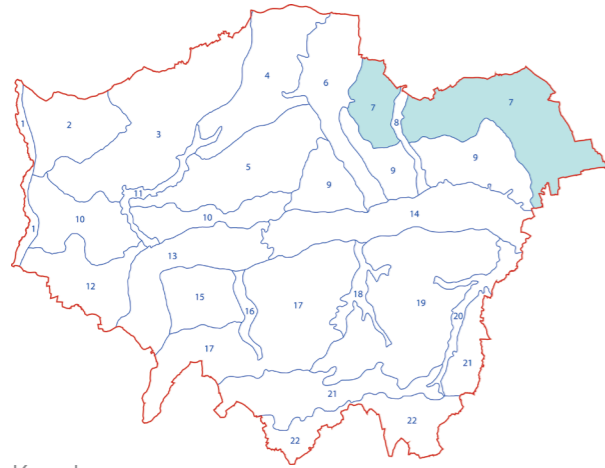
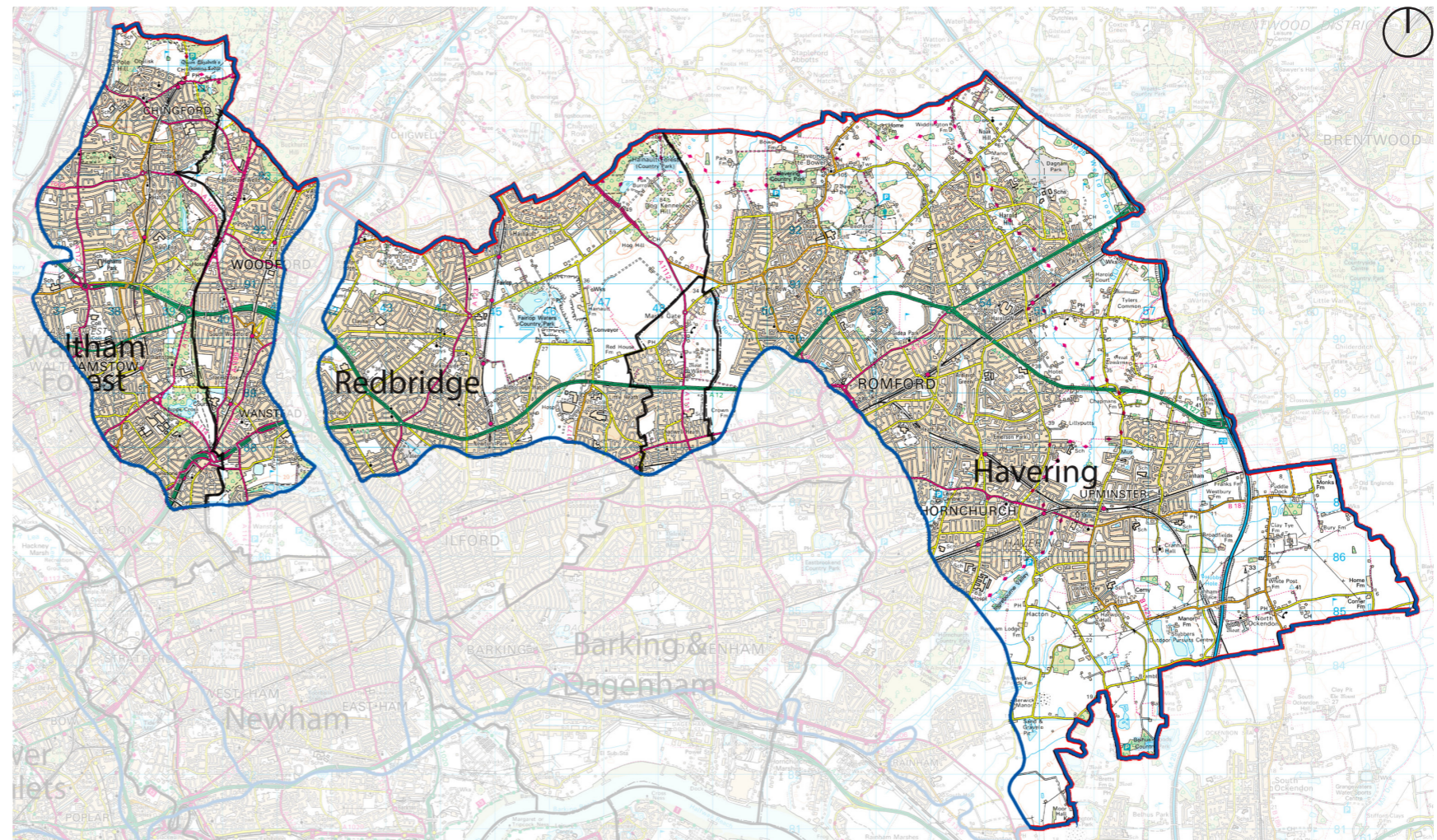


7. Essex Plateau



Key plan



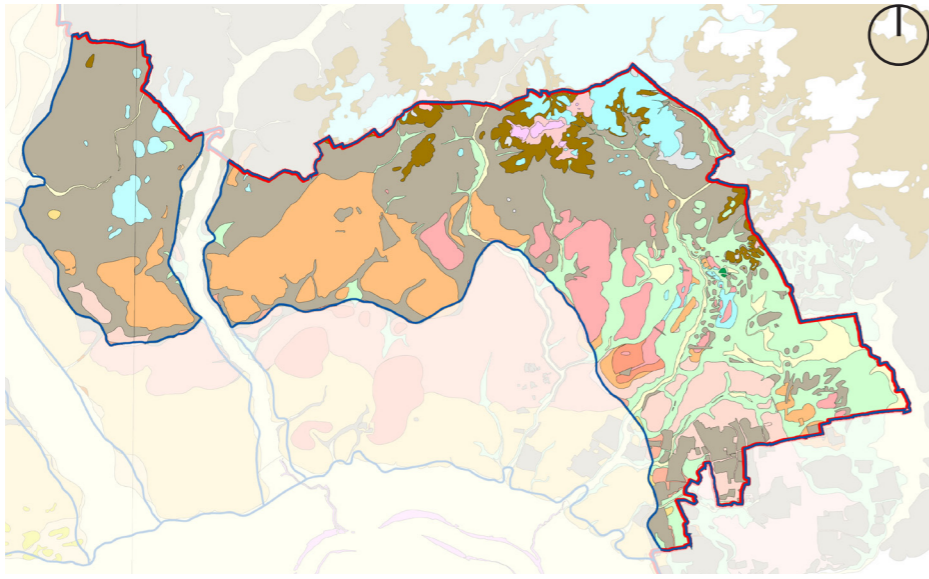
7. Essex Plateau

Description

The Essex Plateau, as its name suggests, represents the southern edge of the more extensive deposits of Bagshot Sands and Claygate Member which characterise the southern part of Essex. It extends from the Lea Valley in the west to Romford and Upminster in the east and is bisected by the River Roding (NLA 8), as well as the smaller rivers Rom, Beam and Ingrebourne. The majority of the Bagshot Sands and Claygate Member deposits survive between the Rivers Lea and Roding, where they form a notable ridge (90 m AOD) overlooking the Lea, and along the north-eastern boundary, where the land climbs fairly sharply from 20m AOD at Romford to 70m AOD at Harold Hill. Elsewhere, the underlying geology is London Clay and the topography is a relatively gentle slope from south to north. There are extensive areas of gravel quarrying between Barkingside and Romford.

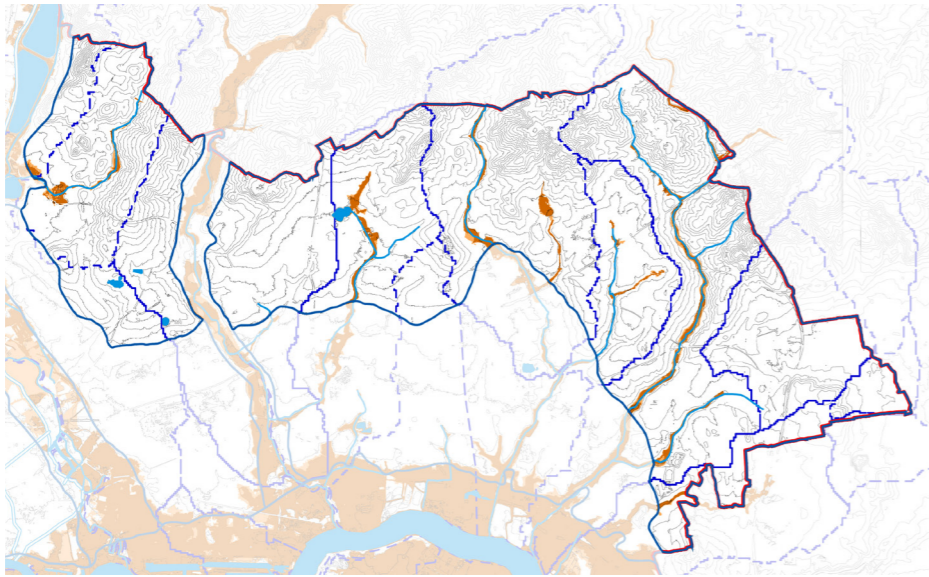
Although there are areas of free-draining deep loam, generally overlying the Bagshot Sands, the majority of soils are seasonally wet clays and loams, making the area generally unsuited to early settlement or agriculture, hence the existence of major areas of royal hunting forests – typically a mixture of wood and open grassland – at Epping Forest and Havering. Historic settlement cores are therefore sparse and generally relate to the major roads out of the capital (e.g. Romford, Walthamstow), though isolated early settlement is also found at Havering atte Bower. There was limited Victorian expansion, associated with Walthamstow, but the main suburbanisation of the area occurred during the interwar period. Considerable amounts of open farmland survive, with occasional areas of native wood and former hunting ‘forest’, protected as Green Belt, along the northern and eastern edge, and there is also a string of ancient woodlands representing the southern extension of Epping Forest.

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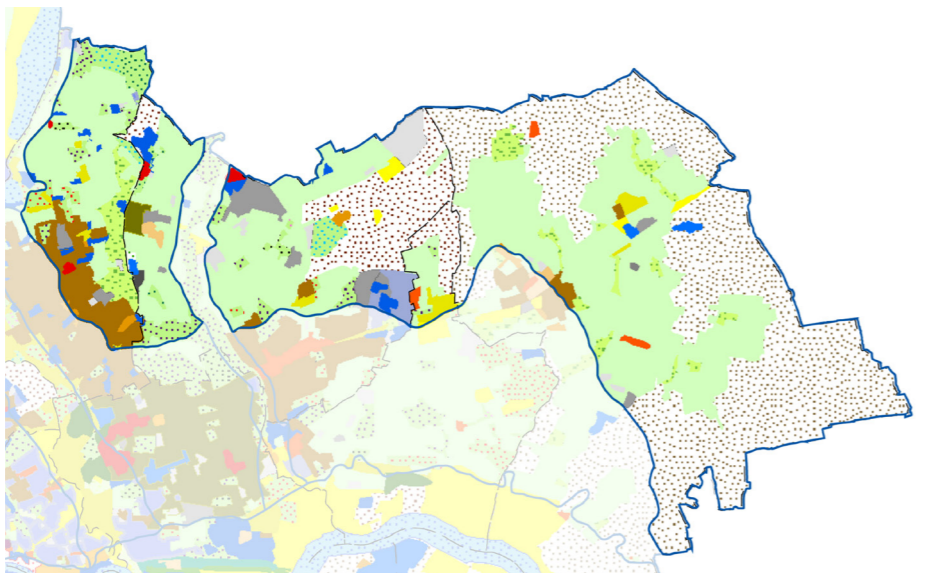
Geology

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Rivers and Topography

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: ENGLISH HERITAGE DATA



Historic Development

Natural Signature and natural landscape features

Natural Signature:

Essex Plateau – Mosaics of ancient woodland, wood pasture and acid grassland within the former royal hunting ‘forests’ at Epping Forest and Havering.

The areas of former royal hunting ground, which survive particularly in the Chingford and Woodford area and at the Havering and Hainault Forest Country Parks, are a mixture of native woodland with open areas of acid grassland. Of secondary importance, but still an important contributor to the open character of the Natural Landscape Area are the surviving areas of farmland, with small pockets of native woodland, associated for example with the ancient settlement of Havering atte Bower and the valley of the River Ingrebourne.

The prominent ridges between the Lea and the Roding, and the valley of the River Ingrebourne, are significant features in the landscape. Elsewhere, the topography is generally gentle and a passive, rather than an active element of local landscape character.

Examples of natural landscape features within the Essex Plateau Natural Landscape Area are:

- **Epping Forest North** – A chain of open areas, forming a virtually continuous line (with some outliers) along the top of the Chingford/Woodford Ridge between the Rivers Lea and Roding, and so conspicuous in views from the Lea Valley. Collectively, they demonstrate the full range of the historic ‘forest’ landscape, with a mixture of woodland (dominated by oak, hornbeam (traditionally coppiced) and beech), and acid grasslands, providing a mixture of cover and open ground ideal for hunting. They contain a wide range of flora, fauna, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates (notably stag beetle, for which reason a part is designated a Special Area of Conservation). The London Loop passes along the top of the ridge.

- **Hainault Country Park and Havering Country Park** – Two major country parks, separated by arable fields, providing a mixture of historic forest landscape and more recent agricultural colonisation of what is, in general, not particularly easily worked land. Hainault Forest, part of the Country Park, is a fine example of woodland pasture, similar to Epping Forest. It contains both ancient woodland (oaks and pollarded hornbeam) and acid grassland which are the home to a number of rare or declining birds, reptiles and beetles. Havering Country Park lies immediately west of the ancient settlement, and site of the royal palace of Havering atte Bower, to which it is historically linked. As with Hainault Forest, it contains a mixture of ancient woodland and acid grassland, and is a typical 'forest' landscape. Both parks are linked by the London Loop.
- **Ingrebourne River north of Upminster** – The Ingrebourne's natural, extremely sinuous course survives intact between Upminster and Harold Hill as does the wider valley context, with fields, amenity grassland and some areas of ancient alder woodland. Some footpaths cross the valley.

Underlining the natural signature of the Essex Plateau

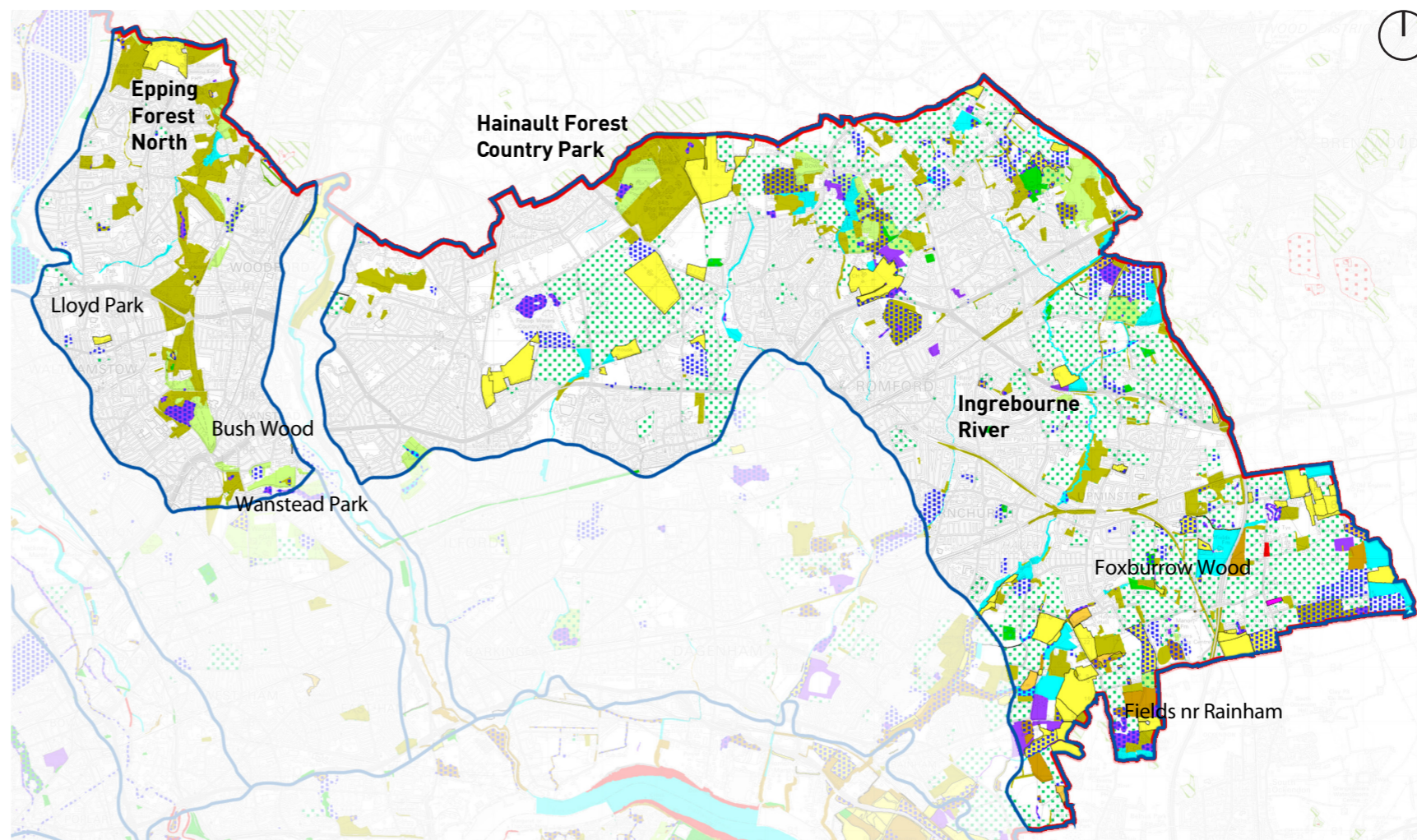
Key influences

- Extensive mosaic of ancient woodland and open acid grassland.
- Hornbeam coppice.
- Extensive interconnected ridgetop woodlands – on the skyline.
- Historic wood pasture.
- Sinuous streams bordered by alder woodland.

Design clues

Ideas for place making and shaping future design decisions - how the Natural Signatures for each natural landscape area might be expressed within the wider public realm, through new development and landscape management projects.

- Blocks of native woodland, linked by lines of trees, so that there is a wooded backdrop to built development.
- Woodland as a framework for open spaces – with trees around the margins and open glades within the centre.
- Managed woodland – blocks of hornbeam coppice, using traditional management techniques.
- Woodland adventure play set against backdrop of woodland.
- Multi-stem trees at gateways and focal points.



Natural Habitats & Landscape Key Features

- Woodland to meadow transition – open meadows set against a backdrop of woodland.
- Link new woodland planting to existing woodlands.
- Consider the production of joint management strategies to cover areas of similar character, such as Epping Forest North, and the Hainault and Havering Country Parks. The Hainault/Havering Strategy, for example, could include Fairlop Waters (which is acknowledged to have potential for enhancement) and the open land to the north-east of Havering atte Bower, aiming to provide an overall Vision for the management of this very significant area of natural signature.

Essex Plateau – Key environmental assets

Environmental asset	Relevant borough	Notes
Epping Forest North	Waltham Forest	Complex of sites forming part of the former Epping Forest. Includes Chingford Plane, Whitehall Plane, Reed's Forest, Hatch Palin, Highams Park, Lark's Wood and other areas of ancient, semi-natural and native woodland, acid grassland, with some ponds and wet marginal vegetation.
Bush Wood	Redbridge	Native wood and wet marginal vegetation.
Wanstead Park (overlap into area 8)	Redbridge	Acid grassland with some still water, including Heronry Pond. Includes a section of the River Roding (Area 8).
The Basin	Redbridge	Still water surrounded by some acid grassland.
Lloyd Park	Waltham Forest	Park incorporating still water in the form of a moat.
Fairlop Plain; Fairlop Waters Country Park	Redbridge	A large area of arable and wetland. Significant habitat for waterfowl and farmland birds. Native hedges and wet ditches. Still water and intertidal mud. Surrounded by various farmlands incorporating native hedges.
Hainault Forest Country Park	Redbridge	Largely native wood (including Hainault Forest). Also grassland and lakes with wet marginal vegetation. Park incorporates Cabin Hill, Sandhills and Park Farm.
Havering Country Park	Havering	Large areas of native woodland and natural acid grassland. This is a significant historic landscape, once having been royal hunting ground. The park includes Pine Wood, Avenue Wood, Pheasant Wood. Also areas of native hedge and running water.
Bedfords Park	Havering	Site of an old estate. Still water field ponds, running water and wet marginal vegetation. Several native wooded areas including Latch Wood and Bower Wood. Other natural features are acid grassland and ditches. Site also includes Deer Park, Upper Bedfords Farm and Sunnyside Farm.

Environmental asset	Relevant borough	Notes
Foxburrow Wood	Havering	Small area of native wood, surrounded by large area of native hedges bringing in various farms and plantations. Larger area also includes some still and running water.
Dagenham Park and Hatters Wood	Havering	Large area also incorporating The Osiers, Fir Wood, Burnt Wood and Duck Wood. Historic park – largely landscaped but also including the above various native woods. Large areas of acid grassland and various small ponds.
Ingrebourne River	Havering	Becoming Carter's Brook further north.
Fairplay Farm	Havering	Large area of farmland surrounded by old native hedges and incorporating areas of ditches, bog and running and still water.
Clay Tye Wood	Havering	Possibly ancient woodland. Significant as natural habitat for being only place in London with nesting rooks.
Cranham Marsh	Havering	Rare example of London marsh. Mixture of ancient native woods, water and grassland.
Belhus Woods Country Park	Havering	Large area incorporating ancient native woods and series of lakes. Varied native features including reedswamp, wet ditches, grassland and native hedges.
Fields to east of Rainham	Havering	Area of various natural features such as ditches, native hedges, typha, running and still water, and wet marginal vegetation. Taking in wooded areas such as Warwick Wood and White Post Woods.
Hornchurch Cutting	Havering	An important geological site with an exposure of a rarely seen boundary between glacial tills and terrace gravels (not publicly accessible)