



Always planning ahead
WALSINGHAM PLANNING

SPECIALIST PLANNING & HERITAGE CONSULTANTS

Objection to:
Strategic Policies S6 and S7; and
Strategic Growth Sites I6a and I6b

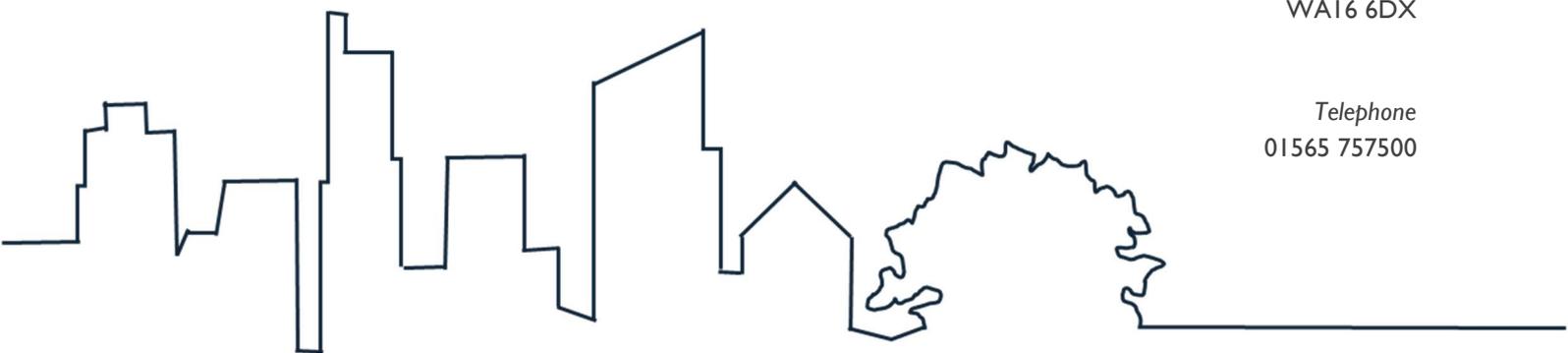
Representation to:
Chelmsford Local Plan Pre-Submission
(Regulation 19) Document

On behalf of: **Little Baddow Parish Council**
Sandon Parish Council
Boreham Parish Council
Danbury Parish Council

Walsingham Planning

Brandon House
King Street
Knutsford
WA16 6DX

Telephone
01565 757500



knutsford@walsingplan.co.uk
www.walsinghamplanning.co.uk



Always planning ahead
WALSINGHAM PLANNING

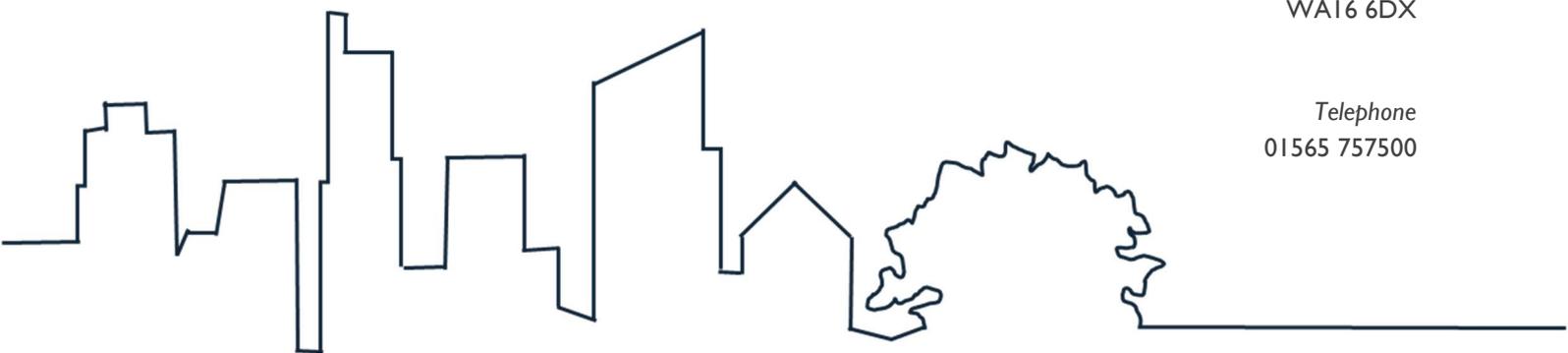
SPECIALIST PLANNING & HERITAGE CONSULTANTS

MARCH 2025

Walsingham Planning

Brandon House
King Street
Knutsford
WA16 6DX

Telephone
01565 757500



knutsford@walsingplan.co.uk
www.walsinghamplanning.co.uk

CONTENTS

I	INTRODUCTION.....	1
(A)	BACKGROUND CONTEXT	2
(B)	COMMUNITY-LED PLANNING	3
(C)	SANDON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN.....	6
(D)	DANBURY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN.....	7
(E)	BOREHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA.....	9
(F)	SUMMARY.....	10
2	STRATEGIC GROWTH SITE POLICY 16A.....	12
(A)	INTRODUCTION	12
(B)	LANDSCAPE VALUE	12
(C)	HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE	16
(D)	FLOOD RISK.....	27
(E)	LOSS OF AGRICULTURAL LAND	34
(F)	WILDLIFE AND ECOLOGY	35
(G)	COUNTRY PARK.....	38
(H)	MINERALS.....	40
(I)	ACCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY	41
(J)	SUMMARY IN RELATION TO THE SUITABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF HAMMONDS FARM	53
3	STRATEGIC GROWTH SITE POLICY 16B.....	57
(A)	INTRODUCTION	57
(B)	AGRICULTURAL LAND.....	57
(C)	HERITAGE ASSETS.....	59
(D)	ARCHAEOLOGY	60
(E)	LANDSCAPE CHARACTER.....	61
(F)	MINERALS SAFEGUARDING.....	61
(G)	HIGHWAYS IMPACT	63
(H)	FLOOD RISK.....	65
(I)	SUMMARY IN RELATION TO THE SUITABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF LAND ADJACENT TO THE A12 JUNCTION 18.....	68
4	DRAFT STRATEGIC POLICIES S6 AND S7	70
(A)	STRATEGIC POLICY S6.....	70
(B)	STRATEGIC POLICY S7.....	76
(C)	SUMMARY IN RELATION TO STRATEGIC POLICIES S6 AND S7	82

5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS83

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – NATIONAL LANDSCAPE APPLICATION (INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT), PREPARED BY DANBURY RIDGE AND THE CHELMER VALLEY NATIONAL LANDSCAPE WORKING GROUP (NOVEMBER 2023)

APPENDIX 2 – FLOOD RISK SUMMARY STATEMENTS FOR SITE POLICIES 16A AND 16B, PREPARED BY STOMOR (FEBRUARY 2025)

APPENDIX 3 – TRANSPORT TECHNICAL NOTE, PREPARED BY STOMOR (JUNE 2024) AND TRANSPORT TECHNICAL NOTE 2, PREPARED BY STOMOR (FEBRUARY 2025)

APPENDIX 4 - CROSS-PARISH WORKING GROUP OBJECTION TO APPLICATION REFERENCE 24/01768/OUT (DATED 25/02/2025)

This Report has been commissioned and approved by the following Parish Councils:

Little Baddow Parish Council (Chair: Peter Irvine)

Boreham Parish Council (Chair: Peter Elkington)

Danbury Parish Council (Chair: April Chapman)

Sandon Parish Council (Chair: Martin Cross)

I INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Walsingham Planning has been instructed by a Cross-Parish Working Group - comprising **Little Baddow Parish Council, Boreham Parish Council, Danbury Parish Council and Sandon Parish Council** - to respond to the Council's current consultation on its Pre-Submission (Regulation 19) Draft Local Plan. The fact that the Parish Councils have chosen to work together to prepare this representation, reflects the very high level of local concern and objection to the strategy being presented in the Local Plan Pre-Submission Document.
- 1.2 The proposed allocation at Hammonds Farm (Policy 16a) and the proposed additional employment site (Policy 16b) lie within the parishes of Little Baddow and Sandon. However, the impacts of these proposed developments will be felt further afield, and will directly affect the other villages surrounding these strategic allocations, notably Boreham and Danbury. All four Parish Councils therefore have significant concerns regarding the proposed Spatial Strategy and planned form of development in this location. As such, all four Parish Councils **OBJECT** in the strongest terms to the following proposed policies in the Local Plan Pre-Submission (Regulation 19) Draft:
- **Draft Strategic Policy S6 – Housing and Employment Requirements;**
 - **Draft Strategic Policy S7 – The Spatial Strategy;**
 - **Draft Strategic Growth Site Policy 16a – East Chelmsford Garden Community (Hammonds Farm); and**
 - **Draft Strategic Growth Site Policy 16b (Land Adjacent to A12 Junction 18 Employment Area).**
- 1.3 We address the policies together in this report, and we explain: (a) Why Hammonds Farm and the land adjacent to Junction 18 of the A12 are fundamentally unsuitable for the type and scale of development proposed; (b) the shortcomings of the Council's proposed spatial strategy; and we question (c) why other – more appropriate and sustainable – options have been ruled out.
- 1.4 Certainly, it is our strong view that a proposal for a new Garden Community (comprising 3,000 new homes, 43,000 sq.m of employment floorspace, in addition to other supporting infrastructure and facilities), alongside 43,000 sq.m of additional employment floorspace on an adjacent site, which are both sited in a scenic and historic rural area, should only be put forward as a last resort, when all other, less harmful options have been exhausted first. We

can find no evidence that this process has been duly followed by the City Council, and have major concerns with the evidence base that supports the Council’s Pre-Submission Draft. It is our view that the Pre-Submission Local Plan is unsound, because Draft Strategic Policies S6 and S7 and the Strategic Growth Site allocations at 16a and 16b have not been positively prepared, are not properly justified, are not consistent with national policy, and will not be effective, and our reasoning is set out in the following sections of this report.

(A) BACKGROUND CONTEXT

1.5 From the outset, it is important to explain that this representation follows objections made by the Parish Councils at the Issues and Options stage of the Local Plan Review, which was consulted upon between 11 August and 6 October 2022, and the Preferred Options stage, which was consulted on between 8th May and 19th June 2024.

1.6 It is not only the Parish Councils who have raised concerns with the proposed strategy in the emerging Local Plan. At the Preferred Options stage, it is relevant that the City Council received a substantial number of objections to its proposed allocations at 16a (Hammonds Farm) and 16b (Land adjacent to A12 Junction 18), as summarised in **Table 1.1** below. In addition to the objection from the Cross-Parish Working Group, objections were received from a wide variety of parties, including members of the public and local residents; local interest groups; developers, housebuilders and land promoters. It is clear from the figures presented in **Table 1.1** below that the overwhelming response was of objection to the proposed allocations, and this was supported by detailed comments.

Table 1.1 – Summary of Preferred Options Consultation Responses to Strategic Growth Sites 16a and 16b

<u>Consultation point</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Comments</u>	<u>Total number of responses</u>
Strategic Growth Site 16a – East Chelmsford Garden Community (Hammonds Farm)	9	4410	4433	4448

<u>Consultation point</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Comments</u>	<u>Total number of responses</u>
Strategic Growth Site 16b – Land adjacent to A12 Junction 18 Employment Area	5	4331	4337	4348

Source – Preferred Options Consultation Document: You Said We Did Feedback Report (February 2025)

- I.7 However, despite the substantive and detailed concerns raised in relation to the proposals for Site Policies I6a and I6b, both draft allocations have proceeded to the Pre-Submission (Regulation 19) Draft Local Plan, with minimal amendment or revision. As such, it can be confirmed that the Regulation 19 Draft Local Plan has not addressed the serious concerns previously raised by the Cross-Parish Working Group, and their strong objection to draft Strategic Policies S6 and S7 and the proposed allocation of Sites I6a and I6b remains.
- I.8 It is the Parish Councils' view that the City Council has failed to justify its reasons for proceeding with the allocations, which will direct development to fundamentally unsuitable and unsustainable locations, and have a series of significant harmful impacts.
- I.9 Indeed, at the last Local Plan review the Council and the Inspector rejected the allocation of land at Hammonds Farm. There have been no changes of circumstances to the land since 2020, and there is no justification for taking a different approach now.

(B) COMMUNITY-LED PLANNING

- I.10 The Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan acknowledges in its introduction that town and parish councils have the ability to prepare plans and orders that complement the Local Plan. These rights and powers were introduced to enable communities to get more involved in planning for their areas.
- I.11 Paragraph I.47 of the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan notes that the Council will work with communities who are developing their community-led plans alongside the Local Plan, to make sure they complement each other. Paragraph I.48 of the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan explains that Neighbourhood Plans have been made for South Woodham Ferrers, Writtle, Little Baddow, Sandon and Danbury, and these areas are even identified on the proposed Policies Map.
- I.12 However, despite acknowledging the existence of the Neighbourhood Plans, the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan does not explain that the provisions of the proposed new Local Plan will be completely at odds with the adopted policies of the recently made Neighbourhood Plans in Little Baddow, Sandon and Danbury, rendering these community-led documents effectively redundant. This does not align with the spirit of neighbourhood planning, as introduced by the Localism Act.

- I.13 Paragraph 132 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)¹ explains that: *“Neighbourhood planning groups can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in development, both by their own plans and by engaging in the production of design policy, guidance and codes by local planning authorities and developers”*.
- I.14 No justification is provided within either the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan, or its evidence base, to explain why the policies of the recently made Neighbourhood Plans (and the Little Baddow Neighbourhood Plan Design Guide) have been entirely disregarded. Whilst a new Local Plan can of course supersede earlier Development Plan documents, the complete disregard for the community-led planning process, which has been undertaken very recently and at considerable cost to the Parish Councils, does not represent a positive or collaborative approach to plan-making.
- I.15 We note that paragraph 7.385 of the justification text in relation to Site Policy 16a of the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan states that: *“The site is located partly in the Parishes of Sandon and Little Baddow. Each Parish has a ‘made’ (adopted) Neighbourhood Plan. Development proposals should have regard to the Sandon Neighbourhood Plan and the Little Baddow Neighbourhood Plan”* (our emphasis). However, given that both the Sandon and Little Baddow Neighbourhood Plans seek to preserve the countryside, valued historic landscapes, views and heritage assets within their parishes, it is unclear how the proposed new strategic development can align with the objectives or adopted policies within these Neighbourhood Plans, and this statement represents a clear conflict in the Local Plan, which cannot be delivered.
- I.16 The conflict between the recently agreed strategy of the made Neighbourhood Plans, and the proposed (entirely different) strategy of the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan, is of considerable concern to the Parish Councils, and indicates from the outset that the emerging Local Plan has not been positively prepared with regards to community-led planning.

Little Baddow Neighbourhood Plan

- I.17 On 18th August 2023, Chelmsford City Council, working in partnership with Little Baddow Parish Council, made the **Little Baddow Neighbourhood Plan, alongside a Little**

¹ All references (including paragraph numbers) to the NPPF relate to the December 2023 version, unless stated otherwise.

Baddow Neighbourhood Plan Design Guide, and these documents form part of the adopted Development Plan.

- I.18 The Neighbourhood Plan area includes part of Hammonds Farm, in so far as it falls within the parish of Little Baddow. Section 2 of the Neighbourhood Plan usefully summarises the key characteristics of the Parish as follows (our emphasis):

“Little Baddow is a small, rural parish situated on the ridge that runs from its high point at Danbury in the south, to the valley of the Chelmer & Blackwater Canal to the west. Apart from the boundary with Danbury, the village boundaries are noticeably marked by a fall in housing density and an increase in natural vegetation. Consultation undertaken for the Neighbourhood Plan highlighted the importance that is attached by the community to its separation from other neighbouring parishes, as well as the presence of extensive areas of woodland and other natural areas, the waterways and the resulting feeling of tranquillity and aid to wellbeing.

Little Baddow is recognised for its natural beauty, and it provides a haven for plants and wildlife.

Little Baddow’s most unique feature is the presence of extensive woodlands, some of them ancient, which are further enhanced by similar areas in the Woodham Walter and Danbury parishes. Much of this is protected by nine nature reserves and significant parts of two others. All this land enjoys total protection, offers free access to the public and helps to enclose the village settlements along both sides of the north-south axis. These reserves are bolstered by private woods, woodland gardens, and remnant hedgerows.

Much of the parish comprises arable farmland interspersed with further woodlands. The valley bottom to the north of the Parish comprises part of the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation Conservation Area and to the west is the Sandon Brook. Furthermore, there are numerous Local Wildlife Sites in these areas, with a large amount of the parish being identified as priority habitat areas...

The parish enjoys extensive views to the north over the Chelmer valley due to the steep elevation of the land towards the Danbury ridge”.

- I.19 The Vision of the Neighbourhood Plan is to retain Little Baddow as a small, rural settlement, surrounded by open countryside, with its landscape character, heritage, biodiversity and community assets protected and enhanced. The Vision also stipulates that: “Any development

will be small in scale, complementary within its setting, sensitive to the rural environment and compatible with the capability of the infrastructure, such as traffic, roads, parking, medical and educational facilities”.

- I.20 Little Baddow Parish Council is very concerned that the City Council is now pursuing an alternative development strategy, which will remove the area’s current rural protections and will irrevocably erode the key assets of the Parish, which are held in high regard by its residents. As we discuss below, there appears to be no reasoned justification for this radical change in approach.

(C) SANDON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

- I.21 The Sandon Neighbourhood Plan was made on 28th November 2023. At the referendum, 85% of voters were in favour of using the neighbourhood plan to help decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area, showing strong levels of local support for the strategy outlined in the document.

- I.22 The Neighbourhood Plan explains that the Parish currently comprises just 616 dwellings, in three settlement areas, and the existing villages date from Roman times. The Neighbourhood Plan sets out a clear vision for Sandon, as follows:

“The overall purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan is to safeguard the distinctive character and attributes of the Parish, whilst enabling the parish to grow, maintain a healthy rural economy and change in tune with the shared values of residents”.

- I.23 The Neighbourhood Plan explains that – although there is a Park and Ride facility within Sandon – there is poor access to it by bike or on foot. There are also infrequent buses both along the A414 to Maldon and South Woodham Ferrers, and from Howe Green and Butts Green to Chelmsford and Southend. A community bus currently serves the village centre. Conversely, car ownership is high in the parish with 63.5% of households owning at least two cars or vans, whilst only 6.9% of households have no car or van.

- I.24 The adopted Chelmsford Local Plan allocates two housing sites in the Sandon Neighbourhood Plan area, in addition to a business development area. A further housing site lies just outside the parish boundary, but immediately next to it. In total, the allocated sites will deliver 400 new homes in the Parish, and so the Neighbourhood Plan makes no further allocations. It should be noted that all of these allocated sites lie to the west of the A12, and are adjacent to the Sandon Park and Ride facility. The Neighbourhood Plan is therefore pragmatic – it

accepts growth in sustainable locations, whilst seeking to preserve the open characteristics of the countryside and village settings across the remainder of the Parish.

- I.25 The Neighbourhood Plan reiterates that the largest area of the Parish is rural, and includes Sandon Brook, a reinstated quarry, and agricultural land used for arable farming, with many hedges, mixed woodland and a water meadow. Sandon also includes a large Conservation Area, which includes the area around St Andrew’s Church, and other listed buildings nearby.
- I.26 The Neighbourhood Plan notes that in consulting on the document, a clear preference was expressed regarding protecting the countryside and, in particular, to prevent coalescence with neighbouring communities and to maintain a ‘village’ feel. Paragraph 6.18 is clear that: *“The encroachment of large-scale housing developments into the Parish could have a significantly detrimental impact on its character and appearance”*.
- I.27 **Policy HI** seeks to safeguard the village setting of Sandon. The policy stipulates that *“proposals for major development in the setting of Sandon Village will need to be accompanied by a visual impact assessment that clearly indicates the impact of development on the character and appearance of Sandon village and the surrounding countryside”*.
- I.28 Clearly, the proposed introduction of 43,000 sq.m of employment floorspace (on Site 16b) within the open countryside is entirely contradictory to the provisions of the Sandon Neighbourhood Plan, which forms a recent addition to the Development Plan for the City.

(D) DANBURY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

- I.29 The Danbury Neighbourhood Plan was made very recently, on 20th December 2024, and is intended to cover the period to 2036.
- I.30 The Neighbourhood Plan explains that Danbury is about to enter a period of growth, with the adopted Chelmsford Local Plan requiring land to be allocated in Danbury to accommodate 100 new homes. As such, the Neighbourhood Plan duly proposes five sites for allocation for housing development, which will together accommodate almost 100 new homes.
- I.31 Danbury is a large village, which lies along the route of the A414. Danbury is set in wooded hills, and residents have uninterrupted views across the Chelmer Valley. The surrounding countryside is mainly arable, with some sheep farming. Danbury supports several SSSIs, 53 listed buildings, 1 listed war memorial, 3 scheduled monuments, 2 registered parks and

gardens, a Conservation Area, Protected lanes, local wildlife sites, and several village greens and common land.

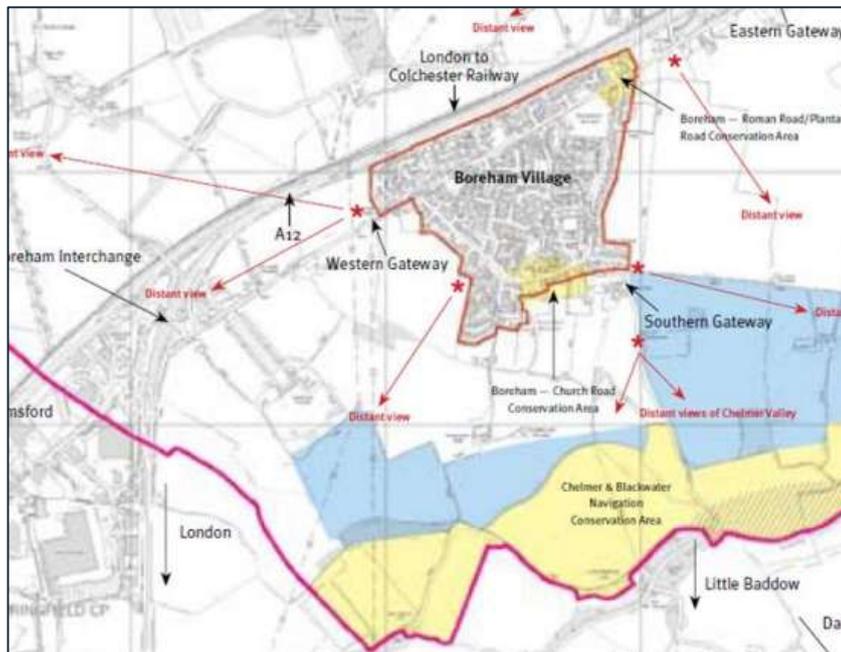
- I.32 The Neighbourhood Plan explains that Danbury’s residents value its village character, natural and heritage assets, the countryside, open spaces, local lanes, public rights of way and listed buildings. Development should not detract from the rural and historic character of the village. Meanwhile, the main concern expressed during the first stage of consultation on the plan was congestion on the A414, and increasing potential for rat running along the local lanes, many of which are very narrow.
- I.33 **Policy DNP12** identifies that all development proposals should protect the key views into and out of the village, and minimise the visual impact on the landscape. The overall importance of the key views is that they show the character of Danbury as a hilltop village with views in all directions, which gives a sense of place, space and wellbeing. The proposed allocations at Site 16a and 16b will – as we discuss in **Sections 2 and 3** below – have a significant impact on existing protected views into and out of the village of Danbury.
- I.34 Danbury is situated midway between Chelmsford and Maldon, and the A414 carries the bulk of the traffic between these areas, with an existing noticeable effect on the village. Paragraph 7.2 of the Neighbourhood Plan explains that Danbury already experiences rat running via the local lanes and heavy traffic on the A414. Danbury’s residents very much want to see improvements to this situation. The Neighbourhood Plan explains that the biggest issue for Danbury is heavy traffic along the A414, which bisects the village, separating the north and south areas. The traffic flows through Danbury cause long tail backs, with pinch points at Well Lane and Eves Corner.
- I.35 As a result of the high levels of congestion, residents are subjected to high levels of air pollution along the A414 corridor. During 2018 and 2024, there was an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in place between Eves Corner and Butts Lane. Whilst the AQMA has currently been revoked, air quality is still being monitored very carefully.
- I.36 It is clear that the proposed strategic allocations in the Pre-Submission Local Plan – whilst being sited outside the parish of Danbury – will still have substantial potential for significant impacts on the Parish, in terms of impact on the landscape, views and historic setting of the village, and the exacerbation of existing congestion on the A414 (with associated impacts on historic lanes, and local air quality).

(E) BOREHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA

- I.37 The Parish of Boreham has been designated as a Neighbourhood Plan Area. A Regulation 14 Consultation Draft Neighbourhood Plan, was published for consultation between 29th September 2024 and 10th November 2024.
- I.38 Boreham Parish is located directly to the north of the proposed development at Hammonds Farm. It is proposed that access to the new garden community will be taken (in part) from Junction 19 of the A12, and this access road will necessarily pass through the Parish, and across the River Chelmer.
- I.39 The Consultation Draft Neighbourhood Plan explains that Boreham remains a separate village, surrounded by agricultural land and open countryside, and it has an individual identity that is distinguishable from the urban expanse of Chelmsford, with outstanding views to the south over the Chelmer Valley. The introductory text also explains that the traffic noise from the A12 is “*intense*”, and Main Road, Waltham Road and Church Road are frequently used as ‘rat runs’ for through traffic.
- I.40 The vision of the draft Neighbourhood Plan is for Boreham to retain its identity as a village, distinct and separated from Chelmsford by protected open space. The aim is also to retain and where possible improve the existing heritage assets in the Parish, and facilitate the conservation and enhancement of the Chelmer Valley’s landscape character.
- I.41 **Proposed Policy 3** relates to landscape setting, character and the protection of high quality agricultural land. The draft policy states that development proposals should seek to protect the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land within the Parish; have regard to and respect the character of the landscape and its sensitivity to change; and enhance the locally distinctive character of the landscape.
- I.42 Figure 5.2 in the Consultation Draft Neighbourhood Plan shows the key views, Conservation Areas and special landscape areas within the Parish, and is replicated in **Figure I.1** below. It is notable that the proposed multi-modal access road to Hammonds Farm will bisect the identified area of special landscape value and the protected Conservation Area to the south.
- I.43 The Consultation Draft Neighbourhood Plan also explains that Boreham suffers from a disproportionate volume of through traffic, as vehicles attempt to avoid delays elsewhere on the road network. The congestion primarily affects Plantation Road, Church Road and Main Road, and is generated from capacity stress on the A12, and as a result of road traffic accidents

causing traffic to divert onto the local network. The through traffic is noted as creating air and noise pollution within the village.

Figure I.1 Map Showing Long Views from Boreham, to be protected



Source: Boreham Regulation 14 Consultation Draft Neighbourhood Plan

(F) SUMMARY

- I.44 The proposed allocation at Hammonds Farm, alongside the proposed employment park adjacent to Junction 18 of the A12, will both be situated within a highly sensitive setting within the open countryside and close to several historic villages. The proposals have the scope to significantly impact the Parishes of Little Baddow and Sandon (in which the developments are to be located), but also the adjoining Parishes of Boreham and Danbury.
- I.45 All four Parishes have recently ‘made’ Neighbourhood Plans, or are investing in Neighbourhood Plans, which have been based upon the adopted Chelmsford Local Plan, which extends up to 2036. The current Local Plan Review process proposes to ‘roll’ the plan forward to 2041, and provides a five-year review of the Local Plan, as required by national planning policy.
- I.46 However, it is clear from the Pre-Submission Draft that the Council does not simply seek to roll forward the existing plan strategy, but proposes an entirely different spatial approach to future development within the City, focusing on the development of a strategic new growth

area / garden community at Hammonds Farm. Moreover, this is a site that was previously rejected by both the Council and the Local Plan Inspector, when formulating the adopted Local Plan.

- I.47 This thus marks a **fundamental departure from the adopted Local Plan**, from the made Neighbourhood Plans, and from the previously agreed long-term spatial strategy for the City. As we discuss in the following sections of this report, the rationale for the proposed spatial strategy is very unclear from the Council's evidence base, and cannot – in our view - be justified.
- I.48 We now turn to review in detail the soundness of the proposed allocation of Hammonds Farm and the land adjacent to Junction 18 of the A12, taking into account the Council's evidence base, as well as the Parish Councils own detailed local knowledge of the area.

2 STRATEGIC GROWTH SITE POLICY 16A

(A) INTRODUCTION

2.1 The Pre-Submission Local Plan proposes a new Garden Community to the East of Chelmsford, on land known as Hammonds Farm (Strategic Growth Site Policy 16a). It is our professional view - and that of the Parish Councils - that the land at Hammonds Farm is severely constrained, and fundamentally unsuitable for the development proposed under **draft Site Policy 16a**. It is considered that strategic development of the site will have a range of severe adverse impacts, which would represent an unsustainable form of development, contrary to the objectives of national planning policy.

2.2 We summarise in turn below the key issues, which individually – and cumulatively – act as a constraint on the development of this open land, highlighting the unsuitability of the area for strategic development. It is our view that the Pre-Submission Local Plan, and its accompanying evidence base, do not provide sufficient justification for the inclusion of the Hammonds Farm site as a strategic allocation, given the substantive harm that has been identified in pursuing this approach.

(B) LANDSCAPE VALUE

2.3 A comprehensive **Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment** was undertaken in March 2017, by Amec Foster Wheeler Environment & Infrastructure UK Limited, and this forms part of the Council's Evidence Base. The Assessment considers the landscape sensitivity, value and capacity of Hammonds Farm (alongside other sites) and divides the site into three land parcels. No subsequent landscape capacity assessment has been undertaken by the Council, but the findings of the 2017 Assessment remain relevant and up-to-date, as there have been no changes to the historic landscape in the area.

2.4 **Figure 2.1** below, which is taken directly from the Assessment, is useful because it highlights the sheer number and type of long and short-distance views which currently exist within and across the land at Hammonds Farm.

2.5 The Assessment includes the following detailed observations regarding the landscape quality at Hammonds Farm:

- *“This valley corridor is very open with a strong relationship with the wider countryside (notably the slopes of Danbury Hill)”.*

- “Overall, open fields are highly visible in public and private views located both within the immediate vicinity (PRoWs, isolated residential properties / farmsteads, and roads within and adjoining the area); and the wider settled countryside including views from elevated areas to the east”.
- “The Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation presents an important wildlife and recreational focus”.
- “Overall development within this predominantly open landscape would be uncharacteristically conspicuous and could not be successfully mitigated (i.e. would undermine landscape character)”.
- “Development would be uncharacteristically intrusive and difficult to mitigate without introducing substantial structural planting and thereby altering the current balance between open and more restricted views” [our emphasis].

2.6 In conclusion, the Assessment finds that the entire Hammonds Farm area has a ‘high’ landscape sensitivity rating, and a ‘low to medium’ capacity for development. Page 17 of the Assessment clearly explains that:

“Those locations where the landscape, with or without appropriate mitigation, appears to have capacity to accommodate development (i.e. medium, medium to high, and high landscape capacity) would be more favourable locations to be taken forward in the Local Plan process in landscape terms than those in which development would be less appropriate or difficult to accommodate within the landscape (i.e. low and low to medium landscape capacity)”.

2.7 The evidence base is therefore clear that the land at Hammonds Farm has the highest landscape sensitivity rating, and that it has limited capacity to accommodate development, since any development in this area would be conspicuous, intrusive and would be challenging to mitigate.

Figure 2.1 Extract from the Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment (2017)



2.8 Aside from the Council’s own evidence base, it is relevant to note that an **‘Integrated Landscape Character Assessment’** has independently been prepared by the **Danbury Ridge and the Chelmer Valley National Landscape Working Group** (in 2023). The Working Group has applied to Natural England, seeking designation of Danbury Ridge (which includes the land at Hammonds Farm) as a ‘National Landscape’ (formerly known as an ‘Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty’). The submission to Natural England underlines the Parish Councils’ commitment to preserving the rural character of this area of countryside, and its strong conviction regarding the area’s high landscape value². The comprehensive **Integrated Landscape Character Assessment** is presented in **Appendix I**, for reference.

² It is recognised that Natural England is still working on its current round of National Landscape designation projects, and so it may be some time before it can consider the Working Group’s submission in relation to Danbury Ridge. However, Natural England has kept the report on file, in advance of future consideration and review.

2.9 In its submission to Natural England, the Danbury Ridge is put forward as the “**Jewel of Mid Essex**”, since it is an ancient landscape, with an intrinsic beauty, and which affords commanding views of the surrounding areas. Furthermore, the submission notes that:

“This part of Essex is ‘ancient countryside with field boundaries that are hundreds if not thousands of years old, resulting in extensive ancient hedgerows including many ancient and veteran trees as well as a complex network of lanes and byways that criss-cross the area.

Away from the main road corridors there is a sense of tranquillity, peacefulness and timelessness among these ancient landscapes”.

2.10 The Integrated Landscape Character Assessment presents a detailed assessment of the history and cultural heritage of the landscape; its ecological diversity and habitats; and the availability of public spaces, footpaths and facilities through the area.

2.11 In summary, it is clear that – based on both the City Council’s own evidence base, and the independent Landscape Character Assessment undertaken by the Parish Councils - Hammonds Farm is an area of high landscape sensitivity, where development cannot be accommodated without irrevocable harm to the distinct and ancient landscape character of the area. The Council’s evidence base acknowledges that the land parcel has a ‘low to medium capacity’ to accommodate development and that development would be “intrusive and difficult to mitigate”.

2.12 Notwithstanding this, Draft Policy 16a attempts to mitigate the impact by reference to the following measures:

- Delivery of a ‘landscape-led setting’;
- Including provision for a new Country Park (albeit – as set below - we note that this area of greenspace already exists on site, and takes the form of the existing River Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation corridor);
- Providing multi-functional green and blue infrastructure (which again is already present on site);
- “Reinstating historic landscape features” – it is completely unclear how this would be achievable; and
- Provision of substantial linear landscape buffers around Hurrells Protected Lane and Graces Walk. The buffers are shown on the draft Policies Map, but will be ineffectual as it is clear that transport and other infrastructure will need to bisect these areas to allow movement between the various development parcels.

- 2.13 Whilst the City Council’s resolve to retain some existing green and blue infrastructure on the site is welcomed, this does not represent appropriate mitigation for the substantial extent of landscape features that will be lost, with the associated loss of cultural heritage, landscape significance, views, habitats and wildlife, and agricultural land. Moreover, the context of the landscape setting and its appreciation will be entirely altered, and this remains a significant adverse impact of the proposed development.
- 2.14 Section 15 of the NPPF is clear that planning policies should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by “*protecting and enhancing valued landscapes*” and “*recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside*”. Furthermore, paragraph 20 of the NPPF states that strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places, and make sufficient provision for: “*conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure*”.
- 2.15 The Pre-Submission Local Plan promotes strategic development which will result in significant adverse impacts on the landscape setting and the distinctive countryside in the Danbury Ridge area, and the City Council has failed to demonstrate how these impacts can be adequately mitigated, or how the landscape will be conserved and enhanced. The scheme is directly contrary to the provisions of the NPPF, and the loss of the highly valued landscape / countryside has not been justified.

(C) HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

- 2.16 Allied closely to the above, and linked to the historic nature of the landscape, it is relevant that the area is also of **high heritage value**.
- 2.17 Indeed, the farmstead at Hammonds is of Saxon or Norman origins, and has provided an important agricultural land use for millennia. Many of the field boundaries are of ancient origins. The Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation was opened in 1797, providing an important trade route from Chelmsford to the sea lock at Heybridge. The landscape of isolated farms, cottages, woodlands, lanes and tracks remains unchanged from the thirteenth century.

Built Heritage

- 2.18 The Council has prepared a **Heritage Assessment of Hammonds Farm**, as part of its Local Plan Review Evidence Base. The Assessment identifies numerous designated and non-designated heritage assets, located both within the site and on its outskirts, which could be

affected by development within their setting. The list of assets is extensive and includes (but is not limited to):

- **Sandon Brook Place** – a non-designated heritage asset;
- **Church of St Andrew and the Old Rectory, Sandon** – a Grade II* listed asset;
- **Sandon Village Conservation Area**;
- **St Cleres Hall and adjacent barn** – both Grade II listed;
- **Danbury Park** – a Registered Park and Garden, on Historic England’s inventory of special historic interest at Grade II. The **main house and lodge** are also Grade II listed;
- **The Ice House** – a scheduled monument;
- **St John the Baptist church, Danbury** – Grade I listed;
- **Danbury Conservation Area**;
- **Water Hall** – Grade II listed house;
- **Hurrells Lane** – an ancient route;
- **Rumbolds House** – a non-designated heritage asset;
- **Hammonds Farm farmhouse** – Grade II listed;
- **Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Conservation Area**, which includes a number of **listed bridges and locks**;
- **Grace’s Walk** – a seventeenth century avenue, which is a significant landscape feature;
- **Phillows Farmhouse** – a Grade II listed building;
- **The Mill House** – a non-designated heritage asset;
- **Great Graces, with brew house, barn, outbuildings and historic boundary wall** – all Grade II listed;
- **Riffhams Estate** - Grade II listed, and the **park** is included at Grade II on the Register of Parks and Gardens;
- **St Mary’s Church** – Grade I listed;
- **Little Baddow Hall** – Grade II* listed;
- **The Manse, Little Baddow Reform Church, Yew Tree Cottage and Cuckoos** – all Grade II listed;
- **New Hall Park Farm** – a non-designated heritage asset;
- **Boreham Church Road Conservation Area**;
- **Church Road, Boreham** – Protected Lane (non-designated heritage asset);

- **Church of St Andrew, Boreham** – Grade I listed;
- **Boreham House** – Grade I listed, and the **landscape** is a Grade II registered park and garden; and
- **Church Lane, Chapel Lane, Graces Lane and New Lodge Chase** – historic lanes.

2.19 The Heritage Assessment is clear that there are a high number of designated and non-designated heritage assets, which are of both local and national importance. The site itself contains many assets, notably the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Conservation Area, Grace’s Walk, Hammonds Farm Grade II listed farmhouse, and Hurrells Lane. However, due to the open nature of the land, it is crossed by many distinctive views to landmarks in the distance, including Boreham House, and the parish churches at Sandon, Danbury, Boreham and Little Baddow.

2.20 The Heritage Assessment makes several recommendations to mitigate the impact on the listed heritage assets. However, the Assessment is also clear that development of the site will have a harmful impact on these important historic assets. For example, the report notes the following:

- **Hammonds Farm (Grade II):** *“Development around Hammonds Farm will have a harmful impact on its setting, likely a moderate-high level”.*
- **St. John the Baptist Church (Grade I):** *“There are views from most of Hammonds Road and the surrounding land. Some of the most significant views are from the west-northwest where the tower and spire are visible...Given the size of the proposed allocation site, it forms a notable part of the extended setting of the church. The change from a rural to an urban setting and likely loss or impact upon views from a large area would impact on the significance of the church”.*
- **Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation (Conservation Area):** Development will have a considerable impact on the setting of the Conservation Area, radically altering the setting from rural to urban. Furthermore, even with appropriate mitigation there is *“still likely to be a harmful impact amounting to a moderate to high level of less than substantial harm”.*
- **St Mary’s Church (Grade I):** The northern part of the allocation extends to c.400m southwest of the church. There would be a considerable impact on the setting, essentially changing from a rural to urban environment. Even with mitigation, *“there is still likely to be a low to moderate level of less than substantial harm to the setting”.*

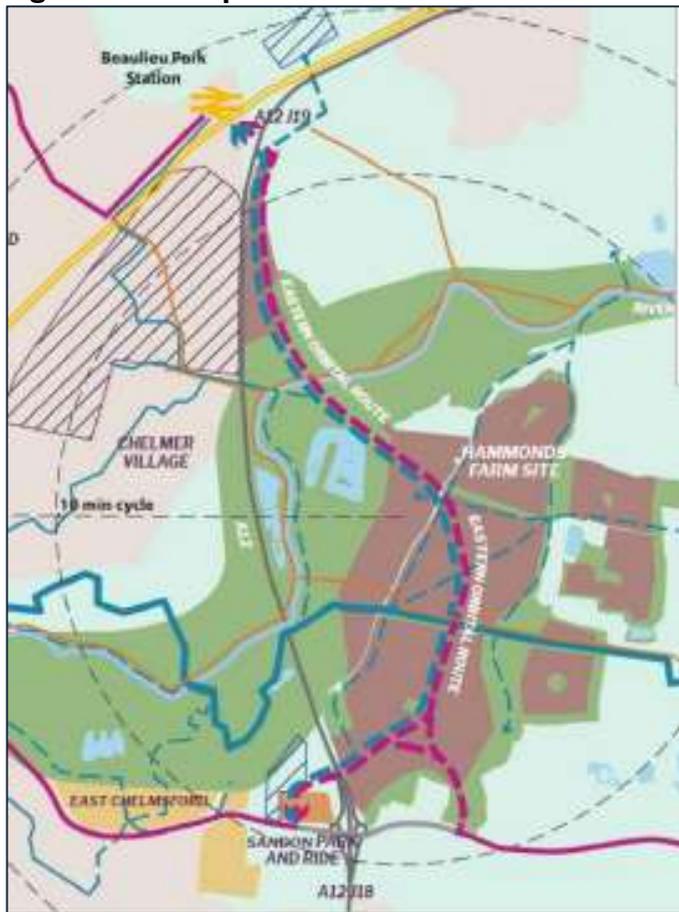
- **Little Baddow Hall (Grade II*):** “There will likely be harm to its setting and mitigation measures...will be required”.
- **Boreham House (Grade II):** Even with screening, “it is likely that the development would still amount to a moderate – high level of less than substantial harm”.

2.21 The above is a snapshot, and the Heritage Assessment also identifies impacts on other heritage assets that are considered within the report.

2.22 It is astounding that the Assessment identifies harm to such a large range of important heritage assets, and yet the Council has still proceeded to put the site forward for allocation for strategic development in the Pre-Submission Local Plan.

2.23 In particular, the “considerable” harm to the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation is worthy of further, detailed consideration. One of the two access routes to Hammonds Farm will be from Junction 19 of the A12 (Boreham Interchange). This access arrangement will see the construction of a multi-modal route through the countryside, to the east of the A12, and this road will necessarily need to cross the River Chelmer, and will directly bisect the heart of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Conservation Area. The access route will include the construction of a road traffic bridge over the waterways, which is likely to accommodate a high number of vehicle, bus and potentially HGV movements, as it will serve 3,000 new homes and 43,000 sq.m of employment floorspace (which could support in the region of 1,200 employees). The proposed new route is mapped out in the Council’s **‘Transport Impact Appraisal of Local Plan Review Pre-Submission’** document, and is referred to as the **‘Eastern Orbital Route’** (see **Figure 2.2** below).

Figure 2.2 – Proposed Eastern Orbital Route



2.24 In contrast, the existing character of this stretch of Conservation Area is shown in diagrammatic format in **Figure 2.3** below, which is taken from the **Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Conservation Area Character Appraisal**. The Conservation Area was designated in 1991, and the Appraisal notes that: “*In the context of Essex, the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation is of considerable architectural, historic, and scenic interest. Since its opening in 1797, the influence of the canal has been considerable, revolutionising industrial transport*”. **Figure 2.3** shows that the Conservation Area includes many key viewpoints, including panoramic views, woodland, trees of significance, listed buildings and locks, agricultural land and water meadows, as well as tracks and public footpaths.

2.25 It is abundantly clear that the introduction of a road traffic bridge over the historic waterway, with accompanying road infrastructure serving a major new community, will introduce major change and permanent harm to the character and significance of the area. It is unclear how

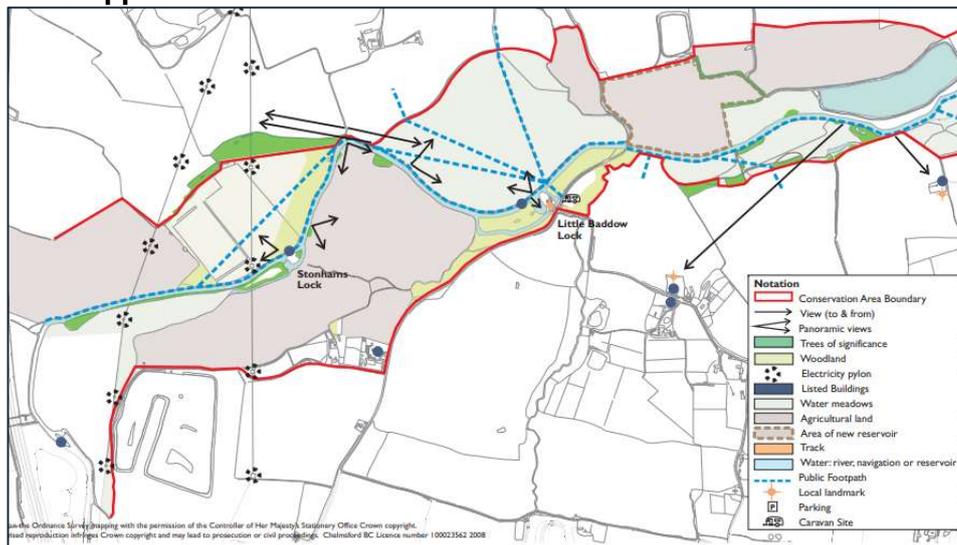
such a development can be achieved, whilst preserving and enhancing this important Conservation Area.

2.26 Indeed, the Conservation Area Appraisal concludes that:

“The Chelmer and Blackwater navigation has immense historic, architectural, scenic and recreational value. Its character is derived from its historic function and development, land uses, buildings and views.

With future management and partnership working, the area can be protected and enhanced”.

Figure 2.3 – Extract from the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Conservation Area Appraisal



2.27 The proposed allocation at Hammonds Farm will completely contradict the purpose and aspirations of the designated Conservation Area. The new road will cross an area of undisturbed countryside, of high landscape value, and rich with wildlife and biodiversity, which is currently protected by its Conservation Area status. The character and setting of this heritage asset will change irrevocably, and the high level of impact and harm on the significance of the asset should not be under-estimated. Indeed, the new road and bridge structure will also require accompanying infrastructure such as lighting and signage, and the tranquil character of the historic canal corridor will be severely impacted.

2.28 We note that the Pre-Submission Local Plan has added additional text in draft Policy 16a, which refers now to a “*sensitively designed new bridge*”, but it is the Parish Council’s view that this minor amendment is not sufficient to mitigate the substantial harm that will be caused.

- 2.29 Indeed, it is our clients' case, supported by the evidence base, that it is not possible to mitigate the harm that has been identified, which will irreversibly change the character of the Conservation Area, and this damage cannot be simply 'undone' or 'softened'.
- 2.30 The NPPF is clear that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations (NPPF paragraph 195). Paragraph 196 is also clear that: "*Plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment*". The proposed allocation of land at Hammonds Farm, contradicts the advice of the NPPF, and – as the evidence base shows – will result in a wide range of impacts and harm to a substantial number of heritage assets, of varying degrees of significance. In some cases – such as the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Conservation Area – the harm will be significant, and will change the historic character of the area forever. This is totally unacceptable and has not been justified in the Pre-Submission Local Plan.
- 2.31 Indeed, in relation to development proposals, the NPPF is clear in paragraph 205 that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). Paragraph 206 stresses that: "*Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting) should require clear and convincing justification*". Furthermore, paragraph 207 is clear that:
- "Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits"*.
- 2.32 In this case, it is clear that a development proposal – of the scale proposed - on the Hammonds Farm site will have substantial harm to the significance of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Conservation Area, and will have a moderate level of harm to the significance of a large number of listed buildings, Protected Lanes, non-designated heritage assets and Registered Parks and Gardens. The high impact has not been properly justified in the Pre-Submission Local Plan, and the evidence base has failed to properly consider other – less harmful – options for meeting the City's future housing and employment land needs.

Archaeology

- 2.33 It should also be noted that the site has been assessed to be of high archaeological value. The City Council's **Archaeological Impact Assessment**, prepared in June 2024, states that the site contain a substantial number of cropmarks which, whilst many are undated, they have been interpreted as including linear features, ring-ditches, pit, burials, rectangular enclosures and trackways which are likely to be Late Bronze Age to Late Iron Age origin and which evidence human activity and interaction within the site from the prehistoric period.
- 2.34 The Archaeological Impact Assessment concludes that the site has a RAG score of 'Amber / Red' within the area of the county park, future recreation use / or SUDS and / or biodiversity areas, and an 'Amber' score within the proposed development area and it requests that the wording of the proposed Policy allow for areas to be removed from development if they are shown to be of high archaeological significance.
- 2.35 The Archaeological Impact Assessment advises that only a small selection of the cropmarks have been evaluated further. In 2014, excavations uncovered significant archaeological remains including a medieval building platform with structural remains and a Roman field system. The latter was interpreted to indicate the presence of a nearby settlement. Further evaluation of a small number of cropmarks was undertaken in 2018. This works confirmed earlier interpretations of the crop marks being indicative of prehistoric activity and including evidence of a Bronze Age cremation burial. Trial trench evaluation was undertaken in 2016, by Archaeology South East. The evaluation uncovered archaeological remains in 29 of the 35 trenches. Archaeological features included widely scattered prehistoric remains (including evidence of a cremation burial of probably Bronze Age date); late Iron Age and Early Roman ditched enclosures, suggesting occupation activity; and a medieval boundary ditch. The subsequent Archaeological Evaluation Report concluded that: *"It is judged that development of this site has the potential to adversely impact upon below-ground archaeological remains present within the Site"*.
- 2.36 The justification text for draft Policy 16a (paragraph 7.384) is particularly interesting because it acknowledges the archaeological value of the site and explains as follows:

"The site may contain archaeological deposits which will need to be considered by future development proposals, through an archaeological evaluation. Of particular interest, land to the north of Rumbolds Farm, Hammonds Road contains a significant number and configuration of crop marks requiring further investigation. Other significant archaeological

remains and their settings should also be identified and protected. The archaeological evaluation should include appropriate trial trenches. Once complete the evaluation will inform the location of development parcels and open space within the masterplan".

- 2.37 The Pre-Submission Local Plan is thus aware that the site is likely to have high archaeological value and additional trial trenches are required to understand the nature and extent of the archaeology, which dates back to the prehistoric period (and is thus of considerable significance). The Pre-Submission Local Plan also acknowledges that some parts of the site will not be suitable for development, due to the significance of the archaeology which may need to be preserved in situ.
- 2.38 The evidence base surrounding the allocation of the site and archaeology is therefore considered to be weak. In view of the conclusion of the Archaeological Impact Assessment and the evidence of previous, limited archaeological evaluations, it is questioned why the site has not been subject to further archaeological assessment at the evidence gathering stage.
- 2.39 Further evaluation works would surely be proportionate in this instance given the scale of development proposed and given that the current baseline indicates potential for archaeological remains of high significance to be present which may in fact mean areas of the site cannot be developed and should be removed (as requested within the City Council's own Archaeological Impact Assessment).
- 2.40 The fact is that the extent of the archaeology on the site is unknown, and until the additional evaluation is undertaken, the City Council does not know how much, or which parts of the site will be unavailable for development. The Local Plan is thus based upon an incomplete evidence base, and until further archaeological investigation is undertaken to understand the extent of the constraints, it cannot be assumed that Hammonds Farm can accommodate the scale of development proposed.

Summary in Relation to Heritage Impact

- 2.41 The wording of draft Strategic Growth Site Policy 16a does acknowledge the heritage significance of the site, and the risks of heritage harm, and attempts to address this through specific requirements and future mitigation measures. However, we have significant concerns that the proposed policy requirements could never in fact be complied with, and thus the proposed mitigation / policy text is insufficient to address the risks identified, as follows:

"Prepare a detailed Heritage Impact Assessment"

- 2.42 It is considered that this should have been undertaken as part of the initial evidence base research to inform firstly the appropriateness of the site for allocation, and secondly, the quantum and location of any development. As set out above, the Council’s initial Heritage Impact Assessment identifies harmful impacts to a high number of designated and non-designated heritage assets within the site and surrounding the site (where their setting will be impacted). Such an assessment should have included a detailed analysis of setting, including the contribution of key views to inform whether development can in fact be accommodated and what mitigation measures are required to minimise or remove harm, if possible.

“Preserve or enhance the character or appearance of Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Conservation Areas and its setting, including landscape enhancement works and sensitively designed bridge to mitigate harm”.

- 2.43 The policy requirement to ‘preserve or enhance’ cannot not be complied with in view of the requirement to construct a new vehicular bridge over the canal. As set out above, it is abundantly clear that the introduction of a road traffic bridge over the historic waterway, with accompanying road infrastructure serving a major new community, will introduce major change and permanent harm to the character of the area. It is unclear how such a development can be achieved, whilst preserving and enhancing this important Conservation Area.

“Preserve or enhance the setting of Boreham and Danbury Conservation Areas”.

- 2.44 The City Council’s own Heritage Impact Assessment concluded that there is likely to be a low level of less than substantial harm to the setting of both Conservation Areas due to change to their wider setting from rural to urban. The draft policy includes no further information to explain how development could be achieved that will comply with this requirement.

“Preserve and where appropriate enhance the listed buildings and structures and their settings including Cuton, Stonhams and Little Baddow Locks, Hammonds Farmhouse, Phillows Farmhouse, The Congregational Chapel and Manse, Yew Tree Cottage, St Mary’s Church, Little Baddow Hall, Boreham House, Generals, Water Hall, St Johns the Baptist Church Danbury, Little Graces, and Great Graces group of listed buildings. The Hammonds, Phillows and Rumbolds farmsteads which are within the site (the latter farmhouse being a non-designated heritage asset) should be provided with appropriate landscape buffers within the site to protect their settings”.

- 2.45 As with the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Conservation Area, it is unclear how strategic development can be achieved whilst preserving the significance and setting of numerous identified heritage assets when it is clear, after possible mitigation, harm will remain. The policy advises that Hammonds, Phillows and Rumbolds farmstead should be provided with appropriate landscape buffers. However, no buffer is identified on the draft Policies Map and it is unknown, without further detailed assessment what such landscape buffer may involve and the effect that providing them will have on delivering the policy requirements.

“Protect the setting of Danbury Park, Riffhams and Boreham Houses Registered Park and Gardens”.

- 2.46 The policy offers no advice on how protecting the setting of these assets should be delivered by development.

“Retain the significance of Church Lane, Chapel Lane and New Lodge Chase Protected Lanes”.

- 2.47 The policy offers no advice on how retention of significance should be delivered by development.

“Retain the significance of Hurrells Protected Lane and Graces Walk which both go through the site by providing substantial linear landscape buffers”.

- 2.48 These proposed landscape buffers are now identified on the draft Policies Map. However, it is completely unclear how the buffers will function and be delivered in practical terms, given that they segregate the site into three detached development plots. In practice, the linear buffers will necessarily be bisected by road infrastructure to allow access and connectivity across the community and between the different uses. Thus, it remains unclear how the significance of the lanes will be protected, if the landscape buffers are compromised.

“Undertake an Archaeological Assessment and conserve existing archaeological features”.

- 2.49 As set out above, it is considered that the City Council should have undertaken further archaeological assessment (evaluation) as part of the evidence base to inform the location and quantum of any development. This is particularly pertinent given that there is a specific policy requirement to conserve existing archaeological features. Further evaluation may potentially render large parts of the site sterile to any development. Until the additional evaluation is

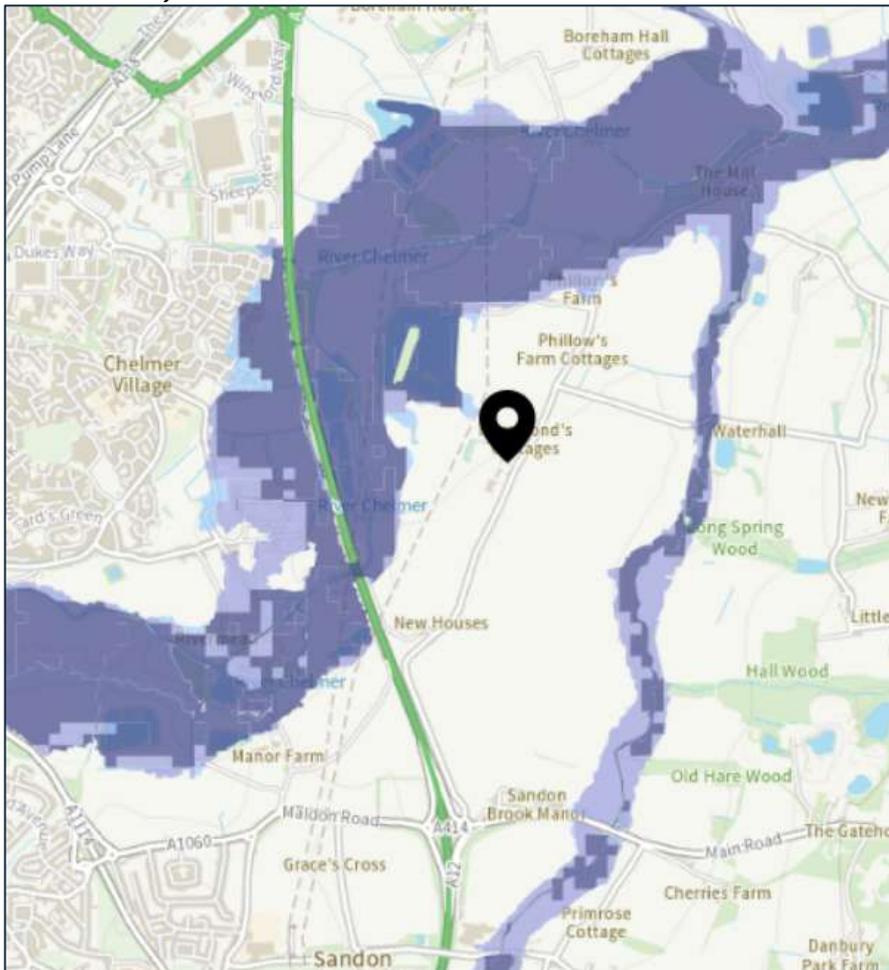
undertaken the City Council does not know how much, or which parts of the site will be unavailable for development.

- 2.50 Paragraph 196 of the NPPF states that Local Plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, in which the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets should be considered. This is amplified by the statutory duty set out in S66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 regarding the desirability of preserving a building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses and the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area must be considered.
- 2.51 Local plans must also be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development (NPPF Paragraph 16, part a). As such, significant adverse impacts on the three dimensions of sustainable development (and the historic environment is included within the environment objective) should be avoided in the first instance.
- 2.52 It is considered that Strategic Growth Policy 16a has not been positively prepared and is contrary to the provisions of the NPPF, since it is inconsistent with the aims of achieving sustainable development, and the impact that the development will have on the significance of heritage assets, both within the site and in its vicinity. The impacts are not considered to be justified and no suitable form of mitigation has been proposed to make the allocation acceptable with regards to heritage harm.

(D) FLOOD RISK

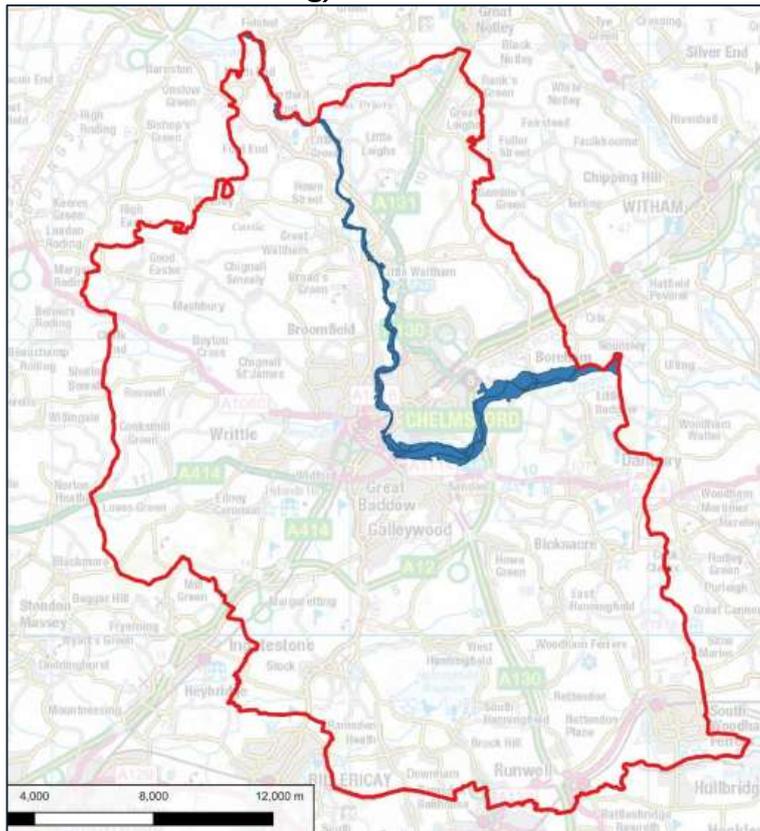
- 2.53 Substantive areas of the site are at elevated risk of flooding from rivers / watercourses / reservoirs. This is due to the site's location, directly adjacent to the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation and the Sandon Brook. There are also a number of unnamed watercourses, likely informal field drainage ditches, located within the site boundary. The site is also unusual because it contains a natural Ford along Hurrells Lane, which is regularly subsumed by water and is unpassable.
- 2.54 Indeed, the risk of flooding from rivers and the sea is shown in **Figure 2.4** below, and this extract has been taken from the Environment Agency website. **Figure 2.4** shows that the northern and eastern parts of the site lie within Flood Zones 2 and 3. Indeed, parts of the site to the north lie within the functional flood plain, with existing water meadows on either side of the River Chelmer.

Figure 2.4 – Extract from Environment Agency Mapping (Flood Risk from Rivers and the Sea)



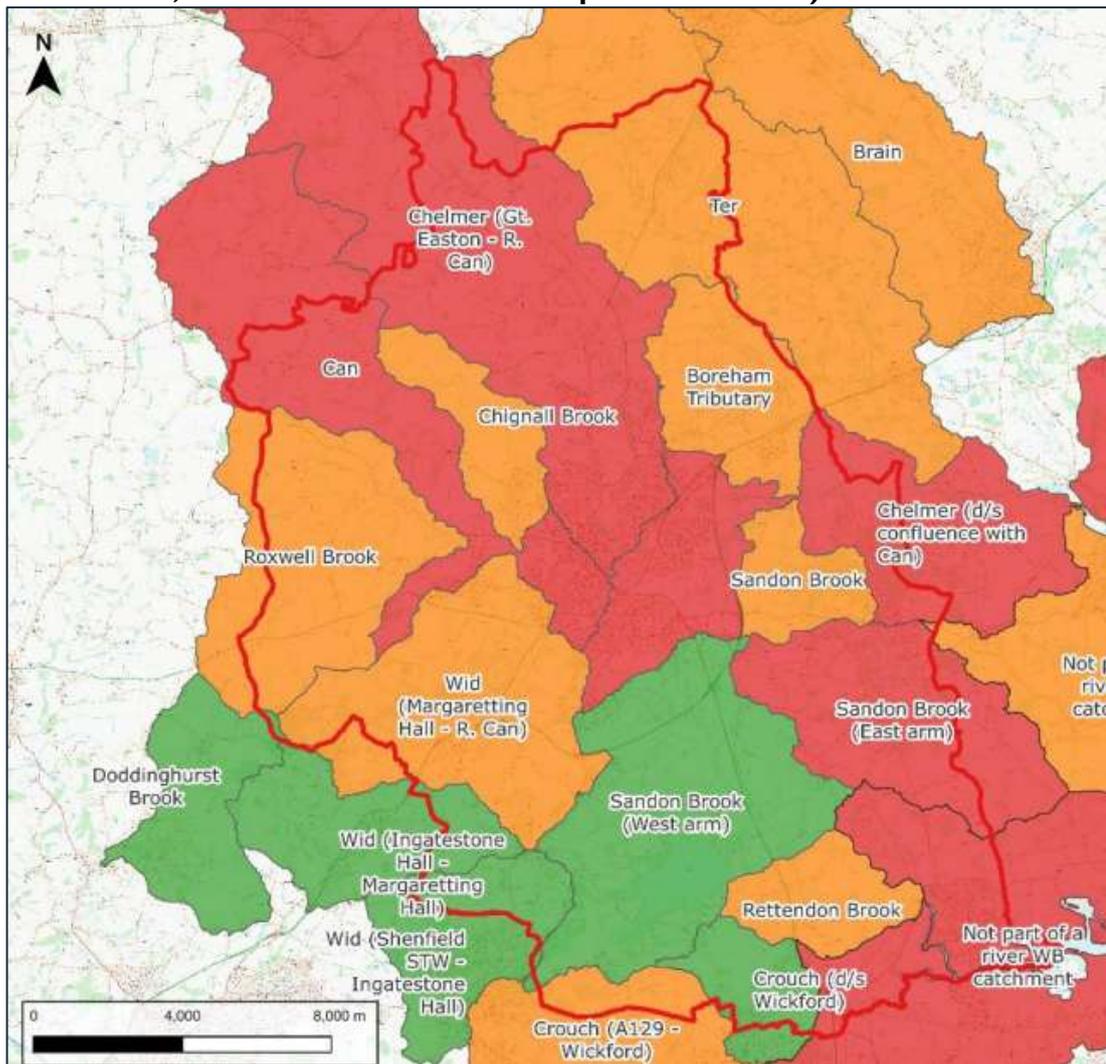
- 2.55 JBA has undertaken a **Level I Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)**, which was published in February 2024, as part of the Local Plan Review Evidence Base. The Level I SFRA notes that the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation is a section of the River Chelmer and River Blackwater which has been canalised. The navigation has the potential to interact with other watercourses in the area and become a conduit for flow paths during flood events or in a breach scenario.
- 2.56 This likelihood of breach is clear from past flooding data. Indeed, on page 65 of the Level I SFRA, there is a map which shows the locations of historic flooding (reproduced as **Figure 2.5** below). **Figure 2.5** shows clearly that the only area of historic flooding within the City Council boundary is along the River Chelmer, particularly the section that lies within the proposed allocation of land at Hammonds Farm.

Figure 2.5 – Extract from Level I Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (Map of Historic River Flooding)



- 2.57 The Level I SFRA concludes by setting out a cumulative impact of development. The SFRA notes that when allocating land for development, consideration should be given to the potential cumulative impact of the loss of floodplain storage volume, as well as the impact of increased flows on flood risk downstream. Indeed, whilst the loss of storage for individual developments may only have a minimal impact on flood risk, the cumulative effect of multiple developments may be more severe. All developments are required to comply with the NPPF and demonstrate that they will not increase flood risk elsewhere.
- 2.58 The Level I SFRA goes on to rank catchments as high, medium or low risk (see extract in **Figure 2.6** below). The ranking indicates the likely sensitivity of the catchment to increase flood risk as a result of development. A section of the land at Hammonds Farm is identified as being within a 'high risk' catchment in terms of flood risk sensitivity. This indicates from the outset that flooding is a very sensitive issue in this area, as seen from the historic flood data, and reflecting the potential for development in this area to increase flood risk elsewhere.

Figure 2.6 – Extract from Level I Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (Ranking of Catchments, based on the Cumulative Impact Assessment)



- 2.59 The Cross-Parish Working Group commissioned Stomor to undertake an independent review of the Council’s evidence base with regards to flood risk, and Stomor’s **Flood Risk Summary Statement** is presented for reference in **Appendix 2**.
- 2.60 The Statement clearly demonstrates that the majority of land at Hammonds Farm is also at high risk of flooding from reservoirs when river levels are normal, as shown on **Figure 2.7** below. This is because there is a large irrigation reservoir located within the north-west boundary of the site. The Hanningfield Raw Water reservoir is owned by Northumbrian Water Limited. The Sir Great Hughes Reservoir is also located along the Sandon Brook.

Figure 2.7 – EA Flooding from Reservoirs, Canals and other Artificial Sources



- 2.61 The NPPF is clear that strategic policies should manage flood risk from all sources of flooding, and that plans should take a sequential, risk-based approach to the location of development, taking into account all sources of flood risk (paragraphs 166 and 167).
- 2.62 JBA has produced a **Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)** for the Council, which was published in May 2024. This provides a more detailed review of the sites proposed for allocation, where the sites are at higher risk of flooding / flood risk sensitivity. Hammonds Farm is one of the sites that has been flagged up for more detailed review, due to its higher flood risk sensitivities.
- 2.63 However, there appears to be a major deficiency in the evidence base. The Level 2 SFRA considers the site-specific issues associated with two plots of land at Hammonds Farm; the main section of development land to the south, and the access strip to the north. However, the SFRA does not consider the ‘middle’ section of land that is proposed for a country park (which is at the highest risk of fluvial flooding, and which forms part of the active flood plain). Whilst no residential or commercial development is proposed within the country park area,

the proposed site access road / bridge must be constructed within the confines of this area, to connect the new community to Boreham Interchange to the north. Thus, despite the fact that the scheme includes substantive development and new infrastructure within this high flood risk and highly sensitive area, it has seemingly been excluded from the detailed SFRA.

- 2.64 The Level 2 SFRA shows that – even excluding the Country Park area, which is at the highest risk of flooding – within the southern section of the proposed allocation (ref. SGS16a(S)), 8.1% of land is still located within Flood Zone 2 (or higher), and 6.7% is within Flood Zone 3. The main risk of fluvial flooding in this part of the site is from the Sandon Brook, and the eastern border of the site is within an Environment Agency Flood Alert area. The Level 2 SFRA site proforma also points out that: *“the site is at significant risk of surface water flooding and is shown to be highly sensitive to increased risk as a result of climate change”*. Given the very high flood risk status of the site, it is necessary to demonstrate compliance with the flood risk sequential and exception tests. The Level 2 SFRA site proforma states: *“It is recommended that Chelmsford City Council carefully weigh up the benefits of developing the site against the flood risk”*.
- 2.65 In particular, the SFRA queries whether safe access and egress can be demonstrated, without displacing floodwater elsewhere. Certainly, any development on this site will require a flood warning and evacuation plan, which indicates the very real, and high level of flood risk in this area from multiple sources.
- 2.66 The Council has subsequently published a **Pre-Submission Sequential and Exception Test Focused Update**, December 2024, which includes further review of the site.
- 2.67 Paragraph 168 of the NPPF explains that the aim of the sequential test is to steer new development to areas with the lowest risk of flooding from any source, and it is clear that: *“development should not be allocated or permitted if there are reasonably available sites appropriate for the proposed development in areas with a lower risk of flooding”*.
- 2.68 With regards to the exception test, paragraph 170 of the NPPF explains that, to pass the exception test it should be demonstrated that:
- a. The development would provide wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh the flood risk; and
 - b. The development will be safe for its lifetime, taking account of the vulnerability of its users; without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and, where possible, will reduce flood risk overall.

- 2.69 Paragraph 171 of the NPPF notes that: “*both elements of the exception test should be satisfied for development to be allocated or permitted*”.
- 2.70 The Sequential and Exception Test process has been completed by the Council, but does not in our view address the core requirements of the NPPF. The evidence base report mentions briefly that the ‘more flood risk sensitive’ uses (i.e. the residential and education components of the scheme) can be sited within the lower flood risk areas. However, this focuses on fluvial flooding only, and does not consider or address the risk from reservoir flooding that has been identified across the site.
- 2.71 This is despite the fact that the report acknowledges elsewhere that the risk from reservoirs is ‘high’ and in the event that the reservoirs fail, there may be a risk to life. In order to mitigate this risk, the Council’s report states that: “*Consultation with the reservoir owners and the Environment Agency should be sought at an early state to ensure that residents of the site can be kept safe in the unlikely event of a reservoir breach, which is likely to require suitable arrangements for warning and evacuation*”.
- 2.72 Furthermore, the report does not consider any potential alternative sites for the location of the development as a whole, and this is a fundamental omission from the evidence base, and an inadequacy of the sequential testing. There is no analysis of whether other development options and strategic sites that were submitted as part of the Local Plan Review process are preferable with regards to flood risk and the sequential test
- 2.73 With regards to the exception test, the report does not consider in detail whether there are any “sustainability benefits” that outweigh the high flood risk. It is merely concluded that the site will deliver a garden community and this must therefore outweigh the risks identified.
- 2.74 The exception test does, however, identify the safety risks associated with the proposed development. It is clear that there are real flood risks associated with the proposed allocation of the site, but rather than review and address these matters to provide reassurance that the risks can be addressed, the Sequential and Exception Test report simply suggests that the issues be resolved later down the line with a site-specific flood risk assessment. This is despite the high risk of flooding from reservoirs across the site (with a potential risk to life), and the fact that one of the access routes into and out of the site (one of only two routes available) will directly pass through an area within Flood Zone 3a and 3b (functional flood plain). The report notes that: “*Developers will need to demonstrate that the bridge and access road will not*

increase flood risk elsewhere including consideration of potential blockage of the bridge, or impedance of floodplain flows”.

- 2.75 This is woefully inadequate, and – given the high flood risks (from multiple sources) identified in the Council’s own evidence base – these issues must be shown to be capable of resolution before the land is allocated for an entire new community. If the access route is prone to flooding, this could cut off access and also pose a threat to life. Development within the flood plain also needs proper attention, given the risk to flooding it can cause from the displacement of flood water.
- 2.76 In summary, the evidence base points to a significant level of flood risk on the proposed allocated land, particularly from reservoirs, and from fluvial flooding along the access route. The implications for the new community and the surrounding areas do not appear to have been properly considered, and alternative options have certainly not been fully explored. Instead, the issue has essentially been put ‘on hold’, for consideration when the major development comes forward, and this is not a rational or justified strategic approach, and is contrary to the requirements of the NPPF.

(E) LOSS OF AGRICULTURAL LAND

- 2.77 Figure 6 within the adopted Chelmsford Local Plan shows that the land at Hammonds Farm is Grade 3 agricultural land. The Local Plan provides no further detail regarding whether the land is classified as Grade 3a or 3b, but notes that the agricultural land provides an important natural resource.
- 2.78 We understand – from tenants who have farmed at Hammonds in the past – that the land should rightfully be considered as Grade 3a (i.e. the best and most versatile agricultural land). Indeed, former tenants have been able to grow a wide variety of crops from the site, including those that could only be supported on the best quality agricultural land.
- 2.79 Certainly, it is an established fact that the land at Hammonds Farm has been farmed for centuries, and the landholding is centred on a historic farm. The Council’s own Heritage Assessment explains that: *“The fertile land at Hammonds Farm has served the area’s agricultural land use for millennia. Many of the farmsteads are of probably Saxon or Norman origins...Many of the field boundaries are of ancient origins”.*
- 2.80 Large sections of the site are still used for agriculture today, and a variety of crops are grown each year from the land, with the fields currently being used to grow potatoes, onions, sugar

beet, wheat and barley. The Council’s evidence base does not consider the impacts associated with the proposed loss of this high-quality farming land. This is contrary to the requirements of the NPPF, which states in footnote 62 that:

“Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality. The availability of agricultural land used for food production should be considered, alongside the other policies in this Framework, when deciding what sites are most appropriate for development”.

2.81 If the land at Hammonds Farm is allocated for development, it will directly result in the loss of high-quality agricultural land, which is actively used for food production, and this is another harmful impact of the proposed strategy. The Council is required to consider what alternative options are available, for development on poorer quality land.

(F) WILDLIFE AND ECOLOGY

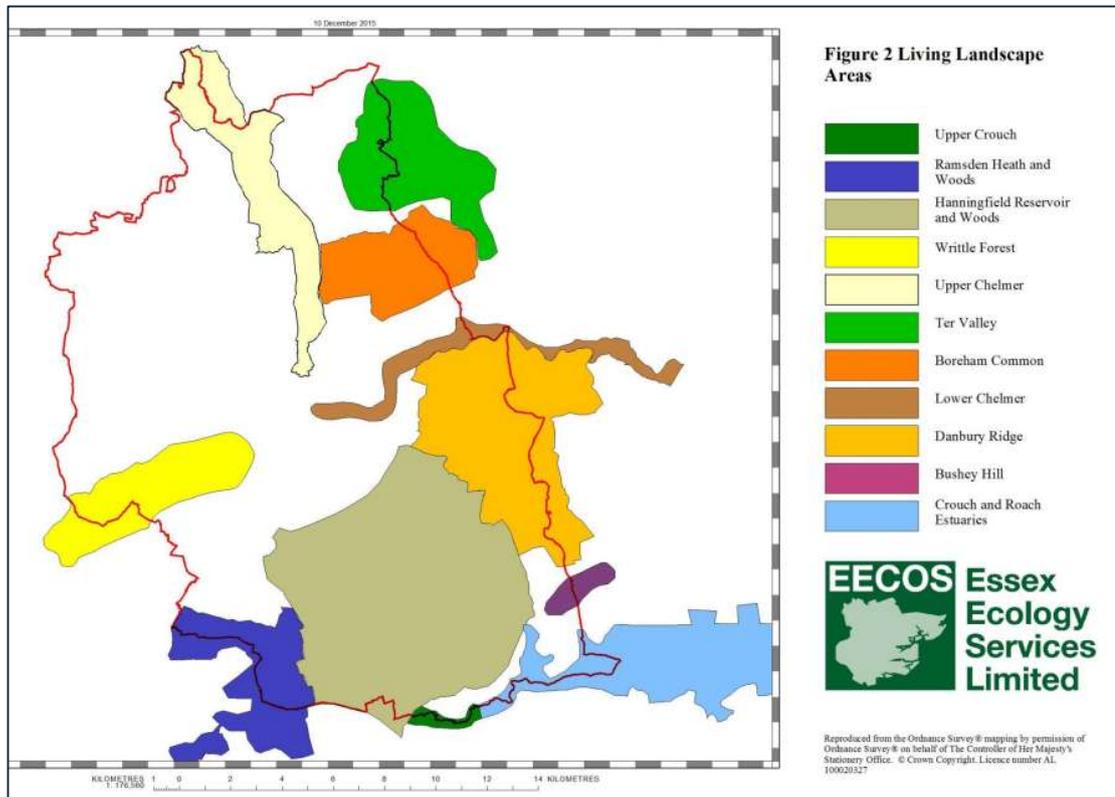
2.82 The land at Hammonds Farm is tranquil and undisturbed, and is consequently rich with habitat, wildlife and ecology, associated with its hedgerows, flower-rich meadows, nearby ancient woodland, canal and watercourse corridors, and bogs. The site lies within close proximity of local wildlife sites at the River Chelmer and Old Hare Wood, Waterhall Meadows Essex Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve, the ancient woodlands of Long Spring Wood and Hall Wood, and Blakes Wood and Lingwood Common SSSI, which all lie either within or immediately adjacent to the site.

2.83 We are aware that a **Local Wildlife Site Review** was prepared for the City Council in April 2016, by Essex Ecology Services Ltd, to inform the preparation of the adopted Local Plan. The Review explains that in 2016, the Essex Wildlife Trust was promoting a suite of significant landscapes for wildlife across the county under the title of **‘Living Landscapes’**. **Figure 2.8** below shows that three ‘living landscape areas’ were identified in the vicinity of the sites that are now proposed for allocation; these being Danbury Ridge, Lower Chelmer and Boreham Common.

2.84 With regards to Lower Chelmer, the Review notes that this comprises the floodplain of the River Chelmer, which is one of the best quality rivers in the County. The Review recommends that the tendency of the river corridor to flood arable land here should be used as a leverage to encourage the creation of new river backwaters and floodplain grassland.

2.85 With regards to the Danbury Ridge, this area is noted as supporting one of the most important clusters of Local Wildlife Sites in the County, with numerous areas of old heathland, ancient woods and important recreational sites.

Figure 2.8 – Identified Living Landscape Areas



2.86 In terms of specific wildlife sites, it is notable that **Waterhall Meadows** lies along the boundary of the proposed allocation at Hammonds Farm, and is an Essex Wildlife Trust nature reserve. The Essex Wildlife Trust website explains that this site comprises ancient, unimproved flood meadows on the west bank of the Sandon Brook, with a small spinney, a pond and an area of blackthorn thickets. Several warbler species nest regularly in this location, and many kingfishers visit regularly. It also supports many dragonfly species, including white-legged damselfly.

2.87 **Blake’s Wood and Lingwood Common is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**, which lies very close to the proposed allocated sites, in Danbury. It is owned by the National Trust, and comprises a mix of woodland, heath and bog habitats. There is a wide variety of birds, such as hawfinches and nightingales, that use the site.

2.88 The **Blackwater Estuary**, which lies around 8km to the east of the sites, is a SSSI, National Nature Reserve, Special Protection Area and Ramsar site. The site is one of the largest estuarine complexes in East Anglia and consists of mudflats, saltmarsh, shingle and shell banks and offshore islands. The area supports an outstanding assemblage of nationally scarce plants and rare invertebrates, as well as nationally and internationally important waterbirds. In order to seek to protect this area, and prevent the burden of additional recreational pressure from new development, Essex County Council has prepared an ‘Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy.’ The sites at Hammonds Farm fall within the zone of influence of this important Ramsar site, where the addition of 3,000 new homes would undoubtedly have a material impact.

2.89 With regards to the Hammonds Farm site itself, the Parish Councils report that there are many species which have been identified within and around the site in recent years, many of which are protected species or on the national Rare Breeding Birds Panel, including:

- Nightingale;
- Lesser Spotted Woodpecker;
- Red Kite;
- Hobby;
- Honey Buzzard;
- Grey Wagtail;
- Goshawk;
- Marsh Tit;
- Siskin;
- Redpoll;
- Snipe;
- Lapwing;
- Little Ringed Plover;
- Dormouse;
- Yellow-Necked Mouse;
- Daubenton Bat;
- Noctule Bat;
- Barbastelle Bat;
- Water Vole;
- Otter;

- White-legged Damselfly;
- Heath Fritillary;
- Purple Hairstreak; and
- Great Crested Newt.

2.90 The substantial loss of natural habitat, as a result of the urbanisation and development of the land should not be under-estimated and is a major harmful impact of the proposed allocation, which is not considered in detail in the Council’s evidence base.

2.91 We note that draft Site Policy I6a proposes that the development should provide a minimum 20% biodiversity net gain, above the ecological baseline. The site consists almost entirely of undeveloped land, rich with trees and other habitat, and it is unclear how strategic development of the land could achieve any uplift in biodiversity, let alone a 20% net gain, especially given the quantum of built development proposed on the land.

2.92 These challenges are acknowledged in the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan, and we note that whilst draft Site Policy I6a requires a 20% biodiversity net gain as a minimum, the policy justification text (paragraph 7.375) already proposes a dilution of this requirement, explaining: *“The opportunity exists for these developments to achieve 20% biodiversity net gain, subject to site constraints”*.

2.93 If the biodiversity impact needs to be mitigated off-site, or through the purchase of statutory credits, this will represent a major loss of biodiversity on site, with consequences for the multitude of species that currently use the valued landscape. Moreover, basing the proposed mitigation on a standard metric / calculation, fails to take into account the rich diversity of established, natural habitat that already exists on the site, and the number and range of species that will actually be displaced by the development proposed by the allocation.

2.94 The loss of biodiversity and natural habitat is another major adverse impact of the proposed strategy, which has not been properly justified.

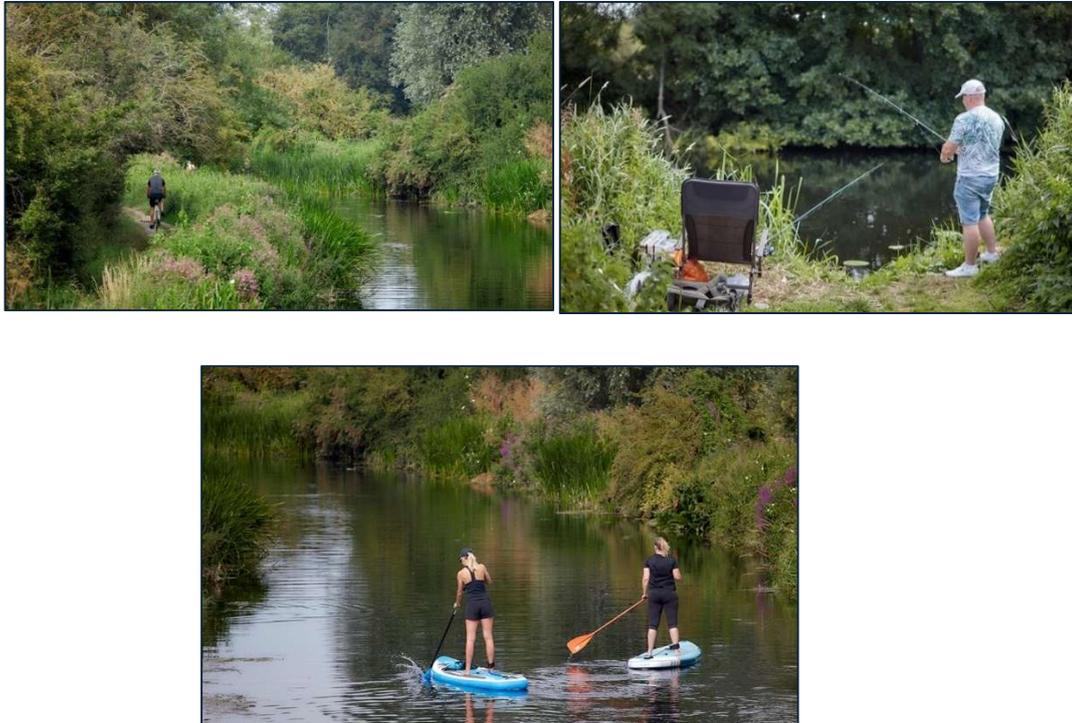
(G) COUNTRY PARK

2.95 Related to the above, it is noted that the draft allocation makes provision for supporting on-site development of: *“A new Country Park to be primarily informal and natural in character”*, and this is depicted in green on the draft Policies Map.

2.96 It is relevant to point out that the proposed ‘new’ Country Park will essentially follow the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation corridor, and encompasses part of the site that is at high risk of flooding. Indeed, the area around the river corridor already functions as a ‘country park’, in that it supports a vast array of habitats and wildlife, there is established and new tree planting in the area, and the canal corridor already supports recreational use (both on and adjacent to the water). The waterway is utilised by canal boats and other craft, and the canal is extensively used for fishing, rambling, and dog walking, etc. This is reinforced by the images in **Figure 2.9** below, which are taken from the Essex Tourist Board website (Visit Essex), which promotes a walking route along the Navigation corridor.

2.97 The canal corridor thus already functions as a popular informal and natural ‘country park’, and is well managed by Essex Waterways. The proposal at Hammonds Farm will add no benefit in this respect, and – in fact – has the potential to cause **substantial harm to the existing parkland**, through the development of the Eastern Orbital Route, which will directly bisect the area. The new route will introduce a major transportation bridge across the canal, with associated main road infrastructure, and will drive substantial traffic through the area.

Figure 2.9 – Images of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation (source: Visit Essex website)



(H) MINERALS

- 2.98 The site lies within a Minerals Safeguarding Area. **It is not yet known whether the site contains a viable minerals resource that would require extraction prior to development.** As such, the impact of the proposed development in terms of mineral safeguarding is currently unknown.
- 2.99 The site’s proposed allocation for strategic development is in direct conflict with the Essex Minerals Local Plan, which seeks to safeguard the land to meet future mineral needs within the County, and to protect mineral resources from the risk of sterilisation.
- 2.100 The Minerals Local Plan explains that sand and gravel resources in Essex are significant in national, sub-national and local terms, and Essex is one of the largest producers in the UK. The deposits are capable of being processed to supply a range of construction products, including building sand, sharp sands and gravel. It is also used as a raw ingredient to produce concrete, mortar, asphalt and construction fill.
- 2.101 The NPPF also seeks to safeguard mineral resources, and paragraph 215 is clear that: *“It is essential that there is sufficient supply of minerals to provide the infrastructure, buildings, energy and goods that the country needs. Since minerals are a finite natural resource, and can only be worked where they are found, best use needs to be made of them to secure their long-term conservation”*.
- 2.102 Paragraph 216 of the NPPF is also clear that in terms of planning policies, this means that Local Plans should provide for the extraction of mineral resources of local and national importance, and safeguard mineral resources by defining Mineral Safeguarding Areas, and adopting *“appropriate policies so that known locations of specific minerals resources of local and national importance are not sterilised by non-mineral development where this should be avoided”*.
- 2.103 When it comes to the planning application stage, paragraph 218 of the NPPF is clear that: *“Local planning authorities should not normally permit other development proposals in Minerals Safeguarding Areas if it might constrain potential future use for mineral working”*.
- 2.104 The proposed allocation of the land at Hammonds Farm is therefore remarkable, as it conflicts with the provisions of the NPPF with regards to the safeguarding of mineral resources, and it also directly conflicts with the Essex Minerals Local Plan, which seeks to safeguard the land for future (potential) mineral extraction.

- 2.105 The draft Site Policy I6a includes a stipulation that a Mineral Resource Assessment must be undertaken, but – given the importance of this matter – surely this should be undertaken prior to allocating the land for strategic non-mineral development.
- 2.106 The policy justification text is also curiously-worded, as it appears to imply that the site does indeed contain a workable mineral resource. Paragraph 7.381 of the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan states as follows:

“Whilst it is acknowledged that working of the full mineral deposit would not be compatible with the proposed non-mineral development, the Mineral Resource Assessment would indicate that there is a workable mineral resource that would be sterilised by the non-mineral development and thus the supporting statement to the application needs to demonstrate that the need for the built development is such that it outweighs the sterilisation of the mineral resource”.

- 2.107 The Council’s position regarding the site’s conflict with national and County-wide minerals planning is therefore very unclear and is unjustifiable. The site potentially has a workable mineral resource, but the Council aims to resolve this conflict by stating that the applicant will need to demonstrate that the benefits of the development outweigh the sterilisation of the resource. This is a key matter that must be addressed in advance of its allocation for strategic development, rather than at the application stage, and it represents a major omission from the evidence base.
- 2.108 The value of the land for minerals (sand and gravel), and whether there is just cause to deviate from national policy on the sterilisation of resources, is an issue that cannot be pushed back to the application stage, and should be considered upfront if the Council intends to allocate the land for development, as it otherwise casts significant doubts on the suitability and deliverability of the proposed allocation.

(I) ACCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY

- 2.109 The land at Hammonds Farm lies to the east of the A12, in the open countryside. The area is completely undeveloped, except for the presence of scattered farmsteads and historic properties. There is no utilities or transport infrastructure in the area, and the existing routes through the site are predominantly narrow, winding, single-track country lanes. There is no public transport infrastructure in this part of Chelmsford, and no local shops, health facilities,

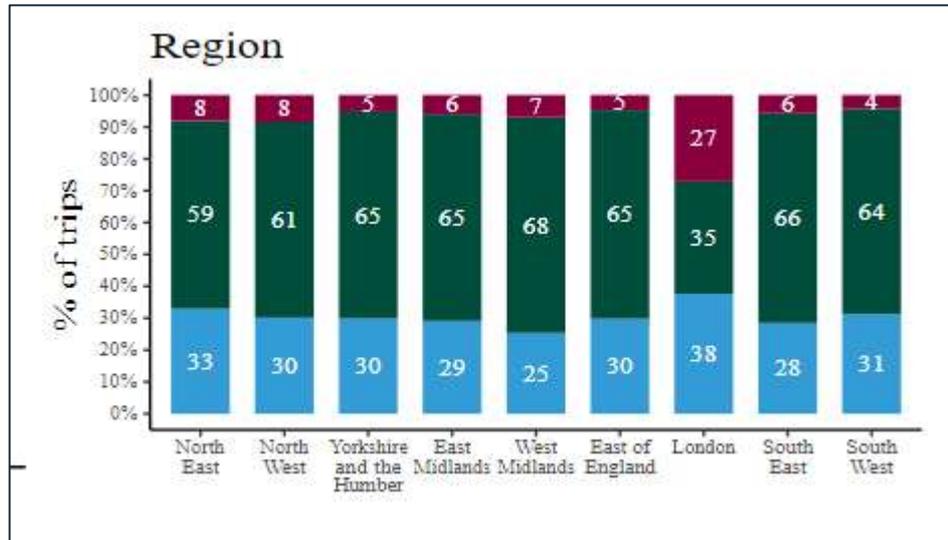
schools, or services. It should therefore be an undisputed fact that the site – in its current form – clearly does not represent a sustainable or accessible development opportunity.

- 2.110 This assertion is recognised in the Council’s own evidence base, in the **‘Sustainable Accessibility Mapping and Appraisal’** (July 2022), which considered the merits of the five draft Spatial Approaches that were set out in the Issues and Options draft of the Local Plan. The appraisal considered criteria such as accessibility to urban centres; accessibility to different forms of public transport; access to health care and schools; and internet connectivity.
- 2.111 The report concludes that the most sustainable and accessible spatial approach was Option B (Growth in Urban Areas), and unsurprisingly, the least sustainable and accessible approach was Option E (New Settlement at Hammonds Farm).
- 2.112 Despite this finding, the Council determined to proceed with elements of Option E, and the new settlement is proposed for allocation in the Pre-Submission draft of the Local Plan. The Council has now undertaken further modelling of the transport impacts of the proposed new settlement, and this is presented in the **‘Transport Impact Appraisal of Spatial Approaches’** (December 2023), the **‘Transport Impact Appraisal of Preferred Spatial Approach’** (March 2024), and the **‘Transport Impact Appraisal of Local Plan Review Pre-Submission’** (TIA, December 2024). We note from the outset that no additional or improved infrastructure is proposed to support the draft allocations in the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan, and thus the concerns raised in relation to the Preferred Options draft still stand.
- 2.113 The Cross-Parish Working Group has commissioned Stomor to review the Council’s evidence base on highways and transport matters. We summarise Stomor’s findings below, and Stomor’s full appraisal is set out in its **Transport Technical Note 2**, which is presented in **Appendix 3**. For completeness, Stomor’s first **Transport Technical Note** (prepared in relation to the Preferred Options Draft Local Plan) is also provided within **Appendix 3** as the two notes should be read together.
- 2.114 The evidence base explains that Hammonds Farm has potentially a “good level” of sustainable accessibility, subject to the provision of local amenities and sustainable travel infrastructure by developers. We fundamentally disagree with this change in analysis.

- 2.115 When reviewing the potential development options, the sites should be reviewed on a level playing field, and considered in relation to their current context to provide a fair assessment of the alternative strategies (as was undertaken in the initial Sustainable Accessibility Mapping and Appraisal). Otherwise, any site - situated in the most remote location - could in theory become 'sustainable' and 'accessible', if the facilities and transport infrastructure are provided, and there is no meaningful comparison. It is a fact that – currently – there are other growth options available, that are more sustainable and accessible with regards to the existing urban area, and where there are already established facilities and other infrastructure and utilities upon which to build and develop.
- 2.116 Notwithstanding our view on this point, it is clear that – even if we are to accept the Council's approach of considering the future 'potential' sustainability of the site – there are issues raised in the evidence base, which undermines this approach.
- 2.117 In particular, we note that draft Strategic Growth Site Policy 16a suggests that measures to enable travel by active and sustainable modes should ensure **a 60% share for active and sustainable transport modes**. This assumption is built into the Council's Transport Impact Appraisal (TIA), which consequently sets out very low assumptions for trip generation rates in relation to both the new homes and employment floorspace at Hammonds Farm and the new employment allocation to the south (Section 4.1.3 of the TIA). The report itself acknowledges that: *"It should be noted that the trip rates used in the Chelmsford forecast modelling are comparatively 'low', and account for a reasonable level of trip-internalisation (i.e. trips made within larger development sites) and a good level of sustainable and active travel mode-share"*.
- 2.118 We question, however, how justifiable it is to base the entire assessment on an assumption that 60% of trips will take the form of active and sustainable travel, which would appear to be overly ambitious and thus not realistic. In this regard, we note the following key points:
1. The aim for 60% of trips to take the form of active and sustainable travel is highly aspirational. The National Travel Survey 2023 results provide an overview of mode share for public, private and active travel modes, by region (see **Figure 2.10** below). The results are clear that – on average – across all regions of England, only around 35% of trips are undertaken by active travel or public transport. The only exception to this is London, a dense metropolis with an extensive public transport network, and where deterrents to car use such as congestion charging are in place. London thus achieves a total 65% combined modal share by active travel (38%) and public transport (27%). In this context, it is unclear how a new garden community, detached from the

urban area of Chelmsford, and with no existing infrastructure at all, can be projected to attain almost the same modal share as England’s capital city.

Figure 2.10 – Public, Private and Active Mode Share, by Region (2023)



Source: Department for Transport, National Travel Survey (2023)

Mode type ■ Public ■ Private ■ Active

- Paragraph 2.20 of the Pre-Submission Local Plan itself acknowledges that car trips are prevalent within the existing Chelmsford urban area, noting that there is: **“High car ownership and high levels of vehicle movements and commuting”**.
- This is reinforced by paragraph 2.18 of the Pre-Submission Local Plan, which explains that whilst 50% of Chelmsford’s working population live and work in Chelmsford, around 20% of workers commute to London, whilst other popular commuting destinations are Basildon, Maldon, Brentwood and Braintree. Meanwhile, around 36% of Chelmsford’s workforce lives outside the area, with significant commuting across North Essex. If this trend continues, there will remain high levels of commuting in and out of the City area.
- Travel to Work data from the Census 2011 identifies that only 5% of commuter trips in the Chelmsford area are undertaken by bus, whilst 58% are by car or van (as a driver or passenger). Thus, travel to work by car accounts for more than half of all daily commuter trips in the Chelmsford area.

5. The Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA, paragraph 3.6.6) explains that the UK as a whole has quite poor public transport and that the Chelmsford area scored very poorly (4.19 / 10), due to high public transportation costs and long commuting times. The IIA adds that the Chelmsford City Area has limited spend on public transport / general transport. Thus, given existing commuter habits, and taking into account the constraints of the site's detached location, it is considered highly unlikely that the mode of commuter trips will be materially different to that experienced in the rest of Chelmsford.

6. Whilst the strategic allocation makes provision for homes, some workplaces, educational facilities and small-scale local services, it is clear that trips for many residents will still be undertaken beyond the 'garden community'. Just as one example, the retail floorspace proposed with the new settlement is small in scale, and thus all main food and grocery shopping trips, and most non-food shopping trips, will be undertaken further afield, alongside trips to commercial leisure facilities.

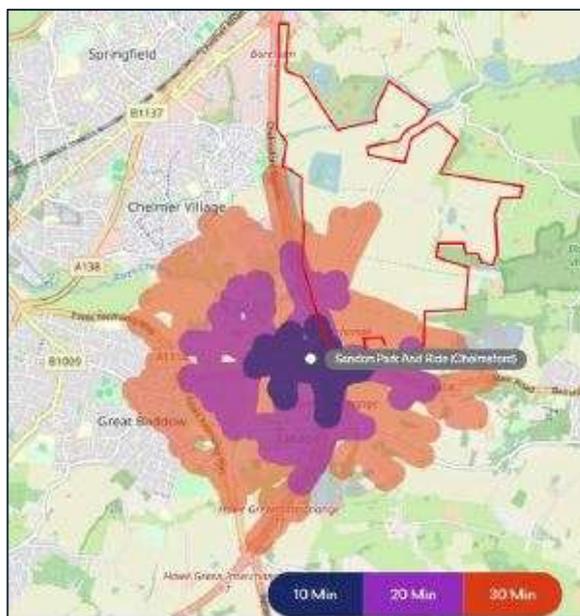
7. Paragraph 2.21 of the Pre-Submission Local Plan explains that the transport modelling evidence base reveals that all the principal roads and many local roads through Chelmsford are at, or near to, capacity during peak periods. In this context, it is unclear why the new community at Hammonds Farm – which will be located some distance from the main urban area - will perform differently to the existing neighbourhoods, and will achieve such extremely high levels of active travel and sustainable travel usage.

8. Further doubt is cast by the fact that there are currently no details regarding the nature of the cycle and footpath links proposed, how connection will be made across the A12, how many bus services will be provided, their frequency and routes.

9. The Preferred Options Draft proposed a 'new active and sustainable route and bridge over the A12' to connect to the Sandon Park and Ride facility. We note that in the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan this provision has been amended and downgraded to the provision of a bridge to connect "close" to the Sandon Park and Ride. This indicates that the proposed routes and linkages will clearly not be direct or seamless.

10. Indeed, the distance between Hammonds Farm and the existing urban area of Chelmsford – which is exacerbated further by the barrier created by the A12 – is such that only the very south-western corner of the site would be within a 20-minute walk of the Sandon Park and Ride facility (see **Figure 2.11** below), and the route is not likely to be attractive to pedestrians. Thus, even if a bridge is provided over the A12, it is not likely to encourage significant walking or cycling trips to the Sandon Park and Ride facility or other parts of the urban area, especially if the route is not direct. Indeed, due to the proximity of the A12 Junction 18 at the south-western corner of the site, access to the park and ride facility is unlikely to be an attractive option by foot for the majority of residents within the development.

Figure 2.11 – Walking Isochrone Map (from Sandon Park and Ride)



Source: Stomor

11. With regards to connectivity by bus / rail, it is relevant that the TIA notes that the modelling has raised a potential concern with capacity of the road / junction access to Beaulieu Rail Station, which means that **“usage of bus services between Hammonds Farm and Beaulieu Rail Station may be limited if congestion causes significant journey time delay”**. There is, therefore, no evidence at all that the new community will be served by exemplary public / active travel connections, which would be essential in order to achieve anything like a 60% modal share.

12. It is proposed in the Pre-Submission Local Plan that the development will be supported by the provision of an appropriate Bus Based Rapid Transit. This system is typified by roads that are dedicated to buses, and gives buses priority at junctions. Whilst suitable bus corridors could be accommodated through the site, the Bus Rapid Transit proposal will be limited to the development site itself and the existing bus route along the A1114 up to the Army and Navy Roundabout. Indeed, the TIA reveals that: “All the principal roads and many local roads through Chelmsford are at, or near to, capacity during peak periods”. It is therefore highly unlikely that a continuous Bus Rapid Transit service to the city centre and neighbouring destinations would be achievable, or that it would attract a material modal share. In addition, as we set out below, given land constraints, it is highly unlikely that a dedicated bus lane, or bus gates, can be physically accommodated on the A414. Paragraph 7.367 of the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan states that the Bus Rapid Transit system is “critical” for enabling local, frequent travel without reliance on the private car, but it is not at all clear how this can be feasibly delivered.

2.119 Thus, even with the introduction of a bridge over the A12, and the creation of a bus priority link, there is clear evidence to demonstrate that the proposed scheme is unlikely to achieve a 60% share for active and sustainable transports modes, which the Council’s modelling work is currently based upon. This is a critical issue, as the transport modelling work that underpins the Pre-Submission Local Plan appears to represent a considerable underestimate of the trip generation associated with the strategic site allocations. As such, the evidence base relating to required junction improvements, capacity on the network, and infrastructure requirements cannot be relied upon and as it is not robust.

2.120 Indeed, even if the Council’s unrealistic low car trip generation rates are accepted, the evidence base still raises a range of transport infrastructure issues, related to travel by car. The modelling in the TIA identifies a number of key concerns, as follows, and these points are taken directly from the TIA Executive Summary:

- Even without the proposed new allocations (at Hammonds Farm), key locations on Chelmsford’s transport network are expected to experience notable congestion in the peak hours.

- Hammonds Farm and the employment site adjacent to the A12 (Junction 18) are shown in the modelling to generate vehicle flows of sufficient volume to impact traffic conditions significantly on the surrounding road network.
- Network capacity issues are modelled in the 2041 baseline along the A12 between Junction 17 and 19. Proposed new development along the A12 corridor has the potential to route a significant proportion of trips via the A12 – both northbound and southbound – from Junction 18, thereby exacerbating congestion along the trunk road.
- Modelling suggests that this will also increase the likelihood of traffic re-routing along rural roads to the east of the A12, impacting the villages of Little Baddow and Boreham.
- At the same time, development trips will likely have a direct impact on the link capacity of the A414 east of the A12 Junction 18. The modelling shows that this will result in the displacement of background traffic flows from the A414 onto alternative rural routes through Danbury and Sandon.
- Despite the above, A12 carriageway widening between Junctions 15 and 19 is not in the pipeline.
- The modelling shows that the delivery of the A12 Junction 19 Boreham Interchange improvements is required as a minimum to ensure that the junction has the capacity to accommodate the proposed development across Chelmsford. There is currently no confirmation as to whether funding exists to deliver these essential highways improvements works, or when these works will be undertaken. The TIA explains that: *“Should funding for the DCO proposals be withheld following central government review in Spring 2025, modelling suggests that capacity improvements will require funding by alternative means and ECC and CCC will jointly lobby for funding for the provision of necessary infrastructure at the junction”*.
- The modelling shows congestion at the A12 Junction 18, and it is considered that this will be reduced in severity by driver’s changing their time of travel or mode of travel. Also, it is acknowledged that the use of alternative routes through Sandon will limit

the overall traffic impact along the strategic route, and the TIA notes that this is “undesirable”.

- The modelling suggests that several on and off-slips at the A12 junctions in Chelmsford are likely to be sub-standard in the 2041 baseline scenario. Slip road improvements will be required to mitigate potential safety concerns.
- In conclusion, the TIA states that the delivery of bus, cycling and walking infrastructure at Hammonds Farm will be a requirement in order to secure the 60% modal shift targets. Achieving this ambitious target is “*crucial to ensure that the growth in trips associated with the proposed development is managed and does not have a significant impact on the surrounding area*”.

2.121 The TIA concludes that – by maximising the potential for sustainable accessibility to and from the sites along the A12 corridor - the impact on the strategic highway network should not be considered severe. However, the TIA adds that continued discussions with National Highways will be necessary to ensure that future development growth in Chelmsford can be supported by the strategic highway network over the long-term.

2.122 It is clear therefore that the Council’s own evidence base raises substantive concerns regarding the ability of the highways network to accommodate the new site allocations (particularly Hammonds Farm). The TIA concludes that there will be ‘undesirable’ impacts with regards to the diversion of traffic onto local routes. Moreover, certain infrastructure requirements (the J19 Boreham interchange improvements) are required as a minimum, and yet the Council does not yet know how this will be funded or delivered. Moreover, the entire assessment is underpinned by an assumed significant modal shift to sustainable transport and active travel, which is not considered feasible in real terms.

2.123 On this basis, the assumptions are entirely unrealistic and flawed. If the 60% modal share for active / sustainable travel is not achieved, the adverse highways impacts would certainly be categorised as ‘severe’. This outcome would be contrary to the provisions of national planning policy (paragraphs 114 and 115) and it has not been shown how this can be mitigated to an acceptable degree.

2.124 Whilst the NPPF does of course support the promotion of sustainable transport, and the aim of achieving a 60% modal share for active travel / sustainable transport is very admirable, the goal must be realistic, in order to provide a robust evidence base and a proper understanding

of future highway impacts. Even paragraph 109 of the NPPF acknowledges that: “*Opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, and this should be taken into account in both plan-making and decision-taking*”.

2.125 Hammonds Farm is an entirely new community, detached from the urban area of Chelmsford, with no sustainable travel infrastructure at all, and with major constraints to delivering such infrastructure (such as the A12, which is a natural barrier to movement). In these circumstances, the Council’s high reliance on a significant modal shift (akin to the modal share currently experienced in the city centre of London) is unjustifiable.

2.126 Furthermore, the **Transport Technical Note 2** prepared by Stomor (**Appendix 3**), identifies other key shortcomings in the Council’s modelling work, which indicates that the Pre-Submission Local Plan is not based upon a sound evidence base, and does not reveal the full extent of the highways impacts of the growth options. In summary, we note the following pertinent points, and Stomor’s report should be **read in full** for the detailed analysis:

- The transport model relied upon by the Council is a traffic impact appraisal using the latest version of the Chelmsford VISUM Forecast Model and has been revalidated to 2019 traffic flows, but no recent traffic surveys have been undertaken in support of the model inputs. Significantly, the model is not validated to turning movements at junctions.
- The Council’s modelling only extends to 2041, as such there is a significant unknown regarding the long-term impact of the strategic allocation options, especially as further growth is proposed in the Hammonds Farm area post-2041.
- The access proposals for the sites, as presented in the TIA, give no consideration to bus priority, bus lanes, or a bus gate, which will be necessary in order to deliver Bus Rapid Transit infrastructure. Indeed, there are significant limitations along the A414, which limit options for road widening to accommodate bus priority measures. This further highlights the lack of deliverable sustainable access strategies to serve the proposed allocation(s).
- The modelling shows significant queue lengths on the approach to the eastern roundabout of the A12 Junction 18, and this requires further analysis. Indeed, during the PM peak hour, the A12 Junction 18 southbound off-slip is shown to operate over

capacity with a queue of approximately 180m. It cannot be assumed that the congestion and queuing will be alleviated by the implementation of active travel and sustainable travel routes, for the reasons detailed above.

- Furthermore, the western roundabout of the A12 Junction 18 is shown to operate over capacity during the AM peak hour on the A414 Maldon Road eastern approach and during the PM peak hour, the Maldon Road westbound approach continues to operate over capacity with long queue lengths.
- The A12 Junction 17 will operate over capacity on almost all arms of the junction during the AM and PM peak periods up to 2041, with and without the addition of the Local Plan Pre-Submission draft allocated site trips. The TIA acknowledges that there are currently no feasible plans in place to update the layout of this junction. Clearly, any proposals for site allocation on the eastern edge of Chelmsford will have a serious impact on the operation of this junction, which is already under stress.
- The additional development trips associated with the allocated sites will place additional pressure on several arms of the A12 Junction 19, as Boreham Interchange. This junction has been modelled previously by National Highways to operate close to, or at, capacity, with the A12 widening DCO capacity improvements added at the junction. The current modelling results presented in the evidence base cannot be relied upon, as they do not demonstrate at this stage that an additional access from Junction 19 to serve the Hammonds Farm scheme can be accommodated.
- As mentioned above, the modelling is based on very low trip rates, which represents a 30% reduction in typical residential vehicle trip rates, which is a significant underestimate. It should be noted that these low trip rates have been applied not only to the Hammonds Farm strategic growth site, but also to all proposed allocated sites in the Local Plan Review.
- When using the TRICS database to determine trip rates for large residential developments, sites of a similar nature and scale are selected to ensure comparative trip rates are calculated. This means that for large scale developments, the TRICS data already takes account of the internalisation of trips and access to sustainable modes of travel. As such, further reducing the rates by 30% is 'double-counting' and

a major error in the analysis, which significantly under-estimates the likely highways impact of the new developments.

- The proposed allocations at Hammonds Farm (Policy 16a) and the employment park (Policy 16b) are expected to generate significant additional traffic, exacerbating existing congestion on the A12 and A414 corridors. The model (which is an under-estimate) already predicts substantial queuing, particularly at key junctions such as the A12 Junction 18 and A12 Junction 17. However, the impact on the local highway network and at key junctions is likely to be far greater than is currently predicted.
- The local roads in and around Hammonds Farm, including rural routes through Danbury and Sandon, are likely to experience increased traffic volumes, leading to congestion and longer travel times for residents. The increased traffic on rural roads also poses safety and environmental risks to these communities.
- The proposed mitigation measures, including junction improvements and additional lanes, are insufficient to address the forecasted increase in traffic. The lack of a comprehensive plan to widen the A12 and improve critical junctions in a timely manner poses a significant risk.
- It is Stomor’s conclusion that without suitable mitigation (which has not been demonstrated), the draft allocations **will result in an unacceptable impact on highways safety and the residual cumulative impact on the road network would be severe.**

2.127 Finally, it is also highly relevant that the Council’s evidence base identifies that development is likely to increase traffic volumes along rural routes through villages including Boreham, Little Baddow, Danbury and Sandon. It is indeed entirely likely that the existing rural lanes will become ‘rat runs’, to avoid queuing on the A12 and A414, and this could have many adverse consequences for the local highway network within and around these villages, and could also have negative effects in terms of the character and tranquillity of these small, historic settlements, and on the setting and character of the Protected Lanes and Conservation Areas within these areas.

2.128 The issue of rat-running through local lanes has already been identified in Danbury’s Neighbourhood Plan (see **Section I** above) as a problem resulting from existing congestion

on the A414. This situation will only be exacerbated further, and will extend into the other historic settlements, if the strategic developments proceed.

- 2.129 Given the proposed location of 86,000 sq.m of employment floorspace in the area, it is also highly possible that HGVs may divert through the settlements. The surrounding villages simply do not have the local highways infrastructure to accommodate such movements. It should be reiterated that most of the existing local lanes are single-track, unlit, with no road markings and no footpaths, and they fundamentally cannot support any material volume of vehicle movements. Indeed, to do so would pose significant highways safety risks.
- 2.130 It should be recorded that **all four Parish Councils are extremely concerned about the local highways impacts identified in the evidence base**, and it is considered that this will result in **serious adverse impacts** in relation to the surrounding villages. It is relevant that despite the harm identified, no detailed modelling is included within the Council's evidence base to show the impacts on local junctions and minor roads within these areas.
- 2.131 To summarise, the Council's own evidence base identifies major issues with the operation of the highway network as a result of the proposed spatial strategy. Stomor has undertaken an independent review of the Council's TIA, and we have identified a number of serious deficiencies with the evidence base. The impacts of the proposed development on the main road network is highly likely to be severe. Moreover, as identified in the TIA, there will also be serious adverse consequences for the rural routes on the local road network, which will have direct adverse impacts on small, historic villages, such as Little Baddow, Danbury, Boreham and Sandon.
- 2.132 Given the severe highways impacts identified, which also raise significant highways safety concerns, it is our case that the proposed allocation of the land at Hammonds Farm has not been properly justified, and is contrary to the provisions of the NPPF.

(j) **SUMMARY IN RELATION TO THE SUITABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF HAMMONDS FARM**

- 2.133 We have highlighted a number of substantive physical, environmental and heritage constraints, which impede the development of land at Hammonds Farm. Indeed, it has been shown that **the land is fundamentally unsuitable for strategic development**, and that the proposed allocation would result in levels of harm, which cannot be adequately mitigated.
- 2.134 In summary, we have identified the following significant adverse impacts:

- Complete erosion of a large area with **high landscape sensitivity**. The proposal will irreversibly urbanise a tranquil, scenic rural area, where development has historically been prohibited [**contrary to Section 15 of the NPPF**];
- Considerable harm to the significance of a large number of **heritage assets and their settings**, including Grade I, II and II* listed buildings, Conservation Areas, Registered Parks and Gardens, non-designated heritage assets; and protected lanes. There is particular concern for the preservation of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Conservation Area; a historic waterside setting, which will be irrevocably harmed by the proposed Eastern Orbital Route, which will bisect the area [**contrary to Section 16 of the NPPF**].
- Potential harm to an area of **high archaeological value**, which requires further investigation to ensure the conservation and preservation of assets [**contrary to Section 16 of the NPPF**];
- **Significant level of flood risk**, in relation to river and reservoir flooding. As a result, in order to proceed to allocation, the site must pass the flood risk sequential and exemption tests, and little evidence has been presented to explain how the harm will be mitigated. Indeed, the SFRA does not even consider the risk of flooding associated with the introduction of main road infrastructure in the active flood plain [**contrary to Section 14 of the NPPF**].
- **Irreversible loss of agricultural land**, which is considered to be ‘the best and most versatile land’. The land at Hammonds Farm has been farmed for millennia, and remains in active use for food production. This valuable existing use would be lost as a result of development [**contrary to footnote 62 of the NPPF**].
- The site lies within a **Minerals Safeguarding Area**, and development of the site will sterilise its potential for minerals workings [**contrary to the Essex Minerals Local Plan and Section 17 of the NPPF**].
- The land benefits from a **high level of biodiversity**, and accommodates a range of wildlife and ecological interests, including those associated with the watercourses, hedgerows, flower-rich meadows, nearby ancient woodland, and bogs. A high number

of protected species and rare Breeding Birds have been identified on the site in recent years. Development of the land will have a major harmful impact on the existing natural ecosystems and rich biodiversity [**contrary to Section 15 of the NPPF**].

- The site is **fundamentally unsustainable, and suffers from very poor levels of accessibility**. It is detached from the main urban area by the A12, and has no existing infrastructure, in terms of public transport services, utilities, road infrastructure, shops, community facilities or services. There are other development options available to the Council that are more sustainably located, with regards to the existing infrastructure in the urban area [**contrary to Section 9 of the NPPF**].
- The development is expected to have a **severely harmful impact on the operation of the highway network** (A12 and A414), which is already congested and at capacity in the peak hours, and the existing dual carriageways are not due to be widened as part of the strategy. The scheme will also impact upon the local rural roads, adversely affecting small villages such as Little Baddow, Boreham, and Danbury, as drivers seek alternative routes through the countryside. This will have a harmful impact on the historic setting of these villages, and will also pose serious highways safety risks [**contrary to Section 9 of the NPPF**].

2.135 It is clear that development of the land at Hammonds Farm will result in a series of adverse impacts, many of which will result in a **very high level of harm**, and it is our view that the proposed allocation of the site has cannot be and **has not been properly justified**.

2.136 Indeed, this is the reason that the land was not allocated for development, in the existing Local Plan (which was adopted in 2020). Paragraph 5.6.15 of the **Local Plan Pre-Submission Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)** explains: “*The site at Hammonds Farm was previously discounted as a reasonable alternative as part of the preparation of the Adopted Local Plan in favour of alternative sites to the north and west of Chelmsford which exhibited better performance in respect of landscape, historic environment, flood risk, traffic generation and local road congestion*”. There has been no change to the context of the site since 2020, and the land remains severely constrained.

2.137 In addition to the above, it is relevant that there are some critical gaps in the evidence base relating to the site, such that the full extent of its constraints are not yet fully understood. For example:

- The extent and value of minerals deposits on the site is not yet fully known. The Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan advises in paragraph 7.381 that the onus will be on the developer to demonstrate that the need for the built development is such that it outweighs the sterilisation of the mineral resource;
- The full extent and significance of the archaeological assets on the site are not yet known. Further archaeological evaluation, including trial trenches is required, and paragraph 7.384 of the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan explains that this will then inform the location of development parcels and open space;
- There is uncertainty regarding the funding source and timescales involved for the necessary upgrades to the national highways infrastructure (principally the Junction 19 Boreham Interchange), which is required – as a minimum - to support the development.

2.138 These issues represent significant gaps in the evidence base. The Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan relies upon the Hammond’s Farm site to deliver a significant portion of the City’s housing and employment land requirements, with development set to commence as early as 2030 (based on the trajectories set out in Appendix C of the Plan). However, with key information regarding the site’s constraints, infrastructure requirements and delivery as yet unknown, it is our view that the site’s allocation cannot be justified. Moreover, to rely upon a site which is not necessarily deliverable, or deliverable to the extent proposed, is not an effective strategy and does not represent a positive approach to plan preparation.

2.139 In conclusion, it is our view that the proposed allocation of Hammonds Farm (Strategic Growth Site Policy 16a) is contrary to national planning policy and has not been properly justified, and – given the serious doubts that exist regarding the extent of constraints on the site, and its deliverability – it does not represent an effective strategy or a positive approach to plan preparation. As we go on to explain in **Section 4** below, it is also our view that alternative options are available to accommodate the City’s housing and employment needs that would represent a less harmful growth strategy. Taking all the above into account, the inclusion of Proposed Strategic Growth Site 16a renders the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan **unsound**.

3 STRATEGIC GROWTH SITE POLICY 16B

(A) INTRODUCTION

3.1 The Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan also proposes a new strategic employment allocation, on land immediately to the south of Hammonds Farm, known as 'Land adjacent to A12 Junction 18' (Strategic Growth Site Policy 16b). The site has similar characteristics to the land at Hammonds Farm, and faces similar constraints. As such, it is our professional view - and that of the Parish Councils - that the land adjacent to the A12 Junction 18 is severely constrained, and fundamentally unsuitable for the development proposed under **draft Site Policy 16b**. It is considered that strategic development of the site will have a range of severe adverse impacts, which would represent an unsustainable form of development, contrary to the objectives of national planning policy.

3.2 It is relevant that an application for outline planning permission has already been submitted for the development of an employment park on this plot (ref. **24/01768/OUT**), which is currently pending determination. The planning application is accompanied by a range of technical reports, which goes beyond the Council's evidence base and provides more detailed information regarding the site's characteristics. The Parish Councils have already submitted an objection to the outline planning application, and this is presented for reference in **Appendix 4**. Taking on board all the information known about the site, it is our view is that the site cannot accommodate a strategic employment park without causing a range of significant harmful impacts that cannot be adequately mitigated.

3.3 We summarise in turn below the key issues, which individually – and cumulatively – act as a constraint on the development of this open land, highlighting the unsuitability of the area for strategic development.

(B) AGRICULTURAL LAND

3.4 The outline planning application on the site is accompanied by an Agricultural Land Classification Report, which confirms that the site is in active agricultural use, and that the development plot consists entirely of Grade 3a agricultural land (i.e. the best and most versatile land, 'BMV'), as shown on **Figure 3.1** below. Only the southern section of the site comprises Grade 3b, and this is due to historic flooding in this area (associated with the Sandon Brook, which bisects the site).

Figure 3.1 – Agricultural Land Classification



- 3.5 The proposed site allocation will therefore result in the permanent loss of 17 ha of the best and most versatile agricultural land, which is a significant adverse impact.
- 3.6 Paragraph 180 of the NPPF is clear that planning policies should contribute to, and enhance the natural and local environment, by: *“recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland”*. Furthermore Footnote 62 of the NPPF adds that: *“Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality. The availability of agricultural land used for food production should be considered...when deciding what sites are most appropriate for development”*.
- 3.7 Natural England has prepared a guidance document entitled ‘Guide to Assessing Development Proposals on Agricultural Land’ (February 2021), and this also reiterates that the aim is to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land from significant, inappropriate or unsustainable development proposals.
- 3.8 The proposed allocation will permanently remove 17 ha of fertile agricultural land (Grade 3a), which is in active farming use, and this is directly contrary to the provisions of national planning policy, and will be an adverse impact of the scheme, which cannot be mitigated.

(C) HERITAGE ASSETS

- 3.9 The site lies in close proximity to several heritage assets, and it also forms a part of the setting of other assets. Immediately to the south of the site are the Grade II listed Sandon Lodge, Sandon Bridge (Non-Designated Heritage Asset) and the Grade II listed Bridge Farmhouse, whilst the site lies within the wider setting of Danbury Park (Grade II Registered Park and Garden), and the Church of St John the Baptist (Grade I). It is a fact that the open, rural character of the site currently makes a positive contribution to the setting of these important assets.
- 3.10 An allocation for strategic employment development on the site, which will necessarily be accompanied by extensive car and HGV parking, lighting, infrastructure and 24/7 activity, will significantly and irrevocably alter and cause harm to the setting of the designated heritage assets. Indeed, the outline planning application that has been submitted provides an example of the type and extent of development that is likely to come forward if the site is allocated as a strategic employment site. The outline application scheme (ref. 24/01768/OUT) is for up to 7 large format industrial units, which are proposed to be 15m – 18m high.
- 3.11 The Built Heritage Statement that has been submitted with the live planning application contains images and views of the local heritage assets (see **Figure 3.2** below). It is evident that 18m high warehouses, located directly to the rear of the important heritage assets shown in the visuals below, will significantly alter and undermine the setting of these assets, which are framed by their open, rural location, and this will result in substantial harm to the significance of the assets.
- 3.12 It is the Parish Councils' view – based on their local knowledge of the site, and usage of local footpaths - that an allocation for strategic employment development on this open plot - will have a very real, permanent and significant adverse impact on the significance of the neighbouring heritage assets. This is contrary to paragraph 195 of the NPPF, which notes that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource, and so should be conserved in a matter appropriate to their significance, “*so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations*”.

Figure 3.2 - Views of Designated Heritage Assets, as set out in the Built Heritage Statement submitted with application ref. 24/01767/OUT



Grade II listed Sandon Lodge (left) and rear of Grade II listed Bridge Farmhouse (right)

- 3.13 Furthermore, paragraph 196 of the NPPF explains that plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, and this should take into account opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.
- 3.14 Section 16 of the NPPF is also clear (in relation to development proposals) that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting) should require clear and convincing justification.
- 3.15 In this case, the proposal for the development of a strategic employment park in a tranquil, rural location, will inevitably have a substantial impact on the significance of the neighbouring heritage assets and will irremovably alter their settings, which is completely contrary to the aim of the NPPF to conserve the historic environment.

(D) ARCHAEOLOGY

- 3.16 The outline planning application on the plot is also accompanied by an Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment, and this confirms that the site has an enhanced potential for Prehistoric activity, represented by individual pit-like features. Furthermore, surrounding archaeological works on neighbouring sites, have previously uncovered significant Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age settlement activity. The groundworks associated with the development therefore have the potential to impact upon significant archaeological remains.
- 3.17 As with Site Policy 16a (Hammonds Farm), it is clear that the land has potential to accommodate significant archaeology, but the full value and extent of this is currently unknown. The site should not be allocated for strategic development, when the full extent of

its archaeological value is unknown, because there may be a need to conserve certain features in situ, and this will not be known until proper field evaluations have been undertaken.

- 3.18 In the case of the Land adjacent to the A12 Junction 18, there is a high likelihood of significant archaeology on the site, but this must be properly interrogated, and a cautionary approach taken to future development, to ensure that the assets will be protected, enhanced or preserved.

(E) LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

- 3.19 The proposed strategic allocation will also have a significant impact on the local landscape character, which is highly regarded by local residents.

- 3.20 The area is currently characterised by open agricultural land, a brook, and areas of woodland, and it provides open viewpoints to heritage assets, such as the spire of the Church of St John the Baptist. If the site is allocated for a new strategic employment park it will necessitate:

- the removal of areas of woodland to create the site accesses;
- the loss of 17 ha of Grade 3a agricultural land;
- the introduction of intensive industrial activity, car and HGV movements, noise and light, into an area of open countryside;
- harm to the setting of nearby designated and undesignated heritage assets; and
- the development of large format industrial units, which will be completely incompatible with the site's tranquil, rural setting, which characterises and is a distinctive feature of the Parish.

- 3.21 It is the Parish Councils' view that the proposed allocation for a large format employment park (which – based on the current planning application – could be up for large format warehouses that are up to 18m in height) will have a significant detrimental impact on the local landscape character, and this would be a harmful impact of the designation.

- 3.22 Given the scale of the proposed development, it is not considered that this can be adequately mitigated with new landscaping and planting, as it is not plausible that this would substantially screen 43,000 sq.m of warehousing.

(F) MINERALS SAFEGUARDING

- 3.23 Alike Site Policy 16a, the proposed plot lies within a Minerals Safeguarding Area for sand and gravel. Safeguarding is necessary to ensure the protection of mineral resources from the risk of sterilisation.

- 3.24 The outline planning application on the site is supported by a Minerals Assessment, which shows that land directly to the south of the site has historically comprised a quarry for sand and gravel extraction, and a couple of other minerals sites are located to the northeast. As such, the local area does have resource potential for sand and gravel. The site investigations also identified loose to medium dense, orange brown, silty gravelly sand within the plot.
- 3.25 The Minerals Assessment argues that there are abundant deposits in the Essex area, and the Local Plan identifies sufficient deposits up to the next Local Plan period. However, this line of argument does not justify lifting the current mineral safeguards which are placed upon the site and are designed to safeguard mineral reserves over the long-term. Irrespective of current supply levels, once the site is developed, the resource is permanently sterilised. We note that in commenting on the current outline planning application, Essex County Council (as the Minerals and Waste Planning Authority) state that they do not accept the conclusions of the applicant's submitted Minerals Assessment, noting that: "*the MRA is not sufficiently competent to conclude that the prior extraction of minerals is not appropriate at this site*".
- 3.26 It is clear that important questions still remain regarding the viability of the mineral resource on the site, and no information has been presented – either within the Local Plan evidence base or with the submitted planning application – to demonstrate whether the sterilisation of the resource can be justified. Indeed, paragraph 7.402 of the justification text in the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan simply states that: "*The developer will be required to undertake a Mineral Resource Assessment to assess if the site contains a viable mineral resource that would require extraction prior to development*". This represents a significant unknown. As stated above, a Mineral Resource Assessment has now been undertaken to accompany the outline planning application, and Essex County Council's conclusion (as of 11th February 2025) is that the submitted MRA does not provide sufficient justification that the prior extraction of minerals is not appropriate.
- 3.27 The Council is thus proposing to allocate a site for strategic development, which is known to be constrained by minerals safeguarding, and where the delivery timescales for development are currently unknown, as it is entirely possible that prior extraction of minerals will be required. In these circumstances, the proposed allocation is contrary to both national planning policy and the Essex Minerals Local Plan

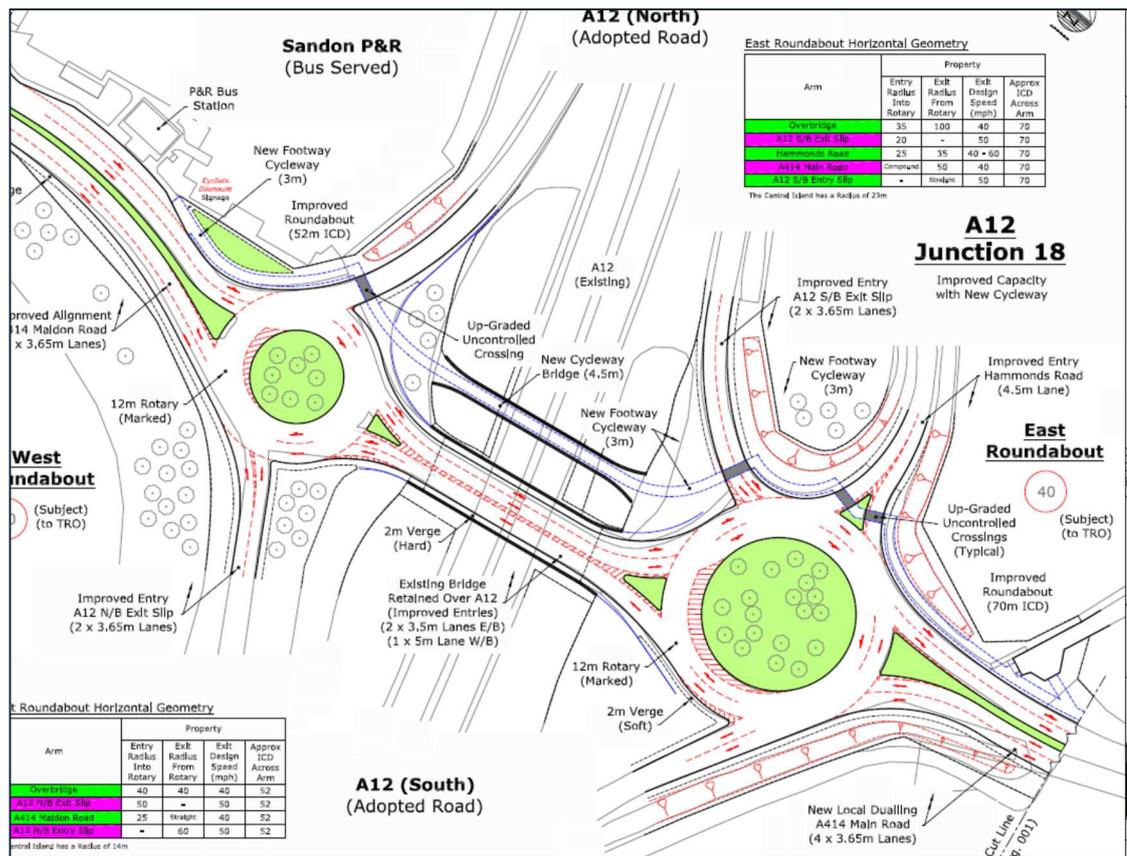
(G) HIGHWAYS IMPACT

- 3.28 The Parish Councils have serious concerns regarding the likely highways impact of the proposed strategic employment allocation, which will be located directly adjacent to Hammonds Farm, and will similarly take its access from the A414 (close to Junction 18 of the A12). Thus, significant traffic generation – arising from 3,000 new homes (rising to 4,500 after the plan period), alongside 86,000 sq.m of new employment floorspace, together with schools and other local shops and facilities – will all take primary vehicle access from the same location along the A414, in an area which is already heavily congested.
- 3.29 We have deep concerns with the evidence base presented by the Council in relation to the expected highways impacts of both strategic allocations (Site Policies 16a and 16b), since the modelling shows significant issues for the network, and this is based on an under-estimate of likely future vehicle trips associated with the schemes. Our critique of the Council’s highways modelling is presented in **Section 2** above, and the points raised in paragraphs 2.107 to 2.130 are equally relevant to proposed Site Policy 16b.
- 3.30 In addition, it is useful to again briefly reference the outline planning application that has been submitted on the site (ref. 24/01768/OUT), since this provides an indication of the type, form and scale of strategic employment development that is likely to come forward on the site, if the land is allocated as proposed under Site Policy 16b. The application highlights the real, practical issues and constraints that will arise once a developer seeks to build-out the site, as per the proposed allocation.
- 3.31 For example, despite the Council’s aspirations to achieve a 60% modal share for active and sustainable travel (and basing the Local Plan evidence base upon this ambitious assumption), it is clear that this will be challenging to achieve in practice on a strategic employment site, with a high volume of HGV movements and over 700 employees. The current outline application makes no provision for direct bus services to the site, and no provisions are made for the delivery of dedicated bus lanes along the A414. This will severely limit opportunities for employees to utilise sustainable transport.
- 3.32 Meanwhile, in order to access the Park and Ride facility at Sandon, employees would need to exit the site, cross the A414, and then and make their way across the A12. Whilst a new pedestrian / cycle bridge across the A12 is proposed (as required by the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan), convenient access to the bridge will not be available. Indeed, the Transport

Assessment submitted with the outline planning application shows – in practical terms – what form such connections are likely to take.

- 3.33 The proposed junction arrangements are shown in **Figure 3.3** below, and it is clear that in order to access the new bridge, pedestrians / cyclists must still cross three busy slip roads by uncontrolled crossings (i.e. with no official traffic signals). Given the volume and speed of vehicle flow, with two lanes of traffic exiting / entering a slip road, this would represent a major risk to pedestrian safety. Indeed, employees would have to cross a number of heavily trafficked roads, without control, and pedestrians and cyclists would be reliant on finding a gap in the traffic to cross.
- 3.34 As such, it is evident that the land to the east of the A12 is severed from the main urban area of Chelmsford, and despite the aspiration to achieve linkages, this will be challenging to deliver in practical terms, to ensure safe, convenient and welcoming active travel connections.

Figure 3.3 – Proposed Active Travel Linkages Across the A12 (Junction 18)



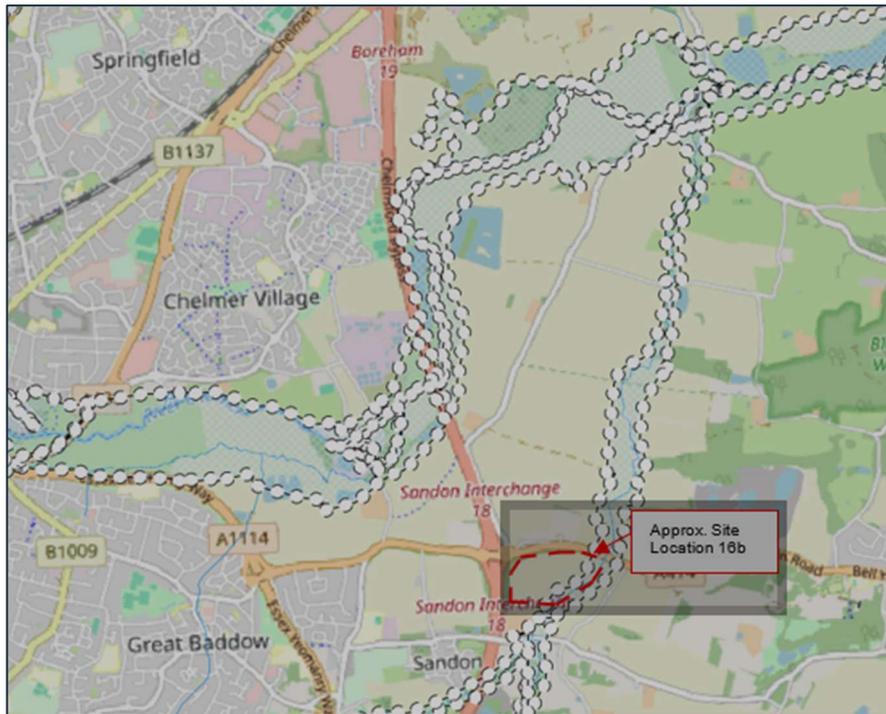
Source – Transport Assessment, prepared by Walker Engineering to accompany application ref. 24/01768/OUT).

- 3.35 In summary, as set out in **Section 2**, the Council’s evidence base identifies major issues with the operation of the highway network as a result of the strategic allocations in the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan (Site Policies 16a and 16b). Stomor has undertaken an independent review of the Council’s transport reports, and has identified a number of serious deficiencies with the evidence base, such that the position is expected to be even more severe than projected. There is particular concern with the assumption that 60% of trips will be undertaken by active / sustainable modes of travel, which appears to be entirely unrealistic, and this results in an under-estimate of vehicle trips associated with the proposed developments.
- 3.36 Moreover, the technical reports that accompany the recently submitted outline planning application for employment development on Site 16b serve to highlight the very real, practical challenges that will be involved in trying to secure usable sustainable travel connections and active travel linkages across the A12. This reinforces our view that the modal share assumptions that underpin the Local Plan Review evidence base are flawed, and the sites should not be considered to be sustainable locations for strategic new development.
- 3.37 Taking all this into account, it is our case that the proposed allocation of the Land adjacent to the A12 Junction 18 has not been properly justified, and is contrary to the provisions of the NPPF.

(H) FLOOD RISK

- 3.38 The Sandon brook (a designated Main River) runs along the eastern boundary of the site, and thus areas of Flood Zone 2 and 3 extend into the eastern part of the site. The Environment Agency Historic Flood Map has identified that there is historic flooding associated with the Sandon Brook, as shown in **Figure 3.4** below. Increasing the amount of impermeable area on the site could exacerbate this, and cause displacement into neighbouring areas.

Figure 3.4 – Extent of Historic Flooding (Sandon Brook)



Source – EA Historic Flood Map Extract

3.39 As with Site Policy 16a, the Environment Agency flood maps show that the entire site is at risk of flooding from reservoirs, when river levels are normal, as shown in **Figure 3.5** below.

Figure 3.5 - Risk of Flooding from Reservoirs



Source – Environment Agency

- 3.40 The NPPF is clear that strategic policies should manage flood risk from all sources of flooding, and that plans should take a sequential, risk-based approach to the location of development, taking into account all sources of flood risk (paragraphs 166 and 167).
- 3.41 The Sequential and Exception Test for this site was completed by the Council in its report dated May 2024. However, as with Site 16a, it is clear that the sequential test focuses on fluvial flooding only, and does not consider or address the risk from reservoir flooding that has been identified across the site. This is despite the fact that the evidence base notes that the risk from reservoirs is ‘high’ and in the event that the reservoirs fail, there may be a risk to life.
- 3.42 The conclusions of the sequential test appear to refer to fluvial flooding only, and it is unclear whether the risk of flooding from all sources (including reservoirs) has been taken into account. Furthermore, the report does not consider any potential alternative sites for the location of the development as a whole, and this is a fundamental omission from the evidence base. It is not shown whether other development options and strategic sites that were submitted as part of the Local Plan Review are preferable with regards to flood risk and the sequential test. The report simply states that the allocation is for a strategic development that must be near the city centre and the national trunk network, and thus there are no other reasonable alternative sites. This is despite the fact that alternative large sites, suitable for employment development, were submitted as part of the Local Plan Review process, and these have not been considered or ruled out here.
- 3.43 With regards to the exception test, the report does not consider in detail whether there are any “sustainability benefits” that outweigh the high flood risk. It is merely concluded that the site is consistent with the Council’s strategy to support the growth of Chelmsford city, and the proposed use needs to be located by the trunk road network. These benefits could be delivered on alternative sites, and so this does not provide sufficient justification to pass the exception test.
- 3.44 The exception test does, however, identify the safety risks associated with the proposed development. Although we note that this does not refer to measures to mitigate the risk of flooding from reservoirs, despite the high risk.
- 3.45 In summary, the evidence base points to flood risk on the proposed allocated land, particularly from reservoirs, and fluvial flooding associated with the Sandon Brook. The flood risk implications for the proposed employment site do not appear to have been properly

considered, and other options have certainly not been fully explored. This is not a rational or justified strategic approach, and is contrary to the requirements of the NPPF.

(I) SUMMARY IN RELATION TO THE SUITABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF LAND ADJACENT TO THE A12 JUNCTION 18

3.46 We have highlighted a number of substantive physical, environmental and heritage constraints, which impede the development of Land Adjacent to the A12 Junction 18. Indeed, it has been shown that **the land is fundamentally unsuitable for strategic development**, and that the proposed allocation would result in levels of harm, which cannot be adequately mitigated.

3.47 In summary, we have identified the following significant adverse impacts:

- Complete erosion of a large area of **locally-distinctive and valued landscape**. The proposal will irreversibly urbanise a tranquil, scenic rural area, where development has historically been prohibited [**contrary to Section 15 of the NPPF**];
- Considerable harm to the significance of a number of **heritage assets and their settings**, including the Grade II listed Sandon Lodge, Grade II listed Bridge Farmhouse, Sandon Bridge (Non Designated Heritage Asset), Danbury Park (Grade II Registered Park and Gardens) and the Grade I listed St John the Baptist Church [**contrary to Section 16 of the NPPF**].
- Potential harm to an area of **high archaeological value**, which requires further investigation to ensure the conservation and preservation of assets [**contrary to Section 16 of the NPPF**];
- **Significant level of flood risk**, in relation to river and reservoir flooding. As a result, in order to proceed to allocation, the site must pass the flood risk sequential and exemption tests, and little evidence has been presented to explain how the harm will be mitigated [**contrary to Section 14 of the NPPF**].
- **Irreversible loss of agricultural land**, 17ha of which is considered to be ‘the best and most versatile land’, and which is currently in active use for food production. This valuable existing use would be lost as a result of development [**contrary to footnote 62 of the NPPF**].

- The site lies within a **Minerals Safeguarding Area**, and development of the site will sterilise its potential for minerals workings [**contrary to the Essex Minerals Local Plan and Section 17 of the NPPF**].
- The development is expected to have a **severely harmful impact on the operation of the highway network** (A12 and A414), which is already congested and at capacity in the peak hours, and the existing dual carriageways are not due to be widened as part of the strategy. The scheme will also impact upon the local rural roads, adversely affecting small villages such as Sandon and Danbury, as drivers seek alternative routes through the countryside. This will have a harmful impact on the historic setting of these villages, and will also pose serious highways safety risks [**contrary to Section 9 of the NPPF**].
- The site is **fundamentally unsustainable** and it is detached from the main urban area by the A12. Creating safe and welcoming linkages across the A12 from this location will be physically challenging to achieve, given the extent of existing highways infrastructure in the area (the dual carriageway and slip roads) [**contrary to Section 9 of the NPPF**].

3.48 It is clear that development of the Land Adjacent to the A12 Junction 18 will result in a series of adverse impacts, many of which are irreversible and cannot be mitigated, and many of which will result in a **very high level of harm**. It is our view, therefore, that the proposed allocation of the site cannot be and **has not been properly justified**.

3.49 In addition, as we discuss in **Section 4** below, it is our case that the evidence base does not identify a strong need for the strategic employment allocation, given the existing strong levels of supply and the assessment of future needs. In this context, the proposal to allocate additional employment land, which will have a series of significant adverse impacts, cannot be justified and does not represent a positive approach to plan-making overall.

3.50 Taking all the above into account, the inclusion of Proposed Strategic Growth Site 16b renders the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan **unsound**.

4 DRAFT STRATEGIC POLICIES S6 AND S7

4.1 In this Section, we review the Council's proposed housing and employment land requirements (Strategic Policy S6), and the draft spatial strategy (Strategic Policy S7), and outline our concerns with the proposed approach, taking into account the site-specific constraints we have identified in relation to proposed strategic allocations at Site Policies I6a and I6b.

(A) STRATEGIC POLICY S6

4.2 Draft Strategic Policy S6 sets out the Council's housing and employment land requirements over the plan period (up to 2041).

4.3 We object to the Council's proposal that "*a minimum of 162,646 sq.m of new employment floorspace*" (in addition to existing employment development commitments) should be identified for delivery over the plan period. This equates to a substantial quantum of new employment land, which will be principally met through three strategic allocations; with around 57,000 sq.m of employment land proposed as part of the North East Chelmsford Garden Community (Policy Site 6); 43,000 sq.m proposed as part of the Hammonds Farm scheme (Policy Site I6a); and 43,000 sq.m proposed on the Land Adjacent to the A12 Junction 18 (Policy Site I6b).

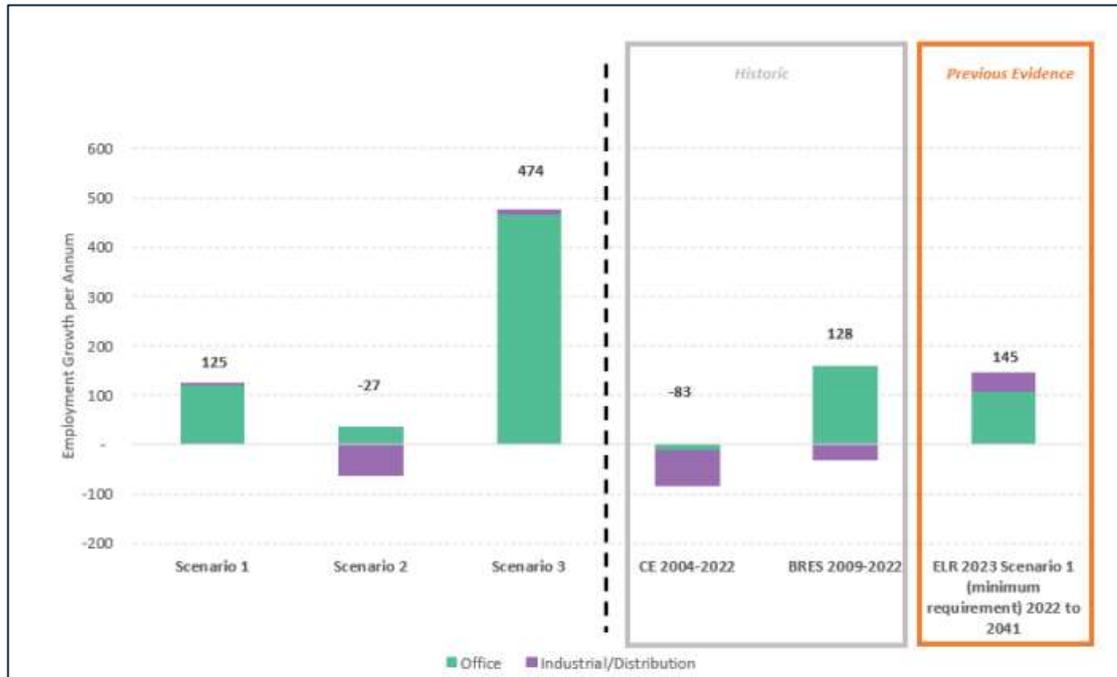
4.4 The Pre-Submission Local Plan explains that the allocation of employment land is informed by the evidence base documents and it "*exceeds the recommended minimum employment space requirements over the period to 2041*". As such, the Council is pursuing a high growth strategy.

4.5 The proposed allocations are informed by an assessment of the need for employment land, as set out in the Chelmsford Employment Land Review Focused Update (Lichfields, December 2024). The report considers the economic growth needs of Chelmsford over the plan period, and it reviews three alternative scenarios (i.e. (1) Labour demand – forecasts of job growth; (2) past development rates; and (3) future labour supply).

4.6 The results are shown diagrammatically on page 10 of the Employment Land Review Focused Update, and is reproduced in **Figure 4.1** below. **Figure 4.1** shows that under the first and second scenario there will be modest growth in new office jobs, which is broadly in line with historic growth in the City, and the 2023 evidence base. All scenarios show limited growth in industrial / distribution jobs. With regards to total job growth, it is evident that Scenario 3 is an 'outlying' result and presents a very high level of forecast growth, that far outstrips that

shown under Scenarios 1 and 2, the historic rates, and the previous evidence base. The Employment Land Review Focused Update concludes in paragraph 2.34 that: “...it appears that Scenario 1 balances better the historic and current forecasts”.

Figure 4.1 – Annual Employment Growth Scenarios, Compared with Historic Growth and Previous Evidence



Source – Chelmsford Employment Land Review Focused Update, December 2024 (Lichfields)

4.7 Drawing together the results from the three future economic scenarios, the Employment Land Review Focused Update goes on to summarise the net employment floorspace requirements over the plan period, which are reproduced in **Figure 4.2** below for ease of reference.

Figure 4.2 – Net Employment Requirements in Chelmsford, 2022 – 2041 (in sq.m)

Type of Space/Use Class	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
Office E(g)(i)/(ii)	36,283	10,716	138,143
Industrial and Distribution Eg(iii)/B2/B8	34,236	-49,267	126,801
Total	70,519	-38,551	264,944

Source: Lichfields analysis

4.8 Lichfields then make further refinements to the calculations, by adding an extra safety margin to the figures to give some flexibility of provision, and to account for potential delays in some sites coming forward. Furthermore, in arriving at a gross requirement, an allowance is made

for the replacement of lost employment floorspace that may be developed for other, non-employment uses.

- 4.9 Table 2.10 on page 13 of the Employment Land Review Focused Update then presents the final gross employment floorspace requirements, based on the three scenarios, and we reproduce this table in **Figure 4.3** below.

Figure 4.3 – Gross Employment Requirements in Chelmsford, 2022 to 2041 (in sq.m)

Type of Space/Use Class	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
Office E(g)(i)/(ii)	38,053	12,486	139,913
Industrial and Distribution Eg(iii)/B2/B8	48,280	-35,223	140,845
Total	86,333	-22,737	280,758

Source: Lichfields analysis

- 4.10 It is clear from the evidence base that the three different scenarios vary widely, ranging from a negative requirement under Scenario 2, to a significant figure of 280,758 sq.m under Scenario 3. The Employment Land Review notes that Scenario 1 balances the other two scenarios, and balances with the historic growth in the city. On this basis, it is concluded in the evidence base that: “Scenario 1 with a gross employment requirement of 86,333 sq.m (or 17.8 ha) of employment land, should comprise the minimum employment space requirement for the Local Plan period to 2041”. This can be further sub-divided into 38,053 sq.m of office floorspace and 48,280 sq.m of industrial / distribution space.
- 4.11 The Employment Land Review Focused Update goes onto explain that – once account is taken of extant planning permissions, and land subject to live planning applications (where masterplans are in place) – there is a healthy emerging supply of 111,783 sq.m employment land.
- 4.12 Thus, when the demand / supply of employment land is reviewed, it is evident that the Council can already meet its future employment land needs under Scenarios 1 and 2, without allocating any further land for employment development (as shown in **Figure 4.4** below, which is taken from page 18 of the Lichfields report). Indeed, under Scenario 1, there will still be a surplus of over 25,000 sq.m of employment land, which provides a generous buffer. Lichfields’ report recommends that flexible land allocations across office, industrial and distribution sectors would help accommodate varying future needs.

Figure 4.4 – Demand – Supply of Employment Space in Chelmsford, 2022 – 2041

	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
Employment Requirements	86,333	-22,737	280,758
Employment Supply/Capacity	111,783		
Surplus (+) / Shortfall (-)	+25,450	+134,520	-168,975

Source: Chelmsford Council (Oct 2024) / Lichfields analysis

Note: Figures rounded

- 4.13 The clear conclusion from the evidence base is that Scenario 1 represents the most ‘balanced’ scenario, and that the employment land demand identified over the plan period can be met based on extant planning permissions and existing site allocations. There is thus no evidence of an overriding need to allocate new employment land sites in the Local Plan Review. Paragraph 4.5 of the Lichfields report concludes:

“It is recommended that the Local Plan should seek to meet Scenario 1 (Labour Demand) as a starting point and although there is a small shortfall for industrial / distribution uses, the proposed Local Plan site allocations are flexible enough to accommodate this”.

- 4.14 Despite the clear evidence base, the Council proposes to allocate a significant quantum of new employment land, with a particular focus on East Chelmsford, where the Hammonds Farm site and Land Adjacent to the A12 Junction 18 are proposed together to provide a significant 86,000 sq.m of additional employment land. This is despite the fact that the minimum requirements identified by Scenario 1 already includes a built-in ‘safety margin’, and that the Scenario 1 figures will already be exceeded without additional allocations.
- 4.15 It is our view that the Council’s approach to employment land allocation – as set out in Strategic Policies S6 and S7 – cannot be justified, and will not represent the most effective and positive approach to plan-making.
- 4.16 Indeed, whilst the commitment to high levels of economic growth and development can of course be considered to be positive under the right circumstances, there can also be disadvantages of pursuing such an ambitious approach, leading to adverse impacts.
- 4.17 It is our view that the Council’s decision to deviate from its evidence base and propose additional significant strategic employment allocations in East Chelmsford (Site Policies 16a and 16b) is particularly harmful for the following reasons:
- We have shown in **Sections 2 and 3** of this report that both the Land at Hammonds Farm and the Land Adjacent to the A12 Junction 18 are severely constrained by a

range of environmental and heritage factors, and that development will cause a series of harmful adverse impacts, which cannot be adequately mitigated. It is clear that there is no overriding 'need' or demand for the proposed employment floorspace, as the City's employment land needs can be adequately met (with a buffer) by existing commitments / allocations over the plan period. In these circumstances, the harm caused by the proposed allocations clearly outweighs the benefit of delivering surplus employment land, and this position cannot be justified.

- We have shown in **Sections 2 and 3** that the local highway network is already under significant pressure, and it is unclear how the A12 and the A414, and its associated junctions, will safely and efficiently accommodate the additional traffic generated by the proposed strategic allocations for housing and employment land. Indeed, the draft allocations at Site Policies 16a and 16b, are both expected to seek primary access from a similar point along the A414 (which will need to serve 3,000 dwellings, local schools and facilities and 86,000 sq.m of employment floorspace with both staff travel and HGV movements to take into account). The projected strain on the local highways network and associated infrastructure is clear from the Transport Impact Appraisal, and cannot be justified, especially given that there is evidently no overriding need to provide for such a substantial surplus of employment land.
- Related to the above, the proposed ambitious growth strategy will necessarily mean that the Council's resources and infrastructure spending are spread thinly, as three major strategic employment sites (to be delivered within two entirely new garden communities) come forward for development at the same time, with major investment needed to support strategic growth both in North Chelmsford and East Chelmsford. There is a real risk that the lack of focus and overly ambitious program could result in under-delivery, through strained resources and management.
- The over-provision of new employment floorspace, which far exceeds historic levels of supply, could saturate the market and dilute demand. Given the extent of proposed new provision, existing businesses in central locations may seek to relocate to the out-of-town facilities. Moreover, if supply outstrips demand, there are likely to be vacancies within the stock, which does not represent an efficient use of land.

- The proposed strategy may be ambitious, but it does not provide sufficient flexibility with regards to the type of land proposed to support future employment growth. The forward strategy focuses on large, strategic sites that can be challenging and very slow to deliver. It is our view that if the Council wants to allocate additional employment land, to provide flexibility and a surplus of provision, it should focus on the allocation of additional smaller employment sites, in a range of locations across the City, and including sites within existing built-up areas, where there is already local infrastructure in place to support delivery. This would provide the Council with a more flexible buffer with regards to its future employment land supply.
- Finally, we have shown in **Sections 2 and 3** that the draft site allocations at I6a and I6b are detached from the Chelmsford urban area, and are cut-off from the city by the A12, which creates a divisive barrier that is currently hard to cross. Whilst a range of measures are proposed in the Pre-Submission Local Plan to encourage sustainable and active modes of travel, it is as yet unknown how and when this will be delivered, and what the take-up will actually be, given the separation distance that exists between the sites and the wider urban area. It is our view that Sites I6a and I6b are unsustainable locations for development, and on this basis their proposed allocation for strategic employment development is not justified. We note that the evidence base in relation to projected future job growth (as shown in **Figure 4.1** above) is clear that the main demand over the plan period is for office development, which would be most suitably located within or adjacent to existing urban centres in the built-up area. Furthermore, office development is a main town centre use, that should be directed towards in or edge-of-centre locations.

4.18 In summary, it is our view that the proposed requirement for 162,646 sq.m additional employment floorspace over the plan period (as per draft Strategic Policy S6) is not justified, based on the Council's own evidence base. Moreover, this approach – which is significantly above the identified minimum requirements – will result in a series of site specific adverse impacts, and does not represent the most sustainable growth option. It is our case that draft Policy S6 is not justified and does not represent an effective strategy or a positive approach to plan preparation. Taking all the above into account, the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan should be considered to be **unsound**.

(B) STRATEGIC POLICY S7

- 4.19 Draft Strategic Policy S7 sets out the proposed spatial strategy for the plan period, and provides details of the scale and distribution of new development that is planned across the City. As set out above, the Parish Councils strongly object to the inclusion of Sites I6a and I6b, which together are expected to deliver 3,000 new homes, 20 traveller pitches, 13 travelling showpeople plots, and 86,000 sq.m of employment floorspace.
- 4.20 In **Sections 2 and 3**, we set out our significant concerns with both proposed allocations, since both sites are severely constrained and their development will have a range of significant adverse impacts that cannot be adequately mitigated.
- 4.21 It is our view that the Council has failed to properly consider alternative options and strategies for accommodating the City's future development needs that could have fewer adverse impacts.
- 4.22 We have already explained in relation to Strategic Policy S6 above that the scale of additional employment land provision has not been properly justified. Indeed, it is clear that there is no overriding quantitative or qualitative need for the additional employment allocations at Hammonds Farm and adjacent to Junction 18 of the A12. The Council can meet its calculated employment land requirements through existing allocations and commitments, and this includes a substantive buffer for flexibility and additional growth. Under these circumstances, it can be concluded that there is **no substantive need to allocate sites I6a and I6b for strategic employment development**, and the 'benefits' to be gained from this option (in terms of more flexibility) does not outweigh the significant adverse impacts of pursuing this course of action. As such, the proposed employment allocations at Site Policies I6a and I6b can be deleted from Strategic Policy S7 without detriment to the provision of a range of employment sites in the City over the plan period to meet identified needs.
- 4.23 With regards to housing land, we accept that there is a requirement for the Council to identify land to accommodate 22,990 new homes over the plan period. However, it is our strong view that Hammonds Farm (Site Policy I6a) is fundamentally unsuitable for the accommodation of 3,000 new homes (for the reasons set out in **Section 2** above), and the Council has not properly justified why other – less harmful - options have been ruled out.
- 4.24 Indeed, all other development options must be fully explored and interrogated before committing to the creation of a new garden community, which will have a series of significant

adverse impacts. We are concerned that there are serious gaps in the Council's evidence base, and that the opportunity has not been taken to fully explore other – potentially more sustainable – options, as outlined below.

West and North West Chelmsford

- 4.25 The Local Plan Pre-Submission Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) considers an alternative option (Option 2c), whereby 3,000 new homes and 43,000 sq.m of employment floorspace could be located on identified development parcels within West and North West Chelmsford (on site refs. 21SHELAA41; CFS165; CFS182 (part); CFS82; CFS80; 21SHELAA100; 21SHELAA17; and CFS183).
- 4.26 This alternative option would deliver the same benefits in terms of housing and employment land provision as Hammonds Farm, but in a location that is sited directly adjacent to the existing built-up area of Chelmsford. The IIA explains that Option 2c is rejected because – although adjacent to the Chelmsford Urban Area – the sites have poorer connectivity into the urban area, and are relatively isolated from the strategic highway network. It is also noted that there are less opportunities to create sustainable routes to existing public transport or provide new Bus Based Rapid Transport Infrastructure. It is noted that the area contains sites in multiple ownership and employment opportunities would be less accessible to the wider population.
- 4.27 We disagree with this analysis. The plots have all been submitted as part of the Council's Call for Sites exercise and are shown to be 'green' for availability in the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA), meaning that they are held by a developer / willing owner / public sector, and should therefore be considered to be available for development. The fact that the sites are in different ownerships should not in itself represent a constraint to development. Indeed, it is common for strategic developments to proceed on land which is owned by a consortium of parties.
- 4.28 With regards to the site's accessibility, the plots lie adjacent to the existing urban area, and existing, direct pedestrian / cycle connections are available to Chelmsford City Centre via Roxwell Road (the A1060). In addition, the sites benefit from close proximity to existing infrastructure in the western part of Chelmsford, including existing bus stops / routes (along Roxwell Road, Avon Road and Chignal Road); a Morrisons foodstore, library, community hall, and Chelmsford City Football Club stadium. Whilst further enhancements and infrastructure would necessarily be delivered as part of the strategic development proposals, it is clear that

there is a foundation upon which to build, and the plots are well-located with regards to the existing facilities within Chelmsford.

- 4.29 Moreover, the Pre-Submission Local Plan does propose to allocate one site in this area, directly adjacent to the plots identified above. Draft Strategic Growth site Policy 2 is proposed for a ‘sustainable neighbourhood’, that maximises opportunities for sustainable travel, and that will deliver 880 new homes, a Travelling Showpeople site for 5 serviced plots, a new neighbourhood centre, and a new primary school. The site will take main vehicular access from Roxwell Road, and will provide “*safe and convenient pedestrian and cycle connections*”, including new dedicated pedestrian and cycle links to the existing urban area, and well-connected internal road layouts to allow good accessibility for bus services. The policy justification text (paragraph 7.115) describes the site as offering: “*an opportunity for a landscape-led sustainable urban extension that maximises opportunities for travel by sustainable modes*”.
- 4.30 As such, it is unclear why the other sites identified within the West and North West Chelmsford area, which lie directly adjacent to both the existing urban area and the planned development at Site Policy 2, have been ruled out as a potential suitable and sustainable location to accommodate future growth.
- 4.31 Taking the above into account, it is unclear why the IIA should favour Hammonds Farm, which is entirely disconnected from the urban area; where the A12 is a physical barrier to movement; and where the delivery of convenient and efficient active and sustainable travel linkages will be challenging.
- 4.32 Moreover, the IIA should also take into account the fact that the plots in West and North West Chelmsford are potentially less constrained than Hammonds Farm, and it is our view that growth in this direction would represent a less harmful strategy. We note that the main plots of land in West and North West Chelmsford score well in terms of their ‘suitability’ in the Council’s Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA, Autumn 2024).
- 4.33 As summarised in **Table 4.1** below, whilst the Hammonds Farm site attains a total score of 84 in the SHELAA, the plots within West and North West Chelmsford all achieve much higher scores, and this is reflective of the fact that they are subject to far fewer constraints in terms of their suitability.

Table 4.1 – Summary of SHELAA Scores (Autumn 2024)

SHELA Ref	Name	Total Score
CFS83	Land East and West of the A12, and North and South of the A414 [Hammonds Farm]	84 [Amber]
21SHELAA41	Land adjacent to Reeds Spring, Roxwell Road [West and North West Chelmsford]	100 [Amber]
21SHELAA100	Land South West of 2 Scotts Green, Hollow Lane, Broomfield [West and North West Chelmsford]	99 [Yellow]
CFS165	Land Known as North West Quadrant, West of Avon Road [West and North West Chelmsford]	94 [Amber]
CFS182	Land North and South of Brick Barns Farm, Mashbury Road, Chignal St James [West and North West Chelmsford]	100 [Yellow]
CFS82	Land South West of Bethal Baptist Church, Chignal Road, Chignal Smealy [West and North West Chelmsford]	114 [Green]
CFS80	Land South West of 217 Chignal Road, Chignal Smealy [West and North West Chelmsford]	108 [Amber]
CFS183	Land North of Newlands Spring and South West of Broomfield Village [West and North West Chelmsford]	101 [Amber]

4.34 It is therefore clear that the sites available within West and North West Chelmsford represent sustainable and accessible development options, which could together accommodate a strategic quantum of development (i.e. 3,000 new homes and 43,000 sq.m of employment floorspace). These plots are available for development (having been submitted to the Call for Sites process by willing owners / developers); benefit from less severe constraints than Hammonds Farm; and benefit from close proximity to the urban area and the City Centre, with some existing infrastructure already in place and potential to deliver further enhancements.

4.35 The Council has not provided sufficient justification to explain why it has discounted this potential growth option.

Green Belt

4.36 It is understood that the local and national planning policy attaches great importance to Green Belts, and that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping

land permanently open. Paragraph 142 of the NPPF explains that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

- 4.37 Notwithstanding this, the context of some areas of Green Belt has naturally changed over time, as development has occurred since their original designation. This is certainly the case in Chelmsford. The Green Belt in Chelmsford is part of London's Green Belt (the Metropolitan Green Belt), and this covers 34% of land to the south and west of Chelmsford.
- 4.38 However, we question whether all parts of Chelmsford Green Belt are still serving the five key purposes of Green Belt land, because the context and role of these areas has naturally evolved over time. In particular, it is relevant that a large swathe of Green Belt land lies immediately to the south of Chelmsford, but within the urbanised area, as defined by the A12 corridor. The A12 now provides a clear and defensible physical barrier in this location, whilst the Green Belt land to its north performs no special function. Indeed, development between Chelmsford and the A12 to the south would be at no risk of causing unrestricted sprawl, it would not result in the coalescence of settlements; and it would not impact any historic towns, as the development would be contained within the A12.
- 4.39 The Green Belt land within the confines of the A12 is located adjacent to the existing urban area of Chelmsford and the settlements of Galleywood and Great Baddow. This swathe of land benefits from close connectivity to the strategic transport network (at Junctions 16 and 17 of the A12), and it also has the potential to establish direct linkages to the City Centre. Other than the site's location within the designated Green Belt, we are not aware of any major physical, environmental or heritage constraints to development in this location.
- 4.40 Whilst it is understood that the Pre-Submission Local Plan is proceeding to Examination under the transitional arrangements (and thus will be based upon the NPPF, 2023), it is still material to consider that national planning policy with regards Green Belt land has evolved. The 2024 version of the NPPF introduces the notion of 'Grey Belt' land, which is defined as previously developed land and / or other land that does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143.
- 4.41 With regards to the characteristics of the land to the south of the City, between Chelmsford and the A12, it is our view that this area could rightly be considered to be 'Grey Belt', since the land is tightly bound by the A12, and thus serves no specific purpose in terms of checking the unrestricted sprawl of the urban area; preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another; or preserving the setting and special character of historic towns.

- 4.42 These points are of course open to debate, but the Local Plan Review has made no attempt to engage in this process. The potential offered by poorly-performing Green Belt land; land that may now be considered to be ‘Grey Belt’; and land in the Green Belt that is surrounded by built development has not been given any consideration at all. Indeed, the IIA explains (in paragraph 6.4.30) that site options that are situated within the Green Belt were not taken forward as part of any spatial strategy options. It is clear that the Council remains committed to protecting the Green Belt, but – by ruling all Green Belt sites out from the outset – the Council has failed to consider all reasonable development options.
- 4.43 It is entirely possible that development to the south of the City within the A12 boundary, has the potential to be less harmful overall, than development at Hammonds Farm and to the east of the A12. Indeed, it is the land at Hammonds Farm that lies within the open countryside; which will cause urban sprawl beyond the A12; and which may lead to coalescence with nearby historic settlements.
- 4.44 It is a major deficiency in the Council’s evidence base that it has not undertaken a Green Belt Review, especially given the high-level constraints identified with the proposed development options.
- 4.45 The Council has ruled out all Green Belt sites as non-starters, and it is considered that this approach cannot be justified, given: (a) the length of time that has passed since Chelmsford City Council last reviewed its Green Belt boundaries (if they indeed have ever been reviewed); (b) the evolution in national planning policy and the introduction of the concept of ‘Grey Belt’ land, which is a material consideration and should be given some deliberation (despite the transitional arrangements); and (c) the significant constraints that have been identified with the proposed development strategy, such that all other feasible options should be duly interrogated.
- 4.46 A Green Belt Review is necessary to provide further evidence on this matter, and to allow a fair planning balance to be undertaken, with regards to future development options in the City. In the absence of a comprehensive evidence base, the decision to allocate strategic land at Hammonds Farm and adjacent to Junction 18 of the A12 is not justified and should not be taken forward.
- 4.47 As explained in **Sections 2 and 3** above, given the scale of adverse impacts identified at Hammonds Farm and in relation to the proposed new employment park, all other feasible options must be rigorously tested before progressing with this spatial strategy.

(C) SUMMARY IN RELATION TO STRATEGIC POLICIES S6 AND S7

4.48 It is our case that there are fundamental shortcomings with both Strategic Policies S6 and S7.

4.49 Whilst we accept the housing requirements proposed in the Pre-Submission Local Plan, the employment land requirements have been over-inflated and represent a deviation from the Council's own evidence base, which has not been justified.

4.50 With regards to the proposed spatial strategy, it is our case that the Council has not rigorously interrogated alternative options for growth. It is unclear why other, reasonable options have been discounted, such as focusing growth on suitable, sustainable sites within West and North West Chelmsford. Moreover, the Council has discounted all Green Belt sites from the outset (as a matter of principle), despite the fact some Green Belt sites (particularly those to the South of Chelmsford) could represent more sustainable options for development than a new garden community outside the boundary of the A12.

4.51 It is our view that draft Strategic Policies S6 and S7 have not been properly justified, and that they do not represent an effective and positive approach to plan preparation, as other – less harmful – growth options have not been properly interrogated. For these reasons, we consider the **Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan to be unsound.**

5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 We have raised a number of **substantive concerns** with the Council's proposed **Housing and Employment Requirements (draft Strategic Policy S6)** and its **Spatial Strategy (draft Strategic Policy S7)**, and in particular, the proposal to allocate land at Hammonds Farm for a new Garden Community (**draft Strategic Growth Site Policy I6a**) and land east of Junction 18 of the A12 for a new employment park (**draft Strategic Growth Site Policy I6b**).
- 5.2 In this representation, we have highlighted multiple serious physical, environmental and heritage constraints, which impede the development of both proposed strategic sites. We have demonstrated that the plots are **fundamentally unsuitable for strategic development**, and that the proposed allocations would result in levels of harm, which cannot be adequately mitigated.
- 5.3 In particular, we have identified the following significant adverse impacts:
- Complete erosion of a large area of open countryside with high landscape value;
 - Considerable harm to a large number of heritage assets and their settings, including Grade I, II and II* listed buildings, Conservation Areas, Registered Parks and Gardens, non-designated heritage assets; and protected lanes. There is particular concern for the preservation of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Conservation Area, which will be irrevocably harmed by the proposed Eastern Orbital Route;
 - Impact on an area with potential for significant archaeology, which may need to be preserved in situ;
 - Irreversible loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land, which remains in active use for food production;
 - Harm related to the sites' high risk of flooding from fluvial sources and reservoirs, which has not been properly interrogated;
 - The sites lie within a Minerals Safeguarding Area, and the development will sterilise the resource;

- The land benefits from a high level of rich biodiversity, and is constrained by its proximity to important local wildlife sites;
- The sites are fundamentally unsustainable, and currently suffer from very poor levels of accessibility, and options to address this will be challenging to deliver given the barrier created by the busy A12 corridor;
- The developments are expected to have a severe harmful impact on the operation of the highway network (A12 and A414), which is already congested and at capacity in the peak hours. The allocations will also seriously impact local rural roads, adversely affecting small historic villages such as Little Baddow, Boreham, Sandon and Danbury, as drivers seek alternative routes through the countryside, with consequent implications in terms of highways safety and the erosion of the historic setting of these settlements.

5.4 Given the level of harm identified, it is our view that the proposed allocation of Site Policies I6a and I6b has not been properly justified, and does not represent an effective and positively prepared Local Plan.

5.5 Moreover, we are of the view that the identified employment land requirements (Strategic Policy S6) have been over-inflated and represent a deviation from the Council's own evidence base, which has not been justified.

5.6 With regards to the proposed spatial strategy (Strategic Policy S7), it is our case that the Council has not rigorously interrogated alternative options for growth. It is unclear why other, reasonable spatial options have been discounted, such as focusing growth on suitable, sustainable sites within North and West Chelmsford, or reviewing potential opportunities on poorly performing Green Belt / Grey Belt land.

5.7 It is also useful to note that the proposed allocations would run directly contrary to the core Spatial Principles of the Pre-Submission Local Plan, and this underlines the fundamental unsuitability of the proposed spatial approach. The Spatial Principles are set out in **draft Strategic Policy S1** and stipulate that:

- Development should be well-connected and in sustainable locations;
- New development should promote the use of suitable previously-developed land;

- Development should continue the renewal and enhance the vitality of Chelmsford City Centre and its Urban Area;
- Development should be focused on the higher-order settlements outside the Green Belt, and should respect the development pattern and hierarchy of other settlements;
- Development should respect the character and appearance of landscapes and the built environment, and preserve or enhance the historic and natural environment and biodiversity;
- Locate development to avoid or manage flood risk;
- Ensure development is served by necessary infrastructure; and
- Locate development to utilise existing and planned infrastructure effectively.

5.8 At the last Local Plan review the Council and the Inspector rejected the allocation of land at Hammonds Farm. There have been no changes of circumstances to the land since 2020, and there is no justification for a different approach now.

5.9 In conclusion, the Cross-Parish Working Group contend that draft Strategic Policies S6 and S7 have not been properly justified, and that they do not represent an effective and positive approach to plan preparation, as other – less harmful – growth options have not been properly interrogated. Indeed, given the serious level of harm identified in relation to the Council's proposed spatial strategy, all other potential alternative options – including land within the Green Belt - must be reviewed and thoroughly tested.

5.10 For all these reasons, we consider that the Pre-Submission Local Plan is unsound. We suggest that **draft Site Policies 16a and 16b are removed from the Plan**, and the Council should reconsider its evidence base, and interrogate alternative spatial strategy options, to deliver a more sustainable and positive growth strategy.

APPENDIX I

National Landscape Application (Integrated Landscape Character Assessment), Prepared by
Danbury Ridge and the Chelmer Valley National Landscape Working Group

(November 2023)

APPENDIX 2

Flood Risk Summary Statements for Site Policies I6a and I6b, prepared by Stomor

(February 2025)

APPENDIX 3

Transport Technical Note, Prepared by Stomor (June 2024); and
Transport Technical Note 2, Prepared by Stomor (February 2025)

APPENDIX 4

Cross-Parish Working Group Objection to Application Reference: 24/01768/OUT

(Dated 25/02/2025)