

Norfolk Coast AONB

INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE GUIDANCE

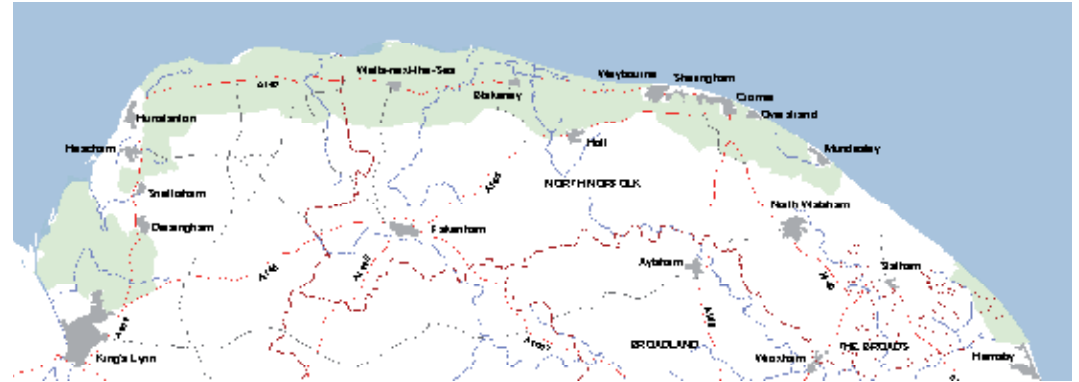


section 01

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.1

Background to the study



MAP 1 - EXTENT OF THE NORFOLK COAST AONB

1.1.1 The Norfolk Coast AONB

The Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was designated in 1968 in recognition of its scenic beauty, remarkable landscape and cultural diversity, and unique and special wildlife. The Norfolk Coast AONB is one of a family of 41 in England and Wales which, together with the National Parks, make up the areas that are identified as being our finest scenic areas.

The area of the Norfolk Coast AONB is shown on Map 1. It encompasses:

- the North Norfolk coastline between Old Hunstanton to the west and Bacton to the east, which includes the wild and remote coastal marshes of the North Norfolk Heritage Coast – a changing mixture of sand and mud flats, dunes, shingle, saltmarsh, reedbeds and grazing marsh - with its internationally important and renowned birdlife. It also includes the soft, eroding cliffs of glacial sands and gravels east of Weybourne, which are important geologically as well as scenically, and the rolling farmland, estates and woodland of the coastal hinterland, with important areas of heathland;
- the western outlier, north of King's Lynn, which includes part of Sandringham Estate and comprises part of the Wash mudflats as well as coastal marshes and lowland heath and bog, along with farmland; and
- the eastern outlier, between Sea Palling and Winterton, which comprises sand dunes and the low-lying marsh and arable farmland behind them.

The designated area is approximately 450 km² and includes the inter-tidal areas and the hinterland of the coast (which stretches up to 6km inland). The AONB crosses the boundaries of four administrative areas:

- King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council
- North Norfolk District Council
- Great Yarmouth Borough Council; and
- the Broads Authority Executive Area

1.1.2 Sustainable use and management of the AONB

A wide range of organisations and interests play a part in managing the Norfolk Coast and the Norfolk Coast Partnership was set up in 1991 to promote co-ordinate policies and action amongst its member organisations with the overarching aim of promoting the sustainable use of the AONB.

All landscapes are in a constant state of flux and the Norfolk Coast Partnership aims to manage and direct changes to the landscape so that they conserve and/or enhance its scenic character. The AONB landscape is a setting for nature conservation, farming, recreation and industry. It is a vulnerable coastline, which is influenced by the ongoing impacts of coastal erosion and sea level rise. Approximately 18,280 people live in the area and approximately 2.8 million visit each year ¹ to enjoy the beaches, panoramic seascapes, its wild, natural character and its stunning range of birds and wildlife.

The Norfolk Coast Partnership has prepared the first management plan for the AONB ². It was produced as a result of extensive consultation with local communities, organisations, interest groups and individuals and provides a framework for management of the area for partner organisations, and guidance for other organisations and individuals, to achieve conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the area and sustainable enjoyment of that natural beauty.

The AONB Management Plan is a working document, which undergoes a constant review process. This Guidance for the Integrated Landscape Character of the Norfolk Coast AONB has been developed as part of the ongoing AONB Management Plan Review process.

¹ Scott Wilson Ltd (for Norfolk Coast Partnership), June 2006
Tourism Benefits & Impacts Analysis in the Norfolk Coast AONB – Executive Summary

² Norfolk Coast AONB Management Plan 2004-2009

1.2

Guidance for the Integrated Landscape Character of the Norfolk Coast AONB

This Guidance for the Integrated Landscape Character of the Norfolk Coast AONB was commissioned by the Norfolk Coast Partnership, which facilitates a Working Group of landscape and planning officers from the local authorities, the Broads Executive Area, Norfolk County Council and a range of environmental organisations with an interest in the ongoing management of the AONB landscape. The group is working to develop a wider understanding and awareness of landscape character assessment and its use as a tool for managing the sustainable use of the AONB.

1.2.1 What is meant by ‘Integrated Landscape Character Assessment’?

Landscape character assessment is the process of identifying areas of similar character, classifying and mapping them and describing their character³. It highlights the unique combinations of elements and features which make each landscape distinctive and provides the evidence to assist the management of ongoing change. Integrated landscape character assessment is a holistic, ‘joined-up’ approach to landscape character assessment which considers visual, historic and ecological aspects of the landscape in equal measure.

1.2.2 What is the Guidance for?

The objectives of the Integrated Guidance for the Norfolk Coast AONB are to:

- describe the distinctive character of the Norfolk Coast AONB, taking account of its scenic qualities, its ecological value and its historical development (ie a holistic account which integrates these three aspects of landscape character)
- highlight those aspects of the landscape which are valued and particularly vulnerable to change and which therefore should be a priority for conservation – the ‘key environmental assets of the AONB landscape; and

- develop guidance on appropriate measures and considerations that will help conserve and enhance them, whilst encouraging the sustainable development of the area.

This Guidance is based on an Integrated Landscape Character Assessment which considers the landscapes of the AONB as a mosaic of different landscape types and character areas, each with particular characteristics and particular forces for change. The assessment is intended to provide an understanding of the AONB landscape, of the constraints and opportunities it presents to development, and to inform future policy.

1.2.3 Structure of the Guidance

The overall structure of the Guidance is summarised below.

SECTION 1 – SCOPE OF THE STUDY

- 1.1 Background to the study
- Norfolk Coast AONB
 - Role of the Norfolk Coast Partnership
 - Relationship of this study to the AONB Management Plan process

Guidance for the Integrated Landscape Character of the Norfolk Coast AONB

- Definition of integrated landscape character assessment
- Objectives of the Guidance
- How it is structured?
- Who is it for?
- How to use it?

SECTION 2 – OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT DATA

- 2.1 Relationship to previous studies
Role of this guidance in relation to other previous work in the region
- 2.2 Geology and coastal geomorphology
- 2.3 Landscape character
Hierarchy of landscape character classification at national, county, district and AONB level
- 2.4 Ecological network modelling
County & District ecological network mapping (Norfolk Wildlife Trust)
Heathland studies
- 2.5 Historic landscape characterisation - Historic Landscape Characterisation project (English Heritage)
- 2.6 Statutory designations
Ecological designations, nature reserves, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Conservation Areas
- 2.7 Tranquillity mapping

SECTION 3 – NORFOLK COAST AONB – CHARACTER & PRESSURES FOR CHANGE

- 3.1 AONB Landscape character
 - Summary description of landscape character across the Norfolk Coast AONB
- 3.2 Pressures for change
 - Generic guidance on managing the principal pressures for change in the AONB & a checklist of key points to consider in relation to planning applications
 - built development
 - infrastructure (roads, telecommunication masts, power lines etc.)
 - mineral extraction & waste disposal
 - agriculture & land management
 - forestry & woodland
 - tourism & recreation
 - renewable energy
 - climate change

SECTION 4 – INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE GUIDANCE FOR THE NORFOLK COAST AONB

- Open Coastal Marshes
- Drained Coastal Marshes
- Coastal Slopes
- Wooded Slopes with Estate Land
- Rolling Open Farmland
- Plateau Farmland
- Rolling Heath & Arable
- Small Valleys
- Tributary Farmland
- Wooded with Parkland
- Coastal Plain
- Coastal Towns & Villages
- Large Valleys
- Estuarine Marshland
- Settled Farmland
- Dunes, Coastal Levels & Resorts

Section 1 sets the scene and provides an overall introduction to the Norfolk Coast AONB, why it is special and how it is managed. It goes onto explain what the Guidance is for and how it is intended to be used.

Section 2 reviews the key data sets which are of relevance for the study, with cross references to key studies and documents which have informed this work and which might provide useful supplementary (and often more detailed) information.

Section 3 provides a broad overview of the distinctive landscape character of the AONB landscape and an analysis of the ongoing forces for change which are likely to influence the character of the landscape. Generic guidelines for managing each of these forces for change are also presented in this section, along with references for more detailed guidance and information and a checklist of key considerations to take into account when submitting or reviewing planning applications within the AONB.

Section 4 presents the integrated landscape character assessment and guidance for each of the 16 landscape types within the AONB. For each landscape type, there is:

- a description of integrated landscape character, with typical illustrative photographs
- a review of inherent landscape sensitivity in terms of key environmental assets. These are the distinctive and valuable landscape features and elements which are considered to be a priority for conservation
- a review of variations in landscape character within each type – the more detailed landscape character areas and their inherent sensitivity to change
- the forces for change which are likely to be influential
- guidance notes which demonstrate how landscape change can be managed so that the distinctive and valuable aspects of landscape character are conserved and enhanced. The guidance takes account of the specific key environmental assets and the forces for change relevant to each landscape type. The Guidance notes are accompanied by photographs and sketches which demonstrate how change can be managed within each landscape type. In many cases the sketches show what is meant by ‘appropriate, innovative design’.

1.2.4 Who is it for?

The Guidance is for use by everyone who has an interest in the character, conservation and management of the AONB landscape. It is particularly relevant to:

- Planning officers – who may use it to assist with the process of assessing and responding to planning applications
- Members of planning committees – who are asked to comment on planning applications
- Highways & transportation engineers – who may be designing changes to roads and infrastructure within the AONB
- Landowners & developers, who are submitting planning applications for sites which are within the AONB (or likely to have an impact on its landscape character). For instance the Guidance provides information which will be of particular relevance in preparing Design & Access Statements to accompany planning applications
- Local communities & Parish Councils – who may be responding to planning applications (and a range of other issues) as consultees or who may be engaged in the preparation of community-led planning documents such as Parish Plans.
- Land managers and agri-environment advisers, for agri-environment applications

1.2.5 How to use it

The Guidance is not designed to be read right through from start to finish. You may find it useful to skim through sections one and two and then dip in and out of section 3 and the individual reports for each landscape type (section 4). You can focus on the landscape types or the forces for change which are of most interest.

The key to accommodating landscape change successfully is to understand landscape scale and character; appreciate landform, geology, valuable ecological habitats, the evolution of field and settlement patterns; and respect local materials and building styles.

The text boxes below suggest how the Guidance might be of assistance to users who are:

- making or commenting on a planning application
- developing or evaluating an application for Environmental Stewardship
- preparing a Village/Town Design Statement or a Parish Plan.

Using the Guidance to help make or comment on a planning application

Following the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, planning applications must be accompanied by a Design Statement (also referred to as a Design & Access Statement). This is a written and illustrated report, which shows how the applicant has:

- analysed the site and its setting
- developed and applied design principles to achieve good, inclusive design for buildings and public spaces; and
- consulted on the issues⁴.

The scope and level of detail of the Design Statement depends on the nature of the development, the site and its context. All developments in AONBs require a Design Statement

If you are writing a Design Statement:

- Look up which landscape character type(s) the site is located in.
- Use the description of distinctive landscape character to help write the section on Site Context and Appraisal in the Statement, bearing in mind that you need to consider how the site relates to its wider context - well beyond the 'red line'.
- Use the description of distinctive landscape character and the bullet points in the guidance section to inform your proposals for landscape design, demonstrating that you have developed your proposals in response to the inherent landscape character of the area and that you are reinforcing and enhancing local character rather than imposing on it.

⁴ Urban Design Group, 2008, *Design & Access Statements Explained*

Include reference to:

- landscape type and setting, biodiversity, typical landscape pattern and boundary features (trees, hedgerows, walls, fencing), micro climate/orientation, historic and cultural features, local building materials and locally distinctive (vernacular) design
- Refer to relevant planning policies, adopted policy documents and to documents prepared by local communities – which show which aspects of the local area people value and the design principles on which they hope future development will be based.

If you are commenting on a Design Statement: -

Visit the application site to assess its likely impact on the surrounding landscape. Consider: -

- the extent to which the proposed design has evolved from an evaluation of the site and its context. Do you recognise the local landscape character from the description provided. If not use the description in the Guidance to help explain what has been missed and why these characteristics are important (from visual, ecological and/or historic landscape perspectives).
- whether the proposals take account of the key environmental assets of the area (as set out in the Landscape Sensitivity & Change sections of the Guidance) and, if necessary, refer to the need to conserve and enhance these specific assets in your response.
- how the development is integrated within the surrounding landscape context – in terms of boundary treatments (hedgerows, trees, fencing etc), public spaces, hard landscape, lighting etc.
- if the photos in the Design Statement have been taken from the key ‘public’ viewpoints – ie from local roads or public rights of way. If not, take your own photos from these obvious viewpoints and check how the development will appear in them.
- if the Design Statement has referred to local policies, strategies and reports, giving particular credence to those which have been adopted (as Supplementary Planning Documents) by the local planning authority and/or which express the views of the local community

Using the Guidance to help develop or evaluate an application for Environmental Stewardship

Key aims of the Environmental Stewardship scheme are to:

- improve conditions for farmland wildlife
- maintain and enhance landscape character
- protect the historic environment⁵.

The application maps supplied by Natural England include descriptions of the key characteristics of the relevant Joint Character Area(s) for the application land. Each has a priority target for the management of a variety of features. The Joint Character Areas are broad and correspond to the Countryside Character Areas shown on Map 2. The Environmental Information Map you are provided with may show features of particular historic, landscape or wildlife interest, but this Guidance provides the information at a far greater level of detail. You can use the information on Key Environmental Assets to help target which management options will deliver benefits that are particularly relevant to your land and where to focus action.

The full benefits of Environmental Stewardship will usually only be achieved when Entry Level or Organic Entry Level Stewardship options are combined with the more demanding Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) options. These are designed for land that is of significant environmental interest and the options available are carefully targeted to meet regional targets. The precise management package for HLS agreements is determined through the process of preparing a Farm Environment Plan. The Guidance should be one of the documents consulted to inform the desk study; the detailed maps for each landscape character type (in Part 4) provide an excellent basis for this work as they combine the ecological network mapping with statutory designations (ecological and heritage), public rights of way and landscape character. Information from the Guidance (and other detailed Landscape Character Assessments) can be used to complete the second of the two 'key characteristics' tables. The Historic Landscape Character Assessment will be an essential document for completing the section on historic environment.

⁵ Defra, 2005, *Entry Level Stewardship Handbook*

Using the Guidance to help prepare a Village/Town Design Statement or a Parish Plan

- Look up which landscape character type(s) relevant to your village/town. Bear in mind that many settlements are sited on the boundaries of two or more landscape types (because of the historic benefits of access to a diverse range of environmental resources (fuel, food, fish etc)).
- Note the landscape characteristics which apply to your settlement (visual, ecological and historic) and use them to build up your own description of your area. The Guidance will provide you with the basics, but you may also wish to consult the more detailed local Landscape Character Assessments (see Section 2.1). You should refer to the documents you have consulted in your Statement.
- Note that it is important to consider your settlement within its wider landscape setting, highlighting the physical, visual and cultural inter-relationships between a place and its landscape.
- Use the information in the Guidance as a basis for your own detailed assessment of landscape character, highlighting key views, landmarks and distinctive features. The Key Environmental Assets (in the Landscape Sensitivity & Change sections of the Guidance) should provide some helpful clues – these are features and characteristics which should be conserved and enhanced in your recommendations for action and/or in principles or guidance for managing change in your settlement.
- The bullet points in the Integrated Landscape Guidance sections should assist you in writing principles for managing future change, although you will need to tailor them to suit specific locations. Where possible refer to the names of local views, roads and places
- Cross reference recommendations in your Statement to relevant policy documents including this Guidance and any other Landscape Character Assessments you have referred to.

Key issues to bear in mind are:

- All landscapes are valuable and it is important to recognise that the unique character and diversity of the AONB landscape stems from its underlying geological structure and the evolving patterns of land use and landscape character. This inherent diversity has been ‘captured’ and recorded through the landscape character assessment process.
- Within each landscape type, the Key Environmental Assets are considered to be particularly ‘significant’ in terms of their contribution to the distinctive character of the landscape, its ecological value and its historic value. These are the most sensitive landscape elements and features, which should be a priority for conservation and enhancement.
- The Guidance has been developed using the existing more detailed landscape character assessments for each of the 4 planning authorities within the AONB (see Section 2.1 for more detail about these). It is not intended to replace these studies and they may provide more detailed information on landscape condition and sensitivity to change, particularly for the detailed landscape character areas.
- This is working document, which will continue to be updated as more data and information becomes available.

In summary, the Guidance for the Integrated Landscape Character of the Norfolk Coast AONB is intended to lay the foundation for common policies and action on landscape issues. It is a tool for creative conservation and landscape enhancement and, where appropriate, it can help to identify opportunities for robust and attractive new development.

The landscape of the Norfolk Coast AONB is a unique and valuable national asset, but one that is very vulnerable to ill-considered change. By recognising and taking account of landscape character in planning for development and change, we can direct that change so that it is positive, creative and effective.