

The Essex Historic Landscape Characterisation Project



ENGLISH HERITAGE



Essex County Council

Essex Historic Landscape Characterisation

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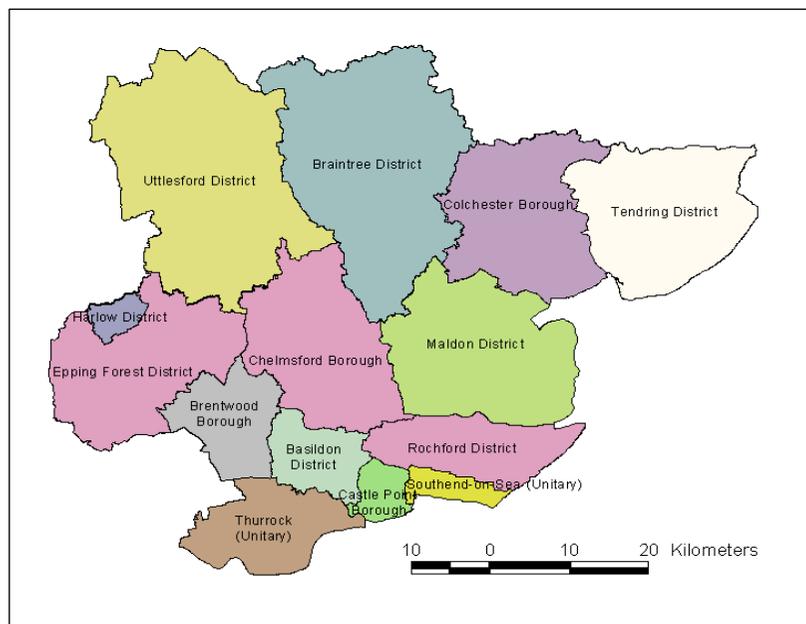
Executive Summary

The county of Essex is today subjected to enormous pressures from housing and transport infrastructure developments, but many historic elements can be seen to survive in the landscape. A Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) project has therefore been carried out as part of the English heritage national programme to assess the rural landscape in terms of its historic origins.

The aim of the project in Essex was to *characterise the distinctive historic dimension* of the current rural landscape. This has been carried out as part of, and using the methodology developed for, the East of England Regional HLC project. The regional project is sponsored by English Heritage and covers the six counties of Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, plus the unitary authorities within the region.

In Essex desk-based research using modern and historic mapping sources was carried out to identify and map the historic character of the landscape through the application of defined Historic Landscape Character types. The results of the project are a full report in four volumes, and a comprehensive Geographic Information System (GIS) which provides a complete coverage of the county with information on current and past landscape origins.

Overview of the Project



Background

HLC in Essex covers c. 4,250 sq km (367,725.84 ha) and includes the modern administrative area of Essex comprising 12 districts plus Southend and Thurrock Unitary Authorities.

As with other HLC projects, this records and illustrates changes within the historic landscape, especially over the past 150 years. HLC represents a shift from monument and building designations to a view of the whole landscape. The HLC approach makes it possible to understand the development of the entire landscape in historic terms, and from this assessment to identify the diverse patterns which make its historic landscape distinctive.

Methodology

Historic Landscape Characterisation in Essex started with an assessment of historic and current mapping. It attributed various HLC Types to blocks of landscape and the data was entered into a Geographic Information System (GIS). Where changes in landuse were observed from the source maps, the previous HLC type data was also entered into the GIS database. These 'relict' HLC types give a time depth to the data, and allow the degree of change in the landscape to be calculated.

HLC Types were defined, based on either morphology, or on landuse. Morphology in this context is the shape and pattern of features in the landscape. The majority of Essex consists of enclosed land and the study of the shape and pattern of field boundaries helps determine the date and origin of these fields. For example, the regular shaped planned fields from parliamentary enclosure in the 18th to 19th centuries can be distinguished from smaller, irregular fields which are considered to represent earlier landscapes. HLC Types reflect these differences. Landuse also defines some types of landscape and can reflect historical elements, such as duck decoy ponds or oyster beds. A full methodology is in Appendix A.

Overview of the Project

Characterising the landscape

The landscape of Essex is very varied, based on the underlying geology, which determines its soils, and on the topography, shaped by natural processes. These factors have influenced the character of the county's natural and semi-natural vegetation, and the human activities that can be supported.

54 HLC Types are used in the Essex HLC (see panel). These can be loosely grouped together into 24 Broad Groups which aids analysis of patterns and themes in the landscape. For the purpose of this report, these have been grouped into 10 wider categories. Each of these wider categories is discussed in the full report and these include an indication of importance and more details on the principal HLC Types. The full glossary of HLC types is in Appendix B.

The HLC data, combined with other key datasets such as Ancient Woodland, historic mapping, historic parks and gardens and secondary sources, was analysed and summarised in order to develop a series of character areas that reflected distinct combinations of Historic Landscape Character types and landscape character attributes. The descriptions seek to highlight the key characteristics and HLC types in an area and identify any particular significant features or assets. A full description of these Character Areas are in Appendix C.



Google Earth view of irregular fields and river meadows around Steeple and Helions Bumpstead

Enclosed land

Pre-18th Century Enclosure: unenclosed common arable· irregular enclosure· coaxial enclosure· rectilinear enclosure· dual-axis - rectilinear 'co-axial' fields· dual-axis - sinuous 'co-axial' fields· irregular sinuous enclosure
18th-19th Century Enclosure: piecemeal enclosure by agreement· piecemeal style parliamentary enclosure· formal style parliamentary enclosure
20th Century Agriculture: boundary loss· 20th century enclosure· boundary loss - with relict elements

Inland - Managed Wetlands: enclosed meadow· water meadow· managed wetland

Miscellaneous: mixed origin Marginal: unimproved rough pasture

Open land

Commons, Wastes, Heaths: commons with a built margin· heath· commons with an open margin

Woodland

Woodlands: ancient woodland· 18th-20th century woodland plantation

Parks & Gardens

Parks, Gardens, Recreation: informal parkland· leisure / recreation

Coastal

Coastal - Drained Enclosure: drained reclamation - curvilinear - pre-18th century· drained reclamation - rectilinear - 19th -20th century

Coastal - Managed Wetlands: unimproved marine marsh or brackish fen· saltings· unimproved intertidal Water features: sea defences

Settlement

Built-up Areas- Historic: religious institutions

Built-up Areas- Modern: built-up areas - urban development · plotlands· hospital, school, university

Industrial

Mineral: disused mineral extraction· restored land· mineral extraction

Industry: disused industrial · industrial

Horticulture

Horticulture: allotments· nursery with glass house· orchard

Military

Military: disused post-medieval military· post-medieval military

Landuse

Historic Earthworks: historic earthwork Water features: water reservoir

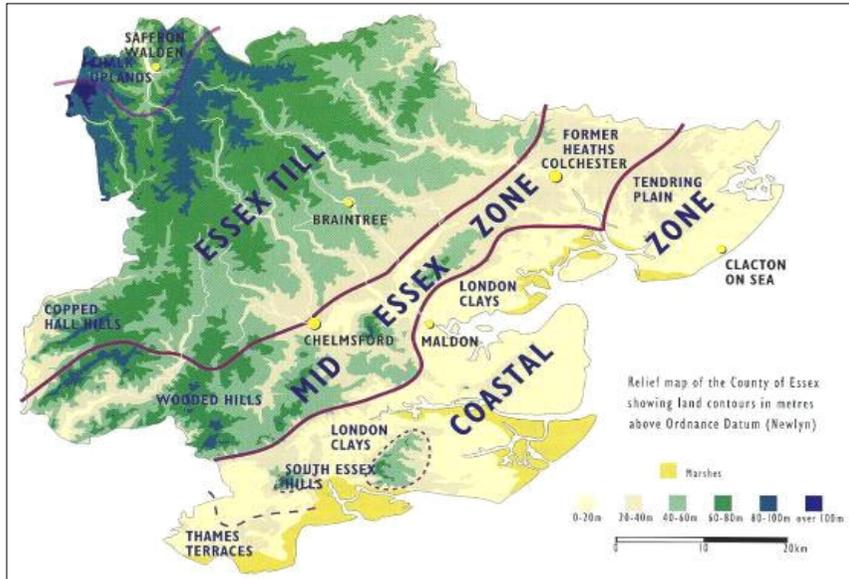
Communications: airfield - civilian· motorway, railway

Miscellaneous: duck decoy pond· stud farm· rabbit warren

Inland - Managed Wetlands: watercress beds

Coastal - Managed Wetlands: oyster beds

Historic Landscape Profile - Essex

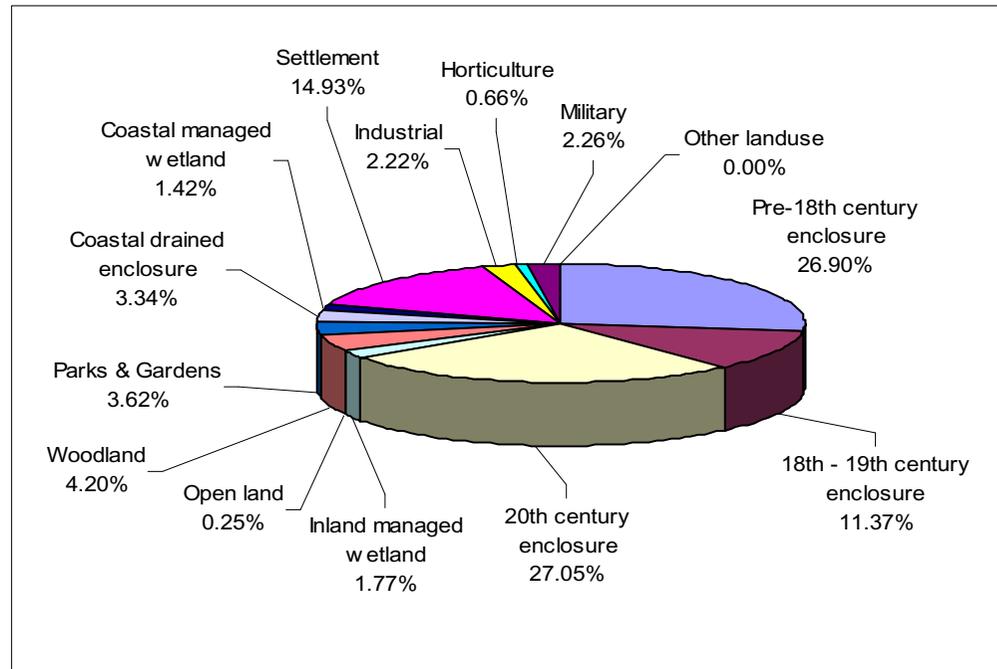


An Agricultural landscape

The landscape of Essex has been formed by the gradual simplification of the medieval landscape through the loss of field boundaries, woodland and heath. It is the product of a long process of social and agricultural evolution. The landscape of 18th-century Essex was substantially similar to that of the 10th century. The farming revolution transformed Essex from the fairly tightly enclosed landscape of that 18th century period, through agricultural intensification from the Second World War onwards, into the landscape of today where there are many uninterrupted arable stretches. Despite this, Essex retains the varied and distinctive character of each HLC type. See section 6 of the report for more details on all the district profiles, and Appendix C for description of the character zones.

Topography

The Essex landscape is one of considerable variety which can be described as gently rolling countryside bisected by many river valleys. The county is predominantly low-lying, with a coastline which extends for almost 400 miles and is indented with numerous estuaries. At its highest, in the extreme north-west, chalk hills rise to over 120 meters. Other areas of high ground exist, such as the South Essex Hills. The landscape of Essex can be divided into four broad regions, the Coastal Zone, the Mid-Essex Zone, the Essex Till and the Chalk Uplands.



Pie chart showing the composition of the current landscape by percentage area

Historic Landscape Profile - Basildon

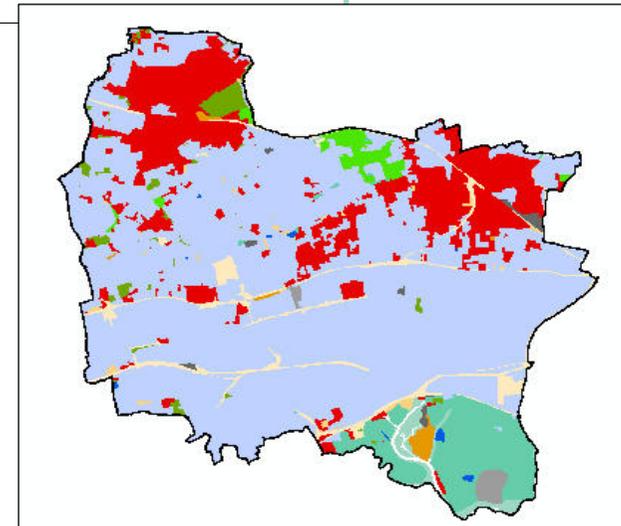
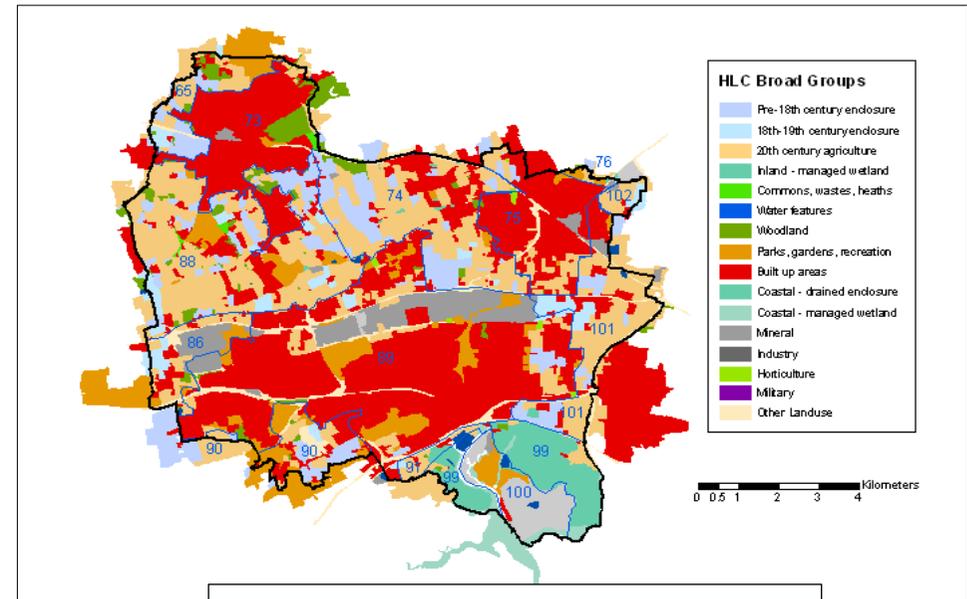
Basildon District is largely urban in character, being dominated by Basildon New Town, and to a lesser extent Wickford and Rawreth. Basildon New Town was constructed in the 1950s and 60s, replacing one of the largest concentrations of plotlands in Essex. To the south are the Langdon Hills, rounded sand and gravel ridges rising steeply to the Westley Heights. They are well wooded with a mix of ancient woodland and secondary woodland on abandoned plotlands. The south-east corner of the district is characterised by grazing marsh and former grazing marsh on the Thames flood-plain.

Billericay, a medieval market town with Roman origins, forms the principal urban element in the north of the district. This part of the district is more rural, comprising the south Essex hills and the upper valley of the River Crouch.

The field pattern across the district is strongly rectilinear with a pronounced north-south grid. Onto this have been superimposed areas of former plotlands. Post 1950's boundary change can be described as moderate to severe, largely due to urban expansion.

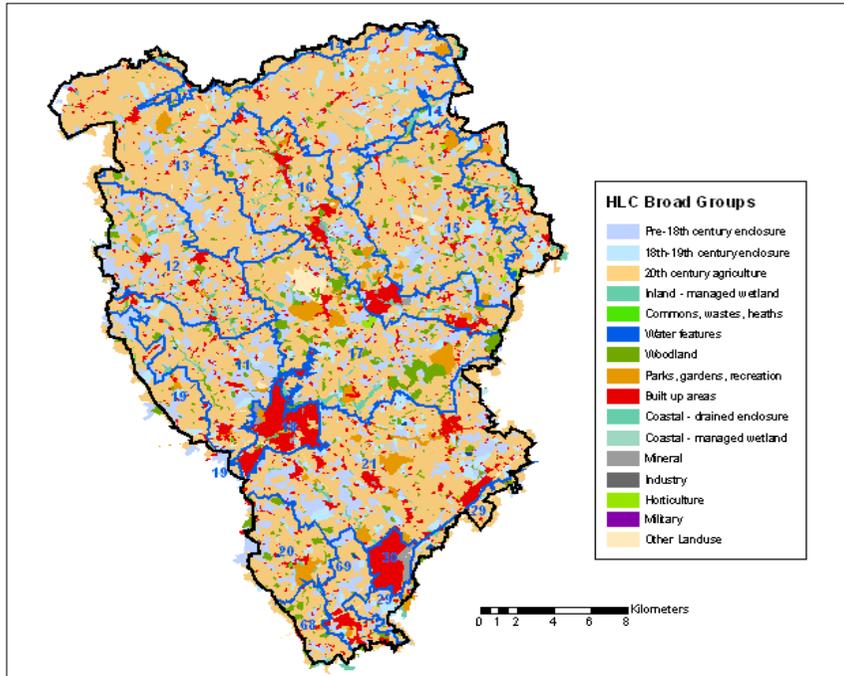


Reconstruction of the Basildon plotlands (©P.Froste)



The top map above shows the HLC Broad Groups overlaid by the Historic Landscape Character Zones. The bottom map shows the previous HLC Broad Groups, illustrating the older character of the landscape.

Historic Landscape Profile - Braintree



The map above shows the HLC Broad Groups overlaid by the Historic Landscape Character Zones. Above is a Google Earth image of irregular enclosures north-east of Halstead

Braintree District is an area of undulating countryside, bordered by the River Stour valley to the north. The area is also drained by the upper reaches of the River Colne and the River Pant/Blackwater, as well as many smaller streams and tributaries creating a landscape of gentle slopes and small valleys.

The urban areas comprise Braintree, Witham, Kelvedon, Coggeshall and Halstead, all of which were medieval market towns, some having their origins in Roman times. The rural settlement was historically very dispersed, comprising church/hall complexes, manors, farms, moated sites and small hamlets strung out along extensive network of linear and triangular greens, the latter located at road junctions. The greens do not show clearly on the HLC, largely because they were enclosed in a piecemeal fashion prior to the 1st edition OS map, however their location is still discernible within the current fieldscape. Post-1950s boundary loss varies widely.

The River Stour and River Colne valley bottoms are characterised by extensive meadows or meadow pasture. The higher ground between them is characterised by a complex mix of pre-18th century irregular fields of probable of medieval origin or older, and common arable field enclosed by agreement largely before the mid-19th century. The Upper Pant/Blackwater valley, and the area to the southwest of Braintree town, are characterised by pre-18th century irregular fields. The Coggeshall area is complex, comprising a mix of pre-18th century irregular fields and pre-18th century co-axial fields. The southern part of the district has a more complex fieldscape with a mixture of a irregular and regular fields, including some co-axial fields, and enclosed heathlands and commons, particularly in the Tiptree heath area, with enclosed meadow pasture bordering the streams and rivers.

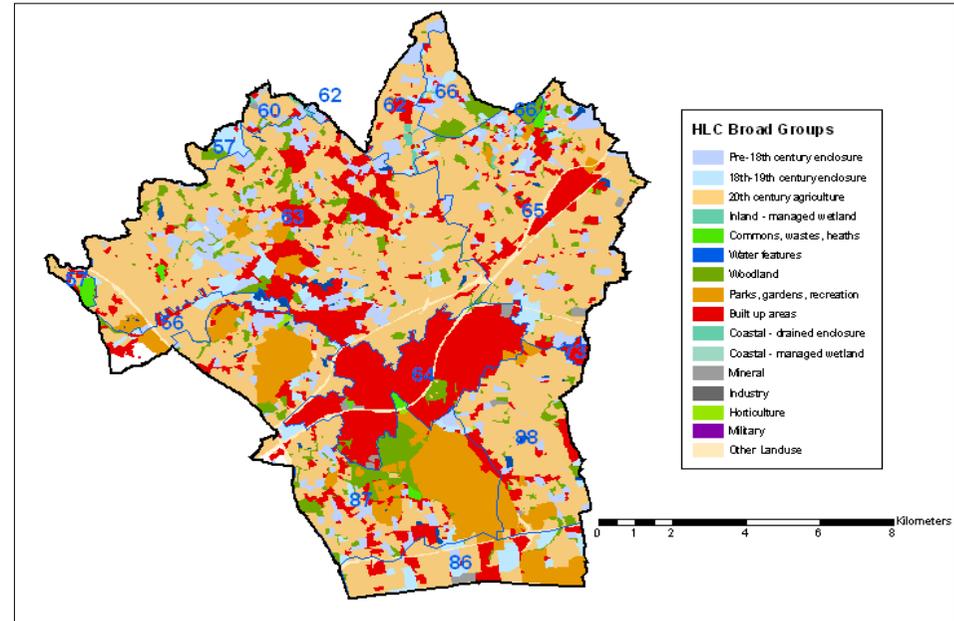
The area around Gosfield is notable for its Ancient Woodland and a number of large landscaped parks, some of which are medieval in origin, including Gosfield Hall, Gosfield Place and Marks Hall park.

Historic Landscape Profile - Brentwood

Brentwood District is largely an area of gently undulating countryside, bordered to the north and west by the Roding valley. The modern urban areas of Brentwood and Shenfield effectively bisect the district. Brentwood was a medieval market town.

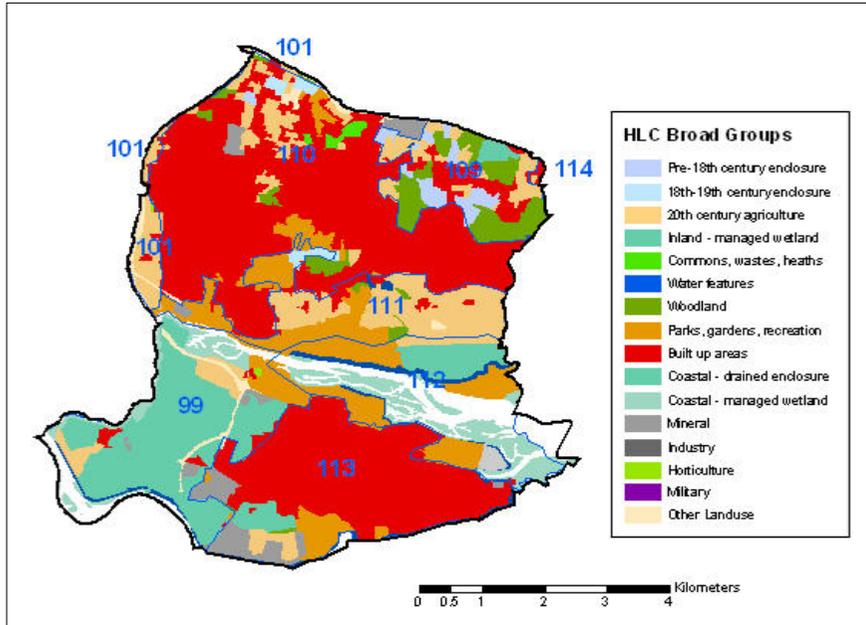
In the north-west the landscape was historically dominated by a complex network of heaths and commons, some of which were enclosed in the post-medieval period and the remainder in the 18th century. The area around Ingatestone appears to have formed a single very large Saxon estate. The fieldscape here is mixed, with areas of co-axial fields and irregular fields. There was extensive enclosed meadow pasture along the Roding valley floor.

To the south the landscape comprises the south Essex hills, a complex landscape of undulating hills and ridges with panoramic views over the Thames. Much of this is still heavily wooded, including the historic parklands of Thorndon Park and Weald Park, both medieval in origin. The only surviving portion of the medieval Royal Forest of Hainault survives here. The historic settlement pattern again is very dispersed, supplemented by some plotland development in the south and east. The landscape has a strong linear grain, running southeast-northwest, reflecting the functional integration of this area with the low-lying land in the Mar Dyke valley to the south. Much of the Mar Dyke area has a distinctive grid-like grain to its layout, this is ancient in origin. The lowest lying areas were fen common until the 1930s.



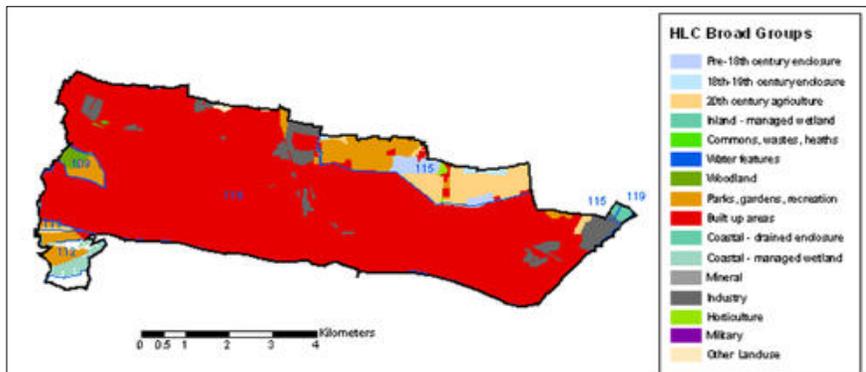
The map above shows the HLC Broad Groups overlaid by the Historic Landscape Character Zones. Above is a Google Earth view over Kelvedon Hatch and Dodington, the area of the former Navestock Heath

Historic Landscape Profile – Castle Point and Southend



Castle Point

Castle Point District borders the River Thames, and comprises a mixture of dryland, former estuarine marsh and Canvey Island. The northern half of this small district is largely urban in character, comprising modern South Benfleet, Hadleigh and Thundersley, all of which have developed from small historic settlements. The exception to this is the Daws Heath/Belfairs Ridge in the north-eastern corner of the district, which is heavily wooded and is mainly in conservation ownership. To the south of the urban area is a narrow strip of steeply rising land which forms a boundary between the estuarine marshes and the dryland. This area is dominated by Hadleigh Castle. The estuarine marshes comprise a varied landscape of reclaimed land, saltmarsh, marshy islands and creeks. This area is largely devoid of settlement, both historically and to-day, and has an open and exposed feel. The reclaimed land was largely enclosed in the post-medieval period and the field boundaries comprise a mix of original creeks and more regular (and usually later) dykes. Canvey Island had similar origins to the marshlands, but is now largely urban in character, most of which is post World War II in date.



Southend

Southend-on-Sea Unitary Authority is overwhelmingly urban in character. The modern urban area incorporates the historic settlements of Prittlewell, Leigh-on-Sea, Westcliff-on-Sea, Southend and Shoeburyness. Only in the north-east of the district does the landscape become rural, although it still retains a strong urban fringe character. To the west the edge of the Belfair Ridge protrudes into the district, a landscape dominated by ancient woodland and a patchwork of regular and irregular fields carved out from the woodland. In the south-west corner the district includes part of the Benfleet creek area, an area of reclaimed marsh, saltmarsh and tidal creeks. This area is now largely used for recreation.

The maps above show the HLC Broad Groups overlaid by the Historic Landscape Character Zones.

Historic Landscape Profile – Chelmsford

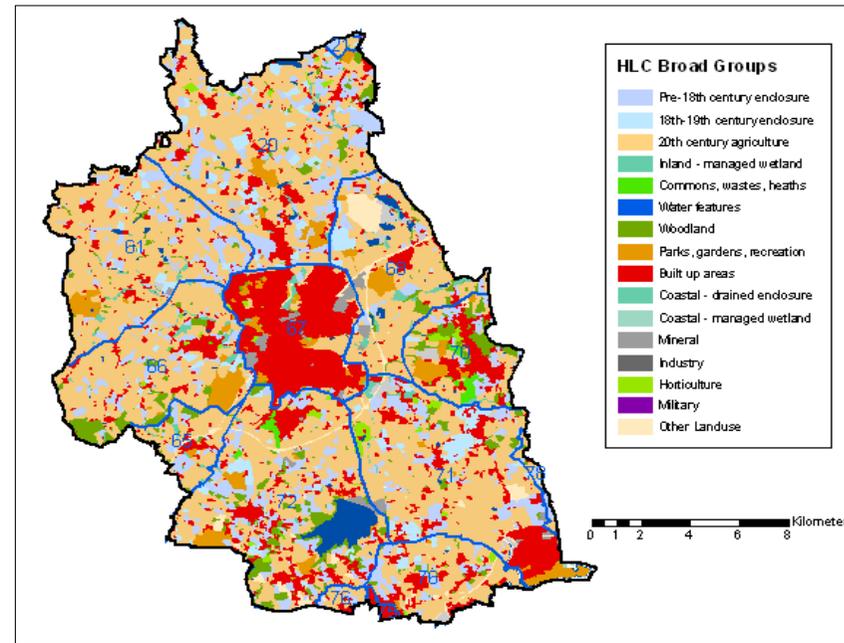
The northern part of Chelmsford District is an area of undulating countryside with the valleys of the Chelmer, Ter and Can rivers. South of the Chelmer is a hilly area between the River Wid and Sandon Brook, and the ridge between the Rivers Chelmer and Crouch drops steeply down to the Crouch valley. It is a highly varied historic landscape.

The modern urban area of Chelmsford, which incorporates the historic settlements of Chelmsford, Widford, Springfield and Great Baddow, forms the central portion of this district. South Woodham Ferrers is a new town in the south-east of the district, replacing an area of plotlands.

To the north and north-west of the district there has been a considerable amount of 20th century development, including major roads and golf courses, and urban development on the boundary with Chelmsford. The historic fieldscape comprises irregular fields, with dispersed settlements and many small, often linear, greens.



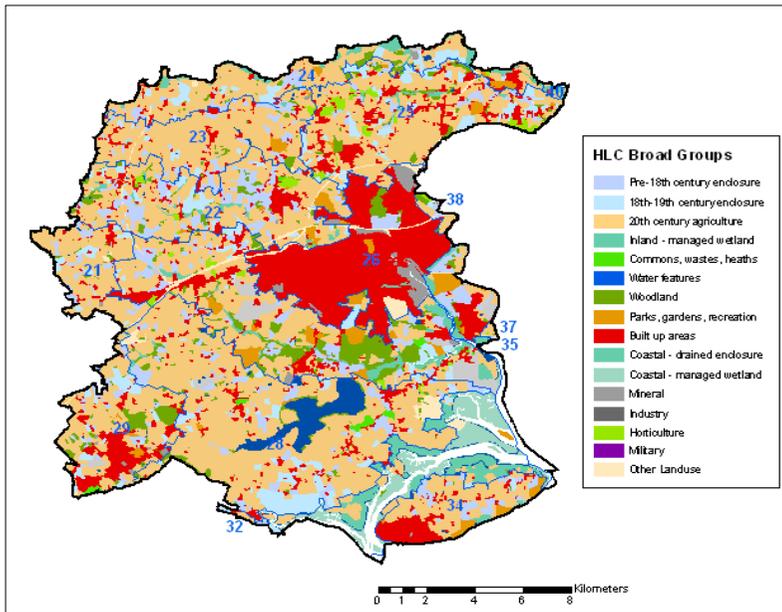
Google Earth view over the area of Writtle Forest



The map above shows the HLC Broad Groups overlaid by the Historic Landscape Character Zones

To the west of the district was the medieval Forest of Writtle. Substantial pockets of woodland still survive in this area. Hylands Park also forms a notable landscape feature. In the south of the district the field-pattern comprises many small fields of ancient origin, both grid-like co-axial and irregular in shape. Modern intrusions in this area include the A12 Chelmsford By-pass and Hanningfield Reservoir. To the south-east the fieldscape comprises a mix of co-axial and irregular fields, becoming strongly co-axial around South Woodham Ferrers. There is also some salt marsh and grazing marsh at the head of the Crouch in the vicinity of South Woodham Ferrers.

Historic Landscape Profile – Colchester



Colchester District can be crudely divided into four zones, comprising the modern urban area of Colchester, the heathlands, the river valleys and the coastal marsh. The historic settlement pattern, with the exception of the town itself, is highly dispersed. The modern urban area includes the Iron Age tribal capital of *Camulodunum*, the Roman, medieval and post-medieval town of Colchester, and the historic settlements of Mile End and Lexden. It is fringed by extensive industrial estates and incorporates a number of tracts of open countryside, mainly along the river valleys.

The northern limits of the district comprise the Stour river valley, including the Dedham Vale area, where the valley landscape is characterised by extensive meadow pastures. To the south of this lies a ridge of higher ground, forming the watershed between the Stour and Colne valleys. In the western half of this, the fieldscape largely comprises pre-18th century irregular fields, probably of medieval origin with some areas of later enclosure by agreement. The eastern half is characterised by large areas of former heathland, forming a rough semi-circle around Colchester. To the south of this ridge is the lower Colne valley, which like the Stour valley is characterised by extensive meadow pasture along the valley floor and pre-18th century irregular fields along the valley sides. To the south of Colchester is the Roman River valley, which has been extensively quarried. However, there are surviving areas of meadow pasture and ancient woodland on the valley floor. Where the Roman River meets the Colne Estuary there are areas of reclaimed marshland.



Google Earth view over Mersea Island and the former coastal marshes

In the south-west corner of the district the landscape is undulating and dominated by Abberton Reservoir. The field pattern is very varied, and includes irregular fields, co-axial fields and areas of heath. This blends into the larger Tiptree Heath area, a huge area of former common rough pasture and wood-pasture. Encroachment began in a piecemeal fashion on this in the medieval period and continued until the Enclosure Acts of the 19th century. The southern edge of Colchester District comprises former and current marshland and Mersea Island, a gently domed mound of London Clay rising from the marsh. The field boundaries are large drainage ditches, some following the sinuous lines of former creeks. Much of the area on the mainland is under conservation ownership.

Historic Landscape Profile – Epping and Harlow

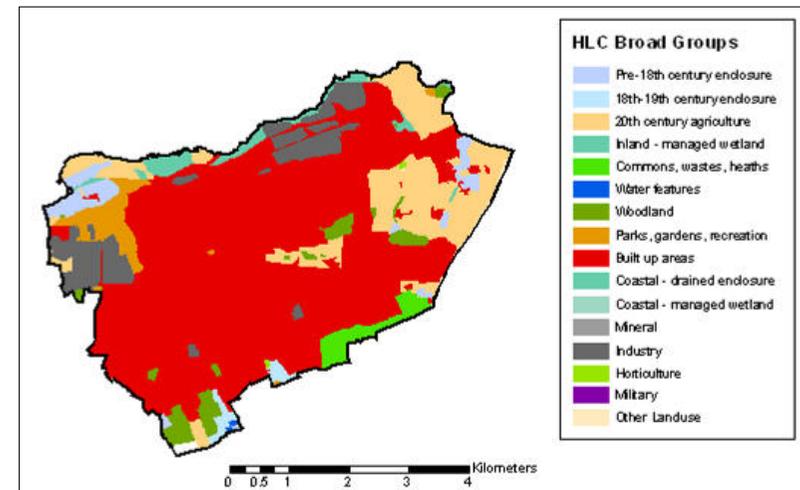
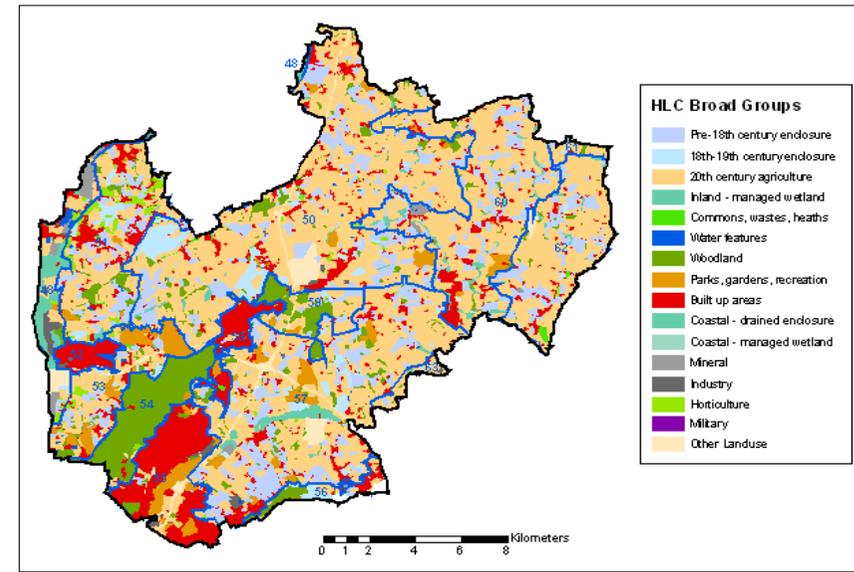
Epping Forest

The landscape of Epping Forest District is very varied. The modern urban areas are in the southern half of the district, and include Epping, Waltham Abbey, Chigwell and Loughton. The southern half of the district was once heavily wooded, and sizable tracts survive at Epping Forest, Wintry Forest and Hainault Forest. The Copped Hall ridge has a high density of historic parks, some medieval in origin, some post-medieval. The western edge of the district comprises the Lea-Stort valley, nowadays characterised by extensive quarrying and formerly by meadow pasture. There was also industry linked with the use of water including the gunpowder mills and the glasshouse industry. To the east of this, and northwards onto the Lavers Ridge, was a dispersed settlement pattern and a mix of irregular fields and large common fields, subsequently enclosed in the later medieval period.

The eastern side of the district comprises the Roding valley, formerly a single large Saxon estate, and the area around Willingale. These are rural in character, with irregular and pre-18th century sinuous fields. There are extensive areas of meadow pasture along the valley floor and numerous small areas of 17th and 18th century woodland. The historic settlement is highly dispersed, comprising hall/church complexes and small hamlets.

Harlow

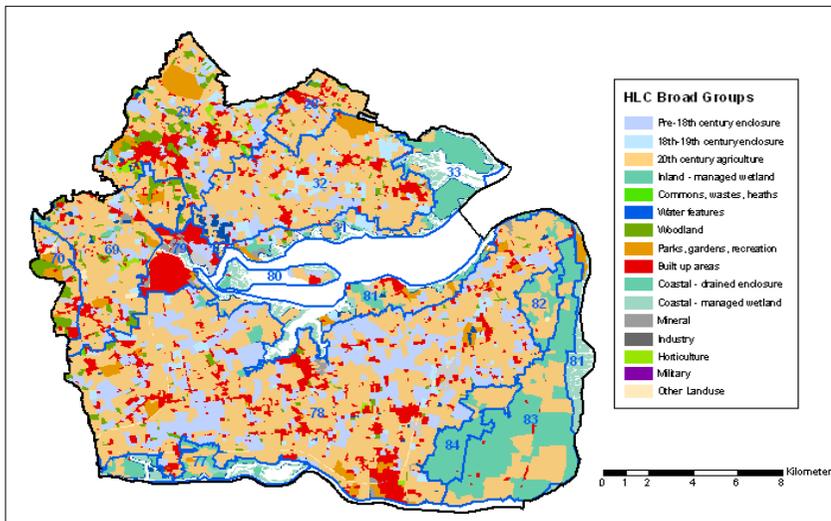
Harlow District largely comprises the modern urban area of Harlow New Town, a 1950s construction. This incorporated the sites of a Roman town, a Saxon settlement, and the several medieval settlements. The northern side of Harlow comprises a narrow strip of land running along the Lea-Stort valley, a broad flat-bottomed valley cutting through glacio-fluvial and alluvium deposits. The fieldscape here largely comprises meadow pasture, often originating as common. To the west and south of Harlow was the Lavers ridge, this is a ridge of higher ground, cut by numerous small tributaries of the Lea-Stort. The fieldscape comprises large irregular fields, interspersed by common arable that was enclosed in the later medieval period. Historically the settlement is dispersed, although there is now a greater degree of linear settlement along the roads and greens.



The maps above shows the HLC Broad Groups overlaid by the Historic Landscape Character Zones

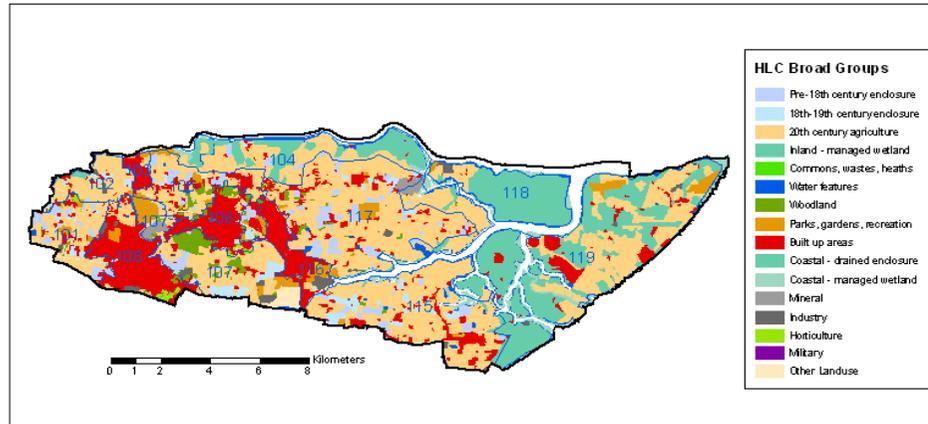
Historic Landscape Profile – Maldon

Maldon District falls into four distinct areas, comprising the Dengie peninsula, the land to the north of the Blackwater Estuary, the former heathland, and the marshes. Maldon at the head of the Blackwater estuary, and Burnham-on-Crouch were both medieval market towns. The Dengie peninsula comprises a ridge of higher ground, bordered by the Rivers Blackwater and Crouch and the North Sea. The field system is of a distinctive co-axial rectilinear type, known as Dengie-form after this area, and is of considerable antiquity, possibly from the middle Saxon period. The historic settlement is scattered along the top of the ridge and on smaller ridges protruding out to the coast. Despite post-1950s boundary loss the area retains its distinctive grain. Bradwell Nuclear Power Station is the most visible modern intrusion on the landscape. The lower Blackwater and Chelmer valleys are an area of undulating landscape, mostly pre-18th century fields, often regular in plan, with extensive meadows along the rivers. North of the Blackwater estuary much of the area comprised a single large Saxon estate. The fieldscape comprises rectilinear fields set within an irregular framework, possibly representing individual farm extents. Historically the settlement is very dispersed comprising church/hall complexes, isolated farms and small hamlets, often strung out along greens. The north-western corner of the district comprises the former Tiptree Heath, a huge area of common rough pasture and wood-pasture which has been encroached on in a piecemeal fashion since the medieval period, until much of the remainder was enclosed under the 19th-century Enclosure Acts. There are still surviving areas of heath, with the Wickham Bishops ridge being particularly well-wooded. The district is fringed by coastal marsh, much having been reclaimed since the early post-medieval period, first as grazing marsh and latterly as arable. Field boundaries consist of large drainage ditches, mainly without banks or hedges, some following the sinuous course of former creeks. There are areas of unimproved salt-marsh, mainly fringing the Blackwater estuary. To the north of the Blackwater breaches have been made in the sea-wall to re-flood former reclaimed land. Within the Blackwater itself are the low-lying alluvial islands of Northey and Osea, both are of natural origin but have been subsequently modified by further reclamation.



Google Earth view of Dengie-form rectilinear fields around Steeple

Historic Landscape Profile – Rochford



Google Earth view over the Rayleigh Hills towards Hockley

Rochford District is sited in the south-east corner of Essex. It is a varied landscape of wooded hills, urban areas, flat arable land and wide marshes. Rochford and Rayleigh were medieval market towns.

The area to the west of the district consists of the urban edge landscape of Rawreth and the modern urban areas of Rayleigh, Hullbridge and Hockley. These are bordered to the north by the Crouch valley, a gently undulating landscape around the tidal limit of the River Crouch and to the east by the Rayleigh Hills. The Rayleigh Hills contain a significant amount of ancient woodland, much in conservation ownership, little settlement and few roads, with urban edge activities, such as golf-courses and Southend Airport located along the boundary with Southend. The influence of the inter-war plotlands can be observed in many areas.

The areas around Ashingdon, Great Wakering and Canewdon are characterised by a gently undulating arable landscape. There is a strong grid-like field structure of ancient origin, and in some areas the Dengie-form co-axial field systems still survive. Historically the settlement was very dispersed.

The River Crouch, which forms the northern boundary of Rochford District, is bordered by extensive marshes. These form a flat, open landscape of medieval and post-medieval grazing marsh. The Foulness archipelago of islands which forms the eastern limits of the district consists of marsh islands. Of these Wallasea had undergone considerable post-1950s boundary loss and leaving nothing of its original fieldscape, but is now being restored. The remainder of the islands comprise reclaimed grazing marsh of medieval and post-medieval date, with a small settlement at Church End on Foulness, a number of scattered farmsteads and a military nuclear test centre and artillery range. The fields comprise a mix of regular and irregular shapes, probably reflecting different phases of reclamation.

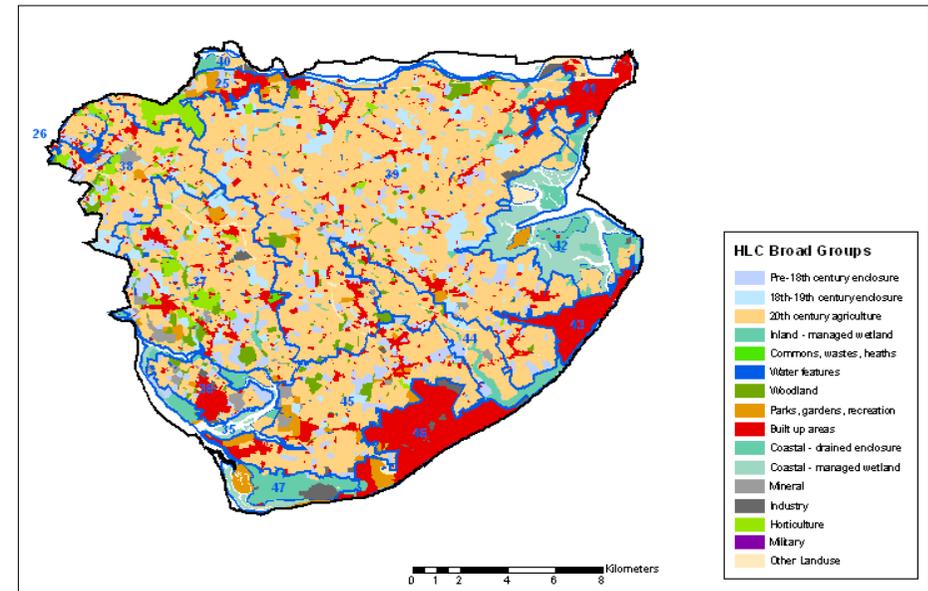
Historic Landscape Profile – Tendring

Tendring District forms the north-east corner of the Essex, forming a large peninsula, bordered by the River Stour to the north, the North Sea to the east and the Colne estuary to the west and south. The modern urban areas comprise the port and town of Harwich and the resort towns of Clacton, Frinton and Walton.

The core of the area comprises a plateau of London Clay. The fieldscape consists of a mix of later enclosure and pre-18th century irregular fields, probably of medieval origin. The area is also characterised by long thin roadside greens and triangular greens at road junctions. Historically the settlement is very dispersed in character.

To the east of this were extensive heaths, effectively encircling the northern and eastern flank of Colchester. These were enclosed in the early 19th century. Ardleigh Reservoir now forms a major landscape feature within the area. To the south, in the Alresford area, the landscape is gently undulating. The zone is characterised by extensive areas of meadow pasture along the valleys of the three brooks which drain it and large areas of orchards. The fieldscape comprises a mix of pre-18th century irregular fields and later enclosure of common fields. There are extensive areas of mineral extraction to the south. The landscape is similar to the south-east, around St Osyth, although the fields are noticeably smaller. The valley of the Holland Brook forms a distinct landscape element, characterised by enclosed meadows along the brook and drained tidal marshes. Historically the settlement for the area is markedly dispersed.

The coastline is marked by both improved and unimproved coastal marsh. Hamford Water in particular represents a particularly complex landscape of reclaimed marsh, salt-marsh, inter-tidal muds, creeks and islands.



Google Earth view of Hamford Water

Historic Landscape Profile – Thurrock

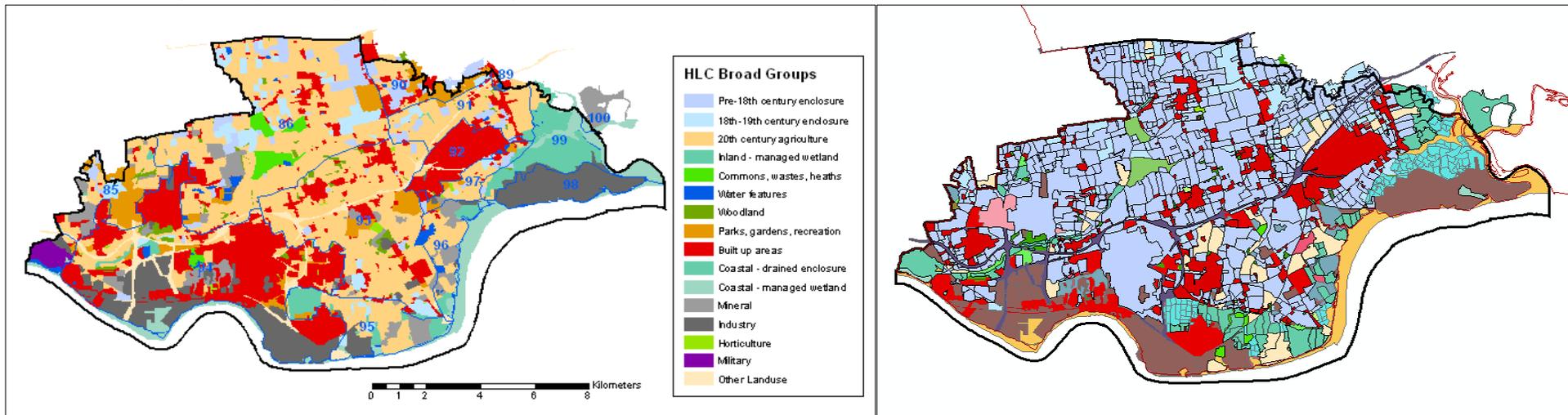


Google Earth view over Orsett and the former fens of the Mar Dyke valley showing the grid-like field layout.

Thurrock Unitary Authority is located on the southern edge of Essex, bordering London. It is a largely urban or urban-edge landscape, bordered by former marshes along the Thames. There are extensive areas of mineral extraction, both on the river terraces formed by earlier routes of the River Thames, and on the chalk outcrops. The modern urban areas include South Ockendon, Grays, Tilbury and Corringham.

In the north of the district is the valley or basin of the Mar Dyke, a rural area of regular fields, many of which were fen commons until the 1930s. To the east of this is the undulating landscape which comprises the Langdon Hills and the Fobbing and Orsett ridges, the former being well-wooded. The fieldscape for this comprises regular fields of ancient origin and sparse and very dispersed settlement.

The Thameside is flanked by reclaimed marshes, including the Pitsea marshes, the Tilbury marshes and Mucking Marsh. The oil refinery at Shellhaven/Coryton forms a dominant visual element in the estuarine landscape.



The maps above show the current HLC Broad Groups overlaid by the Historic Landscape Character Zones (left) and the previous HLC Broad Groups (right)

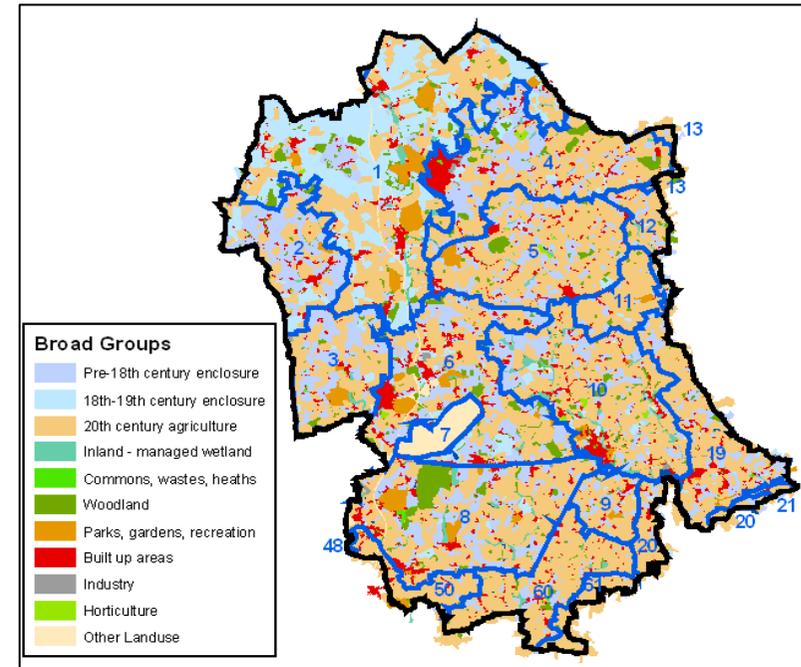
Historic Landscape Profile – Uttlesford

Uttlesford District comprises the north-west corner of the county of Essex. It is largely made up of the boulder-clay plateau rising to the low chalk hills on the northern border with Cambridgeshire. The landscape is undulating, with numerous small river and stream valleys. The River Cam/Stort forms a north-south valley and natural routeway through the western half of the district. The principal settlement in the District is the planned medieval market and castle town of Saffron Walden. Great Dunmow and Thaxted are also medieval market towns. Great Dunmow had a Roman predecessor on the site.

Uttlesford is the only area in Essex where the Cambridge and Midland-type of large common-fields developed. These were largely confined to the chalk ridge on the Cambridgeshire border, and were finally enclosed by enclosure act in the 18th and 19th century. The remainder of the district is typified by pre-18th century irregular fields, probably of medieval origin, with winding lanes, dispersed hamlets and greens and ancient woodlands. There are surviving areas of the enclosed meadow pasture along the valley floors. The area is overwhelmingly rural in nature.

The medieval forest of Hatfield Forest is the most significant area of ancient woodland in the district, and there are numerous smaller woods. There are also a series of parks, mainly strung out along the valley of the River Stort/Cam.

The most significant modern elements of the landscape are the A120, the M11 motorway and Stansted Airport. Post-1950s boundary loss has particularly impacted on the enclosed common-fields, some of which have been returned to their pre-enclosure dimensions.



Google Earth view of parliamentary enclosure fields looking east over Great Chesterford

The Historic Landscape and Change

Capacity to absorb change	Degree of change				
	Increasing	Stable (<5% change)	Minor change (5-29% change)	Moderate change (30-60% change)	Major change (>60% change)
Low		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sea defences Waterways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parliamentary enclosure (piecemeal) Ancient woodlands Saltings Unimproved intertidal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-C18th co-axial Pre-C18th irregular enclosure Parliamentary enclosure (formal) Water meadows C18th-19th coastal drained enclosure Plotlands Allotments Nurseries Duck-decoy ponds Watercress beds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common arable Commons Heathland Pre-C18th coastal drained enclosure Marine marsh Orchards Historic earthworks Oyster beds
Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20th century leisure Woodland plantation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water reservoirs 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C18th-19th piecemeal enclosure Informal parkland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Military airfields
High		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20th century agriculture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roads and railways Military 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mineral extraction Industry Airports Stud farms

The HLC project has recorded information relating to how the landscape has changed since the late 19th century. It has been possible to give a value to the degree of change based on the loss of previous HLC types. The table shows the degree of change HLC types have been subjected to, and their capacity to absorb further change.

It is apparent from this exercise that the biggest changes have been within the agricultural landscape. Over 70% of the enclosure HLC types have been affected by some degree of change in the 20th century. The bulk of this change relates to boundary loss. Where three or less boundaries have been lost, the fields have been judged to retain a relict character of the original HLC type and are characterised as that original type. This means that c.37% of the landscape pre-dates the 18th century, c.16% dates from the 18th-19th century, and c.45% dates from the 20th century.

The coastal HLC types also show significant change. Most of this is due to natural erosion, exacerbated by the 'fixing' of the Essex coast by sea walls. These prevent the natural cycle of erosion as sea levels rose with new marsh forming on the landward side.

The table also shows that the HLC types which can absorb the greatest degree of change are all modern creations.

Full details of each HLC type are in Section 5 of the full report.

Using Historic Landscape Characterisation

HLC is the first historic environment dataset in the county to provide complete and seamless coverage of one critical component of the historic landscape, namely field systems and their boundaries, and also takes into consideration other significant component features (for example woodland and parkland) of the natural and built environment. HLC provides a tool that shows how these aspects of the landscape have changed over time and what elements from the past survive into the present. In addition it can be used as a background against which other individual assets can be shown to inter-relate and fit into their surroundings and the wider landscape. Due to its geographically comprehensive coverage, HLC lends itself to a wide range of applications.

HLC has been, and continues to be, used in Essex for a number of different purposes relating to the characterisation, management and enhancement of the county's rich historic environment. Future applications are likely to be equally varied, with the data most effectively used in combination with other historic environment, landscape and wider environmental datasets to serve the needs of the County Council and its clients. Whilst HLC can be used as a stand-alone tool its value in that regard is limited, and it's full potential will only be realised as one component in the systems of environmental and landscape characterisation, which are currently being developed for the county.

Strategic Planning: Growth Areas And Local Development Frameworks

HLC data has been used in several different strategic projects, including the Essex and Southend-on-Sea Structure Plan Review; the London-Stansted-Cambridge corridor; and is being used in conjunction with archaeological character and historic urban character, in the development of Historic

Environment Characterisation (HEC) to inform the creation of Local Development Frameworks.

Green Infrastructure

HLC is being used alongside other historic environment data in the planning of Green Infrastructure projects in Essex, for example in the Haven Gateway. The Haven Gateway is one of four planning sub-regions identified in the emerging East of England Plan (EEP).

Rural Land Management

HLC is regularly used in combination with historic mapping and other historic environment data, to inform the provision of advice to rural land managers applying to Defra's Higher Level Stewardship Scheme, and to inform the response to consultations by the Forestry Commission on applications to its English Woodland Grant Scheme.

Landscape Character Assessment

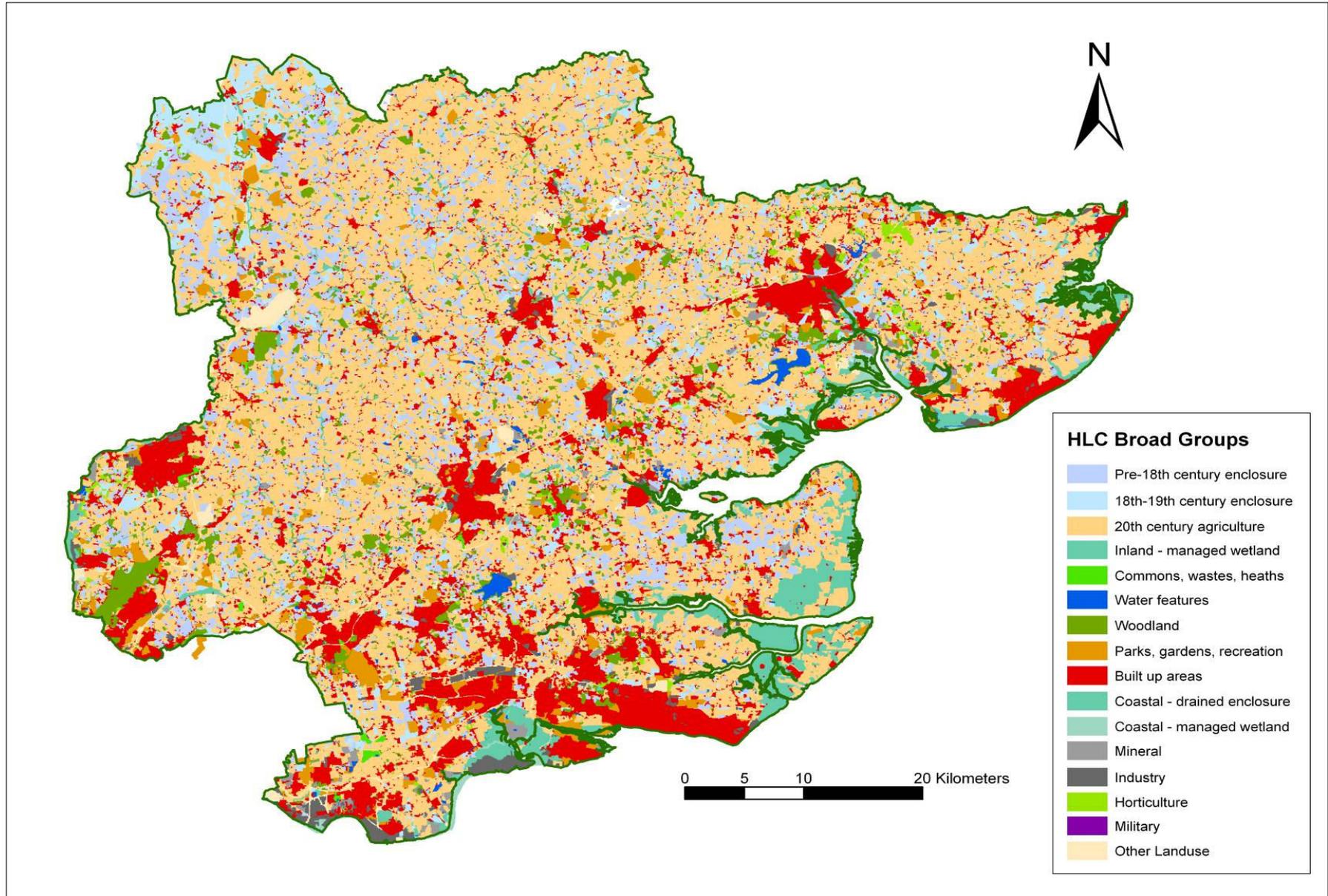
HLC has been used in the production of the Mid Essex Landscape Character Assessment and the Essex Coast Landscape Character Assessment.

Historic Settlement Assessments

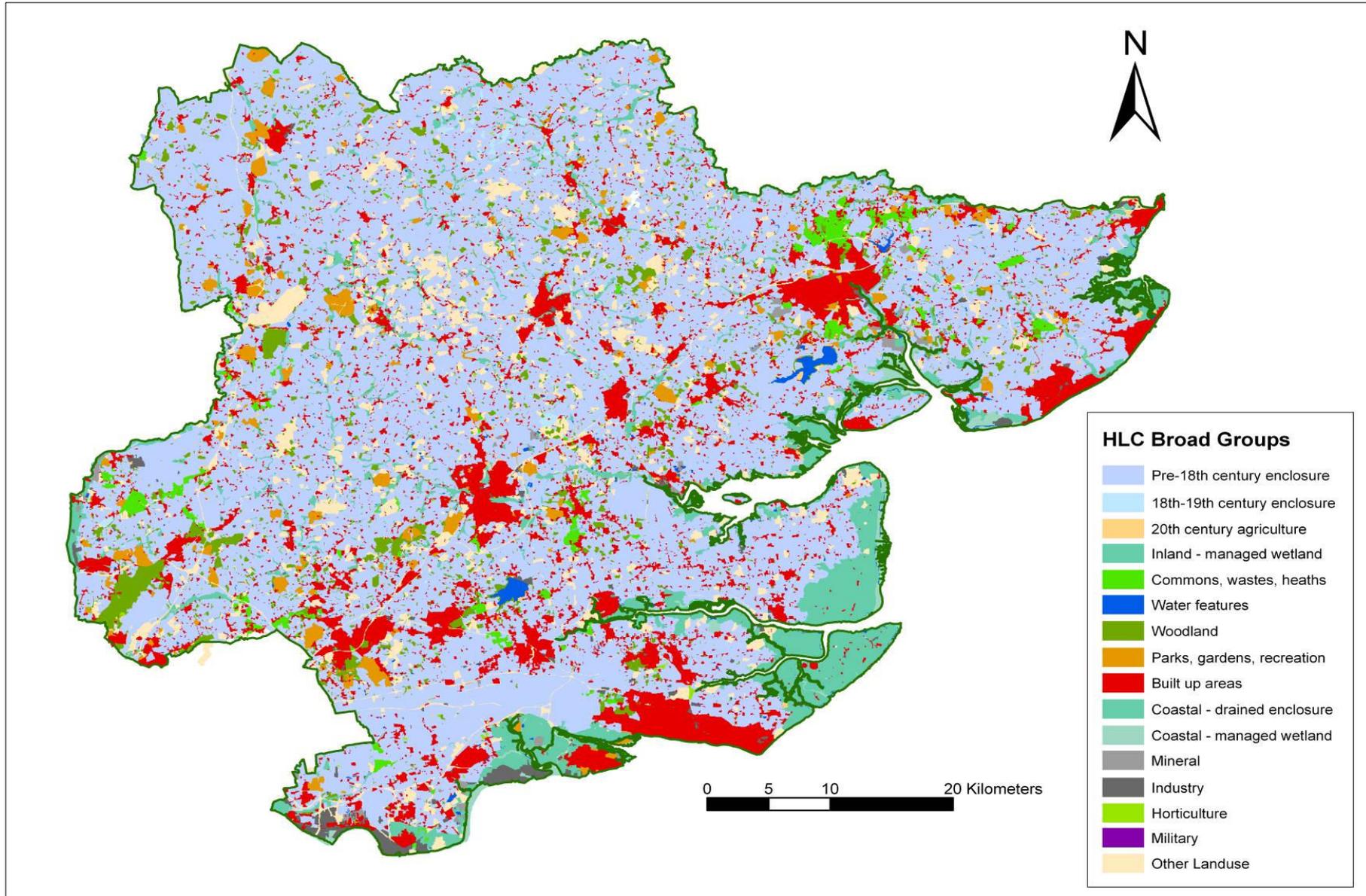
Essex has over the past seven years developed a Historic Settlement Assessment methodology. This assesses the origins and development of historic settlement, both nucleated villages and the dispersed settlements more common in Essex, within their immediate landscape setting, usually at parish level. This makes extensive use of the HLC, in conjunction with historic cartographic and documentary sources, as a tool in understanding the development of the historic environment and establishing which elements survive into the present.

Potential areas for the use of HLC include research and for outreach and education. For full details of the uses of HLC see Section 2 of the HLC report.

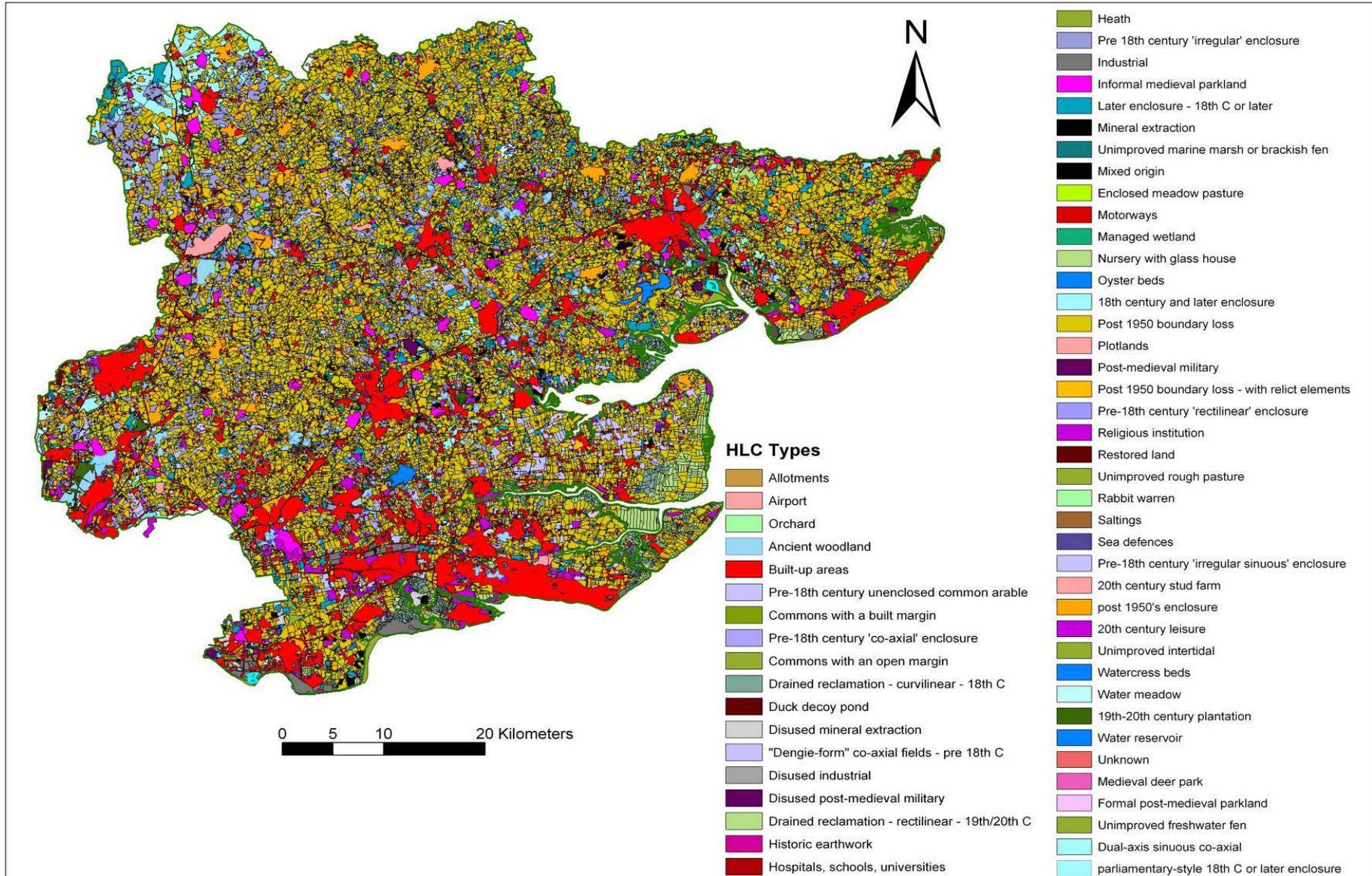
HLC Broad Groups - current



HLC Broad Groups – previous types



HLC types - current



Sources of further information

Essex Historic Environment Record

Further information on the Essex Historic Landscape Project, and on the historic environment of Essex is available via the Essex web site at:

www.essex.gov.uk/Activities/Heritage

or e-mail: heritage.conservation@essex.gov.uk

Unlocking Essex's Past

Visit: <http://unlockingessex.essexcc.gov.uk> for access to our online version of our Historic Environment database. This contains details of the archaeology and buildings of Essex, allowing users to find out more about their local area.

English Heritage

Further information on the national programme of Landscape, Seascape and Urban Characterisation can be found on the English Heritage website at:

www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/research/landscapes-and-areas

Heritage Gateway

This website gives online access to historic environment resources, allowing searching of local records alongside national records. Visit it at:

www.heritagegateway.org.uk

Useful Publications

Using Historic Landscape Characterisation by Clark, J., Darlington, J, and Fairclough, G. 2004, available as a download from www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications

Historic Landscape Analysis by Stephen Rippon, 2004, Council for British Archaeology Practical Handbook No 16

English Heritage Conservation Bulletin Issue 47, 2005: Characterisation, available as a download from www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications

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