

**CHELMER AND BLACKWATER
CONSERVATION AREA**

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER
ASSESSMENT**



Essex County Council
Planning

1999, ECC

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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT OF THE CHELMER AND BLACKWATER NAVIGATION CONSERVATION AREA .

INTRODUCTION

1. The Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Conservation Area (CBNCA) is shown on the plan opposite page 4. This assessment describes the landscape character of the CBNCA, in general and in detail, describes opportunities and threats in terms of landscape character, and makes recommendations. It has been produced to meet the requirements for a Conservation Area Partnership Scheme.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Outline Description

2. The CBNCA forms the central element of the lower Chelmer Valley which is a major landscape feature with scattered trees and traditionally characterised by water meadows. It runs from within Chelmsford to Maldon, and then extends through Maldon to Heybridge Basin on the coast. It lies between the boulder clay plateau to the north and the wooded slope of Danbury Ridge to the south. Only a minority of it is now grazed, most of it having been converted to arable or miscellaneous other uses, including significant set aside. In places hedge removal has been significant and traditional character has been lost. In places the traditional field pattern remains untouched, but where land use has changed this may lead to hedge removal. Changing policies towards agriculture may affect land use.
3. Within this landscape a number of very localised patches, generally centred on locks, have prominent tree cover. For most of the length of the area the dominant tree species beside the Navigation is Cricket Bat Willow, *Salix alba 'Coerulea'*. The A12 crosses the Area and runs beside a stretch of it, where it dominates the character of the area.
4. The CBNCA extends over a generally flat strip of land, on either side of which land generally rises with varying degrees of steepness. It is geologically consistent, formed on non glacial sands and gravels with alluvial deposits running between them, except for the easternmost section to the north-east of Maldon (classified as zone 10 in this assessment) which is formed only from the sands and gravels.

Agriculture

5. The traditional use of fields for pasture, does much to conserve a distinctive riverside landscape which is visually pleasing. The presence of even a limited amount of riverside pasture along any particular length of the Navigation makes a large difference to landscape character. There are various parts of the CBNCA where the restoration of some pasture would be desirable. A habitat survey of the Navigation by the Environment Agency considers that 'run off' of fertiliser and pesticides is an environmental problem where the Navigation adjoins arable land, and this reinforces the argument for waterside pasture.
6. The Countryside Stewardship Scheme run by MAFF will provide payments of £580 to £740 per ha. for leaving strips round fields without fertiliser or pesticides, £280 per ha. to convert arable to pasture and £80 per ha. for management of neglected pasture. It will also provide payments for managing water meadows and wet marshy grassland, for creating new public access linked to existing access, and for particular landscape features of interest. All these aspects of the scheme are desirable within the CBNCA, as described in more detail later. It is hoped that various elements of Stewardship funding can be linked on some sites, in particular to encourage more pasture.

Riparian Vegetation; Woody Species and Invasive Weed

7. Although Cricket Bat Willows are such a prominent feature in the landscape now, they have only been introduced within the last century. Arguably they are a distinctive feature of river valleys in Essex. However, the planted willows are regularly spaced, they have standard symmetrical forms, they are not allowed to become old and there is a lack of any foliage close to ground level belonging either to the trees themselves or any associated shrub layer. These factors reduce the aesthetic and wildlife value of the Bat Willows compared to mixed native trees and shrubs.
8. Mixed native trees and shrubs are particularly valuable, both aesthetically and to wildlife, when they are by the water's edge. There are limited stretches of the Navigation along which this is the case. The irregular and complex forms of such vegetation, often reflected in the water and parts of which are often intriguingly obscured, add considerably to the interest of the water's edge, particularly when viewed from boats.
9. Some of the Bat Willows are in mixed age stands, which are preferable to even aged and should be encouraged. Bat Willows do have the advantage that from the river it is possible to see beneath them to the landscape beyond. It is desirable for such views, unobscured by vegetation, to be distributed along the length of the CBNCA, but native vegetation can be managed to allow this.
10. It is recognised that the Bat Willows provide a significant income for the canal company and that any noticeable reduction in their numbers in the foreseeable future is unlikely. However, just as the presence of a limited amount of pasture makes a significant difference to perception of the riverside environment, so would a limited amount of water's edge mixed native vegetation within each stretch of the Conservation Area. There should be a balance between woody vegetation close to ground level, on the one hand, and views from the river, and its banks, of the surrounding landscape, on the other.
11. The Environment Agency's habitat survey shows in detail the whereabouts of different tree species along the Navigation, and can be usefully referred to in making precise proposals.
12. The Navigation and the rivers flowing into it are one of the worst affected sites in the country in terms of the growth of a recently introduced alien invasive weed, *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*. It grows from the bank over the water surface. It will grow right across the width of the water body, and grows so fast that it is able to do this several times a year in places where it is being repeatedly controlled. It prevents other plant growth beneath it, removes open water habitat, affects the ecotone at the water's edge, impedes navigation and can cause flooding. It is important that it is eradicated before it spreads to similar water bodies throughout the country. The currently suggested method is to spray with Glyphosate in August or September, but any use of pesticides in or near a water body needs to be agreed with the Environment Agency.

Waterside Access

13. A public footpath exists along the whole length of the Navigation, and is one of the more popular walking destinations in Essex. It is referred to as 'the towpath' but is quite different in character to most canal towpaths, which are generally much more urban in character. Because of the Canal company's concerns about dredging placement, fishing licenses and bat willows, the 'towpath' generally resembles an ordinary, low key, soft surfaced footpath. This is desirable in landscape terms in rural areas, although it conflicts with any proposed conversion to a designated cycleway and also to some extent with the wishes of the Inland Waterways Association. Designated cycleways require a 4m width of tarmac, white lines and often lighting, all of which would be inappropriate for any rural stretch of the Navigation.

Treatment of Navigation Bank

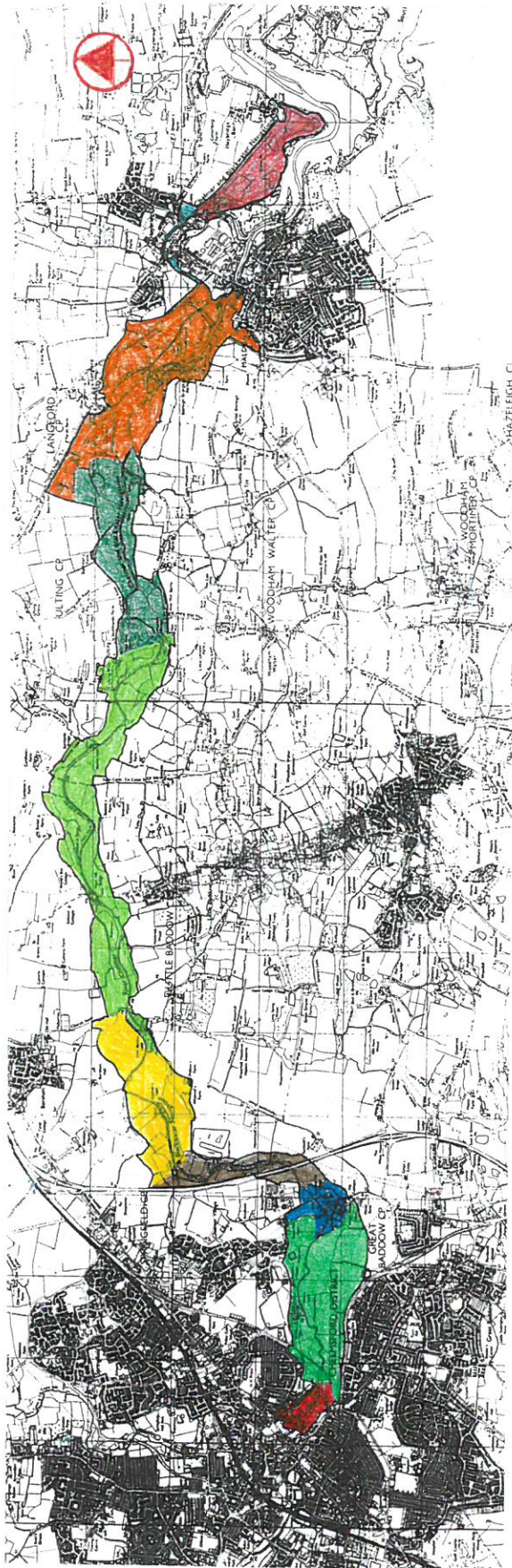
14. The Inland Waterways Association has a towing path policy. It states that no trees should be permitted between the path and the Navigation. In landscape and nature conservation terms such a policy is highly undesirable (see paragraph 8 above). IWA policy recommends that bank vegetation is cut annually so that flowering grass replaces taller vegetation. This policy may well be worth practising in carefully selected limited experimental areas, to see how the environmental benefits compare with those of existing taller non-woody vegetation. The IWA policy document also describes how to produce a natural, rural appearance on a bank that is supported by retainers, information which may be useful in enhancing the CBNCA's character in rural locations.

Built Structures

15. In places it will be desirable to create appropriate landscape settings for historic buildings and structures of interest.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ZONES

For the purposes of the assessment the CBNCA has been divided into zones according to landscape character. For each zone the existing character, opportunities and threats have been described, and recommendations made. These zones are shown on the plan opposite, and their characters are shown on individual plans, accompanying the following text.



-  Zone 1; Urban.
-  Zone 2; Chelmsford to Sandford Lock.
-  Zone 3; Sandford Lock
-  Zone 4; A12 Corridor
-  Zone 5; A12 to Little Baddow Lock
-  Zone 6; Little Baddow to Hoe Mill Lock
-  Zone 7; Hoe Mill Lock to Langford
-  Zone 8; Langford to Maldon
-  Zone 9; Within Maldon
-  Zone 10; Maldon to Heybridge Basin

CBNCA ; LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ZONES
 Scale; 1 : 80,000

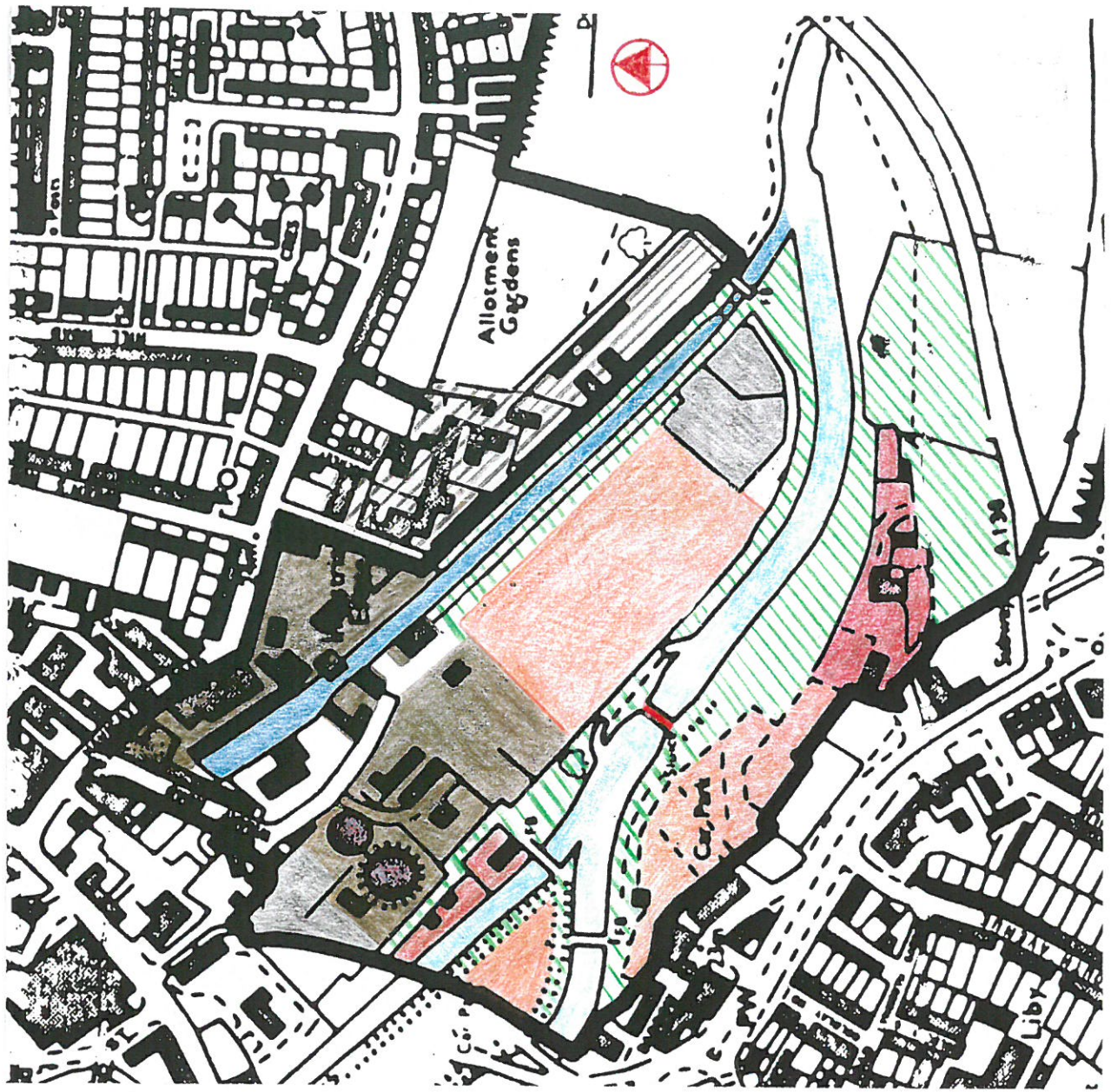
ZONE 1; URBAN




Description

1. This zone is characterised by its urban quality. It is a mixture of spaces and structures, much of it run-down and some new. It includes significant areas of mown grass and tree and shrub planting, forming a small green wedge running into the town. Other significant land uses are car parks, a British Gas depot, industry and some vacant plots. The river and the Navigation, which ends in the disused Springfield Basin, are foci of interest. Footpaths in the zone link town to country along the CBNCA. Most of the zone is owned by the Borough Council. There are intermittent willows along some of the water edges.
2. For this zone the plan opposite shows the existing features, while the following plan shows how the zone is likely to develop.

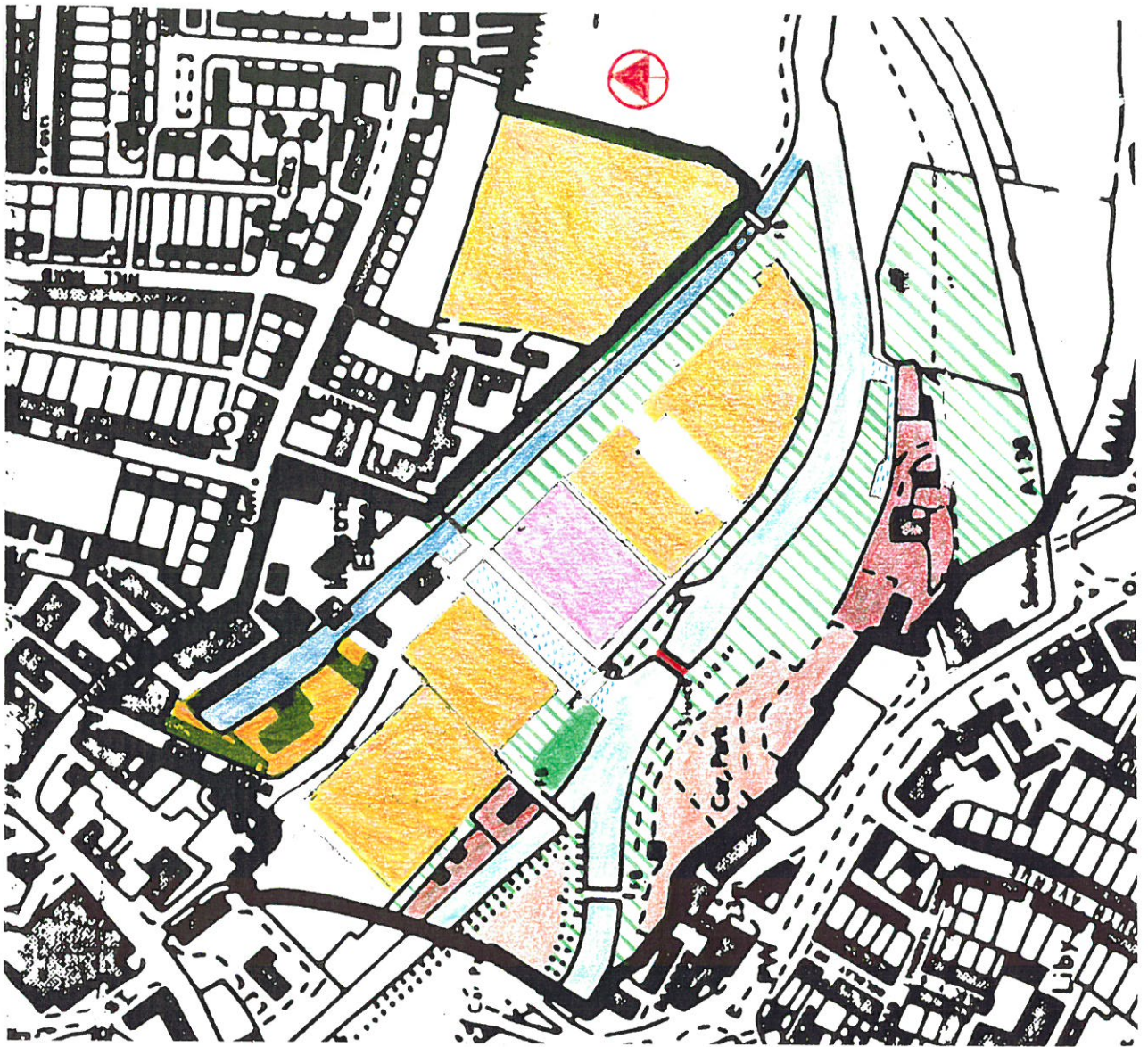
Opportunities and Problems


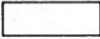








3. The area is intended for redevelopment. Development of an appropriate kind could transform this zone into a major asset for the town. It is planned to revive Springfield Basin for use by boats and mooring, and to create a new navigable cut linking it to the river course, enabling boats to bypass the sluice which currently prevents them passing upstream into the town. The aim is to guide the development of an attractive, lively extension of the town centre, involving residential flats, with leisure and commercial activities, all facing onto the water features which will be enhanced by the boat presence, generally with public access to the water's edge. The Navigation leading to Springfield Basin needs regular use by boats to prevent it becoming blocked by vegetation.
4. Chelmsford Borough Council aims to create a continuous network of riverside access, linking the town to the country and linked to informal public open spaces, in particular the green wedge. At present there is no public access to the Basin and the path by the Navigation is little known. However, the ROW network that now exists in this zone is quite extensive, and additions are planned.
5. The run-down character is perceived as a deterrent to development, as is the possibly contaminated nature of some of the land. Some of the existing businesses on or adjoining the site have a negative visual impact in terms of the aims for the site. Also some disused gas storage holders are conspicuous at the west end, are generally perceived as undesirable visually, and are due for removal.
6. On the one hand it is desirable for the water bodies, particularly those bearing boats, to be visible from the new developments that are likely. On the other hand it is desirable to conserve, if not enhance the character of the green wedges that follow the water bodies into the town. One solution would be to plant trees between new buildings and waterside walks, allowing views of the water between them or beneath their leaf canopies. However, for much of the north bank of the river there may not be space for trees between the Right of Way and new buildings, although there is space to move the ROW nearer the water. A line of existing trees to the south-west of the gas holders and adjoining industrial sites would be useful for screening new development there.
7. The multi-stemmed willows along the north bank of the river have a valuable visual character when viewed from either the water or the land.
8. One proposal is to redevelop some land north-east of the Navigation, as shown on plan. This would replace the existing scrap yard, removing an eyesore, along with some of the allotments.



-  Navigation leading to Springfield Basin
-  River
-  Green wedge
-  Car park
-  Industrial plots within CBNCA
-  Industrial plots outside CBNCA
-  Residential / Offices / Private land
-  Vacant
-  Sluice
-  Gas holders

ZONE 1 - Urban ;Existing
 Scale; 1; 5,000



-  Navigation leading to Springfield Basin
-  River
-  Proposed flooded channels
-  Likely areas for proposed new development
-  Green wedge
-  Car park
-  Residential / Offices / Private land
-  New County Records Office
-  Sluice
-  Proposed tree planting

ZONE 1 - Urban ; Proposed
Scale; 1 : 5,000

For flood control reasons it is suggested that this is combined with the flooding of the channel leading to Moulsham Corn Mill which should enhance the Mill's landscape setting.

9. It is likely as part of development between the Navigation and the river, that the existing flood defence wall there will be removed, and new buildings raised to take account of this. This may make such buildings more imposing as a result.
10. To the east of the existing car park is a derelict walled area, shown as 'vacant plot' on the plan. Within this area dense scrub has grown up which has value for its own sake and as a habitat. The walls are covered in graffiti, some of which has artistic quality. This area is also characterised by rubbish and detritus. At least some of this is incompatible with the vision for this character zone. The scrub could be retained by sacrificing land for development, without impinging significantly on the character of the rest of the zone. The graffiti is not acceptable in the context of the proposed development, but if the development does not materialise for economic reasons then it will remain something that has a value, albeit controversial.

Recommendations

11. All new development needs to be carefully controlled, so that it contributes to, and further encourages, the desired effect described above. In general, the objective should be a landscape of unified character and for the water bodies to remain foci for the area. It would be preferable, in landscape terms for the more unsightly enterprises to move from the site. Where it is not possible to arrange this, landscape measures will be required to mitigate their impact. It may be possible to transform the gas storage holders into positive features with the help of different coloration and a museum type use, as some have proposed, but this seems unlikely and remains to be demonstrated.
12. It is recommended that a line of trees is planted between the areas of 'Green Wedge' and most of the area of likely new development, as these are shown on the plan opposite. These trees should be frequent beside the south bank of the Navigation, and almost continuous beside the north bank of the river. It is recommended that the cycleway beside this river bank is moved closer to the water to accommodate both the trees and the development. The trees should be large enough to screen most of the new building when viewed from the green space south of the river. These trees would not be compatible with a built eastern edge to the land between the two water bodies, although this has been envisaged by some. The north river bank, just downstream of the confluence of the Can and Chelmer, presently rough grass, could be enhanced by appropriate tree planting. As part of the urban landscape intended and to allow views of the water, it is recommended that the space beneath all these trees is occupied by mown grass. Occasional trees would also enhance the walkways to either side of the proposed new 'navigable cut' between the Navigation and the river.
13. The creation of a tall native hedge against the boundary of the scrap-metal yard, to the north, is recommended. This would relate to the existing hedge on the opposite bank and contribute to the relatively rural character of this corner of the zone. Similar screening would be appropriate, in places, further to the north-west along this stretch of the north bank of the Navigation.
14. Willows by the edge of the Navigation, and particularly the river, should be retained, along with the line of trees south-west of the gas holders.
15. If development progresses across the existing car park, bringing it closer to the graffiti-covered wall then the wall should be removed to the extent that it is visible from the new development. If development adjoins the plot with the wall, then the wall should be removed entirely. If neither of these developments occur then it would be best to leave the vacant plot with its wall alone, apart from removal of rubbish and detritus. Ideally the scrub, that is presently within the wall, would not be replaced by development, but retained, largely separated from the rest of the zone by new buildings. If this plot is developed then it is expected to be as shown on the plan opposite.
16. On areas awaiting development, as distinct from the edges of the zone and water edges, significant landscape work may be premature until the development is agreed.

17. It would not be desirable for development north-east of the Navigation to overlook the space immediately to its east, without a vegetative screen. The green wedge and Rights Of Way within it, are important to a perception of the town's setting.

ZONE 2; BETWEEN CHELMSFORD AND SANDFORD LOCK








Description

1. This part of the CBNCA is one of the widest and generally has an open, flat character. Beyond the southern boundary the land sweeps up away from the level of the old flood plain, adding to the drama of the landscape. This expansive landscape and the views across it are important to the setting of Chelmsford.
2. The area immediately to the east of Chelmer Road has a very strong, attractive and apparently traditional character. Here the river is clearly visible meandering through grazed old water meadows with a little scattered vegetation. This forms part of the Chelmsford Water Meadows Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), which was designated because of its good mix of vigorous grasses, which is maintained by grazing, and its marginal aquatic vegetation. However the rest of the designated SINC, a large portion of it, is presently converted to arable. In addition, most of the rest of this character zone is degraded by conversion to arable.
3. The relatively small part of this zone that is west of Chelmer Road retains much of its earlier agricultural character of small fields, the hedges partially remaining. It is now public open space with a footpath and cycleway passing through it. The former fields are presently neglected, although management varies over time.
4. North of the river most of this zone forms a buffer area between Chelmer Village and the river, containing some dispersed development and arable fields where the general character of this zone is less apparent.

Problems and Opportunities

5. A number of development proposals that are clearly inappropriate have been made in recent years, such as gravel extraction, lakes for water sports and a hotel all to the east of Chelmer Road, or development on the south slope of the valley. Much of the best grazed landscape is owned by a developer.
6. As part of its policy for riverside public access the Borough Council plans to give almost all of this zone north of the river to informal public open space. This has the potential to either enhance or degrade the landscape and amenity aspects of the site. On the grazed area of value, to the east of Chelmer Road, noted above, any significant extension of public access beyond the existing Rights Of Way would be inappropriate as it would alter the existing character.
7. There is persistent pressure for development south of Chelmer Village Way. The zone 2 plan shows an 'Area suitable for public open space' which has an existing landscape of unexceptional quality. However, further built development in a rural part of the CBNCA would not be appropriate, particularly as this area is not allocated for building in the Borough Local Plan. Views of the Navigation should be a feature of any public open space in this area.
8. Views of the interesting land form to the south, particularly from the higher ground, are desirable, while views of Great Baddow are not, and these two considerations need to be balanced.
9. West of Chelmer Road the traditional elements, the public access, the ownership of the land by the Borough Council and the situation (adjoining pasture in the rest of this zone) are all opportunities for the creation of an area of amenity and landscape value. Present management neither conserves traditional character nor makes it suitable for public space. Traditional grazing would be incompatible with the heavy public use of the area.



-  Pasture
-  Arable
-  SINC
-  Area suitable for public open space
-  Existing public open space
-  Existing tree cover
-  Length of Navigation with bat willows prominent

ZONE 2 - Between Chelmsford and Sandford Lock
Scale; 1 : 20,000

10. The Chelmer Road bridge over the river is due for replacement soon. An alternative design with fewer supports would reduce the sense of separation between different parts of this zone.

Recommendations

11. The existing grazed landscape with distinctive character, east of Chelmer Road, should definitely be retained, and a return to pasture should be encouraged on the rest of the SINC and in fields on the river's south bank, using the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Retaining arable elsewhere, south of the river, would emphasise the interesting land form. Extensive views of Danbury Hill from the river valley, and across the valley from north of the river, and the generally open aspect of the landscape should be retained.
12. West of Chelmer Road, management as hay meadow, retaining the relics of hedges, would conserve some traditional character while improving it for public access. It is recommended that it is cut several times per year but left uncut for part of the year to allow flowering, and that cuttings are removed to lower nutrient status.
13. It is desirable that the character north of the river is not made less rural as a result of any changes there. This applies especially by the river, by Sandford Mill Road, Storms Way, etc. A designated cycleway, lit at night, and with a 4m wide tarmac surface, for example, would be inappropriate in most of this area and in particular along the route proposed for a cycleway in the Local Plan. In converting this area into public open space, some planting will be necessary to enhance it and to screen Chelmer Village Way and built elements. However, a largely open landscape with general views of the Navigation should be the aim.
14. Similarly, a designated cycleway would be inappropriate north of the Great Baddow bypass, where one has been proposed.

ZONE 3; SANDFORD LOCK

Description

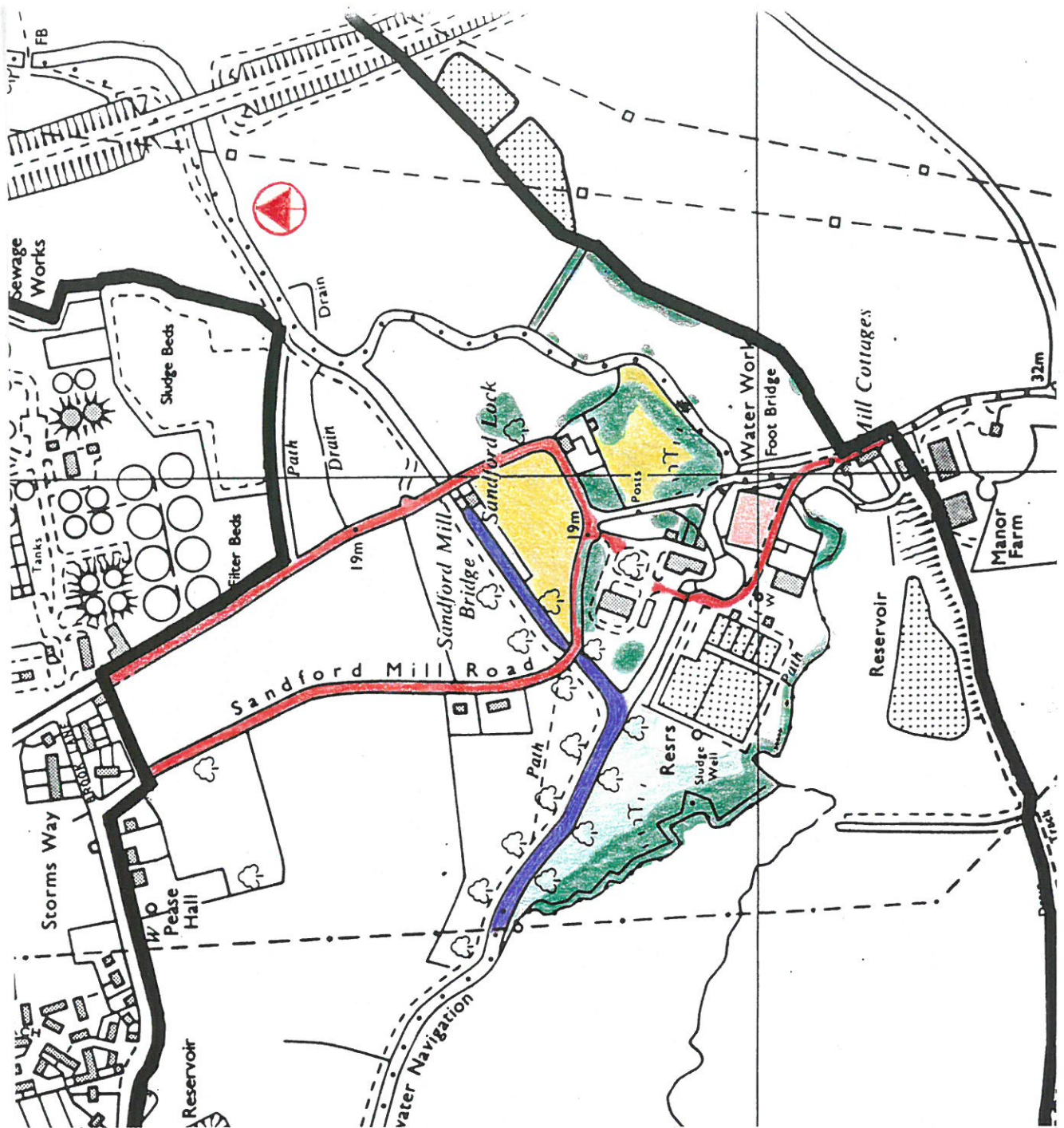
1. This is a small zone, distinguished by small enclosures bounded by lines of trees and by its relatively built up and non-agricultural character. It includes some small parts of the Chelmsford Water Meadows SINC.







Opportunities and Problems

2. The Borough Council has produced a detailed study and set of proposals for this zone and is proposing to develop the site for museum purposes, appropriate recreation and for boat mooring. The proposals include management of part of the site as a nature reserve, and the use of the site as a field studies centre which seems most appropriate, and a well screened car park. Campsites are proposed on two pasture SINCs which seems unlikely to be acceptable. The proposals attempt to move boat use of the Navigation upstream, relieving pressure on existing mooring points. From a landscape perspective it is desirable not to increase the level of boating in the more rural stretches downstream, and if mooring facilities here and in Chelmsford helped to prevent such an increase rather than contributed to it, they would be desirable. In particular conversion of the rectangular concrete reservoirs into a marina for mooring is envisaged. There is a view that road access to the site is not adequate for its envisaged function.

Recommendations

3. If possible, the vehicular access problem should be dealt with by introducing a one-way traffic system rather than by building new roads. The SINCs should be conserved by appropriate management. The trees should be retained to screen the buildings, and do not need to be changed for a more native species mix given the zone's character and urban fringe situation. Any changes to this site, whether developing its recreational potential or otherwise, should retain the general quality which means that trees form enclosures and screen buildings. It would be preferable for any changes to exploit the potential of the site's intimate spaces. Most of the detailed recommendations of the Borough Council's study seem appropriate.



-  Existing tree cover
-  Proposed nature reserve
-  Proposed car park
-  Proposed camp-sites
-  Existing road access
-  Length of Navigation with bat willows prominent

ZONE 3 - Sandford lock
 Scale; 1 : 6,250

ZONE 4; A12 CORRIDOR

Description

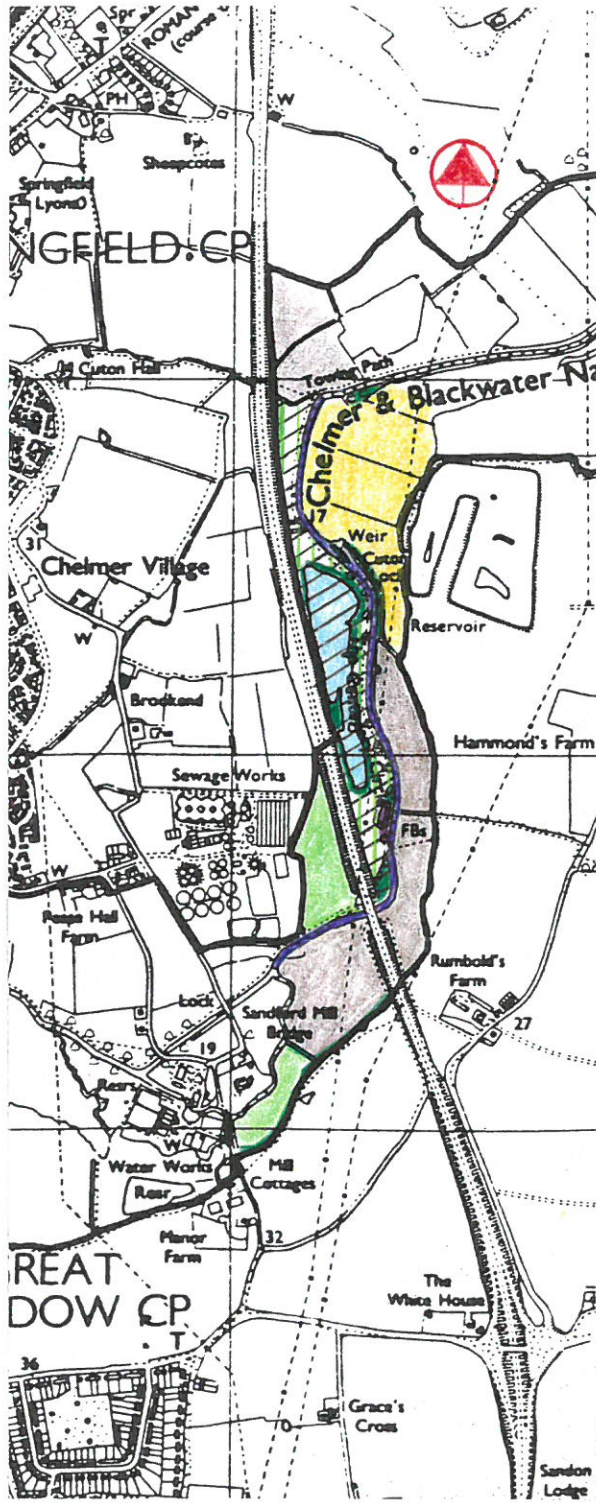
1. This zone is distinguished by several features. It runs from north to south, it is narrower than the bulk of the Conservation Area, The layout is of narrow fields that relate closely to the river they run beside. The A12 forms one edge of the zone, running along its length.
2. On the east bank, fields that traditionally would have been pasture are presently arable. The area west of the river is occupied by the Cuton Lock Lake SINC. The lake is popular for fishing. The SINC is valued for birds, rough grassland, and aquatic and waterside vegetation, and contains meadows and some cricket bat willows. It forms part of the wildlife corridor along the Navigation. The pasture is currently neglected and mostly overgrown by nettles and thistles.
3. Away from the south end of this zone, the upward slope of surrounding land is less noticeable.

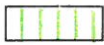





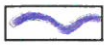

Problems and Opportunities

4. The zone is dominated by the sight and sound of the A12, which is raised on an embankment and ineffectively screened. Vegetative screening to reduce the impact of the A12 is desirable, but this raises problems. Generally it is desirable for the places that are planted to be between the road and the lake, rather than east of the lake, otherwise some pasture will be lost and the lake will not be screened from the road. However, the most valued plants on the site are on the water's edge, and would be shaded out by nearby trees. Planting therefore needs to be set back from the water's edge, but land immediately at the base of the embankment is intended as an access track. Trees can grow on the embankment, though possibly not as fast as elsewhere.
5. A return to management of the east bank as pasture would have significant landscape, as well as nature conservation, benefits given the traditional, distinctive field pattern. It is therefore desirable to retain most of the pasture unplanted, and preferably adjoining the Navigation. The pasture cannot be conserved unless it is grazed.
6. Nevertheless, there is an area, on the pasture at the south end of the zone, which is owned by the Highways Agency, and where planting would be particularly useful as it would screen two footpaths, as well as the Navigation, from the road. Planting here would need to be by the Navigation to avoid a line of pylons.
7. In addition, there may be a need for some planting to reduce views of the sewage works from the south-west corner of this character zone.
8. The Chelmsford Borough Local Plan shows a proposed cycleway crossing the Navigation in this zone. The urban qualities of a designated cycleway, described under 'Zone 2', would be inappropriate here. General problems associated with such cycleways are discussed under 'Access'.

Recommendations

9. Appropriate native tree planting should take place, where required, just below the embankment if the Highways Agency will allow, or alternatively on the embankment near to its base. An area of the Highways Agency pasture is to be planted. A return to grazing on the pasture is to be encouraged.
10. Regarding the sewage works, the Anglian Water Authority should be encouraged to implement screening on its land.



-  Neglected pasture
-  Lake
-  SINC
-  Set aside / Cut grass
-  Arable
-  Existing tree cover
-  Length of Navigation with bat willow prominent
-  Proposed planting on pasture

ZONE 4 - A12 Corridor
 Scale; 1 : 20,000

ZONE 5; A12 TO LITTLE BADDOW LOCK

Description

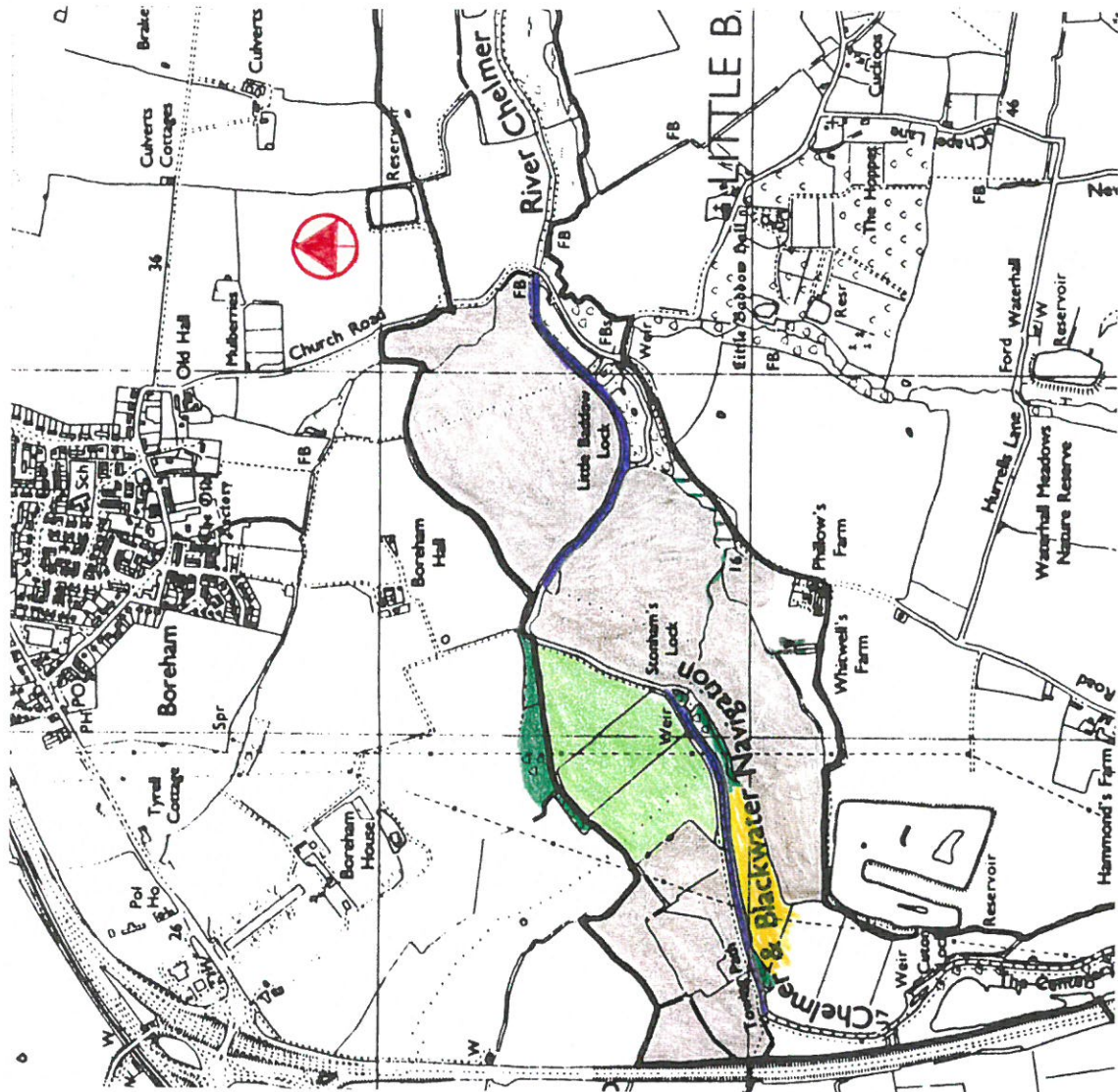
1. This character division is not easily distinguished from its surroundings outside the Conservation Area. Only some of the surrounding land slopes up from the CBNCA, and the slope is subtle. The CBNCA and surroundings both consist of arable fields. The effect is of a fairly open, expansive, flat landscape which contains relatively little of interest other than the sense of space and distance from development. There are significant tree belts by the river and on the north edge of the zone, but cricket bat willows are prominent in the landscape.





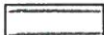
Problems and Opportunities

2. There would seem to be less to be gained from converting some of this zone to pasture than elsewhere as the fields are not closely related to the river or with field boundaries of great interest. This zone may be appropriate for creating new landscape features, while retaining the sense of space and difference from the rest of the Conservation Area.
3. On this length of the CBNCA there are no public Rights of Way to the south which link to the riverside footpath, although there are existing footpaths quite nearby on the southern side. This, combined with the effect of the A12 to the north-west, discourages access. Such a link to the south seems desirable.

Recommendations

4. Some new copses and field edge trees may be appropriate. Mixed native vegetation along some of the river should be encouraged. In landscape terms this would ideally replace some of the Bat Willow, but otherwise it could be in addition to the existing willow.
5. A footpath link to the south should be encouraged, preferably linked to the new planting envisaged.



-  Arable
-  Pasture
-  Existing tree cover
-  Length of Navigation with bat willow prominent
-  Willow coppice

ZONE 5 - A12 to Little Baddow Lock
 Scale; 1 : 20,000

ZONE 6: LITTLE BADDOW TO HOE MILL LOCK

Description

1. As a character zone, this is quiet, rural, remote from development and has the most valuable landscape of the Conservation Area. Most of it occupies what is clearly the flat bottom of the valley between large slopes, presenting an interesting combination of land forms. Views up onto these slopes are important to the character. These views are more obvious from those parts of the zone that are away from the navigation itself. Danbury Hill, which forms the southern slope, is heavily wooded. Where the northern slope is within Braintree District it appears to be thick with trees because of the many hedges there. On the north bank, west of Paper Mill Lock, is a reservoir which blends well into the landscape and probably has wildlife value.
2. Bat Willows constitute the bulk of trees. Apart from trees lining the banks there are small additional areas of tree cover. At the east end of the zone there is the beginning of a stretch of mixed native waterside vegetation, and this creates an attractive tree-lined water-body.




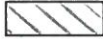

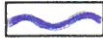

Problems and Opportunities

3. The potential of this landscape to show its traditional distinctive character, especially when compared to its surroundings, is best fulfilled by significant waterside areas of grazing. Little of the traditional pasture remains, although a number of small old fields, invisible from the Navigation, in Braintree District are grazed. There is some arable. A significant area east of Paper Mill Lock is currently managed as grass but not grazed, some of it being cut for turf.
4. On the south bank between Little Baddow Lock and Paper Mill Lock is a SINC which contains wet and marshy grassland of value. In the past it had SSSI status when it had higher species diversity, and with suitable management it may achieve it again. It also contains a belt of mixed native vegetation running along a neighbouring water body.
5. Use of the Navigation at both Paper Mill Lock and Hoe Mill Lock for mooring boats is growing. This can be visually intrusive, and would be more so if this spread to other rural locks. It is hoped to encourage the mooring of more boats in Chelmsford and at Sandford Mill where they would make a positive landscape contribution. A related problem is car parking at these sites and at Little Baddow lock. Car parking provision appears insufficient to meet demand for it. Chelmsford Borough Local Plan proposes small car parks at Little Baddow and Paper Mill locks. There is a chance that such car parks could attract more cars, increase the number of recreational users of this zone and erode some of its quiet rural character. Once new mooring facilities are created upstream, the parking problem at these rural sites may disappear. Any further development of the caravan site at the Little Baddow lock is likely to have deleterious effects on the surrounding character.

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that the valuable features of this area are conserved. A return to more pasture should be encouraged. The wet grassland of the SINC requires appropriate management. Ideally in landscape terms, some of the Bat Willows would be replaced by mixed native species, where this can be achieved without obscuring desirable views of surrounding landscape.
7. The argument for small car parks with minimal landscape impact is appreciated. However, it would be better to delay a decision on the need for them until after it is known what the effect of developments upstream will be on reducing mooring and demand for parking.



-  Arable
-  Pasture
-  Cut grass
-  SINC
-  Existing tree cover
-  Length of Navigation with bat willow prominent
-  Lake / Reservoir

ZONE 6 - Between Little Baddow and Hoe Mill Locks
 Scale; 1 : 20,000

ZONE 7; FROM HOE MILL LOCK TO LANGFORD PUMPING STATION

Description

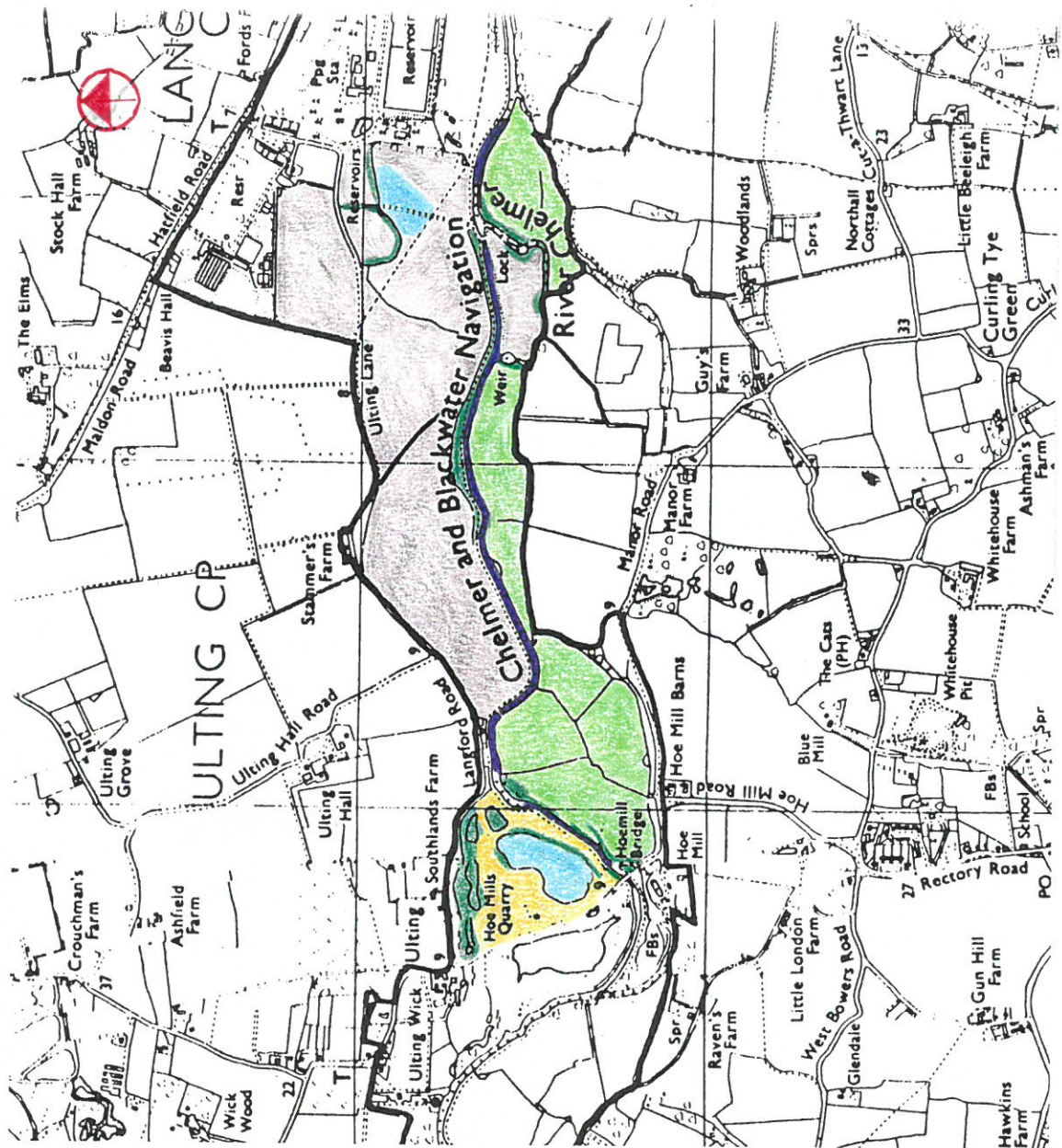
1. This character zone does not have large slopes to north and south, as the section to the west of it does. It is more enclosed than the CBNCA west of Little Baddow Lock. This zone has more pasture than has been retained than others, and there is considerably more mixed native vegetation along the water-body banks than elsewhere. However, enlarged arable fields that have not retained much distinctive riverside character are prominent on the north bank, and can give an impression of a flat open landscape. Some neighbouring small fields are bounded by rows of poplars which seem acceptable.
2. The Hoe Mill Quarry has a different kind of landscape to the general agricultural one, and is visually separated by vegetation belts. It appears to be developing into a good wildlife habitat.
3. A pipe bridges the river at one point, forming a rather strange feature. Also, the water body divides into two for the length of one field, adding interest.







Problems and Opportunities

4. There is a lack of public access to this length of the Navigation from the south. Improved access could provide views of significant pasture and of a section of the river which is unusually sinuous and rich in native woody vegetation, both currently unappreciated. This same length of water, was described in the Environment Agency's habitat survey as containing potential obstacles to water flow, for example submerged logs, trees in or overhanging the water and large beds of reed-mace.

Recommendations

5. Pasture should be conserved. In general, and in dealing with any potential obstacles to water flow, the existing native water-side vegetation should be generally retained. The right balance between this vegetation, on the one hand, and views through it to pasture beyond should be conserved or created.
6. A Public Right Of Way linking to the south, as described, should be encouraged.
7. An elm hedge, east of Stammer's Farm farmhouse would benefit from periodic coppicing to prevent it succumbing to Dutch Elm Disease.



-  Arable
-  Pasture
-  Unmanaged rough grassland
-  Lake
-  Existing tree cover
-  Length of Navigation with bat willow prominent

ZONE 7 - Hoe Mill Lock to Langford Pumping Station
 Scale; 1 : 20,000

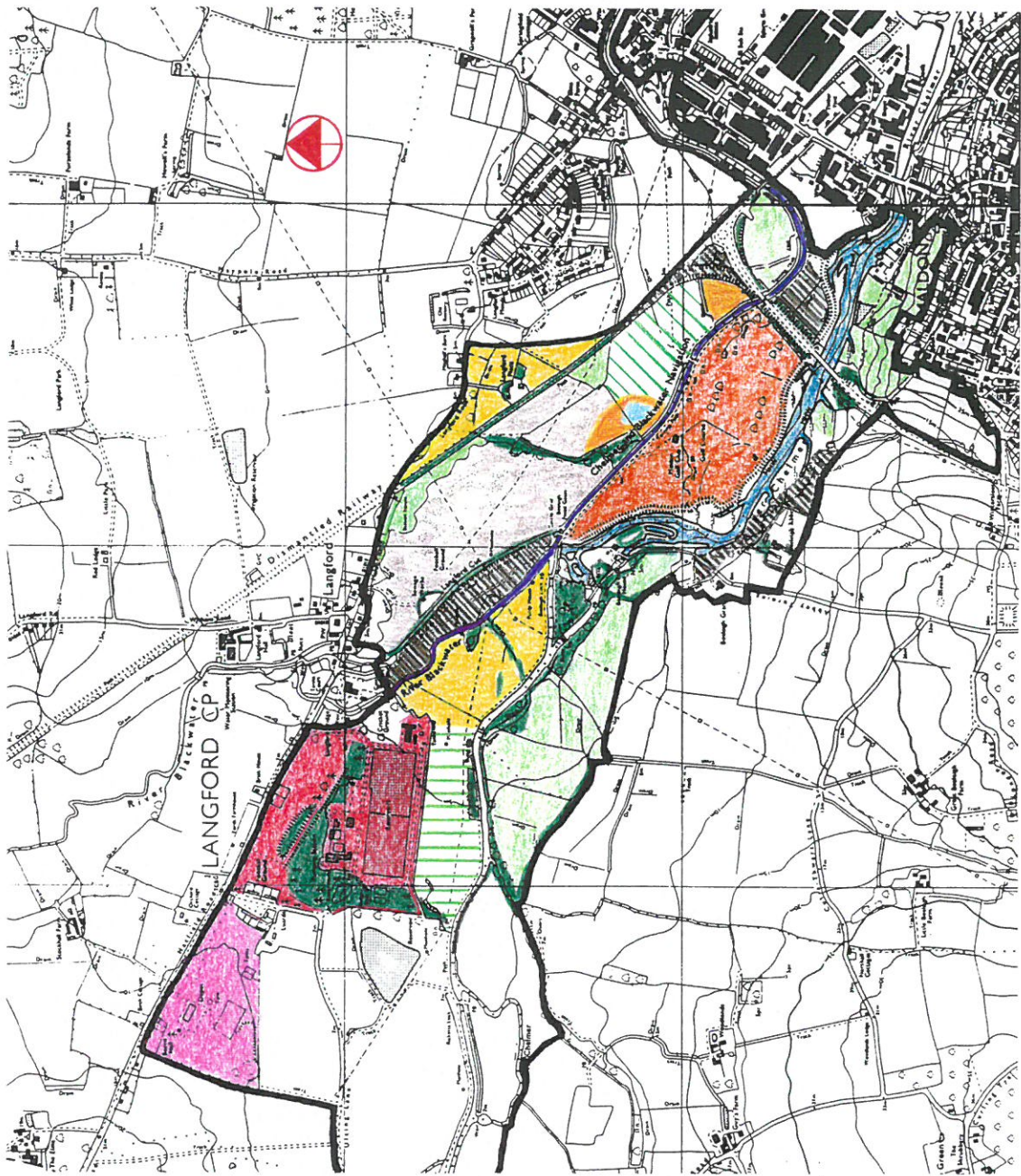
ZONE 8; LANGFORD PUMPING STATION TO MALDON















Description

1. This zone is currently in a very different condition to most of the CBNCA. It is taken over by a jumble of miscellaneous land uses. These include the Langford pumping station, a site for hi-tech factories, set-aside, cut grass, arable, woodland, and a golf course with non-native trees and with little 'rough'. There is also a mown public open space edged by non-native varieties of trees and shrubs, small areas of unmanaged rough grassland, a small lake, a little grazing, a school playing field, the estuary edge and the Maldon Bypass. Various water-bodies run parallel within this division. The Chelmer is joined by the Blackwater (which runs parallel to the Langford Cut, another water-body) at Beeleigh, and the combined rivers then immediately split into the tidal river Blackwater and the man-made Navigation.
2. Most of this zone would traditionally have consisted of low-lying water-side fields, but some other traditional landscapes remain in this zone. Where the river is tidal this gives both it and its surroundings a different character to elsewhere. In addition, the part of the zone to the south of the tidal section of river has a different landscape created by sloping ground, blocks of tree cover and small pastures. Thirdly a disused railway separates an area of small fields in the north-east from the rest of this zone. These fields are not currently in agricultural use but otherwise retain a traditional hedge pattern and landscape. All these traditional characteristics should be conserved.
3. There are other valuable features. There is the Beeleigh Abbey area, which includes woodland and a SINC valued for inter-tidal reeds, grassland at the tidal limit, dry grassland with hedges and a small pond. There is the Chelmer / Blackwater Meadows SINC which occupies a narrow field between the Blackwater and the Langford Cut. This has wildlife, landscape and recreational value.
4. The low-lying area between the bypass and the town has retained more traditional character. It includes the Viaduct Meadow SINC. This is a threatened type of meadow and depends on periodic flooding. It is valued for birds and grass species. Treebelts on the bypass and the disused railway line are also a valuable feature, and include another SINC which contains a sizeable pond.
5. The site of the old Langford pumping station has a different character to the neighbouring Conservation Area. The west part is now used as the site for micro-chip manufacture, and contains some landscape features which are worth conserving but which do not have much in common with surrounding countryside or influence on it. The east part is still used as a pumping station and is characterised by blocks of non-indigenous trees, grey rectangular concrete buildings, large rectangular concrete reservoirs and grass that is mostly close-mown. It affects the neighbouring Conservation Area by the noticeable block of trees at its south-west and limited ugly structures at its south-east corner.

Problems and Opportunities

6. At the moment this zone is muddled in landscape terms. However there are elements remaining, namely the water-bodies themselves and field boundaries, which, if they were made the foundation of landscape design, would unify the main body of the zone and make the most of its potential.
7. As noted above, traditionally most of this division would have consisted of low-lying water-side fields, and this is the character which has largely been lost although relics of this agricultural landscape remain. The golf course has a low-lying water-side location but its character is completely at odds with the traditional landscape. The public open space to the north of it contains relics of agricultural hedges, along with its non-native planting. The enlarged arable



- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|---|
|  | Pumping Station |  | Unmanaged rough grassland |
|  | Factory site on old pumping station |  | SINC |
|  | Pasture |  | Golf course |
|  | Set aside / Cut grass |  | Tree cover |
|  | Neglected pasture |  | Lake |
|  | Arable |  | Length of Navigation with bat willows prominent |
|  | Public open space |  | Tidal river |

ZONE 8 - Langford Pumping Station to Maldon

Scale; 1; 20,000

field north of the Langford cut, could regain some of its earlier character by replacement of lost hedges and by the gradual replacement of the various non-indigenous tree species on much of its margins. There is more potential for such restoration to the south and east of the pumping station.

8. The low-lying area between the bypass and town (as described above) needs to be protected against change. A cycleway is planned parallel to the Navigation at this point, and care needs to be taken that the remaining rural character here is not lost. Litter from nearby developments has been noted here.
9. The junction of the water-bodies at Beeleigh involves an extensive collection of structures and features. This connects the Chelmer / Blackwater Meadows SINC with Beeleigh abbey and its surroundings. All these elements could be combined to form a significant recreational feature. Any increase in recreational use on the site should not be at the expense of conservation of the SINCS.

Recommendations

10. In order to create a more unified landscape focusing on the water features and their valuable character, it is recommended that the character of the traditional agricultural landscape is restored as far as reasonable, with its pattern of hedges, vegetation species and management by grazing or hay meadows. A change in emphasis in the management of the golf course would be desirable to fit more into the intended rural character.
11. All the traditional landscape characters of this zone should be conserved.
12. A possible solution to the undesirable aspects of Langford Pumping Station is appropriate clumps of planting on the site's south edge perhaps with a small associated water feature. Selective replacement of trees on the Pumping Station site with native species should be encouraged.
13. As mentioned above, care should be taken to ensure that the proposed cycleway near the Navigation does not spoil rural character.

ZONE 9; WITHIN MALDON

Description

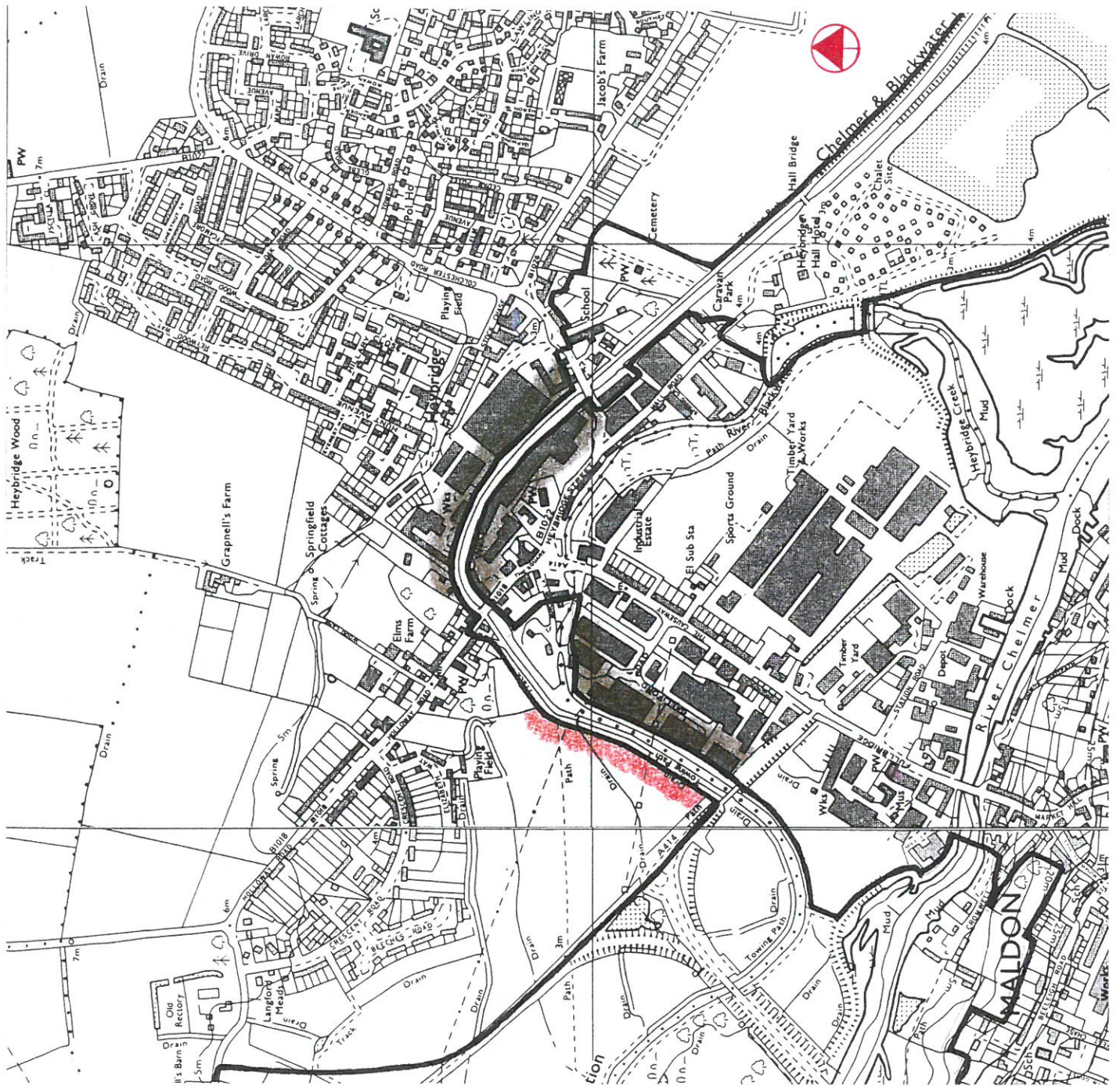
1. This covers the length over which the CBNCA passes through the built-up area in, and on the edge of, Maldon. For most of this zone the CBNCA is narrowed considerably to include only very thin strips of land either side of the canal. In places it widens slightly.

Problems and Opportunities

2. At the western end the Navigation passes between industrial buildings on one side and a new housing development on the other. There is significant native woody vegetation acting as a screen, but there is a need for more on both sides to protect the CBNCA from its surroundings, so as to enhance its relatively refreshing, tranquil, natural character.
3. Between Holloway Road and Colchester Road the CBNCA passes through an industrial estate. Here, again, there is a partial vegetation screen, but where it is missing the influence of the surroundings is particularly strong. A more extensive vegetation screen seems to be required. Most success would probably be achieved by allowing natural regeneration beside the boundary fence, in consultation with neighbouring land-owners. One possible risk of allowing more vegetation is that the zone will become darker, reducing wildlife value, but this will not be the case if vegetation is increased on the north bank, which is where it is mainly required.
4. East of Colchester Road there appears to be better screening beside the Navigation and the surroundings have a less deleterious effect on the character. The Environment Agency's habitat survey noted an area of wild, damp ground near Heybridge Hall which probably has conservation value.
5. All existing woody vegetation in this zone is valuable in its context. Throughout this zone the Navigation supports lush marginal vegetation, appears to have wildlife value and generally seems to be surprisingly free of rubbish.

Recommendations

6. The solution in most of this zone is to screen the Navigation from the surroundings, as detailed above, rather than to integrate the surroundings into a landscape centred on the Navigation. The zone should be maintained to ensure there is no decline in the existing level of vegetation and wildlife, and no increase in the level of litter.



Residential development



Industrial areas

ZONE 9 - Within Maldon

Scale; 1 : 10,000

ZONE 10; MALDON TO HEYBRIDGE BASIN

Description

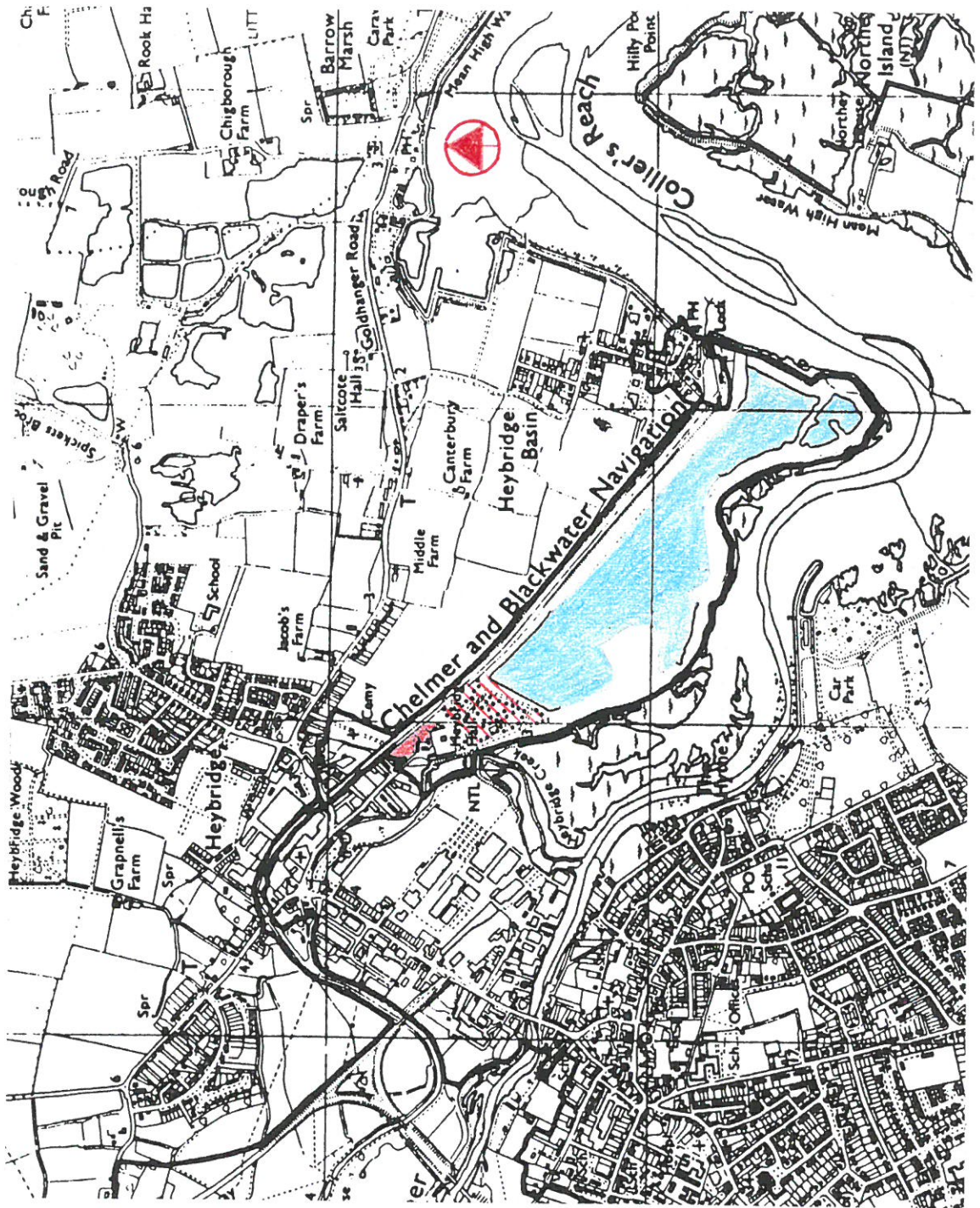
1. This zone is not narrowly constricted as zone 9 is. Its landscape and soil is different from the rest of the CBNCA, the soil consisting of sands and gravels without any alluvium. Presumably this reflects the fact that this section of canal was never a river.
2. Most of the zone consists of a flooded but apparently fairly unmodified gravel pit, Heybridge Hall Lake. It fronts onto the river estuary. The Navigation occupies a straight linear strip along the north-eastern edge of the zone, supports reeds and rushes and is enclosed by strips of woody vegetation, mainly hawthorn. At the north-western end the zone is occupied by chalets, a new residential development, and the remains of Heybridge Hall, a Grade II listed building.

Problems and Opportunities

3. The zone consists of unrelated elements. One approach would be to try to integrate the lake area and the Navigation by creating links between the two water bodies that could be used by some boats, and by trying to extend some of the Navigation-side woody vegetation into the lake area. The Navigation along this stretch appears to be heavily used for mooring, while the lake may have significant potential for some kinds of recreational water use, such as canoeing, rowing and wind-surfing. However, the lake is a SINC, partly as an open water haven for resting coastal birds and supports sizeable reed beds in places around its edges.
4. The lake edge has a rough character which can be attractive, but appears to attract activities such as rubbish burning.

Recommendations

5. The level and form of recreational use that the lake could tolerate without damaging its conservation value needs further consideration. It is recommended that preventing significant damage to wildlife takes priority, but it is expected that a degree of recreational use, as envisaged above, will be acceptable.



Lake



New residential development



Chalets

ZONE 10 - Maldon to Heybridge Basin
 Scale; 1 : 20,000

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

1. The CBNCA divides into distinct character zones, which require distinct and very varied landscape treatments. In the urban zone in Chelmsford, there are opportunities for major or significant change, while the zone within Maldon requires screening. Rural zones 5 and 8 contain opportunities for significant change. In the case of 8, on the edge of Maldon, this is in order to restore former character. Conservation of existing qualities is also a major requirement, particularly in rural zones 6 and 7. The character of Zone 2 on the edge of Chelmsford, in particular, is threatened by inappropriate development, but would benefit from some changes. The A12 zone requires screening.
2. A general objective should be the conservation or recreation of an attractive distinctive landscape centred on the Navigation. Policies to help achieve this would be the restoration of waterside pasture, and encouragement of a small amount of mixed native woody water-side vegetation where this is lacking, balanced with the retention of views.
3. There is a justifiable desire to encourage recreational use of the river and its surroundings, particularly around Chelmsford. However, one of the most attractive, and to some extent distinctive, features of rural stretches of the CBNCA is its quiet, secluded character. It is intended to relocate much of the boat mooring to built up locations where it would form an interesting feature. It is desirable that increased recreation in and around the river will concentrate in and around Chelmsford, rather than altering the existing character elsewhere. Therefore, it seems that the new car parks proposed in the Chelmsford Borough Local Plan for Little Baddow and Paper Mill locks are inappropriate, at least for the present, as explained under 'Zone 6'. At the same time appreciation of some of the rural CBNCA would be greatly helped by the creation of some new Rights Of Way.
4. It is expected that funding for changes proposed on agricultural land will be assisted by the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and by the Conservation Area Partnership Scheme. It is intended that much of the landscape improvement in the urban zone 1 will form part of the planning conditions for new development. In the short term some tree planting is proposed within the Chelmsford and Maldon urban zones with the consent of the landowners, Chelmsford Borough Council and the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Ltd. The Highways Agency has given consent to the proposed tree planting on its land in the A12 zone. Funding for all this proposed planting can be provided by CAPS. It is hoped that the Anglian Water Authority will provide consent and funding for hedging along the boundary of the sewage works by Sandford Mill. The recommendations of this landscape assessment also involve changes to land owned by Maldon District Council, Maldon golf club, and Essex and Suffolk Water (in relation to Langford Pumping Station) all within zone 8. Co-operation will be required from some of the landowners in Maldon industrial estate to allow natural regeneration along their boundaries. Funding for new public space in zone 2 appears unlikely in the foreseeable future. Limited or minor modification to the species of trees lining the canal, as suggested (see 'Riparian Vegetation'), will largely depend on the co-operation of the Canal company, and is likely to involve leaving natural tree growth at selected points.
5. Ideally, the CBNCA would be subject to repeated landscape assessments spread over time, to monitor progress, decline and threats in terms of landscape character, and on which relevant policies can be revised if necessary.

PROJECTS PROPOSED

- Changes on agricultural land, reinstating pasture and a few hedges, leaving strips around fields free of fertiliser and pesticides, creating new public access and new copses.
- Tree and hedge planting in Chelmsford urban zone, to screen eyesore, to enhance green wedge and to surround new development site.
- Tree planting to screen A12.
- Hedging on boundary of sewage works by Sandford Mill.
- Tree and shrub planting, combined with management of natural growth, to screen zone within Maldon.
- Replacing ornamental vegetation with native, and partially reinstating hedges on land owned by Maldon District Council.
- Replacing ornamental vegetation with native on Maldon Golf Course.
- Clumps of planting and a small water feature by south boundary of Langford Pumping Station.
- Some tree and shrub planting as part of conversion of farmland to public open space in zone 2.
- Leaving natural tree growth at limited, selected points along the Navigation banks.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TEXT

CAPS; Conservation Area Partnership Scheme

CBNCA; Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Conservation Area

IWA; Inland Waterways Association

MAFF; Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food

ROW; Right of Way

SINC; Site of Interest for Nature Conservation

SSSI; Site of Special Scientific Interest

