West Suffolk

Green Infrastructure Study

West Suffolk Council

Final report

Prepared by LUC

April 2022

Version	Status	Prepared	Checked	Approved	Date
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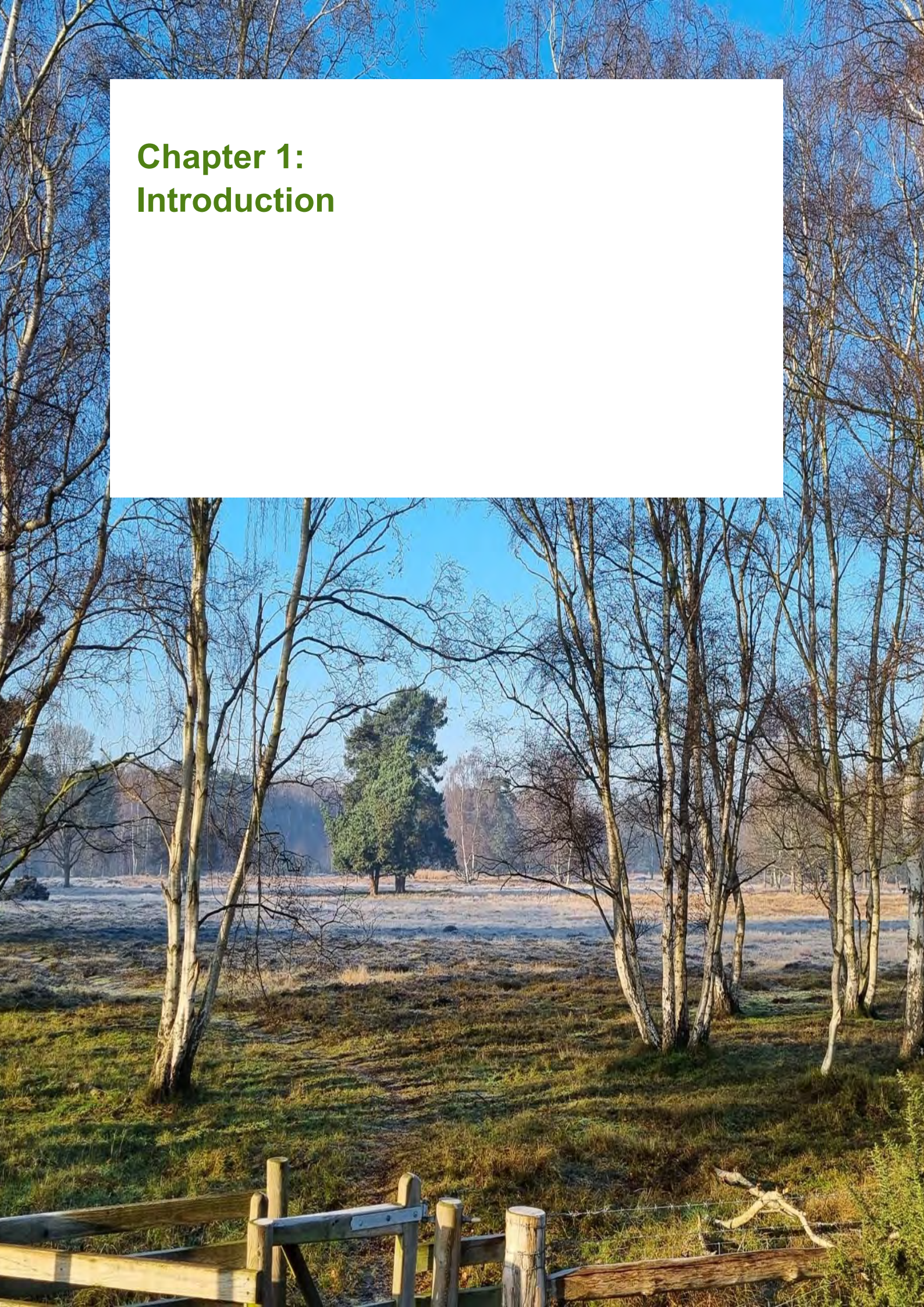
Contents

Implementation and Next Steps

Chapter 1: Introduction



Chapter 1
Introduction

Green infrastructure (GI) forms an essential component of sustainable growth and is fast becoming recognised as a key feature in enabling both local and global communities to tackle environmental, societal and economic challenges.

1.1 The West Suffolk GI Study (herein referred to as the 'Study') has been commissioned by West Suffolk Council (herein referred to as the 'Council') and will address the need for a unified approach to GI within West Suffolk. The Council is currently in the process of delivering a new Local Plan, which will be informed by the outputs of the Study through its role in providing a framework to guide sustainable development. The Local Plan will provide a key delivery mechanism for securing GI enhancements within the district. However, the Study also presents the opportunity to pursue interventions which fall outside the scope of the planning system.

1.2 The Study will build on the outputs of the former St Edmundsbury GI Strategy **[See reference 1]** and Forest Heath Accessible Natural Greenspace Study **[See reference 2]** to identify priority opportunities for improvement. Through the delivery of an integrated approach to GI across the district, it will enable a greater variety of multifunctional benefits to be achieved for a wider range of receptors. Furthermore, it will allow the Council to attain a strategic, yet holistic, approach to the planning, design and management of GI.

Structure of this report

1.3 The report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction provides an overview of GI, its benefits, its context within West Suffolk and why the district needs a study.
- Chapter 2: Approach to the Study sets out the methodology, introduces the six themes, explains the process of stakeholder consultation and how it feeds into the project, and describes how the vision has been developed.
- Chapter 3 to 8: GI Themes explores the key objectives to inform the vision, GI assets, drivers and emerging opportunities for each of the six themes, including:
  - Chapter 3: Access and Connectivity;
  - Chapter 4: Open Space and Recreation;
  - Chapter 5: Nature Recovery;
  - Chapter 6: The Water Environment;
  - Chapter 7: Urban Greening and Integrating Development; and
  - Chapter 8: Landscape, Heritage and Culture.
- Chapter 9: Holistic Analysis ties together the overarching critical analysis of West Suffolk's GI network across all six themes.
- Chapter 10: Identifying Priority Areas identifies the Priority Areas for improvement and starts to define the next steps for the identification of Priority Opportunities.
- Appendix A: GIS Data Sets;
- Appendix B: Record of Stakeholder Consultation;
- Appendix C: Detailed SWOT Review;
- Appendix D: Prioritisation of Opportunities; and
- Appendix E: Developer Checklist.

How to use this document

1.4 The Study provides a 'how-to' guide to help ensure that GI is successfully delivered by the Council, developers and other interested parties. The document has been undertaken in close cooperation with partners, including virtual stakeholder workshops in June and November 2021. The workshop formed a key stage in the process for developing the Study and encouraged participants to provide feedback on the usability and effectiveness of the existing published documents (St Edmundsbury GI Strategy and the Forest Heath Accessible Natural Greenspace Study). These responses were used to inform the preparation of the emerging Study.

1.5 Whilst comprehensive and well received when originally published, feedback suggests that delivery of GI initiatives has been impacted by the lack of clarity on how to interpret the existing documents by both planners and developers. Consequently, a user guide has been developed as part of the Study to demonstrate how the document aligns to its audience. This will provide a framework to assist in the effective delivery of GI (see Figure 1.1). The Study has been developed to support the planning process and to address previous challenges of successful implementation and management of GI.

User guide

Embedding green infrastructure delivery in the planning system

Policy makers and planners

1. Appraise development proposals to ensure adoption of a 'GI-led' design approach to new development, including the protection and enhancement of existing GI (see Chapter 12, Chapter 13 and Appendix E).

2. Refer to policy context and planning 'hooks' (see Figure 1.6).

3. Identify mechanism to fund and implement GI through developer contributions (see Chapter 11, Chapter 12, Chapter 13 and Appendix D).

4. Maintain the GI Study as a live resource that can be updated with new evidence and opportunities as these emerge (future steps).

Developers

1. Identify existing GI to protect and enhance (see Chapters 3 to 9).

2. Consult the GI 'checklist' for developers and the deliverable opportunities for enhancement (see Chapter 12 and Appendix E).

3. Integrate GI as part of Initial design work (beyond remit of the GI Study).

4. Develop design with input from stakeholders/priority projects (beyond remit of the GI Study).

5. Finalise proposals which demonstrate enhancements to GI assets (beyond remit of the GI Study).

Delivery of green infrastructure independent of the planning system

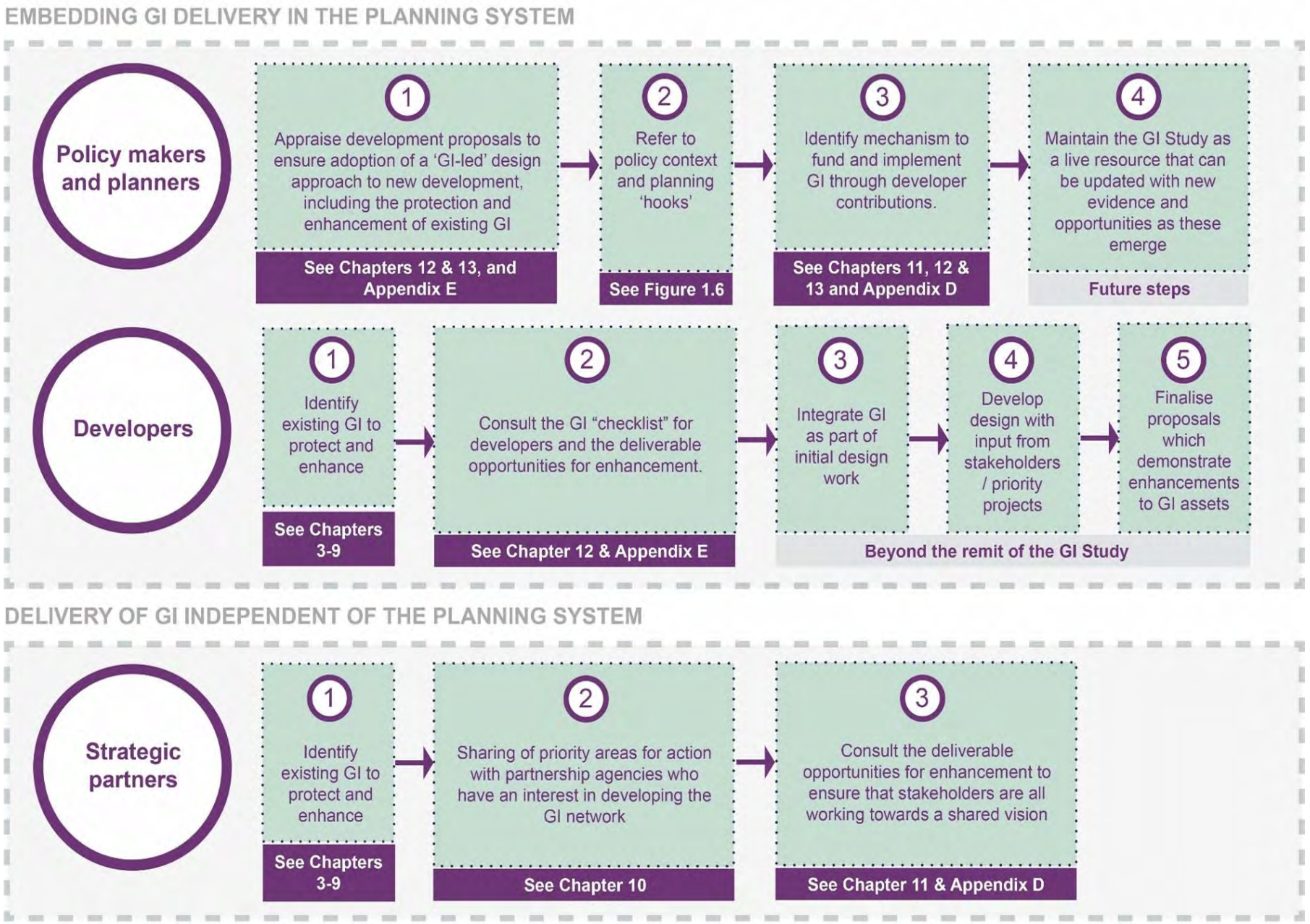
Strategic partners

1. Identify existing GI to protect and enhance (see Chapters 3 to 9).

2. Sharing of priority areas for action with partnership agencies who have an interest in developing GI network (see Chapter 10).

3. Consult the deliverable opportunities for enhancement to ensure that stakeholders are all working towards a shared vision (see Chapter 11 and Appendix D).

Figure 1.1: How to use this study – user guide



Defining green infrastructure

1.6 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021 **[See reference 3]** defines GI as "A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity".

The core elements of the GI network

For the purpose of this Study, the core elements of the GI network include (as illustrated in Figure 1.2):

Managed and natural green spaces

- Public parks and gardens;
- Formal and informal open space, including churchyards, amenity green space, play space, allotments, community gardens and sporting facilities; and
- Nature conservation sites.

Linear linkages

- Public Rights of Way (PRoW), promoted routes and cycle infrastructure;
- Disused railway lines; and
- River corridors.

Elements of the built environment

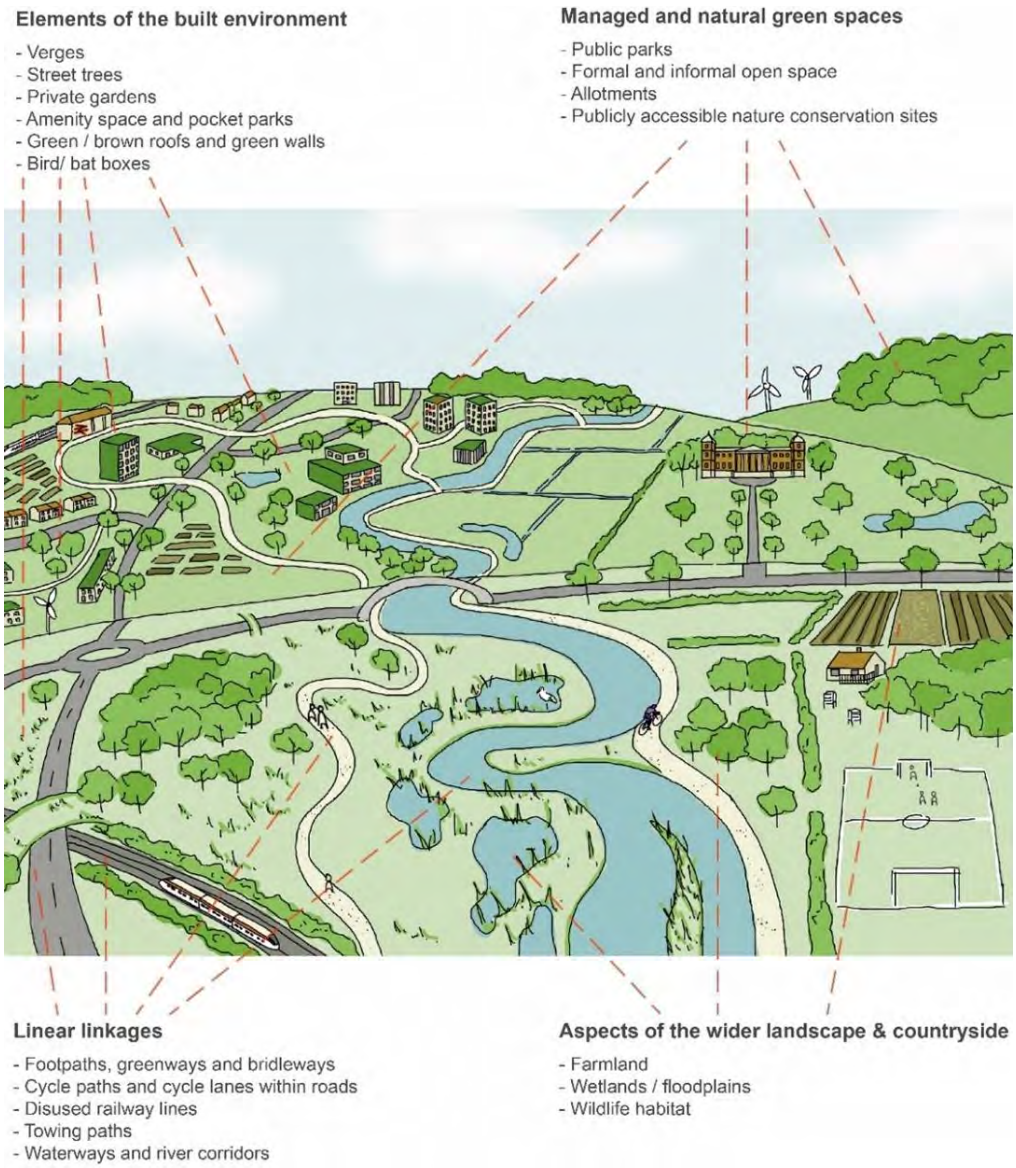
- Road verges and street trees;
- Private gardens; and

- Urban greening features, including green walls, roofs and Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDS).

Aspects of the wider landscape

- Farmland; and
- Floodplains, wetlands, forestry and woodland.

Figure 1.2: The core elements of the green infrastructure network



Benefits of good quality green infrastructure

1.7 GI is defined by its multifunctionality, with a single asset having the ability to provide a number of benefits to both people, wildlife and wider environmental functions, as shown in Figure 1.3. It is this variety of societal, environmental and economic benefits that play an important role in the delivery of sustainable growth and should be achieved in mutually supportive ways.

1.8 Planning Practice Guidance **[See reference 4]** states that "GI is a natural capital asset that provides multiple benefits, at a range of scales. For communities, these benefits can include enhanced wellbeing, outdoor recreation and access, enhanced biodiversity and landscapes, food and energy production, urban cooling, and the management of flood risk. These benefits are also known as ecosystem services".

1.9 Ecosystem services include:

- Provisioning services – food, fibre, fuel, biomass and clean water;
- Regulating services – climate control, flood regulation, carbon storage, pest control, air quality and pollination;
- Cultural services – recreation, tourism, spiritual, education and aesthetic value; and
- Supporting services – soil formation, nutrient cycling, photosynthesis, biodiversity.

1.10 A natural capital approach to GI attempts to assess the monetary value of natural assets. There are several studies which have estimated the value of elements of the GI network, the outputs of which can be seen in Figure 1.4. Although this does not comprise comprehensive natural capital 'accounts' for West Suffolk, it provides an insight into the significant economic benefits afforded by a good quality, cohesive GI network and therefore builds a strong case for future investment.

The green infrastructure context in West Suffolk

1.11 West Suffolk, with its population of over 170,000 people, covers an expanse of nearly 1,035 kilometres squared which ranges from intensive agriculture, dense forestry, open fens to historic market towns and estates. The district is bordered by East and South Cambridgeshire to the west, Braintree to the south, Babergh and Mid Suffolk to the east, and Breckland and King's Lynn and West Norfolk to the north. Although this Study focusses on West Suffolk, it is important to consider the network at the strategic scale, including cross-boundary partnerships. Five market towns lie within the boundary of West Suffolk, although the district is generally characterised as rural with a hierarchy of villages.

1.12 The district is home to a significant number of cultural, ecological and recreation designations, making their appropriate planning and management within the GI Study essential. These include:

- 113 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), covering approximately 16% of the district;
- Breckland Special Protection Area (SPA), covering approximately 15% of the district;
- Around 4,000 listed buildings;
- 48 Conservation Areas;
- 54 Scheduled Monuments;
- Five country parks;
- Nine Local and National Nature Reserves;
- Two National Cycle Network routes; and
- Eight promoted walking routes.

1.13 An overview of the key GI assets within the district are shown in Figure 1.5 with additional detail provided within Chapters 3 to 8.

The benefits of good quality GI

- Improving resident's and visitors' physical and mental health;
- Aesthetic value and reinforcing sense of place;
- Play, education and interaction with nature;
- Improving air quality and noise regulation;
- Active transport opportunities, such as walking and cycling;
- Reducing the risk of flooding and improving water quality;
- Opportunities for community growing;
- Increased economic activity and attractiveness for inward investment;
- Space for biodiversity and improved ecological resilience;
- Opportunities for social interactions and community cohesion;
- Carbon sequestration and mitigating climate change; and
- Urban cooling, natural air conditioning and shading.

Figure 1.3: The benefits of good quality green infrastructure

Focused green infrastructure values

1. A typical medium-sized deciduous tree can intercept over 10,000 litres of rainfall per year.

2. One mature oak can support over 280 different species of insect.

3. Approximately 22 kilograms of carbon dioxide is sequestered in a mature tree every year.

4. Research from the University of Edinburgh shows that one oak tree living for 100 years will uptake 1.5 tonnes of carbon dioxide. An average tree will uptake just under 1 tonne of carbon dioxide in its lifetime.

5. Particulate levels can be reduced by up to 60% on tree-lined streets when compared to those without.

6. One mature tree has the same cooling effect as 10 room-sized air conditioners, reducing local energy consumption by up to 10%.

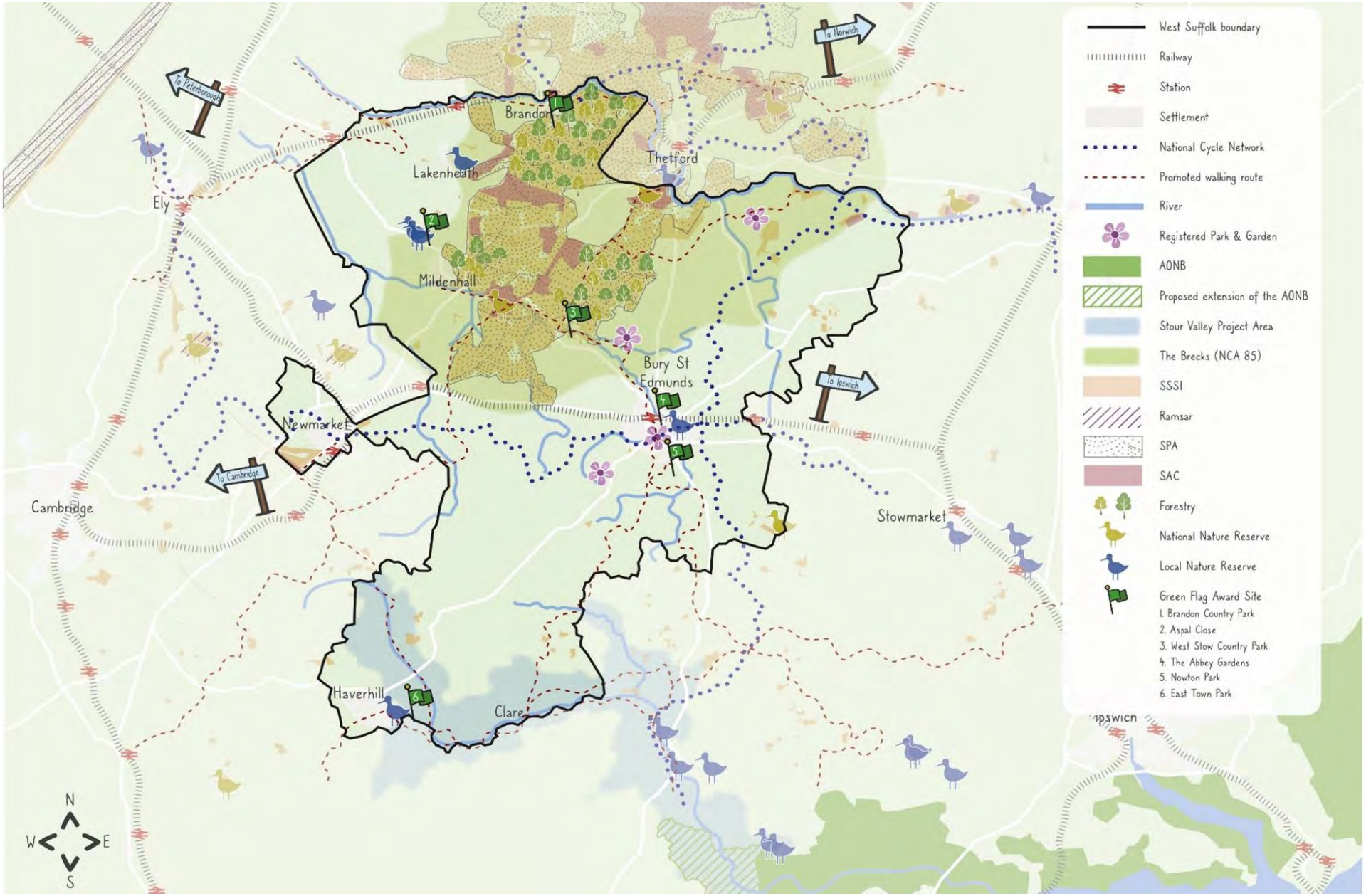
7. One mature tree releases enough oxygen into the atmosphere each year to support two human beings.

8. Records of a mature lime tree in Malmo, Sweden consuming approximately 670 litres of rainfall per day during heavy rainfall events.

9. Apartment blocks surrounded by mature trees experienced 52% fewer reported crimes than those without greenery.

Figure 1.4: Focused green infrastructure values

Figure 1.5: Overview of West Suffolk and its green infrastructure context



Policy context

1.14 An overview of West Suffolk's GI policy context which was used to inform the baseline of the Study is included below and shown in Figure 1.6.

International

- International Convention on Biological Diversity;
- United Nations (UN) Paris Climate Agreement;
- Bern Convention;
- Environment Act 2021;
- National Planning Policy Framework; and
- 25 Year Environment Plan.

Regional

- Suffolk Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan 2021;
- Suffolk Climate Emergence Plan;
- Suffolk Business Plan for 2021/2022;
- Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment;
- Suffolk Nature Strategy;
- Suffolk Transport Recovery Plan 2020;
- Suffolk Flood Risk Management Strategy;
- Suffolk Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2022;
- Suffolk Green Access Strategy 2020-2030;
- Suffolk Local Transport Plan;

- Suffolk Climate Action Plan; and
- Suffolk Design Guide.

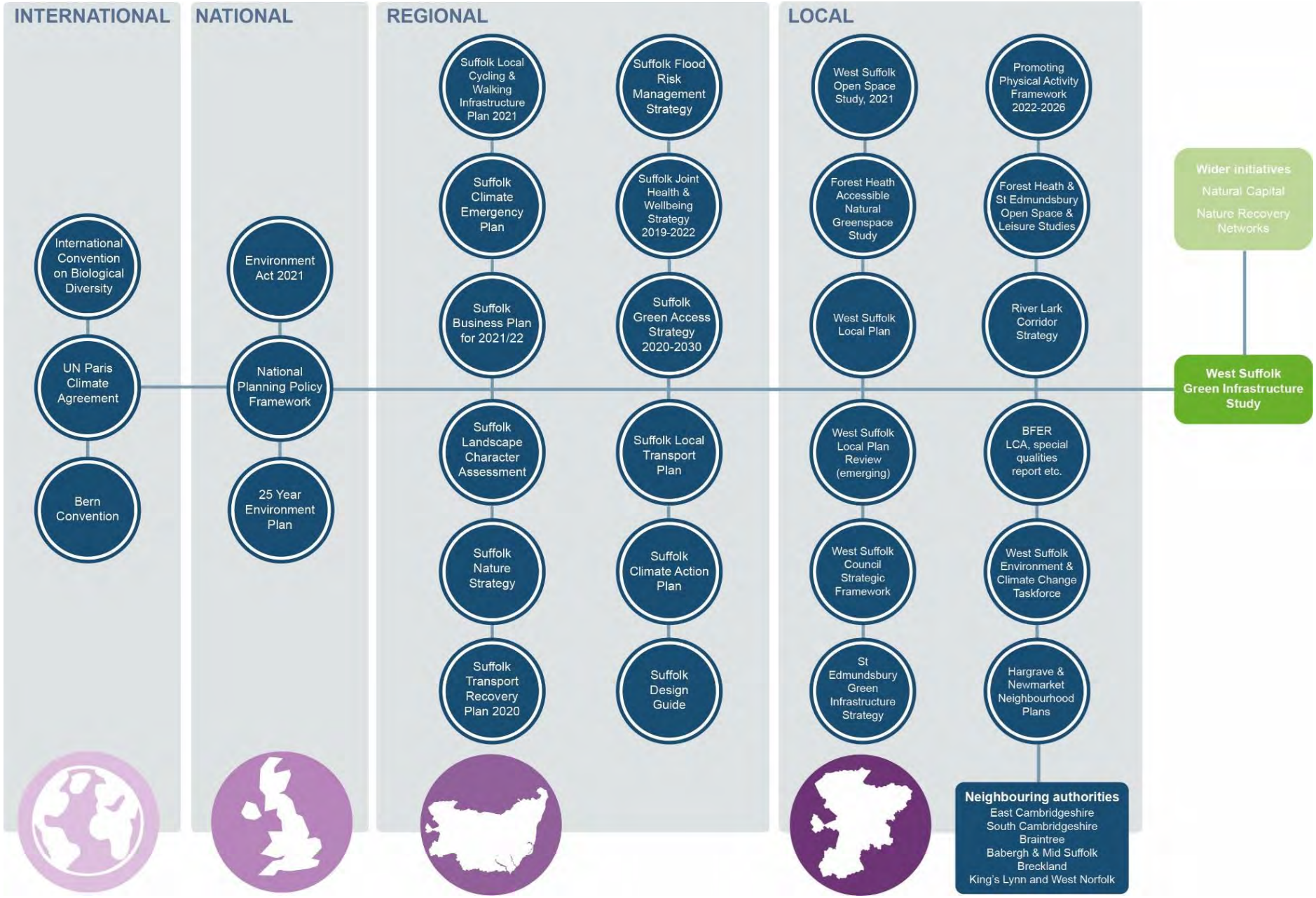
Local

- West Suffolk Open Space Study, 2021;
- Forest Heath Accessible National Greenspace Study;
- West Suffolk Local Plan;
- West Suffolk Local Plan Review (emerging);
- West Suffolk Council Strategic Framework;
- St Edmundsbury Green Infrastructure Strategy;
- Promoting Physical Activity Framework 2022-2026;
- Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Open Spaces and Leisure Studies;
- River Lark Corridor Strategy;
- Brecks' Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Character Area, special qualities report etc.;
- West Suffolk Environment and Climate Change Taskforce; and
- Hargrave and Newmarket Neighbourhood Plan.

Neighbouring Authorities

- East Cambridgeshire;
- South Cambridgeshire;
- Braintree;
- Babergh and Mid Suffolk;
- Breckland; and
- King's Lynn and West Norfolk.

Figure 1.6: Policy context



The need for a green infrastructure study

1.15 There are a number of global and local challenges which drive the need for the GI Study in West Suffolk, as shown in Figure 1.7 and Figure 1.8.

Climate crisis

1.16 In July 2019, West Suffolk established an Environment and Climate Change Taskforce to play an essential role in enabling the district to reach its goals of net-zero carbon by 2030. This is to be achieved through a series of actions and initiatives, many of which relate directly to the GI network.

1.17 The GI network provides the opportunity to mitigate and adapt to climate change. However, consideration is required to understand the impacts on the network which are set to amplify due to climate change, such as the increased frequency and magnitude of extreme weather. Links to climate change are referred to throughout, but the key emphasis in the Study relates to:

- Role of woodland and trees in sequestering carbon, improving air quality, alleviating flooding and providing shade;
- Ensuring habitats (and associated wildlife) are resilient to the impacts of climate change, and restoring habitats to help adapt (e.g. wetland restoration);
- Large extent of agricultural land which can be used in ways to mitigate and adapt to climate change, but also may be impacted by drought and flooding;
- Enhancing the water environment – water quantity and quality, as well as mitigating flood and drought risk, and the associated impacts on agriculture;

- Urban greening to help settlements store carbon and adapt (e.g. providing shade, sustainable drainage systems to reduce surface water flooding); and
- Reducing transport emissions by encouraging sustainable active travel.

Biodiversity crisis

1.18 The district has experienced some degree of habitat loss and fragmentation through intensive agriculture and development. In addition, infrastructure acts as barriers to the movement of wildlife. This can be addressed within the Study through identification of opportunities for habitat protection, connection, enhancement and creation at the local, district and regional scale. The success of these networks will require comprehensive consultation with stakeholders, potential partners and landowners.

1.19 With such significant ecological and recreational assets within the district, often within very close proximities of each other, management of the competing demands of wildlife and leisure is a key issue. For instance, the Study will need to take into account the use of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) as a measure to reduce recreational access to Breckland Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)/Special Protection Area (SPA)/Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Devil's Dyke SSSI/SAC. This is of particular consideration for areas surrounding potential development sites where recreational pressure is most likely to increase.

Health crisis

1.20 Moving out of lockdown and into a post-pandemic world, it is important to remember the significant effect access to green space has on our health and wellbeing. Large areas of West Suffolk's towns experience pockets of health deprivation, as seen in Figure 1.9. The Study can help to enable healthy lifestyles both within urban and rural areas, through the implementation of active travel corridors and improvements to air quality. The benefits of GI on people's mental wellbeing should also not be overlooked, with possibilities to use GI as an asset for social prescribing providing an important opportunity.

Economic crisis

1.21 The opportunity for a green recovery from the economic and societal impacts of Covid-19 should be explored within the Study. The network's role in creating attractive places to live, work and invest should be explored, particularly within areas of growth and development for both residential and employment spaces.

Figure 1.7: Global drivers of the West Suffolk Green Infrastructure Study

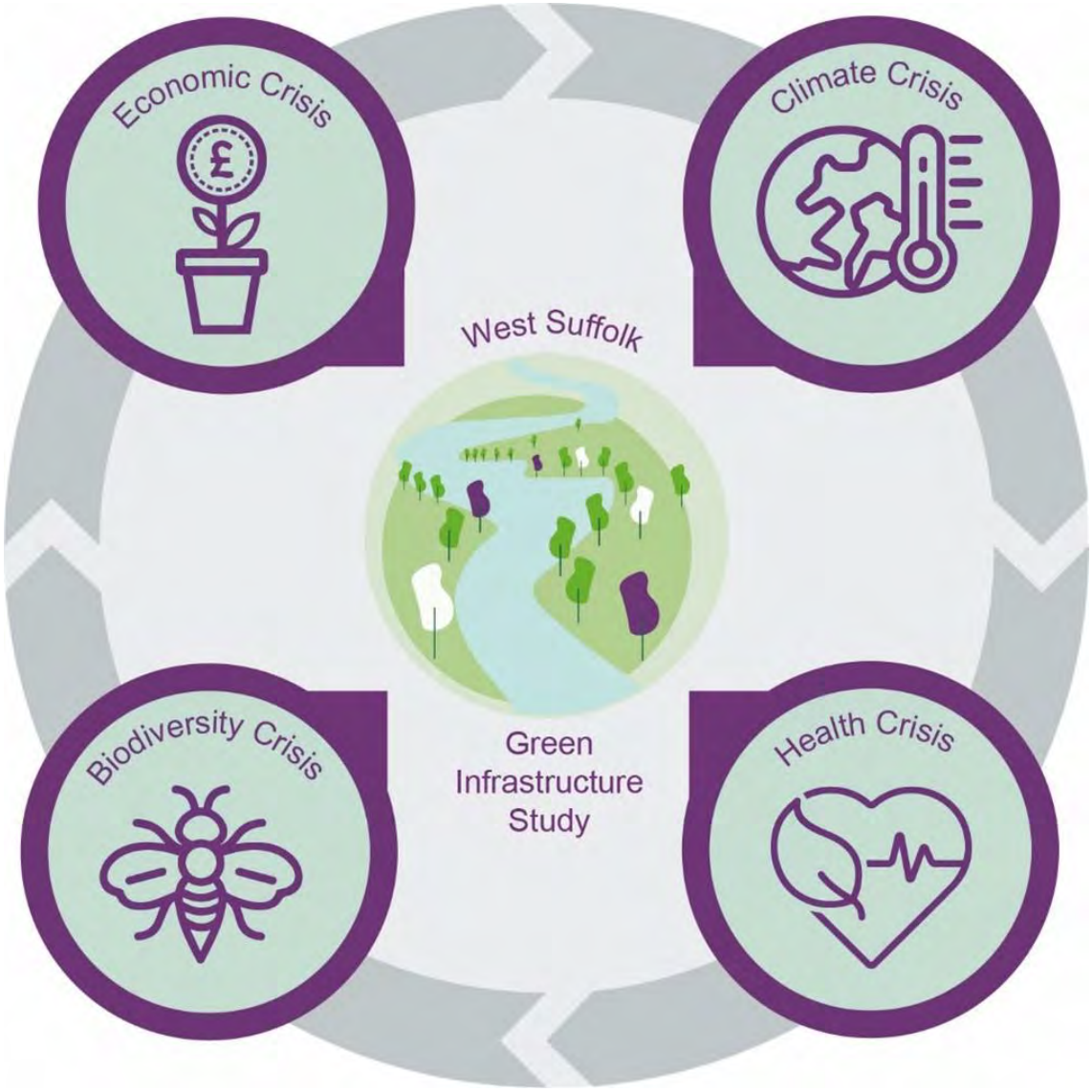
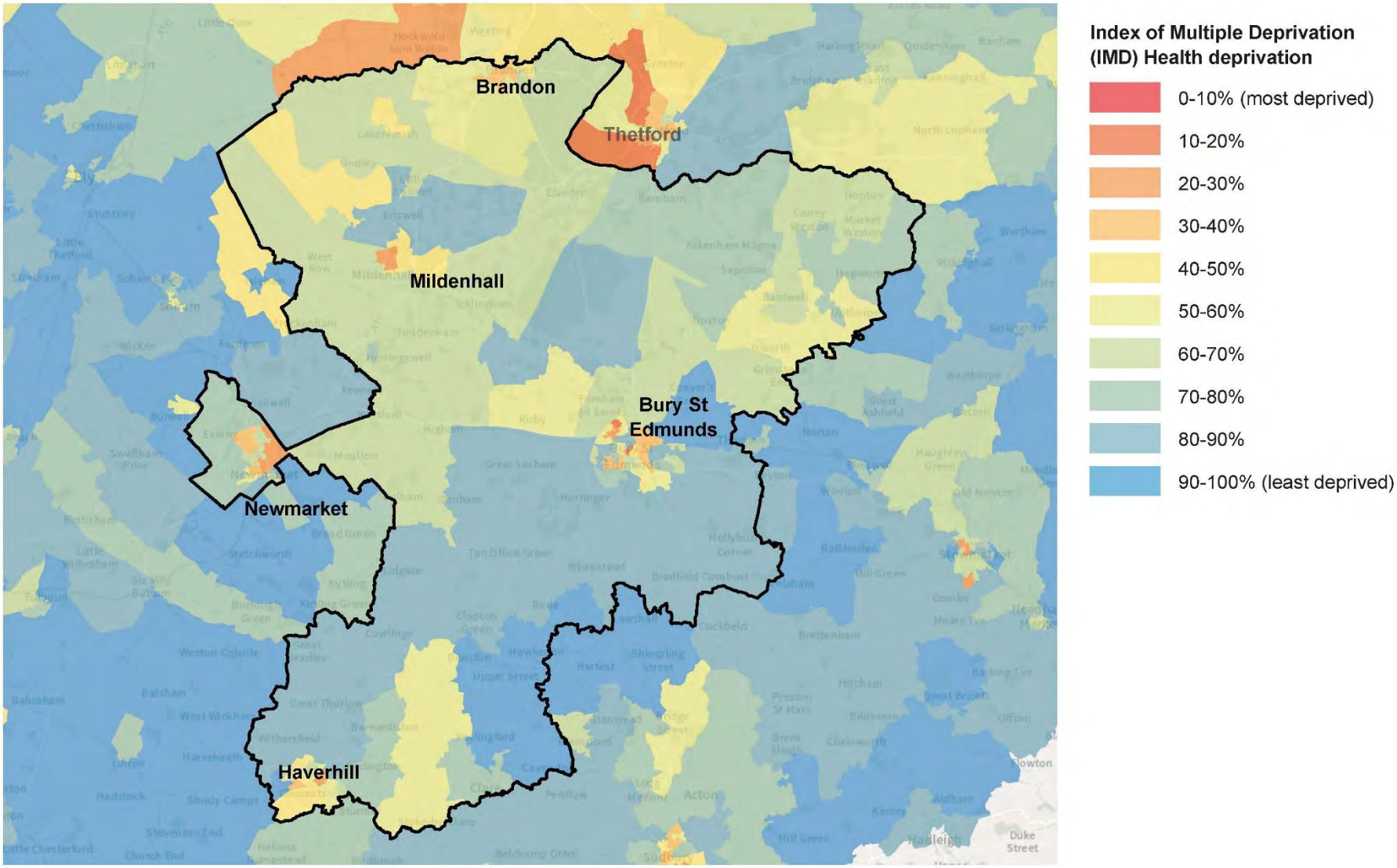
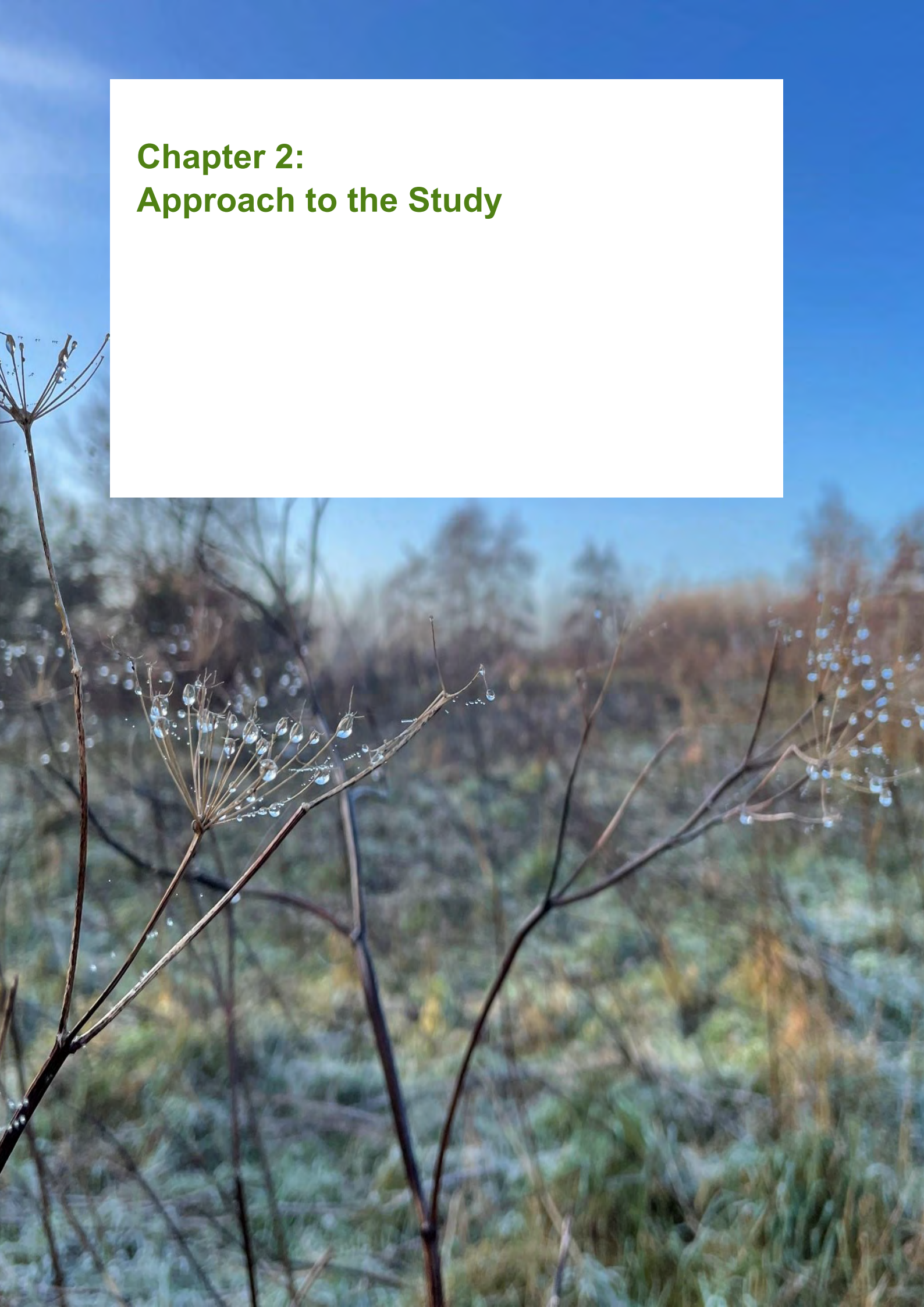


Figure 1.8: Global drivers and the benefits achieved through the Study

Figure 1.9: Health deprivation within West Suffolk



Chapter 2:
Approach to the Study



Chapter 2

Approach to the Study

This chapter describes the approach to undertaking the Study, including the development of the six themes, stakeholder consultation and the progression of the vision.

2.1 The development of the Study has involved four distinct stages, which are detailed below and illustrated graphically in Figure 2.1.

Stage 1 – Assessment of existing network

Document review and data collation

2.2 In order to understand the characteristics of the existing GI network and initiatives within West Suffolk, a detailed desk review was undertaken of policy documents, studies and guidance, as detailed in Figure 1.6. The existing strategies for St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath were also reviewed in detail. GIS data was collated from a range of sources, as detailed within Appendix A. This allowed analysis of the existing network, together with a holistic review of the factors contributing to the 'need' for GI in West Suffolk and identification of areas of deficiency.

Virtual stakeholder workshop

2.3 In June 2021, key stakeholders were invited to attend an online workshop to introduce them to the project. The consultation allowed participants to provide input on issues such as datasets, existing initiatives, prevailing issues, emerging opportunities and potential partnerships.

2.4 The workshop was attended by representatives from a range of organisations and geographical areas. A summary of consultation outputs and how the results were used to inform the Study can be found later in this chapter and within Appendix B.

Critical analysis of the green infrastructure network

2.5 A ‘themed approach’ was undertaken to organise the review of West Suffolk’s GI baseline, with the emergence of the themes detailed later in this chapter. This entailed a detailed review of the existing key assets, key considerations, emerging opportunities and stakeholder consultation within each theme. Following the review by theme, an overarching holistic analysis was undertaken to create a unified baseline analysis to inform the next stages of the project.

Stage 2 – Identify priority areas for actions

Defining the vision and objectives

2.6 In close collaboration with the Council and with consideration of outputs from the stakeholder consultation, an overarching vision was produced for West Suffolk's GI network. This is supported by a series of objectives which will be used to guide the roadmap towards successful delivery.

Community consultation to understand local need

2.7 Consultation was carried out to understand recreational pressure on the district's natural and semi-natural green spaces. An online survey and interactive map were used as a tool for gaining an insight into perceptions, popular sites and expectations.

Identify, define and assess priority areas

2.8 Using the outputs of Stage 1, holistic analysis and mapping of priority areas was prepared. The impacts and benefits of these areas were determined through an assessment of their multifunctionality. As well as the potential to support a range of ecosystem services, providing for the delivery of nature-based solutions to some of the district's biggest challenges.

Stage 3 – Identify deliverable opportunities for enhancement

Identify and assess specific opportunities and stakeholder consultation

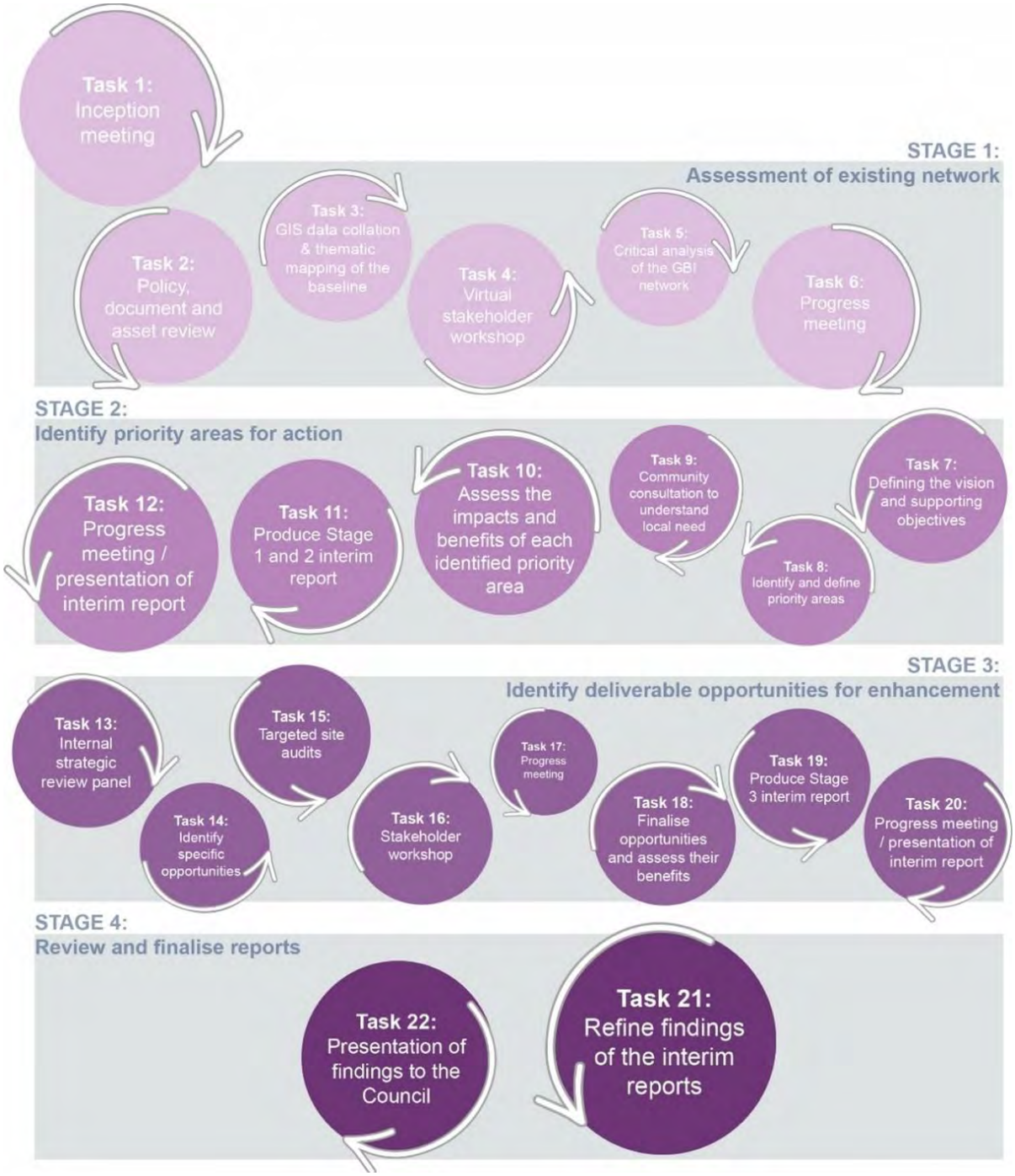
2.9 A long list of specific project and initiative opportunities were identified. These were presented to stakeholders through a virtual workshop held in November 2021 where the deliverability, potential partnerships and additional ideas were discussed. This enabled a short list of opportunities to be determined, with their relative multifunctionality and benefits assessed.

Stage 4 – Review and finalise reports

Refine findings and present to the Council

2.10 Following the Issues and Options Preferred Approach Consultation within the Local Plan programme, any required amendments will be made before the final issuing of the GI Study.

Figure 2.1: Overview of the methodology undertaken within the Study



Green infrastructure themes

2.11 In order to establish a comprehensive baseline to afford multifunctional and integrated opportunities, a themed approach was adopted to explore the existing assets and considerations within West Suffolk. Six themes were selected which provide a holistic view of the GI network, these include:

- Access and Connectivity: Creating permeable landscapes for sustainable travel whilst sensitively enhancing access to nature and green space.
- Open Space and Recreation: Providing easily accessible and high quality open spaces which are multifunctional and provide for a diversity of people.
- Nature Recovery: Identifying areas to protect, connect, create and enhance, therefore creating a framework for resilient networks of habitats and nature recovery.
- The Water Environment: Realising the full potential of West Suffolk's network of rivers, ditches, wetlands and open water in providing habitats and nature-based solutions to strategic challenges.
- Urban Greening and Integrating Development: Using GI as a tool for the sensitive and sustainable incorporation of development into West Suffolk's existing landscape fabric, providing resilient communities of the future and bringing nature into the urban areas.
- Landscape, Culture and Heritage: Recognising and considering West Suffolk's rich historic, archaeological and cultural assets alongside its distinctive landscape character and agricultural heritage.

2.12 The climate emergency and health and wellbeing agenda act as overarching themes, signalling their importance as drivers of the Study. An explanation of the themes, their scope and links to Sustainability Appraisal topics and the key objectives within West Suffolk's Local Plan is provided in the section below.

West Suffolk green infrastructure themes and their relation to Sustainability Appraisal topics and Local Plan objectives

Overarching themes

The Climate Emergency

2.13 Having the climate emergency as an overarching theme means adaption and mitigation techniques can be covered across a variety of interventions and nature-based solutions. For example, using nature networks to ensure climate resilience within species, using Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) and green architecture features to ensure resilient communities, and enhancing active travel opportunities to reduce the reliance on cars.

Health and wellbeing

2.14 Green and blue infrastructure plays an integral role in the delivery of physically and mentally healthy communities through providing access to nature, recreation, exercise and creating spaces for quiet contemplation and relaxation.

Interlinking themes

Nature recovery

2.15 This would ensure the ecological resilience of the district through bigger, better and more joined up habitat areas. Encouraging access to, and interaction with, nature in a sustainable manner. The role of the nature-network in providing additional ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration will be explored. The potential for enhancing the district's local nature recovery network will be examined, as well as how this can link with the wider national nature recovery network seen across neighbouring authorities.

Elements to examine

2.16 Designated sites; priority habitat; areas for protection; enhancement and creation; access to nature; tree planting and carbon sequestration; agricultural land practices; recreational pressure; geodiversity; severance; nature recovery networks; and community involvement etc.

Link to Sustainability Appraisal topic

- Air and environmental quality;
- Biodiversity;
- Climate change adaption and mitigation;
- Communities, health and wellbeing;
- Landscape;
- Soils and other natural resources; and
- Water.

Link to key objectives within the Local Plan (Regulation 18 October 2020)

- Sustainability Objective 4: ensure equipped to deliver net zero targets and reduce emissions;
- Sustainability Objective 12: protect and enhance the character of natural and historic landscape;
- Sustainability Objective 13: promote the sustainable use of natural resources;
- Sustainability Objective 14: increase provision of multi-use green spaces and corridors; and
- Sustainability Objective 15: ensure new development minimises environmental impact.

Open space and recreation

2.17 Access to good quality open space which supports residents' sporting and leisure needs is an essential part of creating healthy communities, both physically and mentally. Through looking at accessibility standards, this theme will determine the open space needs of the current and future population, taking into account any recent losses or additions to open space and potential future losses to development. The Outdoor Recreation Valuation Tool (ORVal) will be used as a tool to quantify the benefits of these spaces.

Elements to examine

2.18 Open space typologies; open space accessibility; Green Flag Award parks; sports facilities; destination spaces; country parks; allotments and community gardens; events; commercialisation of spaces; ORVal; Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD); population; demographics; health data etc.

Link to Sustainability Appraisal topic

- Air and environmental quality;
- Biodiversity;
- Climate change adaption and mitigation;
- Communities, health and wellbeing;
- Economy; and
- Landscape.

Link to key objectives within the Local Plan (Regulation 18 October 2020)

- Sustainability Objective 3: supporting the growth of the visitor economy;
- Sustainability Objective 4: ensure equipped to deliver net zero targets and reduce emissions;
- Sustainability Objective 14: increase provision of multi-use green spaces and corridors;
- Sustainability Objective 16: enable healthy lifestyles and safe communities;
- Sustainability Objective 17: reduce health inequalities and improve physical and mental health; and
- Sustainability Objective 18: reduce the need for travel, enhance access to by active travel.

Access and connectivity

2.19 Providing a network of active corridors across the district and facilitating active travel and working towards 15-minute neighbourhoods where possible. Creating an active and healthy population whilst simultaneously reducing carbon emissions and reliance on polluting modes of transport. The role active

travel will play in the future of commuting and job prosperity will also be explored, therefore enhancing air quality and health.

Elements to examine

2.20 15-minute neighbourhoods; cycle network; walking routes and rights of way' wayfinding and signage; stations and public transport; key strategic and local links; severance; and air quality etc.

Link to Sustainability Appraisal topic

- Air and environmental quality;
- Climate change adaption and mitigation;
- Communities, health and wellbeing;
- Economy;
- Landscape; and
- Transport.

Link to key objectives within the Local Plan (Regulation 18 October 2020)

- Sustainability Objective 2: ensure adequate infrastructure to support new growth;
- Sustainability Objective 4: ensure equipped to deliver net zero targets and reduce emissions;
- Sustainability Objective 14: increase provision of multi-use green spaces and corridors;
- Sustainability Objective 15: ensure new development minimises environmental impact;

- Sustainability Objective 16: enable healthy lifestyles and safe communities;
- Sustainability Objective 17: reduce health inequalities and improve physical and mental health;
- Sustainability Objective 18: reduce the need for travel, enhance access to by active travel; and
- Sustainability Objective 19: promote an integrated sustainable transport network.

Urban greening and integrating development

2.21 This will ensure the appropriate integration of development by exploring suitable Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) compensatory improvements for new development, as well as the use of GI in enhancing both new and existing development. GI is an excellent way of improving perceptions of places and therefore can act as a catalyst for inward investment and potential employment opportunities, as well as ensuring future population growth can be accommodated. Urban greening within public realm will also be explored.

Elements to examine

2.22 Trees; Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and Environmental Net Gain (ENG); urban greening architecture and features; greening within existing development; air quality; water quality; pocket parks; public realm enhancements; employment opportunities; economic indicators; and creating attractive places for inward investment etc.

Link to Sustainability Appraisal topic

- Air and environmental quality;
- Biodiversity;

- Climate change adaption and mitigation;
- Communities, health and wellbeing;
- Economy;
- Landscape;
- Transport; and
- Water.

Link to key objectives within the Local Plan (Regulation 18 October 2020)

- Sustainability Objective 1: supporting local businesses and start ups;
- Sustainability Objective 4: ensure equipped to deliver net zero targets and reduce emissions;
- Sustainability Objective 5: avoid building in areas of greatest flood risk and manage future risk;
- Sustainability Objective 7: focus homes in sustainable locations;
- Sustainability Objective 8: promote high quality and sustainable design;
- Sustainability Objective 11: meet the housing needs of rural areas;
- Sustainability Objective 12: protect and enhance the character of a natural and historic landscape;
- Sustainability Objective 14: increase provision of multi-use green spaces and corridors;
- Sustainability Objective 15: ensure new development minimises environmental impact;
- Sustainability Objective 16: enable healthy lifestyles and safe communities; and
- Sustainability Objective 18: reduce the need for travel, enhance access to by active travel.

The water environment

2.23 Developing a resilient network of rivers, ditches, ponds and wetlands for wildlife and people, with special focus on the risks associated with climate change, particularly within the north west of the district. Opportunities for natural flood alleviation will be a fundamental opportunity within this theme, as well as the opportunities for riverside economies and access, and the enhancing of water quality.

Elements to examine

2.24 Flooding; water quality' sea level rise; saline intrusion; river corridors; wetlands; floodplain and grazing marsh; and de-culverting opportunities etc.

Link to Sustainability Appraisal topic

- Air and environmental quality;
- Biodiversity;
- Climate change adaption and mitigation;
- Communities, health and wellbeing;
- Landscape;
- Soils and other natural resources; and
- Water.

Link to key objectives within the Local Plan (Regulation 18 October 2020)

- Sustainability Objective 4: ensure equipped to deliver net zero targets and reduce emissions;

- Sustainability Objective 5: avoid building in areas of greatest flood risk and manage future risk;
- Sustainability Objective 13: promote the sustainable use of natural resources;
- Sustainability Objective 14: increase provision of multi-use green spaces and corridors;
- Sustainability Objective 15: ensure new development minimises environmental impact;
- Sustainability Objective 18: reduce the need for travel, enhance access to by active travel; and
- Sustainability Objective 19: promote an integrated sustainable transport network.

Landscape, culture and heritage

2.25 Protecting and enhancing built and natural heritage, including sense of place, local character, heritage and improving the interpretation of these spaces. Agricultural land will play an integral role in sustainable food production and healthy communities, as well as providing prosperity for the agricultural and tourism economy.

Elements to examine

2.26 Landscape character; land quality; agricultural classifications; Areas of Natural Beauty (AONB) and views; destination spaces; built and heritage assets; promoted trails and routes; agriculture; horse racing; sustainable food production; and agricultural and tourism economy etc.

Link to Sustainability Appraisal topic

- Air and environmental quality;

- Biodiversity;
- Climate change adaption and mitigation;
- Communities, health and wellbeing;
- Economy;
- Historic environment;
- Landscape; and
- Soils and other natural resources.

Link to key objectives within the Local Plan (Regulation 18 October 2020)

- Sustainability Objective 1: supporting local businesses and start ups;
- Sustainability Objective 3: supporting the growth of the visitor economy;
- Sustainability Objective 4: ensure equipped to deliver net zero targets and reduce emissions;
- Sustainability Objective 9: support agriculture diversification and rural tourism;
- Sustainability Objective 10: support the growth of the agricultural sector;
- Sustainability Objective 12: protect and enhance the character of a natural and historic landscape; and
- Sustainability Objective 13: promote the sustainable use of natural resources.

Consultation

Stakeholder consultation

2.27 Stakeholder consultation was used to underpin the delivery of the Study, including the delivery of virtual workshops in combination with targeted stakeholder engagement (see Figure 2.2). Workshop invitations were extended to stakeholders and partners within and outside the Council, with the list of those to engage produced in collaboration with the client group. Workshop attendees ranged from a variety of organisations with a diverse geographical spread and subject interest.

2.28 The Stage 1 workshop was held virtually and was structured around a series of exercises which focused on the identification of existing project and initiatives, additional policy and datasets, valuable features, key issues, key opportunities and potential partners.

2.29 Key findings from the various exercises are addressed within each of the relevant themes. An example of workshop outputs can be seen in Figure 2.3, with a full summary of the engagement findings included within Appendix B.

Public consultation

2.30 A virtual consultation hub was created to facilitate public consultation and gain an enhanced understanding of local needs in relation to access to natural and semi-natural greenspace. The results of this are detailed further in Appendix B. A focussed website dedicated to the project was developed, enabling key stakeholders and the general public to access and comment on maps as part of the consultation process. The landing page of the consultation hub provided links to the following resources:

- Online survey, targeted to seek views on natural and semi-natural green spaces; and
- Interactive map allowing participants to provide information in relation to natural and semi-natural green space assets that are working well or require improvement.

Figure 2.2: Stakeholder consultation and its role in the study

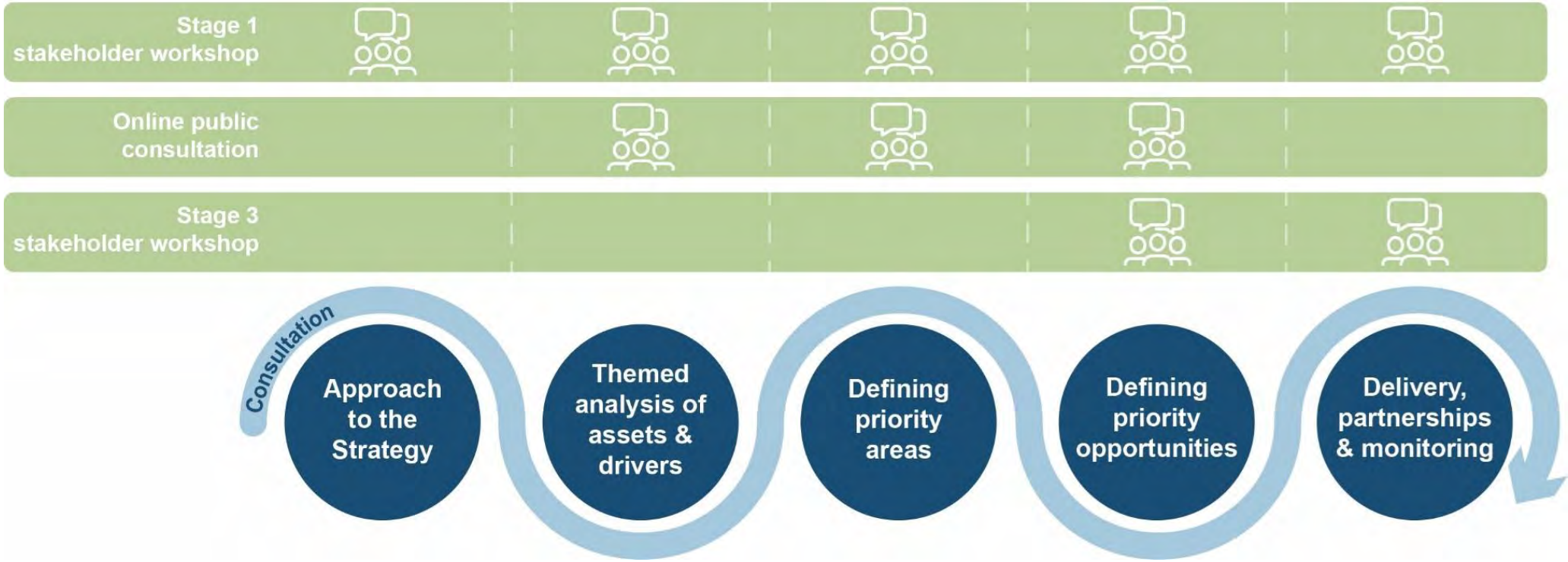
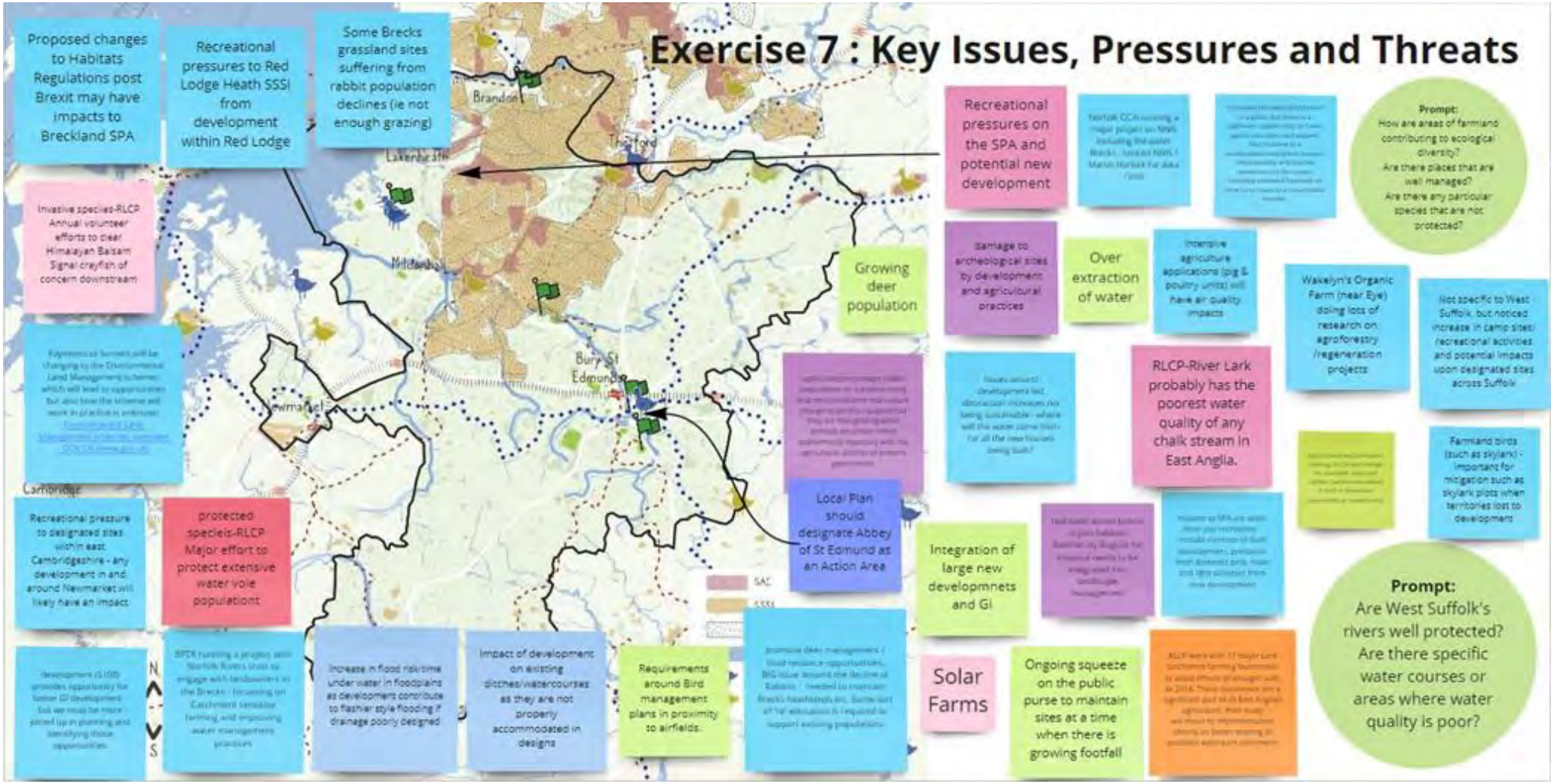


Figure 2.3: Example outputs from the virtual stakeholder workshop



Development of the vision

2.31 As defined within the Strategic Framework **[See reference 5]**, the overarching vision of the Council is supported by a series of strategic priorities, as defined below.

Overarching vision of the Council

Supporting and investing in our West Suffolk communities and businesses to encourage and manage ambitious growth in prosperity and quality of life for all

Strategic priorities of the Council

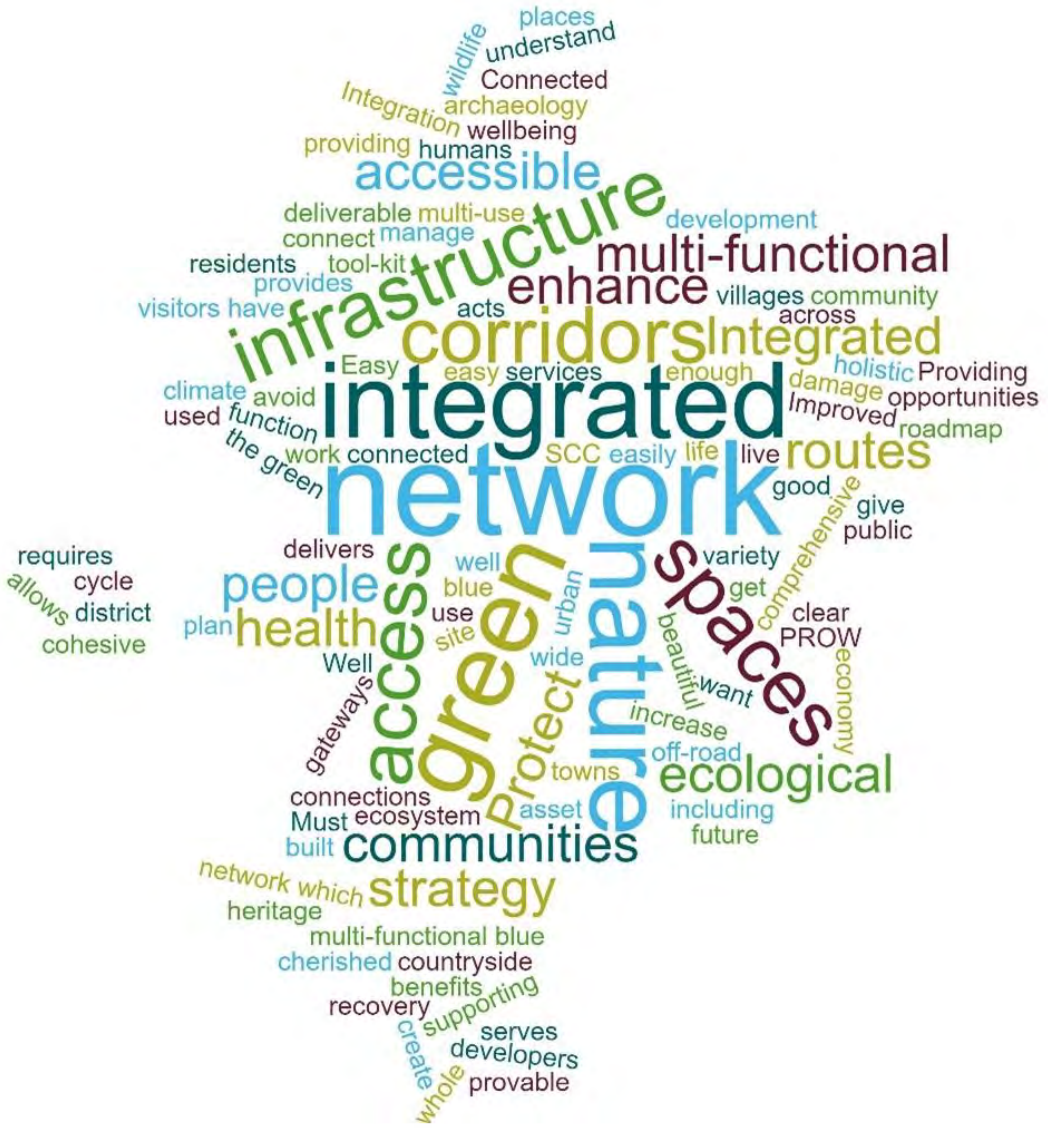
- Growth in West Suffolk's economy for the benefit of all our residents and UK;
- Increased and improved provision of appropriate housing in West Suffolk in both our towns and rural areas; and
- Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active.

2.32 The vision for GI within West Suffolk aims to set the roadmap for achieving this overarching vision and the strategic priorities for 2020-2024. The Study will establish the district's future direction of travel in relation to delivering sustainable, healthy, biodiverse and prosperous communities.

2.33 The GI vision framework has developed in close collaboration with the Council and in response to feedback from stakeholder consultation. One of the exercises at the June 2021 workshop focussed on the development of the vision for GI within West Suffolk. Figure 2.4 identifies the frequently used words adopted by participants during this task. The key terminology identified has

been used in the development of the vision and objectives for GI within the district.

Figure 2.4: Outputs from the visioning exercise during the initial consultation workshop



2.34 Additional discussion points during the stakeholder consultation required participants to summarise their aspirations for GI within West Suffolk in one succinct statement. Key feedback from this task is illustrated in Figure 2.5. Analysis of the responses has highlighted the following key principles:

- Requirement to balance the competing demands of people and the environment.
  - Example of stakeholder feedback: “A cohesive and integrated network which serves both humans and wildlife.”
- Importance of creating spaces which are beneficial to communities.
  - Example of stakeholder feedback: “Protect and enhance what we have and create more places where residents and visitors have opportunities to connect with nature.”
- Need for an integrated network of green corridors to promote accessibility and ecological linkages.
  - Example of stakeholder feedback: “Integrated infrastructure supporting communities, health and wellbeing, nature and the economy.”
- Requirement to promote the concept of multi-functionality.
  - Example of stakeholder feedback: “A multi-functional asset which delivers a variety of ecosystem services.”
- Need to enhance the user friendly features of the Study, including its appearance and usability.
  - Example of stakeholder feedback: “An easy to understand toolkit that requires developers to give over more of a development to GI.”

2.35 The Council’s strategic priorities have also been used to underpin the overarching aim for GI within West Suffolk. This approach to delivery of GI is supported by a series of six objectives which will drive, guide and deliver the Study. Informed by feedback within the initial consultation workshop, each objective is linked to the Study’s ‘themed’ approach which provides a useful framework to understand and plan for GI within the district.

Overarching aim for GI within West Suffolk

An integrated, multifunctional and resilient network of natural and semi-natural green spaces which support West Suffolk's communities for the benefit of present and future generations.

Key objectives for GI within West Suffolk

Theme 1: Access and Connectivity

- Utilise green and blue corridors to enhance accessibility and infrastructure to support existing and proposed communities.

Theme 2: Open Space and Recreation

- Improve the quantity, quality and connectivity of open spaces to provide recreation and wellbeing benefits, as well as to deliver nature-based solutions.

Theme 3: Nature Recovery

- Balance the needs of wildlife and communities to lay the foundations for nature recovery and climate change resilience.

Theme 4: The Water Environment

- Promote the resilience of the water environment, whilst maximising the benefits of water resources for West Suffolk communities.

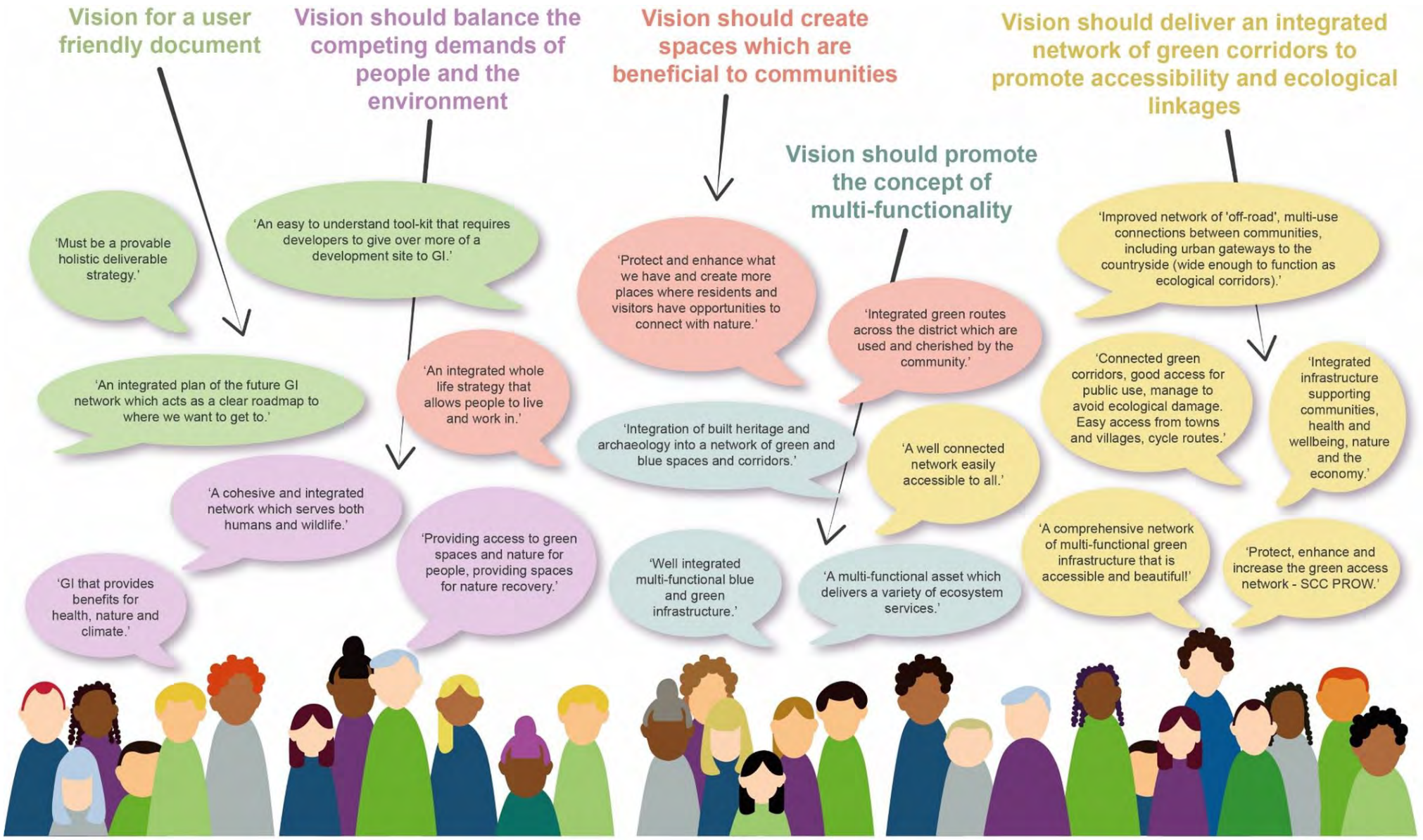
Theme 5: Urban Greening and Integrating Development

- Ensure the successful integration of GI principles within the public realm of existing settlements and within new development to promote sustainable growth.

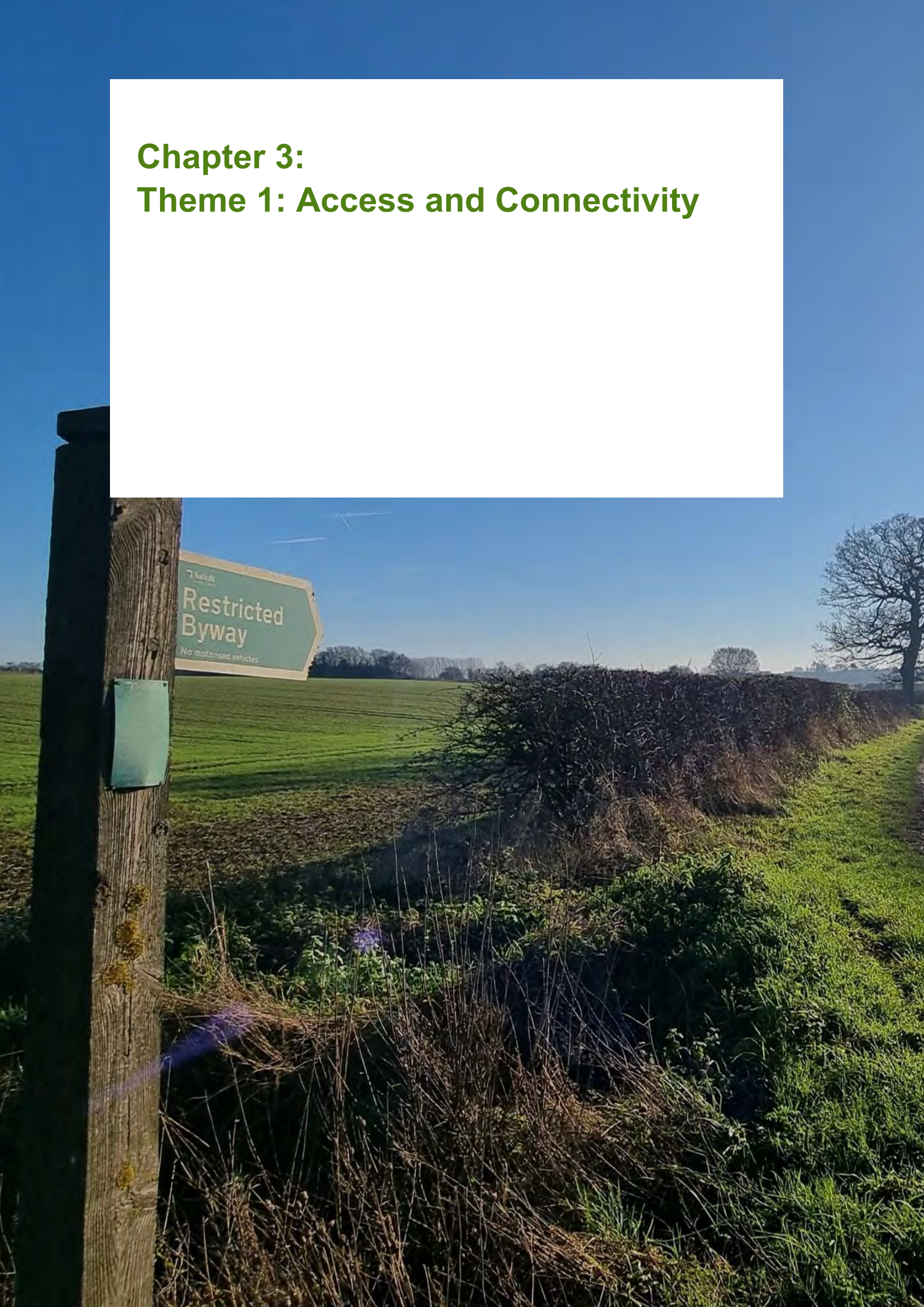
Theme 6: Landscape, Culture and Heritage

- Integrate landscape character, heritage and cultural assets into the GI network, allowing their full potential to be explored.

Figure 2.5: Key feedback from the initial stakeholder consultation



Chapter 3:
Theme 1: Access and Connectivity



Chapter 3

Theme 1: Access and Connectivity

This theme covers the accessibility of West Suffolk and its GI network, focusing primarily on methods of active travel.

Key objective(s)

- Utilise green and blue corridors to enhance accessibility and infrastructure to support existing and proposed communities.

Key assets

3.1 West Suffolk's network of walking, cycling, road and rail routes are shown in Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2. A network of long distance and promoted walking and cycling routes exist across the district, connecting some of the most significant assets in terms of visual amenity, recreation, nature and heritage.

3.2 A good network of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) covers the south of the district, particularly across rural farmland. Extensive river networks also provide conduits for the movement of people and nature, particularly the River Lark corridor. Others include the Black Bourn, Glem, Kennet, Linnet, Little Ouse and Stour. There are many footpaths which provide important active travel routes connecting settlements and key GI assets. In the north, large sections of Countryside Rights of Way (CRoW) Act open access land exist around Thetford Forest, which is discussed in more detail in Theme 2: Open Space and Recreation.

3.3 Alongside the two National Cycle Network routes (51 and 13), local cycle routes exist within Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Newmarket, all of which are managed by Suffolk County Council.

Walking and cycling infrastructure

3.4 Culture and heritage walking trails are available at Thetford High Lodge, alongside pilgrimage routes associated with St Edmundsbury Cathedral and several local historic routes around Bury St Edmunds, in partnership with Suffolk Steps. These are coupled with a fine network of Public Rights of Ways (PRoW). However, there is a distinct disparity in coverage across the District, with the south experiencing a much more comprehensive, although fragmented in places, network of PRoWs. Local cycle routes are confined to the more urban areas of Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Newmarket, with a distinct lack of cycling infrastructure within Mildenhall and Brandon.

3.5 Figure 3.1 shows the promoted national and regional walking and cycling routes, which include:

- Hereward Way (100 miles);
- Peddars Way (49 miles);
- National Cycle Network (NCN) route 13 (136 miles);
- Icknield Way Trail (112 miles);
- Lark Valley Path (13 miles);
- Brecks Trail (14 miles);
- NCN Route 1 (189 miles);
- St Edmunds Way (79 miles);
- Bury to Clare Walk (18 miles);
- Haverhill Railway Walk (7 miles); and
- Stour Valley Path (60 miles).

Public transport and roads

3.6 Although rural in character, West Suffolk's main towns are generally well-connected to the rest of the country, including Felixstowe, Norwich, Cambridge, and Stansted. There are four strategic main roads, including:

- A14 (Midlands to Ipswich) – runs west to east connecting Cambridge, Newmarket, Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich.
- A11 (London to Norwich) – connects Newmarket and Mildenhall to Thetford.
- A134 – runs north to south connecting Thetford and Sudbury via Bury St Edmunds.
- A143 – runs from Bury St Edmunds to Great Yarmouth on the east coast.

3.7 Two rail lines serve the district including:

- The Greater Anglia line which runs west to east across the centre of the district (near the A14) with stations at Newmarket, Kennett, Bury St Edmunds and Thurston.
- The East Midlands Railway and Greater Anglia line which shadows the north west district boundary, connecting Ely and Thetford with stations at Lakenheath and Brandon.

3.8 As seen in Figure 3.2, the majority of West Suffolk's towns and villages are served by the bus network. However, the majority of these routes are designed to serve people travelling between Bury St Edmunds and the towns of Brandon, Mildenhall, Thetford, Stowmarket, Haverhill and Newmarket. This makes travelling between villages or GI assets which are not orientated on these routes very difficult by public transport.

Active travel and Indices of Multiple Depravation Living Environment

3.9 The English Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) are a measure of relative social issues and challenges faced by communities, based on seven key domains. IMD's Living Environment indicator is calculated from both 'indoor' and 'outdoor' factors, as shown above. GI can play a key role in determining the state of 'outdoor' factors due to its ability to enhance air quality, as well as its role in acting as a framework for safe and connected active travel networks, therefore reducing the incidence of road traffic accidents involving pedestrians and cyclists.

3.10 It can be seen in Figure 3.3 that there is a significant trend towards healthier living environments within and surrounding West Suffolk's major towns, also corresponding with where the active travel network is most extensive. It is also clear that areas considered to have the least healthy living environments are those which are considerably rural and experience a lack of active travel opportunities.

3.11 The IMD Living Environment is measured from most deprived (0-10%) to least deprived (90-100%). The trends for West Suffolk's main settlements are as follows:

- 0-10%: West Row Fen, Great Livermere, Grimstone End;
- 10-20%: Culfordheath, Barnham, Euston, RAF Honington;
- 80-90%: Upthorpe, Mildenhall, Newmarket, Kedington; and
- 90-100%: Haverhill, Bury St Edmunds, Brandon, Ixworth.

15-minute neighbourhoods

3.12 An option for exploring sustainable travel and living within West Suffolk's more urbanised location is the implementation of 15-minute neighbourhoods.

The concept is based on providing most of residents' needs within a short walk or cycle from home, including amenities, shops, education, public transport and services. A strong consideration of GI is essential for the successful delivery of 15-minute neighbourhoods through its role in creating a framework for healthy and sustainable travel.

3.13 The key role GI has in creating these neighbourhoods include:

- Providing safe, attractive streets and a high quality environment through increased tree cover and planting in urban areas;
- Providing access to green space and play space within a short walk from home;
- Reducing car use and facilitating walking, cycling and the use of green corridors;
- Protecting and enhancing key destination green/blue spaces and local heritage to support local economic activity; and
- Ensuring local open spaces are multifunctional and cater for a diverse range of needs, sport and recreation.

3.14 Although the district's town centres have the most potential to provide all residents' requirements, key service centres have also been mapped in Figure 3.4 to demonstrate their potential in creating more connected and sustainable communities.

Figure 3.1: Walking and cycling infrastructure

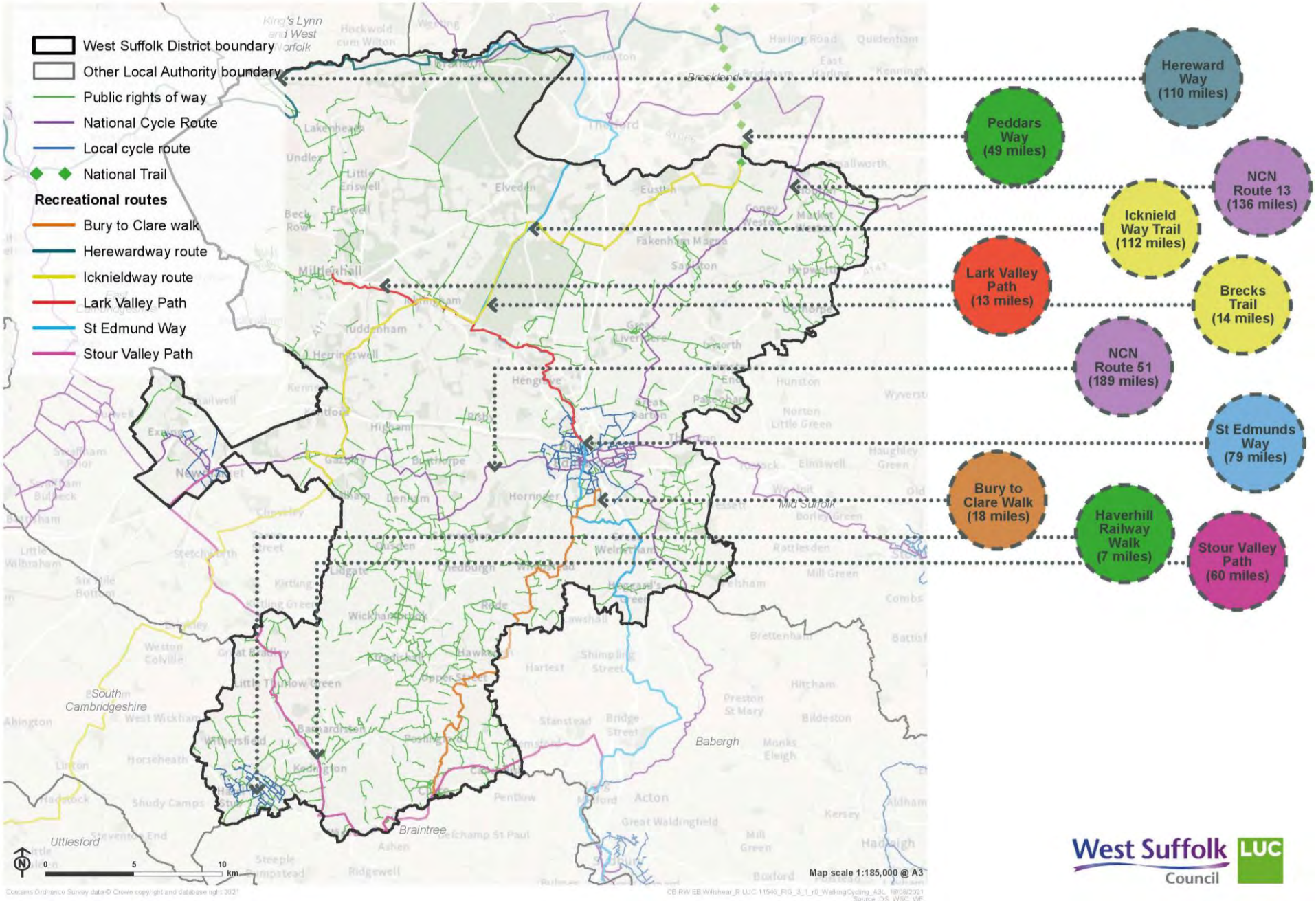
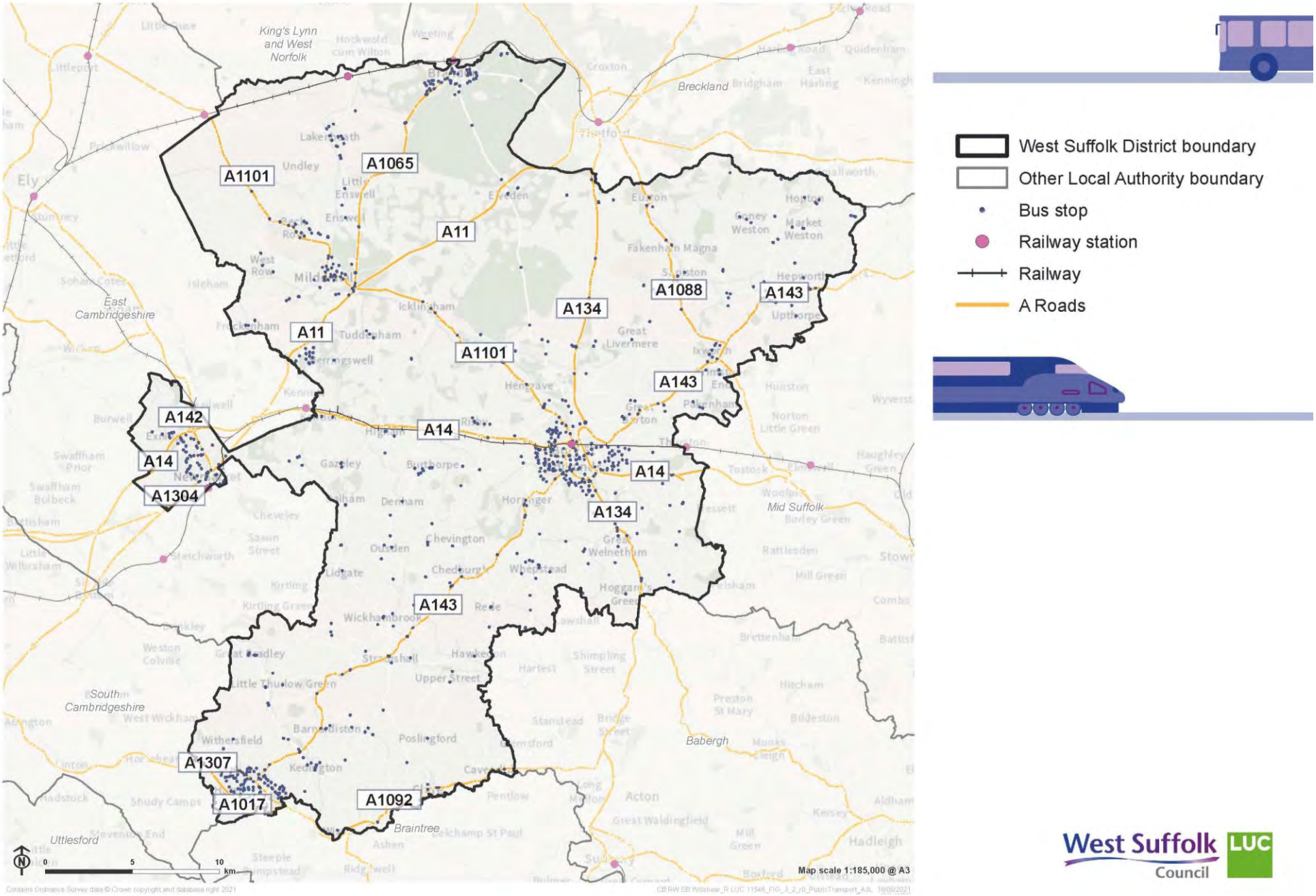


Figure 3.2: Public transport and roads



Stakeholder consultation

Valuable features

- Lark Valley Path;
- Brecks Trail;
- Icknield Way Path;
- Stour Valley Path;
- Bury to Clare Walk;
- St Edmund Way;
- Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network; and
- Cathedral Pilgrimage routes.

Existing projects

- East West Rail;
- Cycle rail;
- Greater Cambridge Partnership South East Transport;
- Yellow Brick Road;
- River Lark path extension;
- Bury St Edmunds active travel improvements;
- Bridleway between Horringer and Bury St Edmunds; and
- Bury Goes Biking.

Issues, pressures and threats

- Lack of PRoW close to Beck Row;

- Lack of Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan for Bury St Edmunds may limit access to funding;
- Severance by rail and major roads;
- Lack of public transport to villages and funding;
- Poor inter0urban National Cycle Network (NCN) routes, mostly on-road;
- Safety of cycle routes;
- Gaps in the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network; and
- Increase in use of PRoWs has led to damage.

Key drivers

Commuting patterns

3.15 Air quality is poor along the radial road routes out of Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket, as discussed in Chapter 7 – Theme 5: Urban Greening and Integrating Development and shown in Figure 7.2. Poor air quality is harmful to human health so actions should be taken to improve air quality. Encouraging walking and cycling for short journeys and commuting is an important step to improve air quality, ensuring routes bypass areas of poor air quality.

3.16 Carbon emissions per head are 55% higher than the national average, likely due to the rural nature of the district and reliance on personal vehicles for everyday trips. GI plays an important role in facilitating a shift in people's habits, particularly in relation to the uptake of active travel and the potential for off-road routes linking settlements, key service centres and GI assets.

3.17 The percentage of adult population cycling (aged 16-74) is higher than the national average of 9.5%, at 10.2% in the former Forest Heath area and 12.9%

in the former St Edmundsbury area. However, some neighbouring districts are performing better (e.g. Suffolk Coastal at 15.5%) **[See reference 6]**.

3.18 The Outdoor Recreation Valuation Tool (ORVal) (discussed in detail in Chapter 4 – Theme 2: Open Space and Recreation) estimates that when considering all recreational sites in the district, 44-48% of visits are taken by car. Additional evidence based on a visitor survey of Breckland Special Protection Area (SPA) point to this being much higher to particularly sensitive sites (91% of visitors to Breckland Forest were by car).

Population, growth and transport infrastructure

3.19 Access to transport infrastructure, including railway stations and bus services, is generally confined to the main settlements of Newmarket, Bury St Edmunds, Brandon, Haverhill and Mildenhall. However, equal access for all residents is important and many of the rural communities suffer from poor provision, as shown in Figure 3.2.

3.20 Population growth planned around the main settlements will increase pressure on existing transport infrastructure. To reduce future reliance on car, new settlements need to be well connected to the GI network through provision of safe, active travel routes. Likewise, improvements are required in more deprived areas of West Suffolk located to the north of Bury St Edmunds and around West Row in the north west of the district, as shown in Figure 3.3.

3.21 If approved, the district will be affected by the proposed eastern section of East West Main Rail Line (which currently ends in Cambridge). The business case is being made at present to improve the frequency of existing services on the eastern section which extends from Cambridge to Norwich/Ipswich through West Suffolk **[See reference 7]**.

Severance

3.22 Direct severance is caused by main roads (e.g. A14 and A11) and rail routes, and in some cases the extensive network of rivers. Permeability of these severance features is essential for the easy movement of both people and wildlife, particularly where population is likely to increase. Red Lodge for example requires improved active travel provision, including to Kennett train station (2 kilometres south).

3.23 Indirect severance is caused by large areas of privately owned agricultural land in the rural parts of the district and limited off-road connectivity, which constrains the ability of people to use active travel. This sees West Suffolk experience a much more fragmented and sparser Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network when compared to the rest of Suffolk, particularly within the former Forest Heath area of West Suffolk.

Extent and condition of the network

3.24 The main settlements are generally well-connected. However, Mildenhall has no cycle routes and the district's numerous smaller, rural villages lack access to safe, active travel routes. Promoting active travel through provision of safe, connected routes for residents in these areas is required to reduce reliance on the car. These routes must enable access between key settlements, service centres, workplaces and the network of GI assets. The online stakeholder consultation for natural and semi-natural green spaces undertaken as part of this study highlighted deficiencies in accessibility, stating:

- “Car transport is needed to access these spaces if you live in a village rather than the town”; and
- “I can only easily access the parks that are close to me. If there was better provision for cycling, I could cycle to places further away, e.g. Clare Castle Country Park or even Nowton Park.”

3.25 There is fragmentation of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and promoted walking trails, and a particularly low density of PRoW in the north of the district. However, there is a lot of Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act land in the north (see Chapter 4 – Theme 2: Open Space and Recreation).

3.26 There is need to improve provision of information and signage across areas of the footpath and bridleway network connecting GI assets.

3.27 There is good investment into active travel projects across Suffolk as a whole, but in West Suffolk these are concentrated within the surrounds of Bury St Edmunds.

The Climate Emergency

Cars emit harmful greenhouse gas emissions, making a significant contribution to climate change. Reducing reliance on car by providing a safe, active travel network across West Suffolk is important to enable people to walk and cycle safely and efficiently, to help reduce unnecessary transport emissions for routine journeys.

Health and wellbeing

Active travel is proven to boost physical and mental health. A safe, active travel network close to home and between key assets enables physical activity to be incorporated into day to day lives, leading to significant improvements in health whilst reducing economic health-related costs for businesses and society.

Figure 3.3: Active travel and Indices of Multiple Depravation Living Environment

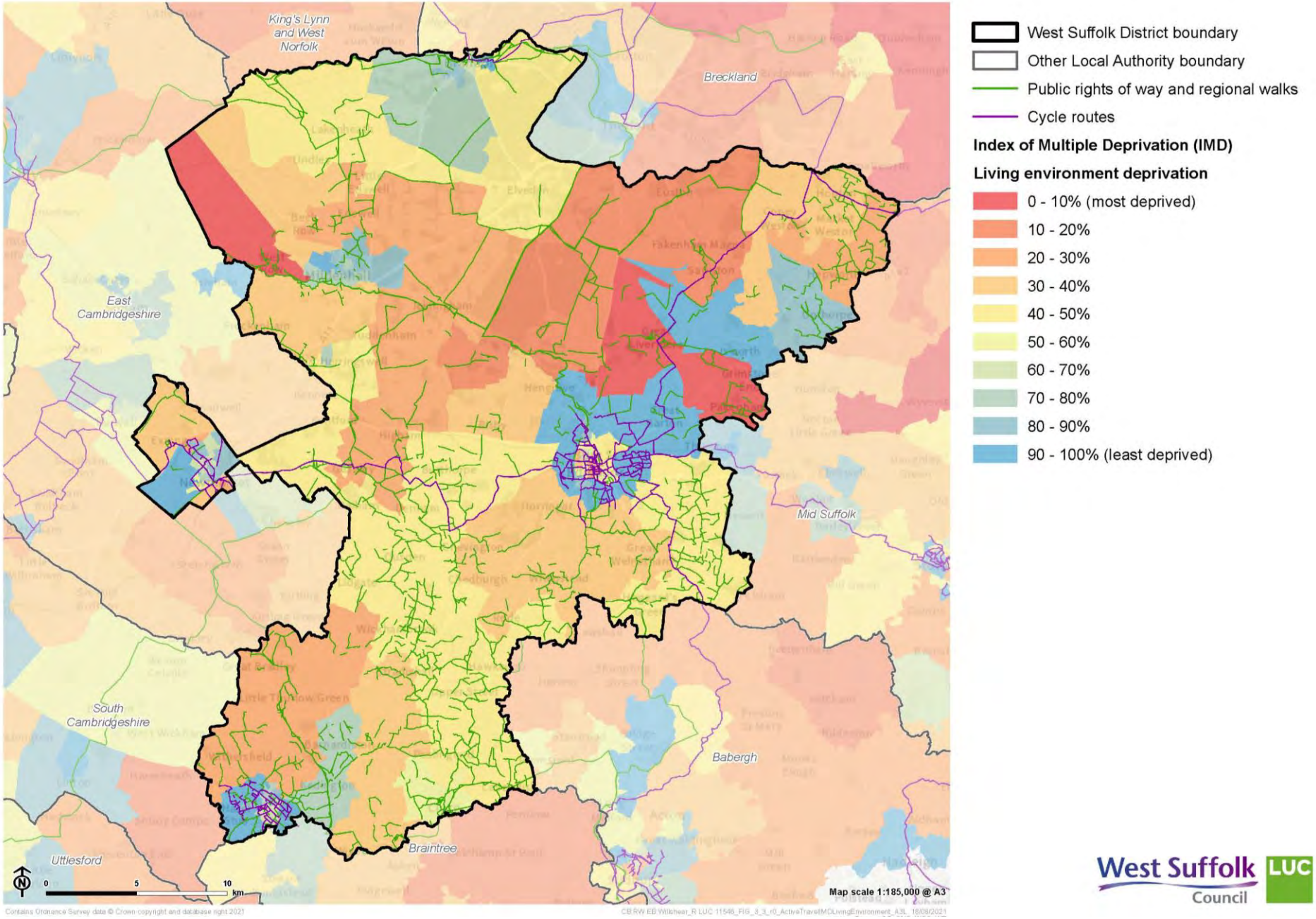
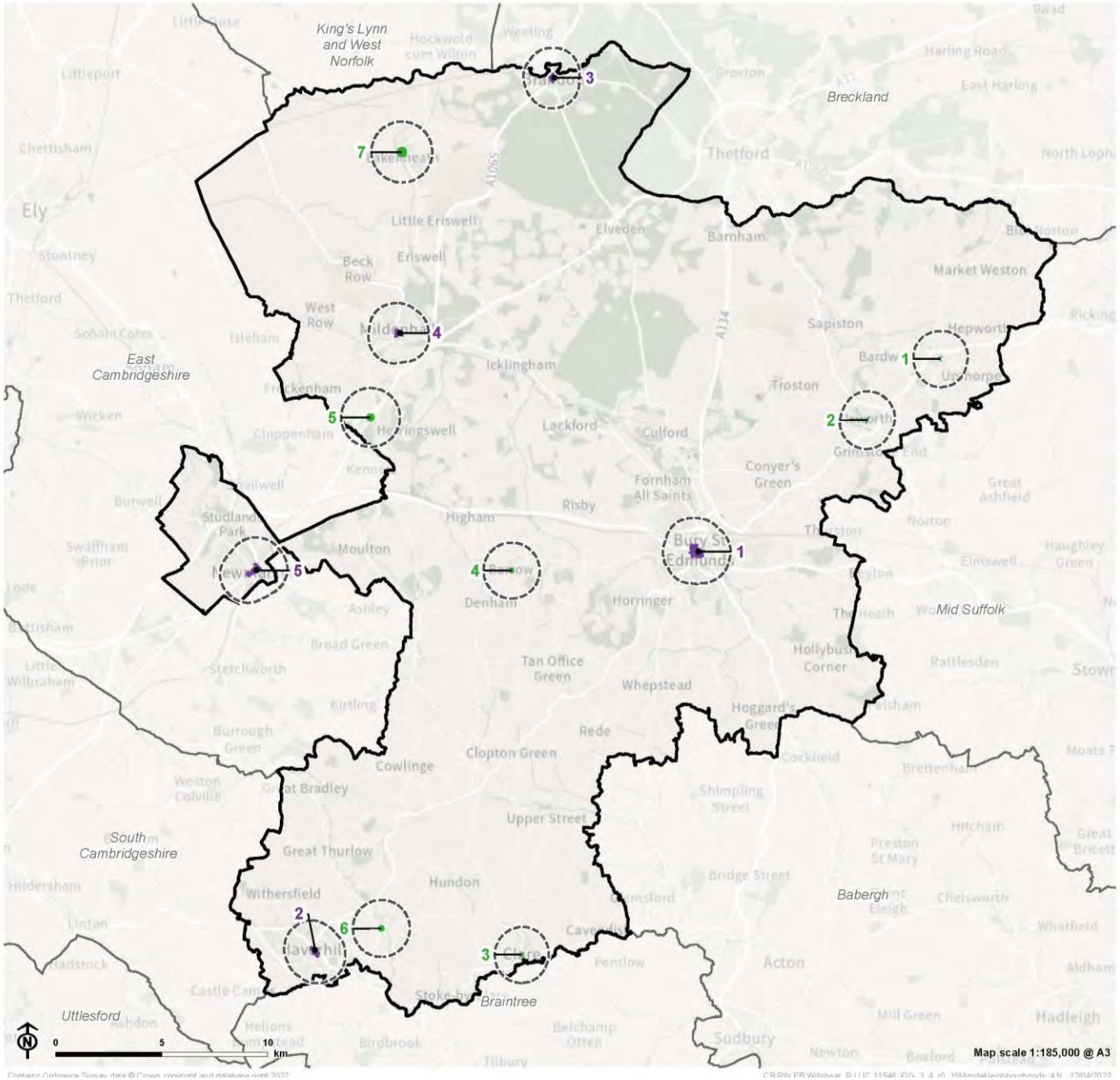


Figure 3.4: 15-minute neighbourhoods



West Suffolk District boundary
Other Local Authority boundary
1200m buffer
Town centre
1: Bury St Edmunds
2: Haverhill
3: Brandon
4: Mildenhall
5: Newmarket
Key service centre
1: Stanton
2: Ixworth
3: Clare
4: Barrow
5: Red Lodge
6: Kedington
7: Lakenheath

West Suffolk Council LUC

Existing projects

Suffolk County Council Transport Recovery Plan 2020, Phase 2 [See reference 8]

3.28 Active travel is at the heart of the Transport Recovery Plan. Plans for Bury St Edmunds (although are yet to be agreed):

- Compiegne Way to town centre – reallocation of road space to provide segregated cycle lane on Northgate Street;
- Beetons Way – enhanced and extended cycling facilities near schools, including modal filters to reduce car traffic;
- Risbygate Street – cycle lane installed on parkway roundabout to St Andrews Street;
- Bentgovel Street/Looms Lane – continuing the east to west link, linking to Northgate Street; and
- A general review of all signalled crossings with a view to reducing waiting times.

3.29 Other Suffolk-wide schemes identified in the desk review include:

- High quality cycle parking, soft measures to promote active travel (free cycle training, bike maintenance, working with public health Suffolk and local GPs), promoting Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and Mini-Hollands;
- Partnerships with Cycling UK and local charities to embed behavioural changes (e.g. Dr Bike sessions), as well as links with Love to Ride, and trialling School Streets and Play Streets; and
- Cycle Allowance Pilot for 2021-2022 – offers £70 per term or £210 lump payment as well as Bikeability training to students ages 11-16 in Suffolk with an existing funded school bus pass [See reference 9].

Greater Cambridge Partnership

3.30 The desk review identified the Greater Cambridge Partnership South East Transport Scheme (A1307) cycle improvements which connect into the west of Haverhill **[See reference** 10**]**.

Yellow Brick Road project, Newmarket

3.31 The Yellow Brick Road project to improve access to town footpaths was identified through consultation **[See reference** 11**]**.

Projects and events in Bury St Edmunds

3.32 The consultation process identified the following projects and events in Bury St Edmunds:

- River Lark path extension;
- Cycle rail – potential to increase cycle parking at the rail station;
- New bridleway creation (2019) between Horringer and Bury St Edmunds to provide new cycle link. New path provides off road route for walkers and cyclists to avoid busy A14 junction 44 **[See reference** 12**]**;
- Creation of a new surfaced Public Rights of Way (PRoW) utilising an existing farm track and underpass beneath the A14, connecting Moreton Hall and south east Bury St Edmunds;
- Bury Goes Biking event 2019 – 1 day where town centre transformed into cycle free route **[See reference** 13**]**;
- Encourages people to undertake more walking in Bury St Edmunds, including several pre-work and lunch walks and a map for Park and Stride **[See reference** 14**]**; and

- Abbeycroft Leisure 5k run/walk routes across the district **[See reference 15]**.

Haverhill Town Centre Improvements

3.33 The following projects were identified through feedback from West Suffolk:

- Haverhill Town Centre Masterplan which was published in 2015, formation of the Haverhill BID;
- Town centre improvements which have repaired a number of pavements and surfaces to create a more welcoming place; and
- Railway walk surface improvements planned.

Previously identified opportunities

Opportunities identified within the St Edmundsbury Green Infrastructure Strategy

Black Bourn and Little Ouse Headwaters/Brecks

Project A.2: Stanton Woodland Enhancement Corridor – linking into the key service centres of Stanton and Ixworth.

- No progress to date – although is a worthwhile nature recovery project; and
- Note: Wyken Hall is now a popular destination with a vineyard, shop, gardens, restaurant and café.

Brecks

Project B.1: Improved and sustainable visitor management – in Kings Forest and West Stow Country Park.

- There have been some improvements to this destination which continues to be popular - there is potential for future improvements.

River Valleys

Project C.1: Improved Lark Valley Path and Sustrans 'Fornham Link' – creating a route between Lackford Lakes, West Stow Country Park and the Icknield Way.

- Lark Valley path improved from Fornham (north of golf club) to Mill Road;

Project C.2: New multifunctional Linnet Valley route – connecting Bury St Edmunds and Ickworth Park; and

- There is a proposal, however this has never progressed – it remains an aspiration. Superseded by the new off-road Public Rights of Way (PRoW) connecting Horringer with Ickworth and Bury St Edmunds. If hospital site goes ahead this has potential to improve access and provide developer contributions.

Project C.4: Improved signage along riverside paths – interpreting sites such as British Sugar, historic parks, gardens etc.

- Some progress, for example signage in the Abbey Gardens, however the project remains an aspiration.

Bury St Edmunds

Project D.2: Bury St Edmunds radial route – shared surface route linking Nowton Country Park, Ickworth Park and the River Lark Valley.

- Some sections have progressed in the east through developments, e.g. the creation of a new surfaced route utilising an existing farm track and underpass beneath the A14 at Moreton Hall other sections have been more difficult to achieve, for example the north west which remains an aspiration.

Project D.4: Enhance public access between north west of Bury St Edmunds and Breckland Special Protection Area.

- Lark Valley Path improved from Fornham (north of golf club) to Mill Road.

Project D.5: Creation of gateways – in and out of Bury St Edmunds at A14/Westerley Road roundabout and A134/Compiegne Way roundabout.

- Some improvements have been made to the access into Ram Meadow from Compiegne Way. There have also been improvements along the river corridor with the former Eastgate Nursery becoming part of the publicly accessible Abbey Gardens. This provides better pedestrian access between Ram Meadow and No Man's Meadow.

Project D.7: Wetland Green Corridor – along the Lark to the south east of Bury St Edmunds, linking to Nowton Country Park.

- Some potential partial progress on this through south east Bury St Edmunds strategic site; and
- Final section of the path (from Vale Lane to south of The Firs) remains an aspiration.

Haverhill

Project E.2: Improve gateways into Haverhill – at the A1307/A1017 roundabout and the A1017/Rowley Hill roundabout.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Project E.3: Green corridor fingers – to the north of Haverhill, improving access to the Stour Valley.

- There are a number of existing routes in place – development to the north of Haverhill will link into these.

Project E.6: Streetscape and signage strategy for Haverhill.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Green corridors

Project 1.1: Shared use route along disused railway between Thetford, The Kings Forest and the Lark Valley Greenway.

- Unaware of any completed projects.

Project 1.2: Improved links between Fornham St Martin and Bury St Edmunds town centre.

- Potential footpath along the River Lark to Barton Hill.

Project 1.3: New riverside shared path between Bury St Edmund's town centre, Ickworth Park and Chevington via the River Linnet.

- This has not progressed but remains an aspiration.

Project 1.4: Enhance paths between Chevington and Hawkedon via the River Glem Valley.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Project 2.1: Enhance paths between Bury St Edmunds, Thurston and the Icknield Way via the Black Bourn Valley.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Project 3.1: Enhance paths between St Edmund Way and Bradfield Woods National Nature Reserve (NNR).

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Project 4.1: Urban river corridors through Haverhill.

- New lengths of path installed along the railway with additional S106 secured.

Project 5.1: Creation of new riverside path to provide access between Barnham Camp and Knettishall Heath Country Park along the Little Ouse.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Opportunities identified within the Forest Heath Natural Greenspace Study

Brandon

3.34 Improvements to footpath links, focus could be along the River Little Ouse corridor.

- Improvements to the River Ouse in Norfolk undertaken in collaboration with Norfolk County Council – delivered.

Mildenhall

3.35 Improvements to the existing footpath network and links to existing greenspace. Focus could be on the River Lark corridor.

- Included in the West of Mildenhall Masterplan to be completed prior to any occupation.

Newmarket

3.36 New links to the Yellow Brick Road blue/green corridor.

- Some footpath improvements have been secured (Hatchfield), but this remains an aspiration.

Lakenheath

3.37 New access routes are required which could potentially focus on the Cut-Off Channel.

- Funding secured to formalise access along the Cut-off Channel from Wangford Road to connect with existing Public Rights of Way (PRoW) south of the village; and
- Funding for footbridge crossing of Cut-off Channel in north of village to connect with path at Grime Drove.

Red Lodge

- Routes connecting the existing and proposed greenspace;
- New access routes potentially focusing on the River Kennet corridor; and
- Recreational footpath on the east of the village connecting existing PRoW in south with existing greenspace – under construction.

Beck Row

3.38 Walking routes - focus on links to the east and to the Cut Off Channel.

- Walking route provided from Hicfield Road to connect with existing at Wildmere Lane.

Kentford

3.39 Walking route to connect developments avoiding B1506.

- Footpaths connecting Gazeley Road and River Kennet Corridor delivered.

Exning

3.40 Provide additional links to the existing GI including tree belts and PRoW network.

- New cycle/footway to Burwell adjacent to B1103 Burwell Road secured through S106.

West Row

3.41 Accessible natural green space and walking routes - focus on the existing PRoW network and the River Lark corridor.

- New bridleway between West Row and Mildenhall.

Actions identified within the West Suffolk Climate Change Task Force

Action 3.7: Work with Suffolk County Council to ensure West Suffolk benefits from the Cycling and Walking Fund.

Opportunities identified within the West Suffolk Climate Change Task Force: Environment and Biodiversity Emergency in West Suffolk

Action 3.5: Promote greener ways of travel to parks and recreation sites.

- All major parks do not have cycle racks and investigations are being made into the cost and viability of installing charging points within those parks that have car parks. However, significant investment is required in the electrical supply network.

Action 3.7: Increase provision of cycle racks and charging points at parks.

- The 'What's on West Suffolk' parks web page is to be enhanced and will promoted greener ways of travel to parks and recreation sites **[See reference** 16**]**.

Stakeholder engagement

Key outputs relevant to this theme from the 'opportunities' task in the workshop

3.42 Active travel routes/improvements are required in specific locations as listed below.

3.43 In and around Bury St Edmunds:

- To Saxham Business Park;
- To Horringer, Ickworth House/Ickworth Park;
- Between Hardwick Heath and Nowton Park;
- Between Thurston Station and Suffolk Business Park;
- New cycle path along railway sidings between train station and Beetons Way; and
- Cycle links to the new West Suffolk hospital site.

3.44 River and rail routes vital as active travel corridors, with specific interventions including:

- Along cut off channel between Lakenheath and Mildenhall, connecting to the Lark;
- Extension of Lark Valley footpath from Bury St Edmunds to Mildenhall and beyond;
- Haverhill railway walk; and
- Haverhill to Clare along the Stour Brook.

3.45 Those elsewhere in the district include:

- Footpaths through Sunnica sites;
- Brecks Trail - path from Centre Parcs to Brandon Country Park and the village; and
- Promoted routes through open access land to reduce diffuse pressure from open access roaming on ground nesting birds/disturbance etc.

3.46 Dispersed opportunities:

- Support/replicate community led projects like Yellow Brick Road.

Conclusions and next steps

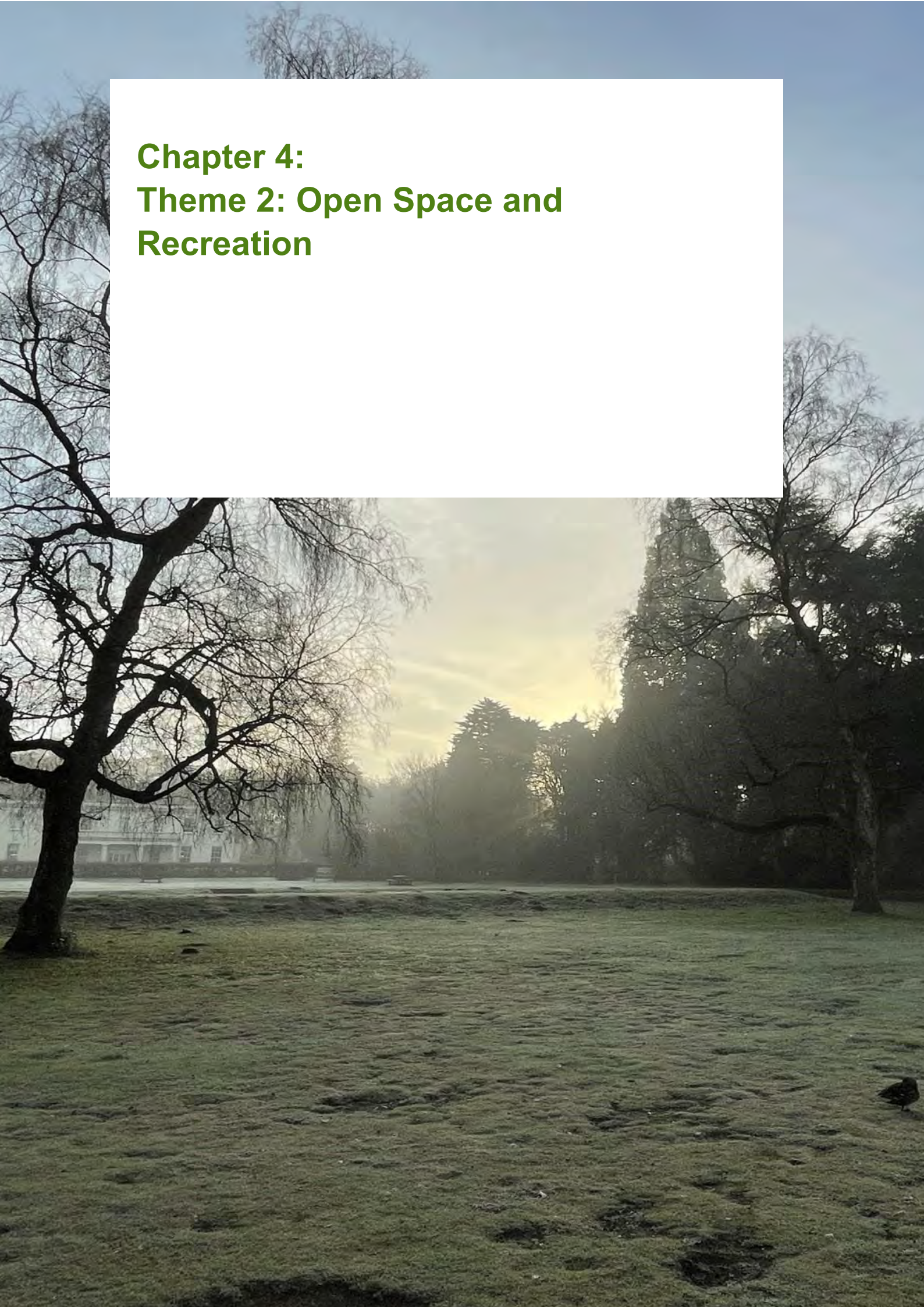
Summary of key issues

- Fragmentation of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and promoted walking routes, particularly in the north;
- Inconsistency of cycle network coverage, with no routes available within Mildenhall;
- National cycle routes are largely on-road which may deter use, and local cycle links are limited to the centres of Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket and Haverhill only;
- Severance by the A14, A11 and rail lines;
- Rural district with little public transport to villages or active travel routes results in a reliance on car; and
- Lack of signage and information across the active travel network.

Key opportunities

- Carry forward specific opportunities as identified in stakeholder consultation;

- Consider the network of smaller villages and how new or upgraded PRoW and cycle routes can be used to connect them with both local and key service centres;
- Move the focus of access away from the Special Protection Area (SPA), utilising river corridors;
- Implement '15-minute neighbourhoods', low traffic neighbourhoods and school streets in main settlements;
- Create and promote an active travel route from Newmarket to Mildenhall into Breckland. Strategic connections to the existing Icknield Way could also be sought;
- Explore key strategic river corridor links in the following locations;
- Routes out of Newmarket to connect into the River Kennet (via Moulton) to provide access to nature to the east of Newmarket. For cycling, link with the National Cycle Network (NCN) route 51;
- Enhance active travel provisions from West Row to the wider fen landscape to the northwest along the Lark; and
- Along the cut-off channel between Lakenheath and Mildenhall, connecting to the Lark.



Chapter 4:
Theme 2: Open Space and Recreation

Chapter 4

Theme 2: Open Space and Recreation

West Suffolk's network of parks, natural green spaces, allotments, amenity spaces, play spaces and corridors are vital in serving recreational demand, as well as for relaxation and day to day activities.

Key objective(s)

- Improve the quantity, quality and connectivity of open spaces to provide recreation and wellbeing benefits and to deliver nature-based solutions.

Key assets

4.1 Open spaces contribute to the health, well-being, cultural heritage, landscape, education, climate change mitigation, biodiversity and movement for people and wildlife. The emerging Open Space Assessment Report **[See reference** 17**]** has informed the following sections.

4.2 West Suffolk's network of public open space covers a variety of land uses and typologies, as shown in Figure 4.1 and listed in Table 4.1. There is a total of 651 open space sites equating to approximately 736 hectares. Parks, amenity greenspace and natural greenspace are the largest contributors, accounting for 92% of open space provision.

Open space typologies

Allotments or community growing space

Provide space for people who wish to grow their own produce as part of a long-term promotion of sustainability, health and social inclusion. As well as allotments, this can include community gardens and city farms.

Example sites:

- Jubilee Park Allotments;
- Grow Bury St; and
- Cotton Lane allotment site.

Amenity green space

Provide opportunities for informal activities close to home, work or school. They generally provide less opportunities for recreation and habitat than parks and gardens.

Example sites:

- Layhill Covert; and
- Stanton Recreation Ground.

Cemeteries and churchyards

Provide areas for quiet contemplation, as well as hosting opportunities for the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity.

Example sites:

- Bury St Edmunds Cemetery; and
- All Saints Churchyard.

Natural and semi-natural greenspace

Wildlife conservation and environmental awareness are the primary functions of this space. They also have a great potential to deliver amenity value through visitor engagement and conservation activities.

Example sites:

- Meldham Washlands;
- Aspal Close; and
- Barton Mills Riverside Reserve.

Public parks and gardens

Accessible, high quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events, these areas are essential destination spaces for the district. They are more multifunctional than any of West Suffolk's other open spaces and provide opportunity for sport and play, as well as quiet relaxation.

- Abbey Gardens;
- Clare Castle Country Park;
- Memorial Hall Gardens;
- Brandon Country Park; and
- Nowton Park.

Provision for children and young people

Designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people, such as equipped play areas, ball courts, skate parks and teenage shelters. Provision for children and young people is often located alongside other typologies.

- Hyperion Way Multi-use Games Area (MUGA);
- West Row Play Area; and
- Howe Road Playground.

Other contributors towards local amenity (not included on Figure 4.1)

Other types of open space and recreation assets

Not formally categorised as open spaces but still serve important functions for recreation, for example sports facilities, golf courses, school grounds and camp sites.

Example sites:

- The New Croft;
- Haverhill Golf Club; and
- Newmarket Rugby Club.

Green and blue corridors

These are important wildlife corridors, but also provide space for walking and cycling, whether for leisure purposes or commuting. A number of blue corridors (along rivers) are not accessible.

Example sites:

- River Lark;
- Cut-off Channel; and
- Haverhill Railway Walk.

Table 4.1: Quantity of each open space typology

Open space typology	Number of sites	Total amount (hectares)
Allotments	39	44
Amenity greenspace	212	255
Cemeteries/churchyards	117	0
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	77	229
Park and gardens	15	199
Provision for children and young people	191	15
Total	**651**	**742**

4.3 The quantity figures above do not include the large natural and semi-natural greenspaces listed in Table 4.2 as their inclusion can skew the setting of open space quantity standards. However, they do still play an important role in providing access to natural and semi-natural greenspace for many of West Suffolk's residents.

4.4 Many of these sites are Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 sites. Open access land is shown in Figure 4.2, alongside National Nature

Reserves (NNR) and access networks (PRoW and promoted walking routes). The nature conservation designations are further discussed in Chapter 5, which goes on to explore recreational pressure on sensitive sites.

Other important publicly accessible greenspaces

Quantity figures of various open space typologies, as displayed in Table 4.1, do not include a number of large natural and semi-natural greenspaces as these can skew the setting of open space quantity standards. However, they still play important roles in contributing towards access to nature and are shown in Figure 4.2.

These spaces include:

- Thetford Forest Park Countryside Rights of Way (CRoW) Act and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (some National Nature Reserves (NNRs));
- Maidscross Hill CRoW Act, Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and SSSI;
- Knettishall Heath CRoW Act, SWT and SSSI;
- Mildenhall Wood CRoW Act and SSSI;
- King's Forest CRoW Act and SSSI;
- Cavenham Heath CRoW Act, NNR and SSI;
- Newmarket Heath/The Gallops (publicly accessible after 1pm); and
- Bradfield Woods SWT, NNR and SSSI.

Table 4.2: Analysis of sites not included in open space quantity figures

Site and location	Size (ha)	Access, (management in brackets)	Ecological Designations
Mildenhall Woods, north west of district near Mildenhall	506	Countryside Rights of Way (CRoW) Act	Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
Cavenham Heath National Nature Reserve, south east of Mildenhall	210	CRoW Act	National Nature Reserve (NNR), SSSI
Knettishall Heath Nature Reserve, north east of district, east of Thetford	175	CRoW Act, (Suffolk Wildlife Trust)	SSSI
Bradfield Woods National Nature Reserve, south east of district near Felsham	70	Public access, (Suffolk Wildlife Trust)	NNR, SSSI
Maidscross Hill Nature Reserve, north west of district near Lakenheath	50	Public access	SSSI
Thetford Forest Park, north of district	18,000	CRoW Act	Part of the site is Thetford Heath NNR, large areas are SSSI
King's Forest, centre-north of district	2,300	Public access (Forestry England)	Part of Breckland Forest SSSI
The Gallops (part of Newmarket Racecourse)	0	Public access after 1pm	None

Combined open space deficiency

4.5 As shown in Figure 4.3, the largely rural nature of the district means most of West Suffolk sits within an accumulation of open space deficiency for parks and gardens, amenity greenspace and natural and semi-natural greenspace. Good access to all three types of open space is generally limited to the district's towns and larger villages, including:

- Bury St Edmunds;
- Haverhill;
- Newmarket;
- Mildenhall;
- Brandon;
- Clare; and
- Stanton.

4.6 Figure 4.3 shows that in some locations where there is a 'deficiency in access to 1 level of the hierarchy', this commonly refers to a lack of parks and gardens, for example within Newmarket, Lakenheath, Red Lodge, Beck Row, Great Barton, the western side of Haverhill and parts of Bury St Edmunds. Where spots of 'deficiency in access to 2 levels of the hierarchy' appear across the district, this generally refers to areas which are deficient in access to parks and gardens and natural and semi-natural greenspace, as amenity greenspace is commonly present within villages.

4.7 Where possible, opportunities to enhance both natural and seminatural greenspace and amenity greenspace so that they begin to perform more like a park could help to enhance access to good quality greenspace for West Suffolk's residents. This could include adding play or exercise equipment, creating wildlife areas with educational trails and interpretation, or simply adding amenities such as benches and picnic tables. This should be coupled with careful consideration for how natural and semi-natural greenspace can help to perform a recreational role as many sites within West Suffolk are already under

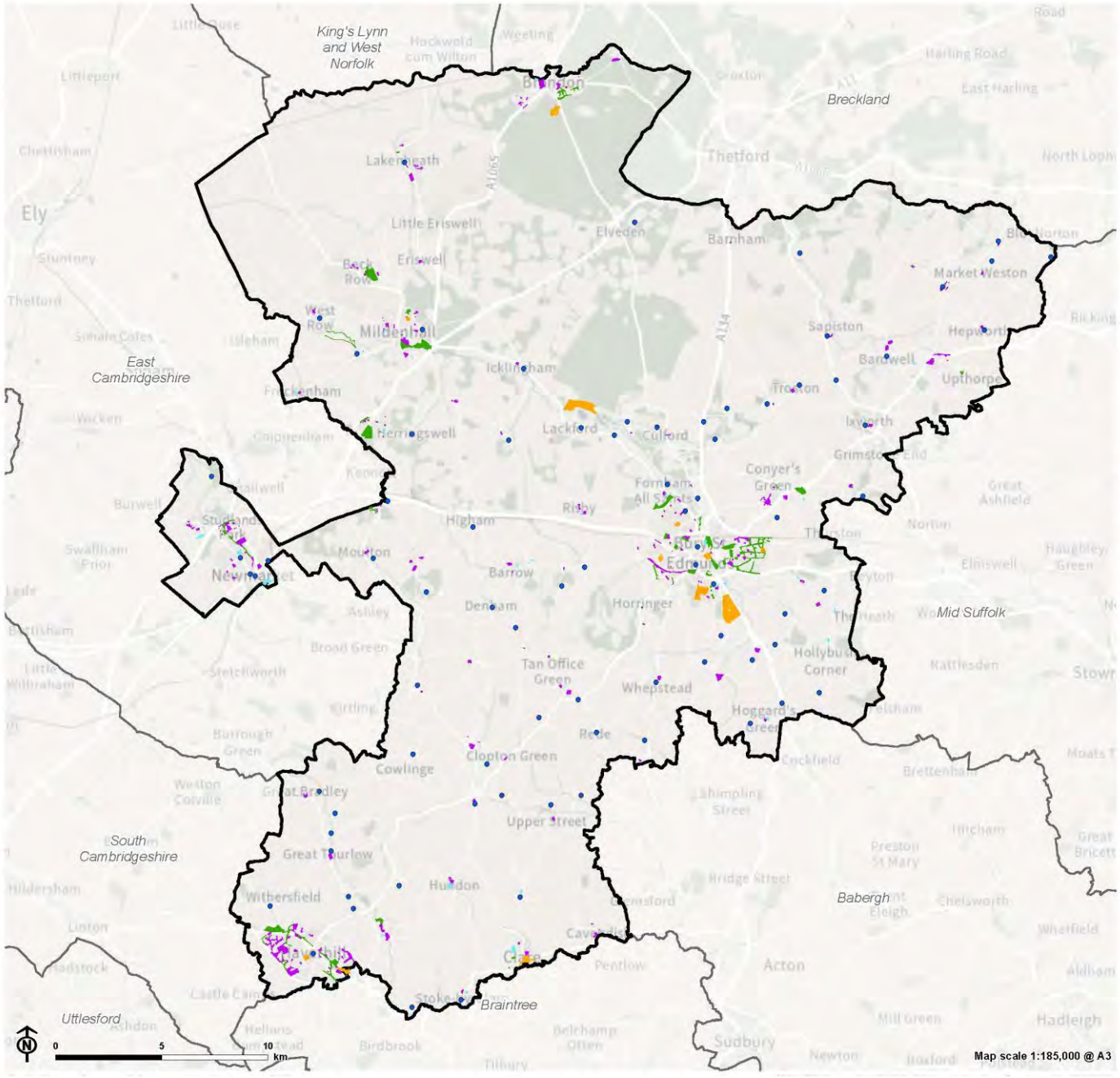
pressure. This could include having designated recreation areas to try and concentrate pressures or implementing educational resources such as a code of conduct for recreational users. The type of open space which developers should be providing should also be a consideration here.

4.8 Addressing the deficiency in access to open space across the whole district is not possible, however, where access to any open space is limited in rural areas, consideration should be given to how PRoW and cycle paths can be used to help create access to the surrounding countryside for residents. Table 4.3 details the walking distance guidelines and approximate time equivalent for each of the different open space types.

Table 4.3: Walking distance guidelines and the approximate time equivalent per open space type

Open space type	Walking distance guideline (metre)	Approximate time equivalent (minute)
Parks and gardens	710 metres	9 minutes
Amenity greenspace	480 metres	6 minutes
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	720 metres	9 minutes
Local Area for Play (LAP)	100 metres	1 minute
Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAP)	400 metres	5minutes
Neighbourhood Equipped Area of Play (NEAP)	1000 metres	12 minutes
Other (Multi-Use Games Area)	700 metres	9 minutes

Figure 4.1: Open spaces



West Suffolk District boundary
Other Local Authority boundary
Cemeteries
Allotment
Amenity greenspace
Childrens play area
Parks and Gardens
Semi / Natural greenspace

Note: Mildenhall Woods (506ha), Cavenham Heath National Nature Reserve (210ha), Knettishall Heath Local Nature Reserve (175ha), Bradfield Woods National Nature Reserve (201ha) and Maidscross Hill Local Nature Reserve (50ha) have not been included within the quantity calculations in Table 4.1 due to their size skewing the standards. However, they still contribute towards accessible natural and semi-natural greenspace within the district. Other green spaces not included in the figure but contribute towards amenity also exist, for example green and blue corridors, school grounds, sports facilities and golf courses.

Figure 4.2: Other important publicly accessible green spaces

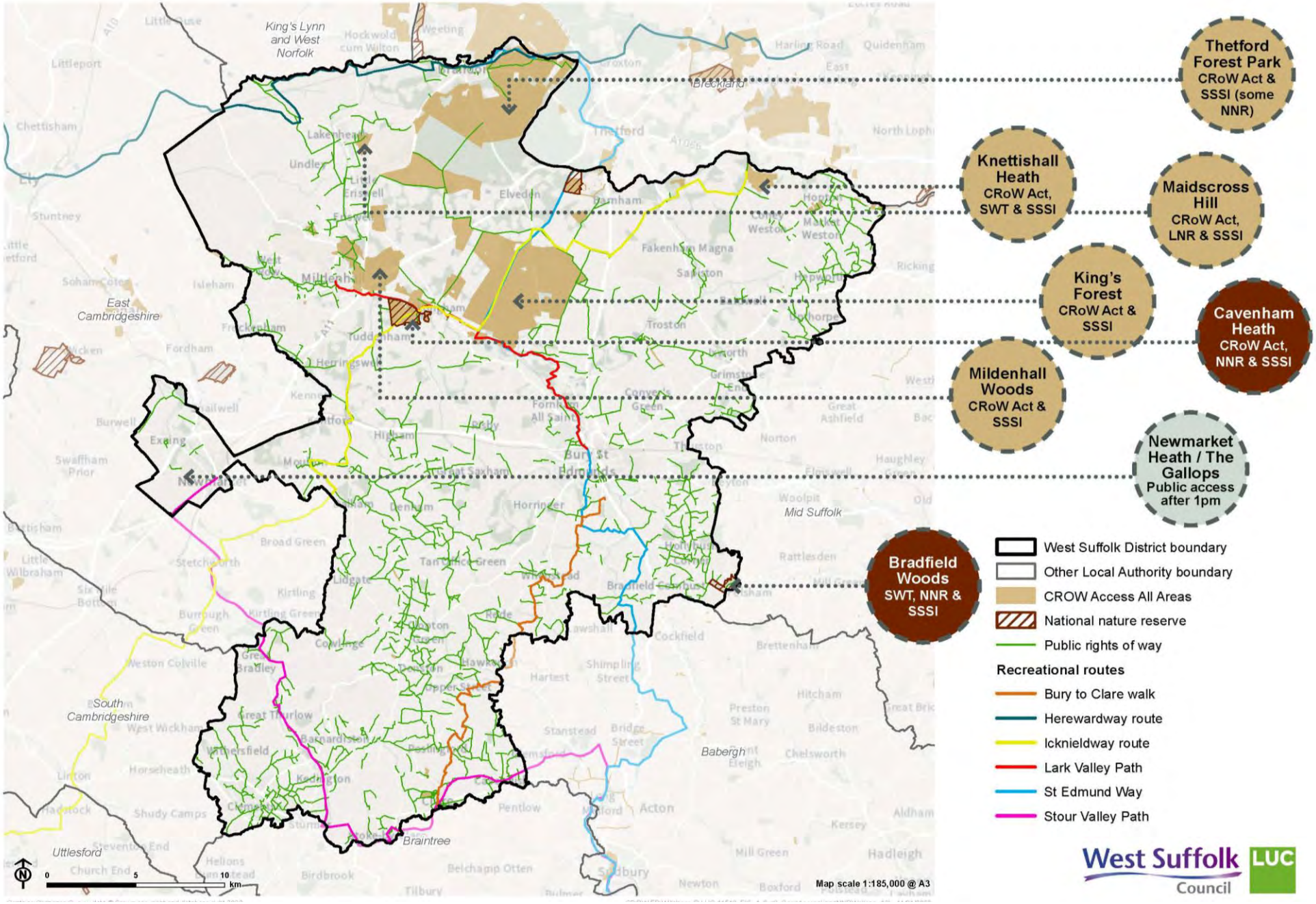
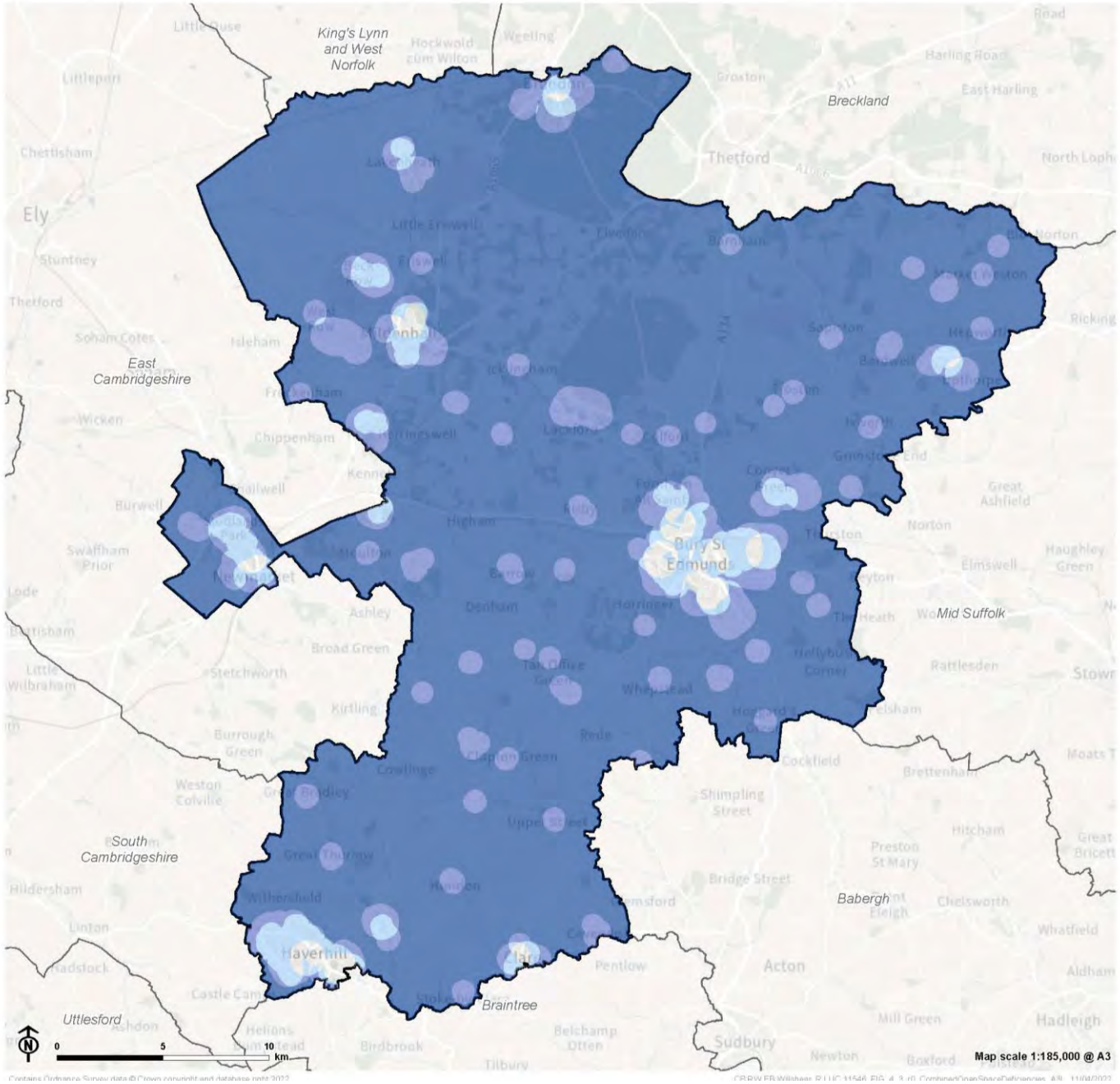


Figure 4.3: Combined open space deficiency



West Suffolk District boundary

Other Local Authority boundary

Combined Deficiency

Deficient in access to 1 level of the hierarchy

Deficient in access to 2 levels of the hierarchy

Deficient in access to 3 levels of the hierarchy

Note: Combined deficiency is calculated using the Fields in Trust accessibility catchments for parks and gardens, amenity greenspace, and natural and semi-natural greenspace. 'Deficiency in access to 3 levels of the hierarchy' means falling outside the recommended walking distance for all three of these open space typologies.

Stakeholder consultation

Valuable features

- West Stow Anglo Saxon Village and Country Park;
- Brandon Country Park;
- Newmarket Several and George Lampton Playing Fields;
- Nowton Park, Bury St Edmunds;
- Abbey Gardens;
- Ickworth House;
- High Lodge, Thetford; and
- Areas of open access.

Existing projects

- SANG at Mildenhall;
- New country parks/open space as part of development;
- SANG at North Lakenheath;
- Review of grounds maintenance standards to ensure quality of open space; and
- St Genevieve Lakes.

Issues, pressures and threats

- Burial site provision;
- Recreational pressure on designated sites within East Cambridgeshire (development in Newmarket could impact);

- Recreational pressure to Red Lodge Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) from development within Red Lodge;
- Recreational pressure on the Special Protection Area (SPA) and from potential new development; and
- Increased footfall on sites, will need to increase spending to maintain quality of sites.

Key drivers

Quantity and access to open space

4.9 The West Suffolk Council Open Space Assessment Report (December 2021) identifies quantity deficiencies in all five analysis areas of West Suffolk for some form of open space (see Table 4.4, Table 4.5 and Table 4.6), but no analysis area (or ward) is highlighted as having shortfalls across all open space types. However, Newmarket stands out as being deficient across several types. Mildenhall is also deficient and although there is proximity to large Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) Act sites (see Figure 4.2), these serve only to increase the surplus of provision of natural and semi-natural greenspace rather than other typologies. Furthermore, many of these large sites are important for nature conservation and therefore are at risk of increased recreation pressures.

Table 4.4: Recommended quantity standards for each open space type (hectares per 1000 people)

Open space type	Recommended quantity standard
Parks and gardens	1.11 hectares
Natural and semi-natural	1.28 hectares
Amenity greenspace	1.43 hectares

Open space type	Recommended quantity standard
Allotments	0.24 hectares

Table 4.5: Current provision in each analysis area (hectares)

Analysis Area	Parks and Gardens	Natural and Semi-natural	Amenity greenspace	Allotments
Brandon	1.20 hectares	0.75 hectares	1.47 hectares	0.15 hectares
Bury St Edmunds	2.16 hectares	1.38 hectares	1.28 hectares	0.21 hectares
Haverhill	0.54 hectares	1.00 hectares	2.18 hectares	0.28 hectares
Mildenhall	0.06 hectares	2.12 hectares	0.85 hectares	0.10 hectares
Newmarket	0.03 hectares	0.36 hectares	1.36 hectares	0.54 hectares

Table 4.6: Current analysis area provision against recommended quantity standards (hectares)

Analysis Area	Parks and Gardens	Natural and Semi-natural	Amenity greenspace	Allotments
Brandon	+ 0.09 hectares	0.53 hectares	+0.04 hectares	0.09 hectares
Bury St Edmunds	+ 1.05 hectares	+ 0.10 hectares	0.14 hectares	0.03 hectares
Haverhill	0.44 hectares	0.28 hectares	+0.76 hectares	+ 0.04 hectares
Mildenhall	1.05 hectares	+ 0.84 hectares	0.57 hectares	0.14 hectares

Analysis Area	Parks and Gardens	Natural and Semi-natural	Amenity greenspace	Allotments
Newmarket	1.08 hectares	0.92 hectares	0.06 hectares	+ 0.30 hectares

4.10 Provision of parks and gardens is concentrated within Bury St Edmunds and Brandon by large parks such as Nowton Park, West Stow Country Park, Hardwick Heath and Brandon Country Park.

4.11 Haverhill is the only analysis area deficient in play provision. Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket and Mildenhall are level and Brandon has sufficient provision. No alternative open spaces serve the same function as equipped play spaces. However, an option could be to explore and encourage opportunities to expand provision at existing sites nearest to where there are gaps in provision.

4.12 There are quantity deficiencies of allotments in Brandon, Bury St Edmunds and Mildenhall. Provision of allotments should be led by need/demand using information such as waiting lists. Likewise, provision of burial space (a known issue in West Suffolk) should be led by demand. Plans to increase long-term burial capacity are being developed by the Council. It is noted that the proposed burial site at Brandon has been considered unfit for purpose as the water table is too high.

4.13 Combined deficiency in access to open space for parks and gardens, amenity greenspace and natural and semi-natural greenspace is shown in Figure 4.3, using Fields in Trust accessibility standards.

4.14 As discussed in Chapter 3, there is a reliance on the car to access many open spaces due to a lack of active travel infrastructure, particularly for those living in the district's rural areas. Improving connectivity of the open space network for people and wildlife is vital, through the provision of green corridors, active travel routes and new infrastructure which supports development.

4.15 Three key recommendations are set out in the Open Space Assessment Report (2021) to improve the quantity and accessibility of open space provision in West Suffolk, as follows:

1. Recommended provision standards should be used to help determine priorities for open space provision, using information on quantity and accessibility in conjunction. New development should aim to deliver all types of open space provision, but where this is not possible analysis of shortfalls in open space quantity standards for each typology should be analysed to enable prioritisation.

2. There are numerous sites that help, or have the potential to help, serve areas identified as having gaps in catchment mapping. These should be prioritised as opportunities for enhancement to ensure they provide multiple social and value benefits. For example, there are many amenity greenspaces within the district which help to serve gaps in accessibility catchments to parks and natural and semi-natural greenspace catchments.

3. Recognise areas with sufficient provision in open space and how they may be able to meet other areas of need. For instance, Haverhill and Brandon have a potential quantity sufficiency in amenity greenspace but a potential shortfall in natural and semi-natural greenspace. Consequently, the function of some amenity greenspace could look to be strengthened to act as natural and semi-natural greenspace provision, whilst considering other factors/issues such as heritage or visual amenity value.

4.16 It is also important to account for population growth. Population increase will result in the requirement for greater open space provision. In many areas the amounts required in 2040 will be greater than the current provision levels. In areas which fall below open space accessibility/quantity standards and are expected to experience further pressure due to increased demand, the following are key principles:

- Increase capacity/usage in order to meet increases in demand;
- Enhance quality in order to meet increases in demand; and

- Secure commuted sums for ongoing maintenance/repairs to mitigate impact of new demand.

Quality and value of open space

4.17 Six of West Suffolk's parks have attained Green Flag status, an internationally recognised standard for quality. These are:

- Abbey Gardens in Bury St Edmunds;
- Aspal Close Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Beck Row;
- Brandon Country Park;
- East Town Park, Haverhill;
- Nowton Park; and
- West Stow Country Park.

4.18 Enhancements to the quality of open spaces is identified as one of the primary ways to address accessibility deficiencies (as discussed above). Evaluation of open space quality should be undertaken as part of open space assessment to identify specific sites which have scope for improvement.

4.19 Online stakeholder consultation undertaken as part of this study suggested that the quality of natural and semi-natural greenspace is generally good across the district. However, improvements to pockets of green space which are overgrown would ensure they deliver more for people and wildlife, for example Studlands in Newmarket.

Recreational pressure

4.20 Development opportunities are likely to come forward in Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill, Mildenhall and Newmarket, alongside some of the district's key and local service centres, such as Stanton, Red Lodge and Lakenheath. Threshold

distances have been determined in which future development has the potential to cause in-combination recreational effects on sensitive ecological landscapes, including 7.5 kilometres for the Breckland SPA/SSSI and 5 kilometres for Devil's Dyke SAC/SSSI (see Figure 5.5, Chapter 5) **[See reference** 18**]**. Therefore, any development which falls within these buffers will likely have an impact on these sites and their habitats due to increasing recreational pressure. Other sites which have been identified as being sensitive to recreational pressures include Red Lodge SSSI, Maidscross Hill SSSI and Aspal Close LNR **[See reference** 19**]**. This is discussed further in Chapter 5 – Nature Recovery.

4.21 Increasing footfall on sites will require a strategic approach to management, including the financial implications for Council owned and managed sites.

Health and ethnicity

4.22 Open spaces are vital for our health and wellbeing. The Outdoor Recreation Valuation Tool (ORVal) **[See reference** 20**]** is a web application developed by the LEEP Institute and Defra to provide an estimate for the 'welfare value' provided by publicly accessible open space for each local authority in England. Welfare value is based on the monetary equivalent of how much people's wellbeing would fall if they could not access open spaces. It is also based on the estimated number of visits to green spaces within the district per annum (based on modelling of recreational demand not actual visitor counts). The ORVal model considers the features present within a green space, as well as the availability of alternative open space within the area, alongside the characteristics of the population provides an estimate of the welfare value of open spaces in England **[See reference** 21**]**. In West Suffolk, these are shown separately for the former Forest Heath and former St Edmundsbury council areas as follows:

- St Edmundsbury:
  - Welfare values £15,640,108 (Per Year); and

  - Estimated visits 5,197,662 (Per Year). Approx. 44% of these are taken by car.
- Forest Heath:
  - Welfare values £9,488,416 (Per Year); and
  - Estimated visits 2,941,498 (Per Year). Approx. 48% of these are taken by car.

4.23 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Health data and % ethnicity minority are important data sets to overlay with deficiency in access to open space, to identify if there are trends in inequalities that may be exacerbated as the population grows and GI interventions are delivered. The importance of this reflects research findings which indicate two concerning trends England-wide:

- There is inequality in access to high quality green space across England, with disadvantaged communities having significantly less access. Also, Public Health England highlight that disadvantaged groups appear to gain larger health benefit and have reduced socioeconomic-related inequalities in health when living in greener communities **[See reference** 22**]**.
- Typically, neighbourhoods with higher proportions of ethnic minority groups experience less local green space and it is generally of a poorer quality.

4.24 These trends do not appear prominent in West Suffolk at present due to the relatively equal distribution of open space within towns and the lack of evidence available to assess open space ‘quality’. However, interventions to enhance the GI network should consider both health deprivation and ethnicity to maximise the benefits derived and ensure inclusive community engagement to avoid the risk that some communities may feel cut off or disassociated with their local open spaces.

Ownership and management

4.25 The Council own and manage many open spaces. Other key stakeholders have an active role in management of natural and semi-natural green spaces in West Suffolk, including RSPB (Lakenheath), The National Trust (Ickworth), Suffolk Wildlife Trust (Lackford Lakes, Bradfield Woods, Mickle Mere, Knettishall Heath) and Forestry England (Thetford Forest Park).

The Climate Emergency

Open spaces provide space not only for recreation but also for interventions to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Acting as vital green spaces in built-up areas, they are often suitable sites for tree planting, urban greening (see Chapter 7) and flood risk mitigation. However, it is important to strike the right balance between delivering ecosystem services and retaining the primary function of open spaces which is to provide recreation.

Health and wellbeing

Open spaces are important for the health and wellbeing of residents and visitors, providing space for exercising, play, socialising and interaction with nature. It is estimated that parks and green spaces save the NHS roughly £111 million a year in health care costs **[See reference** 23**]**. The value of open space for mental health has been highlighted throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, as has the need for these spaces to be easily accessible and inclusive for all ages, abilities and ethnicities, and to be of high quality.

Existing projects

Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs)

4.26 Consultation identified the SANGs for Breckland SPA including:

- Mildenhall - concept stage; and
- North Lakenheath - concept plan and outline permission.

Open space/country parks being delivered as part of developments

4.27 The following projects were identified through consultation and feedback from West Suffolk:

- Haverhill - new linear country park, woodland and parks currently under construction as part of the Great Wilsey Park development to the north east. A country park extension to East Town Park has outline planning permission and will be delivered in a later phase. Additionally, strategic open space and parks have outline permission in the north west.
- North east of Bury St Edmunds - New country park/large green space (approx. 15ha) as part of development with outline permission.
- North west of Bury St Edmunds - New large scale green space/country park delivered at Marham Park (16ha of parkland) **[See reference** 24**]**.
- South east of Bury St Edmunds - Strategic open space adjacent to the River Lark has outline permission as part of development.
- Red Lodge – Extension to the existing open space (approx. 2ha) is currently under construction.

St Genevieve Lakes, Bury St Edmunds

4.28 Previously a sand and gravel quarry until 2015, the site has since been landscaped into arable farmland, rich grassland and open water lakes (24 acres of carp fishing lakes) to create an area fit for recreational, leisure and tourism facilities. As identified through consultation.

Council – Grounds maintenance standards review

4.29 Ongoing review within the Council of grounds maintenance standards and regimes to ensure high quality of open space. As identified through consultation.

The Hive – West Suffolk Community Interest Company

4.30 Founded in 2019, the Hive is a collaborative organisation which aims to connect the community and the environment, working from their community garden site in Bradfield St George and also within Bury St Edmunds town centre **[See reference** 25**]**. As identified through the desk review.

River Lark Corridor Strategy Local Green Space proposals – River Lark Catchment Partnership

4.31 The River Lark Catchment Partnership (RLCP) has proposed a series of suggested designated Local Green Space sites along the River Lark corridor

throughout West Suffolk to be included within the new Local Plan. The designation of these Local Green Spaces would see them afforded the same protection from development as if they were Green belt, recognising their importance to local people. As identified through consultation.

Previously identified opportunities

Opportunities identified within the St Edmundsbury Green Infrastructure Strategy

Black Bourn and Little Ouse Headwaters/Brecks

Project A.3: 'The Grundle' Nature Reserve – enhancing access to semi-natural greenspace in Stanton.

- The Grundle part of Stanton Woodland Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), is already served by Public Right of Ways (PRoW).

Project A.4: New nature reserve at farmland adjacent to Market Weston Fen.

- Currently being pursued by Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

Brecks

Project B.1: Improved and sustainable visitor management – in Kings Forest and West Stow Country Park.

- There have been some improvements to this destination which continues to be popular - there is potential for future improvements.

Bury St Edmunds

Project D.1: Creation of new community parkland in northern Bury St Edmunds.

- 15ha of parkland created at Marham Park.

Project D.7: Wetland Green Corridor – along the Lark to the south-east of Bury St Edmunds, linking to Nowton Country Park.

- Outline permission granted.

Project D.10: County park for strategic scale development to the north-east of Bury St Edmunds.

- Outline permission pending.

Haverhill

Project E.1: Improve and expand the Meldham Washlands site for low key access to nature.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Project E.5: Haverhill Community Parkland – to the north of the town.

- Not aware of any completed projects; however significant open space and woodland access is being delivered as part of development at Great Wilsey.

Historic parkland and woodlands

Project F.1: Recreational access to Bradfield Woods.

- Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve open to the public for recreation.

Ancient farmland

Project G.2: Restoration of historic and former greens associated with smaller villages. Opportunities for allotments/community gardens.

- There are new allotment and community orchard sites being delivered within the Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill areas. A community orchard has been delivered at the Howard Estate in Bury St Edmunds (Greener Growth). There is also a community woodland in Honnington run by the Blackbourne Tree Group - remains an aspiration

Opportunities identified within the Forest Heath Natural Greenspace Study

Brandon Special Protection Area

4.32 Provision of alternative greenspaces (SANGs) within 7.5 kilometres. Important factors to consider in the design are travel distances, site facilities and experience/feel (must be at least equally, if not more attractive than the SPA).

- See below (Mildenhall and Lakenheath) – potential for further sites within buffer.

Mildenhall

4.33 A large SANG (10ha+) to the west of Mildenhall.

- Included in the West of Mildenhall Masterplan to be completed prior to any development.

Lakenheath

4.34 New natural green space.

- 4.7ha of open space secured to the north east linking to the Cut-off Channel.

Red Lodge

4.35 Extension of the existing green space provision.

- Natural greenspace extension to existing open space and allotments secured and under construction.

Beck Row

4.36 Location for new football ground to restore heathland at Aspal Close.

- No progress.

Kentford

4.37 Community greenspace to the rear of the Kentford PH.

- Delivered.

Exning

4.38 Extend the existing new open space provision north-east of the settlement.

- New public open space linked to existing footpath adjacent to existing tree belts secured.

West Row

4.39 Accessible natural green space and walking routes - focus on the existing Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network and the River Lark corridor.

- New bridleway between West Row and Mildenhall.

Opportunities identified within the West Suffolk Climate Change Task Force: Environment and Biodiversity Emergency in West Suffolk

Action 2.1: Enhance Green Flag sites in environment management, biodiversity, landscape and heritage.

- Management plans are reviewed on an annual basis and enhancements are identified during those reviews.

Action 2.4: Provide improved information about the natural environment in parks and open spaces.

- The work undertaken to map all the sites has been completed. Furthermore, parks web pages are being updated and onsite interpretation is being improved at certain sites.

Action 2.7: Provide a range of public events and awareness campaigns at parks with a Ranger presence.

- An online parks event application process has been created to capture all the events that are taking place. The ‘What’s On West Suffolk’ web page is being utilised to market and promote events and activities in parks **[See reference** 26**]**.

Action 2.8: Support and utilise partners to improve green spaces e.g. Friends of groups.

- Friend groups or volunteering opportunities now exist in all the main parks, volunteer hours are recorded.

Stakeholder engagement

Key outputs relevant to this theme from the 'opportunities' task in the workshop

- New open spaces (including Country Parks) delivered through development; and
- Increase provision around Newmarket.

Conclusions and next steps

Summary of key issues

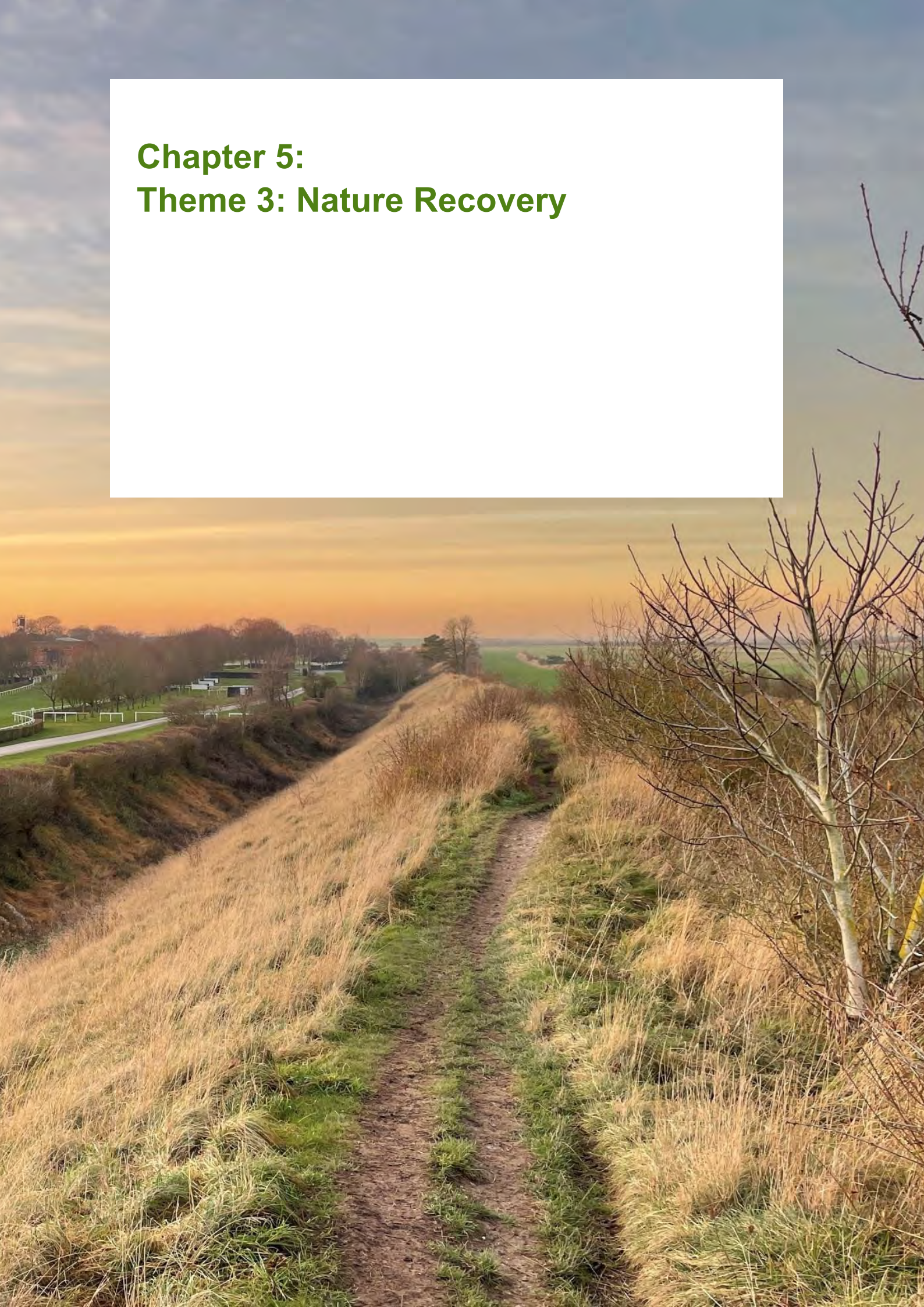
- All analysis areas (Brandon, Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill, Mildenhall, Newmarket) are deficient in at least one type of open space;
- Notable quantity deficiencies around Newmarket for parks and gardens, natural and semi-natural and amenity greenspace which will be exacerbated by development;
- Poor burial space provision; and
- Many natural and semi-natural greenspaces (some also Countryside Rights of Way (CRoW) Act) have ecological designations. Increasing recreational pressure threatens these sensitive sites.

Key opportunities

- Address deficiencies in open space, particularly around Newmarket;

- Developers should deliver new open space through development, with the typology informed by deficiencies in each area (referencing the Open Space Assessment Report 2021). Ensure open space is multi-functional and delivers maximum benefits for people, wildlife and the climate;
- Explore and encourage opportunities to expand play provision at existing sites nearest to where there are gaps in provision;
- Prioritise enhancement of open spaces (namely amenity greenspaces) which serve to fill gaps in accessibility and quantity to ensure they provide multiple social and value benefits;
- Improve the quality and value of open spaces through improved management (reviewing maintenance regimes, promoting partnership working, supporting Friends of groups) and enhancing existing functions where possible (e.g. play facilities);
- Raise public awareness of the multi-functional benefits of open spaces through interpretation, events and campaigns;
- Mitigate increasing recreational pressure on sensitive ecological sites by delivering SANGs and educating visitors on the natural value of these sites; and
- Take a demand-led approach to cemetery and allotment provision.

Chapter 5:
Theme 3: Nature Recovery



Chapter 5

Theme 3: Nature Recovery

West Suffolk contains many protected habitats and species. A resilient and coherent nature network will address the biodiversity crisis and be balanced with growing recreational demand.

Key objective(s)

- Natural assets are protected, connected and enhanced to create a resilient and coherent nature network that supports thriving biodiversity and access for people.

Key assets

Designated sites

5.1 Designated sites have a vital role to play as the focal points of landscape-scale conservation from which species can move into, and across, the wider landscape. Figure 5.1 shows that the northern half of the district its far more heavily designated in comparison to the south.

5.2 The Brecks National Character Area (NCA) is home to the Breckland SPA, four SACs, four NNRs and numerous SSSIs. The Breckland Biodiversity Audit found at least 12,845 species have been recorded in the area. 72 of these species have their UK distribution restricted to, or have a primary stronghold in, the Brecks.

Breckland SAC and SPA

5.3 The Breckland SAC is designated features found in West Suffolk are dry acidic heath, calcareous grassland and inland sand dunes. The Breckland SPA is designated primarily for stone curlew, nightjar and woodlark. These species have adapted to live in arable land and coniferous forest, which cover extensive areas of the SPA. A significant proportion of the Stone Curlew population in Breckland are known to nest outside the SPA.

Rex Graham Reserve SPA and SSSI

5.4 Rex Graham Reserve SAC and SSSI is comprised of a small disused chalk pit, together with surrounding grassland and woodland, which support 95% of the total UK military orchids population.

Waveney and Little Ouse Valley Fens SAC and SSSIs (including Weston Fens SSSI and Blo'Norton and Thelnetham Fens SSSI)

5.5 These designations all sit along the Little Ouse Valley and are characterised by the fen communities which are preserved by the high water table, creating a mosaic of freshwater, marshes, heath, grassland and woodland. Important habitats within the SAC site includes calcareous fens and molinia meadows.

National Nature Reserves

5.6 There are three designated NNRs in the district:

- Cavenham Heath;
- Bradfield Woods; and

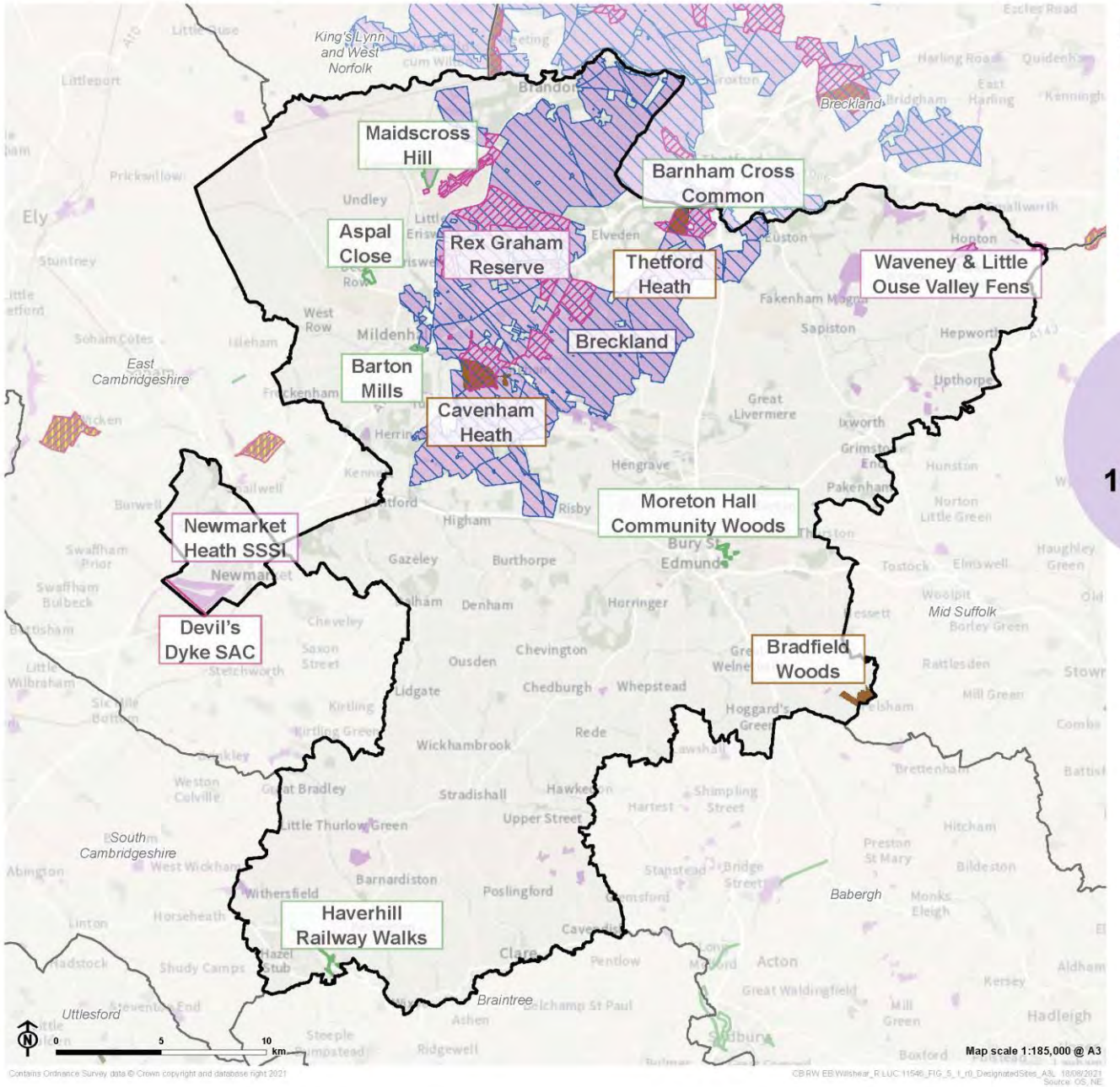
- Thetford Heath.

5.7 Chippenham Fen NNR (and Ramsar) and Redgrave and Lopham Fen NNR lie just beyond the district boundary.

Local Nature Reserves

5.8 Local Nature Reserves provide some of the most accessible designated sites within West Suffolk and are therefore an important asset in terms of access to nature. Some of West Suffolk's Local Nature Reserves include Maidscross Hill, Aspal Close, Barton Mills, Haverhill Railway Walks and Moreton Hall Community Woods. Barnham Cross Common also sits on the border of the district in Thetford.

Figure 5.1: Designated sites



Priority and notable habitats

5.9 Priority Habitats, alongside the more 'common and widespread' habitats of the district, are an important component of the ecological network to support the thriving biodiversity envisaged in the 25 Year Environment Plan. However, many of these habitats are very small and fragmented, particularly deciduous woodland, traditional orchards and lowland fens. Figure 5.2 and Figure 5.3 show the spread of priority and notable habitats across West Suffolk.

Farmlands

5.10 The most common land-use type in West Suffolk is arable farmland, which can be a key habitat for biodiversity. West Suffolk is home to large portions of 'very good' (Grade 2) quality agricultural land, which is explored further in Chapter 8 and Figure 8.4. 60% of the UK's stone curlew population establish nests on open ground provided by arable cultivation.

> Farmers play a crucial role in Suffolk by shaping large areas of our countryside, supporting the distinctive sense of place and other ecosystem services. For example, the fate of farmland birds in the county is almost entirely in the hands of our farmers and agriculture, and forestry can also have a significant influence on water quality within rivers and estuaries – Suffolk's Nature Strategy **[See reference** 27**]**

Geology and soils

5.11 There are several County Geological Sites (CGSs) including at Knettishall Heath, Aspal Close (Beck Row), Lakenheath Church and the largest site (186 ha) at Cavenham Heath. The highly variable soils across West Suffolk generally consist of a very sandy free-draining mix of chalk, sand, silt, clay and flints,

which show marked pH variation within short distances. This has resulted in the mosaics of heather-dominated heathland, acidic grassland and calcareous grassland that make the area special. The climate of the Brecks experiences relatively hot summers, cold winters and low rainfall. The unique combination of underlying geology, low-fertility soils, soil disturbance, a dry, frost-prone climate and grazing by sheep and rabbits has strongly influenced the natural and cultural evolution of the landscape. The chalk bedrock also gives rise to West Suffolk's chalk rivers (see Chapter 6 for more information).

Priority Habitats

5.12 While Priority Habitats represent over 20% of the key natural areas in Norfolk and Suffolk, Table 5.1 shows that more than three-quarters of this extent is in patches smaller than 10 hectares and for deciduous woodland the proportion is 91%. Only 5% of the Priority Habitat in Norfolk and Suffolk is in patches larger than the 40 hectare threshold advocated by Natural England.

Grassland and heathland

5.13 Lowland heath and dry acid grasslands are internationally important, scarce habitats, with 22.5% of England's dry acidic grassland being found within the Brecks. Areas of heathland within the forestry areas create more permanent areas suitable for breeding and feeding of all three of the Special Protection Area (SPA) feature species. Floodplain grazing marsh can also be found along river corridors.

Reedbeds

5.14 Areas or priority lowland fens and reedbed are found at the Lakenheath Fens RSPB reserve, south of the Little Ouse, and Cavenham Heath Nature Reserve. These attract hundreds of pairs of reed warblers and sedge warblers, as well as bearded tits and marsh harriers.

Table 5.1: Priority habitat coverage and degree of fragmentation

Priority habitat	Percentage coverage of West Suffolk	Percent of habitat patches less than 1 hectare	Area (hectare) within 1 kilometres of West Suffolk
Coastal floodplain and grazing marsh	2.35%	9.34%	3,364 hectares
Deciduous woodland	10.8%	23.24%	13,331 hectares
Good quality semi-improved grassland	0.66%	13.81%	791 hectares
Lowland calcareous grassland	1.52%	6.81%	2,472 hectares
Lowland dry acid grassland	1.75%	13.68%	1,950 hectares
Lowland fens	0.37%	16.97%	533 hectares
Lowland heathland	2.27%	6.41%	2,536 hectares
Lowland meadows	0.12%	8.06%	275 hectares
No main habitat but additional habitats present	1.43%	17.62%	1,886 hectares
Purple moor grass and rush pastures	0	0	26 hectares
Reedbeds	0.36%	13.64%	372 hectares
Traditional orchard	0.04%	89.51%	61 hectares

Notable habitats

Wetlands

5.15 The valley floodplains of the Little Ouse (with Black Bourn) and River Lark are predominantly pasture, although there are areas of wet meadow, fen, reedbed, alder/willow carr and wet woodland, which create a diverse, small scale mosaic of valuable wetland habitats within the linear river valley corridors. Areas or priority lowland fens and reedbed are found at the Lakenheath Fens RSPB reserve, south of the Little Ouse. From 1995 the RSPB converted an area of arable farmland into a large wetland, that now attract hundreds of pairs of reed warblers and sedge warblers, as well as bearded tits and marsh harriers.

5.16 A mosaic of wetland habitats occurs along the natural river channels and extends up the minor tributaries. Lakenheath Fen lies within the Fens Biosphere Reserve and is part of a network of other fenland nature reserves. These include Wicken Fen, Chippenham Fen, Woodwalton Fen and the washlands of the rivers Great Ouse and Nene. Further information about river corridors and their supporting habitat is given in Chapter 6. Nature-rich field boundaries and greater and enhanced woodland areas can create stronger corridors, which connect and link existing clusters of ancient woodland. Heathland restoration and extension of existing/former heath can create a mosaic of woodland heath and arable land on the plateau land between the valleys.

Hedgerows

5.17 The Suffolk Hedgerow Survey (1998-2012) found 52.7% of all landscape hedgerows surveyed in Suffolk are species rich, that is, with 8 and more different species of hardwood trees and bushes but that West Stow and Lakenheath had two of the lowest densities of hedges in the County.

Woodland and ancient woodland

5.18 Priority deciduous woodland, as shown on Figure 5.2, is found throughout the district but this is generally highly fragmented. Coverage is mostly concentrated around Bury St Edmunds and Mildenhall. Semi-natural and replanted ancient woodland, as shown on Figure 5.3, is also highly fragmented, with blocks largely focused in the south and the north-east of the district. Of particular note is the ancient woodland at Bradfield Woods Nature Reserve, alongside large blocks at Fakenham Wood, Trundley Wood and Rushbrooke Wood. However, most of these blocks are generally small in scale (less than 10ha) and exist as isolated pockets in an unconnected landscape. A lack of appropriate management is leading to further neglect with many trees being ash and therefore at risk of ash die back. Within the north and north-west of the district, woodland is primarily composed of coniferous plantations in large-scale blocks, including The King's Forest, Mildenhall Woods and Thetford Forest. Woodland here is much more connected through shelter belts and the distinctive Scots Pine field boundaries.

Strategic habitat mapping

5.19 Local Wildlife Sites and County Wildlife Sites play an important role in providing regulatory services and functionally linked land to support core areas of the nature network. County Wildlife Sites are particularly important in the south of the district where international and national designations are lacking compared to the north.

5.20 'Functionally linked habitats' are the areas beyond the boundary of a designated site which play an important role in maintaining the favourable conservation status of features and attributes on which a site was designated, e.g. by providing supporting habitats or regulating hydrological or nutrient cycles. Natural England have created a series of network mapping to guide the expansion and enhancement of habitats, therefore helping to deliver the aspirations of the 25 Year Environment Plan and a Nature Recovery Network. It

is hoped that this data will enable Local authorities to deliver Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

- Restorable Habitat: Areas of land where the primary habitat is present in a degraded or fragmented form and which are likely to be suitable for restoration.
- Network Enhancement Zone 1: Land connecting existing patches of primary and associated habitats which is likely to be suitable for creation of the primary habitat.
- Network Enhancement Zone 2: Land connecting existing patches of primary and associated habitats which is less likely to be suitable for creation of the primary habitat.
- Fragmentation Action Zone: Land within Enhancement Zone 1 that connects existing patches of primary and associated habitats which are currently highly fragmented.
- Network Expansion Zone: Land beyond the Network Enhancement Zones with potential for expanding, linking/joining networks across the landscape.

5.21 National network mapping (Figure 5.4) shows opportunities to expand and enhance the network. Notable locations are around Newmarket, Moulton, Ickworth Park, HMP Highpoint, Lakenheath, Little Ouse Valley, Black Bourne Valley and Culford Park.

Nature-based solutions to flooding

5.22 Working with Natural Processes (WWNP) is an Environment Agency project which has aimed to map the potential for reducing flooding and coastal erosion through restoring the natural functions of catchments, floodplains, rivers and coasts.

- WWNP riparian woodland potential: Locations where tree planting may be possible on smaller floodplains close to flow pathways, and effective to attenuate flooding.

- WWNP floodplain woodland potential: Locations where tree planting on the floodplain may be possible, and effective to attenuate flooding.
- WWNP floodplain reconnection potential: Locations where it may be possible to establish reconnection between a watercourse and its natural floodplain, especially during high flows.
- WWNP wider catchment woodland potential: Locations where there are slowly permeable soils, where scrub and tree planting may be most effective to increase infiltration and hydrological losses.

Urban biodiversity

5.23 Biodiversity centred urban greening in Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket, Brandon, Mildenhall and Haverhill can facilitate nature recovery by provide stepping stones amongst the largely rural matrix. Examples include making private gardens more wildlife friendly and leaving road verges uncut.

Stakeholder consultation

Valuable features

- The Brecks with associated functionally linked land;
- Lakenheath Fen Nature Reserve;
- Suffolk Wildlife Trust Reserves, including Lackford Lakes and Knettishall Heath;
- Newmarket and Devil's Dyke;
- Cavenham Heath;
- Great Crested Newt distinct level licensing ponds;
- County Wildlife Sites; and
- Tayfen, Holywater and Bury St Edmunds water meadows.

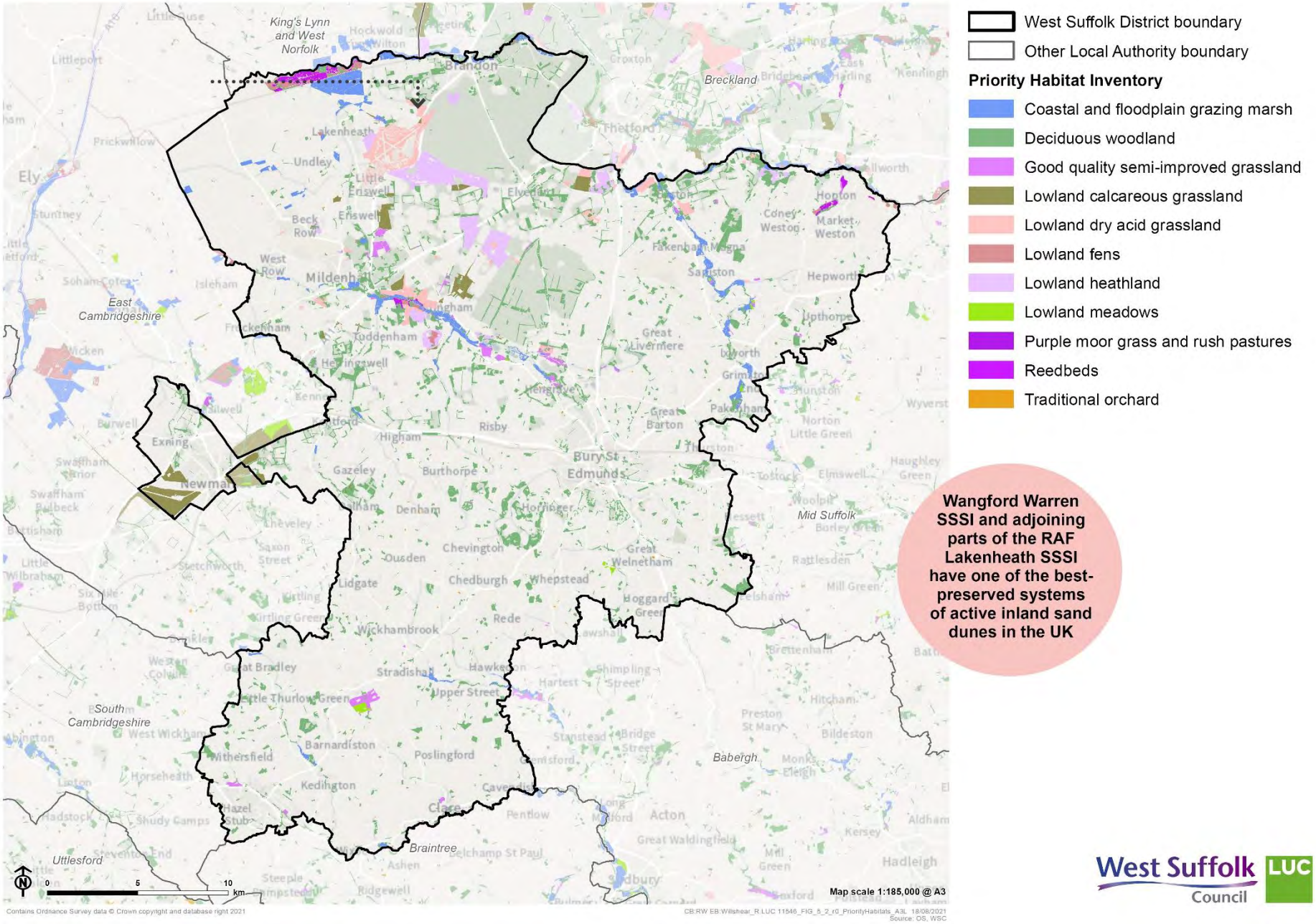
Existing projects

- SANG at Mildenhall;
- SANG at North Lakenheath;
- Wildflower planting at Abbey Gardens;
- Surrey County Council appointed a Green Recovery Project Manager;
- RSPB Turtle Dove recovery zones in north east;
- Woodland Trust Eastern Claylands project;
- Woodland Trust collaborating with the Suffolk Tree Warden Network and Suffolk County Council; and
- Re-wilding the Lark in the Park project.

Issues, pressures and threats

- Recreational pressure on designated sites within East Cambridgeshire, in particularly Devil's Dyke SSSI and SAC;
- Recreational pressure (particularly from development) on Breckland SPA, Red Lodge Heath SSSI, Maidscross Hill SSSI and LNR and Aspal Close LNR;
- Proposed changes to Habitats Regulations post Brexit may have impacts to Breckland SPA;
- Need to manage declining rabbit populations; and
- Invasive species, e.g. Signal Crayfish and Himalayan Balsam.

Figure 5.2: Priority Habitats



West Suffolk Council

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Figure 5.3: Notable habitats

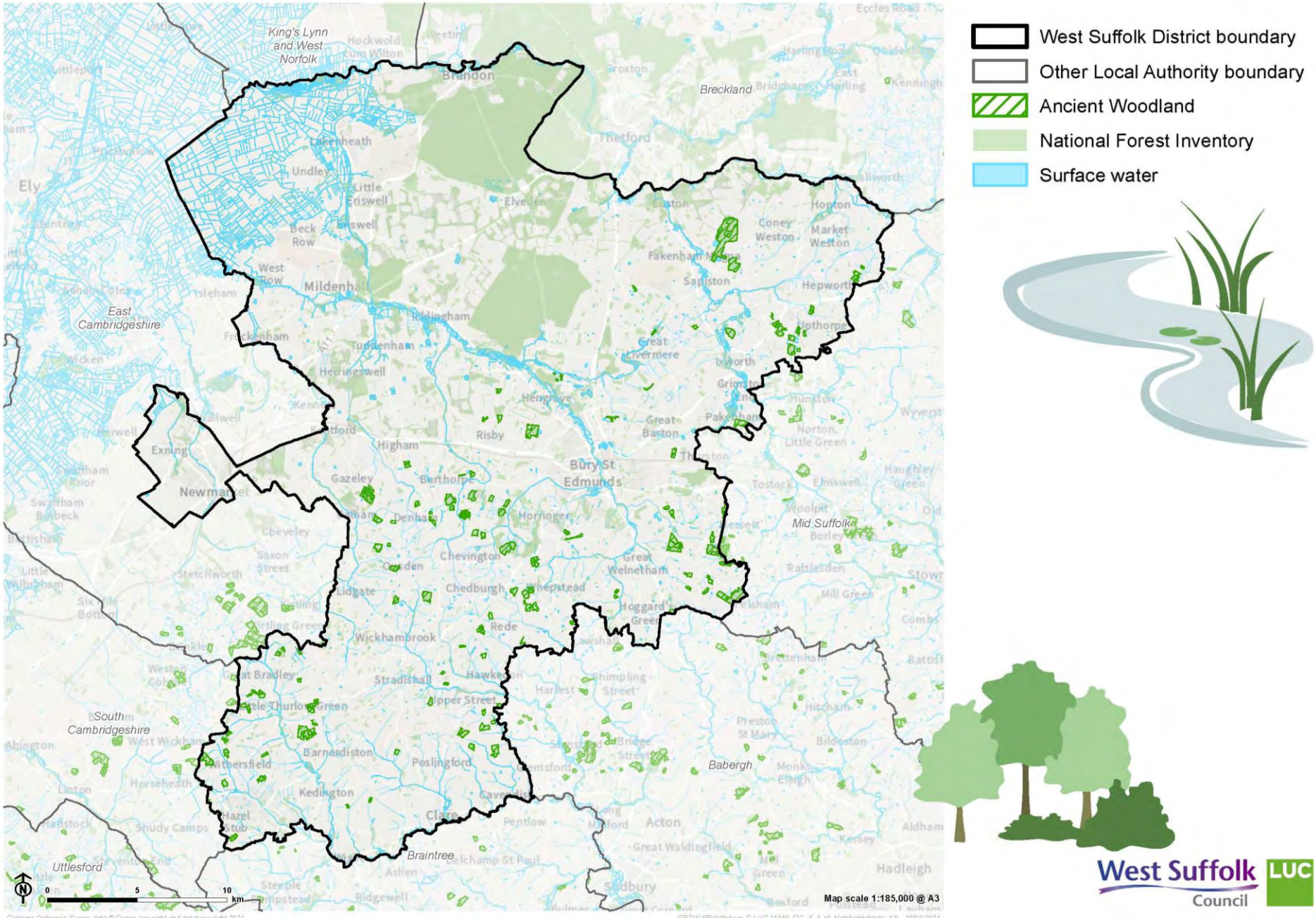


Figure 5.4: Strategic habitat mapping - national network mapping

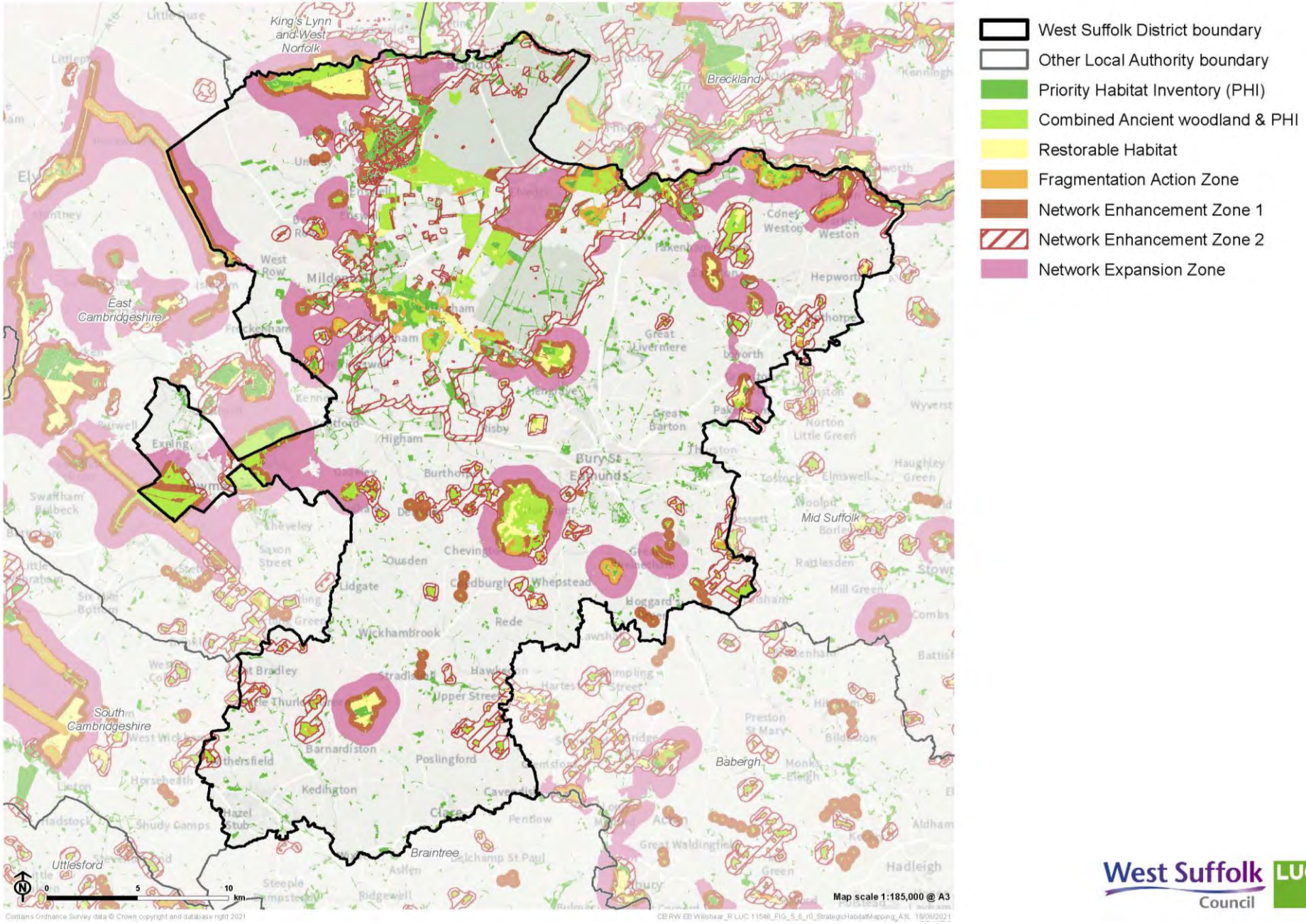
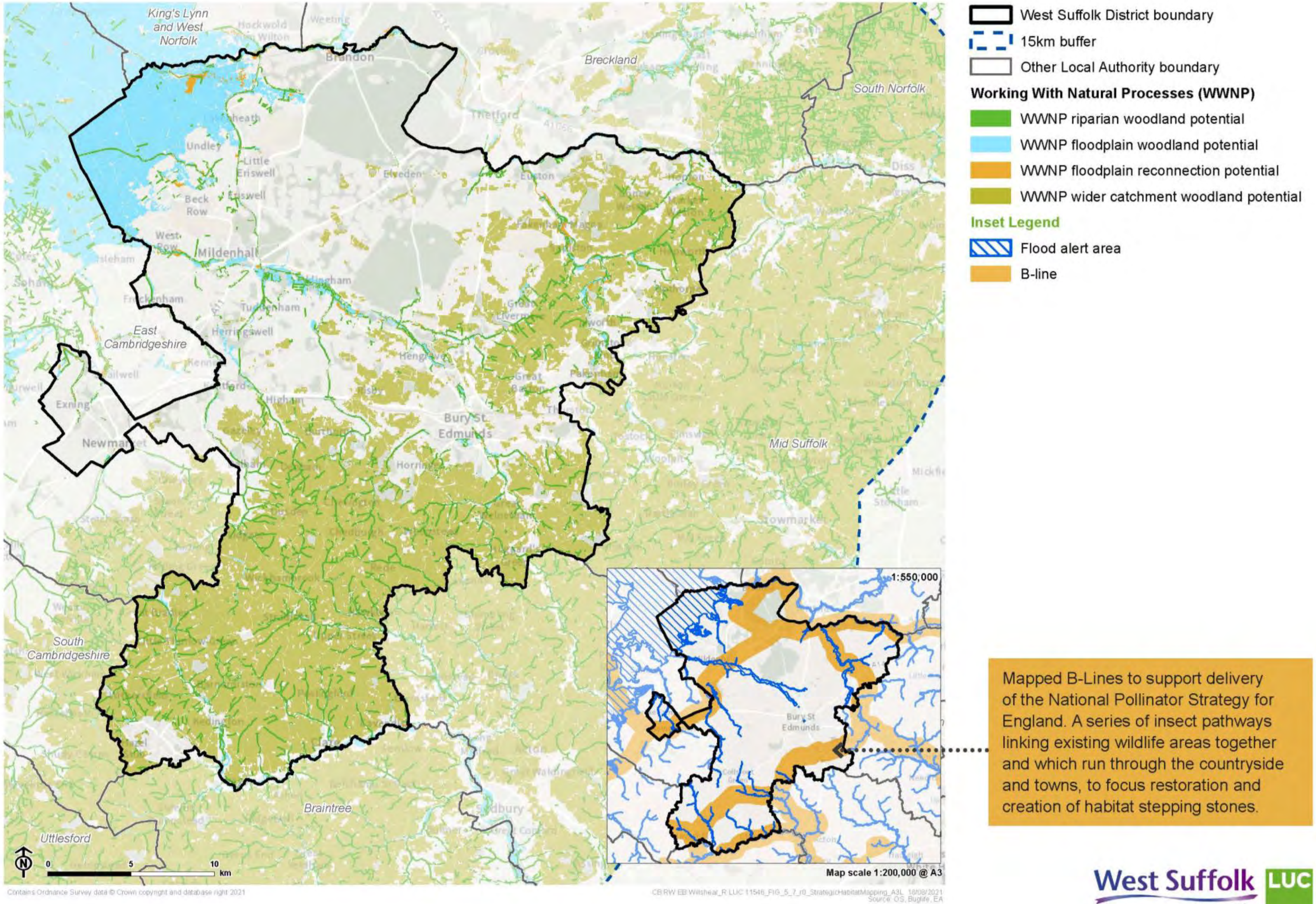


Figure 5.5: Strategic habitat mapping - nature based solutions to flooding



Key drivers

Condition of sites, recreation pressure and management

5.24 Of the 48 Sites of SSSIs in West Suffolk, around 20% of them have units in unfavourable declining condition. Two SSSIs have units which are part destroyed, including Weather and Horns Heath, Eriswell (due to the construction of the A11) and Bugg's Hole Fen, Thelnetham (due to inappropriate cutting/mowing and agriculture). Furthermore, two SSSIs have units which have been destroyed, including Berner's Heath, Icklingham (due to inappropriate cutting/mowing and agriculture) and Cavenham Heath, Icklingham (due to water management issues). However, many of these SSSI condition surveys are out of date, for example Bugg's Hole Fen which was assessed in 2011 and Cavenham Heath in 2013. Since then, issues may have been resolved and therefore up-to-date condition surveys are required. More information is also required to understand the condition of local wildlife sites and country wildlife sites.

5.25 Recreational pressure is another key driver for placing pressure on designated sites. For example, Lakenheath Warren SSSI, designated for lowland heath, is predominately in unfavourable condition as overall levels of rabbit grazing are insufficient, with sward height and litter cover both too high, and bare ground and early successional communities rare. Other SSSIs which are known to be of concern, primarily due to recreational pressure, includes Maidscross Hill, Red Lodge Heath and Devil's Dyke.

Severance

5.26 Road and rail schemes can fragment habitats, creating barriers to species movement. The A14 and parallel rail line from Newmarket through Bury St Edmunds bisects the district in half and cuts off the relatively nature-rich areas

of the north from the south. Major A-roads also run through the north of the district, with the A11 trunk road connecting Mildenhall and Thetford.

5.27 Mitigation is required by providing crossing points for a range of species such as deer, bats, birds, and dormice. Linear infrastructure can also be a wildlife home in their own right through the incorporation of design features such as scrub woodland, grassland, bat roosts and water features, and if managed appropriately, provide a resource for species such as pollinators.

Changes in land management and planning

5.28 About three-quarters of the unique Breckland grassland and heathland has been lost in the last two centuries, primarily to arable farming and forestry. Tension can exist between arable production and species recovery. A significant proportion of the Stone Curlew population in Breckland are known to nest outside the SPA; this is primarily on arable land. Woodlark also sometimes nest on arable field margins. Nightjar by contrast breed almost exclusively in afforested land but use open heaths and grasslands together with some arable land outside of the forest for feeding.

5.29 The farming industry is under pressure from the impact of climate change, with the largest concern being associated with the quality of soils. Many experts believe that some soils in the east of the UK could have as few as 100 harvests left unless action is taken to restore them. Soil degradation is a cost to the farm business with an increasing need to add nutrients to depleted soils and to improve soil structure. Wild Anglia, awarded Local Nature Partnership status by the government in 2012, aims to return 250,000ha of farmland to nature and restore the natural ecological conditions that are most important for maintaining a fully functioning, self-sustaining ecosystem.

5.30 Identified under the Environment Act 2021, Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) form the delivery mechanism for a national Nature Recovery Network. This framework for nature recovery is intended to allow ‘joined-up thinking’ in monitoring and reporting on biodiversity, and in the planning and

delivery of conservation actions. The LNRS will support delivery of biodiversity imperatives (for designated sites and protected species) and duties (under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act) of the council, which are cross-compatible with achieving wider environmental benefits as referenced in the Act. Incoming mandatory 10% BNG is a key mechanism to secure the Nature Recovery Network (NRN). The Environment Act will also require local authorities to produce a 'Biodiversity Report' every five years and places a new duty on local planning authorities to cooperate in the establishment and operation of Species Conservation and Protected Site Strategies.

Species pressure

5.31 High deer numbers (in particular muntjac and fallow) are a major problem in the area. Much of the woodland in Suffolk and Essex has traditionally been managed by coppicing but reinstating this management regime is increasingly difficult with constant browsing pressure from deer.

Site of Special Scientific Interest Impact Risk Zones and ecological buffers

Recreation and development pressure

5.32 Increased recreational use of the forest and heathland areas, new housing around the Brecks, and infrastructure developments, such as the dualling of the A11 which is now complete, continue to provide challenges.

5.33 The Site Improvement Plan for Breckland SPA states that designated populations of nightjar and woodlark could be threatened by future increases in recreational visitors. As a ground-nesting bird, designated populations of stone curlew are known to be susceptible to public access/disturbance **[See reference** 28**]**. The Forest Heath site allocation HRA **[See reference** 29**]** found

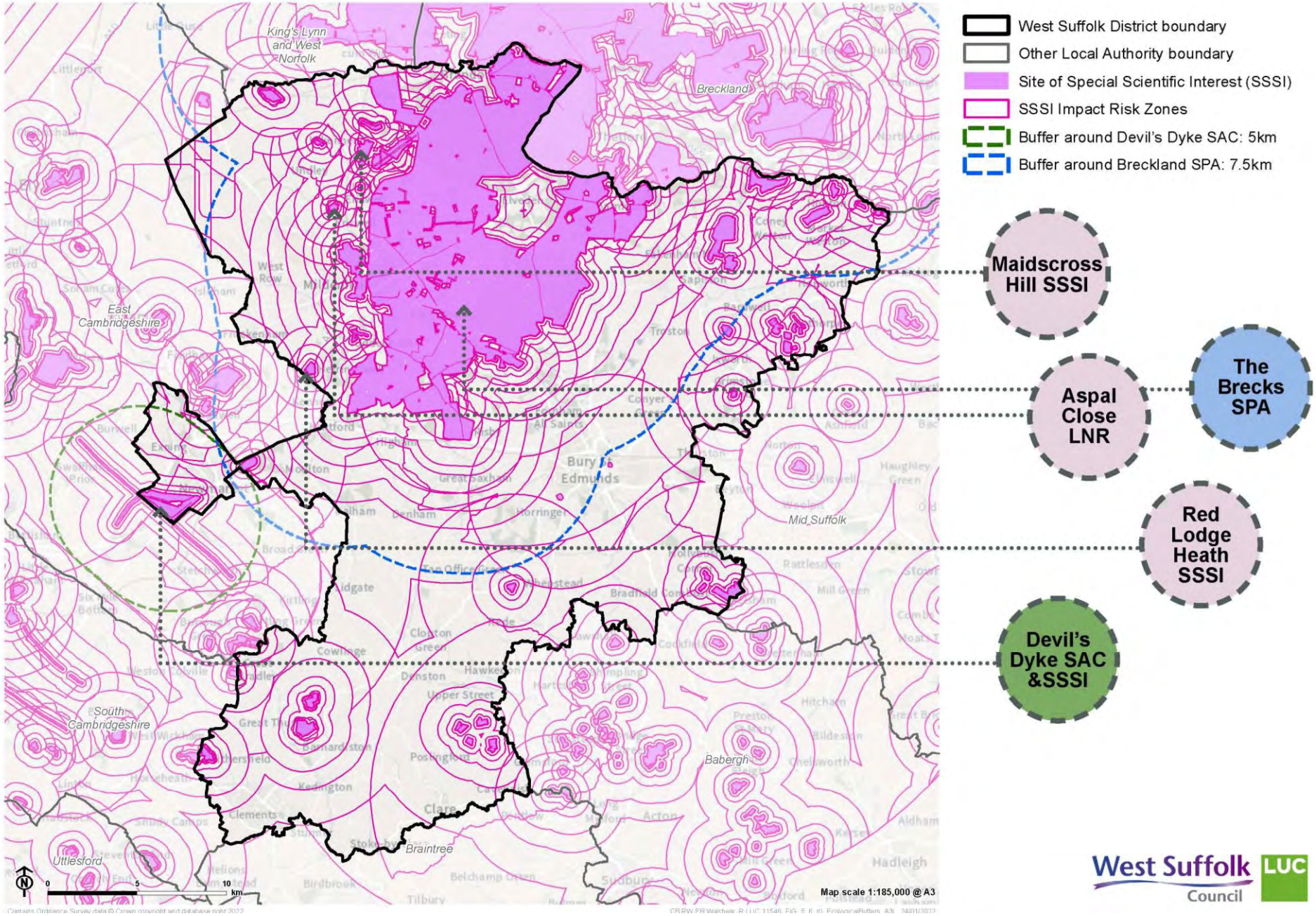
that adverse effects on integrity due to recreation pressure could occur for housing development within 7.5 kilometres of the boundary of non-farmland parts of Breckland SPA, as shown in Figure 5.6, or within 1.5 kilometres of the boundary of farmland parts of Breckland SPA or of stone curlew nesting attempt areas.

5.34 The Site Improvement Plan for Breckland SAC identified a potential future threat of increased recreation through eutrophication (dog fouling, unauthorised fires) and disturbance of soils. However, it does not list any SAC designated features as currently being under pressure from public access/disturbance.

5.35 Any further new development may add to recreational disturbance and visitor pressure within the Breckland SPA, SAC and SSSI network. The SSSI Impact Risk Zones define areas around each SSSI which reflect the particular sensitivities of the features for which it is notified and indicate the types of development proposal which could potentially have adverse impacts. Lakenheath, Brandon, Mildenhall, Newmarket and to a lesser extent Bury St Edmunds are all heavily constrained by the presence of multiple SSSIs.

5.36 The SSSI IRZ for Devils Dyke SSSI, also a SAC, notes the need for new housing developments to be assessed for recreational pressure and measures to mitigate adverse impacts provided, for example alternative open space. Recreational pressure is also known to occur in Red Lodge Heath SSSI and Maidscross Hill SSSI from planned development around Newmarket and Lakenheath **[See reference** 30**]**.

Figure 5.6: Site of Special Scientific Interest Impact Risk Zones and ecological buffers



The Climate Emergency

Species and habitats will need to adapt to climate change. Central to these will be the development of ecological networks across Suffolk and beyond, ensuring that wildlife is not fixed and restricted to a series of unconnected wildlife sites.

Contributing to a significant part of the district's identity, woodland and tree cover will be essential in providing opportunities for carbon sequestration to achieve the district's objective of delivering a 1% increase in forest area cover to achieve carbon storage **[See reference** 31**]**, as well as delivering air quality enhancement, natural flood alleviation and multiple other ecosystem services.

Health and wellbeing

As well as having a primary role of supporting thriving biodiversity, a nature network, should deliver benefits for people, including recreational opportunities to support health and wellbeing. Joint aims, for nature and people are likely to receive greater investment and protection by society and consequently provide more for nature in the long term.

Existing projects

Wicken Fen Vision – National Trust

5.37 The desk review identified the Wicken Fen Vision which is 4 kilometres beyond the north west district boundary, but applicable to the strategic nature recovery network. It is a 100-year plan to create a diverse landscape for wildlife and people. A historic landscape that will provide a space to breathe, think and explore for the modern world. It is intended to extend the nature reserve to an area of 53 kilometres squared by 2099 **[See reference** 32**]**.

Fens Biosphere

5.38 The desk review identified the Fens Biosphere to the north west of the district boundary, although part of the district is within the draft transition zone of the Biosphere as shown on the draft biosphere area map **[See reference** 33**]**.

Buglife B-Lines

5.39 The desk review identified the mapped B-Lines, used to support the delivery of the National Pollinator Strategy for England. A series of insect pathways linking existing wildlife areas together and which run through the countryside and towns, to focus restoration and creation of habitat stepping stones **[See reference** 34**]**. There are a number of B-Lines across the district as shown in Figure 5.5.

5.40 Projects identified on the website include:

- Risby Wildlife Friendly Village **[See reference** 35**]**;
- Linnet Water Meadows; and

- Pakenham habitat creation project (2016).

Rewilding the Lark in the Park, at West Stow Country Park, Bury St Edmunds Trout Club

5.41 Consultation identified this project to improve the habitat and environment of the River Lark as it passes through 1.6 kilometres of West Stow Country Park. It is also supported by Keep Britain Tidy, the Council and Suffolk Wildlife Trust as members of the River Lark Catchment Partnership **[See reference** 36**]**.

Eastern Claylands Project – Woodland Trust

5.42 The Woodland Trust manage 34 woodlands in the Eastern Claylands. They have initiated the project which works at a landscape scale with a variety of stakeholders including landowners to increase and connect woodland cover in the area and create resilience against tree diseases and pests as well as the long-term threat of development, agricultural intensification and climate change. As identified through the desk review and consultation.

Woodland Trust tree and hedgerow packs

5.43 In collaboration with the Suffolk Tree Warden Network (the tree council) and Suffolk County Council, this project is providing tree and hedgerow packs to tree wardens in Suffolk for planting within their parishes. As identified through consultation.

No Mans Meadow, Bury St Edmunds habitat creation and possible Local Nature Reserve designation

5.44 Consultation identified the long-term development of management plan similar to existing Ram Meadow management plan and maintenance agreement led by Bury Waters Meadows Group and the Council **[See reference** 37**]**.

Wildflower planting

5.45 At Abbey Gardens **[See reference** 38**]**. As identified at consultation.

Suffolk County Council (in partnership with Norfolk County Council) recruiting for Green Recovery Project Manager

5.46 To take forward natural capital evidence work and develop approach to nature recovery across the two counties. As identified at consultation.

RSPB Turtle Dove Recovery/Friendly zones

5.47 The desk review and consultation identified this project which covers the north east of the district.

Research led by Wakelyn's Organic Farm

5.48 Based outside West Suffolk, however leading research on agroforestry and regeneration projects which will be applicable to the district. As identified at consultation.

Non-native species project by Norfolk County Council

5.49 Consultation identified this major project on non-native invasive species. Although undertaken by Norfolk County Council, the project, its practices and aims is applicable to the wider Brecks and West Suffolk.

Roadside Nature Reserves

5.50 Under the Roadside Nature Reserves (RNR) Scheme grass verges are individually managed to benefit the scarce or unusual plants or fungi growing in the stretch protected from normal highways management. RNRs may also be designated as County Wildlife Sites and several are SSSI. As identified through the desk review and consultation.

Previously identified opportunities

Opportunities identified within the St Edmundsbury Green Infrastructure Strategy

Black Bourn and Little Ouse Headwaters/Brecks

Project A.3: 'The Grundle' Nature Reserve

- Part of Stanton Woods SSSI. There is existing access.

Project A.4: New nature reserve at farmland adjacent to Market Weston Fen.

- Being pursued by Suffolk Wildlife Trust who are doing a lot of work in the Black Bourn Valley, including wetland scrapes, farmland restoration and grazing marsh.

Brecks

Project B.2: Targeted habitat creation to reflect that found around the SAC/SPA.

- Two Brecks Heritage Lottery Fund projects which have seen successful habitat restoration - continues to be an aspiration, however issues with landowner attitudes and enthusiasm.

River Valleys

Project C.3: Extension of Lackford Lakes Nature Reserve and creation of new habitat.

- Lackford Lakes was extended to include an area known as Sayers Breck.

Project C.5: Habitat restoration of mosaic wetland along the River Lark and Linnet.

- National project of building and monitoring new wetlands along the River Lark, links with Environmental Land Management (E.L.M) schemes.

Project C.7: Creation of new floodplain grazing marsh, reedbeds and fens along the Little Ouse.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Project C.8: Creation of new broad-leaved semi natural woodland and wet woodland along Black Bourn Valley.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Project C.9: Creation of mosaic of lowland meadow, floodplain grazing marsh, reedbeds and wet woodland long the River Stour.

- Not aware of any progress to date.

Project C.11: Creation of new areas of semi-natural woodland and wet woodland along River Glem Valley.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Bury St Edmunds

Project D.6: Woodland planting along the A14.

- A significant buffer of 30m of woodland planting has been secured on the southern boundary of the Suffolk Business Park along the A14.

Haverhill

Project E.1: Improve and expand the Meldham Washlands site for low key access to nature.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Project E.4: Enhance woodland planting along the A1017 to provide linear habitats for movement.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Historic parkland and woodlands

Project F.1: Recreational access to Bradfield Woods.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Project F.2: New semi-natural woodland, wet woodland, lowland meadow and floodplain grazing marsh along the River Linnet and Lark south of Bury St Edmunds.

- Sections of Ram Meadow have been fenced and are being managed by grazing. There have been some nature conservation interventions by volunteers.

Ancient farmland

Project G.1: Restoration of hedges to facilitate movement of wildlife.

- There is the Breckland Farmer Network which focuses on cultivated field margins - this remains an aspiration.

Opportunities identified within the Forest Heath Natural Greenspace Study

Mildenhall

5.51 A large Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) over 10ha to the west of Mildenhall.

- Included in the West of Mildenhall Masterplan to be completed prior to any development.

Beck Row

5.52 Location for new football ground to restore heathland at Aspal Close.

- No progress.

Opportunities identified within the West Suffolk Climate Change Task Force: Environment and Biodiversity Emergency in West Suffolk

Action 1.2: Develop a local plan tree policy.

- Action in progress.

Action 1.4: Develop skills in the planning team in relation to Biodiversity Net Gain and GI.

- Relevant officers are attending training events.

Action 2.6: Review the maintenance regimes of grass areas under Council ownership.

- A phased approach is ongoing and currently being implemented in suitable spaces.

Action 2.9: Progress the recommendations made in the SWT phase one habitat surveys for open spaces.

- Progress made through actions at Ram Meadow, College Heath Road, West Stow Country Park, Maidscross Hill and Yellow Brick Road.

Action 3.4: Actively seek to reduce the use of glyphosate.

- Glyphosate use is minimal in the first instance and has reduced due to a change in highway contracts and through trialling an alternative.

Stakeholder engagement

Key outputs relevant to this theme from the 'opportunities' task in the workshop

Improve biodiversity on Newmarket heath and training grounds, working with Jockey Club Estates.

Potential offsetting measures for impacts on Breckland SPA.

Join Brecks habitats, e.g. to BugLife beelines. Ensure this is integrated into landscape management.

New developments can link fragmented habitats.

River Lark Catchment Partnership – new wetlands are a major opportunity area:

- Improve River Lark flow from very low summer level;
- Anglian Water looking at wetlands for small phosphate removing sites on Lark and tributaries;
- Small wetlands act as reservoirs to help reduce abstraction; and
- Reconnection of current river with its historic water table.

Conclusions and next steps

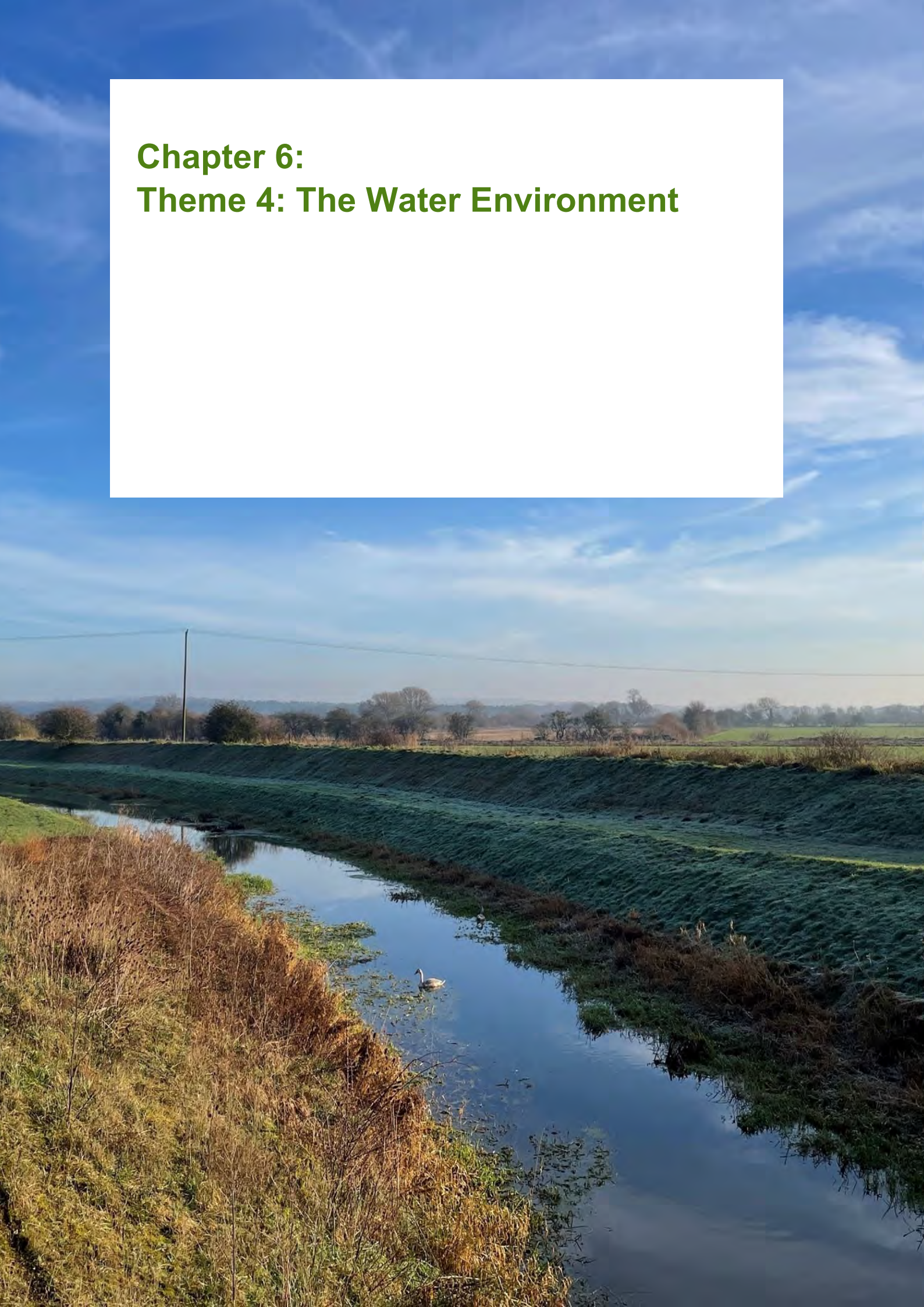
Summary of key issues

- Relative lack of designated sites in the southern half of the district;
- Designated sites in the north of the district subject to severance from the A11, A14, A1065 and railway line, compromising integrity and resilience of ecological network;
- 35% of SSSIs have units in poor condition, reducing ability to provide habitat for species and support wider regulatory ecosystem services (note condition information on remaining designated network is unknown);
- Priority habitat is fragmented and often found in small habitat patches, particularly for deciduous and ancient woodland;
- Designated sites in the Breckland and qualifying ground nesting bird species are at risk of disturbance from visitor pressure. This is only likely to increase if alternative opportunities for recreation are not provided in line with growth and development;
- Issues with landowner attitude and lack of enthusiasm towards nature recovery initiatives such as hedgerow restoration and habitat creation;

Key opportunities

- Carry forward specific opportunities as identified in stakeholder consultation;
- Improved management and controlled grazing regimes are needed to bring acid grassland and heathland sites into favourable condition;
- Bigger, better and more connected core areas are needed to support thriving biodiversity and provide reservoirs for species to disperse into the wider landscape;
- Alternative opportunities for recreation are required to alleviate growing recreational pressure on Breckland and species at risk of disturbance;
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) can help deliver the ambitions of the Suffolk Local Nature Recovery Network (LNRN). A LNRN should maximise benefit to biodiversity whilst also optimising wider environmental benefits, in line with the principal multifunctional benefits of green and blue infrastructure; and
- Provide educational tools to enable people to realise the value of nature, alongside how to behave to ensure their actions do not compromise the integrity of designated sites.

Chapter 6:
Theme 4: The Water Environment



Chapter 6

Theme 4: The Water Environment

West Suffolk has an extensive network of rivers, lakes, ponds and wetlands. These are a unique and integral component of the green infrastructure network, but are threatened by flood risk, poor water quality, physical modifications and climate change.

Key objective(s)

- Promote the resilience of the water environment, whilst maximising the benefits of water resources for West Suffolk communities;
- Restore rivers to good ecological and chemical condition; and
- Provide multifunctional blue/green corridors for the movement of people and wildlife.

Key assets

6.1 Blue infrastructure refers to water elements, such as rivers, canals, ponds, wetlands, floodplains, water treatment facilities. They provide opportunities for natural flood alleviation, which is important in adapting to a higher frequency and magnitude of extreme weather events expected with a changing climate, as well as water-based recreation, economy, access and valuable corridors for wildlife.

River network and supporting habitats

6.2 West Suffolk's river network and supporting habitats are shown in Figure 6.1.

Rivers

6.3 The River Lark, River Linnet and Little Ouse River are chalk rivers. Chalk rivers emerge from the chalk aquifer and provide very pure water that's rich in minerals. Suffolk has 3% of the chalk rivers in England.

6.4 Gravel extraction has been a significant influence within river valleys where there are extensive terrace gravel deposits, most notably in the valley of the River Lark and Little Ouse. The resulting large pools and reedbeds form part of the mosaic of wetland habitats on the valley floor. At Lackford, the gravel pits are a LNR and a SSSI, designated for both dragonflies and wintering waterfowl.

6.5 The narrow river valleys that flow through the Brecks are highly sensitive landscapes because their small-scale, diverse landscape mosaic can easily be overwhelmed by development and by local changes in land use or water quality and flow. This vulnerability is heightened by the narrow form of most river valleys and their subtle landform, which means that their intimate landscape character can be disrupted by changes in adjacent landscape types.

Ponds and lakes

6.6 Lackford Lakes Wildlife Trust reserve is a landscape of lakes, reeds, meadow and woodland. In the summer swallows and nesting great-crested grebe, kingfisher, tufted duck and water rail can be found in the autumn and winter hoveler, lapwing, goosander and bittern.

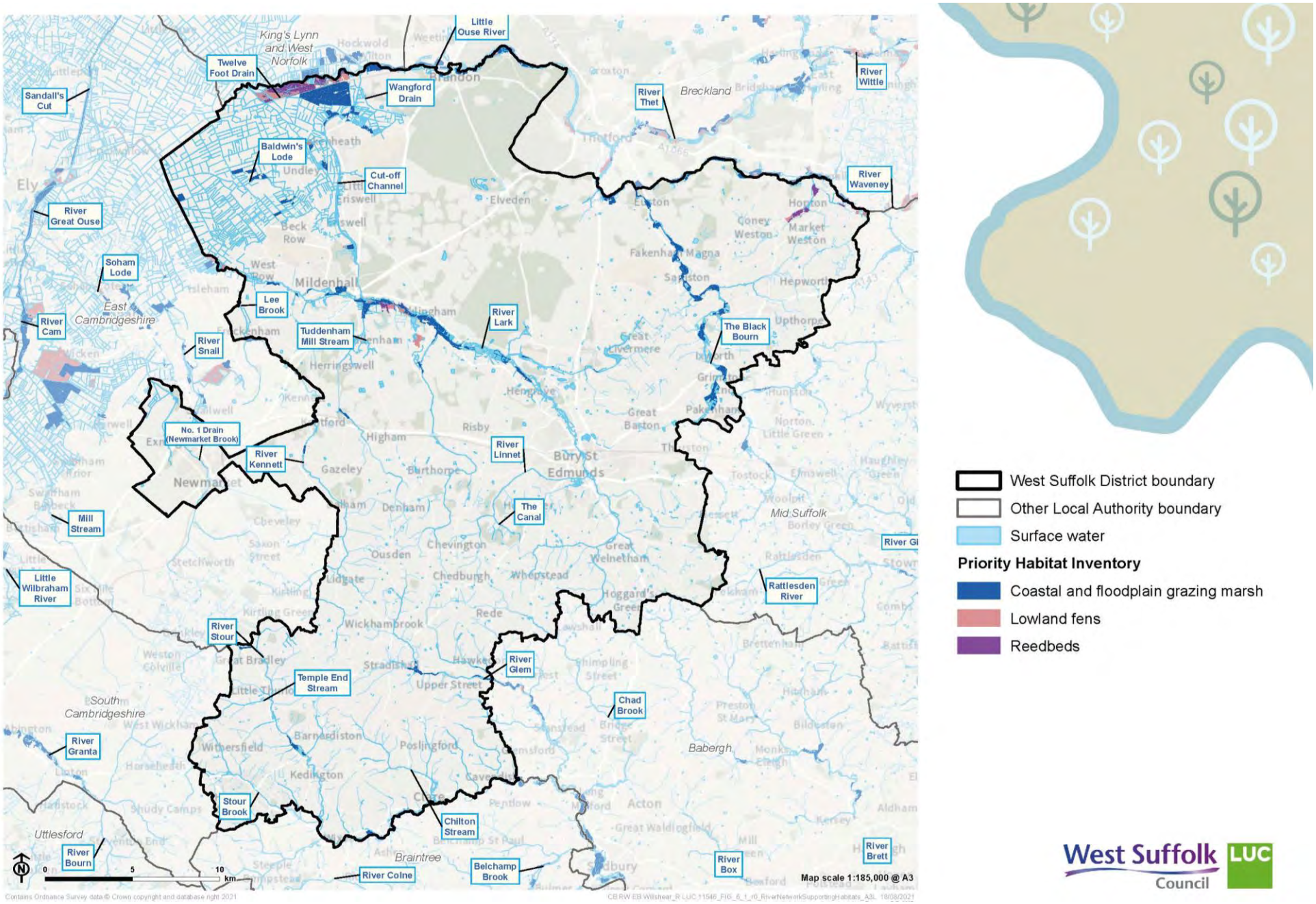
6.7 Across Suffolk, there are thought to be around 23,000 ponds due to high prevalence of impermeable clay soils. Most of these ponds are outside protected sites. They provide a stronghold for great-crested newt. Suffolk Wildlife Trust state that up to 70% of Suffolk's ponds are neglected or abandoned. Dragonflies are also commonly associated with Suffolk's waterways but are under threat from pressures caused by development and intensive farming.

Wetlands

6.8 The valley floodplains of the Little Ouse (with Black Bourn) and River Lark are predominantly pasture, although there are areas of wet meadow, fen, reedbed, alder/willow carr and wet woodland, which create a diverse, small scale mosaic of valuable wetland habitats within the linear river valley corridors.

6.9 Wetland sites can improve water quality and play a key role in reducing flood risk by slowing the flow of water filtering water and capturing carbon. No Mans Meadows and Holywater Meadows are important spaces which attenuate flood risk in Bury St Edmunds. More information about wetland habitats is provided in Chapter 5.

Figure 6.1: River network and supporting habitats



Priority and notable habitats

6.10 The Brecks' Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership Scheme (BFER LPS) is a new Landscape Heritage Scheme for the Norfolk and Suffolk Brecks. Over the 5-year delivery period (2020 – 2024) the Partnership will deliver a minimum of 24 projects across a 215 kilometres squared area. The River Lark Catchment Partnership and the Bury Water Meadows Group are also important delivery partners.

6.11 The Brecks as a whole is identified nationally as an Important Freshwater Area. The River Lark alluvial valley and the Little Ouse alluvial valley are both areas containing Species of Conservation Concern **[See reference** 39**]**.

Selected projects from the Breck's Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership Scheme

River Lark Channel Restoration

Aims to improve the morphology and habitat quality of many stretches of the River Lark by restoration works to naturalise the river banks and channel.

Delivery partners

- River Lark Catchment Partnership.

Delivery timeframe

- 2020-2024.

Little Ouse River Improvement

Aims was to improve Fish, Eel and Canoe Passage at Brandon Staunch without increase to flood risk.

Delivery partners

- Environment Agency.

Delivery timeframe

- 2020.

Barton Mills Sluice

Aims to carryout in channel restoration and reconnection of the flood plain Upstream of Barton Mills.

Delivery partners

- Environment Agency.

Delivery timeframe

- 2020-2024.

Riparian Landowners Advice

Aims to provide a joined-up approach for delivering bespoke land management advice for the Brecks' riparian landowners.

Delivery partners

- Norfolk Rivers Trust.

Delivery timeframe

- 2020-2023.

Sea to Chalk: Restoring Sea Trout and Eels

Aims to remove in-river structures and create fish passes on the River Lark to enable the free flow of Native wild brown trout and other river species includes provision for improved canoe and recreation access to this stretch of the river.

Delivery partners

- Environment Agency and Norfolk Rivers Trust.

Delivery timeframe

- 2020-2022.

Sustainable urban Drainage Systems

6.12 A large number of SuDS now exist across West Suffolk as a result of development. These not only enhance the natural management of surface water run-off, therefore reducing the risk of flooding, but they also enhance provisions for biodiversity through interweaving green and blue features throughout development. Furthermore, they contribute positively to the character and amenity of public realm and residential areas.

Stakeholder consultation

Valuable features

- River Lark has a number of important tributaries, ponds and streams which are being investigated within Brecks' Fen Edge and Rivers (BFER);
- Lackford Lakes Nature Reserve;
- Great Crested Newt distinct level licensing ponds;
- River corridors with existing and potential green access links and ecological corridors;
- Santon Downham wild swimming; and
- Bury Water Meadows.

Existing projects

- Brecks' Fen Edge and Rivers (BFER) undertaking citizen science project to map and test water quality in the Brecks;
- River Lark Catchment Partnership (RLCP) river restoration at Fullers Mill Garden;
- BFER delivering 24+ landscape/heritage/access projects along the River Lark and Ouse corridors, HLF funded;
- BFER with Norfolk River Trust engaging landowner in catchment sensitive farming and water management;
- Lark new wetland study and pollution review/action plan; and
- No Mars Meadows long-term management plan.

Issues, pressures and threats

- Over abstraction of water, need to consider population growth;

- Poor water quality of the River Lark, one of the poorest chalk streams in East Anglia;
- Increase in flood risk and flash flooding if drainage is poorly designed; and
- Impact of development on existing ditches, watercourses and rivers, designs need to accommodate the water environment.

Key drivers

6.13 There are a number of pressures on water usage in West Suffolk including:

- Driest region in the UK;
- Within the East of England which is experiencing the highest forecast growth outside of London;
- Internationally important natural habitats;
- Leading agricultural producer;
- Tension between water needed for the environment, public supply and irrigation; and
- Little surplus water currently available.

6.14 These pressures interact to create a number of pressures on surface and ground water quality and availability.

Surface water quality

6.15 Suffolk's rivers receive an excess of nutrient-rich sediment from a range of sources including from road run-off and agricultural fields. Excess sediment smothers riverbeds, which is detrimental to fish and invertebrates. Phosphorus

from agricultural fertilisers binds to sediment and leads to excess plant growth and a reduction in the range of plant species present.

6.16 The results of the 2019 Water Framework Directive cycle 2 assessment for ecological and chemical classification for surface waters is shown in Table 6.1 and Table 6.2, by surface water operational catchment. Most West Suffolk catchments are classed as 'moderate' status. The Hawstead Tributary and the section of the Lark from Hawstead to Abbey Gardens are in bad ecological status. The Water Framework Directive requires that all streams, rivers and estuaries are at Good Ecological Status by 2027.

Table 6.1: Water Framework Directive assessment for ecological status of surface waters

Catchment	Bad	Poor	Moderate	Good	High
Lark – contains River Lark, River Kennet and River Linnet.	2	2	7	1	0
Little Ouse and Thet - contains The Black Bourn and Little Ouse.	1	1	14	3	0
Stour – contains River Stour and River Glem.	0	2	18	1	0

Table 6.2: Water Framework Directive assessment for chemical status of surface waters

Catchment	Fail	Good
Lark – contains River Lark, River Kennet and River Linnet.	12	0

Catchment	Fail	Good
Little Ouse and Thet - contains The Black Bourn and Little Ouse.	19	0
Stour – contains River Stour and River Glem.	21	0

6.17 The reasons for not achieving good status with the greatest number of counts for each river catchment are summarised in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: Reason for river catchments not reaching good ecological status

River catchment	Reason for not reaching good status
Lark	Physical modifications
Little Ouse and Thet	Pollution from rural areas and; physical modifications
Stour	Pollution from rural areas

6.18 The River Lark Pollution Review and Action Plan **[See reference** 40**]** assesses the current state of the river and aims to deliver effective responses to reduce risks and address the underlying pressures.

Ground water quality

6.19 The Environment Agency Cycle 2 assessment of groundwater body status for Norfolk and Suffolk shows overall 'poor' groundwater status for virtually the whole of the two counties. The dominant cause of quantitative failures is over-abstraction of groundwater, while for chemical status it is most commonly diffuse pollution from agriculture.

6.20 Source Protection Zones (SPZs) indicate where potentially polluting activities might endanger wells, boreholes and springs used for public drinking water supply. The zones indicate different levels of risk; the closer to the source (i.e. inner zones), the greater the potential risk of contamination. Several zone 1 areas are in West Suffolk, including Bury St Edmunds, Little Eriswell, Euston, Gazely and Newmarket.

6.21 Anglian Water have identified high levels of nitrate in the groundwater sources at several of their supply boreholes within the Lark catchment. This presents a risk to public drinking water supplies and may also pose a longer-term risk to river water quality where connectivity to groundwater remains high.

Water availability

6.22 West Suffolk is a relatively dry region when compared to the surrounding landscapes. Therefore, running and standing water bodies including the Little Ouse River and the River Lark, and various streams, meres, lakes, ponds, ditches, springs and fens are impacted by abstraction, pollution, changes in land-use and development.

6.23 May through October is when the greatest pressure falls on the catchment due to abstraction for public water supply, and spray irrigation for arable crops. Low summer flows are compounded as a result of low rainfall in preceding winters that reduce the contribution of groundwater to support base river flow. Lack of water directly impacts the amount available to habitats and wildlife due to falling water levels but also by increasing the concentration of pollutants.

Fluvial and tidal flood risk and incidences of surface water flooding

6.24 In West Suffolk there have been few recent severe fluvial or surface water flooding events. Figure 6.2 shows fluvial and tidal flood risk zones in West

Suffolk. Flood Zone 3 is described as having a 'High Probability' of flooding and is defined as land which has a 1 in 100 or greater annual probability of river flooding. This area is largest west of Lakenheath and Mildenhall. Table 10 of the West Suffolk Council Strategic Flood Risk Assessment provides the potential impacts of climate change on flood risks in key settlements.

6.25 Many of the district's towns have pockets of flood risk where rivers dissect, including the south of Bury St Edmunds at the confluence of the Lark and Linnet, land through the centre of Newmarket, the north of Brandon (Little Ouse) and south of Mildenhall (Lark).

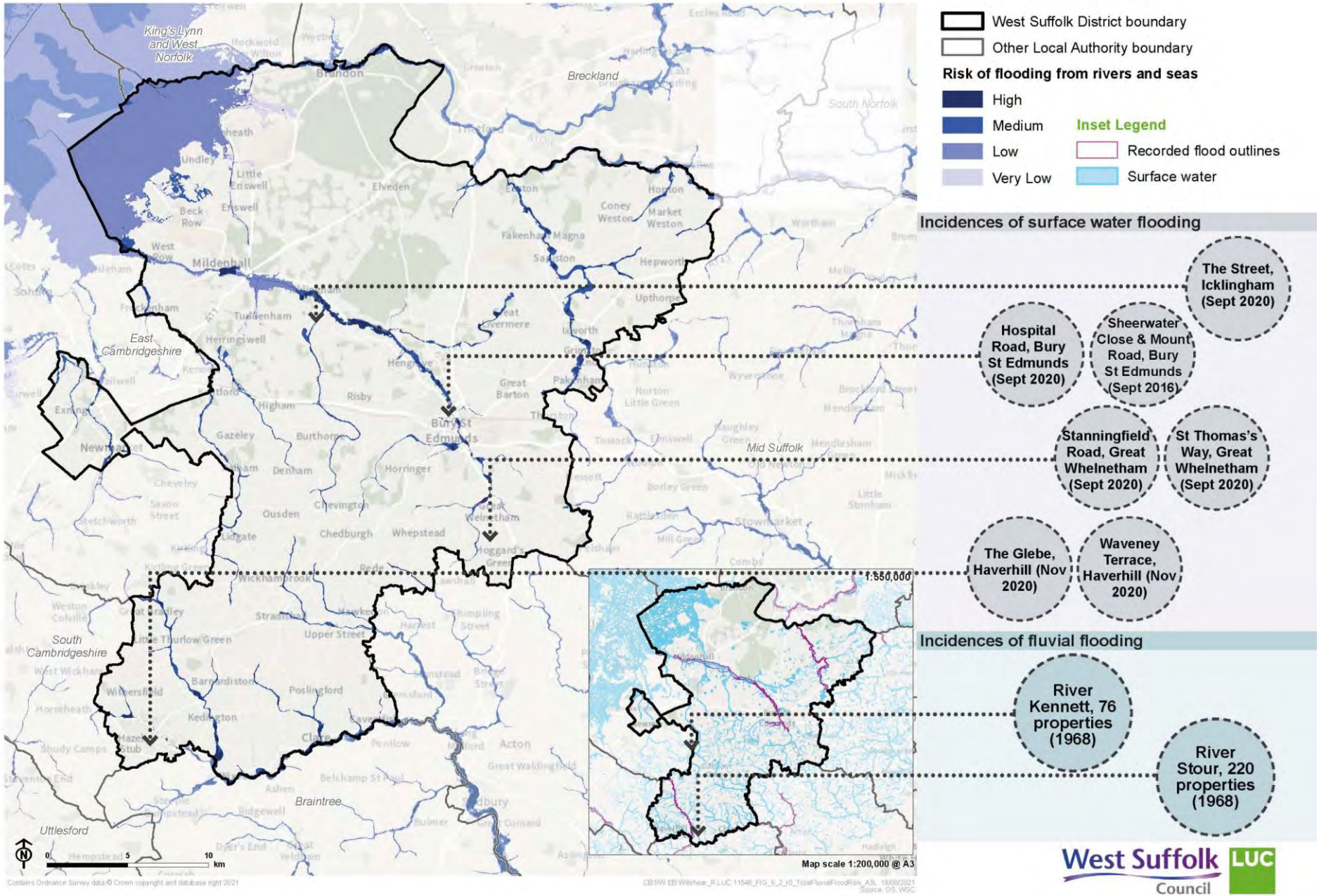
Incidences of surface water flooding

- The Street, Icklingham (September 2020);
- Hospital Road, Bury St Edmunds (September 2020);
- Sheerwater Close and Mount Road, Bury St Edmunds (September 2016);
- Stanningfield Road, Great Whelnetham (September 2020);
- St Thomas's Way Great Whelnetham *September 2020);
- The Glebe, Haverhill (November 2020); and
- Waveney Terrace, Haverhill (November 2020).

Incidences of fluvial flooding

- River Kennett, 76 properties (1968); and
- River Stour, 220 properties (1968).

Figure 6.2: Fluvial and tidal flood risk and incidences of surface water flooding



Physical modifications

6.26 Many rivers have been widened, deepened and straightened in the past for land drainage and flood risk management purposes. They have also had structures such as locks, weirs and mills installed.

6.27 The impact of this is an over wide, straightened, embanked channel, lacking gravels and the floodplain connectivity that much of the invertebrate and fish communities require. Redundant barriers and flood defence structures impound flow, interfere with natural sediment transport and restrict the movement of migratory protected fish species such as Brown trout and European eel.

Invasive species

6.28 Invasive signal crayfish are understood to have entered the Lark in the early 1990's and by the year 2000 had replaced the native white clawed crayfish through competition, direct predation and disease. Signal crayfish can also cause sediment to enter the river through their burrowing, therefore leading to siltation. Their burrowing behaviour increase bank erosion and bank retreat by up to 253% and can input 25 tonnes of sediment per kilometre **[See reference** 41**]**.

The Climate Emergency

Water resources are already scarce in West Suffolk, and rising temperatures will reduce them further, with the threat of more frequent droughts. Yet at the same time, more intense rainfall events will increase the risk of fluvial and surface water flooding.

Although relatively inland, the north west of the district is at risk of future rises in sea level, as mapped by the Environment Agency. Areas of fens surrounding Brandon and Lakenheath could be underwater by as early as 2050, with saline intrusion causing issues for wider communities within the district. The severity of these risks highlights the need for a bold strategy which works in partnership with surrounding authorities to create a strategic solution.

Health and wellbeing

Blue corridors are multifunctional assets that provide for people and nature. Footpaths along rivers are often used as active travel routes and wetland wildlife reserves, lakes and ponds are frequented by bird watchers, walkers and anglers.

Existing projects

Water Resources East Emerging Natural Capital Plan

6.29 Identified through the desk review and consultation, the plan aims to spatially identify priority areas across the water region where actions should take place to achieve natural capital objectives set by stakeholders for water, nature and people in the most cost-effective way. It is not statutory, but is designed to inform and coordinate on-the-ground action delivered by government bodies, environmental organisations, farmers, local communities, volunteer groups, the private sector and any other person or organisation who feels they can contribute) **[See reference** 42**]**.

Anglian Water

6.30 Identifying projects on chalk streams (e.g. Lark and Little Ouse) as part of Anglian Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) totalling £800million between 2020 and 2025 **[See reference** 43**]**. As identified through the desk review.

River Stour Enhancement

6.31 The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project and the Environment Agency are working together on a partnership project to address Water Framework Directive targets in the Stour catchment. The project aims to strike a balance between protecting the diverse wildlife living in and around the River Stour and its tributaries whilst providing access for people to enjoy **[See reference** 44**]**. As identified through the desk review.

Essex and Suffolk Stour Valley Ten Rivers Project

6.32 Identified through the desk review, the Essex and Suffolk Stour Valley Ten Rivers Project will help to address problems in 10 rivers (13 water bodies) identified in the Water Framework Directive assessment of the River Stour and its tributaries.

The Brecks' Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership Scheme

6.33 The desk review and consultation identified the New Landscape Heritage Scheme for the Norfolk and Suffolk Brecks. Over the 5-year delivery period

(2020- 2024) the Partnership will deliver a minimum of 24 projects across the 215 kilometres squared Scheme area. These are landscape/heritage/access/conservation projects along the River Lark and River Lark/Ouse corridors, linked by the fen edge area, including the cut-off channel.

BFER Landscape Partnership

6.34 Identified through consultation, the BFER are running a project with Norfolk River Trust to engage landowners across the Brecks, including West Suffolk, in Catchment Sensitive Farming and improving water management practices.

River Lark Catchment Partnership

6.35 Consultation identified the river restoration project at Fullers Mill Garden in West Stow **[See reference** 45**]**. Full details of their projects are included in Chapter 5.

Bury Water Meadows Group

6.36 The desk review identified the group, which setup in 2013 and became a charity in 2019. Aim to conserve, preserve and improve the Rivers Lark and Linnet in Bury St Edmunds and adjacent areas **[See reference** 46**]**. Support work of the River Lark Catchment Partnership, produced 2020 Annual Report **[See reference** 47**]**.

River Lark wetland study

6.37 Consultation identified the Lark new wetland study by RLCP and Water Resources East.

River Lark pollution review and action plan (2021)

6.38 Document for RLCP for their use to identify and drive forward a range of actions to mitigate pollution risks on the River Lark catchment, with relevant partners **[See reference** 48**]**.

6.39 Companion report - River Lark Catchment Appraisal **[See reference** 49**]** - was produced by Norfolk Rivers Trust and supported by a grant from Cam Ely Ouse Catchment Partnership to summarises the current ecological and environmental state of the Lark catchment. As identified through consultation.

Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership – Draft overarching plan

6.40 Consultation identified this plan, which is to direct work over 10 years. Part of this Plan aims to conserve natural habitats and the rare chalk streams of the River Lark and the River Linnet. It will enhance the landscape setting of the Abbey ruins and continue high quality maintenance of the formal gardens. It will develop a distinctive landscape around the ruins and enable research into the medieval management of the water meadows **[See reference** 50**]**.

Little Ouse Headwaters Project

6.41 Desk review identified this local charity, dedicated to the restoration, conservation and promotion of enjoyment of the wildlife and landscape of the Little Ouse valley.

Testing the Water Citizen Science project by Freshwater Habitats Trust

6.42 Involves people from the community in the collection of important biological and environmental data needed to better understand and protect freshwater habitats in the scheme are. New technologies, specifically environmental DNA testing and low cost, rapid result, nutrient pollution test kits will be used **[See reference** 51**]**. As identified through consultation.

Previously identified opportunities

Opportunities identified within the St Edmundsbury Green Infrastructure Strategy

Black Bourn and Little Ouse Headwaters/Brecks

Project A.3: 'The Grundle' Nature Reserve – would alleviate flooding issues in the area.

- The Grundle, part of Stanton Woodland Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), already performs this function.

Project A.4: New nature reserve adjacent to Market Weston Fen.

- A current Suffolk Wildlife Trust project.

River Valleys

Project C.10: Creation of balancing ponds at Wixoe crossing to attenuate peak flows and reduce flooding.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Bury St Edmunds

Project D.9: Planning and management guidance of SuDS.

- Suffolk County Council, who are the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), have produced guidance on development and flood risk **[See reference** 52**]**.

Project D.11: No Man's Meadow – flood water attenuation and SuDS scheme.

- No Man's Meadow is existing floodplain, accessible to the public and managed by grazing.

Opportunities identified within the West Suffolk Climate Change Task Force: Environment and Biodiversity Emergency in West Suffolk

Action 2.2: Map all the existing rivers, ponds, lakes and SuDS, and riparian responsibilities.

- Mapping work has progressed and identified works implemented in some locations.

Action 2.10: Produce an action plan to measure and improve wetland habitats, including the control of invasive species.

- Some progress along the Yellow Brick Road in Newmarket, Ram Meadow and No Man's Meadow.

Stakeholder engagement

Key outputs relevant to this theme from the 'opportunities' task in the workshop

Utilise rivers as active travel corridors, improving access to them. This is being done via one of the 24 projects in the Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership project. See info on project here which includes provision of new public access, interpretation, engagement, and promotion in 5 opportunity areas.

River Lark Catchment Partnership – new wetlands are a major opportunity area:

- Improve River Lark flow from very low summer level;
- Anglian Water looking at wetlands for small phosphate removing sites on Lark and tributaries;
- Small wetlands act as reservoirs to help reduce abstraction;
- Reconnection of current river with its historic water table; and
- Link the River Lark Strategy to the Abbey of St Edmunds overarching plan.

Conclusions and next steps

Summary of key issues

- Extensive river network, with chalk rivers, priority wetland habitats and a lake/pond network;
- Physical modifications to riverbanks and agricultural run-off mean none of the river catchments meet good ecological or chemical status (Water Framework Directive);
- Increased development and hotter and drier summers with climate change will increase water abstraction demands and impact concentrations of pollutants;
- Pockets of potential flood risk associated with the river network and surface water flooding in some key towns; and
- SuDS which are delivered as part of development require ongoing management to ensure their full functionality of ecosystem services, including biodiversity and water retention, are maintained. This needs to be achieved through thorough management plans moving forward.

Key opportunities

- Carry forward specific opportunities as identified in stakeholder consultation (see above);
- Strengthen mosaic of wetland habitats along river channels, particularly the Lark, to create multifunctional green and blue infrastructure corridors which improve flow levels, remove phosphates, act as water reservoirs and reconnect rivers with historic water tables;
- Work with landowners to minimise rural nutrient pollution, especially in the catchments of the Stour, and Little Ouse and Thet; and
- Support woodland planting along riverbanks and floodplains to reduce flood and erosion risk and create new wildlife corridors.

Chapter 7:
Theme 5: Urban Greening and Integrating Development

Chapter 7

Theme 5: Urban Greening and Integrating Development

57% of residences in West Suffolk are within the five largest settlements **[See reference** 53**]**, which is where growth is likely to be concentrated, alongside key and local service centres. It is important to ensure green assets are embedded within the fabric of these urban areas.

Key objective(s)

- Ensure the successful integration of GI principles within the public realm of existing settlements and within new development to promote sustainable growth.

Key assets

Urban greening assets

7.1 Urban greening forms an essential part of the GI network by ensuring its continued functionality and delivery of benefits within built-up areas and in areas of new development. Where provisions of green and open space are limited, for example within town centres, greening the 'grey' infrastructure is vital to provide benefits to people and the environment. Green walls, green/brown roofs, street trees, pocket parks, community gardens, rain gardens, SuDS and raised planters are all forms of urban greening considered in this study.

7.2 There is little data available on the urban greening assets within West Suffolk's main settlements. However, there is some evidence of urban greening assets and recent projects to incorporate such features. For example, a sedum roof and water harvesting has recently been incorporated in the new information point at Abbey Gardens, Bury St Edmunds.

Public realm and gateways

7.3 Urban greening within the public realm of settlement centres, including at key transport gateways is important to increase amenity value and promote sense of place.

7.4 Bury St Edmunds is known for its floral displays, largely spearheaded by Bury in Bloom, an independent charity which works with the local authority and community groups to deliver projects which enhance the public realm. There are no similar groups in West Suffolk's other towns, which likely explains why urban greening is less widespread.

7.5 Areas of amenity grass and highway verges are also key areas to enhance the public realm.

Street trees

7.6 Trees are a fundamental building block of the GI network and deliver multiple benefits, namely urban cooling, provision for biodiversity, carbon sequestration, higher property prices, rainfall attenuation, pollutant removal and improved sense of place. Appendix 12 of the Tree Management Policy describes the benefits of trees (available here).

7.7 Management responsibility of many trees falls with the Council, although a number of housing associations are responsible for a significant amount of

public realm trees. Management of highway trees is the responsibility of Suffolk County Council.

7.8 There is currently little data on street trees within the built areas of West Suffolk. However, many residential areas contain tree lined streets and Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) have been placed on individual and groups of trees that are known to be at risk.

7.9 The Council is investing in tree planting with over 1500 trees planted on a variety of sites between 2020 and 2021 **[See reference** 54**]**. This includes within parks and open spaces, within new developments and at the West Suffolk Operational Hub.

Settlements, service centres and employment

7.10 The five main towns (Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket, Haverhill, Mildenhall and Brandon), together with key service centres (Barrow, Clare, Ixworth, Kedington, Lakenheath, Red Lodge, Stanton) and local service centres (e.g. Wickhambrook, Great Barton, Hopton, Beck Row and West Row) are the focal point for urban greening and public realm enhancements, particularly where future growth is planned.

7.11 The district also has a number of rural employment areas, including Saxham Business Park, Risby Business Park, Barrow Business Park, Chedburgh and Great Wratting. In the surrounds of Bury St Edmunds there is also Bury St Edmunds Business Park, Rougham industrial estate and British Sugar, as well as employment sites across West Suffolk's other towns. Given the number of residents who commute to, and use these sites, it is important to deliver urban greening enhancements and ensure these sites are strategically linked through green, active travel networks (see Chapter 3).

Stakeholder consultation

Valuable features

- Greener Growth scheme in Bury St Edmunds; and
- Existing good provision of green spaces.

Existing projects

- A number of residential and employment allocated sites;
- Strategic growth at Marham Park, The Several, Great Wilsey and Northwest Haverhill, which all include GI;
- New country parks NE and NW of Bury St Edmunds as part of hybrid planning applications; and
- Mildenhall Hub.

Issues, pressures and threats

- Plans for Kennett Garden Village (within East Cambridgeshire) may put pressure on Newmarket's roads and services;
- Significant levels of development, which can be an opportunity is developers are engaged well;
- Key for new developments to have integrated travel plans;
- A lot of development at the moment lacks appropriate GI; and
- Development pressure on ecological and recreation sites.

Key drivers

Population growth

7.12 Population growth in West Suffolk increased by 0.8% between 2016 and 2018 (compared to 1.3% in England) **[See reference** 55**]**. Despite the relatively small population growth, this still impacts demand for open space and infrastructure. Therefore, it is important that all new development makes space for GI.

7.13 There is also an ageing population, with demographic shifts in future needing consideration when planning access and provision of GI.

Population density

7.14 The 2011 Census data highlights that 57% of the population live in the five biggest towns, as shown in Figure 7.1. This highlights that the population density in these regions is much higher than in the rural areas. Greening will be particularly important in these areas to ensure there is a balance between grey infrastructure and green and blue assets.

Planned growth and infrastructure, and population density

7.15 The number of households in West Suffolk has increased at a greater rate than population growth. Between 2011 and 2018, the number of households in West Suffolk increased by 4.43%. This growth is expected to increase between 2018 to 2043 by 11.25% **[See reference** 56**]**.

7.16 The 2011 Census shows that just over one third (36.6%) of properties are located in the rural areas, outside of the five biggest towns, which typically have higher house prices, greater home ownership and a higher proportion of older residents. In these areas, around half of dwellings are detached houses or bungalows. This highlights that modest growth of a similar character in these areas would use a larger amount of land than would be required building to higher densities in urban areas. Planned housing within the district is currently located within strategic sites around Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill, Mildenhall and Red Lodge. There is limited development proposed for Newmarket itself, although Exning to the north west will see some growth. There are some smaller residential sites around key service centres of Ixworth and Stanton, plus very small residential allocations in many rural villages (as per the St Edmundsbury Local Plan and Forest Heaths Local Plan).

7.17 The housing need in West Suffolk set by government is to build at least 16,000 homes up to 2040 (800 homes per year) and West Suffolk's new Local Plan (due to be adopted in 2024) will set out how the district will accommodate this. Four spatial options were presented in the Issues and Options consultation, 2021:

- Option 1: focus growth on new settlement(s) which would be of a sufficient scale to support new community infrastructure and employment;
- Option 2: focus growth in the towns and key service centres where infrastructure and environmental constraints allow;
- Option 3: focus growth in the towns, key service centres and local service centres through urban extensions and infilling where infrastructure and environmental constraints allow; and
- Option 4: disperse growth around the district allocating sites across the towns, service centres and villages to allow them to grow where infrastructure and environmental constraints allow.

7.18 Which option is pursued will have an impact on the green and blue infrastructure network, with potential changes to deficiency in open space, pressure on sites designated for nature conservation, and demand for active travel networks.

7.19 Several strategic objectives of the emerging Local Plan are of importance when planning to improve the green and blue infrastructure network, including climate change mitigation and adaptation (flood risk resilience, sustainable travel), rural areas (supporting the countryside and its communities), communities, wellbeing and culture (access to facilities including green spaces), and connectivity and accessibility (reducing the need to travel and encouraging alternatives to car use). SuDS will be integral to new development (and are required for all major development sites), particularly in areas that may suffer from fluvial and surface water flood risk, together with a range of well-maintained multifunctional green spaces, accessed via wide streets with urban greening at their core (e.g. street trees and planters).

Air quality and active travel

7.20 The air quality within West Suffolk is generally good, with a recent trend of improvements at monitored locations. The air pollution there is, is predominately as a result of road traffic, particularly within the market towns, including Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and New Market. Nitrogen dioxide is the main pollutant. This is linked particularly to diesel and heavy goods vehicles.

- Brandon
  - Level of pollution is lower than national air quality objectives. There is a long term improvement in air quality. The level of traffic, including HGVs travelling through the town on the A1065 are a concern.
- Mildenhall
  - The concentration of pollutants is below air quality levels. There is no sign of significant decline in nitrogen dioxide levels over the long term in this area. Poor air quality is likely to be associated with the A11 and particularly the 5-ways roundabout.
- Great Barton
  - Air quality objectives are being breached in the AQMA, where cottages and the post office are alongside the A143, designated as an HGV route. Pollution levels dropped from 2018 to 2019. Grant funding has

been received to change the location of a puffin crossing away from the AQMA.

- Bury St Edmunds
  - Despite ongoing growth, levels of pollution decreased from 2018 to 2019. All monitored locations in Bury St Edmunds remain below national air quality objectives. There is an AQMA on Sicklesmere Road which had shown previous high levels of pollution. Significant decreases in pollution have been seen here more recently.
- Newmarket
  - There have been improvements to air quality and the AQMA along High Street and Old Station Road reduced in size in 2017. All locations remain below the air quality objectives.
- Haverhill
  - All monitored areas are compliant with air quality objectives. Withersfield Road is of the biggest concern, as levels have historically been close to the threshold. There have been steady decreases in pollution in this location over the last five years.

Figure 7.1: Planned growth and infrastructure, and population density

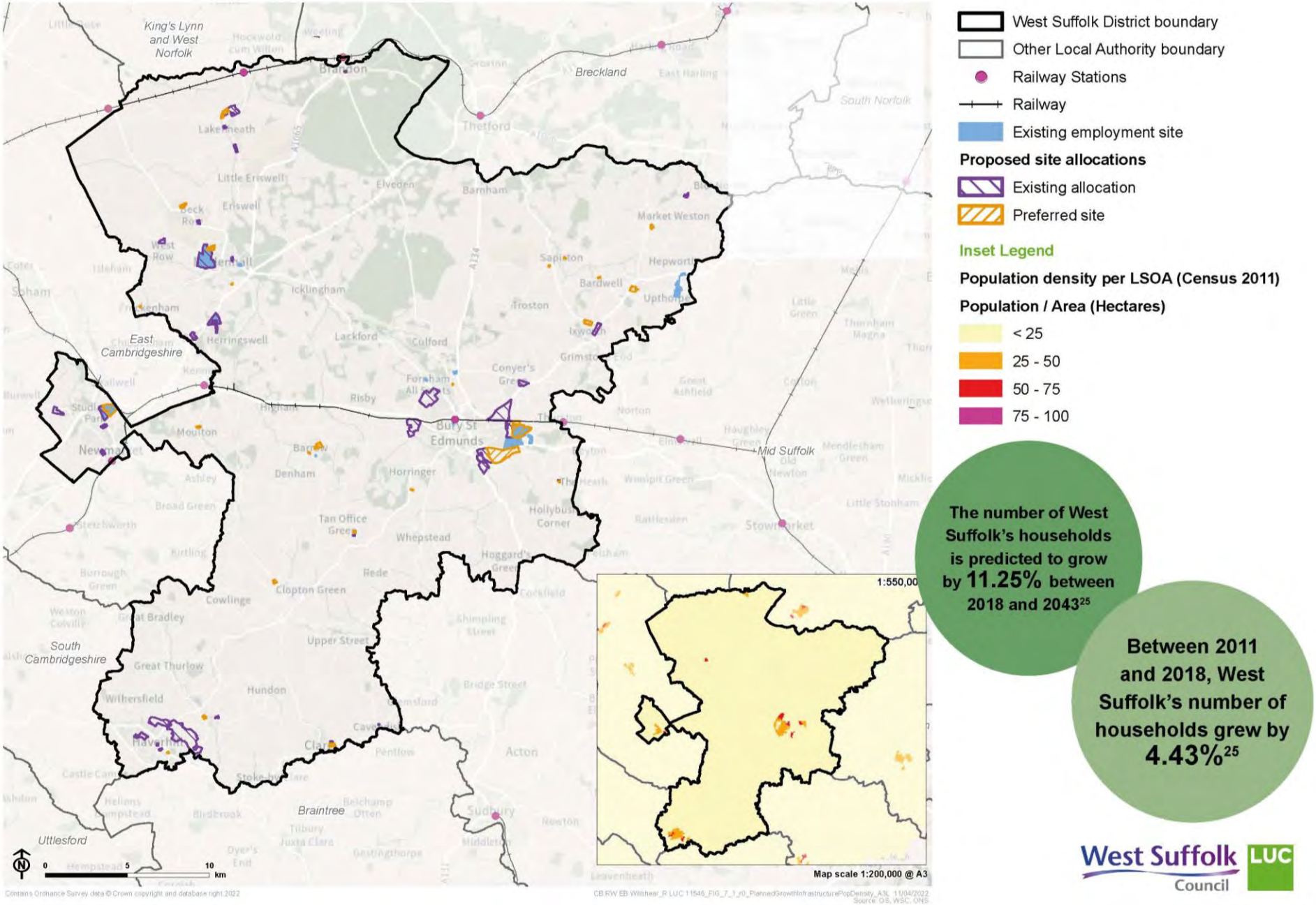
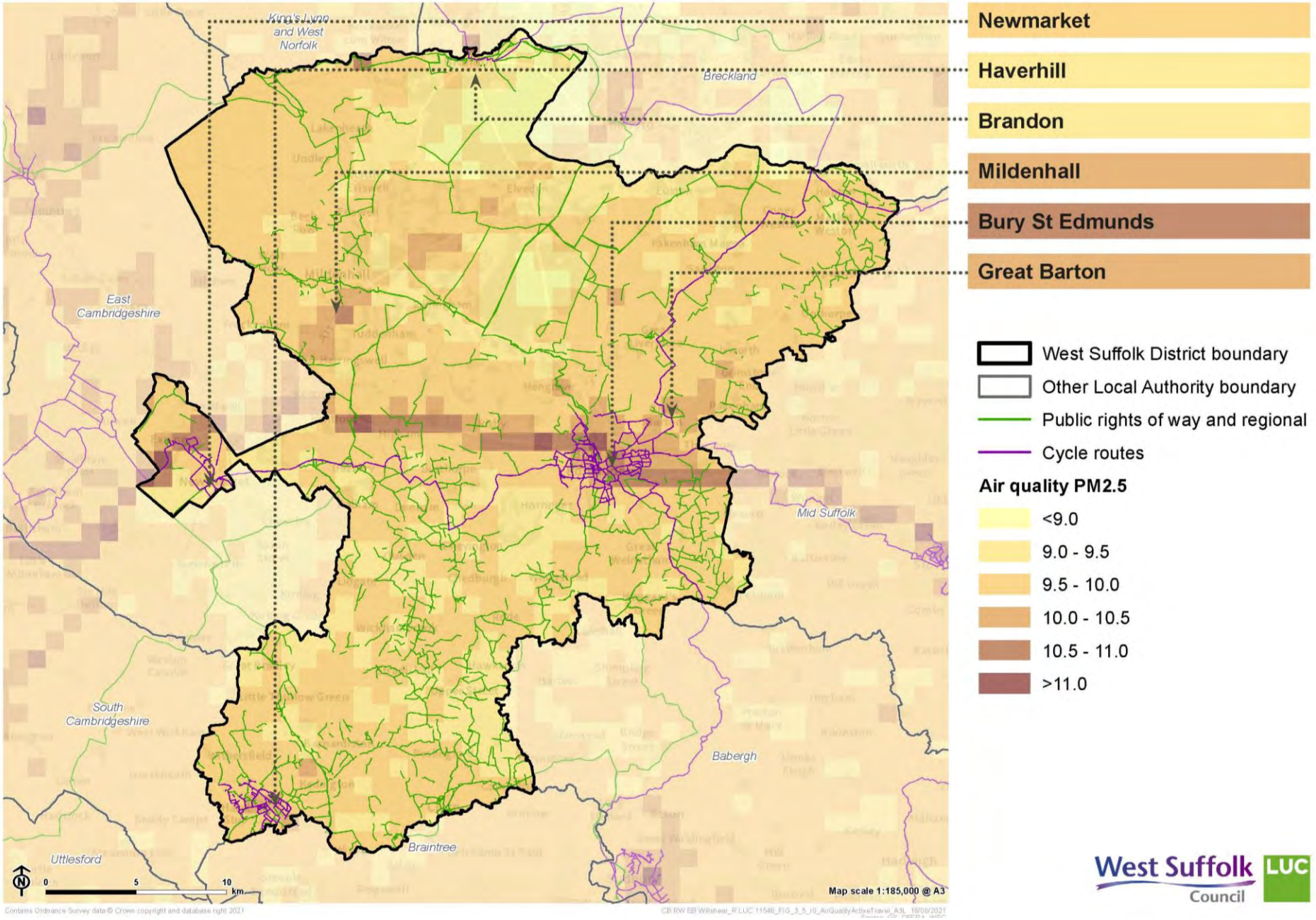


Figure 7.2: Air quality and active travel



Air quality

7.21 There are pockets of poor air quality in the main settlements (see Figure 7.2) of Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket, and to a lesser extent Mildenhall, Haverhill and Brandon. Poor air quality is typically associated with main roads. Trees, open spaces, hedges and green walls can significantly reduce exposure to air pollution, although care must be taken to choose the right GI in the right place. Where planting trees, tree species should be carefully selected, utilising native species for biodiversity, but also ensuring climate resilience through a diverse tree stock.

Right green infrastructure, right place [See reference **57**]

Street canyons

7.22 Where air quality at street level is better than above surrounding buildings: street canyons with little or no traffic

- A dense avenue of trees can provide effective pollution from polluted air above and create a clean 'green corridor' for active travel.

7.23 Where air quality at street level is worse than above surrounding buildings: street canyons with moderate or heavy traffic

- All street canyons with moderate or heavy traffic:
  - Addition of green open space to one side (opening up the street canyon) is always beneficial.
- Canyons of this sort with height/width ratio < 2:
  - A hedge of green wall between vehicles and people can reduce exposure in their immediate wake.

Open roads

7.24 Where priority is to protect people immediately at the roadside (e.g. pedestrians and cyclists):

- A hedge or green wall between vehicles and people can as much as halve-exposure in their immediate wake.

7.25 Where priority is to protect people further away (e.g. children in a school playground bordering the street):

- A combination of hedge and dense line of trees can provide a taller vegetation barrier, offering protection over a greater distance downwind.

7.26 The air quality within West Suffolk is generally good, with a recent trend of improvements at monitored locations. Any air pollution is as a result of road traffic, particularly within the market towns, including Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Newmarket. Nitrogen dioxide is the main pollutant, linked particularly to diesel and heavy goods vehicles **[See reference** 58**]**.

Safety and perception of safety

7.27 Safety, and the perception of safety, can have an important impact on GI within urban areas. In particular, this relates to trees and frequent inspections need to be carried out and appropriate safety works carried out. Some stages of a tree's lifecycle need to be managed more carefully in urban areas, for example standing deadwood.

7.28 There are often concerns by residents related to tree 'nuisance' or perception of danger. Each year, it is estimated that the Council receives around 1,400 concerns about trees **[See reference** 59**]**, typically associated with interference with television reception, roosting bird droppings and

honeydew excretion damaging cars, and obstruction of light to homes and gardens.

7.29 It is therefore important that green assets within urban areas are sited and managed appropriately to reduce overly negatives perceptions from local communities. This includes careful design to ensure informal surveillance is achieved of the street and green spaces to manage antisocial behaviour. If not achieved, negative perceptions could then threaten other aspects of GI delivery.

Development

7.30 Development should be delivered alongside a programme of sensitive urban greening, including green architecture features such as green walls and roofs, as well as green street infrastructure including street trees, parklets, raised planters, community gardens, rain gardens and flower-rich meadows instead of traditional highway verges. This will not only improve the functionality of the district's more urbanised areas, but also enhance the perceived environmental quality of neighbourhoods to residents and visitors. Interventions should reflect the townscape character of the settlements to impart a sense of place.

The Climate Emergency

Impacts of climate change will be particularly strong in urban areas. A greater proportion of hard surfacing in urban areas which increases the chances of flooding, and the urban heat island effect that will increase warming in urban areas. Green spaces, permeable surfaces and SuDS can increase water attenuation and reduce flooding in built areas.

Health and wellbeing

Effective urban greening can have significant benefits to health and wellbeing due its proximity to large population centres. Introducing GI enhancements within residential developments creates healthier living space. Greening targeted at improving air quality is hugely beneficial for health.

Existing projects

Great Wilsey Park

7.31 Outline planning permission was granted for the development of 2,500 homes east of Haverhill in 2018. As part of this, a new country park will be provided at the eastern extents of the development. This will be in addition to the GI which runs through the development, framing the existing woodlands and incorporating parks, cycle-footpaths, open space and SuDS infrastructure. As identified through consultation.

The Severals

7.32 Consultation identified the proposed strategic extension to the northeast of Bury St Edmunds includes green spaces, including numerous pocket parks, allotments, a linear park with SuDS and a country park.

Tree planting by the Council

7.33 Over 1500 trees planted during 2020-2021. As identified through the desk review.

Previously identified opportunities

Opportunities identified within the St Edmundsbury Green Infrastructure Strategy

Bury St Edmunds

Project D.8: Advance landscape planting in relation to development sites, providing visual mitigation.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Project D.10: Country park for strategic scale development at Great Barton.

- Planning permission pending.

Haverhill

Project E.4: Enhance woodland planting along A1017 to improve the harsh settlement edge.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Project E.6: Streetscape and signage strategy for Haverhill.

- Not aware of any progress to date.

Project E.7: Advance landscape planting in relation to development sites, providing visual mitigation.

- Unaware of any progress to date, however there will be advanced planting for the next phase of Great Wilsey Park.

Opportunities identified within the West Suffolk Climate Change Task Force

Action 3.9: Support Suffolk-wide air quality monitoring.

- Discussions with partners at Suffolk County Council and the University of Suffolk are ongoing.

Action 3.11: Work with partners by sharing information and positive work practice for air quality.

- Ongoing work with other Local Authorities to develop joint campaigns for Clean Air Day and domestic burning.

Action 3.12: Continue to work with partners and community groups to improve air quality.

- Continued support and engagement with Bury St Edmunds Air Quality Group.

Action 3.13: Continue to support residents to identify community projects for improving air quality.

- The council have promoted the Plug in Suffolk grant scheme, which supports community groups to install EV chargers - this has already been successfully implemented in Ixworth Village Hall and for the Quiet Lanes project.

- The council have continued to work with community groups, including supporting the Churchgate residents' association to launch a campaign for Clean Air Day.

Stakeholder engagement

Key outputs relevant to this theme from the 'opportunities' task in the workshop

- New developments offer opportunities to integrate multifunctional sustainable drainage systems for the benefit of biodiversity, amenity and the water environment;
- Development (S106) provides opportunity for better GI development. The Study should enable joined up planning in order to identify these opportunities;
- New developments can link fragmented habitats;
- Opportunity to make GI mandatory within new development. This could include green lanes, green routes and hedges, to ensure there is an integrated, accessible GI network; and
- Increase tree planting in open spaces and street trees.

Conclusions and next steps

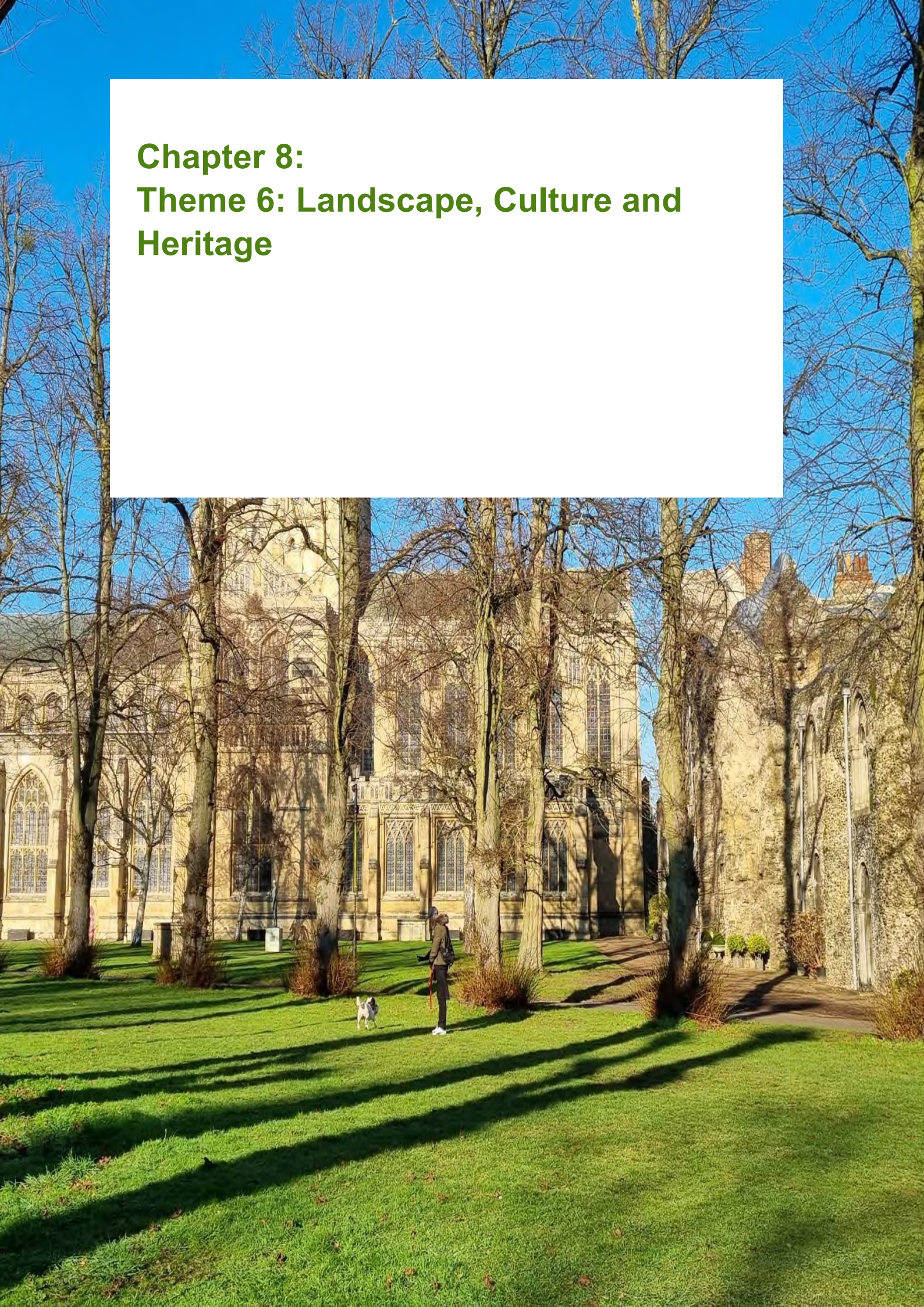
Summary of key issues

- Lack of urban greening in some settlement centres and public realm to provide valuable amenity, sense of place, climate adaptation and stepping stones for wildlife;

- Lack of use of SuDS to alleviate flooding, particularly in built-up town centres where bisecting rivers often increase flood risk;

Key opportunities

- Carry forward specific opportunities as identified in stakeholder consultation;
- Enhance urban greening and the public realm within the key towns and service centres, including key transport gateways. This may require working with existing partners and community groups;
- Focus urban greening interventions into the fabric of new development; and
- Green assets within urban areas must be sited and managed appropriately to reduce overly negatives perceptions from local communities, whilst also providing educational tools to enable communities to see the value of “wilder” space.



Chapter 8:
Theme 6: Landscape, Culture and Heritage

Chapter 8

Theme 6: Landscape, Culture and Heritage

Understanding landscape, land use and heritage can help ensure Green Infrastructure helps to create a sense of place.

Key objective(s)

- Integrate landscape character, heritage and cultural assets into the GI network, allowing their full potential to be explored.

Key assets

Landscape character

8.1 West Suffolk is characterised by a largely rural landscape. Bury St Edmunds is the main settlement and lies within the centre of the district, and there are a number of market towns, including Brandon in the north, Mildenhall in the north west, Newmarket in the west and Haverhill in the south west.

8.2 The landform of West Suffolk is generally low lying. The lowest land is found in the north west of the district in the Fens. Higher land to the north east and south forms a plateau which is cut by gently sloping river valleys. Woodland is generally limited, predominantly comprising small (less than 200ha) ancient woodland blocks. In the north of the district, the Brecks, woodland is more extensive.

National Character Areas

8.3 As shown in Figure 8.1, West Suffolk incorporates 5 different National Character Areas (NCA), which all comprise of relatively flat, open landscapes. More detail on these is given below.

NCA 46: The Fens

8.4 Located in the north west of the region, this NCA is a particularly distinctive wetland landscape with notable historic and human influence. The landscape is large scale, with flat, open and expansive vistas, and sparse woodland.

NCA 85: The Brecks

8.5 The Brecks is located in the centre north of the region. This is a unique landscape, with a historic identity, distinctive land use and rich wildlife. Characteristics include acid grasslands, dry heaths, arable fields and belts of Scots pine.

NCA 83: South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands

8.6 Located in the east of the region, this character area forms a continuous till plateau. It has a long history of settlement, reflected in the older buildings. Agriculture has a strong impact on the sense of place.

NCA 87: East Anglian Chalk

8.7 This NCA comprises a linear chalk ridge and is located in the west of the region. This creates a simple, open landscape of smooth rolling chalkland distinguished by large-scale regular fields.

NCA 86: South Suffolk and North Essex Claylands

8.8 Covering large parts of the landscape in the south of the district, this gently undulating plateau has a sense of enclosure, provided by the ancient wooded arable landscape.

Suffolk Landscape Character Types

8.9 There are 31 different Landscape Character Types (LCT) identified in the Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment, 16 of those fall within West Suffolk district.

8.10 Figure 8.1 shows the southern half of West Suffolk is dominated by Undulating Ancient Farmland and Undulating Estate Farmland dissected by Rolling Valley Farmlands and Rolling Estate Farmlands as they follow the course of river valleys, including the Stour. Agriculture dominates these character types, with settlements generally comprising dispersed villages, hamlets and farmsteads.

8.11 Within the north, a more varied landscape exists surrounding a series of market towns including Brandon, Bury St Edmunds, Mildenhall and Newmarket. Estate Sandlands dominate this landscape, which comprises both coniferous plantations, heathland and arable fields. To the north east, Plateau Estate Farmlands and Ancient Plateau Claylands reflect the agricultural nature of the landscape. Within the north west, Planned Fenlands and Settled Fenlands character types reflect the managed nature of the fen landscape for agricultural purposes.

Night blight and tranquillity

Night blight

8.12 As shown in Figure 8.2, the majority of land within West Suffolk has a low level of night blight. The brightness value is generally within band two, highlighting skies which are generally within the darkest 50% of skies within England. Night skies in the north west are generally slightly brighter. A number of the district's brightest skies are located in close proximity to sites designated for their ecological value. This can have a negative effect on wildlife, particularly nocturnal species such as bats, as well as crepuscular birds.

Tranquillity

8.13 The tranquillity scores across West Suffolk are generally higher in the north and west, with very high scores within Lakenheath Fen Nature Reserve, Thetford Forest and the Kings Forest. Areas with lower tranquillity are along major roads and within the largest settlements, including Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket and Mildenhall.

Heritage and cultural designations

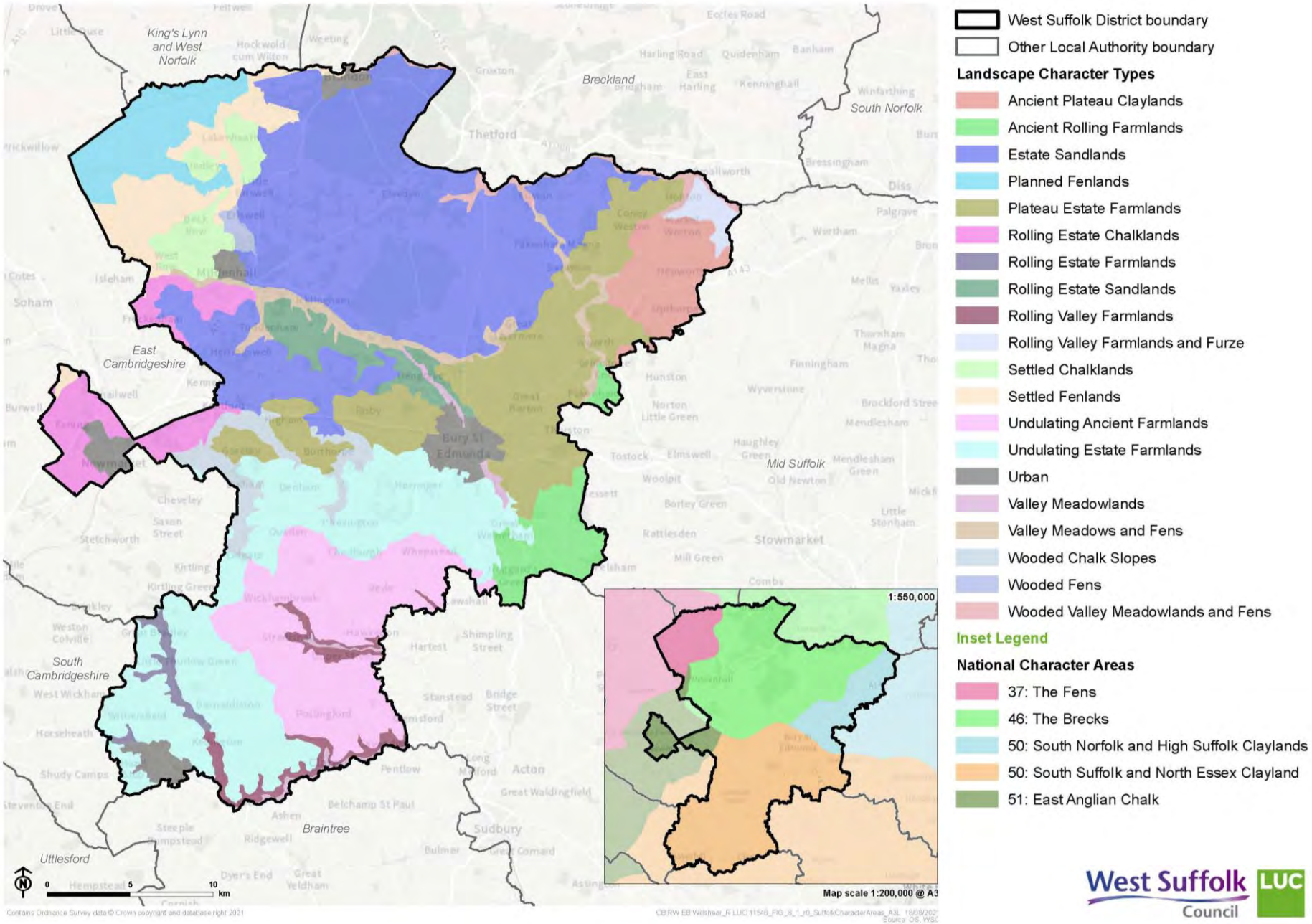
8.14 There are over 4000 listed buildings within West Suffolk. This includes over 100 Grade I listed buildings, including predominantly medieval churches and, in the south west, Halls. Within Bury St Edmunds, around 40 Grade I listed buildings (many associated with the Abbey) contribute tits world class heritage core.

8.15 Figure 8.3 shows the 54 Scheduled Monuments in West Suffolk, including small moated sites in the south, and small Bowl Barrows, Bell Barrows and Round Barrows further north and west. There are also several Roman features,

including a large Roman villa south west of Weatherhill Farm (roughly 10 kilometres north west of Bury St Edmunds).

8.16 Figure 8.3 also shows West Suffolk's 48 conservation areas, most of which are located in the district's town and village cores. There are also many buildings and archaeological sites of local interest.

Figure 8.1: National and local character areas



West Suffolk Council LUC

Figure 8.2: Night blight and tranquility

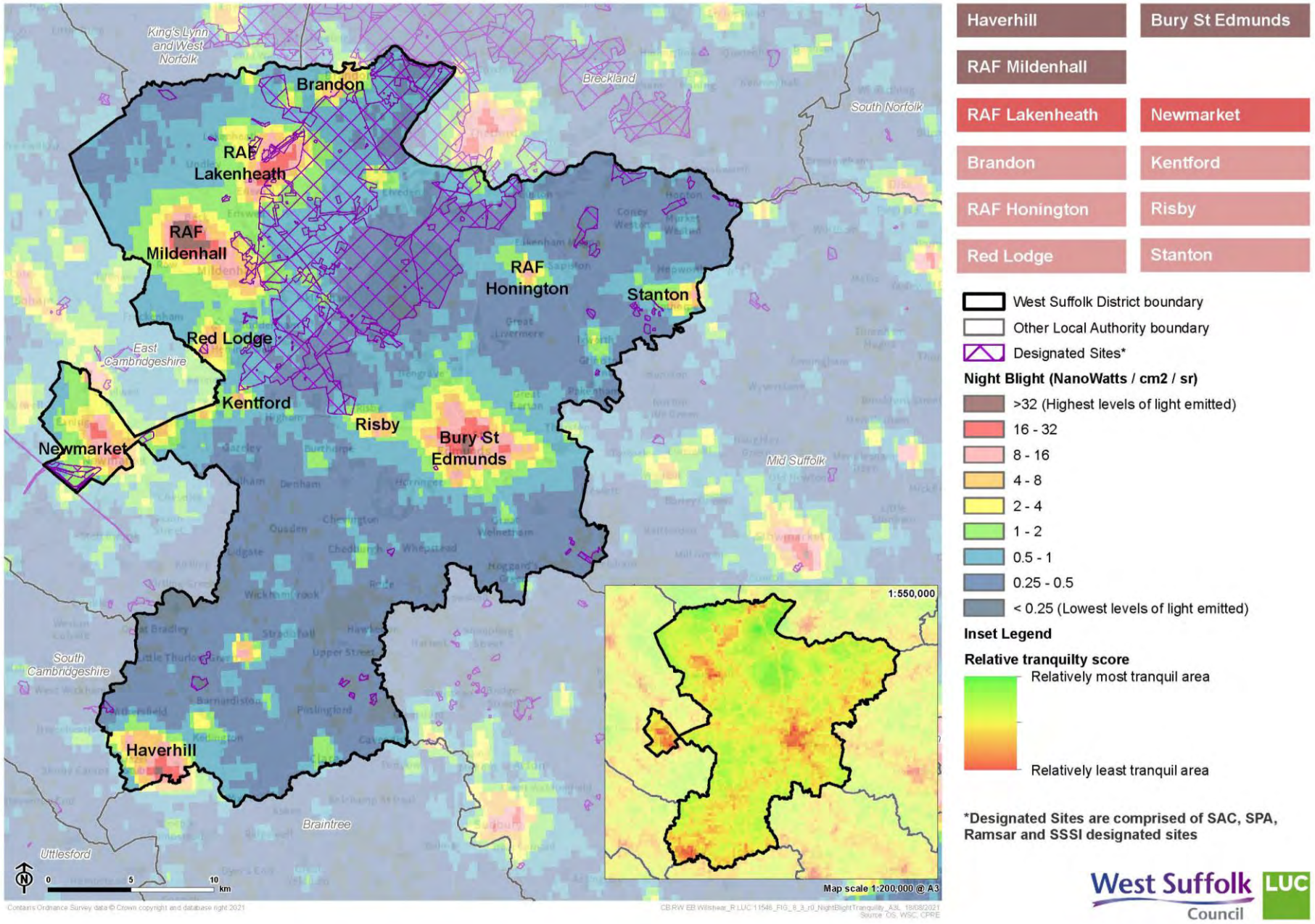
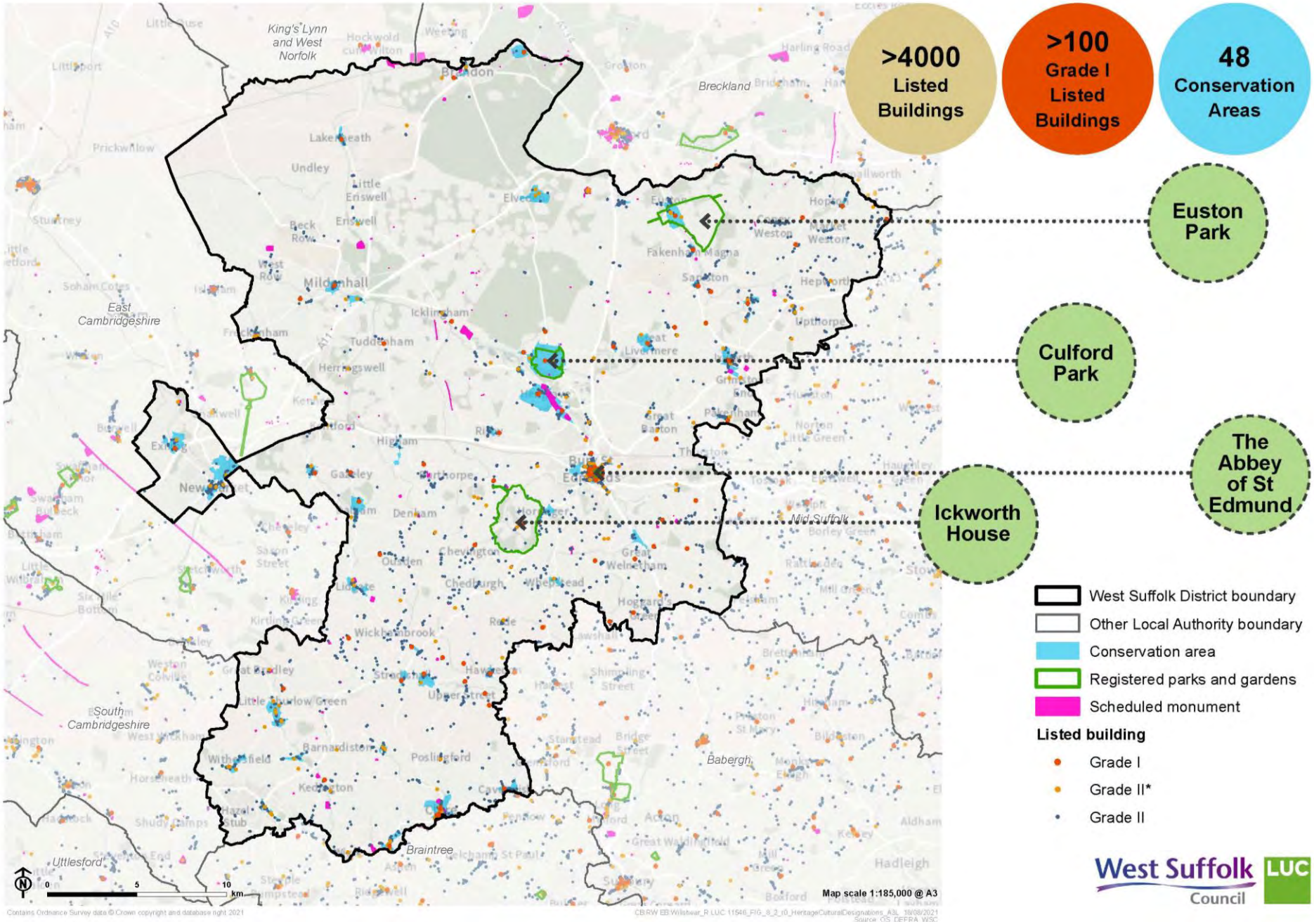


Figure 8.3: Heritage and cultural designations



Designated landscapes

8.17 There are four of Registered Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest within West Suffolk, as shown in Figure 8.3, including:

- Abbey Gardens and Precincts (Grade II) is the site of the former Abbey of St Edmund. The site has achieved Green Flag status and is 6.5ha in size **[See reference** 60**]**;
- Culford Park (Grade II) comprises over 200ha, straddling the gently sloping river valley of a tributary to the River Lark **[See reference** 61**]**. Culford Park is owned by Culford School and there is no public access other than on limited rights of way;
- Euston Park (Grade II*) is located in the north of West Suffolk and is nearly 600ha in size **[See reference** 62**]**. Access to the hall and garden is ticketed, however the Icknield Way passes along the historic Dukes Ride; and
- Ickworth House (Grade II*) is owned and managed by the National Trust. Access to the over 300ha site is free to members but not for non-members **[See reference** 63**]**.

Non-designated assets

8.18 As well as numerous designated assets, West Suffolk hosts a rich variety and distribution of non-designated assets. The preservation and setting of these locally important features is extremely important under local policy and strategies due to the lack of statutory protection.

Market towns

8.19 Bury St Edmunds, Clare, Haverhill and Newmarket are all medieval market towns, with medieval street patterns, built character and a strong sense of place, all of which form valuable features to preserve. Open spaces provide an

important setting for the historic core of Bury St Edmunds, as well as framing views out of the town core, in addition to the river valley setting at the confluence of the Lark and Linnet.

8.20 The various settings of these market towns are also defined by their surrounding countryside, particularly Clare. The presence of many historic farmsteads and houses scattered throughout the countryside which, although not necessarily listed, contribute significantly to the character and appearance of the rural landscape.

Heritage trails and routes

8.21 The north eastern section of the historic Icknield Way passes through West Suffolk. It runs through the north west of the district between Dalham and Knettishall Heath. The route, which links the Dorset Coast to Norfolk, claims to be ‘the oldest road in Britain’. The pre-Roman route now consist of tracks and green lanes along the chalk ‘spine’ of England.

8.22 St Edmundsbury Cathedral pilgrimage routes include an eight-mile circular route via Rushbrooke and Nowton, an eight-mile linear route from West Stow, and an 18-mile route from Mildenhall via West Stow.

8.23 There are also a number of heritage trails in the district, for example at High Lodge (funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund). Suffolk Steps, a partner of Get Moving Suffolk, also has a collection of local historic walks and trails, including two in Bury St Edmunds. The Stour Valley, which hosts a rich archaeological landscape, can be explored via the Stour Valley Path.

Horse racing

8.24 Newmarket is recognised as the international headquarters of the horse racing industry. Horse racing is not only a key component of the economy of Newmarket and the surrounding area, but also has an important cultural role in

the town with historic racing yards and stables designated as a conservation area. It is vital to protect the unique heritage, landscape and built environment of Newmarket whilst also promoting the horse racing industry.

Agriculture

8.25 Figure 8.4 shows the highest quality agricultural land is located in the north west of the district, within The Fens NCA. This includes Grade I agricultural land located primarily within the Planned Fenlands and Settled Fenlands LCTs. Agriculture in the Planned Fenlands generally comprises individual farmsteads, with historic linear fields separated by drainage ditches. Agriculture is smaller scale and more varied within the Settled Fenlands, including livestock, salad crops and orchards.

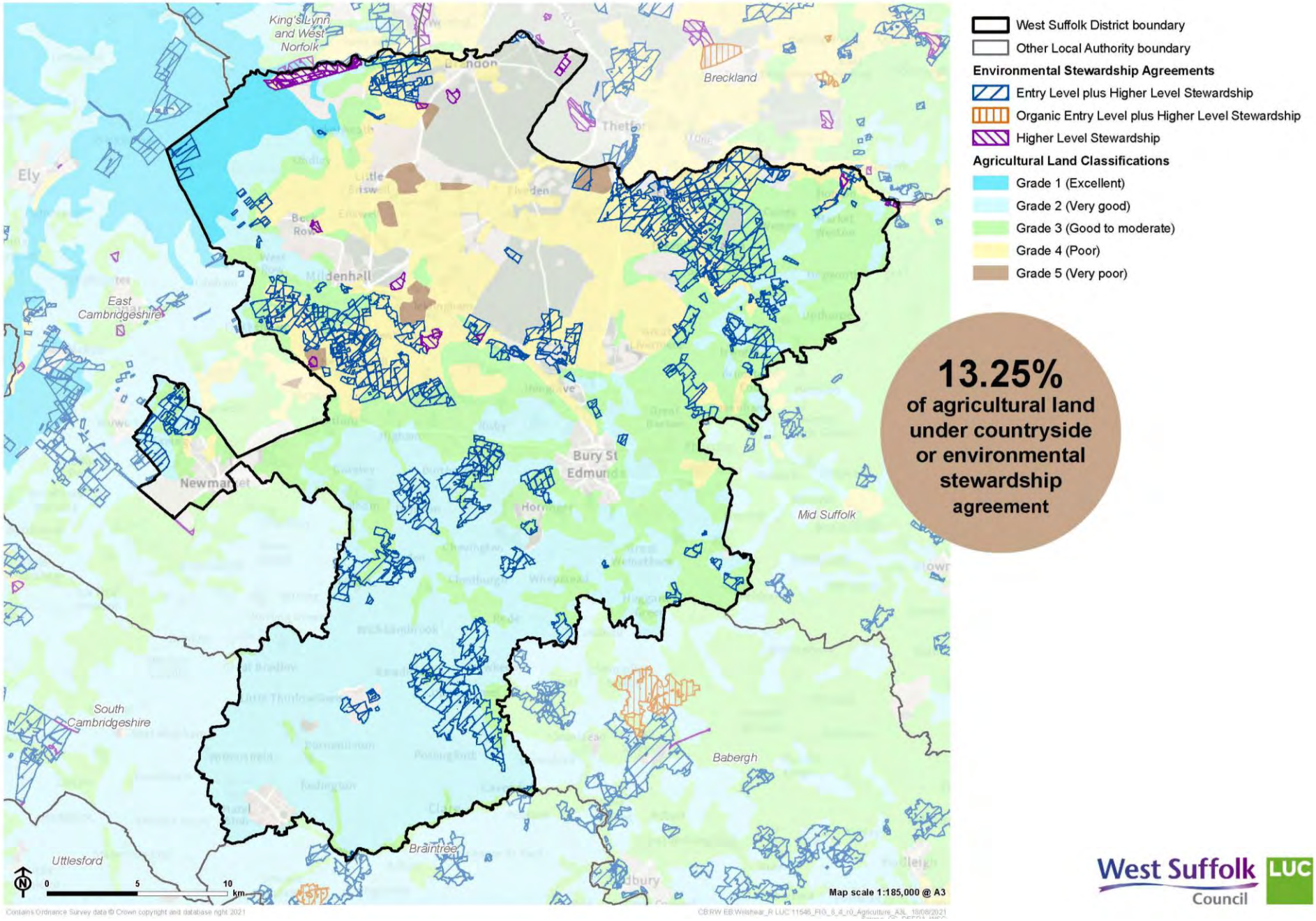
8.26 Agriculture, predominantly for arable crops, is particularly important in the south of the district, within the South Suffolk and North Essex Claylands NCA. Farmland in this NCA is the primary land use for 84% of the area. Agricultural land in this area is primarily Grade 2 and 3, indicating good to moderate farmland.

8.27 Within West Suffolk there is good uptake of agri-environment schemes, with 13.25% of agricultural land is under Countryside or Environmental Stewardship agreements. However, in the Brecks, update of environmental schemes is below the national average. Many agreements are now coming to the end of their agreement period, with the hope that agreement holders will enter into agreements within the emerging Environmental Land Management Scheme (E.L.M.s).

- Grade 1: Excellent quality agricultural land: Land with very minor limitations and where a wide variety of crops can be grown, including fruit, salad and winter harvested vegetables. Yields are high.
- Grade 2: Very good quality agricultural land: Land with minor limitations which can affect crop yield and harvesting. A wider variety of crops can be grown but yields are more variable than Grade 1.

- Grade 3: Good to moderate quality agricultural land: Land with moderate limitations which can affect the choice of crops, timing and type of cultivation or harvesting and level of yield.
- Grade 4: Poor quality agricultural land: Land with severe limitations which can significantly impact upon the range of crops and level of yield. Mainly suited to grass with some arable crops.
- Grade 5: Very poor quality agricultural land: Land with very severe limitations on what can be grown and is therefore restricted to use for permanent pasture or rough grazing.

Figure 8.4: Agriculture



Stakeholder consultation

Valuable features

- Abbey of St Edmund and Abbey Gardens;
- Geologically important sites and features;
- Stately homes and park, e.g. Euston Hall and Estate;
- Important geodiversity within the Brecks, formed on 90 million year old chalk beds which contain huge reserves of groundwater which supplies agricultural and public demand; and
- Range of archaeological sites recently remapped by Suffolk Records Office.

Existing projects

- Brecks' Fen Edge and Rivers (BFER) has HLF projects aimed as discovering heritage;
- Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership have a draft overarching plan to inform the next 10 years;
- BFER and Norfolk River Trust engaging with farmers about catchment sensitive farming and water management; and
- Links to the Dedham Vales AONB and Stour Valley Green Light Trust work at West Stow Country Park.

Issues, pressures and threats

- Changes to payments for agri-environment scheme with new E.L.M;
- Agricultural diversification relating to climate change both a threat and an opportunity e.g. solar, carbon capture;
- Damage to archaeological sites by development and agricultural practices; and

- Intensive agriculture can impact air quality

Key drivers

Heritage at Risk

8.28 Some of the district's heritage assets are in poor condition, and 17 designated heritage assets are on Historic England Heritage at Risk Register. Many Scheduled Monuments are at risk due to arable ploughing.

Conservation Areas

- Hamlet Road, Haverhill;
- Queen Street, Haverhill; and
- Newmarket.

Listed Buildings (I and II*)

- Church of St Mary, Cavendish (Grade I);
- Church of St John, Bury St Edmunds (Grade II*);
- Church of St Mary, Market Weston (Grade II*);
- Moreton Hall, Bury St Edmunds (Grade II*);
- Stoke College, Stoke by Clare (Grade II*); and
- The Umbrello, Great Saxham Hall, Chevington Road, Great Saxham, The Saxhams (Grade II*).

Scheduled Monuments

- East Low Hill tumulus, Rushbrooke with Rougham;
- Mildenhall Roman site, Mildenhall;
- Roman settlement south of Ixworth, Pakenham;
- Round barrows, Risby Poor's Heath East, Flempton/Lackford/Risby;
- Sites NW and SE of Fornham All Saints, Fornham All Saints/Hengrave;
- Three bowl barrows 750m south west of Pin Farm, Gazeley; and
- Two bowl barrows 150m south east of Warrenhill Farm, Herringswell.

8.29 As identified within Historic England's recent guidance on managing local authority heritage assets **[See reference** 64**]**, the importance of heritage is multifaceted through its role in enabling economic prosperity, regeneration, civic pride, sustainability, education, leisure and tourism, and health and wellbeing. Furthermore, the decline in condition of cultural and heritage assets can have a negative impact on sense of place, due to their role in perceiving time-depth within the landscape and forming community distinctiveness.

Development and population growth

8.30 Population growth in West Suffolk is fairly low (and recently the population has been in decline). However, development is still taking place within the district. This puts pressure on the existing sense of place, particularly in rural areas.

Access

8.31 Large swathes of West Suffolk are in private ownership (typical of East Anglia where wealthy landowners own large proportions of the land). Many

Scheduled Monuments are located on private land which makes it difficult to improve public access to them.

8.32 Access to heritage assets is limited, particularly the Registered Parks and Gardens with free access to only one of the four sites (making up less than 1% of the total area). Limited access to iconic sites reduces their value in providing a sense of place, including for more deprived communities.

8.33 Connectivity between heritage sites is generally lacking. Improved active and green travel provision would increase visitors to many of the sites.

Sustainable farming and environmental land management scheme

8.34 Within all of the NCA profiles, encouraging sustainable farming is outlined as a key opportunity. This can have an important link with GI, for example through introducing wildflowers and native hedgerows and mitigating flood risk. This forms an important link with many of the objectives set out in the local and national landscape character assessments and ties in with the Nature Recovery theme (Chapter 5).

The Climate Emergency

- Rising sea levels associated with climate change could have a big impact on landscape character, particularly within the fen landscapes in the north west of the district. This change in landscape could have a big impact on the sense of place.
- Additional tree planting, if not done sensitively, could impact landscapes and cultural heritage features by reducing many of the open views and screening historic landmarks. Furthermore, afforestation, particularly using novel or inappropriate species, can have a significant impact on landscape character. However, if locations for tree planting are selected

appropriately, there are opportunities to help combat the climate emergency.

Health and wellbeing

- Important links between this theme and health and wellbeing includes the level of tranquillity. High tranquillity has been shown to reduce stress for visitors and local communities.
- A strong sense of place can enhance community cohesion. In turn this can reduce rates of loneliness and isolation in the population.

Existing projects

Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership Scheme (BFER)

8.35 Consultation identified the Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership Scheme (BFER), which has been discussed in previous chapters, but relevance here as there are some heritage-focused projects e.g. discovering heritage and heritage skills for the future.

Catchment Sensitive Farming – BFER and Norfolk Rivers Trust

8.36 Consultation identified this project to engage landowners within the Brecks in Catchment Sensitive Farming and improving water management practices.

Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership – Draft overarching plan

8.37 To direct work over 10 years. Informed by Heritage Assessment 2018, Conservation Plan 2018 and Past Present Future Conference 2019. “The ten year vision for the Abbey of St Edmund is that it will inspire all its visitors through excellent conservation, learning and community engagement" **[See reference** 65**]**. As identified through consultation.

Dedham Vales AONB and Stour Valley Project Area

8.38 On southern boundary of West Suffolk. Several enhancement projects in which the AONB and EA have worked in partnership, including to improve ecological status of the River Stour and tributaries, large scale habitat restoration to improve fish habitat and floodplain connectivity, and tree planting **[See reference** 66**]**. As identified through consultation.

Green Light Trust

8.39 Consultation identified the projects at West Stow Country Park e.g. Into the Wild for adults with mental health issues **[See reference** 67**]**.

Previously identified opportunities

Opportunities identified within the St Edmundsbury Green Infrastructure Strategy

Black Bourn and Little Ouse Headwaters

Project A.1: Enhance wooded character and hedgerow restoration, enhancing the setting to Euston Park.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Brecks

Project B.3: Conserve and restore Scots pine lines, planted as part of 18th Century enclosure.

- Ongoing as and when the opportunity arises.

River valleys

Project C.6: Enhancement of existing pine line belts, and restoration of hedgerows and designed landscape features/plantations, particularly near Hengrave Hall, Culford Park and Ickworth Park.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Bury St Edmunds

Project D.3: Enhancement of existing pine lines and restoration of hedgerows around the town and near Ickworth Park.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Project D.6: Creation of woodland planting along the A14 approaches to enhance landscape/townscape character.

- A significant buffer of 30m of woodland planting has been secured on the southern boundary of the Suffolk Business Park along the A14.

Haverhill

Project E.6: Streetscape and signage strategy for Haverhill.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Historic parkland and woodland

Project F.1: Restore woodland adjacent to Bradfield Woods.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Project F.2: Enhance wooded character south of Bury St Edmunds, enhancing the setting of Ickworth Park. Woodland could also be coppiced for wood and biofuel.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Ancient farmland

Project G.1: Restoration of characteristic hedges along field boundaries to restore the ancient irregular field pattern.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Project G.2: Restoration of historic green and former greens associated with smaller villages.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Project G.3: Enhance the wooded character north of Hundon, improving the medieval deer park landscape character.

- Unaware of any progress to date.

Stakeholder engagement

Key outputs relevant to this theme from the 'opportunities' task in the workshop

- Improve hedgerow networks and ancient woodland, and boundary management on farmland;
- Link to emerging Environmental Land Management (E.L.M) schemes;
- Ensure GI improvements benefit from inclusion of education, awareness (of heritage) and sense of place in interpretation material; and
- Link the West Suffolk GI Study with the River Lark Strategy.

Conclusions and next steps

Summary of key issues

- Large areas of privately owned agricultural land in rural West Suffolk restricting access to GI including sites of cultural heritage importance; and
- Increased drought with climate change and the associated decline in soil health will likely lead to an increase in intensive land management, potentially impacting sites of nature and cultural heritage importance. This could also have a detrimental impact on West Suffolk's landscape character.

Key opportunities

- Improve network of grasslands, heathlands, hedgerows and ancient woodland, reflecting the characteristics of the district's varied landscape;
- Work with business and landowners to sustainably manage land under their influence including contributing to the wider GI network; and
- Improve connectivity of villages to features of natural and cultural heritage importance.

Chapter 9:
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Chapter 9

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

The following considers the functionality of the district's green infrastructure network and considers how this will need to respond to future challenges.

9.1 Following a comprehensive review of the baseline within Chapters 3 to 8, alongside the initial stakeholder workshop, an overview of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) of the GI network across West Suffolk was conducted. The purpose of this exercise was to start a spatial analysis of the district's GI, as well as tying the six themes back together to ensure opportunities identified moving forward are holistic and multifunctional.

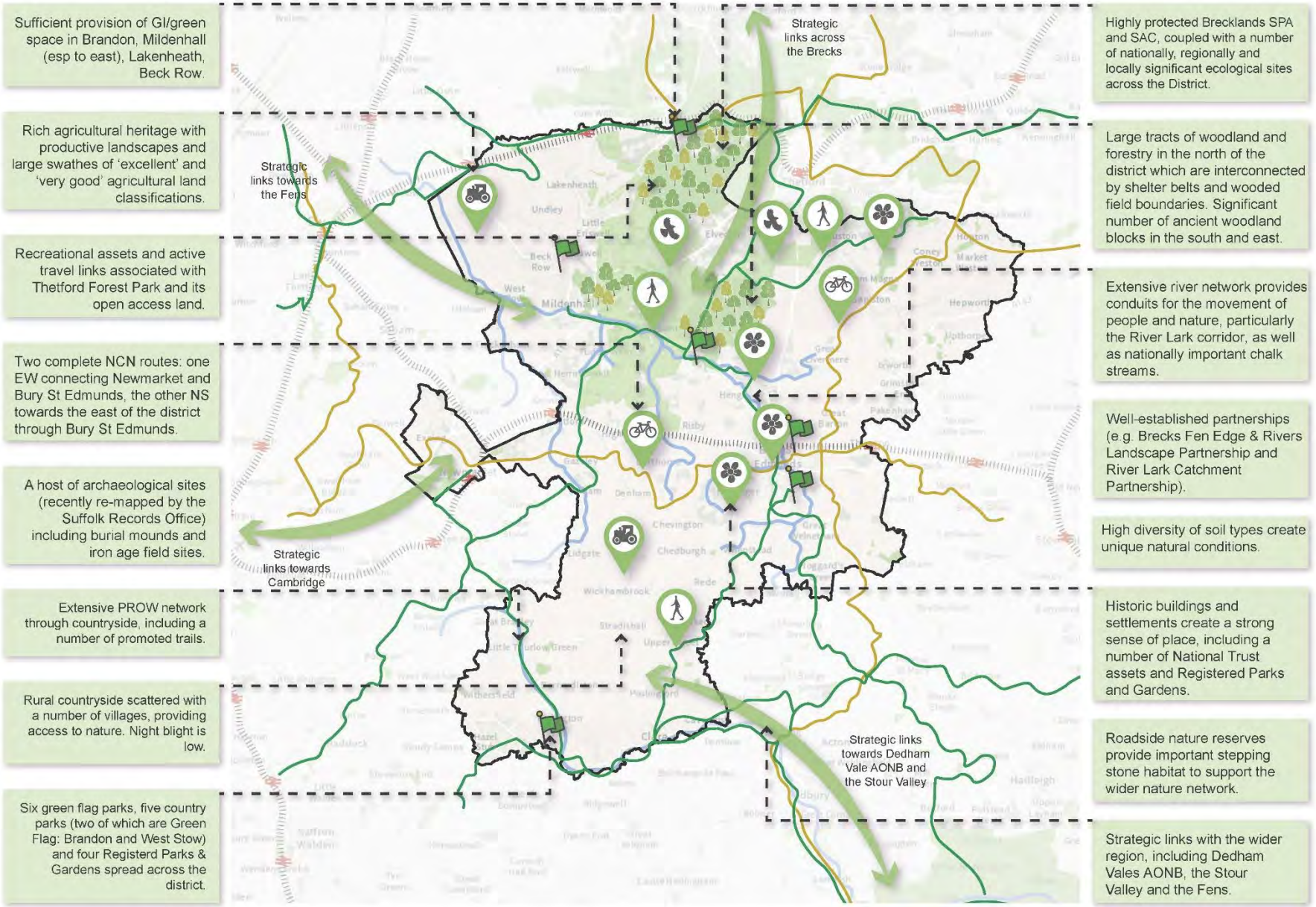
9.2 A more detailed overview of the various SWOT elements can also be found in Appendix C with a cross-reference to the themes to allow for an analysis of multifunctionality.

Strengths

- Sufficient provision of GI/green space in Brandon, Mildenhall (especially to east), Lakenheath, Beck Row;
- Rich agricultural heritage with productive landscapes and large swathes of 'excellent' and 'very good' agricultural land classifications;
- Recreational assets and active travel links associated with Thetford Forest Park and its open access land;
- Two complete National Cycle Network (NCN) routes: one east west connecting Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds, the other north south towards the east of the district through Bury St Edmunds;

- A host of archaeological sites (recently re-mapped by the Suffolk Records Office) including burial mounds and iron age field sites;
- Extensive PROW network through countryside, including a number of promoted trails;
- Rural countryside scattered with a number of villages, providing access to nature. Night blight is low;
- Six green flag parks, five country parks (two of which are Green Flag: Brandon and West Stow) and four Registered Parks and Gardens spread across the district;
- Highly protected Breckland SPA and SAC, coupled with a number of nationally, regionally and locally significant ecological sites across the District;
- Large tracts of woodland and forestry in the north of the district which are interconnected by shelter belts and wooded field boundaries. Significant number of ancient woodland blocks in the south and east;
- Extensive river network provides conduits for the movement of people and nature, particularly the River Lark corridor, as well as nationally important chalk streams;
- Well-established partnerships (e.g. Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership and River Lark Catchment Partnership);
- High diversity of soil types create unique natural conditions;
- Historic buildings and settlements create a strong sense of place, including a number of National Trust assets and Registered Parks and Gardens;
- Roadside nature reserves provide important stepping stone habitat to support the wider nature network; and
- Strategic links with the wider region, including Dedham Vales AONB, the Stour Valley and the Fens.

Figure 9.1: Strengths

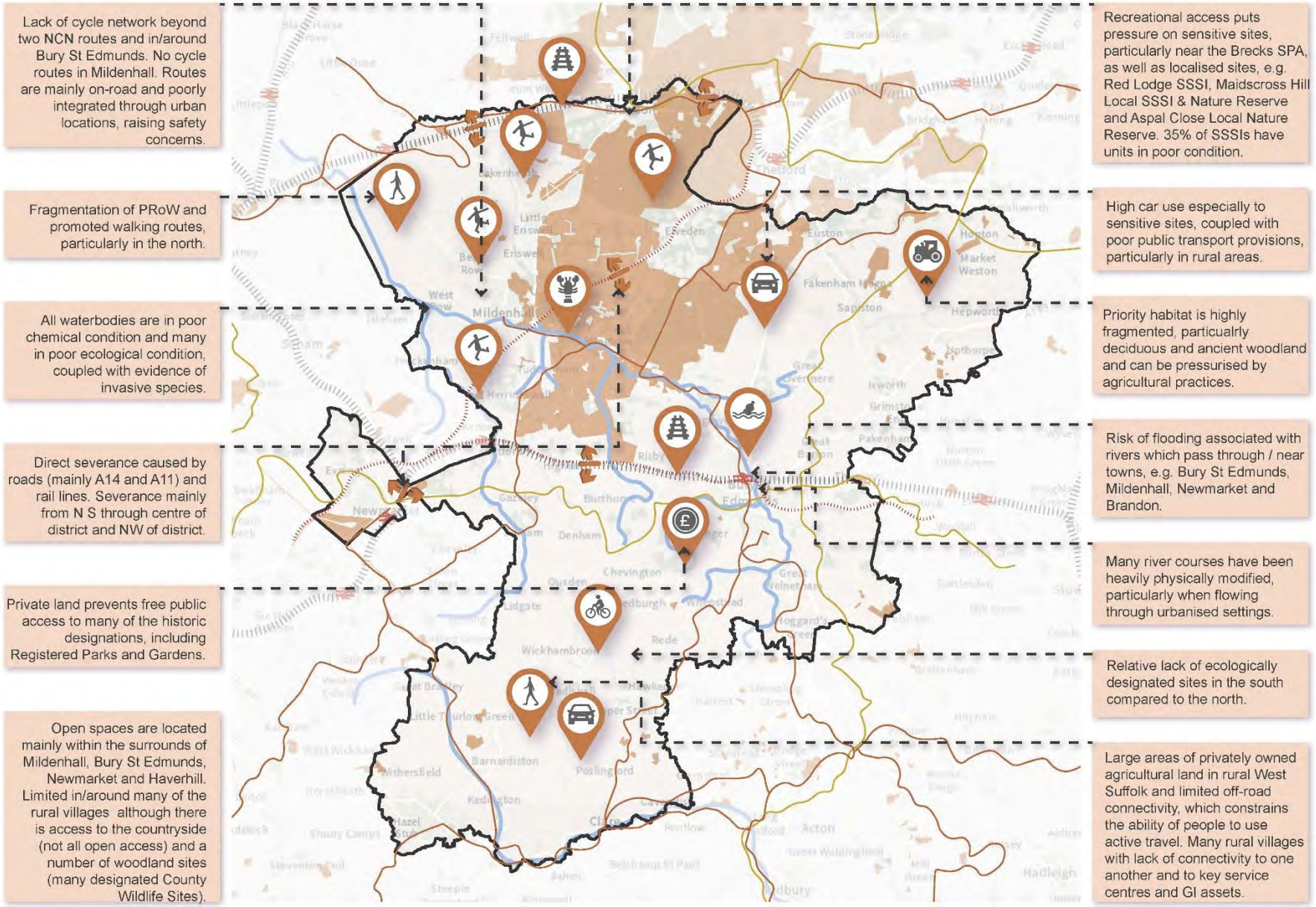


Weaknesses

- Lack of cycle network beyond two National Cycle Network (NCN) routes and in/around Bury St Edmunds. No cycle routes in Mildenhall. Routes are mainly on-road and poorly integrated through urban locations, raising safety concerns;
- Fragmentation of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and promoted walking routes, particularly in the north;
- All waterbodies are in poor chemical condition and many in poor ecological condition, coupled with evidence of invasive species;
- Direct severance caused by roads (mainly A14 and A11) and rail lines. Severance mainly from north south through centre of district and north west of district;
- Private land prevents free public access to many of the historic designations, including Registered Parks and Gardens;
- Open spaces are located mainly within the surrounds of Mildenhall, Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket and Haverhill. Limited in/around many of the rural villages although there is access to the countryside (not all open access) and a number of woodland sites (many designated County Wildlife Sites);
- Recreational access puts pressure on sensitive sites, particularly near the Brecks SPA, as well as localised sites, e.g. Red Lodge Site of SSSI, Maidscross Hill Local SSSI and Nature Reserve and Aspal Close Local Nature Reserve. 35% of SSSIs have units in poor condition;
- High car use especially to sensitive sites, coupled with poor public transport provisions, particularly in rural areas;
- Priority habitat is highly fragmented, particularly deciduous and ancient woodland and can be pressurised by agricultural practices;
- Risk of flooding associated with rivers which pass through/near towns, e.g. Bury St Edmunds, Mildenhall, Newmarket and Brandon;

- Many river courses have been heavily physically modified, particularly when flowing through urbanised settings;
- Relative lack of ecologically designated sites in the south compared to the north; and
- Large areas of privately owned agricultural land in rural West Suffolk and limited off-road connectivity, which constrains the ability of people to use active travel. Many rural villages with lack of connectivity to one another and to key service centres and GI assets.

Figure 9.2: Weaknesses



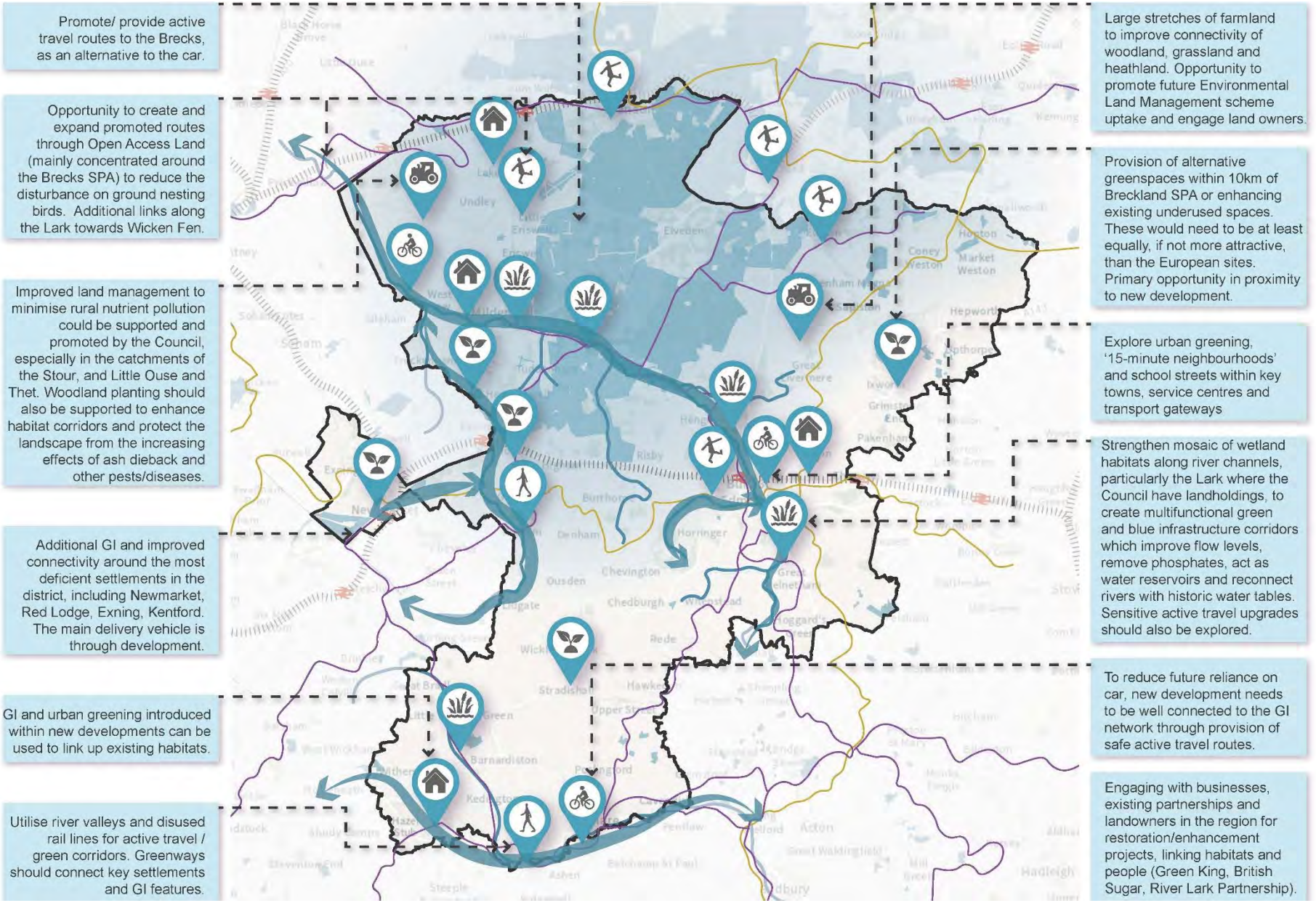
Opportunities

- Promote/provide active travel routes to the Brecks, as an alternative to the car;
- Opportunity to create and expand promoted routes through Open Access Land (mainly concentrated around the Brecks SPA to reduce the disturbance on ground nesting birds. Additional links along the Lark towards Wicken Fen;
- Improved land management to minimise rural nutrient pollution could be supported and promoted by the Council, especially in the catchments of the Stour, and Little Ouse and Thet. Woodland planting should also be supported to enhance habitat corridors and protect the landscape from the increasing effects of ash dieback and other pests/diseases;
- Additional GI and improved connectivity around the most deficient settlements in the district, including Newmarket, Red Lodge, Exning, Kentford. The main delivery vehicle is through development;
- GI and urban greening introduced within new developments can be used to link up existing habitats;
- Utilise river valleys and disused rail lines for active travel/green corridors. Greenways should connect key settlements and GI features;
- Large stretches of farmland to improve connectivity of woodland, grassland and heathland. Opportunity to promote future Environmental Land Management scheme uptake and engage land owners;
- Provision of alternative greenspaces within 10 kilometres of Breckland SPA or enhancing existing underused spaces. These would need to be at least equally, if not more attractive, than the European sites. Primary Explore urban greening, opportunity in proximity to new development;
- "15-minute neighbourhoods" and school streets within key towns, service centres and transport gateways;
- Strengthen mosaic of wetland habitats along river channels, particularly the Lark where the Council have and holdings, to create multifunctional green and blue infrastructure corridors which improve flow levels,

remove phosphates, act as water reservoirs and reconnect rivers with historic water tables. Sensitive active travel upgrades should also be explored;

- To reduce future reliance on car, new development needs to be well connected to the GI network through provision of safe active travel routes; and
- Engaging with businesses, existing partnerships and landowners in the region for restoration/enhancement projects, linking habitats and people (Green King, British Sugar, River Lark Partnership).

Figure 9.3: Opportunities

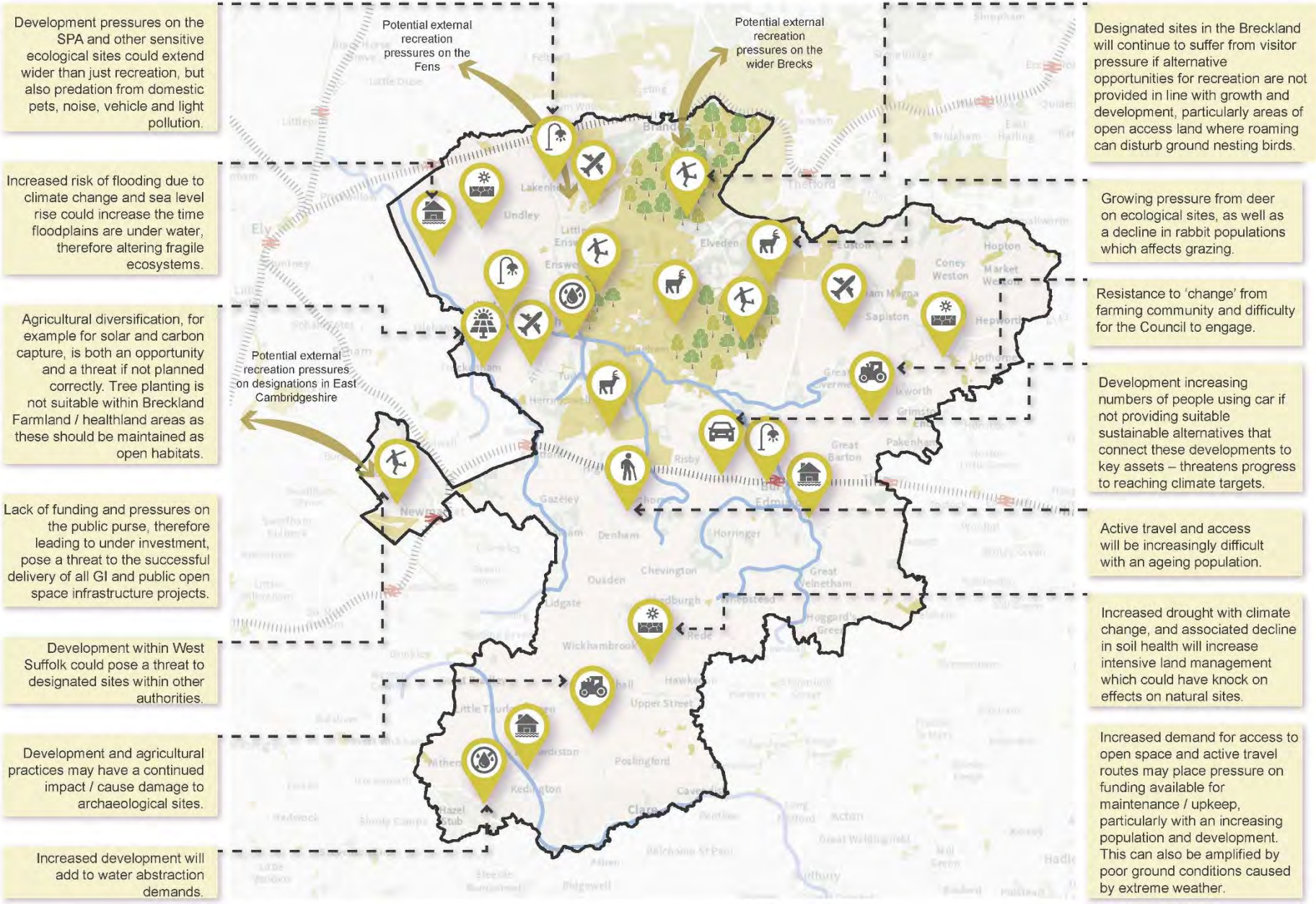


Threats

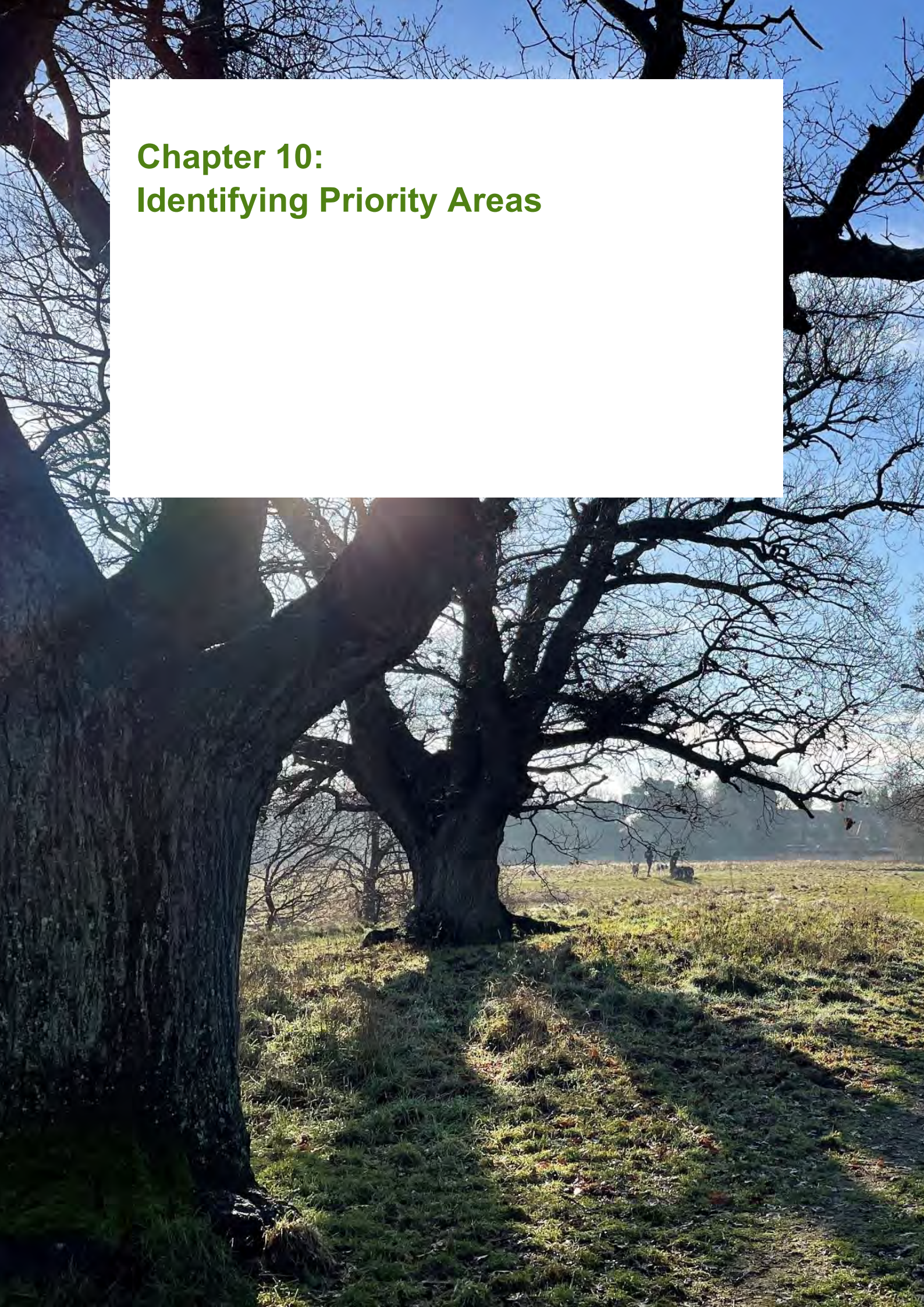
- Development pressures on the SPA and other sensitive ecological sites could extend wider than just recreation, but also predation from domestic pets, noise, vehicle and light pollution;
- Increased risk of flooding due to climate change and sea level rise could increase the time floodplains are under water, therefore altering fragile ecosystems;
- Agricultural diversification, for example for solar and carbon capture, is both an opportunity and a threat if not planned correctly. Tree planting is not suitable within Breckland Farmland/heathland areas as these should be maintained as open habitats;
- Lack of funding and pressures on the public purse, therefore leading to under investment, pose a threat to the successful delivery of all GI and public open space infrastructure projects;
- Development within West Suffolk could pose a threat to designated sites within other authorities;
- Development and agricultural practices may have a continued impact/cause damage to archaeological sites;
- Increased development will add to water abstraction demands;
- Designated sites in the Breckland will continue to suffer from visitor pressure if alternative opportunities for recreation are not provided in line with growth and development, particularly areas of open access land where roaming can disturb ground nesting birds;
- Growing pressure from deer on ecological sites, as well as a decline in rabbit populations which affects grazing;
- Resistance to 'change' from farming community and difficulty for the Council to engage;
- Development increasing numbers of people using car if not providing suitable sustainable alternatives that connect these developments to key assets – threatens progress to reaching climate targets;

- Active travel and access will be increasingly difficult with an ageing population;
- Increased drought with climate change, and associated decline in soil health will increase intensive land management which could have knock on effects on natural sites; and
- Increased demand for access to open space and active travel routes may place pressure on funding available for maintenance/upkeep, particularly with an increasing population and development. This can also be amplified by poor ground conditions caused by extreme weather.

Figure 9.4: Threats



Chapter 10:
Identifying Priority Areas



Chapter 10

Identifying Priority Areas

Utilising all information recovered within the baseline and initial stakeholder consultation, a series of seven Priority Areas for green infrastructure were identified.

Methodology for identifying Priority Areas

10.1 Following the collection of baseline information and initial stakeholder consultation, a series of Priority Areas were identified to help focus the next stages of identifying opportunities. The principle behind the Priority Areas is to identify strategic locations at a landscape scale where GI interventions can be focused. This involved using a number of criteria combined together to give finalised areas, including:

- The spatial zones of greatest need, which amalgamated all research done to date through the baseline and stakeholder consultation;
- The spatial areas which provide the most opportunities which are viable and deliverable;
- The spatial areas which have the most potential to deliver multifunctional benefits;
- The outputs of the SWOT analysis, as shown in Chapter 9;
- The areas identified during stakeholder consultation, including virtual stakeholder workshops and online community consultation; and

- The areas in and around strategic development and key settlements, as these are most likely to see the most change and growth, as well as deliver viable funding mechanisms through developer contributions.

Assumptions

10.2 There are a number of key assumptions which are important to the functionality of the Priority Areas. These include:

- The Priority Opportunities identified within Chapter 11, are not confined to Priority Areas, therefore opportunities can fall out of these areas and still get taken forward; and
- The boundaries of the Priority Areas are not prescriptive and are not meant to be hard lines or follow defensible boundaries within the landscape.

Stakeholder consultation on Priority Areas

10.3 To confirm the boundaries of the Priority Areas, consultation was undertaken both with the Council and the wider stakeholder group.

Stakeholder comments on the Priority Areas

- Potential to focus along the Icknield Way corridor, a mode of linking up the Priority Areas – Suffolk County Council;
- Could Agricultural Land Classifications and BugLife 'B-Line' data be used to inform Priority Areas? – Suffolk County Council;
- Newmarket currently looking like an island, potential to improve connections, however, this would require cooperation with and perhaps interventions within neighbouring Cambridgeshire. This is possible, for

example the recently secured cycle route between Exning and Burwell in East Cambridgeshire – the Council;

- There is scope for better linkages between Newmarket and Moulton utilising the existing NCN Route 51 – the Council;
- Could the Clayland Plateau Villages be extended to include the Black Bourn Valley? The extensive network of PRoW should be integrated here – Suffolk County Council;
- There is a good overlap between the River Lark Corridor and the Abbey of St Edmund – The Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership;
- Bury St Edmunds should be a priority area for the natural environment and heritage – The Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership; and
- Using the river corridors for movement of people and wildlife, as well as focussing enhancements, is ideal and should be further explored, particularly within its role in taking recreation pressure away from the Breckland SPA – Suffolk County Council.

10.4 Stakeholders appreciated the importance of Priority Opportunities being able to fall outside the Priority Areas and that it was important to focus on areas where the delivery of projects is more feasible and beneficial. This means that some parts of the district look comparably sparse to others, for example, the south of West Suffolk. This is due to large parts of these areas falling within private agricultural ownership, meaning the ability to deliver projects here may be more limited. However, this doesn't mean opportunities cannot fall within this area.

Priority Areas

10.5 Seven Priority Areas have been identified within West Suffolk and are shown in Figure 10.1. These include:

1. River Lark Corridor;

2. Little Ouse Corridor;

3. River Stour Corridor;

4. Bury St Edmunds;

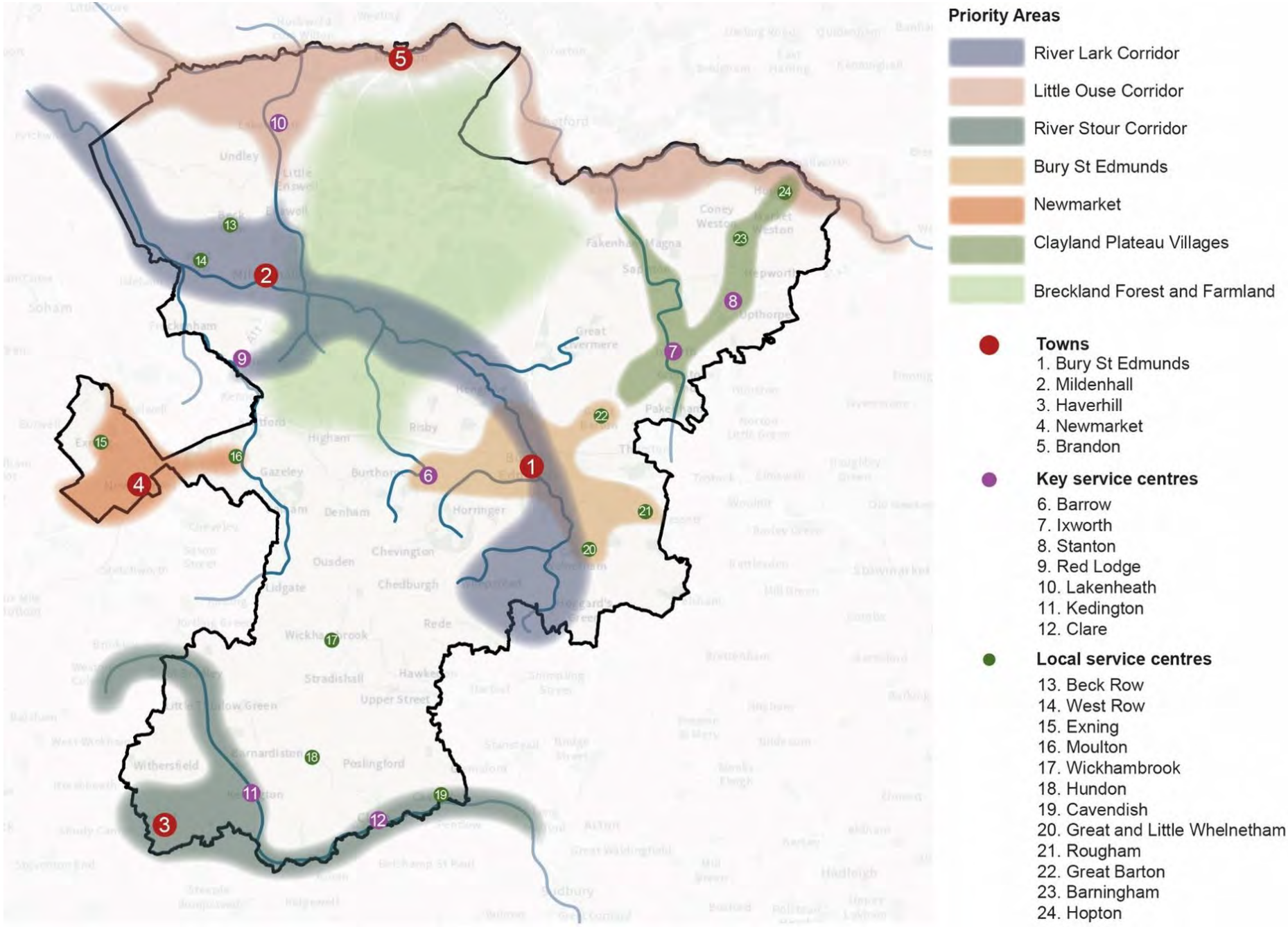
5. Newmarket;

6. Clayland Plateau Villages; and

7. Breckland Forest and Farmland.

10.6 The inclusion of towns, key service centres and local service centres within Figure 10.1 demonstrates the focussing of growth, needs and potential users within these Priority Areas (with the exceptions in the south of the district of Wickhambrook and Hundon).

Figure 10.1: Priority Areas for green infrastructure in West Suffolk



Priority Area 1: River Corridor

Description

10.7 This Priority Area follows the path of the River Lark as it bisects the district from the north west corner, down through the towns of Mildenhall and Bury St Edmunds before ending where the river rises at Bradfield Combust. This area also includes the course of the River Linnet which rises just south of Ickworth Park and confluences with the Lark at Bury St Edmunds Abbey. Fed by the underlying chalk aquifer, these two rivers provide important priority habitats, including wetlands, water meadows, reedbeds, grasslands, wet woodland and the chalk streams themselves.

Figure 10.2: Priority Area 1: River Lark Corridor

Strengths

- The River Lark is one of only 200 chalk rivers within the country;
- Valuable wildlife corridor through the southern edge of Mildenhall to Bury St Edmunds, connecting wetland, woodland and grassland habitats. A number of publicly accessible country parks and nature reserves along the corridor reflect this importance;
- Contains species of high conservation value and protection, including the European eel, Brook lamprey and Brown trout;
- Focus for recreational activity and provides very good walking and cycling linkages;
- Active catchment partnership in place; and
- Residents note how special the River Lark and Linnet areas are in Bury St Edmunds.

Considerations

- Significant recreation pressures on Aspal Close Local Nature Reserve and Maidscross Hill Local Nature Reserve, reinforced by development pressure;
- Catchment is failing to meet ecological and chemical objectives of the Water Framework Directive. Over-abstraction of groundwater and physical modifications are negatively affecting the flow of the river;
- The networks of field drainage, reduction in grassland and a network of ditches have increased the connectivity of agricultural fields to watercourses, increasing diffuse pollution;
- The Lark is disconnected from much of its floodplain which is fragmented, degraded and encroached by development and arable cropping, increasing flood risk;
- Non-native invasive species are present including signal crayfish, demon shrimp, Himalayan balsam and floating pennywort; and

- Catchment sensitive farming seen to not have enough financial incentives by Lark farmers – River Lark Catchment Partnership.

Planned growth

10.8 There is significant planned growth in Mildenhall, notably the West Mildenhall Masterplan Area. Some significant pockets of growth also exist within Bury St Edmunds (detailed within Priority Area 4). In addition, there are some opportunities for growth within West Row and Beck Row.

Emerging opportunities

- Increased recreational opportunities to take pressure off sensitive ecological sites;
- Reconnect riparian habitats and naturalise riverbanks, enhancing resilience;
- Enhance access along the Cut-Off Channel and other links coming off the Lark;
- Raise awareness and enable take-up of catchment sensitive farming; and
- Create additional green space in areas of growth.

Priority Area 2: Little Ouse Corridor

Description

10.9 This Priority Area follows the northern border of West Suffolk and the course of the Little Ouse river as it flows east to west, encompassing the towns of Brandon and Thetford (outside of West Suffolk), as well as smaller settlements including Lakenheath and Hopton. The course of the river varies between open fens in the west, before becoming distinctly more wooded as it traverses through Thetford Forest and opening up to wetlands and wet woodland in the east. The Black Bourn River and Cut-Off Channel make for important secondary corridors branching off the river.

Figure 10.3: Priority Area 2: Little Ouse Corridor

Strengths

- An important conduit for the movement of people and wildlife linking woodland, fens, wetlands, grassland and people;
- Weston Fens and the Inetham Fens form part of the Little Ouse and Waveney SAC and Little Ouse Valley Fens Important Plant Area -the largest surviving valley fen in England;
- A number of nationally significant sites, including Knettishall Heath SSSI, Weeting Heath NNR and RSPB Lakenheath Fen;
- The area is of international importance for its stonewort assemblages; and
- An important recreation corridor of movement for encouraging people away from the Breckland SPA.

Considerations

- The catchment is failing to meet good ecological and chemical status under the Water Framework Directive;
- Diffuse pollution, physically modified channels, and point source pollution have adversely affected priority fens habitat; and
- The watercourse sits adjacent to and directly passes through the Breckland SPA, meaning management of recreation along its course and within neighbouring settlements should be carefully considered.

Planned growth

10.10 There is no planned growth within Brandon apart from some minor infill opportunities within the east of the settlement. This is primarily due to its sensitive location on the edge of the Breckland SPA. There are some small opportunities for growth within the local service centre of Hopton, as well as well as some growth to the north of Lakenheath and within the existing settlement boundary.

Emerging opportunities

- Concentration of recreation enhancements along the River Ouse at Brandon to take pressure off the SPA;
- Creation and connection of new priority habitats, including floodplain grazing marsh, reedbeds, fens and wet woodland along the corridor to enable nature recovery and nature-based solutions to issues such as flooding;
- Support of nature-friendly farming with particular focus on the network of ditches;
- Using S106 to help deliver additional public green space where growth is to occur, for example in Lakenheath; and
- Enhance access along the Cut-Off Channel to increase connectivity between Mildenhall, Lakenheath and Lakenheath train station.

Priority Area 3: River Stour Corridor

Description

10.11 This Priority Area follows the course of the River Stour and the chain of settlements located within the south of the district, including Cavendish, Clare, Kedington and Thurlow. Haverhill, located on the Stour Brook, forms an important town and focus of growth and amenities along this southern corridor. The now disused Stour Valley railway line is also an important linear feature of this area. The mosaic of habitats frame the built and natural heritage found along the river, including important archaeological and cultural asset.

Figure 10.4: Priority Area 3: River Stour Corridor

Strengths

- Mosaic of priority lowland meadow, floodplain grazing marsh, reedbeds and wet woodland along the River Stour;
- The Stour Valley hosts a rich archaeological landscape which can be explored via the Stour Valley Path. This high quality landscape is part of the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project Area;
- The valley connects the medieval market towns of Kedington and Clare; and
- Significant new open space and woodland access are being delivered as part of development at Great Wilsey.

Considerations

- The upper river Stour is failing to meet good ecological and chemical status under the Water Framework Directive. The river has been historical modified;
- Problems include rising water temperatures (due to climate change, lack of riparian trees and low flows), sedimentation, a lack of habitats for fish, invertebrates and flora, and phosphate pollution;
- Non-native invasive species are present in the catchment including signal crayfish, giant hogweed and Himalayan balsam;
- Two Conservation Areas (Hamlet Road and Queen Street) are on the Heritage at Risk Register; and
- There is significant planned growth in Haverhill, which will not only increase the pressures on the wider Stour corridor, but also provide opportunities for the delivery of enhancements through developer contributions.

Planned growth

10.12 Significant growth is planned for Haverhill and is already occurring through the North East and North West Haverhill Urban Extension, with a new country park planned to the east. The potential for significant growth has also been identified in the south-west of the town. Pockets of smaller growth potential have also been identified within Clare, Kedington and Cavendish.

Emerging opportunities

- Enhance access, amenity and nature along the former Stour Valley Railway;
- Riparian habitat creation and connection to help deliver strategic objectives of nature recovery;
- Explore nature-based solutions to issues such as flooding;
- Create new roadside nature reserves to protect existing habitats; and
- Identify areas where critical strategic links across the river are needed.

Priority Area 4: Bury St Edmunds

Description

10.13 This Priority Area covers the extents of Bury St Edmunds, its urban-rural fringes and the neighbouring settlements served by the town. The extension of this area to include the service centres of Barrow, Great Barton, Rougham and Great and Little Whelnetham, is guided by the idea of delivering a network of sustainable communities. The confluence of the River Lark and Linnet through Bury St Edmunds is an important part of the town's history, natural heritage and also the movement of people. Significant heritage assets exist here, including Ickworth Park and the Abbey of St Edmund.

Figure 10.5: Priority Area 4: Bury St Edmunds

Strengths

- Medieval street patterns and built character which give the town a strong sense of place;
- Local historic walks and trails are a recreational and educational asset;
- Two National Cycle Network (NCN) routes run east-west and north-south through the town, making strategic cycle links with the wider region;
- New green space is being delivered as part of development with outline permission;
- Examples of urban greening at information points at Abbey Gardens and floral displays by Bury in Bloom; and
- Significant cultural and recreational assets exist across Bury St Edmunds and its wider rural fringes, including Ickworth Park, Abbey of St Edmund, Nowton Country Park and Hardwick Heath.

Considerations

- Bury St Edmunds and its surrounding settlements fall within several SSSI Impact Risk Zones, meaning consideration is needed for ecological impacts when planning growth;
- Severance is created by the A14 and railway, particularly for communities in the north and east of the town, although a couple of new paths have been delivered at Moreton Hall;
- Lack of active travel network beyond the two NCN routes;
- The town falls within a Source Protection Zone 1, indicating potentially polluting activities could affect public drinking water supply;
- Areas of poor air quality and noise associated with road traffic; and
- There are areas of fluvial and surface water flood risk.

Planned growth

10.14 There are some significant pockets of growth within Bury St Edmunds, most notably the Abbots Vale Masterplan Area, North East Bury Masterplan Area and Marham Park Urban Extension. There are also some identified zones of growth in the east. Some opportunities for growth are also likely to be explored in Barrow, Great Barton and Rougham.

Emerging opportunities

- Enhancing accessibility along existing green corridors for active travel and wildlife;
- Delivery of 15 minute neighbourhoods where viable and where amenities exist;
- Multi-use corridor connecting Bury St Edmunds with Great Barton and to the wider Clayland Plateau Villages;
- Species rich urban greening to reduce flood risk and enhance air quality;
- Bury St Edmunds Radial Route; and
- Enhancing interpretation and wayfinding between the Abbey and town centre, utilising the River Lark and Linnet corridors.

Priority Area 5: Newmarket

Description

10.15 This Priority Area encompasses the settlement of Newmarket, extending north to Exning and a branch extending east to highlight the importance of enhancing connections with nearby Moulton. This area is dominated by the market town of Newmarket and the surrounding influence of the horse racing industry, with stables and racecourses making up much of the rural fringes in the west and east. Outside of these two land uses, pastoral fields bound with well-treed hedgerows are common. Newmarket also has a watercourse named the No.1 Drain (Newmarket Brook) which traverses north to south through the town.

Figure 10.6: Priority Area 5: Newmarket

Strengths

- Medieval street patterns and built character all contribute to the sense of place;
- Unique heritage, culture and landscape as international headquarters of the horse racing industry. Historic racing yards and stables designated as a Conservation Area;
- Good access to transport infrastructure, including main roads and a rail station;
- Priority lowland calcareous grassland contained within Devil's Dyke SAC; and
- No. 1 Drain which routes north to south through the centre of the town and is an existing green and blue corridor for movement of people and wildlife. Recent enhancements to Newmarket's Yellow Brick Road have seen increased use of this.

Considerations

- Limited open space and access to nature, particularly to the east of Newmarket. The Gallops are open to the public in the afternoon; however this does not provide all-day access and has limited provisions in terms of amenity and interactions with nature;
- Falls within SSSI Impact Risk Zones. Recreational pressure is known to occur at Devil's Dyke SSSI and SAC from walkers. This pressure will be reinforced through development and growth in Newmarket;
- Falls within Source Protection Zone 1 indicating that potentially polluting activities could affect public drinking water supply;
- Areas of poor air quality and noise associated with road traffic; and
- Newmarket Conservation Area is on the Heritage at Risk Register.

Planned growth

10.16 A significant pocket of growth is expected to occur in the north of Newmarket at Hatchfield Farm, as well as smaller opportunities for growth across the town. A small amount of growth is also expected to occur in Exning and Moulton.

Emerging opportunities

- Support new high-quality GI/open space through planned development, for example the Hatchfield Farm Masterplan, with enhanced links to the Yellow Brick Road;
- Extension and upgrade of the Yellow Brick Road north to incorporate employment spaces, as well as south to enable direct links to the station, encouraging commuters to use the route. Enhance provisions for wildlife and educational interpretation along this course;
- Work directly with large landowners such as the Jockey Club to improve biodiversity provisions and public access on their estate;
- Work with neighbouring Cambridgeshire to enhance recreational and access routes; and
- Explore how new solar farms can enhance biodiversity and access provisions.

Priority Area 6: Clayland Plateau Villages

Description

10.17 This Priority Area incorporates the chain of key and local service centre villages within the north east of the district, including Ixworth, Stanton, Barningham and Hopton. Following stakeholder consultation, the importance of the Black Bourn Valley as a movement corridor for people and wildlife was reinforced and therefore included within the priority Area. The A143 and B111 form the main routes to connect these settlements which are largely bounded by private, large-scale and largely open agricultural land. A network of smaller villages exists around and are served by these service settlements.

Figure 10.7: Priority Area 6: Clayland Plateau Villages

Strengths

- Former Roman settlements with rich local history, distinct vernacular and community identity;
- As key or local service centres, all the villages have amenities which they can serve themselves and surrounding villages with;
- Strong rural character;
- Position, especially for Ixworth, on the Black Bourn Valley, which provides potential opportunities for access to nature and movement;
- Proximity to National Cycle Network (NCN) 13 and 30 (which runs directly through Hopton), linking the villages with the strategic cycle network; and
- Euston Hall and other heritage assets such as Bardwell Windmill.

Considerations

- Existing lack of footpath or route along the Black Bourn river with much being within private ownership;
- Lack of PRoW and local cycle routes connecting these settlements with each other and the wider countryside, particularly around Ixworth and Barningham. This also applies to limited connections between surrounding smaller villages which should be served by these centres;
- Roman settlement south of Ixworth and Pakenham is a Scheduled Monument at risk; and
- Woodland coverage is sparce and fragmented.

Planned growth

- There are some small pockets of growth opportunity within all service centres in this Priority Area, including Ixworth, Stanton, Barningham and Hopton.

Emerging opportunities

- Existing lack of footpath or route along the Black Bourn river with much being within private ownership;
- Lack of PRoW and local cycle routes connecting these settlements with each other and the wider countryside, particularly around Ixworth and Barningham. This also applies to limited connections between surrounding smaller villages which should be served by these centres;
- Roman settlement south of Ixworth and Pakenham is a Scheduled Monument at risk; and
- Woodland coverage is sparce and fragmented.

Priority Area 7: Breckland Forest and Farmland

Description

10.18 This Priority Area encompasses the extents of the Breckland SPA, SAC and other important ecological designations. The landscape here has been influenced by its age-old land practices, which date back to the Medieval period, recreation use and distinctive wildlife, which has led to the development of a mosaic of dry heathland, grassland communities, deciduous woodland, coniferous plantations and arable farmland. Recognised for its biodiversity, the landscape is also managed by grazing sheep and rabbits.

Figure 10.8: Priority Area 7: Breckland Forest and Farmland

Strengths

- Highly designated, containing the Breckland SPA, two SACs and several other statutory and non-statutory sites, including SSSI and nature reserves;
- Rich in biodiversity and recognised as a national Important Freshwater Area;
- Unique geology which has influenced the formation of the mosaic of heathland and grassland communities;
- A number of recreation assets, including Brandon Country Park, High Lodge Visitor Centre and the wider Thetford Forest, as well as a network of PRoW, national trails and open access land; and
- A highly productive and economic landscape through forestry and agriculture.

Considerations

- Significant areas of open access land which can lead to recreation pressures on wildlife, particularly the disturbance to ground nesting birds;
- Arable farming and forestry have historically degraded and fragmented species-rich grassland and heathland;
- A large proportion of visitors to Breckland Forest access it by car, with many local residents using it as their local green space;
- Catchment sensitive farming and agri-environment schemes seen to have no financial incentive for many farmers. For example, heathland and grassland creation are very difficult as no farmer wants to lose productive land; and
- Heathland in poor condition due to decline in rabbits.

Planned growth

10.19 There is no planned growth within the Priority Area itself. However, there is the potential for significant growth at Mildenhall and some growth in other surrounding settlements, such as Red Lodge and Lakenheath, which should be noted for their potential impact on the SPA.

Emerging opportunities

- Support and encourage nature-friendly farming;
- Upgrade existing paths through open access land to encourage their use, instead of roaming which can trample valuable ground nesting bird habitats. This could be accompanied by a user's 'Code of Conduct';
- Work with landowners to explore how the nature recovery network can be enhanced through the use of shelter belts, hedgerows and wooded field margins;
- Consult with Forestry Commission about the creation of heathland through their forestry resilience programme; and
- Continue the promotion of Brandon Country Park and other recreation assets in neighbouring Priority Areas.

Chapter 11:
Priority Opportunities

Chapter 11

Priority Opportunities

Following the second stakeholder workshop, a long list of opportunities for green infrastructure were identified across West Suffolk which have then been 'prioritised' to create a short list.

11.1 A long list of 33 opportunities for new or enhanced GI were identified across West Suffolk. This list was created using all outputs and consultation to date, including the identified Priority Areas of most need and potential, as set out in Chapter 10, to help focus the interventions. Once the long list was composed, site visits were undertaken to sense check the opportunities and to ensure assumptions made on aspects such as deliverability and scale were correct.

11.2 The long list of opportunities and their priority rating (the calculation of which is explained later in this chapter) are shown by their Priority Area in Table 11.1 to Table 11.7.

Table 11.1: Priority Area 1 - River Lark Corridor Opportunities and their Priority Ratings

Ref.	Project	Priority
RLC1	Green space enhancements and links along the River Lark	High
RLC2	Programme of enhanced water-based recreation along the River lark	Low
RLC3	The River Lark as a primary and secondary movement corridor	High
RLC4	Red Lodge recreation and connections	Medium

Ref.	Project	Priority
RLC5	Bradfield Woods and surrounding ancient and semi-natural woodlands	Medium

Table 11.2: Priority Area 2 – Little Ouse Corridor Opportunities and their Priority Ratings

Ref.	Project	Priority
LOC1	Cut-Off Channel walking route	High
LOC2	Nature-based recreation in Brandon	Medium
LOC3	Earlsfield/Lord's Walk connections and improvements	High

Table 11.3: Priority Area 3 – River Stour Corridor Opportunities and their Priority Ratings

Ref.	Project	Priority
RSC1	Nature-based solutions to flooding for River Stour settlements	Low
RSC2	Haverhill Railway Walk	Medium

Table 11.4: Priority Area 4 – Busy St Edmunds Opportunities and their Priority Ratings

Ref.	Project	Priority
BSE1	Abbey interpretation	Medium
BSE2	15-minute neighbourhoods	Medium
BSE3	Bury St Edmunds Radial Route	High

Ref.	Project	Priority
BSE4	Active West Suffolk	Medium

Table 11.5: Priority Area 5 – Newmarket Opportunities and their Priority Ratings

Ref.	Project	Priority
N1	Newmarket Racecourse biodiversity improvements and accessibility	Medium
N2	Open space enhancements	High
N3	Yellow Brick Road	Medium
N4	Connecting Newmarket	Medium

Table 11.6: Priority Area 6 – Clayland Plateau Villages Opportunities and their Priority Ratings

Ref.	Project	Priority
CPV1	Connecting the Claylands	Medium
CPV2	Black Bourn Valley multifunctional corridor	Medium

Table 11.7: Priority Area 7 – Breckland Forest and Farmland Opportunities and their Priority Ratings

Ref.	Project	Priority
BFF1	Ecological land management	Medium
BFF2	Disturbance and access	High
BFF3	Bury St Edmunds to Thetford multi-use route	Low

Table 11.8: Opportunities outside a Priority Area and district-wide opportunities

Ref.	Project	Priority
O1	Catchment sensitive farming	Medium
O2	Natural flood management	Low
O3	Wildlife Friendly Villages and citizen science	Medium
O4	Multi-functional open space provision	Medium
O5	Shared rural service network	Medium
O6	Off-site Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) catalogue	High
O7	Farm Plans/Whole Estate Plans and promoting Farm Cluster Groups/Partnerships	Medium
O8	West Suffolk Design Code	High
O9	Education for designated sites under pressure	High
O10	Local nature recovery	High

11.3 To help create a clearer picture of the opportunities which should be pursued first, a prioritisation exercise was undertaken to appraise whether opportunities were of high, medium or low priority. This entailed applying a series of prioritisation criteria to each project and scoring them according to the following (with higher scores indicating a higher priority):

- Multifunctionality and delivering a range of benefits: Number of themes project is relevant to (scored 1-6).
- Meeting identified need: Degree to which the project meets an identified gap in the network (scored 1,3 or 5).
- Stakeholder support: Level of stakeholder support judged through projects being raised in workshops (scored 1,3 or 5).
- Long term sustainability: Degree to which the project is financially viability and management is safeguarded in the long-term (scored 1,3 or 5).

- Deliverability/risk: The degree to which the project is deliverable without substantial investment in staff time and resources (scored 1,3 or 5).

11.4 Priority is then calculated based on the above factors with the thresholds shown in Table 11.9.

Table 11.9: Priority rating factors

Priority Rating	Factors
Less than 14	Low priority, but still important if delivery/implementation/funding mechanisms arise, or scenarios change.
14 to 18	Medium priority, but still important if delivery/implementation/funding mechanisms arise. Small scenario changes could make this project a high priority.
More than 18	High priority, project should be pursued as a priority objective for West Suffolk.

11.5 To help contribute towards the forward-planning of all the opportunities identified, outline cost bands and timescales were also applied using the criteria in Table 11.10 and Table 11.11.

Table 11.10: Priority rating cost band criteria

Priority Rating	Cost Band
Low	Less than £250k
Medium	£250k to £1 million
High	More than £1 million

Table 11.11: Priority rating timescale criteria

Priority Rating	Timescale
Quick win	Less than 1 year
Medium-term	1 to 5 years
Long-term	More than 5 years

11.6 The long list of 33 opportunities were prioritised to produce 12 ‘high’ priority opportunities (shown in Figure 11.2) which could be implemented by the Council, stakeholders or developers, either through the planning system or other initiatives.

11.7 The opportunities which were judged to be of high priority have been taken forward into a series of more detailed proformas, as seen overleaf, for consideration by the Council, communities, partners and developers. The long list of opportunities and the detailed methodology of how they’ve been scored can be found in Appendix D.

11.8 Opportunities which have been identified as being ‘medium’ or ‘low’ priority have still been included within this Study due to the ever-changing scenarios when it comes to GI delivery. Should new funding streams open up, or new delivery partners be formed, or an increased need identified, then some of these projects may be deemed a higher priority in the future. Therefore, the Council are advised to continue monitoring this list and to ‘re-score’ opportunities should it be necessary.

RLC1: Green space enhancements and links along the River Lark

Context

11.9 A number of local green spaces of community value exist along the River Lark corridor. Enhancing the ecological and amenity value of these spaces will improve the river's status as a recreation asset. Work may include encouraging conservation volunteering, improving the value of open spaces and habitat restoration. Locations for this include Hawstead Green, Jubilee Fields, Mildenhall Hub, Ramparts Field and No Man's Meadow, The Crankles, Ram Meadow, Leg of Mutton and Babwell Meadows at Bury St Edmunds (see Appendix D for more detail).

Timescale: Long Term

Indicative cost: High

Figure 11.1: Existing area of wet ground which could be suitable for small wetlands, Jubilee Fields

Potential challenges

11.10 This is a long-term opportunity which will require sustained financial input to reach its full potential. Additional challenges include the relatively large spatial extent of the project and different communities and management partners involved.

Potential partnerships

- River Lark Catchment Partnership (RLCP);
- Relevant town and parish councils;
- Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust;
- Bury Water Meadows Group;
- Suffolk Wildlife Trust; and
- The Conservation Volunteers.

Potential funding

11.11 Primarily through smaller community grants improving local areas along the corridor:

- Idverde Community Investment Fund, Community Ownership Fund, and Tesco Community Grants – Focus of these is on community led projects; and
- Highways England Designated Funds – Delivers partnership GI projects.

Recommended next steps

- Establish a partnership working group with stakeholders along the river corridor;
- Identify detailed opportunities, including green spaces identified by RLCP; and
- Prioritise areas for enhancement and liaise with key communities.

RLC3: The River Lark as a primary and secondary movement corridor

Context

11.12 The River Lark path currently provides a largely off-road promoted route between Bury and Mildenhall. There is the opportunity to upgrade the path, so it is suitable for a wider range of users and provide a functional green and blue corridor through the centre of the district, benefitting both people and wildlife. Route extensions should utilise existing rights of way, connecting with the Ouse Valley Way and improve connectivity through Bury St Edmunds. Enhanced connectivity could be provided by enhancing secondary branching routes.

Timescale: Long Term

Indicative cost: High

Figure 11.2: Public Rights of Way along the River Lark between the Mildenhall Hub and Jubilee Fields

Potential challenges

11.13 Key challenges include securing funding for surface upgrades. Creating multi-user routes can lead to conflicts between users which need to be managed.

Potential partnerships

- Sustrans;
- River Lark Catchment Partnership;
- Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership;
- West Suffolk Wheelers and Mildenhall Cycling Club;
- Ramblers Association; and
- Relevant town and parish councils.

Potential funding

11.14 Primarily through smaller community grants improving local areas along the corridor:

- Sport England – Funding to create an 'active nation'; and
- Developer contributions – For example, the West of Mildenhall Masterplan.

Recommended next steps

- Surveys to assess current 'accessibility' of the River Lark Path and identify major needs to address suitability for bikes, wheelchairs and pushchairs;
- Identify and secure further opportunities for funding;
- Map and prioritise key 'secondary branches' to improve the connectivity of the route; and
- Community engagement to understand how the path may be used and reduce conflicts.

LOC1: Cut-Off Channel walking route

Context

11.15 The man-made Cut-Off Channel runs along the edge of the Fens. There is the opportunity to create a walking route utilising this channel, to connect Lakenheath and Mildenhall. Opportunities to connect Lakenheath with the Little Ouse and RSPB Lakenheath Fen further north should be an aspiration. This will involve upgrading existing PRoW and will also require new routes to be identified and secured. Additional opportunities to create direct access to the Cut-Off Channel from adjoining communities such as Earlsfield and Beck Row is also an option.

Timescale: Long Term

Indicative cost: High

Figure 11.3: Cut-Off Channel through Lakenheath

Potential challenges

11.16 Some of the land required for this opportunity is within private ownership, including the Environment Agency. Aspirations to eventually create a multi-user route are difficult due to the steep sides of the man-made channel.

11.17 Establishing a public route through these lands would be a key challenge. Additional challenges include extending the path into Norfolk and ensuring access for cyclists on steep slopes.

Potential partnerships

- Environment Agency;
- Landowners;
- River Lark Catchment Partnership;
- Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership;
- Suffolk County Council; and
- Norfolk County Council.

Potential funding

- Sport England – Funding to create an 'active nation'; and
- S106 funding – From development in close vicinity to the Cut-Off Channel.

Recommended next steps

- Start conversations with private landowners to establish potential for route options; and
- Form a partnership for Norfolk County Council to extend the route northwards.

LOC3: Earlsfield/Lord's Walk connections and improvements

Context

11.18 Earlsfield community is a former military base now within private ownership. There is a need for improvements to GI within this community, particularly improvements to Central Park. Opportunities include tree planting, wildflower meadows, more sociable spaces, a formal playground (LEAP), seating and natural play. As an additional phase, this park could be connected to the new PRoW or cycle route along the Cut-Off Channel (Opportunity LOC1), linking with the wider countryside and reducing recreational pressure on the Brecks SPA.

Timescale: Quick Win

Indicative cost: Low

Figure 11.4: Central Park, Earlsfield

Potential challenges

11.19 Land ownership and management responsibilities need to be determined; Central Park was listed as a community asset in December 2021 through community right to bid.

Potential partnerships

- Groundwork;
- RAF Lakenheath and Mildenhall;
- Eriswell Parish Council; and
- The Earlsfield Community.

Potential funding

- Idverde Community Investment Fund, Community Ownership Fund, and Tesco Community Grants – Focus of these is on community led projects;
- National Lottery Community Fund – flexible funding of up to £10,000 for five years aimed at communities; and
- Evergreen Fund – Aimed at companies and social enterprises for native tree planting.

Recommended next steps

- Understand land ownership and management responsibilities for the site;
- Explore and secure funding; and
- Work with the community to establish a 'Friends of' group and create opportunities for community-led design workshops.

RSC2: Haverhill Railway Walk

Context

11.20 Work has already been initiated to re-surface parts of the Haverhill Railway Walk. The route would benefit from re-surfacing its entire length between Meldham Washlands and East Town Park with softer surface materials alongside sympathetic widening in places. Incorporating a range of robust, low maintenance street furniture, interpretation, signage and incidental natural play features along the route will help to transform the corridor into a recreation asset. Conservation activities led by volunteer groups could help to promote wellbeing and community cohesion. Focus should be placed on enhancing biodiversity provisions adjacent to Tesco.

Timescale: Medium Term

Indicative cost: Medium

Figure 11.5: Haverhill Railway Walk, Haverhill

Potential challenges

11.21 Re-surfacing of the entire route will be a more expensive and long-term aspiration, however, interpretation improvements and conservation management could provide quick-wins for the site. Enhancing access to the route for cyclists, walkers and others with mobility issues could create potential conflicts between user groups if the path is not widened in places. Path widening would require vegetation clearance which would need to be done outside the bird nesting season and in consultation with an ecologist or Ecological Clerk of Works.

Potential partnerships

- The Conservation Volunteers;
- Suffolk Wildlife Trust;
- Green Light Trust; and
- International Flavours and Fragrances (IFF).

Potential funding

- Sport England – Funding to create an 'active nation'; and
- Groundwork – Supports capacity building and project delivery.

Recommended next steps

- Undertake feasibility study and tree survey to British Standard 5837;
- Consult with community groups and adjacent landowners; and
- Develop a street furniture and signage strategy for the route.

BSE3: Bury St Edmunds radial route

Context

11.22 The opportunity to create a Bury St Edmunds radial route should focus in particular on the NW quarter of the town. There are also opportunities to create branches from the route to enhance connectivity into the town centre, for example the recently secured Horringer to Bury route. This would include options for 'quiet lanes' at Great Barton and Elderstub Lane. There are opportunities to link up with new developments and GI which is being proposed as part of such masterplans, for example the North East Bury Masterplan Area.

Timescale: Long Term

Indicative cost: High

Figure 11.6: Angel Hill and entrance to the Abbey Gardens

Potential challenges

11.23 Funding for this project is a potential challenge. Funding was announced by the Department for Transport in July 2021 for cycling infrastructure schemes but projects for this have already been identified.

Potential partnerships

- Suffolk County Council;
- Sustrans;
- West Suffolk Wheelers;
- Developers;
- Bury St Edmunds Town Council; and
- Highways England.

Potential funding

- Sport England – Funding to create an 'active nation';
- Highways England Designated Funds – Delivers partnership GGI projects; and
- Levelling up Fund – Upcoming with publication of the Levelling Up White Paper.

Recommended next steps

- Consult with local road users and cyclists to outline most need for new branches;
- Continue to develop the plans already submitted to deliver this route in its entirety, with special focus in the northwest; and
- Consult with landowners where necessary.

N2: Open space enhancement

Context

11.24 The open space study identifies a deficiency in the quantity and accessibility to multiple types of open space within Newmarket. Enhancing the functionality of amenity greenspaces within the town could fill gaps in some of the open space provision and reduce recreational pressures on sites such as Devil's Dyke SSSI. There are opportunities for improving management and enhancements for people and wildlife, for example along the No.1 Drain (Newmarket Brook).

Timescale: Medium Term

Indicative cost: Medium

Figure 11.7: Entrance to the Yellow Brick Road, Newmarket

Potential challenges

11.25 Ensuring ongoing management of spaces will be a challenge for this opportunity.

Potential partnerships

- Suffolk Wildlife Trust;
- Ramblers Association;
- Suffolk County Council;
- Natural England; and
- Forestry Commission.

Potential funding

- Groundwork – Supports capacity building and project delivery; and
- National Lottery Community Fund – flexible funding of up to £10,000 for five years aimed at communities.

Recommended next steps

- Monitoring of damage caused by trampling and human disturbance to identify key opportunity areas;
- Engage local communities and walkers to ensure local buy-in; and
- Engage with Natural England and Forestry Commission.

O6: Off-site Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) catalogue

Context

11.26 There is the opportunity to create a catalogue of locations for off-site BNG provisions in the circumstances where development cannot deliver 10% on site. This will enable quick and focussed biodiversity improvements in the locations where the most benefit will be created. Further work is needed to identify areas where sites could be improved. Desk-based reviews as part of the GI Study have already established a number of potential sites, as shown in Appendix D.

Timescale: Quick Win

Indicative cost: Low

Figure 11.8: No Man's Meadows and the confluence of the River Lark and Linnet, Bury St Edmunds

Potential challenges

11.27 Further work will need to be undertaken to develop this catalogue of sites and to determine the sorts of interventions which will be most appropriate. Buy-in from willing landowners will be required for any privately owned sites.

Potential partnerships

- Suffolk County Council;
- Developers;
- Suffolk Wildlife Trust; and
- Natural England.

Potential funding

- West Suffolk Council – Initial identification and monitoring of the catalogue should be done in-house, utilising consultation with stakeholders such as Suffolk Wildlife Trust; and
- Developers – Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) enhancement will be funded by developer contributions.

Recommended next steps

- A district-wide study is needed to identify sites and landowners, assess their existing biodiversity value and define appropriate interventions;
- Work with developers to ensure appropriate BNG is secured in the best place; and
- Additional sites may need to be identified if there is development in other locations.

O8: West Suffolk Design Code

Context

11.28 The revised NPPF sets out the expectation for all local authorities to prepare local design guides or design codes. The Council should explore the opportunity to produce a district wide design guide/code, which adheres to the National Model Design Code and National Design Guide. This will include detailed guidance on how developers can successfully implement and design GI, play, open space, SuDS, BNG and urban greening. This will create the evidence base and grounding for only accepting high quality GI from developers. There should also be guidance on retrofitting GI within existing urbanised areas.

Timescale: Quick Win

Indicative cost: Low

Figure 11.9: New development in Red Lodge which makes use of the distinctive Scots Pine windbreaks

Potential challenges

11.29 There would be the potential challenge relating to major development coming forwards before the Design Code is established. Using developer's 'site specific' design codes or existing standards such as Building with Nature, will help with this. Funding sources for this opportunity are limited.

Potential partnerships

- Suffolk County Council;
- Developers;
- Community (through design workshops); and
- Urban design professionals.

Potential funding

- Suffolk County Council or the Council - Large proportions of the funding will likely be from either Suffolk County Council or the Council. However, moving into Stage 2 of the national pilot programmes, it is still unclear how the Government are going to support Local Planning Authorities in their delivery and the training of officers.

Recommended next steps

- Consult with Suffolk County Council to determine scope of the design code and whether the document will be district-wide or county-wide.
- Commission professionals to deliver the design code, this should ideally include or follow a characterisation study.

O9: Education for designated sites under pressure

Context

11.30 This opportunity aims to reduce pressure on designated sites without reducing access, which is difficult due to high demand for recreation. Enhancing education and creating a 'Code of Conduct' through signage at a number of sites which are under pressure could help to alleviate negative behaviour such as trampling, loose dogs and cycling where not appropriate. Such sites include Devil's Dyke SSSI, Aspal Close LNR, Maidscross Hill LNR, Red Lodge Heath SSSI, Brandon Country Park, West Stow Heath SSSI and across the wider Brecks SPA.

Timescale: Quick Win

Indicative cost: Low

Figure 11.10: Aspal Close Local Nature Reserve, Beck Row

Potential challenges

11.31 Negative reactions from some members of the public is a potential challenge of the opportunity. However, it is hoping that information which focuses on the sensitivities of sites and why some restrictions are necessary, as opposed to reducing access altogether, should help get users on board. Where issues continue to exist, Public Space Protection Orders could be issued which would require dogs to be kept on leads.

Potential partnerships

- Natural England;
- Forestry Commission;
- Suffolk Wildlife Trust; and
- Managing bodies for individual sites e.g. Red Lodge Conservation Group.

Potential funding

- Developers – There may be the possibility of using developer contributions if development is within close proximity to identified sites.

Recommended next steps

- Establish a partnership to undertake education and engagement;
- Run community events and education days in designated sites. Where possible include local communities in creating their own Codes of Conduct;
- Produce signage outlining new Codes of Conduct; and
- Ongoing monitoring to assess whether new guidelines are being adhered to.

O10: Local Nature Recovery

Context

11.32 This opportunity aims to help provide net gain for smaller developments where restrictions on space and funding are challenging. Smaller contributions to enhancing the local nature recovery network should be sought through projects such as small-scale woodland planting, hedgerow connections, wetland scrapes and pond creation. This could also include the delivery of new Roadside Nature Reserves, particularly where the buffering and connecting of Priority Habitats can be achieved. This should also be applied to the loss of specific habitats for Priority Species.

Timescale: Medium Term

Indicative cost: Medium

Figure 11.11: Views across agricultural fields near Risby

Potential challenges

11.33 Ongoing monitoring to ensure the success of this opportunity will be needed, alongside relating land ownership to suitable locations. The commitment for landowners to manage new habitats for 30 years (a requirement under the Environment Act) will also be another challenge.

Potential partnerships

- Suffolk County Council;
- Breckland Farmers Wildlife Network;
- Suffolk Wildlife Trust; and
- Landowners.

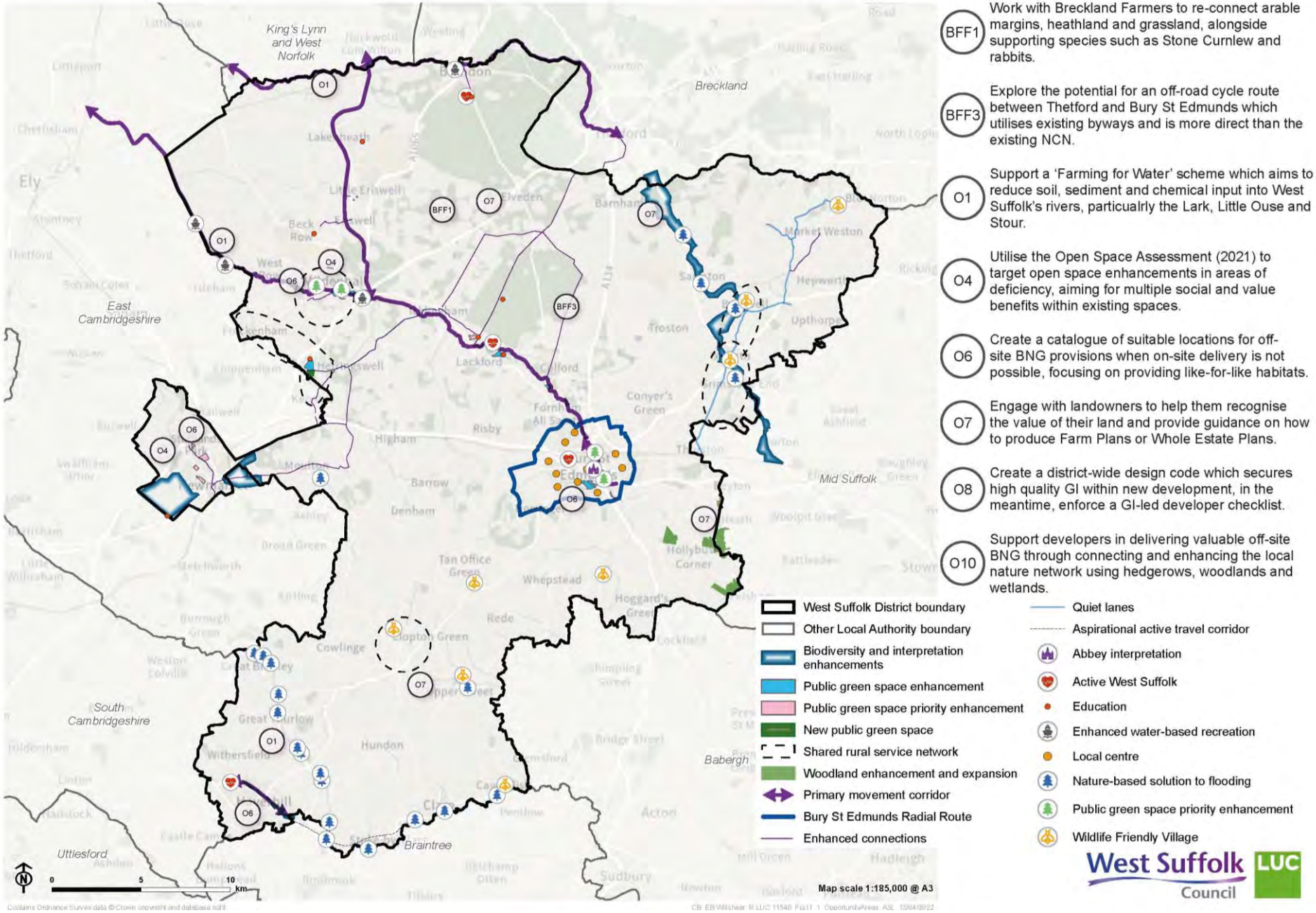
Potential funding

- Forestry Commission – Various woodland creation grants;
- Developers – BNG enhancement will be funded by developer contributions; and
- Environmental Land Management (E.L.M) Schemes – Currently being piloted by Defra.

Recommended next steps

- Ensure an up-to-date data set of priority habitats across the district;
- Engage with willing landowners and continue engagement with developers; and
- Establish a partnership with Suffolk Wildlife Trust who could be involved with the ongoing monitoring of sites. This could tie in with their existing engagement with landowners and the creation of farming clusters to support the delivery of wildlife enhancements across agricultural land.

Figure 11.12: Map of priority green infrastructure opportunities within West Suffolk



Chapter 12
Policy Recommendations

Chapter 12

Policy Recommendations

To ensure the successful delivery of green infrastructure across West Suffolk, its integration throughout the emerging Local Plan and its policies is essential.

12.1 The emerging West Suffolk Local Plan will play an integral role in the delivery of sustainable development across the district, alongside guiding appropriate land use change. The weight, breadth and timescale of the plan means it presents an essential opportunity to fully integrate GI throughout its policies, therefore safeguarding the delivery of multifunctional enhancements to the GI network. Despite the benefits of GI now being widely recognised, it has previously been difficult to deliver on expectations due to competing priorities.

12.2 The national, regional and local need for development and housing is an ongoing issue which needs finely balancing, with the role of the Local Plan to coordinate the needs of communities, businesses and the natural environment. However, development also provides an opportunity for funding and delivery mechanisms, with the Local Plan also having the ability to influence the direction of developer contributions to help mitigate the impacts of development. The backing of a project or opportunity within the Local Plan can also play a central role in securing outside funding and helping to promote the cooperation of various partnerships. However, local plans are inherently development-focused, meaning that their influence over current land uses is very limited, unless they are proven to mitigate the impacts of planned development.

What makes a good policy?

Mainstreaming green infrastructure

12.3 When integrating GI into development plans, it is fundamental to ensure that it is considered across all topics and embedded within the Local Plan, instead of sitting in an isolated policy. Alongside a dedicated GI policy, which clearly sets out the main expectations, the Local Plan should be structured in a way which enables the 'mainstreaming' of GI by incorporating it into a variety of policy areas and agendas, including transport, housing, economic development and health and wellbeing.

12.4 It is recommended that the new Local Plan is tested through the 'Green Infrastructure Planning Policy Assessment Tool' **[See reference** 68**]** which has been developed by the Nature Environment Research Council (NERC) as part of the Mainstreaming GI project. This assessment process is guided by two principles which should be considered through policy preparation, including:

- Functional coverage: The extent to which GI is covered across all policy areas, including the introduction and vision for the plan. The tool recognises the benefit of using 'place-making' as a uniting concept for GI; and
- Strength of policy wording: The phrasing used to convey the treatment of GI, including whether it is explicitly stated within economic, social, health and climate change policies, alongside the degree of its mainstreaming outside environmental policies.

12.5 It is recommended that this assessment is undertaken independently by two assessors and then the scoring compared. Pilots of how the tool was first tested within authorities in Scotland and examples of high scoring policies can be found in the TCPA's report 'What does good GI look like?' **[See reference** 69**]**.

Best practice green infrastructure principles

12.6 A recent literature review **[See reference** 70**]** has explored the best practice principles which should be applied to GI planning and therefore it is recommended that these are embedded within the West Suffolk Local Plan. These include:

- Connectivity: Making connections is crucial to allow for species movement and therefore climate resilience, as well as maintaining the functions and value of natural systems.
- Multifunctionality: Multifunctionality is at the heart of GI and ensures the ongoing delivery of social, economic and ecological functions.
- Multiscale: GI exists at both the strategic, for example river catchments, down to the building scale, for example a green roof. Both these scales and everything in between are important for delivering the multifunctional suite of benefits desired from GI.
- Integration: The interactions and relationship between the traditional 'grey' infrastructures, which has historically been prioritised, and 'green' infrastructures should be considered carefully.
- Diversity: The size, context and use of GI can vary dramatically, with each 'form' of the asset performing different solutions to solve specific issues.
- Applicability: GI planning needs to be realistic in terms of applicability, adaptability and deliverability of projects to ensure they are a success, and their long-term management is secured.
- Governance: Although planning is the most robust method to ensure GI delivery, collaborations between government and communities should be well integrated into the process.
- Continuity: GI requires frequent investment, management and public updates. This should involve a robust monitoring system which includes reporting.

Policy recommendations for West Suffolk

12.7 This GI Study recommends a series of new policies to be incorporated into the West Suffolk Local Plan to guide the delivery of GI, as well as supporting the ongoing stewardship of the network. Key GI policy recommendations include:

Identify areas for environmental protection and improvement

12.8 The Local Plan should set out clearly what GI is and what makes it distinctive in West Suffolk, including a strong statement on what the multifunctional benefits of GI are. Within this, areas to protect and enhance should be identified, for example designated sites, ancient woodland, river corridors and open spaces.

12.9 Priority areas of environmental protection and enhancement could include or be modified versions of the Priority Areas identified within Chapter 10, which not only focus on biodiversity enhancements but aim to deliver multifunctional improvements. This should be done in conjunction with Suffolk Wildlife Trust and Suffolk County Council to highlight the areas which will form the backbone of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy, the requirement of which is set out within the 25 Year Environment Plan and Environment Act.

Support the development of a district-wide design code

12.10 Soon to become a requirement for all LPAs, local design codes will use the National Model Design Code (2021) and the National Design Guide (2020) as a reference for what good design should look like.

12.11 By producing a locally relevant and context-led design code, the delivery of high-quality GI across all new development will be ensured, as well as streamlining the planning process by making it clear to developers what is expected from them at the start of the process. This should be reinforced through a developer checklist for GI, as included within Appendix E.

12.12 In the absence of a design code, adopting external tools for assessing the successful integration of GI into development can be used in the interim, which can then be incorporated into the design code, for example the Building with Nature Standards or the Developing with Nature Toolkit.

The Building with Nature standards

12.13 This Study recommends the exploration of the Building with Nature **[See reference** 71**]** accreditation to set out the expectations for new development. The standards provide both planners and developers with a ‘how to’ guide on what high-quality GI should look like in practice. It also reinforces the concept that it is not just about how the GI looks, but also how it functions for both people and wildlife. Responsibility for the Building with Nature standard should lie with the existing Landscape and Ecology team and would involve pursuing training for key members of the Local Authority team.

The Developing with Nature toolkit

12.14 Published by Natural Cambridgeshire **[See reference** 72**]** with the intention of doubling nature in the Greater Cambridge and Peterborough area, this toolkit refers to numerous evidence bases to help support nature in development. These include the reports 'Biodiversity Net Gain: Good Practice Principles for Development' **[See reference** 73**]** and 'Planning for a Healthy Environment – Good Practical Guidance for Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity' **[See reference** 74**]**. The toolkit also refers to best practice GI strategies which have been developed by other local authorities.

Set a requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain at 20%

12.15 In 2023, a minimum of 10% BNG is set to become a mandatory requirement for all new development in England following Royal Assent of the Environment Act in November 2021. BNG is calculated using a metric produced by Defra which evaluates the amount of 'biodiversity units' before and after development, taking into account the area, type and condition of habitats. Not only will the net gain need to be delivered by the end of the development process, but it will also need to be maintained for the next 30 years, ensuring the long-term stewardship of biodiversity interventions.

12.16 The UK Government's consultation on BNG **[See reference** 75**]** concluded that 10% net gain "strikes the right balance between ambition, certainty in achieving environmental outcomes, and deliverability and costs for developers". However, this takes into account the vast discrepancies in baseline conditions across the country, ranging from large-scale strategic sites in a rural setting down to small infill developments within an urban setting. Furthermore, the Environment Act highlights the importance of 10% as a minimum.

12.17 Exploring the viability of a 20% minimum standard in West Suffolk for certain development types, for example strategic housing sites, will help the

district be at the forefront of enabling nature recovery networks and increasing access to nature. It will also safeguard against anecdotal evidence that 10% may not be sufficient for buffering the margins of error which can emerge from these calculations. Further still, the existing pressures which are placed on West Suffolk's designated sites reinforces the need for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) to be at the top of the agenda to help support sustainable new development in the district. Should 20% BNG be successful for pilot development types, this policy could be more widely rolled out across the district. The Doubling Nature Strategy **[See reference** 76**]**, prepared for South Cambridgeshire, begins to set out how 20% BNG can be delivered across all developments. Other examples of a 20% BNG standard being recommended in practice includes the Surrey Nature Partnership report **[See reference** 77**]**, the Oxfordshire Biodiversity Advisory Group **[See reference** 78**]** and the Lichfield Biodiversity and Development SPD **[See reference** 79**]**.

12.18 Both on-site and off-site provisions can be used to deliver BNG, with larger sites having a greater ability to accommodate on-site net gain. However, medium and smaller-scale sites may struggle to accommodate the on-site habitat enhancements required, therefore resorting to off-site provisions. These could be secured through the developer creating and managing new habitat on additional land, or alternatively purchasing biodiversity credits from a third-party landowner who will enhance and manage their own land for the next 30 years.

12.19 Although West Suffolk has a handful of strategic development sites in the pipeline, a number of infill and smaller developments will likely require the opportunity to deliver off-site BNG. Therefore, it is recommended that the Council creates an off-site BNG catalogue, identifying council-owned land, which is suitable for improvement, as well as engaging with willing landowners to be included within biodiversity credit schemes.

Strengthen the requirements for open space

12.20 Many of West Suffolk's open spaces, particularly designated natural and semi-natural greenspaces, are experiencing recreational pressures which are

set to increase if coupled with new development and population growth. The need for new development to provide open space is required by extant local plans, however this Study recommends a stronger obligation for specifically looking to reduce recreational pressures on designated sites, particularly where large strategic sites or urban extensions are in the pipeline.

12.21 The recently updated West Suffolk Open Space Assessment **[See reference** 80**]** should be used as a baseline guide to developers in understanding what sort of open space provisions they should be delivering across their scheme. Consultation with the Council and appropriate stakeholders should then inform how these provisions can help to reduce the recreational pressures on nearby sites. Through the use of s106 payments, developers could also contribute to the re-purposing or enhancing of existing nearby greenspaces to help mitigate the pressures of the new development. This, for example, could apply to amenity greenspaces which have the potential to function as a park or to provide access to nature on the smaller scale through educational trails and biodiversity interventions.

12.22 Particular focus for these measures should apply to any developments which fall within the 7.5 kilometres recreational buffer from the Brecks SPA and the 5 kilometres recreational buffer from Devil's Dyke SSSI. Developments located within SSSI Impact Risk Zones should also have this consideration. Where the delivery of new open space is limited, opportunities to enhance connectivity between communities and open spaces through active travel should be explored.

Policies not recommended for West Suffolk

Urban Greening Factor

12.23 An urban greening factor (UGF) sets out a points-based system for the expected 'green increase' of new development sites, when compared to the pre-existing baseline. The approach was first developed within the London Plan which requires all residential developments to achieve a score of 0.4, and for predominately commercial developments to score 0.3.

12.24 This approach is not recommended for West Suffolk due to the large overlap it will create with the other recommended metric standard, BNG. By adopting UGF and BNG, it could create unnecessary complications and particularly if the leveraged BNG standard of 20% is adopted, then an additional UGF standard should not create significant additional benefit. However, it is recommended that urban greening principles are incorporated into policies which effect the district's larger towns. This could include the introduction of smaller scale greening solutions, such as green roofs, green walls, pocket parks, street trees and rain gardens, to help integrate new development or retrofit existing development successfully into the townscape. This should also help to address other priorities for the Council, including issues around air quality, surface water flooding and water quality.

Setting a community infrastructure levy

12.25 Although Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a useful tool for channelling funding towards environmental improvements which don't necessarily relate to development sites, the uncertainty surrounding the future of CIL and s106, as set out in the 'Planning for the Future' White Paper means it should not be an adopted method at present. However, once plans become

clear on the pathway for the new ‘infrastructure levy’ proposed in the White Paper, this should be explored fully to ensure land value uplift can be captured efficiently within West Suffolk.

12.26 It should be noted that well-designed, landscape-led masterplans which take into account the needs of both wildlife and people should be able to mitigate against increased recreational pressures and habitat fragmentation, instead of relying on paying for solutions to be delivered elsewhere.

Chapter 13:
Implementation and Next Steps

Chapter 13

Implementation and Next Steps

Alongside clear and cross-sector policies which are well integrated into the Local Plan, the successful delivery of green infrastructure also relies on strong partnerships, robust delivery mechanisms and transparent funding sources.

13.1 In recent years, there have been significant reductions in the resources available to deliver and fund GI across the nation. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the traditional models of delivery in the past, which saw local government funding and maintaining projects, is becoming progressively less viable. Therefore, it is important to consider a wide variety and alternative options for delivery and financing to ensure the GI network performs the functions required to address the issues of climate change, recreational pressures and nature recovery.

Delivery mechanisms

13.2 There are a number of mechanisms which can be adopted to ensure the successful delivery of GI, including:

- Organisations: Organisations can identify and deliver GI projects independently from the planning system, for example ongoing work being carried out by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, the Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership, and the River Lark Catchment Partnership.
- Grassroots initiatives: Grassroots initiatives or neighbourhood planning means that communities can deliver GI directly, for example the Risby Wildlife Friendly Village and the Greener Growth scheme in Bury St

Edmunds. Wild East is another organisation which encourages and facilitates the 'people led' approach to re-wilding.

- The planning system: The planning system can provide the mechanisms by which opportunities are identified, funded and delivered, for example through identification in the Local Plan (and subsequent Infrastructure Delivery Plan) and delivery through developer contributions.

13.3 Embedding GI within the planning system provides the most robust method of securing the future protection, enhancement and expansion of the network. However, adopting a range of these mechanisms is the most likely way to guarantee continued and supported delivery which engages the wider community, ensuring they are not isolated from the process and champion its ongoing stewardship.

Partnerships

13.4 Before deciding on a definitive delivery mechanism and funding stream, it is important to consider the partnerships which will be utilised in delivering a project. The more cooperation and stakeholders which are involved in a project from the outset, the more likely it will be successfully delivered and maintained in the long-term.

13.5 From the outset of this GI Study, partnership and stakeholder involvement has been paramount to the identification of projects and therefore this creates a starting point for moving opportunities forward. It is important to remember that positive partnership working requires open communication from inception through to delivery and during ongoing maintenance.

13.6 Eight key stakeholders who actively participated in the production of this Study and are therefore already engaged in the process of GI delivery in West Suffolk are listed below. Additional potential delivery partners who were not directly engaged with as part of this Study, however, will be essential in the

delivery of some projects, have also been named. Greater detail on the stakeholders who were consulted, how and when can be found in Appendix B.

Potential delivery partners who were consulted as part of this Study

- Natural England;
- RSPB;
- Sustrans;
- Environment Agency; and
- Forestry England.

Additional potential delivery partners who were not consulted as part of this Study

- CPRE;
- Defra;
- Historic England;
- Cambridgeshire County Council;
- Norfolk County Council;
- Wild Anglia;
- Norfolk Rivers Trust;
- Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust ;
- Norfolk Wildlife Trust;
- WildEast;
- Wakelyns;
- Elveden Estate;

- Euston Estate;
- Breckland Farmers Wildlife Network;
- The Conservation Volunteers;
- British Trust for Ornithology;
- Groundwork;
- Green Suffolk;
- English Heritage;
- Ramblers Association;
- RAF Lakenheath and Mildenhall;
- Bury Water Meadows Group;
- 'In Bloom' and 'Friends of' groups;
- Red Lodge Conservation Group;
- West Suffolk Wheelers, Mildenhall and Haverhill Cycling Clubs;
- British Sugar;
- Jockey Club;
- Green King;
- IFF (Haverhill);
- Greener Growth;
- Parish and Town Councils;
- Blackbourne Tree Group;
- Schools;
- Green Light Trust; and
- Developers.

Funding

13.7 Financing projects is most often the biggest obstacle to overcome when planning for GI. Therefore, it is essential that a combination of funding streams and financing mechanisms are drawn upon. Potential funding sources include:

- The direct delivery of greening features within masterplans of new development, using BNG policies as a lever, alongside design codes and developer checklists as tools for ensuring high-quality interventions;
- Section 106 (s106) and offsetting BNG through biodiversity credits (where on-site provisions cannot be achieved) from new development;
- Small-scale community-level funding to retrofit urban areas with green features, for example neighbourhood grants or lottery funding. These sources provide the upfront costs for initial implementation and therefore their use should also consider the source of financial support for the ongoing costs associated with their maintenance;
- Town and local centre regeneration or public realm enhancement schemes which could benefit from some national government grants, for example Future High Streets Fund;
- Funding associated with Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), for example the Our Bury St Edmunds BID and the Love Newmarket BID. This could be used for delivering high street greening and active travel projects; and
- Events and commercial activity in open spaces which re-invest some of the profit into the district's open space assets and could also be used to fund maintenance.

13.8 The use of 'alternative' funding mechanisms in the delivery of green spaces has recently been researched by a coalition of public and private partners (SWEEP) within the Alternative Funding Mechanisms for Green Space report **[See reference** 81**]**. This research helps to provide guidance to Local Planning Authorities (LPA) who are delivering and managing green spaces. The main opportunities for 'alternative' funding are included in Figure 13.1. The

SWEEP Report highlights external grants as an opportunity to secure capital funding, and a handful of grant funding schemes which are currently live are detailed in below. Further information on funding sources for GI can be found on the TCPA website **[See reference** 82**]**. It should be noted that external funding sources and grant schemes are opening and closing all the time and therefore will need continued monitoring.

External funding sources

Highways England Designated Funds

Type of funding:

- This can help to fund GI/nature recovery projects, delivered in partnerships.

Indicative amount:

- Project dependent.

Tesco Community Grants

Type of funding:

- The grant helps fund community-led projects, such as community orchards and gardens.

Indicative amount:

- Up to £1,500.

Environmental Land Management (E.L.M.) scheme

Type of funding:

- Countryside Stewardship will eventually be replaced by the new E.L.M scheme with roll out from 2024-2027.

Indicative amount:

- Project dependent.

Forestry Commission

Type of funding:

- Woodland Creation Offer provides capital and maintenance costs for tree planting.

Indicative amount:

- Up to £8,500 per hectare.

National Lottery Heritage Fund

Type of funding:

- National Lottery Grants for Heritage – Focus particularly on assets which are at risk.

Indicative amount:

- £3,000 - £5,000,000

National Lottery Community Fund

Type of funding:

- Reaching Communities – offers flexible funding of up to £10,000 for up to five years.

Indicative amount:

- £10,000.

Sport England

Type of funding:

- Small Grants and Community Asset Fund both work towards creating an 'active nation'.

Indicative amount:

- £300 - £10,000; and
- £1,000 - £150,000.

Groundwork (with Comic Relief)

Type of funding:

- The Community Fund will support capacity building and project delivery.

Indicative amount:

- £10,000.

Spacehive

Type of funding:

- Using ‘crowdfunding’ to identify and deliver projects by the community.

Indicative amount:

- No minimum or maximum.

An overview of alternative financing mechanism for funding Green Infrastructure (SWEEP report)

1. Income-generated opportunities and loans and taxation:
    - Sponsorship/naming rights;
    - Events of special uses;
    - Concessions;
    - Rental charges;
    - Bonds;
    - Tax Increment Financing (TIF);
    - Business Improvement Districts;
    - Location-specific tax;
    - Levy; and
    - Precepts.

2. Alternative management structures:
    - Endowments;
    - Community asset transfers; and

- Non-profit distributing organisations (NDPOs).

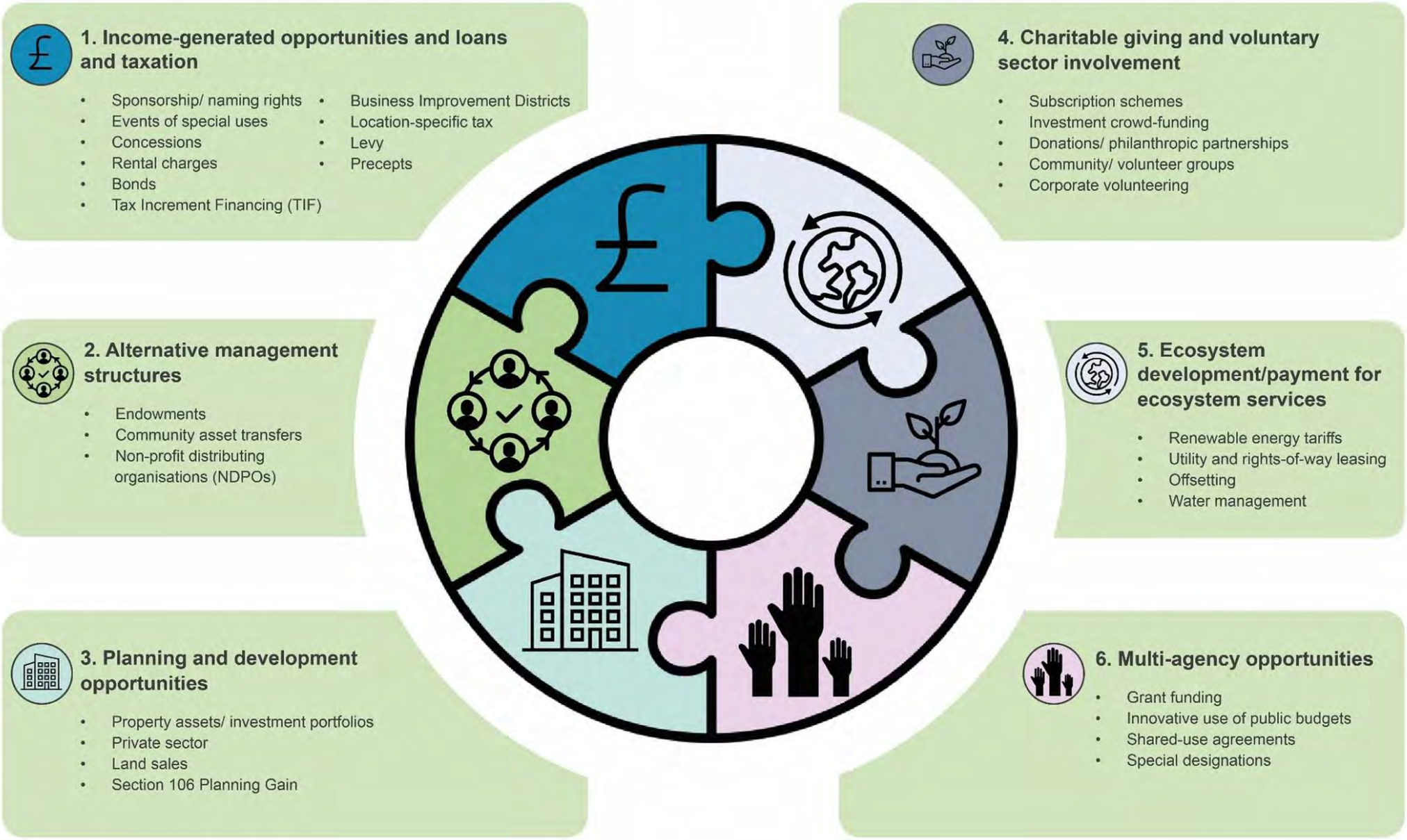
3. Planning and development opportunities:
    - Property assets/investment portfolios;
    - Private sector;
    - Land sales; and
    - Section 106 Planning Gain.

4. Charitable giving and voluntary sector involvement:
    - Subscription schemes;
    - Investment crowd-funding;
    - Donations/philanthropic partnerships;
    - Community/volunteer groups; and
    - Corporate volunteering.

5. Ecosystem development/payment for ecosystem services:
    - Renewable energy tariffs;
    - Utility and rights-of-way leasing;
    - Offsetting; and
    - Water management.

6. Multi-agency opportunities:
    - Grant funding;
    - Innovative use of public budgets;
    - Shared-use agreements; and
    - Special designations.

Figure 13.1: 2021 SWEEP Report alternative financing mechanisms for funding green infrastructure diagram



13.9 Strategic-scale projects will need to undertake significant scoping and viability assessment to identify any 'alternative' delivery and funding models which may require considerable in-house capacity to undertake work. Therefore, it is likely that a lot of GI enhancements within West Suffolk will be secured through developer contributions.

Alternative governance

13.10 There are several options which can be explored to provide alternatives to ongoing Council management.

Community Right to Bid

13.11 The Localism Act (2011) and Assets of Community Value Regulations (2012) provide opportunities for the transfer of land from statutory bodies or the LPA to communities through the Community Right to Bid scheme. The process sees communities or parish councils nominating buildings or land for listing by the LPA as an 'asset of community value'.

13.12 Should one of these assets come up for sale, the community can request a moratorium on the sale, meaning the selling process can be paused to allow for funds to be pulled together by the community to purchase the asset. This moratorium period generally lasts for six months. Once purchased by the community or parish council, it will then be their responsibility to run and manage the asset to ensure it continues to serve and provide for the community.

Community Asset Transfer

13.13 Community Asset Transfer (CAT) is the transfer of publicly owned assets, including both land and buildings, to a community organisation which could enable the delivery of projects. This could be several different forms, including:

- The full transfer of the asset to a community organisation at less than the market value or for no cost;
- A long-term lease arrangement which generally includes low rental prices; or
- A service level agreement which will give the community ongoing management responsibility for the asset.

Trusts

13.14 This method involves the transferring of assets, generally open spaces, into a trust which will oversee the continued management of the asset. The social enterprise could also fund its ongoing costs through commercial activity within the space. These models are generally costly and complex to set up and therefore may not be suitable for many projects within West Suffolk.

Monitoring and review

13.15 The continued monitoring of the implementation of this GI Study is essential to gauge its success, as well as identifying any amendments or changes in priorities. The recommendations and opportunities within this Study are based on information available at the time of writing and may need to be revisited and refined at a later date.

Approach to delivery

13.16 It is anticipated that this Study will remain live for a 10-year timeframe and therefore and interim review of 5-years should be adopted to ensure it continues to align with the Council's core objectives and any other emerging initiatives. The list of priority opportunities should be reviewed alongside this, ensuring that the prioritisation of projects continues to reflect the existing circumstances within the district, for example, whether a specific development coming forward alters the need, delivery mechanisms and financing of a lower priority project to a high priority.

13.17 A review of the Study and its opportunities can be assessed as part of the emerging Local Plan's monitoring framework, including the Council's Annual Monitoring Report. These reviews should consist of:

- Dates any actions and projects have been completed;
- Any required changes to the timescale of proposed opportunities and projects;
- A record of any measurable targets or outcomes; and
- Details of any new opportunities that should be included within the list.

Measurable standards

13.18 Measurable standards provide the most robust way of monitoring the success of GI projects and determining their degree of adherence with policy requirements. New standards which apply to development and infrastructure are updated frequently and therefore the Council should ensure they continue to remain on top of these. This includes the new Biodiversity Net Gain Metric 3.0, as well as Natural England's emerging Green Infrastructure Standards Framework GI accreditation schemes such as Building with Nature can also be used as a measurable standard for success.

Recommended next steps

13.19 The key next steps towards delivering GI within West Suffolk are:

- Identify available sites using the projects identified within this Study, i.e. council-owned sites, sites coming forward for development or sites with willing landowners, where enhancements could take place;
- Identify the landowners, potential managers and delivery partners and consult with them on proposals;
- Understand the desired features and functionality of the areas which can be guided by the evidence of this Study, but may also require additional surveys, assessments and consultation to understand their potential in greater detail;
- Identify funding sources and calculate the degree to which these can support the delivery of the project e.g. how much can be delivered through developer contributions;
- Ensure the inclusion of identified projects within the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP), emerging as part of the new Local Plan;
- Prepare concept plans and outline costs for proposals;
- Consult with the community if appropriate; and
- Delivery phase.

13.20 It is also important to secure the ongoing political backing and leadership of GI, for example through:

- Ensuring GI is high on the agenda within decision making. This could be achieved through the identification of a cabinet member who will be the ‘champion’ of GI in West Suffolk.
- Consider the funding of a dedicated GI Officer post. This post will not only ensure the delivery of high-quality GI projects across the district, but will maintain partner relationships, explore alternative methods of funding outside of developer contributions and also maximise the community

engagement and momentum behind projects. This role will be particularly useful when trying to coordinate strategic-scale projects which may require a number of different delivery mechanisms and partnerships.

- Ensure that development planners and the planning enforcement system are given adequate resources to robustly police and fine non-compliance with policy.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

13.21 The recommendations and opportunities within this Study are based on information available at the time of writing and may need to be revisited and refined following the development of the emerging Suffolk Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Now a requirement of the Environment Act 2021, each responsible authority, which will apply to Suffolk County Council in the case of West Suffolk, will need to deliver a LNRS. Pilot strategies are continuing to be undertaken in 2022 and the nation-wide roll out will begin in 2023.

13.22 The scale of this Study means collaborative and partnership working will be essential to its successful delivery. This means early engagement and continued communication throughout the whole process between the Council, Suffolk County Council and other relevant stakeholders is crucial. The LNRS will ensure the cross-boundary identification of projects and maximise the opportunities presented by catchment-scale projects.

13.23 The Government will soon be issuing statutory guidance on producing LNRS and the strategies will become a material consideration within planning. Therefore, it is essential the Council keeps a close eye on the current pilots taking place and any emerging evidence of potential issues and opportunities which have been flagged throughout the process.

Appendix A

GIS Data Sets

A.1 The following table provides an overview of the GIS datasets and their sources used to produce the figures within this Study and also to enable a holistic analysis of the GI baseline.

Table A.1: Base Maps Datasets

GIS Layer	Source
Ordnance Survey Mastermap	West Suffolk District Council
Ordnance Survey Vector Map Local	West Suffolk District Council
Ordnance Survey 25K	West Suffolk District Council
Ordnance Survey 50K	West Suffolk District Council
Contour lines	Ordnance Survey
LiDAR	Environment Agency
Local authority boundaries	Ordnance Survey
Aerial imagery	ESRI
Ordnance Survey Vector Map District	Ordnance Survey
Ordnance Survey 1:250k	Ordnance Survey

Table A.2: Landscape Datasets

GIS Layer	Source
Landscape character types/areas	West Suffolk District Council
National Character Areas	Natural England
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty	Natural England
Agricultural Land Classifications	Natural England
Country Parks	Natural England
Environmental Stewardship (ES)	Natural England
Environmental Stewardship Objectives	Natural England
Countryside Stewardship (CS)	Natural England
Countryside Stewardship Objectives	Natural England
Nitrate vulnerable zones	Defra
Light Pollution (Night Blight)	CPRE
Tranquillity	CPRE

Table A.3: Water Datasets

GIS Layer	Source
Watercourses/bodies	Ordnance Survey
Floodplain Reconnection Potential - Working With Natural Processes (WWNP) data	DEFRA
Runoff Attenuation Features 3.3% AEP and 1% AEP (WWNP)	DEFRA
Land at risk of surface water flooding (1:30 and/or 1:100 years)	Environment Agency

GIS Layer	Source
Flood zone 2 and 3	Environment Agency
Flood Storage Areas	Environment Agency
Source Protection Zones	Environment Agency
Areas benefitting from flood defences	Environment Agency
Risk of flooding from rivers and seas	Environment Agency
Recorded flood outlines	Environment Agency
Flood alert areas	Environment Agency
Watercourses/bodies	Ordnance Survey
Floodplain Reconnection Potential - Working With Natural Processes (WWNP) data	DEFRA
Runoff Attenuation Features 3.3% AEP and 1% AEP (WWNP)	DEFRA
Land at risk of surface water flooding (1:30 and/or 1:100 years)	Environment Agency
Flood zone 2 and 3	Environment Agency

Table A.4: Geology Datasets

GIS Layer	Source
British Geological Survey Geology 50K	BGS

Table A.5: Historic Environment Datasets

GIS Layer	Source
Conservation areas	West Suffolk District Council
Listed buildings	Historic England
Parks and gardens	Historic England
Scheduled monuments	Historic England

Table A.6: Ecology Datasets

GIS Layer	Source
County wildlife sites	West Suffolk District Council
Priority Habitat Inventory (PHI) (including wood pasture and parkland dataset)	Natural England/West Suffolk District Council
B-line	Bug Life
Natural Habitat Network Class	Natural England
Woodland Constraints (WWNP data)	Natural England
Riparian Woodland Potential (WWNP data)	Natural England
Wider Catchment Woodland Potential (WWNP data)	Natural England
Floodplain Woodland Potential (WWNP data)	Natural England
Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	Natural England
National Nature Reserves (NNR)	Natural England
Ramsar	Natural England
Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)	Natural England

GIS Layer	Source
Special Protection Areas (SPA)	Natural England
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	Natural England
SSSI Impact Risk Zones	Natural England
Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI)	Natural England
National Forest Inventory (NFI)	Forestry Commission

Table A.7: Access and Recreation Datasets

GIS Layer	Source
Local cycle routes	West Suffolk District Council
Public Rights of Way (PRoW)	West Suffolk District Council
Open spaces and typology	West Suffolk District Council
Country Parks	Natural England
National Trails	Natural England
National and Regional Cycle Routes	Sustrans
Ordnance Survey Open Greenspace	Ordnance Survey
Countryside Rights of Way (CRoW) Act Open Access Land/Open Country	Natural England
CRoW Act Registered Common Land	Natural England

Table A.8: Health and Wellbeing, Socioeconomic Datasets

GIS Layer	Source
Air quality data (nitrogen dioxide and particulates)	Defra

GIS Layer	Source
Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2019)	Office of National Statistics
Census 2011 data	Office of National Statistics
Road and rail noise data	Defra

Table A.9: Planning Datasets

GIS Layer	Source
Settlement boundaries	West Suffolk District Council
Town centres/Local centres	West Suffolk District Council
Proposed site allocations	West Suffolk District Council

Table A.10: Infrastructure Datasets

GIS Layer	Source
Bus stops	West Suffolk District Council
Post offices	West Suffolk District Council
Primary and secondary schools	West Suffolk District Council
Universities/Higher education	West Suffolk District Council
Hospitals	West Suffolk District Council
GP surgeries	West Suffolk District Council
Retail parks	West Suffolk District Council
Existing employment sites	West Suffolk District Council
Existing industrial sites	West Suffolk District Council
Brownfield land	West Suffolk District Council

Appendix A GIS Data Sets

GIS Layer	Source
All local authority owned land	West Suffolk District Council
Railway stations and railways	Ordnance Survey
Road network	Ordnance Survey
National Grid infrastructure	National Grid
District boundaries	Ordnance Survey

Appendix B

Record of Stakeholder and Public Consultation

This appendix provides an overview of the organisations invited for consultation and a summary of the discussions had during stakeholder workshops. It also provides an overview of the online public consultation held to determine the value of existing natural and semi-natural greenspaces.

B.1 Below is a list of stakeholders who were invited to attend the stakeholder workshops carried out in June and November of 2021. The list was compiled in collaboration with the Council to achieve the correct balance between hearing from a range of stakeholders whilst keeping numbers manageable to ensure open and discursive conversation is had.

Table B.1: Workshop attendance record

Stakeholder organisation	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Attended Workshop 2	Additional consultation
Abbey of St Edmund Heritage Partnership	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Attended Workshop 2	Additional consultation
Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Did not attend Workshop 2	No additional consultation
Environment Agency	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Did not attend Workshop 2	No additional consultation

Stakeholder organisation	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Attended Workshop 2	Additional consultation
Forestry England	Invited	Did not attend Workshop 1	Did not attend Workshop 2	No additional consultation
Groundwork	Invited	Did not attend Workshop 1	Did not attend Workshop 2	No additional consultation
Natural England	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Attended Workshop 2	No additional consultation
River Lark Catchment Partnership	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Attended Workshop 2	Additional consultation
RSPB	Invited	Did not attend Workshop 1	Attended Workshop 2	No additional consultation
Suffolk County Council – Flood and Water	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Did not attend Workshop 2	No additional consultation
Suffolk County Council - Landscape	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Attended Workshop 2	No additional consultation
Suffolk County Council – Natural Environment	Invited	Did not attend Workshop 1	Attended Workshop 2	No additional consultation
Suffolk County Council – Nature Recovery	Invited	Did not attend Workshop 1	Attended Workshop 2	No additional consultation
Suffolk County Council – Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and Access	Invited	Did not attend Workshop 1	Attended Workshop 2	Additional consultation
Suffolk Wildlife Trust	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Attended Workshop 2	Additional consultation
Sustrans	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Did not attend Workshop 2	No additional consultation

Stakeholder organisation	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Attended Workshop 2	Additional consultation
West Suffolk Council – Economic Development	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Attended Workshop 2	No additional consultation
West Suffolk Council – Families and Communities	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Did not attend Workshop 2	No additional consultation
West Suffolk Council – Landscape and Ecology	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Attended Workshop 2	Additional consultation
West Suffolk Council – Leisure and Cultural Services	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Attended Workshop 2	Additional consultation
West Suffolk Council - Planning	Invited	Attended Workshop 1	Attended Workshop 2	Additional consultation
Wild Anglia	Invited	Did not attend Workshop 1	Did not attend Workshop 2	No additional consultation

Figure B.1: Key outputs from Workshop 1 Exercise 3: Existing Projects (June 2021)

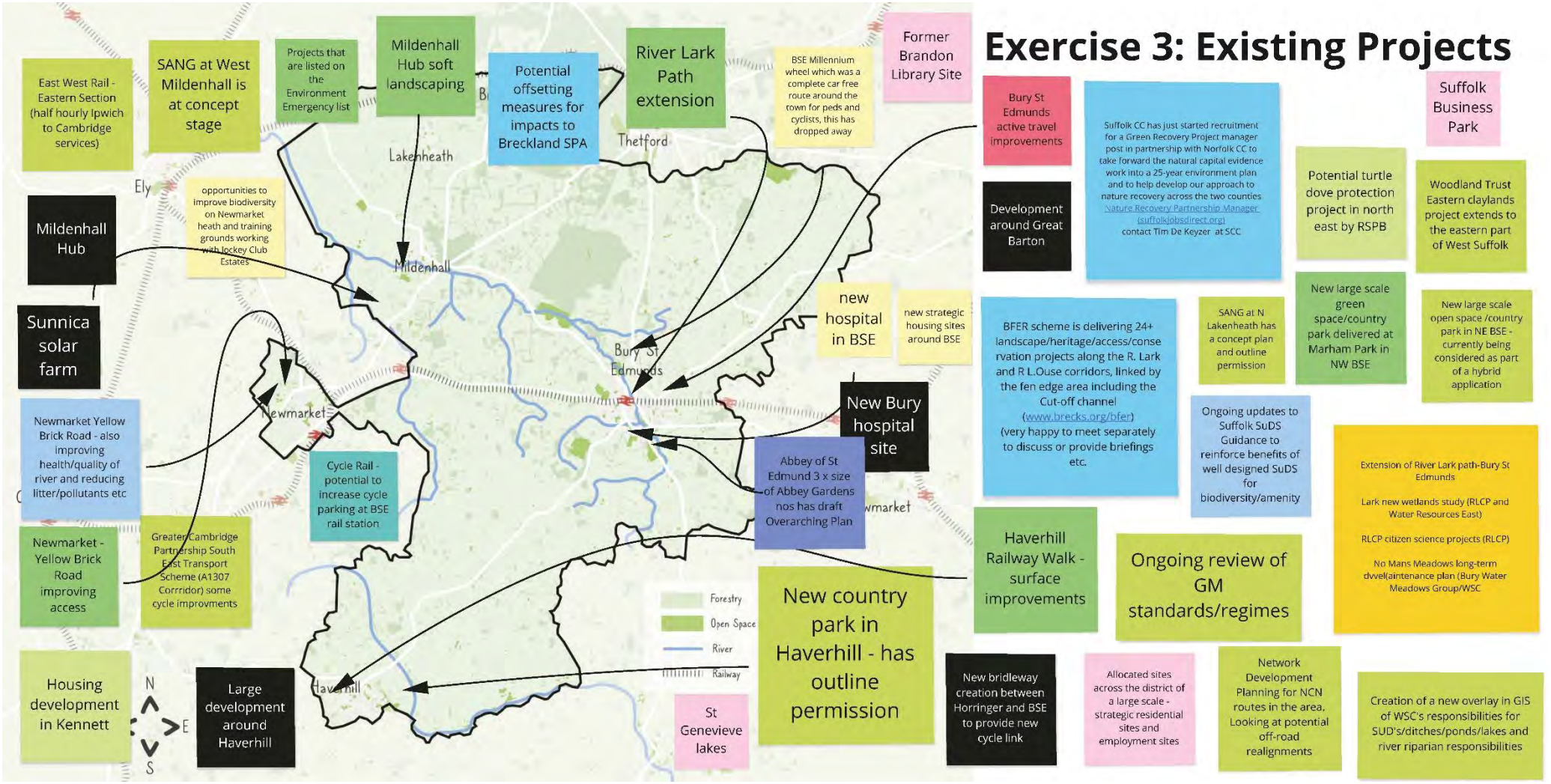


Figure B.2: Key outputs from Workshop 1 Exercise 6: Valuable Features (June 2021)

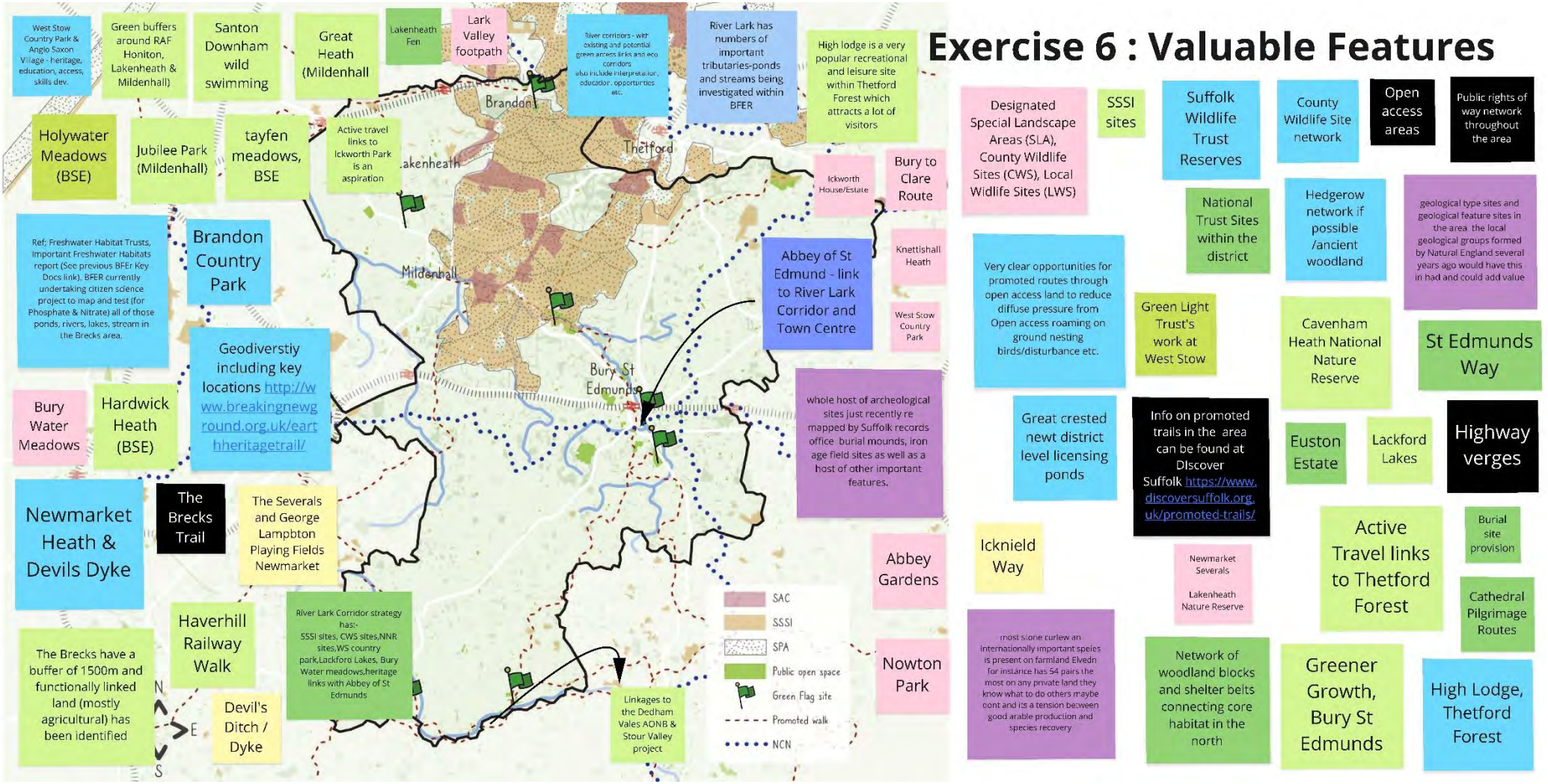


Figure B.3: Key outputs from Workshop 1 Exercise 7: Key Issues, Pressures and Threats (June 2021)

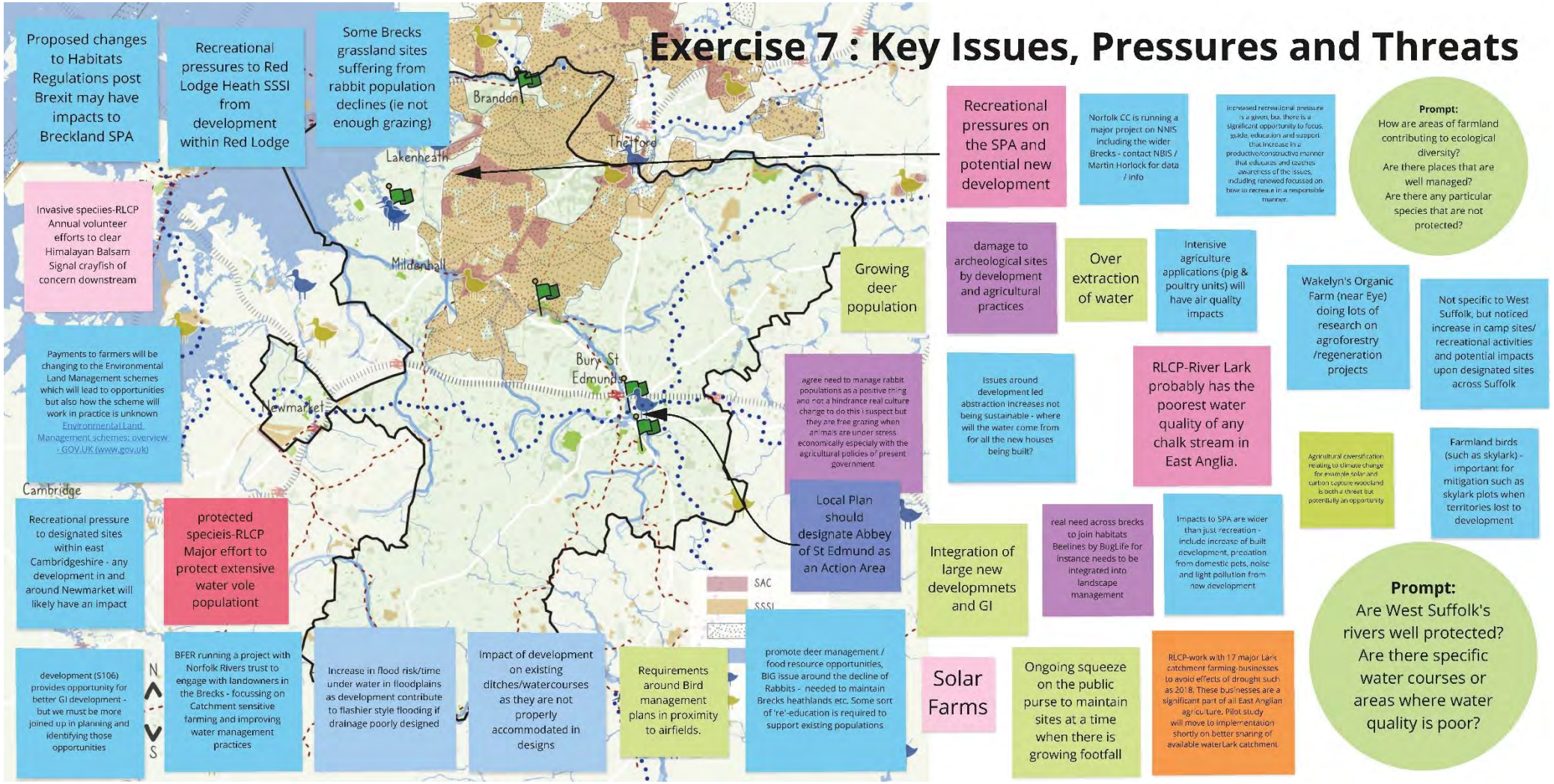


Figure B.4: Key outputs from Workshop 1 Exercise 7: Key Issues, Pressures and Threats (continued)

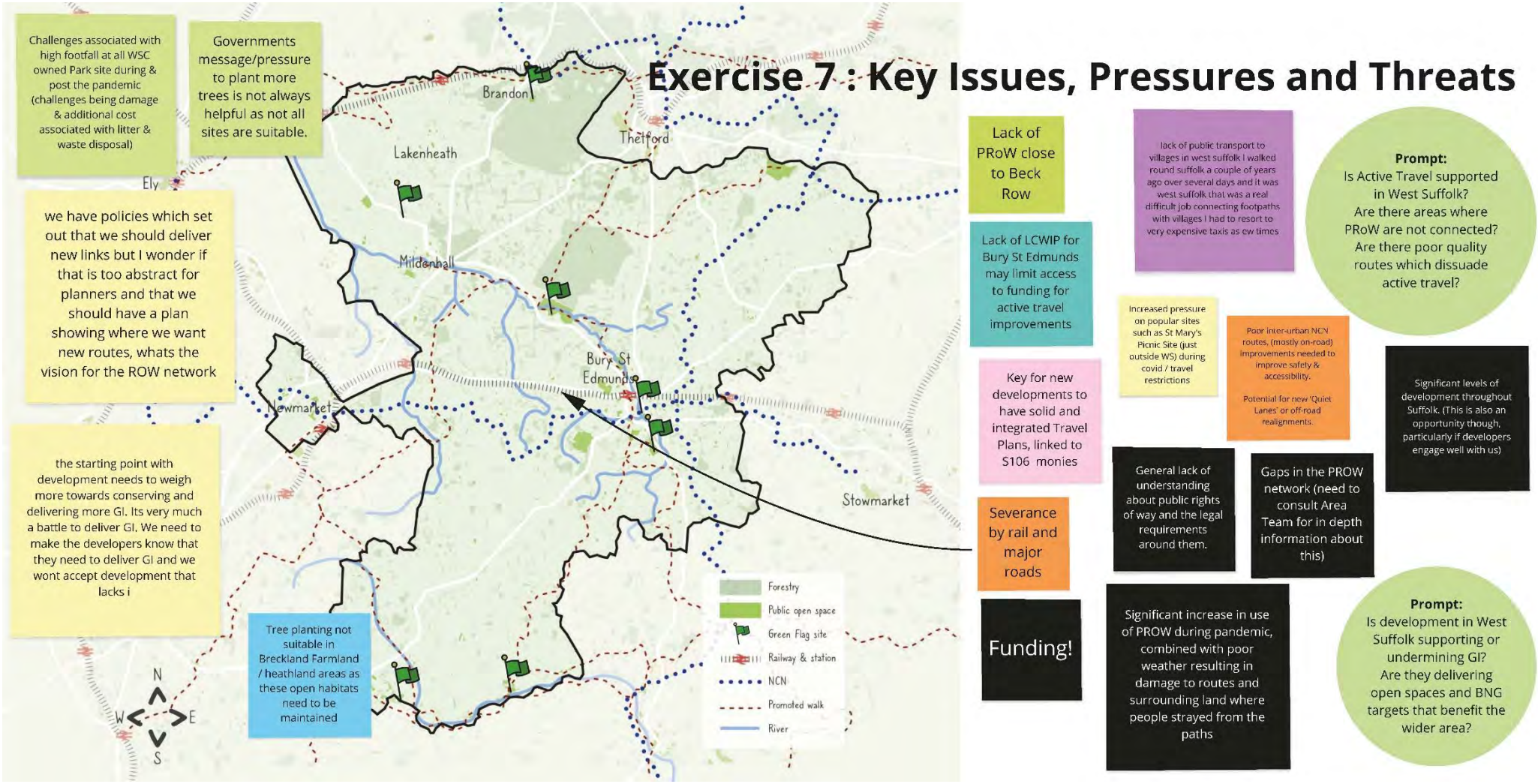


Figure B.5: Key outputs from Workshop 1 Exercise 8: Key Opportunities to be Addressed (June 2021)

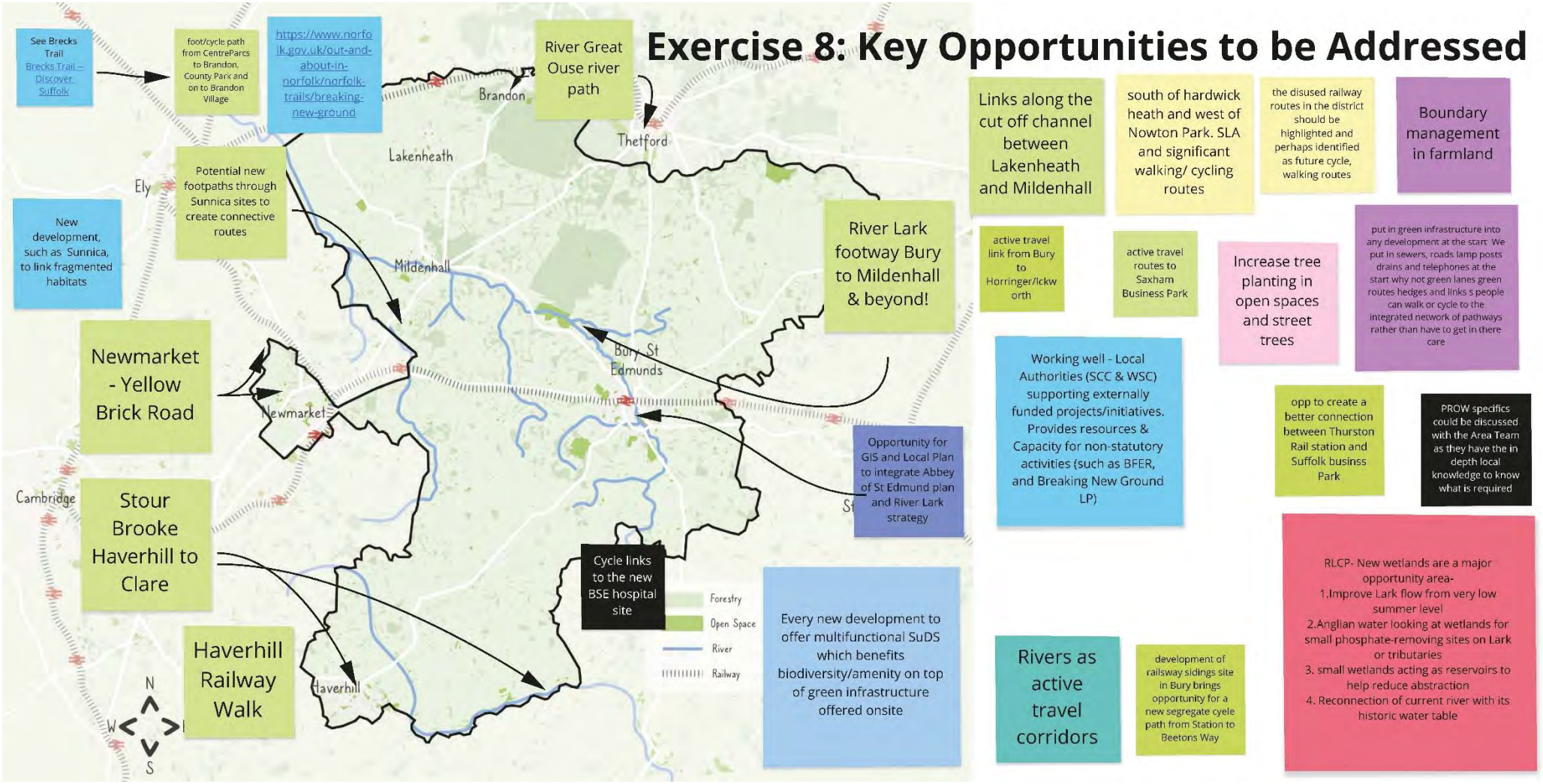


Figure B.6: Key outputs from Workshop 2: Draft Priority Areas (November 2021)

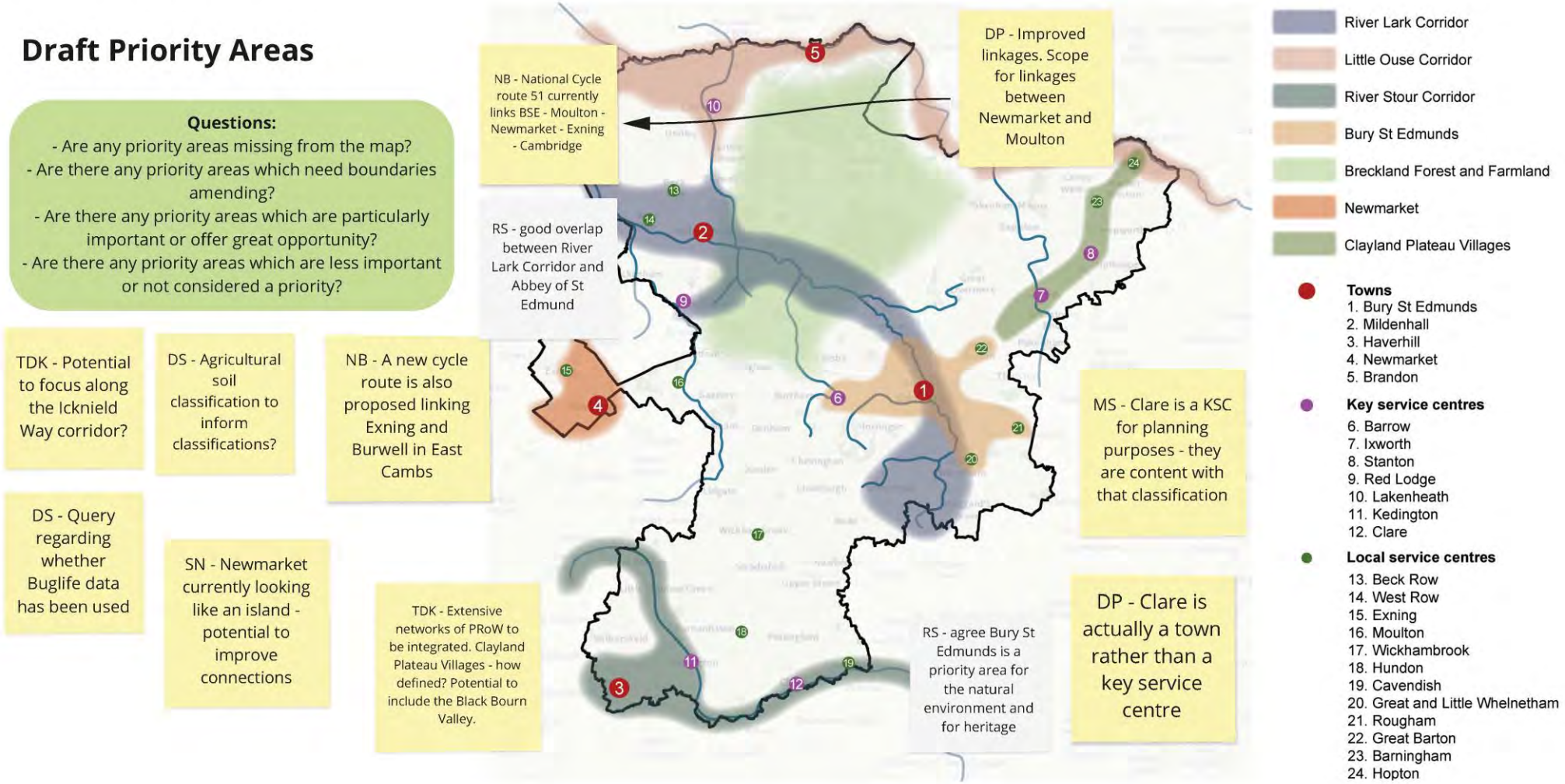


Figure B.7: Key outputs from Workshop 2: Priority Opportunities - River Corridors (November 2021)

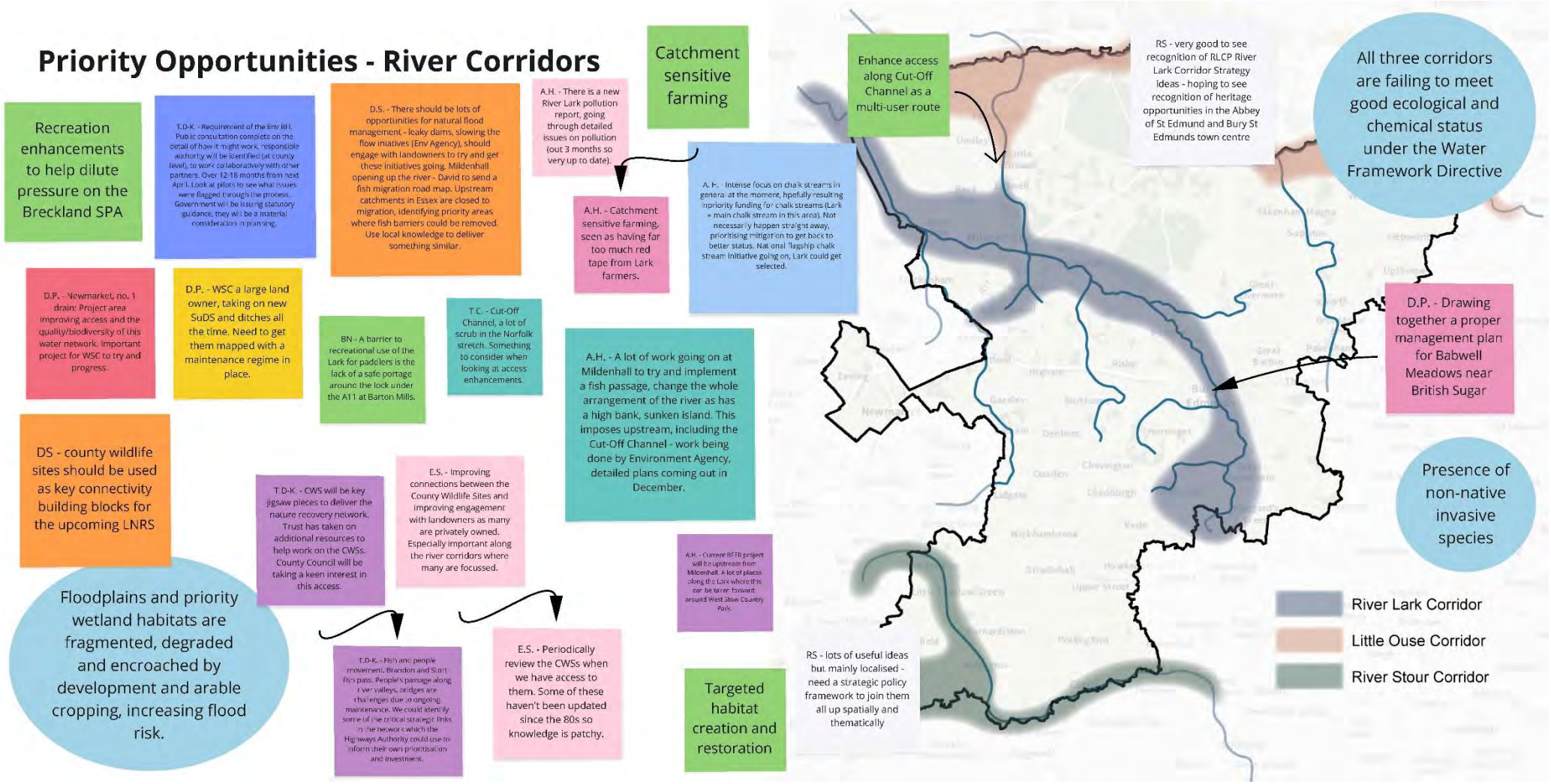


Figure B.8: Key outputs from Workshop 2: Priority Opportunities - Settlements (November 2021)

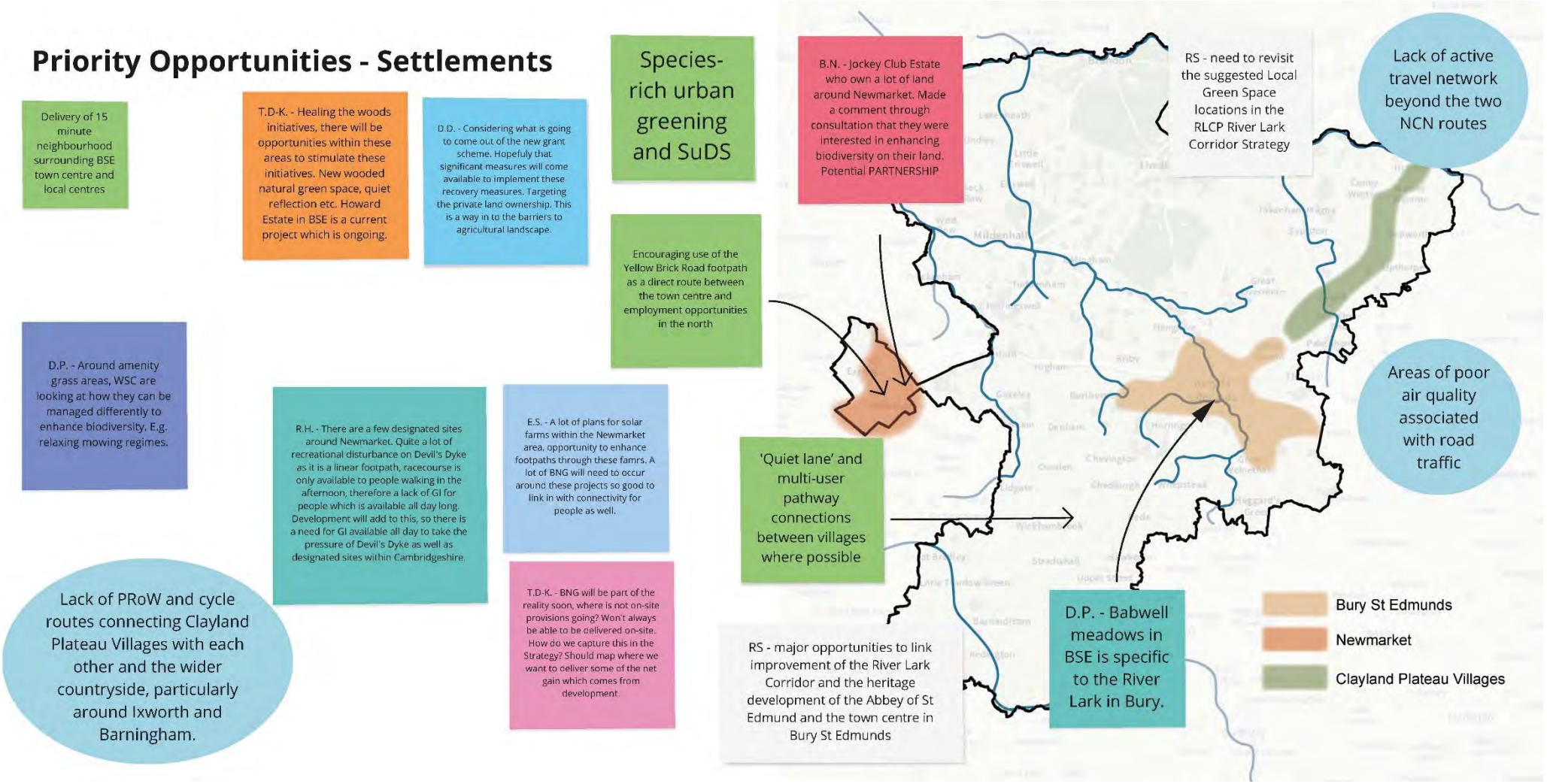


Figure B.9: Key outputs from Workshop 2: Priority Opportunities - Breckland (November 2021)

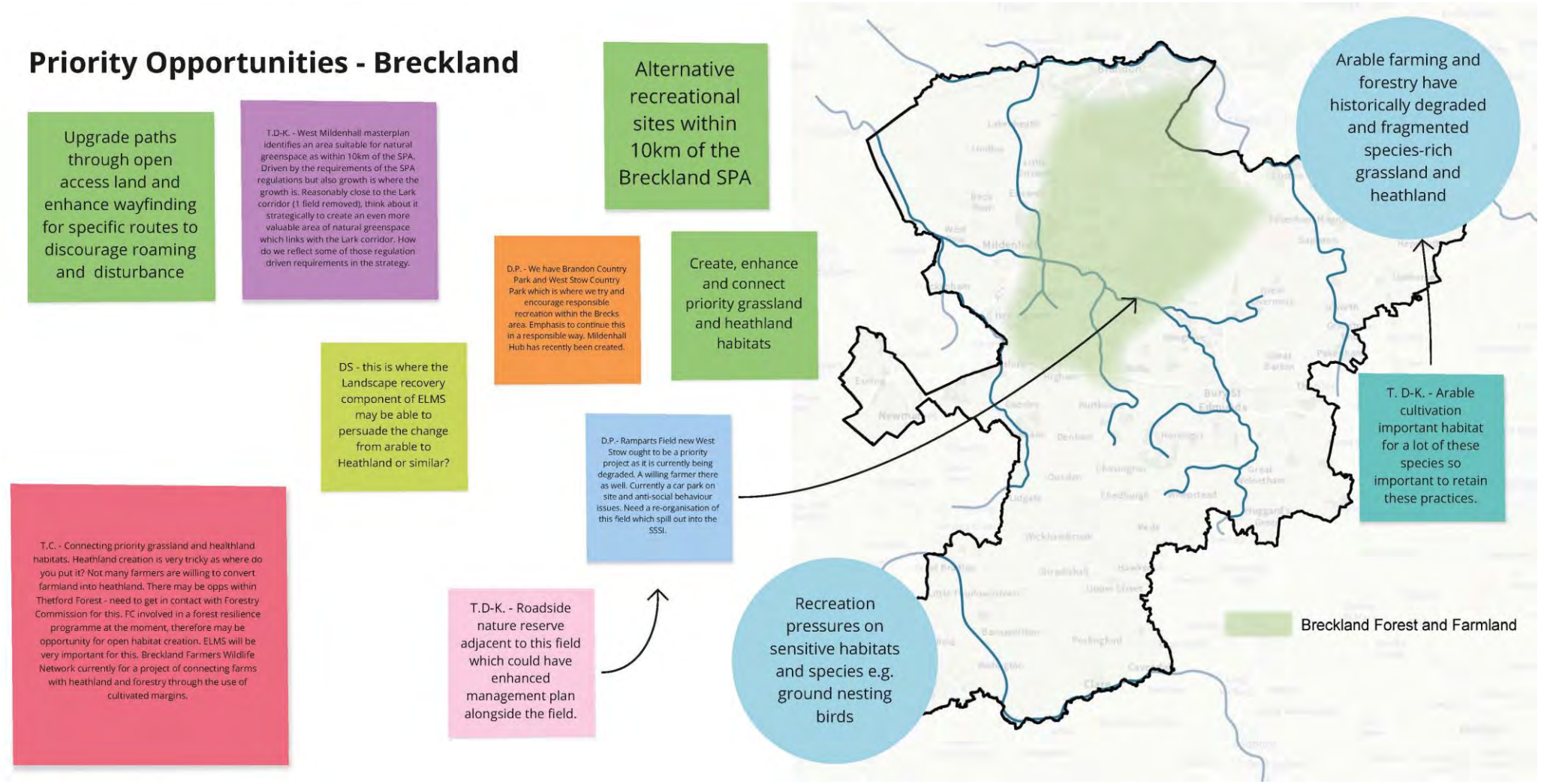


Figure B.10: Key outputs from Workshop 2: Priority Opportunities - District-wide/Non-spatial/outside Priority Areas/outside the District (November 2021)

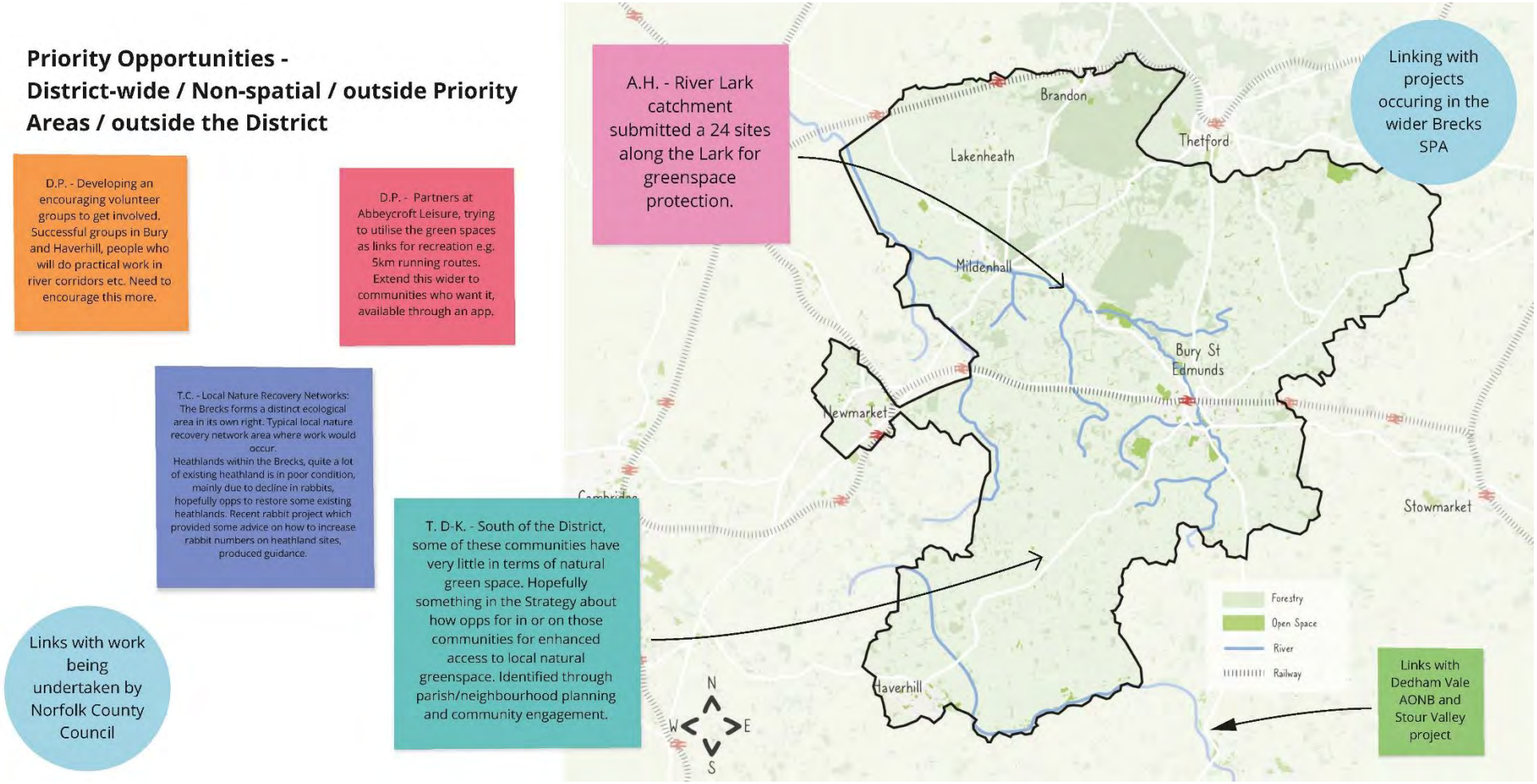
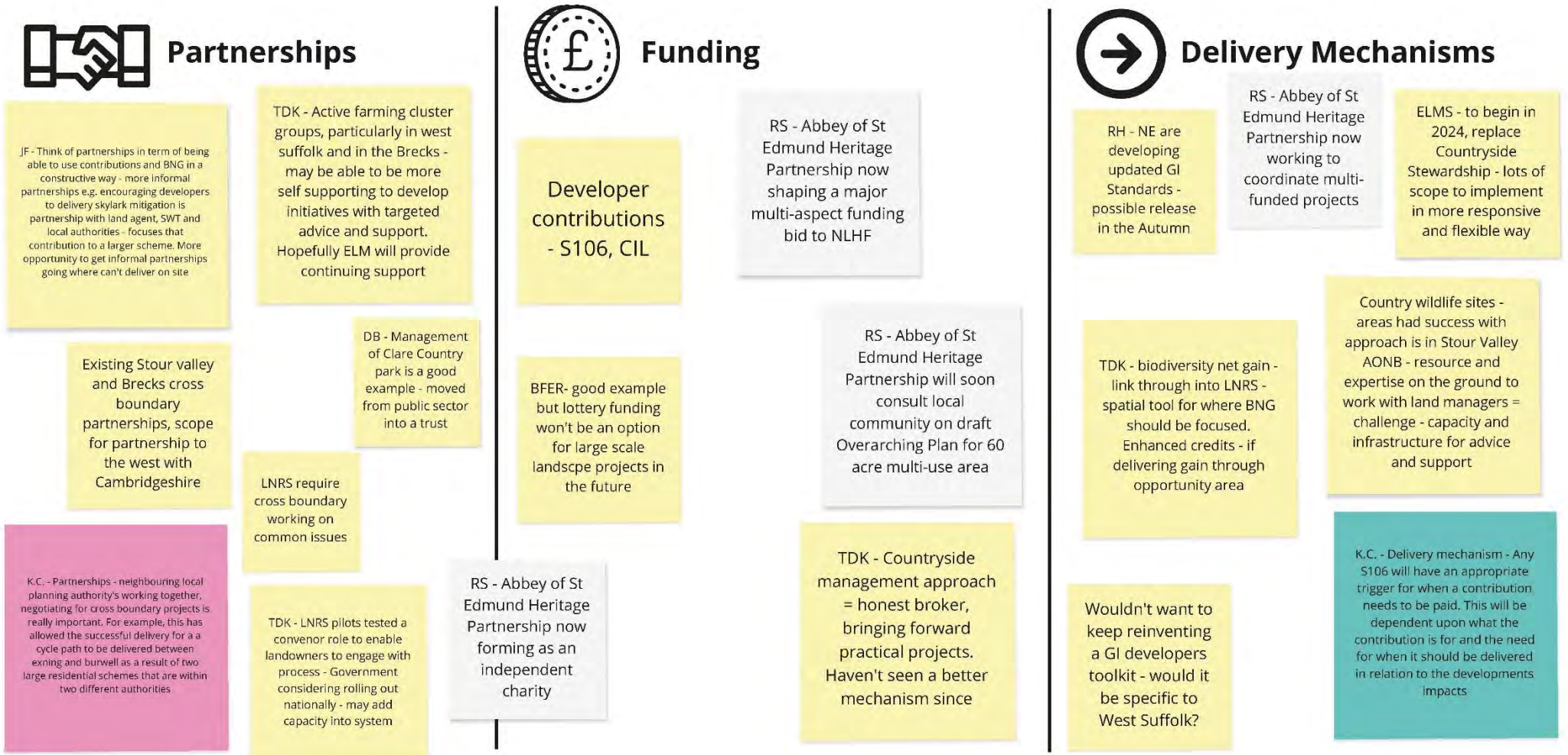


Figure B.11: Key outputs from Workshop 2: Partnerships/FUnding/Delivery Mechanisms



Overview of the outputs from the online consultation hub to determine an overview of local need for natural and semi-natural greenspace (August-October 2021)

Question 1: Overall, how would you rate the quality of existing network of natural and semi-natural green spaces in West Suffolk?

This question scored a mean of 6.4 from respondents.

Key themes in the comments:

- Noted that there is poor management and maintenance of spaces either in general or specifically to boost value for wildlife;
- The reduction in provision due to increased development and green space not being taken into account in planning; and
- Car use seen to be an important threat to wildlife or to reaching open spaces.

Example comments:

“There is simply far too little designated green spaces. Much more needs to be done to help nature and for the benefit of human well-being”

"They are great at the moment, but diminishing by the minute as huge housing estates are being thrown up on previous farmland, destroying ancient hedgerows in the process. Wanton destruction, especially at a time when we need to be improving our UK food production"

"There are quite a few green areas around Studlands (Newmarket) some larger and lots of small pockets. Both could be better maintained for wildlife/biodiversity and climate change reasons. Most of the spaces are overgrown and although they probably do provide some good natural habitats, I think that they could be improved upon, maintained and used for education and social enrichment etc."

"The quality of the green spaces is excellent. However, I would argue that they could be better connected to each other. Also, I'd also recommend more trees on streets and micro-green spaces to help beautify the high street and town centre, as well as better connect together our green spaces."

"There is very limited walking space in my area, limited connection between villages. Many paths involve walking along busy roads, for example Bury Road"

One respondent noted the importance of the River Lark: "We should make more of the River Lark – especially through Bury – and have a continuous riverside walk. Not every town has a chalk stream running through it!"

Question 2: Overall, how accessible do you find the existing network of natural and semi-natural green spaces in West Suffolk?

This question scored a mean of 6.6 from respondents.

Key themes in the comments:

- By far the largest issue was the need for a car to visit many of the spaces. Improvements to public transport and accessibility for bicycles goes along

with that. This also includes 2 responses who noted that walking to open spaces involved walking on busy roads;

- There is general positive comments about the amount of parking; and
- Maintenance of paths.

Example comments:

“I am disabled and can access most areas, though there could be more sitting areas”

“Car transport is needed to access these spaces if you live in a village rather than the town.”

“I can only easily access the parks that are close to me. If there was better provision for cycling, I could cycle to places further away, e.g. Clare Country Park or even Nowton park.”

“Normally parking is easy and free at most places”

Question 3: Overall, how well connected do you think the existing network of natural and semi-natural spaces in West Suffolk is for Wildlife?

This question scored a mean of 5.5 from respondents.

Key themes in the comments:

- General sense that there is not one cohesive, connected network;
- Connectivity through linear features such as tree belts, hedgerows, road verges and wildflowers are often noted; and
- Farming framed as both a good and a bad force in relation to connectivity.

Example comments:

“We need a lot more of the verges and hedgerows to be allowed to grow with native wildflowers and tree species. More hedgehog routes through neighbourhoods and road crossing points for small mammals.”

“We really need an incentive for farmers to rewilding some of their land … thus creating more space for wildlife surrounding Bury St Edmunds”

“Lots of developments have separated green spaces for wildlife with roads and housing”

“Who is this question aimed at? It's council speak. I'm not sure I know how well connected the network is. I can travel between green spaces with a car and walk through the towns. Build green into all development then you have a network everywhere”

Question 4: How would you rate the provision and quality of the following features within natural and semi-natural green spaces in West Suffolk?

Strong provision comments:

““We have some fantastically maintained areas of woodland and heathland in the area”

“The Brecks is a great asset”

“While I wouldn't rate provision as bad in general by any means, there is of course more than could be done. Don't be afraid to think creatively - you can go big (i.e. earmark a large new park, establish an active travel route across the district, or plant trees and hedgerows along the highways) and/or think small (i.e. micro-green spaces and a few cherry trees on the high street).”

“It was great to see wild flowers growing in the hedgerows and borders of field”

Weak provision comments:

“More planting of English native trees and wild flowers needed”

“The areas need a robust management plan that is rigorously implemented and supported by funding, to make the areas stronger. A management plan for Ram Meadow (which is not coloured green on your interactive map - Why?) has already been published but one for Crankles and No Man's meadow is in the making. Tayfen meadow and other in town areas have no such protection.”

"They are sparse, poorly maintained and involve a car journey to reach, so not great environmentally. The recent flooding would suggest wetlands and watercourses are inadequate"

- A couple of comments specifically mention Newmarket as lacking in provision for most of these features.

Appendix C

Detailed SWOT Review

This appendix provides an overview of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats discussed in Chapter 9, with reference to their relevant themes.

Table C.1: Overview of the strengths discussed in Chapter 9

Strengths	Access and connectivity	Open space and recreation	Nature recovery	Water environment	Urban greening and integrating development	Landscape, culture and heritage
Highly protected Breckland Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC), coupled with a number of nationally, regionally and locally significant ecological sites across the district.			+	+		+
Roadside nature reserves provide important stepping-stone habitat to support the wider nature network.			+		+	
Extensive river network provides conduits for the movement of people and nature, particularly the River Lark corridor, as well as nationally important chalk streams.	+	+	+	+		+
Well-established partnerships (e.g. Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership and River Lark Catchment Partnership).			+	+		
High diversity of soil types create unique natural conditions.			+	+		
Large tracts of woodland and forestry in the north of the district which are interconnected by shelter belts			+			+

Strengths	Access and connectivity	Open space and recreation	Nature recovery	Water environment	Urban greening and integrating development	Landscape, culture and heritage
and wooded field boundaries. Significant number of ancient woodland blocks in the south and east.						
Two complete National Cycle Network (NCN) routes: one E-W connecting Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds, the other N-S towards the east of the district through Bury St Edmunds.	+					
Extensive PROW network through countryside, including a number of promoted trails.	+					
Rural countryside scattered with a number of villages, providing access to nature. Night blight is low.	+	+				+
Sufficient provision of GI/green space in Brandon, Mildenhall (especially to east), Lakenheath, Beck Row.		+				
Six green flag parks, five country parks (two have attained a Green Flag Award: Brandon and West Stow) and four Registered Parks and Gardens, and their spread across the district.		+				+
Recreational assets and active travel links associated with Thetford Forest Park and its open access land.	+	+				

Strengths	Access and connectivity	Open space and recreation	Nature recovery	Water environment	Urban greening and integrating development	Landscape, culture and heritage
Historic buildings and settlements create a strong sense of place, including a number of National Trust assets and Registered Parks and Gardens.		+				+
Strategic links with the wider region, including Dedham Vales AONB, the Stour Valley and the Fens.	+					+
A host of archaeological sites (recently re-mapped by the Suffolk Records Office) including burial mounds and iron age field sites.						+
Rich agricultural heritage with productive landscapes and large swathes of 'excellent' and 'very good' agricultural land classifications.						+

Table C.2: Overview of the weaknesses discussed in Chapter 9

Weaknesses	Access and connectivity	Open space and recreation	Nature recovery	Water environment	Urban greening and	Landscape, culture and heritage
Priority habitat is highly fragmented and can be pressurised by agricultural practices.			+			+
Relative lack of designated sites in the south compared to the north.			+			
Recreation access creates pressure on sensitive sites, particularly surrounding the Breckland Special Protection Area (SPA), as well as to localised sites, for example Red Lodge Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Devil's Dyke SSSI, Maidscross Hill Local Nature Reserve and Aspal Close Local Nature Reserve.		+	+			
All waterbodies are in poor chemical condition and many in poor ecological condition. This is coupled with evidence of invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam and Signal Crayfish.			+	+		
Many river courses have been heavily physically modified, particularly when flowing through urbanised settings.			+	+		

Weaknesses	Access and connectivity	Open space and recreation	Nature recovery	Water environment	Urban greening and	Landscape, culture and heritage
Direct severance caused by road (mainly A14 and A11) and rail lines. Severance mainly from N-S through centre of district and NW of district.	+					
Large areas of privately owned agricultural land in rural West Suffolk and limited off-road connectivity, which constrains the ability of people to use active travel. Many rural villages with lack of connectivity to one another and to key service centres and GI.	+					+
High car use especially to sensitive sites (e.g. visitor survey found 91% arrive by car to Brecks). This is coupled with poor public transport provisions, particularly within rural locations.	+					
Lack of cycle network beyond the two National Cycle Network (NCN) routes and in/around Bury St Edmunds. Also, mainly on-road routes. These NCNs are poorly integrated when passing through urban locations and raise safety concerns in some locations. There are no cycle routes in Mildenhall.	+					
Publicly accessible open space is located mainly within the surrounds of Mildenhall, Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket and Haverhill. Limited in/around many of the rural villages – mainly churches/cemeteries or playing fields/sports facility. However, there is access to countryside (albeit	+	+				

Weaknesses	Access and connectivity	Open space and recreation	Nature recovery	Water environment	Urban greening and	Landscape, culture and heritage
farmland so not open access) and possibly a number of woodland sites (many CWSs).						
Fragmentation of PROW network, particularly in the north.	+					
Private land prevents free public access to many of the historic designations, including Registered Parks and Gardens.						+
Risk of flooding associated with rivers which pass through/near towns, e.g. Bury St Edmunds, Mildenhall, Newmarket and Brandon.					+	

Table C.3: Overview of the opportunities discussed in Chapter 9

Opportunities	Access and connectivity	Open space and recreation	Nature recovery	Water environment	Urban greening and	Landscape, culture and heritage
Strengthen mosaic of wetland habitats along river channels, particularly the Lark where the Council have landholdings, to create multifunctional green and blue infrastructure corridors which improve flow levels, remove phosphates, act as water			+	+		

Opportunities	Access and connectivity	Open space and recreation	Nature recovery	Water environment	Urban greening and	Landscape, culture and heritage
reservoirs and reconnect rivers with historic water tables.						
Large stretches of farmland to improve connectivity of woodland, grassland and heathland.			+			+
Engaging with businesses and landowners in the region for restoration/enhancement projects, linking habitats and people (Green King, British Sugar, River Lark Partnership).	+		+			+
Utilise river valleys and disused rail lines for active travel/green corridors. Green corridors/Greenways should connect key settlements and GI features.	+	+				
Promote/provide active travel routes to Breckland, instead of car.	+					
More Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and improved connectivity of PRoW, particularly in the north.	+					
Improve provision of information and signage across areas of the footpath and bridleway network which connects GI assets. Both for waymarking and education (where applicable e.g. nature and heritage).	+					+
Additional GI and improved connectivity around the most deficient settlements in the district, including	+	+				

Opportunities	Access and connectivity	Open space and recreation	Nature recovery	Water environment	Urban greening and	Landscape, culture and heritage
Newmarket, Red Lodge, Exning, Kentford. The main delivery vehicle is through development.						
To reduce future reliance on car, new settlements need to be well connected to the GI network through provision of safe, active travel routes.	+				+	
Provision of alternative greenspaces within 7.5 kilometres of Breckland Special Protection Area (SPA). These would need to be at least equally, if not more attractive than the European sites. Opportunity in proximity to new development.		+				
Improved rural land management could be supported and promoted by the Council to: - minimise rural nutrient pollution, especially in the catchments of the Stour, and Little Ouse and Thet (not achieving good status in WFD). - support woodland planting to enhance habitat and corridors and protect landscape from increasing effects of ash dieback and other pests/diseases.			+	+		+
Explore '15-minute neighbourhoods', low traffic neighbourhoods and school streets in urban areas.	+	+			+	
GI introduced within new developments can be used to link up existing habitats.			+		+	

Opportunities	Access and connectivity	Open space and recreation	Nature recovery	Water environment	Urban greening and	Landscape, culture and heritage
Opportunity to develop promoted routes through Open Access Land (mainly concentrated around the Breckland Special Protection Area (SPA)) to reduce the pressure of people roaming on disturbance and ground nesting birds.	+	+				

Table C.4: Overview of the threats discussed in Chapter 9

Threats	Access and connectivity	Open space and recreation	Nature recovery	Water environment	Urban greening and	Landscape, culture and heritage
Increased drought with climate change, and associated decline in soil health will increase intensive land management which could have knock on effects on natural sites.			+	+		+
Increased risk of flooding due to climate change and sea level rise could increase the time floodplains are under water, therefore altering fragile ecosystems.						
Designated sites in the Breckland will continue to suffer from visitor pressure if alternative opportunities for recreation are not provided in line with growth and development, particularly areas of open access land where roaming can disturb ground nesting birds.		+	+			
Increased development will add to water abstraction demands.				+	+	
Resistance to 'change' from farming community and difficulty for the Council to engage.			+			+
Agricultural diversification, for example for solar and carbon capture, is both an opportunity but a			+			+

Threats	Access and connectivity	Open space and recreation	Nature recovery	Water environment	Urban greening and	Landscape, culture and heritage
threat if not planned correctly. Tree planting is not suitable within Breckland Farmland/heathland areas as these should be maintained as open habitats.						
Development increasing numbers of people using car if not providing suitable sustainable alternatives that connect these developments to key assets – threatens progress to reaching climate targets.	+					
Active travel and access will be increasingly difficult with an ageing population.	+	+				
Development and agricultural practices may have a continued impact/cause damage to archaeological sites.					+	+
Growing pressure from deer on ecological sites, as well as a decline in rabbit populations which affects grazing.			+			
Increased demand for access to open space and active travel routes may place pressure on funding available for maintenance/upkeep, particularly with an increasing population and development. This can also be amplified by poor ground conditions caused by extreme weather.		+			+	

Threats	Access and connectivity	Open space and recreation	Nature recovery	Water environment	Urban greening and	Landscape, culture and heritage
Development pressures on the Special Protection Area (SPA) could extend wider than just recreation, but also predation from domestic pets, noise, vehicle and light pollution.			+		+	
Development within West Suffolk could pose a threat to designated sites within other authorities, for example development in Newmarket impacting on Devil's Dyke Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).		+	+		+	
Lack of funding and pressures on the public purse, therefore leading to under investment, pose a threat to the successful delivery of all GI and public open space projects.	+	+	+	+	+	+

Appendix D

Prioritisation of Opportunities

Prior to producing the proformas for high priority projects within Chapter 11, a long list of opportunities was created and prioritised using the methodology explained in this appendix.

D.1 The long list of 33 opportunities which were identified within Chapter 11 were prioritised to produce 12 'high' priority opportunities which the Council should look to explore first, due elements such as need, deliverability and stakeholder support. To prioritise the long list, a number of criteria were applied, as set out below.

D.2 Opportunities which have been identified as being 'medium' or 'low' priority have still been included within this Study due to the ever-changing scenarios when it comes to GI delivery. Should new funding streams open up, or new delivery partners be formed, or an increased need identified, then some of these projects may be deemed a higher priority in the future. Therefore, the Council are advised to continue monitoring this list and to 're-score' opportunities should it be necessary. For example, a project may be of 'medium' priority due to challenges faced by delivery and funding. However, if a development site comes forward adjacent to this opportunity, this could provide the mechanisms needed for delivery and therefore the project will become a 'high' priority.

D.3 The long list of opportunities has been produced in collaboration with the Council, using the outputs from both stakeholder workshops and the baseline analysis. These were then sense checked through site work.

Criteria for prioritisation

Multifunctionality and delivering a range of benefits

The action/priority delivers a range of multifunctional benefits, marked by the number of GI themes relevant.

- 5 = The action/priority delivers numerous multifunctional benefits relevant to West Suffolk, as marked by its contribution to five GI themes.
- 4 = The action/priority delivers multiple benefits, as marked by its contribution to four GI themes.
- 3 = The action/priority delivers a number of benefits, as marked by its contribution to three GI themes.
- 2 = The action/priority delivers some benefits, as marked by its contribution to two GI themes.
- 1 = The action/priority delivers minimal benefits, as marked by its contribution to one GI theme.

Evidence = Action/priority proformas

Meeting identified need

The action/priority meets identified GI gaps and needs.

- 5 = The action/priority meets a current gap in quantity or quality identified by this Study's evidence base. Provision of this action/priority will enhance the overall functionality and connectivity of GI in the district.
- 3 = Fills identified local gap but limited wider connectivity/accessibility.

- 1 = The action/priority does not fill an identified gap. This could also relate to actions/priorities which are dependent on a specific scenario which is not yet certain, for example development and population growth in a certain area in the future may increase the need for a GI intervention, therefore actions may move up the priority list.

Evidence = GI Study evidence base.

Stakeholder support

The action/priority has stakeholder support, as demonstrated by workshops, online consultation and one-to-one communication.

- 5 = Stakeholders in the workshop or other consultation with either the Council, stakeholders or the public is fully supportive of the action/priority – either by multiple organisations or firmly supported by one organisation.
- 3 = The action/priority has some stakeholder support, although is not viewed as a priority. This could also include if the priority was mentioned in the former St Edmundsbury GI Strategy as this assumes previous support.
- 1 = No stakeholder support, however this likely relates to actions/priorities which were not raised in consultation and therefore will still be useful projects.

Evidence = Workshop Miro boards, discussion notes, online consultation hub.

Long term sustainability

The action/priority can be sustained and is financially viable with long-term management arrangements and resources able to be secured. It provides a long-term legacy for GI in West Suffolk.

- 5 = The action/priority has long-term land ownership/management/maintenance agreements in place and revenue/capital costs covered. It creates a long-term legacy.
- 3 = The action/priority could potentially be sustained long-term but further work is needed to secure landowner management ownership/agreements/funding.
- 1 = The action/priority has significant challenges to become sustainable and financially viable in the long-term, normally with no clear responsibility for stewardship.

Evidence = LUC

Deliverability/risk

The action/priority is achievable and deliverable, within an agreed time period. It does not require substantial investment in staff/resources or involve a high level of risk for the Council:

- 5 = The action/priority is deliverable relatively easily with existing staff/partners. It has a low level of risk, e.g. regarding securing land and permissions, and no dependencies.
- 3 = The project is deliverable but will need extra staff/new partners and/or has some degree of risk e.g. dependencies on other projects or scenarios.
- 1 = The project is not deliverable without substantially more staff/a new partnership; and/or there is a high degree of risk in relation to land ownership and permissions or dependencies on other projects.

Evidence = LUC

Priority

Based on the above factors.

Table D.1: Priority ratings

Priority Rating	Factors
Less than 14	Low priority, but still important if delivery/implementation/funding mechanisms arise, or scenarios change.
14 to 18	Medium priority, but still important if delivery/implementation/funding mechanisms arise. Small scenario changes could make this project a high priority.
More than 18	High priority, project should be pursued as a priority objective for West Suffolk.

Table D.2: Cost bands

Priority Rating	Cost Band
Low	Less than £250k
Medium	£250k to £1 million
High	More than £1 million

Table D.3: Timescales

Priority Rating	Timescale
Quick win	Less than 1 year
Medium-term	1 to 5 years

Priority Rating	Timescale
Long-term	More than 5 years

Priority Area 1 – River Lark Corridor

RLC1

Action/priority: Green space enhancements and links along the River Lark

The River Lark corridor provides a number of local green spaces which are of great value to the community and could help to form a chain of green spaces linked by the river itself, therefore providing a functional and green and blue corridor for people and wildlife through the centre of the district. This should include the 24 Local Green Spaces highlighted by the River Lark Catchment Partnership within the River Lark Corridor Strategy, with particular focus on the top 10 highest ranking ones within the Strategy.

- Deliver ecological and recreational enhancements to Ramparts Field, through some changes to the existing car parking infrastructure, to align it with its inclusion within the West Stow Heath Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This should also aim to discourage anti-social behaviour, enhance ecological links and provide space for sustainable interactions with nature. Include interpretation opportunities for the site's geological and palaeolithic history. Opportunities for nature conservation volunteering could be explored. Potential to couple with active travel links to West Stow Country Park and the River Lark, as well as providing a short stretch of pavement to connect the Lark Valley Path and the site.
- Ensure links are created between the River Lark and the destination green spaces/SANG delivered as part of the West Mildenhall Masterplan. This should be achieved through direct connections with the

new green space at the Mildenhall Hub. Consider the potential for some additional land take of the agricultural field between the River Lark and the proposed SANG to expand the facility and increase the connection to the River Lark.

- Explore opportunities to enhance biodiversity provisions and interaction to nature within Jubilee Fields in Mildenhall, helping to relieve some recreation pressure on the nearby Mildenhall Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Protection Area (SPA). The amenity space/recreation ground currently sits in a gap of park catchment provisions and therefore has the potential to see its value improved. Its position directly on the River Lark could be used to enhance access as well as creating a more naturalised edge, with the potential for small wetland creation. (When on site there was evidence of an existing marshy patch on the fields adjacent to the River Lark, showing the potential for wetlands to be successful here). It will be important to create the right balance between retaining amenity for both formal and informal recreation and providing some biodiversity enhancements.
- Enhance biodiversity provisions, access (including connections with the Abbey), interpretation and opportunities for interaction with nature around the green spaces at the confluence of the River Lark and Linnet in Bury St Edmunds, including No Man's Meadow, Ram Meadow, Leg of Mutton and Babwell Meadows. This should also include a long-term maintenance plan for the area's management.
- Green at Hawstead Green, source of the River Lark and large extent of Lowland Meadow Priority Habitat, provides an opportunity for habitat enhancements and some increased interpretation. The green is already a County Wildlife Site, reflecting its existing biodiversity value and is managed by the Parish Council. Improvements could see community-led projects such as creating insect habitats, a nature trail with ties to the play area, small-scale tree planting (this could include a community orchard) and also considering the enhancing of riparian habitats along this starting stretch of the River Lark.

Source:

- Suffolk County Council;
- The Council;
- River Lark Catchment Partnership; and
- Abbey of St Edmunds Heritage Partnership.

Notes

Potential partnerships could include:

- Bury Water Meadows Group;
- Suffolk Wildlife Trust;
- River Lark Catchment Partnership;
- Abbey of St Edmunds Heritage Partnership;
- Mildenhall Town Council for projects on Jubilee Fields;
- Hawstead Parish Council for any interventions on Hawstead Green; and
- Other relevant town and parish councils.

A long-term project, however, there could be some medium-term and quick win smaller projects.

RLC2

Action/priority: Programme of enhanced water-based recreation along the River Lark

Explore how water-based recreation can be enhanced on the Lark to further its status as a recreation and active travel corridor, therefore taking pressures away from fragile habitats. Areas of interest could include:

- Allow for safe portage around the lock under the A11 at Barton Mills. This could be delivered in conjunction with the proposed future improvements to the Fiveways Roundabout junction;
- Riverside Island Marina near Isleham is a popular marina with floating lodges and could be a focal point of enhanced water-based recreation as it is already an established tourism spot; and
- Fenland Boats, at Isleham Fen, is already a popular mooring spot. Enhanced recreation offers such as paddle boarding and kayaking could be explored.

It's important to note that demand for water-based recreation will be highest in the summer when river levels are at their lowest. The feasibility of this would need further exploration.

Source:

- The Council.

Notes

Riverside Island Marina and Fenland Boats would be key delivery partners.

RLC 3

Action/priority: The River Lark as a primary and secondary movement corridor

The River Lark path currently provides a largely off-road promoted route between Bury and Mildenhall. Opportunities should be sought to upgrade this route to make it navigable for cyclists, people with disabilities and push chairs. This should also incorporate extending the promoted trail to the West of Mildenhall, taking in the West of Mildenhall Masterplan Area and eventually continuing to the Ouse Valley Way. There are existing Public Rights of Way (PRoW) along most of the River Lark and therefore only upgrades and wayfinding are required. Aspirations to connect a stretch of the Lark through Bury St Edmunds where access is limited, between Ram Meadow and behind Maltings Cottages on the Mildenhall Road, should be explored. In the short-term, enhanced signage and wayfinding to the river, including presentation of entrances, could be delivered.

Secondary route branches coming off this primary route should also be explored to afford enhanced connectivity to communities near to the corridor, including:

- Widen the footpath or create an off-road route using the dismantled railway and existing PRoW between Mildenhall and Worlington.
- Improve signage and waymarking of the PRoW connecting Barton Mills and Mildenhall (to the west of Norah Hanbury-Kelk Meadows) which allows for direct access to the town centre. (Existing boardwalk may be too narrow to promote for cyclists and pedestrians, however the ramped bridges makes is accessible).
- Explore the possibility of upgrading the paths of the Icknield Way as they pass east of Red Lodge (better connections with the trail and Red Lodge itself should also be explored, see project RLC4) and towards the River Lark, through Herringswell, Tuddenham and Cavenham Heath National Nature Reserve, ensuring routes are safe and accessible for both walkers and cyclists. The proximity of the route to the Special Protection Area (SPA) means special consideration of recreation pressures would need to be considered and only existing paths would be used.

- Enhance and widen the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) (ideally making it suitable for walkers and cyclists) which follows the River Lark between Jubilee Fields and the Mildenhall Hub (currently it is narrow, muddy and overgrown). Explore the potential for S106 from the West of Mildenhall Masterplan to provide the funding for this as it will create a direct and traffic-free route between the strategic site and Mildenhall town centre.

Source:

- River Lark Catchment Partnership; and
- Suffolk County Council Rights of Way Team.

RLC4

Action/priority: Red Lodge recreation and connections

Restore the former landfill site to the south of Red Lodge Heath as an area for wildlife and recreation, creating opportunities for interactions with nature and activities such as dog walking away from the sensitive Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

This should be combined with improvements to the byways (Green Lane, The Carrops and Chamomile Close) to make them more accessible for cyclists, walkers, people with disabilities and push chairs, with an aim of creating a more direct route with the Icknield Way as well as down towards Kennett Station. At present, these byways are overgrown and are only accessible to people on foot (despite advertising they are open to all traffic). This will also create links with the new footpath and public open space being created in the east of Red Lodge as part of new development.

Implementing a ‘quiet lane’ (which sees either the reduction of speeds or changes to access) between Herringswell and Kennett could help to enhance safety for people trying to access the Icknield Way from Red Lodge as well as down to the station at Kennett along the newly enhanced Green Lane byway. The implementation of this would require further analysis by a transport team to determine the viability of a quiet lane as it is recognised these routes are used as a cut through between the A11 and A14, but should remain an aspiration. Enhancing/widening the existing footpath along Station Road to support cyclists and walkers could help to deliver the final link to Kennett Station. This will require partnership with East Cambridgeshire Council and could also link with project N4.

Source:

- The Council;

Notes

Would require landowner buy-in (assume ties with the existing recycling and waste management units on The Carrops). Little potential for a former landfill site apart from environmental remediation so could be a positive partnership.

RLC5

Action/Priority: Bradfield Woods and surrounding ancient and semi-natural woodlands

Bradfield Woods National Nature Reserve is one of the largest areas of ancient and semi natural woodland in West Suffolk. The site is owned and managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust. Tree planting and woodland creation would buffer the site and expand/connect remnant woodlands across the intervening farmland matrix. Priority areas for expansion and enhancement include:

- Mellfield Wood, along the Blackbourn River;
- Free Woods;
- Chevin's Wood; and
- Link Wood.

Indicative costs could include the commissioning of a site finding study for suitable woodland creation locations (£15,000-£40,000 depending on scale).

Source:

- Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

Notes

Would require landowner buy-in, however funding should be relatively easy through schemes such as Forestry Commission's England Woodland Creation Offer.

Table D.4: Relevant Themes for Priority Area 1 - River Lark Corridor Opportunities

Opportunity	Access and Connectivity	Open Space and Recreation	Nature Recovery	The Water Environment	Urban Greening and Integrating Development	Landscape, Culture and Heritage
RLC1	+	+	+	+	+	+
RLC2		+	+	+		
RLC3	+	+		+		
RLC4	+	+	+			
RLC5			+			+

Table D.5: Prioritisation Ratings for Priority Area 1 - River Lark Corridor Opportunities

Opportunity	Meeting identified needs	Stakeholder support	Long term sustainability	Deliverability and risk	Priority	Cost band	Timescale
RLC1	5	5	3	5	23 (high)	£££	Long-term
RLC2	3	3	1	1	11 (low)	££	Medium-term
RLC3	5	5	5	3	21 (high)	£££	Long-term
RLC4	5	3	3	3	17 (medium)	£££	Medium-term
RLC5	5	5	3	3	18 (medium)	££	Medium-term

Priority Area 2 – Little Ouse Corridor

LOC1

Action/Priority: Cut-Off Channel walking route

Utilise the course of the Cut-Off Channel to provide a walking route connecting Lakenheath and Mildenhall. Aspirations for connecting Lakenheath and the Little Ouse River in the north should continue to be explored. This would require some land take as some of the channel banks are within private ownership, including the Environment Agency, however there are a number of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) which follow the channel and could be upgraded. Routes down to Mildenhall should also explore how direct access can be improved from the Cut-Off Channel to Beck Row. S106 through development in Beck Row, Lakenheath and Mildenhall could be used to deliver this and will help to reduce recreation pressures on the Special Protection Area (SPA), Maidscross Hill Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and Aspal Close LNR.

As the channel is man-made it has steep banks which can pose an issue for cyclists using the route. The aspiration should remain that this could become a multi-user route in the future, creating cycling access north towards RSPB Lakenheath Fen and the Little Ouse corridor (a separate cycling lane may be required along Station Road to achieve the final stretch).

Norfolk County Council should also be engaged to extend this route northwards and to clear the channel from scrub.

Source:

Suffolk County Council Rights of Way Team.

Notes

Potential partnerships:

- Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership;
- Environment Agency; and
- River Lark Catchment Partnership.

LOC2

Action/Priority: Nature-based recreation in Brandon

Create a new accessible and recreationally attractive nature site on the floodplain/water meadows of the Little Ouse in Brandon, encouraging the extension of recreation along the River Ouse and diverting pressures away from the Special Protection Area (SPA). This could also explore the use of Brandon Lock as a local hub for water-based activities and recreation, working in partnership with Brandon Leisure Centre.

Aspirations for the future should include creating links with Thetford along the river where this is a similar ambition for enhanced connections with the watercourse.

Continue to promote Brandon Country Park as a key destination spot for recreation. This could include additional conservation and volunteering activities on site.

Notes

Landowner agreement will be required (owned by Brandon Remembrance Playing Field Association), however Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and promoted trail already passes through the area and looks to merge with the Leisure Centre playing fields? There is an existing area of long grass/meadow.

LOC3

Action/Priority: Earlsfield/Lord's Walk connections and improvements

Deliver a programme of GI and recreation enhancements within the Earlsfield community, Lakenheath. The community once formed part of the military base but is now within private ownership and requires a series of improvements within the existing GI, including its Central Park (which hosts amenity grass and a now broken basketball hoop). This could include areas of tree planting, community growing, wildflower meadow planting and more sociable spaces including a more formal playground (LEAP) within Central Park and incidental natural play and seating opportunities across the estate (for example at Myrtle Close). A large area of grass is also situated next to the row of shops and cafes, which could act as a spill-out area with seating and planting for these amenities.

Additional phase:

The disconnected nature of the community and lack of available large-scale GI should justify the creation of a new Public Rights of Way (PRoW)/cycle path connecting the community with the Cut-Off Channel. A potential route could link from Dogwood Walk. This would help to serve the recreational demands of the community whilst also encouraging movement away from the Brecks Special Protection Area (SPA).

Source:

- The Council.

Notes

- GI improvements within Earlsfield could be a quick-win;
- Connections with the Cut-off Channel would be a longer-term and more expensive option; and
- Would need to double-check ownership and management responsibilities.

Table D.6: Relevant Themes for Priority Area 2 – Little Ouse Corridor Opportunities

Opportunity	Access and Connectivity	Open Space and Recreation	Nature Recovery	The Water Environment	Urban Greening and Integrating Development	Landscape, Culture and Heritage
LOC1	+	+		+		
LOC2	+	+	+	+		
LOC3	+	+	+	+	+	

Table D.7: Prioritisation Ratings for Priority Area 2 – Little Ouse Corridor Opportunities

Opportunity	Meeting identified needs	Stakeholder support	Long term sustainability	Deliverability and risk	Priority	Cost band	Timescale
LOC1	5	5	3	3	19 (high)	£££	Long-term
LOC2	5	3	1	1	14 (low)	£££	Long-term
LOC3	5	3	3	3	19 (high)	£	Quick win

Priority Area 3 – River Stour Corridor

RSC1

Action/Priority: Nature-based solutions to flooding for River Stour settlements

Nature-based solutions to flooding within Haverhill, Kedington, Clare and Cavendish, including riparian woodland planting, wetlands and flood storage areas.

A more in-depth site finding study with input from hydrologists would be required and also engagement with willing landowners would be crucial.

Notes

Forestry Commission grants and Environmental Land Management (E.L.M) Schemes could be alternative mechanisms to explore the delivery of this.

RSC2

Action/Priority: Haverhill Railway Walks

The Haverhill Railway Walk Local Nature Reserve is an important recreation and nature conservation asset within Haverhill. Also designated as a County Wildlife Site, the green corridor provides important habitats for

reptile populations alongside foraging opportunities for bats. The path follows the route of the former Stour Valley Railway and at present the corridor is well used by people walking and cycling between communities in the north-west, the town centre, and communities in the south-east, including East Town Park.

Some work has already been initiated along the route, including re-surfacing of parts, however, the route would benefit from re-surfacing along its entire length alongside some sympathetic widening in places, if space permits. Re-surfacing should explore alternative options to asphalt concrete such as self-binding gravel that will help to soften the naturalistic feel of the route but is also soft under foot for cyclists and wheelchairs. Consideration for the use of self-binding gravel should be had in damp areas due to its tendency to rut and become muddy, which will discourage some people with mobility issues to use the path. Accessibility issues in relation to the existing steps along the corridor should also be addressed. Considerations should also be given to the duties of the Council and the requirements for compliance with the Equality Act 2010.

By sympathetically widening and enhancing the surface of the path, it will increase accessibility for both cyclists and walkers, alongside those with mobility issues, wheelchairs and pushchairs. This will help to create a more friendly space which is not dominated by one user group and will therefore encourage its wider everyday use. Any widening will require some vegetation clearance which should be carried out in consultation with an Ecological Clerk of Works and outside of the bird nesting season.

This project could also expand to include a cohesive suite of street furniture, interpretation and signage, which would help to enhance the amenity value and appeal of the Railway Walk. Utilising repetitive, robust materials, such as corten steel, will help to increase legibility of the site, whilst bollards and new street lighting will increase safety. Utilising tough

materials such as corten steel will reduce maintenance and replacement in the long-term as they naturally weather and retain their look. It is worth noting that any lighting proposals should be undertaken in liaison with an ecologist to avoid any negative impacts on the wildlife who use the corridor, therefore striking a balance between the perception of safety and biodiversity consideration. Siting of these additional features will need to be carefully considered to ensure they do not encourage anti-social behaviour and additional littering.

A range of interpretation boards revealing the history of the railway and nature conservation value of the Local Nature Reserve will transform this site from an active travel corridor to a recreation asset. Seating and incidental natural play could also encourage lingering times and enhanced use of the space.

Enhancing the nature conservation value of the green corridor could be done in partnership with community groups or volunteer groups, for example The Conservation Volunteers who are currently not present in West Suffolk but could be worth engaging for this project. Particular focus should be had on how biodiversity can be enhanced within central portions of the route (around Tesco) where habitat quality and connectivity reduces. This could be achieved through re-planting with low maintenance suitable species such as native shrubs and wildflowers, subject to appropriate ground preparation. Management of woodland strips, scrub and grassland to ensure biodiversity potentials are met should also be a priority, alongside providing specific areas and refuge for priority species such as hedgehogs, breeding birds and reptiles. Any planting proposals should consider the importance of sight lines in enhancing perceptions of safety and should have their long-term management secured through the development of a Landscape Management Plan. This should also include provisions for the management of areas of wildflowers to ensure vigorous grass species do not take hold.

Biodiversity connections with the surrounding green spaces, including Meldham Washlands, Millfields Way, Howe Road Open Space, Meadowlands Open Space and East Town Park could help to reinforce the local nature recovery network of Haverhill as a thriving community asset.

Remnants of the dismantled railway continue from east Haverhill towards Clare. At present this is largely wooded and in places still used as an informal path. An aspiration for the future could be reconnecting Haverhill and Clare via active travel links which re-use this route. This could create a direct route between Clare Country Park and Meldham Washlands.

Source:

The Council

Stakeholder workshop.

Notes

A scalable project in terms of price and timescale. Interpretation improvements and conservation management could be quick-wins, whereas re-surfacing of the path will be an expensive and long-term aspiration.

Table D.8: Relevant Themes for Priority Area 3 – River Stour Corridor Opportunities

Opportunity	Access and Connectivity	Open Space and Recreation	Nature Recovery	The Water Environment	Urban Greening and Integrating Development	Landscape, Culture and Heritage
RSC1			+	+		
RSC2	+	+	+			+

Table D.9: Prioritisation Ratings for Priority Area 3 – River Stour Corridor Opportunities

Opportunity	Meeting identified needs	Stakeholder support	Long term sustainability	Deliverability and risk	Priority	Cost band	Timescale
RSC1	5	1	3	1	12 (low)	£££	Long-term
RSC2	5	5	3	5	22 (high)	££	Medium-term

Priority Area 4 – Bury St Edmunds

BSE1

Action/Priority: Abbey interpretation

Enhance interpretation, active travel links and wayfinding between the Abbey and the town centre, further encouraging visitors and residents towards using the River Lark corridor.

Extending the focus to the important area of green spaces surrounding the confluence of the River Linnet and the River Lark, connecting with project RLC1. This could include expanding the Abbey Gardens to that they follow the course of the Lark south and provide direct links with No Man's Meadow. Enhance wayfinding and interpretation signage between these assets, particularly between Ram Meadow and the Abbey.

Source:

- Abbey of St Edmunds Heritage Partnership

BSE2

Action/Priority: 15-minute neighbourhoods

Explore the possibility of implementing local 15 minute neighbourhoods across Bury St Edmunds where existing amenities and facilities are

present. This includes the upgrade or creation of active travel routes to ensure safe movement for children, cyclists, the elderly, those with disabilities and people with push chairs. This should also be accompanied by urban greening interventions to improve the aesthetics of the streetscape and enable easier wayfinding through a cohesive public realm strategy. This will need to be delivered in association with the residents and businesses within the local centre through consultation and community-led design practices. Promotion of active travel and helping to change people's mindsets will be fundamental to the success of these schemes. This could include methods such as social media campaigns, as well as including the community from the outset of the project.

Following the delivery of successful pilot schemes in Bury St Edmunds, similar projects could be rolled out across the district's other towns.

Notes

Potential delivery partners include:

- Bury St Edmunds Town Council;
- Local communities and business owners; and
- Highways.

Upcoming Levelling Up Funding could be a funding mechanism for this sort of projects from the government.

BSE3

Action/Priority: Bury St Edmunds radial route

Bury St Edmunds radial route, particular focus needed on NW extents of the route. Branches coming off connecting to:

- Great Barton (link through the North East Bury Masterplan Area and creating a 'quiet lane' along The Avenue, linking with the considerable amount of new GI being delivered as part of the masterplan);
- Could create a 'quiet lane' along Elderstub Lane and link with the National Cycle Network (NCN) and new path along the A14;
- Widen footpath along A134 between Great Whelnetham and Bury St Edmunds to create walking/cycling route between the village and schools to the south of Bury St Edmunds and Nowton Park; and
- Make use of new route to Horringer and Ickworth.

Source:

- The Council; and
- Suffolk County Council.

BSE4

Action/Priority: Active West Suffolk

Work in partnership with Abbeycroft Leisure in Bury St Edmunds to expand use of their recreation running routes through wider community promotion and the use of an active lifestyles app. Existing routes can be found around Bury St Edmunds and Brandon, and opportunities to expand this across the district should be explored. This could also double up with their 'Explore Outdoor' scheme and volunteering opportunities.

There is opportunity to set up a scheme similar to 'Green Gym' in London through Abbeycroft Leisure to provide opportunities for nature conservation, whilst also keeping fit and socialising at the same time. Pilot schemes could be implemented at sites such as Brandon Country Park, Meldham Washlands and West Stow Country Park.

This could utilise West Suffolk's already active community base to encourage activities such as river restoration schemes, including naturalising riverbanks, reconnecting riparian meadows and wetland mosaics and removing invasive species. Replicating the success of interventions by The Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership (BFER) between Fornham and Mildenhall. Opportunities include:

- Improving morphology and habitat quality through West Stow Country Park.

Source:

- The Council; and
- River Lark Catchment Partnership.

Table D.10: Relevant Themes for Priority Area 4 – Bury St Edmunds Opportunities

Opportunity	Access and Connectivity	Open Space and Recreation	Nature Recovery	The Water Environment	Urban Greening and Integrating Development	Landscape, Culture and Heritage
BSE1	+	+				+
BSE2	+				+	
BSE3	+	+			+	
BSE4	+	+				

Table D.11: Prioritisation Ratings for Priority Area 4 – Bury St Edmunds Opportunities

Opportunity	Meeting identified needs	Stakeholder support	Long term sustainability	Deliverability and risk	Priority	Cost band	Timescale
BSE1	1	5	3	5	17 (medium)	£	Quick-win
BSE2	3	3	5	5	18 (medium)	£££	Long-term
BSE3	5	5	3	3	19 (high)	£££	Long-term
BSE4	3	5	3	5	18 (medium)	££	Quick-win

Priority Area 5 - Newmarket

N1

Action/Priority: Newmarket Racecourse biodiversity improvements and accessibility

Engage with the Jockey Club to discuss how biodiversity can be improved on their estate, for example buffering and connecting large swathes of lowland calcareous grassland, particularly around Newmarket Heath and Devil's Dyke Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Interventions could also include planting for pollinators and creating woodland corridors. For example, The Curragh in County Kildare, Ireland is exploring how biodiversity on the racecourse and wider Curragh Plains can be enhanced through a Conservation Management Plan.

Instigate communication about the potential for enhanced use of some areas for walkers before 1pm to create accessible GI within the town all day.

Source:

- The Council.

Notes

Jockey Club seem to be keen to explore how they can improve biodiversity on their estate.

N2

Action/Priority: Open space enhancements

Address the deficiency in quantity and access to multiple types of open space within Newmarket. Seek to enhance the function of other open spaces (namely amenity greenspaces) serving gaps in open space catchments, for example Lady Wolverton Playing Fields, George Lambton Playing Fields, the former school sites at St Felix and Scaltback, and Studlands. This includes improved management to ensure spaces are of high quality for both people and wildlife, whilst also delivering enhancements which will improve the value of the space to residents.

New development within the surrounds of Newmarket should provide new open space, guided by the deficiency of each typology as assessed by ward within the Open Space Assessment Study (2022). This could include links with action NC1.

Source:

- Open Space Study, 2022.

Notes

Some cheaper, quick-win projects may be available through enhancements to existing open spaces, undertaking a phased approach.

N3

Action/Priority: Yellow Brick Road

Encouraging use of the Yellow Brick Road footpath as a direct route between the town centre and employment opportunities in the north. Improved links between the route and the station should be an aspiration to encourage active travel over private vehicles. Greening with raised planters and a coherent street sign strategy will help to enhance legibility and promotion of the route.

Flood risk is identified along the corridor and therefore enhancements to No.1 Drain should be delivered in conjunction with this. Identify additional areas for flood storage, wetland creation and riparian woodland planting, for example the existing detention basin at Frampton Close. Activating the spaces of amenity grassland along the route may help to encourage usage and promote natural surveillance.

This could be accompanied by and waymarked with greening along the High Street.

Source:

- The Council;

Notes

Could be delivered through developer contributions.

N4

Action/Priority: Connecting Newmarket

Work with East Cambridgeshire District Council to enhance connections between Newmarket and the rest of West Suffolk. Active travel links between Moulton and Newmarket should be enhanced through upgrades to the on-road stretch of National Cycle Network (NCN) route 51. Furthering these links onto the Icknield Way will create a direct route to the River Lark corridor. Links north to Kennet Station and Kentford for cyclists and walkers could also be explored (link with project RLC4).

Source:

- The Council.

Table D.12: Relevant Themes for Priority Area 5 - Newmarket Opportunities

Opportunity	Access and Connectivity	Open Space and Recreation	Nature Recovery	The Water Environment	Urban Greening and Integrating Development	Landscape, Culture and Heritage
N1		+	+			
N2		+	+		+	
N3	+		+	+	+	
N4	+					

Table D.13: Prioritisation Ratings for Priority Area 5 - Newmarket Opportunities

Opportunity	Meeting identified needs	Stakeholder support	Long term sustainability	Deliverability and risk	Priority	Cost band	Timescale
N1	5	5	3	3	18 (medium)	£	Medium-term
N2	5	3	3	5	19 (high)	££	Medium-term
N3	3	3	3	5	18 (medium)	££	Medium-term
N4	3	5	3	3	15 (medium)	£££	Long-term

Priority Area 6 – Clayland Plateau Villages

CPV1

Action/Priority: Connecting the Claylands

Delivery of 'Quiet Lanes' and multi-user pathway connections between villages. Quiet lanes could use a range of different methods to reduce traffic and enhance safety for people on bike or walking. For example, reducing speed limits, making them access only for residents, making them access only during certain times. Example routes could include:

- Using the Roman Road/Ixworth Road as a 'quiet lane' between Ixworth and Thurston train station;
- Connecting Bardwell, Ixworth and Stanton by a 'quiet lane network' using Bardwell Road, Low Street, Knox Lane and Glassfield Road;
- Connect Stanton and Barningham through a 'quiet lane' along Barningham Road and Stanton Road. Upgrade West Bury Lane and Field Lane (tracks) for multi-use. Deliver a 'quiet lane' along Coney Weston Road; and
- Connect Barningham and Hopton through a 'quiet lane' along The Street, Fen Street and Nethergate Street.

Also, the possibility of linking Hopton with Bury St Edmunds through Great Barton and the North East Bury Masterplan Area with associated new GI.

This should be dependent on the commissioning of a transport study.

CPV2

Action/Priority: Black Bourn Valley multifunctional corridor

Continue to support work being undertaken by SWT along the Black Bourn Valley through the creation of wetland scrapes, farmland restoration and grazing marsh enhancement. Further explore how the river can deliver a multifunctional corridor of ecosystem services including flood storage, carbon sequestration and biodiversity movement. This should be accompanied by small-scale access improvements to and along stretches of the river to enable access to nature and recreation. However, the focus of this corridor should be wildlife and not recreation.

Links enhanced down to the Black Bourn Valley Reserve between Norton and Ixworth, linking in with the West Suffolk Nature Triangle project run by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

Source:

- Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

Notes

- A scalable project both in terms of cost and timescale; and
- Dependent on landowner buy-in, however SWT already have a presence in the area and are working with landowners.

Table D.14: Relevant Themes for Priority Area 6 – Clayland Plateau Villages Opportunities

Opportunity	Access and Connectivity	Open Space and Recreation	Nature Recovery	The Water Environment	Urban Greening and Integrating Development	Landscape, Culture and Heritage
CPV1	+				+	
CPV2	+		+	+		+

Table D.15: Prioritisation Ratings for Priority Area 6 – Clayland Plateau Villages Opportunities

Opportunity	Meeting identified needs	Stakeholder support	Long term sustainability	Deliverability and risk	Priority	Cost band	Timescale
CPV1	5	3	3	3	17 (medium)	££	Medium-term
CPV2	5	3	3	3	18 (medium)	££	Medium-term

Priority Area 7

BFF1

Action/Priority: Ecological land management

Create a landscape-scale wildlife network across the Brecks by optimising habitat creation and linkage of uncropped cultivated margins. Support the implementation of the recent Environmental Land Management (E.L.M) scheme-funded landscape scale management plan created by the Breckland Farmers Wildlife Network and target efforts where mapping reveals the best opportunities to support priority plants and insects.

Work with farmers to identify areas of agricultural land which are performing poorly and explore the potential of reverting some areas to heathland and grassland through appropriate grazing regimes, potential to deliver through E.L.M schemes.

Continue to work with farmers to monitor populations of Stone Curlew before carrying out certain farming practices, as well as implementing areas of safe nesting habitat.

Improve grassland management regimes and provide rabbit habitat enhancement plots to provide the necessary disturbance to create open habitats that allow plants and insects to thrive. Build on the legacy of the Shifting Sands project to maintain restored habitats and investigate where populations have disappeared or declined. Reintroduction of populations and best practice management should be followed.

Work with the Forestry Commission in their new forestry resilience programme to deliver a mosaic of more open habitats, including grassland and heathland within fire breaks. The areas chosen for this should be in collaboration with the outputs of the Thetford Open Habitat Plan to create ecological corridors which benefit the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and connect neighbouring heaths. An important next step in the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

Source:

- RSPB.

Notes

- Work in close partnership with the Breckland Farmers Wildlife Network;
- Key landowner to engage will be Elveden Estate; and
- Work with Suffolk Wildlife Trust and the ongoing work they're doing with farming clusters.

BFF2

Action/Priority: Disturbance and access

Upgrade existing paths and enhance their wayfinding signage through open access land to encourage more of their use and reduce trampling, for example:

- Icknield Way through The King's Forest, alongside some of the existing tracks to create round routes (trails are currently not waymarked and could be improved through signage);

- Deliver improvements to the layout and management of car parking at West Stow Country Park to reduce the impact of informal parking on forest verges in the vicinity;
- Also applicable to areas outside of open access land, for example; and
- The byway through Berner's Heath.

Source:

- Suffolk County Council Rights of Way Officers.

Notes

Close engagement with Natural England and Forestry Commission will be essential.

BFF3

Action/Priority: Bury St Edmunds to Thetford multi-use route

- Explore the potential for a largely off-road cycle and walking link between Thetford and Bury St Edmund which is more direct than the existing National Cycle Network (NCN) route. This should make use of existing byways and promoted routes using sensitive upgrades and enhanced wayfinding. This will also help to concentrate recreational pressures away from other more sensitive parts of the Special Protection Area (SPA).

Notes

Will be difficult to deliver through the SPA.

Table D.16: Relevant Themes for Priority Area 7 – Breckland Forest and Farmland Opportunities

Opportunity	Access and Connectivity	Open Space and Recreation	Nature Recovery	The Water Environment	Urban Greening and Integrating Development	Landscape, Culture and Heritage
BFF1			+			+
BFF2	+	+	+			
BFF3	+	+	+			

Table D.17: Prioritisation Ratings for Priority Area 7 – Breckland Forest and Farmland Opportunities

Opportunity	Meeting identified needs	Stakeholder support	Long term sustainability	Deliverability and risk	Priority	Cost band	Timescale
BFF1	5	5	3	3	18 (medium)	££	Long-term
BFF2	5	3	3	5	19 (high)	£	Quick-win
BFF3	3	1	3	3	13 (low)	£££	Long-term

Priority Opportunity outside a Priority Area/District-wide opportunities

O1

Action/Priority: Catchment sensitive farming

Raise awareness and encourage implementation of catchment sensitive farming across the whole of the district, with special consideration for farms adjacent to the Lark, Stour and Little Ouse corridors which are all failing to meet the EU Water Framework Directive standard of 'good'.

This should include the creation of a 'Farming for Water' scheme which aims to reduce soil, sediment and chemical input into West Suffolk's rivers and encourage the sustainable use of pesticides through providing advice for riparian landowners. This project will require a sponsor to take it forward and should be delivered in partnership with Natural England and the North Anglia Catchment Sensitive Farming Officers.

Notes

This would require a sponsor as it's not something the Council could deliver; however, they can promote it.

O2

Action/Priority: Natural flood management

A programme of natural flood management should be adopted to focus opportunities for nature recovery alongside other multifunctional services such as flood storage. Example locations could include:

- Roadside nature reserve along the River Glem at Stansfield; and
- Riparian woodland planting in Moulton. .

O3

Action/Priority: Wildlife Friendly Villages and citizen science

Encourage ‘wildlife friendly village’ initiatives, as trialled by Risby, which encourages community groups, schools and individuals to create smaller scale networks of wild areas on both public and private land. Woodlands Way is a voluntary group who manage a number of woodlands at Moreton Hall in Bury St Edmunds and could be included as a delivery partner.

Mapping of Priority Habitats, semi-natural green space and designations should be made available to communities so that they can take action in buffering and connecting these spaces. Community growing could be an additional way to deliver these initiatives, with local events handing out seeds, bulbs and compost etc.

This could be delivered as part of the Wild East initiative, using their 'Map of Dreams' to record pledges and track progress. Alternatively, a standalone West Suffolk web platform could be used. A West Suffolk-based platform could double up as a citizen science tool for communities to map GI assets within their area and wouldn't need to be confined to 'villages' but could extend across the whole district.

This could include the creation of smaller roadside nature reserves which help to buffer and connect Priority Habitats, for example:

- Stansfield;
- Cavendish;
- Wickhambrook;
- Chedburgh;
- Bardwell;
- Hopton;
- Ixworth; and
- Hawstead Green.

There is potential to link with Healing Woods initiative from Green Suffolk as a delivery mechanism. These interventions should be focussed within the south of the district where access to natural greenspace is very limited and difficult to create due to large swathes of farmland and private ownership.

Notes

A scalable project, e.g. just encouraging the implementation of Wildlife Friendly Villages can be cheap and quick.

Delivery partners:

- Woodlands Way;
- The Conservation Volunteers;
- WildEast;
- Suffolk Wildlife Trust; and
- Green Suffolk.

O4

Action/Priority: Multi-functional open space provision

Use open space provision standards to help determine priorities for open space provision, using information on quantity and accessibility in conjunction.

Prioritise enhancement and functionality of open spaces that are identified as of low quality and/or which address gaps in catchment mapping (as identified in the Open Space Assessment Study, 2022) to ensure they provide multiple social and value benefits (e.g. amenity spaces in Haverhill and Brandon). Note that quality/functionality assessment of the open space network is required to inform priority opportunities, namely those sites which are identified as low quality but high value.

Explore and encourage opportunities to expand play provision at existing sites nearest to where there are gaps in provision and in areas of deficiency (e.g. Haverhill, where developer contributions could play a significant role in both delivery on-site and funding for off-site).

Take a demand led approach to provision of new allotments and burial space, identifying needs based upon information such as waiting lists.

This should be accompanied by a review of the management practices undertaken across West Suffolk's open spaces, including green verges, to ensure the most wildlife-friendly and sustainable practices are being adopted, for example relaxing mowing regimes.

Source:

- West Suffolk Council Leisure and Cultural Services Team; and
- Open Space Assessment Study, 2022.

Notes

- Scalable project; and
- Levelling Up Funding for Parks may be a potential delivery mechanism when introduced.

O5

Action/Priority: Shared rural service network

Ongoing initiative of implementing either on-road or off-road routes between villages which share services. This has the potential to be delivered through developer contributions and where possible should be off-road with natural multi-use surfacing such as hoggin.

A principle should be implemented where if a byway or public track are connecting settlements, these should be upgraded to support safe active travel.

For example:

- Connecting Wickhambrook with Stradishall, Wickham Street and Clopton Green;
- Connecting Ixworth with Packenham and Bardwell;
- Connecting Red Lodge with Kennett and Frackenham; and
- Connecting Mildenhall with Barton Mills and Worlington.

Source:

- Suffolk County Council Rights of Way Team.

O6

Action/Priority: Off-site Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) catalogue

Create a catalogue of where off-site BNG provisions will go for development across the district which cannot deliver 10% on site. This will enable quick and focussed biodiversity improvements where the most benefit will be created. It is important to note that many of these spaces are heavily relied on as a recreation asset and therefore any enhancements should ensure this function is retained. Further work is needed to identify areas where sites could be improved, however an initial review has concluded the following spaces as a starting point:

- Ten Acre Field, Bury St Edmunds;
- No Man's Meadows, Bury St Edmunds;
- Leg of Mutton, Bury St Edmunds;
- Holywater Meadow, Bury St Edmunds;
- The Butts, Bury St Edmunds;
- Shakers Lane, Bury St Edmunds;
- British Sugar, Bury St Edmunds;
- Larks Gate Meadow, Fornham;
- Chimswell Way open space, Haverhill;
- Meldam Washlands, Haverhill;
- Forties Close, Haverhill;
- The Great Meadow/Risbridge Meadow, Keddington;
- Jubilee Fields, Mildenhall;
- Mildenhall Hub, Mildenhall;
- Norah Hanbury-Kelk Meadows, Mildenhall;
- St John's Recreation Ground, Mildenhall;
- Lady Wolverton Playing Fields, Newmarket;;
- George Lambton Playing Fields, Newmarket
- Parkers Close, Newmarket;
- Cut-Off Channel, Lakenheath;
- Ram Meadow, Bury St Edmunds;
- Hyperion Way Open Space, Newmarket; and
- Open space on College Heath Road, Mildenhall.

(Above sites have been identified through desk and site-based reviews of where existing biodiversity provisions could be improved within settlements where development is likely. An additional study will be needed to develop this catalogue and define the types of interventions appropriate to that site.)

O7

Action/Priority: Farm Plans/Whole Estate Plans and promoting Farm Cluster Groups/Partnerships

Work with landowners, including farmers and estate holders to help them recognise the value of their land for biodiversity and encourage the production of Farm Plans/Whole Estate Plans where appropriate. This project would require a sponsor and could have input from Suffolk Wildlife Trust who have experience working with farming clusters. For example:

- The Elveden Estate (which owns a significant portion of the Brecks Special Protection Area (SPA) and northern West Suffolk). The estate is already very proactive when it comes to biodiversity and will be a regional player in the delivery of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS);
- The Denston Hall Estate sits on an important stretch of the River Glem with associated floodplain grazing marsh;
- Clopton Green Estate;
- Various solar farms which need to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), as well as the potential to enhance access through the sites e.g. Sunnica; and

- Euston Hall Estate which occupies a key position on the Black Bourn Valley.

(Above estates may already have plans in place, would require further research and engagement).

Notes

This could be done with the guidance of Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Farm Advisory Team who is helping to set up farming clusters where funding is channelled towards these clusters to help deliver enhancements – predominantly focussed along river catchments (to receive data from Rupert at SWT).

Two clusters in West Suffolk:

1. The River Glem and Chad Brook; and

2. The Gipping.

O8

Action/Priority: West Suffolk Design Code

Produce a district-wide design guide/code which adheres to the National Model Design Code and National Design Guide. This will include detailed guidance on how developers can successfully implement and design GI, play, open space, sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), Biodiversity Net

Gain (BNG) and urban greening. This will create the evidence base and grounding for only accepting high quality GI from developers.

The Design Code could also provide an additional section on setting design standards and expectations for GI retrofitting within West Suffolk's already urbanised areas, for example the retrofitting of Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDS), green walls and roofs, pocket parks etc.

Additional standards can be included within the Design Code which ensure enough open space and recreation amenities are delivered within or adjacent to a development if it sits within 7.5 kilometres of the Brecks and 5 kilometres of Devil's Dyke. This could also be used to address existing deficiencies in access to nature, for example within Newmarket and the Hatchfield Farm masterplan.

In the absence of a district-wide design code being prepared before major developments come forward, developers should produce site-specific design codes for approval by the Council. Alternatively the use of GI standards such as the Building with Nature accreditation could help to ensure high quality and multifunctional GI is delivered as part of schemes.

Source:

- Suffolk Wildlife Trust; and
- The Council.

O9

Action/Priority: Education for designated sites under pressure

It is recognised that reducing access to many designated sites is difficult due to the demand for recreation. Enhancing education and creating a 'code of conduct' through signage at a number of sites which are under pressure could help to alleviate negative behaviour such as trampling, loose dogs and cycling where not appropriate. Particular sites include:

- Devil's Dyke Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI);
- Aspal Close Local Nature Reserve (LNR);
- Maidscross Hill LNR;
- Red Lodge Heath SSSI;
- Across the Brecks Special Protection Area (SPA);
- Brandon Country Park;
- West Stow Heath SSSI; and
- Around Ramparts Field and West Stow (highlighting damage caused by parking on verges).

Where issues continue to exist, Public Space Protection Orders, which require dogs to be kept on leads, can be an alternative. This would be particularly beneficial at Devil's Dyke SSSI, however, would require engagement with East Cambridgeshire Council where most of the designated site falls within.

Source:

- Suffolk County Council Rights of Way Team and West Suffolk.

O10

Action/Priority: Local nature recovery

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) through large developments can be delivered both on-site and off-site, however, providing net gain for smaller developments is more of a challenge due to restrictions on space and funding. Where this is the case, smaller contributions to enhancing the local nature recovery network should be sought through projects such as small-scale woodland planting, hedgerow connections, wetland scrapes and pond creation. This could also include the use of woodland buffers surrounding developments or along roadsides to both screen, buffer and connect habitats. Through consultation with Suffolk County Council, this could also include the delivery of new Roadside Nature Reserves, particularly where the buffering and connecting of Priority Habitats can be achieved.

This should also be applied to the loss of specific habitats for certain priority species, for example, if Skylarks were to lose breeding territories through development, compensatory territories should be found nearby through a contract with the landowner and the developer. Bodies such as the Suffolk Wildlife Trust can be used to help monitor the success of this. .

Source:

- Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

Notes

Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Wildlife Trust will be essential in the delivery of this to explore how the wider local nature recovery network can be reinforced.

Table D.18: Relevant Themes for Priority Opportunities outside a Priority Area/District-wide Opportunities

Opportunity	Access and Connectivity	Open Space and Recreation	Nature Recovery	The Water Environment	Urban Greening and Integrating Development	Landscape, Culture and Heritage
N1			+	+		
N2			+	+		
N3		+	+		+	+
N4	+	+	+			
N5	+				+	
N6			+	+	+	
N7			+	+		+
N8	+	+	+	+	+	+
N9	+	+	+			
N10		+	+		+	

Table D.19: Prioritisation Ratings for Priority Opportunities outside a Priority Area/District-wide Opportunities

Opportunity	Meeting identified needs	Stakeholder support	Long term sustainability	Deliverability and risk	Priority	Cost band	Timescale
N1	5	3	3	1	14 (medium)	££	Medium-term
N2	5	3	1	1	12 (low)	££	Long-term
N3	3	3	3	3	16 (medium)	£	Quick-win
N4	5	3	3	3	17 (medium)	££	Medium-term
N5	5	5	1	1	14 (medium)	£££	Long-term
N6	5	5	5	5	23 (high)	£	Quick-win
N7	3	3	3	3	15 (medium)	£	Medium-term
N8	5	5	5	5	26 (high)	£	Quick-win
N9	5	3	5	5	21 (high)	£	Quick-win
N10	5	5	3	5	21 (high)	££	Medium-term

Appendix E

Developer Checklist

In the absence of a district-wide design code, the Council should be utilising a robust developer checklist to assess planning applications against, ensuring high-quality GI is delivered in new development.

Figure E.1: Developer checklist

	Compliance (Yes/No/Not Relevant)	Comments
Process		
Has a design team been assembled with appropriate qualifications, experience and accreditation? This should include a team of landscape architects and, where possible, include an approved Building with Nature assessor on the team.		
Has a site appraisal been carried out to an appropriate level, including the required ecological assessments?		
Has pre-application engagement with relevant stakeholders been undertaken, including going further than just the 'statutory consultees', where appropriate?		
Have pre-application discussions on conceptual design carried out?		
Has the landscape 'led' the production of the masterplan? This means features such as Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) and open space guiding the earliest design stages of the plan, rather than being an after-thought to built form. The GI should also be context-driven by the surrounding landscape character and form.		
Has the planning application been submitted with the necessary supporting information to prove high quality GI will be delivered as part of the scheme?		
Open Space		
Has appropriate and multifunctional open space been incorporated into the design?		

	Compliance (Yes/No/Not Relevant)	Comments
Has open space been properly integrated into the layout? Has it been placed appropriately for use, including for natural surveillance?		
Have the recreational needs of the new and existing communities been provided for in terms of play, parks, sports and natural greenspace, building on the findings of the West Suffolk Open Space Assessment and beginning to address gaps in deficiency?		
Has any loss in open space been compensated properly?		
Has adequate space for private growing, community growing, and allotments been provided? This should meet the rising demand of growing spaces and enhance opportunities to connect with nature on your doorstep.		
Active travel		
Has active travel provision been integrated into the development and provides access to the wider network and local facilities?		
Are active travel links safe, convenient and direct, discouraging private vehicle use for shorter journeys?		
Has the storage of bikes and other equipment used for active travel been thought through within the masterplan and made easily available for all plots?		
Do active travel link cater for different types of users, including the disabled, elderly and children?		
Has severance to existing active travel routes been avoided and resolved?		

	Compliance (Yes/No/Not Relevant)	Comments
Is the specification of the route appropriate to the desired users and location?		
Has an access plan been produced and submitted?		
Landscaping		
Has a landscape-led approach been taken which utilises appropriate use of vegetation and design for the local context?		
Has a landscape plan been produced which is consistent with the other plans?		
Has sufficient space been made for trees and other planting within the proposals and designed to achieve multiple benefits? For example, providing shade in open spaces, helping flood attenuation and contributing positively to the landscape character.		
Is the species choice appropriate and is there species diversity to promote resilience against climate change and disease? This should include species choices which are likely to survive in their setting (particularly within urban environments and areas of high air pollution). This should be assessed with the guidance of the Tree Officer, as well as using online resources such as the Trees and Design Action Group's 'Tree Species Selection for Green Infrastructure'. **[See reference** 83**]**		
Sustainable Design		
Has surface water management and flood risk been considered at the outset of the design process, this includes consideration for the downstream impacts of increased impervious surfaces on flooding?		

	Compliance (Yes/No/Not Relevant)	Comments
Have opportunities for rainwater harvesting been maximised? Has the design of street-facing private spaces been well considered to avoid the large-scale 'paving over' of front gardens?		
Has water been used creatively and positively within the layout?		
Have the appropriate Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) requirements been incorporated, and guidance followed? Assessor should consider the CIRIA SuDS Manual checklist **[See reference** 84**]** and the information held on the Suffolk County Council Guidance on Development and Flood Risk webpage **[See reference** 85**]**, including the SuDS Local Design Guide **[See reference** 86**]**.		
Has consideration been taken for how SuDS can help to enhance water quality?		
The Water Environment		
Has the riparian environment been considered within the design process and safeguarded/enhanced where opportunities arise?		
Have appropriate buffers been put in place between development and waterbodies, taking into account management needs as well as riparian habitats?		
Have unnecessary engineering works in the water environment been avoided, included any obstacles to the migration of wildlife?		
Has enhanced access for the public to waterbodies been provided, where appropriate? This could also include the exploration of water-based recreation.		
Wildlife		

	Compliance (Yes/No/Not Relevant)	Comments
Has the approach to biodiversity been directly informed by site audits, survey work, the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy and consultation with relevant stakeholders?		
Have the relevant Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) enhancements been achieved?		
Have existing habitats within and adjoining the site been integrated into the landscape design where they have been protected and enhanced?		
Have the opportunities to create new habitat been maximised and are these new habitats appropriate to the setting?		
Have opportunities to enhance education and interpretation of biodiversity been explored?		
Have green and blue corridors been provided to ensure the safe movement of wildlife and connectivity to the wider ecological network?		
Does the site include 'micro-greening' features to support wildlife, including quick wins such as integrated bat and bird boxes, insect hotels, hedgehog highways and pollinator planting?		
Climate Change		
Do designs adhere to Natural England's Climate Change Adaptation Manual – Green Infrastructure? **[See reference** 87**]**		
Has tree cover significantly expanded? The Woodland Trust is advocating for 30% canopy cover on all new sites and the NPPF now requires all new streets to be tree-lined.		
Have opportunities for carbon sequestration been explored within tree planting?		

	Compliance (Yes/No/Not Relevant)	Comments
Management and Maintenance		
Have common areas, such as play space, parks, connecting paths and landscaped areas been designed to be well managed and maintained?		
Has a Landscape Management and Maintenance Plan (LMMP) been submitted with all the required information? This should preferably be ecologically led, for example a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP).		
Have Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) maintenance arrangements been set out within the drainage strategy and cross-referenced with the LMPP where appropriate?		
Has the long-term stewardship of the site been discussed and secured?		

References

1 St. Edmundsbury Borough Council (2009) St. Edmundsbury Green Infrastructure Strategy.

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6 Suffolk County Council (2014) Suffolk Cycling Strategy.

7 For more information follow this link: East West Main Line Partnership (undated) Consultants appointed for Eastern Section business case.

8 Suffolk County Council (2020) Transport Recovery Plan 2020, Phase 2.

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10 For more information follow this link: Greater Cambridge Partnership (2019) Cambridge South East Transport.

11 For more information follow this link: Suffolk News (2021) Newmarket's Yellow Brick Road set to be rejuvenated in new community project.

12 For more information follow this link: RWS fm (2019) New bridleway opens up traffic free link in Bury St Edmunds.

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14 For more information follow this link: Suffolk County Council (undated) Bury St Edmunds Park and Stride.

15 For more information follow this link: Abbeycroft Leisure website.

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17 West Suffolk Council (2021) West Suffolk Open Space Assessment Report.

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22 Public Health England (2020) Improving access to greenspace: A new review for 2020.

23 Fields in Trust (2018) Revaluating Parks and Green Spaces: Measuring their economic and wellbeing value to individuals.

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