

2.0 COLCHESTER TO WIVENHOE

2.1 Landscape Context

- 2.1.1 The large, nucleated settlement of Wivenhoe is situated on the eastern side of the River Colne, approximately 2.2km to the south of Colchester (see Figure 2.1). The two settlements are separated a wide belt of arable farmland, by the mature parkland landscape of the University of Essex campus and by several small blocks of woodland. The corridor of the River Colne, including the Hythe Marshes, abuts the western edge of the area.
- 2.1.2 The A133 (Clacton Road) extends out from the southern edge of Colchester, and heads eastwards through this area of open countryside. The B1028 (Colchester Road) connects the northern edge of Wivenhoe with the A133, and the Brightlingsea Road extends south-eastwards out from the B1028, passing some 300m to the northeast of Wivenhoe.
- 2.1.3 The small settlement of Rowhedge is situated between 0.1 and 0.5km to the southwest of Wivenhoe on the opposite bank of the River Colne.

2.2 Baseline Review

Topography

- 2.2.1 Wivenhoe lies on the top of a plateau that is approximately at the same elevation as much of Colchester. Wivenhoe Park and the University of Essex occupy part of this plateau (see Figure 2.2). The plateau extends south and east of the University, between an approximate elevation of 30 and 35m AOD. Wivenhoe is situated predominantly at 20-30m AOD. The western edge of the plateau slopes steeply down to the wide valley of the River Colne. The river has a relatively wide flood plain at this point, with the valley floor located at approximately 4m AOD. The northern edge of the plateau slopes steeply down to meet a narrow valley at approximately 5m AOD. This valley contains Salary Brook and defines the southern edge of Colchester (see Photograph 2.1). To the north of the valley, residential buildings sit on land that rises from 10 to 30m AOD in a relatively short distance.

Land Use

- 2.2.2 Land use between Wivenhoe and the section of the Colchester settlement edge to the east of the River Colne is generally dominated by a wide belt of arable fields, which are delineated by mature hedgerows and interspersed by blocks of mixed woodland.

- 2.2.3 The University of Essex campus lies within the historic and mature parkland of Wivenhoe Park, which lies within this belt of arable farmland. The campus includes many university buildings, some of which are many storeys taller than adjacent trees. The campus also includes parking areas, large areas of sports fields, campus grassland, historic parkland (Post-Medieval Deer Park) and the historic Wivenhoe Lodge. The relatively minor Boundary Road provides access to the University of Essex and passes along the southern edge of the campus.
- 2.2.4 The eastern slopes of the River Colne are vegetated by a combination of pasture fields and rough grassland. The Colchester to Clacton-on-Sea railway runs along the eastern bank of the River Colne.

Vegetation

- 2.2.5 The most dominant type of vegetation in this area is the parkland trees that surround the University of Essex buildings. In addition to parkland surrounding the University of Essex campus, this area of countryside contains several large areas of woodland. At the top of the southern slopes of Salary Brook, there are several blocks of mixed woodland, including Thousand Acres, The Strip and Home Wood. There are two other large linear blocks of woodland at the western edge of Wivenhoe, including Wivenhoe Woods along the settlement edge. East of the University, there is a triangular patch of woodland adjacent to the B1027.
- 2.2.6 The arable fields surrounding the University of Essex parkland are delineated with mature hedgerows, which often contain mature deciduous trees. These include fields to the north and south of A133, and those between Boundary Road and the northern edge of Wivenhoe. There are small groups of trees and intermittent mature hedgerows alongside the northern edge of Wivenhoe (see Photograph 2.2).
- 2.2.7 Fields adjacent to the River Colne are generally more open, with a general absence of field boundary hedgerows.

Settlement Edges

- 2.2.8 The northern edges of Wivenhoe are generally softened by a belt of mature deciduous trees. Similarly, the western settlement edges are softened and enclosed by mature, predominantly deciduous woodland.

- 2.2.9 The southern Colchester settlement edge is visually harsh when viewed from the Salary Brook valley. However, in views from fields on the plateau to the south of the valley, views of the settlement are filtered or substantially enclosed by trees and mature hedgerows.
- 2.2.10 In the intervening landscape, the University of Essex and Wivenhoe Park are partly surrounded by peripheral mature deciduous trees. There are also many single mature deciduous trees within the University campus. These provide visual complexity to the parkland, soften the appearance of its tallest buildings and visually enclose many smaller buildings from summer views.

Public Rights of Way

- 2.2.11 A network of public footpaths connects Colchester and Wivenhoe via the open countryside between the two settlements. At the southern edge of Colchester, a public footpath runs south-eastwards from the urban edge towards Slough Lane. A second public footpath runs westwards from Colchester Road, along Boundary Road on the southern side of the University of Essex. A third public footpath connects with this footpath, heading southwards to the northern edge of Wivenhoe. A fourth public footpath runs from the western edge of Wivenhoe, to connect with the public footpath that runs north-south along the eastern bank of the River Colne. There is a parallel footpath on the western bank of the river.

Landscape Character

- 2.2.12 This area of open countryside is situated within the Ardleigh River Valley (A6), Wivenhoe Farmland Plateau (B8), and Colne Drained Estuarine Marsh (D3) Landscape Character Areas, as identified within the Colchester Borough Landscape Character Assessment (November 2005). The key characteristics of each area are listed below:

Ardleigh River Valley (A6)

- Lower reaches of a small narrow river valley encompassing the Salary Brook and steep valley sides;
- Wooded western valley slopes (patches of ancient deciduous woodland);
- Small regular fields on the valley sides in proximity to Salary Brook, becoming larger adjacent to the south;
- Connects to the large Ardleigh reservoir and remainder of the character area outside the borough boundary to the north.

Wivenhoe Farmland Plateau (B8)

- Small, irregular patches of woodland;
- Plateau, predominantly arable farmland consisting of medium to large arable irregular fields with gappy field boundaries;
- Well-connected network of lanes and footpaths traversing the area;
- Distinctive Wivenhoe Park and Lodge adjacent to the University of Essex site.

Colne Drained Estuarine Marsh (D3)

- Corridor of rough grassland and grazing marsh lining the River Colne;
- Scattered patches of low-lying scrub;
- Network of drainage ditches;
- Visual influences of main railway line which runs through parts of the area.

2.2.13 The character of the landscape between the settlements has been examined in further detail as part of this study to ascertain the degree to which variation in landscape character contributes to the separation of settlements. The relatively enclosed, intimate, small-scale valley encompassing Salary Brook to the immediate south of Colchester, contrasts with the larger-scale, more open landscape of arable fields to the north and south of both the A133 and Brightlingsea Road. Towards the centre of the area, the mature, semi-enclosed, designed landscape associated with Wivenhoe Hall, now forms a distinctive setting for the University of Essex buildings. Arable fields to the south of Boundary Road are semi-enclosed with mature deciduous hedges along field boundaries. The agricultural land to the north of Wivenhoe and to the north, east and west of the university campus generally has a gently undulating rural character. The landscape has a strong sense of openness in many places with few blocks of trees and typically with well-trimmed field hedgerows. Outside the university campus, there is generally a strong sense of rurality associated with the open countryside between the settlements.

Inter-visibility

2.2.14 There is no inter-visibility between Wivenhoe and the section of Colchester southern edge located to the east of the railway. Views from this part of Colchester are enclosed by the well-treed southern side slopes of the Salary Brook valley (see Photograph 2.1), by boundary trees and shrubs on the University of Essex campus and by mature field boundary hedgerows to the north of the A133 road corridor.

2.2.15 Views from the northern edge of Wivenhoe are generally enclosed by mature deciduous vegetation along the settlement edge, which limits views northwards towards the edges of

Colchester. Northward views are also limited by field hedgerows within the tract of farmland to the north of Wivenhoe and by the boundary vegetation and relatively high land within the University of Essex campus.

Intra-visibility

- 2.2.16 Intra-visibility (i.e. the ability to see settlement edges of both Colchester and Wivenhoe from a single point) is difficult to perceive, due to the distance between the settlements and the screening effect of woodland, landform and field boundary hedgerows.
- 2.2.17 A mixture of partial and open views of housing on the northern edge of Wivenhoe may be obtained from Colchester Road and from the public footpath between Boundary Road and Wivenhoe. These views are softened along much of the settlement edge by groups of deciduous trees and by rear garden hedgerows. There are no views to the settlement edges of Colchester from this footpath, although views of upper parts of buildings within the university campus may be obtained over intervening hedgerows.
- 2.2.18 In views from Brightlingsea Road, mature hedgerows and occasional deciduous trees limit most views of housing on the northern edge of Wivenhoe (see Photograph 2.3) and the southern edge of Colchester (see Photograph 2.4). Views towards Wivenhoe may be obtained from Boundary Road, but these are restricted to glimpsed views above the hedgerow that lines the southern side of the road. However, no views of Colchester may be obtained from the southern sections of Boundary Road.
- 2.2.19 Views of the residential buildings on the southern edge of Colchester are difficult to obtain from the university campus on account of enclosure provided by trees near the campus periphery.
- 2.2.20 The university residential towers are perceived as isolated structures in the countryside as they are typically seen protruding above the canopies of trees in views from the outside the university campus.
- 2.2.21 Views of industrial and commercial buildings along the southern edge of Colchester, but west of the railway line, may be obtained from the northern sections of Boundary Road and from western parts of the university campus. Views of Wivenhoe are not obtained from the section of railway that passes between the two settlements.
- 2.2.22 In westward views from the public footpath that connects the northern edge of Wivenhoe with the University of Essex (see Photograph 2.5), housing on the far southern edge of Colchester,

west of the Hythe Marshes, may be seen against a well-treed backdrop on the far side of the River Colne valley.

2.3 Evaluation

- 2.3.1 The lack of inter-visibility and general lack of intra-visibility between the settlements contributes to a strong sense of separation between settlements. When travelling eastwards along the A133 and southwards along the B1207 and B1208 roads, the contrast between the predominantly rural character of the landscape and the adjacent settlements helps to establish a distinct sense of leaving one settlement and arriving at another. Topography and the visual enclosure of university buildings by campus trees play a key role in contributing to the visual separation of settlements.
- 2.3.2 The contribution made by various areas of land between Colchester and Wivenhoe to the separation of settlements has been assessed below according to whether they provide a high, medium, or low contribution. These assessment findings have been mapped on Figure 2.3.

High Contribution

- 2.3.3 The mature tree planting along the periphery of the University of Essex campus provides visual enclosure to the campus and provides the impression of a significant block of woodland in many views from surrounding roads and public footpaths. These peripheral trees enclose views of many existing buildings within the campus, have a strong visual mass, and provide increased complexity and depth to the landscape. The enclosure provided by these trees, combined with the relatively high-lying landform within the campus, contributes to the lack of inter-visibility between Colchester and Wivenhoe. The university residential towers are perceived as isolated structures in the countryside, rather than an extension of Colchester. The contribution of the campus parkland to the separation of the settlements is high.
- 2.3.4 The eastern side slopes of the River Colne valley are well-treed in the vicinity of Wivenhoe and the far western part of the university campus. They are prominent in views towards both Colchester and Wivenhoe when seen from viewpoints in the western parts of the River Colne valley and beyond. Views of Wivenhoe and the southern edge of Colchester to the east of the railway are difficult to obtain in most of these views. On this basis, the topography and tree cover on these eastern side slopes provide a high contribution to the physical and visual separation of settlements. The university residential towers are perceived from these viewpoints as isolated structures in the countryside as they are typically seen protruding above the peripheral tree belts.

- 2.3.5 There is no inter-visibility between Colchester and Wivenhoe and very limited intra-visibility from public viewing points within this belt of agricultural land, thereby supporting its strength of rural character.
- 2.3.6 The land between the northern edge of Wivenhoe and the northern edge of the plateau provides a high contribution of settlement separation on account of the visual enclosure provided by field boundary hedgerows, woodland and campus trees.
- 2.3.7 There is a strong sense of departure when leaving the edge of Colchester, as a result of a sudden change in topography and an increase in the degree of enclosure provided by roadside trees and woodland in the open countryside. There is also a strong sense of arrival/departure on the northern edge of Wivenhoe on account of the abrupt form of the settlement edge and the contrast between the open nature of the agricultural land and the built-up nature of the settlement. The strong sense of arrival and/or departure near the settlement edges contributes to the sense of settlement separation.

Medium Contribution

- 2.3.8 The fields adjacent to the northern edge of Wivenhoe generally have mature, robust deciduous hedgerows along their boundaries, and these provide a degree of visual separation from agricultural fields further to the north. In terms of views from the northern edge of Wivenhoe, these fields contribute to the sense of separation between settlements. However, there is a line of linear housing along the western edge of the B1028, which substantially encloses views of these fields from the road. These fields do not therefore contribute to the visual separation of the two settlements in terms of the perception obtained by people moving northwards from the settlement along the B1028. On this basis, these fields are considered to provide, overall, a medium contribution to the physical and visual separation of settlements.

Low Contribution

- 2.3.9 Immediately to the south of Colchester's settlement edge, the lower and upper southern parts of Salary Brook valley are considered to provide a low contribution to the separation of settlements. Whilst this land has a generally open character with views to Colchester's visually harsh urban edge, views towards Wivenhoe are completely enclosed by the rising southern valley slopes, which support scattered woodland blocks. In this context, the bottom of the valley and its wooded southern slopes are considered to provide a low contribution to the visual and physical separation of settlements.

2.4 Conclusions

- 2.4.1 Any new built development, as defined, on the land identified as providing a high contribution to the separation of settlements is likely to seriously undermine both the sense of settlement separation, and the strong rural character of land outside the university campus. In spite of the visual enclosure provided by field boundary hedgerows, woodland and campus trees, new development would result in a diminished sense of leaving one settlement and entering another for people travelling along the roads and public footpaths between the settlements. Any new development south of the campus is likely to result in visual coalescence with existing campus buildings. There is potential for some new built development to be accommodated within the university campus, provided that the new buildings are not visually obtrusive. Any new development on the eastern side slopes of the Rover Colne Valley would be visually prominent and is likely to be perceived as an extension of Colchester in views from the railway, from western parts of the valley and from viewpoints further to the west.
- 2.4.2 There is one parcel of land on the northern edge of Wivenhoe, identified as providing a medium contribution to the separation of settlements, which 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 parcel has existing built development on its western, eastern and southern edges, is not visually prominent from the wider landscape, and has some visual enclosure provided by peripheral hedgerows.
- 2.4.3 The narrow stream valley on the southern edge of Colchester, identified as providing a low contribution to the separation of settlements, has the most potential in relative terms to accommodate new built development, as the land is under a strong urban influence and is visually enclosed from most parts of the plateau to the south. Any new built development in this valley would not diminish the sense of separation between the settlements or the rurality of the remaining undeveloped land. However, this assessment does not take account of other issues such as potential flooding and recreational value.