

Green Buffers

Introduction

The following paper outlines the work undertaken to determine Green Buffers within the Braintree District Local Plan, as set out on Inset Maps 1A, 1B, 2A,9, 21A, 29,43, 45 and 53, and within policy LPP72

The 2016 Local Plan consultation introduced a policy for the identification of Green Buffers around Braintree, Witham and some of the larger villages. On the 12th April 2017, the extent of the Green Buffers as well as revisions to the draft policy and supporting text was taken to the Local Plan Sub-Committee who agreed;. *Recommendation A – That the policy and text for Green Buffers is amended as set out in this report and that green buffers are allocated in the areas highlighted in green on the accompanying maps within the appendix.* The report, appendix and minutes of that meeting can be found on the Councils website at the following link <https://braintree.cmis.uk.com/braintree/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/565/Committee/6/Default.aspx> . The text for the policy as set out in the Local Plan 2017 with proposed modifications added in bold is below.

Policy LPP72 Green Buffers

The following areas are identified on the proposals map as Green Buffers;

- *Land between Braintree, Panfield, **Rayne, Deanery Hill**, Bocking and High Garrett*
- *Land between Great Notley and Black Notley*
- *Land between Witham, Rivenhall and Rivenhall End*
- *Land between Sible Hedingham and Castle Hedingham*
- ***Land between Earls Colne and White Colne***

Uses considered appropriate in green buffers include agricultural and forestry development, formal and informal recreation, footpaths and cycle ways, cemeteries, the re-development of suitable brownfield sites, development which relates to an existing use, and the extension or replacement of existing homes. Proposals for strategic infrastructure within green buffers would be supported provided suitable consideration is given to their impact on the surrounding area.

Where development is necessary it will have regard to the local landscape character and be of a design, density and layout which minimises the coalescence and consolidation between built areas and preserves the setting of those areas.

An assessment of the local landscape and physical separation between settlements will be required, demonstrating that the development is to be located on an area which has the least detrimental impact to the character of the countryside and does not reduce the visually sensitive buffer between settlements or groups of houses.

Appropriate landscaping, comprising of local native species, will be required in order to enhance the countryside character of these areas, and encourage biodiversity.

The main aim of the policy therefore is to prevent the merging of one village into another town or village, or for areas of different character within the same urban area to be joined together or for development to damage the setting of individual towns or villages. Coalescence is defined as the merging or coming together of separate towns or villages to form a single entity. This is not considered to be a desirable outcome as it can have a significant impact on the character and appearance of areas, as well as the loss of historic settlement patterns. As such the Council decided that it was necessary to consider the use of Green Buffers in the District in order to help protect the visual separation of main towns and their surrounding villages from Coalescence.

As set out in the Spatial Strategy formulation document within the evidence base (BDC013) and the Local Plan itself, it is not the intention of this policy to reduce development in the District, as the Local Plan sets out it provides for above the minimum levels of housing and employment development required in the District to 2033, but to direct that development to the most appropriate places and should be seen in conjunction with numerous policies in the Plan including LPP1 on development boundaries. The Green Buffer policy provides identifies areas which require additional protection above those considered in the countryside however as set out within the policy a range of uses are still considered acceptable within these areas, as such the Council considers it provides an appropriate level of protection, commensurate with the issue which has been identified.

Assessment Process

The assessment for Green Buffers was undertaken by an experienced officer within the Planning Policy team with longstanding knowledge and understanding of the District and its landscape.

The primary source of evidence for the assessment was the Council's Landscape Character Assessments carried out in 2007 and 2015. The 2007 study was an overall landscape character assessment of the District, with much more detailed work being undertaken in 2015 around the edges of the Main Towns and other large villages within the District which contained a small scale analysis of landscape capacities and quality. These were undertaken by expert consultants and are available separately as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan section 2 (BDC044 – BDC047).

The individual study areas can be found within the documents, and the overall mapping of these more detailed study areas can be found on page 22 of the spatial strategy formulation document (BDC013) and is attached as Appendix 1 to this report for information

Other evidence used in this process includes the Historic Characterisation Study (BDC017), the Strategic Flood risk assessments (BDC049 and its update BDC054) and the Councils mapping as set out in the Local Plan which includes conservation areas, historic parks and gardens, local nature reserves, and SSSI etc.

The first step was to identify the areas of the District which are most at risk from coalescence. This included a desk based assessment of the proximity of different towns and villages to each other using the Councils internal mapping system, satellite images and officers knowledge of the local area. Once these areas were identified it was considered whether a neighbourhood plan area was in place, the relevant plan was checked (if one was available), and the neighbourhood plan group contacted to determine if they were working on a Green Buffer or similar designation. Those areas where a Green Buffer was being determined at a more local level (Hatfield Peverel and Cressing) were then not included in the assessment as this work was already being undertaken by local community groups at a more local level and would afford the area the same level of protection as a designation in the Local Plan, given the status of both Plans as being Development Plans

Once these areas at potential risk were identified they were subject of the remaining steps below

The next step was to consider the detailed settlement fringe studies for each of the areas identified and in particular to consider what the landscape capacity of those areas at risk of leading to coalescence was. Where these areas were identified as having low or low to medium landscape capacity for change, these were considered as a starting point for a potential green buffer.

Now that a broad area for a green buffer had been identified officers considered a more detailed analysis which included consideration of other heritage, environmental and built factors which were located within this area. This could include for example any road or feature which would form a natural edge to a green buffer, any areas of trees or woodland which form a natural barrier to longer views or the impacts on the setting of any conservation area or listed buildings. In some cases therefore parcels identified in the landscape settlement analysis were reduced for the purposes of the Green Buffer to ensure the buffer covered the minimal possible area to achieve the aims of the policy and reflect the situation on the ground.

Finally these areas were plotted on the Local Plan mapping and considered against other designations or allocations in the same areas. Green buffers which also contained allocations such as open space or wildlife sites were considered as acceptable. The extent of the green buffers and the policy were then subject to public consultation as part of the 2017 pre submission consultation.

Individual Assessments

The next section of this report contains detailed reasoning as to the individual green buffers which are proposed within the Section 2 Local Plan.

Braintree

Braintree is the biggest town in the District and is made up of a number of historic core areas which have come together over the centuries including most notable Braintree and Bocking. As such it is made up of many different character areas which remain separate, particularly at the northern side of the town where there has been more limited 'modern' infill. With historic main roads running through the town and beyond it also sits within close proximity to other smaller scale and historic collections of buildings and villages. As such there are a number of green buffers proposed adjacent to the Braintree and Bocking area, the detail of which is set out below.

Bocking Church Street/High Garrett

This is an area of Braintree and Bocking to the north of main town centre and running along the main A131 road. There are several distinct character areas of housing in this area, alongside a strategic allocation for 1,000 homes. Distances between the individual development boundaries are less than 0.2miles. As such it was considered appropriate to protect the individual character areas and the new development through the introduction of small scale green buffers.

The majority of this area is low or low/medium landscape capacity. Parts of the buffer are not covered by the landscape capacity, but have been included within it as they would help prevent coalescence. The buffer is considered to be logical and helps prevent the potential merging of the built extent of Bocking and High Garrett, it was not considered necessary to include the whole field to the north, as this area is unlikely to impact on coalescence. However part of the buffer is to be removed due to an appeal decision (17/01304/OUT), this was because the Inspector gave negligible weight to the policy given progress at the time of the appeal, and that a community orchard would be provided on part of the buffer area. The table below summarises the assessment made.

Coalescence Risk	Distance	Visual Separation	Landscape Character Assessment	Heritage Impact	Agricultural Land Classification	Flood Risk	Other
Yes – Between development along Church Street, and High Garrett.	200-300m	Reasonably well screened however loss of hedgerows could have significant impact.	14a – Low Medium (Hockey Club), some areas excluded from assessment.	Limited	3	Zone 1	Area reduced in modifications due to appeal decision (17/01304/OUT).

Towerlands and Panfield

This buffer comprises low to low/medium landscape parcels between Panfield and the growth location at Towerlands. The area has additional value due to the presence of Public rights of way in the area. Views from the local road network are more limited due to hedgerows and mature trees. An area to the north of Church End is also included to help better protect Grade II listed Buildings along the B1053, all other boundaries are drawn to existing features. The area to the north of Church End was not extended as far north as the field boundary as this area would not be necessary to prevent coalescence. The Green Buffer is intended to help protect the setting of the Grade I listed building at Panfield Hall whose curtilage sites adjacent to the buffer.

Coalescence Risk	Distance	Visual Separation	Landscape Character Assessment	Heritage Impact	Agricultural Land Classification	Flood Risk	Other
Between the strategic growth location of Towerlands and the village of Panfield	550 – 650m	Good visual separation due to presence of hedgerows and mature trees, more open views on area to	Low and Low Medium Landscape Capacity	Grade I listed building at Panfield Hall.	2 and 3	None	Recreational Value due to presence of PROWs in area

		the north of Church End.					
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Braintree/Rayne

This area is east of Braintree and separates Braintree town from the village of Rayne which is located less than ½ a mile to the west. Braintree town in this location has relatively modern housing with some new houses currently being built, whilst Rayne has mixed more historic housing with the conservation area boundary for Rayne extending further than the development boundary towards Braintree. As such it is considered necessary to add a green buffer in this location to preserve the historic setting of the conservation area of Rayne and prevent coalescence between the two settlements.

The majority of this area is identified as having low landscape capacity. The buffer runs either side of the Flitchway which is a popular walking and cycling route on an old railway line which is also an allocated Local Wildlife site and informal recreation area, and has listed buildings either in or adjacent to it, including Naylinghurst and the grade I All Saints Church. Parts of the site are also within an identified Flood Zone. The parcels of land included in the buffer are primarily of low capacity. It was deemed appropriate to draw the north extent of the buffer no further than Rayne Hall Farm Airfield which helps to define a northern boundary to the buffer.

It should be noted that land to the south of Rayne Road was subject to a planning decision (15/01538/OUT) and appeal which was dismissed, this was partly due to heritage impact on Grade II listed buildings at Naylinghurst, and that the development proposal would appreciably diminish the sense of separation between the settlements of Braintree and Rayne. An area of higher landscape capacity was excluded from the buffer to the south of Springfields as it was considered this would not decrease either the physical or visual separation of the settlements, and had a higher landscape capacity than the remainder of the site.

A more recent appeal was lost on part of this site on land to the rear of Gilda Terrace (18/01065/OUT), with the Inspector concluding that Green Buffers could only have limited weight as the Plan was still under examination, and that although the proposal would lead to development encroaching within the mainly undeveloped land that separates the two settlements, it would extend no further towards Rayne than Gilda Terrace. The table below summarises the assessment made.

Coalescence Risk	Distance	Visual Separation	Landscape Character Assessment	Heritage Impact	Agricultural Land classification	Flood Risk	Other
Between Braintree and Rayne	700-800m	Very open	Predominantly Low Landscape Capacity.	Adjacent to Grade I listed Church Grade II Listed buildings a Naylinghurst, Rayne Conservation Area. Roman Road of Stane Street (Rayne Road)	3	Zone 2/3	Recent appeal decision on small area to the north of Flitchway 18/01065/OUT. Recreational route along former Railway Line at Flitchway

Deanery Hill

The Strategic Growth Location BOCN137 land at Towerlands is situated on a former golf course, leisure and equestrian centre and is bounded by Panfield Road to the north, an essentially country road, well vegetated and with rural long reaching views to the north. As such the road provides a clear edge to the built development of the town in this location. However to the north east Bocking does 'curl' round to some extent and whilst it has some recent modern building on the edges is made up of a conservation area in its core.

The River Pant runs between the built development and the new strategic growth location with reasonably steep valley sides which would afford long views from any development and the area is identified as having low landscape capacity. For the purposes of preventing coalescence not all of the landscape area needs to be included within the buffer. As such it was drawn to a logical boundary which follows a field boundary and reflects the edge of the strategic growth location which represents the edge of the built development of Braintree. A number of listed buildings are present at the Deanery site which is also included in the buffer to further protect its setting. The table below summarises the assessment made.

Coalescence Risk	Distance	Visual Separation	Landscape Character Assessment	Heritage Impact	Agricultural Land Classification	Flood Risk	Other
Yes – Between development at the Towerlands site, and Bocking.	350-400m	Very open cross valley views around the River Pant	Low	Listed buildings Grade II at Deanery Hill.	3 with some 2.	Flood Zone 1	Within buffer zone for historic landfill site.

Blackwater River Valley

This buffer is located between the established area of Braintree and the allocated strategic growth location Land East of Broad Road (BOCN132) and runs along the River Blackwater. It provides visual and physical separation between the proposed growth location at Land East of Broad Road and the existing residential development. This area would also benefit from remaining undeveloped as it is adjacent to the River Blackwater, an informal recreation area and a Local Nature Reserve. The landscape in this area has low landscape capacity to accommodate change and so the buffer is proposed to run in the river corridor between the A131 edge of Braintree and Broad Road. The table below summarises the assessment made

Coalescence Risk	Distance	Visual Separation	Landscape Character Assessment	Heritage Impact	Agricultural Land Classification	Flood Risk	Other
Between Braintree and new growth location at Straits Mill	150-250m	Cross river valley views	Low	Western edge adjacent to Bocking Church Street	N/A	Zones 2 and 3.	Within buffer zone of historic landfill. Recreation Value, public rights of way in the area.

				Conservation Area			
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Great Notley/Black Notley

Great Notley is a largely modern Garden Village which was built to the south of Braintree in the last 30 years. Strategic growth location BLAN114 is located to the east of the existing Great Notley village and largely mirrors the shape of the existing village, bordered by Bakers Lane and Notley Road. Black Notley is a more historic village which is also to the south of Braintree sitting within a countryside setting, with the development boundaries between the village and the new development around 0.4miles at its closest point.

The majority of this buffer is identified as low landscape capacity with areas of Medium/low landscape capacity to the east of Notley Road. The purpose of this buffer is to help retain the physical and visual separation between the proposed strategic growth location at land East of Great Notley and Black Notley. The buffer has a number of listed buildings within or adjacent to it including a cluster of buildings at Black Notley Hall, and listed buildings along Bakers Lane including John Ray Cottage which is associated with the famous English naturalist. An area adjacent to Black Notley has been excluded from the buffer because it is of a medium capacity and would not reduce the visual separation between Bakers Lane and Black Notley. The table below summarises the assessment made

Coalescence Risk	Distance	Visual Separation	Landscape Character Assessment	Heritage Impact	Agricultural Land Classification	Flood Risk	Other
Between the Strategic Growth Location at Great Notley and the village of Black Notley, as well as the cluster of listed	900 – 1200m	Limited visual separation due to number of PROW's on site.	Low	Grade II listed buildings at Black Notley Hall and along Bakers Lane.	2/3	None	Land number of PROW's in area.

buildings at Black Notley Hall.							
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Sible Hedingham/Castle Hedingham

Sible Hedingham and Castle Hedingham are two villages located in close proximity to each other in a rural setting. Sible Hedingham is a large village located on the main A1107 and the development boundaries between it and Castle Hedingham are only around 1/4 mile apart to the northeast on Queens Street. Castle Hedingham's conservation area boundary is located on Queen Street just beyond the development boundary, whilst more modern housing, employment and education facilities are located on the Sible Hedingham side. As such it was considered appropriate to designate a green buffer in this area to protect the character of the Castle Hedingham Conservation Area and to maintain the slip area of green space between the two villages, allowing them to retain their own characters.

The majority of this buffer is identified Flood Zone and as a Local Wildlife site. The buffer is also adjacent to the Conservation Area in Castle Hedingham and listed buildings at Queen Street. It is considered to be necessary to maintain the gap between the two settlements due to the low landscape capacity in this area, in particular the open landscape to the south of Queen Street. The landscape character area between the two settlements extends a considerable distance to the south, and, for the purposes of preventing coalescence, it was decided that the buffer only need extend as far as the water treatment works as Castle Hedingham is to the north. The table below sets summarises the assessment made.

Coalescence Risk	Distance	Visual Separation	Landscape Character Assessment	Heritage Impact	Agricultural Land Classification	Flood Risk	Other
Yes	300 to 500m	Views from Sheepcot Road toward the River Colne, and beyond to Sible Hedingham.	Low Landscape Capacity.	Yes, buffer adjacent to Castle Hedingham Conservation Area, and Grade II listed buildings	Grade 3	Yes	Buffer is within the River Colne river valley resulting in prominent cross valley views. No sites are proposed in the call for sites in this area, however considering the historic importance of Castle Hedingham and its landscape

		View along Queen Street between the settlements.		along Queen Street.			setting, it is considered appropriate to designate a landscape buffer in this location. Loss of trees or vegetation could reduce visual separation of the two settlements.
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Earls Colne/White Colne

Earls Colne and White Colne are two villages along the main A1124 towards Colchester and are to the east of the Braintree District. The two villages sit in very close proximity to each other separated by the River Colne and their development boundaries are less than 0.1miles apart. The villages have similar mixed historic buildings and share a conservation area which extends between the two development boundaries.

This buffer therefore aims to keep the visual and physical separation between the historic villages of Earls Colne and White Colne and retain their identities as two separate villages. The buffers have been draw to only include areas within which development would impact on the coalescence of the two villages, as such it was not considered necessary to extend the buffer any further south east than an existing field boundary, and no further north west than to adjacent the sewerage works. The majority of the buffer is low landscape capacity with some elements of medium low landscape value. The buffer includes parts of the conservation area, and a number of grade II listed buildings along the A1124/Colneford Hill. The whole green buffer area is also an area at risk of flooding due to its proximity to the river.

The table below summarises the assessment made.

Coalescence Risk	Distance	Visual Separation	Landscape Character Assessment	Heritage Impact	Agricultural Land Classification	Flood Risk	Other
Between Earls Colne and White Colne	40-500m	Prominent cross river valley views, with paddocks	Low and small area of Low/Medium	Part within Conservation Area. Grade II listed buildings	3	Flood Zone 2 and 3	Recreational value with PROW in area.

		providing further a generally open appearance to the landscape.	landscape capacity.	along Colnesford Hill			
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Witham/Rivenhall

Witham is the second largest town in the District and is located adjacent to the A12 and the Great Eastern mainline railway line. Along this historic route there are a number of villages including Rivenhall to the north and Hatfield Peverel to the south. Rivenhall and Rivenhall End are small villages and have their own identity and communities which they want to retain. There is a strategic growth location RIVE360 land at Forest Road which is currently being built out in this area and a protected lane and local wildlife site.

The majority of this area is identified as having Medium/Low landscape capacity. Parts of this buffer have not been assessed in the Landscape Capacity assessment but have been included as they contribute to the separation of Witham and Rivenhall and Rivenhall End. The buffer extends to the A12 to the south west which provides a natural barrier and to the north-west stopping at the boundary of Rivenhall and Oak Road.

The area between Rectory Road and the Rivenhall Oaks Golf Centre was not included within the buffer as the Golf Course provides a significant buffer between Witham, Rivenhall and Rivenhall End. The listed building at Stoverns hall and along Rectory Road are also included in the buffer. The table below summarises the assessment made.

Coalescence Risk	Distance	Visual Separation	Landscape Character Assessment	Heritage Impact	Agricultural Land Classification	Flood Risk	Other
Witham and main built extent of Rivenhall and Rivenhall End	700-1000m	Golf Course provides a significant area of open space.	Medium Low. Are to the south of Rivenhall not assessed but included in	3 Listed buildings. Grade II along Rickstones Road, which	2	Flood Zone 1	PROW runs through buffer zone connecting Oak Road with Witham

		Open landscape views when looking South West from Oak Road toward the golf course. Need to contain employment area at Eastways	buffer due to heritage assets	back on to open fields.			
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Appendix 1

