

# Basildon Outline Landscape Appraisals of Potential Strategic Development Sites



Sites 1-29

May 2017

the **landscape** partnership

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## Background

In July 2015 The Landscape Partnership was commissioned by Basildon Borough Council (BBC) to undertake outline landscape appraisals for 29 specific sites within the Borough. All sites were located within the Borough's Green Belt and, at the time of assessment, were under consideration as potential development sites to be included in the revised Basildon Local Plan.

In preparing the revised Basildon Local Plan, there was a need to balance development needs of the Borough with protecting landscape character and the integrity of valuable landscape assets. This study follows on from a previous landscape study of the Borough in 2013/2014, also undertaken by The Landscape Partnership, which comprised two parts:

- a Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) of the Borough - which included the identification and description of 14 landscape character areas, together with gateways and key views within the Borough; and,
- a Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment of the whole of the Borough's Green Belt including the assessment of 73 separate Green Belt areas

These studies are independent assessments carried out on behalf of the council by landscape consultants. They provide part of the evidence base for the Basildon Local Plan and address the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) by ensuring that landscape impacts, impacts on the openness and purposes of including land within the Green Belt, and opportunities to improve the landscape are fully considered in the selection of development sites for inclusion within the Local Plan.

The outcomes of the Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment were used to identify broad development areas within the Local Plan Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options Report in 2013. Following the approval of a revised Local Development Scheme in December 2014, the Council is now preparing a consolidated Local Plan and needs to identify specific sites for development purposes, including sites beyond the extent of the current urban area, within the Green Belt.

This Outline Landscape Appraisals Study was undertaken to understand in more detail, the potential impact upon the landscape of development on specific sites including: identifying how the landscape, and its features limit the location of development within these sites; how it could affect the capacity of a site to accommodate development; and, how it could affect the scale of development. Additionally, the assessment provided the opportunity for identifying enhancements to the landscape whilst accommodating development.

A first draft of this document (dated December 2015) formed part of the evidence base for the Draft Local Plan 2014-2034 which was published by BBC for public consultation for eight weeks between January and March 2016. Consultation responses to the report were collated by BBC and reviewed by BBC and The Landscape Partnership during December and January 2016/2017. The report was then updated in January 2017 to incorporate and respond to comments raised by consultees, where appropriate.

## Purpose of the study

The purpose of the Outline Landscape Appraisals Study is to supplement the previous Borough-wide Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment with a more detailed evaluation of strategic sites that have the potential to accommodate development within the Basildon Borough up to 2031. The study focuses on strategic sites identified as preferred options and alternative options for development in the Local Plan.

### The principal aims and objectives of the study are:

- To provide the Council with a clear and robust evidence document to inform decision making on the allocation of land for development and the associated Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment;
- To provide the Council with information on how the landscape, and its features will affect the capacity of potential strategic development sites to accommodate development;
- To provide the Council with information on how the landscape impacts of potential strategic development sites can be mitigated through development limits; the retention of landscape features; and through the provision of additional landscaping, informing both policy making, and decision taking in relation to planning applications for strategic sites;
- To provide the Council with information on the capacity of the landscape to accommodate ancillary energy generation infrastructure alongside other development; and,

- To provide the Council with an independent, objective assessment of the harm development on each site would have on the openness, and purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

It should be noted that the study considered each site individually and did not consider potential cumulative effects if some or all of the sites are brought forward for development nor did it consider potential landscape and visual effects of any associated infrastructure development which may be necessary as part of the development process. It is recommended that these potential cumulative effects on the Borough's landscape are given consideration prior to the allocation of sites for development.

## Approach and methodology

The methodology used to undertake the outline landscape appraisals is based on current best practice including principles set out in Natural England's 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' 2014 and ideas relating to potential landscape and visual effects set out in the publication 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' (3rd edition, 2013). The precise approach was developed to meet the requirements of BBC.

The appraisal process was undertaken by Chartered Landscape Architects and comprised the following key stages, each of which are described in more detail below:

- Desk-top assessment of plans and aerial photographs; and review of previous studies;
- Site visit and assessment of site characteristics;
- Summary of Green Belt context;
- Assessment of landscape sensitivity and capacity of the site;
- Recommendations on development potential of the site; and,
- Preparation of site development guidelines.

### Site selection and site boundaries

The selection of sites to be included within the study and the definition of boundaries for these sites was undertaken by BBC. Individual sites or clusters of sites promoted through the Council's Housing and Economic Land Availability Study (HELAA) with an initial combined capacity of 200 homes or more were identified as strategic sites where a) they were considered within the HELAA to be suitable and available for development or b) they were considered within the

HELAA to be available for development, and were only not considered suitable for Green Belt and/or landscape reasons. Those sites falling under definition b) were appraised as part of this assessment to ensure that the findings of the earlier Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment could be applied to smaller development sites within the larger Green Belt areas appraised in 2013/14.

### Desk-top assessment

The initial stage of the study involved the assessment of each site using existing information relating to the site including:

- Ordnance Survey (OS) maps;
- Aerial photographs;
- Basildon Borough Landscape Character Assessment and Green Belt Landscape Capacity Study (2013);
- Planning and environmental designations and public rights of way (PROW) (mapped on the Basildon Borough Geographic Information System (GIS));
- Basildon Borough Historic Environment Characterisation Project (2010 – 2011); and,
- Basildon Borough Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Opportunities and Constraints Assessment (December 2015).

The above sources allowed an initial assessment to be made of each Site prior to making a site visit. This included an understanding of: landscape character context, key landscape features (e.g. topography, vegetation, transport corridors, rivers/watercourses and field patterns), land use context, Green Belt context, landscape sensitivity of the

site, likely key views towards the site, local public rights of way and key planning and environmental designations which could influence the potential for development on the site.

The study area for each site broadly comprised the site itself and the surrounding area up to approximately 2km from the site boundary.

### Field survey

Site visits were undertaken during July and August 2015 and comprised a visit to the site itself together with a survey by car and on foot of the surrounding area in the key areas from which the site was visible. For most sites, access was arranged in advance with the local landowner. In some instances the site could be easily viewed from publically accessible points (e.g. roads and public rights of way) and it was not necessary to enter the site itself.

The site visit was used to verify information collected from the desk-based assessment and to record additional information. For each site the following was recorded for the site itself and the adjoining areas:

- Key vegetation and any other screening elements;
- Key land-uses;
- Approximate extent of visibility of the site, key views into the site and key views out of the site (including consideration of potential variations in visibility when vegetation is not in leaf);
- Key topographic features and variations; and,
- Any other key landscape features.

The site visit was recorded using photographs and annotated plans. Photographs were taken using a Canon EOS 1100D digital single lens camera with a Canon 18-15mm zoom lens.

It should be noted that both the desk-top assessment and field survey focussed on the key characteristics of the site with the purpose of identifying the main landscape opportunities and constraints of the site to inform decision-making regarding allocation of sites for future development. It was not intended that the appraisal should comprise a detailed survey and assessment of the site. It is expected that any future development proposals for each site (or part thereof) would be accompanied by the appropriate detailed assessment of landscape and visual context, ecological and heritage features and detailed assessments of likely impacts arising from the proposed development schemes.

### Green Belt context

The sites under consideration within this assessment all fall within the current extent of the Metropolitan Green Belt. An initial Green Belt Study was prepared in 2013. This is now the subject of review, taking into account consideration of comments raised to the Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options consultation. This will provide a separate assessment of the role of the parcels of land within the Borough in meeting the five purposes of the Green Belt as

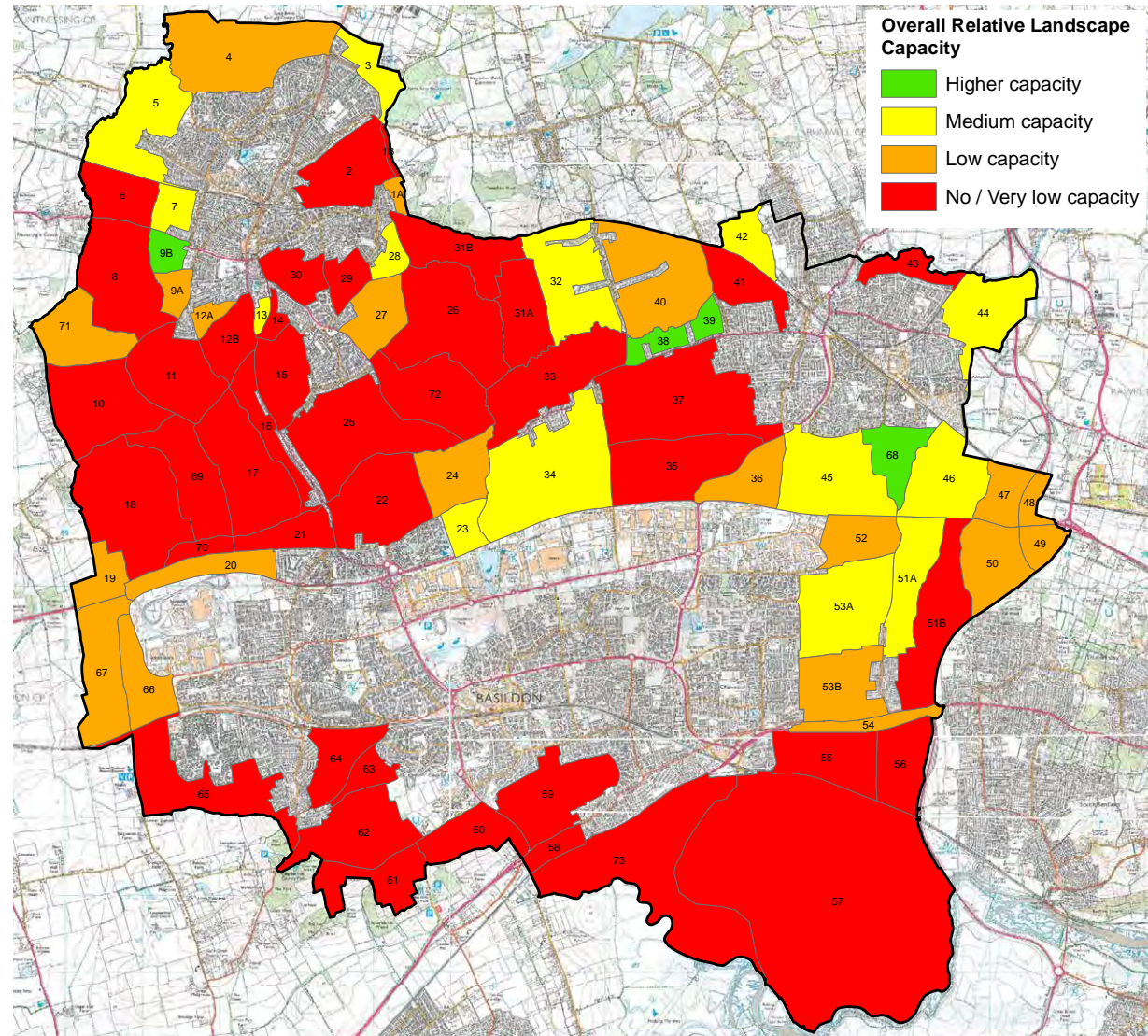


*Field survey photographs*

set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.  
**Assessment of landscape sensitivity and capacity of the site**

The assessment of landscape sensitivity and capacity of the site was undertaken in two stages. The first stage comprised an assessment of the overall sensitivity and capacity of the site which was based on the assessment made in the Basildon Borough Green Belt Landscape Capacity Study (2013). Where the boundaries of the site differed from those of the Green Belt parcel in the Landscape Capacity Study, commentary is provided on any significant variations to the rating given for the relative landscape capacity of the parcel as a whole.

The second stage comprised an assessment of the variations in landscape sensitivity and capacity within the site itself. This stage identified areas of the site with a lower landscape sensitivity due to local variations in site characteristics. This included consideration of the key issues contributing to landscape sensitivity and capacity which were considered in the 2013 study i.e. slope analysis, extent of enclosure by vegetation, complexity/scale of the landscape, historic character, landscape character quality/condition, openness to public view, openness to private view, openness to views towards landmark buildings/natural features, relationship with existing urban built form/edge, scope to mitigate development and landscape value. The criteria used when considering each of the above were the same as those used in the 2013 study (see Appendix 1) but in this case a numerical scoring system was not used.



**Figure I: Relative capacity of Green Belt areas to accommodate development**

## Recommendations on Development Potential of the site

On the basis of the above survey and analysis, recommendations were made on the key landscape areas within each site which should be protected and retained as undeveloped land, areas which could potentially accommodate development without significant landscape or visual impacts and areas which could not accommodate development but could potentially be suitable for alternative open landscape uses such as public open space, sports pitches, allotments etc. These recommendations are based on judgements regarding the potential effect that development would have on visual amenity and the character, quality and features of the local landscape. They do not consider other issues such as accessibility, land ownership/availability, ground conditions, ecology, and local services etc which have been considered separately in other studies and may have different conclusions on the suitability of areas for development.

Recommendations were also developed on the key landscape qualities/features within the site which should be safeguarded if the site were to be developed.

## Development guidelines

For the areas identified as having development potential, guidance was developed on how development should be incorporated within the site. This included guidance on suitable building heights, typical building density (gross), massing/key frontages, areas suitable for open space creation and the type(s) of development that would be suitable. An indication is provided on the approximate area of the site with development potential and the approximate number of dwellings that could be provided based on a

proposed typical gross building density. This is an indicative summary of the development potential based on the landscape constraints. Further work will be required to identify infrastructure requirements for each site (highways, services, schools, flood attenuation requirements etc) which will affect the final number of dwellings which can be accommodated on each site. In addition, recommendations were made for any specific landscape measures required which were necessary to mitigate potential landscape and visual effects of the development. These would need to form part of a wider landscape strategy for the site which would need to be developed as part of the planning and design process for a new development. Guidance was also provided on the suitability of the site for accommodating renewable energy infrastructure could be accommodated within the landscape.



## Landscape character context

### National and regional context

The value of understanding the Landscape Character of all landscapes in England is recognised in one of the Core Planning Principles within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF para 17) which states that planning should *“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”*. Landscape Character Assessment is the process which can identify these intrinsic values and unique characteristics of the diverse landscapes in the UK.

Natural England has divided England into 159 distinct National Character Areas that define the landscape at a national scale. Basildon Borough is located within National Character Area 111 - Northern Thames Basin and Area 81 - Greater Thames Estuary. The detailed profile descriptions for these areas can be found on the Natural England section of the Government's website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making>.

At a regional level further analysis of landscape character is provided in:

- Essex Landscape Character Assessment (2003);
- Essex Coast Landscape Character Assessment (2005); and,
- Thames Gateway South Essex Greengrid Strategy 2008

A summary of these assessments can be found at Volume one of the Basildon Landscape Character and Green Belt Landscape Capacity Study.

### Local context

Basildon is located to the south of Essex and close to the Thames Estuary. It has a varied landscape and topography ranging from elevated plateaux and local hills to the marshlands and creeks associated with the Thames Estuary. The underlying geology is largely formed of London Clay with Claygate clays and Bagshot Formation sands and gravels forming areas of higher ground at the Langdon Hills to the south-west and also to the north-east around Billericay. The Vange and Bowers marshes are comprised of tidal flat deposits while the valley-floor and tributaries associated with the river Crouch are alluvial. Early records of vegetation in the area suggest that from 7,500 BC the Borough was covered by mixed deciduous forest, largely of Oak, Lime and Elm.

There is an existing detailed historic study of Basildon Borough produced by Essex County Council (2010-2011) that provides a thorough report of the development of the Basildon landscape. The 'Basildon Borough Historic Environment Characterisation Assessment' can be found on the Council's website: <http://www.basildon.gov.uk>.

Significant human influences on the landscape of Basildon from the last century extracted from the study include: the transformation of derelict and abandoned farms following the agricultural depression at the beginning of the 20th century into individual plots or what has now become known

as Plotlands; the post WWII establishment of Basildon New Town in 1949; and further growth in the towns of Billericay and Wickford.

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st has seen a significant amount of change in the Borough with large scale expansion of urban areas and intensification of arable farming practices. This is likely to be an ongoing trend as pressure for further urban development continues. Pressures for major improvements to roads could also be damaging to Landscape Character with narrow hedged/banked lanes vulnerable to development change. Rural landscapes face pressures not only of potential development but also from visual intrusion and noise especially from roads. The impact of light pollution has also become more apparent in recent times resulting from settlement growth and road infrastructure improvements.

The Basildon Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2013/14) defines the borough at progressive scales of Regions, Character Types and Character Areas. Character Types are generic in their attributes and can appear in more than one location, including locations within Basildon and outside. In contrast, Character Areas are a specific local expression of a Character Type occurring only in one unique location.

### Landscape regions

Basildon Borough can be broadly categorized into 4 landscape regions:

- the higher ground to the north-west, formed by underlying patches of Claygate clays and Bagshot Formation sands, and comprising the wooded hills and arable plateaux which surround Billericay;
- the central part of the Borough which lies on the lower lying London Clays. Here, the land is dissected by the valleys of the River Crouch and associated tributaries. Basildon urban core and Wickford comprise much of this zone along with the less developed River Crouch valley which mainly comprises farmland;
- the south east of the Borough which comprises the low-lying drained marshlands of the Thames estuary. The Pitsea landfill site forms a prominent raised landform within this zone and the Wat Tyler Country Park occupies a restored landscape of grassland and scrub; and,
- the Langdon Hills in the south west of the Borough which are formed on Bagshot sands and Claygate Clays. Large parts of this area are densely wooded and part of the Langdon Hills Nature Reserve. Steep ridges provide long distant views out of the Borough.

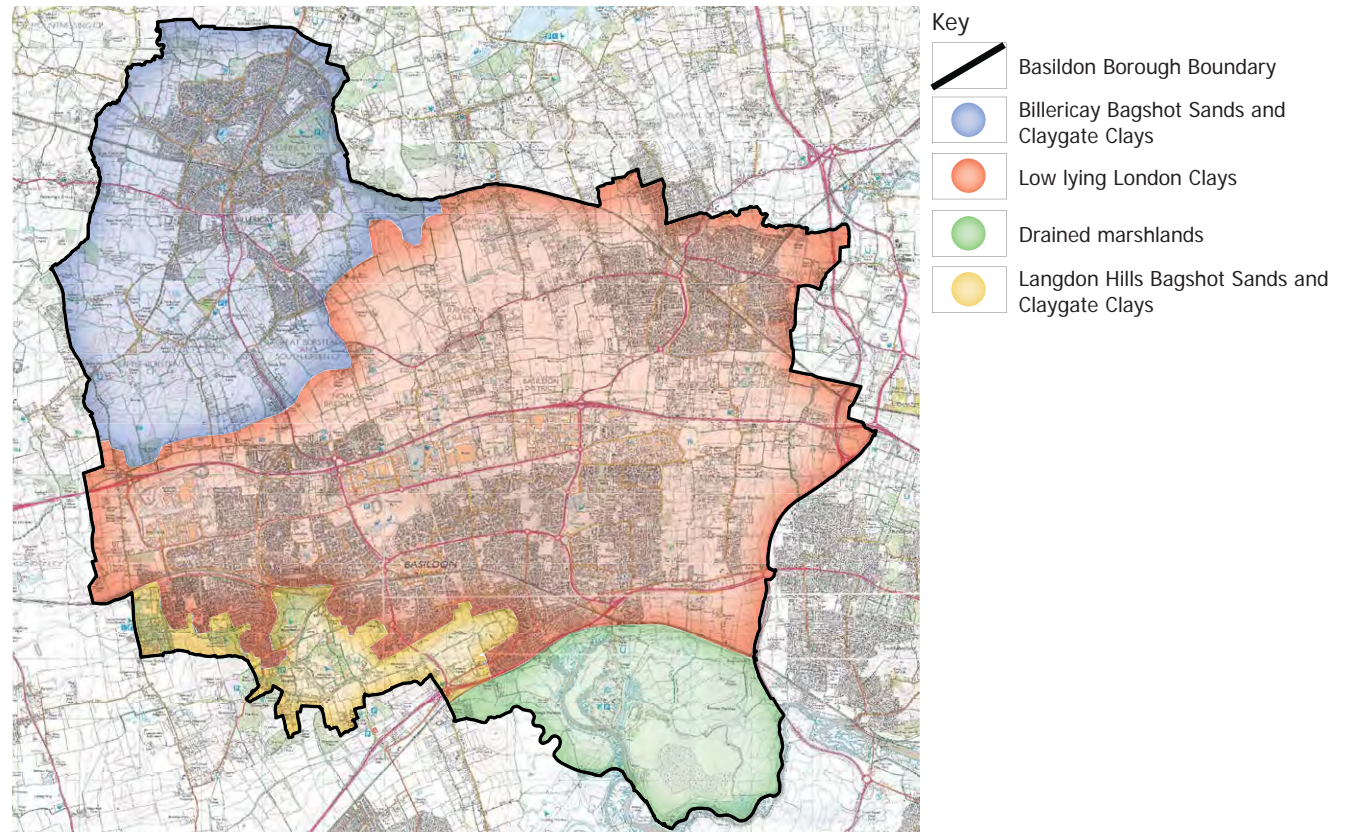


Figure II: Landscape regions

### Landscape character types

The Borough has been divided into eight Landscape Character Types as follows:

- **Estuary Marshlands** - Flat, coastal landscape of relatively undisturbed marshland. Extensive natural habitats of saltmarsh and intertidal mudflats. Remote, open character that has avoided extensive human influence.
- **Lowland Settled Claylands** - Relatively flat, settled agricultural landscape often associated with coastal fringe areas. Small fields and plots create a relatively enclosed landscape with limited long distance views. Dispersed settlements are scattered throughout the zone.
- **Lowland Farmlands** - Low lying landscape crossed in parts by major river corridors. Intensely farmed agricultural land that is in close proximity to well developed, densely populated settlements. Intrusive modern buildings may be a feature and the open character of the land allows views to settlements on higher ground.
- **Restored Landforms** - Area of raised landform, previously used for landfill that has been restored. Current land uses include country parks, waste disposal and restored grassland and scrub. Isolated location with a remote character.
- **Urban Fringelands** - Gently sloping, open landscape adjacent to a dense urban edge. Typical land-uses include public open space, scrub land, transport corridors and agricultural land.
- **Wooded Hills and Ridges** – Sloping and undulating landscape providing enclosure and variation in texture and scale. Prominent hills and ridges. Large parts of the land are covered in woodland with more open clearings of pasture and arable farmland.

- **Wooded Farmland** - A gently undulating, elevated arable landscape with scattered blocks of woodland. Small ribbon developments or isolated farmhouses. The elevated land allows some open long distance views, where not contained by woodland.

- **Sloping Farmland** – A sloping and undulating arable landscape, very open in character allowing long distant views over farmland. Some localised ribbon development and scattered farm buildings.

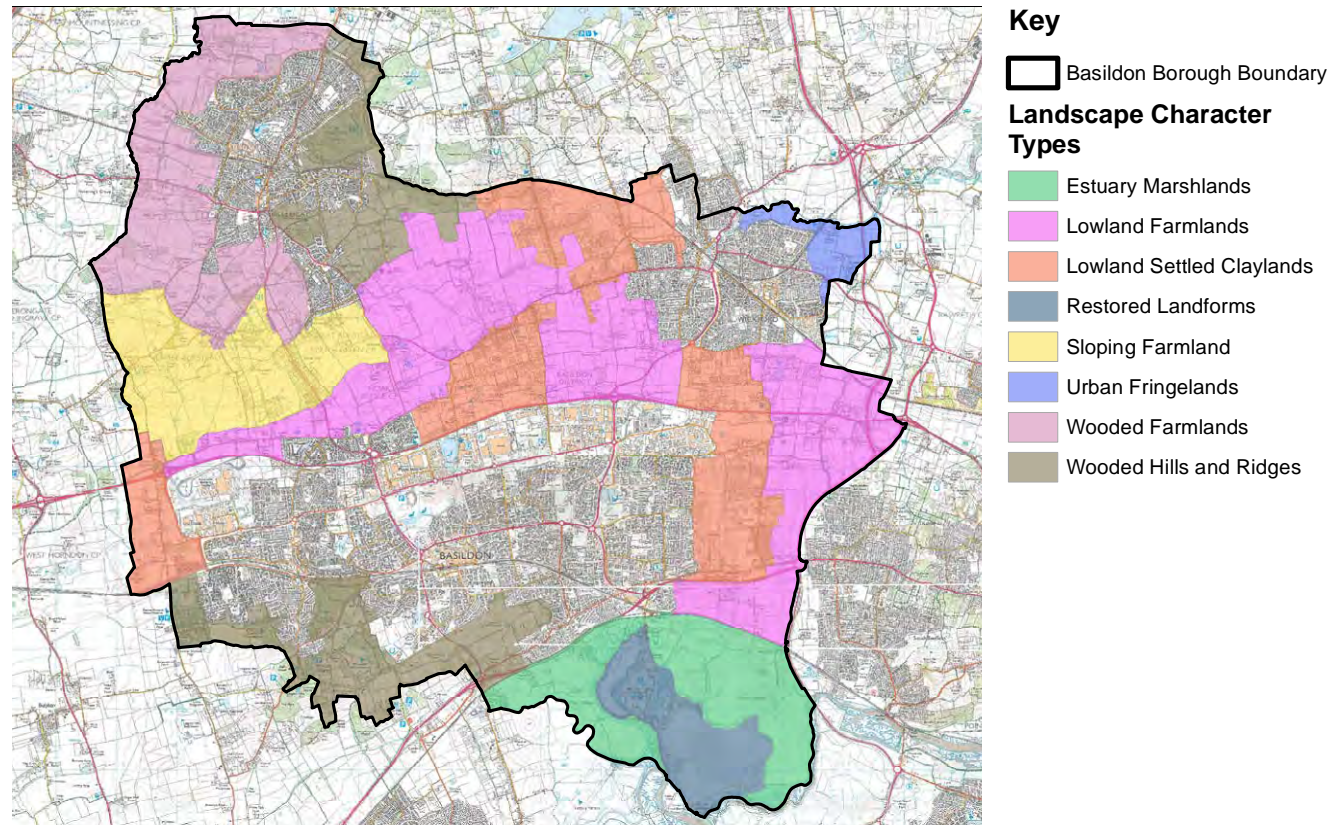


Figure III: Landscape character types

## Landscape character areas

The Landscape Character Areas were derived from the Landscape Character Types. Fourteen Areas were identified, following stakeholder comments. Key characteristics and guidelines relating to the sensitivity of the landscape from these Character Area descriptions were used to inform the outline landscape appraisals for each of the strategic sites in this study. An overview of the relevant character area is provided within the appraisals. The full list Landscape Character Areas identified are as follows:

- 1: Bowers and Vange Estuary Marshlands
- 2: Pitseahall Island Restored Landforms
- 3: Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet Farmlands
- 4: North Benfleet and Nevendon Settled Claylands
- 5: Shotgate and North Wickford Urban Fringe
- 6: Ramsden-Bellhouse and Wickford Settled Claylands
- 7: Doeshill Farmlands
- 8: Crays Hill Settled Claylands
- 9: Upper Crouch Valley Farmlands
- 10: East Billericay Wooded Hills and Ridges
- 11: West Billericay Wooded Farmlands
- 12: Burstead Sloping Farmlands
- 13: Dunton Settled Claylands
- 14: Langdon Hills

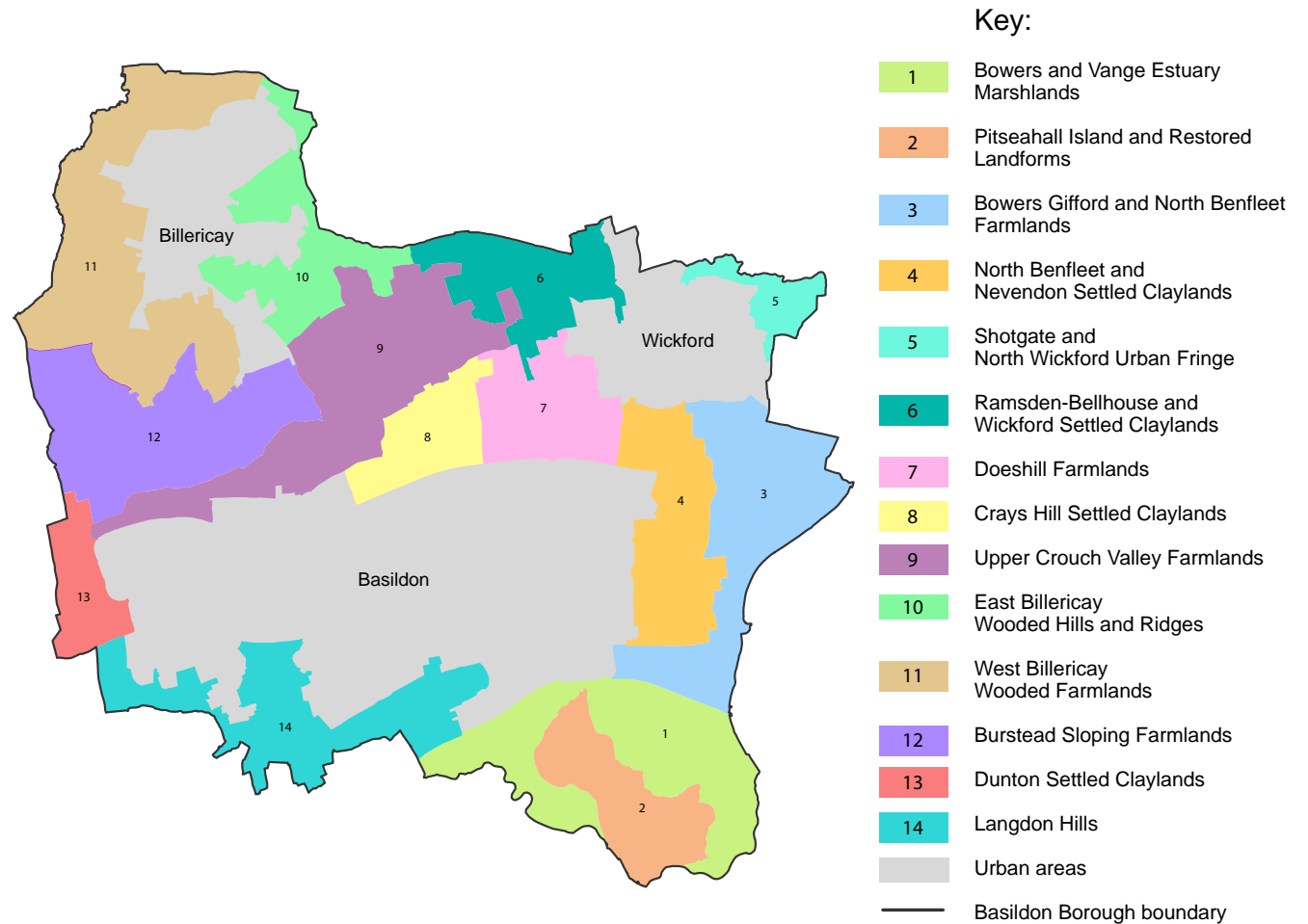




Figure IV: Landscape character areas

# Outline Landscape Appraisals

## Key to sites

-  Site Boundary
-  Site Reference



Potential Strategic Development Sites 1 to 29