

Protected Lane Assessment Cressing Parish



Client

Cressing Parish Council

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1 Introduction

Essex County Council's Place Services Team were commissioned by Cressing Parish Council in December 2016 to undertake an assessment of eight proposed new protected lanes within the Parish of Cressing in Braintree as part of the Neighbourhood plan supporting documentation. The proposed lanes were assessed using the Protected Lanes criteria developed by the County Council (ECC 2009) for Chelmsford Borough Council and used across Essex on the existing Lanes identified in the 1970's.

The work was undertaken in two stages, comprising an initial stage of desk-based assessment followed by field survey. Following the assessment, the scores for each Protected Lane were checked against the threshold for determining Protected Lane status. The assessed lanes that have met the minimum threshold will be adopted by Braintree District Council and be given Protected Lane status. This report summarises the methodology and results of the project.

2 Background

2.1 Historic Lanes in Essex

The greater part of the road network in the Essex countryside derives from at least as far back as the medieval period. Much of it undoubtedly existed in Saxon times and it is likely that many roads and lanes were formed long before that. These lanes are part of what was once an immense mileage of minor roads and track-ways connecting villages, hamlets and scattered farms and cottages. Many were used for agricultural purposes, linking settlements to arable fields, grazing on pasture, heaths and greens; and other resources such as woodland and coastal marsh. Generally these roads were not deliberately designed and constructed; written records of the establishment of roads during the medieval period are rare (Rackham, 1986, 264). Instead they would have started life as track-ways without a bearing surface, although often with defined boundaries including hedgerows, ditches and banks.

The width of ancient roads depended then, as now, on the traffic using them but historic lanes tend to be very variable in width, often within a short distance. Before metalling the roads became rutted in wet weather and the traffic would move over less rutted areas to the sides. Principal roads between towns tended to be wide for this reason. Wide verges and linear roadside greens were also grazed by cattle, sheep and

geese being driven through the countryside to market. Roadsides often had ponds associated with them for watering livestock, although it is clear from The Court Rolls that these frequently began life as extraction pits for clay and gravel (Emmison, 1991, 287). Many lanes had ditches along one or both sides of the lane to demarcate the highway and to assist drainage. These boundaries are frequently even more sinuous than the road itself. On the clay lands, the roads inevitably became water courses during heavy rain; the water would pour off the fields and wash away the muddy surface. They were also eroded through continuous use; over the centuries lanes on hillsides tended to become sunken. Lanes with marked differences in the level between two sides of a lane are also apparent on sloping ground, caused by lynchet formation – the gradual shift of soil down-slope caused by ploughing over hundreds of years. When roads became properly metalled in the 19th century and 20th centuries they became in a sense fossilized; the carriageways were fixed as metalled strips and the verges were formed from the marginal land between the carriageway and the highway boundary (Hunter, 1999).

Today, historic lanes are an important feature in our landscape: they continue to have an articulating role, providing insights into past communities and their activities through direct experience of a lanes historic fabric; contain the archaeological potential to yield evidence about these past human activities and to provide insights into the development of a landscape and the relationship of features within it over time; have considerable ecological value as habitats for plants and animals, serving as corridors for movement and dispersal for some species and acting as vital connections between other habitats; and allow people to enrich their daily lives by accessing cherished historic landmarks and landscapes, encouraging recreation within the countryside, thereby promoting well-being.

2.2 Protected Lanes Policy in Essex

The policy to preserve Essex historic lanes has been in operation for over a quarter of a century and is summarized in a document prepared by Essex County Council (ECC, 1998). However when Local Authorities decided to re-assess their existing Protected Lanes as part of the evidence base for the Local Development Frameworks, precise information on the criteria used to assess historic lanes for Protected Lane status and the original survey guidelines for making this assessment were found to be no longer available. Essex County Council's Historic Environment Specialists were

commissioned by Chelmsford Borough Council to develop robust and defensible criteria for its Local Development Framework, Core Strategy and Development Control Policies (Policy DC 15) on Protected Lanes (CBC, 2008, 75) and then to apply these criteria to Protected Lanes in the Borough (ECC, 2009). The criteria used for Chelmsford was found to work well and therefore has been used to assess those lanes across the rest of the county.

2.3 Protected Lanes Policy in Braintree District Council

Braintree District Council in defining their Core Strategy and Development Control Policies wanted to retain their Protected Historic Lane Policy from their present Local Plan which identified a total of 141 lanes, however, there was a lack of supporting information for this policy and the Lanes had not been assessed for a period of at least 25 years. An assessment of all the Braintree lanes was completed in 2012 and those meeting the required threshold retained their protected status. The same principles have been applied to a further eight lanes identified within Cressing Parish. This overview is based on the original report produced for Braintree district Council with a number of photographs from the Cressing lanes assessment incorporated.

3 Reason for the project

Development Policies can have significant effects and so it is important that the criteria for decision making and the evidence base on which decisions are made is comprehensive, robust and defensible. Consistency and transparency of judgment is crucial to public acceptability and fairness of the process. Detailed criteria for Protected Lane status and a methodical articulation of how a lane does or does not meet such criteria, which clearly illustrates the rationale behind a lanes selection, will make a major contribution to achieving that acceptability.

The Neighbourhood Plan group of Cressing Parish commissioned a project to undertake an assessment of eight potential new protected lanes within the Parish of Cressing. This was undertaken to inform the development of the Neighbourhood Plan, and following discussion with Alan Massow at Braintree District Council to add these to the existing protected lanes in Braintree.

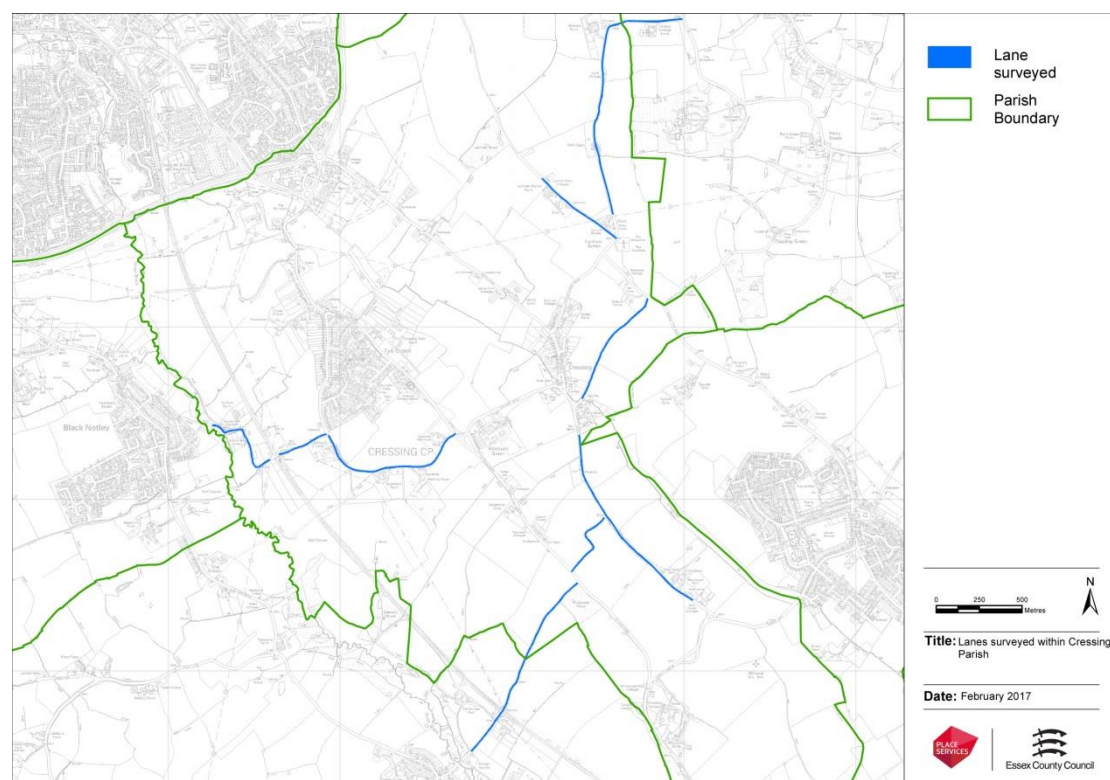


Figure 1 - Location of the Lanes assessed during the survey

4 Protected Lanes Assessment Procedure Criteria and Scoring System

The following section describes the processes undertaken in the assessment of each protected lane as well as the additional lanes added by Cressing. This comprised both office based and on site assessment with all of the lanes visited. Figure 1 shows the location of all of the protected lanes.

4.1 Units of Assessment

Each Protected Lane was originally identified by Parish name. As part of the project each lane was assigned a unique number (using CRESSLANE 1 etc). A desk based assessment using Google Earth and Google Earth Streetview, Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER), and GIS data relevant to the criteria was undertaken. Examples of the GIS data used includes ancient Woodland, Special Verges, Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS), heritage assets including designated sites, and SSSI's. The use

of Google Earth Streetview allowed a detailed assessment to be made along the length of the lane as part of the desk based assessment.

As part of this initial assessment the lane names were identified by the National Street Gazetteer. Where more than one lane of the original protected lanes was identified with the same National Street Gazetteer name these were merged to form a single unit unless the separate lengths were of significant difference. In some cases the lane had two street names but was a single lane, in which case both names were added to the recording sheet.

For the purposes of the field assessment, further details were added to the sheets undertaken for the desk based phase of assessment. These forms were completed in digital format being based on individual **units of assessment**. For a lane which was largely intact along the whole of its historic length (as identified on the first edition OS map), a single **unit of assessment** was identified and only one form completed. However, there were cases where extensive alterations had occurred along a historic lane, or where a lane had been broken by a new road which meant that these lengths of lane automatically fell out of the criteria and as such either the lane was broken into separate units or were reduced in length. So for each named lane, one or more assessment forms had to be completed.

Within Braintree District 103 lanes have protected status. The lanes that meet the criteria within Cressing Parish will be added to the overall Braintree District Council Protected Lane layer.

4.2 Field Assessment

Each historic lane was assessed in good weather conditions by a team of two historic environment specialists. Digital assessment sheets were updated as each lane was inspected.

4.2.1 Photographic Record

Most units of assessment had a colour digital image taken of it and the photo stored within the unit assessment folder. Photographs were taken which illustrated the range

of forms that a lane took and its historic features e.g. banks, ditches, veteran pollards, hedges etc.

4.2.2 Data Fields:

For each unit of assessment, the following data fields were completed:

- *Name* – name of historic lane
- *Unit* – the number of the unit of assessment
- *Highway / Byway Classification* – Class III, Unclassified or Byway Open to all Traffic (BOAT)
- *NGRs* – X and Y numbers for each end of the units of assessment. These were generated from the GIS after completion of the assessment. To allow this, the assessment maps (one for each historic lane) were marked at the beginning and end points of each unit of assessment during the field visit and the map annotated with the number of the unit.

4.2.3 Diversity

Description of form and features – this was a description of the historic lane for the length of the unit of assessment. The description included information on the following where possible:

- Form(s) that the lane took e.g. sunken, flat, raised, or lynchet (positive lynchet on uphill side and/or negative lynchet on down hill side).



Figure 2 - Change in form of lane with drop into the valley (BTE Lane 125)

- Carriageway surface(s) e.g. tarmac, stone, dirt, road planings etc.
- Verges – width, flat, sloping etc.



Figure 3 - Verges on undulating lane at Shalford Road (BTE Lane 24)

- Banks and ditches including approximate dimensions and profiles
- If sunken – depth of sunken lane and amount of variation etc.



Figure 4 - Sunken lane at Hulls Lane (BTE Lane 35)

- Associated vegetation e.g. hedgerows (with an indication of species mix i.e. largely single species, large variety of woody species etc., veteran trees (including pollards, coppice stools), mature trees, grass / flowering plants on verges and banks.



Figure 5 - Veteran pollard (CRESSLANE2)

4.2.4 Historic Integrity

Description of erosion damage – this was a description of erosion damage to the structure of the lane from vehicular traffic along the length of the unit of assessment. The description included information on damage to banks, verges and surfaces.



Figure 6 - Shows area of erosion in an area used for parking, with concrete blocks at field entrance (CRESSLANE5)

Description of improvements – this was a description of any significant improvements that had been made to a lane along the length of the unit of assessment. The description included information on the type and extent of traffic calming measures and other ‘improvements’ such as widening, kerbing etc.



Figure 7 – Station Road showing improvements of kerb stones and road signs (CRESSLANE5)

4.2.5 Archaeological Potential

Archaeological potential of the lane and its associated features such as the ditches, banks and greens etc. These features can all contain important archaeological remains that relate to the development and human interaction with the landscape.



Figure 8 - Greens at Codhams Lane forming part of the important historic settlement associated to this short length of lane (BTE Lane 28)

4.2.6 Aesthetic Value

Views – notable views, which are particularly scenic, unusual or which include contemporary historic features of note e.g. a parish church, listed building, farm complex or landscape that are framed by the lane and/or its associated vegetation were identified.



Figure 9 – Church Road with view of Cressing Church (CRESSLANE8)



Figure 10 - Modern intrusion on aesthetic view of Lanham Green Road (CRESSLANE7)

4.3 Protected Lane Scoring System

The criteria and associated scoring system that were developed during the project and used to evaluate existing Protected Lanes in Braintree District through a combination of desk based and field assessment are set out below:

PROTECTED LANES SCORING SYSTEM			
Criterion	Type of assessment	Description	Score
Historic Integrity	Field assessment	Significant improvements or damage evident; erosion of historic fabric affecting significant length of the lane (excluding significant hedgerow loss)	1
		Moderate improvements or loss to historic fabric of the lane (excluding significant hedgerow loss)	2
		Limited or discrete erosion/damage to the historic fabric of the lane and/or significant hedgerow loss	4
		No improvements to the lane and well preserved historic fabric	6
Diversity	Field assessment	The lane has limited diversity of features, form, alignment, depth and width	1
		The lane has a moderate range of features but limited form, alignment, depth and width or vice versa	2
		The lane has a moderate range of features and form, alignment, depth and width	3
		The lane has a wide range of features, form, alignment, depth and width	4

Group Value (Association)	Desk-based assessment	The lane has limited association with historic landscape features and other heritage assets of broadly the same date	1
		The lane has direct association with one or more historic settlements or other significant heritage assets of broadly the same date	2
		The lane has association with a moderate range of contemporary historic landscape features and other heritage assets	3
		The lane has a strong association with numerous and/or designated historic landscape features/other heritage assets of broadly the same date	4
Archaeological Association	Desk-based assessment	The lane has no known association with a non-contemporary archaeological feature	0
		The lane has a single association with a non-contemporary archaeological feature	1
		The lane has limited association with non-contemporary archaeological features	2
		The lane has a strong association with non-contemporary archaeological features	3
Archaeological Potential	Field assessment	The lane has limited potential for archaeological evidence	1
		The lane includes components which have the potential to contain archaeological evidence	2
		The lane contains a wide range of components with potential to contain archaeological evidence	3
Biodiversity	Field and desk based assessment	The lane has limited biodiversity assets e.g. grass verge or bank, single species hedge e.g. garden hedge or has suffered	1

		significant hedgerow loss	
		The lane has significant lengths of intermittent hedge (with or without occasional mature trees) and verge surviving and single non-designated assets e.g. pond, or lane or is adjacent/connected to designated asset e.g. Ancient Wood, SSSI	2
		Non-designated assets including continuous mixed species hedgerows, mature trees (including TPOs), grass verge with flowering plants, ponds etc.	3
		Designated assets e.g. LOWS, Special Verge, veteran pollards, Ancient Species Rich hedgerow(s) associated with the lane or its component parts	4
Aesthetic Value	Field assessment	The lane has limited variety of aesthetic features, or forms/alignment and no significant views	1
		The lane has a variety of aesthetic features or forms/alignment and / or a significant view	2
		The lane has a wide variety of aesthetic features or forms/alignment and / or more than one significant views	3

5 Application of the threshold for Protected Lane Status

After completion of the assessment and scoring of the Protected Lanes in the Parish (Appendix 1), the final step in determining whether assessed lanes should be designated as Protected Lanes was to apply a threshold score (of 14 which was established in the original project within Chelmsford Borough) to each of the historic lanes to identify lanes that were deemed worthy of Protected Lane status.

The threshold score was determined by the following method:

- *Stage 1 – The lane must score a minimum of 2 for integrity.*

If a lane fails to score 2 for integrity it is not taken forward to the next stage.

- *Stage 2 – The combined score for integrity and diversity must be 5 or more.*

If a lane fails to score 5 for its combined integrity and diversity scores it is not taken forward to the next stage.

- *Stage 3 – The sub total for integrity and diversity (5 or more) from Stage 2, when combined with the scores for group value, archaeological association, archaeological potential, aesthetic value and biodiversity value must be 14 or more.*

The threshold score of 14 was arrived at by adding the minimum score of 5 points from Stage 2 to a score of 9 which is equal to the combined total of the second highest scores attainable for each of the remaining criteria i.e. Group Value score of 2, Archaeological Association score of 1, Archaeological Potential score of 2, Aesthetic Value score of 2 and Biodiversity score of 2. A lane which scores the maximum score of 10 during Stage 2, from a combination of the maximum integrity and diversity scores, must score the second highest score on at least one of the remaining criteria to qualify.

Applying the threshold score to the assessed lanes resulted in a final tally of 7 Protected Lanes in Cressing Parish that were deemed worthy of Protected Lanes Status under the Policy in the future Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (Table 1 and Figure 2).

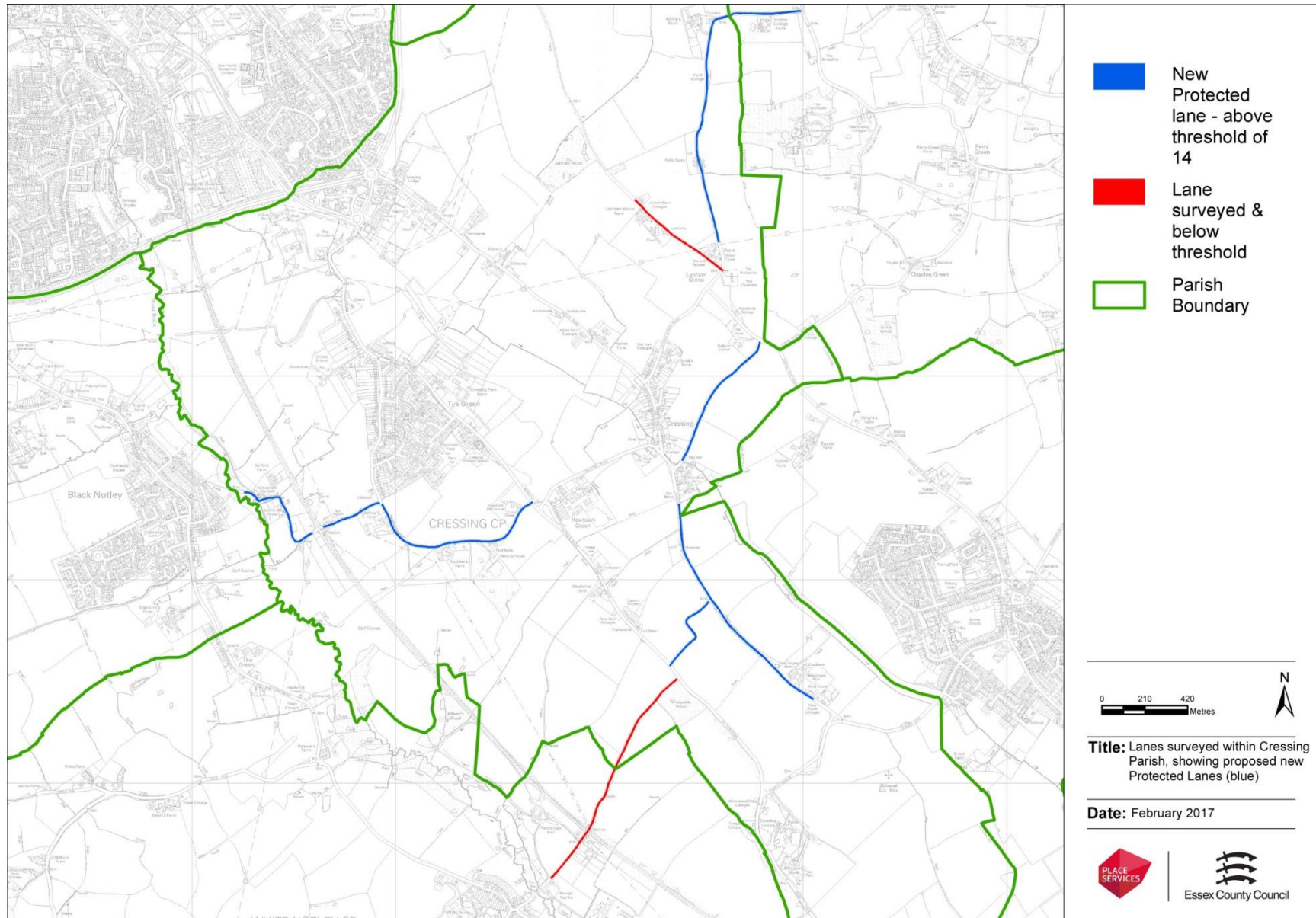


Figure 11 — Lanes which meet the criteria and score above 14 (blue) and those which failed (red)

Table 1 Scores for all the lanes assessed. Lane below the threshold are highlighted in red

LANE ID	National Street Gazetteer Name (NSG)	NSG 2	Diversity	Integrity	Potential	Aesthetic	Biodiversity	Group Value	Archaeol. Assoc.	TOTAL
CRESSLANE1	MILL LANE		3	4	2	2	3	3	1	18
CRESSLANE2	BULFORD MILL LANE		3	4	2	2	3	2	0	16
CRESSLANE2a	BULFORD MILL LANE		2	4	1	2	3	2	1	15
CRESSLANE3	SHARDLOES LANE		2	4	1	2	2	1	2	14
CRESSLANE4	LANHAM MANOR ROAD		2	2	2	1	2	2	2	13
CRESSLANE5	STATION ROAD		3	2	1	1	4	1	1	13
CRESSLANE6	PETTIT WAY		2	4	2	2	3	1	0	14
CRESSLANE7	LANHAM GREEN ROAD		3	4	3	2	3	3	1	19
CRESSLANE8	CHURCH ROAD		2	4	2	3	3	3	1	18

6 Conclusions

The project has applied robust and defensible criteria consistently and methodically to the proposed new Protected Lanes in Cressing Parish in order to determine lanes that are worthy of Protected Lanes status under Braintree District Council's Site Allocations and Development Management Plan.

Of the nine lanes assessed seven fulfilled the criteria to become protected Lanes. The two lanes that were assessed but failed to meet the minimum threshold failed because of the nature of road used and highway improvements/changes. Road improvements, such as widening and passing places were found in a number of areas along the length of the lanes, resulting in damage and loss of verges. The high traffic volumes using the lanes had resulted in erosion which affects the historic integrity score.

This suggests that, with the ever increasing rise in the number, size and diversity of motorised vehicles using minor rural roads (CPRE, 1996), Protected Lane status may not in itself be enough to secure the long term future of these important historic landscape features. Consideration should therefore be given to exploring options and partnerships for influencing user behaviour and applying intelligent and positive measures of highway management that will serve to encourage local journeys to be made on bicycle or foot, and for recreation, and reduce the impact of vehicles on the historic fabric of lanes, whilst maintaining their local character (e.g. CPRE, 2003).

The remaining 7 lanes will be added to the Essex County Council layer of Lanes and the report and digital layer will be forwarded to Braintree District Council if Cressing Parish is happy for this to happen.

7 References

Chelmsford Borough Council	2008	'Our Planning Strategy for the Future: Core Strategy and Development Control Policies'
CPRE	1996	'Lost Lanes: An investigation into the impact of rising traffic levels on England's country lanes'
CPRE	2003	CPRE's guide to Quiet Lanes
Department of Transport	2006	'The Quiet Lanes and Home zones (England) Regulations'
Essex County Council	1998	'Protected Lanes'
Essex County Council	2009	'Protected Lanes Study for Chelmsford Borough Council: Summary Report'
Emmison, F G	1991	'Elizabethan Life: Home, Work and Land'
Hunter, J	1999	'The Essex Landscape'
Rackham, O	1986	'The History of the Countryside'

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