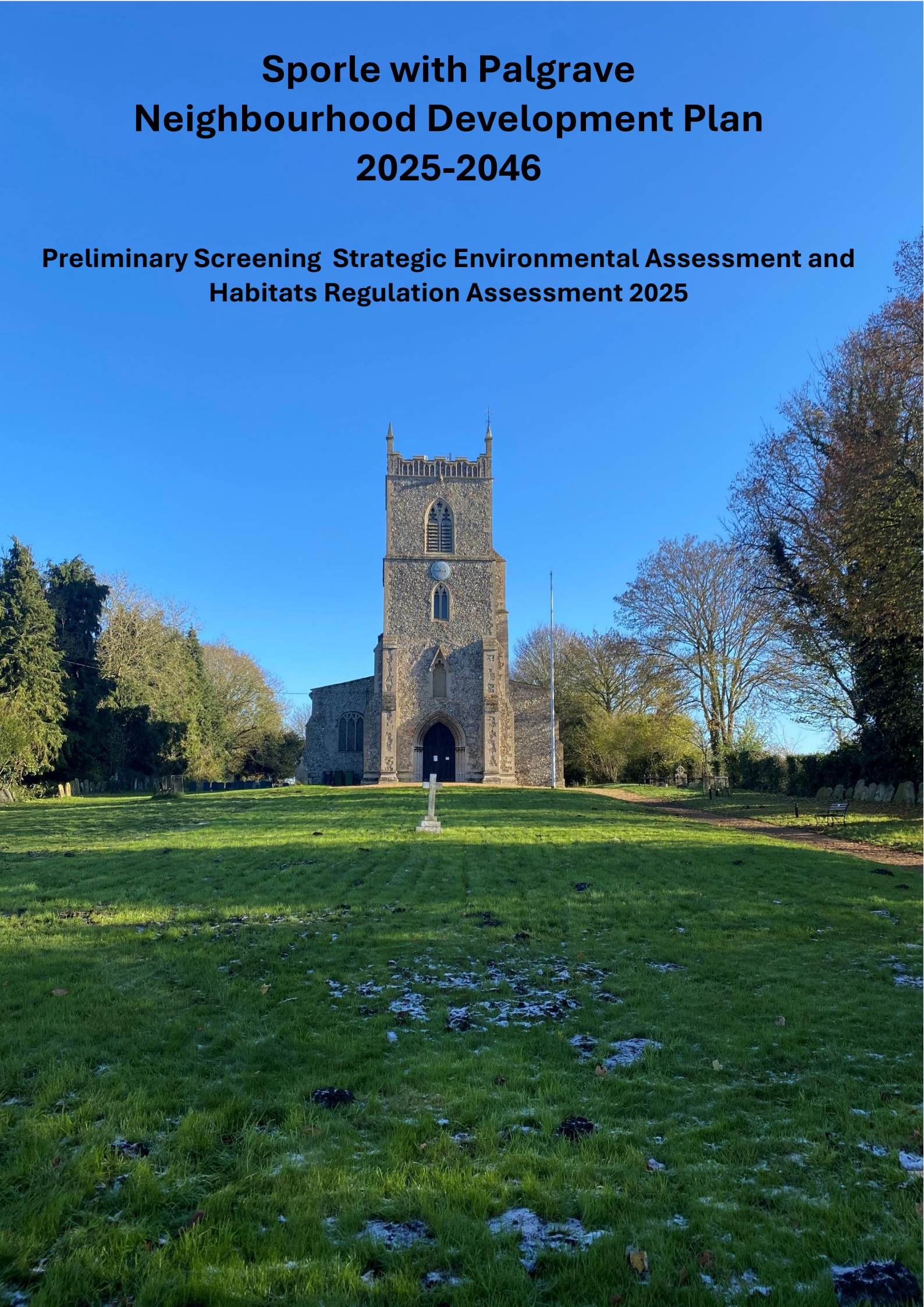
Sporle with Palgrave Neighbourhood Development Plan 2025-2046

Preliminary Screening Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulation Assessment 2025



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Introduction

1. Sporle with Palgrave Parish Council is preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan for its area known as SPNDP throughout this document. The planning period will be 2025-2046 and the designated area (**See Figure 1**) is located within Breckland District Council. Collective Community Planning has been appointed by the parish councils to consider whether there is a need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to be undertaken on SPNDP. This is required under European Directive 2001/42/EC (the SEA Directive), transposed into UK law through the SEA Regulations[1].

2. SEA may be required for a Neighbourhood Development Plan if it is likely to have significant environmental effects. A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is like an SEA but includes assessment of the likely significant effects of a plan or programme on economic and social factors, as well as environmental factors. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) clarifies that there is no legal requirement for a Neighbourhood Development Plan to be subject to a SA, but that SA can be used to demonstrate how the plan will contribute to sustainable development.

[1] The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SI 2004/1633), as amended by the Environmental Assessment and Miscellaneous Planning (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018 (SI 2018/1232). It should be noted that the purpose of the amendments to the SEA Regulations is to ensure that the law functions correctly after the UK has left the European Union. No substantive changes are made to the way the SEA regime operates.

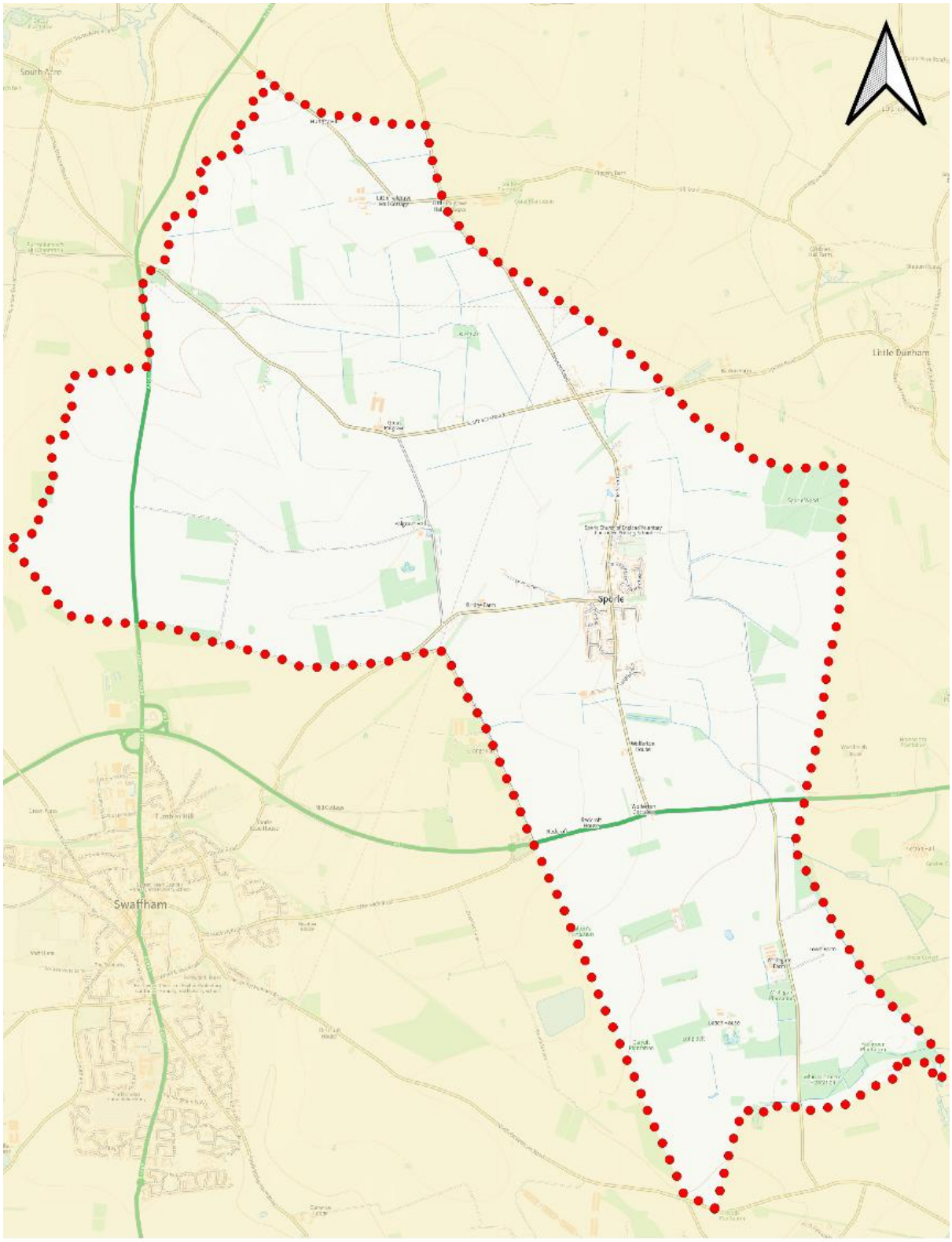


Figure 1: Designated Neighbourhood Area

3. A draft (Regulation 14) version of SPNDP is currently being prepared. It is intended that this is subject to public consultation in 2026. SPNDP includes a vision for the long-term future of Sporle with Palgrave, along with aims to support delivery of this vision. The current draft vision is:

Sporle with Palgrave will remain a distinct, self-contained rural parish, with development that is of high quality, sensitively designed, and appropriate to its location. Growth will be carefully managed to maintain the village's linear form, protect its agricultural surroundings, and preserve separation from Swaffham.
New housing will deliver a balanced mix of types and tenures to meet the needs of all age groups, encouraging families and younger residents while enabling older people to remain in the parish. Development will safeguard valued views, heritage assets, green spaces, and areas prone to flooding.
Community facilities, infrastructure, and open spaces will be enhanced to support a thriving, socially sustainable community where residents feel connected, engaged, and proud to live.

4. The draft plan currently includes six objectives to deliver this vision:

1. **High Quality and Locally Appropriate Design:** Ensure all development is of a high standard, reflects the varied character and rural setting of the parish, and maintains the village's linear form and separation from Swaffham.

2. **Planned Housing Growth:** Ensure future housing developments meet identified local needs, deliver a balanced mix of homes in locations that respect the scale, character, and infrastructure capacity of the village.

3. **Heritage, Landscape, and Views:** Protect and enhance heritage assets, the agricultural surroundings, key rural views, and distinctive features such as Sporle Wood.

4. **Flood Risk and Environmental Protection:** Avoid development in areas prone to flooding and incorporate measures to manage flood risk and protect the natural environment.

5. **Community Facilities and Infrastructure:** Support improvements to local facilities, green spaces, and infrastructure to meet the needs of residents of all ages and keep pace with development.

6. **A Thriving and Cohesive Community:** Encourage development and uses that strengthen community life, support local events, and provide opportunities and activities for young people.

5. **The plan does not allocate land for development.**

Baseline Information

6. This section summarises baseline information for the SPNDP area, drawing on the Evidence Base which will accompany the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Context

7. Sporle with Palgrave is a small parish in the west of Norfolk, in the District of Breckland, 3 miles north-east of Swaffham (10 minutes by car) located relatively close to the A47. Dereham is 11 miles east along the A47 (20 minutes by car). Downham Market is approximately 19 miles south-west (30 minutes by car) whilst the large town of King's Lynn is the same distance to the north-west of Sporle. The parish includes Palgrave Great and Little as well as Cotes Common and Petygards which lie to the south of the parish, separated from Sporle by the A47.

8. Sporle and Great and Little Palgrave are all mentioned in the Domesday Book in 1086 and the parish has a rich history reaching back to Anglo-Saxon times[2] The Norfolk Heritage Explorer notes that the name Sporle comes from Old English meaning 'clearing with an enclosure'. Palgrave comes from Old English meaning 'Paga's grove or copse'. It also states that "Sporle and Palgrave were originally separate parishes, each with their own church before they were combined into a unified parish. Both Sporle and Palgrave have a long history and were well established by the time of the Norman Conquest. Their population, land ownership and productive resources were detailed separately in the Domesday Book of 1086.

9. Today Sporle is a small community with a population of 1,000, served by a village shop/Post Office, primary school, public house, churches, and village hall/community centre. There are lots of community groups/clubs and the village has a playing field, pavilion and children's playground managed by trustees/volunteers[3].

Biodiversity, Flora, and fauna

10. There are no International and National statutory designated sites in the neighbourhood area as shown in **Figure 2**. However, there are a number of designations within close proximity including :

- **Breckland** Special Protection Area (SPA) and Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- **Castle Acre Common** Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- **River Nar** Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI)

[2] Sporle with Palgrave History Group - introduction. Accessed 12/02/2024
[3] Sporle with Palgrave Parish Council website. Accessed 12/02/2024

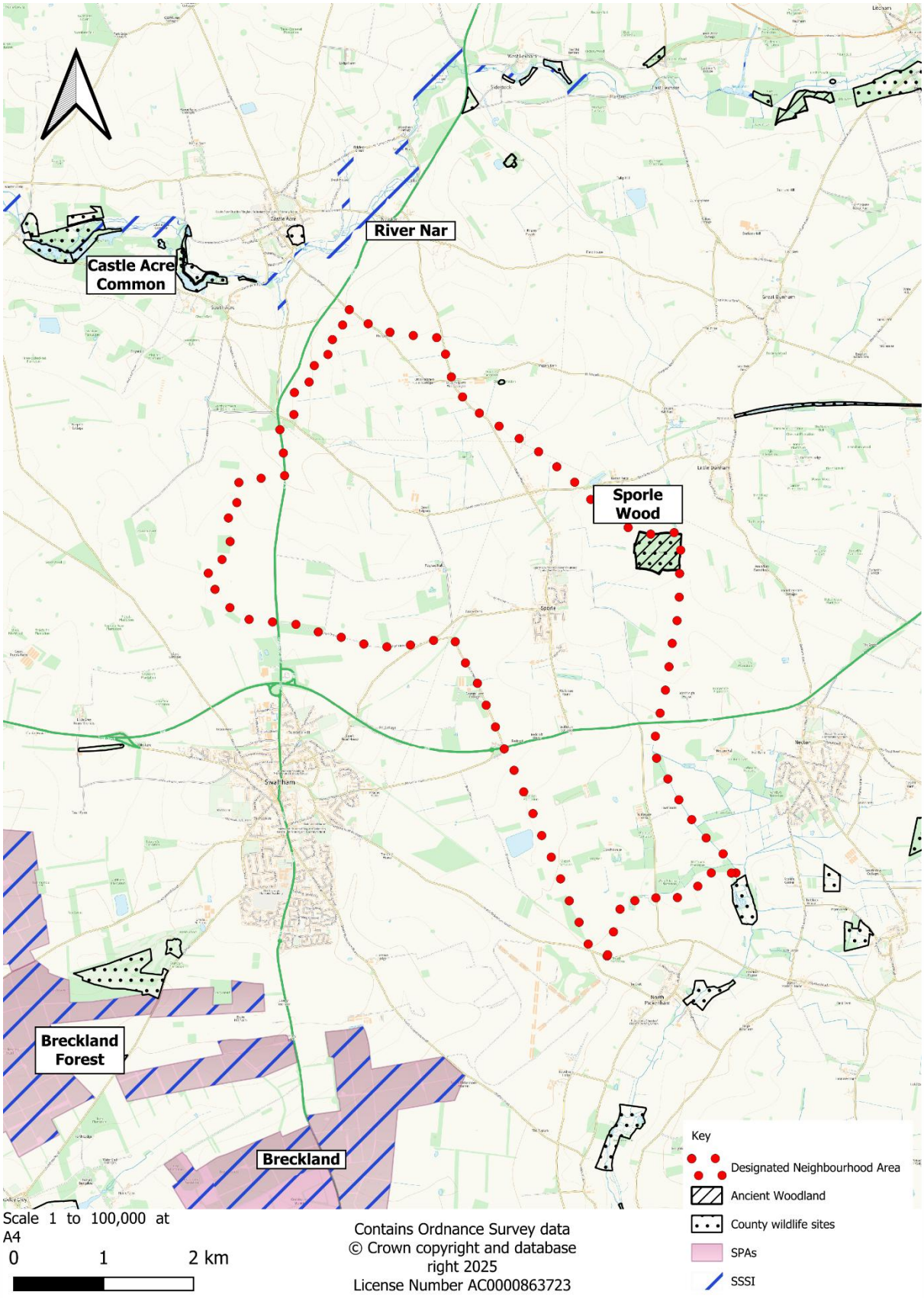


Figure 2- Wildlife Designations

11. **Breckland**[4] of Norfolk and Suffolk lies in the heart of East Anglia on largely sandy soils of glacial origin. In the nineteenth century the area was termed a sandy waste, with small patches of arable cultivation that were soon abandoned. The continental climate, with low rainfall and freedraining soils, has led to the development of dry heath and grassland communities. Much of Breckland has been planted with conifers throughout the twentieth century, and in part of the site, arable farming is the predominant land use. The remnants of dry heath and grassland which have survived these recent changes support heathland breeding birds, where grazing by rabbits and sheep is sufficiently intensive to create short turf and open ground. These breeding birds have also adapted to live in forestry and arable habitats. Woodlark Lullula arborea and nightjar Caprimulgus europaeus breed in clear-fell and open heath areas, whilst stone curlews Burhinus oedicnemus establish nests on open ground provided by arable cultivation in the spring, as well as on Breckland grass-heath**.**

12. The SPA is approximately 39,433ha. There are a number of qualifying species within this area including the Stone Curlew, Nightjar and Woodlark. The SPA regularly supports small numbers (less than 1% of the GB population) of wintering hen harrier Circus cyaneus and breeding goshawk Accipiter gentilis, both of which are listed in Annex I to the Birds Directive.

13. The dry heaths of Breckland are of the Calluna vulgaris – Festuca ovina (heather – sheep'sfescue) community. The sand sedge-dominated Carex arenaria sub-community is typical of areas of blown sand – a very unusual feature of this location. The highly variable soils of Breckland, with underlying chalk being largely covered with wind-blown sands, have resulted in mosaics of heather-dominated heathland, acidic grassland and calcareous grassland that are unlike those of any other site. In many places there is a linear or patterned distribution of heath and grassland, arising from fossilised soil patterns that formed under peri-glacial conditions. Breckland is the most extensive surviving area of the rare Festuca ovina – Hieracium pilosella – Thymus praecox (sheep's-fescue – mouse-ear-hawkweed – wild thyme) grassland type. The grassland is rich in rare species typical of dry, winter-cold, continental areas, and approaches the features of grassland types in central Europe more than almost any other seminatural dry grassland found in the UK.

14. Qualifying habitats within the SAC include alluvial forests, European dry heaths, Inland dunes with open grasslands, natural eutrophic lakes or lochs, semi-natural dry grasslands and scrublands. A qualifying species within the site is the Great crested newt.

15. **Castle Acre Common**[5] consists of a large area of unimproved grazing marsh on the banks of the River Nar. The grassland communities are exceptionally diverse and make this the most important valley grassland site in west Norfolk. Many different grassland types are present, and these reflect underlying variations in soil acidity and wetness. Acidic flush communities are an unusual feature and occur where

[4] https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/6581547796791296
[5] Natural England Designated Site record: Castle Acre Common SSSI (webpage)

springs emerge from sands at the base of the valley sides. The marshy conditions provide suitable nesting sites for several species of wetland birds. The waterlogged soils in the valley-bottom support a marshy grassland flora dominated by a variety of species including marsh horsetail Equisetum palustre, bogbean Menyanthes trifoliata, marsh valerian Valeriana dioica, marsh pennywort Hydrocotyle vulgaris and brown sedge Carex disticha. This rich community includes several other plants characteristic of such conditions, namely flat sedge Blysmus compressus, devil's bit scabious Succisa pratensis, meadow thistle Cirsium dissectum, southern marsh orchid Dactylorhiza praetermissa blunt-flowered rush Juncus subnodulosus. There is a graduation to tall fen vegetation on the wettest soils adjacent to the river and these areas are dominated by reed sweet-grass Glyceria maxima, common reed Phragmites australis or lesser pond sedge Carex acutiformis.

16. Damp, slightly acidic grassland occurs on the drier margins of the site. The rabbit-grazed short turf is dominated by sweet vernal-grass Anthoxanthum odoratum, together with a variety of other grasses including creeping soft-grass Holcus mollis, mat-grass Nardus stricta and sheep's fescue Festuca ovina. Herb species are well-represented and notable species include meadow saxifrage Saxifraga granulata, yellow rattle Rhinanthus minor, tormentil Potentilla erecta, and heath bedstraw Galium saxatile. The acidic flushes merge from the base of a bracken-covered slope ad are marked by a narrow band of vegetation dominated by bog-mosses Sphagnum spp. Plants associated with this unusual community include marsh cinquefoil Potentilla palustris, common cotton-grass Eriophorum angustifolium, cross-leaved heath Erica tetralix and heath rush Juncus squarrosus. Several pairs of snipe nest on the marshy areas and other breeding birds include lapwing, sedge warbler and cuckoo.

17. According to Natural England[6] the site was designated in 1990 for its biological interest and is 17.8ha in size. There are currently 6 pressures on site as of November 2025 including overgrazing wild animals, water abstraction, scrub encroachment, undergrazing, agricultural sources of water pollution, water company discharges causing water pollution[7] and the whole site is within unfavourable condition[8].

18. **River Nar**[9] originates as a spring-fed stream, west of Mileham in Norfolk and flows for 42 km before joining the River Great Ouse at Kings Lynn, where a sluice prevents the penetration of seawater at high tide. The River combines the characteristics of a southern chalk stream and an East Anglian fen river. Together with the adjacent terrestrial habitats, the Nar is an outstanding river system of its type. The solid geology of the catchment is dominated by chalk of the Upper Cretaceous, which is overlain by glacial drift deposits of varying thickness. The source of the Nar lies in an area of clays, sands and gravels, though near Castle Acre this gives way to exposed chalk. At West Acre the Nar flows over the river valley gravels and then over alluvial

[6] https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1005965.pdf
[7] Natural England Designated Site record: Castle Acre Common SSSI (webpage)
[8] Castle Acre Common SSSI. Source:
Natural England Designated Site record: Castle Acre Common SSSI (webpage)
[9] https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1006323.pdf

silt from Narborough through the fens. The river water is base-rich, alkaline and recharged by clear springs flowing from the underlying chalk.

19. The upper Nar has a wide range of natural physical features incorporating riffles, pools, gravel beds and meanders, whilst the lower reaches below Narborough are embanked and steep sided with water flowing sluggishly through a predominantly arable flood plain. The variation in physical features and the influence of the underlying chalk give rise to a rich and diverse flora. Amongst the 78 species of riverine and bankside plants are many eutrophic and mesotrophic species, including 5 pondweeds and 8 bryophytes. The flora of the first 10 km of the river, to West Lexham, is typical of a calcareous, lowland ditch community with an abundance of starwort Callitriche spp. and reed sweetgrass, Glyceria maxima. The next 12 km of the River, to Narborough Mill, is fast flowing over stoney substrates and is rich in chalk stream plants including narrow-leaved waterparsnip, Berula erecta; mare's-tail, Hippuris vulgaris; greater tussock-sedge, Carex paniculata; water crowfoot, Ranunculus pseudofluitans var. vertumnus and opposite-leaved pondweed, Groenlandia densa.

20. The wet margins, with a constantly high water table typical of chalk streams, support a wide range of emergent plants. The final 18.5 km is embanked and although less physically diverse than the upper reaches, it possesses a contrasting flora with several species not found in the upper river. These plants are characteristic of sluggish flows and include 3 pondweeds, Potamogeton spp.; 2 water crowfoots, Ranunculus spp.; hornwort, Ceratophyllum demersum; water-milfoil, Myriophyllum spicatum; and river water-dropwort, Oenanthe aquatica. The Nar is well-known locally for its brown trout, Salmo trutta. Since 1985, trout numbers have increased steadily; pike, Esox lucius, numbers have remained fairly stable whilst roach, Rutilus rutilus, and eel, Anguilla anguilla, have continued to be the dominant species in the river. A further 11 species have been recorded in the Nar although they contribute only a small amount to the total fish biomass e.g.: chubb, Leuciscus cephalus; tench, Tinca tinca; gudgeon, Gobio gobio; rudd, Scardinius erythrophthalamus; bullhead, Cottus gobio; rainbow trout, Salmo gairdneri; spined loach, Cobitis taenia; and roach x bream, Abramis brama, hybrids.

21. The chalk acts as a natural aquifer and thus maintains flows throughout the year, peaking in the spring with frequent flooding of adjacent land. This has led to the development of a range of adjacent semi-natural inundation communities and wetland habitats. Many have their water-tables intricately linked to and therefore dependent on the river whilst others are dependent on seasonal inundation. In the upper reaches of the river extensive areas of traditionally managed unimproved pasture survive. A combination of summer cattle grazing and hay making have encouraged the establishment of a variety of wetland species, including southern marsh orchid, Dactylorhiza majalis subsp. praetermissa; yellow rattle, Rhinanthus minor, and bogbean, Menyanthes trifoliata. Where land adjacent to the river is seasonally flooded and has not been reclaimed as pasture, areas of rough fen and unmanaged scrub remain. Further downstream this scrub has developed into mature wet woodland, dominated by alder carr. The result is a river corridor of

considerable importance to wildlife. Although the river channel can be regarded as nationally important in its own right, the quality and type of adjacent habitats increases its value for fauna which use both the river and floodplain. Breeding birds include snipe, lapwing, redshank, sedge and grasshopper warblers.

22. The variations in river profile including slope, width and depth are important factors in the provision of nesting sites for kingfishers and sand martins, and the combination of water meadow, fen, scrub and woodland in the upper Nar provides feeding and resting grounds for a number of other birds including grey wagtail, reed warblers, teal, marsh harriers, willow and marsh tits.

23. According to Natural England[10] the site was designated in 1992 for its biological interest and is 212.3ha in size. There are currently 3 pressures on site as of 2020 including invasive species, pollution and freshwater impacts[11] and the whole site is within unfavourable condition[12].

24. As well as this within 20km of the Neighbourhood Development Plan area, there are a number of additional important International designations. This includes:

    - Breckland (SAC; SPA)
    - Norfolk Valley Fens (SAC)
    - Roydon Common (Ramsar and SAC)

[10] Natural England Site Designation Castle Acre Common (PDF)
[11] Natural England Designated Sites View - River Nar SSSI
[12] River Nar SSSI. Source:
Natural England Designated Sites View - River Nar SSSI

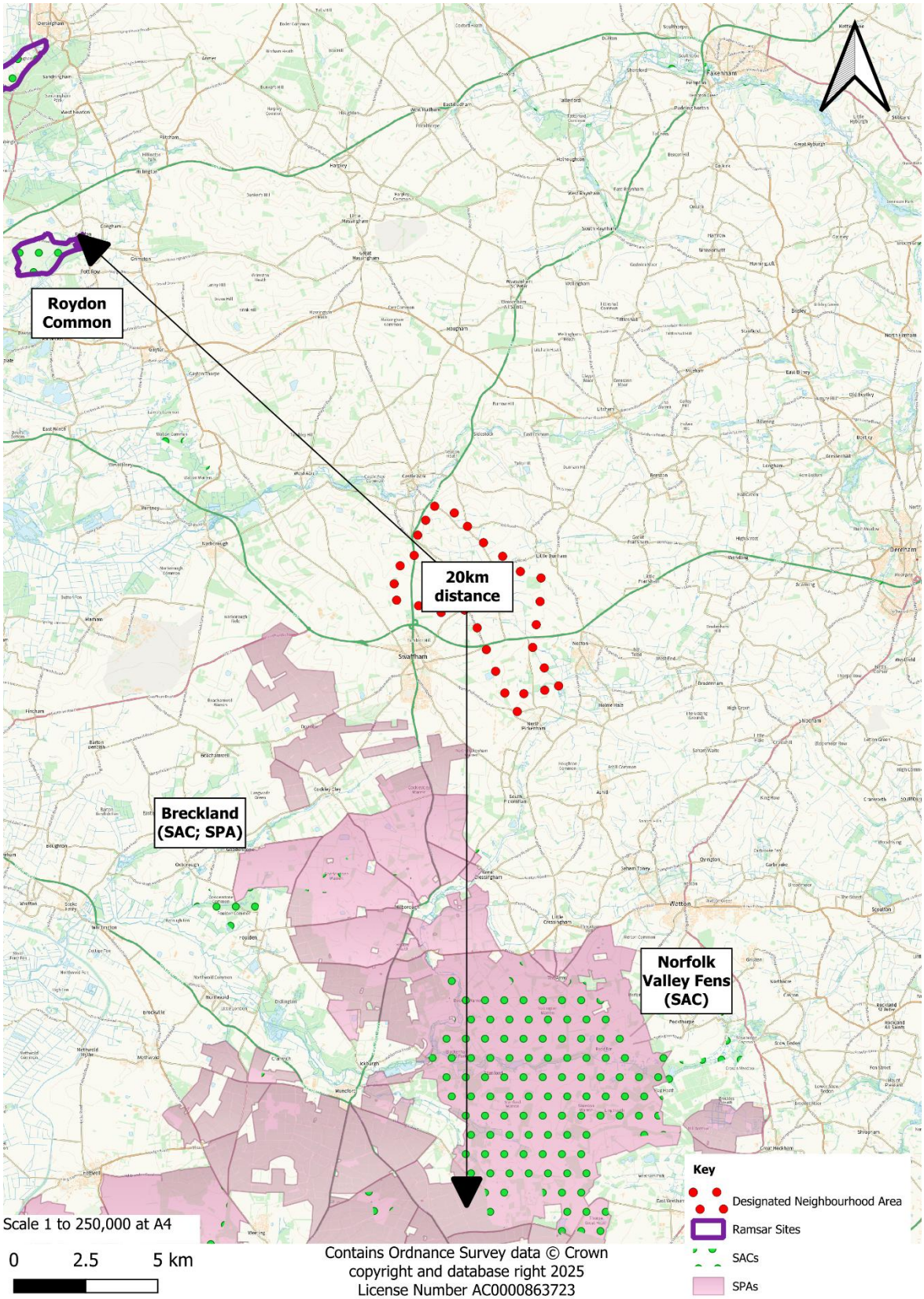


Figure 3- Wildlife Designations within 20km distance of Sporle with Palgrave Neighbourhood Development Plan Area

National and Local Designations

25. There is one County Wildlife Sites that falls within the neighbourhood area to the east called Sporle Wood shown in **Figure 4**. County wildlife sites are not designated on a statutory basis, though they do receive a degree of protection through the planning process and are often recognised in district local plans. In this context, site protection relies on the commitment of local authorities and public bodies.

26. The parish contains priority habitat also known as Habitats of Principle Importance for biodiversity conservation. These are habitats which are most threatened, in greatest decline, or where the UK holds a significant proportion of the world's total population. There is one main priority habitat in the parish (see **Figure 4**) being deciduous woodland. Deciduous woodland accounts for 39% of the total priority habitats resource in England[13], the largest proportion of any habitat group. There are also small areas where no main habitat occurs, but additional habitats are present.

[13] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/654df579c0e06800101b2d2b/2a_Extent_and_condition_of_priority_habitats.pdf

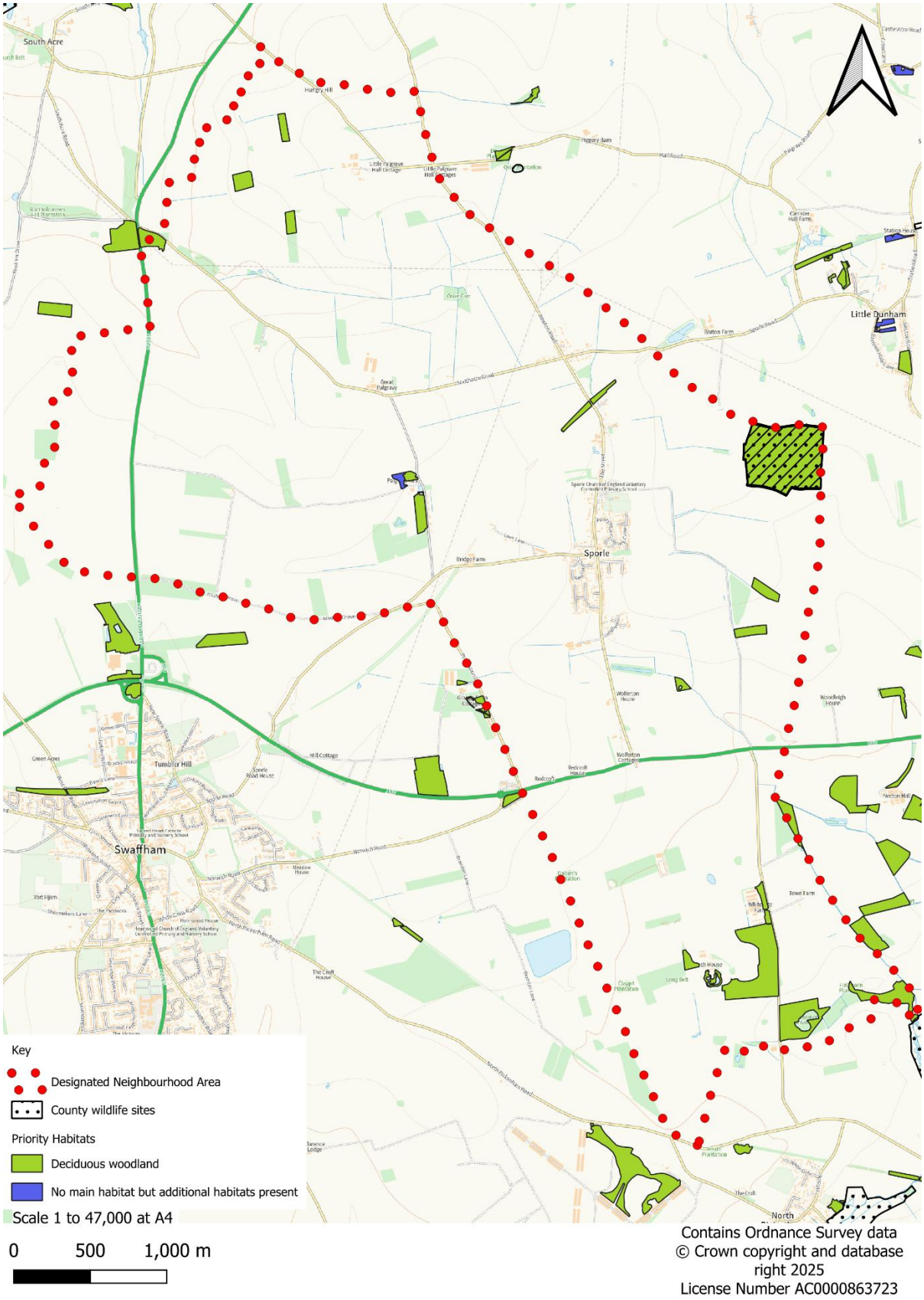
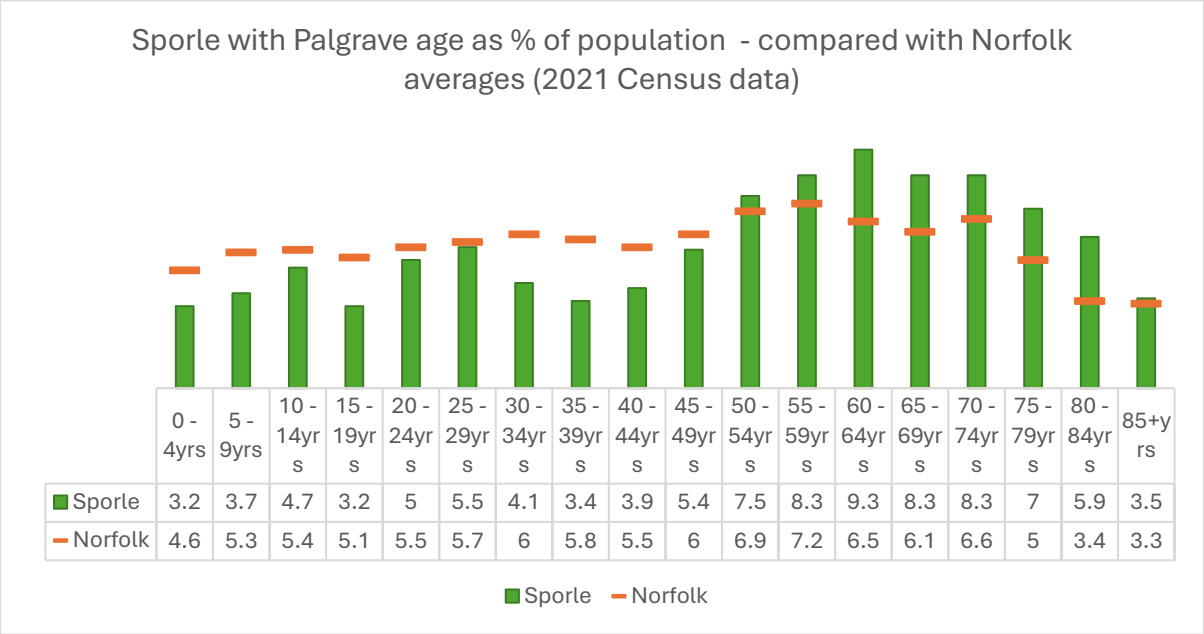


Figure 4-County Wildlife Sites and Priority Habitats (Source Norfolk County Council, 2025)

Population

27. According to the 2021 Census, the total resident population of Sporle with Palgrave is 1,000 people living in 480 households[14] which is very small drop (1%) from the 2011 census when there were 1,011 usual residents[15]. It is also a drop in population from the 2001 Census when there were 1,038 people in the parish –overall a reduction of 4% in the 20 years from 2001 to 2021. Census 2021 data shows that Sporle with Palgrave has an older age profile when compared to the rest of Norfolk with above average distribution of ages 50+ and below average distribution of ages 0-49[16].

28. The majority of the parish population (47%) are in the 25-64 age bracket representing adults of working age. However, in the ten years between the 2011 and 2021 Censuses, the population profile of Sporle with Palgrave grew slightly older, with a small drop in the proportion of the population in the younger age groups and a small rise in the proportion of the population in the older age groups. The 65 and over population now makes up 33% of the parish compared to 26% in 2011 and the Norfolk average of 25%.



	0 - 4yrs	5 - 9yrs	10 - 14yrs	15 - 19yrs	20 - 24yrs	25 - 29yrs	30 - 34yrs	35 - 39yrs	40 - 44yrs	45 - 49yrs	50 - 54yrs	55 - 59yrs	60 - 64yrs	65 - 69yrs	70 - 74yrs	75 - 79yrs	80 - 84yrs	85+yrs
Sporle	3.2	3.7	4.7	3.2	5	5.5	4.1	3.4	3.9	5.4	7.5	8.3	9.3	8.3	8.3	7	5.9	3.5
Norfolk	4.6	5.3	5.4	5.1	5.5	5.7	6	5.8	5.5	6	6.9	7.2	6.5	6.1	6.6	5	3.4	3.3

Figure 5-Sporle with Palgrave population age profile vs Norfolk - Census 2021

[14] Office of National Statistics census 2021 – build a custom profile. Accessed 12/02/2024
[15] Census 2011. Nomis Local Area Report for Sporle with Palgrave. Source: Local Area Report for areas in England and Wales - Nomis (nomisweb.co.uk)
[16] Office of National Statistics census 2021 – build a custom profile. Accessed 12/02/2024

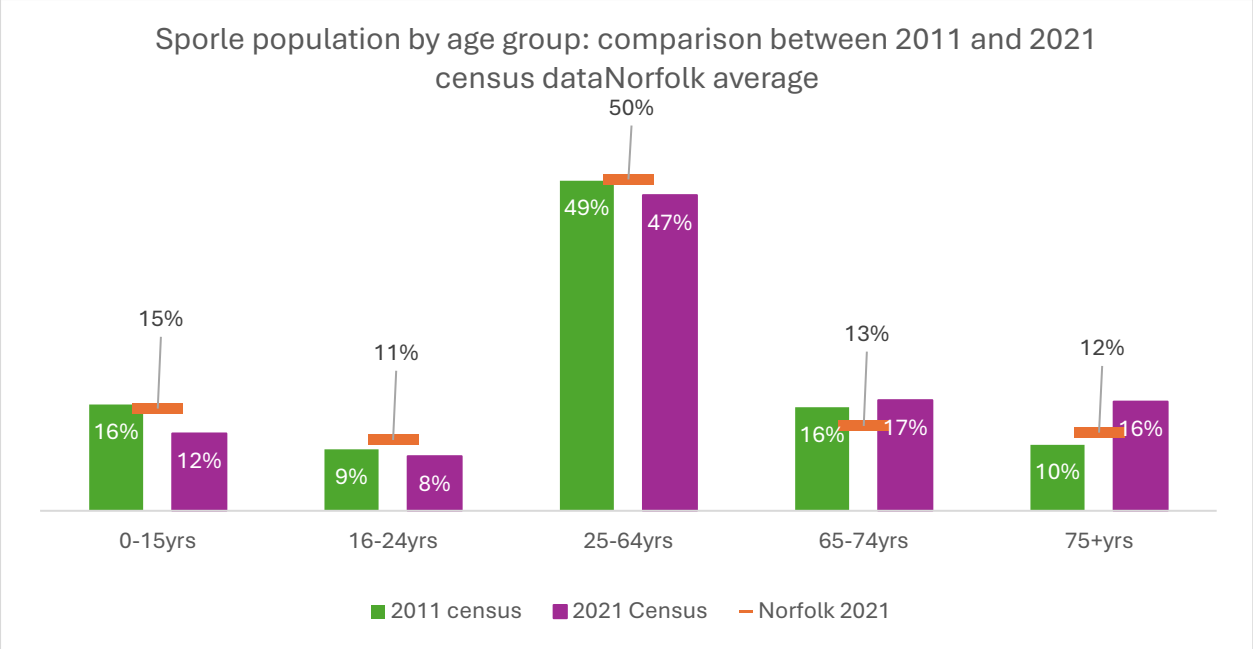


Figure 6- Sporle with Palgrave population age profile 2011 vs 2021 (Census data)

Human Health

29. Provision of age-related services is likely to become an increasing consideration for the Neighbourhood Development Plan area as the proportion of over 65s according to the Census 2021 makes up 33% of the NPA.

Soil

30. The parish contains some of the best and most versatile agricultural land in England, as identified by the Agricultural Land Classification Scale including Grade 2 and Grade 3, see **Figure 7**.

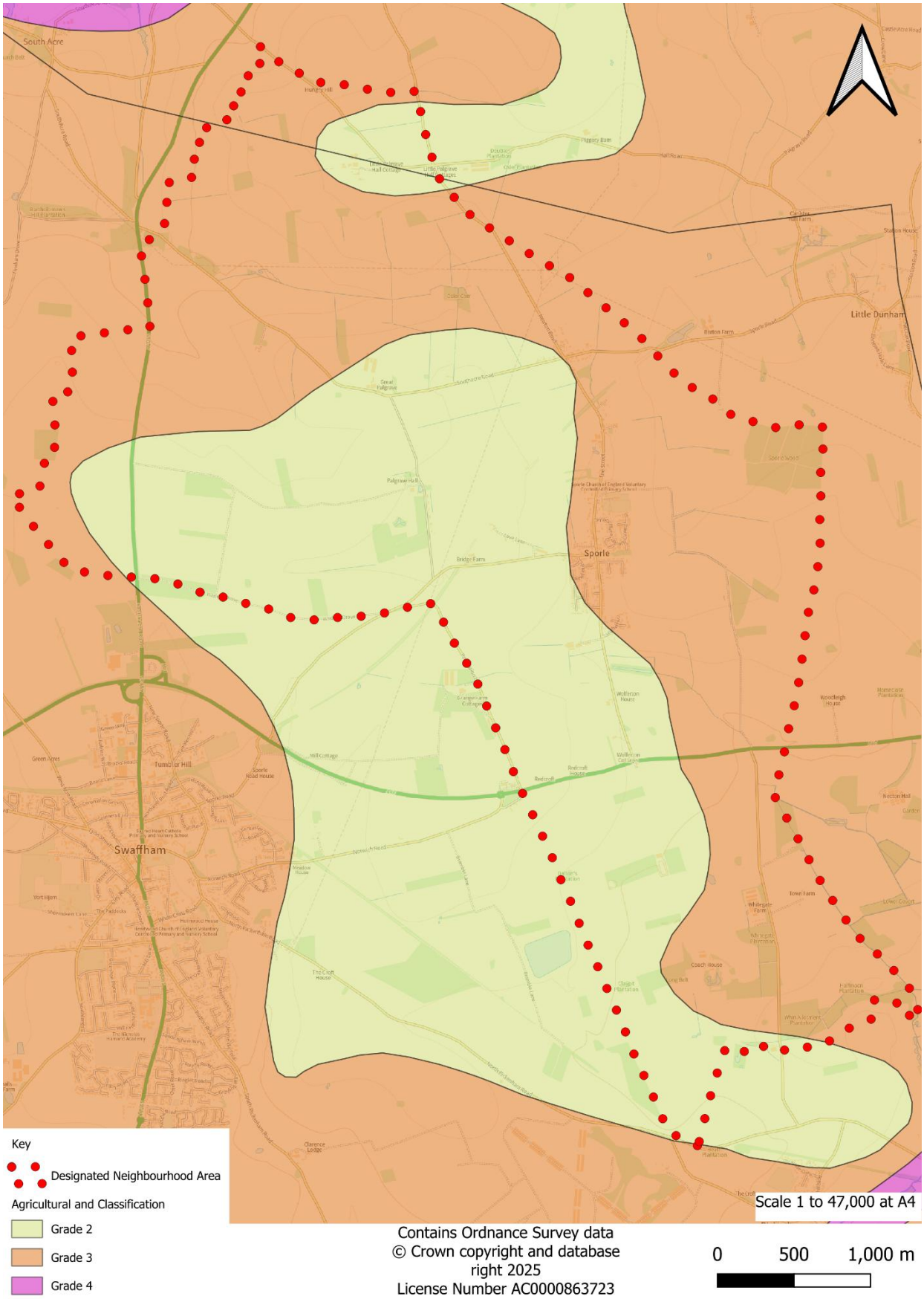


Figure 7-Agricultural Land Classification (Source: Natural England, 2025)

Water

31. The Environment Agency provides summary flood risk information for local areas alongside detailed maps showing future risk of flooding from both surface water and from rivers/sea (fluvial). There is little risk of fluvial flooding in the parish with just two small areas falling into the higher risk zones and both of these are outside of the built-up part of the villages (**Figure 8**).

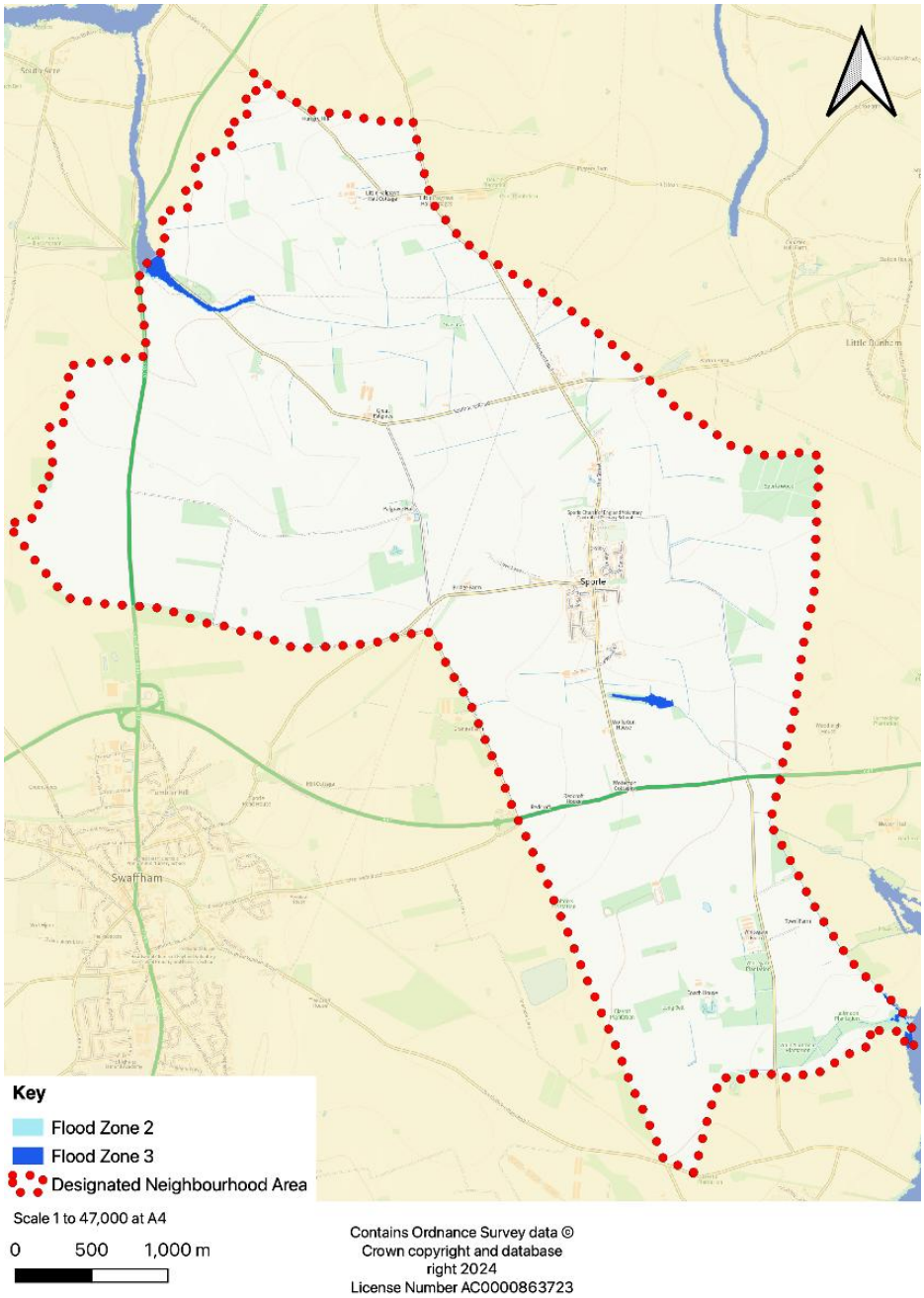


Figure 8-Flood risk from rivers and sea in Sporle with Palgrave (Source: Environment Agency, 2024)

The Environment Agency future flood risk modelling[17] shows that there is medium and high risk of surface water flooding in parts of the parish, including around some stretches of The Street within the built-up part of the parish[18]. The mapping indicates this mainly effects the road and properties that lie adjacent to the watercourse that flows south through the centre of the village as shown on **Figures 9 to 10.**

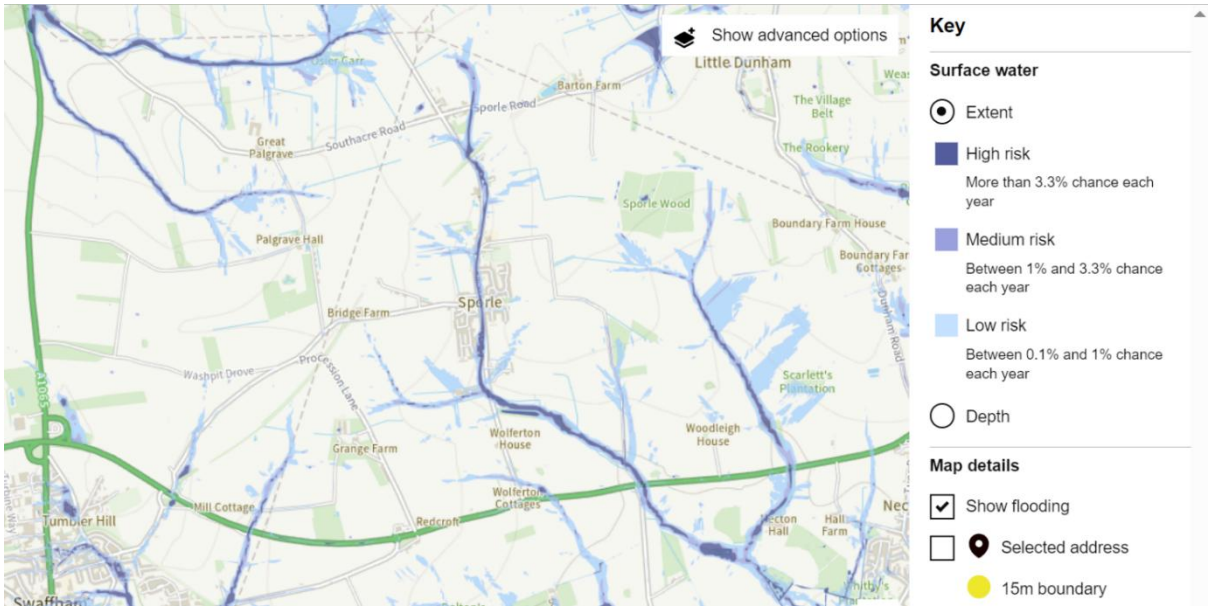


Figure 9- Surface Water Flood Risk (Source: DEFRA, 2025)

[17] Environment Agency – learn more about flood risk
[18] Environment Agency Long term flood risk – surface water flooding

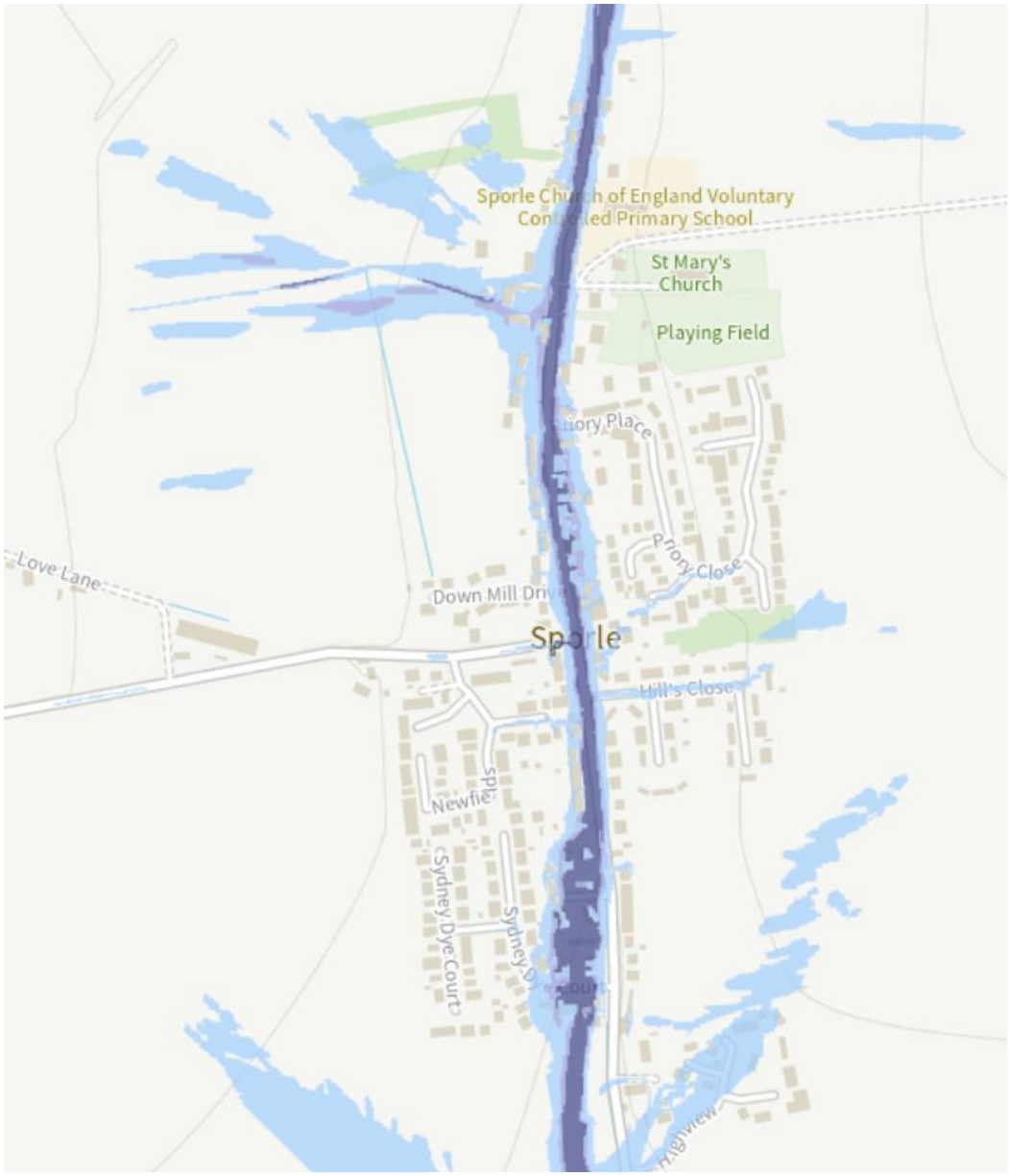


Figure 10-Surface Water Flood Risk within the built-up area of Sporle with Palgrave (Source: DEFRA, 2025)

32. The Breckland Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2024[19]) makes no reference to flood risk in Sporle with Palgrave.

33. The Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) datasets show there are no flood investigation reports for Sporle with Palgrave[20].

[19]Breckland District Council Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. 2024. Source: Breckland District Council Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

[20] Norfolk County Council Flood Investigation Reports

Air and Climatic Factors

34. As part of the National Air Quality Strategy all local authorities are obliged to establish air quality levels in their area that meet national air quality objectives. If an area does not meet these objectives Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) are declared. The Breckland District Council Air Quality Annual Status Report (2025) confirms that there are no Air Quality Management Areas in the district now the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA), located in Swaffham, was revoked on the 24th of June 2024[21]. This would suggest that air quality is generally not of a concern in the SPNDP area.

Material Assets

35. Sporle is identified in the Breckland Local Plan as a Local Service Centre village and provides a range of local services including a Church of England primary school, shop and Post Office, village hall, and a public house. The parish also benefits from a regular bus service and has an active community with numerous groups such as a bridge club, gardening group, Sporle Singers, and a history group. The IDBR (2016) records 22 businesses operating within the parish. There are no medical or dental facilities in Sporle; residents travel to Swaffham for GP and dental services and to King's Lynn for hospital care at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. The nearest library is in Swaffham, supplemented by a mobile library service visiting Sporle monthly. The primary school is currently at capacity for three of its five-year groups and operates mixed-age classes across four classrooms.

36. Public transport provision includes regular weekday bus services to Swaffham and Dereham, supporting access to employment and services, although there are no evening or Sunday services and no north–south bus links. The nearest mainline rail station is at King's Lynn, providing connections to Cambridge and London.

37. Walking and cycling opportunities include public rights of way and the Peddars Way long-distance trail, which runs through the parish and offers off-road access for walkers, cyclists, and horse riders, see **Figure 11**.

[21] Breckland District Council Air Quality Annual Status Report (2025) Available at: 2025 Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR)

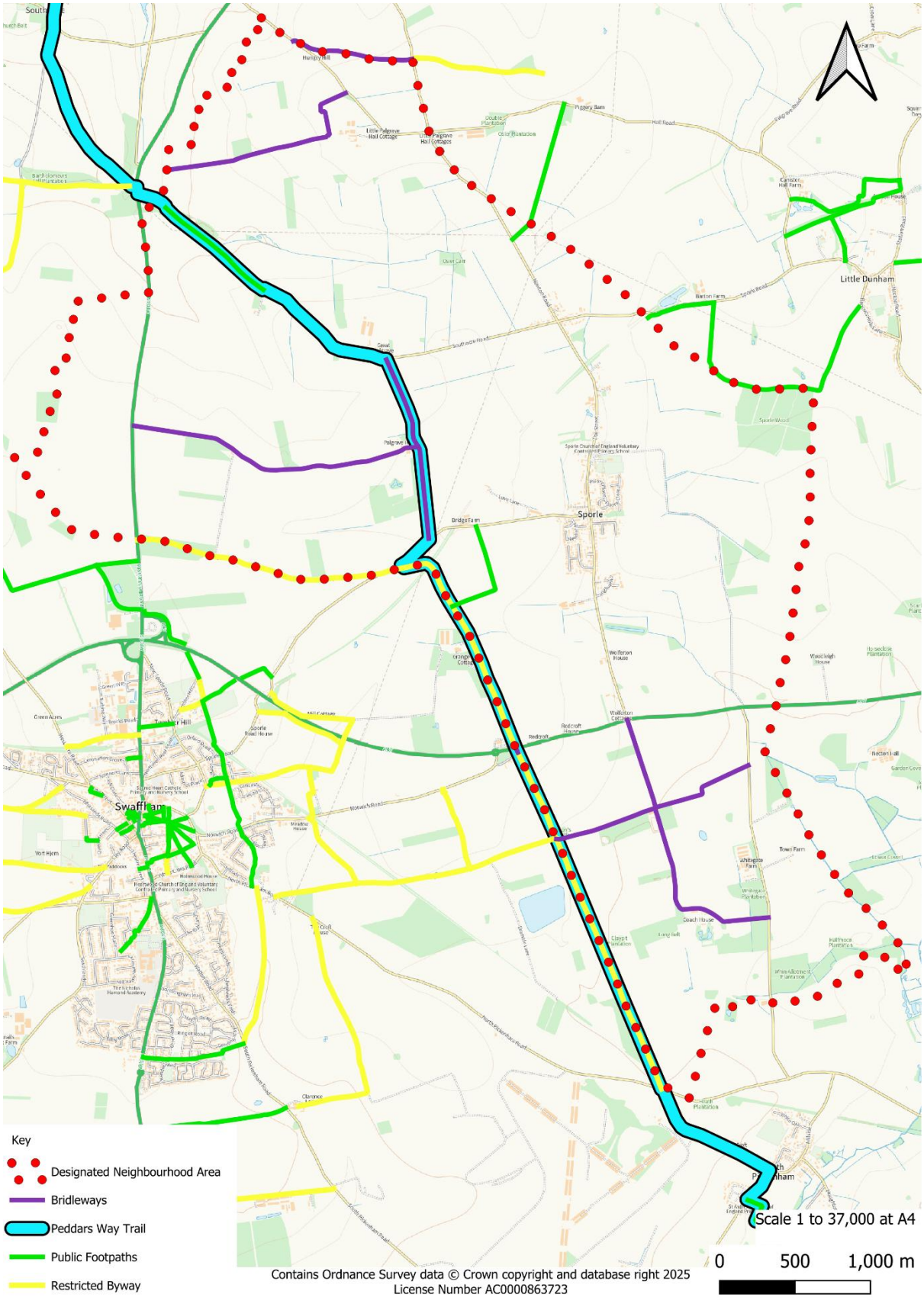


Figure 11-Public Rights of Way within Sporle with Palgrave (Source: Norfolk County Council, 2025)

Cultural Heritage

38. According to the Norfolk Heritage Explorer[22] there are 128 records of historic artefacts, structures, buildings, and markings in the landscape within the neighbourhood area. The oldest of these are 13 artefacts that date back to middle Palaeolithic times (150,000BC-40,001BC) including prehistoric pots used for boiling water.

39. There are five listed buildings in the parish identified in the table and map below. There is also a scheduled monument (the deserted medieval village site of Great Palgrave) which is shown in **Figure 12**. Sporle Wood is designated as Ancient Woodland. There are no conservation areas, battlefields, or other historic designations within the neighbourhood area.

Figure 12- Heritage Assets within and around Sporle with Palgrave (Source: Historic England 2025)

Landscape

[22] Norfolk Heritage Explorer parish summary – Sporle with Palgrave

40. The parish falls within the National Character Area 84 Mid Norfolk, defined by Natural England[23]. The Mid Norfolk NCA is a flat rural landscape characterised as:
    - Ancient countryside with along-settled agricultural character
    - Arable land is enclosed by winding lanes and hedgerows
    - Interspersed with woodland and heath
    - Dissected by river valleys
    - A patchwork of cultivated land
    - Numerous church spires, distant wooded horizons and big skies dominate the landscape

41. Natural England describe Mid Norfolk NCA as "a tranquil place, with isolated market towns, and scattered villages and farmhouses, their red brick and flint walls and pantile roofs an intrinsic component of Norfolk character"[24]. Natural England emphasises the environmental objective for Mid Norfolk of encouraging a sympathetic approach to development that maintains traditional Norfolk character and gives examples including:
    - Ensuring that development plans are sensitive to conserving the historic character of the landscape and promote the use of traditional vernacular and building materials
    - Minimising the effects of new development by avoiding areas with high tranquillity, incorporating green infrastructure and woodland buffers, and minimising new sources of light pollution.

42. Breckland District Council's Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2022)[25] identifies that Sporle with Palgrave falls within two distinct landscape character types: plateau farmland[26] and settled tributary farmland[27]. It identifies Sporle with Palgrave as having the origin settlement type of 'agricultural village' of the 'continuous rural row' morphological type. These definitions are explored more below along with development implications[28].

[23] Natural England National Character Areas Accessed 15/02/2024
[24] Natural England NCA profile 84 Mid Norfolk
[25] Breckland District Council Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2022)
[26] Settlement comprising individual farmsteads, hamlets and small scale villages – the latter often centred around a green or pond. There are some larger scale settlements on the edges of the plateau.
[27] Settled character, with dispersed farmsteads and nucleated villages.
[28] Breckland District Council Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2022)

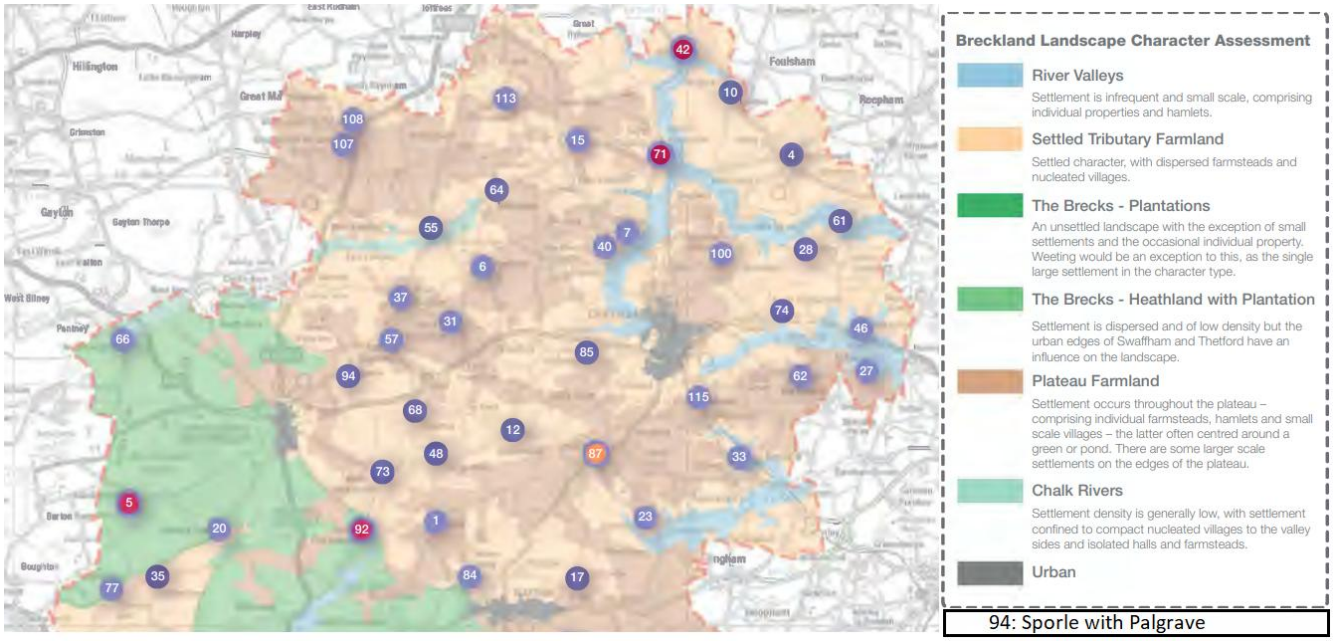


Figure 13-Breckland Character Assessment 2022 - showing Sporle with Palgrave (94) (Source Breckland District Council)

43. Agricultural villages are small settlements which initially originated as a series of dispersed buildings which have since developed into villages. The historic origins may range from farmsteads, grain milling or turnpike settlements on key routes. In the character assessment, Breckland District Council notes that:
    - Within the older historic centre of the village, residential properties are low in height and generally do not exceed three storeys. Churches form features of the villages, often providing the tallest structure.
    - The older historic buildings of agricultural origin are generally located within the village core. The continued use of some farmsteads for agriculture purposes provides an important link to the land uses and practices which continue today.
    - Older buildings within the village are generally characterised by attractive vernacular detailing to the facades, gables and roofs.
    - Many villages have now experienced mid-late 20th century and early 21st century development which uses non place-specifc architecture and materials, diluting the character and sense of place.
    - The villages typically exhibit a strong relationship with surrounding farmland which contributes to the rural identity of the settlement.
    - Selective views between properties and visual links are afforded across the surrounding agricultural context, with woodland often forming a component of the view. Patterns of mature vegetation typically align the street frontage and frame key views.
    - Where settlements have developed along watercourses, historically signifcant buildings can be found along the river.

Continuous rural row villages have:

- Linear arrangement of farmsteads and dwellings, usually built along a road.
- A row settlement with no large gaps between buildings.

- These commonly begin as interrupted rural rows which have since been infilled by development.

44. In the character assessment, Breckland District Council notes that these types of villages:
    - Lack a single clustering or central focus, with amenities and facilities distributed along the streetscape.
    - Have regular rows of historic properties which provide a distinctive feature. However, evidence of modern infill development stretching along local roads detracts from the historic linear form of the settlement type.
    - Have a reduced network of local green spaces due to the pattern of infill development, detracting from the wider village setting.
    - Are generally characterised by a limited palette of materials (predominantly Norfolk red brick, clay pantiles, render and timber frames).
    - Have limited scope for public open space because of the continuous nature of the row.
    - Work well because the higher density of housing within the village core can create a greater sense of community, alongside continuous natural surveillance as houses overlook the street.

45. Sporle with Palgrave is given as an example of what works well in these types of villages as "the linear settlement pattern provides linkages with the countryside and open rural views with opportunities for green corridors"[29]. With regard to development in these types of villages, Breckland District Council notes that the following issues:
    - When development infills within the settlement boundary there can be a loss of green space which alters the nature of the settlement and creates more urbanised environments.
    - Infill or side street development can create pockets of architecture which do not relate well to the historic look of the village.
    - Development inside settlement boundaries, particularly high-density development within small villages, can cause street clutter and parking issues.

[29] Breckland District Council Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2022)

SEA Screening

Legislative Background

46. The European Directive 2001/42/EC[30] is the basis for Strategic Environmental Assessments and Sustainability Appraisal legislation, which was transposed into English secondary legislation by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 otherwise known as the SEA Regulations. A SEA would be required if the implementation of the contents of the Sporle with Palgrave Neighbourhood Development Plan are likely to cause significant environmental effects.

47. The assessment undertaken will follow and answer specific questions using criteria drawn from the European SEA Directive and Schedule 1 of the UK Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 when determining the likely significance of effects as shown in **Figure 14**[31].

48. **Figure 15** presents the flow diagram entitled Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes which is taken from the Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive, published in September 2005[32]. **Figure 16** below assesses whether SPNDP will require a full SEA. The questions in the first column are drawn from **Figure 15** which sets out how the SEA Directive should be applied.

49. An assessment has been undertaken to determine whether the draft SPNDP requires SEA in accordance with the SEA Regulations. Where the results can be viewed below.

[30] EUR-Lex - 32001L0042 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)
[31] The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (legislation.gov.uk)
[32] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7657/practicalguidesea.pdf

SCHEDULE 1- CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING THE LIKELY SIGNIFICANCE OF EFFECTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT

1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to:

a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;
b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;
c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;
d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and
e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of [F1retained EU law] on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).

2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:

a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;
b) the cumulative nature of the effects;
c) the transboundary nature of the effects;
d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);
e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);
f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to—
(i)special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;
(ii)exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or
(iii)intensive land-use; and
g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.

Figure 14-Schedule 1 Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects

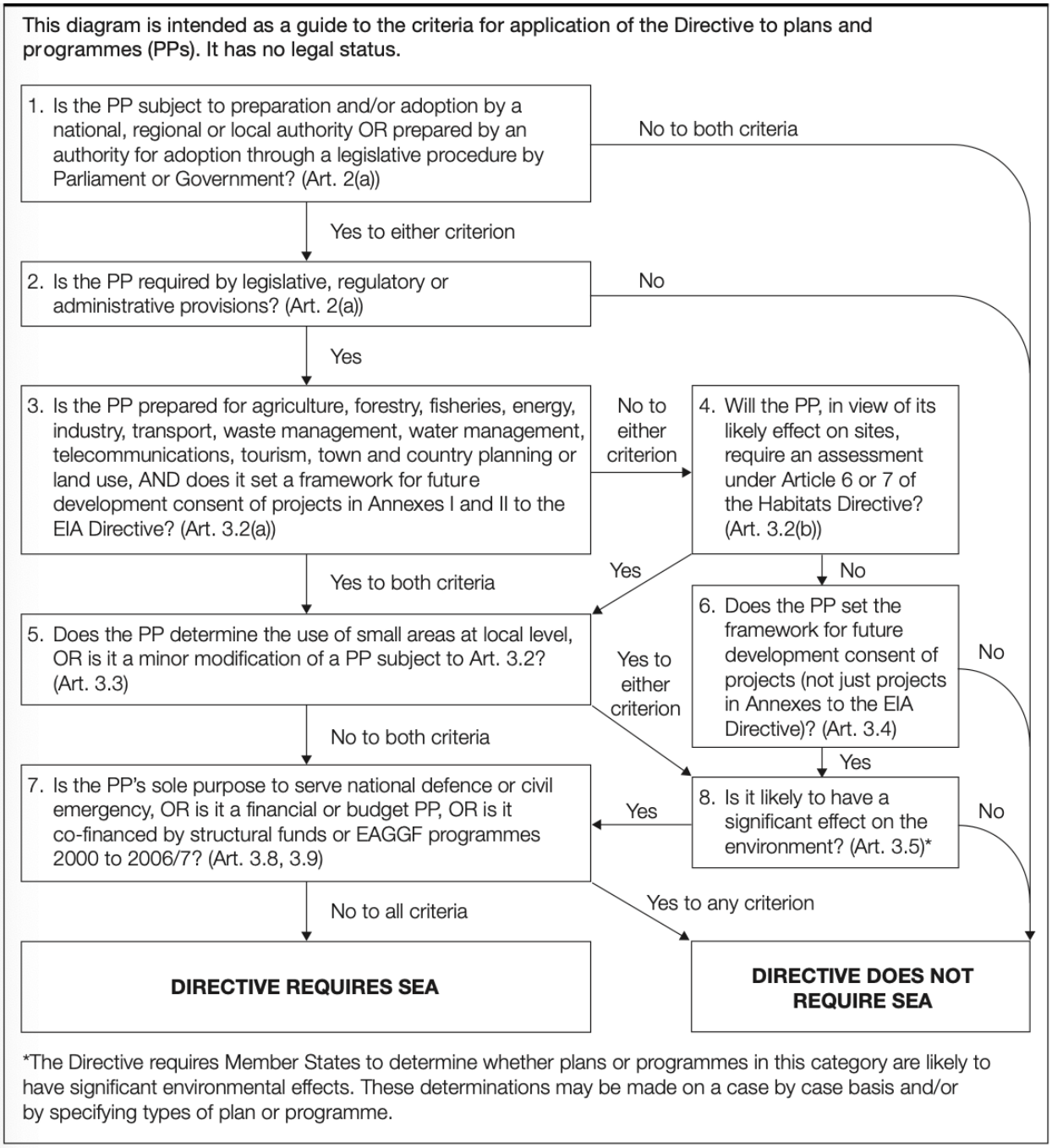


Figure 15-Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes

	Stage	Y/N	Justification
1	Is the Neighbourhood Development Plan (PP) subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government (Art. 2(a))	Y	The NP is being prepared by Sporle with Palgrave parish council (as the "relevant qualifying body") and will be made by Breckland District Council, subject to Sporle with Palgrave passing an independent examination and successful local community referendum. The preparation of the Sporle with Palgrave Neighbourhood Development Plan is allowed under primary legislation: The Town and Country Planning Act (1990) as amended by the Localism Act (2011). The preparation of NP's is subject to several relevant regulations as shown below (not intend to be a complete list): • The Neighbourhood Development Planning (General) Regulations 2012, • the Neighbourhood Development Planning (referendums) Regulations 2012 • the Neighbourhood Development Planning (General)(Amendment) Regulations 2015 • the Neighbourhood Development Planning (General)and Development Management Procedure (Amendment) Regulations 2016 • the Neighbourhood Development Planning (General)and Development Management Procedure (Amendment) Regulations 2012 **GO TO QUESTION 2**
2	Is the Neighbourhood Development Plan (PP) required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))	Y	Whilst it is not a requirement for a parish to create a Neighbourhood Development Plan under the Town and Country Planning Act (1990) and Localism Act (2011), the NP will

	Stage	Y/N	Justification
			eventually be "made" and form part of the Development Plans for Breckland District Council. The authority is directed by legislative processes, and it is important that the screening process considers whether it is likely to have significant environmental effects and hence whether an SEA is required under the Directive. **GO TO QUESTION 3**
3	Is the Neighbourhood Development Plan (PP) prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Art. 3.2(a))	Y	Developments that fall within Annex I are 'excluded' development for Neighbourhood Development Plans (as set out in Section 61(k) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as subsequently amended)[33] and the Localism Act 2011 Schedule 9 Part 2 Para 7 Section 38 B (1)(b),(6)[34]. A Neighbourhood Development Plan is prepared for Town and Country Planning and Land use. The Sporle with Palgrave Neighbourhood Development Plan can include at a neighbourhood level, through different policy areas, the framework for development that would fall within Annex II of the EIA Directive. The Neighbourhood Development Plan is being prepared to set out a framework for town and country planning and land use within the parish of Sporle with Palgrave. Its intention is to complement the higher order strategic framework that already exists for land use planning across the Breckland District. The Neighbourhood Development Plan seeks to align and be in general conformity with the strategic framework.

[33] Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (legislation.gov.uk)
[34] Localism Act 2011 (legislation.gov.uk)

	Stage	Y/N	Justification
			The Neighbourhood Development Plan is not allocating any development itself but anticipates being one of the key tools to manage future development with Sporle with Palgrave. **GO TO QUESTION 5**
4	Will the Neighbourhood Development Plan (PP), in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.3)		A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening of the Neighbourhood Development Plan has been undertaken in the next section and has concluded that the Neighbourhood Development Plan is not likely to have a significant effect on any European site, either alone or in combination. **GO TO QUESTION 6**
6	Does the Neighbourhood Development Plan (PP) set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art. 3.4)		Although the Neighbourhood Development Plan does not allocate sites for development, it includes non-strategic policies which proposals for development within the parish will be assessed against when materially relevant. **GO TO QUESTION 8**
8	Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)	N	**SEE FIGURE 15 – PLAN DOES NOT REQUIRE SEA.**

Figure 16-Application of SEA Directive to SPNDP

PP in this instance refers to Neighbourhood Development Plan

50. Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations sets out the criteria for determining the likely significance of effects. These are listed in **Figure 17** below along with comments on the extent to which the SPNDP meets these criteria.

SEA Directive Criteria (Annex II)	Comments	Likely Significant Effect? Y/N
Characteristics of the plan and programmes, having regard in particular, to:		
a) The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources	Once made, SPNDP will become part of the statutory development plan and will guide the delivery of development within the designated plan area. In the current Breckland Local Plan (2023) Policy GEN03- Settlement Hierarchy sets out the broad approach to development within the district. Sporle is designated as a Local Service Centre under Policy GEN03- Settlement Hierarchy. Areas which are identified as local service centres must satisfy qualifying criteria including access to public transport, community facilities, employment, shop/post office and a school. The Breckland Local Plan allocated one site in the parish known as land to the north-east of Essex Farm. This site was allocated for residential development of at least 35 dwellings and the provision of open space. In January 2025 the agent of this site confirmed to the Parish Council that the site is currently subject to a reserved matters application. In the emerging Local Plan (2024-2042) which underwent the Regulation 18 consultation (preferred options) in October 2025, Policy GEN 02 designates Sporle as a Secondary Parish and sets out that approximately 5% of new housing development is	**N**

SEA Directive Criteria (Annex II)	Comments	Likely Significant Effect? Y/N
	directed to Secondary Parishes in Breckland over the Plan period. Two allocations are proposed for Sporle being SL1- Bunkers Hill (Left) and SPL2 – Land off the Street for approximately 30 dwellings each. These allocations may be subject to change. **In terms of the degree to which SPNDP sets a framework, it does not allocate land for development.**	
b) The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	The Sporle with Palgrave Neighbourhood Development Plan will be adopted alongside the higher order adopted Local Plan and National Planning Policy Framework and form part of the District Council's Development Plan. The Neighbourhood Development Plan must be in general conformity to the strategic framework and will expand upon some of the Local Plan policies, providing supplementary information on a local scale. It does not have an influence over other plans. However, once made SPNDP will form part of the statutory development plans for Sporle with Palgrave and will be used in conjunction with the current development plans to determine planning applications.	**N**
c) The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	One of the Basic Conditions which SPNDP must meet is to contribute towards sustainable development. Given the non-strategic nature of the SPNDP this does not have the potential to restrict the delivery of other plans or programmes.	**N**

SEA Directive Criteria (Annex II)	Comments	Likely Significant Effect? Y/N
d) Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme	Baseline information relating to SPNDP was described earlier in this Screening Document. There are no European statutory designated sites in the neighbourhood area. However, there are several designations within close proximity including : • **Breckland** Special Protection Area (SPA) and Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI) • **Castle Acre Common** Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI) • **River Nar** Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI) **The plan itself will not specifically allocate land for development and will not exacerbate any significant known environmental problems.**	**N**
e) The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of community legislation on the environment (eg plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection)	The implementation of community legislation is unlikely to be significantly compromised by the Neighbourhood Development Plan.	**N**
Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to		
a) The probability, duration, frequency, and reversibility of the effects	SPNDP does not contain any site-specific development proposals that will result in complex, widespread, long lasting, or serious environmental effects.	**N**

SEA Directive Criteria (Annex II)	Comments	Likely Significant Effect? Y/N
b) The cumulative nature of the effects	As it will not allocate land for development SPNDP will not lead to any cumulative effects in combination with existing or emerging plans.	**N**
c) Transboundary nature of effects	The SPNDP area provides supplementary policy areas on a local scale such as design. The impacts for transboundary effects beyond the parish are unlikely to be significant.	**N**
d) The risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents)	SPNDP is unlikely to produce any significant effects to human health or the environment.	**N**
e) The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The SPNDP area has a total population of around 1000 (Census 2021). This sits within the context of a total population of 146,620 in Breckland district. SPNDP remains a non-strategic plan and the principle of development that will take place has already been established within the Breckland Local Plan.	**N**
f) The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to – i. Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; ii. Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or iii. Intensive land-use	i) There are no national statutory natural designations which fall within Sporle with Palgrave. Regarding cultural heritage, there are five statutory listed buildings, one scheduled monument and one Ancient Woodland within the Neighbourhood Development Plan area according to the latest data on the Historic England website. As the plan does not allocate land for development it is not	**N**

SEA Directive Criteria (Annex II)	Comments	Likely Significant Effect? Y/N
	expected to have likely significant effects on the natural and cultural characteristics of the area. ii) SPNDP is unlikely to result in exceedance of environmental quality standards, such as those relating to air, water, and soil quality. iii) SPNDP is unlikely to bring forward development to an extent that would result in a significant intensification of Local land Use. **The emerging SPNDP does not include site allocations and therefore are not anticipated to have likely significant effects on the parish.**	
g) The effects on areas of landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status	The Neighbourhood Development Plan Area does not have recognised international or national protection status except Sporle Wood which is Ancient Woodland. There is local protection status being Sporle Wood which is a County Wildlife Site. There is one type of priority habitat in the parish. SPNDP is not anticipated to have likely significant effects on designated landscapes given it will not allocate land for development. The environmental effects on areas of international and national status	**N**

SEA Directive Criteria (Annex II)	Comments	Likely Significant Effect? Y/N
	have been considered and examined through the Local Plans.	

Figure 17-Likely Significant Effects

SEA Screening Conclusion

51. A Screening Assessment has been undertaken by applying the criteria from the SEA Directive and Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations to determine whether or not the SPNDP is likely to have significant environmental effects when assessed against the topics listed in the SEA Regulations.

52. SPNDP will set out a vision and non-strategic planning policies to shape development in Sporle with Palgrave up to 2046. The plan does not allocate sites for development.

53. **On this basis, it is considered that SPNDP does not have the potential to have significant environmental impacts, and SEA is not required.**

HRA Screening Assessment

What is a Habitats Regulation Assessment?

54. A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) is the process by which a 'competent authority' is required to assess the potential impacts of plans and projects (such as Local Plans, Neighbourhood Development Plans or development proposals put forward in planning applications) on International Sites in accordance with Article 6 (3) of the EU Habitats Directive and Regulation 61 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). A competent authority, such as the Local Planning Authority, must determine if a plan or project may affect the protected features set out in the Conservation Objectives of an International habitat site before deciding whether to undertake, permit or authorise it.

What are the International (European) Designated Sites?

55. There are three types of International Sites designations:

- **Ramsar:** Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance, designated under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands[35].
- **Special Area of Conservation (SAC):** Areas which have been given special protection for a variety of wild animals, plants and habitats.
- **Special Protection Area (SPA):** Identified as being of international importance for the breeding, feeding, wintering or the migration of rare and vulnerable species of birds found within EU countries.

Screening

56. To fulfil the legal requirements if likely significant effects will occur with the implementation of the SPNDP upon the International Sites (Natura 2000 sites) an initial screening assessment has been undertaken which is the first stage of the HRA process. If any likely significant effects on International Sites will occur then the screening is followed by an appropriate assessment (second stage of the HRA process) which needs to consider these impacts in more detail and what mitigation measures, if any, can be achieved to address these[36].

57. The purpose of the Screening stage is to:

- Identify all features of the SPNDP that would have **no effect** on an International/ European site. These features can be eliminated from further consideration in respect of this and other plans.
- Identify all aspects of the SPNDP that would **not be likely to have a significant effect** on an International/European site (i.e. would have some effect because of links/connectivity but the effect is not significant), either alone or in combination

[35] The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. It is named after the city of Ramsar in Iran, where the Convention was signed in 1971. It came into force in 1975.
[36] Habitats regulations assessments: protecting a European site - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

with other aspects of the same plan or other plans or projects. These do not require 'Appropriate Assessment'.

- Identify those aspects of the SPNDP where it is **not possible to rule out the risk of significant effects** on a European site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. This provides a clear scope for the parts of the plan that will require Appropriate Assessment.

Case Law and the Interpretation of 'likely significant effects'

58. Before undergoing the assessment, it is useful to reflect on relevant case law to help interpret when effects should be considered as a likely significant effect, when carrying out HRA of a Neighbourhood Development Plan. In the Waddenzee case[37] the European Court of Justice ruled on the interpretation of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive (translated into Reg. 105 in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017[38]):

    "An effect should be considered 'likely', "if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that it will have a significant effect on the site" (paragraph 45). An effect should be considered 'significant', "if it undermines the conservation objectives" (paragraph 48). Where a plan or project has an effect on a site "but is not likely to undermine its conservation objectives, it cannot be considered likely to have a significant effect on the site concerned" (paragraph 47)."

59. As well as this another relevant opinion delivered to the Court of Justice of the European Union stated: *"The requirement that an effect in question be 'significant' exists in order to lay down a de minimis threshold. Plans or projects that have no appreciable effect on the site are thereby excluded. If all plans or projects capable of having any effect whatsoever on the site were to be caught by Article 6(3), activities on or near the site would risk being impossible by reason of legislative overkill (Paragraph 48).[39]"*

60. This opinion on the interpretation of significant effects in the 'Sweetman' case allows for the authorisation of plans and projects whose possible effects, alone or in combination, can be considered de minimis; referring to such cases as those "that have no appreciable effect on the site". In practice such effects that could be screened out as having no likely significant effect would be 'insignificant'. The HRA Screening assessment therefore considers whether the Pre-Submission Draft of Sporle with Palgrave Neighbourhood Development Plan and its policies could have likely significant effects either alone or in combination.

[37] Case C-127/02 Landelijke Vereniging tot Behoud van de Waddenzee and Nederlandse Vereniging tot Bescherming van Vogels vStaatssecretaris van Landbouw, Natuurbeheer en Visserij. Directive 92/43/EEC – Conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna – Concept of 'plan' or 'project' – Assessment of the implications of certain plans or projects for the protected site Source: EUR-Lex - 62002CJ0127 - EN - EUR-Lex

[38] The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

[39] Case C-258/11 Peter Sweetman Ireland Attorney General Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government v An Bord Pleanala (Reference for a preliminary ruling from the Supreme Court (Ireland)) (Environment – Special conservation areas – Assessment of the impact of a plan or project on a protected site – Adverse effect on the integrity of the site). Source: CURIA - Documents

Assessment

61. Firstly, it is established practice in HRA to identify any International/European Sites that could possibly be affected within the area covered by the plan proposal and other sites that may be affected beyond this area. In this screening assessment the area screened was the SPNDP designated area as well as a distance of 20 kilometres (km) taken from the centre of SPNDP as shown in **Figure 19**. A distance of 20 kilometres from the centre point of the SPNDP area was used in the first instance because this has been agreed with Natural England for the relevant Local Plans HRAs in this region[40] and is considered precautionary. In line with HRA requirements, the application of a 20-kilometre buffer is considered a highly precautionary distance with relation to potential impacts to the surrounding area.

62. The assessment also considers areas that may be functionally linked to the International/European sites. The term 'functional linkage' refers to the role or 'function' that land or sea beyond the boundary of a European site might fulfil in terms of ecologically supporting the populations for which the site was designated or classified. Such land is therefore 'linked' to the European site in question because it provides an important role in maintaining or restoring the population of qualifying species at favourable conservation status[41].

63. Whilst the boundary of an International/European site will usually be drawn to include key supporting habitat for a qualifying species, this cannot always be the case where the population for which a site is designated or classified is particularly mobile. Individuals of the population will not necessarily remain in the site all the time. The mobility of qualifying species is considerable and may extend so far from the key habitat that forms the designated area (SAC or SPA) that it would be entirely impractical to attempt to designate or classify all of the land or sea that may conceivably be used by the species.

64. **In the SPNDP area there are no designated International/European sites**. This screening assessment has also considered the impact on International Sites within a 20km radius of the SPNDP area as an in-combination assessment (**Figure 18**). The point for measuring 20km has been taken from the centre of SPNDP as shown in **Figure 19**. A number of International Sites are shown to be located within 20km radius of the SPNDP area including:

[40]Footprint Ecology. 2017. Breckland Local Plan HRA. Source: LP_S_4_Habitats_Regulations_Assessment.pdf
[41] Functional linkage: How areas that are functionally linked to European sites have been considered when they may be affected by plans and projects - a review of authoritative decisions - NECR207 (naturalengland.org.uk)

Special Areas of Conservation	Special Protection Areas	Ramsar Sites
• Breckland • Norfolk Valley Fens • Roydon Common	• Breckland	• Roydon Common

Figure 18- Table of the International Designated Wildlife Sites within 20km radius of SPNDP

65. Natural England provides detailed information about the European Sites with reference to Standard Data Forms for the SPA sites and Natural England's Site Improvement Plans[42]. Natural England's conservation objectives[43] for the SPA sites have also been reviewed when writing this report. These state that site integrity must be maintained or restored by maintaining or restoring the habitats of qualifying features, the supporting processes on which they rely, and populations of qualifying species.

66. As required under Regulation 105 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), an assessment has been undertaken of the potential 'likely significant effects' of the plan. The assessment has been prepared in order to identify which policies would be likely to have a significant effect on European sites. The Screening assessment has been conducted without taking mitigation into account, in accordance with the 'People Over Wind' judgment which took place in April 2018[44].The judgment clarified that when making screening decisions for the purposes of deciding whether an appropriate assessment is required, competent authorities cannot take into account any mitigation measures in Neighbourhood Development Plans, permissions in principle and certain development orders[45].

[42] Natural England Access to Evidence - Site Improvement Plans: East of England
[43] Natural England Access to Evidence - Conservation Objectives for European Sites
[4444] The Court of Justice of the European Union delivered its judgment in Case C-323/17 People Over Wind & Peter Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta ('People over Wind').
[45] GOV. Para 009 . Source: Appropriate assessment - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

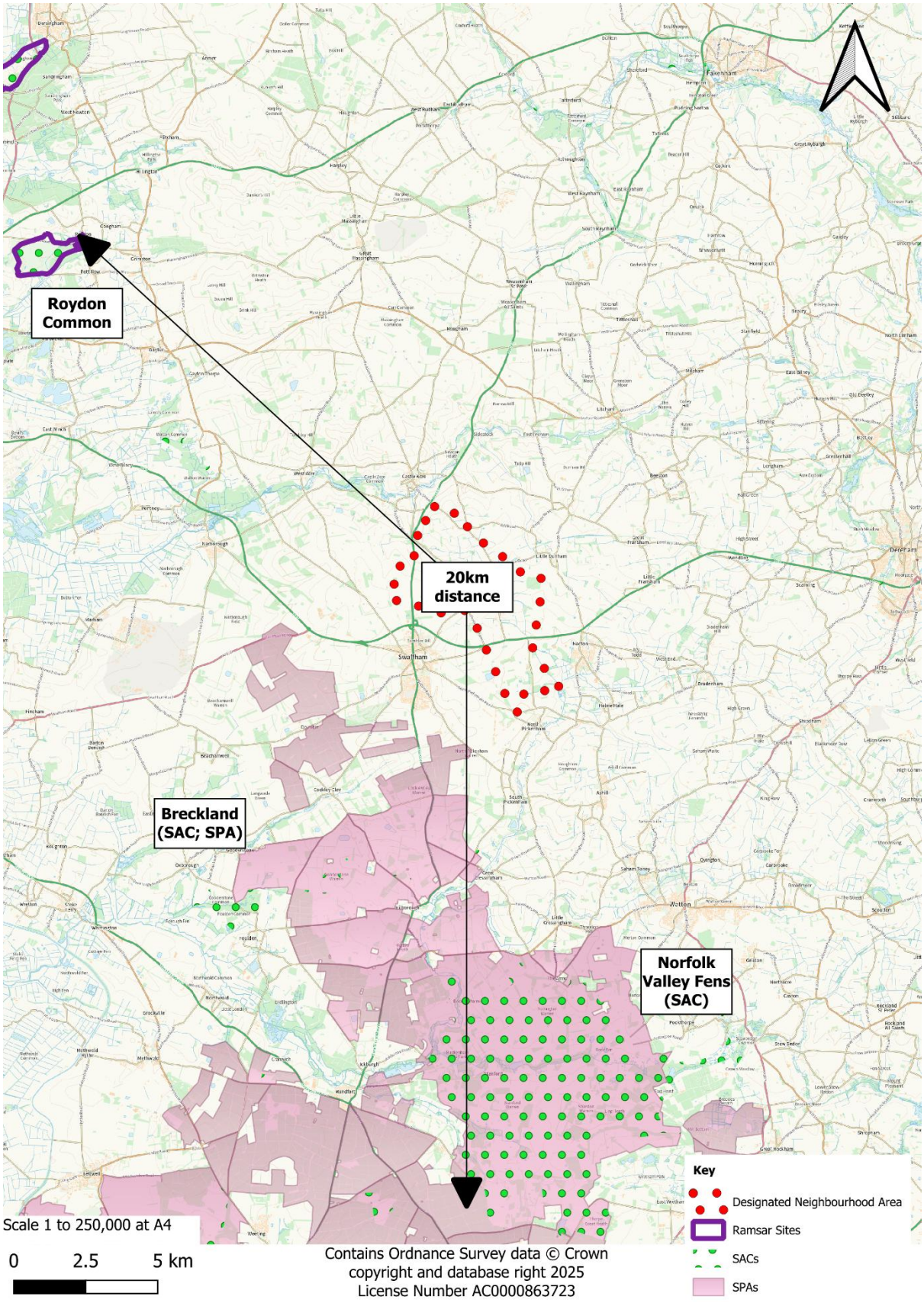


Figure 19- Map of the International Designated Wildlife Sites within 20km radius of SPNDP

67. Each European site has a set of interest features which are the ecological features for which the site is designated or classified, and the features for which Member States should ensure the site is maintained or where necessary restored. European sites are at risk if there are possible means by which any aspect of a plan or project can, when being taken forward for implementation, pose a potential threat to the wildlife interest of the sites. This is often referred to as the 'impact pathway'. Potential impact pathways causing significant effects are:

    - Physical loss or damage to habitat;
    - Non-physical disturbance (noise, vibration and light pollution);
    - Pollution Impacts (Air, Non-toxic contamination, Wastewater) ;
    - Recreational pressure;
    - Increased pressure on water resources
    - Urban effects

HRA Impacts Screening

68. A risk-based approach involving the application of the precautionary principle was adopted in the assessment, such that a conclusion of 'no likely significant effect' (LSE) would only be reached where it was considered unlikely, based on current knowledge and the information available, that a SPNDP policy would have a significant effect on the integrity of a European site. SPNDP does not allocate land for development and therefore will not directly result in an increase in the number of new dwellings within the vicinity of European Sites. A summary of findings linked to potential impact pathways are considered in **Figure 20** and an assessment of potential impacts of the draft policies contained within SPNDP is provided in **Figure 21**.

HRA Impacts Screening

Impact Pathway	Findings
Physical loss or damage to habitat	Habitat loss from development in areas outside of the European site boundaries may result in likely significant effects where that habitat contributes towards maintaining the interest feature for which the European site is designated. This includes land which may provide offsite movement corridors such as sheltering habitat for mobile species Including birds, bats and fish. European sites susceptible to the indirect effects of habitat loss are restricted to those with qualifying species that rely on offsite habitat. As SPNDP is not allocating any sites for development in the area it is considered there will be no likely significant effects of physical loss or damage to a habitat and is screened out of the assessment.
Non-physical disturbance (noise,	Non-physical disturbance effects such as noise and vibration are most likely to disturb bird species and thus are a key consideration

Impact Pathway	Findings
vibration and light pollution)	with respect to potential effects on European sites where birds are the qualifying features. Light pollution from artificial lighting at night also has the potential to affect species where it occurs in close proximity to key habitat areas, such as key roosting sites of SPA birds. As SPNDP is not allocating any sites for development in the area it is considered there will be no likely significant effects of non-physical disturbance to a habitat and is screened out of the assessment.
Non-toxic contamination	A non-toxic environment is understood to be an environment that is free from chemical pollution and of exposures to hazardous chemicals at levels that are harmful to human health and to the environment. An example of non-toxic contamination in the environment is the creation of dust from human activities such as road transport, construction and industry[46]. Dust can smother terrestrial habitats, preventing natural processes, and an increased sediment can potentially affect the aquatic habitats/species. As SPNDP is not allocating any sites for development in the area it is considered there will be no likely significant effects of non-contamination and is screened out of the assessment.
Air pollution	There are number of atmospheric pollutants which can result in direct or indirect impacts to Habitats sites. These impacts are usually caused when the qualifying features are plants, soils and wetland habitats. However, some species may also be indirectly impacted from air pollution causing changes in habitat composition. Around the world the primary contributors to atmospheric pollution is transport and industry related activities[47]. The main pollutants to atmospheric pollution are considered to be oxides of nitrogen (NOx) or sulphur dioxide (SO2)[48]. In England, road transport Is a major source of emissions of nitrogen oxides contributing to 30% of emissions In 2022 alone. It has been stated that excess deposition of nitrogen (NOx) compounds may lead to a cascade of environmental problems including both soil and freshwater acidification, the reduction of biodiversity (Zhang et al; 2021[49]) and

[46] Monitoring ambient air: particulate matter - GOV.UK
[47] Air quality, energy and health
[48] Emissions of air pollutants in the UK - Summary - GOV.UK
[49] Atmospheric nitrogen deposition: A review of quantification methods and its spatial pattern derived from the global monitoring networks - ScienceDirect

Impact Pathway	Findings
	cause eutrophication of soils and water affecting nutrient levels and reducing the diversity of species in sensitive environments[50]. Based on the 2019 Highways England Design Manual for Road and Bridges (DMRB) LA 105 Air quality[51] (which sets out the requirements for assessing and reporting the effects of highway projects on air quality), the report states that an assessment of the impact of pollutant concentrations on sensitive receptors should be done within 200m from the road itself. As SPNDP is not allocating any sites for development in the area it is considered there will be no likely significant effects of air pollution on the European Sites and is screened out of the assessment.
Recreational pressure	Recreational activities can result in significant effects on European sites. European sites with qualifying bird species are likely to be particularly susceptible to recreational disturbances from walking, dog walking, angling, off-road vehicles and motorbikes, wildfowling, and water sports. In addition, recreation can physically damage habitat as a result of trampling, fire or vandalism and also through erosion associated with terrestrial activities. Each European site will typically have a 'Zone of Influence' (ZOI) within which increases in population would be expected to result in likely significant effects. Zones of influence are areas from within which it is deemed there will be likely significant effects arising from additional residents living within the zone and travelling to European sites for recreation. This determines where new development may result in changes in recreation and therefore where mitigation will be necessary. The creation of buffer zone was developed for Breckland District for the Breckland SPA: 1500m buffer SPA (with Stone Curlews). Within such a zone a likely significant effect from new development is presumed at the plan level and adverse effects cannot be ruled out as stated in the Breckland Local Plan HRA 2017. This zone was originally defined as part of HRA work undertaken around 2008 (following analysis of Stone Curlew distribution and housing; Sharp et al. 2008). It is considered as the 'primary buffer'. This 1500m buffer constraints zone has been taken forward in the emerging Local Plan Update 2024-2042 in the Regulation 18 version.

[50] Emissions of air pollutants in the UK - Background - GOV.UK
[51] LA 105 - Air quality (standardsforhighways.co.uk)

Impact Pathway	Findings
	SPNDP is not allocating any sites so a full HRA should be ruled out at this stage.
Changes to hydrology, including water quantity and quality	An increase in demand for water abstraction and treatment resulting from any growth proposed in the SPNDP area could result in changes in hydrology at European sites. Depending on the qualifying features and particular vulnerabilities of the European sites, this could result in likely significant effects, for example, due to changes in environmental or biotic conditions, water chemistry and the extent and distribution of preferred habitat conditions. The SPNDP does not allocate any development and does not have influence over any development outside of the SPNDP designated area. Therefore, no likely significant effects will occur from SPNDP as a result of changes to hydrology either alone or in-combination with other plans and policies.

Figure 20-Summary of Impact Pathways

Policy	Description	Likely Significant Effects (LSE)	Recommendation at Screening Stage
Policy 1: Design	Requiring high quality design that accords with the Sporle with Palgrave Design Codes/Guide Document 2025.	No LSE – policy is qualitative and does not promote development	None. This policy does not trigger the need for an appropriate assessment (HRA Stage 2) to be undertaken.
Policy 2: Housing	This policy addresses housing mix with specific regard to the results from the Sporle with Palgrave Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) 2025 including requirements that ensure future housing development meets the needs of local people. The policy sets out detail for affordable housing including a local connection test for any First Homes that may be delivered.	No LSE – does not promote development but relates to qualitative criteria for development	None. This policy does not trigger the need for an appropriate assessment (HRA Stage 2) to be undertaken

Policy	Description	Likely Significant Effects (LSE)	Recommendation at Screening Stage
Policy 3: Landscape Character	Development proposals are required to conserve and, where appropriate, enhance the landscape character, appearance and setting of the parish. Consideration should be given to the Sporle with Palgrave Design Code and Guidance Document. The development of best and most versatile agricultural land (Grades 1,2 and 3a) should be avoided. Proposals affecting such land will only be supported where it is clearly demonstrated that the development is necessary, no reasonable alternative of lower quality exists, and the benefits of the proposal significantly and demonstrably outweigh the harm. In line with the NPPF (footnote 65), areas of poorer quality agricultural land should be preferred to those of higher quality. Protection of important local views means proposals must demonstrate that development is sited and designed to be of a form and scale which avoids harm to the views.	No LSE – policy is qualitative and does not promote development	None. This policy does not trigger the need for an appropriate assessment (HRA Stage 2) to be undertaken
Policy 4: Local Green Spaces	Protection of green spaces of local importance from future development.	No LSE – supports retention of green open spaces, conserving the natural environment	None. This policy does not trigger the need for an appropriate assessment (HRA Stage 2) to be undertaken
Policy 5: Flood and Water Management	The policy sets out detail regarding flood and water management including seeking	No LSE – policy is qualitative and does not promote development	None. This policy does not trigger the need for an

Policy	Description	Likely Significant Effects (LSE)	Recommendation at Screening Stage
	to achieve the four pillars of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) ensuring they are multi-functional and appropriate to the scale and nature of the development. Proposals should have regard to Design Codes B1 and B2 in the Sporle with Palgrave Design Guidance and Codes Document (AECOM 2025).		appropriate assessment (HRA Stage 2) to be undertaken
Policy 6: Community Facilities and Employment	Policy protects five community facilities. The Parish Council will support new community or employment facilities coming forward within the parish where they are conforming with the other neighbourhood plan policies and the relevant character areas set out in the Sporle with Palgrave Design Code (2025). Any future facilities should provide for onsite parking provision.	No LSE – does not promote development	None. This policy does not trigger the need for an appropriate assessment (HRA Stage 2) to be undertaken

Figure 21- HRA Screening Assessment

HRA Screening Conclusion

The HRA Screening Assessment concludes that no significant effects are likely to occur with regards to the integrity of European Wildlife Sites within 20km. As such a full HRA and Appropriate Assessment is not required at this point and is **screened out.**

Appendix A- Conservation Objectives of the European Sites

This appendix contains information on the European sites that are within 20km to SPNDP area. The site area and designated features are drawn from Natural England's website. Site conservation objectives are drawn from Natural England's website too and are only available for SACs and SPAs. Site Improvement Plans which have been published for the SPA/Ramsar Sites have been reviewed and included for information purposes.

It must be noted this information has been gathered from Natural England[52]. This document should be read in conjunction with Supplementary Advice documents provided by the Statutory Body, which provides more detailed advice and information to enable the application and achievement of the Conservation Objectives.

Breckland SAC, SPA

Site location overview[53]

69. **Breckland**[54] of Norfolk and Suffolk lies in the heart of East Anglia on largely sandy soils of glacial origin. In the nineteenth century the area was termed a sandy waste, with small patches of arable cultivation that were soon abandoned. The continental climate, with low rainfall and freedraining soils, has led to the development of dry heath and grassland communities. Much of Breckland has been planted with conifers throughout the twentieth century, and in part of the site, arable farming is the predominant land use. The remnants of dry heath and grassland which have survived these recent changes support heathland breeding birds, where grazing by rabbits and sheep is sufficiently intensive to create short turf and open ground. These breeding birds have also adapted to live in forestry and arable habitats. Woodlark Lullula arborea and nightjar Caprimulgus europaeus breed in clear-fell and open heath areas, whilst stone curlews Burhinus oedicnemus establish nests on open ground provided by arable cultivation in the spring, as well as on Breckland grass-heath.

70. The SPA is approximately 39,433ha.

71. The dry heaths of Breckland are of the Calluna vulgaris – Festuca ovina (heather – sheep'sfescue) community. The sand sedge-dominated Carex arenaria sub-community is typical of areas of blown sand – a very unusual feature of this location. The highly variable soils of Breckland, with underlying chalk being largely covered with wind-blown sands, have resulted in mosaics of heather-dominated heathland, acidic grassland and calcareous grassland that are unlike those of any other site. In many places there is a linear or patterned distribution of heath and grassland, arising from fossilised soil patterns that formed under peri-glacial conditions. Breckland is the most extensive surviving area of the rare Festuca ovina – Hieracium

[52] https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/6581547796791296
[53] Natural England European Site Conservation Objectives for Broadland SPA (webpage)
[54] Natural England Conservation objectives for European Sites: East of England (webpage)

pilosella – Thymus praecox (sheep's-fescue – mouse-ear-hawkweed – wild thyme) grassland type. The grassland is rich in rare species typical of dry, winter-cold, continental areas, and approaches the features of grassland types in central Europe more than almost any other seminatural dry grassland found in the UK.

Qualifying features (SAC)

- H2330. Inland dunes with open Corynephorus and Agrostis grasslands; Open grassland with grey-hair grass and common bent grass of inland dunes
- H3150. Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition-type vegetation; Naturally nutrient-rich lakes or lochs which are often dominated by pondweed
- H4030. European dry heaths
- H6210. Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (FestucoBrometalia); Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone
- H91E0. Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae); Alder woodland on floodplains*
- S1166. Triturus cristatus; Great crested newt

Qualifying features (SPA)

- A133 *Burhinus oedicnemus*; Stone-curlew (Breeding)
- A224 *Caprimulgus europaeus*; European nightjar (Breeding)
- A246 *Lullula arborea*; Woodlark (Breeding)

Conservation Objectives (SAC)

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats, and the habitats of qualifying species rely
- The populations of qualifying species, and,
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site

Conservation Objectives (SPA)

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring;

1. The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features
2. The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features
3. The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely
4. The population of each of the qualifying features, and,
5. The distribution of the qualifying features within the site.

Key vulnerabilities

Reviewing the Site Improvement Plan (2015[55]) there were a number of prioritised issues for the site and the features they affect. Measures were set out to address these. These can be considered as key vulnerabilities and are listed below:

- Air pollution – impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition
- Change in species distributions
- Climate change
- Forestry and woodland management
- Habitat fragmentation
- Inappropriate cutting/mowing
- Inappropriate pest control
- Inappropriate weed control
- Inappropriate management practices
- Inappropriate scrub control
- Lack of ground disturbance
- Monitoring
- Public access/disturbance
- Planning permission: general
- Stone curlew monitoring and intervention
- Water pollution
- Under grazing

Non-qualifying habitats and/or species in which the qualifying habitats and/or species depend

In general, the qualifying species all rely on the sites ecosystem as a whole. The species will rely on the maintenance of populations of species in which they feed on and potentially off-site habitat foraging for these species.

Norfolk Valley Fens SAC

Site location overview

This site comprises a series of valley-head spring-fed fens. Such spring-fed flush fens are very rare in the lowlands. The spring-heads are dominated by the small sedge fen type, mainly referable to black-bog-rush – blunt-flowered rush (Schoenus nigricans – Juncus subnodulosus) mire, but there are transitions to reedswamp and other fen and

[55] Natural England Site Improvement Plan: Breckland (webpage)

wet grassland types. The individual fens vary in their structure according to intensity of management and provide a wide range of variation. There is a rich flora associated with these fens, including species such as grass-of-Parnassus Parnassia palustris, common butterwort Pinguicula vulgaris, marsh helleborine Epipactis palustris and narrow-leaved marsh-orchid Dactylorhiza traunsteineri.

In places the calcareous fens grade into acidic flush communities on the valley sides. Purple moor-grass Molinia caerulea is often dominant with a variety of mosses including thick carpets of bog-moss Sphagnum spp. Marshy grassland may be present on drier ground and purple moor-grass is again usually dominant but cross-leaved heath Erica tetralix can be frequent. Alder Alnus glutinosa forms carr woodland in places by streams. Wet and dry heaths and acid, neutral and calcareous grassland surround the mires.

Within the Norfolk Valley Fens there are a number of marginal fens associated with pingos – pools that formed in hollows left when large blocks of ice melted at the end of the last Ice Age. These are very ancient wetlands and several support strong populations of Desmoulin's whorl snail Vertigo moulinsiana as part of a rich assemblage of rare and scarce species in standing water habitat. At Flordon Common a strong population of narrow-mouthed whorl snail Vertigo angustior occurs in flushed grassland with yellow iris Iris pseudacorus.

Qualifying features

Qualifying habitats: The site is designated under article 4(4) of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following habitats listed in Annex I:

- Alkaline fens. (Calcium-rich springwater-fed fens)
- Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae). (Alder woodland on floodplains)*

Calcareous fens with Cladium mariscus and species of the Caricion davallianae. (Calcium-rich fen dominated by great fen sedge (saw sedge))*

- European dry heaths
- Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (Molinion caeruleae). (Purple moor-grass meadows)
- Northern Atlantic wet heaths with Erica tetralix. (Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath)
- Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (FestucoBrometalia). (Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone)

Qualifying species: The site is designated under article 4(4) of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following species listed in Annex II:

- Narrow-mouthed whorl snail Vertigo angustior
- Desmoulin's whorl snail Vertigo moulinsiana

Conservation Objectives

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats, and the habitats of qualifying species rely
- The populations of qualifying species, and,
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site

Key vulnerabilities

Reviewing the Site Improvement Plan (2014) there were a number of prioritised issues for the site and the features they affect. Measures were set out to address these. These can be considered as key vulnerabilities and are listed below:

- Air Pollution
- Change in land management and species distributions
- Inappropriate cutting/mowing, scrub control and water levels
- Hydrological changes
- Invasive Species
- Water Pollution
- Water Abstraction
- Under grazing and over grazing

Non-qualifying habitats and/or species in which the qualifying habitats and/or species depend

In general, the qualifying species all rely on the sites ecosystem as a whole. The species will rely on the maintenance of populations of species in which they feed on and potentially off-site habitat foraging for these species.

Roydon Common Ramsar and SAC

Site location overview

Roydon Common is approximately 194ha in area size. It is a mixed valley mire exhibiting a classic sequence of vegetation types, linked to the varying hydrological characteristics of the site and influenced by the nutrient quality of the water. Several vulnerable or nationally scarce plant and invertebrate species are supported. The site provides nesting habitat for Caprimulgus europaeus, winter roosting sites for raptors Circus cyaneus and Falco columbarius[56].

[56] Roydon Common | Ramsar Sites Information Service

The Annex I habitats that are a primary selection for Dersingham Bog and Roydon Common to be a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) include the Northern Atlantic wet heaths with Erica tetralix and the depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion[57]. The Erica tetralix vegetation community is part of a lowland mixed valley mire, a complex series of plant communities grading from wet acid heath through valley mire to calcareous fen. This gradation is of outstanding interest. The mire is extremely diverse and supports many rare plants, birds and insects, including the dragonfly *Sympetrum scoticum*, a northern species with a very local distribution in south-east England. Birds protected at European level occurring in the heathland at this site include European nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, hen harrier *Circus cyaneus* and merlin *Falco columbarius*. Dersingham Bog represents **Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion*** in eastern England. There are examples of this habitat type present in natural bog pools of patterned valley mire, in flushes on the margins of valley mire and locally in disturbed areas associated with trackways and paths in mire and wet heath. Mosaics containing this habitat type are important for bog orchid *Hammarbya paludosa*.

Qualifying features

- H4010. Northern Atlantic wet heaths with Erica tetralix; Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath
- H4030. European dry heaths
- H7150. Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion

Conservation Objectives

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats, and
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats rely

Key vulnerabilities

Reviewing the Site Improvement Plan (2015[58]) there were a number of prioritised issues for the site and the features they affect. Measures were set out to address these. These can be considered as key vulnerabilities and are listed below:

- Air Pollution: risk of atmospheric nitrogen deposition
- Changes in species distributions
- Inappropriate ditch management

[57] Roydon Common and Dersingham Bog - Special Areas of Conservation (jncc.gov.uk)
[58] Natural England Site Improvement Plan: Roydon Common and Dersingham Bog (webpage)

- Hydrological changes
- Water Pollution
- Under grazing

Non-qualifying habitats and/or species in which the qualifying habitats and/or species depend

In general, the qualifying species all rely on the sites ecosystem as a whole. The species will rely on the maintenance of populations of species in which they feed on and potentially off-site habitat foraging for these species.