# ASSESSMENT OF LOCAL GAP AND CORRIDORS OF SIGNIFICANCE IN ELMSTEAD PARISH

# Introduction

* 1. Elmstead Parish Council has set out to identify areas along the connecting roads between settlements in the parish, which either serve as a rural buffer or a visual break helping to maintain the individual nature of a settlement, or which make a key contribution to the character of a settlement, or its rural setting. These will be designated as Local Gaps or Corridors of Significance in the Elmstead Parish Neighbourhood Plan and given additional protection in recognition of the significant role they play.
	2. The Tendring District Local Plan Section 2 designates some open land as ‘Strategic Green Gaps’ under policy PPL 6 to retain the separate identity and prevent coalescence of settlements and contribute to Objectives 7 (historic identity) and 8 (biodiversity) of the Local Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to apply the same principles at a parish scale.
	3. The Parish Council together with the Elmstead Parish Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group has prepared this assessment to create a consistent and transparent methodology for evaluating potential Local Gaps and Corridors of Significance. It forms part of the Evidence Base which has informed the production of the Neighbourhood Plan.
	4. This assessment establishes three tests which potential sites must pass in order to qualify as Local Gaps. It also demonstrates how each of the sites identified in the Elmstead Parish Neighbourhood Plan ‘Submission Version’ (July 2022) satisfies these tests.

# Policy Background

## National Planning Policy

* 1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the government’s planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The most relevant paragraphs are:
		+ Paragraph 7 – The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.
		+ Paragraph 8 – Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives):… an environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.
		+ Paragraph 15 – planning should be genuinely plan-led. Succinct and up to date plans should provide a positive vision for the future of each area; a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities; and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings.

Non-strategic policies should be used by local planning authorities and communities to set out more detailed policies for specific areas, neighbourhoods or types of development. This can include allocating sites, the provision of infrastructure and community facilities at a local level, establishing design principles, conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment and setting out other development management policies.

* 1. NPPF §174 a) states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.

## Local Planning Policy

* 1. The Tendring District Local Plan 2013-2033 and Beyond (Section 1) was adopted on 26th January 2021. The Tendring District Local Plan 2013-2033 and Beyond (Section 2) was adopted on 25th January 2022. This is the ‘local plan’ which is used to determine planning applications in Tendring. It sets out the basic rules which new development must follow, as well as allocating certain areas of land for new housing or employment.
	2. Policies SPL1 (Managing Growth), SPL2 (Settlement Development Boundaries) and SPL3 (Sustainable Design) sets out the principles which should apply to new development in Tendring. It establishes a Settlement Hierarchy and Settlement Development Boundaries which steers future windfall development away from the open countryside and towards larger more sustainable settlements.
	3. Policy SPL1 (Managing Growth) identifies Elmstead as a Rural Service Centre. Rural Service Centres have been identified for smaller-scale growth accommodating a modest increase in housing stock, where appropriate. New development will predominately be aimed at addressing local housing needs, supporting the village economy and assisting with the overall housing growth proposed for Tendring.
	4. Policy SP8 (Development & Delivery of a New Garden Community in North Essex) allocates land for 2,200 – 2.500 new homes which extends into the parish. There are no other allocations in the LP for Elmstead due to a large number of completions and commitments to date.
	5. Tendring: Policy PPL6 Identifies Strategic Green Gaps to retain the separate identity and prevent coalescence of settlements. Developments must not (individually or cumulatively) lead to the coalescence of settlements. Strategic Green Gaps have the following characteristics:
* The open and undeveloped character of the land;
* They form a visual break between settlements;
* Their boundaries follow physical features on the ground floor; and/or
* Only land required to secure the objectives of the Strategic Green Gaps has been included
	1. Policy PPL6 contributes to objectives 7 and 8 of the Local Plan.
* Objective 7: To conserve and enhance Tendring District’s historic environment, including: heritage; respecting historic buildings and their settings; heritage assets; landscapes; links; and views.
* Objective 8: To provide a network of interconnected multi-functional natural green and blue spaces which secures a net gain in biodiversity and geodiversity; promotes healthy lifestyles; and enhances the quality of the natural and built environment.

# Criteria for assessing Local Gaps and Corridors of Significance

* 1. For defining Local Gaps, wherever feasible, the physical boundaries have been used to define these. However, where no suitable boundary exists, other features have been used to demarcate the area, such as a line created by extending a neighbouring boundary. Corridors of Significance extends along either or both sides of the road, the roadside corridor.
	2. To ensure consistency of approach across the parish, three tests have been devised for identifying Local Gaps and Corridors of Significance. To qualify for designation, each area should satisfy Test 1, as well as satisfying either Test 2 or Test 3.

## Test 1. Does any land in the proposed Local Gap or Corridor of Significance already have planning permission, or has it been allocated for development in the LP?

* + - The first stage in the assessment will be to review the planning history of each area to ensure that it is not subject to an extant planning permission, and that it has not been allocated for development under a local plan.
		- The Local Gaps or Corridor of Significance designation will rarely be appropriate where land already has planning permission, or where it has been allocated for development under the local plan.
		- An exception to this may be where it can be demonstrated that the Local Gap or Corridor of Significance designation would be compatible with the planning permission / local plan allocation, or where the planning permission / local plan allocation is no longer capable of being implemented.

## Test 2. Does the area or roadside corridor play an important role as a buffer preventing coalescence between settlements, and if so, could this role be significantly harmed by development?

* + - An area could qualify for designation as a Local Gap or Corridor of Significance if it played an important role as a buffer preventing coalescence between settlements, and if this role could be significantly harmed by development.
		- Coalescence is the growing together of settlements. This frequently takes the form of ribbon development along main roads between neighbouring settlements. The merging of settlements is often accompanied by a loss of individual identity: instead of being experienced as a community in its own right, a settlement may be regarded as a neighbourhood or suburb of a larger combined entity.
		- In evaluating the importance of an area’s role as a buffer, consideration should be given as to how much open space currently exists between settlements. Where little open space remains between settlements, its designation should be prioritised.
		- Consideration should also be given to the quality of the remaining open space. A significant stretch of undeveloped land will be more effective at preventing coalescence than land punctuated by built forms.
		- In determining if development would significantly harm an area’s ability to act as a buffer, account should be taken of how even low levels of development can bring about changes in the way an area is experienced. For example, a few dwellings, modern agricultural barns, holiday caravans or equine structures can in some situations fragment the sense of uninterrupted open countryside and create the experience of a suburban rather than a rural landscape.
		- Account should also be taken of the fact that large settlements tend to exert greater effects on their hinterlands than small ones. The impacts of noise, litter, light pollution, traffic and incidental development tend to extend further from large settlements than from small ones. Larger settlements may therefore require larger buffers than smaller ones in order to prevent a sense of coalescence.

## Test 3. Does the area make an important contribution to the character or rural setting of a settlement, and if so, could this be significantly harmed by development?

* + - An area could qualify for designation if it made an important contribution to the character or rural settling of a settlement, and if that contribution could be significantly harmed by development.
		- Contributions to character or rural setting might include helping to create an attractive rural backdrop for a key approach to the settlement or providing important views into or out of the settlement or its environs.
		- Harms might include the interruption of views, or a reduction in the sense of rural isolation.
		- In determining harms to the character or rural setting of a settlement, account should be taken of how even low levels of development can bring about changes in the way an area is experienced in certain contexts. For example, a single dwelling, modern agricultural barn or equine complex on open land can fragment a sense of rural isolation deriving from uninterrupted countryside.
		- Account should also be taken of the effects of incidental development such as gardens, lighting, vehicle splays and signage. For example, the planting of alien coniferous trees or shrubs around new dwellings can have a powerfully suburbanising effect in a rural location.

# Consultation

* 1. Not included in this pre-submission report.

# Areas identified as Local Gaps

* 1. Table A below provides information about each of the four areas identified as Local Gaps or Corridors of Significance in the Elmstead Parish Neighbourhood Plan ‘Pre-Submission Version’ (July 2022). These have each been assessed against the three tests set out above.

**TABLE A: Assessment of Corridors of Significance and Local Gaps identified in the Elmstead Parish Neighbourhood Plan (Pre-Submission Version)**

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| **Policy Map key** | **Location of Corridor of Significance** | **Description of Corridor of Significance** | **Overall area (Ha)** | **Overall length of road frontage** | **Maximum stretch of frontage with unbroken country****-side on both sides of road (no buildings, etc.)** | **TEST 1****existing planning permission or SWDP allocation** | **TEST 2****importance of area's role as a buffer preventing coalescence between settlements; &****extent this role could be harmed by development** | **TEST 3****contribution to settlement's character or rural setting; & extent to which this could be harmed by development** |
| Corridor (i) | The most eastern end of the A133, within the Parish boundary.  | The area spans Clacton Road (A133) between Elmstead and Frating, with the boundary being Tenpenny Brook. It consists of farmland with an open character to the southwest and farmland to the northeast with an intermittent hedgerow and trees. There are no buildings along this stretch of road. Clacton Road is lined with mature hawthorn hedges which are an attractive feature. There are extensive views through the trees and hedges (especially Nov- Apr)  | N/A | 280m | 280m on both sides of the road | No | The corridor acts as an essential buffer preventing coalescence between Frating and Elmstead.Only a very small amount of undeveloped frontage remains (maximum extent 280m) on both sides of Clacton Road before the Parish boundary as Grange Farm and Lanswood have been developed. Even a limited amount of new development in this gap would have a significant detrimental impact. It is only another 150m along Frating Hill before the first built forms of Frating appear on the northern side of the road. The loss of any further open land would lead to coalescence, so that it would no longer be possible to determine by visual means alone where one Parish ends, and another has begun. | The open land at the entrances to the village contributes significantly to their character and rural setting.There are no built forms in the views across the fields that lie either side of this stretch of road. Any development would erode the prevailing landscape character which encompasses Elmstead and harm the character and rural setting of the village through loss of countryside in a key location. It would lead to a loss of individual identity through merger. |
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| Corridor (ii) | A133 between the Garden Community border and the village.  | Open working farmland with sporadic cottages and a farm to the north and south of the A133. There are stretches of hedgerows and trees alongside the road. There are extensive views across the fields north and south of the A133 with typical farmland patterns of hedgerows and treelines.  | N/A | 850m | 580m on both sides of the road | No | The area acts as an essential buffer preventing the coalescence of the proposed Garden Community and Elmstead village.Once the Garden Community is built, only a small amount of undeveloped frontage will remain on the north side of the A133. Even a limited amount of new development in this gap would have a significant detrimental impact. The loss of any further open land would almost definitely lead to coalescence, and it would no longer be possible to determine by visual means alone where the Garden Community ends and Elmstead begins. | The open land at the entrance to the village contributes significantly to its character and rural setting.Any development would erode the prevailing landscape character which encompasses Elmstead and harm the character and rural setting of the village through loss of countryside in a key location. It would lead to a loss of individual identity through merger.The identity of the Garden Community will be very different to that of a rural village, and it is necessary to retain that sense of leaving the GC and entering the countryside before arriving at a rural village. The corridor is essential for the transition from settlement to rural to settlement.  |

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| Corridor iii | From the Bromley Road/The Chase junction in an easterly direction to the Parish boundary at Tenpenny Brook. | The corridor lies along one of the key routes into the village. The surrounding environment chiefly consists of farmland, bordered by hedgerows, with an open character.The south end of the gap contains a small group of houses (4) set back from the road. The views are of fields with 2 cottages and a farmhouse well in the distance.  | N/A | 640m  | 540m on both sides. | No | This corridor acts as an important buffer preventing the coalescence of Elmstead and Great Bromley.Coalescence is a process and whilst some development in these corridors may not result in coalescence it may contribute to the coalescence of separate and distinct communities and the rural character of the area and is therefore a vital consideration. Harmful ribbon development happens over time and so it could become an issue if its cumulative effects are not considered.   | The open land along this corridor makes an important contribution to the character and rural setting of the villages.Given the sensitivity of the landscape, even limited development in this gap would harm the character and rural setting of both Elmstead and Great Bromley villages. |

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| **Policy Map key** | **Location of Local Gap** | **Description of Local Gap** | **Overall area (Ha)** | **Overall length of road frontage** | **Maximum stretch of frontage with unbroken country****-side on both sides of road (no buildings, etc.)** | **TEST 1****existing planning permission or SWDP allocation** | **TEST 2****importance of area's role as a buffer preventing coalescence between settlements; &****extent this role could be harmed by development** | **TEST 3****contribution to settlement's character or rural setting; & extent to which this could be harmed by development** |
| ELM3 Local Gaps | To the north of the A133 on land known as Whitings, between Winterbourne Gardens and the proposed Lanswood/Market Field Farm development. To the south of the A133 the field to the north of Beth Chatto Gardens and the field to the west between Beth Chatto and White Barn Farm. Some of the land is behind Shaftesbury House, The Pool House, The Nest and The Bower, | The area spans Clacton Road (A133). To the North (Whitings land) It chiefly consists of an open field, with large agricultural buildings (barns). To the south it consists of open fields down to Elmstead Brook and Beth Chatto’s Gardens.  | 11.21 | 260m on the south side and 140m on the north side.  | 260m on the south side and 140m on the north side. | No | The remaining open land acts as an important buffer preventing coalescence between the Elmstead village area and the Lanswood development area, two distinct settlement areas Only a fairly limited amount of undeveloped frontage remains (maximum extent 130 m) on both sides of Clacton Road separating the village from the Lanswood settlement.The remaining frontage is fragmented by sporadic development, including large agricultural barns and a few homes. Further fragmentation of this gap through development would harm its role as a buffer and increase the sense that the Lanswood settlement forms part of the Elmstead settlement area. | The open fields and agricultural buildings on either side of Clacton Road at the main eastern approach to Elmstead provide a buffer between 2 distinctive settlements allowing to retain their own distinctive character and provide a transition from settlement to rural to settlement.The gap gives rise to open views across fields to the north and south, with Beth Chatto’s Gardens at the southern end. The large agricultural barns at Whitings Farm provide a rural feel and view on the landscape, as the landscape setting is largely farmland. The gap between the two settlements will become the more important in the event the prominent brownfield site on Clacton Road becomes available for development in the plan period and the policy therefore guides its redevelopment to ensure that the part of the site which contains buildings which are not fully integrated with the Lanswood settlement is returned to open countryside and any residential ‘infill’ redevelopment scheme provides a defensible boundary creating a definitive settlement edge at this location. |
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