

North Norfolk District Council

# Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Determination

Blakeney Neighbourhood Plan – Draft examination version (December 2020)

**26<sup>th</sup> April 2021 (final)** (updated May 21)

Document control

Correction para 3.15 & 4.12 removal of reference to policy 12 - May 2021

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# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Regulations require Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening to be undertaken by the competent authority i.e. any public body or individual holding public office with the statutory remit and function. In the case of Planning, North Norfolk District Council is the competent authority under the EU ‘Habitats’ Directive 92/43/EEC. The *Habitats Directive* is transposed into UK legislation by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (referred to as the *Habitats Regulations*). Under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive the Council must consider if the project i.e. the development proposal (Neighbourhood Plan), is likely to have a significant effect on the conservation objectives of the Natura 2000 site or adversely affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 site alone or in combination with other plans or projects. This process is generally referred to as a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).
- 1.2 Whether a neighbourhood plan requires a habitats regulation assessment and the level of detail needed will depend on what is proposed in the draft Neighbourhood Plan and the potential impacts on European sites designated for their nature conservation interest. Following the Screening Assessment this report represents the Screening Determination of North Norfolk District Council as the responsible body in Law on whether the emerging Blakeney Neighbourhood Plan (December 2020) will significantly affect the integrity of any European site, in terms of impacting on the site’s conservation objectives. This report therefore determines whether a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) under Directive 92/43/EEC, also known as the Habitats Directive, is required for the Blakeney Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.3 As the “responsible body” this report sets out North Norfolk District Council's HRA determination conclusions in respect of the:
- Screening report undertaken by NNDC on behalf of the Neighbourhood Plan steering group, which can be viewed online at: <https://www.north-norfolk.gov.uk/info/planning-policy/neighbourhood-plans/blakeney-neighbourhood-plan/>
  - The responses to this report from the statutory consultees (where they responded) are contained in Appendix 1 to this report.
- 1.4 This assessment relates to the Draft Examination version 2 December 2020 of the emerging Blakeney Neighbourhood Plan 2020- 2040 and follows earlier consultation on the pre submission version of the emerging neighbourhood plan at regulation 14 stage of neighbourhood plan preparation and consultation on the HRA screening assessment with the statutory bodies.

## 2. Legislative Background

- 2.1 It is a requirement of law that a plan or project is subject to an iterative assessment to determine whether it will significantly affect the ecological integrity of any European site, in terms of impacting on the site's conservation objectives. HRA is the a two-stage process to consider whether a proposed development plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on a European site designated for its nature conservation interest. Firstly, plans or programmes must be screened to determine if they are likely to have a significant effect (and are not plans connected to the management of the European site(s) in question). If it cannot be demonstrated during at the screening stage that the plan or programme will not have significant effects of the European site(s), an 'Appropriate Assessment' (AA) must then be undertaken, which is a much more detailed study of the effects of the plan or programme. The two parts together form a full HRA. Where it is deemed that adverse effects cannot be ruled out, a plan or project must not proceed, unless exception tests are met.
- 2.2 In determining whether a proposed development plan or programme is likely to have significant effects, the local authority must incorporate the 'precautionary principle' into its decision. This means that if there is uncertainty as to whether the plan or programme would cause significant effects on a European site, the full AA would be required. If an Appropriate Assessment is required, then this will engage the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment.
- 2.3 The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012<sup>1</sup>, state that submitted neighbourhood plans need to be accompanied by a statement explaining how the proposed neighbourhood plan meets the "basic conditions" set out in Schedule 4B of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act. These basic conditions include a requirement to demonstrate how the plan is compatible with EU obligations, which includes the need to undertake a HRA. This is one of the matters that will be tested as part of the independent examination of the Plan. In doing so the competent authority i.e NNDC will issue a Screening Determination as part of the HRA regulations setting out the Councils' HRA determination conclusions. Such a document follows the initial screening and or more detailed Appropriate Assessment and can be relied upon by the submitting authority i.e the Parish Council, as part of submission documents and for the subsequent examination.
- 2.4 Neighbourhood planning bodies are advised through national guidance to consider the environmental implications of its proposals in the production of a neighbourhood plan. Screening though can only be undertaken when sufficient information is available to enable the competent authority to determine whether the emerging Plan requires further detailed assessments in relation to the Habitats Regulations 2017. Undertaken too early a further screening exercise is likely to be necessary at subsequent stages when the direction and content of the plan is known. Undertaken during the later stages in the production of the neighbourhood plan however may have implications for delay as sufficient time needs to be factored into the production of a neighbourhood plan for any procedural steps required under

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/637/pdfs/ukxi\\_20120637\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/637/pdfs/ukxi_20120637_en.pdf)

the legislation. Plans should be kept under review and screened again should the content and particularly the scope change. A screening determination issued by the Council is required at submission.

### 3. Assessment

3.1 The Blakeney neighbourhood plan has been written *to enable the local community to have a positive influence on planning in the parish of Blakeney for the benefit of residents* To do this, the December 2019 version of the Plan seeks to bring forward 17 policies over three themes covering Local Economy & Tourism, Natural Environment and Built Environment

3.2 The Plans objectives as set out in the emerging plan (December 20) are:

- To accommodate appropriate change and development so that the intrinsic character and appearance of the village is retained and enhanced;
- To support the provision of affordable housing and to balance the number of second homes with the housing needs of the local community so that Blakeney continues to be a place where people of all ages can live and work;
- To give people with a connection to Blakeney priority for affordable homes;
- To support and promote the development of new and existing local businesses and employment opportunities;
- To protect green open spaces and footpaths within the village to promote wellbeing, preserve the local environment and protect wildlife;
- To make sure any development is of the highest standards of design and meets local needs;
- To maintain a navigable port in Blakeney for leisure and commercial craft

3.3 In determining whether a proposed development plan or programme is likely to have significant effects, the local authority must incorporate the ‘precautionary principle’ into its decision. This means that if there is uncertainty as to whether the plan or programme would cause significant effects on a European site, the full AA would be required.

3.4 The Blakeney Neighbourhood Plan Area (NPA) contains the following designated European sites and nature conservation sites:

- The North Norfolk Coast Special Area of Conservation
- The Wash and North Norfolk Coast Special Area of Conservation
- The North Norfolk Coast Special Protection Area
- The North Norfolk Coast Marine, Special Protection Area
- The Greater Wash Marine Special protection Area

3.5 Component Sites of Scientific Special Interest: North Norfolk Coast SSSI

3.6 Ramsar Site: North Norfolk Coast Ramsar Site.

3.7 The District contains a number of European sites within 10Km of Blakeney village

3.8 Table 1 European sites within 10 km

Designation	Name
SAC	North Norfolk Coast
	The Wash & North Norfolk Coast
	Norfolk Valley Fens
SPA	North Norfolk Coast
SAC (Marine)	North Norfolk Coast
	The Wash and North Norfolk Coast
SPA( Marine)	North Norfolk Coast
	Greater Wash
Ramsar Sites	North Norfolk Coast
SSSI	Cockthorpe Common, Stiffkey
	Weybourne Town Pit
	Morston Cliff
	Glandford (Hurdle Lane)
	Bilsey Hill
	Weybourne Cliffs
	Warham Camp
	Swanton Novers Woods
	Kelling Heath
	Holt Lowes
	Wells Chalk Pit
	Glandford (Ietheringsett Rd)
	North Norfolk Coast
	Stiffkey Valley
Wiveton Downs	

Table 2 European sites including Ramsar and component SSSI

Name & Uk Ref No	Description	ref	Feature Description
<b>North Norfolk Coast SAC - UK0019838</b>	Designated primarily for its coastal habitats including: coastal lagoons, perennial vegetation of stony banks (at Blakeney Point), Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrub, embryonic shifting dunes, white dunes, fixed grey dunes and humid dune slacks. Species of importance which are	1150	Coastal lagoons
		1220	Perennial vegetation of stony banks
		1420	Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs ( <i>Sarcocornetea fruticosi</i> )
		2110	Embryonic shifting dunes
		2120	Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> ("white dunes")
		2130	Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation ("grey dunes")
		2190	Humid dune slacks
		1355	Otter, <i>Lutra lutra</i>

	present as a qualifying feature on the site, but not a primary reason for selection, include otter and pearlwort.	1395	Petalwort, <i>Petalophyllum ralfsii</i>
<b>The Wash and North Norfolk Coast SAC - UK0017075</b>	An important marine area, covering the intertidal and subtidal areas only, which are also included in the component SPAs/SACs. It forms the largest marine embayment in the UK, consisting of extensive areas of sand and mud flats fringed by saltmarsh, supporting rich invertebrate communities and internationally important overwintering birds. It provides the only classic British example of a barrier beach system.	1110	Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time
		1140	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide
		1150	Coastal lagoons
		1160	Large shallow inlets and bays
		1170	Reefs
		1310	Salicornia and other annuals colonizing mud and sand
		1330	Atlantic salt meadows ( <i>Glaucopuccinellietalia maritima</i> )
		1420	Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs ( <i>Sarcocornetea fruticosi</i> )
		1365	Harbour seal, <i>Phoca vitulina</i>
		1355	Otter, <i>Lutra lutra</i>
<b>The North Norfolk Coast SPA - UK9009031</b>	Designated for its large numbers of wintering bird species including wigeon, pink-footed geese, brent geese, red knot and avocet; and for its breeding birds including ringed plover, little tern, common tern, sandwich tern, bittern, avocet and marsh harrier.	A132	Avocet, <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
		A021	Bittern, <i>Botaurus stellaris</i>
		A193	Common tern, <i>Sterna hirundo</i>
		A046a	Dark-bellied brent goose <i>Branta bernicla bernicla</i>
		A143	Knot, <i>Calidris canutus</i>
		A195	Little tern, <i>Sternula albifrons</i>
		A081	Marsh harrier, <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
		A084	Montagu's harrier, <i>Circus pygargus</i>
		A040	Pink-footed goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>
		A191	Sandwich tern, <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>
A050	Wigeon, <i>Anas penelope</i>		
	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Feature</b>	
<b>North Norfolk Coast Ramsar Site</b>	Criteria 1	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. There are a series of brackish-water lagoons and extensive areas of freshwater grazing marsh and reed beds. 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.  Assemblages of international importance with peak counts in winter: 98,462 counts of waterfowl (5 year peak mean (1998/99 to 2002/03))	
	Criteria 2		
	Criteria 5		
	Criteria 6		



		<i>Populations of breeding, passage and winter bird species of international importance, including:  Sandwich tern, Sterna sandvicensis  Common tern, Sterna hirundo  Little tern, Sternula albifrons  Knot, Calidris canutus  Pink-footed goose Anser brachyrhynchus  Dark-bellied brent goose Branta bernicla bernicla  Wigeon, Anas penelope  Northern pintail, Anas acuta</i>	
	<b>SSS1 Units</b>	<b>Special Interest Feature</b>	<b>Condition Status</b>
<b>North Norfolk Coast SSSI</b>	Multiple Units (70 live units in total)	Various	Ranging from Unfavourable – recovering to Favourable. 98% in favourable condition

Source: European sites in the East of England <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/6581547796791296>

## In-combination effects

- 3.9 Existing Plans and proposals must be considered when assessing new plans or programmes for likely significant effects as they may create “in- combination” effects.
- 3.10 The effects of the plan in-combination with other plans or projects are the cumulative effects which will or might arise from the addition of the effects of other relevant plans or projects alongside the plan under consideration. If during the stage 1 screening it is found the subject plan would have no likely effect alone, but might have such an effect in-combination then the appropriate assessment at stage 2 will need to proceed to consider cumulative effects. Where a plan is screened as having a likely significant effect alone, then the subsequent appropriate assessment should initially concentrate on its effects alone.
- 3.11 The emerging Blakeney Neighbourhood Plan will subject to examination and referendum success sit alongside the Local Plan and form part of the wider Development Plan in as far as material considerations are concerned in the Blakeney Neighbourhood Plan Area and the determination of any planning applications. The emerging North Norfolk Local Plan covers the administrative area of the District Council, with the exception of the areas that are within the designated Broad’s Area. The Broads Authority is the local planning authority for the designated Broads area. The current Local Plan is made up of the Core Strategy 2008 and the Site Allocations DPD 2011. These are shortly to be replaced with the emerging updated single Local Plan which is scheduled for pre submission regulation 19 consultation summer 2021. The emerging North Norfolk Local Plan sets the future strategic policy in relation to key topics such as the environment, retail, housing, job creation and tourism, as well as identifying site allocations and setting the strategic policies to deliver sustainable growth over the Plan period 2016- 2036. The Local Plan has been subject to an Interim HRA and is currently undergoing final HRA.

- 3.12 ALL Norfolk authorities Local Plans have been subject to HRA and, (with the exception of the Broads Authority) **conclude that the in-combination growth that is planned across the county has the potential to have significant adverse impacts due to recreational pressure on the designated wildlife sites – referred to as a likely significant effect (LSE), in the HRAs.** In some cases the HRA's also conclude that there are also LSE from individual development alone, and as such specific mitigation may be required. Each LPAs Local Plan (recently adopted or emerging<sup>2</sup>) through policies contained in them, and informed by the Appropriate Assessments undertaken as part of the HRAs have specific links to the implementation of the Norfolk Wide Green Infrastructure Recreational Impact Avoidance Strategy, GIRAMs, as the agreed process of mitigation.
- 3.13 Local planning authorities are the designated competent bodies and as such are responsible for ensuring that policies and proposals contained in their Development Plans (including neighbourhood Plans) and submitted as developer proposals **do not** have an adverse effect on the integrity of European sites, Es.
- 3.14 The Local Plan interim HRA, May 2019, acknowledges that policies in the emerging Local Plan have been developed with the need to protect European sites understood, and as such the policies contain strong wording and supporting text that enables a conclusion of no likely significant effects for most of the strategic policies. The appropriate assessment whilst providing actions for the next phase of plan making concluded that there are measures in progress that are capable of providing the necessary certainty required to conclude no adverse effects at the next iteration of the HRA. Such measures include the progression of the strategic mitigation strategy for recreation pressure across the Norfolk European sites to address in-combination recreation effects. The emerging final HRA screening also identifies likely significant effects for the emerging site allocations in Blakeney in relation to general urban effects and avoidance of buildings.
- 3.15 Urban effects relate to issues where development is close to the European site boundary and is an umbrella term relating to impacts such as light, noise, cat predation, fly tipping, increased fire risk, spread of invasive species (e.g. from gardens and garden waste) and vandalism.
- 3.16 The interim Appropriate Assessment of the preferred sites in Blakeney contained in the emerging Local Plan concluded that there is no credible means by which urban effects from the Blakeney preferred sites could adversely affect the integrity of the North Norfolk Coast SAC/SPA/Ramsar and as such no further assessment in relation to this aspect of the appropriate assessment was required.
- 3.17 Screening also identified that due to their immediate proximity to the European sites and the likelihood of triggering LSE alone (in addition to in-combination) will require high quality green infrastructure provision and specific measures on site to address localised recreational issues and impacts on the adjacent European site. The HRA of the Local Plan concludes that due to the

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<sup>2</sup> With the exception of the Broads Authority

limited levels of growth, provision should be concentrated on site and be informed by a project level HRA which should check the local footpaths and ensure signage, dog bins, potentially screening etc. are in place to resolve any access issues in the immediate vicinity of the allocations. This requirement would be picking up and very specific, local issues that might be missed given the more strategic scale and scope of the emerging Recreational Avoidance Mitigation Strategy, RAMS.

- 3.18 The HRA for the adopted Site Specific DPD was undertaken in 2011 and concluded that there is the potential for disturbance to fen orchid at the Norfolk Valley Fens SAC located approximately 10km away from Blakeney. However due to the nature of site and the limited visitation that it receives it can be concluded that levels of disturbance will be very low and there will be no adverse effect were concluded from the level of growth in the Core strategy. Adverse effects were not ruled out for the North Norfolk Coast and Wash SAC but following the appropriate mitigation measures subsequently incorporated it was concluded no adverse effects on the integrity of any of the Natura 2000 or Ramsar sites. Impacts on water quality and water resource from the proposed development at the time were also concluded to have no adverse effect on the integrity of any site as a result of the Plan at the time, (2007). The strategic policies of the Core Strategy were also subject to HRA along with each separate element in other policies and it was concluded that the development levels and policies were not likely to pose a likely significant effect either in isolation or cumulatively.
- 3.19 The Blakeney Neighbourhood Plan proposes no site allocations or new designations but is supportive through various criteria approaches of adhoc development while seeking to control the use/ occupancy of others. Some policies seem to apply to the village, which is classified as a growth location and Coastal Service Village in the Core Strategy and a large Growth Village in the emerging Local Plan. Outside the village the rest of the NPA is designated as a Countryside location in the statutory Development Plan, where development is restricted in the strategic policies of the District Council. It is not clear if the intention is to seek to apply the approaches across the whole of the NPA or where growth is supported through the Local Plan. The emerging Local Plan does identify site allocations for development in the parish, as does the existing Development Plan, however those previously identified in the Site Specific DPD 2011 have all been built out. Those sites identified in the emerging Plan, have undergone detailed HRA and appropriate assessment and are considered strategic policies. With the neighbourhood plan not promoting any quantum of development and in particular any additional development not already in Plans/emerging Plans the impacts of the plan on the integrity of the European sites is considered to be limited as the neighbourhood plan does not seek to increase in population and overall visitor numbers, and remains largely qualitative.
- 3.20 The Blakeney neighbourhood plan is a lower order plan than the adopted Core Strategy and the emerging Local Plan which focuses on strategic issues such as housing growth and distribution. Whilst the neighbourhood plan in its present state contains duplication and reparation across its policies as well as policies in higher order Plans, it is not the remit of this screening determination to consider however a number of policies have been identified as and would benefit from specific reference to the consideration of adverse impacts on the integrity of European sites, in line with the precautionary principles of HRA.

## Screening Outcome

- 3.15 The screening assessment considered that the mitigation measures described above in relation to the emerging Local Plan **and the precautionary wording when added to policies 3,10,11,15 and 17 of the BNP** were sufficient for the assessment to ascertain no in-combination adverse effects upon the integrity of any European sites in relation to the emerging neighbourhood Plan. It went onto conclude after a further detailed review of the likely effects of the proposed plan on the qualifying features of the European site that there would be no adverse effects upon the integrity of any European site.
- 3.21 Natural England, Historic England and The Environment Agency as the statutory bodies were consulted between 12 March 2021 and 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021 on the Screening Report issued March 2020. Their responses are appended to this report.

## Screening Determination

- 4.1 In line with the precautionary approach the recommended wording in policies 3, 10, 11, 15 and 17 as set out in Table 2 of the Screening Report should be attended where relevant. With this in mind the screening assessment report identifies that the draft plan would not have any adverse effects upon the integrity of the European sites. In light of the Screening Report and the responses from the statutory bodies it is determined that the Blakeney Neighbourhood Plan does not require a Habitats Regulation Assessment.

## Appendix 1 Consultation Responses

North Norfolk District Council  
Holt Road  
Cromer  
Norfolk  
NR27 9EN

**Our ref:** AE/2021/125994/01-L01  
**Your ref:** SEA screening  
**Date:** 22 April 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

**BLAKENEY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN SEA & HRA SCREENING  
CONSULTATION**

Thank you for consulting us on the SEA screening consultation for the Blakeney Neighbourhood Plan. We have reviewed the submitted SEA screening report and can confirm that we do not disagree with the conclusion reached in the Screening outcome paragraph 6.1.

The neighbourhood plan does not allocate any land for development and therefore we do not consider that a SEA report is required as there is unlikely to be significant environmental effects.

If however a SEA report is screened in then we request that Flood Risk is considered within the report.

We trust the above is useful.

Yours faithfully



**Miss Natalie Kermath  
Planning Advisor**

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Date: 17 March 2021  
Our ref: 346562  
Your ref: Blakeney Neighbourhood Plan SEA & HRA Screening Consultation



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Dear Iain Withington

## **Blakeney Neighbourhood Plan SEA & HRA Screening Consultation**

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 12 March 2021 which was received by Natural England on 12 March 2021

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.

### **Screening Request: Strategic Environmental Assessment / Habitat Regulations Assessment**

It is our advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that, in so far as our strategic environmental interests (including but not limited to statutory designated sites, landscapes and protected species, geology and soils) are concerned, that there are unlikely to be significant environmental effects from the proposed plan.

### **Neighbourhood Plan**

Guidance on the assessment of Neighbourhood Plans, in light of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (as amended), is contained within the [National Planning Practice Guidance](#). The guidance highlights three triggers that may require the production of an SEA, for instance where:

- a neighbourhood plan allocates sites for development
- the neighbourhood area contains sensitive natural or heritage assets that may be affected by the proposals in the plan
- the neighbourhood plan may have significant environmental effects that have not already been considered and dealt with through a sustainability appraisal of the Local Plan.

We have checked our records and based on the information provided, we can confirm that in our view the proposals contained within the plan will not have significant effects on sensitive sites that Natural England has a statutory duty to protect.

We are not aware of significant populations of protected species which are likely to be affected by the policies / proposals within the plan. It remains the case, however, that the responsible authority should provide information supporting this screening decision, sufficient to assess whether protected species are likely to be affected.

Notwithstanding this advice, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all potential environmental assets. As a result the responsible authority should raise environmental issues that we have not identified on local or national biodiversity action plan species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites or local landscape character, with its own ecological and/or landscape advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local landscape and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by this plan, before determining whether an SA/SEA is necessary.

Please note that Natural England reserves the right to provide further comments on the environmental assessment of the plan beyond this SEA/SA screening stage, should the responsible authority seek our views on the scoping or environmental report stages. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make.

For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to [consultations@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:consultations@naturalengland.org.uk).

Yours sincerely

Julie Lunt  
Consultations Team



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

## Natural environment information sources

The [Magic](#)<sup>1</sup> 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](#)<sup>2</sup>.

**Priority habitats** are those habitats of particular importance for nature conservation, and the list of them can be found [here](#)<sup>3</sup>. 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](#)<sup>4</sup>.

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](#)<sup>5</sup> website and also from the [LandIS website](#)<sup>6</sup>, which contains more information about obtaining soil data.

## Natural environment issues to consider

The [National Planning Policy Framework](#)<sup>7</sup> sets out national planning policy on protecting and enhancing the natural environment. [Planning Practice Guidance](#)<sup>8</sup> 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.**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup> <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

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

<sup>7</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/807247/NPPF\\_Feb\\_2019\\_revised.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807247/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <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](#)<sup>9</sup>), such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or [Ancient woodland](#)<sup>10</sup>. 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](#)<sup>11</sup>) or protected species. To help you do this, Natural England has produced advice [here](#)<sup>12</sup> 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](#)<sup>13</sup>.

# 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.

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

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

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

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

<sup>13</sup> <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](#) <sup>14</sup>).
- 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).

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<sup>14</sup> <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/>