



Habitats Regulations Assessment
Screening Statement

Bungay

Neighbourhood Development Plan

Pre-Submission draft May 2020

December 2020

Contents

1.	Introduction.....	3
2.	Bungay Neighbourhood Plan.....	5
3.	The Screening Assessment	6
4.	Other Plans and Projects	6
5.	Summary and conclusions.....	6
	Appendix 1: Bungay Neighbourhood Development Plan HRA Screening Assessment (written by Collective Community Planning on behalf of Bungay Neighbourhood Development Plan Working Group)	7
	Appendix 2: Sources of background information	19
	Appendix 3: Natural England Consultation Response	20

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 through EU Exit legislation). 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) (as amended through EU Exit legislation) 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.

¹ 92/43/EEC

² 2009/147/EEC

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 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 Bungay Neighbourhood Plan is being produced by Bungay Town Council. 'Collective Community Planning' produced a screening assessment of the 'Pre-submission draft May 2020' version of the draft neighbourhood plan on behalf of Bungay Town Council.

1.6 This assessment considered whether there would be likely significant effects on protected European sites. It found that significant effects were likely. The assessment was sent to East Suffolk Council who checked and agreed the findings of the assessment.

1.7 The Bungay Neighbourhood area is covered by both the Broads Authority and East Suffolk Council. As such there are two local planning authorities for the neighbourhood area. The Bungay Neighbourhood Plan will need to be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plans of both the Broads Authority and East Suffolk Council. The adopted Local Plans are currently the Local Plan for the

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

Broads (2019) and the East Suffolk Council Waveney Local Plan (2019) (referred to collectively as the ‘local plans’ for the purposes of this document). The Bungay Neighbourhood Plan has been developed within the context of both of the local plans.

- 1.8 Both local plans have been subject to Habitats Regulations Assessment as part of their 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 conclusions that the local plans will not lead to any adverse effects on European wildlife sites within and in the vicinity of the local plan area. Significant effects were identified in the East Suffolk Waveney local plan 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. Significant effects were identified in the Local Plan for the Broads in relation to recreation; increased boat navigation and access to the water’s edge; tourism; water quality and water resources; and air quality. Mitigation has been included in the local plan where required.
- 1.9 This screening report addresses Stage 1 in para. 1.4) above in relation to the Bungay Neighbourhood Plan. Stages 2 and 3 are required where the screening stage concludes that there is likely to be a significant impact on a European site(s). The initial screening has been undertaken by Collective Community Planning; checked and agreed by East Suffolk Council; and was subject to consultation with Natural England as a statutory consultee.

2. Bungay Neighbourhood Plan

- 2.1 Bungay Town Council is producing a Neighbourhood Plan for Bungay, 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 plans.
- 2.2 The draft neighbourhood plan contains a range of policies covering the Bungay neighbourhood area. It includes a policy to allocate land for development of 75 homes.

3. The Screening Assessment

- 3.1 The screening assessment (see appendix 1) considers each policy in the draft neighbourhood plan and whether they will result in likely significant effects. It also identifies the European Sites within 20km of the Bungay neighbourhood area.
- 3.2 The assessment finds likely significant effects arising from 3 of the policies: H3 'Affordable Housing'; H4 'Land to the east of St Margaret's Road; and TC&E2 'Tourism Accommodation'. It therefore screens in the neighbourhood plan for the requirement to undertake appropriate assessment.
- 3.3 In their consultation response (see appendix 3), Natural England agree with the requirement for appropriate assessment.

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 plans are the Local Plan for the Broads and the East Suffolk Waveney Local Plan. The screening assessment concludes that there will be likely in-combination effects as a result of the policies in the neighbourhood plan.

5. Summary and conclusions

- 5.1 The Bungay Neighbourhood Plan provides policies which allocate land for 75 homes and will be used for determining planning applications alongside the Local Plan. As such it is concluded that there will be likely significant effects on European sites. Therefore, the Bungay neighbourhood plan is screened in for the requirement to undertake appropriate assessment under the Habitats Regulations.

Signed:



Dated: 22nd December 2020

Appendix 1: Bungay Neighbourhood Development Plan HRA Screening Assessment (written by Collective Community Planning on behalf of Bungay Neighbourhood Development Plan Working Group)

HRA Screening Assessment



Bungay Neighbourhood

Contents Page

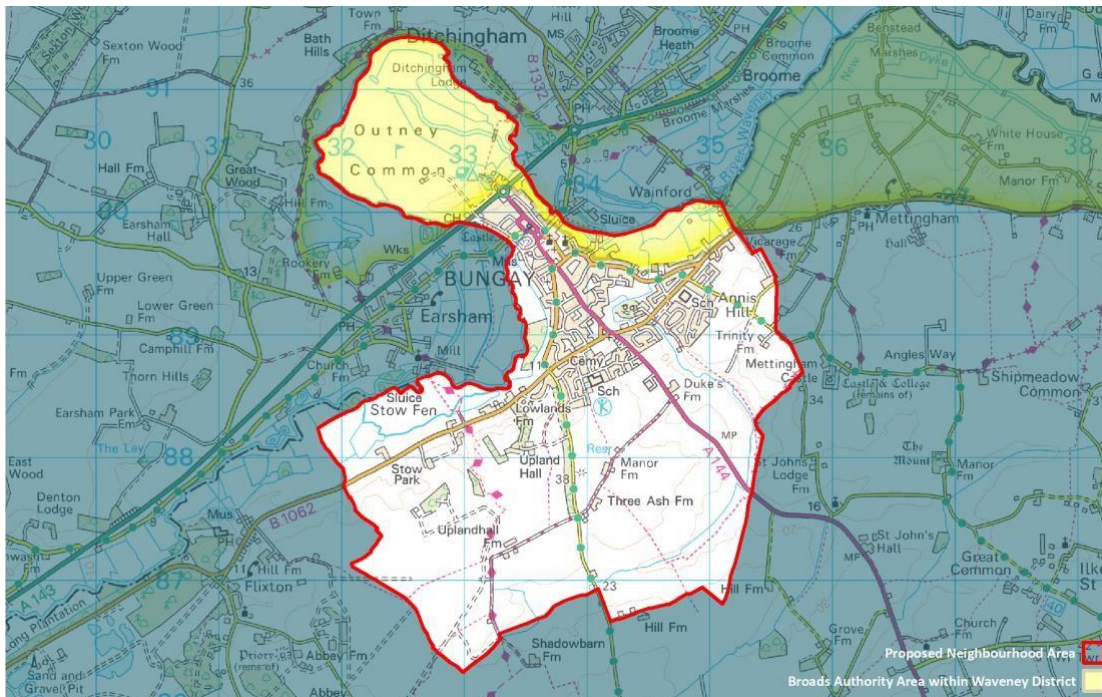
Section Page	8
Introduction	9
Legislative Background	12
Screening Process	12
Assessment	12
Conclusions	18

Introduction

Neighbourhood Plan Area

The Bungay Neighbourhood Plan Area has been designated to cover the area identified in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Designated Area



Vision

Vision for Bungay

As a historic and distinctive market town with a strong local identity and a vibrant town centre, Bungay is a place that people choose to visit. In the next 15 to 20 years the town will host a mix of new housing built to a high green standard and community facilities that meet the needs of its residents and the surrounding rural communities. Our Plan is to develop a sustainable Bungay with increased local employment and leisure facilities; to establish a green policy to encourage walking, cycling and a greener approach to local transport generally. Enhancing access to open spaces and the surrounding countryside is to be a priority within the Plan with a focus on the health and well-being of residents. Facilities for tourists will be encouraged.

Objectives

The objectives for Bungay are:

Objective 1 - Meet the housing and infrastructure needs of Bungay's residents and future population.

Objective 2 – Protect and enhance community and public facilities and services.

Objective 3 - Support the vitality and regeneration of the town centre.

Objective 4 - Enable Bungay to realise its potential as a visitor attraction.

Objective 5 - Improve the attractiveness of walking and cycling.

Objective 6 - Ensure that the built character of Bungay is preserved and is reflected in new developments.

Objective 7 - Promote the quality and enjoyment of the natural environment, especially the surrounding fen and marshes.

Objective 8 - Ensure that new development manages flood risk in the most sustainable way possible.

Draft Planning Policies

The neighbourhood plan for Bungay contains policies that seek to deliver the vision, this includes identifying and proposing sites to be allocated for development within the parish. Below is a summary of key points from the draft policies.

Housing:

H1: New residential developments are required to be designed to a high quality, considering local character and enhancing local distinctiveness

H2: New housing developments should provide a mix of housing to meet the needs of the community, with proportions to reflect the Bungay Housing Needs Assessment

H3: Strong support for affordable housing which should reflect local need

H4: Land to the east of St Margaret's Road allocated for approximately 75 dwellings.

Community Matters

CM1: Support for a new Community Hub

CM2: Support for proposals that will expand Bungay Medical Centre

CM3, CM4 & CM5: Increased or expanded sports provision, educational opportunities and pre-school education welcomed

Cultural Heritage

CH1: Development is required to meet specific criteria so as to protect the integrity of the Bungay Conservation Area

CH2: Support to regenerate the King's Head Grade II Listed Building within the town centre

CH3: Requirement for a heritage statement to accompany any development proposals within or adjacent to designated heritage assets

Town Centre and Economy

TC&E1: Support for development that enhances the vibrancy and vitality of the town centre

TC&E2: Encouragement for tourism accommodation within the town centre

TC&E3: Support for proposals that enable goods to be transferred from HGVs to smaller commercial vehicles

Environment

ENV1: Creation of a green corridor linking the south-east with the town centre

ENV2: Provision of open space will need to be designed to deliver significant gain in ecological value and habitat

ENV3: Protection of key areas of biological and geological significance

ENV4: Development required to deliver a net gain in ecological value

ENV5: Flood prevention or mitigation measures will need to demonstrate an ecological gain.

Traffic and Transport

TM1: Minimum standards for parking at new residential development

TM2: Electric vehicle charging points required at all new homes with on-plot parking

TM3: Support for additional off-street parking in or adjacent to the town centre

TM4: HGVs required to avoid the town centre and Conservation Area in so far as possible for construction of new development

TM5: New development should support safe and convenient pedestrian and cycle access and connections

Legislative Background

To be ‘made’ a Neighbourhood Plan must meet certain Basic Conditions. These include that making of the plan ‘does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with EU obligations’. One of these obligations is Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, often referred to as the Habitats Directive. Under the Habitats Directive an assessment referred to as an Appropriate Assessment must be undertaken if the plan in question is likely to have a significant effect on a European protected wildlife site. The SEA Directive requires that if a plan or programme requires an Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Directive, then that plan or programme will also require an SEA.

Screening Process

Three steps will be followed for this screening process:

Preparation of a screening report – this report

Request a screening opinion from the consultation bodies in light of the report – East Suffolk Council responsibility

In light of their responses, determine whether the plan has potential likely significant effects on protected European wildlife sites (and therefore require Appropriate Assessment) East Suffolk Council in discussion with Bungay Town Council.

Assessment

The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) refers to the assessment required for any plan or project to assess the potential implications for designated European wildlife sites. This includes Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar Sites, collectively known as internationally designated wildlife sites.

There are no designated European wildlife sites in the Bungay Neighbourhood Plan area. This screening assessment has also considered the impact on European sites within 20km of the neighbourhood plan area, as an in-combination assessment area. These include:

Figure 2: European Sites within 20km of BNDP area

Special Areas of Conservation	Special Protection Areas	Ramsar Sites
The Broads	Broadland	Broadland
Minsmere to Walberswick Heaths & Marshes	Minsmere-Walberswick	Breydon Water
Benacre to Easton Bavents Lagoons	Outer Thames Estuary	Minsmere-Walberswick
Dew's Ponds	Benacre to Easton Bavents	
	Breydon Water	

Each European site has a set of interest features which are the ecological features for which the site is designated or classified, and the features for which Member States should ensure the site is maintained or where necessary restored. Each site also has a set of conservation objectives.

European sites are at risk if there are possible means by which any aspect of a plan can, when being taken forward for implementation, pose a potential threat to the wildlife interest of the sites. This is often referred to as the 'impact pathway'.

There are a range of impacts that Bungay Neighbourhood Development Plan could have on those designated European Sites identified in Figure 4. These can be summarised as:

Increased disturbance, trampling and enrichment of European Sites from additional recreational pressure;

Impact on protected species found within but that travel outside of the designated sites;

Water issues relating to water quality and quantity; and

Changes in atmospheric pollution levels due to increased traffic from development proposals.

In accordance with the Waveney Local Plan HRA Screening the following buffers have been considered – 400m for urban effects, 5km for recreational impacts and 13km which reflects the distance used to define a zone of influence in the wider Suffolk mitigation strategy. **Figure 3** identifies the housing numbers allocated within the BNDP which fall within those zones of influence of the European Sites identified in **Figure 4**. The Broads SAC and Broadland SPA/Ramsar are within 13km of potential new homes proposed – with the closest site around 6.5km from the allocated site.

Figure 3: Number of potential new dwellings within 400m, 5km and 13km of European Sites

Site	400m	5km	13km
The Broads SAC	0	0	75
Broadland SPA / Ramsar	0	0	75
Minsmere-Walberswick SPA / Ramsar	0	0	0
Benacre to Easton Bavents Lagoons SAC	0	0	0
Dew's Ponds	0	0	0
Outer Thames Estuary	0	0	0
Benacre to Easton Bavents SPA	0	0	0
Breydon Water SPA / Ramsar	0	0	0

Figure 4: Assessment of Potential Impacts of Policy contained within the BNDP

Policy	Description	Likely Significant Effects	Potential Risks	Recommendation
H1: Design Principles for New Development	Qualitative policy with criteria for high quality design, setting particular requirements for new development	No LSE – does not promote development	N/A	None
H2: Housing Mix	Policy stipulating required mix of new homes coming forward	No LSE – does not promote development	N/A	None

H3: Affordable Housing	Policy accords with NPPF, setting requirements for affordable housing, including delivery of onsite provision and criteria for exception sites	LSE – the Neighbourhood Plan area falls within 13km of the Broads sites which means there could be in-combination effects, such as increased recreational pressure from additional homes delivered on exception sites.	In combination effects such as increased recreational pressure	For consideration at appropriate assessment.
H4: Land to the east of St Margaret's Road	Residential allocation for 75 new dwellings, with the site developed in accordance with site specific criteria	LSE – the allocated site falls within 13km of the Broads sites which means there could be in-combination impacts, such as recreational pressure from the additional homes.	In combination recreational pressure linked with allocations in the Waveney Local Plan.	For consideration at appropriate assessment.
CH1: Conservation Area	Qualitative policy seeking to protect the integrity of	No LSE – does not promote development	N/A	None

Policy	Description	Likely Significant Effects	Potential Risks	Recommendation
	Bungay Conservation Area			
CH2: The King's Head	Policy supporting proposals to restore the King's Head to its former use as a hotel	No LSE – promoting use of a derelict building within its current use class	N/A	None
CH3: Heritage Statements	Policy seeking to protect the integrity of Bungay's historic environment	No LSE – does not promote development	N/A	None

TC&E1: Town Centre Vitality	Criteria for change of use development within the town centre	No LSE – does not promote development	N/A	None
TC&E2: Tourism Accommodation	Policy with criteria for new tourist accommodation aiming to influence location of such within the settlement boundary. Although it does not promote growth it is generally supportive of tourism uses.	LSE – the Neighbourhood Plan area falls within 13km of the Broads sites which means there could be in-combination effects, such as increased recreational pressure from additional tourist accommodation.	In combination effects such as increased recreational pressure	For consideration at appropriate assessment.
TC&E3: Employment Growth	Policy supporting proposals for economic growth meeting agreed criteria	No LSE –does not allocate land for development purposes	N/A	None
CM1: Bungay Medical Centre; CM2: Sports Facilities; CM3: Community Hub; CM4: Pre-School Education; CM5 Community Education	Policies that support delivery of infrastructure within the town	No LSE – the policy does not allocate land for development but sets criteria for the consideration of proposals should land become available. The policy encourages the reuse of brownfield and previously developed land.	N/A	None
ENV1: Green Corridors	Policy seeking to establish a green corridor from	No LSE – mitigation policy for growth protecting European	N/A	None

	growth areas to the	sites		
--	---------------------	-------	--	--

Policy	Description	Likely Significant Effects	Potential Risks	Recommendation
	town centre linking existing open green space			
ENV2: Green Amenity Space	Policy requiring contributions towards open green space in line with the Open Space Needs Assessment	No LSE – mitigation policy for growth protecting European sites	N/A	None
ENV3: Landscape Character	Policy protecting the integrity of areas of biological or geological significance	No LSE – protective policy not promoting development	N/A	None
ENV4: Biodiversity	Protective policy requiring green space connectivity and net ecological gain	No LSE - protective policy not promoting development	N/A	None
ENV5: Flooding	Protective policy requiring appropriate flood risk and ecological assessment	No LSE – protective policy including identification of risks to natural environment	N/A	None
TM1: Parking Standards for New Residential Development	Policy setting requirements for parking for new residential development	No LSE – does not promote development	N/A	None

TM2: Electric Vehicle Charging Points	Policy requiring provision of electric vehicle charging points	No LSE – does not promote development	N/A	None
TM3: Off Street Public Car Parking	Policy supporting additional public car parking provision subject to agreed criteria in or adjacent the town centre	No LSE – Policy designed to reduce the impact of current on-street car parking and contains protective criteria around the Conservation Area	N/A	None
TM4: HGVs in the Town Centre	Protective policy requiring HGVs associated with construction to avoid the Conservation Area and Town Centre	No LSE – does not promote development	N/A	None
Policy	Description	Likely Significant Effects	Potential Risks	Recommendation
TM5: Sustainable Transport and Highway Safety	Policy promoting sustainable transport as part of new development	No LSE – does not promote development, encourages walking and cycling in local environment	N/A	None

5. Conclusions

The screening assessment identifies **Policies H3, H4 and TC&E2** as having potential likely significant effects on protected European wildlife sites. This means likely significant effects on the Broads sites in combination with other growth proposed in the Waveney Local Plan cannot be ruled out. To ensure compliance with the Sweetman judgement it is not possible to take into account mitigation measures to screen out likely significant effects at this stage. Therefore, the requirement for the Bungay Neighbourhood Development Plan to undertake further assessment under the Habitats Regulations 2017 is **screened in**.

Appendix 2: Sources of background information

- East Suffolk Council Waveney Local Plan adopted 20 March 2019 (<https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Planning/Waveney-Local-Plan/Adopted-Waveney-Local-Plan-including-Erratum.pdf>)
- Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Waveney Local Plan (December 2018) (<https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Planning/Waveney-Local-Plan/Habitats-Regulations-Assessment.pdf>)
- Habitats Regulations Assessment for the Waveney Local Plan (June 2018) ([A3-Habitats-Regulations-Assessment-of-the-Waveney-Local-Plan-June-2018.pdf](https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Planning/Waveney-Local-Plan/Habitats-Regulations-Assessment-of-the-Waveney-Local-Plan-June-2018.pdf) ([eastsuffolk.gov.uk](https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk)))
- Local Plan for the Broads (https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0036/259596/Local-Plan-for-the-Broads.pdf)
- Habitats Regulations Assessment (modifications version) of the Local Plan for the Broads (https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0021/257151/Local-Plan-for-the-Broads-HRA-Modifications-stage-080119.pdf)
- Habitats Regulations Assessment (addendum) of the Local Plan for the Broads (https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0031/259591/Broads-Local-Plan-Habitats-Regulation-Report-Addendum-APPENDIX-3-ba-170519.pdf)

Appendix 3: Natural England Consultation Response

Date: 05 November 2020
Our ref: 331967
Your ref: Bungay Neighbourhood Plan

Dickon Povey MRTPI

Principal Planner (Policy and Delivery)
East Suffolk Council
Dickon.Povey@eastsoffolk.gov.uk

BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Dickon Povey,

Bungay Neighbourhood Plan HRA Screening

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 26 October 2020

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.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening

Natural England agrees with the report's conclusions that the Bungay Neighbourhood Plan Policies H3, H4 and TC&E2 have the potential to cause likely significant effects on protected European wildlife sites, and therefore we agree that the further assessment under the Habitats Regulations 2017 should be screened in.

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

Yours sincerely,

Ben Jones

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/)⁴ 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](#)⁵.

Priority habitats are those habitats of particular importance for nature conservation, and the list of them can be found [here](#)⁶. 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](#)⁷.

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.

⁴ <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

⁵ <http://www.nbn-nfbr.org.uk/nfbr.php>

⁶

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

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making> ⁵ <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

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](#)⁵ website and also from the [LandIS website](#)⁸, which contains more information about obtaining soil data.

Natural environment issues to consider

The [National Planning Policy Framework](#)⁹ sets out national planning policy on protecting and enhancing the natural environment. [Planning Practice Guidance](#)¹⁰ 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.

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.

⁸ <http://www.landis.org.uk/index.cfm>

⁹

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

¹⁰ <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/natural-environment/>

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-ofway-and-local-green-space/local-green-space-designation/>