

Blofield parish Neighbourhood Plan **Habitat Regulation Screening Report**

December 2015



To accompany Version 2: Neighbourhood Plan submission draft for examination

1. Introduction

This Habitat Regulations Screening Report has been undertaken in order to support the Blofield parish Neighbourhood Plan which is being produced by the Blofield Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.

The aim of this Screening Report is to assess whether there are likely to be any significant effects on European Sites as a result of the emerging policies set out in pre-submission draft Neighbourhood Plan that would necessitate the production of a full Habitat Regulations Assessment.

This report assesses, as far as practicable, whether there are likely to be any significant effects on European Designated Sites within or relatively proximate to the approved Neighbourhood Plan area, which comprises the civil parish of Blofield.

Legislative basis

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.

The purpose of the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) is therefore to ensure the protection of European Designated Sites (Natura 2000) wherever practicable. European Designated Sites are designed to form an ecologically coherent network of designated spaces across Europe.

European Designated Sites, (Natura 2000) include **Special Protection Areas (SPAs)** and **Special Areas for Conservation (SAC)**. As a matter of policy the government also expects authorities to treat **Ramsar sites**, **candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSAC)** and **proposed Special Protection Areas (pSPA)** as if they are European Designated Sites for the purpose of considering development proposals that may affect them.

Definitions (taken from the DEFRA – Joint Nature Conservation Committee)

- **Special Protection Areas (SPAs)** are strictly protected sites classified in accordance with Article 4 of the EC Birds Directive, which came into force in April 1979. They are classified for rare and vulnerable birds and for regularly occurring migratory species.
- **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)** are strictly protected sites designated under the EC Habitats Directive. Article 3 of the Habitats Directive requires the establishment of a European network of important high-quality conservation sites that will make a significant contribution to conserving the 189 habitat types and 788 species. The listed habitat types and species are those considered to be most in need of conservation at a European level (excluding birds).
- **Ramsar sites** are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention.

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

2. Approach

The first step in producing this Screening Report involves the identification of European Designated Sites within the Neighbourhood Plan area itself or in close proximity to it. European Designated Sites were identified using open-source software provided by DEFRA (Magic). The relevant European Designated Sites identified are as follows:

- a. (Part of) The Broads Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- b. (Part of) Broadland Special Protection Area (SPA)
- c. (Part of) Broadland RAMSAR

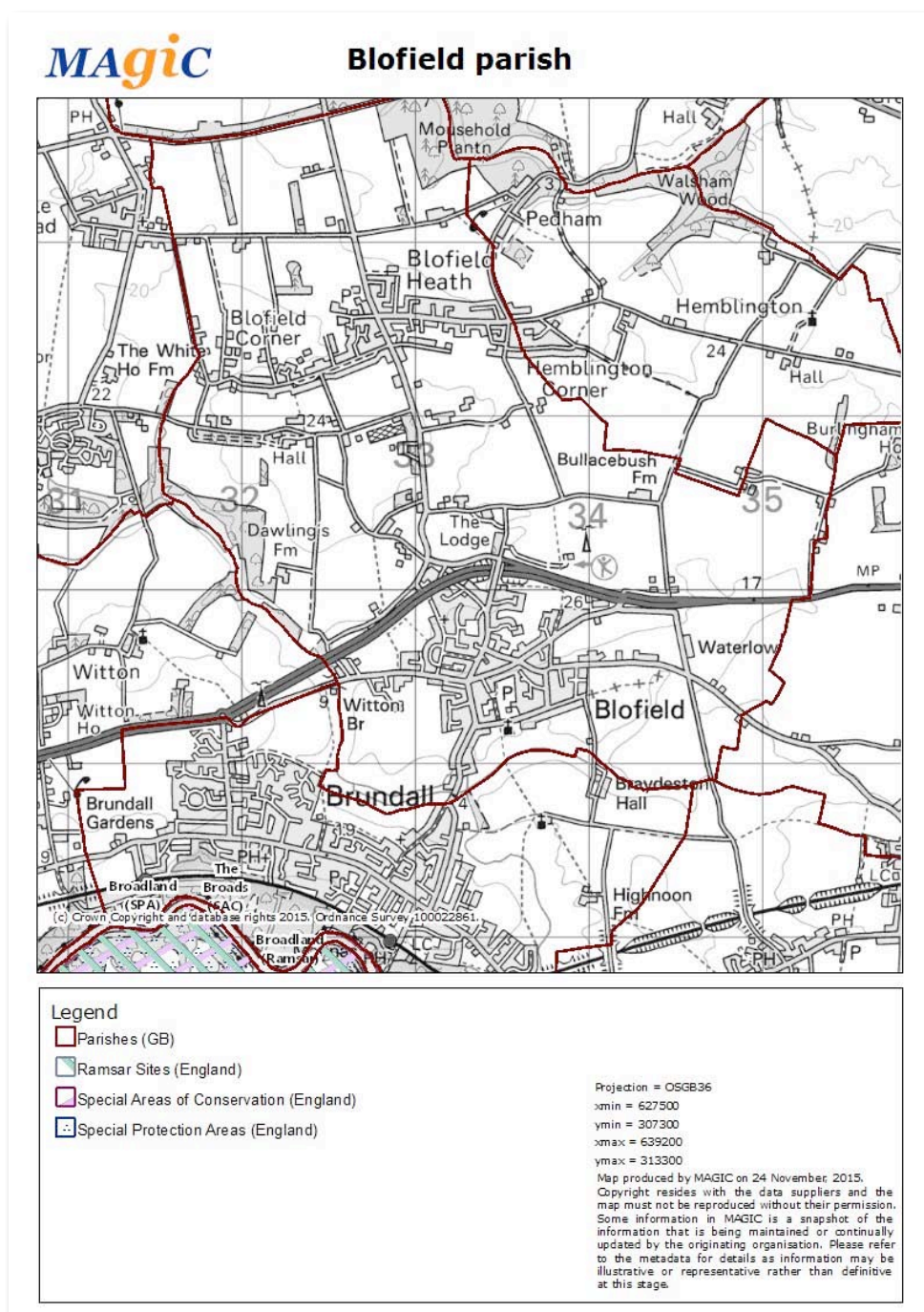


Figure 1 left: Blofield parish in relation to relevant European Designated Sites.

The next step in the assessment is to undertake an appraisal of the extent to which the proposed policies could have a significant effect on the European Designated Sites. Specifically the assessment considers any potential effect that policies may have on the 'qualifying features' of each European Designated Site. The 'qualifying features' for the identified European Designated Sites were set out in the Appropriate Assessment produced in support of the Joint Core Strategy (JCS) in 2009 for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk and these are provided at Appendix 1.

3. Screening Assessment

The table below provides an assessment of any likely significant effect of each Neighbourhood Plan policy on the European Designated Sites. For the purposes of this assessment the policies appraised are those that were issued in the Blofield Neighbourhood Plan Version 2: submission draft for examination, December 2015.

Key

- No likely significant effect (NLSE) on the site’s qualifying features
- Likely significant effect (NLSE) on the site’s qualifying features
- Uncertain whether it is NLSE or LSE

Neighbourhood Plan policy	Comments	Likely effect on identified sites		
		Broadland SPA	Broadland RAMSAR	Broads SAC
HOU1: Local housing needs	This Policy does not seek to deliver new development. It is intended to ensure the housing mix meets the needs of the parish. It is, therefore, unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
HOU2: Supported housing	This Policy does not seek to deliver new development. It seeks to ensure there is provision of a supported housing development. Individual development proposals will be subject to their own assessment. It is, therefore, unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
HOU3: Valued community assets	This policy does not seek to deliver new development and is therefore unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
HOU4: Rural image, heights and massing	This policy does not seek to allocate development, but to set out criteria for appropriate location and design.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
HOU5: Parking for new developments	This Policy does not seek to deliver new development. It seeks to ensure there is adequate parking. It is, therefore, unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
ENV1: Allotment, orchard and green space	This policy is intended to enhance and protect the natural environment.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE

ENV2: Soft site boundaries and trees	This policy is intended to enhance the natural environment.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
ENV3: Drainage	This policy is intended to enhance the natural environment.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
ENV4: Agricultural land	This policy is intended to enhance the natural environment.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
ENV5: Dark skies	This policy does not seek to deliver new development and is therefore unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
ENV6: Distinct villages	This Policy does not seek to deliver new development. It seeks to manage growth by ensuring a physical separation is maintained between adjacent villages. It is, therefore, unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
ENV7: Approaches to Blofield and Blofield Heath	This policy is intended to enhance the natural environment.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
ENV8: Important views and vistas	This policy does not seek to deliver new development and is therefore unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
COM1: New land for community use	This policy allocates land for community use. It is likely to involve the building of a new multiuse community building in the future as well as recreation space. Individual proposals will be subject to their own assessment. It is, therefore, unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
ECO1: New businesses and employment	This policy does not seek to deliver new development and is therefore unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
ECO2: Retention of retail or services in the village centres	This policy does not seek to deliver new development and is therefore unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
SER1: Primary school places	This policy does not seek to deliver new development and is therefore unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
SER2: Preschool provision	This policy seeks to allow the development of new or expanded	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE

	preschool provision. Individual development proposals will be subject to their own assessment. It is, therefore, unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.			
SER3: Primary Health Care	This policy seeks to allow the development of new or expanded healthcare provision. Individual development proposals will be subject to their own assessment. It is, therefore, unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
SER4: Library service	This policy does not seek to deliver new development and is therefore unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
SER5: Internet connection	This Policy does not seek to deliver new development. It is intended to support additional facilities that service the parish. It is, therefore, unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
TRA1: Access to and from A47	This policy does not seek to deliver new development and is therefore unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
TRA2: Local traffic generation	This Policy does not seek to deliver new development. It seeks to understand and address the accumulative effect of development on local traffic. It is hoped, through mitigation measures, that traffic impacts can be reduced with less reliance on motorised transport. It is, therefore, unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
TRA3: Off-road parking and safe drop-offs	This Policy does not seek to deliver new development. It seeks to ensure there is adequate off road parking and safe drop-offs. It is, therefore, unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE
TRA4: Walking and cycling	This policy does not seek to deliver new development. It is intended to improve the network of footpaths and cycle ways and is therefore unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features.	NLSE	NLSE	NLSE

4. Conclusion

The assessment suggests that there is likely to be no significant negative effects on the European Designated Sites resulting from the Policies detailed within the Blofield parish Neighbourhood Plan.

Therefore a full Habitat Regulations Assessment is not required.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Details of relevant European Sites

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

Broadland SPA

(i) Site Description & Qualifying Features

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

Broadland SPA Qualifying Features

Article 4.1	Breeding	Over winter	Passage
Bewick's swan		x	
Whooper swan		x	
Bittern	x		
Marsh harrier	x		
Hen harrier		x	
Ruff		x	
Noteworthy: Gadwall			

(ii) Conservation Objectives

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

- Open water
- Swamp
- Fen
- Reed Bed

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

(iii) Vulnerability

The site has suffered from management neglect and natural succession during the 20th century. Sea level rise and reduced summer flows in the river Bure brought about by abstraction are resulting in increasing saline intrusion into the site and generally drier summer conditions. The site also suffers from eutrophication, brought through the build up of nutrients over a long period, primarily through sewage outfalls and, to a lesser degree, agriculture. The region as a whole is a centre for tourism and recreation, however this pressure is now starting to be brought under control by the Broads Authority via the Broads Plan. Efficient drainage within much of the reclaimed parts of the wetland has reduced the wildlife value.

Broadland RAMSAR

(i) Site Description & Qualifying Features

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

Broadland Ramsar Qualifying Features

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

Ramsar criteria for designation:

Criterion 2: The site supports a number of rare species and habitats within the biogeographical zone context, including the following Habitats Directive Annex I features: H7210 Calcareous fens with *Cladium mariscus* and species of the *Caricion davallianae*; Calcium-rich fen dominated by great fen sedge (saw sedge); H7230 Alkaline fens Calcium-

rich springwater-fed fens; H91E0 Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (Alno-Padion, Alnionincanae, Salicion albae) and Alder woodland on floodplains. It includes also the Annex II species: S1016 *Vertigo moulinsiana* Desmoulin's whorl snail; S1355 *Lutra lutra* Otter; S1903 *Liparis loeselii* Fen orchid. The site supports outstanding assemblages of rare plants and invertebrates including nine British Red Data Book plants and 136 British Red Data Book invertebrates.

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

(ii) Vulnerability

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

The Broads SAC

(i) Site Description & Qualifying Features

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

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

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

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

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

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

SAC Qualifying features- Habitats

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

SAC Qualifying features- Species

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

(ii) Conservation Objectives

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

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

(iii) Vulnerability

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

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

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