

Stradbroke Neighbourhood Plan

Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report for consultation

January 2018

Introduction

- 1.1 This report represents a screening of the need for a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) under Directive 92/43/EEC, also known as the Habitats Directive¹.
- 1.2 HRA is the a two-stage process to consider whether a proposed development plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on a European site designated for its nature conservation interest. Firstly, plans or programmes must be screened to determine if they are likely to have a significant effect (and are not plans connected to the management of the European site(s) in question). If it cannot be demonstrated during at the screening stage that the plan or programme will not have significant effects of the European site(s), an 'Appropriate Assessment' (AA) must then be undertaken, which is a much more detailed study of the effects of the plan or programme. The two parts together form a full HRA.
- 1.3 In determining whether a proposed development plan or programme is likely to have significant effects, the local authority must incorporate the 'precautionary principle' into its decision. This means that if there is uncertainty as to whether the plan or programme would cause significant effects on a European site, the full AA would be required.

Stradbroke Neighbourhood Plan

- 2.1 The purpose of the Stradbroke Neighbourhood Plan is to provide for the sustainable development of Stradbroke to make it a key service centre village for residents and surrounding villages. To do this, it seeks to phase the provision of good quality housing, educational facilities, business and local retail opportunities through a set of place and people-focused objectives.
- 2.2 The objectives are:

Place

- Infrastructure and services: support the community of Stradbroke with first rate infrastructure that includes an expanded range of utilities, improved highways, telecom and internet services.
- Built environment: allocate sites for development that retain the historic crossroads shape and character of the village and manage parking and traffic issues.
- Transport and movement: mitigate and manage critical highway pinch points and reduce travel by car or lorry within the village by improving internal connectivity and alternative travel options.

¹ Directive 92/43/EEC 'on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora': <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:31992L0043>.

- Business: support local business growth and employment opportunities and actively seek further employment generating opportunities which directly contribute to the welfare of the community.
- Housing: ensure development respects the historical build pattern and style whilst also encouraging design for the future through innovation.
- Environment: promote community safety including issues of pollution, the green economy and protect and nurture green spaces and assets of community value.

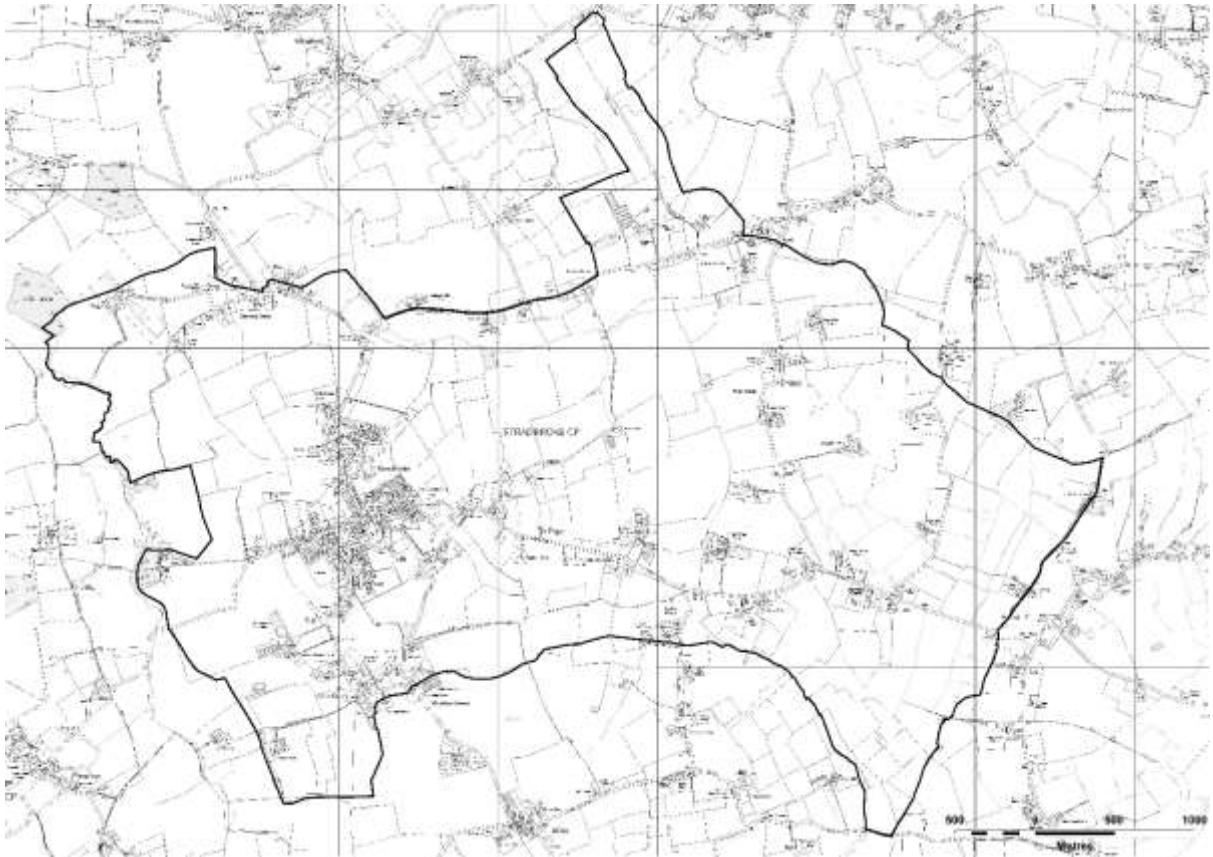
People

- Education: support the growing and changing needs of education for all ages and in particular, provide for the needs of the local primary and secondary schools.
- Health: expand the range of health care services available to local residents, as well as addressing the residential and care needs of the community as it ages.
- Sport and leisure: deliver facilities that promote leisure and recreation facilities for all ages and abilities.
- Community: increase community self-sufficiency and resilience by expanding the retail base and range of village community services.
- Housing: provide homes that meet the changing needs of Stradbroke in terms of affordability, size, type and tenure that will allow families and single people to settle, grow and continue to live in the village.
- Transport: to achieve improved transport to services at distance, especially educational services for post-16 students.

2.3 The legislative background set out below outlines the regulations that require this screening exercise. Section 4, provides a screening assessment of the likely significant environmental effects of the Neighbourhood Plan and whether there is the need for an SEA.

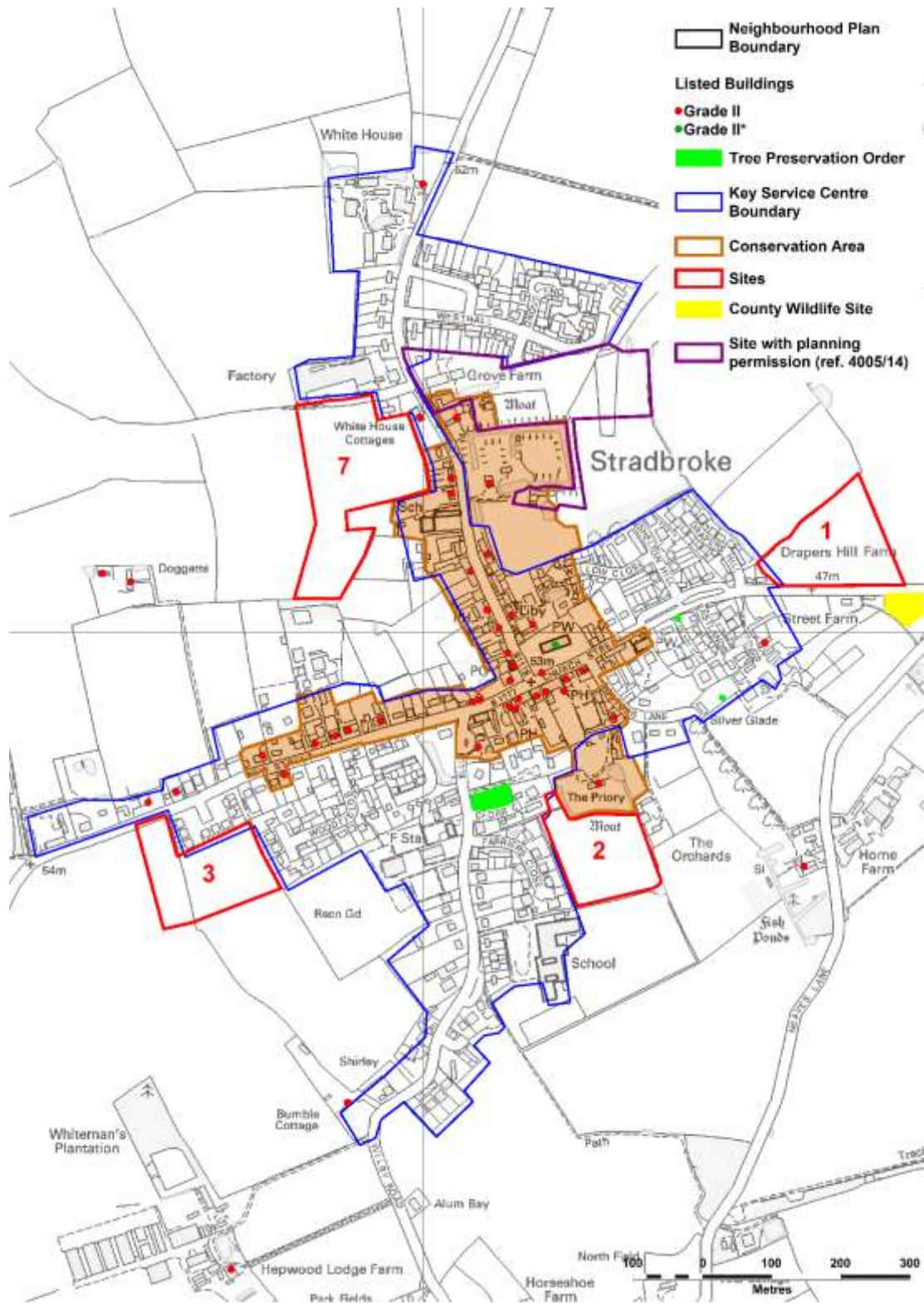
2.4 The designated Stradbroke Neighbourhood Area is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Stradbroke Neighbourhood Plan Area



- 2.5 The Neighbourhood Plan covers a 20-year period from 2017 to 2037 and seeks, amongst other things, to specify certain exact locations for development. The first complete draft of the Neighbourhood Plan proposes to allocate five sites, one of which already has the benefit of planning permission. The location of these sites is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Location of site allocations in first draft of the Stradbroke Neighbourhood Plan



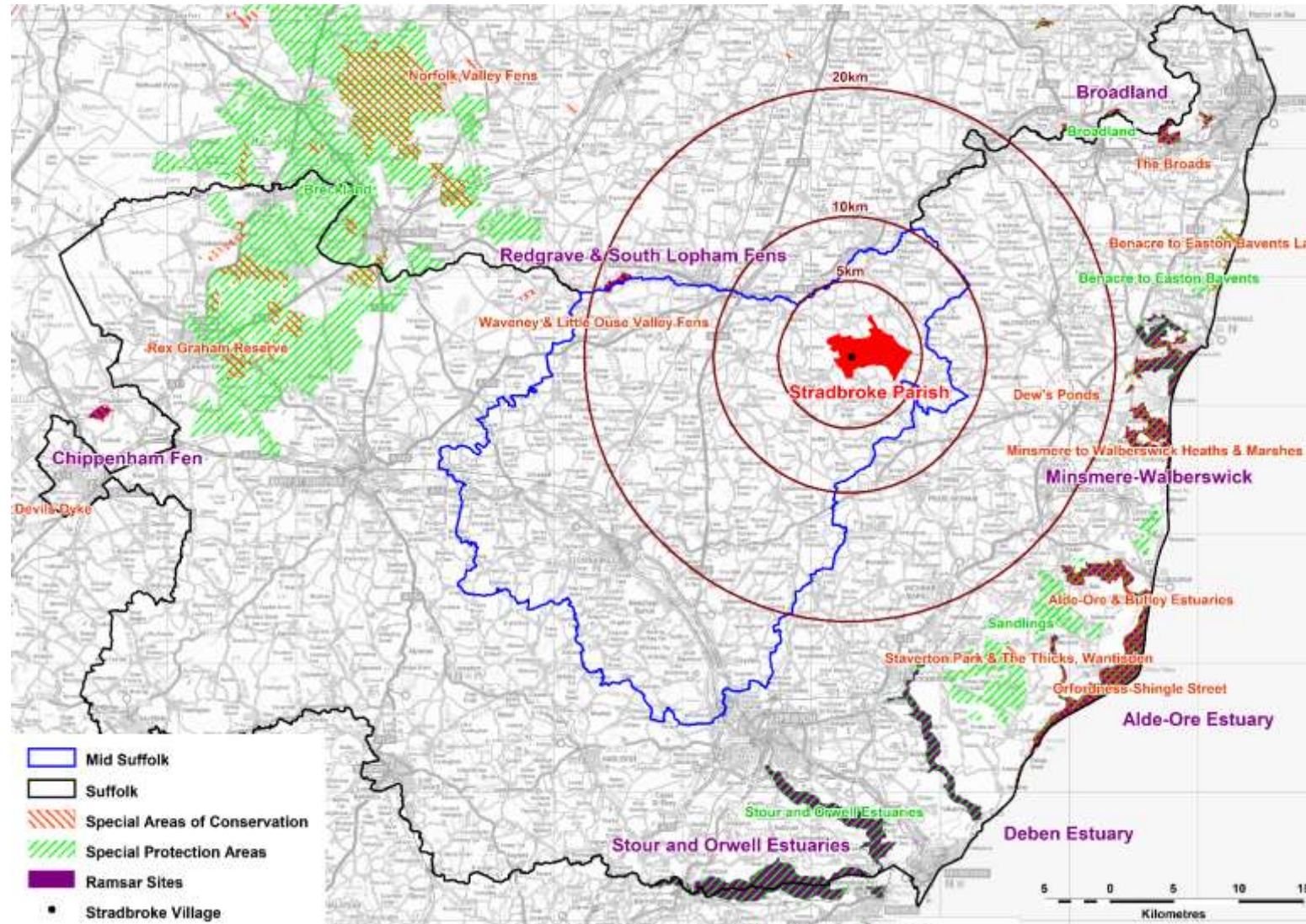
European sites potentially affected

3.1 There are a number of European sites within the wider Suffolk area. All the sites are listed below:

- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
 - The Broads
 - Benacre to Easton Bavents Lagoons
 - Dews Ponds
 - Minsmere to Walberswick Heaths and Marshes
 - Alde-Ore and Butley Estuaries
 - Staverton Park and The Thicks, Wantisden
 - Orford Ness-Shingle Street
 - Waveney and Little Ouse Valley Fens
 - Rex Graham Reserve
 - Norfolk Valley Fens
- Special Protection Areas (SPAs):
 - Breckland
 - Broadland
 - Benacre to Easton Bavents
 - Sandlings
 - Stour and Orwell Estuaries
- RAMSAR sites:
 - Broadland
 - Minsmere-Walberswick
 - Alde-Ore Estuary
 - Deben Estuary
 - Stour and Orwell Estuaries
 - Redgrave and South Lopham Fens
 - Chippenham Fen

3.2 These are shown in Figure 3 and more detail is provided in the Appendix.

Figure 3: Location of the Stradbroke Neighbourhood Area within a 5km, 10km and 20km radius of SACs and SPAs



3.3 Of these European sites, none are within 10km of Stradbroke village where the growth proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan is to be located. The following sites are within 20km:

- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
 - Dews Ponds
 - Waveney and Little Ouse Valley Fens
- RAMSAR sites:
 - Redgrave and South Lopham Fens

3.4 The Stradbroke Neighbourhood Plan focuses, amongst other things, on shaping development, and protecting, maintaining and enhancing existing green space assets. Design principles (Policy STRAD2) ensure that development minimises its impact on the open countryside and environmental features through effective landscaping and seeking to minimise the loss of hedgerows.

3.5 Policies that seek to positively address the environmental aspects of sustainable development – specifically, local green spaces (Policy STRAD10) and light pollution (Policy STRAD12) – are likely to serve to have a positive effect on the wider environment, although the European sites are at a distance where such effects will not be felt. The scale of growth likely in the Neighbourhood Area is such that any effects are likely to be localised but not significant.

3.6 The Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to have any significant effect on the identified network of protected sites.

In-combination effects

3.7 Existing plans and proposals must be considered when assessing new plans or programmes for likely significant effects as they may create ‘in combination’ effects.

3.8 A Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Report was carried out as part of the Mid Suffolk Core Strategy and published in 2011. This report concludes that the Mid Suffolk Core Strategy is unlikely to have an adverse impact on any of the identified sites within approximately 20km of the boundary of the District.

3.9 Mid Suffolk District Council is committed to the implementation of a series of measures to ensure that the Core Strategy policies will not have a significant effect on the European sites. These measures include:

- Protecting the environment from unsafe or unhealthy pollutants (see Policy CS4);
- Protecting the districts natural capital and applying an ecological network approach (see Policy CS4);

- Protecting, managing and enhancing the network of designated sites and ecological networks (see Policy CS5);
- Monitoring Programme. Reporting on this monitoring plan will be tied in with the annual monitoring programme described in Section 4 of the Core Strategy; and
- Planned Mitigation Measures. If during the monitoring programme it is found that recreational pressure is increasing, this will trigger the requirement to consider whether additional mitigation is required.

3.10 None of the sites above fall within the district. The Core Strategy HRA (see page 20) found that the policies in the Core Strategy, Core Strategy Focused Review and Stowmarket Area Action Plan (AAP) are unlikely to have significant effects on the European sites. This was due to:

- The distance of the European Sites away from the district boundary;
- The nature of the proposed policies themselves.

3.11 The Stradbroke Neighbourhood Plan is a lower level plan than the Core Strategy and focuses, amongst other things, on shaping development, protecting, maintaining and enhancing existing green space assets. Whilst the Neighbourhood Plan proposes to allocate specific residential development sites, it ensures that these are in general conformity with the District Council's Core Strategy. These development sites are being allocated to ensure that the District Council meets its housing requirements which are being established through the emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan. Any development proposal that would be likely to have a significant effect on a European site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, will be subject to assessment at the project application stage.

3.12 The Mid Suffolk Core Strategy HRA screening report concluded that the Core Strategy would not lead to significant adverse effects. It is therefore concluded that no significant in-combination effects are likely to occur due to the implementation of the Stradbroke Neighbourhood Plan.

Screening outcome

- 4.1 The screening assessment which has been undertaken concludes that no likely significant effects in respect of the European sites within 20km of Mid Suffolk district will occur as a result of the implementation of the Stradbroke Neighbourhood Plan. As such, the Neighbourhood plan does not require a full HRA to be undertaken.
- 4.2 The outcome of this Screening Report is subject to review by Natural England and Mid Suffolk District Council. The Screening Report and subsequent screening opinion may also need to be reviewed if significant changes are made to the Neighbourhood Plan as



a result of this review or any other evidence that informs a significant change to the Plan prior to the Submission Stage (Regulation 16).

APPENDIX - STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS

Designation relates to, or having the nature of, a statute (such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, or the National Parks and Countryside Act, 1949). The NPPF states for plan-making that Local Plans should meet objectively assessed needs, with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change, unless: specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted. For example, those policies relating to sites protected under the Birds and Habitats Directives (see paragraph 119) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Heritage Coast or within a National Park (or the Broads Authority); designated heritage assets; and locations at risk of flooding or coastal erosion. See [circular 05/2006](#).

Ramsar Sites

A Ramsar site is the land listed as a Wetland of International Importance under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (the Ramsar Convention) 1973. The Stour and Orwell Estuaries Ramsar is located approximately 35km to the south of Stradbroke and includes extensive mud-flats, low cliffs, saltmarsh and small areas of vegetated shingle on the lower reaches. The Ramsar supports important numbers of breeding Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, while in winter they hold major concentrations of water birds, especially geese, ducks and waders. The geese feed and the waders roost in agricultural land beyond the designated area. The vulnerability of the Ramsar is affected by natural coastal processes exacerbated by fixed sea defences, port development and maintenance dredging.

The Minsmere-Walberswick Ramsar is located approximately 25km to the east of Stradbroke. It contains a complex mosaic of habitats, notably, areas of marsh with dykes, extensive reedbeds, mudflats, lagoons, shingle and driftline, woodland and areas of lowland heath. The site supports the largest continuous stand of reed in England and Wales and demonstrates the nationally rare transition in grazing marsh ditch plants from brackish to fresh water. The combination of habitats create an exceptional area of scientific interest supporting nationally scarce plants, British Red Data Book invertebrates and nationally important numbers of breeding and wintering birds.

The Deben Estuary Ramsar is located approximately 40km south-east of Stradbroke. This estuary is relatively narrow and sheltered. It has limited amounts of freshwater input and the intertidal areas are constrained by sea-walls. The site supports nationally and internationally important flora and fauna. This includes a population of the mollusc

Vertigo angustior. Martlesham Creek is one of only about fourteen sites in Britain where this species survives.

The Alde-Ore Estuary Ramsar is located approximately 25km south-east of Stradbroke. It comprises the estuary complex of the rivers Alde, Butley and Ore, including Havergate Island and Orfordness. There are a variety of habitats including, intertidal mudflats, saltmarsh, vegetated shingle (including the second-largest and best-preserved area in Britain at Orfordness), saline lagoons and grazing marsh. The Orfordness/Shingle Street landform is unique within Britain in combining a shingle spit with a cusped foreland. The site supports nationally-scarce plants, British Red Data Book invertebrates, and notable assemblages of breeding and wintering wetland birds.

Redgrave and South Lopham Fens Ramsar is located approximately 18km west of Stradbroke. It is an extensive example of lowland base-rich valley, remarkable for its lack of fragmentation. The diversity of the site is due to the lateral and longitudinal zonation of the vegetation types characteristic of valley mires, such as dry birch woodland, scrub and carr, floristically-rich fen grassland, mixed fen, wet heath and areas of reed and saw sedge. The site supports many rare and scarce invertebrates, including a population of the fen raft spider *Dolomedes plantarius*.

Special Protection Areas

A Special Protection Area (SPA) is the land classified under Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds.

The Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA is located 40km to the south of Stradbroke. It contains an internationally important assemblage of birds. Qualifying species include; Avocet (breeding), Northern pintail *Anas acuta* (wintering), Dark-bellied Brent goose *Branta bernicla bernicla* (wintering), Red knot *Calidris canutus* (wintering), Black-tailed godwit (Icelandic) *Limosa limosa islandica* (wintering), Grey plover *Pluvialis squatarola* (wintering), and Redshank *Tringa totanus* (wintering and passage). The vulnerability of the SPA is affected by pressure for increased port development and marine recreation in this area including tourism.

The Sandlings SPA is located 25km to the south-east of Stradbroke. Qualifying species include; Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and Woodlark *Lullula arborea*.

The Alde-Ore Estuary SPA is located 25km to the south-east of Stradbroke. Qualifying species include; Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* and Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*.

The Minsmere-Walberswick SPA is located 25km to the east of Stradbroke. Qualifying species include; Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* and Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*.

The Benacre to Easton Bavents SPA is located 30km to the east of Stradbroke. Qualifying species include; Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* and Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*.

The Breckland SPA is located 40km to the west of Stradbroke. Qualifying species include; Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedipnemus* and Woodlark *Lullula arborea*.

Special Areas of Conservation

A Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is the land designated under Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora.

The Alde, Ore and Butley Estuaries is located approximately 25km to the south-east of Stradbroke and is an estuary made out of three rivers. It is the only bar-built estuary in the UK with a shingle bar. The estuary contains large areas of shallow water and is diverse and species-rich containing many lengths of vegetated or shingle habitat, saltmarsh, grassland and reed bed.

The Orfordness-Shingle Street SAC is located approximately 25km to the south-east of Stradbroke. Orfordness is an extensive shingle structure consisting of a foreland, a 15 km-long spit and a series of recurves running from north to south. It supports some of the largest and most natural sequences in the UK of shingle vegetation affected by salt spray. The southern end has a particularly fine series of undisturbed ridges, with zonation of communities determined by the ridge pattern. Pioneer communities with sea pea *Lathyrus japonicus* and false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* grassland occur. Locally these are nutrient-enriched by the presence of a gull colony; elsewhere they support rich lichen communities. Drift-line vegetation occurs on the sheltered, western side of the spit, at the transition from shingle to saltmarsh, as well as on the exposed eastern coast. The drift-line community is widespread and comprises sea beet *Beta vulgaris*, *maritima* and orache *Atriplex*. The site also includes a series of percolation lagoons that have developed in the shingle bank adjacent to the shore at the mouth of the Ore estuary. The salinity of the lagoons is maintained by percolation through the shingle, although at high tides sea water can overtop the shingle bank. The fauna of these lagoons includes typical lagoon species, such as the cockle *Cerastoderma glaucum*, the ostracod *Cyprideis torosa* and the gastropods *Littorina saxatilis tenebrosa*

and *Hydrobia ventrosa*. The nationally rare starlet sea anemone *Nematostella vectensis* is also found at the site.

The Staverton Park & The Thicks SAC is located approximately 25km to the south-east of Stradbroke. The site is representative of old oak *Quercus* spp. woods, and its ancient oaks have rich invertebrate and epiphytic lichen assemblages. Despite being in the most 'continental' part of southern Britain, the epiphytic lichen flora of this site includes rare and Atlantic species, such as *Haemotomma elatinum*, *Lecidea cinnabarina*, *Thelotrema lepadinum*, *Graphis elegans* and *Stenocybe septata*. Part of the site includes an area of old holly *Ilex aquifolium* trees that are probably the largest in Britain. The site has a very well-documented history and good conservation of woodland structure and function.

The Minsmere to Walberswick Heaths and Marshes SAC is located approximately 25km to the east of Stradbroke. Lowland dry heaths occupy an extensive area of this site on the east coast of England, which is at the extreme easterly range of heath development in the UK. The heathland is predominantly heather – western gorse (*Calluna vulgaris* – *Ulex gallii*) heath, usually more characteristic of western parts of the UK. This type is dominated by heather, western gorse and bell heather *Erica cinerea*. Shingle beach forms the coastline at Walberswick and Minsmere. It supports a variety of scarce shingle plants including sea pea *Lathyrus japonicus*, sea campion *Silene maritima* and small populations of sea kale *Crambe maritima*, grey hair-grass *Corynephorus canescens* and yellow horned-poppy *Glaucium flavum*. A well-developed beach strandline of mixed sand and shingle supports annual vegetation. Species include those typical of sandy shores, such as sea sandwort *Honckenya peploides* and shingle plants such as sea beet *Beta vulgaris maritima*.

The Dews Pond SAC is located approximately 15km east of Stradbroke. It comprises a series of 12 ponds set in an area of formerly predominantly arable land. The ponds range from old field ponds created for agricultural purposes to some constructed in recent years specifically for wildlife. Some of the land has been converted from arable to grassland, with a variety of grassland types present. Other habitats include hedges and ditches. Great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* have been found in the majority of ponds on the site.

The Benacre to Easton Bavents Lagoons SAC is located approximately 30km to the east of Stradbroke. It is a series of percolation lagoons on the east coast of England. The lagoons (the Denes, Benacre Broad, Covehithe Broad and Easton Broad) have formed behind shingle barriers and are a feature of a geomorphologically dynamic system. Sea water enters the lagoons by percolation through the barriers, or by overtopping them during storms and high spring tides. The lagoons show a wide range of salinities, from

nearly fully saline in South Pool, the Denes, to extremely low salinity at Easton Broad. This range of salinity has resulted in a series of lagoonal vegetation types, including beds of narrow-leaved eelgrass *Zostera angustifolia* in fully saline or hypersaline conditions, beds of spiral tasselweed *Ruppia cirrhosa* in brackish water, and dense beds of common reed *Phragmites australis* in freshwater. The site supports a number of specialist lagoonal species.

The Waveney and Little Ouse Valley Fens SAC is located approximately 18km to the west of Stradbroke. This site occurs in the East Anglian centre of distribution of calcareous fens and contains very extensive great fen-sedge *Cladium mariscus* beds, including managed examples, as well as stands in contact zones between small sedge mire and species-poor *Cladium* beds. The habitat type here occurs in a spring-fed valley fen. Purple moor-grass – meadow thistle (*Molinia caerulea* – *Cirsium dissectum*) fen-meadows are associated with the spring-fed valley fen systems. The *Molinia* meadows occur in conjunction with black bog-rush – blunt-flowered rush (*Schoenus nigricans* – *Juncus subnodulosus*) mire and calcareous fens with great fen-sedge. Where the fen-meadow is grazed it is more species-rich, with frequent southern marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*. A population of Desmoulin's whorl snail *Vertigo moulinsiana* occurs in a valley fen at Weston Fen.

The Breckland SAC is located 40km to the west of Stradbroke. This is a gently undulating plateau underlain by bedrock of Cretaceous Chalk, covered by thin deposits of sand and flint. The conditions during the last glaciation have given rise to the patterned ground features and ice depressions (pingos) that we see today and that are of high geological and biological importance. The continental climate, with low rainfall and free-draining soils, has led to the development of dry heath and grassland communities. Relatively lush river valleys provide a gentle contrast to the drier harsher surroundings. Occasional woods with alder *Alnus glutinosa* and willow *Salix* sp. the most dominant trees occur beside rivers and streams in the floodplains. These woods rely on high water levels and sometimes surface flooding as both river flooding or spring flows can be very important. The dry heaths of Breckland are of the *Calluna vulgaris* – *Festuca ovina* (heather – sheep's-fescue) community. The sand sedge-dominated *Carex arenaria* sub-community is typical of areas of blown sand – a very unusual feature of this location. The highly variable soils of Breckland, with underlying chalk being largely covered with wind-blown sands, have resulted in mosaics of heather-dominated heathland, acidic grassland and calcareous grassland that are unlike those of any other site. In many places there is a linear or patterned distribution of heath and grassland, arising from fossilised soil patterns that formed under peri-glacial conditions. Breckland is the most extensive surviving area of the rare *Festuca ovina* – *Hieracium pilosella* – *Thymus praecox* (sheep's-fescue – mouse-ear-hawkweed – wild thyme) grassland type. The grassland is rich in rare

species typical of dry, winter-cold, continental areas, and approaches the features of grassland types in central Europe more than almost any other semi-natural dry grassland found in the UK. Wangford Warren and adjoining parts of RAF Lakenheath have one of the best-preserved systems of active inland sand dunes in the UK. The habitat type, which is in part characterised by the nationally rare grey hair-grass *Corynephorus canescens* occurring here at its only inland station, is associated with open conditions with active sand movement. The site shows the colonisation sequence from open sand to acidic grass-heath. The Breckland meres are examples of hollows within glacial outwash deposits and are fed by water from the underlying chalk aquifer. Natural fluctuations in groundwater tables mean that these lakes occasionally dry out. The flora is dominated by stonewort – pondweed Characeae – Potamogetonaceae associations. A number of the water bodies within the site support populations of amphibians, including great crested newts *Triturus cristatus*.

The Rex Graham Reserve SPA is located approximately 45km to the west of Stradbroke. It is a disused chalk pit and surrounding land most of which is developing dry calcareous grassland characterised by false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*. The site supports the largest population of military orchid *Orchis militaris* in the UK. The pit also contains a large number of bushes of mezereon *Daphne mezereon* which is also rare as a wild plant. Other species found on the site include twayblade *Listera ovata*, adder's tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, ploughman's spikenard *Inula conyza* and mullein *Verbascum thapsus*.

Environmental Stewardship Schemes

Environmental Stewardship Schemes replaced Environmentally Sensitive Areas which were introduced in 1987 to offer incentives to encourage farmers to adopt agricultural practices which would safeguard and enhance parts of the country of particularly high landscape, wildlife or historic value. Land within the Stradbroke NP area is designated as an ESA. The ESA designation does not however have any planning status and cannot be used for decision-making purposes.

Designated Heritage Assets

Stradbroke contains a number of heritage assets. The National Heritage List for England ([the List](#)) records 69 entries in the parish, including three Grade 2* listed buildings.

In 1973 the historic village core was designated as a Conservation Area.