

SECTION 1.1

PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ASSETS

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SECTION 1.1

PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ASSETS

This 'Protection of Environmental Assets' section follows on from Strategic Principle 1 and in conjunction with section 1.2 'Controlling the Impact of Development', sets the framework for policies and proposals in the Plan. The Government's White Paper on Rural England identifies the changes that have taken place and future challenges. This section reflects the issues raised in the White Paper.

The District Council is directed through Government advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 7 "Countryside – Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development" (February 1997), to integrate countryside policies by including environmental objectives in agricultural and forestry policies and by encouraging high environmental standards in the implementation of rural development policies. There is a need to handle location and design factors relating to development sensitively. Building in the open countryside away from existing settlements should be strictly controlled.

1. Landscape

South Norfolk is a landscape of subtle contrasts and restrained beauty with landscapes ranging from the exhilarating openness of the farmed plateaux to the peaceful rural quality of the valleys. The Plan Area predominantly consists of an arable agricultural landscape of farmland, woodland and historic parkland interspersed by a limited number of settlements.

The plateaux are dissected by the river valleys of the Yare, Tas, Tiffey, Chet, Wensum, Tud and Waveney rivers. The edge of Norwich in the north of the Plan Area is well defined by the Yare valley which provides a clear boundary between the City and the surrounding countryside. In the Rural Area much of the character is formed by the river valleys running east to west across the District and by the tributaries, which generally run south to north.

During the Second World War, six airfields were located within the current District boundary. Remnants of these airfields can be seen today at Hethel, Deopham, Fersfield, Thorpe Abbots, Seething and Hardwick.

The landscape of the area will inevitably change in the future for a number of reasons, including changing farming practices and as a consequence of development pressures being experienced in East Anglia as a whole and in South Norfolk in particular.

The loss of field boundaries, hedgerows and woodland and the greater use of pesticides and herbicides has resulted in a more uniform landscape. Future changes may be caused by changing national agricultural policies, some of which may be beneficial.

The District Council is conscious of the threat to the character and appearance of the landscape in the Plan Area posed by the general trends outlined above. Whilst accepting that the Plan Area needs to accommodate development on a moderate scale in line with the Strategic Principles, the Plan seeks to safeguard the integrity and character of the landscape.

In order to establish which areas of the landscape are worthy of special protection, above that afforded by policy ENV 8, the Council commissioned Land Use Consultants (LUC) to undertake a Landscape Assessment. This established the broad landscape types throughout the whole of the District and the more detailed character areas found within the Norwich Policy Area (NPA). The LUC study identifies the extent of each landscape type and character area e.g. rural river valley, and describes the features that define their character and details the key characteristics and assets to be found therein. In the NPA, the essential qualities, sensitivities and vulnerabilities of each character area are identified along with development considerations and a landscape strategy. The Council intends to adopt the Landscape Assessment as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG).

Whilst the Plan includes no areas in which the landscape is designated as of national importance, there are landscapes which are attractive and have variety, the character of which is worthy of protection. This is recognised in policy ENV 4 of the Norfolk Structure Plan. The distinctive landscape character types, areas and the features of importance in the Plan Area are given in SPG, based on the South Norfolk Landscape Assessment prepared for the Council by LUC. It is the intention of the Council that these should be taken into account when proposals for development are considered in accordance with policy ENV 1.

Policy ENV 1: Protection of landscape

Development will not be permitted where it would significantly harm the identified assets important to the character of the landscape.

Government guidance and the Norfolk Structure Plan (1999) give clear direction as to what areas are considered of particular landscape significance and what forms of development are acceptable within those areas (see Structure Plan policies CS.1, ENV.1 & 3 and N.1 & 6). Those areas in South Norfolk that have been designated as significant, and their associated policies, are listed below and the areas where they are intended to apply are shown on the Proposals Map.

2. Areas of open land which maintain a physical separation between settlements within the Norwich area

For the most part, the landscape setting of South Norfolk's towns and villages is essentially of a rural character. In some settlements, where peripheral expansion in the form of modern housing estates has progressed over a number of years, the transition can be abrupt and unattractive. In others, such as Wymondham, the relationship between built area and countryside may have some particular historical significance. In order to ensure the protection and conservation of local landscape character (discussed in more detail in the South Norfolk Landscape Assessment SPG) and the setting of urban areas, towns and villages, the District Council has defined 'green wedges' of open land that maintain the segregation and individual identities of certain settlements in the NPA and so avoid areas of development "sprawl" which would be detrimental to the rural character of the area. 'Green wedges' for areas of open land between Costessey - Easton and between Cringleford - Hethersett - Wymondham have been defined and are shown on the Proposals Map. "Inappropriate development" (see glossary for definition) will not be allowed in these areas.

Policy ENV 2: Areas of open land which maintain a physical separation between settlements within the Norwich Area

“Inappropriate development” and other development which would erode the gaps, identified on the Proposals Map, between the built up limits of settlements, or which would otherwise undermine the general quality of openness of these gaps, will not be permitted.

3. River valleys

There are six main river valleys, which, together with their tributaries, provide an important and distinct contrast to the more open and undulating landscape generally characteristic of the District. Of these, five have been identified as ‘rural river valley’ landscape type, whilst where the River Yare skirts Norwich is characterised as ‘valley urban fringe’. The valley profiles have a certain degree of variability, with valley forms ranging from large scale, open valley landscapes with broad flat flood plains such as the River Waveney to more confined valley forms such as the River Tud. The valley sides appear to be gentle but are deceptively steep in places. There is a strong historical quality to the valleys, with earthworks, round towered churches and historic river crossings being notable landscape assets. The valleys are sparsely settled being typified by scattered farmsteads, occasional large halls and small villages, with a few large towns being confined to the Waveney valley. The river valleys also give rise to variations in land use, such as traditional grazing pastures in the floodplain and arable cultivation on the drier slopes. Such variations contribute to the visual interest of the landscape. The different habitat types within the river valleys, including wetland vegetation, heathland and wet meadows/pastures, Willow pollards and lines of Poplar flanking ditches and watercourses support a variety of wildlife, including protected species such as otter and water vole.

The river valley landscape is “very important in providing spatial definition to and creating variety within the South Norfolk Landscape” (LUC Landscape Assessment, 2001). The protection of the appearance and character of these areas is a Structure Plan objective. The extent of the river valleys whose character and contribution to the landscape warrant protection above and beyond that given to the more general open countryside, are shown on the Proposals Map and discussed in more detail in the South Norfolk Landscape Assessment.

Policy ENV 3: River valleys

The distinctive local landscape character of the river valleys identified on the Proposals Map will be protected and enhanced. “Inappropriate development” will not be permitted within the river valleys in the Norwich area, and special regard will be paid to protecting all parts of these valleys which contribute positively to the historic setting of Norwich.

4. Broads Area

The north-eastern, eastern and part of the southern boundaries of the Plan Area abut the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads which acquired status equivalent to that of a National Park in April 1989. Although the Broads Area is excluded from the Plan Area and is covered by a separate Local Plan prepared by the Broads Authority, it is recognised that development in adjacent areas within the Plan Area could be visually intrusive on the Broads landscape. The District Council will therefore seek to resist proposals for development in areas where it will have a detrimental impact on the unique and sensitive character of the Broads Area.

Policy ENV 4: Broads Area

The District Council will seek to resist development which would have a detrimental environmental or visual impact on the Broads Area.

5. Historic parklands

The number and extent of historic parks in Norfolk has declined considerably over the last century. The reasons for this include changes in farming practice, increased pressure for access and recreation and a decline in the number of trees due to disease and poor management. Historic parklands contribute to the diversity and visual interest of the landscape and often represent the work of eminent landscape designers. For these reasons historic parks in the Plan Area will be protected from insensitive development and positive management will be encouraged. Some of these historic parks form part of a larger area of attractive landscape reflecting the presence of a variety of features such as woodland, parkland and an attractive settlement pattern.

The historic parkland shown on the Proposals Map is derived from work done by Norfolk County Council (Countryside Strategy: Draft Historic Parklands Topic Paper). The areas defined on the Proposals Map are the remaining remnants of parkland areas over 25 hectares in extent which retain their parkland character. Many of the parklands in the Plan are of regional/local importance. Only the larger sites have been included as the impact of these parklands on the overall landscape character is the greatest. Applications affecting historic parkland will need to be accompanied by appraisals of historical interest, surveys of extant features and the content of landscaping schemes. Within the Norwich Area any “inappropriate development” affecting these would therefore have potentially greatest impact on the landscape. A definition of ‘inappropriate development’ can be found in the glossary.

The maintenance costs of the parks and their related buildings can be significant and development proposals may arise for changes of use of the land and buildings as has happened at Keswick Hall and Dunston Hall. The District Council will seek to ensure that such proposals are sympathetic to the original character of the park.

English Heritage has compiled a national register of parks and gardens of special historic interest in England. The register is being produced to draw attention to important parks and gardens as an essential part of the nation's heritage. There may be additional sites added to the register over the Plan period. A copy of the updated register is held by the Conservation Officer at South Norfolk Council.

Parks and gardens of historic interest will continue to be identified in the Plan Area. Research on historic parks and gardens to date has primarily concentrated on private sites over 25 hectares. Norfolk Gardens Trust supported by grant aid from English Heritage is undertaking a survey of smaller historic parks and gardens in Norfolk.

The District Council has limited funds for community environmental grants, which are given in certain circumstances. Advice on grant aid and related matters can be obtained from the Landscape Officer at South Norfolk Council.

Policy ENV 5: Historic parklands

The Parkland quality and landscape integrity of the historic parks shown on the Proposals Map, and their settings, will be protected. Proposals that would facilitate the restoration or enhancement of the parks will be supported, provided there would be no adverse impact on their historic form, character or setting. All development proposals within historic parklands will be required to respect the nature and layout of the original parkland planting scheme. In those historic parklands falling within the Norwich Area, “inappropriate development” will not be permitted.

6. Areas which contribute to maintaining the landscape setting of the southern bypass of the city of Norwich

Following the Secretary of States rejection of proposals for a Green Belt around Norwich, the 1993 Structure Plan Panel, recognising that the City's role as “the dominant centre of its sub-region” which would continue to act as a focus for development pressure wanted to “preserve those attributes of the City's natural setting which contribute to its environmental quality”.

The Panel were also impressed by the way in which the Southern Bypass had been designed to fit into the landscape through which it passes, and accepted the need to ensure that it should not come to be regarded as a boundary up to which development is acceptable. They therefore considered that Structure Plan policy (*N.6 in the 1999 Structure Plan*) would need to be further extended to provide protection for areas which contribute to the landscape setting of that road.

The District Council, in association with Land Use Consultants have, following a detailed assessment of landscape types and character areas, a zone of visual influence analysis and fieldwork, defined the extent of the Norwich Southern Bypass Landscape Protection Zone (NSBLPZ). The NSBLPZ is shown on the Proposals Map and includes those areas that contribute to maintaining the setting of the bypass including those vulnerable to pressures which would lead to the bypass becoming a new development boundary for Norwich. Within the NSBLPZ “inappropriate development” (see glossary) will not be permitted.

Policy ENV 6: Areas which contribute to maintaining the landscape setting of the Southern Bypass of the City

“Inappropriate development” and any other development within the Norwich Southern Bypass Landscape Protection Zone, as shown on the Proposals Map, which would undermine the landscape quality and openness of zone, or which would lead to the bypass (or any section of it) becoming the outer development boundary of the City, will not be permitted.

As noted above the landscape setting of the Southern Bypass is an important area which is to be protected from “inappropriate development”. It is important that the road is not viewed as a hard edge up to which development could locate. Similarly, the locational advantage of the junctions will not be allowed to outweigh the environmental protection aspects. In terms of the landscape setting for the bypass, most of the land surrounding either the road itself or its main junctions is undeveloped. Certain allocations have been made, for example, at Longwater for employment use. Outside these allocations, development proposals that are excluded from the definition of “inappropriate development” will need to demonstrate that measures have been taken to maintain the integrity of the landscape setting of the road.

The extent of the Norwich Southern Bypass Landscape Protection Zone (NSBLPZ) is shown on the Proposals Map. By its nature the NSBLPZ it is not uniform but it is continuous. Variation in the landscape setting zone appears where there are:

1. Physical changes in the character of the landscape either open or enclosed in nature.
2. Physical alterations in the boundaries to the road itself, for example, the influence of cuttings.
3. Existing land allocations, and permitted sites which have been excluded from the visual envelope because of its commitment to development.
4. Development Limits, Village Boundaries that fall within the zone have also been excluded.

The NSBLPZ is shown on the Proposals Map and is discussed in more detail in the South Norfolk Landscape Assessment.

7. Strategy for the distribution of development.

The Plans distributional strategy is derived from Regional Planning Guidance, the approved Structure Plan and Strategic Principle 3. These provide a framework for establishing a broad hierarchy of preferred development locations. Policy ENV 7 then sets a clear hierarchy of locations where new development may be permitted. The policy distinguishes between the appropriateness of settlements to accommodate varying levels of development during the Plan period. Whilst policy ENV 7 is primarily concerned with the distribution of development it is also relevant in the formulation and implementation of other policies in the Plan. This includes those concerned with the protection of ‘environmental assets’ (e.g. ENV 1, 2, 3, 5 & 6, ENV 8, 19 & 21, IMP 3), and the consideration of applications for economic development (e.g. EMP 2, 4, 5 & 7, SHO 8, TOU 4, 6 & 7) and housing (e.g. HOU 2, 4-7, 10 & 14).

Policy ENV 7 groups settlements according to their appropriateness to accommodate development based on Structure Plan policies (1993 CS.8 & CS.9, H.4, H.5 and 1999 CS.6). Settlements have been put into one of three groups (full definitions of which are given in the glossary):

- Those with “**DEVELOPMENT LIMITS**”. These are the Council’s preferred areas for development, in the sense that they are the areas where it is appropriate to indicate that new development e.g. housing, employment, shopping and tourist related proposals under normal circumstances may be permitted.
- Those with “**VILLAGE BOUNDARIES**”. These are settlements where development proposals may be acceptable. In essence these are the smaller villages that have a restricted range of facilities and services and a very limited capacity to absorb growth, but where strictly limited development for local needs might be appropriate.
- “**OTHER RURAL COMMUNITIES**”. Those areas of the Plan that are not included within Development Limits or Village Boundaries, due to their lack of services, infrastructure, employment opportunities and their poor accessibility and relative isolation. Development in ‘other rural communities’ will be strictly controlled and assessed against policies such as ENV 8 and HOU 8 and development will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances.

Settlements with Development Limits are those larger towns and villages or established areas where on the basis of their form and character, availability of employment opportunities, accessibility and infrastructure capacity coupled with good public transport provision, proximity to shops, schools, workplaces and entertainment venues are the areas where development will, under normal circumstances, be permitted. Development Limits are mainly within parishes explicitly mentioned in Structure Plan housing, employment or other policies. Village Boundaries are those smaller settlements with a more limited range of facilities and capacity to accommodate growth but where small scale development could still be acceptable. Development Limits and Village Boundaries will endure for the Plan period before being reviewed, as they differ from the boundaries designed to protect the District’s “environmental assets” (policies ENV 2,3,5 & 6) which will endure beyond the Plan period having been drawn on a more permanent basis and which are intended to provide protection in addition to that under policy ENV 8.

Policy ENV 7: Strategy for the distribution of development.

The main locations for development during the plan period will be in the following towns, villages, and other areas specifically allocated for development, for which 'Development Limits' have been identified on the Proposals Map:

NORWICH AREA:**1. Close to Norwich:**

Colney
Costessey (Longwater)
Cringleford
Trowse with Newton

2. In settlements with good communications to the City:

Easton
Hethersett
Little Melton
Long Stratton
Mulbarton
Newton Flotman
Poringland
Wymondham

RURAL AREA:**1. Selected locations adjacent to strategic routes:**

Diss
Roydon

2. Selected towns which function as local employment centres:

Harleston
Loddon/Chedgrave

3. Selected villages well related to the transport network and where a range of facilities are available:

Barford
Barnham Broom
Brooke
Dickleburgh
Ditchingham
Earsham
Hales
Hempnall
Hingham
The Pulhams
Scole
Thurton/Ashby St Mary
Wicklewood

Within other settlements, for which 'Village Boundaries' have been defined on the Proposals Map, development will be limited to minor infilling and other similar schemes which are compatible in scale with the size, form, function and character of the village concerned.

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DEVELOPMENT LIMITS	VILLAGE BOUNDARIES	OTHER RURAL COMMUNITIES
Ashby St. Mary (Inset Map 2) Barford (Inset Map 5) Barnham Broom (Inset Map 6) Brooke (Inset Map 11) Chedgrave (Inset Map 15) Colney (Inset Map 16) Costessey (Inset Maps 17A, 17B & 17C) Cringleford (Inset Map 16) Dickleburgh & Rushall (Inset Map 18) Diss (Inset Maps 19A & 19B) Ditchingham (Inset Map 12) Earsham (Inset Map 20) Easton (Inset Map 21) Framingham Earl (Inset Map 41) Hales & Heckingham (Inset Map 29) Harleston (Inset Maps 44A & 44B) Hempnall (Inset Map 30) Hethersett (Inset Map 31A) Hingham (Inset Maps 32A & 32B) Little Melton (Inset Map 33) Loddon (Inset Maps 34A & 34B) Long Stratton (Inset Map 35) Mulbarton (Inset Map 37) Newton Flotman (Inset Map 39) Poringland (Inset Map 41) Pulham Market (Inset Map 42) Pulham St. Mary (Inset Map 43) Roydon (Inset Maps 46 & 19A) Scole (Inset Map 48) Spooner Row (Inset Map 62C) Thurton (Inset Map 2) Trowse with Newton (Inset Map 55) Wicklewood (Inset Map 57) Wymondham (Inset Maps 62A & 62B)	Alington (Inset Map 1) Ashwellthorpe (Inset Map 3) Aslacton (Inset Map 4) Bawburgh (Inset Map 7) Bracon Ash (Inset Map 8) Bressingham (Inset Map 9) Brockdish (Inset Map 10) Broome (Inset Map 12) Bunwell (Inset Map 13) Burston & Shimpling (Inset Map 14) Ellingham (Inset Map 22) Forncett End (Inset Map 23) Forncett St. Peter (Inset Map 24) Geldeston (Inset Map 25) Gillingham (Inset Map 26) Great Moulton (Inset Maps 27A & 27B) Haddiscoe (Inset Map 28) Kirby Cane (Inset Map 22) Morley (Inset Map 36) Needham (Inset Map 38) Norton Subcourse (Inset Map 40) Rockland St. Mary (Inset Map 45) Roydon (Inset Map 9) Saxlingham Nethergate (Inset Map 47) Seething (Inset Map 49) Shelfhanger (Inset Map 50) Stoke Holy Cross (Inset Map 51) Surlingham (Inset Map 52) Swardeston (Inset Map 53) Tacolneston (Inset Map 23) Tasburgh (Inset Map 54) Thurlton (Inset Map 40) Wacton (Inset Map 56) Winfarthing (Inset Map 58) Woodton & Bedingham (Inset Map 59) Wortwell (Inset Map 60) Wreningham (Inset Map 61) Yelverton (Inset Map 1)	Alburgh Aldeby Bergh Apton Bixley Bramerton Burgh St. Peter Caistor St. Edmund Carleton Rode Carleton St. Peter Claxton Denton Deopham East Carleton Flordon Forncett St. Mary Framingham Pigot Gissing Great Melton Hapton Hedenham Hellington Hethel Holverston Howe Keswick Ketteringham Kimberley Kirby Bedon Kirstead Langley/Hardley Marlingford & Colton Morningthorpe Mundham Raveningham Redenhall Runhall Shelton Shotesham Sisland Starston Stockton Swainsthorpe Tharston Thorpe Abbots Thwaite Tibenham Tivetshall St. Margaret Tivetshall St. Mary Toft Monks Topcroft Wheatacre Wrampingham

8. Development outside defined Development Limits and Village Boundaries

The District Council will, in accordance with PPG7 and the 1999 Structure Plan, continue to strictly control development in the open countryside. Such strict control is necessary to maintain the landscape setting of the settlements and the predominantly rural character of the Plan Area and ensure the protection of the countryside 'for its own sake' (PPG 7). New development outside defined settlement limits e.g. farm diversification schemes (EMP 8) or dwellings for rural enterprises (HOU 9) will be expected to be able to demonstrate the necessity of their location and that they will be of benefit to rural communities. The District Council wishes to encourage the suitable re-use and adaptation of redundant / under used rural buildings for alternative uses e.g. for employment uses (EMP 3) or by conversion to residential or holiday accommodation (HOU 10 & TOU 7).

Policy ENV 8: Development in the open countryside

Permission for development in the open countryside, outside the Development Limits and Village Boundaries of existing settlements and areas identified for development in the Plan, will only be granted if it:

- i) Is requisite for agriculture or forestry; or**
 - ii) Is justified to sustain economic and social activity in rural communities, and demands a rural location; or**
 - iii) Is for the suitable adaptation and re-use of an existing rural building.**
- All such development must**
- iv) Respect the intrinsic beauty, the diversity of landscape, the wealth of natural resources, and the ecological, agricultural and recreational value of the countryside; and**
 - v) Be sensitively integrated into its rural surroundings in terms of siting, scale and design, while avoiding creating ribbon development or an unduly fragmented pattern of development**

9. Archaeology

There are Scheduled Ancient Monuments and sites of archaeological interest in the Plan Area and a considerable number of other sites which are recorded in the County Sites and Monuments Record. Norfolk Landscape Archaeology has the statutory responsibility for holding a copy of the Sites and Monuments Records under the General Development Order. If further information is sought on these sites potential developers should contact Norfolk Landscape Archaeology for details. In addition, the Unit can also provide advice on archaeological matters.

There is increased interest in, and awareness of, the history of Norfolk. Archaeological remains are important both for their own sake and for their role in education, leisure and tourism. For these reasons the District Council will seek to protect sites of archaeological interest. Where archaeological remains would be affected by development proposals, Norfolk Landscape Archaeology will be consulted on the importance of the remains and their protection under the following policies may be sought, as appropriate.

Policy ENV 9: Nationally and locally important archaeological remains.

There will be presumption against proposals which would involve significant alteration or cause damage, or which would have a significant impact on the setting of visible archaeological remains of national importance, whether scheduled or not, ancient monuments are shown on the Proposals Map.

Development affecting sites of archaeological remains of local interest and their settings will only be permitted if the need for the development outweighs the local value of the remains.

Applicants will be required to arrange for archaeological field evaluation of any such remains before applications are determined. Proposals should include provision for the remains and their settings to be protected, enhanced or preserved.

Where it is accepted that physical preservation in situ is not merited, planning permission may be subject to conditions and/or formal agreement requiring the developer to secure investigation and recording of the remains, and publication of the results.

Nationally important sites are given special protection as ‘Scheduled Ancient Monuments’ under the 1983 National Heritage Act. The Secretary of State for National Heritage is responsible for deciding applications for Scheduled Monument Consent, in consultation with English Heritage. The importance of such status is underlined by the example that, where a building is both a Listed Building and a Scheduled Monument, scheduling takes priority. Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 16 “Archaeology and Planning” (November 1990) recommends that ‘proposals maps should define the areas and sites to which the policies and proposals apply’. In this instance the policy protection is intended to apply throughout the District covering known and as yet undiscovered sites of archaeological interest.

In some areas of Britain, landscape reorganisation in the post-Roman period has not destroyed earlier systems of land division, which have instead been preserved in modern arrangements. One local example discovered recently has been the hedgerow pattern in the Dickleburgh area. It is suggested that in parts about 80% of the hedgerows were either early Roman or even Iron Age in origin. They form a rectilinear pattern running on a north to south axis. The Proposals Map shows the extent of an area which typifies this pattern. The District Council would wish to see this archaeological feature retained. The new Hedgerow Regulations (1997) can now make formal protection of historic hedgerows possible. The Council also considers that the features are worthy of interpretation facilities for members of the public. It is the intention of the Council to provide an interpretation facility to illustrate the archaeological value of the features.

Policy ENV 10: Historic hedgerow pattern - Dickleburgh

The District Council will seek to retain and enhance the historic hedgerow pattern in the Dickleburgh area.

10. Nature conservation

Sites of nature conservation and wildlife value comprise a range of different habitats such as woodland, river, marshland, heathland, unimproved grassland and old mineral extraction sites. The importance of some of these is recognised by various statutory designations, for example, Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

The Habitats Directive is European Law, which provides for the creation of a network of protected areas across the European Union known as 'Natura 2000'. It will consist of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated under the Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the Birds Directive. SPAs are designed to protect rare and migratory bird species.

Each member state is required to compile a list of areas containing the habitat types and species listed in the Directive. The Habitats Directive lists 168 natural habitat types in Europe whose conservation requires the designation of SACs. SACs in Great Britain will cover some of the best examples of 75 of these habitat types, including 22 priority (that is, types at greatest risk of disappearing altogether) habitat types.

The Yare Broads and Marshes, Hardley Flood, Ducan's Marsh Claxton, Poplar Farm Meadows Langley, Geldeston Meadows, Stanley & Alder Carrs SSSIs within the District have been put forward for inclusion in the Broads candidate SAC. The Norfolk Valley Fens candidate SAC in part lies within South Norfolk. Flordon Common and Coston Fen (Runhall) form part of the Norfolk Valley Fens candidate for Special Area of Conservation.

South Norfolk has 26 whole or part SSSIs of which 8 are also internationally designated. There are 6 designated SSSIs in the Broads as part of the Broads SPA and RAMSAR site (RAMSAR is the place in Iran where in 1971 a convention was signed aimed at halting the decline in the world's most important wetlands). RAMSAR designations impose no further requirements on the owners and occupiers than those applying to SSSIs. The Government has pledged to promote the conservation of RAMSAR sites and to endeavour to increase wildfowl populations.

A SSSI is identified by English Nature and is an area of land of special interest due to its flora, fauna, geological or physiographical features. Sites which have been designated as SSSIs are sites of national importance and as such are subject to special scrutiny. The Local Planning Authority is required to consult English Nature on any development proposals in, around or likely to affect a SSSI. Those in the Plan Area are shown on the Proposals Map.

Certain sites of nature conservation value in Norfolk are also designated as County Wildlife Sites (CWS). These are the best semi-natural habitat sites in the County other than SSSIs. They have been identified following a countywide survey by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust. The CWS sites in the Plan Area are shown on the Proposals Map.

There are also wildlife habitats throughout the Plan Area that have no statutory 'designation', but are nevertheless important for nature conservation.

In January 1994 the Government published “Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan”. Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 9 “Nature Conservation” (October 1994) echoes the “UK Biodiversity Action Plan” and explains how local authorities can contribute to the conservation of biodiversity through their planning role. The District Council will play a full part in the production and implementation of any local biodiversity action plans.

Sites of nature conservation value are under threat from the pressure for new development, intensification of agriculture, increased pressure for access, recreation and changes in land use patterns. The District Council will seek to safeguard the value of such sites and therefore give protection to their associated wildlife, in particular species protected by law.

~~Policy ENV 11: Sites of international importance for nature conservation~~

~~Development which is likely to adversely affect any designated site of European Nature Conservation significance or Ramsar site will not be permitted unless:~~

- ~~i) It is directly connected with, or necessary for, the management of the site for nature conservation; or~~
- ~~ii) The proposal would not cause demonstrable harm to the integrity of the site; or~~
- ~~iii) There are no alternative solutions in terms of locating the proposed development elsewhere, or achieving the purpose of the proposed development in some other way.~~

~~If the site concerned includes a ‘priority natural habitat type’ or a ‘priority species’, development will not be permitted unless, in addition to i), ii) and iii) above, there are imperative reasons of over-riding public interest for the proposed development, or it is necessary for reasons of human health or public safety, or would provide benefits of primary importance to the environment.~~

~~Permission will only be granted in these exceptional circumstances with planning conditions of planning obligations to maintain the overall coherence of ‘Natura 2000’.~~

Attention: Please note that Local Plan policy **ENV 11** has been **discontinued** since 28th September 2007 as part of the ‘saved policy’ process. Applicants should now instead refer to national planning policy statement PPS9 (Biodiversity and Geological Conservation).

~~Policy ENV 12: Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)~~

~~Development which is likely to adversely affect any site of special scientific interest will not be permitted unless the need for the development clearly outweighs the nature conservation value of the site and national policy to safeguard the national network of such sites.~~

(Continued...)

(Policy ENV 12 continued)

~~In cases where development is compatible with protecting the site's nature conservation interest, planning conditions may be imposed and/or planning obligations sought in connection with any permission granted to ensure that the site's interest is protected or enhanced.~~

Attention: Please note that Local Plan policy **ENV 12** has been **discontinued** since 28th September 2007 as part of the 'saved policy' process. Applicants should now instead refer to national planning policy statement PPS9 (Biodiversity and Geological Conservation).

Policy ENV 13: Sites of regional and local nature conservation interest and geological/ geomorphological value

Development which is likely to adversely affect any local nature reserve, site of importance for nature conservation (County Wildlife Site) or a regionally important geological/ geomorphological site will not be permitted unless there are material planning considerations of sufficient importance to outweigh the need to safeguard the nature conservation interest of the site, or its geological/ geomorphological value.

In cases where development is compatible with safeguarding the site's nature conservation interest or its geological/ geomorphological value, planning conditions may be imposed and/or planning obligations sought in connection with any permission granted to ensure that the site's interest and value are protected or enhanced.

Policy ENV 14: Habitat protection

Where sites include features of habitats which are identified in a national or local biodiversity action plan or which, either individually or cumulatively, are of demonstrable importance to wildlife or nature conservation, development will not be permitted unless:

- i) The development would not harm those features or habitats; or
- ii) The features and habitats can, and would be, fully reinstated; or
- iii) The integrity of the features and habitats would be maintained through the establishment of regime of protective management.

Policy ENV 15: Species protection

Planning permission will not be granted for any development that would be likely to cause demonstrable harm to a species of animal or plant which is:

- i) Protected under European or British Law; or**
- ii) Identified in a National or Local Biodiversity Action Plan**

Unless planning conditions can be imposed, or a planning obligation is in place, to:

- iii) Facilitate the survival of the species on site; or**
- iv) Cause minimum disturbance of the species; or**
- v) Sustain current levels of the species' population in an alternative location.**

Policies ENV 14 and 15 are intertwined in nature conservation terms, they have been separated because land use policy must differentiate between the measures which may need to be taken during the development process in respect of each. Habitat protection under ENV 14 is, for example, likely to be primarily concerned with securing the protection, enhancement, replacement or maintenance of certain physical attributes of development sites for the long term. Conversely, species protection (in the sense of flora and fauna known to be present on any particular site as covered under policy ENV 15) is more likely to be concerned with short term security or relocation measures for the species themselves during the period while development is actually taking place.

Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) are also significant landscape features. A system for identifying RIGS in South Norfolk has not been developed but during the plan period RIGS may be identified by such a system.

In addition to protecting designated nature conservation sites the District Council wishes to protect specific features of the landscape, which by their linear or continuous structure, function as stepping stones, which are essential for migration, dispersal and genetic exchange. Such features may fail to satisfy the criteria for protection under other existing legislation e.g. Hedgerow Regulations (1997), but form important networks which are necessary for maintaining the range and diversity of flora and fauna. Examples of such features could include rivers and their corridors, field boundary systems, woodland, heathland, water meadows, unimproved pasture, lakes, ponds and streams, marshes and green lanes etc.

Recent EC legislation has redefined the need to give careful consideration to the potential effect of development on wildlife species.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) give protection to a number of threatened nature species including bats, newts etc. In addition there is special legislation, for example, concerning seals and badgers. There are a number of protected animal species that are found within South Norfolk including otter, water vole, great crested newt, badger and several bat and bird species. Measures involved in species protection during the development process may include protected habitats and/or movement corridors, possible relocation for species themselves during the construction period and sensitivity to species' requirements e.g. breeding season, activity periods such that the result is a minimum of disturbance. To alert developers and the

public to this issue and to establish a framework for planning decisions policy ENV 15 is included in the Plan.

The advice of English Nature will be sought at an early stage in appropriate cases.

The District and County Councils are empowered to designate Local Nature Reserves and enter into management agreements with landowners in order that certain sites can be managed in the interests of nature conservation. Local Nature Reserves with management agreements have been established at Roydon Fen, Whitlingham and Dunston Common.

Where the District Council (in association with English Nature) considers that it would be expedient in the interests of the locality that an area of land be managed as a nature reserve it will favourably consider the establishment of a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

Policy ENV 16: Local Nature Reserves

The District Council will designate Local Nature Reserves in appropriate areas of nature conservation value. It will liaise closely with English Nature to establish the desirability of such designation.

Policy ENV 17: Public access to sites of nature conservation value

The District Council will seek to ensure through the control of development and its own actions that public access to sites of nature conservation value occurs except where such access would be detrimental to conservation interests.

It is important that the District Council has regard to a wider role in encouraging and enabling access to sites of nature conservation interest. LNRs are one aspect, countryside management projects (noted below) are another. However through its normal day to day control of development it can also play an important part.

11. Trees and hedgerows

Trees and hedgerows make a significant and positive contribution to the appearance of the landscape in the Plan Area. They help to break up extensive tracts of land into a more human scale, thus creating greater visual interest. They also provide valuable screening for new development enabling better integration with the existing landscape. This is particularly important in the rather open and undulating landscape characteristic of many parts of the Plan Area. Trees and hedgerows also make a significant contribution to nature conservation purposes, providing valuable habitat for native species.

There has been a decline in the number of trees and hedgerows throughout the County, including the Plan Area, which has contributed to a gradual change in the landscape towards greater uniformity. This decline can be attributed to a number of factors including changes in farming practices, disease, particularly Dutch Elm disease, and the lack of management to ensure replacement of mature trees and the survival of those existing.

Part One Section 1.1 – Protection of Environmental Assets

The Hedgerows Regulations 1997 (SI No. 1160) came into force on 1 June 1997. It is against the law to remove most countryside hedgerows without permission. It is a criminal offence except under certain situations to deliberately remove a hedgerow without permission. Advice on the new legislation is available from the Landscape Officer at South Norfolk Council.

It is the District Council's policy to encourage tree planting throughout the District to reverse this decline and seek to soften the impact of new development, particularly on the edges of settlements. Developers will be required to submit details of tree belts and other landscaping in connection with sites for new development (see policy IMP 2). The Council can also offer advice on management of woodland. Where necessary the District Council will make use of Tree Preservation Orders in order to retain important trees in the landscape or in settlements that are under threat. The Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance "Trees and Development" gives detailed guidance on the protection and retention of trees.

Policies relating to landscape requirements for new development are located in the "Controlling the Impact of Development" section of this Plan.

Policy ENV 18: ~~Planting of trees and hedges~~

~~The District Council will continue to promote the planting of native deciduous trees and hedges in appropriate locations and will encourage the positive management of woodland in the Plan Area.~~

Attention: Please note that Local Plan policy **ENV 18** has been **discontinued** since 28th September 2007 as part of the 'saved policy' process. Applicants should now instead refer to Local Plan policy IMP 2 (Landscaping).

Policy ENV 19: Tree Preservation Orders

Within or adjacent to development boundaries Tree Preservation Orders will be made to protect individual trees, groups of trees and woodland where they make a significant contribution to the amenity, landscape or character and appearance of a settlement. Within the Norwich Policy Area important areas of woodland that help to define the hard edge of the built up area and maintain the physical separation between settlements will be protected from inappropriate development. Outside development boundaries orders will be made where a demonstrable threat to fell exists and similar amenity value is eminent.

Where a Tree Preservation Order has been made, any future applications which may be considered involving the order will be subject to strict scrutiny. An application which adversely affects, or will lead to the loss of the tree affected by the order could be refused. The impact of the affect on the tree will form part of the assessment of the application in relation to the form and character under policies such as HOU 6.

Part One Section 1.1 – Protection of Environmental Assets

The Council is also concerned to avoid the loss of other trees in the countryside and in built up areas since they are valuable for their own sake. Tree owners should take professional advice where they are unsure of the health or otherwise of their trees, and felling should only be considered as a last resort. The Council's Landscape Officer can offer help in identifying sources of suitable professional advice.

12. Village greens and commons

Some villages or hamlets have parcels of land which serve as village greens or commons. Both form attractive visual features, especially when occupying prominent village locations. Substantial areas of common land are also important in the wider sense as valuable habitats for flora and fauna. It is essential that these community and landscape assets are protected and appropriately managed. Tree planting on commons and village greens should be avoided. In exceptional cases development will be allowed but only if it is strictly in conformity with current legislation protecting village greens and commons.

Policy ENV 20: Village greens and commons
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Development on village greens or commons will not be permitted.
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13. Agricultural land

Agriculture is the predominant land use and activity within the Plan Area. Agricultural land is an important resource and land of the highest quality (Grades 1, 2 and 3a) needs to be protected from irreversible development, as PPG 7 and GDO amendment 2 (1991) make clear. The majority of agricultural land in the Plan Area is Grade 3, which is of medium quality, but within this Grade there may be pockets of higher quality land, for instance, Grade 3a. Higher quality land, Grade 2, occurs in limited areas in parts of the north east and west of the Plan Area. The largest tract lies between Trowse and Bramerton with small pockets around Forncett, Shotesham, Bergh Apton, Ashby St. Mary and north of Chedgrave. Development of the best and most versatile agricultural land will not be permitted unless opportunities have been assessed for accommodating development needs on previously developed sites, on land within the boundaries of existing developed areas and on poorer quality farmland.

Policy ENV 21: Protection of land for agriculture
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Development which would result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land, will not be permitted unless:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">i) The development cannot be accommodated on land within the defined Development Limits of existing towns and villages or within defined Village Boundaries, or on previously developed land, or, failing that, on poorer quality farmland; andii) The need for the development outweighs the agricultural considerations. |
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14. Countryside management projects

The District Council is actively participating in three countryside management projects, the aims of which are to protect the special character of the areas from insensitive change by

implementing landscape improvements, managing wildlife habitats and increasing local and visitor awareness of the areas covered.

These projects are:

1. Upper Waveney Valley Project
2. Wensum
3. Norwich Fringe Project

The projects involve positive enhancement measures which will usefully complement the District Council's policies to protect designated landscapes and the open countryside from the detrimental effect of development.

Policy ENV 22: Countryside Projects

The District Council actively supports the aims and objectives of the Countryside Projects for the Upper Waveney, Wensum or Norwich Fringe areas.

As noted above these projects aim to improve local and visitor awareness of the area and in part does this through improved recreational access to land e.g. policy LEI 10.