Stour and Orwell Society

Suffolk Coast & Heaths
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Shotley Peninsula and Hinterland
Landscape Character Assessment

Final Report

April 2013

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The data recorded on these drawings were supplied by Suffolk County Council in 2012. These drawings will be revised as further data becomes available.

Non Technical Summary

This landscape character assessment for the Stour and Orwell Society (SOS) and Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership, was carried out during 2012/13. It covers the Shotley Peninsula as far inland as the A12 and includes the Orwell Estuary to the north and Stour Estuary to the south. It therefore includes land which falls within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB and land within the AONB's Additional Project Area. In particular the Study Area straddles the Babergh and Tendering District boundaries as well as Suffolk and Essex border (refer to drawing no 1 for Study Area).

The Study Area is characterised by high quality agricultural land along the spine of the Peninsula and the valley sides which slope down towards the open water of the estuaries. As a 'peninsular' landscape between two estuaries, it has a strong association with water and has been bypassed by road and rail through the centuries giving rise to a sense of isolation and rural remoteness.

The purpose of the landscape character assessment is to provide an understanding of the variety of landscape within the area and to record what is special and distinctive in order to inform and provide a framework for future decision making.

The assessment subdivides the Study Area into landscape character areas which have a distinct and recognisable character. The assessment describes these landscapes in detail, which are recognisable to both resident and visitor alike, revealing aspects which can be celebrated, conserved and enhanced through land management, environmental initiatives and appropriate planning.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Appointment

1.1.1 Alison Farmer Associates was appointed by the Stour and Orwell Society in association with the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths AONB Partnership in July 2012 to undertake a landscape character assessment of the Shotley Peninsula. The landscape assessment was part funded by a Sustainable Development Fund grant which was awarded to the Stour and Orwell Society.

1.1.2 The Stour and Orwell Society (SOS) was established in 2007 and aims to promote the conservation, protection and enhancement of the physical and natural environment of the Stour and Orwell Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the adjoining Additional Project Area which collectively combine to cover the whole of the Shotley Peninsula as far inland as the A12.

1.1.3 The preparation of a landscape character assessment for the area is directly relevant to these aims and provides a robust context for SOS which can be used to help develop and deliver initiatives and influence decision making and change.

1.1.4 This report sets out how the landscape character assessment has been prepared, explains what past actions and events have helped shape the landscape we see today and goes on to provide detailed descriptions of unique Landscape Character Areas[1](LCA). These descriptions celebrate the special qualities of the area and the changes shaping it, and explore how we might best manage change into the future. The Landscape Character Area descriptions are written in an accessible narrative style to assist in building understanding and connection to the area. Landscape character types[2] are already defined in the East of England Landscape Typology and Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment and have not been developed further as part of this study.

1.2 The Brief and Scope of Work

1.2.1 The aim of the project was to provide the SOS with a detailed understanding of the landscape. The initial Study Area comprised the Shotley Peninsula as far west as Additional Project Area for the AONB and extending to the southern valley shores of the Orwell and northern valley shores of the Stour.

1.2.2 At the start of the project this initial Study Area was broadened to include a wider area defined by the visual unit of the estuaries, and particularly the Stour. The extent of the final Study Area can be seen on Drawing Number 1. The reason for this change was twofold:

1) to ensure LCAs are compatible with those defined for the AONB to the north as part of the Touching the Tide project[3], and;

2) to ensure understanding of the whole of the Stour Estuary to inform any future work relating to a Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB boundary review. Therefore from the start the study also included provision for observations and recommendations that would help to inform other aspects of the AONB's work.

[1] Landscape Character Areas occur in specific locations and are unique. They help to celebrate what is special about a place.
[2] Landscape character types are distinct types of landscape which are generic in character in that they may occur in different parts of the country, but wherever they are they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation and historical land use and settlement pattern. Names are generic, for example 'moorland slopes and hills', 'open, intensive farmland' and 'high cliffs and sheltered bays'.
[3] http://www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org/assets/Projects--Partnerships/Touching-the-Tide/FinalReport.pdf

1.2.3 As a result, the Study Area extends across the Suffolk/Essex and Babergh/Tendering administrative boundaries.

1.3 Approach and Method

1.3.1 The aim of this study was to consider the Shotley Peninsula as a whole and therefore to consider its relationship to the AONB and estuaries which define it. More specifically the study seeks to:

- Raise awareness of the landscape and its special qualities;
- Improve understanding and enjoyment;
- Identify issues and initiatives for conserving and enhancing its key characteristics;
- To inform decision making though the planning process and land management.

1.3.2 The following documents/websites have been referred to during this study:

- GIS datasets supplied by Suffolk County Council and Tendring District Council
- The Suffolk Coast and Heaths Landscape (1993)
- East of England Regional Typology (http://landscape-east.org.uk/map.html)
- Suffolk County Typology (http://www.suffolklandscape.org.uk/landscape_map.aspx)
- Tendering District landscape assessment (2001)
- Essex County Landscape Assessment (2003)
- Touching the Tide Landscape Character Assessment (2012)
- Babergh Local Plan Alteration 2 (2006)
- Babergh Core Strategy 2011-2031
- The Suffolk Coast and Heaths Landscape Guidelines (2001)[4]
- The Suffolk Coast and Heaths Management Plan (2008)
- Stour and Orwell Estuaries Management Strategy (2010)
- The Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan - Lowestoft Ness to Felixstowe Landguard Point (Jan 2010).
- Haven Gateway (http://www.haven-gateway.org)
- The Green Infrastructure Study for the Haven Gateway (2008)
- A Green Infrastructure Framework for Babergh District (2012)
- The Orwell Estuary Hinterland Report (2007)

1.4 Existing Landscape Classifications

1.4.1 The Study Area is covered by four existing character assessments which identify a range of landscape character areas or types, namely the East of England Regional Typology[5], the Suffolk County typology[6] and the Essex landscape assessment[7] and the Tendering landscape assessment[8]. All four assessments have been referred to during this study. The boundaries of the landscape character areas defined in this assessment have, wherever possible, been tied into existing landscape type boundaries set out in earlier assessments, to ensure boundaries relate well to one another and assessments 'nest' appropriately.

[4] http://www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org/uploads/SCH%20Landscape%20guidelines(1).pdf
[5] http://landscape-east.org.uk/east-england-landscape-typology
[6] http://www.suffolklandscape.org.uk/landscape_map.aspx
[7] http://www.the-edi.co.uk/downloads/cb_lca_essex_2003reduceddoc1aa.pdf
[8] http://www.tendringdc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/planning/planning%20policy/LandscapeCharacterAssessment2001Vol1.pdf

1.5 Approach to Study

1.5.1 This assessment is based on national guidance[9]. Landscape character area boundaries used landscape character type boundaries as a starting point for definition. In particular the estuary character areas have been defined in the same way as those for Touching the Tide[10] and these two assessments now comprise a complete set of descriptions for all the estuaries within the AONB.

1.5.2 The overall scope of work included four broad stages – firstly a familiarisation stage including a site visit and gathering background data from the client team; secondly a desk study stage where digital data and background documents were reviewed and landscape character areas defined in draft; thirdly site assessment where the draft character areas were verified in the field, assisted by online public consultation undertaken via the SOS website and consultation with local parish councils and other stakeholders; fourthly a write-up phase where the written descriptions for landscape types and landscape areas were developed.

1.5.3 Landscape Character Assessment is a useful tool, recognised by Government and promoted by Natural England, to identify the special character that gives a landscape its sense of place and through this understanding, inform planning and management of future change. Landscape Character Assessment recognises that all landscapes matter, not only designated areas.

1.6 Structure of the Report

1.6.1 This report is divided into four sections and appendices as follows:

- Section 2 sets the scene for the whole of the Study Area, considering how it has been shaped and looking specifically at its natural influences, cultural evolution and nature conservation value as well as generic forces for change;
- Section 3 provides detailed descriptions of the 6 Landscape Character Areas;
- Section 4 looks at how the assessment can inform and shape decision making and strategies in the future;
- Appendix 1 provides definitions for nature conservation designations.

[9] Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland, Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002.
[10] http://www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org/assets/Projects--Partnerships/Touching-the-Tide/FinalReport.pdf

2.0 About the Landscape

2.1 Geology, Soils and Coastal Processes

2.1.1 The solid geology of the Study Area is relatively simple, comprising rocks formed by sedimentary processes and including shelly, muddy and sandy sediments known as Crag, which was deposited over a long period of time in shallow marine or estuarine waters, in cool or temperate climates in the late Tertiary and the early Quaternary. In a few places Tertiary deposits of London Clay underlie the Crag or are at the surface. For example the London Clay is well exposed at Wrabness Cliff and is notable for its Tertiary fossil flora, while Septaria (a compact mass of sedimentary rock formed by the precipitation of mineral cement) platforms at Wrabness Cliff and at Nacton and are of great geological interest. Within the Stour Estuary the influence of the clay is more significant between Wrabness and Harwich.

2.1.2 These soft rocks are responsible for the subtle and gentle undulations of the peninsula and are seldom visible except where exposed along the coastal cliffs or within the estuaries. The higher land which forms the peninsula itself is capped by sandy deposits of outwash which have given rise to good quality agricultural soils, a particular feature of the peninsula which has been recognised for centuries[11].

2.1.3 The Stour and Orwell estuaries were formed through a combination of subsidence, climatic changes and sea level rise following the retreat of the ice sheets of the Anglian Glaciation over 400,000 years ago. These processes resulted in the 'drowning' of coastal river valleys and the formation of estuaries. The Orwell is long and narrow while the Stour is wider and more open.

2.1.4 Within the estuaries, the distinctive character of the shorelines is the product of marine erosion and deposition, natural processes which are extremely complex. The sandy shelly crag geology is soft and easily eroded by the sea and wave action, which has meant that the estuaries have seen considerable change over the centuries. Erosion, as a result of the rising and falling tides and the annual cycle of storms, is contrasted by the deposition of shingle and sand resulting in the creation of beaches and minor spits for example at Wrabness beach and Stutton Ness.

2.1.5 The combination of the geology of the area and the coastal processes at work has given rise to a gentle landscape, where changes in relief between the sandy rolling 'upland' of the peninsula and the estuaries are slight. Inland the plateau is dissected by gently sloping alluvial valleys, which create a small scale rolling landscape and local variations in character. Examples of narrow valleys which extend into the plateau from the estuaries include Newmill Creek and Holbrook.

2.1.6 In response to these dynamic processes, many sea defences have been constructed along the rivers. In some places these take the form of hard defences such as sea and river walls/earth embankments and in places also comprise soft defences such as salt marshes. Examples of sea defence embankments can be seen between Marsh Farm and Holbrook and Shotley Gate to Colton Creek.

2.2 The Cultural Landscape and Historic Evolution

2.2.1 The Shotley Peninsula and its hinterland is an area that has been transformed by the impact of people from the Neolithic period right through to the present day. Archaeological evidence suggests that after the Ice Age prehistoric people first settled here in the areas of light sandy soil and along the river valleys; although their impact on the landscape was relatively slight, the clearance of woodland from the Neolithic period onwards began the process of heathland creation. Some areas of previously

[11]For example, Arthur Young, A General View of the Agriculture of the County of Suffolk (1804)

cleared heathland have since become re-wooded with birch forest but in the Shotley Peninsula area evidence of former heathland is now only apparent in place name evidence such as Shotley Common, Hall Heath (Bentley), The Heath (east of Bentley) and Warren Hill near Erwarton, or acid loving plants such as bracken, gorse and birch which thrive on the sandy soils and can still be found in places along lane verges and the edge of woodland.

2.2.2 The Shotley Peninsula and its hinterland has little evidence from the Roman Period and is perhaps better known for its archaeological evidence dating to the Anglo-Saxon period. In particular a Saxon timber fishtrap, which highlights the long history of human exploitation of the estuary, has been recorded within the inter-tidal area of the Stour Estuary.

2.2.3 A clearer picture of the character of the Shotley Peninsula and adjacent estuaries only emerges with the Domesday Book of 1086. What is striking is the continuity of what is described with the present day; this is still essentially a landscape based on the medieval pattern. The Medieval period also marked the start of enclosure, where landowners sought to increase their acreage of pasture and arable land. This marked the beginning of the process that has gradually reduced the extent of heathland in the area and seen the draining of marshes fringing the rivers and estuaries e.g. Shotley Marshes. In an area of poor sandy soils, the drained marshland represented a golden opportunity in the form of fertile alluvial sediment.

2.2.4 The Domesday Book also gives a picture of settlement patterns including churches, watermills on rivers and saltpans on the estuaries, with the heaths becoming a central part of medieval society. The construction of religious centres such as Dodnash Priory, as well as numerous churches such as Stutton, Harkshead and Erwarton reflected increased prosperity and a healthy economy which flourished as a result of the growing wool trade. This was also a period of expanding ports and shipbuilding, fisheries and trade based out of coastal settlements such as Mistley, Manningtree and Ipswich. Trade with Northern Europe and the Baltic ports assisted and influenced the development of these major ports and the banks of the larger estuaries provided a fine setting for a number of imposing houses and large estates: Wherstead Park and Broke Hall (influenced by Repton), Freston, Woolverstone Hall and Orwell Park along the Orwell; Stutton Hall, Crowe Hall, Holbrook House (site now part of the Royal Hospital School) and Erwarton, on the Stour.

2.2.5 However, by the 17th century much of the shipbuilding industry had declined and in subsequent centuries (particularly the 18th and 19th centuries) other industry developed such as the development of brickworks, which made use of the exposures of clay along the edge of the Shotley peninsula e.g. the Holbrook Creek Brick Works, the Shotley Brick Works, the Hare's Creek Brick Works in Shotley and the Bourne Hill Brick Works in Wherstead. During this time new military defence structures appeared along the coast known as Martello Towers (built in response to the threat of French invasion from 1808 during the Napoleonic Wars). They formed a line of defence along the coastline and two occur within the Shotley Peninsula at Shotley Gate and remain visible today.

Extract from Hodkinson's 1783 map of Suffolk

2.2.6 More recently the 20th century has witnessed considerable intensification of land use, including intensification of agriculture and loss of structural landscape features such as hedgerows, ditches, banks, copses and lines of trees.

2.2.7 Today quays, landing places and wrecks survive clustered around the historic ports of Manningtree and Mistley; jetties and other timber structures may be found along the length of the estuary, in association with historic houses, designed landscape, churches and ancient woodland, all contribute to a tangible time depth and historic continuity.

2.2.8 Nationally valued historic assets within the Study Area include Conservation Areas and Scheduled Monuments and these are illustrated on drawing number 1.

2.3 Important Habitats and Species

2.3.1 The Orwell and Stour estuaries are both significantly designated for their habitats and associated breeding bird populations. However, the wider hinterland, including tributary valleys and farmland are also significant for habitats and species in their own right.

2.3.2 The Orwell and Stour have special protection, either because of their importance for wildlife or because they contain unusual or important natural features. The basic unit of UK wildlife designation is the 'Site of Special Scientific Interest' (SSSI). However, there are a number of other national and internationally important designations (Ramsar and Special Protection Area) comprising extensive mudflats, low cliffs, saltmarsh and small areas of vegetated shingle on the lower reaches. The estuaries provide habitat for an important assemblage of wetland birds and internationally

important numbers of wintering and passage wildfowl and waders. Further detail on these designations can be found in Appendix 1.

2.3.3 Within the wider peninsula and valley slopes of the estuaries, there is also a wealth of valuable and nationally important wildlife. For example, there are several nationally scarce plants and British Red Data Book invertebrates found across the peninsula, including high concentrations of Stag Beetle around Bentley. There is a notably high concentration of ancient semi-natural woodland such as Bentley Long Wood, Old Hall Wood, Wherstead Wood, Holbrook Park, Cutler's Wood and Stour and Copperas Woods and areas of wet woodland along the river valleys such as the Samford Valley which are designated County Wildlife sites. Areas of open arable land use also make a particularly important contribution to the area's biodiversity and are important for arable birds (including stone curlew), while Alton Water is also valued for its breeding bird habitat for species such as Common Tern in summer and as a refuge/roost for wildfowl during winter months.

2.3.4 The distribution and range of different habitats and species as well as nature conservation designations can be seen on drawings 1,2, and 3.

2.4 Current Forces For Change

Sea Level Rise and Coastal Processes

2.4.1 It is now generally accepted that sea levels will continue to rise during the next century, although it is still unclear how great the rise may be. Even the most optimistic predictions could have very serious implications for the Study Area, both for human communities and for the internationally important wildlife of the estuaries and associated wetland.

2.4.2 Many of the present River Walls comprise earth banks and revetted earth embankments and were rebuilt by the government after the 1953 floods, although often based on much older structures. They provide protection to low-lying coastal floodplains, grazing marshes and agricultural land. Until now they have been maintained by the Environment Agency under permissive powers, but they are likely to become the responsibility of landowners and communities in the future. Undefended frontages include the soft cliffs in the Stour and Orwell Estuaries.

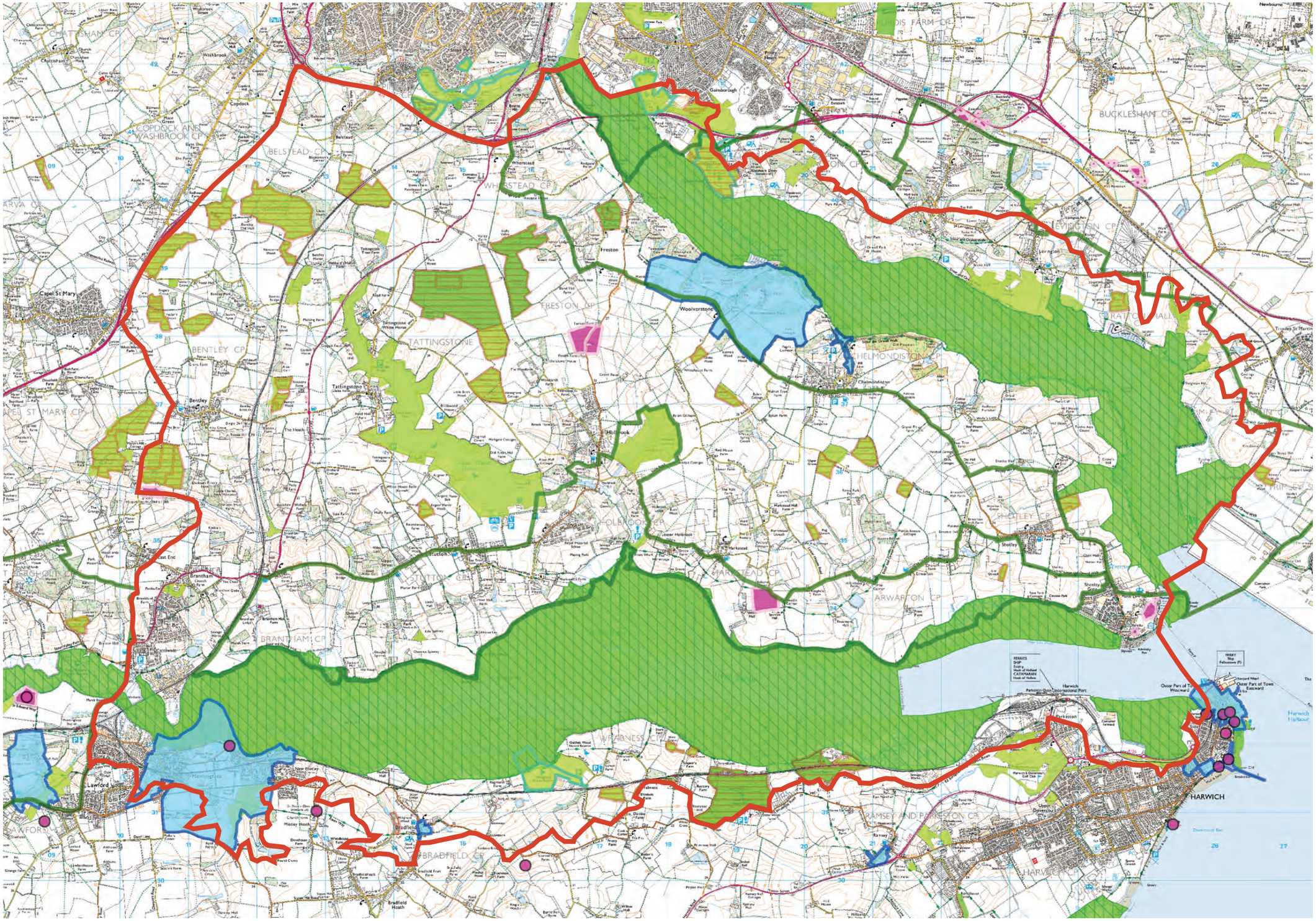
2.4.3 Both short and longer term maintenance of the extensive existing defences is a considerable task owing to their sheer extent, and the costs involved. Changes in government policy and reductions in public funding for coastal protection are factors which are also contributing to the current debate and are likely to have a profound influence on future management and decision making.

2.4.4 In response, a series of local partnerships have been created, including the Stour and Orwell Management Group, created in the mid 1990's with the aim of promoting sustainable use of the Stour and Orwell estuaries through the management of human activity, in a way which is compatible with the conservation of the estuarine landscape and wildlife. This partnership reflects a bottom-up approach that aims to represent the diverse interests of the estuary landscapes and local communities and published the Stour and Orwell Estuaries Management Strategy 2010, which compliments the top-down approach of the Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan (2010).

2.4.5 Although the threat of sea level rise poses a real challenge for the Suffolk and Essex coast, it also holds many opportunities for both people and wildlife. Most of the land surrounding the estuaries falls outside the tidal flood risk zone, although there are some within the Study Area: Shotley Gate, Manningtree and Mistley on the Stour and Levington, Nacton, Freston, Woolverstone and Chelmondiston on the Orwell. The

Shotley Peninsula Landscape Character Assessment

Drawing Number 1: Designations



Key:

- Study Area
- AONB
- Ramsar/ SPA/SSSI
- SSSI
- Local/County Wildlife Sites
- Local Nature Reserve
- Ancient Woodland
- Conservation Area
- Scheduled Monument

Date: April 2013
Scale: 1:50,000
Status: Final

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Shotley Peninsula Landscape Character Assessment

Drawing Number 2: Habitats

Note: Data for Essex south of the Stour Estuary was not avaialble

The data recorded on this drawing were supplied by Suffolk County Council in 2012. This drawing will be revised as further data becomes available.

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Status: Final

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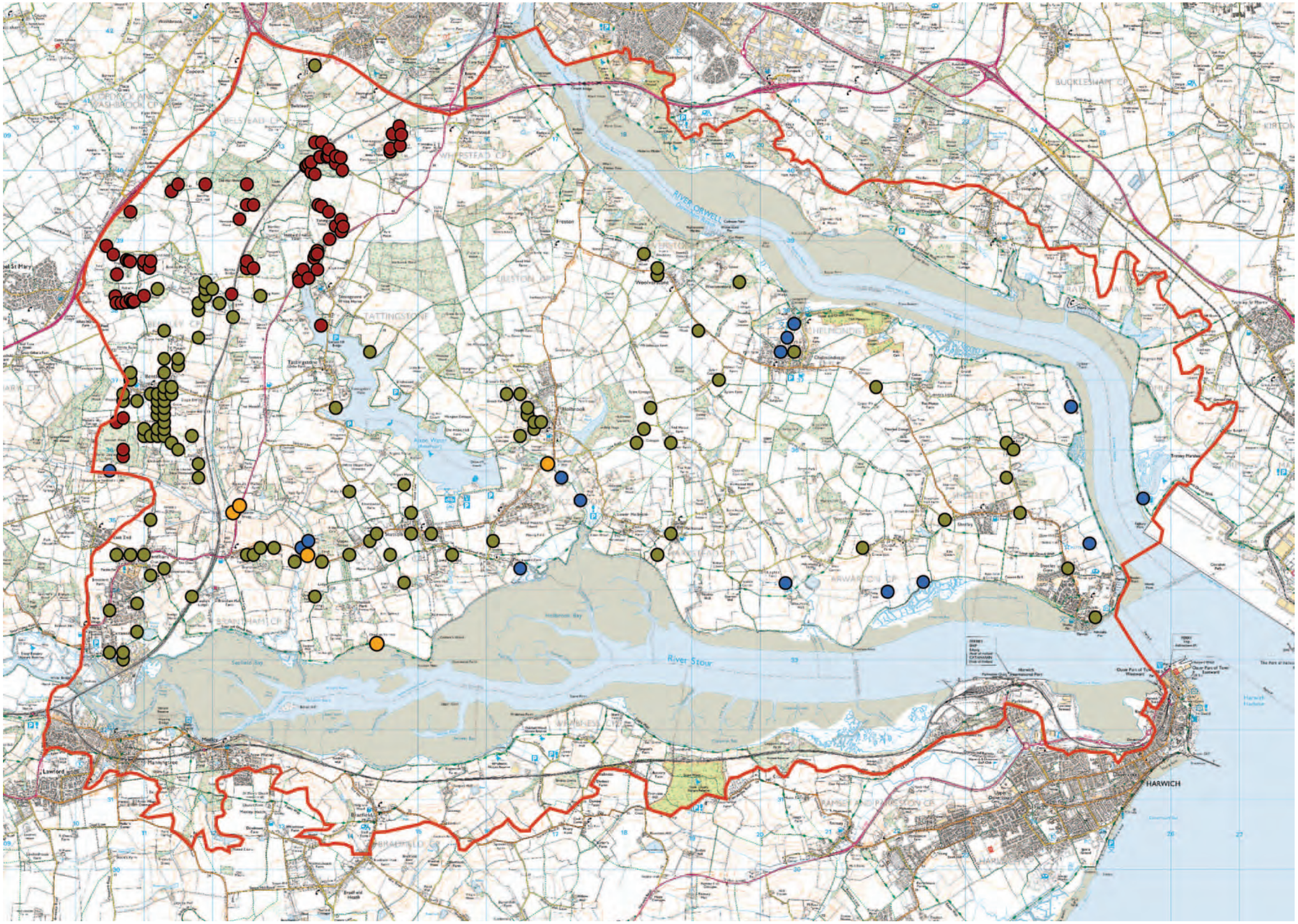
Key:

- Study Area/Landscape Character Areas
- Coastal Grazing Marsh
- Saltmarsh
- Mudflats
- Reeedbed
- Broadleaved Woodland
- Wet Woodland
- Coniferous Woodland
- Mixed Woodland
- Hedges
- Parkland

Shotley Peninsula Landscape Character Assessment

Drawing Number 3: Species

Note: Data for Essex south of the Stour Estuary was not avaialble



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Key:

- Study Area
- Water Vole
- Otter
- Stag Beetle
- Dormouse

railway line on the southern side of the Stour could become at risk at several places in the future, while the B1458 road at The Strand, Wherstead is already at risk. Most of the flood zone, however, is characterised by agricultural land. Along the Orwell there are numerous marinas, golf courses, and camping and caravan sites that are at risk.

Changes in Agriculture

2.4.6 The valley sides of the Orwell and Stour Estuaries fall within Natural England's Higher Level Stewardship Target Area for the Suffolk Coast, Heaths and River Valleys. Consequently much of the valley sides within this area and in particular within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB are within Entry Level and Higher Level Stewardship agreements. The Higher Level Stewardship objectives include biodiversity, landscape, historic environment, resource protection and access.

2.4.7 Nevertheless there is a significant gap in stewardship take-up in areas across the peninsula and in particular on land between Bentley in the west across to Tattingstone and as far as Holbrook.

2.4.8 An increase in pig farming and the use of plastic sheeting to conserve moisture as well as irrigation and widening of field gates have all been trends within this landscape over the last 30 years.

Development Pressures

2.4.9 There is evidence of housing development within the Shotley Peninsula which has occurred in the latter part of the 20th century. This development is mainly associated with existing hamlets and villages such as Belstead, Holbook, Harkstead, Tattingstone, Chelmondiston, Manningtree, Mistley and Bradfield have all been affected by additional housing provision, which in some instances has altered the historic settlement layout and overall character. Other development has included the expansion of individual dwellings and the installation of telephone masts. Future development pressure is likely to come from road widening, increased signage, and renewable energy including wind farm development as well as solar farms.

2.4.10 In addition to there are future development pressures associated with the Haven Gateway Growth Point which focuses on the important cluster of Felixstowe, Harwich and Ipswich Ports; the sub-region was designated in 2006 as a “national growth point”, critical to the UK's economy. The Haven Gateway Partnership was created in 2001 to provide a framework through which its partners – from both the public and private sectors – could work together to promote economic opportunities and secure the future prosperity of this international gateway to the UK.

2.4.11 As part of the Haven Gateway Initiative, a Green Infrastructure Strategy has been developed. Green Infrastructure involves pputting the environment right at the centre of the planning process and producing a strategic and linked, multifunctional network of spaces with benefits for people and wildlife. Within the study area, the Shotley Gate Stour Footpath Renovation Project was been supported by the Haven Gateway Partnership as part of GI improvements. The project has addressed the effects of erosion of Shotley Cliff in order to protect against further loss of woodland habitat and to preserve public access.

2.4.12 In addition the identification of Ipswich as a major growth point has identified the need for further open space provision and linkage to Shotley Peninsular for recreation. The Green Infrastructure Study for the Haven Gateway states that:

> *"To the southwest, extensions to the Belstead Brook Park (Projects 78 and 79) and the creation of a western green corridor/new country park/extension to Chantry Park in the vicinity of Hadleigh Road (Project 67) would provide a necklace of ANG*[12]

[12] ANG means Accessible Natural Greenspace

within the urban fringe. These facilities could link with other initiatives, including a new country park at Wherstead (Project 77) and potential open space at Grove Hill, Belstead (Project 86), together with a network of green corridors out to the south (e.g. Projects 76 and 81), which would provide enhanced links to the improved Alton Water (Project 75, which has the potential to provide a significant area of ANG), and on to the Shotley peninsula and Dedham Vale."

2.4.13 It also states in relation to the southern shores of the Stour Estuary that:

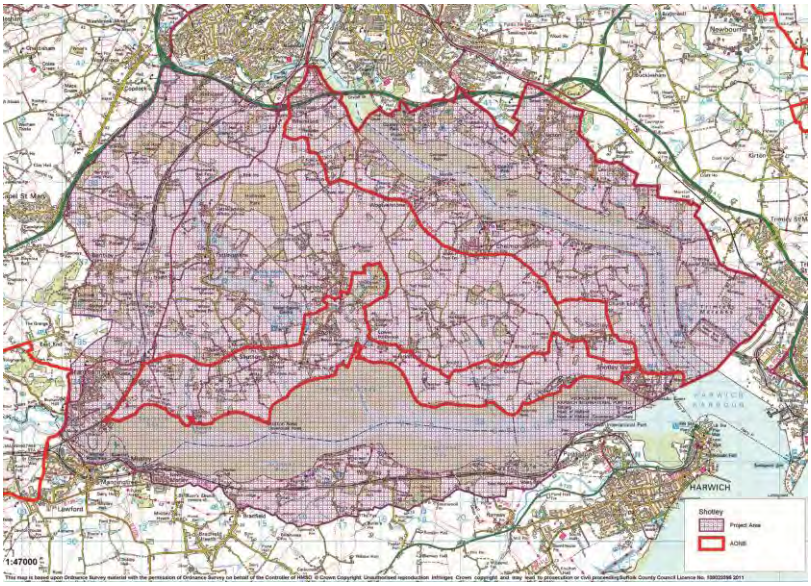
"Completion of the cycle route between Mistley and Harwich (Project 100) and a new link to Copperas Wood along the line of the dismantled railway (Project 103) would improve recreational access into and out of the towns."

2.4.14 The Haven Gateway Green Infrastructure Strategy has been developed in more detail in the Babergh District Green Infrastructure Study (2012). Again the focus of growth in the Ipswich Fringe is highlighted and GI opportunities are shown on Figure 13b (page 34). The report specifically identifies links from Belstead Brook to Thorington Hall, Jimmy's Farm and Alton Water as well as a new country park at Wherstead.

2.4.15 The Babergh District Green Infrastructure Study also considers current recreation provision within the Shotley Peninsula area and highlights the existence of promoted cycle routes e.g. from Shotley gate to Chelmondiston and in the Erwarton area, as well as the concentration of routes around Alton Water and through Bentley connecting to Dedham Vale. Within the study area there is also the Stour and Orwell path which extends along the valley sides and foreshore of the estuaries.

2.5 Landscape Designation

2.5.1 The northern and southern valley sides of the peninsular are designated as part of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The remainder of the study area lies outside of this landscape designation, although the whole of the peninsula and the southern shores of the Stour Estuary are included in the AONB Additional Project Area as defined in the AONB Management Plan. The purpose of defining the Additional Project Area, as set out in the AONB Management Plan has been to ensure the effective management of the area as a whole. Although the rationale behind the physical extent of APA is not known, it is possible that it reflects land visually associated with the estuary landscapes and which provides a setting to the AONB.



Additional Project Area and AONB - provided by Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Partnership

2.5.2 In addition, the western half of the peninsular around Dodnash and Bentley is designated a Special Landscape Area (SLA) in the Babergh Local Plan Alteration 2. The boundaries of the SLA mainly reflect river valleys and woodlands and the area around Dodnash is a relatively recent addition. Policy CR04 and CR05 in the Babergh Local Plan (Alteration No 2) relate to this designation and seek to ensure the special qualities and characteristics of the areas are maintained and enhanced. The Local Plan highlights the use of Landscape Character Assessment to determine whether or not planning permission should be granted for development within the SLA. No local character assessment exists for the District and reliance is placed on the Suffolk County Typology.

2.5.3 This report and character assessment supplements that of the County. The County Assessment comprises a ***landscape character types*** while this character assessment classifies the landscape into ***landscape character areas*** which are geographically specific and unique. As such they provide a more detailed understanding of the special qualities of the area at a local level and therefore should provide valuable detail in applying planning polices which seek to maintain and enhance the landscape both within the SLA and wider countryside.

Shotley Peninsula Landscape Character Assessment

Drawing Number 4: Landscape Character Types

Note: Data for Essex south of the Stour Estuary was not avaialble

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Key:

- Study Area
- Coastal Levels
- Saltmarsh and Intertidal Flats
- Rolling Estate Sandland
- Rolling Estate Farmland
- Ancient Estate Farmlands
- Ancient Estate Clayland
- Rolling Valley Farmlands
- Valley Meadowlands
- Plateau Estate Farmlands
- Plateau Farmland

3.0 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs)

The Shotley Peninsula and Hinterland Study Area has been divided into 6 Landscape Character Areas. These character areas are illustrated on drawing number 5.

Landscape character areas (LCAs) are unique, due to a combination of special landscape characteristics and features and serve to demonstrate the considerable variation in landscape over a relatively short distance. Each LCA comprises several Landscape Character Types, for example the Orwell estuary landscape comprises saltmarsh and intertidal flats as well as coastal levels and rolling estate farmlands. Details of landscape character types relating to the study area can be found at http://www.suffolklandscape.org.uk/landscape_map.aspx for Suffolk and http://landscape-east.org.uk/east-england-landscape-typology for both Suffolk and Essex.

The LCA descriptions provide information in an accessible way covering aspects of past evolution, present day character, current values, and how change may occur in the future.

Each LCA is described in terms of its location, what makes it special, notable highlights and features of particular value and then a description of what is changing and how we might manage that change. In the descriptions the inseparable nature of natural heritage, cultural heritage and the present day landscape as well as the relationship between water and land is expressed.

Shotley Peninsula Landscaoe Character Assessment

Drawing Number 5: Landscape Character Areas

Date: April 2013
Scale: 1:50,000
Status: Final

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ALISON FARMER
ASSOCIATES
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING

Key:

- Study Area Boundary
- Orwell Estuary
- Stour Estuary
- Shotley Peninsula Plateau
- Holbrook Valley and Alton Water
- Samford Valley
- Belstead Brook

3.1 Orwell Estuary

Description

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

Constituent Landscape Types: Rolling Estate Farmlands, Rolling Estate Sandlands, Coastal Levels, Saltmarsh and Intertidal Mudflats and open water.



Summary Description
The Orwell Estuary is one of a number of estuary landscapes which fall within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB. Its upper tidal limits are bounded by the Ipswich Docks and at its lower reaches by the confluence of the Stour Estuary and Harwich Harbour. The Orwell estuary is long and narrow, heavily influenced by the sea which is the dominant source of sediments. Relatively straight and orientated west east for much of its length, the estuary takes an abrupt right angled turn southwards between Chelmondiston and Shotley.

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

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

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

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

Distinctive Characteristics

- The predominate geology is London Clay, sands and gravels and alluvium giving rise to deep permeable coarse loamy soils which are slowly permeable in places
- Narrow sheltered estuary, approximately 1km wide, enlarged by glacial meltwater and then 'drowned ' by rising sea level
- Defined by steeply rising and undulating valley sides reaching approximately 20-25m AOD and interrupted by small tributary valleys around Freston and between Nacton and Levington
- Small inlets or creeks occur where tributary streams enter the estuary e.g. Pinmill, Colton, Nacton, and Levington Creeks
- Areas of intertidal mudflats exposed during low tides when river shrinks to a central channel of water. At high tide this is contrasted with a wide expanse of open water
- Large tidal mudflats and limited fringes/pockets of saltmarsh at Levington Creek and Colton Creek and flood defence embankments in lower reaches enclosing Shotley and Trimley Marshes and Levington Creek
- Mixed farming in small to medium scaled fields - pasture on steepest slopes with arable (including maize and sugar beet) on more gentle slopes resulting in a predominately undeveloped shoreline and scenic patchwork of land uses
- Well wooded landscape including small copses, woodland belts and more extensive areas of woodland - some ancient and semi-natural including lime, oak and sweet chestnut coppice providing enclosure and in places meeting the shoreline
- Poplar plantations along tributary stream valleys, and on the upper slopes there are frequently small conifer plantations
- Dispersed pattern of farmsteads and repetitive pattern of estate houses/halls often associated with parkland (e.g. Orwell Park House (school), Broke Hall, Stratton Hall, Alston Hall, Woolverstone Park House (school) and Freston Park
- Larger settlements include Pinmill which nestles within a small valley along the southern shore and the southern part of Nacton and Levington on the north shore
- Narrow lanes extend down from main valley side road to large houses overlooking the estuary and connect small hamlets/villages
- Local vernacular building materials include red brick, pantiles, colour washed plaster
- Tidal character gives this landscape a dynamic quality with changing views across the open water/mudflats
- Estuary is used for a variety of quiet recreational pursuits including yachting, recreational boating, wildfowling (through club membership) and there is good parking and footpath access along the northern and southern shores
- Extensive views to Felixstowe cranes from lower reaches and Orwell Bridge from upper reaches

Evaluation

Special Qualities and Features

- The majority of the area falls within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB designation and is valued for its natural beauty
- Pin Mill is a Conservation Area - focused on the waterside, it stretches to the south, up two gentle valleys towards the larger settlement of Chelmondiston and is valued for its intimate character, boating associations, waterside views and use of traditional building materials
- Woolverstone House was designed by Lutyens and the gardens by Gertrude Jekyll and forms a central part of the Conservation Area covering the wider parkland of the Woolverstone Park estate and stretching down to the water's edge
- High scenic quality resulting from patchwork of land uses on valley sides and key landmark features, which create visual variety, balance and emphasise the valley side topography

- Exceptional veteran trees particularly in parkland/estate landscapes - Plane tree at Thatched Cottage is alleged to be the oldest of its species in England
- Landmark features include Freston Tower, Broke Hall, Orwell Park Observatory and church at Shotley
- Shotley Battery and Martello Tower to the west of Shotley are Scheduled Monuments
- Rare and internationally important coastal habitats with many layers of designation - SSSI designation for natural shoreline and rich intertidal flats and saltings rich in invertebrates and SPA and Ramsar site designations for wetland habitat and wildfowl/wading birds
- The Stour and Orwell long distance path along the north shore is the main walking route from Ipswich into the AONB.
- On valley sides there are many County Wildlife Sites and some Sites of Special Scientific Interest relating to ancient woodland sites and habitat mosaics
- Limited but highly valued fresh water meadows at Shotley Marshes - Some small scale pastures on lower lying land fringing reclaimed salt marsh grazing areas including species rich grassland
- Valued waterside walks including between Pin Mill Cliff and Cat House through Woolverstone Park

Forces for Change and Their Landscape Implications

Past and Current

- Tidal flooding along the Ipswich to Shotley Road at Wherstead Strand
- Loss of inter-tidal habitats and particularly saltmarsh - 46% decrease in saltmarsh in Orwell Estuary between 1973 and 1997 due to sea level rise and also land reclamation particularly in Shotley/Trimley Marshes
- Noise intrusion from traffic on Orwell Bridge affecting upper /middle estuary reaches
- Visual intrusion of tall cranes associated with Felixstowe influencing middle/lower reaches of the estuary including landscape character, sense of scale and tranquillity
- Increased light pollution from Felixstowe Docks
- Suburbanisation of rural lanes through changes to property boundary treatment
- Changes in management/use of landscape parklands which undermine their integrity and contribution to local landscape character e.g. redevelopment of Woolverstone Park and estate and subsequent changes to the main buildings with lack of management/loss of parkland features e.g. park railings, woodland, veteran trees
- Derelict buildings in places e.g. Freston village junction with B1456
- Poplar plantations which are at odds with historic pattern of woodland cover
- Disturbance to feeding and nesting birds as a result of access to foreshore areas and narrowness of mudflats within the estuary
- Increased incidence of fly tipping east of Pin Mill along the foreshore
- Unsympathetic development/extensions to existing historic dwellings altering traditional character and scale of development
- Impact of bait digging on intertidal habitats e.g. Nacton and Orwell Country Park

Future

- Continued flooding issues along the Ipswich to Shotley Road at Wherstead Strand
- Inter-tidal habitats under increasing pressure from coastal squeeze where saltmarsh is unable to respond to sea level rise because of the presence of sea defences
- Further development of tall cranes within the Harwich Bay area is likely to adversely extend the perception of built development associated with Felixstowe affecting the middle and lower reaches of estuary
- Further suburbanisation of narrow lanes and larger roads due to inappropriate development on boundaries and within curtilages as well as infill development
- Pressures for recreation/access to waterfront with potential for conflict with nature conservation interests
- Pressure for the development of houseboat dwellings along the foreshore at Pin Mill
- Opportunities to recreate areas of former heathland e.g. west of Pin Mill

- Potential port extensions and channel deepening
- Potential for further cliff erosion caused by wind and rain, wave action and storminess, particularly at Nacton

Landscape Strategy

Protect
• Protect the quiet, rural character of lanes within the peninsula, avoiding unnecessary signage, kerbing, widening, lighting or the introduction of roundabouts, all of which undermine the essential 'back-water' qualities of the area • Protect the landscape features and elements which contribute to the significance of the estate and parkland landscapes and avoid cumulative adverse impacts through ad hoc changes • Protect the immediate and wider setting of key landmark structures, including Freston Tower • Protect the estuary landscape from visual intrusion of development in areas beyond this character area e.g. from new tall vertical features such as masts or turbines or new urban development on the Shotley Peninsula Plateau • Protect important habitats and bird populations from disturbance through careful management of recreation and access
Manage
• Manage areas of ancient semi-natural woodland and coppicing through appropriate woodland management regimes • Record and survey veteran trees seeking management which prolongs life and monitors gradual loss and potential replacement by maturing trees in future • Manage woodland and seek opportunities to open up key views across the estuary to particular features or attractive patterns of land use
Plan
• Undertake whole park plans for Woolverstone and other former parkland landscapes such as Wherstead, to ensure a clear understanding of the significance of the historic estate as a whole to inform future management • Plan for the replanting of veteran trees and careful management of maturing trees in order to retain their contribution to landscape character • Plan for the long term realignment of the coast along Shotley/Trimley Marshes with some re-creation of mudflats and saltmarsh in areas previously reclaimed in accordance with the Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan2 (October 2010) • Plan for the re-creation of former areas of heathland and extension of areas of existing heathland where appropriate • Work with the Stour and Orwell Management Group to address coastal change

3.2 Stour Estuary

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

Constituent Landscape Types: Rolling Estate Farmlands, Coastal Levels, Saltmarsh and Intertidal Mudflats and open water.



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

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

There are also strong associations with the Navy, particularly at Shotley Gate. Here land at Shotley Gate was used as a cadet training school for the Royal Navy (known as HMS

Ganges), while the Royal Hospital School at Stutton, which has close links to the Royal Navy, was originally based in Greenwich before relocating to Holbrook in 1933.

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

Distinctive Characteristics

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

Evaluation

Special Qualities and Features

- The northern shores of the Stour are included in the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB and southern shores part of Additional Project Area as defined in the AONB Management Plan
- Particularly valued for its habitats (coastal saltmarsh, sheltered muddy shores) and bird species - supporting 13 species of wintering waterfowl and 3 species on autumn passage and designated SSSI, SPA and Ramsar
- The Stour has the largest wintering population of blacktailed godwit in Britain
- Shoreline valued for its nationally important geological exposures at Stutton and Wrabness
- Stour Estuary nature reserve (RSPB) - comprises an unusual juxtaposition of intertidal mudflats and deciduous woodland while Wrabness nature reserve is former naval mine depot including woodland, grazing land and saltmarsh
- Shotley Gate is a Conservation Area covering the HMS Ganges site. It contains a number of listed structures including a set of gates, piers, railings and lamp standards at the entrance to HMS Ganges along with its ceremonial mast and Martello Tower[13]

[13] A second Martello Tower lies within the grounds but within the Orwell Estuary character area

within the grounds and affords unique views out across the estuaries towards Felixstowe
- Stour and Copperas Woods on the south bank of the Stour estuary were originally oak/hornbeam woods. Stour Wood is the oldest recorded sweet chestnut plantation in Britain. These woods and adjacent ancient woods have an abundance of wild cherry (Prunus avium)
- Limited vehicular access to the shoreline enabling a retention of tranquillity and remoteness
- Undeveloped estuary valley sides - there is little evidence of housing development in views across the estuary, in part because much of the new development has occurred on the higher plateau landscapes adjacent
- Characteristic patterns of remnant structures on the foreshore add visual interest including wooded stumps associated with former sea walls, remains of Anglo Saxon fish trap at Holbrook Creek and ship wreck on Wrabness Beach
- Essex Way and Stour and Orwell Walk long distance footpaths extend along the southern and northern shores respectively

Forces for Change and Their Landscape Implications

Past and Current
- Loss of inter-tidal habitats and particularly saltmarsh - estimated as 59% decrease in saltmarsh in Stour Estuary between 1973 and 1997
- Visual intrusion of tall cranes associated with Felixstowe affecting the middle and lower reaches altering landscape character, sense of scale and tranquillity
- Suburbanisation of narrow lanes through changes to hedgerows/boundary property treatment
- Marshland reclamation at Wrabness and use of grazing areas for horses
- Disturbance to feeding and nesting birds from recreation along the foreshore
- Coastal erosion of cliffs and loss of footpaths or woodland adjacent to the water due to wave action and rising sea levels
- Changes in the management and use of landscape parklands which undermine their integrity and contribution to local landscape character
- Significant damage caused by the 1953 floods to foreshore and recreation e.g. Wrabness Beach
- Impact of bait digging on intertidal habitats especially at Wrabness
- Development of large scale farm buildings particularly between Shotley Gate and Harkstead

Future
- Future redevelopment and mixed-use development proposals at Brantham Industrial Area
- Potential for further cliff erosion caused by wind and rain, wave action and storminess
- Inter-tidal habitats under increasing pressure from coastal squeeze where saltmarsh is unable to respond to sea level rise because of the presence of sea defences
- Pressure for improved parking and access to the northern and southern shores with potential for conflict with nature conservation interests
- Further development of tall cranes within the Harwich Bay area is likely to adversely extend the perception of build development associated with Felixstowe and affect the middle and lower reaches of this estuary
- Further suburbanisation of narrow lanes and larger roads due to inappropriate development on boundaries and within curtilages as well as infill development
- Pressure for redevelopment of HMS Ganges site at Shotley Gate (former naval training site now derelict) with may affect character of rural lanes
- Haven Gateway Green Infrastructure Strategy has identified the opportunity to improve cycle routes between Mistley and Harwich and Copperas Wood using routes such as the disused railway line and the creation of areas of Accessible Natural Greenspace

Landscape Strategy

Protect
• Protect the rural quiet character of lanes within the peninsula avoiding unnecessary signage, kerbing, widening, lighting or the introduction of roundabouts, all of which undermine the essential 'back-water' qualities of the area • Protect views across the estuary to unspoilt areas of estuary valley side and to key landmarks • Protect views from the southern shores of the estuary from intrusive visual impact of redevelopment on the Brantham Industrial Area - consideration should be given to building height, low reflective building materials, use of night lighting and massing of buildings, coastal habitat improvements and creation of accessible open space along water frontage • Protect undeveloped estuary valley sides and avoid the development of housing which may intrude into the estuary landscape • Protect character of Wrabness Beach and prevent further hut development or extensions which could undermine current low key and random character • Protect the estuary landscape from visual intrusion of development in areas beyond this character area e.g. from new tall vertical features such as masts, cranes or turbines or new urban development on the Shotley Peninsula Plateau • Protect important habitats and bird populations from disturbance through careful management of recreation and access • Protect traditional farm buildings and avoid inappropriate siting of large scale modern farm buildings which may be visually intrusive in views across the estuary
Manage
• Manage areas of ancient semi-natural woodland and coppicing through appropriate woodland management regimes • Record and survey veteran trees seeking management which prolongs life and monitor gradual loss and potential replacement by maturing trees in future • Manage areas of reedbed north of Holbrook Creek which have become silted up and where scrub development has occurred
Plan
• Plan for the replanting of veteran trees and careful management of maturing trees in order to retain the character of mature trees in this landscape - which are so characteristic • Plan to protect limited access to the northern shores and beaches along the Stour in order to retain sense of tranquillity and remoteness and manage disturbance to wildlife • Plan for redevelopment of HMS Ganges site for uses which will minimise the extent of new traffic generated and seek opportunities to increase public open space and views • Plan for the recording and research of coastal archaeology within the mudflats of the estuary such as the Holbrook fish trap • Work with Stour and Orwell Estuary Management Group to address coastal change including possible managed realignment of coastal strip around Wrabness Point, Copperas Bay, eastern side of Holbrook Bay and Shotley Point in accordance with the Essex and South Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan 2 (October 2010)

3.3 Shotley Peninsula Plateau

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

Constituent Landscape Types: Ancient Estate Claylands and Ancient Estate Farmlands



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

The landscape pattern is characterised by large-scale arable blocks divided into rectilinear fields (reflecting relatively late enclosure) coupled with ancient woodland and remnant parklands. There are some notable hedges of holly with pollard oaks, while suckering elm is usually very dominant on the lightest land. Places names reflect former heathland, and occasional patches of gorse and birch in verges/hedgerows indicate former unenclosed areas of common grazing and heath. Although the predominant land use is arable, some pig rearing occurs in the east and orchards/fruit growing in the west. Areas of open arable farmland are of particular value for farm birds including lapwing, grey partridge, yellow wagtail, tree sparrow, turtle dove and corn bunting.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Distinctive Characteristics

- Deep loamy soil that originated as wind-blown sediments from glacial sources giving rise to fertile soils and predominately Grade 2 Agricultural Land
- Elevated, open, exposed, gently undulating plateau/shoulder of land, drained by small shallow valleys particularly in the southeast between Holbrook and Erwarton
- Predominately arable farmland defined by rectilinear hedgerow enclosures and woodland blocks giving rise of an often open and defined landscape
- Extensive areas of ancient semi-natural woodland and some mixed conifer plantation which form blocks of woodland and create visual structure to the otherwise open, relatively flat landscape
- Hedgerows along lanes frequently comprise suckering elm with pollarded oaks and holly
- Dispersed estate farmsteads are the predominate settlement pattern reflecting former medieval halls and parks (e.g. Pannington Hall and Bond Hall) and remnant areas of parkland including Bentley Hall, Bentley Park, Bentley Manor and Belstead Hall
- Settlements of Bentley, Belstead, Woolverstone, Stutton, Holbrook, Chelmondiston and Shotley, many of which include extensive areas of late 20th century housing development
- Concentration of historic manor houses, churches and farms particularly in the west
- Old lanes remain in the landscape as farm tracks and footpaths e.g. Old Hall Lane and Bentley Lane
- Occasional long distant views to a wooded skyline but there are no views to the estuaries which lie in close proximity to the north and south
- Views to isolated properties are commonplace giving rise to a settled but predominately quiet back-water character

Evaluation

Special Qualities and Features

- Whole area lies outside the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB designation but within its Additional Project Area as set out in the AONB Management Plan
- Majority of the area is designated a Special Landscape Area for its river valleys and woodland
- Area important for significant population of Dormouse and stag beetle

- SSSI woodlands at Holbrook Park and Freston and Cutler's Woods
- CWS designations associated with high concentration of ancient woodlands
- Significant blocks of ancient woodland including Bentley Long Wood, Brockley Wood, Old Hall Wood, Wherstead Wood, Holbrook Wood, Cutler's Wood, Glebe Wood, Bylam Wood, Rence Park, Broomfield Covert and New Covert.
- Erwarton Hall - late 16th century English county house (listed) and gatehouse with historical links with Anne Boleyn.
- Stools of coppiced sweet chestnut found in Holbrook Park wood are among the largest recorded in Britain (*The Shotley Peninsula, Sylvia Laverton, pg 17)*
- SAM at Potash Farm comprising an interrupted ditch system

Forces for Change and Their Landscape Implications

Past and Current

- Fragmentation of habitats e.g. woodlands due to intensification of arable cultivation
- Lack of hedgerow management reflected in gappy and over trimmed hedges, elm dieback and some stag head oaks
- Development of masts and telegraph poles which visually intrude into this landscape
- Pressure for wind farm development e.g. Thorington Hall/Cottage, east of Belstead
- Development of farm food outlets and business parks e.g. Wherstead Office Park in part due to proximity to Ipswich
- Significant areas of 20th century housing development extending onto plateau areas and altering traditional settlement pattern
- Increased traffic on B roads which traverse the plateau particularly B1456
- Loss of former areas of heathland - evidence now limited to place names and vegetation
- Noise intrusion from A12 in western extremities of this area
- New hardwood plantations e.g. Harkstead Hall Estate
- Lack of traditional woodland management and coppicing resulting in dereliction of some former coppice woods
- Diffuse pollution from use of agricultural chemicals affecting water quality in adjacent estuaries

Future

- Further development of tall cranes within the Harwich Bay area is likely to adversely extend the perception of built development associated with Felixstowe and affect the rural qualities of the tip of the peninsula
- Further suburbanisation of narrow lanes and larger roads due to inappropriate curtilage development or new infill development
- Pressure for redevelopment of HMS Ganges site at Shotley Gate (former naval training site now derelict) with may affect character of rural lanes
- Lack of hedgerow management resulting in fragmentation of hedgerow pattern
- Loss of hedgerow trees in particular ash due to Chalara or ash dieback
- Pressure for further vertical structures including masts and windfarms (inc domestic scale)
- Pressure to create a major new Areas of Natural Greenspace associated with Alton Water Reservoir, through acquisition of additional land on the north and northwest sides of the reservoir with potential to have wider implications for the character of this landscape which lies adjacent
- Pressure for housing growth in existing settlements including Chelmondiston, Holbrook, as key service centres, and also smaller settlements of Bentley, Stutton and Tattingstone as set out in Babergh District Core Strategy Issues Document (2011)
- Planning allocation for growth of Wherstead Office Park to the east of the current development and new access off the A137

- Some historic buildings are at risk - particularly farm related barns which have fallen into disrepair and yet make a significant contribution to local distinctiveness (eg the semi-derelict Grade 11* listed Bentley Hall Barn)
- Conversion and expansion of farmsteads for residential uses/food outlets
- Impact of deer on the condition of woodlands
- Changes in crops and land use as a consequence of change in climate and markets

Landscape Strategy

Protect
• Protect the rural quiet character of lanes within the peninsula avoiding unnecessary signage, kerbing, widening, lighting or the introduction of roundabouts, all of which undermine the essential 'back-water' qualities of the area • Protect visual integrity of Woolverstone Village and particularly the unity of estate cottages along the main road. Avoid cumulative ad hoc development such as increases in signage, boundary treatment changes etc which may adversely affect the current character. • Protect newly planted woodland from deer damage through use of appropriate fencing • Protect dark skies and restrict the introduction of night lighting associated with new development or improvements to road infrastructure • Protect rural character of roads across this area and avoid development such as HMS Ganges site which will increase traffic pressure and the needs for road alteration which would undermine current character • Protect area's distinctive wooded skylines and avoid cumulative impacts from vertical structures which interrupt these skylines and undermine perceptions of a rural backwater. Ensure that any new development avoids adverse impact on adjacent estuary or valley landscapes
Manage
• Manage areas of ancient semi-natural woodland and coppicing through appropriate woodland management regimes • Record and survey veteran trees seeking management which prolongs life and monitors gradual loss and potential replacement by maturing trees in future • Reinforce the historic pattern of regular boundaries though appropriate hedgerow management including coppicing of elm hedges • Maintain, enhance and restore locally distinctive holly hedges • Restore, maintain and enhance the network of tree belts and pattern of small plantations found across much of this landscape type • Restore, maintain and enhance the historic parklands through the preparation of significance statements and whole park plans to ensure recognition of subtle elements e.g. park railings • Restore and enhance the condition of ancient woodlands including the effective control of deer grazing and browsing • Resist development which will erode the tranquillity of the area
Plan
• Plan for the replanting of veteran trees and careful management of maturing trees in order to retain the character of mature trees in this landscape which are so characteristic • Undertake whole park plan for Woolverstone to ensure a clear understanding of the significance of the estate including the Nelson's Avenue, park boundaries and Estate cottages as a whole to inform future management • Plan for the preparation of village design statements to enable the special qualities of each settlement to be articulated so that new development can be incorporated sensitively • Plan for the creation of strong street scenes within villages which have undergone

significant 20th century growth through the re-emphasising of old routes through the settlement, planting of street trees/avenues, reducing visual clutter such as overhead wires and signage

- Consider carefully the implications of future housing growth in the villages and seek ways to reinforce/reinstate local distinctiveness in any new development, including edge treatment, mitigation and open space provision

3.4 Holbrook Valley and Alton Water

Description

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

Constituent Landscape Types: Rolling Estate Farmlands, Valley Meadowlands and Ancient Estate Farmlands at the margins



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

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

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

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

East of the reservoir, the natural river valley returns and comprises gently sloping valley sides supporting both arable and pasture and a narrow valley floor with some areas of wet meadow/pastures as well as a small area of willow plantation. These wet pastures are likely to have been former reedbed/salt marsh prior to the construction of the sluice and flood defence barrier at the head of Holbrook Creek. There are a number of water channels and waterbodies in the valley relating to the fishponds associated with Holbrook Gardens which extended further to the north and also the mill pond. Overall the valley is well treed both in terms of small copses and lines of alder along watercourses or hedgerows and hedgerow trees and as such there are only occasional glimpsed views across the valley or to landmark buildings. Landmark buildings include the clock tower and water tower of the Royal Hospital

School, which lies on higher land adjacent to the valley, as well as Holbrook Mill and church. The South Suffolk cycle route B runs through this area.

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

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

Distinctive Characteristics

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

Evaluation

Special Qualities and Features

- Alton Water and Holbrook Gardens are both designated CWSs for their habitat mosaics
- Holbrook Mill in the valley floor and St Andrew's Church overlooking the valley are key landmark buildings in this character area which add to local distinctiveness
- Attractive views across open water and to landmark buildings including St Andrew's Church, Holbrook and from the village of Tattingstone across open water of the reservoir
- Remnant water meadows and wet pastures giving rise to visual variety and small scale landscape which contrasts with upper reaches of the Holbrook valley/reservoir landscape
- Remnant parkland trees either side of Alton Reservoir which formed part of Tattingstone Park

- Listed buildings within this landscape and on its margins which act as local landmarks
- Easily accessible recreation associated with Alton Reservoir
- Incised rural lanes which descend into the valley landscape flanked by old coppiced hazel and earth banks
- Banks of Holbrook River provides important habitat for Water Vole and Otter
- Northern fringes of Alton Water provide scrub and woodland cover suitable for Hazel Dormouse

Forces for Change and Their Landscape Implications

Past and Current

- Fragmentation of woodlands and habitat networks
- Loss of valley landscape as a result of reservoir creation and associated built structures which do not reflect local vernacular styles and are functional/utilitarian in character
- Some hedgerows are gappy and over trimmed and others show elm dieback and some hedgerow oaks with stag heads and lack of management
- Overgrown character of scrub and woodland vegetation on shores of Alton Water with opportunities to open up some vistas and views from the surrounding landscape and shores of the reservoir and create more striking headlands
- Conversion of pasture to arable cultivation on the valley sides
- Planting of poplar trees on the valley sides/lower slopes

Future

- Further suburbanisation of narrow lanes and larger roads due to inappropriate development on boundaries and within curtilages as well as infill development
- Alton Water identified as an area with significant potential to provide Area of Natural Greenspace for major conurbations such as Ipswich which are likely to experience considerable housing growth in future
- Increase in woodland and hedgerow trees obscuring views across the valley
- Pressure for solar park development particularly on south facing slopes

Landscape Strategy

Protect
• Protect the rural quiet character of lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvement or signage • Protect the rural valley setting of Holbrook Mill and St Andrew's Church which add to the significance of these historic buildings and combined with these landmarks add to local distinctiveness and sense of place • Protect and restore historic features within the valley, particularly those relating to the watercourses e.g. mills, bridges and sluices • Protect Water Vole habitat through appropriate grazing levels, avoiding bank erosion and introduction of riparian woodland • Protect unspoilt rural valley character from solar park development where it may undermine the pattern of land use and be visually prominent
Manage
• Manage areas of ancient semi-natural woodland and coppicing through appropriate woodland management regimes • Record and survey veteran trees seeking management which prolongs life and monitors gradual loss and potential replacement by maturing trees in future • Manage woodland and scrub areas fringing Alton Water and seek opportunities to open up views across the water and to the reservoir from the surrounding wider landscape • Manage recreation in this landscape and ensure the development of any new

associated infrastructure is in keeping with the local rural character

- Manage the landscape's distinctive hedges along lanes and reinstate coppicing to ensure future survival
- Manage and extend areas of wet grassland and meadow with appropriate grazing with cattle and sheep, particularly on areas of importance for wildlife and avoid bank erosion which may affect Water Vole and Otter habitat

Plan

- Plan for the replanting of veteran trees and careful management of maturing trees particularly in areas of former parkland
- Plan for the reversion of arable farmland to pasture on the valley sides where it extends down to the edge of the valley floor
- Plan for the improved interpretation of the historic character of this valley landscape and its changing face through time
- Plan for the opening up of views across the valley including across the reservoir and also around Holbrook through woodland and scrub management
- Plan for the felling of poplar and retention of valley floor pastures through appropriate management and grazing levels
- Plan for the increased informal recreational use of this area, particularly Alton Water and ensure sufficient provision of low key parking and facilities, which reflect local vernacular and character
- Plan for the sensitive creation of circular themed walks associated with Alton Water that connect this 'honey pot' site with the wider landscape including facilities at Tattingstone and Holbrook

3.5 Samford Valley

Description

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

Constituent Landscape Types: Rolling Valley Farmlands

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

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

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

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

The railway line connecting Manningtree with Ipswich severs the valley west of Brantham Bridge and passes through the northern tributary valley on its western valley sides. Its valley location means that it is visually well concealed by topography and vegetation from the wider landscape and there once was a station at Bentley - hence the collection of houses at the junction of the road and railway. Nevertheless the railway does affect perceptions of tranquillity within the tributary valley, as do the pylons which follow an almost identical route northwards.

In the west of the valley there is the site of a former Augustinian Priory which was founded c1188 and dissolved in 1525. Although there are thought to be no physical remains of the

Priory there is some evidence in the vicinity including a pond (perhaps former fish ponds) and a section of stone wall. There is also evidence of some reused Medieval stone in Dodnash Priory Farm.

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

Distinctive Characteristics

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

Evaluation

Special Qualities and Features

- This whole area lies outside the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB but within an area identified as a Special Landscape Area and within the Additional Project Area as set out in the AONB Management Plan
- County Wildlife Site at Dodnash Wood and Buxton Wood
- Species rich grassland sites within the valley bottom e.g. Brantham Bridge Meadow, Buxton Wood Meadow and Wolves Wood Meadow
- Banks of Samford River provide an important habitat for Otter and Water Vole
- Site of Dodnash Priory is a Scheduled Monument

Forces for Change and Their Landscape Implications

Past and Current

- Pylons and railway impact on tranquillity
- Growth of equine activity in the area with increased grazing by horses and associated development
- Planting of small scale conifer plantations and poplar/cricket bat willow plantations
- Ploughing of former grassland/meadows resulting in a loss of traditional valley floor character
- Development and land use change adjacent to this landscape type resulting in visual impacts
- The loss of grazing by cattle and introduction of horse grazing
- Neglect of the characteristic ditch and hedgerow networks due to lack of management

Future

- Pressure for development of small micro scale wind turbines associated with rural landholdings on the valley sides or plateau landscape adjacent
- Development on the valley sides adjacent which may have a visual impact
- Pressure for increase in horse paddock and associated structures and loss of traditional grazing management
- Lack of traditional woodland management and coppicing resulting in dereliction of some former coppice woods

Landscape Strategy

Protect
• Protect rural character of lanes and valley and avoid unnecessary signage or linear development • Protect river water quality through encouraging buffers to arable fields and reinstatement of grassland meadows where they have been previously lost to arable cultivation • Protect the small scale field enclosure pattern and seek to avoid subdivision of fields by post and rail/wire fencing associated with stable and horse development • Protect the rural and tranquil characteristics of the valley and avoid development on the valley sides and adjacent landscape which may impact on these special qualities (including domestic scale wind turbines and solar parks)
Manage
• Manage areas of ancient semi-natural woodland through appropriate woodland management regimes including coppicing • Manage and extend areas of wet grassland and meadow with appropriate grazing with cattle and sheep particularly on areas of importance for wildlife and avoid bank erosion which may affect Water Vole and Otter habitat • Manage and maintain the pattern of meadows divided by ditches and dykes which are a characteristic feature of this landscape and seek to extend them to establish more effective ecological corridors
Plan
• Plan for the removal of poplar plantations and replanting with alder carr and restoration of wet meadows • Plan for creation of stronger habitat network along the Samford River connecting areas of species rich grassland • Plan for the sensitive felling of conifer plantations and their replacement with appropriate native species of tree • Plan for arable reversion though agri-environment schemes, or with the expansion of livestock enterprises, in order to maintain the character of this landscape and deliver ecological benefits • Plan to retain an appropriate balance of wet and plantation woodland with grassland. While wet woodland is an important part of the habitat mix in this landscape, excessive creation of plantation woodland should be avoided

3.6 Belstead Brook

Description

Context: This includes the north sloping valley sides of the Belstead Brook which form the northern fringe of the Study Area where there are views overlooking Ipswich. Much of this character area extends beyond the Study Area boundary.

Constituent Landscape Types: Rolling Estate Farmlands, Ancient Estate Farmlands and Valley Meadowlands



Summary Description
Only the southern valley sides fall within the Study Area and therefore this description focuses on these slopes, although they are discussed within the wider context of the valley as a whole.

Within this valley landscape there is a notable change in geology from the sandy deposits so characteristic of the Shotley Peninsula Plateau landscape, to the occurrence of heavier clay on the lower slopes. As a result of this there are spring lines which feed the Brook and which have also resulted in localised patches of wet woodland and pasture. This is evident to the north of Belstead Hall (Grade II* listed), east of Belstead in Alder Carr and also Spring Wood north of Thorington Hall.

This landscape has seen significant change in second half of 20th century with construction of A14 on southern slopes of the river valley, a double line of pylons again along the southern valley sides and the significant growth of Ipswich onto the northern valley sides including urban fringe development such as the dry ski slope. As with villages/hamlets elsewhere in the Study Area the settlement of Belstead has also experienced some considerable growth and infill development which has altered its overall character and appearance. These changes contrast with other areas which remain relatively unchanged including Belstead Church, Belstead Hall and farm and Thorington Hall.

Immediately north of the A14 the open landscape on the edge of Ipswich forms part of Belstead Brook Park - an informal country park.

Although much of this landscape within the Study Area remains intact and rural in character it is visually and audibly influenced by the development associated with Ipswich and major infrastructure and this has undermined perceptions of tranquillity.

Distinctive Characteristics

- North facing slopes forming part of the Belstead Brook and River Bourne Valley which separates the Study Area from the fringes of Ipswich
- Steep valley side slopes with numerous springs reflecting underlying geology
- Ash on lower slopes where clay substrates create impeded drainage contrast with free draining sandy soils on the upper slopes where there is a higher incidence of oak and patches of bracken and scrub
- Medium scale field pattern of hedgerows enclosing areas of intensive arable farmland

- Extensive views across Ipswich built development, although infrastructure is reasonably well concealed
- Areas of urban fringe development include the dry-ski slope, A14 and pylons
- Historic settlement of Belstead includes a collection of medieval farms and cottages interspersed with infill development along Old Lane and other more recent estate housing
- Perceptions of tranquillity affected by visual impacts of Ipswich and infrastructure and audible impacts of traffic

Evaluation

Special Qualities and Features

- This whole area lies outside the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB but within the Additional Project Area as set out in the AONB Management Plan
- Important and valuable green landscape setting to Ipswich
- Notable mature veteran oaks in hedgerows
  Historic church of Belstead and associated manor house and farm form an outstanding collection of historic buildings and the church acts as a local landmark
- Valuable areas of woodland carr

Forces for Change and Their Landscape Implications

Past and Current

- Loss of field boundaries and parkland landscapes due to intensive arable farming
- Traffic noise and intrusion from the A12
- Visual intrusion of the edge of Ipswich where it extends onto the northern slopes of the Belstead Brook beyond the Study Area - including housing, pylons, roads and lighting
- Loss of old farm buildings which have fallen into a state of disrepair
- Pressure for development and recreational access to this area

Future

- The Haven Gateway Green Infrastructure Strategy includes the development of the Belstead Brook Park and associated footpaths. It notes that this area could link with other initiatives, including a new country park at Wherstead (Project 77) and potential open space at Belstead Grove (Project 86), together with a network of green corridors out to the south (e.g. Projects 76 and 81), which would provide enhanced links to the improved Alton Water (Project 75, which has the potential to provide a significant area of ANG), and on to the Shotley Peninsula and Dedham Vale.
- Loss of hedgerow trees in particular ash due to Chalara or ash dieback
- Pressure for wind farm development - imminent application for construction of two wind turbines on land at Thorington Hall/Cottage, east of Belstead

Landscape Strategy

Protect
• Protect the setting of historic buildings and their association with other historic buildings in the vicinity • Protect historic farm buildings from disuse and loss • Protect area from developments which have a cumulative urbanising influence and seek to minimise urban influences through strategically located woodland planting
Manage
• Manage existing historic hedgerows and hedgerow oaks and plant new hedgerow oaks to replace old veteran trees in time • Manage areas of wet woodland through appropriate management i.e. coppicing
Plan

- Plan for the continued expansion of Ipswich north of the A14 and seek ways to protect and reinforce the perceived separation of this landscape from Ipswich as a result of Belstead Brook Valley though strategic woodland planting and careful management of physical links between this area and Ipswich
- Plan to enhance habitat networks through woodland along stream courses and the development of field buffers and wide hedgerows

4.0 Looking Forward

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 This landscape character assessment has considered the variation in landscape character across the Shotley Peninsula and its relationship with the two adjacent estuaries - the Orwell and Stour. Importantly the definition of different character areas and assessment of their special qualities demonstrates the high degree of inter-dependence between areas and the risk of focusing attention on protected areas such as the AONB alone. Similarly when considering pressures affecting the landscape, changes in one character area may, and often do, have an impact on an adjacent character area(s). For example the Shotley Peninsula Plateau area is inter-visible with the Stour and Orwell Estuaries, while development on the estuary valley sides may have an impact on the character of the lanes and rural roads which cross the wider peninsula -due to increases in traffic. It is therefore important when using this character assessment that the study area is also considered as a whole.

4.1.2 The text set out below considers how this character assessment may, in general terms, be used to inform future change. It also sets out what further complementary studies could be carried out to safeguard the special qualities of this landscape and how these may contribute to existing initiatives and central and local Government agendas.

4.2 Contributing to Planning Decisions

4.2.1 It is hoped that this landscape character assessment will inform planning decisions in a number of ways. Firstly, in relation to ***informing policy*** within emerging planning documents and secondly, in ***development control/management*** where it can be used to understand the key characteristics of the landscape and its special qualities and therefore provide an evidence base from which the impacts of individual applications can be assessed and potential mitigation considered. Thirdly, it can be used to engage the ***local community*** through the Localism Agenda, whereby local communities can articulate what is special about their area and make choices about future change.

4.2.2 This assessment could also be used to ***inform more detailed studies*** such as whole settlement assessments, which in turn can inform and influence the identification of future housing sites and other developments. Similarly it can inform the development of design guidance including generic local vernacular advice or more specific design briefs for individual settlements or sites.

4.2.3 This assessment could also be adopted by Babergh District Council as a ***supplementary planning document*** which would give it added weight, increasing the extent to which developers may respond to landscape characteristics and local distinctiveness. As a basic principle, any development within the peninsula should seek to contribute to the key characteristics and special qualities of the area.

4.3 Strategies for Wildlife, Cultural Heritage and Recreation

4.3.1 This character assessment highlights the biodiversity interest of the peninsula. However there is considerable unrealised potential for establishing better ***habitat networks and linkage*** of existing valued sites. A recent study looking at habitat networks has been prepared for the Orwell Estuary[14] and there is considerable scope for extending this across the peninsula and into the Stour Estuary.

4.3.2 There is also unrealised potential to encourage landowners to take up ***higher level stewardship*** (particularly between Bentley and Holbrook) and to target the provision

[14] The Orwell Estuary Hinterland Report, 2007, Suffolk Wildlife Trust

of nesting habitats for arable birds including lapwing, grey partridge, yellow wagtail, tree sparrow, turtle dove and corn bunting. There is also scope to target the provision of wet grassland birds on the margins of the estuaries including lapwing, snipe, redshank, curlew and yellow wagtail and to develop and enhance the existing habitats which support rare invertebrates and plants.

4.3.3 In relation to cultural heritage there are opportunities to undertake further research and assessment to establish the number and ***condition of veteran trees*** and also the condition of ancient semi-natural woodland and to develop a ***woodlands strategy*** which includes programmes for new planning linking to stewardship and woodland grant schemes. Also there are opportunities to encourage ***archaeological surveys*** to inform understanding but also understand condition of sites and management requirements.

4.3.4 A ***recreation and interpretation strategy*** could also be developed which seeks to:

- balance access with the retention of the area's special qualities - such as nature conservation value and tranquillity;
- link together the existing footpath network and establish circular walks or promote some walks to assist in the protection of sensitive areas;
- identify honey pot sites which could be developed further, or the identification of new attractions which could help relieve pressure on other sites;
- realise the potential for enjoyment and understanding of the peninsula through improved interpretation, helping to tell the story of the evolution of the landscape and its special qualities;
- develop a 'tool-kit' which enables local businesses to market themselves in relation to the local distinctiveness of the landscape.

4.3.5 These opportunities have already been considered to a degree within the Babergh District Green Infrastructure Framework (2012) which identifies:

- gaps between habitats and species and opportunities for creating inter-connected networks;
- existing key assets, destinations and connections; and
- opportunities around the Ipswich Fringe and Alton Water as shown on Figures 13b and 15 including new access routes and a new country park at Wherstead.

4.3.6 There is considerable scope, using this character assessment, proactively to shape and influence the initiatives/projects set out in the Babergh Green Infrastructure Strategy.

Appendix 1: Nature Conservation Designations

National Designations

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

SSSIs are a representative sample of the United Kingdom's finest wildlife and geological sites and support our most characteristic, rare and endangered species, habitats and geological features. The purpose of SSSI designation is to safeguard our remaining natural heritage for future generations, often by protecting plants and animals that struggle to survive in the wider countryside. Areas designated as SSSIs are extremely varied and can include land that is either privately or publicly owned. Consequently, some SSSIs are inaccessible but, on others, the public are welcomed and these sites provide wonderful opportunities for people to enjoy and appreciate nature.

European Designations

Special Protection Area (SPA)

Special Protection Areas are designated under the European Union's Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (the “Birds Directive”). Member states have a duty to safeguard the habitats of migratory birds and certain other particularly threatened species. The SPA designation is usually added to sites that have already been designated at a national level. Thus, in the UK, SPAs can be made up of one or more SSSIs and include the Stour and Orwell Estuaries.

Where an SPA or SAC incorporates sub-tidal and/or intertidal areas, it is also referred to as a 'European Marine Site' (EMS)

The main requirements for Natura 2000 sites are that:

- the sites should be managed in 'favourable conservation status' for species specified in the designation
- steps shall be taken to avoid the deterioration or disturbance of habitats and species
- activities, plans and projects that are likely to have an impact on the features for which the site is designated shall be subject to formal assessment
- a programme of monitoring of each site's key habitats and species shall be undertaken
- management of the site shall take account of the economic, cultural, social and recreational needs of local people.

Other International Designations

Ramsar

The Ramsar Convention is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971. Its full title is The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat. Over the years the Convention has broadened its scope to cover all aspects of wetland conservation, recognising their importance both as ecosystems that are important for natural biodiversity and for the well-being of human communities. There are over 1500 Ramsar sites throughout the world and the UK has been a particularly strong supporter of the Convention, designating over 160 sites. Ramsar sites in the Study Area include the Stour and Orwell Estuaries.