

South Norfolk Council

**South Norfolk
Local Landscape Designations Review**



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Approved

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Watkins', enclosed within a large, loopy circular flourish.

Dominic Watkins

Position

Director

Date

11th June 2012

Revision

Final

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 South Norfolk is a predominantly rural District 90,891ha in area located in the south-east of Norfolk. While its northern boundary borders the City of Norwich, the District is largely a rural area of subtle contrasts, ranging from large scale and open plateaux landscapes to the more enclosed and intimate character of the low-lying river valley landscapes. The landscape is predominantly arable farmland, interspersed with woodland, historic parkland and settlements. 6,701ha (7.4%) of the eastern fringes of the District lie within The Broads Authority Area, a nationally important landscape designated by Government that has an equivalent status of a National Park.

1.1.2 In common with many local authorities elsewhere, local landscape designation policies have been a component of successive development plans in Norfolk (Structure Plans) and South Norfolk District (Local Plans) for many years.

1.1.3 To inform the preparation of the South Norfolk Local Development Framework, South Norfolk Council commissioned Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) to undertake a review of potential local landscape designations (LLD) proposed for the Site Specific Policies and Allocations Development Plan Document.

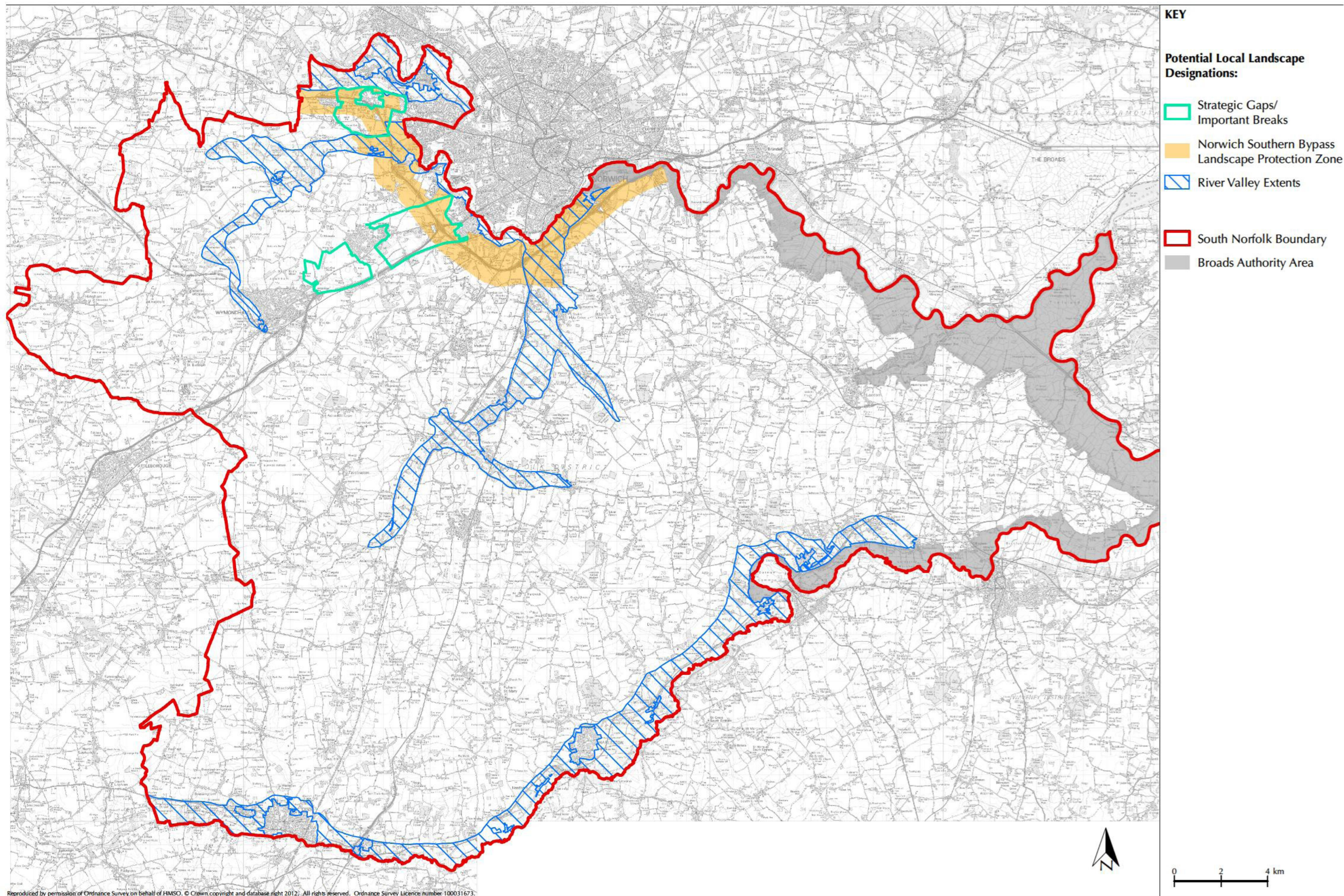
1.2 Objectives and Scope

1.2.1 The potential LLD proposed in the Site Specific Policies and Allocations Development Plan Document¹ are shown on **Figure 1.1** and listed below:

- Strategic Gaps/Important Breaks.
- Norwich Southern Bypass Landscape Protection Zone.
- Landscape Character Areas and River Valleys.

1.2.2 In line with the Brief, the aim of the review is to assess whether the potential LLD are sufficiently evidenced and justified by the existing evidence base to satisfy the requirements of current planning policy. The assessment was desk-based and did not involve field visits.

¹ South Norfolk Local Development Framework – Site Specific Policies & Allocations Document and Long Stratton & Wymondham Area Action Plans: 2nd Public Consultation (Regulation 25), 29th August -18th November 2011 (South Norfolk Council)



1.2.3 Taking into account current best practice, the objectives of the review are twofold:

- To examine and make recommendations on the adequacy of the existing evidence base, where appropriate.
- To assess and make recommendations on the Council's suggested potential LLDs, where appropriate.

1.3 The Existing Evidence Base

South Norfolk Landscape Assessment

1.3.1 The South Norfolk Landscape Assessment comprises four separate volumes:

- Volume 1: Landscape Types of South Norfolk District (2001)²
- Volume 2: Landscape Character Areas of the Norwich Policy Area (2001)³
- Volume 3: Implications for Policy (2001)⁴
- Volume 4: Landscape Character Areas of the Rural Policy Area (2006)⁵

1.3.2 Together, the studies provide a comprehensive assessment of the key elements that define the distinctive character of the District's landscapes. While the work to prepare Volumes 1 and 2 predated the publication of the 2002 Landscape Character Assessment Guidance⁶, the approach and methodologies adopted for the studies overall are generally considered to be in line with current best practice. It is not the purpose of the Landscape Assessment to rank one area against another in landscape value terms, nor is it intended to identify in detail areas suitable for development or otherwise. The study does however provide information about variations in the character of the District's landscape that can be used to inform and underpin planning policies and decision making.

South Norfolk Wind Turbine Landscape Sensitivity Study

1.3.3 The South Norfolk Wind Turbine Landscape Sensitivity Study⁷ was commissioned to inform proposals for wind turbine development in the South Norfolk District, and to assist in the formulation of appropriate policies. It sets out a robust and transparent evaluation framework following guidance set out in current national Landscape Character Assessment Guidance⁸, its

² South Norfolk Landscape Assessment : Volume 1 - Landscape Types of South Norfolk District (June 2001, Land Use Consultants)

³ South Norfolk Landscape Assessment : Volume 2 - Landscape Character Areas of the Norwich Policy Area (June 2001, Land Use Consultants)

⁴ South Norfolk Landscape Assessment : Volume 3 – Implications for Policy (June 2001, Land Use Consultants)

⁵ South Norfolk Landscape Assessment : Volume 4 - Landscape Character Areas of the Rural Policy Area (April 2006, Land Use Consultants)

⁶ Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002, The Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage)

⁷ South Norfolk District : Wind Turbine Landscape Sensitivity Study (April 2006, Amended January 2008, Land Use Consultants)

⁸ Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002, The Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage)

accompanying Topic Paper⁹ and current best practice. The study builds on the information in the South Norfolk Landscape Assessment, supplemented by field work to collect additional information. The study highlights the particular landscape sensitivity of the Rural River Valleys.

Greater Norwich Green Infrastructure Strategy

1.3.4 The Greater Norwich Green Infrastructure Strategy includes the following key documents:

- Green Infrastructure Strategy¹⁰
- Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan¹¹

1.3.5 The Green Infrastructure Strategy provides a strategic framework for the protection and enhancement of green infrastructure corridors across the Joint Core Strategy area. The subsequent Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan focuses on two key locations for strategic growth identified in the Joint Core Strategy, including the South West Norwich area within South Norfolk District. The Delivery Plan identifies priority areas for green infrastructure enhancement projects that would provide a sensitive fit with the local character of the landscape.

Greater Norwich Historic Characterisation and Sensitivity Assessment

1.3.6 The Historic Characterisation and Sensitivity Assessment¹² was compiled by Norfolk County Council for the Greater Norwich Development Partnership (GNDP). The study involved a rapid historic environment characterisation of growth areas identified in the Joint Core Strategy, which included the following areas within South Norfolk District:

- Long Stratton
- Wymondham
- Hethersett-Easton

1.3.7 For each identified growth area, a number of 'historic character zones' were identified through a desk-based study of historic landscape character, archaeology and historic built environment patterns, and confirmed by field visits. A desk-based assessment of the sensitivity of each location was also undertaken.

⁹ Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland - Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity (2004, The Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage)

¹⁰ Greater Norwich Green Infrastructure Strategy (2007, Chris Blandford Associates)

¹¹ Greater Norwich Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan (2009, The Landscape Partnership)

¹² Greater Norwich Historic Characterisation and Sensitivity Assessment (2009, Norfolk County Council)

2.0 PLANNING POLICY REQUIREMENTS

2.1 Review of Government Policy

2.1.1 For many years, LLDs have been a widespread and well understood component of development plans in England, and have provided protection to landscapes valued at the local level that have not received national recognition as a National Park or an AONB.

2.1.2 The Government's current planning policies on different aspects of land use planning in England are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework¹³ (NPPF). The NPPF came into effect on 27th March 2012, replacing previously published planning policy statements and guidance in England. This included PPS7 Planning for Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, which included specific policies on LLDs.

2.1.3 The Government's approach to protection of the countryside and landscapes in the NPPF is set out below with key phrases underlined.

2.1.4 The importance of landscape character is acknowledged in the NPPF's core planning principles:

'11. Planning should take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it.'

2.1.5 Section 11 of the NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies on conserving and enhancing the natural environment, including the landscape:

'109. The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils '

'113. Local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or landscape areas will be judged. Distinctions should be made between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites, so that protection is commensurate with their status and gives appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution that that they make to wider ecological networks.'

¹³ National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012, DCLG)

'114. Local planning authorities should:

...set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure;...'

115. Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in all these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads.

- 2.1.6 With regards to plan making, the NPFF requires that local planning authorities should ensure that the Local Plan is based on adequate, up-to-date and relevant evidence about the environmental characteristics of the area.

'170. Where appropriate, landscape character assessments should also be prepared, integrated with assessment of historic landscape character, and for areas where there are major expansion options assessments of landscape sensitivity.

2.2 Review of Joint Core Strategy Policy

- 2.2.1 In March 2011, a Joint Core Strategy¹⁴ was adopted for the Councils of South Norfolk, Norwich City and Broadland. The spatial vision of the Joint Core Strategy (JCS) seeks to retain the distinctive Norfolk character of the rural area.

- 2.2.2 The current approach to protection of the countryside and landscapes in the JCS is set out below with key phrases underlined.

- 2.2.3 Spatial planning objective 9 seeks:

'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'.

- 2.2.4 The importance of landscape is further emphasised in the following JCS policies:

¹⁴ Joint Core Strategy for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk (Adopted March 2011)

2.2.5 Policy 1 (Addressing climate change and protecting environmental assets) states:

‘..In areas not protected through international or national designations, development will minimise fragmentation of habitats and seek to conserve and enhance existing environmental assets of acknowledged regional or local importance’.

2.2.6 The supporting text for Policy 1 refers to assets of local importance and states that:

‘The area has a wealth of environmental assets ranging from international and national status, to those of local importance. These must be safeguarded and enhanced for the benefit of current and future generations. These assets include biodiversity (wildlife and habitats), built heritage and the wider historic environment, ancient monuments and archaeological assets, geodiversity (geological features), landscape and historic landscape character; as well as more general aspects such as the countryside and rural character, the setting of Norwich, towns and villages and the Broads. Assets of local importance, such as County Wildlife Sites are valuable in their own right, and in combination provide a significant resource’.

2.2.7 Policy 10 (Locations for major new or expanded communities in the Norwich Policy Area) recognises the importance of maintaining strategic gaps between Wymondham, Hethersett and Cringleford within South Norfolk.

2.2.8 With regards to Wymondham, Policy 10 states:

- *‘at least 2,200 dwellings located in a number of sites providing easy access to local jobs, services and facilities and the town centre whilst maintaining the strategic gap to the north and northeast and the historic setting of the town and abbey’*
- *‘extensive levels of green infrastructure to create a ‘Ketts Country’ pastoral landscape of grass, wood, hedgerow and wetland habitat. This will also strengthen the importance and role of the Tiffey valley, the landscape setting of the town and strategic gaps, particularly towards Hethersett’*

2.2.9 With regards to Hethersett, Policy 10 states:

‘This location is dependent on expanded capacity of the A11/A47 Thickthorn junction and will deliver modest growth to the existing village to include:

- *at least 1,000 dwellings located to maintain the strategic gap to the north and south west’*

2.2.10 Policy 12 (the remainder of the Norwich urban area, including the fringe parishes) refers to the protection of the landscape setting of the Norwich urban area.

2.2.11 Policy 18 (the Broads) recognises the importance of the Broads' landscape and states:

'In areas in close proximity to the Broads Authority area particular regard will be applied to maintaining and enhancing the economy, environment, tranquillity, setting, visual amenity, recreational value and navigational use of the Broads. Opportunities will be taken to make better use of the benefits of the Broads, and to support its protection and enhancement while ensuring no detrimental impact on the Broadland SPA, Broadland Ramsar and Broads SAC.

2.3 Summary of Key Policy Requirements

National Planning Policy

2.3.1 In contrast to the more prescriptive approach to LLDs set out in previous Government policy (PPS7), the NPPF does not rule out that locally valued landscapes may be identified and protected through designation by local planning authorities.

2.3.2 The key requirements of the NPPF for local planning authorities to consider in relation to landscape protection policies are:

- **The Government recognises that the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside should be protected for its own sake.**
- **The Government recognises that valued landscapes should be protected and enhanced commensurate with their status.**
- **Local planning authorities should set criteria-based landscape protection policies.**
- **Local planning authorities should set out a strategic approach to the protection of green infrastructure networks.**
- **Local planning authorities should give great weight to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.**
- **Local planning authorities should base landscape policies on adequate, up-to-date and relevant evidence.**

- **Landscape character assessments should be integrated with assessment of historic landscape character, and landscape sensitivity assessments should be prepared for major expansion areas.**

Joint Core Strategy

2.3.3 The key requirements of the adopted Joint Core Strategy in relation to landscape protection policies within South Norfolk's Development Plan Documents are:

- **DPDs should seek to retain the locally distinctive character of rural areas in accordance with the JCS's spatial vision.**
- **DPDs should seek to protect 'key landscapes of acknowledged regional or local importance' in order to comply with a core planning objective of the JCS.**
- **The JCS requires that DPDs should safeguard and enhance environmental 'assets of local importance' (including landscape and historic landscape character, countryside and rural character and the setting of Norwich, towns and villages and the Broads).**
- **DPDs should recognise that assets of local importance are valuable in their own right, and in combination provide a significant resource for the JCS area.**
- **DPDs should maintain strategic gaps between Wymondham, Hethersett and Cringleford in relation to planning of major new/expanded communities.**
- **DPDs should protect the landscape setting of the Norwich urban area.**
- **DPDs should protect the landscape setting of the Broads.**

Local Landscape Designations – Guidance and Current Practice

2.3.4 No formal guidance has been published for England to assist local planning authorities in taking forward LLD policies, either in terms of their justification or the delineation of LLD boundaries. The national Landscape Character Assessment guidance¹⁵ does not include a methodology for the identification of LLDs at either national or local levels. However, the

¹⁵ Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002, Countryside Agency and Scottish National Heritage)

guidance does acknowledge the concept of 'landscape value', which 'refers to the relative value or importance that stakeholders attach to different landscapes and their reasons for valuing them' (para 7.22). Criteria for assessing landscape value that would be relevant in the context of providing justification for LLDs are identified in para 7.22 of the guidance as follows:

- ***'Landscape Quality:*** *the intactness of the landscape and the condition of features and elements.*
- ***Scenic Quality:*** *the term that is used to describe landscapes which appeal primarily to the visual senses.*
- ***Rarity:*** *the presence of rare features and elements in the landscape or the presence of a rare landscape character type;*
- ***Representativeness:*** *whether the landscape contains a particular character and/or features and elements, which is felt by stakeholders to be worthy of representing;*
- ***Conservation Interests:*** *the presence of features of particular wildlife, earth science or archaeological, historical and cultural interest can add to the value of a landscape as well as having value in their own right;*
- ***Wildness:*** *the presence of wild (or relatively wild) character in the landscape which makes a particular contribution to sense of place;*
- ***Associations:*** *with particular people, artists, writers or other media, or events in history.'*

2.3.5 In addition to the above landscape related criteria, the concept of 'tranquillity' is also introduced in para 7.23 of the guidance (defined as a composite feature related to low levels of built development, traffic, noise and artificial lighting). Para 7.24 of the guidance states that the criteria in 7.22 and 7.23 'may be used to identify valued landscapes that merit some form of designation or recognition.'

2.3.6 Taking into account the NPPF's requirements and the absence of specific guidance or accepted practice, it is generally acknowledged that local planning authorities seeking to include LLD policies in their local plans should:

- **Make a specific case for the LLDs based on factors unique to its area (relating to the particular characteristics of the landscape and its development pressures).**
- **Show that the boundaries of areas to be designated as LLD can be defended using a clear methodology based on a robust Landscape Character Assessment undertaken in accordance with best practice**

3.0 STRATEGIC GAPS/IMPORTANT BREAKS POLICY

3.1 Background to the Policy

3.1.1 The protection of strategic gaps between settlements within South Norfolk has been an established policy approach in successive development plans since the Secretary of State's rejection of the Norfolk Structure Plan's proposals for a Green Belt around Norwich in 1993.

3.1.2 Saved Policy ENV2 of the Adopted South Norfolk Local Plan (2003)¹⁶ identifies 'areas of open land which maintain a physical separation between settlements within the Norwich Policy Area'. Policy ENV2 states:

"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'.

3.1.3 The supporting text to Policy ENV2 states:

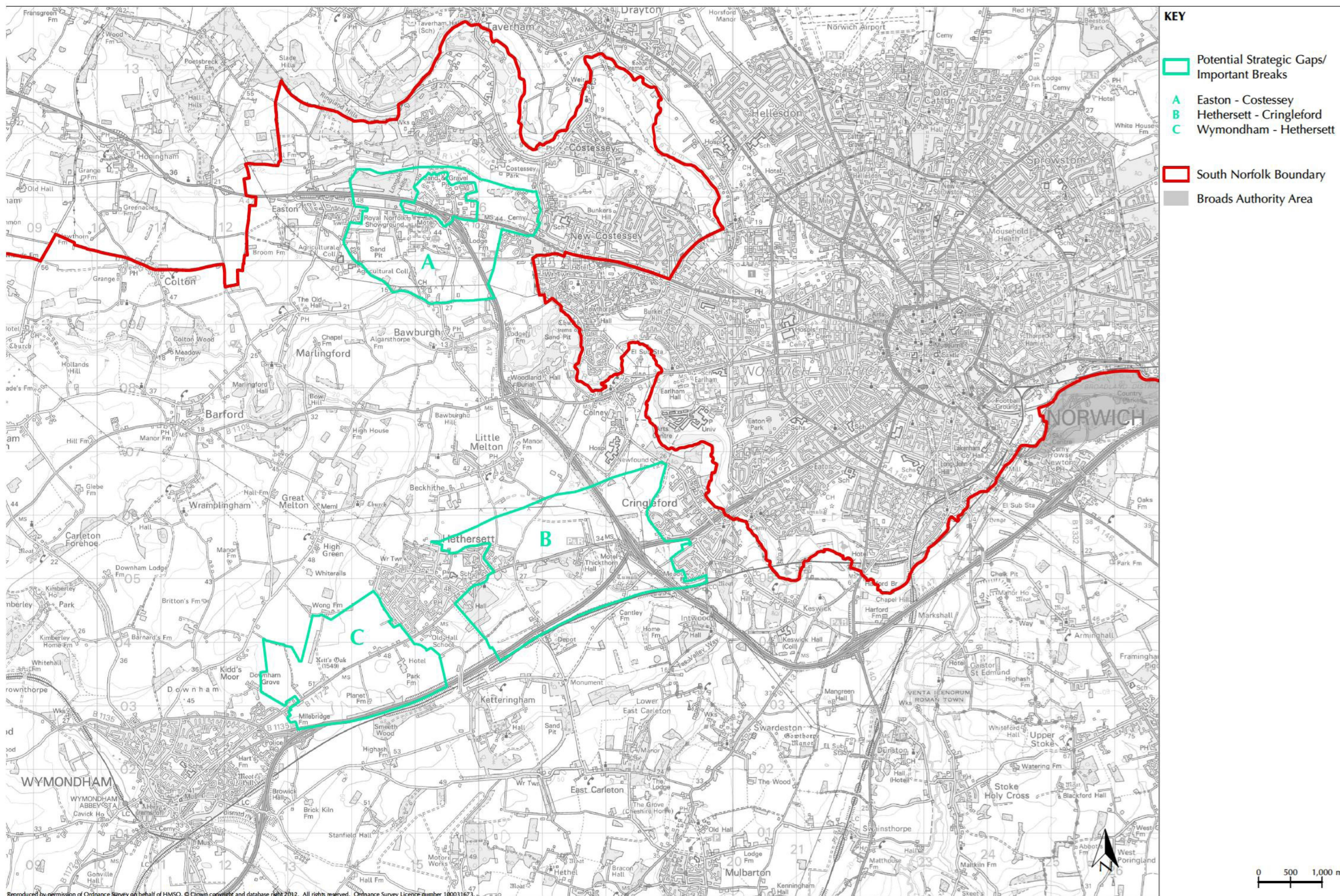
'For the most part, the landscape setting of South Norfolk's towns and villages is essentially of a rural character. In some settlements, where peripheral expansion in the form of modern housing estates had progressed over a number of years, the transition can be abrupt and unattractive. In others, such 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' or 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'.

3.2 Review of Suggested Policy

3.2.1 The extents of the potential **Strategic Gaps/Important Breaks** as proposed in the Site Specific Policies and Allocations Development Plan Document¹⁷ are shown on **Figure 3.1**. The

¹⁶ South Norfolk Local Plan Adopted Version (March 2003)

¹⁷ South Norfolk Local Development Framework – Site Specific Policies & Allocations Document and Long Stratton & Wymondham Area Action Plans: 2nd Public Consultation (Regulation 25), 29th August -18th November 2011 (South Norfolk Council)



combined area of the Strategic Gaps/Important Breaks designations is 1,410ha, which is approximately 1.6% of South Norfolk District.

3.2.2 The Council's suggested policy wording for the Strategic Gaps/Important Breaks is as follows:

'Development which would erode, or otherwise undermine the openness of the Strategic Gaps/Important Breaks, identified on the Proposals Map, between the development boundaries of the settlements listed below, will not be permitted.'

Wymondham-Hethersett

Hethersett – Cringleford

Easton – Costessey.

3.2.3 This review has considered the potential Strategic Gaps in relation to current planning policy requirements and the existing evidence base. Taking into consideration NPPF requirements and the Joint Core Strategy's development and green infrastructure policy aims, it is considered that maintenance of the Strategic Gaps/Important Breaks policy in the Site Specific Policies and Allocations Development Plan Document is justified in policy terms.

3.2.4 The 2001 LUC Report states that the Landscape Character Assessment undertaken in the same year identified parts of the landscapes within the Strategic Gaps as having a 'sense of openness'¹⁸, and that a number of these are identified as 'very important'¹⁹. However, as noted by the Planning Inspector in a 2009 Appeal decision for a planning application within a Strategic Gap²⁰, an up to date assessment is required that takes account of the changes that have taken place, or will take place, within the Strategic Gap. It is considered that the 2001 Landscape Character Assessment does not in itself provide sufficiently robust and credible evidence to justify maintaining the extent of the potential Strategic Gap/Important Break boundaries shown on **Figure 3.1**. It is therefore recommended that further work, involving in-depth, detailed field-based assessment, is undertaken to ensure that only land which can be clearly demonstrated to be necessary to achieve the policy's aim is included within the Strategic Gap/Important Break boundaries. Ideally, this assessment should be informed by the findings of the updated South Norfolk Landscape Character Assessment as recommended in Section 5.0.

3.2.5 Subject to the above, no changes to the suggested wording of the Strategic Gaps/Important Breaks are recommended.

¹⁸ South Norfolk Landscape Assessment, Volume 3, Implications for Policy (June 2001, Land Use Consultants) – Paragraph B1.9

¹⁹ South Norfolk Landscape Assessment, Volume 3, Implications for Policy (June 2001, Land Use Consultants) – Paragraph B1.10

²⁰ Land North of Norwich Common, Wymondham, Ref: APP/L2630/A/09/2097802, Inspector's Report to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (September 2009) – paras 206 - 208

4.0 NORWICH SOUTHERN BYPASS LANDSCAPE PROTECTION ZONE POLICY

4.1 Background to the Policy

- 4.1.1 Saved Policy ENV6 of the Adopted South Norfolk Local Plan (2003)²¹ identifies areas which contribute to maintaining the landscape setting of the Southern Bypass of the City of Norwich. Policy ENV6 states

“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’.

- 4.1.2 The supporting text to Policy ENv6 states:

‘Following the Secretary of State’s 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 waned 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 by 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’.

²¹ South Norfolk Local Plan Adopted Version (March 2003)

'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 be located. 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 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 been excluded'.*

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

4.2 Review of Suggested Policy

4.2.1 The extent of the potential **Norwich Southern Bypass Landscape Protection Zone** as proposed in the Site Specific Policies and Allocations Development Plan Document²² is shown on **Figure 4.1**. The area of the Norwich Southern Bypass Landscape Protection Zone is 2,781ha, which is approximately 3% of South Norfolk District.

4.2.2 The Council's suggested policy wording for the Norwich Southern Bypass Landscape Protection Zone is as follows:

²² South Norfolk Local Development Framework – Site Specific Policies & Allocations Document and Long Stratton & Wymondham Area Action Plans: 2nd Public Consultation (Regulation 25), 29th August -18th November 2011 (South Norfolk Council)

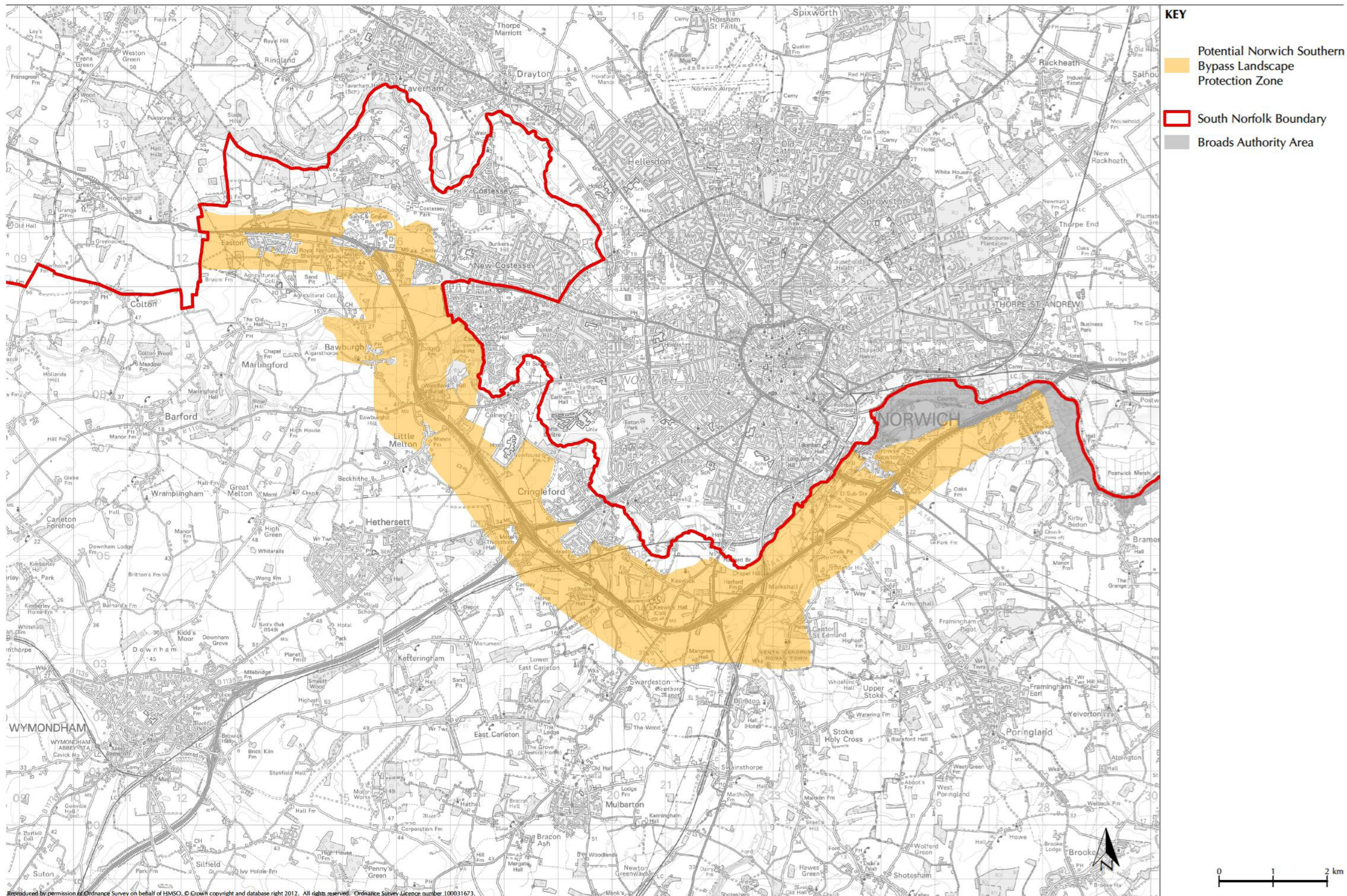


FIGURE 4.1
Potential Norwich Southern Bypass
Landscape Protection Zone

'Development within the Norwich Southern Bypass Landscape Protection Zone (NSBLPZ) as shown on the Map B, should have regard to preserving and, where possible, enhancing the landscape setting of the southern bypass and the urban area, in particular;

- Long distance views and relatively undeveloped approaches to Norwich which contribute to the historic setting of the City; and*
- Historic urban/rural 'gateways' on major routes to/from the City.*

Development which would significantly harm the NSBLPZ will not be permitted'.

- 4.2.3 It is stated within the 2001 Report²³ (Paragraph B1.12) that the findings of the Landscape Assessment *'confirmed that the setting of the Norwich Southern Bypass is not of special landscape character or quality except in relation to the harm that unsuitable and uncharacteristic development in this area could cause, particularly as a result of the areas high levels of visual accessibility to and from the road and as part of the setting of Norwich. Therefore, it is considered that any policy to protect this area is a 'planning tool' rather than intended to protect specific 'landscape assets' of high quality.*
- 4.2.4 The 2001 report further investigated the correlation between the results of the Landscape Character Assessment and what was then called the 'Norwich Southern Bypass Protection Zone' (NSBPZ). This analysis concluded that *'the road currently passes through the landscape in such a way that it crosses a number of distinct character areas, rather than creating a character area in its own right'* (Paragraph B2.10).
- 4.2.5 The report also states that *'The Landscape Character Assessment identifies the key landscape assets for each of the landscape types and the character areas'* (Paragraph B2.11) and that *'Landscape character does not change simply on the basis of being visible to or from the Southern Bypass'.*
- 4.2.6 The LUC report further states that *'The NSBPZ itself is not based on any intrinsic quality/character of the landscape. The boundaries of the character areas extend considerably further than the zone (as currently defined). The challenge is to consider how the landscape character assessment can contribute to a more robust and objective definition of the NSBPZ and associated policy'.*

²³ South Norfolk Landscape Assessment, Volume 3, Implications for Policy (June 2001, Land Use Consultants)

4.2.7 The 2001 LUC report defined the boundary of the NSBPZ in light of the following parameters:

- *'Boundary based upon a combination of intervisibility analysis and systematic landscape character assessment;*
- *Boundary embracing all areas within the 'setting' and not focussing just on positive or vulnerable areas;*
- *Protective policies and criteria for the zone reflecting a character-based approach relating to the character and quality of the individual character areas which lie within the zone;*
- *Specifically, the boundaries of the zone must not be tightly drawn to the road corridor so as to exclude potential areas for new development (such as Colney-Cringleford or the Research Park). The onus must be to justify new development within these areas (e.g. economic need) and ensure appropriate criteria to mitigate landscape impacts are developed'.*

4.2.8 The 2001 report also clearly defined the purpose for the NSBPZ:

'The purpose of the NSBPZ is to ensure that the new bypass does not come to be regarded as a development corridor or the development boundary for the City. The aim of planning policy is to protect the areas that contribute to the landscape setting of the road from development. The NSBPZ is not intended to be a Green Belt, nor to provide blanket restriction on all development. However, any proposed future development (over and above current allocations) within this zone will require very special justification and/or need to be approved through the Local Plan Review. Such exception could be made, for example, on the basis of an indisputable regional economic need or strategic requirement. Any development permitted would need to include appropriate commitments to mitigate landscape impacts, for example, by conserving particular landscape assets that contribute to local landscape character as defined in the landscape character assessment'.

4.2.9 Based on a review of the above information within the 2001 LUC Report, it is clear that the current boundaries of the NSBPZ were subject to detailed, robust, field-based analysis.

4.2.10 Norwich has a very distinctive skyline with a clearly defined centre. The Cathedral is the focal point of the skyline. It is therefore important that new developments protect or enhance views of the Cathedral from the historic landscape setting of the City. Development should also ensure that long distance views from the City to the landscape setting are protected. The protection of views plays an important role in maintaining local distinctiveness and sense of place, which are essential in attracting and maintaining investment. The review has identified that the 'Long distance views and relatively undeveloped approaches to Norwich which contribute to the historic setting of the City' are not currently defined in the existing evidence base. It is therefore recommended that a study is carried out using English Heritage's published

advice on methods for understanding and assessing heritage significance within views to identify key views and map their viewing cones/corridors.

- 4.2.11 Subject to the above, no changes to the suggested wording of the NSBLPZ policy or its extent are recommended.

5.0 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS AND RIVER VALLEYS POLICY

5.1 Background to the Policy

5.1.1 Policies for protecting the landscape character of river valleys within South Norfolk has long been an established policy approach in successive development plans.

5.1.2 Policy ENV 3 of the former Norfolk Structure Plan (1998) referred to ‘Areas of Important Landscape Quality’, which included ‘river valleys’ South Norfolk District and stated that ‘proposals for development will only be acceptable where they can be shown to conserve and are sensitive to the appearance and character of these areas’. These Areas of Important Landscape Quality were shown on a Key Diagram within the Norfolk Structure Plan, which included areas within South Norfolk District.

5.1.3 Saved Policy ENV3 of the Adopted South Norfolk Local Plan (2003)²⁴ states that:

‘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’.

5.1.4 The supporting text to Policy ENV3 states:

‘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 types, whilst where the 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 floodplains 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 settlement being typified of 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

²⁴ South Norfolk Local Plan Adopted Version (March 2003)

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’.

5.2 Review of Suggested Policy

5.2.1 The extents of the potential **Landscape Character Area and River Valley** policy areas as proposed in the Site Specific Policies and Allocations Development Plan Document²⁵ is shown on **Figure 5.1**.

5.2.2 The Council’s suggested wording for the Landscape Character Areas and River Valleys policy is as follows:

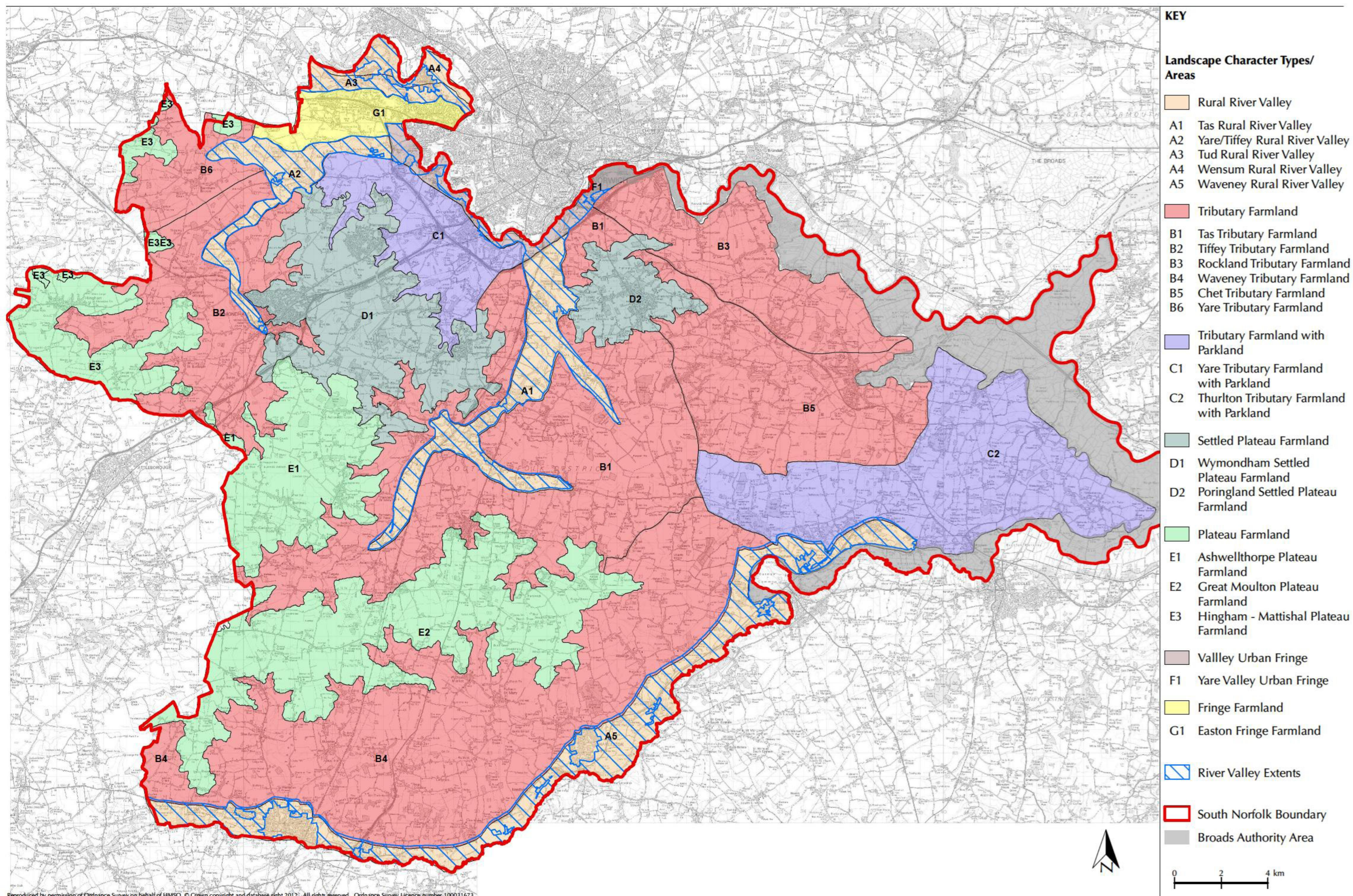
‘All development should respect, conserve and, where possible, enhance the landscape character of its immediate and wider environment. Development will not be permitted where it would significantly harm the identified landscape character of an area.

All development will be expected to demonstrate how they have taken the following elements (from the South Norfolk Landscape Assessment) into account:

- *the key characteristics, assets, sensitivities and vulnerabilities;*
- *the landscape strategy; and*
- *development considerations.*

Particular regard will be had to protecting the special character, and geographical identity of the identified Rural River Valleys and Valley Urban Fringe landscape character areas.

²⁵ South Norfolk Local Development Framework – Site Specific Policies & Allocations Document and Long Stratton & Wymondham Area Action Plans: 2nd Public Consultation (Regulation 25), 29th August -18th November 2011 (South Norfolk Council)



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The landscape character areas and river valley extents (Rural River Valley and Valley Urban Fringe character areas are shown on Map A).

- 5.2.3 The River Valley Extents cover 8,937ha, approximately 9.8% of South Norfolk District.
- 5.2.4 The suggested integrated 'landscape character area' based policy approach is in line with current practice throughout Norfolk and elsewhere in England. The benefits of this approach for Norfolk were examined in a study undertaken for the Norfolk Coast Partnership in 2006, which remains of relevance²⁶.
- 5.2.5 In relation to river valleys, the 2001 LUC Report²⁷ (Paragraph B1.4) states that '*LUC considers that the Landscape Character Assessment has provided sufficient justification, as required by PPG7 and the Inspector, for the designation of valleys as 'important landscape areas' on the basis of the high number and significance of the 'landscape assets' they contain and their overall contribution to providing variety within the South Norfolk context*'.
- 5.2.6 The review of the available landscape-related evidence base, including the above report, the suite of South Norfolk Landscape Character Assessment volumes and the South Norfolk District Wind Turbine Landscape Sensitivity Study²⁸ confirms the distinctive characteristics and special qualities of the Rural River Valley and Valley Urban Fringe Landscape Character Types, and their constituent Landscape Character Areas, within South Norfolk that are desirable to safeguard. These can be summarised as follows:

- **Very distinctive character and strong sense of place.**
- **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.**
- **Grazed, pastoral valleys floors contrast strongly with the arable dominated farmland of the majority of the District.**
- **Largely intact rural character, which in places is highly tranquil and undisturbed.**
- **Intimate and enclosed landscape with an overall small-scale character.**

²⁶ Towards a Coordinated Approach to Integrated Landscape Planning in Norfolk (2006, Chris Blandford Associates).

²⁷ South Norfolk Landscape Assessment, Volume 3, Implications for Policy (June 2001, Land Use Consultants)

²⁸ South Norfolk District Wind Turbine Landscape Sensitivity Study (April 2006, Land Use Consultants) [Final Amendments January 2008]

5.2.7 It is therefore considered that the existing evidence base is sufficiently robust to justify and defend this policy. Whilst the Landscape Character Assessment was undertaken in line with best practice, it is however recommended that the study is updated to take into account potential changes in landscape character, recent pressures on the landscape (particularly around the fringes of Norwich) and to incorporate the findings of the Greater Norwich Historic Characterisation & Sensitivity Assessment (including the Norfolk Historic Landscape Characterisation data) in line with current best practice and NPPF requirements.

5.2.8 The following changes to the suggested wording of the Landscape Character Areas and River Valleys policy are recommended:

'All development should respect, conserve and, where possible, enhance the landscape character of its immediate and wider environment. Development will ~~not~~ be permitted where it can be demonstrated that it would not significantly harm the ~~identified distinctive landscape characteristics~~ character of an area.

All development will be expected to demonstrate how they have taken the following elements (from the South Norfolk Landscape Assessment) into account:

- *the key characteristics, assets, sensitivities and vulnerabilities;*
- *the landscape strategy; and*
- *development considerations.*

Particular regard will be had to protecting the ~~special~~ distinctive characteristics ~~character~~, special qualities and geographical extents ~~identity~~ of the identified Rural River Valleys and Valley Urban Fringe landscape character types. ~~areas~~.

The landscape character areas and river valley extents (Rural River Valley and Valley Urban Fringe) ~~character areas~~ are shown on Map A).



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