

TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

**SUBMISSION TO ROCHFORD CORE STRATEGY
EXAMINATION COMMENCING 11 MAY 2010**

ON BEHALF OF WEST ROCHFORD ACTION GROUP

EXAMINATION REFS 16161 & 16163
SPL REF: 10.1380

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APPENDICES

WRAG1	Photos 1-24 including Google Earth satellite Photo
WRAG2	Natural England Technical Information Note TIN049: Agricultural Land Classification: protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land. Includes plans relating to Rochford District: 1) Best and Most Versatile Land 2) Provisional Agricultural Land Classification
WRAG3	1:7250 detailed ordnance survey plan: west side of Rochford.
WRAG4	Extracts from the Rochford Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, May 2007

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Smart Planning Ltd represents the West Rochford Action Group (the 'Action Group').
- 1.2. The Action Group has made valid representations to the public consultation on the Rochford District Council Core Strategy Submission Document (CSSD). The representations relate to Policy H1 (reference 16161) and Policy H2 (reference 16163)
- 1.3. The Rochford Core Strategy Examination is scheduled to commence on 11 May 2010.
- 1.4. The Action Group has requested to appear at the Rochford Core Strategy Examination and is listed to appear in relevant sessions.
- 1.5. This further written submission is to enlarge on the points already raised and to assist in matters to be discussed at the Examination.
- 1.6. Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Inspector is charged with firstly checking that the plan has complied with legislation which includes in particular checking that the plan has been subject to sustainability appraisal, and has regard to national policy.
- 1.7. In addition, the Act requires the Inspector to determine whether the plan is "sound". To be sound, a core strategy should be *justified, effective and consistent with National Policy*.
- 1.8. The Action Group has some serious reservations about the integrity of the work that has been undertaken by the Rochford District Council (the Local Planning Authority or LPA) in formulating the Core Strategy. In particular the basis under which land to the west of Rochford has been identified as a sustainable location for an appropriate extension to the residential envelope appears to be highly questionable.
- 1.9. There is little evidence to suggest that the selection and assessment of this location has been undertaken with any degree of rigour.
- 1.10. Despite Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability appraisals¹ at

¹ For ease of writing, where referring to SEA and SA, the Action Group adopt the convention that the generic phrase 'sustainability appraisal' refers to both unless indicated otherwise.

various stages in the plan making process, there has been an abject failure to attend to detail. This failure has led to an underestimation of the environmental qualities of this land on a number of levels.

- 1.11. There is little to demonstrate how the preferred locations for residential development have been identified, tested and in all ways derived from a thorough sustainability analysis of the possible options.
- 1.12. If the analysis leading to the identification of this land is flawed, then so is any conclusion about its suitability for sustainable residential development. The LPA is then not in any position to make reliable comparisons with other possible locations for residential development and is likely to have overlooked, or at least given insufficient weight to the relative sustainability of other possible locations for residential development.
- 1.13. In some areas then, the Action Group demonstrate that the Core Strategy is not consistent with National Policy. They further demonstrate that the sustainability appraisal insofar as it relates to land west of Rochford is superficial, and lacking in substance and hence unjustified.
- 1.14. Taking these points together, the Core Strategy Submission is unsound and should not be accepted.
- 1.15. In order to illustrate some of the points made in this statement and to give a visual impression of the west side of Rochford a suite of photos is appended at **WRAG1**. This includes an extract from Google Earth which shows the whole town edge and its relationship to the countryside. For context, this can be compared with the detailed Ordnance Survey Extract at **WRAG3**

2.0 LOSS OF BEST AND MOST VERSATILE LAND

- 2.1. In the evidence base to the Core Strategy Submission Document (CSSD) there is a comprehensive list of 'Core Strategy Sustainability Appraisals'. These are fairly complex and difficult to read documents notwithstanding that there are non-technical summaries.
- 2.2. Soil is identified throughout as being a 'key relevant sustainability appraisal objective', but that is about as far as it goes. In the earlier SA's, soil does not appear to have been the subject of a 'headline indicator' or been the subject of a 'key question'. It tends to be mentioned alongside 'water', or 'land' or 'air' but is seldom if ever mentioned in its own right or subject to any sustainability analysis of any kind.
- 2.3. In the latest SA/SEA, Technical Report of the Rochford CSSD, September 2009, soil is again listed as described above as a key relevant SA objective, but neither key positive effects nor key negative effects are identified specifically in relation to soil (see tables under paragraphs 0.17 and 0.18 respectively of the Technical Report).
- 2.4. Specifically, the loss of the best and most versatile land to housing or other development is not considered as part of the sustainability analysis. The development of the best and most versatile land in lieu of other more sustainable options is at odds with national policy.
- 2.5. The Rochford District Council Replacement Local plan referred to the importance of protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land (para 8.16) and that it is:

'.... a valuable natural resource for the future'

The Local Plan acknowledges that 'the best land' is found around Rochford including land west of Rochford. It states that:

'...It is important that, as a national resource, the best agricultural land is protected from permanent loss.'

- 2.6. There is no similar policy or text in the CSSD relating to soil or land quality. The Action Group consider that the LPA has overlooked this matter.
- 2.7. These are the facts: The East of England has 58% of the country's Grade 1 and 2 Land with 72% of agricultural land under cultivation compared to 29% nationally.
- 2.8. Appended at **WRAG2** is plans produced by Natural England indicating:

- 1) Best and Most Versatile Land (BMV) and
- 2) Provisional Agricultural Land Classification (ALC)

These plans are consistent with those historically produced by the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food and as updated from time to time.

- 2.9. These plans indicate that land immediately west of Rochford (north of Hall Road) is predominantly Grade 1 and otherwise Grade 2 and also constitutes a greater than 60% likelihood (i.e. the highest) of constituting the best and most versatile land of all. This land is a valuable national resource.
- 2.10. Natural England's Technical Information Note TIN049² reaffirms the Government's strategic stance on protecting natural resources and, in this regard, refers also to another Government publication: Securing the Future – delivering UK sustainable development strategy, March 2005.
- 2.11. The ALC gives a high grading to land which allows more flexibility in the range of crops that can be grown (it's 'versatility') and which requires lower inputs, but also takes into account the ability to produce consistently high yields of a narrower range of crops.
- 2.12. It is at the heart of sustainable development to protect the most productive and versatile farmland from development. The ability of future generations to grow food (and fuels) is potentially prejudiced by using the best farmland for housing.
- 2.13. This is also coupled with climate change (another 'key relevant sustainability appraisal objective') whereby poorer quality soils will be commensurately less robust in responding to new climatic conditions and will generate correspondingly lower yields and over a narrower range of possible crops. Land inefficiencies will occur where more lower grade land would be needed, than of Grade 1 & 2 land, to grow the same yield. In this scenario, some crops would simply not be possible on the lower grade land, whereas others would need a high input of imported nutrients to make them grow. Loss of variety and increased external inputs (and hence energy) are all symptoms of a system that lacks sustainability.

² Natural England TIN049: Agricultural Land Classification: protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land

2.14. The relationship between loss of the best and most versatile land and climate change is not examined at all by the LPA.

2.15. Paragraph 16 to PPS7³ states that:

‘When preparing policies for LDDslocal planning authorities should:

....(iii) take account of the need to protect natural resources’

2.16. Paragraphs 28 & 29 set out National Policy to the best and most versatile agricultural land i.e.

‘The presence of best and most versatile agricultural land (defined as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification), should be taken into account alongside other sustainability considerationsWhere significant development of agricultural land is unavoidable, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land (grades 3b, 4 and 5) in preference to that of a higher quality, except where this would be inconsistent with other sustainability considerations. Little weight in agricultural terms should be given to the loss of agricultural land in grades 3b, 4 and 5

Development plans should include policies that identify any major areas of agricultural land that are planned for development. But local planning authorities may also wish to include policies in their LDDs to protect specific areas of best and most versatile agricultural land from speculative development. It is for local planning authorities to decide whether best and most versatile agricultural land can be developed, having carefully weighed the options *in the light of competent advice*’.

2.17. There is nothing apparent in the evidence base to the CSSD that the LPA has sought, taken into account or considered ‘competent advice’ relating to the impact of the Core Strategy proposals on the use of best and most versatile agricultural land.

2.18. It would appear that the importance of retaining the best and most versatile land in agriculture has been seriously overlooked and whilst it is identified as a sustainability

³ Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, November 2007

appraisal objective, in actuality, any practical consideration of this matter is absent.

- 2.19. The Action Group consider that the LPA's failure to have adequate regard to the importance of agricultural land quality, is inimical to the concept of sustainable development.
- 2.20. Consequently, the identification of land West of Rochford as a preferred location for development is not justified. It is not founded on a robust and credible evidence base. It is not demonstrated to be the most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives. The LPA's approach is contrary to National Policy and overall renders the CSSD unsound.
- 2.21. It is clear from the land classification maps that there are considerable areas, to the west principally around Rayleigh, but also to a lesser extent on the eastern fringe of Rochford, where lower grade agricultural land could be identified as preferred locations for development and which do not rely upon the best and most versatile land. There is no evidence to show that this has been considered.
- 2.22. The Action Group acknowledge that the value of agricultural land is only one environmental asset to be taken into consideration. The Natural England TIN049 for example refers to heritage attributes. Without taking anything away from the above the Action Group considers that the LPA has also failed to assess the importance of land west of Rochford for its heritage asset value, and the historic landscape setting of the town. These matters are set out in the following section.

3.0 CONSERVATION AND HERITAGE

3.1. In the latest SA/SEA, Technical Report of the Rochford CSSD, September 2009, 'Cultural Heritage' and 'Landscape and Townscape' are both identified as 'Key Sustainability Appraisal Objectives'.

3.2. It is stated that the approach to development will have a significant positive effect on these Objectives by:

'...steering development toward the more developed western side of the District and existing settlements' (table in paragraph 0.17 of the Technical Report)

3.3. Whereas the significant negative effect identified relevant to these Objectives is stated as being:

'Less tangible effects of significant physical, economic and social changes for local communities, including impacts on cultural heritage, landscape, community cohesion and identify (.sic 'identity' ?) particularly in locations where there will be significant increases in development'(table in paragraphs 0.18 of the Technical Report).

3.4. The Action Group consider that, in relation to positive effects, the generalisation of steering development toward the western side of the District is so broad as to be of no usefulness, particularly where the CSSD identifies a number of much more specific locations for housing development which are not assessed at any significant level of detail or otherwise in any meaningful way.

3.5. Similarly, in relation to significant negative effects, the LPA has either not studied the relationship between landscape, townscape and cultural heritage or it has underestimated these impacts to such an extent as to render the sustainability appraisal meaningless.

3.6. The most 'significant increase in development' is proposed on land identified in Policy H2 as West Rochford. Here 450 houses are proposed by 2015 with a further 150 in the period 2015 – 2021. The policy caveats this by saying that the detailed location and quantum of development will be articulated within the Allocations Development Plan Document.

3.7. For reasons unknown to the Action Group, the Allocations Development Plan

Document, which relies upon the Core Strategy, was published for public consultation purposes in February 2010 in the run up to the Core Strategy Examination. Action Group members are extremely dismayed at this timing by the LPA which is an apparent disregard of unresolved but legitimate objections to the CSSD. It reads as a prejudging of the Core Strategy Submission Document by pressing on with allocations before the strategy is agreed.

- 3.8. The publication of the Allocations DPD adds no weight to the CSSD and no regard should be had to it in the Examination.
- 3.9. Appended at **WRAG3** is a detailed ordnance survey plan extract showing the west side of Rochford. It is clearly bounded by the railway line to the north, and Hall Road to the south. It is bisected by Ironwell Lane⁴, an ancient byway which runs from the west side of Rochford in a westerly direction to the next settlement, Hawkwell.
- 3.10. This area of land and its environs is steeped in history and goes back to the origins of Rochford. These matters are set out in various places but most helpfully in the Rochford Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan ('The CA Appraisal'), May 2007. The CA Appraisal forms part of the LDF Evidence Base.
- 3.11. The Conservation Area was first designated in 1969 but has been extended to specifically include the area west of the town covering the station, the parish church of St Andrews and Rochford Hall which includes a scheduled Ancient Monument. These lay to the south of Hall Road. Extracts from the CA Appraisal are at **WRAG4**.
- 3.12. As part of the Character Statement, the CA Appraisal states that whilst the town generally has 20th century suburban development at its edges,

'...to the west there are large areas of open space around the parish church and the old manorial centre of Rochford Hall'

Indeed Rochford Hall did precede the town where historically it is known that Rochford grew up around a market that was established in 1257 about a half a mile to the east of the Hall.

⁴ Note: the spelling 'Iron Well' is historic and only recently appears as 'Ironwell' in relation to Ironwell Lane. The CA Appraisal refers to Iron Well Stream

3.13. The importance of Rochford Hall recurs throughout the CA Appraisal the manor of which dates back to Domesday and was, during part of its history, occupied by the family of Ann Boleyn.

3.14. The railway, which is important to the landscape setting of the town came in 1889. The CA Appraisal explains⁵ how the densely built up town centre is divided from a large area of open space by the River Roach and the Iron Well stream⁶. This division is also marked by the railway which:

'...represents a significant visual separation as it runs on an embankment. The transition from this open space to the built-up area is still relatively abrupt, as *suburban sprawl on the west side of the town has been kept at bay*'

3.15. The Action Group endorse this visual assessment of the significant townscape/landscape features, how these relate to the history of the town and their importance in the positive historic setting of the town and its identity. There is nothing else in the CA Appraisal relating to the wider setting of the town and its relationship to the countryside of any significance. This crucial observation about the open setting of the west side has arisen historically, been reinforced by the railway and continues to the present day. The west side is therefore of the most historic significance and the most sensitive to change.

3.16. There is a clear sense when leaving town along Hall Road, when emerging from under the railway bridge that there is a definite opening up of aspect and a distinct change in character which is endorsed in the CA Appraisal.

3.17. Character zones are identified in Chapter 8 of the CA Appraisal whereupon it states:

'A particularly well defined boundary is that on the west side of the town between the manorial area, the public open space and the historic town area. This is reinforced by the railway, stream and Bradley Way, creating a situation *analogous to a walled town. However, it is a*

⁵ Chapter 7 – Use of Buildings and Space within the Conservation Area

⁶ Note that Iron Well Lane and Iron Well stream both remain as historical physical features to the west of Rochford.

boundary that could be subject to erosion and as such warrants careful protection

'The undeveloped part of the conservation area, comprising the land around Rochford Hall and the church, and the public open space, forms a readily recognisable unit, albeit one cut through by the railway. The combination of a manorial hall and church in relative isolation is a typical feature of the historic landscape of Essex. The Rochford example is a good one *and notable at the edge of so large a built up area.*'

3.18. The history and resultant character of the west side of Rochford is expressed in the highest conservation terms and is unsurpassed in any other place in the CA Appraisal. No other place on the edge of town boasts such high conservation credentials or indeed in any other settlement in the District.

3.19. The Action Group supports the expert's adopted position that the west side boundary is 'notable' and 'warrants careful protection'.

3.20. The Hall Road area is considered in detail in Chapter 9 of the CA Appraisal. This is included in full in the extract at WRAG4. The Area Analysis states that Hall Road still has a rural feel to it and forms an attractive approach to the town and conservation area. The analysis is emphatic that:

'The Hall and the conservation area have formed an obstacle to development on this side of the road , but the houses resume on the north side outside the conservation area boundaryIt is essential to the preservation of this approach to the town, and of the setting of Rochford Hall, that further suburbanisation of the road is avoided'

3.21. There are a number of other detailed references about Rochford Hall and its environs e.g. that it was probably the 'largest mansion in Essex'. The associated barns now form part of a Scheduled ancient monument one of only five in the District. St Andrew's Church is a landmark which from certain vantage points provides a visual link from the town and so on. There is clear group value to all the buildings in this area which are embraced in an historic landscape which is of significance in the town and the wider District.

3.22. This can be partly understood with reference to Fig 59 (page 68) in the CA Appraisal

which indicates the contribution of individual buildings to the conservation area. Rochford Hall and St Andrews Church are two of only three buildings in the whole conservation area regarded as producing the highest positive contribution. There are then other buildings within the landscape of Rochford Hall and the Church which are regarded as still positive in their contribution i.e. at the level that the majority of the rest of the buildings in the Conservation Area reach.

- 3.23. Taken collectively, the finest buildings and the most significant historic setting exists to the west of Rochford. Their overall quality is greater than the sum of the individual parts. It is only this part of the Conservation Area that also has a fine and acknowledged landscape setting which is characteristic of the town and relates it to history and to the countryside.
- 3.24. The link between Conservation Area and countryside on the west side is also established in other ways demonstrating an integrity to the historic quality of the area. The CA Appraisal explains how the Roach Valley Way enters the conservation area at the south east corner. It proceeds along Hall Road, to the west of Rochford, past Rochford Hall and links up with Ironwell Lane.
- 3.25. The Roach Valley Way is acknowledged within the Evidence Base for the LDF. It celebrates and gives the public access to the finest environmental aspects of the Roach Valley. It is perhaps academic that it would go past Rochford Hall, the historic manorial seat and where town characteristically gives way to countryside. It is in the highest order of footpath amenity which includes its passage through land west of Rochford.
- 3.26. The western part of the conservation area is within the Roach Valley Conservation Zone
- 3.27. Having reviewed the high conservation characteristics of the west side of Rochford, it makes the Action Group's position very clear indeed. We say that the LPA has not properly assessed the Cultural Heritage, Landscape and Townscape Objectives of the plan in setting out preferred locations for housing development.
- 3.28. The importance and sensitivity of the west side of Rochford does not appear to have been considered at the level of detail necessary to reach a rational decision. Therefore the CSSD is not founded on a robust and credible evidence base. The preferred development options in the CSSD do not constitute the most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives which includes less

sensitive locations on the edge of the higher order settlements which are not so historically significant nor defined so clearly by existing landscape, topographical and townscape features.

- 3.29. These matters are crucial in relation to the question of soundness of the CSSD. In the absence of the considerations described above, this renders the CSSD unsound.
- 3.30. Matters relating to the historic setting of the town, its landscape and townscape character and the existence of clearly defined physical boundary features are also fundamental to the importance of Green Belts, their function and continued protection. These matters are interrelated with the Action Groups objection to the CSSD and are discussed in the following section.

4.0 GREEN BELT

- 4.1. The Action Group's original response to the CSSD sets out National Policy on Green Belts as found in PPG2: Green Belts.
- 4.2. Land west of Rochford, without questions fulfils all five main purposes of including land within Green Belts i.e.
 - 1) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
 - 2) To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another
 - 3) To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
 - 4) To preserve the setting and character of historic towns
 - 5) To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other land uses
- 4.3. What is lacking in the LPA's consideration of preferred locations for development is any sensitivity analysis of the consequences of allocating one location over another.
- 4.4. Urban sprawl has the effect of spoiling the discrete nature of a town or village, it blurs the edges and can hide, disguise or simply impose a new character to a settlement that is at odds with its defining characteristics. Walled cities, a town on a hill, the village on one side of a river can all preserve their sense of place if their settings are identified, given the weight of consideration they deserve and allocation decisions made accordingly.
- 4.5. It is no mistake that the fourth criterion – to preserve the setting and character of historic towns has always been included in the five main purposes. This criterion is not subordinate or in any way inferior to the other four and has been the saviour of many a historic town when threatened with development.
- 4.6. What distinguishes west Rochford from all other potential settlement edge sites is its unique history. Every possible development location could be said to comply with the other four criteria to some degree, whereas the setting of historic towns can be rather more unique.
- 4.7. The history of west Rochford has many facets which have resulted in buildings, spaces, routes, infrastructure landscape and townscape that has grown from that

history. The buildings, spaces and landscapes are not mundane or even just individually special. There is a cumulative quality that distinguishes it from all other town edge locations whether in Rochford or any other settlement in the District.

- 4.8. Apart from anything else, despite, or as a consequence of its history, it remains open in character. The manor which created the town, has stayed outside the town. Every environmental experience of living, moving, enjoying recreation towards the west side of Rochford reinforces that feeling of openness and rich heritage.
- 4.9. If there has to be a release of Green Belt land, then on any matrix of possible locations, west Rochford has to be at the bottom (not the top) of the list of possible choices. Its environmental characteristics are strong, positive and relatively unique. That is not just an assertion by the Action Group, there is documentary evidence not least of all in the CA Appraisal to support this. No other Green Belt location has the same level of independent professional analysis in support of its continued protection.
- 4.10. It is a basic tenet of conservation area policy that the more clearly the special architectural or historic interest that justifies designation is defined and recorded, the sounder will be the basis for local development frameworks and the formulation of proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the character or appearance of an area. Such analysis is very clear in its description of west Rochford.
- 4.11. The Action Group remain deeply concerned about how the LPA put themselves in a position of favouring west Rochford as a preferred location for development without apparently going through a process of scoring possible alternatives. Apparently the Sustainability Appraisal processes were meant to make such an assessment but there is little evidence to support that proposition.
- 4.12. A basic tenet of PPG2 is that Green Belt boundaries should be enduring and clearly defined using readily recognisable features such as roads, streams, belts of trees or woodland edges. The railway has long since acted in that capacity on the west side of Rochford, referred to in the CA Appraisal as being :

‘ analogous to a walled town’

- 4.13. The CA Appraisal warns about this being a boundary that

‘could be subject to erosion and as such warrants careful protection’

4.14. Of all town boundaries in the District, there is not one which, in Green Belt terms:

‘...preserves the setting and special character of historic towns’

as the railway line does at west Rochford.

4.15. Notwithstanding that there is a small residential enclave to the west of the railway line i.e. St Andrew’s Road and Oak Road, this is a relatively low density area which was not excluded from the Green Belt. The houses are predominantly detached and there is a foil of mature trees on both Hall Road and the first part of St Andrew’s Road.

4.16. It is at a density that is not sustainable in current times and any new development of this kind would represent an inefficient use of land. It does read as an incursion into the Green Belt beyond the railway line and as such does have an arbitrary, though straight, boundary with the field to the west.

4.17. This small development area exists for what it is, but it does not represent a form or location of development that is to be followed. In the CA Appraisal, there is an important warning that:

‘...further suburbanisation of the road is (to be) avoided’

4.18. The Action Group consider that conservation and Green Belt considerations are hand in hand where they relate to west Rochford. The Green Belt boundary is historic, enduring, visually strong, readily recognisable, characteristic, defining of both town and country, and not given to suburban or superficial change.

4.19. This cannot be said of other possible development locations either on other Rochford boundaries or on the boundaries of other high order settlements such as Rayleigh. Many preferable locations do not have a rich history that reflects in any discernible character. They are characterised by suburban edges and boundaries with typical rather than noteworthy landscape characteristics. Green Belt release in these areas would score much more highly in sustainability appraisal than at west Rochford.

4.20. The enduring nature and physical permanence of the Green Belt boundary, and the manner in which it characterises the setting of this historic west Rochford does not appear to have been considered at the level of detail necessary to reach a rational decision. Therefore the CSSD is not founded on a robust and credible evidence base. The preferred development options in the CSSD do not constitute the most

appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives which includes less well defined boundaries on the edge of the higher order settlements which are not so historically significant.

- 4.21. These matters are crucial in relation to the question of soundness of the CSSD. In the absence of the considerations described above, this renders the CSSD unsound.

5.0 DEMOGRAPHICS

- 5.1. All the above presupposes that the need for new housing has been properly considered and is related in scale and kind to the population demographics of the District.
- 5.2. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment forms part of the Local Development Framework Evidence Base. It was not however available for the public to view at any time during the statutory consultation period for the Core Strategy Submissions Document.
- 5.3. This matter was raised by the Action Group with the LPA's Director of Planning but without satisfactory explanation. The Action Group has reserved its position in relation to the SHLAA and any impact it may have upon the Examination in due course.
- 5.4. Although there has been a tick box filter exercise in relation to sites referred to in the SHLAA and a rudimentary assessment of 'physical problems or limitations', this is not at the level of detail suitable to fully understand the preferred locations or their alternatives. This approach might at best identify sites for further, more detailed, consideration but no such further consideration has been undertaken.
- 5.5. This 'strategic' approach to identifying sites does not bear close scrutiny when one considers the implications of large scale housing development. It behoves the LPA to make proper assessments of suitability at a level of detail which demonstrates an understanding of the environmental characteristics of individual competitor sites so that the least impact and all round most sustainable locations can be found.
- 5.6. Statistically 44.4% of the demand for social housing arises in Rayleigh. Rayleigh is the largest town in the District. By comparison, it is surrounded by the lowest grade agricultural land. It is sited furthest away from the Coastal Protection Belt, and not constrained by so many landscape and nature conservation designations as Rochford. It is best located in relation to transport infrastructure including reliable local bus routes, a railway line to London and East Anglia, and major trunk routes i.e. A127 and A130.
- 5.7. Overall, the Green Belt boundary detail at Rayleigh is no better than any other settlement in terms of its historic character and the setting of the town.

- 5.8. Only 29% of social housing demand arises from the population of Rochford and its west side is most sensitive in terms of history, character, permanence and environmental distinction. There is a high proportion of the highest grade agricultural land particularly contiguous with the west side.
- 5.9. In the light of this, it is an anathema to the Action Group why the largest preferred locations are west Rochford. Whilst the hierarchy of settlement between Rayleigh and Rochford is similar, they have readily discernible differences both in terms of housing demand and the ability to assimilate that demand within their environmental capacity.
- 5.10. The highest demand stems from Rayleigh and the least impact, highest sustainable solutions are to be found on the periphery of Rayleigh. This does not reflect in the LPA's assessment of these matters which do not include sensitivity analysis or any other detailed analysis.
- 5.11. The provision of affordable housing will largely follow the provision of market housing. The LPA's current strategy will result in a high proportion of the population in housing need having to move from their home town to Rochford where they have no roots or social networks of any kind. This will divorce them from the cultural and social connections with which they are familiar.
- 5.12. The nature of local demographics does not appear to have been considered at the level of detail necessary to reach a rational decision. The largest housing provision should be centred on settlements which primarily create that demand, particularly where the settlement scores highly in sustainability, has relatively high environmental capacity and ability to minimise impacts. Rayleigh is of that kind.
- 5.13. Please note that the Action Group are not entirely against development at Rochford but consider that the current CSSD proposals are disproportionate. The proposed quantum of other preferred locations at Rochford such as identified in the Allocations DPD at SEA1 (and its variants) and EA1 (and its variants) are more in line with known demographics and would represent a better 'fair share' of the housing allocations taking everything into account and subject to a thorough sustainability appraisal.
- 5.14. These considerations add weight to the earlier conclusions that west Rochford is more sensitive to change than many other more sustainable locations and in a situation where much of the recognised housing demand is arising from a more

sustainable settlement to the west.

- 5.15. Therefore the CSSD is not founded on a robust and credible evidence base. The preferred development options in the CSSD do not constitute the most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives which includes more sustainable locations, better located and primarily where the greatest demand has been identified.
- 5.16. These matters are crucial in relation to the question of soundness of the CSSD. In the absence of the considerations described above, this renders the CSSD unsound.

6.0 ROADS AND TRANSPORT

- 6.1. The Action Group's position on this is set out under their objection to Policy H2 which is adopted here for brevity and not unnecessarily repeated. There are known transport and infrastructure limitations to west Rochford which will be exacerbated by large scale development of the order envisaged in the CSSD.
- 6.2. The provision of additional housing in significant numbers of the kind envisaged in the CSSD will exacerbate existing transportation limitations.
- 6.3. In the absence of planned infrastructure improvements in advance of development, the CSSD proposal will result in significant disruption to the efficient and amenable functioning of the highway through congestion, conflict within the highway and gridlock at peak times. There are already a number of recognised but unacceptable congestion points along the A127 both into and out of Southend towards Basildon
- 6.4. Most of these matters are of strategic highway importance such as the ability of the A127 to accommodate traffic arising from new regional housing provision. These are principally matters for the roads and transport sessions in the Examination.
- 6.5. Locally there are a number of transportation issues which the Action Group consider are directly related in scale and kind to the preferred locations proposal which, if accepted, would see 600 houses located at west Rochford.
- 6.6. There is no bus service on Hall Road. Buses travel to Southend from other locations within Rochford but not via Hall Road. Buses similarly travel north via Hawkwell and out to Rayleigh, but not via Hall Road. The Rayleigh service is hourly during the day and passes through the outlying villages before reaching Rayleigh.
- 6.7. This bus service is not convenient, is relatively infrequent and does not run early or late enough to be of enduring or daily usefulness particularly for journeys to work. Any person living in new development in west Rochford is highly unlikely to be able to use the existing bus service with any reasonable convenience or reliability.
- 6.8. PPG13⁷ requires that planning and transportation should be linked to ensure that strategies for both are complementary to one another. Consideration of development plan allocations and local transport priorities are required to be closely considered.

⁷ Planning Policy Guidance Note 13: Transport

There is no such close consideration in this case.

- 6.9. PPG13 advocates high density development in locations close to significant transport nodes. Yet the historic character of west Rochford is such that the type of development required to satisfy accessibility, is the very type of development that would be contrary to the open historic landscape setting of west Rochford. These townscape characteristics have been formally recognised and are extremely sensitive to change.
- 6.10. The highway strategy and how it relates to preferred development at west Rochford has not been elucidated.
- 6.11. The railway bridge is a clear physical feature which separates the town from the countryside. It is also a transport bottle neck which holds traffic in gridlock at peak hours in three directions. The design of the mini-roundabout beyond is partly at fault but the CSSD provides no solutions to the existing situation let alone accommodating the traffic associated with a further 600 homes.
- 6.12. The bridge is also a very clear obstacle to pedestrians, cyclists, wheel chair users, parents with pushchairs, dog walkers and indeed anyone seeking to access the town from west Rochford by foot or cycle. There is only limited access on one side (in fact the far side) of the bridge which is not wide enough for people to pass or indeed for anything other than the narrowest buggy to pass through. It is constrained by the geometry of the bridge, the proximity of a water course and the availability of land.
- 6.13. The physical limitations of the railway bridge serve as a disincentive for pedestrians and cyclists to access town at this point. The inadequacy of this physical infrastructure will be to the detriment of sustainable access to and from the town and will add to the congestion and conflict arising at this location. New residents will be inclined to use their cars and the traffic volumes will, in any case, conflict with the safe and amenable access to town.
- 6.14. The cumulative impact of traffic arising from new housing at west Rochford has not been considered in conjunction with proposed expansion of Southend airport. This will have significant implications for traffic using Cherry Orchard Way which has a junction with Hall Road to the west. This will be exacerbated by the absence of a bus route between Rochford and Southend via Hall Road. The CSSD preferred location of housing at west Rochford does not address these matters in any meaningful way.

- 6.15. The Action Group consider that the transport proposals related to the preferred location of housing at west Rochford have not been closely linked together. As such the LPA seem to be relying upon generalised transportation proposals which are not detailed and which do not provide a firm and reliable evidence base to justify this preferred location.
- 6.16. There is insufficient understanding within the CSSD to provide a rational for housing at west Rochford and necessary transport infrastructure at this level. Once again, Rayleigh has superior transport infrastructure and generally better access to the main route network as well as better accessibility all round including local bus services and main line railway services.
- 6.17. Whilst there are strategic matters that will require solving across the board, Rayleigh has a generally higher sustainability rating when considered in conjunction with roads, transport and accessibility through different modes. These matters are not enunciated in the CSSD and Rochford is given the same accessibility level as Rayleigh which, according to the Action Group, is patently not true.
- 6.18. The failure of the LPA to provide a sufficiently detailed and most appropriate integrated planning and transportation strategy for preferred locations when considered against the reasonable alternatives renders the CSSD unsound in this regard.

WRAG1

PHOTO'S 1 - 24

Google Earth Map



Photo 1: Hall Road looking east – approach from countryside (1)



Photo 2: Hall Road looking east – approach from countryside (2)



Photo 3: West edge of town – railway embankment in distance (1)



Photo 4: West edge of town – railway embankment in distance (2)



Photo 5: Railway embankment marks edge of town (1)



Photo 6: Railway embankment marks edge of town (2)



Photo 7: Railway embankment to left marks edge of town



Photo 8: Edge of town



Photo 9: Open Character immediately west of railway bridge



Photo 10: Hall Road at junction of St Andrew's Road



Photo 11: St Andrew's Road



Photo 12: Houses in Hall Road



Photo 13: Rochford Hall



Photo 14: Scheduled Ancient Monument/Rochford Hall



Photo 15: St Andrew's Church



Photo 16: From St Andrew's Church to Hall Road



Photo 17: St Andrews Church seen above Oak Road from the west



Photo 18: Ironwell Lane (1)



Photo 19: Ironwell Lane (2)



Photo 20: Approaching town from Ironwell Lane



Photo 21: Ironwell Lane at railway embankment



Photo 22: Town side of railway bridge (1)



Photo 23: Town side of railway bridge (2)



Photo 24: Physical limitation of railway bridge



WRAG2

**NATURAL ENGLAND TECHNICAL INFORMATION NOTE TIN049:
AGRICULTURAL LAND CLASSIFICATION: PROTECTING THE BEST
AND MOST VERSATILE AGRICULTURAL LAND. INCLUDES PLANS
RELATING TO ROCHFORD DISTRICT:
1) BEST AND MOST VERSATILE LAND
2) PROVISIONAL AGRICULTURAL LAND CLASSIFICATION**

Agricultural Land Classification: protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land

Most of our land area is in agricultural use. How this important natural resource is used is vital to sustainable development. This includes taking the right decisions about protecting it from inappropriate development.

Policy to protect agricultural land

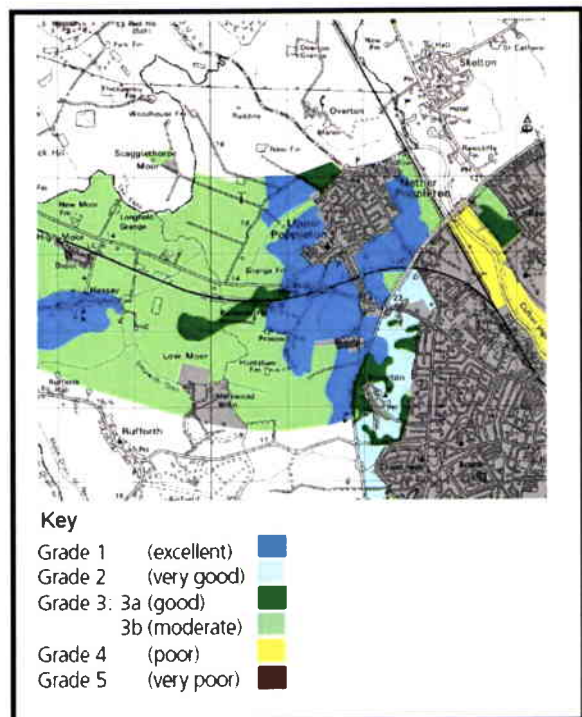
Government policy is that such decisions rest with planning authorities. Where significant development of agricultural land is unavoidable, poorer quality land should be used in preference to that of higher quality, except where this would be inconsistent with other sustainability considerations. Government policy is set out in Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7) *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas* published in August 2004 (paragraphs 28 and 29). The Government has re-affirmed the importance of protecting our natural resources and the services they provide in *Securing the Future - delivering UK sustainable development strategy* published in March 2005 (see chapter 5).

The ALC system: purpose & uses

Land quality varies from place to place. The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) provides a method for assessing the quality of farmland to enable informed choices to be made about its future use within the planning system. It helps underpin the principles of sustainable development.

The ALC system classifies land into five grades, with Grade 3 subdivided into Subgrades 3a and 3b. The best and most versatile land is defined as Grades 1, 2 and 3a by policy guidance (see PPS7). This is the land which is most flexible, productive and efficient in response to inputs and which can best deliver future crops for food and non food uses such as biomass, fibres and

pharmaceuticals. Current estimates are that Grades 1 and 2 together form about 21% of all farmland in England; Subgrade 3a contains a similar amount.



Agricultural Land classification - map and key

The ALC system is used by Defra and others to give advice to local planning authorities,

Agricultural Land Classification: protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land

developers and the public if development is proposed on agricultural land or other greenfield sites that could grow crops.

The General Development (Procedure) Order refers to the best and most versatile land policy in requiring statutory consultations with Defra. Following the NERC Act (2006) Natural England became responsible for Minerals and Waste Consultations. The ALC grading system is also used by commercial consultants to advise clients on land uses and planning issues.

Criteria and guidelines

The Classification is based on the long term physical limitations of land for agricultural use. Factors affecting the grade are climate, site and soil characteristics, and the important interactions between them.

- **Climate:** temperature and rainfall; aspect, exposure and frost risk.
- **Site:** gradient, micro-relief and flood risk.
- **Soil:** texture, structure, depth and stoniness; chemical properties which cannot be corrected.

The combination of climate and soil factors determines soil wetness and droughtiness. Wetness and droughtiness influence the choice of crops grown and the level and consistency of yields, as well as use of land for grazing livestock.

The Classification is concerned with the inherent potential of land under a range of farming systems. The current agricultural use, or intensity of use, does not affect the ALC grade.

Versatility and yield

The physical limitations of land have four main effects on the way land is farmed. These are:

- the range of crops which can be grown;
- the level of yield;
- the consistency of yield;
- the cost of obtaining the crop.

The ALC gives a high grading to land which allows more flexibility in the range of crops that can be grown (its 'versatility') and which requires

lower inputs, but also takes into account ability to produce consistently high yields of a narrower range of crops.

Availability of ALC information

After the introduction of the ALC system in 1966 the whole of England and Wales was mapped from reconnaissance field surveys, to provide general strategic guidance on land quality for planners. This Provisional Series of maps was published on an Ordnance Survey base at a scale of One Inch to One Mile in the period 1967 to 1974. These maps are not sufficiently accurate for use in assessment of individual fields or development sites, and should not be used other than as general guidance. They show only five grades: their preparation preceded the subdivision of Grade 3 and the refinement of criteria, which occurred after 1976. They have not been updated and are being allowed to go out of print. A 1:250 000 scale map series based on the same information is available. These are more appropriate for the strategic use originally intended. This data is now available on Magic, an interactive, geographical information website. www.magic.gov.uk/

Since 1976, selected areas have been re-surveyed in greater detail and to revised guidelines and criteria. Information based on detailed ALC field surveys in accordance with current guidelines is the most definitive source. Revisions to the ALC guidelines and criteria have been limited and kept to the original principles, but some assessments made prior to the revision may need to be checked against current criteria. The guidelines introduced in 1988 with improved criteria for climatic limitations and climate-soil interactions adopted only two Subgrades for Grade 3.

More recently, strategic scale maps showing the likely occurrence of best and most versatile land have been prepared for selected areas. Mapped information of all types is available from Natural England (see *Further information* below).

New field survey

Digital mapping and geographical information systems have been introduced to facilitate the provision of up-to-date information. ALC surveys

Agricultural Land Classification: protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land

are undertaken by field surveyors using handheld augers to examine soils to a depth of 1.2 metres, at a frequency of one boring per hectare for a detailed assessment. This is usually supplemented by digging occasional small pits (by hand) to inspect the soil profile. Information obtained by these methods is combined with climatic and other data to produce the ALC map and report.

There is no comprehensive programme to survey all areas in detail. Private consultants may survey land where it is under consideration for development, especially around the edge of towns, to allow comparisons between areas and to inform environmental assessments. (ALC field surveys are usually time consuming and should be initiated well in advance of planning decisions.) ALC maps are normally produced on an Ordnance Survey base at varying scales from 1:10,000 for detailed work to 1:50 000 for reconnaissance survey.

Consultations

Through its presence in Government Offices, Defra is normally consulted on the preparation of all development plans, and consultations are required on planning applications that are not consistent with an adopted local plan and involve the loss of twenty hectares or more of the best and most versatile land. The land protection policy is relevant to all planning applications, including those on smaller areas, but it is for the local planning authority to decide how significant are the agricultural land issues, and the need for field information. Defra will not normally become involved with specific development proposals unless they raise interests of more than local importance. The local authority may seek Defra's advice if it needs technical information or policy guidance.

Consultations are required on all applications for mineral working or waste disposal if the afteruse is agriculture or where the loss of high quality agricultural land will be 20 ha or more. These consultations are dealt with by Natural England.

For mineral workings or waste disposal by landfill, there would normally be no objection to such development on high quality land, where Natural England was satisfied that this would be restored to its former physical characteristics, following its reclamation. Non-agricultural afteruse, for example for nature conservation or amenity, can be acceptable even on better land if it does not alter the physical characteristics of the land.

Other factors

The ALC is a basis for assessing how development proposals affect agriculture within the planning system, but it is not the sole consideration. Local planning authorities are guided by PPS7 to also take into account the value of land in agriculture, for example for its environmental or heritage attributes. Other factors include impact on farm size and structure, use of buildings and other fixed equipment (including irrigation and drainage), or any stimulus the development might give to rural economic activity, for example in demand for renewable energy.

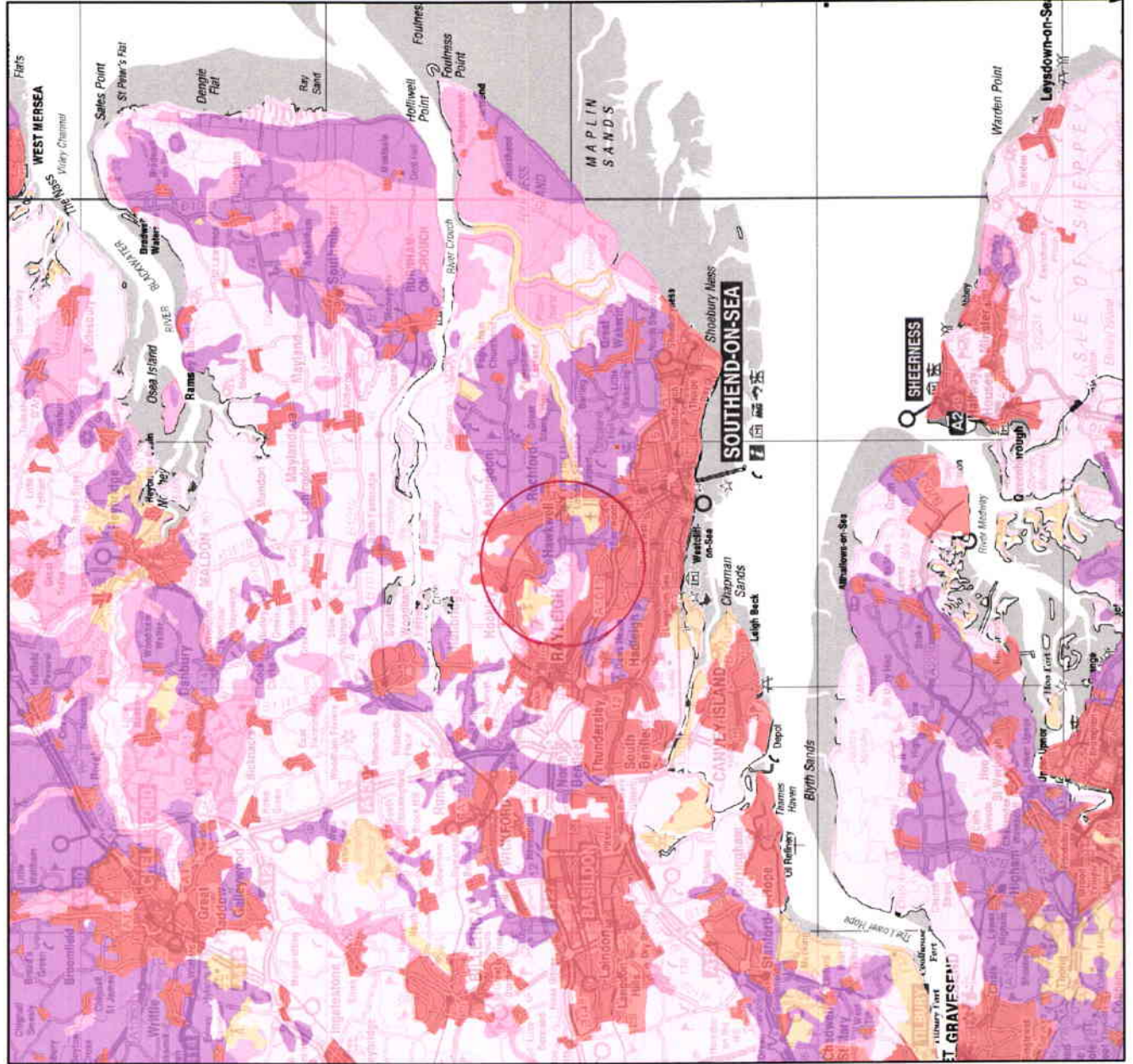
Further information

Details of the system of grading can be found in: *Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales: revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land* (Defra Publications, 1988, Price: £7.00 Tel: 08459 556000). www.defra.gov.uk

For further information please contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0845 600 3078 or e-mail enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk.

Natural England Technical Information Notes and other technical publications are available to download from the Natural England website: www.naturalengland.org.uk .

Best and Most Versatile Land (BMV) Land

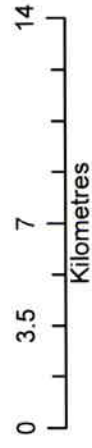


Legend

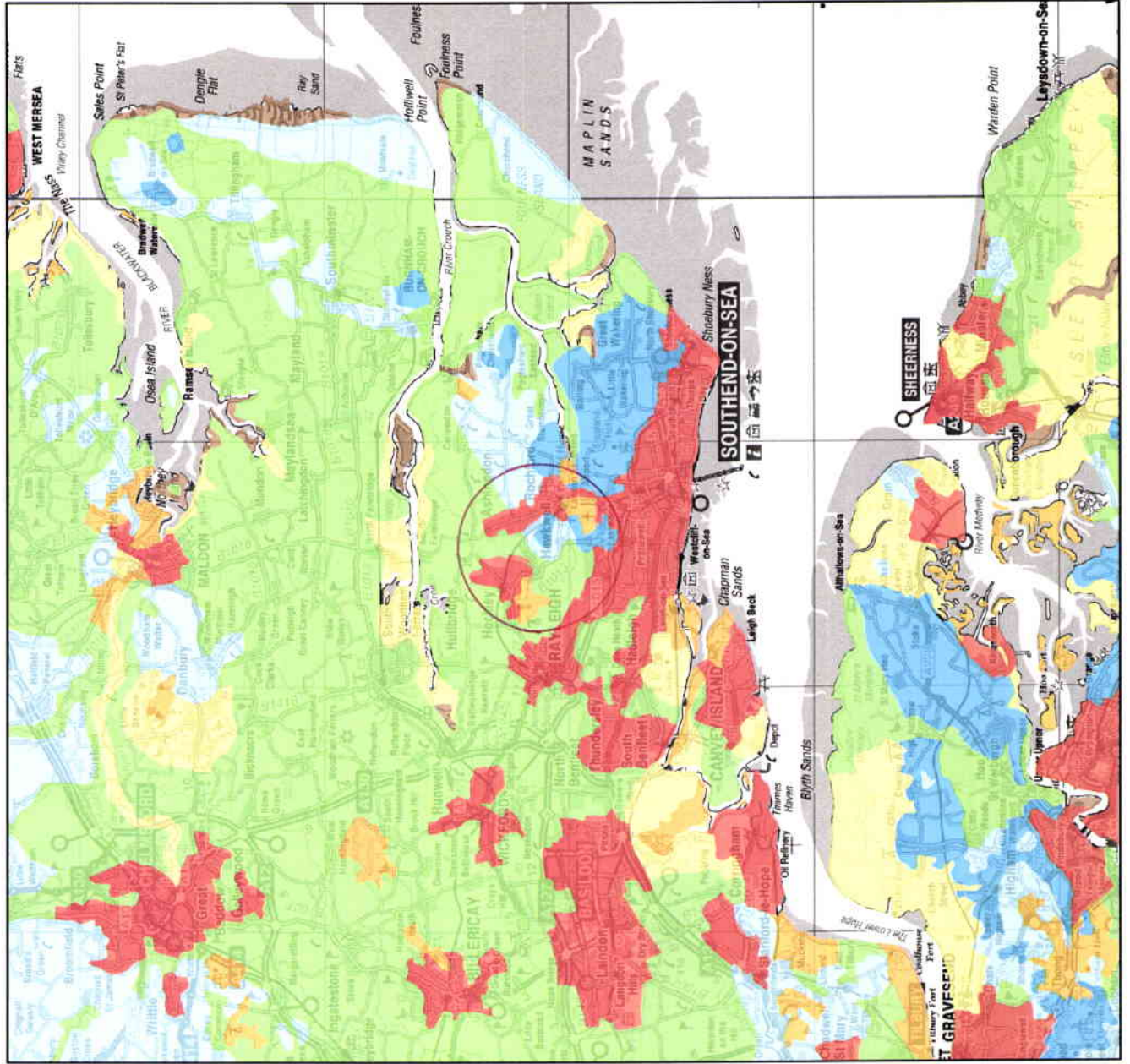
Best and Most Versatile Land

- > 60% likelihood bmV
- 20.1 - 60% likelihood bmV
- <= 20 likelihood bmV
- non agricultural use
- urban/industrial

1:250,000

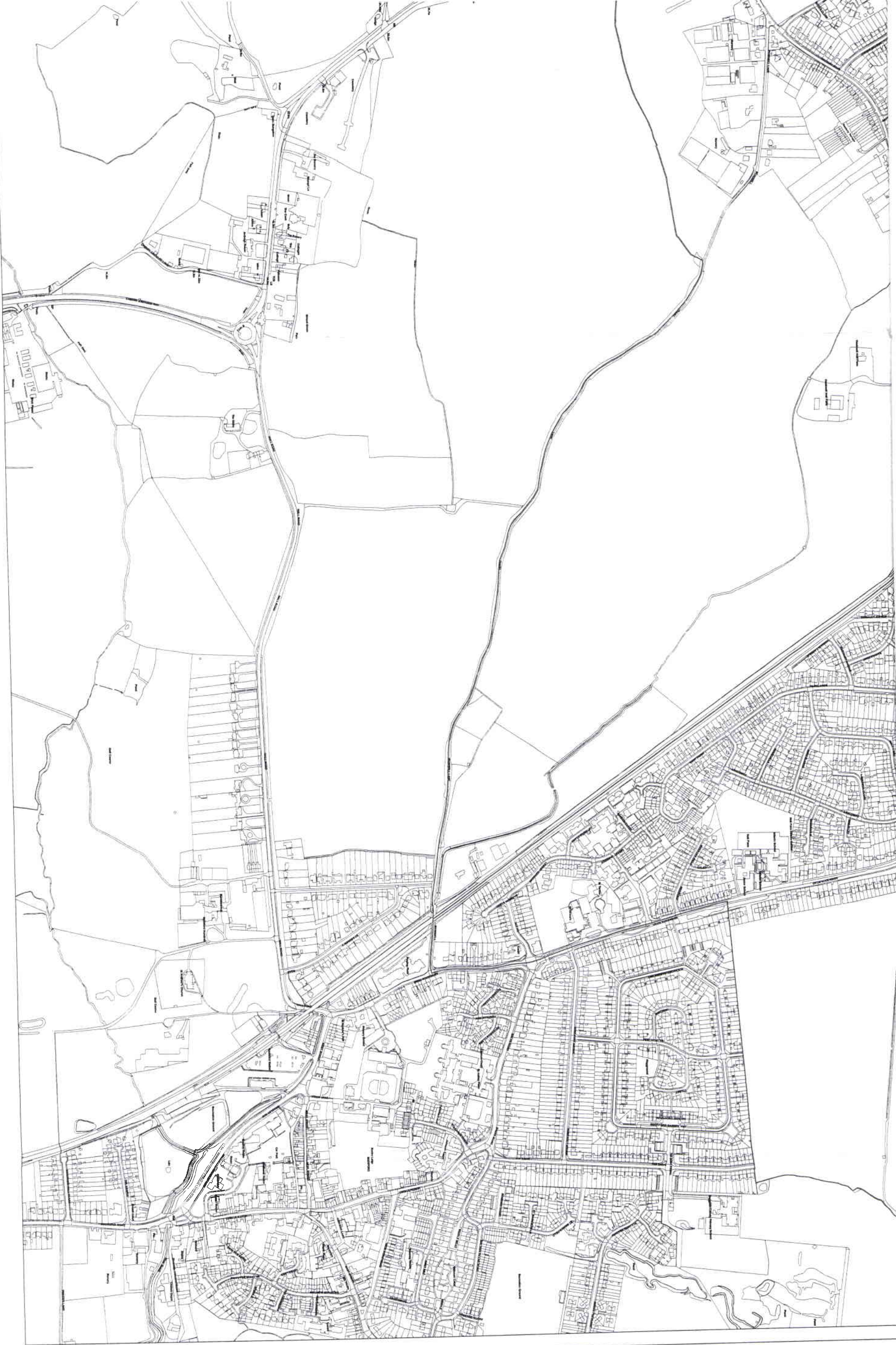


Provisional Agricultural Land Classification (ALC)



WRAG3

**1:7250 DETAILED ORDNANCE SURVEY PLAN:
WEST SIDE OF ROCHFORD**



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Map Created: 10/08/06
Map Produced: 10/08/05

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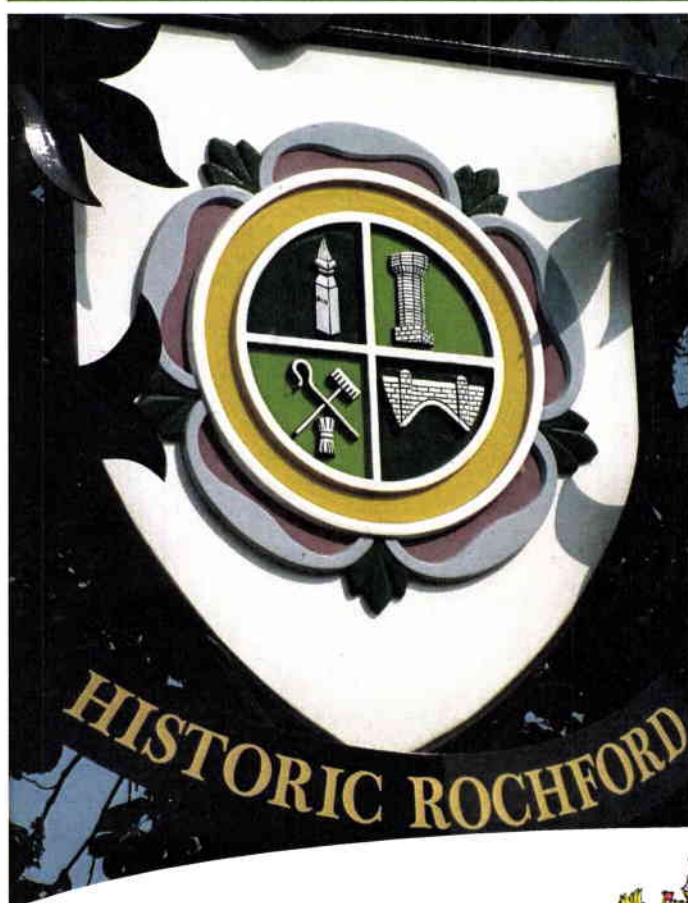
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WRAG4

**EXTRACTS FROM THE ROCHFORD CONSERVATION AREA
APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN, MAY 2007**

Local Development Framework
Evidence Base

Rochford Conservation Area
Appraisal and Management Plan



LDF Evidence
Base

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Rochford is an old market town which still preserves its original character despite being located in the shadow of the Southend conurbation. Its survival is in many ways a triumph of the planning system, as well as of individual and collective pride of place.
- 1.2 The conservation area was designated in 1969. Originally it covered the historic town centre, but it has since been extended to include the backlands east of South Street and north of West Street, and also the area west of the town covering the station, the parish church, and Rochford Hall, a Tudor mansion now partially demolished.
- 1.3 Conservation areas are 'Areas of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' (Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990). They were introduced by the Civic Amenities Act of 1967. Local authorities have a duty to designate conservation areas, to formulate policies for their preservation and enhancement, and to keep them under review.
- 1.4 Government Planning Policy Guidance 15, Planning and the Historic Environment, emphasises that character of conservation areas derives not simply from the quality of individual buildings, but also depends on 'the historic layout of property boundaries and thoroughfares; on a particular "mix" of uses; on characteristic materials; on appropriate scaling and detailing of contemporary buildings; on the quality of advertisements, shop fronts, street furniture and hard and soft surfaces; on vistas along streets and between buildings; and on the extent to which traffic intrudes and limits pedestrian use of space between buildings' (para. 4.2).

2. Character Statement

- 2.1 Rochford is a modest but exceptionally well preserved market town centred on a cross-roads. Founded in 1257, there is little evidence today in the fabric of its buildings for its medieval past. The street plan is another matter: the axial roads, the infilled market place, Back Lane, and the irregular frontages are all features inherited from its medieval layout. Around the road junction, along the three main axial streets, there is a picturesque historic core consisting mostly of brick and weatherboarded buildings of 18th- to 19th-century appearance. Imposing brick town houses occur in South Street and the east end of West Street, whilst rows of one-and-a-half storey cottages are characteristic of the west end of West Street and much of North Street and elsewhere. No other Essex town preserves so many cottages of this type. At its edges are 20th-century suburban development, whilst to the west there are large areas of open space round the parish church and old manorial centre of Rochford Hall, where there is a golf course. The condition of the buildings in the conservation area is mostly good, in part the result of successful grant schemes over the last 30 years.

3. Statutory protection within the conservation area

- 3.1 The west half of Rochford Hall (the part which is not used by the Golf Club) is a scheduled ancient monument protected under the 1979 Ancient Monuments Act. There are about 70 listed buildings in the conservation area (*Fig. 1; Appendix 1*). This large number is in part the result of a survey made by the late Mike Wadhams in the 1970s which was used for the accelerated resurvey of listed buildings in the 1980s. Most of the frontages of South Street and West Street are listed, and many buildings in North Street are too. The dates given in the list descriptions are often rather approximate. When it becomes possible to examine them in detail, many buildings with timber frames concealed by brickwork or render may well prove to be older than the dates indicated in the list descriptions. An example is Horners Corner where a 16th-century frame was found behind 18th- and 19th-century brickwork. The low cottages which are such a feature of Rochford are a class of building which has not been closely studied. They seem to have been built c.1600-1800. The 18th-century date generally assigned to them may well be too narrow. In preparing this report, there has been no fresh assessment of buildings or their date.
- 3.2 The Roach Valley Way enters the conservation area at its south-east corner. It then follows the roads to the north and west before linking up with Iron Well Lane. At the eastern edge of the golf course, a north-south public right of way follows an old field boundary. Other footpaths lead off from it across the golf course, one going through the churchyard.
- 3.3 The western part of the conservation area, including the station, is green belt, and within the Roach Valley Conservation Zone.

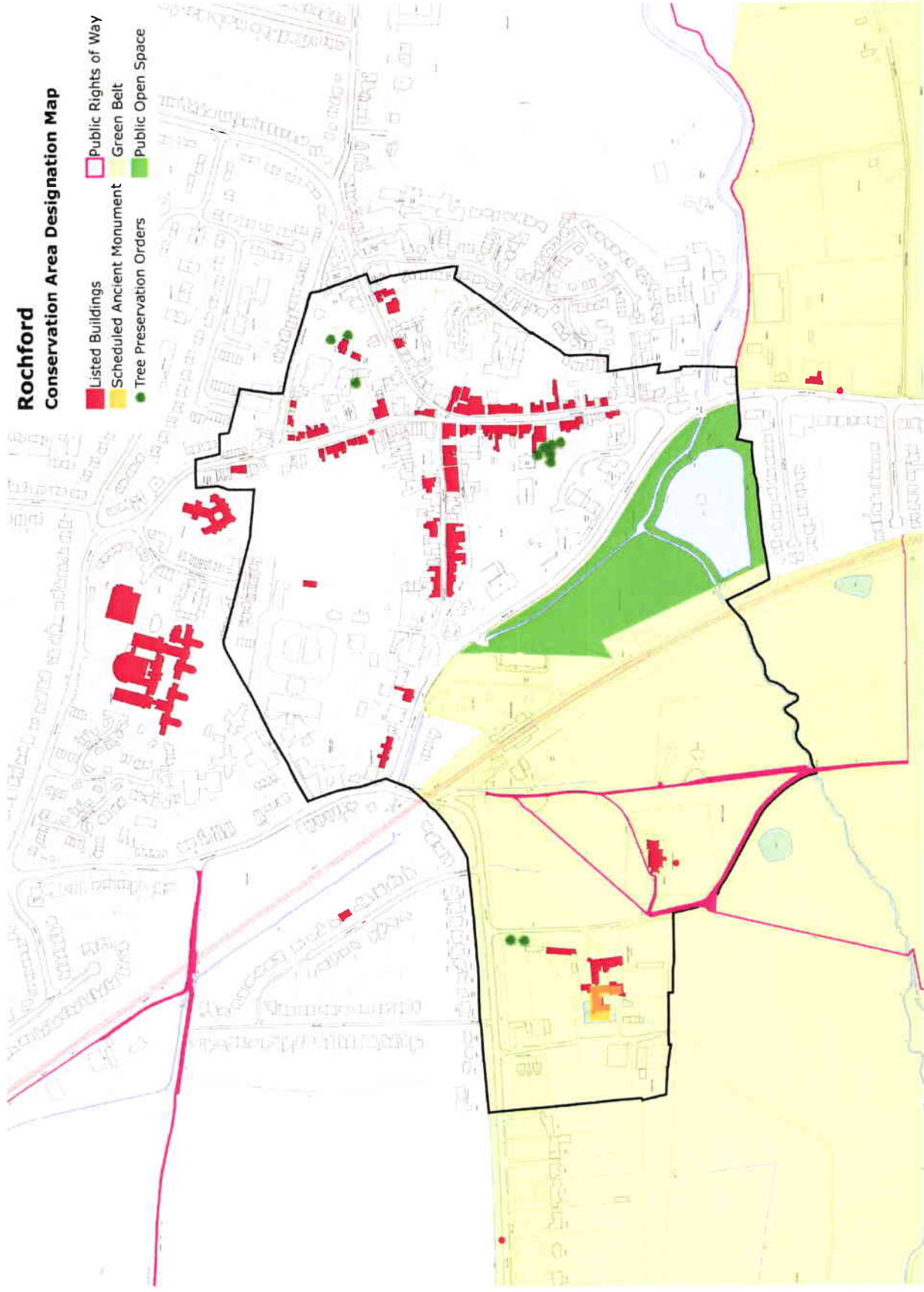


Fig. 1 Rochford town centre, map showing statutory designations within the conservation area.

- 5.12 It can be argued that the market extended further still, occupying a large open area on both sides of West Street. This street presents a typical medieval street pattern, with a back lane running behind and parallel to it. The short depth of the plots suggest that they are infill of a regular row of stalls on one side of a wide market street, comparable, for instance, to Rayleigh High Street. Such rows are well preserved at Saffron Walden and Bury St. Edmunds. No late medieval houses survive intact in West Street, but a fragment of a 15th- or 16th-century house has been identified incorporated in no. 41.
- 5.13 A market house formerly stood in the Market Square, a building of the type open at the ground floor and with office accommodation above, as at Thaxted or Horndon-on-the-Hill (*Fig. 5*). It is said to have been built in 1707 and was demolished in 1861.

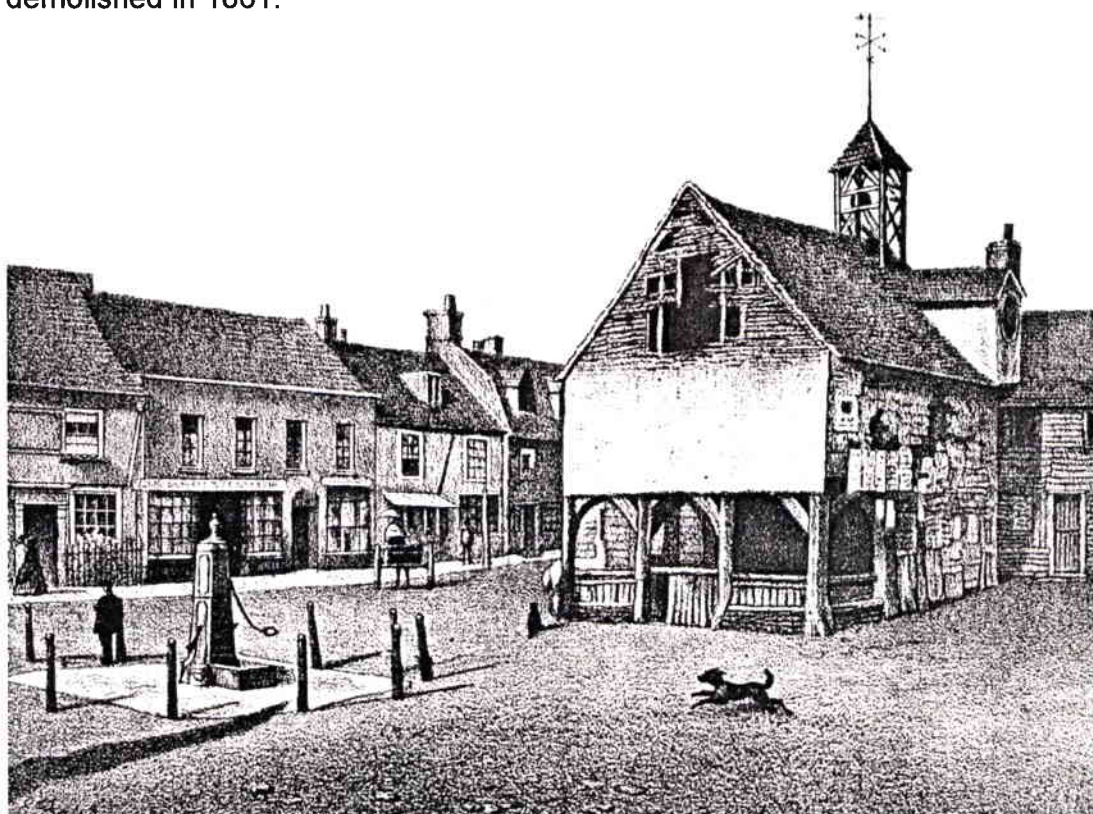


Fig. 5 The Market House in Market Square, demolished in 1861.

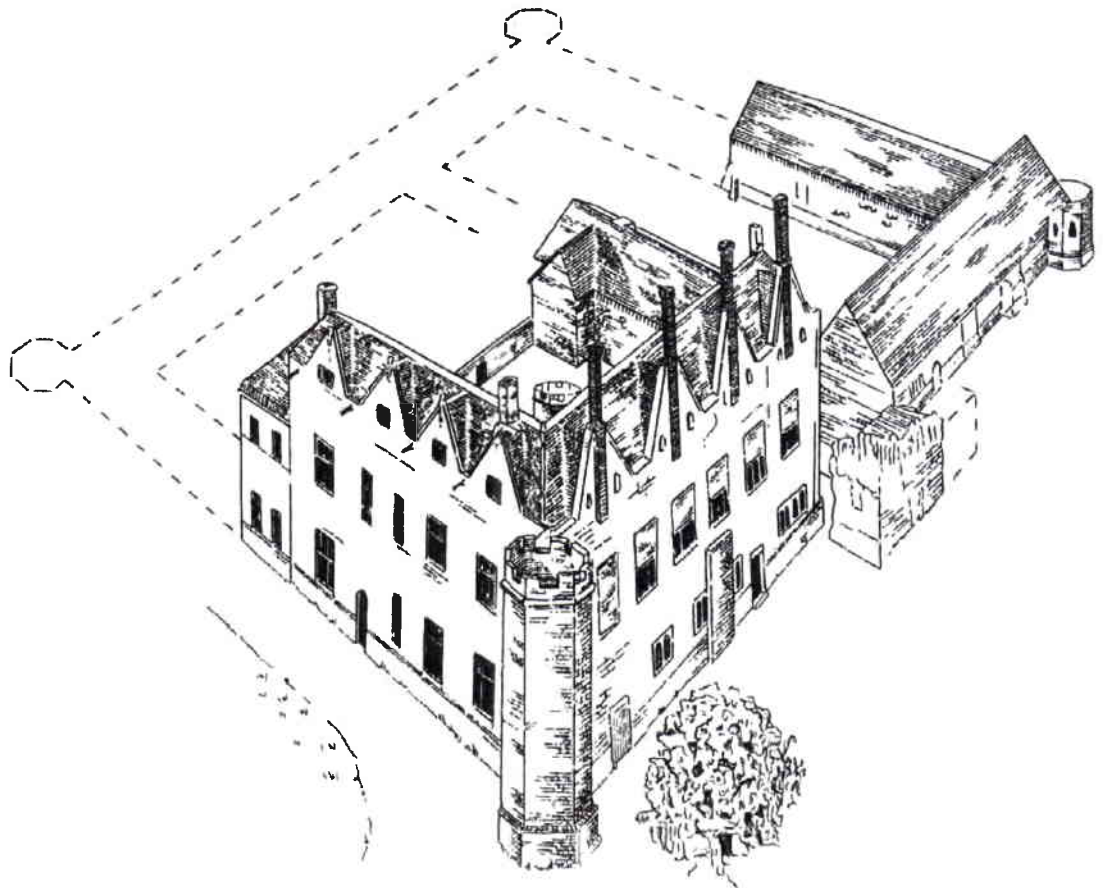
- 5.14 Because few medieval buildings survive, the size of the medieval town is uncertain, though it is probable that there was ribbon development down the main axial streets. This must have been true of South Street and West Street, the main routes in and out of the town.

Rochford Hall

- 5.15 In 1340, the manor of Rochford was granted to William de Bohun, earl of Northampton, passing to his son Humphrey de Bohun. After his death, it remained part of the extensive landholding of his widow Joan de Bohun who died in 1419. It was later in the possession of her niece, Joan Fitzalan, wife of William Beauchamp, lord Abergavenny, another wealthy widow who refurbished the manor and died in 1435. Of the extensive building works carried out in the 1430s, nothing survives today (Andrews 2004a). Her eldest daughter Joan

married James Boteler, earl of Ormond, and on her death the manor passed to that family. The fifth earl was beheaded after the Lancastrian defeat at Towton in 1461. The manor was confiscated and given to the duchess of Exeter, the Woodvilles, and then the Greys, but was recovered by Thomas Boteler in the reign of Henry VII. He probably built the handsome brick tower of the church as the Boteler arms are over the west door. His daughter Margaret married Sir William Boleyn: their son Thomas was created viscount Rochford and was father to Ann Boleyn, the most famous personage associated with the Hall though it is unclear how much time she spent there. Ann's sister Mary and her second husband Sir William Stafford resided at the Hall.

- 5.16 Sir Henry Carey, Mary's son by her first marriage, sold the manor with other property to Richard lord Rich in 1550 for £2000. The lands acquired by Rich included 2000 acres of arable, 500 acres of meadow, 3000 acres of pasture, 1000 acres of wood, and 2000 acres of furze and heath. Richard lord Rich remodelled the manor house as a vast Tudor mansion, part of which survives today (*Fig. 6*).



A reconstructed view of Rochford Hall (after Norman Barnes)

Fig. 6 Rochford Hall, before the barns were converted to residential use. The original extent of the mansion is shown dashed

7. Uses of buildings & space within the conservation area (Fig. 13)

- 7.1 The densely built-up town centre is divided from a large area of open space by the river Roach and the Iron Well stream. This division is also marked, though less exactly, by the railway, which represents a significant visual separation as it runs on an embankment. The transition from this open space to the built-up area is still relatively abrupt, as suburban sprawl on the west side of the town has been kept at bay.
- 7.2 Although the Dutch barn to the west of the Hall is still a grain store, the open space is recreational land used a golf course, or, to the east of the railway, maintained as amenity by the local authority. Public rights of way exist across part of it, one of them leading to the church, a building with a significant community use as well as a major landmark. The large area occupied by the golf course gives a sense of remoteness from the town and the Southend conurbation. Within Rochford town centre, there is very little public open space.
- 7.3 For the most part, there is a welcome variety of uses within the town centre. Shops are concentrated mainly in West Street and Market Square, and at the south end of North Street. There are few empty shops or charity shops. South Street looks residential, but the majority of its houses are put to office use, as are the new buildings on Bradley way and in the Back Lane car park.
- 7.4 North Street, West Street and Weir Pond Road are mainly but not entirely residential. Businesses, churches and pubs are to be found scattered along their length. In contrast, the new developments along Millview Meadows and in the South Street backlands are unrelieved housing.
- 7.5 Like the shops, food and catering outlets are centred on the market area. The pubs, most of which occupy historic sites going back well over 100 years, are often in more peripheral positions near the entrances to the historic town. Most of them occupy prominent sites and are landmarks in the street scene.

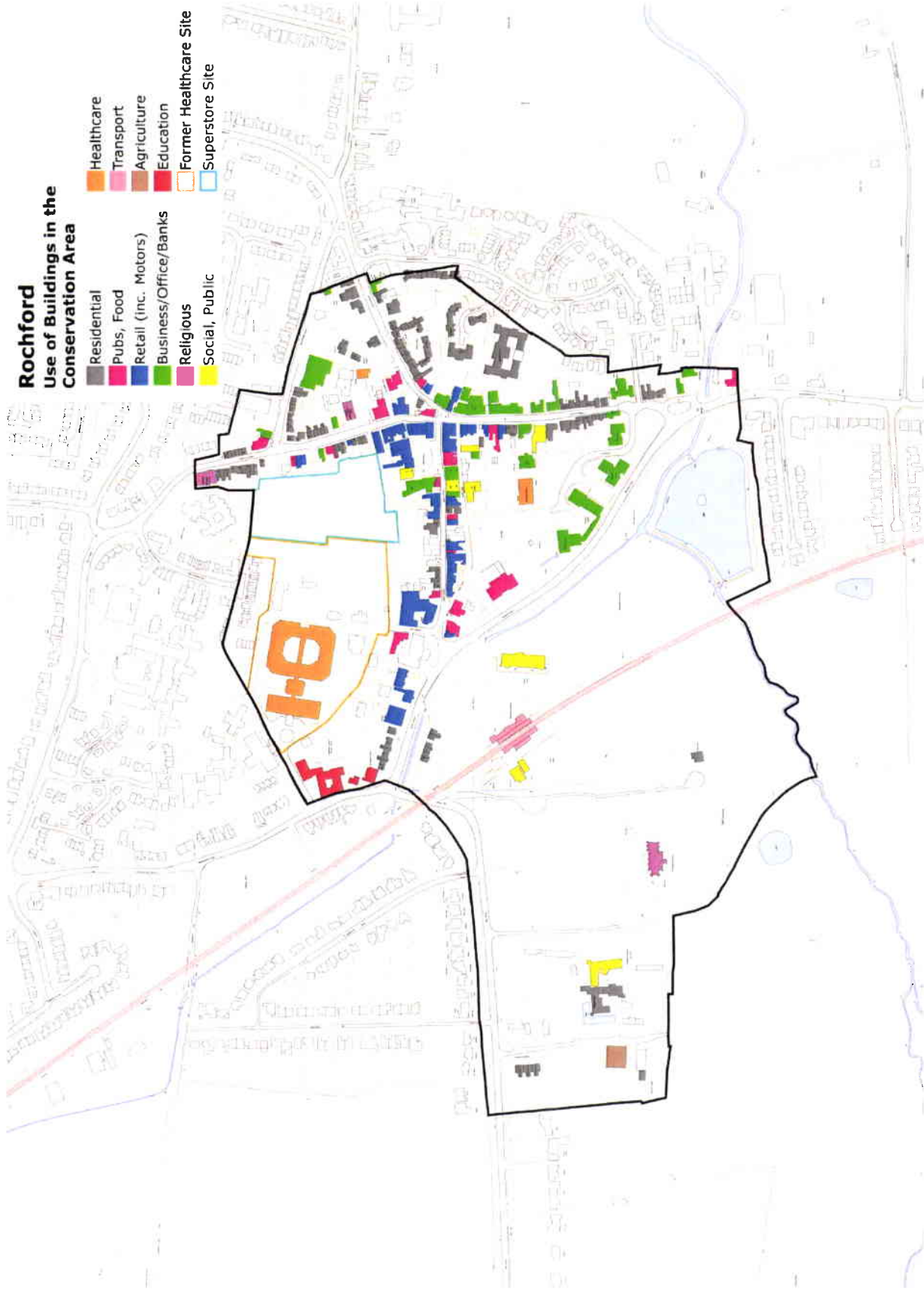


Fig 13 Use of buildings and spaces within the conservation area.

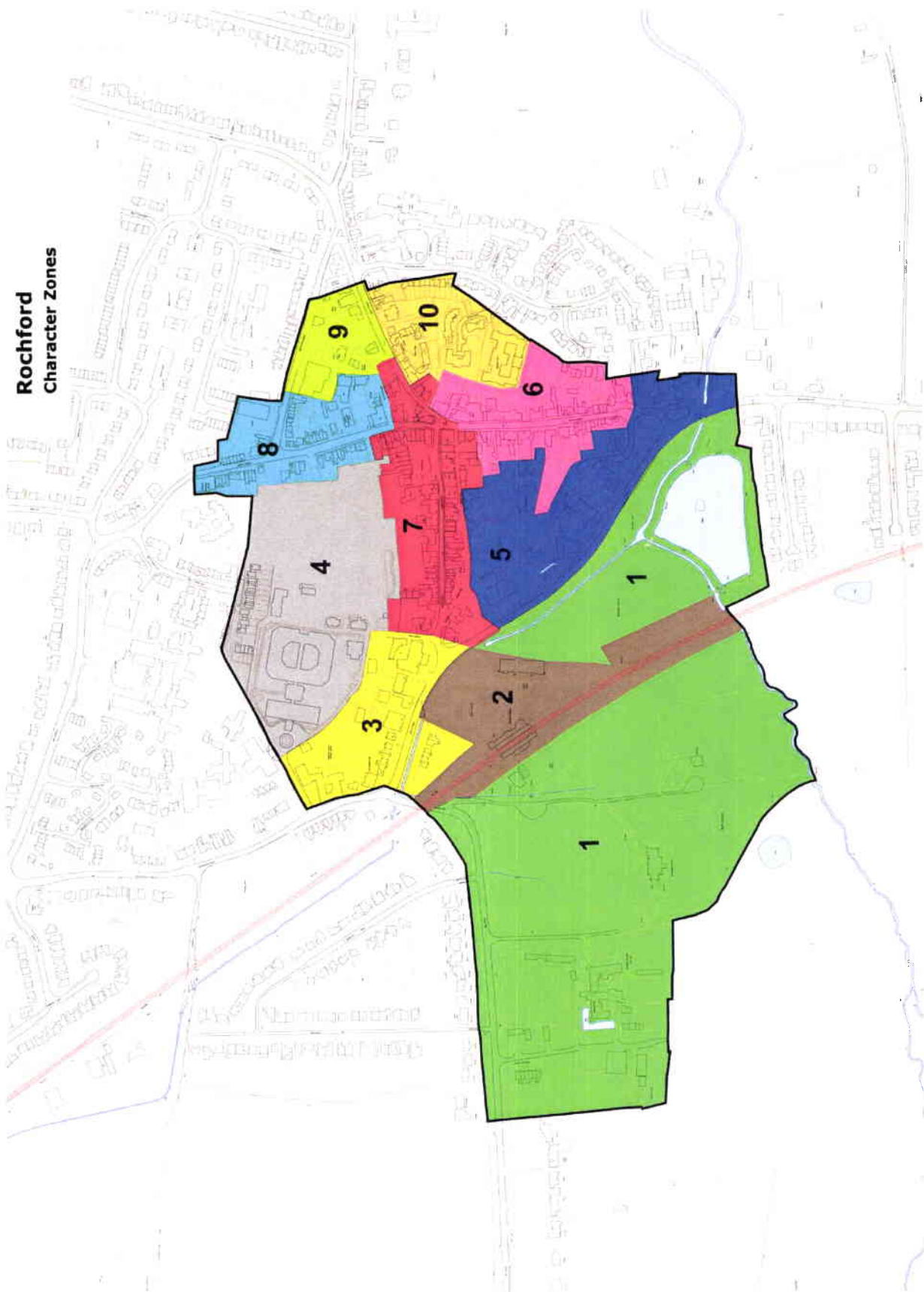


Fig. 14 Character zones identified in the Rochford conservation area.

8. Character zones and spatial interrelationships (*Fig. 14*)

- 8.1 The conservation area can be divided into ten character zones, on the basis of visually unifying factors arising from the degree of open space or density of built environment, combined with the age, use and appearance of buildings. The boundaries, needless to say, are somewhat arbitrary. However, significant alteration to the boundaries would reflect a change in the character of the conservation area. A particularly well defined boundary is that on the west side of the town between the manorial area, the public open space, and the historic town area. This is reinforced by the railway, stream and Bradley Way, creating a situation analogous to a walled town. However, it is a boundary that could be subject to erosion and as such warrants careful protection.
- 8.2 The undeveloped western part of the conservation area, comprising the land around Rochford Hall and the church, and the public open space, forms a readily recognisable unit, albeit one cut through by the railway (*Fig. 14, 1*). The combination of a manorial hall and hall in relative isolation is a typical feature of the historic landscape of Essex. The Rochford example is a good one, and notable at the edge of so large a built-up area.
- 8.3 The station and associated railway land forms a discrete area which in terms of landscaping and maintenance is inferior to the rest of the conservation area (*Fig. 14, 2*). The western end of West Street has a mixture of buildings of different ages and uses, but spaciouly laid out reflecting their suburban location peripheral to the town centre (*Fig. 14, 3*).
- 8.4 The hospital site is currently a building site, though it will presumably divide eventually into two zones, one with the healthcare use and the other with houses and shops (*Fig. 14, 4*). The new buildings will be conspicuous, with views into them from Market Square and North Street in particular. The impact of the development, and the quality of the views into it, cannot be assessed at present.
- 8.5 The Bradley Way area is identifiable by large isolated modern buildings surrounded by spaces used for car parking (*Fig. 14, 5*). The Back Lane car park is largely screened from South Street, but has strong visual links to the buildings on the south side of West Street.
- 8.6 Within the historic town centre, three zones can be identified (*Fig. 14, 6-8*), whilst two peripheral zones are more suburban and affected by 19th- or 20th-century development (*Fig. 14, 9-10*). South Street is distinguished by its frontages, occupied largely by imposing brick houses. West Street and Market Square are more commercial, and correspond approximately to what is interpreted as the original extent of the medieval market place. North Street is predominantly residential, with many old cottages. The east end of East Street is less densely built up, with late Victorian villas and buildings on large plots, and has a suburban feel to it. The blocks of flats on the south side of East Street and to the rear of South Street are all much of a piece in terms of age and design with the housing in Millview Meadows and Lever Lane. The narrowness of the main axial streets, and their slight curvature, means that they tend form separated discrete units, except around Market Square and Horners Corner where they are visually interlinked.

9. Area analysis

Hall Road

9.1 Until the first half of the 20th century, Hall Road was undeveloped. It still has a rural feel to it, to which the trees along it make a significant contribution, and forms an attractive approach to the town and conservation area. The large houses which have been built along Hall Road since the Second World War begin on the south side outside the conservation area and stop at Rochford Hall where the conservation area begins. The Hall and the conservation area have formed an obstacle to development on this side of the road, but the houses resume on the north side outside the conservation area boundary which is drawn along the north side of the road. It is essential to the preservation of this approach to the town, and of the setting of Rochford Hall, that further suburbanisation of the road is avoided. In particular, boundary walls in unsympathetic materials can have an effect quite disproportionate to their size on the appearance of the road (*Fig. 15*). Hedges are much more appropriate in this context.



Fig. 15 Hall Road. Boundary walls, if too elaborately designed, do not look as good in this semi-rural setting as hedges.

9.2 To the west of the Hall, an asphalt farm road gives access to the residential part of the Tudor mansion, the farmyard and beyond to the golf course (though this is not used by golfers). On the right, there is a row of six early 20th-century stock brick estate cottages. They are partly rendered. They preserve their original doors and windows and form a nice group. Opposite them are brick and timber sheds and garages. To the south is a large area of derelict grassland enclosed by Tudor brick walls, a hard standing used for parking agricultural equipment,

and a large cement rendered Dutch barn or grain store (*Fig. 16*). This area still has the aspect of a working farmyard, a valuable foil to the creeping suburbanisation of Hall Road and traditional setting to the Hall itself. An application made in the late 1980s to build a row of detached houses to the west of the Hall was rejected.



Fig. 16 Hall Road, access road to the Hall and grain store, an area that still preserves something of its agricultural character.

- 9.3 South of the Dutch barn, there is a row of collapsing late 19th-century lean-to sheds built up against a Tudor brick wall. A small house, Shepherds Cottage, has been erected here, probably in the 1970s.
- 9.4 When it was first built, by Richard lord Rich in the 1550s, **Rochford Hall** was probably the largest mansion in Essex. It was about 200 feet square with octagonal corner towers, and rows of gables, a somewhat precocious feature at this period, separated in the middle of each side by large square projections resembling towers. Until recently, it has been a poorly understood building, and its place in the development of Tudor architecture not really assessed. Today it is reduced to an E-shaped plan, less than half its former size (*Fig. 6*). Until the 1970s, the eastern part was the Rochford Hundred Golf Club and a farmhouse, whilst the western part was used as barns, which were eventually abandoned and became increasingly derelict. In the 1980s, the barns were converted to dwellings, a moat dug out, and improvements effected to the landscape of the immediate vicinity (Clark 1990). The Hall is listed grade 1. The western part (i.e. the former barns) is a scheduled ancient monument. The scheduling takes precedence over the listing. For this reason, the conversion was carried out free of building control. It is curious that this part of the building remains scheduled after the conversion as residential buildings are not normally scheduled.

9.5 The conversion of the barns was done in an accurate mock Tudor style. It included small extensions, and also conversion of some farm buildings. Despite the density of the development, and the element of pastiche, 20 years on it looks good and has worn well (*Fig. 17*). The landscaping around it has also enhanced its setting.



Fig. 17 Rochford Hall, a view of the residential conversion of the former barns area.

9.6 A grade II listed Tudor brick wall of the 16th or 17th century almost completely surrounds the site of the Hall. This has not been studied and the way the enclosures round the Hall were used is not understood. It is a major landscape feature of considerable historic interest, one that gives definition to the site of the Tudor mansion, but unfortunately not one that can really be appreciated from Hall Road as it is very overgrown by scrub and ivy. This should be partially cleared to avoid damage to the brickwork and to make it more visible (*Fig. 18*). The elevation to Hall Road is said to have diaperwork.



Fig. 18 Hall Road, one of the least overgrown parts of the Tudor boundary wall.

- 9.7 On the east side of the Hall where the entrance to the Golf Club is located, there is a clump of very fine but elderly chestnuts. This is the best preserved part of the Tudor mansion. It is unfortunate that the most prominent elevation, the east one, with its characteristic row of gables, is clad in dull grey cement render, an inferior substitute for the original lime render.
- 9.8 The golf course replaces the former parkland setting of the Hall. There are extensive views across the greens. The airport can be glimpsed in the distance. There are numerous trees, but too many birches and evergreens. A planting scheme that attempted to re-instate something of a parkland appearance would be an improvement. There is a row of inappropriate *Lleylandii* close to the churchyard. Although imposing, the church is not a very visible landmark today except from the golf course. It is partly screened from the road by trees. The railway has severed the church from the town, but it is possible, however, to see the tower from the Back Lane car park, from which it looks surprisingly close, a reminder that it was not always as detached from the town as it seems today.
- 9.9 **St. Andrews church** is large with aisles, built mainly of Kentish ragstone, and predominantly 15th-century in appearance (RCHM 1923; *Fig 19*). Its most prominent feature is the magnificent late 15th-century brick tower with diaper work. Of interest is the vestry on the north side of the chancel which was probably built for a chantry priest in the 15th century. In 2005, two-thirds of the north aisle was partitioned off to provide toilet and kitchen facilities, and a meeting room, something which has helped to bring the building more into community use.



Fig. 19 St. Andrews church, the Hall in the background.

- 9.10 The **churchyard** has been extended to the west and south. It is enclosed by low brick walls, a stock one on the west side, and a red brick one on the south side. The churchyard is closed for burial and is maintained by Rochford District Council. It is tidy but not manicured. The asphalt paths would look better surfaced in bound gravel. Some graves have been cleared and the stones stood up against the south boundary. It is attractively planted with evergreens, though a clump of pampas grass is less appropriate. The entrance to it is through iron gates to a path flanked by privet hedge leading to the west door. In

the west part of the churchyard, the grass has been replaced by gravel. This surface treatment is quite alien to an English churchyard (though not a French one) and is totally out of character. Its appearance is made worse by many graves with the space between the kerbs filled with green glass chippings.

- 9.11 The area to the east of the golf course is surprisingly rural in character. A patch of wilderness on the road provides a contrast to the mown greens. The area is traversed by footpaths which are public rights of way, following old field boundaries and former routes to the church. One goes through the churchyard. An early 20th-century house, Linden Lodge, stands isolated in this area but virtually invisible behind trees. A scout hut and nursery operate from prefabricated buildings close to the railway line.
- 9.12 At the east end of Hall Road, a sign advertises its north side as a **cycle lane**. There are as many as five signs relating to this cycle lane where it ends by the access point for the footpath to the station. The cycle stands here seem little used. These features need rationalisation.
- 9.13 At the end of the cycle route, a flight of steps ascends the embankment to the west side of the station. The entrance to the steps is through a dilapidated chain link fence, whilst the posts and handrails are painted white and blue, making them excessively visible and an eyesore from a distance (*Fig. 20*). The steps are supplemented by a ramp which tacks up the side of the embankment. These too have unsightly handrails painted blue and white. These features make for an unsightly view at this end of Hall Road, not helped by the use of bright blue plastic reinforcing similar to milk crates used to revet the embankment at this point.



Fig. 20 Steps and ramp at the west access to Rochford station.

- 9.14 As Hall Road encounters the railway embankment, it turns sharp left under a bridge, which is typically shabby, the paint on the ironwork peeling, and the engineering bricks badly stained. The bridge over the Iron Well stream has plain white painted railings. Black would be a better colour. The conduit for the stream is overgrown and has accumulated litter. The junction of Hall Road, Ashingdon Road and West Street is very busy; it is unfortunate that the primary school is so close to it.

10. Evaluation of the contribution of individual buildings to the character of the conservation area

- 10.1 A map (*Fig. 59*) has been prepared assessing the contribution made by individual buildings to the appearance and character of the conservation area. Although a subjective process, the map can be a helpful guide in the planning process. Buildings have been graded on a scale of five according to the following criteria:
- Negative, buildings of no architectural quality detrimental to the character of the area, either by reason of mass, design, materials or siting.
 - Negative, buildings of indifferent design or detailing, or unsuited to the character of the conservation area.
 - Buildings which have a neutral presence in the conservation area, fitting satisfactorily into it.
 - Positive contribution through design, age, materials or detailing.
 - Positive, listed buildings or landmark buildings.
- 10.2 Unsympathetic alterations or 'improvements' can have the effect of moving a building down a grade. Similarly, reversal of such alterations could restore its original character and move it up a grade.
- 10.3 *Fig. 60* attempts to assess the public realm and open space within the conservation area. It shows bad views; the extent of car parks and parked cars which form negative townscape; green spaces which contribute to the character of the town centre and warrant protection; traffic flows and problems, and footpaths.

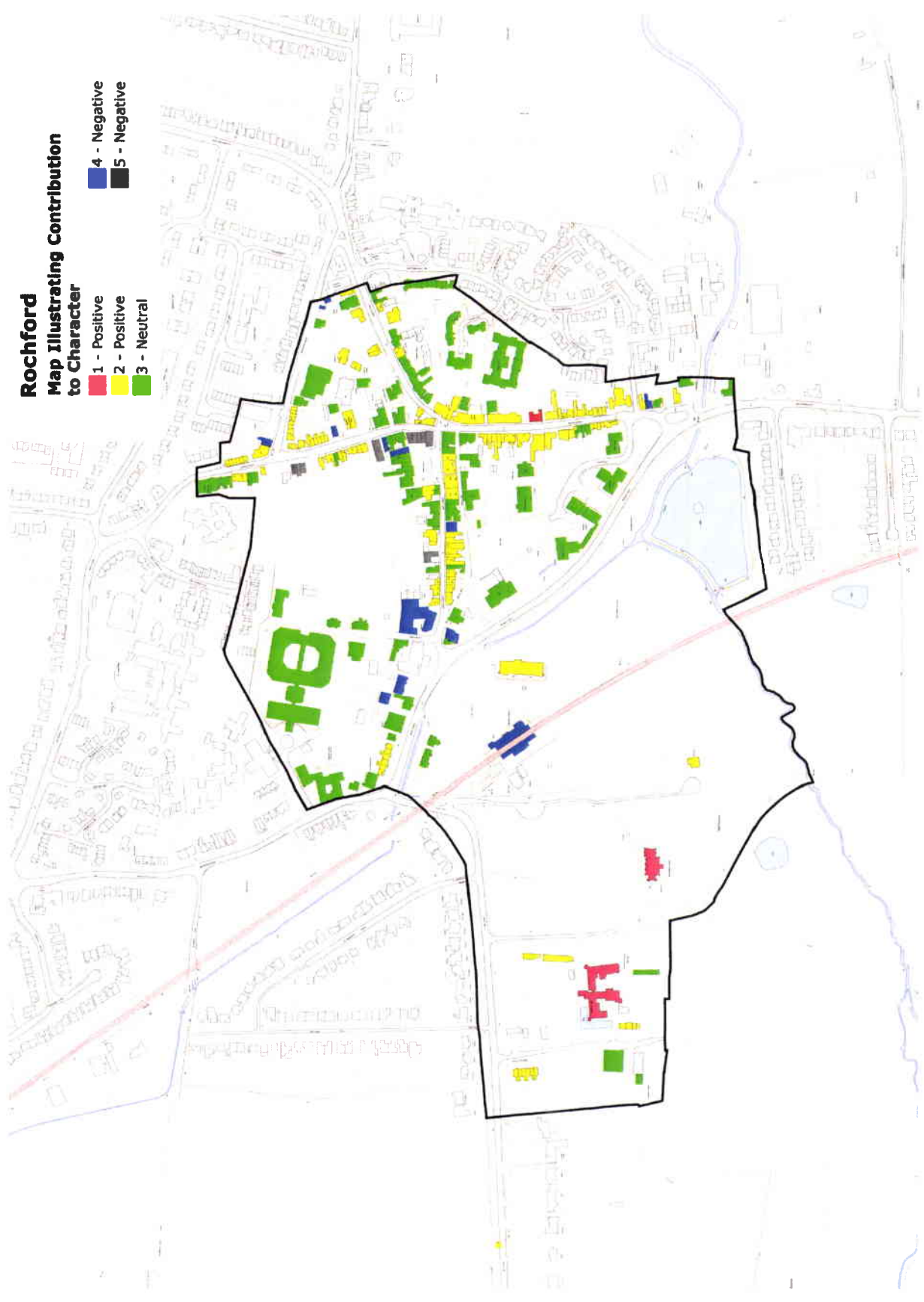


Fig. 59 Map to illustrate the contribution of individual buildings to the conservation area.