



Statement of Common Ground
Castle Point Plan 2026 to 2043
Regulation 19 Pre-Submission Draft
North West Thundersley Development Option

Between

Castle Point Borough Council

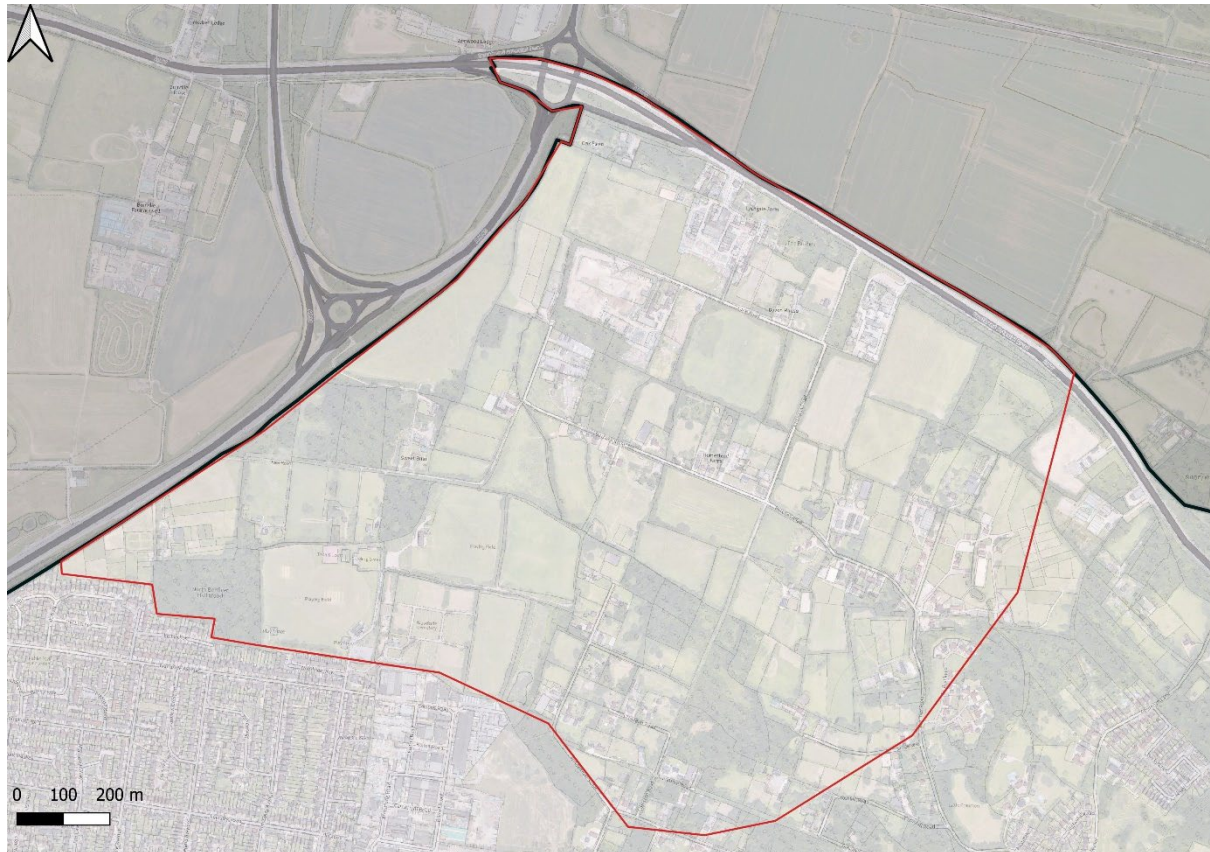
and

Essex County Council

August 2025

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) identifies the areas of agreement between Castle Point Borough Council (CPBC) and Essex County Council (ECC) regarding the suitability of the site at North West Thundersley (NWT) as a potential development allocation in the emerging Castle Point Plan. The Castle Point Plan will cover the period up to 2043.



Map 1 – Broad area of North West Thundersley

2. Background

- 2.1 Parts of the land in North West Thundersley (NWT) were submitted under the call for sites held from 12 January 2024, to 12 February 2024 as requests from landowners for their consideration in the Castle Point Plan.
- 2.2 This led to the area being identified in the Issues and Options Consultation Report (Regulation 18) published in July 2024, as one of the areas of Green

Belt promoted for development if CPBC was mindful to reallocate Green Belt sites.

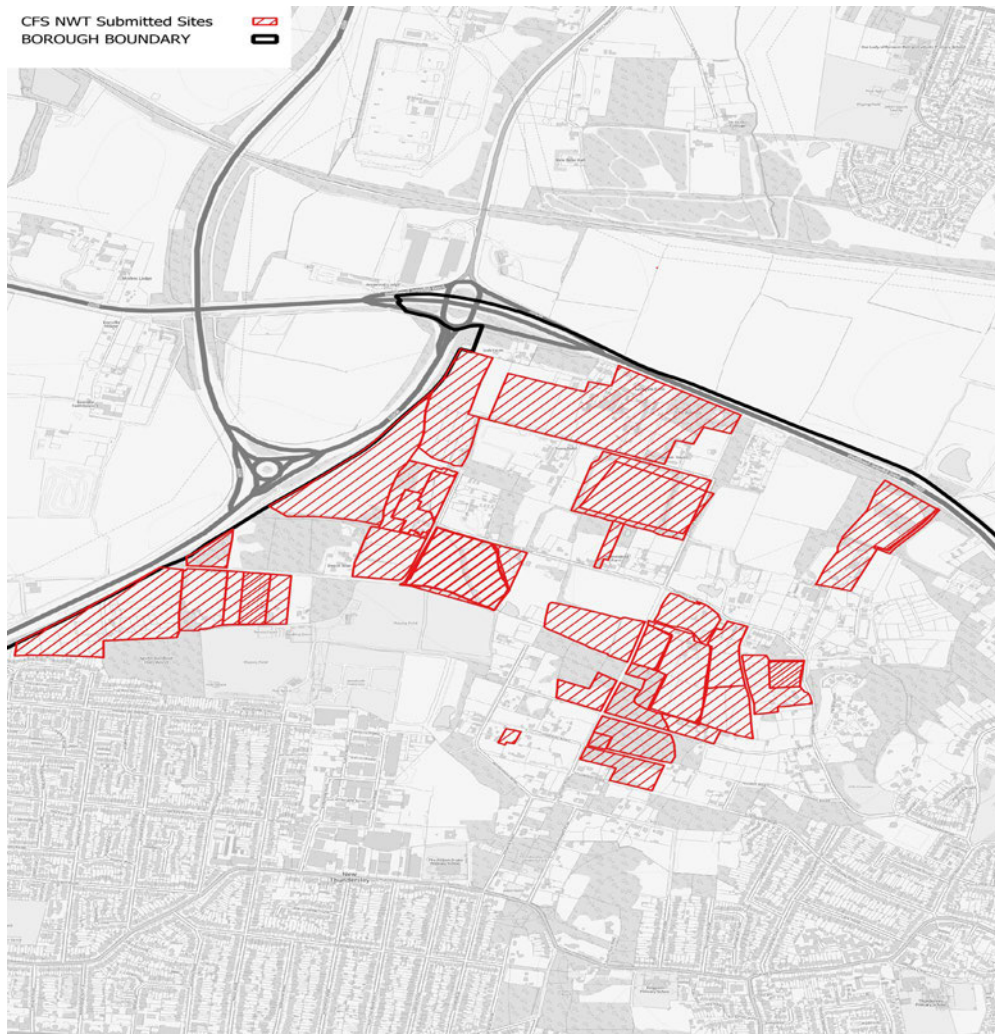
- 2.3 The area had previously been identified in the withdrawn Castle Point Local Plan 2019 to 2033 as a potential area for longer term growth and was not safeguarded. During the preparation of that plan, it was considered unlikely that the site would be deliverable during the plan period. This approach in that plan was consequently found to be sound by the Inspector.
- 2.4 As part of the preparation of the Castle Point Plan the site, together with other Green Belt sites has been assessed by CPBC using sustainability criteria as part of the Green Belt review.
- 2.5 Duty to Cooperate discussions have taken place between Castle Point Borough Council and Essex County Council and this Statement of Common Ground reflects those discussions and the conclusions reached.

3. Policy context

- 3.1 Since the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in December 2024, the context for which the Castle Point Plan must be prepared has significantly changed, particularly in relation to the mandatory requirement to identify housing need using the standard method (which has nearly doubled the housing target from 355 dpa to 686 dpa), the consequential need to positively consider development in the Green Belt if there is insufficient capacity in urban areas, and the introduction of the Grey Belt.
- 3.2 In response to this, CPBC has reviewed urban capacity — particularly densities — through its [Density and Capacity Study \(2025\)](#), which updates previous assessments in light of the revised NPPF and undertaken a [Green Belt Review](#) in accordance with the Green Belt Planning Practice Guidance.

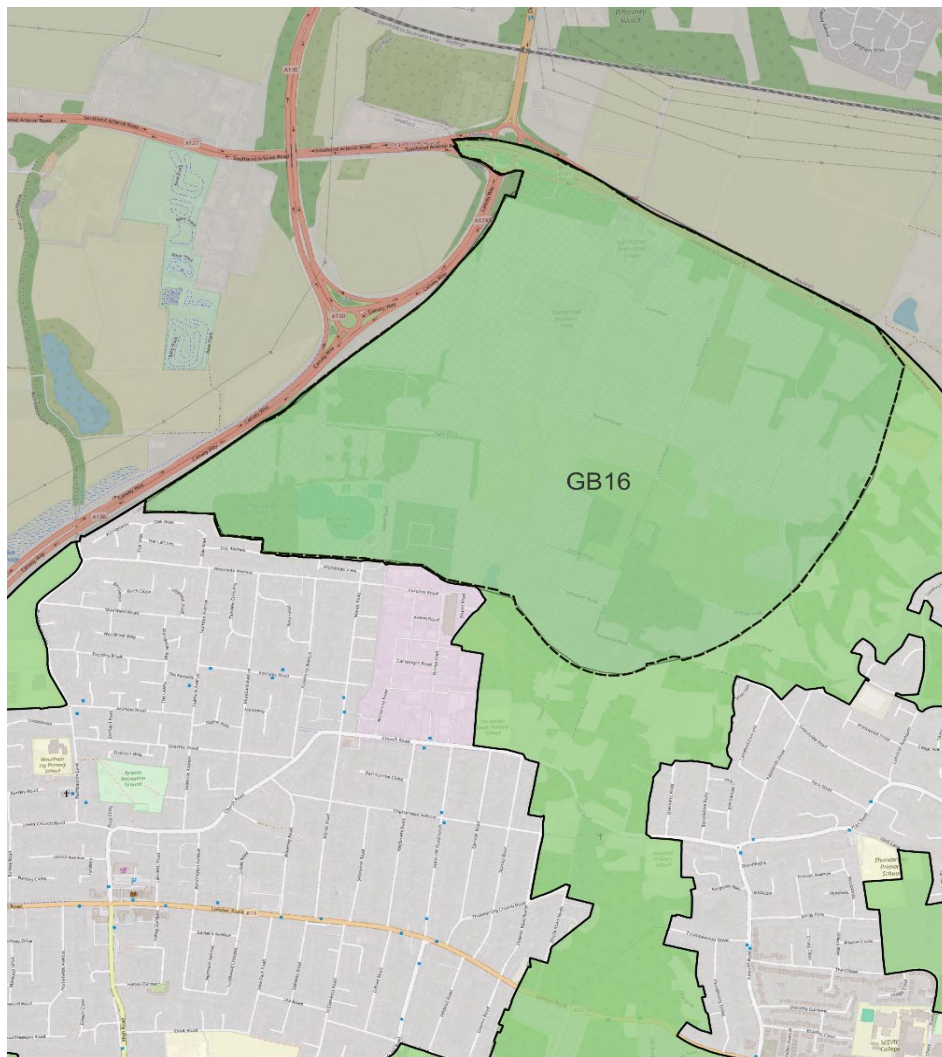
4. How the site was considered in the preparation of the Castle Point Plan

- 4.1 During the Call for Sites held in January and February 2024 landowners within the NWT area put forward sites for consideration – see Map 2 below.



Map 2 – Call for Sites submissions locations

- 4.2 These sites represent a significant proportion of NWT, and therefore, the Council presented NWT as a single option in the Issues and Options Consultation Document, July 2024 as shown on Map 3 below.



Map 3 – Issues and Options Consultation - North West Thundersley Option

- 4.3 The area comprises approximately 187 hectares, with landowner submissions covering a significant proportion. The Castle Point Strategic Land Availability Assessment (2025) identifies a theoretical capacity of between 5,624 and 9,373 dwellings, depending on assumed densities. The surrounding local roads lack the physical and operational capacity to support general vehicular access for strategic-scale development. These routes are constrained by their physical nature and existing traffic volumes. As a consequence of these constraints, access would need to be limited to active travel modes (walking and cycling) and public transport. Without potential access from the primary route network — namely the A127 or A130 — any future development would need to function as a self-contained settlement, with on-site provision of

essential services such as shops, employment space, education, and healthcare to meet day-to-day needs.

- 4.4 Both councils acknowledge that NWT was not deliverable during the previous plan period and it remains the case that it is not deliverable during the current plan period due to significant constraints including access to/from the strategic and local highway network via all modes, the need for its comprehensive development to deliver and fund the necessary infrastructure highway and community infrastructure, on-site environmental constraints, multiple land ownership and other planning concerns. It is anticipated that the costs and magnitude of the said required infrastructure would be both substantial and complex.

5. Strategic Considerations and Long-Term Planning Approach

- 5.1 Both CPBC and ECC agree that any potential growth in NWT must be master planned in a comprehensive manner over the long-term requiring collaborative work, via the Duty to Co-operate, between CPBC, ECC, Basildon Borough Council, Rochford District Council and other South Essex Councils (SEC), given their proximity and shared infrastructure corridors, including the A127/A130 strategic network and Fairglen Interchange.
- 5.2 There are multiple land ownerships in NWT, which would require coordinated planning and infrastructure delivery. While it is recognised that large-scale developments — including new settlements — often involve complex land assembly or government support both CPBC and ECC agree that such mechanisms are not in place or sufficiently advanced to support delivery within the current plan period. The Castle Point Plan (Regulation 19) does not rely on NWT to meet its local need for housing as set out in the Local Housing Needs Assessment (2023) or wider spatial objectives. As such, no allocation is proposed, and any future consideration of the site should be pursued through a longer-term strategic planning process.

6 . Transport and Highway Constraints

A127/A130 Fairglen Interchange:

- 6.1 The interchange is of strategic importance and is already operating at or beyond capacity.
- 6.2 Permitted short-term improvements at the Fairglen Junction have secured the necessary funding with construction expected to commence in 2025 and cover a two year period, and is forecast to provide relief until at least 2036.
- 6.3 Future proposals will need to consider the housing and job growth requirements in current and future local plans cumulatively across South Essex.
- 6.4 The short-term improvements to the Fairglen Junction are not designed to accommodate the significant uplift in growth across South Essex, as identified in emerging Local Plans, but it is not prohibitive to the indicative requirements of a longer-term scheme, or other future proposals. However, there is no certainty on what level of development, residential and commercial, will take place in South Essex and how that will impact strategic junctions such as Fairglen and what longer terms improvements are needed to manage the increase in traffic from growth.
- 6.5 Therefore, this issue is better explored through the forthcoming strategic planning process.
- 6.6 Access to the strategic road network from North West Thundersley is severely constrained. Direct access onto the A127 is not feasible due to safety concerns, lack of available land for a new junction, and policy restrictions on new access points to strategic routes. Similarly, access onto the A130 including via the Rayleigh Spur Roundabout, or direct access points are not feasible due to safety, capacity, and policy limitations.

- 6.7 ECC did not formally object to the identification of NWT as a potential long-term growth location in the withdrawn Castle Point Local Plan (2018–2033). However, ECC’s current advice remains is not to allow additional access points onto the A127 and A130, both strategic routes, in the vicinity of the Fairglen Interchange for safety and capacity reasons as well as influencing the Lower Thames Crossing. This is to be kept under review but a direct access onto the Strategic Route (A127) is contrary to current Policy DM2 Strategic Routes/Main Distributors , as set out in [ECC Development Management Policies](#).
- 6.8 National Highways will be a key stakeholder as strategic movements via the Fairglen interchange are expected to increase once the consented Lower Thames Crossing is open to traffic in the early 2030’s.
- 6.9 It has been suggested that access to the site could be achieved via a left in, left out arrangement onto either the A127 or the A130. However, this is not considered an acceptable solution. Such arrangements would place additional pressure on the nearby strategic junctions — namely Fairglen and either Rayleigh Weir or Sadlers Farm — as vehicles would be reliant on these junctions to facilitate full access and egress movements. In addition, there is concern that LILO arrangements in this location would raise significant safety concerns.

Local Road Network Issues:

- 6.10 Increased development in NWT would exacerbate existing capacity issues at Tarpots (A13) and Woodman’s Arms (A129) junctions to the south and east. The Castle Point Local Plan Transport Assessment (2025) identifies both junctions as operating at or near capacity. Access onto these routes is therefore not considered feasible, as additional traffic would likely result in unacceptable congestion, queuing, and highway safety risks. Active and sustainable transport connectivity options into the existing urban area to the south require further investigation with regards their deliverability, design, feasibility and viability.

7. Green Belt and Environmental Constraints

- 7.1 NWT is designated as Green Belt land, and both CPBC and ECC agree that it should remain so within the emerging plan period.
- 7.2 The site includes several playing fields and open spaces (e.g., Woodside Park and Benfleet Football Club) that serve important community functions and must be retained.
- 7.3 The area should be assessed as part of a Strategic or Cross Border Green Belt Review, which must fully consider the cumulative impact of any potential releases, particularly regarding the sustainability of the area and urban sprawl prevention. This is likely to be a key piece of evidence undertaken to inform the future Spatial Development Strategy for Greater Essex.
- 7.4 The Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy identifies Strategic Opportunity Combined Areas for habitat creation, of which NWT has been identified as such and seeks to secure 20% biodiversity net gain in these areas.

8. Deliverability and Infrastructure Concerns

- 8.1 ECC and CPBC maintain that the viability and deliverability of development at NWT requires significant infrastructure investment impacting upon its potential viability and deliverability, which would need to be evidenced including:
 - a. New local highway access and strategic and local junction improvements.
 - b. Pedestrian, cycling and public transport enhancements to integrate NWT with the existing urban area to the south and key destinations within and to wider South Essex.
 - c. Education and childcare, healthcare, SuDS and drainage infrastructure upgrades.
- 8.2 Any future development would be required to be at a sufficient scale to secure the developer funding for the necessary infrastructure and cannot place an unaffordable cost burden on the public purse.

- 8.3 Small-scale, piecemeal developments within NWT would not be of the scale to generate the sufficient developer contributions (S106/CIL) to fund necessary infrastructure or to enable proper place making. Therefore, a comprehensive, master-planned approach would be essential to deliver the scale of infrastructure required, and any future consideration of the site should be pursued through the longer-term strategic planning process.
- 8.4 A further critical infrastructure issue that must be addressed relates to energy. This area does not currently benefit from significant existing energy infrastructure, and substantial electricity network reinforcement will be required to support any future development. The absence of sufficient energy capacity presents a major deliverability challenge, and this must be fully factored into any assessment of the site's viability.
- 8.5 Without clear commitments and funding mechanisms, any development in NWT risks creating isolated and unsustainable communities.

9. Agreed Position

- 9.1 Both councils agree that North West Thundersley (NWT) should not be allocated for development in the Castle Point Plan due to there being unresolved strategic matters preventing it being deliverable during the plan period. Key issues include, but are not exhaustive:
- 1) Strategic planning complexities requiring cross-boundary collaboration, particularly with planning authorities across South Essex. Any future consideration of the site should be pursued through the longer-term strategic planning process and the Spatial Development Strategy for Greater Essex.
 - 2) Significant highways and transportation constraints that cannot be easily mitigated, including direct access from the strategic network, namely the A127/A130; the strategic importance of the A127/A130 Fairglens interchange to wider South Essex; the need to safeguard land within the vicinity of the junction to secure any necessary future

transport improvements; and the connectivity by active and sustainable modes, to the existing urban area to the south and wider key destinations.

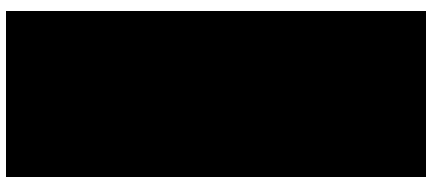
- 3) Green Belt and environmental protection considerations.
- 4) Unresolved viability and deliverability issues related to infrastructure provision, including multiple land ownerships.
- 5) The potential scale and pattern of growth at NWT should be informed by the specific infrastructure requirements and balanced to ensure there is the necessary scale of development to secure the developer funding for necessary infrastructure. This must not place an undue burden on the public purse.
- 6) A comprehensive master plan approach, based on Town and Country Planning Association's Garden Community principles for large scale developments will be necessary.
- 7) Any such development should also have regard to the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy and maximise biodiversity net gain on-site.
- 8) Both councils agree that NWT should only be considered for future development as part of a wider, evidence-based review in collaboration with other local authorities and key stakeholders, including the preparation of a detailed master plan.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 The potential for growth in NWT is a long term joint strategic matter which will require collaborative working between ECC and CPBC, and cross boundary working with Basildon Borough, Rochford District and other South Essex Councils and is best considered as part of future strategic planning for Greater Essex
- 10.2 NWT is complex, in a multitude of land ownerships which will take a considerable time to address in order to inform its deliverability.

10.3 Any potential solutions are likely to be far reaching and so whilst this SoCG illustrates the collaborative approach between the authorities, it does not guarantee a resolution to the challenges presented within the emerging plan. Moreover this reaffirms a commitment in principle of partners to seek to address these issues outside of the current plan making process and the willingness to consider potential solutions as and when identified.

Signed:



Date: 03/09/2025

For and on behalf of Castle Point Borough Council

Name and Position: Ian Butt – Director of Place and Communities

Signed:



Date: 12/09/2025

For and on behalf of Essex County Council

Name and Position: Graham Thomas Head of Planning & Sustainable Development
