Basildon Borough Council

Settlement Hierarchy Review

August 2015

BasildonCouncil

BASILDON • BILLERICAY • WICKFORD

Creating Opportunity

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1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1   The purpose of this review is to reconsider the assessment and identification of a settlement hierarchy for Basildon Borough as previously set out in *Topic Paper TP8: Settlement Hierarchy* dated February 2012. Since that topic paper was prepared, the Regional Spatial Strategy has been revoked, and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has been introduced. These Government actions have substantially altered the policy basis on which that previous topic paper was prepared. Additionally, the Council consulted on the Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options Report from January to March 2014. This identified the need to reconsider parts of the settlement hierarchy to ensure it incorporates community identity.

1.2   Topic Paper TP8 was prepared to establish a settlement hierarchy for Basildon Borough. Basildon Borough is enveloped by the Metropolitan Green Belt, and consequently its settlements have never been formally defined through local plan policies. In order for the Local Plan to reflect the different characters of the different settlements within Basildon Borough, which is a Core Principle of plan-making as identified in paragraph 17 of the NPPF, it is necessary for an assessment to be undertaken to understand the different characters of the different settlements and to establish a hierarchy of settlements that can inform the plan-making process.

1.3   Topic Paper T8 applied an approach to the classification of settlement types according to measurable factors such as the size of population, the level of facilities and the accessibility of services. This approach had initially been devised through the Regional Spatial Strategy. Whilst the Regional Spatial Strategy has been revoked to allow for greater local determination of growth requirements, this approach to the classification of settlement types remains a logical and robust means by which a settlement hierarchy can be determined. Furthermore, applying an approach recognised at a larger than local level ensures that any settlement hierarchy arrived at will be consistent with any settlement hierarchy in neighbouring and nearby cities, boroughs and districts.

1.4   The approach to assessing the settlement hierarchy within this paper has not therefore altered, although additional work has been undertaken to ensure that the assessment is up to date, and that issues of community identity have been effectively addressed.

2.   PROCESS

2.1   The development of a settlement hierarchy needs to follow a process which may see settlements move within the hierarchy as planning proposals are included within the Local Plan. For example, a significant new development next to an "un-serviced settlement" may bring new services to the settlement such as a school, shops and public transport provision. This settlement would move to become a "serviced settlement" as a consequence of the Local Plan. Figure 1, sets out the process for identifying a settlement hierarchy. This review, at this point in time will only address the identification of the *Initial Settlement Hierarchy* and discuss the implications of the various development options available to the Council on this initial hierarchy to inform the Local Plan. Until such time as the final distribution of development is known, it cannot set out the final settlement hierarchy.

Figure 1: Settlement Hierarchy Identification Methodology
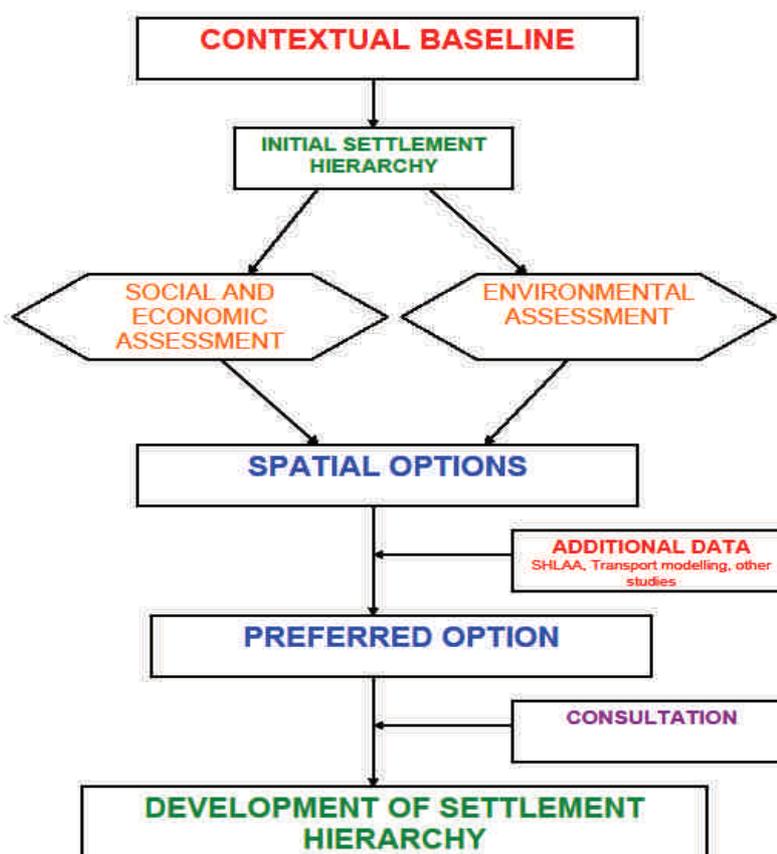
3.   POLICY CONTEXT

National Planning Policy

3.1   As set out in the introduction, previous national planning policy set out in PPGs and PPSs was replaced in March 2012 by the NPPF. The national policy context set out in Topic Paper TP8 is no longer relevant; although the actual intent and planning principles of national policy has not changed as significantly as the quantity of it.

3.2   Paragraphs 6 of the NPPF states that:
"The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development."

3.3   Paragraph 7 is clear that sustainable development will have three roles – an economic role, a social role and an environmental role. Paragraph 8 is clear that development which seeks to deliver these three roles in an integrated way that responds in an integrated way will achieve the most sustainable and consequently successful solutions for people, the environment and the economy.

3.4   Paragraph 17 of the NPPF sets out 12 Core Principles that the planning system should strive to apply when plans are being prepared and decisions are being taken. These 12 principles are that planning should:

1) *"be genuinely plan-led, empowering local people to shape their surroundings, with succinct local and neighbourhood plans setting out a positive vision for the future of the area. Plans should be kept up-to-date, and be based on joint working and co-operation to address larger than local issues. They should provide a practical framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made with a high degree of predictability and efficiency;*
2) *not simply be about scrutiny, but instead be a creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places in which people live their lives;*
3) *proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs. Every effort should be made objectively to identify and then meet the housing, business and other development needs of an area, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth. Plans should take account of market signals, such as land prices and housing affordability, and set out a clear strategy for allocating sufficient land which is suitable for development in their area, taking account of the needs of the residential and business communities;*
4) *always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings;*
5) *take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it;*
6) *support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change, and encourage the reuse of existing resources, including conversion of existing buildings, and encourage the use of renewable resources (for example, by the development of renewable energy);*

> 7) *contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution. Allocations of land for development should prefer land of lesser environmental value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework;*
> 8) *encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value;*
> 9) *promote mixed use developments, and encourage multiple benefits from the use of land in urban and rural areas, recognising that some open land can perform many functions (such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, carbon storage or food production);*
> 10) *conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significant, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations;*
> 11) *actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling, and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable; and*
> 12) *take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all, and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs."*

3.5   In order to achieve these principles, it is important to understand the role that different settlements play in the current network of towns and places, and the opportunities that exist to improve or enhance their roles going forward, particularly in relation to the 11th principle which seeks for planning to actively manage patterns of growth to make the best use of public transport and active travel modes, and requires development to be focused in locations which are, or can be made sustainable.

3.6   This is not to always say that some development should not be directed towards smaller settlements. Paragraph 28 of the NPPF deals with supporting the prosperity of rural communities including small settlements such as villages. It expects a sustainable approach to new development to be taken which helps to promote the retention and development of local services and community facilities in villages, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.

The Duty to Cooperate

3.7   The Localism Act 2011 and the NPPF introduce the concept of the *Duty to Cooperate*. The Duty to Cooperate requires neighbouring local authorities and other specified public agencies to work constructively together to address strategic planning issues. The five planning authorities in South Essex (Basildon, Castle Point, Rochford, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock) have historically worked closely on strategic planning issues, due to the extension of the Thames Gateway regeneration area to cover this area in the 2000s. Thames Gateway South Essex is also specifically identified as a growth area with the South East Local Enterprise Partnership Economic Plan. More recently, joint working has been undertaken on the preparation of a Strategic Housing Market Assessment across this area to identify the objectively assessed need for market and affordable housing. The outcomes of this assessment will have implications for the need and distribution of housing growth within Basildon Borough.

3.8   Further joint working is now being considered across the five South Essex authorities with regard to employment need, the role and hierarchy of town centres and transport amongst other things. These areas of work will also have implications for the need and distribution of development.

3.9   Whilst the primary focus of joint working has been with South Essex authorities, Basildon Borough is located to the north of South Essex and also borders the mid-Essex boroughs of Brentwood and Chelmsford.

3.10   Brentwood and Basildon entered into an agreement via a Memorandum of Understanding at the end of 2014 to investigate the opportunity for creating a cross boundary settlement, referred to as 'Dunton Garden Suburb' to the west of Basildon. Consultation on this proposal was undertaken from January to March 2015, and consultation responses are being analysed in order to determine whether the proposal should feature in the Local Plans of the two respective authorities. This proposal would subsume the existing settlement of Dunton Village by extending Basildon's urban edge further west towards West Horndon.

3.11   Chelmsford is located to the north of Basildon, and parts of Wickford and Runwell fall within the administrative boundary of Chelmsford. The south western parts of the Chelmsford administrative area fall within the Metropolitan Green Belt area, and initial discussions under the auspices of the Duty to Cooperate indicate that limited development is likely to be directed towards this part of Chelmsford's area through the review of the City's Local Plan. Therefore, smaller settlements falling within this part of Chelmsford will retain their current status as serviced and un-serviced settlements, and any reliance they have on Billericay and Wickford for service provision are likely to remain largely unchanged going forward.

Local Planning Policy

Basildon District Local Plan 1998

3.12   The Basildon District Local Plan Saved Policies 2007 that remain applicable in the Borough are from the last adopted development plan document for the borough, the

Basildon District Local Plan 1998. The Local Plan set out policies and allocations for development within Basildon District (now borough) during the period 1991 to 2001.

3.13   Within the Local Plan 1998 Basildon, Billericay and Wickford are referred to as "towns" and identified as the main locations of services. Whilst Bowers Gifford, Ramsden Bellhouse, and Noak Hill Road are mentioned in the Local Plan, no particular settlement classification is given to these areas. The Local Plan does however recognise that there are numerous small settlements and Plotland areas dispersed throughout the Green Belt.

Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options Report 2013

3.14   The Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options Report was published for consultation in the period from January to March 2014. It identified within Core Policy 1, the spatial hierarchy derived from Topic Paper TP8. The settlement hierarchy was used as a means by which to distribute development around the borough, with a certain number of homes and employment directed towards the main urban area (Basildon), and each of the towns (Billericay and Wickford). Collective targets for housing provision were also set out for the serviced and unserviced settlements.

3.15   The outcomes of this consultation were reported to the Council's Cabinet in September 2014. In December 2014, the Council's Cabinet agreed to a revised Local Development Scheme which will see a full Local Plan prepared rather than separate Core Strategy, Allocation and Development Management Development Plan Documents. This revised approach will need further consideration given to the settlement hierarchy, as it is necessary to understand how the specific site allocations will impact on the settlement hierarchy going forward.

4. IDENTIFYING THE INITIAL SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY

Historical Context

4.1 The Basildon Borough Historic Environment Characterisations Report 2011 identifies evidence of human occupation in Basildon borough from the late Palaeolithic period (500,000 to 10,000 BC) from the discovery of flint hand-axes. A few scattered find-spots from the Mesolithic period (10,000 to 4,000BC) meanwhile indicated that there were possibly Mesolithic settlements in the Borough around the Nevendon area.

4.2 The study further highlights some evidence of settlement activity in the Neolithic period (4,000 to 2,200BC). However, it is from the Bronze Age (2,000BC to 700BC) that settlement activity within the Borough become more pronounced. There is evidence of Bronze Age settlements around Billericay and Norsey Wood; to the east of the borough, around Wickford and North Benfleet; and to the south of the borough in Vange.

4.3 There is also considerable evidence of Iron Age (700BC to 43AD) activity within the borough, particularly in the vicinity of Norsey Wood and south Billericay, with a possible settlement at Little Burstead and an extensive settlement at Beauchamps Farm in Wickford. During the Roman period (43 to 410AD) the principal settlement in the area appears to have been Billericay, with evidence of scattered farms and villas at Little Burstead, Wickford, Ramsden Bellhouse and Langdon Hills. There is however, little evidence of people continuing to live in area during the Saxon period (410-1066AD).

4.4 The Medieval period (1066-1537AD) laid the foundations for the modern development present within the Borough, through the establishment of local manors, parish churches and parish boundaries. The historic parishes are:

- Mountnessing;
- Billericay;
- Great Burstead;
- Little Burstead;
- Ramsden Crays;
- Ramsden Bellhouse;
- Downham;
- Wickford;
- Nevendon;
- North Benfleet;
- Pitsea;
- Vange;
- Basildon;
- Lee Chapel;
- Laindon;
- Langdon Hills; and
- Dunton.

4.5 During the post medieval period (1598-1900AD) further expansion of Billericay in the form of ribbon development and infilling along medieval streets occurred. It was however during the modern period (1900 to the present day) where the most profound development occurred. The agricultural depression at the beginning of the 20th Century was a key cause of this growth, as many semi-derelict farms were brought by local entrepreneurs and split into plots for sale. The extension of the Railways into South Essex during the late 19th Century meant that people seeking to escape London were able to access these plots, and develop small-holdings and holiday chalets. These areas of plots became known as "Plotlands".

4.6   These plotland developments were unplanned and occurred in an ad-hoc unregulated manner, mostly in the period between the First and Second World Wars. Most of the plots were developed without access to adequate connections to utilities, drainage, other services, and lacked metalled roads.

4.7   In 1946, the Town and Country Planning Act designated a series of New Towns around major cities in England. Basildon New Town was designated in 1949, incorporating the existing settlements of Laindon, Langdon Hills, Pitsea and Vange. The towns and Wickford and Billericay meanwhile expanded significantly in the post war period as standalone settlements. Residential development also took place in Ramsden Bellhouse, Crays Hill, Noak Hill Road and Bowers Gifford.

4.8   As a consequence of these patterns of development, the historic parishes of Laindon, Langdon Hills, Lee Chapel, Pitsea, and Vange no longer form separate settlements, but are instead neighbourhoods within Basildon Town. Meanwhile, the parish of Nevendon has largely be subsumed within Wickford Town.

4.9   Billericay, is now considered to include the parish of Great Burstead, along with the newer settlement known as South Green which sits between the two. Great Burstead and South Green are a single parished area which maintain a community identity separate to Billericay, and queries have been raised through consultation on the Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options as to whether Great Burstead and South Green should be treated as separate settlements to Billericay. Further analysis of this point is set out later in this review.

Settlement Services and Facilities Appraisal

4.10   To understand the function of each settlement within the Borough, a review was undertaken in Topic Paper TP8 to determine the main facilities present. This has been updated to consider additional facilities or places that are necessary to make communities more sustainable. In addition, this review includes *Dunton* which was omitted from the initial appraisal, and considers Great Burstead and South Green as a separate settlement.

4.11   The main facilities considered in the appraisal were as follows:
- A secondary school;
- A primary school;
- A health facility – for this study, a GP / Health Centre will be used as it can provide the widest service in comparison to an opticians or a dentist, for example;
- Town Centres where a mixture of comparison and convenience shopping and and services are available
- Local Centres – where a smaller parade of shops, takeaways and community hall are available;
- A convenience store;
- A post office;
- Local employment opportunities;
- Access to public transport; and
- Mixed housing provision – social, registered providers, private, sheltered, care homes, Gypsy and Traveller sites.

4.12   Table 1 sets out the revised review of services and facilities.

Place	Population (to the nearest 100)	Secondary School	Primary School	Post Office	Town Centres*	Local Centre **	Convenience Store Provision	GP Health Facility	Employment Opportunities ***	Frequent Public Transport	Mixed Housing Provision	Public Open Space	TOTAL
Basildon	103,600	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
Wickford	29,600	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
Billericay	28,000	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
G.Burstead & South Green	6,000		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
Break Egg Hill	100 (40)									✓		✓	2
Crays Hill	600		✓	✓		✓			✓	✓		✓	6
Ramsden Bellhouse	600		✓	✓		✓						✓	4
Bowers Gifford	900		✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	5
North Benfleet	400								✓	✓	✓		3
L.Burstead	100									✓		✓	2
Noak Hill Road	600									✓			1
Bells Hill	100 (80)									✓			1
Broomshill Chase	100 (60)									✓			1
Crooked Brook - Fobbing	100									✓	✓		1
Crays Hill Plotlands	390									✓	✓		2
Fairmead	400										✓		1
Green Lane	50												0
Newhouse Farm & Castledon Road	270												0
Northlands	100 (70)											✓	1
Ramsden View Road	100 (60)									✓			1
Wickford Lawns	100 (40)												0
Stormonts Way	100 (15)											✓	1
Dunton	100 (65)								✓		✓	✓	3

Table 1: Review of Services and Facilities
*Mixture of Comparison and Convienence Shopping and Services
**Where a smaller parade of convenience shops, takeaways or community hall are available
*** Not within the other service/facilities present

4.13   This appraisal clearly distinguishes between the higher order settlement areas of Basildon, Billericay, Wickford and Great Burstead & South Green, which benefit from a more diverse range of local services and facilities and those settlements which are lower order and benefit from fewer facilities.

4.14   There are a significant number of smaller settlements (primarily Plotlands) which have no direct access to services and facilities and rely on neighbouring settlements for many if not all of their services. Due to the lack of access to services, these locations should be classified as un-serviced settlements within the hierarchy. These locations are not therefore the most sustainable locations for growth, although depending on the size and type of development proposals that could be delivered as part of the Local Plan should these areas otherwise be suitable and available locations, it needs to be considered that these Local Plan opportunities could improve the level of service provision within that settlement and make it more sustainable.

4.15   The Basildon District Local Plan identified Bowers Gifford, Crays Hill and Ramsden Bellhouse as "other small settlements". Compared to the plotlands and un-serviced settlements, these three villages have higher levels of local service provision, although not the fullest range. These three villages should therefore be classified as

serviced settlements, which are part dependant on larger settlements nearby for a fuller suite of services/ facilities. These locations are more sustainable locations for growth than un-serviced settlements, as there is local infrastructure in place which could support growth subject to capacity, and further development offers the opportunity to do this, or increase the range of facilities and services in these settlements.

Billericay, Great Burstead and South Green and Break Egg Hill Plotland

4.16   A query was raised through the Core Strategy consultation in 2014, as to whether Great Burstead and South Green should be considered to be a separate settlement to Billericay. As a starting point it is first necessary to consider whether these two settlements should be considered to be separate settlements from one another. The modern maps which follows shows the Great Burstead and South Green area. It is not possible to distinguish from this map, or indeed from the ground, a distinctive boundary between Great Burstead and South Green. Consequently, the Parish Council for the area covers both. Whilst it is recognisable on the ground that Great Burstead's historic centre focuses around the Church of St Mary Magdalene and the village pump in the south west extremity of this area and in South Green, the crux of the village green and Grange Parade, the residential areas in between are not distinctively of separate building styles. Therefore, they should be treated within any hierarchy that is arrived at, as a joint area of settlement of Great Burstead and South Green.

4.17   The second issue to consider, is whether Great Burstead and South Green form part of Billericay within the initial settlement hierarchy, or are for the purposes of the hierarchy a stand-alone settlement. Physically, Great Burstead and South Green sit to the south east of Billericay, and are substantially separated from the majority of the east of Billericay Town by Mill Meadows to the north east. Mill Meadows is a significant landscape area that benefits from nature conservation designations. It forms a high point in local topography and visually separates Great Burstead and South Green from the main mass of the town to the north. Billericay does however extend further southwards to the west of this ridge, and consequently there is a continuous, albeit narrow ribbon of development along Southend Road that links Billericay with the northern edge of Great Burstead and South Green.

4.18   Table 1 shows that Great Burstead and South Green have many of the features of a stand-alone serviced settlement, similar to those which are seen in Crays Hill, but generally of a higher order. This happens elsewhere in the Borough where services can also be found in Pitsea and Laindon for example, which whilst have local identities and characteristics of their own, are difficult to distinguish from the wider Basildon Town area and for most planning and infrastructure purposes are considered to be smaller parts of the larger Basildon area. Due to the adjoining location, residents in Great Burstead and South Green also benefit from the facilities in Billericay such as close proximity to secondary school provision, a High Street within a wider range of goods and services, and access to railway services. The same cannot be said for the Crays Hill, Bowers Gifford and Ramsden Bellhouse, which are the other stand-alone settlements in terms of service provision and physical separation. This weakens the argument for Great Burstead and South Green to be considered for planning terms as separate standalone settlement.

4.19   Given the physical connection of Great Burstead and South Green with Billericay through development at its northern edge, and due to the shared provisions of services, it is considered that Great Burstead and South Green are areas within the larger settlement of Billericay. It is recognised that historically these were separate settlements. However, the passage of time has seen these areas integrated into the physical being of Billericay, such as Laindon and Pitsea have been integrated into the physical being of Basildon.

4.20   Similarly, the Break Egg Hill Plotland sits on the eastern edge of Billericay, adjacent to the urban area. As such, it is difficult to distinguish this as a separate settlement, and due to its limited access to services, it relies on Billericay to meet its needs. Consequently, this plotland also forms part of the settlement of Billericay.

4.21   For these reasons, Great Burstead and South Green cannot be distinguished as a separate settlement for the purposes of the Borough's Settlement Hierarchy.

Distinguishing between the Higher Order Settlements

4.22   Topic Paper T8 used the RSS to distinguish between Basildon as the main town, and Billericay and Wickford as other large towns within the Borough. The RSS had identified Basildon as a Key Centre of Development and Change (KCDC), which clearly distinguished it from Billericay and Wickford in terms of the scale of development it was intended to accommodate.

4.23   The revocation of the RSS removed the designation of Basildon as a KCDC, and therefore the assumptions applied in Topic Paper T8 need to be checked using factual evidence to ensure that they remain appropriate.

4.24   There is substantial evidence that Basildon is the main town within the Borough. Key factors which distinguish it from Billericay and Wickford are:
   - A significantly greater population compared to either of the other settlements;
   - Its primary Town centre (Basildon) is recognised as a higher order centre within the Retail Needs Assessment 2015. Billericay and Wickford identified as secondary centres;
   - Basildon Enterprise Corridor a significant employment destination for the wider area (South Essex);
   - Basildon is the civic heart of the borough – location of most local Government services;
   - Significant sport and leisure, and commercial leisure provision is located within Basildon; and
   - The bus and railway station hub is located within Basildon Town Centre.

4.25   It therefore remains reasonable to consider Basildon to be the main town within Basildon Borough, as it has a wider role in providing services and jobs compared to Billericay and Wickford where provision is more focused on meeting the needs of the local area.
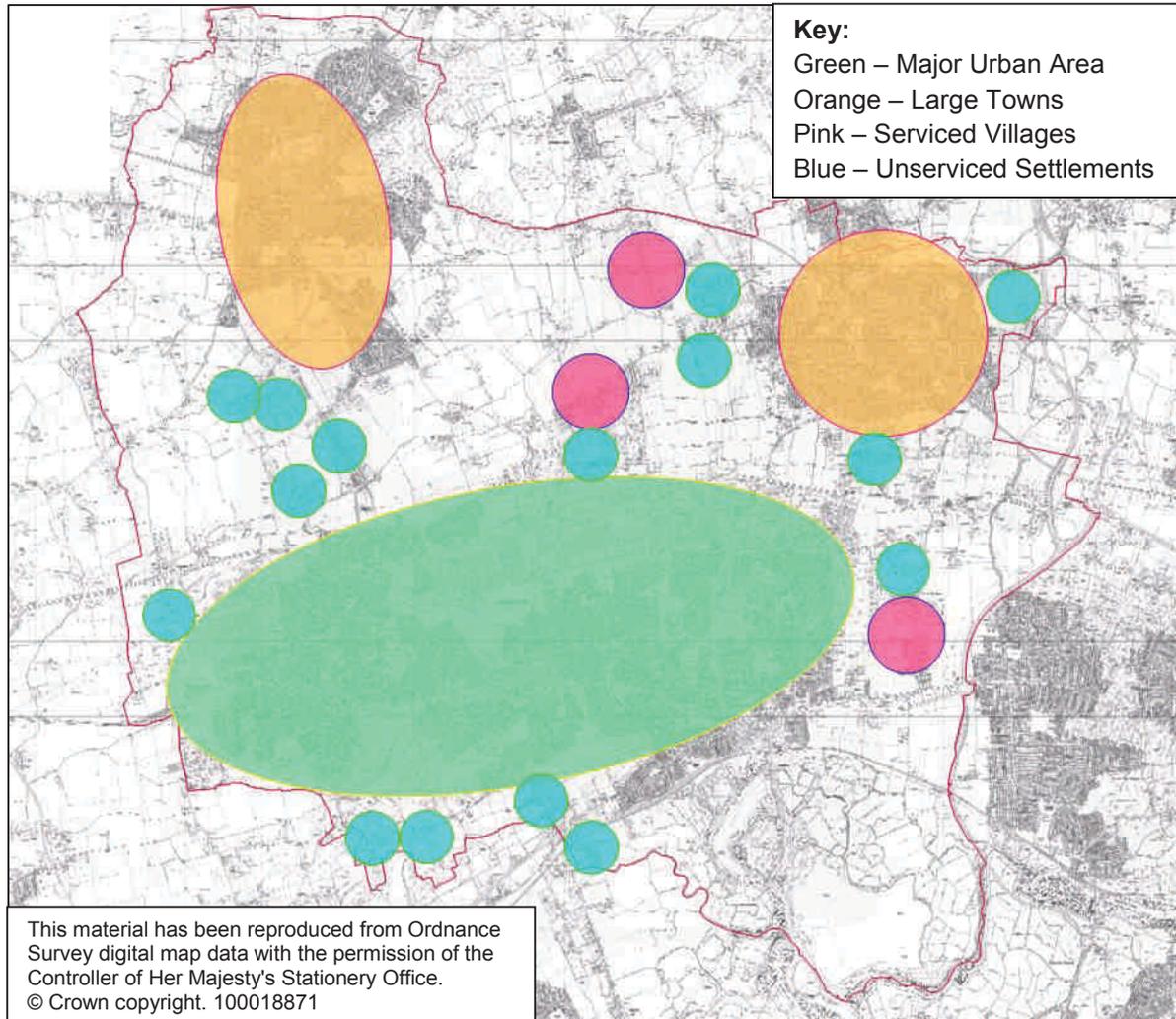
4.26   The initial settlement hierarchy can therefore be characterised as set out in Table 2.

Settlement Type	Characteristics	Places
Major Urban Area	• Main Town – wider than local role; • Focal point for retail and commercial activities; • A127 employment corridor; • Hospital and other health and civic facilities; • Wide range of community and leisure facilities; and • Wider accessibility by public transport.	Basildon (incorporating Laindon and Pitsea)
Large Towns	• Large town centres; • Retail and commercial activities; • Employment areas; • Health facilities; • Several primary and secondary schools; • Some leisure and community facilities; and • Good public transport accessibility.	• Billericay (incorporating Great Burstead & South Green, and Break Egg Hill) • Wickford (incorporating Shotgate)
Serviced Villages	• Some community facilities; and • Fair public transport accessibility.	• Bowers Gifford Village • Crays Hill Village • Ramsden Bellhouse Village
Un-serviced Settlements	• Small collection of dwellings; • Limited public transport accessibility	• Little Burstead Village • Dunton Village • Fobbing Plotland • Bells Hill Road Plotland • Broomshill Chase Plotland • Crays Hill Plotland • Fairmead Plotland • Green Lane Plotland • Newhouse Farm & Castledon Road Plotland • Noak Hill Road • Northlands Plotland • North Benfleet Plotland • Ramdens View Road Plotland • Stormont Way Plotland • Wickford Lawn Plotland

Table 2 Settlement Hierarchy

4.27   A map showing the initial settlement hierarchy is shown in Figure 2, which follows.
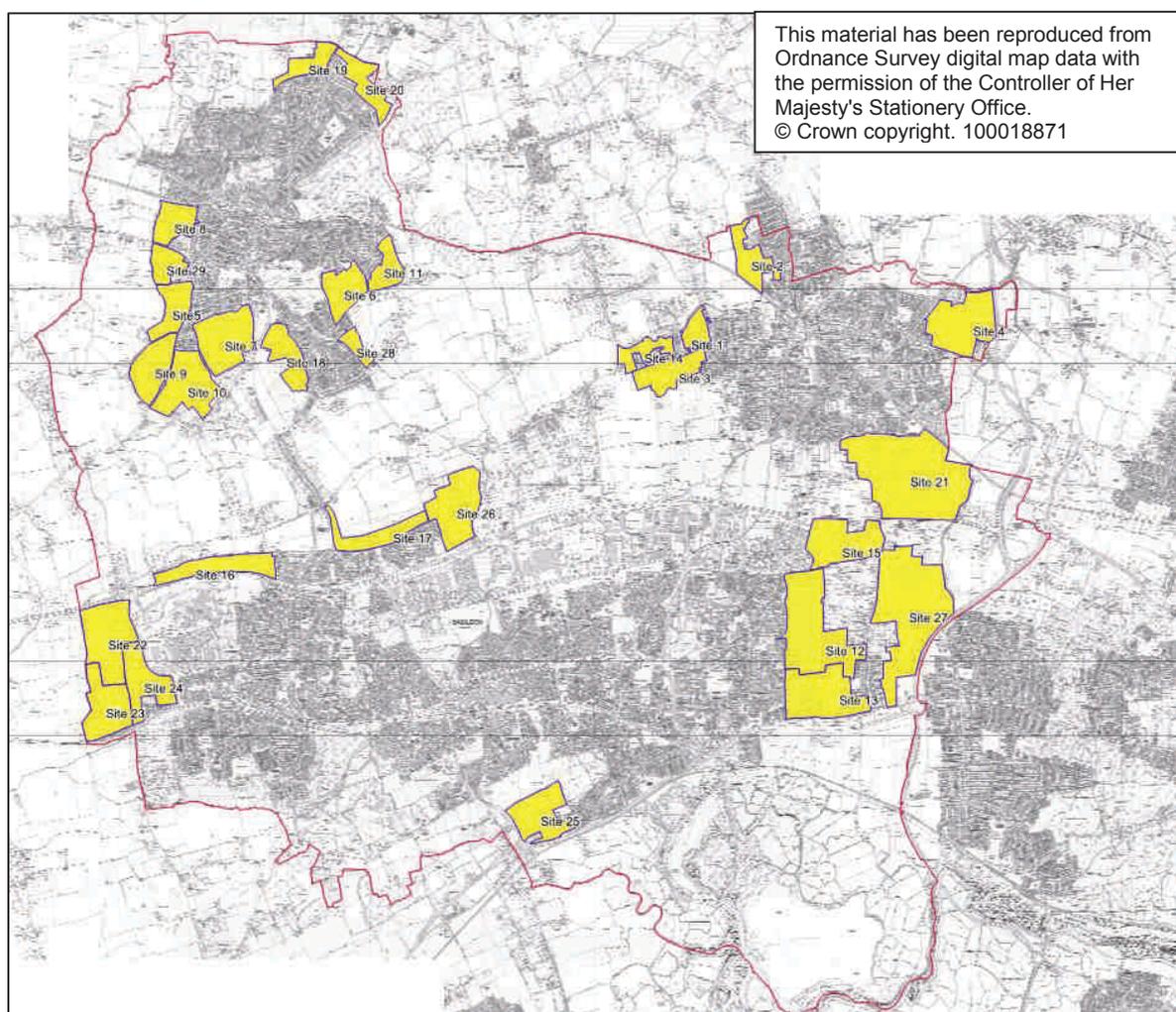
Figure 2: Initial Settlement Hierarchy

Key:
Green – Major Urban Area
Orange – Large Towns
Pink – Serviced Villages
Blue – Unserviced Settlements

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5. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY OF POTENTIAL STRATEGIC SITES

5.1 Topic Paper TP8 only went as far as identifying the initial settlement hierarchy. This review goes a step further, and considers the implications of potential housing growth locations on the future settlement hierarchy in the borough.

5.2 The potential housing growth locations considered in this report, are suitable and available strategic sized sites identified through the HELAA, or else collections of suitable and available sites which together could form a strategic sized allocation. There are 29 such sites under consideration for inclusion in the Local Plan. A map of these sites is shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**, below.

Figure 3 Strategic Sites Map

5.3 Mapping of these potential housing growth locations have been compared to the settlement map at Figure 2 in order to determine whether they have implications for the initial settlement hierarchy. Where there are potential issues, these are set out below.

5.4   For the purposes of this study, strategic sites 2, 5, 8, 11, 18, 19, 20, 28 and 29 are not considered to impact on the settlement hierarchy, as they are potential extensions to the existing main urban area or towns which have no implications on outlying settlements in terms of causing them to merge.

5.5   Additionally, site 6 which is located to the south east of Billericay and to the north of South Green poses no impact of the initial settlement hierarchy identified in the previous section of this report. If this site were to be brought forward, depending on design it could however act to strengthen the relationship between these two areas, further incorporating South Green into the wider settlement of Billericay. This should be considered in determining the appropriateness of site 6 for development purposes in the Local Plan.

Figure 4: Strategic Site 6
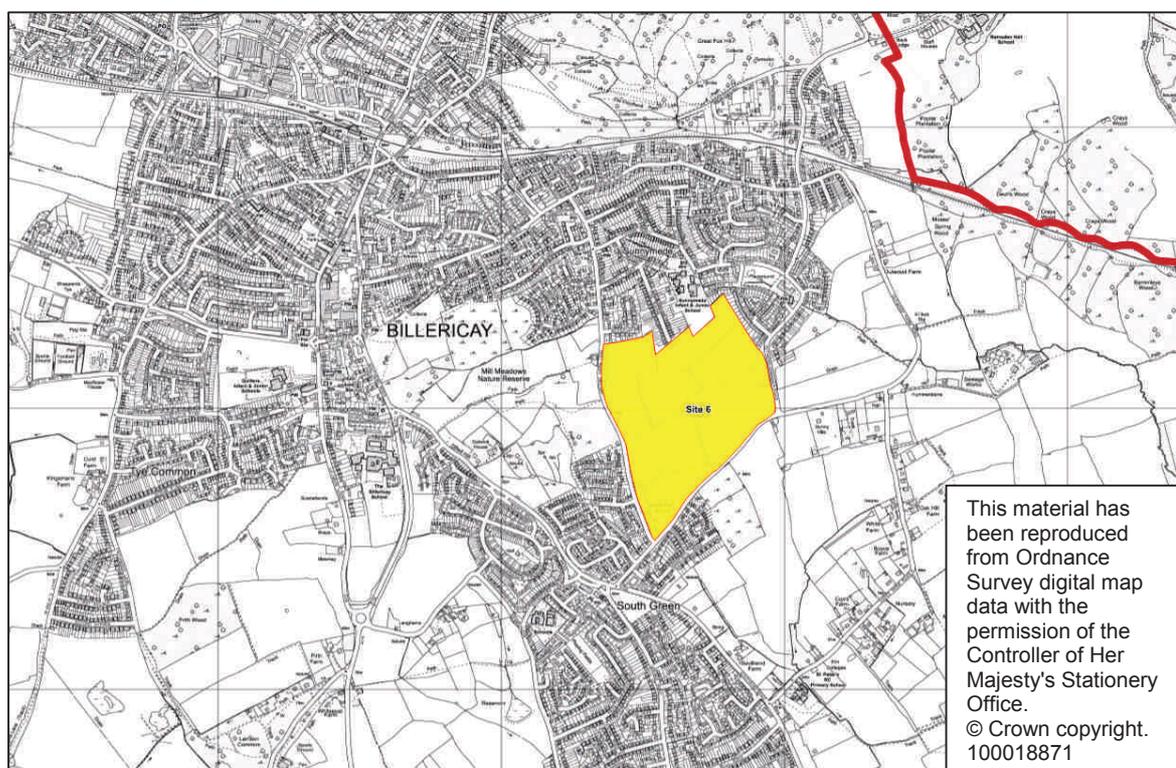
5.6   Strategic sites 1 and 14 sit to the west of Wickford, north of Southend Road. The plotland area known as Newhouse Farm and Castledon Road sits to the north west. Beyond that sits the Serviced Village of Ramsden Bellhouse. The development of these sites would potentially result in the settlements of Wickford and Ramsden Bellhouse beginning to merge by creating a broad ribbon of development between the two. This has implications for the settlement hierarchy in the longer term, and should be considered in determining the appropriateness of sites 1 and 14 for development purposes in the Local Plan.

Figure 5: Strategic Sites 1 and 14
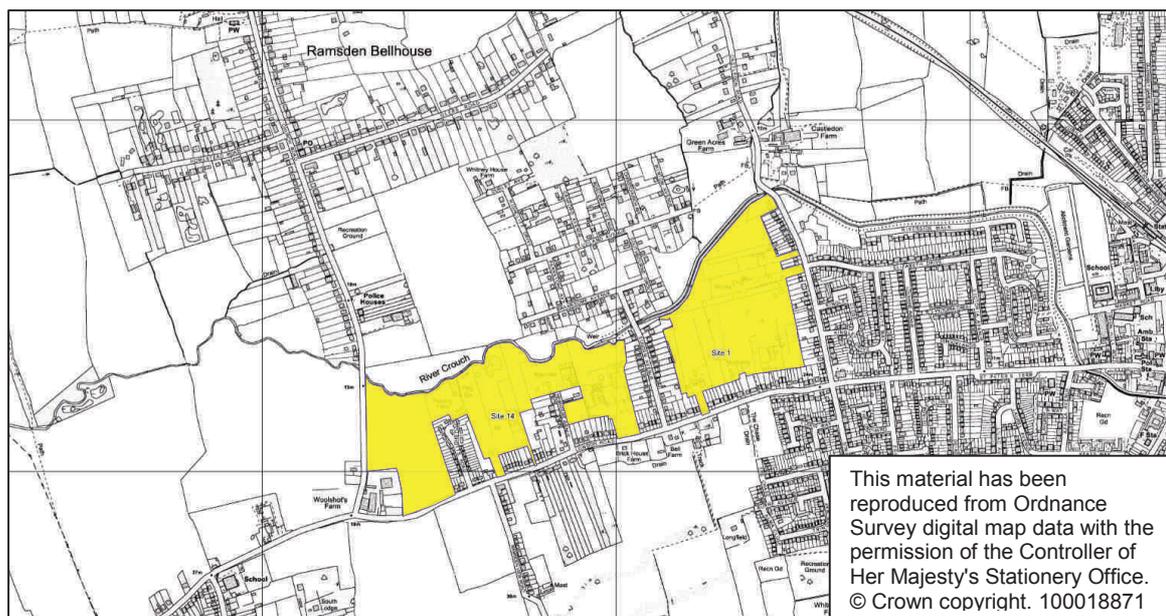
5.7   Strategic site 3 sits to the west of Wickford, south of Southend Road. This site wraps around the Ramsden View Road Plotland, and consequently, if this site were to be developed this settlement would no longer exist as a separate entity. Given the limited population, it is unlikely that this would be significantly harmful to the Borough's settlement hierarchy, although there would be local impacts for residents. The development of strategic site 3, would reduce the physical degree by which Wickford is separated from Crays Hill, a serviced settlement in its own right and to what degree should be considered in determining the appropriateness of site 3 for development purposes in the Local Plan.

Figure 6: Strategic Site 3
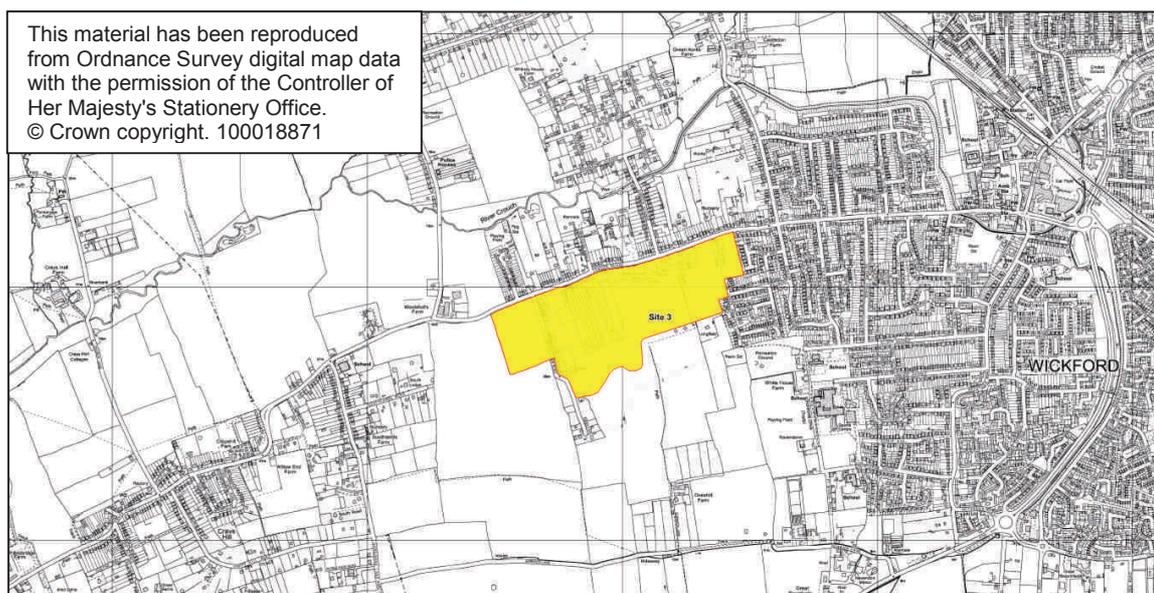
5.8   Strategic site 4 sits to the east of Wickford, to the north of Southend Road. The site wraps around the west and north of the Wickford Lawns Plotland, and consequently if this site were to be developed in its entirety this settlement would no longer exist as a separate entity. Given the limited population, it is unlikely that this would be significantly harmful to the settlement hierarchy, although there would be local impacts for residents. Beyond the borough's boundary, in Chelmsford City Battlesbridge is located to the north east along the River Crouch and Rawreth to the east; although the A130 embankment does serve as a physical boundary between them. Development of this site would extend the settlement boundary of Wickford towards these settlements in mapping terms, but to what degree might be appropriate should be considered in determining the appropriateness of site 4 for development purposes in the Local Plan.

Figure 7: Strategic Site 4
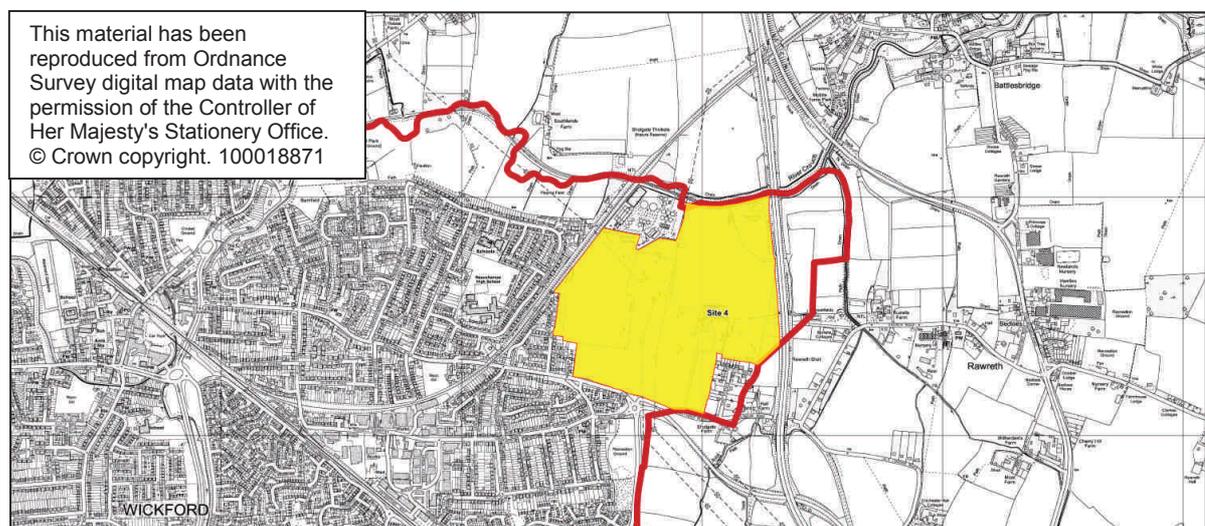
5.9   Strategic sites 7, 9 and 10 are located to the south of Billericay, between Billericay and the smaller un-settlement of Little Burstead. There is a risk that if development were located within this area without maintaining a sufficient degree of separation from Little Burstead, this smaller settlement and the associated plotland known as Broomhill Chase would be subsumed by the expansion of Billericay southwards. Consideration therefore needs to be given as to whether the expansion of Billericay southward through the Local Plan seeking to develop all, a combination or one of sites 7, 9 and 10 should be pursued to enhance access to services in Little Burstead or contained to prevent Little Burstead being subsumed within the town.
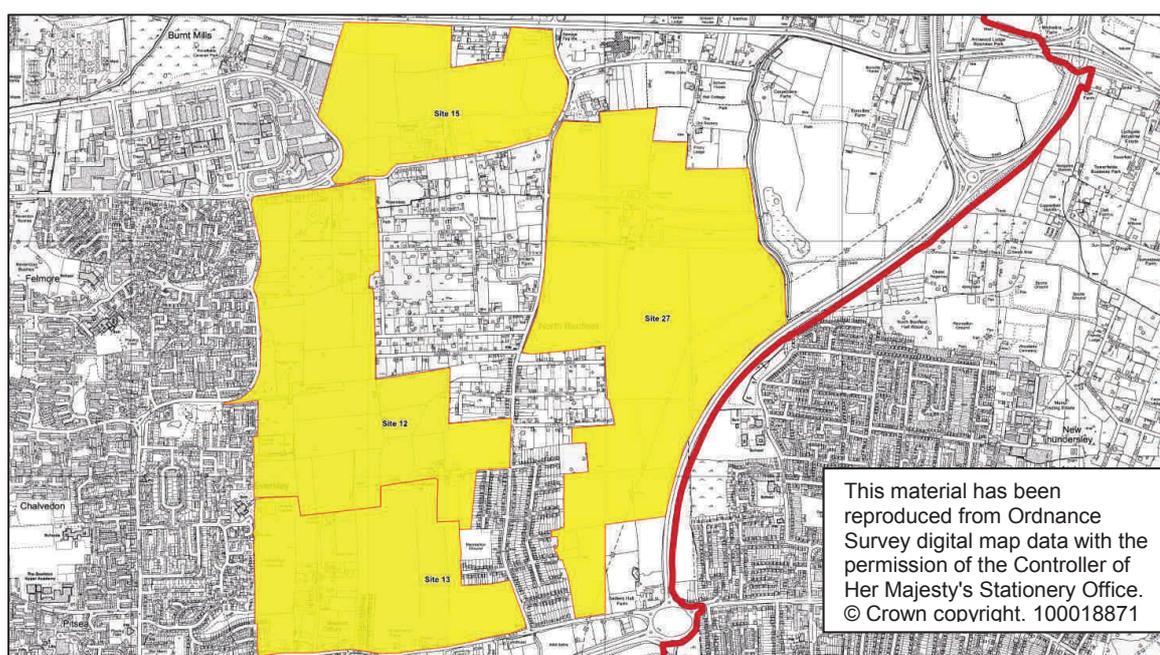
Figure 8: Strategic Sites 7, 9 & 10
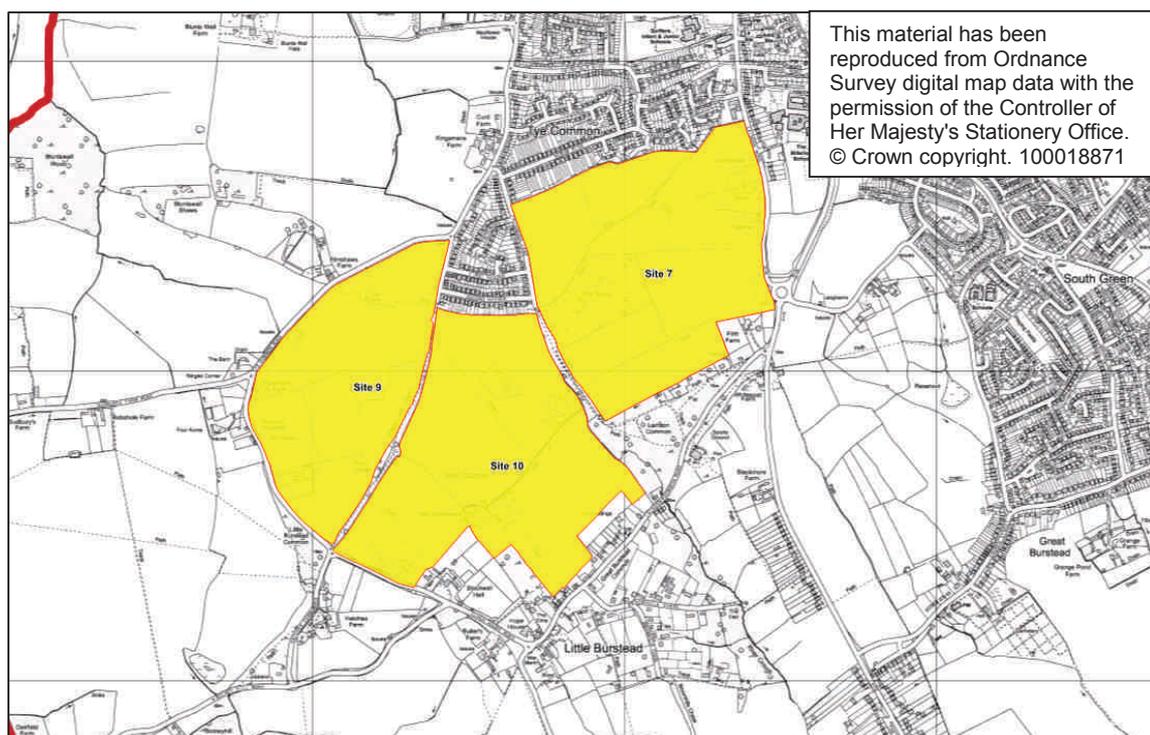
5.10   Strategic sites 12 and 13 sit to the east of Basildon between Pitsea and the separate serviced village of Bowers Gifford, and the un-serviced North Benfleet plotlands area. Development of these sites, depending on the design, layout and the arrangement of landscaping and open space could result in Bowers Gifford, and potentially North Benfleet being subsumed within the larger urban area settlement of Basildon. This would potentially have consequences for community identity, but would potentially bring benefits in terms of access to services and facilities. Consideration needs to be given to these potential effects when considering development in this location through the Local Plan.

5.11   As can be seen from figure 8, strategic site 15 sits to the north of North Benfleet, and adjoins industrial development in the north eastern part of Basildon. It is likely, that development in this location would act to reinforce the identity of North Benfleet by creating a more robust pattern of development, and providing local services in an area where they are currently limited. Ultimately, North Benfleet could potentially be subsumed within the Basildon urban area, however the mix of uses could be arranged to ensure that North Benfleet was still distinguishable from other parts of the Basildon area geographically. However, if delivered alongside sites 12 and 13 as part of a larger urban expansion, this distinction may not be so clear unless adequate landscaping was provided. Consideration needs to be given to these potential effects when considering development in this location through the Local Plan.

5.12   Strategic site 27 sits between Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet to the west and Thundersley (in Castle Point Borough) to the east. However, the A130, which is a substantial piece of highways infrastructure forms the borough boundary, and would act to create a visual delineation between the two settlements. Therefore, it is likely

that the individual settlements would retain their individual identity if this site were to be brought forward. Additionally, the scale of development would enable the delivery of more services within Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet strengthening their sustainability. Consideration needs to be given to these potential effects when considering development in this location through the Local Plan.

5.13   Whilst strategic site 27 may retain the settlement identity of the individual settlements at a local level, its development would at a strategic level have an impact on the identity and legibility of South Essex more generally. This area provides visual separation for those travelling from Castle Point and Rochford in the east, to Basildon in the west. The development of this site could potentially affect the public understanding of the settlement hierarchy in South Essex at a more fundamental level, which could be further exacerbated if site 27 was brought forward alongside sites 12 and/or 15, as it would remove the sense of separation of settlements to create a conurbation of built form between neighbouring Boroughs. Consideration needs to be given to these potential effects when considering development in this location through the Local Plan.
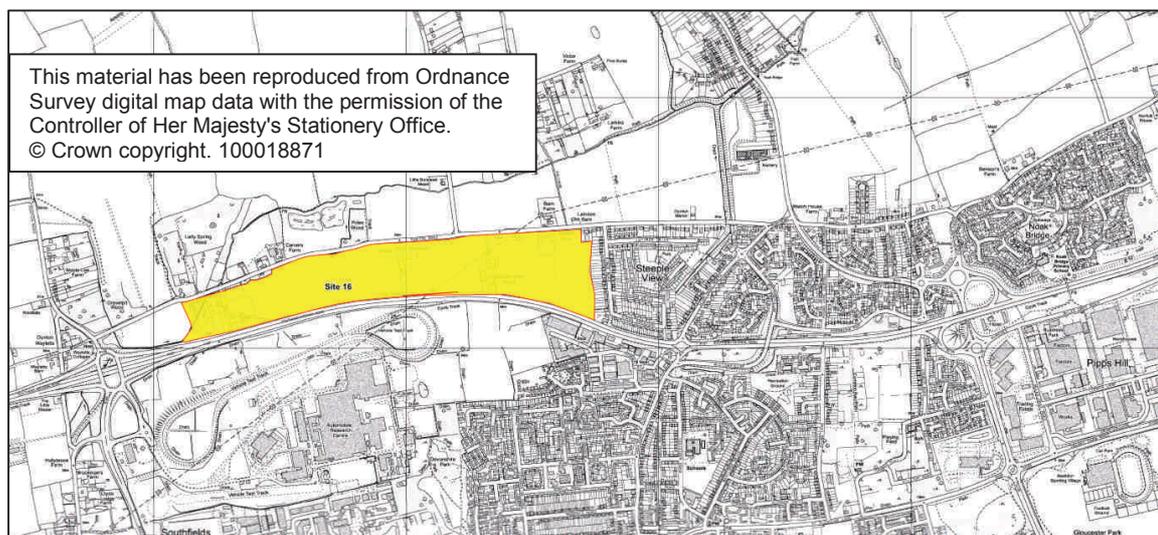
Figure 9: Strategic Sites 12, 13, 15 and 27

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5.14   Strategic sites 16, 17 and 26 are located around Noak Bridge and Steeple View. Noak Bridge and Steeple View are part of the Basildon urban area which extends north of the A127. The A127 acts a visual and physical divide for this part of the Basildon area to the parts in the South. This affects access to some services. Strategic site 16 sits to the west of Steeple View extending along the A127. If considered as part of the Basildon area, this site is located on the periphery of the town's northern extreme and is physically separated from some services, including education. However, if Noak Bridge and Steeple View were to be developed further as communities within Basildon, and were to grow to the extent that they were supported by greater service provision, then strategic site 16 may be a more
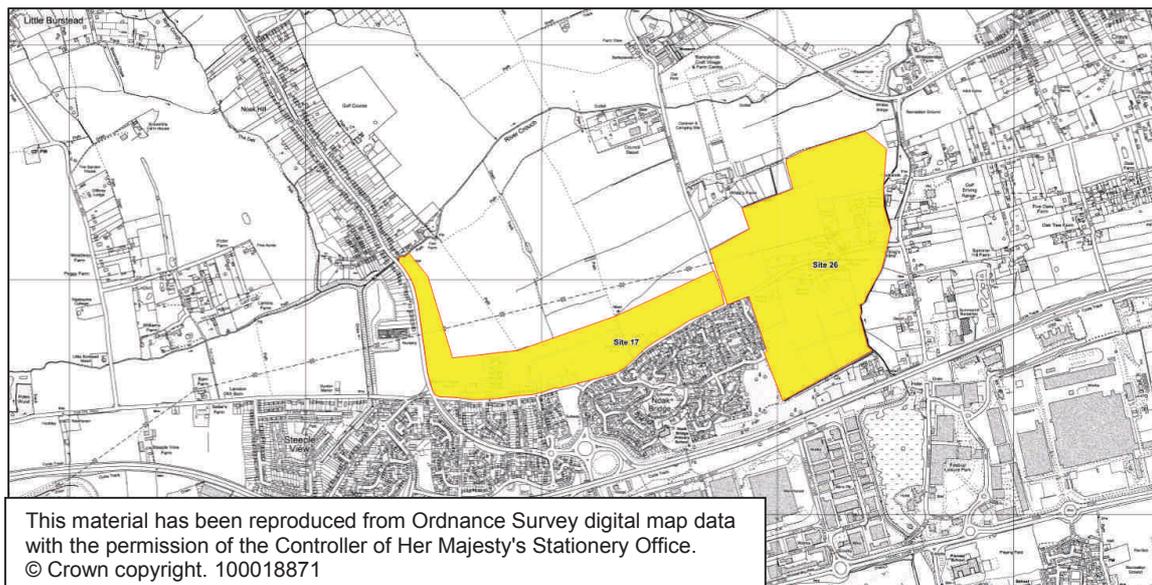
appropriate development location. Consideration needs to be given to these potential effects when considering development in this location through the Local Plan.

Figure 10: Strategic Site 16

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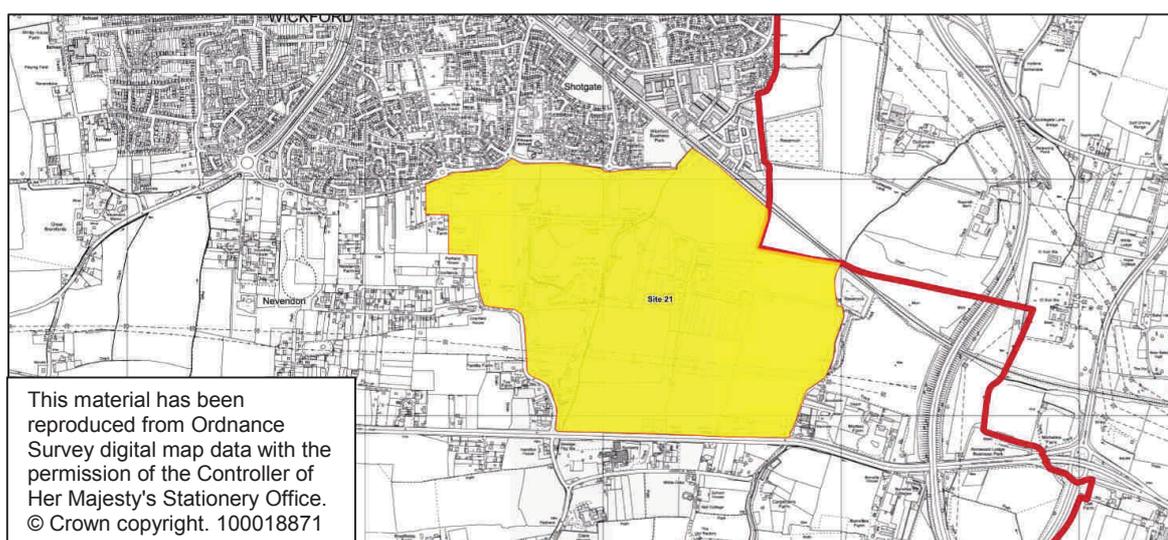
5.15   Parts of Basildon Urban area called Noak Bridge and Steeple View could support a broader range of services if they accommodated growth. Sites 17 and 26 propose this in locations closer to the area's local core which may be considered more sustainable and beneficial to existing residents. However, if site 17 extends up along Noak Hill Road, there is a risk that the Noak Hill unserviced settlement will also become incorporated. This would result in a ribbon of development running from Basildon almost to Billericay, affecting the local sense of place and increasing the level of conurbation. The northward extent of site 17 would therefore need to be constrained to prevent this conurbation effect from occurring. Site 26 meanwhile sits to the east of Noak Bridge, extending towards the Crays Hill Plotland. Again, there is a risk of further conurbation through the extension of settlements towards one another. This could be avoided by limiting the eastward extent of site 26. Consideration needs to be given to these potential effects when considering development in this location through the Local Plan.

Figure 11: Strategic Sites 17 and 26

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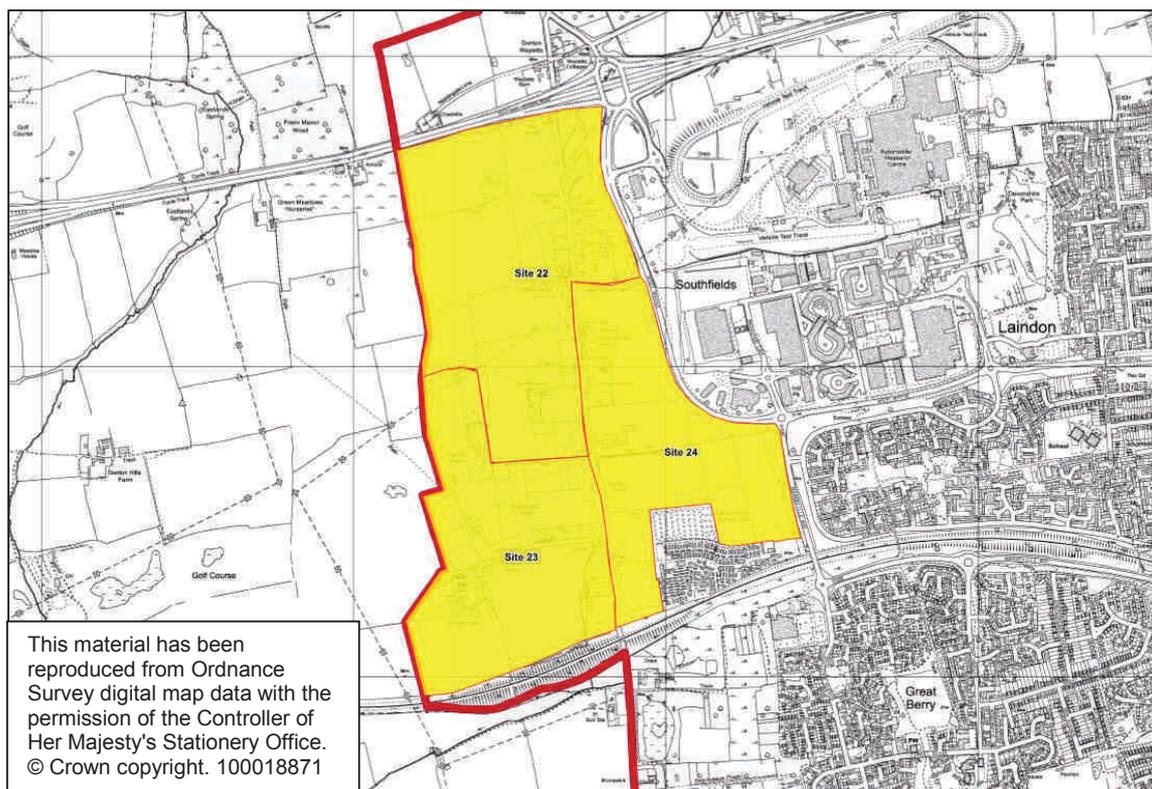
5.16   Strategic site 21 is located to the south of Wickford. To the west of this potential development location is the Fairmead Plotland, an unserviced settlement. The Fairmead plotland comprises dispersed low density development. The development of site 21 would potentially result in coalescence between the Fairmead Plotland and Wickford. This would affect the character of this settlement, and potentially result in it being subsumed within Wickford to the north. Additionally, site 21 extends southwards towards the A127. If developed up to this boundary, site 21 would potentially result in the separation between Basildon Urban area and Wickford being significantly eroded. This would have consequences not only for local identity, but also for the legibility of South Essex more generally. A degree of separation between these settlements should therefore be maintained. Consideration needs to be given to these potential effects when considering development in this location through the Local Plan.

Figure 12: Strategic Site 21

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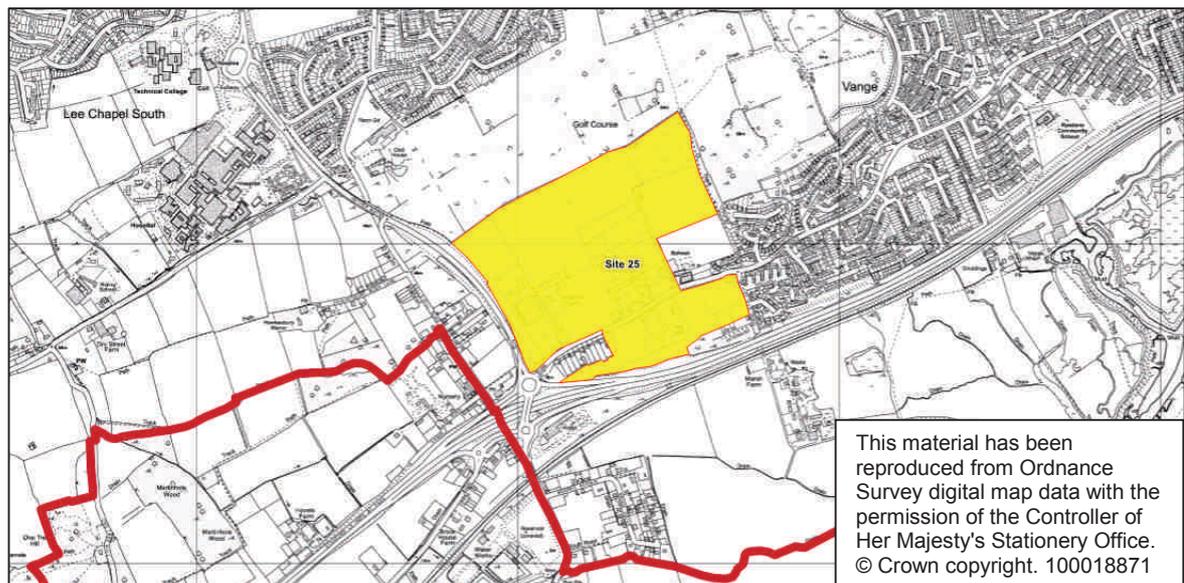
5.17   Strategic sites 22, 23 and 24 sit on the western edge of Basildon adjacent to Laindon. These sites combined/ separated, if developed, would subsume Dunton, an un-serviced settlement that is largely of a ribbon nature along Lower Dunton Road, with a more historic assembly of buildings around Church Road, within the greater extent of Basildon urban area. Development in this location would not see Basildon subsume any settlements further to the west, although the degree of separation with West Horndon and Herongate & Ingrave (in Brentwood Borough) would be reduced, together with part of Dunton village which is within Thurrock to the south. Consideration needs to be given to these potential effects when considering development in this location through the Local Plan.

Figure 13: Strategic Sites 22, 23 and 24.

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5.18   Finally, strategic site 25 sits to the south of Basildon Urban Area, adjacent to a neighbourhood known as Vange. This site is separated from the plotland areas of Bells Hill and Crooked Brooke - Fobbing by the strategic road network and in the latter's case a railway line, potentially resulting the urban area of Basildon extending to subsume these two individual settlements. However, the highway infrastructure in this area is significant in scale, and acts as both a physical and visual barrier between these plotland areas and the urban extent of Basildon. As such, development in this location is unlikely to impact on the settlement hierarchy, but consideration needs to be given to these potential effects when considering development in this location through the Local Plan.

Figure 14: Strategic Site 25

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6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 This paper has reviewed the initial settlement hierarchy in Basildon Borough, having regard to the work undertaken for Topic Paper TP8 in 2012. The policy context for plan-making has changed considerably since that date. Additionally, consultation on the Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options and on the proposals for Dunton Garden Suburb raised queries as to whether the settlement hierarchy was correct.

6.2 As a consequence of this review, Dunton has been identified as a separate, un-serviced settlement within the hierarchy. Meanwhile, consideration was given as to whether Great Burstead and South Green should be treated as a separate settlement to Billericay. Due to the degree of physical and service integration, it was found that Great Burstead and South Green should be treated as part of Billericay for the purposes of the Settlement Hierarchy, and form a potentially sustainable location for future growth due to the level of service provision available.

6.3 Table 2, and figure 2 of this report summarise the initial settlement hierarchy arising from this review.

6.4 This report however goes beyond identifying the initial settlement hierarchy, and also considers how the settlement hierarchy might be altered if strategic sites under consideration for inclusion in the Local Plan were brought forward for development. There are several sites that could see smaller, un-serviced settlements subsumed within the borough's larger settlements. This would represent a change to the hierarchy, but that reason alone is not insurmountable to it occurring if there is merit to do so when considering other planning reasons.

6.5 Proposals for sites 7, 9 & 10, and 12 &13, would potentially see the serviced villages of Little Burstead and Bowers Gifford respectively subsumed within the larger settlements nearby. This is of more significance, and would need to either be accepted through the local plan process, or otherwise prevented through site selection or the use of landscaped buffers.

6.6 Of greatest potential to impact on the settlement hierarchy and of sense of place are strategic sites 21 and 27. Strategic site 21 sits to the south of Wickford, and if development were to extend to the A127 would affect the visual separation and legibility of towns within South Essex. This could be prevented by limiting the southward extent of strategic site 21. Strategic site 27 is more challenging to overcome. It sits between Bowers Gifford and Thundersley. Whilst the scale of highway infrastructure present in the locality may result in the individual identity of towns being retained, the development of this site, would create visual conurbations between Basildon in the west and Thundersley/Benfleet to the east, affecting the legibility of the wider South Essex area and the towns within it.

6.7 It is recommended that consideration is given to the impact that development of the strategic sites would have on the settlement hierarchy as part of the Local Plan process. Where appropriate, landscape buffers should be considered to ensure that the serviced villages and towns retain their individual identities.

6.8 It is also recommended that very serious consideration is given to the implications of site 27 on the legibility of South Essex, and whether it would result in conurbation to an undesirable degree on a strategic scale. Similar consideration should be given to site 21, although the possibility of mitigation through the retention of a landscape buffer is more likely to be achievable in this regard.