

Landscape Character Assessment

**THAXTED, UTTLESFORD**

Thaxted Parish Council

October 2016



Landscape Character Assessment

**Thaxted, Uttlesford**  
**Client: Thaxted Parish Council**

October 2016

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Revision:	<b>FINAL</b>
File name:	<b>1806 Thaxted LCA FINAL 16 10 13.docx</b>
Date issued:	<b>13<sup>th</sup> October 2016</b>
Checked by:	<b>Mark Flatman</b>

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# **1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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## **1.1 Non-technical summary of the study**

- 1.1.1 The rural landscape surrounding the historic town of Thaxted generally comprises an expansive, open and gently undulating agricultural landscape, which is important on many levels.
- 1.1.2 Historically and inextricably linked to the town in functional and cultural terms, the landscape contributes strongly towards - and forms an intrinsic part of - the character, visual amenity and historic significance of Thaxted. It provides an important context to the town overall and a valuable setting to Thaxted Conservation Area (CA) and its two key listed landmarks within (the Church of St John the Baptist and John Webb's windmill).
- 1.1.3 The landscape is also important in its own right. Of strongly undeveloped rural character, it has considerable time-depth; historic field patterns, enclosed meadow pastures, intimate ancient pathways and mature trees and hedgerows all provide a strong sense of historic continuity, integrity and cultural value. Visual amenity is high, with attractive and far-reaching panoramic views incorporating the expansive, undulating farmland, distinctive river valley and iconic landmarks of the Church and windmill. The landscape's biodiversity and agricultural values also contribute towards its special qualities.
- 1.1.4 In February 2016, Thaxted Parish Council commissioned Liz Lake Associates to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), comprising a landscape sensitivity and capacity appraisal, of the landscape surrounding Thaxted town.
- 1.1.5 The study will provide a clear and concise evaluation of various parcels of land to determine their relative capacity to accommodate change in the form of residential development(s). The results of this assessment are to form part of the evidence base that Thaxted Parish Council will use when compiling its Neighbourhood Development Plan. The study is intended to assist the Parish Council in making informed decisions as to whether any such future development(s) can be appropriately absorbed into the landscape surrounding Thaxted, and, if so, where, at what scale and with what

associated mitigation measures, to ensure that no unacceptable effects on the landscape result and that its special qualities are maintained and, where possible, enhanced.

- 1.1.6 A combination of desktop study, fieldwork and stakeholder consultation was used to identify parcels of land with common characteristics, hereafter referred to as Local Parish Landscape Character Areas (LPLCAs), within an identified study area surrounding Thaxted as agreed with the Parish Council. A range of landscape character and visual amenity criteria were identified and assessed, and key views into the village from the surrounding countryside were identified, in order to evaluate the sensitivity and capacity of the landscape, parcel by parcel, to accommodate development. Parcels were rated as having Low, Low-Medium, Medium, Medium-High or High capacity to accommodate development, based on the criteria and assumptions set out in *Section 3 Methodology for the study* below.
- 1.1.7 This study considers only criteria relating to landscape character and visual amenity. Development in parcels may be unfeasible or undeliverable for other reasons beyond the scope of this study, for example an inability to provide suitable access arrangements or due to the presence of ecologically important habitats. It is, therefore, recommended that this report is read in conjunction with reports by other disciplines, such as traffic management, hydrology, ecology and heritage. Issues relating specifically to the potential consequences of development on the significance of heritage assets within Thaxted and its surrounding landscape, including the CA, key listed buildings and their settings, are covered in the Heritage Assessment report by Grover Lewis Associates, 2016.
- 1.1.8 The analysis found that parcels LPLCA 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15 and 16 are particularly sensitive to development, with a capacity rating of Low.
- 1.1.9 Parcels LPLCA 8 and 11 were identified as having a Low-Medium capacity to accommodate development.
- 1.1.10 The parcels which were considered to be the least sensitive to change are LPLCA 5, 12 and 13, with a capacity rating of Medium.

- 1.1.11 Evaluation revealed that there are no parcels with a Medium-High or High capacity to accommodate residential development within the landscape setting of Thaxted.
- 1.1.12 In conclusion overall, it is recommended that future development is largely contained within Thaxted's existing built envelope, with the exception of the Claypitts Farm site (LPLCA 5), where there is potential for sensitive development to improve the current scenario in visual and landscape character terms.
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## **2 INTRODUCTION**

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### **2.1 Background to the study**

- 2.1.1 The small historic town of Thaxted is situated in the Uttlesford district of Essex, approximately 7 miles south east of Saffron Walden and 6 miles north of Great Dunmow. Located astride the north-south running B184, it occupies a focal point in the local road network (*Figure 1 Study area refers*).
- 2.1.2 Comprising a dense nucleated settlement, Thaxted is frequently described as one of the finest examples of a small market town in the East of England. Approximately 43% of the town is included in a Conservation Area (CA) which embraces the whole of the historic part of the settlement and contains many listed buildings. These coalesce to create a noteworthy roof-scape and rich historic architectural details abound, with a local vernacular of thatch, peg tile roofs, half-timber, colour washed plaster and some decorative pargetting. The medieval Church of St John the Baptist (dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, with its impressive 181 foot spire; hereafter referred to as ‘the Church’) and John Webb’s windmill (1804) both constitute key listed landmark features in views to the town from the surrounding countryside.
- 2.1.3 The town’s compact form, resulting from relatively little expansion, contributes to its strong sense of historic integrity. Little expansion has occurred overall on the southern and western sides of the town. Some 20<sup>th</sup> century expansion has taken place on the eastern side, but on a relatively modest scale and, with the exception of the ribbon development of Bardfield Road, in a compact form attached to the historic core. Subsequent 21<sup>st</sup> century developments located on the eastern and northern edges of town are considered to have had more detrimental consequences for Thaxted in terms of local landscape character and visual amenity. The town today is under pressure for further development.
- 2.1.4 The rural landscape surrounding the historic town of Thaxted generally comprises an expansive, open and gently undulating agricultural landscape, which is important on many levels.

2.1.5 Historically and inextricably linked to the town in functional and cultural terms, the surrounding landscape contributes strongly towards - and forms an intrinsic part of - the character, visual amenity and historic significance of Thaxted. It provides an important context to the town overall and a valuable setting to Thaxted Conservation Area (CA) and its two key listed landmarks within (the Church of St John the Baptist and John Webb's windmill).

2.1.6 The landscape is also important in its own right. Of strongly undeveloped rural character, it has considerable time-depth; historic field patterns, enclosed meadow pastures, intimate ancient pathways and mature trees and hedgerows all provide a strong sense of historic continuity, integrity and cultural value. Visual amenity is high, with attractive and far-reaching panoramic views incorporating the expansive, undulating farmland, distinctive river valley and iconic landmarks of the Church and windmill. The landscape's biodiversity and agricultural values also contribute towards its special qualities.

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## 2.2 Objectives of the study

2.2.1 In February 2016, Thaxted Parish Council commissioned Liz Lake Associates to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), comprising a landscape sensitivity and capacity appraisal, of the landscape surrounding Thaxted town.

2.2.2 The study will provide a clear and concise evaluation of various parcels of land to determine their relative capacity to accommodate change in the form of residential development(s). The following assumption has been applied:

- Development would include mainly 2-2<sup>1/2</sup> storey residential units; any commercial units would be of a similar height.

2.2.3 The results of this assessment are to form part of the evidence base that Thaxted Parish Council will use when compiling its Neighbourhood Development Plan. The study is intended to assist the Parish Council in making informed decisions as to whether any such future development(s) can be appropriately absorbed into the landscape surrounding Thaxted, and, if so, where, at what scale and with what associated mitigation measures, to ensure that no unacceptable effects on the

landscape result and its special qualities are maintained and, where possible, enhanced.

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## **2.3 Methodology overview for the study**

2.3.1 A combination of desktop study, fieldwork and stakeholder consultation was used to identify parcels of land with common characteristics, hereafter referred to as Local Parish Landscape Character Areas (LPLCAs), within an identified study area surrounding Thaxted as agreed with the Parish Council.

2.3.2 A range of landscape character and visual amenity criteria were identified and assessed, and key views into the village from the surrounding countryside were identified, in order to evaluate the sensitivity and capacity of the landscape, parcel by parcel, to accommodate development. Parcels were rated as having Low, Low-Medium, Medium, Medium-High or High capacity to accommodate development, based on the criteria and assumptions set out in *Section 3 Methodology for the study* below.

2.3.3 This Assessment was carried out by Mark Flatman, Director and Chartered Landscape Architect, and Sian Jones, Senior Landscape Architect and Chartered Landscape Architect, between March and August 2016.

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## **2.4 Scope of the study**

2.4.1 This study considers only criteria relating to landscape character and visual amenity. Development in parcels may be unfeasible or undeliverable for other reasons beyond the scope of this study, for example an inability to provide suitable access arrangements or due to the presence of ecologically important habitats. It is, therefore, recommended that this report is read in conjunction with reports by other disciplines, such as traffic management, hydrology, ecology and heritage.

2.4.2 Issues relating specifically to the potential consequences of development on the significance of heritage assets within Thaxted and its surrounding landscape, including the CA, key listed buildings and their settings, are covered in the Heritage Assessment report by Grover Lewis Associates, 2016.

- 2.4.3 The assessment does not respect land ownership boundaries and so takes no account of whether or not a landowner might wish to promote land for future development.

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## **2.5 Local Green Infrastructure strategy**

- 2.5.1 No green infrastructure plans currently exist for Uttlesford District Council or Essex County Council. Within the emerging Uttlesford District Council Local Plan (Pre-Submission Consultation, April 2014) the following policies apply:

- 2.5.2 Policy DES1: Design

*“Climate Change: Development should be capable of adaptation to cope with the effects of climate change. Development must embrace the use of high quality design including sustainable, renewable resources of energy and low emissions technology and enhance Green Infrastructure” (p25).*

- 2.5.3 Policy NE1: Protecting and Enhancing the Natural Environment

*“The design of development should incorporate measures to improve the biodiversity or geodiversity value of the development site. Such measures should include making a contribution to the network of biodiversity sites, including open spaces and green infrastructure and water bodies which make links between communities and support wildlife. These measures will be secured by condition or planning obligations upon any approval that may be granted and may need to include financial support for continued maintenance” (p82).*

- 2.5.4 Policy SP14: Infrastructure

*“Development must take account of the needs of new and existing populations. Each development must address water supply, sewage disposal and the provision of other utilities including high speed fibre optic broadband; flood risk issues, educational, health and transport issues and make enough provision for children’s play space, open space, green infrastructure and new or enhanced social/community infrastructure” (p87).*

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### **3 METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY**

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#### **3.1 Relevant advisory publications**

3.1.1 In undertaking this study regard was had to the following advisory publications:

- Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland (Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002);
- Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity, which forms part of 'Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland' (the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002);
- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013);
- Evaluating the Impact of Housing Development on the Historic Environment (LUC, March 2014); and
- An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England, October 2014).

3.1.2 The methodology for this LCA was based on the approach promoted in Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity (referenced above), whereby:

“Existing Landscape Character Sensitivity + Visual Sensitivity = Overall Landscape Sensitivity”,

and:

“Overall Landscape Sensitivity + Landscape Value = Overall Landscape Capacity”.

3.1.3 The methodology was further tailored to address the study area's specific issues and requirements as outlined in the study brief.

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## **3.2 Information sources**

3.2.1 The study was informed by a combination of landscape baseline desktop study (including the collection, review and analysis of previous relevant studies/reports and readily available data sources), fieldwork and stakeholder consultation.

3.2.2 Previous studies/reports specific to Thaxted which were consulted are as follows:

- Thaxted Design Statement (2010);
- Thaxted Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals (2012);
- Evaluating the Impact of Housing development on the Historic Environment – Case Study 6: Bellrope Meadow, Thaxted (LUC, March 2014);
- Uttlesford District Council Call for Sites and Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) (2016); and
- Uttlesford Officers' Assessment of Call for Sites and Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) (2016).

3.2.3 Existing national, regional and district landscape character assessments which encompass the site, as well as historic characterisation studies, were consulted as follows:

- Natural England's National Character Area profiles;
- Essex Landscape Character Assessment (Essex County Council and Southend on Sea Borough Council, July 2002) / Essex Landscape Character Assessment, Final Report (Chris Blandford Associates, 2003);
- Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon and Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessments (Chris Blandford Associates, September 2006); and
- Thaxted Historic Settlement Character Assessment (commissioned by Uttlesford District Council, August 2007).

3.2.4 In addition, the following data sources were consulted:

- Uttlesford District Council Local Plan (Adopted 2005);

- Emerging Uttlesford District Council Local Plan (Pre-Submission Consultation, April 2014);
- Uttlesford Open Space, Sport Facility and Playing Pitch Strategy (The Landscape Partnership, January 2012);
- The Essex Biodiversity Action Plan 2010 – 2020;
- MAGIC website - for landscape and cultural heritage designations;
- Essex County Council website - for landscape and cultural heritage designations and PRoWs;
- Environment Agency's online 'Flood Map for Planning (Rivers and Sea)' - for flood zones;
- CPRE - for tranquillity, intrusion and dark skies; and
- Google Earth.

3.2.5 Fieldwork was undertaken by Mark Flatman and Sian Jones between March and May 2016. Liz Lake Associates attended site meetings as follows:

- Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016 - accompanied by Richard Haynes, Tom Wilson and Suzanne Compagnoni; and
- Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2016 - accompanied by Richard Haynes, Julie Abel and Roy Lewis.

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### **3.3 Identification of the study area**

3.3.1 *Figure 1 Study area* indicates the extent of the study area as agreed with the Parish Council at the outset.

3.3.2 Thaxted's built-up town centre, including the majority of the CA, is excluded from the scope of this study.

3.3.3 The inner edge of the study area follows the current settlement limit. The 'Settlement Boundary', as defined in Uttlesford District Council Local Plan, Adopted 2005 (refer to Policy S3 – Other Development Limits), was used initially to define this inner edge.

This edge was then refined to include subsequent recent developments on the edge of Thaxted, which have extended the urban area.

- 3.3.4 The outer edge of the study area was agreed with Thaxted Parish Council and Grover Grover Lewis Associates and includes all key and supplementary viewpoints.

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### **3.4 Landscape context**

- 3.4.1 Landscape, cultural heritage and biodiversity designations for the study area were identified via MAGIC and Essex County Council's website and mapped, as part of the appraisal of landscape context.

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### **3.5 Visual context**

#### *Key views into the town*

- 3.5.1 A series of key public views into the town from the surrounding countryside were identified and photographed, from the main vehicular approach routes in, as well as from other roadways and footpaths within the study area.
- 3.5.2 Following a desktop map review, a walkover survey was conducted to verify the location and extent of key views. Representative viewpoints were selected to adequately illustrate the potential impact of future residential development(s) from a range of locations and for a range of receptor groups at long, medium and short distance from the village.
- 3.5.3 An assessment of each key view was made using a standard *Proforma 1 Key view – template* (*Appendix B: Proformas* refers). This incorporated an assessment of the impact which residential development(s) would have within the line of each key view, including with regard to the presence of the Church and the windmill within the sightlines. Any particular sensitivities or mitigation relating to existing topography or vegetation were identified. *Proforma 1* included various options which could be circled – and subsequently highlighted – where they applied to the particular view under consideration.

- 3.5.4 As well as key views, further supplementary views were photographed, and included within the report, to ensure comprehensive coverage across the entirety of the site and to demonstrate views from sequential points along routes where appropriate.
- 3.5.5 Key views and sightlines identified within this report have been agreed/coordinated with heritage consultants Grover Lewis Associates, to ensure a consistent approach. A detailed visual assessment in relation to the setting of key heritage assets is provided in the Heritage Assessment report by Grover Lewis Associates, 2016.

### *Photographs*

- 3.5.6 The photographs accompanying this report were taken by Liz Lake Associates between March and May 2016, with a Canon EOS 1200D digital camera at a focal length of 30mm. The camera was set at heights of between 150cm and 170cm above the ground to represent eye-level.
- 3.5.7 Photographs were intended to show a clear line of sight towards the village, free of immediate obstructions, as well as illustrating the local context.
- 3.5.8 Clear weather conditions and times of day which presented legible views were attained.

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## **3.6 Identification of Local Parish Landscape Character Areas (LPLCAs)**

- 3.6.1 According to An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England, October 2014), *“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. Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is the process of identifying and describing the 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”.*
- 3.6.2 A combination of landscape baseline desktop study, fieldwork and stakeholder consultation (Section 3.2 ‘Information sources’ above refers) was used to divide the landscape around Thaxted into 16No. parcels of land with common characteristics, hereafter referred to as Local Parish Landscape Character Areas (LPLCAs). The sectors were defined initially by desktop research, and then adjusted and refined

subsequently in the light of findings in the field and through consultation, as necessary.

3.6.3 Analysis was typically at the field level grain/scale, with some aggregation of field and landscape units where appropriate.

3.6.4 The drawing of boundary lines between parcels was a necessary part of the process, but did not always mean that parcels were dramatically different to each other either side of the line, as it is more typical for change to be of a gradual transitional nature. However, in some instances, the boundary lines for parcels do mark more of a watershed of character, where the balance of the defining elements has shifted from one landscape character to another. For practical purposes, boundaries were aligned where possible on landscape features or elements that could be identified on the ground.

3.6.5 The existing landscape and visual characteristics selected to inform the identification of the LPLCAs were those considered to be of most relevance to this study and which would not be picked up in reports by other consultants. Factors reflected both natural landscape elements and human influences, as follows:

Existing landscape character criteria

- Physical relationship of landscape with existing urban conurbation; settlement pattern/buildings within the landscape;
- Land-use and classification (including vegetation cover, key tree and hedgerow species);
- Boundary features;
- Topography;
- Hydrology;
- Landscape scale;
- Landscape complexity;
- Time-depth;

- Landscape, cultural heritage and biodiversity designations;
- Public access (physical);
- Tranquillity;
- Landscape condition;
- Strength of landscape character; and
- Contribution of landscape to local character, distinctiveness and sense of place.

#### Existing visual amenity criteria

- Visual relationship of landscape with existing urban conurbation;
- Degree of screening/enclosure/openness of landscape to public views;
- Visual influence of landscape on the wider landscape;
- Presence of key view(s)/sight line(s) to the town and landmark features; and
- Visual contribution of landscape to the setting of Thaxted town/CA/listed buildings.

#### 3.6.6

The field survey work was carried out by Landscape Architects who used a standard *Proforma 2 LPLCA Field Survey Sheet - Template (Appendix B: Proformas refers)*, which incorporated the above factors, to record data in a consistent manner. *Proforma 2* included various options which could be circled – and subsequently highlighted – where they applied to the particular parcel under consideration. Representative photographs were taken to capture the existing landscape character.

#### 3.6.7

A Local Parish Landscape Character Areas (LPLCAs) map was then produced at a scale of 1:25,000 for Thaxted, together with supporting information comprising a representative photograph and a description for each LPLCA of its:

- Key landscape characteristics;
- Key visual characteristics;
- Key landscape planning and land management issues;
- Landscape character sensitivity to change;

- Visual sensitivity to change;
- Overall landscape sensitivity to change (evaluation of the sensitivity of a parcel in broad strategic terms), where “*Existing Landscape Character Sensitivity + Visual Sensitivity = Overall Landscape Sensitivity*” (Topic Paper 6);
- Overall landscape value (evaluation of the function and significance of the landscape within the overall settlement context);
- Overall landscape capacity for change (the effect of development in broad terms and whether it would diminish, improve or have little effect on local distinctiveness and sense of place, where “*Overall Landscape Sensitivity + Landscape Value = Overall Landscape Capacity*” (Topic Paper 6);
- Opportunities for mitigation;
- Proposed landscape strategy objectives;
- Suggested landscape planning guidelines;
- Suggested land management guidelines; and
- Known presence of allocated land/approved planning applications.

A standard *Proforma 3 LPLCA Supporting Information - Template (Appendix B: Proformas refers)* was used, which incorporated the above factors, to present information for each LPLCA in a consistent manner. *Proforma 3* included various options which could be circled – and subsequently highlighted – where they applied to the particular parcel under consideration.

### 3.6.8

In terms of assumptions as to the scale of any appropriate development, it is unlikely that any development, save individual plots in very specific locations, would be appropriate in parcels with a Low landscape capacity. Anything but very localised, small-scale development in parcels with a Low-Medium or Medium capacity is likely to have a significant adverse effect on landscape character and/or visual amenity, even with mitigation measures in place. Parcels that have a Medium and above landscape capacity are considered to be the most likely to be suitable as a potential location for development. Notwithstanding this, even where parcels are considered to have an ability to accommodate some development, it is unlikely that this would be

appropriate over the whole parcel. New development would need to be accompanied by suitable, and often significant, mitigation measures, such as planting, to assist in assimilating the development into the surrounding landscape, as well as green infrastructure provision to provide biodiversity and amenity value. Elsewhere, significant portions of the parcel would need to be left undeveloped in order to maintain separation or provide appropriate buffers to particular features.

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### **3.7 Mitigation and recommendations**

- 3.7.1 Information concerning opportunities for mitigation was gathered on site and 'Proposed general landscape strategy objectives', together with 'Suggested landscape planning guidelines' and 'Suggested land management guidelines' (both general and LPLCA-specific) were then produced to inform change. Recommendations were in keeping with, and intended to reinforce/enhance, local landscape character and visual amenity.
- 3.7.2 Where appropriate, recommendations are made regarding the type, nature and principles for acceptable development within each parcel, to help provide guidance in identifying the most suitable locations and/or layouts for future development.
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## 4 THAXTED TOWN CONTEXT

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### 4.1 Historic settlement character

4.1.1 Thaxted is a town of exceptional environmental quality where the architectural and historic interest is of national importance. First granted a market in 1205, Thaxted is frequently described as one of the finest examples of a small market town in the East of England, and Nikolaus Pevsner's comments about the town are often quoted: *"the town as a whole is very perfect, chiefly because there is truly not one house in it that would appear violently out of place. All is in scale, nothing too high or too ostentatious, mostly white, cream, pink plastering or exposed timber framing"*. Thaxted is one of several significant medieval settlements in Uttlesford District.

4.1.2 The historic town comprises a dense nucleated settlement with elements dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century and significant numbers of buildings surviving from the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, many of which are listed. Approximately 43% of the town today is included in a Conservation Area, which embraces the whole of the historic part of the settlement.

4.1.3 Key characteristics of Thaxted town of particular relevance to this study are as follows:

- Rich historic architectural detail in the town, with its noteworthy roof-scape and a local vernacular of thatch, peg tile roofs, half-timber, colour washed plaster and some decorative pargetting;
- The medieval Church of St John the Baptist (dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, with its impressive 181 foot spire; hereafter referred to as 'the Church') and John Webb's windmill (1804), both of which constitute key listed landmark features in views to the town from the surrounding countryside;
- The town's compact form, with relatively little expansion overall contributing to a strong sense of historic integrity; and
- The town's rural setting in an expansive, open and gently undulating agricultural landscape. Historically and inextricably linked to the town in functional and cultural

terms, the surrounding landscape contributes strongly towards - and forms an intrinsic part of - the character, visual amenity and historic significance of Thaxted. It provides an important context to the town overall and a valuable setting to Thaxted Conservation Area (CA) and its two key listed landmarks within (the Church of St John the Baptist and John Webb's windmill).

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## 4.2 Settlement expansion and current pattern

- 4.2.1 Thaxted has not seen the level of subsequent development that has occurred in other settlements within the District and retains much of its original medieval extent and appearance. Its historic core, contained within the designated CA, remains compact and relatively unaltered. In general, the southern and western sides of the town are little altered, while expansion has occurred on its northern and eastern sides.
- 4.2.2 20<sup>th</sup> century development attached to the eastern side of the CA - accessed by Weaverhead Lane, land to the north of Newbiggen Street and land either side of Bardfield Road - has had limited impact upon the CA. In a compact form (with the exception of ribbon development along Bardfield Road) and on a relatively modest scale, there is for the most part *"clear visual demarcation between these areas and the historic core"*, with many developments following the design principles set out in the Essex Design Guide for Residential and Mixed Use Areas (1997), *"achieving a mixed success rate"* (Thaxted Historic Settlement Character Assessment, September 2009).
- 4.2.3 21<sup>st</sup> century residential developments located on the eastern and northern edges of town - particularly those accessed from the B1051 approach road from Great Sampford - are considered to be poorly integrated with the historic core and the surrounding landscape, with more detrimental consequences for Thaxted in terms of local landscape character and visual amenity. Sub-standard design features include the prominent locations of developments, the incorporation of 2<sup>1/2</sup>-storey buildings with steeply pitched roofs and a lack of integral and peripheral vegetation/green infrastructure. Such development is visible - sometimes breaking skylines - in long views to the town from the B1051 Sampford Road (one of the main approaches into Thaxted) and from across the countryside to the north and east of Thaxted, and former key views and sightlines towards the Church and windmill sails have been

partially or wholly intruded upon. The document *Evaluating the Impact of Housing Development on the Historic Environment (LUC, March 2014)* describes the adverse landscape and visual effects of the Bellrope Meadow development thus:

*"Where previously, high quality views to the town from the north-east were almost entirely rural, with only the distinctive spire and windmill sails of the historic town breaking above the trees and hedgerows, now a dense suburban development... sprawls out into the countryside... the density of the development and its hard built edges on the rural fringe of the town, the tightly packed distribution of large houses and individual work-at-home units, minimal integral greenspace, and weak screening by planting on the eastern boundary, all contribute to a development that lacks sensitivity to place and the broader landscape surroundings of an exceptional historic town".*

- 4.2.4 A large housing development is currently approaching completion on the Sampford Road, east of Bellrope Meadow and *Figure 1 Study area* depicts approved planning applications and land allocations known at the time of writing this report. The town today continues to be under pressure for further development.
- 4.2.5 Beyond Thaxted's main built up area, a traditional rural settlement pattern prevails within the study area. Settlement is limited and scattered, consisting of ribbon development along Bardfield Road, a disused depot at the northern end of Copthall Lane, a small residential development east of Cutlers Green, a pumping station off Bolford Street, the hamlet of Stanbrook south of Thaxted, Thaxted Youth Centre, Prior's Hall Farmhouse and Cottages, several farmsteads located on the periphery of town (Claypitts Farm, Rail's Farm, Park Farm and Totman's Farm) and other isolated farmsteads scattered within the wider rural area, as well as various private detached houses.
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## **5 LANDSCAPE CONTEXT**

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### **5.1 General landscape character**

5.1.1 The rural landscape surrounding the historic town of Thaxted generally comprises an expansive, open and gently undulating agricultural landscape, which is important on many levels.

5.1.2 Historically and inextricably linked to the town in functional and cultural terms, the surrounding landscape contributes strongly towards - and forms an intrinsic part of - the character, visual amenity and historic significance of Thaxted. It provides an important context to the town overall and a valuable setting to Thaxted Conservation Area (CA) and its two key listed landmarks within (the Church of St John the Baptist and John Webb's windmill).

5.1.3 The landscape is also important in its own right; key characteristics which contribute towards the landscape's special qualities include its:

- Strongly undeveloped rural character, with considerable time-depth; historic field patterns, enclosed meadow pastures along the river valley floodplain, intimate ancient pathways and mature trees and hedgerows all provide a strong sense of historic continuity, integrity and cultural value;
  - High visual amenity value, with attractive and far-reaching panoramic, sometimes radial, views. Certain long-distance views of the isolated nucleated settlement, punctuated by the landmarks of the Church and windmill and surrounded by expansive undulating countryside, are exceptional and iconic. Other closer-range views of the edge of town, which include these landmarks, are also outstanding;
  - Biodiversity value; and
  - Agricultural value.
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## **5.2 Land-use and classification**

- 5.2.1 The landscape around Thaxted is predominantly in intensive arable use, with some smaller pastoral fields and areas of rough or wet meadow pasture occupying the narrow River Chelmer floodplain. A string of small wet woodlands occurs along the River Chelmer corridor, with dense riverside trees; trees also line the Crispey Brook. Elsewhere, occasional sparsely scattered small wooded areas occur, as do mature trees, generally located within hedgerows. Occasional paddocks abut the urban edge in places to the north, south and west of the town and playing fields are located on the northern edge of the town. *Figure 2 Site context (aerial photograph)* refers.
- 5.2.2 Key hedgerow tree species include elm, oak and ash.
- 5.2.3 Most of the land is classified as Grade 2 Agricultural Land of relatively high quality, apart from some low lying areas alongside the River Chelmer where the quality is reduced to Grade 3.

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## **5.3 Boundary features**

- 5.3.1 Despite recent efforts by local farmers to reinstate hedgerows along field boundaries, they have been denuded in part by intensive agriculture and are in places fragmented or absent.

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## **5.4 Topography and hydrology**

- 5.4.1 Thaxted town is situated on the eastern slopes of the narrow Chelmer Valley. The meandering River Chelmer bisects the study area east-west, creating a distinctive topography (*Figures 2 Topography and 3 Hydrology refer*).
- 5.4.2 Within the study area the northern and south eastern parts of the town and the landscape beyond lie on relatively high ground, as does the far western portion of the study area. The Church and windmill both occupy elevated positions within and on the south western edge of town respectively. The lowest parts of the study area lie within the Chelmer Valley, whilst the lower areas of the town, centred on Park Street, The Tanyard and Copthall Lane, lie in the tributary valley of the Crispey Brook.

- 5.4.3 According to flood zone data taken from the online 'Flood Map for Planning (Rivers and Sea)' by the Environment Agency, last updated 18<sup>th</sup> March 2016, there are no significant flood risk issues in Thaxted. However, previous serious flood events have been reported in 2014 in many parts of Thaxted, including Cophall Lane and Mill Lane/Dunmow Road,

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## 5.5 Time depth

- 5.5.1 In general terms the landscape within the study area is undeveloped with ancient countryside remnants and considerable time-depth. Despite rationalisation, it largely reflects pre-18<sup>th</sup> century agricultural practices with its irregular field patterns, enclosed meadow pastures along the river valley floodplain, occasional scattered small wooded areas (some of which go back to the Middle Ages), intimate ancient pathways and mature trees and hedgerows, all of which provide a strong sense of historic continuity, integrity and cultural value.
- 5.5.2 A pylon route crosses the landscape in an east west direction, north of Thaxted town, providing a rare and incongruous visually prominent modern intervention. The pumping station off Bolford Street constitutes a further visually intrusive contemporary feature.

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## 5.6 Landscape, cultural heritage and biodiversity designations

- 5.6.1 *Figure 5 Landscape, cultural heritage and biodiversity designations refers.*

### ***Conservation Area***

- 5.6.2 The historic core of Thaxted is compact and embraced by a CA designation. Covering approximately 43% of the town's current extent, the CA is located largely in the south west portion of the built up area of Thaxted, centred on the B184. It also extends southwards, along the B1051 and to the south west along Bolford Street and to incorporate the windmill. The CA excludes areas of modern residential development, principally located to the north and east of the historic town.
- 5.6.3 The CA is largely, though not wholly, excluded from the study area.

5.6.4 The Historic Settlement Character Assessment for Thaxted, 2009, describes the CA thus:

*“The roofscape of the Conservation Area is noteworthy, contributing to Thaxted’s character and visual interest, with its juxtaposition of different shapes and angles, heights and materials (tile, slate and thatch) and chimneys of varying styles. Building render colours are predominantly yellows, oranges, pinks, blues and greens...*

*Throughout the Conservation Area there are trees in abundance... Walls are generally of brick construction although a few are constructed of flint.*

*The spatial dimensions of street widths and the overall relationship of buildings to urban spaces, combined with their varied characteristics, both historic and architectural, makes for an historic environment of the highest quality...*

*Thus the architectural and historic importance of the historic core and the dominance of the church spire remain vitally important visual characteristics that must be taken into account and respected by any new development proposed.”*

#### ***Listed buildings***

5.6.5 There are approximately 170 individually listed buildings in Thaxted town, excluding the outlying areas of Bardfield End Green, Boyton End, Cutler’s Green, Monk Street, Richmond’s Green and Stanbrook. The majority of listed buildings are located within the CA. Seven buildings are Grade I listed, including the Church of St John the Baptist, the Guildhall, Clarence House and numbers 1-4 Stoney Lane. Seven are Grade II\* listed, including John Webb’s windmill (built in 1804) and The Manse, with the remainder at Grade II.

5.6.6 Beyond the CA in the surrounding landscape listed buildings include Borough Farmhouse and Parkstile Cottage (both Grade II\*), and Prior’s Hall Farmhouse and Cottages, the Old Cottage and Barn at Cutlersgreen Farm, Hillside Cottage (East of Claypitts Farm) and Coldhams Fee (all Grade II).

#### ***Designated landscapes***

5.6.7 There are no international, national or local designated landscapes within the study area.

***PRoWs and Access Land***

- 5.6.8 The long distance footpath the Harcamlow Way National Trail bisects the study area, passing through the west of Thaxted town past the windmill and Church and along Watling Lane.
- 5.6.9 A comprehensive network of other paths and tracks provide further access to the countryside around the town.

***Biodiversity designations***

- 5.6.10 There are no international, European or national designated wildlife sites within the study area.

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**5.7 Public access (physical)**

- 5.7.1 Located astride the north-south running B184, Thaxted occupies a focal point in the local road network.
- 5.7.2 The long distance footpath the Harcamlow Way National Trail bisects the study area, passing through the west of Thaxted town, while a comprehensive network of other paths and tracks provide further pedestrian access to the countryside around the town.
- 5.7.3 Intimate narrow ancient pathways exist in the form of Watling Lane and Copthall Lane.

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**5.8 Tranquillity**

- 5.8.1 Thaxted lies immediately below Stansted Airport's flight approach path, with most of the community falling within the 57 Leq noise exposure contour, impacting on the area's tranquillity. Government advice considers that whilst noise at this level need not be a determining factor in granting planning permission, such levels are not desirable.
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## **5.9 Landscape condition**

- 5.9.1 The landscape surrounding Thaxted within the study area is generally well-preserved and well-maintained, although a decline in hedgerow management is apparent.

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## **5.10 Strength of landscape character**

- 5.10.1 The landscape character is generally strong, of archetypal lowland English countryside character with a rural settlement pattern.

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## **5.11 Existing landscape character assessments**

- 5.11.1 Three existing landscape character assessments encompass the site - *Figure 6 Existing landscape character areas* refers.

### ***National level: National Character Area profiles***

- 5.11.2 In the 1990's, English Nature and the Countryside Commission jointly produced The Character Map of England – a single map that identified and described 159 Joint Character Areas (JCAs) covering the whole of England. Each distinct area was defined following consideration of its landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, and cultural and economic activities. The boundaries of the areas followed natural rather than administrative boundaries. The various volumes of the Map were published between 1998 and 2000.

- 5.11.3 More recently, Natural England has undertaken a review of the JCAs in order to fulfil, in part, responsibilities set out in the Natural Environment White Paper 2011, Biodiversity 2020, and the European Landscape Convention 2007, creating National Character Area (NCA) profiles which are based on the original JCA profiles. The NCA profiles are guidance documents that can assist communities in decision-making by informing them about the places that they live in and care for. The profiles are working documents that draw on current evidence and knowledge. Natural England aims to refresh and update them periodically as new information becomes available. Each NCA profile includes:

- A description of the natural and cultural features that shape our landscapes;
- Details as to how the landscape has changed over time;

- The current key drivers for ongoing change;
- A broad analysis of each area's characteristics and ecosystem services; and
- Statements of Environmental Opportunity are suggested and guidance offered on the critical issues, which could help to achieve sustainable growth and a more secure environmental future.

#### NCA 86: South Suffolk and North Essex Claylands

- 5.11.4 Thaxted and the study area fall within NCA 86: South Suffolk and North Essex Claylands.
- 5.11.5 NCA 86 is a broadly flat, chalky boulder clay plateau, dissected by an undulating river valley topography that is particularly marked in upper valley reaches, which are much smaller in scale. Land use is predominantly arable with a wooded appearance. There is some pasture in the valley floors. Field patterns are irregular, despite rationalization, due to remnants of Ancient Countryside.
- 5.11.6 Settlement consists of scattered farmsteads, divided by deep ditches and moats. Parishes are dispersed with small settlements focused around tyes (commons) or strip greens in isolated hamlets. Buildings tend to be timber-framed and colour-washed houses, which are sometimes faced with Georgian red brick. There are also several large villages and frequent towns, most with medieval street plans and elaborate timber-frame houses, as well as a rich heritage of barns and impressive churches.
- 5.11.7 This well preserved, archetypal, lowland pastoral English countryside is coupled with attractive vernacular buildings dating from a period of industrial wealth. There are a few large woods (20 acres plus), including some ancient coppice wood, as well as a typical pattern of copses connected by hedgerows. Trees and woods appear to join together to give a wooded skyline, with occasional bare ridgelines. The road pattern away from major routes, is winding with wide verges and strong hedgerows. Sunken hollow lanes, lined with hedgerows, are a common feature, with the impact of Dutch Elm disease quite apparent. The main hedgerow trees in this area are elm, oak and ash.

5.11.8 “Key drivers” for change within NCA 86 include:

- *“Locally determined planning and development control may in some cases have the potential to impact on the landscape. Ensuring that local development frameworks recognise the importance of conserving and enhancing the landscape will help reduce any potentially negative impacts.*
- *Potential growth may lead to increases in the importance of the recreational and environmental value of landscapes within the urban surround; the potential for green infrastructure funding; opportunities for improved access and climate change adaptation.”*

5.11.9 With regard to accommodating new development, NCA profile 86 includes the following landscape opportunities:

- *“Protect the pastoral river valley landscape from further fragmentation by resisting inappropriate use and development, promoting traditional management practices, protecting existing pasture from conversion to arable use (especially those containing archaeological features), and seeking opportunities to create more permanent grassland as appropriate, through the uptake of agri environment options.*
- *Conserve the rural settlement pattern by ensuring that new development is complementary to intrinsic local character.*
- *Conserve rural settlement character by using traditional materials in new developments especially the use of colour-washed render and pegtiles.*
- *Conserve the strongly nucleated character of settlements by encouraging new development to take place within the existing curtilage of settlements.*
- *Raise the design quality of new and existing development. Incorporate green infrastructure that provides opportunities for wildlife and public access within urban areas and screens intrusive urban influence (especially on the periphery of settlements), with the use of substantial and appropriate landscaping, such as woodland planting, earthworks and green roofs.”*

***County level: Essex Landscape Character Assessment***

5.11.10 Within the framework provided by the JCAs, the Essex Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) was produced in 2003 by Chris Blandford Associates on behalf of Essex County Council and Southend on Sea Borough Council, based on the guidance *Interim Landscape Character Assessment Guidance (1999)* produced by the former Countryside Agency (now Natural England). The study sought to identify distinctive character areas across the Essex landscape, defined at the 1:50,000 scale, which can then be evaluated for their sensitivity to change, *“guiding necessary development to landscapes where the type and degree of change can be best accommodated.”*

5.11.11 The LCA identified seven Landscape Character Types (LCTs), which were refined to classify thirty-five Landscape Character Areas (CAs), two of which fall within the study area: B1 Central Essex Farmlands and C5 Chelmer Valley. CA B1 covers the majority of the study area, with a segment south of Thaxted village falling within C5.

**CA B1 Central Essex Farmlands**

5.11.12 Key characteristics of CA B1 include:

- *“Irregular field pattern of mainly medium size arable fields, marked by sinuous hedgerows and ditches.*
- *Many small woods and copses provide structure and edges in the landscape.*
- *Scattered settlement pattern, with frequent small hamlets, typically with greens and ponds.*
- *A concentration of isolated moated farmsteads.*
- *Network of narrow, winding lanes.*
- *Mostly tranquil character away from major roads and Stansted Airport.”*

5.11.13 The commentary notes that the CA is an *“extensive area of gently undulating arable farmland bisected by the Chelmer Valley”*. In relation to visual experience it notes *“in long views scattered small woods and copses, and hedgerow trees coalesce to sometimes create the illusion of a wooded horizon”*. The spire of the church in Thaxted is identified as a local landmark and pylon routes, such as north of Thaxted, are visually prominent.

5.11.14 The sensitivity evaluation gives a range of Landscape Sensitivity Levels based on various types or scales of development. Generally the CA is assessed to have Moderate sensitivity to most forms of development including major urban extensions over 5ha and incremental small scale developments. Common issues include moderate intervisibility of the CA, integrity of hedgerow and woodland patterns, the tranquil character and distinctive settlement patterns. As for small urban extensions under 5ha (of relevance to this study), the landscape is assessed to be of Low sensitivity, with the identified *“possible opportunity to improve some existing visually poor urban edges”*.

#### CA C5 Chelmer Valley

5.11.15 Key characteristics of CA C5 include:

- *“Narrow valley, with a restricted valley bottom.*
- *Dense riverside trees.*
- *Arable valley sides with a fairly open character...*
- *Mostly tranquil character.”*

5.11.16 The commentary notes that the valley bottom is narrow, affording confined and framed views. The surrounding landscape is gently undulating formed of glacial clay plateau.

5.11.17 The Landscape Sensitivity Level ranges from High to Moderate across the range of development types and scales. Of relevance is the High level given to major urban extensions over 5ha, new settlements and incremental small scale developments, which all raise issues of the intrinsic character of settlement patterns and narrow lanes, and the tranquil character. Moderate sensitivity is given to small urban extensions under 5ha, with issues raised around the *“visual exposure of some valley sides”*.

#### ***District/borough level: Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon and Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessments***

5.11.18 The Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon and Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessments (September 2006) were carried out jointly by the respective districts and borough councils, all located within the County of Essex. The aim of the LCA was

*“to provide a comprehensive Borough/District-wide assessment of landscape character within the Study Area to inform land use planning and land management decisions.”* The approach to the LCA was based on Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland (Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002).

5.11.19 The identified CAs were based on those within the Essex LCA, sub-dividing the CAs into smaller areas. A degree of sensitivity of each CA is given, however, due to the *“relatively broad-brush analysis undertaken”* these sensitivities are not absolute. Therefore, sensitives should be read in conjunction with those previously mentioned within the Essex LCA, which affords a more strategic evaluation.

5.11.20 In total, seventy distinct Landscape Character Areas (ChAs) were identified across the joint districts and boroughs. Three ChAs fall within the Study Area: A6 Upper Chelmer River Valley; B8 Thaxted Farmland Plateau, and B11 Lindsell and Bardfield Farmland Plateau.

#### A6 Upper Chelmer River Valley

5.11.21 ChA A6 Upper Chelmer River Valley occupies the same segment of land south of Thaxted village as C5 Chelmer Valley Landscape Character Area in Essex Landscape Character Assessment (2003). Key Characteristics for A6 Upper Chelmer River Valley include:

- *Narrow valley, with a restricted valley floor.*
- *Small meandering river channel on the left side of the valley close to the rising ground of the valley side.*
- *Dense riverside trees.*
- *Arable valley sides with a fairly open character...*
- *Mostly tranquil away from Great Dunmow, Chelmsford and the A120.”*

5.11.22 In terms of Overall Character the commentary notes that the CA encompasses the River Chelmer and its valley as it stretches from the southern edge of Thaxted to the urban edge of Chelmsford. The valley is narrow within the surrounding gently undulating plateau, with several small tributary streams that form valley sides. The commentary goes on to state that: *“The gently undulating valley floor has an enclosed character and restricted views often framed by the many riverside and*

*hedgerow trees, a string of small wet woodlands and the sloping valley sides. The undulating valley sides which are steep in places, have a more open character with low thick but fragmented hedgerows, scattered hedgerow trees and only occasional woods separating the large arable fields that line the valley sides meeting at the river. The fields to the east of the River Chelmer tend to be larger and more regular in shape. Those to the west of the river tend to be smaller pastoral fields or areas of rough pasture or wet meadow in the small floodplain with larger arable fields dominating the valley sides.” Roads run parallel to the valley, up on the valley sides with occasional small lanes crossing the valley. There is an overall sense of tranquillity within the river valley, with a comprehensive network of public rights of way and narrow lanes winding through the landscape.*

- 5.11.23 In relation to Visual Characteristics, the commentary notes that the spire of the church in Thaxted is a notable landmark within views into and across the valley slopes. Views are generally open from the valley sides into the valley floodplain, framed in places by small patches of woodland, whereas views along the valley floor are enclosed and framed by riverside trees and the valley sides, giving an enclosed character.
- 5.11.24 Evidence of Historic Land Use within the ChA is dominated by the extensive enclosed meadow pastures along the river valley floodplains.
- 5.11.25 Key Planning and Land Management Issues include:
- *“Potential residential expansion of villages onto valley slopes, which would be conspicuous on the skyline.*
  - *Potential further decline in condition of field boundaries through further agriculture intensification.”*
- 5.11.26 The commentary notes the Sensitivities to Change within the ChA. Sensitive key characteristics and landscape elements within this character area include dense riverside trees and a string of small wet woodland on the sloping valley sides, which are sensitive to changes in land management. The skyline of the valley slopes is visually sensitive, with *“open and framed cross-valley views and long views along the river corridor potentially affected by tall or non-screened new development.”* Historic integrity is strong, with a *“largely surviving pattern of medieval dispersed settlements, isolated farms, moated sites and small hamlets strung out along linear greens, small historic parklands and a number of churches and local vernacular buildings with*

*timber-frames, bright colour-washed walls and thatched roofs.*” Overall this character area has a “*relatively high sensitivity to change*”.

5.11.27 Suggested Landscape Planning Guidelines include:

- *“Consider the visual impact of new residential development and farm buildings upon valley sides.*
- *Conserve and enhance cross-valley views and characteristic views across and along the valley.*
- *Ensure any new development on valley sides is small-scale, responding to historic settlement pattern, landscape setting and locally distinctive building styles.*
- *Protect and enhance the role of the river valley in providing a network of informal open space and nature conservation sites.”*

5.11.28 Suggested Land Management Guidelines include:

- *“Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting where appropriate to local landscape character...”*
- *Conserve and manage the ecological structure of woodland, copses and hedges within the character area.*
- *Strengthen the recreational role of the woodland resource.*
- *Conserve and promote the use of building materials, which are in keeping with local vernacular/landscape character.*
- *Conserve and enhance the green ‘natural’ character of the river valley through appropriate management of wildlife habitats.”*

#### B8 Thaxted Farmland Plateau

5.11.29 ChA B8 Thaxted Farmland Plateau occupies approximately 75% of the study area, including the urban area of Thaxted. Key Characteristics include:

- *“Gentle rolling plateau, almost flat in some areas, incised by the River Pant and the River Chelmer.*
- *Broken hedgerows evident; absence of hedgerows due to agricultural intensification.*
- *Expansive views on open roads at higher elevations.*
- *Settlements dispersed across the landscape.*

- *Rich architectural detail in the historic market town of Thaxted, with vernacular of colour washed plaster, half-timber, thatch, and peg tile roofs and some decorative pargetting.*
- *Stansted flight paths have severely altered tranquillity in this area.”*

## 5.11.30

In terms of Overall Character this plateau is of broad, gently undulating arable farmland. Field patterns are irregular, bounded by hedgerows that are often broken or gappy, and deciduous tree cover gives distant structure to the landscape. Many ancient woodlands are scattered across the landscape. Settlement is mostly dispersed with frequent small villages and hamlets and *“only one locally important town, historic Thaxted, which is notable for its wealth of vernacular architecture.”* Two visually prominent pylon routes cross the countryside east to west in close proximity north of Thaxted. A good network of paths and tracks give pedestrian access, including the Harmcamlow Way National Trail which crosses the area west of Thaxted. The landscape scale of this character area varies from medium to small, with *“open views from lanes and roads contrasted with the more enclosed and smaller-scale views in village lanes or in river valleys”*. The local vernacular architecture is rich and varied: colour-washed plaster or half-timbered, with thatch or peg-tile roofs. Modern development behind Thaxted has *“no visual link with the local landscape character.”* The texture of this landscape is *“varied, with trees, fields and hedges, buildings and water all contributing to its visual interest.”* It is *“a place that feels long-settled, and its history is still apparent.”* The tranquillity of the area is moderate to strong away from roads, but Stansted flights overhead have had a major impact.

## 5.11.31

In relation to Visual Characteristics the commentary notes the *“visible cultural heritage”*, including the *“outstanding ancient town of Thaxted.”* Views are both open and closed, tending to be more panoramic on the higher, more exposed upper plateau levels. The spire of Thaxted church, the windmill and occasional water towers are local landmarks. Double lines of pylons that cross the countryside southwest to northeast above Thaxted are locally prominent.

## 5.11.32

Evidence of Historic Land Use within the area is dominated by pre-18<sup>th</sup> century irregular fields. The medieval town of Thaxted is one of the main historic landscape features of the area.

- 5.11.33 Key Planning and Land Management Issues include:
- *“Past loss of hedgerows and decline in hedgerow management.*
  - *Potential loss of hedgerows and field patterns due to further introduction of intensive agricultural practices.*
  - *Pressure from expansion of Thaxted.”*
- 5.11.34 The commentary notes the Sensitivities to Change within the ChA. The *“open nature of the skyline of higher, more exposed upper plateau levels is visually sensitive to new development, which may interrupt views across to and from the plateau.”* There is a *“strong sense of historic integrity, resulting from a dispersed historic settlement pattern... and rich architectural detail in Thaxted. This pattern is sensitive to potential large-scale development”*. Overall this ChA has a *“relatively high sensitivity to change”*.
- 5.11.35 Suggested Landscape Planning Guidelines include:
- *“Conserve the open views.*
  - *Conserve the traditional dispersed settlement pattern and generally undeveloped character.*
  - *Ensure that any new development responds to historic settlement pattern, especially scale and density, and that it is of an appropriate scale, form, design and materials and uses colours that respond to landscape setting and landscape character. Such development should be well integrated with the surrounding landscape...*
  - *Conserve open views to historic buildings and local landmarks such as Thaxted church, which is visible from other adjacent character areas as well.”*
- 5.11.36 Suggested Land Management Guidelines include:
- *“Strengthen and enhance hedgerows with hawthorn where gappy and depleted...*
  - *Conserve and manage the ecological structure of woodland, copses and hedges within the character area.*
  - *Conserve historic lanes and unimproved roadside verges.”*

#### B11 Lindsell and Bardfield Farmland Plateau

- 5.11.37 ChA B11 Lindsell and Bardfield Farmland Plateau occupies a segment of land southeast of the village. Key Characteristics include:

- *“...Open, broadly rolling plateau, dissected by Pods Brook and Stebbing Brook.*
- *Mainly arable farmland with many shelterbelts forming dark backdrop to many views...*
- *Vernacular architecture pale cream or white-washed plaster with thatched roofs, some half-timbered buildings.*
- *Tall species-rich hedgerows along many lanes; some hornbeam coppice visible.”*

#### 5.11.38

The commentary notes that the ChA is located above the river valleys of the Chelmer, the Pant and the Blackwater. The countryside is gently rolling and open, covered by medium to large arable fields. Field patterns are regular and delineated by a variety of vegetation. The overall character of the area is formed by the constant backdrop of trees, sometimes as dense shelterbelts, and sometimes interspersed between field boundaries, along with gappy hedgerows. Hedges are usually hawthorn, used in a variety of ways: as low field dividers, as tall screens along lanes, as gappy remnants of pre-enclosure and as mature specimens in isolation or grouped together. Shelterbelts, including coniferous trees, appear as dark blocks on the ridges and mature trees dot the field pattern: in hedgerows, along ditches, or in isolation in a field. Patches of ancient woodland have woven themselves along with newer planting into the field pattern. Despite the tree cover the landscape appears very open; the field pattern is medium to large scale and there are no villages of any size – settlement is linear or dispersed. Newer residential development appears suburban. The texture of this character area is as varied as the topography, but the general impression is of a landscape that offers changing interest, with views that may progress from open to closed again. It has a sense of isolation despite its proximity to Stansted Airport and retains a moderate to strong sense of tranquillity.

#### 5.11.39

In relation to Visual Characteristics the commentary notes that views across farmland plateau from roads and public rights of way are usually open, but often framed or limited by tree belts or high hedges. Attractive views across the Chelmer Valley slopes can be gained from the western edges of the area and Thaxted is visible from higher ground in the north of the area.

#### 5.11.40

Evidence of Historic Land Use within the area is dominated by pre-18<sup>th</sup> century irregular fields and the main historic landscape features include twisting and often partially sunken roads.

- 5.11.41 Key Planning and Land Management Issues include:
- *“Past loss of hedgerows and decline in hedgerow management.*
  - *Potential loss of hedgerows and field patterns due to further introduction of intensive agricultural practices.*
  - *Pressure from increased traffic on rural lanes and erosion of verges.*
  - *Pressure from expansion of settlements which may be detrimental to landscape character.”*
- 5.11.42 The commentary notes the Sensitivities to Change within the ChA. *“Several areas of plateau have a very open skyline, which is visually sensitive to new development that may interrupt views across, to and from the plateau”*. It is also noted that the *“dispersed historic settlement pattern and a network of narrow lanes (several of which are partially sunken)”* across the CA creates a sense of historic integrity, which is also sensitive to development. Overall this ChA has a “moderate sensitivity to change”.
- 5.11.43 Suggested Landscape Planning Guidelines include:
- *“Conserve the rural character of the area.*
  - *Ensure that any new development responds to historic settlement pattern, especially scale and density, and that use of materials, and especially colour, is appropriate to the local landscape character; such development should be well integrated with the surrounding landscape...*
- 5.11.44 Suggested Land Management Guidelines include:
- *“Strengthen and enhance hedgerows with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.*
  - *Enhance existing landscape character by avoidance of further conifer planting along roads...*
  - *Conserve historic lanes and unimproved roadside verges...”*
- Historic Settlement Character Assessment***
- 5.11.45 The Historic Settlement Character Assessment for Thaxted, September 2009, was commissioned by Uttlesford District Council to inform long term planning for the management and conservation of its historic environment.

- 5.11.46 It evaluated the environmental capacity of the village to accommodate future growth by:
- *“Summarising its general character.*
  - *Describing the historic core and its relationship with the built up area of Thaxted as a whole.*
  - *Summarising the general function the landscape performs in relation to the built up area and the historic core, particularly on the approach roads, which are the area’s most susceptible to development pressures, and in relation to the larger open spaces within the settlement.*
  - *Analysing the quality and function of these landscapes.*
  - *Summarising in broad terms the effect of development and whether it would diminish, improve, or have little or no effect, on the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.”*
- 5.11.47 The character assessment identified seven principal landscape character sectors for Thaxted, within a study area which encompassed the village centre as well as the surrounding landscape (*Figure 7 Principal sectors from Thaxted Historic Settlement Character Assessment* refers). The sectors were as follows:
- *“Sector 1. Land between Watling Lane and Bellrope Gardens, including the B184 approach from Saffron Walden and Boyton Mill Place (formerly Fox and Pheasant PH).*
  - *Sector 2. Land between Bellrope Gardens and Cophall Lane, including the Sampford Road approach and open space at Weaverhead Close (2a).*
  - *Sector 3. Land between Cophall Lane and Bardfield Road and open space at Magdalen Green (3a).*
  - *Sector 4. Land between Bardfield Road and Dunmow Road, including parking/storage area and buildings to rear of the Fire Station (4a).*
  - *Sector 5. Dunmow Road to Park Street, including the chemical works, Molecular Products, Mill End (5a) and the Murco Garage Site (5b).*
  - *Sector 6. Park Street to Bolford Street.*
  - *Sector 7. Bolford Street to B184.”*
- 5.11.48 Regarding areas assessed by the Historic Settlement Character Assessment which fall within the study area for this report, the Overall Summary of the assessment stated that:

*“...Sensitive and small scale residential redevelopment of part of the Claypits Farm complex (Sector 4a)... is considered appropriate.*

*In relation to Sectors 4, 5, 6 and 7 the conclusion reached is that development (except at 4a and 5a) would have a detrimental impact on parts of the historic core. Development on the approach roads of all sectors would extend development into the open countryside beyond clearly defined limits, diminishing the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.*

*Additionally the environment of the whole community is detrimentally affected by regular... flights of aircraft leaving Stansted airport. This combined with the limitations of the rural road network, are additional reasons that make Thaxted inappropriate for large scale development.”*

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## 6 VISUAL CONTEXT

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### 6.1 General visual amenity

- 6.1.1 The landscape surrounding Thaxted town is generally expansive open arable farmland with far-reaching panoramic views, particularly from approach roads and PRowS on high land. The landscape contributes to the distinctive character and sense of place of Thaxted, providing a valuable setting to the town itself, to the Conservation Area (CA) and to its two key listed landmarks within, the Church of St John the Baptist and John Webb's Windmill, which dominate the skyline. In general, the visual contribution of the surrounding landscape to these settings is notably greater on the southern and western sides of the town, which are little altered, than the northern and eastern sides, where expansion has occurred.
- 6.1.2 The Church is elevated, with a 181 feet spire, and is a dominating feature not only within the village but also in the wider landscape - Pevsner describes it thus: *"The church lies high up, at the N end of the town, visible as a climax from everywhere"*. The windmill, also located in a strategically elevated and commanding position, south-west of the Church, presents a key feature in many views from the south, east and west. Due to the tight urban townscape of Thaxted, very few views exist of the other listed buildings located within the town's historic core from the surrounding countryside, although fine views of the southern and western edges of the CA are afforded from Bolford Street and Dunmow Road.
- 6.1.3 Views from high land to the north-west, west, south-west, south and south-east typically encompass much of the full extent of the town, with the settlement edge intermittently apparent, filtered by vegetation. Certain views of the nucleated settlement, punctuated by the landmarks of the Church and Windmill and surrounded by expansive undulating countryside, are exceptional and iconic.
- 6.1.4 Views to Thaxted from the east, north-east and north are typically more restricted by intervening topography, vegetation and built form, capturing only parts of the settlement edge and the Church tower and/or spire within the CA. In places a harsh

urban-rural interface is apparent, where recent developments about the surrounding countryside.

- 6.1.5 Certain closer-range views of the southern and western edges of town, which include the Church and/or windmill with the rural landscape in the foreground, are also exceptional.
- 6.1.6 Pylons cross the landscape east-west, north of Thaxted town, and are visually prominent in long-distant views from the north, north-east and north-west.
- 6.1.7 The majority of the listed buildings within the surrounding rural area are either too distant to have a visual relationship with the edge of the town, or are screened by intervening vegetation and/or topography.

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## 6.2 Visual analysis

- 6.2.1 (*Views 1, 2, 3, 4*) From PRowS located on high land to the **north-west**, expansive long distance views are available across undulating farmland and the wooded river valley, to encompass parts of the western settlement edge of Thaxted, including the western edge of the CA. The settlement edge is filtered by intervening vegetation, including field boundary hedgerows, woodland along the river valley, and trees on the edge of/within Thaxted town. The Church spire provides a strong focal point and the Windmill is visible to varying degrees above buildings and vegetation. These long distance views are largely unspoilt by modern development, although, where pylons occur in the longer-range views, they exceed the height of the Church spire, reducing its impact. (*Views 5, 6, 7*) In contrast, medium and short distance views of the settlement edge from lower points in the river valley to the north-west, including the northern enclosed section of Walting Lane, are generally screened by the valley's strong vegetative framework, although the Church spire and occasional buildings are sometimes visible through weaker points in the vegetation.
- 6.2.2 (*Views 8, 9*) From PRow 49\_17 on high land to the **west**, long distance panoramic views are available across expansive farmland and the wooded Chelmer Valley, to encompass much of the western settlement edge of Thaxted, including the western edge of the CA. The settlement edge is filtered by intervening vegetation, including field boundary hedgerows, woodland along the river valley, and trees on the edge

of/within Thaxted. The town's compact nucleated form and strongly rural setting are very apparent in these views. As well as the Church spire, the Windmill is clearly visible in these views, sometimes in its entirety. (Views 10, 11) Closer to the town on lower ground associated with the river valley, views of the settlement edge are largely screened by the rising topography and intervening vegetation.

6.2.3 (View 12) From land to the **south-west**, at certain high points along Bolford Street, long distance panoramic views are available across the expansive rolling rural landscape of parts of the western settlement edge of Thaxted, including the western edge of the CA. The settlement edge is partially screened by intervening vegetation. The pumping station and buildings of The Borough occupy the middle ground, while the wooded river valley beyond is largely tucked away in a dip, out of view, creating the impression of continuous green fields sweeping up to meet the settlement edge; in this respect the green fields east of the river either side of Bolford Street contribute significantly to the town's rural setting. The Church spire and the entirety of the Windmill provide dramatic landmarks in these views. (Views 13, 14) Medium distance views are also available of limited parts of the western settlement edge as Bolford Street descends into the river valley, on approach to the town. The settlement edge is largely screened by intervening topography and vegetation. Lateral views are offered along the meandering river valley and the Church spire aligns with the centre-point of the road, enhancing the Church's dominance and creating a pleasing symmetry. These views from Bolford Street, are some of the most attractive and iconic views of Thaxted. (Views 15, 16) Medium range views, sometimes uninterrupted, are also available from PRoW 49\_34 of the Church spire and the Windmill, occasionally also capturing the south-east façade of the listed United Reformed Church as it emerges from behind vegetation.

6.2.4 (Views 17, 18) From land to the **south**, along section 49\_49 of the Harcamlow Way National trail as it runs alongside the river, as well as from PRoW 49\_101, long distance views are available across farmland of parts of the southern and western settlement edges of Thaxted, filtered by intervening topography and vegetation. The Church spire and Windmill provide focal points on the horizon, and part of the main body of the Church (south elevation) is distinguishable from here, emphasising its impressive bulk. (View 19) A long distance narrow glimpse between trees which

captures just the Church spire and the Windmill is offered where the B1051 crosses the River Chelmer. (Views 20, 21) Long distance views over rolling countryside of parts of Thaxted's southern and western settlement edges are also available from the Dunmow Road south of Prior's Hall, through gaps in the roadside vegetation, again incorporating the Church spire and the Windmill. (Views 22, 23, 24) Increasingly dramatic medium and short distance views are available of the Church (including part of its south elevation) and the Windmill (including its staging) from section 49\_37 of the Harcamlow National Trail as it climbs towards the town, with the south-east façade of the United Reformed Church and the attractive settlement edge along Bolford Street also visible from certain points. (View 25) Medium distance views of limited parts of the southern and western settlement edges, largely screened by topography but dominated by the Church spire and the Windmill, are available from the Dunmow Road in the vicinity of Prior's Hall.

- 6.2.5 (Views 26, 27) From PRowS on high land to the **south-east**, long distance panoramic views are available across the undulating rural landscape to the southern settlement edge. The settlement edge is filtered by adjacent vegetation and the Church spire and Windmill are notable landmarks. (Views 28, 29) Short distance views of the southern settlement edge along Bardfield Road east of Claypitts Farm are offered from PRow 49\_95, just east of Claypitts Farm, including a partial glimpse of the south elevation of the Church.
- 6.2.6 (View 30) From points to the **east** of Thaxted along Bardfield Road, views to the settlement edge are blocked by built form along the road.
- 6.2.7 (View 31) From high land to the **north-east** along the B1051, long distance views are available over farmland to the eastern settlement edge, in the vicinity of the new development on Moscotts. Its prominent location extending into open countryside, together with the use of 2½ storey buildings with steeply pitched roofs and the lack of peripheral vegetation, combine to create a very harsh rural-urban interface, with extremely poor integration of the development into the surrounding agricultural landscape. Former key far-reaching views and sightlines towards the Church have been partially or wholly intruded upon/compromised by development. (View 32) Long distance views to the eastern settlement edge are also offered from the north end of PRow 49\_29 over undulating farmland. The settlement edge is largely screened by

mature vegetation on the edge of Thaxted and along the Crispey Brook, above which the Church spire protrudes, yet recent development at Ellers Way and Noel Close is visible through gaps in the vegetation, and the tops of new houses at Moscotts break the skyline, interrupting the pastoral scene. (Views 33, 34) Medium distance views are available of the eastern settlement edge in the vicinity of Ellers Way and Noel Close from the south end of PRow 49\_29, as well as from PRow 49\_30. While some of the settlement edge is screened by mature vegetation, lack of peripheral vegetation in other areas results in a further very harsh rural-urban interface, with the Church spire partially blocked from view by development. (Views 35, 36) Medium distance views are available from various points along the northern section of Copthall Lane of recent development on elevated land at Barnards Field, filtered by vegetation on the western side of Copthall Lane, but intruding on the otherwise undeveloped rural character of the lane. (View 37) Medium distance unfiltered views of the same development are offered along PRow 49\_29 as it runs alongside the Crispey Brook, at points where the vegetation along Copthall Lane lowers. (View 38) Further south along Copthall Lane, where it becomes residential, built development and vegetation along the lane are self-screening, limiting views out of the lane. (View 39) The new footpath which links Burns Way with The Mead provides short distance views of Weaverhead Close from its northern end.

6.2.8 (View 40) From high land to the **north**, along PRow 49\_13 adjacent to the B184 Walden Road, long distance views are available across the expansive undulating rural landscape and the wooded river valley to the north settlement edge in the vicinity of Little Maypole, Clare Court and The Maypole. The recently built properties of Little Maypole are prominent on the horizon, their red tiled roofs contrasting sharply with the general darker roofscape. The Church spire within Thaxted provides a strong focal feature, and the tops of the sails of the Windmill are partially visible above vegetation. Pylons in the middle ground provide additional vertical elements within views. (Views 41, 42, 43) As the land drops towards the town, medium and short distance views from the B184 to the settlement edge are increasingly limited, filtered or blocked by the intervening topography, built form and vegetation, although the Church spire still emerges on occasion. (Views 44, 45) Middle distance views are available from PRow 49\_97 looking across farmland towards the settlement edge in the vicinity of Little Maypole, Clare Court and The Maypole. The properties of Little

Maypole again feature prominently on the horizon and the Church spire provides a focal point. As the footpath gains height towards the B184, views expand/broaden to the west to incorporate the wooded River Chelmer valley and farmland to the west of Thaxted.

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### **6.3 Views towards the town**

- 6.3.1 Selected views into Thaxted from the surrounding countryside are depicted on *Figure 9 Views and photograph locations*.
- 6.3.2 *Figure 10 Photographic sheets* provides the accompanying photographs.
- 6.3.3 Completed *Proforma 1 Key View* assessment sheets are supplied in *Appendix B*. Highlighted options indicate those which apply to the particular view under consideration.
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## **7 IDENTIFICATION OF LOCAL PARISH LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS (LPLCAS)**

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### **7.1 Identification of LPLCAs**

7.1.1 A combination of landscape baseline desktop study, fieldwork and stakeholder consultation (*Section 3.2 'Information sources'* above refers) was used to divide the landscape around Thaxted into 16No. broad parcels of land with common characteristics, hereafter referred to as Local Parish Landscape Character Areas (LPLCAs). The sectors were defined initially by desktop research, and then adjusted and refined subsequently in the light of findings in the field and through consultation, as necessary.

7.1.2 Analysis was typically at the field level grain/scale, with some aggregation of field and landscape units where appropriate.

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### **7.2 Arrangement of LPLCAs**

7.2.1 *Figure 8 Local Parish Landscape Character Areas (LPLCAs)* depicts the arrangement of the various parcels at a scale of 1:25,000.

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### **7.3 Completed Proforma 2 LPLCA Field Survey Sheets**

7.3.1 The completed *Proforma 2 LPLCA Field Survey Sheets* for each LPLCA are provided in *Appendix B: Proformas*. Highlighted options indicate those which apply to the particular parcel under consideration.

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## **8 LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY AND CAPACITY ANALYSIS/APPRaisal**

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### **8.1 LPLCA analysis**

- 8.1.1 A range of landscape and visual criteria were identified and assessed in order to evaluate the sensitivity and capacity of the landscape, parcel by parcel, to accommodate development. The assumptions made as regards to the scale of any future development are considered at *Section 2.2*. The potential to alleviate the effects of built development on each parcel was considered, based on the ability of the landscape to provide effective mitigation across the short – medium – long term. The consideration around mitigation was undertaken as part of the fieldwork, and based on factors such as scale, enclosure, pattern, type and maturity of vegetation, movement and visibility of each parcel.
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### **8.2 Completed Proforma 3 LPLCA Supporting Information sheets**

- 8.2.1 The completed *Proforma 3 LPLCA Supporting Information sheets* for each LPLCA are provided in *Appendix B: Proformas*. Highlighted options indicate those which apply to the particular parcel under consideration.
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### **8.3 Description of results**

#### *High landscape capacity*

- 8.3.1 Evaluation of the landscape features, visual factors, potential landscape features and landscape value revealed that there are no parcels with a High capacity to accommodate residential development within the landscape setting of Thaxted.

#### *Medium-High landscape capacity*

- 8.3.2 Likewise, evaluation of the landscape features, visual factors, potential landscape features and landscape value revealed that there are no parcels with a Medium-High capacity to accommodate residential development within the landscape setting of Thaxted.

***Medium landscape capacity***

- 8.3.3 Parcels LPLCA 5, 12, and 13 are considered to be the least sensitive to change, with a Medium capacity to accommodate residential development within the landscape setting of Thaxted.

***Low - medium landscape capacity***

- 8.3.4 Parcels LPLCA 8 and 11 are considered to have a Low-Medium capacity to accommodate residential development within the landscape setting of Thaxted.

***Low landscape capacity***

- 8.3.5 Parcels LPLCA 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15 and 16 are considered to be particularly sensitive to development, with a Low capacity to accommodate residential development within the landscape setting of Thaxted.
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## 9 MITIGATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### 9.1 Background

9.1.1 This study is intended to assist the Parish Council in making informed decisions as to whether any future residential development(s) can be appropriately absorbed into the landscape surrounding Thaxted, and, if so, where, at what scale and with what associated mitigation measures, to ensure that no unacceptable effects on the landscape result and its special qualities are maintained and, where opportunities exist, enhanced. The architectural and historic importance of the historic core and the dominance of the Church spire and windmill remain vitally important characteristics that must be taken into account and respected by any new development proposed.

9.1.2 To this end 'Proposed general landscape strategy objectives', together with 'Suggested landscape planning guidelines' and 'Suggested land management guidelines' (both general and LPLCA-specific) are provided below to inform change.

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### 9.2 Proposed general landscape strategy objectives

#### General

9.2.1 Conserve and enhance the landscape to help reduce any potentially negative impacts as follows:

***Conserve*** – seek to protect and enhance positive landscape features that are essential in contributing to local distinctiveness and sense of place through effective planning and positive land management measures.

***Enhance*** – seek to improve the integrity of the landscape, and reinforce its character, by introducing new and/or enhanced elements where distinctive features or characteristics are absent.

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### 9.3 Suggested landscape planning guidelines

#### General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas

- Consider cumulative effects of developments on landscape character and visual amenity.
- Conserve the generally rural and undeveloped character of the landscape surrounding Thaxted.
- Conserve the strongly nucleated character of Thaxted by encouraging new development to take place within the existing settlement curtilage where possible.
- Any development on the edge or approaches to the town needs to protect important views and sightlines to the Church and the windmill, both from within the village and from the wider landscape, as well as protecting characteristic views across and along the valley.
- Protect and provide traditional locally sensitive boundary treatments, to integrate development into the local context.
- Explore possible opportunities to improve some existing visually poor urban edges.
- Raise the design quality of new development.
- Ensure that new development is sympathetic, complementary and responds to the intrinsic local character of the historic townscape and the surrounding landscape in terms of its location, scale, density, design layout/settlement pattern and use of traditional materials (for example the use of colour-washed render and pegtiles).
- Consider the vulnerability of the valley sides and ridge tops to insensitive development. Siting should be below the crest of the ridge or hilltop utilising existing or new native planting as a screen.
- Incorporate green infrastructure that provides opportunities for wildlife, public access and climate change adaptation and which screens intrusive urban influence (especially on the periphery of settlements), with the use of substantial and appropriate landscaping, such as native woodland planting, earthworks and green roofs.

LPLCA-specific landscape planning guidelines

LPLCA	Suggested landscape planning guidelines
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect pastoral river valley landscape from further fragmentation by resisting inappropriate use and development.</li> <li>• Protect traditional dispersed rural settlement pattern.</li> <li>• Conserve and enhance green rural landscape character of the river valley.</li> <li>• Protect historic field patterns.</li> <li>• Protect pastoral fields, areas of rough and wet meadow pasture and wet deciduous woodlands which occupy the River Chelmer floodplain.</li> <li>• Protect Traditional Orchard area.</li> <li>• Protect historic Watling Lane.</li> <li>• Protect key views and attractive views along the valley.</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect traditional dispersed rural settlement pattern.</li> <li>• Protect undeveloped open rural landscape character.</li> <li>• Protect historic field patterns and remaining hedgerows.</li> <li>• Protect blocks of deciduous woodland.</li> <li>• Protect key iconic far-reaching radial/panoramic views of the nucleated settlement of Thaxted, incorporating the Church and windmill.</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect peri-urban settlement pattern and landscape character.</li> <li>• Protect historic field patterns.</li> <li>• Protect small pastoral fields, paddocks and meadows associated with peripheral farmsteads.</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect traditional dispersed rural settlement pattern.</li> </ul>

LPLCA	Suggested landscape planning guidelines
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect undeveloped rural landscape character.</li> <li>• Protect historic field patterns and existing hedgerows.</li> <li>• Protect key iconic views of Thaxted/Church/windmill/United Reformed Church.</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect peri-urban settlement pattern and landscape character.</li> <li>• Protect historic field patterns.</li> <li>• Protect small pastoral fields associated with peripheral farmsteads.</li> <li>• Enhance landscape condition where poor, e.g. explore opportunity to improve area around Claypitts Farm.</li> <li>• Protect key view to Church.</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect undeveloped open rural landscape character.</li> <li>• Protect key iconic far-reaching panoramic views of the nucleated settlement of Thaxted, incorporating the Church and windmill.</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect undeveloped open rural landscape character.</li> <li>• Protect historic field patterns and remaining hedgerows.</li> <li>• Protect key iconic far-reaching panoramic views of the nucleated settlement of Thaxted, incorporating the Church and windmill.</li> </ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect remaining rural landscape character.</li> <li>• Protect historic field patterns and remaining hedgerows.</li> <li>• Reinforce boundary planting alongside Copthall Lane to screen views from Copthall Lane to recent residential development.</li> </ul>
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect undeveloped enclosed rural landscape character.</li> <li>• Protect historic field patterns and remaining hedgerows.</li> <li>• Protect wet meadow pasture (“Walnut Tree Meadow”).</li> <li>• Protect small block of woodland.</li> </ul>

LPLCA	Suggested landscape planning guidelines
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect historic Copthall Lane.</li> <li>• Protect key views.</li> </ul>
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect undeveloped enclosed rural landscape character.</li> <li>• Protect historic field patterns and remaining hedgerows.</li> </ul>
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect remaining undeveloped rural landscape character.</li> <li>• Explore opportunities to soften harsh urban interface, including screening recent developments projecting above the horizon with new native planting.</li> <li>• Incorporate within any new development green infrastructure that provides opportunities for wildlife, public access and climate change adaptation and which screens intrusive urban influence on the periphery, with the use of substantial and appropriate landscaping, such as native woodland planting, earthworks and green roofs.</li> <li>• Raise the design quality of any new development.</li> <li>• Protect historic field patterns and existing hedgerows.</li> <li>• Protect remaining key views to Church.</li> </ul>
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect regenerating scrub/woodland character.</li> </ul>
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect recreational/community character.</li> <li>• Protect views to Church.</li> </ul>
14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect peri-urban settlement pattern and landscape character.</li> <li>• Protect historic field patterns and remaining hedgerows.</li> <li>• Protect small fields/paddocks associated with peripheral farmstead.</li> <li>• Retain B1051 as northern settlement limit.</li> </ul>
15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect undeveloped rural landscape character.</li> <li>• Protect historic field patterns and remaining hedgerows.</li> </ul>

LPLCA	Suggested landscape planning guidelines
16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect remaining undeveloped rural landscape character.</li> <li>• Protect historic field patterns and remaining hedgerows.</li> <li>• Protect remaining key panoramic views to Church and wider valley landscape.</li> </ul>

## 9.4 Suggested land management guidelines

### General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas

- Conserve and manage the ecological structure of woodland, copses, orchards and hedgerows within the study area.
- Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern where appropriate to local landscape character, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.
- Conserve and manage the ecological structure of pasture and meadows.
- Conserve historic lanes and unimproved roadside verges.
- Use traditional management practices where possible.

### LPLCA-specific land management guidelines

LPLCA	Suggested land management guidelines
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and enhance the green character of the river valley through appropriate management of wildlife habitats.</li> <li>• Conserve and manage the ecological structure of woodland, orchard, pasture and meadows.</li> <li>• Conserve Watling Lane.</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and manage the ecological structure of woodland.</li> <li>• Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and</li> </ul>

LPLCA	Suggested land management guidelines
	strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.</li> <li>• Conserve and manage the ecological structure of pasture and meadows.</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.</li> <li>• Conserve and manage the ecological structure of pasture, grassland and parkland.</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.</li> </ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.</li> <li>• Manage reinforced boundary planting alongside Copthall Lane to effectively screen views from Copthall Lane to recent residential development.</li> </ul>
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and</li> </ul>

LPLCA	Suggested land management guidelines
	<p>strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and manage the ecological structure of woodland and wet meadow pasture.</li> <li>• Conserve and manage the ecological structure of woodland</li> <li>• Conserve Copthall Lane.</li> </ul>
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.</li> </ul>
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.</li> </ul>
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and manage the ecological structure of regenerating scrub/woodland.</li> </ul>
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain recreational areas to a suitable standard.</li> </ul>
14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.</li> </ul>
15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.</li> </ul>
16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.</li> </ul>

## **10 CONCLUSION**

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- 10.1.1 The rural landscape surrounding the historic town of Thaxted is important on many levels. A generally expansive, open and gently undulating agricultural landscape, it is historically and inextricably linked to the town in functional and cultural terms, contributing strongly towards - and forming an intrinsic part of - the character, visual amenity and historic significance of Thaxted. The landscape provides an important context to the town overall and a valuable setting to Thaxted Conservation Area (CA) and its two key listed landmarks within (the Church of St John the Baptist and John Webb's windmill).
- 10.1.2 The landscape is also important in its own right, with special qualities including its strongly undeveloped rural character, considerable time-depth, high visual amenity and biodiversity and agricultural values.
- 10.1.3 This study is intended to assist the Parish Council in making informed decisions as to whether any future residential development(s) can be appropriately absorbed into the landscape surrounding Thaxted, and, if so, where, at what scale and with what associated mitigation measures, to ensure that no unacceptable effects on the landscape result and its special qualities are maintained and, where opportunities exist, enhanced.
- 10.1.4 A combination of desktop study, fieldwork and stakeholder consultation was used to identify parcels of land with common characteristics, known as Local Parish Landscape Character Areas (LPLCAs), within an identified study area surrounding Thaxted. A range of landscape character and visual amenity criteria were identified and assessed, and key views into the village from the surrounding countryside were identified, in order to evaluate the sensitivity and capacity of the landscape, parcel by parcel, to accommodate development. Parcels were rated as having Low, Low-Medium, Medium, Medium-High or High capacity to accommodate development, based on the criteria and assumptions set out in Section 3 Methodology for the study.

- 10.1.5 This study has considered only criteria relating to landscape character and visual amenity. Development in parcels may be unfeasible or undeliverable for other reasons beyond the scope of this study, for example an inability to provide suitable access arrangements or due to the presence of ecologically important habitats. It is, therefore, recommended that this report is read in conjunction with reports by other disciplines, such as traffic management, hydrology, ecology and heritage. Issues relating specifically to the potential consequences of development on the significance of heritage assets within Thaxted and its surrounding landscape, including the CA, key listed buildings and their settings, are covered in the Heritage Assessment report by Grover Lewis Associates, 2016.
- 10.1.6 The analysis found that parcels LPLCA 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15 and 16 are particularly sensitive to development, with a capacity rating of Low. Parcels LPLCA 8 and 11 were identified as having a Low-Medium capacity to accommodate development. The parcels which were considered to be the least sensitive to change are LPLCA 5, 12 and 13, with a capacity rating of Medium. Evaluation revealed that there are no parcels with a Medium-High or High capacity to accommodate residential development within the landscape setting of Thaxted.
- 10.1.7 In conclusion overall, it is recommended that future residential development is largely contained within Thaxted's existing built envelope, with the exception of the Claypitts Farm site (LPLCA 5), where there is potential for sensitive development to improve the current scenario in visual and landscape character terms.
- 10.1.8 'Proposed general landscape strategy objectives', together with 'Suggested landscape planning guidelines' and 'Suggested land management guidelines' (both general and LPLCA-specific) have been provided in *Section 10* to inform any change deemed appropriate.
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