

Chapter 11: Conserving the Local Environment

11.1 The conservation and enhancement of the Borough's natural environment are central to achieving sustainable development and supporting the health and wellbeing of our communities. The Borough has a wealth of natural, semi-natural and planned green and blue spaces, habitats, and corridors. These are part of our everyday lives; where we work, do business, and learn, the way we travel around, where we play, celebrate, and spend our leisure time. They play host to wildlife, reflect our cultural heritage and sit in a landscape shaped over time. Collectively, they help deliver cleaner air, reduce flood risk, support urban cooling, and contribute to tackling the wider challenges of climate change.

11.2 The Council has a duty to protect sites of international, national, and local sites of importance for habitats and biodiversity. The importance of these sites is reflected in the range of designations across the Borough. Whilst there are no internationally or European protected habitats in the Borough, there are Ramsar Sites, Special Protection Areas (SPA), and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) within 5km of the Borough boundary. They include the Essex Estuaries SAC to the northeast of the Borough, Crouch & Roach Estuaries SPA and Ramsar site to the northeast, Benfleet and Southend Marshes SPA and Ramsar site to the southeast and Thames Estuary & Marshes SPA and Ramsar site to the south of the Borough.

11.3 Within the Borough, there are also numerous nationally designated sites including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and locally designated sites including Local Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites.

GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE

11.4 Given its strategic importance, high-quality green and blue infrastructure will continue to play a vital role in managing new development and change across the Borough. There is already an extensive green and blue infrastructure network covering an area of over 1,300ha, comprising a series of multi-functional spaces of different sizes and purposes.

11.5 The Water Framework Directive and River Basin Management Plans (RBMP) also emphasize that development should avoid deterioration in water body status and seek opportunities for ecological improvement, in line with the RBMP and any local catchment plans.

ESSEX COAST RECREATIONAL DISTURBANCE AVOIDANCE AND MITIGATION STRATEGY (RAMS)

11.6 The *Essex Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy Document* (RAMS) was adopted in 2019, with the accompanying SPD adopted in 2020. The Essex Coast RAMS aims to provide the necessary mitigation to avoid adverse effects on the integrity of designated habitat sites arising from the combined impacts of residential development across Essex.

11.7 To achieve this, RAMS identifies a detailed programme of strategic avoidance and mitigation measures. These are to be funded by developer contributions from all qualifying development within the defined Zones of Influence.

HABITATS REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT (HRA) AND SUITABLE ALTERNATIVE NATURAL GREENSPACE (SANG)

11.8 Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) is a concept developed almost 20 years ago as part of the South East Regional Plan Examination in Public, to mitigate for recreational pressure impacts caused by

planned new development, by providing alternative, less sensitive, green spaces aimed at deflecting visitors, especially dog walkers, away from designated Habitat Sites where a significant increase in visitors is predicted. The Natural England SANG Guidelines (updated in 2021) arose from that Examination in Public. SANG are a tool to mitigate the 'alone' impact of residential development on Internationally designated sites (Habitat Sites); Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar sites and can also mitigate recreational pressure on Nationally designated sites; Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The 'in combination' impacts of residential development on the Essex Coast Habitats Sites are dealt with through the mitigation measures in the Essex RAMS.

11.9 SANG may be created from:

- existing open space of SANG quality with no existing public access or limited public access, which for the purposes of mitigation could be made fully accessible to the public;
- existing open space, which is already accessible, but which could be changed in character so that it is more attractive to the specific group of visitors who might otherwise visit the SPA; or
- land in other uses which could be converted into SANG.

11.10 Whilst SANG is not an automatic delivery mechanism for BNG, the two can exist on the same site. BNG on SANG is only attributable to such habitat creation or enhancement that proves measurable additionality over and above the minimum requirements of the SANG, demonstrated using the Biodiversity Metric.

11.11 Developments within the Essex Coast Habitats Sites Zone of Influence which involve 500+ dwellings are most likely to have alone impacts on the designated Habitat Sites. However, development proposals for far fewer dwellings in close proximity to the Essex Coast Habitats Sites could have an 'alone' impact. Any development that has 'alone' impacts will be required to provide SANGs, either on-site or provide contributions towards an off-site location within a reasonable proximity of the development. The criteria for catchment areas are set out below.

SANG size	Catchment area
2-12 hectares	2km
12-20 hectares	4km
20+ hectares	5km

11.12 Natural England have produced SANG Guidelines (2021) which are expected to be adhered to, these guidelines include, but are not limited to, provision of 2.3km circular walks and a car park for all dwellings further than 400m from the SANG boundary (1 space per hectare). The requirement for SANGs reflect the evidence from the recent Visitor Survey update undertaken by Footprint Ecology in relation to the Essex RAMS.

HABITATS REGULATION ASSESSMENT (HRA) AND FUNCTIONALLY LINKED LAND (FLL)

11.13 For any substantial development within 10km of a Habitats Site, a Habitats Regulations Assessment will be required to assess the likelihood of the application site and/or adjacent land being Functionally Linked Land for designated bird species and/or assemblages of a Habitats Site, to avoid any adverse effect on the integrity of the Habitats Sites. Functionally linked land (FLL) is a term used to describe areas of land or sea occurring outside a designated site and which are critical to, or necessary for, the ecological or behavioural functions in a relevant season of a qualifying feature for which a Special Area of Conservation (SAC)/Special Protection Area (SPA)/Ramsar site has been designated. These areas are frequently used by qualifying features and support the functionality and integrity of the designated site.

11.14 A desk-based study covering the last 5 years of bird surveys, using local records, shall be undertaken and unless FLL can be ruled out, a wintering bird survey (two full seasons)

including nocturnal surveys will be required for all suitable fields both within the application site and adjacent (as development of the application site can cause adverse effects to adjacent FLL), to either rule out FLL or inform the requirement for mitigation. Mitigation will require an equivalent amount of land to be managed for the relevant SPA/Ramsar bird species/assemblages in perpetuity and without public access.

SITES OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST (SSSI)

11.15 A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is designated for its important wildlife, habitats, or geological features, and SSSI is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Development can harm a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) through habitat loss, disturbance to protected species, pollution, changes to water systems, habitat fragmentation, and increased recreational pressure, including impacts from nearby development that affects the site's ecological integrity.

11.16 The SSSI IRZs are a Geographical Information System (GIS) tool developed by Natural England to make rapid initial assessment of the potential risks posed by development proposals to SSSIs and those Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Ramsar sites that they underpin. They define zones around each site which reflect the sensitivities of the features for which the site is notified and indicate the types of development proposal which could potentially have adverse impacts and need further consideration.

BIODIVERSITY AND BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN (BNG)

11.17 The *Environment Act 2021* introduced mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), requiring all eligible new developments to deliver a minimum 10% increase in biodiversity. This follows the mitigation hierarchy (avoid, minimise, restore, offset).

11.18 BNG is a sustainability-focused approach to development. It ensures that habitats for wildlife are left in a measurably better state than before the development. This means a development will result in more or better-quality natural habitat than there was before development.

11.19 The NPPF sets out how local plans should promote the conservation, restoration, and enhancement of priority habitats and ecological networks, as well as the protection and recovery of priority or threatened species. It also encourages measurable net gains for biodiversity.

11.20 The *Essex Design Guide* (EDG) supports this approach, recommending that nesting boxes and other spaces for birds and bats be provided on buildings or in communal green spaces as part of a development's *Ecological Strategy*.

LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY (LNRS)

11.21 The *Environment Act 2021* establishes clear targets, plans, and policies for improving the natural environment. Included within the Environment Act 2021 is the statutory requirement for *Local Nature Recovery Strategies* (LNRSs) to be implemented across England,

11.22 LNRSs are an England-wide system of spatial strategies that identify priorities and map proposals for targeted action to support nature's recovery. They aim to deliver wider environmental benefits for people, wildlife, ecosystems, and climate adaption and mitigation.

11.23 The *Essex LNRS 2025* identifies locations where creating or enhancing habitats would provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment across the county and in Basildon. Developers must have regard to the LNRS when preparing proposals. The LNRS is a key tool for identifying optimal locations for biodiversity delivery and nature recovery. It highlights both strategic opportunity areas, where habitat creation or enhancement will

provide the greatest ecological benefit, and broader opportunity zones, where meaningful gains can still be achieved. Development proposals should demonstrate how they contribute to LNRS priorities, avoid harm to identified areas, and, where feasible, integrate measures that support wider nature recovery objectives.

LANDSCAPE

11.24 Landscape features across the Borough play an important part in shaping the character and appearance of an area. These features include trees, hedgerows, woodlands, meadows, field margins and water features that do not benefit from international, national, or local designations. Each application will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking account of the importance and contribution that the existing landscape features make to the appearance of the locality.

11.25 The Council supports the Essex Wildlife Trust Living Landscape's vision to 'restore, recreate, and connect wildlife habitats'. Within each Living Landscape, opportunities to preserve, restore, and enhance priority habitats, ecological networks, and populations of priority or threatened species will be supported, helping to strengthen strategic wildlife corridors across Essex. There are several Living Landscape areas within the Borough, including those which extend across its boundaries.

LOCAL WILDLIFE SITES

11.26 The NPPF expects local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, such as Local Wildlife Sites, to be identified and mapped so they can be protected through planning policy.

11.27 The *Basildon Local Wildlife Sites Register* (2021) identifies 49 Local Wildlife Sites and 3 potential Local Wildlife Sites within the Borough. These comprise a mix of habitat types including ancient woodlands, grasslands, meadows, and marshes. Ancient woodland and rich grasslands tend to be found in Billericay and Little Burstead, and coastal marsh in Vange, Fobbing and Pitsea.

11.28 Local Wildlife Sites in the Borough can be negatively affected by factors such as development, poor agricultural practices, inappropriate management, road-widening, and recreational activities. Such impacts can reduce their ecological value and the contribution they make to biodiversity and landscape character.

11.29 Potential Local Wildlife Sites are identified as having the potential to meet the Local Wildlife Site selection criteria in the future, through the enhancement and restoration of their habitats.

LOCAL GEOLOGICAL SITES

11.30 The NPPF requires sites of local geological value to be protected and enhanced. Local Geological Sites (LoGS) are areas of substantive nature conservation value that make an important contribution to ecological networks and nature's recovery. They can also provide wider benefits including public access (where agreed), climate mitigation and helping to tackle air pollution.

11.31 There are two LoGS within the Basildon Borough which were ratified in November 2024. They are Vange Hills Brick Pit and Norsey Woods Nature Reserve.

POLICY NE1: Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

1. Development proposals will be supported where they protect and enhance international, national, and/or locally designated sites of importance for nature conservation, ecological and/or geological value.
2. The Council will ensure that, where appropriate, development delivering net additional dwellings or net non-residential floor space (100 square metrers or more) takes a positive approach to enhancing, protecting, and creating an inclusive and integrated network of high-quality green and blue infrastructure, in line with the principles and standards of the *Essex Green Infrastructure Standards* (2022), or any subsequent strategy.
3. The appropriate tariff will be secured from qualifying residential developments within the Zones of Influence, as defined in the adopted *Essex Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy* (RAMS), towards mitigation measures identified in the RAMS. Other contributions will be sought in accordance with Policy INF1.
4. Developments which lie within the defined Essex Coast Habitats Zone of Influence must:
    a. Carry out a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA), including an Appropriate Assessment;

       In addition to 4.1, if the allocation would have 'alone' impacts the following must be satisfied:

    b. Deliver Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) at a rate of 8ha/1000 new population (using ONS data of 2.4 people per dwelling);
    c. Master plan the SANG for the development site at an early stage of the development process to ensure that the requirement can be delivered on-site, or by providing financial contributions to an off-site location within the specified catchment area;
    d. Deliver the SANG prior to first occupation of the first phase of new dwellings; and
    e. Ensure the SANG provision and in-perpetuity management of the site is agreed with the Local Planning Authority in consultation with Natural England via their pre-application Charged Advice Service.
5. Development located within Natural England's Impact Risk Zones for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI IRZs) must provide an Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) to assess the impact of the development on the nearby SSSI and to determine whether any mitigation measures are required.
6. Development within 10km of a Habitat site, which is situated on land which could be used by SPA bird species or assemblages as Functionally Linked Land (FLL), must provide a Functionally Link Land Assessment to assess the likelihood of the application site and/or adjacent land being Functionally Linked to Habitats Sites.

7. Unless exempt, development proposals must provide a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain above the existing ecological baseline value of the site, or any subsequent government standard. This must be calculated and reported in accordance with local and national best practice guidance prevailing at the time of the application and secured for a minimum of 30 years after completion.
8. Development is required to protect and enhance biodiversity through:
    a. Demonstrating biodiversity enhancements that contribute to the objectives of the latest *Basildon Council Local Biodiversity Action Plan*;
    b. Undertaking a Biodiversity Survey and Report if protected/Priority habitats and species are likely to be present on site that would be affected by the proposed development. This assessment must form part of the planning application;
    c. Protecting and increasing the provision of trees by:
        i. protecting all trees, including street trees;
        ii. incorporating native trees, wherever possible;
        iii. providing replacement trees, including street trees, where the loss of or impact on trees in a development is considered acceptable;
        iv. including clear establishment and maintenance standards; and
        v. following standing advice from Natural England and the Forestry Commission on ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees.
    d. The design of any new development will be expected to incorporate beneficial biodiversity features, including but not limited to: swift boxes, bat or bird boxes, swift, bat and bee bricks, passageways to prevent access to roadways, wildlife kerbs, and gaps in the bases of garden fences to facilitate the movement of native wildlife, or the creation and connection of wildlife corridors through landscaping or other means.
9. The Council will ensure that development proposals demonstrate how they have had regard to the LNRS to support effective nature recovery and have avoided harm to identified opportunity areas.
10. Development must protect, conserve, and enhance the Borough's landscape character and local distinctiveness in accordance with the *Basildon Borough Landscape Sensitivity Assessment* 2025, *Landscape Sensitivity Study* (2025), and *Green Belt Study* (2025), or any subsequent reviews. Proposals should maintain:
    a. The landscapes historical, biodiversity, and cultural features, scenic quality, condition and tranquillity;
    b. The distinctive setting of, and relationship between, settlements, buildings, and the landscape, including important views, landmarks and the degree of openness;
    c. The nature conservation value of

the area, including the composition, pattern, and extent of woodland, trees, field boundaries, vegetation and other features;

d. The recreational value of the landscape;

e. The special qualities of rivers, waterways, wetlands, and their surroundings; and

f. The existing topography including sensitive skylines, hillsides, and geological features.

11. The Council will seek the conservation and enhancement of Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) and Local Geological Sites (LoGS) and will support proposals which ensure the active management and improvement of biodiversity and geodiversity interest at these sites.

12. For urban and brownfield sites, development proposals should apply the Urban Greening Factor (UGF) to quantify and secure high-quality greening measures that deliver biodiversity net gain, climate resilience, and health benefits. Proposals are also encouraged to use Natural England's Environmental Benefits from Nature Tool to assess and demonstrate the wider environmental and social benefits of nature-based solutions.

Reasoned Justification

11.32 The Borough is close to Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) around the South Essex coastline, as well as Ramsar sites at Benfleet and Southend Marshes, in the Roach and Crouch Estuaries. These sites benefit from high levels of protection under international and European legislation. There is therefore a legal requirement to ensure that the growth arising from this Plan does not place unmanaged pressure on these areas.

11.33 Local green and blue infrastructure can make a vital contribution to quality of place, biodiversity, and health outcomes. High-quality green and blue infrastructure should be used to protect, enhance, and create wildlife corridors to maintain ecological connectivity.

11.34 The Essex Coast RAMS is a long-term strategic approach designed to lessen the impact of local housing development on protected birds along the Essex coast. It aims to prevent bird and habitat disturbance from recreational activities through a series of mitigation measures that encourage visitors to enjoy the coast responsibly. A detailed programme of strategic avoidance and mitigation measures, funded by developer contributions from all qualifying residential development within the Zones of Influence, is defined in the adopted RAMS.

11.35 Depending on the size and location, residential development which attracts the Essex Coast RAMS tariff is likely to need to provide additional mitigation in the form of a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), in accordance with the Natural England SANG Guidelines (2021), to account for impacts of residential development taken 'alone' on Internationally designated sites (Habitats Sites). This requirement reflects the evidence from the recent Visitor Survey update undertaken by Footprint Ecology. The impact of residential development on Internationally designated sites; Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar sites will need to consider the site's conservation objectives by carrying out a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) which includes an Appropriate Assessment on the site's conservation objectives to assess the potential adverse impacts of recreational disturbance, loss or disturbance of Functionally Linked Land (up to 10km from the Habitats Sites) and any other relevant pathways of impact. Where necessary to assess the likelihood of the application site and/or adjacent land being Functionally Linked to Habitats Site, a desk-based study covering the last 5 years of bird surveys, using local records, shall be undertaken and unless FLL can be ruled out, a wintering bird survey (two full seasons) including nocturnal surveys will be required for the application site and all suitable adjacent fields.

11.36 Development within 10km of a Habitats site, which is situated on land which could be used by SPA bird species or assemblages as Functionally Linked Land (FLL), requires a desk-based study covering the last 5 years, using local records, to be undertaken. Unless FLL can be ruled out, a wintering bird survey (two full seasons) including nocturnal surveys will be required; Natural England generally advocates the use of NatureScot (SNH) bird survey methodologies. The desk-based study should cover the last 5 years (if possible) such as WeBS counts, information from Essex Field Club, BTO, RSPB, local records centres and local recorders.

11.37 LPAs have a duty to consult Natural England before granting planning permission on any development that is in or likely to affect a SSSI. The SSSI IRZs are used to consider if a proposed development is likely to affect a terrestrial SSSI and those SACs, SPAs or Ramsar sites that they underpin and when to consult Natural England to seek advice.

11.38 The Council expects the requirements for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) to be provided within the application site boundary to ensure biodiversity is maintained in new development and to prevent the removal of biodiversity from developed areas. Only where it can be clearly demonstrated that BNG cannot be adequately achieved on-site will off-site provision or a financial contribution towards Biodiversity Credits be considered as a last resort. Off-site measures will be expected to be in reasonable proximity to the development, strategically located for nature conservation, and informed by local and national guidance and data, including the Essex LNRS.

11.39 The *Basildon Borough Local Biodiversity Action Plan* includes a proposed 5-year action plan setting out a range of objectives aimed at conserving and enhancing biodiversity across the Borough.

11.40 Natural England and Forestry Commission 'standing advice' for ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees is a material planning consideration for local planning authorities (LPAs). Ancient woodland, ancient trees and

veteran trees are irreplaceable. Therefore, proposed compensation measures cannot be considered acceptable as part of the assessment of the merits of the development proposal.

11.41 Local Plans should align their objectives and policies with the goals and priorities outlined in the Essex LNRS, ensuring that nature recovery considerations are integrated into land-use planning decisions and that development activities support them.

11.42 New development should include measures to encourage biodiversity by creating varied habitats and a rich diversity of trees and planting throughout the built environment, as well as providing nesting boxes and other spaces for birds and bats.

11.43 There are four Living Landscape areas within the Borough, identified as part of the *Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts Living Landscape Project* (2010). These are Langdon Hills, South Essex Marshes, Nevendon Mosaic, and Upper Crouch. Living Landscapes are large-scale areas of the countryside that are ecologically stable and rich in wildlife. Their scale and diversity provide a range of habitats for many species of wild plants and animals, bringing a quality of life for local people who are part of them.

11.44 Sites identified as having nature conservation at a county level are known as Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS). The identification of these sites enables Basildon Council to comply with the NPPF requirements.

11.45 The *Basildon Local Wildlife Sites Review* (2021) and the *Basildon Borough Local Wildlife Sites 2020 Register* (2021) considered the existing Local Wildlife Sites contained within the *Basildon Local Wildlife Sites Register* (2009). These were reassessed, along with potential new sites, against the *Essex Local Wildlife Selection Criteria* (2016). Sites that no longer met the criteria were removed from the Local Wildlife Sites register, and any new sites which now met the criteria were added. It was also considered that potential Local Wildlife Sites be identified within the Local Plan through the Local Wildlife Sites policy to encourage active conservation and enhancement where possible.

11.46 Two Local Geological Sites (LoGS) have been ratified in the Borough by Essex Local Sites Partnership under NPPF provisions: Norsey Wood Nature Reserve and Vange Hall Brickworks Pit. These are sites of geological interest with potential for geological education. Any significant excavations in the reserves should be recorded.

Policy Links

- SG1 - Growth Needs
- EMP4 - Rural Enterprise Sites
- HOU1 - Size, Type and Quality of New Housing
- CC1 - Responding to Climate Change
- D2 - Major Developments - Design
- D3 - Design in Smaller Scale Projects
- HE1 - Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment

Evidence Links

- Basildon Local Wildlife Site Review (2021)
- Basildon Local Wildlife Sites Register (2021)
- Essex Green Infrastructure Strategy Standards (2022)
- Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (2025)
- Essex Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy 2018 – 2038 (RAMS) (2018)
- Basildon Borough Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Part One - Introduction & Methodology (November 2025)
- Basildon Borough Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Part Two - Housing Sites (November 2025)
- Basildon Borough Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Part Three - Employment, Alternative and Infill Sites (November 2025)
- Basildon Borough Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Local Plan Addendum to consider Site Options at Crays Hill and Land North of Dry Street (April 2026)
- Basildon Green Belt Study (2025)
- Policy Map

Green Belt

11.47 The primary aim of Green Belt designation is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open, as such, the Council places great importance on protecting this. The Metropolitan Green Belt serves five purposes, which are to:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

11.48 Designated Green Belt covers 63% of land in the Borough and is therefore a key feature of Basildon Borough's character and green infrastructure. It plays with a key role in shaping its settlement and development patterns and forms an important element of the Borough's character. It is an asset which is highly valued by local people and has wider strategic significance across South Essex. Our Green Belt includes agricultural land, woodland, open space, country parks, designated areas for wildlife, and a large area of the Thames Estuary's coastal grazing marshland.

11.49 In February 2025, the Government published an update to its national planning guidance on Green Belt, clarifying the concept of Grey Belt Land within the Green Belt framework. The guidance outlines how to identify Grey Belt Land and assess its suitability for development, emphasising that it comprises previously developed land or other land that does not strongly contribute to Green Belt purposes. This new guidance has been incorporated into an updated *Green Belt Study 2025* and fed into the Green Belt and Site Allocation policies within the *Draft Local Plan Regulation 18, part 3* public consultation.

11.50 When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. As the NPPF advises, most forms of development in the Green Belt are considered 'inappropriate development', save for a few limited exceptions.

11.51 The NPPF 2024 introduced the definition of Grey Belt, describing it as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that does not strongly contribute to the Green Belt purposes of: (a) checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; (b) preventing neighbouring towns merging into one another; or (d) preserving the setting and special character of historic towns. 'Grey belt' excludes land where policies relating to designated areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.

11.52 Where a site is identified as Grey Belt through a planning application, it generally remains in the Green Belt, but for the purposes of this Plan, Grey Belt is not a specific designation.

POLICY GB1: Protecting the Green Belt

1. The extent of the Green Belt is defined on the Policies Map.
2. Land designated as Green Belt will be protected against inappropriate development.
3. Where weight is to be given to the benefits of a proposal advanced under Very Special Circumstances, the Council will expect that the delivery of these benefits is shown to be viable and is secured by planning conditions or a legal agreement.

Reasoned Justification

11.53 The Government's approach to Green Belt policy is set out in the NPPF. Development in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate, except for the specific exceptions defined in the NPPF or where 'Very Special Circumstances' are demonstrated to justify a departure from policy.

Policy Links

- SG2 - Settlement Hierarchy
- SG3 - Spatial Distribution of Growth
- EMP1 - Securing Economic Growth
- D4 - Advertisements
- GB2 - New Development in the Green Belt
- INF5 – Digital Infrastructure

Evidence Links

- Basildon Green Belt Study (2025)
- Policy Map

New Development in the Green Belt

11.54 Within the Green Belt, there is a general presumption against inappropriate development except where very special circumstances exist. Not all forms of development are inappropriate in the Green Belt, and the NPPF sets out categories of development that are not considered inappropriate. Very special circumstances are defined in the NPPF as being when the potential harm to the Green Belt, by way of inappropriateness or other impacts, is clearly outweighed by other material considerations. Local planning authorities must give substantial weight to any harm to the Green Belt when considering planning applications.

POLICY GB2: New Development in the Green Belt

1. Within the Green Belt, inappropriate development (as set out in the NPPF) will not be approved except in very special circumstances.
2. Development will not be treated as inappropriate in the Green Belt if it meets an exception set out in paragraph 154 (a) (b) (e) or (h) of the NPPF 2024, and/or the terms of paragraph 155 of the NPPF 2024 and/or meets one or more of the following exceptions:
    a. Dwellings associated with an agricultural, forestry or rural based enterprise, provided the Council is satisfied that accommodation for one or more workers to live at, or in the immediate vicinity of, their place of work is essential for the proper functioning of the enterprise. Applicants must submit evidence to identify and confirm the need.
    b. Limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan, meeting the requirements set out in policy HOU2.The Council will assess applications based on:
        i. whether there is clear evidence, supplied by the applicant, of need for the number and type of housing proposed within the Village or Parish; and
        ii. whether the allocation is adjacent to a Defined Settlement Boundary and accessible to local services and facilities; and
        iii. whether appropriate legal agreements are entered into to ensure that all dwellings will remain available for affordable housing, and exclusively for local need, in perpetuity, and that the necessary management of the scheme can be permanently secured; and
        iv. whether there are any other overriding environmental or other planning constraints.
    c. Limited infilling or the partial/complete redevelopment of previously developed land (including a material change of use to residential or mixed use including residential), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
    d. The Council will assess the development based on the following:
        i. the size, scale, massing, and spread of the new development compared to the existing; the visual impact of the development compared to the existing;
        ii. the activities/use of the new development compared to the existing; and
        iii. whether the location of the site is sustainable and appropriate to the type of development proposed.

    Planning permission for the proposed developments in

paragraphs 2, 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 above (treated as not inappropriate in the Green Belt) will be granted where there are no other harms outweighing the grant of planning permission.

3. Replacement of a building in the Green Belt will be granted planning permission provided that:

   a. the existing building being replaced is of permanent and sustainable construction, and is lawful;

   b. the new building is in the same use as the existing; and

   c. the new building is not materially larger than the one it replaces; and

   d. the new building would not be out of keeping with its context and surroundings and does not result in any other harm.

   In accordance with NPPF paragraph 154 (d), a replacement building will not be treated as inappropriate development in the Green Belt provided that it is in the same use as the existing building and will not be materially larger than the one it replaces.

   In respect of replacement of a building in the Green Belt, where very special circumstances are required to be demonstrated, and development is exceptionally permitted within the Green Belt, the Council will seek to remove permitted development rights for any further works to the proposed development or to works within its curtilage, where it is likely that further development would cause harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

REMOVAL OF PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

4. In respect of limited infilling in villages, where development proposals are permitted as infill within the Green Belt, the Council will seek to remove relevant permitted development rights to ensure that extensions, alterations, and ancillary buildings would not result in the development causing harm to the character or the openness of the Green Belt.

5. For development proposals within plotland sites, the above paragraphs 1-4 are applicable as well as the design principles in policy D3. Additionally, the development will:

   a. Be subject to design guidance in a forthcoming *Plotlands Planning Document* (SPD);

   b. Provide contributions through a Community Infrastructure Levy regime (CIL) and, where appropriate, be secured by legal agreement.

Reasoned Justification

11.55 Within the NPPF, the Government attaches great importance to protecting Green Belt land. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. However, this is not a moratorium on development. Green Belt boundaries can be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified through the preparation or updating of Local Plans.

11.56 The NPPF identifies a range of circumstances where exemptions apply, and development is deemed 'not inappropriate'. In the case of plotland sites, key existing infrastructure in these locations, such as roads, drainage, lighting is of poor quality. As such, CIL contributions will be charged for new development at these sites to support necessary improvements and essential infrastructure. Where necessary, infrastructure obligations will be secured by legal agreement.

Policy Links

- SG2 - Settlement Hierarchy
- SG3 - Spatial Distribution of Growth
- EMP1 - Securing Economic Growth
- EMP4 - Rural Enterprise Sites
- HOU1 - Size, Type and Quality of New Housing
- HOU2 - Affordable Housing
- HOU5 - Travelling Showpeople Accommodation
- CC6 - Renewable & Low Carbon Energy Infrastructure
- D3 - Design in Smaller Scale Projects
- D4 - Advertisements
- GB1 - Protecting the Green Belt
- INF1 - Infrastructure Delivery
- INF2 - Securing Infrastructure Contributions

Evidence Links

- Basildon Green Belt Study (2025)
- Plotlands Potential Growth Study (2024)

