

CORE STRATEGY SINGLE POLICY REVIEW:

## **Conversion & Re-use of Rural Buildings as Dwellings Draft Policy**

(incorporating Proposals Map Amendments)

## **Final Appropriate Assessment**



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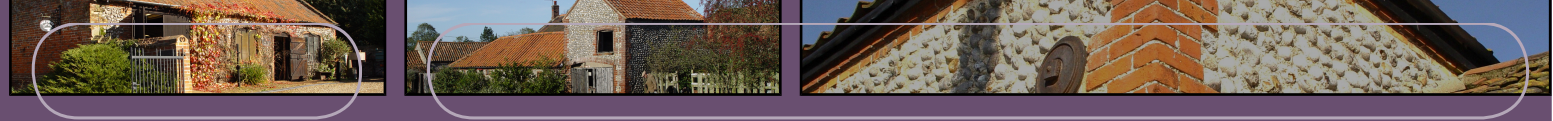
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# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Habitats Directive protects sites of exceptional importance in respect of rare, endangered or vulnerable natural habitats and species within Europe. These sites are referred to as 'European Sites' and consist of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Offshore Marine Sites (OMSs), however there are no OMSs designated off the North Norfolk coast at present.
- 1.2 Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive require Appropriate Assessment (AA) of any plans or projects likely to have a significant effect on a designated feature of a European Site. Appropriate Assessment looks at the potential effects of a proposed plan on all European sites, both within and adjacent to the plan area. The intention is that a plan or project should only be approved after determining that it will not adversely affect the integrity of any European Site. If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the site, and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must be carried out for reasons of overriding public interest, compensatory measures must be incorporated to ensure that the overall coherence of a European Site is protected.
- 1.3 The guidance on Appropriate Assessment <sup>(1)</sup> has informed the Appropriate Assessment of the North Norfolk Core Strategy Development Plan Document.
- 1.4 This report summarises the Appropriate Assessment process, describes the European Sites within, and adjacent to, North Norfolk and assesses the possible implication of the Conversion and Re-use of Rural Buildings as Dwellings policy. The previous AA report for the Core Strategy is available on the Council's website and should be referred to for further details on the anticipated effects that have been mitigated through the development of other Core Strategy policies.

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## 2 The Appropriate Assessment Process

- 2.1 The stages involved in the Appropriate Assessment process are set out below:

### 1) Screening for likely significant effects

Identifying whether a plan option is likely to have a significant effect on any European Site. This will determine whether the subsequent steps of Appropriate Assessment are required.

- 2.2 The precautionary principle must be used when assessing whether effects are significant. Where there is any doubt or further research is needed the Appropriate Assessment process should proceed to the next test, rather than reach a conclusion of 'no significant effect'.
- 2.3 If there are found to be likely significant effects the plan option must be subject to Appropriate Assessment of its implications for the conservation objectives of the European Site.

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1 *Planning for the Protection of European Sites: Appropriate Assessment. DCLG August 2006*



## 2) Appropriate Assessment

The implications for the conservation objectives of the European Site should be examined.

- 2.4** The Assessment should enable fine-tuning of the plan as it emerges to ensure that significant effects on European sites are avoided.

## 3) Alternative Solutions and Mitigation

Where the plan is assessed as having an adverse effect on the integrity of a site, then alternative solutions must be considered.

- 2.5** The primary aim of any mitigation of an option should be to allow 'no adverse affect on integrity' to be concluded. Where this is not possible then mitigation should aim to reduce the adverse affect as much as possible. Measures will normally involve the modification of an option.
- 2.6** After mitigation measures and possible alternatives have been exhausted and it still cannot be concluded that there will be 'no adverse affect on integrity' then, as a rule, the option should be dropped.
- 2.7** In exceptional circumstances, and as an exception to that rule, if the pursuit of the option is justified by 'imperative reasons of overriding public interest' consideration can be given to proceeding. Strong justification will be required to support this and it must be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Secretary of State that there were no possible mitigation measures and/or alternative solutions to cancel out the negative effects. In these cases the Secretary of State shall secure any necessary compensatory measures to ensure the overall coherence of the European Site is protected.

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## 3 Consultation & Preparation

- 3.1** Natural England is the statutory nature conservation body responsible for providing advice on Appropriate Assessment and has commented on the contents of this AA. The Appropriate Assessment was carried out by Planning Policy and Countryside Officers at NNDC.
- 3.2** An AA (published June 2007) was prepared of the Core Strategy by an external ecologist (with assistance from Planning Policy and Countryside Officers at NNDC) in consultation with Natural England. The AA concluded that none of the policies were likely to cause significant effects on European Sites within and adjacent to North Norfolk. The document can be viewed or downloaded from the LDF website ([www.northnorfolk.org/ldf](http://www.northnorfolk.org/ldf)).
- 3.3** This report is being published alongside the submission of the Single Policy Review of the Core Strategy - Conversion and Re-use of Rural Buildings as Dwellings Draft Policy. During the Examination the Inspector will consider the soundness of the policy using the AA as part of the evidence base.

## 4 Evidence Gathering for the Appropriate Assessment

**4.1** Evidence gathering is the first stage and information on the following should be collected:

- European Sites within and outside the plan area potentially affected;
- The characteristics of those European Sites and their conservation objectives; and
- Other relevant plans or projects

### European sites that may be affected

**4.2** The following sites have been considered through the Appropriate Assessment process:

Special Protection Areas (SPAs) (protected sites classified under the EC Directive on the conservation of wild birds, the Birds Directive):

- North Norfolk Coast
- Broadland
- Great Yarmouth North Denes

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) (protected sites designated under the EC Habitats Directive):

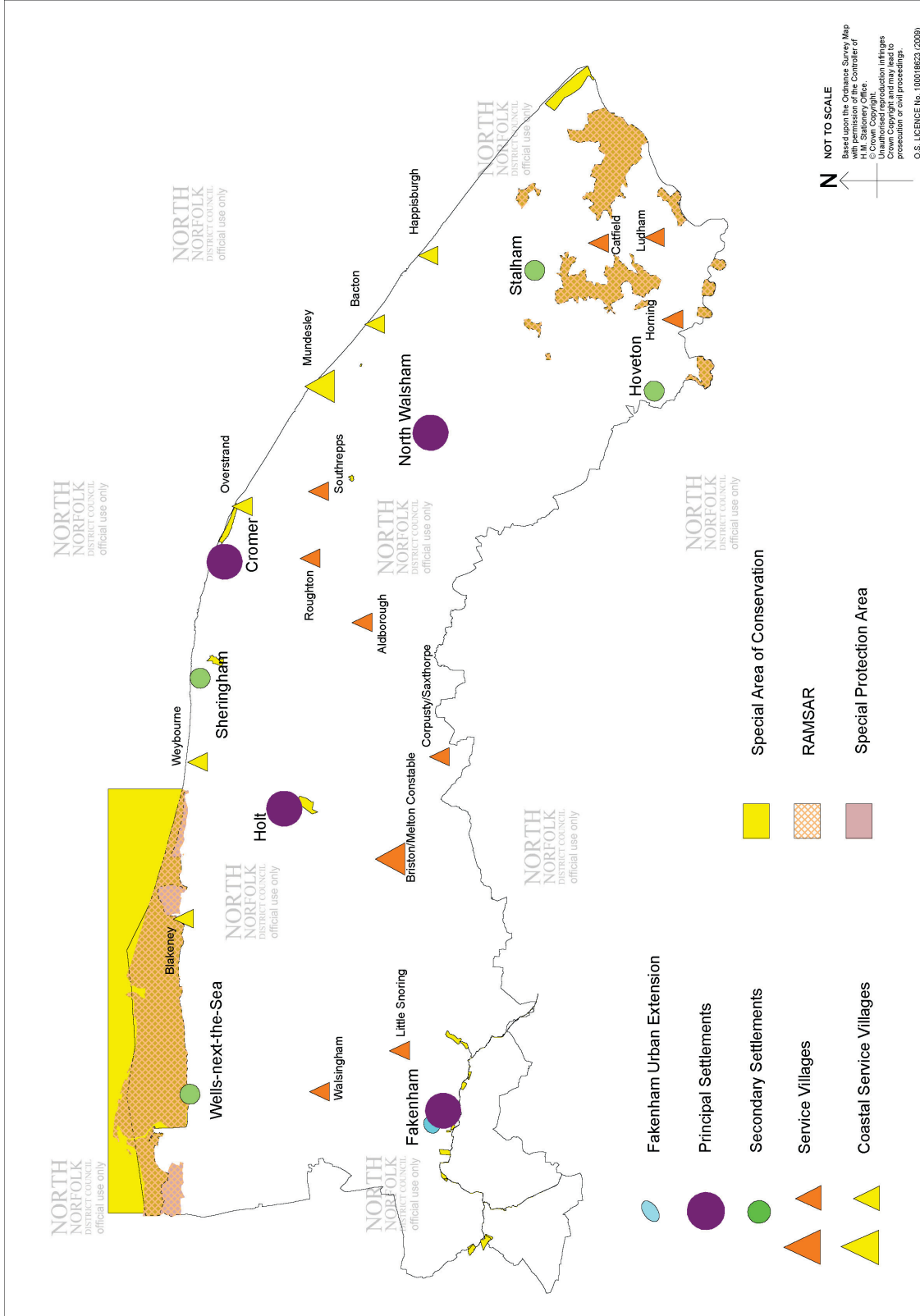
- North Norfolk Coast
- The Broads
- The Wash and North Norfolk Coast
- Norfolk Valley Fens
- Overstrand Cliffs
- Paston Great Barn
- River Wensum
- Winterton - Horsey Dunes

**4.3** The locations of these sites are illustrated on the following location plan, and more detailed plans for each site are contained within the description of their characteristics.



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Map 1 Environmental Designations





## Characteristics and conservation objectives of the European sites

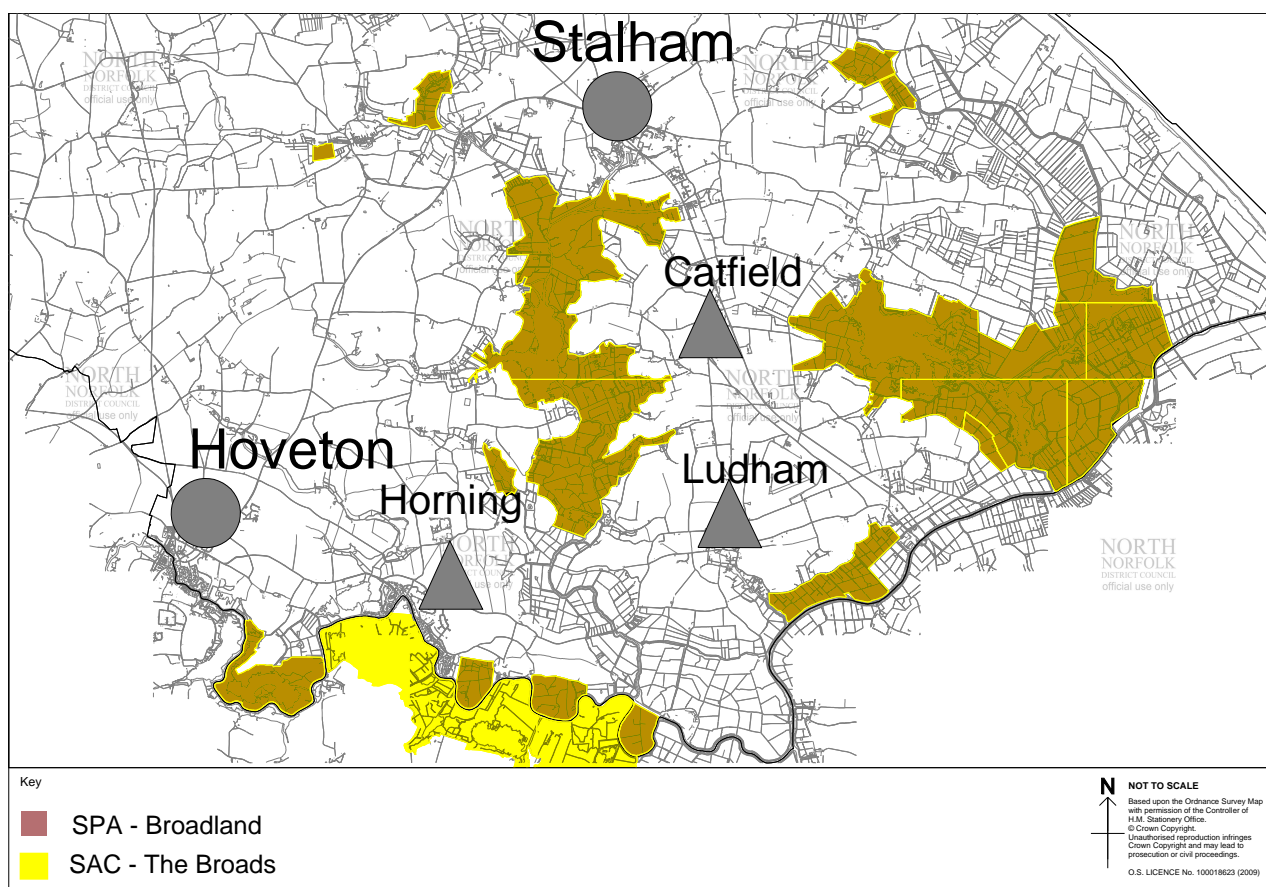
Further details about the sites are contained in this section.

### Broadland

Incorporating

- Broadland Special Protection Area (SPA) – Designated 21 September 1994
- The Broads Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – Designated 1 April 2005

Map 2 Broadland Environmental Designations



### Site Condition

- 4.4** Of the 2252.13 hectares, or 38.4% of the protected area, within the administrative boundaries of North Norfolk District Council, 44.5% is considered to be in “favourable” or “unfavourable recovering” condition. The remaining 55.5% is considered to be in unfavourable condition.

### Description

- 4.5** Broadland is a low-lying wetland complex straddling the boundaries between east Norfolk and northern Suffolk and comprises some 5865.60 hectares. The Broads are a series of flooded medieval peat cuttings within the floodplains of five principal river systems. The area includes the river valley systems of the Bure, Yare and Waveney and their major tributaries. Component sites in the North Norfolk district include Alderfen Broad SSSI, Ant Broads and Marshes SSSI, Broad Fen, Dilham SSSI, Bure Broads and Marshes SSSI, Calthorpe Broad SSSI,



Ludham–Potter Heigham Marshes SSSI, Priory Meadows, Hickling SSSI, Smallburgh Fen SSSI and Upper Thurne Broads and Marshes SSSI. Throughout the District the SPA and SAC sites overlay each other. Two additional component SSSIs that contribute to the Broads/Broadland are situated a little way outside the District boundary and might be affected by this plan. These SSSIs are Upton Broad and Marshes SSSI and Shallam Dyke Marshes, Thurne SSSI.

**4.6** The open distinctive landscape comprises a complex and interlinked mosaic of wetland habitats including open water, reedbeds, carr woodland, grazing marsh and fen meadow, forming one of the finest marshland complexes in the UK. The differing types of management of the vegetation for reed, sedge and marsh hay, coupled with variations in hydrology and substrate, support an extremely diverse range of plant communities. The region is important for recreation, tourism, agriculture and wildlife.

### Determining Reasons for Designation

**4.7** The freshwater habitats support internationally important numbers of overwintering wetland bird species (Bewick’s swan, bittern, hen harrier, ruff, whooper swan, gadwall, pink-footed goose, shoveler, cormorant, great crested grebe, coot, bean goose, white-fronted goose, wigeon, teal, pochard and tufted duck), and internationally important breeding populations of bittern and marsh harrier.

**4.8** The Broads contain several examples of naturally nutrient-rich lakes. These lakes and the ditches in areas of fen and drained marshlands support relict vegetation of the original Fenland flora, and collectively the site contains one of the richest assemblages of rare and local aquatic species in the UK. The stonewort–pondweed–water-milfoil–water-lily associations are well represented, as are club-rush–common reed associations. The dyke systems support vegetation characterised by water-soldier, whorled water-milfoil and broad-leaved pondweed as well as being a stronghold for Desmoulin’s whorl snail in East Anglia. The range of wetlands and associated habitats also provide suitable conditions for otters.

**4.9** The complex of sites contain the largest blocks of alder wood in England. Within the complex complete succession sequences occur from open water through reedswamp to alder woodland, which developed on fen peat. The site also contains the largest example of calcareous fens in the UK. The Broads also contain examples of transition mire that are relatively small, having developed in re-vegetated peat-cuttings as part of the complex habitat mosaic of fen, carr and open water.

**4.10** The site supports outstanding assemblages of rare plants and invertebrates including nine British Red Data Book plants and 136 British Red Data Book invertebrates.

Table 1 Broadland SPA/SAC qualifying features

Broadland SPA/SAC	Qualifying Features	Key Environmental Features that support site integrity
Broads SAC 1	3140 Hard oligo - mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp.	Topography, hydrology, drainage, water quality
Broads SAC 2	3150 Natural eutrophic lakes with <i>Magnopotamion</i> or Hydrocharition - type vegetation	Topography, hydrology, drainage, water quality
Broads SAC 3	7140 Transition mires and quaking bogs	Topography, hydrology, drainage, water quality, management

Broadland SPA/SAC	Qualifying Features	Key Environmental Features that support site integrity
Broads SAC 4	7210 Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i>	Topography, hydrology, drainage, water quality, soil conditions, management
Broads SAC 5	7230 Alkaline fens	Topography, hydrology, drainage, water quality, soil conditions, management
Broads SAC 6	91E0 Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> ( <i>Alno-Padion</i> , <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i> )	Hydrology, lack of human intervention
Broads SAC 7	6410 Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils ( <i>Molinion caeruleae</i> )	Hydrology, management, drainage
Broads SAC 8	1903 Fen orchid <i>Liparis loeselii</i> (L.) Rich.	Hydrology, drainage, water quality, soil conditions, management
Broads SAC 9	1395 Desmoulin's whorl snail <i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i>	Hydrology, flood frequency, management
Broads SAC 10	1355 Otter <i>Lutra lutra</i>	Relative tranquillity, hydrology,
Broadland SPA 1	Breeding Populations: bittern, marsh harrier	Relative tranquillity, hydrology,
Broadland SPA 2	Overwintering Populations: Bewick's swan, bittern, hen harrier, ruff, whooper swan, gadwall, pink-footed goose, shoveler, cormorant, great crested grebe, coot, bean goose, white-fronted goose, wigeon, teal, pochard and tufted duck	Relative tranquillity, hydrology,

## Vulnerability

**4.11** The site has suffered from management neglect and natural succession during this century. This is slowly being reversed via conservation and other management works undertaken through a number of bodies. Sea level rise and reduced summer flows in the River Bure brought about by abstraction are resulting in increasing saline intrusion into the site and generally drier summer conditions. The Environment Agency, Water Companies and Natural England are proceeding with a project to investigate options and remedy this situation via the Review of Consents process and AMP4/5 funding cycles. The site also suffers from eutrophication, brought about through the build up of nutrients over a long period, primarily through sewage outfalls, agricultural practices and sedimentation. Some of the sewage works are now stripping phosphorus and there is a programme of mud pumping to remove enriched material from lakes. The Review of Consents process and AMP4/5 is examining if further improvements to sewage treatment works are required and the Catchment Sensitive Farming Project is starting to address the diffuse pollution problem. The region as a whole is a centre for tourism and recreation, however this pressure is now starting to be brought under control by the Broads Authority via management action including Water Space Management Plans. Efficient drainage within much of the reclaimed parts of the wetland has reduced the wildlife value. Water Level Management Plans and the Environmental Stewardship scheme are starting to raise water levels, revert arable areas back to grass and encourage sensitive management, particularly of the ditches. Flood management works are carried out in accordance with the Environment Agency Broads Strategy and Broadland Rivers Catchment Flood Management Plan.

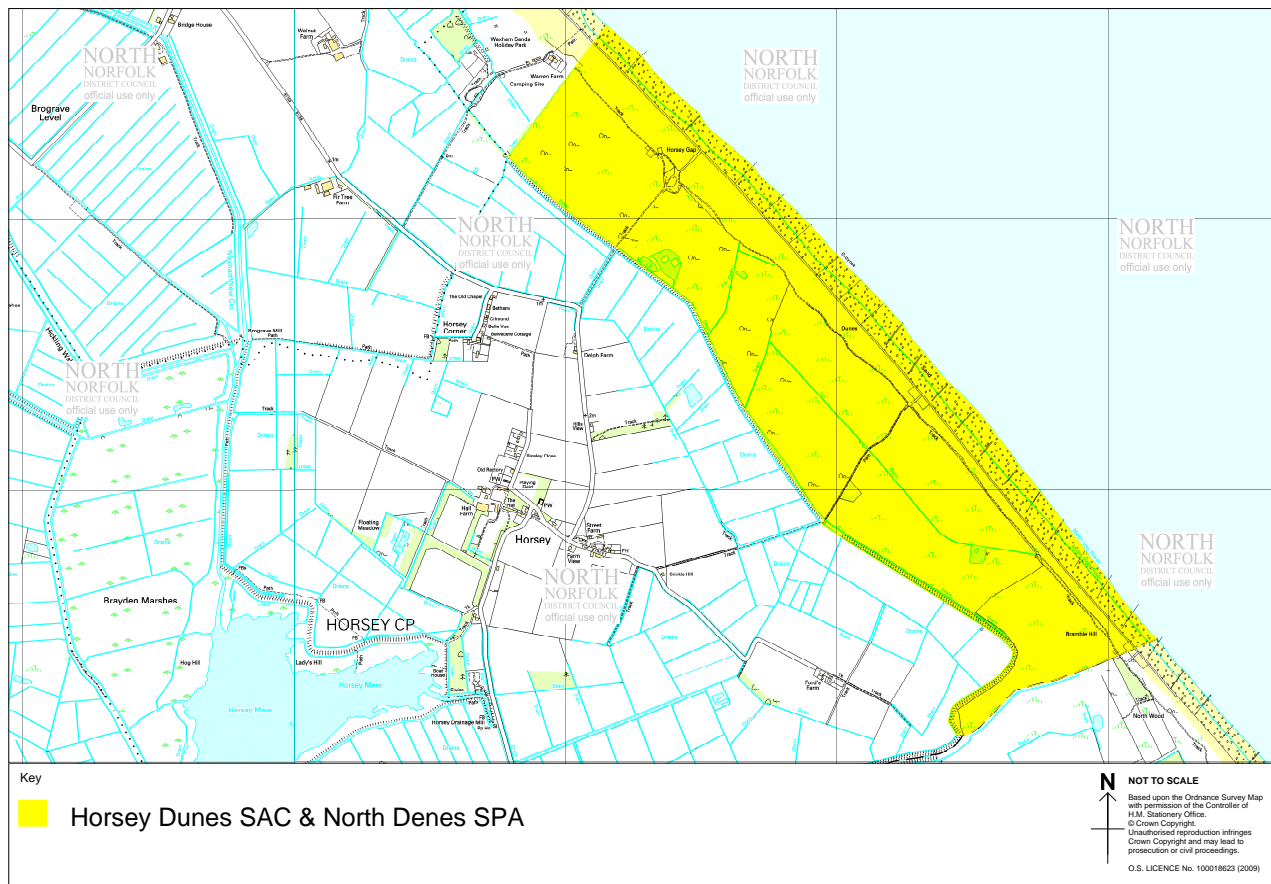


## Great Yarmouth North Denes & Winterton – Horsey Dunes

### Incorporating

- Great Yarmouth North Denes Special Protection Area (SPA) – Designated 1 March 1993
- Winterton – Horsey Dunes Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – Designated 1 April 2005

Map 3 Horsey Dunes and North Denes Environmental Designations



### Site Condition

- 4.12** Great Yarmouth North Denes SPA: Of the 52.99 hectares, or 35.5% of the protected area, within the administrative boundaries of North Norfolk District Council, 28.2% is considered to be in “favourable” or “unfavourable recovering” condition.
- 4.13** Winterton – Horsey Dunes SAC: Of the 168.44 hectares, or 39.5% of the protected area, within the administrative boundaries of North Norfolk District Council, 77.4% is considered to be in “favourable” or “unfavourable recovering” condition.

### Description

- 4.14** The Great Yarmouth North Denes SPA contains two component SSSI areas: the low dune system and beach at Great Yarmouth (within Great Yarmouth Borough Council administrative area) and the beach and foredune ridge at Winterton – Horsey Dunes (from Warren Farm, Horsey in the north down to The Valley, Winterton in the south). Within this part of the SPA only the section from Warren Farm to Bramble Hill, about 35.5%, is within the boundary of

North Norfolk District Council. The two component areas of the SPA are linked, due to the high mobility of little terns, and to the dynamic nature of the beach shapes which influences suitability for breeding.

- 4.15 Winterton – Horsey Dunes SAC covers an area of 425.94 hectares from Warren Farm, Horsey in the north to The Valley, Winterton in the south. Approximately 39.5% of the designation is within the boundary of North Norfolk District Council. The site is a coastal dune system, with foreshore, and associated areas of dry heathland, dry grassland and mesotrophic grassland.

### Determining Reasons for Designation

- 4.16 Great Yarmouth North Denes SPA qualifies for SPA status under Article 4.1, by supporting a nationally important breeding population of little tern *Sterna albifrons*, representing 9.2% of the GB breeding population (5 year mean, 1992-1996).
- 4.17 Winterton - Horsey Dunes SAC: The primary reason for selection of this site is because it is the only significant area of dune heath on the east coast of England and also includes areas of acidic dune grassland as an associated acidic habitat. The Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (*Calluno-Ulicetea*) vegetation, a priority feature, is characteristic of dune heath in an eastern locality with low rainfall, and Winterton - Horsey Dunes is considered to be one of the best sites in the UK. The drought-resistant grey hair-grass *Corynephorus canescens* is a characteristic species of the open dry dune soils. Also a primary feature are the Humid Dune Slacks, the slacks within Winterton - Horsey Dunes are chiefly of interest because they occur on an extremely base-poor dune system on the dry coast of East Anglia in eastern England. Because of their acidic soils, the dunes support swamp and mire communities, in addition to small areas of typical dune slack vegetation. As a result they represent an extreme of the geographical range and ecological variation of humid dune slacks within the UK.
- 4.18 Also of importance are the embryonic shifting dunes, for which the area is considered to support a significant presence; and Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *ammophila arenaria* (“white dunes”) for which the area is considered to support a significant presence.

Table 2 Great Yarmouth North Denes SPA/SAC

Great Yarmouth North Denes SPA/SAC	Qualifying Features	Key Environmental Features that support site integrity
W-HD SAC 1	2150 Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes ( <i>Calluno-Ulicetea</i> )	Coastal processes
W-HD SAC 2	2190 Humid dune slacks	Topography, rainfall, hydrology
W-HD SAC 3	2110 Embryonic shifting dunes	Coastal processes
W-HD SAC 4	2120 Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> (“white dunes”)	Coastal processes
GYND SPA 1	Breeding Populations: little tern <i>Sterna albifrons</i> .	Coastal processes, extent of site, relative tranquillity.

### Vulnerability

- 4.19 The little tern colonies within the Great Yarmouth North Denes SPA are dependent upon the maintenance of high accreting beaches. Coast protection schemes have the potential to disrupt or reduce sediment supply to the SPA. However, Beach Management Plans are required before works proceed. These require mitigation measures should an adverse impact occur in



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the future. The success of the colonies at both sites is dependent upon wardening in order to exclude people and dogs and the control of predators. The wardening is jointly undertaken by the Natural England and the RSPB, with assistance of Great Yarmouth Borough Council.

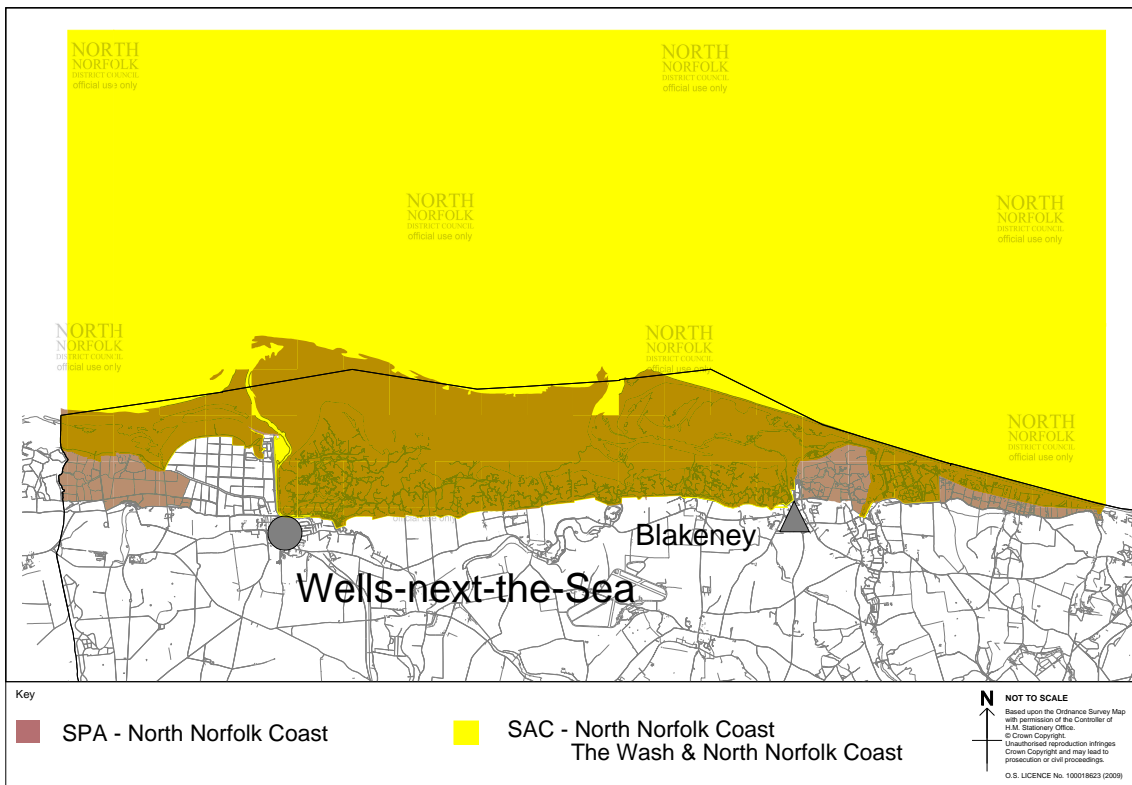
**4.20** A concrete wall constructed in the 1960s, together with sea defence works up-drift which reduce sediment supply, constrain and prevent the site from responding naturally to coastal processes. The embryonic shifting dune communities are most vulnerable. Beach-feeding operations pose a threat through the possible use of sand with shell fragments, particularly to the Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes. A Coastal Habitat Action Plan (ChaMP) was produced in 2002, and this provides guidance on how to address these issues. Recently the Shoreline Management Plan has been reviewed. The site is backed by intensively-farmed arable land, and water abstraction from this area is a threat to the humid dune slack communities. Visitor pressures are high especially in the summer, resulting in erosion, fire and disturbance impacts. The site relies on rabbits to maintain open habitats, and is therefore vulnerable to outbreaks of disease.

## North Norfolk Coast

Incorporating:

- North Norfolk Coast Special Protection Area (SPA) – Designated 1 January 1989
- North Norfolk Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – Designated 1 April 2005
- The Wash and North Norfolk Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – Designated 1 April 2005

Map 4 North Norfolk Coast Environmental Designations



## Site Condition

- 4.21** North Norfolk Coast SPA: Of the 4573.25 hectares, or 58.17% of the protected area, within the administrative boundaries of North Norfolk District Council, 99.05% is considered to be in “favourable” or “unfavourable recovering” condition. The remaining 0.95% is considered to be in unfavourable condition.
- 4.22** North Norfolk Coast SAC and Wash and North Norfolk Coast SAC: Of the 4444.35 hectares, or 4.2% of the protected area, within the administrative boundaries of North Norfolk District Council, 99.02% is considered to be in “favourable” or “unfavourable recovering” condition. The remaining 0.98% is considered to be in unfavourable condition.

## Description

- 4.23** The North Norfolk Coast is an area of low-lying barrier coast that extends for 40 km from Weybourne, beyond the border of the district, to Holme and Hunstanton in the west of the county, covering an area of some 7862.39 ha. A portion of the site lies within the Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council area.
- 4.24** The site encompasses a variety of habitats including intertidal sands and muds, saltmarshes, shingle and sand dunes, together with areas of land-claimed freshwater grazing marsh and reedbed, which is developed in front of rising land. The geographical position of the North Norfolk Coast and its range of habitats make it especially valuable for migratory birds and wintering waterfowl, particularly Brent and Pink-footed geese. Both freshwater and marine habitats support internationally important numbers of wildfowl in the winter and several nationally rare breeding birds. The sandflats, sand dune, saltmarsh, shingle and saline lagoons habitats are of international importance for their fauna, flora and geomorphology.

## Determining Reasons for Designation

- 4.25** The justification for designation of the sites includes the following; the site is one of the largest expanses of undeveloped coastal habitat of its type in Europe. It is a particularly good example of a marshland coast with intertidal sand and mud, saltmarshes, shingle banks and sand dunes. In addition there are a series of brackish-water lagoons and extensive areas of freshwater grazing marsh and reed beds.
- 4.26** The site supports at least three British Red Data Book and nine nationally scarce vascular plants, one British Red Data Book lichen and 38 British Red Data Book invertebrates.

Table 3 North Norfolk Coast SPA/SAC qualifying features

North Norfolk Coast SPA / SAC	Qualifying Features	Key Environmental Features that support site integrity
NNC SAC 1 & W&NNC SAC 8	1150 Coastal lagoons	Topography, salinity, drainage
NNC SAC 2	1220 Perennial vegetation of stony banks	Coastal processes, relative tranquility
NNC SAC 3 and W&NNC SAC 7	1420 Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs ( <i>Sarcocornetea fruticosi</i> )	Coastal processes
NNC SAC 4	2110 Embryonic shifting dunes	Coastal processes
NNC SAC 5	2120 Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> ('white dunes')	Coastal processes



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North Norfolk Coast SPA / SAC	Qualifying Features	Key Environmental Features that support site integrity
NNC SAC 6	2130 Fixed dunes with herbaceous vegetation ('grey dunes')	Coastal processes, relative tranquility
NNC SAC 7	2190 Humid dune slacks	Topography, rainfall, hydrology
NNC SAC 8	1355 Otter <i>Lutra lutra</i>	Extent of site, mosaic of habitats, habitat structure, relative tranquility.
NNC SAC 9	1395 <i>Petalophyllum ralfsii</i>	Soil conditions, hydrology, habitat structure
W&NNC SAC 1	1110 Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time	Coastal processes
W&NNC SAC 2	1140 Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide	Coastal processes
W&NNC SAC 3	1160 Large shallow inlets and bays	Coastal processes
W&NNC SAC 4	1170 Reefs	Coastal processes
W&NNC SAC 5	1310 <i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand	Coastal processes
W&NNC SAC 6	1330 Atlantic salt meadows ( <i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i> )	Coastal processes
W&NNC SAC 9	1365 Common Seal <i>Phoca vitulina</i>	Coastal processes
W&NNC SAC 10	1355 Otter <i>Lutra lutra</i>	Coastal processes
NNC SPA1	Breeding populations: avocet, bittern, marsh harrier, little tern, common tern, mediterranean gull, roseate tern, sandwich tern, redshank, ringed plover.	Coastal processes, extent of site, mosaic of habitats, habitat structure, relative tranquility.
NNC SPA2	Wintering populations: avocet, pink-footed goose, dark-bellied brent goose, wigeon, knot, hen harrier, bar-tailed godwit, bittern, golden plover, ruff, pintail, redshank.	Coastal processes, extent of site, mosaic of habitats, habitat structure, relative tranquility.
NNC SPA3	Migrant populations; ringed plover	Coastal processes, extent of site, mosaic of habitats, habitat structure, relative tranquility.
NNC SPA4	Wetland bird assemblage (in addition to the overwintering and migratory species above): common scoter, cormorant, shelduck, white-fronted goose, dunlin, gadwall, teal, shoveler, velvet scoter, oystercatcher, grey plover, lapwing, sanderling	Coastal processes, extent of site, mosaic of habitats, habitat structure, relative tranquility.

### Vulnerability

**4.27** The site is vulnerable to natural sea level rise, storm surges and changes in erosion patterns that are increasingly likely to affect the freshwater grazing marsh and reedbed habitats. The requirement for establishment of freshwater habitats to replace these natural losses is being investigated with the Environment Agency. Water abstraction for irrigating of arable land and public water supply may affect freshwater spring flows onto grazing marshes and this will be addressed through the Environment Agency Review of Consents process and possibly AMP4/5. The site is visited by a large number of tourists especially in the summer. A visitor management

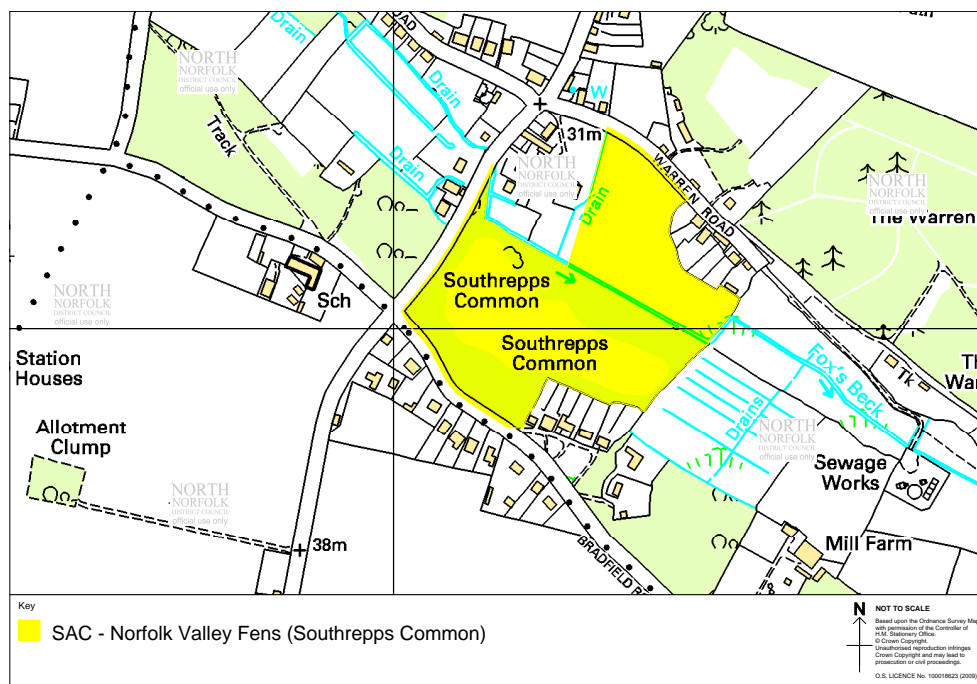


strategy has been developed through the Norfolk Coast Project. A shoreline management strategy has been approved for this coast, which will address many of these issues. Large parts of the site are managed as Nature Reserves either directly by Natural England (Holkham & Scolt Head Island) or through voluntary sector (Holme, Blakeney, Titchwell and Cley).

- 4.28** A Shoreline Management Plan, local biodiversity action plans, Water Level Management Plans, Site Management Statements and Environmental Stewardship are addressing the issues of flood management, sea-level rise, coastal retreat, water level management, habitat recreation and visitor pressure. The SAC includes a number of National Nature Reserves and reserves owned or managed by voluntary conservation organisations.
- 4.29** The Wash and North Norfolk Coast is one of the most diverse coastal systems in Britain. This diversity is largely dependent on physical processes that dominate the natural system; consequently the vulnerability of habitats is linked to changes in the physical environment. The intertidal zone is being threatened from coastal squeeze as a result of land-claim and coastal management works as well as sea-level rise and storm-surges. Changes in the sediment budgets also threaten these habitats. At present activities which alter the sediment characteristics include dredging and coastal protection works. Current management is underway to address concerns over declines in shell-fisheries. The area supports internationally important seal populations that are vulnerable to disturbance and disruption of the marine ecosystem upon which they depend. Such issues should be addressed through the Marine Scheme of Management.



Map 7 Norfolk Valley Fens (Southrepps Common) Environmental Designation



## Site Condition

**4.30** Of the 80.01 hectares, or 12.9% of the protected area, within the administrative boundaries of North Norfolk District Council, 68.83% is considered to be in “favourable” or “unfavourable recovering” condition. The remaining 31.17% is considered to be in unfavourable condition.

## Description

**4.31** Norfolk Valley Fens SAC comprises a series of sites scattered through out the County. Three of the fifteen separate sites are within the North Norfolk District; these are Southrepps Common SSSI, Holt Lowes SSSI, and Sheringham and Beeston Regis Common SSSI.

**4.32** The SAC comprises a series of valley-head spring-fed fens. Such spring-fed flush fens are very rare in the lowlands. The spring-heads are dominated by the small sedge fen type, mainly referable to black-bog-rush – blunt-flowered rush mire, but there are transitions to reedswamp and other fen and wet grassland types. The individual fens vary in their structure according to the intensity of management and provide a wide range of variation. There is a rich flora associated with these fens, including species such as grass-of-Parnassus, common butterworth, marsh helleborine and narrow-leaved marsh-orchid.

## Determining Reasons for Designation

**4.33** A number of habitats and species are present that represent a qualifying feature for selection of these sites. The primary reason relating to Annex 1 Habitats is the presence of Alkaline Fens. All three sites within North Norfolk District have alkaline Fens – in addition, Holt Lowes SSSI has European dry heaths and North Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*, and Sheringham and Beeston Regis Common SSSI has *Molinia* meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils. The other features listed are not supported by any sites within North Norfolk District.



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Table 4 Norfolk Valley Fens SAC qualifying features

Norfolk Valley Fens SAC	Qualifying Features	Key Environmental Features that support site integrity
NVF SAC 1	7230 Alkaline fens	Hydrology, topography, water quality
NVF SAC 2	4010 Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i>	Soil, hydrology, water quality
NVF SAC 3	4030 European dry heaths	Soil conditions
NVF SAC 4*	6210 Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates ( <i>Festuco-Brometalia</i> )	Soil conditions; habitat structure
NVF SAC 5	6410 <i>Molinia</i> meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils ( <i>Molinion caeruleae</i> )	Soil conditions; habitat structure, hydrology
NVF SAC 6*	7210 Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i>	Hydrology, topography, water quality
NVF SAC 7	91E0 Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> ( <i>Alno-Padion</i> , <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i> )	Hydrology, topography, lack of management
NVF SAC 8*	1014 Narrow-mouthed whorl snail <i>Vertigo angustior</i>	Habitat structure
NVF SAC 9*	1016 Desmoulin's whorl snail <i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i>	Habitat structure; hydrology and water levels.

\* Not present within SAC component sites in the District

### Vulnerability

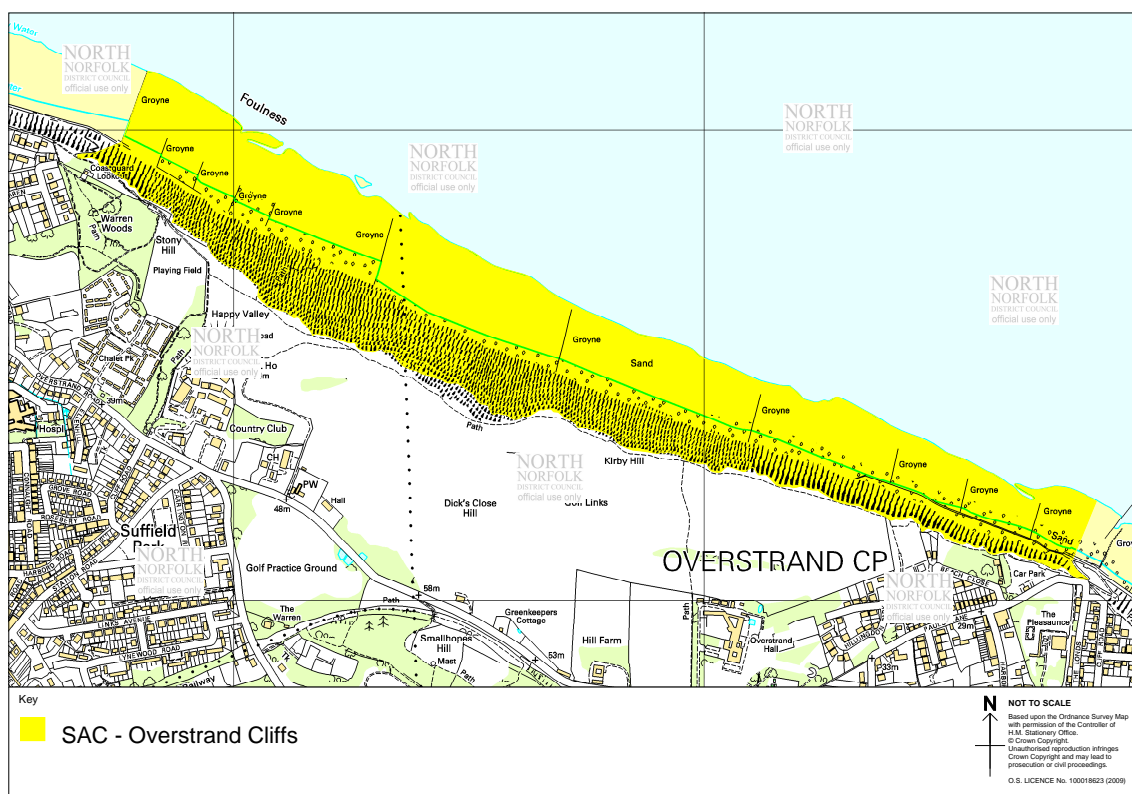
**4.34** These alkaline fens are generally small in area and surrounded by intensively-farmed land. They are very vulnerable to reductions on the water table and a decrease in the volume of spring flows arising from groundwater abstraction. In recent decades scrub and woodland has spread due to the cessation of traditional cutting and grazing management and the drying-out of the fens. These sites are now largely isolated from the rural/agricultural economy of which they were once a part, and in many instances this traditional management has become uneconomic. Management agreements and Environmental Stewardship payments help towards the reintroduction or promotion of the continued use of traditional management. Improved understanding of the water needs of these wetlands is the subject of work by the Environment Agency advised by Natural England. Any effects of groundwater abstraction which are identified will be addressed through appropriate licensing regimes, and the forthcoming Environment Agency Review of Consents process and AMP4/5 programmes.

## Overstrand Cliffs

### Incorporating

- Overstrand Cliffs Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – Designated 1 April 2005

Map 8 Overstrand Cliffs Environmental Designation



### Site Condition

- 4.35** Of the 30.02 hectares, or 100% of the protected area, within the administrative boundaries of North Norfolk District Council, 100% is considered to be in “favourable” condition.

### Description and Determining Reasons for Designation

- 4.36** The site covers the area of cliffs and foreshore between the Coastguard Lookout at The Warren, Cromer and Pauls Lane, Overstrand, which is an area of 30.02 hectares. All of the selected site is within North Norfolk District Council area.
- 4.37** Overstrand cliffs are one of the best examples of unprotected vegetated soft cliffs on the North Sea coast in the most easterly part of the UK. The cliffs are up to 70 m high and are composed of Pleistocene sands and clays with freshwater seepages in places and are subject to moderately frequent cliff-falls and landslips. Much of the length is unaltered by coast protection measures and is therefore natural in character. The vegetation exhibits cycles of succession with ruderal communities developing on the newly-exposed sands and mud followed by partially-stabilised grasslands and scrub. Seepage areas support wet fen communities and in places perched reedbeds occur. The diverse range of habitats supports an outstanding range of invertebrates.



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Table 5 Overstrand Cliffs SAC qualifying features

Overstrand Cliffs SAC	Qualifying Features	Key Environmental Features that support site integrity
Overstrand SAC 1	1230 Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts	Coastal processes, soils

### Vulnerability

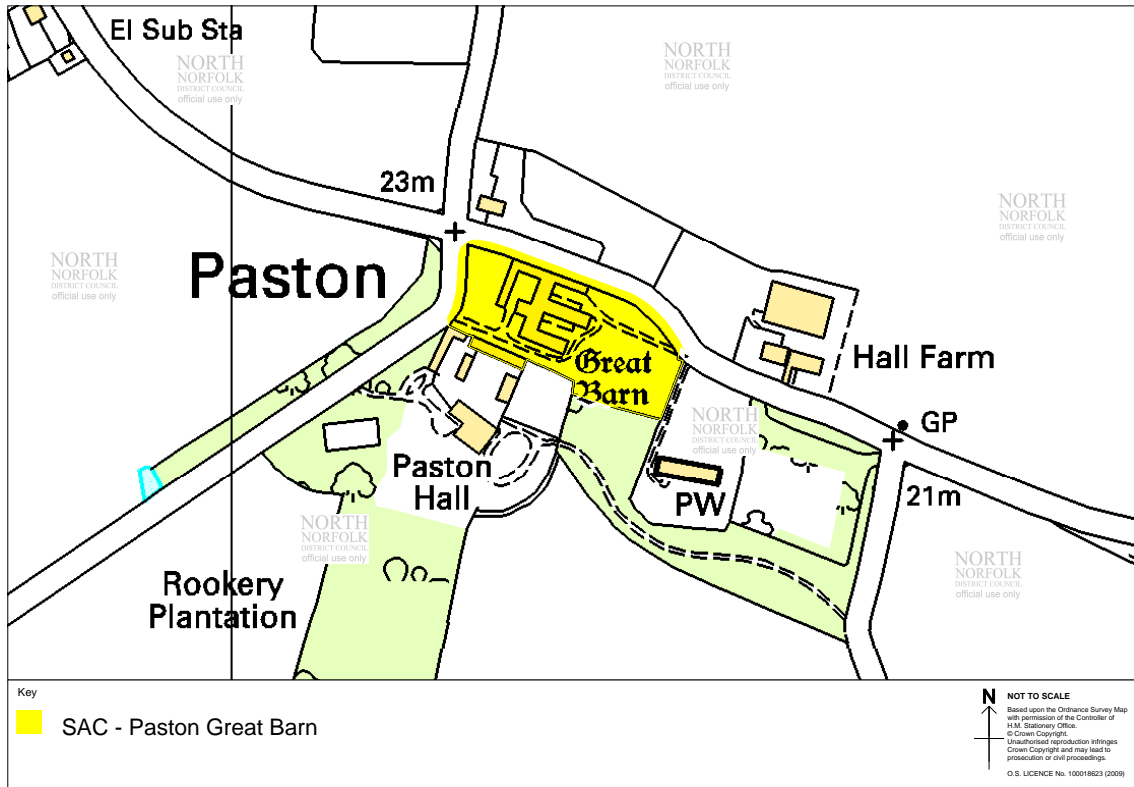
**4.38** Overstrand Cliffs are composed of Pleistocene sands and clays with seepages which result in moderately frequent landslips. Coast protection measures are limited to a few groynes except at the extreme eastern and western ends. The land-use on the landward side is mostly golf course, with some houses towards the eastern and woods and open ground at the western end. The site is most vulnerable to coastal protection measures and possible artificial drainage of seepages to reduce slippages. However, the current Shoreline Management Plan allows for 'do nothing', i.e. retreat along all but the extreme eastern end of this section. Therefore, the site is probably of low vulnerability.

## Paston Great Barn

Incorporating

- Paston Great Barn Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – Designated 1 April 2005

Map 9 Paston Great Barn Environmental Designation



## Site Condition

**4.39** Of the 0.95 hectares, or 100% of the protected area, within the administrative boundaries of North Norfolk District Council, 100% is considered to be in “favourable” condition.

## Description and Determining Reasons for Designation

**4.40** Paston Great Barn is situated at Paston near Mundesley, and covers an area of 0.95 hectares. It is the only known example of a maternity roost of barbastelle bats in a building. The barn is a 16<sup>th</sup> century thatched barn with associated outbuildings. A maternity colony of barbastelles utilises a range of cracks and crevices in the roof timbers for roosting.

Table 6 Paston Great Barn SAC qualifying features

Paston Great Barn SAC	Qualifying Features	Key Environmental Features that support site integrity
Paston SAC 1	1308 Barbastelle <i>Barbastella barbastellus</i>	Relative tranquillity, presence of suitable roosting and feeding habitat for barbastelles.

## Vulnerability

**4.41** Barbastelles are considered to be sensitive to disturbance throughout their range. Paston Great Barn is used by a maternity colony between May and September, but their whereabouts at other times is not known. They roost in the main barn, but also utilise some of the outbuildings when entering and leaving. The Great Barn is a medieval building which is scheduled as an ancient monument.

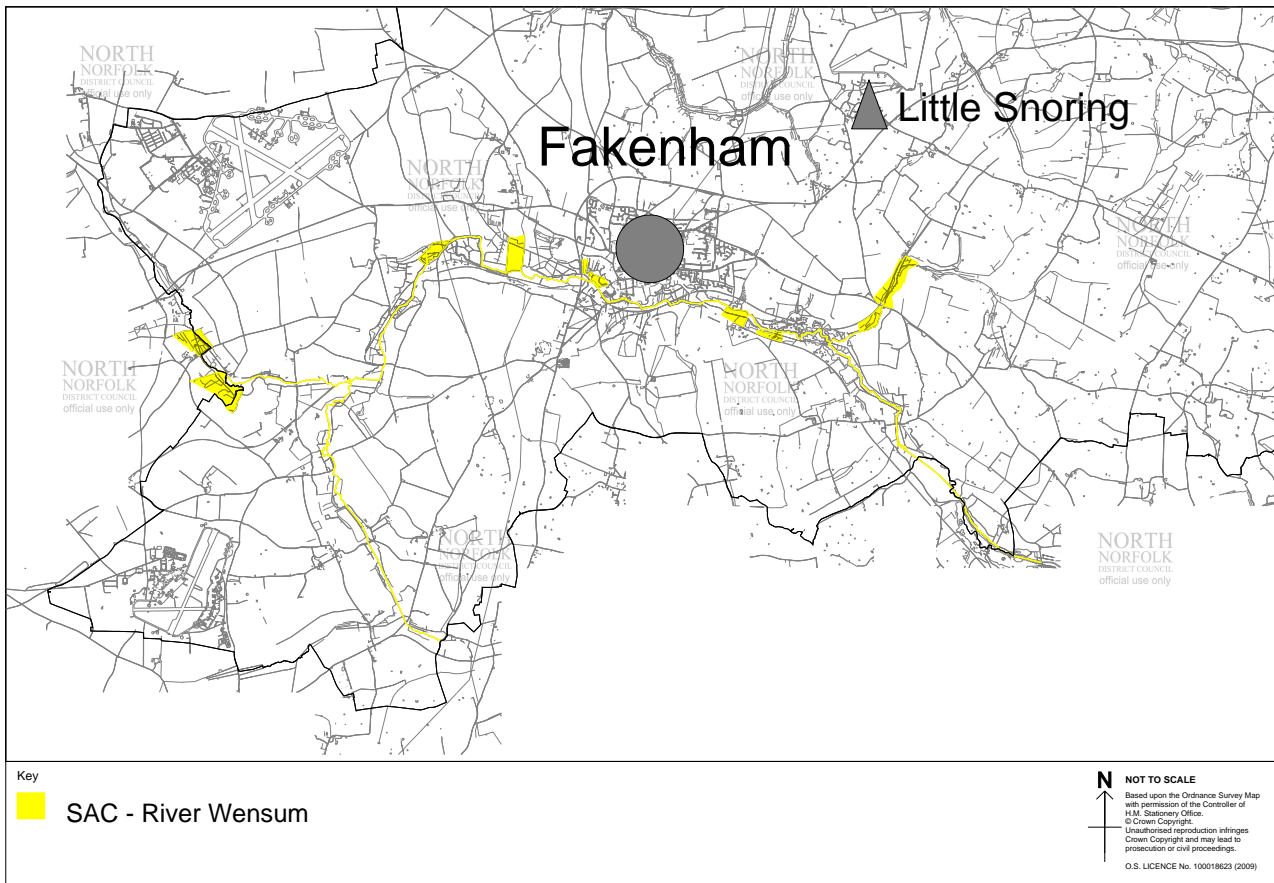


## River Wensum

### Incorporating

- River Wensum Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – Designated 1 April 2005

Map 10 River Wensum Environmental Designation



### Site Condition

**4.42** Of the 88.59 hectares, or 23.2% of the protected area, within the administrative boundaries of North Norfolk District Council, 71.41% is considered to be in “favourable” or “unfavourable recovering” condition. The remaining 28.59% is considered to be in unfavourable condition.

### Description

**4.43** The River Wensum SAC stretches along the length of the River Wensum and its tributaries from Broomsthorpe and South Raynham in the west down to Hellesdon in the suburbs of Norwich, covering an area of 381.74 hectares. In the main, the upper reaches of the river are within the borders of North Norfolk District, with the boundary at Sennowe Hall near Guist, resulting in approximately 30% of the SAC within the district.

**4.44** The Wensum is a naturally enriched, calcareous lowland river. The upper reaches are fed by springs that rise from the chalk and by run-off from calcareous soils rich in plant nutrients. This gives rise to beds of submerged and emergent vegetation characteristic of a chalk stream. Lower down, the chalk is overlain with boulder clay and river gravels, resulting in aquatic plant



communities more typical of a slow-flowing river on mixed substrate. Much of the adjacent land is managed for hay crops and by grazing, and the resulting mosaic of meadow and marsh habitats, provides niches for a wide variety of specialised plants and animals.

### Determining Reasons for Designation

**4.45** Ranunculus vegetation occurs throughout much of the river’s length. Stream water-crowfoot is the dominant Ranunculus species but thread-leaved water-crowfoot and fan-leaved water-crowfoot also occur in association with the wide range of aquatic and emergent species that contribute to this vegetation type. The river supports an abundant and rich invertebrate fauna including the native freshwater crayfish as well as a diverse fish community, including bullhead and brook lamprey. The site has an abundant and diverse mollusc fauna which includes Desmoulin’s whorl snail, which is associated with aquatic vegetation at the river edge and adjacent fens.

Table 7 River Wensum SAC qualifying features

River Wensum SAC	Qualifying Features	Key Environmental Features that support site integrity
River Wensum SAC 1	3260 Water courses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculion fluitantis</i> and <i>Callitricho-Batrachion</i> vegetation	Water quality, rapid flow, river substrate
River Wensum SAC 2	1092 White-clawed (or Atlantic stream) crayfish <i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i>	Presence of non-native crayfish species
River Wensum SAC 3	1016 Desmoulin's whorl snail <i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i>	Habitat structure; hydrology, water quality and water levels.
River Wensum SAC 4	1096 Brook lamprey <i>Lampetra planeri</i>	Flow, water quality, river substrate, habitat structure
River Wensum SAC 5	1163 Bullhead <i>Cottus gobio</i>	Flow, water quality, river substrate, habitat structure

### Vulnerability

**4.46** A stepped profile, with alternating fast and slow-moving reaches, was imposed on the river with the construction of water-mills. Habitat diversity has been reduced by the modification of the channel form. The input of silt and agricultural chemicals as a result of arable farming practices are a concern and the reversion of arable fields to low-input grassland is being encouraged via Environmental Stewardship and the Catchment Sensitive Farming Project. A Fluvial Audit has been undertaken to understand river processes and the current state of the river. A river restoration plan is being developed to address silt management in the river and channel form and function. Further development on the flood plain might alter the flow regime of the river. More detailed studies on groundwater resources are being carried out so as to determine suitable flow objectives to ensure that the river's ecology is not threatened by water abstraction. At adjacent sewage treatment works, a programme of phosphorous removal is being undertaken. Any increase in the distribution of *Pacifastacus leniusculus* within the catchment would threaten the long-term viability of *Austropotamobius pallipes*. Populations of *Lampetra planeri* and *Cottus gobio* are dependent on the maintenance of riffle habitats and might also be vulnerable to the introduction of non-native fish species. Populations of *Vertigo moulinsiana* are susceptible to interference with the emergent bank-side vegetation in which they occur.



## Other relevant plans or projects

**4.47** The assessment of significant effects of a given option needs to take account of the impact in combination with other plans and projects. The guidance states that only those that are considered most relevant should be collected for the 'in combination' test - an exhaustive list could render the assessment exercise unworkable. The following plans or strategies are considered to have potential effects and therefore have been included within the assessment.

### **North Norfolk Community Partnership: Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2011**

**4.48** North Norfolk Community Partnership brings together several organisations in the public, community and business sectors with the aim of working in partnership to achieve a shared vision for the future of North Norfolk.

**4.49** The key priorities of the Community Strategy are:

- Improved housing;
- Better jobs and prospects; and
- Sustaining a high quality of life - a nice place to live, work and visit.

**4.50** Other important issues to address include protecting the environment, retaining the special character of the area, coastal erosion and public transport.

### **East of England Plan - The Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England 2008**

**4.51** The East of England Plan sets the general policies for the East of England and LDFs should be in conformity with it. The Plan covers several policy areas and issues of relevance to this assessment include:

- A North Norfolk housing allocation of 8,000 dwellings to be provided between 2001 and 2021
- A North Norfolk jobs target of 4,000 jobs to be provided between 2001 and 2021
- Requirement for LDFs to provide land for commerce and industry
- Reducing the need to travel

**4.52** The following principles for the management of the natural, built and historic environment are set out:

- Conserve and enhance the natural, historic and built environment by positive management and protect it from development likely to cause harm
- Integrate protection and enhancement of nationally and internationally designated areas while meeting the social and economic needs of local communities
- Protect for their own sake all important aspects of the countryside
- Conserve and enhance local distinctiveness based on a thorough assessment of local character
- Promote a sustainable approach to the use of natural resources
- Protect the environment by considering the nature and location of proposed development, along with awareness of biodiversity and other environmental issues including light and noise pollution
- Restore damaged and lost environmental features wherever possible

## Shoreline Management Plans

- 4.53** Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) set out a strategy for coastal defence planning for a specified length of coast taking account of natural coastal processes and human and other environmental influences. The coast is divided into cells, and the coast of North Norfolk is included in Cells 3a and 3b. Adopted SMPs are 3a (Snettisham to Sheringham) and 3b (Sheringham to Lowestoft). Replacements for these are due for completion in spring 2010.
- 4.54** The draft SMPs promote greater sustainability of the shoreline more in keeping with the natural character and processes of the coast rather than continued protection of all areas. The policies in the emerging SMPs will mean greater retreat of the coastline than in recent years, which for the area to the east of Kelling will lead to impacts on property, communities and the local economy. Each SMP is going through its own Appropriate Assessment and it is not expected that either will promote policies that are harmful to European Sites.

## Local Transport Plan for Norfolk 2006 – 2011

- 4.55** This document, Norfolk's second Local Transport Plan, covers the five year period from April 2006 to March 2011 but with a longer term strategy up to 2021. The Plan contains five thematic strategies:
- Delivering sustainable growth
  - Improving accessibility
  - Reducing congestion
  - Protecting and enhancing the environment
  - Improving road safety
- 4.56** It also contains a number of area strategies and North Norfolk falls within the 'Market Towns', 'The Broads' and 'North Norfolk Coast' areas. These seek to achieve a number of aims such as discouraging development that could be detrimental to the Broads, developing market towns such as Fakenham as visitor entrance points to the coast and developing the Coasthopper bus service along the A149 as a viable alternative to the car.

## Biodiversity Mapping and Ecological Networks, Norfolk Wildlife Trust

- 4.57** Norfolk Wildlife Trust and the Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership have prepared a series of maps showing areas for protection and enhancement in order to create an ecological network. Key habitats for protection and enhancement in North Norfolk include all coastal habitats, reedbed, calcareous grassland, lowland meadow, heath, fen, chalk river, woodland, grazing marsh on the coast and large river valleys.

## Norfolk Biodiversity Action Plan

- 4.58** This contains objectives for improving the sustainability of priority habitats and species in coastal, agricultural, heathland, wetland and urban environments and contains broad targets for creating or expanding new habitat.

## Broadland Rivers Catchment Flood Management Plan.

- 4.59** The Environment Agency consulted in 2006 and is currently preparing CFMPs for all river catchments in England and Wales. These should provide a broad understanding of current and future flood risk, together with a set of justifiable long-term flood risk management policies and a prioritised set of further studies. The aim is to ensure that policies are sustainable and



maximise benefits to the environment, as well as providing protection from flooding to people and property. The Broadland Rivers CFMP covers the Waveney, Yare, Wensum, Bure, Ant and Thurne catchments and gives detailed information on the flood risk in each area.

### Norfolk Coast AONB Partnership Management Plan, 2009-14

**4.60** The management plan provides information and guidance for the conservation and enhancement of the AONB area. The overall aim is 'to bring about the sustainable management of the AONB in such a way that meets its specific environmental, social and economic needs whilst conserving and enhancing its natural beauty'.

### Neighbouring Districts

**4.61** The districts neighbouring North Norfolk are King's Lynn and West Norfolk, Great Yarmouth, Breckland and Broadland. The Broads Authority executive area includes part of North Norfolk. These Authorities are also in the process of preparing LDFs for their area, although they are all at different stages.

Table 8 Neighbouring Districts LDF Progress Table

Authority	Core Strategy	Site Specific Proposals
Broads Authority	Adopted December 2007	N/A
Breckland	Submitted March 2009	Submission scheduled April 2010
Kings Lynn & West Norfolk	Submission scheduled March 2010	Submission scheduled November 2010
Great Yarmouth	Submission scheduled March 2010	Submission scheduled February 2011
Broadland	(Joint) Submission scheduled March 2010	Public consultations on potential sites Mar-June & July-Sept 2009

## 5 Appropriate Assessment & Plan Analysis

**5.1** In order to determine whether the North Norfolk Conversion and Re-use of Rural Buildings as Dwellings Draft Policy represents an adverse affect to the integrity of any European Site within the District a two stage assessment is required to be undertaken.

Task 1 - Identifying whether a plan option is likely to have a significant effect.

Task 2 - Where there is found to be a likely significant effect assess the affect to the integrity of the European site and explore any mitigation measures that could reduce or remove the impact.

**5.2** Task 1 is a screening process. Policies which are considered not to have a significant effect on any European Site within or outside of the District boundaries at this stage need not be considered further. Those that are considered to have a significant effect will be taken forward to Task 2. The screening process involves consultation with the statutory nature conservation body (Natural England), and is a judgement based on a number of factors including the proximity of proposals to the European Sites, the type of impacts likely to be caused by the policy, the qualifying features of the European Site, the probability of the impact, the duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact.

**5.3** The term “significant” means not trivial or inconsequential but an effect that is potentially relevant to the site’s Conservation Objectives. The Conservation Objectives for each site are produced by Natural England, and are the objectives of management necessary to maintain the qualifying features in favourable condition. Maintenance implies restoration where the feature is currently in unfavourable condition.

**5.4** A matrix has been created which seeks to assess the following:

### Task 1:

- Whether the policy is necessary for the conservation management of a European Site.
- If a ‘likely significant effect’ can be expected.
- What is the likely mechanism for impact and the feature / features affected?
- Is an Appropriate Assessment required?

Where an Appropriate Assessment is required then move to Task 2:

### Task 2:

- Can it be ascertained it will not adversely affect the integrity of the European Site?
- Can it be carried out in a different way or be conditioned or restricted?
- What modifications to the policy / option are required?
- Can the modified policy / option be pursued without adversely affecting the integrity of the European Site?

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### Task 1 - Identifying whether a policy is likely to have a significant effect

**5.5** The original policy on the re-use of rural buildings as dwellings was assessed through the Core Strategy Appropriate Assessment (June 2007) which concluded that no sites would be affected and / or there were no possible mechanisms for adverse effect.



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- 5.6** A similar methodology was used for the AA of the new policy and from looking at the location and characteristics of the SACs/ SPAs in the area at the Task 1 screening stage it was concluded that the revised policy would not be likely to have a significant effect:
- 5.7** There are a number of SAC's / SPAs's in and around North Norfolk, however the conversion of rural buildings to dwellings is unlikely to affect their specific features, environmental conditions and conservation objectives. The policy would only allow conversions in particular locations, mainly centred around existing settlements away from designated sites.
- 5.8** There are a few cases where the conversion and re-use of rural buildings as dwellings policy area overlaps a SAC/SPA, and these are shown in the table below.

Table 9 SAC/SPA's falling within the Conversion and Re-use of Rural Buildings as Dwellings policy area.

Designated Area	Policy Area
Broadland	Potter Heigham, Stalham, Sutton, Hickling, Catfield, Hoveton, Horning.
North Norfolk Coast	Wells, Stiffkey, Blakeney and Cley.
Norfolk Valley Fens (Holt Lowes)	Holt.
Norfolk Valley Fens (Sheringham & Beeston Regis Common)	Sheringham and West Runton.
Overstrand Cliffs	Cromer and Overstrand.
River Wensum	Fakenham, Sculthorpe, Little Snoring and Ryburgh

- 5.9** The majority of the SACs/SPAs in North Norfolk are undeveloped areas with no suitable buildings available for re-use, and therefore there is unlikely to be any direct impact.
- 5.10** While there may be suitable buildings nearby these will have been previously used and the policy requires that they be structurally sound and suitable for conversion to a residential use without substantial rebuilding or extension. Therefore there should not be any significant impact from building work. The policy will normally apply to very small groups of buildings, and it is concluded that there will not be a significant impact from visitor disturbance.
- 5.11** The policy does allow exceptional buildings anywhere to be converted, however as stated above, the majority of the designated sites are in undeveloped areas with no suitable buildings available for re-use and it is extremely unlikely that any proposals would come forwards within a SAC/SPA. The obvious exception is Paston Great Barn, a designated SAC, which could in theory qualify for conversion under this rule. However as the building itself is a designated SAC managed by Natural England it is unlikely to come forwards and would be protected from any development proposals under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, & c.) Regulations 1994.
- 5.12** It was therefore concluded that there was no likely significant effect from the proposed policy.



Table 10 Screening for Likely Significant Effects

Policy	Necessary for conservation management of European Site	Likely significant effect	European Site Affected: Possible Mechanism: Possible Feature Impacted:	Appropriate Assessment required?
Conversion and Re-Use of Rural Buildings as Dwellings Policy	No	No	Sites affected: No sites affected and / or no possible mechanisms.	No

**5.13** Where Appropriate Assessment is not required, there is no need to move to Task 2.