

Stort Valley Feasibility Study

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[Stort Valley Feasibility Study]

Checked by Project Manager:	Approved by:
Signature:	Signature:
Name: Laura Smith	Name: Christopher Stratton
Title: Environmental Planner	Title: Director
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The Landscape Partnership is registered with the Landscape Institute, the Royal Town Planning Institute, and is a member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment

The Landscape Partnership

Registered office
Greenwood House
15a St Cuthberts Street
Bedford
MK40 3JB

Registered in England No. 2709001

Natural England
GO East
East of England Development Agency
The Forestry Commission
The Environment Agency
British Waterways
Hertfordshire County Council
Essex County Council
East Hertfordshire District Council
Harlow District Council
Lee Valley Park
Essex Wildlife Trust
Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust
Groundwork
Sustrans
Green Arc

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Part 1: Supporting text

Summary

The purpose of this feasibility study is to draw together and supplement existing data relating to the study area, consider the priorities and activities of the key stakeholders in the locality and recommend future actions and how these can be achieved.

The feasibility study also does the following:

- Assesses the scope to deliver the vision
- Researches and maps land ownership
- Captures the map details of existing projects
- Considers existing policies and recommends new policies
- Makes recommendations for further consultation

The key themes investigated by the study are:

- Determine whether the Stort Valley can retain its natural landscape character, and at the same time have capacity for integrating a range of other uses.
- Consider the feasibility of conserving and enhancing landscape, biodiversity and the historic environment (safeguarding landscape character types and grazing regimes via appropriate land management, protect and enhance local BAP habitats and species and respect the historic environment).
- Explore the broad principles of achieving greater public access, both in terms of increased provision and outreach to the local community, with associated benefits for social inclusion and economic regeneration, respecting the ecology, landscape character, the historic environment and the rural economy of the area.
- Consider the options and mechanisms for taking forward the actions from this study.

The vision for the Stort Valley is based on the Harlow Green Infrastructure Plan (See Figure 1) and on the consultation undertaken in the preparation of this study (See Appendix 1), particularly the steering group meeting held on the 12th October 2006, at which the steering group identified their priorities for the Stort Valley.

Vision

To protect the integrity of the Stort valley, whilst optimising the areas multifunctional landscape value through:

- Providing appropriate opportunities for recreation, considering both existing and potential user groups to encourage social inclusion.
- Conserving the working natural character of the valley, with a commitment to landowner involvement.
- Facilitating habitat creation, enhancement and restoration and encouraging access to biodiversity.
- Ensuring proactive green belt policies for recreation, nature conservation, public access and farming.
- Protecting and enhancing water quality.
- Provide broad guidance that would help to inform a future Local Development Document(LDD) to ensure that any future development is integrated sensitively and respects the key characteristics of the Stort Valley
- Improving public access to the Stort Valley where appropriate, particularly from the deprived wards.

Figure 9 displays the project vision for strategic access and open space, detailing the existing open access areas, proposed open access areas and key greenway and access links in **the** context of the major settlements in the study area. The existing open access areas key to **the** feasibility study include Hatfield Forest, Pishiobury Park and Harlow Town Park. There is potential to improve access to the north of Harlow and in Bishop's Stortford. The existing nature reserves owned by Essex Wildlife Trust and Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust also provide strategic open space and enable strategic access.

1 Introduction, background, purpose and key themes

1.1 Introduction

Harlow District Council commissioned this study on behalf of the stakeholders represented on the Stort Valley Steering Group. The Stort Valley, upstream from its confluence with the River Lea in Hertfordshire, has been identified as an area of key importance to the environmental infrastructure of the greater Harlow area, both in terms of its existing valuable assets, and also for the opportunities it offers for the multifunctional use of land close to large centres of population.

The Harlow Area Green Infrastructure Plan (GIP) -November 2005 has, as one of its key recommendations, the 'creation of a new strategic park in the Stort Valley, as an extension to the Lee Valley Regional Park'. The plan suggests that the proposals would 'enable the creation of a new and substantial green space asset for the Harlow area'. The proposal would provide a strategic coordinated approach to the management of ecological, landscape, heritage, access and recreation of the Lea and Stort river corridors, as key components of the green infrastructure network.

A group of stakeholders held a workshop on 16th May 2006 to explore further this recommendation. After teasing out the various issues, they decided that the next step in taking forward this suggestion is the preparation of a feasibility study.

1.2 Background information/context

The draft East of England Plan recommends that the Harlow area receive a high level of growth in the period up to 2021, to aid its regeneration. The broad locations for this growth were debated at the Examination in Public, and the Inspectors Report was published in June 2006. The Local Development Frameworks will then translate the final East of England Plan policies at a local level. The existing high value environment of the area, and the key importance of minimising the environmental impact of new growth and maximising the opportunities it offers to create new assets, were key messages that came through the Examination in Public and in the Inspectors Report.

Two important studies were carried out to inform and influence the preparation of and consultation on the draft East of England Plan. These are:

- Harlow Landscape and Environment Study 2004

This study sought to identify the key landscape and environmental assets, and to assess their sensitivity to change, in order to inform strategic decisions on the location and shape of future growth in the Harlow area. The study includes a detailed analysis of Harlow's fringes, including the Stort Valley to the north. The data collected and its analysis then informed the development of the green infrastructure network in the Harlow Area Green Infrastructure Plan (GIP).

- Harlow Area Green Infrastructure Plan 2005

This study, also 100% funded by ODPM and prepared by Chris Blandford Associates, was part of a package of green space projects supported by the Department of Communities and Local Government under their Growth Area Fund and delivered by a partnership of local organisations between 2004 and 2006. The Green Infrastructure Plan provides an exciting vision and a strategic framework for integrated environmental planning across 310 sq.km, centred on Harlow. The proposed green infrastructure network emerged through analysis of multiple layers of up to date data on ecological, historical, landscape and recreational assets. Gaps and opportunities in the ecological and recreational networks within their landscape setting were identified, and importantly the Green Infrastructure Plan recognises that the land resource can accommodate a range of issues. The Green Infrastructure Plan comprises two volumes: The green infrastructure network and developer guidelines. Volume one also contains the ecological data captured from the target habitat survey work carried out in 2005. The Green Infrastructure Plan and its supporting documents will be a valuable source of information and a tool to guide landowners, planners, developers and others in assessing the impacts of land use change. It is of value both at the site masterplanning scale and at a wider strategic level.

The first location identified as a priority is the Stort Valley. The Stort Valley is also seen as a priority area for the Green Arc Initiative and it links in with projects being implemented by several partners in the Stort and Lea Valleys, supported by the CLG Growth Areas Fund award for 2006-2008, and steered by the Harlow Area Green Spaces Partnership, managed by Groundwork Hertfordshire.

Natural England (who chair the GIP steering group) organised a facilitated stakeholder discussion on 16th May 2006, to explore the plan proposals. All the main stakeholders thought to have an interest in the valley were invited and there was an excellent response. The people attending are listed in the note of consultation, which forms Appendix 1. At this stage landowners and more local interest and community groups were not invited. This feasibility study makes recommendations for consultation with these key groups and was jointly funded by EEDA, the Forestry Commission, Harlow District Council and Green Arc.

1.3 Purpose of study

The purpose of this feasibility study is to draw together and supplement existing data relating to the study area, consider the priorities and activities of the key stakeholders in the locality and recommend future actions and how these can be achieved.

The feasibility study also does the following:

- Assesses the scope to deliver the vision
- Researches and begins to map land ownership
- Captures and maps details of existing projects
- Considers existing policies and recommends new policies
- Makes recommendations for further consultation

The objectives of the feasibility study were derived from the conclusions of the facilitated stakeholder discussion on 16th May 2006. The consultation meeting recommended the following issues as fundamental to the study:

- Agreeing definitions
- Supporting the character of the place
- Visual and physical access
- Community engagement
- Resolving conflicts of interest within the stakeholder partnership

The main issues to be considered by this feasibility study are as follows:

- Definition of the area of study
- Definition of the edges and the relationship with existing green space
- The dominant focus should be as a natural landscape, offering great opportunities for multifunctionality, with other uses complimenting the natural characteristics
- Complement the focus of the Lee Valley Regional Park
- Create natural character which links to adjacent land
- Determine whether the term 'Riverpark', identified within the GIP, constrains the vision
- Consider visual and physical access to the valley
- Consider the role of community engagement
- Discuss the conflicts of interest between the stakeholders
- Explore and map developer interests
- Consider the role and use of the waterway
- Determine the need for built visitor facilities
- Consider communications, transport links and footpaths

In summary, the purpose of this feasibility study is to draw together and supplement existing data relating to the study area, consider the priorities and activities of the key stakeholders in the locality and recommend future actions and how these can be achieved.

1.4 Study area

An early priority was to try and define more precisely the geographical extent of the area to be included in the 'Stort valley'. Should it be just the river and its floodplain, or the flood plain and parts of the valley sides? How far upstream should the study area extend from the confluence with the River Lea?

It is recommended that the study area should extend upstream including Bishops Stortford, and include the valley sides to explore the potential for greenway linkages. A concise boundary has not been defined, as it is important to consider projects and priorities with an impact on the Stort Valley, in addition to those within the valley. Of particular importance is the relationship between the Stort Valley and the existing Harlow Town Park and the Lee Valley Regional Park, in addition to the impact of projects in the Stort Valley on future initiatives within these adjoining parks. The feasibility study provides an opportunity to determine how the Stort Valley can compliment and link into these valuable areas of green space.

1.5 Key themes and issues which this study will investigate

The key themes to emerge from the issues listed in 1.3 above are:

- Determine whether the Stort Valley can retain its natural landscape character, and at the same time have capacity for integrating a range of other uses.
- Consider the feasibility of conserving and enhancing landscape, biodiversity and the historic environment (safeguarding landscape character types and grazing regimes via appropriate land management, protect and enhance local BAP habitats and species and respect the historic environment).
- Explore the broad principles of achieving greater public access, both in terms of increased provision and outreach to the local community, with associated benefits for social inclusion and economic regeneration, respecting the ecology, landscape character, the historic environment and the rural economy of the area.
- Consider the options and mechanisms for taking forward the actions from this study.

2 Information gathering and evaluation

2.1 Process and methodology

The study builds on the work carried out to produce the Harlow Green Infrastructure Plan (GIP) 2005, which guides the production of the Local Development Frameworks in the locality. The GIP and influencing policy documents form the basis of the policy context. The policy documents have been reviewed and the green infrastructure and green space policies considered in the context of the opportunities and constraints within the Stort Valley. Recommendations have been made for new policy to influence the emerging Local Development Frameworks (See Section 6.8).

The stakeholder consultation carried out on 16th May 2006, the issues raised in the individual interviews described in Appendix 2 and the outcomes of the inception meeting informed the study area appraisal. A site visit was carried out to review the study area.

A sample of the landownership in the locality has been mapped (See Figure 5). We were unable to obtain information from Natural England due to data availability and confidentiality. The key landowners and tenants were invited to attend a group meeting (See Appendix 2). Information on landownership was obtained at this meeting and it is recommended that additional landownership data be obtained through further consultation. The landowner meeting was used to determine their subscription to, and future interest in, Higher Level Stewardship. We were unable to obtain further data on environmental stewardship as Natural England could not release confidential data and the map data provided was incompatible with the Arc View GIS programme used to produce the maps (See Figure 4).

The existing projects within the study area and linked green space have been identified and mapped (See Figure 7). The data has been obtained from the steering group members and the quality of these datasets reflects the information provided. The green space initiatives outside of the study area, within the adjacent urban areas and the Lea and Stort River Corridors, have been identified to determine how the Stort Valley compliments and contributes to the wider network of green space. The developer interests in the locality have been identified and mapped in the form of land ownership, options, planning applications and allocated sites. In some cases this data was difficult to obtain due to issues of confidentiality and the delay in the East of England Plan process (See Figure 6).

The review of existing projects and land uses within the study area has identified opportunities for a multifunctional landscape. Recommendations for appropriate land uses and projects have been explored, focusing on social, economic and environmental issues. The process of consolidating information has been time consuming, as different organisations have provided information with a different emphasis. Strategic access links and accessible green space have been mapped to identify the current accessibility of the Stort Valley and opportunities for enhancement (See Figure 8 and Figure 9). The role of the waterway has been explored in consultation with British Waterways and the Environment Agency.

Environmental opportunities and constraints have been mapped based on the Figures set out within the Harlow GIP 2005. Landscape Character Areas 81, 82 and 83 of the Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment are located within the study area. The relevant objectives within these areas (which are listed in Appendix 6) have been considered in proposals for the creation of natural character linking to adjacent land.

A consultation strategy has been prepared, building on the Stort Valley Stakeholder Consultation carried out 16th May 2006, defining the required community engagement and input. Consultation has been completed with individual members of the steering group and a few local farmers and landowners. The consultation strategy is focused on encouraging greater equity, diversity and usage of the Stort Valley, making recommendations to involve those that do not normally participate in the process. Delivery is the focus of the feasibility study and a strategy for implementation is presented, with appropriate mechanisms of delivery appraised.

2.2 Planning policy context

The relevant planning policy documents were researched and are detailed within Appendix 2. The pertinent policies and guidance produced by national government include PPS7: Sustainable development in rural areas, which seeks to improve the quality and sustainability of local environments, whilst protecting valued landscapes and natural resources, PPS9: Biodiversity and geological conservation, which states that biological and geological diversity should be sustained and enhanced as an integral part of social, environmental and economic development and PPS25: Development and Flood Risk, which sets out Government policy on development and flood risk. PPG17: Open space, sport and recreation, states that the provision of these is fundamental to the delivery of broader government objectives.

At the regional level policies ENV1 (Environmental infrastructure) and ST1 (Spatial strategy for the M11 corridor) in the Draft East of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy provide support for a safeguarded and extended network of multifunctional green space in the Stort Valley. The Secretary of State's proposed changes to the draft East of England Plan were subject to twelve weeks public consultation up to 9th March 2007. The Secretary of State has recommended that there should be a stronger focus on Harlow as a strategic growth location, with a green belt review to its north and the housing target increased by 2,500 to 16,000. Local Development Documents should provide for a total of 16,000 additional dwellings between 2001 and 2021 including urban extensions into Epping Forest and East Hertfordshire Districts. The Green Belt will be reviewed to accommodate the urban extensions. New green belt boundaries will be drawn so as to maintain its purposes, specifically to maintain the integrity of the principles of the Gibberd Plan and landscape setting of Harlow and the physical and visual separation of the town from smaller settlements to the west and north. The review to the north should provide for an eventual development of at least 10,000 dwellings and possibly significantly more, of a large enough scale to be a model of sustainable development.

If this proposal is accepted then the planning of this major growth must act as a delivery vehicle for the implementation of the Green Infrastructure Plan for the Harlow area in the Stort Valley. The Draft East of England Plan proposals already outline the need for Local Development Documents to provide for the creation and maintenance of a network of green spaces within and around the town, taking forward the Green Infrastructure Plan for Harlow. Policy HA1 (4) of the Secretary of States Proposed Changes outlines that opportunities should be taken to retain and make use of attractive existing environmental features within green infrastructure provided within the urban extensions. The Stort Valley represents a major such opportunity.

The planning policies relevant to the Stort Valley Feasibility Study at the local level include East Hertfordshire Re-deposit Local Plan, November 2004, which will replace the Adopted Local Plan 1999 and Harlow Adopted Local Plan 2006.

East Hertfordshire Re-deposited Local Plan, due for adoption in April 2007, contains chapters on sustainable development, green belt and countryside, in addition to environment and design. The key policies within these chapters relate to support for biodiversity, landscape and the historic environment, taking a proactive approach to enhancement, whilst safeguarding areas protected for their landscape, historic and biodiversity importance from inappropriate development. The relevant policies aim to safeguard the integrity of landscapes of major importance, such as the Stort Valley, through the implementation of Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Conservation Areas. Working more closely with the Countryside Management Service, Biological Records Centre and County Archaeology department is also a priority.

PPG17 recommends that open space standards are devised at the local level. East Hertfordshire District Council have completed a PPG17 Assessment and their standards for open space comply with the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) standards. Development proposals are required to provide informal open space at a minimum ratio of 0.4 hectares per 1000 population, as set out within the Local Plan Second Review Re-deposit Version, November 2004

The most pertinent policy within the plan is ENV25 which supports proposals that would preserve and/or enhance:

- The ecological value of watercourses
- Nature conservation within water habitats
- River corridor landscape enhancements
- Sustainable leisure use and public access

Harlow Adopted Local Plan 2006 encompasses sustainable development, leisure and culture in addition to the natural environment and natural resources. The relevant policies consider favourably development that would contribute positively to biodiversity, provide sports, leisure or recreation opportunities and respect landscape character. Harlow District Council have prepared a draft Supplementary Planning Document for open space, sport and recreation to comply PPG17, this document sets out an overall standard of 2.09 ha of open space per 1,000 population.

The Epping Forest Adopted Local Plan (1998) and the Local Plan Adopted Alterations (July 2006) both have regard to sustainable development objectives, recreation, sport and tourism, nature conservation and landscape character. Through its policies this Local Plan seeks to protect, enhance and /or provide for nature conservation. The policies state that planning permission will only granted to developments associated with the recreational use of the Stort where landscape character is respected and facilitate an improved network of public access to the countryside.

Epping Forest District Council are preparing new Open Space Standards as part of the ongoing LDF process, these are anticipated to be available by Autumn 2007 (subject to funding). However, the adopted Local Plan states that "new residential developments on large sites will be required to provide public open space which is appropriate to the scale of development, of adequate size and suitably located within the network".

2.3 The Harlow Area Green Infrastructure Plan (GIP) and 'riverpark' terminology

'A green infrastructure plan for the Harlow area' was prepared in 2005. It provides an exciting vision and a strategic framework for the implementation of a connected and multifunctional network of green spaces and links within and around Harlow. This Stort Valley Feasibility Study is a daughter document of the GIP, using relevant data sets collected for the GIP and the Figures set out within the GIP. The feasibility study takes forward/challenges the recommendations from the GIP (See Section 1.2).

The green infrastructure network sets out a typology of strategic green spaces and links, including the concept of a 'strategic park'. The GIP proposes a new linear strategic park called the Stort Riverpark. Para 3.4.5 states that this 'should be established through the acquisition of land along the Stort Valley between the Lee Valley Regional Park and Bishop's Stortford, to enable the creation of a new and substantial multi-functional green space asset for the Harlow area. This will realise and integrate the opportunities for delivering the green infrastructure network identified in section 2, especially 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7. The feasibility of developing the Stort Riverpark as a formal extension of the Lee Valley Regional Park should be examined, as this would provide a strategic co-ordinated approach to integrated management of ecological, landscape, heritage and access and recreation of the Lee and Stort corridors as key components of the green infrastructure network.'

Section 5 of the GIP focuses on delivery. Project area 1 is the Stort Riverpark, and it sets out a number of recommendations for future actions. Priority projects for North of the Stort, East of the Stort and Harlow Town have emerged a priority projects during the preparation of this study. Please see Figure 9 and project areas 2, 7 and 8 in the Green Infrastructure Plan.

Research undertaken for the GIP included plans of the study area showing land use, statutory and non-statutory ecological and historic designations, existing access, rights of way and potential green links. This information gives an indication of the quality of land in the study area for biodiversity, culture and access. The plans have been included in this study as they can be used to identify areas which may be sensitive to increased activity and opportunities for enhancement. Land which has a designation may impose a constraint on some types of activity, particularly where disturbance or fragmentation is a consequence. Potential 'greenways' show how 'green' paths may link areas of public interest to one another. The Harlow Area Green Infrastructure Plan also includes details of landscape character areas, which have been used to identify the sensitive landscapes in the Stort Valley and highlight areas that could be enhanced (See section 4).

This study was asked to consider the terminology 'riverpark' and its appropriateness for the Stort valley. Discussions with stakeholders have clearly indicated that 'riverpark' is not the best terminology, as the preferred emphasis is on the valley as managed natural landscape, with public access, rather than a 'park' which infers widespread public access and recreation as the dominant land use. The stakeholders' preferred term of 'Stort Valley' is therefore strongly supported, as this is the term by which the area is already known locally.

2.4 Stakeholder consultation outcomes

A key part of this study was to find out the views and aspirations of the stakeholders represented on the newly formed steering group. Some of these had emerged at the May 2006 stakeholder event, and it was important to talk further to the key groups with an interest in the valley, to understand their priorities and potential tensions with other stakeholder interests. Meetings were held with the key stakeholders and a summary of the main issues is set out below, with more detail of these discussions in appendix 1. Face to face interviews were carried out with self selecting participants. Within the time available, an attempt was also made to meet with some of the farmers in the valley, facilitated through the Herts CMS.

Harlow District Council considers that any development in the Stort Valley should contribute to landscape, ecology and recreation provision. Any proposals for the Stort Valley should be linked to the activities currently taking place within Harlow. Social aspects are also a priority to encourage greater access to the valley by more Harlow residents.

Groundwork Hertfordshire require that project viability is a key concern and emphasise the importance of the contribution that the Stort Valley can make to social inclusion.

East Hertfordshire District Council believe that nature conservation and low key recreation pursuits should be promoted in the Stort Valley, maintaining the rural character of the locality. A more coordinated approach is required to implement projects in the Stort Valley.

Hertfordshire County Council highlight the value of the Stort Valley for nature conservation, cultural and historic assets considering the role of biodiversity in the multifunctional landscape. The County Council emphasise the importance of involving farmers and landowners, in addition to obtaining funding to realise projects in the Stort Valley.

Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust emphasises the need to:

Create, restore and link characteristic ecological, hydrological and landscape features to form a fully integrated floodplain corridor.

Realise the full ecological potential of the valley by conserving the present range of species and habitats where appropriate, expand important habitats.

Acknowledge the more natural aspect of the Stort Valley (in contrast to the Lea Valley, which should be protected and enhanced).

Essex Wildlife Trust emphasised looking at points of value along a linear feature and stated that access to biodiversity is important, especially in deprived areas. The project vision can help deliver a number of priority biodiversity targets, including enhancement and protection. As the river valley is flat and river relatively small, to brand something as part of the 'Stort Valley Project' – visual access to the river will be a challenge. It is important to join clusters of sites that are important to wildlife and people. Land use, agriculture and landowners are both very important, especially in the north of the Stort Valley. The trust aspires to gain a sizable land acquisition for wildlife and people.

The Green Arc encompasses the study area, and the Green Arc Partnership believes the Stort Valley to be an essential resource to encourage social inclusion and environmental landscape improvement in the Green Arc area.

Farmers and landowners although scantily represented at the feasibility stage consultation are key to the delivery of projects in the Stort Valley. These groups were given the opportunity to give their views at a workshop including the Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service. Difficulties associated with Countryside Stewardship are a crucial issue as stewardship will be essential in the delivery of projects in the Stort Valley. A constraint identified by landowners was the lack of access to information, which was previously identified in the ADAS report commissioned by the GLA and LDA in 2005 and is being addressed by GreenArc with a series of seminars and events targeting this sector. The complex process of obtaining stewardship funding and the difficulty of accessing an ecologist were also identified as constraints. The Countryside Management Service can provide information, support and advice as can other organisations and it was proposed that an extension of such a service could be fundamental in delivering stewardship within the valley. This extension will require additional income which could be grant aided via Green Arc bidding strategically to funders who require programmes rather than projects.

Evaluation has shown that there is general agreement between the nature conservation organisations over biodiversity targets. The small sample of landowners welcomed environmental initiatives, and, surprisingly, access was not identified as a major issue. The planning officers expressed caution due to the uncertainty in development proposals for the area. Management initiatives are a key priority. The valley floor is viable for livestock grazing, but this has to be accompanied by husbandry, that allows for the safeguarding and enhancement for ecology, landscape and the historic environment.

2.5 Environmental opportunities and constraints

The Stort Valley, as shown on Figures 2A and 2D, has a number of sites with ecological designations, as well as being of high landscape value, both visually and historically. As part of the Feasibility Study, some of the environmental information held for the study area has been updated. Details of statutory sites such as RAMSAR sites, Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are shown on Figure 02A). The Local Nature Reserves (LNR), and Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority habitats, have been obtained from Natural England's interactive website 'Nature on the Map' and listed in Appendix 3. The Wildlife Trusts' reserves are not all designated as LNR, but are all County Wildlife Sites and very important as local nature reserves.

The ecological value of these sites offers both constraints and opportunities. Sites within the Stort Valley, which have a designated status for their biodiversity values, should be protected and access should be managed. Disturbance to sensitive features associated with these sites, such as uncommon habitat and rare/protected species, may have a negative impact on the features for which the sites have designations, and access would have to be designed so as to remove any potential for adverse impact. The Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAP) for Essex and for Hertfordshire have highlighted conservation priority habitat and species for the area. Opportunities to contribute to BAP targets may arise through the creation/restoration of priority habitat and through appropriate land management to benefit listed species. These are discussed further in section 5.

Land holdings within the study area covered by Countryside Stewardship and the new Environmental Stewardship Scheme are indicated on Figure 04. The new Environmental Stewardship Scheme provides incentives for landowners to manage their holdings in an environmentally sensitive manner and offers opportunities for habitat restoration and creation. As Figure 4 shows, a significant proportion of the study area is not under environmental stewardship.

Figure 02B shows the key ecological assets, habitat enhancement areas, habitat creation areas, enhanced habitat linkages and new habitat linkages set out within the Harlow Green Infrastructure Plan. These features require further assessment, and priorities drawn up. These can then be used in targeting landowners, encouraging them to undertake such enhancements through entering into either entry level, or where appropriate, higherlevel stewardship schemes. The Biodiversity Action Plans for Hertfordshire and Essex should provide a framework for and drive all of the conservation activities in the Stort Valley.

The River Stort valley contains various types of wildlife sites, from SSSI to county Wildlife Sites, which form a necklace along the whole length of the valley. Wetland habitats (excluding open water and marshy grassland) in this part of Hertfordshire, (East Herts) cover 34.3 hectares; just 0.07% of the total land area of the district (47,550ha). Marshy grassland covers 93ha. Typically, all unimproved grasslands and most rivers are selected as Wildlife Sites in recognition of their ecological importance.

Wildlife Sites are located within the existing areas of urban fringe and the wider countryside with little connectivity between them other than the river itself. What happens to the sites individually largely depends on their owners, but sometimes partnerships with conservation bodies can be very effective. Equally important is what happens on the intervening agricultural land as this is clearly in the hands of the landowners and agricultural change over the last 50 years has seen major changes in land management, in particular a loss of livestock, both beef and dairy, and an intensification of arable cropping.

Creating a "necklace" of inter-connected wetland sites along the river valley is the ideal or "vision", as stated in the Hertfordshire BAP. This wetland-system should include all existing floodplain meadows with ditches and 'wet' grasslands, which ideally, should be seasonally wetted during the winter months (November-March). Existing grassland and long-term setaside does exist in between the wildlife sites and could, if managed appropriately, join up these sites to form an inter-connecting necklace.

Similarly, convincing landowners to 'better manage' grasslands by grazing, or allow their fields to seasonally inundate, even with raised ground water, may prove difficult, particularly with the loss of livestock and hay meadow management skills and the loss of local livestock markets and slaughter-houses. One possible answer is to form grazing cartels of local graziers, supported by mobile slaughter-systems and local retail outlets with appropriate branding of produce that local people can relate to.

In addition, GAF2 funded GreenArc to assist with the purchase of Amwell Quarry which is close to the Stort valley and may have an effect on biodiversity. GreenArc are also working with EEDA to formulate a LEADER+ style programme to enable farm enterprise to develop in a sustainable way.

2.6 Landscape

The Landscape Character Areas are shown on Figure 2C and described in Appendix 6

The River Stort Valley, Area 12, which relates to the floodplain, forms the spine or continuous core of the valley with five variations of the Stansted and Pishiobury Parklands 10A-D on the northern flank; the Little Hallingbury ridges and slopes (15) on the eastern flank and Harlow (18) and the Roydon and Nazing Plateau 17A to the south west

The land management measures contained within the countryside stewardship initiatives and new environmental stewardship scheme should be capable of delivering land management which not only enhances biodiversity, but also strengthens local distinctiveness within the floodplain e.g. willow management (pollarding), grazing, dyke management and Alder Carr control.

However we anticipate more difficulty within the valley side character areas which tend to contain much more arable land which would benefit from landscape and habitat improvement in order to provide an improved context or setting for the grazing meadows of the valley floor. Existing and some former field boundaries could be strengthened and reinstated to provide a more intimate structure to the landscape particularly where it provides containment or a setting for the Stort Valley.

2.7 Historic environment context

The historic environment context in the locality is set out within Figures 03 and 2D, based on the Harlow Area Green Infrastructure Plan. Any project to implement the Stort Valley vision should preserve and seek to enhance archaeological and historic features and historic landscape characteristics of the project area, whether they be visible features such as earthworks, military sites, historic buildings or settlements, or are sites or features that are hidden below-ground, such as crop marks (visible on aerial photographs) or scatters of archaeological finds such as pottery. All of these historic environment sites, landscapes and features combine together to make the historic environment character of an area, and full details can be provided by Hertfordshire and Essex Historic Environment Records (contacts). Some sites and areas are designated and afforded special protection under planning and other legislation, including Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Registered Historic Parks and Gardens and Conservation Areas.

Historic Environment Record, Environment Department, Hertfordshire County Council, County Hall, Hertford, SG13 8DN

Historic Environment Branch, Environment and Commerce, Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH

2.8 The role and use of the river

The River Stort could be considered the most important feature and asset of the study area. It is important in landscape terms, for its biodiversity interest and of course for the recreational opportunities it offers.

The River Stort Navigation, a tributary of the River Lee was historically made navigable for the transportation of timber and malt to London. Today's use of the River Stort Navigation is mainly for leisure purposes. The Stort Navigation allows the passage of powered boats, particularly narrow boats from the River Lee Navigation to Bishops Stortford.

Commercial trading vessels and community boats also operate on the River Stort: the Canal Boat Project offer cruises for groups of young people and those with special needs and a new restaurant boat, Annie's Launch, operates from Parndon Mill offering a wide range of cruising packages.

Other leisure pursuits on or around the River Stort include canoeing, walking and angling. Improvements have been to the towpath to encourage further recreational use. Events such as sponsored walks and Dragon Boat Racing take place every year.

The River Stort Navigation has one of the highest concentrations of priority BAP habitats in the region. Flooding from the Stort plays an important role within the valley, in the ecology of the traditional grassland systems and floodplain grazing marsh, which is home to several rare species including black poplar. Parts of the floodplain are also designated as 'Sites of Special Scientific Interest' for example Hunsdon Mead, which is botanically rich and includes species such as Green Winged Orchid.

The river also has very good fish populations, including roach, bream, perch, gudgeon, chub and dace and is also a key regional site for the recovering otter population. The river could be important for water voles, except for presence of American mink. Mink control is part of Water Vole Action Plan and is crucial to maintaining water vole populations.

The riparian zone and land immediately adjacent is currently poorly managed for conservation. Vegetation management to maintain the openness of the valley is essential, as are works to the existing rights of way along the watercourse at some locations. Better signage could promote the valley for quiet recreation, whilst also leading recreational users away from the areas that require protection for biodiversity. Commercial recreational activities would be compatible with the visual amenity of the valley, but would not be compatible with biodiversity. Any formal recreational use must be appropriately managed in areas allocated for that use to mitigate the impact on biodiversity.

Hunsdon Mead SSSI is a former flood meadow in the valley bottom, which was traditionally cut for hay under Lammas rules (rules facilitating individual smallholdings), then the aftermath grazed by cattle. In the late 1980s-early 1990s it was noticed that some small areas, which most frequently flooded, were developing a flora more typical of nutrient enrichment (e.g. nettles) at the expense of the species-rich meadow flora. Consequently, low points along the canal towpath have since been built up slightly, in order to reduce the incidence of flooding. Hudson Mead is currently included in the DEFRA list of SSSIs at risk from diffuse pollution.

The issue of poor water quality in some parts of the Stort was first formally recognised in the Environment Agency's Middle Lee Catchment Management Plan (CMP) of 1994 (which included the Stort catchment). This included recognition of the potential role of set-aside land in protecting watercourses from agricultural run-off.

These concerns were subsequently further developed in the Local Environment Agency Plan (LEAP) for the Upper Lee of 2001 (into which the Stort was by then included, following reduction of the Lee from 3 to 2 sub-catchments). The Environmental Overview report for this LEAP (which was produced in May 1999) identified the following sources of pollution:

- Medium to large sewage works at Bishops Stortford and Stansted Mountfitchet (some improvements to latter since made under AMP3);
- At least 3 smaller sewage works on the Stort, plus 3 more on the Pincey Brook;
- Numerous privately-owned package sewage treatment units (mostly in rural areas on tributary headwaters);
- Urban run-off (especially from western Harlow, via Canon's Brook);
- Misuse of drains (disposal of oil, garden chemicals, car washings, etc);
- Agricultural run-off of fertiliser and pesticides (there was a serious herbicide incident in the Stort Navigation a few years ago);
- Occasional oil and de-icing fluid incidents from Stansted airport.

The report also specifically stated that 'Intensive agriculture on riverbanks is a particular concern in the Rib and Stort catchments'; and recommended increased use of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme as a possible means of addressing diffuse agricultural pollution.

2.9 Access and greater community use of the valley

Enhancements to Rights of Way provision through a riverside path and sculpture trail are being delivered through the GAF2 funded partnership, co-ordinated by Groundwork Hertfordshire and delivered by the various partner organisations (See section 5.2). Figure 8 displays accessible green space and deprivation by ward. The most deprived wards in the locality are in North Harlow, and although there is currently an extensive network of green space in this area it is by no means always accessible. This has implications for the Rights of Way Improvement Plan which is currently being prepared, it is hoped that it will be able to address these deficiencies. There is a key opportunity to encourage people into the Stort Valley via initiatives in Harlow Town Park (See section 5.5 and 5.3). The promotion of walking and cycling could also encourage a more diverse range of people into the valley. The Stort Valley Feasibility Study has been assessed using EEDA's Equality and Diversity Assessment Toolkit. The results are provided in Appendix 7.

Hertfordshire County Council has developed and published a county-wide Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP), which can be found at www.hertsdirect.gov.uk. This plan was developed in support of the Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan 2006/11 and seeks to address local needs and demands for access to the Rights of Way network over a 10-year period.

Initially the plan will deliver improvements over a 5-year investment plan through 9 improvement area plans, which have been identified around the major population centres of the county. A draft pilot plan, including action plan has been produced for the Hertford/Ware area of the county. Further area RoWIP's including one covering the geographical area of Bishops Stortford, Sawbridgeworth and the associated hinterland, are being produced in 2007. It is desirable that any Stort Valley Plan eventually includes an action and implementation plan based on the relevant area RoWIP.

2.10 Landowner interests

The study required the mapping of landownerships, as far as time allowed, and the picture is still very limited. These are shown on Figure 5. In addition, Natural England has a map of registered land holdings, from which land ownership can be ascertained. However, it is believed that at least 50% of the land in the valley floor, often in small parcels, is not registered. Therefore finding ownerships will be much more difficult. It is suggested that all stakeholders add to this database of landowners, as and when they find out information.

In Hertfordshire all landholders of wildlife sites are contactable through the Wildlife Sites Partnership and this is a key mechanism for future engagement and support for landowners.

2.11 Developer interests

Partners have provided information on known planning allocations, and these are shown on Figure 06. Housing and employment allocations are set out within East Hertfordshire Local Plan 1999 and Harlow Local Plan 2004. These plans currently form the basis for the consideration of development proposals in the area and are slowly being replaced by Local Development Frameworks within each District. The allocations are primarily within and adjacent to Harlow, Sawbridgeworth and Bishops Stortford.

Any proposals for development should include measures to preserve and enhance landscape character, the historic environment, biodiversity and public access. Development must also make provision for new green spaces and greenway links into the Stort Valley. Funding will be required from developers for improvements associated with development in line with the Stort Valley vision. Guidance for developers should be produced to identify what will be expected where there is an impact on the Stort Valley study area. IT should enable pressures to be identified and designed out, and so to achieve positive benefits related to development. Green Arc has produced a draft guidance document for developers, which is currently under consultation with the local authorities.

The draft East of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy includes proposals for the Stansted M11 sub region. The Secretary of State's proposed changes to the East of England Plan (December, 2006) recommend that Harlow will be a key centre for development and change, stating that development should take place to the north and east of Harlow and to a lesser extent to the south and west (See Figure 06). These future development issues will not be resolved for some time, It is fortunate that the Green Infrastructure Plan has been completed and so with this study will be able to inform the Local Development Documents and lead eventually to developer guidance if any sites are identified for development which would have a bearing on the Stort Valley.

3 Vision and objectives

3.1 Overarching vision

The vision for the Stort Valley is based on the Harlow Green Infrastructure Plan (See Figure 1) and on the consultation undertaken in the preparation of this study (See Appendix 1), particularly the steering group meeting held on the 12th October 2006, at which the steering group identified their priorities for the Stort Valley.

Vision

To protect the integrity of the Stort valley, whilst optimising the areas multifunctional landscape value through:

- Providing appropriate opportunities for recreation, considering both existing and potential user groups to encourage social inclusion.
- Conserving the working natural character of the valley, with a commitment to landowner involvement.
- Facilitating habitat creation, enhancement and restoration and encouraging access to biodiversity.
- Ensuring proactive green belt policies for recreation, nature conservation, public access and farming.
- Protecting and enhancing water quality.
- Provide broad guidance that would help to inform a future LDD to ensure that any future development is integrated sensitively and respects the key characteristics of the Stort Valley
- Improving public access to the Stort Valley where appropriate, particularly from the deprived wards.

Figure 9 displays the project vision for strategic access and open space, detailing the existing open access areas, proposed open access areas and key greenway and access links in the context of the major settlements in the study area. The existing open access areas key to the feasibility study include Hatfield Forest, Pishiobury Park and Harlow Town Park. There is potential to improve access to the north of Harlow and in Bishop's Stortford. The existing nature reserves owned by Essex Wildlife Trust and Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust also provide strategic open space and enable strategic access.

3.2 Objectives

The priorities for the Stort Valley are as follows:

Land management – The River, landscape, biodiversity and the historic environment

- Obtain water quality data to determine how best to use the river as a resource
- Safeguard landscape character types and grazing regimes via appropriate land management, seeking opportunities for protection, restoration and enhancement
- Protect wildlife species and habitats and seek opportunities to enhance biodiversity in line with the Essex, Hertfordshire and Lee Valley Biodiversity Action Plans
- Seek opportunities to protect historic and archaeologically important features
- Functioning agricultural systems, both pastoral and arable, need to be supported and encouraged through Environmental Stewardship (Both Entry Level and Higher Level schemes)
- Encourage participation in the conservation of the River Stort's landscape and habitats.

Public access – Social inclusion and the social context, linked to economic regeneration

- Access and recreation are already reasonably well served within the valley. But improved links are needed, particularly to deprived wards within Harlow. Disabled access also requires improvements, as does the legibility of the valley and access by sustainable modes of transport.
- Consider the implications of significant new housing developments and the likely need for greater access provision.
- Any additional facilities must be well considered and managed and should not cause damage or disturbance to habitats and wildlife
- Encourage those not currently using the countryside into the Stort Valley by means of improved signing, publicity and access links
- Manage countryside access to respect ecology, landscape character, the historic environment and the rural economy
- Raise awareness of the River Stort Valley's special biodiversity and landscape

Management and delivery - Greater coordination between stakeholders and linkages between projects and activities to enhance the Stort Valley profile

- Create effective mechanisms for the delivery of Stort Valley objectives

4 Realising the vision

4.1 Introduction

The information gathering, research and consultation responses set out in section 2 helped inform the vision, and also gave pointers to what needs to happen to help realise that vision. These are described below under several themes:

- Ecology and landscape character enhancement
- Land management opportunities
- Historic environment character enhancement
- Social inclusion and greater public access
- Other recreational opportunities
- Planning and development

Many of these themes are inter-related, but for the purpose of clarity are described separately.

4.2 Ecology and landscape character enhancement

Section 2 has set out the existing ecological and landscape value of the study area, and indicates opportunities for their enhancement, as do Figures 2A, 2B, 2C and 2D. The bullet points below set out the key issues and detailed principles for the delivery of these ambitions..

- The river channel should be emphasised and given greater prominence by the management of regenerating Alder Carr woodland and willow pollarding to provide better views up and down stream and visual links between the river and its flood plain.
- Where the river channel, water meadows and grazing pastures are denuded of tree cover provide some additional planting of appropriate species eg. Willow, Black Poplar and some Alder. But have regard to views, the legibility of the river channel and the need to maintain an appropriate degree of openness.
- Appropriate planting on the valley sides is necessary to reinstate former field boundaries especially within larger arable areas. This will improve the landscape context of the flood plain. This planting could be associated with new greenways and access links.
- Restore the condition of water meadows, grazing pastures
- Revitalize Alder Carr woodland with management to promote natural regeneration
- Footpaths which may effect SSSIs should be designed in consultation with Natural England: visual, noise and physical disturbance may have a negative impact on species and habitats
- Severance of habitats and habitat linkages should be avoided in order to prevent population and habitat fragmentation and to allow continued uninterrupted use of wildlife corridors
- The use of "screening vegetation" should be considered very carefully. Enhancing wooded corridors may not be appropriate in a river valley floodplain; the habitat should be left open, dominated by floodplain meadow grasslands and wetlands. Discrete wet woodlands (alder and willow) in appropriate locations would be acceptable, as are individual trees (pollarded willows)
- Footpaths should provide access throughout. Given the footpath is on one bank, it may be desirable to limit footpath access on the opposite bank

- Avoid additional riverside walks which run along the entirety of the River Stort, particularly in areas where bankside habitat is suitable for disturbance-sensitive species, such as Otter (except the towpath, which already exists). Areas of woodland/scrub adjacent to the river should not be severed from the river by a footpath for this reason
- Changes in ditch management may have a negative impact upon important mollusc populations in the local area, particularly in the vicinity of Sawbridgeworth Marsh. Specialist advice should be sought prior to changes
- Care should be taken to avoid the direct loss of ecologically valuable habitat through footpath creation. Placement of footpaths should be carefully considered on site in consultation with an ecologist, in order that they avoid sensitive or valuable features so as not to lose or inappropriately manage habitat
- The locations of valuable habitats should be carefully identified and safeguarded: it is important not to lose habitat which already has wildlife value
- Creation of wildlife corridors and habitat linkages to connect existing areas of biodiversity interest
- It may be possible to establish a biodiversity network to link in with the Lee Valley Park through:
 - Enhancing wooded corridors, planting of waterside willows and pollarding willows
 - Creating new ditch linkages (buffer ditches for footpaths/SSSI's as above)
 - Re-conversion of arable fields to wet meadows/floodplain grazing marsh and wet woodland – would contribute towards BAP targets and could be funded through HLS
 - Grazing regimes to protect water meadows
 - Management of Carr woodland
- Black poplar planting initiatives in the river valley would contribute to LBAP targets for Essex. It is important to identify appropriate locations with the Wildlife Trust. This could be implemented by Project 3; Pollards and Poplars as detailed in the Project Document
- Incentives available for appropriate ditch management through ELS and HLS could benefit species such water vole, molluscs and other aquatic invertebrates
- Construction of artificial otter holts and the erection of bird boxes, barn owl boxes and bat boxes in appropriate settings may provide some mitigation for impacts resulting from disturbance
- Implementation of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) for site drainage in new developments within the valley could benefit local wildlife, enhance habitat linkages and may contribute to BAP targets, for example for reedbed creation
- Opportunities for ecological recreation/education could be delivered through (appropriate) placing of wildlife watching hides/platforms, boardwalks, interpretation boards and dipping platforms
- Creation/enhancement of 'greenways' to link places of public interest would enhance biodiversity within the Stort Valley, if carefully managed to ensure that greenways for ecology and public access are separated where public access could cause damage to wildlife, optimising the potential for visual enhancements in all greenway linkages. Green links could tie-in with environmental stewardship options such as hedgerow planting/strengthening and arable field margin management. Recycled materials should be utilised for footpath/cycle paths

- Enhancement of the river valley corridor, particularly between Rushy Mead, Thorley Flood Pound SSSI and Sawbridgeworth Marsh SSSI, and between Hunsdon Mead SSSI and Rye Meads SSSI (part of Lee Valley RAMSAR and SPA) would allow interaction between wildlife populations and colonisation of new habitat, reducing the risk of population fragmentation and increasing genetic diversity. Links between County Wildlife Sites, Local Nature Reserves, areas of BAP habitat and other wildlife sites in the local vicinity of the river valley could be implemented through appropriate land management and funded through environmental stewardship and greenways, to extend the network of wildlife corridors
- Implementation of the Action Plan for Wetland Mammals in the Stort Valley (HMWT, 2006)
- Implementation of the Mink Control Strategy for River Stort (Strachan, 2004)

The principles established in the Government's sustainable development strategy¹ acknowledge the important contribution biodiversity makes towards local economies and communities. For example, through tourism, recreation, flood defence, and improved mental and physical health. As such, the Government considers biodiversity a cornerstone of sustainable development and a key indicator of its success in achieving it. Furthermore, local authorities have powers and duties to promote sustainable development enshrined in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which underpins the new planning system. In addition, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 places a legal 'duty to conserve biodiversity' on every public authority. To ensure the Government's aims are delivered locally, e.g. biodiversity is fully integrated within the planning system, a wide range of policy guidance² has been published.

Developing projects and strategies to deliver the Stort Valley vision consistent with national policy and legislation, will require a clear understanding of the areas existing biodiversity assets. Phase 1 habitat survey³ is accepted as the national standard for undertaking such a task, particularly at the landscape scale. Unfortunately, the last time a Phase 1 survey was completed for Epping Forest, Harlow or Uttlesford was over 13 years ago and in Hertfordshire over 10 years ago. Therefore, re-surveying these areas is essential if the impacts of development and growth are to be planned in such a way to meet this vision

Without up-to-date biodiversity information, strategic decisions made to deliver this vision are open to question. Additional Surveys have been carried out as part of the Harlow Area Green Infrastructure Plan.

4.3 Land management opportunities

There appears to be a problem due to a lack of appropriate conservation land management outside the designated sites and/or land owned by conservation organisations. Most of the former grazing pastures are either being left to regenerate into scrub/Alder Carr or inappropriately grazed with horses.

As already indicated in earlier sections, the new environmental stewardship schemes potentially offer a number of opportunities to realise the vision for the Stort Valley. The number of farm managers and landowners participating in stewardship schemes within the Stort Valley is low (See figure 4). A few are under the old Countryside Stewardship agreements, and some on the valley sides have entered into the new entry level agreements.

Before making recommendations on how the new scheme can best be used, it is useful to outline the main characteristics of the scheme.

¹ Securing the Future - <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/uk-strategy/uk-strategy-2005.htm>

² Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation; PPS12: Preparing Local Development Frameworks; Strategic Environmental Assessment and Biodiversity: Guidance for Practitioners.

³ Phase 1 Habitat Survey as per: Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey - a Technique for Environmental Audit. England Field Unit, Nature Conservancy Council, reprinted JNCC, (1993).

Environmental Stewardship (ES) is a new agri-environment scheme set up by DEFRA and now managed by Natural England. ES is open to farmers and landowners who have control of over the management of their land for the agreement period. The scheme has been set out with following objectives:

Primary objectives

- Conservation of wildlife
- Maintenance and enhancement of landscape quality and character
- Natural resource protection
- Protection of the historic environment
- Promotion of public access and understanding of the countryside

Secondary objectives

- Flood management
- Conservation of genetic resources

Landowners are offered three different tiers of stewardship; Entry Level Stewardship (ELS), Organic Entry Level Stewardship (OELS) and Higher Level Stewardship (HLS). Which type of stewardship to join, depends on how the land is currently managed and what the future aspirations for the land are, however, in most cases entry into the scheme starts with either ELS or OELS. HLS is aimed at landholdings trying to deliver more significant environmental benefits; it can be combined with either ELS or OELS.

Entrants into ELS will receive £30/ha; those in OELS will receive £60/ha. Payments will be made depending on whether or not the points total has been met. Differing amounts of points are available depending upon the land management options chosen; a list of options is given in the ELS and OELS handbooks.

Landowners intending to apply for HLS should first meet their points target for ELS/OELS. There is a list of land management options open to HLS applicants to choose from and additional payments will be made according to these. Liaisons with a Natural England advisor should ensure that the management options chosen are appropriate for the environment in which the land is situated. Grants for capital works are available from DEFRA in assisting with the fulfilling of some management options.

Proposed changes to the scheme were made in a speech by the Natural England Chief Executive to the NFU conference on 27 February 2007, so some of the information given above may be superseded.

Examples of land management options suitable for use within the river valley and the features to which they will benefit are shown below.

ELS/OELS

Option	Benefit
Hedgerow management	Bird nesting habitat; act as wildlife corridor
Ditch management	Benefit Water Vole and molluscs; act as wildlife corridor
Buffer strips on cultivated land	Food source for birds, mammals and insects; act as wildlife corridor

HLS	
Option	Benefit
Reedbed creation	Habitat for birds, mammals; contribute to BAP targets
Restoration of wet grassland for wintering waders and wildfowl	Benefit to wetland birds; enhancement of wildlife network in river valley
Creation of woodland outside the LFA	Creation of wet woodland in floodplain would enhance wildlife corridor; provide habitat for birds, mammals and invertebrates

The Environmental Stewardship scheme is administered by Natural England on two levels:

1. Entry Level Scheme (ELS) is a simple scheme aimed to be implemented on 80% of all farms in England, in order to address particular countryside problems such as:
 - Diffuse **pollution**
 - Loss of **biodiversity**
 - Loss of **landscape** character
 - Damage to the **historic** environment
2. Higher Level Scheme (HLS) is **regionally competitive** between the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, and Bedfordshire in the Eastern Region, and has a regional emphasis with regard to:
 - **Historic environment (archaeology)**; **Note:** consultation of the relevant County Historic Environment Record and inclusion of the data provided is a mandatory element of any scheme submitted under ES-HLS.
 - **Landscape character**,
 - **Ecology (Biodiversity Action Plan – habitats and species)**,
 - **Public access.**

Higher Level Scheme applications will need to be targeted and must deliver maximum benefits for JCA 086: South Suffolk and North Essex Claylands.

Key Targets:

1. To maintain or achieve favourable condition of **SSSIs**.
2. Maintain, enhance or restore local **BAP priority habitats**; e.g. wet woodland, lowland meadow, floodplain grazing marsh, fen-reedbed, pollards – see county BAP list above.
3. Maintain, enhance regionally important **BAP or locally important species** – see county BAP list above.
4. Maintain, restore or recreate characteristic **landscapes**; e.g. river valley grasslands, floodplain grazing marsh and lowland meadows.
5. Restore traditional and characteristic **field boundaries**.
6. Maintain, protect and restore **historic landscape features**.
7. Protect above and below ground **historic features**; e.g. Scheduled Ancient Monuments.
8. Minimise diffuse **pollution** to watercourses and **protect water quality** through managed soil erosion.

Secondary Targets are:

1. Create recreational opportunities near centres of population.
2. Conservation of native livestock breeds.
3. Protection of historic features.
4. Minimise diffuse pollution of watercourses.
5. Flood management on land in the flood plain.

Key Targets score five points and Secondary Targets score two points. Currently, applications need to score 25 points or more in order to get in.

The Stort Valley has the potential to deliver **all** of the above Key and Secondary Targets, but this is completely dependant on landowners and farmers interest. In our experience the best way to deliver ES is by farm visits and personal contact. **Building a relationship of mutual respect, trust and sound advice is vital.** Farmers need to be assured about the scheme and what it can deliver **for them and their farm business.** Without landowner involvement and commitment our vision for the Stort Valley will not be delivered.

Environmental Stewardship; developments as of 1st April 2007. Natural England Press Release; Natural England's Chief Executive Helen Phillips has announced changes to streamline the application procedure for Higher Level Stewardship (NFU annual conference, 27 February 2007), as follows:

- There will be an initial consultation to ascertain whether or not an application has a strong chance of success.
- Raising the bar on securing entry to the Entry Level scheme to ensure that public money secures real large-scale environmental gains.
- There is potential for Higher Level Stewardship to be an "invitation only scheme – directed at those areas where there is the greatest need to support environmental benefits".
- Natural England will be working with Defra and stakeholders to review the targeting of the Environmental Stewardship scheme.
- There is a need for ES to be managed at "a landscape-scale to accommodate...increased flooding" as a result of climate change.
- From 1st April NE will be telling applicants "whether or not we are minded to grant your application in advance of requiring a FEP" – (Farm Environment Plan).

The Historic Environment

- Consideration of the historic environment is a constructive as well as an essential part of any Environmental Stewardship Scheme submitted to Defra, and its mandatory inclusion within ES frequently enables the successful submission of a scheme.
- The maintenance, protection and restoration of 'Historic features' (i.e. historic and archaeological features) is one of the Key Targets for ES JCA 0861: South Suffolk and North Essex Claylands
- County Historic Environment Records and their Historic Environment Countryside Advisers (HECAS Officers) play an essential role within ES
- Both Essex CC and Hertfordshire CC employ officers to provide mandatory input into ES

More detailed information about ES should be obtained from the official handbooks and through discussions with the Essex or Hertfordshire land management teams in regional Natural England office.

Natural England recommends that the priority for the Stort Valley, as well as the wider Green Arc, should initially be to encourage more farmers to enter into entry-level stewardship agreements. Funding for the whole scheme is currently under great pressure, and priority is being given to ELS applications. It is suggested that this is done in co-operation with the Herts CMS and the Green Arc project, with the initial step being to hold a farm walk on a local farm to promote the benefits of ELS to local farmers.

It is much harder for farmers to meet the criteria for HLS. More information needs to be gathered on priority habitats in the Stort valley, the size of holdings, and what the realistic chances are of farmers satisfying the criteria for HLS. Given the current uncertainties over funding and whether the scheme will become 'invitation only', it is sensible to focus on ELS in the short term.

Consultations with the farmers highlighted an interest of at least two farmers in livestock production, and then possibly marketing cartels for local meat. Livestock production is likely to focus on grass fed cattle and sheep with relatively low stocking rates, which do not have a great commercial value. A locally branded assurance scheme could be introduced to enable local producers to sell to local butchers at a premium, or market the meat directly to the public. This would necessitate links with commercial graziers, local mobile abattoir facilities and voluntary herding groups. Experience from other similar Natural England initiatives has not generated encouraging results, so caution is advised. More information on interest from farmers in this idea is needed, and this can be gained as part of the proposed events to promote ELS.

The Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service currently supports farmers and landowners in their applications to Environmental Stewardship where the outcomes will achieve Hertfordshire County Council's strategic objectives. This service is provided broadly across Hertfordshire. If the Countryside Management Service were encouraged to focus and increase the level of this activity in the Stort Valley further resources would be required. No one organisation is currently resourced to facilitate the activities required to achieve the Stort Vision.

This approach of providing a 'dating agency' for grazing sites and graziers is already being explored elsewhere in Hertfordshire. In the Stort Valley the capacity of existing graziers is supported to maximise the opportunities for extensive grazing. Other local organisations will be doing this in their areas too. Natural England could play a coordinating role. Volunteer herders, is currently an idea to support green-space grazing on local authority owned sites only and volunteer shepherds are used on Wildlife Trust reserves.

There are already a number of organisations in Hertfordshire and Essex providing land management advice, which have strong and longstanding links with the farming and landowning community. Any additional resource available to support this work should be spent in delivering greater support to landowners. The grant aid streams identified are already being accessed by the existing organisations.

In Hertfordshire, a Grazing Animal Project is currently being developed to encourage increased grazing for conservation, by facilitating grazing networks and co-operation. Such a project could help to implement the grassland habitat action plan, of which Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust is the lead agency along with a number of other partners including the Countryside Management Service. This is a national priority and additional resources are required for realisation. Green Arc is willing to host a project officer post.

The Green Arc project has suggested that a strategic approach to land management be adopted, by having Stort Valley as an exemplar project within the Green Arc initiative. They have already forged links with the Farming and Wildlife Action Group, Country Care, Essex Wildlife Trust, Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, The City of London, Thames Chase, Essex County Council, LVRP, the National Trust and the Woodland Trust, and held a workshop for farmers in the Epping part of the Green Arc area on 28 February 2007. The Green Arc works closely with its statutory partners and contributors, including Natural England. The organisation could provide the catalyst for an extended Countryside Management Service by implementing their Biodiversity Audit 2005. Existing organisations and partnerships could deliver management regimes via grant aid from lottery funding, landfill tax, major trusts and statutory grants such as better take up of ESL, EWGS and ECC's hedgerow fund.

4.4 Visual enhancement

It is essential to safeguard and strengthen the landscape character types and areas by seeking to safeguard and enhance the key green infrastructure assets where possible (See Figure 2C). These are identified within the Harlow Area Green Infrastructure Plan as follows:

Valley floodplains – River Stort

Ridges and valleys – Stansted and Pishiobury Parklands, High Wych Slopes, Little Hallingbury Ridges and Slopes

Plateaus – Hunsdon Plateau

To safeguard and enhance the above landscape character types and areas appropriate grazing regimes are vital and regenerating scrub and Alder Carr must be managed to maintain openness. Willow pollarding will also be appropriate. Additional planting will be required to restore character particularly on the open arable valley sides

4.5 Historic environment character enhancement

Historic environment character represents the evidence of the development of all the landscape by human action over the past 10,000 years. This includes archaeological sites and features, historic buildings, historic parks and gardens, airfields, woodlands, and other historic sites and boundaries.

Proposals should take account of and aim to enhance where necessary, historic environment character. Historic environment should be included within all proposals and management plans and should be integrated wherever possible with projects to enhance the natural environment.

Opportunities should also be taken wherever possible to engage local communities in both understanding the significance of their local historic environment character and also by contributing to its protection and enhancement.

Nationally designated historic environment sites and landscapes, and identified areas of high potential should also be protected from damage. Where damage to historic environment character and/or features might result from the overall opportunities under consideration, provision should be made for mitigation by recording as part of project proposals.

4.6 Social inclusion and greater public access

The Stort Valley offers opportunities for the local community (both existing and proposed) to access and enjoy the natural environment close to their homes. The most deprived wards in Harlow are very close to the proposed access points to the valley. Increased public access could contribute to regeneration and health targets. Natural England's health campaign requires that accessible green space should be within 300m of everyone's home. The most deprived wards in the locality of the Stort Valley are in North Harlow (See Figure 08). Countryside access should be facilitated and encouraged from north Harlow into the Stort Valley respecting ecology, the historic environment and landscape character, whilst benefiting the rural economy. Funding from the likely development proposed within the East of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy could aid in the delivery of these objectives.

Natural England is one of several organisations promoting the health benefits of walking and other physical activities in green spaces close to people's homes. A number of opportunities have been identified for improving access:

- Improving gateway points
- Potentially extending the work currently underway on improving access for various users in the valley, to upgrade the surfacing and signage of existing rights of way
- Clear signage and branding, taking into consideration existing paths and their branding
- Identifying new links in the path networks, which could be delivered either through negotiation with landowners or as part of a stewardship agreement
- The Environment Agency has suggested that the Stort Valley should be promoted in London, via a long distance walk out of London that incorporates the Lea and Stort Valleys.

The Stort Valley is a key transport corridor. The railway is very significant, there are busy roads on both sides of the valley and Stansted Airport has a substantial impact. The valley is also of great interest as a corridor for cycling. Cycle links in the valley provide transport links between communities, in addition to providing better access. Additional cycle links should be provided away from the road network. A sustainable transport strategy for the Stort Valley should be prepared, which could include bus routes to the Stort Valley from the local railway stations and other parts of Harlow. Access for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians should be encouraged. To facilitate effective public access existing Public Rights of Way links must be maintained and circular routes established, including the sustrans route from Bishops Stortford. The creation of new links is an essential long- term consideration. Clear signage throughout the Stort Valley could be used as a branding tool and facilitate better access to the area. The strategy would identify bus routes linking the Stort Valley with the communities and the local railway stations and be linked to the Essex and Hertfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plans. Guided walks also help to facilitate access and introduce participants to the habitats and species of the Stort Valley (Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust provides accompanied guided walks).

In addition to physical improvements on the ground, promotion to the local community is a key action. Ideas for this are set out in section 5.5.

4.7 Other recreational opportunities

The River Stort is already utilised for a number of formal recreational activities, including boating, angling and canoeing. Any intensification of these activities will require careful management to mitigate negative visual and nature conservation impacts. The Stort valley would benefit from further study to identify potential recreation activities and sites or links that would be compatible with its biodiversity, landscape and cultural qualities. This work would probably be associated with future housing site allocations.

4.8 Planning and development

It is vital that the key principles of the Stort Valley Feasibility Study and those set out within the Harlow Area Green Infrastructure Plan are taken forward through the Local Development Framework process. Local Development Frameworks should incorporate a Local Development Document to guide developers on contributions that will be expected to further realise the objectives of the Stort Valley project and to ensure development is in keeping with the objectives of any vision/management plans. The guidance should be produced during the next phase of the Stort Valley project.

Suggested generic policy within future LDFs for the Stort Valley is as follows:

Development will be expected to preserve and enhance the following elements within the Stort Valley:

Landscape character

The historic environment

Biodiversity

Public Access

Biodiversity work should be delivering the County Biodiversity Action Plans

5 Priority opportunities, actions and projects

5.1 Introduction

The following actions are required to take forward the recommendations of this feasibility study:

- Firstly, a structure or framework for coordinating and delivering advice, management initiatives and securing funding must be agreed by stakeholders
- Consultation on the vision with the wider community and more stakeholder groups
- Further consultation with farmers and landowners leading to the wider uptake of Entry Level Stewardship
- Specific advice and initiatives offered by stakeholder organisations on the steering group
- Further information gathering to enable more practical activities to proceed
- Decisions on the delivery mechanism for taking forward the Stort Valley project
- Further work leading to the preparation of a management plan which will coordinate the delivery of existing and future initiatives and relate these to funding sources
- An action plan outlining the priorities, who will lead, resources etc will follow after discussion at the March 20th meeting.

5.2 Current projects

Below is the list of existing projects in the Stort Valley, see Figure 07. Most are being delivered through the GAF2 funded partnership, co-ordinated by Groundwork Hertfordshire and delivered by the various partner organisations. All have to be completed by March 2008. Some are in the Lee valley and some in the Stort or adjacent parts of the valley, so all contribute directly or indirectly to the realisation of the Stort Valley vision.

Project	Objectives	Contribution to the Stort Valley vision	Timescale	Lead organisation
1: Implementation of Lee Valley Regional Park Plan – Ware to Rye House and Roydon to Broxbourne sections	Overarching Proposal for Ware to Rye House seeks to create an "Area for quiet recreation and nature conservation focused on the natural and historic heritage of the water and open countryside. The Proposal for Roydon to Broxbourne seeks to establish an "Area providing for a wide range of recreational and sporting activities based on and around the water resources of the Lee and Stort Navigations and the lakes." In addition, attractive riverside and wetland parkland will be created from derelict land for both day and short break visitors.	Social inclusion and enhanced public access	Ongoing	LVRPA

2: Bishops Stortford green links	Delivering of increased walking and cycling opportunities and links in the area, thus increasing accessibility to jobs and services and improving health.	Social inclusion and enhanced public access	September 2006 – March 2008	Herts County Council
3: River valley access	Improvement of riverside path along Stort Valley to Lee Valley Regional Park. GAF	Social inclusion and enhanced public access Visual enhancement	April 2006-March 2008	BW
4: Habitat enhancements	Enhancement of the ecological assets and biodiversity of the Stort Valley. GAF	Ecology and land management Visual enhancement	April 2006-March 2008	HMWT
5: Poplars and pollards	Conservation and enhancement of the environment within the River Stort floodplain between Harlow and Sawbridgeworth. GAF	Ecology and land management Visual enhancement Historic environment character	April 2006-March 2008	
6: Riverside Art Trail	Increase use of the river way, Town Park and surrounding areas. Improve appearance of the river way and connect disparate visitor attractions situated along the river	Social inclusion and enhanced public access	April 2006-March 2008	
7: Town Park, Spurriers House	Works to the area around Spurriers House, including improvement of landscape, installation of lighting and creation of new skateboard and BMX area	Social inclusion and enhanced public access	April 2006-March 2008	
8: Lea Valley National Cycle Network	Creation of additional shared use path from the Stort Valley into Harlow as part of the National Cycle Network; and to develop and agree additional routes and links within the town to maximize the benefits within the whole Harlow area.	Social inclusion and enhanced public access	April 2006-March 2008	
9: Lea Valley Pathway extension	Construction of a shared use pathway providing a strategic link through the Stort valley from Harlow to the Lee Navigation and the open space opportunities in the wider Regional Park.	Social inclusion and enhanced public access	April 2006-March 2008	
10: Urban regeneration projects		Social inclusion and enhanced public access Visual enhancement		

11: Green Arc specific site areas	A report describing the principal drivers relating to the Green Arc and its biodiversity, the key habitats and species that require protection and management and four site specific areas within the Green Arc where improvements could be made. Quarrying followed by recreation fishing Habitat fragmentation Epping Forest extension	Ecology and land management Visual enhancement Land acquisition		Green Arc
12: Bishop Stortford Riverside Trail	Suggested walk stretching from Grange Paddocks Car Park to London Road mainly along the river, but also including a few points of interests in the town centre.	Social inclusion and enhanced public access		
13: Implementation of action plan for wetland mammals in the River Stort	Assessment has been made of the Stort Valley up to Harlow and a second study has been commissioned to extend it to Bishops Stortford. Surveying points have been identified and volunteers are being recruited.	Ecology, social inclusion	Commenced 2007	HMWT
14: Mink control	Introduction of mink control to integrate with mink control in Lea Valley, to secure future for water voles, working with landowners and angling class.	Conservation of water voles in particular	Commenced 2007	HMWT
15: Wildlife sites resurvey in the river Stort	Project being developed by Wildlife Trusts. Applications for funding made.	Conservation. Social inclusion	Summer 2007	EWT/HMWT
16: Expanding the Wildlife Trusts landholding in the Stort Valley	Opportunities are being sought by both Wildlife Trusts.		Commenced Jan 2007	EWT/HMWT
17: Pishiobury, Sawbridgeworth	Public park based on Brown landscape with current Stewardship funding (cattle/sheep grazing)	New pedestrian bridge/art work, Bishops Stortford, across the Stort and new housing development, linking station and Rhodes Centre (£2.5m government funded)	Due for completion in Autumn 2007	EHDC

5.3 Proposals from partners

Social inclusion and enhanced public access

East Hertfordshire District Council wish to see improved circular walks and new destinations possibly related to development, e.g. a possible Marina at Bishops Stortford Castle and Jackson Square which will pull users up the navigation channel.

Wherever possible, planning applicants should be encouraged to provide improved access links associated with new development.

Harlow DC will also negotiate with development applicants to secure improved access links to the Stort Valley

Natural England's primary focus is to promote access into the natural environment for people living in the key deprived wards, specifically in North Harlow. Natural England will help with targeting for Natural Environments for All (NE4 All) and involve other partners in opportunities arising from this BIG lottery funded programme. If the resources are available Natural England will also encourage local community group participation in the BBC Breathing Places campaign, walking the way to health and life long learning. Natural England will work with and potentially fund other partners to run consultations with community groups, and will analyse data from the Indices of Multiple Deprivation to identify opportunities in the Stort Valley for projects under the new NE4ALL programme.

Essex WT will look to improve access to important biodiversity areas, especially from areas of deprivation. There are also a number of projects relating to public access & promotion that we would be keen to develop on our own land holdings.

Hertfordshire and Middlesex WT leads occasional guided walks and is training volunteers, including landowners in mink control, Ecology and Land Management

Harlow Council and Groundwork Hertfordshire are developing a bid for over £3 million to Heritage Lottery Fund (anticipated submission date to HLF for the preliminary stage of the bid is September 2007), towards an intended £5 million project to redevelop Harlow Town Park. A key aspect of the bid is the audience development plan whose draft objectives are currently as follows:

- Increasing the number of all visitors
- Increasing the number of childless adult visits, older community member visits, and visits by people from black and minority ethnic groups
- Enabling all visitors to enjoy their visit through improved facilities and accessibility
- Increasing the number of school/educational visits

Education officers from Groundwork Hertfordshire are planning to work with education colleagues from other GAF2 partner organisations to explore ways of maximising the educational potential of the Harlow Green Spaces projects funded by GAF2. For example schools in Roydon are within walking distance of some of the access projects. Groundwork Hertfordshire will contact the education sub-groups of local strategic partnerships to gauge what types of resources schools will find most valuable.

Health

Partnerships with the health sector already exist at a local level through LSPs. In Herts several models for Health Walks exist and have proved successful.

Natural England will focus on building partnerships between the health sector, people and sites. Natural England will explore the potential for Green Exercise within Harlow Primary Care Trust and Harlow District Council, exploring funding mechanisms to support this with the Green Arc. Natural England will investigate current WHI and step-o-metre activity in the Stort Valley, with the potential to expand this by training cascade trainers and marketing the Stort Valley to clients using step-o-metres.

Ecology and land management

Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT) – 3 reserves: Hunsdon Mead (jointly with Herts. WT), Rushy Mead, Sawbridgeworth Marsh

The trust intends to work with neighbouring landowners to create links and corridors between their existing sites by enhancing biodiversity through management initiatives. The trust also recognises the need to work with riparian landowners to increase the 'visibility' of the river. This will lead to a greater appreciation or perception in people's minds and give the Stort corridor a greater significance.

Essex Wildlife Trust currently offers a Countryside Management Service style initiative to Essex landowners through their consultancy branch, Essex Ecology Services Limited and would be interested to explore how they could work with other such service providers to concentrate efforts on the Stort Valley project area.

Essex Wildlife Trust will consider land acquisition in the Stort Valley to join existing Essex Wildlife Trust Sites, join clusters of sites that are important to wildlife and people, or, a significant size where a change in management would result in a change in biodiversity.

The trust will look to work with local authorities and the LDV to complete a Phase 1 survey and update Wildlife Sites information for the Essex side of the Stort Valley.

Essex Wildlife Trust has recently employed a 'Water for Wildlife' post and is working with Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust to see how best to cover the Stort Valley in partnership and link with their Habitat Enhancement project.

Essex Wildlife Trust hosts, and is a lead partner in, the Essex Biodiversity Project (Essex LBAP) and have carried out a number of BAP surveys in the Harlow / Epping Forest and Uttlesford districts and are looking to extend these. In particular, the trust have surveyed for the UK BAP Desmoulin's Whorled Snail in the Lower Stort discovering new sites around Harlow. They have also surveyed for otter, great crested newt, old orchards, brown hare, dormouse and bats. Further surveys will inform the Local Biodiversity Action Plan as well as give valuable information for local land managers.

The Trust coordinates the Wildlife Sites programme in Essex, which surveys sites and monitors the condition of Wildlife Sites.

The Herts CMS

Elements of the Pollards and Poplars project have been delivered by CMS in Essex. Hertfordshire's CMS, Country Care and others who provide land management advice including support with Environmental Stewardship should come together to review current programmes and identify how a more complete, targeted service for the Stort Valley project might be provided. Joint Character Area statements guide ES targeting.

The Green Arc

The Green Arc has held a seminar on funding opportunities for landowners and agents through schemes such as Environmental Stewardship and the England Woodland Grant Scheme. They are also working with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group to improve the management of horse paddocks and improve access for riders through the Green Arc Horsewise Project. As a follow on, Green Arc will be working with the Deer Initiative to design and deliver a series of seminars to deal with the ongoing deer issue in the region and will link to the National Trusts 'Plot to Plate' programme.

Green Arc has funds for site acquisition until March 2008.

Green Arc are developing a fundraising strategy with their non governmental and statutory partners to implement the Green Arc biodiversity audit, which will be implemented in April 2007 with applications being made in September 2007 to three core funders. The aim is to bring the "outdoors" closer to people by working with multiple delivery organisations in a co-ordinated and appropriate manner.

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust manage Hunsdon Mead and are looking to expand their land holding in the Stort Valley

The trust coordinate the Wildlife Sites Partnership in Herts, which provides advice to landowners, surveys sites, monitors condition of Wildlife Sites.

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust is currently implementing the Herts Mink Control Strategy in the Stort Valley.

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust is working with the Essex Wildlife Trust to collaborate on the Wetland Enhancement Work.

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust is lead on the Habitat Action Plans for Grasslands, Wetlands, Otter and Water Vole (Herts BAP) and Otter, Water Voles (Lea Valley BAP).

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, through Grassland HAP Working Group is exploring feasibility of a Grazing Animal Project in Hertfordshire.

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust is reviewing the land at the confluence of the Lee/Stort with LVRPA.

Natural England

Natural England's target is to get as many farmers in the Stort Valley as possible into Entry Level Stewardship. Working in partnership, farm meetings and farm walks will be used to promote entry- level stewardship and higher level stewardship where relevant.

The priorities for Natural England will focus on habitat creation to create buffers around protected sites, with hedgerows, reedbeds to improve water quality and new access opportunities. Natural England will quantify the extent of agri environmental uptake and potential in the area, following the initial promotion work. The data available to support applications will be established, as will criteria for the support of applications.

Farm advice programme – Working with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Groups, Green Arc, the Countryside Management Service, the Biological Records Centres, the Wildlife Trusts (Via Wildlife Sites project) and the Historic Environments Units, land agents and consultants, also aim to bring as many farmers as possible within the valley into ELS. Then identify priority areas for HLS targeting, e.g. wetlands, buffer areas around EAP habitats, creation of greenways etc.

As a lower priority, it will be necessary to establish criteria to support potential higher level stewardship applications which, although they may be below the target threshold, would enhance the landscape, water vole habitats and resource protection within the river corridor.

Undergrazing

Audit grasslands, their condition and management prior to establishing the location of graziers and clarifying the demand for grazing cartels. This could be done as part of the proposed farm walk promotion of ELS.

Natural England will establish the demand for grazing cartels. The under-grazing project is currently attempting to enhance people's understanding of the link between landscape, livestock and food. Farm walks and farm visits will be used to explore these issues. Farmer interviews will be followed up where interest in grazing is expressed. Natural England will promote links, and EEDA and the Green Arc are potential bodies to take this forward.

Water Quality

Natural England is concerned about poor water quality arising from pollution occurring as a result of ineffective sewage treatment, urban run off and misuse of drains. The protection of SSSIs, e.g. Hunsdon Mead are top priority, then BAP habitats. There may be scope to incorporate reed filter beds into permanent 'set-aside' schemes

Substantial investment by both EA and the Heritage Lottery Fund has been made in Hunsdon Mead.

It is therefore vitally important to involve the Environment Agency in delivering actions to address this problem. Discussions are already taking place between the Environment Agency, Natural England and Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. Of particular concern is the continued pollution of wetland habitats by nutrient enriched (eutrophic) waters as a result of poorly treated sewage water and diffuse pollution as a result of agriculture.

It is encouraging to note therefore, the publication of an EA document, Creating a better place for wildlife, which summarises the role of the EA under four main headings:

- Reducing pollution,
- Managing water and drought,
- Managing flood risk, and
- Creating and improving habitats – including species recovery.

Visual enhancement

East Herts have a compensatory tree planting policy, 50% additional planting for any development within 5 miles of the site. This could be used to enhance the Stort Valley. Any compensatory tree planting policy must be applied with great care; particularly, when dealing with river valley flood plains where tree planting may not be appropriate. Therefore, the watching brief must always be 'the right trees in the right place' and planting schemes must not be to the loss or detriment of more important habitats; e.g. lowland wet grassland, marshes, fens, and reedbeds.

Restoration of former tip sites, e.g. Pole Hole Elwood tip.

The Herts CMS is supporting farmers and landowners with advice and access to financial support via stewardship, for tree management and planting; the take up is patchy within the Stort Valley and largely confined to East Herts. It is hoped that this successful initiative could be extended into the Essex side of the Stort Valley.

5.4 Recommendations to the Steering Group for actions and further information gathering/analysis

The table below identifies the proposed projects that have resulted from the feasibility research.

Project	Objectives	Timescale	Lead organisation	Feasibility and barriers to implementation
A leaflet and marketing strategy for the general public	To encourage social inclusion	April 2007-July 2007	Harlow council, Groundwork, Natural England, others	Targeting socially excluded elements of the community
Farm walk and information for landowners	To encourage landowner participation in projects and stewardship	April 2007-July 2007	Natural England + CMS, FWAG, Green Arc	The involvement of a sufficient proportion of landowners
Extension of Countryside Management Service advice	To work with landowners to deliver on farm advice with regard to Environmental Stewardship	May 2007 - ongoing	Director of the land management unit for Hertfordshire County Council, FWAG, Green Arc	Obtaining sufficient revenue funding and commitment to extend the service via bidding with partners
Developer guidance	To advise on appropriate contributions to landscape character, the historic environment, biodiversity and public access	TBD	The Local Planning Authorities, Green Arc, the County Councils	The adoption and use of developer guidance, building on the draft version
Sustainable Transport Strategy	To review and suggest improvements to the rail, bus and public rights of way network Cycle links should be provided away from the existing road transport network.	TBD	TBD	Obtaining sufficient revenue funding and commitment for implementation, encouraging use of sustainable transport
Grazing cartels	To scope whether there is sufficient local interest in and demand for increased livestock farming and associated marketing of local meat	May 2007 - ongoing	To be developed by local organisations in partnership with EEDA, Green Arc and Natural England	Encouraging participation in the scheme, particularly that of graziers

Ecological assessment	Further assessment of ecological assets, habitat enhancement areas, habitat creation areas, enhanced habitat linkages and new habitat linkages to enable implementation via stewardship Data input to the Biological Records Centres so that land management advice can be coordinated and delivered	May 2007 - ongoing	Wildlife Trusts, Natural England, Biological Records Centre	Obtaining sufficient revenue funding and commitment for implementation GreenArc biodiversity audit is being updated by the WT's and does already provide this information which will be used as a bid document to funders
Detailed implementation and management plan	Further mapping of greenways, additional land acquisition sites, access links, biodiversity, landscape and cultural enhancement priorities, mechanisms to retrieve and sustain developer contributions	May 2007 - ongoing	TBD	Obtaining sufficient revenue funding and commitment for implementation
Substantial open access area, North Harlow	To fulfil open space requirements and access opportunities for the deprived wards in Harlow, balancing access and environmental objectives	May 2007	Green Arc with all partners and Harlow renaissance	Willingness of landowners to cooperate
Increase sense of place of the Stort Valley	To increase the visual prominence of the river channel, tree management, new gateways related to green links	Jan 2008	To continue the work of Groundwork under GAF1 and GAF2	Obtaining funding and cooperation of landowners
Establishment of a joint Wildlife Trust post/Initiative	To drive the Biodiversity Action Plans for Hertfordshire and Essex and to coordinate the delivery of the biodiversity audit within the Stort Valley	April 2007	Green Arc leading applications to HLF, trusts and EEDA to enable delivery of local BAP	TBD
Establishment of a grazing animal project	To improve the condition of grassland for biodiversity	TBD	Green Arc to host project post subject to funding from NE	TBD
Recreation Study	To identify potential for new recreation provision	2009/10	Working group	Possible Govt/developer funding

Further work is required here to make recommendations for potential ways forward.

5.5 Further consultation

Further consultation and participation exercises are required to test the Stort Valley vision with a much wider cross section of local interests. This should be done in two stages:

- Testing the vision with a selected range of community, special interest and landowners
- Once there is an agreed vision and action plan, a programme of promotion and outreach is prepared and implemented.

It is essential that all sectors of the local population be targeted to achieve social inclusion (See section 4.5). It is recommended that:

- A workshop is held at Harlow Town Park, as the park is easily accessible from the most deprived wards in the locality (See Figure 8).
- A leaflet be produced and distributed to encourage local people to use the Stort Valley for quiet recreation.
- Information is provided to Parish Councils, with public exhibitions held in the key parishes. With a link to the Harlow 60th celebration with a model of the Stort or similar on display.
- Information is provided to a wide range of community groups in Harlow.

User and potential user groups in the Stort Valley that could be consulted on the vision and action plan include:

- Parish Councils
- Running, cycling and rambling groups – Bishops Stortford running club
- Harlow and Bishops Stortford cadets, cubs, brownies, guides, scouts etc
- Civic societies and Rotary clubs – Hertford Civic Society
- Archery clubs – Bowmen of Harrow
- Photographic groups – Bishops Stortford camera club
- Art clubs
- Wildlife, countryside and conservation groups – Friends of Rivers Orchard Nursery
- Ethnic minority groups
- Local businesses
- Disability and access groups – Hertfordshire access group
- Youth groups – Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme
- Religious groups
- Educational establishments – schools and colleges
- Healthcare and sports organisations – Harlow runners
- Anglers and other river users – Stort Valley Angling Society
- Essex Society for Archaeology and History
- British Canoe Union
- Globe Angling Society
- Sawbridgeworth Angling Society
- Bishops Stortford and District Angling Society
- Hertfordshire Natural History Society

- Hertfordshire Bird Club
- Butterfly Conservation
- Hertfordshire and Middlesex Bats Group
- Hertfordshire and Middlesex Badger Group
- Essex Biodiversity Project
- Essex Wildlife Trust – Epping Forest Local Group
- Essex Wildlife Trust – Uttlesford Local Group

Both easy to reach (those that have been consulted or have shown an interest previously) and hard to reach groups should be consulted.

People active in the community are recognised as being able to disseminate information down to the less active population. Meetings and events should be held for influential members of groups, where their identity is known and their reaction likely to be receptive. Otherwise leaflet drops and wider advertising may introduce the subject to a new wider audience who may report it back to their peers. Many social and community groups are represented by websites and forums – this could be a cost effective way of consulting a group via a medium they are comfortable with.

Groups may be hard to reach because there are no existing lines of communication or because the 'group' predominantly speaks another language, therefore the media (newspapers, community notices) they utilise is different. Each group will be different and as such may need approaching in different ways.

User groups in the Stort Valley, such as Anglers, the Ramblers Association and the Cycle Touring Club should be consulted to determine their needs and priorities and to enable them to participate in projects in the Valley, including Rights of Way improvements, to implement the vision.

The table below details various methods of consultation, some of the advantages and disadvantages of those methods and who they will include or alternatively who might be missed by them:

Method	Detail	Advantages	Disadvantages	Groups likely to be included	Groups likely to be missed
Campaign	High profile method utilising local media, leaflets and exhibitions	Creative. Familiar medium. Wide scope. Promotes.	Targeting appropriate participants. Outcome difficult to measure. Expensive. Limited feedback.	Existing user groups Potential user groups	'Hard to reach'
Exhibition	Visual, interactive medium that can be both static or portable. Model of stort valley at Harlow 60 th celebration.	Creative. Cost effective. Promotes. Wide scope. Informal. Some feedback.	Targeting appropriate participants. Staff intensive. Limited exposure. Outcome difficult to measure.	Existing user groups Potential user groups	'Hard to reach'
Local press	Can be used to advertise a consultation exercise or raise awareness of a resource	Cost effective. Fast. Familiar medium. Wide scope. High profile. Publicise events.	Targeting appropriate participants. Language. Outcome difficult to measure. Depth of issue. Limited feedback.	Existing user groups Potential user groups	'Hard to reach'

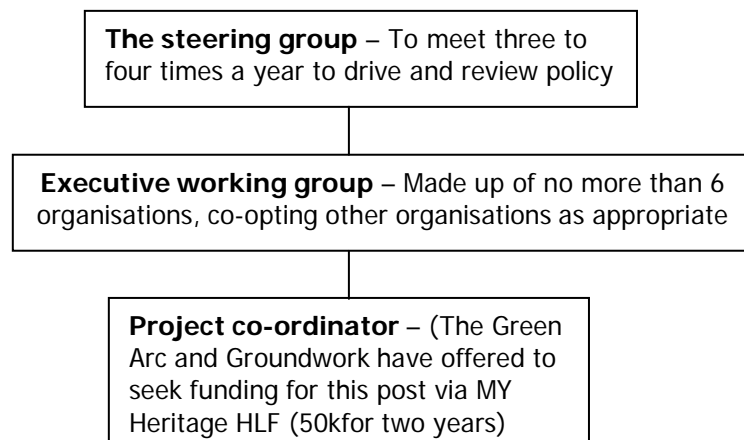
Leaflets and newsletters	An effective and accessible medium for informing the public of a resource or event	Creative. Familiar. Targeted. In depth. Wide scope. Return slips for feedback.	Time consuming. Language. Limited feedback. Outcome difficult to measure.	Existing user groups Potential user groups	'Hard to reach'
Workshops	Groups individuals in focused environ, delivery by experienced staff	Cost effective. Flexible. Networking. Participative. In depth. Targeted. Informal.	Outcome could be inconclusive. Dominated by the few. Potential for high cost.	Existing user groups Potential user groups	'Hard to reach'
Focus groups	Increasingly popular method of consultation with specific people on in depth issues	Networking. Flexible. Identify solutions. Emphasis on participants. Local knowledge. Targeted.	Language. Biased grouping. Requires basic knowledge. Output not quantitative.	Existing user groups	'Hard to reach'
User panels	Regular meetings of user groups that identify needs and solutions	Networking. Participative. In depth. Feedback. Informed participants. Targeted.	Time consuming. Requires commitment. May not be representative.	'Hard to reach' Existing user groups	Potential user groups
Partnerships	Can engage the public in long term on either issue or geography specific basis	Shared goals. Shared resources. In depth. Informed participants. Trust building. Uses existing groups.	Time consuming Can stray from goal. May become dominated by a few. Long term commitment.	'Hard to reach' Existing user groups	Potential user groups

6 Delivery mechanisms, funding sources, management options and business plan

6.1 Delivery mechanism

The brief asked for recommendations on delivery mechanisms. There is a strong accord and “buy-in” to the Stort Valley vision by the stakeholders but this now needs to be re-focused on partnerships for delivery. The priority is to identify a lead or coordinating team who have the mandate and resources to translate the vision into a series of interrelated initiatives. Strategic accountability, progress review and identifying alternative implementation approaches should be overseen by the existing steering group, comprising those organisations making a financial contribution to implementation and those with democratic accountability. The GAF1 and GAF2 have developed partnerships for delivery that are current and ongoing. Thus, there is already an initial model for delivery led by Groundwork Hertfordshire. We understand that there will not be a GAF3 and that any government funding is likely to be delivered through Harlow Renaissance (the Local Delivery Vehicle). Harlow Renaissance has been formed in response to the government’s Sustainable Communities Plan (ODPM (now CLG), 2003). This delivery vehicle is the lead development delivery body charged with ensuring the sustainable housing, economic, social and environmental regeneration and growth of the area. Statutory planning and other functions will remain with the local authorities. In other parts of the valley, eg. Bishops Stortford, Local Area Partnerships may be established to deliver major new development.

It is proposed that the Stort project will be taken forward by adopting the following structure. An executive group comprising Natural England, Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service, Green Arc, Essex Wildlife Trust, Hertfordshire Wildlife Trust, Groundwork and the Environment Agency will work to the established steering group. The executive working group will define the role of the project co coordinator, and apply to fund the post.



It is vital that the Stort Valley implementation working group and project coordinator are closely involved with the Harlow and East Herts district councils in the identification of future housing sites within the vicinity or catchment of the Stort. The new open space/access requirements/opportunities must be related to the Stort and provision put in place to safeguard biodiversity, landscape and cultural assets of the valley.

6.2 Funding

There are a variety of funding mechanisms available to deliver the proposed projects and activities. These are summarised below. Appropriate mechanisms for obtaining funding from development will be determined by Harlow District Council, East Hertfordshire District Council and East Hertfordshire District Council. Environmental Stewardship is an additional mechanism for obtaining funding, described within the 'realising the vision' section. The tariffs gained from Section 106 agreements, planning gain and roof tax apply at different scales for funding infrastructure, depending on the development type and extent.

It is vital that all options for payments from developers are fully explored as to how they could fund the Stort Valley project. Dialogue needs to take place between local planning authorities and developers at a very early stage in the process, preferably before planning applications are submitted. All interested parties should have a set of clear, pre-determined aims and objectives to take to the negotiating table.

Local Authority Contributions

Key issues that must be considered at the outset of the decision making process include the adequacy of funding in covering acquisition, development and subsequent management costs and the long term security of income. Some revenue funding for projects in the Stort Valley might be obtained from Harlow District Council and East Hertfordshire District Council's general tax funds and government transfers if their income increases due to population growth and government financial support. More realistically though one must assume that these funding sources are at risk of being withdrawn or cut, as the management of green space is a non statutory duty that is competing for funds with statutory services. Local Authorities' resources are shared between increasing numbers of projects.

Other Funding Sources

Section 106 Agreements

Section 106 agreements can be drafted requiring developers to make a financial endowment to a charitable trust, thereby enabling the trust to manage the project. The endowment may then be invested and returns may be used for ongoing management and maintenance. Financial expertise is required for the investment of funds. Obtaining capital sums of sufficient value presents a major challenge, as large sums of money are required to generate relatively small annual returns. Rental incomes from a property endowment can supply revenue funding. Roof tariffs and the planning gain supplement could aid in obtaining Section 106 monies. Circular 05/2005 encourages a greater emphasis on the inclusion of policies in Local Development Frameworks to clarify what is to be expected from developers and achieve coordination between different statutory bodies in formulating those policies. It also encourages the pooling of obligations within and between Local Planning Authorities. If the Planning Gain Supplement is realised, then the intention is to scale back planning obligations so that they relate to the physical environment of the development site, but the planning gain supplement is still at the proposals stage (see below).

Planning Gain Supplements

The government set out proposals for a Planning Gain Supplement in a consultation document in May 2006. The Planning Gain Supplement involves splitting the compensatory and revenue raising functions of the current system by first retaining developer contributions to mitigate the impact of development and provide affordable housing within a scaled back range of Section 106 Agreements and secondly, levying a Planning Gain Supplement to capture a portion of any land value uplift consequent upon the granting of planning permission. If accepted, Planning Gain Supplement funds could aid in the implementation of the objectives for the Stort Valley.

Roof Tax

A tariff system roof tax, piloted in Milton Keynes, sets out standard contributions designed to ensure that key regional and local infrastructure be provided with major development. The contribution is based on the number of dwelling units permitted. A separate contribution is made for employment sites based on a calculation of floor area. Consideration of the roof tax option should be made by the local authorities and Harlow renaissance Ltd. 'Green projects' like those in the Stort Valley could then be one of the infrastructure necessities funded through this route. The tariff or roof tax system could well play an important role in helping to secure more strategic green infrastructure provision.

Revenue Funding

Project managers can generate revenue funds by charging for access or the use of facilities. Charges are more appropriate for new facilities or in areas subject to significant regeneration. It is difficult to introduce revenue generating facilities to established spaces constrained by the existing design and current patterns of use. Income cannot be ring fenced if land is in a local authority's ownership, as earnings must be returned to the Local Authority's budget. Charging generates additional project requirements and costs, such as business management skills and additional site management.

Where sites are managed by e.g. Wildlife Trusts, their membership is supporting management via subscriptions.

Business Growth Incentives

The Local Authority Business Growth Incentive may be of use in the projects relating to the employment area to the north of Harlow. Local Authorities may retain a portion of an increase in business rates to improve the physical environment. Within Business Improvement Districts, companies agree to pay for additional services which improve the business environment.

Grant Aid

The overall programme of activities to implement a project may be broken down into more tangible and marketable components so that a wide range of funding organisations may be approached. Grant aid is a disparate source of funding, prioritising areas that are most in need. This approach is unlikely to raise sufficient resources to provide an endowment and funding bodies usually prefer to finance current activity rather than generate and be liable for ongoing revenue funding. Growth Area Fund Grants from government via CLG and lottery and regeneration initiatives continue to be potential sources of grant income. The Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership scheme and 'Parks for People' scheme provides significant capital and revenue funding, which could be match funded with RDA and Trust grants. A combination of revenue funding options will increase stability.

Additional funding might be obtained from central government, as departments provide finance to achieve a range of targets relating to the Stort Valley projects, such as health and sustainable development. When projects are related to a development a commuted payment can be made by the developer via a Section 106 Agreement to provide capital and revenue funding for the project. Section 106 monies may also be used to obtain match funding. Funds for Growth Areas infrastructure will in future be drawn down from DCLG through the Local Delivery Vehicle, Harlow Renaissance Ltd.

Grant aid may be obtained through lottery funding, via the Heritage Lottery Fund and Sport England. English Partnerships provide infrastructure of strategic importance to a regional or sub regional strategy. English Partnerships can provide expertise in regeneration and sustainable development at the higher regional to sub-regional level for projects that will either directly or indirectly make provision for green space, wildlife areas and recreational facilities to provide public and private spaces where sustainability is a core aim.

EEDA is not strictly a funding organisation, rather they support partner organisations to advance long term projects at the regional and sub regional levels. They can provide information on funding, available through EEDA from other organisations such as the DTI.

EEDA provide 'support directories' (databases) where people and organisations seeking funding might find information on sources, best practice and eligibility.

Growth area funding is supporting the delivery of key components of green infrastructure:

- rural/urban fringe - improving the interface between the urban and rural environments
- habitat creation - creating and restoring new areas of countryside to improve greenspace provision
- habitat protection - providing rare and sensitive habitats with increased protection through buffering and habitat enhancement works.

The funds likely to be made available through Round 3 of the GAF will be known with the results of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review – expected in late September 2007.

Interreg is a European Community initiative which aims to stimulate interregional cooperation in the EU. It is financed under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The NWE programme recognises the importance of the historic environment and will also allocate resources to safeguard and creatively enhance the integrity of sites, monuments and cultural landscapes, considering them not only as assets for economic development. It aims to strengthen local and regional identities and to promote culture as an essential element in the development of society.

The general objective of the LIFE initiative is to contribute to the implementation, updating and development of Community environmental policy and legislation, in particular regarding the integration of the environment into other policies and to sustainable development in the community. While many other EU funding programmes have environmental strands, LIFE has been the only programme devoted entirely to supporting and developing EU environmental policy throughout the Community. **LIFE-Environment** provides funding for demonstration projects developing innovative and integrated techniques and methods, which address community environmental interests. **LIFE-Nature** has provided funding for actions aimed at the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund

The levy on aggregate extraction was introduced in April 2002; part of the money raised by the levy finances the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (ALSF). The aim of ALSF is to address the environmental and social costs of aggregate extraction through delivery of environmental improvements, minimising the demand for primary aggregates and reducing the local effects of aggregate extraction.

Natural England administers the ALSF Grant Scheme and provides funding for projects that reduce the effects of aggregate extraction, with particular interest in projects that reduce the effects on small bodies of water/ponds SSSIs. Themes for funding applications include landscape and nature conservation, access and informal recreation, education and community involvement. Grants will be awarded within the range of £5,000 to £350,000. Natural England reports that it has an ALSF allocation of £5 million in the financial year 2007/2008.

Landfill Tax

The landfill tax credit scheme was introduced with the landfill tax in October 1996 and enables landfill site operators to donate up to 6 per cent of their landfill tax liability to environmental projects in return for a 90 per cent tax credit. Landfill tax credits must be spent in compliance with the landfill tax regulations, which state the kinds of projects that the landfill tax credit scheme should be for. Funding for admin and financial costs incurred by environmental bodies enrolled with ENTRUST. The landfill tax credit scheme was designed to help mitigate the effects of landfill upon local communities. It encourages partnerships between landfill operators, their local communities and the voluntary and public sectors. The Scheme can generate finance for environmental, conservation and public amenity initiatives managed by registered environmental bodies, although these often preclude local authorities. Only projects located within 10 miles of an active landfill site are eligible and it must be recognised that with the emphasis moving away from landfill, this source of funding is likely to diminish. Discussions with waste operators will identify existing and potential funding opportunities. The delivery of biodiversity conservation for UK species/habitats is one of the criteria identified for funding and this mechanism.

6.3 Management options

It is also important to consider what options are available for managing any new public green space created as part of the Stort Valley vision. A number of options are available, which are set out below. These management options could be implemented to manage the individual components of the Stort Valley vision.

Publicly owned land

The relevant local authorities could retain land in the Stort Valley within their ownership and manage that space. This is a relatively straightforward approach enabling full rights of public access. Management capacity (dependent on revenue funding) is an essential consideration and partnership working is required where green spaces span, or are adjacent to, local authority boundaries.

Charitable Trusts

There are two existing Wildlife Trusts, who already manage land in the Stort Valley, but who have an interest in expanding their land holdings. They engage local communities both through their local members and through volunteers. Setting up a new trust would be much more demanding. Charitable Trusts are not for profit organisations owning or leasing land or property in trust for the community. A legal structure may be formed or an existing organisation may be utilised. Management by a charitable trust offers the greatest scope for community involvement of the management models. This model enables high standards of maintenance and full rights of public access. Establishing a charitable trust requires a large sum of money at the outset, whereas use of existing organisations such as the Land Restoration Trust is less costly. A financial endowment is not required if management is passed to a management company. A management company is the management model most likely to provide a high standard of maintenance. If a management company manages a project then opportunities for local involvement are reduced and rights of public access are likely to be permissive.

Partnerships

These are specifically established to address key issues and should be based on the needs and opportunities of the local area. Existing partnership mechanisms include Local Strategic Partnerships, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and Regional Parks Forums. A legal structure may be required for effective partnership working, for example Local Strategic Partnerships operate under Local Area Agreements. Partnerships may be established with organisations holding the knowledge and skills to manage green space. The steering group that has facilitated the production of the Harlow Green Infrastructure Plan and this subsequent study could be an ideal partnership to manage the project. National bodies with responsibilities or programmes impacting on green space include Sport England, Groundwork, CABI, Natural England and the Forestry Commission. Partnerships for management may be formed with user groups, businesses and the wider public. The voluntary and community sector can be encouraged to share management and maintenance responsibilities, contributing time and labour, in addition to raising funds. The Countryside Management Service supports a number of site based community volunteer groups, in addition to two peripatetic 'bands' of experienced volunteers and several volunteer Rights of Way action teams. As well as offering time, labour and volunteers the Wildlife Trusts have considerable expertise and experience of local land management, biodiversity, fundraising, community outreach, partnership work and managing public access, through their growing membership they also have strong local community support.

Business plan and site management plans


A business plan is required to set out what is needed to deliver the agreed action plan (e.g. income sources, establishment costs and maintenance implications all have to be understood at an early stage). These documents are increasingly required by funding organisations and should be prepared with professional advice.

For individual sites, management plans will be required. These will enable the effective use of resources and form a useful vehicle to attract additional resources. A management plan is the hinge of the Civic Trusts Green Flag award criteria. The Civic Trust requires a management plan to cover aims and objectives, skills for delivery, financial planning, future investment programmes, pricing policies and actions for implementation.

Figure 01
The Vision

The Green Infrastructure Network involves the creation, protection and enhancement of the following multi-functional green spaces and links:

Heritage Landscapes


-  Historic Airfields
- 1. Allen's Green, 2. Hunsdon, 3. North Weald

-  Historic Parklands

- 1. North of River Stort, 2. Down Hall, 3. West of Hoddesdon, 4. Epping Forest Fringe

-  Ancient Landscapes

- 1. Hatfield Foest, 2. Waltham Abbey and Environs, 4. Ongar Park and Woodlands, 5. Nazeing and Rye Hill

-  Stort Valley Historic Landscapes

-  Strategic Parks

- major areas of multi-functional public green space

- New Strategic Park**

- The Stort Riverpark

- Existing Strategic Parks**

- Epping Forest
- Hatfield Forest Country Park
- Lee Valley Regional Park

-  Local Green Space Parks

- locally significant areas of multi-functional public green space

-  Core Natural Green Spaces

- designated sites of nature conservation

-  Major Strategic Destinations and Gateways

- 1. Hatfield Foest Country Park, 2. Parndon Wood Nature Reserve, 3. Harlow Town Park, 4. Clayton Hill Country Park

-  Key Strategic Designations and Gateways

- 1. Gibberd's Garden, 2. Eastwick Medieval Settlement Site, 3. Epping Green / Rye Hill, 4. Roydon Mill
- 6. Broxbourne / Keyzers Estate
- 7. Dobb's Weir / Nazeing Mead, 8. Rye House
- 9. Amwell Nature Reserve, 10. Pishiobury Park

-  New Strategic Designations and Gateways

- 1. Gilston Park Area, 2. Copped Hall Area, 3. Wintry Wood to Beachet Wood

-  New Urban Landscapes of Distinction

- 1. Harlow Rail Station/Town Park, 2. West Harlow, 3. East Harlow/New Hall, 4. South East Harlow/M11 Approach

-  River Stort & Lee Navigations

-  Public Rights of Way

The key refers to Figure 08 from the Harlow GI Plan (the map is only an extract), so some items on the key cannot be correlated to the reproduced scale of the plan.



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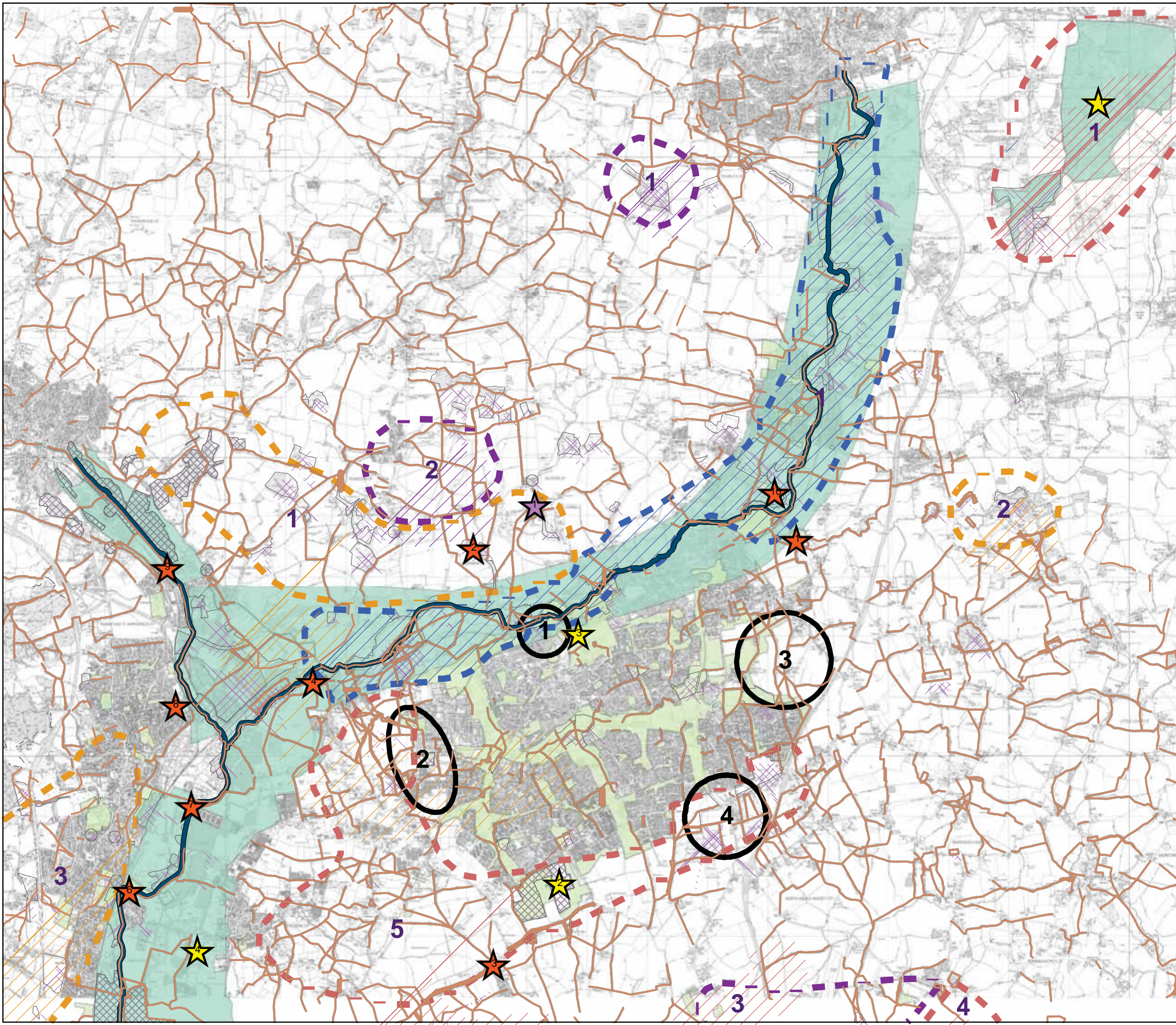


Figure 02A Existing Ecological sets and Biodiversity

KEY

- Environma1tal P.ssets
1. Hunsdon M3ad SSSI
 2. Sawbridgeworth Marsh SSSI
 3. Thorley Flood Pound SSSI
 4. Rushy M3ad
- Key Links, Dispersal Corridors
- Key Hab ats
- D Grassland
 - D Miscellaneous
 - D Parkland
 - D Lakes
 - 9:rub
 - D Wetland
 - Ancia1t IM:odland
 - Other IM:odland
 - W Pond (Indi:ative Location)
 - D Agricultural and Other Land Uses

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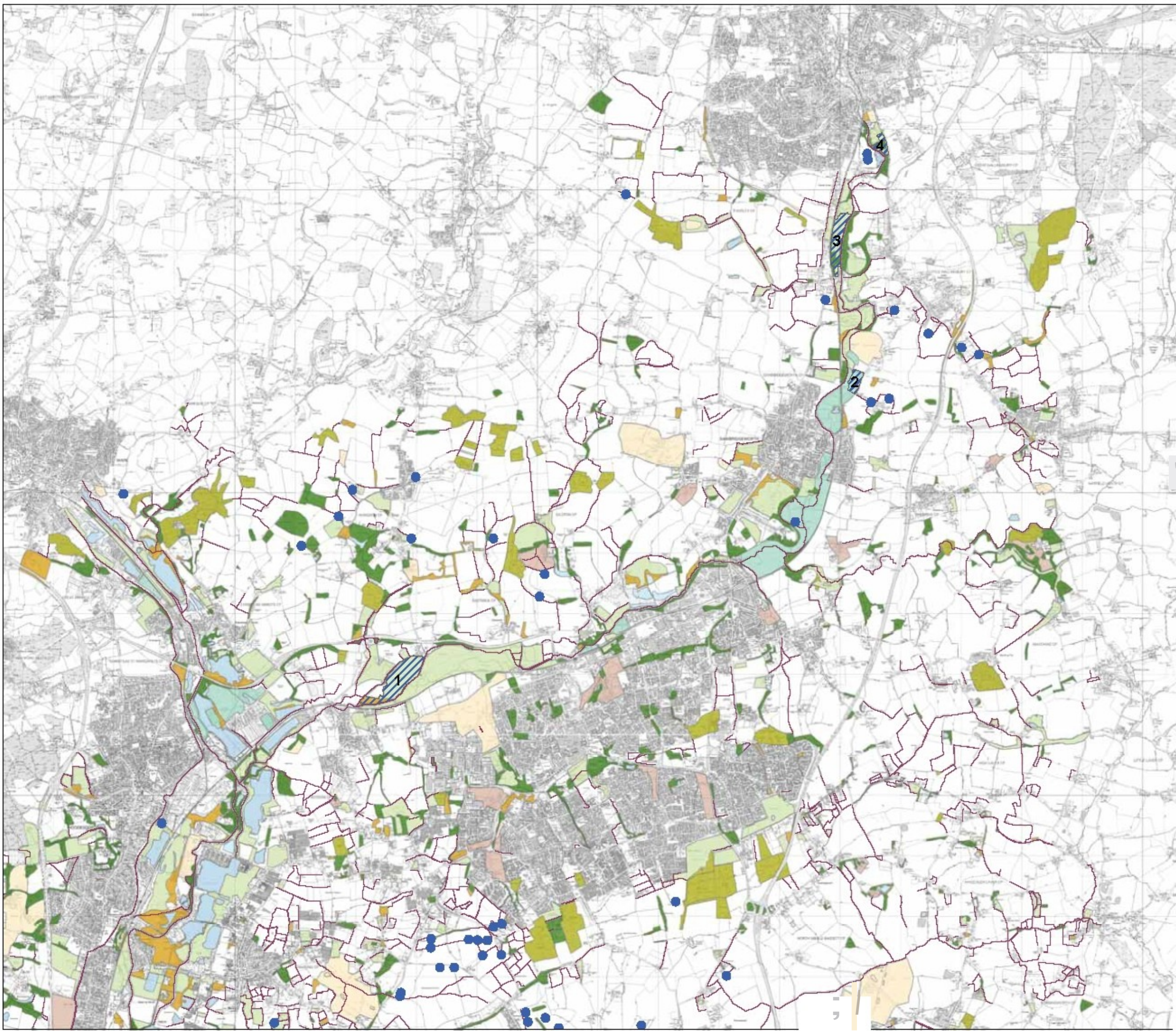




Figure 02B
Priority Areas for Enhanced Green Spaces and Links for Wildlife

KEY

-  Key Ecological Assets
-  Habitat Enhancement Areas

- A1 Cheshunt Park - Enhancement of hedgerows, verges and grassland
- A2 Hoddesdon Park Wood Fringe - Enhancement of grassland and wet woodland
- B1 East of River Lee - Enhancement of grassland, wetland and hedgerows
- B2 Great Amwell - Enhancement of wetland and grassland
- C1 River Stort - Enhancement of wetland
- C2 Spellbrook - Enhancement of pools, swamp and wet grassland, hedgerows and woodland
- D1 Hunsdonbury - Enhancement of grassland
- D3 Gilston Park - Enhancement of new verges, woodland, scrub
- E1 Kingsmead - Enhancement of grassland
- I1 Harlow Urban Area - Enhancement of Town Park

Habitat Creation Areas

- A3 Park Lane - Creation of woodland, hedgerows and grassland
- D2 The Grove - Creation of arable field margins, grassland
- E2 Lower Nazeing - Creation of new grassland, wetland
- F1 South Harlow - Creation of new woodland, heathland, hedgerows and ditches
- G2 Thornwood - Creation of new hedgerows, scrub
- H1 Matching - Creation of woodland and scrub
- H2 Little Hallingbury Park - Creation of scrub, woodland, wet woodland

Enhanced Habitat Linkages

- A4 Broxbourne to the Lee Valley - Enhancement of hedgerows and verges
- C3 Fiddlers Brook - Enhancement of grassland, wetland, reed beds and aquatic vegetation
- D4 Fiddlers brook - Enhancement of verges, hedgerows and brook
- E3 West Harlow - Enhancement of verges and hedgerows
- I2 Harlow Urban Area - Enhancement of riparian habitats and verges within the Green Wedges
- I3 Hoddesden/Cheshunt Urban Area - Enhancement of species-rich grassland, scrub and aquatic habitats along the New river navigation canal.

New Habitat Linkages

- C4 Hunsdon Lane/Brook - Creation of new habitats along road verges, brook, hedgerows, arable field margins
- D5 Between Fiddlers Brook and River Stort - Creation of new hedgerows, field margins, ponds, grassland, woodland
- E5 Nazeing to Cobbin's Brook - Creation of new hedgerows, ditches, verges and grassland
- E6 Roydon Park - Create new hedgerows, ditches, verges and grassland
- F2 Rye Hill - Creation of new hedgerows and scrub
- F3 East Harlow - Creation of new woodland and hedgerows
- H4 Hatfield Heath - Creation of new woodland, verges and hedgerows
- H5 Tilegate - Creation of verges and hedgerows
- H6 Lower Bobbingworth - Creation of grassland and scrub
- H7 Stortford Road - Creation of green bridge

0 0.250.5 1 1.5 2 Kilometers



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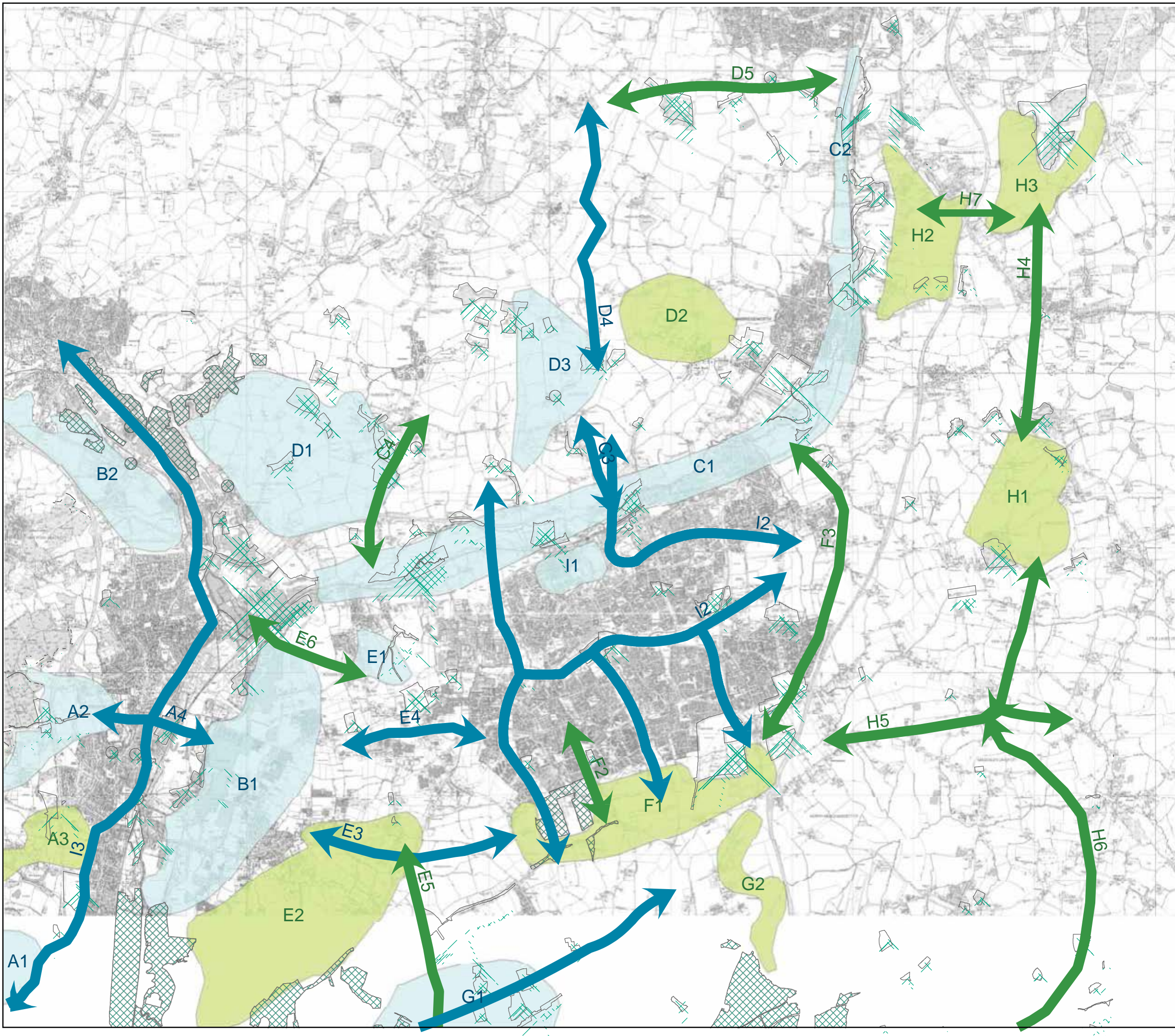


Figure 02C
Landscape Character

KEY

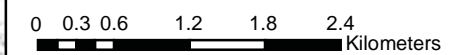
Landscape Character Types

- Major Urban Areas
- Marshes
- Plateau
- Ridge
- Ridges and Slopes
- Ridges and Valleys
- Upland
- Urban Area
- Valley Floodplain
- Wooded Ridge

Landscape Character Areas

- 1 Wormleybury and Cheshunt Park
- 2 Lea Valley Marshes
- 3 Middle Lea Valley South
- 4 Hoddesdon and Cheshunt Major Urban Area
- 5 Broxbournebury
- 6 Rye Meads
- 7 Great Amwell Ridges and Slopes
- 8 Amwell Floodplain
- 9 Lower Ash Valley
- 10 Stanstead and Pishiobury Parklands
- 11 Hunsdon Plateau
- 12 River Stort
- 13 High Wych Slopes
- 14 Thorley Uplands
- 15 Little Hallingbury Ridges and Slopes
- 16 Hatfield Heath Plateau
- 17 Roydon and Nazeing Plateau
- 18 Harlow Major Urban Area
- 19 Matching Plateau
- 20 Jack's Hatch to Church Langley Ridge and Slope
- 21 North Weald Plateau
- 22 Magdalen Laver Plateau
- 23 Holyfield Ridges and Slopes
- 24 Copped Hall Ridges and Slopes
- 25 Epping Uplands
- 26 Thornwood Common Ridges
- 27 Epping Urban Area
- 28 Coopersale Ridge
- 29 East Epping Wooded Ridge
- 30 Toot Hill Ridge
- 31 Waltham Abbey

Woodland



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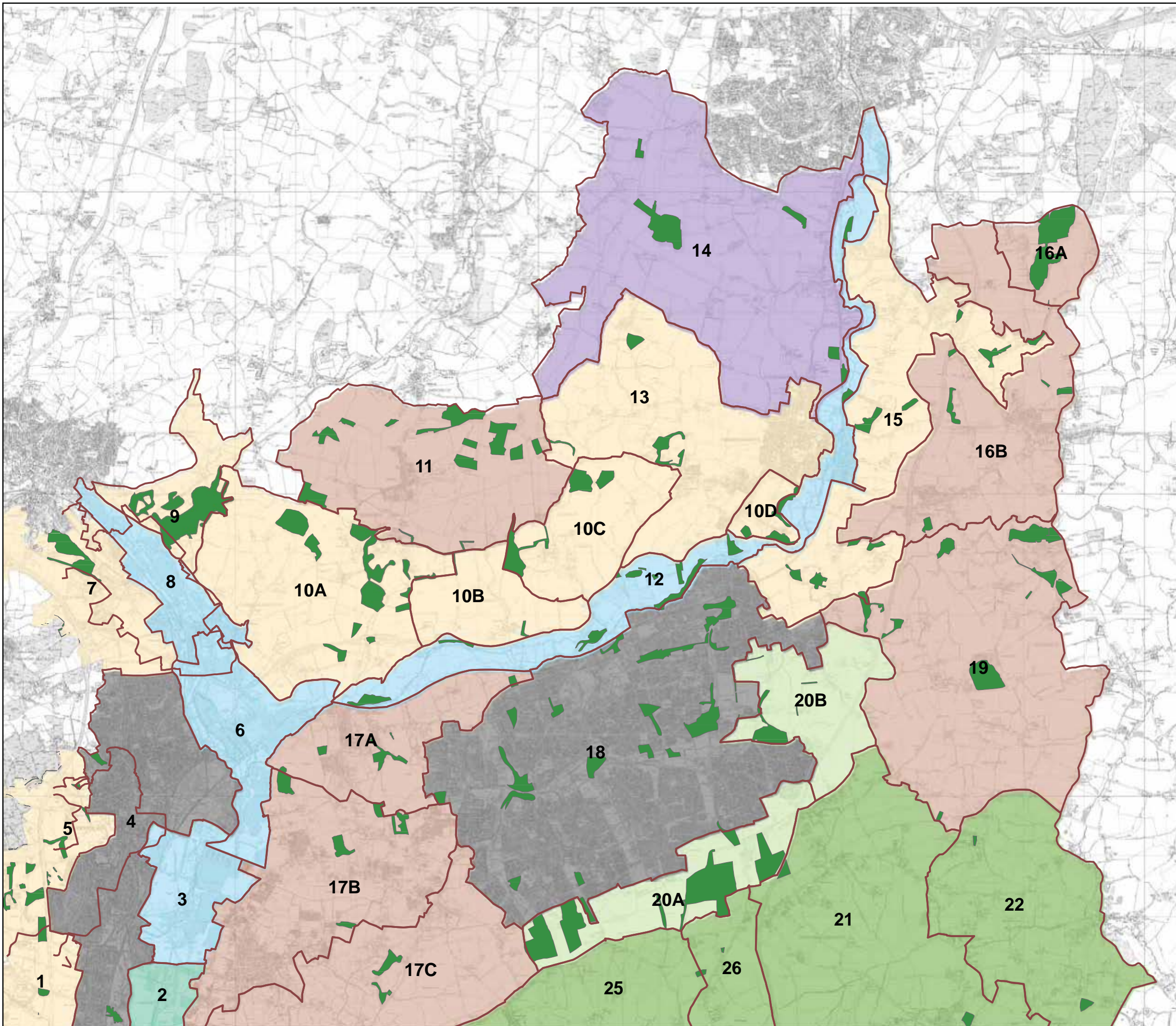











Figure 02D





Key Green Infrastructure Assets In and Around Harlow

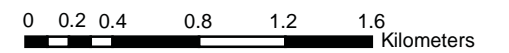
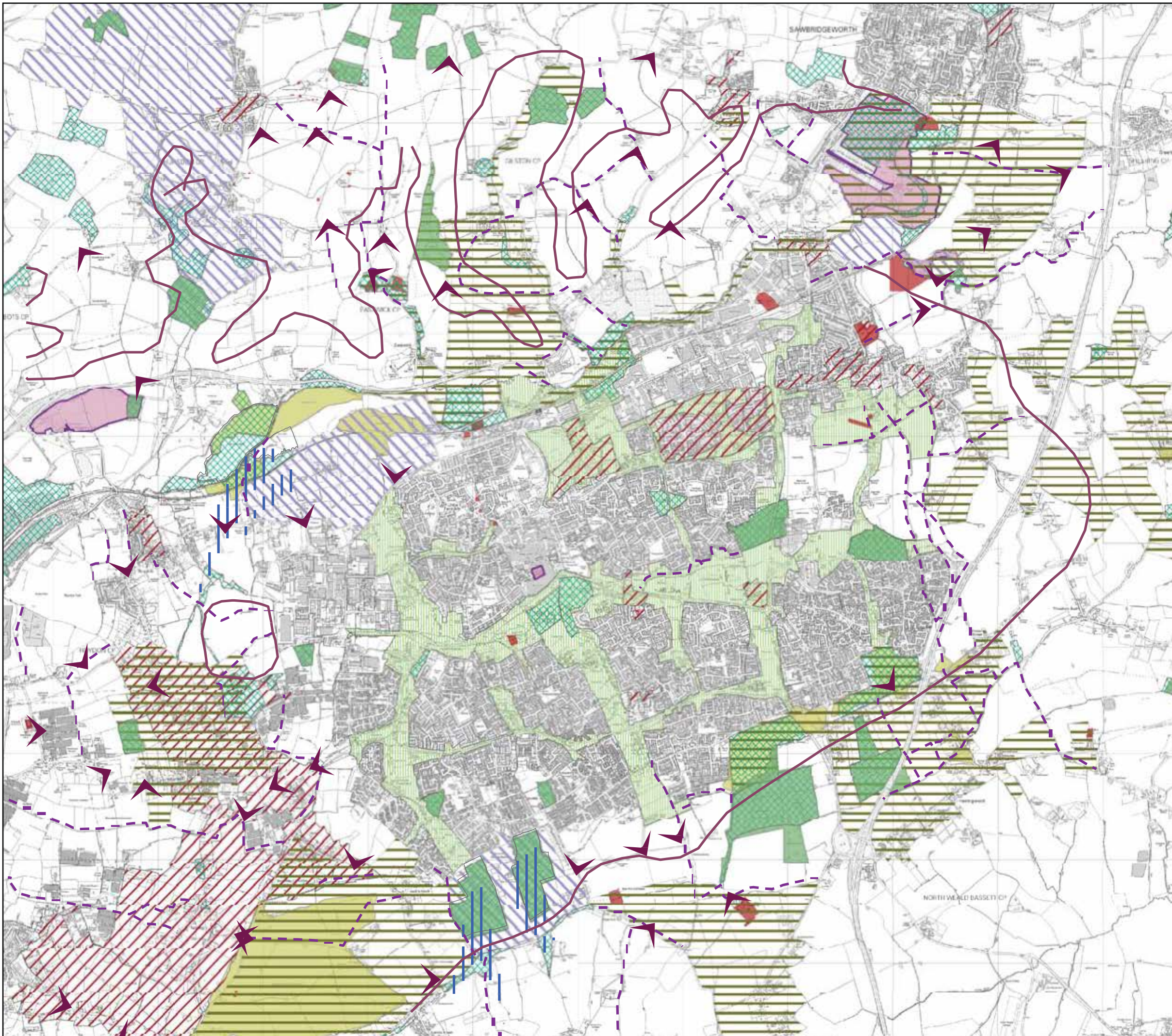
KEY

Key Designated Assets

-  Ancient Woodland
-  Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
-  County Wildlife Site
-  Local Landscape Designation
-  Conservation Area
-  Scheduled Monuments
-  Registered Historic Park & Gardens
-  Registered Common Land
-  Green Wedge

Other Key Assets

-  Visually Significant Slopes
-  Key Historic Landscapes
-  Key Paths
-  Key Views



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Figure 03
Historic Context

KEY





Protected Areas

-  Scheduled Monuments
-  Registered Historic Park & Gardens
-  Conservation Area
-  Ancient Landscapes

Historic Features

-  Historic Features
-  1. Briggens House Hotel
-  2. Manor Of Groves
-  3. Pishiobury Park
-  4. Great Hyde Hall
-  Visible Archaeological Features

Pre 18th Century Surviving Landscape Features

-  Ancient Woodland
-  Enclosed Fields
-  Registered Common Land
-  Historic Routeways

18th & 19th Century Surviving Landscape Features

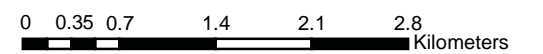
-  Parkland
-  Enclosed Fields
-  Enclosed Meadow Pasture
-  Water Meadow
-  Navigation

19th & 20th Century Surviving Landscape Features

-  Orchard
-  Woodland

Key Sites

-  Parks and Gardens
-  Mill Sites
-  Medieval Settlement Sites
-  Prehistoric Sites
-  20th Century Military Sites
-  Monastic Sites



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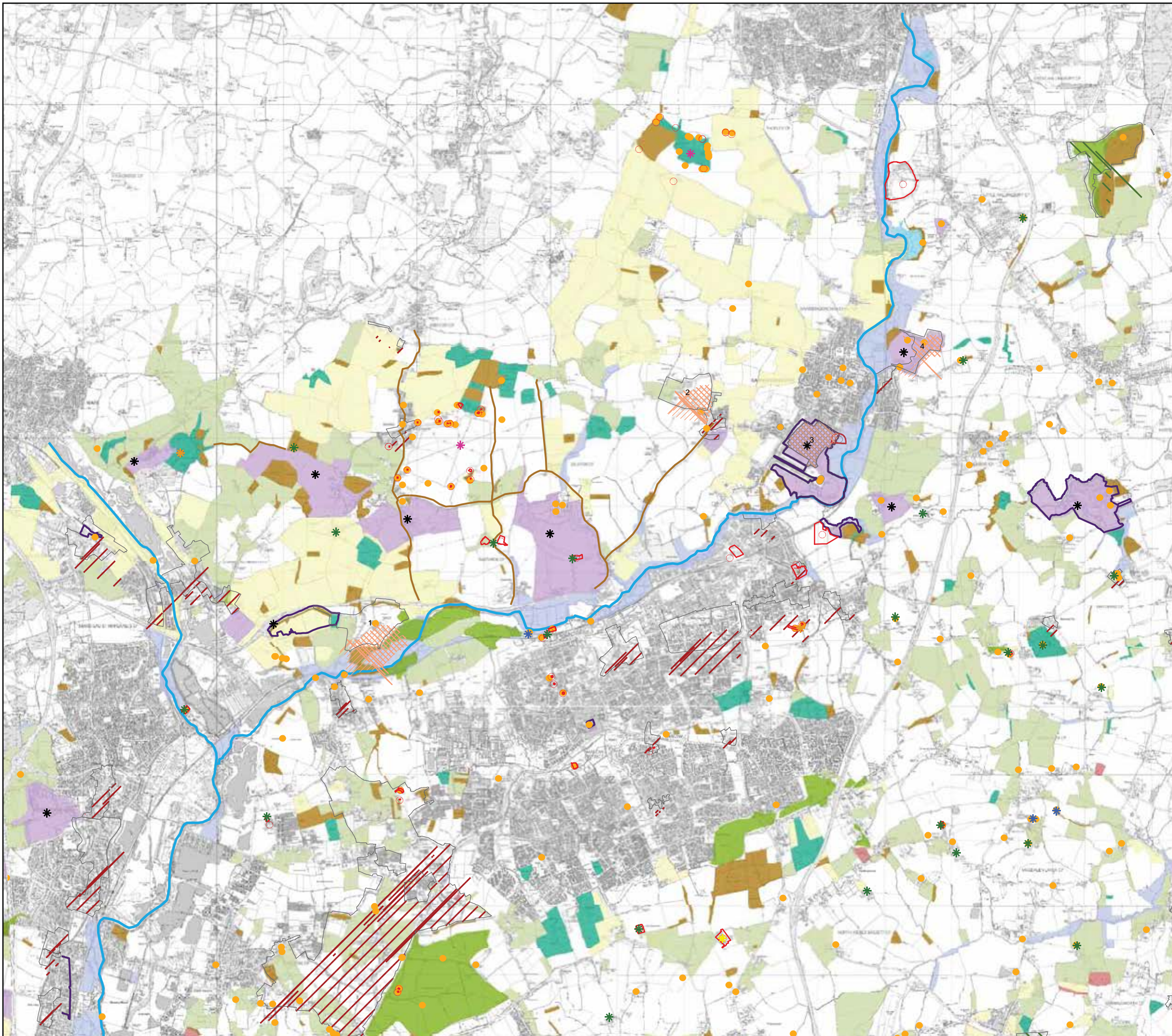



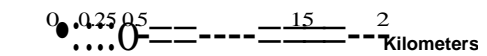
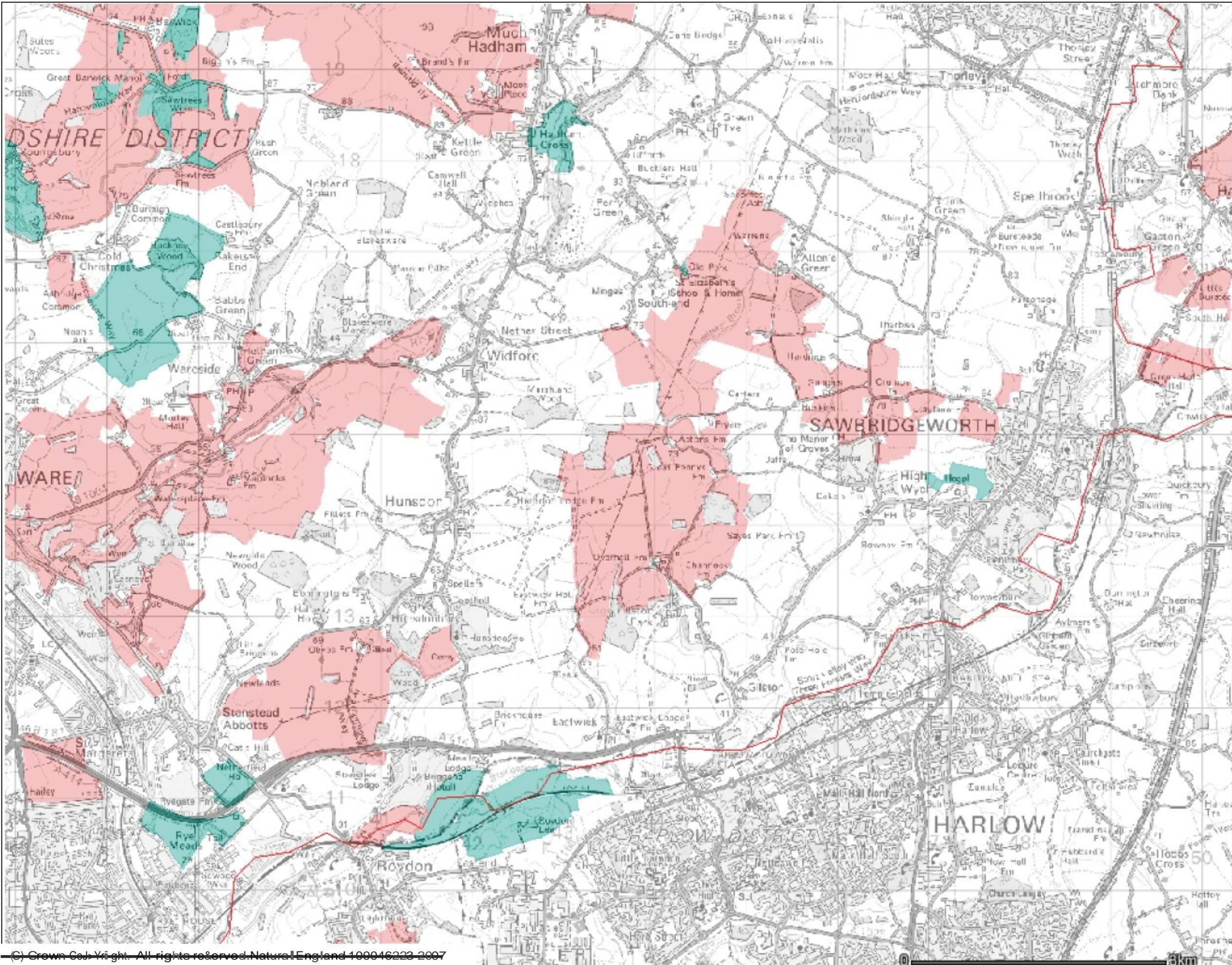


Figure 04
Environmental Stewardship

KEY

-  Traditional Counties
-  Environmental Stewardship Agreements
-  CSS Agreement Holding Boundaries
-  Government Office Regions



Natural England
















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Figure OS
Landowner Interests

- KEY**
-  Hertfordshire CoLnty CoLncil
 -  CartErs
 -  Charles Abbey
 -  E Camp and Slns
 -  EniArmmnt Agency
 -  Essex VIALdife Trust
 -  Mr Frecticks Temple Farm
 -  Herts and Middelsex Wldife Trust
 -  JdIn Harding
 -  JdInlimey
 -  StreetEr
 -  Paul Abbey
 -  SimmCdlns

Further information on land ownerships is available from NaturalEngland

Scale: 1:40,000 Kilometers



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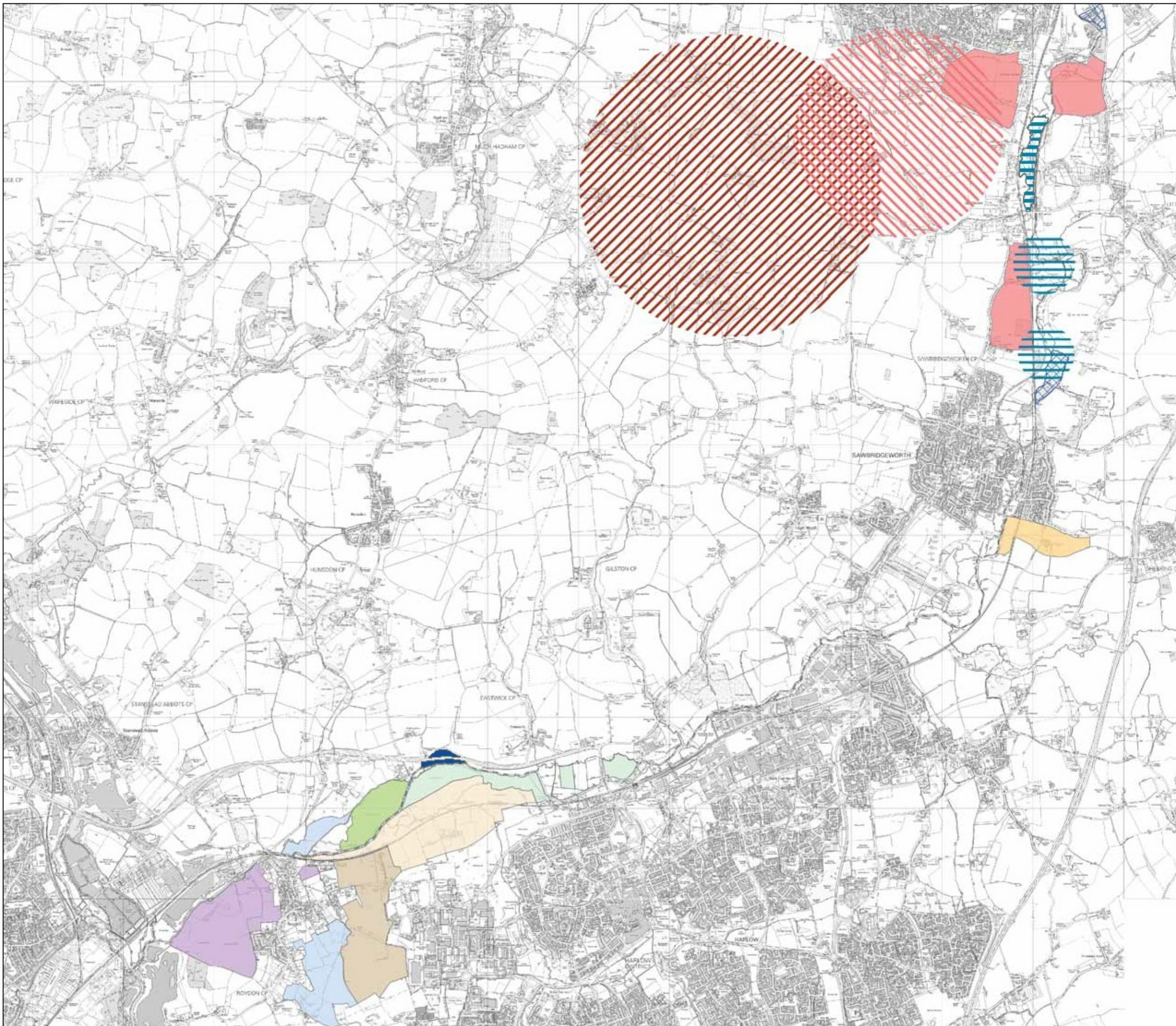
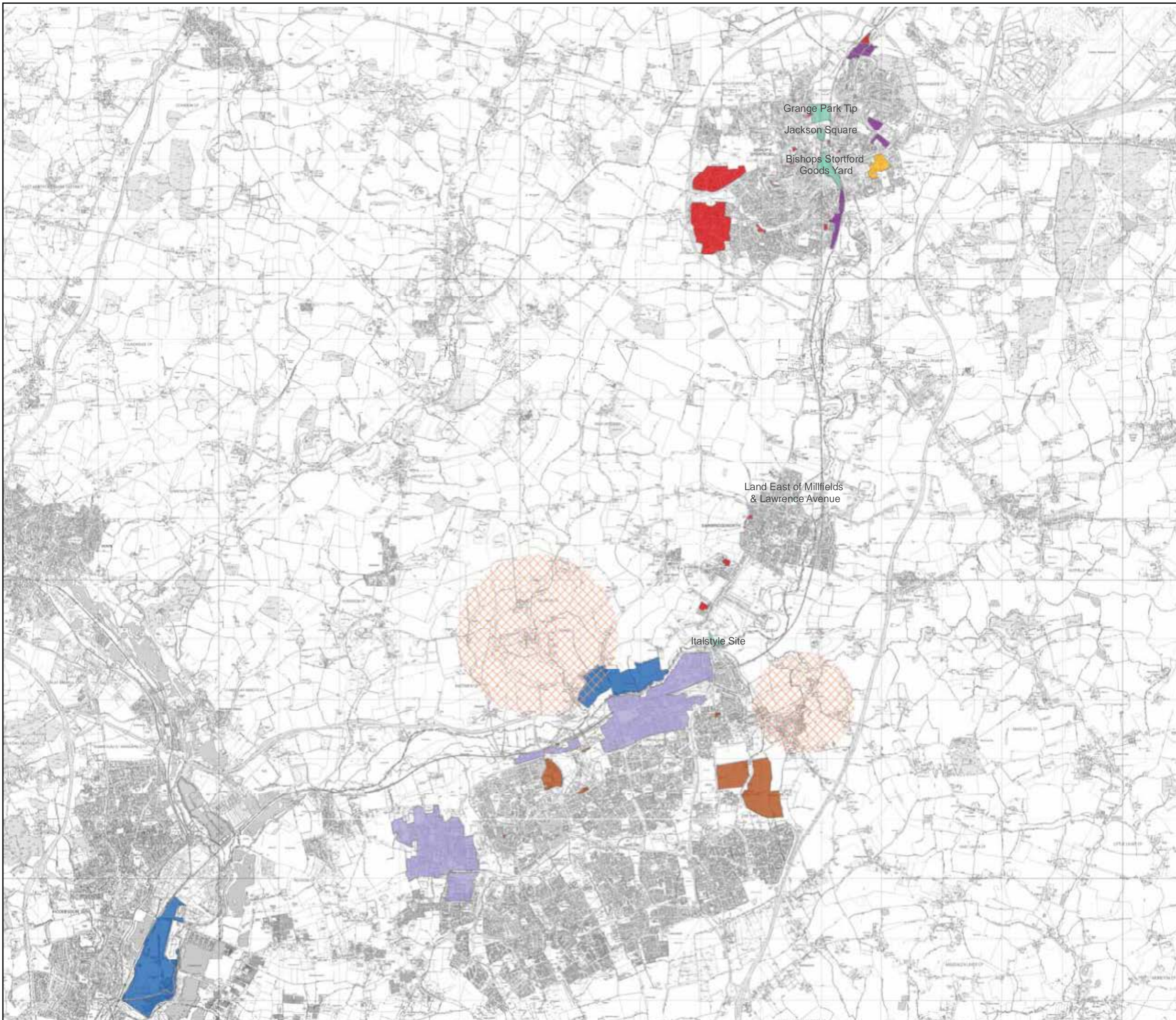


Figure 06
Known Developer Interests

- KEY**
- East Herts Local Plan - Current Permission for Housing
 - East Herts Local Plan - Allocated for Housing
 - East Herts Local Plan - Allocated for Employment
 - Approved Sites
 - Mixed Use Development (Indicative)
 - Harlow Local Plan - Housing Development
 - Harlow Local Plan - Employment Land
 - Mineral Sites (Restored Land or Awaiting Restoration)



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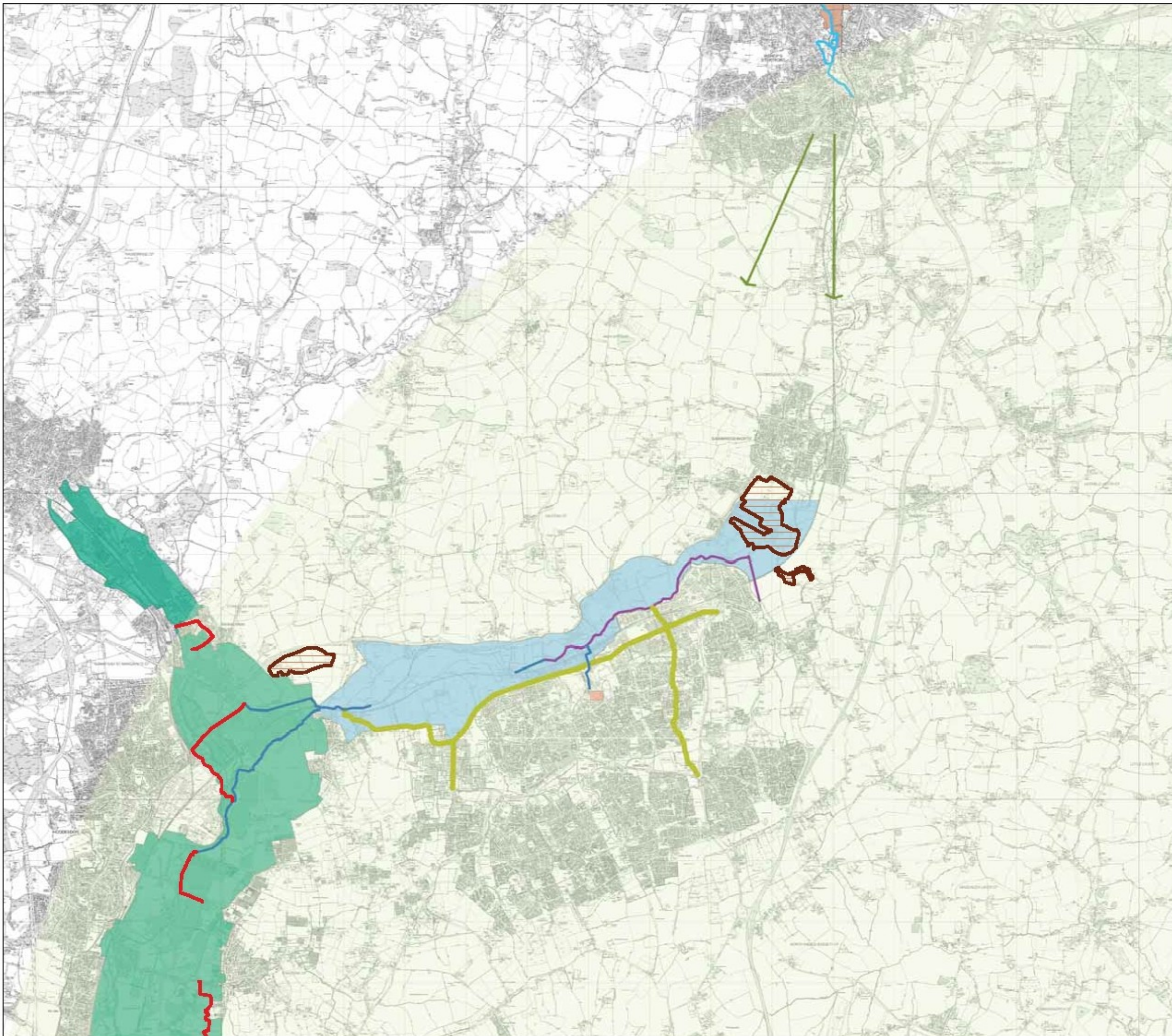


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Figure 07
Existing Projects

KEY

- Historic Parks and Gardens
- Existing Projects**
- Stort and Lee Valley Access (GAF II)
- National Cycle NebNork into Harlow(GAF II)
- Riverside Art Trail(GAF II)
- Watervole Enhancements, Pollards & Poplars (GAF II)
- Town Park, Spurriers House(GAF II)
- LeeValleyRegionaiPark
- Lee Valley Pathway: Proposed
- GreenArcArea
- Bishop's Stortford Green Links (Indicative)
- Bishop's Stortford Riverside Trail
- Urban Regeneration Projects



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



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Figure 08
Accessible Green Space and Deprivation by Ward

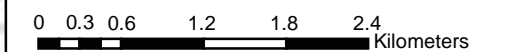
KEY

-  Accessible Open Space
 (Data Source: East Herts District Council; Middlemarch Environmental through Harlow Council; Epping Forest Local Plan)
-  Public Rights of Way

Index of Deprivation (2004)

-  0 - 20 (Most Deprived) - not present
-  21 - 40
-  41 - 60 - not present
-  61 - 80
-  81 - 100 (Least Deprived)

(NB: Accuracy of data cannot be assured for Public Rights of Way in Essex)



Stort Valley Feasibility Study

Scale 1:55,000
 Date March 2007
 Drawn GF Checked LS



Do not scale off drawing. All dimensions & levels are to be checked on site. Any discrepancies must be reported to the landscape architect immediately. ©The Landscape Partnership Ltd. Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Licence Number: 100002205

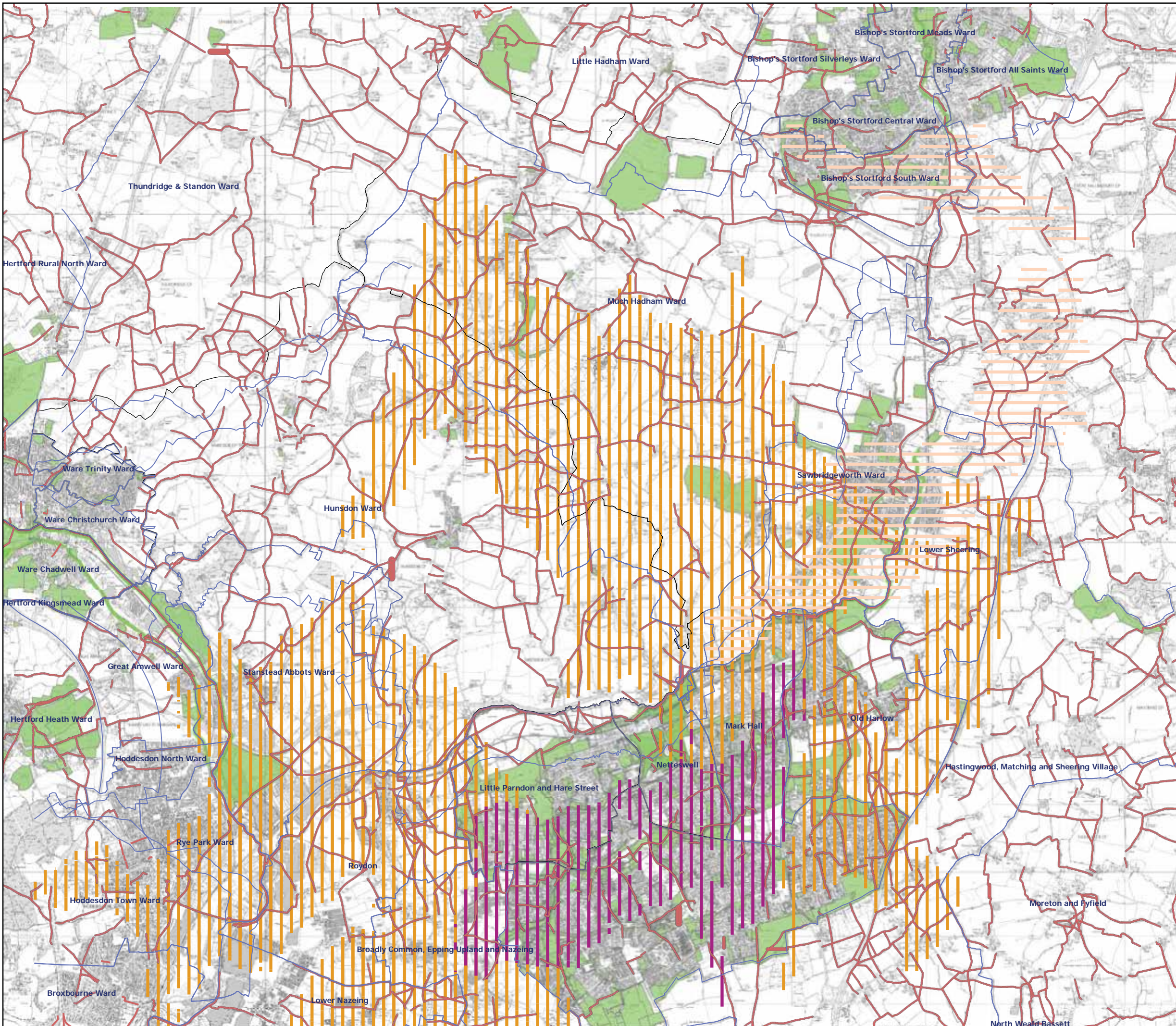






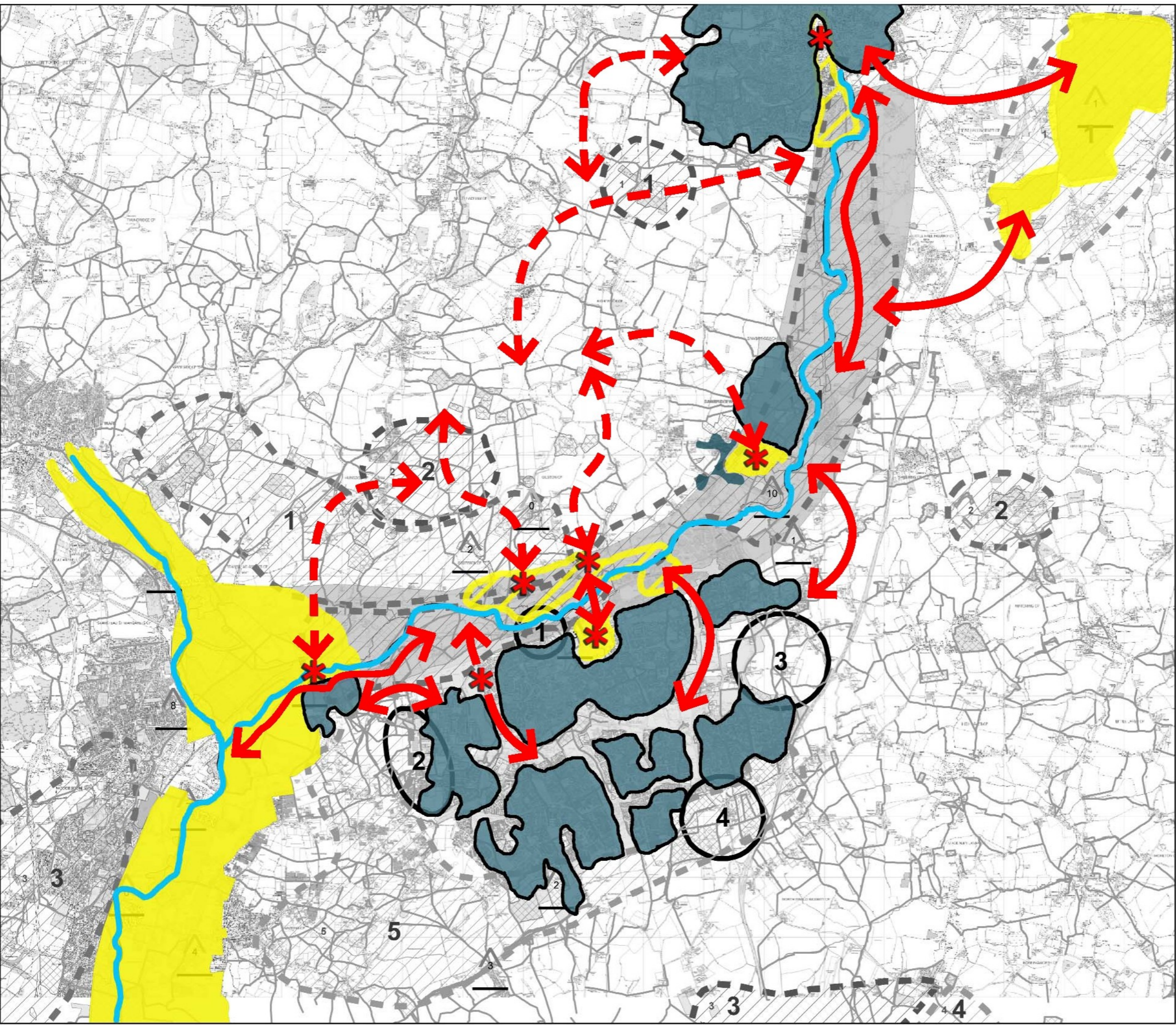


Figure 09
Strategic Access Links & Open Space Concept

- Key
-  Gateway
 -  Major Public Open Spaces
 -  Potential Open Spaces Within The Valley
 -  Key Greenway / Access Link
 -  Major Settlements
 -  Possible Future Greenway / Access Link
 Dependant On Development Allocations



0 0.3 0.6 1.2 1.8 2.4
 ———— Kilometers



Stort Valley Feasibility Study

Dwg No. 06223/09
 Scale 1:60,000
 Date February 2007
 Drawn CM Checked CHS



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**Appendix 1: Note of
consultation 16th May
2006**

**Stort Valley Stakeholder Consultation
May 16th 2006 at Harlow Civic Centre**

Attendees:

Dianne Cooper, Harlow Council (Planning)

Wendy Frost, Harlow Council (Planning)

Darren Fazackerley, Harlow Council (Landscape)

Ken Coyne, East Herts DC (Landscape)

Paul Hewitt, Epping Forest DC (Country Care)

Martin Wakelin, Essex CC (Landscape)

Stewart Bryant, Herts CC (Archaeology)

Rob Rees, Herts CC (Countryside)

Tony Bradford, Herts CC (CMS)

Graham Goodall, Herts CC (Biological Records Centre)

Claire Martin, Lee Valley RPA

Judy Adams, Herts and Middlesex WT

Claire Cadman, Essex WT

Emma Pritchard, Forestry Commission

Alan Bullivant, Defra (RDS)

Geoff Angell, Environment Agency

Nick Birkbeck, Environment Agency

Mark Blackwell, British Waterways

Nigel Brigham, Sustrans

Mary Parodi, Green Arc

Emma Norrington, Groundwork Herts

Peter Christmas, Groundwork Herts

Richard Kay, Go East

Pat Crosby, Countryside Agency

Catherine Cairns, Countryside Agency

Apologies were received from Fran Falconer (English Nature), Geoff Wilkinson (Essex CC RoW), Gill Taylor (Groundwork Herts) and Janet Green (LVRPA)

Purpose of consultation

The aims of the consultation were:

- To update participants on existing and planned developments in the area
- To explore the potential for creating a Riverpark in the Stort Valley
- To share issues which need to be addressed in the course of its development

The consultation was facilitated by an independent consultant.

The report from the day is in three sections:

Section 1 – Context

Section 2 - Aspirations and Expectations for the Stort river valley

Section 3 – Issues that need to be addressed to achieve these

Section 4 – Key areas needing to be addressed by the feasibility study and other decisions

Section 1 – Context

Harlow Area Landscape and Environment Study 2004

Harlow Area Green Infrastructure Plan 2005

RSS 14/East of England Plan process

Overview of main ecological, archaeological, landscape and recreational assets and opportunities in the Stort valley

Stort Riverpark: this is a key recommendation of the Green Infrastructure Plan 'to create a new strategic park in the Stort Valley, as an extension to the Lee Valley Regional Park.' The Stort Riverpark would 'enable the creation of a new and substantial multi-functional green space asset for the Harlow Area.'

The proposal would provide a strategic co-ordinated approach to the management of ecological, landscape, heritage, and access and recreation of the Lee and Stort river corridors, as key components of the Green Infrastructure Network.

Section 2 - Aspirations and Expectations

Group 1

- Need to be clear what this means i.e. not a 'chipped formal space' but a natural space. Ensure all partners working together to provide easy use vehicle for developers to use. Protect habitat/ecology while enabling access and education for increasing community pressure.
- Would like to see good conflict management in order to maintain biodiversity and tranquil waterside environment without any deterrent to existing and new users/visitors to the valley.
- Plan now – Identify key issues, be proactive to achieve best outcomes for biodiversity, public recreation etc. Action – Each agency identify projects on O.S any information have on it to inform everyone activities in area. Link key areas interest together to benefit all.
- Recreational opportunities linked to River Lee but also up to Bishops Stortford. Opportunities to work with developers. Improve towpath, routes access.
- Multi-functional landscape - historic, ecological, access and recreational. Biodiversity (BAP) driven. Wetlands and key species. Land ownership critical to delivery. Environmental stewardship. Opportunity to 'create' a natural 'park' within a local landscape perspective.
- New awards for environmental projects. To engage LA's and community groups.
- Enable developers to work with BAP and green infrastructure plan to have win/win – in partnership. Ensure a mosaic of green areas to allow movement and expansion of species.

For a successful project

- Clear aspirations/vision
- Strong leadership
- Clear accountability
- Clear project(s) and project management process
- Enhance habitats
- Create new habitats
- Provide multifunctional green way for existing and new inhabitants/settlements
- Integrate existing work into plan
- Increased involvement in project
- Ensure biodiversity information is up to date and correct
- Maximise potential of archaeology within the plan
- The valley is one of the most important and interesting ones for archaeology in the region
- It has potential to improve understanding including sense of place for existing and new communities
- Archaeology needs to be integral within management plans for the 'park'
- Consideration of the mechanism for long term management before the Stort River Park is developed
- Leadership and tender process
- Woodland creation (esp. wet woodland biodiversity action plan targets) where appropriate!
- Woodland management (bringing existing ones into management)
- Both above for public access/biodiversity/local communities
- Green jewel that needs polishing and enhancing
- Sensitivity not to impose but to enhance
- Consider relationship between River Park and Harlow Town Park
- Take care not to dilute the importance of Harlow Town Park
- Take care to consider how the River Park will be managed and sustained, and by who? Need to ensure it will be cared for in the future

Group 3

- Living valley – retain traditional skills, agricultural
- Multifunctionality is key
- Enable restoration of habitats
- Quieter, softer, informal landscape
- Incorporate formal park in town, leave rural landscape
- Harlow's blue ribbon – not just green wedge
- Park is too small a concept...it's more than just a park
- Work by influence and through control

Group 2

- 'Intense' development in the town
- Conservation important to protect – concentrate recreation towards urban expansion
- Extend good habitats to make more robust
- Need to take landscape scale not constrained to river floor
- Park could be restrictive
- Needs to be softer than Lee Valley – more natural landscape
- Sustainable use of the navigation – issues of water availability
- Limit expansion of marinas
- Build on narrow features
- Natural but robust landscape, ecologically rich
- Well connected throughout full length
- Well serviced at certain 'spots' – to enable access i.e. car park, centre, activity base
- Enhanced role for the river
- Linked, robust, buffering, natural, responsive, coherent, strategic

Section 3 - What do we need to do to achieve our goals?

Group 1

Support overall concept – but the name 'PARK' too constraining?

1. Nature-led 'park' – to complement LVRPA (recreation led)
2. Key opportunity to integrate BAP led biodiversity, access, recreational, cultural aspects etc within a natural landscape
3. Unique opportunity to be proactive in setting the agenda for discussions with developers
4. Need to manage the conflicts
5. Multi-agency approach
6. Access/habitat links in/out/along valley
7. What is area of search?? – How far upstream?
8. Early need to engage with land owners/managers and seek/advise on funding opportunities (ES/HLS)
9. Identify focal points/gateways e.g. Pishiobury as exemplar
10. Need to capture detail of all existing projects – feasibility study
11. Physical links into valley are poor and lack of knowledge/confidence of Harlow residents to venture forth
12. Enabling greater use
13. Community empowerment. Involvement further down the line through awards scheme
14. Marina (commercial) investment opportunity

Conflict with development pressures

- Status of document/park
- Need to integrate the 2 conflicts or aspirations, take opportunities

Stakeholders/representation/town people

- Developers and land owners need to be identified and involved, take opportunities
- Local people involved – not imposed on them
- Transport infrastructure bodies

What are we aiming for? Name of a 'Park'

- Decide before plan – LVRP – community forest models
- Logic of LVRP stopping = extension?
- Degree of multi-functionality

Maximise archaeological Interest

- Sustaining management of sites
- Balance with habitat creation/forestry sites

Major new roads and development expansion of existing in park area

- Done deal?
- Need non-motor networks between and in settlements to enable people to use space
- No point developing space if people not get to it
- Quality of access

Town Park vs Riverpark

- Dilute importance of Town Park?
- Town Park already see sections of River as part of the Town Park

Sustained and Long-Term management

- Back to trusts etc. e.g. community forest, Milton Keynes Park Trust, Marston Vale Trust
- Revenue??

Quality of G.O.S.

- Retain landscape/biodiversity/archaeology. Focus of park as is developed
- Biodiversity data correct/up to date

Group 2

Group 3

Support for the idea of a River Park?

- Term defines it
- May make it easier to 'fit' in planning terms

Aspirations

- Real connections – town/country e.g. Cambridge 'rubbish dump' Colchester 'grazing marshes'
- 'Softer' edges
- Local resource meeting local demands/needs but within an overall vision/context
- Retain a 'different' experience in wider areas rather than trying to recreate/duplicate existing provision
- Pragmatism/realism/sustainable (£!)

Problems/issues/opportunities

- Needs to be robust
- Multi-functionality = different parameters, boundaries and standards
- Less 'attractive' needs should be acknowledged and addressed (noisy?)
- Control or influence developments?
- 'Blueness' of area to be affirmed!!

Section 4 – key areas needing to be addressed by the feasibility study and other decisions

The meeting agreed that the Countryside Agency/Natural England, through Catherine Cairns, with the existing Green Infrastructure Plan Steering Group should write the brief for and commission feasibility study. Stakeholders will be given an opportunity to comment on the brief before commissioning takes place.

Stakeholders are to let Catherine know if they wish to become members of the existing Steering Group.

Timing is important with the East of England Plan due to be adopted in early 2007. So we need the draft feasibility study prepared and ready for consultation by the end of 2006. The local LDV Harlow Renaissance Ltd is currently being established and will be an important player.

The feasibility study will look at options for driving the Stort Valley proposals forward ie different models. Part of the feasibility study is about 'how to succeed' and how to keep the momentum going?

The consultation meeting recommended the following issues as fundamental to the study:

1. Agreeing definitions

- Are we talking about the river or the river and its valley?
- Where does the Stort study area begin and end?
- What/where are the edges? Do we want them hard and fast?
- What is the relationship of what is being talked about to existing green spaces eg Harlow Town Park
- Dominant focus is as a natural landscape, but one which offers great opportunities for multi-functionality
- Word 'park' constrains the vision?

2. Supporting the character of the place

The feasibility study should work on the basis that whatever the definition is, the place will be 'natural' in character aiming more to put back/enhance what was always there. Stakeholders all agreed that it should not be another Lee Valley Park, rather it fulfils a different purpose, though its links to the LVRP should be carefully considered.

3. Access (physical)

The study should explore the appropriate physical access points to the 'place'. There was a desire to keep the core facilities near the urban areas and to keep other parts 'natural'. Gateways into the 'park'/valley define its character, so should be aligned with the aspiration for 'naturalness'.

4. Access (visual)

The study should look at all the features which people pass through to see the 'park'/valley and how the road and other infrastructure design does/could better support this.

5. Community engagement

The study should address how to engage with residents and community groups with regard to the form and use of the Stort valley, both in the feasibility study methodology and in actions beyond this.

How do communities see themselves using the valley? Points to bear in mind include:

- Consultation fatigue
- The need to capture the views already using existing spaces
- The potential to use existing communication vehicles with the public such as Environment Day, BBC Breathing Places, etc
- Use existing groups and audiences on stakeholders existing databases
- Distinguish between audiences who need to be asked about the Grand Plan (specialist community groups?) and the local detail (residents?) Number of different levels.

6. Talking together

Need to resolve any conflicts of interest within the stakeholder partnership very early in the process ie talk to ourselves. Conversations are needed between the stakeholders themselves during the feasibility study with regard to issues such as marina development versus conservation issues.

The feasibility study should identify different developer interests (eg housing developers, landowners, gravel extractors) and state the ways in which these should be addressed. There are major concerns about the timing of 'talking' to developers, many feeling this is already underway and that the feasibility study should not mean stakeholders lose out/delay these talking opportunities.

The feasibility study should get stakeholders to agree a common vision and then recommend how stakeholders should organise to take the work forward ie who talks with the different developers and on behalf of whom and with what purpose/intent? Can the study come up with a proposal to which all stakeholders can sign up? Mechanisms to deliver the agreed vision and funding options also need considering early.

Elaine Willis

May 2006

Appendix 2: Consultation responses

Stakeholder group	Method of consultation	Purpose of consultation	Timescale	Summary of outcomes
Harlow District Council	Initial workshop Feasibility study inception meeting Interview Project review meeting	Supporting policy Links to existing projects Potential projects Developer interests Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Inception Project development Delivery	Consider social aspects and links into Harlow.
East Hertfordshire District Council	Initial workshop Feasibility study inception meeting Interview Project review meeting	Supporting policy Links to existing projects Potential projects Developer interests Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Inception Project development Delivery	<p>Stort open space important. Potential to bring the river forward in focus but it will be important to keep the balance with the natural environment.</p> <p>Agricultural uses in the Stort Valley area are well managed and are very rural in character.</p> <p>The Olympics will create a need for hotels for training events – Briggens and Manor of Groves are ideal sites.</p> <p>There is a lack of communication across the river between local authorities – this project should help people to take a more co-ordinated approach.</p> <p>The tip sites are key – restoration is critical with regard to timeframes; could be used for open space all the way through the Valley.</p> <p>Emphasis on nature, low key recreation, sports should be restricted to the marina at Bishops Stortford.</p> <p>There should be more use of river for leisure.</p>
Epping Forest District Council	Initial workshop Project review meeting	Supporting policy Links to existing projects Potential projects Developer interests Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Inception Project development Delivery	
Essex County Council	Initial workshop Feasibility study inception meeting Project review meeting	Supporting policy Links to existing projects Potential projects Developer interests Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Inception Project development Delivery	

Hertfordshire County Council	Initial workshop Interview (CMS, Biological Records Centre) Feasibility study inception meeting Project review meeting	Supporting policy Links to existing projects Potential projects Developer interests Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Inception Project development Delivery	<p>There needs to be a focus on the historic Orchard remnant at the rear of the hospital site, known as the Rivers Nursery.</p> <p>The biodiversity and economic aspects of the agricultural system are regarded as equal.</p> <p>Environmental Stewardship is seen as the most appropriate method for delivering large-scale land management that will benefit landscape, historic environment, biodiversity and public access that supports the agricultural infrastructure of our countryside.</p> <p>The Stort Valley should be more 'natural' than the Lea Valley. Broxbourne and Bencroft Woods National Nature Reserve and Pishobury Park are key sites.</p> <p>The vision should encompass a multifunctional landscape.</p> <p>It is essential to involve the farming community in the study, as they will enable implementation.</p> <p>Management and maintenance funding is an essential consideration in ensuring the long-term delivery of green space.</p>
Lee Valley Regional Park Authority	Initial workshop Feasibility study inception meeting Project review meeting	Links to existing projects Potential projects Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Inception Project development Delivery	
Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust	Initial workshop Feasibility study inception meeting Interview Project review meeting	Links to existing projects Potential projects Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Inception Project development Delivery	<p>HMWT have aspirations for land holdings in the Stort Valley.</p> <p>Working with farmers will be very important.</p> <p>Hunsden Mead and Roydon Mead are key biodiversity sites.</p> <p>With regard to GAF3 – present a menu of small scale projects that are costed so that people can pick and choose.</p> <p>The Stort / Lea Valley division is very important as the Stort has a more natural quality of landscape.</p> <p>Must be organisation led not structure led.</p> <p>Habitat of the type seen at Pishiobury should be increased.</p>

				<p>Horizontal connections between sites important for Otters and Voles as in links in and out of the valley for people and wildlife.</p> <p>Manage Hunsdon Mead</p> <p>Manage Water Vole Project in Herts Hunsdon Mead, Roydon Mead and Eastwick Mead are key biodiversity sites.</p> <p>Need for resurvey of Wildlife Sites</p> <p>Create, restore and link characteristic ecological, hydrological and landscape features to form a fully integrated floodplain corridor.</p> <p>Realise the full ecological potential of the valley by conserving the present range of species and habitats where appropriate, expand important habitats.</p> <p>Acknowledge the more natural aspect of the Stort Valley (in contrast to the Lea Valley, which should be protected and enhanced).</p>
Essex Wildlife Trust	<p>Initial workshop</p> <p>Feasibility study</p> <p>inception meeting</p> <p>Interview</p> <p>Project review meeting</p>	<p>Links to existing projects</p> <p>Potential projects</p> <p>Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership</p> <p>Delivery</p>	<p>Inception</p> <p>Project development</p> <p>Delivery</p>	<p>Essex Wildlife Trust has 3 reserves in the Stort Valley area: Hunsdon Mead; Rushy Mead; and Sawbridgeworth Marsh.</p> <p>The Stort Valley must be regarded as a potential String of pearls.</p> <p>Links to areas of biodiversity access deprivation is important for the community and EWT.</p> <p>EWT would wish to prioritise biodiversity enhancement and protection.</p> <p>Sites need to be adjacent to the river to be termed as part of the Stort Valley project.</p> <p>Considers it important to join up clusters of sites – South Harlow/A120 as an alternative to the String of pearls approach.</p> <p>Agriculture is very important especially in the north of the Stort Valley.</p>
Forestry Commission	<p>Initial workshop</p> <p>Project review meeting</p>	<p>Links to existing projects</p> <p>Potential projects</p> <p>Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership</p> <p>Delivery</p>	<p>Inception</p> <p>Project development</p> <p>Delivery</p>	

Natural England	Initial workshop Feasibility study inception meeting Project review meeting	Land ownership Landowner involvement in agri environmental schemes Links to existing projects Potential projects Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Inception Project development Delivery	
Environment Agency	Initial workshop Feasibility study inception meeting Project review meeting	Links to existing projects Potential projects Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Inception Project development Delivery	
British Waterways	Initial workshop Project review meeting	Links to existing projects Potential projects Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Inception Project development Delivery	
Sustrans	Initial workshop Feasibility study inception meeting Project review meeting	Links to existing projects Potential projects Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Inception Project development Delivery	
Green Arc	Initial workshop Feasibility study inception meeting Interview Project review meeting	Links to existing projects Potential projects Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Inception Project development Delivery	The Green Arc has been extended to encompass the M11 corridor up to Stansted. Harlow to Epping and Lee Valley to Hainault Forest are the main interest of Green Arc. There is a potential for funding to feed into the Stort Valley study – however there has been no communication with Herts County yet. The possible impact of the Stansted expansion and M11 are very important for the Stort Valley study. Advise switch from land acquisition to advice – but this is dependant on HLES Schemes. Important for a Green Arc / Groundwork partnership.

				<p>The focus is away from the Stort area at present – but this may change in the near future if the feasibility study indicates otherwise.</p> <p>The problem for the study will be encouraging the residents of Harlow out into the study area.</p>
Groundwork Hertfordshire	Initial workshop Feasibility study inception meeting Interview Project review meeting	Links to existing projects Potential projects Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Inception Project development Delivery	Public Rights of Way improvements are still required. Landownership should be key to the strategy over developer interests.
GO East	Initial workshop	Links to existing projects Potential projects Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Inception Project development Delivery	
EEDA	Feasibility study inception meeting Project review meeting	Links to existing projects Potential projects Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Inception Project development Delivery	
Landowners	Landowner workshop Interview Future exhibitions and workshops	Land ownership Landowner involvement in agri environmental schemes Potential for Higher Level Stewardship Links to existing projects Potential projects Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Project development Delivery	<p>Constraints to stewardship include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complicated application process • Access to information • Access to an ecologist. <p>Administrative boundary and lack of a CMS in Essex cited as further constraints. More grazing and set-aside land needed. Join Flich Way and Whittington Way to the Stortford PRow network. Invite Liz Drake, Hertsmere Greenways officer to participate in project. Extend role of HCMS Story Valley project officer.</p>
Stort Valley user groups	Future exhibitions and workshops	Links to existing projects Potential projects Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership Delivery	Delivery	

Parish Councils	Future exhibitions and workshops	Agreed vision for the Stort Valley Partnership	Delivery	
The wider public, including residents	Future exhibitions and workshops	Agreed vision for the Stort Valley	Delivery	

Initial workshop

May 16th 2006, Harlow Civic Centre

To explore the potential in the Stort Valley

Feasibility study inception meeting

October 12th 2006, Harlow Civic Centre

To review the feasibility study methodology, collect data and develop a clear vision

Interviews

October 12th 2006 – 14th December 2006

To collect data and discuss specific concepts

Landowner workshop

December 2006

To collect information on the potential for entry level and higher level stewardship

To determine means of working with farmers to realise the study's objectives

Project review meeting

January 18th 2007

To gain stakeholder agreement of the draft feasibility study and priority projects identified

March 20th 2007

To discuss and agree delivery mechanism and make final amendments to the second draft of the feasibility study

Appendix 3: Planning policy context

Local policy context

East Herts Local Plan Second Review Re-Deposit Version November 2004

SD4 (New Policy) Compensatory Tree Planting

This is a compensatory tree planting policy – 50% additional tree planting off site in the Green Belt or on rural land adjacent to the Green Belt for any significant development anywhere in the district. Areas identified as being of developer interest could be required to provide off site tree planting, this must be appropriate to the context of the Stort Valley.

SD20 (New Policy) Sustainable Development and Nature Conservation

This policy is intended to support proposals that will have a positive contribution to biodiversity. The aim is to safeguard the integrity of landscapes of major importance such as the Stort Valley and to protect, enhance and manage habitats.

GBC1 (Amended Existing Policy RA1) The Rural Area

Has regard to safeguarding countryside character in the rural area.

GBC3 (Amended Existing Policy RA2) Appropriate Development in the Green Belt

This policy restricts new buildings and land uses in the Green Belt unless they are for agriculture, forestry or essential small scale facilities for outdoor sport and recreation.

GBC9a (New Policy) Rural Diversification

This policy sets out criteria for the support of farm diversification proposals:

- Continuation of the whole unit and not to subdivide the farm
- Re-use of farm buildings
- Caution with regard to new buildings
- No significant adverse impact on local amenity
- Nature conservation, architectural interest and archaeology
- Traffic, access, parking and services

GBC10 (Amended Existing Policy RA6A) Adaptation and Re-use of Rural Buildings

Provides detailed criteria on the re-use of rural buildings beyond that in GBC9a. This policy provides further protection for the rural character of much of the Stort Valley area from unsympathetic re-use and/or adaptation of rural buildings.

GBC15 (Existing Policy RA7) Countryside Management

This policy states the District Council's aim to consolidate and extend its countryside management role. To work more generally with partner organizations such as the Countryside Management Service, the Biological Records Centre and the archaeology section of the county heritage and environment unit in order to identify new sites and support existing ones.

GBC16a Landscape Character

With this policy the District Council aims to use the principle of Landscape Character Assessment to strengthen landscape character in line with the Hertfordshire County Council methodology.

GBC16b Landscape Conservation Areas

Using Landscape Conservation Areas the District Council will assess the landscape implications of proposals, with particular emphasis on design, setting and siting. Landscape improvements will be sought wherever appropriate.

ENV5 (Amended Existing Policy BE8) Landscaping

This policy seeks the retention and enhancement of existing landscape features in all proposals, including an expectation for proposals to accord with the targets set out within the Hertfordshire Local BAP.

ENV8 (New Policy) Access for Disabled People

This policy sets out requirements for disabled access to be included within development proposals, including; accessible parking spaces, convenient movement along pathways and unhindered approaches to buildings.

ENV17 (Existing Policy RA10) Planting New Trees

Reinforcing policy SD4, this policy states the District Council's intention to promote and encourage planting of native trees to strengthen landscape character and improve landscape condition.

ENV19 (Existing Policy RA13A) Special Area of Conservation/Special Protection Area/Ramsar Site

This policy outlines a presumption against development in these areas unless there is no alternative solution, an overriding public interest, issues of human health and/or public safety or a beneficial consequence for nature conservation.

ENV20 (Existing Policy RA13B) Development and SSSI's

There will be a presumption against development on these sites unless the development's merits would outweigh those of the nature conservation value of the site. National Nature Reserves, Nature Conservation Review Areas or Geological Conservation Review Areas are given additional weighting. Where development is permitted conditions and/or obligations will be used to ensure protection and enhancement of the nature conservation interest.

ENV21 (Existing Policy RA13C) Local Sites

Details a presumption against development that would prejudice a Local Nature Reserve, Wildlife Site or Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Site, unless the need for development outweighed the value of the site.

ENV22 (Existing Policy RA13D) Nature Conservation Area Management Agreements

This policy states that within any of the Nature Conservation Areas referred to in Policies ENV19, 20 and 21 above, which are considered to be at risk from improper development, management agreements (under Section 39 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981) may be used to control undesirable permitted development.

ENV24 (Existing Policy RA14) Wildlife Habitats

The District Council sets out aspirations to:

- Support the work of the Hertfordshire Environment Forum
- Realise opportunities for habitat creation
- Actively pursue the designation of Local Nature Reserves
- Seek to ensure that river and transport network improvements and other public utility maintenance schemes are appropriately designed in the river valleys.
- Promote nature conservation in urban areas
- Seek improvements to nature conservation wherever possible

ENV25 (New Policy) Water Environment

This policy supports in principle, proposals that would preserve or enhance:

- The ecological value of watercourses in the district
- Nature conservation within water habitats
- River corridor landscape enhancements
- Sustainable leisure use and public access

This support would be based on favourable consultation with the Environment Agency, British Waterways and other relevant bodies.

ENV36 (New Policy) Environmental Zones

Environmental Zones will be designated to maintain high environmental quality and landscape character.

SD4 (New policy) Compensatory Tree Planting.

As stated, this must be appropriate to the location - particularly, when dealing with river valley flood plains where tree planting may not be appropriate. Therefore, the watching brief must always be **'the right trees in the right place'** and planting schemes must not be to the loss or detriment of more important habitats; eg. lowland wet grassland, marshes, fens, and reedbeds.

Harlow Adopted Local Plan 2006

SD1

States a presumption in favour of development that would protect and enhance the environmental wealth of the district.

L4

Suggests favourable consideration of development that provides sports, leisure or recreational facilities as long as the sequential approach has been demonstrated for need and current provision.

L11

This policy states a presumption towards the improvement of inclusive recreational access to the River Stort that would also conserve and enhance wildlife habitats.

NE11

States a preference towards proposals that contribute to Accessible Natural Green Space Standards (ANGSt).

NE13

Development proposals must have regard to the protection, maintenance and enhancement of the River Stort and its water meadows.

NE17

A Local Nature Reserve has been identified in the Stort Valley/

Epping Forest Adopted Local Plan 1996

NC4

Requires adequate provision for the protection and enhancement of those established habitats of local significance which are likely to be affected by new development.

NC5

Encourages landowners and occupiers to participate in nature conservation schemes that involve less intrusive forms of land management and reintroduce traditional methods of management for the benefit of existing and potential new habitats.

RST1

Permits the development of additional recreational and sports facilities where it best suits local communities and does not affect landscape character.

RST2

Attempts to seek through development, the expansion of the Rights of Way network and securing public access onto private land for informal leisure purposes.

RST7

Favours development associated with the recreational use of the Stort Navigation provided there is no adverse impact on the character of the green belt and water levels.

LL1

Conveys the Council's intention to continue to conserve and enhance the character of the countryside and encourage its considerate use and enjoyment by the public.

With particular attention being paid to the needs of the environment, agriculture, forestry and nature conservation, the provision of public recreation facilities, the protection of heritage resources and the conservation of the landscape.

LL2

The council will favour development that respects and enhances landscape character, and where appropriate involves management of all or part of the site for its contribution to landscape.

LL10

The Council will refuse permission for developments that do not retain trees, wildlife habitats, and features of historical, archaeological or landscape significance.

Relationship to Other Plans and Initiatives at the national and regional levels

The Sustainable Communities Plan, ODPM,

The ODPM's Sustainable Communities Plan aims to:

- Raise the quality and accessibility of greenbelt land by improving accessibility, biodiversity and utility value;
- Promote more and better publicly accessible green space in and around communities; and
- Protect green wedges and green corridors through the planning system.

The Stort Valley feasibility study reflects these aims. The provision of new and improved open space adjacent to existing communities will improve their quality of life and that of the environment. Business will also be attracted to the area as a result.

The Countryside in and Around Towns Initiative

The initiative aims to connect development in and around towns to the countryside by:

- Making it easily accessible
- Thereby improving the health and well being of the community that use the resource
- Which will promote sustainable living
- And have a beneficial effect on the environment and biodiversity

The vision of the Countryside in and Around Towns Initiative recommends 10 key aspects of multifunctional green space:

- A bridge to the country
- A gateway to the town
- A health centre
- A classroom
- A recycling and renewable energy centre
- A productive landscape
- A cultural legacy

- A place for sustainable living
- An engine for regeneration
- A nature reserve

The East of England Plan

Policies ENV1 (Environmental Infrastructure) and ST1 (Spatial Strategy for the Stansted/M11 Sub-Region) of the draft East of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy provide support for a safeguarded, enhanced and extended network of multi-functional green space.

The Green Arc Initiative

The Green Arc initiative is a strategic level green space development project, which seeks to support the creation and protection of an extensive, attractive and valued landscape of well-connected and accessible countryside for people and wildlife in the green belt around the conurbations surrounding London.

PPG17: Open Space, Sport and Recreation, ODPM, 2002

PPG17 states that provision for open space, sport and recreation is fundamental to delivering broader government objectives including urban renaissance, rural renewal, social inclusion and community cohesion, health and well being, in addition to sustainable development. The companion guide to PPG17 reiterates the role of open space provision, providing guidance on how local authorities should assess open space.

Biodiversity Action Plans, ODPM,

Biodiversity Action Plans are in place for the Harlow Area, providing targets for the positive conservation of key habitats and species.

PPG 2: Greenbelts

The objectives of PPG2 are as follows:

- To provide opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population;
- To provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas;
- To retain attractive landscapes, and enhance landscapes, near to where people live;
- To improve damaged and derelict land around towns;
- To secure nature conservation interest; and
- To retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses.

PPS7: Sustainable development in rural areas, ODPM, 2005

Aims within PPS7 include ensuring the improvement of the quality and sustainability of local environments and neighbourhoods and continuing the protection of valued landscapes and natural resources.

PPS9: Biodiversity and geological conservation, ODPM, 2004

PPS9 states that biological and geological diversity should be sustained and enhanced as an integral part of social, environmental and economic development.

PPS25

Planning Policy Statement 25 (PPS25) sets out Government policy on development and flood risk. Its aims are to ensure that flood risk is taken into account at all stages in the planning process to avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding, and to direct development away from areas of highest risk. Where new development is, exceptionally, necessary in such areas, policy aims to make it safe, without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and, where possible, reducing flood risk overall.

Green Spaces, Better Places, Urban Green Space Task Force, 2005

The Urban Green Space Task Force document identifies the benefits of urban parks and green spaces. The document considers that urban parks and green spaces contribute to urban regeneration and renewal, health, social cohesion, community development and citizenship, education and life long learning, environmental sustainability, heritage and culture.

Living Places – Cleaner, Safer Greener, ODPM, 2002

The ODPM identify four challenges for public open space, these include accounting for the wide range of owners, tenants and users, combating creeping degradation, improving the quality of public space for everyone and responding to rapidly changing circumstances.

Reconnecting people and nature: English Nature's approach, English Nature, 2002

A key aim of English Nature (now Natural England) is to promote access to designated areas, enhancing people's understanding of biodiversity. A critical focus is on 'People and Nature', considering the principles of both social inclusion and sustainability. This is reflected in the research report 'Re-connecting people and nature: English Nature's approach'. A priority within the report is greater involvement of the community in natural areas.

Position Statement on Local Environmental Quality and Liveability, The Environment Agency, 2002

The role of the Environment Agency is to improve the environment and people's quality of life, and as such the agency supports central government's liveability agenda. The position statement iterates that environmental improvements should be combined with social and economic benefits. The document also requires urban rivers and wildlife corridors to be included as part of 'green space' initiatives.

Biodiversity by Design: A guide for sustainable communities, Town and Country Planning Association, 2004

The Town and Country Planning Association document provides guidance on how to maximise the opportunities for biodiversity in the planning and design of sustainable communities. It offers exemplars from international projects on successful design and management of environmental infrastructure, benefiting communities, to demonstrate new approaches that have the potential for replication in the UK. The document considers core design principles which relate well to biodiversity, examines methods of analysing a site and its context, advises on how new Green Infrastructure can be created that links to existing networks, and considers detailed design and long term management.

Hertfordshire and Essex Biodiversity Action Plans are also essential to setting the planning policy context as these provide a framework of priority habitats and species in the Stort Valley.

Appendix 4: Designated wildlife sites

Designated Wildlife Sites within/adjacent to the Stort Valley (see Figure2A)

Lee Valley RAMSAR SPA including Amwell SSSI and Rye Meads SSSI Nature Reserves nearby

Hunsdon Mead SSSI

Sawbridgeworth Marsh SSSI

Little Hallingbury Marsh SSSI

Thorley Flood Pound SSSI

Harlow Marsh LNR

BAP Priority habitat

- Fen
- Purple moor grass and rush pasture
- Wet woodland
- Lowland meadow
- Reedbeds
- Floodplain grazing marsh

Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan:

- Wetlands (rivers, streams, springs, open water, fen, marsh, reedbed, swamp, wet grassland, alder woodland).
- Neutral/marshy grassland (lapwing, redshank, snipe).
- Farmland and associated declining birds (grey partridge, lapwing, turtle dove, song thrush, linnet, bullfinch, reed bunting).
- Orchards.
- Bittern.
- Water vole.
- Natterer's bat.
- Otter.
- Great crested newt.
- White-clawed crayfish.
- River water-dropwort.
- Common Dormouse
- Tree Sparrow
- Stone-curlew
- Song Thrush
- Chalkhill Blue
- Grizzled Skipper
- Stag Beetle
- Great Pignut

- Cornflower
- Pasqueflower

Essex Biodiversity Action Plan

Species

- Brown hare
- Dormouse
- Otter
- Bats
- Water vole
- Bittern
- Grey Partridge
- Skylark
- Song thrush
- GC Newt
- Stag Beetle
- Desmoulins Whorl Snail
- White clawed crayfish
- Shining Ramshorn Snail

Habitats

- Ancient woodland
- Brownfield sites
- Cereal field margins
- Heathland
- Hedgerows
- Lowland grassland
- Old Orchards
- Reedbeds
- Urban areas
- Veteran trees
- Woodland pasture

Appendix 5: Relevant links

Relevant links

BTCV www.btcv.org

CABE Space www.itsyourspace.org.uk

Crime and Disorder Reductions Partnership www.crimereduction.gov.uk/partnerships

Civic Trust www.civictrust.org.uk

Forestry Commission www.forestry.gov.uk Groundwork

www.groundwork.org.uk Heritage Lottery Fund

www.hlf.org.uk

Land Restoration Trust www.landrestorationtrust.org.uk Local

Strategic Partnerships www.neighbourhood.gov.uk National Trust

www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Natural England www.naturalengland.org.uk

RSPB www.rspb.org.uk

Sport England www.sportengland.org Wildlife Trust

www.wildlifetrusts.org Woodland Trust www.woodland-trust.org.uk

Environment Agency www.environment-agency.gov.uk

English Heritage www.english-heritage.org.uk

GreenArc www.greenarc.org

Hertfordshire Environment Forum www.hef.org.uk

Useful documents

CABE Space, 2006, Paying for parks: Eight models for funding urban green spaces

CABE Space, 2004, A guide to producing park and green space management plans

Groundwork, 2005, Sustaining green space investment: Issues, challenges and recommendations

Hertfordshire County Council Countryside Management Service, 2006, Community green space and new development

HLF, 2000, Parks for People guidance note ODPM, 2005,

Green spaces, better places ODPM, 2005, Local area agreements toolkit

ODPM, 2002, Living places: Cleaner, safer, greener

TCPA, 2002, Biodiversity by design

Land Use Consultants, 2004, Improving the Countryside around London: The GreenArc Approach

Land Use Consultants, 2005, A Biodiversity Audit and Objective Setting Exercise for the GreenArc

Appendix 6: Landscape character areas

Please see Harlow Landscape and Environment Study, Appendix A Volume 1 (CBA ,2004)

A convenient summary is set out in sections 2.4.2 and 2.4.3 of the Harlow Green Infrastructure Plan (CBA, 2005), as follows.

Key Assets

The Key Landscape Assets related to the Harlow Area's landscape, townscape and riverscape character include:

- The distinctive 'landscape-led' approach by Sir Frederick Gibberd to the development of the Harlow Master Plan, which has strongly shaped the development of the town's urban form and was key to its relationship to the surrounding countryside. Gibberd's approach to landscape can be summarised as:

- * Compact groups of buildings within discrete neighbourhoods separated by a network of broad areas of generally linear open spaces (now known as 'green wedges') providing playing fields, children's playgrounds, accessible natural spaces, allotments and other types of green spaces;

- * Physical and visual links from the centre of the town to the surrounding countryside on its edge formed by the green wedges, which encapsulate natural features such as valleys, woods, brooks;

- * A clear contrast between the town and the surrounding countryside provided by the Stort river corridor separating the town from the undulating/rolling landscapes to the north, and the pronounced north-facing ridge slope to the south which visually and physically contains the urban area from the open countryside to the south.

- The diversity of landscapes within the Harlow Area as reflected in the 10 Landscape Character

Types and 31 Landscape Character Areas shown on Figure 4 – in particular:

- * The Urban Areas ranging from the varied townscapes related to the planned neighbourhoods and large green wedges of Harlow New Town, the linear conurbation comprising Hoddesdon, Cheshunt and Broxbourne, and the historic settlements of Waltham Cross and Epping

- * The Lee and Stort River Valley Floodplains characterised by wetland vegetation, a mixture of natural river corridors, canals and extensive waterbodies created by sand and gravel extraction, including in particular the distinctive waterscapes of the Lee Valley Marshes, characterised by open and expansive mosaic of marsh, scrub and wet woodland and large flocks of waterfowl

- * The undulating/rolling Ridges and Slopes and Uplands to the north of the River Stort characterised by pockets of woodland, isolated small settlements and farmsteads, and distinctive areas of historic parkland

- * The extensive gently undulating Plateaux, with medium to large-scale largely arable fields and winding lanes connecting scattered farmsteads

- * The series of undulating Ridges and Valleys between Harlow and Epping Forest with a mix of arable and pasture fields

- * The distinctive Wooded Ridges of Epping Forest with an enclosed character and dominated by semi-natural / ancient woodland.

- The distinctive glasshouse landscapes of the Roydon / Nazeing plateau;

- The elevated views over Harlow to the north from the pronounced ridge running along the southern edge of the town;

- The woodland blocks, hedgerows and hedgerow trees providing a green edge to many urban areas;

- The individual identity of generally dispersed small-scale nucleated rural settlements and their dispersed pattern within the landscape;

- The range of varied field patterns in the landscape reflecting different patterns of historic land-use and modern development;

- The range of local landscape elements and features, many of which are of historical and cultural value, that contribute to local distinctiveness and sense of place.

Opportunities

Informed by the relevant Landscape Character Assessments³³, the key opportunities for protection and enhancement of the Key Landscape Assets within the Harlow Area are considered to be:

- Protection and enhancement of remaining areas of traditional farmland character which contribute to the character and quality of the Harlow Area landscape;
- Improvement of urban fringe farmland, including restoration of characteristic landscape features and elements where appropriate;
- Integrated management and enhancement of the 'multi-functional landscapes' of the Lee Valley, the Stort Valley and their associated tributary river corridors;
- Promoting further uptake of agri-environmental funding support for targeted enhancement of key landscape features within intensively farmed areas under arable;
- Protection of the distinctive pattern of small, irregular pre-18th century field systems in the west and south of the Harlow Area;
- Softening the visual impact of the extensive areas of glasshouses that dominate the plateau landscape to the east of the Lee Valley;
- Protection of the ancient woodlands, parklands, commons and assarted fields that provide strong and visible links with the past;
- Protecting the rural settlement pattern of predominantly small-scale medieval and post-medieval settlements as key characteristic features of the Harlow Area landscape;
- Physically and visually linking the internal green spaces of major urban areas (Harlow, Hoddesdon, Cheshunt, Broxbourne and Waltham Cross) with the wider countryside;
- Improving the environmental quality of major highway and railway corridors, and greening of strategic gateways to urban areas;
- Integrating the grain and fabric of the historic landscape into modern land uses where appropriate;
- Protection and restoration of historic designed landscapes as key green infrastructure assets;
- Strengthening local character of urban fringe landscapes through promotion of high quality and distinctive places providing a strong framework for existing and new development.

Appendix 7: Equality and diversity toolkit

Step	Process	Assessment of the Stort Valley Feasibility Study
<p>1. Identify the aims of your project/ initiative/ strategy/ programme (hereafter referred to as "initiative")</p>	<p>To begin the assessment process, you must have a clear understanding of the initiative you want to develop.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the purpose of the proposed initiative (or the changes you want to make to an existing initiative)? 2. What are the specific outcomes you hope to see from the proposed initiative? 3. What criteria will you use to measure progress towards these outcomes? 4. What impact will the initiative have on for example, jobs or the ways you deliver your services? 5. How will the proposed initiative be put into effect? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The proposed initiative draws upon previous initiatives (Harlow Landscape and Environmental Study 2004 / Harlow Area Green Infrastructure Plan 2005) and recent planning legislation (the East of England Plan) in order to optimise the delivery of sustainable, multifunctional land management within the Stort Valley. 2. The specific outcomes are to determine the feasibility of, and provide a mechanism for the co-ordination of stakeholders, linkages, projects and activities in the future. 4. The initiative should promote the relationships between various owners and users of land as well as ensuring the protection of environmentally and historically valued areas. 5. The initiatives set out in the study will be put into effect by testing the aims with a particular group of stakeholders, landowners and those with a special interest in the area, before approaching and integrating the wider community.
<p>2. Screening the proposed initiative</p>	<p>You now need to conduct an initial screening of your proposed initiative to assess the impact under your equality and diversity duties to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, promote good relations between different racial groups, and promote positive attitudes towards minority/under-represented groups.</p> <p>→ To carry out this initial screening you must have a minimum amount of up-to-date and reliable data on the groups relevant to the area/s affected by the initiative</p> <p>You need to answer the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there any reason to believe that certain groups of people could be affected differently by the proposed initiative, for example in terms of access to a service, or the ability to take advantage of proposed opportunities? 2. Is there any evidence that any part of the proposed initiative could discriminate unlawfully, directly or indirectly, against some groups – e.g. disabled people, ethnic minority groups etc? 3. Is the proposed initiative likely to affect relations between certain groups, for example because it is seen as favouring a particular group or denying opportunities to another? <p>If you have answered 'yes' to any of the questions above, the proposed initiative will be relevant to your responsibilities under the equality duties. Make sure you are clear about which equality strand(s) the initiative is relevant to. You should also consider whether the risk of adverse impact is sufficiently significant to warrant undertaking a full impact assessment (step 3).</p> <p>If you conclude that the proposed initiative is not relevant to any equality duty, you should make sure this is recorded. However, you should monitor the initiative to ensure this is actually the case.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The study promotes the diversity of users regardless of background, status or residence. The focus on improving links will benefit the entire community (both existing and proposed) as well as people visiting the area – clearer signage and better surfacing on walkways will ensure that all users have the opportunity to enjoy the Stort Valley area. In land management terms, the study has appraised all Environmental Stewardship schemes in the area to ensure that, within reason, the full extent of people's visions can be realised. Attracting visitors to the area is essential as well as ensuring that local residents benefit from the qualities of the area. 2. Access is open to all. Improvements to the surfacing and signage of the Stort Valley's public paths would suggest that disabled people are being encouraged to visit/use the area. The promotional campaign values all users of the area. 3. Path networks are to be assessed and new ones created. All linkages are to be agreed with landowners, possibly as part of stewardship schemes. Recreational activities within the river corridor are popular and any intensification of these activities will need to be done with careful consideration to the natural environment and the landowners. It has been ascertained that further detail should be gathered, especially if housing development occurs in the area. The proposed initiative focuses on the promotion and security of relations between groups in and around the area in equal context, therefore it certainly can be said that favour has not been placed on one particular group.

<p>3. Gathering detailed data</p>	<p>The validity of your full impact assessment will depend on the quality of the information you use. The aim should be to establish a reliable and extensive database of information on racial groups</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the relevant data you have capture all the information you need about the areas upon which your initiative may impact? - e.g. the data may not reflect the ethnic diversity in the area sufficiently 2. Do you need additional information about the different groups of people to help inform your initiative? 3. Is the additional quantitative and qualitative information already readily available? - e.g. on the East of England Observatory 4. Is the information up-to-date, relevant and reliable? 5. Is the available information sufficiently detailed to permit analysis of differential impact on different groups? 6. If you need further data to assess the likely impact, where will you get it from? e.g. specially commissioned qualitative or quantitative surveys or consultation exercises designed to fill gaps in the information about certain groups? 7. Who will be responsible for pulling together all the information needed in the required format? i.e. in a way so that inferences can be drawn on the likely effects of the proposed initiative on different racial groups. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Methods for establishing social inclusion and partnerships is a theme running throughout the report – partnerships to address key issues including the needs and opportunities of the area. It is felt that by focusing heavily on social inclusion in the wider context, no single group has been specially mentioned in the report, providing equality in its content as well as its goals. Information has been obtained from the Indices of Deprivation and democratically accountable organisations. 2. For the purposes of this initiative all necessary information has been gathered, however when the projects set out within the report are realised, further information may be required. The study makes provision for this. 3. All additional information is available from the agencies which have contributed to this report – the figures shown in the study clearly state where the information has been obtained from, and where further/detailed information can be found. 4. The information is the most up to date and reliable information available. 5. The information is sufficiently detailed to substantiate the objectives of this initiative. 6. Further information will be obtained through the consultation proposals identified within the report. 7. Consultants, the steering group, the working group and the project officer will be responsible for gathering this information.
<p>4. Assessing the likely impact</p>	<p>This stage lies at the heart of the impact assessment process. It involves systematically appraising the proposed initiative against all the information and evidence and assessing whether the initiative is likely to have significantly negative consequences for a particular group or groups.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does your analysis of the proposed initiative indicate possible adverse impact on some groups? 2. If your analysis of the information shows that the disparities between for example, racial groups or disabled people are statistically significant, can this be explained by factors other than race/disability? 3. Could the proposed initiative lead to unlawful direct discrimination, i.e. people being treated less favourably purely on grounds of their race/disability? If yes, you must abandon it straightaway and look for different ways of achieving your initiative aims; direct discrimination can never be justified. 4. Could the proposed initiative lead to unlawful indirect discrimination? (e.g. the initiative is applicable to everyone but it inadvertently disadvantages a particular racial group). If yes, does the initiative's potential for indirectly discriminating against some groups appear to be justifiable at this stage? – remember your reasons must have nothing to do with the equality strands - race/disability/gender/age/sexual orientation/faith etc. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The initiative encourages a positive impact on all groups by ensuring land is protected, enhanced and utilised by all residents and visitors in the appropriate manner. 2. The information focuses on the locality of all groups. The purpose of analysing the information gathered was to ensure that relationships between groups were optimised and protected, and all groups become integrated with their surroundings, enjoying the benefits, which the area has to offer. 3. The initiative encourages social inclusion and sustainable communities. It does not in any way discriminate a group. 4. As above

<p>5. Consider alternative measures</p>	<p>If the proposed initiative is likely to be unlawfully discriminatory, you should look for other ways of achieving your aims, or be sure you can justify the decision to proceed with the initiative.</p> <p>1. Are there aspects of your initiative that could be changed to reduce or remove adverse impact on a particular group, without affecting the initiative's overall aims?</p> <p>2. Will you seek to justify the initiative, as originally proposed, in spite of its potential for affecting some groups adversely, because of its importance? i.e. the reasons have nothing to do with race/gender/age/disability etc., and the social and economic benefits far outweigh any potentially discriminatory effect.</p> <p>→ Note: if you choose the second option you should be satisfied that: (i) you have a strong case; (ii) that your reasons cannot be construed as contravening EEDA's equality duties; (iii) that you were unable to find other ways of achieving your initiative aims. You are also advised to take legal advice.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The initiative in its present stage and format is effective in its objectives and applies equally to all groups. During the stages whereby the initiatives are developed, there may be a change in the way that the aims are met. Provisions are set up to ensure that the transition from working group to wider community is as efficient and effective as possible. 2. The initiative incorporates important objectives for the area, which have been made to benefit the existing and future populations. The aim of creating and maintaining relationships suggests that no group or individual should be adversely affected.
<p>6. Consulting on the initiative</p>	<p>Consulting people who may be affected by your initiative provides an opportunity to obtain feedback on your proposals before final decisions are made. Consultations must be proportionate and appropriate. In deciding who to consult and the methods to be adopted, you should ask the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who are the groups, organisations and individuals most likely to be affected by the proposed initiative, directly and indirectly? 2. What methods of consultation are most likely to succeed in attracting the organisations and people you want to reach? <p>In reaching your decisions consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The consultation methods should be tailored to the groups you want to reach; consider using focus groups to explore issues in greater detail with a few individuals, written questionnaires or interview surveys to access a wider audience, setting up representative lay advisory groups for regular discussion and consultation. <input type="checkbox"/> The process should be properly planned with: (i) clear objectives; (ii) named person responsible; (iii) clear explanations of purpose and process for consultees, including translating the consultation materials, where necessary; (iv) the timescale should provide the consultees with sufficient time to digest the information they are being given and adequate time to respond; v) the arrangements for responding to the views put forward by the consultees. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All groups, organisations and individuals residing in the area and within the peripheral area will be affected directly, whilst the wider population could potentially be affected indirectly by being given a renewed incentive to visit the Stort Valley. 2. The stakeholder organisations have been involved in the project steering group and will be responsible for implementing the initiatives with a separate working group and a project officer. A meeting was held with landowners to include them in the study. The consultation strategy sets out the potential consultees and methods of consultation for further stakeholder and community involvement.

<p>7. Making a decision on the initiative</p>	<p>With the results of the consultation in place, you will now be in a position to decide whether to adopt the initiative and if so, in what format.</p> <p>Your decision will be based on four important factors: (i) the aims of the initiative; (ii) the evidence you have gathered; (iii) the results of your consultations; and (iv) the relative merits of any alternatives put forward.</p> <p>In making your final decision you should address the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Does the full assessment show that the proposed initiative will have an adverse impact on a particular group (or groups)? b. Is the proposal likely to make it difficult to promote equal opportunities or positive attitudes or foster good relations between different groups? c. If the answer to both (a) or (b) is 'yes', can the initiative be revised, or additional measures taken, so that it achieves its aim but without risking any adverse impact? d. In considering revising the initiative, can any of the findings of the consultation process be utilised? e. Given the final picture, will you abandon the initiative or go ahead with it? If you are going ahead, what will the final initiative look like? <p>If you are considering proceeding with a initiative which you know is likely to have adverse impact on some groups, e.g. it is indirectly discriminatory, you must first satisfy yourself of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> the initiative is essential in order to carry out your functions <input type="checkbox"/> you were unable to find another way of achieving the aims of the initiative that had a less discriminatory effect <input type="checkbox"/> you believe that the means you have employed to achieve the aims of the initiative are proportionate, necessary and appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> the benefits far outweigh any potential discriminatory effect <p>Make sure you keep a record of your conclusions at each stage of the decision-making process, and bring your conclusions together in an equality impact assessment report. The report should clearly show the relative weight given to each type of evidence: monitoring data, research findings, other statistics, and the results of your consultations. You can then explain the reasons for the decision reached, and make recommendations on how to put the initiative into practice, including suggestions for training and monitoring.</p>	<p>A steering group, key stakeholders and democratically accountable bodies will oversee the delivery of the initiatives. Further work through consultation should ensure that the delivery of the initiative is effective and widespread.</p>
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<p>8. Monitoring the initiative</p>	<p>You will only know the actual impact of the initiative once it is put into operation. This means you will have to monitor it regularly to know what is happening in reality. You must therefore make arrangements to monitor initiatives for any adverse impact. Equality monitoring reports should be published each year.</p> <p>You need to decide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> If the initiative should be given a trial run, to see how or whether it actually affects different groups. <input type="checkbox"/> How the initiative will be monitored once it becomes operational, i.e. who will be responsible for the monitoring, what sort of data will be collected, how will it be collected, how often will it be collected and how often will it be analysed? <input type="checkbox"/> How the effects of the initiative on promoting equality will be monitored, i.e. what assessment criteria will be used <input type="checkbox"/> How will any concerns be taken into account in any review of the initiative, i.e. how will any problems be addressed? 	<p>N/A</p>
<p>9. Publishing the results</p>	<p>A summary of the results of the assessments and any consultations carried out should be published by EEDA each year. The aim is to be open about the way decisions are made and to be answerable to the public. In writing your full impact assessment, it is suggested you follow the structure below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> A description and explanation of the proposed initiative, putting it in its wider strategic and legislative context <input type="checkbox"/> A brief explanation of how the initiative was assessed for its likely effects on different groups, with clear references to the information and research used as a benchmark <input type="checkbox"/> A brief description of the consultation methods used, and a summary of the overall findings <input type="checkbox"/> The conclusions reached through the assessment and consultation as to the likely effects of the proposed initiative, being clear about which equality strand(s) it relates to <input type="checkbox"/> Any modifications of the initiative introduced as a result of the assessment and consultation, or alternative or additional measures <input type="checkbox"/> An explanation of whether and how the revised initiative differs from the original proposal <input type="checkbox"/> A statement of the plans for monitoring the initiative when it is put into effect 	<p>The study is at the feasibility stage and consequently a detailed assessment is not appropriate. It is anticipated that a full assessment will be completed at the project stage of each initiative.</p>