



Biodiversity net gain

Martins Farm and Mersea Field 2024 and beyond

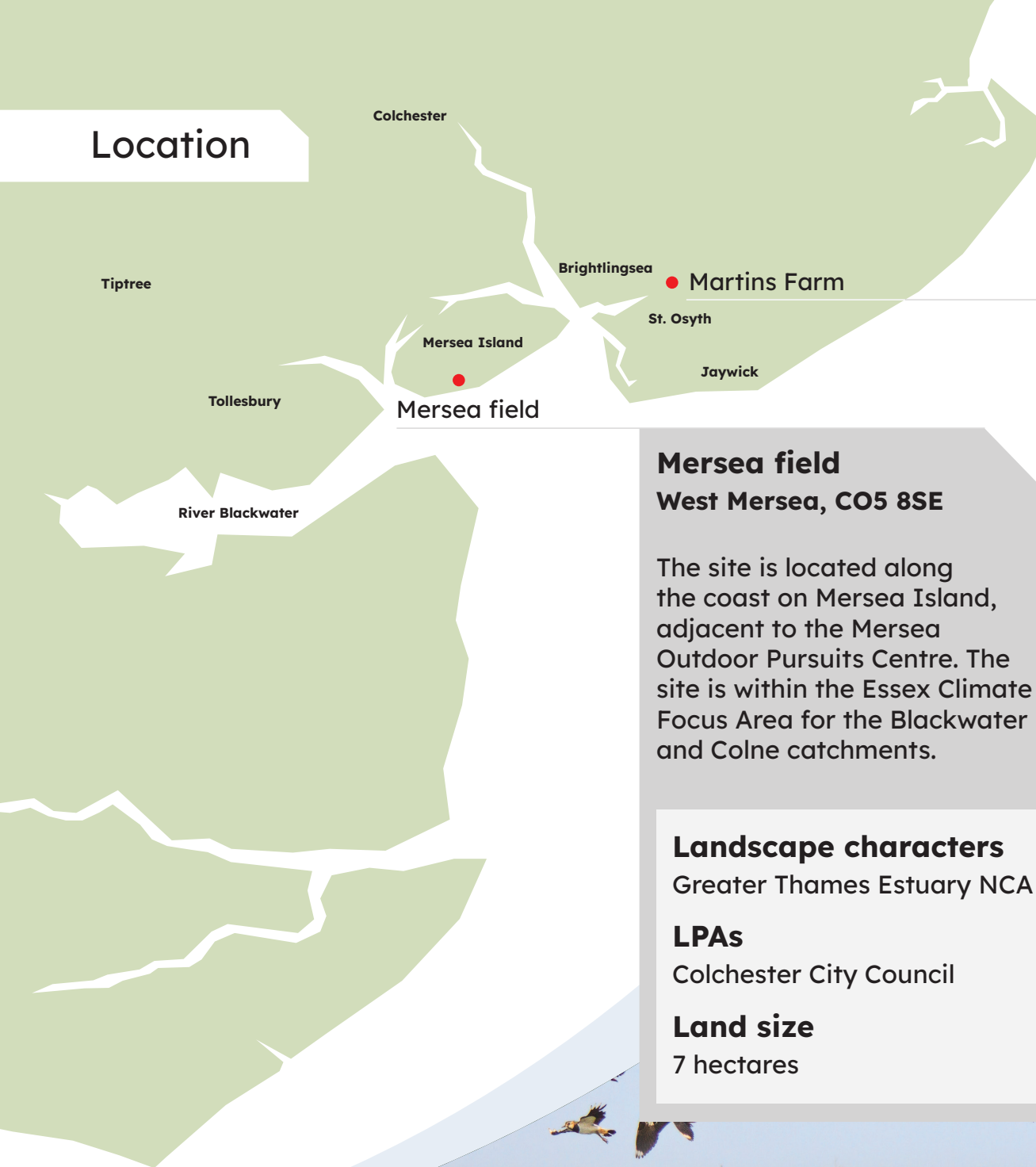
Intro to BNG

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is an approach to development that aims to ensure that habitats for wildlife are left in a better state than before the development. Whenever the uplift of minimum 10% cannot be achieved on site, developers have the option to purchase off-site BNG units. BNG is mandatory from 12 February 2024.

As part of our drive for nature recovery, Essex County Council is creating two BNG habitats with the aim to provide ecological, climate and social benefits. Both sites are Essex County Council-owned and the sites' management plans have been developed by an in-house team. Both sites are within locally important areas.



Location



Mersea field

West Mersea, CO5 8SE

The site is located along the coast on Mersea Island, adjacent to the Mersea Outdoor Pursuits Centre. The site is within the Essex Climate Focus Area for the Blackwater and Colne catchments.

Landscape characters

Greater Thames Estuary NCA

LPAs

Colchester City Council

Land size

7 hectares

Martins Farm

St. Osyth, CO16 8HN

The site is a restored landfill site, located near St, Osyth, Clacton-on-Sea. The site is within the Essex Climate Focus Area for the Blackwater and Colne catchments.

Landscape characters

North Thames Basin NCA

LPAs

Tendring District Council

Land size

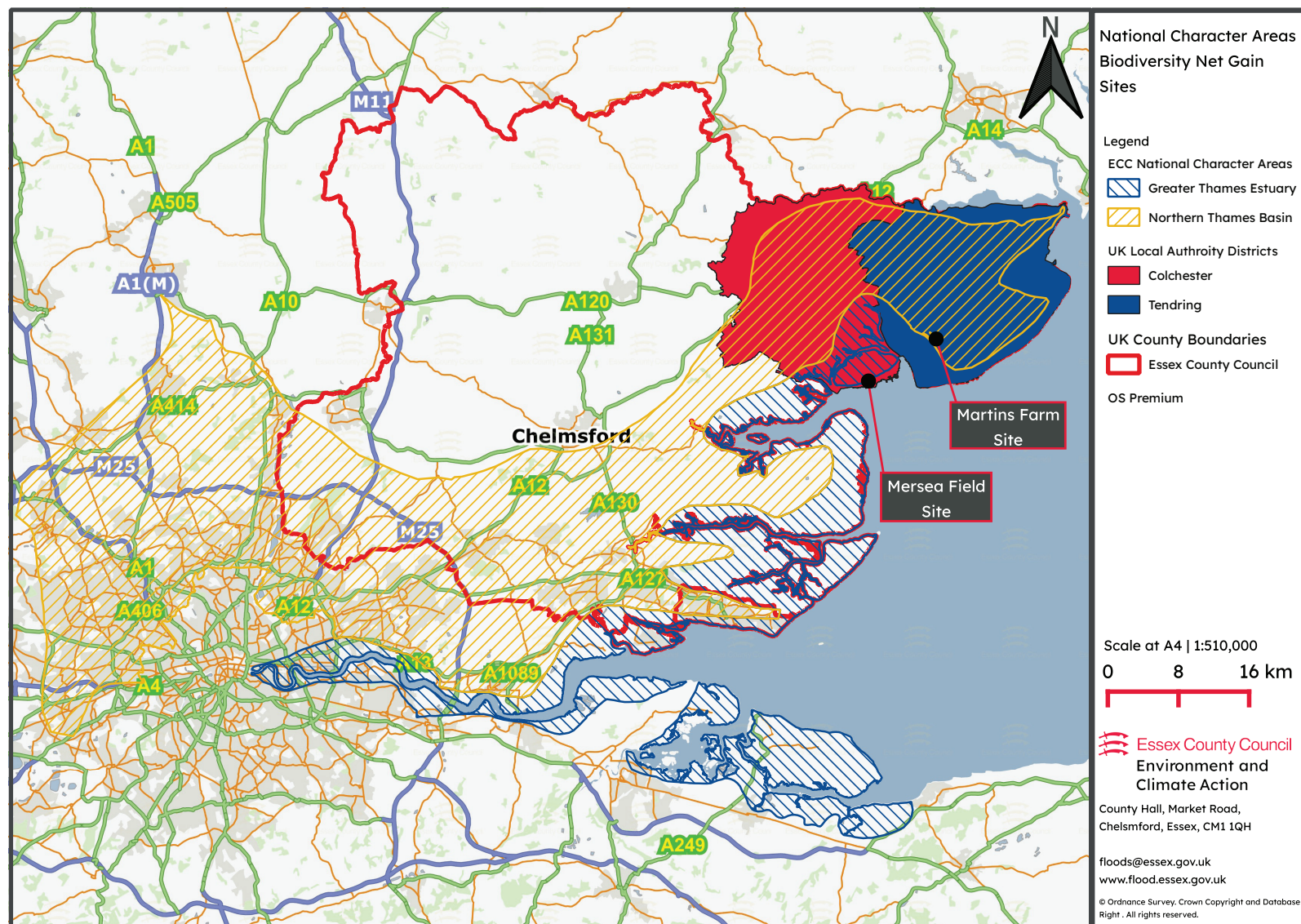
9 hectares



Map 1. National Character Areas

The map shows the national character areas the sites are located in as well as the boundaries of Essex and the boundaries of Colchester and Tendring.

The sites are located in the Greater Thames Estuary National Character Area and the Northern Thames Basin National Character Area.



Current use and baseline habitats

Martins Farm

Martins Farm is a closed landfill site restored to grassland and scrub, with public access for the local community. The baseline habitat is 'other neutral grassland' in 'poor' condition and 'mixed scrub' in 'poor' condition. The project area consists of 10.39 ha of grassland and 1.9 ha of scrub.

Mersea Field

The field has been managed as arable land by a tenant farmer in recent years, so the baseline habitat is 'cropland'. The project area is 7.8ha in extent. A public footpath runs along the eastern edge of the field.

Habitat creation

Martins Farm

The condition of the grassland habitat will be enhanced to 'good' condition by changing the mowing regime to improve structural diversity and increase species diversity, with additional measures to introduce a wider range of flowering plants appropriate to the habitat and the location. Blocks of scrub will be thinned to create more structural diversity and edge habitat, improving their condition to 'good'.

Mersea Field

We are creating 7.1ha of 'other neutral grassland' in 'good' condition' together with 0.7ha of 'mixed scrub' and 630m of new hedgerow. The scrub will form wide margins to the field and isolated patches within it. The aim is to encourage farmland birds such as Turtle Dove, Corn Bunting and Yellowhammer.

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Land management

Mersea field

Ongoing management of the site will be by low intensity cattle grazing to encourage floristic and structural diversity. Scrub will be managed on a rotational basis to maintain an appropriate diversity of structure, including good edge habitat and tall, thick sections suitable for birds to nest in. This will be set out in a 30-year Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan, to include regular surveys to assess condition and make any adjustments to management that are necessary.

Martins farm

Ongoing management of the site will involve maintaining floristic and structural diversity in the grassland and scrub habitats in accordance with an agreed 30-year Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan. This will include regular surveys to monitor the condition of habitats and to adjust the grass mowing regime where necessary to achieve maintain the uplift in biodiversity.

Biodiversity units

Martins Farm generates 60 Habitat Units

Mersea Field generates 46 Habitat Units and five Hedgerow Units.

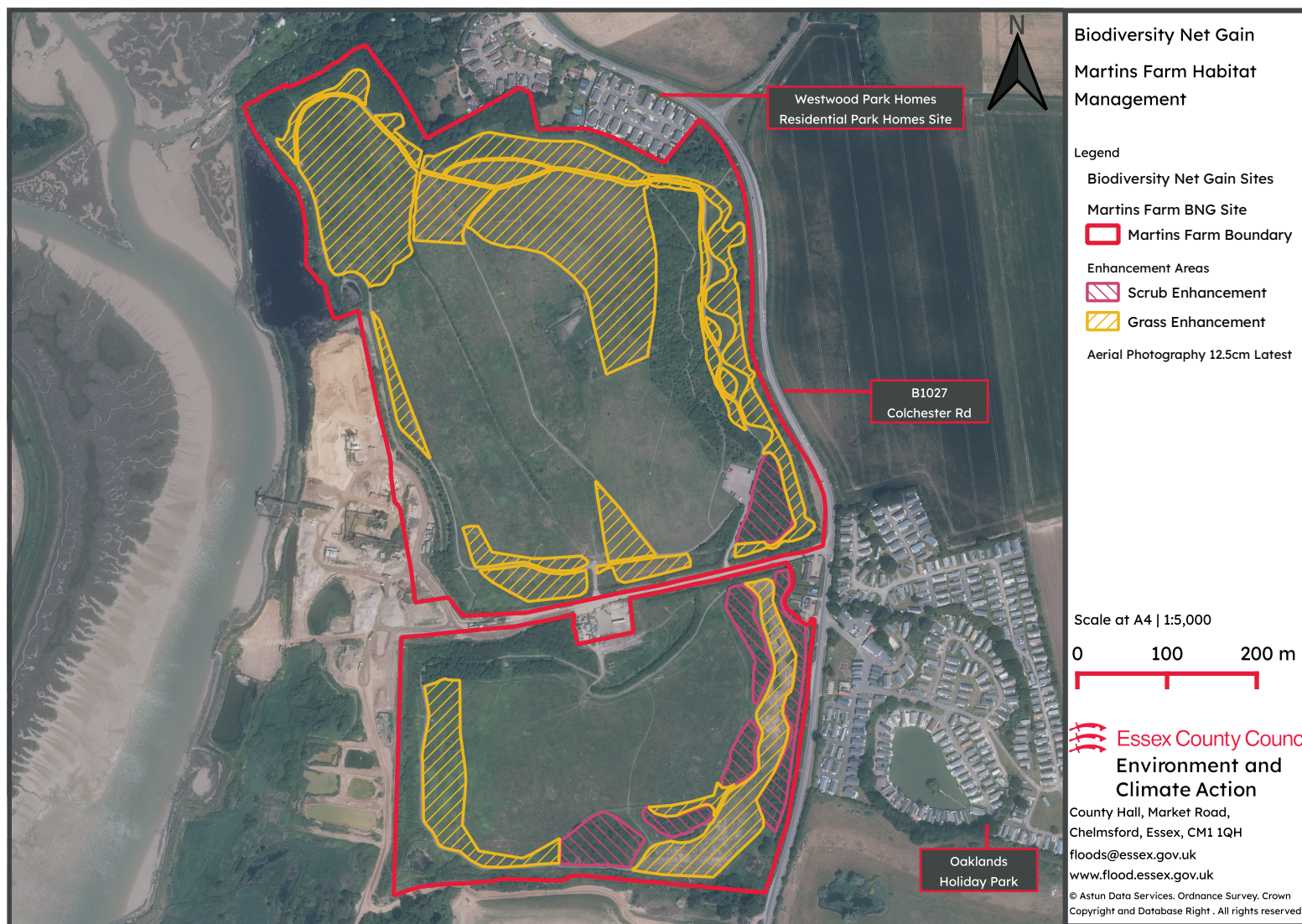
Map 2. Martins Farm Habitat Management

The areas of grassland identified for enhancement are those showing limited floristic diversity and currently receive several cuts during the year.

Where there is existing public use, this will be accommodated by retaining the current amenity management, with more frequent cutting.

Over the first five years, different sections of the grassland habitat will be enhanced floristically by scarifying the ground and seeding in target plant species appropriate to the location.

Paths and patches will be cut during the summer months to provide a variety of sward huts, while also continuing to encourage public use of the site.



Map 3. Mersea Field Habitat Creation






At the Mersea Field site, arable land will be converted to moderately species-rich grassland with broad scrubby borders and hedgerows, as well as isolated patches of scrub. Once established it will be managed by low intensity grazing with cattle to create a varied sward. With adjoining agricultural land, it will provide a more traditional mix of arable and pasture. The site slopes down to the shore, and the southernmost section will be allowed to regenerate naturally to provide a transition from marine to terrestrial habitats.



This information is issued by:
Environment and Climate Action

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