

Melton Neighbourhood Plan

Landscape and Wildlife Evaluation 2020



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DISCLAIMER

This report has been compiled in accordance with BS 42020:2013 Biodiversity - Code of practice for planning and development, as has the survey work to which it relates.

The information, data, advice and opinions which have been prepared are true, and have been prepared and provided in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's Code of Professional Conduct. We confirm that the opinions expressed are our true and professional bona fide opinions.

This survey was carried out and an assessment made of the site at a particular time. Every effort has been made to date to provide an accurate assessment of the current situation, but no liability can be assumed for omissions or changes after the surveys have taken place.

It is our policy to submit any biological records to the Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service, in accordance with BS42020 (6.4.7). We will do this 3 months after the submission of this report. If you wish to discuss this, please contact us within this time period.

Executive Summary

SWT Trading Ltd: Ecological Consultants, the consultancy of Suffolk Wildlife Trust, was instructed by Melton Parish Council to undertake a landscape and ecological evaluation of the parish as part of their review of the existing Neighbourhood Plan. This document seeks to provide the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group with an evaluation of landscape character and in particular, highlight specific habitats and associated ecological networks as a rich source of biodiversity.

There are five different landscape character types within the parish. The largest area, largely in the north and west of the parish, is defined as 'Ancient Rolling Farmlands'. The next largest area to the east of that is defined as 'Rolling Estate Sandlands'. There are also 'Saltmarsh and Intertidal Mudflats', 'Valley Meadowlands' and 'Coastal Levels' along the Deben Estuary to the east of the parish. These landscape character types help define the different habitats across the parish and also the species within them.

The Deben Estuary is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar Site, primarily for its assemblage of overwintering wildfowl and waders. The estuary is also important for its diverse and extensive saltmarsh communities. There are also three non-statutorily designated sites within the parish: Hospital Grove County Wildlife Site (CWS), Woods Lane and Hutchison's Meadow CWS and Melton Picnic Site CWS.

Eleven Priority Habitats have been identified within the Parish: ancient species-rich hedgerows, lowland mixed deciduous woodland, wet woodland, wood pasture and parkland, traditional orchards, lowland meadows, lowland heathland and acid grassland, reedbed, coastal saltmarsh, intertidal mudflats and ponds. Across the Parish, 57 UK and Suffolk Priority Species have been recorded which complement and help define the biodiversity value of the locality.

There are two main ecological networks across the parish. The most significant is the River Deben corridor which encompasses a range of riparian habitats along the eastern side of the parish. On a smaller scale, the cluster of interconnected habitats centred on Leeks Hills and the adjacent CWS represent an important green corridor through this otherwise built-up area.

Development Management guidance for any new developments within the area covered by this Neighbourhood Plan should seek to protect existing landscape and ecological assets and restore, enhance and reconnect the ecological network.

Comments are provided regarding the site allocated in the existing Melton Neighbourhood Plan (Policy Mel 20). This area also contains Priority habitat and is highly likely to support a good range of protected and Priority species. Further detailed surveys of this site are recommended to inform any future planning applications for this area. Given the Priority habitats on the southern part of this site, then significant measures will be necessary to ensure that any proposal does not result a biodiversity net loss. Consequently, it is recommended that the mixed-use plans for this site are modified to take account the existing ecological value.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Brief and Terms of Reference

SWT Trading Ltd: Ecological Consultants, the wholly-owned consultancy of Suffolk Wildlife Trust, was instructed by Melton Parish Council on 24th January 2020 to undertake a landscape and ecological evaluation of the parish as part of their Neighbourhood Plan that is currently being refreshed.

The Civil Parish of Melton, within its formal parish boundary, is the 'Neighbourhood Area' for the purposes of the Plan.

The Parish Council advise that the main purpose of their existing Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2030 [1] is to guide development within the parish and provide guidance to any interested parties wishing to submit planning applications for development within the designated Neighbourhood Area. The process of producing a plan has sought to involve the community as widely as possible and the different topic areas are reflective of matters that are of considerable importance to Melton, its residents, businesses and community groups. It has therefore given the community the opportunity to guide development within their neighbourhood.

The current Neighbourhood plan is currently being reviewed as a result of updates in legislation and new circumstances which have a bearing of the Plan. Particularly relevant to this Landscape and Wildlife Evaluation is that in March 2019, Suffolk County Council declared a Climate Emergency and in the same month the Government published their mandate for Biodiversity Net Gain, to be included within the forthcoming Environment Act.

This document seeks to provide the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group with an evaluation of landscape character and use this as a basis to highlight key habitats and associated ecological networks as a rich source of biodiversity.

1.2 Parish Location and Statistics

Melton is an urban village within the former Suffolk Coastal District (now East Suffolk Council), it covers 578 hectares and its central point grid reference is TM 28143 50755. It has boundaries with the market town of Woodbridge and lies around 8.5km to the north-east of Ipswich. The parish also shares boundaries with the civil parishes of Bredfield, Hasketon, Sutton, Bromeswell and Ufford.

Data from East Suffolk Council [2] indicate a population of around 3741 people with approximately 1783 households. The housing within the parish is most concentrated in the south, on the immediate boundary with Woodbridge, but there is another significant residential area in the north of the parish known as Melton Park. The historic buildings on this residential estate date from 1764 on the establishment of a 'house of industry for the poor', subsequently becoming an 'asylum' hospital and most recently known as St Audry's Hospital for Mental Diseases until it closed in 1993. The hospital golf course, laid out within a parkland setting, is still in use. The parish also contains a boatyard, an industrial estate and a business centre, Riduna Park. Outside of the road network, buildings and gardens there are approximately 85 plots of land given over to other land uses, with grassland cover being the most extensive.

2. Planning and Development Context

An outline of elements of the current planning system and associated strategic documents will help to place this present evaluation in context:

2.1 Localism Act (2011)

The Department of Communities and Local Government promoted the Localism Act (2011) [3]. The subsequent Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations (2012) provide the statutory framework for Neighbourhood Development Plans. These allow communities to establish the general planning policies for the development and use of land in a neighbourhood. 'Neighbourhood Plans allow local people to get the right type of development for their community, but the plans must still meet the needs of the wider area'.

2.2 National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is statutory guidance published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (February 2019), which provides national planning policy [4].

Of particular relevance to this project is Paragraph 170, under Section 15 'Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment', which states

The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the wider benefits of ecosystem services; including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;
- c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;
- d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
- e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and
- f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate

The NPPF also sets out the plan-making framework in Paragraph 17, in that development plans must include strategic policies to address each local planning authority's priorities for the development and use of land in its area. These can be contained in a local plan and/or a spatial development strategy. Policies to address non-strategic matters are also included in local plans and in neighbourhood plans. These set out more detailed policies for specific areas,

neighbourhoods or types of development. Neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan that covers the area.

2.3 Suffolk Coastal District Council Development Plan

Suffolk Coastal District Council, now formally part of East Suffolk Council, has a Development Plan against which all planning applications and other development proposals will be assessed.

In July 2013, SCDC adopted a revised Local Plan [5] setting out the planning policies, proposals and actions for the future development of the District to 2027 and beyond. This Local Plan consists *inter alia* of:

- Core Strategy and Development Management Policies (adopted July 2013)
- Site Allocations and Area Specific Policies Development Plan Document (adopted January 2017)
- Neighbourhood Plans (as developed by local communities)

The Core Strategy consists of a series of Objectives complemented by associated Strategic Policies - prefixed as 'SP'. Within Objective 11 - Protecting and Enhancing the Physical Environment - SP14 covers Biodiversity and Geodiversity and SP15 covers Landscape and Townscape.

However, the Local Plan is in the process of being reviewed [6] and at the time of writing, the final draft is currently being examined by an Independent Planning Inspector. Following the close of public hearings in September, the Inspector has written to the Council advising what modifications are likely to be required in order for the plan to be found 'sound'. None of the above policies will be 'saved'.

In the emerging local plan, Policy SCLP10.1: Biodiversity and Geodiversity is particularly relevant to this report. In addition, due to the proximity of the Deben Estuary, Policy SCLP2.3: Cross Boundary Mitigation of the effects on Protected Habitats also applies.

In Policy SCLP3.2, Melton (village only) is described as an 'Large Village', although the adjacent settlement of Woodbridge (defined as a 'Market Town') includes part of the built up area of the town extending into the parish of Melton.

2.4 Suffolk's Nature Strategy

Published in 2015, Suffolk's Nature Strategy describes the challenges faced by and the opportunities open to our natural environment, [7]. This document has been compiled by a partnership consisting of Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, RSPB and National Trust and advised by Natural England, Environment Agency and Forestry Commission. It sets out the key natural environment priorities for the county and conveys to decision makers how the wildlife and landscapes of Suffolk not only have intrinsic value but are critically important building blocks for our own economic growth and well-being.

The Strategy has strong relevance and linkages to the Neighbourhood Plan process. Within the Our Health and Wellbeing section, it makes direct reference to Neighbourhood and Parish Plans, stating that:

- 'Once adopted, these plans become part of the Local Development Plan and as such become part of the statutory planning framework. These new powers provide a significant opportunity for communities to recognise, protect and improve local environmental assets.
- There is great scope for benefiting the environment, from designating green spaces to establishing 'green corridors' by linking open spaces and improving local watercourses. We will support communities' writing and implementing their plans and help describe the wider context as we seek to build ecological networks across Suffolk'.

2.5 Biodiversity Net Gain

Following the consultation on mandating biodiversity net gain in development, it was confirmed in March 2019 that the government will use the forthcoming Environment Bill to mandate 'biodiversity net gain' – meaning that new developments must deliver an overall increase in biodiversity.

Net gain in planning terms describes an approach to development that leaves the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. The approach to delivering net gain still requires the application of the mitigation hierarchy, in that impacts on biodiversity should be first avoided, then minimised and only as a last resort be compensated. Where losses cannot be compensated within the development footprint then biodiversity losses may be offset by delivery of gains elsewhere. As a very minimum a target of 10% net gain should be sought as currently specified in the emerging Environment Bill. However, it should be noted that impacts on irreplaceable habitat cannot be offset to achieve no net loss or net gain.

A key part of the process is demonstrating measurability and The Biodiversity Metric 2.0 Beta Edition designed by Natural England (often termed the 'Defra Metric'). This metric provides the means to account for the ecological value of a site and how changes arising from development or management will impact on this value over time.

Achieving the best outcomes for biodiversity requires credible evidence derived from ground-truthing and justifiable choices based on ecological knowledge. In addition, the delivery of net gain is dependent upon the financial means to undertake the necessary habitat management, in order to secure a long-term biodiversity benefit.

3. Methods

3.1 Field Survey

A 'Phase 1 type' field survey and ecological audit of the parish was undertaken, with a series of visits undertaken on 11th February, 12th March, 18th March and 4th June. The objectives of the field surveys were to investigate and record land use, habitat types and notable plant and animal species and take digital images to illustrate these features. Using public highways, bridleways and footpaths it was possible to view and comment upon all but a small percentage (around 10%) of the parish land area. The timing of the earlier surveys was sub-optimal for assessing most habitats and for recording incidental species records, so a subsequent visit was undertaken to selected areas.

3.2 Desktop Survey

A variety of existing source material was consulted including:

- Suffolk County Council website and other documents
- Suffolk Coastal District Council website and other documents
- Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service website and databases
- The MAGIC website (provides geographic information about the natural environment from across a range of government sources) including Sir Dudley Stamp 1933-1949 Land Use Inventory).
- Suffolk Wildlife Trust databases
- Suffolk Hedgerow Survey – County Report

3.3 Evaluation of Landscape and Wildlife Assets

The descriptions and evaluation that follow in the report draw on information collected during the field and desktop surveys. For convenience and clarity, elements concerned with the wider landscape are considered first in Section 4. These are then followed in Section 5 by wildlife elements, from protected sites through to wider ecological networks habitats.

However, these two sections should be considered together as there is integration of significant landscape and wildlife elements, resulting in a network of landscape and wildlife features.

4. Evaluation of Landscape Assets

4.1 Protected Landscapes

The south-easternmost boundary of Melton Parish lies within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which includes the Deben Estuary at this location. The statutory duty to conserve and enhance natural beauty within the AONB is fully recognised both within the NPPF (Paragraph 172) and in the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan.

4.2 Local Landscape Policy

Policy SP15: Landscape and Townscape in the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan (Core Strategy and Development Management Policies July 2013) sets out the landscape policy of the Suffolk coastal district. It seeks to 'protect and enhance the various landscape character areas within the district either through opportunities linked to development or through other strategies. As well as the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Beauty and other named sites and features.

The Local Plan is currently being reviewed and it is the intention to supersede the principle of area specific landscape designations with Landscape Character Assessment becoming the emerging Policy. Suffolk Coastal District Council commissioned a Landscape Character Assessment [8] and Settlement Sensitivity Assessment [9] in 2018 (Alison Farmer Associates, July 2018) to provide a detailed understanding of the landscape within the District. The character type boundaries in the County assessment (See 4.3) were used to help define the extent of character areas. This approach recognises particular qualities and features of landscapes to provide an understanding of distinct sense of place and sensitivities to development and change.

Within the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan Final Draft (2019), Policy SCLP10.4: Landscape Character is the relevant policy.

4.3 Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment

In 2008, Suffolk County Council completed a project to describe landscapes throughout Suffolk in detail and assess what particular character and qualities make up the different landscape areas of the county. This is known as the Level 2 Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), [10]. The guidance required the preparation of landscape character assessments in order to review and/or replace local landscape designations. The results of these assessments could then be used as supplementary planning guidance and to help produce landscape management guidelines.

Suffolk County Council worked in partnership with the Living Landscapes Project based at Reading University, private consultants and all District and Borough Councils in Suffolk, using methodology in which discrete units of broadly homogeneous land were identified according to a set of physical and cultural characteristics. These characteristics were defined by four principal attributes: physiography, ground type, landcover and cultural pattern, which in turn were derived from six mapable datasets: relief, geology, soils, tree cover, farm type and settlement. Application of this methodology maintained a consistent approach across Suffolk.

It is highly appropriate for the Melton Neighbourhood Plan to acknowledge and make full use of both the descriptions and the land management guidelines related to the five Landscape Types that exist within the parish.

The Landscape Character Types (LCT) which cover Melton parish are:

- **Ancient Rolling Farmlands** (coloured striped green on Figure 1)
- **Rolling Estate Sandlands** (coloured pink on Figure 1)
- **Valley Meadowlands** (coloured teal on Figure 1)
- **Coastal Levels** (coloured pale blue on Figure 1)
- **Saltmarsh & Intertidal Flats** (coloured lilac on Figure 1)

An area of grey also shows on Figure 1, this represents **Urban** area, which is not assessed under Landscape Character Assessment.

For each of these Landscape Character Types, Suffolk County Council has produced written guidance involving detailed descriptions of:

- key characteristics
- sensitivity to change
- key forces for change
- development management guidelines
- land management guidelines

SCC notes highlight that the guidance documents have been written principally to address the needs of development management. That is, to provide a summary of the forces that have been and are at work in the landscape and the key forces for change operating in the landscape at the time of writing.

However, the caveat is added that guidance cannot be considered to be definitive for a particular site, nor is it exhaustive. Rather it is intended to give a clear indication of the issues raised and principles to be followed when dealing with a particular type of development.

This evaluation for the Neighbourhood Plan therefore distils the essence of the information provided - as it applies to Melton - as a guide for any future development here. Much of the discussion on development guidance is taken verbatim from the documents, but linkages and comments are added that make it relevant to this parish.

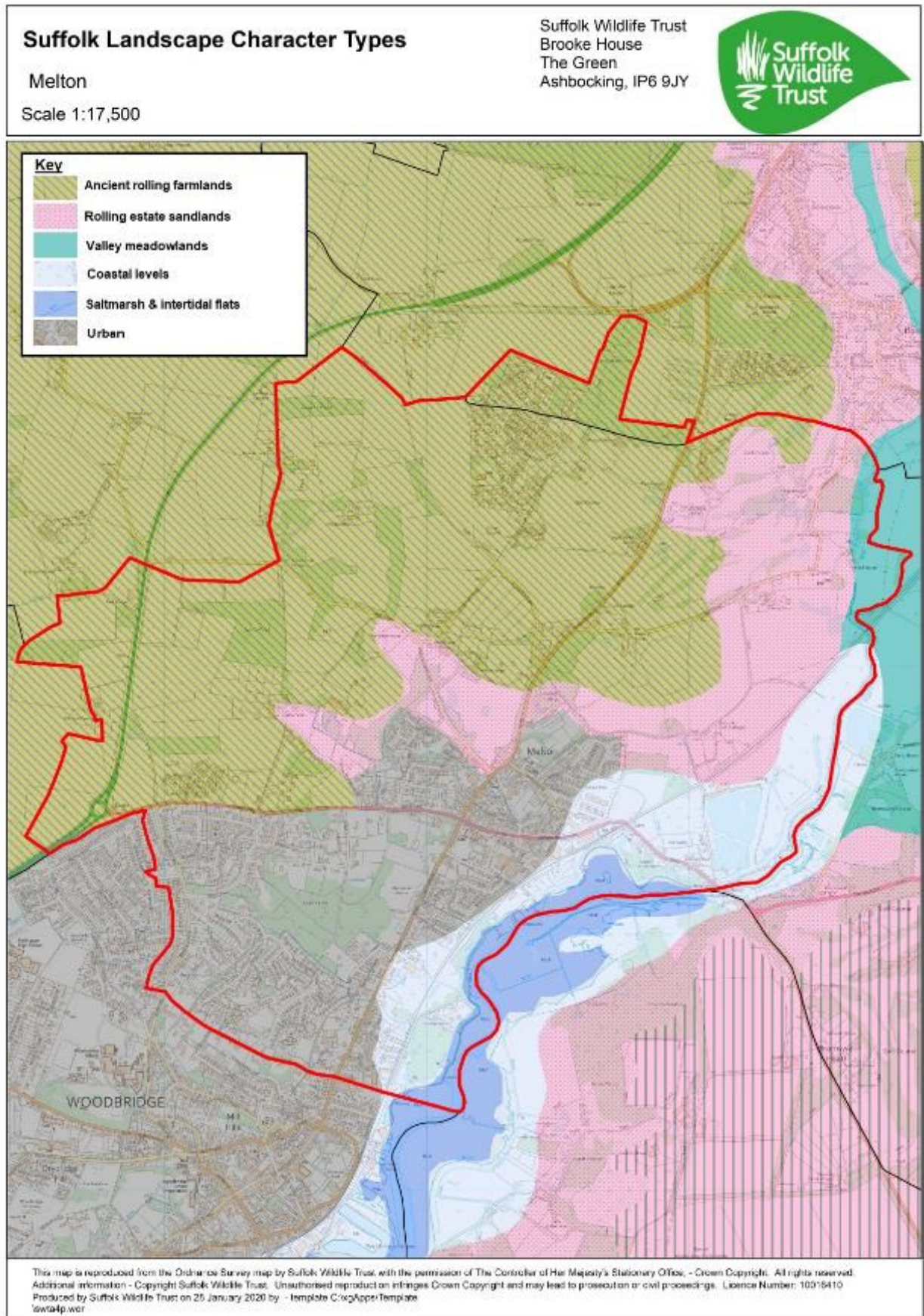


Figure 1: Suffolk Landscape Character Types ascribed to Melton (Source: Suffolk County Council)

4.3.1 Ancient Rolling Farmlands

This landscape character type is typified by rolling clayland landscapes with the main soil type derived from chalky clays left behind by the Anglian Glaciation, with some sand and gravel deposits. The largest area of this type is in south-central Suffolk. However, a smaller, more fragmented area is present to the north of Ipswich and Woodbridge. The enclosure pattern is fairly organic, retaining ancient characteristics such as species-rich hedgerows and associated ditches. Settlement is limited to a few landholdings over quite an extensive area.

Key characteristics of this landscape type as they refer to Melton are:

- Rolling arable landscape, dissected widely by the river valleys, with some sinuous field boundaries in places
- Network of winding lanes and paths, often associated with hedges, create visual intimacy
- Hedges of hawthorn and elm, with oak, ash and field maple as hedgerow trees
- Scattered with ancient woodland parcels containing a mix of oak, lime, cherry, hazel, hornbeam, ash and holly

Just under half of the parish of Melton is covered by this landscape, located in the north-west and extending beyond the A12. It is made up of a mixture of arable land, some grazing land and blocks of woodland and also some extensive areas of parkland. Some of this land has been converted to more uniform horse paddocks.

Key potential changes and Development Management guidance related to this landscape type:

- Any settlement expansion, conversion or expansion of farmsteads, or release of land for development should reflect the local pattern. Ribbon development can have a considerable impact on the wider landscape and destroys this pattern. Any new buildings should be usually close to the existing buildings and be subordinate in size to the principle buildings.
- Larger scale agricultural buildings can have their impact mitigated by the right choice of siting, form, orientation and colour and should also relate to an existing cluster of buildings. Location in relation to existing trees should be carefully considered and any new planting should be designed to integrate the development into the character of the landscape.
- New or expanded garden curtilage should always be designed to fit into the local context and respect the established pattern.
- Effective boundary planting to reduce the visual intrusion of garden into the open countryside, should be conditioned with any planning consent.
- Change of land use to horse paddocks, with associated subdivision of land and temporary boundaries can have a significant landscape impact, and on the quality and condition of the grassland in more ecologically sensitive areas. Mitigation strategies in terms of design, layout and stockings rates should be employed where possible and opportunities taken to design field layout that is in keeping with the local field pattern or historic pattern of boundaries.
- The impact of deer on woodland cover continues to increase significantly. Large scale deer-control should be supported to reduce populations to a level that allows natural woodland regeneration to take place. Individual sites may require deer fencing.

Land Management guidance for this Landscape Type as relevant to Melton include:

- Reinforce the historic pattern of sinuous boundaries where they exist
- Recognise localised areas of late enclosure hedges when restoring and planting hedgerows
- Carry out coppice management on elm-dominated hedgerows
- Maintain and increase the stock of native hedgerow trees
- Maintain the extent, and improve the condition, of woodland cover with effective management



Ancient Rolling Farmland landscape - west of Lodge Farm Lane

4.3.2 Rolling Estate Sandlands

This landscape represents transitional habitat between this and the Valley and Coastal type characters where it forms narrow valley-side strips. It is found on sandy Newport series soils on river terraces and coast-edge slopes where they overlie thin glacial deposits on top of Crag sands. In the east, there is a mix of land and soil types giving variable field patterns and dry areas, reflected by a number of extant or former heaths or commons.

Key characteristics of this landscape type as they refer to Melton are:

- Rolling river terraces and coastal slopes
- Sandy and free draining soils with areas of heathland
- Late enclosure with a pattern of tree belts and straight edges
- Landscape parklands
- Tree belts and plantations throughout
- Occasional and significant semi-natural woodlands and ribbons of wet woodland

This landscape is present running through the centre of the parish, south-east of the Ancient Rolling Farmlands and either side of the valley formed by the Deben estuary. Within these areas dry sandy grassland is present. Unlike the other areas of Rolling Estate Sandlands, in Melton there is relatively little settlement so that much of the semi-natural elements of the landscape are relatively intact. The area south of Melton Lodge represents an example of Landscape Parklands typical of this landscape character type (detailed in Section 5.5.7).



Dry sandy grassland grazed by rabbits in Rolling Estate Sandlands

Key potential changes and Development Management guidance related to this landscape type:

- Expansion of settlements: Limit visual impacts of new buildings on the landscape by implementing height restrictions, confining new developments to the plateau areas rather than valley sides. Provide Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and use planting to reduce visual impacts.
- Any large-scale agricultural buildings should consider siting, form, orientation and scale to reduce visual impact, preferably within an existing building cluster or backed by trees.
- Leisure as a driving force for changes in the economic activity in this landscape, especially but not exclusively, on the coastal parts of this landscape. This includes golf courses, holiday complexes, caravan sites and tourist centres. Development on plateau only, visual impact on valley sides would be high risk to visually sensitive and designated landscapes.
- Changes of land management and use, particularly on landscape parklands, could have a negative impact on these historic landscapes. Appropriate detailed management plans or strategies are required with any planning applications that affect historic parklands.

- The introduction of new agricultural techniques such as turf or outdoor pig production and changes in the production of high value irrigated crops such as the use of plastic and fleece on a large scale. Conditions to manage landscape impacts required.

Land Management guidance for this Landscape Type as relevant to Melton include:

- Reinforce the historic pattern of regular boundaries
- Restore, maintain and enhance the network of tree belts and patterns of small plantations found across much of this landscape type
- Restore and maintain landscape parklands and their features

4.3.3 Coastal Levels

- This low-lying, flat marshland landscape with underlying alluvial deposits of marine origin is found beside estuaries and coastal valleys along the whole of Suffolk's coast. Ancient settlement was limited to the edges of the marshes, with virtually no domestic buildings actually within the landscape, which is more often used for grazing livestock. There are wide open views due to no widespread tree cover but woodland plantations and belts of the inland sides, adjoining slopes and Estate Sandlands often fringe the landscape.

Key characteristics of this landscape type as they refer to Melton are:

- Flat marshland adjacent to the coast or estuaries
- Marine alluvium soils
- Important wildlife conservation areas
- Unsettled landscape with domestic buildings on the fringes

In the south east of the parish, a small thin area of marsh flanks the head of the Deben estuary from Kyson Point in Woodbridge through Melton to just beyond Wilford Bridge. The railway line connecting Ipswich to Lowestoft runs through the landscape and to the west of this there are some residential dwellings which fringe the landscape, along with an Industrial Estate. The north eastern-most point of this landscape is occupied by a new plantation and fishing lakes.

Key potential changes and Development Management guidance related to this landscape type:

- Changes of land management and land use adjacent to this landscape, especially the changes to the quantity, scale and style of built development. Due to its flat, open nature, this landscape is highly sensitive to any interruption of the horizon by built structures. Therefore, if any development is permitted, high standards of design and effective mitigation strategies should be applied, including reduced height structures, the use of sympathetic and unobtrusive materials and appropriate planting schemes.
- Sea level rises. Manage coastal realignment to retain and enhance the local landscape character. Minimise the use of structures for flood or sea defence, but where required, use sympathetic material and low, unobtrusive structures bearing in mind the potential increased need for ecological management if natural processes have been restricted.
- Management of land for nature conservation should be undertaken sensitively with consideration for the historic landscape and wider visual landscape impacts, along with the issues raised by increased visitor pressure.
- Changes to agricultural practice and land use within this landscape should be carefully controlled. Cattle grazing is the characteristic land cover, but ancient dyke features and woodland cover have been lost to arable production.

Land Management guidance for this Landscape Type as relevant to Melton include:

- Support the continuation of the traditional economic activities;
- Restore and retain the historical pattern of drainage ditches and dykes within the meadows, delivering ecological benefit;
- Maintain levels of grassland by entering into agri-environment schemes or expanding livestock enterprises.

4.3.4 Saltmarsh & Intertidal Flats

These wild, unimproved landscapes are found on the larger of the east flowing rivers in the county, It consists mainly of marine alluvium with some outcrops of clay forming mud flats, with a comparatively few small areas of saltmarsh. The inter-tidal flats are dissected by creeks and covered with primarily cord grass and samphire. The landscape is a key characteristic of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is part of protected and ecologically sensitive sites, including European Designated Sites.



Saltmarsh and intertidal flats

Key characteristics of this landscape type as they refer to Melton are:

- Marine and alluvium and some outcrops of clay, forming mud flats
- Inter-tidal flats dissected by creeks
- A few small areas of saltmarsh
- Wild unimproved land
- Unsettled landscape

- Powerful sense of isolation and wilderness
- Integral to the setting of notable features
- Suffering from coastal squeeze and the associated erosion

A very small area of Saltmarsh and Intertidal Flats exists along the banks of the River Deben. The remnant saltmarsh in the county does not behave naturally in response to sea level change and as such is suffering from coastal squeeze and associated erosion.

Key potential changes and Development Management guidance related to this landscape type:

- Sea level rise will inevitably impact this landscape, changing the physical and chemical conditions of the substrate. Any installation of flood or sea defence structures should use sympathetic materials and be low and unobtrusive in stature.
- Changes of land management and land use adjacent to this landscape especially the changes to the quantity, scale and style of built development can have an impact on the setting of and views from, this landscape. The highest standards of design, using sympathetic and unobtrusive materials, along with effective mitigation strategies are required for any planning applications which may have an impact upon this landscape.
- Large-scale infrastructure projects related to Sizewell and the port of Felixstowe are likely to have an impact upon this landscape, however, this does not apply directly to Melton.

Land Management guidance for this Landscape Type as relevant to Melton include:

- Wherever possible maintain the processes that allow the formation of this landscape type.
- Maintain the structural diversity of upper, lower and middle saltmarsh habitats within this landscape.
- Minimise disturbance on important wader feeding areas within estuaries.
- Minimise the impact of erosion caused by boat wash.

4.3.5 Valley Meadowlands

Found principally in the floors of the river valleys of south and south-east Suffolk, Valley Meadowlands are made up of seasonally wet clays overlying alluvial deposits and peat. The damp nature of the land and tree-lined wet dykes support good meadow habitat, although much of this is now used as animal pasture rather than for hay production. Settlement tends to be limited to occasional farmsteads and any woodland tends to be alder carr in the wetter areas. However, in the 20th century plantations of poplar and cricket-bat willows were introduced.

A very small area of this landscape is found on the far north-east boundary of the parish, in the Deben valley, upstream of the Coastal Levels landscape and continuing as far as Winston and Earl Soham to the north.

4.4 Suffolk Coastal District Council Landscape Character Assessment and Settlement Sensitivity Assessment

In the Alison Farmer Associates Reports of July 2018 [8 & 9], the Landscape Character Assessment for the Parish of Melton is described as two principal areas: The northern part of the Parish, north of Wilford Bridge is defined as 'B7 Deben Valley' and the southern section, south of Wilford Bridge is 'J5 Deben Estuary'. In the second document, Settlement Sensitivity Assessment Volume 2, July 2018, the central section of the Parish, directly north of the Urban area, is subdivided into two Peripheral Areas: ML1 and ML2 in the Suffolk Coastal Settlement Analysis for Melton. ML2 also

wraps around the north eastern corner of the Urban area, between the railway line and the River Deben with its boundary just below Wilford Bridge.

Peripheral Area ML1 lies within the Rolling Valley Farmlands and Rolling Estate Claylands landscapes north of the built-up area of Melton between the A12 and Saddlemakers Lane. It extends north beyond Long Wood and covers half of the Foxboro Hall Estate. This area is described as intact historic field patterns bounded by hedgerow and woodland, with rural lanes. The report indicates that sensitivity lies in the rural valley side character. Traditional meadow management would improve condition of pastures, and importance is also placed upon maintaining rural and wooded settings.

Peripheral Area ML2 encompasses the parkland estate of Melton Lodge which lies within Rolling Estate Claylands, an area of Rolling Valley Farmlands to the north including Ledge Farm and The Old Rectory and part of the Coastal Levels to the east. Sensitivity lies in the strong estuary valley character, along with the ecological and visual value of the AONB and designated sites overlapping and adjacent the Peripheral Area. Restoring semi-natural habitat and traditional land uses in the valley bottom, along with improving approach and gateway into the settlement from the east would reduce the effects of the commercial development in the area.

4.5 The Significance of the Landscape for the Neighbourhood Plan

Melton maintains a remote, historic feeling along lanes and minor roads on the valley side despite being close to busy main roads. The good condition and variety of landscape character types gently sloping down towards the Deben Estuary indicate the diversity and visual importance of the parish. There is a responsibility to provide protection and enhancement to the particularly sensitive Saltmarsh and Intertidal Mudflats and Coastal Levels landscapes, their habitats and the species that they support. It is also important to retain the historic character of the parish, reinforcing separations between Woodbridge to the south and Ufford to the north.

As well as adherence to Local Plan Policy, development management guidance for any new developments within the area covered by this Neighbourhood Plan should consistently reflect the Development Management and Land Management Guidelines drawn up within the Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment and Suffolk Coastal District Landscape Character Assessment and Settlement Sensitivity Assessment.

5. Evaluation of Wildlife Assets

5.1 Local Biodiversity Policy

Strategic Policy SP14: Biodiversity and Geodiversity within the existing Suffolk Coastal Local Plan (Core Strategy and Development Management Policies July 2013) sets out the biodiversity policy of the Suffolk coastal district. The policy seeks to protect and enhance Biodiversity and geodiversity ‘using a framework based on a network of designated sites, wildlife corridors and links, the rivers, estuaries and coast, identified habitats and geodiversity features, landscape character areas and protected species.’

Development Management Policy DM27 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity states that:

All development proposals should:

- (a) protect the biodiversity and geodiversity value of land and buildings and minimise fragmentation of habitats;
- (b) maximise opportunities for restoration, enhancement and connection of natural habitats; and
- (c) incorporate beneficial biodiversity conservation features where appropriate.

Reference is made to the hierarchy of designated sites (Global, European, UK and Local). The supporting text also highlights that in order to protect nature conservation, it will also be important to protect habitats outside designated sites and to protect particular species, such as those which are rare or protected.

Within the SCDC Local Plan Final Draft January 2019 (Modifications Version – May 2020), Policy SCLP10.1: Biodiversity and Geodiversity is proposed:

‘Development will be supported where it can be demonstrated that it maintains, restores or enhances the existing green infrastructure network and positively contributes towards biodiversity and/or geodiversity through the creation of new habitats and green infrastructure and improvement to linkages between habitats, such as wildlife corridors and habitat ‘stepping stones’. All development should follow a hierarchy of seeking firstly to avoid impacts, mitigate for impacts so as to make them insignificant for biodiversity, or as a last resort compensate for losses that cannot be avoided or mitigated for. Adherence to the hierarchy should be demonstrated.

Proposals that will have a direct or indirect adverse impact (alone or in-combination with other plans or projects) on locally designated sites of biodiversity or geodiversity importance, including County Wildlife Sites, priority habitats and species, will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated with comprehensive evidence that the benefits of the proposal, in its particular location, outweighs the biodiversity loss.

New development should provide environmental net gains in terms of both green infrastructure and biodiversity. Proposals should demonstrate how the development would contribute towards new green infrastructure opportunities or enhance the existing green infrastructure network as part of the development. New development must also secure ecological enhancements as part of its design and implementation and provide a biodiversity net gain that is proportionate to the scale and nature of the proposal.

Where compensatory habitat is created, it should be of equal or greater size and ecological value than the area lost as a result of the development, be well located to positively contribute towards the green infrastructure network, and biodiversity and/or geodiversity and be supported with a management plan.

Where there is reason to suspect the presence of protected UK or Suffolk Priority species or habitat, applications should be supported by an ecological survey and assessment of appropriate scope undertaken by a suitably qualified person. If present, the proposal must follow the mitigation hierarchy in order to be considered favourably. Any proposal that adversely affects a European site or causes significant harm to a Site of Special Scientific Interest, will not normally be granted permission.

Any development with the potential to impact on a Special Protection Area, Special Area for Conservation or Ramsar site within or outside of the plan area will need to be supported by information to inform a Habitat Regulations Assessment, in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended (or subsequent revisions).

The Recreational disturbance, Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy has been prepared to provide a mechanism through which impacts from increased recreation can be avoided and mitigated via financial contributions towards the provision of strategic mitigation. Where mitigation is proposed to be provided through alternative mechanisms, applicants will need to provide evidence to demonstrate that all impacts are mitigated for, including in-combination effects. Depending on the size and location of the development, additional measures such as Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANGS) may be required as part of development proposals.

A Supplementary Planning Document will be prepared to assist with the implementation of the Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy. The Council will work with neighbouring authorities and Natural England to implement this strategy. ‘

5.2 Protected Wildlife Sites

The quality of the natural environment in Suffolk is reflected by the extent of its land area with statutory protection for its wildlife. 8% of the county has national designation as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), reflecting the importance of habitats and species found here. Many of these areas are also of European or international importance, with designations as Special Areas for Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Ramsar Site. Large areas of the nearby estuaries and coastline are protected in this way.

5.2.1 Sites of European and International Importance

The Deben Estuary SPA [11]. and Ramsar site overlaps the south-eastern boundary of the parish of Melton. It is designated for supporting internationally important numbers of over-wintering avocet (*Recurvirostra avocetta*) and the migratory species, dark-bellied brent geese (*Branta bernicula bernicula*). The mudflats and intertidal brackish waters provide an important feeding resource, rich in insects, larvae, crustaceans and other invertebrates as well as algae, and eel-grass. The saltmarsh also provides important roosting habitat.

The Sandlings SPA lies beyond this, 1.28km from the parish and this site is principally designated for breeding woodlark and nightjar populations. Staverton Park & The Thicks, Wantisden SAC lies

5.3km east of the parish boundary and its primary reason for this designation is because it is old acidophilous oak woodland on sandy plains. The Alde-Ore Estuary SPA, Ramsar site and the Alde-Ore & Butley Estuaries SAC lie 9km east of the boundary, which have a diverse scientific interest including geological, botanical, ornithological (particularly breeding avocet) and entomological.

The Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar site is important for breeding avocet in summer and overwintering water bird species; this is located 11.8km to the south-west of the parish boundary.

It should be noted that development of new housing within the 13km 'zone of influence' of European designated sites is likely to have a significant effect upon the interest features of the designated sites, through increased recreational pressure, as set out in the Suffolk Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) [12].

New housing within the Suffolk Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation area will be required to mitigate the effects of the development through Section 106 planning obligations.

5.2.2 Sites of Special Scientific Interest in Melton

Deben Estuary, (TM 29561 44160)

The Deben Estuary SSSI [13]. is designated for its important populations of overwintering waders and wildfowl, and for its extensive and diverse saltmarsh communities which make up around 40% of Suffolk's total area of Saltmarsh. The Citation for the SSSI states that it contains the most complete range of the vegetations' community types in the county. At the head of the estuary, in the low marsh communities, the vegetation is dominated by sea aster, annual seablite, glasswort, sea poa and sea purslane with pure stands of common cord-grass.

The Estuary is known to support 3 nationally scarce plant species, including marsh mallow, shrubby seablite and small cord-grass, as well as molluscs; the nationally rare *Vertigo augustior* and nationally scarce *Vertigo pusilla*.

The site covers around 977 hectares and is comprised of 22 units. 2 of which are Lowland Fen, Marsh and Swamp components, and 20 of which are Littoral Sediment components. The results of Natural England Condition Assessments made between 2009 and 2011 indicate that both of the Lowland Fen, Marsh and Swamp units are in a 'favourable' condition. However, only 4 of the 20 Littoral Sediment units are in a 'favourable' condition, leaving over 75% of the site as 'unfavourable declining'. This is due to active erosion and loss of saltmarsh frontage caused by coastal squeeze.

5.3 County Wildlife Sites

5.3.1 Rationale behind this non-statutory designation

County Wildlife Sites (CWSs) are areas known to be of county or regional importance for wildlife. They have a key role in the conservation of Suffolk's biodiversity and are important links in Suffolk's 'Living Landscape', as described on the Suffolk Wildlife Trust website [14]. CWS designation is non-statutory but is recognition of a site's high value for biodiversity. Suffolk currently has over 900 County Wildlife Sites representing approximately 2.6% of the county's land area.

CWSs have been identified throughout Suffolk and range from small meadows, green lanes, dykes and hedges through to much larger areas of ancient woodlands, heathland, greens, commons and marsh. Outside of areas with statutory protection (such as SSSIs, Local and National Nature Reserves), CWSs are therefore the most important areas for wildlife in Suffolk and can support both

locally and nationally threatened wildlife species and habitats.

Many County Wildlife Sites support UK Priority Habitats and Species (see 5.3 and 5.4 below). They complement the statutory protected areas and nature reserves by helping to buffer and maintain habitat links between these sites.

It is important to note that the designation of a site as a CWS does not confer any new rights of access either to the general public or conservation organisations.

Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service and Natural England manage the Suffolk County Wildlife Site system in partnership. This CWS system involves:

- Maintaining an up to date database of CWSs in Suffolk. Partners and local authorities have copies of the database
- Designating new CWSs, extending existing CWSs and modifying information held on existing sites when changes occur. New sites and site extensions are notified in accordance with selection criteria.
- Supplying information on wildlife interest of CWSs to landowners and other organisations whose work may affect CWSs. The importance of CWSs is recognised by local authorities in Suffolk and they have all developed policies that give CWSs some protection in line with national planning policy. If a CWS is likely to be affected by development the views of the CWS partners is normally sought as part of the consultation process.

CWSs are implicitly recognised by the NPPF as having a fundamental role to play in meeting overall national biodiversity targets. In the NPPF 2019 they are described as ‘Locally Designated Sites’. CWS are not protected by legislation, but their importance is recognised by local authorities when considering planning applications. Under current planning policy there is a presumption against granting permission for development that would have an adverse impact on a CWS.

Suffolk Wildlife Trust monitors planning applications for potential impacts on County Wildlife Sites.

It is important to note that Environmental Impact Assessments are required by Natural England when areas of uncultivated land over two hectares are to undergo agricultural change, including operations such as increases in stock density, cultivation, soil spreading and new drainage work.

The high wildlife value of many CWSs has developed through land management practices that have allowed wildlife to thrive, for example traditional and historical management such as rotational coppicing of woodland, hay cutting or grazing of grasslands. Ensuring the continuation of such appropriate management is vital to maintain the wildlife value of a site. Establishing and maintaining good working relationships with landowners and managers is therefore essential.

The CWS partnership appreciates the difficulties that achieving the conservation management of CWSs can present and is therefore happy to offer advice on management and on potential sources of funding. Free advice is available from Suffolk Wildlife Trust to CWS owners and managers and includes:

- Information on the wildlife and nature conservation interest of the site;
- Advice and site visits can be made to establish the best management to maintain and enhance wildlife value.

5.3.2 County Wildlife Sites in Melton

There are three county Wildlife Sites in Melton: Woods Lane & Hutchison's Meadow, Melton Picnic Site and Hospital Grove.

Woods Lane & Hutchison's Meadow – Suffolk Coastal 125

2.69ha grassland mosaic

This grassland site includes two meadows – the Suffolk Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve known as Hutchison's Meadow and a privately owned meadow immediately to the north east. The western end of both meadows supports spring fed wet grassland, characteristic of flushes associated with Red Crag. The wet grassland supports a high diversity of species characteristic of this habitat and includes fleabane, greater bird's foot trefoil, ragged robin and southern marsh orchid.

Downslope from the flushes the underlying sands and gravels give rise to dry grassland. Although this dry grassland has a lower species count it is none the less unimproved and is a scarce habitat in Suffolk.

Characteristic plant species include bulbous buttercup, sheep's sorrel, meadow saxifrage, yellow rattle, sweet vernal grass and yellow oat grass.

It is unusual to find both wet and dry grassland together, but this site is particularly characteristic of where springs arise at the boundaries of Red Crag and underlying permeable London Clay. This type of underlying geology is confined to river valleys and the coastal areas of south and east Suffolk making the flora associated with Red Crag flushes unique to this area of Suffolk.

	
<p>View eastwards across Hutchison's meadow part of the CWS</p>	<p>Melton picnic site CWS</p>

Melton Picnic Site – Suffolk Coastal 126

Wet species-rich grassland 0.67ha

This wet meadow site is located next to Melton Picnic site and car park close to Wilford Bridge. Despite its small size (Approximately 300m² in area) it supports southern marsh orchid together with abundant ragged robin, greater bird's-foot trefoil, fleabane and other marshland plants characteristic of such habitats.

Hospital Grove – Suffolk Coastal 203

Ancient Woodland 6.18ha

Hospital Grove CWS is a small woodland forming part of the complex of woodlands, plantation and shelter belts of the residential estate known as Melton Park on land that was formerly St Audry's Hospital. Although it is not listed in Natural England's Ancient Woodland Inventory and is adjoined by secondary woodlands and plantations on both sides, Hospital Grove has distinct boundary earthworks on the west and northern side and complex internal banks which indicates its ancient origin. In addition, its flora is characteristic of ancient woodland with carpets of wood anemones and bluebell with also early purple orchid and goldilocks buttercup. Much of the woodland consists of hazel and ash coppice with oak standards overhead. However, the management history of the wood has clearly been complex with areas where oaks have been planted, areas of exotic species and considerable variation in the intensity of management of the coppice. Where recent coppice management has taken place, the density of remaining standard trees means the understorey is still quite shaded so the subsequent regrowth from the coppice stools may be less vigorous. There are a number of ponds in the woodland which provide additional habitat diversity.



5.3.3 Roadside Nature Reserve

The Roadside Nature Reserve project is administered by Suffolk County Council. The aim of the project is to conserve species-rich plant areas and plants of national or county importance. All Roadside Nature Reserves are marked with white posts and plates indicating the direction of the protected stretch of roadside verge. These ensure cutting takes place at the appropriate times

There is a Roadside Nature Reserve on the B1438. Due to its proximity to traffic, for safety reasons only Suffolk County Council staff undertake any visits to this site.

5.4 Biodiversity Action Plans

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP, 1994) was the UK Government response to the 1992 International Convention on Biological Diversity. The UK BAP listed a range of habitats, plus a number of birds and species from other taxa of conservation interest. National targets and priorities were set in order to address the particular needs of those species. The list was amended in August 2007 to include additional species and habitats to reflect concerns over continuing declines. Much of the work previously carried out under the UK BAP is now focused through from

country level down to local level through the creation of local biodiversity strategies. However, the UK BAP lists of priority species and habitats remain important and valuable reference sources.

In addition, Section 40 of the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act states that 'Every public body must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity'. UK priority species, listed within Section 41 of the Act, are normally taken as a good benchmark for demonstrating biodiversity duty.

In January 2014, Suffolk Biodiversity Partnership (SBP) - a consortium of over 20 organisations working for wildlife within the county - published revised statutory lists of Priority Habitats and Species occurring in Suffolk, [15] and these have been subsequently updated and amended. In a small number of cases where previously no national BAP existed, certain species are described as Suffolk Character Species to reflect their particular importance within the county.

The following section deals with the Priority Habitats that are present in Melton. In most cases the habitat descriptions include Priority Species and other notable species as supporting evidence. For the majority of species, they are only referenced if they were noted during the field survey or are recent records (post 2000) held by Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service.

5.5 Suffolk Priority Habitats in Melton

Of the 24 Suffolk Priority habitats, eleven are believed to be present in Melton parish:

- Hedgerows
- Mixed deciduous woodland
- Lowland meadows
- Ponds
- Lowland heathland and acid grassland
- Wood pasture and parkland
- Wet woodland
- Coastal saltmarsh
- Intertidal mudflats
- Traditional Orchards
- Reedbeds

The Priority Habitats are described in more detail below to highlight the significance of these ecological assets within the parish. The format is in three parts:

1. General descriptions of the habitats as they relate to Suffolk
2. These are followed by descriptions of the Priority habitat as found in Melton during the field survey, noting any associated UK and Suffolk Priority species
3. Finally, reference is made from the Suffolk BAPs (or other sources) to those development activities that are most likely to affect the Priority Habitat as it exists in Melton

5.5.1 Hedgerows

5.5.1.1 General description of this Priority Habitat in the context of Suffolk

Hedgerows are boundary lines of trees and/or shrubs, sometimes associated with banks, ditches and grass verges. Those considered ancient or species-rich or both are an important reservoir of biodiversity in the farmed landscape as well as being of cultural, historical and landscape importance. Hedges act as wildlife corridors, linking habitats of high biodiversity value such as woodland and wetland, thus enabling bats, other small mammals and invertebrates to move around under cover from predators.

Ancient hedgerows, which support a greater diversity of plants and animals than subsequent hedges, may be defined as those that were in existence before the Enclosure Acts, passed between 1720 and 1840.

Species-rich hedgerows contain five or more native woody species on average in a 30 metre length. Those which contain fewer woody species, but a rich basal flora may also be considered as important. The Hedgerow Regulations 1997 define 'important' hedgerows as those with seven woody species, or six woody species in a 30m length, plus other defined features.

Key Priority species in Suffolk which use hedges and associated grassy verges include: brown hare, grey partridge, song thrush, linnet, turtle dove, corn bunting, tree sparrow, bullfinch and various species of bats. Hibernating reptiles and amphibians and invertebrates such as white-letter hairstreak butterfly on elm hedges also all make use of this Priority Habitat.

5.5.1.2 Hedgerow Priority Habitat in Melton

The field survey noted a network of hedgerows within the parish, although several had been allowed to grow-on and are functionally more similar to thick lines of trees. Hedgerows are important for a number of bird Priority Species and the Suffolk Bird Atlas 2007-11 recorded dunnoek, yellowhammer, linnet, bullfinch, redwing and fieldfare in the parish – all typical of this habitat. It also recorded turtle dove. This rapidly declining species favours thickets and tall hedgerows with wide bases as breeding sites but is currently in severe decline.

Melton was one of the many parishes covered by the Suffolk Hedgerow Survey, 1998-2012. The 2012 report on this project [16] shows that, although access was not granted to some landholdings, out of the 137 hedges surveyed for woody species:

33 contained 4 species or fewer

47 contained 5, 6 or 7 species

57 contained 8 species or more

Therefore 41% of the sampled hedgerow resource within the parish can be deemed species-rich.

It must be noted that this summary is based on data collected in the early stages of the Suffolk Hedgerow Survey (2004) and that changes will have occurred since that time, both positive and negative. However, it remains broadly true that the hedgerows in the parish are an important reservoir for wildlife.

During the walkover surveys, it was noted that numerous hedgerows are tall, thick and species-rich. Common species include hawthorn, blackthorn, dog rose, field maple, elm, dogwood, holly with sycamore, English oak and ash as standard trees. However, several hedges also include hazel, spindle and hornbeam indicating their ancient origins.



Species rich hedgerows bordering St Audrys Road

5.5.1.3 Activities and developments most likely to affect Hedgerow Priority Habitat in Melton

- Removal to facilitate arable, other farming operations or other developments (though this may require consent under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997);
- Under-management and neglect of hedges leads to a reduction of their biodiversity value and structural coherence (and occasionally leads to their complete disappearance);
- Too-frequent flailing can lead to structural incoherence and – if carried out in successive years - loss of hedgerow fruit in autumn, as flowering and fruiting normally takes place on second year growth;
- Mature hedges with a minimum grass strip separating them from arable land may suffer damage to tree and shrub roots through ploughing;
- Fertilizer and other agro-chemical drift may degrade plant and invertebrate populations, especially where a crop extends to the hedge base;
- Losses of veteran trees that may not be replaced by new plantings.

5.5.2 Mixed Deciduous Woodland

5.5.2.1 General description of this Priority Habitat in the context of Suffolk

This Priority habitat includes all broadleaved stands and mixed broadleaved and coniferous stands which have more than 80% of their cover made up of broadleaved species. It also includes patches of scrub of above 0.25 hectares forming a continuous canopy, areas of recently felled woodland and other successional types, along with the other integral features of woodland such as glades and rides.

These woodlands may be ancient (where cover existed before c 1600) or recent (where cover has been created since c 1600). Both these age designations may have semi-natural cover or plantation cover, depending on past management. Management can vary from coppice or coppice with standards to wood-pasture, high forest or minimum intervention. The latter, when found in ancient semi-natural woodland, contains some of the most important wildlife assemblages of any habitat.

5.5.2.2 Mixed Deciduous Woodland Priority Habitat in Melton

Melton Park woodland - a series of woodland belts are associated with Hospital Grove CWS

(described in 5.3.2) Hospital Grove is ancient woodland and whilst the adjoining woodlands are likely to be secondary in origin, they provide important habitat to buffer and extend the available habitat. Some ancient woodland indicator species are found in these secondary woodlands, such as moschatel.

Hope Wood TM 28542 51023 – is a woodland with wide sunny rides and glades. No public access was available, but it was viewed from the perimeter. The wood includes holly, ash, sweet chestnut, oak, cherry, hornbeam, yew, leylandii, beech, some areas of bracken. Spring bulbs were visible including daffodils and snowdrops. Pond within the woodland appears to have good water quality and likely supports a healthy population of aquatic invertebrates and potentially amphibians.

Leeks Hills TM2750 5006 is a large area of woodland largely within the built-up area of Melton. Much of the wood is public open space well-used by dog walkers and other members of the public. Part of the woodland are secondary regrowth and there are also areas which have been replanted with substantial areas dominated by sycamore. Along the southern boundary where the ground slopes steeply is an area of dry oak dominated woodland, with holly, gorse and broom in the understorey.

Long Wood, Crag Pit Wood and Asylum Wood form a cluster of secondary woodland in the north west of the Parish and are all owned by Suffolk Wildlife Trust as part of their Foxburrow Farm Reserve. Crag Pit Wood contains a range of species including oak, ash, cherry and pine with an understorey of elder, hawthorn, field maple, holly, hazel and honeysuckle. Long Wood is dominated by oak and beech with silver birch, field maple, hawthorn, elm and cherry also present. Asylum Wood is dominated by oak, with some sycamore and ash. The understorey is dominated by holly, with hazel, hawthorn and elder also present.

Land surrounding Greylands, and Greylands Cottage also includes woodland, listed under the Priority Habitat inventory. It surrounds mature gardens and is comprised of similar species to the surrounding woodlands but also contains some introduced but notable redwood trees.

There are several small stands of woodland associated with Potash Farm.

There is a small area of mixed woodland north of Bury Hill. This contains a range of species including oak, ash, pine, elm and holly. Many of the trees are ivy covered. The oaks along the northern boundary are particularly old.

There is a patch of woodland north of footpath which runs along the rear of St Andrews Place with sweet chestnut, sycamore, oak ash and several pine with areas of thick undisturbed elder saplings with good amounts of fallen and standing deadwood. There is evidence that this area is used recreationally by stunt bikers, with tracks and ramps carved out of the ground. Steep sides rise up to the field to the north. A large open area (recently cleared) lies to the south, further down the valley side with springs making the ground conditions considerably more wet. Ground flora noted includes lords-and-ladies, comfrey and primrose.

5.5.2.3 Activities and developments most likely to affect the Mixed Deciduous Woodland Priority Habitat in Melton

- Further fragmentation of and within the existing woodland area;
- Overgrazing and overbrowsing by expanding deer populations changes woodland structure

- through reduced regeneration;
- Intensification of management between woodland fragments reduces the ecological value; of edge habitats and the connectivity between woodland blocks in the landscape.

5.5.3 Lowland Meadows

5.5.3.1 General description of this Priority Habitat in the context of Suffolk

Often termed 'old meadows', these grasslands are characterised by a long history of traditional management of haymaking and have not been altered through ploughing or the use of agro-chemicals. This definition is also broad enough to include unimproved pastures where livestock grazing is the main land use.

In addition to species-rich swards of grasses and other flowering plants, unimproved hay meadows and pastures support a wide range other wildlife, including birds, small mammals and invertebrates. 96% of this BAP Habitat has been lost in Suffolk since 1939, with less than 100 hectares still remaining, though churchyard flora and fauna can mirror this habitat to some extent.

5.5.3.2 Lowland Meadow Priority Habitat in Melton

Woods Lane and Hutchisons meadow CWS and Melton Picnic site CWS are examples of this habitat. Both are described in 5.3.2.

5.5.3.3 Activities and developments most likely to affect the Lowland Meadow Priority Habitat in Melton

- Declining agricultural value of species-rich hay and reduction in the availability of the appropriate type and size of farm machinery for traditional hay making;
- Changes in plant communities through inappropriate grazing/cutting regimes;
- Lack of resources for long-term management of hay meadows;
- Abandonment leading to rank overgrowth and scrub encroachment.

5.5.4 Ponds

5.5.4.1 General description of this Priority Habitat in the context of Suffolk

For the purposes of classifying this Priority Habitat, ponds are defined as permanent or seasonal standing water bodies up to 2 hectares in extent which meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Habitats of international importance
- Species of high conservation importance, for example ponds supporting Priority Species
- Ponds of high ecological quality, as determined by standard survey techniques

5.5.4.2 Ponds Priority Habitat in Melton

Information provided by Suffolk Biodiversity Information Services indicate that there are records of 33 ponds within the Parish of Melton. This may be an underestimate as this does not include all ponds within individual gardens.

A density of 5.7 ponds per square km (5.7 ponds/km²) shows that Melton contains slightly less than the average of 6.3 ponds/km² throughout the rest of the Suffolk Coastal District, but is similar to the entire County average of 5.9 ponds/km² [17]. The ponds are fairly evenly spread throughout the

two main 'terrestrial' Landscape Character Types. There are also two large fishing lakes at the southern boundary of the Coastal Levels in the north east of Melton.

As access was limited it was only possible to visit very few of these ponds during the walkover survey, but reference to Google Earth imaging suggests that the majority still exist. There may also be an additional network of garden ponds, which it was not possible to identify during the field survey.

5.5.4.3 Activities and developments that could affect the Ponds Priority Habitat in Melton

Ponds are dynamic systems, being both lost and created over time. However, loss or degradation of ponds - even if they are at low densities within a landscape network - may lead to a reduced diversity of wildlife as ponds become more isolated from one another, compromising species that may rely on a network of ponds for their survival. Examples of how such changes may occur include:

- Complete infilling due to loss of economic value or new development;
- Loss of terrestrial buffer zones in areas of intensive land use;
- Diffuse or point source pollution from nutrients or other chemicals;
- Inadvertent or deliberate introduction of non-native species such as New Zealand pygmyweed (*aka* Australian swamp stonecrop), least duckweed or ornamental fish;
- Neglect and/or lack of management resulting in heavy shading and drying out.

It should be noted that some apparently neglected ponds and many ephemeral ponds are of great interest for biodiversity and that a pond survey based on a standard procedure can do much to inform management decisions.

5.5.5 Lowland Heathland and Acid Grassland

5.5.5.1 General description of this Priority Habitat in the context of Suffolk

Acid grassland occurs on nutrient-poor, freely-draining soils with a pH ranging from 4.0-5.5. It is found mainly in the Sandlings and Breckland areas of Suffolk, but also in other areas where sand is dominant in the geology and soils. In Suffolk, many grasslands of this type are more strongly influenced by the free-draining nature of the soils than the pH, so that they are effectively 'parched grasslands'.

This grassland is characterised by a species-poor plant community, dominated by sheep's fescue, sheep's sorrel and common bent-grass. Other species often present in the sward include sand sedge, wavy hair-grass, tormentil and heath bedstraw. The summer-parched soils in Suffolk often support stands of acid grassland rich in both mosses and lichens. In addition, acid grassland in Suffolk is noted for a number of rare and nationally scarce spring annual plants. These include clustered clover, suffocated clover and mossy stonecrop.

Many of the invertebrates occurring in acid grassland are species that do not occur elsewhere, many of which are Red Data Book Listed, Nationally Scarce or Notable. Ground-dwelling and burrowing invertebrates particularly favour the open acid grassland swards that typically contain bare sandy areas. Suffolk Priority bird species which are associated with acid grassland include woodlark, stone curlew and nightjar.

The loss of unimproved acid grassland mirrors the loss of other unimproved grassland types in Suffolk. Agricultural intensification, particularly the use of agrochemicals and irrigation has resulted in substantial loss of acid grassland in the county. Further losses can be attributed to an increase

in urban development particularly around Ipswich. Recent assessments of the county's resource of this habitat are 820 hectares (2.7% of the national resource).

5.5.5.2 Lowland Heathland and Acid Grassland Priority Habitat in Melton

A large expanse of field north of Decoy Farm in the northeast of the Parish appears to contain features which may meet the criteria to qualify as Lowland Heathland and Acid Grassland Priority Habitat. Further survey would be required to adequately assess if the area meets the criteria outlined in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat Descriptions.

An area north of Valley Farm also appears to contain features which may meet the criteria to qualify as Lowland Heathland and Acid Grassland Priority Habitat but would also require further survey to adequately assess if it does meet the criteria. This area has visibly dry sandy soil, with sparse, rabbit grazed vegetation and some small scrubby oaks, holm oak and bramble around the edges.



Field north of Valley Farm

5.5.5.3 Activities and developments that could affect Lowland Heathland and Acid Grassland Priority Habitat in Melton

- Agricultural improvements through ploughing and reseeding, liming, irrigation, fertiliser and herbicide application and change of use to horse paddocks;
- Development for housing, recreational or infrastructure projects;
- Afforestation or smaller scale woodland plantation;
- Reduction in the rabbit population leading to an encroachment of open acid grassland heath by self-sown pines, birch and bracken.

5.5.6 Wood Pasture and Parkland

5.5.6.1 General description of this Priority Habitat in the context of Suffolk

Lowland wood pastures and parkland are the products of historical land management systems and represent a vegetation structure rather than being a particular plant community. Typically, this structure is one of large open-grown or high forest trees (often pollarded) at various densities, in a matrix of grazed grassland, heathland and/or woodland floras. It can include non-native species introduced as part of a designed landscaping scheme.

Historic landscapes can provide a wealth of habitats and niches for wildlife, especially fungi, invertebrates, bats and woodland birds.

5.5.6.2 Wood Pasture and Parkland Priority Habitat in Melton

There are three areas shown as Wood Pasture and Parkland on the Priority Habitat Inventory on MAGIC. An area extending to eight hectares is located to the south of Foxburrow Hall, centred on TM 2774 5142 and there are also 12 hectares south and east of Melton Lodge, extending beyond the B1438. These areas are clearly visible from aerial imagery. The third area includes eight hectares of land south of Woods Lane including Hutchisons Meadow, although much of the southern part is now taken over by playing field. The occasional very large veteran oak trees in this area are a strong indicator of this area's history.

St Audry's Golf Course also has a strong parkland feel but is not listed on the Priority Habitat Inventory.

5.5.6.3 Activities and developments that could affect the Wood Pasture and Parkland Priority Habitat in Melton

- Reduction in structural and age diversity of woody species, including lack of replanting to replace lost mature/veteran trees or damage to young trees by cattle;
- Unsympathetic tree surgery including removal of fallen deadwood or standing deadwood (unless required for safety reasons);
- Cessation of grazing by cattle or sheep leading to changes to grassland habitat.

5.5.7 Wet Woodland

5.5.7.1 General description of this Priority Habitat in the context of Suffolk

Wet woodlands occur on land that has waterlogged or seasonally waterlogged soils, where the water table is correspondingly high and drainage poor. They are frequently associated with river valleys, floodplains, flushes and plateau woodlands.

Typical tree species include grey willow, alder and downy birch. The habitat supports a number of important Priority species in Suffolk. These include mammals such as otter and various bat species, birds such as marsh tit and various scarce species of beetles and weevils.

5.5.7.2 Wet Woodland Priority Habitat in Melton

There are a number of springs rising along the boundary between the Ancient Rolling Farmland and Rolling Estate Sandlands. Most of these areas were inaccessible but are likely to contain small patches of linear wet woodland.

There is a small wooded area between Hall Farm Close and Hall Farm Road dominated by alder, and willow. Fool's watercress, wavy bittercress, yellow flag iris and willowherb sp were noted along with a bank covered with lesser celandine. Unfortunately, much fly tipping was noted in this area.

Wet woodland is also found in the southern part of the site allocated within the current Neighbourhood Plan (Land off Wilford Bridge Road: Policy Mel 20). This is described in more detail in Section 5.9.



Wet woodland adjacent recreational area near Hall Farm Road

5.5.7.3 Activities and developments that could affect the Wet Woodland Priority Habitat in Melton

- Changes in the flow patterns in the land drainage systems causing changes to woodland hydrology;
- Inappropriate management causing changes in the structure and flora, leading to poor regeneration and changes in the floristic diversity;
- Poor water quality leading to changes in the flora and invertebrate communities;
- Colonisation of the woodland by non-native species, for example Himalayan balsam;
- Direct loss of the habitat through a change to other land uses;
- Climate change may have a significant impact on the hydrology and biology of these woods.

5.5.8 Coastal Saltmarsh

5.5.8.1 General description of this Priority Habitat in the context of Suffolk

Coastal saltmarshes comprise the upper, vegetated portions of intertidal mudflats and are dependent on their presence. They tend to be restricted to relatively sheltered areas such as estuaries, saline lagoons and behind barrier islands.

Vegetation is comprised of salt tolerant species adapted to regular immersion by the tides, with clear zonation depending on tolerance level, tending to show more diversity in the mid-upper marsh. Glassworts and grasses dominate.

They are particularly important for wading birds and wildfowl offering refuge, feeding and breeding sites, and can also be important for fish and invertebrates.

5.5.8.2 Coastal Saltmarsh Priority Habitats in Melton

There is a small area between the boatyard and the sewage treatment works (see 4.3.4). However, the majority of this habitat lies elsewhere within the Deben Estuary.

5.5.8.3 Activities and developments that could affect the Coastal Saltmarsh Priority Habitats in Melton

- Erosion and coastal squeeze are most pronounced in south-east England. Rising sea levels and storm surges as a result of climate change can result in coastal squeeze and changes in sediment structure;

- Spread of cord grass hybrids (native/non-native mix);
- Other human influences including recreational pressure.

5.5.9 Mudflats

5.5.9.1 General description of this Priority Habitat in the context of Suffolk

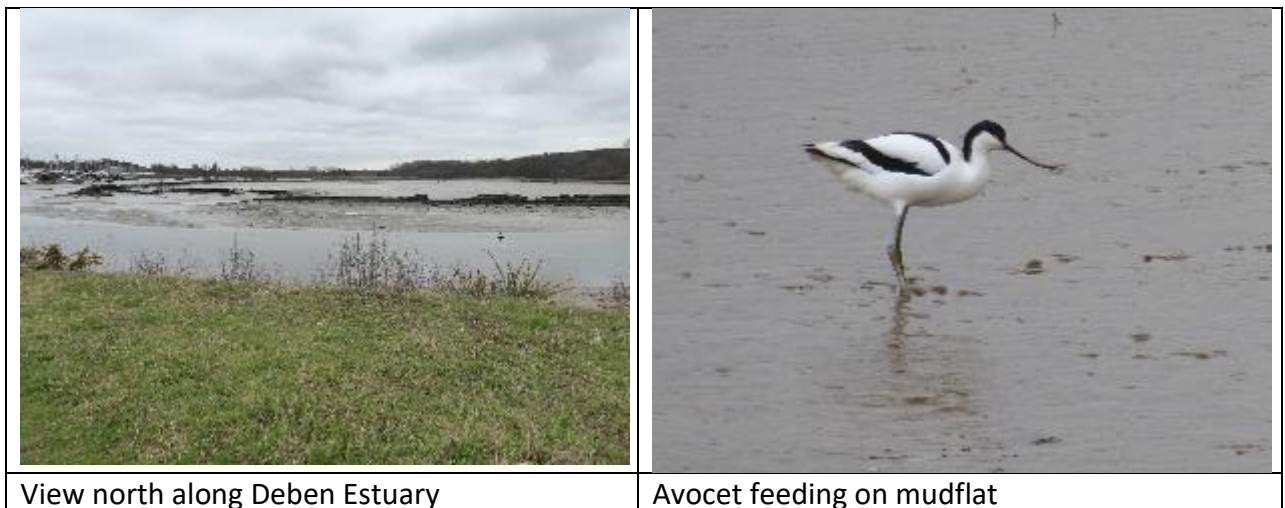
Mudflats are sedimentary intertidal habitat created by deposition in low energy coastal environments, particularly estuaries and other sheltered areas. They are interlinked to saltmarshes, lying between them and subtidal channels.

Mudflats are important in their role of dissipating wave energy, reducing impacts upon saltmarshes, coastal defences and low-lying land. They also play a role chemically by sequestering contaminants.

They are usually devoid of vegetation, but despite low diversity, they have a high biological productivity and abundance of organisms such as worms and benthic microalgae. Mudflats support large numbers of predatory birds and fish, providing feeding and resting areas for internationally important populations of migrant and wintering wildfowl.

5.5.9.2 Mudflats Priority Habitats in Melton

These are associated with the Deben Estuary.



5.5.9.3 Activities and developments that could affect the Mudflats Priority Habitats in Melton

- Barrage schemes such as water storage, amenity, tidal power and flood defence pose a threat to the integrity and ecological value of mudflats in estuaries;
- Diffuse and point source discharges from agriculture, industry and urban areas creating abiotic areas or algal mats which could impact invertebrate communities
- Fishing or bait digging;
- Human disturbance on bird populations;
- Introduction of new or non-native species;
- Higher sea level and increased storm frequency may affect the sedimentation patterns of mudflats and estuaries.

5.5.10 Traditional Orchard

5.5.10.1 General description of this Priority Habitat in the context of Suffolk

Traditional orchards are structurally and ecologically similar to wood pasture and parkland, with open-grown trees set in herbaceous vegetation. However, they are set apart by a number of factors as follows:

- Species composition - trees grown for fruit or nut production, such as apple, pear, plum, damson, walnut, cherry and cobnut;
- Management – low intensity grafting and pruning with little or no use of chemicals;
- Spacing – denser arrangement with good ground flora structure;
- Scale – small individual habitat patches;
- Dispersion and frequency – wider and greater occurrence in the countryside.

Traditional orchards are hotspots for biodiversity supporting a range of wildlife, particularly when associated with other features such as ponds, hedgerows, scrub, fallen deadwood and streams. The minimum size of a traditional orchard is defined as five trees with crown edges less than 20m apart.

Traditional orchards are not to be confused with commercial orchards which tend to be much larger in size, have more of a monoculture and are much more intensively managed.

5.5.10.2 Traditional Orchard Priority Habitat in Melton

There are two traditional orchards listed on Natural England's Priority Habitat Inventory on MAGIC: There are part of privately owned land at Melton Lodge and Greylands and were not viewed as part of this assessment.

5.5.10.3 Activities and developments that could affect the Traditional Orchard Priority Habitat in Melton

- Inappropriate management;
- Use of pesticides;
- Pressure from land development;
- Neglect;
- Intensification of agriculture.

5.5.11 Reedbeds

5.5.11.1 General description of this Priority Habitat in the context of Suffolk

Reedbeds are wetlands which are dominated by stands of common reed and where the water table is at or above the ground level for most of the year. They tend to incorporate areas of open water and ditches and are also often associated with small areas of wet grassland or carr woodland.

Reedbeds are among the most important habitats for birds in the UK. They support a distinctive breeding bird assemblage including bittern, marsh harrier, Cetti's warbler and bearded tit. They also provide important feeding and roosting sites for a number of migratory species and are often used as roosting sites by raptors during the winter. Several Priority mammal species are associated with this habitat including water vole and harvest mouse. Several rare invertebrates are also strongly associated with this habitat.

5.5.11.2 Reedbed Priority Habitat in Melton

There is a small area of reedbed near the Sewage Treatment Works, between the sea wall and the railway line. It is surrounded by dense scrub and there are some oak trees growing within the reedbed.

Reedbed is also found in the southern part of the site allocated within the current Neighbourhood Plan (Land off Wilford Bridge Road: Policy Mel 20). This is described in more detail in Section 5.9.



Reedbed near Sewage Treatment Works

5.5.11.3 Activities and developments that could affect the Reedbed Priority Habitat in Melton

- Pressure from development;
- Lack of management;
- Other human influences such as waste tipping, recreational pressure and pollution.

5.6 Suffolk Priority Species in Melton

Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service has provided records of species within the Parish. Those that are listed as protected or Priority species are as follows:

Mammals: Bats including noctule, serotine, soprano pipistrelle, common pipistrelle, Nathusius's pipistrelle, brown long-eared and Natterer's. Additionally, badger, hedgehog, polecat, brown hare, water vole and otter have been recorded.

Birds: A good range of Red List and Amber List Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) have been recorded, most of which are also Priority Species.

Key species likely to be associated with farmland include turtle dove, skylark, yellowhammer, linnet, lapwing (all Red List) and barn owl (Schedule 1). The species most associated with settlements include starling, song thrush, house sparrow (red list) and swift and dunnoek (both Amber List). Spotted flycatcher (Red List) and Bullfinch (Amber List) are also recorded.

Various birds are associated with wetland and the estuary, including herring gull, black-tailed godwit, scaup, curlew, yellow wagtail, marsh tit, grasshopper warbler, cuckoo (Red List) and Brent goose, bittern and reed bunting (Amber List).

Swift and barn owl are also Suffolk Priority Species. Swift is classed as Endangered as a GB breeding bird according to International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) criteria. Barn owl is listed under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Invertebrates: Several moth species have been recorded including beaded chestnut, oak hook-tip, sawfly, small square-spot, centre-barred sawfly, grey dagger, mouse moth, ear moth, white-line dart, concolorous, mottled rustic, lunar yellow underwing, dot moth, rustic, buff ermine, powdered quaker, rosy rustic, white ermine, cinnabar, small phoenix, blood-vein, hedge rustic, feathered gothic, autumnal rustic, deep-brown dart, flounced chestnut, dusky-lemon sawfly, large wainscot and green-brindled crescent. White letter hairstreak, grayling, wall and small heath butterflies have also been recorded, along with several records of stag beetle and a small number of five-banded weevil wasps which favour sandy soils.

Several amphibian and reptile species have been recorded in the parish. A high number of great crested newt records exist, associated with farmland ponds in the north-west of the parish and beyond. Common toads have been recorded throughout the parish. Common lizard, grass snake and slow worm are found in urban areas and in the riparian habitat of the River Deben.

In addition, several Suffolk Rare Plants have been recorded: parsley water-dropwort, common cudweed, chicory, dittander, common sea lavender, annual beard-grass, field pepperwort, sneezewort, hound's tongue, strawberry clover, smooth cat's ear, suffocated clover, mossy stonecrop, crosswort, harebell, hoary cinquefoil, clustered clover, corn parsley, hoary plantain, good King Henry, wild clary, field scabious, sea bindweed, golden samphire, bogbean and corn spurrey.



There are also records of plants listed as invasive on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) including hollyberry cotoneaster and wall cotoneaster, along with Indian balsam in some of the water courses and wetter areas and giant hogweed around the junctions between Leeks Hill, Wood Lane and Valley Farm Road. New Zealand pigmyweed and giant rhubarb have been recorded on Ufford Golf Course as well as Indian balsam.

5.7 Veteran Trees

There are a number of Tree Preservation Orders, all along southern boundary of the parish, along with several groups of trees and tree areas throughout.

The NPPF 2019 considers veteran trees, along with ancient woodland as an 'irreplaceable habitat' and any development impacting on such features should be refused. The location of such trees within the Parish means that they are unlikely to be impacted upon by development. Consideration should be given to undertaking new planting in strategic locations, protected from livestock, to provide the veteran trees of the future.

A number of veteran trees were noted scattered across the Parish during the walkover surveys and consequently, the Parish is notable for the presence of these features.

	
<p>One of a number of historically pollarded oaks along northern boundary of Bredfield Road open space</p>	<p>Veteran, formerly pollarded oak at Foxburrow Farm</p>

5.8 Built Environment and Associated Habitats

5.8.1 General description of this habitat in the context of Suffolk

This habitat refers broadly to the wide range of structures, materials and microhabitats found in the built environment, including (though not exclusively) farm buildings, houses, gardens, allotments and waste land. These built-up areas, gardens and associated spaces can form a significant proportion of the land use within a settlement, but still provide a wide range of habitats with significant biodiversity value. All provide opportunities and in some case refuges for a wide range of species to complete their life cycles.

The conservation importance of the built environment and its associated habitats also lies as much in the opportunities they provide for people to have close contact with wildlife as in the protection of common and scarcer species. Becoming familiar with the wildlife in a garden often stimulates interest in species and habitats within the wider countryside.

5.8.2 Built Environment Habitat in Melton

Melton was first mentioned in 11th Century records, but has the potential to be much older, with links to Saxon times. The main settlement area of Melton is located in the south of the parish, immediately adjoining Woodbridge on the southern side of Pytches Road. Many of the residential areas surround the recreation area and the woodland park known as Leeks Hills. The majority of the listed buildings are located around the crossroads of Woods Lane and Melton Road, indicating that this area is likely the historical centre of Melton.

Old maps support this and show that over the past 100 years there has been a general expansion in housing, which has resulted in the current close association with Woodbridge. There also appears to have been a large degree of development in the early 1970s.

To the south east of the historic centre, are the industrial and commercial areas supporting a number of large warehouses, a family owned and run boatyard and the train station along with Riduna Park, which contains East Suffolk Council Offices.

St Audry's is located in the north-west of the parish. It was built in 1764 and was originally a workhouse. From 1829 until its closure in 1993, it was used as Suffolk County Asylum and was then sold for residential conversion. A number of new-build properties were also erected in a style sympathetic to that of the existing buildings to form a moderately sized housing estate on the boundary with Ufford. There is a golf course and cricket ground also associated with St Audry's.

Between St Audry's and the main urban settlement of Melton, there are a number of large mansion houses, estates and farms. These include Melton Lodge, Foxboro Hall, Whitwell House, Old Rectory Lodge, Greylands, Lodge Farm, Valley Farm and Decoy Farm. Ufford Park Hotel Golf and Spa also lies within the parish boundary, along with most of its golf course. This occupies the north eastern corner of the parish.

The A12 bisects part of the parish on the western edge, with Park Lodge and Witchpit Farm on the western side of the road.

5.8.3 Activities and developments that could affect this habitat in Melton

Rather than note adverse actions, there is a wide range of information and websites generally available on wildlife gardening. Some of the positive actions that individual gardeners can consider include:

- Creating ponds and mini wildflower meadows;
- Putting up swift boxes on buildings;
- Creating hedgehog highways between gardens ;
- Composting and creating deadwood areas;
- Harvesting rainwater;
- Avoiding garden chemicals.

5.9 Area allocated for mixed development in the Existing Melton Neighbourhood Plan

An area of land off Wilford Bridge Road is included within the current Melton Neighbourhood Plan as an allocation for mixed-use development, including residential, employment and community uses (Policy MEL 20). The site is located on the eastern side of Melton, north of the Ipswich to Felixstowe railway line and is largely within the Coastal Levels Landscape Character Type being just over 100m north of the Deben Estuary at the closest point.

The original site totalled 9.7 hectares and the western part included a vacant employment site which has now been developed as new offices for East Suffolk Council and other employment uses. The remainder of the site is approximately 3.4 hectares and is shown as a mixture of commercial, residential and green/community space and lake in Chapter 10 of the Melton Neighbourhood Plan.

As part of this audit, the site was assessed in June 2020. There is a distinct habitat mosaic defined by the prevailing hydrological conditions. In the lower lying parts of the site to the south there is swamp/fen, wet woodland, scrub and marshy grassland interspersed with several drainage ditches. Although small in area, the reedbed and wet woodland do qualify as Priority habitat. At the northern end of the site the ground slopes upwards with tall ruderal vegetation, bracken and poor semi-improved grassland present. There is a woodland belt along the northern and eastern boundaries of the site.

A previous ecological survey to accompany a planning application (DC/19/2558/OUT- Withdrawn) for 55 dwellings on the northern part of the site was undertaken in September 2018 [18]. The site location plan accompanying the planning application did not include the lower-lying wetter southern part of the site, but the ecological survey also took this area into consideration as part of the wider habitat block.

The survey noted that the low-lying mosaic of wet woodland, scrub and swamp/fen adjacent to the network of drainage ditches was considered to be of value at the District or County level, while the species diverse grassland is considered to be of value at the Local level. At the time of this 2018 survey, part of the wet woodland had recently been felled. This has now partially regrown as willow and alder scrub which will eventually succeed back to wet woodland.

This site is likely to support various protected species. Grass snake was recorded on site in September 2018 and given the nature of the habitats on site other species of reptile, including slow worm and common lizard, are likely to be present. The site has moderate potential for roosting bats and also high potential for commuting and foraging bats. The drains and open pools may support water vole and otter may also forage and potentially have a resting place within this area.



Mosaic habitats such as these often support important breeding bird assemblages, including migrant warblers and other species. In June 2020, small heath butterflies were seen and it also has the potential to support other Priority species including hedgehog, common toad, water shrew, harvest mouse and also stag beetle in association with drier woodland areas. No evidence of badger was seen, but this species can quickly colonise a site such as this.

The 2018 survey has recommended a suite of additional surveys on this site in conjunction with any future planning application. These include detailed botanical assessment, bat roosting and activity surveys, breeding birds, reptiles, amphibian and invertebrates. However, these recommendation are based on a scheme for the northern part of the site only and any future application affecting the southern part of the site would also be required to survey this part of the site in detail for the above species and also undertake otter and water vole surveys in this area also.

The outcome of these surveys will be required ahead of any future planning application, in accordance with the NPPF and its accompanying circular (biodiversity and geological conservation circular 06/2005) and also local plan policy.

Whilst the low-lying nature of this part of the site means it is unlikely to be chosen for housing, it is vulnerable to other impacts such as the need for remodelling of the site to accommodate sustainable urban drainage schemes or the proposal for a lake as mentioned in the existing Neighbourhood Plan. Given the sensitive nature of this wetland parts of this site and also depending on the outcome of the surveys, this should be used to inform the decision making on

how best to utilise the site whilst avoiding and mitigating for any impacts. Should the wetland area be affected by future proposals, then this is likely to have a negative impact upon the biodiversity of this area. Consequently, in order to deliver overall biodiversity net gain, it is likely that off-site compensation may be required. Consideration should therefore be given to protecting this area from any future development that would require remodelling, reshaping or introducing drainage.

	
<p>Wide ditch with wet woodland/scrub in background: Land off Wilford Bridge Road</p>	<p>View south across marshy grassland towards wet woodland/scrub: Land off Wilford Bridge Road</p>

5.10 Ecological Networks and Connectivity

5.10.1 The significance of ecological networks and connectivity

Maintaining and improving connectivity between habitats is important in ensuring the longer-term survival of biodiversity in an increasingly fragmented landscape and with a changing climate.

An ecological network is the basic natural infrastructure that enables biodiversity assets (both habitats and species) to become re-established if damaged or in decline and become resilient to the impacts of climate change. Integrated with the natural cycling of water, soil and nutrients, biodiversity provides what are increasingly recognised as vital 'ecosystem services'. These services are not only of intrinsic of social and economic value but will create social and economic problems if they fall too far into deficit.

The major components of an ecological network can be identified as:

- Core Areas: existing areas/features/resources of importance for biodiversity
- Corridors: existing linear features providing structural connectivity between Core Areas and into the wider landscape
- Stepping Stones: existing habitat patches providing functional connectivity between Core Areas and into the wider landscape

- Restoration Areas: areas/features/resources with the potential to become future Core Areas, or to improve connectivity, if they are enhanced or restored
- Buffer zones: can be included around all these elements to lessen the likelihood of direct or indirect impacts upon them

As already noted, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019 states that Plans should take a strategic approach to biodiversity. It includes a range of requirements to conserve and enhance the natural environment, among them requiring Local Plans (and by association Neighbourhood Plans) to: ‘...promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species.’ Consequently, it is essential that decision makers have access to high quality ecological advice in order to meet these requirements.

In addition, Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystems services also features a number of Priority Actions, including to 'establish more coherent and resilient ecological networks on land that safeguards ecosystem services for the benefit of wildlife and people'.

5.10.2 Ecological networks in Melton

The River Deben corridor represents a key ecological network and encompasses a range of habitats extending through the east of the parish and beyond. It provides excellent connectivity to the wider landscape, not only along the river but also through tributaries, ditches and dykes associated with its surrounding habitat.

On a smaller scale, the cluster of interconnected habitats centred on Leeks Hills and the adjacent CWS represent an important green corridor through this otherwise built-up area.

Although not featured on Figure 2, it is necessary to highlight that across the wider landscape the network of mature and species-rich hedgerows provides important connectivity through the landscape and also link up blocks of woodland. There are also several sunken lanes lined with trees and scrub throughout the parish.

The railway line also offers a degree of ecological connectivity. However, the A12 represents a potential barrier to the west.

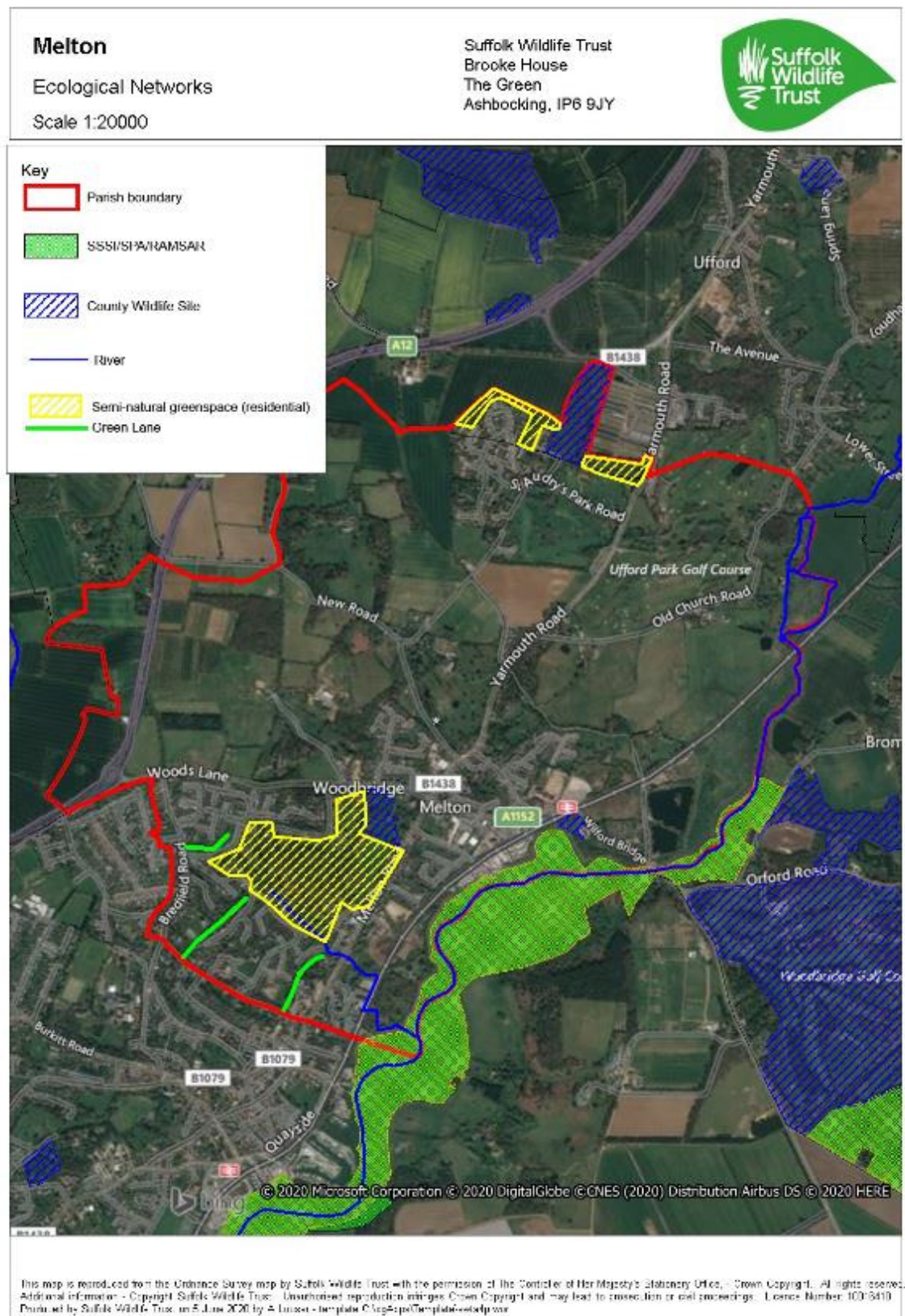


Figure 2: Aerial view of landscape of Melton, showing the River Deben in the east

5.11 The significance of wildlife and ecological assets for the Neighbourhood Plan

Melton contains part of the statutory designated site of Deben Estuary SSSI, SPA and Ramsar Site, as well as three County Wildlife Sites. In addition to the above, eleven Priority habitats have been identified within the parish making it highly diverse ecologically, offering a wide variation of habitats supporting a number of species including 57 Priority species (2 amphibians, 3 reptiles, 26 birds, 8 mammals, 17 invertebrates and 1 fungi).

Linear features such as the River Deben estuary and its associated habitats, hedgerow corridors and also sunken lanes provide the basis of an important network across the parish, whilst ponds, ditches, meadows and woodlands are spread across the parish, rather than being concentrated into a particular landscape character type. Even the built-up areas have maintained a good level of open space with Leek's Hills along with Woods Lane and Hutchison's Meadow CWS both offering important habitats for wildlife within the urban area.

Development Management guidance for any new developments within the area covered by the Neighbourhood Plan should seek to protect existing ecological assets and restore, enhance and reconnect the ecological network.

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