

Protecting & Enhancing Green & Blue Infrastructure

The high quality of the natural environment contributes to the quality of life for people living and working in the borough. It also helps to attract tourists and visitors who help to support the local economy. The varied landscapes, including grasslands, river floodplains, and ancient woodland, are also important in terms of maintaining biodiversity value.

The Council is part of the SEEPARK project, which seeks to link and nurture landscapes including woodland, parkland, wetland and marshland across the south Essex area, bringing the benefits of ecological diversity and carbon capture as well as opportunities for leisure, tourism and business.

During the initial engagement you told us:

- The protection of Castle Point Borough's Green Belt areas should be the main priority when considering any development in the new Castle Point Plan.
- Opportunities should be sought to increase and improve green spaces. There was a perception from some that the standard of maintenance of open spaces has declined in recent years.
- To prevent further erosion of green spaces more planting of trees is suggested.
- Fields and farmland form part of the rural backdrop to the borough. Urban sprawl threatens the beauty of our open spaces.
- The conservation of the countryside and woodland areas of the borough are essential to preserve and protect nature and habitats.
- Creating Green Corridors for the wildlife to thrive rather than just survive would be beneficial.
- The seafront is unique part of the Essex coastline that should be better advertised. Maintenance of the Seawall and the Beach for the safety of the Island and for people to enjoy is supported.
- More trees were recommended to improve air quality, and shrubs to provide habitats.

- Prevent building on flood plains due to the increasing risk of flooding from climate change.
- Accessibility to all our green and blue infrastructure sites is essential, and should be improved.

Acceptable uses in the Green Belt

Castle Point sits within the London Metropolitan Green Belt. Green Belt plays an active role in restricting development, ensuring that settlements do not merge into one another, that local landscape character is maintained, and that countryside is protected.

The Green Belt is a valuable asset for local communities, providing a reservoir of open space for leisure and recreation activity, as well as ecological habitat, and agricultural uses. There is, and there is the potential for Green Belt to be improved for this role to be strengthened.

In some circumstances, built development in the Green Belt can help to enhance the use of the Green Belt. Buildings related to agriculture, sports and leisure activities, and habitat maintenance for example may be appropriate.

All development in the Green Belt needs to be carefully designed to ensure that it does not adversely impact the character and function of the Green Belt. Acceptable uses need to be well designed to be complementary to their setting. Inappropriate uses in the Green Belt will continue to be restricted.

Q89. What new uses could be acceptable within the Green Belt area to support and enhance its use (i.e. cafés or sports infrastructure etc)?

Managing Flood Risk

The borough sits on the northern coast of the Thames Estuary, and there is a high risk from flooding. Significant flood defences exist on Canvey Island and along the northern banks of Benfleet Creek, and there is flood storage in place to manage tidal and fluvial inundation in South Benfleet. However, risk levels are measured before such measures are considered and therefore Canvey,

Hadleigh Marshes and South Benfleet carry a residual risk of tidal flooding and are in flood risk zone 3.

Additional mitigations that can reasonably be delivered are railway operation safeguarding between Benfleet and Leigh stations to ensure ongoing provision of service as the climate changes, and maintaining a 19m buffer inland of the existing defences on Canvey to enable future sea defence improvements later in the 21st Century.

The sequential test steers development to areas with the lowest flood risk. Due to the constrained land supply due to Green Belt, the requirement to progress an urban-first approach, and existing flood protection levels in Canvey and South Benfleet, it is appropriate that the exceptions test is applied to ensure that new development in these areas is appropriately designed to manage flood risk.

A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment has been carried out to guide design of new development within areas of flood risk. It recommends that ground floor habitation should not be permitted, with any ground floor user required to have safe refuge above ground floor built into the development. This restricts the development of new bungalows in Canvey, and puts additional design requirements on 2+storey development.

Surface water flood risk is also an issue in the borough. The risk of flooding from rainfall events will also need managing, particularly in the borough's Critical Drainage Areas. Rainfall can also be managed through the introduction of SuDS on new development, which will reduce the rate of rainfall runoff from new development

In order to minimise the land take associated with SuDS features in developments wherever possible, above ground storage should be integrated with public open space. The integration of above ground storage and open space does not always have to be in the form of an empty detention/infiltration basin. Where possible, basins and amenity features such as informal play areas can be merged to create multifunctional spaces. By doing so, the amenity of the basin is greatly enhanced whilst still providing its primary purpose.



Q90. How do you feel the risk of flooding should be managed in new development?

PLEASE NOTE THAT ALL SITES SHOWN ARE IDENTIFIED AS POTENTIAL SOURCES OF DEVELOPMENT ONLY, THEY ARE NOT ALLOCATIONS AT THIS STAGE

Coastal Protection

The coast is one of the key landscapes in the borough, and of great importance to local residents. Key to local enjoyment of the coast is the retention and enhancement of the coastal path. Improvements to the accessibility of the coastal path would support greater use of this asset by a wider range of users.

The Thames Estuary 2100 Plan requires riverside strategies to be prepared in local areas to ensure that the riverside is protected from flood risk, but also that local communities remain connected with the riverside environment. A riverside strategy for the northern Thames estuary will be prepared alongside the Castle Point Plan.

Q91. What, beyond improved flood defences, do you want to see as part of the upgrades to coastal defences?



Open Spaces within the urban area

Open spaces play a valuable role in contributing to the delivery of national and local priorities and targets, including climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity and health and well-being.

The Council has commissioned an Open Space Needs Assessment, which recommends standards and policies for ensuring the adequate provision of open space across the borough over the plan period, as well as a process for calculating developer contributions.

It establishes quality standards for a whole range of different types of open spaces, and quantity and accessibility standards for the most common types of open space.

Typology	Quantity standards (ha/1,000 pop)	Access standard (walking time, straight line)	Additional open space to be delivered over the Plan period
Allotments	0.2	15 mins (720m)	2.45 Ha
Amenity Green Space (sites >0.1 ha)	0.6	10 mins (480m)	7.34 Ha
Parks and Recreation Grounds	1.1	15 mins (720m)	13.46 Ha
Play Space (Children)	0.07	10 mins (480m)	0.87 Ha
Play Space (Youth)	0.07	15 mins (720m)	0.87 Ha
Accessible Natural Green Space	1.80	15 mins (720m)	22.03 Ha
Total for new provision	3.84	3.84	47.02 Ha

PLEASE NOTE THAT ALL SITES SHOWN ARE IDENTIFIED AS POTENTIAL SOURCES OF DEVELOPMENT ONLY, THEY ARE NOT ALLOCATIONS AT THIS STAGE

There is existing provision of most types of open space in the borough, but there is not always good access for all to each type of open space, and open spaces are of variable quality. This is especially true in relation to youth play space. As such it will be important to protect and improve existing open spaces, and where possible to improve access to them.

New developments sites, particularly large sites, present opportunities for new open spaces to be provided. Opportunities to create new open spaces should have regard to the current surplus or deficiency of open space typologies in the local area, and assist in addressing any shortfall. Where there is no deficit, an off-site contribution may be more appropriate to ensure ongoing access to good quality open space nearby.

Q92. How would you like the plan to protect and improve the borough's stock and network of open spaces?



Protecting valuable landscape features

Responding to a site's surrounding landscape enhances a development's design, and plays an important role in respecting the character of a local area. The Thames Gateway Historic Environment Characterisation Study 2007 identified landscape features that might either be retained, or be input into the design of new development:

- Established field boundaries, hedgerows and tree lines;
- Established trees with a high visual amenity value;
- Established areas of woodland, including ancient woodland; and
- Topographical features including ridge lines, watercourses, ditch systems and bunds.

The benefits of retaining and enhancing landscape features could include an enhanced recreational offer for local people, opportunities for local food production, and the protection ecological assets, areas of nature conservation and valued landscapes.

Q93. What aspects of Castle Point's landscape should be protected and enhanced through new development?

Q94. Are there opportunities to improve areas of Castle Point's landscape?

Q95. Which landscape features should be protected in new development, and how?

Habitat & Wildlife Safeguarding

Castle Point contains a rich and varied network of habitats, some of which are designated for protection under national or international legislation. Proposals which are likely to cause adverse effects on the integrity of designated sites (either individually or in combination with other developments) must satisfy the requirements of the Habitats Regulations, determining site specific impacts and avoiding or mitigating against impacts where identified. Where appropriate, contributions from development could be secured towards mitigation measures to mitigate any recreational disturbance impacts.

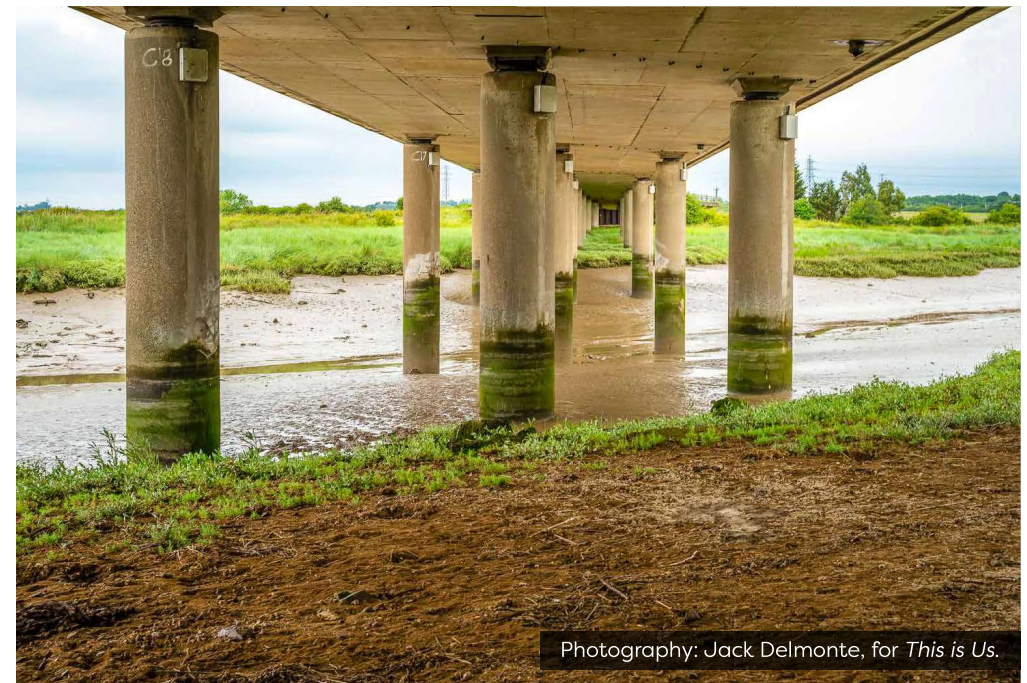
Similarly, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are designated for their protection, and development in close proximity will need to be carefully managed. The borough also includes irreplaceable Habitats such as Ancient Woodlands, which need to be protected.

The Council currently has 40 Local Wildlife Sites, and 5 Potential Wildlife Sites in the borough. These are locally designated sites recognised as comprising priority habitats or being home to priority species. It is important that these habitats are protected to ensure that endangered species are able to recover.



Photography: Dawn Thomas, for *This is Us*.

Q96. What approach do you feel should be taken to protection of habitats and wildlife sites?



Photography: Jack Delmonte, for *This is Us*.

PLEASE NOTE THAT ALL SITES SHOWN ARE IDENTIFIED AS POTENTIAL SOURCES OF DEVELOPMENT ONLY, THEY ARE NOT ALLOCATIONS AT THIS STAGE

Biodiversity Net Gain

Government requires that all new developments seek to improve upon the existing biodiversity within an area by setting a target of 10% uplift in biodiversity value when development takes place. Delivering this on new development sites will create a patchwork of small biodiversity improvements that collectively will help nature recover within urban areas.

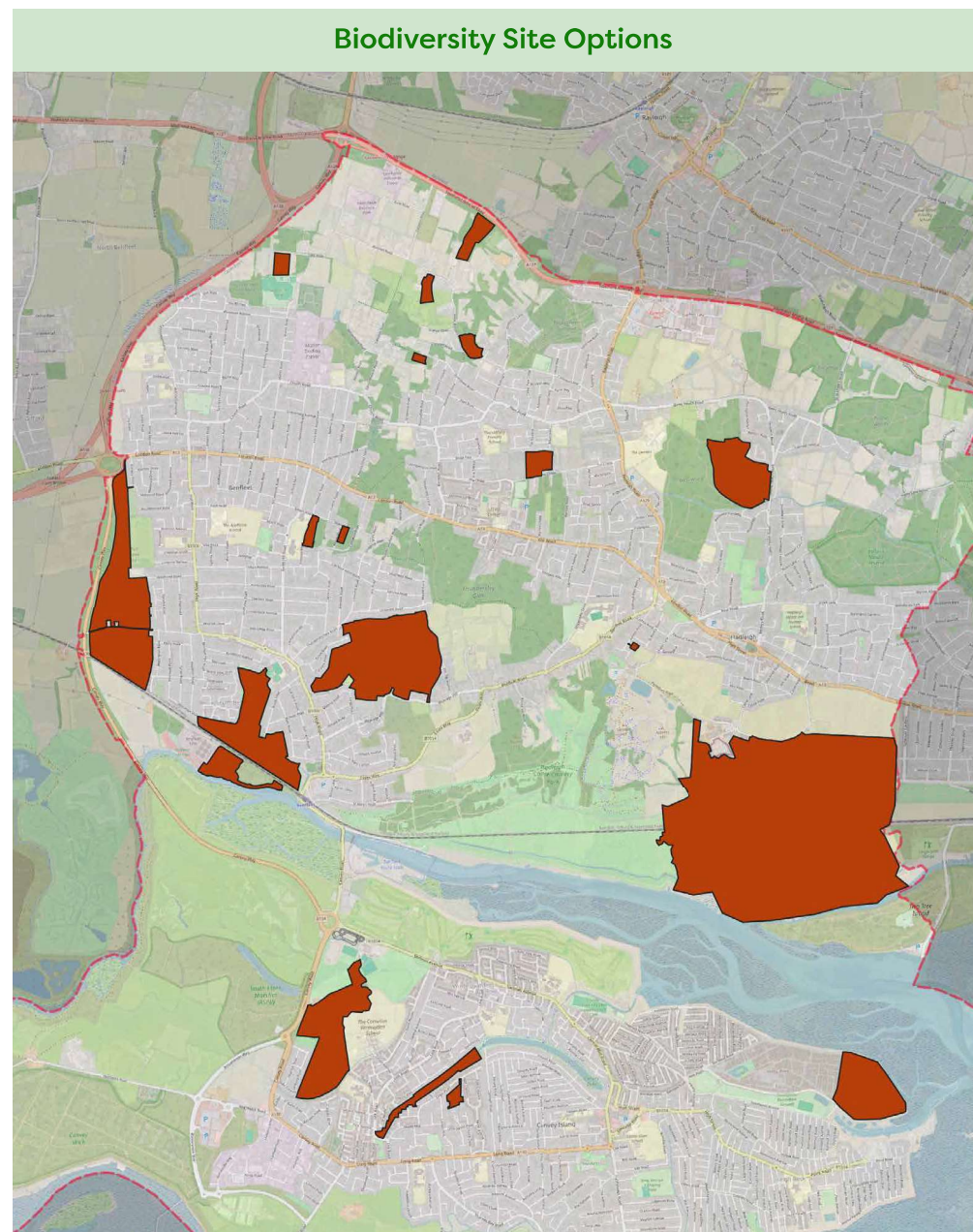
10% is a minimum figure which Local Plans can improve upon, and any increase in this amount would need to be balanced against competing priorities for developer contributions.

Several sites across the borough have been promoted as being suitable for use as biodiversity net gain sites which offer an opportunity to spend other site's off-site contributions locally. These have the potential to make an important contribution to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Urban sites can sometimes have low levels of, or no existing vegetation on them. In these cases, it is more appropriate to use an Urban Greening Factor to set a benchmark for the levels of biodiversity to be obtained on a site, instead of a 10% increase from a minimal starting benchmark.

Q97. Would you support seeking a higher than 10% Biodiversity Net Gain requirement?

Q98. Would you support the introduction of an Urban Greening Factor seeking to increase biodiversity in urban areas?



Map Key:

 Biodiversity Site Options

PLEASE NOTE THAT ALL SITES SHOWN ARE IDENTIFIED AS POTENTIAL SOURCES OF DEVELOPMENT ONLY, THEY ARE NOT ALLOCATIONS AT THIS STAGE

Agricultural Land

The retention and enhancement of the borough's stock of agricultural land is important as part of a nationwide responsibility to ensure food supply. As such high quality (grade 3 and above) agricultural land should generally be protected from development. Some development is required in order to enable agricultural operation.

Q99. What do you feel about the management of agricultural land?

Supporting Documents & Information

- [Essex Green Infrastructure Strategy, ECC, 2020](#)
- [South Essex Green and Blue Infrastructure Study, ASELA, 2020](#)
- [Local Wildlife Site Review 2024](#)
- [Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Level One 2024 - emerging](#)
- [Critical Drainage Areas Essex County Council Surface Water Management Plans](#)
- [Open Space Assessment 2023](#)
- [Castle Point Borough Strategic Biodiversity Assessment, 2019](#)
- [Essex Coast Recreational Avoidance and Mitigations Supplementary Planning Document, 2020](#)
- [Draft Castle Point Biodiversity Net Gain Supplementary Planning Document, 2024](#)
- [South Essex Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, 2018](#)
- [Essex Climate Action Commission Action Plan, ECC, 2021](#)
- [Castle Point Air Quality Annual Status Report, 2023](#)
- [Thames Estuary 2100](#)

