



rolling open farmland



Integrated landscape character



MAP 17a - Rolling Open Farmland Key Plan

The gently rolling landform of the Rolling Open Farmland stems from the underlying solid geology of Middle and Upper Chalk. The solid Chalk defines the surface geology of much of the western half of the landscape but further east, drift deposits dominate. This is apparent where fields have been cultivated and the soil is peppered with gravels. Drift deposits are also associated with the River Valleys – the Rivers Burn and Heacham for example are defined by linear strips of sand and gravel, silty clays and shell marl. The most valuable semi-natural habitats are patches of remnant calcareous grassland on the chalk slopes and the lowland meadows and the network of drainage ditches within the narrow river floodplains.

This area has a long history of human occupation, but the earliest tangible evidence of early occupation of this area are the round barrows and associated monuments of the Bronze Age, such as the scheduled round barrow and associated ring ditches beside Whiteway Road in Burnham Westgate Park. Occupation continued through the Iron Age and the Romano-British period, when various roads are recorded, for example the one that runs from Holkham to Toftrees.

The majority of agricultural land was cultivated under open field and fold course systems until the mid 18th century, when through a process of piecemeal and Parliamentary enclosure, land parcels were reorganised. Some areas were scarcely affected by Parliamentary enclosure, but landholdings were typically large and tended to become even larger as a result of the enclosure movement. These larger field sizes have generally been large enough to accommodate modern agricultural machinery, with relatively few hedgerow removals, so today's field patterns date back to the 18th century. The area is now dominated by intensive arable production and the large open arable fields are bordered by hawthorn hedgerows which exaggerate the strong geometric field pattern. The hedges also impart a distinct sense of enclosure, particularly along the often straight rural roads where views become channeled. This is particularly evident where lanes become partially sunken as they cut down into the shallow river valleys.

Where hedges are broken or gappy views become both intermittent and distant. The hedges are often flanked or interspersed by hedgerow trees – typically oak or beech clothed in ivy. These trees are often prominent, but the extensive linear shelterbelts of Scots Pine (sometimes mixed with beech)

Integrated landscape character (continued)

are the most dramatic landscape features, which contrast with the low hedgerows and subtle rolling landform. The interconnected network of hedgerows, hedgerow trees, copses and shelterbelts provides an ecologically valuable series of linked habitats across areas of intensively farmed arable land.

There are also some areas of pasture, particularly close to the river valleys and on the edges of settlements but is not an overt characteristic of the landscape. Pig farming is more common with sizeable fields units given over to free range rearing. This is conspicuous within the landscape as a result of the kennels. This is a semi-enclosed landscape, with ever changing views - sometimes long and open and focused on local landmark vertical features, but often directed by landform and hedgerows. There is an overriding sense of unity due to the simplicity of the land use and the regular and consistent occurrence of key elements such as the hawthorn hedgerows and Scots pine shelterbelts.

The area has a relatively undeveloped character. Small villages, rural hamlets and isolated farmsteads are widely dispersed; villages are typically sited at road crossings and have a linear or bilinear form. They generally appear contained rather than sprawling due to their small size and scale. Windmills, church towers and spires are important focal points in views across the farmland. Vernacular village buildings are typically constructed from a broad and eclectic mix of local traditional materials including clunch (squared blocks and random); flint nodules; cobbles (coursed and random); pebbles; red brick; yellow or gault brick; colourwashes; orange clay pantiles; black glazed pantiles; smut pantiles; and slate.

Landscape sensitivity and change

The Rolling Open Farmland is an expansive rural landscape, with long, open views set against a smooth rolling horizon. Individual elements may be highly prominent, particularly where they appear on the skyline in local views. Key environmental assets which are sensitive to change are:

- The network of hedgerows and shelterbelts which encloses the large arable fields and provides an ecologically valuable network of habitats is the principal structural framework for the Rolling Open Farmland.
- Mature hedgerow trees and the hedgerows along roads and tracks, which are often much older than field hedgerow boundaries.
- The well dispersed blocks of woodland and particularly areas where blocks of woodland are more concentrated (for instance on the slopes of the river valleys and near Hunstanton Hall).



Landscape sensitivity and change (continued)

- Existing areas of unimproved chalk grassland, including some road verges, and any rough, uncultivated land, which may provide opportunities to create additional chalk grassland habitat.
- The landscape setting of rural villages, particularly views to landmark churches and windmills.
- Distinctive vernacular farm buildings and historic buildings (built from an eclectic mix of traditional materials).

Variations in character

Variations in character and inherent landscape sensitivities are highlighted in the following distinctive landscape character areas within the Rolling Open Farmland (AONB area):

Landscape character area	Distinctive character	Inherent sensitivity
Burnham Market - ROF1	Distinctive, neatly organised settlement of Burnham Market is a visitor honeypot with a colourful mix of colour-washed & brick buildings. Straight ditches or hedgerows predominantly demarcate field boundaries. Blocks of deciduous and mixed woodlands occasionally mark field boundaries, breaking up the openness of the landscape. The B1155 runs north-south through the middle of the area and narrow relatively straight country lanes criss-cross the landscape, providing access to the isolated farmsteads and villages. The sense of tranquillity is strong in the area away from the B1155 and Burnham Market.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The exceptionally diverse mature landscape structure, including belts and copses, woodland, mature trees and intact hedgerows is vulnerable to change • The landscape setting of Burnham Market and other smaller settlements, which is a gateway for visitors to the area • Striking built character and layout of Burnham Market • Distinctive combinations of traditional building materials within small village settlements • Barrow Common - an elevated area of acid grassland heath (with open access) from which there are spectacular views to the coast

Landscape character area	Distinctive character	Inherent sensitivity
Ringstead Downs - ROF2	<p>The northern boundary of the area encloses the woodland plantations around Hunstanton Hall. This designed parkland is crossed by strips of linear mixed woodlands and plantations with irregular edges. Elsewhere there are few dwellings or farmsteads outside Ringstead, Hunstanton or associated with Hunstanton Hall. The large area of unimproved chalk grassland at Ringstead Downs Nature Reserve provides diversity and an area of ecological value within the landscape. Other than the main A149 coastal road which runs along the eastern edge of the area, roads and communications are infrequent, with a few minor roads and tracks providing access, particularly to Hunstanton Hall and Park. Linear woodlands, plantations and hedgerows contribute a sense of enclosure and intimacy and limit long distance views. Throughout the area there is a strong sense of tranquillity away from the urban edges and the A149 road corridor.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodlands, linear shelterbelts and hedgerows which contribute an unusual sense of enclosure and intimacy within an otherwise open farmland landscape • The historic designed parkland landscapes and woodlands associated with Hunstanton Hall • Extensive areas of unimproved chalk grassland at Ringstead Downs Nature Reserve • The landscape setting of Ringstead
Ringstead - ROF3	<p>Open rolling arable farmland that slopes gently down to the north. There are few strips or areas of woodland to break up the long expansive views across the patchwork of irregular (predominantly arable) fields. Straight, well-maintained hedgerows delineate the field boundaries. Outside Ringstead scattered isolated dwellings and farmsteads dominate settlement character. These are accessed by the straight narrow country lanes that criss-cross the fields. A few footpaths and tracks including the Norfolk Coast Path also dissect the fields in straight lines, often following field boundaries. There is a strong sense of isolation and tranquillity throughout the character area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long views across open farmland – this is a relatively undeveloped rural landscape with little scope for mitigating impacts of built development or tall structures • Views from the Norfolk Coast Path are particularly important • The remnant blocks of woodland and shelterbelts are critically important landscape elements within an otherwise open arable landscape • The network of hedgerows which defines the structure of the landscape – demarcating field and road boundaries – is important both visually and as an ecological network • Remnant areas of chalk grassland are of high ecological value

Landscape character area	Distinctive character	Inherent sensitivity
Burnham Thorpe and the Creakes - ROF4	<p>The area is divided by the shallow clear chalk stream of the River Burn (Small Valley 3), which runs south to north between the surrounding low lying hills. Within the main valley, the linear ribbon settlement of Burnham Thorpe has vernacular buildings faced with flint and chalk. Outside the settlements, farmsteads with walls faced with flint and chalk are also found near to the river. Hedges with hedgerow trees delineate these fields. To the north of Burnham Thorpe, deciduous plantations break up the patchwork of arable fields. There are often open views from the sloping valley sides overlooking the winding River Burn and to the landmark church tower in Burnham Thorpe. The area away from the valley floor around the villages and the B1355 has a strong sense of tranquillity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patches of plantation woodland and the mosaic of regular small-scale fields provide a wooded backdrop for local views • The landscape setting for Burnham Thorpe, which is prominent in views from the valley side slopes • The distinctive vernacular farm buildings and historic village buildings within Burnham Thorpe • Rural character and strong sense of tranquillity
Sedgeford - ROF5	<p>Characterised by steep valley sides surrounding the valley of Heacham River leading up to flat plateaux with large arable fields. Sedgeford lies at the centre of the area forming a linear ribbon development centred along the B1454. The village has a church with a tower in the oldest part of the village surrounded by vernacular style buildings. Scattered farmsteads and cottages in the vernacular style line the rural roads. The majority of the landscape outside the villages is characterised by large arable fields with low flailed or trimmed gappy hedgerows. Due to the low and fragmented hedgerows and openness of the landscape the views within the area are open and panoramic framed by the topography of the land. A key view point in the area is the Water Tower east of Sedgeford. Away from the B1454 the area has a relatively strong sense of isolation and tranquillity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The small-scale fields, woodlands and hedgerows which form a relatively small-scale, interconnected network on the upper slopes of the Heacham Valley (Small valley 2) establish the overall structure of the valley landscape • The landscape setting of Sedgeford, particularly the gateways to the village along the rural roads and views to the church tower

Landscape character area	Distinctive character	Inherent sensitivity
Egmere & East Wells - ROF6	Low settlement density – only rural hamlets, farmstead and some isolated groups of farm cottages. Rectilinear road network. More undulating landform than elsewhere in the type and the network of hedgerow field boundaries is particularly intact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively open farmland, with long rural views • The network of intact hedgerows is a key environmental asset
Wells-next-the-Sea - ROF7	Area is centred on the town and coastal port of Wells, which has a distinctive ‘older non-industrial’ feel to its layout, with layers of settlement radiating in a compact manner from the central hub of the town. The town and harbour has a distinctive, dramatic and undeveloped coastal landscape setting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The highly distinctive landscape setting of Wells, which is sited within a very undeveloped and rural coastal location, including views to the village from approach roads and the surrounding countryside • Distinctive built character and layout of Wells, including the many characteristic mature trees and open spaces within the compact urban area

THE HISTORIC LANDSCAPE PATTERN IS EASILY LOST



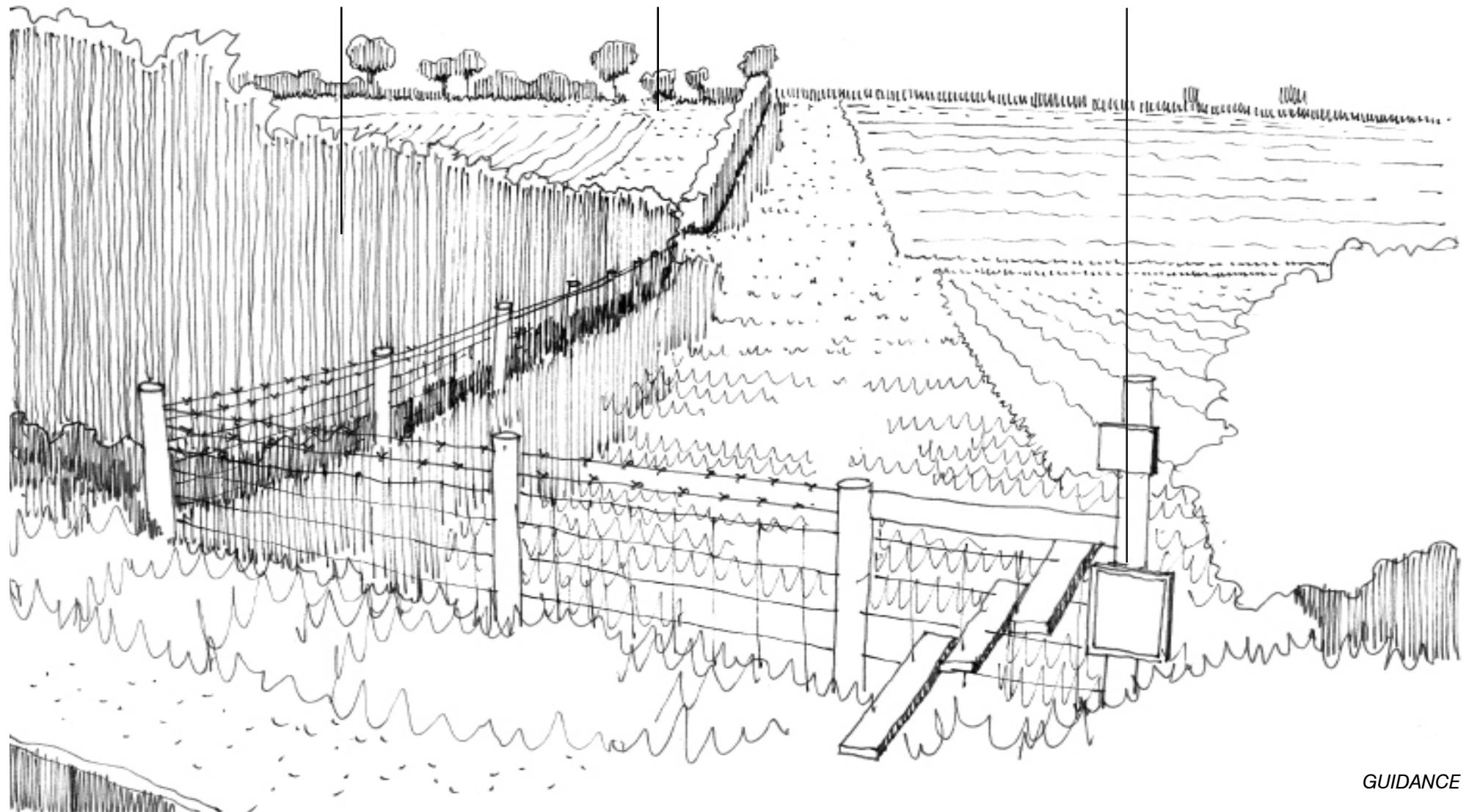
Key forces for change

- Potential farm diversification, resulting in conversion of agricultural buildings to houses and recreational facilities
- Potential loss of mature hedgerow field boundaries as a result of agricultural intensification
- Pressure for development of second or holiday homes
- Small-scale development within villages, which may be out of character with existing settlement pattern
- Increased pressure on rural roads as a result of increased second home ownership, and increased tourist activity along the North Norfolk Coast
- Car parking in Burnham Market and associated pressures
- Exception sites for low cost housing
- Minor changes to rural roads on the approaches to villages and towns – widening, sight-lines etc

*Reintroduce native
hedgerows*

*Create and maintain native
meadow margins*

*Encourage public access
and interpretation*



GUIDANCE

20 year vision

enhance and create

Long open views across rolling farmland are structured by Scot's pine shelterbelts and extensive woodlands linked by a restored network of hedgerows. Groups of buildings are sheltered by copses and often 'balanced' by small pastures. The core chalk grassland sites at Ringstead Downs are extended with new areas of reversion from arable land to chalk grassland. The verges of roads and tracks include distinctive patches of chalk grassland wherever they cross areas underlain by Chalk.



Integrated landscape guidance

1 Conserve the typical long open views – this is a relatively undeveloped rural landscape with little scope for mitigating impacts of built development or tall structures

- Give priority to the identification and conservation of views from the Peddar's Way and Norfolk Coast Path National Trail and the network of rural roads, which provide the majority of public viewing points.
- Conserve the characteristic smooth skylines and ensure any necessary development is well integrated with appropriate large scale planting.
- Ensure the sensitive location of necessary development involving tall structures (such as telecommunications masts and wind turbines for example) both within the Rolling Open Farmland and adjacent areas.

2 Conserve and enhance the character, quality and connectivity of the mature structuring elements within the landscape type as a whole – the pattern of hedgerows, Scots Pine shelterbelts and dispersed blocks of woodland

- Conserve all existing shelterbelts and woodlands, aiming to extend and improve their visual/ecological structure by new planting (to maintain the typical age structure) and by the creating of buffer zones of semi-natural habitat along the margins of the woodland/shelterbelt edge.
- Design new woodland or shelterbelt planting to create or enhance connections with the existing matrix of woodlands and hedgerows.
- Aim to increase the diversity of landscape elements and habitats within the landscape – take opportunities to create new woodlands, hedgerows and shelterbelts.
- Manage and where possible replant hedgerows to maintain the scale and pattern of the landscape and enhance ecological connectivity.
- Replace mature specimen hedgerow trees (with locally appropriate species) so that they are conserved as positive local landscape features.

3 Conserve, enhance and extend areas of existing semi-natural habitat

- Create and enhance chalk grassland in and around Ringstead Downs SSSI (core area) - extend the habitats, with reversion from arable land.
- Create and enhance acid grassland and heath at Barrow Common, encouraging reversion to heathland from farmland in surrounding areas.

¹ See: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/countryside/farming/advice/farmhabitats/margins/index.asp>

Integrated landscape guidance (continued)

4 Manage arable farmland to enhance its biodiversity value

- Establish arable field margins as potential nest sites for ground nesting birds and habitats for small mammals. ¹
- Manage arable farmland as habitat for game birds.

5 Ensure that any new appropriate village development responds to historic settlement pattern and is well integrated into the surrounding landscape.

- Conserve the landscape setting of all rural villages, giving particular priority to gateway views on the approaches to villages and to views from rights of way.
- Conserve the characteristic layout of village settlements – each one is different, but infilling open spaces should be avoided and the specific balance of built form and open space merits conservation.
- Promote the use of local traditional building materials appropriate to local landscape and settlement character, taking account of the distinctive mix of buildings materials and styles typically used in each village.
- Retain mature trees within and on fringes of villages.

6 Conserve the rural character of farm buildings, which are often exceptionally prominent in the wider farmland landscape.

- Avoid the introduction of suburban features, including gardens, fencing, lighting and entrance driveways, which can cumulatively alter the rural character of the landscape.
- New farm buildings or conversions require exceptionally high standards of siting and design – large scale woodland, shelterbelt and hedgerow planting may be required to integrate structures within the surrounding landscape.

7 Conserve and enhance the character and quality of the network of rural roads

- Give priority to the conservation of the hedgerows and hedgerow trees which line many rural roads, ensuring that these are replaced if there are minor changes to road alignments, for instance as a result of improvements to sightlines or the introduction of passing places.

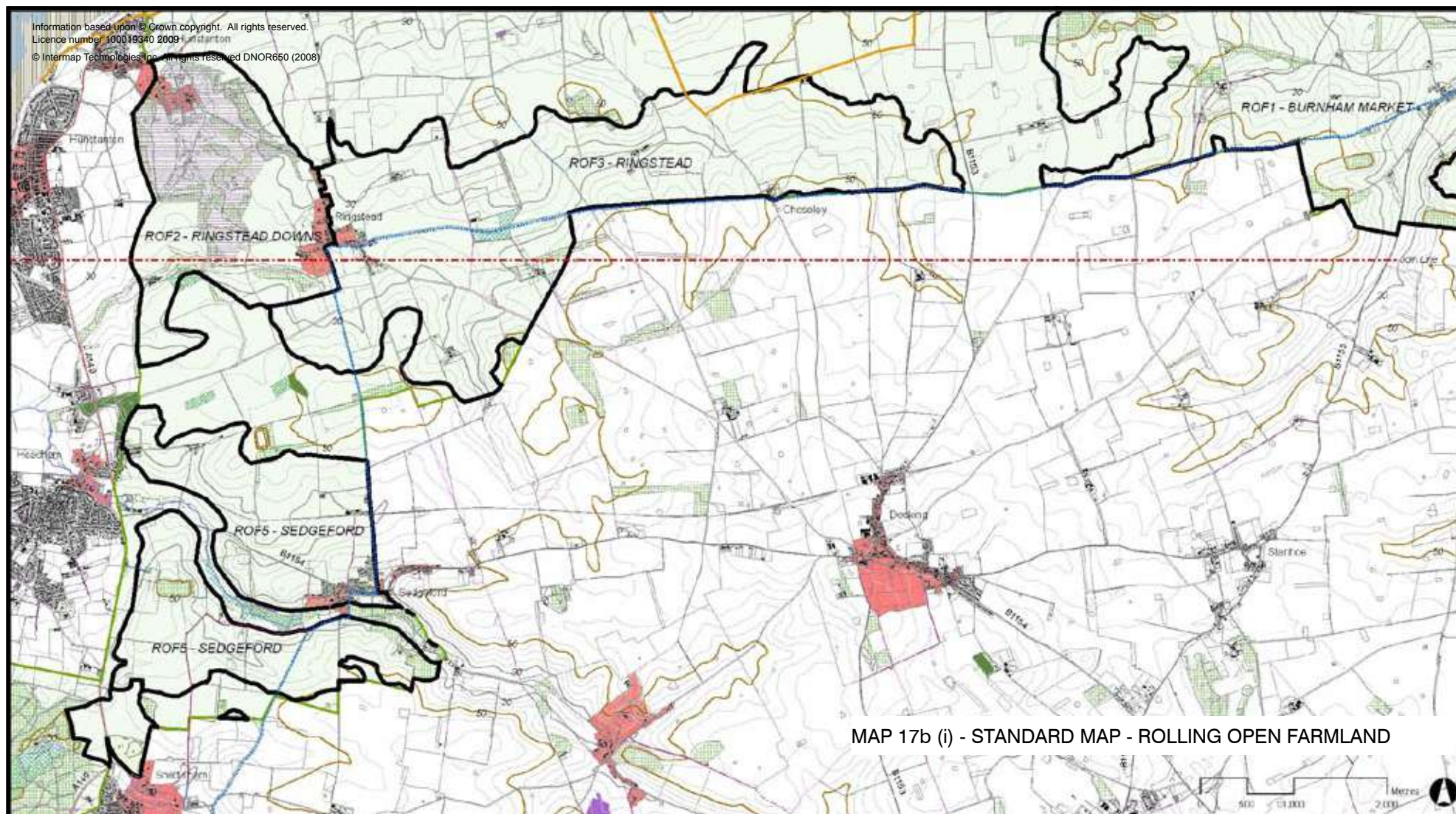
Detailed maps

- **Standard** - landform, drainage, rights of way and statutory designations
- **Biodiversity** - ecological networks ²
- **Historic landscapes** - broad historic landscape character types ³ and data from the Historic Environment Record ⁴

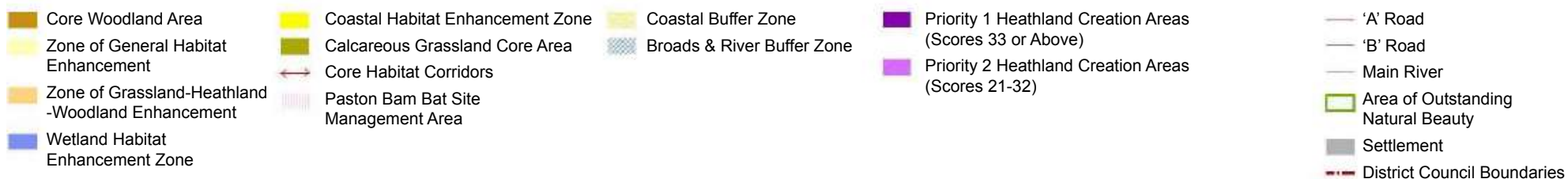
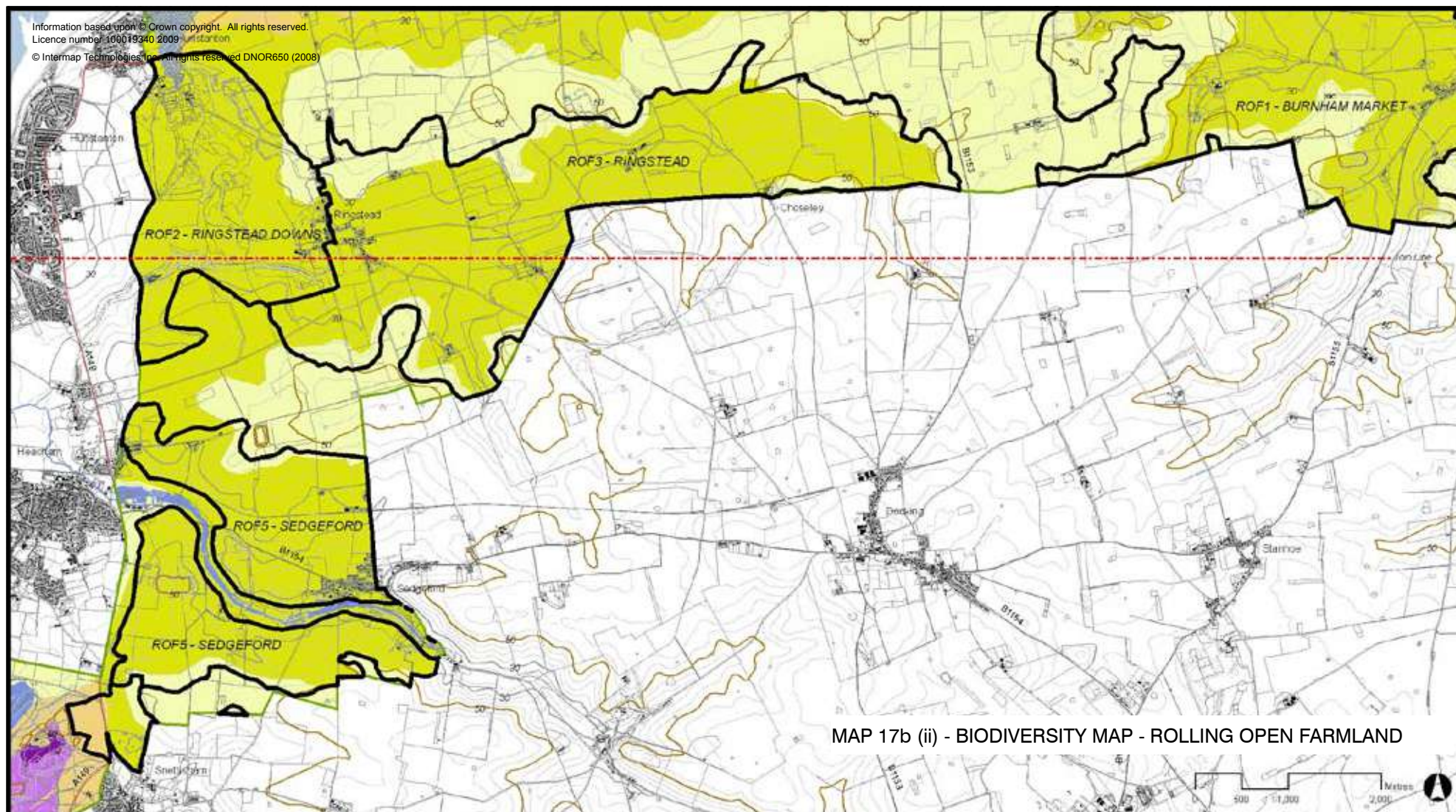
² Norfolk Wildlife Trust on behalf of the Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership, July 2006, *Ecological Network Mapping Project for Norfolk*

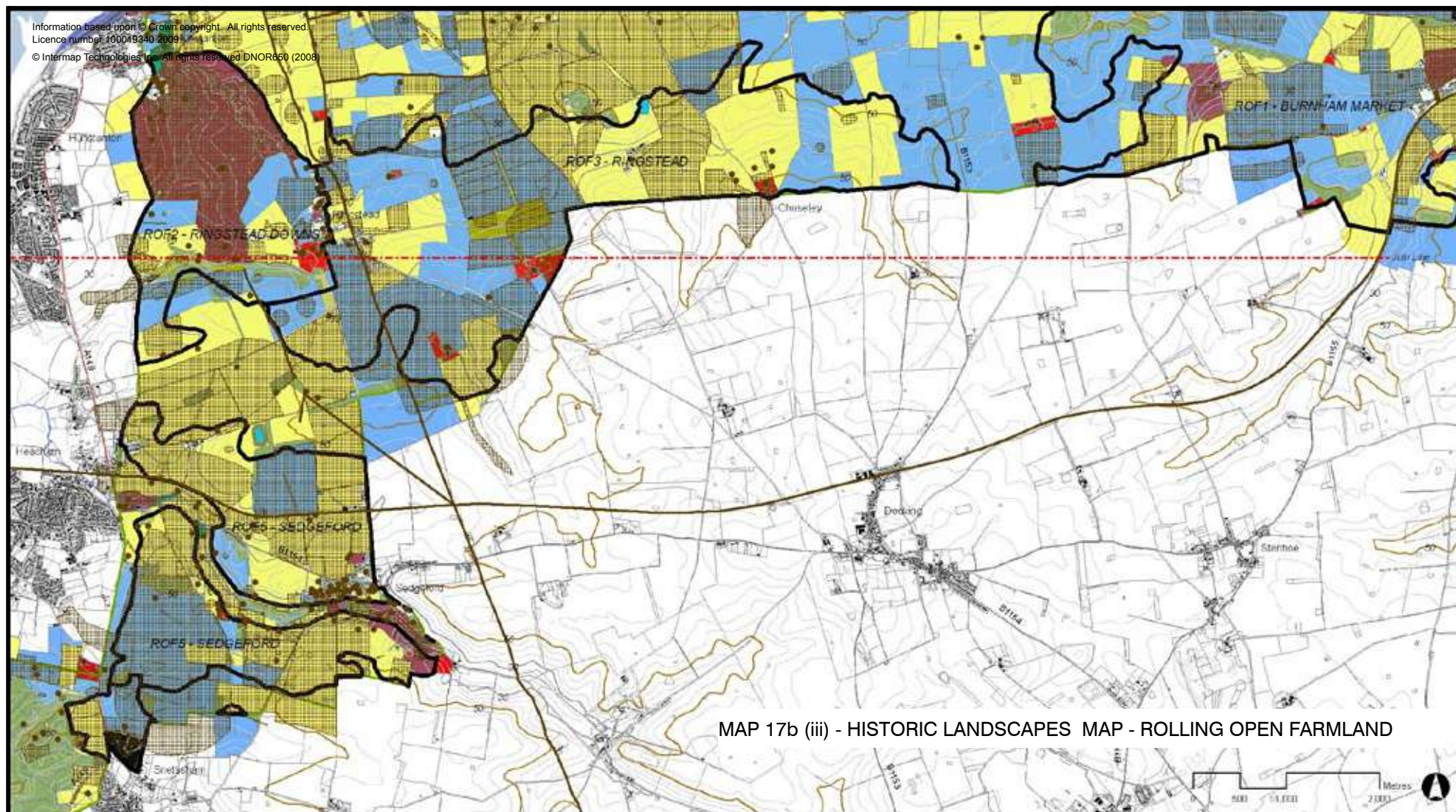
³ Norfolk Landscape Archaeology, January 2009, *Norfolk Historic Landscape Character - a report on the Norfolk Landscape Characterisation (HLC) Project*

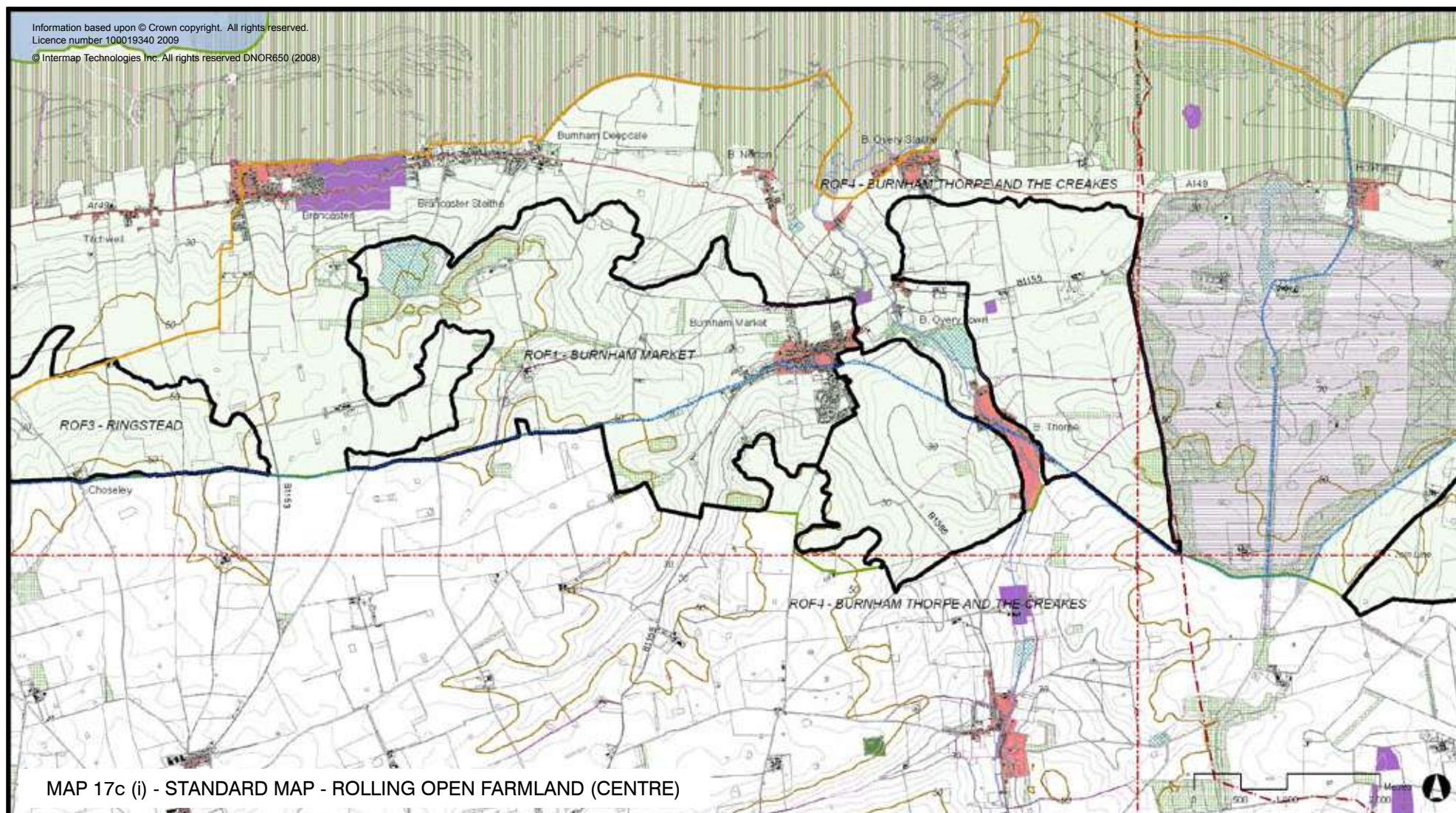
⁴ www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk - provides a computerised, searchable database (with integrated digital mapping) of all areas of known archaeological activity, sites, finds, cropmarks, earthworks, industrial remains, structures and historic buildings in the county



Statutory Designations		Heritage	Connections	Topography	
Ramsar Site	Local Nature Reserve	Scheduled Ancient Monuments	National Cycle Route	Contour Line (Interval 5 m)	'A' Road
Special Protection Area	Forestry Commission Woodland	Conservation Areas	Cycleways	30 m Contour Line	'B' Road
Ancient Woodland	Special Area of Conservation	Historic Parks and Gardens	Long Distance Path	50 m Contour Line	Main River
Site of Special Scientific Interest			Footpath		Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
County Wildlife Sites			Bridleway		Settlement
			Restricted Byway		District Council Boundaries







MAP 17c (i) - STANDARD MAP - ROLLING OPEN FARMLAND (CENTRE)

Statutory Designations

- Ramsar Site
- Special Protection Area
- Ancient Woodland
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- County Wildlife Sites

- Local Nature Reserve
- Forestry Commission Woodland
- Special Area of Conservation

Heritage

- Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- Conservation Areas
- Historic Parks and Gardens

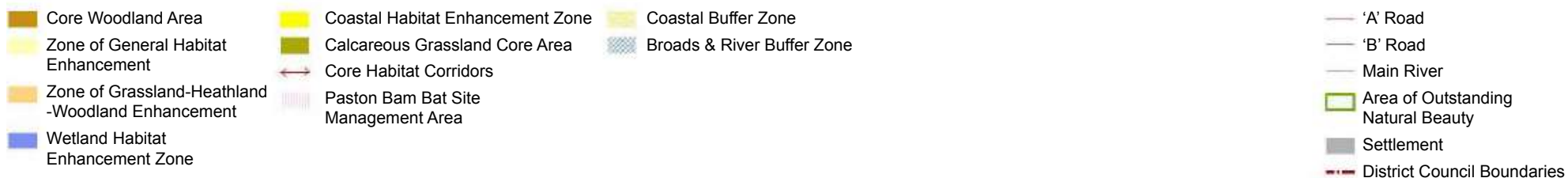
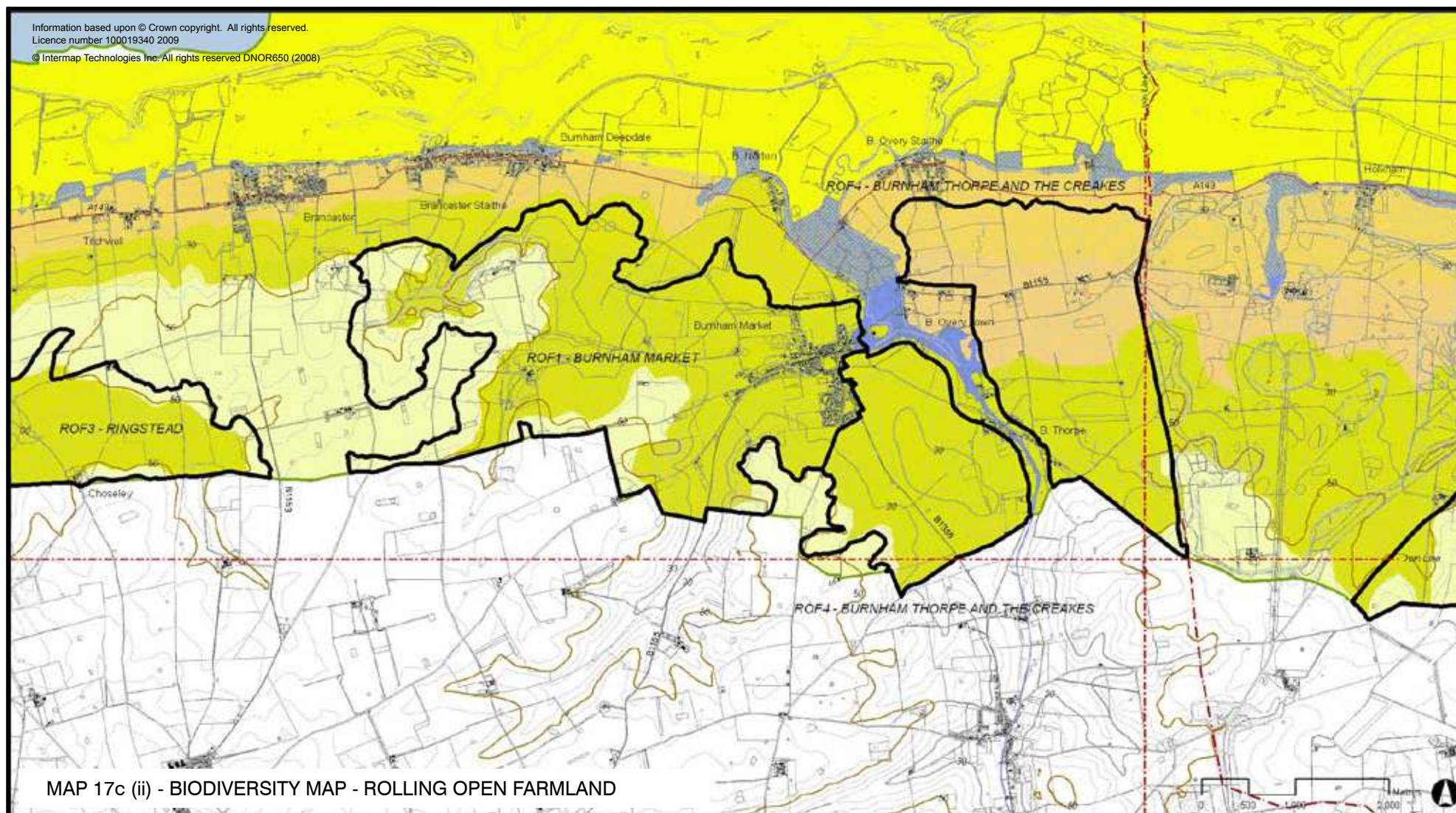
Connections

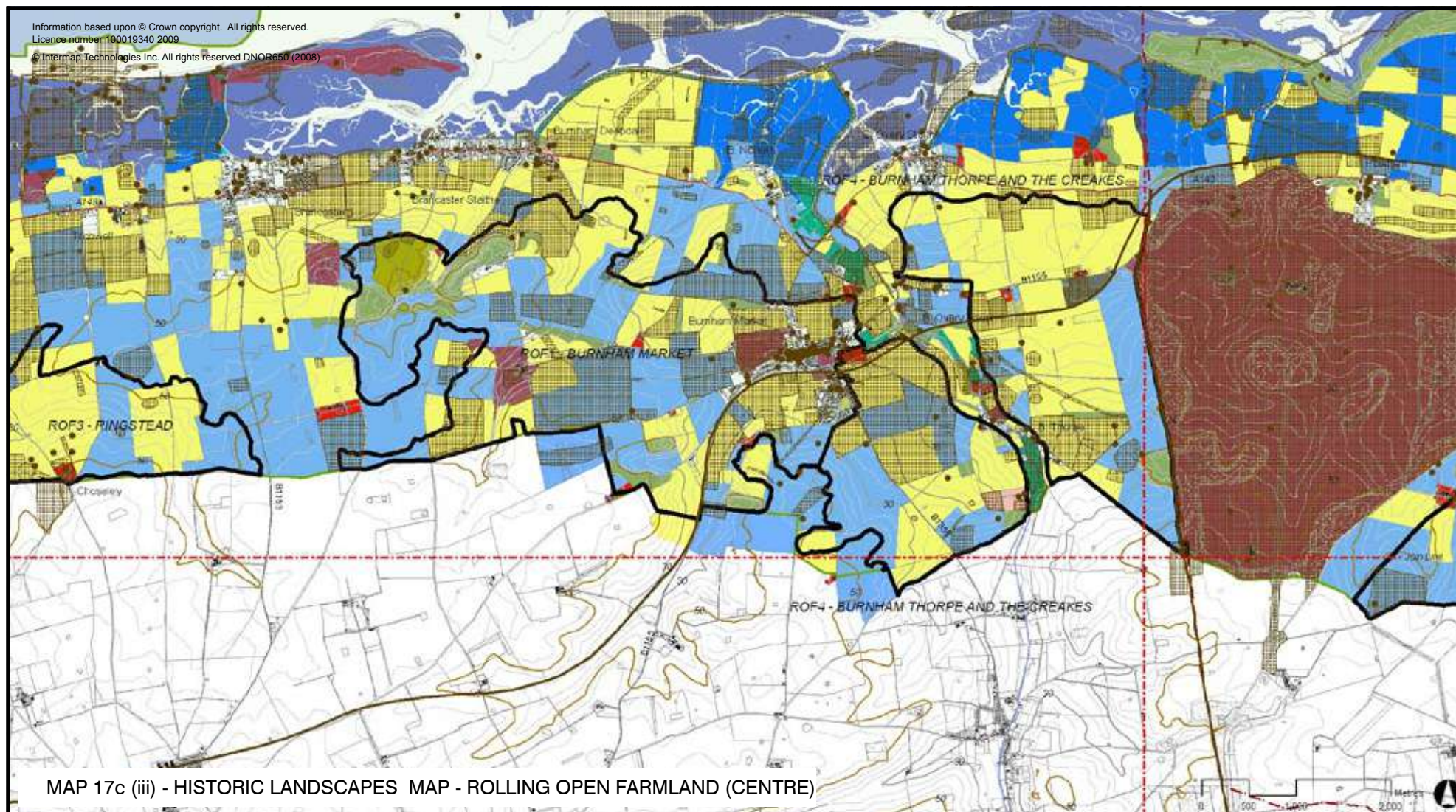
- National Cycle Route
- Cycleways
- Long Distance Path
- Footpath
- Bridleway
- Restricted Byway

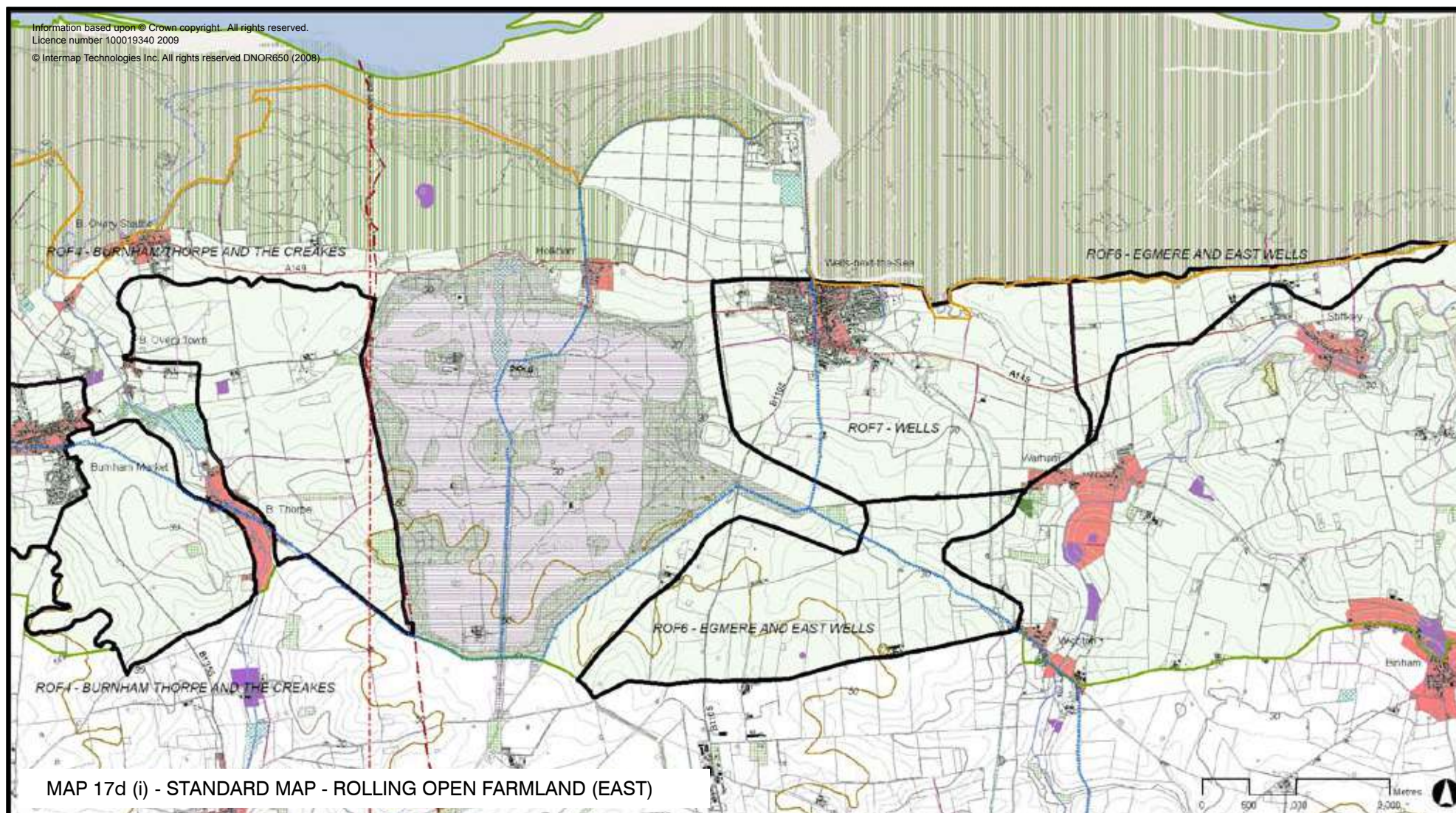
Topography

- Contour Line (Interval 5 m)
- 30 m Contour Line
- 50 m Contour Line

- 'A' Road
- 'B' Road
- Main River
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Settlement
- District Council Boundaries







MAP 17d (i) - STANDARD MAP - ROLLING OPEN FARMLAND (EAST)

Statutory Designations

- Ramsar Site
- Special Protection Area
- Ancient Woodland
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- County Wildlife Sites

- Local Nature Reserve
- Forestry Commission Woodland
- Special Area of Conservation

Heritage

- Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- Conservation Areas
- Historic Parks and Gardens

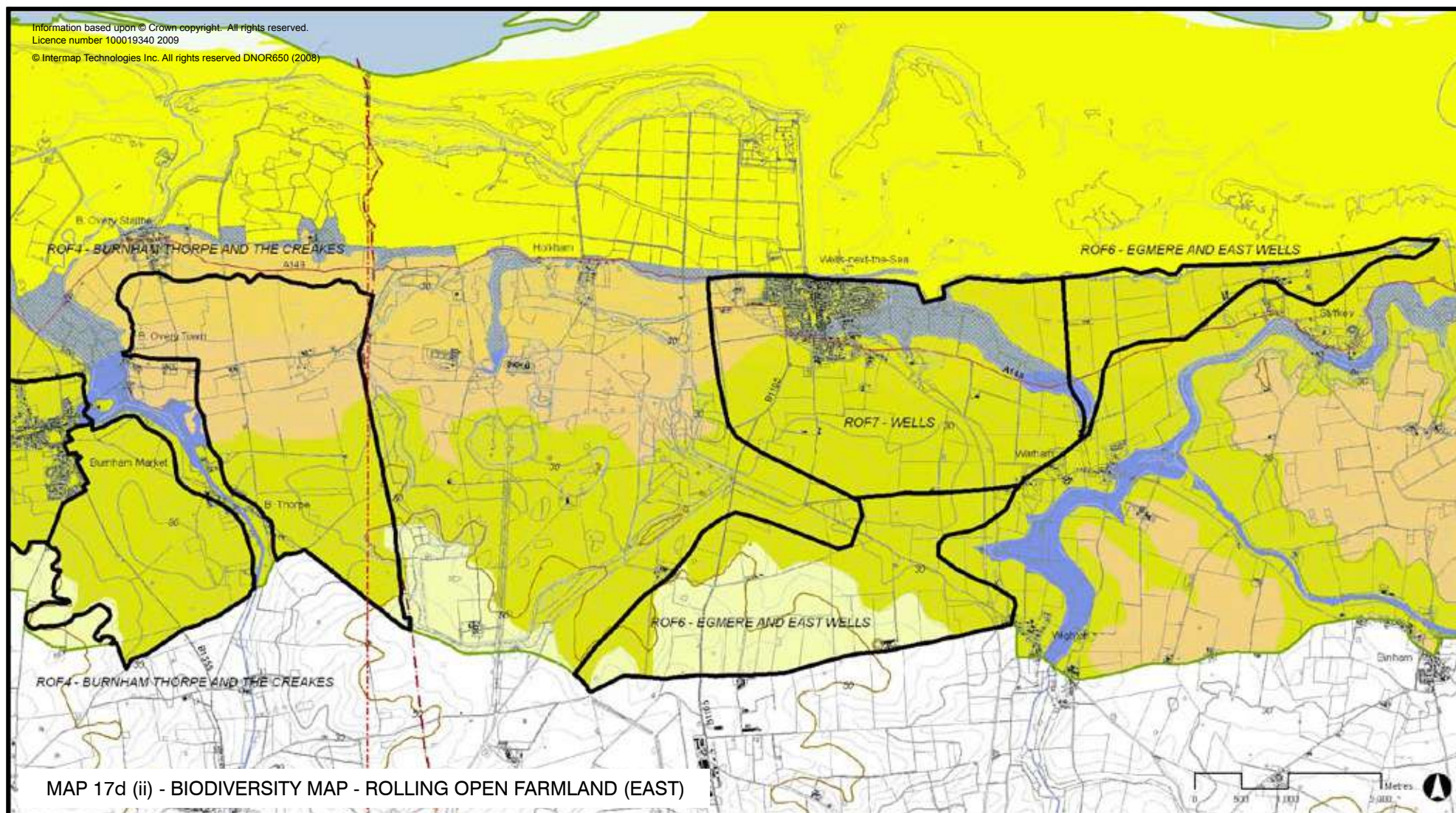
Connections

- National Cycle Route
- Cycleways
- Long Distance Path
- Footpath
- Bridleway
- Restricted Byway

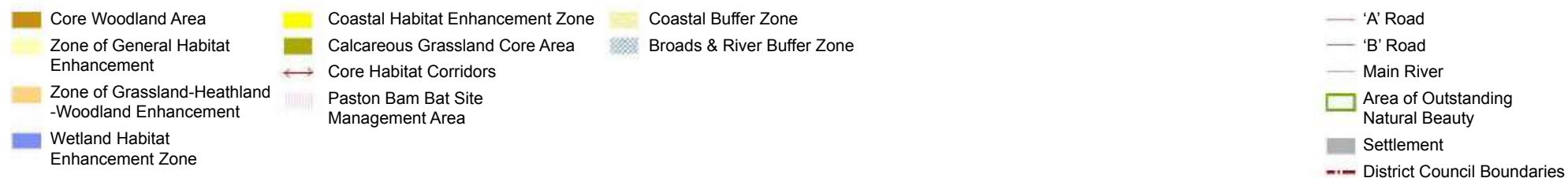
Topography

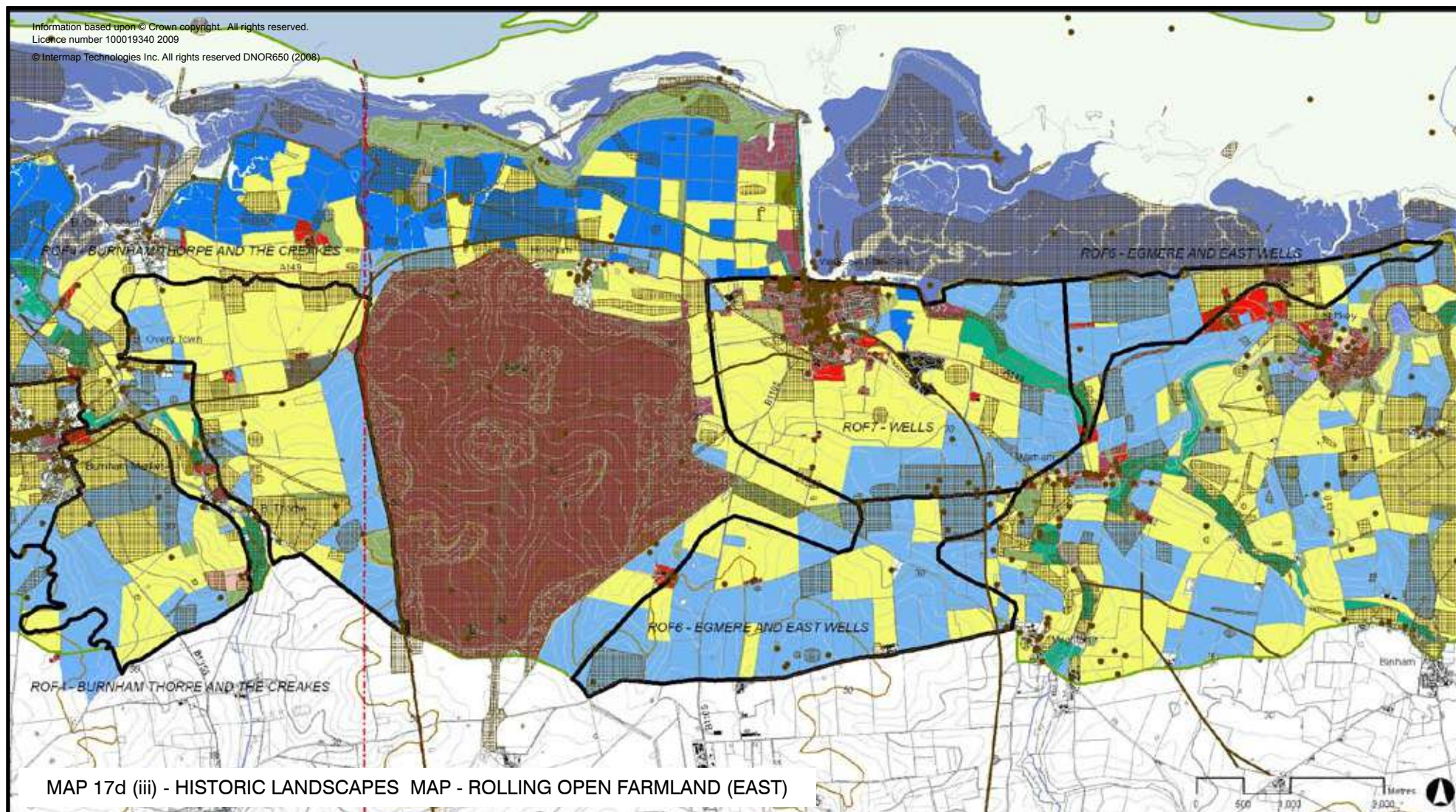
- Contour Line (Interval 5 m)
- 30 m Contour Line
- 50 m Contour Line

- 'A' Road
- 'B' Road
- Main River
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Settlement
- District Council Boundaries



MAP 17d (ii) - BIODIVERSITY MAP - ROLLING OPEN FARMLAND (EAST)





MAP 17d (iii) - HISTORIC LANDSCAPES MAP - ROLLING OPEN FARMLAND (EAST)

