



**Swainsthorpe Neighbourhood Plan (Pre-submission Draft)**

**Habitats Regulations Assessment**

**Screening Report**

**November 2025**

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This screening report has been undertaken by South Norfolk Council in order to support the emerging Swainsthorpe Neighbourhood Plan which has been produced by a working group on behalf of Swainsthorpe Parish Council in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended).
- 1.2 The aim of this screening is to assess whether there will be any likely significant impacts on designated European sites either within or in relative proximity to the designated neighbourhood area of the Neighbourhood Plan (i.e. the civil parish of Swainsthorpe).

1.3

## 2. Legislative Basis

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

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

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

- 2.3 One of the basic conditions of Neighbourhood Plans, prescribed by Regulation 32 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) is that the plan:

*...is not likely to have a significant effect on a European site (as defined in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017) or a European offshore marine site (as defined in the Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017) (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects).*

2.4 Regulation 105 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (CHSR) puts into effect the requirements of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (see 2.1 above) and requires that:

*(1) Where a land use plan –*

*(a) is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and*

*(b) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site,*

*the plan-making authority must before the plan is given effect, make an appropriate assessment of the implications of the site in view of that site's conservation objectives.*

2.5 Regulation 106 of the CHSR requires that:

*A qualifying body which submits a proposal for a neighbourhood development plan must provide such information as the competent authority may reasonably require for the purposes of the assessment under regulation 102 or to enable them to determine whether that assessment is required.*

2.6 As the 'competent authority' for these purposes, South Norfolk Council has produced this screening report to determine whether a full Habitats Regulations Assessment is required.

### 3. Screening Approach

- 3.1 The first step of the screening process involves the identification of European Sites that are either within or in close proximity to the Swainsthorpe Neighbourhood Plan area.
- 3.2 A list of European sites within, near or partially within the Greater Norwich area is set out in the HRA that was produced to support the submission of the Greater Norwich Local Plan, and which was approved by Natural England.
- 3.3 There are no designated sites within the parish of Swainsthorpe. The nearest EU designated site is located approximately 4km southwest of the parish, at Flordon Common (Norfolk Valley Fen SAC):

<b>Designation Name</b>	<b>Designation Type</b>
Norfolk Valley Fen	SAC

- 3.3 All other EU designated sites are further than 15km from the Swainsthorpe Neighbourhood Area. A map showing the location of the above designation in relation to Swainsthorpe parish can be found in Appendix 1 at the end of this report. Full details of the particular European designation, including conservation objectives, can be found in Appendix 2.
- 3.4 Whilst the aforementioned site is in relatively close proximity to the Swainsthorpe neighbourhood area, the fact that the Neighbourhood Plan is not seeking to allocate any sites for future development means it is not expected that there would be any significant impacts on EU designated sites as a result of the Neighbourhood Plan policies.
- 3.5 Alongside the legislation mentioned above, there are two other issues that currently affect Norfolk habitats.
- 3.6 Along with other local planning authorities in Norfolk, the Council received a letter dated 16 March 2022 from Natural England concerning nutrient pollution in the protected habitats of the River Wensum Special Area of Conservation and the Broads Special Area of Conservation and Ramsar site. The letter advised that new development within the catchment of these habitats comprising overnight accommodation has the potential to cause adverse impacts with regard to nutrient pollution.
- 3.7 The Council as the Competent Authority cannot lawfully grant planning permission unless it can conclude that development within the catchment of the River Wensum Special Area or Broads Special Area of Conservation and Ramsar site will not have an adverse effect. This process is considered where relevant through a Habitats Regulations Assessment.
- 3.8 A Norfolk-wide Green Infrastructure and Recreational Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (GIRAMS) looks to mitigate adverse impacts that might arise from additional visitor pressure through new housing developments. There are two recommendations for this. Firstly, by looking to provide suitable informal recreational greenspace elsewhere (GI), away from sensitive sites, and, secondly by securing a financial contribution from each new home towards direct mitigation measures to be implemented at protected sites (RAMS).

- 3.9 This neighbourhood plan is not seeking to allocate any sites for development and is not in either of the catchment areas which have implications for nutrient pollution, as discussed above. Therefore, it is not considered that this issue will have any implications for this neighbourhood plan.

#### 4. Assessment

4.1 The table below sets out a summary of the proposed policies within the pre-submission draft Swainsthorpe Neighbourhood Plan and provides an assessment as to whether there is likely to be a significant impact from these policies on EU designated sites.

4.2 This assessment has been carried out in relation to the proposed draft policies of the Neighbourhood Plan, produced in November 2025.

Swainsthorpe Draft NP Policy	Analysis	Likely significant effect
<p><b>Policy SWS1: Design</b></p> <p>The design of all new development will reflect the local distinctiveness and character of the parish and seek to enhance its quality.</p> <p>When considering proposals for new development, irrespective of scale or use, proposals must demonstrate how the design of the proposal has been developed with regard to the Character Area analysis in the Swainsthorpe Design Guidance and Codes 2025.</p> <p>Proposals for new developments in Swainsthorpe should accord with the following:</p> <p>a) <b>Layout:</b> New development must reflect the rural nature of the village and keep suitable gaps between buildings to preserve short views, as their loss would harm the village's natural, rural character. New development must maintain visual connections to the surrounding landscape and long views out of the settlement through careful consideration of site layout. Important views of the church must be protected. Proposals must reflect the topography of the site and maintain Swainsthorpe's open feel and rural character.</p> <p>b) <b>Building line and front gardens:</b> Development should follow the existing building line (where there is a clear and obvious building line) relative to neighbouring dwellings and to the wider streetscape. The setback of new development must allow for adequate space to accommodate front garden space. All dwellings should have a clear separation between private and public realm and careful consideration</p>	<p>This policy looks to influence the design of development and to preserve the village's local distinctiveness and identity by setting out guidelines for buildings, layout and street scene. The plan also has an accompanying design guide to add more detail on design features. This is a generic development management policy and, as such, it is not expected to have any significant effects on EU designated sites.</p>	<p>No likely significant effect</p>

should be given to the design of refuse storage and cycle parking when this is to be located to the front of the building.

c) **Scale:** The height and scale of new buildings must respect the overall scale and height of adjacent buildings. Large blank facades with no openings should be avoided, except where they have noise cancelling benefits such as when facing a road such as the A140. The scale and design of development, including landscape screening, should not be intrusive to internal or external views. New development must be proportionate to the rural nature of the existing village and the scale and pitch of roof design should integrate with surrounding development, whilst avoiding overly complex design.

d) **Landscaping and views:** Locally important views of the church from surrounding countryside and from the A140 to the north must be protected. Screening measures must be used, such as planting of trees and hedgerows, to mitigate the impact on the landscape or views of any development, including energy projects or industrial/commercial development. Any major changes to the landscape or view, which is temporary (for construction purposes) must be restored to its original or enhanced quality. Gaps between neighbouring tandem properties should be wide enough to maintain views of the countryside.

e) **Streetscape:** Development must provide adequate separation distances between facing windows to ensure privacy from overlooking is maintained. The building typology of any infill Development must respect the existing surrounding context. Development should ensure that there is diversity and variety in scale and bulk informed by the building types of the surrounding context.

f) **Parking:** should be integrated on-plot and with parking spaces set behind the building line, preferably to the side of the plot. For narrow dwellings where front-of-building parking is the only possible option, ensure manoeuvring areas for the car parking does not dominate the street frontage. Parking should not be placed in front of any ground floor windows. Car parking ports could be used for variety and should be designed to sensitively complement the surrounding dwellings, considering form, materiality and placement. On-street-parking should be avoided wherever possible, particularly within the village centre.

<p>g) <b>Lighting:</b> All external lighting should be kept minimal, at low level and at low intensity.</p> <p>h) <b>Design features and materials:</b> Development proposals must demonstrate that the materials used have been selected based on an understanding of the surrounding built environment and refers to the outlined Swainsthorpe material and vernacular palette presented in the <b>Design Guidance and Codes</b>. Rooflines should have a rhythmic pattern of chimneys. Dormer windows whether added later or included in the original scheme, should reflect the form of the main roof and be of an appropriate and proportional size to the original building, whilst not increasing the overall height of the dwelling.</p>		
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<p><b>Policy SWS2: New housing</b></p> <p>The scale and pattern of new development in the parish should conserve and enhance the form and character of the existing settlement of Swainsthorpe.</p> <p>New housing development within the Parish over the plan period, should consolidate the existing settlement pattern and be located within the defined settlement limits as set out in the South Norfolk Village Clusters Housing Allocations Plan. The settlement limits have been drawn to allow for only very limited ‘infill’ development preventing further extension into the surrounding countryside due to the limited services and facilities available and the narrowness of local roads.</p> <p>Where new development is to occur in the parish, the development of brownfield sites will be prioritised, and the scale of development proposed should reflect the position of Swainsthorpe within the identified settlement hierarchy for the District.</p> <p>Proposals for new infill or windfall development within the settlement boundaries such as individual dwellings will be supported provided that the proposal maintains or enhances the form, character and setting of the existing settlement pattern and that they do not detract from views of the Church.</p> <p>Proposals for development outside of the identified settlement boundaries will only be supported where it meets the criteria set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 84) or it accords with other national, district or neighbourhood level policies or is an exception site for affordable housing to meet identified local needs.</p>	<p>This policy looks to influence the location of new housing developments within the adopted settlement boundary to allow for better integration with the existing development and access to facilities. In all, this is a generic development management policy and, as such, it is not expected to have any significant effects on EU designated sites.</p>	<p>No likely significant effect</p>
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<p><b>Policy SWS3: Connections and Rights of Way</b></p> <p>Existing public rights of way must be protected and enhanced. Where new development is likely to affect the route of an existing right of way, that right of way must preferably be retained unless it can be demonstrated that there is strong community support for it to be re-routed.</p> <p>Where existing public rights of way are unavoidably to be lost or impacted, appropriate diversions and new routes should be provided that are equally safe and convenient for all users including people with limited mobility, people using pushchairs or in wheelchairs, and cyclists and horse riders.</p> <p>New development proposals must improve or enhance public rights of way for example through the provision of new routes, new connections, improved surfaces or signage.</p> <p><b>New connections</b></p> <p>Otherwise acceptable proposals, which would contribute to making the parish safer and more accessible for pedestrians and cyclists and would contribute to the health and wellbeing of residents will be supported. Where new pedestrian or cycle routes or crossings are to be provided, they should be safe, accessible and suitable for all users.</p> <p>All new developments should have, where reasonably possible, new footpath and/or bridleway connections created, linking to the existing right of way network surrounding the village and provide comprehensive and cohesive network which allows for access to the wider countryside and adjoining parishes.</p>	<p>This policy looks to protect and to enhance a joined up network of footpaths, cycleways and bridleways to improve access to village amenities, the countryside and within the settlement. This is a generic development management policy and, as such, it is not expected to have any significant effects on EU designated sites.</p>	<p>No likely significant effect</p>
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<p><b>Policy SWS4: Heritage</b></p> <p>The historic significance of existing heritage asset in the parish, both designated and non-designated will be protected. Proposals for new development should ensure that its design complements the shape and form of the existing settlement pattern, respects the setting of designated heritage assets including views of the Church, its setting and the space around it.</p> <p>The following are heritage assets that are considered to be locally important to Swainsthorpe in terms of their architectural, historical, or cultural significance and these will be treated as Non-designated Heritage Assets:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Old School House</li> <li>2. Ransome Old Smithy, Briar Lane</li> <li>3. Milestone at A140/ Church Road junction</li> <li>4. The Old Rectory, 6 Church Road</li> <li>5. New Village Sign 1996</li> <li>6. 1920s Council Houses, Church Road</li> <li>7. Yew Tree Cottages, junction Briar Lane and the A140</li> <li>8. Beehive Cottage, 28 Church Road</li> <li>9. Church Farm, Longbrooke Drive</li> <li>10. Ivy House , 52 Church Road</li> <li>11. Orchard Cottage, 58 Church Road</li> <li>12. Violet Bank, 66 Church Road</li> <li>13. The Vale</li> <li>14. The Granary, Church Road</li> <li>15. The Barn, Church Road</li> <li>16. The Croft, Church Road</li> </ol>	<p>This policy identifies several non-designated heritage assets for protection as part of the Neighbourhood Plan. The policy also highlights the need for careful design consideration when proposals would have an impact on buildings which have historic significance and contribute to the local character. It is not expected this would have any significant effects on EU designated sites.</p>	<p>No likely significant effect</p>
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<p><b>Policy SWS: Green Spaces</b></p> <p><b>Local Green Spaces</b></p> <p>The following existing green spaces within the parish are identified as Local Green Spaces:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Village Green (including children’s play area)</li> <li>b) Millennium Green</li> <li>c) Jubilee Garden</li> <li>d) Pond and surrounding green space at Longbrooke Drive</li> <li>e) Churchyard</li> <li>f) Green space at The Vale.</li> </ul> <p>Development within Local Green Spaces will be managed consistent with the approach taken to managing Green Belts.</p> <p><b>New Green Spaces</b></p> <p>The creation of new green spaces such informal amenity areas, play spaces and areas for dog walking will be supported where they comply with other policies in this Neighbourhood Plan.</p>	<p>This policy seeks to designate a series of sites as Local Green Spaces for special protection. Although this policy is site specific, it does not encourage development nor does it mean additional access is promoted and instead relates to the protection of these areas. On this basis, it is not expected to have any significant detrimental effects on EU designated sites</p>	<p>No likely significant effect</p>
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<p><b>Policy SWS6: Biodiversity</b></p> <p>Proposals for new development will be expected to protect and enhance existing ecological networks, wildlife corridors and priority habitats and species.</p> <p>Existing priority habitats such as woodland areas, and other features of biodiversity value within the parish should be retained, and where practicable be incorporated into the design of new proposals. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• trees, both individual trees and narrow woodland belts</li> <li>• hedgerows, including ancient hedgerows</li> <li>• reed filled ditches</li> <li>• ponds, including the existing network of waterbodies in the parish</li> <li>• blocks of managed mixed deciduous woodland</li> </ul> <p>Development proposals must avoid the loss of trees and hedgerows and must protect and enhance local habitats and wildlife corridors. New wildlife corridors should be designed and located help increase movement between isolated populations.</p> <p>Where loss or damage to a biodiversity feature is unavoidable, the benefits of the development must clearly outweigh the impacts and the development shall provide for mitigation in the form of appropriate replacement or replanting or creation of appropriate natural features on site together with a method statement for the ongoing care and maintenance of that planting or feature, or, as a last resort, compensation measures will be sought. If suitable mitigation or compensation measures cannot be provided, planning permission will be refused.</p> <p>Otherwise acceptable development proposals will be supported where they provide a minimum net gain of 10 per cent in biodiversity, moving</p>	<p>The policy looks to reflect and reinforce biodiversity net gain requirements and enhance other natural assets within the neighbourhood area. It is a development management policy and is not expected to have any significant effects on EU designated sites.</p>	<p>No likely significant effect</p>
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<p>towards an aspiration for 20 per cent, delivered on-site in the first instance, through, for example the creation of new and the restoration and enhancement of existing natural habitats, e.g. ponds, hedgerows, wildflower meadows, new woodlands and the planting of additional trees and hedgerows.</p> <p>Where biodiversity net gain is to be delivered via off- site habitat creation, this should be preferably delivered elsewhere in the parish and targeted at the proposed woodland opportunity areas and wildlife corridors.</p> <p>The design of all new development should connect existing landscape features and promote biodiversity through the planting of local trees, plants and hedgerows. Existing road verges should be enhanced to increase biodiversity and act as wildlife corridors of safe passage for wildlife; and development should provide bat, owl and bird boxes and bat friendly lighting to maintaining foraging routes.</p>		
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<p><b>Policy SWS7: Floodrisk</b></p> <p>All proposed development should be directed away from areas of the parish at highest risk of flooding from surface water (whether existing or future) listed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Junction of Longbrooke Drive and Church Road</li> <li>• Junction of Briar Lane and the A140</li> <li>• Bridleway to Rookery Barn</li> <li>• Hickling Lane</li> <li>• Land next door to the garage on the A140</li> <li>• Western extent of Church Road</li> <li>• The Vale</li> </ul> <p>Where development is necessary in such areas, the development should be made safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere.</p> <p>All new development including minor development, is required to use appropriate sustainable drainage system which will mitigate and protect against pollution, provide drainage and wider amenity, recreational and biodiversity benefits commensurate with the size of the development proposed.</p> <p>Development will be expected to demonstrate (through the submission of a drainage strategy to accompany the submission of a planning application) how it will seek to achieve lower than greenfield run off rates, mitigate its own flooding and drainage impacts, whilst avoiding increases of flooding elsewhere.</p>	<p>This policy seeks to ensure that new development is located away from areas of high flood risk. The policy ensures that development does not create new, or exacerbate existing, surface water flooding issues. The policy requires that development is designed with appropriate mitigation and does not increase the flood risk elsewhere. The policy sets out specific sites that are liable to surface water flooding and requires future development to avoid these areas. As such, it is not expected to have any significant effects on EU designated sites.</p>	<p>No likely significant effect</p>
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<p><b>Policy SWS8: Landscape Character and Important views</b></p> <p>Proposals for new development in the parish should take into account the distinctive landscape features and character of the landscape character type within which the proposal is located demonstrating how it has taken account of the specific guidance for that character type.</p> <p>The following views and vistas within Swainsthorpe are identified as Important Public Local Views.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. St Peter’s Church</li> <li>2. Entrance to the village, looking west towards St Peter’s Church from Church Road</li> <li>3. From the end of Church View looking north across the fields</li> <li>4. View from the A140 looking east across to the Tas Valley both from The Sugar Beat Eating House and from Briar Lane across the new vineyard</li> <li>5. Church Farm from Church Road west of the village looking east across the fields</li> <li>6. View from the A140 /Hickling Lane looking south-west across the fields with the outline of St Peter’s Church on the horizon</li> <li>7. View of the entrance to The Vale</li> <li>8. View of the bridleway beside Ivy House leading to Hickling Lane</li> <li>9. Views from Hickling Lane which runs east -west from the A140 to Gowthorpe Lane and forms the northern border of the Parish of Swainsthorpe</li> </ol> <p>Development proposals within or which would affect an important public local view should not detract from, or have an adverse impact upon the landscape or character or any key features of these views.</p> <p>Proposals for new buildings outside the Settlement Boundaries should be accompanied by a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment, or other appropriate and proportionate evidence, which demonstrates how the proposal can be accommodated in the countryside without having a</p>	<p>The policy looks to protect important local views and highlights that proposals that would have a significant adverse impact on the landscape or character of the view concerned will not be supported. This policy relates to specific areas of land but takes a protective approach and, as such, it is not expected to have any significant effects on EU designated sites.</p>	<p>No likely significant effect</p>
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<p>significant detrimental impact, by reason of the buildings' scale, materials and location, on the key features of the views.</p> <p>Any development which would have a significant adverse impact upon the landscape or character of the view concerned will not be supported.</p>		
<p><b>Policy SWS9: Mitigating the impacts of energy projects</b></p> <p>The impacts on the Neighbourhood Area of energy infrastructure projects and associated developments (e.g. renewable energy projects, interconnectors, pylons, overhead wires, converter stations, pipelines etc) including the cumulative impacts from multiple schemes should be given significant weight in the determination of such schemes.</p> <p>The sensitivity to change of the relevant landscape character type should be given significant weight in the determination of proposals</p> <p>Where works take place which have temporary impacts, the emphasis should be on timely restoration once works have been completed.</p> <p>Where mitigatory or compensatory measures are identified which are considered necessary to remedy the permanent or long-term impacts of energy schemes on the landscape, natural environment, wildlife and nature recovery, historic environment or the residential amenity for the parish, these should be provided in the first instance directly in the parish where those impacts are most felt.</p> <p>Only if this is not possible or practicable should they be provided elsewhere in the parish. Where such mitigations are required in respect of biodiversity, the standard biodiversity net gain metric of 10% should be applied.</p>	<p>The policy looks to protect and mitigate any impacts brought about from energy projects on the natural and built environment and continues to reinforce biodiversity net gain requirements and enhance other natural assets within the neighbourhood area. It is a development management policy and is not expected to have any significant effects on EU designated sites.</p>	<p>No likely significant effect</p>

<p><b>Policy SWS10: Community Facilities</b></p> <p>The parish has the following community facilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) St Peter’s Church, including community facility</li> <li>b) Children’s Play area</li> <li>c) Allotments</li> <li>d) Sugar Beat Eating House (Public House)</li> <li>e) Millenium Green</li> <li>f) Jubilee Garden</li> </ul> <p>Proposals for development including changes of use which would involve the potential loss of one of the existing community facilities identified above will not be supported. The exception will be where an improved or equivalent facility can be located elsewhere in the parish in an equally convenient, safe and accessible location or where there is no reasonable prospect of continued viable use, and this can be sufficiently demonstrated.</p>	<p>This policy looks to support improvements to existing community infrastructure and new infrastructure when supported as in line with other policies in the development plan. It also looks to avoid loss of such facilities. This policy identified specific sites/ buildings, but takes a protective approach and does not encourage development. As such, it is not expected to have any significant effects on EU designated sites.</p>	<p>No likely significant effect</p>
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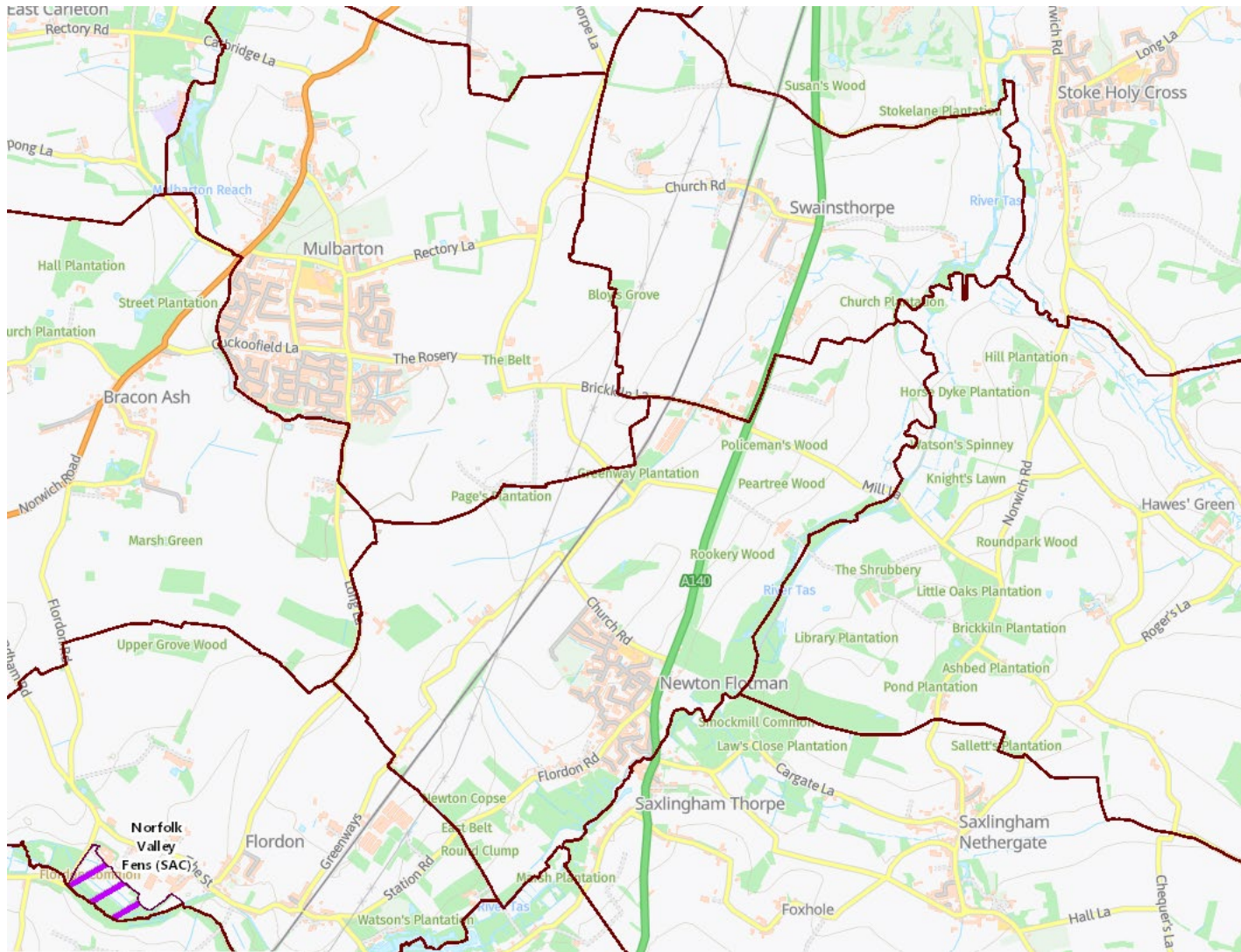
<p><b>Policy SWS11: Centre of the village</b></p> <p>Otherwise acceptable proposals that would provide for a new, community/village hall with off street car parking, located either in the centre of the village or in an alternative location with safe, and convenient access, will be supported.</p> <p>Proposals for such a development will need to consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the significance and setting of St Peter’s Church, including views of it, and any other designated heritage assets ensuring they are safeguarded and, where practicable, enhanced.</li> <li>b. the protection of existing areas of green space such as the village green.</li> <li>c. safe access and egress for vehicles onto Church Road.</li> <li>d. safe pedestrian and cycle connections to the rest of the village.</li> <li>e. the provision of facilities for cycle parking and electric charging.</li> <li>f. a car park layout which takes account of any flood risk so that there are no adverse impacts upon surface water drainage and that greenfield run off rates are not increased.</li> <li>g. a car park layout which mitigates potential pollution impacts caused by surface water runoff.</li> <li>h. the inclusion of suitable biodiversity enhancements and landscaping of the site and its boundaries to ensure its assimilation into the surrounding area.</li> <li>i. the scale, mass, height and layout of any proposed building and its impact on the character of the streetscape and wider landscape.</li> <li>j. minimising external lighting, at low level and at low intensity.</li> <li>k. materials from the palette of materials as shown in the Swainsthorpe Design Guidance and Codes 2025.</li> </ul>	<p>This policy looks to develop a thriving and viable village centre by promoting the provision of a new community/village hall. The policy also emphasises the need for high quality design which improves the visual appearance within the village centre whilst improving public realm, creating social and community spaces. Although the policy seeks to support such a development, it is not an allocation and, instead, sets out a series of conditions for any such development in the future. As such, it is not expected to have any significant effects on EU designated sites.</p>	<p>No likely significant effect</p>
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<p>l. the inclusion of low carbon and sustainable features such as solar panels, grey water recycling, air or ground source heat pumps, rainwater capture</p> <p>m. the amenity of adjoining residents.</p>		
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## 5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The screening assessment suggests that there will be no likely significant effect of the proposed Newton Flotman Neighbourhood Plan on European designated sites, and therefore that a full Appropriate Assessment is not required.
- 5.2 None of the proposed policies within the draft Neighbourhood Plan allocates any sites for future development in the parish. The majority of the policies are development management policies that seek to shape and influence future proposals. Those policies that do relate to specific sites are those that seek to protect Local Green Spaces, deal appropriately with flooding issues, protect specific community facilities, and preserve important views and heritage features.
- 5.3 In addition, as explained in section 3, there are no European designated sites that are within the Swainsthorpe neighbourhood area. The closest being approximately 4km south-west of the parish – Flordon Common, designated as Norfolk Valley Fen SAC).
- 5.3 This screening assessment has been performed in relation to the draft version of the Neighbourhood Plan policies, which are intended to be subject to Reg. 14 pre-submission consultation. Once the final draft of the Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to South Norfolk Council, the authority will review the policies therein to see if there have been any significant changes. If so, then the local planning authority may decide to update this assessment at that time.
- 5.4 This assessment report has been sent to Natural England for comments, as the appropriate nature conservation body specified by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. The response from Natural England, dated 19<sup>th</sup> December 2025, is that the organisation agrees there is not likely to be any significant effect from the proposed policies within the Neighbourhood Plan on European designated sites. The response letter is included as Appendix 3 to this report.

**Appendix 1: European Designated Sites in relation to Swainsthorpe**  
(source Magic Map <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/magicmap.aspx> November 2025)



## Appendix 2: Details of relevant European Sites

This information has been taken from the Appropriate Assessment – Task 1 report produced in support of the Joint Core Strategy for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk (adopted 2014).

### **Norfolk Valley Fens SAC**

#### **(i) Site Description & Qualifying Features**

Norfolk Valley Fens comprises a series of valley-head spring-fed fens which are very rare in the lowlands (Figures A.8a and 8b). Most of the vegetation at this site is of the small sedge fen type, but with transitions to reedswamp and other fen and wet grassland types. The individual fens vary in their structure according to intensity of management and provide a wide range of variation. There is a rich flora associated with these fens.

The site is considered to be one of the best areas in the United Kingdom for the narrow-mouthed whorl snail *Vertigo angustior*, and the desmoulin's whorl snail *Vertigo moulinsiana*.

#### **SAC Qualifying Features - Habitats**

- Alkaline fens;
- Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*;
- European dry heaths;
- Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*);
- Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-siltladen soils (*Molinion caeruleae*);
- Calcareous fens with *Cladium mariscus* and species of the *Caricion davalliana*, and;
- Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion*, *Alnion incanae* and *Salicion albae*).

#### **SAC Qualifying Features - Species**

- Narrow-mouthed whorl snail *Vertigo angustior*, and;
- Desmoulin's whorl snail *Vertigo moulinsiana*.

#### **(ii) Conservation Objectives**

The conservation objectives are to maintain in favourable condition the qualifying features of the designation. Management agreements, Countryside Stewardship and ESA payments help towards the reintroduction or promotion of the continued use of traditional management. Improved understanding of the water needs of these wetlands is required and is the subject of work by the Environment Agency and

Natural England. Any effects of groundwater abstraction which are identified will be addressed through appropriate licensing regimes, and the Environment Agency Review of Consents and Asset Management Plans.

**(iii) Vulnerability**

These alkaline fens are very vulnerable to reductions on the water table and to a decrease in the volume of spring flows arising from groundwater abstraction.

The cessation of traditional cutting and grazing management has contributed to the spread of scrub and woodland leading to the drying-out of the fens.

## Appendix 3: Response from Natural England

Date: 19 December 2025  
 Our ref: 534299  
 Your ref: Swainsthorpe Neighbourhood Plan



Ms Vicky West  
 South Norfolk & Broadland Councils

**BY EMAIL ONLY**  
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Dear Ms West

### Swainsthorpe Neighbourhood Plan - Review - SEA & HRA Screening

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated and received by Natural England on 24 November 2024.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

### Screening Request: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

It is Natural England's advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that:

- significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes are unlikely; and,
- significant effects on Habitats sites<sup>1</sup>, either alone or in combination, are unlikely.

The proposed neighbourhood plan is unlikely to significantly affect any Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection areas (SPA), Ramsar wetland or sites in the process of becoming SACs or SPAs ('candidate SACs', 'possible SACs', 'potential SPAs') or a Ramsar wetland. The plan area is unlikely to have a significant effect on a National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or Heritage Coast, and is unlikely to impact upon the purposes for which these areas are designated or defined.

Guidance on the assessment of Neighbourhood Plans, in line with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 is contained within the [Planning Practice Guidance](#). This identifies three triggers that may require the production of an SEA:

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

Natural England does not hold information on the location of significant populations of protected

<sup>1</sup> Habitats sites are those referred to in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (Annex 2 - glossary) as "any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 for the purpose of those regulations, including candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and any relevant Marine Sites".

species, so is unable to advise whether this plan is likely to affect protected species to such an extent as to require an SEA. Further information is included in Natural England's [standing advice](#) on protected species.

Furthermore, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all environmental assets. The plan may have environmental impacts on priority species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites, soils and best and most versatile agricultural land, or on local landscape character that may be sufficient to warrant an SEA. Information on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees is set out in Natural England/Forestry Commission [standing advice](#).

We therefore recommend that advice is sought from your ecological, landscape and soils advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local soils, best and most versatile agricultural land, landscape, geodiversity and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by the plan before determining whether a SEA is necessary.

Natural England reserves the right to provide further advice on the environmental assessment of the plan. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make. If a SEA is required, Natural England must be consulted at the scoping and environmental report stages.

Please send any new consultations, or further information on this consultation to [consultations@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:consultations@naturalengland.org.uk)

Yours sincerely

Sally Wintle  
Consultations Team

## Appendix 4 South Norfolk Council Determination Statement



### Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) - Determination Statement

#### Swainsthorpe Neighbourhood Plan

This determination statement has been produced by South Norfolk Council, as the “responsible authority”, to meet the requirements of Regulations 9 and 11 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. The regulations implement European Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment.

As the “competent authority” in respect of the Conservation of Habitat and Species Regulations 2017, South Norfolk Council is also required to determine whether the proposed Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination). This statement also provides a determination in respect of this requirement.

#### SEA & HRA Screening Assessment of Swainsthorpe Neighbourhood Plan

Swainsthorpe Parish Council is in the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the parish. Preliminary SEA and HRA Screening Assessments were undertaken for the draft version of the Neighbourhood Plan, and subsequent reports were produced in October/November 2025. These were preliminary draft SEA and HRA Screening Assessments, subject to consultation with the statutory environmental bodies.

#### Consultation with Statutory Bodies

The draft SEA and HRA Screening Reports, detailing the results of the initial screening assessment of the plan and the preliminary conclusion shared by South Norfolk Council and the Qualifying Body (that the plan is not likely to result in significant environmental effects and is unlikely to have significant effects on European sites), was circulated to the statutory bodies - namely the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England. The statutory bodies were invited to provide comments on the Screening Report within a 5 week consultation period over November / December 2025.

Responses were received from all three bodies. Details of these responses can be found in the updated SEA and HRA Screening Reports.

#### In summary:

- The Environment Agency supports the conclusion that a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.
- Historic England concurs with the Council that the preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required, based on the information provided.
- Natural England supports the conclusion of the draft Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report and the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Report, that significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes are unlikely and that significant effects on Habitat sites, either alone or in combination, are also unlikely.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the assessment undertaken in the SEA and HRA Screening Reports and the responses received from the consultation bodies, South Norfolk Council considers that it is unlikely that significant environmental effects and/or significant effects on European sites will arise from implementation of the Swainsthorpe Neighbourhood Plan, and therefore that a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment are not required.

South Norfolk Council, January 2026