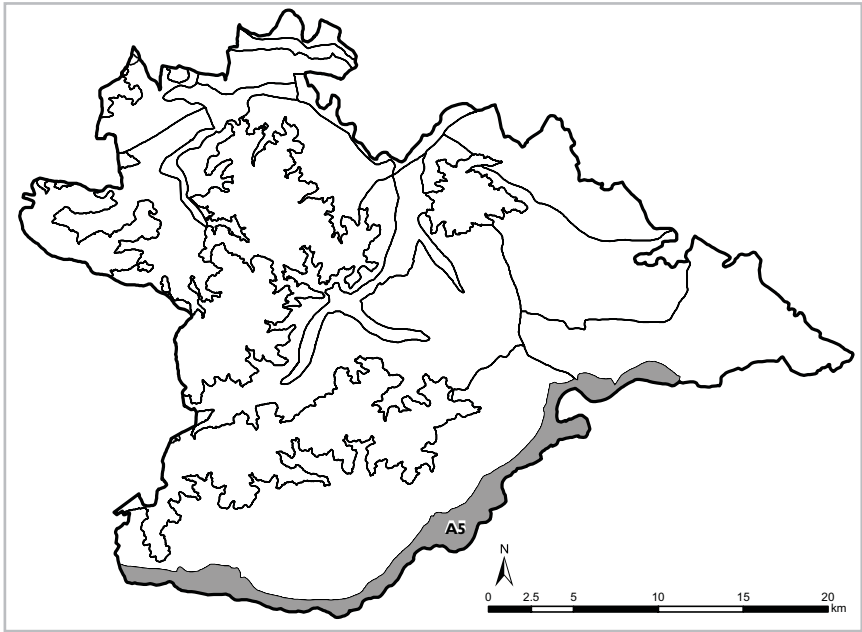
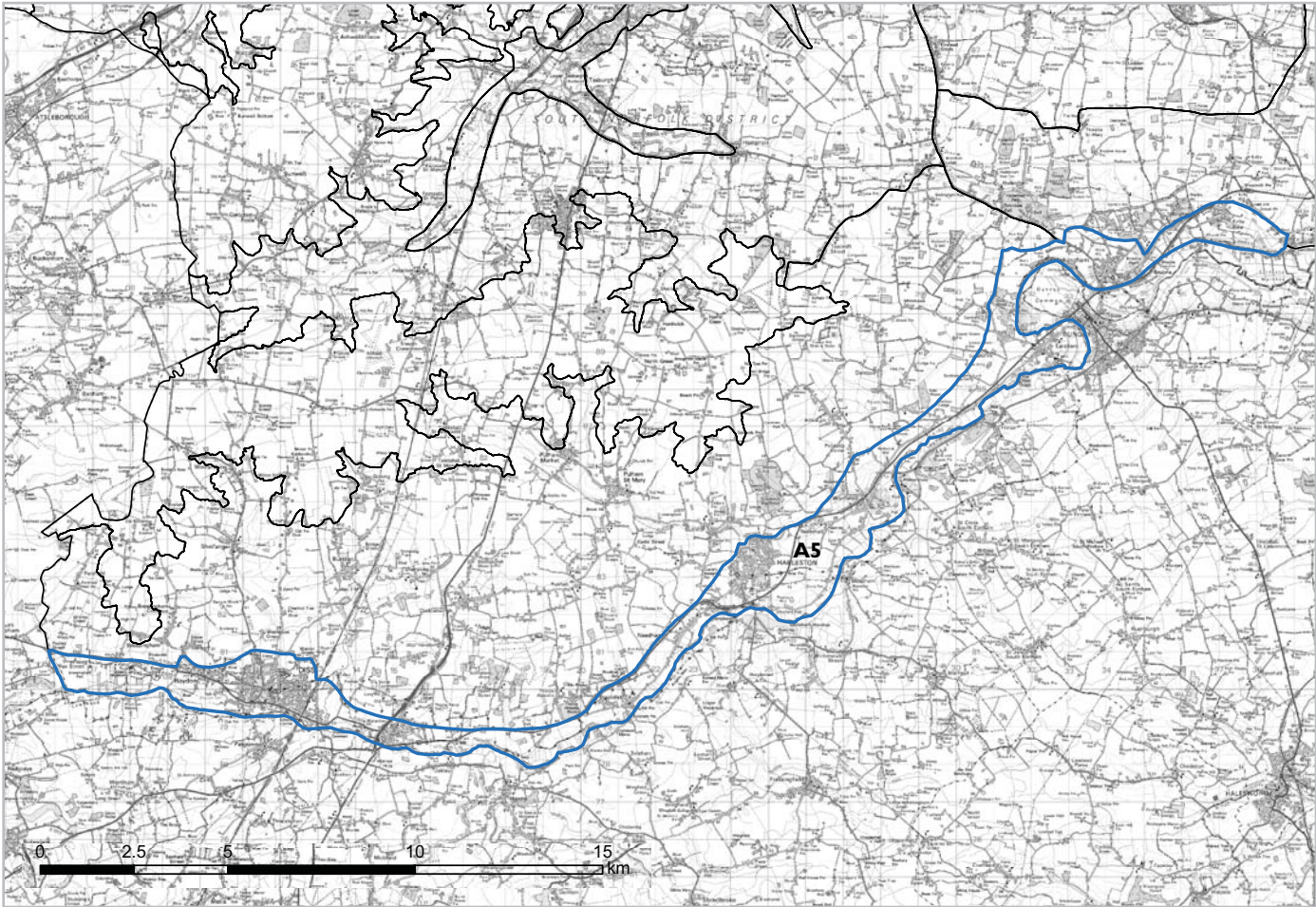


Character Area: A5  
**Waveney Rural River Valley**



Location within South Norfolk District



Extent of the Waveney Rural River Valley Character Area



Grazed pasture within the valley



The windmill at Billingford



Billingford Common



Churches provide distinctive landmarks (e.g. at Roydon)



Bridge and Ford at Brockdish



View across farmland





## 7. A5: WAVENEY RURAL RIVER VALLEY

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### DESCRIPTION

- 7.1. **Location and boundaries:** The Waveney Rural River Valley runs along the south and south east edge of the Rural Policy Area. The River Waveney itself forms the division between the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, separating South Norfolk District from Mid Suffolk District and Waveney. The boundaries of this character area are defined topographically to the north by the upper crest of the valley sides. However settlements such as Diss and Harleston extend beyond the topographically defined northern boundary and valley line, reducing the influence of the valley form. In these areas the boundaries of the character area have been drawn to encompass the whole settlement within the valley. To the south, it is the administrative boundary forming the edge of the district rather than topography which defines the boundary of the character area.
- 7.2. The character of the **Waveney Rural River Valley** is illustrated in **Figure A5**.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- **Flat, wide floodplain with gently sloping valley sides** forming a broad valley.
- **A relatively large-scale open valley landscape** (compared to other river valleys within the district) with some long views within the valley. More intimate and enclosed areas also occur along the river course.
- **The course of the river is not always distinct**, flowing across the character area boundary into Suffolk in some instances and in other areas braided into numerous small channels.
- **A number of attractive fords** (e.g. at Brockdish) and small bridges (e.g. Doit Bridge west of Diss) occur along the river course.
- **Arable and pastoral farming** is characteristic of the valley sides.
- **Diversity of land cover** along the valley floor including fen, heath and meadow creates ecological richness.
- **Discrete woodland blocks** occur along the valley floor, with larger and more significant woodland areas on the valley sides.
- **Presence of Scole Roman Settlement** Scheduled Ancient Monument.
- **Strong market town character** at Diss and Harleston (plus Bungay in Suffolk) with nucleated and linear settlement occurring along the valley.
- **Mills** (e.g. Windmill at Billingford) **and Churches** (including round tower churches, e.g. at Needham) **form distinctive landmark features** throughout the character area.

- **The A1066 and A143** run along the upper valley sides, cutting into the character area in places. **The A140** cuts across the character area west of Scole.
- **A peaceful and tranquil character is retained** away from the main roads.
- **Intact river valley character.**
- **Role in dividing and defining the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk.**

### **Geology and Soils**

- 7.3. The geology of the Waveney Valley is dominated by alluvium with some pockets of sand and gravel deposits occurring on the valley sides of the Waveney and its tributaries to the east and west of Diss. A distinct and isolated area of peat occurs to the west of the Character Area, this corresponds with Bressingham and Roydon Fen. Along the valley floor soils are deep peat, associated with clayey over sandy soils. Deep well drained sandy and coarse loamy soils occur on the valley sides and there are some isolated areas of permeable calcareous clayey soils.

### **Landform, Topography, Scale and Enclosure**

- 7.4. The River Waveney flows in an easterly direction through its wide valley. The landform is simple with a broad, flat valley floor and gently sloping valley sides to the north. The southern side of the valley lies outside the district boundary. There is a sense of both openness and enclosure in this character area with pockets of intimacy on the valley floor (for example close to river crossings) contrasting with more open view across the valley floor to the valley sides, and landmark churches. The river itself is more obvious in some areas than others, in places the main course flows outside the character area boundary and in other parts of the valley (east of Diss) the river becomes so braided its course is not clear.

### **Land Cover and Biodiversity**

- 7.5. The Waveney Valley has a distinctly green pastoral character. The pattern of grazing on the valley floor has been long established with the Waveney identified as one of the prime dairying regions of Norfolk during the medieval period. Marsh, fen, wet woodland, commons (heathy), and rough grazing are characteristic of the valley floor while arable and pastoral fields (of varying size and shape) define the valley sides. The diversity of land cover on the broad valley floor contrasts with the simplicity of the valley sides. Heath, a rarity in South Norfolk, is found in patches to the west of the Character Area, formed on the peaty soils which occur here (e.g. Broome Heath). Broome Heath Pit, located to the north east of Broome is a SSSI of geological interest. Wortham Ling, south of Roydon is also a designated SSSI. This is an area of dwarf shrub heath-lowland managed by rabbit grazing and scrub control.
- 7.6. Redgrave and Lopham Fen, a National Nature Reserve (NNR) managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust, form an extensive area of spring-fed valley fen in the headwaters of the River Waveney on the Suffolk/Norfolk border, located just outside the district boundary.

- 7.7. Pockets of fen and wet woodland, designated as County Wildlife sites, occur to the west of this NNR (Bressingham Fen, Horse Fen, Horse Fen Carr, Roydon Fen). The peaty soils support a range of mosses, sedges, rushes and grasses as well as uncommon flowers.
- 7.8. Billingford common (largely damp grassland) is a County Wildlife Site and a registered common. Old Meadows (e.g. around Wortwell) still survive as fragments of an older landscape. The open, grassy commons of many of the village centres are also a reminder of this historical landscape.
- 7.9. Hedgerows occur intermittently as field boundaries on the valley sides. Ditches are also a feature, occurring along roads (A1066). Poplars help mark out the lines of ditches and watercourses.
- 7.10. The River Waveney does not have an obviously wooded character however woodland does occur in small, discrete and dispersed blocks along the valley floor with some areas of wet woodland around Horse Fen and Roydon Fen (West of Diss). Larger blocks of woodland occur on the valley sides and form a significant cluster to the north west of Earsham. Great Wood and Holly Grove are recorded as Ancient Woodlands. Wortwell Wood and Buckhills Plantation (to the south east of Denton) are County Wildlife sites.

### **Historic Character**

- 7.11. Scole Roman settlement is the only Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) in the Waveney Valley. It occurs around the junction of the modern A140 and the River Waveney and was the site of a large village of which several areas have been excavated. It may also have been the site of Villa Faustini, a posting station mentioned in the Antonine Itinerary. North of the river, earthworks survive in the pasture fields.

### **Settlement and Built Character**

- 7.12. The Waveney Rural River Valley has a strong market town character, containing larger towns which form a linear belt along the valley. Diss and Harleston expanded as two of the most important market towns in Norfolk until the close of the eighteenth century. Settlements occur on the northern slopes of the valley side predominantly clustered, with the exception of Needham and Wortwell which are distinctly linear, stretching along the valley floor. Diss is built around a six-acre mere (lake) providing a setting unique to Norfolk. There are an unusually high proportion of timber-framed building remains in the narrow streets around the church as unlike many market towns Diss did not suffer from fire in the c16 or c17. Its Conservation Area includes the historic core, important open spaces at Fair Green, the Mere and Park, Rectory Meadows in the east and the Parish Fields in the north. Harleston has an unusual number of good unaltered c17 and c18 houses and a celebrated c14 raised aisle hall house, one of only two known in Norfolk. Its Conservation Area boundary is drawn closely around the historic core of the town. Scole Conservation Area is focussed around the Scole Inn and the cluster of historic buildings.
- 7.13. Red brick is a distinctive building material, contributing to the attractive vernacular character of settlements.

- 7.14. Water mills and windmills are significant within the valley. The windmill at Billingford (1860) is visible, forming an impressive and intact landmark. It ceased working in 1956 but was the first mill to be restored the Norfolk Windmills Trust from 1965. Water mills are found at Homersfield and Earsham and Ditchingham.
- 7.15. Churches are prominent features where they occur on the northern crest of the valley for example at Roydon, Scole and Brockdish. Churches form landmark features with distinctive round tower and isolated churches (e.g. at Needham and Redenhall respectively). A Norman round tower church stands at Needham, at Redenhall the imposing church of St Mary is elevated above the road.
- 7.16. Bridges and fords occur along the course of the river and tributaries forming attractive crossing points. From Wortwell the Homersfield Bridge forms the transition into Suffolk. This is an early pre-cast concrete and iron bridge.
- 7.17. The A1066 and A143 cut east-west along the valley sides, linking but often bypassing the villages. A network of rural lanes crosses the valley. Some areas remain inaccessible by road such as the Fens west of Diss and the stretch of land between Billingford and Brockdish and as such retain a tranquil and remote character.

## **EVALUATION**

### **Significant Landscape Assets**

#### ***National/ International***

- SSSIs (Broome Heath pit and Wortham Ling).
- SAM at Scole (Roman settlement, Villa Faustini).
- Presence of round tower churches (Needham).
- Areas of Ancient Woodland (Great Wood and Holly Grove).

#### ***District/ County***

- Distinctive settlement pattern and strong vernacular market town character (Diss, Harleston, Ditchingham).
- Distinctive valley landform.
- River and drainage channels.
- Windmills and Watermills (Billingford, Earsham).
- County wildlife sites (notably fen and heath).

#### ***Local***

- Grazed pastoral farmland.
- Presence of landmarks – churches and mills.
- Important views (e.g. to churches).

- Drainage ditches.

### **Sensitivities and Vulnerabilities**

7.18. The principal sensitivities and vulnerabilities of the Waveney Rural River Valley Character Area include:

- the tranquil, intact character of the Waveney Valley, which is especially vulnerable to development associated with transport corridors through the area (A1066 and A143). Upgrading of the rural lane network could be detrimental to the characteristic small fords and bridge crossings;
- visual sensitivities associated with open views to churches and the valley crest skyline and the threat of intrusion of development into these views;
- the need to conserve the mixed arable and pastoral character of the valley sides. Further degradation of hedgerow boundaries could open up the valley sides creating a more monotonous landscape;
- the local rural vernacular and market town quality. The compact and contained settlements could be eroded by residential extensions or linear development along the major roads;
- sensitivity of historic landscape/ landmark features and their setting such as windmills and round churches;
- the need to conserve and enhance diversity of habitats (e.g. heath and wet woodland). These habitats are sensitive to development, fragmentation and changes in water level/ quality.

### **Landscape Strategy**

7.19. **The overall strategy is to conserve the tranquil, intact, rural quality of the Waveney Valley and its distinctive character, created by the wide open pastoral valley, its diversity of habitats and strong market town character. It would be beneficial to:**

- manage and restore commonland, heathland and valley fen to prevent deterioration of vegetation and scrub invasion;
- maintain pasture and grazing (cattle and sheep) in the valley.
- restore hedgerows on the valley sides;
- manage of small woodland blocks and wet woodland, there is particular opportunity for further woodland planting on the valley sides to provide more visual interest and textural contrast;
- maintain ditches and the poplars which mark the course of ditches.

### **Development Considerations**

7.20. Any development in the area must respect the character of the Waveney Rural River Valley:

- maintain the character of the rural lane network and particularly the sunken lanes with their fords and bridge crossings, which characterise the area;
- conserve the views to landmark churches on the valley crests. Protect and enhance the setting of these landmark features;
- conserve and enhance the compact character of the market towns and small-scale vernacular settlements;
- ensure main roads along the valley sides (A1066 and A143) do not provide a catalyst for further linear development;
- protect the intact rural character of the river valley, for example from large-scale development and road lighting schemes, which could impinge on the tranquil, peaceful character.
- consider impact of potential infrastructure projects (e.g. a Diss Bypass) on the character of the Waveney River Valley and the adjacent *B4 Waveney Tributary Farmland*.