



South Sandlings Living Landscape Project Recreation Strategy



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Summary

This strategy looks at the Tunstall and Rendlesham area in Suffolk. Comprised mainly of heath and forestry, the Strategy Area lies within the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The area is internationally important for nature conservation and is also a popular location for a range of recreational activities. Recreational use ranges from residents from the surrounding towns and villages visiting to walk the dog, exercise and enjoy the scenery to day-trippers visiting from a much larger catchment area and drawn to the range of attractions, visitor facilities and expansive areas of open countryside.

In this strategy we use comprehensive visitor to consider existing recreational activities and we consider how access patterns are likely to change in the future. Given the large volume of housing likely to take place, both relatively close and set back from the Strategy Area, plus trends for England-wide trends of increasing recreational use of the countryside, it is necessary to look carefully to the future. By anticipating how access may develop and considering the various issues and constraints in the area – we set out a series of recommendations. These recommendations relate to the need to ensure:

- Protection of Nature Conservation Interest (with particular reference to statutory obligations);
- Better links between the different areas, between local housing and the countryside, between the heaths, forest and wider countryside
- Enhanced access and provision to cope with future levels of access;
- Sustainability.

In general our recommendations revolve around maintaining the quiet, relatively low-key and informal access provision, but setting out broad areas where the aim is to enhance and promote access and equally other areas where access should not be overly restricted, but equally not promoted and kept at relatively low levels. Key elements within our recommendations include enhancing the existing Forestry Commission visitor facilities at the Rendlesham Centre, such that this area becomes the main destination for day-trippers and those seeking to undertake particular activities such as cycling. Enhancements should include a better cafe, covered outdoor area for shelter/picnics, better interpretation. Also in the Rendlesham area we recommend the creation of a dedicated dog walking area, where dog walking is actively promoted and specific infrastructure including a fenced dog exercise area, good parking facilities away from the road and a range of routes that encompass a range of habitats (both wooded and open). To be successful this will need to be close to Woodbridge and adjacent to Woodbridge Golf Course would be ideal.

Other recommendations aimed at enhancing access include an additional cycling route linking Sutton Hoo to the Rendlesham Centre; better links between the local housing at Sutton and Rendlesham and the Forestry areas and better information for users.

In other areas we recommend parking (most of the access to the area is currently by car) is closely monitored and limited to the current parking provision, and certain areas are maintained as relatively quiet zones, where management can focus on provision of suitable habitat for key bird species.

Contents

Summary	3
Contents	4
Maps (in Annex at end of the report)	5
Acknowledgements	5
1. Introduction	6
Overview	6
Scope and Purpose	6
2. Context	8
Landscape Character.....	8
Historic Environment.....	8
Nature Conservation interest.....	9
Land ownership and management.....	11
Local population	13
Planning context.....	13
3. Existing Recreational Use and Infrastructure.....	17
Visitor Infrastructure within the south Sandlings area	17
Rendlesham Forest Centre	17
Parking.....	17
Path Network and Walking Routes.....	17
Cycling Routes and Facilities for Cyclists	18
Horse Riding Routes and Facilities for Riders	18
Other Infrastructure	18
Visitor Infrastructure in the surrounding area.....	18
Suffolk Punch Trust	18
Sutton Hoo.....	18
Orford and Orfordness	19
Woodbridge	19
Snape Maltings.....	19
Current Recreational Use.....	19
4. Challenges and Issues	20
Protection of Nature Conservation Interest	20
Making Links.....	22
Enhancing access and ensuring provision to cope with future levels of access.....	23
Sustainability	23
5. Ways to Achieve the Objectives.....	25
Access Infrastructure	25
The need for a Gateway?.....	25
Parking Infrastructure	27
Information and Interpretation	29
Facilities for Particular User Groups.....	31
Access on foot	31

Dog walking	32
Cycling.....	34
Horse Riding.....	36
Family Groups	37
Habitat and Forestry Management	37
General Issues	37
Issues relating to management of access and Annex I birds.....	40
6. Monitoring and Review	46
7. Summary of the Strategy	47
9. References	51
Appendix 1: Summary of Local Development Frameworks for surrounding Districts	53
MAP ANNEX	56

Maps (in Annex at end of the report)

Map 1: Study area, context (Settlements, AONB, coast)

Map 2: Scheduled Ancient Monuments

Map 3: Natura 2000 sites (map 2 in visitor survey, SPA, SAC, Ramsar)

Map 4: SSSIs (check map 19 in vis survey)

Map 5: BAP Priority Habitats

Map 6: Current Recreation Infrastructure: Parking and Routes (Car parks (graduated), paths)

Map 7: Current Recreation Infrastructure: Other (Ferries, Visitor Centres/Attractions, Train Stations)

Map 8: Current Recreational Use: Current levels of visitor use

Map 9: Summary of Key Recommendations within the Strategy

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1. Introduction

Overview

- 1.1 This Recreation Strategy considers the Rendlesham and Tunstall area of Suffolk. It has been produced to ensure that recreational access is managed and allowed to develop in a way that is compatible with the nature conservation interest, in sympathy with the landscape and landscape interest, and yet also, as far as possible, provides opportunities for people to enjoy the area's rich countryside.
- 1.2 A detailed visitor survey (including an assessment of the impacts of access on the nature conservation interest of the area), grazing management plan and an overall delivery plan also accompany and link to this Strategy.

Scope and Purpose

- 1.3 The Strategy addresses the area shown on Map 1, essentially Tunstall and Rendlesham Forests, and the associated heaths and commons that sit within and alongside the forests. To the south lies the Deben Estuary, to the east the marshes and coast, and to the north and north-west the Alde-Ore complex of marshes and estuarine habitats. Inland and to the west is the boundary of the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the river Deben and the main north-south road along the Suffolk coast, the A12. The area shown in Map 1 includes approximately 6,600 ha.
- 1.4 The Strategy Area sits within the AONB. Land-use within the area is predominantly forestry, managed by the Forestry Commission. The Suffolk Wildlife Trust and the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths District Council own and manage some heath/common sites. There are also a number of private farms within the area. The National Trust own and manage the Sutton Hoo site in the south-west and the RSPB manage marshes to the east at Boyton and near Shingle Street.
- 1.5 The area contains extensive semi-natural and other habitats with considerable opportunities for access and recreation. The extensive land area, much of which is open access, provides one of the largest areas of greenspace in the south Suffolk/north Essex region. The area lies within a relatively short travel distance of large settlements such as Ipswich, Felixstowe and Colchester. Visitor survey work has shown that people from these settlements visit for day trips, family outings, birdwatching and similar activities. Lying closer are settlements such as Woodbridge, Saxmundham, Martlesham, Wickham Market and Leiston. Residents in these locations visit more regularly, with the area being particularly attractive for dog walkers. By comparison, relatively few people live within the area itself; for some, their livelihood is linked to the area, for example through farming, forestry, nature conservation or tourism.
- 1.6 Large scale levels of new housing, an increasing human population within the UK and changes in people's recreation patterns means that there will be pressures on the area. These pressures need to be considered within the context of the area's importance for nature conservation and the current (and future) land management within the area. The

Strategy is a proactive response to these issues, identifying where changes to management, or new access initiatives are required or desirable.

- 1.7 The Forestry Commission published the Sandlings Forests Recreation Strategy¹ in 2005 with the remit of defining the recreation roles of three key Forestry Commission managed forests within the East Anglia Forest District: Rendlesham, Tunstall and Dunwich. The strategy focused on new access provision for a growing number of visitors over the next 20 years and outlined extensive options for new attractions and improved trails and transport links in order to redistribute and absorb visitors to the AONB.
- 1.8 The 2005 strategy was limited to the Forestry Commission managed sites only. It contains a range of expensive measures which require new infrastructure and attractions which in the current economic climate may be difficult to justify. Whether it is wise to introduce new activities and thus additional pressures, for instance with the creation of paintball or archery sites, is questionable. This would seem to add to visitor pressure to the Forests rather than helping to soften the impact of existing uses. Certainly, the location of such facilities in sites of international nature conservation importance would require the most careful assessment before proceeding.
- 1.9 This current Strategy follows from extensive visitor survey work and subsequent analysis which combined visitor access patterns with ecological data relating to the nature conservation interest. The Strategy is therefore able to identify measures that relate to the needs of visitors and to the internationally important nature conservation interest. It also looks beyond the boundaries of the Forestry Commission holdings, including the heaths and adjacent land.
- 1.10 The timescale for the Strategy is the period 2011 – 2025, the 2025 end-point was chosen to coincide with that of the Suffolk Coastal District Core Strategy.

¹ [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/fce-strategy-report-final-draft-05-01-06-reduced.pdf/\\$FILE/fce-strategy-report-final-draft-05-01-06-reduced.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/fce-strategy-report-final-draft-05-01-06-reduced.pdf/$FILE/fce-strategy-report-final-draft-05-01-06-reduced.pdf)

2. Context

- 2.1 This section describes the existing landscape character, historic and nature conservation interest, patterns of land ownership and management, local population distribution and relevant planning framework. These provide the necessary context for the Strategy, setting out the issues and identifying constraints and particular issues that need to be considered.

Landscape Character

- 2.2 The Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB runs from the Stour estuary to the eastern fringe of Ipswich as far north as Kessingland, covering approximately 403 km². 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. The Sandlings Heaths run through the AONB, covering approximately 1,700 ha (Sibbett 1997). They owe their existence to the sandy deposits when the area was once under the North Sea. The character of the Suffolk coastal zone has been defined by its distinctive geological composition. The wider county is principally chalk, but towards the coast, the chalk is overlain by two deposits of marine shelly sand deposits ('Crag') laid down during the Pleistocene or Holocene periods. The soils of the eastern fringe of the county are therefore composed of sands, gravel and local till, with surface pockets of the underlying Crag and clay. It is these light soils that underlie the 'Sandlings'.
- 2.3 During the 13th century, sheep farming dominated the local land-use and resulted in the maintenance of open countryside of heathland and acid grassland, the sheep walks. Rabbits too were farmed from the 14th and 15th centuries until the 18th and 19th centuries. In the early 20th century, sheep farming became uneconomic, and many estates were bought by the Forestry Commission and planted with conifers. The trees were planted in the 1920s continuing into the 1940s (Sibbett 1997). A major change occurred in 1987, when a storm event flattened large tracts of the plantations, particularly at Rendlesham and once again opened up large tracts of the forest.
- 2.4 The coast draws visitors from far afield and is clearly a major attraction for people visiting the south Sandlings area. Sites such as Shingle Street and Orford are reached by travelling through the Strategy Area. The estuaries have provided both a barrier and a means of travel (by boat) for centuries. Foot ferries provide transport for tourists, walkers and others at Felixstowe Ferry-Bawdsey and at Boyton-Gedgrave. The coast and estuaries therefore provide important geographical, social and historical context.
- 2.5 Further landscape context and a detailed account of the development of the landscape of the area can be found in Williamson (2005).

Historic Environment

- 2.6 The Strategy Area contains 14 scheduled ancient monuments (Map 2). Many of these are barrows. The light sandy soils mean the Sandlings, like the Brecks, were a focus for prehistoric settlements. The relatively high density of the barrows is also a reflection of the lack of ploughing and fact that the light sandy soils allow features to be detected easily

from aerial photographs Williamson (2005). During the fifth to eighth centuries the Sandlings formed one of the most important centres of political power in England. The Strategy Area is littered with sites of considerable early and middle Saxon importance, including the famous ship burial at Sutton Hoo. Just to the north of the Strategy Area, on the other side of the Alde, lies another ship burial site, the Snape Anglo-Saxon cemetery and also just outside the Strategy Area is the hill fort at Burrow Hill, overlooking Butley Creek.

Nature Conservation interest

- 2.7 Suffolk is nationally and internationally important for its heathland habitats. Suffolk holds over 3,000 ha of heathland, some 5.3% of the national resource (e.g. Beardall & Casey, 1995). There are two important heathland areas in Suffolk: the Breckland heaths and the Sandlings heaths. This Strategy focuses on the main heathland sites within the south part of the Sandlings; however, it is important to realise the internationally important and geographically restricted resource that characterises the wider county. The importance of these heathland sites is recognised in the local, national and international wildlife designations that have been placed on the Breckland and the Sandlings heaths. The designations relevant to this Strategy centre on the Rendlesham Forest and Tunstall Forest areas and are summarised below and shown on Map 3. Map 4 shows the SSSIs within the area and Map 5 shows BAP priority habitats.
- 2.8 The Sandlings Special Protection Area (SPA) is a European wildlife site classified in accordance with the Council Directive on the conservation of wild birds of 30th November 2009 (2009/147/EC), which updates the original Directive of 1979. It is protected by UK law under the provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (the 'Habitats Regulations').
- 2.9 The Sandlings SPA includes key heathland and plantation habitats that support internationally important breeding populations of nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and woodlark *Lullula arborea*, the two interest features of the SPA. According to the Natura 2000 Standard Data Form for the Sandlings SPA, the site holds at least 3.2% of the breeding nightjar population of Great Britain (count as at 1992) and at least 10.3% of the breeding population of woodlark of Great Britain (count as at 1997). Although much of the Sandlings was planted up with commercial forestry plantations during the 20th century, nightjar and woodlark have adapted to the commercial forestry cycle by utilising recently felled blocks, being able to remain within the block until replanted stock is several years old. This adaptation is recognised across the UK lowland heaths where these species occur (Langston et al. 2007). Numbers of both nightjar and woodlark have declined in the south Suffolk Sandlings in recent years.
- 2.10 The SPA comprises six Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) (Map 4). Four are within the study area for this Strategy: Blaxhall Heath, Sandlings Forest, Tunstall Common, and Sutton and Hollesley Heaths. Leiston- Aldeburgh and Snape Warren SSSIs are both outside the study area.

- 2.11 Blaxhall Heath SSSI is an area of remnant heath that has not been the subject of extensive planting although the adjacent plantation has provided a seed source for self set pines on the site. A heather and acid grassland mosaic includes areas of bell heather *Erica cinerea*, and notable Cladonia lichen and moss communities. Iron age earth banks provide additional habitat for reptiles and solitary bees. According to the SSSI citation for this site, Blaxhall Heath hosts breeding nightjar, and was a former site for stone curlew *Burhinus oediconemus*, last recorded in 1927 and Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*, last recorded around 1911. The condition assessment notes for this site also advise that the silver studded blue butterfly *Plebejus argus* was re-introduced on the site in 2007, and also identifies the site as being used by woodlark. The current condition of the SSSI is recorded as unfavourable recovering.
- 2.12 Sandlings Forest is a large expanse of coniferous plantation on the former Sandlings heathland. The SSSI is a stronghold for nightjar and woodlark, which colonise the rotationally felled and replanted areas of the forest. The two SSSI units form the main plantation blocks of the Sandlings, being Tunstall Forest and Rendlesham Forest and covering an area of nearly 2,500 ha. Both units are currently assessed as being in favourable condition because the current felling regime continues to provide a good supply of newly felled and recently planted areas, thus providing an ongoing supply of habitat for nightjar and woodlark.
- 2.13 Tunstall Common SSSI is similar in nature to Blaxhall Common SSSI, being remnant heathland of heather and acid grassland that has not been extensively used for forestry; however, self-set pines occur as a result of the adjacent plantation seed sources. Bell heather is also a feature of this site, along with the lichen and moss communities. The SSSI is assessed as being in unfavourable recovering condition.
- 2.14 Sutton and Hollesley Heaths SSSI is one of the largest heathland patches within the Sandlings area. The site has significant expanses of heath, with some acid grassland. The site also hosts stands of gorse *Ulex europaeus* and supports the locally scarce dwarf furze *Ulex gallii*. The citation for the site states that this is a former site for red squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*, last recorded as recently as 1989, and also that the site is nationally important for its ornithological interest, with breeding long-eared owls *Asio otus* and a winter roost for hen harriers *Circus cyaneus*, in addition to heathland bird species. The majority of the site is currently assessed as unfavourable recovering, but two of the SSSI units (unit 1 and unit 4) are recorded as unfavourable declining, primarily because of a lack of appropriate scrub and bracken control.
- 2.15 An additional European wildlife site lies within the Strategy Area. Staverton Park and the Thicks Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is designated in accordance with the Council Directive on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora of 21st May 1992 (92/43/EEC), which is transposed into UK law by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (the 'Habitats Regulations'). This SAC lies between Rendlesham Forest and Tunstall Forest, and is recognised for its old acidophilous (requiring an acidic environment) oak woods. Staverton Park is a medieval park with magnificent ancient oaks that create an atmospheric and magical place. These oaks support a rich invertebrate and

epiphytic lichen assemblage, including rare Atlantic lichen species. The SAC also hosts a stand of old holly trees within 'the Thicks' that are likely to include the largest in Britain. Staverton Park and the Thicks is also notified as a SSSI, where in addition to the ancient oaks, the SSSI citation makes reference to the important lichen and invertebrate interest supported by the oaks, including a number of rare species only found within old parkland. Public access to both the Thicks and the Park is limited to a public footpath that runs through the eastern edge of the Thicks and the edge of the Park.

- 2.16 Remaining Sandlings heathland remnants that lie outside the statutory national and international sites are designated as local wildlife sites. These include Bromeswell Heath Golf Course and an area of Tunstall Forest not within the SPA and SSSIs. Further local wildlife sites within the Strategy Area are ancient woodland sites.

Land ownership and management

- 2.17 This strategy considers a total land area of some 6,680ha.
- 2.18 The Forestry Commission forests lie at the centre of the Strategy Area. The Commission is responsible for two roughly equally sized blocks: Rendlesham (1,419 ha) and Tunstall (1,085 ha). Of the total Commission holding of 2,503 ha, just over 80% (2,037 ha) is managed as high forest and 13% (330 ha) are open habitats; a further 1.6% of the holding is categorised as felled and the rest is a range of different land use types, such as car-parks, residential, built etc. Management of the forests are set out in the Forest Design Plans for each site.
- 2.19 In tandem with timber production, the Forestry Commission is able to provide for public access. The freehold woodland is dedicated under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, securing pedestrian access in perpetuity.
- 2.20 Management of forestry to create open habitats is relevant to this strategy and is set out in the Forestry Commission's policy on 'when to convert woods and forests to open habitats in England'². The aims of this policy are to generate biodiverse landscapes of open habitat and woodland that provide long term benefits to people and wildlife; to make sure that conversion of woodland results in more open habitat which makes a significant contribution to biodiversity objectives; and to minimise any negative impacts on the ability of woodland and forestry to increasingly contribute towards a low-carbon economy. Among the outcomes of the policy it is expected that the policy will result in resilient ecological communities, where wildlife, including open habitat species, is able to cope with changes so that biodiversity is maintained and enhanced; and people's engagement with the landscape they use, particularly their local landscape, is maintained or enhanced.
- 2.21 Outside the Forestry Commission holding, the remaining land is predominantly agriculture (1,876 ha) and a further 819 ha are open habitats, such as heathland and acid grassland. There are also some 348 ha of deciduous woodland. The Suffolk Wildlife Trust has reserves

² <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-openhabitats>

at Bromeswell, Blaxhall Heath and Captain's Wood. Tunstall Common is managed by Tunstall Parish Council. Sutton Heath is owned by Suffolk Coastal District Council.

- 2.22 The current AONB Management Plan covers the period 2008-2013. It is a statutory plan which provides strategic management of the natural beauty and amenity of the area. One of three broad areas identified within the plan is to "meet the demand for recreation where it is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the management of the land". Objectives that relate to this requirement include

Aim 11: Have access and recreation provision that respects biodiversity, landscape, geodiversity and historic assets

- 11.1 Implement the Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- 11.2 Manage open and coastal access to bring integrated benefits to people, wildlife and landscape
- 11.3 Promote the need for and the benefits of integrated/multi-objective management of green space
- 11.4 Increase the opportunities for non-car access in the AONB

Aim 12: Provide interpretation that improves understanding, guides behaviour and helps people to enjoy the AONB

- 12.1 Deliver consistent messages about the importance and value of the AONB
- 12.2 Increase the provision of information to enable people to enjoy the AONB in a sustainable way
- 12.3 Increase the provision of interpretation to raise understanding about the management of the AONB

Local population

2.23 Suffolk Coastal District has a population of just over 122,000 people³. In the period 1976 – 2006, the population rose by around 26,000, a 29% increase that is amongst the higher rates of growth in the country. Much of the population is concentrated in small towns, and the Strategy Area is rural and relatively sparsely populated. However, the area lies close to a number of small towns and larger settlements, summarised in Table 1. Ipswich is by far the largest town in Suffolk and lies approximately 12 km away to the south-west

Table 1: A selection of local settlements and their population sizes. Population figures include MOD personnel. Data sourced from Suffolk County Council⁴. Rows in grey highlight settlements beyond 5km from the Strategy Area.

Town / village / parish	2005 population
Aldeburgh	2,690
Alderton	430
Bawdsey	320
Blaxhall	220
Boyton	170
Bromeswell	340
Butley	200
Eyke	370
Felixstowe	24,000
Hollesley	1,400
Ipswich	118,400
Kesgrave	11,020
Leiston	5,430
Martlesham	5,670
Melton	3,910
Orford	630
Rendlesham	2200
Saxmundham	3,420
Shottisham	200
Snape	630
Sudbourne	330
Sutton	550
Tunstall	490
Ufford	860
Wickham Market	2,140
Woodbridge	7,320

Planning context

2.24 The Haven Gateway sub-region was identified as a key area of growth for the country, and was awarded ‘Growth Point Status’ by the previous Government in 2006. There was particular emphasis on the role of the ports (Felixstowe and Harwich) as key economic drivers for the area, and subsequently the towns of Ipswich and Colchester as the two main growth nodes to support the economic growth with adequate housing stock. Funding has

³ Figure dated 2006, from the Suffolk Coastal District Council core strategy, preferred options: <http://www.suffolkcoastal.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/A95EF8ED-424B-419D-89B1-E42EE6FED06F/0/CoreStrategyAmend12Dec08.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/38314C3E-02A0-4515-92FE-8909C6FDB3A3/0/Parishestimates01to05.pdf>

- been allocated to the sub-region to support the new infrastructure required to support the levels of growth proposed, and also to take forward regeneration projects in areas such as Colchester.
- 2.25 The Haven Gateway sub-region covers local planning authorities in both Suffolk and Essex, all of which produce spatial planning documents in the form of development plan documents that form the local development framework for each district or borough. The local development framework sets the direction and priorities for spatial planning within each local administrative boundary. Documents are currently being produced to manage local spatial planning up to and beyond 2021, with most providing a forecast up to 2025 or 2026. Each document will be continually reviewed every few years, but the vision and spatial objectives for each should capture this longer timescale.
- 2.26 Until July of this year, the Local Development Framework Documents would take forward the overarching spatial planning objectives for the Region that were set out within the East of England Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), published in 2008, which would direct the scale and distribution of growth. The regional level strategies were put in place to prioritise areas for regeneration, economic activity, infrastructure, employment and housing with a region-wide overview of sustainable development needs. For example, Policy E1 of the East of England RSS proposed a total of 30,000 new jobs within the Haven Gateway sub-region over the regional plan period.
- 2.27 An issue-specific review of the East of England RSS took place in 2009, and a draft review with the aim of a full document review was published in March 2010. However, on 6th July 2010, following initial announcements in the immediate aftermath of the 2010 general election, the Secretary of State confirmed the revocation of all Regional Strategies. The Secretary of State emphasised the need for a locally-led planning system that provides sustainable growth in response to the needs of local communities, and expects local level planning documents to lead in this regard.
- 2.28 A number of local planning authorities within the Haven Gateway sub-region have taken stock of their local development framework documents, and the changes that need to be made to reflect new Government aspirations. However, it is clear that local authorities remain committed to the principles for growth established for the Haven Gateway sub-region, and it is recognised that a substantial amount of valuable work has already been invested in taking the Haven Gateway forward as a growth point. This work will continue to underpin a framework for sustainable development that encompasses a multi-partner approach to economic, social and environmental development across the Haven Gateway; this remains a fundamental element of the relevant local development framework documents.
- 2.29 The Haven Gateway green infrastructure strategy is one of the key areas of work that will continue to underpin and influence growth in the sub-region, and local planning authorities continue to recognise and support this work, fully integrating it into emerging development plan documents. This document, the Recreation Strategy for the Suffolk Sandlings, forms part of the Haven Gateway green infrastructure work. It is vital that the development of the Strategy is informed by the proposed growth within the Haven

Gateway sub-region to take full account of the potential recreational pressure that is likely to arise in the next 10 to 20 years.

- 2.30 Proposed residential growth, as set out in Core Strategies, the overarching documents within the local development framework, has therefore been assessed for each of the districts and boroughs within the Haven Gateway. Waveney District in Suffolk and Braintree District in Essex are also both included, as their geographical proximity to the Suffolk Sandlings is considered to be close enough for additional recreational pressure from these districts to also be realised within the open spaces of the Sandlings.
- 2.31 Suffolk Coastal District contains the Strategy Area, and growth within this District is therefore central to the Recreation Strategy. Suffolk Coastal District Council adopted its Core Strategy in March 2010. The Core Strategy runs from 2009 to 2026 and allocates 7,660 houses to be built up to 2026, at a rate of 450 per annum. There is a focus within the Core Strategy on the Ipswich Policy Area, which encompasses the settlements around the eastern side of Ipswich within Suffolk Coastal District. The majority of this allocation is directed towards a new community at Martlesham to the east of the A12, forming a single allocation of 2,000 new homes. A considerable number of new homes will also be directed towards Felixstowe and the market towns, totalling 3,310 of the overall 7,660 figure.
- 2.32 Following the abolition of the RSSs, Suffolk Coastal District Council issued a Local Development Framework Update Report, which identifies the need for a revised Core Strategy that adequately reflects the new Government focus on localism. The report recommends the production of a revised draft Core Strategy for formal consultation as soon as possible.
- 2.33 In Table 2 we summarise the housing allocations for all the Districts that surround the Strategy Area or are relevant to it. Detailed accounts of the content of these strategies is also provided in Appendix 1. The table gives a figure for the number of proposed new houses from 2010 to 2026 incorporating all districts and boroughs within the Haven Gateway sub-region that may contribute to increased recreational pressure on the Suffolk Sandlings. It also includes Waveney and Braintree. As each Core Strategy has a slightly different timescale for the projected housing numbers, the actual projections and annual rate of new houses have been used to give an estimate of 2010 to 2026 figures, which then provides a like-for-like comparison and an overall figure for the whole sub-region, including Waveney and Braintree.

2.34

Table 2: Summary of proposed new housing levels in the surrounding Districts

District/Borough	Actual total housing figure within Core Strategy	Approximate annual rate of new houses	Estimated total housing figure for 2010 to 2026
Suffolk Coastal	7,660 (2009 – 2026)	450	7,200
Ipswich	14,000 (2010 - 2026)	700	14,000
Waveney	2,574 (2007 – 2025)	150	2,500
Mid Suffolk	7,268 (2007 – 2025)	400	6,900
Babergh	10,406 (2010 - 2031)	670	7,000
Colchester	19,000 (2001 – 2021)	830	15,700
Tendring	6,300 (2011 – 2031)	315	5,000
Braintree	4,800 (2009 – 2026)	280	4,500
Total		3,795	62,800

3. Existing Recreational Use and Infrastructure

Visitor Infrastructure within the south Sandlings area

Rendlesham Forest Centre

3.1 The Rendlesham Forest Centre is a collection of facilities centred around a relatively large and well-used car-park at Tangham. The car-park can hold at least 40 cars and is set within trees with car access restricted by the use of banks and ditches. Within the car-parking area, there are 11 well-used picnic benches and BBQs are allowed in this area with prior permission. The centre is within a few minutes' walk of the Forest Camping Tangham Campsite which covers 2.8 ha with around 100 camping and caravanning pitches.

3.2 The main attractions at Rendlesham Forest Centre are the two play areas (adventure play area and an area for smaller children adjacent to the car-park) and the three waymarked forest trails for walking (UFO Trail, Phoenix Trail and Daisy's Walk) and two for cycling (6 miles and 10 miles long). A recent addition to the site is a bike skills area located less than 500 m from the car-park providing a circuit with jumps and platforms. There is a small but well-used mountain bike hire centre that is open in the summer and also sells a limited selection of refreshments and snacks. Visitor information is available from the information hut which is staffed between 9am and 5.30pm during busy periods e.g. summer and school holidays. There is also a notice board with a leaflet holder and details of forest events and activities. The leaflet 'explore Rendlesham Forest' includes a schematic map of the trails, an overview of the facilities and a brief history of the landuse in the area. There is a fixed orienteering course within the forest and maps for the route can be purchased from the information hut. In addition, there are individual interpretation boards associated with the future of the Sandlings, the UFO trail, the adventure play area and the bike skills area. There is a toilet facility with three toilets. Additional temporary installations include a laser shooting establishment and the Rose Road Chain outdoor Theatre Company which puts on productions through August.

Parking

3.3 Across the Sandlings area, there are 16 formal car-parks which provide a total of 261 parking spaces. There are 106 additional informal parking locations providing 256 parking spaces. There is a greater provision of larger formal car-parks within and around Rendlesham Forest (e.g. Sutton Heath and Tangham) compared to Tunstall where there is a higher density of smaller car-parks including on-road parking and lay bys (see Map 6).

Path Network and Walking Routes

3.4 Two long distance routes bisect the Strategy Area:

- The Suffolk Coast Path: a 50-mile walk from Felixstowe to Lowestoft.
- The Sandlings Walk: a 60-mile walk between the eastern fringes of Ipswich and Southwold, linking fragments of Sandlings Heath.

- 3.5 There are also a series of shorter marked trails, for example the Forestry Commission has marked trails that include the Phoenix and UFO Trails at the Rendlesham Centre.

Cycling Routes and Facilities for Cyclists

- 3.6 The Suffolk Coastal Cycle Route runs the length of the Suffolk Coast and is signposted. The route is widely promoted and specific leaflets/maps showing the route are available. Some additional cycle routes also exist (see Map 7).
- 3.7 There are also marked cycle trails within the forest blocks. There is a dedicated Tunstall and Rendlesham Off-road Group⁵ (TROG) which works closely with the Forestry Commission to develop trails. The group has weekly group cycle events.
- 3.8 Cycle hire is available at the Rendlesham Centre and there is also a bike park near the centre, the latter providing challenging routes for experienced cyclists. There is also a 'dirt jump site' at Sudbourne, where users can construct and modify the jumps. This is advertised by the Forestry Commission as an extreme sport site for competent cyclists only.

Horse Riding Routes and Facilities for Riders

- 3.9 The area is popular for horse riding, with equestrian centres located at Tunstall, Hollesley, Iken and Melton (see Map 7). At Hollesley, there is a dedicated horse route, which is a waymarked permissive route that follows firebreaks and other tracks to provide links to rights of way. The route is shown on Map 7.

Other Infrastructure

- 3.10 There is a dog walking enclosure at Sutton Heath. This fenced compound, of around 2 ha, is designed to provide a dedicated area for dogs off leads.
- 3.11 There is a permanent orienteering course at the Rendlesham Forest Centre.

Visitor Infrastructure in the surrounding area

- 3.12 Visitors tend to focus on the coastal strip, and previous initiatives, such as the HLF funded Tomorrow's Heathland Heritage Project have tried to spread visitors around the landscape (Clarke 2006).

Suffolk Punch Trust

- 3.13 The Suffolk Punch Trust has a centre, near Hollesley which is an open farm, hosting a range of visitor events and providing visitors with an opportunity to see horses and other farm animals; there is a cafe, visitor centre and education centre.

Sutton Hoo

- 3.14 The ship burial site of Sutton Hoo lies in the south-west corner of the Strategy Area. The National Trust manages the site, and the 103 ha estate includes various visitor facilities, including a cafe, gift shop, education centre and various trails providing views of the burial mounds.

⁵ <http://www.trogmtb.com/>

Orford and Orfordness

- 3.15 Lying to the east of Rendlesham and Tunstall, Orford is an attractive village with a castle (managed by English Heritage) and a jetty which provides boat access to the RSPB Reserve at Havergate and to the National Trust site at Orfordness. Havergate is famous as one of the first RSPB reserves and for nesting avocets. Orfordness draws visitors for the coastal scenery and military history. It is one of the main sites in the UK for coastal vegetated shingle.

Woodbridge

- 3.16 Woodbridge is an attractive market town lying on the River Deben. It is the main entry point to the Rendlesham / Tunstall area, lying just to the south-west. The town has a range of visitor infrastructure, including a range of accommodation. There is a tourist information centre at the railway station (direct services to London), a range of attractive riverside walks, a museum and a tide mill which is open to the public.

Snape Maltings

- 3.17 Snape Maltings is a complex of accommodation, cafes and shops centred around an internationally famous concert hall. The venue hosts the Aldeburgh festival and a range of high profile music events through the year. There is a quay, running some boat trips through the summer and a small RSPB visitor centre. Opposite the quay is the Suffolk Wildlife Trust Snape Marshes Reserve.

Current Recreational Use

- 3.18 The Suffolk Sandlings is a highly locally used site. Results from a year long visitor survey suggest that the main factor attracting visitors to the Sandlings is closeness to home. Holiday makers only account for 6% of winter visitors, rising to 19% in the summer. Regular visitors travel from the villages and towns within 10 km including Woodbridge, Martlesham, Kesgrave, Rendlesham, Saxmundham and Leiston. Day-trippers tend to travel from the local towns but also from Ipswich, Felixstowe, Colchester, Bury St Edmunds and settlements east and north east of the A12. The busiest locations within the area are Sutton Heath, Iken and the Rendlesham Forest Centre. Visitor numbers are higher at the weekends compared with weekdays. Visitors tend to spend around two hours per visit and 79% of visitors travel to the area by car.
- 3.19 Nearly two-thirds of all visitors bring dogs to the Sandlings and dog walking is the most popular activity followed by walking (without a dog). The occurrence of family outings increases tenfold in the summer and the number of groups using the area for cycling doubles, whereas the number of bird watching visitors is higher in the winter. The Rendlesham Forest Centre is particularly popular in the summer with family groups and cyclists and these groups tend to travel further to use the site. Sites such as Sutton Heath have a much more local catchment consisting mainly of dog walkers – across the whole survey, 75% of dog walkers live within 10 km. The majority of visitors to the Sandlings also visit a range of sites within and around the area with 59% also visiting local coastal and estuary locations

4. Challenges and Issues

4.1 In this section, we set out the key challenges that the Strategy needs to address. We have summarised these challenges into four broad categories – ‘themes’ - that run through the Strategy. The themes are relevant to all activities and set the broad principles which the Strategy is trying to achieve, namely:

- Protection of Nature Conservation Interest;
- Making Links;
- Enhancing access and ensuring provision to cope with future levels of access; and
- Sustainability.

Protection of Nature Conservation Interest

4.2 Of paramount importance to the development of a strategy for managing recreation in the Sandlings area are the legislative and national planning policy duties relating to the protection and enhancement of European and nationally designated sites.

4.3 The Sandlings SPA, classified for its nightjar and woodlark populations, is currently failing to meet its conservation objectives, because both woodlark and nightjar populations are declining. This is of considerable concern because in the main, these species are gradually increasing nationally. The Sandlings SPA is somewhat unique because it was classified at a point when both nightjar and woodlark were at peak population levels in the Sandlings area. The famous great storm of 1987 had a disastrous effect on the forestry plantations and large numbers of trees were lost. However, this event was of immense benefit to nightjar and woodlark, as it resulted in a considerable increase in the open areas required by both species. The significant increase in the availability of breeding territories enabled populations to flourish.

4.4 The classification of the Sandlings SPA for nightjar and woodlark was based on the high population levels of the 1990s, when the birds took advantage of the new open areas of favourable habitat. Since then, much of this habitat has returned to commercial forestry use, and the availability of suitable habitat has consequently reduced. This is reflected in the survey results for both species, most markedly so for woodlark; Sandlings populations are now precariously low in comparison to the numbers recorded in the 1990s.

4.5 Pressure on woodlarks and nightjars is compounded by the recreational use of the Sandlings. The precious areas of open heathland habitat still available to the birds are also inevitably attractive to visitors. The scarcity of habitat, combined with the continued pressure of recreational disturbance, could be having a cumulative effect on the birds, whereby the ecological effect of both pressures in combination is greater than the sum of the individual pressures.

4.6 The Forestry Commission recognises its responsibility to urgently recreate areas of open heathland to provide additional habitat for the birds. This must however be undertaken in

conjunction with a longer term plan for the sustainable management of visitors, and an increasing number of visitors to the Sandlings area.

- 4.7 All European member states are duty bound to ensure that deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species for which a European site is designated is avoided, along with ensuring that significant disturbance effects are also prevented. This is in accordance with Article 6(2) of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), which, by the authority of Article 7 of that Directive, is applicable to both SACs and SPAs. Furthermore, the Birds Directive (2009/147/EEC) clearly states that Member States should take the requisite measures to preserve, maintain or re-establish habitats for Annex 1 species, and that those measures not only include the creation of protected areas, but also the upkeep and management of those areas in accordance with the ecological needs of habitats inside and outside of the protected zones.
- 4.8 Preventing deterioration of habitats used by the bird species, and managing those areas in accordance with the ecological needs of habitats used by those species, requires a combination of ensuring that good quality habitats are available to the birds, and that those habitats are capable of use to their maximum capacity. Recreational disturbance can reduce the capacity of an otherwise suitable habitat to meet the ecological needs of a species. The Recreation Strategy therefore faces the challenge of contributing to the achievement of the requirements of European Directives, and duties echoed in the transposition of those Directives into UK law through the Habitats Regulations. Ensuring that areas of suitable habitat are undisturbed is therefore one of the most important objectives of the Recreation Strategy.
- 4.9 The Sandlings area also has a concentration of SSSIs that, in addition to the nightjar and woodlark interest, are also notified for a range of other heathland species, and the lowland heathland and acid grassland habitats in their own right. In accordance with Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, public bodies must take reasonable steps, consistent with the proper exercise of their functions, to further the conservation and enhancement of SSSIs. Government Circular 06/2005, which accompanies Planning Policy Statement 9, Biodiversity and Geological Conservation, advises that the Government expects public bodies to adopt the highest standards of management in relation to SSSIs in their ownership, and as owners or otherwise, to take positive steps wherever possible to conserve and enhance the special features of a SSSI where their activities may be affecting it, or as opportunities arise in the exercise of their functions.
- 4.10 Disturbance of and damage to habitats as a result of recreation will prevent the achievement of legislative and national policy duties for SSSIs. The Recreation Strategy not only faces the challenge of disturbance impacts, but also damage to habitats that are a notified feature of the SSSIs. Reducing the effect of trampling, ground disturbance and erosion on sensitive SSSI habitats is a key objective for the Recreation Strategy. Eutrophication of lowland heathland and acid grassland habitats as a result of dog fouling is also a major concern, across heathlands nationally as well as within the Sandlings area. Resolving the issue of dog fouling on susceptible wildlife habitats can be both sensitive and

complex. However, the impacts are significant and a reduction in dog fouling must therefore be an objective of the Recreation Strategy, in order to conserve the special interest of the Sandlings SSSIs.

- 4.11 The Strategy therefore incorporates the following objectives to address the protection of nature conservation interest:

Objective 1: Ensure that there are areas of undisturbed suitable habitat (for key bird species)

Objective 2: Reduce levels of dog fouling on areas of grass-heath and lowland heath

Objective 3: Ensure trampling levels and ground disturbance is not damaging nature conservation interest

Making Links

- 4.12 Rendlesham and Tunstall Forests dominate the Strategy Area and are essentially separate, isolated blocks of forestry with areas of intensive farmland lying between and around them. However, within a wider context, they sit within the Suffolk Coasts and Heaths AONB and are adjacent to the Deben and Alde/Ore estuaries and the coast. A series of patches of open heath and common lie within and adjacent to the forestry areas; in addition, there is the deciduous woodland of Staverton Park and the Thicks in the middle of the area. The need for this Strategy has come about partly as a result of the need for a joined-up, strategic approach, looking beyond the forestry and considering the issues relating to recreation in context with the surrounding landscape.
- 4.13 The need for connectivity is recognised for both access (allowing visitors to move easily between different locations), nature conservation management (for example the ability of grazing animals to move between sites) and biodiversity (the need to ensure that heathland blocks are not fragmented). The Strategy needs to consider recreation in terms of visitor flows to and from the wider area, and the links with other visitor attractions within the AONB. Over much of the area, there is little connection with the coast and estuaries; they are rarely visible from the Forests for example, despite their proximity. Many visitors will be drawn to the coast, to Snape Maltings or Sutton Hoo and simply pass by the Forests en-route to their destination of choice. Others will visit the Forests specifically, for example drawn by the option of dedicated cycling facilities and may not appreciate the wider context. Connections provide the opportunities to give visitors and users a sense of place, and allow people to move easily between destinations. Given the general increases in access levels in England it is necessary to ensure the opportunities for recreational access are maximised and the best use is made of available space.
- 4.14 In terms of nature conservation, there are opportunities in the long term to create better links between key sites, providing the potential for extensive grazing and integrated management over a wide area. For many species, particularly invertebrates, dispersal distances are relatively small and by connecting sites, the impacts of fragmentation can be reduced.
- 4.15 Another area where better links could be made is between local residents and the surrounding countryside. Visitor survey results indicated that local residents from

Rendlesham and at Sutton Estate do visit, but for both these groups access links between their homes and the surrounding countryside could be improved.

4.16 The Strategy therefore incorporates the following objectives to facilitate making links:

Objective 4: Establish and maintain links between heathland habitats

Objective 5: Enhance access links with the coast and estuaries

Objective 6: Ensure access links between local housing and the countryside

Enhancing access and ensuring provision to cope with future levels of access

4.17 The area is currently used by a wide variety of people for recreation. Visitors range from the local dog walker to tourists; from extreme sport cyclists to families undertaking a short cycle ride in the countryside; from long distance walkers to those out for a short stroll. In the context of a growing population, particularly those within the range of a short drive/day trip, this means that use will continue to increase. In particular, we expect an increase in day trippers, including those from more urban environments seeking a destination for a day in the countryside – visiting to ride horses, bicycles, long walks etc. It is necessary therefore to consider current and future levels of different activities in the context of constraints such as the space available and the nature conservation interest. As the numbers of visitors increase, there is a risk of increased conflict between users, a lack of space and increased impacts from recreation. These issues need to be addressed in such a way that users, as far as possible, have the opportunities, choice and freedom to undertake their preferred activities. Looking ahead can ensure that the potential issues can be avoided before they arise. The Strategy therefore incorporates the following objectives to facilitate enhancing access and ensuring provision to cope with future levels of access:

Objective 7: Ensure facilities and infrastructure match the needs of users

Objective 8: Long-term provision of access is adequate to meet future demand and meets expectations of users

Sustainability

4.18 With nearly 80% of visitors travelling to the Sandlings by car it is clear that a major challenge in improving the sustainability of recreation in the Sandlings is to reduce car use. The rural nature of the area means that public transport is limited and the nearest train station at Melton (4 miles from Rendlesham Forest Centre) only runs a two hourly service from Woodbridge. Regular visitors come from towns like Woodbridge and often drive to the area on a daily basis. Day trippers travelling from within 45 minutes to 1 hour's drive away often bring the family, children, dogs and bicycles for which public transport is not generally seen as a viable option. A consequence of this is that access is focused around the major car-parks near to facilities (e.g. Rendlesham Forest Centre and Iken) and close to the major settlements (e.g. Sutton Heath). The coast and estuaries create transport barriers, adding to the focus on a few roads from the east being the main vectors and links between sites. While there are existing cycle routes and ferries operating across the Deben and across Butley Creek, these cater largely for tourist use.

- 4.19 Sustainability issues also extend of course to the use of carefully sourced materials in building and infrastructure. There is an opportunity to promote the area to visitors as one with high environmental standards and consideration should be given to the sourcing of produce and merchandise available to visitors. Coupled to the sale of goods there is an opportunity to promote a firm commitment to recycling and carbon footprint reduction. Other sustainability issues revolve around social issues since the Sandlings is a place where people live as well as visit. For residents, issues such as traffic, noise, employment opportunities and the maintenance of a pleasant living environment are important. The Strategy therefore incorporates the following objectives to address sustainability:

Objective 9: Reduce car use and car dependency for visitors

Objective 10: Social, economic and environmental sustainability is integrated within all elements of the strategy.

5. Ways to Achieve the Objectives

5.1 In this section we set out how the above objectives could be achieved.

Access Infrastructure

The need for a Gateway?

- 5.2 Day trippers and holiday makers constitute a large proportion of visitors to the Sandlings that come to the area to undertake specific activities or to enjoy a certain characteristic of the landscape. Evidence at a national level suggests that visits to the countryside are increasing (TNS Research International Travel & Tourism 2010) and looking locally it is likely that visitor numbers will increase over the next 20 years in the South Sandlings due to the increased housing provision in the Haven Gateway area. Rendlesham and Tunstall forests represent the nearest significant areas of open access and semi-natural green space to the Gateway area and therefore there is a need to cater for a likely increase in day visitors. Such visitors are drawn to the area for activities such as family day trips, mountain biking, horse riding, long walks etc.
- 5.3 A gateway could ensure that the longer distance visitors have the experience they want and may even attract the regular local visitor on some occasions. If a gateway was created and managed sensitively then the activities of visitors could be contained within one focal area away from ecologically important habitats and the impacts on the local residents could be minimised.
- 5.4 Looking across the area under consideration, it is clear that Rendlesham forest receives the highest volume of visitors, particularly day trippers that would make use of and be attracted to a gateway. This is perhaps in part due to the existing facilities at Rendlesham Forest Centre but also due to the location, provision of parking and nature of the forest which makes it attractive to walkers, mountain bikers and families. As an alternative location, a gateway could be sited at one of the existing attractions around Rendlesham forest such as Snape Maltings or Sutton Hoo. However these attractions already serve a specific role in tourist attraction in the area and would not be suitable to host the kinds of visitors that want an outdoors forest experience.
- 5.5 Given the main flow of visitors comes from the southwest via Woodbridge (and the A12), the proximity of the railway and the proximity to Sutton Heath it could seem sensible to position a gateway area around Wilford Bridge. However this area is some distance from the open forest and large amounts of investment would be required to establish visitor facilities here. In terms of providing a 'gateway to the forest' the area around Wilford Bridge actually feels lacking in trees due to the presence of the golf course and adjacent farmland to the south. Furthermore, unless there is convenient and attractive transport provided into the heart of the forest, it is likely that visitors would drive into the forest for the outdoors experience that they seek.
- 5.6 An obvious site for the creation of a gateway is at the Rendlesham Forest Centre. Feedback from visitors interviewed at the Centre would suggest that the current facilities are tired in places and that there is a general lack of cohesion in the visitor experience with

visitors often unsure of what's on offer, where to get information and where to go. A simple improvement to the centre would be to redesign the current signposting to provide low key but informative and suitably branded signs which direct people to the adventure play area, the bike skills area, the various trails (current and improved) and any other installations/attractions. There should also be one central interpretation point (potentially associated to a small visitors' centre- see below) describing the facilities on offer, history of the area, information about the wildlife, providing maps of trails and telling the story of the UFO trail - as this is a popular attraction for visitors. In addition an improved notice board could be regularly maintained by FC staff to record sightings and promote events in the area and throughout the AONB, including the other major visitor attractions such as Snape Maltings and Sutton Hoo.

- 5.7 Trails could be enhanced to include trails of set lengths through the forest areas, providing routes for joggers, as well as the existing routes and circuits for cycling, orienteering etc.
- 5.8 During two days of interviews which covered both a sunny and rainy day in August, over 50 groups were interviewed about their use of the centre. None of the groups interviewed said that they would like a large visitor centre and associated commercial attractions such as paint balling and an activity assault course. Everyone commented that they liked the centre the way it was and would hate to see it become 'too commercialised'. However some improvements could make visits more enjoyable and attract visitors from other locations. Suggested improvements included more detailed maps (the current ones are seen as too simplistic and many visitors said that they have got lost in the forest), more outdoor shelter for bad weather, a better cafe with more choice, more information on routes, better bike hire facilities and improved information about the history and wildlife of the forest.
- 5.9 The area would benefit from a small visitor centre with attached cafe which is open at weekends and during the school holidays or outside of school holidays when it could be used for educational purposes. The idea of the centre would be to provide information on the whole of the Sandlings and to direct people into the best part of the forest for their chosen activity whilst encouraging awareness of the management of the forest for people, wildlife and timber production.
- 5.10 The area is popular with holiday makers staying at the campsite as the playground facilities and forest provide a safe environment to bring children and dogs for short and frequent visits. The campsite is often fully booked in the school holidays and it was suggested in the FC recreation strategy (2005) that it should be moved so that it could expand. An alternative option would be to create another campsite further away from Tangham but within walking distance on forest tracks of the Rendlesham Forest Centre.
- 5.11 Family outings accounted for around 11% of the groups interviewed during the summer element of the visitor survey and around 1% of the groups interviewed during the winter. This difference may partly due to the focus of survey effort (a smaller sample of sites were surveyed in the summer). Family use is mainly focused currently at the Rendlesham Centre, which has recently improved play equipment. It is clear from the survey results that the playground is a draw for local families. The improvements already set out at the

Rendlesham Centre will largely cater for family users. The centre could be improved for family groups through the provision of a covered areas for picnics, improved (more cohesive) information and activities, better toilets, retaining safe areas near the cars where cars drive slowly (as many families hang around cars to eat, relax and allow the children to play safely), improvements at the small play area and better promotion of outdoor adventure play area.

- 5.12 Consideration must be given to the local residents of the ten properties in Tangham. The residents are concerned about increased visitor levels and the noise and congestion that could be created and how this might impact upon the wildlife. A future gateway or improved facilities could therefore be sited up the road from Tangham towards the B1084. This location has the benefit of being closer to Woodbridge and also Tunstall forest and it is on one of the main routes into the area making it more suitable to public transport. An additional benefit would be more opportunities to expand the camping facilities. However, this location is somewhat restricted by the airfield which cuts off access to a large part of the forest to the southwest and distances visitors from the existing attractions including the highly popular UFO trail. Both nightjar and woodlark have been recorded around the end of the runway in the open habitat whereas their distribution does not cover the existing centre, where there is currently a relative lack of suitable open habitat and high levels of human disturbance. Therefore whilst it seems appealing to move the centre there are many issues that would need to be resolved, not to mention the cost of an entirely new gateway centre.
- 5.13 New buildings and facilities do not need to be overly expensive or ambitious. With a relatively low-key design there is greater potential to use locally sourced materials in the building and to create an innovative and inspiring space highlighting best practice in sustainable design. Examples for shelters etc. could be drawn from the outdoor classroom commissioned by the Sustainability Centre in Hampshire⁶.

Recommendations

New/enhanced visitor facilities at Rendlesham, moving the centre to the north (near the end of the runway), away from residential properties. The new facilities should be relatively low-key and largely an improvement on the existing facilities, providing a small cafe (providing locally sourced food), interpretation, sheltered area for picnics, education facilities, access to a range of trails for families, horse riders, cyclists, walkers etc. The centre should become the main hub for much of the recreational access involving people coming on day-trips and weekend trips.

- 5.14 During the visitor survey work, 41 counts of the cars in all 115 formal and informal car parks across the Sandlings there were 153 occasions when one of the car parks was

⁶ <http://www.flickr.com/photos/naturewise/sets/72157624727494239/with/4945758783/>

considered full⁷. Most of the locations that were full were small informal parking locations, with space for just a small number of cars. The single location that was most frequently full was the parking next to the bike jump area at Sudbourne, which was considered full on twelve of the occasions that car-park counts were conducted here. The data for formal car-parks are summarised in Table 3. Of the formal car-parks it was Sutton Heath and Captains Wood that were full on the most occasions.

Table 3: Formal car parks and number of instances when car park was considered full. Cars parked in all parking locations were counted 41 times, between December 2009 and August 2010. Counts conducted at varying times of day and included bank holidays, weekends and weekdays.

Car park	Estimated number of spaces	Number of times car park full
Sutton Heath Car Park	20	4
Captains Wood	4	4
Friday Street	5	3
Tunstall Forest, white sign	3	3
Upper Hollesley Common 1	4	1
Chillesford Wood, white sign,	4	1
Sandgalls Picnic Site	10	1
Blaxhall Common	4	1

- 5.15 Current parking provision within Rendlesham forest seems to meet the requirements of visitors. There are a number of small car parks and lay bys for use by local and often regular visitors looking for a quiet walk but there are also larger formal car parks such as those at Sutton Heath and Rendlesham Forest Centre. Parking capacity at the Rendlesham Centre has recently been increased through the removal of the grassy mounds between parking bays. An improved gateway located towards the end of the runway would benefit from more parking.
- 5.16 Parking should not be improved at Sutton Heath – despite the fact that it was full on approximately 10% of the times counts were conducted here. Instead improved parking should be provided at a new dog walking location closer to Woodbridge (see later sections on dog walking). In Tunstall forest there is a higher number of smaller formal and informal parking areas dotted around the forest with two larger car parks at Sandgalls Picnic site and Iken.
- 5.17 In general the current distribution and volume of parking provision works reasonably well. Aside from the main car parks / existing visitor ‘hot spots’ at Sutton Heath, the Rendlesham Centre, Friday Street, Daisy’s Walk, Sandgalls, Iken and at Blaxhall most of the parking is low key, with a large number of small, informal locations (such as forest gateways) where there is limited parking for a small number of vehicles. This results in a relatively even, low level of visitor use spread over a wide area.
- 5.18 A proportion of the dog walkers interviewed in the visitor survey stated that they would typically walk at a favoured site (such as Sutton Heath) most mornings, but would also visit a range of alternative sites in the afternoon, at weekends etc. Some visitor responses

⁷ Car park capacity estimates are based on an estimate of the number of spaces from aerial photographs and ground truthing.

revealed that parking locations were sometimes chosen according to availability – i.e. if there was no parking at one location then they would drive along the road to the next available location. The range of options and choice is clearly important to many visitors. Maintaining a range of low key, ad hoc parking locations is therefore important. The users of these locations are visitors who may also visit coastal sites and therefore retaining the informal parking will continue to draw visitors from sites such as Shingle Street, potentially helping to relieve visitor pressure on the coast.

- 5.19 In the long term it is important to ensure that the parking in these gateways and small locations remains low key and does not grow, such that particular locations do not gradually develop into larger car parks over time. Limiting parking at these locations, such that there is only room for one or two cars at many locations will be beneficial in the long term, ensuring that a proportion of visitors will be flexible with where they park and used to moving between alternative parking locations. In the long term such a pattern and flexibility would bring the potential to divert parking at some locations – for example where forestry operations, other management or the presence of Annex I birds means that it is ideal to have relatively low levels of access.

Recommendations

Retain existing network of small informal parking locations, but ensure that these cannot grow over time through bunds, banks or similar. Similarly ensure ad hoc roadside parking cannot develop further.

Information and Interpretation

- 5.20 While FC manage the majority of the land area with public access, there are a variety of bodies involved in promoting access in the area and a range of bodies managing land and promoting sites. It is important that clear simple messages are available to all visitors, who can potentially be confused by the guidance, signage and promotion by different organisations.
- 5.21 Joint working between the different organisations (potentially FC, Suffolk Coastal District Council, the AONB, the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, the RSPB, Natural England and the National Trust) could result in a single ‘brand’ for the area between Woodbridge, Orford and Snape. It would be possible to develop a series of guidance and information for visitors that provides an overview of the whole area. The advantages of the partnership working would be the ability to deliver clear, simple messages to a wide audience in a cost effective way. We envisage a series of leaflets that feature a single map of the whole area and highlight where to go for particular activities or types of activities. One leaflet could highlight areas for wildlife, showing the different reserves, key sites and ideal sites to visit to view wildlife. Another could be on activities, highlighting cycling routes, bike hire, locations for boat trips, visitor centres etc. By communicating visitor attractions etc in a single source it should be possible to facilitate how day trippers, visiting families etc. plan their trips, enabling them to see the forest area in context with the surrounding coast.

- 5.22 Good clear and consistent communication with dog walkers is essential. Many dog walkers are clearly unsure about when and where they are required to keep their pet on a lead and where they are expected to pick up after their dog. For many dog walkers knowledge of where livestock are grazing is important and a key element in where they choose where to walk. A system where dog walkers can identify check where to walk is recommended; for example a 'traffic light' system where a web site indicates with a red, amber or green dot particular locations that are suitable for dog walking. The colours can change depending on grazing, management etc and provides a clear and simple means for dog walkers to check where they should walk. While some locations might always be green – i.e. welcoming dogs – others would change depending on the management and sensitivities. Such a system would be compatible with (and link to) the AONB's current I'm a good dog campaign. The development of the site could be facilitated by involving local dog walkers.
- 5.23 The visitor survey work revealed high levels of access at Sutton Heath by people visiting from the estate within the Woodbridge Base. Informal discussion with some users at this location has highlighted that the gym within the base promotes walking and exercise routes around Sutton Heath. There is potential to develop a map of jogging circuits for residents in the Woodbridge base. The provision of routes of set lengths that are easy to follow should ensure good take-up and provide a means of directing away from areas sensitive for wildlife.

Recommendations

Develop a single set of jointly branded leaflets and a web presence for the south Sandlings, i.e. between Snape, Orford, Bawdsey and Woodbridge. Leaflets would be topic based – i.e. one on wildlife, one on activities. Leaflets should have a central map showing key locations to visit and provide relevant contacts etc. Aim is to allow visitors to have a comprehensive 'joined-up' view of the area, recognising that visitors to the National Trust, RSPB, Wildlife Trust, coastal and forest sites will move between sites.

Develop a website for dog walkers, with a colour coding system (e.g. traffic lights) to indicate suitability of different locations for walking the dog. The colours for sites would change over time to indicate presence of livestock, habitat management etc. It would also highlight where dogs are required to be on a lead and promote a code of conduct for dog walkers.

Develop a leaflet for residents in the estate at Sutton and in particular MOD personnel using the gym, to highlight circuits for jogging etc within the Forest.

Facilities for Particular User Groups

Access on foot

- 5.24 The visitor survey results found that by far the majority of visitors walking directly from their home to visit the area originate in the estate at Sutton Heath, within the air base compound. Directly opposite the main gate to the base there is a bridleway heading south across the heath. Due to the layout of the fencing and site security issues people on foot must use this route or else walk along a relatively busy road with no path.
- 5.25 The access provision for residents in the base and MOD personnel could be enhanced through additional green infrastructure within the base itself. This and other options would need to consider security and MOD operational issues. If possible it would be ideal to provide another exit/entry point for people on foot, potentially establishing a direct link to the Rendlesham Centre, allowing residents in the camp and MOD personnel to make use of the facilities and trails within the forest. Any discussion with the MOD should also consider the runway and potential future management of this area, see paragraph 5.57.
- 5.26 Another site where access to the forest could be much enhanced, especially for people on foot, is from the recent development north of Bentwaters airfield to Friday Street. To gain access to the small car park here currently requires a car journey along narrow lanes whereas the direct distance on foot would be less than 1km if a new footpath could be created to the west of the airfield.
- 5.27 In the northern part of the Strategy area, there are high levels of visitor use at Snape Maltings and Iken, where visitors are drawn to the wide range of facilities at Snape Maltings, the estuary and attractive walks. Iken car-park lies adjacent to the estuary and there is a popular walk from the car-park to the Maltings along the estuary. The RSPB have an interpretation centre at the Maltings and the Wildlife Trust manage a reserve just to the north of the Maltings. The Maltings contains a series of flats and holiday apartments and this area will continue to grow as a destination attracting many 1000s of visitors all year round. Visitors travelling from the south-east to the Maltings drive through Blaxhall Common and the proximity of Blaxhall Common and Tunstall Forest mean to Snape mean that visitor use in this area is likely to be high and to increase. Much of the access involves picnics, family groups and those undertaking longer walks – even promoted in the national press⁸.
- 5.28 In general this area (in the northern corner of the Strategy area) represents great potential to show people wildlife and promote relatively quiet recreation. Given the existing infrastructure (such as the Maltings and the Youth Hostel in Blaxhall) relatively little is necessary to draw visitors, but there is potential to enhance the links between the estuary and the forest. Iken car-park itself is a fantastic location to show people wildlife, as the site provides a high vantage point across the estuary. The use of this location for wildlife-linked events and guided walks etc is ideal. One particular issue is that access into Tunstall Forest

⁸ For example an article in the Guardian in June 2007 promoted a 5 mile walk that included both Tunstall Forest and the estuary. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2007/jun/02/guardianspecial4.guardianspecial21>

is relatively difficult from the Iken car-park, as the roads can be busy and there are no paths. A dedicated route starting at Iken, and going into the Forest from here, aimed at walkers and birdwatchers could provide a dedicated location from which people can view wildlife and access both the estuary and the forest/heath. A walking circuit that took in one of the heath/forest car parks would provide alternative starting options. The aim would be to ensure dedicated access for walkers, birdwatchers etc in the northern area of the Strategy Area, providing a location that can be promoted for those wishing to appreciate the mixed habitats, wildlife and landscape. The proximity to Snape should draw visitors but also minimise car use and potentially also ensure access is around the edge of the grazing unit here rather than the middle.

Recommendations

Discussion with MOD regarding Woodbridge Base and foot access. Discussion should explore the potential for enhanced green infrastructure within the base itself and the potential to provide additional foot access points, ideally providing a direct link with the Rendlesham Centre.

Establish foot access link between the housing at Bentwaters and Friday Street, allowing foot access from the housing directly into the forest.

Establish a dedicated walking circuit in the north of the Strategy area linking Iken with the heaths/forestry. Footpath required along road.

Dog walking

- 5.29 Dog walkers account for nearly two thirds of recreational users at Rendlesham and Tunstall. Dog ownership within the UK remains high, with nearly a third of households owning a dog (Murray et al. 2010). Anecdotal evidence from talking to users at Sutton Heath suggests that the numbers of dog walkers has increased in recent years and looking to the future the numbers of people visiting to walk their dog is likely to increase in the medium term, due to increased levels of housing at locations such as Martlesham, resulting in a larger local population. Much of the existing use by dog walkers is concentrated on heathland sites, rather than the forestry and Sutton Heath is particularly popular. Heathland sites are potentially the most vulnerable to impacts from dogs, such as disturbance to Annex I birds and dog fouling. Given the context of increasing use and the vulnerability of the heathland sites, additional infrastructure for dog walkers within the area is necessary and ideally needs to focus use away from heathland areas. FC Policy within the forest allows dog walking where the dog is under close control, it would seem appropriate to provide an area targeted for dog walking that is within the forest but created in a way to specifically draw dog walkers. Given that the majority of users travel by car, from settlements such as Woodbridge (and therefore cross the Deben at Wilford Bridge), provision of additional facilities close to Wilford Bridge would be ideal.

- 5.30 The design and enhancement of a 'new' area for dog walkers would be best done in conjunction with the dog walking community. Specific measures that would be required to attract dog walkers could include the following (largely taken from Edwards & Knight 2006; Liley, Mallord, & Lobley 2006; Jenkinson & McCloy 2008):
- easy, safe parking
 - a safe environment for the dog to be off the lead (i.e. away from roads)
 - attractive terrain for walking, ideally incorporating a mixture of tree cover and open areas, and a mixture of woodland types. Open areas are important as many dog walkers like to see their dog when it is off the lead.
 - a range of paths and routes, providing options for dog walkers to vary their route
 - the possibility of a dedicated fenced area for exercising dogs such as greyhounds. Such a fenced area should ideally be larger than the existing one at Sutton Heath and be relatively open, allowing owners to see their dogs, yet providing enough cover and interest for the dogs to explore.
- 5.31 An obvious potential location would be adjacent to Woodbridge Golf Course, where there is a block of forestry that lies between the golf course and the Woodbridge runway. This forestry block is more than large enough to provide a suitable area. The 'busy' area at Sutton Heath totals around 75ha. We have plotted an area on Map 9 of roughly equivalent size (c.65ha), that runs alongside the golf course, already contains some deciduous trees (at least near the golf course) and is closer to Woodbridge than Sutton Heath. Potential issues with the area that would need to be resolved would be the potentially dangerous road access at the junction (if the car park is retained in current location, which is conveniently close to Wilford Bridge) and the proximity to the road. The travellers' camp at the eastern end of the block may also deter some dog walkers. A further issue is the presence of a small number of woodlark and nightjar in the one large clearing in the area near the golf course.
- 5.32 The measures necessary to enhance a location such as this will take a number of years to implement, and it would be expected that it would take some years for dog walkers to start to use the site regularly. The aim would be to create an additional (rather than alternative) location for dog walkers besides Sutton and the other heaths, but over time it would be expected that the Bromeswell location would become the main dog-walking location. As it develops as such (and it will be necessary to carefully monitor use), it would be possible to remove the dog enclosure at Sutton Heath. Changes in management at Sutton Heath (e.g. expansion of the grazing unit) may result in dog walkers preferring the 'new' location.
- 5.33 Without the provision of 'new' areas or enhanced facilities, any measures such as limiting parking at heathland sites, promoting dogs-on-leads etc. are likely to antagonise existing users. The new area would provide a positive step to welcoming dog walkers. The Bromeswell location is likely to be successful in attracting use as it is closer to Woodbridge.

Results from the visitor survey showed that proximity to home was the main reason given by dog walkers in their choice of site, with around a third of dog walkers citing close to home as a reason underlying their choice of site.

- 5.34 In the north of the Strategy Area, Blaxhall Common is another popular location for dog walking, attracting residents from Blaxall and also even residents from Saxmundham and Leiston. It is important that provision for dog walking is retained to avoid any potential conflicts with enhanced grazing schemes in the area. One option here is to manage the grazing units such that there is always parts of the area where livestock are not present. Such a system will need the support of local walkers and good communication to ensure good information exchange about which areas are being grazed.

Recommendations

A new dog walking location is established where people are encouraged to come to walk their dog. The location will require various infrastructure, including dedicated parking, range of routes, landscaping and would ideally incorporate open grassy/heath areas. Adjacent to Woodbridge Golf Course would work well due to proximity to Woodbridge. The area should be welcoming to dog walkers and, at least within a clearly defined (and possibly perimeter fenced area?) dogs should always be able to run free. The location should include a fenced dog exercise area, near the car-park and similar (or ideally slightly larger) than the existing one at Sutton Heath.

In the long term, as the new site becomes established, the existing compound at Sutton Heath could be taken down.

At Blaxhall, grazing schemes will need to ensure space for existing dog walkers, with one option being to manage the grazing such that parts of the area are always ungrazed. Good communication will need to be established with the local dog walking community for this to work.

Cycling

- 5.35 Mountain biking and cycling in general continues to grow in popularity. During the spring summer element of the visitor survey work, around 1 in 10 visitors were cycling. Cycle facilities within the area need to provide for a range of different types of cyclists, including:
- Day-trippers/weekend visitors travelling considerable distances by car to mountain bike within the forests,
 - More local residents driving out for part of a day,
 - Families, cycling with trailers, tag-alongs or similar,

- People undertaking long distance touring
 - Teenagers (and older cyclists?) using jumps etc. such as at Sudbourne or the Rendlesham Centre.
- 5.36 The visitor survey results showed that a relatively small proportion (2%) of visitors actually arrive at sites by bicycle, with many cyclists bringing their bikes on their car. It is people coming from well outside the area, visiting for the day/weekend that are most likely to increase given the levels of development within a drive of an hour or two. Such visitors would potentially bring their own bikes or wish to hire cycles and would involve cyclists of a range of abilities and experience. The visitor survey recorded a higher incidence of cycling in the summer and recorded people travelling greater distances in the summer compared to the winter.
- 5.37 We would envisage the Rendlesham Centre becoming the main ‘hub’ for activities such as cycling and in particular providing the infrastructure and resources for non-local visitors, who perhaps only visit occasionally and have limited local knowledge. The Rendlesham Centre should provide all the facilities required by these visitors, and the improvements at the centre should particularly include cycling provision. Enhanced bike hire facilities, cycle washdown facilities and an improved range of well mapped routes should be provided. Better promotion of the bike skills area at Rendlesham would also be beneficial.
- 5.38 For more long distance cyclists, there is a need to establish easy cycling routes between the main destinations that attract visitors. There is an existing Suffolk Coast cycle route and the ferries at the mouth of the Deben and across Butley Creek take cyclists. Building on this existing network, there is a major gap at the moment in terms of linking Melton (where there is a railway station) and Sutton Hoo (which will be an attraction for many visitors on bikes) with the Rendlesham Centre and the Suffolk Coast Route. A link could therefore be developed along the northern edge of the Woodbridge runway, starting at Bromeswell and linking up to the existing promoted cycle route within Rendlesham (see Map 6). Such a link would provide a direct link with the station.

Recommendations

Promote Rendlesham Centre as the main location for cycling within the Forest, with the ability to cater for a range of cycling activities and groups.

As part of the improvements to the Rendlesham Centre develop a marked cycling route through the forest running along the northern edge of the Woodbridge base, through to the edge of Woodbridge Golf Course, and therefore to Sutton Hoo (and on to the station at Melton).

Horse Riding

- 5.39 Relatively few horse riders were interviewed as part of the visitor survey, however the survey probably underestimates levels of horse riding as interviewing horse riders can be difficult and they tend not to use the main access points/car parks.
- 5.40 Much of the horse riding use within the area is linked to the equestrian centres, with centres as Tunstall, Hollesley and Chillesford. The centres teach riding and take groups within the forest/heaths. There is an existing network of bridleways and the Hollesley Horse Route links some of the existing bridleways (see Map 7).
- 5.41 Horses with a rider can exert considerable ground pressure, which can lead to ground disturbance. This can be a problem on lowland heath sites, in particular areas important for certain invertebrates or herptiles (see Lowen *et al.* 2008 for a review). The long term aim should therefore be to ensure that the equestrian centres have access to suitable routes away from sensitive areas and that use is focused on existing bridleways and dedicated routes, such that groups do not stray onto firebreaks or hack across-country. The existing network of routes should be sufficient for this purpose.
- 5.42 For people riding from home, or driving out to the forest use to ride, use should be encouraged in the forested areas and provision made for riding away from the main areas used by dog walkers and cyclists. This could be achieved through a permit system for riding on the FC land (permits being required for any off-bridleway use – with such use being carefully stipulated to be limited to particular areas as a condition of the permits. Issue of the permits could be subject to a small fee (or be free) and an incentive for application for a permit could be an established dedicated parking area for horse trailers. The advantage of a permit system is a contact list for all local riders and this can be potentially used to inform riders about any issues (such as presence of grazing livestock such as ponies in a new area) and permits can be withdrawn if problems arise.
- 5.43 While such permit systems are in place on selected FC sites where there is no freehold, on its freehold ground, FC has issued a 'global' permission for horse riding. It may be difficult or unfeasible to withdraw this for selected sites, in which case targeted work with the local equestrian centres/livery yards would provide a means of focusing use on existing bridleways and dedicated routes and providing a means of communication with users.
- 5.44 Long term monitoring of car-park use should include checks for horse trailers/boxes. Where these occur regularly in heathland areas, and away from bridleways then consideration should be given to height restriction bars at the parking location.

Recommendations

Explore the potential to develop a permit system for horse riding in the Forest. Permits should allow users access to particular routes and a dedicated parking area for horse boxes. Permits should be relatively inexpensive or free, but ensure that users follow a code of conduct.

Alternatively close working with local livery yards/equestrian centres should focus on promoting use of dedicated routes/bridleways etc. and communicating where there are sensitive areas.

Monitoring of car park use should include numbers of horse boxes/trailers.

Family Groups

- 5.45 Family outings accounted for around 11% of the groups interviewed during the summer element of the visitor survey and around 1% of the groups interviewed during the winter. This difference may partly due to the focus of survey effort (a smaller sample of sites were surveyed in the summer).
- 5.46 Family use is mainly focused currently at the Rendlesham Centre, which has recently improved play equipment. It is clear from the survey results that the playground is a draw for local families. The improvements already set out at the Rendlesham Centre will largely cater for family users. The centre could be improved for family groups through the provision of a covered areas for picnics, improved (more cohesive) information and activities, better toilets, retaining safe areas near the cars where cars drive slowly (as many families hang around cars to eat, relax and allow the children to play safely), improvements at the small play area and better promotion of outdoor adventure play area.

Habitat and Forestry Management

General Issues

- 5.47 With respect to a recreation strategy, the issues relating to habitat and forestry management revolve around ensuring the compatibility of timber production, recreational use and nature conservation interest. These issues overlap; management for timber production will determine the habitats present within the forest blocks and will have knock on consequences for the nature conservation interest and where people go. Visitors will prefer particular landscapes and habitats for their visit and the presence of wildlife may even be a feature attracting some visitors. Looking to the future it is necessary to ensure that there will be some zonation of access such that quiet areas exist where management can ensure suitability for nightjar and woodlark (the SPA interest). Given the need to ensure that there is no deterioration of the SPA interest, and also to dovetail forestry and access it is potentially necessary to ensure a mix of the following:
- Permanent open blocks of open habitat in relatively undisturbed areas
 - Cyclical forestry management such that areas of open habitat are available in all years in areas with relatively low disturbance
 - Management of access such that levels of use can be diverted away from some areas of open habitat as necessary and as the areas of open habitat change
- 5.48 The present large forest blocks of Rendlesham (1426 ha) and Tunstall (1170 ha) were established by afforestation between the 1920s and 1940s. Until that time the present forested area was open heath/acid grassland and it had been so, largely as sheep walk and rabbit warren, for several centuries at least. The original open character of the Sandlings before afforestation has virtually disappeared but a hint of the type of landscape that used to prevail can be gleaned from the few areas not planted, such as at Sutton Heath. Here the mix of open grassland, heath and scattered trees, though not entirely as the Sandlings would have been, is in marked contrast to the dense stands of conifers that today typify the planted forest.

- 5.49 Even Sutton Heath is probably more tree covered than the original Sandlings would have been, due to a century or so without grazing coupled with the abundance of seed emanating from the planted conifers, that has given rise to a scatter of self-sown pines. Nonetheless, the highly characterful landscape of Sutton Heath clearly appeals to people; it can be no coincidence that this is one of the most visited of all the locations in the forests, even though there are none of the visitor attractions that are provided for instance at the Rendlesham Forest Centre at Tangham.
- 5.50 The acidic, sandy soils and a long history of grazing resulted in once extensive tracts of heathland and where relicts of this still persist, as at Sutton Heath, an extremely important habitat and its associated wildlife is found. Elements of this nationally and internationally scarce heathland take advantage of the temporary open conditions formed when trees are felled, or if an event such as the 1987 storm sweeps away more substantial areas of conifers. The more mobile species including some birds can use such clearings for a few years but there will be a gradual accumulation of soil nutrients from successive crops of trees, and the brash that follows felling and clearing. This may mean that these short-term clearings may increasingly become less suitable as surrogate heathland. Nonetheless, experience here and in other forests established on former heathland, show that with the right degree of clearing and follow-up management, and cessation of the forest cycle of planting, and felling, heathland can successfully be recreated.
- 5.51 Any increase in use of the forest needs to be planned and directed so that such conflicts are not introduced; and where they may already apply, steps must be taken to reduce the impacts. Such has been the loss of heathland, both in UK and across its entire range in NW Europe, only some 15% of its extent 250 years ago still remains. These losses were from agricultural change, afforestation and urban development, compounded by cessation of traditional management.
- 5.52 Within the south Sandlings a deliberate policy is required to restore and manage areas as heathland rather than simply continuing to rely on the temporary return of quasi-heathland habitat in between felling/planting cycles. Such a policy would allow some selection over the position of new heathland patches and these could be chosen to maximise habitat linkages, reflect and enhance species distribution, and indeed access and recreational opportunities for visitors. Given the relative lack of open areas within the Forest at the moment and the immediate need to reverse the decline of woodlark and nightjar, the immediate priority is to ensure the recovery of these species, and therefore existing clearings must be managed currently for their bird interest and new areas created. In the longer term it should be possible to establish these species both in the temporary clearfell areas within the forestry and within more extensive patches of more permanent open heathland, maintained in part by livestock moving freely through forest.
- 5.53 The SSSI management plan for Tunstall and Rendlesham identified areas of permanent open space for woodlark and nightjar, recognising that as the forest regenerated after the 1987 gales suitable habitat would diminish. FC is currently in discussions with appropriate partners to manage these areas under FBT arrangements to ensure that they are brought back into and are maintained in favourable condition. The Forestry Commission policy on

'When to convert woods and forests to open habitat in England' was published in March 2010 and all future planned conversions will need to meet the requirements of this policy. The policy recognises the importance of open habitat in meeting biodiversity and Habitat Action Plan targets but also recognises the contribution that woods can make in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and to the long term financial viability of land management. An implementation strategy is currently being developed.

- 5.54 The visitor survey results reveal that much of the forestry is relatively quiet and much of the visitor use is concentrated on the heaths (see Map 8). In particular Sutton Heath seems to particularly attract dog walkers. Part of this attraction is the proximity to the Sutton Estate and to Woodbrige, but visitors are also drawn by the mix of deciduous woodland, mixed woodland, open heath and grassland. This suggests strongly that the landscape type provided here should be created elsewhere to attract visitors. Evidence from other studies lends support to the idea that mixed landscapes, with varying interest and a mix of habitats are appeal to visitors (Edwards & Knight 2006; Liley et al. 2006)
- 5.55 In the western part of Rendlesham Forest, at Bromeswell there are existing open areas, including one area of failed crop. The creation of additional substantial clearings in the forest here, to make large open glades with grassland and heathland, and the provision of walk routes of varied length, together with a secure area for dogs to be allowed to exercise off lead, would create a viable alternative to Sutton Heath. Developing this location as a long term alternative to Sutton Heath would not prevent the existing open areas there also continuing to hold annex I birds in the short term. Indeed, for the alternative at Bromeswell to become established with dog walkers it will need to include substantial areas of open habitat. As it would take a number of years for the Bromeswell area to become established with the dog walking community, in the interim years the area could continue to support the bird interest, which is expected to increase in the future as management measures are implemented elsewhere.
- 5.56 Acid grassland and heathland require management input, the use of extensive grazing is a real and sustainable option to assist such habitat management. There is experience of this already at Rendlesham and of course in FC sites elsewhere, e.g. Dunwich Forest, New Forest, Wareham Forest, etc. The practicalities of livestock grazing on the Sandlings sites is considered in a separate report produced concurrently with this document. With respect to access, it is necessary to ensure that there are no conflicts with the grazing management; conflict can arise through dogs worrying livestock, issues with ponies and horse riders and some access users not liking fencing. It is therefore necessary to ensure that the areas promoted for recreational use do not limit the long term potential for extensive grazing.
- 5.57 One extensive tract of heathland and acid grassland, apparently of good quality and currently supporting rare breeding bird interest (including woodlark and nightjar), is the runway at Woodbridge Air Base. The site is not designated, currently has no public access and is surrounded by high security fencing. It would be useful to ascertain MOD requirements and long term plans for this area. Were it to be released by the MOD it would have nature conservation interest and potentially also draw visitors.

Issues relating to management of access and Annex I birds

- 5.58 Nightjar numbers in the Tunstall and Rendlesham Forests were collected during national census years and for some other years during the 1980s and 90s. In 1986 and 1987 just before the big storm there were 29 and 36 pairs of nightjar in the two forests, but by 1992 the number had increased to 81, following the widespread felling of wind blown trees to create temporary open areas (Morris *et al.* 1994). As replanting took place, these clear felled areas became progressively less suitable for nightjar and numbers declined to 54 pairs in 1998, 44 in 2004 and 16 in 2009 (Conway *et al.* 2007). During this period nightjar numbers nationally have increased from an estimated 2100 males in 1981, to 3400 males in 1994 and 4606 males in 2004, and in Suffolk excluding Rendlesham and Tunstall from an estimated 119 males in 1981 to 236 in 1992 and 236 in 2004 (Gribble 1981; Morris *et al.* 1994; Conway *et al.* 2007).
- 5.59 So while nightjar numbers increased nationally by about 35% and elsewhere in Suffolk were stable between 1992 and 2004, in Tunstall and Rendlesham, they dropped by 46% during the same time and have since declined by a further 64%.
- 5.60 Nightjars nest on open heathland and in forest clearfells and clearings. Dominant ground vegetation in a study of heathland nest sites on the Sandlings was found to be heather with scattered birch trees and some bracken (Berry 1979). The nest is on the ground, often close to small trees, tree stumps or similar features, with the birds relying on their cryptic colouring to hide from predators. The birds will roost on the ground, but will also roost in trees, including in plantation trees at a height of 10m or above.
- 5.61 Following the severe storm in 1987, when it was estimated there were some 591 ha of open and clearfelled ground and replanted plantation under five years old in the two forests, by 1992, the area under the same categories had increased through felling to some 1041 ha, the year of the national nightjar survey, giving a density of birds of about one singing male to 12.8ha. By 2004, the total suitable area was about 445 ha with 44 birds, a density of one bird to 10.1 ha. In 2009 the open areas under the same categories totalled 530 ha with 16 males at a density of only one male per 33 ha⁹.
- 5.62 Areas of open ground required by nesting nightjars vary between different areas. Ravenscroft (1989), studied nightjars in plantations on the Suffolk Sandlings and found no nesting birds in clearings of less than 10 ha and that the size of clearing needed to be about 23ha or more before it would be occupied by two nesting pairs. He also found (Ravenscroft 1988) that the number of nightjars correlated with the amount of woodland edge. Based on this, at Minsmere on the Suffolk Sandlings, it was shown that nightjar numbers doubled with the creation of clearings as small as 2.25 ha but with related work that increased the length of deciduous woodland edge from 2.5k to nearly 4k (Burgess, Evans, & Sorensen 1989).
- 5.63 In 2007, 14 of 16 males were recorded singing from, or on the edge of areas of heathland within the forest, in 2008 16 of 23 and in 2009 11 of the 16. An examination of the

⁹ We are indebted to Neil Armour-Chelu for assisting us with these figures

distribution of singing nightjars shows that there are large areas of the forests apparently not used by breeding birds over the three seasons, notably, in the north and north-east and south-west of Tunstall, and to the south of the airfield through to Capel Green and within the forest areas to the north and east of the airfield in Rendlesham Forest.

- 5.64 There are two main possibilities to explain the recent declines in the numbers of nightjars in the two forests. The first is the reduction in the open areas including clearfell and young plantation between 1992, 2004 and 2009. The area of open ground in 1992 was 1041ha of which some 156ha was recently felled and 688ha was young plantation under 5 years old. By 2004 this had shrunk to 445ha of which only 7ha was clearfell or young plantation. These figures strongly suggest that the declines were partly driven by the reduction in open areas, particularly in clearfell and young plantation. However, between 2004 and 2009, there was a further decline in numbers, with the open area increasing to 530 ha with clearfell and young plantation increasing to 80 ha. This suggests that some other factor was operating, and increasing public access may have played a part in this. Analysis from the visitor survey results does suggest that the distribution of nightjars is such there is avoidance of areas of high disturbance. This matches work elsewhere, where the distribution of nightjars and breeding success has been shown to be affected by recreational access, however there do appear to be differences between SPAs and the impacts of access do not appear to be consistent between sites.
- 5.65 Nightjars forage along edge habitat and over open heathland. In Dorset They have been recorded foraging in forest rides and along forest edges, around deciduous woodland, orchards and gardens and over wetland habitats such as water meadow, marsh and even saltmarsh (Alexander & Cresswell 1990; Cresswell 1996). On the Brecks, nightjars were found to forage over grass heathland and young plantations (Bowden & Green 1991). It is apparent from these studies that nightjars will use whatever features are available in the area where flying insects can be foraged, with some foraging taking place on the open areas where they breed, but with most birds apparently leaving the breeding areas to forage further afield where they favour either forest rides within the forest or deciduous woodland edges hedgerows and wetland features elsewhere.
- 5.66 Nightjars will travel some distance to forage and have been recorded travelling a mean distance of 3.1km, but up to 7km in Dorset (Alexander & Cresswell 1990, Cresswell 1996). The birds have been found to forage at up to 2k on the Brecks, with females possibly moving further than males, while in Nottinghamshire the furthest recorded distance was just under 900m (Bowden & Green 1991).
- 5.67 It might be expected therefore that in the Sandlings, the birds would make use of forest rides, particularly where these are edged by deciduous woodland, and would also hunt outside the forest, especially where this is close to nesting sites and connected to the interior of the forest by ride systems
- 5.68 The evidence suggests that to increase the nightjar population, additional areas of clearfell need to be created in areas of the forest undisturbed by people and dogs with appropriate foraging areas nearby, connected to nesting clearings by forest rides. Foraging areas could be outside the forest or areas of deciduous woodland within the forest.

- 5.69 New clearings should be created within 1km of existing areas of deciduous woodland within or on the edge of the forest wherever possible. The clearings should be sited away from well used paths and rides, if necessary, within areas of forest with little or no current access and where rides run at a tangent to avoid offering a view through to the clearing which might encourage visitors to walk through. Signs in the breeding season to warn visitors to keep their dogs on leads due to ground nesting birds at entrances to clearings will also assist in keeping them undisturbed.
- 5.70 Woodlark numbers for the Tunstall and Rendlesham Forests are available for the national census year 1986 and then from 1990 to 2009. These show that from 14 pairs in 1986, numbers have risen to 54 pairs by 1990, and then to 100 by 1997 declining to 25 pairs by 2006 (the latter both national census years) and dropping further to 16 pairs in 2009. Nationally woodlarks increased from the first national census in 1986 when 241 territories were recorded to between 1426 and 1552 territories in 1997 and 1757 territories found in 2006. On the Suffolk Sandlings, excluding Tunstall and Rendlesham the population was recorded as 11 pairs in 1986, between 109 and 145 in 1997, and 138 territories found in 2006. Although numbers at Tunstall and Rendlesham increased in line with the national trend and that for the rest of the Sandlings from 1986 to 1997, since then, while nationally numbers have increased, and on the Sandlings they have been relatively stable, in the two forest sites they have declined by some 75%.
- 5.71 The recent declines in woodlarks in the two forests may be due, as with nightjar, to the planting up of former abundant open habitat or to human disturbance. However, woodlarks appear to be far more specific in their breeding habitat than nightjar, requiring very sparse vegetation and open ground for nesting and feeding. Woodlark are also vulnerable to hard winter weather which can have a limiting effect on populations and a very severe winter can cause abrupt declines (Sitters *et al.* 1996). Nightjars, as migratory species are not subject to these effects.
- 5.72 Woodlark distribution in Tunstall Forest shows a strong affiliation with the heathland along the north-western and western edges. There are also a small number of records on adjoining agricultural land. Additional clearings in the eastern areas of the forest may attract additional breeding birds, with, initially, clearings created close to the north-western heathlands. Breeding woodlarks are far more widespread around Rendlesham Forest, although again, mostly in association with heathland areas around and within the forest. Breeding woodlarks are absent from the northern part of the forest and to the south and east of the airfield, an area where nightjar are also absent or at low densities. There are particularly high densities within the mosaic of heaths, woods and fields to the south-west of the road from Sutton Hoo to Stores Corner
- 5.73 Woodlarks nest on the ground in areas of sparse vegetation often with areas of bare ground. Wright *et al.* (2007) found that in the forests of the Brecks the highest densities of breeding woodlarks were in the first five years after planting with densities declining from year 2 after planting and almost no breeding birds after year six, and with slightly higher productivity in year three after planting than before or after. Bowden & Hoblyn (1990) noted that woodlarks cease using areas for breeding when the young trees reach about

- 1.1m 1m height and shade less than 7% of the ground area. They speculated that it was unlikely to be the growth of the trees themselves that cause the birds to move elsewhere but rather the change in conditions suitable for foraging.
- 5.74 In a further examination of the woodlark breeding data from the Brecks, Wright (2006) noted that the highest densities were achieved in felling coupes of 2-4 ha with much lower densities in larger coupes and few birds nesting in coupes smaller than 2ha. It was not known however whether woodlark productivity was greater in smaller coupes. It is possible that woodlarks favour smaller coupes as their response to the arrival of a predator is often to fly up into adjoining trees (Schaefer & Vogel 2000 in Wright 2006). Woodlarks will nest in clearings or clearfells used by nightjars (Birklands Ringing Group pers. comm.).
- 5.75 The home range of woodlarks can be between 3ha and nearly 30 ha (Patzold 1986 in Bowden & Green 1992). Woodlarks will forage on areas of bare ground in clearings and forest rides but their productivity is significantly lower in younger stands, possibly because there is less food in the sparsely vegetation areas of recently felled conifer woodland (Wright 2006)
- 5.76 Much of the work on human disturbance and woodlarks was carried out by Mallord, working on the Dorset Heaths (Mallord 2005; Mallord et al. 2006). He found that woodlark density per site was significantly negatively correlated with access levels and recreational activity (measured as disturbance events/hour) was a significant negative factor determining woodlark occupancy of suitable patches within sites.
- 5.77 Dartford warblers have only recently colonised Suffolk following extinction in 1939 due to persecution and the hard winters of 1917 and 1940 (Payne 1962). They returned to breed at Dunwich Heath in 1996, and by 2003 had spread to at least five sites in Suffolk, all of them heathland with a minimum of 75 breeding pairs (Black 2004). A survey in 2009 found 45 pairs of Dartford warbler at Rendlesham and 2 pairs at Tunstall. The two pairs at Tunstall were at Blaxhall Common and Tunstall Common on heathland and the pairs at Rendlesham were mostly on the heaths to the south-west of the Sutton Hoo with 14 pairs on Upper Hollesley Common. There were no Dartford warblers within the Forests and they are not an interest feature of the SPA.
- 5.78 The Dartford warbler is a heathland specialist, holding a territory on heathland all year round. In the 1960s, after a series of cold winters, the UK population was down to 11 pairs, the numbers recovered and were estimated at 3214 territories in 2006, with 130 territories located in Suffolk and an estimated 142 territories in the county. This number may have been reduced by the hard winter of 2008/09, but numbers on the Sandling Heaths seem to have held up. Based on the 2006 figures nationally and the figures locally, the Sandling heaths at Tunstall and Rendlesham have about 1.5% of the national population which would make them of national importance for this species. The visitor survey results indicated that there was significant avoidance by Dartford warblers of areas of high disturbance in the Sandlings.
- 5.79 Dartford warblers mostly nest in mature heather (and sometimes gorse) and feed in heather communities and gorse. Gorse is also particularly important for foraging in winter

and provides essential cover to warblers in hard weather. To provide maximum protection from frost and particularly snow, ideally a proportion of the gorse used in any territory gorse should be coppiced or subject to controlled fires about every 15 years to provide some thick, maturing gorse for shelter and food in hard winters (Bibby 1977). Wildfires in gorse in the summer can be very damaging to Dartford warbler populations, particularly if the fires are extensive and cover many territories.

- 5.80 Recent doctoral research by Murison (2007) considered the impacts of disturbance on breeding Dartford warblers on the Dorset heaths. She found significant effects of disturbance on breeding success, where birds were nesting in heather-dominated (rather than gorse-dominated) territories. Analyses suggested that disturbance both delayed start of breeding and interrupted adult foraging and chick feeding behaviour. It was found that above a threshold of 13-16 people per hour each day through heather territories, breeding was delayed sufficiently to prevent multiple broods. Thus, disturbance delayed breeding, and these later nesting birds produced only one brood and had poorer overall breeding success than those nesting earlier. Murison found on the Dorset heaths that a few highly disturbed sites subject to high visitor pressures produced very few young, but maintained high densities of Dartford warblers from year to year, presumably by immigration of young birds from more successful areas (Murison 2007). Such an effect could increase over time and could be compounded by other effects such as large heathland fires or hard winters. It is also likely that disturbance can affect wintering birds, particularly during cold weather when the birds may already be under energetic stress (i.e. the quality and quantity of food they can find only just meets their energy requirements for foraging and maintaining body temperature).
- 5.81 For nightjars and woodlark, as SPA interest features, management must ensure favourable conservation status is achieved. We understand that SPA targets for these two species are currently under consideration, but it is clear that the management must provide suitable habitat and ensure that suitable areas of habitat exist in the future, and that these are relatively undisturbed. We refrain from setting specific amounts of open habitat for the bird interest, given uncertainty about the SPA targets. Instead we highlight particular areas where management of open habitats could ensure the recovery of the key bird species and their long term survival.

Recommendations

Declines in nightjars and woodlark numbers need to be reversed through creation of open habitats; this needs to be done in consideration of access to ensure areas of suitable habitat are undisturbed.

Clearings of around 10ha are considered ideal for nightjar and around 2ha are ideal for woodlark.

Forest management should ensure suitable clearings are created in rotation and some managed as permanent areas of open habitat. In order to maintain clearings annual cutting or grazing is necessary. For woodlarks rotation of the ground in early spring (i.e. 1ha within 2ha clearings) creates enhanced areas for feeding and should be left fallow for 12 months.

Where clearfells exist and are to be restocked it will be necessary to potentially deflect access levels and limit disturbance through signage and promotion of alternative routes/sites. It is necessary to ensure such clearings are present in all years. The felling programme is such that additional areas of open habitat are required. These are best achieved through the development of more areas of permanent open habitat, managed extensively with grazing livestock. Such areas would ideally have relatively low levels of access.

An active fire management plan should be maintained for the heaths.

Management of gorse should ensure dense low gorse is present on the heaths for Dartford warblers and gorse should be allowed to develop along the edges of tracks etc to reduce disturbance impacts for Dartford warblers.

On the areas of open heath path networks should ideally be rationalised such that access levels are concentrated along single routes rather than dispersed over a wide area. This is difficult to achieve in the open, grassy heath areas but can be achieved through careful signing, directing visitor flows and allowing vegetation such as gorse to develop in key locations.

6. Monitoring and Review

- 6.1 It will be necessary to monitor and review the effectiveness of the measures set out in this strategy. The issues within this strategy are complex. Access patterns tend to take some time to become established and where people go and how they spend their time in the countryside are dependent on a range of factors. We consider it important to establish regular monitoring of access in tandem with the on-going wildlife monitoring.
- 6.2 Annex I birds are already monitored at regular intervals, and given the recent declines in woodlark and nightjar it is important that monitoring effort focuses on these species.
- 6.3 The new dog walking location at Bromeswell is one of the main recommendations within this strategy and we believe it important to review the effectiveness of this when it is implemented. Direct interviews with visitors at the new location, and existing sites such as Sutton Heath should record people's opinions of the new location and accurately assess level of use. The monitoring should be used to modify management at the new location, for example modifying landscaping, fencing, planting etc to ensure that the location draws dog walkers and provides the facilities they require. Involving a group of active dog walkers in the process of the design and management of the site should help ensure it's effectiveness and such a group could provide feedback on the success of the site and further improvements required.
- 6.4 Monitoring of parking use and distribution is important across the whole area; car-park counts are a quick and relatively cost effective means of assessing where people are going. A complete count of all parked cars across both Rendlesham and Tunstall can be completed by a single observer in around 4 hours. Such counts should record the presence of horse boxes and bike racks and be repeated at regular intervals over time.
- 6.5 The visitor survey conducted in 2009/2010 provides a baseline and the use of standard times and counts means that the methods can be repeated in the future to provide comparable data.

7. Summary of the Strategy

7.1 In this section we summarise the recommendations. In Map 9 we summarise key elements and show how the spatial distribution of the different elements fits together. The map also shows the areas in the respective Forest Design Plan that are scheduled for clearance in the period to 2026. The inclusion of these is included in order to highlight which areas may become important for key bird species in the period covered by this Strategy. The key spatial elements within the strategy – as mapped and numbered in Map 9 are listed in Table 4 which directly links to the map.

Table 4: Key Elements of the Strategy, as shown in Map 9.

Map Ref	Action	Details	Further notes
1	Avoid long term overcrowding	Encourage and promote responsible visitor behaviour and ensure no increase in visitor pressure	Sutton Heath, 75ha as mapped. In this area aim to ensure does not become busier and ideally reduce access. Provide alternative sites for dog walkers.
2	Enhanced Access, new dog walking area	New dog walking area	New area for dog walking, area as mapped is 63ha. Will need to landscaped and new parking provided. Access routed round open area. Managed for dog walking
3	Enhanced Access, new cycle route	New cycle route	Cycle route providing route from Melton, via Sutton Heath to existing trails to Rendlesham Centre
4	Enhanced Access, Rendlesham Centre	Improvements to Rendlesham Centre aimed at families and cyclists	Rendlesham Centre, potentially moved north and improved. Main hub for cycling, families and day trips
5	Enhanced Access, pedestrian routes/GI	Provide foot access for walkers and dog walkers	Foot access provision created for residents at Rendlesham, providing access to Friday Street
6	Enhanced Access, pedestrian routes/GI	Enhanced access from estate to Rendlesham Centre	Options explored with MOD for enhanced access from estate to Rendlesham Centre and GI within estate
7	Low Disturbance	Conservation of nightjar and woodlark	Area with relatively low levels of access, enhanced management for nightjar and woodlark (rotational forestry)
8	Low Disturbance	Conservation of nightjar and woodlark	Area with relatively low levels of access, enhanced management for nightjar and woodlark (rotational forestry)
9	Low Disturbance	Conservation of nightjar and woodlark	Area with relatively low levels of access, enhanced management for nightjar and woodlark (rotational forestry)
10	Low Disturbance	Conservation of nightjar and woodlark	Area with relatively low levels of access, enhanced management for nightjar and woodlark (rotational forestry)
11	Low Disturbance	Encourage and promote responsible visitor behaviour and ensure no increase in visitor pressure	Extensive grazing management in the longer term, long term reduce horse riding use and dog walking use
12	Low Disturbance	Conservation of nightjar and woodlark	Area with relatively low levels of access, enhanced management for nightjar and woodlark (rotational forestry)
13	Low Disturbance	Encourage and promote responsible visitor behaviour and ensure no increase in visitor pressure	Extensive grazing management in the longer term, long term reduce horse riding use and dog walking use

Map Ref	Action	Details	Further notes
14	Low Disturbance	Conservation of nightjar and woodlark	Area with relatively low levels of access, enhanced management for nightjar and woodlark (rotational forestry)
15	Enhanced Access, Rendlesham Centre	Improvements to access and forestry	Key area for family groups and access from Centre - bike trails, UFO trail. Management for access and forestry
16	Enhanced Access, pedestrian access	Low key foot access between sites	Low key foot access, with links to Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Iken, river path and Snape Maltings
17	Enhanced Access, rotate grazing to allow for dog walking	Rotate grazing to allow for dog walking	Grazing managed to provide opportunities for local dog walkers from Blaxhall

In Table 5 we list all the recommendations, the table shows the links to particular objectives, indicates potential lead organisations and also provides indicative timescales (short – i.e. 0-5 years, medium (i.e. 3 – 10 years) and long term – i.e. 10-15 years) for each.

Table 5: Summary of all recommendations

Objective	Action	Details	Lead	Timescale
7,8,11	Develop new small visitor centre at Rendlesham, with associated interpretation, cafe and other limited facilities.	Developed near the end of the runway, and including small cafe, all-weather shelters, direct links to UFO trail, bike park, play facilities	FC	Requires detailed planning. Medium term.
1, 10	Retain network of small informal parking locations	Ensure the small, informal and ad hoc parking locations remain low key through bunding or similar measures.	FC, SWT, SCDC, AONB	Short to medium term
5, 7	Development of single 'brand', leaflets and web presence for the area	Series of leaflets and potentially wider material highlighting area as a whole, including heaths and forests between Snape, Orford and Woodbridge	AONB	Short term
1,2,8	Dog walkers website promoting sites	Traffic light system allowing different locations to be highlighted according to management etc. Potentially developed through involving local dog walkers	AONB	Short term
6, 9, 10	Enhanced foot access for residents at Sutton Estate	Options need to be explored with the MOD, but enhanced green infrastructure inside compound and also additional foot entry/exit ideally providing link to Rendlesham Centre.	AONB	Short term discussion
6, 9, 10	Establish foot access link between the housing at Bentwaters and Friday Street, allowing foot access from the housing directly into the forest.	Footpath / bridleway to the west of the airfield	AONB	Medium term
5,8,9	Walking route from Iken into Tunstall, providing circuit that encompasses forest,	Footpath needed on road near Iken car park. Various options for route – idea is a dedicated	AONB	Medium term

South Sandlings Recreation Strategy. Footprint Ecology

Objective	Action	Details	Lead	Timescale
	heath and coast	location/ area where people can appreciate the landscape links and see wildlife, yet ensuring the main grazing areas are relatively undisturbed.		
1,2,3,7,8,9	New area for dog walking near Golf Course	Enhancement of area for dog walking through better parking, path provision, dog enclosure, creation of open habitats, landscaping etc. Local dog walkers involved to help inform design	FC	Initial work can take place in the short term, may take some time to become established
1,2	Close dog enclosure at Sutton Heath (once use at 'new' location has become established)	Use of existing enclosure and 'new' enclosure checked. Promotion of new area possibly required.	SWT/SCDC	Medium term
6,7,9	Any options to enhance grazing at Blaxhall should consider local dog walking use and ensure areas without livestock where dogs can be let off lead.	For this to work, good communication will need to be established with local dog walking community here.	SWT	Short – long term
7,8	Promote Rendlesham Centre as main cycling location, particularly drawing day trippers and non-local cyclists	Facilities at centre to include enhanced hire facilities, cycle washdown etc. Cafe and interpretation also will draw cyclists. Existing trails work well and could continue to develop. Better promotion of bike trail.	FC	Medium term
7,8,9	Provide better routes for cycling from Melton and Sutton Hoo to Rendlesham Centre	Marked cycling route from Sutton Hoo through forest running along north edge of Woodbridge runway	FC	Medium term
3, 7,8	Development of a permit system for horse riding in the forest	Permit system provides means of contacting riders and ensuring riding is focused in areas where ground disturbance is not an issue. It also means that dedicated parking and routes can be provided away from other users such as dog walkers and cyclists.	FC	Medium term
1	Create additional clearings in undisturbed areas of forest and install signs March-August	For nightjars optimum clearings need to be 10 ha each, left unplanted until third winter (two summers) with 3 created per annum for 7 years. This will provide 18 potential territories for nightjars by year 7 Create c. three 2 ha clearings for woodlark p.a. for five years scattered across the forest and away from heavily used rides. Clearings should be permanent open habitat.	FC	Short term
1	Plant some new clearings at	Deciduous planting design	FC	Short –

South Sandlings Recreation Strategy. Footprint Ecology

Objective	Action	Details	Lead	Timescale
	least in part with deciduous trees and include deciduous plantings within next review of FDP	should aim over the next 10-15 years to provide block of deciduous woodland within 1 k of all part of the forests		medium term
1	Create additional deciduous woodland edge and create new rides leading to deciduous woodland outside forests	Rides next to deciduous plantings and existing deciduous stands to be created as foraging corridors for NJ	FC	0-5 years
1	Monitor the success of newly created clearings. Review clearings policy in years 4 and seven	Consider retaining (i.e. not replanting clearings that have been immediately colonised by breeding pairs in first two yrs)	FC / others?	Medium term
1	Maintain clearings for nightjar and woodlark	Maintain clearings by annual cutting or grazing	FC, Conservation body	Short – Long term
1	Establish or re-establish small cultivated plots for breeding and wintering woodlark	Where possible within the forest establish 3 plots (1ha in two ha clearing), to be rotoated in early spring and left fallow for 12 months	FC, Conservation body	Short – medium term
1	Monitor woodlark breeding occupancy of clearings and review after five years and monitor woodlark winter use of rotoated plots	Potentially partly achieved through national surveys	FC, Conservation body	Short – medium term
1, 3	Maintain an active fire plan for the eaths	Fire plan prepared in liaison with Fire Service and promoted to public	Conservation Bodies, FC, other landowners	Ongoing
1	Manage gorse	Produce a gorse management plan for regular coppicing of gorse such that it is a mosaic of approximately a third 1-5 yrs, a third 5-10 yrs and a third 10-15 yrs old at any time	Conservation Bodies, FC	Ongoing
1,3	Access patterns on open heathland	Review unofficial footpath patterns across open heath, especially where Dartford warblers present areas and rationalise to reduce disturbance	Conservation Bodies, FC, other landowners	

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Appendix 1: Summary of Local Development Frameworks for surrounding Districts

- 9.1 Ipswich Borough formally submitted its Core Strategy for Examination in March 2010. However, following the change of Government and abolition of RSSs, the Examination of the Ipswich Core Strategy was formally suspended, and the Council has now resolved to undertake a further round of consultation on minor amendments to the submitted Core Strategy, in order to reflect the recent changes. This is currently underway, with the overall housing figure slightly reduced to 14,000 new houses between 2010 and 2026, at a rate of 700 dwellings per annum.
- 9.2 Waveney District Council adopted its Core Strategy in January 2009, and is yet to propose any action to be taken in light of the recent changes. The strategy identifies that significant growth has taken place within the District between 2001 and 2007, with a total of 4,386 new homes. The strategy proposes a housing figure of 2,574 houses for the period 2007-2025, with the vast majority of houses being located in and around Lowestoft and a few hundred houses in other market towns. The annual rate is therefore taken to be approximately 150 houses per annum.
- 9.3 Mid Suffolk District Council adopted its Core Strategy in August 2008. Residential growth is to be focused in the market towns of Stowmarket and Needham Market and also in the town of Eye. The Mid Suffolk strategy proposes a housing figure of 7,268 houses for the period 2007-2025, of which 2,132 require the allocation of new greenfield sites. The annual housing rate for Mid Suffolk is therefore taken to be approximately 400 houses per annum.
- 9.4 Babergh District Council is not as advanced with its local development framework as the other authorities in Suffolk. However, this will enable the Core Strategy to react to the removal of RSSs and the new localism agenda earlier in the formulation of policies and options for growth, whilst other authorities have had to react to the changes and take action accordingly. Babergh District is a priority for economic growth, with industrial, small business and agriculture all featuring strongly in the local economy, along with tourist interest in the wider Constable landscape. Historically, manufacturing was also important within the District. Of all the Suffolk authorities within the Haven Gateway, Babergh in particular has fully embedded the aspirations of the Haven Gateway into its emerging Core Strategy.
- 9.5 The Core Strategy has gone through its initial Issues and Options stage, and in reaction to recent Government changes, a 'Growth Options 2010' consultation is currently underway. The document makes reference to, but does not commit to, the most up to date regional housing figures for Babergh, as outlined in the Regional Spatial Strategy draft review, which were 6,700 new homes to 2031, at a rate of 335 per annum. This did not include Babergh's contribution to the Ipswich Policy Area. In the Growth Options document, four scenarios are proposed for the period 2010 to 2031. These range from 1,696 houses at 255 per annum to 10,406 houses at 670 per annum. In considering the potential recreational needs and impacts, the higher level of growth has been assumed at this stage. A precautionary approach to assessing impacts upon European wildlife sites is embedded within the

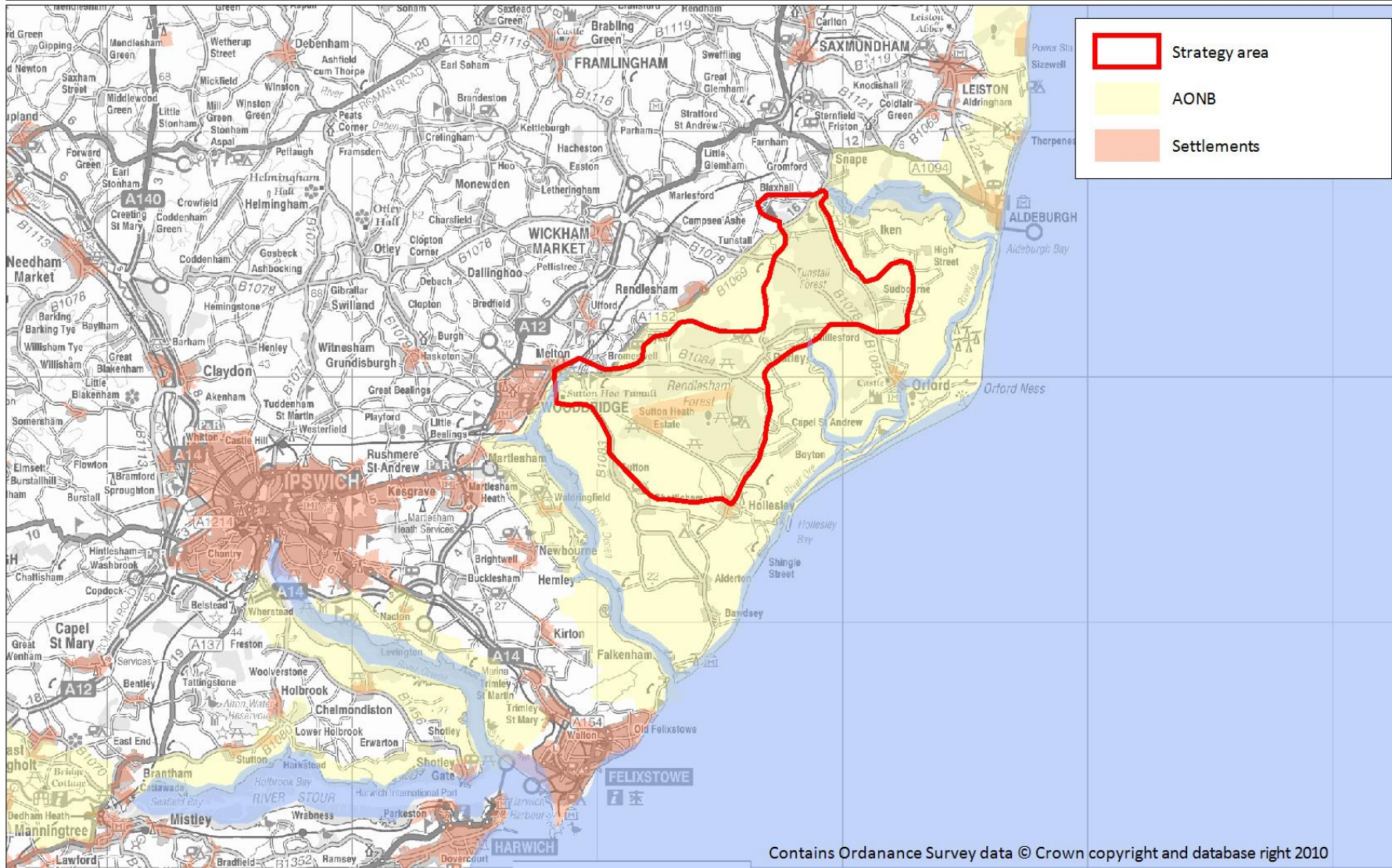
legislation protecting them, and with a European wildlife site spanning much of the Sandlings, the Recreation Strategy must abide by the precautionary approach until updated information advises otherwise.

- 9.6 Of the Essex authorities within the Haven Gateway sub-region, Colchester Borough Council adopted its Core Strategy in December 2008. The majority of growth is focused on the town of Colchester and also at Stanway. Colchester is a growth node within the Haven Gateway, and has also been previously identified as a priority area for regeneration. The Core Strategy takes forward the original regional spatial strategy allocation of 19,000 homes between 2001 and 2021, with 16,700 focussed on the Colchester and Stanway area. The strategy commits to an annual supply of at least 830 new homes per year. Colchester is rapidly expanding and the proposed growth has already been established with the delivery of 4,630 new homes between 2001 and 2006, with a significant focus on affordable housing.
- 9.7 The considerable number of new homes for Colchester reflects the economic aspirations for the Borough, with almost half of the proposed new jobs for the Haven Gateway sub-region being proposed within the Colchester Core Strategy. Employment zones for warehousing and industry are to be taken forward on the fringe of urban areas, with new retail and office space being allocated in the town centre. Banking, finance and other business services have the largest projected growth in employment within the Borough, in comparison with other employment types.
- 9.8 Tendring District Council is currently consulting on the submission draft of its Core Strategy and Development Policies Document, prior to its submission for Examination. The port of Harwich is at the north east tip of Tendring District and it is here that the focus of economic development lies, with new jobs in industry, warehousing and logistics being sought. Tourism is also a significant source of employment within the District, and the Core Strategy promotes further growth in this area.
- 9.9 To support the significant level of economic development, the Tendring Core Strategy submission draft sets a figure of 6,300 new homes between 2011 and 2031, at a rate of 315 new houses per annum. This figure, which is within the current consultation document, is slightly less than that proposed in the former East of England RSS.
- 9.10 Braintree District Council published the submission draft of its Core Strategy in May 2010, and is currently preparing its final document to submit for Examination, following a further round of consultation on a number of minor changes, being primarily triggered by the abolition of the RSS. However, housing numbers have not been altered, with these most recent amendments generally focusing on the removal of references to the RSS. The delivery of 4,800 homes over the plan period, 2009 to 2026, is proposed, with 1,500 houses at Braintree and a further 500 at the Braintree north-west growth location. Witham is also a focus for growth within the District, with 1,800 homes proposed for the town and its two additional growth locations. An overall annual rate of approximately 280 houses is assumed.

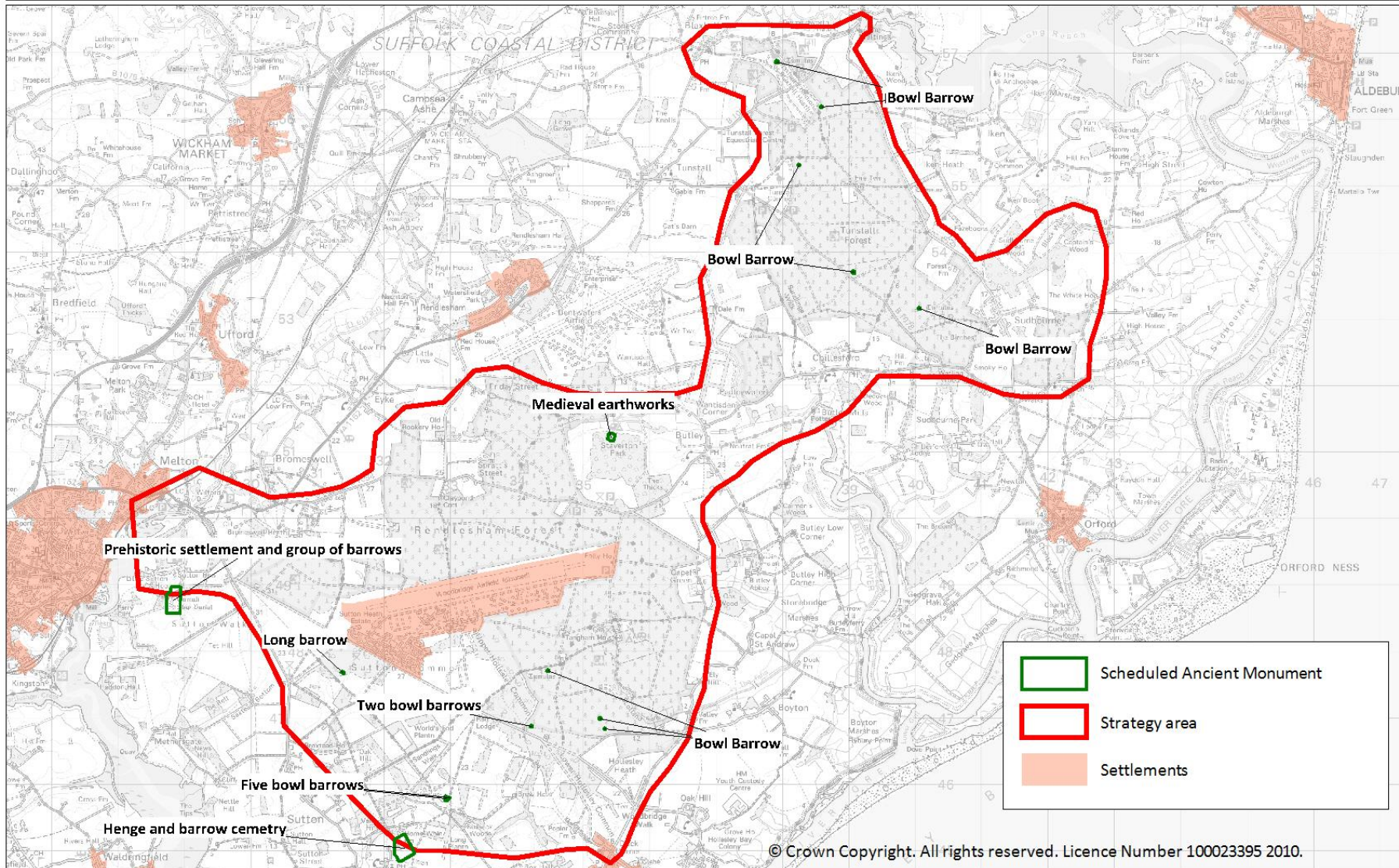
- 9.11 Braintree is only a 45 minute journey from London, and the main Norwich to London railway line runs through the District. Economic aspirations for the District are therefore focussed both on the Haven Gateway and the ports, and also on its proximity to London and assets such as Stansted Airport. Regeneration of towns and redundant factory sites is a priority for the Core Strategy, as is the strengthening of local job opportunities to reduce the high level of commuting.

MAP ANNEX

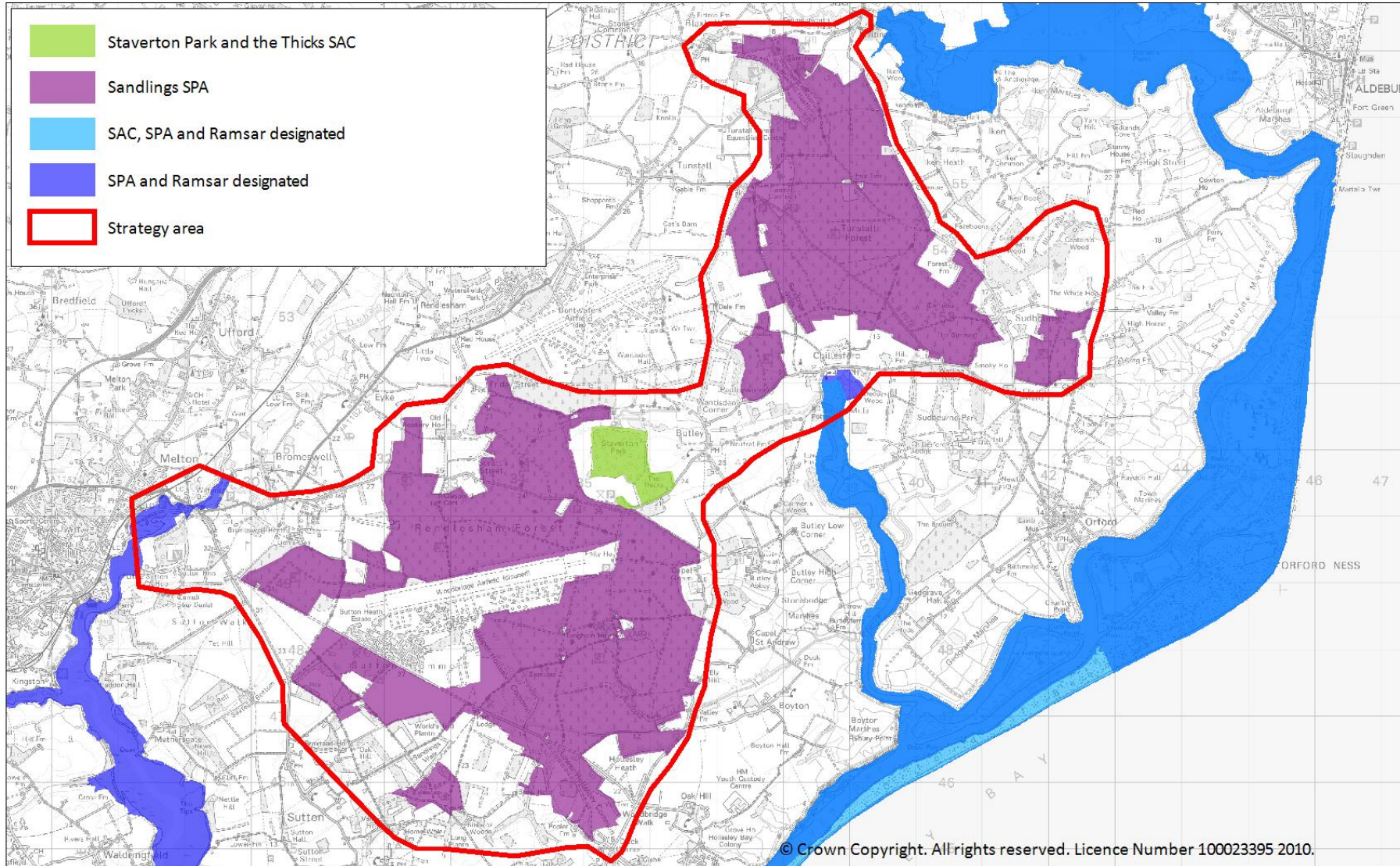
Map 1: Study area and context



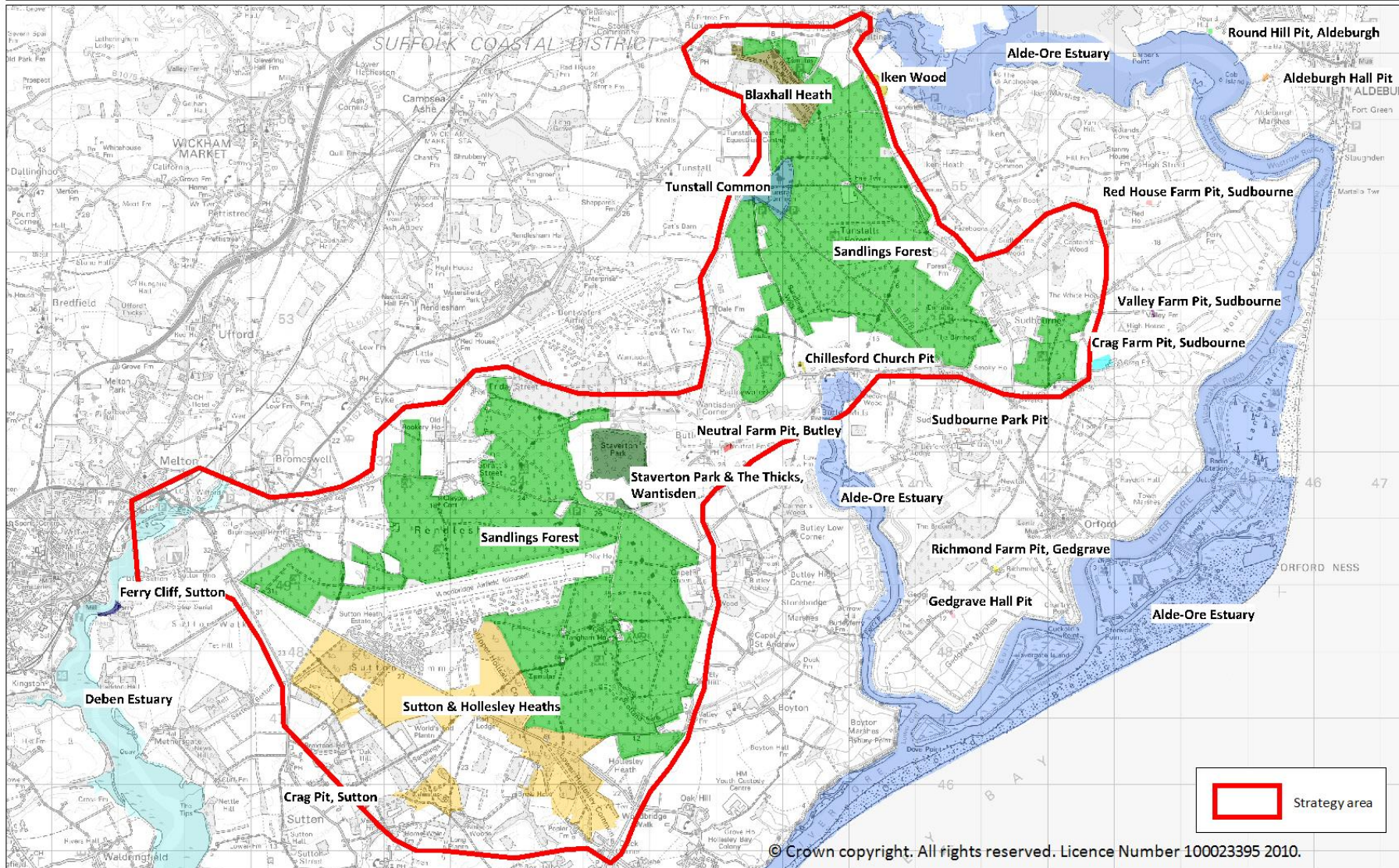
Map 2: Scheduled ancient monuments



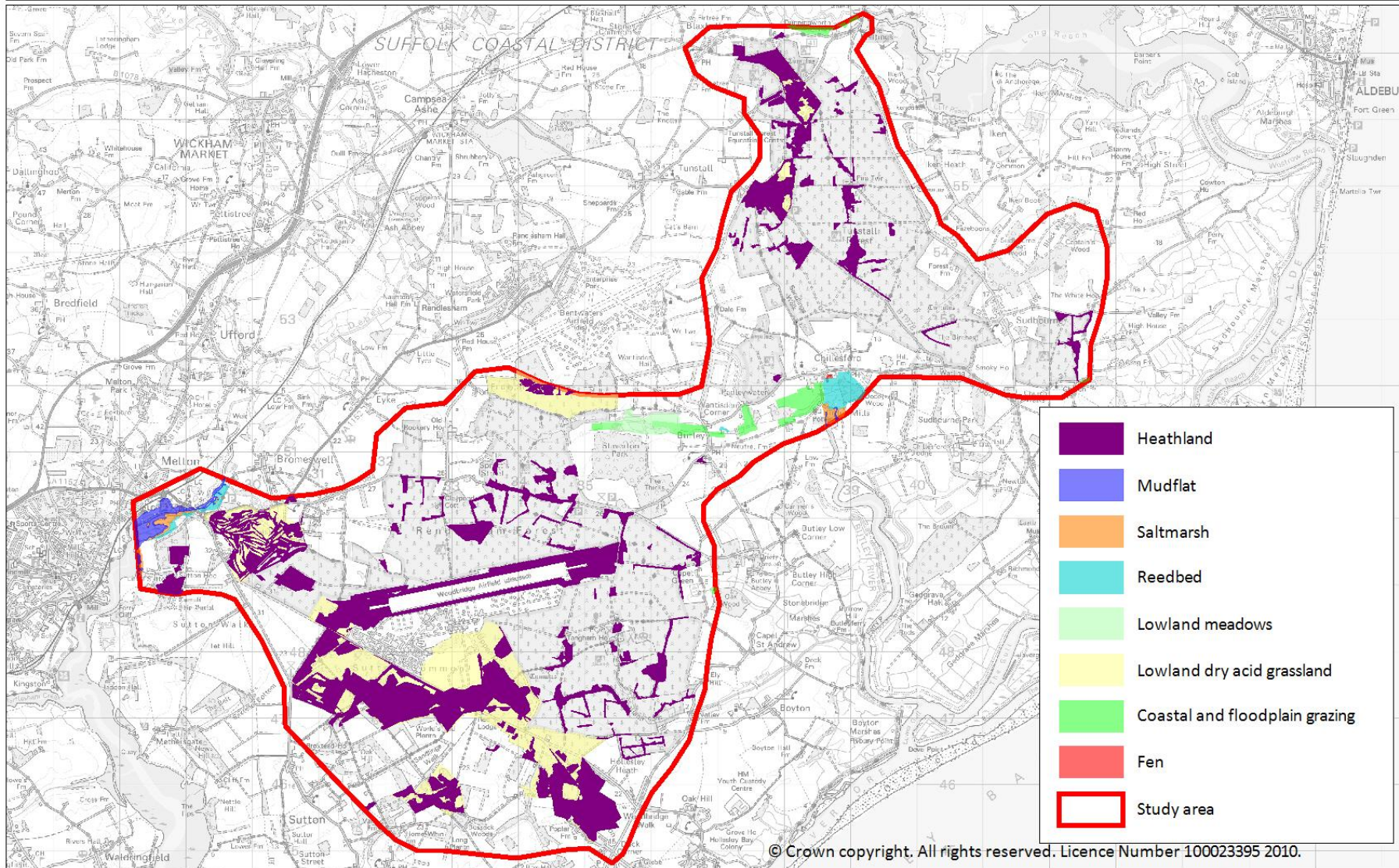
Map 3: Natura 2000 sites



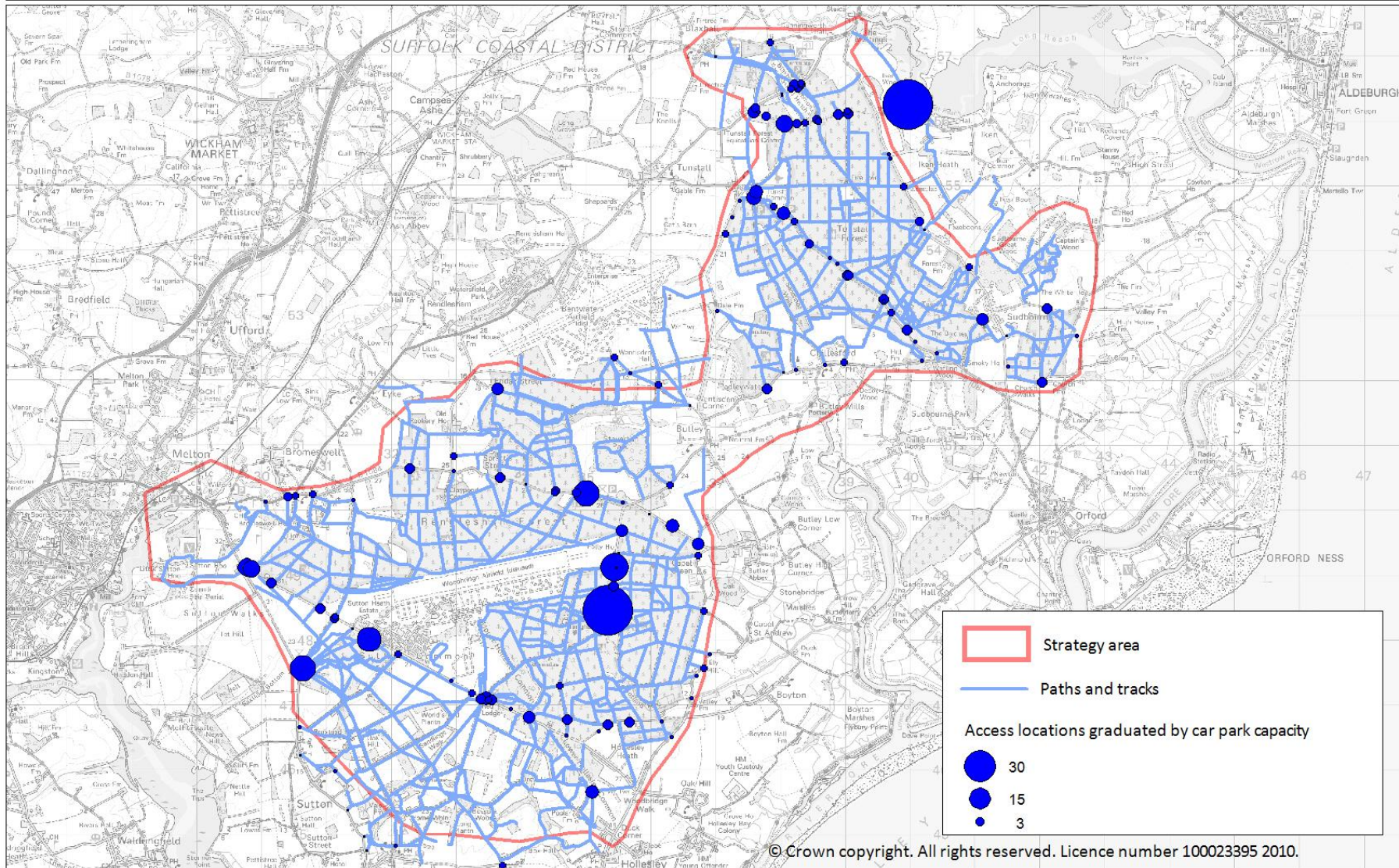
Map 4: Sites of special scientific interest



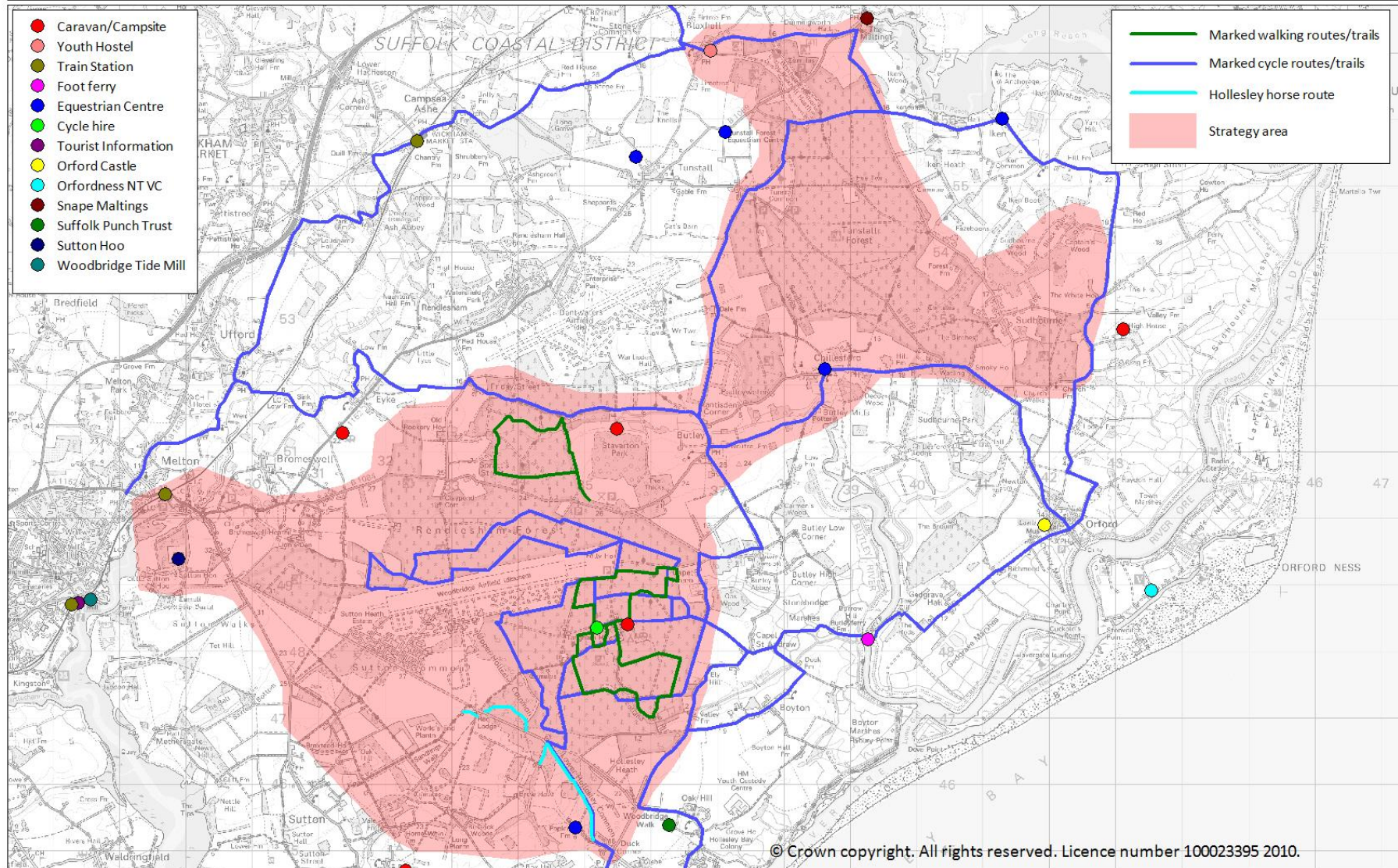
Map 5: BAP priority habitats within the study area



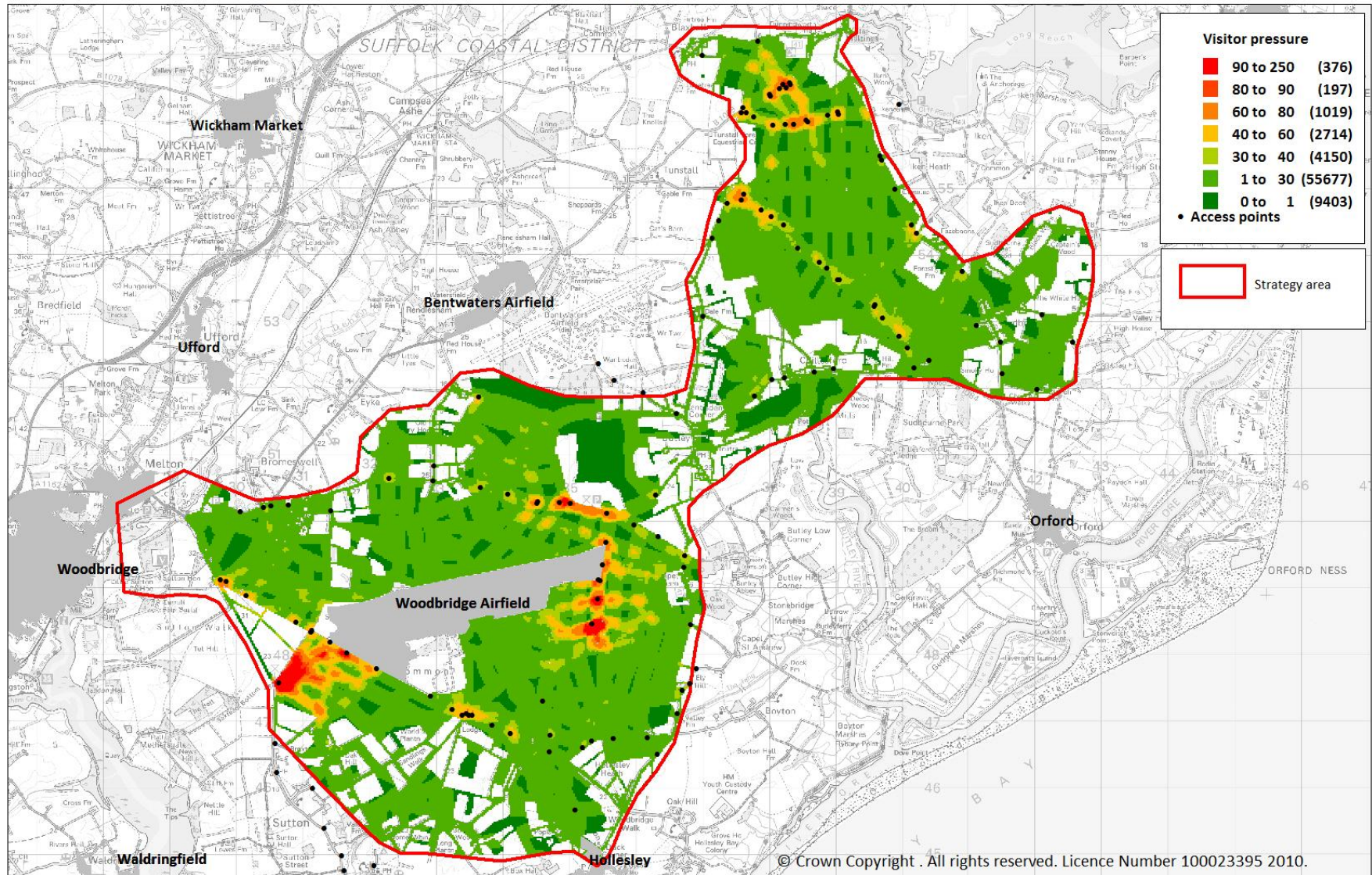
Map 6: Current recreation infrastructure: Tracks, paths, access locations and car parking capacities



Map 7: Current recreation infrastructure: Other (ferries, visitor centres, attractions, train stations and marked routes/trails)



Map 8: Visitor pressure shown as the number of visitors per hour within 100m of each 25m square cell and access point



Map 9: Summary of key recommendations within the strategy

