

Green Infrastructure Strategy

for

Suffolk Coastal District Council

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Final

Quality control

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for

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Contents

Part 1: Supporting text

Executive summary

1	Introduction	1
2	Vision and principles	5
3	Approach to the study	8
4	The Green Infrastructure Plan	21
5	Steps to delivery and further actions	25

Part 2: Figures

Figure 1	Study area context within the District Context
Figure 2	Rivers and flood zones
Figure 3	Agricultural land classification
Figure 4	National landscape character types
Figure 5	Local landscape character types
Figure 6	Designated wildlife sites and landscape designations
Figure 7	Biodiversity Action Plan habitats,
Figure 8	Historic landscape character
Figure 9	Heritage assets
Figure 10	Existing accessible natural greenspace (ANG) resource
Figure 11	Access: strategic links and promoted routes
Figure 12	Indices of multiple deprivation
Figure 13	ANG deficiencies – Neighbourhood Level
Figure 14	ANG deficiencies – District Level
Figure 15	ANG deficiencies – Sub-regional Level 60ha
Figure 16	ANG deficiencies – Regional Level
Figure 17	Green Infrastructure Strategy Concept Map
Figure 18	Green Infrastructure Strategy Opportunities Map
Figure 19	Schedule of opportunities

Part 3: Appendices (not bound with this report)

Appendix 1	Policy context
Appendix 2	The Brief
Appendix 3	Documents and GIS datasets reviewed as part of this study
Appendix 4	Stakeholder consultation
Appendix 5	Funding opportunities

Executive summary

What is green infrastructure?

Suffolk Coastal District Council is one of the partners that comprise the Haven Gateway Partnership (HGP) that commissioned the original Haven Gateway Green Infrastructure Study (HGGIS) as part of its role as a New Growth Point. The Suffolk Coastal District Council area extends beyond the boundary of the Haven Gateway, however, and so the council has commissioned this extended Green Infrastructure Strategy at the same high-level scale in order to inform development of its Local Development Framework across the district. This strategy forms Part 1 of a two-stage study, Part 2 of which is an Issues Paper that identifies the concerns of carrying out a district level assessment using an evaluation technique designed for use at a sub-regional level, key policy and economic changes since the HGGIS was written, as well as additions to the evidence base.

Green infrastructure is a connected system of protected sites, nature reserves, greenspaces and greenway linkages. By providing for multi-functional uses, e.g. wildlife, recreation, and cultural experience, green infrastructure contributes to quality of life whilst also delivering landscape, historic and ecological benefits.

The vision

The vision has been adopted from the Haven Gateway Green Infrastructure Strategy.

To establish a framework for the delivery of high quality green infrastructure over the next 20 years, complementing and supporting planned housing and development growth.

To contribute to quality of life through ensuring that everyone living and working in Suffolk Coastal District has access to a high quality natural and historic environment.

The success of these aims can only be secured by sustained support by all communities of interest in Suffolk Coastal District namely local communities, developers, businesses, central government and government agencies, and the voluntary sector.

Principles

The principles have been adopted from the Haven Gateway Green Infrastructure Strategy and will guide planning, design and maintenance of the green infrastructure network. The overarching principles are to:

- integrate green infrastructure provision and management into development proposals
- champion the role that green infrastructure assets play in delivering a high quality of life
- promote an integrated approach to green infrastructure provision and management that provides recreational opportunities for people whilst maintaining and enhancing the exceptional natural and historic environment within Suffolk Coastal District
- create green infrastructure that reflects the ethos and character of Suffolk Coastal District
- increase everyone's understanding of, and ability to take action for, green infrastructure
- ensure that sustainability issues are considered, e.g. in construction, location, access, management and use

These principles are elaborated under the themes of access, biodiversity, historic environment and landscape.

Stakeholder group

The extended Green Infrastructure Strategy has been informed through a facilitated event with a Stakeholder Group of partners comprising local government, government agencies, the local wildlife trust, other environmental organisations and Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit.

The green infrastructure resource

The strategy identifies the resources that define or give character to the existing green infrastructure. In doing so it also provides the building blocks for identifying the opportunities for enhancement. The following resources were identified and mapped using a geographical information system.

- River patterns and flood risk
- Agricultural land classification
- Landscape character at both a national and local level
- Designated wildlife sites and landscapes and Biodiversity Action Plan habitats
- Historic landscape character and heritage assets
- Existing accessible natural greenspace
- Strategic and promoted access routes
- Indices of multiple deprivation

Accessible natural greenspace

Accessible natural greenspace (ANG) provides opportunities for informal recreation in a natural setting, therefore giving people the opportunity to experience wildlife close to where they live. This is important for quality of life, healthy living and sense of place. The strategy appraises and identifies standards for delivering enhancements to the existing ANG network. The criteria for defining ANG were originally developed in liaison with the HGGIS Steering Group. The existing ANG provision was appraised to identify deficiencies in provision based on four nationally promoted accessible natural greenspace standards, but adapted for use by the HGGIS Steering Group and then adopted for this extended Study Area.

- 2ha+ of ANG within 300m of home – the Neighbourhood Level
- 20ha+ of ANG within 1.2km of home – the District Level
- 60ha+ of ANG within 3.2km of home – the Sub-regional Level
- 500ha+ of ANG within 10km of home – the Regional Level

The deficiencies were appraised to see where they corresponded to areas of population density and local areas of growth.

Opportunities

Consultation was carried out with the Stakeholder Group to identify and analyse the resource data and to determine indicative project opportunities. The Opportunities Map identifies several main types of opportunity for accessible and non-accessible green infrastructure:

- potential river corridor projects
- potential access projects, including existing walks, campsite and railway based walks with potential for further promotion.
- potential site-based projects
- potential area-based initiatives

The Opportunities Map identifies opportunities and indicative vision projects across the extended Suffolk Coastal study area. The schedule of projects identifies the current lead organisation, the indicative cost of the project, and its priority as judged against criteria related to the over-arching principles and the benefits of green infrastructure to the sub-region.

The Concept Map identifies key existing assets such as ANG, rivers, promoted walks and cycleways, and key strategic opportunities.

Steps to delivery and further actions

The strategy represents the first step in delivering high quality green infrastructure in Suffolk Coastal. Success in delivery will depend on how the strategy is taken forward over the next few years. This includes promoting the strategy to key stakeholders and the community by a variety of methods; developing 'best practice' examples of green infrastructure to raise standards and expectations, and sustaining action, including sourcing funding, through maintenance of the Stakeholder Group. It also requires promotion of the green infrastructure principles through the new neighbourhood planning system, whatever format that takes.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

- 1.1.1 Suffolk Coastal District Council is one of the partners who comprise the Haven Gateway Partnership (HGP) that commissioned the original Haven Gateway Green Infrastructure Study (HGGIS). The Haven Gateway Partnership was established in 2001 and brings together the ports of Felixstowe, Harwich, Ipswich, Mistley and their surrounding hinterlands including the regional centres of Colchester and Ipswich. The Partnership is an association of public and private sector organisations that are working together to secure the future economic prosperity of the sub-region.
- 1.1.2 The Haven Gateway was awarded New Growth Point status by the previous Government in 2006. The production of a Green Infrastructure Strategy was a condition of New Growth Point status and was seen as an important document ensuring that a balance was struck between new development and meeting community needs.
- 1.1.3 The Suffolk Coastal District Council area extends beyond the boundary of the Haven Gateway, however, and so the council has commissioned this extended Green Infrastructure Strategy in order to provide district wide information in relation to the need or otherwise of this resource (see **Figure 1**). This strategy forms Part 1 of the study. The original HGGIS was a high level study and, for the purposes of comparison and consistency of approach, Part 1 of this study has been undertaken at that same high level utilising the methodology and principles developed for that original study.
- 1.1.4 The second part of the study, Part 2, identifies the issues that arise at a district level with the approach and outputs of these studies being designed for understanding the resource and needs at a sub-regional level, as well as some additions to the evidence base since the completion of the original HGGIS such the availability of a county level landscape character assessment data.
- 1.1.5 The two studies (the Suffolk Coastal District Green Infrastructure Strategy and the Issues Paper) will be used alongside the existing HGGIS to support Suffolk Coastal District Council's Local Development Framework Documents.

1.2 District context.

- 1.2.1 Covering nearly 90,000 hectares, Suffolk Coastal is a diverse district incorporating thirty miles of coast, wide areas of countryside, much of which is still a working landscape, five market towns as well as several other urbanised communities, the resort and port of Felixstowe as well as many villages¹.
- 1.2.2 In the last 30 years the district has seen its population rise to just over 122,000 people. This is amongst the higher rates of growth in the country, although most of that growth would have taken place in the urban areas outside the extended study area. The proximity of major centres of population, such as Ipswich, still has an impact on the Green Infrastructure network outside its boundaries, however, including within Suffolk Coastal.
- 1.2.3 In 2005 a MORI poll showed that residents rated Suffolk one of the top places to live in the country. The Sustainable Community Strategy 2008 shows that Suffolk Coastal has relatively good health and low crime rates, with people thinking police and other local services successfully deal with anti-social behaviour and crime.
- 1.2.4 Access to affordable housing remains an issue, as the recession has led to a fall in the completion of this type of housing. Access to services is usually low for rural and coastal areas, thus for the extended Green Infrastructure Strategy area it's likely to be lower than the rest of the district. Access has improved, however, in most Suffolk Coastal wards since 2005. The 'connectivity' for Suffolk Coastal is judged as very low as it is based on a count of railway stations, ports, airports and motorway junctions.

¹ The sustainable community strategy for Suffolk Coastal; Suffolk Coastal Local Strategic Partnership, 2008

1.2.5 The high quality of the environment is recognised in the substantial areas of countryside and coast that are designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The built environment is of a similar high quality, with numerous listed buildings, Conservation Areas and Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The coast and estuaries support vibrant communities, outstanding landscapes and are internationally significant for the wildlife they support. Suffolk Coastal is in the top fifth of districts for natural environment but for amenities and services it is relatively lacking in resource.

1.2.6 The southern part of the district, within the Haven Gateway, is where the majority of the population resides. Most of the large employers in the district are also located outside the extended Study Area, therefore, although there is a high proportion of small and medium sized businesses in the district as a whole that are vital to the local economy. Tourism is also a major driver for the local economy, although tends to be focused along the coast, within the villages and the attractive natural areas in the coastal hinterland.

1.3 Haven Gateway Growth Point

1.3.1 The Haven Gateway Partnership was established in 2001 and brings together the ports of Felixstowe, Harwich, Ipswich, Mistley and their surrounding hinterlands including the regional centres of Colchester and Ipswich. The Partnership is an association of public and private sector organisations that are working together to secure the future economic prosperity of the sub-region. The Haven Gateway Partnership is currently recognised as a sub-regional economic partnership by the East of England Development Agency. This status will change with the abolition of the Regional Development Agency next year.

1.3.2 In 2006 Haven Gateway was awarded New Growth Point status by the Government in recognition of its ambitious housing targets; its population is projected to increase from 611,300 in 2001 to 684,500 in 2021. The planned growth in the Haven Gateway could impact on both the quality of life of the existing and proposed future communities, and the natural and cultural assets of the area. In order to ensure a balance between new development and the needs of the community, and as a condition of the New Growth Point status, the Haven Gateway Green Infrastructure Strategy was prepared in 2008 with Suffolk County Council as commissioning authority.

1.4 The Extended Study Area

1.4.1 The extended green infrastructure study area covers just over a third of the district outside the HGGIS boundary. It encompasses a short stretch of the coast east of the A12, between Walberswick and Eastbridge, within the AONB. Further inland, it takes in the whole of the north of the district from just south of Halesworth, including the villages of Heveningham and Peasenhall, and the market town of Framlingham. To the east, the boundary just excludes Saxmundham and in the south the boundary stops just north of Wickham Market.

1.5 What is green infrastructure?

1.5.1 The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), East of England Plan (2008), defines green infrastructure as,

'networks of protected sites, nature reserves, green spaces, and greenway linkages. By providing for multi-functional uses i.e. wildlife, recreation and cultural experience, it contributes to liveability whilst delivering biodiversity benefits and other benefits including, potentially, flood relief.... ...green infrastructure will be particularly important in settlements and surrounding areas proposed for regionally significant development, notably the key centres for development and change.'

1.5.2 It further identifies that:

'The linkages include river corridors and flood plains, migration routes and features of the landscape, which are of importance as wildlife corridors.'

{Green Infrastructure} should also operate at all spatial scales from urban centres through to open countryside.'

- 1.5.3 This definition of green infrastructure was developed within the HGGIS to also include the historic environment as a key element, and this addition has carried forward to the Suffolk Coastal District Green Infrastructure Strategy.
- 1.5.4 In addition, the aims for green infrastructure have been developed in Natural England's Guidance² for the United Kingdom. These are broadly to:
- a/ conserve and enhance the natural and historic environment, including landscapes, biodiversity, natural resources and historic and cultural heritage
 - b/ increase the number, diversity and frequency of people enjoying the natural environment
 - c/ increase everyone's understanding of, and ability to take action for, the natural environment
 - d/ improve places for people to enjoy the natural environment

1.6 Policy context

- 1.6.1 Green infrastructure is recognised as integral to the development of sustainable communities due to its importance for quality of life. This is clearly set out in current national policy and documents such as **Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development** (CLG), **Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation** (CLG, 2004), **Planning Policy Guidance 17: Open Space, Sport and Recreation** (CLG 2002). Current regional policy is identified within the **East of England Plan, A Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England**, (East of England Regional Assembly, 2004), although this is due to be superseded by new policy, and within local development documents that are emerging as part of **Local Development Frameworks**. The importance of green infrastructure for quality of life has been highlighted through research into a range of issues, such as health, by organisations such as Natural England, Commission on Architecture and the Built Environment and the Royal Society for the Protection Birds. Further details on relevant policies and national guidance can be found at **Appendix 1**.

1.7 The role of the extended Suffolk Coastal District Green Infrastructure Strategy

- 1.7.1 The main purpose of this strategy is to:
- assess the interplay of the five main components of green infrastructure: physical resources and natural systems, ecological assets, landscape character, historical and cultural assets, and access networks and recreational facilities
 - establish a holistic and coordinated spatial framework for the delivery of high quality multi-functional green infrastructure over the next 20-25 years, complementing and supporting planned housing and employment growth
 - (together with the HGGIS) inform the preparation of Suffolk Coastal Development Plan documents as envisaged in Policy ENV1 of the RSS
 - provide an evidence base for future funding
- 1.7.2 The original project brief is included at **Appendix 2**.

1.8 Governance

- 1.8.1 The Suffolk Coastal District Green Infrastructure Strategy has been commissioned by Suffolk Coastal District Council, and supported by a Stakeholder Group composed of:
- Suffolk County Council
 - Natural England
 - Environment Agency
 - Forestry Commission

² Green Infrastructure Guidance, Natural England, 2009.

- English Heritage
- Suffolk Coasts and Heaths Unit
- Suffolk Local Access Forum
- Haven Gateway Partnership
- Suffolk Wildlife Trust
- RSPB
- Sustrans
- Woodland Trust

1.8.2 The stakeholder group has provided invaluable input at the evidence-gathering and visioning stages through a facilitated half-day event and will provide input on the draft report.

2 Vision and principles

2.1 Aims and objectives

2.1.1 The overall objective of the Haven Gateway Green Infrastructure Strategy is:

to establish a framework for the delivery of high quality green infrastructure over the next 20 years, complementing and supporting planned housing and development growth.

2.1.2 The aim is to contribute to quality of life by:

ensuring that everyone living and working in the Haven Gateway has access to a high quality natural and historic environment.

2.1.3 This vision has been adopted for the extended Suffolk Coastal District Green Infrastructure study area. The vision aims to champion the role that green infrastructure plays in delivering sustainable communities, in attracting investment, delivering life-long learning and bringing a sense of well-being to all who live, work and visit the area. Thus the vision for this study is to create green infrastructure that strengthens the character and sense of place for Suffolk Coastal that maintains and enhances the exceptional natural and historic environment (especially the beauty of its heaths and estuaries), integrates open and accessible green space within new developments, integrates development into existing neighbourhoods and landscapes, embraces sustainability, enhances recreational opportunities for people, and increases community understanding and engagement with greenspace.

2.2 Principles for green infrastructure in Suffolk Coastal District

Role of principles

2.2.1 The principles for the HGGIS were developed by its Steering Group and were intended to guide the planning, design and management of green infrastructure in the Haven Gateway. It was envisaged that they be incorporated within policies in local development frameworks, supplementary planning documents, master plans, project briefs, and other guidance at the strategic or local level e.g. developer guidelines.

2.2.2 Again, these principles have been adopted for the Extended Suffolk Coastal District Green Infrastructure Strategy.

Overarching principles

2.2.3 Green infrastructure planning, design and maintenance in Suffolk Coastal should:

- integrate green infrastructure provision and management into development proposals
- champion the role that green infrastructure assets play in delivering a high quality of life
- promote an integrated approach to green infrastructure provision and management that provides recreational opportunities for people whilst maintaining and enhancing the exceptional natural and historic environment within the Suffolk Coastal area
- create green infrastructure that reflects the ethos and character of the Suffolk Coastal area
- increase everyone's understanding of, and ability to take action for, green infrastructure
- ensure that sustainability issues are considered e.g. in construction, location, access, management and use

Access principles

2.2.4 Green infrastructure planning, design and maintenance in Suffolk Coastal should:

- create new, or extend existing, accessible natural green space in order to address shortfalls in provision, and when opportunities arise, at both strategic and local levels

- create new, or extend existing, accessible natural green space in order to reduce recreational pressure on sensitive wildlife or historic sites
- ensure that accessible natural green spaces are protected, managed and promoted appropriately for people, wildlife and historic interest
- create and enhance, manage and promote strategic routes for non-motorised users, especially:
 - within and between main settlements
 - from main settlements to, and between, accessible natural green spaces and the coast
 - with regard to PRow³, in line with ROWIP⁴
 - to provide circular routes of varying lengths and demands to meet the needs of different users, including walkers, cyclists and equestrians of varying abilities
 - to provide multifunctional green corridors
 - to provide improved access to rivers and estuaries, where appropriate
 - to maximise opportunities to use existing public transport links and encourage the creation and promotion of new links, e.g. community bus links

Biodiversity principles

2.2.5 Green infrastructure planning, design and maintenance in Suffolk Coastal should:

- enhance, manage and protect existing key habitats and species (statutory and non-statutory designated sites and Biodiversity Action Plan habitats and species) as key components of the green infrastructure network
- reduce fragmentation of wildlife habitats by creating ecological corridors and networks
- contribute to Suffolk Biodiversity Action Plan habitats and species targets
- reduce disturbance to ecologically sensitive sites through improved management of access, and the creation of alternative accessible natural green spaces
- be informed by ecological surveys and Biodiversity Action Plan priorities to guide the design and implementation of green infrastructure improvements and development schemes
- create new areas of habitat as part of new development

Historic principles

2.2.6 Green infrastructure planning, design and maintenance in Suffolk Coastal should:

- enhance, restore, manage and protect the historic environment as a key component of the green infrastructure network
- be based on a sound understanding of the historic environment of the Suffolk Coastal area (e.g. historic landscape characterisation work)
- promote the recognition of the historic environment as an integral part of green infrastructure

Landscape principles

2.2.7 Green infrastructure planning, design and maintenance in Suffolk Coastal should:

³ Public Right of Way

⁴ Rights of Way Improvement Plan

- protect and enhance the distinctive landscape character of the Suffolk Coastal area as defined in landscape character assessments
- contribute to the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty management plan

3 Approach to the study

3.1 Baseline data

3.1.1 The following data was collated in order to provide a baseline for the review and analysis of existing green infrastructure assets within the Suffolk Coastal area, and to identify opportunities for future enhancement (as discussed further in Section 4).

3.1.2 Information considered in the baseline study included:

- policies and relevant strategies. The documents were reviewed and are listed at **Appendix 3**
- environmental resources, e.g. physical attributes and resources such as river patterns and flood zones; geology, soils and agriculture; landscape character and designations; wildlife designations and biodiversity habitats; and historic landscape character
- existing ANG sites (see below)
- strategic access routes and networks
- key built up areas
- deprivation data
- feedback from consultation workshop.

3.1.3 Environmental data was mapped digitally using a geographical information system. By using a geographical information system, the various sets of spatial data relevant to the sub-region were easily captured, stored, shared, managed, analysed and displayed.

3.1.4 The data sets used within the geographical information system model are listed at **Appendix 3**.

3.2 Policy context

3.2.1 The policy context provides a review of existing and emerging government policy relevant to green infrastructure in the Suffolk Coastal District area at the national, regional, sub-regional and local levels. At the national level, green infrastructure policy and guidance documents prepared by government agencies and non-governmental organisations were assessed, in addition to central government planning policy statements. The policy topics considered encompass the environmental, social and economic benefits of green infrastructure, the creation and enhancement of the green infrastructure network and the management and maintenance of green infrastructure. The review of existing and emerging policy provides guidance on the implications of the current planning context for this Green Infrastructure Strategy.

3.3 Environmental resources

3.3.1 The baseline data relating to the environmental resources within the Suffolk Coastal District area was reviewed and analysed. The following paragraphs contain a summary of the findings, together with notes on key issues that might affect current or future green infrastructure resources.

Topography, river patterns and flood zones

3.3.2 The Suffolk Coastal District area embraces five estuaries: the Blyth, the Alde and Ore, the Deben, and the Orwell, of which the Blyth, upper Yox, Alde and Deben fall within the extended study area. The mouth of the Blyth separates Southwold and Walberswick on the northern edge of the study area, and is the smallest of the estuaries in Suffolk Coastal.

3.3.3 A large part of this estuarine landscape to the east of the A12 is low-lying, the coast itself consisting of shingle beaches and coastal lagoons, as well as the mud-flats and creeks of the salt-marsh fringed estuaries themselves.

- 3.3.4 There is a history of flooding across East Suffolk⁵. (see **Figure 2**). River flooding has occurred in all the river catchments and tidal floods have occurred along the coast and estuaries; areas around Halesworth and Framlingham are at risk. Surface water flooding in parts of the upper/mid catchments of the Blyth is due to the underlying geology combined with seasonally waterlogged soils and steep slopes. This risk will increase with climate change. There is already a debate about which undeveloped areas can be protected and which may be allowed to become inundated over time. This debate also extends beyond economics to the conservation of the dynamic coastal landscape of estuary, mudflat and salt marsh, which can often conflict with the provision of hard defences.
- 3.3.5 It is difficult to assess the current impact of flooding to environmental features which currently form part of the Green Infrastructure resource, but the Minsmere to Walberswick Heaths and Marshes (SPA, SAC, Ramsar), may be at risk from the impacts of flooding, although some of the impacts could be positive. The UK Climate Impacts Programme is predicting changes to UK weather patterns and levels of precipitation over the coming decades.
- 3.3.6 The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change has predicted that the East of England may experience hotter, drier summers, milder, wetter winters, more extreme climate events and increased risk of flooding. Despite being classified as semi-arid, current predictions suggest that the eastern region is likely to experience both water shortages during drier summers and increased risk of flooding during the winter months due to climate change. These predicted changes could have impacts, not only on the character of the landscape and wildlife resource, but also on the accessibility of footpaths and cycleways, the maintenance of historic features and the costs of maintenance.
- 3.3.7 **Key issues include:** Flood risk, economics of flood defence renewal, conservation and re-creation of salt marsh and other key elements of coastal landscapes. The loss of some landscape character types to rising sea level particularly coastal levels and freshwater grazing marshes. Threats to coastal and estuarine access, conservation of the coast and estuaries, sensitivity of low-lying areas to visual intrusion from development and water management issues arising from increased levels of flooding and drought as a result of climate change.

Geology, soils and agriculture

- 3.3.8 The geology of Suffolk is relatively simple. Extensive spreads of till, or boulder clay, deposited over the last million years, cover the gently undulating plateau that forms much of the county, including large parts of the northern end of Suffolk Coastal District. The geology of the district is divided by a line that approximates to the A12. The till plateau is bordered on its eastern edge by marine sands and gravels. These deposits support heathland and conifer plantation and continue eastwards into a largely undeveloped coast comprising a mosaic of estuaries, salt marsh, and steep shingle banks. This underlying geology affects both the local soils and the quality of the land for agriculture (see **Figure 3**).
- 3.3.9 Large areas of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are Agricultural Land Classification Grade 4 or poorer because of the free-draining, acidic nature of the soils. However these soils are now capable of producing high value vegetable crops through the application of modern irrigation and husbandry. This more intensive cultivation has had an impact on landscape character at the local level. Tracts of Grade 3 land correspond to some of the drained estuary and coastal marshes; this better quality and more diverse land is found, for example, north of Felixstowe.
- 3.3.10 In contrast, the soil in the western portion of the District is generally clayey or a clayey loam, providing agricultural land quality usually of Grade 3, with significant areas of Grade 2. This higher quality land, much of it in a flat or gently undulating plateau landscape has given rise to extensive areas of arable land, which is not judged as of such high scenic quality as the coastal or river landscapes, thus attracting fewer visitors.

⁵ Environment Agency, 2009: East Suffolk Catchment Flood Management Plan Summary Report

3.3.11 **Key issues include:** Water abstraction for agriculture resulting in diminished fresh water flow from rivers in spring and summer and thus increased saline concentrations in estuaries; increased development resulting in increased water demand, which could reduce groundwater supplies for agricultural irrigation and impact on the natural environment; wind blow on light soils causing erosion; intensive cropping and run-off from arable land and areas used for outdoor pigs; loss of grazing by traditional livestock in areas such as heaths and marshland resulting in invasion of inappropriate species or reduced species diversity, and through conversion to arable in the river valleys, and thus changes to the landscape and ecological character.

Landscape character

3.3.12 At a national level, the landscape character of the Suffolk Coastal District falls into two National Character Areas (NCAs) as defined on the English Nature/English Heritage National Character Area map. These two NCAs are the Suffolk Coast and Heaths and South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands NCAs and are shown within **Figure 4**.

3.3.13 **Suffolk Coast and Heaths:** this NCA has a distinctive topography and land cover forming free draining and easily worked acidic sands and gravels. Much of the area is a largely unspoilt mosaic of estuaries, salt marsh, grazing marsh, reed bed, river valleys, arable, heath and woodland with a strong coastal influence. The NCA encompasses the eastern portion of the District.

3.3.14 **South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands:** this is a chalky boulder clay plateau with a slightly undulating topography, generally flat but more varied along valley sides. There is a strong contrast between the small-scale wooded valleys which fringe the Suffolk Coast and Heaths area, and the open, arable plateau. There is a mix of remnant ancient countryside, early co-axial field patterns and large modern fields devoid of hedges and trees. The area is almost entirely arable, except for pasture in river valleys, remnant parkland, commons and greens. This NCA encompasses much of Suffolk Coastal District to the west of the A12.

3.3.15 Within this national context, a landscape character assessment has been carried out at the county level in Suffolk. This more detailed local landscape character assessment was not available at the time of the development of the HGGIS. Thirteen landscape character types from this assessment are identified in the northern part of the district, the key characteristics of which are summarised below and shown on **Figure 5**. Landscape character provides a tool for identifying the distinctive and characteristic features to conserve or enhance as part of green infrastructure improvement, and is particularly valuable in guiding landscape scale projects.

3.3.16 **Rolling Estate Claylands:** These are valley side landscapes on clay loam soils with a mosaic of landcover of parklands, fragmented woodland, winding hedged and occasionally sunken lanes. The field pattern is organic with occasional areas of more rectilinear planned fields. This landscape type is represented along the middle reaches of the rivers Deben, Alde and Yox.

3.3.17 **Rolling Estate Sandlands:** This type can be found in the study area around Wenhaston and Blackheath along the northern edge of the district. This landscape occurs on sloping or rolling river terraces and coastal slopes with sandy and free draining soils. It is a complex and intimate landscape of heathland, parklands, occasional semi-natural or wet woodlands, tree belts and plantations. The field pattern includes tree belts and straight hedges. Buildings in the eastern parts of this landscape are 19thC red brick buildings with black glazed pan tiles.

3.3.18 **Rolling Valley Claylands:** this landscape type is extensively represented in the study area in the upper reaches of the Deben, Alde, Yox and Blyth. It is a landscape of gently sloping valleys with occasional steeper slopes. The fields are often smaller than on the surrounding plateaux. Influenced by landscape parks with a few large greens or commons and ancient woodland on the upper valley sides. These valleys are locally the focus of settlement.

3.3.19 **Valley meadowlands:** these are narrow valley bottom landscapes. The characteristic landcover consists of cattle-grazed grassland, divided by a network of wet ditches with

occasional, small reedbeds, carr woodland and plantations of poplar. Occasional fields are converted to arable production.

- 3.3.20 **Valley meadows and fens:** These landscape types are found in the middle reaches of the River Blythe (between Heveningham almost as far as Blythburgh) and the River Yox (from Sibton Abbey down to Middleton). They are flat, narrow, valley bottoms creating ancient meres and important fen sites. The landcover consists of small grassland fields, with the drier fields now used for arable production and is part of a wider estate landscape with infrequent woodlands, scrub encroachment, tree planting and horse paddocks. Settlement is sparse except for occasional farmsteads.
- 3.3.21 **Plateau estate farmlands:** This landscape type is found in only a small part of the study area between the middle reaches of the Deben and the Alde, north east of Wickham Market. It is a flat landscape of large regular fields with small woodlands on light soils. The landcover includes a network of tree belts and coverts with large areas of enclosed former heathland, parkland, clustered villages and a scattering of farmsteads.
- 3.3.22 **Ancient estate claylands:** This landscape type occurs over a large part of the study area between the river valleys. It is a gently rolling heavy clay plateau with ancient semi-natural woodlands and parklands, with straight field boundaries where the estate influence is strongest. The landcover includes enclosed former greens and commons. Settlement traditionally takes the form of villages, with dispersed hamlets and farmsteads, timber framed buildings and distinctive estate cottages.
- 3.3.23 **Coastal dunes and shingle ridges:** These are found in one small area of the study area between Dunwich and Walberswick on the coast. This landscape type consists of flat or gently rolling landform of sand or shingle with low, fragile vegetation. Any built structures stand out in these open landscapes. Intensive tourist activity is found close to Walberswick and Dunwich.
- 3.3.24 **Coastal levels:** These landscapes appear in the lower reaches of the River Blythe and Minsmere levels. They are flat coastal grazing lands reclaimed from saltmarsh, behind sea and river walls, forming important wildlife areas. The traditional agriculture is one of cattle grazed wet grassland but arable production has become widespread; this landcover is supplemented by small plantations and carr woodlands. Settlement is rare except at the fringes.
- 3.3.25 **Estate sandlands:** this landscape type forms a large percentage of the eastern part of the study area. It is a flat or very gently rolling area of free-draining soils, with extensive areas of heathland or acid grassland. The field pattern is strongly geometric, with large blocks of commercial forestry, 'pine lines', tree belts or plantations. Buildings are typically brick with pantiled roofs. Much of this landscape type is designated, either for its ecological or scenic quality.
- 3.3.26 **Open coastal fens:** this landscape type occurs in one location on the coast, and forms a substantial part of the Suffolk Coast National Nature Reserve (NNR) including Dingle Marsh, the largest reedbed in England. This is a flat landscape that supports wet grazing marsh and reedbeds with a fringe of wet woodland on the inland side. It is a landscape largely managed for wildlife conservation.
- 3.3.27 **Plateau claylands:** These are extensive plateau landscapes in the west of the study area with a very gently undulating or flat landform with heavy clay soils dissected by small streams. The field pattern includes hedgerows of hawthorn, blackthorn and elm, with oak and ash hedgerow trees. Extensive area of hedgerow loss has given rise to "arable prairies". There is almost no woodland, except small copses in the villages and around farmsteads. Most characteristically, large or former large greens, such as Saxtead Green, can be found in association with the villages. Settlement is dispersed, with a mix of villages and scattered farmsteads and hamlets. There is a rich stock of vernacular buildings, but large modern agricultural buildings are a recurrent feature.
- 3.3.28 **Key issues include:** Low-lying, level landscapes at the coast are particularly sensitive to intrusion by large-scale development e.g. at the fringes of urban areas. Access is constrained by the river and estuary patterns. Sea-level rise and climate change could impact on landscape management and access. To the west of A12 the agricultural plateau landscape is vulnerable to

intrusion from large-scale agricultural buildings. There is a need to maintain and strengthen local distinctiveness where this is under pressure from standardised housing, retail or commercial development, or from suburbanisation (subdivision of fields, erection of buildings, use as pony paddocks and extended gardens). More use of public transport, cycleways and pedestrian access is also needed.

Designated wildlife sites and landscapes

- 3.3.29 There are a number of different conservation designations providing legal protection to the most ecological rich terrestrial and coastal and estuarine areas within the Suffolk Coastal District area. These identify, within a specified area, the important species and/or habitats, and set out the condition in which they should be maintained. The Suffolk Coastal District area, and in particular the eastern portion of the District, contains some of the most important habitats in the UK, notably for over-wintering birds. Designated sites are shown at **Figure 6**. All international sites are also Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
- 3.3.30 Areas rich in ecological diversity form one of the core resources of green infrastructure, and are valuable not just for their wildlife value, but also for the role they play in providing access to nature for people. The designated landscapes provide accessible greenspace for countryside activities such as walking, cycling, riding and other forms of casual outdoor recreation for both residents and visitors attracted by the scenic quality of the landscape.
- 3.3.31 **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB):** The Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB is a continuation of the designation to the south in the HGGIS area. It is designated for its scenic beauty. The AONB consists of a mosaic of different habitats: farmland; heathland; ancient woodland; commercial forestry; reed beds; estuaries; grazing marsh; small towns and villages; low, crumbling cliffs and shingle beaches - a rich mixture of unique and vulnerable lowland landscapes, many of which are under pressure of change.
- 3.3.32 **Special Landscape Areas (SLAs):** these are non-statutory landscape designations that, within Suffolk, cover the undeveloped parts of the Suffolk river valleys, including the Rivers Deben, Alde, Yox and Blyth. SLAs are landscapes designated for their scenic value, but that are not of as high quality as that found in the AONBs.
- 3.3.33 **Special Areas of Conservation (SAC):** Special Areas of Conservation are sites that have been given special protection under the European Union's Habitats Directive. They provide increased protection for rare, endangered or threatened flora and fauna, other than birds. Many of these sites are also recognised as Ramsar sites, designated for their internationally important wetlands including their fowl populations. The study area includes a large part of the Minsmere to Walberswick Heaths and Marshes SAC (designated for the mixed sand and shingle strandline, of which it is the best example of this type and for its lowland European dry heaths).
- 3.3.34 **Special Protection Areas (SPA):** Special Protection Areas are designated under the European Union's Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds. The Special Protection Area in this northern part of the Suffolk Coastal District area is the Minsmere to Walberswick SPA. This comprises two large marshes, the tidal Blyth estuary and associated habitats, and contains a complex mosaic of marsh with dykes, reedbeds, mud-flats, lagoons, shingle, woodland and areas of lowland heath. There are nationally important numbers of breeding and wintering birds, including breeding Bittern and Marsh Harrier, breeding waders (*e.g.* Avocets), heathland birds, and Little Tern.
- 3.3.35 **Ramsar sites:** Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention. Sites are selected for their importance to waterbirds and consequently many Ramsar sites are also Special Protection Areas (SPAs) classified under the Birds Directive. The Suffolk Coastal site contains a complex mosaic of habitats, and supports the largest continuous stand of reed in England and Wales. The combination of habitats creates an exceptional area of scientific interest⁶.

⁶ <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/>

3.3.36 **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI):** Sites of Special Scientific Interest are the UK's finest wildlife and geological sites and support our most characteristic, rare and endangered species, habitats and geological features. The one SSSI in this northern part of Suffolk Coastal District area is the Minsmere to Walberswick heaths and marshes, much of which also has international protection – large wetlands, gorse and heather-clad heathlands and shingle beaches.

3.3.37 **National Nature Reserves (NNR):** National Nature Reserves are usually chosen because they represent the best example of a particular wildlife habitat and, as the name suggests, are consequently of national importance. Most National Nature Reserves are accessible to the public. Those in the Suffolk Coast NNR, within the study area, comprise three reserves: Walberswick, Hen Reedbed and Dingle Marshes. Walberswick provides a variety of habitats including reedbed, hay meadows, grazing marshes and woodlands, with wildlife including otters, deer, and natterjack toads. Bird species include bitterns, marsh harriers, woodlarks and nightjars. There are also hundreds of species of butterflies and moths. Hen Reedbed is a blend of reedbeds, fens, dykes and pools that provides habitat for bitterns and marsh harriers, otters and water voles. Dingle Marshes attracts avocets, white-fronted geese, lapwings and redshanks, marsh harrier and bittern.

Biodiversity Action Plan

3.3.38 The Biodiversity Action Plan for Suffolk details the set priorities for nationally and locally important habitats and wildlife. The Plan identifies species that are disturbance-sensitive and which present a serious possible conflict between biodiversity and recreational need. Priority Biodiversity Action Plan habitats within the extended Suffolk Coastal District area have been mapped and are shown at **Figure 7**. The northern portion of the District encompasses significant areas of priority Biodiversity Action Plan habitats, and includes coastal habitats such as mud-flats at Blythburgh, reedbeds such as Dingle Marsh, grazing marsh, saline lagoons as well as ancient woodland and lowland heathland, such as that at Dunwich Heath.

3.3.39 **Key issues:** Many species are sensitive to disturbance; certain recreational activities, such as dog walking may cause particular harm to fauna and require access to be managed through redirection of routes or reinforcing of the existing ones. The provision of ANG within or close to new development will have a particularly important role to play in redirecting some activities away from sensitive habitats. Other potential pressures include small-scale development pressure and fragmentation of habitats and migration routes due to roads and railways.

Historic landscape

3.3.40 The '*Historic Landscape Characterisation in Eastern England project 1998/99*⁷, identified fourteen broad historic landscape types across Suffolk, defined through the historical period of origin and the historic land use. Most of these historic landscape character types have been identified in the extended Suffolk Coastal District area. These are shown at **Figure 8**.

3.3.41 The western portion of the District is dominated by areas of pre-C18th enclosure (lands that was enclosed for agriculture before 1700). Throughout the District, much of these earlier types of landscape have been damaged due to C20th post-war agricultural practice, generally through hedge removal, as a result of which more open landscapes have been created.

3.3.42 Where still existing, this enclosed landscape is broken up by tracts of meadow or managed wetlands that follow the river valleys and, in the vicinity of Framlingham, by significant areas of post 1950 agricultural landscape. There are also a number of post-medieval parks, particularly along the line of the A12. These include Heveningham Hall, Glemham Hall and Henham Park. Small areas of woodland and horticultural crops can also be found.

3.3.43 Relevant designated historic sites and features are mapped at **Figure 9**, and, in addition to the registered parks and gardens mentioned above, include eighteen Conservation Areas, many Scheduled Ancient Monuments and listed buildings (listed buildings are too numerous to show

⁷ See <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/Environment/Archaeology/LandscapeProjects/>

on figure 9). These sites all provide potential destinations or features in the landscape for trails and links.

- 3.3.44 **Key issues include:** Maintaining the integrated management of the historic and natural environment including hedges and woodlands that are important nature conservation and cultural features; recognition and enhancement of the contribution of the historic environment to local character and sense of place.

3.4 Accessible natural greenspace (ANG)

- 3.4.1 The concept of Accessible Natural Greenspace (ANG) was developed by English Nature (now Natural England) in 2003 in their publication 'Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards in towns and cities'⁸. The concept was adapted by the Town and Country Planning Association in their publication 'Biodiversity by Design'⁹ as one of the ways of delivering green infrastructure to communities.

- 3.4.2 ANG plays a vital role in improving quality of life by providing access to informal recreation in a natural setting, thereby promoting healthy living and a sense of place. ANG also enables people to experience wildlife close to their homes and have everyday contact with nature; provides an educational resource; helps to ensure that urban areas function ecologically and that greenspace and wildlife is protected; and plays an important role in reducing pressure on more sensitive wildlife sites by providing an alternative attraction. Natural England believes that the provision of natural areas should be part of a balanced policy of greenspace provision.

- 3.4.3 Given its importance, it is thus essential that ANG provision in the extended Suffolk Coastal District area be addressed in the framework for future delivery of high quality green infrastructure over the next 20 years. Such information can then be used, together with the other baseline analysis, to suggest opportunities to enhance ANG provision and to address any existing or future deficiencies. Delivery of new or enhanced ANG in the more rural areas of Suffolk Coastal District is likely to need a different approach from that in the more urban areas of the Haven Gateway to the south.

- 3.4.4 A number of definitions exist to describe what ANG actually is. For the purposes of the HGGIS, the Steering Group of that project agreed that the following test should be applied to areas of open space within the sub-region. To be considered as ANG, sites must comply with each of the following parameters:

- be 2ha or greater in size. [Anything under 2ha in size was not to be included, as these sites would not have a significant impact at the strategic scale. However, consideration was to be given to strategic corridors created by the amalgamation of a number of sites each of less than 2ha in size]
- have a public right of access that is not subject to admittance, membership or subscription fees, and a security that such access will remain in perpetuity
- have an access network that allows public infiltration across a substantial part of the site
- be positively managed for public access (as appropriate to the site)

- 3.4.5 The potential ANG sites must also comply with one or both of the following:

- have a natural or semi-natural land covering, e.g. a woodland or meadow
- be a park or other green space, with a significant part thereof managed for wildlife

- 3.4.6 These parameters are adopted within this study in order to identify existing ANG in the extended portion of the Suffolk Coastal District Green Infrastructure Strategy.

- 3.4.7 The identification of existing and potential ANG was undertaken by the consultants and Suffolk Coastal District Council, in discussion with county and district officers, and other stakeholders. The existing ANG sites are shown at **Figure 10**. Those over 2 has include:

⁸ 'Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards in towns and cities' English Nature (2003)

⁹ 'Biodiversity by Design: A guide for sustainable communities' Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), London, 2004

- Walberswick Common
- Dunwich Forest
- Westleton Heath
- Dunwich Heath
- Westleton Walks
- Pound Farm, a Woodland Trust site that was arable farmland until 1990, but has since been planted with more than 60,000 trees, resulting in a new native woodland, now useable by local people.

3.4.8 A number of different types of ANG have been identified including: country parks; urban parks with areas managed for wildlife; nature reserves; forests and woodlands; commons, village greens and millennium greens; and open access land (under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000), e.g. heaths.

3.5 Access: Strategic links and promoted routes

3.5.1 The extended Suffolk Coastal District area is criss-crossed with a network of Public Rights of Way (PRoW), including extensive footpaths, intermittent byways and bridleways, and cycle routes (see **Figure 11**). These include sections of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Path, sections of the National Cycle Network, and other local Sustrans' routes. Some coastal trails are at risk of erosion from the sea and may need to be realigned. More routes are also needed to connect existing and proposed development with existing and potential greenspace.

3.5.2 This northern part of the district has two principle roads, one of which, the A12, follows a line south-west to north-east from just north of Saxmundham to the district boundary north of the river Blyth. This provides access down to Ipswich and Colchester to the south and Lowestoft in the north. The only other roads of any size are the A1120 that runs from Yoxford south-west to Earl Soham, substantially along the route of a Roman road, and the A144 that runs north-west from the A12 up to Halesworth.

3.5.3 Rail services to this northern part of the district are provided by the east coast line between Ipswich and Lowestoft, which stops at Darsham and then Halesworth, at hourly intervals in peak times from December 2010. This branch line is vital in enhancing the connectivity of the walking/cycling routes and the sustainability of the overall transport system. It is promoted for its tourism value as well as providing vital commuting services for residents.

3.5.4 The National Cycle Route (NCR) 1 runs from just west of Wickham Market to Framlingham and thence north to Halesworth. NCR 1 links with Regional Cycle Route 42 through Bramfield and Blackheath to the coast at Dunwich, and a link to the station at Darsham. Regional Cycle Route 42 continues south from Dunwich to link into the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB in the Haven Gateway area. Further west, Regional Cycle Route 41 connects NCR1, via Bruisyard and Rendham, with Regional Route 42 at Snape, outside the study area.

3.5.5 There is a strong existing network of PRoW, especially around Framlingham, Peasenhall, Westleton, and Blythburgh. Of the promoted walking routes, several make a significant contribution to the connectivity of the rural environment including **The Suffolk Coast Path** that starts down in Felixtowe, continues into the study area close to Minsmere and runs behind the marshes, through Dunwich and up to Walberswick and Southwold. **The Sandlings Walk** is a 60mile route that runs between the eastern fringes of Ipswich, within the Haven Gateway, up to Southwold, linking the remaining fragments of Sandlings Heath slightly inland from the coast. The **East Suffolk Railway Line** has a series of promoted walks of which 'The Garden of Suffolk Walk' and the Yox/Blyth Walks are within the study area.

3.5.6 **Open Access Land** (of which there is a lot in the Sandlings between the coast and the B1125) has promoted routes through it. The land itself, although subject to certain limitations, allows members of the public to wander at will for most recreational activities such as walking running, bird watching and sightseeing. Restrictions include control on dogs during the nesting season, no access by horses or bicycles or mechanical vehicles.

- 3.5.7 There are a range of additional walks that are promoted locally including at Blythburgh, the Newdelights, Lumphall and Toby's Walks; walks at Westleton Heath and Westleton Walks; at Walberswick, Tinkers Walks, East Sheep Walk and Walberswick Common, and Dunwich Heath.
- 3.5.8 The previous Government had, in recent years, set out a vision of the right to walk along the length of the English coast within a wildlife and landscape corridor that would offer enjoyment, understanding of the natural environment and a high quality experience, and which is managed sustainably in the context of a changing coastline. This coast path will be possible because of the Marine and Coast Access Act 2009. When it is complete, people will for the first time have the right to walk around the whole of England's open coast.
- 3.5.9 **Key issues:** managing access is going to be critical to the success of any future strategy; the marshy coastlines and estuaries can be a barrier to movement; flood risk and its effect on maintenance of river bank walks may require new PRoW routes to be found inland in some areas; connectivity between market towns and villages and greenspace needs to be improved; conflict between recreation and nature conservation (especially along the sensitive coastal areas), can arise; limited public transport in rural hinterland can inhibit sustainable access.

3.6 Strategic growth and deprivation

- 3.6.1 Suffolk Coastal District Council's strategy for housing growth is set out in its Local Development Framework document Interim Core Strategy and Development Management Policies from June 2010¹⁰, and in particular Objective 2 – Housing Growth and Strategic Policy SP2. The Core Strategy currently makes provision for 7,660 new homes across the District in the period 2009 to 2026, but the focus for growth will be the major centres – notably east of Ipswich and to a lesser extent the Felixstowe peninsula, both of which contain strategic employment sites of regional and national significance, and are outside the Extended Study Area.
- 3.6.2 Some growth will also occur in the market towns, however, “at levels appropriate to the size of the town or village, function, character and environmental capacity.” Development in villages will be “limited solely to that required to meet local needs, with more focussed on those communities that provide a range of services”. The Secretary of State's letter of intent to revoke the Regional Spatial Strategy remains a material consideration that could impact on the number of new homes that a future revision of the Core Strategy ultimately makes provision for.
- 3.6.3 In terms of deprivation, the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) shows that levels of deprivation across Suffolk are generally low with large areas falling within the least deprived 20% or 40% in England. IMD is a summary measure of a range of factors including income, employment, health, education, crime, barriers to services and the living environment. Within the study area, **Figure 12** shows that in terms of rankings, half the spatial research areas (known as Super Output Area (SOA)) fall within the middle measure, but with the area around Framlingham being among the least deprived and the geographical areas to the north and south-west being the next best, along with the area incorporating Dunwich and Westleton. In terms of priority for provision for greenspace, therefore, a key factor will be the greater the deprivation of an area.

3.7 Assessment of Accessible Natural Greenspace (ANG) provision

- 3.7.1 Access to a range of sizes and types of ANG is recognised as being important in order to satisfy people's various recreational needs and aspirations. ANG can be located at varying distances from where people live, but to achieve a good quality of life, people should have easy access to small neighbourhood sites that they might walk to for daily activities such as dog walking or play, with larger scale sites available (such as country parks) for longer walks, picnics, etc. It is accepted that people would be prepared to travel longer distances to use the larger, better-equipped facilities.

¹⁰ Local Development Framework document Interim Core Strategy and Development Management Policies, Development Plan Document, Interim Planning Policy; Suffolk Coastal District Council, June 2010,

ANG Standards

- 3.7.2 In order to analyse ANG provision in terms of size and function, assess the population it serves, and identify areas of ANG deficiency, a set of standards was promoted by Natural England (as published in the document 'A Space for Nature', 1996), and in turn developed by the Town and Country Planning Association ('Biodiversity by Design: A Guide for Sustainable Communities', 2004) and others (e.g. the Woodland Trust). These standards promote the size of ANG that should be available to people within a given distance of their home.
- 3.7.3 For the purposes of analysing ANG within the Haven Gateway, the following set of standards was used and, again, these have been adopted for the extended Suffolk Coastal District Green Infrastructure Strategy. The 60ha standard replaces the 100ha standard at the sub-regional level in order to capture important but smaller sites (in this case the Woodland Trust Pound Farm site) that would otherwise be filtered out of the search, and which form a critical resource within a rural area.
- 3.7.4 People should have access to:
- 2ha+ of ANG within 300m of home – this has been termed the Neighbourhood Level
 - 20ha+ of ANG within 1.2km of home – the District Level
 - 60ha+ of ANG within 3.2km of home – the Sub-regional Level
 - 500ha+ of ANG within 10km of home – the Regional Level

ANG deficiency

- 3.7.5 In order to identify which areas of the extended Suffolk Coastal District area are deficient in ANG at each of the above four levels (Neighbourhood to Regional), appropriately sized catchment areas were mapped around each of the agreed ANG sites. Thus, a
- catchment of 300m was mapped around all sites of 2ha+ (see **Figure 13**)
 - catchment of 1.2 km was mapped around all sites of 20ha+ (see **Figure 14**)
 - catchment of 3.2 km was mapped around all sites of 60ha+ (see **Figure 15**)
 - catchment of 10km was mapped around all sites of 500ha+ (see **Figure 16**)
- 3.7.6 The maps that have been generated have been taken from a study carried out by Natural England early in 2010, apart from the one for Sub Regional 60ha+ sites.¹¹ The resultant maps clearly show which settlements are within the catchment of an individual ANG site. For each Level, those people who live outside of a catchment could thus be considered to be deficient in terms of access to that scale of ANG.
- 3.7.7 At the Neighbourhood level, **Figure 13**, large areas away from the coastal sites do not have provision of a site greater than 2 ha within 300m of home. This appears to be the case even in Framlingham, which is the main market town in the area, although there are a series of smaller linked sites at the centre of the town that arguably perform the function of a Neighbourhood level site. Thus most residents away from the coast are deficient at the neighbourhood level of ANG. This includes Halesworth just over the district border in Waveney, and Saxmundham in the HGGIS area.
- 3.7.8 At the District level, **Figure 14**, around 20-25% of the study area has ANG coverage, due to the large areas of ANG at the coast between Minsmere and Walberswick, and also due to the Pound Farm site east of Framlingham, and Carlton Meres Country Park to the northwest of Saxmundham. However, Framlingham is again deficient at this level.
- 3.7.9 At the sub-regional level, shown in **Figure 15**, coverage of ANG is about 20-25% of the study area. Only 60ha sites and above are considered within this level, but these give a catchment of 3.2km. This brings part of Framlingham within the catchment of Pound Wood site, managed by

¹¹ Analysis of Accessible Natural Greenspace Provision for Suffolk, Natural England (2010)

the woodland Trust, but Saxmundham and Halesworth, on the edge of the study area, are deficient at this level.

- 3.7.10 **Figure 16** identifies areas that are deficient in access to Regional Level ANG sites (sites of 500ha or more). Again the buffer areas hug the coast around the main large sites at Dunwich Heath, Dunwich Wood, Walberswick Common and Westleton Heath, leaving the market town of Framlingham deficient, along with Halesworth and Saxmundham outside the study area.

3.8 Stakeholder consultation

- 3.8.1 This extended green infrastructure strategy (along with the HGGIS) is intended to inform the preparation of the Suffolk Coastal District Development Plan documents as currently envisaged in Policy ENV1 of the RSS. It has been important, therefore to ensure that key stakeholders have been engaged with the process of evidence gathering and preparation of the strategy.
- 3.8.2 The key consultation event consisted of a facilitated half day workshop with 17 No. attendees representing 12 No. organisations. The workshop provided an opportunity to present the approach to the study, summarise the existing resource and ANG deficiencies, and identify any gaps or errors in the database, and to seek support for the principles and objectives informing the strategy that have been adapted from the HGGIS strategy.
- 3.8.3 Small facilitated break out groups then had an opportunity to discuss the draft vision plan for the extended study area and identify the key opportunities for delivery or enhancement of the vision.
- 3.8.4 Full details of the stakeholder consultation and attendees are included at **Appendix 4**.

3.9 Green Infrastructure principles

- 3.9.1 On completion of the analysis of the baseline data for the HGGIS, a set of principles were developed to guide future green infrastructure provision (including location, form, resources and linkages) in terms of:
- access (principles to promote, enhance and create greenways, corridors and linkages, including Public Rights of Way (PRoW), with a view to developing and delivering multi-purpose sites) for different users including walkers, cyclists and equestrians
 - biodiversity (principles to protect, enhance, create, mitigate and monitor biodiversity resources).
 - landscape (principles to safeguard protected landscapes and landscape character types, promote landscape distinctiveness and explore landscape capacity)
 - historic environment (principles to understand, protect, manage and enhance historic resources)
- 3.9.2 These principles have been adopted for the extended Suffolk Coastal District Green Infrastructure Strategy (with minor amendments where necessary to ensure they remain relevant to the revised area) and will guide the provision and management of a spectrum of greenspace, from ANG (managed primarily for people) to greenspace managed primarily for wildlife, as well as other green infrastructure resources. The promotion/enhancement of existing green infrastructure and the creation of new/alternative ANG and other green infrastructure will offset the direct and indirect effects of new development in this part of the district, where this is appropriate.
- 3.9.3 The principles are detailed at **Section 2**.

3.10 Visioning

- 3.10.1 Following the approach used for the preparation of the HGGIS, the results of the desktop analysis, consultation feedback, discussions with stakeholders and the set of principles, were appraised in order to identify opportunities for the promotion, enhancement or creation of existing and new ANG and other green infrastructure, having due regard to:
- opportunities to reduce existing and prevent future ANG deprivation

- opportunities to create green links or enhance corridors, including Public Rights of Way (PRoW), between existing or future green infrastructure resources
- opportunities to secure sites with ANG potential and other green infrastructure, or the linkages and corridors between them
- opportunities to provide alternative resources to relieve pressure on sensitive wildlife and historic sites.
- opportunities to create green infrastructure resources primarily for nature to offset indirect effects of new development
- opportunities to create new strategic links, including PRoW, particularly to and between the principal areas of population, key green infrastructure and the countryside
- opportunities to promote historical resources and landscape distinctiveness and strengthen weak landscape character

3.10.2 These criteria were used to guide the identification of opportunities for the extended Suffolk Coastal District area. The various opportunities proposed are detailed in the schedule at **Section 4**.

3.11 Strategy

3.11.1 A Green Infrastructure Concept Map was developed to provide a framework for future green infrastructure provision in the Suffolk Coastal District area (see **Figure 17**). The Concept Map derives from that produced for the HGGIS, but has been adapted to suit this more rural situation. It includes:

- key existing ANG
- existing PRoW
- strategic existing and potential promoted walks and cycle routes
- potential for river corridor enhancement projects
- potential site-based and area wide projects

3.11.2 The opportunities identified during the stakeholder exercise were mapped and referenced on the Opportunities Map (see **Figure 18**). This map identifies potential opportunities and indicative vision projects across the study area at the current time. This list of projects will need to be amended over time as new opportunities arise and projects are completed. The schedule of projects identifies the nature of the project and potential lead organisations, and will eventually also identify the indicative cost of the project, and its priority as judged against criteria related to the over-arching principles and the benefits of green infrastructure to the sub-region.

3.11.3 The Opportunities Map identifies several main types of opportunity for accessible and non-accessible green infrastructure:

- potential river corridor projects
- potential access projects, including existing walks, campsite and railway based walks with potential for further promotion.
- potential site-based projects
- potential area-based initiatives

3.11.4 The Opportunities Map is accompanied by a Schedule of Opportunities (**Figure 19**). Here, each potential project will eventually be tabulated together with the following information:

- project type (e.g. ANG, river enhancement project)
- project title
- potential partners (with the lead partner identified, when known)

- indicative cost of the project
- notes regarding project attributes, i.e. whether it reduces ANG deficiency, improves strategic access links, and whether it is located within a growth node
- ability to contribute to the delivery of the Green Infrastructure Plan
- notes relating to the project, e.g. brief description, possible funding sources

3.11.5 A number of the key projects identified on the Opportunities Map are discussed in more depth in the next section.

4 The Green Infrastructure Plan

4.1.1 The results of the workshop exercise with key stakeholders are presented on the Opportunities Map, **Figure 18**, and detailed on the accompanying Schedule of Opportunities, **Figure 19**. All project numbers referred to in the text below also relate to these figures. In addition, the projects identified in the HGGIS study within the Suffolk Coastal area are reproduced here so that a complete picture for the district can be seen. The HGGIS Opportunities map and Schedule are not reproduced. HGGIS projects are referred to as **HGGIS Project 1**, **HGGIS Project 2** etc. to distinguish them from the project opportunities identified in this current study.

4.1.2 The following paragraphs provide an overview as to how existing and future green infrastructure provision and opportunities within Suffolk Coastal District area relate to:

- significant areas of ANG
- key potential access corridors including the river corridors where appropriate
- green infrastructure in and around the key market towns and villages

The vision for ANG

4.1.3 The analysis demonstrates that there is currently one Regional Level ANG (500ha+) site within the extended Suffolk Coastal District area: the Forestry Commission woods at Dunwich Forest. Dunwich Forest is a mixture of coniferous and broadleaved woodland and is accessible from Dunwich village. The forest links into some high quality conservation areas of marshland and wetland providing an excellent resource for walkers. North Dunwich Forest has a circular 4 mile walk around it.

4.1.4 This site and the two regional ANG sites in the Haven Gateway segment of Suffolk Coastal i.e. Rendlesham and Tunstall Forests, provide cover at a regional scale of over half the extended study area. Residents and visitors in the west of this part of the district do not have access to ANG over 500ha. The visioning process has identified a number of potential projects that could address, provide new, or enhance existing ANG at all levels, and thus play a role in alleviating some of the identified deficiencies with the extended Suffolk Coastal District area. Such projects are considered below.

Regional level opportunities in Suffolk Coastal District

Rendlesham and Tunstall Forests

4.1.5 Rendlesham and Tunstall forests, within the HGGIS part of Suffolk Coastal, are capable of accommodating significant numbers of visitors if additional facilities are provided. A new Visitor Centre at Tangham (**HGGIS Project 14**) with associated car parking would be required as would additional trails and activity areas (e.g. Project 11 – completion of a corridor linking Snape and Melton via the woods). Another advantage of these woodlands is their location adjacent to but inland from such sensitive coastal locations as Orford, Shingle Street and the Deben Estuary. By intercepting visitors and traffic accessing the coast via the A12, it would be possible to create a hub at Tangham whereby visitors could leave their cars and visit the more sensitive coastal sites by more sustainable, less intrusive means of public transport. The Forestry Commission has recently prepared a Recreation Strategy for the Rendlesham, Tunstall and Dunwich forests; this anticipates increasing numbers of visitors and recognises the forests' role within the context of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty as a recreation hub. Therefore, it would seem expedient to give priority to extending the potential of the visitor facilities, particularly in Rendlesham and Tunstall. A further, far-reaching initiative is proposed to 're-wild' the Sandling conifer plantations and the adjacent areas thus increasing the biodiversity interest of the forests (Project 13) by improving links to the surrounding heathland and farmland.

4.1.6 The Forestry Commission has recently prepared a Recreation Strategy for the Rendlesham, Tunstall and Dunwich forests; this anticipates increasing numbers of visitors and recognises the forests' role within the context of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural

Beauty as a recreation hub. A long-held aspiration is the 're-wilding' of the Sandling conifer plantations and the adjacent areas thus increasing the biodiversity interest of the forests by improving links to the surrounding heathland and farmland.

- 4.1.7 Dunwich Forest is currently undergoing a process of 'rewilding' (**Project 3**) with a long-term plan to recreate and regenerate the natural landscape that existed prior to the conifer plantations. The management of the forest is now a partnership between the Forestry Commission, Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT) and RSBP, with the more northerly area being managed by SWT and grazed by a herd of Dartmoor ponies. The heathland habitat to the south is being managed by the RSPB, an area that will increase as conifer crops are gradually harvested and areas of deciduous trees are allowed to revert to heather. Lowland heath is one of the rarest of all Britain's wildlife habitats and is vital to the survival of many rare species of birds, reptiles and butterflies.
- 4.1.8 Additionally, two long distance paths pass through the AONB close to the coast, the Suffolk Coast Path (**Project 1**) and Sandlings Walk (**Project 2**). The Suffolk Coast Path has been undergoing repair work as part of an extensive programme of improvement on the flood defences which the Environment Agency is carrying out. The vast majority of this work is taking place within the large reed bed between Walberswick and Dunwich. The Sandlings Walk enters the study area via Eastbridge and the Minsmere Levels, onto Dunwich Heath, through Dunwich and across Dunwich Forest, eventually crossing the Blythe into Southwold.
- 4.1.9 Perhaps the most important site, to the west of the study area is Pound Farm (**Project 29**). This forms a critical resource for Framlingham, which is deficient in all levels of ANG except the sub-regional level. This site is very popular with dog-walkers, but most users access the site by car. The opportunity exists to enhance the opportunities for access by foot, as well as for cyclists and riders from both Framlingham and Saxmundham, to enlarge the effective function of this site as ANG.

Potential river corridor enhancement projects

- 4.1.10 The study area is cut north-west to south-east by four strategic rivers - Deben, Orwell, Alde and Blythe - that drain from the clay plateau of mid-Suffolk to the coast in the east. **Project 14** seeks to provide enhancement to habitat, landscape or access in these river valleys, through promotion of appropriate landscape management approaches, and partnership between communities and, local government and government agencies.
- 4.1.11 Significant areas of grassland still occur in the river valleys and the landscape remains traditional and pastoral in character, contrasting with the broader arable landscape of the surrounding countryside. The valleys can be narrow in their upper reaches but typically widen into open coastal marshes. The river valleys are valued for their landscape quality, falling within either the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB or Suffolk County Council's Special Landscape Areas (SLAs).
- 4.1.12 Previously, the Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) programme allowed for the maintenance of key environmental features characteristic of this landscape. Now, Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) includes targets for a similar spatial area, and gives the opportunity to target enhancement of many of the same features. These features include nationally and internationally important areas of grazing marshes, wetland habitats, intertidal habitats and heathlands. Important areas of old meadows and pastures, wood pasture, wet woodlands, ancient semi-natural woodlands and arable species interest are also present. This area also retains significant archaeological features, as well as Grade 1 and 2* Historic Parks.
- 4.1.13 The Suffolk Coast, Heaths and River Valleys area is also recognised as a target area for access provision. There are significant opportunities to provide additional permissive routes to link and extend the existing Public Rights of Way network, provide links to coastal access routes and open access land and the provision of educational access. A recent announcement from the government confirms that changes to the scheme will focus its role on safeguarding the environment, so less money may be available for access to the countryside.

- 4.1.14 Local projects such as the Deben greenspace projects, **Project 20**, existing projects led by the community, can contribute to the overall objective of increasing accessible greenspace and countryside access within the river valleys.

Green infrastructure in the principle settlements, growth nodes and villages

Areas North and East of Ipswich

- 4.1.15 The outer perimeters of Ipswich are not well served by greenspace compared to the town centre, particularly to the north and east. Here, ANG deficiencies at the Regional, Sub-regional and District Levels are recorded. The creation of a green corridor around the north of the town (**HGGIS Project 59**), together with a new green bridge (**HGGIS Project 60**) to overcome the potential barrier afforded by the A14 (T) could significantly enhance access provision, intercept with the various existing and proposed pedestrian and cycle routes that radiate out from the town centre and link existing ANG.

- 4.1.16 To the east of Ipswich there are a number of opportunities to improve recreational access into/out of the town, linking with Kesgrave/Grange Farm, Martlesham, and out to Woodbridge, for instance, (e.g. **HGGIS Projects 49 and 53**). Such initiatives include exploration of opportunities to provide access along the Mill River Valley (linking Purdis Heath with the River Deben) (**HGGIS Project 38**), heathland enhancement schemes (e.g. **HGGIS Projects 51 and 57**), and the creation of a number of potential new ANG sites including the establishment of the country park on the restored Foxhall Landfill Site (**HGGIS Project 48**) and Walk Farm Open Space (**HGGIS Project 36**) immediately to the east of Adastral Park.

Felixstowe

- 4.1.17 Felixstowe benefits from its seafront but has very little ANG inland, and thus records ANG deprivation at the District and Regional Levels. It is hoped that a new green bridge (**HGGIS Project 43**) over the A14 (T) at Trimley would complete the creation of a strategic access route linking the Orwell and Deben estuaries. Other potential initiatives include a green corridor around the northern edge of the town (**HGGIS Project 40**), creating a new urban edge and improved access, and the extension of Trimley Marshes (**HGGIS Project 42**) with associated access improvements.

Framlingham

- 4.1.18 Framlingham is a market town in the northern part of Suffolk Coastal District. It provides a focal point for employment, shopping and community facilities and is also the local transport hub within the study area. As such it will take a proportion of any new proposed housing development in the district. Like the other rural towns in Suffolk Coastal District, Framlingham has an economy based on agriculture and tourism. It is an attractive town dominated by the Norman Castle, with the adjoining mere, managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust forming the main greenspace in the town centre. **Project 7** and **Project 19** identify the importance of the castle and mere as a combined green infrastructure resource for the town.

- 4.1.19 A significant 'brownfield' land opportunity at Station Road has been identified within the core strategy¹² that could provide a mixed use development. **Project 11** identifies the need to address current greenspace deficiencies (see **Section 3**) through linking prospective new dwellings to the delivery of new green infrastructure, through section 106 agreements.

- 4.1.20 Framlingham can be well accessed by long-distant cycleway, the National Cycle Route 1, which runs north-east and south-west through the town and connects it to the rest of Suffolk. It has a good network of PRow around the town but opportunities exist for enhancement through further promotion or enhancement of existing walks such as **Project 22**, The Brownsord Way. The Brownsord Way is a circular 20mile route around the town taking around 5-6 hours to walk altogether.

- 4.1.21 Better access is also needed to the nearest sub-regional green infrastructure site for Framlingham i.e. at the Woodland Trust site at Pound Wood to the east. An unsigned section of

¹² Core strategy and development management policies, DPD; SCDC (June 2010)

the Suffolk Cycle Route northern loop runs along the lanes to the north of the B1119 and a bridleway runs east from the town via North Green. **Project 9** proposes improving the links out from Famlingham to Pound Wood, which could take the form of actual new sections of route, surface and existing route enhancements, signage, interpretation or promotion.

Links to Saxmundham

- 4.1.22 Whilst Saxmundham is a small market town outside the study area, its proximity as a key retail, employment and transport hub ensures it provides a focus for local communities to the west of the A12 as well as the Haven Gateway area to the east. It has good road and rail links being close to the A12 and the East Suffolk rail route. The town has seen significant growth in recent years and still suffers from pockets of deprivation.
- 4.1.23 In terms of ANG, the town suffers from deficiencies at all levels. Opportunities exist on several remaining brownfield sites, such as the proposed closure of the Middle School, **Project 25**, which may through up the opportunity of greenspace to be delivered as part of the planning gain for the site. Opportunities also exist to develop green links beyond the Brook Farm and Church Hill development (**Project 15**).
- 4.1.24 To the west of the town, the A12 forms a substantial barrier to access to the existing PRoW network. **Project 26** seeks to improve the bridle way crossing to open up access into the quieter network beyond the A12. The East Suffolk Line Walks (**Project 31**) run through Saxmundham, the longest link, the Alde Valley Walk, coming up from Campsea Ashe station, and then running on up to Yoxford station through Rookery Park along the 'Garden of Suffolk Walk'. Further opportunities may exist for enhancements to additional links and signage to features of historic, environmental or cultural interest (**Project 30**) on this, and other segments of the route, as well as additional promotion at a local, sub-regional or regional scale.

Links to Halesworth

- 4.1.25 As part of the existing East Suffolk Railway Line walks, **Project 30**, proposes enhancing the signage and linkages of existing footpaths and bridleways in the Halesworth area in order to link into the study area. **Project 23** proposes enhancing promotion of the walks west from Halesworth to Chediston into the study area. These are walks that are already promoted by existing community groups. South-west from Halesworth, there is the potential to expand the ANG and green infrastructure along the river valley towards Walpole (**Project 12**) using prospective housing growth in the market town as leverage to pay

5 Steps to delivery and future action

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 The Suffolk Coastal District Council extended Green Infrastructure strategy is designed to complement the approach of the Haven Gateway Green Infrastructure Strategy, produced in 2008, in setting the framework for delivery of a network of high quality green space to 2021. The rural character of the extended study area, however, affects the approach, not only to the strategy itself, but also how that strategy can be made to happen on the ground.

5.1.2 This section sets out some recommendations from the consultant for 'making it happen' based on published or known success achieved elsewhere.

5.2 Governance

5.2.1 In order to sustain the momentum generated with key stakeholders to inform the development of the Green Infrastructure Strategy to date, it would be useful if a support structure is maintained in some way, to guide and inform delivery of the strategy. Some options are identified below.

Role of Stakeholder Group

5.2.2 The Stakeholder Group has formed a critical sounding board for both gathering of the evidence base for the strategy and development of the visioning and opportunities for enhancement. The opportunity exists to maintain the function of the Stakeholder Group, but with a changed role to ensure:

- monitoring of the overall delivery of the strategy
- identification of project clusters and strategic transformational projects amongst the local projects, and appraise these against the principles
- the setting of targets and outputs for the strategy, as appropriate e.g. hectares of land improved, kilometres of footpaths created or improved etc. and the monitoring of impacts of the priority projects e.g. the benefits in social, environmental and economic terms.
- coordination of project development and approach, consolidation of resources, fund-raising efforts and partnership working
- coordination of promotion and community engagement
- engagement is sought from the private sector
- buy-in with local authority members and stakeholder partners at a director or board level as appropriate.
- dissemination of best practice and feedback gathering among stakeholder groups and engaging the community in project development, skills development and promotion

5.2.3 It is suggested that co-ordination of the stakeholder group should be managed via the District Council, through provision of the chair of the group and a secretariat role. Meeting venues could be rotated among partners and meetings kept to once a quarter, to minimise the cost and disruption to any one organisation, with dedicated task and finish groups meeting around specific projects or actions as necessary between times.

5.3 Delivery through the planning system

5.3.1 The development of the extended SCDC Green Infrastructure Strategy sets the framework for delivery of greenspace across the district. This is just a starting point for delivery, however, and the task now is to get the vision and principles to be adopted into local policy within the emerging LDF and the detailed local green infrastructure framework plans adopted as supplementary planning documents, as appropriate. The aim should be to:

- incorporate SCDC Green Infrastructure Strategy principles into local development framework policy, including development control policies, site allocations, open space strategies, area action plans and site master plans

- produce green infrastructure guidance
 - investigate the value of a template for creation of guidance at a neighbourhood or parish level as part of the new agenda for 'Neighbourhood Planning' and the 'Big Society'.
 - ensure that any proposed local Planning Policy Guidance 17 study complements and supports the SCDC Green Infrastructure Strategy
- 5.3.2 It is important that the potential to enhance existing ANG and create new green spaces and links is carefully considered within the local development framework in relation to the siting of new development, particularly of housing. It is recognised that it is very difficult and costly to assemble and acquire land for open space. There are likely to be many competing calls on Section 106 or roof tariff funds but ANG at all levels is needed within the extended SCDC area. It should be part of the sustainability appraisal to determine whether potential new developments will safeguard and enhance existing green infrastructure or, conversely, have a negative impact. It is to be hoped that such appraisals would ensure that new development is able to create further opportunities thereby fulfilling the principles and vision set out at the beginning of this report.

5.4 **Neighbourhood planning**

- 5.4.1 The current government wishes to enable neighbourhoods to exert more influence in the planning system. They aim to create a means for people to formulate their own plans about what their area should look like in 5-20 years' time, through the idea of 'neighbourhood planning'. More detail about neighbourhood planning is intended through publication of the Localism Bill late in 2010.
- 5.4.2 It is understood that neighbourhood plans won't replace wider, local plans, but it is unclear how they will relate and how they will differ to existing parish plans and visual design statements, especially in rural areas.
- 5.4.3 Whatever the format of the new, community-based planning, it is essential that the Suffolk Coastal Green Infrastructure Strategy is incorporated and developed through the neighbourhood planning system.

Parish Plans

- 5.4.4 The Rural White Paper in 2000¹³, provided communities with the opportunity to transform their local environment, in the form of a parish plan, which communities of any size can produce. Parish plans are intended to be evolving documents, outlining how a community would like to develop over the next ten years, and usually include an action plan detailing how these developments can be achieved. They are intended to give everyone in a community the opportunity to influence the development of their surroundings. In July 2007 Defra published a report looking at the integration of parish plans into the wider system of local government. While recognising the work of volunteers in developing the plans, the report highlighted the failure of parish plans to be integrated into the local planning system.
- 5.4.5 In Suffolk, Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), works with local communities to develop village appraisals, parish plans etc. Currently 45% of Suffolk parishes have a village plan of some sort. These plans will be vital in providing a vehicle to engage local communities in green infrastructure planning at the community level and building grass roots support for strategic projects.

Village and town design statements

- 5.4.6 Village and town design statements set out clear and simple guidance for the design of development, based on the character of the locality, including landscape settings, greenspace, heritage and biodiversity. The documents are produced by the local community and can encourage community support for proposals. Design statements seek to influence the operation of the planning system, so that there is a better chance that new development is in harmony

¹³ Our countryside: the future – a fair deal for rural England; DEFRA (2000)

with its setting and makes a positive contribution to the immediate environment, including relevant green infrastructure assets such as woodland, hedgerows grasslands or wetland habitats. View www.naturalengland.org.uk

5.5 Funding

5.5.1 Whilst funding for delivery of new greenspace had made great advances in recent years, especially for projects in areas of growth, for less deprived neighbourhoods and for long-term maintenance of existing and new greenspace, funding remains a big issue, especially in the current economic climate. **Appendix 5** lists some existing sources of funding that can be accessed to help create new greenspace and also identifies guidance that suggests alternative models and mechanisms that can support ongoing greenspace management.

5.6 Project delivery

5.6.1 The strategy sets the framework for delivery to 2021 to link to the timescale for the current Regional Spatial Strategy East of England Plan, but needs to be monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis, including against the development of the Local Development Framework. In addition, the Schedule of Opportunities (**figure 19**) should be incorporated into a more detailed phased action plan, for example every two years, in order to accommodate changes to local, strategic or national policy and funding streams. The action plan should incorporate a more detailed strategy for governance, funding, promotion and further community and stakeholder engagement.

Project clusters

5.6.2 Some of the vision projects may best be able to contribute to strategic deficiencies in ANG through grouping as project clusters, based on themes such as **landscape character** (e.g. coastal, riverside, heath, woodland), **principle** (e.g. access, quality of life, community, greening development, biodiversity) or **location** (Framlingham, Saxmundham, Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB etc.). Such 'clusters' or 'project programmes' may be able to lever in significant external funding, e.g. from a Local Enterprise Partnership (if one is set up in this region) or European funding, in a way more modest individual projects cannot hope to do.

5.6.3 **Monitoring and evaluation**

5.6.4 Establishment of a clear monitoring framework for projects against an agreed set of criteria to compare them against external benchmarks is needed to judge the success of the strategy. Indicators should be measurable, relevant to both the SCDC Green Infrastructure Strategy principles and the particular project and local context, e.g. relationship to the Sustainable Community Strategy. Annual Monitoring Reports – which are used by Local Authorities as part of the monitoring of their Local Development Framework's – could be used to embed green infrastructure provision into the planning process.

5.7 Other tools for delivery

Landscape management

5.7.1 Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)¹⁴ includes the opportunity to target enhancement of many of the features that are characteristic or distinctive in the rural landscape of Suffolk Coastal District. These features include nationally and internationally important areas of grazing marshes, wetland habitats, intertidal habitats and heathlands. Important areas of old meadows and pastures, wood pasture, wet woodlands, ancient semi-natural woodlands and arable species interest are also present. This area also retains significant archaeological features, as well as properties that are Grade 1 and 2* on the *Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England*, maintained by English Heritage.

¹⁴ Environmental Stewardship is an agri-environment scheme that provides funding to farmers and other land managers in England to deliver effective environmental management on their land. Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) aims to deliver significant environmental benefits in high priority situations and areas.

- 5.7.2 The Suffolk Coast, Heaths and River Valleys HLS area is also recognised as a target area for access provision. There are significant opportunities to provide additional permissive routes to link and extend the existing Public Rights of Way network, provide links to coastal access routes and open access land and the provision of educational access. A recent announcement from the government confirms that changes to the scheme will focus its role on safeguarding the environment, however, so less money may be available for access to the countryside in future.

Developer checklists

- 5.7.3 Detailed guidance could be provided under each of the key principles, stating which party is responsible, which stage of the planning process is relevant and a list of actions to take to follow the principle. Essex Biodiversity Partnership has developed a checklist tool as part of their guidelines for planners and developers; 'Integrating biodiversity into development' which shows how this methodology could be applied. View at www.essexbiodiversity.org.uk.

Concept statements

- 5.7.4 A 'concept statement' is a simple, clear expression of the kind of place that new development should create. It is a brief explanation of how development on that site should contribute to the local authority's vision. Concept statements explain how the policies and objectives – including greenspace - of the local plan or local development document should apply to each specific site, in order to deliver the best possible economic, social and environmental benefits. Concept statements can be used on greenfield and brownfield sites and in town centre, suburban and rural locations, to identify green infrastructure elements, access routes and wildlife links both within and between key sites. Concept statements are promoted by Natural England. View at www.naturalengland.org.uk

Design and access statements

- 5.7.5 Design and access statements are a recent (mandatory) addition to the planning process and aim to allow the applicant to demonstrate that proposals are based on a thorough design process and a sustainable approach to access. A key part of the statement is an explanation of how local context, including landscape character, biodiversity and heritage, has influenced the final design. The purpose of design and access statements is to verify that applicants have considered the surrounding area and how the proposed development has been sensitively informed by what already exists. These statements provide an opportunity for local authority planners to ensure key green infrastructure assets, on and adjoining a site, are protected and enhanced through the development control process.

Cultural assets: conservation management plans

- 5.7.6 It is recommended that conservation management plans be prepared for developments with an impact on cultural assets. English Heritage considers that conservation management plans should pull together research on what assets exist to develop an understanding of what is important and how features should be preserved and enhanced, including their settings where relevant. Plans can then be prepared for maintenance and/or restoration and proposals for change can be formulated. View www.english-heritage.org.uk.

5.8 Engagement

Further stakeholder engagement

- 5.8.1 The process of developing the Suffolk Coastal Green Infrastructure Strategy has initiated a consensus of approach among green space professionals and organisations towards green infrastructure enhancement. This consensus now needs to be promoted among a broader stakeholder group that includes development control, transport and housing professionals, the culture and arts sector, health professionals, businesses and investors and developers. Links need to be maintained with the Local Strategic Partnership, and appropriate indicators embedded in local government strategies, as appropriate, as well as the LDF. Existing local government networks can be used for this purpose or those built up through the consultation process for the extended Green Infrastructure strategy.

Community engagement

- 5.8.2 Along with an effective promotional programme, a key step in delivery is building community support for green infrastructure through available networks. This can include presentations to local government citizen's panels, parish or town councils, community forums or residents' associations, school councils, or youth panels and forums. In addition promotional displays can be organised for library or supermarket foyers, green fairs or existing greenspace events and public interest and feedback gained through games, competitions or targeted questionnaires.

Green champions

- 5.8.3 The success of the Green Infrastructure Strategy delivery over time will in part depend upon support at the highest level. Support could best be focussed through engagement of a green 'champion' that crosses over communities of interest. A likely figure could be the appropriate cabinet Member of SCDC or a local 'celebrity' if appropriate.
- 5.8.4 An alternative is to promote a business support network as launched by the Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust¹⁵. The 'Green Champions Corporate Supporters Scheme' to improve the quality of local greenspaces provides all sorts of corporate benefits to the supporting businesses such as free team building events, programmes of walks developed for staff to use regularly as part of their healthy working lives, use of company logos on the supporters section of the Trust's website, help towards offsetting a company's CO2 emissions, and promotion of a company's good corporate social responsibility practices in our regular e-news bulletin and newsletter. This is a role that could be developed with a partner stakeholder organisation that already has charitable status.

Promotion

- 5.8.5 A key part of the success of the Green Infrastructure Strategy will be in promoting the concept and principles to a wide audience to build support for the vision, develop community capacity and generate project and funding partnerships across a broad community of interest and place. Key partners in delivery need to be engaged early on in order to ensure buy-in from communities, commerce and Government. This includes not only partners of influence, such as the Department for Communities and Local Government and any future Local Economic Partnership (LEP), who can provide potential funding and champion the programme politically, but delivery partners such as the key environmental organisations and community groups.

Web pages

- 5.8.6 The option exists to host distinct web pages on a key partner's website. The Haven Gateway Partnership has recently developed a distinct set of pages about the HGGIS that gives information on green infrastructure, its benefits to the community, the role the Haven Gateway Partnership is playing, key projects and players. This website can be found at http://www.haven-gateway.org/themes/green_infrastructure. The district council could host a few distinct pages on its own website that can link to the Haven Gateway and other partner organisation websites.

Events

- 5.8.7 In order to build support for the green infrastructure programme with the community and local businesses, that could help provide sponsorship for the programme, as well as promoting the emerging network to visitors, participatory events such as walks, talks, fun-days and greenspace management days should be encouraged by the key stakeholder partners. The events programmes can be managed locally by partners but brought together on the SCDC Green Infrastructure web pages and promoted through joint web pages, newsletters etc. This approach works successfully already in the AONB programme at Suffolk Coast and Heaths which lists key collaborations and events at their own and partners' sites on their website <http://www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org/index.asp>

¹⁵ <http://www.elgt.org.uk/>

Newsletters

- 5.8.8 Both printed and increasingly electronic magazines are good ways of engaging support and disseminating information. Again these are used successfully by the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Unit. View at <http://www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org/index.asp>

Best practice examples

- 5.8.9 Extensive 'best practice' on green space and green infrastructure creation is developing nationally. The Steering Group can draw on this existing expertise to promote 'best practice' across the sub-region and develop, in time, its own library of sub-regional examples. Some existing 'best practice' examples can be found at www.cabe.org.uk/casestudies.aspx which details good quality urban open space in particular or at <http://www.thelandtrust.org.uk/>

