

13.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

13.1.1 National planning policy, as set out in Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, recognises that the countryside is a major environmental asset, contributing significantly to the quality of life for local communities. This Planning Policy Statement sets out some of the Government's objectives for rural areas, which include "to raise the quality of life and the environment in rural areas" through the promotion of, amongst other things, "good quality, sustainable development that respects and, where possible, enhances local distinctiveness and the intrinsic qualities of the countryside", and "the continued protection of the open countryside for the benefit of all, with the highest level of protection for our most valued landscapes and environmental resources".

13.1.2 The work carried out by CBC as part of the Core Strategy consultation confirmed that the existing pattern of settlements in the Borough is strongly valued by local people. CBC commissioned CBA in September 2008 to undertake an assessment of the contribution provided by open countryside in maintaining the physical and visual separation between Colchester and adjacent settlements. The study included the open countryside between the following settlements:

1. Colchester to Rowhedge
2. Colchester to Wivenhoe
3. Colchester to Great Horkesley
4. Colchester to West Bergholt
5. Stanway to Copford
6. Colchester to Eight Ash Green
7. Colchester to Layer-de-la-Haye
8. Colchester to Langham
9. Colchester to Boxted
10. Copford to Mark's Tey
11. Mark's Tey to Little Tey
12. Mark's Tey to Easthorpe

13.1.3 The study considers that protection of this open countryside is essential to the maintenance of the distinct character of the above settlements. Adopted Core Strategy Policy ENV1 – Environment of the adopted Core Strategy states that "Where new development needs, or is compatible with, a rural location, it should demonstrably (amongst other things) protect, conserve or enhance landscape and townscape character, including maintaining settlement separation;"

- 13.1.4 The findings of this study confirm that the limitations on inter-visibility (i.e. visibility between settlements) and intra-visibility (i.e. the ability to see the edges of two or more settlements from a single point in the intervening landscape) resulting from visual enclosure by landform and vegetation in the open countryside, and the strength of rural character cumulatively provide a significant contribution to the actual and perceived separation of settlements in many instances (i.e. a high level of contribution to the separation of settlements and to maintaining their distinct character). On the basis of the work carried out for this study, areas that provide a high contribution to the separation of settlements are considered to be essential in helping retain the character and identity of the Borough's key settlements, and should be safeguarded from inappropriate development. Any new built development on this land is likely to seriously undermine the sense of settlement separation and the strong rural character of the land.
- 13.1.5 However, there are also some parts of the open countryside between the following settlements that provide a less significant contribution (i.e. medium level) to settlement separation::
- Colchester to Rowhedge (see Figure 1.3)
 - Colchester to Wivenhoe (see Figure 2.3)
 - Colchester to Boxted (see Figure 9.3)
 - Copford to Mark's Tey (see Figure 10.3)
 - Mark's Tey to Easthorpe (see Figure 12.3)
- 13.1.6 Land identified as providing a medium contribution to the separation of settlements has some potential to accommodate new built development without significantly diminishing the sense of separation between the settlements or the rurality of the remaining undeveloped land. This land is typically not visually prominent in views from the wider landscape and its character is influenced by existing built development.
- 13.1.7 The study also identified a number of areas located close to edges of certain settlements, where open countryside provides a much more limited contribution to settlement separation. Areas that provide a low contribution to settlement separation have the potential to accommodate some new built development, if required, subject to appropriate design, and appropriate landscape and visual mitigation measures. Parts of the open countryside between the following settlements provide only a limited contribution (i.e. low level) to settlement separation:
- Colchester to Rowhedge (see Figure 1.3)
 - Colchester to Wivenhoe (see Figure 2.3)
 - Colchester to Great Horkesley (see Figure 3.3)

- Colchester to West Bergholt (see Figure 4.3)
- Colchester to Eight Ash Green (see Figure 6.3)
- Colchester to Layer-de-la-Haye (see Figure 7.3)
- Colchester to Langham (see Figure 8.3)
- Mark's Tey to Little Tey (see Figure 11.3)
- Mark's Tey to Easthorpe (see Figure 12.3)

13.1.8 Land identified as providing a low contribution to the separation of settlements has the most potential in relative terms to accommodate new built development and is land is typically either under a strong urban influence or has a high degree of visual containment. Any new built development on these land parcels would not significantly diminish the sense of separation between the settlements or the rurality of the remaining undeveloped land.

13.1.9 Any development within areas identified as having low or medium contribution to settlement separation must ensure that the strength of rural character and sense of separation between settlements in the remaining areas of open countryside is not significantly diminished, and that the distinctiveness of the settlements is maintained. Further studies at a more detailed level would be required to establish the capacity of these areas to accommodate new built development.



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