

Steeple Bumpstead Parish Landscape Character Assessment

Prepared for: Steeple Bumpstead Parish Council

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Version Control

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1 Introduction

This Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) was commissioned by Steeple Bumpstead Parish Council and carried out by Wynne-Williams Associates, Chartered Landscape Architects. The aim of the assessment is to provide an evidence base as part of the preparation of the parish's Neighbourhood Development Plan.

The LCA seeks to define the essential landscape character features in the Parish of Steeple Bumpstead and assess how sensitive they are to changes, such as development.

The study is both a research and mapping investigation, and a field study carried out to standards set down by Natural England and The Landscape Institute. Following the gathering of baseline information, the assessment considers the sensitivity of the landscape and its value.

To establish the capacity for development in the parish, the areas adjoining the settlement boundaries have been mapped and assessed and the broad capacity for small scale housing has been considered.

This Landscape Character Assessment is an integral part of the Neighbourhood Plan and must be given weight in the planning process.

2 Landscape baseline information

Steeple Bumpstead Parish Situation and Context

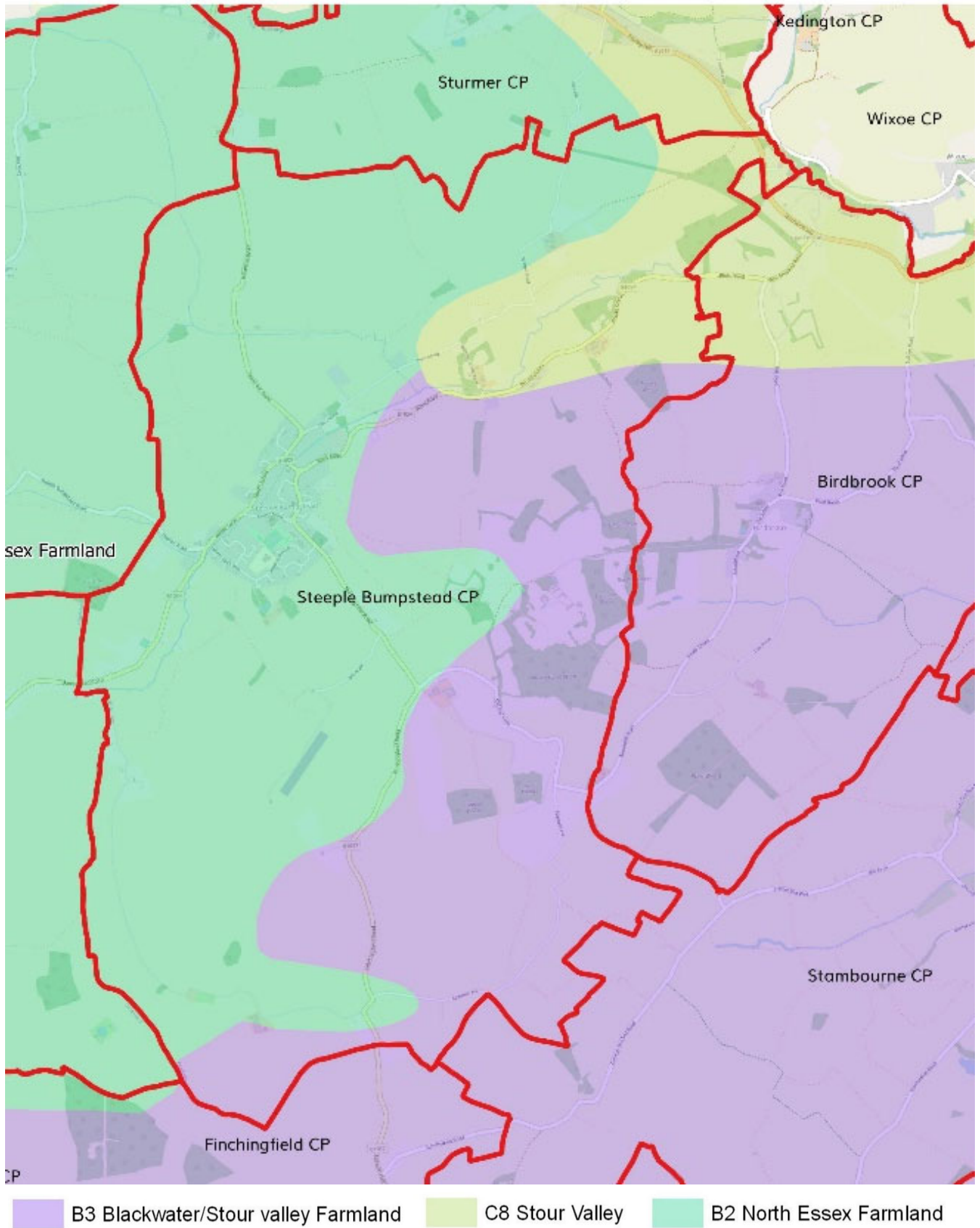
Steeple Bumpstead is a parish within Braintree District, to the northwest of the county of Essex. The district is largely rural, with the town of Braintree to the South. The town of Haverhill to the North West is closer to the parish but lies outside parish, district and county boundaries.

To gather the baseline information about the landscape of the parish, a number of published sources and studies have been reviewed. The starting point was the Essex Landscape Character Assessment (Chris Blandford Associates, 2003).

Essex Landscape Character Assessment 2003

Steeple Bumpstead Parish sits within three Essex LCA areas: North Essex Farmland area (B2, Blackwater and Stour Farmlands (B3) and Stour River Valley (C8) **[Figure 1]**. The North Essex Farmland area lies to the West of the parish and connects to the wider Essex glacial till plateau Farmland areas (B) of that cover much of NW Essex. The Blackwater and Stour Farmlands character area to the East of the Parish are on the glacial till plateau. The North East of the Parish is characterised as Stour River Valley and is the start of a narrow band of Landscape Character Area that follows the river as it runs East.

Figure 1 – Essex Landscape Character Assessment Map



North Essex Farmlands (B2)

Key characteristics described in the Essex LCA are:

- Strongly undulating landform dissected by small valleys.
- Distinctive, elevated broad flat topped ridges.
- Medium to large scale arable field pattern.
- Sense of openness and space on high ground with wide views.
- Contrasting semi-enclosed character of some valleys.
- Relatively low density of small villages, hamlets and farmsteads
- Mostly remote/tranquil character

The landscape condition as described in the Essex LCA can be summarised:

- Large scale arable landscape which is more rolling than other area of the glacial till plateau.
- The highest land has large fields forming strong bands of colour across the landscape with wide views from open roads.
- Hedgerows are often fragmented and in poor condition so occasional trees and hedgerows stand out. Woodlands are infrequent
- Small nucleated and linear villages/hamlets nestle in the valleys with only a few farmsteads on higher ground. These all tend to have traditional character in which the local vernacular of half timber and colour wash plaster, thatch and pegtile and some brick and flint dominate.
- The character of small settlements and farmsteads is good with few incongruous features

The western side of Steeple Bumpstead parish is generally characterised by its large arable fields with few hedgerows and consequent wide views. These wide views mean the area has high landscape sensitivity to; any urban development, incremental small scale developments, transport development, commercial/warehouse development, utilities development and mineral extraction.

Blackwater and Stour Farmlands (B3)

Key characteristics described in the Essex LCA are:

- Very gently undulating or flat landform.
- Large scale arable field pattern.
- Infrequent small blocks of woodland, some mature hedgerow trees on field boundaries.
- Wide views across the farmland.
- Small villages, hamlets with a wealth of historic buildings.
- Tranquil character

However some of these key characteristics are not relevant to the character of land to the South East of Steeple Bumpstead parish. This land is dominated by the 16th century Moyn's Park estate which dominates the character of the area. The estate has a priority habitat woodland pasture and parkland area, woodlands and linked hedgerows. This trees reduce the sense of openness and wide views that are typically associated with the character area. Fields are somewhat smaller and more irregular than those typical of the character area.

The Essex LCA gives a landscape character sensitivity of medium to most change issues in this character area but this is not appropriate for the areas in proximity, and with views to, Moyn's Park where the historic nature of the landscape would be highly sensitive to any development or change.

Stour River Valley (C8)

Key characteristics described in the Essex LCA are:

- Typically wide flat valley floor with floodplain meadows, riverbank willow trees and small wet woodlands.
- Gentle arable valley sides dominated by pasture and arable farmland.
- Church towers, traditional villages, farmsteads, barns and mills are distinctive features.
- Sinuous pattern of lanes and roads.
- Mostly tranquil, secluded character.

Landscape condition

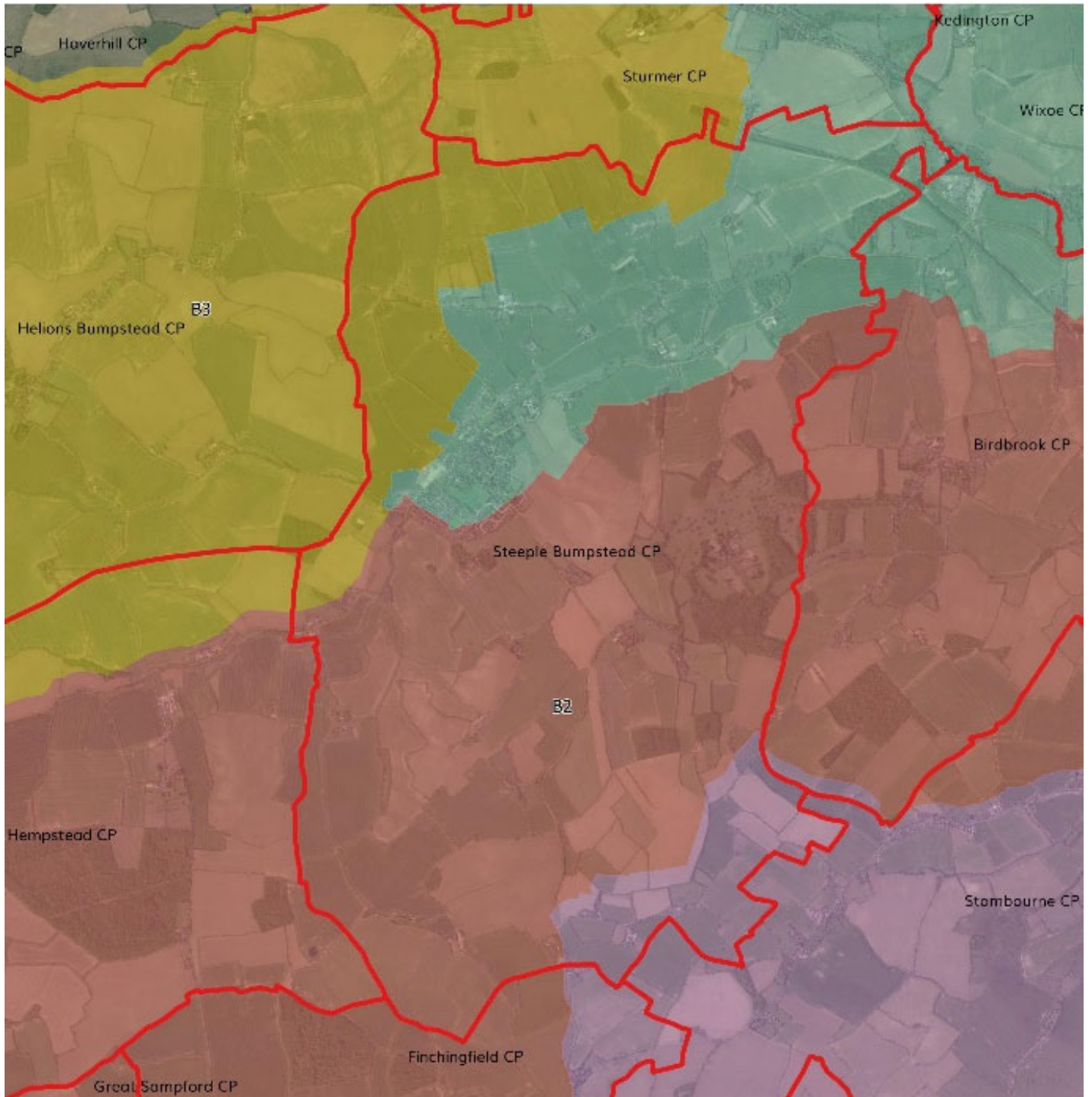
- Traditional small settlements and isolated farmsteads with limited modern development occur throughout the area
- The condition of valleyside hedgerows is somewhat fragmented.
- Hedgerowed trees are less frequent in this north west part of the Stour valley than elsewhere. The Essex LCA report notes a particular loss of characteristic elms. Small settlement condition is mostly good.

Braintree District Landscape Character Assessment 2006

Following production of the Essex LCA, the Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon and Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessment (Chris Blandford Associates, 2006) was carried out.

The parish of Steeple Bumpstead is covered by the Stour river valley character area and three farmland plateau areas, Stambourne, Hempstead and Bumpstead **[Figure 2]**. The general characteristics of each area are broadly relevant to the parish. The characteristics of all three farmland plateaus in the parish of Steeple Bumpstead have similar relevant characteristics.

Figure 2 – Braintree District Landscape Character Assessment Map



- B2 Hempstead Farmland plateau
- B3 Bumpstead Farmland plateau
- A2 Stour River Valley
- B9 Stambourne Farmland plateau

Stambourne Farmland Plateau (B9)

The Stambourne Farmland Plateau covers a very small part of the parish to the South East.

Key characteristics

The character area is summarised by key characteristics, as follows

- Relatively open gently undulating arable land.
- Predominantly agricultural land bounded by species rich hedgerows with trees and ditches.
- Narrow country lanes bounded by grass verges and ditches dissect the fields.

Sensitivity

The area has **moderate to high** sensitivity to change:

Suggested Landscape Planning Guidelines:

- Consider the visual impact of new residential development and farm buildings on the open arable landscape.
- Ensure that any new development is small-scale, responding to historic settlement pattern, landscape setting and locally distinctive building styles.

Bumpstead Farmland Plateau (B3)

The Bumpstead Farmland Plateau covers a small area of the parish to the north west.

Key characteristics

The character area is summarised by key characteristics, as follows

- Medium to large scale arable fields bounded by hedges with trees and ditches.
- Rolling hills and deep narrow valleys.
- Dissected by narrow rural lanes lined with hedges or ditches.
- Small villages, hamlets with a wealth of historic buildings.
- Tranquil character.

Sensitivity

The area has **moderate to high** sensitivity to change:

Suggested Landscape Planning Guidelines:

- Ensure new built development is in keeping with landscape character.
- Conserve panoramic views.
- Screen visual detractors, e.g. Haverhill industrial estates.

Hempstead Farmland Plateau (B2)

The Hempstead Farmland Plateau covers half the parish. It is part of a wider landscape character area that extends west into Uttlesford. In the parish of Steeple Bumpstead the Western side of the Hempstead Farmland Plateau is largely typical of the wider character area. The Eastern side, however, is not typical of the character area as it takes its character from the historic Moyn's Park Estate with large ancient trees, woodlands and hedgerows.

Key characteristics

The character area is summarised by key characteristics, as follows

- Rolling arable farmland and hills surrounding steep valleys with small streams.
- Settlements located in the valleys.
- Number of interesting and colourful vernacular buildings within small linear settlements.
- Overall strong sense of tranquillity and sense of place.
- Panoramic views in all directions.
- Key landmarks are the village churches and towers on tops of hills and Haverhill industrial estates.

Sensitivity

The area has a **high** sensitivity to change:

Suggested Landscape Planning Guidelines:

- Maintain cross-valley views and characteristic views across and into the valleys.
- Ensure any new development is small-scale, responding to historic settlement pattern, landscape setting and locally distinctive building styles.
- Develop strategies for managing and monitoring traffic on minor roads.

Stour River valley (A2)

The Stour River Valley character area encompasses almost the whole of the village of Steeple Bumpstead.

Key characteristics

The character area is summarised by key characteristics, as follows

- Gentle rounded arable valley sides.
- Valley sides dissected by tributary valleys. The valley at Steeple Bumpstead is a tributary valley of the Stour created by Bumpstead Brook and Helions Brook.
- Several small settlements are located near the top of the slope or within adjoining valleys.
- Mostly tranquil, secluded character away from the settlements.
- Sinuous pattern of lanes and roads are generally located at the edges of the valley floor and valley sides.

Sensitivity

The area has a **high** sensitivity to change:

Suggested Landscape Planning Guidelines:

- Maintain cross-valley views and characteristic views across and into the valleys.
- Ensure any new development is small-scale, responding to historic settlement pattern, landscape setting and locally distinctive building styles.
- Develop strategies for managing and monitoring traffic on minor roads.

Stour Valley Project Area

The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project Area Management Plan 2021-26 is a document produced by a partnership of organisations including the Dedham Vale AONB Team, Suffolk County Council, and six other local authorities. Its aim is to highlight the special qualities of the AONB and wider project area to aid decision makers in their duty to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape.

Although the Steeple Bumpstead Parish does not fall within the AONB designation, approximately half of the land in the north-east of the parish lies within the Stour Valley Project Area [Figure 3]. Despite not holding an AONB designation, the management plan outlines how many similar special qualities can be observed within the project area. These include:

- Outstanding collection of historic buildings and small scale villages that exhibit qualities that should be valued individually and as groups.
- Significant collection of churches whose towers create key landmarks and are often inter-visible across the Stour Valley and contribute to a quintessential English lowland scene.
- Extensive areas of valley floor pasture grazed by livestock and associated with pollarded willows high value ecosystem services and settings for historic settlements.
- Perception of a rural backwater.
- The coincidence of historic features and patterns, small church/hall complex hamlets/villages, remnant parkland, pre 18th century enclosures and small copses on the valley sides, gives rise to a tangible time.
- Notable areas of valley and valley floor with are relatively inaccessible except by foot increasing perceptions of tranquillity.
- Wooded skylines that define valleys and reduce

The statement of significance for the Stour Valley Area states:

“The Stour Valley project area is predominately an agricultural area that is a sparsely populated with most people living in village settlements that can trace their history back to the Saxon period and are listed in the Domesday Book of 1086.

The valley slopes are gentle, forming shallow valleys which sit within wider undulating farmland. The junction between valley and wider farmland is transitional and subtle, the presence of a water courses, associated wetland vegetation, and small nucleated villages/hamlets, generally distinguishing the valleys from other landscape undulations.

On the more elevated farmland above the valleys there is a high incidence of medieval moated farmhouses and small copses/blocks of ancient woodland. These features reflect the underlying clay soils found on the higher land. Despite woodland blocks, elevated farmland has a predominantly open character, affording long distance views over the shallow valleys.

The expansive views and openness perceived from higher land contrasts with that of the more intimate valleys and small settlements. The lack of major transport infrastructure gives this landscape a relative tranquillity reinforcing perceptions of a rural backwater.

The majority of the settlements have a distinctive settlement pattern with dwellings clustered around small angular greens or tyes. Medieval churches have often been built in prominent positions and knapped in flint reflecting the areas prosperity and the importance of religion during the time of construction.

Villages show a rich heritage of building styles, reflecting changing building techniques, fashions and relative wealth over the centuries of development but many retain a core of medieval timber framed buildings. Beyond the villages there are a series of isolated farmsteads and manorial halls (often moated) reflecting the areas agricultural heritage and accumulated wealth" (Page 22).

The authors of the management plan go on to explain the importance of identified qualities to the planning decision making process, "It is anticipated that where planning permission is awarded in the Stour Valley project area it will not significantly impact those defined qualities of the area that make it important to residents and visitors" (Page 17).

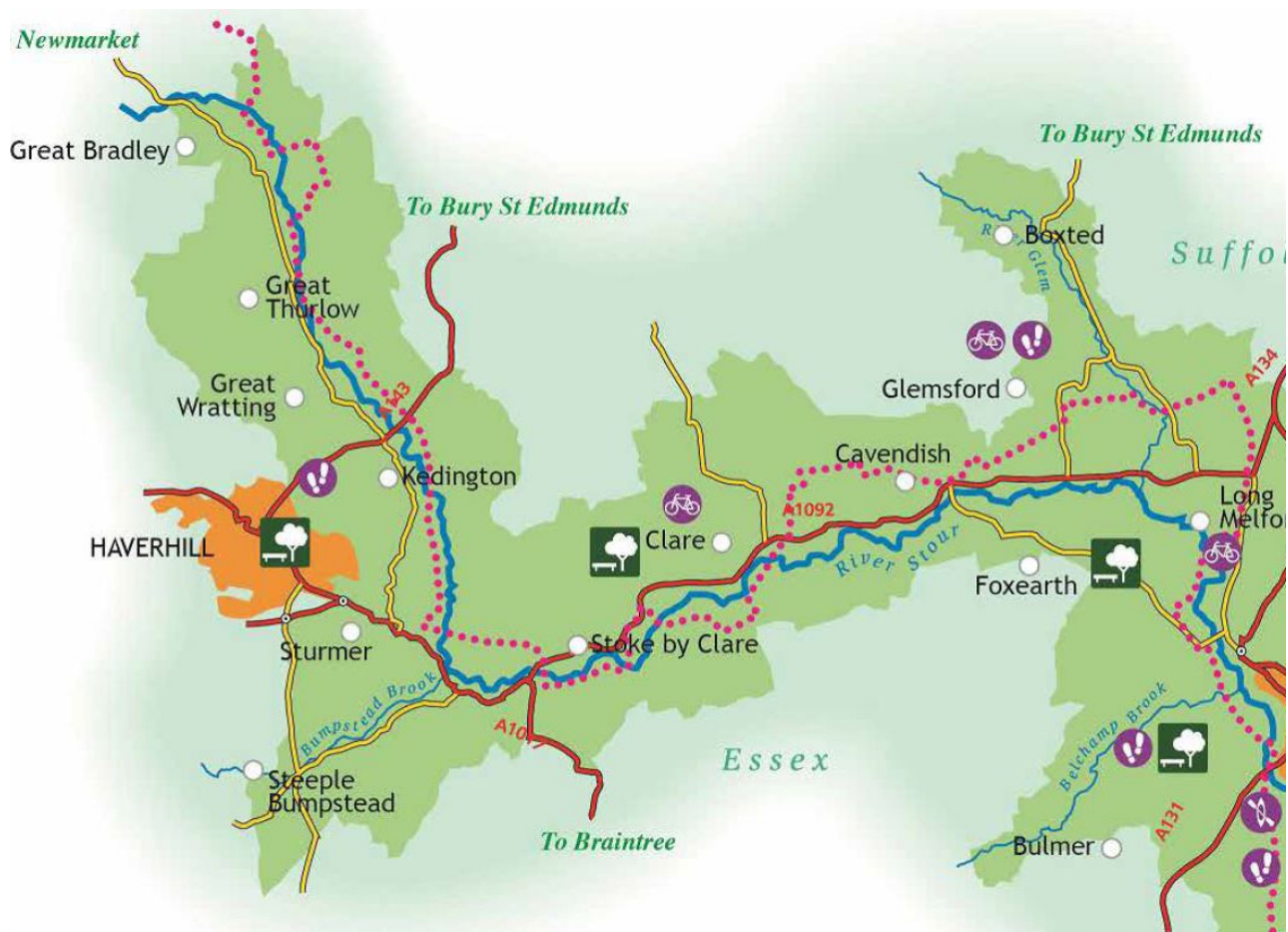


Figure 3 – Stour Valley Project Area Extract

Underlying topography and soils

The topography of the Steeple Bumpstead parish is seriously impacted by its watercourses. Bumpstead Brook and Helions Brook cross the parish, joining each other before joining the River Stour in the northeast corner of the parish.

The plan below shows the contours and landform across the parish **[Figure 4]**.

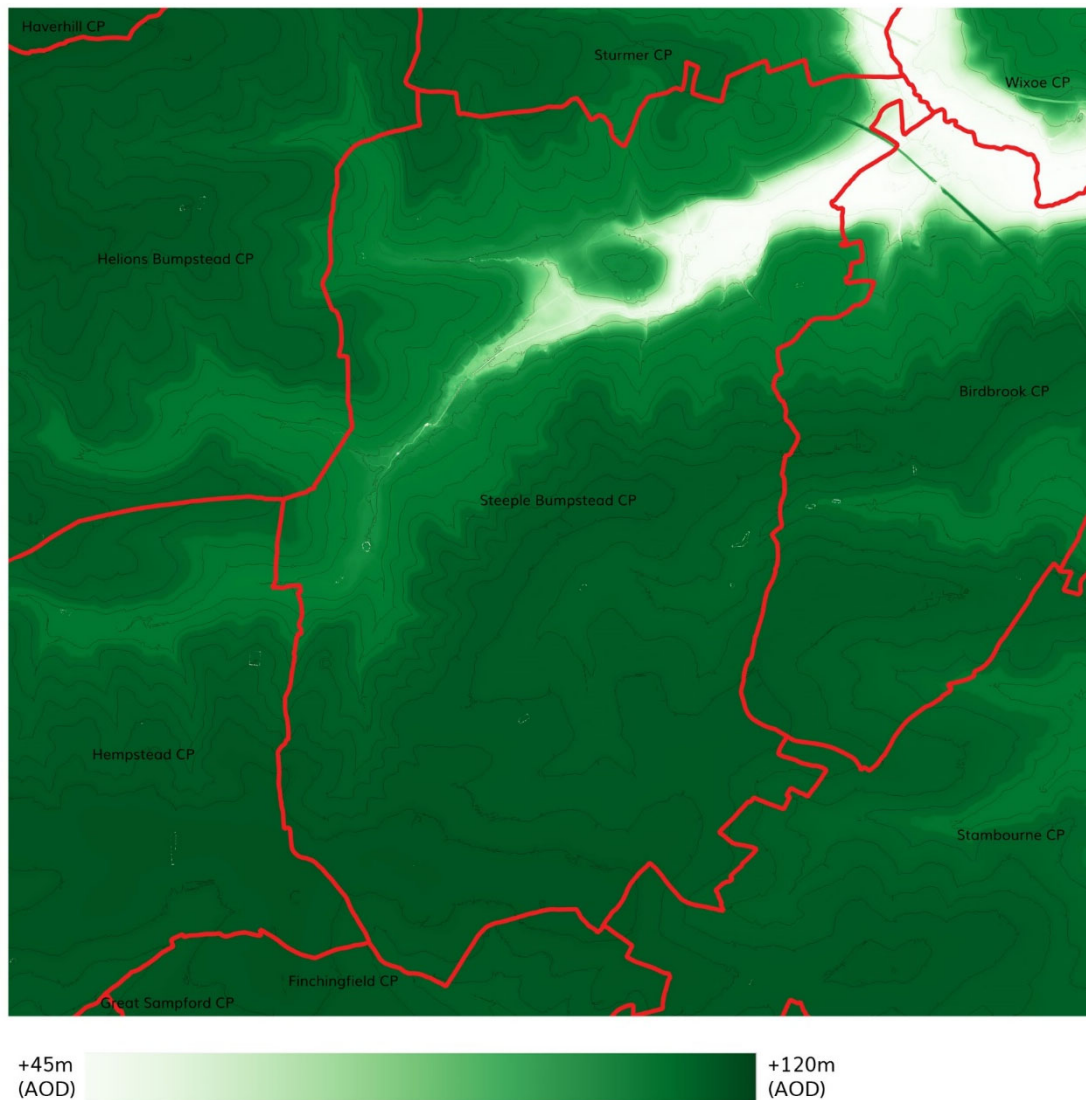


Figure 4 – Parish Topography Map

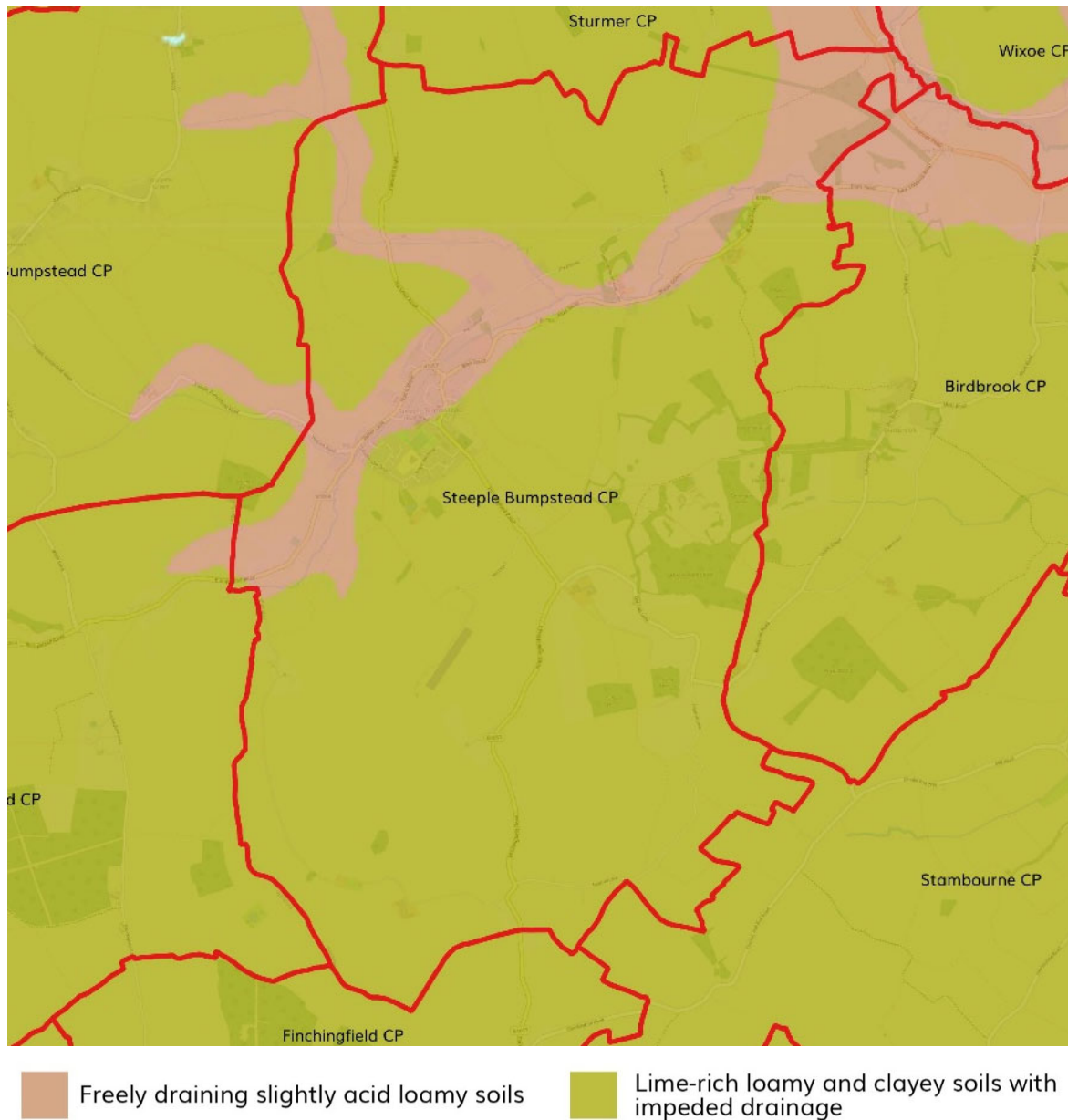
The soils in the parish are mostly lime-rich loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage.

These soils have a high fertility and support habitats such as base rich pastures, classic chalky boulder clay ancient woodlands, some wetter areas and lime-rich flush vegetation.

Areas around the river valleys are lime-rich loamy freely draining soils, and these are generally less fertile.

Refer **Figure 5**, source: soilscapes.

Figure 5 – Parish Soil Map



Historical development

Origins

Early archaeological settlement evidence is scant. There is evidence of Roman settlement in the parish, as well as a Roman Road that joined the settlements of Radwinter and Wixoe . Anglo Saxon coins have also been found evidencing early settlement. Bumstead or Bumsted is Anglo-Saxon for “place of reeds”. Archaeological surveys around the Wixoe pumping station in the far NE of the parish suggest settlement between 780-1260 and shows a well preserved, rare, historic floodplain².

The parish of Steeple Bumpstead appeared in 1086 in the Domesday book as “Bumesteda” with 78 households and was amongst the largest 20% of settlements in England¹. The land

comprised 76 acres of meadow, up to 1200 acres of ploughed fields and woodlands. It also shows a well established settlement prior to the Norman conquest.

There is archaeological evidence from the medieval period for a moated site and fishponds.

Evolution of Settlement

Steeple Bumpstead was once a clearing within the Great Forest of Essex, which stretched from the Suffolk border down to East London. Most of this forest has since been cleared but remnants of the wood survive, for example Hempstead Wood just west of the parish and in Steeple Bumpstead two smaller woodland blocks remain Old Hall Wood and Moyn's Wood.

Settlement in the parish has historically been along the Bumpstead Brook valley with evidence of Roman, medieval and post medieval settlement. There is even possible evidence of prehistoric activity.

There have been a series of small to medium size residential developments added to the village since the middle of the 20th Century. The latest of which is the Poppy Field development to the north of North Street. Historically, development within the village has stayed below the 70m AOD contour on either side of the valley.

Land Use

Some elements of historic land uses are described in the Braintree Landscape Character Assessment, with those pertinent to Steeple Bumpstead summarised and added to below:

- Evidence of historic land use within the Character Area is dominated by a mixture of pre-18th century irregular fields, probably of medieval origin and former common fields, usually enclosed in the 18th century by piecemeal agreement.
- In the valley bottom there are extensive tracts of enclosed meadow.
- Substantial pockets of woodland survive, as does the historic settlement pattern of dispersed villages focussed on greens and commons, and scattered farmsteads in an irregular field and woodland pattern.
- Settlements are described as 'largely dispersed' with church/hall complexes, isolated manors and farms, moated sites and small hamlets.
- Notable estates included Moyn's Park and Bower Hall **[Figure 7]**.
- There are two Grade I Listed buildings within the parish; Moyn's Park, a 16th Century mansion, and the Church of St Mary the Virgin situated within the main village area. There are also two scheduled monuments; Latchley's Farm moated site and fishponds located to the west side of the parish, and a dovecote at Blois Farm, north-east of the main village **[Figure 6]**.
- There are intricate lanes of ancient origins. As part of a 2013 study commissioned by Braintree District Council, four such lanes in the parish were assessed against robust criteria to determine if they met the threshold for protected lane status. Two met the threshold; Yewtree Farm Road (BTELANE64) and Eggshell Lane (BTELANE58). Steeple Bumpstead Road (BTELANE60) and Birdbrook Road

(BTELANE57) fell below the threshold. These lanes can be seen on historic maps [Figure 7].

Figure 6 – Listed Buildings and Conservation Area Map



Administration boundaries

 parish_region


Heritage Designation


 Scheduled Monuments

Listed Buildings

-  I
-  II
-  II*

Woodland Habitat

 Ancient Woodlands

 Wood Pasture and Parkland BAP Priority

Protected lanes



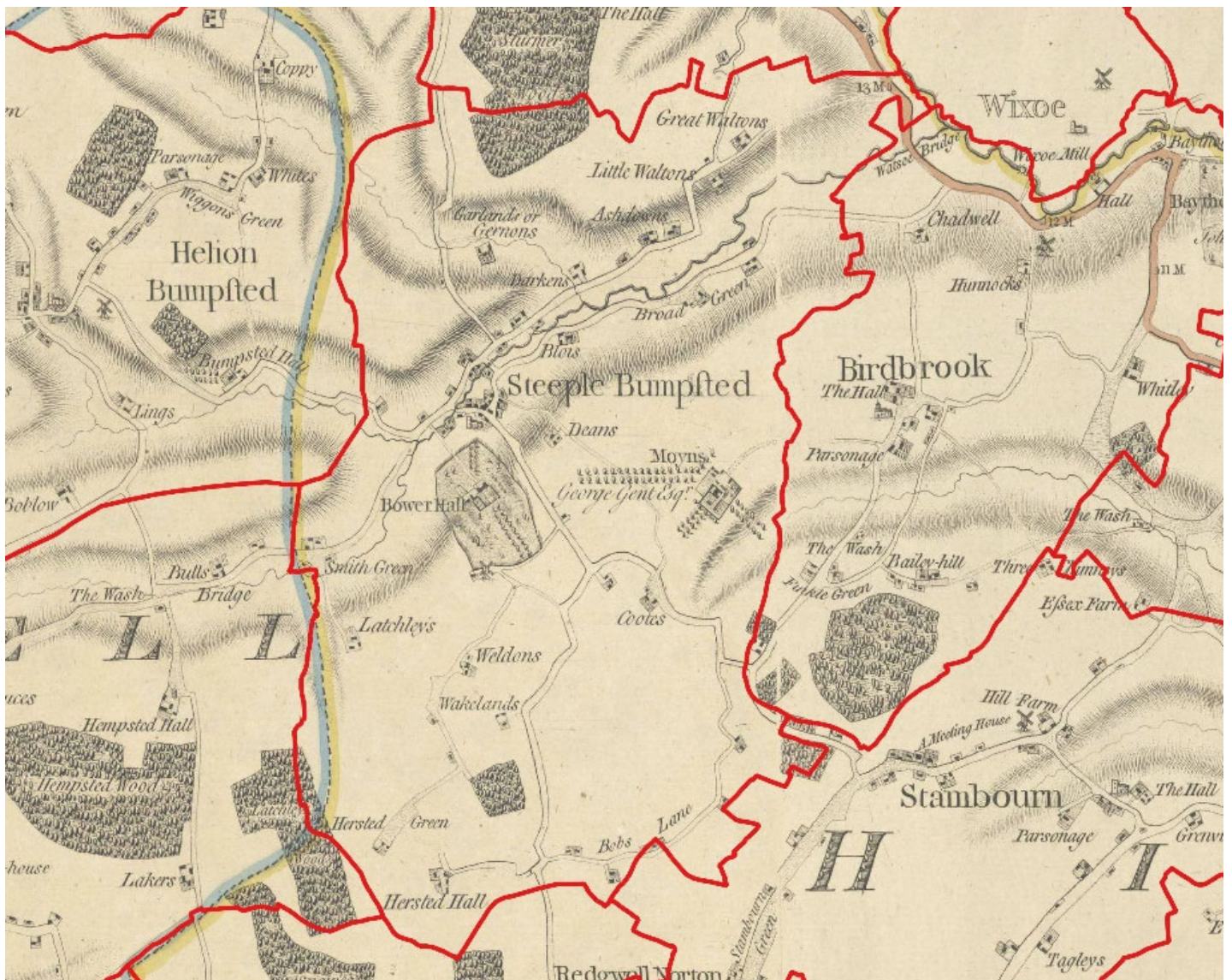
-  Protected lane
-  Assesed lane (now below threshold)

Figure 7 – Extract from Chapman & Andre Map of Essex 1777



Transport Links and Accessibility

The parish has limited connectivity to major roads. The closest A-road is the A1017, which runs in a north-west to south-east orientation, connecting Haverhill to Great Yeldham. Approximately 0.5km of the A1017 passes within the parish area, close to the far north-east boundary.

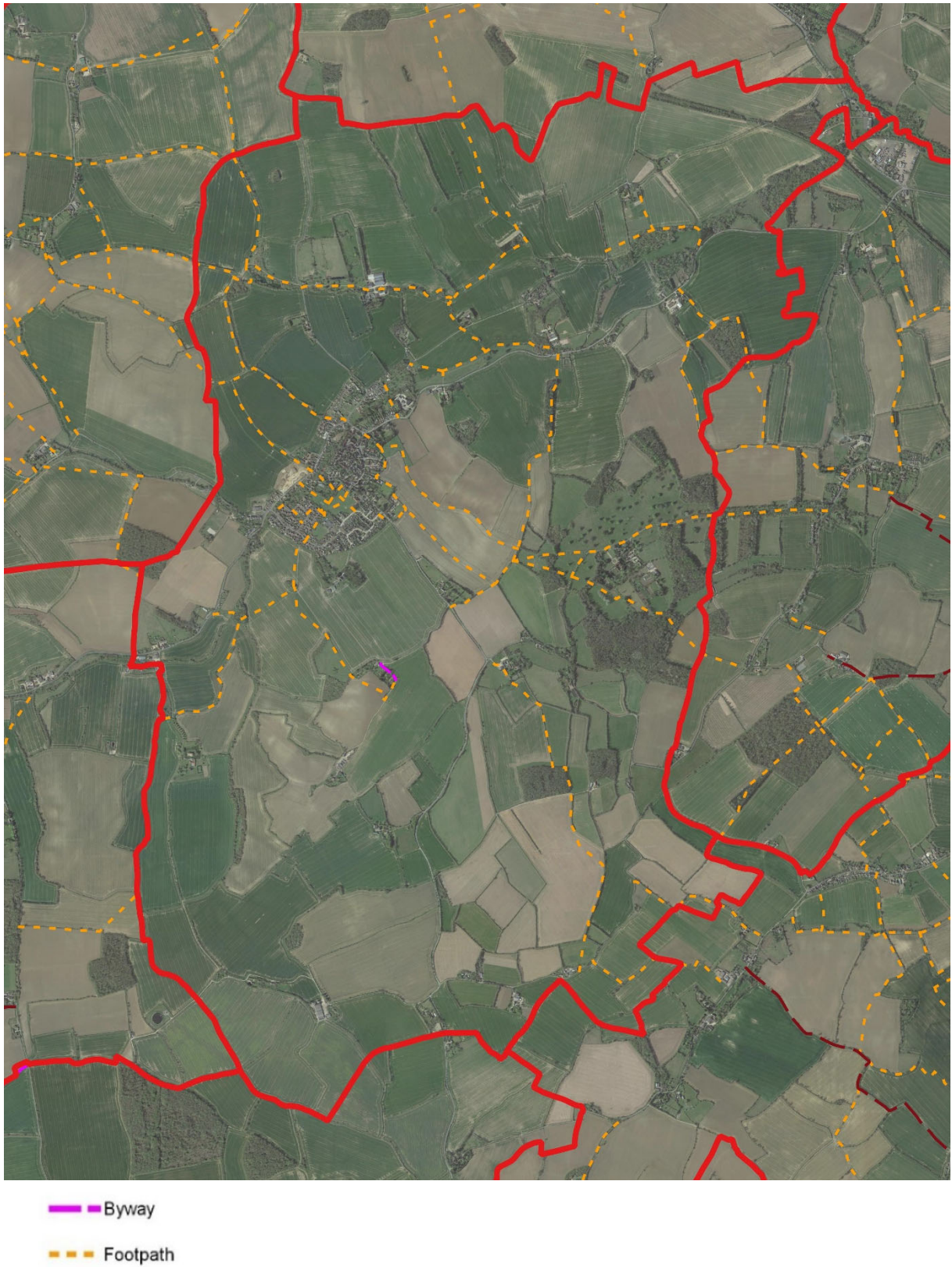
The main roads serving Steeple Bumpstead village are two B-roads; the B1054 which runs east to west (Blois Road/North Street/Water Lane) and the B1057 which runs north to south (Haverhill Road/Claywall Bridge/Chapel Street/Finchingfield road). The B-roads connect to a wider network of sinuous local lanes, providing access to more remote areas within the parish. Much of the road network appears the same as that mapped on the Chapman and Andre map of Essex 1777 [Figure 7].

The parish does not have any rail stations, with the nearest station being Audley End approximately 30 minutes' drive away. The Colne Valley Railway, a disused line, does traverse the north-east corner of the parish. This closed in 1962.

London Stansted airport is approximately a 35-minute drive to the south-west, offering connections to many international destinations.

The parish is well served by a network of local public footpaths **[Figure 8]**. However, there are no long distance paths that pass through the parish. There is a publicised walking route around Steeple Bumpstead village called 'A Guide to our Rights of Way in and Around Steeple Bumpstead'. This includes a series of key views which have helped to inform the photographic survey and key view section of this assessment. There is also an attractive riverside walk along the Bumpstead Brook, stretching from Claywall Bridge to The Crescent, along the north side of the Brook.

Figure 8 – Access in the Parish



Tranquillity

The parish can certainly be described as tranquil. There are some minor elements of noise intrusion close to the main Steeple Bumpstead village and from the local road network. However, the numerous public rights of way provide opportunities for people to experience high levels of rural tranquillity. There are no major infrastructure intrusions in the form of railways lines, although some air traffic going in to Stansted Airport is audible.

Land use

Current land use in the parish is overwhelmingly agricultural. This contains scattered pockets of woodland including Old Hall Wood and Moyn's Wood.

Settlement land use is mainly contained to the village of Steeple Bumpstead, with a small cluster of dwellings found in Smith's Green on the western edge of the parish. Other settlements include dispersed individual farmsteads.

Other than a small business park comprising a cluster of agricultural-style barn units, the Blois Meadow Business Centre, there are no other concentrations of commercial or industrial activity within the parish.

Flood risk

The Environment Agency prepare flood maps for the UK. Land is classified as being in one of three zones:

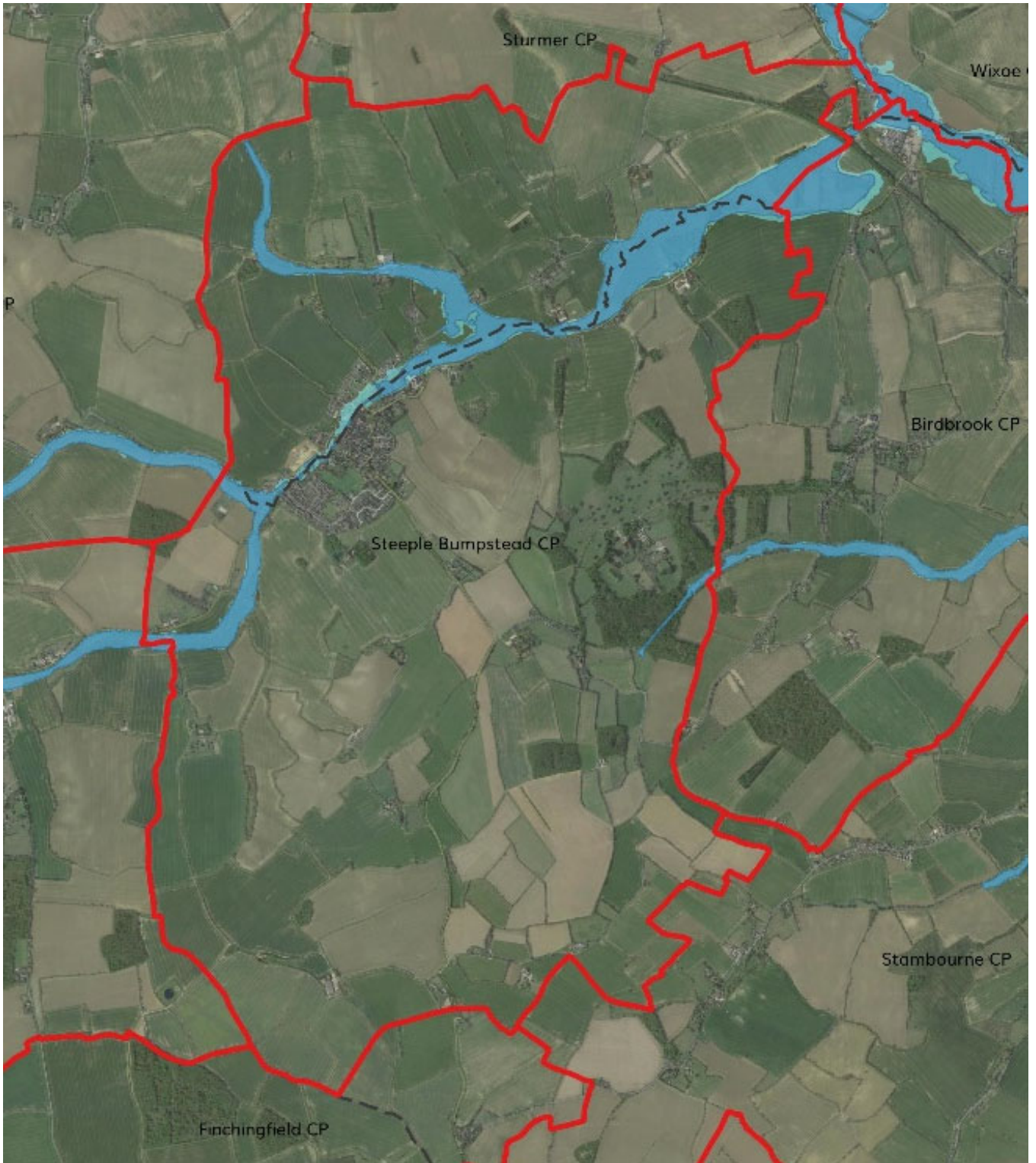
Flood Zone 1 is land assessed as having less than a 1 in 1000 annual probability of river or sea flooding.

Flood Zone 2 is land assessed as having between a 1 in 100 and 1 in 1,000 annual probability of river flooding (1% – 0.1%), or between a 1 in 200 and 1 in 1,000 annual probability of sea flooding (0.5% – 0.1%) in any year.

Flood Zone 3 is land assessed as having a 1 in 100 or greater annual probability of river flooding (>1%), or a 1 in 200 or greater annual probability of flooding from the sea (>0.5%) in any year.

The flood map for the parish indicates that Bumpstead Brook and the River Stour are classified as main rivers. The Bumpstead Brook runs from Hempstead, across the parish west to east through the centre of Steeple Bumpstead village. It is then joined by Helions Brook before joining the River Stour at the north east corner of the parish. The rivers flood with flood zones 2 and 3 along the river course. Previous regular flooding of up to 50 properties led to installation of flood defences in 2014. Current flood maps show reduced flood risk in historic areas of the village.

Figure 9 – Parish Flood Risk Map



-  Flood Zone 3
-  Flood Zone 2

Biodiversity

Biodiversity in the parish is provided by:

- The watercourses which run through the parish
- Scattered woodland, especially ancient woodlands, such as Old Hall Wood and Moyn's Wood
- A large proportion of the parkland within Moyn's Park is Wood Pasture and Parkland BAP priority habitat.
- A network of mature hedgerows
- 4 Local Wildlife Sites; Martins Farm Meadow (Bra16), Oldhall Wood (Bra19), Moyn's Park (Bra22), and Moyn's Wood (Bra25)

There are no sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) within the parish.

Combining the baseline information

Review of the baseline information shows how the character of the parish is a product of many natural and human factors. Historic land use and settlement patterns are still prevalent, with many features from the 1777 Chapman & Andre map recognisable today. The historic settlement, features, lanes, land use patterns, and ancient woodlands provide a strong historic integrity which is an important part of the landscape character. There has been some small to medium size residential development around Steeple Bumpstead village since the 1950s, but this does not override the overwhelmingly rural character of the parish.

3 Local Landscape Character Assessment

Field work was carried out between November 2022 and February 2023 to establish and record the local parish landscape characteristics.

A photographic survey was carried out to support the field work and provide examples of the most characteristic local features.

The map below illustrates the finer grain of the local landscape character **[Figure 10]**. The broad character types are based on the Braintree LCA, which provides a solid understanding of large rural areas within the parish. However, some additional character areas have been added to give more detail where necessary. This is mainly focused on the addition of character areas recognising the distinctive character of the Steeple Bumpstead historic core and outer village areas **[Figure 11]**. The Steeple Bumpstead historic core is defined by the boundaries of the Conservation Area, with the outer village delineated by the existing settlement envelope.

The Moyn's Park Estate has also been identified to hold distinctive character features from the wider Hempstead Farmland Plateau.

Figure 10 – Steeple Bumpstead Parish Landscape Character Area Map

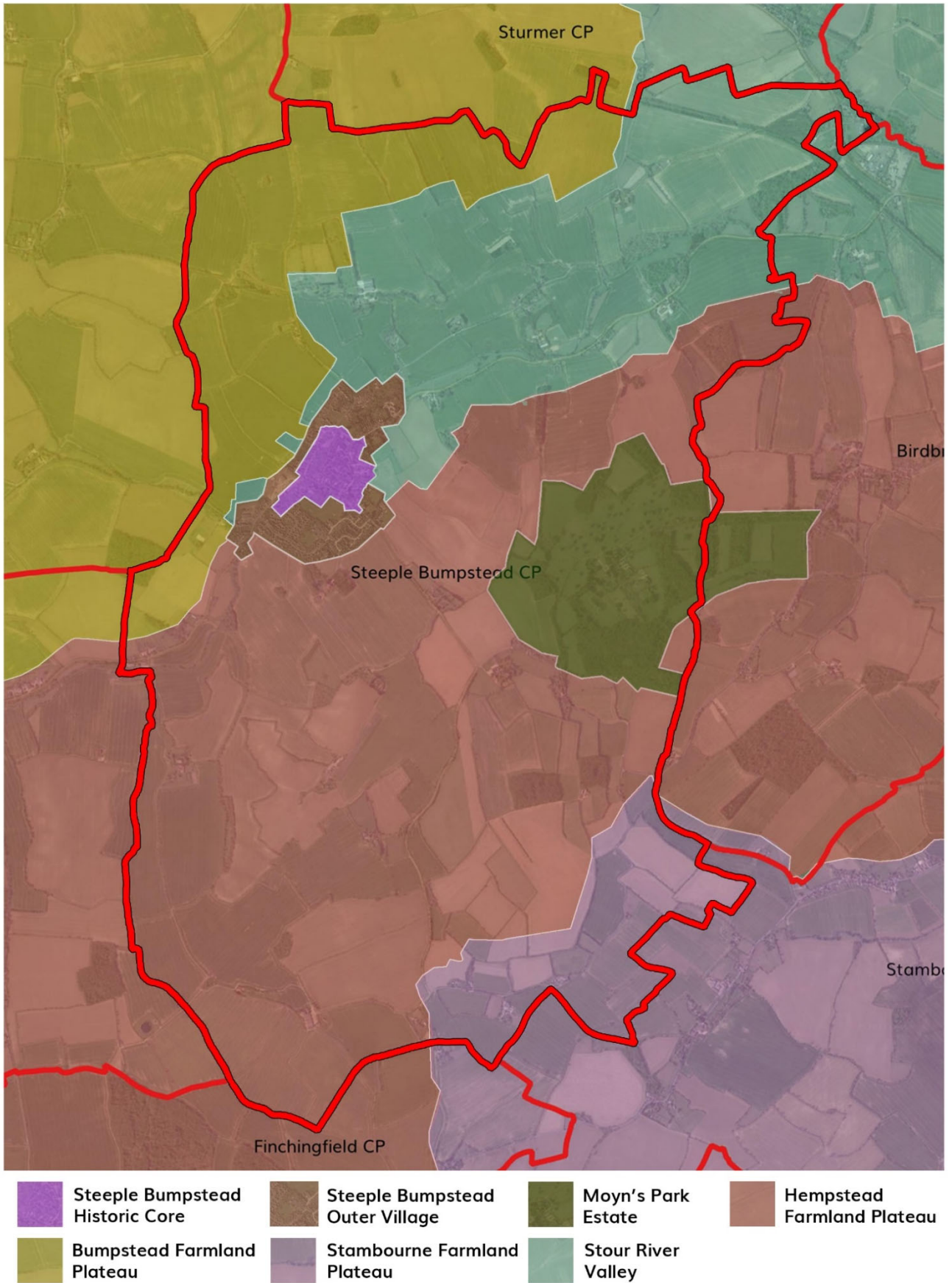
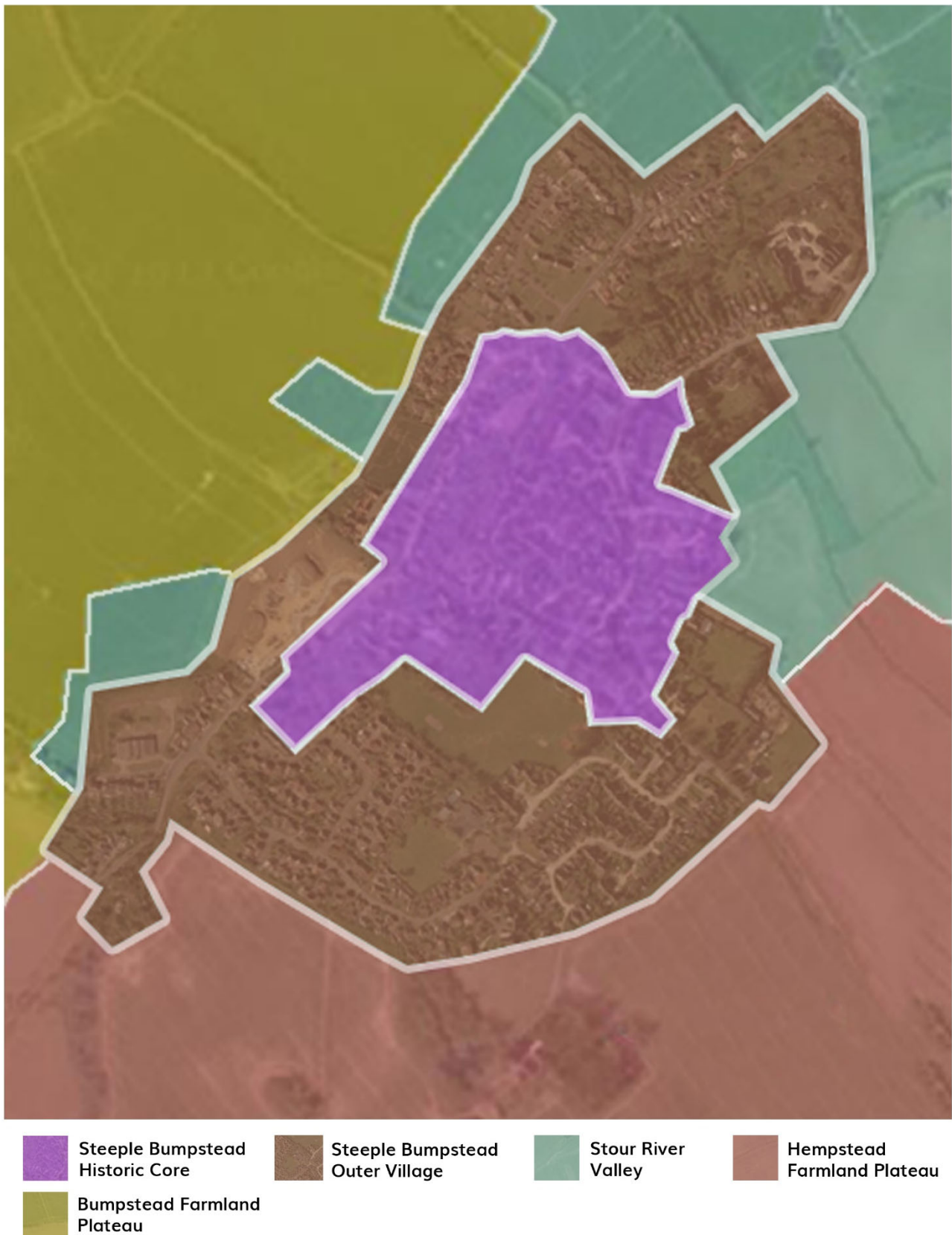


Figure 11 – Steeple Bumpstead Parish Landscape Character Area Inset



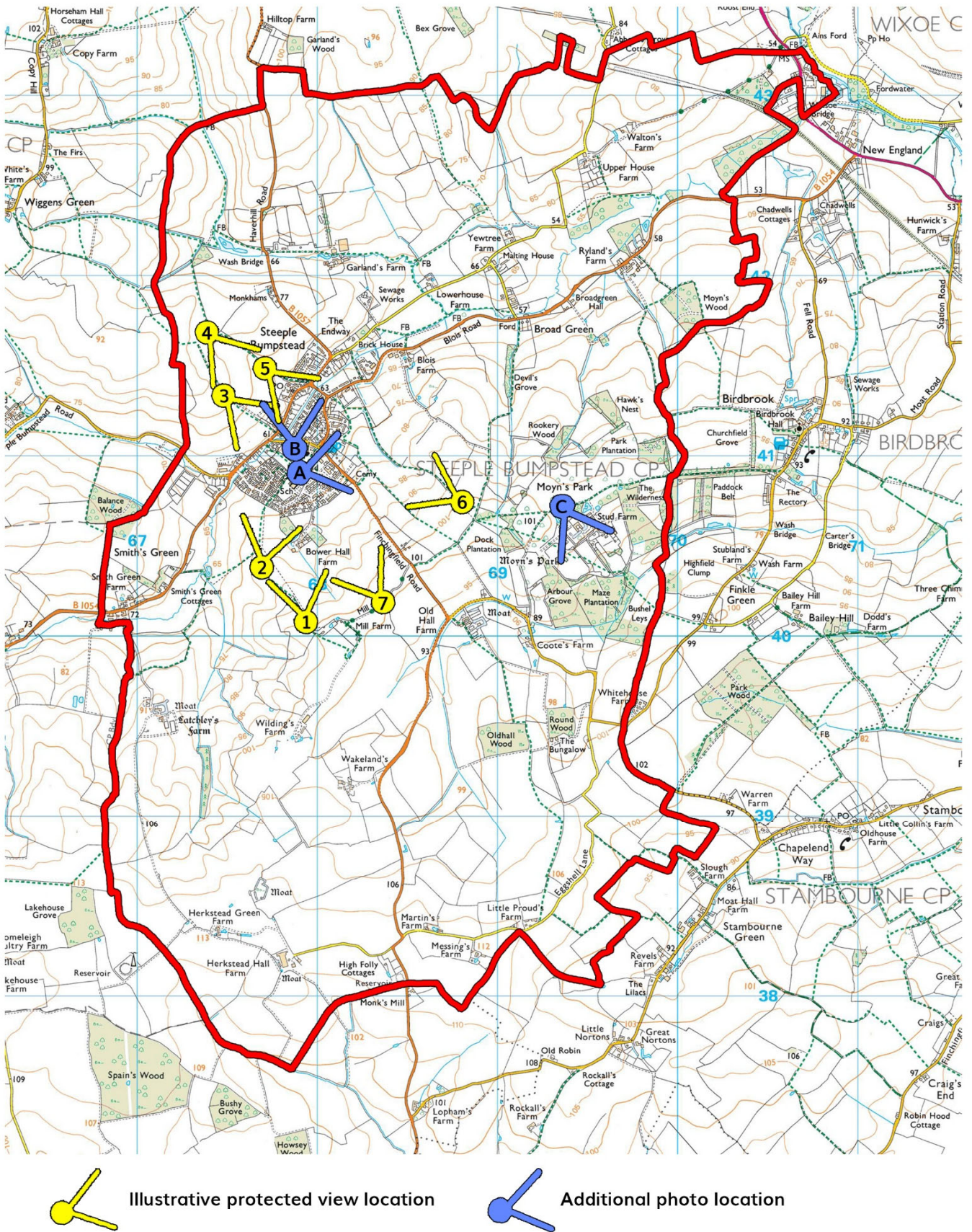
Photographic Survey and Protected Views

The photographic survey captured Protected Views which are typical of the character of the parish and which highlight specific landscape character features. The map below **[Figure 12]** shows the location and viewing direction of each Protected View, as well as locations of additional illustrative photos. However, it is important to note that some views can be experienced from multiple positions along public footpath walking routes. Although the photos attempt to illustrate important elements of Protected Views, appreciation of each view is not limited to the fixed location shown on the map.

The Protected Views display many key landscape characteristics that are integral to the setting of Steeple Bumpstead Village. The observable character is undoubtedly rural with glimpsed views to the existing village settlement nestled at the bottom of the valley. Cross-valley views are important for appreciating the surrounding topography and the scale of the landscape. Arable fields and grassland are dominant within each view, with boundary vegetation and clusters of woodland providing vertical interest.

Any development proposals that intrude on the sensitive rural setting to the village or disturb Protected Views should be considered inappropriate.

Figure 12 – Protected View and Additional Photo Viewpoint Map





Protected View 1 – Looking north towards Steeple Bumpstead village from PRow Footpath 32



Protected View 2 – Looking north towards Steeple Bumpstead village from PRow Footpath 32 closer to Bower Hall Farm



Protected View 3 – Looking south-east towards Steeple Bumpstead village from PRow Footpath 10



Protected View 4 – Looking south-east towards Steeple Bumpstead village from PRow Footpath 8



Protected View 5 – Looking south-east towards Steeple Bumpstead village from PRoW Footpath 7



Protected View 6 – Looking north-west towards Steeple Bumpstead village from PRoW Footpath 16



Protected View 7 – Looking north towards Steeple Bumpstead village from Mill Chase (lane with public access)



Additional View A - towards Steeple Bumpstead Village Hall from 'Camping Close' open green space



Additional View B - View of Grade I Listed Church of St Mary the Virgin



Additional View C - View of Grade I Listed Moyn's Park

4 Landscape sensitivity and value

Landscape sensitivity and value are terms which are used in landscape studies to assist in informing planning for change. By assessing the sensitivity and value of an existing landscape its capacity to absorb change can be measured.

Using guidance: 'Approach to Landscape Sensitivity Assessment to Inform Spatial Planning and Land Management' (Natural England, 2019), GLVIA, and LI TGN 02/21, the sensitivity and value of the parish has been assessed.

Definitions

Landscape sensitivity is defined as; the sensitivity of the *landscape resource* (in terms of both its character as a whole and the individual elements contributing to its characteristics) and the degree to which the landscape can accommodate change without adverse impacts to its character.

Visual sensitivity of the landscape is assessed in terms of a combination of factors such as views, visibility, the number and nature of people perceiving the landscape and the particular nature of the type of change in question, (Source Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity).

Landscape Value is the relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society. Landscapes may be valued by different stakeholders for a variety of reasons (GLVIA3)

Landscape value can be assessed by looking at a number of criteria – does the landscape have any national or local designations? Does it have other indicators of value such as tranquillity, remoteness, wildness, scenic beauty, cultural associations, conservation interests and consensus on value?

Assessment of the parish – Landscape sensitivity

A full sensitivity assessment of the six identified landscape character types can be found in Appendix 1. Each area was assessed for its sensitivity to potential future small-scale residential development, with varying levels of sensitivity identified. Each character area is summarised below.

Natural England's guidance 'Approach to Landscape Sensitivity Assessment to Inform Spatial Planning and Land Management' (2019) was used.

Hempstead Farmland Plateau

This area is characterised by rolling hills and valleys predominantly covered by medium scale arable fields. Small copses of woodland occasionally punctuate fields. This is the largest character area identified within the parish and is found centrally and to the south of the study area.

The landscape here is intact with very few character intrusions. It is representative of many characteristics identified by the Braintree LCA. Views are open with minimal topographic variation and some screening from existing vegetation.

The distinctly rural character of the area makes it sensitive to small-scale development. Appropriate development is likely to be limited to individual dwellings, with locations restricted to areas where there would be no intrusion on longer-distance views. The effects of any proposed development on the special qualities identified within the Stour Valley Project Area must be a key consideration.

Sensitivity: medium to high.

Bumpstead Farmland Plateau

There are similarities between the Bumpstead Farmland Plateau and the Hempstead Farmland Plateau. This area is also characterised by rolling hills and valleys predominantly covered by medium scale arable fields. However, the Bumpstead Farmland Plateau, found to the north-west of the parish, is more locally influenced by sloping valley topography.

The character area representative of many characteristics identified by the Braintree LCA, with many features intact and minimal intrusions. It is also overwhelmingly rural in nature.

The sloping valley topography makes many parts of this character area visually open and highly sensitive to small-scale residential development. It is also part of the highly sensitive Stour Valley Project Area. Once again, appropriate development is likely to be limited to individual dwellings, with careful consideration of wider effects on the Stour Valley Project Area needed.

Sensitivity: medium to high.

Stambourne Farmland Plateau

The Stambourne Farmland plateau includes gently undulating arable land, forming a small part of the parish in the south-east. Land use remains unchanged from historic maps and is predominantly arable agriculture, with settlement limited to very few individual farmsteads.

This relatively flat rural landscape provides open long-distance views, punctuated by field boundary vegetation and small clusters of trees.

The open views and lack of existing development within this character area restrict the opportunities for small-scale residential development. Therefore, proposals larger than single dwellings are not likely to be appropriate.

Sensitivity: medium to high.

Stour River Valley

This character area is a shallow river valley with sloping sides. The stream running through the parish is known locally as the Bumpstead Brook. The stream banks are open in places, with some areas of adjacent vegetation. Valley slopes are shallow enough to support arable farming, defined by hedgerows and hedgerow trees.

The landscape is very representative of the features identified within the Braintree LCA, with less intrusion from existing settlement when compared to other parts of the character area in the wider district.

The sloping valley topography restricts wider views to some extent and offer a sense of enclosure in places. Views do open up on higher land and longer views across the valley are possible.

Proposed development would need to highly considerate towards the special qualities of the Stour Valley Project Area readily appreciable within this character area. It is therefore unlikely that proposals larger than a single dwelling would be appropriate without harming the sensitive landscape character.

Sensitivity: high.

Steeple Bumpstead Historic Core

The Steeple Bumpstead historic core centres around the village conservation area. Much of the historic core follows the building pattern shown on historic maps. Some infill development has taken place within and directly adjacent to the core, but this has not undermined the historic character.

Visual enclosure is provided by the clustered buildings. Mature trees and landmark buildings such as St Marys Church dominate the skyline.

There are unlikely to be many opportunities for appropriate development within the conservation area. There may be opportunities for single dwellings, however these would need to be very carefully considered to ensure that there were no negative effects to the historic core. Quality and materials would be crucial to mitigate effects.

Sensitivity: high.

Steeple Bumpstead Outer Village

Surrounding the historic core, some residential development in the outer village displays a more contemporary sinuous pattern than within the conservation area. Village boundaries are defined by private gardens.

The outer village is in fair condition with well-kept private gardens adding visual amenity, but the area does not hold many uniquely distinctive features. Visual enclosure is provided by the existing buildings. The permeable nature of development and surrounding valley slopes offer views to agricultural fields and associated hedgerows beyond.

There may be some opportunities for small-scale residential development within this character area. Therefore, mitigation of visual effects will be an important consideration. Mitigating visual effects of small-scale residential development can be achieved through a combination of measures. Selecting appropriate sites in locations that do not interrupt open and long-distance views or views to the historic core is key. Linear and clustered screening tree planting would reduce visual disturbance to skylines and would reflect existing vegetation pattern. Proposed development would need to be limited to very small groups of houses or individual plots to be in keeping with existing character.

Sensitivity: medium.

Moyn's Park Estate

Distinct from the surrounding landscape, Moyn's Park is a grand estate consisting of open parkland, large clusters of woodland, arable fields, and stud farming. It is located to the east of the parish.

Areas of open parkland and fields away from woodland on the edge of the estate provide open views to a large-scale landscape. Other parts of the estate are small-scale and intimate. The landscape is representative of historic parkland found in other parts of the Braintree district.

Opportunities for development are very limited within the estate due to the sensitivity of the heritage asset.

Sensitivity: high.

Landscape Value

Landscape value of the parish has been assessed using the method described in GLVIA and LI Technical Guidance Note 02/21. A full assessment can be found in Appendix 2.

The parish holds significant landscape value. Specific designations include scheduled ancient monuments, ancient woodlands, protected lanes, a conservation area, as well as a range of listed buildings and features.

Aside from designations, much of the value is experiential within the more tranquil areas with open skies, mature vegetation and historic lanes. The network of public rights of way is strong and allows good access to enjoy the landscape.

Long-standing land use patterns, the Moyn's Park Estate, lanes, ancient woodlands and historic buildings offer strong continuity with the past and deepen the sense of historic character. This is something that should be conserved.

It is also important to note that as part of a Public Inquiry relating to an appeal against planning refusal for housing to the south of Steeple Bumpstead village, Inspector Gregory stated, "the site has a high landscape value to which I attribute substantial weight. Having considered all its characteristics and the inclusion of the site within the Stour Valley Project Area, I conclude that it is a valued landscape". The Inspector went further to confirm " I have identified that the appeal site should be regarded as part of a valued landscape". This suggests that the appeal site and surroundings should all be considered to be a valued landscape. Although the Inspector did not set a clear geographic extent to their judgement, many of the valued characteristics that were highlighted can be observed across large parts of the parish.

5 Summary and Conclusion

This Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) was commissioned by Steeple Bumpstead Parish Council and carried out by Wynne-Williams Associates, Chartered Landscape Architects. The aim of the assessment was to provide an evidence base as part of the preparation of the parish's Neighbourhood Development Plan. The LCA seeks to define the essential landscape character features in the Parish of Steeple Bumpstead and assess how sensitive they are to changes, such as small-scale residential development. This Landscape Character Assessment is an integral part of the Neighbourhood Plan and must be given weight in the planning process.

The report contains a detailed baseline study of the area, with necessary references to adopted precedent studies including the Braintree District Landscape Character Assessment (2006). Considerable attention is paid to the special qualities identified within the Stour Valley Project Area, which covers a sizable area of the parish. Further specific detail relating to the physical and cultural features of the landscape has been provided.

A photographic survey of the parish was carried out, with a series of important views identified for protection. The Protected Views display many key landscape characteristics that are integral to the setting of Steeple Bumpstead Village. The observable character is undoubtedly rural with glimpsed views to the existing village settlement nestled at the bottom of the valley.

Building on the Braintree LCA, this report provides a finer grained assessment of the landscape character areas found within the parish. Three additional character areas were identified. The defining characteristics of each character area have been identified, with a detailed sensitivity assessment also provided for each. In addition, a landscape value assessment of the parish has been included.

After considering the existing landscape character, value, and sensitivity, recommendations on the scale and appropriateness of future residential development have been provided. For many of the identified character areas, it is unlikely that proposals larger than a single dwelling would be appropriate without harming the sensitive landscape. Proximity to the village conservation area and the special qualities of the Stour Valley Project Area are key considerations for any future proposals. Any proposals that intrude on the sensitive rural setting to the village or disturb Protected Views should be considered inappropriate.

6 References

1. <https://opendomesday.org/place/TL6741/steeple-bumpstead/>
2. <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archsearch/record?titleId=2589343>