to the section
- a brief summary of the audit methodology (including any limitations)
- a description of the existing conditions



KEY

Site Boundary

District/Borough Boundary

0 1 2 Kilometres



1:75,000 @A3

FIGURE 1.1
LOCATION PLAN

WEST COLCHESTER GROWTH AREA OPTION
ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT
COLCHESTER BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHRIS BLANDFORD ASSOCIATES
landscape | environment | heritage

November 2015

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KEY
 Site Boundary

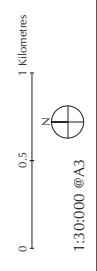
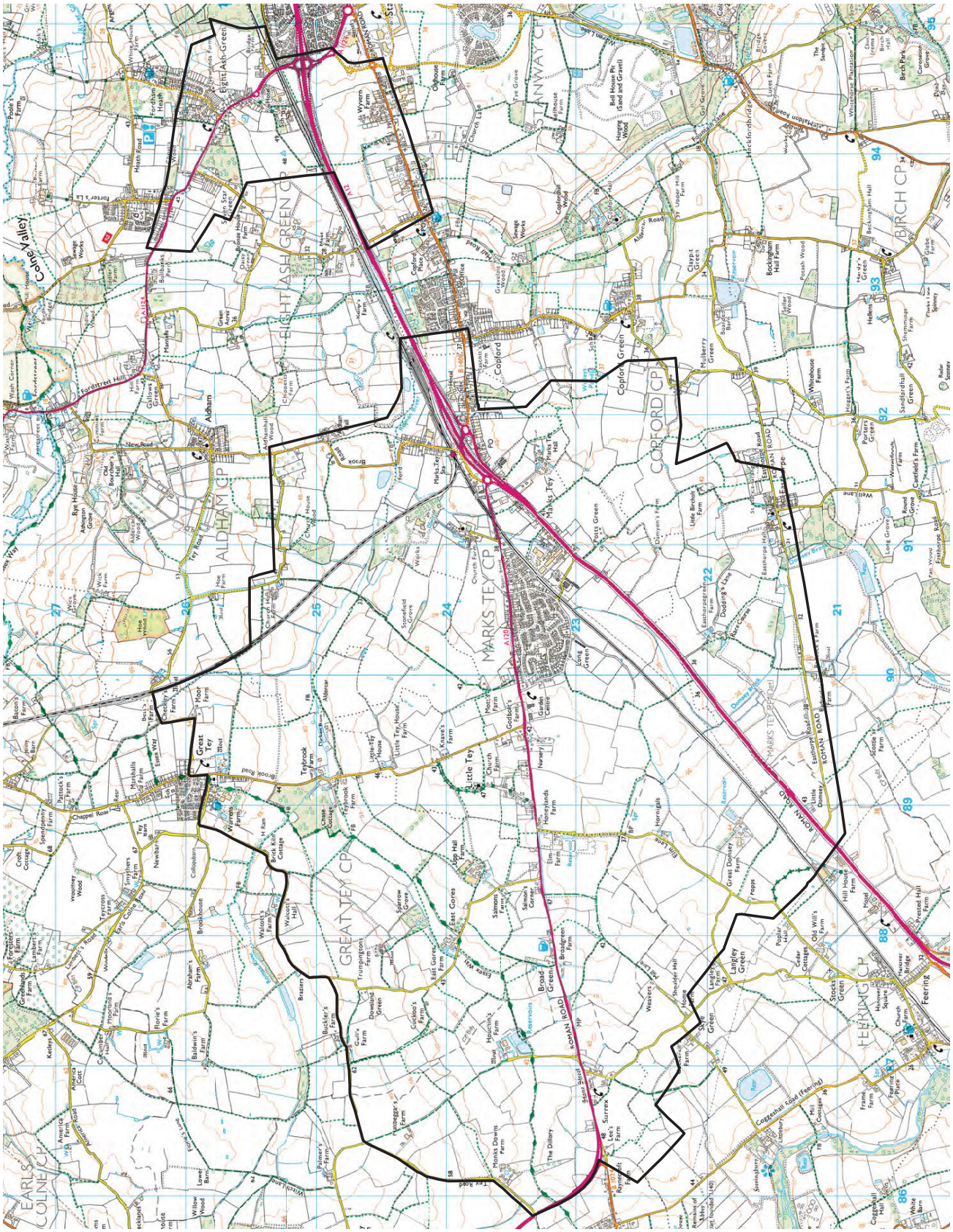


FIGURE 1.2
SITE PLAN

WEST COLCHESTER GROWTH AREA OPTION
ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT
COLCHESTER BOROUGH COUNCIL

Based upon the Ordnance Survey Map with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown Copyright Licence number - 100017241

- an appraisal of the constraints and opportunities for development (including recommendations for further work as appropriate)
- a summary of the key findings

1.2.3 Drawing on the findings of the individual appraisals, mitigation measures for avoiding or reducing potential adverse environmental effects through the Site masterplanning and assessment process are recommended. These also include identification of opportunities for incorporating Green Infrastructure features into the development of the Site. It should be noted that the mitigation measures are not exhaustive; they are intended to provide broad guidance on the type of measures that are likely to be necessary in order to achieve a sustainable development on the Site.

1.2.4 A summary of the Environmental Audit's key findings and conclusions is also provided.

1.3 Study Areas

1.3.1 For each of the environmental disciplines, an appropriate Study Area has been defined to allow the relevant issues that may influence the suitability of the Site for development to be adequately considered. Where appropriate, reference is also made to the wider context of the Study Area.

2.0 ECOLOGY AND NATURE CONSERVATION

2.1 General

- 2.1.1 This section identifies potential ecological and nature conservation constraints and opportunities for development on the Site. In line with the purpose of the Environmental Audit, the appraisal involves a desk-top review of currently available ecological information, supplemented by a habitat survey of the Site to identify features of potential ecological and nature conservation interest.
- 2.1.2 The principal nature conservation legislation in the UK includes: the EC Habitats Directive 1992 (transposed into UK legislation by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010)¹ (referred to as ‘the Habitats Regulations’); the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)²; and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000³.
- 2.1.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)⁴ sets out the Government’s current planning policy in relation to the natural environment. Paragraph 118 of the NPPF states: *‘If significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused’*. Paragraph 118 of the NPPF also states: *‘opportunities to incorporate biodiversity in and around developments should be encouraged’*. Paragraph 017 of the Planning Policy Guidance on the Natural Environment provides guidance on opportunities for biodiversity enhancements in and around developments, such as *‘habitat restoration, re-creation and expansion; improved links between existing sites; buffering of existing important sites; new biodiversity features within developments; and securing management for long-term enhancement.’*

2.2 Audit Methodology

- 2.2.1 A desk-based appraisal has been undertaken for a 2km Study Area. Information regarding land designated for its nature conservation value and of Habitats of Principal Importance/Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitats has been derived from the Magic website (www.magic.gov.uk). Desk study data comprising records of notable species (species protected by law and species of conservation concern, but excluding birds (as this data is not currently available) were obtained from the Essex Field Club.

¹ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/490/pdfs/uksi_20100490_en.pdf

² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69>

³ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/pdfs/ukpga_20000037_en.pdf

⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf