

PART 2:

Spatial Strategy

Chapter 2: Spatial Portrait

2.1 Basildon Borough lies at the heart of South Essex, 30 miles east of London, covering an area of approximately 42 square miles.

2.2 The Borough comprises the urban areas of Basildon (including Laindon, Noak Bridge and Pitsea), Billericay and Wickford and the three serviced villages of Bowers Gifford, Crays Hill, and Ramsden Bellhouse. Its main settlements are separated by countryside designated as Green Belt, containing several smaller rural settlements. The Green Belt contains two unserviced villages and thirteen plotland settlements. Basildon is the principal town, providing a wide range of services and facilities.

2.3 Basildon Borough is part of the wider South Essex area and works in partnership to deliver excellent digital infrastructure, improved connectivity, high-quality blue and green infrastructure, skills development and quality new homes and commercial development.

Historic Environment

2.4 The main settlement in the Borough is Basildon. It was designated a Mark 1 New Town in 1949 and developed over 50 years to provide structured housing in place of the plotlands and to accommodate London's expanding population. The New Town Designated Area largely absorbed the villages of Basildon, Laindon, Nevendon, Vange and Pitsea.

2.5 There are three nationally designated Scheduled Monuments in the Borough: Bronze Age earthworks in Norsey Woods, Billericay, and two moated sites at Botelers and West Thorpe, Basildon. The Borough contains four Conservation Areas (Billericay High Street, Little Burstead, Great Burstead, and Noak Bridge) and around 130 Listed Buildings, including two Grade I churches in Great Burstead and Laindon.

Population and Demography

2.6 The population of the Borough has increased significantly since the 1950s following the phased construction of Basildon New Town and the gradual expansion of the older settlements of Billericay and Wickford. The 2021 Census recorded 187,600 residents, an increase of 6.6% since 2011. Basildon (including Laindon and Pitsea) accommodates around two-thirds of the population.

2.7 The *South Essex Housing Needs Assessment* (SEHNA) (2022) projects a population increase of 34,784 between 2020 and 2050.

2.8 The main changes in the population since 2011 have been an increasing proportion of residents aged between 25-34 (up by 1.1%) and those aged between 50-64 (up by 0.9%).

Transport Connections

2.9 The Borough is served by strategic road networks serving South Essex, including the east-west A127 and A13 to M25 and London and the north-south A130 to the rest of Essex. Providing strategic connections to London, Southend Airport, Stansted Airport, and the ports of Felixstowe Freeport East, Thames Freeport Tilbury and London Gateway.

2.10 Rail connections include two railway lines to the north and south and five stations: Basildon, Laindon, Pitsea, Billericay, and Wickford. Rail services link Billericay and Wickford to Stratford City and London Liverpool Street. Crossrail services are now fully operational from Shenfield, one stop west of Billericay, linking with Reading and Heathrow Airport, via Central London. In the south of the Borough, rail services run between

London Fenchurch Street and Shoeburyness with services to Lakeside Shopping Centre and Dagenham, via a junction at Pitsea.

Landscape and Natural Environment

2.11 The Borough features varied landscapes, from the higher ground of Langdon Hills and Billericay to the flat Thames Estuary at Vange and Bowers marshes. There are three main urban development areas and three serviced settlements, set within arable farmland, permanent grazing with hedgerows, woodland, and a large area of the Thames Estuary's coastal grazing marshland. The plotlands are characterised by sporadic residential development and a mosaic of scrub, grassland, and woodland habitats.

2.12 The local natural environment is rich in nationally and locally important habitats with six Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) ranging from Ancient Woodland and rich grasslands in Billericay to coastal marsh in Vange, Fobbing and Pitsea. There are 49 Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), and Country Parks with over 150km of Public Rights of Way that provide a means of accessing the open countryside.

2.13 The borough has 782 square kilometres of green infrastructure (21% of the county), 5.3% woodland, and 4,058 miles of Public Rights of Way. Basildon ranks third in the county for green and blue infrastructure, covering 38.4% of the borough. The largest types are natural and semi-natural open spaces, areas around premises, and coastal features (marshes), followed by outdoor sports facilities, parks, gardens, and ancient woodlands.

2.14 There are no internationally or European protected habitats in the Borough, however there are Ramsar Sites, Special Protection Areas (SPA), and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) within 5km of the Borough boundary, principally downstream of the River Crouch, the Borough's main watercourse, which has its source in Little Burstead.

Housing Stock

2.15 The Borough has around 82,000 homes: 63% owner-occupied, 21% socially rented, and 14% privately rented. Housing types include 17% detached, 17% semi-detached, 37% terraced, and 19% flats and others, with 68% having 2-3 bedrooms.

Education Provision and Performance

2.16 In 2024, Essex County Council recorded 49 state primary schools and 9 state secondary schools, five of which have state sixth forms, in the Borough. Educational attainment in both primary and secondary level is slightly lower than the East of England and England averages. The 2021 Census also showed that the skills levels amongst adult residents is low. Only 25% of residents are qualified to NVQ4 and above, and 21% hold only NVQ1 or no qualifications at all. Higher education and adult education including Community Learning are provided at South Essex College, and ProCAT, as well as some secondary academies.

2.17 Five mainstream schools in Basildon district offer specialist provision for children and young people with SEND covering autism, dyslexia, hearing impairment and speech and language.

2.18 Basildon Borough and Essex County Council are committed to ensuring there are sufficient affordable, quality, and inclusive early years and childcare places to give children in Basildon Borough the best start in life.

Economy

2.19 The *Employment Land Needs Assessment 2024* (ELNA) identifies Basildon as the largest economy in South Essex. There are around 104,700 jobs based in the Borough, which is home to the A127 Enterprise Corridor, the largest concentration of employment in Essex.

2.20 The Borough's working age population broadly matches the county and regional average. However, the low resident skills base results in high levels of out commuting. Key employment sectors across Basildon in 2023 were public services (25,200 jobs), professional & other private services (24,200 jobs), and wholesale & retail (15,400 jobs).

2.21 There are over 7,500 VAT registered business enterprises trading in the Borough. Five-year business survival rates (39.5%) outperform the East of England (33.9%) and UK (38.4%) averages. Business start-ups are one of the highest in the country at 82.3/10,000 population, above regional and national averages.

2.22 Unemployment is slightly lower than the national average with a claimant rate of 3.6% for residents aged 16-64 (national 3.8%).

Retail, Leisure and Provision

2.23 Basildon Town Centre is one of Essex's regional town centres, alongside Chelmsford, Southend-on-Sea, and Colchester. There are four other town centres in the Borough: Pitsea, Laindon, Billericay and Wickford.

2.24 The Borough has four out-of-centre retail parks, each with at least one large supermarket. A number of local centres support the Borough's residential and business neighbourhoods with basic shopping and service needs.

2.25 The Borough offers a range of leisure and recreational opportunities including the Basildon Sporting Village as well as several health clubs, four golf courses, four country parks and approximately 1,300ha of open space.

2.26 Basildon Festival Leisure Park is the Borough's principal commercial leisure complex, featuring a multiplex cinema, bowling alley, wakeboarding centre, play centre, a gym, go-karting centre, and several restaurants and hotels.

2.27 Residential provision should be maximised in the most sustainable locations, particularly in town centres, as part of a balanced mix of uses. The Basildon Retail and Leisure Needs Study 2024 highlighted the need to diversify town centre uses in response to falling market demand, rising occupancy costs, and increasing competition from online and out-of-centre shopping, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The regeneration of Basildon Town Centre will help enhance amenities available and provide economic benefits.

Health

2.28 Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) data demonstrates a significant gap of up to 14 years in healthy life expectancy between wards in Basildon, highlighting stark inequalities within the borough. Residents in more deprived areas are living fewer years in good health, despite often having similar overall life expectancy. This represents not only avoidable ill health but also increased demand on health, social care, and housing services. Core20PLUS5 is a national NHS England approach to inform action to reduce healthcare inequalities at both national and system level. The approach defines a target population – the 'Core20PLUS' – and identifies '5' focus clinical areas requiring accelerated improvement. The Local Plan presents a critical opportunity to align with the Core20PLUS5 approach in Basildon by:

- Prioritising investment in the most deprived 20% of communities, where poor housing conditions, overcrowding and housing

insecurity are most prevalent.

- Identifying and addressing groups who experience compounded disadvantage, including people in insecure housing, those with long-term mental health conditions, and people with cardiovascular risk factors.
- Embedding prevention and early intervention within housing design, regeneration, and allocation policies. Mental health should be a priority within the Local Plan due to its high prevalence locally and its strong association with housing quality, affordability, and stability. Poor housing conditions, overcrowding, fuel poverty, and housing insecurity are all linked to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and severe mental illness. Housing that is safe, warm, secure, and well-connected to green space and services can significantly improve mental wellbeing and reduce pressure on health services. Cardiovascular disease (CVD) remains a leading cause of premature mortality and long-term ill health in Basildon. There is a strong relationship between CVD and the wider determinants of health, including deprivation, poor-quality housing, limited access to healthy food, physical inactivity, and chronic stress. Housing developments that support active travel, reduce fuel poverty, improve air quality, and enable access to green spaces can directly contribute to reducing cardiovascular risk.