

30/08/2025



## **Regulation 15 Submission**

## Accessibility

This document has used high contrast colours and minimal use of data tables and footnotes.

Source references can be found in the Endnotes section at the end of the document.

## Foreword

Thank you for reading this Regulation 15 version of the Finchingfield and Wethersfield Joint Neighbourhood Plan (FWNP) 2023-33. It has been revised to incorporate feedback received from the community and consultees on our Regulation 14 draft published in October, 2024 but remains ambitious and forward-looking.

This Neighbourhood Plan is the result of many months of collaboration between our two parishes and shows how our communities can share resources, talents, and collective interests, whilst preserving the differences that make each of our respective villages, hamlets, and settlements so special to us all. Through drop-in information sessions, leaflets, social media, surveys, presentations and posters, the Neighbourhood Plan team of volunteers have tried their utmost to keep everyone informed and to represent local aspirations throughout the last two years of hard work. Hopefully we can all feel we have had a chance to say what we think and had our voices heard. With your help, once it is adopted, the Parish Councils pledge to play their part to deliver on the Action Plan outlined in Section 11 of this document by working collectively with you to preserve and enhance the beautiful area that we all cherish so highly.

The Plan will now be submitted to Braintree District Council (BDC) for further public consultation and external inspection. Subject to this process, BDC will then conduct a community referendum in which local residents will be able to vote in favour or against the FWNP. This is YOUR plan after all!

This Plan and our detailed response to all consultation comments can also be found on our website [www.fw-np.org](http://www.fw-np.org) which is linked to the Parish Council websites <https://finchingfield-pc.gov.uk/> and <https://wethersfield-pc.gov.uk/> and also on Braintree District Council's website <https://www.braintree.gov.uk/planning-building-control/neighbourhood-planning>. You can also find us on Facebook.

Should you have any comments or questions, please email the Neighbourhood Plan team at [fnwpteam@gmail.com](mailto:fnwpteam@gmail.com), contact us via our Facebook page, send us a message at our website [www.fw-np.org](http://www.fw-np.org) or write to us at: Finchingfield and Wethersfield Neighbourhood Plan, c/o Wethersfield Parish Council, 4 Sims Cottage, Braintree Road, CM7 4BX.

John Strange, Chair Finchingfield  
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Adrian Hanson, Chair Wethersfield  
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**Finchingfield, Richard Bawden one of the “Great Bardfield artists”<sup>1</sup>**



**The Pant Valley, Summer 1960, John Aldridge RA one of the “Great Bardfield artists”<sup>2</sup>**

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## Our guidance and inspiration....

Time present and time past,  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past.  
If all time is eternally present  
All time is unredeemable.

**Extract from Four Quartets 1: Burnt Norton, TS Eliot, 1936**



....this Neighbourhood Plan is for us all



*Who lives in a place like this?iii*

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## List of Acronyms

ACV	Asset of Community Value	LDP	Local Development Plan
AFA	Alison Farmer Associates	LGS	Local Green Space
ARC	Asylum Reception Centre	LNRS	Local Nature Recovery Strategy
BDC	Braintree District Council	LPA	Local Planning Authority
BNG	Biodiversity Net Gain	LPP	Local Plan Policy
BLCA	Braintree Landscape Character Assessment	LSOA	Lower Super Output Area
BME	Blackmore End	MDP	Ministry of Defence Police
BTFTS	Braintree Town Future Transport Strategy	MOD	Ministry of Defence
CBA	Chris Blandford Associates	MOJ	Ministry of Justice
CHE	Cornish Hall End	NCA	National Character Area
DEFRA	Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs	NDHA	Non-Designated Heritage Asset
ECC	Essex County Council	NE	Natural England
EH	Essex Historic Environment Record	NEEB	North Essex Economic Board
EIP	Environmental Improvement Plan	NPA	Neighbourhood Plan Area
ELC	European Landscape Convention	NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
ELCA	The Essex Landscape Character Assessment	NPT	Neighbourhood Plan Team
ELNP	Essex Local Nature Partnership	NRN	Nature Recovery Network
FPC	Finchingfield Parish Council	NSIP	Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects
FWNP	Finchingfield and Wethersfield Joint Neighbourhood Plan	NVZ	Nitrate Vulnerable Zone
GHG	Greenhouse Gas emissions	ONS	Office for National Statistics
GW	Gigawatts	PPG	Planning Practice Guide
GLVIA	Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment	PRN	Primary Road Network
HE	Historic England	PROW	Public Right of Way
HGV	Heavy Goods Vehicle	RCCE	Rural Community Council of Essex
HNS	Housing Needs Survey	REH	Rural Enterprise Hubs
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation	SAC	Samuel Augustine Courtauld
KPI	Key Performance Indicator	SLA	Special Landscape Area
LCA	Landscape Character Area	SuDS	Sustainable Drainage System
LCT	Landscape Character Type	TFA	The Fields Association
LDF	Local Development Framework	USAF	United States Airforce
		WASC	Wethersfield Airbase Scrutiny Committee
		WCA	Wethersfield Conservation Area
		WPC	Wethersfield Parish Council

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## How to read this document

The Neighbourhood Plan consists of two parts:

1. **Full document**
2. **Appendix**

Each of these can be found on our website [www.fwnp.org](http://www.fwnp.org) and in hard copy and accessible format if required.

This **Full document** is structured as follows:

- The Executive Summary outlines our approach, how we used community feedback alongside other evidence and policy guidelines to design the Neighbourhood Plan Vision, Policies and Actions. Objectives and Policies have been grouped into Climate change & Environment; Design, Character, and Heritage; Getting around; Housing; Community & Livelihoods; and the Airbase. In each diagram, each of the segments has a number (4-10) which tells you in which section more details on policies and actions can be found that relate to that group of objectives.
- Section 1 tells you what the Neighbourhood Plan is all about.
- Section 2 provides background on the Neighbourhood Plan Area.
- Section 3 summaries the Neighbourhood Plan Vision and Objectives based on the policy guidelines, evidence, and resident consultation.
- Sections 4-10 then discuss policies and actions in detail for each category of objectives.
- Section 11 outlines the monitoring and evaluation process for all Actions and Policies.

By looking at the list of Policies and Actions on page iv, you can see in which section a particular policy or action you may be interested in is addressed.

Each section follows broadly the same format: we first describe the wider policy context at a district, regional or national level and then provide evidence from external sources and our community feedback. Together these form the basis for each policy or action. Whilst some sections contain maps, images, or data to substantiate these policies or actions, in some cases these are put in the Appendix to save space in the main document. Principal sources and Endnotes can be found at the end of the document.

The **Appendix** contains specific evidence including any images, maps, or other material too large to put in the main document.

## Executive summary

The aim of this Neighbourhood Plan is to represent our local communities' aspirations for the development of our parishes 2023-33. There are limitations on what planning can achieve but the Neighbourhood Plan has sought to be as ambitious as possible in terms of Community, Environment, and Prosperity<sup>4</sup>.

Once adopted by Braintree District Council (BDC), our Neighbourhood Plan forms part of the Local Development Plan (LDP) which is used as a starting point in determining planning applications. If there is no Neighbourhood Plan, planning decisions depend only on policies in the LDP which may not take account of specific details relating to our area. It therefore allows us to add more depth to planning policy that reflects our specific needs and priorities whilst remaining consistent with strategic planning policies at national and district levels.

The Neighbourhood Plan takes account of feedback from community surveys and information sessions, research, policy guidelines and statutory consultation. Residents' aspirations and concerns were grouped into Community and Livelihoods; Climate Change and the Natural environment; Housing; Getting around; Design and Heritage; and the future of the Airbase. Our consultation also revealed overriding concerns about community health and well-being and the need for a sustainable future for the next generation. This is illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Residents' aspirations and concerns

We used this to create a community vision set out below:

To maintain and improve the prosperity, health, and well-being of the communities of the parishes of Finchingfield & Wethersfield as part of a sustainable future for everyone. This future allows for continued evolution of our communities as a well-balanced diversified rural area that retains its distinctive character, where residents value the living environment, social interaction, traditional local architecture, the area's history, landscape, and wildlife, and where the use of green technologies and the broadening of the entrepreneurial skills and livelihood opportunities are encouraged.

To realise this Vision, 15 Objectives were formulated (Figure 2). Two of these are all-encompassing (Sustainability and Health / Well-Being) and hence encircle the rest. The remaining 13 target specific issues.

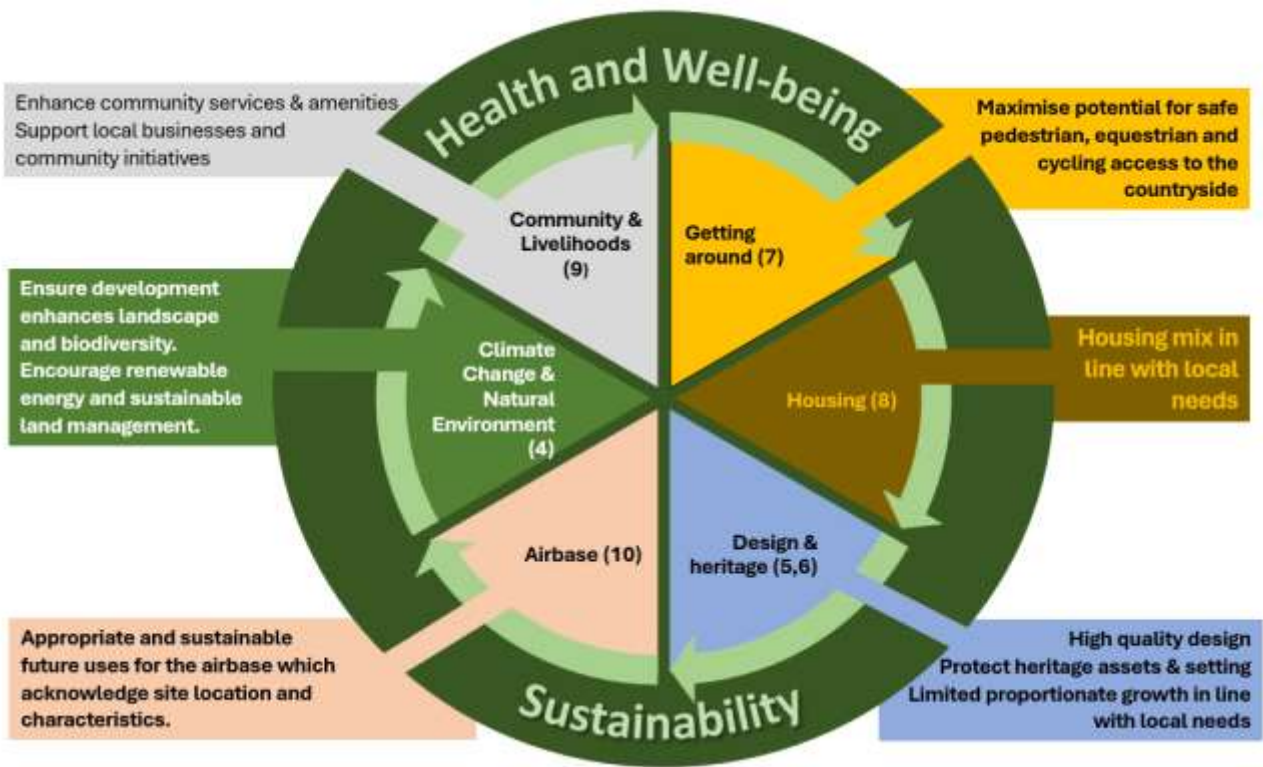


Figure 2: Neighbourhood Plan Community Objectives

To realise these objectives, 18 Policies and 14 Actions were formulated. Each of these is backed by external evidence and fulfils several basic conditions – including facilitation of sustainable development and conformity with strategic planning policies. Figure 3 shows how each of these broadly relates to each category of objectives, though it should be noted that several policies are designed to achieve multiple objectives.

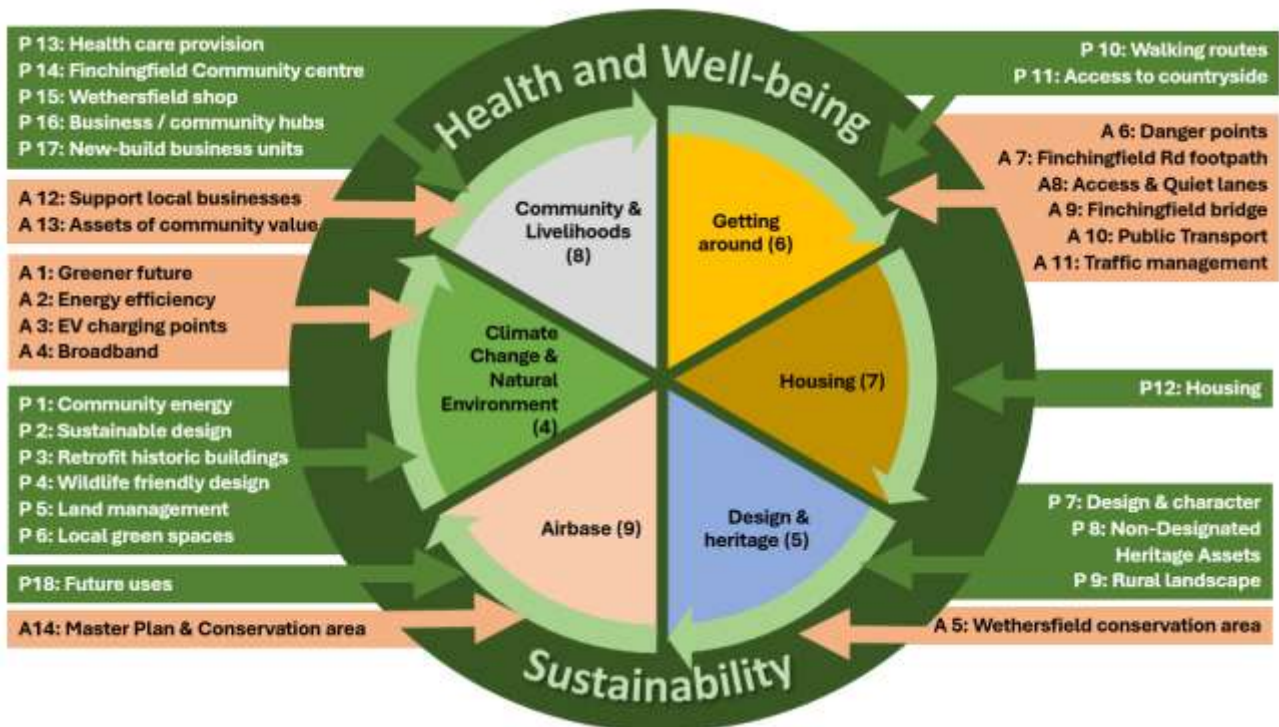


Figure 3: Neighbourhood Plan Actions and Policies

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Description

- 1.1.1 The Localism Act 2011 gives local communities powers to produce Neighbourhood Plans which can be used to guide and shape future development in an area.
- 1.1.2 A Neighbourhood Plan forms part of the Development Plan for the area and is used alongside the BDC's Local Plan (Sections 1 and 2), the adopted Essex Minerals Local Plan 2014 and the Essex and Southend-on-Sea Waste Local Plan 2017 to help determine planning applications. All applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless there are strong overriding material considerations.
- 1.1.3 Prior to adoption, Neighbourhood Plans should be subject to public consultation, examination, and a local referendum. Neighbourhood Plan policies should be supported by documented evidence, an assessment of their sustainability and should have regard to national policy, contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)<sup>5</sup>, particularly in relation to supporting and promoting sustainable development.
- 1.1.4 Where a Neighbourhood Plan is aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area in Braintree district, neighbourhood planning can provide a powerful set of tools for residents to ensure that they get the right types of development for their community.
- 1.1.5 Any Neighbourhood Plan should satisfy the Basic Conditions test set out below:
- the Neighbourhood Plan has regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
  - the Neighbourhood Plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development;
  - the Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area;
  - the Neighbourhood Plan does not breach and is otherwise compatible with EU obligations<sup>a</sup>;
  - prescribed conditions are met in relation to the Neighbourhood Plan and prescribed matters have been complied with in connection to proposals within the Neighbourhood Plan.

## 1.2 Purpose

- 1.2.1 This document represents the Neighbourhood Plan for the parishes of Finchingfield and Wethersfield for the period 2023 to 2033 to be read alongside the current Local Plan though should not merely repeat it. The Neighbourhood Plan contains a vision for the future and sets out clear planning policies to realise this vision.
- 1.2.2 The principal purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan is to guide development within the parishes. It also provides guidance to anyone wishing to submit a planning application.
- 1.2.3 The Neighbourhood Plan aims to reflect the views and opinions of the communities. The Neighbourhood Plan team (NPT) has sought to involve the community as widely as possible. The topic areas covered are reflective of matters that are of considerable importance to the parishes, their residents, businesses, and community groups.
- 1.2.4 Some Neighbourhood Plan policies are general and apply throughout the Plan area, whilst others apply only to the appropriate areas illustrated on the relevant map. Nevertheless, in considering proposals for development, BDC will apply all relevant policies of the Plan. It is therefore assumed that the Plan will be read as a whole, although some cross-referencing between Plan policies has been provided.
- 1.2.5 In addition to policies, the Neighbourhood Plan has identified several actions that relate to policy matters but lie beyond the scope of a Neighbourhood Plan. Nevertheless, these could be addressed by Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils outside of the Neighbourhood Plan process.

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<sup>a</sup> Subject to any amendments in legislation

### 1.3 Policy context

- 1.3.1 The Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Town & Country Planning Act 1990, the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Localism Act 2011, and the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 (as amended). BDC as the local planning authority, designated the Finchingfield and Wethersfield Neighbourhood Plan Area (NPA) in July 2023 to enable Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils to prepare the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.3.2 The Neighbourhood Plan is one part of the development plan for the NPA for the period 2023-2033, the other part being the Braintree Local Plan, the Essex Minerals Local Plan 2014 and the Essex and Southend-on-Sea Waste Local Plan 2017. It is a requirement that the Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies therein.
- 1.3.3 The Plan has been prepared by the community through the Finchingfield and Wethersfield NPT who have prepared the plan to establish a vision for the future of Finchingfield and Wethersfield parishes and to set out how that vision will be realised through planning and controlling land use and development change over the plan period. The boundary of the Neighbourhood Plan Area (NPA) is the same as the administrative boundary of Finchingfield and Wethersfield parishes (Figure 4).

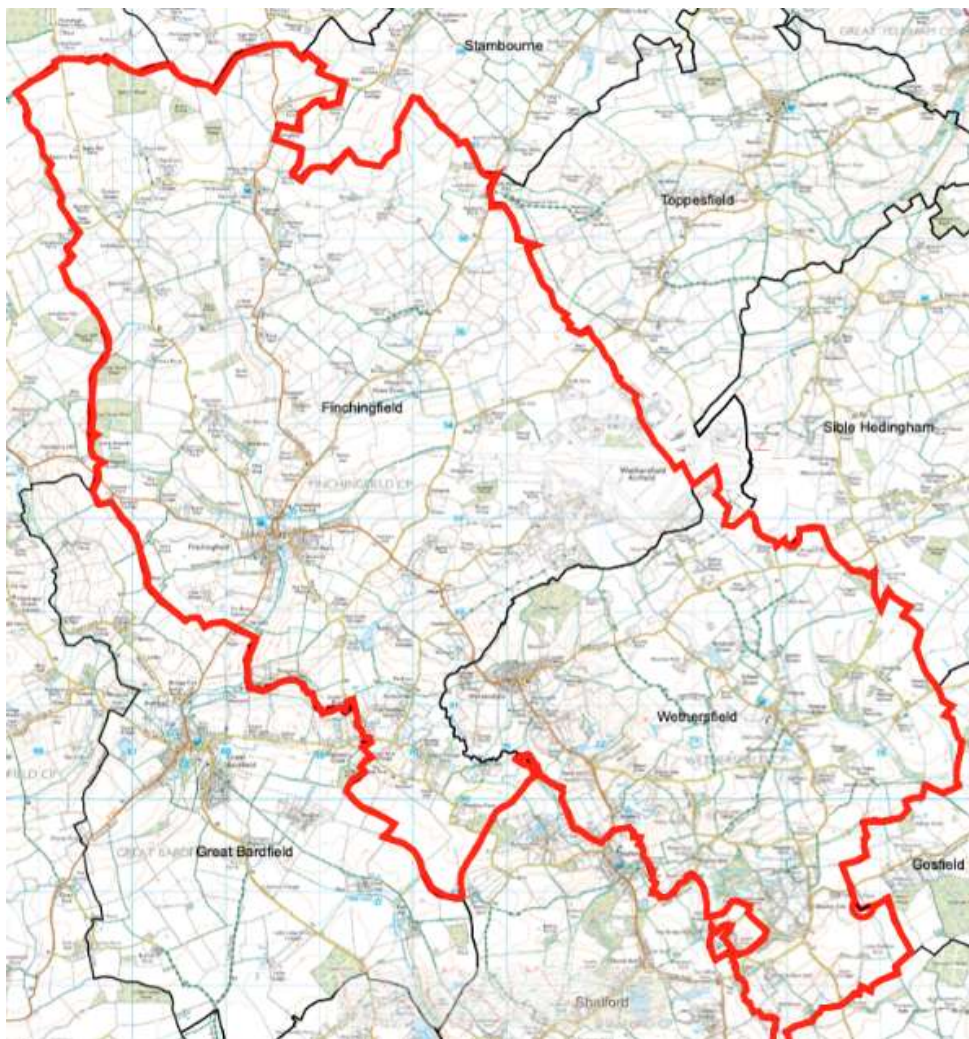


Figure 4: Neighbourhood Plan Area <sup>6</sup>

- 1.3.4 The decision to prepare a joint Neighbourhood Plan reflects the fact that the two parishes have a shared history and several common concerns and interests. A joint plan also offers the opportunity to share community resources and expertise more effectively. The parishes share a common identity with remote rural historical 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> tier villages facing common future threats and opportunities that will affect the way of life of our local communities.

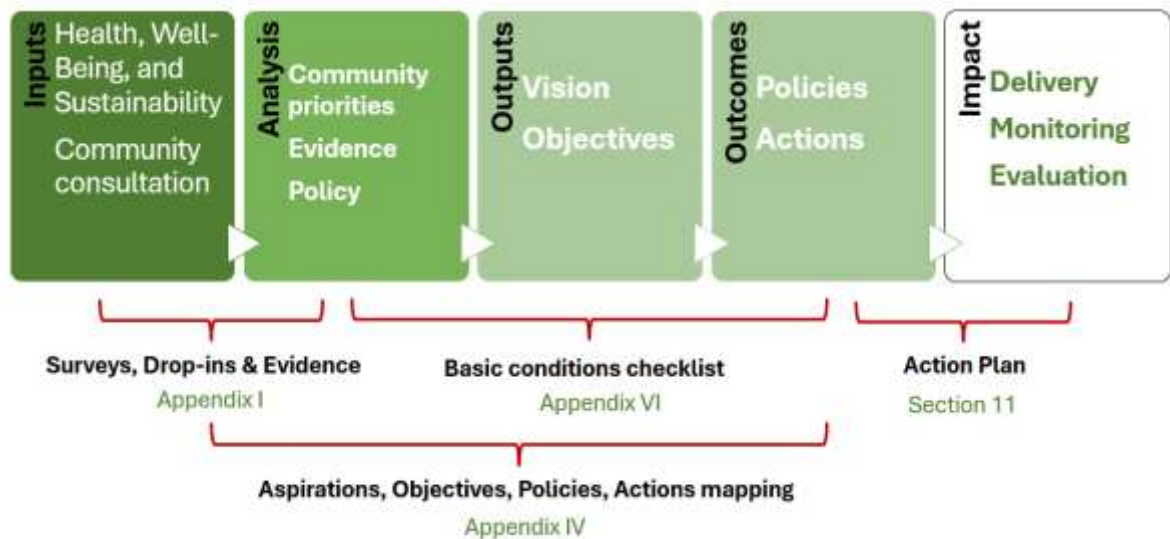
1.3.5 These concerns and interests include climate change and changes to the natural environment<sup>b</sup>, overdevelopment, demographic change, technological innovation, physical and mental well-being, the dynamics of rural economies and uncertainty regarding the future of the Wethersfield Airbase. Many people have historically lived in one parish and worked in the other and continue to do so. Finchingfield parish covers a wider land area than Wethersfield but the populations are similar.

1.3.6 Each parish has an even split between populations living in built-up villages and those dispersed in more sparsely populated rural hinterlands. However, each settlement retains a distinctive identity and place attachment is reflected by small differences in building design, layout, natural setting, and economy. Wethersfield parish has a higher level of home ownership and self-employment but Finchingfield village has more visible retail and hospitality businesses.

## 1.4 Process

### Project management

1.4.1 Design of a Neighbourhood Plan requires time, effort, and project management. The NPT adopted a workflow approach (Figure 5) that delineated between Inputs (Community consultation); Activities (evaluation of community priorities; external evidence; and policy parameters); resulting in Outputs (Vision and Objectives); and Outcomes (Policies and Actions).



**Figure 5: Neighbourhood Plan workflow**

1.4.2 This approach has helped the NPT to ensure that the Plan is well structured, internally coherent, respects the guidance of policy and evidence, and designs policies and actions to help realise the aspirations of our communities.

1.4.3 In view of the requirement to meet the Basic Conditions<sup>c</sup>, our research has covered a wide range of policies and data sets, including those relating to planning, economic strategy, and the environment.

1.4.4 Details on our evidence base references; mapping of Aspirations, Objectives, Policies and Actions; and a Basic conditions checklist can be found in the Appendices.

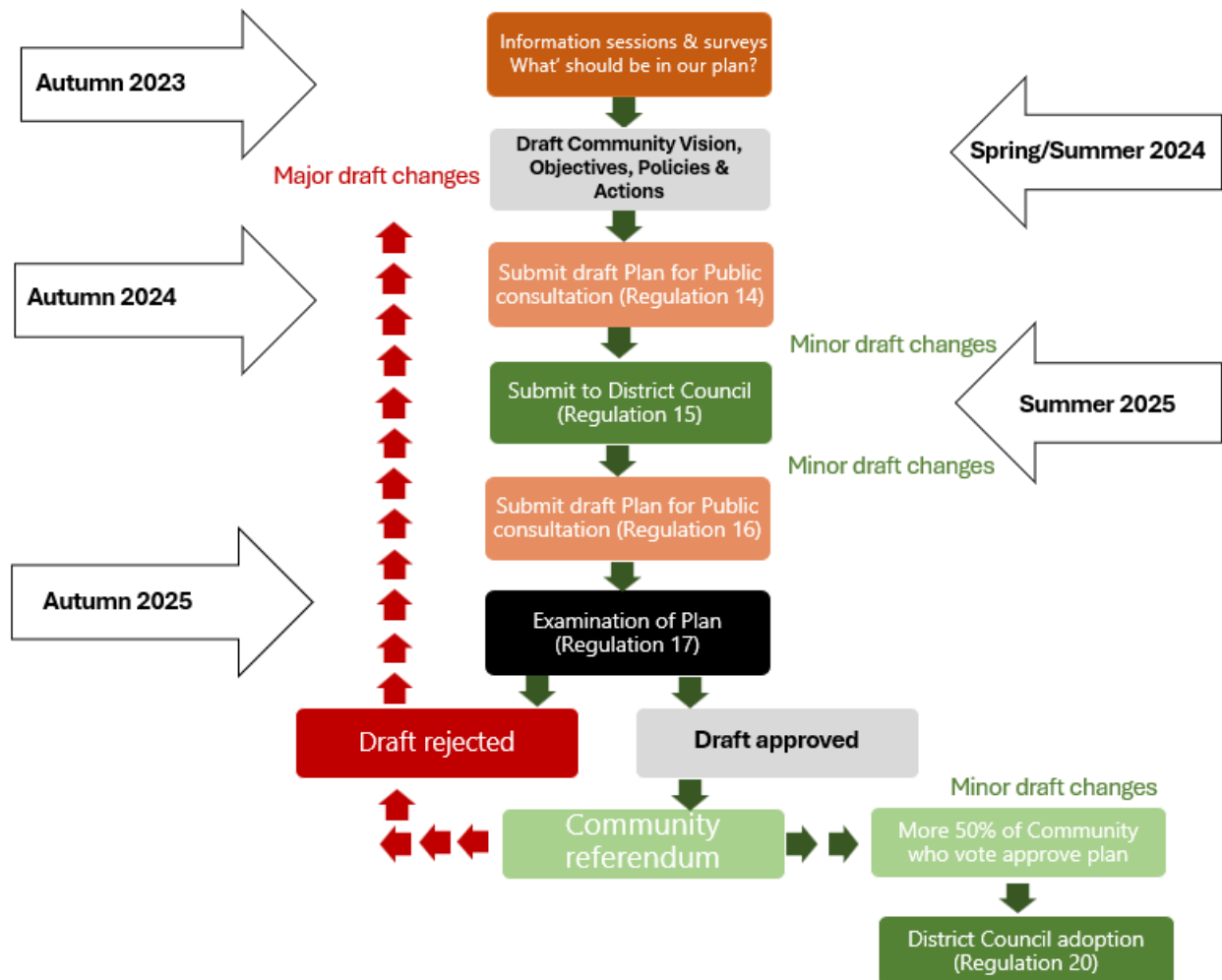
1.4.5 Responsibility for delivery, monitoring and evaluation is outlined in our Action Plan in [Section 11](#).

<sup>b</sup> Including landscape character

<sup>c</sup> Set out in 1.15 above

**Timeline**

- 1.4.6 After the NPA was designated by BDC in July, 2023, the NPT conducted an initial round of research. This built upon work carried out by the Wethersfield Airbase Scrutiny Committee (WASC)<sup>7</sup> and The Fields Association (TFA)<sup>8</sup> in 2021-23 in response to the prison proposals at the Wethersfield Airbase. Information sessions and presentations were then arranged in the autumn and surveys completed just before Christmas 2023 (Figure 6).
- 1.4.7 Having analysed and published survey results in January, 2024, the team spent the spring and summer months conducting further research and drafting the Neighbourhood Plan. This was submitted to the Parish councils in September prior to the initiation of the Regulation 14 public consultation in October<sup>d</sup>.



**Figure 6: Neighbourhood Plan timeline**

- 1.4.8 Consultation on the Regulation 14 draft gave the opportunity for residents and other consultees to give their feedback. Many suggestions have been incorporated into the Regulation 15 document to be submitted to BDC in late summer 2025. These are just some of the initial steps of many (including a community referendum and an independent examination) before our Neighbourhood Plan may be adopted.

<sup>d</sup> Regulation 14 Consultation is a six-week consultation period in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) which requires Parish Councils to notify people who live, work, or carry out business in the NPA details of the proposals; how the information can be accessed; consultation dates; and how to make representations (<https://calnewwithout-pc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/PLACE-STUDIO-Toolkit-for-Reg-14-MODIFICATION-PROPOSAL-consultation-2023-v2.pdf>).

### Inclusion and Consultation

- 1.4.9 Capturing the essence of how our community feels lies at the heart of this Neighbourhood Plan. It has been produced by volunteers from across all our local communities on behalf of everyone in accordance with residents' aspirations and priorities and governed by considerations of policy and good practice. The Neighbourhood Plan Team is made up of residents from across both parishes. Membership has been open to any community volunteers, many of whom have made valuable contributions for a short period of time, only for information gathering or for only one event but nonetheless have all played their part.
- 1.4.10 Through use of multiple venues, timing, formats, and print, as well as digital media, the Team has endeavoured to make this consultation accessible and informative. Presentation material has been designed to be clear, colourful and avoid jargon where possible.
- 1.4.11 This has entailed extensive consultation with a wide range of residents and businesses prior to, during and after the drafting of the plan to increase awareness of its purpose and the process of adoption and to gather feedback.
- 1.4.12 This engagement has included: Information sessions at four different community centres; regular social media posts, a dedicated website and email address; updates at Parish Council meetings, resident meetings, community groups and coffee mornings; posters in local hostelrys and parish notice boards; distribution of information pamphlets; separate surveys for residents, businesses, landowners and young people; active participation of local school children through surveys, competitions and teaching; a Housing Needs Survey (HNS); presentations to local businesses; discussion groups targeted at specific social groups; and numerous one on one discussions with individual residents.

### Monitoring and Review

- 1.4.13 To provide a consistent framework for policies that make up the development plan, the plan period of the Neighbourhood Plan has been aligned with that of the current Braintree Local Plan which has an end date of 2033.
- 1.4.14 Monitoring and review will identify separately the effectiveness of (i) Neighbourhood Plan policies in the delivery of development and (ii) the implementation of actions set out in the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.4.15 Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils, as the responsible bodies, will establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and maintain and periodically revisit the plan to ensure relevance and monitor delivery.
- 1.4.16 The NPT will also monitor the need for a Neighbourhood Plan Review to keep it updated in the light of changing circumstances and that would include the implications of any Local Plan Review. BDC commenced a review of the current Local Plan for the new planning period (2033-41) in Spring 2024. The original timetable envisaged submission in 2025 and adoption by 2027<sup>9</sup>. This timetable was extended for submission by December, 2026 by the UK Government such that a review of the Neighbourhood Plan may be required at some stage to ensure general conformity with any changes in strategic policies.
- 1.4.17 In addition, the Essex Minerals Local Plan includes a Minerals Safeguarding Area in the NPA which seeks to protect sand and gravel deposits. A review of this plan is underway but there are not further candidate sites in the NPA.
- 1.4.18 Further details regarding implementation and review are discussed in [Section 11](#)

## 2 The Neighbourhood Plan area

This Neighbourhood Plan allocates a great deal of space to outlining a holistic understanding of the issues facing the area from residents' perspectives. Places cannot be defined solely in terms of built environment or without cognisance of their spatial, temporal, and social dimensions<sup>10</sup>. Place identity can be particularly strong in rural areas<sup>11</sup>, where UK populations are older and where relationships between people, economy and natural environment differ from urban areas<sup>12</sup>.

The local context can (and should) therefore be viewed through four inter-related lenses - geographical setting; historical environment; natural environment; and present-day life. Each frames the aspirations of our community for the future of our Neighbourhood Plan Area (NPA).

### 2.1 Geographical setting

2.1.1 Finchingfield and Wethersfield are sparsely populated parishes in the rural district of Braintree. Finchingfield village lies approximately nine miles by road to the north-east of Great Dunmow and a similar distance to the north-west of Braintree town. Wethersfield village lies just over two miles to the south-east of Finchingfield village (Figure 7).

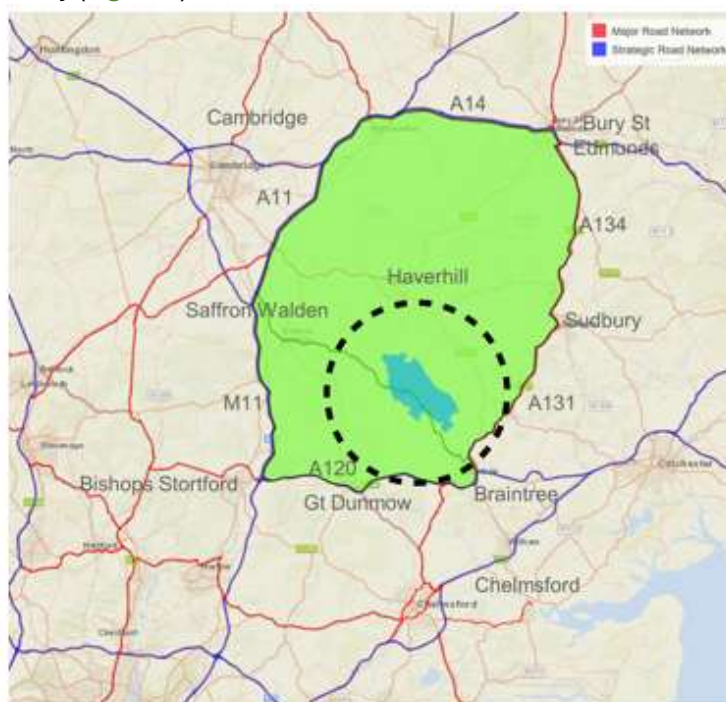


Figure 7: Location of Neighbourhood Plan Area<sup>13</sup>

2.1.2 The other smaller settlements in the NPA are Cornish Hall End (just under three miles to the north of Finchingfield village), Robin Hood End, Howe Street, Blackmore End (two miles east of Wethersfield village), Beazley End (three and a half miles south east of Wethersfield village) and Rotten End (two miles south east of Wethersfield village).

2.1.3 An overriding feature of these settlements is their dispersion, small scale, remoteness, and poor road accessibility. Spanning over 8,000 acres and home to 1,400 people, Finchingfield parish is the third least densely populated Lower Super Output Area (LSOA)<sup>14</sup> of 87 in the Braintree district and Wethersfield Parish is the eighth. This ranks them both in the lowest 10% in terms of population density of all parishes in Braintree which is itself one of the least populated districts in Essex<sup>15</sup>.

- 2.1.4 Households are evenly split across parishes (54% in Finchingfield and 46% in Wethersfield) and between the two main villages and more dispersed settlements. The 2021 Census recorded 730 people in Finchingfield village centre in 320 households. A further 670 people live in 280 households elsewhere in the parish. The main village of Wethersfield is home to 710 people in 320 households but a further 590 live in 220 households elsewhere in the parish<sup>16</sup>.
- 2.1.5 The small scale of these settlements and their wide dispersion has significant implications for development. For example, Wethersfield is defined by BDC as a third-tier village in terms of services and amenities- the lowest category of settlement<sup>17</sup>. Settlements, such as Howe Street and Rotten End are collections of just a few houses often connected by single track roads.
- 2.1.6 This remoteness has a significant bearing upon several issues the communities currently face and upon the potential for future sustainable development. This can be looked at in two ways – distance to major roads and the status of local roads.
- 2.1.7 The Department for Transport (DfT) has found that there are very few places in the whole of England (outside national parks) that are more than 10 miles from the Primary Road Network (PRN) of motorways and strategic A-roads which form an interconnected network for national travel and distribution<sup>18</sup>. Apart from those living on its southern eastern edge, many residents in the NPA fall into this rare category of poor PRN connectivity (Figure 8).



**Figure 8: Geographical setting of Neighbourhood Plan Area<sup>19</sup>**

- 2.1.8 Moreover, vehicular access within the NPA relies upon a limited number of second and third tier roads (primarily the B1053 and B1057) and many residents live on single track roads unclassified roads with few passing places. All roads are twisting and narrow. They traverse through small villages, conservation areas lined with listed buildings, schools and nurseries, and blind pinch points – all unsuitable for high traffic volumes, especially Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs). There are frequent cases of HGVs finding themselves unable to negotiate sharp bends, crests, overhanging trees, or pinch points and not only being delayed but getting stuck (Figure 9).
- 2.1.9 The nature of these narrow carriageways also creates significant issues in terms of risk and resilience. Given the number of narrow pinch points and blind bends, near misses between HGVs are common place. Our roads serve HGVs and slow-moving farm machinery alongside walkers, runners, horse riders and cyclists frequently without access to public rights of way (PROWs). Seasonal flooding renders even roads impassable such that, with no useable alternatives, the villages are cut-off. Routine infrastructure repairs often require road closures and long diversions.

Wethersfield High street



Toppesfield Road, Finchingfield



HGV gets stuck in Finchingfield



Impassable pinch points

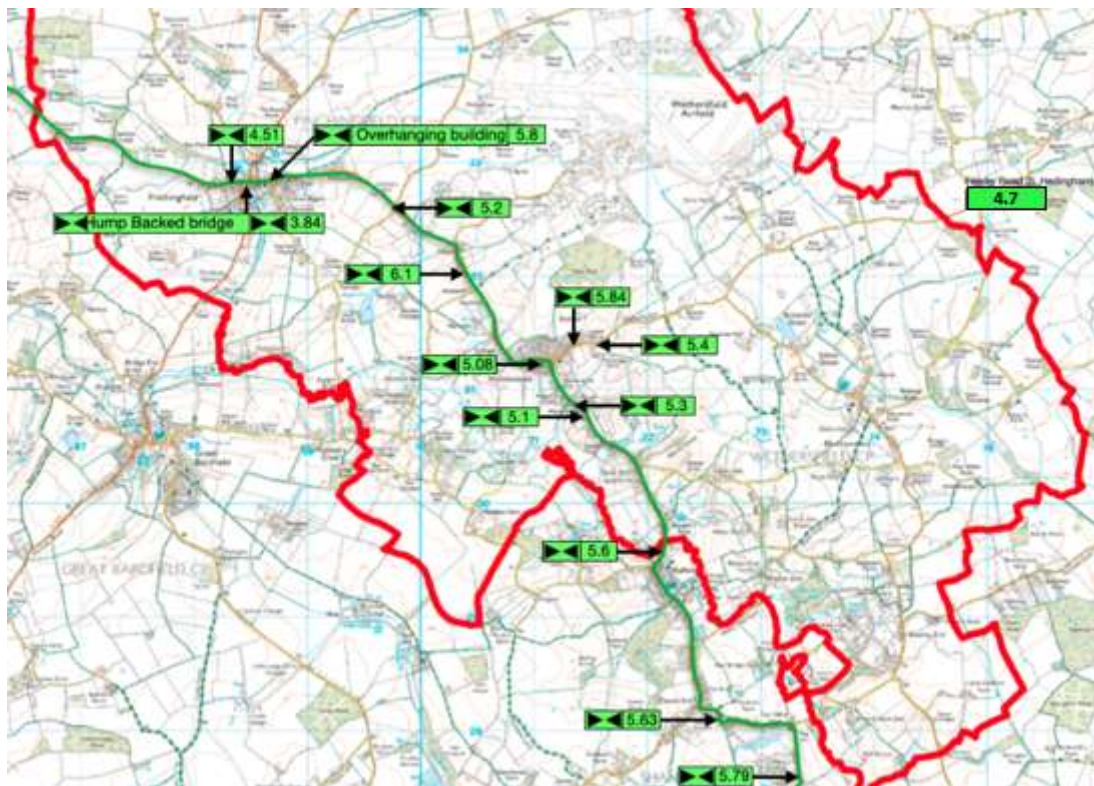


Figure 9: Pinch points<sup>20</sup>

## 2.2 Natural environment

- 2.2.1 The essence of life in the NPA cannot be appreciated without experiencing its agrarian hinterland that not only provides food and jobs but also frames so much of what makes the NPA so special. The importance of farming is etched onto the character of our working landscape. Its enduring appeal and slow evolution can be seen in old maps, the books of C Henry Warren and the artwork of Clausen, Pissarro, Legge, Munnings, Du Plessis, and the Bardfield artists (including Aldridge, Ravilious, Bawden and Garwood)<sup>21</sup>. They would still recognise their celebrated village vernacular, the sprinkling of small farms, the low rolling hills of open farmland, and the gentle River Pant which continue to inspire contemporary artists featured in exhibitions at the Finchingfield Guildhall<sup>22</sup> and Wethersfield Church.
- 2.2.2 The rural landscape of the NPA meanders along the Pant River Valley and ambles up the gentle rise of farmland hills, with fields enclosed centuries ago by hedges and ditches with boundaries often marked by large, ancient oaks, rising to the ancient woodland of Poor Park (Figure 10)<sup>23</sup>.

Figure 10(a) Pant Valley from Rotten End



Figure 10(b) Pant Valley, Wethersfield Manor and ancient woodland on the Airbase plateau



- 2.2.3 In the spring the skies above the fields are filled with the songs of skylarks. If the walker is quiet enough along the banks of the River Pant, they will be rewarded with the spark of a kingfisher darting past. Kites and buzzards circle and call across the sky, yellowhammers skip through hedges of field acer, hawthorn, and brambles, where polecats, badgers, and rabbits make their homes. Around the Summer Solstice, the fields are edged in clouds of chamomile, scenting twilight walks. And everyone out for an evening walk past the meadow below Footpath 10 knows to look for the pale barn owl gliding over the grasses. A familiar sound to all residents in late summer, is the sound of the combine harvesters working across the fields into the night.
- 2.2.4 Buildings, village halls and playing fields, are tucked mostly sympathetically within the landscape having no negative impact on its visual appeal. The few nucleated settlements and isolated farms are often connected by winding narrow single track country lanes which rub shoulders with historical houses, walls, bridges, and hedgerows. The district has the highest number of timber framed buildings in Britain, a few even dating back to the C14th<sup>24</sup>.
- 2.2.5 These small roads follow time-trodden routes, sit lower than adjacent fields and hedges and are closely flanked by houses and walls, suggesting ancient origins. Today they are scenic byways which enhance the bucolic character of these settlements enjoyed by horse riders, cyclists, motorcyclists, ramblers, and tourists. From byways and footpaths, views across fields and meadows towards the villages and farms make a valuable contribution to residents' quality of life by offering the opportunity to experience both natural and built landscape in harmony. The sight on returning home of a church steeple (Figure 11)<sup>25</sup> rising above trees and roofs, and the welcoming sound of bells ringing across the fields connects a person to the landscape that many generations before them have maintained and protected.



**Figure 11: Footpath view of St Mary Magdalene Church, Wethersfield, off West Drive**

2.2.6 There is an intrinsic link between the activities that take place on this land and the community's determination to protect it. It forms a key part of well-being, lifestyle, and sense of place. This attachment is reflected in highly treasured conservation areas in Wethersfield and Finchingfield.

2.2.7 The many green spaces within these settlements enhance the awareness of being in a rural setting even among the dense clusters of ancient buildings. The variety of verges, both within and at village boundaries, many planted with trees or spring bulbs, adds significantly to the character of the villages, and they are tended with care by residents. Village greens also serve as regular venues throughout the year.

2.2.8 Residents recognise the importance of preserving built and natural locations, not just for their historic value but as components of a valued environment today and for future generations. As part of this, there is widespread appreciation of the role farming and countryside play in climate change adaptation and mitigation (above and below

ground), as well as enhancing biodiversity and community health and well-being. Several parish landowners of all types are already taking proactive measures to protect and regenerate the mosaic of natural habitats. They are stewards of our landscape and the Neighbourhood Plan is strongly committed to supporting them in this role and to engaging the community in this collective effort.

## **2.3 Historical environment**

- 2.3.1 Discoveries of flint tools and a Neolithic polished axe head suggest that people settled in the NPA as much as 12,000 years ago, living in the valley carved by the melting ice age glaciers. There is evidence thereafter of Roman, Dane and Saxon settlements<sup>26</sup>. Finchingfield became known as Phincinghefelda - 'land cleared by the people of Phinc'. The name 'Wethersfield' is thought to derive from the Viking 'Wutha' who made his way up the River Pant before clearing an area of forest (feld or field) in which to settle.
- 2.3.2 In 1086 the Domesday Book noted both villages as significant settlements in the Hundred of Hinckford and the county of Essex (the land of the East Saxons). Finchingfield was recorded as having a population of 124 households and Wethersfield 68 households which meant they were larger than Braintree and put them both in the largest 20% of settlements in the country<sup>27</sup>. Finchingfield's inclusion in the Domesday Book is denoted by a plaque at the entrance to the fifteenth century Guildhall in the village.
- 2.3.3 Until the late nineteenth century, employment in both parishes was dominated by agriculture for men and dress-making and domestic service for women. The shift in occupations thereafter is evidenced by outmigration to the towns which resulted in a near 50 percent decline in parish populations by the 1950s to 1,100 in Finchingfield and in 900 Wethersfield<sup>28</sup>.
- 2.3.5 In 1952 the population was boosted by the re-opening of the Wethersfield Airbase for the United States Air Force (USAF). Despite its name, most of the 322-hectare site sits in Finchingfield parish. Its historical significance as an early Cold War Nuclear Airbase is recorded on the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER)<sup>29</sup> and the Bomb Storage area were listed in 2023<sup>30</sup>. Security issues precluded an entirely open integration with the local area and many deliveries came by air due to the poor road network which has largely remained unchanged since! However, American servicemen often lived in village homes and left a lasting social legacy through an estimated 4,000 weddings with local and district residents.

### *Finchingfield parish*

- 2.3.6 Although its current population of 1,400 is lower than its Victorian peak of 2,594<sup>31</sup>, Finchingfield parish's 115 listed buildings are testament to a period of wealth and provides a snapshot of pre-industrial England. Its history can be traced through the ordination and construction of the Grade I listed Church in the C12th (with C13-14 century additions) and construction of Cabbaches and the Old Parsonage in the C14th and the Guildhall around 1470<sup>32</sup>. The latter housed a priest, as well as shops, workshops, a meeting hall, and a school<sup>33</sup> (Figure 12).
- 2.3.7 The village still has an array of well-preserved listed houses dating from the C16th and C17th (including Bridge House and Springmede) but relatively few from the 1800s. Street Farm (and its associated outbuildings) is almost unchanged since the late C19th when it was an unusual example of a farm in the centre of a village. It remains an important part of the street scene today. Finchingfield Post Mill (or Duck End or Letch's Mill) dating back to 1756 is the oldest windmill in Essex and the last of seven in the village (and eight in the parish). The C16th Fox Inn public house is on the site of a former inn on the London to Norwich coaching route (Figure 12).



**Figure 12: Historical Finchingfield<sup>34</sup>**

- 2.3.8 Village social-economic history is written in its architecture. Whilst large elaborate chimney stacks suggest pre-industrial wealth, by the mid C18th a workhouse opened to serve the needs of the rural poor<sup>35</sup>. With 75% of men still working the land until the late C19th<sup>36</sup>, this most likely reflected regular agricultural boom and bust cycles. The C19th also saw the use of bricks as a construction material and the village developed a diverse range of businesses including straw plaiting, grocers, drapers, and milliners<sup>37</sup>. Shortly after WWI, the village hosted several pubs, grocers, bakers and butchers, carpenters, blacksmiths, boot repairers, and relatively new ventures, including a car garage<sup>38</sup>.
- 2.3.9 On the village outskirts, the C16th Grade I listed Spains Hall is named after Hervey de Ispania who held the manor at the time of the Domesday Book. It was Hervey de Ispania who first built the house known as Spains Hall. Its architecture and grounds bear witness to developments initiated by the Kempe family in the late C16th and the Ruggles-Brise family from the mid C18th. Though the Hall was sold in 2019, 2,000 acres were retained under family ownership and are now subject to a nature recovery programme<sup>39</sup>.

2.3.10 Collective memories of parish history are also reflected in its street names. For example, C20th housing developments are sited on Kempe Road and Stephen Marshall Avenue. Marshall was the vicar of Finchingfield from 1629-51 and a powerful speaker in Parliament. The fact that he lived in both Wethersfield and Finchingfield is testament to the enduring links between the parishes. Whilst neighbouring parishes have also attracted writers and painters, Finchingfield has been home to C. Henry Warren, Norman Lewis and Dodie Smith, the author of *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*, who lived in 'The Barretts' until 1990<sup>40</sup>.



**Figure 13: Historical Cornish Hall End<sup>41</sup>**

2.3.11 Situated three miles north of Finchingfield, Cornish Hall End (CHE) was constituted as a chapelry in 1842<sup>42</sup>. Although an integral part of Finchingfield parish, CHE has its own electoral ward and sense of individual identity. CHE was one of 313 English sites to take part in the *Survey of English Dialects* conducted by the University of Leeds in the 1950s. Listed buildings include Shore Hall in CHE and Howe Hall in nearby Howe Street<sup>43</sup>. In the hamlet of Little London just outside CHE, Historic England describes a scheduled monument at Cornish Hall first mentioned in 1235. It includes one of 6,000 moated sites in England<sup>44</sup>. Great Biggins and Boyton Hall farmhouses in Finchingfield are also moated.

2.3.12 CHE also has the Horse and Groom pub built in 1845<sup>45</sup> and a Victorian Village Hall. The latter was built as a school in 1847 by the Gent family of Moyns Park (a Grade I listed building in nearby Steeple Bumpstead<sup>46</sup>), reconstructed in 1871, converted to a Village Hall in 1956, refurbished in 2019 and now hosts numerous social gatherings, including a community choir (Figure 13).

#### *Wethersfield parish*

2.3.13 Wethersfield parish is half the size of Finchingfield parish in term of acreage but has a similar population (1,300) and higher number of heritage assets (118). These include the Grade I listed Parish Church of St Mary Magdalene (Figure 11) and several Grade II listed buildings grouped around the small triangular green which make up the historic core of Wethersfield village (Figure 14). These date from the early C15th to C18th, except the Parish Church (parts of which pre-date the Norman conquest) and the C14th Spice's farmhouse and granary in Rotten End.

2.3.14 For many years Wethersfield maintained a strong ecclesiastical link with the University of Cambridge. One famous graduate Patrick Brontë (father of the Brontë sisters) was the Church Curate from 1806-09 and lived at the C16th St Georges House in the High Street<sup>47</sup>. The Manor to the south of the village, located on the site of former Dobbins Farmhouse, housed the White family for decades, the Chaplain of Trinity Hall and Parish vicar in the C19th and American servicemen in the C20th<sup>48</sup>.

2.3.15 Most historical buildings are in good repair, add significantly to the local character and provide architectural snapshots of local history. Braintree Council's *Conservation Character Appraisal and Management Plan* describes the immediate surroundings of Wethersfield as "overwhelming agrarian"<sup>49</sup>. Evidence can be seen at the C15th Russell's Farmhouse (which also housed a brick yard)<sup>50</sup> and the C14th Brook Farmhouse (home to Dr John Clerke in the 1600s who was Lord of the Manor and to Captain Clerke in the C18th prior to his voyages around the globe with Captain Cook)<sup>51</sup>.



**Figure 14: Historical Blackmore End and Wethersfield<sup>52 53</sup>**

- 2.3.16 The early C19th saw the construction of several timber barns, often lime plastered and weatherboarded, built during the Napoleonic Wars when grain prices were high<sup>54</sup>. Many houses are similarly constructed with some capped by thatched roofs or handmade red clay tiles. Others are built of brick in Flemish bond, possibly of local origin. The United Reform Church, school and Brewery and post office buildings are examples of the relatively few later C19th buildings, perhaps an indication of the economic fortunes of the village during the Victorian era<sup>55</sup>. In the 1960s, a large housing development was built on the north and west side of the village and is now home for half of village residents.
- 2.3.17 Although some working buildings have disappeared and others converted to residences, many still bear the hallmarks of their historical origins (brewing, brickmaking, milling and retailing). A prime and rare example is the Wethersfield Brewery site which closed in 1921. It was formerly comprised of the Brewhouse, Malthouse (now the Village Hall), the brewery owner's house (now Hillfoot House), and the Brewery Tavern (now a school)<sup>56</sup>.
- 2.3.18 There are also extensive attractive red brick walls (likely of local origin) and hedgerows which contribute to the street scene within the village and its approaches. These form the boundaries of several listed properties outside the development boundary along the B1053, frame important public views and form a key part of a highly valued conservation area<sup>57</sup>.
- 2.3.19 Located 2.5 miles from Wethersfield village, Blackmore End highlights the legacy of the Courtauld family (who owned silk mills in nearby Halstead and Bocking)<sup>58</sup> in the form of the Village Hall (Figure 12) and playing field gifted to the Parish in the mid C20th, as well as two privately owned cottages called 'Charlotte' and 'Emily', 1-3 Bronte Cottages and 'Gino'. The former provides a link to Patrick Bronte, one time Wethersfield curate<sup>59</sup> and the latter to Henry 'Gino' Watkins who accompanied Augustine Courtauld on an Arctic expedition in the 1930s<sup>60</sup>.
- 2.3.20 The hamlet of Rotten End (1.3 miles from Blackmore End) has only 15 houses but 9 of them are listed (3 of them Grade II\*) and date back as far as the C14th. Codham Mill and Codham Hall are Grade II\* buildings located 3.5 miles from Wethersfield in Beazley End. Dating back to the C13th, the Hall was home to Sir William Coggeshall who was a Member of Parliament, Sheriff of Essex, a Justice of the Peace and assisted in the suppression of the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 which started in Essex. The Mill ceased operations in the 1950s but remains one of only four Essex water mills to survive in complete condition.

## 2.4 Present day life

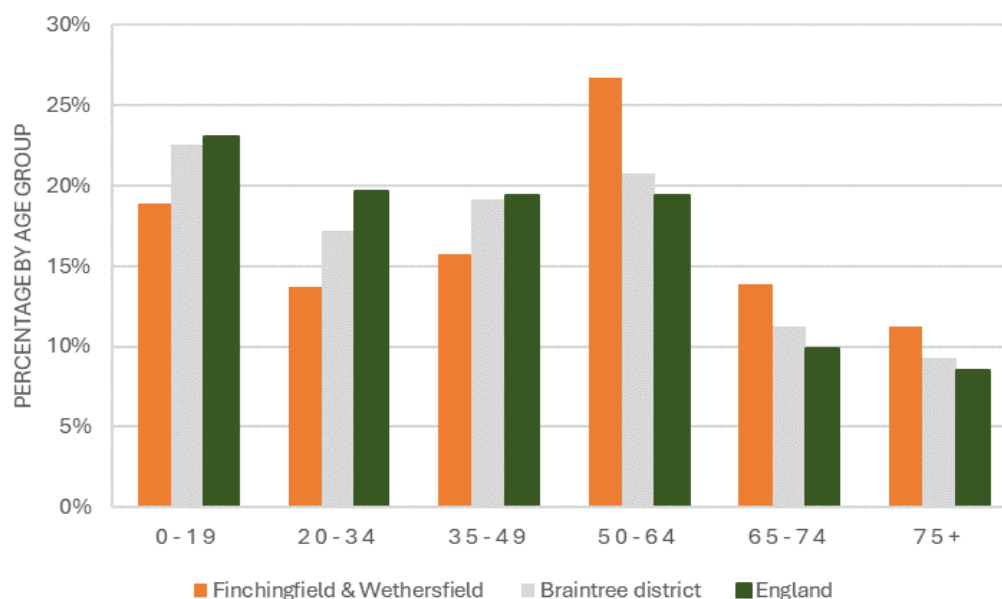
2.4.1 As highlighted in our Residents' survey, the foundation of our present (and future) is our sense of community. This offers an environment in which people can prosper and a social safety net for those needing support. ECC's analysis of 'Community Needs'<sup>61</sup> shows that civic engagement, community cohesion and social connectedness is particularly strong in villages, like ours<sup>62</sup>.



Figure 15: Present day life and events<sup>63</sup>

- 2.4.2 Our social connectedness is founded upon our community assets (including pubs, cafes, and clubs), our community volunteers and a range of community initiatives, including community pantries, teas for the elderly, playing fields, footpaths, Equestrian Centres, the Blackmore End fireworks display; the Wethersfield Christmas lights switch on, Wethersfield Amateur Players and Open Gardens; the Finchingfield three-legged race; and summer fetes (Figure 15).
- 2.4.3 Our Residents' surveys showed that people see their social and working lives as intertwined. Residents therefore urged the Neighbourhood Plan to try to understand community livelihoods.
- 2.4.4 A Neighbourhood Plan is not a socio-economic strategy but like any other planning document, should be set within a socio-economic context<sup>64</sup>. Careful interpretation of appropriate data regarding present day life can facilitate design of suitable, feasible and effective planning actions and policies designed to foster economic prosperity, health, and well-being in the future.
- 2.4.5 The NPA population was broadly static at 2,740 between the 2011 and 2021 censuses and has in fact increased less than 5% this century<sup>65</sup>. As witnessed during the Industrial revolution and recognised in ECC's Economic strategy research<sup>66</sup>, the future size and prosperity of this population will be impacted not only by the *magnitude* of economic growth but its *form*. Economic strategy documents written by ECC<sup>67</sup>, North Essex Economic Board<sup>68</sup> (NEEB)<sup>69</sup> and BDC<sup>70, 71</sup> outline the future importance of technological change, highly skilled 'Green' jobs, research and development, digital infrastructure, and business incubation.
- 2.4.6 A key tenet of each of these documents is recognition of the district wide need for more *highly skilled* jobs, not just any jobs. However, it is not self-evident how this will affect rural areas, such as ours. Even though Braintree is a rural district, there is a significant difference between its market towns (such as Witham) and villages, such as our own, in terms of age, skill-sets and connectivity.

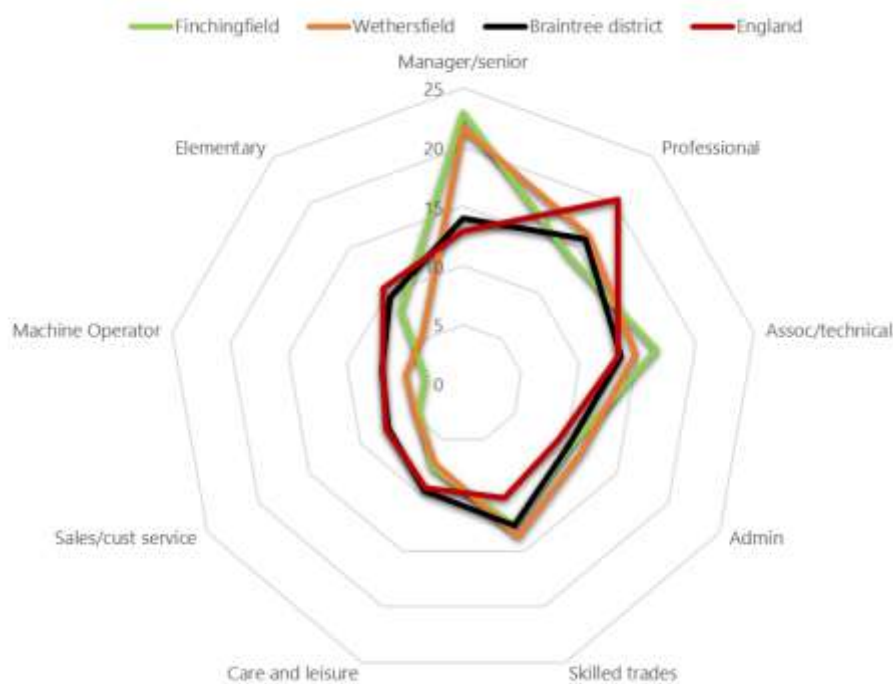
2.4.7 To anticipate *future* planning implications of this “Fourth Industrial Revolution” (4IR)<sup>72</sup> for a rural area like ours, along with the long-term effects of ageing demographics and climate change, requires careful interpretation of the available specific evidence regarding the *current* socio-economic profile of the NPA.



**Figure 16: Neighbourhood Plan area population age composition<sup>73</sup>**

- 2.4.8 Our NPA has a higher proportion (52%) of over 50s, than Braintree district (41%)<sup>74</sup> (Figure 16). This ageing demographic creates specific needs for elderly groups but also suggests younger people may need help to stay in the area. However, it is also important not to generalise across age groups or oversimplify diagnoses. Despite an ageing population, health outcomes in the NPA are *better* than the district average. This may reflect higher average incomes, as well as the open natural environment conducive to outdoor exercise and improved well-being.
- 2.4.9 According to data at the ward level, there may be pockets of concern regarding specific conditions<sup>75</sup> (mental health, heart disease and asthma<sup>76</sup>) but to simply attribute this to the distance to hospitals would be to ignore the complex array of underlying health drivers in accordance with the “Wider determinants of Health model”<sup>77, 78</sup> and the preventative initiatives run by the highly regarded Freshwell Health centre in Finchingfield.
- 2.4.10 The over 50s in the NPA are in fact very active both economically and socially and continue to make a very significant contribution to local society. Our surveys found that 75% of 56–65-year-olds are still working and are *more* likely to be self-employed than any other age group. The lower level of recorded economic activity normally associated with an older population also disguises the high level of community volunteer work amongst the retired and semi-retired which complements the efforts of younger working members of society in supporting community clubs and events that lie at the heart of rural community cohesion, well-being, and health.
- 2.4.11 The strong attraction of self-employment also applies to other age groups. Census data shows that the propensity for self-employment in our parishes (19.5%) is nearly double the national average. Our Residents’ and Business surveys found that 61% of our self-employed work within the parishes compared with 30% of employees. 35% of businesses were ‘home-based’; 26% Agricultural or Equestrian; and 12% Hospitality or Tourism.
- 2.4.12 This has two important implications: First, as our business owners are also residents, their ‘relationship with place’ is dualistic and strong. Second, like most UK rural businesses, most NPA businesses are in *non-agricultural* sectors<sup>79</sup>. Even within in agriculture and related fields, our business owners are extremely dynamic and innovative.

- 2.4.13 These important findings, along with conversations at our Information sessions, reflect *positive* lifestyle choices. People often *choose* self-employment for the freedom it offers, not because of a lack of jobs. People *choose* to live in the NPA, not *despite* its remoteness but *because* of it<sup>80</sup>.
- 2.4.14 This may (in part) explain the price premium house buyers are prepared to pay to live here, compared to the district average. It may also suggest that facilitation of locally run businesses (for example, through improved broadband connectivity or a local business innovation hub) could help them engage with the challenges and opportunities of the 4IR and Climate Change; have distinct benefits for people's well-being and lifestyle; and reduce the amount of daily travel in and out of the NPA.
- 2.4.15 Currently the employed and self-employed working populations in the NPA are less likely to be unskilled and more likely to have Level 4 qualifications (higher apprenticeship or degree) than the district averages. As a result, unemployment rates are low and most employees are engaged in higher paid managerial, technical, professional, or skilled occupations (Figure 17)<sup>81</sup>.



**Figure 17: Neighbourhood Plan area occupations (% of workforce)<sup>82</sup>**

- 2.4.16 By contrast, Braintree district's occupations are more weighted in less well-paid sectors (e.g. wholesale, distribution, and retail) or specific occupational groups within those sectors (Administration, Skilled trades (which includes prison officers), Care and Leisure, and Sales) in which pay is below national averages.<sup>83,84</sup> However, the NPA's *current* skill-set may not be suited to *future* economic needs and may disguise current pockets of need. For example, a notable number of NPA residents work in relatively low paid sectors (such as care work)<sup>85</sup>.
- 2.4.17 From a planning perspective, each of these points reinforce the need to examine the scope to facilitate improvement of skills and livelihood resilience in specific places, not simply more low skilled jobs of any type in any place<sup>86</sup>. Measures to help local rural businesses would also benefit employees, self-employed, homeworkers, students, and residents equally well, especially if they enabled the acquisition of *new* skills to adapt to future economic and technological changes. Community assets should also be enhanced to facilitate the extensive volunteer work for those in need.
- 2.4.18 Economic and Planning strategy documents sometimes talk about 'deprivation' in rural areas. This usually relies on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS)<sup>87</sup> which looks at 7 different 'domains' – income, employment, skills, crime, housing, environment, and housing. The ONS recommends looking at them together, not individually, as they are all interconnected<sup>88</sup>.

- 2.4.19 The IMD data shows that 1.1% of NPA households are deprived in 3 domains. This compares to a district average of 2.7% and a national average is 3.7%<sup>89</sup>. This may suggest NPA residents are generally better off but it is important to remember that these statistics are averages<sup>90,91,92</sup>.
- 2.4.20 The *type* of 'deprivation' may also vary by household and place. Half of Braintree district's 155,200<sup>93</sup> population live in three market towns and the rest are spread across sixty villages<sup>94</sup>. Market towns perform worse in terms of *economic* deprivation but villages appear worse off if measured by *social* and *environmental* metrics (e.g. access to services and road accidents)<sup>95,96</sup>.
- 2.4.21 However, this may be a little misleading. Figure 18 (below) shows rankings of socio-economic deprivation of 6 local areas (including our two parishes) according to the IMD framework. The weighted sum of the 7 'domains' – (columns 1-7) is used to calculate a Multiple Deprivation score (Column 8). The total score for each area is then compared to over 30,000 others in the country to sort them into 10 groups (deciles). Areas in LOWER deciles (1 and 2) are *more* deprived (shaded red/orange) and those in higher deciles *less* so (shaded yellow and green).
- 2.4.22 Using this method, we see that in terms of overall score Finchingfield is ranked in the 7<sup>th</sup> decile and Wethersfield in the 6<sup>th</sup>. This means that both areas are not especially deprived and mirrors the situation in surrounding parishes and most of Braintree district.

Local area	Specific deprivation domain making up the index							Total score
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
	Jobs	Income	Skills	Crime	Health	Housing	Environment	
Toppesfield/Stambourne	6	6	6	7	9	1	4	6
Gosfield & Greenstead	9	9	8	5	8	3	5	8
Shalford/Panfield	8	8	6	9	9	1	3	6
Bardfield	8	7	8	9	8	7	2	8
Finchingfield	9	9	6	10	9	1	2	7
Wethersfield	7	7	6	8	8	1	4	6

Figure 18: Deprivation decile rankings (lower number indicates higher deprivation)<sup>97</sup>

- 2.4.23 The key is to understand the *meaning* of the data before we derive any planning implications. For example, the *low* decile ranking in Housing and Environment in NPA parishes (columns 6 and 7) (indicating a *high* level of local deprivation) may reflect poor insulation in old housing stock and / or a high reliance upon fossil fuels. The policy implication may therefore be the facilitation of energy efficiency measures, not the replacement of apparently dilapidated 'non-decent' homes.
- 2.4.24 Most houses in the NPA are in fact owned outright or with a mortgage, especially in the Wethersfield parish. There is a lower number of rented properties (24%) compared with the district average (31%)<sup>98</sup>. The HNS revealed that half the households have at least two spare bedrooms but the single occupancy rate is below the national average. This suggests that there may be a mismatch between household and dwelling size with scope for downsizing subject to the availability of suitable smaller dwellings.
- 2.4.25 The *low* environment ranking (Column 7, Figure 18) (indicating a *high* level of deprivation) appears to reflect poor physical access to certain amenities (such as a hospital or supermarket)<sup>99</sup>. However, it is important to understand that many people moved here precisely because of its remoteness. They live and prosper *in spite* (or even *because*) of it.
- 2.4.26 Whilst only 6% have no access to a car (compared with 24% nationally)<sup>100</sup>, it is important to identify if support is needed. Physical distance to hospital is only one factor in health outcomes<sup>101</sup> but we need to know who uses public transport and if the new on-demand service is meeting their specific needs.

### *Finchingfield parish*

- 2.4.27 The population of 1,400 recorded in the 2021 Census for Finchingfield excludes major new housing developments on Bardfield Road and Brent Hall Road. Along with several conversions, housing supply in the main village has increased by 22% in just three years but there has been no change in physical infrastructure. Development on such a scale is perceived by many residents<sup>102</sup> as a threat to Finchingfield's appeal as one of the prettiest villages in England and the most photographed in Essex.
- 2.4.28 Most of the village is clustered around the village green, bisected by Finchingfield Brook which forms the iconic 'pond' before meandering its way to feed the River Pant. Heading out towards Wethersfield, the road climbs up the steep hill past the Grade I listed fifteenth century Guildhall and the Church.
- 2.4.29 This idyllic vista of a 200-year-old bridge, pond, village green and multi-coloured timber framed houses (just a few of the parish's 115 listed buildings) continues to enchant residents and visitors.
- 2.4.30 The village's natural and historical setting remain at the core of daily life and have helped it to retain a village store and Post Office, pubs, garages, a restaurant, cafes, an antiques centre, and a curtain and blind shop. There is also a primary school and a highly regarded health centre. The temporary relocation of the Wethersfield Airbase Heritage Museum in August, 2024 complements a rich suite of historical attractions, including the Church, Post Mill and the Guildhall Museum and community library (Figure 19). The library has been run since the 1950s and the Guildhall hosts regular events, including talks and art exhibitions. The recreation ground hosts the Finchingfield Rovers a community focused football club, originally formed in 1920.
- 2.4.31 In the northern part of Finchingfield parish, CHE remains a small village of 230 residents with approximately an additional 100 residents living in adjacent hamlets (including Little London, Howe Street and Robinhood End)<sup>103</sup>. These settlements are surrounded by arable and wooded countryside – one of the few places where oxlip grows – and close to one of the possible sources of the River Colne at Herkstead Hall Farm.
- 2.4.32 The main part of the village is a ribbon development of about 60 houses along the B1057. There is also a refurbished pub (the Horse and Groom), (Figure 19) a splendid church and a village hall which hosts numerous social gatherings, including a community choir.



Figure 19: Finchingfield Parish today<sup>104</sup>

### *Wethersfield parish*

- 2.4.33 Wethersfield village's historical core is flanked by C20th housing to the north and a recent small development on Silver Street. This new housing has been supplemented by the repurposing of several agricultural and business properties as residential homes within the village and across the parish. Although this has sometimes saved them from falling into disrepair, it has also resulted in non-residential uses in Wethersfield now being limited to a Community Social Club, a part-time Community shop and post office, a children's nursery and two schools.
- 2.4.34 However, residences that were once breweries, pubs or shops continue to reveal their past through their architecture and house names. The historical essence of the central village remains and the Manor and its surrounding parkland are still significant to the village's countryside setting beyond the development boundary.



**Figure 20: Wethersfield Parish today<sup>105</sup>**

- 2.4.35 Although commercial activity is less obvious than in Finchingfield village, many Wethersfield parish homes are occupied by self-employed residents attracted by a rural lifestyle that allows remote work in less visible service industries.
- 2.4.36 A vibrant community event calendar includes groups enjoying Amateur Dramatics, Wine tasting, Pilates, Floral Art and History Group at the Wethersfield Village Hall and Pavilion and outdoor activities at recreation grounds in Wethersfield and Blackmore End. Wethersfield Church stages annual Art exhibitions and chamber concerts that provide a platform for some of the UK's best young classical musicians, including Sheku Kanneh-Mason, Ji Liu, Jess Gillam, and Martin James Bartlett<sup>106</sup>.
- 2.4.37 The smaller settlements of Blackmore End, Beazley End and Rotten End located 1.3 - 3.5 miles from Wethersfield village are key parts of the parish but retain a distinct identity. Historical thatched and rendered cottages and agricultural buildings are surrounded by arable fields and linked by historic footpaths with views across the Pant Valley.
- 2.4.38 The conversion of public houses, churches and a school to houses has left only a village hall in Blackmore End, an equestrian centre with a cafe and business units at Codham Park Farm and a residential care home in Beazley End. The activities and facilities at Blackmore End playing fields and village hall (including children's play events, a community piano, and regular coffee mornings and pub evenings), are valued highly by the community across all age groups.

## 2.5 Community consultation

2.5.1 The NPT has sought to make the entire process as transparent and inclusive as possible. Early and ongoing engagement with the community – facilitated through surveys, drop-in events, presentations, discussion groups, coffee mornings, leaflet drops, Parish council meetings and notice boards, social media, and word of mouth - have formed the basis for developing the Neighbourhood Plan (Figure 21).



Figure 21: Community drop-ins and presentations<sup>107</sup>

2.5.2 During initial engagements, residents were asked what they liked (and disliked) about life today in the parishes, as well as what their aspirations (and concerns) were about the future. In terms of what they *liked*, residents most frequently highlighted people and social interaction, village feel, events, walks, clubs, and pubs (Figure 22).

Figure 22: What people like (Information drop-in findings)



Figure 23: What makes your community special?



2.5.3 Responses including words such as 'friendliness', 'neighbours' and 'community spirit'. The villages and surrounding countryside were described as 'idyllic', tranquil, and 'peaceful and pretty' with some 'beautiful' buildings and structures. People often singled out the Finchingfield bridge, pond and green but also noted the pubs, cafes, shops, and health centre as key *community* assets. The fact that nearly half of survey respondents highlighted green and open spaces, fields, and woodland once again demonstrates the importance of our natural environment to the community.

- 2.5.4 It was *very* evident from the degree of attachment and emotive language in these responses that people perceived individual components – community, natural environment, and built heritage as part of an indivisible whole. Views and setting were valued not just for their aesthetic value but also as an essential contributor to individual and communal health, well-being, and livelihoods.
- 2.5.5 These sentiments were repeated in our Residents’ survey (Figure 23). When asked ‘*What makes your community special to you?*’ most highlighted community, people, and social interaction, ‘village feel’, events, walks, clubs, and pubs, and how our natural rural countryside setting contributes to our feeling healthy and safe. Responses including words such as ‘friendliness’, ‘neighbours’ and ‘community spirit’, as well as how our well-being and ‘peace’ and ‘quiet’ rely on our natural setting were common themes throughout the survey.
- 2.5.6 Residents’ current *dislikes* and fears for the future (Figure 24) reflected the fragility of the rural life they cherish. Residents expressed concerns about the erosion of community cohesion, and damage to treasured landmarks (such as the Finchingfield bridge and pond) and the natural environment through ill-considered development that did not respect local needs.

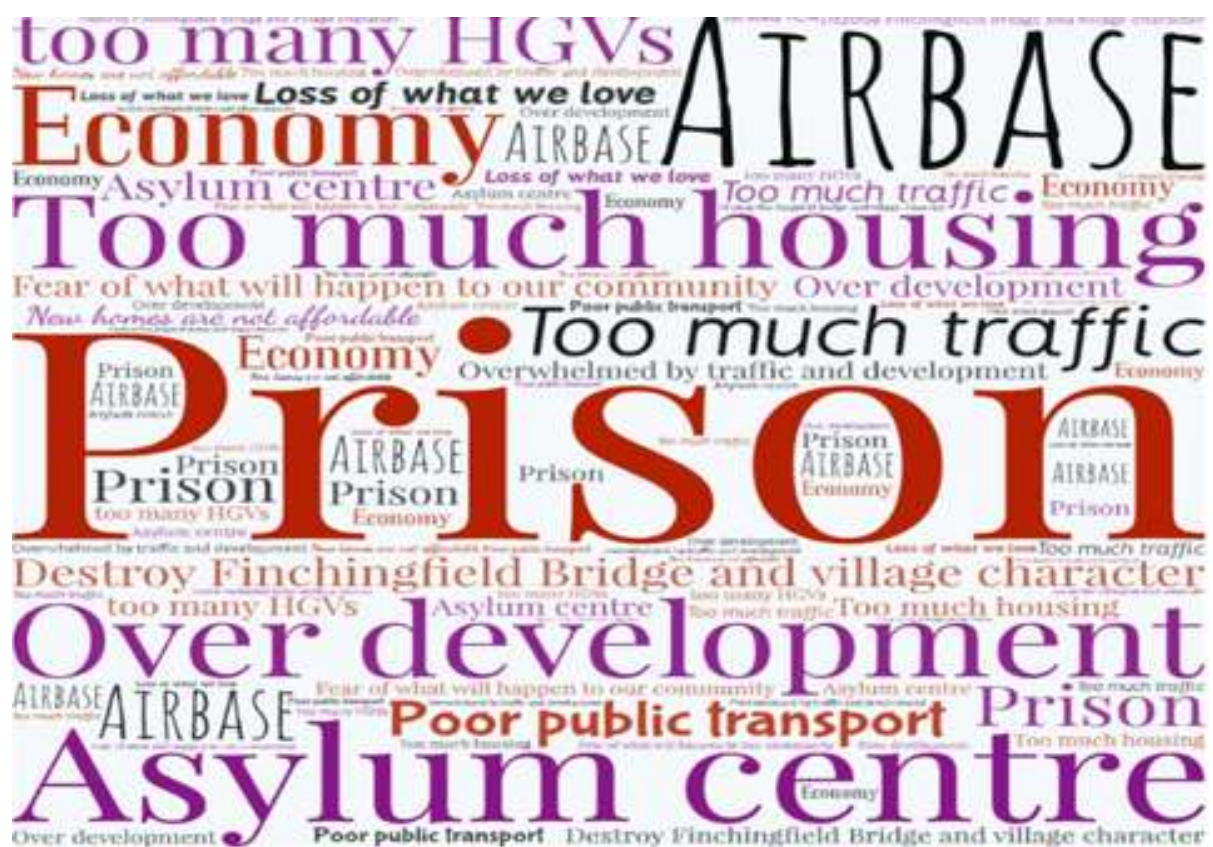
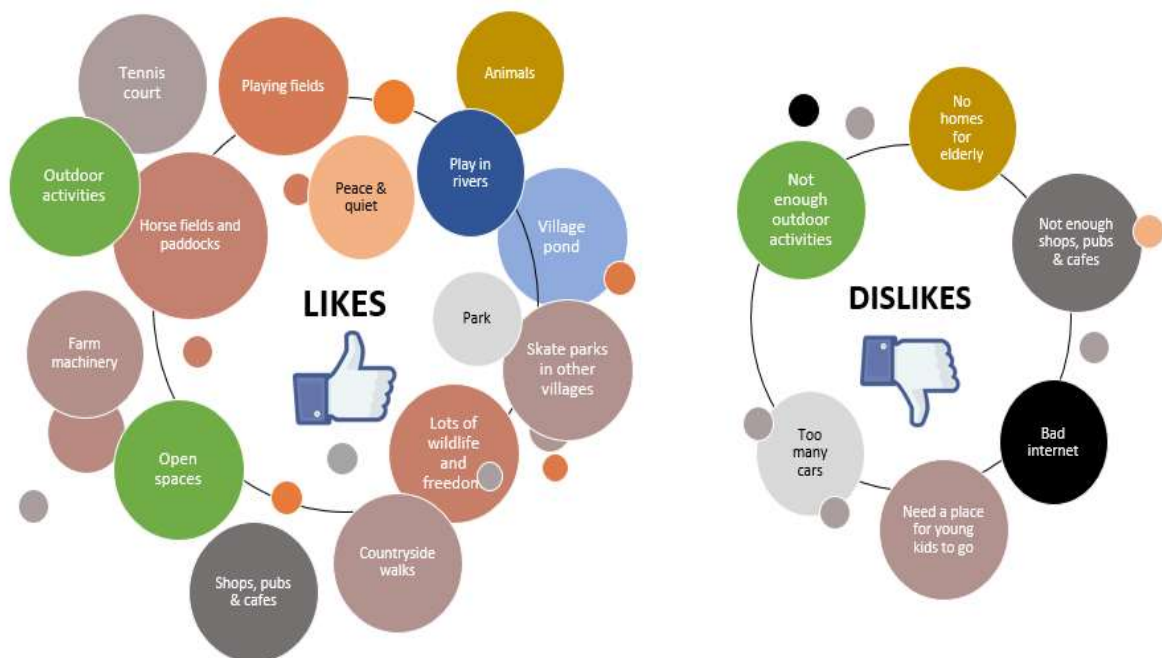


Figure 24: What people dislike & fears for the future

- 2.5.7 The frequent use of particular words and phrases, such as ‘too many’, ‘too much’, over-burden’, over-development’ and emotive language - such as ‘loss’, ‘destruction’, ‘worry’ and ‘fear’ – suggest deep concerns about the potential erosion of community cohesion and failure to consider the needs of particular social groups, such as the young and elderly.
- 2.5.8 Concerns regarding external factors were most amplified regarding the Airbase. Over half of survey respondents saw the current Asylum Reception Centre (ARC) and the prospect of a multi-prison complex as the single biggest threat to the entire community’s social, economic, and environmental sustainability and individual and communal security, welfare, and well-being.
- 2.5.9 As well as the damage to the social fabric of the community, one of the key reasons cited for these concerns about the future was traffic volumes and speed which are *already* significant problems for all residents. Road safety combined with poor footpath maintenance, was identified as a key *threat* to our

continued enjoyment of outdoor community assets and our health and well-being. Further ill-considered development was perceived to make this worse.

- 2.5.10 For residents, the central issue appeared to be how they can move about *inside* the NPA, not simply *outside* it. Traffic and poor pathway maintenance hinder access to local places. Although most of our narrow roads are generally hazardous for walkers and cyclists, several locations did warrant special mention – including most of the B1053 and B1057; routes through Cornish Hall End and Blackmore End; and junctions near schools, Finchingfield bridge and the Guildhall.
- 2.5.11 Access to towns *is* a particular issue for the 6% of households without a car. Less than 10% of survey respondents used public transport but this may reflect a lack of availability (for example, Blackmore End) or reliability and cost. However, 40% of survey respondents said they would never use public transport thereby suggesting a need for carefully nuanced policy responses, not universal blueprints.
- 2.5.12 Whilst highway issues are beyond the scope of a Neighbourhood Plan, it is important for the Plan to recognise the consequences of economic growth in particular locations. In Essex, road transport emissions per person are 12 % higher than the UK average. Over a third of these come from minor roads and nearly 12 % in the district of Braintree<sup>108</sup>. It is self-evident that we should all play our part in minimising environmental externalities in accordance with the regional and national government economic growth, levelling-Up<sup>109</sup>, net Zero<sup>110</sup> and transport objectives<sup>111</sup>.



**Figure 25: What young people like and dislike**

- 2.5.13 As well as talking to adults, the team made a very conscious effort to reach out to younger residents in the form of a shortened online survey and engagement in local schools with the help of the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE). Ultimately, it is the future of this generation that this Neighbourhood Plan seeks to serve.
- 2.5.14 However, whilst the Neighbourhood Plan can try to preserve the open spaces our children clearly love (Figure 25), we are afraid some of the other issues raised (such as a dislike of stinging nettles and pineapple on pizza) are a little beyond our remit.
- 2.5.15 From all generations, we received a clear message that people wanted their voices to be heard. Our communities have endured intense media scrutiny and development pressure in recent years which has put significant pressure on community cohesion and well-being. A recurring theme we heard was the feeling that residents had lost control of their own destiny.

- 2.5.16 They wanted to reclaim their community voice. As such, it is imperative that the perceptions of how we *as a community* should shape our future are adequately incorporated into this Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2.5.17 For example, whilst some may perceive remoteness as a strategic *weakness*, NPA residents often expressed how this formed part of the area's comparative *strength* as a hub for nature regeneration, a pleasant lifestyle, and high-quality skilled jobs in new dynamic green sectors. This is not to say that all is perfect in our rural idyll but there was a general focus on acknowledging what we have, not what we lack.
- 2.5.18 Residents displayed a determination to take steps to preserve and enhance these *opportunities* for everyone in our communities, for example, through promotion of local businesses and the improvement of community facilities.
- 2.5.19 Residents' aspirations and concerns framed what they wanted the Neighbourhood Plan to address (Figure 26). Apart from a 'Give us a voice', people highlighted the need to protect green spaces, environment and local heritage and repurpose the Airbase for community benefit. To ensure vitality of the rural economy, provision of a small number of affordable houses and a business hub were also suggested.



**Figure 26: Desired outcomes from Neighbourhood Plan**

- 2.5.20 As the Neighbour Plan took shape, NPA residents engaged actively with the Neighbourhood Plan Team through extensive and very detailed feedback on policies and actions outlined in the Regulation 14 submission.
- 2.5.21 In short, this is not a community resistant to change *per se* but it is one resistant to change imposed from outside parties. Communities not only need to be engaged in designing development solutions but in diagnosing the underlying problems those solutions are supposed to resolve. The transparency and inclusivity through which this Neighbourhood Plan has been drafted are just one small step on this pathway.
- 2.5.22 Residents have recognised the Neighbourhood Plan process as an empowering one in which they could try to make their voice heard to local people working on their behalf. Our broad suite of Objectives, Policies and Actions reflect the opportunity afforded by this process and of the deep fears, strong views, and wide ambition of our residents.

### 3 Vision and Objectives

**3.1 Community Vision:** The Community vision for the NPA for the plan period to 2033 that has emerged from supporting evidence and community engagement is as follows:

To maintain and improve the prosperity, health, and well-being of the communities of the parishes of Finchingfield & Wethersfield as part of a sustainable future for everyone.

This future allows for continued evolution of our communities as a well-balanced diversified rural area that retains its distinctive character, where residents value the living environment, social interaction, traditional local architecture, the area's history, landscape, and wildlife, and where the use of green technologies and the broadening of the entrepreneurial skills and livelihood opportunities are encouraged.

**3.2 Objectives:** We used this Vision to formulate 15 Objectives – two are all-encompassing (Sustainability and Health / Well-Being) and the rest are specific. This is outlined in Figure 27 below.

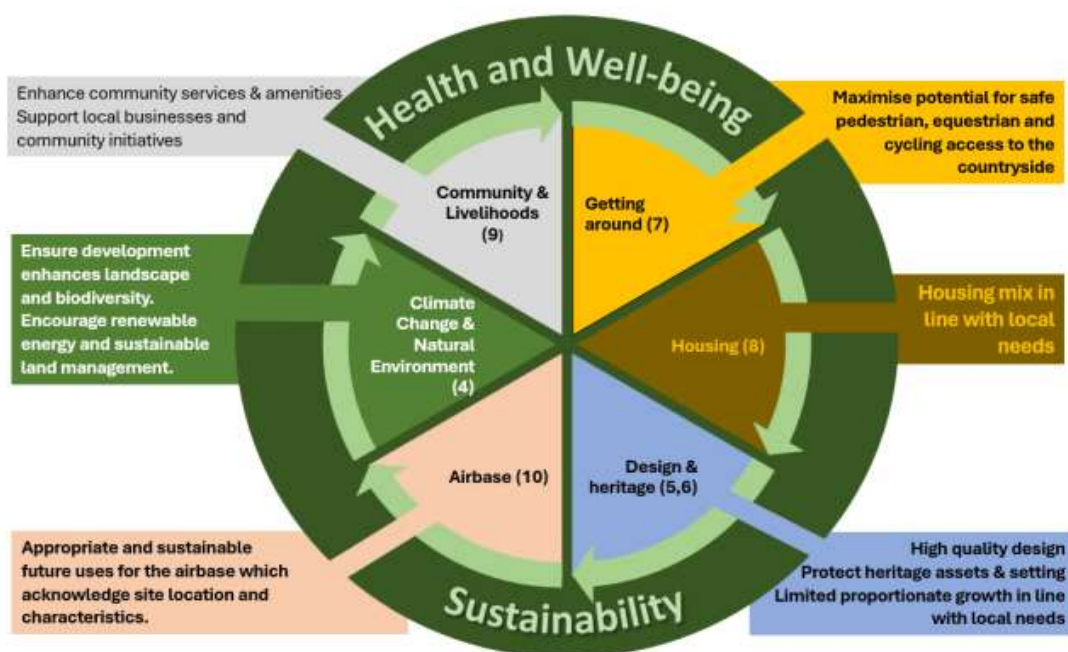


Figure 27: Community Objectives

**3.2.1 Sustainability:** We envisage an inclusive community which meets the social needs of everyone, protects and enhances the natural and historic environment; and promotes individual and collective prosperity for current and future generations. The objective of this Neighbourhood Plan is to address social, environment and economic pillars of sustainability through a holistic foresight approach.

**3.2.2 Health and Well-Being and Security:** Our community envisages an improved level of mental and physical-well-being for everyone, through raised levels of contentment, better work life balance and connectedness with people and the local natural and built environment. The objective of this Neighbourhood Plan is to enhance individual and community health and well-being through improved access to communal and multifunctional green spaces, protection and enhancement of valued places, access to services and housing and facilitation of rewarding livelihoods. Design should seek to minimise the incidence and the perception of crime, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and maximise safety and inclusivity. Perception and fear of crime and ASB can have a significant impact on community well-being.

3.2.3 The remaining 13 objectives were grouped into climate change and environment; design, heritage, and character; mobility; housing; community and business; and the airbase but there is some overlap.

**3.2.3.1 Climate change and environment:** The Neighbourhood Plan Community Vision sees environment and climate resilience at the heart of the future of our local communities. Improving our resilience to climate change will drive an ever-increasing shift to renewable energy, promoting individual and community-based schemes to reduce dependence upon fossil fuels, recover the past loss of biodiversity and to take a leading role in bringing low carbon schemes to fruition. This suggests several interlinked objectives:

Objective 1: ensure that any new development not only protects but significantly enhances biodiversity.

Objective 2: encourage sustainable land management practices to enhance our natural environment.

Objective 3: encourage the adoption of renewable energy technologies.

Objective 4: protect the landscape from intrusive change.

**3.2.3.2 Design, heritage and character:** The communities have clearly defined the local character so that new and adapted buildings complement the local vernacular and respect all aspects of settlements and the countryside. The location and character of the area is not suited to large scale development. This suggests several interlinked objectives:

Objective 5: Ensure high quality design that is sympathetic to and enhances the character of the NPA;

Objective 6: Protect and enhance the heritage assets and their setting in the NPA

Objective 7: Allow only limited and measured settlement growth of our communities and only when proposals meet the specific proven needs of residents in the NPA to preserve its distinct character.

**3.2.3.3 Housing** Any growth in the number of dwellings should be organic and provide the types of housing that meet the specific future needs of the community, such as dwelling size and affordability. This includes the creation of suitable accommodation for older residents to facilitate the release of larger dwellings for family needs. This suggests the following objective:

Objective 8: "To support a flourishing and inclusive community through the provision of a mix of housing types, sizes and tenures to meet local need including accommodation that is or can be made adaptable for a variety of life stages, including independent living housing for older people and people with disabilities, elderly accommodation and care. "

**3.2.3.4 Moving around:** The advantages of the types of development that the plan facilitates and encourages are that they will generate relatively little extra traffic or heavy goods traffic on local roads. This will have resulted in higher levels of cycling and walking. This suggests the following objective:

Objective 9: Maximise the potential for residents and businesses to have safe and convenient walking, riding and cycling routes and access to parish amenities and the open countryside.

**3.2.3.5 Community and livelihoods:** Our Vision sees an improvement in the health of residents and our natural environment through the encouragement of skilled employment, supported by the provision of adapted work premises, so encouraging the growth of local, rural businesses which support the communities' needs and reduce economic migration from the NPA. This suggests a few interlinked objectives:

Objective 10: Enhance the quality and capacity of community services.

Objective 11: Support the prosperity and facilitate the needs of all livelihoods, including homeworkers, farmers, and businesses.

Objective 12: To retain a rich array of local services, and support business and community initiatives which together enhance choice and diversity, to meet the needs and aspirations of our communities.

**3.2.3.6 Airbase:** The Community Vision sees appropriate and sustainable future uses for the Airbase that recognise its communal, ecological and heritage value; inaccessibility; and environmental, economic, and social potential. This suggests the following objective:

Objective 13: Promote sustainable uses that acknowledge site location and characteristics.

## 4 Climate change and natural environment

### 4.1 Background

- 4.1.1 Addressing climate change as the first issue in this Neighbourhood Plan is very deliberate. This reflects its overriding importance to the health and well-being of current and future generations. The need to mitigate the effects of climate change is an overarching issue facing everyone. Rather than this being a limit on our ambitions as individuals and as a community, it should be seen as a way of achieving them.
- 4.1.2 The need to act has prompted policy responses at all levels of government. In the United Kingdom (UK) the Climate Change Act 2008 committed to an 80% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2050; BDC has declared a "Climate Emergency" and ECC has established the Essex Climate Action Commission and launched a net Zero strategy<sup>112, 113</sup>. BDC's Local Plan Policies LPP 71, LPP 72 and LPP 73 are designed to address climate change adaptation and mitigation<sup>114</sup>.
- 4.1.2.1 The NPPF<sup>115</sup> states that planning should recognise not only the intrinsic character and beauty of our natural environment but also the benefits it provides (including food, jobs, flood management and improvement of well-being). The NPPF requires net gains for biodiversity, including establishment of coherent ecological networks more resilient to current and future pressures; and remediation and mitigation of despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate<sup>116</sup>.
- 4.1.2.2 The NPPF reinforces guidance that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate and help to shape places in ways that contribute to *radical* reductions in greenhouse gas emissions; minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.
- 4.1.2.3 The 'State of Nature Report' published in 2023 by over 60 conservation partners<sup>117</sup>, reported a 54% decline in the distribution of over half of UK plant species and a consequent increase in the number of birds and small mammals on the at-risk register. To address this, the previous UK Government committed to regenerate supportive habitats and protect 30% of our land for nature by 2030.
- 4.1.2.4 In July 2024, the Government announced a review of the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) to deliver legally binding targets to save nature. It will develop a new, statutory plan to protect and restore our natural environment with delivery plans to meet ambitious Environment Act targets. In announcing this review, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, painted a bleak picture requiring urgent attention: "*Nature is dying. Britain is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. Our animal species face extinction. Our precious landscapes are in decline. Our rivers, lakes and seas are awash with sewage and pollution. Air pollution continues to plague our towns and cities. Nature underpins everything – the economy, food, health, and society - but we stand at a moment in history when nature needs us to defend it. Working with civil society, business, and local government, we will develop an ambitious programme to turn the tide and save nature.*"
- 4.1.2.5 This dire situation has been also been recognised in our NPA where landowners are already recording the impact of climate change in terms of higher temperatures and the growing incidence of droughts and flooding, declining agricultural productivity, and biodiversity<sup>118</sup>. In one of the most intensely farmed regions in the country<sup>119</sup> and one of the driest and lowest lying<sup>120</sup>, climate change could have a significant effect upon our livelihoods and the flora and fauna in our natural and built environments.
- 4.1.2.6 These impacts are likely to accelerate and be multi-dimensional. As many will be specific and localised, there is a need for our communities to be more involved in mitigation and adaptation, rather than rely on central or regional government<sup>121</sup>. As part of this, there are policies and actions at the local level that can be addressed by the Neighbourhood Plan. This would be compatible with the other Plan objectives in the context of sustainability, health, and wellbeing. Creation of an exemplar 'low carbon rural community' could not only improve resilience to climate change but also foster growth of skills and prosperity in a sustainable and inclusive future for our communities.

## 4.2 Planning for a Greener future

4.2.1 This Neighbourhood Plan calls for an ambitious foresight approach encompassing inter-related components that relate directly to planning and land use: *Technology; Design; Natural resource management; Social inclusion and Well-being.*

4.2.1.1 This is purposely ambitious, yet feasible. Parish Councils cannot work alone but there is scope to improve co-ordination and provide a voice for local communities, as seen elsewhere. For example, the Cambridge Nature Network Vision for Nature recovery was adopted into the local plan as supplementary guidance<sup>122</sup>. In 2019 the resident-conceived John Clare Countryside Partnership of local landowners, charities, businesses, and government bodies created a Toolkit to support local communities to develop a nature recovery plan<sup>123</sup>. Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT) regularly engages with volunteers as part of a bottom-up approach to understanding our natural world<sup>124</sup>.

4.2.1.2 The NPA is located with the Essex Commission's recommended Climate Focus Area. The Environment Act 2021 introduced the requirement for a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) which is designed to establish a Nature Recovery Network (NRN) of 48 Local Nature Recovery Strategies. In Essex this is led by the Essex Local Nature Partnership (ELNP) on behalf of ECC<sup>125</sup>. The final report was published in July, 2025<sup>126</sup>. Parish Councils should work collaboratively with ELNP and ECC to the delivery LNRS in the NPA.

4.2.1.3 There are also numerous simple measures Parish Councils can take directly through their own activities or indirectly by facilitating those of others in the community, including schools. Examples include, planting schemes, recycling, and community compost facilities<sup>127</sup>. Some of these may already in place.

4.2.1.4 These efforts could form part of a proactive (rather than reactive) approach to understanding factors that might affect the natural environment in our NPA in the short and longer-term. Suggested components are outlined in the sections below: Technology; Design; Natural resource management; Social inclusion and Well-being. These can be seen as stand-alone or form part of a holistic foresight approach.

### **Action 1: Planning for a Greener future**

Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils work with appropriate stakeholders to develop a holistic Implementation Strategy that sets out local measures that can be taken within the Neighbourhood Plan Area to mitigate the impact of climate change and promote a greener future which includes an improvement in air and water pollution, reduction of waste, encourage nature recovery, promotion of renewable energy and traffic management. As part of this strategy, some measures should include:

- (i) Continuation the strategic review of the Finchingfield brook and pond.
- (ii) Liaise with appropriate regulatory bodies to ensure that water quality monitoring is carried out along the River Pant and Bourne Brooke and make representations regarding water quality and persistent maintenance issues.
- (iii) Identify measures to assist implementation of the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy within the Neighbourhood Plan Area
- (iv) Consider how the Parish Councils can implement measures on their Council owned buildings and open spaces to help mitigate climate change and promote a greener future
- (v) Identify measures to assist residents to reduce their carbon footprints, promote resilience to climate change and reduce pressure on household budgets. As part of this, Parish Councils appoint an 'Energy champion' in each parish (See Action 2).
- (vi) Aim to support residents, businesses, and landowners to reduce levels of waste.
- (vii) Implementation measures to deliver on Actions and Policies set out elsewhere in this plan e.g. Action 2 (appointing energy champions); Action 3 (locations for electric vehicle charging); Policies FW2 (Sustainable design), FW3 (Retrofitting historic buildings for energy efficiency) FW4 Wildlife friendly development), FW5 Land management for farming and nature), FW9 Rural landscape character FW16 which relates to low carbon rural innovation and community hubs; FW18 and Action 14 (which relates specifically to the airbase site).

### 4.3 Technology component:

#### 4.3.1 Community energy generation and storage:

- 4.3.1.1 In any sustainable energy policy, there is a need for a mix of technologies, locations, and scale<sup>128</sup>. National Planning policy supports initiatives involving community-led renewable energy schemes which help achieve zero carbon targets and secure energy supply. They should be supported unless they unduly adversely impact the landscape, important natural features, or local amenity. The NPPF acknowledges that even small-scale and community-led projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions *and* alleviating fuel poverty<sup>129</sup>.
- 4.3.1.2 Community energy projects involve groups of people coming together to purchase, manage, generate, or reduce consumption of energy. This includes (but is not limited to), solar panels, wind farms, hydro power, rural heat networks, battery storage, electric vehicle charging points, car clubs and fuel poverty alleviation schemes. Programmes are usually not-for-profit, and profits raised from projects are reinvested back into the communities which they power.
- 4.3.1.3 It is understood that pending legislation will see the establishment of a government owned energy company that will work alongside local communities to develop renewable energy projects to generate up to eight gigawatts (GW) of energy<sup>130</sup>. The Government recognises the role community groups play in efforts to reduce their contribution to climate change and offers a range of support to community energy projects such as funding to enable both rural and urban communities to access grant funding to develop local renewable energy projects.
- 4.3.1.4 In a rural area like ours, there may be suitable locations where appropriately scaled projects could be accommodated to assist a shift away from dependence on fossil fuels. However, it is imperative to be aware of the possible impact on food security arising from the installation of very large solar projects on productive land in rural areas.
- 4.3.1.5 ECC research suggests that over 10% of rural households in Braintree district are living in ‘fuel poverty’<sup>131</sup>. Section 2 explained the low decile ranking (indicating a high level of local deprivation) in Housing and Environment deprivation indices in the NPA suggesting this may reflect poor insulation in old housing stock and / or a high reliance upon fossil fuels.
- 4.3.1.6 The policy implication may be to shift away from fossil fuels, facilitate energy efficiency measures (discussed further below) and potentially, the promotion of a community energy project involving the local production of renewable energy. Efforts are already being made by local community organisations to engage with companies who can invest in or support community energy projects to explore the practicalities of achieving this in the NPA.
- 4.3.1.7 As well as supporting the needs of residents, provision of such a facility may also encourage the inward investment by energy intensive Information technology or Agri-tech businesses and thereby enhance opportunities for high skilled green sector employment for local residents.

#### **Policy FW1: Community owned or led renewable energy schemes**

Community owned or led renewable energy schemes (including micro photovoltaic or bio-mass projects and battery storage) will be supported subject to the following criteria:

- i. The siting and scale are appropriate to its setting and position in the wider landscape;
- ii. It does not give rise to unacceptable landscape or visual impact, either in isolation or cumulatively with other development;
- iii. It does not create an unacceptable impact on the amenities of local residents;
- iv. It does not have an unacceptable impact on a feature of natural, historic (including its setting) or biodiversity importance.
- v. The primary purpose of such projects shall be for the supply and benefit of local communities.
- vi. Any such projects that result in the loss of good quality agricultural land will not be supported
- vii. The design demonstrates a level of safety and security to minimise the risk of crime.

- 4.3.1.8 To facilitate such initiatives, effective engagement of the community will require assistance from district and regional institutions. Community Energy Pathways is working alongside ECC through ‘Energy

Champions’ to empower communities to meet local future energy needs, either through small improvements to insulation or the installation of energy generation at various scales<sup>132</sup>.

4.3.1.9 NEEB’s strategic plan targets identification of a ‘Green Champion’ within each LPA to help residents understand broader issues regarding the net zero transition<sup>133</sup>.

4.3.1.10 Whatever they are called, there is scope for Parish Councils to appoint and adopt a similar approach to liaise with appropriate institutions regarding funding and advice.

### **Action 2: Community energy efficiency improvements**

Parish Councils appoint an ‘Energy champion’ or ‘Green champion’ in each community to work alongside Community Energy Pathways, ECC and BDC assisting those in need of help to improve household energy efficiency and understanding of the net zero transition.

#### 4.3.2 *Electric vehicle charging*

4.3.2.1 Rural road traffic is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in the Braintree district<sup>134</sup>.

4.3.2.2 National Building Regulations require all new dwellings to include electric vehicle charging points. There is therefore no need for a Neighbourhood Plan policy to replicate this but there is still some scope for action to address the needs of existing built development.

4.3.2.3 Braintree Local Plan Section 1 Policy SP6 (Infrastructure and Connectivity) states that the District Council will work with partners to provide public charging points.

4.3.2.4 Private re-charging of electric vehicles in the NPA is currently very difficult as several existing properties do not have off-road parking or access to a suitable power supply. There are no public charging points in the NPA. The installation of public charging points could provide an option for residents and visitors to own and charge an electric vehicle and thereby contribute to the reduction of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions in the immediate locality and beyond. 36% respondents to our Residents’ survey indicated their support for such a measure<sup>135</sup>.

4.3.2.5 It is important that this is addressed by Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils as there are possible locations where such services could be provided, for example, the Wethersfield and Blackmore End Playing Field car parks, Wethersfield Fire Station access road, Wethersfield, and Finchingfield Village Hall car parks, as well as on street spaces around village greens.

### **Action 3: Identify locations for public electric vehicle charging**

Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils to work with BDC and ECC to identify locations for public access to electric vehicle charging and work with stakeholders to deliver installation.

#### *Digital technology*

4.3.3.1 The UK Government’s Digital Inclusion strategy<sup>136</sup> and BDC’s Economic Growth and Corporate priorities documentation 2023-28<sup>137,138</sup>, note that improved rural virtual connectivity has economic benefits (productivity, skills, resilience, transition to high growth green sectors, the creation of a sustainable green economy); as well as social and environmental ones (access to remote healthcare; reduced traffic volumes, emissions, and pollution; inclusivity; loneliness; levelling up).

4.3.3.2 NEEB’s strategy document notes that realisation of the benefits of superfast and ultrafast broadband require effective engagement with users regarding its potential, not just paid installation<sup>139</sup>. This may apply, for example, to users of on-demand public transport.

4.3.3.3 Over one third of Neighbourhood Plan businesses cited poor broadband as a barrier to profitability<sup>140</sup>. Along with access to physical facilities (such as a communal innovation hub<sup>e</sup>), broadband improvements could therefore make a telling contribution to the local rural economy, as well as benefitting residents.

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<sup>e</sup> See Section 8

However, there is a need to address the needs for those in our community who are less familiar with Smart phones and the Internet to ensure they are not ‘digitally excluded.’ This may have implications for accessibility to medical and on-demand transport services.

#### **Action 4: Broadband**

Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils to work with BDC and ECC to effectively accelerate the installation of affordable and reliable Gigabit speed and 5G mobile connectivity throughout the parishes and at Community and / or Business hubs and to establish an effective outreach programme that facilitates inclusion of those who currently remain digitally excluded.

#### **4.4 Design component**

##### **4.4.1 Sustainable design:**

- 4.4.1.1** The residential sector accounted for 17% of UK Greenhouse gas emissions in 2022<sup>141</sup>. This is due to electricity and heating but also because every person uses 152 litres of water each every day<sup>142</sup>!
- 4.4.1.2** According to the Centre for Sustainable Energy, University of Exeter, 33% of household carbon footprints in the NPA are due to domestic heating and power. Alongside travel, this is why our footprints are above district and national averages<sup>143</sup>. Although such estimates should be treated with some caution, they are another indicator of fossil fuel dependence. ECC research suggests that 10% of rural households in Braintree live in ‘fuel poverty’<sup>144</sup>. This may also be true in the NPA with our relatively old housing stock<sup>145</sup>.
- 4.4.1.3** Building Regulations and Braintree Local Plan Section 2 policies (specifically, Policy LPP72: Resource efficiency, energy generation and energy efficiency) require new residences to include renewable and low carbon energy technology to provide at least a 19% improvement in energy performance over the requirements of the 2013 Building Regulations. In addition, Local Plan Section 2 Policy LPP72 sets a required water efficiency standard of 110 litres/person/day. The Neighbourhood Plan supports Anglia Water’s threshold of 20m<sup>3</sup> a day for consideration of whether meeting that commercial/ industrial request could jeopardise household water supplies. This is due to pressure on water supplies because of abstraction reduction, climate change and a fast-growing population. As a result, the gap between the demand for water and supply has shrunk. Developments need to avoid situations where water intensive demand projects progress to site acquisition, design, or planning applications without establishing that a water supply and wastewater solution is feasible.
- 4.4.1.4** To make a meaningful contribution towards achieving net zero, the Neighbourhood Plan encourages new development, renovation, and refurbishment to exceed the requirements of Local Plan Section 2 Policy LPP72.
- 4.4.1.5** In terms of water use, this should be achieved through the ‘Fittings Approach’ which provides clear flow-rate and volume performance metrics for each water-using device. In terms of energy use, all developments, renovations, and refurbishments should ensure that designs enable the introduction of new energy efficient technologies in the future, for example, underfloor heating and heat pumps.

## Policy FW2: Sustainable design

- A. The design and standard of any new development should meet a high level of sustainable design and construction including measures which minimise waste reduction, re-use and recycle minerals, and use sustainable materials, including in relation to their procurement, and be optimised for energy efficiency, targeting zero carbon emissions. Design should have regard to Braintree District Council's Sustainability Statement Guidance Note (March 2023).
- B. All developments should demonstrate how they have been designed to incorporate measures to adapt to climate change. The following measures should be incorporated:
  - i. New buildings should maximise the opportunities for both natural heating and ventilation and reducing exposure to wind and other elements;
  - ii. Proposals involving new or existing buildings should demonstrate how their design maximises resistance and resilience to climate change. Measures shall include solar shading, thermal mass, heating and ventilation of the building and appropriately coloured materials in areas exposed to direct sunlight, green and brown roofs, and green walls;
  - iii. Use of trees and other planting should provide shading of amenity areas, buildings, and streets and to help to connect habitat, designed with native plants that are carefully selected, managed and adaptable to meet the predicted changed climatic conditions;
  - iv. All development proposals should demonstrate that there is sufficient utility infrastructure available or could feasibly be provided such that supply to the Neighbourhood Plan Area is not compromised;
  - v. All development proposals should minimise surface water runoff to prevent off-site flooding through design of a multifunctional Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS), having regard to the 'SuDS Guide for Essex and where possible, include measures to address increased flood risks due to climate change. All proposals for SuDS should include arrangements for the whole life management and maintenance;
  - vi. A fittings-based approach should be taken to improve water efficiency in buildings. Proposals for residential developments that achieve a water efficiency standard of 100 litres/person/day or better will be supported. Non-residential development should meet Category Wat 01 of BREEAM for water consumption. Support will be given, where feasible to recycle grey water and rainwater harvesting; and
  - vii. New development will be supported where it is designed and built to Net Zero Carbon (in operation) having regard to Policy NZ1 set out in the Greater Essex Planning Policy Position for Net Zero Carbon Development. The use of low embodied carbon materials, assessed through a Whole Life Cycle Carbon Assessment, should be prioritised. With regard to reducing upfront embodied carbon emissions from new development, reference should be made to the findings and recommended targets set out in the Essex Embodied Carbon Policy Study (June, 2024).

### 4.4.2 *Energy efficiency – retrofitting and heritage*

- 4.4.2.1 With over 200 poorly insulated heritage buildings, many others over 50 years old and an almost total reliance on oil boilers, there is significant scope to improve energy efficiency in the NPA. It is therefore imperative that development or refurbishment of all types, seeks to minimise energy footprints and maximise use of renewable sources. Given the nature of local housing stock, this should include redevelopment work on heritage buildings.
- 4.4.2.2 NPPF requirements to conserve the historical environment have previously meant that proposals for solar panels or heat pumps have either been refused or been subject to lengthy planning applications. Modern solar panel designs and new extremely slimline heritage-sensitive double-glazing mean that such innovations are far less obtrusive than their predecessors. Similarly, the noise impact of heat pumps can now be effectively mitigated. Given improvements in design, there is scope to relax the restrictions on the introduction of energy efficient glazing, solar panels, or heat pumps, subject to the safeguarding of heritage assets.
- 4.4.2.3 41% of Neighbourhood Plan Residents supported the sensitive relaxation of restrictions on energy efficiency improvements on heritage buildings.

### Policy FW3: Retrofitting historic buildings for energy efficiency

The sensitive retrofitting of energy efficiency (including glazing) and renewable energy generation measures that serve historic buildings will be encouraged, including the retrofitting of listed buildings and buildings in Conservation Areas, provided it safeguards their historic character and setting having regard to the Essex Design Guide.

#### 4.4.3 *Wildlife friendly design*

- 4.4.3.1 The Environment Act 2021 (supported by Braintree Local Plan Section 2 Policy LPP52 (Layout and Design of Development) requires all types of development to generate a 10% biodiversity net gain for all types and sizes of development.
- 4.4.3.2 The design of buildings, gardens and green and open spaces can contribute to biodiversity and habitat regeneration through careful selection of mixed species of flora that suit the landscape and historic character of a place. Planting of nectar-rich plants can support bees and other pollinators and thereby encourage other forms of wildlife. Fauna biodiversity can also be enhanced through relatively simple measures including: Integral bird and bat boxes under the building eaves; artificial nests sited away from windows and doors; and holes in boundaries between dwellings can allow hedgehogs to roam freely.
- 4.4.3.3 The Neighbourhood Plan encourages development to go much further than thresholds required by national legislation through effective designs, layouts and by placing biodiversity at the heart of development sites. Development is encouraged to be informed by the full list of considerations in Natural England’s ‘Green Infrastructure Framework 2023’<sup>146</sup>.

### Policy FW4: Wildlife Friendly Development

- A. All development proposals are required to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain in line with national policy. Development which delivers more than the current of minimum 10% is supported.
- B. Development should ensure that existing habitats and species are protected and enhanced. The inclusion of design features into new development that encourages local wildlife to thrive and proposals to create or enhance existing green wildlife corridors are encouraged.
- C. As part of its requirements to demonstrate Biodiversity Net Gain, development should be designed, where possible, to retain trees, shrubs, and hedgerows of arboricultural, habitat and amenity value on-site and to conserve and enhance connectivity to the wider multifunctional green and blue<sup>f</sup> infrastructure networks<sup>g</sup>.

<sup>f</sup> Blue infrastructure is defined as rivers, canals, ponds, wetlands, floodplains, and water treatment facilities that regulate water quality and quantity, reduce flood risk, support biodiversity, and offer recreational opportunities. <https://online.aub.ac.uk/resources/whats-green-and-blue-infrastructure-planning#:~:text=By%20providing%20equitable%20access%20to%20green%20and%20blue%20spaces,%20infrastructure>

<sup>g</sup> The NPPF defines green infrastructure as “A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity’.  
<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/downloads/Green%20Infrastructure%20Standards%20for%20England%20Summary%20v1.1.pdf#:~:text=simplify%20and%20clarify%20the%20green%20infrastructure%20that%20is%20required%20for>

## 4.5 Natural resource management

### *Land:*

- 4.5.1 The relationship between land and landowners is a complex and changing one, influenced by demand for food and leisure, and government policy and climate change. Whilst post-WWII policy encouraged agricultural intensification and the removal of hedgerows in a rush to improve productivity, the balance of priorities is now shifting once again.
- 4.5.2 With an abundance of Grade 2 (very good quality) and Grade 3 (good quality) agricultural land, the East of England has long been the breadbasket of the country<sup>147 148</sup>. It still accounts for over a quarter of UK barley and wheat production, nearly two-thirds of sugar beet, and one third of the pig population<sup>149</sup>. Most agricultural land in the NPA is Grade 2 and most of the Grade 3 land is in the Pant Valley.
- 4.5.3 Arable farming remains a key pillar of our local economy and landscape but in the face of increasing pressure from climate change, regulatory uncertainty, ageing farmers and market competition, landowners are having to diversify<sup>150</sup>. This has implications for planning policy.
- 4.5.4 Conversion of farm buildings for tourist accommodation, the rearing of alternative livestock and sale of land for non-agricultural uses are already subject to existing policies outlined in BDC's Local Plan. However, recent changes in Government policy regarding nature regeneration may warrant some useful clarification in this Neighbourhood Plan.
- 4.5.5 Under the Environment Act 2021<sup>151</sup>, the Government initiated a series of measures designed to encourage the use of marginal land for nature regeneration, as well as sustainable food production on productive land. The Environmental Land Management Schemes includes the Sustainable Farming Incentive which rewards sustainable food production; Countryside Stewardship which rewards farmers for improving biodiversity, habitat, and water; and bespoke large scale Landscape Recovery Schemes. The restriction of some payments to a maximum of 25% of a farm's land area<sup>152</sup> may appear to restrict farmers of unproductive land from accessing some funding but this should not necessarily prohibit change of use to nature regeneration from a planning perspective. For example, the instance where landowners seek to sell Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) 'credits' to developers.
- 4.5.6 BNG aims to minimise the ecological impacts of developments by ensuring a measurable minimum *increase* of biodiversity of at least 10%. Some LPAs require more than this, but this does not yet apply in Braintree. Since February, 2024 BNG has become mandatory for large developers and will soon apply to all others. Biodiversity is measured as BNG "units" using standardised DEFRA metrics which assess the impact of a development in terms of habitat area; condition; distinctiveness; and strategic significance. If it is not possible to achieve BNG onsite, developers can buy BNG units from projects within the same LPA or National Character Area (NCA). If there are insufficient local units, they must be bought from further away which is more expensive for the developer. The developer and the 'seller' of the BNG units sign a contract whereby the seller legally binds land to nature delivery for 30 years.<sup>153</sup>
- 4.5.7 Within the NPA some landowners have adopted a range of approaches to regenerate nature, including sale of BNG units. Local nature regeneration projects include the Wildfell Centre for Environmental Recovery<sup>154</sup>; agro-forestry, wetland creation and the reintroduction of beavers as part of local natural habitat enhancement and flood management at Spains Hall<sup>155</sup>. Several members of the North Essex Farm Cluster throughout the Pant Valley are carrying out habitat, pond, and river restoration in conjunction with ECC, Essex and Suffolk Water, Anglian Water, RSPB, and the Environment Agency<sup>156</sup>.
- 4.5.8 Whilst this Neighbourhood Plan is generally very supportive of efforts to promote diversification and regeneration, in an agricultural area such as ours there is a need to ensure that agricultural land is not simply lost by stealth but for land to be subject to genuine well managed initiatives to preserve our landscape. Enclosing a piece of land with hedges and trees should not render it eligible for alternative non-agricultural uses (including building development) after a period on the basis that the existing use is pasture, when it is still agricultural land. It is also important to support our local landowners to produce food sustainably and enhance our resilience to climate and economic change. Therefore, the planning system should explicitly consider these matters and make an informed and balanced decision based on the lawful existing use. This would ensure that changes of use are properly assessed by the planning system and that good quality agricultural land can be protected.

## Policy FW5: Land Management for Farming and Nature

- A. Proposals for conversion of agricultural land to nature recovery may constitute a material change of use. Such proposals will be supported in principle where there is biodiversity net gain, no substantial loss of Grade 1 or 2 agricultural land and where the character of the landscape can be maintained or enhanced.
- B. Support will be given to proposals that improve access to the countryside.
- C. Development proposals are expected to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain in line with national policy. Development which delivers significantly more than the minimum legal requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain or contributes to delivery of the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy within the Neighbourhood Plan Area will be strongly supported.

### *Water:*

- 4.5.9 Residents in the NPA are already aware of issues regarding the reliability of water supply. Local roads are often closed to allow pipe repair, resulting in substantial traffic flow disruption. In addition, residents experience flooding on local roads as rainfall becomes more intense and less predictable due to the impacts of Climate Change. However, residents may be less aware of other water-related issues.
- 4.5.10 ECC predicts that Essex will have a short-fall of one-third of its daily water needs in the next 25 years<sup>157</sup>. ECC's strategy to address this includes several measures to support land use change and increase natural green infrastructure<sup>158</sup>. Current issues with the flow of Finchingfield Brook through the centre of the village are an early indication of the need to prepare and adapt. Finchingfield Parish Council has formed a working committee to develop a 50-year strategy to manage the iconic village pond. This foresightful multi-capital approach may be an interesting model to explore.
- 4.5.11 The need to do so arises because the issue with water is much more widespread. Situated at the heart of the Pant and Blackwater catchment, our NPA is in one of the few current inter-catchment public water supply systems in England. The River Pant forms part of the Ely-Ouse water transfer scheme<sup>159</sup>. Recognition of the importance of local waterways has led Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust, Essex and Suffolk Water and the Environment Agency to commission a large-scale hydro-geomorphological survey of the Rivers Pant and Blackwater to improve policy makers' understanding of the rivers' characteristics and impacts<sup>160</sup>.
- 4.5.12 Maintaining the health of our waterways is a fundamental necessity but current land management practices may already be having an impact. Data from the Environment Agency suggests that pollutant levels at Wethersfield Mill are already very high<sup>161</sup>. This may be due to ongoing run-off from agricultural land, sewage dumping or even an historical legacy from the airbase<sup>162</sup>. Water quality in Bourne Brook which rises near the airbase is classified as 'poor'<sup>163</sup>. Whilst some of these issues may be covered under national and local planning policies, (for example flood risk), there is scope for further clarity to alleviate public concerns regarding water supply and quality. This is included in Action FW1 (p27).

### *Dark skies:*

- 4.5.13 To continue to experience truly dark skies requires sensitively designed development which does not generate significant light pollution. Inappropriate lighting can have a significant impact on the environment, habitat, sensitive species, and landscape disruption. There is considerable government guidance on the importance of avoiding light pollution<sup>164</sup> and Braintree Local Plan Policy LPP77 (External lighting) has a series of requirements to ensure that external lighting (either within developments or stand-alone lighting schemes) should meet a series of criteria to ensure that the intrinsically dark landscape is retained. It is therefore not considered that a Neighbourhood Plan policy is required.

## 4.6 Social inclusion: Local Green Spaces

- 4.6.1 Under the NPPF, Neighbourhood Plans can designate Local Green Spaces (LGS) which are of particular importance to the public. Designating a LGS will afford protection from development other than in very special circumstances. Over 6,500 LGSs were designated in the UK 2012-22 covering 30,000 acres<sup>165</sup>.
- 4.6.2 Our Residents' survey highlighted the amenity and intrinsic value that residents attach to a LGS. This is reinforced by academic research which suggests a strong link between health and well-being, place attachment and relatively small green spaces, not just large fields, or woods<sup>166</sup>.
- 4.6.3 Paragraph 106 of the NPPF defines LGS designation criteria as follows:
- In reasonable proximity to the community, it serves;
  - demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
  - local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.
- 4.6.4 There are ten such spaces in the NPA described below (Figure 28-30). Photographs and a map of their locations can be found on the Policies Map in Appendix VII.
- 4.6.5 These public open spaces are enjoyed for their opportunities for sport, recreation and as meeting places for a range of activities. Naturally, the playing fields are used for outdoor sport such as football and cricket but also for social and cultural events such as fetes, musical gatherings, parties, outdoor play, use of associated hall/pavilion for meetings, childcare etc. All playing fields in the NPA are on the edge of villages outside development boundaries between the built-up village and open countryside but each perform a central role in village life.
- 4.6.6 It is important that as part of the enjoyment and experience of these spaces that visual amenity is protected and views across them and to adjacent open countryside or heritage assets are safeguarded. Views looking out of these areas into surrounding open countryside reinforce a strong sense of tranquillity and enhance recreational experience and enjoyment of their surroundings.
- 4.6.7 Careful control of development on these open spaces can assist in safeguarding the rural setting of the villages and help define how their designated heritage assets can be experienced. Protection of views across the playing fields would not only help to retain the open rural character of village setting but also protect their important integration and role in village life. The village greens have for centuries acted as focal points within the historic core of villages and those at Wethersfield and Finchingfield have assumed national significance for their historic role and visual attraction to tourists. These spaces too should be protected from unsympathetic physical change and views to and from them be safeguarded from harm.



Figure 28: Local Green Spaces 1-2

**LGS 1 & 2: Blackmore End has two small village greens (North & South).** Both have benches providing somewhere to sit, reflect and enjoy the historic buildings in the village. These are important as they form important open spaces in the village. Both are easily accessible to the community and both protect and preserve the historic landscape setting of Blackmore End.

**LGS 3 Blackmore End Playing fields** provide recreational opportunities and a space for the community to come together. There is play equipment and a football pitch plus green space and meadow with benches which are important for health and well-being with views to the rear across the countryside beyond. The space is also used frequently for local community events which include a fireworks display; kids' fun days; and picnics. A beacon is lit on special occasions such as Royal coronations.

**LGS4 Derek Flannery Memorial Playing Field** is the only facility of its type in the village offering football, cricket, tennis and pétanque facilities. It also provides for outdoor fitness sessions and has children's play equipment. Benches offer outstanding views over the countryside. The space is also used frequently for community events, including the Coronation Picnic in the Park, and a Fun-Day and Music Festival. There is also a beacon which is lit on special occasions.



**Figure 29: Local Green Spaces 3-6**

**LGS5 Wethersfield Village Green** offers an historical village green setting, with benches for seating which provide views of the historic core of the village and several heritage buildings. It is used regularly for community events in conjunction with the Village Hall, including Remembrance Day and the Nativity display. The village Christmas tree is placed here every year.

**LGS6 Cornish Hall End Playing fields** provides a recreational space for community events, such as the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations. It also has some play equipment for children that is well used.

**LGS7 Finchingfield Village Green** is an iconic village green setting in the village. It has seating and views of the historic village centre, the pond, and many listed buildings. It is used for community events and by tourists and day visitors. Outside Winners Cafe there is an old water pump and a village tourist map.

**LGS8 Finchingfield Playing Fields** are well-used predominantly by Finchingfield Rovers Football Club. It also has a playground with play equipment, tennis court, outdoor fitness equipment a building with changing rooms and toilets and a seating area. The Parish Council has recently submitted a Planning application to install a BMX track on part of the site<sup>167</sup>.

**LGS9 Finchingfield Green** is a communal green space with a tulip tree planted by USAF personnel to commemorate their service at the Wethersfield Airbase. There are also two memorial benches, one commemorating Sir E.A. Ruggles-Brise and the other Maureen Gunary.

**LGS10 The Pightle** is a small area of publicly owned land in a withdrawn quiet position close to the centre of Finchingfield. It is an historical amenity space, adjacent to an ancient lane and important to the setting of the Grade I listed St John the Baptist Church.

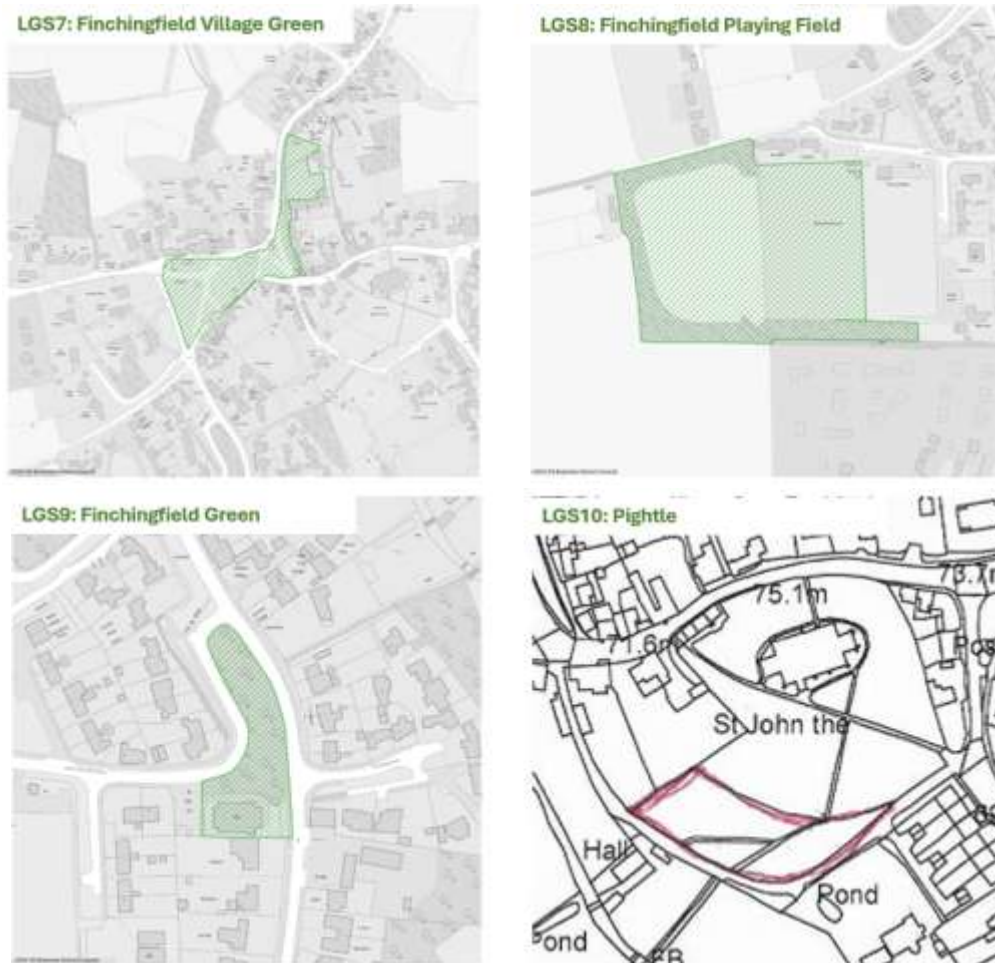


Figure 30: Local Green Spaces 7-10

**Policy FW6: Local Green Spaces**

- A. The following areas are designated as Local Green Spaces: Blackmore End north green; Blackmore end south green; Blackmore End Playing Fields; Derek Flannery Memorial Playing Field; Wethersfield Village Green; Cornish Hall End Playing Fields; Finchingfield Village Green; Finchingfield Playing Field; Finchingfield Green, Pightle
- B. Proposals for development on or adjacent to Local Green Spaces will only be permitted if the proposal is ancillary to its use as an open space and it can be clearly demonstrated that it is required to support or enhance the role and function of that space. Any development that, by reason of design, scale, use or appearance, would cause harm to views within, out of or into a Local Green Space will not be permitted.

## 5 Design, character and heritage

### 5.1 Built Character

- 5.1.1 The NPPF makes clear that creating high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. “Plans should, at the most appropriate level, set out a clear design vision and expectations, so that applicants have as much certainty as possible about what is likely to be acceptable. Design policies should be developed with local communities so they reflect local aspirations, and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area’s defining characteristics. Neighbourhood planning groups can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in development, both through their own plans and by engaging in the production of design policy, guidance and codes by local planning authorities and developers.”<sup>168</sup>
- 5.1.2 The National Model Design Code identifies 12 different coding types for different settlement character types of which 2 apply to the NPA: ‘Villages’ and ‘Rural Settlements’. The special qualities of our villages and rural settlements are examined in this section, to define what elements make up the character of our area and what quality of design is appropriate to sustain the character of the area. The National Design Guide explains “The underlying purpose for design quality and the quality of new development at all scales is to create well-designed and well-built places that benefit people and communities.”

#### *Historical evolution*

- 5.1.3 The villages of Finchingfield and Wethersfield parishes are spatially similar and have some key characteristics that help define their settlement character. At the heart of the communities are nucleated villages built around a historic core. In the hinterland of the villages is an array of individual homes and farmsteads.
- 5.1.4 The Chapman and Andre Map of Essex dated 1777 (Figure 31) shows 30 identifiable buildings clustered around the green and Church in Wethersfield, and 35 identifiable buildings clustered around the green, pond, Church, and Guildhall. In terms of land area, the main villages have expanded 10-fold since the late 18th century. Much of this expansion has been in the form of piecemeal consolidation of the core and outward spread along the main roads and lanes that emanate from the core. Notably there are relatively few Victorian buildings in either village suggesting that economic activity in that period was focused away from the villages and towards local towns.



Figure 31: Extracts from Chapman and Andre Maps of 1777<sup>169</sup>

- 5.1.5 After the 1930s organic growth was replaced by large scale private and public housebuilding by developers and small builders to help service a nationwide housing need arising from the post war population boom. In both Finchingfield and Wethersfield this resulted in significant enlargement of the settlements which was mostly absorbed by the encroachment into surrounding agricultural land to form housing estates. In Wethersfield new estates of mostly family sized houses were constructed on the north and west sides of the central core, and in Finchingfield a similar, but less significant expansion occurred on the west side. Finchingfield also experienced a long ribbon of development on the north side of Wethersfield Road. The smaller villages of Blackmore End, Beazley End and Cornish Hall End also saw mostly ribbon development during this period.
- 5.1.6 Up until the early 1900's both settlements retained their nucleated forms as businesses established themselves in and around the central core to provide services, and individual homes were built to meet the needs of an expanding, mostly local population. Limited geographic mobility means that day to day needs of the population were primarily served within the villages, and shops and services proliferated.
- 5.1.7 In subsequent years improvements in transport facilitated access to other settlements and the relative decline of localised retail businesses. Wethersfield retained 14 or so different retail businesses until the 1990's but these had largely disappeared after the closure of the airbase. Finchingfield has performed better in its retention of local retail offerings and services and still has 12 retail businesses within the public realm.

*Evidence: Analytical framework*

- 5.1.8 These patterns of growth have resulted in a mixture of layouts and frontages that define the character of the built form of the NPA. All the main sections of the villages within the plan area were examined and it was found that the dominant character is best illustrated by analysing the townscape of Finchingfield and Wethersfield.
- 5.1.9 To particularise their special character, these parts of the townscape have been called the key 'character' frontages and have been identified because they represent the distinctiveness of the plan area and encapsulate the variety of designs, styles, scale, materiality, and juxtapositions that are to be found in the whole.
- 5.1.10 They include the built forms that are typical of each village and contain the many different types of buildings that our surveys found were also the most loved by each community. Buildings chosen include a variety of uses from private residential to commercial and community.
- 5.1.11 The key character frontages are also, not surprisingly, to be found at the heart of the conservation areas. These are not comprised exclusively of heritage buildings but also include more recent aged buildings that are also typical of the character of the built environment.
- 5.1.12 The key character frontages comprise approximately 37 individual properties in Finchingfield and 31 in Wethersfield making a total sample of 68 properties (Figure 32).



Figure 32: OS map extracts marked to show key character frontages studied in this plan<sup>170</sup>.

- 5.1.13 This data has been analysed using the Oxford City Council Character Assessment Toolkit<sup>171</sup> created in partnership with English Heritage and a building-by-building photographic survey. The result has been used to compile a series of illustrations that show the dominant themes and have been used to measure heights and identify materials and groupings.
- 5.1.14 Whilst this analysis is primarily concerned with the built-up areas of the villages and rural settlements as defined by the National Model Design code, much of the analysis in terms of materials, shapes and scale of buildings applies equally to the character of buildings in the open countryside.
- 5.1.15 The findings are presented in terms of: Spatial character of the settlements; Architectural Styles; Proximity and Grouping of Buildings; Size and Scale of properties; Roofs; Wall Construction and Fenestration; Materials; Details; Buildings in Open Countryside; Wethersfield Airbase; Other considerations.

#### *Spatial character of the settlements*

- 5.1.16 Both villages have centrally located green spaces, and Finchingfield additionally has its picturesque pond. Both settlements have churches set back from the main frontage, surrounded by well-kept graveyards, each being an important component in the views around the public realm as they occupy the higher ground and are visible from many vantage points. Wethersfield church spire is visible from many points, including long landscape views (Figure 33).
- 5.1.17 A clear difference in the spatial character of the two villages is that the buildings in Wethersfield's character frontages are predominantly set immediately behind the footpath close to the carriageway, whereas in Finchingfield they are often set behind some form of green space. In the key character frontages 50% of Finchingfield's properties are set behind communal green space, whereas in Wethersfield the occurrence is only 20% suggesting that Wethersfield's spatial character is more compact.



**Figure 33: View of Wethersfield church spire from the northeast<sup>172</sup>**

#### *Architectural Styles*

- 5.1.18 Both parish churches are built from flint rubble and dressed with stone and brick and are mainly 12th to early 15th century. These churches are recognised as being fine examples of their type and stand apart, in terms of style, from the other buildings that cluster around them.
- 5.1.19 Most buildings in the villages display a local vernacular style, mainly comprising buildings that were built by local people using locally available materials. Most of these are ordinary private dwellings. Retail premises and places of congregation and community use completing the mix, and date from the medieval period up to the early 19th century. Vernacular houses tend to be smaller, tightly grouped and timber framed with painted render facades. Amongst the vernacular buildings are Georgian and occasional Victorian houses where red brick is more commonly seen and the scale of these buildings are more prominent in the street scene. Whilst most vernacular buildings are ordinary houses, there are some exceptional houses and buildings, such as the Finchingfield Guildhall dating from circa 1500.

5.1.20 This mixture of architectural styles spans many centuries and is a vital part of our local distinctiveness. Of Finchingfield, Pevsner says: “Finchingfield Village is more often illustrated in journals and calendars than any other in Essex and rightly so. It is the picture book village of completeness not often found.” Of Wethersfield Pevsner says: “though less celebrated than Finchingfield, in its way is visually just as satisfying. Whereas Finchingfield is very concentrated, Wethersfield is spread out and runs up and down diverse hills.”

#### Proximity and Grouping of Buildings

5.1.21 An important aspect of the character of the built environment of the villages is the way buildings relate to each other. Almost 80% of buildings in Finchingfield and Wethersfield are orientated flank on to the highway which means their ridges run parallel with the highway, whereas 20% are gable end on to the highway. In both villages most buildings are attached: in Finchingfield 65% of properties are attached to another and in Wethersfield this proportion is even higher at 72%. Detached properties within the built-up area are less common (Figure 34).

5.1.22 This close-grained mix of proximities, when combined with the variety in heights, styles and finishes makes for an intensely varied mix that is a key part of the village character.



Figure 34: Proximity and Grouping of Buildings<sup>173</sup>

#### Size and Scale of properties

5.1.23 In the Finchingfield key character sample, 84% of properties are two storeys, 13% are three storeys, and only 4% single storey. In Wethersfield the proportion of two storey properties is the same at 84% and the remainder, 16% are three storeys.

5.1.24 The overall height of two storey properties in Finchingfield ranges between 6.8m and 10.4m, (average 8.38m), with eaves heights ranging from 3m to 7.2m (average 4.83m). This large range in typical eaves heights reflects the mix of architectural styles in Finchingfield with the dominant characteristic of properties (40%) being low eaves with dormer windows to the upper storey (Figure 35).

5.1.25 On average two storey properties are taller in Finchingfield than Wethersfield, which can be observed by a higher incidence of steeply pitched roofs. In Wethersfield the overall height of 2 story properties ranges from 6.3m to 9.5m averaging 7.9m, with eaves heights of between 3.14m to 6.7m averaging 5m. The incidence of dormer style roofs is less in Wethersfield (22%) (Figure 36).

5.1.26 The overall height of three storey properties in Finchingfield ranges between 8.6m and 9.9m, averaging 9.46m, with eaves heights ranging from 4.2m to 7.7m, averaging 5.4m. In Wethersfield the overall height of three storey properties ranges from 9.5m to 11.5m averaging 10.26m, with eaves heights ranging from

5.1m to 8.8m and averaging 6.74m. There are a greater proportion of three storey properties in Wethersfield and these properties are taller and have higher eaves than those in Finchingfield reflecting the lower incidence of roofs with dormers.

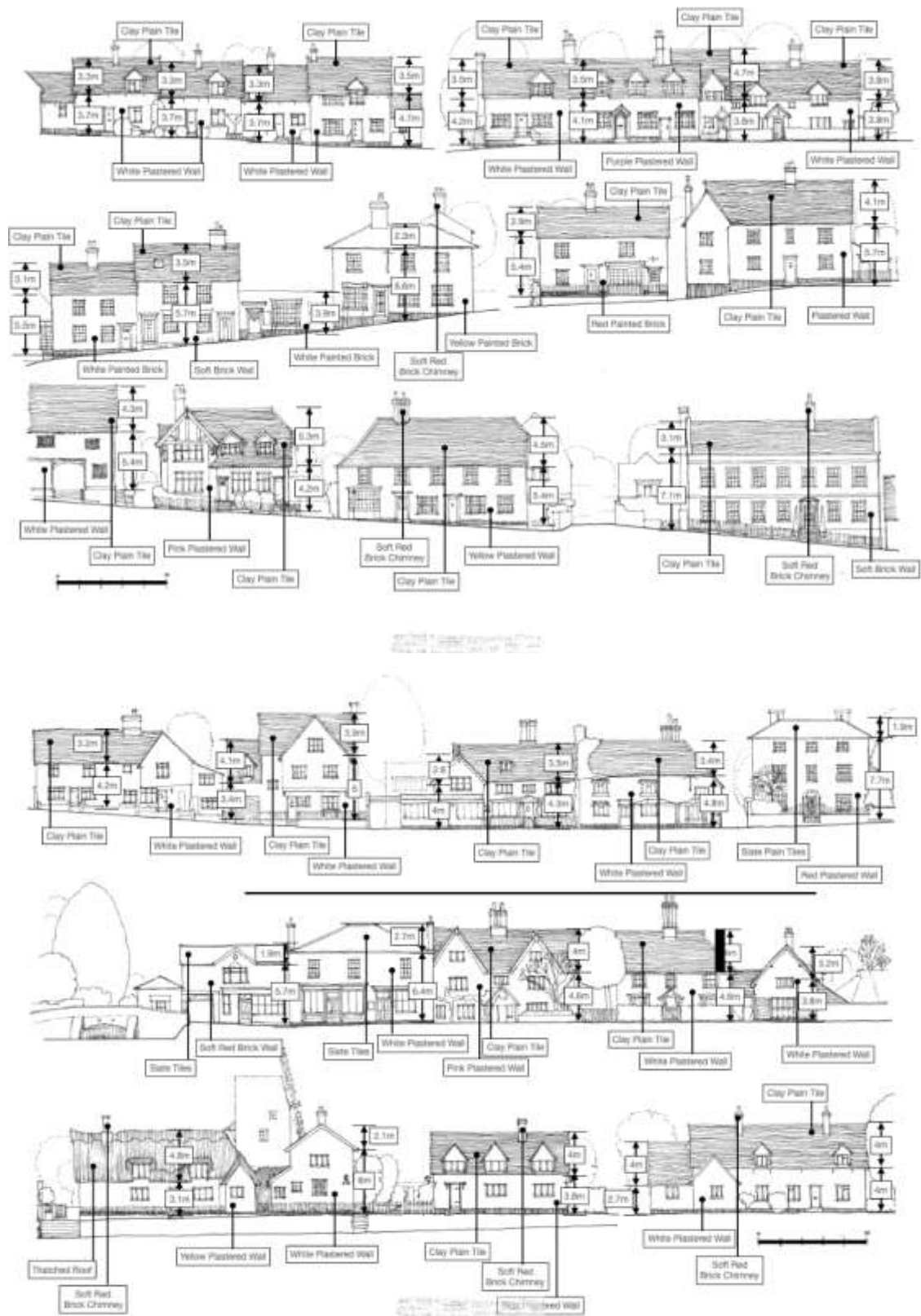


Figure 35 Finchingfield Character Frontages<sup>174</sup>

5.1.27 In both key character samples, the depth of overhanging eaves is a consistent feature, and both villages have average overhang between 250-300mm. In Finchingfield the eaves detail is predominantly exposed rafter feet with bracketed projecting gutters (60%). In Wethersfield the predominant eaves detail is painted soffit boards (68%). In the Finchingfield key character sample, 84 percent of properties are two storey, 13 percent three storey, and only 4 percent single storey. In Wethersfield the proportion of two storey properties is the same (84%) and the remainder are 3 storey (16%).

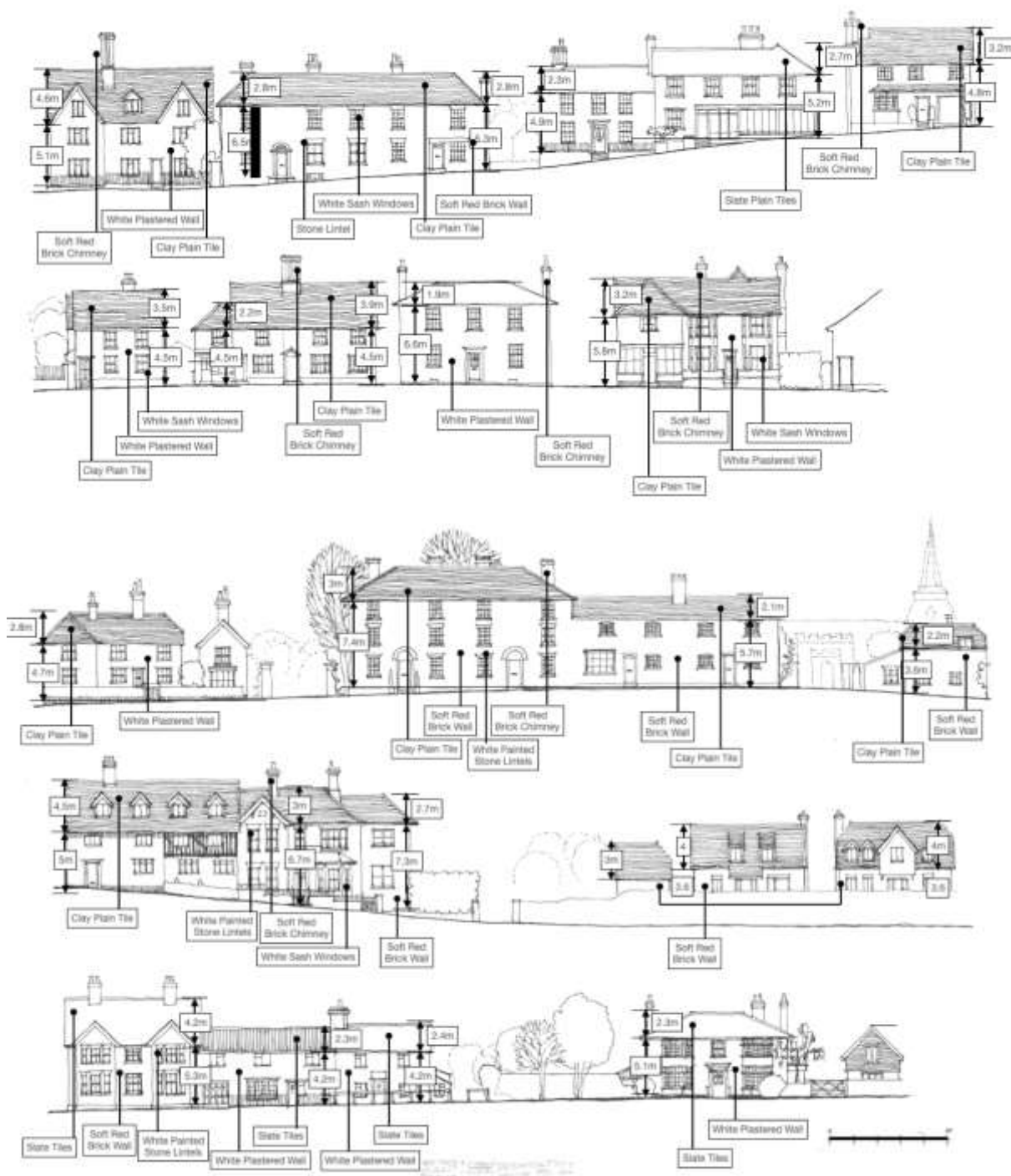


Figure 36 Wethersfield Character Frontages<sup>175</sup>

### Roofs

- 5.1.28 There are two predominant roofing styles in the Finchingfield and Wethersfield key character samples - clay plain tiles and natural slate.
- 5.1.29 In Finchingfield the main roofing material is clay plain tiles (81%) and the roof pitch ranges from 40 to 50 degrees averaging 44 degrees. In Wethersfield, clay plain tile is also the main roofing material (67%) but average pitch is slightly lower averaging 42 degrees. Slate is used more often in Wethersfield (29%) and these roofs have pitches ranging from 20 to 32 degrees averaging 26 degrees. Thatched roofs are fewer in number and the steepest pitch. Because of the more compact nature of the built environment in Wethersfield, and because there are fewer steep roofs, the roofscape is less apparent than in Finchingfield where the roofs are both higher, steeper and are more visible in the overall character.

### Wall Construction and Fenestration

- 5.1.30 Finchingfield and Wethersfield have a high proportion of timber framed buildings, and this is reflected in building materials used for their construction. Most buildings in Finchingfield are finished with painted render (81%) and of these a quarter feature decorative pargetting. The remainder (19%) are constructed from brick, and just over half are finished in soft red brick and just under half have been painted (is likely that soft red brick is beneath the painted façade). In Wethersfield the proportion of painted render is less (61%) and brick is more commonly used (35%) with most of these being soft red brick and fewer than 20% of these being painted brick.
- 5.1.31 Windows in both villages are made from timber and almost exclusively painted white. In Finchingfield there is a genuine mixture of fenestration styles with most properties having either Georgian style eight or six panel sliding sashes, six panel casements, or pairs of casements with single glazing or leaded panes and some with gothic arched heads. Some of these are original to the period of the property and some are modern equivalents.



Figure 37 Wethersfield typical window types<sup>176</sup>



Figure 38 Finchingfield typical window types<sup>177</sup>

5.1.32 In Wethersfield the Georgian style eight or six panel sliding sashes are more typical (45%) and a higher proportion are original to the age of the property. White is the dominant colour for the window decoration and all the red brick-built houses in the key character samples also have white painted stone lintols which is a distinguishing feature in Wethersfield (20%). In rendered facades properties in the character area have flared drips above the window heads, often dressed with lead (Figures 37 and 38).

5.1.33 The ratio of void to solid in the main typical facades is 20%. Occasionally this rises to 34% when there is a former shop window or similar feature in the facade. This is an important metric of local character and should be observed on the main elevation when new buildings are designed. On rear elevations the ratio can be more related to allow more generous use of glass and greater connection between the home garden. Additionally, the void to solid ratio is affected by the depth of window reveals and the size of window cills. Window openings in brick facades in our study have generous depth often with a dual cill with thick solid cast main cills and smaller timber cills set over and it is important to maintain this detailing. Rendered facades have windows set more flush with the facade and cills are less generous (Figure 39).



Figure 39 Typical void to solid ratios<sup>178</sup>

#### Materials

5.1.34 The following palette of materials make up the key ‘character’ frontages: Soft red brick (chimneys, walls and plinths); Red clay plain tiles with red clay semi round ridges and hip tiles (matt clay finish); Blue/Black natural Slate with blue black angled ridges; Natural lead (roofing details and small paned glazing); White and black painted barge boards and fascias (brick houses); Painted medium grit semi smooth render (painted in a range of colours); Pargetted render (painted natural/sand colour); Black render and black painted brick plinths; White painted window frames; Black rainwater goods on rafter brackets (timber frames properties) and fixed to timber fascias (brick houses); Weatherboarding

#### Details

5.1.35 This distinctive palette of materials is a fundamental part of the character of our villages (Figure 40). One of the key aspects of the character is that none of the materials occur together repeatedly. Materials are rarely used in the same combination for more than two properties in a row and where more occur the variety is maintained by changes in ridge lines, eaves lines and fenestration. This variety, combined with changes in plan form and juxtaposition, ensure the distinctive tapestry of materials, shapes, and forms.



Figure 40 Typical building materials<sup>179</sup>

5.1.36 Within the palette of materials there are several special details which, whilst not commonplace, add highlights of local distinctiveness (Figure 41, below).



Figure 41 Details <sup>180</sup>

- 5.1.37 Both Wethersfield and Finchingfield have buildings that have good examples of pargetting. Usually associated with north Essex and Suffolk, pargetting can range from simple panels and ‘coachlines’ scored into the surface of the plaster to relief patterns modelled onto the surface.
- 5.1.38 Barge boards normally made of timber can be both plain with chamfers on the underside, and stepped, or decorative with rolling patterns carved into the timber. Sometimes these are combined with decorative details to the rafter ends.
- 5.1.39 Slate and plain tile roofs generally have mortared verges with gently upturned edge courses, and both types of roofs have an eased angle at the eaves which gives a gentle transition in roof plane.
- 5.1.40 Porches are typically designed to match the host building. In Finchingfield and Wethersfield they are generally roofed with plain tiles and pitched side to side with clay bonnet ridges and pitched to match the main roof. Often porches are supported by projecting timber brackets. On brick-built properties porches are less common, and where they are found the predominant style is flat cantilevered projecting canopies covered with lead.
- 5.1.41 Garden walls are predominantly made from soft red bricks, often with flint inserts and red brick on edge capping.
- 5.1.42 Stone lintels painted white are a feature of Wethersfield brick houses. These are generously proportioned (circa 250-300mm in height or 3.5-4 brick courses) with steeply angled ends that taper to meet the window opening.
- 5.1.43 Chimneys are built from soft red brick with clay pots.

### *Buildings and Settlements in Open Countryside*

- 5.1.44 Outside of the principal villages the buildings are characterised by individual homes and farmsteads, and farm buildings. Since the advent of the planning system in the late 1940's building in the open countryside has been restricted, and therefore the character of buildings outside the main settlements is dominated by properties built up until the 18C and early 19C. Typically individual houses set within their own plots tend to have broad facades, flank onto the road, and are shallow in plan with rear extensions set at right angles to the main ridge. Only buildings of prior significance tend to be set back from the carriageway, some with courtyards where they can be found to form part of a quadrangle of buildings such as a working or former farm or manorial home.
- 5.1.45 There are some key differences between the character of open countryside properties and those to be found in the main settlements. Thatched roofs are more common but clay plain tiles are the main roofing material. Timber frames with rendered plaster predominate and there are relatively fewer brick buildings.
- 5.1.46 The exception to this theme is in a small number of 'grand' houses which are more often constructed entirely (or partly) in brick. This is consistent with the notion that brick was a superior building material and therefore represented higher status. Clay plain tiles remain the principal roofing material, and the number of steeply pitched roofs stands as evidence of the number of thatched timber frames that were re-roofed with clay tiles for cost and durability reasons. Painted render remains the dominant wall finish, along with timber boarding which is much more widely used outside the main settlements, in combination with the other materials in the local palette, both painted and black stained. Walls using red brick and flint are often found in former farm clusters – a material that was cleared from the fields after ploughing and recycled as a building material.
- 5.1.47 Buildings in open countryside generally stand alone or form part of small settlements such as hamlets and clusters. The most recognisable spatial form is the farmstead, normally comprising a farmhouse and farm buildings arranged around a yard. Changing farming practices over the last 100 years have resulted in many small farmsteads becoming surplus to farming requirements and these have been successfully converted to residential and other uses. Where barns and outbuildings have been converted, black weatherboarding is the dominant wall finish and both plain tiles and slate are used for roofing depending upon the age of the host building and the roof pitch (Figure 42).



**Figure 42 Typical converted farm building<sup>181</sup>**

### *Wethersfield Airbase*

- 5.1.48 The buildings at Wethersfield Airfield do not conform with the spatial character of the principal settlements; they have a character of their own that is specific to use of the site as a military facility and the formats and materials used by the Americans during their period of tenure. The site and buildings are recognised as a rare example of a WW2 facility that is significantly unspoilt and intact (Figure 43).
- 5.1.49 Most of the buildings are single storey and clad in a mixture of materials. There are three main types: -

- Accommodation buildings: Mostly brick or steel frame with pitched tiled roofs. This group includes a cluster of system-built houses with were built for the families of service personnel. This group is mainly two storeys in height, with two three storey barracks being the tallest.
- Administration buildings: These have a mixture of building types and some have flat roofs whilst others are pitched. They are all single storey.
- Aircraft facilities: These are engineering buildings and hangars designed for aircraft storage and maintenance. Typically, they are steel framed with painted cladding and have large sliding doors for access. These buildings are exclusively single storey with shallow pitched roofs, generally made from matching sheet cladding to the walls. The most dominant is the T2 hangar located at the southern end of the former runway which has a steel portal frame and clad with galvanized steel sheeting painted cream. The T2 hangars cover approximately 2500m<sup>2</sup> and are 7.6m high.



**Figure 43 Airbase buildings<sup>182</sup>**

- 5.1.50 The airfield buildings are clustered in one main area to the south east and smaller secondary area to the south. The main cluster which includes all the accommodation buildings and most of the administration buildings is located by the main entrance off Sculpins Lane. The secondary area is located next to the alternative site entrance of the southern edge of the site.
- 5.1.51 The main cluster is arranged in an organised form much like an American small town or village, with buildings surrounded by grass based on a loose grid of roads which follow the line of a country lane called Scott's Lane, the old country lane that existed before the airfield was built. The overall density is low compared with the main settlements in the parish, and the built-up areas are clearly defined and easily distinguishable from the adjacent large open countryside part of the site where the former runways and run off areas are now gradually being reclaimed by nature.

*Adapted Buildings and extensions.*

- 5.1.52 Where buildings are adapted for other uses. the exiting character has generally been maintained and there are numerous examples of buildings both within the villages and settlements, and in the open countryside that have successfully been adapted for new uses without loss of character. It is important that this approach continues to be supported and the character attributed identified here are applied equally to adapted budlings as they are to new ones.
- 5.1.53 On Wethersfield Airfield there are numerous opportunities to adapt existing and underused buildings for a range of new uses without loss to the original character and there are good precedent examples of how this has been achieved elsewhere (Figure 44).
- 5.1.54 This plan clearly defines the local character so that new and adapted buildings can adhere to these proportions and materials to complement the local vernacular. Respecting all aspects of the settlements and their form, as well as the surrounding countryside, is of fundamental importance to the community.

5.1.55 The communities have clearly defined the local character so that new and adapted buildings complement the local vernacular, respecting all aspects of the settlements and their form, as well as the surrounding countryside, all of which are of fundamental importance to them<sup>183</sup>.



Figure 44 Examples of converted hangars<sup>184</sup>

*Designing out the incidence and perception of crime*

5.1.56 All developments should be designed to be safe and secure and support the prevention of crime in accordance with Braintree Local Plan LP55 (8). Developments should be designed to reduce the likelihood (and the perception and fear) of crime and Anti-social behaviour (ASB).

**Policy FW7: Design & Character**

- A. Development should demonstrate high quality design and layout which respects the prevailing local character. Development of all kinds should demonstrate how the design has been informed by this guidance and reflects the key attributes of local character including, but not limited to, scale, eaves heights, ridge heights, frontage line and variety of these elements.
- B. In delivering high quality design, development proposals should demonstrate the appropriate use of local character roof and wall finishes, roof pitch, fenestration patterns of the principal facades and eaves details.
- C. In delivering high quality design, development proposals should have regard to the palette of local character materials, introducing variety within frontages and the principal facades, and demonstrate the use of typical local details.
- D. Development should integrate with and enhance the form of its existing surroundings, with all connections including road patterns ensuring permeability for cyclists and pedestrians.
- E. Where proposals for residential development are brought forward, developers shall be required to provide evidence that their designs, scale, and layouts, harmonise with and perpetuate local character.
- F. Parking to support all uses should be provided within the development and should include a proportion of well-designed parking provision, having regard to ECC parking standards and should be constructed of permeable surfacing.
- G. Proposals to adapt and repurpose buildings on the site of Wethersfield Airbase shall be considered on their merits and developers shall be requested to demonstrate how the individual style of the historic use of each building has been sympathetically maintained.
- H. In all developments access for emergency services shall be provided.
- I. Developments should be designed to reduce the likelihood of crime and Anti-Social Behaviour in accordance with LP55 and actively seek to reduce the perception and fear of crime.

## 5.2 Heritage

- 5.2.1 The story of our rich agricultural, brick making, brewing, industrial, textile and social history is told through our landscape and buildings across the NPA and the wider district. Braintree district has more timber framed buildings than anywhere else in the country<sup>185</sup>.
- 5.2.2 Heritage assets of all materials are valued because of their interest to current and future generations and form an integral part of our attachment to a place. This may derive from the asset itself, or its setting. Historic England writes, “Local heritage – whether buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas, historic parks and gardens or other designed landscapes – plays an essential role in building and reinforcing a sense of local character and distinctiveness in the historic environment.”<sup>186</sup>
- 5.2.3 Heritage assets can either be ‘*designated*’ or ‘*non-designated*.’ The presence of 232 listed (or *designated*) properties in the NPA (including 4 Grade I listings, 13 Grade II\* and 4 scheduled monuments) is testament to its rich historical character.
- 5.2.4 A national listing affords a degree of legal protection that ensures that these assets are preserved for future generations. BDC has provided an interactive map that shows the wide distribution of Heritage assets in our NPA<sup>187</sup>.
- 5.2.5 However, there may be similar buildings and structures that for various reasons are not listed but may nevertheless be of significant heritage value. These can be identified as *Non-Designated Heritage Assets* (NDHAs) through local Heritage lists, Local and Neighbourhood Plans, conservation area appraisals, and planning application decisions.
- 5.2.6 NDHAs are defined as locally-identified ‘buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas, or landscapes identified by plan making bodies as having a degree of heritage significance meriting consideration in planning decisions but which do not meet the criteria for designated heritage assets’<sup>188</sup>.
- 5.2.7 Historic England Advice Note 11 outlines how Neighbourhood Plan policies can identify NDHAs and set out how planning proposals affecting them will be considered. This allows communities to identify local heritage that they would like recognised and protected. The credibility of this process relies on the fact that Neighbourhood Plans are researched, written, and voted on by the people who live in the neighbourhood and who share a development vision<sup>189</sup>. Our Residents’ survey showed very strong support for our built heritage.
- 5.2.8 The Planning Practice Guide (PPG) highlights the usefulness of ‘any designated and non-designated heritage assets within the plan area [being] clearly identified at the start of the plan-making process so they can be appropriately taken into account’<sup>190</sup>. The NPPF (paragraphs 8 and 184) requires that conservation of heritage assets (designated or non-designated) be considered as a material consideration in planning applications. By adding a list of such assets to the Historic Environment Record (HER) and publishing it on their website, LPAs can make it clear to developers and residents any heritage assets that may affect planning applications<sup>191</sup>.
- 5.2.9 Historic England has defined the following criteria for successful NDHA designation<sup>192</sup>: Asset type; age; rarity; architectural and artistic interest<sup>h</sup>; historic interest<sup>i</sup>; landmark status; or archaeological interest.<sup>j</sup> NDHAs may also be identified if they make a positive contribution to a conservation area and would thereby be protected by controls on demolition under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
- 5.2.10 Several buildings and structures in the NPA match these designation criteria and are described below (Figures 45-51).

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<sup>h</sup> Interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. Architectural interest refers to the art or science of the design and construction of buildings and structures. Artistic interest means creative skills, like sculpture.

<sup>i</sup> Interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Historic heritage assets not only provide a material record of our nation’s history but can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity.

<sup>j</sup> There will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.

5.2.11 As part of the Courtauld legacy, NDHAs 1-4 are a testament to the district's rich textile heritage<sup>193</sup>.



Figure 45 NDHAs 1-4<sup>194</sup>

**NDHA 1 Village Hall and Caretaker's House, Blackmore End:** were built by Samuel Augustine Courtauld in 1925 of red brick under a plain tiled roof. The two-storey house is more ornate with timber framing on the main elevation infilled with brick, a 1st floor bay window, and a timbered gable end. The hall and the playing field were given to the Parish Council by Samuel Augustine Courtauld in 1957. This forms a group of four buildings in the village with the Bronte cottages (1-3) and house formerly named 'Gino'.

**NDHA2 'Charlotte' and 'Emily', Blackmore End:** A pair of two-storey semi-detached houses built by Samuel Augustine Courtauld. The walls are painted render, with red brick door surrounds. The mansard roof is covered with plain tiles and has four dormer windows. Inscribed above the dormer windows are 'SAC' (Samuel Augustine Courtauld) and the date (1929).

**NDHA3: 1-3 Bronte Cottages, Blackmore End:** Three terraced cottages built by Samuel Augustine Courtauld. On the front the ground floor walls are painted render along with the central gabled projection, the entrance to no.2. The first floors are tile-hung and the roof is of plain tiles. Inscribed on the central projection is 'SAC' (Samuel Augustine Courtauld) and the date (1939).

**NDHA4 Quickthorn Cottage (formerly 'Gino'), Gosfield Road, Blackmore End:** Built by Samuel Augustine Courtauld as a farm worker's cottage and designed by friend of his, Roger Pinckney who was a marine architect. It was originally named after Gino Watkins, the arctic explorer who led the British Arctic Air Route Expedition in 1930/31 but drowned in Greenland a year later. A chalet style bungalow with white painted rendered walls under a plain tiled roof and with a brick chimney stack. The dormer window has been modernised and the name changed.

**NDHA5 Hope Brewery site:** NDHA5 is testament to a rich local rural brewing heritage. Although now under separate ownership and uses, this significant complex of buildings on Braintree Road, Wethersfield is still discernible as a distinctive asset of historical and architectural value. It is a rare example of a large rural village brewery complex intact and makes a positive contribution to village character and to an appreciation of its history. The site includes a Brewhouse, former Malthouse (now Village Hall), former brewery owner’s house (now Hillfoot House), and the Brewery Tavern and stables (now a school).

Their recording (but not their designation) on the Essex heritage Gateway reads: *“The Wethersfield Brewery site is a complex of several extant components of a 19th century large, village brewery, which now all have separate ownership and uses. Probably built in the 1840s when Thomas Raven is recorded as the brewer and eventually also a maltster, the business was managed by his wife Elizabeth from 1877 until it was sold to Greene King and Sons Ltd in 1901. Brewing probably continued until after the Second World War”*<sup>195</sup>.

The *Wethersfield Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan* highlights the group value of these buildings thus: *“This grouping is a rare example of a large rural village brewery complex, intact, and of historic and architectural value.”*

**5a Brewery**



**5b Hillfoot House**



**5c Village Hall**



**5d Brewery Tavern**



**Figure 46: NDHA 5 Hope Brewery complex**<sup>196</sup>

The Essex Place Services ‘Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan’ approved by BDC in 2023 acknowledged the architectural and historical significance of this group of buildings<sup>197</sup>.

**NDHA5a The Brewery:** is a three-storey red brick building, under a slate roof with a two-storey eastern extension and a single-storey out-building. There are two full-length round headed windows on the ground floor of the west façade. Most window openings are original. The Brewery was converted to private residential use in 1952.

**NDHA5b Hillfoot House:** is to the south of the malthouse was the brewery owner's house. This is a magnificent double fronted house with a two-storey bay either side of the front door. It is of rendered brick with white brick chimneys and a slate roof.

**NDHA5c Village Hall (former Malthouse):** To the north of the brewhouse is the brewery malthouse, now the village hall. This too is of red brick, two storeys under a slate roof with a lucam on the road front facade (north east). It is in a prominent location within the character area, overlooking The Green. It was gifted to the village for use as a community hall in 1921 and has undergone alterations since, including the erection of a lean-to bus shelter in 1975. The building still makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and has potential for enhancement.

**NDHA5d: The Brewery Tavern** public house (and stables) was built in 1879 of red brick with yellow brick dressings under a slate roof and has much moulded tile decoration, such as on the gable ends, around some of the first-floor windows and marking the top of the first floor. There is a stable building to the rear that it is within the curtilage of the public house of red and yellow brick under a corrugated roof.

**NDHA 6 Wethersfield Manor estate:** is designated in this Plan as an NDHA (as a collection of buildings) due to its significance to local social, economic, and ecclesiastical history. Now comprising several separate residences (Clock House, Coach House, Carol Cottage, East Wing, Fortescue, West Wing, and South Lodge), the Manor estate is not listed but sits within the Wethersfield Conservation Area.



**Figure 47: NDHA 6 Wethersfield Manor estate**

According to the *Wethersfield Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan*<sup>198</sup>, “The Manor House is a significant building within the character and Conservation Area. It consists of an early nineteenth century high status building, displaying several Georgian features, and with a post-war west wing. The Manor House is thought to have originally incorporated the earlier timber framed Dobbins Farmhouse as its western wing, as shown on the 1724 ‘Plan of the Alexandra Palace and Park’ by Bland, Joseph, Parker, Samuel, Smyth, Payler and Warburton, John. A major fire originated in this earlier part of the house in 1933, and while the western wing was rebuilt it is not known how much of the original fabric was retained. The House makes a positive contribution to the character area; it is prominent in the landscape, located on the highest point, allowing inter-visibility between the heritage asset and the wider Conservation Area. It is of local significance to the area, and architectural interest for its distinctive features.”

Through the Manor and its associated buildings, we can trace the personal narratives of its inhabitants. Originally known as Dobbins, the Manor was occupied by wealthy merchants and lawyers from the

1600s until Francis Bythell passed it to Jonathan White in 1736 in recognition for nursing care his mother had provided to Bythell's wife. White lived in the Manor whilst he was Vicar of Wethersfield before passing it onto his nephew Thomas White who made Georgian modifications around 1820. Within 20 years, his son (also Thomas) was Lord of the Manor – prompting the renaming of Dobbins. However, the 1860s saw the demise of the White family fortunes which led to a forced sale to in 1878 to his wealthy brother-in-law William Marsh, another vicar of Wethersfield. In 1904 the Manor was sold to the Fortescue-Flannery family but much of it was destroyed by fire in 1933. Nevertheless, the Manor remains prominent in the landscape, located on the highest point, allowing inter-visibility with the village.

7a Chapel



7b Hangars



7c Aerial view



Figure 48: NDHA 7 Wethersfield Airbase (selected features)

**NDHA 7 Wethersfield Airbase** The integral part played by the Airbase as a whole (including its airfield and structures) in global, national, and local post-WWII history warrants its recording in its entirety as a Non-Designated Heritage Asset. In its conservation assessment in 2023, BDC highlighted “The airfield to the north of the village is also a significant feature which contributes to the area”. A Heritage report completed by Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) for WASC in 2022 noted “Wethersfield is significant for being an authentic and unchanged aspect of USAF nuclear infrastructure of the 1950s-1960s, designed to facilitate NATO Cold War military strategy”<sup>199</sup>. Of note are the Airbase USAF chapel (St Michael’s) (7a) believed to be the first of its kind in the UK when it was consecrated in 1952 and the ‘Victor Alert’ Area – ‘Dutch barn’ hangars which are rare in tact examples of unaltered Cold War quick reaction alert hangars. These housed up to eight nuclear bombers ready to take off at 15 minutes’ notice<sup>200</sup>.

The airbase’s heritage value has led to the recording of the entire site in the EHER. The record describes the Airbase’s unique features including hangars, bomb stores, barracks, a cinema, a gym, and a chapel, as well as runways and aprons<sup>201</sup>. This appreciation of the Airbase’s heritage has been echoed by the Airfields Research Group, ECC and Place Services. ECC, for example noted “the high potential for non-designated heritage assets to survive on the site,” the need for an archaeological survey and the proximity of at least 12 Grade II listed buildings<sup>202</sup>.

In a letter to BDC in 2021, Place Services wrote “Recent guidance from Historic England on Historic Military Aviation Sites recognises the significance and vulnerability of these sites and the potential for conservation of them”<sup>203</sup>. CBA’s analysis on behalf of WASC<sup>204</sup> resulted in the Grade II listing of the Cold War Bomb Storage area by Historic England in 2023 on the basis that they “*characterise the evolution of American/NATO strategy, tactics and technology during the Cold War*” [and] “*embody the strong political ties and co-operation that existed between the United Kingdom and United States (‘the special relationship’)*”<sup>205</sup>.



**Figure 49: NDHA 8 Parsonage Farm** <sup>206</sup>

**NDHA8 Parsonage Farm:** warrants designation as an NDHA due to its social, ecclesiastical, and economic importance to the history of Wethersfield. First recorded by Chapman and Andre in 1777 (Figure 30), ‘The Parsonage’ was home to the local church leader and surrounded by Glebe land owned and managed by the church. The evolution of a small collection of buildings on the site can be traced through tithe maps which reveal a spring fed pond which served as a key water source for the village. It may have also facilitated construction of an C18th bakehouse which provide bread to village residents. Although fire has damaged the original structures, the group value and clustered setting surrounded by farmland and the juxtaposition of the pond remains undiminished – a fact recognised by the inclusion of the renamed ‘Parsonage Farm’ in the 1973 Wethersfield Conservation Area. The heritage significance of Parsonage Farm and pond stems from its group value and spatial form and setting adjacent to the village but surrounded by open farmland and served by a long chase (Figure 49), and by individual elements of architectural historic fabric in the Stables, main Barn and most significantly the Bakehouse.



**Figure 50: Finchingfield bridge**

**NDHA 9 Finchingfield bridge** (Figure 50)<sup>207</sup>: is at the heart of the village and a key part of Finchingfield’s picturesque setting. The enduring appeal of the bridge, green, hostelrys and pond attract residents, tourists, photographers, and artists. Like many old structures, the bridge has evolved through 19th and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries alterations but as Historic England notes, ‘...the bridge is a structure that contributes positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area and the setting of surrounding designated and non-designated buildings; its south elevation features prominently in key views of the village. Its irregular form and humped arch are in keeping with the winding, narrow nature of the street pattern.’ In our Residents’ survey, the bridge was one of the most frequently cited heritage assets people wished to preserve as a feature itself and as part of the wider village vista and appeal.

**NDHA10 Cornish Hall End Village Hall** has a significant place in village culture and social history. Built in 1847 by the Gent family of Moyns Park, a Grade 1 listed Elizabethan mansion in nearby Steeple Bumpstead, the Hall served as a primary school for local children (and evacuees) until its conversion to a Village Hall in the 1950s. Thereafter it has been held in trust for the use by residents in surrounding hamlets and villages. Refurbishment in 2019 entailed skilled renovation of original roof beams and a stained-glass window that restored the Hall to its pride of place at the heart of the local community<sup>208</sup>.



**Figure 51: Cornish Hall End Village Hall<sup>209</sup>**

### Policy FW8: Non-Designated Heritage Assets

The following buildings and structures are identified as having local heritage interest (as broadly defined above) and will therefore be recorded in the Neighbourhood Plan as Non-Designated Heritage Assets to safeguard their historical character.

1. Village Hall and Caretaker's House, Blackmore End
2. 'Charlotte' and 'Emily,' Blackmore End
3. 1-3 Bronte Cottages, Blackmore End
4. Quickthorn Cottage (formerly 'Gino'), Gosfield Road, Blackmore End
5. Hope Brewery complex, Wethersfield (The Brewhouse, Hillfoot House, the Village Hall (former Malthouse); the Brewery Tavern and stables)
6. Wethersfield Manor estate, Wethersfield (Clock House, Coach House, Carol Cottage, East Wing, Fortescue, West Wing, and South Lodge).
7. Wethersfield Airbase (in its entirety)
8. Parsonage Farm, Wethersfield
9. Finchingfield Bridge, Finchingfield
10. Village Hall, Cornish Hall End

A. Proposals will be permitted where they sustain and enhance the significance and the setting of the asset and use appropriate materials and designs.

B. In considering proposals which involve the loss or alteration of a non-designated heritage asset or its setting, consideration will be given to:

- i. Whether the asset is structurally unsound and beyond feasible and viable repair (for reasons other than deliberate damage or neglect); or
- ii. Where a development proposal would result in the loss of, or harm to a non-designated heritage asset, and its setting, a balanced judgement will be made as to the acceptability of the proposal having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset and its setting.

### 5.3 Conservation area

- 5.3.1 The existing boundary of the Wethersfield Conservation Area (WCA) was designated in 1973. A review was undertaken in 2023 as part of the preparation of the Wethersfield Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan which involved substantive revisions. Many residents objected, several changes were requested and several manifest errors were highlighted by Wethersfield Parish Council but not included in the final version. Whilst many of the amendments were supported, it is considered that there are still certain areas which would merit inclusion in the Conservation Area. It will be important that efforts are made to include these additional areas within the Conservation Area and corrections in the text as part of ongoing representations to BDC.

#### **Action 5: Wethersfield Conservation Area**

Wethersfield Parish Council to request that BDC makes appropriate amendments to the boundary of the Wethersfield Conservation Area and make all other corrections as appropriate.

## 6 Rural Landscape character

### 6.1 A valued landscape

- 6.1.1 It is clear from community engagement that protection of the ever-evolving countryside and historic environment within the NPA from inappropriate change remains a priority for residents and visitors. This reflects the high value placed upon our rural landscape, including both open countryside and historic settlements.
- 6.1.2 Protecting our landscape has more than aesthetic appeal. The *Essex Landscape Character Assessment (ELCA)*<sup>210</sup> notes “*Attractive landscape settings, where a strong sense of place and local distinctiveness is maintained and enhanced, are essential to economic and social development and prosperity.*”
- 6.1.3 In planning terms, landscape and value need to be carefully defined. The *European Landscape Convention (ELC)* defines landscape as “*an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and / or human factors.*”<sup>211</sup> Natural England notes, “*our landscapes are extremely important to us, they are part of our cultural heritage.*” Therefore, landscape cannot be understood in isolation or simply by analysing geology or topography. Landscape should be viewed through the lens of communities, writers and artists and observed as it evolves under social, natural, and economic influences over time<sup>212</sup>.
- 6.1.4 As ECC notes, this relationship between people and place is therefore multi-faceted and dynamic: “*The countryside is the product of many factors-climate, topography, soil, the natural communities of plants and animals; above all it reflects the activities of people; their methods of farming, their social and economic organization, the rise and fall of populations, prosperity and depression, their attitude to nature and to landscape. As a result, the countryside has never been static; each age has modified and altered the existing pattern to suit its particular needs, retaining useful features from the past or adapting them to new uses-a continual process of evolution and change*”.<sup>213</sup>
- 6.1.5 What makes a landscape important to people may be deemed insufficient to make it important in terms of planning policy and law. The meaning, scale, specific and perceived value of a particular landscape varies across and within communities and over time<sup>214</sup>. Therefore, what makes it important in planning terms needs to be well defined.

### 6.2 Policy background

- 6.2.1 The NPPF (e.g. paras 130; 180-194), states that planning decisions should ensure that developments are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change. Decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan), and by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside<sup>215, 216</sup>.
- 6.2.2 Although paragraph 109 of the NPPF provides scope for protecting and enhancing valued landscapes (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan), the concepts of *value*, *quality* and *beauty* are not defined<sup>217, 218</sup>.
- 6.2.3 Planning application decisions are often reliant upon prior High Court judgements and planning appeal decisions. These have tended towards the conclusion that the *popularity* of a landscape is not a sufficient condition for it to be deemed to be *valued* from a planning perspective. However, whilst some judgements have concluded that a valued landscape is one *with "demonstrable attributes beyond the ordinary"*<sup>219</sup>, this does not necessarily require official ‘designation’ in the Local Development Plan or elsewhere<sup>220 221</sup>. This may be because development in a non-designated area would affect a designated area<sup>222</sup> or the landscape is valued irrespective of its designation status. Irrespective of a landscape’s value, the impact of a development upon the local character *is* still a factor in planning decisions<sup>223</sup>. Nevertheless, defining ‘Valued Landscapes’ in the Development Plan would provide clarity and focus for a higher degree of protection and enhancement.

- 6.2.4 Without determining the location of Valued Landscapes, the *Braintree Local Plan Policy LPP1* states “*Development outside development boundaries will be strictly controlled to uses appropriate to the countryside to protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside*”. Policy LPP67 states “the Local Planning Authority will take into account the different roles and character of the various landscape areas in the district and recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside”.
- 6.2.5 In defining landscape character, the Local Plan refers to the national and regional Landscape Character Area (LCA) assessments and notes that “*Proposals for new development should be informed by, and be sympathetic to, the character of the landscape as identified in the District Council’s Landscape Character Assessments.*” Moreover, proposals “*should not be detrimental to the distinctive landscape features of the area, such as trees, hedges, woodlands, grasslands, ponds, and rivers. Development which would not successfully integrate into the local landscape will not be permitted.*”<sup>224</sup> The emphasis here is on what characteristics defines the local landscape and what makes it distinctive (and thereby, implicitly, of value).
- 6.2.6 Natural England’s interpretation “*Landscape character may be defined as a distinct and recognisable pattern of elements, or characteristics, in the landscape that make one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse. Landscape Character Assessment is the process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features (characteristics) that make landscapes distinctive.*”<sup>225</sup>
- 6.2.7 These arguments suggest there is a continuum of *value*, *quality* and *beauty* which extends beyond a landscape’s intrinsic appeal (howsoever defined). Each place can be different but not necessarily superior to another. This may include its relationship to proximate landscapes and its economic, amenity and health value, amongst others. Therefore, a given landscape may be deemed of *value* if it is *representative* of a particular landscape typology irrespective of any subjective hierarchy of *values* attributed to each landscape type. This balance of what makes something *representative* and *distinctive* at the same time lies at the heart of maintaining the rich mosaic of landscapes that our rural countryside currently enjoys.
- 6.2.8 The Landscape Institute provides a working definition thus: “*Landscape qualities are the characteristics / features that are valued*”. This does not mean simply what exists but what makes those characteristics stand out as special. *Landscape value* is the importance attached to different landscapes based on their *qualities*<sup>226</sup>.

### 6.3 Landscape Character Assessments

- 6.3.1 Given this backdrop, planning decisions rely heavily on Landscape Character Assessments at the National, Regional and District level.
- 6.3.2 A LCA is defined as “*a discrete geographical area of a particular Landscape Character Type (LCT) with a distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occur consistently throughout the area*”<sup>227</sup>.
- 6.3.3 The use of Landscape Character Assessments reduces reliance on designating so called *special*’ areas which implies that others are not *special*. This recognition of *difference*, rather than *hierarchy* allows protection of the countryside for its own sake in all its forms<sup>228</sup>.
- 6.3.4 They give an objective description of the landscape along with an assessment of its vulnerability to land-use change. Natural England notes that Landscape Character Assessments do not comment on the *quality* of characteristics and therefore allow determination of a ‘valued landscape’ but they do provide information to facilitate a judgement in individual cases.
- 6.3.5 In the case of our NPA, there are ten relevant LCAs. Each provides a different degree of detail: one at the national level using Natural England research<sup>229</sup> (Figure 52); four at the county level using the ELCA (2003)<sup>230</sup> (Figure 53) and five at the district level using the Braintree Landscape Character Assessment (BLCA) from 2006 (Figure 54).

### 6.3.6 National: South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland NCA 86

6.3.6.1 NCA 86 is one of 159 distinct areas in England. It is described as an undulating chalky boulder clay plateau dissected by numerous river valleys, gently sloping wide valleys, south-east-flowing streams and rivers meandering through a predominantly arable agricultural landscape with lowland wood pasture and ancient woodlands and hedgerows. The history of the landscape is evident in irregular field patterns, Roman sites, medieval monasteries and castles, and ancient woodlands. This is complemented by a built environment rich in heritage, including impressive churches, barns, country estates and several WWII airfields.

6.3.6.2 The historical evolution of the landscape is seen in dispersed settlement patterns of isolated farms, small parishes and settlements around ‘tyes’ (commons) or strip greens and isolated hamlets, and well-preserved medieval towns and large villages linked by winding, narrow and sometimes sunken lanes bound by deep ditches and hedgerows; and an extensive network of PROWs which provide access to the area’s lowland English countryside.

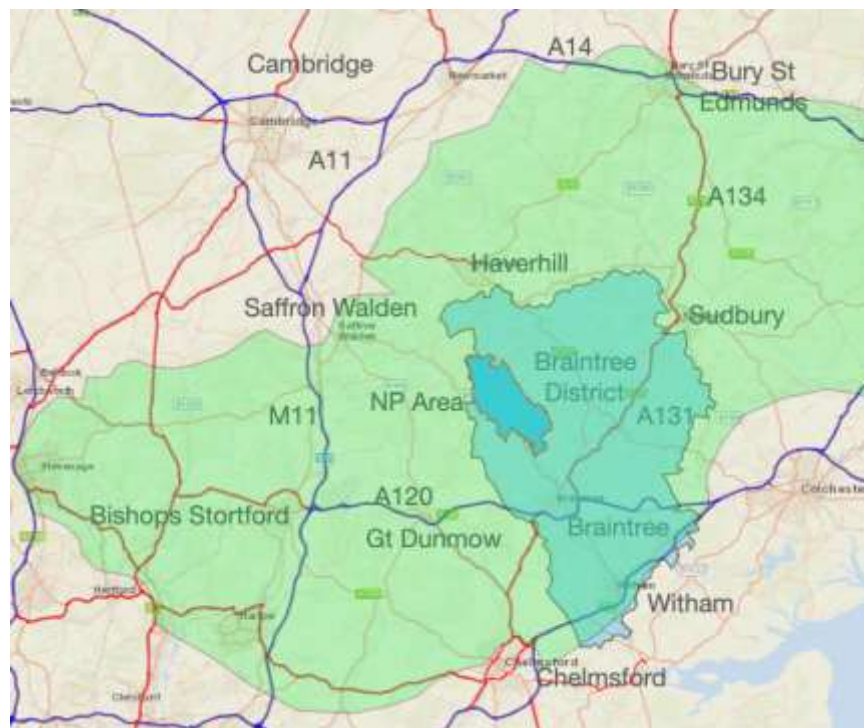


Figure 52: National Character Area 86 <sup>231</sup>

### 6.3.7 Regional: Essex Landscape Area Assessment

6.3.7.1 The NPA falls within 5 LCAs in the ELCA: 4 of these are Glacial Till Plateau type landscapes (B1 Central Essex Farmlands, B2 North Essex Farmlands, B3 Blackwater and Stour Farmlands; B4 Gosfield Wooded Farmlands) and one is a River Valley Landscape (C6 Blackwater/Brain/Lower Chelmer Valleys) <sup>232</sup> (Figure 53).

6.3.7.2 The ELCA was published in 2003 at the start of the replacement of landscapes based on designations with a criteria-based approach. This was the precursor of similar exercises later conducted at the district level <sup>233</sup>. Though the landscape areas are quite broad, there are some useful principles and conclusions worthy of note.

6.3.7.3 A key feature of the county landscape is the gently upslope of the land from the coast towards the west and the high frequency of rivers. ECLA notes that “*river corridors are frequently of landscape, nature conservation and heritage value, as well as providing public access opportunities and the focus of other recreational activities.*” In particular, glacial deposits of clay have left a legacy of fertile soil that still underpins the agrarian character of North Essex.

- 6.3.7.4 In describing the county as “ancient countryside characterised by small irregular fields interspersed with commons, woods and a generally dispersed settlement pattern,” the ELCA could just as well have been describing the NPA. We live in an area that is a distinctive, yet representative case study of agrarian Essex.
- 6.3.7.5 A further insight is the assessment of sensitivity of the landscape to different types of development, including factors such as scale, transport, mixed use, and utility infrastructure. Although countryside management was mentioned as a risk, climate change was not. This assessment allows not only landscape characteristics of value to be highlighted but also the extent to which they are *value at risk*. ELCA identified specific vectors through which ‘value at risk’ can be analysed – for example, high inter-visibility across valleys is viewed as a highly valued quality of an area but at the same time renders it very sensitive to large scale development.
- 6.3.7.6 As shown in Figure 53, LCA B3: Blackwater/Stour Farmlands which covers most of the NPA is described as gently undulating terrain with wide views over arable fields; no major roads; a few nucleated historical settlements; and notable historical parkland at Spains Hall.
- 6.3.7.7 The key point is that, given the nature of the topography, LCA B3 enjoys moderate to high inter-divisibility. It has a high sensitivity to large development owing to these exposed views across gently undulating farmland and the general sense of tranquility that the landscape offers.
- 6.3.7.8 The same is true for LCA C6: Blackwater/Brain/Lower Chelmer Valleys Arable farmland. Here we have narrow sloping valley sides which offer far-reaching views across sparse settlements and heritage buildings. This renders the area sensitive to large development on the valley floors or sides and on the plateau land above. Wherever sensitivity is relatively high, opportunity for mitigation is limited.
- 6.3.7.9 In LCAs B2 North Essex Farmlands, B4 Gosfield Wooded Farmlands and B1 Central Essex Farmlands, the value ascribed to each in terms of valley views and woodland, renders these landscapes at risk from development.

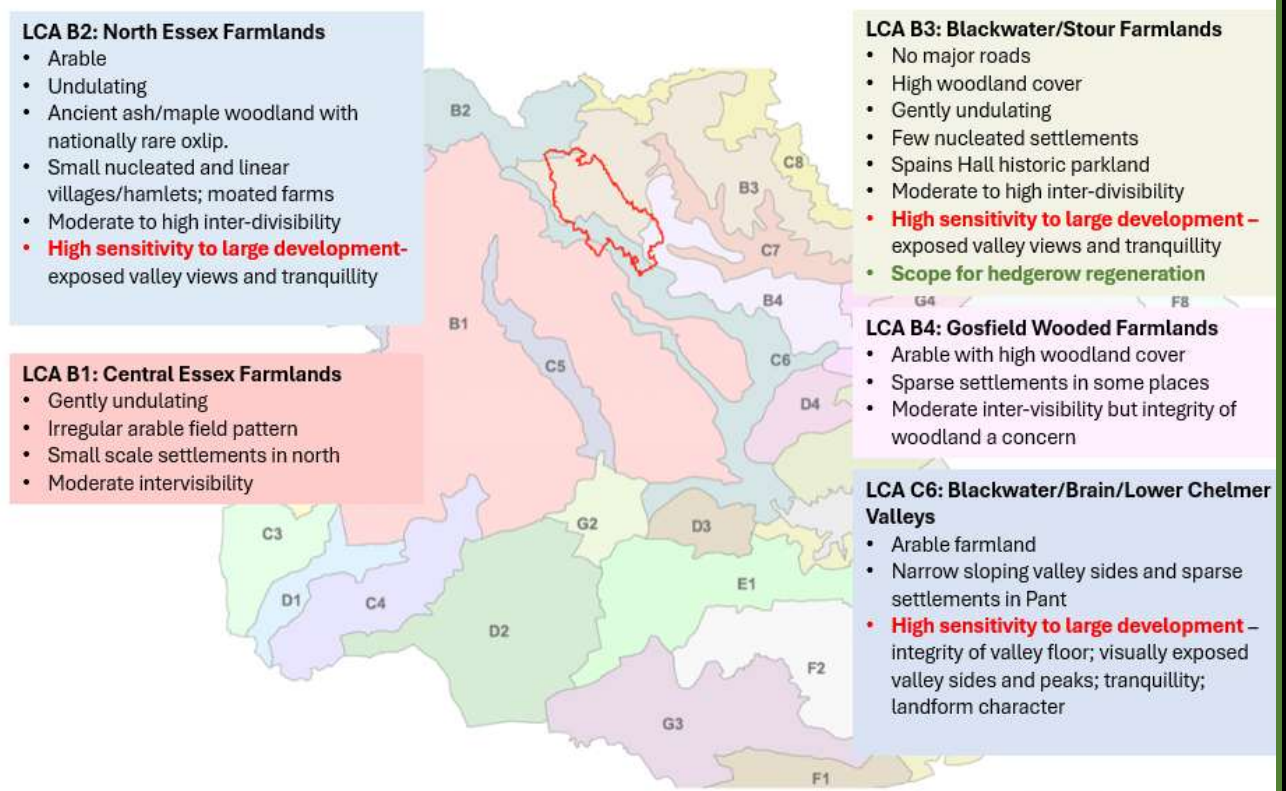


Figure 53: Essex Landscape Assessment areas (NPA in red border)<sup>234</sup>

6.3.8 District: Braintree Landscape Area Assessment BLCA defines three Landscape types (LCTs) (A: River Valley, B: Farmland Plateau and F: Wooded Farmland) and seven distinct LCAs<sup>235</sup>. Five of these are relevant to the NPA (Figure 54).

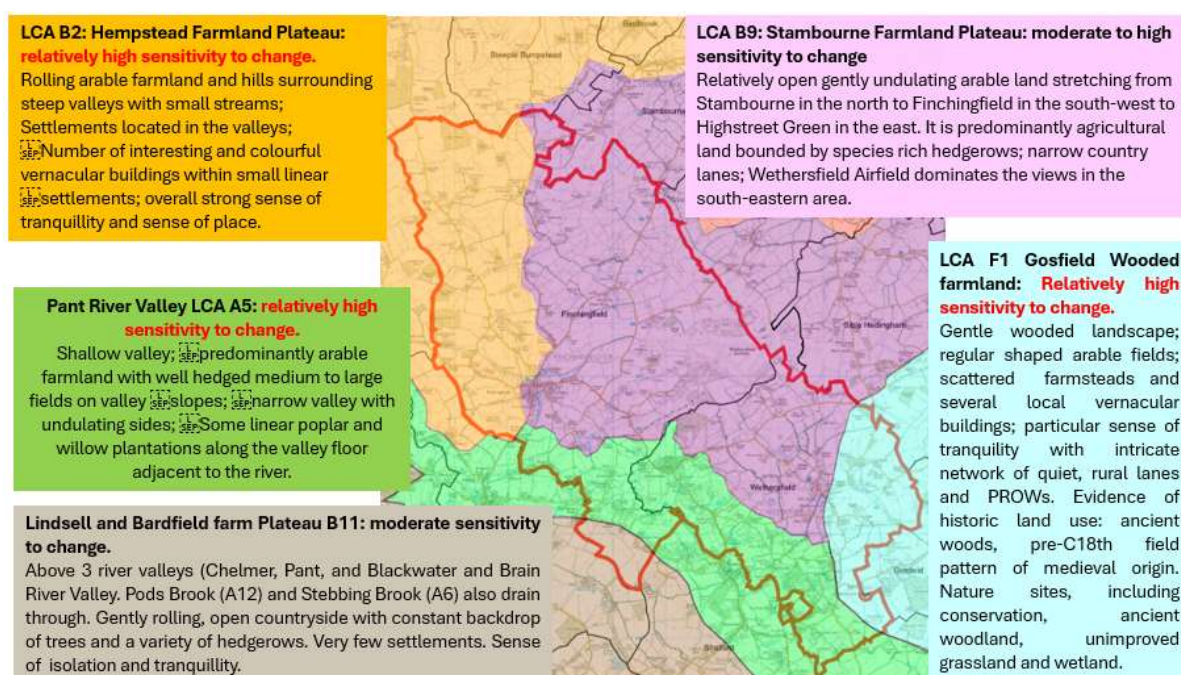


Figure 54: Braintree Local Character Areas in the NPA (red border)<sup>236</sup>

6.3.1 BLCA research confirms the distinctive characteristics of the farmland and river LCAs in the NPA and their relatively high sensitivity to development. Our LCAs are representative of county and district features in terms of arable farmland, and historical settlement and field patterns. Moreover, three of them are relatively highly sensitive to change and one moderately so. This derives from far reaching views across gently sloped narrow valleys, a general sense of calm and tranquillity and a narrow twisting road network, best suited to a bygone era.

6.3.1.1 However, this data only takes us partly towards resolving our issue as to whether our NPA landscape may be deemed ‘valued’ and indeed ‘value at risk’.

## 6.4 Assessing Landscape quality and value

6.4.1 To assess ‘valued landscape characteristics’ and ‘landscape qualities’, many landscape impact assessments have relied upon the Landscape Institute’s Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 2013 (‘GLVIA3’) as amended in its *Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations Technical Guidance Note 02/21*<sup>237</sup>.

6.4.2 These guidelines suggest that judgments about the value of a landscape in non-designated areas can be informed by assessing a range of factors including: Natural Heritage; Cultural Heritage; Landscape condition; Associations; Distinctiveness; Recreational; Perceptual (Scenic); Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity); and Functional roles.

6.4.2.1 Whilst these metrics are informative, appeal judgements have indicated that they are not the only ones that may help landscape evaluation<sup>238</sup>. Whatever criteria are used, the key point is to articulate a clear and rigorous presentation of how a landscape has been evaluated to make judgements about its value, whether it is a designated landscape. Information from Landscape Character Assessments, as well as local research, can be used alongside these guidelines to develop judgements of ‘value’, ‘quality’ and ‘beauty’ for the NPA. They can also be used to gauge the *risk* of that value being lost through an assessment of sensitivity to change. This will vary not just by LCT or LCA but specific LCAs in specific locations and often depend upon the type of development being proposed.

#### 6.4.3 There are several caveats to this approach:

- Appeal cases suggest that a landscape can be considered ‘Valued’ if it matches only some but not all these criteria<sup>239</sup>.
- A particular site may not itself be seen as a ‘Valued landscape’, but it could form part of a wider area which is and be considered as forming part of it.
- An historical perspective is important because there needs to be an appreciation of how perceptions may vary over time.

#### 6.4.4 Moreover, even this helpful guidance does not tell us *how much* value a landscape should have before it is important enough to be protected as a “valued landscape” under the NPPF. The Landscape Institute offers a simple definition:

*“A ‘valued landscape’ is an area identified as having sufficient landscape qualities to elevate it above other more everyday landscapes.”*

#### 6.4.5 The guidance also notes that (a) ‘everyday’ landscapes may nevertheless have value to people, and (b) the identification of landscape value needs to be applied proportionately ensuring that identification of ‘valued landscape’ is not over used. Appreciating the value of any landscape is as much an art as a science. Most importantly, there is a need to recognise the *indivisibility* of each sub-set of the landscape. The concept of ‘value’ or ‘beauty’ is not confined to a particular tree or field. The essence of place attachment made abundantly clear in our consultation process was to the landscape *as a whole* - through its multi-faceted relationship with the natural environment, built environment, the local economy and community. Detailed criteria are important to attempt making this exercise more objective but you cannot forget the visceral, emotional reaction of standing at the top of a hill, gazing out over a landscape, and feeling something. It may be something intangible or irrational but is no less real. That is what Neighbourhood Plan policy is trying to capture.

### 6.5 Application to the NPA

#### 6.5.1 The Neighbourhood Plan approach is to identify landscape value based upon a structured and transparent assessment process, including community-based evidence where practical in order to determine the degree of protection and enhancement needed to meet Neighbourhood Plan objectives.

#### 6.5.2 The purpose of applying this approach to the NPA is to:

- Give more detailed evidence of which landscape characteristics combine to make the NPA or specific places particularly distinctive.
- Highlight special qualities that help define a sense of place.
- Present a holistic description that incorporates socio-cultural and natural considerations that facilitate an understanding of how the NPA as a place (and places) is perceived and valued by the communities that live here<sup>240</sup>.
- Form a basis for policy design to protect and enhance local landscape character but not a means to consider individual proposals for which a more detailed site-specific landscape character assessment would be required.

#### 6.5.3 A two-stage approach was used to evaluate Landscape Quality and Value in the NPA:

1. Assessment of overall Landscape Character to determine landscape value: Each LCA across the entire NPA was assessed using the Landscape Institute’s framework<sup>241</sup>.

2. Individual views worthy of protection were assessed in accordance with their perceived value to residents and in accordance with the methodology outlined below.

Using this approach, the quality and value of the landscapes in the NPA were broadly assessed and the extent to which protection and enhancement was justified was determined, resulting in a proposed local designation as an Area of Special Landscape Value and identification of Protected Views.

## 6.6 Assessment of overall Landscape Character

6.6.1 In Spring, 2025 Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils commissioned landscape consultants Alison Farmer Associates (AFA) to complete a landscape assessment<sup>242</sup>. The objective was to develop an expert understanding of valued aspects of our landscape including natural and cultural features.

6.6.2 The AFA assessment defined land in the NPA considered to be a 'Valued Landscape' in the context of NPPF (2024) paragraph 187a. It comprised four stages of work:

- A desk-based review of background information on the area and key settlements;
- Site assessment of the Study Area to gather information on special qualities;
- Analysis of evidence and assimilation and judgements on landscape value;
- Presentation of the findings of the study in tabular form against each of the 'value factors' as set out by the Landscape Institute and referred to in 6.4.2 above. Separate tables were set out for the five BLCA character areas (because of its small area in the NPA Lindsell and Bardfield Farm Plateau was combined with Pant Valley).

The AFA assessment highlighted differences within and across each of the landscape character areas as follows:

### 6.6.3 Hempstead Farmland Plateau LCA

The area with the greatest weight of evidence to support recognition as a Valued Landscape lies in the southern half of this character area. It focuses around and includes Spains Hall and adjoining farmland as well as the southern slopes that dip into and afford views across the Pant River Valley to the south.

Whilst the evaluation has also identified intact features and landscape elements in the north of the area, including the rural hamlets of Tinker's Green and Shore Hall, and blocks of ancient woodland, it forms a relatively small, isolated area of higher quality landscape within an area of more typical plateau farmland in the Suffolk/Essex border. It is also separated from the wider area of qualifying land to the south by land which lacks distinction and is affected by a pylon corridor.



Figure 55a: Cornish Hall End LCA B2<sup>243</sup> Typical Hempstead Farm Plateau landscape and woodland LCA B9.



**Figure 55b: LCA B2 Spains Hall rise<sup>244</sup>** View looking south towards Finchingfield from Spains Hall as the lane reaches its highest point, showing the Hempstead Farm Plateau falling towards the shallow valley of Finchingfield Brook and the village nestled amongst the trees where three landscapes character types meet.

#### 6.6.4 **Stambourne Farmland Plateau**

The area with the greatest weight of evidence to support recognition as a valued landscape lies in the southern half of this character area. It focuses around and includes the outstanding village of Finchingfield as well as surrounding land forming its setting to the north and east, and extending to include the northern part of the former airbase. It also includes elevated farmland northeast of Wethersfield which afford views into the Pant Valley to the south and the more enclosed and settled landscape associated with Brick Kiln Green, School Green and Blackmore End. The northern boundary of the Valued Landscape is drawn out to the main road to follow clear features on the ground. This results in some more elevated open and less distinctive landscape around Pouches Hall being included. Land north of the road is not included as it lacks the views, topographic variation and cultural and natural heritage interest which is found to the south.

The qualities of the airfield lying outside the built-up areas enable it to qualify as part of a Valued Landscape, including its open elevated remote character and wide views. Its return to nature gives it a relative wildness and sense of mystery and intrigue. The airfield has a wild remoteness, is a haven for wildlife and offers a striking contrast between its emerging natural heritage and its important military past.



**Figure 56a LCA B9 Stambourne Farmland Plateau<sup>245</sup>** Looking across towards the airbase showing strong historic field pattern surrounding the base and illustrating how the base is assimilated into the landscape character



**Figure 56b: LCA B9 Airbase<sup>246</sup>** Looking down the runway showing its reintegration into the landscape.



**Figure 56c: LCA B9 Howe Street** View looking south east from Howe Street across the expansive Stambourne Farm Plateau



**Figure 56d: LCA B9 Finchingfield from the plateau<sup>247</sup>** View west from higher ground of Stambourne Farm Plateau near Boynton Hall Farm showing land falling gently towards Finchingfield and the Pant Valley, with Finchingfield church's distinctive square tower silhouetted in the centre.

### 6.6.5 Pant River Valley LCA

The whole of this character area is considered to reflect a Valued Landscape owing to its unspoilt rural character, attractive land use composition and tangible time depth and cultural associations. Its qualities connect with the continuation of the valley landscape beyond the Study Area with which it is visually and physically associated.



**Figure 57a: LCA A5 Wethersfield Conservation Area and the Pant Valley<sup>248</sup>** View from PROW W3 looking west showing a major part of the Wethersfield Conservation Area including the Manor Park to the left, and the church spire set amongst mature trees to the right, framing the shallow sided Pant Valley with distinctive field pattern and medium sized fields falling gently towards the valley floor, and rows of poplars in the far distance.



**Figure 57b: LCA A5 Pant Valley<sup>249</sup>** View from Hulls Lane across the Pant Valley towards Wethersfield with the church in the centre set against the rising profile of Poor Wood and the airbase water tower on the left horizon.



**Figure 57c: LCA A5 Warren Grove View<sup>250</sup>** from PROW W4 looking northeast along Warren Grove with mature tree belts above and below, showing exemplary characteristics of the upper slopes of the Pant Valley LCA A5.



**Figure 57d: LCA A5 Wethersfield Playing Field<sup>251</sup>** Rising land from Derek Flannery Playing Field signals the meeting of the Pant Valley with the Stambourne Farmland Plateau. On the hill are mature trees lining Wethersfield Manor, and on the right the formal landscape that remains of the Manor Park. This was first identified as being special in the 1973 draft of the Wethersfield Conservation Area (WCA) which also recognised its special landscape value. One of the most frequently cited views in the FWNP Residents' survey.

#### 6.6.6 Gosfield Wooded Farmland LCA

6.6.6.1 This area has a mixture of landscape qualities. Areas of greatest scenic quality and interest occur along the stream courses, the rural lane and small woodland copses north of Pattern's Wood where the landscape starts to dip into the valley. It is the watercourses and wooded valley landscape around Slotslough Bridge and Pattern's Farm that has been identified as Valued Landscape.

#### 6.6.7 Overall Landscape Qualities:

6.6.7.1 The distinctive character of the Pant River Valley lies in its gently rolling slopes and pastoral lowland scenery, which evoke a strong sense of timeless rural England. This enduring appeal stems not only from the landscape's slow, organic evolution but also from its deep agrarian roots. These roots are evident in the vernacular architecture, traditional field patterns, and features such as coppiced and pollarded hazel and oak, as well as sinuous sunken lanes that have served generations.

6.6.7.2 The unique qualities of this landscape were celebrated by the Bardfield Artists between the 1930s-1950's (Figure 58) and continue to inspire residents and visitors today. The relationship between community and land remains strong, exemplified by the activities of the local Farm Cluster Group, nature-friendly farming practices at the Spains Hall Estate, and environmental initiatives such as the Wildfell Environment Recovery project. Even the most significant imposed intervention—the former airfield—has, to a large extent, been reclaimed by nature and become an important strategic site for nature recovery in this part of Essex, as well as being an important part of the country's military history, further underscoring the resilience and enduring value of this landscape.

The River Pant near Sculpin's Bridge



The Pant Valley



**Figure 58 John Aldridge RA one of the “Great Bardfield artists”<sup>252, 253</sup>**

The assessment noted particular features as follows:

- An iconic lowland river valley famously associated with the Bardfield artists; many of the views and painted scenes remain recognisable today.
- Historic villages, cottages, and farmsteads are nestled in the folds of the landscape, reflecting a long-standing pattern of dispersed rural settlement.
- Traditional vernacular architecture—featuring colour-washed walls, brickwork, thatched roofs, and flintwork—creates a strong visual cohesion and contributes to the scenic character.
- Landmark buildings, such as churches, post mills, and water mills, serve as focal points, aid orientation, and reinforce the landscape's cultural and historical connection.
- Riparian woodland, scattered valley-side copses, and ancient woodland blocks on elevated ground provide visual structure and legibility.
- A patchwork of arable and pastoral land, interspersed with nature recovery areas, offers texture and seasonal colour, evoking painterly rural scenes.
- A network of natural watercourses, mature hedgerows, and sinuous lanes form an ecologically rich tapestry of wildlife corridors and historic routeways.
- Quiet rural lanes and dispersed settlement patterns, combined with the absence of major transport routes, lend the landscape a tranquil, slowly evolved character.
- Juxtaposed views create memorable experiences from the small-scale, intimate valley scenes to expansive, long-distance vistas across valleys when on higher ground.

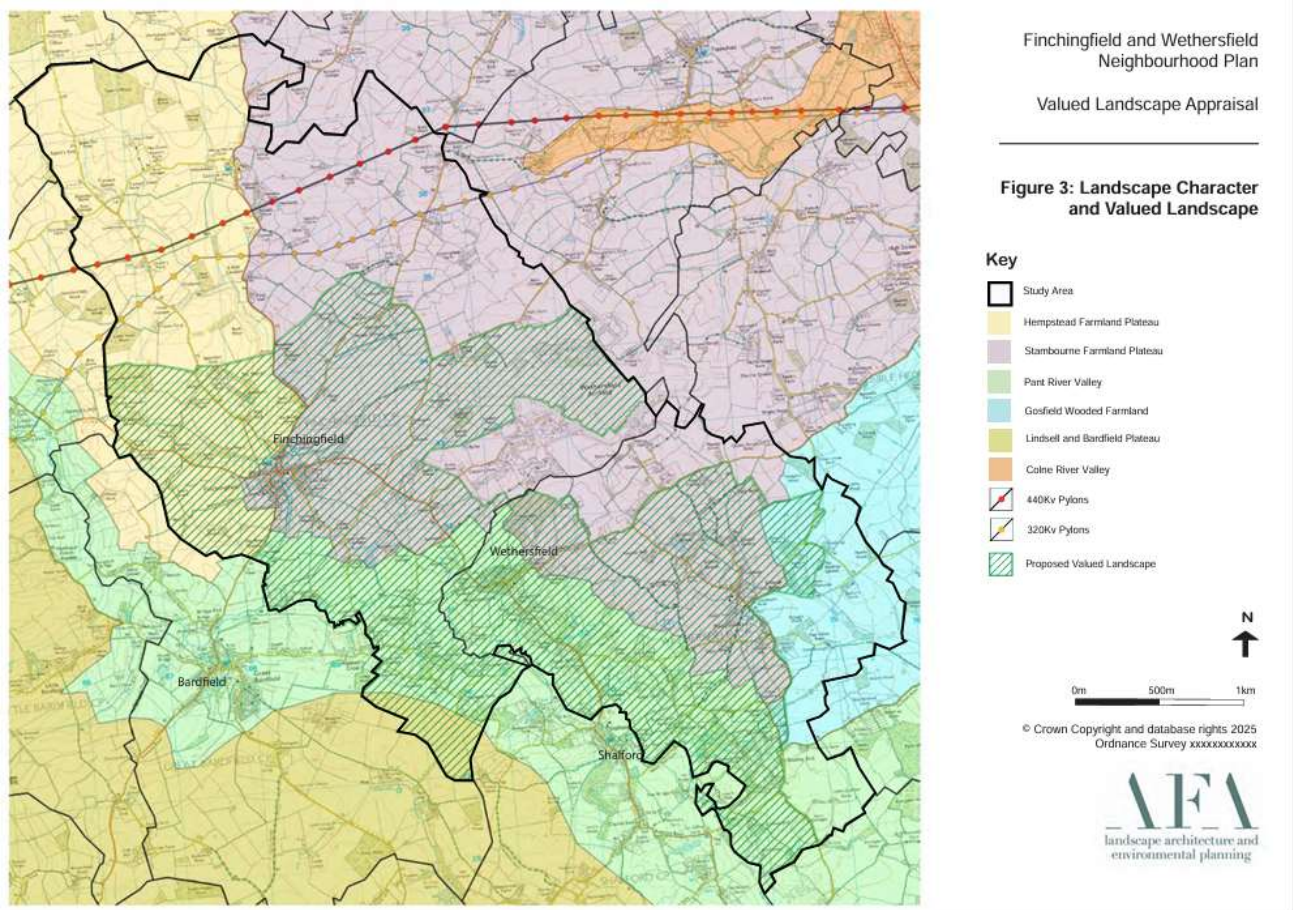
### 6.6.8 Designation of Area of Special Landscape Value:

6.6.8.1 Using the landscape characteristics analysed above for each of the LCAs in the NPA and applying the Landscape Institute guidelines for assessing valued landscapes, the Neighbourhood Plan complements the more generic approach set out in the Local Plan by assessing the value of landscape character across the NPA. The policy set out below seeks to protect valued landscape character across the NPA from inappropriate change.

6.6.8.2 The replacement of Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) by the criteria-based policy in the Local Development Framework and related LCAs which formed part of the supporting evidence base preceded the neighbourhood planning system and NPPF which gives the opportunity for a more focused and granulated policy approach to protecting local character and valued landscapes at neighbourhood level. This in turn provides the basis for recognising the distinctive rural landscape character of the NPA by a non-statutory landscape designation.

6.6.8.3 Whilst the Neighbourhood Plan cannot designate a statutory landscape designation since these would fall under legislation outside of the neighbourhood planning process (e.g. National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty/National Landscapes), the landscape character of the area could be acknowledged with a non-statutory local landscape designation.

6.6.8.4 The AFA assessment concluded that a significant portion of the NPA qualifies as a 'Valued Landscape' and so merits protection as envisaged in the NPPF. The extent of this designation NPA is represented in hatched green together with the BLCAs on Figure 59.



**Figure 59: Area of Special Landscape Value**<sup>254</sup>

6.6.8.5 The identification of Valued Landscape within the meaning set out in the NPPF through application of Landscape Institute value factors to the BCLA, together with the strong attachment of the local community to the countryside in the NPA, provides the basis for a local designation as an Area of Special Landscape Value.

- 6.6.8.6 The core of this area encompasses the Pant River Valley, its tributaries, and the surrounding valley slopes, including the historic settlements of Finchingfield, Wethersfield, and Blackmore End. It also includes adjoining higher ground such as Spains Hall, Howe Street, and parts of the former Wethersfield Airfield.
- 6.6.8.7 The designation of an Area of Special Landscape Value will facilitate policies that seek to conserve and enhance all qualities articulated in the assessment tables above, even beyond the defined Valued Landscape. This can also inform future assessments of landscape and settlement sensitivity to change, contribute to the prioritisation of resources for conservation, help in the promotion of economic activity in the NPA and the development of nature recovery initiatives. As such, it will help to guide the continued sensitive management, protection and enhancement of the landscape's special qualities and promote the local economy and recreational activity.

## **6.7 Wider landscape context**

- 6.7.1 While only part of the NPA has been identified as an Area of Special Landscape Value in terms of the NPPF, this does not imply that the remaining areas are without merit. In line with the European Landscape Convention (ELC), all landscapes—whether or not they meet the threshold of a 'valued landscape' under NPPF paragraph 187—can hold significance for their intrinsic character and beauty. Paragraph 187(b) of the NPPF makes clear that planning policies and decisions should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the wider countryside. It is well established in planning practice that a landscape need not be formally designated as 'valued' to be afforded protection from inappropriate development.
- 6.7.2 The assessment has recorded Valued Landscape qualities across the wider NPA within the evaluation tables. These form a robust evidence base for future planning decisions, helping to ensure that special landscape qualities are taken into account—even where land lies outside the formally identified Valued Landscape. This is particularly the case for the land in the north of the NPA around Cornish Hall End, Shore Hall and Spains Wood. This area is relatively small in extent and separated from the wider area of qualifying land associated with the Pant Valley. Land beyond the NPA is known to have previously formed part of a Special Landscape Area in the Uttlesford Rural Areas Local Plan. Further work is required to determine whether the higher quality landscape in the Shore Hall and Tinker's Green area extends beyond the parish and if, as part of a wider tract of land to the north, it forms another Valued Landscape which can be distinguished from the more extensive plateau farmland on the Essex/Suffolk borders.
- 6.7.3 Braintree Local Plan policies seek to manage change in the countryside on a district-wide basis. These include: LPP1 (Development Boundaries); LPP71 (Landscape Character and Features); LPP8 (Rural Enterprise); LPP9 (Tourist Development within the Countryside); LPP34 Affordable Housing in the Countryside); and LPP38-42 on replacement dwellings, rural workers dwellings, infill development in hamlets, residential conversions. In due course a wider designation could be pursued through the Local Plan or adjoining Neighbourhood Plans. Although the full extent of this broader landscape has not been precisely delineated, it is evident that these areas contribute meaningfully to the character and qualities of the Valued Landscape defined within the NPA.

## 6.8 Protected Views

6.8.1 In addition to protecting overall landscape character the Neighbourhood Plan can identify specific viewpoints for protection. The NPPF recognises the importance of landscape setting and visual amenity<sup>255</sup>, and the protection of such assets. As part of the production of a Neighbourhood Plan, communities seek to protect and enhance important views by identifying them, assessing their importance and the characteristics that make them special, and include such views as part of statutory policy-making. Although views from private properties are not usually a material planning consideration, views from publicly accessible vantage points valued by the community can be. The 550 citations of views in our Residents' Survey are testament to the community's attachment to our setting.

Examples include: village greens, playing fields, historical buildings, 'gateways' into villages and the airbase. A frequent comment was how each aspect of a view complemented the other, thereby suggesting that change to one would impair the whole. This adds support to the two-tier approach taken in this Neighbourhood Plan - protection of overall landscape character AND specific viewpoints.

6.8.2 The sheer number of views cited for protection by residents means that some selection is necessary in accordance with suitable criteria. Protected views should be those that, if obstructed or spoiled, would harm the perceived character and distinctiveness of the parishes and the villages. They need to be of particular significance in contributing to the distinctive characteristics that define a place. They can be open views over countryside from the edges of settlements; broad views as you approach settlements; open views over surrounding countryside; views of a settlement from a vantage point; or channelled views along narrow long vistas or streets. Many valued views within the built-up areas of Wethersfield and Finchingfield are already afforded protection owing to their presence within a Conservation Area, their designation as Local Green Spaces in this plan or their location in open countryside that is protected by the policies relating to overall landscape character (see below) and categorised as village vistas; village 'gateway' approaches; and open space views outside development boundaries.

6.8.3 All sites have been evaluated against the following criteria:

1. visible from a public viewpoint;
2. whether a view permits a particular appreciation of the setting of heritage assets;
3. whether a particular view presents the setting of settlements located in surrounding open countryside, or the view over a settlement from a particular vantage point;
4. presence of particularly important geological or natural features;
5. presence of a channelled view along narrow, long vistas over an asset or a series of assets, be they architectural, historical, or natural;
6. whether a view makes a significant contribution to the distinctive, place-defining characteristics and settings of our villages, hamlets, and/or surrounding countryside;
7. whether views are protected by other policies e.g. conservation area, Local Green Spaces, part of an overall rural landscape character assessment;
8. assessment will take account of views at all times of the year.

6.8.4 Nine sites were selected on the basis that they satisfied most, if not all, of the above criteria:

PV01	Village gateway: Wethersfield, view from Hudson's Hill looking west into Wethersfield village
PV02	Village vista: Wethersfield, view from PROW looking into Wethersfield Conservation Area
PV03	Village gateway: Finchingfield, Stambourne Rd
PV04	Village vista: West Drive meadow, Wethersfield from Footpath 10
PV05	Village vista: Wethersfield, view from Hudson's Hill looking south
PV06	Village vista: Stambourne Rd footpath, Finchingfield
PV07	Village vista: Freshwell Health Centre, Finchingfield
PV08:	Village vista: Finchingfield, Views from Footpath PROW 18
PV09:	Village vista: Finchingfield, Views from Footpath 11

- 6.8.5 The fact that several other popular views have not been selected does not diminish their importance to people but popularity is only one of the criteria we must use. Moreover, many popular views are otherwise protected.
- 6.8.6 The locations of the selected protected views are noted on the Policy Maps in [Appendix II](#) and descriptions and images are provided in [Appendix VIII](#).

### Policy FW9 Rural Landscape character

- A. The area marked hatched green on Figure 59 be designated as an Area of Special Landscape Value. Within those areas all proposals shall demonstrate how they protect and enhance the identified qualities of the valued landscape within which they are located.
- B. Outside the development boundaries, development is confined only to buildings and uses appropriate to the countryside and where it protects the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
- C. To reflect the importance of enhancing the natural and local environment within the Neighbourhood Plan Area, development proposals will be required to protect and enhance the landscape character in a manner commensurate with the landscape qualities and designation identified in this plan by addressing each of the following matters:
- i. Provide evidence to demonstrate how the proposals will protect and enhance the prominent features and overall character in the prevailing Landscape Character Area. This consists of both the natural and man-made special features of each landscape type, including (but not limited to) settlement patterns, field patterns, hedgerows, lanes, paths, banks, watercourses, listed buildings/structures and non-designated heritage assets and their setting, sites of biodiversity or geological value or soils and trees and woodlands. These should be considered both as natural features and as skyline-makers;
  - ii. Protect from harm the Protected Views at locations specified in [Appendix VIII](#).

## 7 Getting around

### 7.1 Improving pedestrian and disability access:

- 7.1.1 To facilitate inclusivity, it is imperative that the natural assets we enjoy are accessible and shared by everyone. The Neighbourhood Plan Residents' survey highlighted the importance of footways, bridleways or byways for the community's leisure activities, maintenance of physical and mental well-being and sense of place.
- 7.1.2 Movement on foot, wheelchair or bicycle is a challenge. There are a numerous pinch-points where footways are either very narrow, poorly maintained or do not exist at all. Speeding and inconsiderate driving, makes walking, horse-riding or cycling a dangerous activity<sup>256</sup>. There have been recent efforts to highlight the dangers for our horse-riding community. In addition to the frequent pinch points along our road network, hazardous or poorly maintained sites include (but are not limited to): walking throughout Blackmore End, along the B1053 in Wethersfield from the village to the old Vicarage, Spains Hall, and Kempe Roads in Finchingfield and the centre of Wethersfield (Figure 60).
- 7.1.3 Improvements to footways would encourage safer movement around the villages and access to sporting facilities, schools, and shops. Improvements to their connectivity could encourage greater use.



Figure 60 Access and safety for all<sup>257</sup>

#### Action 6: Danger points

- The FWNP survey collated a long list of sites of potential hazards.
- Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils to write to Essex Police and ECC Highways Department to alert them to these issues and request remedial action.
- Parish Councils should establish a monitoring mechanism by which all such sites are monitored, help promote courteous road sharing and take appropriate action.

## Policy FW10: Walking and disability access routes

- A. Proposals to enhance all forms of active and sustainable travel, including (but not limited to) improvement of pedestrian, equestrian and cycle access routes and provision for users of wheelchairs and mobility scooters or other such vulnerable users will be strongly supported.
- B. New development is required to provide safe pedestrian routes that connect with the existing network, ensuring links to the respective village centre, retail facilities, education and community facilities are retained and enhanced where practicable for all vulnerable users.
- C. New development is required to provide or contribute to new and enhanced bus services and supporting infrastructure including bus stops, shelters, travel packs and real time information.
- D. Effective and proven mitigation measures will be sought in relation to highway safety and pedestrian, cyclist, and equestrian access where potential harm arises from additional traffic.

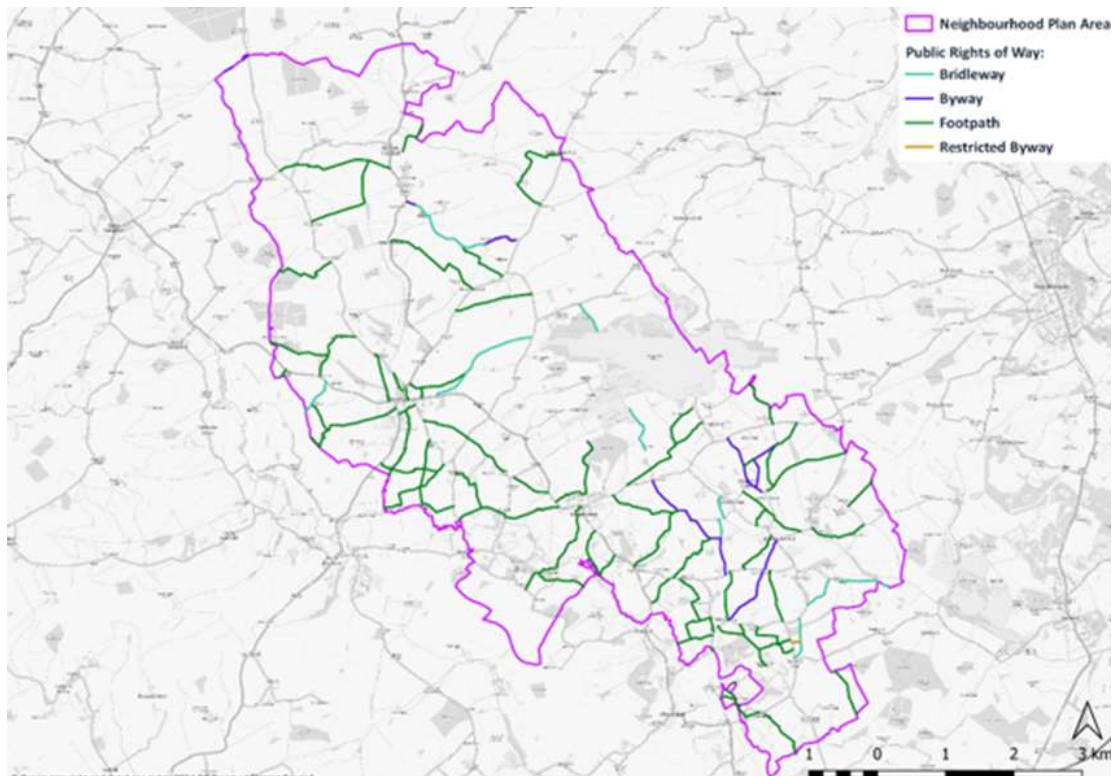
### 7.2 Countryside access

- 7.2.1 The NPPF (paragraph 104) states that '*planning policies should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for all users (including equestrian, cyclists and pedestrians) for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks,*'<sup>258</sup>
- 7.2.2 Government and academic research advocates the preservation and enhancement of formal and informal public green spaces<sup>259, 260</sup> but research by Natural England and the Essex Wildlife Trust suggests that their availability is relatively limited in rural areas<sup>261 262</sup>.



Figure 61 Walking: a very popular pastime<sup>263</sup>

- 7.2.3 Access to such spaces is recognised as a key ingredient of preventative health in the NHS's Long-Term Plan<sup>264</sup> and their role has also been highlighted by the Scottish Nature Agency<sup>265</sup>, the Institute for European Environmental Policy<sup>266</sup>, Campaign for Rural England<sup>267</sup>, the European Centre for Environment and Human Health<sup>268</sup>, Natural England<sup>269</sup> and the recent Finchingfield-Wethersfield Neighbourhood Plan survey<sup>270</sup>, as being central to actual and perceived well-being in rural communities.
- 7.2.4 Without access to local spaces and access routes, the community becomes reliant on potentially hazardous roads (Figure 60) or leisure opportunities elsewhere, thereby generating additional short distance car trips. Walking and riding are popular pursuits in the NPA (Figure 61). It is reasonably well served with PROWs as defined on the definitive map of rights of way (Figure 62). However, access is currently prohibited on several routes (including the airbase) and paths are often overgrown or poorly maintained.



**Figure 62 Public Rights of Way network<sup>271</sup>**

- 7.2.5 Further improvements to the network of PROWs (which includes footpaths, bridleways, byways, and restricted byways) are encouraged, along with the continued maintenance and upkeep of the existing network. Improved signage would also encourage more people to use the PROW network, as would remedial action being taken when issues are reported.
- 7.2.6 In response to potential privacy, recreational or security issues where a PROW is close to a garden or curtilage of a residential dwelling, a farmyard or other commercial premises, DEFRA updated its guidance in August, 2023 to ensure that landowners’ interests are also considered. Their guidance states: “an authority should consider in particular the impact of the existing path on the property owner and/or occupier against the benefit that having the right of way through the land brings to the public” and “They should note that reducing or eliminating the impact of the current route of the right of way on the owner and/or occupier, in terms of privacy, security and safety, are important considerations to which due weight should be given”<sup>272</sup>.

### **Policy FW11: Access into the countryside**

- A. Access to the countryside will be promoted through protection and maintenance of the existing Public Rights of Way (PROW) network (Figure 62) and, where appropriate, the creation of new routes. Any such proposals should comply with the latest guidance from DEFRA on sensitive routes, which acknowledge the interests of property owners and ensuring the safety of users of rural roads and lanes, and have regard to ECC Development Management Policy DM11 Public Rights of Way.
- B. Any development which leads to the loss or degradation of any PROW will not be permitted in other than very special circumstances. Proposals to divert PROWs or cycleways should consider both the interests of the property owner and/or occupier and the clear and demonstrable benefit that having the right of way through the land brings to the public.

- 7.2.7 The footpath leading west from Wethersfield to Finchingfield is a prime example of how improved maintenance could enhance sustainable connectivity between settlements for all residents. This footpath was previously well used as it was the only way in which open countryside could be safely reached from the village on a hard surfaced path. As such, it was an important route for those with mobility difficulties, pushchair users, etc, or for those not wishing to use unmade tracks to access the open countryside, including access during winter months.
- 7.2.8 The other roads out of Wethersfield (Hedingham Road and Braintree Road) only lead to side lanes some distance away and do not have connecting hard surfaced footpaths.
- 7.2.9 The Finchingfield Road path leads directly to Lombard Street which in turn leads to Petches Bridge, Waltham's Cross, Shalford, Great Bardfield and Finchingfield via Protected lanes and proposed Quiet Lanes in open countryside. In recent years this path has not been maintained by local authorities. As a result, it has been covered by so much debris that the path has largely disappeared. A group of community volunteers recently cleared the path but this revealed extensive damage caused by unrestrained excavations by service providers and has since become obstructed again.
- 7.2.10 The path should be re-laid as a footway/cycleway between Wethersfield to Lombard Street (AB) in Stage 1 (Figure 63). In future, the section between Lombard Street to Sculpins Lane (CD) could be added as the plans for Wethersfield Airbase evolve (Stage 2). There may be other cases to consider.

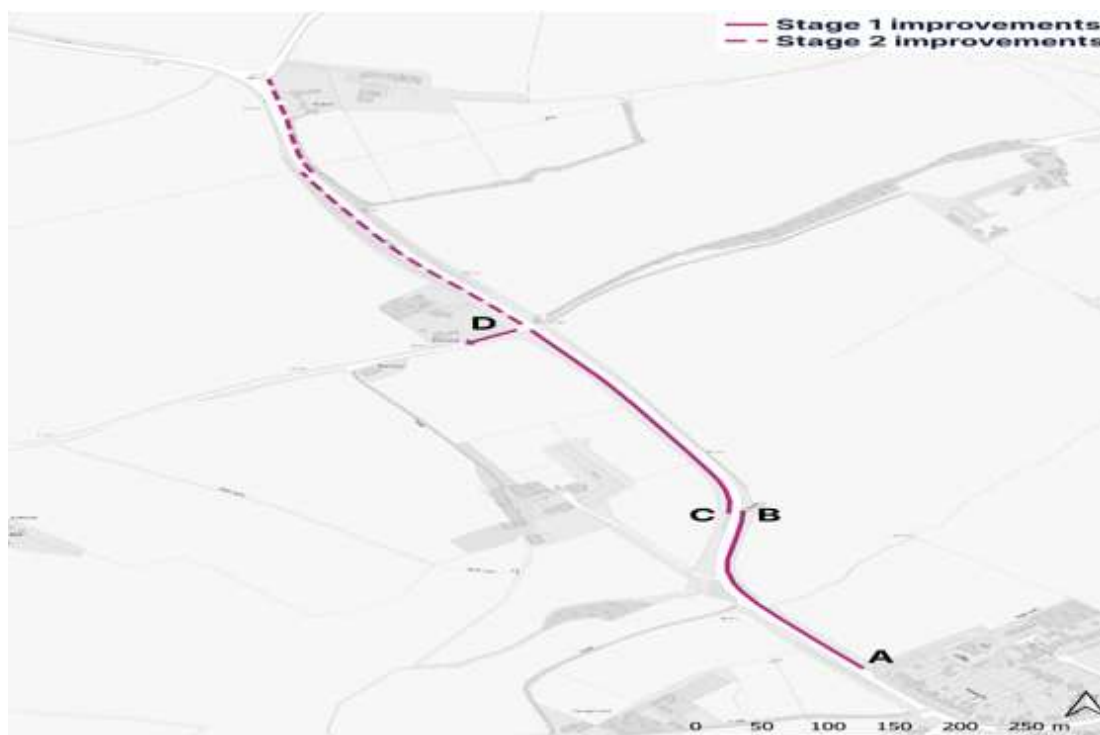


Figure 63 Proposed route of existing footpath refurbishment, Finchingfield Road<sup>273</sup>

#### **Action 7: Restore Finchingfield Road footpath for walking and cycling**

Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils to liaise with ECC Highways Department and the Braintree Local Highways Panel to re-provide the route shown in Figure 64 as a shared footway and cycleway. There may be other such cases to consider (see Action 8).

### 7.3 Quiet lanes

7.3.1 A Quiet Lane is a nationally recognised designation of a single-track road with no line markings or footpaths and with low traffic flows that is shared by motorised and non-motorised traffic. They are routes where visitors and residents enjoy the natural surroundings and use them for activities, such as cycling, horse-riding, jogging and walking. However, the idea is not to restrict motor vehicles on these routes, but to encourage considerate and shared use. An official Quiet Lane will have advisory signs at either end to show motorised users clearly that the road is a shared space and that other more vulnerable users may be using the road. Highway Code guidance indicates that drivers should drive slowly and carefully and be prepared to stop to allow people extra time to make space.<sup>274</sup>



Figure 64 Proposed Quiet Lane examples<sup>275</sup>

7.3.2 A *Quiet Lane* is distinct from a *Protected Lane* though a lane can have both designations. Whilst Quiet Lanes are designated by the highway authority (ECC), Protected Lanes are designated in the Local Plan. A Protected Lane is identified as having a particular historic and landscape value. Local Plan policy LPP 69 seeks to conserve their traditional landscape and nature conservation character, including their verges, banks, ditches, and natural features. Any proposals that would have a materially adverse impact on the physical appearance of these lanes or generate traffic of a type or amount inappropriate for their traditional landscape and nature conservation character, will not be permitted.

7.3.3 BDC's Local Plan designated several NPA lanes as 'Protected': leading west from Cornish Hall End; Lombard Street to Petches Bridge and beyond; north west and south east from Finchingfield; Lovers Lane/Rotten End/Oak Hill in Wethersfield; Toppesfield Road from B1053 heading to Howe Street. As such, the Neighbourhood Plan does not need to repeat these designations.

7.3.4 The criteria for Quiet Lane designation are: a stretch of narrow, single-track lane; and it carries less than 1,000 vehicles/day where at least 85% are travelling at less than 35 miles per hour. There are several routes in the NPA which may fulfil these criteria and are suitable for walking, riding, and cycling in the countryside. This is not a planning designation as it relates to highways, therefore designation would be undertaken by ECC in its role as highway authority. Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils should work with ECC to assess and designate the Quiet Lanes indicated on [Figure 65](#).

- 1. From Cornish Hall End running west via Rivett's Farm to the junction with Spains Hall Road at Lowerhouse.
- 2. Daw Street from its junction with B1053 going south west to and beyond Daw Street Farm to the parish boundary where it crosses the River Pant, and from its midpoint to the intersection with Mill Road and north to where Mill Road joins Vicarage Road and up to the village
- 3. Water Hall Lane off the B1053 south of Shalford where it meets the Parish boundary, to Rotten End, then east to the road junction at Woolmers and west via Valley Farm to the road junction at the top of Oak Hill.
- 4. Road running west from Blackmore End (known as Gosfield Road), past Hyde Lane and Danes Vale to the junction with the B1053, including the fork down Lovers Lane.

- 5. Pattens Farm Road east from Blackmore End at Jarvis Green, north to the parish boundary and south east via Bakers Farm and north to Liston Hall.
- 6. Lower Green Road from Blackmore End to Lower Green Farm.
- 7. Widdleybrook Lane.
- 8. Lombard Street from B1053 to Petches bridge and to Waltham's Cross.

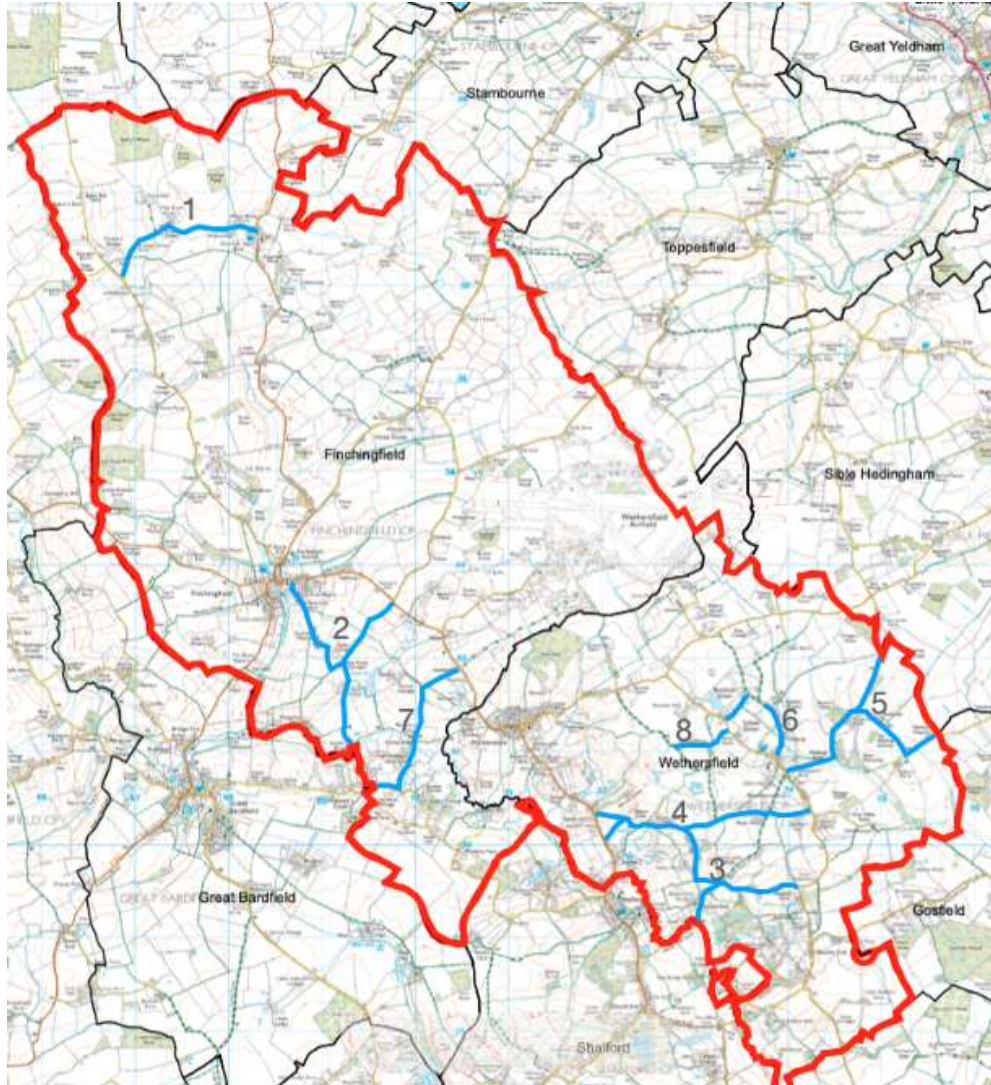


Figure 65 Proposed Quiet Lane map<sup>276</sup>

#### **Action 8: Improve accessibility across the countryside**

In partnership with ECC Highways Department, landowners, and neighbouring Parish Councils, Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils should develop a strategy which sets out a comprehensive network of footpaths, cycle routes, bridleways, and Quiet Lanes (including but not necessarily limited to those outlined on Figure 65).

The strategy shall include retention and enhancement of existing routes, proposals for new/extended routes, signage, and potential implementation measures.

## 7.4 Finchingfield bridge

- 7.4.1 Section 5.2 outlined the reasons behind Policy FW9 through which the Neighbourhood Plan proposed to record Finchingfield Bridge as a non-designated asset. This designation reflects the bridge's inherent heritage and community value that extend far beyond its functional role as a public thoroughfare. It forms *part* of a public space. It is not simply a means to get there.
- 7.4.2 As highlighted in Sections 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5, Finchingfield Bridge (along with the pond and green) is visible from roadways, pathways, the green, hospitality venues and houses. It is an integral part of what many residents, visitors, artists, photographers, writers, and historians regard as an iconic vista and features regularly in literature and social media posts by district and county council's tourist promotion.
- 7.4.3 Due to its narrow width, Finchingfield's ancient humped-backed bridge serves as an effective traffic management mechanism, not just a cherished landmark. This has led to repeated damage by vehicles to which its use is entirely unsuited (Figure 66). The bridge underwent repairs in March, 2024.<sup>277</sup>



Figure 66: Finchingfield Bridge<sup>278</sup>

- 7.4.4 It was abundantly clear in Neighbourhood Plan Information sessions, surveys, and discussion groups that residents want to keep the bridge as is. The bridge, the green, the views and the pond are all indivisible parts of the whole that makes up the intrinsic appeal of the village. Individually and collectively, they each have a definitive aesthetic, social and economic value in their current form and position that the community is determined to preserve.
- 7.4.5 ECC has previously proposed to rebuild the bridge as a larger roadway to enable more and larger traffic to come through the village. Residents are steadfast in their view that any substantive reconstruction of the bridge would not benefit the community or visitors.
- 7.4.6 Historic England have noted the importance of community participation in place making, particularly in our historic places<sup>279</sup>. Given how strongly the bridge represents the community's association with place, any radical reconstruction would effectively destroy the integral core the village. This would be the antithesis of inclusive human centric place making<sup>280</sup>.

- 7.4.7 Opposition to any radical redesign has already been expressed to ECC in negotiations with Finchingfield Parish Council and construction work has yet to commence.<sup>281</sup>
- 7.4.8 As of August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024 ECC appears to have withdrawn its proposal to demolish and rebuild the bridge but its future remains uncertain. The Neighbourhood Plan encourages Finchingfield Parish Council in its efforts to search for solutions that do not entail demolition or substantive modification of the bridge and to pursue its application for a weight restriction.

#### **Action 9: Finchingfield bridge**

Finchingfield Parish Council to continue to work with all parties to protect the existing Finchingfield Bridge in its current form and highlight to relevant stakeholders the community's wish to declare the bridge a non-designated asset as part of this Neighbourhood Plan.

### **7.5 Public transport**

- 7.5.1 The NPA is one of the most isolated locations in the country in terms of accessibility. This is especially important for the 6% of households<sup>282</sup> without access to a car. In July 2024, the local bus service was replaced with a digital on-demand service (Digi-Go).
- 7.5.2 According to our Neighbourhood Plan Residents' survey, only 7 percent of residents regularly use public transport but 23 percent said there was no available service. 28 percent said they would use it if it was available (and reliable) but only a very small percentage (6 percent) said they would use a 'on-demand' service. Current use is highest in the over 75-year-old age group. Willingness to use public transport was highest in the smaller villages (Cornish Hall End, Beazley End and Blackmore End) where it is not current available in any form.
- 7.5.3 The low number of survey respondents preferring an on-demand, rather than a fixed timetable, service may reflect unfamiliarity with the new proposal. A concern is that those people who need to use public transport – particularly older residents – may also be the least digitally literate or completely unaware of the pending changes. It is important to ensure that they are properly supported in being able to continue to access public transport when needed.

#### **Action 10: Support with use of On-Demand Public Transport Service**

- A. Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils to apply for appropriate support to be provided for less digitally literate users of on-demand public transport services.
- B. The feasibility of extending this service to include smaller villages, using electric vehicles and the longevity of the funding of this service should be actively monitored and investigated alongside BDC and ECC.

### **7.6 Traffic management**

- 7.6.1 Resident surveys and engagement sessions highlighted almost universal concern with the volume and nature of vehicular traffic passing through the NPA using an ancient rural highway system of twisting roads, pinch points, and absence of, or poorly maintained, footpaths. These ongoing issues create a perceived lack of highway safety to pedestrians, cyclists, properties (including many historic buildings) and motorists and loss of amenity to residents living along main highway routes and visitors to the area.
- 7.6.2 Many of the behavioural problems raised (e.g. speeding, noisy motor bikes and poor parking practices) are beyond the scope of this plan and Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils already make representations to ECC on these and similar issues<sup>283</sup>.

- 7.6.3 However, given the deep and ongoing concern raised during our community consultation and its evident effect on residents' wellbeing, this is a matter that warrants recording in this Neighbourhood Plan. It has a direct effect on how people experience living here today. The additional impact of any further developments in the future should be evaluated.
- 7.6.4 There are measures of a physical nature that should be explored to address these types of problem and assist in managing speed of traffic, pedestrian safety, control of HGVs, and parking. These may include: village gates; differential road surfacing; highway level changes; (e.g. 'sleeping policemen' or platforms); priority traffic measures; footway extensions/maintenance; width restrictions (including existing features that are of an historic nature which have a traffic calming effect); and additional or marked parking / electric charging points.
- 7.6.5 These would require comprehensive traffic management studies of village approaches to assess the extent and nature of the issues and an evaluation of alternative solutions. This would need to be undertaken by the Parish Councils in partnership with ECC and BDC. Resources and phasing will inevitably be an issue depending on the extent of work needed but simple measures may be shown to be cost effective. Funding sources may include section 106/Community Infrastructure Levy funding, as well as highway and environment budgets.
- 7.6.6 Measures to address traffic management issues elsewhere may also have an impact on the NPA. The Braintree Town Future Transport Strategy (BTFTS) produced by Essex Highways in 2023<sup>284</sup> outlines existing transport issues in Braintree town but acknowledges that other settlements in the district have their own unique issues. To improve connectivity, accessibility, and sustainable growth, the BTFTS evaluates potential solutions against seven objectives. These include promotion of sustainable modes of transport to reduce car journeys, alleviate congestion, and improve the health of the population and the environment.' The strategy identifies three zones - 1. Braintree Town Centre 2. Wider Urban Area and 3. Strategic Corridors (which includes the NPA). These 'strategic corridors' are intended to facilitate reliable and sustainable connections between the town centre and the wider suburban and rural areas of Braintree – given Braintree's strategic location as 'a crossroads within Essex'. The document also mentions improvements to the strategic corridors to increase their capacity whilst facilitating a shift to sustainable transport in Braintree itself, including cycling, walking and public transport.
- 7.6.7 Whether or not this strategy (or similar) is implemented, the concepts discussed raise serious concern that the B1053 could become a strategic corridor linking Braintree to the wider region. This would lead to even more car and HGV journeys through the villages and hamlets along the route causing a further reduction in highway safety, an increase in air pollution and loss of amenity.
- 7.6.8 Moreover, there are concerns that measures to increase road capacity, including through the village centres of Wethersfield and Finchingfield together with surrounding rural roads could harm the heritage assets and their setting and the landscape character of the NPA and conflict with the Vision and Objectives of the NP.

#### **Action 11: Traffic management measures**

- A. Parish Councils work with ECC and BDC to prepare a Traffic Management Scheme for Wethersfield and Finchingfield parishes including traffic calming measures and signage that will mitigate the impact of vehicular traffic on the local environment.
- B. Parish Councils seek close and regular engagement with ECC and BDC to ensure that any measures to increase road capacity and alter the status of the B1053 in the NPA to become a Strategic Corridor to reduce congestion, air pollution, loss of amenity and the impact on heritage assets in Braintree Town centre and Wider Urban-Area Zones, should not lead to an adverse impact on the NPA.

## 8 Housing

### 8.1 Housing supply and demand

- 8.1.1 Braintree Local Plan has a minimum housing requirement of 14,320 dwellings for 2013-33, an annual requirement of 716 dwellings a year. At present the district is exceeding this requirement but BDC is undertaking a Local Plan Review which will include a reassessment of objectively assessed need up to 2041. For the Neighbourhood Plan Area, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) forecasts population will increase by only 3% by 2023-2033<sup>130</sup>. The Neighbourhood Plan Housing Needs survey carried out in 2023 indicates only a very modest need for providing for additional housing in the NPA.
- 8.1.2 The Braintree Part 2 Local Plan includes two sites in Finchingfield village (FINC708 - 50 dwellings west of Bardfield Road and FINC235 – 11 dwellings west of Hill House, Brent Hall Road). These are near completion and will increase housing supply in Finchingfield village by over 20%. Several homes have also recently been completed elsewhere in both parishes.
- 8.1.3 Recent and current developments are considered to constitute a sufficient contribution to the need for housing growth in the Neighbourhood Plan area. There is no further housing requirement set out in the Local Plan or a need to allocate housing sites in the Neighbourhood Plan.

### 8.2 Housing mix

- 8.2.1 ONS data also shows a slight natural ageing of the NPA population 2023-33 due to a high median age and a declining birth rate<sup>285</sup>. This may have implications for the appropriate housing mix reflecting the district wide requirement as expressed in the *Strategic Housing Market Assessment Update* undertaken on behalf of LPAs, including Braintree, in December 2015<sup>286</sup>. This indicated an objectively assessed need for Braintree which showed a strong requirement for smaller market dwellings (2/3 bedroom) and 2-bedroom affordable dwellings (including shared ownership). Around 26% of all dwellings needed to be affordable. This was echoed in our HNS which indicated a small potential mismatch between dwelling size and household size. Respondents felt recent developments were far too large (in terms of number and scale of houses) and thereby failed to address local needs for smaller, more affordable houses for first time buyers and those looking to downsize which could in turn free up larger properties suitable for family accommodation. Notwithstanding this, the absolute number of homes suggested in the HNS was relatively small<sup>287</sup>.
- 8.2.2 There was resident support for ‘affordable homes for local people,’ (defined as those living in, or having close connections with, the parishes in the NPA), especially if these could be owned and operated by the community. This could help ensure that the housing most in need is built; costs are kept affordable; and mechanisms put in place for local people to access the home, rather than being sold or rented by others arriving from outside the area and placing further pressure on the housing market, services, and the local environment.
- 8.2.3 This need could be met through community-led housing which is encouraged in the NPPF and defined as: ‘A development instigated and taken forward by a not-for-profit organisation set up and run primarily for the purpose of meeting the housing needs of its members and the wider local community, rather than being a primarily commercial enterprise.’<sup>288</sup> Whilst any proposal for a community-led housing scheme is a major undertaking, it is supported in principle as a means of providing housing with a significant element of control over who can access it and at what price. Any site for such a scheme will need to ensure that it can meet the other policy requirements of the Neighbourhood Plan and the Local Plan. Any significant impacts on the landscape and historic character of the NPA would not be acceptable.
- 8.2.4 Within the development boundaries, developments that bring forward quality housing that meets the local demand for homes suitable for downsizing will be supported.

### 8.3 Providing new homes

- 8.3.1 The Neighbourhood Plan faces the challenge of how to meet the modest need for housing without conflicting with other objectives of the plan. Over the plan period some of our housing need can be

provided in conversions of existing buildings or infill in hamlets where compatible with the character of the landscape, settlement patterns and historic buildings. The Local Plan sets out criteria for permitting development of this nature within the development boundaries and converting existing buildings.

- 8.3.2 The Finchingfield and Wethersfield Housing Needs Survey 2024 identified a need for six affordable rented units. There are no available allocated sites in the Local Plan and a recent Call for Sites by the LPA in connection with the Local Plan Review drew several housing proposals on the edge of settlements at Finchingfield, Wethersfield and Cornish Hall End which would have an unacceptably adverse impact on the character of the countryside or the setting of those villages. Furthermore, placing social housing in isolated locations, or locations where infrastructure does not exist, whether by villages, or in the countryside or hamlets, would not support the aim of ensuring sustainable, viable communities and would run counter to the aim of promoting social cohesion and integration in this remote rural area.
- 8.3.3 The NPPF recognises that rural exception sites for affordable housing can be provided outside the designated boundaries to meet the needs of villages. Some market homes (up to 30%) can be provided on such sites to facilitate the delivery of affordable homes. Affordable homes on rural exception sites should only be provided where there is a clear need which cannot be met through allocated sites<sup>289</sup>. Local Plan policy LPP34 sets out criteria for judging such proposals. They should be adjacent to development boundaries with reasonable access to services and facilities; in an area designated as rural under the Housing Act 1996; there is a proven need; market housing should be the minimum needed up to 30%; and development should be less than 15 dwellings. These criteria should be extended to protect landscape and heritage assets.
- 8.3.4 There are limited opportunities for housing close to development boundaries given the constraints of landscape character and heritage assets. Since the identified need for affordable social housing in the NPA is relatively small it could be better integrated into the local rural settlement pattern if it were part of a mixed-use development on part of the airbase where replacement of existing military dwellings is proposed and where a more appropriate mix and style of tenure can be achieved (see Section 10).

#### **Policy FW12: Housing**

**A. New Housing Developments within Development Boundaries:** Within the Development Boundaries, proposals for small scale new housing developments will be supported, provided they satisfy the policies of the plan in respect of Sustainable Design (FW2), Wildlife Friendly Development (FW4), Local Green Spaces (FW6), Design and Character (FW7), Non designated Heritage assets (FW8), Rural landscape setting (FW9), and Walking and disability access routes (FW10). Such proposals must satisfy the mix of house types and tenures set down by the Local Plan, to meet local needs, and satisfy local demand. Developments which meet the local need for small homes for young households and properties suitable for mature households to downsize will be encouraged. No housing developments shall be permitted outside the development boundaries unless they fall under B, or C below

**B. 'Rural Exception' sites to meet local need for affordable and community-led housing:**

Small scale 'Rural Exception' sites will be considered favourably provided the following criteria are satisfied:

- i. The development provides small scale community led housing of up to 5 units which meets the identified needs of the community in terms of mix, unit size, tenure, and house type;
- ii. The development site is contiguous with an existing development boundary, and forms a natural, harmonious extension to the existing settlement pattern;
- iii. The development is well related in scale, mass, design, and setting, and conforms with policies Sustainable Design (FW2), Wildlife Friendly Development (FW4), Local Green Spaces (FW6), Design and Character (FW7), Non designated Heritage assets (FW8), Rural landscape setting (FW9), and Walking and disability access routes (FW10);
- iv. The development site causes no harm to designated heritage assets or their setting;
- v. The development site is well located to village services and facilities.
- vi. Proof is provided of the need for affordable and community-led housing for any such proposal, that cannot be met with the existing development boundaries.

**C. On Wethersfield Airbase in compliance with Policy FW18.**

## 9 Community and Livelihoods

The combination of *Community* and *Livelihoods* in this section is entirely deliberate. Our consultation clearly showed that how residents work is inter-twined with how they live. Many people live here because it allows them to work in a specific sector and in an amenable environment of their choosing. Most business owners live and work in the NPA and many saw local businesses as part of the community, irrespective of their being business owners themselves. The NPA has a wide range of businesses. Some in Finchingfield village, for example, are more ‘visible’ but those in Wethersfield village or more isolated parts of the parishes are not. They all contribute to the community.

### 9.1 Health Centre

- 9.1.1 The Freshwell Health Centre is a prime example of a significant local employer that is integrated within the community. The practice provides general health services, as well a range of specialist ones, including X-ray and ultrasound, to nearly 8,000 people in the NPA and surrounding local communities. The teamwork and care provided by Freshwell received unanimous fulsome praise in our Residents’ survey. The Centre’s outstanding service has recently been recognised in district and national surveys of GP practices<sup>290</sup>.
- 9.1.2 The health centre surgery has reported there may be a need to extend the health centre using available land on the rear of the site. This would be strongly supported.

### Policy FW13: Health care provision

Proposals to expand the provision of general practice healthcare at the Freshwell Health Centre will be strongly supported within the existing planning unit if they comply with the Design, Heritage and other relevant policies outlined in this Plan.

### 9.2 Community centres

- 9.2.1 Community centres in all parishes perform a vital role in bringing communities together in social and recreational gatherings thereby improving community well-being and alleviating isolation. They also serve as spaces for formal gatherings, such as Parish Council meetings. 8 out of 10 survey respondents ranked Village Halls and Community centres as being very important to their every-day lives. Due to age and layout, there is sometimes a need to update these amenities.
- 9.2.2 *Finchingfield Village Hall:*
- 9.2.2.1 Finchingfield has a small village hall which is over 100 years old. Whilst this facilitates several activities, it is unable to meet the range of needs of the community.
- 9.2.2.2 Residents’ support for its renovation or replacement was evident in the Neighbourhood Plan survey and Finchingfield Parish Council has begun consultation on the matter.

### Policy FW14: Refurbishment / replacement Finchingfield Community centre

Proposals to refurbish the existing or construct a new community centre in Finchingfield in or adjacent to its current site will be supported, subject to meeting the following criteria:

- i. The proposals clearly demonstrate how they address the range of community needs.
- ii. The proposals do not have an unacceptable impact on the amenity of neighbouring residents, either in terms of the building design or proposals for parking.
- iii. The proposals do not have an unacceptable impact on the operation or maintenance of any proximate community amenities.

### 9.2.3 *Wethersfield Community shop:*

- 9.2.3.1 Wethersfield Community shop in the Wethersfield Club is currently providing a valuable service to the village in meeting the daily convenience shopping needs of the community.
- 9.2.3.2 The Neighbourhood Plan Residents' survey showed general support for a shop providing for local needs that was viable, visible, and accessible.

## **Policy FW15: Provision of a Wethersfield shop**

Proposals to provide a shop in Wethersfield (either on the existing site or elsewhere within the village development boundary) will be supported subject to the following:

- i. The main use of the community shop is for convenience goods
- ii. The store is designed to be fully accessible for all members of the community.
- iii. The proposals do not have an unacceptable impact on the amenity of neighbouring residents, either in terms of the building design or proposals for parking.
- iv. The parking arrangements ensure that there is not an unacceptable impact on highway safety

### **9.3 Shared Business / Low carbon rural innovation and Community hub**

- 9.3.1 In addition to improvements to Community spaces, the FWNP surveys also showed support for the idea of 'shared' spaces suitable for leisure and business uses.
- 9.3.2 Finchingfield and Wethersfield parishes are notable for high levels of self-employment, most of which is conducted in or around the NPA. Our surveys also revealed that over 20 percent of employed residents and over 40 percent of self-employed residents work from home, as it suits their business or employers and their lifestyle choice<sup>291</sup>. However, some home workers may need to hold periodic meetings in a formal space or work with colleagues in a shared workspace. This has economic benefits and alleviates social isolation<sup>292</sup>.
- 9.3.3 The ability to hire flexible workspace may alleviate the need for businesses to invest in fixed assets they rarely use or provide a venue for a range of skills' training courses<sup>293</sup>, including those in high growth Green sectors.
- 9.3.4 There are also potential synergies between business and leisure uses. For example, ECC's Culture strategy<sup>294</sup> recognises the role Culture and the Arts play in enriching and empowering communities but also identifies a shortage of physical spaces, especially in rural areas. The Arts Council has highlighted that community participation in cultural pursuits enhances mental and physical well-being<sup>295</sup>. The Essex Film Collective predicts that the county has significant potential to develop its creative and media sector<sup>296</sup>. Finchingfield village and Wethersfield Airbase have featured in films and TV series generating income and skilled jobs for the local community. With a rich literary and artistic history inspired by the NPA villages and landscape, there is also scope to broaden its visitor appeal and thereby enhance local livelihoods.
- 9.3.5 There are currently opportunities for residents and visitors to access cultural activities, art, and leisure in the NPA. However, there are currently only a few large shared spaces: village halls, the Wethersfield Pavilion, or the Finchingfield Guildhall – not all of which are entirely suitable for multiple or simultaneous uses, including business.
- 9.3.6 There is a wide choice of models from which useful lessons could be drawn. These include Rural Enterprise Hubs (REHs) which bring together rural businesses (either on a permanent or intermittent basis) thereby providing opportunity for centralised business support, face-to-face contact (with other businesses or customers), knowledge exchange, networking, and cross-business synergies<sup>297</sup>.
- 9.3.7 However, case study analysis suggests there is a need to understand specific rural needs, rather than to simply try to transpose urban models. This may mean that such a hub combines social and business offerings and may be run by the community itself, rather than a private business<sup>298</sup>.

- 9.3.8 Research also indicates that, carefully sited and designed, REHs can encourage visits to cafes, galleries, and attractions and “*are often forms of creative micro clusters and may play a key role in fostering the creative industries in rural areas*”<sup>299</sup>.
- 9.3.9 With some imaginative design, it is feasible to support homeworkers, the self-employed, businesses, researchers and community and commercial Art and Cultural activities (for example) in the same space. To enable more people from different backgrounds to meet, work, share ideas, socialise, and store their equipment, may require more suitable spaces.
- 9.3.10 The Neighbourhood Plan would therefore encourage and support the provision of small -scale proposals within Finchingfield and Wethersfield parishes for such uses to operate alongside existing facilities to enhance the growth of rural businesses and leisure activities in the NPA.

### **Policy FW16: Business / Low carbon rural innovation and community hubs**

Small-scale proposals to provide commercial and / or community hubs for use by businesses (and / or the community) will be supported subject to demonstrating the following:

- i. The proposals do not have an unacceptable impact on the amenity of neighbouring residents or the character of local surrounding area, by reason of appearance, general disturbance, or parking.
- ii. The parking arrangements ensure that there is not an unacceptable impact on local highway movements by virtue of congestion and/or highway safety.

Provision of facilities to allow exhibitions of Arts and Culture or facilitate co-working by homeworkers, artists, or community related events will be encouraged. Locations within the development boundary or under-used existing premises will be encouraged.

#### **9.4 Rural Business diversification**

- 9.4.1 In a modern rural economy, it is important that businesses can adapt and diversify, for example, through the conversion of redundant agricultural buildings for business uses. Many such uses already fall under permitted development rights, so do not require a planning application. Braintree Part 2 Local Plan Policies LPP7 (Rural Enterprise) and LPP8 (Tourist Development within the Countryside) are also generally supportive of the development of commercial activities in the countryside. These policies are supported by the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 9.4.2 A strong local preference for self-employment, suggests there may be a need for the Neighbourhood Plan to take additional measures to facilitate growth in the rural economy, including (but not limited to) emerging green business activity. This is in line with several strategic priorities, including NEEB’s “*Convening Green Business*” objective which aims to foster partnerships between national and local green economy businesses<sup>300</sup>. Such measures may include identifying opportunities for new business units through replacement of outmoded industrial buildings without intruding into open countryside or harming heritage assets.
- 9.4.3 Local examples of suitable sites may include those at Courtenhams (Blackmore End); the intensification of existing lawful commercial/industrial sites, such as those at ESco in Sculpin’s Lane; the Mushroom Farm on Hedingham Road; or the former military buildings at Wethersfield Airbase (see Policy Fw18). Such opportunities could encourage the growth and diversification of the rural economy and lead to the creation of additional high skilled employment for residents.

## Policy FW17: Business units in the countryside

Proposals that result in the provision of refurbished or new-build, small-scale commercial business units will be supported where:

- i. They refurbish or replace existing lawful industrial (Class B2) or warehousing (Class B8) buildings;
- ii. They are located within the curtilage or planning unit of existing lawful industrial or warehousing uses;
- iii. Do not adversely affect the amenity of surrounding occupiers;
- iv. Do not adversely affect highway safety, provide satisfactory space for on-site parking and operational needs.

9.4.4 There is also scope to take additional *non*-planning measures to facilitate the growth of a range of exciting business sectors where the NPA *already* has expertise. The NPA has much to celebrate and significant potential to create jobs and opportunities for all generations.

9.4.5 Our surveys showed that 35% of businesses were ‘home-based’; 26% Agricultural or Equestrian; and 12% Hospitality or Tourism. The equine sector is estimated to contribute £5 billion to the UK economy<sup>301</sup>. As well as several equestrian centres for leisure pursuits, the NPA is home to Mill Farm, in CHE which runs a thoroughbred race horse business that helps to sustain a range of rural jobs including feed supplies, veterinary services, chiropractors, and events management<sup>302</sup>. In the Digital sector, ESco in Finchingfield is one of the largest local employers. It serves a wide range of national clients, including the Countryside Alliance, the Royal National Institute of Blind People and the Burlington Magazine, the world's leading monthly publication devoted to the fine and decorative arts<sup>303</sup>.



Figure 67: Some of the rural livelihoods in the NPA<sup>304</sup>

- 9.4.6 There is scope for Parish Councils to help this growth by championing our communities and businesses. In the tourist sector, for example, Parish Councils (individually and in collaboration with neighbouring parishes) could take a proactive stance in promoting the notion of a Nature, Heritage, and Food trail throughout the area to encourage walkers, cyclists, and tourists to visit and stay in the NPA. This could encompass the attractions of nearby Castle Hedingham, Finchingfield village, the working local landscape that attracted the Bardfield artists and stretch as far as the Fry Gallery in Saffron Walden. This mirrors Suffolk County Council's approach in Dedham Vale – an area estimated to generate revenues of £60 million per annum and to create hundreds of local jobs<sup>305,306,307</sup>.
- 9.4.7 Each of these areas dovetails with the strategic priorities laid out in the North Essex Economic Board's vision for rural Essex<sup>308</sup>. Actions to support businesses are intended to complement existing efforts and to use Parish Council's convening power and access to information and funding. There are, however, obvious concerns regarding potential downsides (such as traffic and wage levels) that may warrant a co-ordinated approach and open discussion.
- 9.4.8 It should also be highlighted that discussion of these sectors and occupations is in no way meant to diminish the importance of others. We are carpenters, care workers, teachers, architects, consultants, fitness instructors, homeworkers, homemakers, bank clerks, council workers, dentists, designers, artists, engineers, planners, builders, gardeners, tree surgeons, writers, and students. This rich variety of skill sets is precisely the point – this is why the NPA has so much potential. Maximising this potential has planning and non-planning implications.

#### **Action 12: Support for local businesses**

Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils to lobby for appropriate support to be provided for local businesses and investigate scope for collaboration with neighbouring parish councils and / or external organisations (including BDC and ECC) to facilitate the valued-added growth of important rural sectors and an understanding of their potential wider impacts on the community. This Action should be viewed alongside complementary Actions (1 and 14) and Policies FW16 and FW17.

### **9.5 Assets of Community Value**

- 9.5.1 Braintree Part 2 Local Plan Policy LPP61 protects assets of community value and use by requiring a marketing exercise to be carried out which lasts at least 12 months. Only at this point, if it is demonstrated that the use is no longer required, is a change permitted. This policy does therefore provide a degree of protection for these uses.
- 9.5.2 There are some community facilities, such as public houses, which have been successfully nominated as Assets of Community Value (ACVs) elsewhere in the UK. This has two effects. First, if the ACV is put up for sale, there is a period where the community can assemble a bid to purchase it. Second, ACV status is a material consideration in the determination of any planning application. It can provide an extra layer of protection for such uses, where they are not owned by the community.
- 9.5.3 Our surveys showed that people feel that Finchingfield and Wethersfield's hospitality and retail businesses make a valuable social and economic contribution to village life. When business premises are converted to residential use, there is obvious concern.

#### **Action 13: Identify assets of community value**

Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils to identify potential Assets of Community Value and to apply to BDC for their designation.

## 10 Wethersfield Airbase

### 10.1 The need for an Airbase policy

- 10.1.1 The 322-hectare Wethersfield Airbase sits on a remote inaccessible site equidistant between the villages of Finchingfield and Wethersfield. Most of the land is in Finchingfield parish but extends to parts of the parishes of Wethersfield, Toppesfield, and Sible Hedingham (Figure 68).
- 10.1.2 Its current use as a Home Office ARC is due to end in 2027. Its future use will have a profound influence on the character of the NPA and surrounding areas and is therefore of great interest and concern to the local community. The site is not referred to in the current Local Plan despite its significance in terms of scale and potential economic, environmental, and social impact on the NPA and its pending closure. It is axiomatic that the FWNP should include a detailed policy on the Wethersfield Airbase.

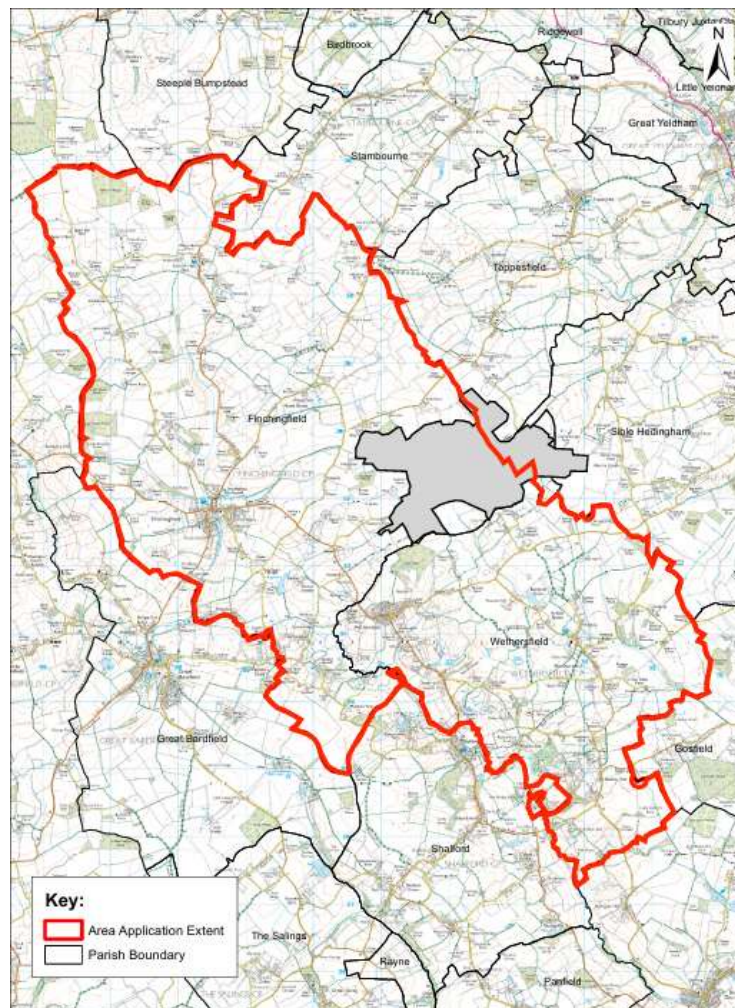
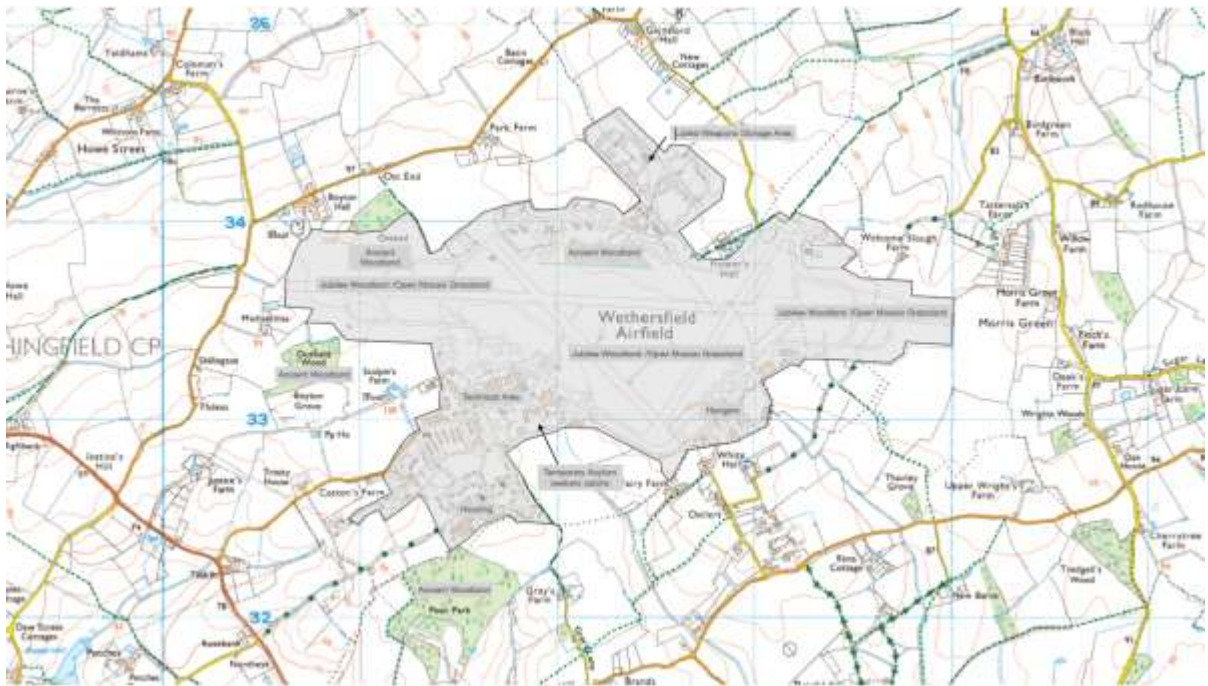


Figure 68 Location of Wethersfield Airbase<sup>309</sup>

### 10.2 Past and current uses

- 10.2.1 Prior to construction of the airbase in WWII, the site was arable farmland and included ancient woodland covering 50 hectares linked to 12 acres of similar habitat nearby<sup>310</sup>. The original A-frame runway, together with extensions and apron areas, occupy the central part of the site, whilst the former Technical Area (comprising hangars, workshops, stores, accommodation, administrative and social buildings etc) and military housing lies in the south-west corner. To the north of the runway are several hangars and a weapons storage area. Surrounding and including the runway and built-up area, lies areas of open mosaic habitat, young and remaining ancient woodland and mixed grassland (Figure 69).

- 10.2.2 Between periods of occupation by the RAF and Ministry of Defence (MoD), the airbase was leased to the US Air Force (USAF) from 1943-46 and 1952-90 during which time it played a key role in WWII and NATO's Cold War nuclear deterrent. The USAF constructed numerous buildings – some of which are of historical interest (e.g. hangars, weapons storage areas and the chapel). Many others (including administration and accommodation blocks) may be suitable for repurposing and refurbishment. Musical events, airshows and numerous marriages between military personnel and members of the local community are also evidence of a high level of local social interaction during this period.
- 10.2.3 After the USAF's departure, the Ministry of Defence Police (MDP) used the Airbase as a major training facility until 2022. The main interaction during this period was through visits to the popular museum opened in 2015 but this was closed by the MOD in 2021 before the site was transferred to the Home Office. The Home Office has erected several temporary buildings in connection with the asylum accommodation centre.



**Figure 69 Current land use at Wethersfield Airbase<sup>311</sup>**

### **10.3 Future uses: a growth opportunity**

- 10.3.1 In terms of its potential for major development in future, the site's location in a very remote area well away from towns and major road and public transport links together with the rural nature of the surrounding highway network, which runs through the heart of two conservation areas, means that sustainable development on the site is unlikely to be achievable without very considerable and intrusive infrastructure investment. A more feasible strategy would be to exploit the site's remoteness and reimagine its potential as one capable of realising a range of national and district policy goals across the three pillars of sustainability -environmental, social, and economic - as well as meeting local needs and aspirations.
- 10.3.2 From the Neighbourhood Plan surveys, residents' overwhelming view is that the distinctive and beautiful, intrinsic rural character of the area should be safeguarded and that the remoteness, ecology and built heritage of the airbase should be acknowledged as presenting a growth opportunity as the basis for development to meet local needs<sup>312</sup>.
- 10.3.3 The strategic planning policy context is consistent with these community aspirations which reflect the rural characteristics of the site, its remote rural location and nature of the surrounding area. The site is not allocated in the Local Plan as a development opportunity and sits outside any development

boundary. It is therefore recognised as ‘countryside’ whereby only uses compatible with its rural location would be acceptable.

10.3.4 Whilst the site offers a significant opportunity to meet local aspirations, at the same time it has potential to meet national and regional policies that seek to promote sustainable travel, recognise the beauty of the countryside and safeguard landscape character, mitigate climate change, enhance the natural and built environment through biodiversity, maintain ecology, green infrastructure, and nature recovery, achieve a high standard of design and protect heritage assets. Moreover, sitting within ECC’s Climate Focus Area, a holistic vision for the airbase could contribute significantly towards the Essex Climate Action Commission’s recommendations to reduce the county’s greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, deliver the strategic opportunity identified in the 2025 Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and meet ECC’s targets for Levelling-Up and BDC’s Local Plan and its review.

10.3.5 The application of strategic policy, national guidance, community aspirations and the FWNP evidence base has led to a set of principles to guide future development of the airbase. These are set out below:

#### **10.4 Guiding principles:**

##### **10.4.1 Protect local character**

10.4.1.1 Surveys of the local community reveal the strength of feeling that the reasons that people live here is the beautiful, rural, and historic character of settlements in both parishes set in a largely agrarian landscape. The NPPF states that policies should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity whilst recognising the intrinsic beauty and character of the countryside<sup>313</sup>.

10.4.1.2 The potential for the airbase to make such a contribution is enhanced by its setting within a valued landscape as described in Section 6 together with the exceptional historic built environment within an area of unspoilt, rural character which carries little capacity for further development. NPPF policy promotes safeguarding valued landscapes and the airfield and surrounding area has been identified as a designated Special Area of Landscape Value. Any future uses of the site will need to be sympathetic to the character of these areas.

##### **10.4.2 Protect and enhance ecology through Nature recovery<sup>k</sup>**

10.4.2.1 The environmental potential of the site and the surrounding area has been recognised by Natural England, Essex Wildlife Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Spains Hall Estate, Ground Control, and the North Essex Farm Cluster. There is growing realisation that there is a unique opportunity to realise a range of policy goals at the district, county, and national level. Evidence for this potential comes in the form of an array of ecological surveys from 2010 to 2022 conducted on behalf of UK Government departments and its inclusion as a Strategic Opportunity in ECC’s Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

10.4.2.2 To complement the ancient woodland and historic landscape, this rich biodiversity has been enhanced through the planting of 75,000 trees to create the only Jubilee Wood in Essex under the supervision of the Woodland Trust and patronage of HRH The Princess Royal in 2012<sup>314</sup>. However, there are signs that this fragile balance may be under threat. One ecologist’s report in 2021 warned that any major future development would result in the loss of nesting and foraging habitats for Red, Amber and Green List species<sup>315</sup>. There is also evidence of the detrimental impacts of past and current uses.

10.4.2.3 To address threats to local biodiversity requires sensitive repurposing of the site and remedial measures to be initiated. Alongside protection of ancient woodlands, landscape enhancement and public access would meet several strategic policies relating to nature recovery, zero carbon, environmental management, health and well-being and recreational opportunities.

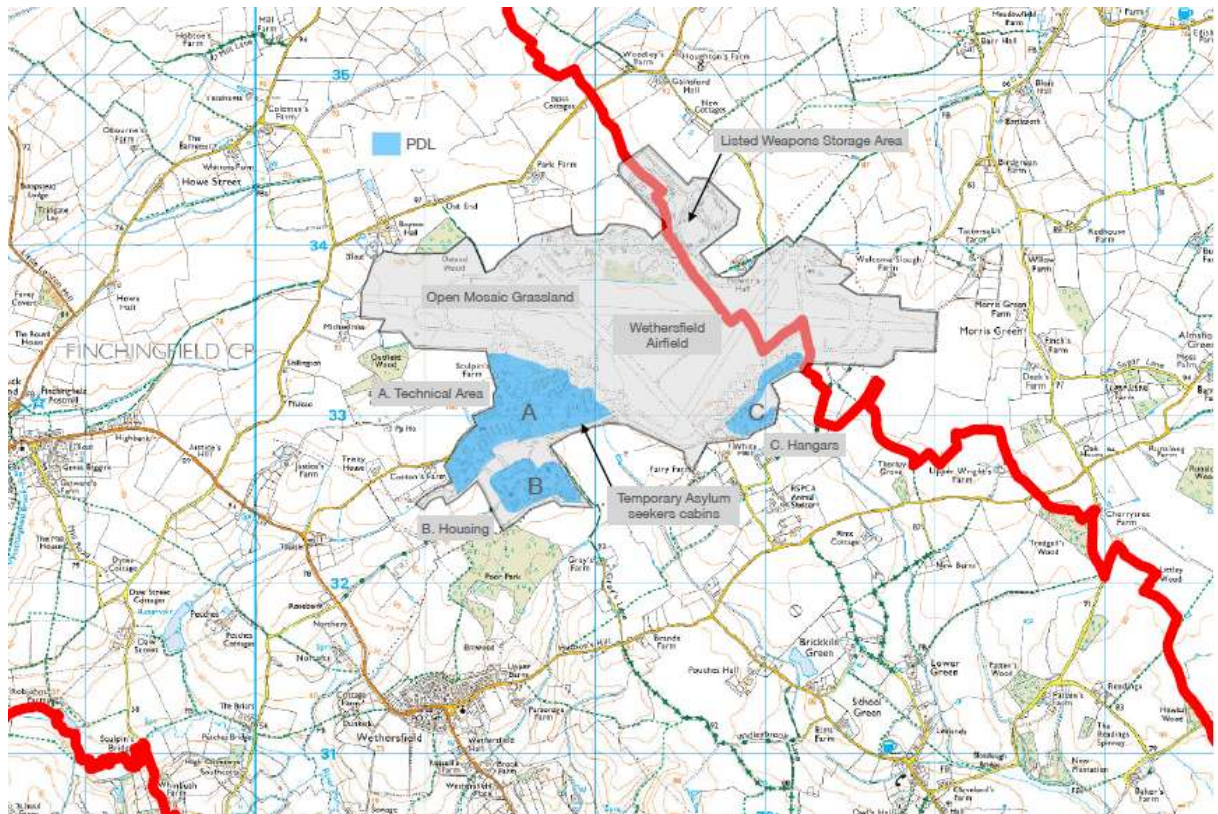
10.4.2.4 There is a need to recognise the potential role of the site to achieve biodiversity net gain as part of a nature recovery programme across this part of Essex, linking with the Pant and Blackwater catchment,

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<sup>k</sup> See Appendix V for background material relevant to this section

ECC focus area, Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), Wildfell Centre for Nature Recovery and North Essex Farm Cluster projects. Given that the site has been identified as a strategic opportunity in the LNRS for nature recovery any development on the site will need to help the delivery of its objectives as a key location in the county for nature recovery, 'where efforts will be most beneficial for nature and the wider environment.' Inclusion as a strategic opportunity indicates where actions could be carried out that will create, expand, and connect existing spaces for nature. In accordance with a key principle of nature recovery known as the Lawton Principles-these actions come under three main headings, designed to make habitats bigger, better, and more connected.

- 10.4.3 **Water, air and land quality and contamination:** There is evidence of poor water and drainage services on site which may or may not be linked to indicators of poor water quality in local rivers. A report by Buro Happold on behalf of WASC in 2023<sup>316</sup> sets out the likelihood of heavy contamination in locations across and outside the site arising from the historic use of the site as a military airfield and the mitigation works that might be necessary. This has been acknowledged in a recent report published by HO. Developers and future occupants will need to ensure that the site is suitable for any proposed use taking account of ground conditions and any risks arising from contamination. This includes risks on and off site arising from natural hazards or former activities and any proposals for mitigation after remediation. It is highly probable that large areas of the site will require a 'no dig' approach to any future uses to avoid disturbing contaminated sub ground deposits.
- 10.4.4 **Sustainable travel:** There is a strong need to safeguard the area from excessive traffic, particularly that which originates from outside the area, owing to the scale and nature of development. A transport report carried out on behalf of WASC by TPC consultants in 2023<sup>317</sup> concluded that it would be very unlikely that any major development on the site could be rendered sustainable without prohibitive cost. This was attributed to the site's remote location, distance to the major highway and public transport networks and the nature of the rural highway network and transport services. Virtually all journeys originating outside the area would have to be done by private car and there is unlikely to be any form of sustainable travel which would be able to render the site suitable for major development. For HGVs and private vehicles forced to use B Class roads, most of the site remains more than ten miles from the Strategic Road Network, which is a significant measure of its inaccessibility. Nevertheless, with the closure of the airfield, a reinstatement of permeability across the site and connectivity with the surrounding villages and open countryside would be consistent with the need to promote sustainable local travel and enhance integration of the site into the wider settlement pattern without it becoming over-dominant.
- 10.4.5 **Previously Developed Land:** The local community recognises that in principle some areas of the site comprising established, disused built footprint could be appropriate for new development, whether for repurposing or newbuild provided the extent of openness across the site was maintained and heritage and landscape character were safeguarded. Some existing built development is outmoded and needs to be replaced or refurbished. Other areas have historic interest for their military heritage and should be protected with new uses found which could assist in meeting local and specialist needs for housing, community, and business opportunities. Whilst newbuild development and retention of existing buildings may be permissible in specific areas, those areas and the scale of built development should be restricted to protect openness and rural character. The extent of total footprint and floorspace across the site should be limited in area so as to sustain the degree of openness across the site that existed as a result of the military use of the site whilst respecting its historic layout and landscape character. Therefore, outside defined built up areas, the site should be safeguarded for open uses appropriate to the rural character of the countryside. Within the built-up areas of the site, the open historic character together with the impact on and relationship to the wider area should be respected.



**Figure 70 Development limits referenced in Policy 18<sup>318</sup>**

- 10.4.6 **Renewable energy:** The flat terrain of the site offers potential to contribute to meeting zero carbon targets and enable a diversification by developing renewable energy generation and storage. Energy generation capacity would appear to be sufficient for on- and off-site users but this would need to be balanced in a holistic manner with other appropriate uses for the site. The viability of developing a mini grid to supply power to the site and surrounding settlements is being explored by local interest groups and this could be an positive approach to securing a reduction in fuel poverty, energy security and a move away from fossil fuel dependency.
- 10.4.7 **A dynamic green economy:** Many of the existing buildings on the site may be suitable for conversion or replacement to small scale industrial or commercial units which would attract existing and new businesses. These would support the local economy by creating high skilled jobs and providing services to residents and businesses. The site could offer new opportunities in a more resilient agricultural sector which may need to evolve in response to climate change, water shortage and changing technology. Tourism based on the ecological, landscape and historic character of the site and surrounding area would also be supported, including the rehousing of the Wethersfield Airbase Museum. Buildings associated with business and other non-residential recreational or community uses should be limited to Areas A and C in Figure 70 in a way that was sympathetic to and safeguarded the scale and open, historic character of the Technical Area and surrounding rural area. It is essential that all uses be appropriate to the site's location and be consistent with the need to minimise travel from outside the area by private cars or HGVs.
- 10.4.8 **Heritage:** Research commissioned by Historic England and the Airfield Research Group concluded that Wethersfield Airbase is one of the most outstanding examples of early Cold War military heritage<sup>319</sup>. The heritage value of the site should be recognised and incorporated into the future development and use of the whole airbase. Whilst designation of the entire site as an NDHA is described in detail in Section 5.2 (NDHA7), in its 2022 report CBA also suggested its potential designation as a conservation area: “As a separate consideration, future airfield heritage management strategies could include the use of Conservation Area status of part or all the airfield. Conservation Area status could be used to encompass and recognise the group importance of the wider airfield where individual building

*designations are not considered appropriate – for example, key surviving aspects such as the runway and a range of surviving Cold War and WWII structures.*<sup>320</sup> Assessment for designation has been undertaken by Place Services on behalf of WASC. The latter also recently successfully applied to Historic England for the statutory listing of the weapons storage area.

- 10.4.9 **Design:** Achieving high quality design in any new and replacement buildings is a cornerstone of national and local planning policies, promoting new uses for existing buildings. Any such refurbishment or new construction should be in accordance with design policies in the NP which set out guidance as to how high-quality design should be achieved in keeping in the setting of the NPA together with principles to guide the design, character, and scale of any new development.
- 10.4.10 **Housing:** A small development of housing would be supported only if it reflected the rural settlement pattern of the NPA and wider area in terms of scale and specifically met local and specialist housing needs as expressed through local surveys and research.
- 10.4.11 NPA Housing Needs and Household surveys carried out in 2023 indicated a very modest need for additional local housing but suggested a mismatch between dwelling size and household size. Small-scale, high-quality, sustainably designed housing would enable downsizing of small households occupying large dwellings and opportunities for first time buyers, through the provision of entry level, small high specification dwellings and social/market affordable units.
- 10.4.12 ECC are currently investigating the supply and use of supported and specialist housing and accommodation over the next 20 years<sup>321</sup>. In combination with the HNS, this work could assist in clarifying local needs in the NPA. Provision of specialist housing on the airbase may meet some of any evidenced need, including veterans' accommodation in reflection of its historic use.
- 10.4.13 There is no further housing requirement for the parishes set out in the current Local Plan but a settlement with a maximum number of dwellings in the range of 150-200 dwellings (together with associated community uses, SUDS/planting buffers etc) located within the existing area of family housing identified as Area B (26.2 acres (10.6 ha) in [Figure 70](#) could be supported where it reflected the settlement pattern on the site and in the surrounding area, gave flexibility in mix, tenure and house types to reflect local needs and would be reasonably consistent with the number of residential units that existed on the site in connection with their lawful military use.
- 10.4.14 **Buildings for community use:** The site contains many buildings and outdoor sports facilities previously used by military personnel. These may be suited to continued use by local communities. Increased accessibility to and integration between surrounding communities and the site should be promoted.
- 10.4.15 **Master plan:** Policies should seek to achieve a balance of uses that are in conformity with strategic objectives and local needs and aspirations whilst playing a substantial role in meeting the Vision and Objectives of this plan.

The overriding aspirations of local communities are that, in meeting the Vision and Objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan, the airbase is transformed from an under- utilised, extensive, closed military environment in a remote location to a sustainable, accessible mixed-use hub which can serve the needs and aspirations of local communities and meet societal goals expressed in national and local policy. The focus for achieving this can be by consensual agreement to a Master Plan which can guide the way forward for the future development of the base. This would be underpinned by a strategy for delivering its components and the infrastructure needed to support implementation.

The Master Plan can set out land uses spatially, based on the Vision and objectives and so aim to seek to protect valued landscapes and heritage assets; help meet zero carbon targets; protect ecosystems and promote biodiversity net gain; help secure food and energy supply; promote cutting edge green technologies, as well as providing eco-homes to meet local needs and business growth opportunities to generate high quality new jobs for local people. This Master Plan should be delivered through close input and collaboration between all key stakeholders-BDC, ECC, the Home Office (or subsequent landowner), Parish Councils, with further input from government bodies, such as Natural England, and the Environment Agency, Essex Partnership, as well as Essex Emergency services, NHS, utility companies, community organisations and other stakeholders who would be able to contribute to its delivery and implementation.

These guiding principles and the associated Policy FW18 set out below have strong support from the local community and a wide range of stakeholders.

## Policy FW18: Wethersfield Airbase

Proposals for development at Wethersfield Airbase, (including new buildings, open areas and refurbishment, demolition and either partial or full redevelopment of any existing buildings) should reflect the distinctive historic air base character of the site, its role as a strategic opportunity site for nature recovery, as part of a valued landscape, and the intrinsic beauty of the surrounding countryside. Development should seize the opportunity and be required to help mitigate climate change and provide for nature recovery whilst respecting the potential of the site's openness and built form to promote a sustainable future for the site and surrounding area. In addition to the requirement to adhere to all other policies in this Neighbourhood Plan, development will be permitted where it meets all the following criteria:

### A. Process

- i. Development proposals will accord with a Master Plan for the entire site, approved by the Local Planning Authority in consultation with Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils and neighbouring parish councils, appropriate strategic and local stakeholders and the local community.
- ii. The mix of uses shall maximise opportunities for community benefits in all respects and shall reflect the community's needs as an outcome of meaningful local consultation.

### B. Site principles and Design

- i. The retained and newbuild footprint of the whole airbase site shall not exceed the total lawful footprint that existed on site in March 2023 (excluding structures designed to be unenclosed or open-sided on any side) where it would cause harm to the openness of the site or historic or landscape character and appearance. New buildings shall be restricted to the main areas of built up Previously Developed Land identified as A, B and C on Figure 70.
- ii. The retained buildings shall include only buildings constructed in conjunction with the lawful use of the site as a military airfield and not temporary and other structures erected on the site associated with the processing and housing of asylum seekers. No new building shall exceed two storeys in height, other than exceptionally where it constitutes a like for like replacement of an existing building;
- iii. Any proposed new building or use shall be appropriate to the site's location in the countryside in terms of the character, scale, traffic generation, design, landscape impact and relationship to surrounding settlements;
- iv. Development should achieve an appropriate mix of uses and contribute positively to the economic and social sustainability of the area in terms of housing, employment, service provision, community cohesion and well-being;
- v. Development must comply with all the policies and objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan;
- vi. Development provides community infrastructure supporting the needs of surrounding local communities together with measures to enhance accessibility to and across the site;
- vii. Development should respect the rural character of the site and surrounding area and ensure that a comprehensive landscape scheme is applied to minimise any visual impact, including dark skies particularly from any prominent viewpoints in the landscape (including public rights of way).
- viii. All proposals shall be supported by satisfactory physical and social infrastructure. Developments must demonstrate that sufficient utility capacity is available or could feasibly be provided.

### C. Environment and Energy

- i. Development is designed to be compatible with the need to mitigate climate change in meeting carbon emission targets;
- ii. It respects and enhances the ecological value of the site identified as a Strategic Opportunity in the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy and delivers a minimum of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain. Support will be given to projects that exceed the 10% threshold, subject to its justification.
- iii. It provides a significant source of renewable energy, including appropriate storage of generated energy, to meet the energy needs of the site and/or surrounding settlements;

iv. It provides for a scheme to assess (through appropriate desk studies and ground investigations) the historic contamination of the site arising from past activities and to set out proposals to decontaminate the site in a way that is appropriate in terms of anticipated risk to proposed future users of the site.

#### **D. Heritage**

Development is required to protect and enhance the character and appearance of designated and non-designated heritage assets of the site and their setting, including the airfield.

#### **E Transport**

i. Development will be required to take account of the remote location of the site, the character of the surrounding countryside, and the impact on the local and wider highway network. Development must not generate a substantial additional need to travel into the area by private car or commercial vehicle. An assessment of impact will have regard to sustainability of transport modes, impact on highway safety, the impact on the character of local villages, hamlets, and buildings along the routes to the site and the amenity and safety of those living in, working in, and visiting the area.

ii. All development proposals will be required to promote connectivity for all both within the site and wider environment through a Travel Plan and/or direct provision of sustainable transport modes which offer a genuine alternative to the private car. This includes safe and convenient walking and cycling routes to and within Finchingfield and Wethersfield villages. Any direct provision of sustainable transport options should be secured through a Section 106 agreement. Proposals for commercial uses on the site which generate heavy goods vehicle traffic should demonstrate how movements and any adverse impact on highway safety and local living conditions will be minimised.

iii. Proposals should result in a return to greater permeability across the site to reconnect and integrate it into the pattern of movement in the surrounding area and enhance connectivity with the villages of Finchingfield and Wethersfield with lanes, footpaths, and cycleways.

#### **F. Specific uses**

i. Provision of new homes will be supported on a replacement basis where development includes provision for demonstrable local housing needs within the NPA and surrounding area which is reflected in housing tenure, house types and mix. Housing that provides (a) small (one/two bedroomed) market units for starter and downsizing households, or (b) social /shared housing for one/two bedroomed and family sized accommodation and (iii) specialist housing needs (eg, veterans' housing or owing to age, health, disability, mental health, learning disabilities) will be particularly encouraged. The total number of dwellings on the site shall not exceed a range of 150-200 dwellings (depending on mix, tenure, house type) within the Areas marked B on Figure 70 below. No additional housing shall be permitted outside Area B.

ii. Strong support will be given to proposals that increase diversification or resilience in local food production whether in existing or replacement buildings (including vertical farming) or in the open countryside.

iii. The provision of low service requirement commercial uses should re-use or replace existing industrial or administrative buildings in the same location on the site in areas A and C. Uses which support the growth of a local green economy and local service provision will be encouraged.

iv. The proposals should include use of land as public open space and related activities, including play equipment, footways, cycle routes and street furniture.

v. Uses should not only meet the broader objectives of the plan but also should demonstrate that they will not increase the likelihood or perception or fear of crime.

### **Action 14: Wethersfield Airbase Master Plan & conservation area**

- A. Finchingfield and Wethersfield Parish Councils to work with a range of stakeholders and advisors (including but not limited to the landowner, Natural England, district, county and central government, Historic England, WASC and the local community) to establish a Master Plan to guide the future development of the site based on the principles above.
- B. This should form part of the Parish's Plan for a Greener future (Section 4) and be conducted in engagement with a wide range of appropriate external stakeholders.
- C. Subject to an appropriate assessment, the Parish councils should request to BDC to designate a conservation area for the airbase site

## 11 Implementation, monitoring, and review

- 11.1** The Neighbourhood Plan sets out a vision and objectives for the NPA and to deliver this vision over the period up to 2033. The Plan will therefore need to be monitored and reviewed over its lifetime to ensure that policies are delivering development that meets those objectives.
- 11.2** To achieve this, an Action Plan needs to identify the required actions and projects over a given period and key performance indicators (KPIs) need to be established against which appropriate targets should be set as a basis for assessing performance.
- 11.3** The following schedule (Figure 71) sets out policy areas and actions set out in the Neighbourhood Plan against which KPIs and targets will be identified by the Parish Councils and these in turn will be monitored and reported on a regular basis.

Policy / Action	Responsibility	Target date
<b>P FW1</b> Community owned or Led Renewable Energy Schemes	BDC; FPC; WPC	To be determined
<b>P FW2</b> Sustainable design	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>P FW3</b> Retrofitting Historic Buildings for Energy Efficiency	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>P FW4</b> Wildlife Friendly Development	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>P FW5</b> Land Management for Farming and Nature	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>P FW6</b> Local Green Spaces	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>P FW7</b> Design & Character	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>P FW8</b> Non-Designated Heritage Assets	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>P FW9</b> Rural landscape character	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>P FW10</b> Walking and Disability Access Routes	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>P FW11</b> Access into The Countryside	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>P FW12</b> Housing	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>P FW13</b> Health care provision	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>P FW14</b> Finchingfield Community Centre	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>P FW15</b> Provision of a Wethersfield shop	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>P FW16</b> Business / Community Hubs	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>P FW17</b> New-build business units in the countryside	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>P FW18</b> Wethersfield Airbase	BDC; FPC; WPC	
<b>A 1</b> <b>Planning for a Greener future</b>	FPC; WPC	To be determined
<b>A 2</b> <b>Community energy efficiency improvements</b>	FPC; WPC; ECC; CES	
<b>A 3</b> <b>Identify locations for public electric vehicle charging</b>	FPC; WPC; BDC	
<b>A 4</b> <b>Broadband</b>	FPC; WPC	
<b>A 5</b> <b>Wethersfield Conservation Area</b>	WPC; BDC	
<b>A 6</b> <b>Danger points</b>	FPC; WPC; ECC	
<b>A 7</b> <b>Re-store Finchingfield road footpath</b>	FPC; WPC; ECC	
<b>A 8</b> <b>Access &amp; quiet lanes</b>	FPC; WPC; ECC	
<b>A 9</b> <b>Finchingfield bridge</b>	FPC; ECC	
<b>A 10</b> <b>Support with use of On-Demand Public Transport</b>	FPC; WPC; BDC	
<b>A 11</b> <b>Traffic management measures</b>	FPC; WPC; ECC	
<b>A 12</b> <b>Support for local businesses</b>	FPC; WPC; BDC; ECC	
<b>A 13</b> <b>Identify assets of community value</b>	FPC; WPC	
<b>A 14</b> <b>Airbase Master Plan and Conservation area</b>	FWNP team; BDC; Landowner	

Figure 71 Action plan

- 11.4** Resources are limited and whilst not every aspect of policy can be monitored precisely. KPIs and targets should be selective but focussed on the primary purpose of the policy concerned. It should also be noted that the design of Neighbourhood Plan policies should facilitate Parish Councils' assessment of any planning applications in the interests of their parishioners. Moreover, the monitoring some KPIs and targets may be taken from the delivery and monitoring of policies by a range of organisations, not the Parish Councils alone.
- 11.5** Monitoring and review will be undertaken by each Parish Council and they will seek to retain some members of the NPT and establishing a Neighbourhood Plan Review Team to assist the Parish Councils in this process. Apart from Actions 5 and 9, actions apply to both Parish Councils. A degree of ongoing collaboration is required for some actions (e.g. 14) but others may simply require co-ordination and good communication.
- 11.6** An Annual Monitoring Report shall be published by each Parish Council setting out progress on the application of policies and actions and their effectiveness in achieving objectives and identifying the need for corrective measures where necessary.
- 11.7** Monitoring and review will identify separately the effectiveness of (i) NP policies in the delivery of development and (ii) the implementation of actions set out in the Neighbourhood Plan. The Neighbourhood Review Team will also monitor the need for a Neighbourhood Plan Review to keep it updated in the light of changing circumstances and that would include the implications of any Local Plan Review.
- 11.8** The strength of this approach (and of our ambition) is that each of these actions and policies originates in the aspirations and objectives that arose from the Neighbourhood Plan's ongoing community engagement process. Although attachment to each policy and action will obviously vary by resident, the community (as a whole) can feel some degree of ownership of the portfolio of measures and therefore be relied upon to hold the Parish Councils and the District Council to account for upholding them effectively and equitably.

## Key sources (See Endnotes below for complete list).

- a. Internal sources: FWNP team research** (available @ [www.fwnp.org](http://www.fwnp.org))
- i. Parish Socio-economic profiles summary
  - ii. The Rural economy
  - iii. Residents' survey summary
  - iv. Business and Landowners' survey summary
  - v. Young person's survey summary
  - vi. Housing Needs survey summary
  - vii. Community engagement
  - viii. Courtauld family history
- b. Key External sources**
- i. Braintree District Council, Corporate Priorities 2024 to 2028 <https://www.braintree.gov.uk/council/corporate-priorities-2024-2028>
  - ii. Braintree District Council, Economic Growth Strategy [www.braintree.gov.co.uk](http://www.braintree.gov.co.uk)
  - iii. Braintree District Local Development Plan 2033 [Braintree District Local Plan 2033 – Local Plan 2033 – Braintree District Council](#)
  - iv. Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) on behalf of Wethersfield Parish Council, Wethersfield Airbase Prisons, Baseline Landscape Character & Visual Assessment August 2022 Landscape Assessment Wethersfield Airbase ([www.fwnp.org](http://www.fwnp.org))
  - v. Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) on behalf of Essex County Council and Southend on Sea Borough Council, Replacement Structure Plan Review, Essex Landscape Character Assessment, Final Report, 2003 [https://www.essexdesignguide.co.uk/media/2277/lca\\_essex\\_2002.pdf](https://www.essexdesignguide.co.uk/media/2277/lca_essex_2002.pdf)
  - vi. Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon, and Uttlesfield Landscape Character Assessments 2006 <https://docslib.org/doc/5783637/braintree-brentwood-chelmsford-maldon-and-uttlesford-landscape-character-assessments>
  - vii. Essex County Council, Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral Essex Climate Action Commission <https://www.essex.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023>
  - viii. Essex County Council, Land Use & Green Infrastructure Technical Annex <https://www.essex.gov.uk/planning-land-and-recycling/energy-climate-and-environment/essex-climate-action-commission>
  - ix. Essex County Council, Employment, Skills, and Barriers to Business, Sector Development Strategy Evidence base, Essex County Council, Oct 2022
  - x. Finchingfield Conservation Area Appraisal, prepared for Braintree District Council, Scott Wilson, Feb 2009 [Finchingfield Conservation Area Appraisal February 2009 - Conservation Area Reviews & Management Plans – Braintree District Council](#)
  - xi. Health conditions in England - prevalence estimates for constituencies, MSOAs, and regions <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/constituency-data-how-healthy-is-your-area/>
  - xii. Historic England Advice Note 7 (Second Edition) <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/local-heritage-listing-advice-note-7/>
  - xiii. Landscape Institute, Assessing landscape value outside national designations, Technical Guidance Note 02/21, <https://www.landscapeinstitute.org/technical-resource/>
  - xiv. National Planning Policy Framework, 2023 National Planning Policy Framework <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>
  - xv. National Planning Policy Framework, July 2024, Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-framework-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system>
  - xvi. North Essex Economic Board, Delivering for North Essex, <https://neeb.org.uk/our-strategy/>
  - xvii. Office for National Statistics, English indices of deprivation 2019. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019-research-report>
  - xviii. Office for National Statistics, Population Statistics, Population projections for local authorities: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets>
  - xix. Office for National Statistics, UK Census 2021, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census>
  - xx. Wethersfield Conservation Area, Character Appraisal and Management Plan, Place Services for Braintree District Council, March 2023 [Wethersfield Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan - August 2023 - Conservation area appraisals – Braintree District Council](#)
  - xxi. Alison Farmer Associates, Finchingfield and Wethersfield Neighbourhood Plan, July 2025

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> <https://fryartgallery.org/bardfield-and-beyond-a-working-landscape/>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/work-of-art/the-pant-valley-summer-1960>
- <sup>3</sup> Images courtesy of Sam Cunningham
- <sup>4</sup> These echo the 3 key themes highlighted in BDC's Corporate priorities until 2028, <https://www.braintree.gov.uk/council/corporate-priorities-2024-2028>
- <sup>5</sup> National Planning Policy Framework, 2023 National Planning Policy Framework <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>
- <sup>6</sup> Braintree District Council
- <sup>7</sup> WASC is formed under the statute of the Local Government Act 1972 Section 102 and currently comprises 13 Parish councils Wethersfield, Finchingfield, Bardfield, Little Bardfield, Shalford, Sible Hedingham, Castle Hedingham, Gosfield, Ridgewell, Helions Bumpstead, Toppesfield, Great Yeldham, Great Saling. As such, WASC represents a wide range of local residents through its mandate to objectively review all proposals for the Airbase. It is not a lobby group.
- <sup>8</sup> TFA is a residents' association based in North Essex <https://www.thefieldsassociation.org/>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.braintree.gov.uk/planning-building-control/local-plan-review-2>
- <sup>10</sup> Devine-Wright, P., 2009, Rethinking NIMBYism: The role of Place Attachment and Place Identity in explaining Place-protective action, *Journal of Contemporary and Applied Social Psychology*, 19, 426-441 (2009)
- <sup>11</sup> DEFRA, 2021, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Statistical Digest of Rural England, July 2021 Edition available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2021-statistical-digest-of-rural-england-previous-updates>
- <sup>12</sup> Belanche, D., Casalo, L.V., Rubio, M.A., 2021, Local Place Identity: A comparison between residents of rural and urban communities, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 82 (2021) 242-252
- <sup>13</sup> Neighbourhood Plan Team derived from Department of Transport
- <sup>14</sup> A Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) is an area of 1,000 to 3,000 people used by the Office for National Statistics. In the case of Finchingfield and Wethersfield, LSOA boundaries coincide with parish ones. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/ukgeographies/censusgeographies/census2021geographies#>
- <sup>15</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps/choropleth/population/population-density/population-density/persons-per-square-kilometre>
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/UK> census
- <sup>17</sup> <https://www.braintree.gov.uk/downloads/file/3865/letter-to-home-office---wethersfield-sdo-process>
- <sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-road-classification-and-the-primary-route-network/guidance-on-road-classification-and-the-primary-route-network>
- <sup>19</sup> Neighbourhood Plan Team derived from Department of Transport
- <sup>20</sup> Photos TFA and Neighbourhood Plan team; map Braintree District Council
- <sup>21</sup> A Working Landscape through time: the thoughts of artists, writers, and people, Evidence Paper 1: Artists, Finchingfield and Wethersfield Neighbourhood Plan and Finchingfield Guildhall, May, 2025, <https://www.fw-np.org/supporting-evidence-documentation>
- <sup>22</sup> <https://finchingfieldguildhall.org.uk/art-exhibition-essex-rural-landscapes/>
- <sup>23</sup> Angela Westgarth and Neighbourhood Plan team
- <sup>24</sup> <https://www.braintree.gov.uk/council/district-statistics-1>
- <sup>25</sup> Neighbourhood Plan team
- <sup>26</sup> <https://www.finchingfield.org/finchingfield-history>
- <sup>27</sup> ESSEX (Buildings of England), Pevsner, Nikolaus, Published by Penguin 1954
- <sup>28</sup> <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/>
- <sup>29</sup> [https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results\\_Single.aspx?uid=MEX1033836&resourceID=1001](https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=MEX1033836&resourceID=1001)
- <sup>30</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1485837>
- <sup>31</sup> <https://www.finchingfield.org/finchingfield-history>
- <sup>32</sup> Finchingfield Conservation Area Appraisal, Prepared for Braintree District Council, Scott Wilson, Feb 2009
- <sup>33</sup> <https://www.historichouses.org/house/finchingfield-guildhall/history/>
- <sup>34</sup> Angela Westgarth; Pauline Jones; Nick Loftus, Neighbourhood Plan team
- <sup>35</sup> <https://www.finchingfield.org/finchingfield-history>
- <sup>36</sup> [https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10239394/cube/TOT\\_POP](https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10239394/cube/TOT_POP)
- <sup>37</sup> Finchingfield Conservation Area Appraisal, Prepared for Braintree District Council, Scott Wilson, Feb 2009
- <sup>38</sup> <https://www.finchingfield.org/finchingfield-history>
- <sup>39</sup> A Family story: The Ruggles of Spain's Hall, Finchingfield, Essex, Edith Freeman, 1993
- <sup>40</sup> Essex Full of Profitable things, Neale K., (eds) 1996, Leopards Head Press, Oxford
- <sup>41</sup> <https://chevillagehall.co.uk/photos/>; <https://www.shorehall.com/>
- <sup>42</sup> <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/place/23761>
- <sup>43</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1115402?section=official-list-entry>
- <sup>44</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1008978?section=official-list-entry>
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