



## **Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Boundary Variation Project**

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### **Natural Beauty Assessment**

September 2017

**Evaluation of Natural Beauty in relation to a proposed Boundary Variation to the  
Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB.**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Scope of Work**

- 1.1.1 Natural England received a formal request from Essex County Council and Tendring District Council to consider making a variation to the existing boundary of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (SC&H AONB) on 23 April 2010.
- 1.1.2 In September 2011 the Natural England Board<sup>1</sup> agreed to fund preliminary scoping and planning work in relation to the proposal. A review of the evidence relating to proposed boundary variations for the Surrey Hills and Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONBs was subsequently undertaken by Alison Farmer Associates<sup>2</sup>. This concluded that there was a case for looking more closely at a SC&H AONB extension and that whilst several studies of the area had been undertaken; further work was needed to ensure compatibility with Natural England's approach to landscape designation (see section 1.2 below) and to clearly establish the presence of natural beauty within the area.
- 1.1.3 During 2013, the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB commissioned a report to identify and evaluate land on the south side of the Stour to establish whether it had sufficient natural beauty to be considered as an extension to the AONB. This report was presented to Natural England for review and further consideration.
- 1.1.4 In December 2013 the Natural England Board<sup>3</sup> considered this report and confirmed that Natural England should take forward a project to determine for itself whether the AONB boundary should be varied and if so, to define a recommended boundary variation to the AONB.
- 1.1.5 The aim of this study has been to collate, update and review evidence of natural beauty in relation to land adjacent to the existing AONB and to evaluate the natural beauty of this area; firstly to determine whether it has sufficient natural beauty to be considered worthy of inclusion within an extension to the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; and secondly to identify areas which qualify for inclusion in a Candidate Area that can form the basis for consideration of whether designation of this area as AONB is desirable; and within which a detailed boundary may be sought.

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<sup>1</sup> Natural England Board Paper NEB BR27 07, September 2011

<sup>2</sup> Review of Evidence Relating to Proposed AONB Boundary Variations for the Surrey Hills and Suffolk Coast and Heaths, March 2012, Alison Farmer Associates, March 2012

<sup>3</sup> Natural England Board Paper NEB PU40 02, December 2013

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### **1.2 Natural England Guidance on Assessing Landscapes for Designation**

- 1.2.1 Natural England has a power under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000<sup>4</sup> (CRoW Act) to designate areas which it considers to be of such outstanding Natural Beauty, that it is desirable that they should be designated for the purpose of conserving and enhancing their natural beauty. Natural England also has a power under the CRoW Act<sup>5</sup> to vary an Order designating an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 1.2.2 Natural England has developed an approved approach to assessing landscapes for designation as either National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This is set out in Guidance for Assessing Landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England<sup>6</sup>. The Guidance seeks to ensure a consistent approach to the delivery of landscape designation projects which draws on best practice and takes account of both changes in the legislative framework relating to landscape designations and the outcome of the South Downs National Park Public Inquiries and relevant court cases. After extensive external consultation the revised Guidance was approved by Natural England and published in March 2011, This guidance was used to guide work to develop extensions to the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks and was successfully tested and found sound during the subsequent Public Inquiry and Confirmation of the Orders by the Secretary of State in October 2015.
- 1.2.3 The guidance is intended for use by Natural England specialist staff to help to identify whether land is likely to meet the statutory criteria for AONB or National Park designation. It has been used as the basis for this assessment of whether there is land worthy of designation as part of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB in the vicinity of the Stour and Orwell Estuaries.

### **1.3 Format of the Report**

- 1.3.1 The remainder of the report is laid out as follows:
  - **Section Two** outlines the method.
  - **Section Three** considers the Designation History of the area and relevant policy background.
  - **Section Four** identifies a Study Area.
  - **Section Five** identifies Evaluation Areas.
  - **Section Six**: contains the detailed evaluation of each of the Evaluation Areas.

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<sup>4</sup> Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, Section 82

<sup>5</sup> Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, Section 83, (7)

<sup>6</sup> Guidance for Assessing Landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England", Natural England, March 2011

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- **Section Seven** sets out the conclusions of the study and identifies the extent of a Candidate Area which is likely to meet the criterion for outstanding natural beauty and within which a detailed boundary may be sought.

### **2: Method**

#### **2.1 Approach**

2.1.1 A combination of desk study and field assessment has been undertaken. A wide range of background information, document reviews, research, mapping and data was collated from both within Natural England and local sources including the relevant Local Authorities and the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Unit.

2.1.2 Examples of data collated include solid and drift geology, landform, soils, agricultural land classification, national and local natural heritage designations and reserves, priority habitats, ancient woodland, historic environment record, national and local cultural heritage designations, selected non-designated archaeological sites, landscape character assessments, historic landscape characterisations, agri-environment schemes, administrative boundaries and local authority allocations and development data.

2.1.3 Reference was also made to a range of published books about the area and web-based information sources such as Google Earth, the Heritage Gateway website, the comprehensive collection of old maps on the National Library of Scotland website, the National Biodiversity Network, CPRE tranquillity mapping and Local Authority allocations and development information.

2.1.4 It should be noted that this list is illustrative, not exhaustive and that the extent of information gathered was also constrained by available data and resources at the time of the study. Data was periodically reviewed and updated during the course of the evaluation.

#### **2.2 Initial Mapping and Desk Study**

2.2.1 The digital mapping and spatial data obtained was combined and interrogated via an mxd in a GIS. A series of thematic working maps was produced to aid the evaluation of natural beauty, to enable comparison between different datasets and the identification of any patterns of distribution of features of interest. For example information on national, regional and local cultural heritage designations and information on non-designated important local archaeological sites and areas of historic parkland were drawn together in order to explore the distribution and relative importance of such features within the area under consideration. Examples of these maps are shown in Figures One and Three to Six below. **Figure One** shows local landscape designations, **Figure Three** shows Natural Heritage Designations in the Study Area, **Figure Four** Priority Habitats and Ancient Woodland, **Figure Five** Cultural Heritage Designations and **Figure Six** Current and Former Agri-Environment Agreements. Where no relevant datasets existed, appropriate raw datasets were also merged to establish composite maps. These include **Figure Two**: Initial Study Area, **Figure Seven**: Landscape Character and **Figure Eight**: Evaluation Areas.

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2.2.2 The pre-existing Landscape Character Assessments and earlier assessments of natural beauty were reviewed and relevant information taken into account.

2.2.3 Three periods of site work were undertaken to test the information gained from the information sources and data gathered, where necessary to update this information, and to assess factors that contribute to natural beauty but require an element of field assessment locally, such as landscape condition, scenic quality, relative wildness and tranquillity. The evidence and conclusions reached in the Alison Farmer Associates review of the South side of the River Stour were also reviewed.

2.2.4 Documents considered included:

### ***Landscape Character Assessment***

- *Joint Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council Landscape Guidance*, 2015
- *National Character Area Profile: 82: Suffolk Coast and Heaths*, Natural England, April 2015.
- *Shotley Peninsula Landscape Character Assessment, Final Report*, Alison Farmer Associates, March 2013.
- *Suffolk County Landscape Character Assessment*, 2009, updated 2011.
- *East of England Landscape Character Assessment 2009*.
- *Tendring District Historic Environment Characterisation Project*, 2008.
- *Historic Landscape Characterisation, Suffolk*, 2008.
- *Essex Landscape Character Assessment*, Chris Blandford Associates, 2003.
- *Tendring District Replacement Local Plan: Tendring Landscape Character Assessment*, Land Use Consultants, 2001.
- *The Suffolk Coast and Heaths Landscape*, Land Use Consultants / Countryside Commission 1993.
- *Suffolk Coast and Heaths Landscape Assessment Technical Report*, Land Use Consultants 1993.

### **Natural Beauty Evaluation**

- *Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB, Evidence and Evaluation to support Boundary Extension to the South, Final Report*, Alison Farmer Associates, 2013.
- *Review of Evidence Relating to Proposed AONB Boundary Variations for the Surrey Hills and Suffolk Coast and Heaths, Final Report*, Alison Farmer Associates, March 2012.
- *Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Project Area – Southern Shore of the Stour Estuary*, Clive Dawson, Principal Tree and Landscape Officer, Tendring District Council, 2009.
- *The Orwell Estuary Hinterland Report*, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, 2007.
- *Designation History Series: Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB*, Ray Woolmore/ Countryside Commission, 1999.
- *Suffolk Coast and Heaths Landscape Assessment: Technical Report*, Land Use Consultants, 1993.

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### **Local Authority Plan Documents**

- *Tendring District Local Plan 2013-2033 and Beyond – Preferred Options Consultation Document.*
- *Babergh Core Strategy and Policies (2011-2031) Local Plan Document*, adopted 2014.
- *Babergh Local Plan Alteration No. 2, 2006.*
- *Tendring District Local Plan: Boundary Definition for the Proposed Extension to the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB on the South Side of the Stour Estuary*, Land Use Consultants / Tendring District Council, 2003.
- *Suffolk Structure Plan*, 2001.
- Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans.

### **Land Management**

- *Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Management Plan 2013-18.*
- *Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan 2, October 2010.*
- *The Stour and Orwell Estuaries Management Strategy*, 2010.
- *The Stour and Orwell Estuaries Scheme of Management*, 2010.

### **Additional Documents.**

- Appeal Decision Appeal Ref: APP/D3505/A/13/2204846, Valley Farm, Wherstead, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP9 2AX, Planning Inspectorate, June 2014.
- Listing Building Descriptions.
- Natural Heritage Designation Citations.

## **2.3 Outline of Subsequent Stages**

### **2.3.1 Subsequent stages in the work included:**

- Consideration of the Designation History and other relevant documents and policies
- Identification of an initial Study Area
- Refinement of the Initial Study Area
- Definition of Evaluation Areas
- The detailed evaluation of the landscapes within the Evaluation Areas.
- The identification of a Candidate Area which generally meets the criterion for designation and within which a boundary can be sought. This included consideration of current and developing land allocations, features of interest, areas of transition and fragmentation, impact of incongruous development and the influence of settlements.

The detailed method used for each of these stages is described within the relevant subsequent section.

## **3.0 Designation History and Policy background**

### **3.1 Background**

#### **3.1.1 This section considers the evidence as to whether there has been a long history of aspiration for designation of the area, or other evidence which might be relevant to**

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the consideration of which areas should be assessed for designation as AONB, such as previous recognition of landscape value in the area. This informs the extent of the Study Area.

### **3.2 Designation History**

3.2.1 The Countryside Agency Designation History for the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB<sup>7</sup> shows that the area currently under consideration for designation did not form part of the area originally considered at the time of the designation of the existing AONB, nor was it included within the original proposed “Conservation Area” identified by Dower<sup>8</sup> and Hobhouse<sup>9</sup> on which the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB proposal was originally based.

3.2.2 The Designation History states that land on the north side of the Stour Estuary was only included within the proposed AONB at a late stage, following a proposed amendment to the consultation boundary made by East Suffolk County Council during the statutory consultation and a subsequent site visit by the countryside Commission’s then Field Adviser, L. J. Watson. It was noted that he considered that “a strip of land on the northern bank of the Stour Estuary between Shotley Gate and Cattawade” was ‘attractive and “Constablesque” in character (it almost linked up with the Constable Country of Dedham Vale)”.

Land on the north side of the estuary was subsequently included within the AONB. Significantly there was no mention of any aspiration to include the estuary or additional land further south at this time.

3.2.3 It is worth noting that the Designation History makes it clear that the original AONB proposals were based on the geology of the area, with the initial proposed boundary largely marking the border between the inland boulder clay country of Suffolk and its coastal fringe, with its crags, gravels and sands. The area under consideration in this report also shares this crag, gravel and sand geology, and it is thus not clear why the Shotley and Stour Estuary areas were not included within the original AONB proposals along with the northern estuary shore at that time.

3.2.4 Furthermore, there is no mention within the Designation History of any issues relating to administrative boundaries and the influence these may or may not have played in the decision to include only land on the northern shore of the Stour Estuary and not half of the estuary or the wider estuarine landscape into Essex. The administrative boundary between Suffolk and Essex runs down the central channel of the Stour estuary effectively cutting it in two. There is also no mention of the origin of the subsequent local aspiration to extend the boundary further south to include the estuary itself or land on its southern shore.

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<sup>7</sup> Designation History Series, Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB, Ray Woolmore, 1999

<sup>8</sup> National Parks in England and Wales, John Dower, HMSO, 1945

<sup>9</sup> Report of the National parks Committee, HMSO, 1947

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### **3.3 Other Relevant Documentary References and Policies**

3.3.1 It has not been possible to establish when the proposals for an extension of the AONB first appeared, however by 1993 the aspiration was clear and by 2003 a draft boundary had been proposed by Tendring District Council<sup>10</sup>. The Adopted Essex and Southend on Sea Structure Plan 1996-2011 contained the following relevant policy, Strategic Policy NR3 Extension of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB:

“An extension of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB – to include land on the south side of the River Stour Estuary is strongly supported. Within the extension:

- 1) Development will not be allowed unless it is compatible with conserving and enhancing the Area’s landscape character and the quiet enjoyment of the countryside.
- 2) Development located outside but near to the proposed extension of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB will not be permitted if it would seriously detract from views into or out of the area.”

3.3.2 A Technical Report produced on behalf of the Countryside Commission by LUC in 1993<sup>11</sup> in association with a separate Landscape Character Assessment of the existing AONB, covered “areas within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Management Plan Area” including the Shotley Peninsula, part of the estuary and land on the south side of the estuary. These areas were thus clearly defined as being of interest locally by that date, though it is unclear when the additional area, included within the Management Plan in October 1994, was first conceived. It has also not proved possible to establish the rationale used to determine its boundary. The area included in later AONB Management Plans differed slightly from that shown in the LUC Technical Report. The LUC Technical Report also states that “The boundary of the AONB currently runs along the northern shore of the Stour Estuary, an alignment which does not appear to reflect significant differences in the landscape within the estuary and which has generated a significant number of representations from the general public”. The LUC report also contained a landscape character assessment of the area and concluded by examining the suitability of including the south side of the Stour within the AONB, but did not state when the proposal to extend the boundary was first made.

3.3.3 The LUC Technical Report stated that the Shotley Peninsula was primarily an area of sandling similar to many inland parts of the AONB, but that all the heathland had been lost to agricultural improvement along with many field boundaries, copses, hedgerow trees and even hedges along roads, which resulted in open, unstructured landscapes of flat farmland which it considered monotonous. It also commented on the lack of ecological interest resulting from the agricultural changes and the lack of

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<sup>10</sup> Tendring District Replacement Local Plan, Boundary Definition for the Proposed Extension of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB on the South Side of the Stour Estuary, June 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Suffolk Coast and Heaths Landscape Assessment, Technical Report, LUC, February 1993

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any literary or cultural references to the landscape of the area. It did however note that the plateau areas had been dissected by streams creating a series of quite narrow, steep-sided valleys which added interest to the otherwise flat landscape. It also noted that the area between Bentley and the A12 had “retained comparatively modest field sizes and blocks of woodland which resulted in a well-structured landscape in this area”.

3.3.4 In relation to the south side of the Stour, the Technical Report considered the land which is visually related to the estuary itself. It noted the relatively steep sides of the estuary and the smaller streams which have dissected the plateau forming “quite narrow, steep-sided valleys”. It commented on the agricultural changes which have affected this area resulting in field amalgamations and loss of landscape features, such as field boundaries and trees, particularly in the vicinity of Jacques Hall. However it also noted the ‘comparatively well-wooded appearance’ of the western part of the southern shore when viewed from the northern shore; and it noted the ecological importance of the estuary itself and its tranquil and undeveloped character with open countryside running down to the edge of the river.

3.3.5 It concluded that the Stour Estuary as a whole lies within the same Character Area as the rest of the AONB, that it was illogical to only include one half of an estuary when there are few differences in character or quality between them; that taken as a whole, the estuary has the same key qualities as other estuaries in the AONB; and is an integral part of the wider regional Character Area.

3.3.6 Since 1993 a range of additional studies have been undertaken in the local area on behalf of the Local Authorities and the AONB Partnership and the relevant local plans and AONB Management Plan have continued to contain specific policies and actions relating to the local aspiration to extend the AONB to the south. These are listed in Table One below:

**Table One: Chronology of Assessments and policy development relevant to the current study.**

Date	Study / Report
February 1993	The Suffolk Coast and Heaths Landscape, produced by LUC and covering the existing AONB.
February 1993	Suffolk Coast and Heaths Landscape Assessment, Technical Report, covering the Shotley Peninsula, part of the estuary and land to the south of the estuary. The report concluded that the whole of the Stour Estuary should be considered for inclusion in the AONB by the then Countryside Commission.
1993	Tendring District Local Plan included policy TCR10A (Stour Estuary Policy Area).

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October 1994	Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Management Plan includes a defined 'Additional Project Area' boundary which includes the whole of the Shotley Peninsula, the estuary and the estuary slopes on the south side of the estuary. It also identified the extension of the AONB as a management priority.
July 1994	Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar sites notified. These European-level biodiversity designations include the majority of the Stour Estuary from the tidal flood gates at Flatford in the west, to where the estuary is crossed from Mean Low water by the County Constituency boundary opposite Erwarton Ness in the east, plus the area of Bathside Bay at Harwich.
1998	Tendring District Local Plan continued to include policy TCR10A.
2001	Essex Structure plan 1996-2011 included policy NR18 (Coastal Protection Policy) and NR3 (proposed extension to AONB to include Stour Estuary and southern shore), giving regional level support to the proposed extension.
2002	Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Management Strategy included the desire of the local authorities for an extension to include the southern shore of the Stour within the estuary.
April 2003	Stour Estuary SSSI notified. National-level biodiversity designation covering the Stour Estuary from the A137 in the west to the boundary of the SPA and Ramsar in the east.
June 2003	Tendring District Replacement Local Plan included a report entitled "Boundary Definition for the Proposed Extension of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB on the South Side of the Stour Estuary". This report was produced by LUC. It included background information about the area and identified a boundary for an extension; but since it pre-dates our guidance it did not evaluate natural beauty against the natural beauty factors set out in the Natural England Guidance, or consider the desirability of designation before identifying a boundary and thus does not meet the specific requirements of the current guidance.
2006	Babergh Local Plan Alteration No. 2 identified a new Special Landscape Area at Dodnash which was the subject of policies CR04 (development to maintain or enhance special landscape qualities of the area) and CR05 (utilities

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	infrastructure in SLAs).
2007	The adopted Tendring District Council Local Plan included Policy EN5a (Stour Estuary Policy Area) relating to the proposal for an extension to the AONB, which included a broad swathe of land on the south shore of the River Stour, between Mistley and Parkeston.
2008	Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Management Plan continued to support an action to press for the inclusion of the Stour estuary and its southern shore within the AONB.
2009	An internal staff report for Tendring District Council was produced by Clive Dawson, Principal Tree and Landscape Officer,
23 April 2010	Formal letter from Tendring District Council submitted to Chief Exec of Natural England requesting that Natural England begin the process of making an Order to vary the boundary of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB. This contained an internal staff report produced by Tendring District Council which reviewed the documents that had been produced over the years to support the inclusion of land on the southern shore of the Stour within the AONB.
September 2011	The Natural England Board agreed to fund preliminary scoping and planning work in relation to the proposal.
April 2011	Natural England approved the revised Guidance for Assessing Landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England.
March 2012	Review of Evidence Relating to Proposed AONB variation for Surrey Hills and Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONBs undertaken for Natural England by Alison Farmer Associates in response to the September 2011 Board decision. This concluded that there was a case for looking more closely at a boundary variation but that further work was needed to ensure compatibility with Natural England's approach to landscape designation and to clearly establish the presence of natural beauty within the area. This study did not consider the Shotley Peninsula.
April 2013	Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Evidence and Evaluation to support Boundary Extension to the South Report produced by Alison Farmer Associates on behalf of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Partnership and Tendring District Council. This report concluded that there was sufficient

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	natural beauty to support designation of the estuary and some land to the south and identified a candidate area. It did not evaluate the Shotley Peninsula and did not identify a detailed proposed boundary.
December 2013	Natural England Board decided to proceed with a project to determine for itself whether the AONB boundary should be varied and if so, to define a recommended boundary variation to the AONB.
2014	Babergh Core Strategy and Policies (2011-2031) included a statement that Adopted and saved Local Plan Policy CR04 re. Special Landscape Areas remained extant at that point in time but that a review of the SLA approach should be undertaken, including whether to retain the designation and if so which areas should be covered.
2014	Tendring Local Plan includes policies PLA2 (Coastal Protection Policy) and PLA5 (The Countryside Landscape – including the proposed AONB extension area). The proposed boundary for the extension area coincides with the proposed boundary produced by LUC in 2003 rather than the Candidate Area identified within the AFA Evaluation Report.
October 2015	Tendring District Local Plan 2013-2033 preferred Options Consultation Document, Section 7 Protected Places, para 7.13 states that “The southern shore of the Stour Estuary is recognised locally for its landscape qualities and the Council supports its inclusion within the proposed extension to the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths AONB.” It is no longer however specifically mentioned in policy.
2015	Joint Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council Landscape Guidance Supplementary Planning Document produced. There is no mention of Special Landscape Areas within it. It does however note that: “The valley surrounded by Dodnash woods and Martins Glen has considerable scenic value with its variations in landform which is complemented by a mosaic of pasture, heath and woodlands, resulting in a particularly rich landscape.”

3.3.7 It is thus clear that although the details surrounding the emergence of proposals to extend the AONB remain unclear, there has been a long history of subsequent district and county level studies and policies which tend to the view that there is land outside the existing AONB which has special qualities and which merits further investigation.

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### **4.0: Study Area**

#### **4.1 Rationale**

4.1.1 Projects to undertake a variation to the boundary of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are only undertaken rarely, so it is important to ensure that the area adjacent to a proposed boundary variation is carefully considered in order to ensure all land likely to meet the criterion for designation, has been adequately evaluated. As outlined above, some areas adjacent to the southern part of the existing Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB have long been recognised at local level as having a high landscape value and special qualities. These areas have for many years been subject to two local-level designations, an 'Additional Project Area' (APA) and the 'Dodnash Special Landscape Area' (SLA), which are reviewed below. The Additional Project Area and Dodnash Special Landscape Area are shown on **Figure One**.

4.1.2 AONB designation of part of the area has also been the subject of a long-standing aspiration by the relevant local authorities. Several studies in relation to this have been carried out and the aspiration to include land on the south side of the Stour remains reflected in the draft Tendring District Local Plan<sup>12</sup>. The areas covered by these two local designations (APA and Dodnash SLA) and relevant studies were used as the basis for identifying an initial Study Area for consideration.

#### **4.2 Additional Project Area.**

4.2.1 The Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB is unusual in that the AONB Partnership has long identified an area now termed the 'Additional Project Area' lying outside but adjacent to the existing AONB boundary, which covers the whole of the Shotley Peninsula, the Stour Estuary and an area of land to the south of the Stour Estuary. The Additional Project Area is recognised within both the AONB Management Plan and in the relevant local authority Area Plans, and has specific policies attached to it in order to conserve and enhance its special qualities. The extent of the Additional Project Area is shown on **Figure One**.

4.2.2 It has not proved possible to establish clearly the rationale behind the original designation of the Additional Project Area or its boundary, (which has changed slightly over the years), however anecdotally it is thought possible locally that it reflects land which has a visual link with the estuary and land which provides a setting to the AONB.

4.2.3 In the AONB Management Plan 2013-2018, it states that:

"Although AONB policies in national and local documents refer specifically to the statutorily designated areas, some adjacent areas share many similar landscape features. The AONB Partnership has been managing these areas of the Shotley

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<sup>12</sup> Tendring District Local Plan 2013-2033 and Beyond – Preferred Options Consultation Document, 2016

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Peninsula in the same way as the AONB proper, to protect and enhance their landscape and heritage.

The Partnership does wish to see the area on the Essex (south) side of the Stour Estuary, as defined by the Tendring Local Plan, formally designated as part of the AONB.”

4.2.4 The Additional Project Area thus forms a useful starting point from which to review whether there are additional areas which merit AONB designation in the area adjacent to the existing AONB. In light of the history of management of this area in line with the rest of the AONB and the statement in the AONB Management Plan that it shares similar landscape features (a fact also subsequently confirmed by examination of the relevant Landscape Character Assessments), the whole of the Additional Project Area was included within the Initial Study Area.

### **4.3 Dodnash Special Landscape Area**

4.3.1 For many years there has also been an additional local-level designation of relevance to the evaluation process called the Dodnash Special Landscape Area.

4.3.2 Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) were originally designated by Suffolk County Council, but the Suffolk Structure Plan 2001 delegated responsibility for defining such areas to District Councils through their Local Plans. Suffolk County Council defined these areas as:

“... areas, not nationally recognised where change could have an adverse impact upon a high quality environment and where the landscape requires protection”.

4.3.3 Within Suffolk, SLAs were defined to protect locally important areas of countryside which exhibited specific characteristics from unsuitable development. The specific characteristics were set out in policy ENV8 in the Suffolk Structure Plan 2001 and included two of relevance to the landscape in the Dodnash area:

“river valleys which still possess traditional grazing meadows with their hedgerows, dykes and associated flora and fauna”; and

“other areas of countryside where topography and natural vegetation, particularly broadleaved woodland, combine to produce an area of special landscape quality and character”.

4.3.4 Since 2006, Babergh District Council Local Plan has also identified areas which it considers to have particular landscape qualities which are important and has defined them as Special Landscape Areas (SLA).

4.3.5 Babergh Local Plan Alteration No. 2 (2006) defined an SLA called the Dodnash Special Landscape Area, whose boundary falls largely within the Additional Project Area, but whose western boundary extends further to the west in places. The boundary of the Dodnash SLA is shown on **Figure One**. This SLA was designated for the special qualities associated with its ancient woodlands and river valley landscapes. Within the SLA, Babergh District Council applies specific policies to ensure that new development proposals or recreation facilities:

- 1) maintain or enhance the special landscape qualities of the area, as identified in the relevant landscape appraisal; and

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- 2) are designed and sited to harmonise with the landscape setting; and
- 3) do not have an adverse impact on landscape character.

4.3.6 Since 2006 these policies have been saved and have continued to be applied in the Dodnash SLA, though they have subsequently been under review and there is no mention of SLAs in the 2015 Joint Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council Landscape Guidance.

4.3.7 In recognition of the fact that the Dodnash SLA has been recognised locally for some time as having a high value landscape, it was also included within the initial Study Area.

4.3.8 Since the boundaries of the two local level designations (Additional Project Area and Dodnash SLA) are not contiguous, a composite map was produced, with the Initial Study Area boundary drawn to include both areas. The Initial Study Area is shown on **Figure Two**.

## **5.0 Evaluation Areas**

### **5.1 Rationale**

5.1.1 The Natural England Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as AONB suggests that in order to aid the practical evaluation of a broad area of land potentially suitable for designation and to make evaluation a more manageable process, the Study Area should be divided into units of an appropriate scale to provide a spatial framework. These units are termed 'Evaluation Areas' and each is then subjected to the evaluation process.

5.1.2 The Guidance differentiates between two stages in this process, firstly characterisation and secondly evaluation.

5.1.3 Landscape characterisation identifies and describes areas in terms of their landscape features and characteristics and is a relatively objective, value-free process. It can define Landscape Character Areas which are geographically specific and unique in their character and/or landscape character types which have shared landscape characteristics and repeat across an area. Character areas and types can be mapped and descriptions developed for each.

5.1.4 Landscape evaluation in the context of landscape designation however, considers land specifically in relation to the technical criterion of outstanding natural beauty. It uses Landscape Character Areas as the spatial framework for more detailed analysis of whether the area has sufficient outstanding natural beauty for designation, using a series of factors and indicators which contribute to natural beauty.

5.1.5 Natural beauty is not exhaustively defined in legislation. It is a subjective concept and its assessment involves making value judgements. In order to make such judgements in a transparent and consistent manner, the Natural England Guidance sets out a framework of factors and sub-factors generally accepted as contributing to natural beauty which have been tested through previous designation projects, public inquiries and court cases. The relevant natural beauty factors and indicators are set out in Appendix Two and have been used as the basis for the detailed evaluation.

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### **5.2 Landscape Character Assessment as a Framework for Evaluation**

- 5.2.1 Evaluation Areas are defined at least initially, using recognised landscape character assessment techniques to divide the Initial Study Area into more manageable units which share characteristics. A range of Landscape Character Assessments (LCAs) which cover all or parts of the area under consideration were reviewed. A list of the LCAs reviewed is included in paragraph 2.2.4 above.
- 5.2.2 The starting point for the characterisation was the Suffolk Coast and Heaths National Character Area Profile which covers the whole of the area under consideration. This provides a high level broad-brush assessment of the character of the area and contains much useful high level background information. Below this sits the East of England typology (a regional-level LCA), which subdivides the entire area under consideration into landscape types. This is also a broad brush assessment. Although both assessments informed the evaluation process, neither provided a sufficient level of detail to define Evaluation Areas.
- 5.2.3 County and local level LCAs were also therefore reviewed. However, whilst robust evidence based documents, none cover the entire area under consideration. The two county level LCAs (Suffolk and Essex), which together cover the area, do not dovetail easily as they used different methods and they only identify broad landscape character types and are not sufficiently detailed.
- 5.2.4 Early LCA work on the Shotley Peninsula undertaken by LUC in 1993, on behalf of the then Countryside Commission, entitled *Suffolk Coast and Heaths Landscape Assessment: Technical Report* was also considered, though it is out of date and does not follow modern LCA best practice.
- 5.2.5 The most recent local-level Landscape Character Assessment which covers the majority of the Study Area and which does follow current best practice, is the *Shotley Peninsula and Hinterland Landscape Character Assessment* undertaken by Alison Farmer Associates<sup>13</sup> (AFA) on behalf of the Stour and Orwell Society and SC&H AONB Partnership. This document divides the Shotley Peninsula and land to the south of the Stour Estuary into Character Areas which share characteristics at a more local level. While it covers most of the area included within the Initial Study Area, a small part in the west lies outside of the assessment. As this LCA does cover most of the Initial Study Area it has been used as the most appropriate basis for informing characterisation, evaluation and definition of evaluation areas.
- 5.2.6 The AFA Landscape Character Assessment also provides a detailed character description for each of the areas under consideration. These have been adopted as the descriptions of the areas under detailed evaluation. The relevant character descriptions are included in **Appendix One**.

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<sup>13</sup> *Shotley Peninsula and Hinterland Landscape Character Assessment, Final Report*, Alison Farmer Associates, March 2013

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### **5.3 Refining the Initial Study Area**

- 5.3.1 A more detailed review of the landscape character assessments covering the area, in conjunction with the other information and data was then undertaken. This revealed that there was also an area of valley landscapes which appeared to merit detailed evaluation further to the west than the Additional Project Area and Dodnash SLA boundaries which formed the basis of the Initial Study Area. Since evaluation is an iterative process, the Initial Study Area was then extended westwards along the Samford Valley and neighbouring areas of plateau as far as the A12.
- 5.3.2 In order to produce a Landscape Character Area Map which covered the whole of the revised Study Area, the East of England Typology was used to identify the extent of the Character Areas which continue further to the west than the area covered by the Shotley Peninsula Plateau LCA.
- 5.3.3 The extent of the Samford Valley system as a whole in this area extends further west than the area covered by the Samford Valley Character Area in the LCA. It coincides with the extent of the Rolling Valley Farmlands Landscape Character Type in the East of England Landscape Typology for this area. As the Samford Valley Character Area in the AFA Landscape Character Assessment nests within this landscape type, the two datasets were dovetailed and the boundary of the Samford Valley Character Area has been extended further west using the boundary of this landscape type as far as the A12.
- 5.3.4 The valley slopes associated with the Samford River and the neighbouring plateau within the Shotley Peninsula Plateau Character Area also continue further west than the SLA boundary. The Shotley Peninsula Plateau Landscape Character Area has thus been extended further to the west, using the Wooded Plateau Farmlands and Wooded Plateau Claylands landscape types in the East of England Typology, as far as the A12 in this area.
- 5.3.5 The resultant composite map showing the Landscape Character Areas within the revised Study Area is shown in **Figure Seven**.

### **5.4 Definition of Evaluation Areas**

- 5.4.1 It is worth noting that the Natural England Guidance states in para 4.4 that “The use of Evaluation Areas is intended merely to make the practical work of detailed evaluation of landscapes more manageable. It is not intended to lead to the designation or exclusion from designation of any land merely because of the way in which Evaluation Areas have been defined. That is why the process is intended to be flexible and iterative in its application.”
- 5.4.2 Desk study revealed that some areas within the Study Area appeared to include a good range of features of a type considered likely to contribute to higher levels of natural beauty such as topographical variation, visual links to the estuarine landscape, high levels of tranquillity, and the presence of designated or other features of natural and cultural heritage interest. Other areas however, particularly parts of the plateau farmland, appeared to lack these types of features and to be flat areas of intensive agriculture typical of much of inland Suffolk and Essex, or areas where the urban influence of Ipswich was strong (refer to Figures Three, Four, Five and Six). Site visits confirmed this was the case.

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5.4.3 The Study Area was thus further refined in order to identify Evaluation Areas suitable for more detailed evaluation. This process excluded the parts of the Shotley Peninsula Plateau Character Area which lie outside the Dodnash SLA and the areas which are affected by proximity to the city of Ipswich, the A14 and major infrastructure within in the Belstead Brook Character Area, since they do not meet the designation criterion of outstanding natural beauty.

5.4.4 The desk study, mapping and site visits revealed evidence that there were three areas outside the existing AONB which merited further exploration. These were areas which lie firstly, within the Stour Character Area (Evaluation Area 1), secondly within the Orwell Character Area (Evaluation Area 2) and thirdly within the Dodnash Special Landscape Area (Evaluation Area 3). These three areas provide a suitable spatial framework for the detailed evaluation of the area.

5.4.5 From the Landscape Character Area Map (**Figure Seven**) it is clear that large areas of the Stour and Orwell Character Areas are already designated as AONB but that significant areas are not. These two Character Areas include land with a clear association with the estuaries and desk studies revealed that many of the areas which are not currently designated also share the estuarine characteristics and small tributary valleys typical of the AONB. The desk work also confirmed that the undesignated areas also appeared to contain features which can contribute to higher levels of natural beauty.

5.4.6 Within Evaluation Area 1: Stour Estuary, the estuary itself, several tributary river valleys, land around the head and mouth of the estuary, and land on the south side of the estuary were not included in the AONB at the time of designation. Initial site visits confirmed that there are significant variations in local landscape character within some parts of the Evaluation Area. Some areas are more urban, others more rural in nature and some are spatially separated. As a result the Evaluation Area has been further sub-divided to aid evaluation. These areas are shown as **Evaluation Sub-Areas S1-S6** and are shown on the Evaluation Areas Map in **Figure Eight**.

5.4.7 Within Evaluation Area 2: Orwell Estuary, two small areas of land associated with tributary valley systems running inland from the estuary were not included within the original AONB designation. Initial desk studies showed that these tributary valleys included features which can contribute to natural beauty. Both of the remaining undesignated valley systems were thus included within Evaluation Areas. These are shown as **Evaluation Sub-Areas O1-O2** on the Evaluation Areas Map in **Figure Eight**.

5.4.8 Evaluation Area 3, Dodnash Special Landscape Area is clearly considered to have landscape value locally and contains a range of features which are considered locally to mean that the area has a higher level of natural beauty, including its river valleys and extensive areas of semi-natural woodland. The SLA contains three Landscape Character Areas, the Samford Valley Character Area, the Holbrook and Alton Water Character Area and part of the Shotley Peninsula Plateau Character Area. These have been used as the basis for defining three further **Evaluation Sub-Areas, D1-D3** which are shown on the Evaluation Areas map at **Figure Eight**.

5.4.9 As described above, the Initial Study Area was extended further out to the west than the Dodnash SLA, as far as the A12 and this extended area was also included within

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Evaluation Areas D1 and D3, due to that fact that the river system which forms the basis for the Samford Valley Character Area actually continues further west than the Dodnash Special Landscape Area. Desk studies and site visits both confirmed that the continuation of the Samford Valley system and its associated slopes further to the west of the SLA, also contained a range of features likely to contribute to higher levels of natural beauty and that these areas also merited further evaluation.

5.4.10 The overall extent of the Evaluation Areas which were then subjected to detailed evaluation can be located on the **Evaluation Areas Map at Figure Eight**. In accordance with the Natural England Guidance, land adjacent to these Evaluation Areas was also considered, to ensure that transitions in landscape quality and the presence of features of interest on the margins of an Evaluation Area were taken into consideration.

## **6.0 Detailed Evaluation of Natural Beauty**

### **6.1 Rationale**

6.1.1 The approach to the evaluation of landscapes for designation as AONB derives directly from the legislation and as such requires an assessment of whether an area has outstanding natural beauty. Whilst natural beauty is not exhaustively defined in the legislation, the Natural England Guidance provides detail on the definition of natural beauty which has been used during this project and which draws on past designation projects and precedent. It is worth noting that the definition of natural beauty was clarified in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006<sup>14</sup> as follows:

“The fact that an area in England consists of or includes

- a) land used for agriculture or woodlands,
- b) land used as a park, or
- c) any other area whose flora, fauna and geological or physiographic features are partly the product of human intervention in the landscape,

does not prevent it being treated as being an area of natural beauty (or outstanding natural beauty)”.

6.1.2 It is also Natural England’s view (as stated in para 6.3 of the Guidance) that cultural heritage (e.g. archaeological, architectural and vernacular features and cultural associations) can also contribute to natural beauty and that any assessment of natural beauty must take these factors into consideration in accordance with the Natural England Guidance and precedent.

6.1.3 Natural beauty has been evaluated using the suite of factors and sub-factors identified as contributing to natural beauty which are included within the Evaluation

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<sup>14</sup> Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, section 99

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Framework for Natural Beauty, in Appendix 1 of the Natural England Guidance. This is included at **Appendix Two**. At a broad level, these factors include landscape quality, scenic quality, relative wildness, relative tranquillity, natural heritage features and cultural heritage features.

- 6.1.4 The range of evidence collated for each of these factors was considered in detail and conclusions recorded in the Evaluation Tables set out in section 6.2 below. The extensive sources of information, many listed in para 2.2.4, were referred to and formed the starting point for the evaluation. This was supplemented by additional field work and evidence gathering. It is however important to note that aspects of the evaluation exercise were dependent on the quality and extent of the information available at the time. The overall weight of evidence and spatial distribution of natural beauty for each Evaluation Sub-Area was considered in turn.
- 6.1.5 Then, for each Evaluation Area, a summary conclusion was provided as to whether part, or all, of each Evaluation Area should be taken forward as part of a Candidate Area for designation and any issues requiring further scrutiny were outlined. This then formed the basis for the mapping of the Candidate Area. It should be noted that a Candidate Area by definition demarcates an area that appears likely to be able to meet the technical criterion and does not have a hard boundary to its extent.
- 6.1.6 In addition, where areas are included in a Candidate Area, additional issues of relevance to the subsequent boundary setting process or which might affect the final extent of a qualifying area were recorded in the evaluation tables. These included areas where the landscape was in transition, areas of fragmentation, the influence of incongruous features, and the influence of any settlements on natural beauty.
- 6.1.7 Areas of transition occur where an element of landscape is changing either in terms of its character or qualities. Such changes may be sudden or gradual, though the boundaries of designated landscapes seldom follow a marked change in the level of natural beauty. The Natural England boundary setting considerations<sup>15</sup> state that the boundary should be drawn conservatively, towards the high quality end of areas of transition, excluding land of lesser quality. Visual associations may also be used to help define the extent of land for inclusion in these circumstances. On this basis it is acceptable that transitional areas are included within a Candidate Area for consideration at the boundary setting stage.
- 6.1.8 Fragmentation may occur, for example, where a landscape is physically separated by a feature such as major infrastructure which may have an impact on the landscape quality of an area; or by geological formations which cause a visual separation of an area from another area of similar character or quality. Where fragmentation is present, the degree to which it affects natural beauty depends on the fragmenting features, their visibility and the types of connections which remain between fragmented areas. Where fragmentation is present but does not significantly affect

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<sup>15</sup> Guidance for Assessing Landscapes for Designation as National Park or AONB in England, March 2011, Appendix 4.

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natural beauty overall, such areas have been included within the Candidate Area but will require particular scrutiny if taken forward.

- 6.1.9 Incongruous features of many kinds can have an effect on natural beauty, particularly factors such as scenic or landscape quality, tranquillity and relative wildness. The extent to which any incongruous feature affects an area will be dependent on its scale, height, distance, surrounding topography, vegetation and movement (e.g. wind turbine blades). Where incongruous features are present this is noted within the evaluation and will require further scrutiny at the boundary setting stage to ensure that only land which meets the natural beauty criterion is included within a designation.
- 6.1.10 Settlements can also have a significant effect on the surrounding area and their influence is thus recorded. In particular, whether the settlements have historic interest; whether there is extensive new development; whether there is a strong sense of place and whether the settlement lies within an area of qualifying land or is at the edge. Natural England Guidance states that settlements should only be included if they lie within a wider tract of qualifying land and should be addressed in relation to their particular merits and relationship to the surrounding countryside. It also stipulates that settlements should not be split by a designation.

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### 6.2 Evaluation Area 1: Stour Estuary

<b>Evaluation Area 1 Stour Estuary</b>	
<b>Landscape Context</b>	<p>This Evaluation Area has been defined based on the Stour Estuary Character Area identified in the Shotley Peninsula and Hinterland Landscape Character Assessment 2013. The Character Area comprises the whole of the Stour Estuary including its north and south valley sides and the water channel/mudflats and saltmarsh areas in-between. It is defined by the main break in slope between the valley sides and wider plateau landscape beyond and is therefore a visual landscape unit with a strong estuarine influence. The majority of the northern estuary slopes of this Character Area are already designated within the SC&amp;H AONB, however six parts of the Character Area are not and these have been considered in detail in this assessment. The six areas can be located on the <b>Evaluation Areas Map</b> at <b>Figure 8</b>. They are:</p> <p><b>S1: Harkstead</b> comprising the three typical small tributary valleys of Ashwell Brook near Harkstead, which merge within the AONB near Beaumont Hall. The shallow valleys have a fairly gentle topography and sloping sides. Starting at the break of slope from the plateau as dry valleys, not much more than shallow indentations in the plateau surface, they deepen and contain small spring-fed brooks in their lower stretches which arise where the Kesgrave Sands and Gravels and underlying London Clay meet.</p> <p><b>S2: Brantham</b> comprising a small tributary valley typical of others within the Character Area, an area of agricultural land lying west of the SC&amp;H AONB boundary, the settlements of Brantham and Cattawade and the head of the estuary, including both Cattawade and Middlebridge Creeks between the railway viaduct and the Dedham Vale AONB boundary. It is bounded to the west and north by the A137 and to the south-east by the Ipswich mainline railway, which also forms the existing SC&amp;H AONB boundary along part of its length.</p> <p><b>S3: Shotley Gate</b>, comprising the settlement of Shotley Gate and the largely derelict ex-navy training site at HMS Ganges, a stretch of foreshore at the tip of the Shotley Peninsula and those parts of the area around the settlement which are not already included within the AONB.</p> <p><b>S4: Head of the Estuary To Mistley</b>, comprising the head of the estuary (including Cattawade and Middlebridge Creeks east of the railway viaduct) and the tributary valley which extends inland between Manningtree and Mistley, formerly Mistley Park.</p> <p><b>S5: Central Estuary and Southern Slopes</b>, comprising the wide stretch of water from the existing AONB boundary on the northern shores to the southern foreshore and land running inland on the south side of the estuary.</p> <p><b>S6: Estuary Mouth and Ramsey Creak</b>, comprising land around Parkeston Quay and mouth of the Estuary across to Shotley Gate.</p> <p>Each of these areas is considered in turn in relation to the factors which contribute to natural beauty.</p>
<b>Area S1 Harkstead</b> <b>Natural Beauty Factors, Sub-factors and Evidence of Indicators</b>	
<b>Landscape quality</b>	<p><b>S1: Harkstead</b></p> <p>Overall, this rural, largely open, arable area is functionally intact with good expression of the typical short river valley topographical features and estuarine influence found throughout the Stour and Orwell Estuary areas. The area has the locally characteristic dispersed pattern of farmsteads and hamlets on the break of slope, a distinctive church and narrow lanes extending down from the plateau. Some small parts of the area retain other characteristic features including semi-natural</p>

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	<p>woodland, valley bottom pasture and smaller field enclosures. However, the majority of the area comprises a modern mix of open arable production in medium to large fields, coupled with modern sporting features including evergreen plantation shelter belts, edged by straight, close-clipped hedges and strips of laurel which have altered the characteristic vegetation patterns.</p> <p>There is little remaining evidence of the locally characteristic mixed farming in small to medium sized fields defined by hedges, or of past typically irregular enclosure patterns and traditional meadow management.</p> <p>Small areas of pasture defined by hedges along the streams, coupled with small ancient broadleaved woodlands provide some habitat and ecological connectivity and are in good condition, however the majority of woodland planting is largely stands of pine and larch and actively managed for sporting use, affecting both character and composition. There is little other semi-natural habitat apart from the streams.</p> <p>There are few large-scale incongruous features but the regular blocks and strips of woodland with laurel edges, have significantly altered the locally traditional estate woodland patterns and broadleaved woodland edge and hedge character. The Felixstowe cranes and the oil refinery at Harwich feature in views from higher areas, but are not dominant in the scene overall. There are also some low level electricity pylons and cables and the watercourses have been modified and deepened in many places affecting landscape quality locally.</p>
<b>Scenic quality</b>	<p><b>S1: Harkstead</b></p> <p>Scenic quality is derived from the gently rolling, interlocking topography of the valleys and small woodlands, which combine to pleasing effect, particularly when viewing the area from the road between Erwarton and Harkstead, as well as the occasional estuarine views visible from higher ground. The surrounding flat plateau land is largely hidden by the combinations of small woods on the skyline. In some places visual interest is enhanced locally by vernacular buildings built of local materials, the landmark church tower on the skyline at Harkstead and by characteristic river valley vegetation of pasture and hedges which add variety and interest. Additionally some views are framed by woodland both within the valleys and on the skyline and in some areas, blackthorn hedges have been left to grow untrimmed, providing a mass of white clouds of blossom in season.</p> <p>Within the majority of the area however, scenic quality is affected by the combination of extensive areas of modern arable agriculture, regular blocks of plantation woodland and modern sporting estate features; and from most of the area there are no estuarine views to add visual interest.</p>
<b>Relative wildness</b>	<p><b>S1: Harkstead</b></p> <p>This area has an agricultural character which does not exhibit a strong sense of relative wildness.</p>
<b>Relative tranquillity</b>	<p><b>S1: Harkstead</b></p> <p>The area has a strong sense of tranquillity derived from its rural nature, lack of development, occasional estuary views from higher ground, undulating landform and the sense of enclosure and peacefulness obtained in the valley floors.</p>

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<b>Natural heritage features</b>	<p><b>S1: Harkstead</b></p> <p>The current land use and gentle, shallow morphology of the river valleys reflect the geology of the area. The upper parts of the valleys are on Kesgrave Sands and Gravels, with bands of Red Crag in some places, and the well-drained loamy loess soils associated with this geology are clearly reflected in their use for arable modern agriculture. In contrast, below the conjunction with the London Clay, some parts of the valley floors still reflect the heavier wetter soils through their clear brooks and the retention of areas of improved meadows.</p> <p>Overall, there are no designated natural heritage features in this area and ecological interest is limited owing to the active management of the area for arable production, which continues down into the valleys in some places. Nevertheless the arable land is important for arable birds and there are some small areas of pasture surrounded by hedges within the tributary valleys. Some mature trees support mistletoe and there are a few small areas of ancient semi-natural woodland providing woodland and woodland edge habitat, though many of the woods in the area have been replanted with conifers and the broadleaved woodland edges are altered in several places by the introduction of laurel plantation strips, reducing their natural heritage interest. In the many of the woods, dense broadleaved and plantation canopies preclude light from reaching the woodland floor, so ground flora is sparse. In a few places, blackthorn hedges have been left to grow up unclipped, providing blossom and nectar and fruit sources in season.</p>
<b>Cultural heritage</b>	<p><b>S1: Harkstead</b></p> <p>This area was historically used for warrening (rabbit production for the table), a tradition which is still recorded in place names such as Warren Hill and Warren Bottom. These reflect the local geology of Kesgrave Sand and Gravel deposits, with their well-drained sandy soils and the ancient estate history of the area, with some estates, including Herchesteda, which subsequently gave its name to the Parish, recorded in the Domesday period. There are several listed buildings in the area including the landmark church at Harkstead and several houses built of traditional red brick and colour washed plaster, with pantile roofs. Interesting farm vernacular buildings also survive in places.</p> <p>There are no designated archaeological sites within the area, though there are many known archaeological and find sites dated to the Bronze Age, Roman and Mediaeval periods, reflecting its long history of agriculture and settlement. These include traces of embanked enclosures, barrows, ring ditches and field systems, which in places remained clearly visible above ground until as late as the 1970s. Owing to subsequent cultivation, these are now only visible as crop marks during dry weather. Of particular note are the remains of a late prehistoric/Roman cropmark complex, south-west of Rence Park Farm.</p>
<b>Evaluation</b>	<p><b>Overall weight and spatial distribution of natural beauty evidence</b></p> <p><b>S1: Harkstead</b></p> <p>The tributary valleys have a mixed weight of evidence, some areas have higher levels of natural beauty, but these are small and fragmented and the majority of the area has a lower weight of evidence of natural beauty. Overall there is a strong sense of tranquillity and landscape and scenic quality are highest where there is a combination of topographical variation, areas of semi-natural habitat, traditional pastoral management, and views of vernacular buildings and the church tower. However, these areas are limited in extent within a wider area which overall, lacks distinction due to intensity of agricultural use and sporting woodland management and a general lack of clear visual links with the estuary. The area as a whole also lacks significant natural or cultural heritage interest. On this basis this area is not considered suitable for inclusion within a Candidate Area for designation.</p>

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<b>Area S2 Brantham</b> <b>Natural Beauty Factors, Sub-factors and Evidence of Indicators</b>	
<b>Landscape Quality</b>	<p><b>S2: Brantham</b></p> <p>The north-east part of S2 comprises estuary valley slopes incised by a short tributary valley typical of the Stour Valley Character Area. The tributary valley has the distinctive shape and form of the short tributary valleys running down to the estuary within this Character Area. The undeveloped valley slopes form a continuation of the estuary valley slopes within the existing AONB particularly when viewed from the estuary and its southern slopes. Thus the north-east part of S2 has a visual unity with the adjacent AONB to the east. The western part of S2 comprises the two largely modern villages of Brantham and Cattawade which extend up the valley slopes from the estuary, and an extensive, largely derelict ex-chemical works. In the south-west of the area is a small low-lying area of grazing marsh and meadow and the head of the Stour estuary, (including Cattawade and Middlebridge Creeks west of the railway viaduct), which extends as far as the tidal limit flood gates adjacent to the A 137.</p> <p>Overall, the north-east part of the area has an attractive character, its landscape quality derived from the typical valley topography and estuary slopes, the well-wooded skyline and the historic village core of Brantham around the church, including the Glebe. The Church with its landmark steeple, views of neighbouring high quality landscapes within the existing AONB, an attractive area of access land at Pattles Fen, occasional views of the estuary and the extensive well-wooded grounds of several large houses all contribute to high landscape quality locally.</p> <p>Landscape condition is good in the immediate vicinity of the historic core of Brantham, due to its intact historic layout and vernacular buildings with their associated well-wooded grounds, but elsewhere the rural parts of the area no longer exhibit the characteristic mixed farming in small to medium sized fields, due to loss of hedges and changes in land use. Despite the relative steepness of the tributary valley slopes, the valley is in open arable production with no pasture and very few hedges. In addition, the stream has been straightened and runs in a ditch.</p> <p>The railway which defines the south-eastern edge of this area runs in a cutting across the higher estuary slopes but runs on a high embankment further south, such that the tributary valley is largely visually and physically cut off from the estuary. Where housing estates back onto the break of slope of the tributary valley sides they give a built up feel and a hard suburban edge overlooking the valley. A sewerage works sits at the base of the valley, though this is well-screened by trees.</p> <p>Landscape quality in the south and west of S2 is affected by a range of incongruous features. These include the extensive, largely derelict ex-chemical works adjacent to the estuary, the large modern housing developments of Brantham and Cattawade which generally do not reflect the local vernacular styles or materials, modern railway infrastructure including metal gantries and electrification cables and a high embankment. High and low voltage power cables also run across the area.</p> <p>In the south-west of S2, between Cattawade and Middlebridge Creeks west of the railway, there are several well managed marshy coastal meadows grazed by cattle and the 18<sup>th</sup> Century brick Cattawade Bridge, both of which have a positive effect on landscape quality locally. The area is however visually and physically fragmented by the A137 and separated from the rest of the estuary by the mainline railway to Ipswich, which runs on a high embankment and a viaduct along the boundary of S2.</p>

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	<p>Landscape quality at the head of the estuary is also affected by the large concrete flood management gates and infrastructure, high voltage power cables and engineered sea walls.</p>
<b>Scenic Quality</b>	<p><b>S2: Brantham</b></p> <p>From higher ground and adjacent areas on the plateau rim near the A137 there are good views to the east and south across the tributary valley topography, where the mainline railway runs in a cutting, towards high quality land within the AONB and across the estuary. Here, on the far side of the estuary, areas of broadleaved woodland at Furze Hill Woods, and the attractive and historic settlement of Mistley provide added visual interest to views. The traditional distinctive wharves, store buildings, malthouses and working boatyard at Mistley and small boats at angles on the mud at low tide on the estuary also add variety and historic interest to the scene. In the vicinity of the historic core of Brantham, scenic quality is higher owing to the local effect of Pattles Fen, an area of wet woodland, and several large houses with extensive ornamental grounds and many mature trees.</p> <p>Views of the estuary are however, only visible from the highest ground and around the head of the estuary, (where the near and far sides of the estuary have a largely developed hard edge of sea walls and industrial development both at Cattawade and Manningtree) which is very different from the largely undeveloped banks of most of the Stour Estuary. The scenic quality of the south-western part of the area is affected by views of the industrial estates and extensive modern housing visible on the neighbouring valley slopes at Manningtree and Lawford and two tall masts draw the eye in views to the south side of the estuary. From lower areas within the tributary valley, whilst the valley topography contributes contrast and variety, estuarine views are completely blocked by the tall mainline railway embankment or crossed by tall high voltage power lines, both of which undermine scenic quality. The hard edge of modern urban development on the skyline at Brantham also affects scenic quality to the west of the bridleway running south-east from Brantham to the railway line.</p> <p>Viewed from the south side of the estuary, the tributary valley is hidden from view by trees near the railway; however the sloping arable fields immediately to the east of Brantham Glebe are clearly visible, forming a continuation of the rim of the undeveloped estuary slopes, which lie within the existing AONB. The housing estates extending up the valley slopes at Cattawade and Brantham and tall factory buildings and chimney affect scenic quality in views from the south side of the estuary between Manningtree and Mistley.</p> <p>At the head of the estuary there are attractive views west towards the valley slopes within the Dedham Vale AONB and also (looking beneath the railway viaduct), of the estuary towards Manningtree and Mistley. Here, scenic quality also derives from the estuary channels and mudflats, the presence of grazing meadows and stock and Cattawade bridge, however scenic quality is significantly affected by the presence of incongruous features including high and low voltage power cables, the large concrete flood gates controlling the tidal limits of the estuary, traffic on the busy A137 and frequent trains on the mainline railway.</p>
<b>Relative Wildness</b>	<p><b>S2: Brantham</b></p> <p>The areas under consideration have either an agricultural or a settled character which do not exhibit a strong sense of relative wildness.</p>

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Tranquillity	<p><b>S2: Brantham</b></p> <p>Relative tranquillity is derived from the agricultural land uses of the rural parts of this area, but is reduced by the influence of the overlooking settlements and the frequent periodic transient noise and movement of freight and passenger trains passing through on the mainline railway. Levels of tranquillity are lower adjacent to the settlements, at the head of the estuary and alongside the busy A137 road which runs along the northern edge of the area. There is a small area of higher tranquillity in the immediate vicinity of the historic core of Brantham, where the impact of the railway is reduced since it runs in a cutting and there are views across high quality, quiet, rural landscapes within the AONB and of the water in the estuary, which contribute to a more pronounced sense of tranquillity in this part of the area.</p>
Natural Heritage Interest	<p><b>S2: Brantham</b></p> <p>Overall, this area has few natural heritage features, reflecting its developed nature or its active management as arable farmland. There is a small area of access land to the immediate south of the old core of Brantham which is also designated as a county and local wildlife site. This Woodland Trust owned site called Pattles Fen, is a small area of broadleaved woodland and marshy grassland. It abuts the extensive wooded grounds and mature specimen trees of several large houses, and together these provide an area of varied habitat which is lacking across the developed parts of S2.</p> <p>There is little clear expression of the geology of the area apart from the tributary valley morphology in the north of the area which shares the typical characteristics of such valleys in this Character Area.</p> <p>The head of the estuary within S2 is part of the area which is considered internationally important for its natural heritage features, particularly geese, ducks and waders and is designated Special Protection Area, Site of Special Scientific Interest and Ramsar. There are extensive areas of mudflats at the head of the estuary, important as a food source for the wide range of bird species and a small area of coastal and floodplain grazing marsh/meadow north of the railway viaduct at the mouth of the estuary which provides winter feeding sites for birds on the estuary. In places, the now largely derelict chemical works site provides a range of habitats for ruderal and other colonising species, including sheets of ground ivy which in spring provide striking large mats of purple flowers on the hard standings immediately adjacent to the decoy. There is a small area of semi-natural emergent marsh vegetation and secondary woodland around the former duck decoy pond adjacent to the industrial area.</p>

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<b>Cultural Heritage</b>	<p><b>S2: Brantham</b></p> <p>Cattawade was an important ancient river crossing point, one of only two land access points to the whole of the Shotley Peninsula. The current 18<sup>th</sup> Century three-arch, brick Cattawade bridge has now been by-passed by the modern A137 road and is listed Grade II. The small village of Cattawade which developed next to the bridge is now dominated by the immediately adjacent and currently largely derelict extensive ex-celluloid (Xylonite) factory site. Brantham New Village was a model industrial village of houses built in 1891 to house workers at the then new, pioneering chemical works. It is now largely surrounded by estates of post-war housing which extend up the valley side from Cattawade onto the plateau top, joining the largely modern settlement of Brantham. Importantly the historic origins of Brantham village remain physically separate from this modern development. The cluster of buildings which immediately abuts the top of the tributary valley contains several listed buildings, including Brantham Church, its Lych gate, and several houses in its vicinity. Historic maps indicate that there was Glebe land here and that the main dwellings and church were surrounded by parkland. The church tower is a highly visible landmark and the mature trees in the area form a wooded skyline in views from some parts of the south side of the estuary.</p> <p>Just to the west of Brantham New Village, immediately west of S2 lies Braham Hall, also a listed building, where Thomas Tusser, who claimed to have introduced barley to the eastern counties, lived in the seventeenth century. He wrote a book about farming and household management which was the source of many well-known proverbs such as 'A stone that is rolling can gather no moss' and 'It is an ill wind that blows nobody good'. More recently, Margaret Thatcher worked for ICI at the chemical works for a few months from 1947.</p> <p>Immediately adjacent to the Chemical Works site lies Brantham Duck Decoy. This historic sporting feature is a pond designed to catch pochard (known locally as dunbirds) in nets; this was in use until it was apparently 'ruined' when the Great Eastern railway cut through its immediate vicinity in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and large areas of neighbouring estuary were reclaimed for industrial use. It has since deteriorated in condition, losing its characteristic decoy features. Though still extant, the three distinctive decoy 'pipes' are now largely silted up and hidden in thick emergent vegetation and secondary woodland. It is currently managed as an amenity fishing pond.</p>
<b>Evaluation</b>	
<b>Overall weight and spatial distribution of natural beauty evidence</b>	<p><b>S2: Brantham</b></p> <p>There is a significant weight of evidence of natural beauty relating to the north-eastern part of S2. The land immediately adjacent to the existing AONB boundary and in the vicinity of the old core of Brantham has a high landscape and scenic quality, largely owing to the tributary valley morphology and views across parts of the existing AONB and towards the south side of the estuary, west of Mistley Towers. Brantham Church, Pattles Fen and the well-wooded grounds of several large houses add further cultural and visual interest and the level of tranquillity is higher here than in the rest of the area. The duck decoy is a significant cultural heritage feature on the margin of the area.</p> <p>From the south side of the estuary, the arable fields immediately to the east of Brantham Glebe, on the rim of the estuary slopes, are clearly visible, forming a continuation of the slopes within the AONB whose skyline forms the limit of the visual envelope of</p>

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	<p>the estuary. This increases the weight of evidence for the inclusion of this part of S2. The skyline and valley slopes further to the west are also visible, but they are heavily influenced by the urban settlement and industrial areas and there is little evidence for their inclusion.</p> <p>Away from the north-east part of S2, the weight of evidence of natural beauty is lower, owing primarily to intensity of use, physical and visual fragmentation and the influence of detracting features such as the modern settlements, the industrial areas and derelict sites, high voltage power cables and the influence of the busy railway and its infrastructure. The remainder of S2 is thus not deemed to sufficiently meet the natural beauty criterion and has not been included within the Candidate Area.</p>
<b>Area S3 Shotley Gate</b> <b>Natural Beauty Factors, Sub-factors and Evidence of Indicators</b>	
<b>Landscape Quality</b>	<p><b>S3 Shotley Gate</b></p> <p>The area lying outside both the existing AONB boundary and S4 is predominantly developed land, including the settlement of Shotley Gate, a modern marina, a length of foreshore and the extensive derelict land associated with the former naval site at HMS Ganges.</p> <p>The original settlement at Shotley Gate began as ribbon development up Bristol Hill, running north from the waterfront to the rim of the plateau and some older houses remain in this area. However, subsequent development of large modern housing estates to the west has significantly altered its character and form as generally they do not reflect the local vernacular styles or materials. The location of the settlement overlooking both the large container port at Felixstowe and the port of Harwich and the modified area of foreshore with its engineered road and sea walls, marina, piers and slipways ensure that it lacks the characteristic undeveloped shoreline and natural heritage features found elsewhere along the estuary.</p> <p>Features contributing positively to landscape quality derive from the area's position immediately adjacent to the estuary and the neighbouring areas of the AONB to the north and to characteristic estuarine elements such as changing tides, mudflats, small boats on the water, the two historic Martello towers and sections of distinctive low cliff, typical of those which occur in several places along the Stour estuary. Landscape quality is however affected by the influence of incongruous features such as the heavily engineered sea walls and coast road, the large cranes and gantries of the container port, very large ships stacked high with containers at Felixstowe and modern port infrastructure on the south side of the estuary at Harwich.</p>

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<b>Scenic Quality</b>	<b>S3 Shotley Gate</b> Positive contributions to scenic quality in areas where the estuary is visible derive from the estuary with its tidal changes, mudflats and associations with boating. Features including piers and slipways, wrecks, boats and birds on the shoreline contribute to scenic quality however the large-scale shipping, container port infrastructure and the modern marina, while very interesting, do not contribute positively to natural beauty. The settlement is almost entirely surrounded on its landward side by land within the existing AONB and houses along the northern edge of the settlement benefit from views across the existing AONB; however most of the settlement is orientated away from the AONB towards the estuary. Scenic quality within the area as a whole is affected by the fact that the whole area is predominantly developed; with several large mid-20 <sup>th</sup> century housing estates and the extensive area of previously developed land of the HMS Ganges site.
<b>Relative Wildness</b>	<b>S3 Shotley Gate</b> This area has a settled character and does not exhibit a strong sense of relative wildness.
<b>Tranquillity</b>	<b>S3 Shotley Gate</b> The area included within S3 does not have a strong sense of tranquillity owing to its developed nature and its location in close proximity to the large ports of Felixstowe and Harwich and the constant noise and shipping traffic associated with them.
<b>Natural Heritage Interest</b>	<b>S3 Shotley Gate</b> Owing to its highly developed nature, there are no designated features of natural heritage interest within S3. The small stretch of foreshore from the slipways and pier round to the modern marina at Shotley Point which lie within S3 are excluded from the immediately adjacent Stour and Orwell Estuary SPA, SSSI and Ramsar sites, designated for their important assemblages of geese, ducks and wading birds, though wading birds can be seen along the tide line occasionally. There is a short stretch of low cliff above Admiralty pier and below the western Martello tower. This stretch of cliff is typical of the low cliffs which occur in several places along the Stour estuary, though in places it is partially developed and modified or covered with developing scrub vegetation, masking its character.
<b>Cultural Heritage</b>	<b>S3 Shotley Gate</b> Shotley Gate has very strong historical associations with the Navy. It was the site of the largest Royal Navy cadet training establishment in Britain, HMS Ganges, which is a Conservation Area, but now largely derelict and scheduled for redevelopment. The HMS Ganges site was the subject of planning application B/12/00500 approved in 2012, for mixed housing, office, retail and workshop development.  There are various features of maritime heritage interest in the area, including two wrecks adjacent to the shore. Listed buildings include the 143ft tall ceremonial mast of HMS Cordelia, a well-known landmark feature clearly visible in views from the estuary and a set of gates, piers, railings and lamp standards at the entrance to HMS Ganges site. Scheduled Monuments include two 19 <sup>th</sup> Century Martello towers built to withstand an invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte (one of which currently supports the distinctive water tower built to serve HMS Ganges, the other a look-out tower) and the mid-19 <sup>th</sup> Century Shotley Battery, all of which are prominent in views from the estuary towards Shotley Gate. Admiralty and Bristol Piers and the Shotley 'hard' used by trading barges (a 'hard' is a more solid section of an otherwise muddy shoreline suitable for mooring or hauling out boats) reflect the long naval and trading history of the area. There is also a range of non-scheduled World war Two features such as pill boxes, artillery battery and barrage balloon sites reflecting its strategic location at the mouth of two estuaries.

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<b>Evaluation</b>	
<b>Overall weight and spatial distribution of natural beauty evidence</b>	<p><b>S3 Shotley Gate</b></p> <p>There are several features of cultural heritage interest reflecting the important maritime heritage of the area. Overall however, landscape and scenic qualities are significantly affected by the settlement's modern developed character, the extensive area of derelict land at HMS Ganges and the proximity of a range of features which do not contribute positively to natural beauty. These, include the large ports of Felixstowe and Harwich, the heavily engineered sea walls and the modern marina. There is little sense of tranquillity in this busy harbour area. The weight of evidence is not sufficient for this area to meet the natural beauty criterion.</p>
<b>Area S4 Head of the Estuary to Mistley</b>	
<b>Natural Beauty Factors, Sub-factors and Evidence of Indicators</b>	
<b>Landscape quality</b>	<p><b>S4 Head of the Estuary to Mistley</b></p> <p>This Evaluation Area includes the head of the estuary between the railway viaduct and The Walls (including Cattawade and Middlebridge Creeks), and southern valley sides (including the settlements of Manningtree and Mistley and the tributary valley system between them, the latter formerly parkland associated with Mistley Hall).</p> <p>The head of the estuary is defined by the narrowing of the waterway between old Manningtree port and a promontory of reclaimed land to the north (refer to evaluation area EA: S2 Brantham). The shoreline is predominately man-made and flood defence embankments and sheet piling line the shoreline. Those around the promontory partially enclose the head of the estuary, restricting perceptions of connectivity to the wider Stour from the upper reaches of the estuary within this Evaluation Area. Nevertheless, the water, mudflats and saltmarsh at the head of the estuary form part of the wider estuary ecosystem and the Stour Estuary SSSI and SPA. Although the condition of the southern shoreline throughout this Evaluation Area is noted as unfavourable, declining due to saltmarsh erosion, the water, mudflats and remaining salt marsh contribute positively to landscape quality in this area, as do the many birds and the small boats moored on this stretch of the estuary.</p> <p>The context of the upper reaches of the estuary affects landscape quality. Manningtree and Mistley both have historic cores associated with their trading history resulting in distinctive historic maltings, warehouses and wharfs along the waterfront which contribute to the setting of the estuary. However, both settlements have also experienced significant urban growth which has surrounded their historic centres and lacks distinction, affecting the landscape quality of the settlements overall. In particular modern development in Manningtree has risen up the southern estuary valley sides and there are industrial areas on the lower slopes adjacent to the flood defence embankments. This more recent development along with the reclaimed promontory to the north, which is currently derelict land, has an urbanising influence on the area, in part due to the narrowing of the waterway and also due to close proximity. As such there is a transition in landscape quality from the main estuary westwards, and the visual clutter associated with the railway bridge and high voltage pylons beyond, becomes more dominant towards the head of the estuary.</p> <p>The land between Manningtree and Mistley comprises gently sloping valley sides dissected by a number of small streams giving rise to an undulating landscape which flattens towards the water's edge. This area comprises the formerly designed landscape and estate of Mistley Hall and later design features of Mistley Place Park (in the north of the area). Some elements of these parklands survive including specimen and veteran trees, woodland planting, water features, listed buildings and tracks, and</p>

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	<p>much of the area retains a pleasant parkland character. However the condition of features is varied as noted below.</p> <p><i>Land between estuary and railway line.</i></p> <p>This area comprises the flat land adjacent to the estuary and lower valley sides. The shoreline itself comprises an area of valued salt marsh, mudflat and open water with views out across the estuary to the northern valley sides and to Brantham Church. Here the visible association with the wider estuary contributes to landscape quality. Although there is some noise and visual intrusion from The Walls road, the sounds and sights of the estuary remain dominant. The saltmarsh adjacent to The Walls is under pressure from recreation and erosion and now much reduced in extent.</p> <p>Immediately inland from The Walls in the west is Lower Park (an individual property which is not visually obvious, being surrounded by mature trees) and in the east, Mistley Place Park Tea Rooms and animal sanctuary and recreation grounds. The current land use at Mistley Place Park has caused extensive visual clutter and fragmentation of the landscape through the proliferation of animal shelters and field enclosures, development of modern buildings and car parking. The area is bounded to the north and south by busy roads with a suburban character. Nevertheless there are remnant parkland elements within this area which are still evident e.g. veteran trees, Hopping Bridge and designed lake/woodland, although their condition is generally poor. The Hopping Bridge was partially demolished at the time of the upgrading of the Walls Road, with only its inland parapet wall surviving. The remnant designed lake has heavily eroded banks and is suffering from nutrient enrichment leading to algal blooms and the woodland associated with Mistley Place Park is lacking management. A number of the mature trees are however in reasonable condition (e.g. to the west of Lower Park).</p> <p>To the southwest of New Road is an area used for recreation including a play area within open amenity grassland, cricket pitch and bowls and associated pavilions. Together with the busy New Road, this gives rise to a suburban managed amenity character in this area. Despite the close proximity of the settlements of Mistley and Manningtree, the extensive areas of housing are however not visually dominant and the urban edge is often concealed by mature vegetation. To the east there is a mature hedgerow pattern defining small fields with the land being used for a graveyard and paddocks. The southern boundary of this area is flanked by the vegetated line of the railway which is not conspicuous. The area retains a predominately open and leafy character although the landscape quality and condition of this landscape is mixed.</p> <p><i>Land between the railway line and Green Lane.</i></p> <p>In this area the former parkland landscape has been subdivided. In the west, some of the land along the railway forms part of the gardens of Mistley Lodge containing tennis courts and domestic gardens. Land immediately to the south is used for pony paddocks divided by post and wire/rail fencing which has caused visual and physical fragmentation. Nevertheless the area retains a strongly pastoral character and mature trees, some dating from the former parkland landscape, are still evident in places (e.g. the Round Clump). In this landscape there are some filtered views (especially in winter), towards the northern upper valley slopes and glimpses of the shores over the railway where it is at grade or in a cutting, along with views to industrial quayside buildings and the church tower, all of which contribute to sense of place and landscape quality. The exception is the eastern third of the area where the railway is on an embankment and severs views. The embankment is well wooded and although there are glimpsed views of overhead gantries from close proximity, the railway does not especially detract from</p>
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	<p>landscape quality. Landscape quality and condition is higher in the east reducing towards the west.</p> <p><i>Land south of Green Lane to the Clacton Road.</i></p> <p>East of Dairy House, the tributary valley slopes retain a strong parkland character comprising open rough grazing, veteran parkland trees (oak, lime, ash), water features (Gamekeepers Pond and a more recent water feature at the confluence of tributary streams to the east of The Dairy), and woodland (Furze Wood) all of which contribute to landscape quality. The pastures are traditionally grazed by livestock and there is evidence of recent field boundary management and tree planting in keeping with the parkland character. In places there is evidence that the parkland character and features of this landscape have lacked positive management over the years with a number of the veteran trees suffering crown dieback or 'stag heads' and some areas of former parkland have been ploughed and converted to arable production, including upper valley slopes.</p> <p>Furze Wood (formerly an area of open land containing dispersed oaks trees) has, over the last century, been in-filled with plantation and secondary woodland which has altered the character of the area. However, large ancient oak trees remain within the woods e.g. Old Knobbley and contribute to landscape quality and tangible time depth. In places sycamore has colonised the woodlands and around Gamekeepers Pond, the valley has become overgrown with scrub and there is a lack of management of waterside vegetation. The original water management features of Gamekeepers pond have also recently been replaced by new structures which do not reflect the designed landscape history and the lake is currently managed an amenity fishing pond, affecting landscape quality. However in the last decade the woods, associated pasture and pond, have been identified as valuable locally for their mosaic of habitat types.</p> <p>In this area there are dispersed buildings the majority of which relate to the former Mistley Park estate, which are listed (see cultural heritage interest below). There is evidence of recent restoration/renovation works and these buildings appear to be in a good state of repair.</p> <p>West of Dairy House, the area south of Green Lane is in transition to the plateau landscape which surrounds the estuary and Mistley Hall (the 19<sup>th</sup> Century replacement for the original manor house of the parkland) sits on higher land to the southwest, overlooking the tributary valleys to the east. The house is currently used as a community centre and there has been some 20th century expansion to the buildings and car parking while surrounding the house the landscape has been converted from parkland pasture to arable, although a number of mature parkland trees remain (some stag headed). These factors result in a transition in landscape quality in this area. Similar influences are felt closer to the Clacton Road where the land starts to rise out of the valley slopes and onto the higher plateau landscape to the south. South of Mistley Hall, close to Clacton Road a new lake has been created which suffers from eroded banks and poor bankside vegetation.</p> <p>On the outer fringes of this area closer to New Mistley the quality of the landscape declines as the adjacent urban areas exert an influence. A former Cold War bunker and associated communications mast is surrounded by metal fencing and exerts an urbanising and unkempt character on land immediately adjacent.</p>
<b>Scenic quality</b>	<p><b>S4 Head of the Estuary to Mistley</b></p> <p>Scenic quality varies significantly in this area. On the Essex side of the head of the estuary in areas lying south of the tip of the</p>

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promontory at Cattawade, there are opportunities for memorable and highly scenic views eastwards, down the full length of the estuary and across mudflats and saltmarsh at low tide, dotted with moored boats. There are also some significant historic portside buildings fronting the estuary in Manningtree and Mistley, which are best appreciated from the water or northern shores and contribute to the sense of place and the estuary's scenic qualities. However despite these positive attributes scenic quality around the head of the estuary is undermined by industrial development and infrastructure, the derelict industrial land at Cattawade and extensive areas of modern housing extending up the valley slopes on both sides which have an urbanising influence on many views. Incongruous features such as the flood defence embankments, manmade foreshore and sheet piling, as well as high voltage pylons beyond the area are also visually intrusive. These elements result in a transition in scenic quality north-westwards due to their scale and proximity and the fact that as the estuary narrows, views to the wider estuary are lost due to the promontory of re-claimed land which protrudes southwards into the estuary from the northern shore at Cattawade.

The settlements of Manningtree and Mistley are partially designated as a Conservation Area, reflecting their historic importance as ports on the Stour and the main streets through both settlements are lined by vernacular houses and shops many of which are highly attractive. Historic features such as the Swan Fountain and Mistley Thorn public house also contribute to higher quality areas along the main street through Mistley. However over the latter half of the 20th century these settlements have undergone considerable growth up the valley sides and onto the plateau farmland inland. The more recent development associated with the settlements now dominates the historic cores and is not of high scenic quality.

Between Manningtree and Mistley, the waterfront, north of The Walls has attractive views across an open expanse of water, mudflats and saltmarsh dotted with moored boats (which add visual interest and colour), backed by the rising undeveloped valley slopes which lie largely within the existing AONB giving rise to scenic quality. Mistley Place Park however, despite having views out towards the estuary, is adversely affected by the cluttered appearance of the brick buildings, car parking and structures associated with Mistley Place Park Tea Rooms and animal sanctuary, which reduce the scenic quality of this area.

Between New Road and the railway the landscape has a managed amenity appearance, reflecting its proximity to the settlements. New Road has a suburban feel including tarmac pavements and the recreation uses of the area blur the distinction between the settlements to a degree. Views to the estuary are also restricted by vegetation along New Road. Nevertheless the mature trees and open grassland areas combined with views to landmark buildings such as St Mary and St Michael Church, Mistley Towers and the quayside buildings/maltings offer some scenic quality. Whilst urban housing areas lie adjacent on both sides of this area they, in the main, do not intrude visually into this landscape, being well screened by mature vegetation and an avenue of relatively young trees along New Road.

South of the railway line the undulating topography, pasture and grazing, parkland trees and water features, create a visually pleasing combination of landscape elements which overall give this area a higher scenic quality. Visually varied topography creates interesting vistas and compositions of landscape elements. The dispersed buildings which relate to the former park estate have a unified character and visually link this area together and contribute positively to the scenic qualities creating attractive focal points. Varied grassland types including dry acid grassland on the higher ground with swards of tussocky rush near the streams gives rise to a variety of texture and colours, while areas of arable on upper slopes add to landscape

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	<p>compositions reflecting the transition to the more productive plateau land. In the area between the railway and green lane, scenic quality is however affected by fencing and subdivision of the area for pony paddocks and gardens and scenic quality also reduces west of Dairy House where conversion to arable has occurred and the plateau influence is stronger.</p> <p>Significant views can be obtained across areas of former parkland from Clacton Road and Green Lane. Views of the Maltings, and to the upper northern estuary slopes from more elevated locations, act as a reminder of the proximity to the estuary and association of this parkland landscape with estuary trade and the Rigby family. This is also reinforced in views from the northern valley slopes where the land between Manningtree and Mistley comprises visually pleasing patterns of woodland and pasture which extend down to the waterfront. In these views the mature trees (including European Black Pine and oaks) along the northern boundary of Mistley Place Park make a particular contribution to views of the waterfront.</p>
<b>Relative wildness</b>	<p><b>S4 Head of the Estuary to Mistley</b></p> <p>There is little to no relative wildness in this landscape except for parts of Furze Wood where the knarled forms of the ancient oaks impart a strong time depth and a wild magical quality.</p> <p>Elsewhere the urbanising influence of development at the head of the estuary, settlements and amenity land uses within other parts of the evaluation area mean that relative wildness is not evident.</p>
<b>Relative tranquillity</b>	<p><b>S4 Head of the Estuary to Mistley</b></p> <p>The settlements of Manningtree and Mistley do not express tranquillity. Development also adversely affects tranquillity at the head of the estuary and at the north-east and north-western extremities of the area formerly covered by Mistley Park.</p> <p>Tranquillity is most readily experienced in the southern parts of the tributary valley area between Manningtree and Mistley and especially along Green Lane and on the footpaths to the south which pass through the remaining former parkland landscape and broadleaved woodland. Here, the tributary valley landform coupled with the strong parkland character provides an area of highly tranquil valley experience with the traditional land management practices associated with the grazed parkland still visible. Broadleaved woodland with veteran trees provides a contrast with the more open parkland character and has a deeply historic and slightly eerie character, the knarled pattern of branches on the veteran oaks appear personified, and the density of woodland often feels disorientating. In these areas the proximity to urban areas is not perceived.</p> <p>In this area, the clear-running brooks and parkland water features provide occasional views of water and the sound of running water is present in some places. Bird song and flowering trees such as hawthorn also contribute in season. There is a transition in tranquillity on approaching the rim of the tributary valleys towards the south. Here the influence of arable farming increases, with its associated machinery movements, and road noise from Clacton Road is evident.</p> <p>Tranquillity also reduces to the north of the railway due to busyness associated with New Road and The Walls road (B1352) which connect villages along the south shore of the estuary. Traffic on these roads and their suburban character has a localised influence on tranquillity as does the momentary noise intrusion from trains (passenger and freight). In addition land uses (animal</p>

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	<p>sanctuary, café, car parking and amenity landscape) affect the sense of tranquillity, being more urban in character. However those areas closest to the shoreline experience higher tranquillity as a result of the expansive views across the water and the strong presence of calling birds across the mudflats.</p>
<b>Natural heritage features</b>	<p><b>S4 Head of the Estuary to Mistley</b></p> <p>The extensive settlements and industrial areas within this evaluation area limit the natural heritage interest of most of the Evaluation Area. However, the whole of the open water channel, mudflats and saltmarsh form part of the wider Stour Estuary SSSI, Ramsar, and SPA sites. These are particularly valued for wildfowl and waders which make a significant contribution to the scenic and perceptual qualities of this landscape, with large numbers of Black-tailed godwits regularly feeding on the mudflats immediately adjacent to The Walls road. The SSSI unit which runs along the Essex side of the estuary is however in unfavourable declining condition due to on-going loss of saltmarsh.</p> <p>Between Manningtree and Mistley there are numerous mature and veteran trees, some dating from the former Mistley Park Estate. These old trees often have significant deadwood providing valued habitats particularly for invertebrate species, and bat roosting sites adding visual interest and sense of time depth to the landscape. In addition broadleaved woods in this area contribute a changing range of seasonal colours and bird song, adding to the special qualities. Along the stream lines and in the adjacent areas of wet meadow, small areas of alder, hawthorn and blackthorn hedges and small copses add habitat variety and seasonal blossom and fruit and bird song and contribute to the strong appeal of the area to the senses.</p> <p>Hopping Bridge Marsh between The Walls and the Stour Estuary SSSI is a County Wildlife Site comprising an area of valued saltmarsh, though this is now much reduced in extent and still eroding. Furze Wood is also a County Wildlife Site, comprising grassland to the west with woodland and a lake to the east. The grassland areas include dry acid grassland on higher ground while nearer the stream the sward is tussocky rush-dominated pasture or damp meadow. The variations in vegetation type contribute to natural beauty.</p>
<b>Cultural heritage</b>	<p><b>S4 Head of the Estuary to Mistley</b></p> <p>This landscape contains a range of historic features which add local interest and time depth and contribute to the area's natural beauty, though their condition is varied. The historic cores of Manningtree and Mistley, as well as part of the estuary and foreshore and former Mistley Hall estate, are included in the Manningtree and Mistley Conservation Area for reasons of heritage interest and distinctive character. The historic port of Manningtree (which received its charter in 1238) has fine Georgian buildings and historic pubs many of which are listed. The Mistley area is closely associated with three generations of the Rigby Family who were instrumental in the establishment of new wharfs and maltings at Mistley and with the later Norman Family who created Mistley Place Park. The village of Mistley contains many characterful vernacular buildings, including the 18<sup>th</sup> century quay, wharves, warehouses, granaries, maltings and large steam mill (many of which are listed). Mistley has a strong sense of place particularly when viewed from the water or northern shores. The extant features from the Mistley Hall estate and a spa town planned by Richard Rigby (most of which was never constructed) make a positive contribution to natural beauty. These include the Swan Fountain, the Hopping Bridge, a gatehouse and Mistley Towers (the latter also a Scheduled Monument), all of which were designed by Robert Adam.</p> <p>The extent of the former parkland landscape associated with the original Mistley Hall is still visible in the landscape, though it is now permanently fragmented by two busy roads and the railway and largely declining in condition. It is however characteristic of</p>

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	<p>parklands which have traditionally been positioned on the valley sides overlooking the estuaries in the wider AONB. The former parkland features have a group value and include veteran trees, woodland blocks, two small lakes and historic buildings including the stables, dairy, and gatehouse. The collection of listed buildings and structures associated with Mistley Hall and its estate (including Hopping Bridge, Old Hall, garden wall at Old Hall and Dairy House) make a notable contribution to the natural beauty of the area. The Church of St Mary and St Michael associated with the later Mistley Park Estate is also listed and its fine steeple is a local landmark. Many veteran trees including Old Knobbley (voted second in the Woodlands Trust Tree of the Year 2014 and possibly 800 years old) make a notable contribution to the time depth of the landscape and its natural beauty in this area.</p>
<b>Evaluation</b>	
<b>Overall weight and spatial distribution of natural beauty evidence</b>	<p><b>S4 Head of the Estuary to Mistley</b></p> <p>Towards the Head of the Estuary the weight of evidence of natural beauty is affected by the influence of detracting features such as settlement growth extending in visible form up the valley slopes, manmade foreshore and sea defences, industrial and derelict areas. The land bordering the estuary in this Evaluation Area is not deemed to sufficiently meet the natural beauty criterion. The open water, mudflats and salt marsh are however contiguous with the main estuary and are considered to meet the natural beauty criterion, though this is in transition where views of the wider estuary are lost towards the head of the estuary and the influence of detracting features becomes stronger. This will need further consideration at the boundary setting stage when a suitable boundary will need to be drawn within the transition.</p> <p>Detailed consideration has been given to the settlements of Manningtree and Mistley which share a single Conservation Area that also includes the former parkland between them. The special intact historic character of the central core areas of both Manningtree and Mistley and their relationship and juxtaposition to Mistley Hall and its former parkland and the Stour Estuary is recognised. Nevertheless these settlements have undergone significant expansion in the 20th century with more recent development extending onto the plateau landscapes above the estuary where landscape quality is declining. As a result, the settlements as a whole can no longer be regarded as sitting fully within a high quality landscape. Whilst the historic cores of these settlements remain strong and intact it is not possible to include only the main historic centres within a Candidate Area as this would ultimately result in the splitting of a settlement during boundary definition. For reasons of significant modern growth and a desire to avoid the splitting of a settlement in accordance with NE guidance, both Manningtree and Mistley are not included within the Candidate Area.</p> <p>From the north side of the estuary, the wooded and apparently undeveloped character of the landscape between Manningtree and Mistley forms part of the estuary slopes and is clearly visible, forming a continuation of the slopes which define the estuary.</p> <p>There is a significant weight of evidence of natural beauty relating to the foreshore in front of The Walls road and to part of the land between Manningtree and Mistley, south of the railway. These areas have a higher landscape and scenic quality, largely owing to the tributary valley morphology, former parkland features and views across the Estuary to the northern shores or valley slopes. Buildings associated with the former Mistley Hall estate along with veteran trees and later woodland (e.g. Furze Wood) add further cultural and visual interest and the level of tranquillity is higher in these areas than elsewhere in the Evaluation Area. These areas have been included within the Candidate Area. Natural beauty is however in transition on the southern fringes of</p>

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	<p>this area where parkland has been converted to arable use and the character changes to typical plateau farmland. Fragmentation also occurs north of Green Lane, where the former parkland has been enclosed and is fragmented in places by fencing and pony paddocks and where in the east, the railway viaduct blocks views towards the estuary. Land to the north of the railway between Manningtree and Mistley is less distinctive, comprising areas of amenity space with a suburban character and is of poor quality north of New Road. These latter areas are not deemed to sufficiently meet the criterion of outstanding natural beauty and have not been included within the Candidate Area.</p>
<b>Area S5 Central Estuary and Southern Slopes</b> <b>Natural Beauty Factors, Sub-factors and Evidence of Indicators</b>	
Landscape quality	<p><b>Area S5 Central Estuary and Southern Slopes</b></p> <p>This area of landscape comprises the expansive open water, mud-flats and saltmarsh of the estuary and the southern valley slopes between New Mistley and Parkeston Quay and is contiguous with the AONB boundary along the northern shores of the Stour. When viewed from within the existing AONB looking south, the southern shores form a matrix of woodland, arable and pasture, typical of estuary valley sides within the wider AONB, defining the Stour Estuary as a single landscape unit. The area has a strong visual unity, with the southern slopes forming the rural backdrop to the open waters of the estuary with trees often crowning the break of slope/skyline.</p> <p>There is good survival of characteristic features in places, such as low sandstone cliffs, open intertidal mudflats, saltmarsh, ancient woodland, tributary valleys, historic lanes which drop down the valley sides (eg Wall Lane), and a scatter of listed buildings, giving rise to a strong and distinctive landscape where many key characteristics are well represented. Where detracting features occur their effects are often localised e.g. farm reservoirs, new agricultural buildings, recreation based development eg Copperas Farm, caravan site off Stone Lane and development at Wheatsheaf Close. The railway between Mistley and Parkeston crosses through the area on the lower estuary slopes and is often not evident in views, running mainly at grade or in a cutting. Where it does run on an embankment and severs views immediately to the south of the line, the effects are felt only locally e.g. from the Essex Way and the B 1352 to the west of Jacques Hall.</p> <p>Much of the southern valley slopes have however experienced significant change such as field boundary loss and field rationalisation, since the turn of the 20th century. This has altered and simplified historic landscape patterns and reduced landscape quality, but has given rise to open views across the estuary in places. Little of this area is currently managed under Agri-Environment Schemes, and overall habitat and ecological connectivity is restricted to the sparse network of woodland and hedges and grass verges along rural lanes/tracks. The area contains linear belts of broadleaved woodland along some water courses e.g. adjacent to Mill Lane and between Spinnel's Hill and the railway line, as well as more extensive areas of ancient woodland in the east. The broadleaved woodlands are in the main well-managed, for example there is evidence of ongoing woodland management in Copperas Wood from coppicing activity and cut stools and timber piles, while Stour Wood is owned by the Woodland Trust and managed by the RSPB and has had a long history of coppicing management.</p> <p>'Long Marsh' near Wrabness remains a distinctive flat area with some floodplain grazing marsh, though partially drained and landscape quality is affected locally by horsiculture.</p>

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	<p>The mudflats, saltmarsh and open water all remain strong elements of the estuary landscape although the saltmarsh and mudflats have historically been subject to loss - eg around 60% of saltmarsh was lost between 1973 and 1997 mainly due to erosion, while dredging of the channels for container ships at the eastern end of estuary has affected the stability of some mudflats.</p> <p>The water quality in the Stour is very good. All sections of the estuary have been graded as 'A' according to the Environment Agency's estuarine classification system thus supporting a strong ecosystem which contributes to the qualities of the estuary.</p>
<b>Scenic quality</b>	<p><b>Area S5 Central Estuary and Southern Slopes</b></p> <p>This is a scenic landscape, with a strong visual unity, where the interplay of the gentle farmed and wooded slopes (primarily between sea level and the 30m contour), the flat and textured expanse of saltmarsh and mudflats and open water at high tide, and undulations created by tributary stream valleys combine to create attractive landscape compositions. Within areas of broadleaved woodland, carpets of spring flowers such as wood anemone, contribute flashes of colour in season which stimulates the senses. Similarly small patches of acidic vegetation such as bracken and gorse on upper slopes along lane verges and in hedgerows add colour and texture and contribute to scenic quality.</p> <p>The estuary as a whole has a strong sense of place reinforced by local landmark features such as the church at Wrabness as well as views north across the estuary to striking landmarks including the estate house of Stutton Park, the façade of the Royal Hospital School and the church tower and Martello towers at Erwarton and Shotley Gate respectively. The views from the southern shores across the estuary are particularly striking because they benefit from being fully lit on sunny days whereas looking south from the northern shore, views can be obscured by sunlight and the details of the valley slopes are less easy to distinguish. There are particularly superb views of the estuary from Ship Hill along the B1352.</p> <p>The southern estuary shores consist of a series of shallow bays divided by promontories, some wooded or tree-lined eg at Copperas Wood and Nether Hall. This combined with the undulating and occasionally intimate, sometimes wooded, character of the small valleys which penetrate inland contrasts with the expansive Stour estuary.</p> <p>The mudflats along the shoreline are peppered with yachts and dinghies particularly at Wrabness and Holbrook Bay, often resting at an angle on the mud at low tide and the sight of a solitary white sail on the water is commonplace, adding interest and focus. The large numbers of wading birds and wildfowl add interest in season. Along the Wrabness peninsula there are small sandy beaches backed by a unique and eclectic mix of beach huts on stilts. Away from these areas the bays and mudflats are unfettered by human structures and retain a strongly natural character.</p> <p>In places there are excellent open views across the water from the adjacent settlements and upper valley slopes. The B1352 coast road and network of lanes along the valley sides emphasise the undulating nature of the valley sides and provide some outstanding views of the Suffolk shore across the estuary. The railway between Mistley and Harwich also offers intermittent but striking and sweeping estuary views both directly across the open water but also along the estuary to the east and west. Where the valley sides jut out into the estuary, as at Wrabness, there are elevated views where the profile of the valley sides and low cliffs and flatter marshes and mudflats along the water's edge form attractive compositions of high scenic quality. There are also elevated and lower-lying outstanding views over the estuary in places including from the Essex Way, which crosses the higher</p>

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	<p>land from Mistley Heath to Jacques Hall and then follows the edge of the Stour eastwards for much of its length.</p> <p>In general land above the 30m contour tends to flatten out forming the fringes of a wider plateau which stretches to the south. Along these fringes there are often elevated scenic views across the estuary slopes and open water. There is a gradual transition from the fringes of the plateau moving southwards. The wider plateau generally lacks the geomorphological variation of the estuary slopes and valleys, loses visual connection with the estuary, and has a more intense arable use with large-scale fields. Similarly in the tributary valley stretching into the plateau around Lonbarn Bridge, estuary views are lost and the area is affected by fruit farming, a solar farm, intensive arable and poplar plantation thus lacking the scenic quality and views of land to the north.</p>
<b>Relative wildness</b>	<p><b>Area S5 Central Estuary and Southern Slopes</b></p> <p>The estuary is unusually wide compared with other estuaries within the existing AONB; an apparently vast area of open water at high tide. At ebb tide the river shrinks and in its upper reaches is little more than a narrow channel which snakes its way across the huge expanses of inhospitable mudflats. There is a strong sense of openness and relative lack of human influence when away from settlements and roads and particularly when along the shores of the Stour which have a predominately undeveloped character. In these locations evidence of human activity appears distant and the semi-natural habitats and processes associated with the water and tide offer a sense of 'closeness to nature' and isolation. There is a strong sense of relative wildness locally at Jacques Bay and Copperas Bay owing to lack of sea walls giving a naturalistic shoreline in these stretches, while at Wrabness Depot Nature Reserve, there is a strong sense of a return to nature with thick scrub and secondary woodland developing.</p> <p>Occasionally there are areas where the sense of remoteness is undermined such as between Stour Wood and Copperas Wood where housing along Wrabness Road locally detracts from a sense of remoteness, or in close proximity to the oil refinery at the eastern end of this area. However these effects are localised.</p> <p>Away from the shoreline areas described above, there is no sense of relative wildness owing to the active agricultural management of the farmland on the valley slopes and plateau beyond.</p>
<b>Relative tranquillity</b>	<p><b>Area S5 Central Estuary and Southern Slopes</b></p> <p>The area as a whole has a peaceful, informal estuary character as a result of open water views and semi-natural habitats which lend a sense of timelessness, with only occasional small hamlets and farms. Where ancient woodlands and old hazel coppice occur they provide contrasting hidden, intimate landscapes. On the valley slopes the network of winding narrow rural lanes which traverse the area, ancient woodland with its associated spring flora and woodland copses give intermittent enclosure. This contrasts with open estuary views from arable farmland which exhibits a strong sense of tranquillity. The villages of Bradfield and Wrabness lie on the periphery of the area (on the upper slopes and edge of the plateau) and their influence on tranquillity on the valley slopes and estuary is limited.</p> <p>Outside settlements, much of the land is private with few rights of way and there is limited access to the foreshore except by foot. Consequently visitor numbers are fewer than other more accessible estuarine landscapes and where footpaths run along the shoreline they do offer a high level of remoteness, where it is possible to feel 'away from it all'. Even where there is a concentration of activity, such as near the beach huts at Wrabness, tranquillity remains strong.</p>

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	<p>At the mouth of the estuary the oil refinery, Parkeston Quay and cranes at Felixstowe have a limited visual influence on the Central Estuary and Southern Slopes generally. They reduce perceptions of tranquillity only locally in part due to the character of the estuary shoreline with its promontories and curving bays which hide them from view in most places, but also where they are visible, due to the perceived sense of distance across the open expanse of water.</p> <p>On the southern shores, the railway (passenger and freight line) follows the shoreline fairly closely and momentary noise intrusion from the trains alters the otherwise strong tranquillity, as does the B1352 road.</p> <p>In the plateau landscape to the south, and in places on valley slopes converted to arable production, agricultural machinery and farming activity may reduce tranquillity intermittently.</p>
<b>Natural heritage features</b>	<p><b>Area S5 Central Estuary and Southern Slopes</b></p> <p>The influence of glacial melt waters at the end of the Ice Age is clearly evident in the Stour Estuary which has a distinctive wide, relatively straight valley profile compared to other estuaries within the AONB, with a series of curving shallow bays between small promontories. Its mudflats and saltmarsh express a soft sedimentary geology, while the gently rising valley sides comprising clay and glacial loams extend up to the surrounding plateau.</p> <p>The Stour is one of the most important wildlife estuaries in Europe, of international importance for wildfowl and waders (SSSI, SPA and Ramsar) supporting an interesting and diverse wildlife population, in both sub-tidal and intertidal areas which contribute movement and visual interest to the area. These include wader species such as redshank, black tailed godwit, dunlin, grey plover, knot, curlew, ringed plover, and turnstone and wildfowl species including wigeon, pintail, shelduck, brent goose and mute swan. The large bird populations are heavily dependent on the mudflats and saltmarshes around the estuary, the mudflats containing vast numbers of invertebrate species, which provide a food source for various birds. Saltmarshes also support rare plant assemblages and invertebrate populations, and provide cover for roosting and feeding birds, while in the water there are many invertebrate and fish species.</p> <p>The areas of salt marsh on the coastal edge e.g. at Copperas and Jacques Bays complement those already within the AONB on the northern shores (e.g. Erwarton Bay).</p> <p>On the southern slopes of the estuary there are areas of ancient deciduous woodland and coppice which form important landscape features. Stour and Copperas Woods (SSSI) together form the largest area of woodland in north-east Essex and the only site in the county where coastal and woodland habitats meet. Within these ancient woodlands sweet chestnut, ash, oak, wild cherry, hornbeam, lime, hazel and birch are all present and carpets of spring flowers including primrose, wood anemone, euphorbia, red campion, yellow archangel, stitchwort and bluebell, are a notable feature adding considerably to the area's scenic qualities.</p> <p>Around Bradfield there are remnant signs of acidic vegetation with patches of bracken and gorse in the hedgerows and along lane verges which add to scenic quality and visual interest.</p>

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	<p>There are also a number of smaller areas of ancient woodland on the southern valley slopes that have been designated as county wildlife sites e.g. Millgrove Wood and Brakey Wood. Field and village ponds are a feature of the eastern part of this landscape and of local biodiversity value.</p> <p>In a few places along the shores of the estuary are short stretches of low sandstone cliff eg at Stone Point. The cliffs are interesting geologically and are formed largely of soft clays and red crag (shelly sand and gravel), which in places contain both sharks teeth and coprolites (fossil faeces). There is also a rock band of small nodules called septaria, owing to the gaps (septa) which develop between the nodules during formation. This stone was much exploited for use in making Roman cement during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and used in Stucco locally, such as that at Mistley Hall. Notable areas of low cliffs occur in the Wrabness and Shotley areas adding topographical variety to the shoreline and opportunities for fossil hunting.</p> <p>The area at Wrabness Depot and Marsh is a Local Wildlife Site comprising grazed grassland, scrub wood, and ponds with marshy grassland heavily grazed by ponies. The grassland is flower rich and adds to the visual interest and texture of the landscape.</p>
Cultural heritage	<p><b>Area S5 Central Estuary and Southern Slopes</b></p> <p>The historic patterns of this landscape are reflected in the dispersed settlement pattern of farmsteads and hamlets and the ancient leafy lanes dropping down the valley sides which may be Saxon in origin e.g. Wall Lane at Wrabness Point.</p> <p>There are distinctive holiday huts on stilts (some of which retain their 1920's character) at Wrabness Point and a number of Halls located on the valley sides which historically have taken advantage of the estuary views e.g. Jacques Hall (late 19th century country house with distinctive Dutch gables), Nether Hall and Wrabness Hall (the latter two are listed). Other historic buildings which add visual interest to the landscape include Wrabness Church and Wrabness Bell-Cage as well as old farmhouses including Home Farm (New Mistley) and Foxes Farm (Wrabness). The remains of St Mary's Church at Mistley Heath and a Pill Box near Spinnel's Farm both Scheduled Monuments, are located on the outer fringes of the valley slopes and in dry weather the non-scheduled cropmark of a post medieval windmill may be visible on the 30m contour at Jenkins Hill. Ragmarsh Farm is an attractive farmhouse with a range of traditional vernacular buildings.</p> <p>There are a number of known archaeological sites including the sites of former salterns, old jetties and quays as well as ship wrecks, which are revealed at low tide from time to time and add to the visual interest along the shoreline and the appreciation of the historical importance of this waterway for trade eg the partially submerged remains of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century sailing barge Victoria at Bradfield Beach. The site of a former decoy pond, west of Nether Hall, hints at the importance of the estuary for sporting interests. Bradfield is a Conservation Area, with a concentration of historic buildings and a traditional village layout around the parish church. However further to the south and into Bradfield Heath there is more modern housing development. Here the historic integrity and visual quality of the settlement lacks distinction.</p> <p>A naval mine depot dating from 1921 was an important ordnance site at Wrabness Nature Reserve. Some large warehouses remain, and are still in industrial use, but the associated railway network and station joining the mainline railway have now gone</p>

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	<p>and the site has a strong sense of being reclaimed by nature with thick scrub developing in many places across the site. Historically connected and an annex to this site was a large WW II Royal Naval sea mine depot, hidden in the woods at Copperas Wood Farm. Although some large storage buildings remain, much of the site was cleared after the War.</p> <p>Copperas Bay takes its name from the old industry of copperas (bisulphide of iron) gathering of which took place in the bay until the 1870's. This industry exploited the pyritised fossil wood deposits by dredging them from the mud and taking them to Harwich to produce green vitriol, for use in woollen dying, tanning and ink production.</p> <p>A house for Essex, a striking modern folly designed by the renowned artist Grayson Perry, sits in a prominent position on the valley slopes above East Grove Woods.</p>
<b>Evaluation</b>	
<b>Overall weight and spatial distribution of natural beauty evidence</b>	<p><b>Area S5 Central Estuary and Southern Slopes</b></p> <p>Overall, the natural beauty criterion is met over most of the Central Estuary and Southern Slopes Evaluation Area. There is a considerable weight of evidence in relation to landscape quality, scenic quality and tranquillity, and evidence of relative wildness, natural heritage and cultural heritage, particularly in areas associated with the expanse of water, mudflats and saltmarsh and foreshore. The natural shoreline, open expanses of water, scatter of moored boats, birdcalls, gentle estuary slopes, ancient woodlands, occasional stream valleys, and occasional historic buildings give rise to a high level of natural beauty.</p> <p>There are some spatial variations in the weight of evidence of natural beauty. The valley slopes have been subject to intensive arable farming such that there are few remaining hedgerows, semi-natural habitats, archaeological or other landscape features. Nevertheless the upper slopes and the edge of the plateau afford elevated memorable views across to the northern shores and/or across open water and undulating valley sides where tributary valleys penetrate inland, and have a high scenic quality. Particular scrutiny will be required when defining the boundary to balance the need to draw the boundary conservatively and yet to identify a clear line on the ground, especially within an area of transition.</p> <p>The small settlements of Mistley Heath, Bradfield Heath and Bradfield were reviewed as part of this evaluation. Modern linear development along the lanes means that it is difficult to perceive their separate identities. In addition, the land to the south of Bradfield comprises open arable farmland stretching onto the plateau landscape. There is no overt sign of the former heathland character of this area and the relatively flat and intensively farmed landscape is not considered to meet the natural beauty criterion. As a result, the settlements of Mistley Heath, Bradfield Heath and Bradfield do not sit within a high quality landscape but at the margins of the area which meets the natural beauty criterion. They have thus been excluded from the Candidate Area</p> <p>The small hamlet of Wrabness lies at the junction between the valley slopes of the Stour estuary and the inland agricultural plateau. It is not a Conservation Area and has little historic interest. It does not sit within a high quality landscape, the land to the south of the settlement comprising intensively farmed agricultural plateau with little to no association with the Stour Estuary. On this basis the settlement of Wrabness has also been excluded from the Candidate Area.</p>

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<b>Area S6 Estuary Mouth and Ramsey Creek</b> <b>Natural Beauty Factors, Sub-factors and Evidence of Indicators</b>	
<b>Landscape quality</b>	<p><b>Area S6 Estuary Mouth and Ramsey Creek</b></p> <p>The area includes the mouth of the estuary and adjacent areas of development along the shoreline (including an oil refinery, train depot, Parkeston Quay, Harwich International Passenger Terminal and Bathside Bay) and the Ramsey Creek valley system running inland from Parkeston. Seen from the northern shores, the south side of the estuary is dominated by the storage silos of the refinery and quays. Immediately behind this is a small hill (Ramsey Ray which historically formed a small island) overlooking Ramsey Creek to the south. Beyond this to the south are the sloping valley sides which define the Stour Estuary, the upper slopes of which have been developed as part of Upper Dovercourt.</p> <p>Ramsey Creek is a tributary to the Stour and meanders unobtrusively through a relatively open and flat valley with gentle valley sides. The floodplain shows some survival of characteristic floodplain features including the flat topography, open views and a small area of wetland habitat, however much of the original floodplain has been reclaimed and developed and the remaining undeveloped area has been extensively drained and intensively farmed. Medium to large fields defined by gappy hedgerows and drainage ditches are typical, reflecting agricultural intensification and conversion of pasture to arable. In places there is evidence of scrub invasion in areas of undermanaged grassland. Built development including a golf course, sewage works and the A120 has also occurred in this area and adjacent development forms a backdrop and context. The embankments of the disused railway line which cuts across the valley to the north of the watercourse, and landform, block views across the floodplain and to the estuary from the valley floor. To the south of the valley floor the valley sides rise gently with the steeper slopes supporting a smaller scale field pattern defined by thick hedgerows especially around Pond Hall Farm.</p> <p>On the western side of this area along the shore in front of the oil refinery there is a shingle bank flood defence which is the same colour as the shore material and visually unobtrusive. This defence bank slopes down to a high metal fence which defines the edge of the oil refinery compound. The railway line runs between the refinery and shore. There is a sharp contrast between these manmade features and the nearby natural shoreline of mudflats and salt marsh to the west, the latter retaining its physical cohesiveness and a high landscape quality despite proximity to incongruous features.</p>
<b>Scenic quality</b>	<p><b>Area S6 Estuary Mouth and Ramsey Creek</b></p> <p>Ramsey Creek valley is inward looking and is visually cut off from the wider estuary to the north by the developed reclaimed land. The windmill above Ramsey and Michaelstow Hall are important features in views across the valley and add visual interest and focal points which contrast with the Upper Dovercourt residential estates which have encroached into the valley landscape.</p> <p>The valley landscape is affected by field boundary loss, land reclamation from marshland and a growing range of urban and industrial influences including a sewage works, golf course and oil refinery. The area as a whole has a semi-urban character, surrounded on three sides by development with visual and noise intrusion from traffic on the A120. These factors undermine the area's scenic quality.</p> <p>From the upper slopes of the valley there are views out across the estuary, however these are primarily in a northeast direction</p>

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	<p>towards Felixstowe Docks with its large-scale cranes and container shipping.</p> <p>Along the western shoreline adjacent to the oil refinery there are views out across and down the estuary towards the undeveloped slopes within the existing AONB. In the area of Bathside Bay the open marshes and mudflats are similar to those found elsewhere within the estuary however the area is adversely affected by neighbouring land uses and high industrial fencing around the bay. From here there are views to Shotley Gate and Felixstowe Docks which are prominent and appear close due to the scale of the cranes and container ships. The shoreline and waterway in this area appear busy and developed and lack the natural scenic qualities of the estuary to the west.</p>
<b>Relative wildness</b>	<p><b>Area S6 Estuary Mouth and Ramsey Creek</b></p> <p>This area has an industrial and/or urban fringe character and does not exhibit a strong sense of relative wildness. Even the open expanse of water at the head of the estuary has a busy character with large-scale container ships moving in and out of the estuary mouth.</p>
<b>Relative tranquillity</b>	<p><b>Area S6 Estuary Mouth and Ramsey Creek</b></p> <p>The port developments, oil refinery and cranes at Felixstowe have a strong physical presence and visual influence on the area, affecting both the open water of the estuary mouth and the southern shoreline of the estuary in this Evaluation Area. Noise and visual intrusion from traffic on the A120 undermine the area's tranquillity particularly in Ramsey Creek. The effect on tranquillity of both passenger and freight trains on the railway is intermittent.</p> <p>Away from these areas and within the Ramsey valley floor, tranquillity is higher.</p>
<b>Natural heritage features</b>	<p><b>Area S6 Estuary Mouth and Ramsey Creek</b></p> <p>The Stour is one of the most important wildlife estuaries in Europe, of international importance for wildfowl and waders (designated as SSSI, SPA and Ramsar). These designations however do not extend into the mouth of the estuary to the north of Parkston Quay and Harwich International Passenger Terminal but instead follow the County Constituency Boundary across the estuary between Deep Fleet creek and Erwarton Ness further to the west and continue east along the Lean Low Water Mark to Parkeston and Shotley Gate, with the intertidal area of Bathside Bay forming an outlier to the designations.</p> <p>The southern valley slopes and Ramsey Valley support a number of local Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation. These include small isolated areas of semi-natural woodland, scrub and wet pastures which are of nature conservation value e.g. Michaelstow Hall (matrix of mature trees and grassland - although there are signs of lack of management eg stag head oaks and rough grassland), Whinny Grove, Dockfields Avenue Allotments, The Hangings, and Station Lane Grassland. In particular Ramsey Ray is the largest of these local conservation sites, the easterly area around the railway embankment and Delf Pond includes a mosaic of open water, marginal reed beds, grazed species-rich grassland and scattered scrub.</p>
<b>Cultural heritage</b>	<p><b>Area S6 Estuary Mouth and Ramsey Creek</b></p> <p>The settlements of Harwich and Dovercourt are both important historic maritime settlements with strong connections to the sea and trade. Both are designated Conservation Areas with many historic features still extant. The historic port of Harwich also has a high concentration of Scheduled Monuments mainly associated with coastal defence including Beacon Hill Fort (late 19th and early 20th century coastal artillery fortification, the Harwich redoubt (low level platform for guns which formed an integral part of the chain of Martello towers in the early 19th century), and a Napoleonic coastal battery.</p>

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	<p>Michaelstow Hall includes a neo-Georgian style Mansion built in 1902 (set adjacent to the former parkland of Michaelstow Lawn). It is associated with a gatehouse and much earlier Saxon church on the valley slopes overlooking Ramsey Creek. Clustered around the house are also relatively recent infill housing developments which do not reflect the local vernacular.</p> <p>Other features of historic interest include Ramsey Village Conservation Area on the edge of the Evaluation Area and Ramsey windmill which is the most easterly windmill in Essex relocated from Woodbridge in 1842.</p> <p>In terms of historic landscape patterns Ramsey Creek is a modern landscape containing drained marshes with post 1950's enclosures which have also experienced hedgerow loss. The only area with some earlier remnant enclosures is around Pond Hall Farm.</p>
<b>Evaluation</b>	
<b>Overall weight and spatial distribution of natural beauty evidence</b>	<p>There are several features of cultural and natural heritage interest reflecting the maritime heritage of the area and land management. Overall however, landscape and scenic qualities are significantly affected by Harwich and Dovercourt's modern developed character which has extended down the Ramsey Creek valley slopes in a visible manner. These settlements although adjacent to the Stour Estuary, at its mouth and confluence with the Orwell Estuary, do not sit within a landscape which meets the natural beauty criterion. In particular they are separated from land further west by Ramsey Creek.</p> <p>Furthermore, the declining landscape quality of Ramsey Creek and the proximity of a range of features which do not contribute positively to natural beauty, including the large port of Felixstowe and international ferry at Parkeston, and oil refinery at Parkeston Quay all undermine the area's natural beauty, including from the open water at the mouth of the estuary and there is little sense of tranquillity in this area. The weight of evidence is not sufficient for this area to meet the natural beauty criterion and it has been excluded from the Candidate Area.</p>
<b>Candidate Area</b>	
<b>Overall recommendation as to land that should be considered a Candidate area</b>	<p>The parts of the Stour Estuary which are considered suitable for inclusion within a Candidate Area include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A small area in the north-east of <b>S2: Brantham</b>. Land which forms part of the undeveloped northern slopes of the estuary which meets the natural beauty criterion is included, along with the tributary valley where landscape quality, scenic quality, tranquillity, natural and cultural heritage factors are present to a higher degree.</li> <li>• The foreshore and an area of upper tributary valley containing part of the former parkland associated with the original Mistley Hall in <b>S4: Head of the Estuary and Mistley Park</b> which meet the natural beauty criterion are included within the Candidate Area. It should be noted however that an area of non-qualifying land (also part of the former parkland of Mistley Hall) separates the foreshore from the qualifying tributary valley land to the south of the railway and has not been included within the Candidate Area. See the 'Need for Further Scrutiny' section below.</li> <li>• The open water, mudflats and saltmarsh at the head of the estuary in <b>S4: Head of the Estuary and Mistley Park</b> which meet the natural beauty criterion have also been included within the Candidate Area at this stage. This will however require particular scrutiny at the boundary setting stage to avoid including areas which are significantly affected by incongruous features and a transition in natural beauty.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The majority of <b>S5 Stour Estuary and Southern Slopes</b>. Land which forms the southern slopes of the estuary where it meets the natural beauty criterion has been included, together with the majority of the Stour Estuary.</li> </ul>
<b>Need for further scrutiny</b>	<p>Based on the analysis above there is a need for particular scrutiny around settlements where defining a boundary may be more problematic. The extent to which the historic core of Brantham can be included within a proposed boundary variation and the likely effects of proposed housing and industrial regeneration in the area will need careful consideration.</p> <p>At the head of the estuary, landscape and scenic quality are in transition and the effects of incongruous features on the area will need further scrutiny. At the mouth of the estuary where the boundary will need to cross open water, the Candidate Area has been drawn to reflect the Suffolk County Constituency boundary and will need further consideration at the boundary setting stage.</p> <p>In order for the land which meets the natural beauty criterion between Manningtree and Mistley (i.e. south of the railway) to be included in the proposed AONB variation, the principle of wash-over would need to be applied to non-qualifying land i.e. the land between The Walls and the railway. The principle of wash-over was established during the designation of the South Downs National Park where the Secretary of State accepted that parcels of lower quality land can be “washed over”, if they form part of a wider high quality tract, (i.e. are surrounded by higher quality land), but that care should be taken when using this discretion on land at the margin of a designation. The fact that the principle of wash-over would need to be applied to non-qualifying land in order to bring the area of land which meets the natural beauty criterion south of the railway in to a proposed boundary variation will require further consideration during the assessment of desirability.</p>
<b>Issues to be Addressed in Defining Extent</b>	
Transition	<p><b>S2: Brantham</b></p> <p>There is a transition in landscape and scenic quality to the west of the track and bridleway which run south adjacent to Brantham Glebe, down to the mainline railway and towards Marsh Farm. Land to the east of this track benefits from uninterrupted estuary views and the fact that the mainline railway runs in a cutting across much of the area, reducing its visual impact. Moving west from the track into the lower part of the tributary valley, although the valley morphology remains attractive, the influence of incongruous features becomes stronger, fragmentation by the high railway embankment and viaduct occurs, landscape and scenic quality reduce as the influence of the hard settlement edge overlooking the valley increases, views of the estuary are lost and there are few features of interest apart from the Brantham Duck Decoy.</p> <p><b>S4: Head of the Estuary to Mistley</b></p> <p>There is a transition in landscape and scenic quality north-westwards from the end of the natural shoreline of the estuary near The Walls, (where it changes to sheet piling and engineered flood-banks) towards the head of the estuary. Here the water channels narrow, the influence of the industrial areas alongside the foreshore, modern housing estates on the valley slopes on both sides of the estuary and a range of incongruous features becomes stronger. In addition, views along the length of the main estuary are progressively lost towards the head of the estuary due to the promontory of reclaimed derelict industrial land at Cattawade which increasingly blocks views.</p> <p>In the part of the former parkland area between Manningtree and Mistley which has been included in the Candidate Area, there</p>

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	<p>is a transition in the southern part of the area where the influence of more intense arable farming on the plateau farmland and the higher valley slopes above the estuary becomes more dominant and the localised effects of traffic on the B1035 Clacton Road is felt, influencing landscape quality, scenic quality and tranquillity. There is also a transition in landscape quality in the western side of the area between Green Lane and the railway where there has been some land take for private gardens and subdivision of the pasture for horse paddocks; and also in the vicinity of New Mistley in the east, where the influence of the settlement increases.</p> <p><b>S5: Stour Estuary and Southern Slopes</b></p> <p>There is a transition southwards as the influence of more intensive arable farming on the plateau farmland and slopes above the estuary becomes more dominant and the localised effect of traffic on the coastal road is felt, influencing landscape quality, scenic quality and tranquillity.</p> <p>Care will need to be taken in all these transitional areas to define a conservative boundary within the transition whilst also balancing the need for a clearly identifiable boundary line on the ground, when applying Natural England's approach to boundary setting (as set out in the Guidance).</p>
Fragmentation	<p><b>S2: Brantham</b></p> <p>Consideration will need to be given to the extent to which the landscape within the higher quality area is fragmented physically and visually from the existing AONB by the mainline railway, particularly in the tributary valley, which the railway crosses on a high embankment.</p> <p><b>S4: Head of the Estuary to Mistley</b></p> <p>The land between Mistley and Manningtree has become permanently fragmented by two busy urban roads, (The Walls and New Road) and a railway line which cut across this area, separating the wider tributary valley from the foreshore. Careful consideration will need to be given as to the extent that these transport routes cause fragmentation (physical and or perceptual).</p> <p><b>S5 Stour Estuary and Southern Slopes</b></p> <p>The railway line runs along the lower slopes of the estuary and where it is on an embankment, it occasionally visually and physically fragments the landscape, separating the inland areas from the foreshore. The B1352 also cuts across the southern valley slopes in places, causing a degree of fragmentation. However, these effects are localised and are not considered to significantly undermine the ability of this landscape overall to meet the designation criterion. Where field enclosure patterns have become fragmented, opportunities to find a suitable boundary line will require particular scrutiny.</p>
Incongruous features	<p><b>S2: Brantham</b></p> <p>Consideration will need to be given to the degree to which incongruous features affect the extent of the area which could be included within the AONB. These include the effects of the overlooking hard urban edge of the settlements of Brantham and Cattawade, the railway embankment and infrastructure and high voltage power cables.</p> <p>Careful consideration will also be needed regarding the likely effects of the re-development of the Brantham Regeneration Area on the area under consideration. Redevelopment proposals are now in the planning process. The detail provided in planning</p>

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	<p>application B/15/00263 (approved 18.5.16) demonstrates that there are likely to be direct and indirect impacts on the area adjacent to the duck decoy and neighbouring tributary valley. The land within the regeneration area includes the duck decoy site and surrounding woodland and fields, though these areas are allocated for use as green space, not development and the proposals allow for the retention and enhancement of the decoy site and woodland. However, land immediately to the south of the duck decoy is allocated for industrial and distribution development, with a proposed height of up to 15m. In addition, a subsequent application for a large rail depot on part of the adjacent land has also been approved. These would potentially have a significant effect on views across the estuary towards the north shore from Manningtree and Mistley, and are also likely to have a potentially significant effect locally in the vicinity of the Duck decoy and the adjacent tributary valley. The current planning applications do not however contain sufficient detail to enable likely effects on this area to be fully determined at the time of the evaluation.</p> <p><b>S4: Head of the Estuary to Mistley</b></p> <p>Recent housing development at Manningtree and Cattawade has spread across the valley slopes. In combination with the Industrial development and derelict land at the head of the estuary adjacent to Cattawade and Middlebridge Creek this has a local influence on scenic qualities, as does the artificial nature of the sheet piling and engineered flood-banks along the estuary shores in this area. The extent to which these incongruous features influence the choice of boundary and thus extent of the area included within the AONB will require careful consideration at the boundary setting stage.</p> <p>The area between the foreshore and the railway at Mistley Place Park is affected by a range of incongruous features and their impacts on the qualifying areas will need further consideration. Careful consideration will also need to be given to incongruous features on the edge of the area south of the railway (such as the former military bunker near New Mistley), and the extent to which a clear boundary can be drawn which excludes them, should it be considered desirable to designate this whole area through application of wash-over.</p> <p><b>S5: Stour Estuary and Southern Slopes</b></p> <p>The estuary and surrounding landscape is locally influenced particularly in the east, by large scale shipping and industrial areas at Felixstowe, Harwich Port, Parkeston Quay and also at Mistley Quay. There are also cranes and intrusive industrial warehouse development at Felixstowe, Harwich and Parkeston. The influence of all these features needs to be considered during the boundary definition stage.</p>
<b>Settlements</b>	<p><b>S2: Brantham</b></p> <p>The immediately adjacent settlements of Cattawade and Brantham consist largely of post-war housing estates which do not respect local settlement form or vernacular styles or materials and do not contribute positively to natural beauty. The settlements as a whole do not thus meet the criterion of natural beauty and sit at the edge of a small qualifying tract of land. The boundary setting criteria in the Natural England Guidance on Assessing Landscapes for Designation would normally preclude both the inclusion of a settlement on the edge of an area of qualifying land, and the splitting of settlements within a Candidate Area. This would normally result in the exclusion of these two settlements from the Candidate Area in their entirety. However, the parts of Brantham immediately adjacent to Brantham Glebe include an attractive area of Access land, woodland, lots of mature trees, an interesting church and several vernacular buildings of historic interest, all of which positively influence the level of natural beauty</p>

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	<p>within the north-east part of S2 as a whole.</p> <p>The exclusion of the high quality area of Brantham village would thus have implications for the remaining qualifying area in S2. Careful consideration should thus be given to the effect of excluding the settlement of Brantham in its entirety, since this would also exclude many of the features which contribute positively to the natural beauty of the higher quality area as a whole. This is particularly relevant to the church steeple and the large numbers of mature trees on the skyline which are particularly important in views from the south side of the estuary and which also have a highly beneficial impact on natural beauty within the immediately adjacent tributary valley. As this area lies outside the formal Settlement Boundary of Brantham in the current Babergh Local Plan, it has been included within the Candidate Area at this stage, but will require further scrutiny at the boundary setting stage.</p> <p><b>S4: Head of the Estuary to Mistley</b></p> <p>As noted above (in S4, Overall weight and spatial distribution of natural beauty), Manningtree and Mistley have been excluded from the Candidate Area for designation and a boundary line will need to be found which excludes them. There are also seven separate housing development sites within the vicinity, which are at various stages in the planning process. Care will need to be taken to ensure allocated sites are excluded from any boundary.</p> <p><b>S5: Stour Estuary and Southern Slopes</b></p> <p>The settlements of Mistley Heath, Bradfield Heath and Bradfield do not sit fully within a high quality landscape but at the margins of the area which meets the natural beauty criterion and contain modern linear development along the lanes which connect them. They have therefore been excluded from the Candidate Area and a boundary line will need to be found which excludes them.</p> <p>The small hamlet of Wrabness does not sit fully within a high quality landscape, the land to the south of the settlement comprising intensively farmed flat plateau with little to no association with the Stour Estuary. On this basis it has been excluded from the Candidate Area and a boundary line will need to be found which excludes it.</p> <p>The Candidate Area thus contains no major settlements, only small hamlets or clusters of dwelling off Wheatsheaf Lane and dispersed farmsteads and estate houses/halls.</p>
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### 6.3 Evaluation Area 2: Orwell Estuary

<b>Evaluation Area 2: Orwell Estuary</b>	
<b>Landscape Context</b>	<p>This Evaluation Area has been defined based on the Orwell Estuary Character Area identified in the Shotley Peninsula and Hinterland Landscape Character Assessment, 2013. The Character Area comprises the whole of the Orwell Estuary, including its north and south valley sides and the water channel/mudflats and saltmarsh areas in-between. It is defined by the main break of slope between the valley sides and wider plateau landscape beyond and is thus a visual landscape unit with a strong estuarine influence. The majority of the Character Area is already designated within the SC&amp;H AONB, however two small parts of the Character Area lie outside the existing boundary of the SC&amp;H AONB and these have been considered in detail in this assessment. These two areas can be located on the <b>Evaluation Areas Map at Figure 8</b>. They are:</p> <p><b>O1: Freston Brook</b> comprising the three small tributary valleys associated with the upper reaches of Freston Brook.</p> <p><b>O2: Shotley</b> comprising the un-named tributary valley between Shotley Walk Road and Shotley village at the eastern end of the Shotley Peninsula, which drains into Shotley Marshes via Crane's Creek.</p> <p>These two valley systems both share the typical short tributary river valley structure of the many other small streams flowing into the Orwell Estuary in this Character Area, but unlike the other streams, their upper stretches lie outside the AONB. The short shallow valleys have a fairly gentle topography and sloping sides. Starting at the break of slope from the plateau as dry valleys, not much more than shallow indentations in the plateau surface, they deepen and contain small spring-fed brooks in their lower stretches which arise where the Kesgrave Sands and Gravels and underlying London Clay meet.</p>
<b>Area O1 Freston Brook</b> <b>Natural Beauty Factors, Sub-factors and Evidence of Indicators</b>	
<b>Landscape quality</b>	<p><b>O1: Freston Brook</b></p> <p>The majority of the characteristic land-based elements of this Character Area are well represented and in good condition. Towards the top of the valleys, there is a clear change from the plateau farmland with its intensive arable production on deep, well drained loamy and sandy soils, to the steeper valley slopes and bottoms, which contain an intact and legible, traditional pattern of small irregularly-shaped permanent wet pastures which re-inforce the topography of the valley sides. Springs and clear streams in the valley bottoms provide a clear expression of the change in underlying geology from sands and gravels to clay. Along the stream lines and in the wet meadows of the valley bottoms, small areas of alder, hawthorn and blackthorn hedges and small copses provide habitat connectivity and give the valleys a well-wooded appearance, particularly towards the top, where they appear to merge with the more extensive nearby plateau woods which create a largely wooded skyline around the head of two of the tributary valleys. There are no houses within the Evaluation Area and those in the immediately surrounding area are well maintained historic country houses, scattered timber framed houses and vernacular buildings which contribute positively to landscape quality. The only roads are narrow lanes around the periphery of the area.</p> <p>There are few detracting features, but there is little evidence of estuarine influence, with topography and parkland vegetation in the middle section of the valley system precluding estuary views. In places, small conifer plantations and poplar plantations</p>

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	<p>replace the traditional permanent pasture, obscuring the historic patterns and textures of the broadleaved woodland and pastures. The condition of landscape features is good overall; however some features, such as hedges and mature trees are declining in places.</p> <p>Leaving the valleys towards the north and north-west, there is a clear change to a lower quality landscape due to declining valley influence and a change to large arable fields and large blocks of woodland on the plateau farmland. Conifer plantations dominate the remnant broadleaved component locally and levels of road noise from the A14 and A137 increase northwards. To the south, the same change in landscape quality from intact river valley to plateau arable farmland also occurs.</p> <p>To the south-west however, landscape quality remains higher owing to the strong local influence of the large ancient woodlands called Cutlers Wood and Holbrook Park, (the latter also a historic mediaeval park), which both extend the historic estate feel of the Freston valley system well onto the plateau in this area. These largely broadleaved woods contain significant biodiversity interest in their own right and play an important role in closing the vistas at the western end of the valley system.</p>
<b>Scenic quality</b>	<p><b>O1: Freston Brook</b></p> <p>The gentle rolling upper tributary valleys of Freston Brook have a strong visual appeal. Scenic quality is high throughout the majority of the area and derives from the typical intimate patchwork of traditional permanent pasture on the valley floors and slopes, with clear babbling streams, small irregular-shaped, hedged fields, large mature trees and small copses, and areas of woodland. The larger, mostly broadleaved plateau woods around the head of the valleys in the west have extensive areas of bluebells and other spring flowers which provide a superb seasonal display of colour. Views of historic vernacular houses, designed parkland, timber-framed halls and traditional vernacular brick and slate-roofed farm buildings in the immediately surrounding area add to the visual interest and scenic qualities within the area, contributing to a strong sense of time depth.</p> <p>There is a strong sense of place and enclosure, with hidden river valley bottoms and parkland character typical of the Orwell Character Area, particularly in the vicinity of Freston Lodge (which lies just within the AONB). This diminishes gradually with distance from the house and vernacular farm buildings, but a strong, typical estate character remains throughout the area. Visually separated from the estuary by its topography, there are no estuarine views from the Evaluation Area, however the topography approaching the valley system is visually interesting in its own right. Pleasing combinations of interlocking slopes, undulating ridges and wooded skylines combine well with the small-scale enclosure patterns of traditional small meadows edged by hedges and small woodlands to provide changing views, visual variety, and elements of surprise. Mature broadleaved trees emphasise the estate character and add visual interest, and characteristic holly hedges occur in places.</p> <p>The most northern tributary valley is of lower scenic quality than the other two, affected by conifer and poplar plantation, a farm reservoir and conversion of the steep upper slope pastures to arable, obscuring the traditional land management and woodland patterns typically associated with such river valleys. Views from its higher slopes are also influenced locally by tall masts to the north at Constables Manor.</p>
<b>Relative wildness</b>	<p><b>O1: Freston Brook</b></p> <p>The small-scale valley landscape does not exhibit a strong relatively wild character or a sense of remoteness. The area is settled</p>

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	and agricultural in character, actively managed and there are few entirely natural habitats. The areas of woodland are too small and affected by past coppice management or plantation to offer any real sense of wildness. The neighbouring plateau woods, Cutlers Wood and Holbrook Park do however have a stronger sense of relative wildness and remoteness. This is due to their larger scale, the extensive areas of semi-natural woodland, patches of developing trees in areas affected by the 1987 storm and groups of huge coppice stools which do not appear to have been actively managed for a long time. These contribute to a sense of a 'return to nature' in places.
<b>Relative tranquillity</b>	<b>O1: Freston Brook</b> The intimate valley landscape provides a small area of highly tranquil river valley experience. Surrounding woodlands on the skyline and small-scale irregular enclosure patterns surrounded by hedges in the valleys provide a strong sense of enclosure in many places. The woodlands also screen the less tranquil surrounding plateau farmland at the head of the valley system and contribute to a feeling of being away from it all. Traditional wet pastures with cattle and sheep and the strong sense of time-depth also contribute to the sense of tranquillity. Springs and the clear-running brook provide the sight and sound of running water in places. Bird song and flowering trees such as blackthorn also contribute to tranquillity in season. There is no road noise throughout most of the area. On approaching the valley rim, occasional machinery movements and noise reduce tranquillity in the more open plateau landscape, and to the north, tall masts and road noise from the A14 also reduce the level of tranquillity to an extent in the most northern tributary valley.
<b>Natural heritage features</b>	<b>O1: Freston Brook</b> There are several woods and copses, both within the valleys, on the valley rim and extending onto the neighbouring parts of the plateau. The largest two, Cutlers Wood and Holbrook Park, both sitting on the plateau at the western head of the valley system, are part of an extensive woodland SSSI which, whilst replanted in some areas after the storm of 1987, forms one of the largest remaining areas of ancient woodland in Suffolk. It contains oak, hornbeam, birch and other species typical of the light sandy soil and spring-fed valleys, with a wide range of woodland edge and understory species such as field maple and small-leaved lime together with sweet chestnut coppice. There is also a highly varied ground flora of ancient woodland indicator species including extensive stands of bluebells and wood anemones. The coppice stools in Holbrook Park are amongst the largest recorded in Britain, with many stools exceeding 3m in diameter and there are veteran pollards on its boundary banks. The broadleaved woods, streamside alder, hedges, copses and meadows contribute a changing range of seasonal colours, sheets of spring flowers and bird song, adding significant natural heritage interest to the special qualities of the area. Bird song and the distinctive call of the green woodpecker also contribute to the strong appeal of the area to the senses. Mature oak and other broadleaved trees also add habitat and wildlife value. Many of the woods are however affected to a degree by replanting with conifers and sycamore, which is altering the locally traditional patterns of woodland management in places and some of the sweet chestnut coppice stools are in need of management. The wet meadows, streams and alder carr in the valley bottoms also provide a range of habitats for wildlife, though in places these are affected by poplar plantation.
<b>Cultural Heritage Features</b>	<b>O1: Freston Brook</b> Strong time depth is visible and Freston Lodge, the designed parkland, and Freston Lodge Farm with its significant cluster of traditional and apparently unmodified vernacular farm buildings add historic interest. These historic buildings lie within the existing AONB boundary, but add significantly to the levels of visual interest and scenic quality of the upper reaches of Freston

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	<p>Brook valley system outside the AONB, where they appear in pleasing combinations with their associated traditional small meadows and hedges as you enter the valley system from the plateau. The historical influence of estate management remains clearly legible in the area in both the buildings and designed landscapes and in the surrounding characteristic well-managed estate farmland with its high levels of woodland. Within Cutlers Wood at the head of the valley and in the neighbouring historically important Holbrook Park, there are a number of wood compartments and boundary banks, reflecting ancient woodland management techniques. Some of the banks are topped by ancient, large pollarded trees and contribute significantly to the historic and visual interest of the woodland as well as the sense of time depth.</p>
<b>Evaluation</b>	
<b>Overall weight and spatial distribution of natural beauty evidence</b>	<p><b>O1: Freston Brook</b></p> <p>Overall, the natural beauty criterion is met over most of the Freston Brook area. There is a considerable weight of evidence in relation to tranquillity, landscape and scenic qualities, and evidence in relation to cultural and natural heritage. The neighbouring area of designed parkland and historic buildings within the AONB, the interlocking topography of the valleys and the juxtaposition of pasture, streams, framing plateau woodlands and parkland planting combine to create a localised area of high natural beauty. Some spatial variations in weight of evidence occur in the higher parts of the valley system where the influence of the neighbouring plateau farmlands becomes stronger, and in the northern tributary valley, where the weight of evidence is less strong, owing to the presence of detracting elements such as loss of traditional valley management patterns and the presence of incongruous features such as tall masts. A small Candidate Area has been identified which includes the land which meets the natural beauty criterion. The northern tributary valley is not deemed to sufficiently meet the criterion of outstanding natural beauty and has not been included within the Candidate Area.</p>
<b>Area O2 Shotley</b> <b>Natural Beauty Factors, Sub-factors and Evidence of Indicators</b>	
<b>Landscape Quality</b>	<p><b>O2: Shotley valley</b></p> <p>A physically intact valley with some estuarine influence, higher parts have partial views of the Orwell Estuary, a key characteristic of the area. The small historic hamlet of Church End with its cluster of attractive vernacular buildings and prominent landmark church sits on the northern rim of the valley in the manner characteristic of the small valley-head settlements in this area. Two small areas of woodland contribute to landscape quality locally. On the eastern edge of the evaluation area, adjacent to the existing AONB, a small area retains the more characteristic forms of valley management, where a few meadows surrounded by hedges remain.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the wide, bowl-shaped, gently undulating valley has allowed conversion of most of the valley to arable, with consequent rationalisation of field boundaries, loss of traditional patterns and textures of permanent pasture with irregular hedged field boundaries resulting in a simple, open, unenclosed arable landscape. The brook in the bottom of the valley has been heavily modified and runs in a deep straight ditch. Overall, the characteristic features of this Character Area are not well represented, it is no longer visually intact and landscape quality is affected by modern land use.</p> <p>The largely modern village of Shotley, bisected by the busy B1456 road to Shotley Gate sits on the southern rim of the valley presenting a straight, developed edge to the skyline along the southern edge of the valley system. This settlement consists largely of estates of post-war housing which do not respect the settlement form or vernacular of the area affecting landscape</p>

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	<p>quality locally.</p> <p>There is a marked change in landscape quality where Old Hall Road (which forms the current AONB boundary) traverses the valley system. East of the road, where the more complex and typical valley characteristics of irregularly-shaped small meadows enclosed by hedges remain, the patterns and textures and interplay of broadleaved woodland and wet meadow run down to the marsh and estuary offering a higher landscape quality. West of Old Hall road, despite the valley topography and positive influence of Church End, landscape quality is lower, more typical of the neighbouring open, arable plateau farmland.</p>
<b>Scenic Quality</b>	<p><b>O2: Shotley Valley</b></p> <p>Elements contributing to scenic quality include occasional views of the Orwell Estuary from higher slopes and the cluster of vernacular buildings, prominent church and trees at Church End on the north rim of the valley, which draw the eye and add visual interest. Scenic quality is slightly higher just west of Old Hall Road, where more complex and typical valley characteristics of irregularly-shaped small meadows enclosed by hedges remain and new native community woodland has been planted. There is a sudden change to lower scenic quality immediately west of these few meadows; coincident with the change to open arable land.</p> <p>Overall, scenic quality is affected by the shallow upper valley topography which has an open simple, straight form which lacks visual interest. The transition from plateau to valley character is not marked, as arable farming continues down from the plateau through most of the valley. Views from northern slopes towards the south and south-east are of a lower scenic quality. Here, the modern settlement edge of Shotley is visible along the length of the rim of southern side of the valley and a water tower, tall masts and gantries associated with the container port at Felixstowe dominate views of the far shore of the estuary. A line of low voltage pylons runs alongside the modified stream and up the centre of the valley, though its visual impact is limited.</p>
<b>Relative wildness</b>	<p><b>O2: Shotley Valley</b></p> <p>This area does not exhibit a relatively wild character or a sense of remoteness. The area is clearly settled and agricultural in character, intensively managed by man and there are few natural habitats. The straight, open valley lies immediately adjacent to and is overlooked by settlement along both sides. It is actively used for arable production and the line of the brook is clearly heavily modified.</p>
<b>Relative tranquillity</b>	<p><b>O2: Shotley Valley</b></p> <p>The lowest parts of the Shotley valley system are largely tranquil with a quiet rural feel. Bird song and the small wooded areas contribute locally to tranquillity in season. Tranquillity is however reduced in the higher parts of the valley as the influence of the surrounding roads and settlements increases. The periodic movements and machinery noise associated with arable farming, vehicles on the B1456 and the container port and ships on the estuary, together with the visual impacts of the settlement of Shotley and the large masts and gantries associated with the container port at Felixstowe across the estuary, whilst not intrusive individually, do reduce tranquillity overall.</p>
<b>Natural Heritage features</b>	<p><b>O2: Shotley Valley</b></p> <p>There are few features of natural heritage interest, other than a small area of broadleaved woodland at Alderton's Grove and several hedges around the remaining improved meadows at the eastern edge of the area. There is an area of recent native woodland planting in the valley bottom just to the west of the meadows, with a wide range of native tree and shrub species and spring flowers which adds variety and developing habitat interest locally. The upper slopes are in arable management and</p>

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	<p>support farmland birds. The modified stream supports a narrow strip of bankside vegetation with large stands of tall, striking Alexanders, a typical component of the local marine-influenced flora.</p>
<b>Cultural Heritage</b>	<p><b>O2: Shotley Valley</b></p> <p>The small ancient hamlet of Church End, with its cluster of attractive vernacular houses surrounded by trees, and its distinctive landmark church, sits on the northern rim of the valley, within the AONB but overlooking the tributary valley. The church (listed grade II*) has a short tower which contrasts with the raised clerestory attached to it, making it a highly distinctive feature. These historic features, together with nearby Shotley Hall, a handsome listed timbered 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century hall house with attractive vernacular farm buildings, make a significant positive contribution to natural beauty from within the valley and in views from the south, adding visual and historic interest.</p> <p>In the upper parts of the Shotley valley, the sense of an historical influence on the landscape or traditional land management practices has been lost with the advent of modern arable farming practice, field rationalisation and deep ploughing, though there are many find sites of Iron Age, Roman and Viking period within the area. If prolonged dry weather affects crop growth, some of these features become visible as crop marks, including the remains of a non-scheduled late prehistoric/Roman complex, south of Alderton's Grove on the southern side of the upper valley.</p>
<b>Evaluation</b>	
<b>Overall weight and spatial distribution of natural beauty evidence</b>	<p><b>O2: Shotley Valley</b></p> <p>The natural beauty criterion is not met in the parts of the valley which lie outside the AONB. Although the river valley topography, occasional views of the estuary and neighbouring areas within the AONB contribute to the pleasant rural character, there is a marked change in landscape and scenic quality which coincides very closely with the minor roads called Old Hall Road and Shotley Walk which form the existing AONB boundary in this area. West and south of these roads the level of natural beauty is lower; there is a lower weight of evidence in relation to landscape and scenic quality, natural heritage and historic features, without the clear expression of the characteristic valley management, meadows, broadleaved woodlands, marsh, historic features and vernacular buildings that are found east and north of these minor roads. The existing AONB boundary is drawn around the area of highest quality which meets the natural beauty criterion and no additional Candidate Area has been identified.</p>
<b>Candidate Area</b>	
<b>Overall Recommendation as to land that should be considered a Candidate Area</b>	<p>The parts of the Orwell Estuary Character Area which are considered suitable for inclusion within a Candidate Area include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The two more southerly tributary valleys of the Freston Brook valley system;</li> <li>• Some neighbouring areas of plateau landscape at the western end of the valley system which play an important role in providing a sense of enclosure around the two tributary valleys have also been included, including Holbrook Park and Cutlers Wood. These areas also provide added features of interest to the margin of the valley system in their own right, through their high levels of natural and historic interest, scenic quality and tranquillity.</li> </ul>
<b>Need for further scrutiny</b>	<p>Based on the analysis above, there is a need for further scrutiny to identify a suitable boundary between the two tributary valleys which meet the natural beauty criterion and the third most northern tributary valley, which does not meet the natural beauty criterion and which has been excluded from the Candidate area.</p>

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<b>Issues to be Addressed in Defining Extent</b>	
<b>Transition</b>	<p><b>O1: Freiston Brook</b></p> <p>There is no sudden transition in character or quality either side of the existing AONB boundary within the valley system. There is a gradual diminution in landscape and scenic quality towards the higher parts of the valley system, where management changes from pasture to arable and small-scale enclosure patterns, hedges and mature field trees are lost. On leaving the valley system for the surrounding flat arable plateau landscape south, north and north-west of the area there is a clear change to a lower quality landscape of a different character. To the south-west of the valley system, framing woodland provides an almost continuously wooded skyline which masks the transition to plateau farmland.</p> <p>To the north of Valley farm, a strip of hedge backed by a narrow strip of mixed broadleaved woodland and shrub planting of buddleia and other non-native species has been planted either side of a concrete bridleway track which runs parallel with the A137, screening it from view and closing the vista. West of this bridleway and north of Vicarage lane the topography loses any valley influence and becomes typical plateau farmland of unenclosed arable with large blocks of woodland, with conifer plantations dominating the remnant broadleaved component locally and levels of road noise from the A14 and A 137 increasing northwards. A suitable boundary should be sought near the bridleway.</p> <p>To the south, the same transition in landscape quality from intact river valley to fragmented plateau arable farmland also occurs along the southern side of the valley system, with a clear change to lower quality arable plateau farmland south of the bridleway track which runs from Bond Hall Farm to the south-west corner of Cutler's Wood.</p> <p>There is also an area of more pronounced change within the valley system. The most northern tributary valley of the three is of a lower quality than the other two, having lost its traditional management and being affected along most of its length by poplar and conifer plantations and a reservoir, by the extension of arable down from the plateau top onto the valley slopes and by the appearance of tall masts on the northern horizon from the upper slopes and traffic noise from the A14. A suitable boundary should be sought within the valley which excludes the lower quality areas.</p>
<b>Fragmentation</b>	<p><b>O1: Freiston Brook</b></p> <p>No relevant issues.</p>
<b>Incongruous features</b>	<p><b>O1: Freiston Brook</b></p> <p>On leaving the valley to the north, levels of road noise from the A14 and A137 increase, two tall masts become visible and modern arable agriculture penetrates the upper slopes of the area. The influence of these features needs to be considered during the boundary definition stage.</p>
<b>Settlements</b>	<p><b>O1: Freiston Brook</b></p> <p>The Candidate Area does not contain any settlements.</p>

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### 6.4 Evaluation Area 3: Dodnash Special Landscape Area

<b>Evaluation Area 3: Dodnash Special Landscape Area</b>	
<b>Landscape Context</b>	<p>This Evaluation Area has been defined primarily on the Dodnash Special Landscape Area (SLA) identified for many years within the Babergh Local Plan and subject to saved policies within the Babergh Local Plan 2011-31 Core Strategy and Policies, but extending further East as outlined above in Section 5.4.9. The extent of the Dodnash Special Landscape Area is shown on the <b>Evaluation Areas Map at Figure 8</b>.</p> <p>Broadly, the area comprises the middle and upper reaches of the Samford River and Holbrook River valley systems including the large reservoir of Alton Water and valley slopes and the Shotley Peninsula Plateau where it lies within the SLA. The lower stretches of both the Samford and Holbrook valley systems are within the area already designated as part of the SC&amp;H AONB, but the majority of the river systems lie outside the existing designated area.</p> <p>The Evaluation Area has been sub-divided into three areas for evaluation purposes using landscape character, based on the relevant Landscape Character Areas identified in the Shotley Peninsula and Hinterland Landscape Character Assessment, (LCA) 2013. These are shown on the <b>Evaluation Areas Map at Figure 8</b>. They are:</p> <p>D1: Samford Valley comprising two incised river valleys associated with the Samford River. The main valley runs west-east from the A12, turning south at Vale Farm, before joining the existing AONB boundary at Stutton Bridge, with a second tributary valley extending north to near Bentley Hall.</p> <p>D2: Holbrook Valley and Alton Water, comprising the large man-made reservoir and the remaining parts of the Holbrook River valley which have not been inundated by the reservoir.</p> <p>D3: Shotley Peninsula Plateau where it lies within the Dodnash SLA, including parts of the upper valley slopes associated with the Samford and Holbrook river systems and the villages of Tattingstone and Bentley.</p>
<b>Area D1: Samford Valley</b> <b>Natural Beauty Factors, Sub-factors and Evidence of Indicators</b>	
<b>Landscape quality</b>	<p><b>Area D1: Samford Valley</b></p> <p>The typical features of the Samford Valley Character Area are well represented and in very good condition. There is a clear expression of the characteristic short river morphology found on the Shotley Peninsula; the two narrow main valleys having incised sloping sides, with complex short, branching tributary valleys running off them, some steep and some gentle, giving a highly varied, complex topography and an intimate enclosed feel.</p> <p>Overall, the Dodnash Brook river valley is visually and functionally intact with good survival of traditional mixed farming patterns and ancient woodland sites and there is a high level of ecological connectivity, especially of woodland and wetland habitats. There is a very rich mosaic of patterns and textures, with the traditional pastoral character in the valley and on the lower slopes of rough pasture, wet pasture, meadows and fen. This contrasts with the woods, heathy areas and arable fields on the higher more gentle slopes providing an area of significant landscape quality. Likewise the retention of irregular field patterns on the valley floor and lower slopes contrasts with the larger, more regular-shaped arable field patterns on the higher valley slopes as</p>

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they grade out onto the neighbouring plateau areas. There is a clear change to a lower quality landscape on leaving the valleys due to declining valley influence, less variation in pattern, colour and texture of land use and a change in management to large regular arable fields and blocks of woodland on the surrounding plateau farmland.

Within the Dodnash Brook valley there is good expression of the typical change of geology from clay in the valley floors, evidenced by the springs, wet meadows and alder carr woods, overlain by sands and gravels and wind-blown loess deposits, with their associated well-drained soils supporting arable cultivation on higher slopes. There is good retention of the locally traditional small, irregular-shaped fields surrounded by hedges with mature hedgerow trees on the valley floors and slopes. The area is unusually well-wooded. There are extensive areas of closely grouped ancient woodland sites, predominantly broadleaved, with some ex-coppice woods of sweet chestnut and hazel and some small areas of coniferous plantations. These woodlands, which extend onto the neighbouring plateau in places, play an important role in framing the valley landscape and reinforce the sense of enclosure. They include Great and Little Martin's Woods, Dodnash Wood and Holly Wood. The area also supports several smaller woods, copses and strips of trees along the streams which contribute to landscape quality. There is little settlement within the main valley, only occasional, well-separated vernacular farmsteads, most perched high on the rim of the valleys, connected by a sparse network of narrow, often sunken, winding lanes with a strong rural character, only one of which crosses the main valley.

The traditional features of the area are largely well-managed in the main valley, with evidence of recent conservation management work including tree planting, arable reversion, grazing by traditional livestock and sensitive hedge management and there are very few incongruous features. In a few places alder carr and wet meadows have been replaced by plantations of poplar and willow; altering the traditional patterns, colours and textures of the valley bottom. Some small woodland areas have been planted with conifers and some pastures on the valley slopes have been converted to arable, particularly west of Great Martin's Wood. A small area of modern fruit farming at Dodnash Fruit Farm affects landscape quality locally on the northern valley slopes near the confluence of the two brooks, due to non-traditional orchard planting and buildings. A neighbouring area of land used for horses also affects field boundary character, owing to the introduction of fencing and associated development. The impact of these features is however localised and does not affect the landscape quality of the main river valley overall.

There is a small area of lower landscape quality at Brantham Bridge, where the valley is traversed by both the mainline railway and the A137. These physically and visually fragment the valley system locally, since the railway is on a high embankment and the road runs across the valley adjacent to it. Owing to the winding valley morphology, the area directly affected by the road and railway is relatively small and the wider valley remains unaffected. Away from Brantham Bridge, the area of higher landscape quality continues along the Stutton Brook valley to the west as far as the A12 and to the east to where it meets the existing AONB boundary at Stutton Bridge.

The smaller northern tributary valley is of a lower landscape quality overall than the main river valley. Here, whilst the patterns of woodland and alder carr remain, the valley topography is less complex, there are few remaining meadows and the surrounding fields are larger, more regular in shape, lacking in hedgerows and used for arable right down to the valley floor on the west side of the valley. The woodlands are smaller and lie in a narrow strip along the eastern valley sides and the mainline railway runs

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	along the length of this valley with a parallel line of high voltage power cables. The railway and pylons are locally dominating features, especially in close proximity and where the pylons stand higher than the valley rim. This is less of an issue in the southern parts of the valley, where the pylons appear to sit within the valley and are not dominant in wider views. Likewise in many places along the northern valley the influence of the railway is concealed or mitigated by the topography and mature trees and woodland. However, there is an area of large-scale drainage features, settling tanks and pipes of an industrial nature associated with the waste management site north of Folly Farm which affects the otherwise naturalistic flow of the river along the valley floor and also affects landscape quality locally. The associated extensive mitigating planting of trees to screen this site is also out of character with the patterns and species mix of woodlands typical of this landscape and has altered the woodland character of the middle stretches of the northern tributary valley.
<b>Scenic quality</b>	<p><b>Area D1: Samford Valley</b></p> <p>This subtle area of intimate, incised river valleys has considerable scenic value overall. It has a strong visual appeal and many outstanding qualities and is contiguous with the River Stour and its estuary, though there are no direct estuarine views from the area. From elevated locations, wide panoramic views across the main valley and glimpses of hidden tributary valleys are obtained and the curving and interlocking valley forms draw one into the valley along the Rights of Way which cross it.</p> <p>There is a very strong sense of place and of enclosure. The many ancient woodlands in the valleys and on the rim of the adjacent plateau frame the complex valley landscapes and reinforce the sense of enclosure as well as contributing a wide range of changing colours and textures as the seasons change. The juxtaposition of sandy heathy soils with bracken and other heath species on the higher ground and the many different shades of green associated with the meadows of the clay wetlands and hedges on the valley floors and lower slopes add to the variety of vegetation textures and colours. Rough textured vegetation in the narrow valley floor contrasts with the smoother higher slopes and complex textures and shapes of the ancient woodlands. Pleasing combinations of broadleaved woods, trees, heath, fen and pasture with the interlocking slopes of the complex tributary valley topography branching in different directions; are found throughout the main river valley, resulting in a particularly rich landscape with changing views and elements of surprise. The character of the brooks is naturalistic and meandering and interspersed with more extensive marshy areas, contributing a positive fresh-water influence to the scenic quality of the area. There are few buildings, but those that occur, such as the attractive wooden barn in the fields near Rookery Farm and the vernacular farmsteads perched on the rim of the main valley, make positive contributions to scenic quality.</p> <p>The northern tributary valley whilst attractive in places is however of lower scenic quality overall owing to its simpler, more open valley morphology and the influence of detracting features such as the presence of the mainline railway and high voltage power cables. In addition, the lack of traditional meadows and hedges and the conversion of the lower valley slopes west of the brook to arable farming, watercourse management infrastructure and amenity tree planting all obscure the traditional land management and woodland patterns of the area, reducing its complexity and reducing scenic quality overall. The small hamlet of Bentley Junction has a utilitarian character which does not reflect the local vernacular.</p>
<b>Relative wildness</b>	<p><b>Area D1: Samford Valley</b></p> <p>Overall, the area does not exhibit a strong sense of relative wildness as it is in the main, an agricultural area. However the level of relative wildness is greater in the more extensive of the semi-natural ancient woodlands. Here, the areas which have not been obviously re-planted and where there are higher levels of undergrowth, offer a stronger sense of remoteness, apparent wildness</p>

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	<p>and a sense of a return to nature. Likewise, in the northern tributary valley, the more extensive areas of alder carr and ex- alder coppice woods and the wet, marshy areas on the valley floors appear to be largely in an unmanaged state and offer a sense of a return to nature in places.</p> <p>There are no village settlements in the area, only a few farms dotted high on the main valley rim and the small hamlet of Bentley Junction half way up the northern river valley. Most of the rural lanes skirt around the valleys contributing to the feel of being away from it all. Within the valleys themselves there is a strong sense of enclosure and remoteness which contrasts with the neighbouring plateau land with its many roads and settlements.</p>
<b>Relative tranquillity</b>	<p><b>Area D1: Samford Valley</b></p> <p>Overall, the intimate, peaceful river valleys provide a high degree of tranquillity, derived from their hidden, secluded qualities. There is a marked sense of enclosure owing to the winding river morphology, the extensive woodlands, the small-scale irregular enclosure patterns and the hedges. In places this is a naturalistic landscape, with few overt signs of man's presence. Much of the woodland and stream-side vegetation and trees appears relatively natural and these habitats are alive with bird song and flowers in season. The woods and valley morphology largely screen the surrounding busy plateau areas with their roads and settlements. The meadows with their traditional livestock, bird song and the frequent 'yaffle' of green woodpeckers in season all contribute to the strong sense of tranquillity. The character of the brooks is naturalistic, meandering across the valley floors and interspersed with more extensive marshy areas in places. The sound of running water adds to the level of tranquillity in places. The lack of settlement apart from occasional farmsteads and the hamlet of Bentley Junction, together with the few narrow winding, often sunken lanes also contribute to the high degree of tranquillity and feeling of being away from it all.</p> <p>There is no road noise throughout the majority of the area, since there are no roads running along the valleys and only three roads cross the Stutton Brook valley, one of which is a little-used ancient, mostly sunken lane. The other roads which cross this valley are the A137 and the B1080. The A137 is a busy road and traffic noise does reduce the level of tranquillity locally in the vicinity of Brantham Bridge, but owing to the winding valley morphology its impact on tranquillity is limited to a very short stretch of the main valley and its influence diminishes quickly. The B1080 also has a limited impact on tranquillity in its immediate vicinity where it crosses the valley along the existing AONB boundary. In the far west of the area, tranquillity is reduced in immediate proximity to the busy A12. However, owing to screening vegetation and the local valley morphology, its impact in this area is far more limited in extent than would be expected for such a major road, with a significant effect only in the area immediately adjacent to the road. From the higher valley slopes south of Brantham Bridge the mainline railway is not particularly intrusive, as it runs along the valley floor and is well concealed by topography and woodland vegetation, but where it crosses the main river valley on a viaduct in close proximity to the A137, tranquillity is locally reduced.</p> <p>The A137, the mainline railway infrastructure, the noise of frequent trains and the high voltage power cables and pylons all reduce perceptions of tranquillity in the northern tributary valley to a degree, though their impact is limited in the woodlands and in many places on the valley floor, owing to topography and vegetative screening.</p>
<b>Natural heritage features</b>	<p><b>Area D1: Samford Valley</b></p> <p>There is a substantial survival of extensive ancient woodland priority habitat sites on the valley slopes and extending up onto the neighbouring plateau area, particularly at Great Martin's Wood and Dodnash Wood, though much of the woodland was replanted</p>

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after the 1987 storm. The woods make a highly significant contribution to the natural beauty of the area through their diversity of colours and textures as well as their associated flora and fauna. On higher slopes, the heathy woodland vegetation reflects the acid, sandy soils, with species such as bracken, broom and gorse present. These are also found in the hedgerows and lane verges on higher ground. This vegetation type is similar to that of the 'sandlings' area within the SC&H AONB, and includes plantations of Scots Pine, now typical of the Sandling woodland landscape, if not strictly native in this area.

The Samford river valleys were included within the Special Landscape Area partly due to the survival of the extensive ancient woodland areas, but also because they comprise a river valley system which still possesses an attractive mix of traditional grazing meadows and wetlands with their hedgerows, babbling brooks, rows of alder trees, dykes and associated flora and fauna. The valley floors are made up of seasonally wet clays and contain areas of priority habitats. These comprise a mix of species rich semi-improved meadows, areas of floodplain grazing marsh, a small area of fen near Lattinford Bridge adjacent to the A12, an area of lowland dry acid grassland on the higher valley slopes which border the A137 and B1080 at Brantham Bridge and an area of traditional orchards on the valley slopes at Dodnash Fruit Farm. There are also areas of mixed habitats in some places which have a positive impact on the level of natural beauty in this area. Mature alders along streams and in the larger areas of ex-coppice alder in the wetlands, support a wide range of birds and other wildlife, though in a few places these have been replaced by poplar plantation.

There is a significant concentration of Local and County Wildlife Sites including Dodnash and Great Martin's Woods and Brantham Bridge, Buxton Wood and Wolves Wood Meadows and Dodnash Brook Pond. There is good connectivity of woodland and riverine sites, hedges and meadows, which all contribute to the importance of the area for wildlife species. These contribute to natural beauty through their flowers, bird song and natural heritage interest. The woodlands contain significant amounts of deadwood in places and together with the ex-alder coppice areas are good for invertebrates, offering the opportunity for rare sightings. Species records indicate the presence of rare species including stag beetle as well as dormouse and there is also some evidence of otter and water voles along the river.

There is a good expression of the local geology of London clay bedrock geology in the valley bottoms with associated brooks and spring lines, overlain by sandy Red Crag contributing to the sense of place. Superficial geology consists largely of Kesgrave sands and gravels with its associated sandy soils resulting in the remnant areas of heathy vegetation in places, particularly in more recent plantation woodlands on former heath. A small area on the plateau in the west, near the A12, lies within the area of Diamicton clays, where land use is predominantly arable, fewer areas of semi-natural habitat remain and the level of natural beauty are lower.

## Evaluation of Natural Beauty in relation to a proposed Boundary Variation to the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB.

<b>Cultural Heritage</b>	<p><b>Area D1: Samford Valley</b></p> <p>Overall this is a highly attractive, unspoilt landscape with a strong sense of time depth. Much of the area retains its historic field and woodland patterns, particularly in the valley floor and lower valley slopes. The retention and restoration of traditional forms of land management and the survival of hedges and narrow sunken lanes as well as the small vernacular buildings eg weather-boarded farm buildings and occasional field barns all contribute positively to the sense of timelessness and the cultural heritage of the area. Occasional traditional vernacular houses and farmsteads with a mix of red tile and grey slate roofs, some listed, nestle just below or on the plateau rim, adding historic and visual interest. The site of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century Augustinian Dodnash Priory, now a Scheduled Monument sits within the main river valley. Although there are thought to be no physical remains of the Priory, there is some evidence in the vicinity including a pond (perhaps former fish ponds) and a section of stone wall. There is also evidence of some reused Medieval stone at Dodnash Priory Farm.</p> <p>Historic landscape characterisation (HLC) of this area shows that there are extensive areas of surviving pre-18<sup>th</sup> Century enclosures, with random and irregular co-axial field shapes, particularly on valley floors and on the south side of Stutton Brook and extensive areas of meadow and managed wetland along the watercourses which contribute to the sense of timelessness. Many of the ancient woodlands contain remnant bank and ditch features, including Dodnash, Great Martin's and Buxton Woods and feature in the writings of Oliver Rackham. Ancient field system sites such as those around Holly Farm and east of Gravel Pit Lane, indicate the early settlement of this area, some still visible as crop marks in dry weather. In some places, areas of plantation now occupy former heath and meadow sites, eg at Hustlers Grove. There are some areas characterised in the HLC as 'post 1950 agricultural landscape', where boundary loss from former random field patterns has occurred, eg along the valley slopes west of Great Martin's Wood and adjacent to Cutler's Lane west of Stutton Brook, from Hustlers Grove towards Lattiford Hill. At Dodnash Fruit Farm, modern orchard management is altering the historic patterns of land management in places; however the orchards add blossom and colour in season and reflect the fact that the wider local area had a history of fruit production in the past, as evidenced by some old place name evidence associated with the area (eg Appleton Field near Brantham Bridge).</p> <p>Along the line of the railway in the northern tributary valley, some traditional railway architecture remains in places, such as brick bridges, but this has largely been replaced by modern equivalents and electrification infrastructure which do not reflect the local railway vernacular. There once was a station at Bentley - hence the collection of houses at the junction of the road and railway, however this settlement does not have a strong local character.</p>
<b>Evaluation</b>	<p><b>Overall weight and spatial distribution of natural beauty evidence</b></p> <p><b>Area D1: Samford Valley</b></p> <p>Overall the natural beauty criterion is met over most of the Samford Valley Character Area. There is a considerable weight of evidence in relation to landscape quality, scenic quality and tranquillity and evidence of a range of features of natural and cultural heritage interest. The extensive broadleaved woodlands, streams, areas of small irregular meadows and hedges, vernacular farm buildings combined with the complex interlocking valley morphology result in an area with a high level of natural beauty. There are some spatial variations in the weight of evidence of natural beauty, which is highest in the main river valley system and lower in the northern tributary valley, owing to its simpler morphology, and the effect of the mainline railway and high voltage power lines. The weight of evidence of natural beauty also reduces towards the margins of the valley system as the valley</p>

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	<p>influence is lost and the character changes to the lower quality, simpler plateau landscape. The main Stutton Brook valley which is deemed to meet the natural beauty criterion has been included in the Candidate Area. The northern tributary valley is not considered suitable for inclusion in a Candidate Area</p>
<b>Area D2: Holbrook Valley and Alton Water</b>	
<b>Natural Beauty Factors, Sub-factors and Evidence of Indicators</b>	
Landscape Quality	<p><b>Area D2: Holbrook Valley and Alton Water</b></p> <p>The area includes the upper reaches of the Holbrook with its shallow winding valley now largely filled by Alton Water, a 1970's water supply reservoir. The characteristic features of the previous river valley landscape are now overlain and masked by the modern reservoir and its recent fringing mitigating planting which has completely altered the valley character. The traditional valley pastures and extensive former parkland areas which previously cloaked the valley sides are no longer intact. The reservoir is long and narrow (only 0.5km wide at its widest point) with a sinuous shape and an indented and well-vegetated shoreline and shallow valley slopes above, rising to the surrounding largely flat Shotley Plateau, some 5 – 10 metres above. The narrowness of the stretch of water and the shallowness of the remaining valley slopes, together with the heavily wooded shores mean that there are few expansive views to open water, even in close proximity to the reservoir, and these are largely restricted to glimpses from the water's edge. The area as a whole is also hidden from view in the wider area and does not have a strong presence in the surrounding plateau landscape.</p> <p>In the immediate vicinity of the reservoir, land use consists primarily of narrow strips of single-aged young woodland with thick developing scrub, grassed areas and cycle and walking routes of yellow gravel and intermittent use of tarmac, together with low key informal car parks providing access around the reservoir. The thin strip of amenity land around the reservoir is bordered by arable cultivation in large rectilinear fields, which continue down from the plateau onto the valley sides. Overall the area has the appearance of a recent man-made landscape, actively managed for recreation use as well as water supply. This is particularly true at the southern end of the reservoir, where areas of developing woodland are surrounded by areas of mown lawns with wide paths, a visitor centre and café, car parks, a marina and picnic areas, providing a busy and manicured country park-type appearance.</p> <p>Landscape condition and quality are mixed. Little pasture remains on the valley slopes, but in the areas where it does, particularly on the eastern side of the reservoir towards its head, as well as on both sides of the reservoir in the vicinity of Tattingstone, it contributes to small areas of greater visual diversity and higher landscape quality locally. Some areas of ancient woodland and historic woodland management features such as remnant hazel coppice and woodbanks remain in places around the reservoir. These, together with small areas of ex-parkland on both sides of the reservoir in the vicinity of Tattingstone Place, contribute to the small area of higher landscape quality as well as providing indicators of the past estate character of the valley before the reservoir was constructed. Many of the remaining parkland and hedgerow trees are however in declining condition and have become stag-headed or lost major limbs, particularly the remnant ornamental planting adjacent to Pond Hall Farm where several Cedars of Lebanon have lost their leader or major branches. Much of the more recent tree planting around the reservoir is in need of thinning, though there is evidence of work to develop a more mixed age-structure in places. North of the reservoir, a short stretch of the Holbrook and its valley remain with good expression of the typical upper valley character with its flat valley floor of seasonally wet clay and its brook, bordered by woodland and wet pasture. Here, the geology of overlying</p>

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	<p>alluvial deposits and peat with freer draining soils on higher ground are reflected in the change from pasture to arable.</p> <p>The area is generally relatively sparsely settled with occasional farmsteads on the rim of the plateau and the historic settlements of Holbrook, Tattingstone and Tattingstone White Horse lying on the plateau rim adjacent to the reservoir. Whilst containing a range of vernacular buildings in good condition which contribute positively to landscape quality, these settlements are all to a degree affected by late 20<sup>th</sup> Century housing on their periphery which does not reflect the local vernacular, reducing landscape quality overall.</p> <p>There are several large-scale incongruous concrete features of a utilitarian character around the reservoir such as the dam, roads, draw off tower, and Lemons Hill Bridge, as well as marina infrastructure and a visitor centre/cafe at the southern end of the reservoir. These structures do not contribute positively to landscape quality. Signage clutter and some fly tipping affect the informal car parks, though these are generally well screened from view. The busy A137 runs across the head of the reservoir and the remaining stretch of valley north of the reservoir, and the mainline railway with its tall electrification gantries bounds the area in the north-west, affecting landscape quality to a degree. Large modern industrial buildings are visible adjacent to the dam area below the southern end of the reservoir and rows of power lines appear on the skyline in places.</p>
<b>Scenic Quality</b>	<p><b>Area D2: Holbrook Valley and Alton Water</b></p> <p>Overall this is a pleasant amenity area comprising a large reservoir surrounded by a narrow strip of sloping land which separates it from the neighbouring plateau farmland. Much of the reservoir is however hidden from view along most of its shoreline and also from the surrounding area, so its influence on scenic quality is less than one would expect. The reservoir also fills the majority of the river valley so there is relatively little remaining valley slope above it and a low horizon, reducing the apparent scale of the valley system and the complexity of the valley topography and reducing scenic quality overall.</p> <p>In the vicinity of Tattingstone Place there is a small area of higher scenic quality, with fine views from higher ground where the remnant parkland and pasture on both sides of the reservoir combine to pleasing effect with the water, the gently sloping valley topography and small tributary valley slopes running up towards a wooded skyline provided by Holbrook Park. Here, historic features of interest such as Tattingstone Place, the Tattingstone Wonder eye-catcher and the church tower add visual interest and contribute to scenic quality. The Tattingstone Wonder is however now losing its designed visual association with Tattingstone Place, as the vista from the house is becoming obscured by tree growth along the edge of the reservoir; and from the other side of the water the grounds are becoming hidden on both sides of the attractive Georgian house by tall willow growth.</p> <p>Where the reservoir can be seen, pleasing views across open water to naturalistic-looking vegetation and slightly rising ground can be obtained. There are good views along the reservoir in both directions from Lemons Hill Bridge, as well as from the areas of close cropped lawn adjacent to the main car park and cafe at the south end of the reservoir. Here there are more extensive views across the water to young, naturalistic-looking scrub and woodland vegetation, small tributary valleys which add creeks and inlets to the far shore and a low rising backdrop of fields with woods on the skyline. Sailing boats provide movement and visual interest. However around much of the reservoir, there are relatively few memorable views, as the thick waterside and woodland vegetation almost entirely preclude views across the water.</p>

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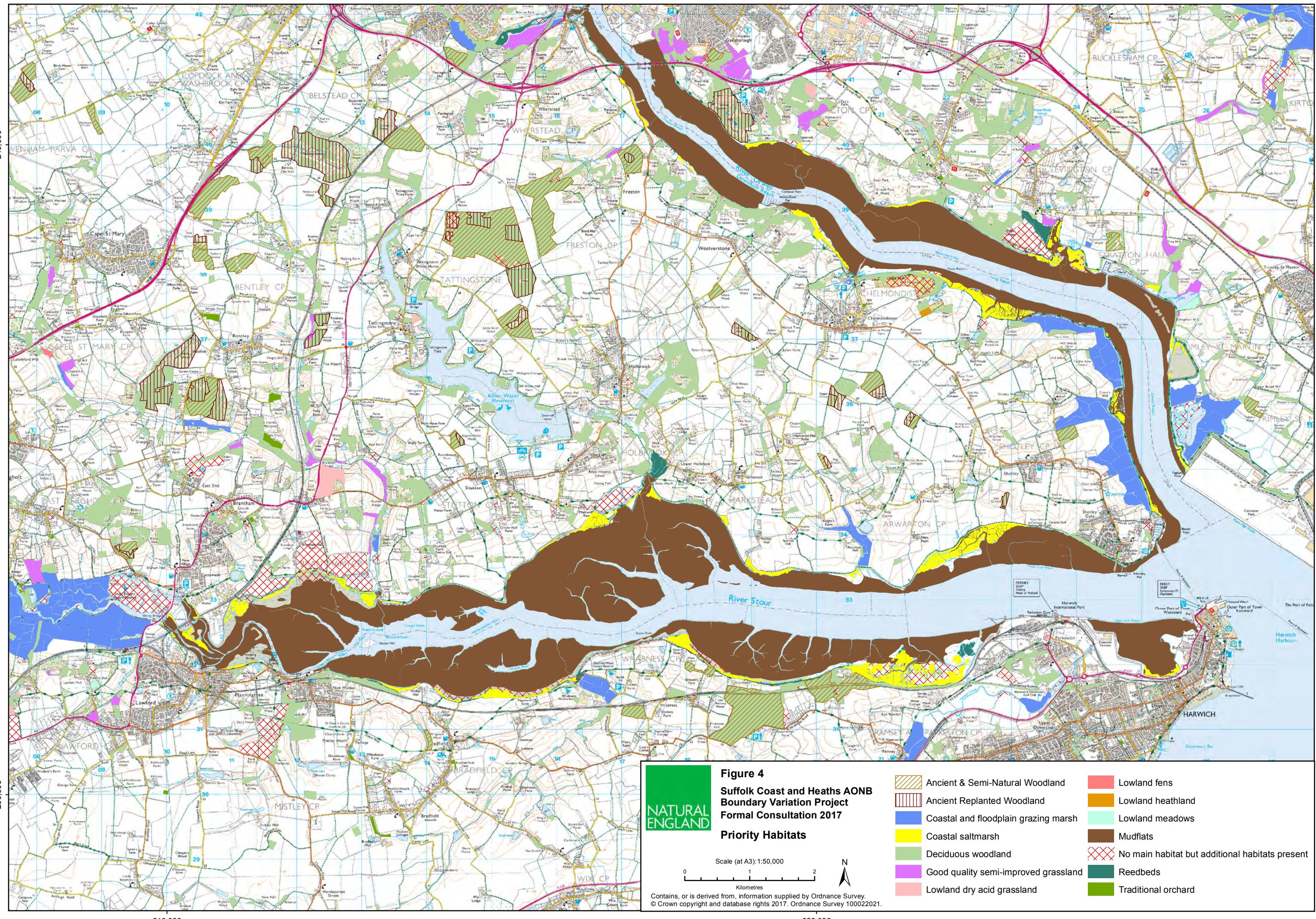
	<p>Overall the patterns of land cover and vegetation types are relatively simple, since the extensive planting around the reservoir is uniform in character and age; though a range of broadleaved trees have been planted. In a few places, water meadows and wet pastures remain, contributing visual variety and a smaller-scale landscape in these areas. A few small patches of old woodland remain e.g. on the northern shores towards the head of the reservoir, where ex-coppice, spring flowers and mature trees provide visual interest. Looking away from the reservoir where valley slopes are low, particularly at the southern end of the reservoir, some open views can be obtained across the surrounding arable plateau farmland, often to a wooded skyline. In places, tall prominent features such as the Royal Hospital School tower and Tattingstone church and workhouse towers provide orientation and draw the eye, adding interest to the skyline. At the head of the river valley, north of the reservoir, the more complex mix of pasture and woodland and open areas provide a small area of higher visual interest and this area benefits from the nearby parkland planting associated with Bentley Manor and Hubbards Hall, though scenic quality is compromised to a degree by trout farm infrastructure in the valley and the busy A137 which crosses it.</p> <p>The utilitarian concrete reservoir infrastructure, especially the draw down tower, dam and Lemons Hill Bridge reduce the scenic quality of the reservoir. The overgrown scrub and un-thinned woodland vegetation around its margins hide the water around much of the reservoir and are beginning to obscure some views of attractive features such as the Tattingstone Wonder and the grounds of Tattingstone Hall. In places the associated reservoir and recreation infrastructure also has a utilitarian character, particularly near the café and main car park, affecting scenic quality.</p>
<b>Relative Wildness</b>	<p><b>Area D2: Holbrook Valley and Alton Water</b></p> <p>There is little sense of relative wildness in this area owing to the water supply infrastructure and strong recreational focus around Alton Water, with fishing, cycling, picnic areas and water sports and many boats on the water, particularly towards the southern end of the reservoir. The provision of car parking areas, footpath and cycle paths and the large numbers of people who use the area result in a strong sense of human influence. This appears to be a young man-made landscape despite the naturalistic broadleaved planting, and the mostly single-aged tree planting, interspersed with extensive mown grass areas, contribute to a managed amenity feel. A stronger sense of relative wildness can be perceived in the areas of remaining semi-natural woodland and where paths run through thick emergent planting immediately adjacent to the water, offering a sense of isolation.</p>
<b>Relative Tranquillity</b>	<p><b>Area D2: Holbrook Valley and Alton Water</b></p> <p>Overall this is a quiet tranquil area. Tranquillity is highest around the middle section of the reservoir where it is hidden from the busy neighbouring plateau and away from the more highly frequented areas at the south end of the reservoir and the A137 in the north. Here, bird song in the woodland and wildfowl calls on the reservoir; contribute to the sense of tranquillity. There is a strong sense of enclosure around much of the narrow reservoir due to the surrounding thick planting and nearby plateau woods on the skyline which limit views away from the reservoir in many places to a small stretch of upper valley slopes, contributing to a feeling of being away from it all. Views of sailing boats scattered across the reservoir also contribute to tranquillity.</p> <p>There are relatively few signs of habitation, though the area does include the fringes of the neighbouring plateau villages of Tattingstone, Holbrook and the hamlet of Tattingstone White Horse and tranquillity is lower in their vicinity. There are few roads apart from the B road which crosses the lake from Tattingstone to Lemons Hill and the busy A137, which crosses the head of the reservoir. These roads together with the mainline Ipswich railway do reduce tranquillity locally in their vicinity.</p>

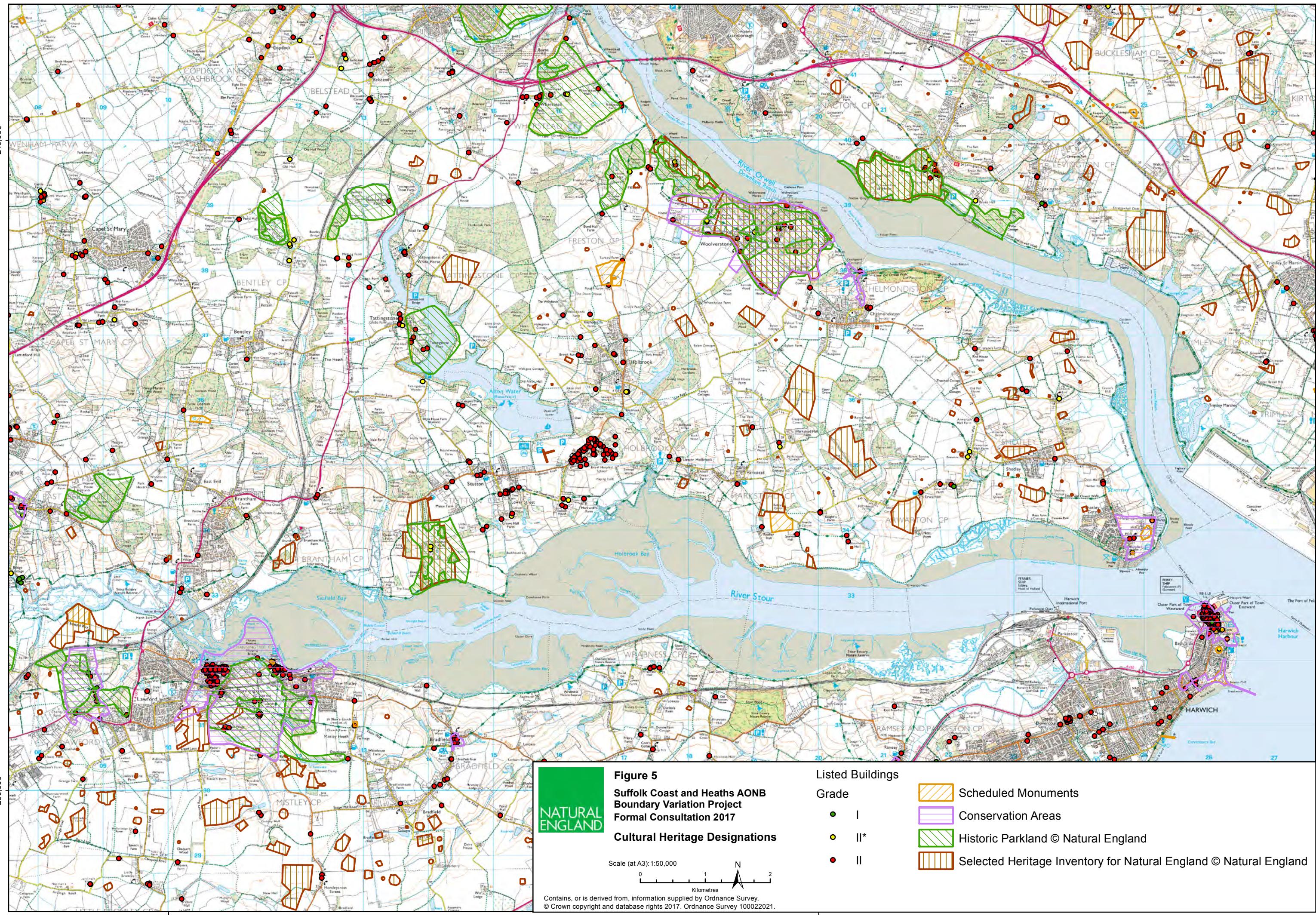
## Evaluation of Natural Beauty in relation to a proposed Boundary Variation to the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB.

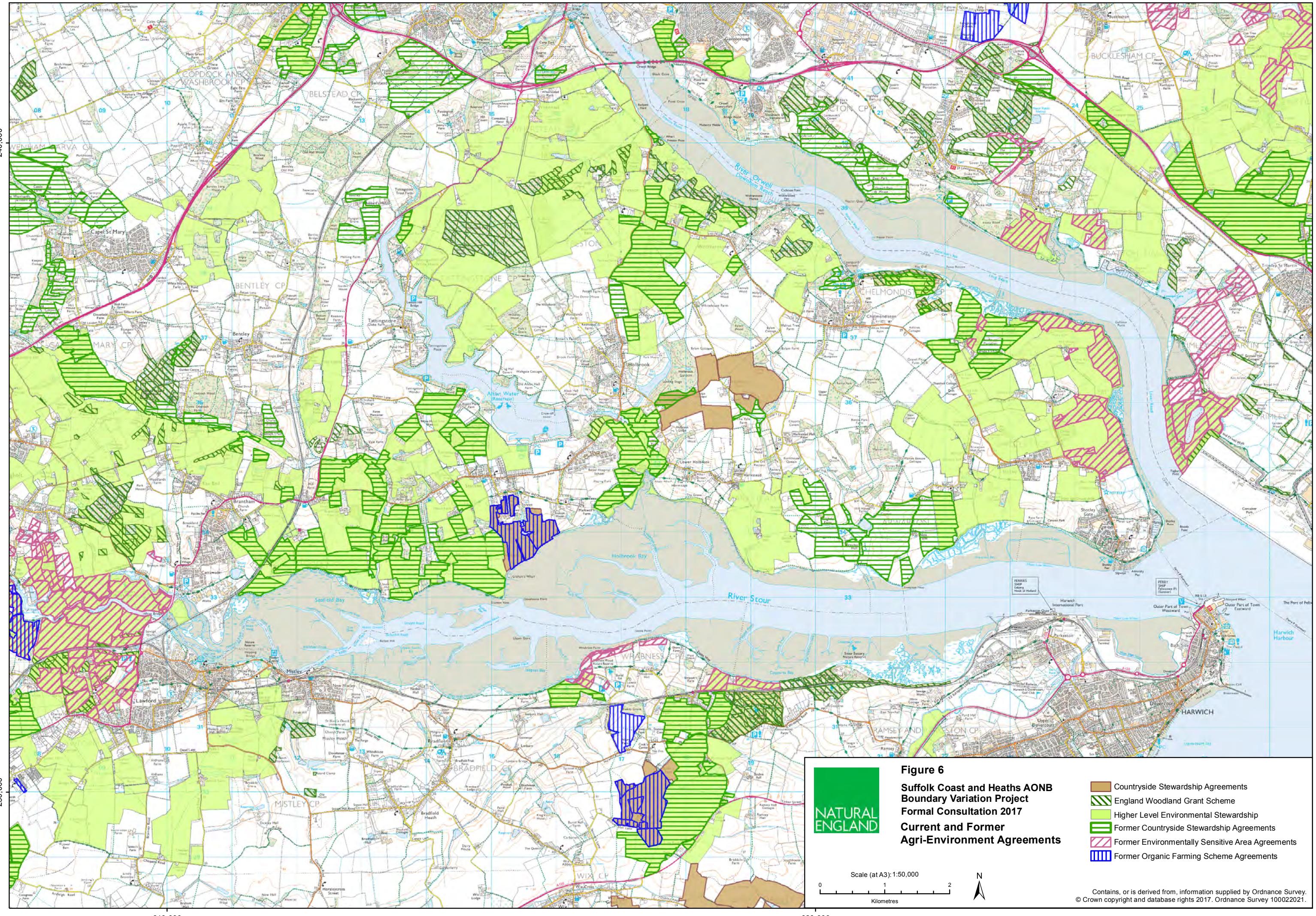
	<p>At the southern end of the reservoir, the strong but informal recreational focus including a café and marina, with fishing, walking and cycling and the car parks, wide footpaths and cycle paths all reduce tranquillity and the water sports facilities and marina add an air of busyness, despite the otherwise apparently rural nature of the area. Car and boat transport movements near to the café and marina on the concrete access roads and the large numbers of visitors reduce tranquillity significantly at the southern end of the reservoir, especially on fine days.</p>
<b>Natural Heritage Features</b>	<p><b>Area D2: Holbrook Valley and Alton Water</b></p> <p>There are no nationally designated areas for wildlife in the area, though Alton Water is valued locally for its birds, offering breeding bird habitat for species such as Common Tern in summer. It also acts as a refuge/roost for wildfowl during the winter months including widgeon, gadwall, pochard and teal. It is designated as a County Wildlife Site for its habitat mosaics. The calls of wildfowl on the water and the song of woodland birds including nightingale, are a distinctive feature of the area in season. Priority habitat is limited to small areas of broadleaved woodland and a small area of lowland dry acid grassland adjacent to the reservoir at Tattingstone.</p> <p>The banks of the Holbrook, north of the reservoir, provide habitat for Water Vole and Otter and the northern fringes of Alton Water provide scrub and woodland cover suitable for Hazel Dormouse. Small areas of older semi-natural woodland and ex-coppice remain in places together with an area of ex-parkland veteran trees, contributing to natural beauty in these areas. Older hedges with elm and hazel and remnant heathy vegetation including broom remain in some places. The thin strip of developing dense scrub and woodland plantings around the reservoir host a good range of woodland birds including nightingales and some of the area is now actively managed to increase habitat for these birds. Emergent vegetation of reedmace and water mint add variety in some places where shallow water occurs and dragon flies can be seen in these areas. Overall however, the habitat networks remain fragmented in many places and surrounded by plateau arable farmland, limiting connectivity. Native species of trees have been densely planted relatively recently in a thin strip in many places around the reservoir. Whilst some management has been undertaken, much of the young woodland has not subsequently been thinned; reducing its wider habitat potential and the diversity of the ground flora is limited to nettles and brambles in many places.</p> <p>The geomorphology of the river valley and its tributaries is almost entirely masked by the reservoir with only the uppermost valley slopes still visible above the water. A length of one tributary valley remains visible from the valley slopes adjacent to Tattingstone village. Looking across the reservoir, this valley rising up towards the heavily wooded skyline of Holbrook Park adds visual interest in this area, though the valley slopes are now under arable cultivation.</p>
<b>Cultural Heritage Features</b>	<p><b>Area D2: Holbrook Valley and Alton Water</b></p> <p>Overall this area appears to be a modern, young landscape and the majority of the area now lies under the waters of the water supply reservoir constructed during the 1970s. The reservoir has covered and/or fragmented many of the features of cultural heritage interest in the area. Prior to inundation, the area contained two areas of historic parkland and designed landscapes. One associated with Bentley Manor and Hubbards Hall, remains extant and has been expanded in recent years and a second more extensive area of parkland and designed landscapes associated with Tattingstone Park (now called Tattingstone Place) which is now largely submerged. Remnants of this parkland survive in the immediate vicinity of Tattingstone Place and contribute to an area of higher scenic quality in this area, especially where veteran trees such as oaks and Cedar of Lebanon remain and can be seen in association with the water on both sides of the central section of the reservoir. Tattingstone Place itself is a large,</p>

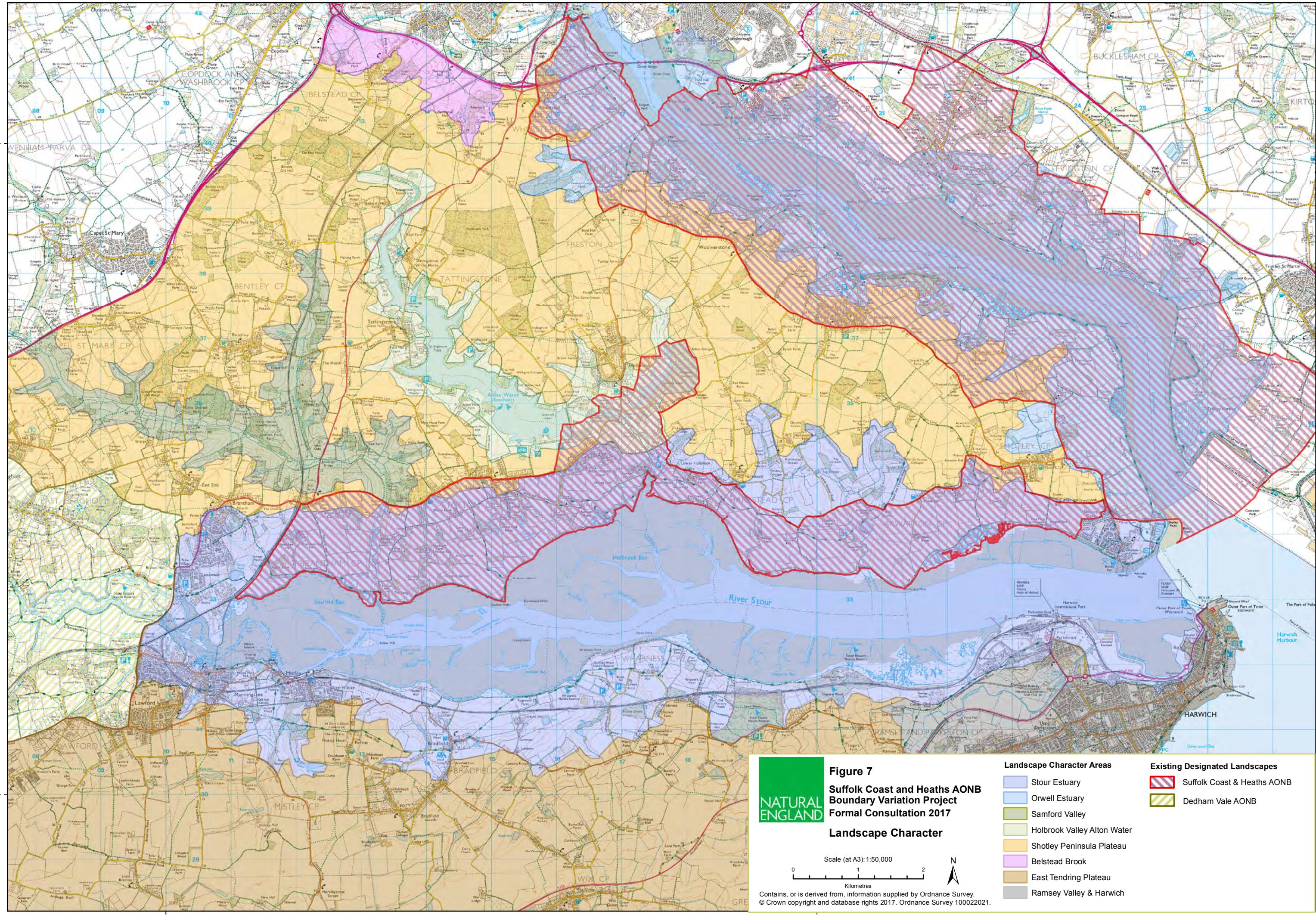
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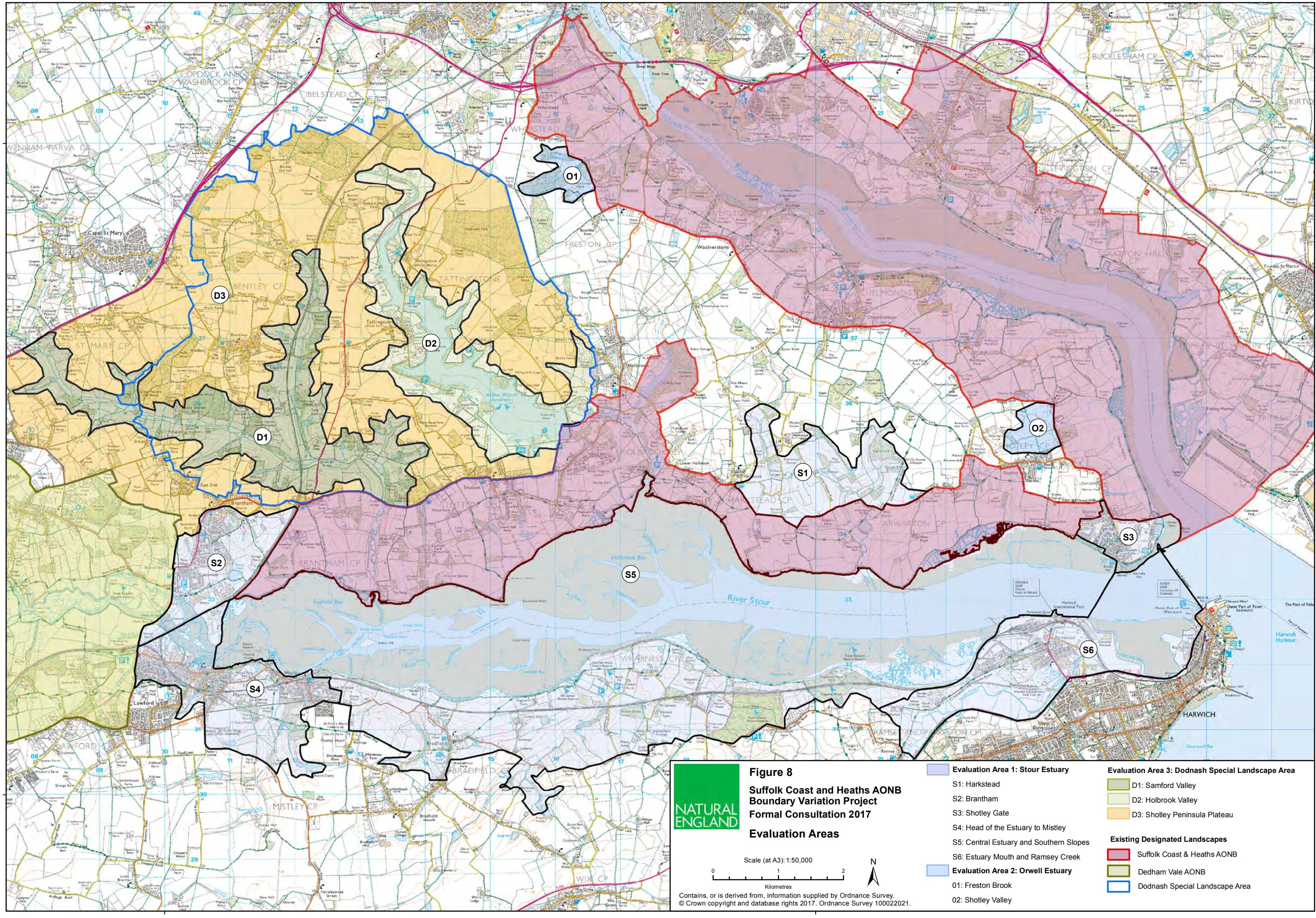
	<p>imposing, listed Georgian country house which makes a positive contribution to views across the reservoir in places, though some views are becoming obscured by tree growth around the reservoir. Nearby is the Tattingstone Wonder, a flint-faced eye-catcher consisting of cottages which were constructed to appear as a church nave with a tower in views from Tattingstone Place, (which are now largely obscured by tree growth around a narrow inlet at the edge of the reservoir).</p> <p>There are also numbers of listed buildings both within this area and on its margins some of which act as local landmarks, particularly in Tattingstone village on the rim of the plateau. This village has an attractive historic core, clustered around its Grade II* church whose tower is visible in places around the area. There are several listed buildings in the village including St Mary's Hospital, which later became a workhouse, before becoming a hospital again; and has associations with a 20<sup>th</sup> Century outbreak of the Plague on the Shotley Peninsula. Areas of more modern 1960-70's housing on the outskirts of the village do not however reflect the local vernacular. Tattingstone White Horse is a small hamlet at the end of the bridge which crosses the reservoir, sited on rising ground and contains some vernacular cottages along the road and an area of modern development. A scatter of vernacular timber-framed farmhouses with red tiled roofs, make a positive contribution to natural beauty where they occur in the surrounding agricultural area. The tall tower of the nearby Royal Hospital School forms a very striking landmark which is visible for many miles, including from many locations within this area. This large complex of striking neo-Georgian buildings lies just to the south of the reservoir, though largely within the existing AONB. It was built to house a naval school and dates from the 1930s. It contains a very large number of attractive listed buildings running along both sides of the B1080. The buildings on the north-west side of the road lie within this Evaluation Area.</p> <p>There are no Scheduled Monuments in the area, though some areas of crop marks occur on the rim of the surrounding plateau during dry weather, (e.g. on the valley slopes south of Shrub Wood), marking the locations of field systems, ring ditches, barrows and ditches. Wood banks associated with past woodland management can also be seen in Woodley and Little Birch Woods, hinting at past management of the area and adding time depth.</p>
<b>Evaluation</b>	
<b>Overall weight and spatial distribution of natural beauty evidence</b>	<p><b>Area D2: Holbrook Valley and Alton Water</b></p> <p>The Holbrook Valley and Alton Water area has a mixed weight of evidence of natural beauty. The area as a whole is a young, modern-looking landscape of mixed landscape and scenic quality. There is a small area of higher quality in the vicinity of Tattingstone Place, where historic buildings, parkland, woodland and pasture combine to pleasing effect with gently sloping valley topography and small tributary valley slopes on both sides of the reservoir. However this area is relatively small and the area as a whole has a lower weight of evidence of natural beauty owing to the simple topography, the limited views of the narrow stretch of water, the thick young mitigating planting around its shoreline, the influence of utilitarian concrete structures associated with the reservoir and the area's active recreational use/management.</p> <p>There are no nationally designated features of natural biodiversity interest and very little priority habitat, though there are features of local importance for birds such as the reservoir and small areas of broadleaved woodland. There is moderate weight of evidence of cultural heritage interest. There are no Scheduled Monuments, but there is a concentration of interesting Grade II and Grade II* listed buildings around Tattingstone and some remnant parkland. Much of the past heritage recorded in the area is however obscured by the modern reservoir or overlain by modern features. There is little sense of relative wildness owing to</p>

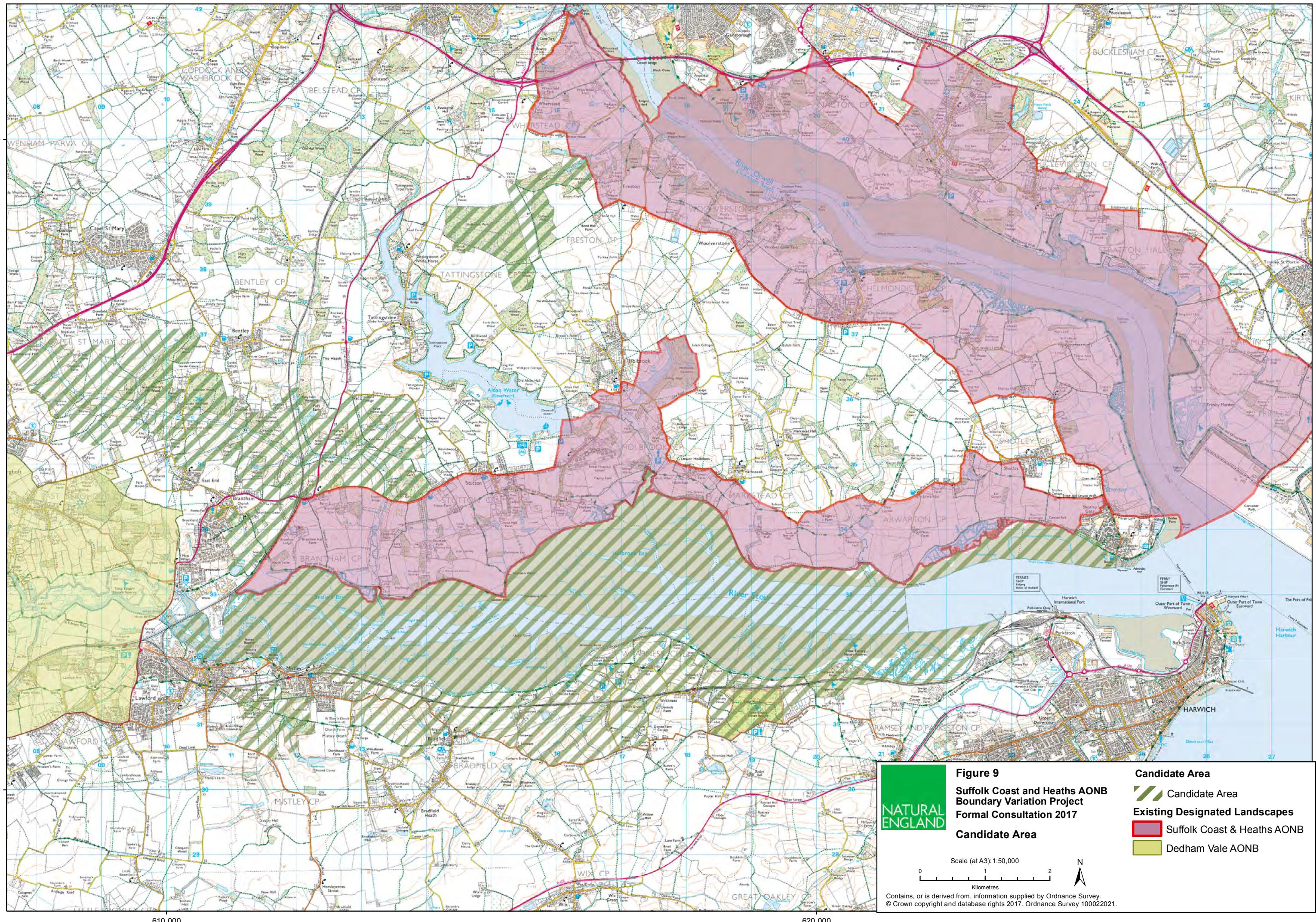












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	active management of the area for water supply and recreation, though the water and fringing broadleaved trees provide a 'naturalistic' appearance around the reservoir itself. The area is generally relatively tranquil, with a lack of large settlements or roads, though tranquillity is reduced towards the southern end of the reservoir where the area near the visitor facilities and marina is often busy. The area as a whole is not considered suitable for inclusion within the Candidate Area for designation.
<b>Area D3: Shotley Peninsula Plateau</b> <b>Natural Beauty Factors, Sub-factors and Evidence of Indicators</b>	
Landscape Quality	<p><b>Area D3: Shotley Peninsula Plateau</b></p> <p>Overall, this rural, largely flat, open plateau landscape has an elevated, exposed, large-scale and simple character of moderate landscape quality. It has a degree of homogeneity and regularity to it and is characterised by large-scale arable blocks divided into recti-linear fields with occasional blocks of woodland and few areas of semi-natural habitat. The deep loamy soils originated as wind-blown sediments from glacial sources and have given rise to fertile, well drained soils well suited to the modern arable production which predominates throughout the area. Some fields are bounded by hedges, but there are relatively few hedgerow trees. In places hedges of suckering elm and holly, with pollarded oaks and ash trees occur, as do areas of heathy vegetation, often along the lanes and verges. Many hedges have become gappy or are over trimmed. The plateau is crossed by many minor roads, including some single-tracked lanes and the historic pattern of lanes is intact.</p> <p>Overall, there is relatively little woodland, with small blocks of plantation woods scattered across the area but with little habitat connectivity between them. Around the periphery of the area though, there are three areas with significant close groupings of ancient woodlands. These are centred round Bentley Hall/Bentley Old Hall/ Bentley Manor in the north-west, Holbrook Park in the east, and the Dodnash area in the south-west, where they contribute to areas of higher landscape quality. The latter two areas are contiguous with neighbouring areas of higher landscape quality in the Samford and Freston valleys.</p> <p>Historically this landscape was only lightly settled. Historic farmsteads, cottages and houses remain scattered throughout the area and groupings of vernacular buildings make a positive contribution to landscape quality in places. Often the farms comprise a mixture of exceptional vernacular buildings with more modern and larger-scale buildings. More recent housing along the lanes forms loose clusters of settlement including Bentley, The Heath, Upper Street and East End which have a predominately modern character, including late 20th century housing developments which have altered the otherwise linear patterns and have little vernacular influence. In the north-west fringe of the area at the boundary with the claylands, there is a group of notable halls including Bentley Old Hall, Bentley Park, Bentley Manor and Bentley Hall with their associated church and vernacular buildings. Together with their areas of parkland, many mature trees, woods and a stretch of slightly incised valley, these form a small area of higher landscape quality due to the intactness of wooded estate features and patterns, set in the wider plateau landscape. Here the parklands appear well managed with some characteristic estate features, though some of the woodlands are not apparently under active management.</p> <p>There are relatively few large-scale incongruous features over much of the area, though some woodland character has been altered by modern plantation planting, including with conifers in places, altering the typical patterns and colours of the local semi-natural woodland. The area is however, physically fragmented by the busy A137 road (which has a visual impact in places on the plateau) and is bounded to the west by the A12 dual carriageway. High and low voltage pylons criss-cross the fields in many</p>

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	places and areas of agricultural machinery and irrigation equipment storage contribute to visual clutter, affecting landscape quality locally. To the north the influence of Ipswich becomes greater, with tall masts which visually intrude into this landscape; and in some places in the north-west of the area the A12 is visible.
<b>Scenic Quality</b>	<p><b>Area D3: Shotley Peninsula Plateau</b></p> <p>The area provides open views across typical, large-scale, open plateau arable farmland, often with a wooded skyline. Overall, the area has a pleasant rural character since there are relatively few built features and few major roads. Views to isolated properties (which often reflect the local vernacular and traditional settlement pattern are commonplace giving rise to a settled but predominately quiet 'back-water' character. There are no views to the estuaries which lie in close proximity to the north and south and there is little topographical variation to offer visual variety.</p> <p>On the wider plateau, there are relatively few remaining hedges or hedgerow trees and a lack of other features to provide visual interest or draw the eye. The small villages and hamlets such as Bentley, The Heath, Potash and East End are largely modern in character with relatively few houses reflecting the local vernacular. The many small roads, telephone wires and low voltage power lines are visible over relatively wide areas owing to the flat nature of the plateau in general and together with storage areas for agricultural machinery and irrigation equipment and the relative lack of hedges or hedgerow trees, give the area a modern utilitarian feel and reduce scenic quality. In some areas shallow valley slopes associated with the river valleys which lie in neighbouring Character Areas occur, offering some topographical variation and small areas of higher landscape quality in the otherwise relatively featureless plateau landscape. These higher valley slopes are associated with the main Samford river valley, the upper reaches of the northern Samford tributary valley at Bentley Hall and the upper reaches of the Holbrook valley.</p> <p>In the immediate vicinity of Bentley Hall and Bentley Park there is a small area of higher scenic quality where a shallow winding tributary valley occurs in combination with well managed areas of estate woodland, parkland type planting, and some designed elements in the landscape, providing a strong woodland influence and estate character with harmonious compositions and slight topographical variation and glimpsed views to the wider plateau landscape. Numbers of attractive vernacular buildings around Bentley Hall, its church, and the presence of old green lanes such as Old Hall Lane also make a significant contribution to scenic quality in this small area, though it is surrounded in all directions by lower quality typical plateau arable land. There is also an area of well managed parkland around Bentley Manor contributing to higher scenic quality locally.</p> <p>In the three areas with significant groupings of semi-natural woodland mentioned in the landscape quality section above, scenic quality is also higher. These woodland groups are important in defining views, create visual structure in the otherwise open, relatively flat landscape and contribute to a stronger wooded estate character in these areas. The woods at Dodnash and Holbrook Park/Cutlers Wood sit on the edge of the plateau and extend into the neighbouring Samford and Orwell Character Areas, where they are important in defining the visual limits of the valley systems. The encircling estate woodlands around Bentley Hall, Bentley Long Wood to Old Hall Wood and Wherstead Wood frame views in all directions in the area north of Bentley though some have been replanted, including with conifers in places, altering the traditional broadleaved woodland colours and patterns. The intervening agricultural land between the Bentley woods however consists of flat, large-scale arable cultivation with few field boundaries, reducing scenic quality and the overall impression here is one of a well-wooded modern farming landscape.</p>

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<b>Relative Wildness</b>	<p><b>Area D3: Shotley Peninsula Plateau</b></p> <p>Overall, this is an area with a strong agricultural character, which does not have a sense of relative wildness. The more extensive areas of woodland do however offer a degree of relative wildness in places, especially where stands of spring flowers combine with mature broadleaved trees. Some areas of re-planted woodland do not appear to have been subsequently managed, offering some sense of a return to nature in places, with fallen trees and accumulations of dead wood.</p>
<b>Relative Tranquillity</b>	<p><b>Area D3: Shotley Peninsula Plateau</b></p> <p>There is a relatively tranquil rural feel across much of the area except where road noise impinges, such as in proximity to A12, A137 and A14, though this is variable and dependent on wind direction and degree of screening vegetation. Intermittent train noise has an impact close to the mainline railway line and the impact of the roads and railway on tranquillity is confirmed by CPRE noise mapping. The settlements of The Heath, Bentley, Upper Street and East End with their higher density modern development and night lighting, also reduce tranquillity in their vicinity. There are few large-scale detracting features apart from the roads, railway and power lines but the flat landform, lack of hedgerows and relatively low overall level of woodland do mean that where smaller scale incongruous features occur, their influence is visible over a wider area than in more enclosed landscapes. The combinations of high voltage and low voltage power lines criss-crossing the fields, together with modern agricultural machinery and irrigation infrastructure contribute to a sense of clutter in some areas, also reducing tranquillity locally.</p>
<b>Natural Heritage Features</b>	<p><b>Area D3: Shotley Peninsula Plateau</b></p> <p>There are three areas which support significant concentrations of semi-natural woodland habitat, all clustered towards the periphery of the area. Around Bentley Hall/Bentley Old Hall/ Bentley Manor in the north-west are Bentley Long Wood, Brockley Wood, Old Hall Wood, Enry Wood, Pedlar's Grove, Newcome and Wherstead Wood. In the east are Holbrook Park, Cutler's Wood, Woodley Wood and Hale Grove, and in the south-west lie Great Martin's Hill Wood, Holly Wood and Dodnash Wood which continue into the neighbouring Samford Valley landscape. The woods at Holbrook Park and Cutler's Wood are designated SSSI for their woodland interest and many of the others are County and Local Wildlife sites. Stools of coppiced sweet chestnut found in Holbrook Park wood are among the largest recorded in Britain.</p> <p>Much of the woodland has been replanted, often with broadleaved species such as beech and sycamore and in some cases by conifers, reducing its biodiversity interest, though in the larger semi-natural woodlands, areas with good spring ground flora (including carpets of bluebells), relict hornbeam, hazel and cherry and a thicker shrub layer survive and provide greater habitat interest. Woodland bird song provides additional interest, many woods support dormouse and areas with good levels of deadwood provide habitat for invertebrates such as Stag Beetle.</p> <p>Other than the ancient woodland sites there are few other priority habitats, only the small scattered broadleaved woods, reflecting the productive soils of the area, which are well suited to modern arable agricultural production. Hedgerows are relatively sparse throughout most of the area and in many cases have become 'gappy' and thin, reducing their biodiversity interest and hedgerow trees are also relatively limited. Areas which have retained a wooded estate character (e.g. in the north-west around Bentley Hall) also retain some substantial hedges containing a mix of species including suckering English Elm, spindle and holly as well as higher numbers of hedgerow trees, largely ash, increasing habitat connectivity locally.</p> <p>The red crag geology of the area is not a dominant presence and there is little geomorphological interest visible apart from a</p>

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	<p>short stretch of shallow river valley at Bentley Hall/Park and some upper valley slopes associated with the neighbouring Samford Valley and Holbrook Valley systems, which provide a little topographical variety. Soils over much of the area derive from fine-grained loess deposits originating as wind-blown sediments from glacial sources and these sandy loam soils support heathy remnant vegetation in places including bracken, broom and birch, particularly along road verges and in Wherstead Wood. However, formerly more extensive areas of heath such as Clubs Heath and Hall Heath have been planted with woodland, changing their characteristic vegetation patterns and species and masking the past heathland character. Heavy Diamicton clays overlie the bedrock geology in the north west of the area. These were harder to cultivate before the advent of tractors and may have influenced the survival of the clusters of semi-natural woodlands in the Bentley area.</p>
<b>Cultural Heritage Features</b>	<p><b>Area D3: Shotley Peninsula Plateau</b></p> <p>The soils on the Shotley Peninsula Plateau were considered by writers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries to be the best in the county. This legacy of productive agriculture and cultivation means that there are relatively few surviving above ground features of cultural heritage interest on the farmland and there are no Scheduled Monuments within the area. In dry weather, some crop marks become visible eg in the area south of Wherstead Wood; and a few areas with ditches, barrow sites and enclosures survive eg south of Shrub Wood. Many of the field systems have however been rationalised owing to changing agricultural practice and increasing machinery sizes, leading to a simplification of the earlier patterns of enclosure and a reduction in field boundaries. Evidence for former areas of heathland, is now generally limited to place names and heathy vegetation in some woods, verges and hedgerows. In places old lanes and hollow ways have survived, often as green lanes or footpaths and the original patterns of roadways connecting the dispersed rural dwellings remains intact. This is particularly true in the west of the area around Bentley e.g. Old Hall Lane and Bentley Lane, where they add interest and contribute to a stronger sense of time depth locally.</p> <p>Some of the ancient woodlands eg Wherstead Wood, Dodnash, Great Martin's Wood and Holbrook Park retain historic woodland management features such as coupes, boundary banks, and old coppice stools and they also feature in the writings of Oliver Rackham. In places heath and ancient woodland indicator species occur, contributing to a stronger sense of time depth and past diversity within the woodlands. Parts of two historic parklands survive in the north of the area at Bentley Park and Bentley Manor, and new parkland planting has been undertaken in the vicinity of Bentley Manor.</p> <p>The settlements do not exhibit a strong local character or sense of time depth, however the scatter of attractive vernacular buildings away from the settlements add time depth especially the significant grouping of fine vernacular listed buildings including halls, a tithe barn (currently in a poor state of repair) and a church in the vicinity of Bentley Hall/Park, Bentley Old Hall. These and nearby Bentley Manor do make a positive contribution to natural beauty locally where they appear in combination with their gardens, parkland and designed landscape features. There is also a line of six attractive, listed, vernacular farmsteads and cottages along the old London Road adjacent to the A12, in the west of the area, including the 14<sup>th</sup> Century Grade II* Boynton Hall, though these are surrounded on all sides by typical modern plateau farmland.</p>
<b>Evaluation</b>	
<b>Overall weight and spatial distribution of natural beauty evidence</b>	<p><b>Area D3: Shotley Peninsula Plateau</b></p> <p>The Shotley Peninsula Plateau within this evaluation area has a mixed weight of evidence of natural beauty. Although some areas have higher levels of natural beauty, these are small and fragmented and the majority of the area has a lower weight of</p>

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	<p>evidence of natural beauty. Overall, the area has a modern utilitarian agricultural character of moderate landscape and scenic quality. There is little sense of relative wildness though much of the area is tranquil, reflecting the relative lack of large settlements and major roads. Landscape and scenic quality are highest in areas with some topographical variation and where this combines with areas of semi-natural woodland and views of vernacular buildings, particularly in the area around Bentley Park, Bentley Hall and Bentley Manor where historic landscape patterns remain relatively intact. However, these areas are limited in extent within a wider area which overall, lacks distinction due to the intensity of modern agricultural use. Apart from the three clusters of semi-natural ancient woodland sites and the groups of listed buildings in the vicinity of Bentley, the area as a whole also lacks significant natural or cultural heritage interest.</p> <p>On this basis, the Shotley Peninsula Plateau as a whole is not considered suitable for inclusion within the Candidate Area for designation. However in areas adjacent to the main Samford River valley and Freston Brook, parts of the upper valley slopes and areas of woodlands lying within this Character Area are closely associated with the neighbouring qualifying valley systems and benefit from views across them, giving them a stronger weight of evidence.</p>
<b>Candidate Area</b> <b>Overall recommendation as to land that should be considered a Candidate Area</b>	<p>The parts of the Dodnash Special Landscape Area which are considered suitable for inclusion within a Candidate Area include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the main Samford River valley, running north, then west from the existing AONB boundary at Stutton Bridge to the A12 and several small tributary valleys running into the main valley.</li> <li>some peripheral areas of the Shotley Peninsula Plateau in the immediate vicinity of the Samford Valley, which play an important role in framing the Samford Valley system. These include the cluster of ancient woodlands along the edge of the plateau landscape, some of which spread down onto the valley slopes, eg Dodnash, Holly and Great and Little Martin's Woods; as well as areas which provide views across the valleys or into the head of the tributary valley systems, such as at Hill Farm, Manor Farm and Stutton Lane.</li> <li>Some peripheral areas of the Shotley Peninsula Plateau in the immediate vicinity of the head of the Freston Brook Valley which play an important role in framing the Freston valley system, including Holbrook Park and Cutler's Wood.</li> </ul>
<b>Need for further scrutiny</b>	<p>There is a need for further scrutiny to identify a suitable boundary between the main Samford tributary valley which meets the natural beauty criterion and the part of the northern tributary valley which does not.</p> <p>There is a need for further scrutiny to identify a suitable boundary which would include the higher quality upper valley slopes and semi-natural woodlands which lie adjacent to the Samford Valley and Freston Brook valley systems on the Shotley Peninsula Plateau which are associated with these valley systems and which do meet the natural beauty criterion, but not the wider Shotley Peninsula Plateau which does not.</p>
<b>Issues to be Addressed in Defining Extent</b> <b>Transition</b>	<p><b>D1: Samford Valley</b></p> <p>There is no sudden change in the level of natural beauty either side of the existing AONB boundary within the Samford Valley system. There is a gradual diminution in landscape and scenic quality in the upper reaches of the main valley system as the valleys narrow and become shallower, agricultural management changes to arable cultivation, field sizes become larger and more regular and there is a change in landscape character and quality to the neighbouring Shotley Peninsula typical plateau</p>

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	<p>farmland.</p> <p>There is a transition in the level of tranquillity in the vicinity of both the A12 and the A137 and the mainline railway; however this is relatively slight and there is surprisingly little road noise, even in close proximity to the A12, due to the complex valley topography and maturing adjacent mitigating tree and hedgerow planting.</p> <p>Along the northern rim of the main Samford Valley, the extensive woods extend onto the neighbouring plateau and screen the Shotley Peninsula Plateau farmland to the north from view along most of the length of the valley west of the A137, framing the valley landscape and providing a clear transition between the two different Character Areas. Their importance in framing the valley landscape and separating it from the neighbouring plateau should be taken into account in seeking a suitable boundary along this side of the valley.</p> <p>There is also a transition in the level of natural beauty between the main river valley and the northern tributary valley, which has a simpler, less branching form and gentler slopes, which have allowed arable cultivation down to the valley floor along most of the west side of the valley, resulting in a simpler, more modern landscape with fewer features of interest.</p> <p>Care will need to be taken at the boundary setting stage to ensure that the proposed boundary is drawn to include the higher quality land and to exclude areas of lesser quality in these areas of transition.</p>
<b>Fragmentation</b>	<p><b>D1: Samford Valley</b></p> <p>Like the other short river systems on south side of the Shotley Peninsula, the Samford Valley system runs into the Stour Estuary. The area which lies outside the existing AONB boundary does not have a strong estuarine influence, as it is fragmented physically and visually from the estuary landscape by topography and also by a bend in the river. The area does however have many other qualities which contribute to natural beauty and which are not undermined by the lack of an estuarine influence.</p> <p>The main river valley is also visually and physically fragmented in the vicinity of Brantham Bridge, where the mainline railway crosses the valley on an embankment and the main A137 road crosses the valley in close proximity, though the impact of this fragmentation is relatively limited in extent.</p> <p>In the far west of the Evaluation Area, the A12 also fragments the Samford Valley system cutting off the valley to the west of this main road from the majority of the valley system.</p> <p>Care should be taken at the boundary setting stage to ensure that the proposed boundary is drawn to exclude areas affected by fragmentation adjacent to the A12 and to find a suitable line in the area affected by the A137 and railway at Brantham Bridge.</p>
<b>Incongruous features</b>	<p><b>D1: Samford Valley</b></p> <p>In the Stutton Brook valley there are few large-scale incongruous features. Those which are present occur either at the edge of the qualifying area (notably the A12) or are clustered together in the vicinity of Brantham Bridge, where their overall impact is limited owing to the curving river morphology and surrounding planting. At Brantham Bridge, the railway runs on a high viaduct across the main valley and then continues along the length of the northern tributary valley. The mainline infrastructure and</p>

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	<p>electrification features have an impact on landscape quality along the full length of the northern tributary valley. A line of high voltage power cables also runs up the entire length of this valley though in places its effect is localised due to the topography and winding nature of the valley and framing woods and the fact that the pylons sit low on the valley floor. The A137 has a localised impact at Brantham Bridge, though it only directly affects a small section of the valley as it continues onto the plateau away from the valley once it has crossed Stutton Brook.</p> <p>In a few places small modern plantations of Scots Pine, poplar and willow and modern orchard planting are altering the traditional patterns, colours and textures of the area. Fencing and other developments associated with keeping horses are also altering boundary patterns and character in a small area overlooking Brantham Bridge. An area of drainage works and modern mitigating tree planting of a non-local species mix affects landscape and scenic quality in the northern tributary valley in the vicinity of Folly Farm. The impact of these features is however localised and does not affect the landscape quality overall.</p> <p>Care will need to be taken at the boundary setting stage to ensure that a suitable boundary is chosen to exclude the lower quality land in the northern tributary valley.</p>
<b>Settlements</b>	<p><b>D1: Samford Valley</b></p> <p>There are no large settlements within the Samford Valley Evaluation Area, only a few scattered farmsteads on the rim of the valleys and one on valley floor at Dodnash Priory, which all make positive contributions to natural beauty, reflecting the use of local materials and styles in their construction.</p> <p>The small hamlet of Bentley Junction lies within the northern tributary valley where the landscape and scenic quality are affected by the mainline railway infrastructure and a row of high voltage power cables and there are few features of natural or cultural interest. The settlement does not have a great deal of remaining historic interest, the old station having been demolished and the small cluster of houses includes an assortment of modern development which does not generally reflect the local vernacular.</p>

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### **7.0 Conclusion**

#### **7.1 Summary of Evaluation Results**

7.1.1 The evaluation process described above identified significant areas of land which have sufficient outstanding natural beauty to warrant designation as AONB. These lie in three separate areas:

- 1) Parts of the Stour Estuary Character Area including the majority of the Stour Estuary, estuary valley slopes at Brantham and the southern estuary valley slopes from east of Mistley to the western end of Parkeston Quay.
- 2) A small area of land in the Orwell Character Area including tributary valley land extending inland from the existing AONB boundary westwards along the Freston Brook and including surrounding plateau woodlands which play an important role in framing the valley system.
- 3) Land in the Samford Valley Character Area extending along the Samford Valley from the existing AONB boundary at Stutton Bridge, running north for a short stretch, then largely west to the A12, and including some areas of neighbouring Shotley Peninsula Plateau Character Area with upper valley slope character and significant concentrations of attractive woodland which are important in framing the valley system.

7.1.2 The full extent of the areas which are likely to meet the technical criterion for designation and within which a boundary may be sought were included within a Candidate Area. The Candidate Area is shown on the **Candidate Area Map at Figure Nine.**

7.1.3 The Candidate Area is shown as a hatched area without a defined boundary. This is because it should not be taken to denote a boundary and also because in drawing a boundary the extent may change. It should also be noted that the degree of natural beauty is variable in some areas which have been included within the Candidate Area due to a range of issues which will require further consideration during the desirability and boundary setting stages. This may or may not result in the exclusion of these areas from a proposed boundary variation. The Evaluation Tables provide further information on the affected areas.

7.1.4 It is worth noting that the Candidate Area does not include any settlements. In the main it includes the majority of the estuary itself, estuary slopes, tranquil tributary valley systems and areas of plateau which have strong visual links to the estuary or tributary valleys and contain natural or cultural interest.

#### **7.2 Satisfying the legislative test**

7.2.1 The detailed evaluation process led to the conclusion that there is a clear weight of evidence of outstanding natural beauty in the areas included within the Candidate Area and that, as required by the legislation, taken together with the existing Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB they form 'an area of land' of outstanding natural beauty, which may be considered further in relation to the desirability of AONB designation and within which a detailed boundary may be sought.

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**Appendix One: Landscape Character Area Descriptions.**

The text in this appendix has been reproduced from the Shotley Peninsula and Hinterland Landscape Character Assessment, Alison Farmer Associates, April 2013. © The Stour and Orwell Society and Suffolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The full assessment can be found on the website of the Stour and Orwell Society at <http://www.stourandorwellsociety.org.uk/>.

**Stour Estuary Character Area Description**

**Context**

This Character Area comprises the Stour Estuary including its north and south valley sides and the water channel/mudflats and saltmarsh areas in between. It is defined by the main break in slope between the valley sides and wider plateau landscape beyond and is therefore a visual landscape unit where the sense of estuary is easily perceived. In the west this area is defined by the Study Area along the A137 and in the east by the confluence with the Orwell Estuary and start of Harwich Harbour.

**Summary Description**

The Stour estuary is almost 11 miles long, relatively straight and wide - stretching 1.5 to 2km in width and straddles the Essex/Suffolk county boundary. It comprises an indented shoreline of small peninsulas with 5 main bays (including some sandy beaches), namely Seafield, Holbrook and Erwarton on the north shore and, Jacques and Copperas on the south shore. Orientated east-west the mouth of the estuary discharges into the lower reaches of the Orwell estuary, while the western upper reaches of the estuary are defined by the A137, beyond which is the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The name Stour comes from the Celtic word sturr meaning "strong".

The predominate geology is London Clay, sands and gravels and alluvium giving rise to deep permeable coarse loamy soils which are slowly permeable in places. Topographically the valley sides of the Stour Estuary are gentle and reclining rising to 20-25m AOD interrupted by small tributary valleys. The width of water and expansive mudflats, reinforce the overall sense of scale and openness and from the shore line there are wide views across and along the estuary with an ever changing sky overhead. On the valley sides there is a mixture of arable land use coupled with estate landscape on the southern shores, or parkland on the northern shores. In places the shoreline is defined by low cliffs and sandy beaches e.g. south of Stutton and around Wrabness Point. Copperas Bay was so called on account of the large quantities of copperas (fossilised or pyritised wood) found within the clay mudflats which historically was extracted and used in the production of iron. There are also a few small areas of saltmarsh e.g. Bramble Creek and Erwarton Bay and areas of sea wall – some operational, some left redundant following sea breaches e.g. around Markwell's Farm. This estuary has a strong historic association with trade which in turn generated significant wealth - still evident in the plethora of country houses, historic parkland and estate lands set back along the estuaries as well as the architecture and buildings in Mistley and Manningtree which flank the upper reaches of the estuary. In the past Holbrook Creek was used by barges to transport the bricks from the brickworks on the edge of the creek to London. Similarly Grahams Dock southwest of Crowe Hall was used to transport goods to and from London. Evidence of past wharfs can be found along the foreshore in the form of wooden posts while recreational piers were associated with Stutton Hall. Other historic features in the mudflats which reflect the history of the area include ship hulks at Wrabness Beach and remains of an Anglo-Saxon fish trap at Holbrook Bay.

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There are also strong associations with the Navy, particularly at Shotley Gate. Here land at Shotley Gate was used as a cadet training school for the Royal Navy (known as HMS Ganges), while the Royal Hospital School at Stutton, which has close links to the Royal Navy, was originally based in Greenwich before relocating to Holbrook in 1933.

The Stour is now used by small recreation boats and also for shooting, while large ferries leave Parkeston to take passengers to Holland. Importantly, beyond the main settlements of Mistley, Manningtree, Brantham/Cattawade, and Shotley Gate, much of the land is private and there is limited access to the foreshore except by foot. Consequently the visitor numbers are less than other more accessible estuaries and opportunities to experience tranquillity and solace are high.

### **Distinctive Characteristics**

- Broad sheltered estuary enlarged by glacial meltwater and then 'drowned' by rising sea level.
- Extensive intertidal mudflats exposed during low tides when river shrinks to a central channel of water. At high tide this is contrasted with a wide expanse of open water.
- Mixed farming in small to medium scaled fields, defined by hedges with occasional hedgerow trees; resulting in predominately undeveloped shoreline.
- Blocks of woodland, some ancient and semi-natural (lime, oak and sweet chestnut coppice) provide areas of greater enclosure and in places extend to the shoreline.
- Dispersed pattern of farmsteads and hamlets e.g. Erwarton, and Bradfield.
- Repetitive pattern of estate houses/halls often associated with parkland (e.g. Stutton Park, Crowe Hall, Nether Hall, Beaumont Hall, Wrabness Hall, Jacques Hall and Mistley Place Park).
- Larger settlements of Brantham, Manningtree and Mistley in the west and Parkeston, Harwich and Shotley Gate in the east historically associated with trade evidence in quays, maltings, and warehouses.
- Vernacular building materials include red brick, pantiles and colour washed plaster.
- Narrow lanes extend down from main valley side road to farmsteads and large houses overlooking the estuary.
- Railway line from Manningtree to Harwich runs along the southern side of the estuary.
- Estuary is used for a variety of recreational pursuits including yachting, recreational boating, wildfowling with waterfront at Mistley and beach at Wrabness (including summer huts) and the Stour and Orwell Walk and Essex Way long distance paths along northern and southern shores respectively.
- Changing tides give this landscape a dynamic character affecting views across the open water/mudflats.

## **Orwell Estuary Character Area Description**

### **Context**

This Character Area comprises the Orwell Estuary including its north and south valley sides and the water channel/mudflats and saltmarsh areas in between. It is defined by the main break in slope between the valley sides and wider plateau landscape beyond and is therefore a visual landscape unit where the sense of estuary is easily perceived. In the west this area is defined by the Study Area where Ipswich docks start and in the south east by the confluence with the Stour Estuary and Harwich Harbour.

### **Summary Description**

The Orwell Estuary is one of a number of estuary landscapes which fall within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB. Its upper tidal limits are bounded by the Ipswich Docks and at its

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lower reaches by the confluence of the Stour Estuary and Harwich Harbour. The Orwell estuary is long and narrow, heavily influenced by the sea which is the dominant source of sediments. Relatively straight and orientated west east for much of its length, the estuary takes an abrupt right angled turn southwards between Chelmondiston and Shotley.

The valley sides comprise a patchwork of arable and pasture land uses interspersed by areas of native woodland which in places overhang the water's edge. Areas of older plantation woodland, wood pasture and veteran trees are common within the estate and landscaped parkland associated with country houses which frequently occur along the valley sides e.g. Orwell Park, Broke Hall, Stratton Hall, Alston Hall, Woolverstone Park, Freston Park, and Wherstead Park.

The pattern of landuse and enclosure often reinforces the topography of the valley sides, which are gently sloping but clearly defined, giving rise to high scenic quality when combined with a foreground of mudflats and saltmarsh as well as open water. Repetitive woodland cover and open arable landuse combine to create a series of spatial experiences and framed views across the estuary which can be appreciated from the shoreline footpaths or valley sides.

The recreational boating activity on the water and associated marinas (such as Stoke Sailing Club at Freston Point, Woolverstone Marina or Levington Marina), along with views across the estuary to large estate houses and landmarks such as Freston Tower add activity, visual interest and also a strong time depth. These features and the relatively intimate scale of the estuary help to reinforce a strong sense of place and local identity.

The dispersed pattern of small villages on the valley sides, along with the rural lanes which connect them, give rise to a landscape which feels disconnected and tranquil. The visual and noise intrusion of the Orwell Bridge/traffic, and of the cranes at Felixstowe Port undermine this tranquillity in places but much of the estuary remains unaffected.

### **Distinctive Characteristics**

- The predominate geology is London Clay, sands and gravels and alluvium giving rise to deep permeable coarse loamy soils which are slowly permeable in places.
- Narrow sheltered estuary, approximately 1km wide, enlarged by glacial meltwater and then 'drowned' by rising sea level.
- Defined by steeply rising and undulating valley sides reaching approximately 20-25m AOD and interrupted by small tributary valleys around Freston and between Nacton and Levington.
- Small inlets or creeks occur where tributary streams enter the estuary e.g. Pinmill, Colton, Nacton, and Levington Creeks.
- Areas of intertidal mudflats exposed during low tides when river shrinks to a central channel of water. At high tide this is contrasted with a wide expanse of open water.
- Large tidal mudflats and limited fringes/pockets of saltmarsh at Levington Creek and Colton Creek and flood defence embankments in lower reaches enclosing Shotley and Trimley Marshes and Levington Creek.
- Mixed farming in small to medium scaled fields - pasture on steepest slopes with arable (including maize and sugar beet) on more gentle slopes resulting in a predominately undeveloped shoreline and scenic patchwork of land uses.
- Well wooded landscape including small copses, woodland belts and more extensive areas of woodland - some ancient and semi-natural including lime, oak and sweet chestnut coppice providing enclosure and in places meeting the shoreline.
- Poplar plantations along tributary stream valleys and on the upper slopes there are frequently small conifer plantations.

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- Dispersed pattern of farmsteads and repetitive pattern of estate houses/halls often associated with parkland (e.g. Orwell Park House (school), Broke Hall, Stratton Hall, Alston Hall, Woolverstone Park House (school) and Freston Park).
- Larger settlements include Pinmill which nestles within a small valley along the southern shore and the southern part of Nacton and Levington on the north shore.
- Narrow lanes extend down from main valley side road to large houses overlooking the estuary and connect small hamlets/villages.
- Local vernacular building materials include red brick, pantiles, colour washed plaster.
- Tidal character gives this landscape a dynamic quality with changing views across the open water/mudflats.
- Estuary is used for a variety of quiet recreational pursuits including yachting, recreational boating, wildfowling (through club membership) and there is good parking and footpath access along the northern and southern shores.
- Extensive views to Felixstowe cranes from lower reaches and Orwell Bridge from upper reaches.

### **Samford Valley Character Area Description**

#### **Context**

This includes the incised, intimate and wooded valleys to the southwest of the Study Area associated with the Samford River. The main valley is orientated west-east with a tributary valley extending northwards as far as Bentley Hall. South of Stutton Bridge the valley becomes more open and forms part of the Stour Estuary Character Area, entering the Estuary at Newmill Creek.

#### **Summary Description**

This is a valley landscape which is incised and narrow with steep valley sides and has some of the most varied topography of the Study Area. There are few places where the valley is accessible by car as roads tend to pass across the valley rather than along it. Footpaths through the valley do however afford opportunities for quiet solitude. Similarly there is little settlement except for the occasional isolated farm.

This river valley has a traditional, pastoral character created by the mix of traditional grazing and arable cultivation. The permanent pastures/meadows of the valley floors are inherently wet, and are drained by a network of ditches. In contrast, the grassland and arable areas typical of the dry valley slopes are enclosed by hedges, often with hedgerow trees.

Historically, the value of the meadows precluded their use for woodland, except in the wettest areas where alder carrs were a more viable option. Some of the alder carrs still survive, but the decline in the value of meadows in the 20th century has led to plantations, particularly of poplars or cricket-bat willows. Some 'amenity' planting of trees in the valleys has also occurred which is out of character with the pattern, species and extent of tree cover of this landscape character type.

Ancient woodlands on the adjacent plateau landscape also help frame the valley landscape and reinforce the sense of enclosure. The valley floor is narrow and in places there are former river bluffs where red sandy deposits are exposed and acid loving species such as gorse can be found.

The railway line connecting Manningtree with Ipswich severs the valley west of Brantham Bridge and passes through the northern tributary valley on its western valley sides. Its valley location means that it is visually well concealed by topography and vegetation from the wider landscape and there once was a station at Bentley - hence the collection of houses at the

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junction of the road and railway. Nevertheless the railway does affect perceptions of tranquillity within the tributary valley, as do the pylons which follow an almost identical route northwards.

In the west of the valley there is the site of a former Augustinian Priory which was founded c1188 and dissolved in 1525. Although there are thought to be no physical remains of the Priory there is some evidence in the vicinity including a pond (perhaps former fish ponds) and a section of stone wall. There is also evidence of some reused Medieval stone in Dodnash Priory Farm.

This area of landscape has been designated as a Special Landscape Area because it comprises a river valley which still possesses traditional grazing meadows with their hedgerows, dykes and associated flora and fauna.

### **Distinctive Characteristics**

- Valley floor made up of seasonally wet clays overlying alluvial deposits and peat with freer draining soils on the valley sides.
- Acidic soils reflected in presence of broom, birch and bracken in lane verges and hedgerows.
- Narrow, intimate and enclosed valley landscape; with steep valley sides, river bluffs and natural springs.
- Areas of wet pasture/meadows and alder carr along narrow valley floors defined by ditches.
- Small scale hedgerow network on valley sides enclosing arable and pasture land uses.
- Areas of ancient woodland and some conifer plantations including sweet chestnut and coppiced hazel; as well as areas of fruit growing/orchards on south facing slopes.
- Pattern of dispersed farmsteads connected by narrow lanes sometimes incised on steep valley sides.
- Railway line and pylons dissect this valley landscape running north south.
- Rights of Way are fragmented and sparse - this is not a readily accessible landscape.
- Deeply historic and unspoilt landscape.

## **Shotley Peninsula Plateau Character Area Description**

### **Context**

This includes the central upland farmed plateau of Shotley Peninsula which stretches from the western boundary of the Study Area (A12) as a central 'shoulder' of land as far as Shotley in the east. It is bounded to the north and south by the Orwell and Stour Estuary Character Areas respectively. The change in character is generally marked by a break in slope and or views to the estuary water. The plateau is drained by small streams which create shallow valleys and add variation to this otherwise relatively flat plateau.

### **Summary Description**

This is a flat plateau of loamy well-draining arable land, which forms the central part of the Shotley Peninsula. It has historically been regarded by 18th and 19th century agricultural writers as having some of the best soils in the country. This landscape is unique in Suffolk with a mix of "modern" rectilinear field systems with Ancient Woodland and parklands.

The landscape pattern is characterised by large-scale arable blocks divided into rectilinear fields (reflecting relatively late enclosure) coupled with ancient woodland and remnant parklands. There are some notable hedges of holly with pollard oaks, while suckering elm is usually very dominant on the lightest land. Place names reflect former heathland, and occasional patches of gorse and birch in verges/hedgerows indicate former unenclosed

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areas of common grazing and heath. Although the predominant land use is arable, some pig rearing occurs in the east and orchards/fruit growing in the west. Areas of open arable farmland are of particular value for farm birds including lapwing, grey partridge, yellow wagtail, tree sparrow, turtle dove and corn bunting.

Historically this landscape had a number of extensive parkland landscapes including Tattingstone and Woolverstone which extended into the adjacent Holbrook Valley or Orwell Estuary Character Areas respectively. Although both have now become fragmented, remnants of parkland continue to make an important contribution to local sense of place.

The area has a substantial number of ancient woodlands, some up to 80ha in size. In the west there is the close grouping of Great and Little Martin's Woods, Dodnash Wood and Holly Wood; Old Hall Wood on Bentley's northern boundary close to Spinney Wood and Wherstead Wood, with Holbrook Park and Cutler's Wood forming another group to the east. The south-eastern part of the area has smaller woods, such as Rence Park. There are also areas of plantation woodland although these are relatively small.

The existing settlement pattern is mainly one of villages, but with some dispersed farmsteads and isolated houses/churches. In the main, settlement clusters are on the edge of this landscape and housing development in the latter part of the century has significantly altered the character and appearance of many of the villages e.g. Holbrook, Shotley and Chelmondiston. This pattern of growth onto the Shotley Plateau has masked the historic association of settlement with adjacent valleys and estuaries.

Outside the villages the landscape is scattered with farms, cottages or isolated churches which in the Middle Ages would have been associated with manor halls. Often the farms comprise a mixture of exceptional vernacular buildings and some examples of more modern and larger scale buildings. On the western fringe of this landscape, at the boundary with the claylands, that there is a notable pattern of estate halls including Bentley Old Hall, Bentley Manor and Bentley Hall.

This landscape is crossed by a series of minor roads including the B1456 and B1080 as well as the more significant A137. These roads, along with a network of single tracked lanes, connect the various settlements and reinforce the perception of the area being a rural backwater. Some ancient routes remain as tracks and footpaths particularly in the west.

This landscape has a degree of homogeneity and regularity to it and a rural settled character. Some spatial variations occur - for example there is a greater concentration of woodland blocks in the west compared to the east; however, overall, the pattern of a wooded skyline across large scale open arable fields is consistent across the area. In most views there is often a farmstead or manor house reflecting the settled character.

There are glimpsed views to areas outside of this area e.g. Felixstowe docks or Royal Hospital School clock tower, and in the north the close proximity to Ipswich is evident in road development, presence of masts and increase in farm food outlets and small scale business parks converted from agricultural buildings.

### **Distinctive Characteristics**

- Deep loamy soil that originated as wind-blown sediments from glacial sources giving rise to fertile soils and predominately Grade 2 Agricultural Land.
- Elevated, open, exposed, gently undulating plateau/shoulder of land, drained by small shallow valleys; particularly in the southeast between Holbrook and Erwarton.
- Predominately arable farmland defined by rectilinear hedgerow enclosures and woodland blocks giving rise of an often open and defined landscape.

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- Extensive areas of ancient semi-natural woodland and some mixed conifer plantation which form blocks of woodland and create visual structure to the otherwise open, relatively flat landscape.
- Hedgerows along lanes frequently comprise suckering elm with pollarded oaks and holly.
- Dispersed estate farmsteads are the predominate settlement pattern reflecting former medieval halls and parks (e.g. Pannington Hall and Bond Hall) and remnant areas of parkland including Bentley Hall, Bentley Park, Bentley Manor and Belstead Hall.
- Settlements of Bentley, Belstead, Woolverstone, Stutton, Holbrook, Chelmondiston and Shotley, many of which include extensive areas of late 20th century housing development.
- Concentration of historic manor houses, churches and farms particularly in the west.
- Old lanes remain in the landscape as farm tracks and footpaths e.g. Old Hall Lane and Bentley Lane.
- Occasional long distant views to a wooded skyline but there are no views to the estuaries which lie in close proximity to the north and south.
- Views to isolated properties are commonplace giving rise to a settled but predominately quiet back-water character.

### **Holbrook Valley and Alton Water Character Area Description**

#### **Context**

This includes the valley of Holbrook River including the upper reaches which were flooded to form Alton Water reservoir. It also includes the remnant parkland, woodland and fish ponds associated with Holbrook Gardens. This Character Area is relatively small and stretches from the A137 in the west to Wall Farm in the southeast.

#### **Summary Description**

This landscape focuses on the valley of Holbrook River which comprises two distinct parts, firstly Alton Water, a manmade reservoir completed in 1978 which drowned the previous upper reaches of the shallow Holbrook Valley, and the river valley to the east and south which includes Holbrook Mill, meadows and remnant fish ponds associated with Holbrook Gardens.

Historically this landscape would have contained two landscaped gardens the first Holbrook Gardens (formerly the pleasure grounds to Woolverstone Hall) and the second Tattingstone Park associated with Tattingstone Place. Both have now become fragmented, the latter as a result of the creation of Alton Water.

Alton Water forms the largest area of inland water in Suffolk with a circumference of over 8 miles (13 km). It is fed from the River Gipping and bore holes on the north side of the River Orwell and has a natural indented coastline. At its widest the reservoir is approximately 0.5km and its water edge well vegetated. This, combined with the shallow valley sides, means that there are relatively few views to open water from the wider landscape and views tend to be restricted to glimpses from the water's edge. Similarly the narrow width of the reservoir means that it often appears small in scale and more like a lake. Only when viewing up or down the valley is there a greater sense of an expanse of open water.

The reservoir provides an important function in providing water to local conurbations, but is also marketed and managed for informal recreation including fishing, quiet water sports, walking and cycling. There is an information centre and facilities to the south near Stutton, parking at a number of locations, and waymarked trails around the reservoir.

East of the reservoir, the natural river valley returns and comprises gently sloping valley sides supporting both arable and pasture and a narrow valley floor with some areas of wet

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meadow/pastures as well as a small area of willow plantation. These wet pastures are likely to have been former reedbed/salt marsh prior to the construction of the sluice and flood defence barrier at the head of Holbrook Creek. There are a number of water channels and waterbodies in the valley relating to the fishponds associated with Holbrook Gardens which extended further to the north and also the mill pond. Overall the valley is well treed both in terms of small copses and lines of alder along watercourses or hedgerows and hedgerow trees and as such there are only occasional glimpsed views across the valley or to landmark buildings. Landmark buildings include the clock tower and water tower of the Royal Hospital School, which lies on higher land adjacent to the valley, as well as Holbrook Mill and church. The South Suffolk cycle route B runs through this area.

In terms of settlement this landscape comprises mainly a dispersed pattern of dwellings: these include the historic cluster of dwellings around Holbrook Mill (formerly the hamlet of Holbrook prior to more recent expansion to the north) as well as more recent infill large properties along the rural lanes. In the context of Alton Water there is the village of Tattingstone which is associated with Tattingstone Park and includes the Tattingstone Wonder - a folly church which is a local landmark and is Grade II\* listed as well as St Mary the Virgin church (Grade II\* listed) and former 18th century Workhouse (now residential). To the southeast of the village is Tattingstone Place, where former parkland and designed landscape is still evident as are white park railings around the house/farm. The village is connected to another small cluster of dwellings (and the 17th century coaching inn called the Tattingstone White Horse) on the north shore of the reservoir by the Lemon's Hill Bridge which is engineered in character reflecting the recent construction of the reservoir.

Where the rural lanes descend into the Holbrook Valley around Holbrook Mill they are often incised and flanked by former hazel coppice and woodbanks.

### **Distinctive Characteristics**

- Flat valley floor made up of seasonally wet clays overlying alluvial deposits and peat with freer draining soils on the valley sides.
- Sinuous and incised valley of the Holbrook, the upper reaches of which have been significantly altered with the creation of a reservoir (Alton Water) in the 1970's.
- Land use comprises a mixture of arable and pasture on the valley sides with patches of wet pastures within the valley floor.
- Alton Water is a small scale reservoir defined by gentle sloping valley sides giving the appearance of a large linear lake.
- The fringes of Alton Reservoir are well vegetated with a mixture of woodland and scrub enclosing views - some areas of ancient woodland including hazel coppice and woodbanks.
- Alton Water is valued for its birds offering breeding bird habitat for species such as Common Tern in summer and as a refuge/roost for wildfowl during winter months.
- The area is generally unsettled although there are occasional farmsteads on the edge of the valleys or on locally higher spots and the historic settlements of Holbrook and Tattingstone on the valley sides.
- Strong but informal recreational focus around Alton Water including fishing, cycling, quiet water sports and good parking, footpath and cycle path provision.
- Alton Water reservoir and Holbrook Valley are strongly concealed from views in the wider landscape and visible only from close proximity - this landscape does not have a strong presence in the wider landscape.

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**Appendix Two: Evaluation Framework for Natural Beauty Criterion.**

**Extract from Appendix 1 of Guidance for Assessing Landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Natural England, March 2011.**

**Evaluation Framework for Natural Beauty Criterion**

The sub-factors and associated indicators should be regarded as a menu of examples (Developed from past designations and subsequent consultation) from which those appropriate to the character of the landscape under consideration should be chosen, adapted or added to. There is no scoring process involving accumulations of indicators and it is possible for a landscape to exhibit natural beauty or offer opportunities for open air recreation even if a number of the indicators shown in this appendix are not present.

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Example sub-factor</b>	<b>Example Indicator</b>
<b>Landscape quality</b>	Intactness of the landscape in visual, functional and ecological perspectives	Characteristic natural and man-made elements are well represented throughout
	The condition of the landscape's features and elements	Landscape elements are in good condition
	The influence of incongruous features or elements (whether man-made or natural) on the perceived natural beauty of the area	Incongruous elements are not present to a significant degree, are not visually intrusive, have only localised influence or are temporary in nature
<b>Scenic quality</b>	A distinctive sense of place	Landscape character lends a clear and recognisable sense of place
	Striking landform	Landform shows a strong sense of scale or contrast
		There are striking landform types or coastal configurations
	Visual interest in patterns of land cover	Land cover and vegetation types form an appealing pattern or composition in relation to each other and/or to landform which may be appreciated from either a vantage point or as one travels through a landscape
	Appeal to the senses	Strong aesthetic qualities, reflecting factors such as scale and form, degree of openness or enclosure, colours and textures, simplicity or diversity, and ephemeral or seasonal interest
		Memorable or unusual views and eye-catching features or landmarks
		Characteristic cognitive and sensory stimuli (e.g. sounds, quality of light, characteristic smells, characteristics of the weather)

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<b>Relative wildness</b>	A sense of remoteness	Relatively few roads or other transport routes
		Distant from or perceived as distant from significant habitation
	A relative lack of human influence	Extensive areas of semi-natural vegetation
		Uninterrupted tracts of land with few built features and few overt industrial or urban influences
	A sense of openness and exposure	Open, exposed to the elements and expansive in character
	A sense of enclosure and isolation	Sense of enclosure provided by (e.g.) woodland, landform that offers a feeling of isolation
	A sense of the passing of time and a return to Nature	Absence or apparent absence of active human intervention
<b>Relative tranquillity</b>	Contributors to tranquillity	Presence and/or perceptions of natural landscape, birdsong, peace and quiet, natural-looking woodland, stars at night, stream, sea, natural sounds and similar influences
	Detractors from tranquillity	Presence and/or perceptions of traffic noise, large numbers of people, urban development, overhead light pollution, low flying aircraft, power lines and similar influences
<b>Natural heritage features</b>	Geological and geo-morphological features	Visible expression of geology in distinctive sense of place and other aspects of scenic quality
		Presence of striking or memorable geo-morphological features
	Wildlife and habitats	Presence of wildlife and/or habitats that make a particular contribution to distinctive sense of place or other aspects of scenic quality
		Presence of individual species that contribute to sense of place, relative wildness or tranquillity
<b>Cultural heritage</b>	Built environment, archaeology and designed landscapes	Presence of settlements, buildings or other structures that make a particular contribution to distinctive sense of place or other aspects of scenic quality
		Presence of visible archaeological remains, parkland or designed landscapes that provide striking features in the landscape
	Historic influence on the landscape	Visible presence of historic landscape types or specific landscape elements or features that provide evidence of time depth or historic influence on the

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		landscape
		Perceptions of a harmonious balance between natural and cultural elements in the landscape that stretch back over time
	Characteristic land management practices	Existence of characteristic land management practices, industries or crafts which contribute to natural beauty
	Associations with written descriptions	Availability of descriptions of the landscape in notable literature, topographical writings or guide books, or significant literature inspired by the landscape
	Associations with artistic representations	Depiction of the landscape in art, other art forms such as photography or film, through language or folklore, or in inspiring related music
	Associations of the landscape with people, places or events	Evidence that the landscape has associations with notable people or events, cultural traditions or beliefs