

# **Valued Landscape Assessment**

## **Waveney Valley**



**Final Report**

**April 2024**

*'With its secret pools and occasional sandy beaches, the Waveney is full of swimming holes, diving stages improvised from wooded pallets, dangling ropes, and upturned canoes pulled up on the bank. Every two or three miles you come to a weir and a whitewashed watermill.*

**Rodger Deakin**

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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Appointment

Alison Farmer Associates was appointed in November 2023 by Suffolk County Council and Norfolk County Council to undertake a valued landscape assessment of the Waveney Valley which straddles the Counties of Norfolk and Suffolk.

This report sets out the findings of this assessment.

### 1.2 The Brief and Scope of Work

The purpose of the study is to:

- Develop knowledge and understanding of the area's special qualities.
- Provide evidence which can be used to inform responses to planning applications/appeals in the context of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF Dec 2023) paragraph 180a.
- Better protect the Waveney Valley against inappropriate development.

Importantly this study does not seek to spatially define an area of valued landscape and therefore replicate past Special Landscape Area (SLA) local designations. Instead, the study seeks to draw together evidence which demonstrates landscape value and as a result, more clearly articulates the special qualities of the area. It therefore forms an important evidence base to inform decision-making.

It is anticipated that the outputs from this study will be used to:

- Celebrate the Waveney Valley
- Inform future management objectives for the area
- Inform future development

This study has not included any stakeholder engagement work, nevertheless, the evidence gathered has been drawn from assessments and reports which are the product of stakeholder engagement, such as neighbourhood plans, as well as reference to art and literature.

### 1.3 Definitions

This study is undertaken in accordance with the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note '*Assessing landscape value outside national designations*', (2021). The guidance defines landscape qualities and landscape value as follows:

**Landscape qualities = characteristics/ features of a landscape that are valued**

*This term is being used to distinguish landscape qualities from landscape characteristics which are elements, or combinations of elements, which make a particular contribution to landscape character. Landscape qualities (in the sense meant in this TGN) are usually referred to as 'special qualities' or 'special landscape qualities' in relation to nationally designated landscapes. For example, 'special qualities' is a statutory expression used in relation to National Parks, in policy for Scotland's local landscape designations, and is a term used informally to describe components of natural beauty set out in AONB Management Plans.*

**Landscape value = the relative value or importance attached to different landscapes by society on account of their landscape qualities.**

*The definition of landscape value used in this TGN draws on, and is compatible with, the GLVIA3 definition of landscape value as well as Natural England's definition (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment, 2013; Tudor, 2014). The definition makes it clear that it is 'society' that assigns value to landscapes. However, landscape value means more than popularity and the Landscape Institute suggests that value assessments should be undertaken by a landscape professional, drawing on evidence from stakeholders where available.*

*Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 20/21*

## 1.4 Study Area

The study area for assessment comprises the Waveney Valley between its source at Lopham Fen in the west, to the boundary of the Broads National Park in the east. The extent of the study area to the north and south of the river has been determined by the past extent of Special Landscape Area (SLA) designations for Norfolk and Suffolk, and also the extent of the valley sides, as defined in the East of England Landscape Typology, that is the Valley Settled Farmlands landscape type. The relevant landscape character types in the East of England Typology and how they relate to the character types and areas of the Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment and South Norfolk Character Assessment are set out in Appendix 1.

This Study Area is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

## 1.5 National Planning Policy Framework (Dec 2023)

The National Planning Policy Framework refers to valued landscapes in paragraph 180 (a) and states that:

*'Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*

*protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan).'*

The term *'identified quality in the development plan'* is generally accepted by planning inspectors to mean any landscape where there is evidence to justify the identification of a 'valued landscape,' whether a local landscape designation exists or not. The

Landscape Institute supports this evidence-based approach. The Landscape Institute considers that planning authorities which removed local designations following previous policy guidance, or those which never had local landscape designation, may nevertheless have ‘valued landscapes’ outside nationally designated areas<sup>1</sup>.

## 1.6 Past Special Landscape Areas

The Waveney Valley was previously identified as a Special Landscape Area (SLA) covering both the Norfolk and Suffolk halves of the valley. This local landscape designation was previously identified during the 1980’s when County Structure Plans (for Norfolk and Suffolk) highlighted a desire to identify them in broad terms, and requested more detailed boundaries to be defined in District Plans. Whilst there is no record of what factors contributed to the identification of the SLA in Norfolk, for Suffolk SLAs were described as comprising:

- *‘River valleys which still possess traditional grazing meadows with their hedgerows, dykes, and associated flora and fauna;*
- *Historic parklands and gardens;*
- *Other areas of countryside where undulating topography and natural vegetation, particularly broadleaved woodland, combine to produce an area of special landscape quality and character.’*

The geographical extent of these areas was subsequently defined in respective local plans and incorporated into relevant policy. Although there is no record of assessments which led to the extent of SLAs, reference to former local plans has enabled the SLAs to be mapped in relation to the Waveney Valley – refer to Figure 1. This demonstrates that the majority of the Waveney Valley, between its source and The Broads, fell within a landscape recognised for its qualities and combination of features.

Whilst SLAs, and policies relating to them, are no longer in use, the removal of a local landscape designation does not mean that the qualities of the landscape that led to designation have changed, often they have not. The past inclusion of the Waveney Valley within a Special Landscape Area is therefore relevant to this study and forms part of the area’s designation history.

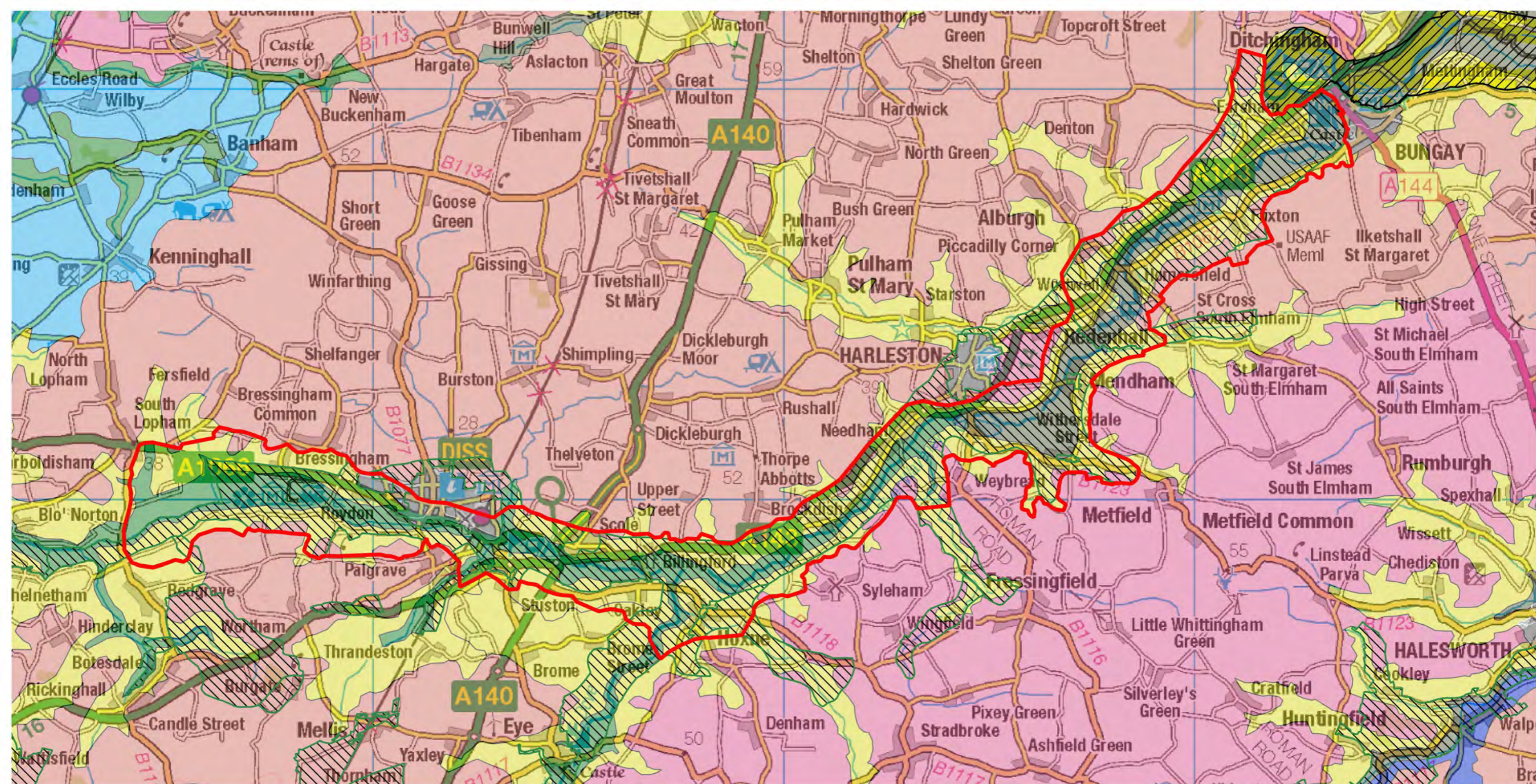
## 1.7 Local Plans

The Waveney Valley is covered by the following Local Authorities: Norfolk County Council, Suffolk County Council, Mid Suffolk District Council, East Suffolk District Council and South Norfolk District Council. The relevant extent of these administrative areas is illustrated in Figure 2.

Planning policies relating to landscape vary between planning authority as set out in Table 1 below (emphasis has been added for clarity). Each local plan makes reference to either landscape features and elements which are valued, or to valued landscapes, with particular reference to valley landscapes.

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<sup>1</sup> Assessing Landscape Value, Technical Guidance Note, Landscape Institute, 2021.



**Key**

- Study Area
- Wooded Fen
- Valley Meadowlands
- Rolling Valley Farmlands
- Wooded Plateau Claylands
- Settled Plateau Claylands
- Plateau Estate Farmland
- Estate Farmland

- Broads National Park
- Special Landscape Area\*

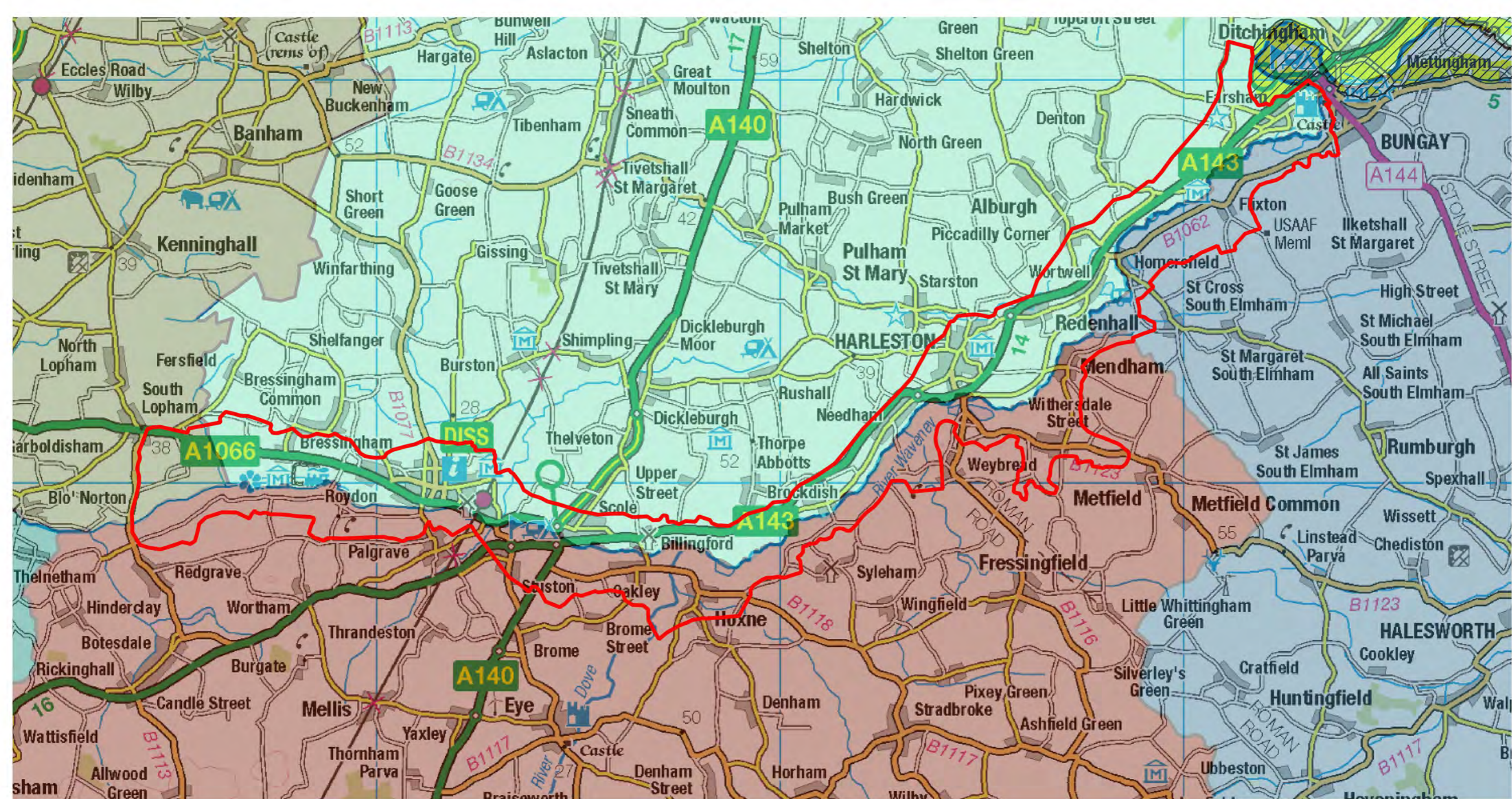
\*The Waveney Valley Special Landscape Area for South Norfolk has been digitised from paper maps

**Waveney Valley  
Valued Landscape Assessment**

**Figure 1: Study Area and Landscape Character Types**



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**Key**

- Study Area
- Breckland District Council
- South Norfolk District Council
- East Suffolk District Council
- Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council
- The Broads Authority

**Waveney Valley  
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**Figure 2: Local Authorities**



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**Table 1: Summary of relevant local plan policy**

<p><b>Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan (Parts 1 and 2 Adopted November 2023)</b></p> <p><b>Paragraph 12.09</b></p> <p><i>Along with Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Conservation Areas, there are also less well-known features that make all landscape character areas significant and worthy of protection. It is important to recognise these elements, in order to balance interests and consider potential impacts in the future, as well as to identify any further management or guidance which may be required that goes beyond the boundaries of defined designations covered by legislation. Furthermore, in cases where mitigation measures are necessary, it may help inform the type of measures which could be appropriate.</i></p> <p><b>Policy SP09 – Enhancement and Management of the Environment</b></p> <p><i>1) The Councils will require development to support and contribute to the conservation, enhancement and management of the natural and local environment and networks of green infrastructure, including: landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and the historic environment and historic landscapes.</i></p>
<p><b>East Suffolk is covered by the Waveney Local Plan (March 2019)</b></p> <p><b>Paragraph 8.205</b></p> <p><i>The Rural River Valleys and Tributary Valley Farmland character areas are identified in the Landscape Character Assessment as being valued landscapes that are particularly sensitive to change.</i></p> <p><b>Paragraph 8.208</b></p> <p><i>The assessment [Settlement Fringe Landscape Sensitivity Study 2016] supports the findings of the Landscape Character Assessment by identifying Tributary Valley Farmland and Rural River Valley landscapes on the fringes of settlements as being valued landscapes that are particularly sensitive to change.</i></p> <p><b>Relevant extracts from Policy WLP8.35 – Landscape Character</b></p> <p><i>Development proposals will be expected to demonstrate their location, scale, form, design and materials will protect and where possible enhance:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The special qualities and local distinctiveness of the area;</i></li> <li>• <i>The visual and historical relationship between settlements and their landscape settings;</i></li> <li>• <i>The pattern of distinctive landscape elements such as watercourses, commons, woodland trees (especially hedgerow trees) and field boundaries, and their function as ecological corridors;</i></li> <li>• <i>Visually sensitive skylines, seascapes and significant views towards key landscapes and cultural features;</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Development will not be permitted where it will have a significant adverse impact on:</i></p>

- *The landscape and scenic beauty of the protected landscapes and the settings of the designated areas of the Broads or the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;*
- *or locally sensitive and valued landscapes including Rural River Valleys and Tributary Valley Farmland character areas.*

#### **South Norfolk District Council Adopted Local Plan – Joint Core Strategy (March 2021)**

**This document identifies the Waveney Valley as a Sub-Regional Green Infrastructure Corridor (page 33) and the valley floor as forming a core area for biodiversity enhancement (page 34)**

#### **Objective 9 of the Spatial Vision**

*To protect, manage and enhance the natural, built and historic environment, including key landscapes, natural resources and areas of natural habitat or nature conservation value.*

#### **Policy 1: Addressing climate change and protecting environmental assets**

*The environmental assets of the area will be protected, maintained, restored and enhanced and the benefits for residents and visitors improved.....*

*The built environment, heritage assets, and the wider historic environment will be conserved and enhanced through the protection of buildings and structures which contribute to their surroundings, the protection of their settings, the encouragement of high-quality maintenance and repair and the enhancement of public spaces.*

#### **Greater Norwich Joint Core Strategy (adopted 2014)**

The northern half of the Waveney Valley falls within the Great Norwich Boundary. Within the Joint Core Strategy, the Waveney Valley is identified as a Sub-Regional Green Infrastructure Corridor stretching between Thetford and Lowestoft comprising core areas and buffer fragmented habitats for biodiversity enhancement.

**Policy 1: Addressing Climate Change and Protecting Environmental Assets** is relevant to the Waveney Valley. It states:

*The environmental assets of the area will be protected, maintained, restored and enhanced and the benefits for residents and visitors improved.*

*The built environment, heritage assets, and the wider historic environment will be conserved and enhanced through the protection of buildings and structures which contribute to their surroundings, the protection of their settings, the encouragement of high-quality maintenance and repair and the enhancement of public spaces.*

#### **Neighbourhood Plans**

##### **Diss & District Neighbourhood Plan**

The Diss & District Neighbourhood Plan was adopted in October 2023. It is relevant to the study of the Waveney Valley in that it includes the Parishes of Roydon, Diss, Scole, Palgrave, Oakley, Stuston and Brome, all of which extend into the Waveney Valley. In paragraph 223 it states:

*The River Waveney, which runs through the Plan area, is a key feature of both the landscape and water management.*

The Waveney Valley is identified as a Green Corridor for Biodiversity Enhancement to which Policy 8 applies.

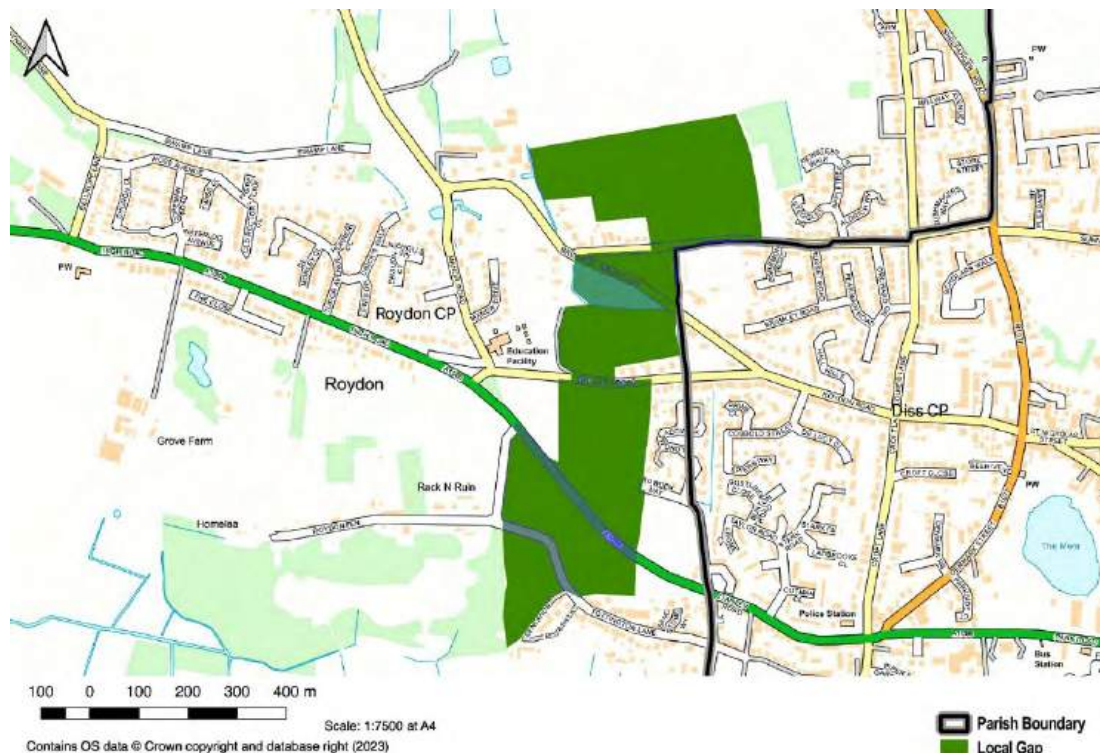
### **Policy 8 – Green Corridors and Biodiversity Enhancement**

*The Plan identifies the management, enhancement, and creation of wildlife habitats within the green corridors identified in Map 17 as a key priority. They will be a focal point for local conservation to create a more joined up Green Infrastructure Network and where possible increased public access, helping people to experience wildlife first-hand.*

*Development proposals should respond positively to the identified green corridors (shown in Map 17). Proposals for new development within or adjacent to a green corridor should deliver measurable net gains in biodiversity in accordance with national or local policy requirements or deliver qualitative improvement to the corridor relating to the quality of habitat or its ability to facilitate movement of fauna or flora.*

### **Policy 14 – Local Gap between Diss and Roydon**

*The area of separation identified in Map 20 [see below] between the built-up areas of Diss and Roydon village will be retained. Development proposals that would unacceptably detract from the open character of the Local Gap or reduce the separation between Diss and Roydon will not be supported.*



### **Policy 16 – Protection of Key Views**

*The views identified in Maps 29 to 35 and described in the DDNP Key Views Assessment Report are important public local views in the Diss and District area.*

*Development proposals should demonstrate that they are sited and designed to be of a form and scale that avoids or mitigates unacceptable harm to the identified key views. Development proposals that would unacceptably harm the identified key views will not be supported.*

Non-designated heritage assets are also identified and include the River Waveney and Landscape Elements as well as built heritage within the valley e.g. Medieval Moated site at Bush Hall which remains as a series of earthwork on the valley floor.

#### **Policy 17 – Non-Designated Heritage Assets**

*The character, integrity and appearance of existing historic assets will be protected and where possible enhanced.*

*The Non-Designated Heritage Assets listed on Maps 36 to 41 have considerable local significance. Development proposals should avoid harm to these heritage assets and have regard to their character, important features, setting and relationship with surrounding buildings or uses. Any development proposals that affect these assets or their setting will need to demonstrate that they do not harm, or have minimised harm, to the significance of the asset, and should make clear the public benefits that the proposal would deliver so that any harm to the asset’s significance or setting can be weighed against the benefits.*

#### **Redenham with Harleston Neighbourhood Plan**

##### **Policy RWH19: Landscape character and town gateways**

*The visual scenic value of the landscape and countryside in the Neighbourhood Plan Area outside the defined settlement boundary will be protected from development that may adversely affect this character.*

##### **Policy RWH20: Important public views**

*The following views and vistas as shown in figures 20 and 21 are identified as important public local views. Development proposals within or which would affect an important public local view should take account of the view concerned. Developments, which would have an unacceptable adverse impact on the landscape or character of the view concerned, will not be supported.*

In particular the following views are associated with the Waveney Valley:

**View 8:** Views from the top of Cuckoo Lane/Green Lane, a panoramic view encompassing the Waveney Valley, Wortwell Marshes, and St. Mary’s Church, Redenhall.

**View 9:** View from the Angles Way towards Mendham Mill.

**View 10:** View from Mendham Bridge across the marshes towards the valley ridge. 11.View from near The Hang towards the River Waveney.

**View 12:** View from footpath 33, from Needham Road to the A143 crossing, towards the Waveney Valley.

Each of these policy documents highlighted above places a value on the Waveney Valley, its characteristics and associated features and elements. This show a degree of continuity with former areas of Special Landscape Areas which were a local landscape designation.

## 1.8 Identified Qualities of Adjacent Land

Land to the west of the Waveney Valley forms the upper reaches of the Little Ouse.

In 2011 a landscape character assessment of the Little Ouse Headwaters<sup>2</sup> was undertaken in order to capture the special and distinctive qualities of the valley landscape to inform and provide a framework for future conservation work.

The River Waveney and Little Ouse Headwaters both share their source in Lopham Fen but flow in opposite directions – the Waveney to the east and the Little Ouse to the west. The upper reaches of these rivers therefore share many similar characteristics and qualities. The Little Ouse Headwaters study describes the Upper Waveney Valley as follows:

*'This area forms one of the most important wetlands in Europe and has international protection [Redgrave and Lopham Fen SSSI and SAC] and comprises wet heathland, open water, scrub and woodland. The underlying acid and alkaline geology has resulted in habitats which support species now rare in Britain.'*

*The nature reserve which covers the majority of the valley floor within the Study Area is managed as a Nature Reserve by Suffolk Wildlife Trust. Over recent years it has undergone significant restoration and parts of it are now grazed by a herd of resilient Polish Konik ponies, beef cattle and hebridean sheep.*

*This area of valley has a strong historical association with the adjacent settlements of Redgrave and South Lopham and the fens are still administered by the respective parishes.'*

### *'Special Qualities and Features*

- *Broad section of valley with gently rising valley sides.*
- *Notable areas of open water.*
- *Significant areas of species rich meadows and limited arable.*
- *Visitor centre and car parking as part of National Nature Reserve.*
- *Largest remaining river valley fen in England - designated a Special Area of Conservation and SSSI.*
- *Tranquil, quiet environment and secretive quality.*
- *Views to South Lopham church (listed).*
- *Redgrave village is a Conservation Area which extends into this valley landscape around Gallows Hill.'*

At the eastern end of the Study Area the River Waveney flows into the Broads, which is recognised as a national landscape designation. The Study Area abuts the Broads boundary beyond Bungay. Here the local planning authority is the Boards Authority, which defines in its Local Plan (Adopted May 2019) the special qualities of The Broads. Many of these qualities (and especially those shown in bold below) are also

<sup>2</sup> Little Ouse Headwaters Project, Landscape Character Assessment, 2011, Alison Farmer Associates

found within the Upper and Middle reaches of the River Waveney, beyond the statutory designated area of The Broads. They include:

- **Rivers** and open water bodies ('broads')
- **Fens, reed beds and wet woodlands**
- **Grazing marshes and dyke networks**
- **Flood plains**, estuary and coast
- Navigable, lock-free waterways
- **Special wildlife**
- **Countryside access** on land and water
- **Views, remoteness, tranquillity, wildness and 'big skies'**
- **The people, the visitors, the activities**
- History: **Earth heritage, heritage assets, archaeology, historic structures**
- Cultural assets, skills and **traditions**.
- **People's interactions with the landscape**
- The **settlements**
- Variety of **patterns and textures** of the landscape



St Margaret's Church and graveyard, Syleham

## 2.0 Approach and Methodology

### 2.1 Stages of Work and References

The project has comprised four stages of work. Firstly, a desk-based assessment to gather and review background information on the area. Secondly, site assessment of the upper and middle reaches to gather information on perceptual qualities of the valley/ landscape condition, and thirdly an analysis of evidence and articulation of special qualities. The final stage has included the writing up of the findings of the study.

Key sources of information used during this study have included the following:

- 1:25,000 mapping.
- Historic maps and aerial photography.
- Historic Landscape Characterisation.
- Landscape Character Assessments.
- Former landscape designations - Special Landscape Areas.
- Cultural heritage designations including Conservation Area Appraisals, Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings, Historic Parks and Gardens.
- Natural heritage designations including ancient woodland, Tree Preservation Orders, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Nature Reserves, Local Nature Reserves, Ramsar, Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, Local Wildlife Sites.
- Recreational routes including public rights of way, bridleways, promoted recreational routes, CROW/access land, national trails, cycle routes, locally important open space.
- Green Infrastructure Strategies.
- Local Plan Policies and Designations (including Neighbourhood Plans)
- Art and literature associated with the valley.

The main background documents referred to in this study are set out in appendix 2.

### 2.2 Approach to Assessing Landscape Value

The Landscape Institute published a Technical Guidance Note (02/21) on assessing landscape value outside of national designations, this clarified the factors which contribute to landscape value. These factors have been used in this assessment and are set out below:



**Table 2: Range of factors that can be considered when identifying landscape value**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Natural Heritage	Landscape with clear evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological or physiographic interest which contribute positively to the landscape	<p>Presence of wildlife and habitats of ecological interest that contribute to sense of place</p> <p>Extent and survival of semi-natural habitat that is characteristic of the landscape type</p> <p>Presence of distinctive geological, geomorphological or pedological features</p> <p>Landscape which contains valued natural capital assets that contribute to ecosystem services, for example distinctive ecological communities and habitats that form the basis of ecological networks</p> <p>Landscape which makes an identified contribution to a nature recovery/ green infrastructure network</p>
Cultural Heritage	Landscape with clear evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest which contribute positively to the landscape	<p>Presence of historic landmark structures or designed landscape elements (e.g. follies, monuments, avenues, tree roundels)</p> <p>Presence of historic parks and gardens, and designed landscapes</p> <p>Landscape which contributes to the significance of heritage assets, for example forming the setting of heritage assets (especially if identified in specialist studies)</p> <p>Landscape which offers a dimension of time depth. This includes natural time depth, e.g. presence of features such as glaciers and peat bogs and cultural time depth e.g. presence of relic farmsteads, ruins, historic field patterns, historic rights of way (e.g. drove roads, salt ways, tracks associated with past industrial activity)</p>
Landscape Condition	Landscape which is in a good physical state both with regard to individual elements and overall landscape structure	<p>Good physical condition/ intactness of individual landscape elements (e.g. walls, parkland, trees)</p> <p>Good health of elements such as good water quality, good soil health</p> <p>Strong landscape structure (e.g. intact historic field patterns)</p> <p>Absence of detracting/ incongruous features (or features are present but have little influence)</p>

Factor	Definition	Examples
Associations	Landscape which is connected with notable people, events and the arts	<p>Associations with well-known literature, poetry, art, TV/film and music that contribute to perceptions of the landscape</p> <p>Associations with science or other technical achievements</p> <p>Links to a notable historical event</p> <p>Associations with a famous person or people</p>
Distinctiveness	Landscape that has a strong sense of identity	<p>Landscape character that has a strong sense of place (showing strength of expression of landscape characteristics)</p> <p>Presence of distinctive features which are identified as being characteristic of a particular place</p> <p>Presence of rare or unusual features, especially those that help to confer a strong sense of place or identity</p> <p>Landscape which makes an important contribution to the character or identity of a settlement</p> <p>Settlement gateways/approaches which provides a clear sense of arrival and contribute to the character of the settlement (may be ancient/historic)</p>
Recreational	Landscape offering recreational opportunities where experience of landscape is important	<p>Presence of open access land, common land and public rights of way (particularly National Trails, long-distance trails, Coastal Paths and Core Paths) where appreciation of landscape is a feature</p> <p>Areas with good accessibility that provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and spiritual experience/ inspiration</p> <p>Presence of town and village greens</p> <p>Other physical evidence of recreational use where experience of landscape is important</p> <p>Landscape that forms part of a view that is important to the enjoyment of a recreational activity</p>
Perceptual (Scenic)	Landscape that appeals to the senses, primarily the visual sense	<p>Distinctive features, or distinctive combinations of features, such as dramatic or striking landform or harmonious combinations of land cover</p> <p>Strong aesthetic qualities such as scale, form, colour and texture</p>

Factor	Definition	Examples
		<p>Presence of natural lines in the landscape (e.g. natural ridgelines, woodland edges, river corridors, coastal edges)</p> <p>Visual diversity or contrasts which contributes to the appreciation of the landscape</p> <p>Memorable/ distinctive views and landmarks, or landscape which contributes to distinctive views and landmarks</p>
Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity)	Landscape with a strong perceptual value notably wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies	<p>High levels of tranquillity or perceptions of tranquillity, including perceived links to nature, dark skies, presence of wildlife/ birdsong and relative peace and quiet<sup>16</sup></p> <p>Presence of wild land and perceptions of relative wildness (resulting from a high degree of perceived naturalness<sup>17</sup>, rugged or otherwise challenging terrain, remoteness from public mechanised access and lack of modern artefacts)</p> <p>Sense of particular remoteness, seclusion or openness</p> <p>Dark night skies</p> <p>A general absence of intrusive or inharmonious development, land uses, transport and lighting</p>
Functional	Landscape which performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function, particularly in the healthy functioning of the landscape	<p>Landscapes and landscape elements that contribute to the healthy functioning of the landscape, e.g. natural hydrological systems/ floodplains, areas of undisturbed and healthy soils, areas that form carbon sinks such as peat bogs, woodlands and oceans, areas of diverse landcover (benefits pest regulation), pollinator-rich habitats such as wildflower meadows</p> <p>Areas that form an important part of a multifunctional Green Infrastructure network</p> <p>Landscapes and landscape elements that have strong physical or functional links with an adjacent national landscape designation, or are important to the appreciation of the designated landscape and its special qualities</p>

The guidance makes it clear that the practical application of these factors requires evidence to be gathered and judgements made at a scale at which landscape is perceived, and not on a field-by-field basis.

## 2.3 Project Methodology

The method adopted in this study is based on recognised approaches to evaluating landscape and drawn on an understanding of landscape character. The Waveney Valley Project Area has then been subdivided into five broad Evaluation Areas as follows:

EA1 - Lopham to Roydon

EA2 - Roydon to Scole

EA3 - Scole to Harleston

EA4 - Harleston to Homersfield

EA5 - Homersfield to Bungay

These areas have been used as a framework for assessment purposes, rather than landscape character types (as defined in existing character assessments). This is because landscape types tend to segregate the valley into valley floodplain, valley sides and surrounding higher farmland, while in reality, the special qualities of the Waveney Valley are experienced as a whole, where the valley floor, valley sides and surrounding skyline farmland form part of a single scene and are interrelated. The five Evaluation Areas listed above are illustrated in Figure 3, and were assessed through desk study and fieldwork, in relation to the factors set out in Table 2. The assessment seeks to describe the special qualities of these areas drawing on existing evidence from landscape character assessment and other studies as well as site work. The assessment sets out the special qualities found in the different areas. The results of this can be found in Section 3.0 of this report.

The larger settlements of Diss, Harleston and Bungay, have been excluded from the assessment. This is because this assessment focuses on landscape rather than areas of built development, and because the scale of these settlements and their more recent development, means they are unlikely to be considered valued landscape. Where smaller settlements make a particular contribution to distinctive sense of place or other aspects of scenic quality they are referred to within the assessment.

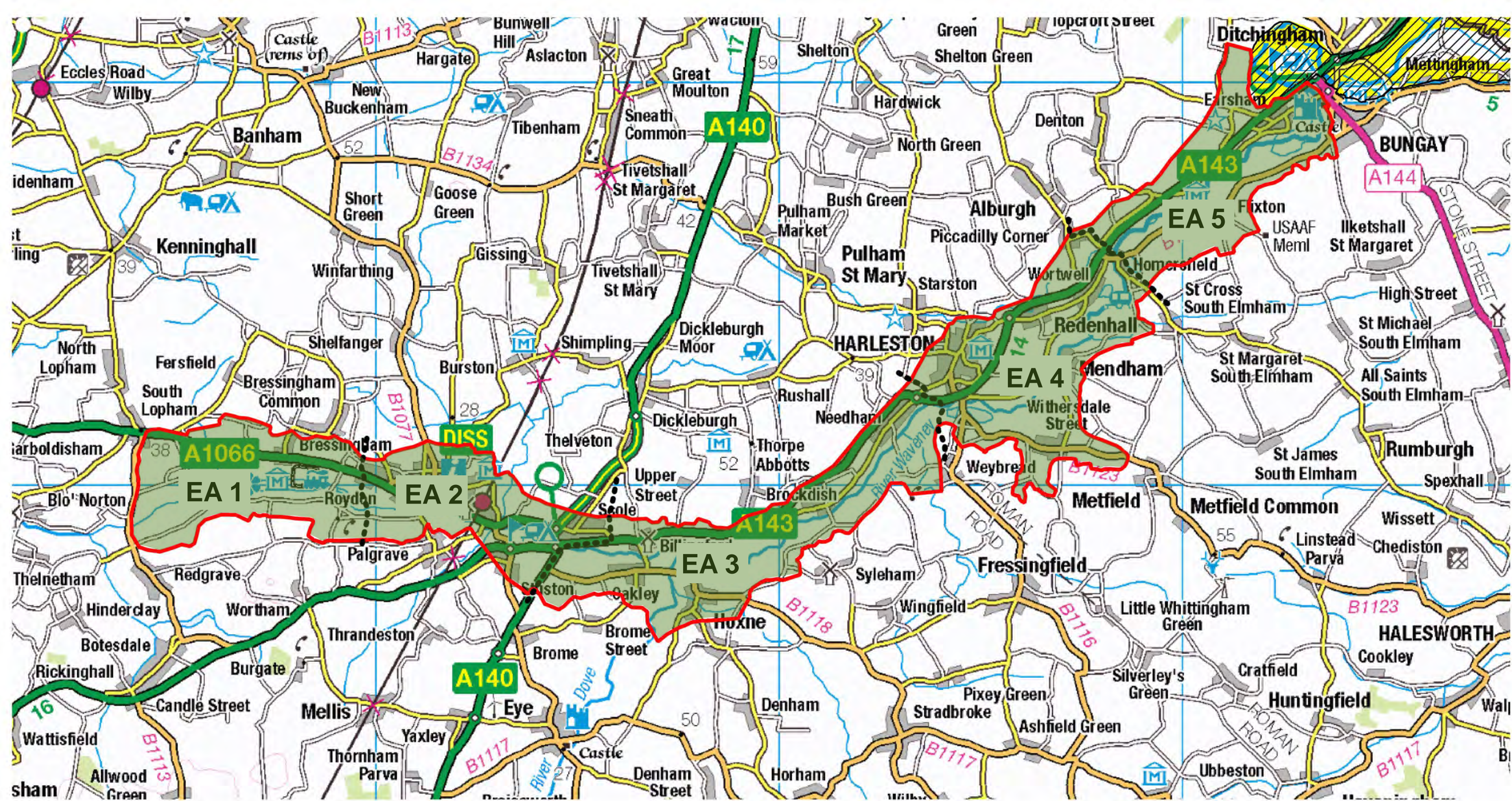
## 2.4 Existing Character Assessments

The Waveney Valley is described in existing landscape character assessments and has been classified at a range of scales and in terms of landscape character areas<sup>3</sup> and landscape character types<sup>4</sup>. The relationship between these different assessments is set out in the table in appendix 1. These assessments contribute to a good

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<sup>3</sup> Natural England Guidance on Landscape Character Assessment (2014) defines landscape character types as distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. They are **generic** in nature in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historical land use, and settlement pattern.

<sup>4</sup> Natural England Guidance on Landscape Character Assessment (2014) defines landscape character areas as single **unique** areas which are the discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type. Each will have its own individual character and identity, even though it shares the same generic characteristics with other areas of the same type.



**Key**

- Study Area
- Evaluation Areas

## Waveney Valley Valued Landscape Assessment

Figure 3: Evaluation Areas



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Ordnance Survey 0100031673



understanding of the characteristics of the Waveney Valley and demonstrate a high degree of correlation.

### **National Character Area**

At the national level the Waveney Valley forms part of the National Character Area 83: South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands. This assessment draws attention to the distinctive character and uniqueness of the Waveney Valley within the wider context of the surrounding plateau farmland. In particular, it states:

*‘Today it is probably better understood as meaning the high and predominantly flat clay plateau that dominates the character of the NCA. The plateau is incised by numerous small-scale wooded river valleys with complex slopes that in places are much unexpected for East Anglia. The underlying geology is chalk, which forms the principal aquifer, and shallow marine deposits overlain with glacial till, buried river gravels, lake sediments and bands of glacial outwash deposits.*

*Rivers are mostly small and slow flowing, contributing to the character of the landscape as well as providing water for irrigation and public usage. The Waveney, the largest of the NCA’s rivers, forms the division between the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. The river valleys contain an important mosaic of small-scale pasture, wet heath, reedbeds and woodland that provide ecological connectivity into the heart of the claylands. Remnant areas of unenclosed ‘semi-wild’ valley fens are designated as a Special Area of Conservation and support a great diversity of wetland species including the fen raft spider.*

*The River Waveney has a relatively large-scale open valley landscape compared with the other river valleys which have narrow valley bottoms.’*

### **East of England Typology**

The East of England Landscape Typology (as illustrated in Figure 1) divides the landscape up into distinctive types of landscape and provides a consistent classification across the Waveney Valley. In simple terms, this includes the definition of the valley floor, valley sides and surrounding plateau farmland. Similar typologies are also defined in **The Suffolk County Landscape Character Assessment** 2009 and update 2011 and **Mid Suffolk District Council Landscape Guidance** August 2015, while the **South Norfolk Landscape Character Assessment** (2001) defines the study area as a valley landscape type and the Waveney Rural River Valley Character Area (A5). The relationship between these assessment is set out in the table in appendix 1, along with the most detailed descriptions and guidance relating to the landscape types.

These typologies provide considerable detail but tend to separate the different parts of the river valley rather than considering it as a whole, in the way landscape is perceived.

### **Local Landscape Character Area – Waveney Valley**

In contrast the **South Norfolk Landscape Character Assessment** 2006 (northern part of Waveney Valley only), **South Norfolk Wind Turbine Sensitivity Study** 2006 and **East Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment** (southeastern part of Waveney

Valley only) consider the Waveney Valley as a single landscape character area. However, given they only cover their respective administrative area, they also do not consider the Waveney Valley as a whole.

The South Norfolk LCA highlights the distinctiveness of the Waveney Valley within the wider landscape, stating:

*'The Rural River Valley Landscape Type is very important in giving spatial definition to and creating variety within the South Norfolk Landscape.'*

The Wind Turbine Sensitivity Study does however summarise the sensitivity of the Waveney Valley as follows:

*'Within South Norfolk the River Valley landscapes have a very distinctive character and strong sense of place. They contain a large number of important (rare) features including landmark features such as windmills, round towered churches and mills as well as diverse habitats of wetland, woodland and heathland. The grazed, pastoral valleys floors contrast strongly with the arable dominated farmland of the majority of the District. In addition, they retain an intact rural character, which in places is highly tranquil and undisturbed.'*

The evaluation set out in this report draws on existing material but takes a fresh, comprehensive, and detailed look at the Waveney Valley, gathering and presenting evidence for the whole of the valley between its source and The Broads and considering its changing and varied character along its length.



Mill and farm buildings at Low House Farm, Water Mill Lane

### 3.0 Waveney Valley as a Valued Landscape

This section considers each of the Evaluation Areas defined in Figure 4 and considers the special qualities of the Waveney Valley as they change along its upper and middle reaches.

#### 3.1 Evaluation Area 1: Lopham Fen to Roydon

**Location:** This part of the valley comprises the source and upper reaches of the River Waveney at Lopham Fen and extends east as far as Roydon.

**Relevant Landscape Types:** Wooded Valley Meadowlands and Fens, Rolling Valley Farmland and Furze.

**Key Settlements:** Dispersed rural settlement of Low Common, Pooley Street and Fen Street.

**Overview of character:** This evaluation area comprises the source and upper reaches of the River Waveney. It comprises a poorly drained wetland landscape, often wooded and overgrown with some clearings for pasture, and is flanked by gentle valley slopes supporting areas of arable farmland.



Extent of EA1: Lopham to Roydon Fen





**Table 3: Assessment Table for Evaluation Area 1: Lopham Fen to Roydon**

Criteria	Assessment
<p><b>Natural Heritage:</b> Landscape with clear evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological or physiographic interest which contributes positively to the landscape</p>	<p>This area has a richness of nature conservation designations reflecting its distinct and isolated area of peat and sandy deposits and a mosaic of habitats which support rare species. Natural heritage interests include:</p> <p><b>Redgrave and Lopham Fen SSSI and SAC</b> which comprises Little Fen, Middle Fen, Great Fen and Redgrave Fen. This is an extensive area of spring-fed valley fen at the headwaters of the River Waveney which is of international importance. It supports several distinct fen vegetation types ranging from grassland, mixed sedge fen and reeds. There are also small areas of wet heath, Sallow carr and Birch woodland. This is the largest remaining river valley fen in England and is the source of the River Waveney and Little Ouse.</p> <p><b>Wortham Ling SSSI</b> is a lowland dry heath with acid grassland communities developed on sandy, glaciofluvial drift deposits. Here there is an abundance of dwarf shrub heath/heather-associated dry acid grassland and carpets of mosses and lichens.</p> <p><b>Hall Farm Meadow CWS</b> comprises wet species rich grassland to the south of Wortham Ling.</p> <p><b>Bressingham Fen, Horse Fen and Horsefen Carr CWS</b> designated for their secondary wet woodland which was established in the 20<sup>th</sup> century on areas of former fen habitat.</p>
<p><b>Cultural Heritage:</b> Landscape with clear evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest which contributes positively to the landscape</p>	<p>The cultural pattern of land management remains tangible in this landscape. Two distinct types of landscape can be discerned, comprising, areas of common fen which provided reeds, sedge, peat, and grazing (evident at Lopham and Royden Fen, as well as Wortham Ling which provided furze for firewood) and other areas of private land which became enclosed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and were subdivided by ditches and dykes to enable them to be used as pasture. Subsequent decline in drainage has meant that some of these latter pastures have now reverted to wet woodland. Evidence of cottager's peat diggings and smallholdings can still be seen in this landscape.</p> <p>The narrow valley side lane to the south of the river (aptly named Fenling Low Road), is dotted with occasional cottages some of which are rendered and painted in Suffolk colours, with steeply pitched thatched roofs. Manor House comprises a distinctive group of listed buildings set within a former post-medieval park, which makes a positive contribution to the character and time depth of this landscape.</p> <p>On the north side of the valley, a similar arrangement of rural lanes and dispersed settlement at Low Common and Fen Street includes a high number of rural cottages and farmhouses. Many of these</p>

Criteria	Assessment
	<p>buildings date to a period of hemp and flax growing which, flourished here in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries as a cottage industry. Ponds on the valley floor were used to ret or soak the plants, so they became softened for further processing.</p> <p>The Grade I churches of Bressingham (square tower) and Roydon (round tower) are both important historic buildings, which act as local landmarks and are visible in open views on the valley sides, or across the valley floor e.g. Wortham Ling, where they add scale and time depth.</p>
<p><b>Landscape Condition:</b> Landscape which is in a good physical state both with regard to individual elements and overall landscape structure</p>	<p>The wetlands on the valley floor form remnants of a much more extensive area. Which has over the centuries, become drained or has dried out due to water extraction. Whilst the Redgrave and Lopham Fen SSSI is in unfavourable condition, it is recovering and is under active management. Wortham Ling SSSI is in favourable condition and is also under active management.</p> <p>On the valley sides Historic Landscape Characterisation indicates some field boundary loss, especially on the valley sides to the south of Lopham Fen but also north of the A1066. Further east, pre 19<sup>th</sup> century enclosures remain intact.</p> <p>The water quality of the River Waveney in this part of the valley is recorded as ‘moderate ecological status’<sup>5</sup>, meaning it expresses moderate change from natural state as a result of human impact, using various water, habitat and biological quality tests.</p> <p>There is some evidence of equestrian use on the valley floor pastures, resulting in some temporary subdivision of plots.</p>
<p><b>Associations:</b> Landscape which is connected with notable people, events and the arts</p>	<p>This part of the Waveney Valley forms a continuous shallow valley with that of the Little Ouse and shares the same source at Lopham Fen.</p> <p>The qualities of this landscape have inspired local contemporary artists including Gillian Crossley-Holland and Jayne Stinton.</p>

<sup>5</sup> <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/WaterBody/GB105034045820>

Criteria	Assessment
	 <p data-bbox="587 913 970 972">Lopham Fen Winter Day - Jayne Stinton (© original artwork by Jayne Stinton).</p>  <p data-bbox="587 1668 1054 1727">Corner of Lopham Fen - Gillian Crossley-Holland (© original artwork by Gillian Crossley-holland).</p>
<p><b>Distinctiveness:</b> Landscape that has a strong sense of identity</p>	<p>The Redgrave and Lopham Fen contains a rare habitat, characterised by peat deposits fed by nutrient-poor alkaline water rising from a chalk aquifer.</p> <p>NCA 83 describes the area as follows: <i>‘These valley fens are unique as the underlying acid and alkaline geology has resulted in characteristic wildlife, including many species now rare in the UK’</i></p>

Criteria	Assessment
	<p>Dry marginal birch woodland gives way to fen grassland while in the centre of the valley are the fens dominated by sedge and rush, scrub and carr.</p> <p>This area has a strong sense of place derived from its intimate and inward-looking character, its tangible history, lack of overt modern development and rich habitat mosaic.</p> <p>The Diss and District Neighbourhood Plan identified a number of views which are associated with and draw on the special qualities of this part of the Waveney Valley, for example, elevated views from Roydon Church across the water meadows.</p>
<p><b>Recreational:</b> Landscape offering recreational opportunities where experience of landscape is important</p>	<p>The Redgrave and Lopham Fen is a National Nature Reserve (NNR) managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust with car park provision, foot access and interpretation. Similarly, Wortham Ling is an area of open-access land.</p> <p>Outside of these areas the valley floor is not accessible.</p> <p>The Angles Way long-distance route passes through the NNR and along the valley sides south of the river before cutting back across the valley at Wortham Ling.</p> <p>The rural lanes along the valley sides are popular for cycling and horse riding.</p>
<p><b>Perceptual (scenic):</b> Landscape that appeals to the senses, primarily the visual sense</p>	<p>The scenic qualities of this landscape are derived from the frequently enclosed and small-scale pastures on the valley floor which contrasts with the simplicity and openness of the valley sides. Added to this are the strong contrasts in vegetation type that form the watery textured qualities of the fen and carr through to the dry sandy acidic vegetation of the Worthing Ling where the purple/brown haze of birch in winter, stunted oaks and the brightness of yellow gorse and flowering heather in Spring, add seasonal delight.</p> <p>The valley sides are gentle and relining but nonetheless define the valley landscape and contain views, forming a rural context into which historic landmark churches draw the eye and punctuate the skyline.</p> <p>The River Waveney is not well defined in this landscape and does not of itself make a significant contribution to the scenic qualities of the area.</p>
<p><b>Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity):</b> Landscape with a</p>	<p>The valley floor west of Diss remains inaccessible by road and unsettled and as such retains a tranquil and remote character and, even where there is dispersed settlement on the valley sides, the</p>

Criteria	Assessment
<p>strong perceptual value notably wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies</p>	<p>rural lanes are infrequently used reinforcing perceptions of a rural backwater.</p> <p>The northern side of the valley along the A1006 and the development at Bressingham garden centre gives rise to a busier yet still rural, and relatively tranquil character.</p> <p>The extensive areas of semi-natural habitat impart a rough and wild appearance.</p>
<p><b>Functional:</b> Landscape which performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function, particularly in the healthy functioning of the landscape</p>	<p>This area of valley is especially important for carbon sequestration comprising a significant area of peat and carr woodland which is permanently waterlogged and an important carbon sink.</p> <p>This area also functions as an area of floodwater storage reducing the risk of flooding downstream.</p> <p>It contains notable areas of land which are used for informal recreation and provides access to nature and a variety of semi-natural habitats.</p> <p>The valley landscape and areas of meadow and heath provide a distinctive landscape setting to historic landmarks such as Roydon church.</p>

### Special Qualities:

- **High ecological value** associated with carbon sequestration, wet and acidic habitats supporting rare species.
- **Enclosed and intimate wooded environment with a rough and wild appearance.**
- **Rich habitat mosaic** comprising contrasting and distinct vegetation patterns which add seasonal variety in colour and texture.
- **Perceptions of a rural backwater** where scattered vernacular cottages and farmhouses occur along rural lanes which flank the valley floor.
- **Wooded skylines define the valleys** and reduce intrusion from development beyond.
- **Church landmarks** create focal points and add scale to the valley sides.

### 3.2 Evaluation Area 2: Roydon to Scole

**Location:** This section of the valley is closely associated with valley side settlements and extends from Roydon to Scole.

**Relevant Landscape Types:** Wooded Valley Meadowlands and Fens, Rolling Valley Farmland and Furze.

**Key Settlements:** Roydon, Market town of Diss, coaching town of Scole and villages of Palgrave and Stuston.

**Overview of character:** In this evaluation area the valley remains relatively narrow and shallow, with sand and gravel terraces creating reclining and undulating valley slopes at Stuston Common. The course of the River Waveney is becoming more distinct, lined by alder trees and flanked by small pastures and is joined by two small tributaries one from the north (Frenze stream) and one to the south. The Frenze stream is heavily wooded and forms the eastern edge of Diss which occupies the northern valley sides and has extended onto the valley floor. Linear infrastructure in the form of roads, rail and pylons cross the valley broadly north to south.



Extent of EA2: Roydon to Scole

**Table 4: Assessment Table for Evaluation Area 2: Roydon to Scole**

Criteria	Assessment
<p><b>Natural Heritage:</b> Landscape with clear evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological or physiographic interest which contribute positively to the landscape</p>	<p>Natural heritage interest in this area is associated with contrasting habitats of fen and heath reflecting the underlying geology of chalk, sand and gravel terraces and peat deposits. It contains several geomorphological features of interest including:</p> <p><b>Diss Mere</b> – this feature has been formed by a solution process in the chalk bedrock and its sediments contain the most complete record of Holocene environmental change in the UK.</p> <p><b>Stuston area</b> - there is evidence of glacial deposits and processes including the deposition of sands and gravels (giving rise to the heath) and a number of small ponds or “pingos” associated with Stuston.</p> <p>Nature conservation designations include:</p> <p><b>Stuston Common CWS</b> - valued for its grassland mosaic  <b>River Waveney Meadows CWS</b> – valued for its species rich grassland just west of the railway  <b>River Waveney sections CWS</b> – valued for its aquatic fauna and flora south of Roydon Fen  <b>Roydon Fen Local Nature Reserve</b> – Spring fed fen habitat with deep peat soils which are permanently water-logged.</p> <p>Along the main valley floor, there are also areas of deciduous woodland (e.g. Alder Carr) and floodplain grazing marsh as well as hedgerows, ponds, meadows and veteran trees, all of which add to the natural heritage value of the area.</p>
<p><b>Cultural Heritage:</b> Landscape with clear evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest which contribute positively to the landscape</p>	<p>The cultural heritage interest of this area is evident in the settlements which are located on the valley sides or above the valley. The settlements include Roydon, Diss and Scole (all sit on the northern valley slopes of the Waveney) while Palgrave and Stuston are located on the southern valley slopes.</p> <p><b>Diss</b> is a market town and its historic core is designated a Conservation Area and contains a number of open spaces (including The Mere and Diss Park) which link it to the Waveney Valley and contribute to its local distinctiveness. There are elevated views from the settlement across the valley.</p> <p><b>The smaller villages</b> surrounding Diss each have their own distinctive features and historic cores. <b>Roydon</b> sits to the west of Diss on the valley sides, <b>Palgrave</b> has an elevated position above the valley and coalesces around a small village green and church, while <b>Stuston</b> is a linear settlement along the edge of the River Waveney. All three villages contain a degree of modern 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century residential development.</p>

Criteria	Assessment
	<p><b>Scole</b> is located on northern valley slopes overlooking the Waveney Valley – centred on the junction of two Roman roads. The village is a Conservation Area which includes a 14<sup>th</sup> century church and coaching inns reflecting its location on the main road close to a crossing of the River Waveney. Nevertheless, approximately half the village comprises relatively modern dwellings which have expanded to the southwest and northeast.</p> <p>To the west of the village is a Scheduled Monument which comprises the site of a Roman settlement, of which several areas have been excavated. It may also have been the site of Villa Faustini, a posting station mentioned in the Antonine Itinerary. North of the river, earthworks survive in the pasture fields but the scheduled site is significantly impacted by the route of the A140.</p> <p>The enclosure pattern in and around the village of Scole forms part of a wider pattern of <b>co-axial field systems</b>. However, the legibility of this enclosure pattern is not strongly expressed within the valley due to visual and physical dominance of transport routes and field boundary loss post 1950s.</p>
<p><b>Landscape Condition:</b> Landscape which is in a good physical state both with regard to individual elements and overall landscape structure</p>	<p>The landscape condition of this part of the Waveney Valley is mixed as a result of settlement expansion and infrastructure (A140, A143, associated road junctions, railway and pylons). This development has resulted in the visual and physical fragmentation of the landscape. The expansion of Diss close to the River Waveney has resulted in the narrowing of the valley floor pastures. East of Diss the valley floor pastures remain narrow due to Stuston Common and the arable land uses which have extended onto the valley floor on both sides of the A1066. Nevertheless, to the west of Diss the landscape condition is higher – here the valley floor pastures are more intact and the fen habitat and the tree-lined watercourse remain legible.</p> <p>The use of the Stuston Common as the Diss Golf Course, whilst retaining the acidic vegetation typical of the sandy soils on the river terraces, has also introduced new landscape elements and features, which disrupt natural landscape patterns.</p> <p>There are a number of overhead powerlines which cross the valley including local distribution lines south of Diss and high voltage Bramford to Norwich main line west of the A140 which have a visual influence on the valley character and qualities. This, coupled with views of the wind turbines on the Eye airfield, influence perceptions of the valley landscape and its condition and intactness.</p> <p>At a finer grain, the course of the river retains its natural meandering form with the exception of some small sections. The most notable is the section west of Denmark Bridge which has clearly been straightened. East of Diss, the water quality of the</p>



Criteria	Assessment
	River Waveney in this part of the valley is recorded as ‘poor ecological status’ <sup>6</sup> , meaning it expresses major change from natural state as a result of human impact, using various water, habitat and biological quality tests.
<b>Associations:</b> Landscape which is connected with notable people, events and the arts	This landscape is described in Richard Mabey’s book Nature Cure (2004). His writing demonstrates the importance of this landscape in offering contact with nature.  – <i>‘The ‘blackthorn winter’ starts in the second week of April, frosting the hedges while the wild plums are still in blossom. I’m finding flowers and flourishes that are quite new to me. Down on the fen there are the beginnings of things that I can’t hope to identify: the first thin spikes of sedges, the russet spears of leaves not yet touched by chlorophyll, finials of the peat. There are precocious cowslips everywhere – on roadsides, churchyards, uncut back lawns.’</i>  <i>‘Why not simply relish the spring’s new life...its exquisite variegation, the interplay of the yellow moss-ground, the filigree of sedges, the solid mass of tussocks, the growingness of it all?’</i>
<b>Distinctiveness:</b> Landscape that has a strong sense of identity	A significant number of important views have been identified in the Diss and District Neighbourhood Plan which are associated with and drawn on the special qualities of this part of the Waveney Valley, for example views 20 and 21 and 24 down and across the valley. These views are valued for their contribution to local sense of place.
<b>Recreational:</b> Landscape offering recreational opportunities where experience of landscape is important	This landscape is highly valued for its recreational opportunities including walking trails along boardwalks at Roydon Fen, and the Stuston Common golf course which extends over 70 hectares. There are also a number of public rights of way which cross the valley floor from north to south while the railway line and road network impede movement along the valley east-west, to some degree.  The Angles Way is not closely associated with this section of the valley but passes to the north, through Diss.
<b>Perceptual (scenic):</b> Landscape that appeals to the senses, primarily the visual sense	The valley landscape is fragmented by infrastructure which affects perceptions of scenic quality. Nevertheless, there are still pockets of valley floor that remain remarkably untouched e.g. Roydon Fen and valley floor pastures at Cock Street Fen or immediately west of the A140.  The shallow and reclining valley sides and complex land uses and infrastructure mean that the valley landform is not strongly legible,

<sup>6</sup> <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/WaterBody/GB105034045780>

Criteria	Assessment
	<p>especially in the east of the area. Perceptions of the valley are also affected by the predominately north south routes across the valley such that the valley is often experienced only fleetingly, rather than along its length.</p>
<p><b>Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity):</b> Landscape with a strong perceptual value notably wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies</p>	<p>The Local Nature Reserve at Roydon Fen is tucked away down a small lane and offers a sense of wildness and extensive wetland.</p> <p>In the east of the area, there is some noise intrusion from traffic on the A140 and A143 as well as intermittent intrusion of trains on the main line. General activity, higher numbers of people and development (including night light intrusion), reduce perceptions of tranquillity.</p> <p>Despite this, the natural qualities of the fen are apparent, especially in the west where the sounds of the turtle dove purring, or the writing of Richard Maybe in his book Nature Cure (2004) reflect a strong rurality:</p> <p><i>'There was a mist hanging over the back meadow, a thin milkiness that was hard to tell from the blowsy lace of the last cow parsley.'</i></p>
<p><b>Functional:</b> Landscape which performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function, particularly in the healthy functioning of the landscape</p>	<p>This area of valley is especially important for carbon sequestration comprising a significant area of peat and carr woodland which is permanently waterlogged and an important carbon sink.</p> <p>It contains notable areas of land which are used for informal recreation and provides access to nature and a variety of semi-natural habitats for local communities.</p> <p>The Diss &amp; District Neighbourhood Plan identified the valley floor as an important Green Infrastructure Corridor.</p> <p>The valley landscape, despite the narrowness of the meadows and gentle valley slopes nevertheless forms a setting for the settlements of Roydon, Diss, Palgrave, Stuston and Scole.</p>

### Special Qualities:

This area has the following special qualities:

- **Accessible rural tranquil valley west of Diss** associated with Roydon Fen and valley floor pastures
- **Distinct acidic vegetation** associated with Stuston Common/golf course providing seasonal interest and variation
- **Settlements and their physical, historical and visual relationship to the Waveney** contribute to sense of place
- **Natural habitat and open spaces** are highly valued by local communities affording access to nature and natural processes

### 3.3 Evaluation Area 3: Scole to Harleston

**Location:** This is the longest section of the valley within the Study Area and stretches between Scole in the west to Harleston in the East.

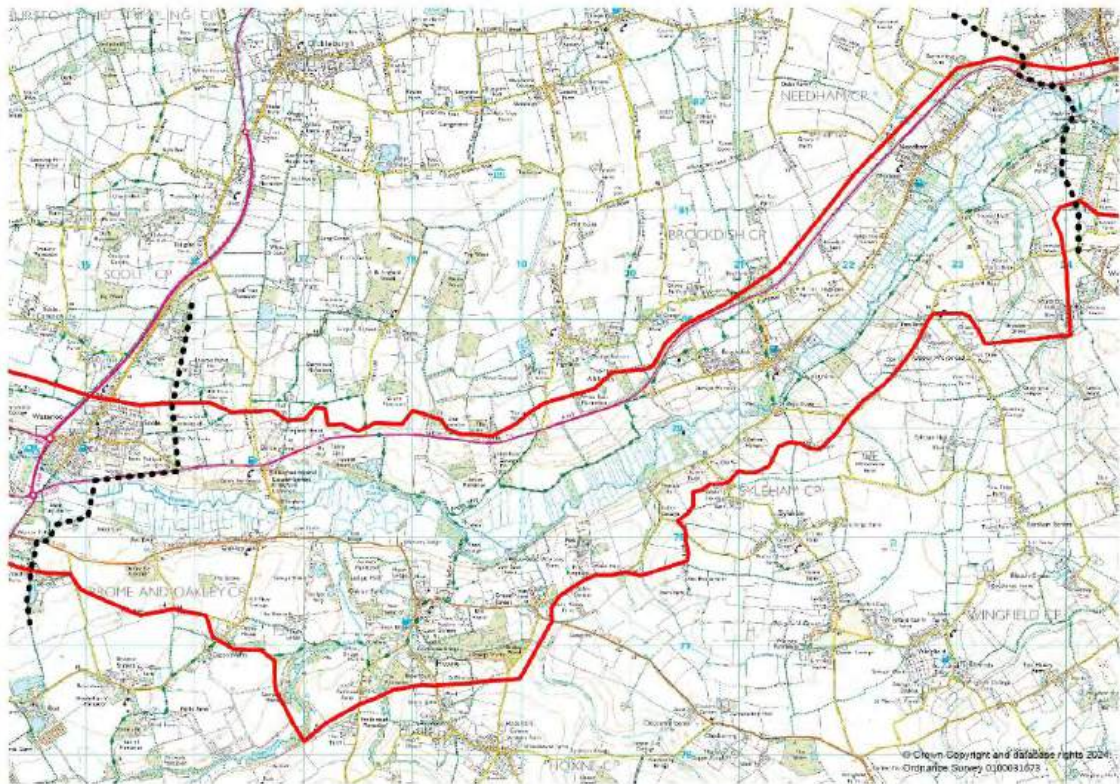
**Relevant Landscape Types:** Wooded Valley Meadowlands and Fens, Rolling Valley Farmland and Furze.

**Key Settlements:** Villages of Lower Oakley, Hoxne, Brockdish and Needham

**Overview of character:** This area is characterised by a relatively narrow valley floor comprising open meadows, flanked by well-defined and undulating valley sides which are relatively steep in places. Woodland cover is limited to small copses at the junction between the valley floor and sides and associated with settlement as well as some isolated blocks of valley floor carr. The meandering course of the river is flanked by alder trees and some pollard willows.

Settlement is located on the valley sides connected by narrow rural lanes between which is a patchwork of arable and pasture fields defined by thick hedges. Three tributary valleys on the south side of the main valley add topographic complexity and more intimate landscapes.

This landscape contains significant built features of cultural heritage importance.



Extent of EA3: Scole to Harleston



View looking west from Mid Suffolk Footpath near Hoxne with mill building visible amongst the trees.

**Table 5: Assessment Table for Evaluation Area 3: Scole to Harleston**

Criteria	Assessment
<p><b>Natural Heritage:</b> Landscape with clear evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological or physiographic interest which contribute positively to the landscape</p>	<p>Nature conservation designations through this area are closely associated with the main river channel comprising sections of riparian vegetation or small patches of grazing marsh or wet species-rich grassland. Designated sites include:</p> <p><b>Billingford common CWS</b> - largely damp grassland and a registered common.</p> <p><b>Syleham Churchyard CWS</b> - wet species-rich grassland including devils-bit scabious and meadow saxifrage.</p> <p><b>River Waveney sections CWS</b> - aquatic fauna and flora northwest of Hoxne, around the weir and Syleham House and also at Needham.</p> <p><b>Weybread Marshes CWS</b> - grazing marsh.</p> <p>The course of the River Waveney and that of its tributaries (River Dove, Gold Brook and a small stream at Weybread), retain their natural meandering courses reflecting the low gradient. In places the course of the River Waveney has been manipulated to create separate channels and weirs and the valley floor has been drained by a series of wet ditches cut perpendicular to the river. Along the valley floor are floodplain grazing marshes which are a priority habitat. This is associated with small blocks of woodland on the valley floor or linear woodlands at the junction of the valley floor</p>

Criteria	Assessment
	<p>and valley sides which create a mosaic of semi-natural habitats. On the valley sides, there is a mixture of arable and pasture farmland. These land use patterns make a strong contribution to the special qualities of this area.</p>
<p><b>Cultural Heritage:</b> Landscape with clear evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest which contribute positively to the landscape</p>	<p>This landscape expresses a strong time depth and intact historic character derived from its enclosure pattern, traditional grazing marshes on the floodplain and small-scale historic settlements. Added to these patterns are highly valued historic buildings which are local landmarks. Historic designations include:</p> <p><b>The windmill at Billingford</b> (1860) – this impressive and intact landmark adds visual interest. It ceased working in 1956 but was the first mill to be restored by the Norfolk Windmills Trust in 1965.</p> <p><b>Hoxne Watermill</b> (1846) – Grade II. This mill building acts as a focal point in views across the valley floor, its white weatherboarding standing out amongst the verdant vegetation.</p> <p><b>Churches</b> - namely Oakley, Hoxne, Church of All Saints, Syleham, Brockdish and Needham. These churches (with the exception of Syleham) are frequently seen on the skyline, like sentinels, creating a repetitive pattern of local landmarks through the valley. Syleham, Brockdish and Needham Church all have distinctive round towers, while Oakley and Hoxne have square towers. All of these landmark buildings are located on the edges of settlement or in isolated locations, such that the valley landscape contributes to their quality and significance and they in turn add to scenic compositions. Syleham church is especially unusual given its valley floor location on a former island and river crossing point.</p> <p><b>Rural valley side villages</b> – Oakley and Needham form linear settlements strung-out along the rural lane which flanks the interface of valley floor and valley side while the village of Hoxne and Brockdish are located on tributary watercourses. Both Hoxne and Brockdish are Conservation Areas reflecting their high concentration of listed vernacular buildings and intact village form. Local vernacular includes the use of red brick and pantile and render and thatch.</p> <p><b>Remnant Parkland</b> is evident at Oakley Park in the form of parkland lodges, boundary walls and mature trees. Much of the original wood pasture has been lost to arable and other land uses.</p> <p>On the valley sides much of the landscape reflects early pre 19<sup>th</sup> enclosure patterns comprising irregular small to medium scale fields defined by thick hedges and hedgerow trees. In places this pattern has been disrupted due to post 1950s boundary loss e.g. south of Oakley.</p>

Criteria	Assessment
<p><b>Landscape Condition:</b> Landscape which is in a good physical state both with regard to individual elements and overall landscape structure</p>	<p>Over much of this area the condition of the landscape is good, especially where historic settlement, pre-18<sup>th</sup> century enclosures and floodplain grazing marshes come together and give rise to intact landscape patterns. However, where enclosure patterns have been altered and arable farming is more intense, such as south of Oakley, or where former parkland landscapes have been lost e.g. Oakley Park, landscape condition is reduced.</p> <p>Only parts of the valley are under countryside stewardship agreements although many show signs of continued cattle grazing and cropping of meadows for hay.</p> <p>West of Hoxne, the water quality of the River Waveney in this part of the Evaluation Area is recorded as ‘poor ecological status’<sup>7</sup>, meaning it expresses major change from natural state as a result of human impact, using various water, habitat and biological quality tests. East of Hoxne, the water quality of the River Waveney in this part of the valley is recorded as ‘moderate ecological status’<sup>8</sup>, meaning it expresses moderate change from natural state as a result of human impact, using various water, habitat and biological quality tests.</p>
<p><b>Associations:</b> Landscape which is connected with notable people, events and the arts</p>	<p>This landscape has a variety of different associations as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hoxne is the most important post-Anglian <b>Palaeolithic site</b> and type site for the <b>Hoxnian Stage of the Pleistocene</b>.</li> <li>• Hoxne village is associated with the martyrdom of King Edmund (marked by <b>St Edmund’s Monument</b> which lies just beyond the study area and is listed), and is also associated with a significant hoard of Roman coins (<b>Hoxne Hoard</b>)</li> </ul> <p>The scenic qualities of the pastoral landscape and landmark buildings have inspired different artists through the centuries. Examples include <b>James J Allen</b> who painted a valley floor scene near Billingford and the etching of Billingford Mill by <b>Aidan Kirkpatrick</b> (1932-1987). These historic paintings illustrate the romantic qualities of traditional meadow and wetland management, and these qualities are still tangible in the landscape today.</p>
<p><b>Distinctiveness:</b> Landscape that has a strong sense of identity</p>	<p>A number of <b>important views</b> have been identified in the Diss and District Neighbourhood Plan (south of Scole) which are associated with and draw on the special qualities of this part of the Waveney Valley, including views across the meadows at Billingford Bridge and elevated views from the southern valley slopes looking north.</p>

<sup>7</sup> <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/WaterBody/GB105034045780>

<sup>8</sup> <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/WaterBody/GB105034045901>

Criteria	Assessment
	<p><b>Landmarks:</b> The location of the church at Syleham in the centre of the valley floor is unique in the Waveney Valley and the high concentration of churches within this stretch of the valley contributes to its distinctiveness.</p> <p>The <b>tributary watercourse</b> of the River Dove, Gold Brook and small stream at Weybread all flow into the main river from the south and create a more varied and <b>undulating southern valley slopes</b> which are unique in the context of the valley as a whole.</p> <p>The <b>open brick walls</b> which define properties in the village of Hoxne are associated with a former local brickworker. They are unique in the context of the Waveney Valley and make a particular contribution to the qualities of the village.</p>
<p><b>Recreational:</b> Landscape offering recreational opportunities where experience of landscape is important</p>	<p>This landscape is important for recreation and includes the Angles Way Long-distance footpath which runs along the length of the valley floor south of Thorpe Abbots and from Brockdish to Needham.</p> <p>The Mid Suffolk Footpath also extends into the Waveney Valley at Hoxne and joins with Angles Way.</p> <p>The network of rural lanes which traverse this landscape on both sides of the valley floor, provide opportunities for cycling and horse riding.</p> <p>There is also a small area of open-access land at Billingford Common.</p>
<p><b>Perceptual (scenic):</b> Landscape that appeals to the senses, primarily the visual sense</p>	<p>This section of the Waveney Valley has a quintessential lowland valley character and is strongly legible – the well-defined valley floor drainage patterns and flat meadows contrast with the undulating irregular enclosure on the valley sides. Added to this are the increased undulations on the southern valley sides due to the tributary valleys which increase the richness and scenic variation within this landscape. This landscape imparts considerable visual variety and landmark buildings add points of interest contributing to the appeal. St Nicholas' Church Oakley, St Peter and St Paul's Church Hoxne, and All Saints Church, Thorpe Abbots, punctuate the skyline and are often seen in silhouette and add to perceptions of scale.</p> <p>Variation in this landscape also comes with the seasons and especially in winter when significant parts of the valley floor may become flooded forming open expanses of water. On these occasions the line of the river is lost, save for the willow or alder which trace its course. Seasonal variation is also notable in the woods around Syleham which are carpeted in snowdrops and daffodils in spring.</p>

Criteria	Assessment
	<p>Skylines are frequently open but where woodland occurs on the upper slopes or margins of the clay plateau, it adds to the scenic compositions, as do the smaller scale and often wooded tributary valleys.</p>
<p><b>Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity):</b> Landscape with a strong perceptual value notably wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies</p>	<p>This is a managed landscape, but the intact and traditional meadows impart a strong time depth. The landscape has an established feel and comprises expansive areas of semi-natural habitat which increases perceptions of contact with nature and tranquillity.</p> <p>The grazing meadows between Billingford and Brockdish remain inaccessible by road and as such express a more remote character.</p> <p>The A143 flanks the upper slopes of the northern valley sides and therefore has minimal effect on perceptions of tranquillity, although in the north, around Needham, it comes onto the valley floor and its influence therefore increases. Otherwise, the presence of small rural lanes traversing up and down the valley sides and across the meadows at occasional river crossing points imparts a settled yet deeply rural feel.</p>
<p><b>Functional:</b> Landscape which performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function, particularly in the healthy functioning of the landscape</p>	<p>This area of valley is especially important for its intact corridor of grazing marshes and forms important green infrastructure and habitat corridor.</p> <p>It also performs an important function in providing access to semi-natural habitat and acts as a high-quality setting to a number of cultural heritage assets and rural villages.</p>

### Special Qualities:

This area has the following special qualities:

- **Quintessential lowland valley** comprising well defined traditional valley floor meadow and land use patterns
  - **Undulating sometimes steep valley sides** add definition to the valley floor, complexity and sequential views
  - **Historic landmark buildings** – significant number and repetitive pattern add points of interest and contribute to compositions
  - **Natural meandering watercourses and natural processes**, including seasonal flooding, add to visual variation throughout the year
- Historic settlements express tangible link to the valley** through vernacular styles, valley side location and form.



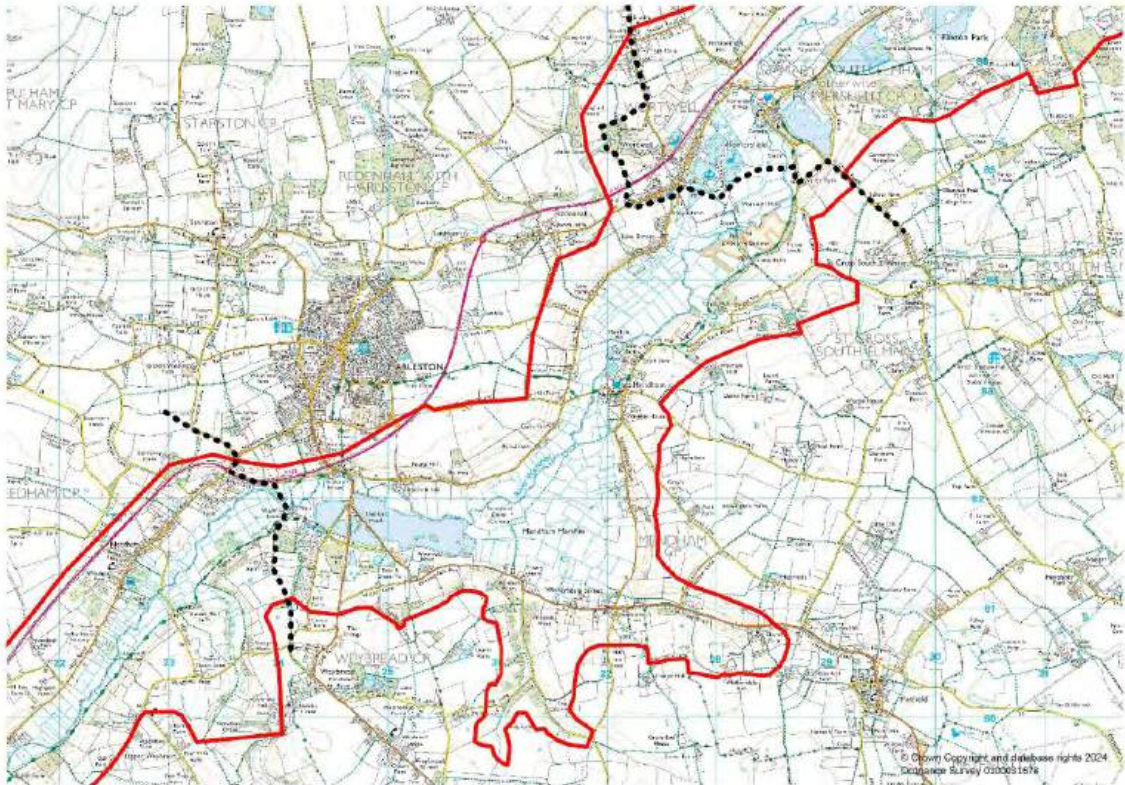
### 3.4 Evaluation Area 4: Mendham Marshes To Wortwell

**Location:** This section of valley stretches from the weir at Weybridge as far as Homersfield Bridge and includes the wide Mendham Marshes.

**Relevant Landscape Types:** Valley Meadowlands and Valley Settled Farmlands.

**Key Settlements:** Withersdale Street, Mendham and Low Street.

**Overview of character:** This section of the valley forms the widest extent of valley meadows and marshes forming an open expanse. The course of the river is not strongly expressed as it meanders across the marshes between an organic pattern of wet ditches which reflect some of the earliest drainage patterns in the Waveney Valley. The southern valley slopes in this section of the valley are some of the most pronounced and steep.



Extent of EA3: Mendham Marshes to Wortwell



**Table 6: Assessment Table for Evaluation Area 4: Mendham Marshes to Wortwell**

Criteria	Assessment
<p><b>Natural Heritage:</b> Landscape with clear evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological or physiographic interest which contribute</p>	<p>Natural heritage interest in this area is primarily associated with the expansive valley floor pastures and watercourses but it also includes areas of more acidic vegetation on the southern valley sides around Withersdale Street. This is reflected in nature conservation designations including:</p> <p><b>Weybread Pits CWS</b> – open water lakes on former gravel extraction sites which are valued for their ornithological interest</p>

Criteria	Assessment
positively to the landscape	<p><b>Timber Shrubs CWS</b> – deciduous woodland adjacent to Limborne Common.</p> <p>The wide valley floor forms an extensive area of traditional grazing marsh priority habitat, especially around Wortwell and Mendham.</p> <p>The course of the River Waveney and that of its tributaries (west and east of Withersdale Street and Sconch Beck), retain their natural meandering courses reflecting the low gradient. In places, the course of the River Waveney has been manipulated to create separate channels and weirs e.g. Wortwell Mill) and the valley floor has been drained by a series of straight and wavy wet ditches. Deciduous woodland occurs as small linear copses on steep valley sides/bluffs at the edges of the floodplain or along the narrow tributary valleys and those in the vicinity of Withersdale Street reflect a localised area of gravel and sand deposits supporting acid-loving vegetation such as bracken, gorse, birch and pine.</p> <p>Across the valley floor marshes, there are isolated poplar and willow trees and some small cricket bat willow plantations. Occasionally the turquoise flash of the Kingfisher can be seen darting along the watercourse. The open expanse of meadows and their propensity to flood in winter means that this area is especially important for significant bird populations.</p>
<p><b>Cultural Heritage:</b> Landscape with clear evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest which contribute positively to the landscape</p>	<p>In this section of the Waveney, the valley floor is classified as 18<sup>th</sup> century or later enclosure on former marsh or fenland. Given the more varied pattern of drainage ditches and the wider expanse of floodplains, it is likely this section contains some of the oldest drainage patterns and grazing marshes in the valley. Furthermore, this section of the valley contains some of the most significant built heritage features.</p> <p>Specific heritage features include:</p> <p><b>St Mary's Priory Scheduled Monument</b> is an isolated site on Mendham Marshes and was the site of a Cluniac priory in the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century. All that remains is a chunk of masonry and a low grassed island. South of the site is the medieval causeway which leads to Withersdale Street.</p> <p><b>Withersdale Church</b> (Grade I) – this is one of the smallest churches in Suffolk and is located in a small tributary to the east of the village in an isolated position.</p> <p><b>Mendham Church</b> (Grade I) is located adjacent to the river and is thought to have been the site of an Anglo Saxon monastery.</p> <p><b>Second World War Pill Boxes</b> – located in the graveyard of Mendham Church and near Withersdale Church.</p>

Criteria	Assessment
	<p><b>Wortwell Corn Mill and Mill House</b> (Grade II Listed) are located on the river adjacent to Wortwell Hall - its three-storey white weatherboarding stands out in views across the marshes.</p> <p><b>Mendham Mill</b> (Grade II) is located north of the village on the river.</p> <p><b>Middleton Hall</b> (Grade II*) 17<sup>th</sup>-century house on the tributary beck (Sconch Beck).</p> <p>This section of the valley is also notable for its necklace of dairy farms located along the rural lane on the north/west side of the valley e.g. Betham Farm, Dairy Farm, Hill Farm, Freston Farm and Low Farm, reflecting traditional grazing practices associated with the marshes.</p> <p>The settlements of Withersdale Street, Mendham and Low Street are small in scale and closely associated with their landscape context and contain a range of vernacular buildings.</p>
<p><b>Landscape Condition:</b> Landscape which is in a good physical state both with regard to individual elements and overall landscape structure</p>	<p>The 18<sup>th</sup> century or later drainage pattern across Mendham Marshes is intact and valley sides are an earlier enclosure pattern of pre 18th century date. There is some evidence of field boundary loss in the north of the area on the Waveney Valley sides north of Socnch Beck.</p> <p>This landscape is traversed by an intact pattern of narrow sinuous lanes although this pattern has become undermined south of Harleston where the A143 intersects with the B1123. Here the valley floor has been subject to sand and gravel extraction. To the south land uses including sports pitches and market gardening which disrupt traditional patterns of the valley sides.</p> <p>The water quality of the River Waveney in this part of the valley is recorded as 'moderate ecological status'<sup>9</sup>, meaning it expresses moderate change from natural state as a result of human impact, using various water, habitat and biological quality tests.</p>
<p><b>Associations:</b> Landscape which is connected with notable people, events and the arts</p>	<p>Sir Alfred Munnings was born at Mendham Mill and grew up in this area. He painted many local scenes including a View of Mendham Church 1989. He also painted scenes of the open marshes and broad skies, capturing the watery qualities of the marshes and the importance of church landmarks, verdant vegetation and horizontal expanse of the marshes.</p> <p>The landscape is also associated with paintings of Edward Seago who painted the Waveney Valley in flood.</p>

<sup>9</sup> <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/WaterBody/GB105034045901>

Criteria	Assessment
	 <p data-bbox="584 801 1157 864">View of Mendham Church (1989) by Sir Alfred Munnings © the estate of Sir Alfred Munnings, Dedham, Essex, 2004</p>  <p data-bbox="584 1473 1157 1536">The Waveney, Mendham (1902) by Sir Alfred Munnings © the estate of Sir Alfred Munnings, Dedham, Essex, 2004</p>
<p data-bbox="279 1581 539 1731"><b>Distinctiveness:</b> Landscape that has a strong sense of identity</p>	<p data-bbox="584 1581 1385 1682">This section of the River Waveney is particularly distinctive forming the widest extent of valley floor marshes as well as river terrace sands and gravels to the south.</p> <p data-bbox="584 1720 1385 1895">The Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment description for the Valley Meadowlands and Furze notes that <i>'In the Waveney valley around Mendham, the flat valley floors are flanked by quite high and steep slopes, giving an enclosed feeling that is rare in the generally very open East Anglian landscape.'</i></p> <p data-bbox="584 1933 1385 2029">A number of important views have been identified in the Redenhall with Harleston Neighbourhood Plan which are associated with, and draw on, the special qualities of this part of the Waveney Valley.</p>

Criteria	Assessment
	<p>For example, the view from the Angles Way towards Mendham Mill and the view from Mendham Bridge northwards across the marshes towards the valley ridge.</p>
<p><b>Recreational:</b> Landscape offering recreational opportunities where experience of landscape is important</p>	<p>The open water lakes at Weybread Pits are valued for their fishing and birdwatching.</p> <p>There is an area of open access land on Limbourne Common south of Wortwell Mill.</p> <p>The Angles Way enters the valley east of Harleston and extends down on the valley floor at Mendham before flanking the southern valley slopes as far as Homersfield.</p> <p>This section of the River Waveney is popular for canoeing, while the rural narrow lanes are popular for cycling and horse riding.</p>
<p><b>Perceptual (scenic):</b> Landscape that appeals to the senses, primarily the visual sense</p>	<p>This landscape has a strong visual appeal derived from the open horizontal expanse of the valley floor marshes coupled with well-defined valley sides, which are steep and complex in places as a result of tributary valleys.</p> <p>Vegetation patterns reflect the underlying geology and drainage, with willow and polar on the valley floor and deciduous woodland on steep bluffs and along tributary valleys. The small sinuous lanes which traverse up and down the valley sides offer occasional elevated views while church towers and mills act as local landmarks adding to the compositional qualities of the landscape.</p> <p>Where there are deposits of sand and gravel the russet colours of bracken and birch add colour and texture. These qualities contrast with the verdant greens of the meadows and wet rush pastures or the lines of water-filled drainage ditches and flooded areas, which reflect the colours of the sky.</p> <p>Within the wide expanse of the valley floor the course of the River Waveney is lost, expressed in the odd location by lines of riparian trees, while along Sconch Beck the tight meandering course of the beck is lined by mature alder trees.</p> <p>Overall, the scenic interest in this landscape comes from its varied scale, simple open marshes and contrasting complex valley slopes, colours and textures and the intriguing unfolding views.</p>
<p><b>Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity):</b> Landscape with a strong perceptual value notably</p>	<p>Activity increases around open water areas at Weybread Pits and where the A143 and B1123 intersect, and the latter crosses the valley floor.</p> <p>Save for the western and northern extremities of this section of valley the A143 is located away from the steeper valley slopes and does not impinge on the tranquil characteristics of the valley.</p>

Criteria	Assessment
wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies	The limited settlement and open expanse of inaccessible meadows gives rise to a high degree of tranquillity and a sense of remoteness, emphasised by isolated monastic sites and areas where the landscape appears vast and empty. In contrast the more intimate tributary valleys offer a secretive quality.
<b>Functional:</b> Landscape which performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function, particularly in the healthy functioning of the landscape	This area of valley is especially important for its intact and expansive grazing marshes which form important green infrastructure and habitat corridor.  It also performs an important function in providing access to semi-natural habitat and acts as a high-quality setting to a number of cultural heritage assets and rural villages.

### Special Qualities:

This area has the following special qualities:

- **Wide expansive landscape** due to open extent of valley marshes with strong horizontal emphasis and broad skies
- **Strong time depth** as a result of tangible historic sites, narrow winding lanes and historic patterns of drainage ditches and enclosures
- **Painterly compositions** of landscape form and features which has inspired many artists
- **Intact pattern of settlements and farms** which exhibit a strong connection to the valley floor and traditional management practices
- **Memorable and contrasting views** across the valley and within the intimate tributaries exhibiting a strong sense of place
- Opportunities for a **range of informal outdoor recreation**

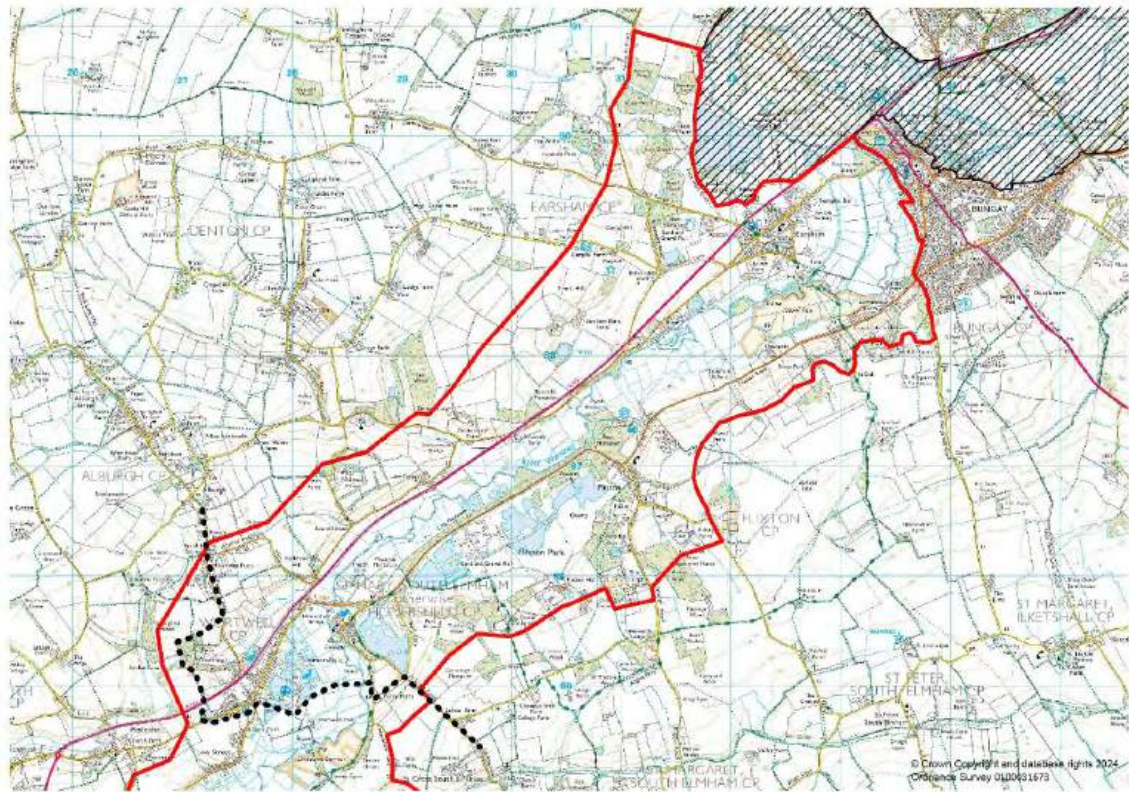
### 3.5 Evaluation Area 5: Wortwell to Bungay

**Location:** This section of the valley extends from Wortwell to the outskirts of Bungay.

**Relevant Landscape Types:** Valley Meadowlands along the valley floor and Rolling Valley Farmlands and Furze on the valley sides. The Study Area also includes the fringes of the Plateau Clayland.

**Key Settlements:** Key settlements associated with this section of the valley include Wortwell, Homersfield, Flixton and Earsham.

**Overview of character:** This section of the valley is substantially affected by mineral extraction and restored extraction lakes and traffic on the A143 and B1062 which flank the valley floor. Nevertheless, the distinctive qualities of the valley remain and include more narrowly defined floodplain meadows and adjoining areas of former parkland landscape which give the valley slopes a more wooded character.



Extent of EA3: Wortwell to Bungay

**Table 7: Assessment Table for Evaluation Area 5: Wortwell to Bungay**


Criteria	Assessment
<p><b>Natural Heritage:</b> Landscape with clear evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological or physiographic interest which contribute positively to the landscape</p>	<p>Throughout this section of the valley the River Waveney retains its <b>natural meandering course</b>, lined by alder trees, and provides an important habitat for species such as otter. It continues to be flanked by more narrowly defined <b>flood meadows which are a priority habitat</b>. In addition, there are two further factors which have influenced this area - , firstly the drainage and manipulation of the floodplain to create two distinct <b>canalised sections of river</b> east of Earsham and secondly the extraction of natural deposits of river terrace sands and gravels. This latter activity has resulted in the creation of a series of large lakes and <b>open water habitat</b>.</p> <p>A further natural heritage feature of this area is the relatively high <b>concentration of ancient woodland</b> which occurs on the upper valley slopes and includes East Wood and Abbey Wood as well as a higher concentration of woods in the north which form part of the former Earsham Park and include America Wood, Great Wood and Holy Grove Wood.</p> <p>Nature conservation designations including:</p> <p><b>Flixton Pits CWS</b> – valued for its invertebrate interest <b>Stow Fen</b> – noted as a site of biodiversity value in the Waveney Green Infrastructure Strategy.</p>
<p><b>Cultural Heritage:</b> Landscape with clear evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest which contribute positively to the landscape</p>	<p>The cultural heritage interest in this landscape relates strongly to former parklands and estates which have influenced land use patterns and also settlement.</p> <p>There is evidence of historic parkland associated with Earsham Park, Stow Park/Upland Hall and Flixton Park, although the former extent of Flixton Park has been significantly altered by minerals extraction in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.</p> <p><b>Earsham Park</b> dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century comprising a hall and extensive deer park. Today it comprises a mansion house and extensive parkland north and west of the Waveney Valley.</p> <p><b>Stow Park/Upland Hall</b> is a relatively small area of former parkland located on the southern valley slopes close to Bungay. From here, there are elevated views across the valley floor meadows towards Earsham. Mature trees and woodland associated with the park contribute to the scenic qualities of the steep valley sides.</p> <p><b>Flixton Park</b> was a former expansive deer park located on the sandy soils of the river terrace gravels to the south of the River Waveney. Remnants of the estate include the perimeter woodland plantations such as Long Plantation (which lies between the River Waveney/valley floor and gravel extraction lakes), and woodlands</p>



Criteria	Assessment
	<p>such as Park Drive, Thicket Wood and Buck Plantation. There are also occasional lengths of park metal railing evident along the rural lanes on the valley sides and estate architecture including semi-detached cottages and lodges.</p> <p><b>Villages</b>  <b>Earsham</b> is located on the inside bend of the River Waveney, surrounded by flood meadows on three sides. On the south side of the village are the church and former corn mill both of which have a strong relationship with the valley floor.</p> <p><b>Homersfield</b> is a former estate village of Flixton Park. It is a <b>Conservation Area</b> and is a compact village at an historic crossing point over the river. Buildings cluster around a small green and the village church is located on a spur of higher land overlooking the valley meadows.</p> <p><b>Flixton</b> is also the former estate village of Flixton Park. Focused as linear development along a rural lane on the valley sides it also comprises a number of distinct historic sites which reflect its early importance including the site of a 13<sup>th</sup> century nunnery at Abbey Farm, (Scheduled Monument of Flixton Priory - comprising upstanding and buried remains) the distinctive landmark church, a medieval moated site at Scheduled Monument at Boys Hall (intact) and the site of the former Flixton Hall.</p> <p><b>Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Sites</b>  The importance of the river terraces for settlement in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval times has been revealed through archaeological investigations due to gravel extraction. Of particular importance is the Flixton II Anglo-Saxon Cemetery which is a Scheduled Monument. The significance of this site is heightened due to its spatial group value with the Scheduled Monument at Boys Hall and the Scheduled Monument of Flixton Priory. All of these sites lie within close proximity to each other in the vicinity of Flixton village and contribute to perceptions of time depth.</p> <p><b>Historic Features</b>  <b>Adair Bridge</b> (Grade II*) is the oldest surviving concrete bridge in Britain.</p> <p><b>Former Waveney Valley Railway:</b> The route of the A143 runs along the former Waveney Valley railway line.</p>
<p><b>Landscape Condition:</b> Landscape which is in a good physical state both with regard to individual elements</p>	<p>This section of the valley has experienced some significant change such that the traditional patterns have become disrupted resulting in some areas of lower quality.</p> <p>These changes have principally occurred on the river terraces and sands and gravels and glacial outwash deposits which formed part of the Flixton Park, leaving a legacy of lakes and open water. This</p>

Criteria	Assessment
and overall landscape structure	<p>has affected the legibility of the valley with narrow floodplain meadows between the A143 and Long Plantation and then a broader area of open water and current gravel extraction to the south. As a result the B1062, which flanks Long Plantation, appears to sit on a causeway between the two.</p> <p>In areas of open flood plain the natural course of the River Waveney is in good condition, while the addition of three water channels (including Broad Water and two canalised channels east of Earsham), reflect alteration and manipulation of the drainage patterns.</p> <p>On the valley sides, enclosure patterns and areas of woodland are relatively intact reflecting former parkland and pre 18<sup>th</sup> enclosure. In places this pattern is disrupted due to post 1950's boundary removal giving rise to patches of larger scale arable landscape on the valley sides.</p> <p>All of the parkland landscapes have suffered some degree of fragmentation, although their influence is still apparent and the area of Flixton Estate is currently the subject of plans to restore the wider estate enhancing historical significant and ecological value.</p> <p>The villages of Homersfield and Flixton remain small in scale and relatively intact, while the village of Earsham has experienced greater growth including a number of modern housing estates. Along Flixton Road there have been a number of small-scale commercial developments.</p> <p>The water quality of the River Waveney in this part of the valley is recorded as 'moderate ecological status'<sup>10</sup>, meaning it expresses moderate change from natural state as a result of human impact, using various water, habitat and biological quality tests.</p>
<p><b>Associations:</b> Landscape which is connected with notable people, events and the arts</p>	<p>The Millenium sculpture by artist and carver Mark Goldsworthy (2000) is located just off Flixton Road at the entrance to Homersfield. It comprises a striking wooden column topped by a man in a boat and is inscribed with the words 'I dreamed of a beautiful woman who carried me away'. This inscription links to the River Waveney which was called 'Alveron' in Roman times otherwise translated as 'beautiful women'.</p>

<sup>10</sup><https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/WaterBody/GB105034045902>

Criteria	Assessment
	 <p data-bbox="584 947 1134 969">Millenium sculpture by artist and carver Mark Goldsworthy</p>
<p data-bbox="280 1010 555 1160"><b>Distinctiveness:</b> Landscape that has a strong sense of identity</p>	<p data-bbox="584 1010 1362 1144">The river terrace gravels along this section of the Waveney Valley contribute strongly to its distinctiveness and have had a profound influence on past land uses including Flixton Park and now extraction sites.</p>
<p data-bbox="280 1189 555 1417"><b>Recreational:</b> Landscape offering recreational opportunities where experience of landscape is important</p>	<p data-bbox="584 1189 1382 1357">There is little to no access along the course of the River Waveney and its associated traditional meadows between Homersfield and Earsham. Nevertheless, the Angles Way Long-Distance Route cuts across the valley between Earsham and Upland Hall. There is also open access land on Stow Fen, to the south of Earsham</p> <p data-bbox="584 1397 1366 1532">Where there has been gravel extraction and the creation of lakes close to Wortwell and Homersfield, this has enabled the establishment of recreational development including the Waveney Valley Lakes holiday homes and angling.</p> <p data-bbox="584 1572 1369 1706">Located just outside of Flixton on the lower valley slopes is the Norfolk and Suffolk Aviation Museum reflecting the close proximity of the former Flixton Airfield located on the plateau landscape to the south of the Waveney Valley.</p>
<p data-bbox="280 1756 549 1939"><b>Perceptual (scenic):</b> Landscape that appeals to the senses, primarily the visual sense</p>	<p data-bbox="584 1756 1382 1989">The scenic qualities of this landscape derive from stretches of traditional floodplain meadow and the meandering course of the river flanked by mature alder trees and areas of relatively steep valley sides where remnant signs of parkland and ancient woodland are evident and give an established character. To the north the higher concentration of mature ancient woodland around Earsham combine with the steep valley sides, rural lanes lined with</p>

Criteria	Assessment
	froths of cow parsley in summer, and glimpsed views of the flood meadows. Here scenic qualities are especially high.
<b>Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity):</b> Landscape with a strong perceptual value notably wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies	The proximity of the A143 which lies immediately to the north of the valley meadows, coupled with gravel extraction activity and recreation/commercial development means that some parts of this landscape appear busy. The noise and sight of traffic on A143 and B1062 affects perceptions of tranquillity. Nevertheless, down on the marshes south of Earsham the traditional quality of the valley can still be readily appreciated.
<b>Functional:</b> Landscape which performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function, particularly in the healthy functioning of the landscape	<p>This area of valley is especially important for its recreational opportunities and natural resources.</p> <p>The valley meadows adjacent to Homersfield are also important as a setting to this Conservation Area and its listed church. The meadows south of Earsham are also an important setting the village church and its historic mill.</p> <p>The steep valley slopes and ancient woodland between Norwich Road and Bath Hills Road form an important visual setting to the Waveney Valley where it enters The Broads and therefore are of significance to this national landscape designation.</p>

### Special Qualities:

This section of the Waveney valley has the following special qualities:

- **Highest concentration of ancient woodland** which gives rise to a more wooded character on the valley sides.
- **Notable collection of Anglo-Saxon and Medieval sites** associated with Flixton Park and village.
- **Historic churches** of Homersfield, Flixton and Earsham **create key landmarks** and are **intervisible across the valley floor pastures**.
- **Multiple water channels** including natural meandering course of River Waveney and contrasting canalised water channels.
- **Open expanses of water** offering recreation opportunities and nature conservation value.

## 4.0 Conclusions

### 4.1 Special Qualities of the Waveney Valley

The Waveney Valley is gentle countryside, expressing an unassuming softness, steeped in history. It is not brash or showy with steep ascents and elevated vistas but rather it offers a subtle, ephemeral beauty, complex in its detail, bucolic and gently rolling, meandering for miles, beneath big skies.

The presence of medieval churches, windmills and watermills provide important points of reference and vertical scale. Along with traditional rural settlement, they form a vital part of the unspoilt rural tranquillity, creating visually appealing compositions with landform, scale, colour, texture and vegetation patterns. These qualities have inspired many past artists and continue to engage contemporary artists and writers.

Overall, this study demonstrates the length of the Waveney Valley expresses many special qualities, and in the context of Suffolk and Norfolk, it is considered to be a valued landscape.

At a more detailed level this study has shown that parts of the Waveney Valley have a particular uniqueness such as the wooded upper reaches west of Diss, the historic meadows at Hoxne and Syleham or the expansive Mendham Marshes, each of which contribute to the whole and which, in places, rival that of other nationally protected landscape.

### 4.2 The Future

Whilst this assessment has not sought to identify specific issues affecting the Waveney Valley, conservation organisations which work within the area such as the Little Ouse Headwaters Project, The River Waveney Trust and The Broads Authority, highlight issues. These issues include over enrichment; chemical pollution; excess sediment; low flows; habitat loss/degradation; invasive non-native species; scrub encroachment; minerals extraction; over modification of the channel; noise intrusion; settlement growth; and proposed new electricity transmission infrastructure. This assessment has revealed that some areas have suffered loss of special qualities as a result of these issues and changes.

Conserving and enhancing the special qualities articulated in this report is a key aspiration of existing planning policy. The evidence base provided here should therefore be used to target resources and develop and implement enhancement initiatives. It can also be used by local authorities in reaching planning decisions and by developers in identifying and designing appropriate developments which achieve a good degree of fit. The evidence in this report should also help to ensure that, where change occurs, it delivers appropriate net environmental gain that demonstrably enhances special qualities.

Due to the position of the Waveney Valley, on the Norfolk and Suffolk border, cross boundary collaboration will be essential to the effective management of the area, especially in terms of development control. Furthermore, the Upper and Middle Reaches of the Waveney are inextricably linked to the Lower Waveney Valley where it falls within The Broads National Landscape Designation. Therefore, what happens in the Waveney Valley upstream of The Broads, may impact the special qualities set out in The Broads Local Plan. This also means that positive conservation activity in the Upper and Middle reaches of the Waveney has the potential to further the purposes of The Broads designation and contribute to the aspirations of The Broads Authority.

Moreover, the Waveney Valley, in association with the Little Ouse, strategically links the Brecks Landscape with The Broads - both exceptional landscapes for their biodiversity. The Waveney is therefore an important corridor for nature recovery and adds further weight to the importance of the cohesive management and recognised value of the valley system as a whole.



Billingford Mill

Relationship between landscape character classifications



The table below sets out the relationship between the different character assessments relevant to the study area.

National Character Area	East of England Typology	Suffolk LCA Typology	South Norfolk
South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands National Character Area 83	Wooded Fen	Wooded Valley Meadowlands and Fens	Rural Valley landscape Type
	Valley Meadowlands	Wooded Valley Meadowlands and Fens	Waveney Rural River Valley Landscape Character Area
	Valley Settled Farmlands	Rolling Valley Farmlands and Furze Rolling Valley Claylands	
	Wooded Plateau Claylands	Ancient Plateau Claylands	

## Appendix 2

### Reference Documents

## **Landscape Character**

- East of England Landscape Character Assessment (2009).
- Suffolk County Landscape Character Assessment (2009 and updated 2011).
- Historic Landscape Characterisation, Suffolk (2008).
- South Norfolk Landscape Character Assessment (2001) LUC
- Suffolk Coastal Landscape Character Assessment (2018) Alison Farmer Associates.
- Joint Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council Landscape Guidance

## **Designation History and Past Landscape Evaluation**

- Little Ouse Headwaters, Landscape Character Assessment, 2011, Alison Farmer Associates

## **Management Plans**

- The Local Plan for the Broads, Plan Period 2015-2036, Adopted May 2019

## **Local Planning Documents**

- West Suffolk (Formerly St Edmundsbury) Core Strategy 2010
- Diss and District Neighbourhood Plan (2023)
- Redenhall with Harleston Neighbourhood Plan (2022)
- Waveney Green Infrastructure Strategy (2015), Waveney District Council
- Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan (Parts 1 and 2 Adopted November 2023)
- East Suffolk is covered by the Waveney Local Plan (March 2019)
- South Norfolk District Council Adopted Local Plan – Joint Core Strategy (March 2021)
- Greater Norwich Joint Core Strategy (adopted 2014)
- Diss & District Neighbourhood Plan
- Redenham with Harleston Neighbourhood Plan

## **Assessment Guidance**

- Natural England Guidance on Assessing Landscapes for Designation as National Park or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Natural England (2021)
- Assessing Landscape Value Outside of National Designations, Technical Guidance Note, 2021, Landscape Institute

## **Literature**

- Nature Cure, 2004, Richard Maybe
- Waterlog, 1999, Roger Deakin
- Waveney Valley, 1975, David R Butcher
- The Angles Way, Walking in an Historic Landscape, 1993, Kate Skipper and Tom Williamson
- Portrait of the Waveney Valley, 2010, Ian Carstairs