



Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Statement

Beccles Neighbourhood Plan

February 2020

1. Introduction

1.1 The European Habitats Directive¹ and Wild Birds Directive² provide protection for sites that are of exceptional importance in respect of rare, endangered or vulnerable natural habitats and species. The network consists of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Both types can also be referred to as European Sites. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) also states that Ramsar sites should be afforded the same level of protection as the European sites.

1.2 The requirement to undertake Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) of development plans is set out in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) (as amended). It is also a requirement of Regulation 32 schedule 2 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 (as amended). In order to proceed to referendum a Neighbourhood Plan must meet a series of ‘basic conditions’, which include that it does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations.

1.3 Regulation 105 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) states:

‘Where a land use plan:

(a) Is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and

(b) Is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site,

The plan-making authority for that plan must, before the plan is given effect, make an appropriate assessment of the implications for the site in view of that site’s conservation objectives.’

1.4 The HRA is therefore undertaken in stages and should conclude whether or not a proposal or policy in the Plan would adversely affect the integrity of any sites.

Stage 1: Determining whether a plan is likely to have a significant effect on a European site. This needs to take account of the likely impacts in combination with other relevant plans and projects. This assessment should be made using the precautionary principle. The screening assessment must reflect the outcomes of the 2018 judgement of the Court of Justice of the European Union³, which has ruled that where

¹ 92/43/EEC

² 2009/147/EEC

³ C-323/17 – People over Wind, Peter Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta

mitigation is necessary this must be identified through an Appropriate Assessment.

Stage 2: Carrying out Appropriate Assessment and ascertaining the effect on site integrity. The effects of the plan on the conservation objectives of sites should be assessed, to ascertain whether the plan has an adverse effect on the integrity of a European site.

Stage 3: Identifying mitigation measures and alternative solutions. The aim of this stage is to find ways of avoiding or significantly reducing adverse impacts, so that site integrity is no longer at risk. If there are still likely to be negative impacts, the option should be dropped, unless exceptionally it can be justified by imperative reasons of overriding public interest.

- 1.5 The Beccles Neighbourhood Plan is being produced by Beccles Town Council. The Neighbourhood Plan has undergone regulation 14 pre-submission consultation and this screening assessment considers whether there are likely significant effects on protected European sites and whether a full Appropriate Assessment will be required.
- 1.6 The Beccles Neighbourhood Plan will need to be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan. The adopted Local Plan is currently the East Suffolk Council - Waveney Local Plan (2019) (referred to as the Local Plan for the purposes of this document). The Beccles Neighbourhood Plan has been developed within the context of the Local Plan.
- 1.7 The Local Plan was subject to Habitats Regulations Assessment as part of its production (see appendix 1). Where screening identified a likely significant effect, an Appropriate Assessment was undertaken and mitigation measures identified were incorporated within the Local Plan, resulting in a conclusion that the local plan will not lead to any adverse effects on European wildlife sites within and in the vicinity of the (then) Waveney District. Significant effects were identified in relation to recreation (including dog walking), air quality and biodiversity net gain. The Council has subsequently undertaken to produce a Recreational Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy and requires payment towards mitigation from residential developments within 13km of the protected European sites.
- 1.8 This screening report contains the results of Stage 1 (above) in relation to the Beccles Neighbourhood Plan. Stages 2 and 3 are only required if the screening stage concludes that there is likely to be a significant impact on a European site. The initial

screening has been undertaken by East Suffolk Council and is subject to consultation with Natural England as a statutory consultee.

2. Protected sites covered by this screening report

2.1 Sites included in this assessment are listed in Table 1 below. This includes all sites that are within 20km of the Beccles Neighbourhood Plan area (for consistency with the distances applied within the HRA of the Local Plan and adopting the precautionary approach). The locations of the sites are shown on maps in Appendix 2 and the Qualifying Features and Conservation Objectives of the sites are contained in Appendix 3, along with a summary of the pressures and threats as documented in the Appropriate Assessment for the Local Plan.

Table 1: Relevant European protected sites

Name
The Broads SAC
Benacre to Easton Bavents SAC
Benacre to Easton Bavents Lagoons SAC
Minsmere to Walberswick Heaths and Marshes SAC
Dews Ponds SAC
Broadland SPA
Benacre to Easton Bavents SPA
Outer Thames Estuary SPA
Minsmere-Walberswick SPA
Broadland Ramsar
Minsmere-Walberswick Ramsar

3. Beccles Neighbourhood Plan

3.1 Beccles Town Council is producing a Neighbourhood Plan for Beccles, in order to set out the vision, objectives and policies for the development of the parish up to 2036, within the context of the Local Plan. This Habitats Regulations Assessment screening assessment reviews the Beccles Neighbourhood Plan Pre-Submission (Regulation 14) Consultation Draft.

3.2 The Neighbourhood Plan includes a range of policies covering the Beccles Neighbourhood Plan area. A number of policies relate to the full Neighbourhood Plan area whilst others are area/location specific. The Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate specific sites for development.

3.3 The policies in the Beccles Neighbourhood Plan are listed in Table 2 below. An assessment of whether each policy is likely to have a significant effect on European protected sites is included in section 5 of this report.

Table 2: List of Neighbourhood Plan policies

BECC1	Provision of a Community Hub in the Beccles and Worlingham Garden Neighbourhood
BECC2	Community Facilities
BECC3	Beccles Tourism
BECC4	Hotel Accommodation
BECC5	Heritage and Design
BECC6	Local Road Junctions
BECC7	Key Movement Routes
BECC8	Beccles Town Centre
BECC9	Medical Provision in Beccles
BECC10	General Design Principles
BECC11	Design of Streets and Public Spaces
BECC12	Multi-Value Sustainable Drainage Systems, Biodiversity and Flood Risk
BECC13	Low Energy Housing Design

4. Other Plans and Projects

- 4.1 Regulation 105 of the 2017 Regulations requires consideration to be given to whether a Plan will have an effect either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.
- 4.2 As noted in the introduction, the other key plan is the Local Plan. The Local Plan was adopted in March 2019. The Local Plan sets out the broad scale and distribution of development across the area of East Suffolk formerly covered by the Waveney District and has been subject to an Appropriate Assessment.
- 4.3 Local plan policy WLP1.1 states that 16% of housing growth (approx. 1458 homes) and 25% of employment land (approx. 11 ha.) development contained in the local plan will take place in Beccles together with the neighbouring village of Worlingham over the plan period. The draft Beccles Neighbourhood Plan policies interpret the strategy and policies of the Local Plan at a local level. The policies contained in the Draft Beccles Neighbourhood Plan are proposed to provide locally specific, criteria based policy for the determination of planning applications in compliance with the local plan's strategy. It does not propose any additional site allocations.
- 4.4 A screening process considered each policy in the Local Plan and concluded that significant effects were likely and that an Appropriate Assessment was needed. The Appropriate Assessment subsequently considered the following themes - recreation pressure from new residential development, air quality from increased road traffic and biodiversity net gain. Mitigation measures were identified within the Appropriate Assessment and were incorporated within the Local Plan, resulting in a conclusion that the plan will not lead to any adverse effects on European wildlife sites within and in the vicinity of the (then) Waveney District.
- 4.5 The Council has subsequently become involved in the production of a Recreational Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy and requires payment towards mitigation of significant effects from residential developments within 13km of the protected European sites.

5. Assessment of likely significant effects of the Beccles Neighbourhood Plan on European protected sites

- 5.1 Table 3 below considers each policy of the Beccles Neighbourhood Plan in relation to whether there is potential for a likely significant effect on protected European sites. This constitutes Stage 1 as set out under paragraph 1.4 above. Consideration is given to the characteristics and location of the protected sites. The policies are considered

within the context of the Local Plan policies which they must be in general conformity with and which have themselves been subject to Habitats Regulations Assessment, as set out in section 4 above.

Table 3: Likely significant effects of the Beccles Neighbourhood Plan

Policy	Assessment of potential impact on Natura 2000 sites	Natura 2000 sites that could possibly be affected	Likely significant effect identified	AA needed?
BECC1: Provision of a Community Hub in the Beccles and Worlingham Garden Neighbourhood	This policy provides specific criteria for the provision of a community hub on a site allocated by local plan policy WLP3.1. Policy WLP3.1 already requires delivery of a community hub, BECC1 adds some detailed criteria. Policy WLP3.1 has been subject to Habitats Regulations Assessment through the production of the local plan, and mitigation has been incorporated in the local plan where necessary. Policy BECC1 will not therefore lead to any likely significant effects.	None	None	No
BECC2: Community Facilities	This policy encourages new community facilities to meet specific criteria. It is in line with local plan policy WLP8.22 'Built Community Services and Facilities' which has been subject to Habitats Regulations Assessment through the production of the local plan. BECC2 encourages development to meet additional criteria in line with WLP8.22 and therefore will not result in any likely significant effects on European Sites.	None	None	No
BECC3: Beccles Tourism	This policy gives broad encouragement for tourism development in general. It also encourages proposals to be sensitive to the natural	None	None	No

Policy	Assessment of potential impact on Natura 2000 sites	Natura 2000 sites that could possibly be affected	Likely significant effect identified	AA needed?
	<p>environment and not worsen environmental degradation and to respect the state of water quality of the River Waveney. It sets out objectives for the improvement of Beccles Quay area which proposals are encouraged to meet. Mooring proposals are encouraged where they are coordinated with the Broads Authority. The environmental protection offered by this policy means it is unlikely there will be any significant effects.</p>			
<p>BECC4: Hotel Accommodation</p>	<p>This policy encourages the provision of new hotel accommodation in Beccles Town Centre only. Policy WLP8.16 New Hotels and Guests Houses limits the development of new hotels to town centres, certain seafront locations and where conversion to flats is not permitted and has been subject to Habitats Regulations Assessment. Therefore, the development of new hotels in the neighbourhood area will be limited to Beccles Town Centre and therefore there is unlikely to be any significant effects.</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>BECC5: Heritage and Design</p>	<p>This policy seeks to preserve heritage assets and includes detailed criteria covering aspects such as design and use of materials. This policy has no direct impacts on European sites and therefore no likely significant effects have been identified.</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>BECC6: Local Road Junctions</p>	<p>This policy requires planning applications to address their</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>No</p>

Policy	Assessment of potential impact on Natura 2000 sites	Natura 2000 sites that could possibly be affected	Likely significant effect identified	AA needed?
	<p>impact on a list of specified road junctions, including the safety of cyclists and pedestrians. This policy is in line with local plan policy WLP8.21 which makes reference to potential impacts on European sites, particularly the Broads Special Area for Conservation. WLP8.21 has been subject to Habitats Regulations Assessment through the local plan process and no likely significant effects were identified.</p>			
<p>BECC7: Key Movement Routes</p>	<p>This policy supports improvements for cycling and walking in general and seeks to protect and enhance key movement routes identified in the neighbourhood plan. This policy has no direct impacts on European sites and therefore no likely significant effects have been identified.</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>BECC8: Beccles Town Centre</p>	<p>This policy addresses change of use in primary and secondary shopping frontages in Beccles town centre. It has no direct impacts on European sites and therefore no likely significant effects have been identified.</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>BECC9: Medical Provision in Beccles</p>	<p>This policy encourages expansion and improvement of medical provision at Beccles Health Campus, including provision of additional car parking and social care services. Any improvements would be part of the built-up area and would not increase recreation or disturbance through other means of European Sites. Therefore, no</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>No</p>

Policy	Assessment of potential impact on Natura 2000 sites	Natura 2000 sites that could possibly be affected	Likely significant effect identified	AA needed?
	likely significant effects have been identified.			
BECC10: General Design Principles	This policy supports high standards of design in new development. It also supports sustainable design and introduces the Nationally Described Space Standard for new dwellings. This policy has no direct impacts on European sites and therefore no likely significant effects have been identified.	None	None	No
BECC11: Design of Streets and Public Spaces	This policy supports high standards of design for public streets and spaces which offer enhancements to the public's health and wellbeing. This policy has no direct impacts on European sites and therefore no likely significant effects have been identified.	None	None	No
BECC12: Multi-value Sustainable Drainage Systems, Biodiversity and Flood Risk	This policy requires development to provide Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) on site, unless this is unviable. It also requires SuDS schemes to provide enhancements for wildlife and biodiversity. It also requires development within Flood Zones 2 and 3 of 1 hectare or more to be accompanied by a flood risk assessment. This policy has no direct impacts on European sites and therefore no likely significant effects have been identified.	None	None	No
BECC13: Low Energy Housing Design	This policy expects residential developments of less than 10 dwellings to improve their energy efficiency. This policy has no direct impacts on European sites and therefore no likely significant effects have been identified.	None	None	No

6. Summary and conclusions

- 6.1 The Beccles Neighbourhood Plan will provide policies which will be used for determining planning applications alongside the Local Plan. It includes policies with locally specific criteria to be used for the determination of planning applications within the Beccles neighbourhood area.
- 6.2 The Beccles Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared to be in general conformity with the relevant policies in the Local Plan and will not lead to likely significant effects on protected European sites.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Desi Reed". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'D' at the beginning.

Dated: 27/02/2020

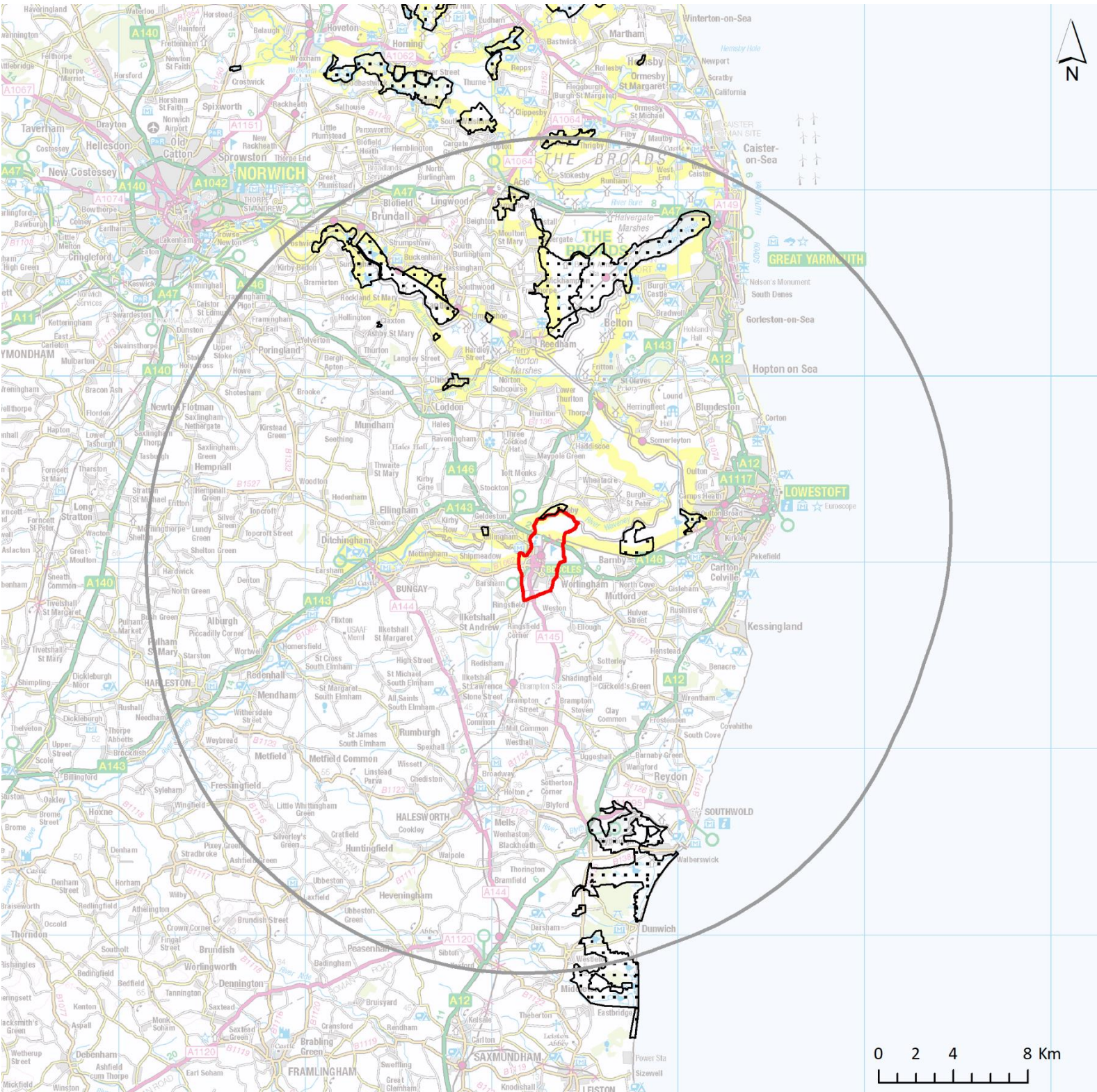
Desi Reed
Planning Policy and Delivery Manager
East Suffolk Council




Appendix 1: Sources of background information

- Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Waveney Local Plan (December 2018)
(<http://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/local-plans/waveney-local-plan/>)

Appendix 2: Locations of European protected sites

RAMSAR



 RAMSAR  Neighbourhood Area  20km Buffer

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Appendix 3: Relevant European protected sites

Name	Qualifying Features	Conservation Objectives	Pressure and threats (as summarised in the Habitats Regulations Assessment for the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan at Final Draft Plan Stage (December 2018))
Special Areas of Conservation			
The Broads	H7210# Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i> S1016 <i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i> : Desmoulin's whorl snail H7230 Alkaline fens H6410 <i>Molinia</i> meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (<i>Molinion caeruleae</i>) H91E0# Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i> , <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i>) H7140 Transition mires and quaking bogs H3140 Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp H3150 Natural eutrophic lakes with <i>Magnopotamion</i> or <i>Hydrocharition</i> -type vegetation S1355 <i>Lutra lutra</i> : Otter S1903 <i>Liparis loeselii</i> : Fen orchid S4056 <i>Anisus vorticulus</i> : Little ramshorn whirlpool snail	Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring; The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species, The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats, The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species, The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species rely, The populations of qualifying species, and, The distribution of qualifying species within the site.	Water pollution, climate change, invasive species, siltation, inappropriate water levels, hydrological changes, water abstraction, change in land management, inappropriate ditch management, inappropriate scrub control, changes in species distributions, public access/disturbance, undergrazing, drainage, direct impact from 3rd party
Benacre to Easton	H1150# Coastal lagoons, A195(B) <i>Sterna albifrons</i> : Little	Ensure that the integrity of the site is	Public access/disturbance,

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<p>Bavents Lagoons</p>	<p>tern A021(B) Botaurus stellaris: Great bittern A081(B) Circus aeruginosus: Eurasian marsh harrier</p>	<p>maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring; The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats, The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats, and, The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats rely.</p>	<p>water pollution, physical modification, changes in species distributions, fisheries (marine and estuarine).</p>
<p>Minsmere to Walberswick Heaths and Marshes</p>	<p>H4030 European dry heaths H1210 Annual vegetation of drift lines H1220 Perennial vegetation of stony banks A052(B) Anas crecca: Eurasian teal A021(B) Botaurus stellaris: Great bittern A081(B) Circus aeruginosus: Eurasian marsh harrier A082(NB) Circus cyaneus: Hen harrier A224(B) Caprimulgus europaeus: European nightjar A056(B) Anas clypeata: Northern shoveler A056(NB) Anas clypeata: Northern shoveler A051(B) Anas strepera: Gadwall A051(NB) Anas strepera: Gadwall A132(B) Recurvirostra avosetta: Pied avocet A195(B) Sterna albifrons: Little tern A394(NB) Anser albifrons: Greater white-fronted goose</p>	<p>Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring; The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats, The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats, and, The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats rely.</p>	<p>Coastal squeeze, public access/disturbance, changes in species distributions, invasive species, inappropriate pest control, air pollution, water pollution, deer, fisheries (commercial marine and estuarine)</p>

Dew's Ponds	S1166 Triturus cristatus: Great crested newt	Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring; The extent and distribution of the habitats of qualifying species, The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species, The supporting processes on which the habitats of qualifying species rely, The populations of qualifying species, and, The distribution of qualifying species within the site.	None identified
Special Protection Areas			
Broadlands (also Ramsar site)	H7210# Calcareous fens with Cladium mariscus and species of the Caricion davallianae S1016 Vertigo moulinsiana: Desmoulin's whorl snail H7230 Alkaline fens H6410 Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (Molinion caeruleae) H91E0# Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) H7140 Transition mires and quaking bogs H3140 Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp H3150 Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or	Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring; The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species, The structure and function (including	Water pollution, climate change, invasive species, siltation, inappropriate water levels, hydrological changes, water abstraction, change in land management, inappropriate ditch management, inappropriate scrub control, changes in species distributions, public access/disturbance, undergrazing, drainage, direct impact from 3rd party

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	<p>Hydrocharition-type vegetation S1355 <i>Lutra lutra</i>: Otter S1903 <i>Liparis loeselii</i>: Fen orchid S4056 <i>Anisus vorticulus</i>: Little ramshorn whirlpool snail</p>	<p>typical species) of qualifying natural habitats, The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species, The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species rely, The populations of qualifying species, and, The distribution of qualifying species within the site.</p>	
<p>Benacre to Easton Bavents</p>	<p>H1150# Coastal lagoons, A195(B) <i>Sterna albifrons</i>: Little tern A021(B) <i>Botaurus stellaris</i>: Great bittern A081(B) <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>: Eurasian marsh harrier</p>	<p>Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring; The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features, The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features, The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely, The population of each of the qualifying features, and, The distribution of the qualifying features within the site.</p>	<p>Public access/disturbance, water pollution, physical modification, changes in species distributions, fisheries (marine and estuarine).</p>
<p>Minsmere to</p>	<p>H4030 European dry heaths H1210 Annual vegetation of drift</p>	<p>Ensure that the integrity of the site is</p>	<p>Coastal squeeze, public access/disturbance,</p>

<p>Walberswick (also Ramsar site)</p>	<p>lines H1220 Perennial vegetation of stony banks A052(B) Anas crecca: Eurasian teal A021(B) Botaurus stellaris: Great bittern A081(B) Circus aeruginosus: Eurasian marsh harrier A082(NB) Circus cyaneus: Hen harrier A224(B) Caprimulgus europaeus: European nightjar A056(B) Anas clypeata: Northern shoveler A056(NB) Anas clypeata: Northern shoveler A051(B) Anas strepera: Gadwall A051(NB) Anas strepera: Gadwall A132(B) Recurvirostra avosetta: Pied avocet A195(B) Sterna albifrons: Little tern A394(NB) Anser albifrons albifrons: Greater white-fronted goose</p>	<p>maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring; The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features, The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features, The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely, The population of each of the qualifying features, and, The distribution of the qualifying features within the site.</p>	<p>changes in species distributions, invasive species, inappropriate pest control, air pollution, water pollution, deer, fisheries (commercial marine and estuarine)</p>
<p>Outer Thames Estuary</p>	<p>A001 (W) Gavia stellate Red-throated Diver A195 (B) Sterna hirundo Common Tern A193 (B) Sternula albifrons Little Tern</p>	<p>Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring; The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features, The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features, The supporting processes on which</p>	

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		<p>the habitats of the qualifying features rely, The population of each of the qualifying features, and, The distribution of the qualifying features within the site.</p>	
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Appendix 4: Response from Natural England

Date: 29 January 2020
Our ref: 304392



East Suffolk Council
Ben.Wright@eastsuffolk.gov.uk

BY EMAIL ONLY

Hornbeam House
Crewe Business Park
Electra Way
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 6GJ

T 0300 060 3900

Dear Ben Wright

Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Draft Beccles Neighbourhood Plan

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 18 December 2019

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Natural England is a statutory consultee in neighbourhood planning and must be consulted on draft neighbourhood development plans by the Parish/Town Councils or Neighbourhood Forums where they consider our interests would be affected by the proposals made.

Natural England does not have any specific comments on this HRA draft neighbourhood plan.

However, we refer you to the attached annex which covers the issues and opportunities that should be considered when preparing a Neighbourhood Plan.

For any further consultations on your plan, please contact: consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Dean
Consultations Team

Annex 1 - Neighbourhood planning and the natural environment: information, issues and opportunities

Natural environment information sources

The [Magic](http://magic.defra.gov.uk/)¹ website will provide you with much of the nationally held natural environment data for your plan area. The most relevant layers for you to consider are: **Agricultural Land Classification, Ancient Woodland, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Local Nature Reserves, National Parks (England), National Trails, Priority Habitat Inventory, public rights of way (on the Ordnance Survey base map) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (including their impact risk zones)**. Local environmental record centres may hold a range of additional information on the natural environment. A list of local record centres is available [here](#)².

Priority habitats are those habitats of particular importance for nature conservation, and the list of them can be found [here](#)³. Most of these will be mapped either as **Sites of Special Scientific Interest**, on the Magic website or as **Local Wildlife Sites**. Your local planning authority should be able to supply you with the locations of Local Wildlife Sites.

National Character Areas (NCAs) divide England into 159 distinct natural areas. Each character area is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity. NCA profiles contain descriptions of the area and statements of environmental opportunity, which may be useful to inform proposals in your plan. NCA information can be found [here](#)⁴.

There may also be a local **landscape character assessment** covering your area. This is a tool to help understand the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape and identify the features that give it a sense of place. It can help to inform, plan and manage change in the area. Your local planning authority should be able to help you access these if you can't find them online.

If your neighbourhood planning area is within or adjacent to a **National Park** or **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty** (AONB), the relevant National Park/AONB Management Plan for the area will set out useful information about the protected landscape. You can access the plans on from the relevant National Park Authority or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty website.

General mapped information on **soil types** and **Agricultural Land Classification** is available (under 'landscape') on the [Magic](http://magic.defra.gov.uk/)⁵ website and also from the [LandIS website](http://www.landis.org.uk/)⁶, which contains more information about obtaining soil data.

Natural environment issues to consider

The [National Planning Policy Framework](#)⁷ sets out national planning policy on protecting and enhancing the natural environment. [Planning Practice Guidance](#)⁸ sets out supporting guidance.

Your local planning authority should be able to provide you with further advice on the potential impacts of your plan or order on the natural environment and the need for any environmental assessments.

¹ <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

² <http://www.nbn-nfbr.org.uk/nfbr.php>

³ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140711133551/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/habsandspeciesimportance.aspx>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making>

⁵ <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

⁶ <http://www.landis.org.uk/index.cfm>

⁷ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807247/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf

⁸ <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/natural-environment/>

Landscape

Your plans or orders may present opportunities to protect and enhance locally valued landscapes. You may want to consider identifying distinctive local landscape features or characteristics such as ponds, woodland or dry stone walls and think about how any new development proposals can respect and enhance local landscape character and distinctiveness.

If you are proposing development within or close to a protected landscape (National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) or other sensitive location, we recommend that you carry out a landscape assessment of the proposal. Landscape assessments can help you to choose the most appropriate sites for development and help to avoid or minimise impacts of development on the landscape through careful siting, design and landscaping.

Wildlife habitats

Some proposals can have adverse impacts on designated wildlife sites or other priority habitats (listed [here](#)⁹), such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or [Ancient woodland](#)¹⁰. If there are likely to be any adverse impacts you'll need to think about how such impacts can be avoided, mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated for.

Priority and protected species

You'll also want to consider whether any proposals might affect priority species (listed [here](#)¹¹) or protected species. To help you do this, Natural England has produced advice [here](#)¹² to help understand the impact of particular developments on protected species.

Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

Soil is a finite resource that fulfils many important functions and services for society. It is a growing medium for food, timber and other crops, a store for carbon and water, a reservoir of biodiversity and a buffer against pollution. If you are proposing development, you should seek to use areas of poorer quality agricultural land in preference to that of a higher quality in line with National Planning Policy Framework para 171. For more information, see our publication [Agricultural Land Classification: protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land](#)¹³.

Improving your natural environment

Your plan or order can offer exciting opportunities to enhance your local environment. If you are setting out policies on new development or proposing sites for development, you may wish to consider identifying what environmental features you want to be retained or enhanced or new features you would like to see created as part of any new development. Examples might include:

- Providing a new footpath through the new development to link into existing rights of way.
- Restoring a neglected hedgerow.
- Creating a new pond as an attractive feature on the site.
- Planting trees characteristic to the local area to make a positive contribution to the local landscape.
- Using native plants in landscaping schemes for better nectar and seed sources for bees and birds.
- Incorporating swift boxes or bat boxes into the design of new buildings.
- Think about how lighting can be best managed to encourage wildlife.
- Adding a green roof to new buildings.

⁹<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140711133551/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/habsandspeciesimportance.aspx>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-and-veteran-trees-protection-surveys-licences>

¹¹<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140711133551/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/habsandspeciesimportance.aspx>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/protected-species-and-sites-how-to-review-planning-proposals>

¹³ <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/35012>

You may also want to consider enhancing your local area in other ways, for example by:

- Setting out in your plan how you would like to implement elements of a wider Green Infrastructure Strategy (if one exists) in your community.
- Assessing needs for accessible greenspace and setting out proposals to address any deficiencies or enhance provision.
- Identifying green areas of particular importance for special protection through Local Green Space designation (see [Planning Practice Guidance on this](#) ¹⁴).
- Managing existing (and new) public spaces to be more wildlife friendly (e.g. by sowing wild flower strips in less used parts of parks, changing hedge cutting timings and frequency).
- Planting additional street trees.
- Identifying any improvements to the existing public right of way network, e.g. cutting back hedges, improving the surface, clearing litter or installing kissing gates) or extending the network to create missing links.
- Restoring neglected environmental features (e.g. coppicing a prominent hedge that is in poor condition, or clearing away an eyesore).

¹⁴ <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space/local-green-space-designation/>