

Essex County Council's Neighbourhood Planning Guide

September 2019

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Local communities have been given new legal powers under the Localism Act 2011 to take part in neighbourhood planning for their areas. This process enables local people to have a major say in helping to shape the development and growth of their local area through the preparation and adoption of a Neighbourhood Plan. Once adopted a Neighbourhood Plan becomes part of the Development Plan for an area, and is used in the determination of planning applications.

In Essex we operate under a two-tier system of local government. In the first instance, you should always approach your local borough, city, or district council for their help and guidance about how to go about neighbourhood planning in your area, and their documents that need to be considered when preparing a Neighbourhood Plan.

However, Essex County Council (ECC) is a key infrastructure provider and delivers and commissions a wide range of important strategic and public services, covering but not limited to highways and transportation, education, early years and child care, minerals, waste, surface water management, passenger transport, adult social care, and Public Health. Such facilities and services are required to be provided in order to support new and existing development.

New housing, employment, and other development can place pressure on existing infrastructure and services. The impacts of growth from the allocation of development sites in neighbourhood plans (over and above those identified in a Local Plan) will need to be assessed, including any mitigation required, and how they will be funded and delivered.

As such ECC can provide policy guidance and advice for those involved in preparing a Neighbourhood Plan.

1.2 The Guide

ECC produces a wide range of guidance documents that can assist in the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan. These documents are already in use to assist in the production of Local Plans at the borough / city / district council level, and in some cases have been adopted as policy by such Councils as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPD).

Documents produced by ECC play an important role in helping to decide whether proposals should be included in a Neighbourhood Plan, and should therefore be given careful consideration when a Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared.

This information Guide explains the main County Council services that may need to be considered when carrying out neighbourhood planning, and provides weblinks to the policy guidance and contacts that can help you.

The Guide is set out by different themes so that community groups preparing neighbourhood plans can easily identify what information, help, and support can be obtained from ECC for specific subjects.

This Guide provides the following information on each theme:

- The relevant service or function within ECC, and their responsibilities
- Relevance to neighbourhood planning
- The key documents produced by ECC to be considered when a Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared, and weblinks to those documents.

1.3 Spatial Planning

Spatial Planning is relevant to neighbourhood planning as it is concerned with development at borough, city, district, and county scale, and produces policies and strategies at a larger scale than Neighbourhood Plans. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires Neighbourhood Plans to be in general conformity with local level policies and plans.

1.4 General Contact Details

ECC's Spatial Planning team provide strategic planning advice on issues that are likely to have an impact across the whole of Essex and its sub-regions. The team supports the development of local planning policy by working with borough, city and district councils, and provides advice on medium- and long-term development issues and major development and infrastructure projects.

The Spatial Planning team can provide advice on strategic planning issues that may affect the preparation of neighbourhood plans. For further information please contact Mail.SpatialPlanning@essex.gov.uk

Essex County Council is located at the following address:

County Hall,
Market Road,
Chelmsford,
Essex, CM1 1QH.

Tel: 0345 743 0430

Web: www.essex.gov.uk

County Hall is open to the public at the following times:

Monday – Friday: 8.30am – 5.00pm (Excluding bank holidays)

(The opening times for other Essex County Council Offices may vary)

Contact information for specific service areas can be found in the relevant sections of this Guide.

2. Highways and Transportation

2.1 Relevance to Neighbourhood Planning

When developing a Neighbourhood Plan consideration should be given to the potential highway and transportation impacts that the allocation of sites, the proposal of different types of development, and the formation of policy could have.

It should also be noted that different approaches between neighbourhood areas could result in unintended consequences and disjointed provision. Consideration should also be given to the requirements for the movement of goods to and within the neighbourhood, such as deliveries to and from local businesses and home, in addition to the movement of people.

The consideration of existing and future transportation and highway needs within neighbourhood plans should therefore be based on the highway and transportation strategies and policies of ECC, to ensure continuity across the county.

2.2 ECC Role

ECC is the Highway Authority for the county. The Highways and Transportation team are responsible for ensuring that the County Council's transport policies and proposals are implemented at the local level, and that ECC's approach considers neighbouring authorities and is consistent with national policy.

2.3 Key Documents and Guidance

The Highways and Transportation teams at ECC provide information on policies and strategies.

Highways

The [Essex Local Transport Plan](#) sets out our long term aim for transport in Essex, and outlines how local communities can provide input into how our transport network is managed and improved.

The Local Transport Plan is supported by documents specific to different modes of transport; for example, rail, bus, walking or cycling that can be found on the Essex Highways [website](#).

In the two-tier system of local government in Essex the boroughs, city and districts have Local Highway Panels (LHP's), which are responsible for making recommendations and setting priorities for highways schemes in their areas. Further information, including terms of reference, the scheme request process, the approved works and delivery programme, and potential scheme list can be found on the Essex Highways [website](#).

ECC also manages a number of improvement schemes on roads and other public areas for which it is responsible and further information can be obtained on the Essex Highways [website](#).

The Essex Traffic Management Strategy contains ECC's traffic management strategy for Essex roads for the next 20 years.

ECC's Highways Signing Policy seeks to ensure a level of consistency in approach across Essex, when making decisions on signing design and layout.

The Essex Speed Management Strategy is designed for use by all those involved in speed management to offer clear and consistent parameters for the setting of speed limits in Essex.

ECC is a member of the Safer Essex Roads Partnership (SERP) and further information about road safety can be found on their [website](#).

Sustainable Travel

The ECC [Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy](#) outlines the steps the authority are taking to enable accessibility to places of employment and education for all, including other neighbourhood services such as retail and leisure; with the associated health, social and economic benefits of using alternative modes of transport.

The [Essex Cycling Strategy](#) accompanies the [Local Transport Plan](#). It outlines how areas in Essex can enable, provide, and promote cycling as an important part of local transport infrastructure.

The [Essex Walking Strategy](#) provides guidance on creating an environment which encourages walking and putting the needs of the pedestrian first.

ECC works alongside developers, businesses, and transport consultants on the creation, implementation and delivery of Travel Plans ([Residential](#) and [Businesses](#)), as well as the supply and distribution of Travel Information Packs for new development sites. Travel Plans contain information on practical travel initiatives, and the range of transport options available, in order to encourage occupiers, employers, and employees to think about the way they travel to and from home and work, to encourage sustainable travel.

Passenger Transport

As the strategic authority responsible for the management of passenger transport services (bus, community transport, and demand responsive transport), ECC produces a number of strategies to guide management and delivery of key services. The following passenger transport strategies produced by ECC should be considered as part of the development of neighbourhood plans.

The [Essex Road Passenger Transport Strategy](#) is the Council's strategy to improve bus, taxi, statutory and community transport services in Essex. It is a statutory part of the Local Transport Plan.

ECC is committed to ensuring that quality passenger transport information is available for the public to enable them to make choices when travelling. [The Getting Around in Essex – A bus and passenger transport strategy](#) outlines how this can be achieved.

The [Essex Rail Strategy](#) outlines how ECC will work with its stakeholders to develop a long term strategic rail plan for the county, delivering passenger and freight services.

ECC is also part of the [Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership](#) which promotes rail travel on the five branch lines within Essex.

Information is available on [community based transport schemes](#) in operation throughout Essex, including local social car schemes, dial-a-ride and minibus services is provided by Living Well Essex.

The ECC [Education Transport Policy](#) sets out how the Council fulfils its statutory duties and exercises its discretionary powers to make arrangements to provide free home to school transport for some children of compulsory school age and discretion whether to provide transport for others.

Public Rights of Way

There are over six thousand kilometres of public rights of way in Essex, comprising footpaths, bridleways and byways. ECC has a statutory duty to maintain and protect the network of public rights of way. Details of how we have committed to fulfilling this duty can be found on the Council's [website](#).

The **'Definitive Map'** and 'Definitive Statement' record the location of public rights of way across Essex. The **digital interactive map** is available online. ECC maintains and updates the Definitive Map and Definitive Statement, to provide conclusive evidence of the existence of a Public Right of Way.

The **Essex Rights of Way Improvement Plan** (ROWIP) is a statutory document that sets out ECC plan for improving access to the countryside through rights of way until 2019.

An **advice note** is available for developers and development management officers about new development which may affect public rights of way.

ECC can provide advice and support to neighbourhood planning groups in relation to public rights of way in their local areas. The Public Rights of Way Team can be contacted via email: prow.web@essex.gov.uk

Maintenance

The **Essex Highways Maintenance Strategy** ensures that ECC complies with its duty to maintain the public highway. This sets out how the highway will be maintained and how complaints and repairs will be dealt with. This strategy was amended in 2013. Details of the road repair programme and capital maintenance works are contained on the ECC **website**.

Responsibility for the maintenance of trees on road verges in Essex falls to different authorities, depending on the borough, city, or district, in which the tree is located. ECC is responsible for the maintenance of trees on road verges in Braintree, Brentwood, Castle Point, Chelmsford, Maldon, Rochford, Tendring (except for the towns of Clacton, Frinton and Walton), and Uttlesford.

ECC can provide advice to neighbourhood planning groups on any proposed alterations to trees and verges within the Local Authority areas listed above. Further information can be obtained on the **website**. Further information regarding the other Local Authority areas within the County can be obtained directly from the local authorities.

Development Management

Development management provides the framework within which to assess whether planning applications are acceptable or not. Local Planning Authority documents contain detailed policies to assess relevant planning applications. Development management is relevant to Neighbourhood Planning because the local level policies within the county development management documents provide a steer on acceptable and unacceptable development and are applicable to planning at a neighbourhood level.

The **Essex Parking Standards** - Parking Standards Design and Good Practice provides guidance on parking standards for local areas. These standards can have an impact on the quantum of development that can be provided.

The **Essex Parking Policy** sets out the County Council's policy regarding on-street parking which is used by police enforcement and local authority enforcement.

ECC produces **Developer Documentation** to provide advice to developers on infrastructure contributions, public rights of way, transport assessments, use of street materials, and technical approval of third party structures.

In relation to pavements, pedestrian areas, and highways the **Street Materials Guide** provides helpful advice and examples of good practice to guide new development on the best use of street materials.

ECC produces transport **development management policies** to deal with development pressures across the County.

3. Education Provision

3.1 Relevance to Neighbourhood Planning

Pupil places are planned across geographic areas or school groups agreed with the Department for Education. Early Years and Childcare is planned by city, borough, and district council ward. It is beyond the scope of most Neighbourhood Plans to plan holistically for education and childcare places in the area. They should, however, consider the proximity and capacity of educational facilities where new housing is proposed, as the scale and type of such development in a Neighbourhood Plan may lead to a need to provide more places in existing or new facilities. Neighbourhood Plans should consider these matters as part of the site selection process, and during policy formation, taking account of the size and type of development.

Neighbourhood Plans can also play a positive role in improving the environment around schools and the walking and cycling routes to them. Community resources that provide learning opportunities for pupils, such as nature trails or sports facilities, may also be of interest to schools and direct consultation with Head Teachers and governing bodies is encouraged in this respect.

3.2 ECC Role

Primary and Secondary Provision

Under section 14 of the 1996 Education Act, local authorities must secure sufficient school places to serve their area. The available schools must be sufficient in number, character and equipment to provide all pupils with the opportunity of an appropriate education. Section 2 of the 2006 Education and Inspections Act further places ECC, as the appropriate local authority, under a duty to secure diversity in the provision of schools and increase opportunities for parental choice. Subsequent legislation has encouraged the development of a more diverse range of education providers, particularly academy trusts and free schools.

The County Council acts as a commissioner rather than a provider of new schools. It has the duty to set out the requirements for any new school needed to serve a new community in order that potential providers may express their interest in running that school. Where a Section 106 legal agreement provides the land and funding for a new school, the County Council will usually procure the school building and then transfer the new building for the successful provider to occupy.

Regardless of whether schools have Academy status, are Free Schools, or are Maintained Schools, the County Council remains the responsible authority for ensuring that there are sufficient school places available within the county to meet the educational needs of its school age population. This means that the County Council remains the appropriate authority to assess the requirements for school place provision for any new housing developments supported by Neighbourhood Plans.

In forecasting pupil numbers ECC (the School Organisation team) works on the basis that 100 houses will on average generate demand for 30 primary main stream state school places and 20 secondary school places (excluding 6th form). These estimates are halved for flats and bungalows. There are also a number of dwelling types, such as single bedroom properties and others unlikely to house children, which are excluded from such calculations.

Using the factor of 0.3 primary school pupils per house (30 per 100) a development of 700 houses would equate to demand for 210 primary school places, which is one form of entry i.e. seven year groups of thirty pupils in each class. It should be noted that the Education Funding Agency currently looks to establish two form entry primary schools (420 places) wherever feasible. ECC supports this approach and, thereby, when considering new primary school sites an area of 2.1 hectares will usually be sought as a minimum. This also provides some necessary flexibility as, due to a younger than

average age profile, most new developments will for a time generate greater demand for school places than suggested by the above factors.

Generally, secondary schools accommodate at least four forms of entry (600 places). To ensure long term viability, ECC will usually look to establish a new school only where demand for six forms of entry has been established (approximately 4,500 homes).

In the case of both age groups there is no exact growth threshold for establishing a new school and the following factors need to be considered when deciding whether a particular development should include school land:

- Cumulative impact with other development proposals
- Ability of local schools to expand sufficiently
- Location / sustainability
- Viability of development and new school

Early Years and Childcare Provision

ECC advises on the requirements for new Early Years and Childcare facilities based on the places generated by any new development. Such provision in an area can be generated by families looking for a new home, but also by levels of local employment, where parents wish to have childcare close to where they work.

The Childcare Act 2006 places a range of duties on local authorities regarding the provision of sufficient, sustainable and flexible childcare.

Early Years and Childcare provision comprises of a range including full day care nurseries, pre-schools, childminders, school run provision, and wrap around care (breakfast, afterschool and holiday clubs).

As with primary and secondary provision, when calculating the requirement for Early Years and Childcare provision, consideration needs to be given to the number of houses and flats suitable to accommodate children, and to the number of staff an employment site might generate.

In forecasting numbers, in relation to residential development, ECC works on the basis that 100 houses will on average generate demand for 9 child places. These estimates are halved for flats and maisonettes. There are also other dwelling types, such as single bedroom properties and others unlikely to house children, which are excluded from such calculations.

Using the factor of 0.09 children per house (9 per 100), a development of 100 x two bedrooled houses would require 9 child places, and a development of 100 x two bedrooled flats would require 4.5 child places.

When forecasting numbers, in relation to employment, ECC works on the basis that 150 employees will on average generate demand for 4 child places. Using the factor of 0.04 places per employee (4 per 150), a development employing 150 staff would therefore require 6 child places.

When considering a standard 56 place day nursery an area of 0.13 hectares will usually be sought as a minimum.

School Transport

The provision of school transport is dealt with under the Highways and Transportation section of this Guide.

3.3 Key Documents and Guidance

The Education and Schools section of the ECC website provides information on the types of schools in Essex, and the roles of the local authority and county council. ECC provides advice on the provision of school places across Essex.

The ECC **Ten Year Plan** outlines the growing need for school places across Essex over the next decade. When using these forecasts, it should be noted that it is recommended that around 5% of capacity remains unfilled to accommodate mid-year admissions and facilitate parental choice. Further details regarding future plans can be obtained by contacting the school.organisation@essex.gov.uk

The **Essex County Council Local and Neighbourhood Planners' Guide to School Organisation** explains how ECC's School Organisation Team can assist in the preparation of Local and Neighbourhood Plans to ensure sufficient school places are provided, arising from new development, over the Plan period.

The ECC **Developers' Guide to Infrastructure Contributions** sets out the specific criteria that any school land must meet and how it must fit in to the overall development masterplan. The learning environment and pupil safety are the key decision making drivers in this process. Further details regarding future plans can be obtained by contacting development.enquiries@essex.gov.uk

4. Developer Contributions

4.1 Relevance to Neighbourhood Planning

New developments for homes and/or employment space result in increased pressure on existing infrastructure in the form of public services and facilities from the additional resident and/or working population. Developer contributions towards additional capacity for services such as schools and highway infrastructure may be a requirement in order to accommodate the extra demand. This can be in the form of capital investment or the contribution of land, and is dependent on thresholds set by ECC. The local district, borough or city council may also require developer contributions towards provision of affordable housing, new open spaces, sports facilities, etc.

Developer Contributions are therefore relevant to Neighbourhood Planning because a site allocation, or proposed development is likely to increase the number of residents and/or employees in the area, which may result in the need for additional infrastructure and/or community facilities.

4.2 ECC Role

ECC, as a major infrastructure provider and commissioner, works closely with the borough, city and district councils, in identifying the infrastructure that is needed to support growth set out in Local Plans. In connection with this work, ECC can provide advice regarding the suitability of potential development sites in terms of current and future infrastructure provision for those areas where ECC has responsibilities.

Such infrastructure includes early years and childcare facilities, primary and secondary schools, school transport and sustainable travel planning, youth, libraries, social care and public health, highways and transportation, passenger transport, public rights of way, waste management, protecting biodiversity, libraries, and flood and water management, and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).

The Infrastructure Planning Team can be contacted via development.enquiries@essex.gov.uk for further advice on developer requirements in relation to these matters.

4.3 Key Documents and Guidance

The [Essex County Council Developers' Guide to Infrastructure Contributions](#) details the scope and range of contributions towards infrastructure, which ECC may seek from developers and land owners, in order to make development acceptable in planning terms. This includes infrastructure associated with Early Years and Childcare, Schools, School Transport and Sustainable Travel, Youth, Libraries, Social Care and Public Health, Highways and Transportation, Sustainable Travel Planning, Passenger Transport, Public Rights of Way, Waste Management, Public Art, Protecting Biodiversity, Libraries, Flood and Water Management and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).

The document covers the administrative area of ECC. Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock are unitary authorities that lie outside of Essex, in administrative terms, and they provide services such as education and highways that ECC would otherwise deliver for their communities. Their developer contribution policies are therefore not covered here.

The document also does not cover services provided by borough, city and district councils, such as affordable housing or open space, nor contributions that may be sought by other infrastructure providers, such as the NHS or the Police. The relevant authorities or organisations will need to be contacted separately.

5. Flood Management

5.1 Relevance to Neighbourhood Planning

Flood management is relevant to Neighbourhood Planning, as the allocation of sites, and the proposal of different types of development, can have flooding implications. The location of sites, and the type and size of development proposed for a site, can be affected by the level of flood risk that applies. In some cases this may result in the site or development being considered unsuitable as a result of potential flood risk.

The formation of policy should also consider flood mitigation measures and management schemes, to ensure that any development is suitable in terms of flood risk.

5.2 ECC Role

ECC is the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA). It is responsible for the management of Local Flood Risk, which is defined as surface water flooding, ordinary watercourse flooding and groundwater flooding. The Environment Agency deal with coastal flooding and main river flooding.

The ECC Flood and Water Management Team is divided into three functions, the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), the Development and Flood Risk Team, and the Capital Delivery Team. The LLFA deals with flood investigations, asset mapping, the development of flood risk management plans and strategies. The Development and Flood Risk Team comments on major planning applications from a surface water drainage perspective and deal with watercourse consents and enforcement. The Capital Delivery Team manages the planning and installation of flood alleviation schemes.

ECC also brings together all key stakeholders in the form of the Essex Flood Partnership Board, to contribute to a strategic overview of matters surrounding flooding in Essex, and ensure a consistent and coordinated approach is implemented with regard to flood risk management.

Contact information for the Lead Local Flood Authority, Watercourse Regulation, and Development and Flood Risk are as follows:

General flood enquires, including watercourse regulation and capital delivery - floods@essex.gov.uk

Queries relating to the assessment of flood risk associated with new development - suds@essex.gov.uk

Anything in relation to fluvial and tidal flood risk should be referred to the Environment Agency. This includes Shoreline Management Plans.

5.3 Key Documents and Guidance

ECC has prepared a Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA). It is a county-wide analysis which considers past flooding and possible future flooding from the surface water runoff, groundwater, ordinary watercourses, canals, and small impounded reservoirs. The PFRA has helped to determine the location of more detailed Surface Water Management Plans (SWMP's). These documents are available on request.

[The Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan 2](#) is concerned with flooding from the sea and identifies the best ways to manage flood and erosion risk to people and to the developed, historic and natural environment. It also identifies opportunities where shoreline management can work with others to make improvements.

The Essex [Local Flood Risk Management Strategy](#) explains the powers and responsibilities of all the major organisations involved in flood risk and provides advice on what householders and businesses need to do. It also highlights and summarises the information available on flooding in Essex so that this information is more easily accessible for those trying to understand more about flood risk in Essex.

The [Essex SuDS Design Guide](#) which provides guidance on surface water drainage schemes including local standards for water quality and water quantity from developments as well as advice on SuDS design.

6. Minerals and Waste Planning

6.1 Relevance to Neighbourhood Planning

Minerals and waste planning involves producing plans and policies to create a strategy for the collection and treatment of all types of mineral deposits and waste streams. Documents outline detailed methods of waste streams that need treatment and disposal, underground minerals reserves that should be protected from development to allow extraction, and site allocations for the waste and minerals processing plants. These must serve the county as a whole and are planned at a strategic level; therefore Neighbourhood Plans must be in accordance with policies in the Minerals and Waste Local Plans.

The remit of Neighbourhood Plans does not include minerals and waste issues, therefore there is little scope for inclusion of policies relating to this issue. However site allocations and transport links for waste and minerals sites could have an impact on planning at a neighbourhood scale.

6.2 ECC Role

ECC is the Minerals and Waste Planning Authority for Essex. The Minerals and Waste Planning Team is responsible for all minerals and waste-related development and planning issues. The County Council makes decisions on all planning applications for minerals and waste sites, and for policy development of the Minerals and Waste Development Plan Documents.

ECC can provide strategic advice on the location and specific details of future proposed minerals and waste sites outlined in the Essex Minerals Local Plan or Waste Local Plan, and provide advice where neighbourhood plans are being prepared in proximity to such sites.

The Minerals and Waste Planning Team can be contacted by mineralsandwastepolicy@essex.gov.uk

6.3 Key Documents and Guidance

The adopted [Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Essex](#) outlines the approach to waste management in Essex and Southend up to 2032.

The adopted [Essex and Southend Waste Local Plan 2017](#) outlines how Essex and Southend propose to meet future waste management requirements up to 2031, and continue to move waste management up the waste hierarchy and away from landfill.

The [Essex Minerals Local Plan 2014](#) outlines sites for current and future mineral extraction, aggregate recycling facilities, and minerals transportation strategy. This Plan also sets out minerals safeguarding areas. These are areas designated by the Mineral Planning Authority which cover known deposits of minerals which are desired to be kept safeguarded from unnecessary sterilisation by non-mineral development.

7. Gypsy and Travellers

7.1 Relevance to Neighbourhood Planning

Sites can be allocated within Neighbourhood Plans for Gypsy and Traveller sites. Liaising with the Local Planning Authority would be necessary to identify the Local Plan approach to planning for Gypsy and Traveller sites and ensuring the alignment with the Neighbourhood Plan.

7.2 ECC Role

ECC's [Essex Countrywide Traveller Unit](#) manage the county's twelve permanent Gypsy/Traveller sites, providing permanent authorised accommodation for the community. ECC also provides a Code for Unauthorised Encampments across Essex.

ECC can provide advice on the management of existing Gypsy and Traveller sites, and the development of proposals to create new sites, or make amendments to existing Gypsy and Traveller sites within neighbourhood plans. Essex Countrywide Traveller Unit can be contacted at ECTU@essex.gov.uk

7.3 Key Documents and Guidance

The [Planning Policy for Traveller Sites](#) is a national planning document to be read in conjunction with the NPPF. It sets out the framework within which Local Planning Authorities can devise their own policies in order to make provisions for permanent Gypsy and Traveller sites.

The [Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment](#) was conducted to provide an evidence base for all Essex Local Planning Authorities to comply with regulations in relation to the Housing Act, NPPF and Planning Policy for Traveller Sites, and the revised Government definition of a traveller for planning purposes. It outlines the up-to-date accommodation needs for the entire Gypsy and Traveller community within Essex and allows for relevant provisions to be implemented by the Local Planning Authority. Basildon Borough Council conducted their own study of this nature, but some of their information is included in this document to contribute to the county-wide statistics.

8. Green Infrastructure and Environmental Management

8.1 Relevance to Neighbourhood Planning

Green Infrastructure is a network of green spaces and other environmental features, (such as waterways, public rights of ways and trees) which together delivers multiple environmental, social and economic benefits within a community. Green infrastructure is vital to contributing to physical activity, good health and social wellbeing, adapting and mitigating from climate change and building resilience of our biodiversity, which contributes to the quality and distinctiveness of our local environment, and generally adding to our quality of life.

Planning for the environment seeks to conserve and enhance biodiversity through the prevention or mitigation of harm to wildlife and habitats as a result of development and growth. This includes issues relating to village greens, public open and green space, trees and hedgerows and wildlife site designations. Local level assessment is beneficial in relation to this discipline to evaluate the impact on specific designated sites within a Neighbourhood Plan Area.

Planning for green spaces should be incorporated from an early stage in both the site selection and policy formation processes as an integral part of the wider planning for the area. Neighbourhood Plans, therefore need to give consideration to the following:

- the environmental impacts of proposed developments within the Plan area;
- the preservation and enhancement of green infrastructure valued by local people, including the accessibility and availability of publicly accessible spaces and its connectivity through the use of 'green corridors';
- the maintenance and management of new and existing public green and open spaces;
- the policies relating to the green infrastructure, with the intention to protect, conserve and enhance the natural environment where possible;
- the need for Sustainability Appraisals and/or Strategic Environmental Assessments, and Habitat Regulations Assessment (see Section 13 of this Guide).

8.2 ECC Role

ECC is responsible for eight country parks, a heritage site, six mills, and over 30 woodlands, as well as disused railway lines. These are managed to give residents access to open spaces, woodland trails and historic parklands, and to protect and encourage rare and important plants and animals. Further information can be obtained by contacting country.parks@essex.gov.uk or visiting the [website](#).

ECC can provide information on the specific location and designation of common land and village greens. Further information can be obtained by contacting the Environmental Law and Property Team in Essex Legal Services at Environmental.TeamDuty@essex.gov.uk

In relation to tree preservation orders, ECC historically shared responsibility for these with borough, city and district authorities. However, since March 2010, in order to simplify access to information, ECC handed full responsibility for tree preservation orders to these authorities. Therefore, all requests for information about tree preservation orders should be made to your local borough, city or district council.

Information regarding Public Rights of Way can be found under the Highways and Transportation section of this Guide.

The ECC Environment Team can provide consultation responses and advice with regards to green infrastructure, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and coastal matters. Further information can be obtained by contacting environment@essex.gov.uk or visiting the [website](#).

Essex contains several valuable and rare habitats, from coastal salt marshes and mudflats to ancient woodlands, trees and wetlands. ECC has a duty to ensure that these environments are managed and maintained, where it owns them or carries out activities that may affect them.

Ecologists in Place Services (an ECC traded service) can provide expert support towards development management and planning environmental policy, and can offer specialist advice on statutorily protected species and sites, as well as provide advice with regards to wildlife and biodiversity issues through the Essex Biodiversity Validation Checklist. Please refer to the Place Services [website](#) for more information, or contact enquiries@placeservices.co.uk

Place Services can provide advice in relation to undertaking SA, SEA and HRA on a commission basis (see Section 13 of this Guide).

8.3 Key Documents and Guidance

Details of all areas designated as common land or village greens are held by ECC. It maintains the registers of common land and village greens, which are statutory documents. Each unit of common land or village green is given a unique registry number, which enables identification within the register. Information regarding common land and village greens can be found on the Council's [website](#).

Information regarding Public Rights of Way can be found under the Highways and Transportation section of this Guide.

The Essex Wildlife Trust Biological Records Centre holds information regarding [Local Wildlife Sites](#) in Essex. These are areas of land with significant wildlife value, such as an area of ancient woodland, a flower-rich hay meadow or a village pond.

The [Essex Biodiversity Action Plan](#) sets out a vision to protect and enhance the biodiversity of Essex, and comprises a series of action plans by habitat group (Lowland Farmland, Lakes and Parks, Rivers, Wetlands, and Coastal).

The [Greater Thames Marshes Nature Improvement Area \(NIA\)](#) covers 55,000ha of estuarine and marshland landscapes in Essex, Kent and London. The Greater Thames Marshes NIA Partnership was formed to deliver landscape-scale, integrated, practical, visible and accessible improvements to nature in the project area.

The emerging [Green Infrastructure Strategy](#) will look to enhance, protect and create an integrated network of high quality green infrastructure in Essex, through setting principles to inform plans and strategies to enable a coherent approach and partner collaboration to the delivery of multi-functional benefits – environmental, social and economic in Essex.

The emerging [Environment Strategy](#) sets out our overall approach to delivering a coordinated approach to our Green Infrastructure, Energy, Waste Management and Flood Management in Essex. The Strategy provides a framework to help create great places to grow up, live and work by securing sustainable development and protect the environment.

9. Historic Environment

9.1 Relevance to Neighbourhood Planning

Planning for the historic environment involves the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets within a Plan Area. Heritage assets range from sites and buildings of local historic value to those of the highest significance, and can include listed buildings, archaeological deposits, scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens, conservation areas, registered battlefields, protected wreck sites, and locally listed buildings.

Consultations with Historic England and reference to the [Essex Historic Environment Record](#) (EHER) would be required to understand the significance of heritage assets and determine where potential harm could impact on these in a Plan area.

The historic environment is relevant to Neighbourhood Planning, as the impacts on historic asset's and their settings within the Plan area, can determine the location of sites, and the quantum and type of development. Policy formation and site selection should therefore consider both the potential impacts and any mitigation that may be required.

9.2 ECC Role

Place Services are a traded unit of ECC, and provide integrated environmental assessment, planning, design and management services. Place Services are a multidisciplinary team, including planners, urban designers, landscape architects, historic environment advisors, ecologists, arboriculturalists, conservation and community engagement specialists. Place Services can provide specialist advice on a range of heritage related subjects, particularly regarding the impact of development on heritage assets including listed buildings, conservation areas and archaeological sites.

Place Services maintains the [Essex Historic Environment Record](#), a computerised database of all known historic buildings and archaeological sites in the County. It also holds the Heritage at Risk Register, which provides information about buildings, scheduled monuments, and other sites at risk of current and future neglect or decay. For further information about the services available, please contact Place Services at enquiries@placeservices.co.uk or place.services@essex.gov.uk

The responsibility for conservation areas and locally listed buildings within Essex lies at the city, borough, district, and unitary authority level. Information regarding these can be obtained from the relevant local authority.

9.3 Key Documents and Guidance

Place Services maintains the [Essex Historic Environment Record](#), a computerised database of all known historic buildings and archaeological sites in the County. It also holds the Heritage at Risk Register, which provides information about buildings, scheduled monuments, and other sites at risk of current and future neglect or decay.

Further information regarding individual conservation areas can be found in specific conservation area appraisals held by the individual Local Authorities.

Historic England have produced advice notes relating to good practice in the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets within a Plan Area. [Historic England Advice Notes](#) are short guidance documents that provide information on how to assess the significance of heritage assets and evaluate the potential for harm resulting from new developments, with more clarity to the importance of setting.

10. Design

10.1 Relevance to Neighbourhood Planning

Design is an integral part of the planning process and should be given consideration within the Neighbourhood Planning process from an early stage. The design of new developments, buildings and landscapes has a direct impact on the quality, sustainability and success of the communities they will become part of.

Design policies can guide and have a positive effect on how new developments complement and enhance the existing built environment aesthetically, mitigate potential negative impacts, as well as deal with practical issues such as layout, physical appearance, access, and parking.

Neighbourhood Plans are a key tool in delivering local planning policies and should therefore have consideration to all aspects of design, as part of both the site allocation process, and policy formation, and when assessing the impact of different forms of development, in both size and type. The use of best practice in producing policies on design and access within a Neighbourhood Plan would also be beneficial.

10.2 ECC Role

Place Services are a traded unit of ECC, and provide integrated environmental assessment, planning, design and management services. Place Services are a multidisciplinary team, including planners, urban designers, landscape architects, historic environment advisors, ecologists, arboriculturalists, conservation and community engagement specialists.

Their combination of specialist skills and experience can assist organisations meet the requirements of the planning process. They can offer services related to site specific allocations including location testing, design analysis and briefing, as well as development management policies, design policies and evaluation.

ECC's specialist team Place Services can provide specialist advice and input for Neighbourhood Plans at each stage of their production.

For further information please refer to the website www.placeservices.co.uk or contact enquiries@placeservices.co.uk

10.3 Key Documents and Guidance

The [Essex Design Guide](#) (EDG) (2018) provides a key planning and design resource to help inform the plan making process, including Neighbourhood Plans. The EDG aims to encourage best practice in the design and layout of residential development.

The EDG retains the original core design principles, but also incorporates reference to revised planning guidance and frameworks, and introduces new themes around ageing population, digital and smart technology, health and wellbeing, active design, and Garden Communities. The EDG 2018 is available [online](#).

11. Land Ownership

11.1 Relevance to Neighbourhood Planning

During the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans an understanding of land ownership, and landowners aspirations is essential. This can provide valuable information on the availability of land, as well as information regarding constraints and opportunities on land, to inform the process of site selection and policy formation.

Agreements with the landowners are then made more easily in regards to appropriate development that meets the need of both groups. The risk of objections and opposition from land owners at the examination and referendum stages would also be reduced following such discussions.

Neighbourhood Plans may express an interest in allocating sites for development, or including land-use policies, that may affect land or property owned by ECC. Liaison with the County would therefore be required to establish the availability and/or suitability of such site allocations and/or policies.

11.2 ECC Role

Initial enquires in relation to ECC land ownership should be made through the Council's retained property advisors Lambert Smith Hampton.

They can be contacted by essexenquiries@lsh.co.uk

11.3 Key Documents and Guidance

The [Essex Property Asset Map \(EPAM\)](#) is a comprehensive database of the land owned, as well as current leases, by Local Planning Authorities and a selection of public service organisations.

This database can assist in identifying the ownership of publically owned land, and liaising with the appropriate body about the availability for development.

To assist in searching the database for more detailed information, a key and list of layers can be accessed from the right-hand side of the top toolbar.

12. Strategic Environmental Assessment

12.1 Relevance to Neighbourhood Planning

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a tool used at the plan-making stage to assess the likely effects of a Plan when judged against reasonable alternatives. Its requirement, if deemed necessary, is a 'Basic Condition' against which any Neighbourhood Plan will be tested.

SEA is a process that helps to understand how a Plan will affect the environment of the area that the plan covers, with additional considerations for social and economic impacts of policies within a Plan. This process is an opportunity to consider ways by which a Neighbourhood Plan can contribute to improvements in environmental, social and economic conditions, as well as a means of identifying and mitigating any potential adverse effects that a Plan might otherwise have. By doing so, it can help make sure that the proposals in any Plan are the most appropriate.

Initial screening is required for all Neighbourhood Plans to determine if there is likely to be significant environment, social and economic impacts. This process is commonly referred to as a "screening" assessment. Such screening should be undertaken at an early stage of a Plan's preparation, to allow the considerations to shape the Plan, and will avoid delays later in the process. It should also be revised to reflect the final version of the Plan.

An SEA Environmental Report is required if a Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have a significant effect on the environment, particularly where it affects a sensitive area and the features for which such an area was designated. Sensitive areas are defined as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and European sites (Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas), Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and World Heritage Sites and Scheduled Monuments.

In addition a Neighbourhood Plan may also have the potential to give rise to significant effects if it affects other designations or features, such as Conservation Areas or Listed Buildings.

In addition to the consideration of any sensitivities within a Neighbourhood Plan area, further consideration needs to be given to the content of any Plan and what is being proposed. A SEA may be required, for example, where a Plan area has a site allocation which contains natural and heritage assets that are vulnerable to change, and which could result in significant effects to such assets. These effects need to be fully assessed, and potential alternatives explored.

The process of undertaking a SEA Environmental Report requires a substantial amount of work in order to address any issues, and is recognised as a complex task which is likely to need expert help. Any Group proposing a Neighbourhood Plan, can commission consultants to undertake such work.

12.2 ECC Role

It is the responsibility of individual local planning authorities to ensure that SEA's appropriate to the nature and scope of a Neighbourhood Plan proposal have been undertaken.

ECC are consulted on Neighbourhood Plans and provide professional advice on their content. Place Services can provide advice in relation to undertaking SEA on a commission basis. For further information please refer to the website www.placeservices.co.uk or contact enquiries@placeservices.co.uk

12.3 Key Documents and Guidance

Guidance on Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal in respect of Neighbourhood Plans can be found on the Government [website](#).

13. Support for Neighbourhood Planning in Essex

To support parish and town councils across Essex with their work, ECC works in partnership with the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC). This provides town and parish councils with access to information, including training and the promotion of neighbourhood planning, and signposting to the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE). Further information can be found on ECC's [website](#).

Further information and sources of guidance and support for parish and town councils in Essex can also be accessed through the following organisations:

- [Essex Association of Local Councils](#)
- [National Association of Local Councils](#)
- [Rural Community Council of Essex](#)
- [Planning Aid](#)'s forum for neighbourhood planning
- [Locality](#) – a national membership network supporting local community organisations

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You can contact us in the following ways:

By email: mail.spatialplanning@essex.gov.uk

Visit our website: www.essex.gov.uk

The information contained in this document can be translated, and/or made available in alternative formats, on request.