

Sprowston



Neighbourhood Plan

Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening, August 2013



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Screening Assessment has been undertaken in order to support the Sprowston Neighbourhood Development Plan which has been produced by Sprowston Town Council in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.
- 1.2 The aim of this screening is to assess whether there might be any potential impacts on 'European Sites' that may be affected by the proposed Neighbourhood Plan. This report assesses, as far as practicable, whether there are any likely significant impacts on European Sites within relative proximity to the Neighbourhood Area designated by Sprowston Town Council for the purposes of the Neighbourhood Plan.

2. Legislative Basis

- 2.1 Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive states that:

Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [European] site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.

- 2.2 The purpose of the Habitat Regulations Assessment is therefore to ensure the protection of European (Natura 2000) sites. These sites are designed to form an ecologically coherent network of designated sites across the whole of Europe. Referred to as 'European Designated Sites', Natura 2000 sites include Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas for Conservation (SAC). As a matter of policy the government also expect authorities to treat Ramsar sites, candidate SAC

(cSAC) and proposed SPAs (pSPA) as if they are European sites for the purpose of considering development proposals that may affect them.

- 2.3 As regards Neighbourhood Development Plans, the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 state that submitted Plans need to be accompanied by a statement explaining how the proposed Plan meets the ‘basic conditions’ set out in Schedule 4B of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act. These basic conditions include a requirement to demonstrate how the Plan is compatible with EU obligations (of which HRA is one).

3. Screening Assessment

- 3.1 The Screening Assessment is carried out with regard to the Conservation Objectives of the European Sites considered to be within relative proximity to the Sprowston Neighbourhood Area. Conservation Objectives for these sites have already been identified through the Appropriate Assessment – Task 1 report produced in support of the Joint Core Strategy (JCS) for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk.
- 3.2 The first step of the screening process involves the identification of European Sites that are considered within close proximity of the Neighbourhood Area. A long list of Natura 2000 sites was compiled as part of the JCS screening report, considering sites within 15 kilometres of the potential zone of influence around the JCS area. This was subsequently agreed by Natural England. Within this perimeter, three sites have been identified within relative proximity of the Sprowston Neighbourhood Area. These are as follows:

Site Name	Site Designation
Broadland	SPA
Broadland	Ramsar
The Broads	SAC

- 3.3 None of these sites lie within the Neighbourhood Area of the Sprowston Neighbourhood Plan. Full details of these sites can be found in Appendix 1 at the end of this report.

- 3.4 The Sprowston Neighbourhood Plan does not seek to identify any significant sites for future development. The policies within the Plan are split between ‘neighbourhood-wide’ policies (development management policies) and ‘site-specific policies’.
- 3.5 The site-specific policies relate to five sites around the Neighbourhood Area, only one of which (Policy 18) is designated for redevelopment (for residential, community and other uses appropriate to the area). This is a brownfield site. Policy 13 does not propose development but sets a condition that if a current (brownfield) site use is relocated in the future, then the current site should be redeveloped for appropriate uses that complement the area. The remaining site-specific policies seek to protect and enhance local areas of green space or enhance the public realm on a section of the main road through the settlement (Policy 14).
- 3.6 The table below illustrates each of the policies within the Neighbourhood Development Plan and assesses whether there is a likely significant impact from these policies on either of the Natura 2000 sites listed above.

Sprowston NP policy	Policy detail	Comment	Likely significant effect		
			Broadland SPA	Broadland Ramsar	Broads SAC
1	The environmental assets of the area will be protected and opportunities taken for the maintenance and enhancement, and increasing the benefits for residents and wildlife.	This policy is intended to conserve and enhance the natural environment.	No significant effect.		
2	Development will be well designed to fit in with the local area and contribute to creating a strong sense of place.	This policy does not seek to allocate development, but set out criteria for appropriate design.	No significant effect.		
3	Housing development will be acceptable, in principle, within a settlement limit or on allocated sites, subject to meeting normal development criteria.	This policy does not seek to allocate development, but set out criteria for appropriate location.	No significant effect.		

4	Small scale business, including a bank or post office, will be encouraged in the proposed local centre on school lane and the enhanced local centre on Wroxham Road, provided they are compatible with the surrounding uses and in keeping with the size and character of the area.	This policy does not seek to allocate development, but to encourage appropriate use of retail premises.	No significant effect.
5	The adaptation and use of vacant buildings for start-up business and retail, including former corner shops, will be encouraged.	This policy does not seek to allocate development, but to encourage appropriate use of retail premises.	No significant effect.
6	Local Employment opportunities will be supported.	This policy does not seek to allocate development, but to set out criteria for appropriate location and design.	No significant effect.
7	Fast broadband connections will be promoted through out the area. All new development should demonstrate how it contributes to this objective.	This policy does not seek to allocate development, but to set out criteria for appropriate design.	No significant effect.
8	All development will be expected to maintain or enhance the quality of life and the wellbeing of the local community and will promote equality and diversity, and protect and strengthen community cohesion.	This policy does not seek to allocate development, but to set out criteria for appropriate location and design.	No significant effect.
9	The existing health facilities on Aslake Close(part of the East Norwich Medical partnership) will continue to be a focus for the provision of health services across the plan area, with additional provision elsewhere being focused on central and easily accessible locations such as local/district centres.	This policy does not seek to allocate development, but to set out criteria for appropriate location.	No significant effect.

10	Development should seek to promote healthier life style by maximising access by walking and cycling and providing opportunities for social interaction and greater access to green spaces and the country side.	This policy does not seek to allocate development, but to set out criteria for appropriate location and design.	No significant effect.
11	Wider Community use of schools will be encouraged. This will enable greater accessible education and leisure opportunities for the community	This policy does not seek to allocate development, but to encourage wider use of existing facilities.	No significant effect.
12	Cultural assets and leisure Facilities should be retained and enhanced, and the cultural heritage will be enriched through the use of innovative design and art in the public realm.	This policy does not seek to allocate development, but to set out criteria for appropriate location and design.	No significant effect.
13	If the Park and Ride site on Wroxham road is relocated in the future, the current site should be redeveloped for appropriate uses that complement the area.	The policy itself does not allocate a particular type of development, and is conditional on the relocation of the existing use. Any re-development will be subject to policies within the Local Plan.	No significant effect.
14	In order to create a Strong and more attractive neighbourhood and commercial centre, the transformation of a section of Wroxham road into a local centre with an improved public realm at the heart of the existing community, will be promoted.	The policy will not lead to any additional development. It sets out a series of public realm improvements and traffic management measures relating to a small stretch of the Wroxham Rd.	No significant effect.
15	Introduction of tree planting in the local centre and on Wroxham Road	See above. This policy is intended to enhance the natural environment.	No significant effect.

16	An area at Harrison's Plantation, off Blue Boar Lane, is identified for a wood land activity park.	This policy is intended to conserve and enhance the natural environment (as well as providing a community facility).	No significant effect.
17	The Woodland Park would be made accessible by creating additional cycling/walking facilities throughout the woodland and a new connection from plantation and across Blue Boar Lane. This Could include a new puffin crossing on Blue Boar Lane.	See above.	No significant effect.
18	An area of approximately 2.4 hectares (6 acres) at School Lane is identified for redevelopment for residential, community and other uses appropriate to the area.	This is a brownfield site, currently allocated for an employment use. A mixed development of the size being proposed within this policy would have a marginal effect on traffic movements locally and it is not felt that there would be any likely significant effect on Natura 2000 sites within relative proximity.	No significant effect.
19	A Community hub building for the south side of Sprowston Parish at the Sprowston Diamond Canter on School lane.	This policy concerns the enhancement of an already existing facility and does not allocate propose any development.	No significant effect.
20	Traffic management measures at School Lane to improve the environment for pedestrians and cyclists. Planting should be used as part of this approach, to enhance the aesthetic look of the area; and on-street parking reviewed to increase safety.	The policy will not lead to any additional development. It sets out a series of public realm improvements and traffic management measures.	No significant effect.

21	Open areas at or near Barkers Lane/Church Lane will be retained and enhanced as an integrated network of green and open spaces to create a "Green Heart" for the community.	This policy is intended to enhance the natural environment.	No significant effect.
22	An area of 2.4 Hectares is allocated as an extension to the existing burial ground at Church Lane.	This policy is intended to enhance the natural environment.	No significant effect.

Conclusion

The table above suggests that there is likely to be no likely significant effect of the Sprowston Neighbourhood Development Plan on the highlighted European Sites, and therefore a full Appropriate Assessment is not required.

Appendix 1: Details of relevant European Sites

This information has been taken from the Appropriate Assessment – Task 1 report produced in support of the Joint Core Strategy for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk.

Broadland SPA

(i) Site Description & Qualifying Features

Broadland is a low-lying wetland complex straddling the boundaries between east Norfolk and northern Suffolk in eastern England. The Broads are a series of flooded medieval peat cuttings. The area includes the river valley systems of the Bure, Yare and Waveney and their major tributaries. The distinctive open landscape comprises a complex and interlinked mosaic of wetland habitats including open water, reedbeds, carr woodland, grazing marsh and fen meadow, forming one of the finest marshland complexes in the UK. The differing types of management of the vegetation for reed, sedge and marsh hay, coupled with variations in hydrology and substrate, support an extremely diverse range of plant communities.

Broadland SPA Qualifying Features

Article 4.1	Breeding	Over winter	Passage
Bewick's swan		X	
Whooper swan		X	
Bittern	X		
Marsh harrier	X		
Hen harrier		X	
Ruff		X	
<i>Noteworthy: Gadwall</i>			

(ii) Conservation Objectives

To restore to favourable condition, if the feature is not currently in favourable condition, the habitats for the populations of Annex1 bird species of European importance (Bewick's swan, whooper swan, bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, marsh harrier, hen harrier, ruff), migratory bird species of European importance (pink-footed goose, gadwall, shoveler) and populations of waterfowl that contribute to the wintering waterfowl assemblage of European importance with particular reference to:

- Open water
- Swamp
- Fen
- ReedBed
- Fen meadow with ditches and water bodies, and
- Lowland wet grassland with ditches and water bodies.

(iii) Vulnerability

The site has suffered from management neglect and natural succession during this century. Sea level rise and reduced summer flows in the river Bure brought about by abstraction are resulting in increasing saline intrusion into the site and generally drier summer conditions. The site also suffers from eutrophication, brought through the build up of nutrients over a long period, primarily through sewage outfalls and, to a lesser degree, agriculture. The region as a whole is a centre for tourism and recreation, however this pressure is now starting to be brought under control by the Broads Authority via the Broads Plan. Efficient drainage within much of the reclaimed parts of the wetland has reduced the wildlife value.

Broadland RAMSAR

(i) Site Description & Qualifying Features

Broadland is a low-lying wetland complex straddling the boundaries between east Norfolk and northern Suffolk. The area includes the river valley systems of the Bure, Yare and Waveney and their major tributaries. The open distinctive landscape comprises a complex and interlinked mosaic of wetland habitats including open water, reedbeds, carr woodland, grazing marsh and fen meadow. The region is important for recreation, tourism, agriculture and wildlife.

Broadland Ramsar Qualifying Features

Criterion 6	Breeding	Over winter	Passage
Bewick's Swan		X	
Wigeon		X	
Gadwall		X	
Shoveler		X	
<i>Noteworthy: Bean goose (fabalis), white-fronted goose (albifrons), teal, Pochard, smew, cormorant (carbo), bittern, marsh harrier, hen harrier, water rail, coot, ruff.</i>			

Ramsar criteria for designation:

Criterion 2: The site supports a number of rare species and habitats within the biogeographical zone context, including the following Habitats Directive Annex I features: H7210 Calcareous fens with *Cladium mariscus* and species of the *Caricion davallianae*; Calcium-rich fen dominated by great fen sedge (saw sedge); H7230 Alkaline fens Calcium-rich springwater-fed fens; H91E0 Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion*, *Alnionincanae*, *Salicion albae*) and Alder woodland on floodplains. It includes also the Annex II species: S1016 *Vertigo moulinsiana* Desmoulin's whorl snail; S1355 *Lutra lutra* Otter; S1903 *Liparis loeselii* Fen orchid. The site supports outstanding assemblages of rare plants and invertebrates including nine British Red Data Book plants and 136 British Red Data Book invertebrates.

Criterion 6: – the site supports bird species/populations at levels of international importance

(ii) Vulnerability

Broadland Ramsar vulnerability are similar to The Broads SAC (please see below).

The Broads SAC

(i) Site Description & Qualifying Features

The Broads SAC covers roughly the same area as the Broadland SPA and Ramsar sites. The Broads SAC is the richest area for charophytes in Britain. The core of this interest is the Thurne Broads and particularly Hickling Broad which is the richest site in the UK. Sixteen species have been recorded within Hickling Broad, a large shallow brackish lake. Within the Broads examples of *Chara* vegetation are also found within fen pools (turf ponds) and fen and marsh ditch systems.

The Broads also contain several examples of southern natural eutrophic lakes for which this is considered to be one of the best areas in the United Kingdom. The lakes are artificial and originated from peat digging in medieval times support relict vegetation of the original Fenland flora, and collectively this site contains one of the richest assemblages of rare and local aquatic species in the UK.

This flood plain mire site in East Anglia has the largest example of calcareous fens in the UK and possibly the largest occurrence in the EU outside Sweden. The *Cladium* habitat occurs in a diverse set of conditions that maintain its species-richness and forms a large-scale mosaics with other fen types, open water and woodland, and important associated plant species including the fen orchid, *Liparis loeselii*.

The Broads is one of two sites selected for alkaline fens in East Anglia, where a main concentration of lowland fen occurs. The fens are principally of the flood plain mire type. The site contains a range of rare and local plant species, including the Annex II fen orchid *Liparis loeselii*, lesser tussock-sedge *Carex diandra*, and slender sedge *C. lasiocarpa*.

The complex of sites in the Broads of East Anglia contains the largest blocks of alder *Alnus glutinosa* wood in England containing a complex complete successional sequence from open water through reedswamp to alder woodland, which has developed on fen peat.

The Broads is the main stronghold of Desmoulin's whorl snail *Vertigo moulinsiana* in East Anglia and is one of several sites selected in this part of its range. Several large populations are known, associated with standing and flowing water and ditch systems. This is a very important area for its wetland invertebrate fauna, and many Red Data Book and Nationally Scarce species occur here.

Also present in the Broads with significant numbers is the otter, *Lutra lutra*.

SAC Qualifying features- Habitats

- Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of *Chara* spp.;
- Natural eutrophic lakes with *Magnopotamion* or *Hydrocharition*-type vegetation;
- Transition mires and quaking bogs;
- Calcareous fens with *Cladium mariscus* and species of the *Caricion davalliana*, Priority feature;
- Alkaline fens;
- Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion*, *Alnion incanae*, *Salicion albae*) Priority feature, and;
- *Molinia* meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*).

SAC Qualifying features- Species

- Desmoulin's whorl snail *Vertigo moulinsiana*, and;
- Otter *Lutra lutra*.

(ii) Conservation Objectives

The conservation objectives are to maintain, in favourable condition, the habitat features of the designation, and to maintain, in favourable condition, the habitats for the populations of the qualifying species, with particular reference to:

- Open water;
- Swamp, and;
- Fen.

(iii) Vulnerability

The Broads are most vulnerable to sea level rise and reduced summer flows, due to abstraction in the northern rivers and drier summer conditions. The major consequence of these pressures is the saline intrusion into the site.

Eutrophication due to nutrients increase from sewage outfalls and agriculture is also considered a problem. Measures to reverse trophic state include phosphate striping in some of the sewage works and mud-pumping to remove enriched material from lakes, followed by biomanipulation.

Pressure from tourism and recreation is being considered by the Broads Authority through the Broads Plan. Water levels are being addressed through the Water Level Management Plans and the Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme. Appropriate standards of flood defence are necessary for the wetland, and works are currently proceeding under the Environment Agency Broads Strategy.