

2.5 SITE APPRAISAL

EX HS066G

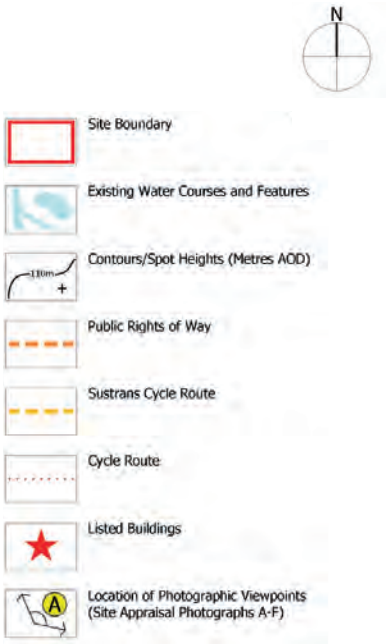
The site comprises two main areas of character: the low lying and generally flat land associated with the river valley in the north of the site and the land sloping up from the river valley to the existing settlement edge in the south of the site.

The southern part of the site is a rising and undulating area of arable farmland, surrounded and separated by native hedgerow. The undulating landform creates a variation in character from enclosed in the west to open with expansive views in the east. A tall hedgerow extends around the south-western to south-eastern boundary, linking with north-south hedgerows which extend into the southern part of the site.

The northern part of the site has little vegetation, creating an open and expansive character, particularly in the central area. A series of tracks and paths run through the site, some Public Rights of Way and some informal.

These run alongside and cross over the network of drainage ditches, which break up this area of the site. Three substantial waterbodies also occur within the site, the largest of which is the central pond, identified within published landscape character assessments as being a visual detractor. More vegetation occurs within the western and eastern extents of this part of the site, creating an intimate character that contrasts with the more open character of the central area.

This contrasting landscape character between the southern and northern parts of the site reinforces the findings of the Green Wedges and Green Corridors review and provides justification for the removal of the southern section of the site from the Green Wedge designation.





Site Appraisal Photograph C



Site Appraisal Photograph D



Site Appraisal Photograph E



Site Appraisal Photograph F

2.6 LOCAL BUILT CHARACTER STUDY

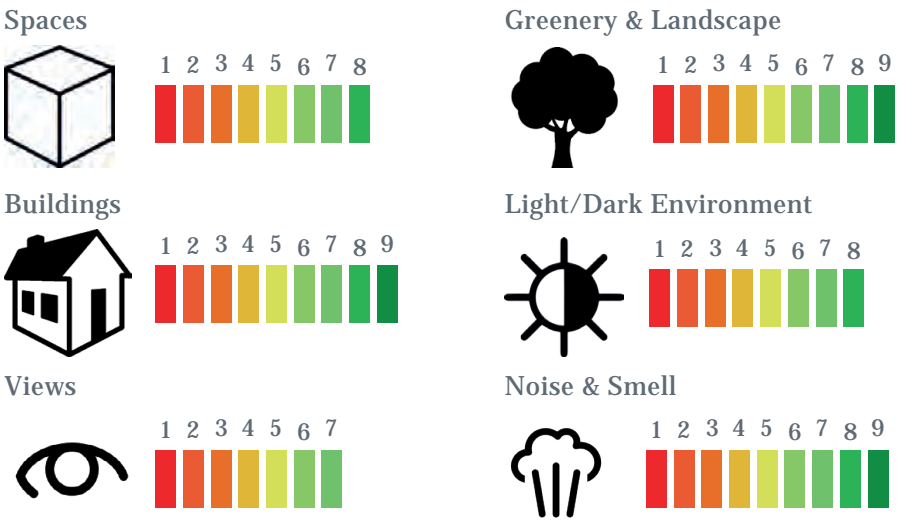
In order to understand the surrounding context of the site, a character assessment was conducted using Oxford City Council's Character Assessment Tool-kit as a base, which specifically focuses on six aspects of a place and its character, to determine a justified psychological and physical survey. This promotes a deeper understanding of an areas built form and should aid in the design of good places that promote health and well-being. The categories are:

- 1. Spaces between buildings
- 2. Quality of buildings
- 3. Views in and around the site
- 4. Greenery & landscape
- 5. Amount of light & dark
- 6. Noise in the area and smell

Chelmer Village:

Chelmer Village is a relatively new development, having been constructed in the 1990's. Predominantly residential this area consists of detached and semi detached units with incidental green space. The site is bounded by two main roads (Chelmer Village Way/A138) with secondary roads leading into the site. Almost all roads feeding off the main road form cul-de-sac's leading to limited connectivity, however this provides a sense of enclosure and security. A strong relationship with green space is apparent with the amount of public open space available and a good level of pedestrian and cycle networks through the site. Travelling through the site, strong residential frontages are presented, with public spaces defined and overlooked by houses, low rise (two storey) homes with a mix between terraced, semi-detached and detached units that create a clearly defined place.

Character Assessment:



Block Structure:



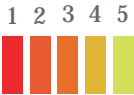
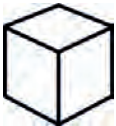
Sandon:

Harrington Mead is a new residential development on the edge of Sandon constructed in the early 2000's. Surrounded by large open green spaces to the north, east and west, and a farm to the south. The units consist of terraced and semi-detached houses with on street car parking. Local amenities around the area include a designated park and primary school, with a supermarket a short drive away. Strong built form defines the route structure and maintains one point of entry/exit which limits the connectivity to other parts of the area.

The area benefits from high accessibility to green space around the site and proximity to Chelmer River. Its location defines its character, an edge development that is predominantly only used by the residents with good links to green space external to the area but none within it.

Character Assessment:

Spaces



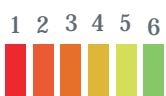
Greenery & Landscape



Buildings



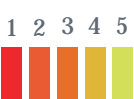
Light/Dark Environment



Views



Noise & Smell



Block Structure:



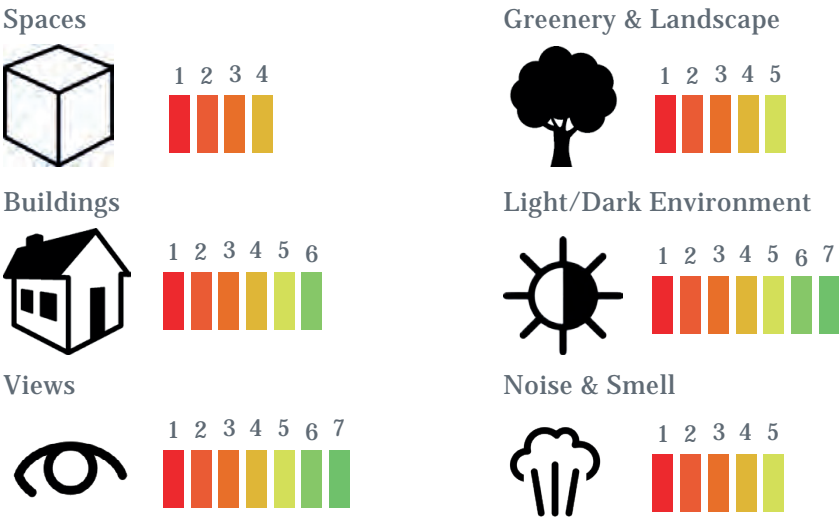
Moulsham Character Zone 1:

Moulsham is a suburban area just outside Chelmsford city centre and was developed early to mid 20th century. The area is predominantly residential with units being either semi-detached or detached with good access to public transport, and local amenities such as shopping centres and supermarkets.

The route structure of this area is comprised mostly of uniform street types that allow good connectivity to surrounding areas. Large block structures are common with houses offset by six to eight metres creating a well defined place with clear legibility and enclosure.

Pedestrians and cyclists use the road network rather than separate routes. There is limited open space or green space within the neighbourhood. Clearly defined frontage onto the main road with concealed back gardens give a sense of privacy, accompanied with the scale of these buildings creates a comfortable suburban environment.

Character Assessment:



Block Structure:



Moulsham Character Zone 2:

The southern part of Moulsham is a 1970's era development, and the built form and character are reflective of this era. The area is not clearly ordered by its routes, the block structure is not clear, and the terraced houses and pockets of semi-detached homes and apartments do not define the streets and public spaces in a clear and continuous format.

There is a small supermarket on site which forms a focal point of the neighbourhood. There are pockets of open green space within the development but these are not clearly enclosed by a continuous built form looking out onto them.

Unclear frontages and exposed back gardens decrease the sense of privacy and blur the clarity between public and private space. Overall it creates a less successful character.

Character Assessment:

Spaces



Greenery & Landscape



Buildings



Light/Dark Environment



Views



Noise & Smell



Block Structure:



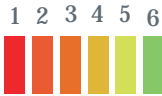
Great Baddow Character Zone 1:

Great Baddow Character Zone 1 is to the south of the site. It has a less clearly defined street character that contains a mix of housing constructed at different times during the course of the 20th century. The area includes mostly detached and semi-detached units with a proportion of bungalows varying the overall roof levels and adding to the sense of openness. Close by the local high street the uniform linear road structure for this area has good access to the primary road leading into it and also forms a loop round allowing users good permeability. Public open space is located to the south of the site with a strong emphasis on pedestrian access that promotes a positive and car free environment.

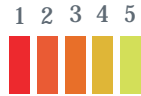
It appears that there has been later development in-filled into the original plot structures. There is a clearly defined frontage with an offset from the road with front gardens that positively contribute to the sense of safety and community and clear separation of back gardens concealed from public routes.

Character Assessment:

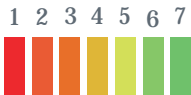
Spaces



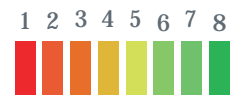
Greenery & Landscape



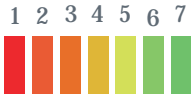
Buildings



Light/Dark Environment



Views



Noise & Smell



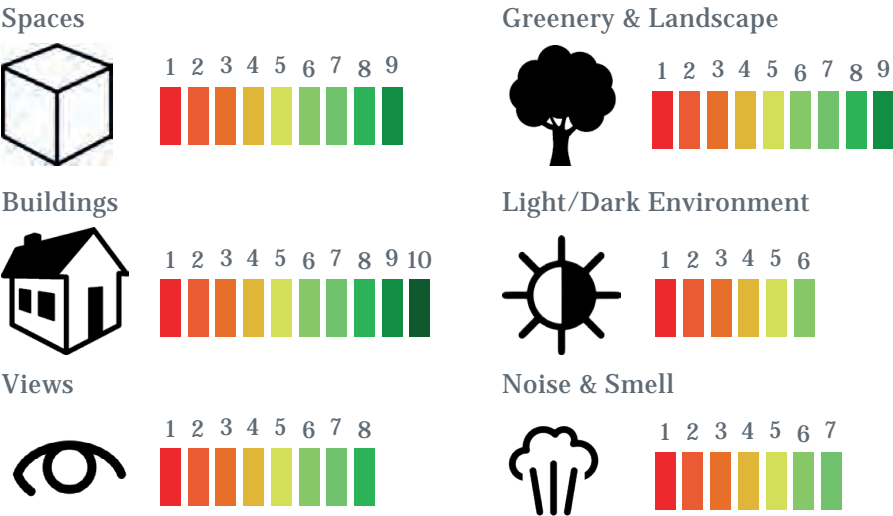
Block Structure:



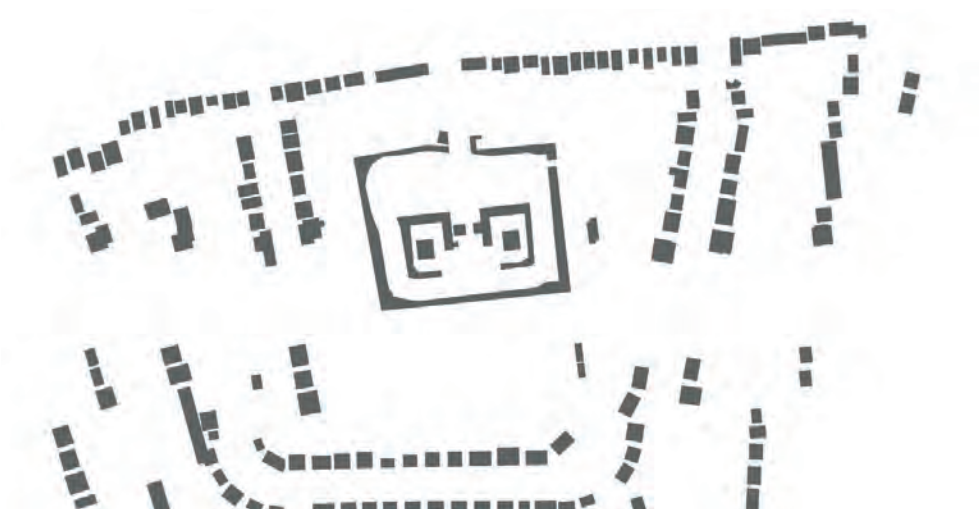
Great Baddow Character Zone 2:

To the centre of the previous location there is a new development constructed in the 2000's with a more formal arrangement centralised around public open space and a children's playground. Located near Great Baddow high street, it is in close proximity to some amenities but more focused around its green space. One point of entry and a shared surface loop road around the site combines both car usage and pedestrian and cycle usage. There is also a strong pedestrian route through the centre of the site with green space either side and a central piece that defines the character of the area being green and contained. Strong frontage primarily from the two large apartment blocks gives the sense of security overlooking the green space and the detached and semi-detached units along the site give clear definition between the front and back with an increased emphasis on privacy.

Character Assessment:



Block Structure:

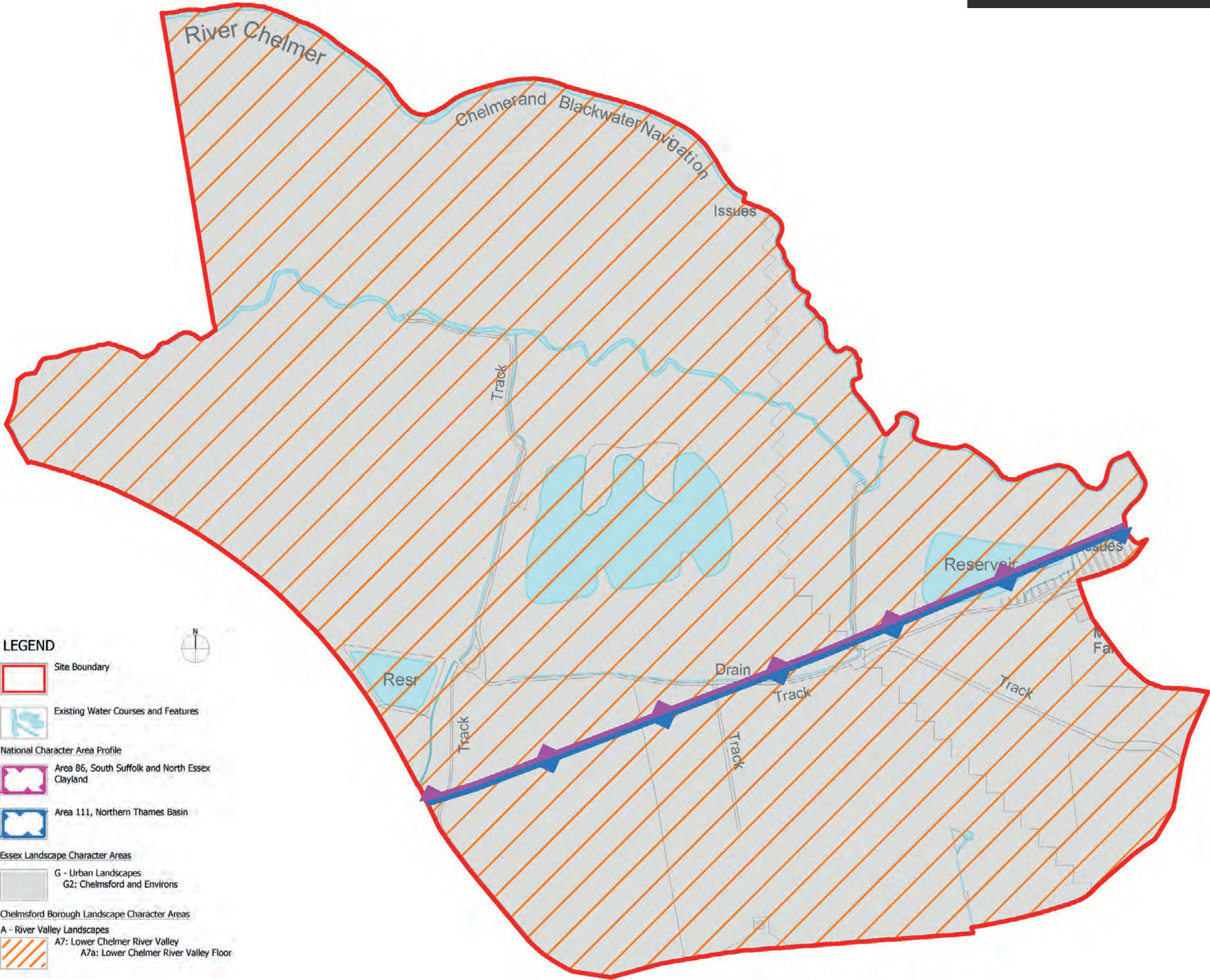


2.7 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

A study of the published landscape character assessments at national, county and local level has identified a series of landscape guidelines to inform the design of the proposed development, the management of existing landscape features and the introduction of new, locally characteristic landscape features. These include the following:

- Protection of open character of river valley
- Increase in woodland and hedgerow planting including tree planting alongside rivers
- Protection of long distance views across the valley
- Create areas of grazing meadow
- Increase public access whilst protecting landscape character
- Enhance the rivers and ditches
- Introduction of willow pollarding and planting of native rare black poplar
- Incorporate Green Infrastructure into new development
- Improve perimeter of reservoirs

FIGURE 9 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER



2.8 SITE TOPOGRAPHY

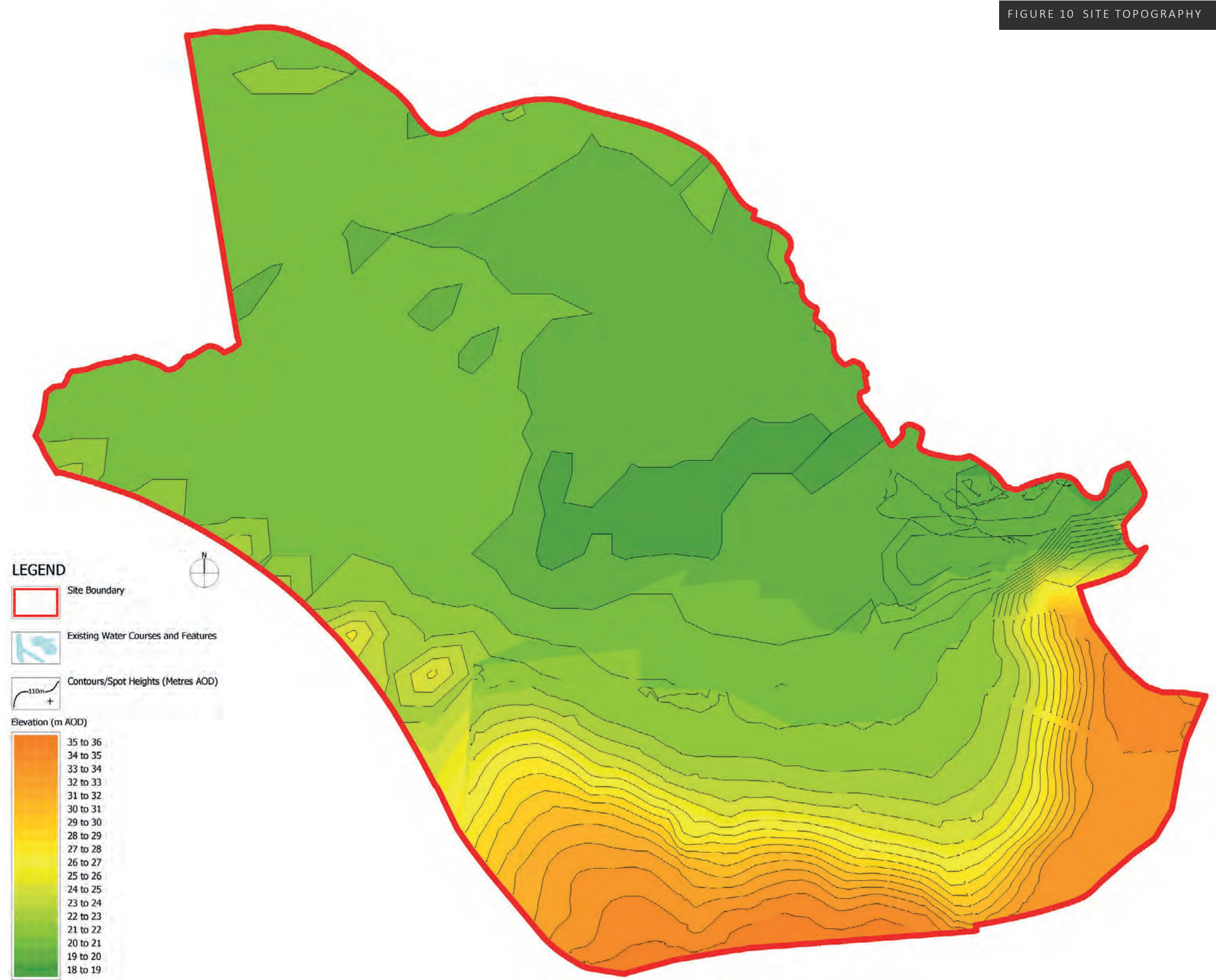
The site is located on the southern side of the valley of the River Chelmer. The northern part of the site occupies the valley floor and is therefore markedly flat and low lying, located between 20 and 25m AOD, with a small area of land below 20m AOD in the north-eastern corner of the site.

Contrastingly, the southern part of the site is located on the sloping valley sides, rising up from the flood plain to a height of 40m AOD at the existing settlement edge along Maldon Road.

There is, therefore, a distinct and conspicuous change between the northern part of the site, relating to the river valley, and the southern part of the site, reflecting the character of the settled valley sides.

The Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation and sections of the River Chelmer run east-west through the river valley along the northern boundary of the site. A series of ditches and small water courses run south to north and east-west through the northern part of the site, draining into the river and navigation in the vicinity of the Sandford Mill Science Education and Visitor Centre.

FIGURE 10 SITE TOPOGRAPHY



2.9 SITE CONSTRAINTS

Archaeology

Magnitude Surveys was commissioned to assess the subsurface archaeological potential of land at Manor Farm proposed to be developed, Great Baddow, Chelmsford. A fluxgate magnetometer survey was successfully completed and a clear area of potential archaeological activity has been identified at the north-west of the site, including a ring ditch and other ditch-like anomalies, as well as an another more ambiguous ring ditch feature, isolated to the south. Two distinct areas of anomalies have been identified towards the east of the site, the potential origins of which could not be confidently determined. Furthermore no evidence of archaeology around the outside of the Bronze Age ringfort monument, located on the site of the farm shop was found.

Ecology

The site is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory nature conservation designations however there are Local Wildlife Sites adjacent to the eastern and western boundaries of the northern part of the site. The landscape design and Green Infrastructure strategy set-out principles to draw together these ecological assets through enhancements to the habitat potential of the northern part of the site.

These enhancements would be integrated into an overall biodiversity strategy for the site which would focus on an holistic improvement of the landscape to conserve existing flora and fauna and create new habitats through locally characteristic planting.

Topography

The site is clearly defined into two contrasting areas by the nature of the landform. The northern section is flat and low-lying, sitting within the flood plain of the River Chelmer, and therefore unsuitable for development, while the southern part slopes markedly up towards existing settlement at Great Baddow. This change in landform is highly perceptible on site and reinforces the need for a different design approach to the southern and northern areas.

Heritage

Despite there being no archaeological evidence of a Bronze Age monument extending beyond the area covered by the existing farm shop, a precautionary approach has been taken through the provision of a 25m buffer around this. The setting of the Conservation Area has been a key consideration in the design of the proposed development, including the introduction of new planting at the development area / Country Park transition.

Noise

The principle noise considerations for this site relate to traffic noise associated with Maldon Road and the Great Yeomanry Way. As set out in the landscape strategy, the southern and south-western boundaries would be reinforced with locally characteristic native tree and shrub planting, providing physical containment to the site and some mitigation of noise impacts on the site.

Arboriculture

The majority of existing trees on the site are located outside the developable area and within the Conservation Area, consequently these trees are strongly protected by planning policy. There are several canopy trees within the existing framework of hedgerow field boundaries within the southern part of the site, and their retention is a key design consideration which has informed the proposed development.

Utilities and Flooding

The existing network of buried and overhead services, together with parts of the site prone to flooding, is presented on Figure 11. Many of these existing features have easements which are key constraints informing the layout of the proposed development. Efforts have also been made to reduce the linearity of the urban form that can result from these easements running through developable areas.

In summary the site is located in close proximity to a good range of local services and facilities including primary and secondary schools, convenience shops and community centres. It also has good access to a wider range of facilities within the town centre for retail, culture, leisure, sport and employment. The northern part of the site is heavily influenced by the river corridor and its associated flood plain, and also the planning constraints of being located within the Conservation Area and flood plain. There is a strong framework of Green Infrastructure on which to build, including existing tree belts, hedgerows, footpath networks, blue infrastructure, open green space and ecological designations, and strong queues for design emanating from the rich surrounding landscape and townscape.





The background image shows a lush garden scene. In the foreground, there are dense green plants, including what appears to be a large fern on the left and various leafy plants on the right. In the mid-ground, there are taller, more delicate plants with feathery foliage. In the background, a house with a light-colored wall and a dark roof is partially visible on the right side. The sky is a pale, hazy blue, and there are some power lines visible in the upper left corner.

Masterplan Strategy

3.1 GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

The overall priorities for Green Infrastructure in Chelmsford are set out in the city council’s Green Infrastructure Strategic Plan 2018-2036. These include the following.

- Reinforcing and extending the connectivity of, and accessibility to, Green Infrastructure resources
- Protecting and enhancing Green Infrastructure assets
- Recognising the critical role that the river valleys play as a focus for the Green Infrastructure assets across the City and its hinterland
- Paying particular attention to the integrity of protected areas
- Ensuring that existing Green Infrastructure resources are used to their best advantage
- Enhancing the quality and accessibility of Green Infrastructure resources
- Promoting Green Infrastructure as central to the character and well-being of local communities

In relation to the area containing the site, the GI strategy notes:

“A principal theme of development in this location will be connectivity, ensuring integration between the new and existing community, enhancing links within and between the River Valley, using existing and new recreational resources (PRoW and cycleways) to achieve this. Detailed planning of the Country Park will need to pay particular attention to finding an appropriate balance between the increased recreational pressures and protection of existing and enhanced biodiversity assets”

The Green Infrastructure strategy for the site, including links with wider existing assets is illustrated in Figure 12.

Key design parameters for masterplanning could include the following:

- Multi-functional habitats on buildings
- Tree lined streets
- Introduce SuDS and avoid impermeable surfaces
- Create high-quality amenity spaces which offer a variety of facilities, services, experiences and community events
- Create natural green spaces and wild or free play areas
- Maximise opportunities for active recreation
- Create an extensive viable network of green and blue corridors
- Reduce the effects of air pollution through the provision of verges of priority habitat
- Provide wildlife-friendly allotments, community meadows, orchards and woodlands, a series of community gardens offering social and amenity space

LEGEND

-  Site boundary
-  Existing/proposed open recreational space
-  Existing nature conservation area
-  Wider green wedge designation
-  Existing/proposed water bodies
-  Existing pedestrian and cycle route
-  Proposed pedestrian and cycle routes
-  Proposed primary blue infrastructure enhancement
-  Proposed primary structural planting routes
-  Primary ecological enhancement routes



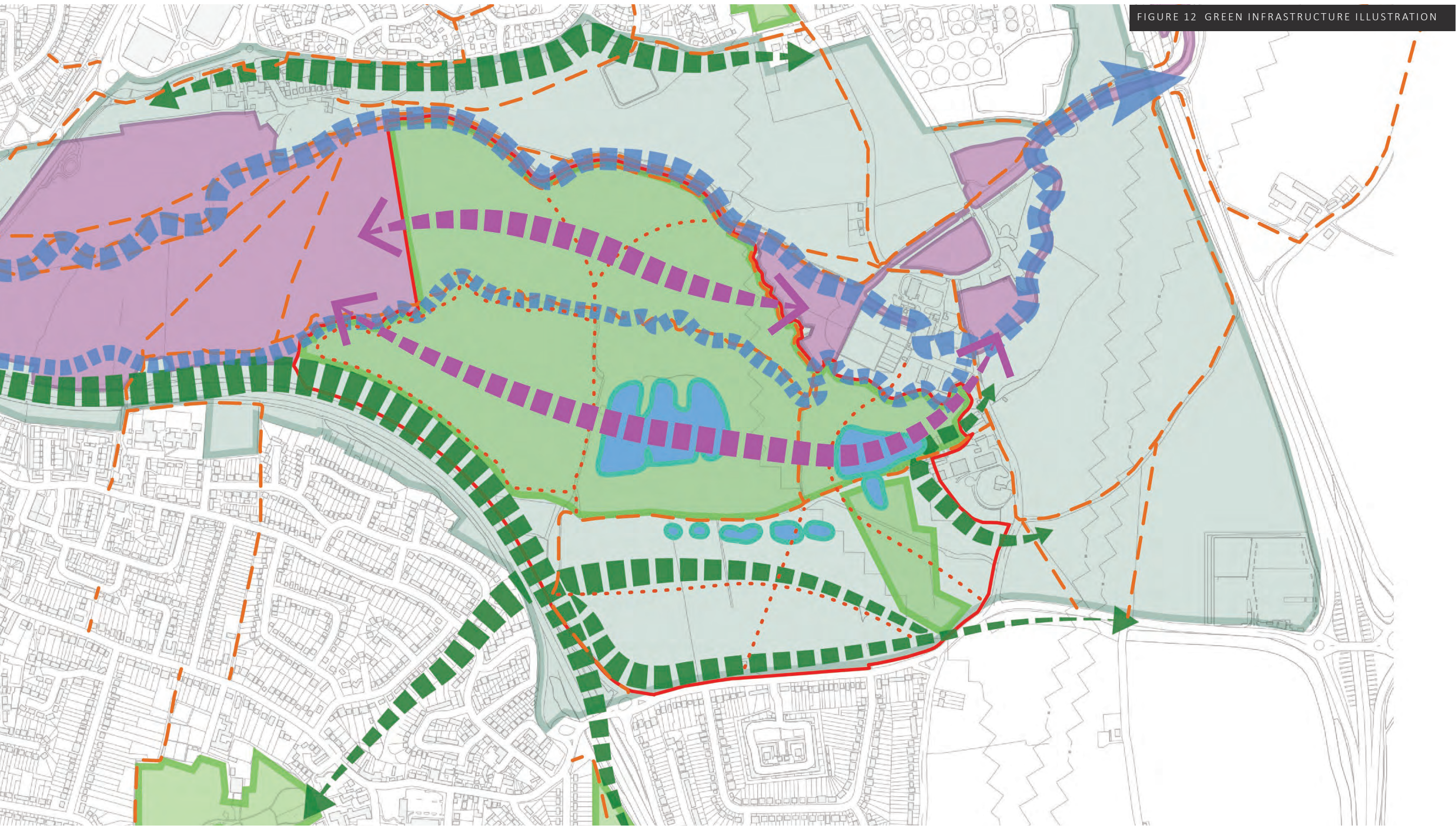


FIGURE 12 GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE ILLUSTRATION