

# **Wickham Market Neighbourhood Plan**

## **Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report**

**February 2019**

## Introduction

- 1.1 This report represents a screening of the need for a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) under Directive 92/43/EEC, also known as the Habitats Directive<sup>1</sup> of the emerging Wickham Market Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.2 HRA is the a two-stage process to consider whether a proposed development plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on a European site designated for its nature conservation interest. Firstly, plans or programmes must be screened to determine if they are likely to have a significant effect (and are not plans connected to the management of the European site(s) in question). If it cannot be demonstrated during at the screening stage that the plan or programme will not have significant effects of the European site(s), an 'Appropriate Assessment' (AA) must then be undertaken, which is a much more detailed study of the effects of the plan or programme. The two parts together form a full HRA.
- 1.3 In determining whether a proposed development plan or programme is likely to have significant effects, the local authority must incorporate the 'precautionary principle' into its decision. This means that if there is uncertainty as to whether the plan or programme would cause significant effects on a European site, the full AA would be required.

## Wickham Market Neighbourhood Plan

- 2.1 The purpose of the Wickham Market Neighbourhood Plan is to provide for the sustainable development of Wickham Market to make it a key service centre for residents and surrounding villages. To do this, it seeks to phase the provision of good quality housing and community facilities through a set of objectives as shown in Figure 1:

**Figure 1: Draft objectives of Wickham Market Neighbourhood Plan**

	Aims/Objectives
1	New development includes provision and management of suitable infrastructure.
2	New developments are built with adequate parking.
3	New houses are energy efficient
4	Mix of housing to meet local needs
5	Provide greenspace, play space, and sports fields are provided in line with the Local Plan green infrastructure requirements for new development.
6	New development is designed to reflect local character and include comprehensive schemes for landscape and ecological enhancement to ensure that the quality and character of the Parish is not compromised.
7	Provide additional sheltered housing.

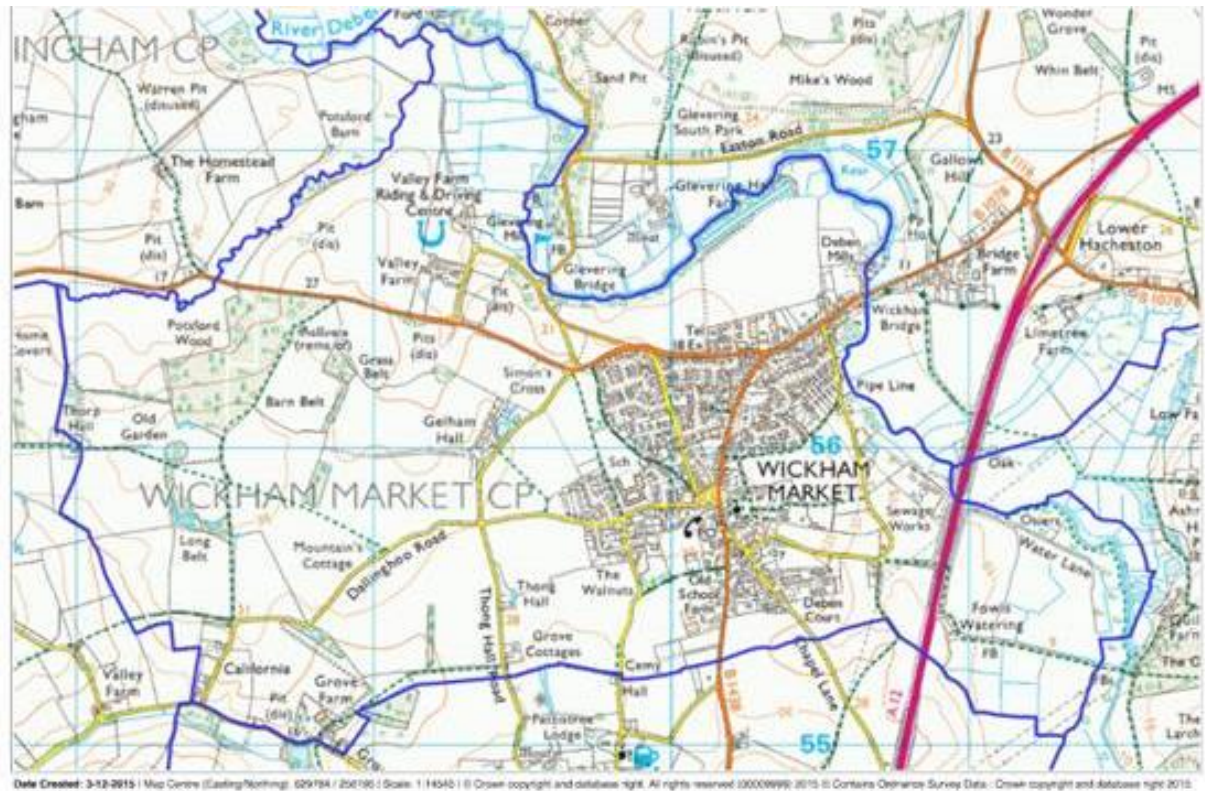
<sup>1</sup> Directive 92/43/EEC 'on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora': <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:31992L0043>.

	Aims/Objectives
8	Provide safe routes through the village, particularly for people with disabilities
9	Protect and enhance footpath and cycle linkages.
10	Provide improved village hall facilities
11	Support the initiative to provide a village pub.
12	Provide improved facilities for youth
13	Ensure provision of adequate sport and leisure provision for all ages.
14	Enhance the play area provision within the village.
15	To retain and protect the current allotment provision.
16	Make the public areas more pedestrian friendly.
17	Manage and protect the quiet rural lanes, bridleways and footpaths
18	Provide adequate mobile phone signals throughout the village
19	Support and maintain the regular market in the village centre
20	Protect and enhance the vitality and viability of the village centre.
21	To support proposals for new initiatives to bring new business to the village, in particular to occupy available units.
22	To support and protect premises and infrastructure to promote and protect local businesses and home workers.
23	Protect all the village heritage assets (both designated and non-designated)
24	Provide availability of fast broadband connection throughout the village
25	Preserve the setting and quality of the Parish Cemetery and ensure adequate future provision.
26	Provide electric charging points for cars
27	Conserve, enhance and link natural spaces and their associated biodiversity
28	Create new green space such as meadows, woodland and orchards.
29	Protect all important trees
30	Enhance the parish treescape through planting new trees and hedgerows.
31	To extend the Conservation Area boundary in order to include important buildings and assets.
32	Preserve and enhance the character of the Conservation Area
33	Reduce traffic speeds and volume throughout the village
34	Provide adequate short term, long term and overspill parking facilities for workers and visitors to the core business centres.
35	Provide local and strategic traffic management to minimise adverse impact of movement of HGV/LGV
36	Minimise additional traffic through village choke points.

2.2 The legislative background set out below outlines the regulations that require this screening exercise. Section 4, provides a screening assessment of the likely significant environmental effects of the Neighbourhood Plan and whether there is the need for an SEA.

2.3 The designated Wickham Market Neighbourhood Area is shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Wickham Market Neighbourhood Plan Area**

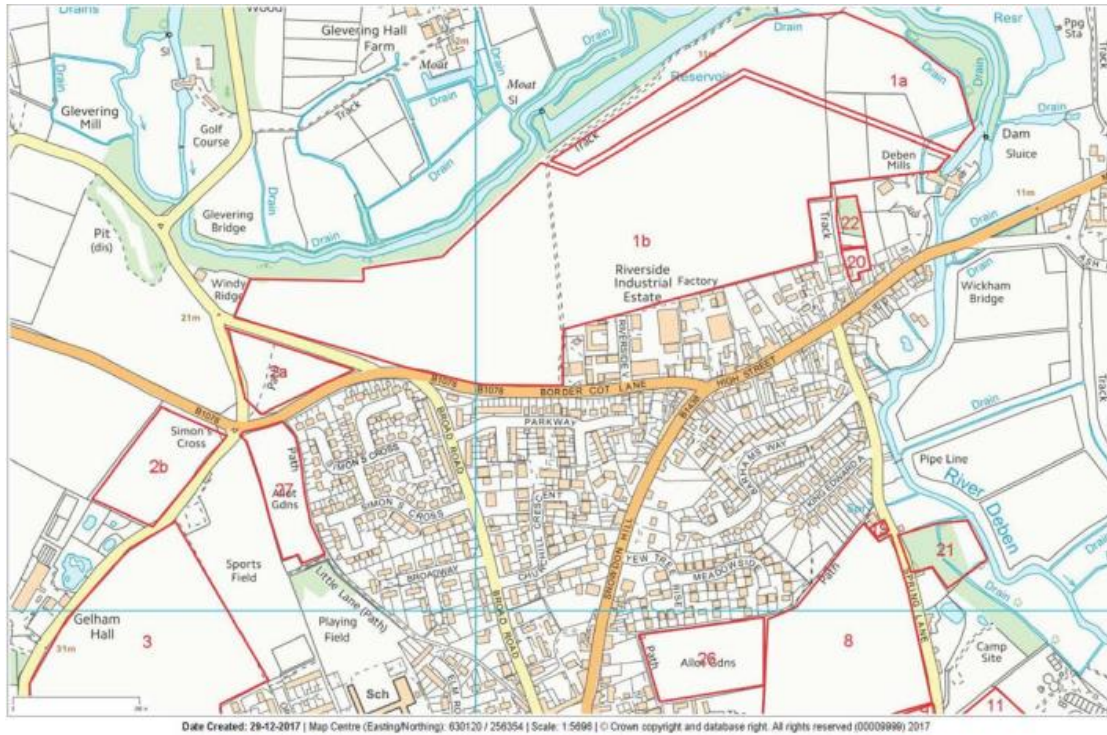


2.4 The Neighbourhood Plan covers a 20-year period from 2017 to 2037 and seeks, amongst other things, to specify certain exact locations for development. An assessment has been undertaken of sites either put forward to the Suffolk Coastal Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) process or identified as having potential by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. This assessment concluded that:

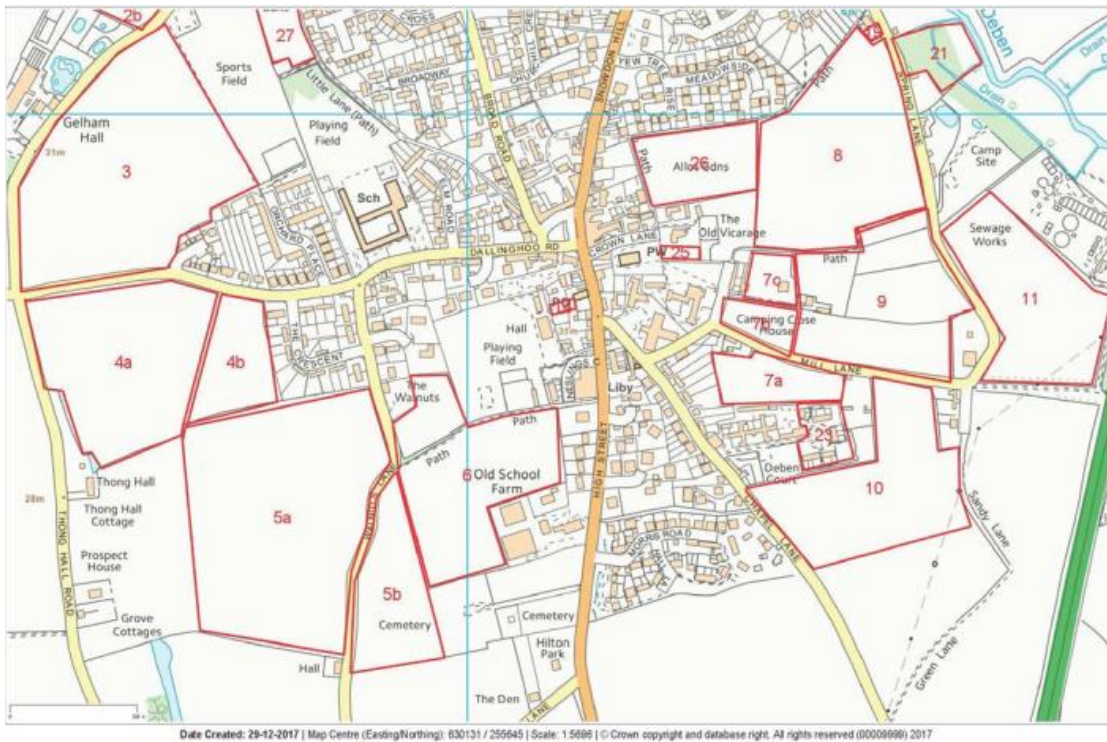
- Two sites would be appropriate for allocation in the Neighbourhood Plan (site refs 5b/6 and 27);
- Two sites are potentially suitable for allocation but with significant constraints that would need to be resolved or mitigated prior to development (site refs 1b (part) and 18);
- Eighteen sites are not suitable for allocation due to insurmountable constraints site refs 1b (part), 2a, 3, 4a, 4b, 5a, 7c, 8, 9, 10, 11, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25 and 26).

2.5 The location of the sites considered is shown in Figures 3a and 3b.

**Figure 3a: Location of sites considered for allocation in first draft of the Wickham Market Neighbourhood Plan - north**



**Figure 3b: Location of sites considered for allocation in first draft of the Wickham Market Neighbourhood Plan – south**



Source: AECOM (2018) Wickham Market Neighbourhood Plan Site Assessment Report

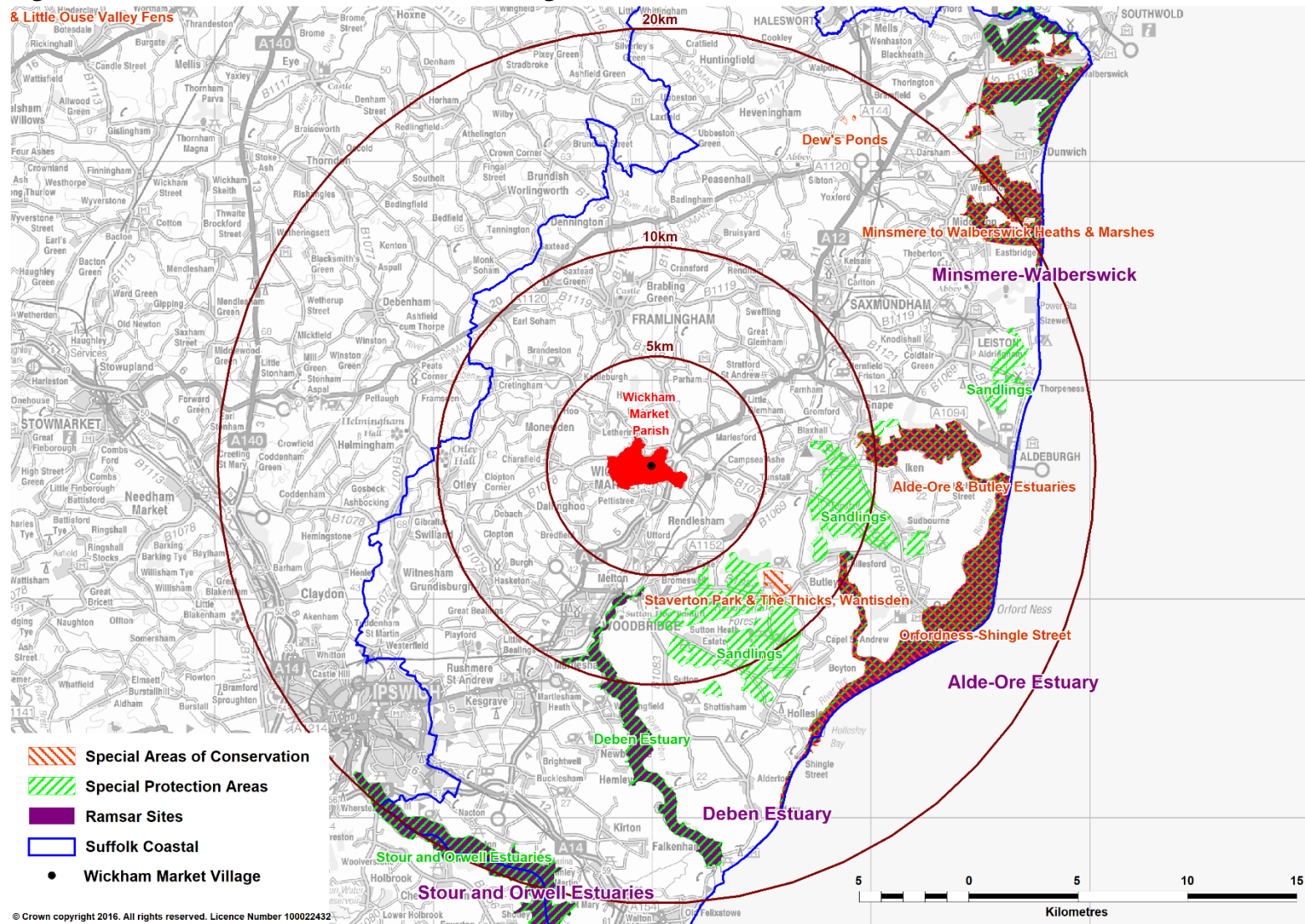
## European sites potentially affected

3.1 There are a number of European sites within the wider Suffolk area. All the sites are listed below:

- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
  - The Broads
  - Benacre to Easton Bavents Lagoons
  - Dews Ponds
  - Minsmere to Walberswick Heaths and Marshes
  - Alde-Ore and Butley Estuaries
  - Staverton Park and The Thicks, Wantisden
  - Orford Ness-Shingle Street
  - Waveney and Little Ouse Valley Fens
  - Rex Graham Reserve
  - Norfolk Valley Fens
- Special Protection Areas (SPAs):
  - Breckland
  - Broadland
  - Benacre to Easton Bavents
  - Sandlings
  - Stour and Orwell Estuaries
- RAMSAR sites:
  - Broadland
  - Minsmere-Walberswick
  - Alde-Ore Estuary
  - Deben Estuary
  - Stour and Orwell Estuaries
  - Redgrave and South Lopham Fens
  - Chippenham Fen

3.2 These are shown in Figure 4 and more detail is provided in the Appendix.

**Figure 4: Location of the Wickham Market Neighbourhood Area within a 5km, 10km and 20km radius of SACs and SPAs**



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- 3.3 Of these European sites, none are within 5km of Wickham Market village where the growth proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan is to be located.
- 3.4 The following sites are between 5km and 10km of Wickham Market village:
- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
    - Alde-Ore and Butley Estuaries
    - Staverton Park and The Thicks, Wantisden
    - Orford Ness-Shingle Street
  - Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
    - Sandlings
    - Alde-Ore and Butley Estuaries
  - RAMSAR sites:
    - Deben Estuary
    - Alde-Ore Estuary
- 3.5 The following sites are between 10km and 20km of Wickham Market village:
- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
    - Dews Ponds
    - Minsmere to Walberswick Heaths and Marshes
  - Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
    - Sandlings
    - Stour and Orwell Estuaries
    - Minsmere to Walberswick Heaths and Marshes
  - RAMSAR sites:
    - Deben Estuary
    - Minsmere-Walberswick
- 3.6 Based on the community engagement to underpin the development of the vision and objectives for the Wickham Market Neighbourhood Plan, its focus, amongst other things, is on shaping development, and protecting, maintaining and enhancing existing green space assets.
- 3.7 Whilst no policies have yet been developed, it is expected that the Plan will seek to positively address a range of environmental aspects of sustainable development with the



intention of having a positive effect on the wider environment. However, the European sites are at a distance where such effects will not be felt.

- 3.8 The scale of growth to be planned for in the Neighbourhood Area is not yet known. The Suffolk Coastal Local Plan Review Issues and Options document 2017 identified a number of development scenarios. For each scenario it presented three options for development targets, with the Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) as a baseline and then scenarios of delivering 20% and 40% above the OAN. It presented aggregated figures for various categories which included Wickham Market, with no further disaggregation to the level of individual settlements.
- 3.9 The range of housing requirements over the plan period 2017 to 2036 on newly allocated sites were as follows:
- Option 4 – Continuation of existing approach – ‘Key and Local Service Centres’ – between 245 and 1,195 dwellings.
  - Option 5 - Focus on Ipswich and A14 transport corridor – ‘other towns, villages and rural settlements’ – between 197 and 683 dwellings.
  - Option 6 - A12 Transport corridor and dispersed rural focus – ‘A12 settlements’ (Saxmundham, Wickham Market, Marlesford, Litle Glemham, Stratord St Andrew, Farnham, Benhall, Kelsale, Yoxford and Darsham) – between 313 and 1,081 dwellings.
- 3.10 Whilst it is not possible to identify a range of figures specifically for Wickham Market, the likely scale of growth to be planned for is likely to mean that any environmental effects will be localised but not significant.
- 3.11 The principal impacts of residential development are:
- i. recreational disturbance caused by walkers, particularly dog walkers; and
  - ii. air pollution caused by increased traffic.
- 3.12 It is considered that all of the European sites are of a distance from the main focus for growth in Wickham Market village such that dog walkers will not travel to these locations on a daily basis and vehicular traffic will be relatively dispersed and minimal in volume as it travels past the sites.
- 3.13 It is concluded therefore that, at this stage, the Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to have any significant effect on the identified network of protected sites.

### **In-combination effects**

- 3.14 Existing plans and proposals must be considered when assessing new plans or programmes for likely significant effects as they may create ‘in combination’ effects.
- 3.15 the key existing plan is the Suffolk Coastal District Local Plan – Core Strategy and Development Management Policies. This document sets out the broad scale and

distribution of development across the whole Suffolk Coastal district. It was adopted in July 2013 and was subject to a strategic level appropriate assessment. It is the role of each of the site allocations documents (including neighbourhood plans) to implement the policies and development strategy in the Core Strategy, insofar as they apply to their plan areas.

- 3.16 Given the absence of European sites within 5 kilometres of Wickham Market village where new development is to be focused, it is not considered likely that there will be any significant environmental effects on any European sites.
- 3.17 The Wickham Market Neighbourhood Plan is a lower level plan than the Core Strategy and is expected to focus, amongst other things, on shaping development, protecting, maintaining and enhancing existing green space assets. Whilst the Neighbourhood Plan proposes to allocate specific residential development sites, it must ensure that these are in general conformity with the District Council's Core Strategy in order to meet the Basic Conditions. These development sites will be allocated to ensure that the District Council meets its housing requirements which are being established through the emerging Suffolk Coastal Local Plan Review. Any development proposal that would be likely to have a significant effect on a European site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, will be subject to assessment at the project application stage.
- 3.18 It is therefore concluded that no significant in-combination effects are likely to occur due to the implementation of the Wickham Market Neighbourhood Plan.

### **Screening outcome**

- 4.1 The screening assessment which has been undertaken concludes that no likely significant effects in respect of the European sites within 20km of the Neighbourhood Plan area will occur as a result of the implementation of the Wickham Market Neighbourhood Plan. As such, the Neighbourhood plan does not require a full HRA to be undertaken.
- 4.2 The outcome of this Screening Report is subject to review by Natural England and Suffolk Coastal District Council. The Screening Report and subsequent screening opinion may also need to be reviewed if significant changes are made to the Neighbourhood Plan as a result of this review or any other evidence that informs a significant change to the Plan prior to the Submission Stage (Regulation 16).

## APPENDIX - STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS

Designation relates to, or having the nature of, a statute (such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, or the National Parks and Countryside Act, 1949). The NPPF states for plan-making that Local Plans should meet objectively assessed needs, with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change, unless: specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted. For example, those policies relating to sites protected under the Birds and Habitats Directives (see paragraph 119) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Heritage Coast or within a National Park (or the Broads Authority); designated heritage assets; and locations at risk of flooding or coastal erosion. See [circular 05/2006](#).

### Ramsar Sites

A Ramsar site is the land listed as a Wetland of International Importance under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (the Ramsar Convention) 1973. The Stour and Orwell Estuaries Ramsar is located approximately 18km to the south of Wickham Market and includes extensive mud-flats, low cliffs, saltmarsh and small areas of vegetated shingle on the lower reaches. The Ramsar supports important numbers of breeding Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, while in winter they hold major concentrations of water birds, especially geese, ducks and waders. The geese feed and the waders roost in agricultural land beyond the designated area. The vulnerability of the Ramsar is affected by natural coastal processes exacerbated by fixed sea defences, port development and maintenance dredging.

The Minsmere-Walberswick Ramsar is located approximately 18km to the north-east of Wickham Market. It contains a complex mosaic of habitats, notably, areas of marsh with dykes, extensive reedbeds, mudflats, lagoons, shingle and driftline, woodland and areas of lowland heath. The site supports the largest continuous stand of reed in England and Wales and demonstrates the nationally rare transition in grazing marsh ditch plants from brackish to fresh water. The combination of habitats create an exceptional area of scientific interest supporting nationally scarce plants, British Red Data Book invertebrates and nationally important numbers of breeding and wintering birds.

The Deben Estuary Ramsar is located approximately 5km south of Wickham Market. This estuary is relatively narrow and sheltered. It has limited amounts of freshwater input and the intertidal areas are constrained by sea-walls. The site supports nationally and internationally important flora and fauna. This includes a population of the mollusc

*Vertigo angustior*. Martlesham Creek is one of only about fourteen sites in Britain where this species survives.

The Alde-Ore Estuary Ramsar is located approximately 9km south-east of Wickham Market. It comprises the estuary complex of the rivers Alde, Butley and Ore, including Havergate Island and Orfordness. There are a variety of habitats including, intertidal mudflats, saltmarsh, vegetated shingle (including the second-largest and best-preserved area in Britain at Orfordness), saline lagoons and grazing marsh. The Orfordness/Shingle Street landform is unique within Britain in combining a shingle spit with a cusped foreland. The site supports nationally-scarce plants, British Red Data Book invertebrates, and notable assemblages of breeding and wintering wetland birds.

### **Special Protection Areas**

A Special Protection Area (SPA) is the land classified under Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds.

The Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA is located 18km to the south of Wickham Market. It contains an internationally important assemblage of birds. Qualifying species include; Avocet (breeding), Northern pintail *Anas acuta* (wintering), Dark-bellied Brent goose *Branta bernicla bernicla* (wintering), Red knot *Calidris canutus* (wintering), Black-tailed godwit (Icelandic) *Limosa limosa islandica* (wintering), Grey plover *Pluvialis squatarola* (wintering), and Redshank *Tringa totanus* (wintering and passage). The vulnerability of the SPA is affected by pressure for increased port development and marine recreation in this area including tourism.

The Sandlings SPA is located 7.5km to the east of Wickham Market. Qualifying species include; Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and Woodlark *Lullula arborea*.

The Alde-Ore Estuary SPA is located 9km to the south-east of Wickham Market. Qualifying species include; Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* and Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*.

The Minsmere-Walberswick SPA is located 18km to the north-east of Wickham Market. Qualifying species include; Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* and Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*.

## Special Areas of Conservation

A Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is the land designated under Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora.

The Alde, Ore and Butley Estuaries is located approximately 9km to the east of Wickham Market and is an estuary made out of three rivers. It is the only bar-built estuary in the UK with a shingle bar. The estuary contains large areas of shallow water and is diverse and species-rich containing many lengths of vegetated or shingle habitat, saltmarsh, grassland and reed bed.

The Orfordness-Shingle Street SAC is located approximately 13km to the south-east of Wickham Market. Orfordness is an extensive shingle structure consisting of a foreland, a 15 km-long spit and a series of recurves running from north to south. It supports some of the largest and most natural sequences in the UK of shingle vegetation affected by salt spray. The southern end has a particularly fine series of undisturbed ridges, with zonation of communities determined by the ridge pattern. Pioneer communities with sea pea *Lathyrus japonicus* and false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* grassland occur. Locally these are nutrient-enriched by the presence of a gull colony; elsewhere they support rich lichen communities. Drift-line vegetation occurs on the sheltered, western side of the spit, at the transition from shingle to saltmarsh, as well as on the exposed eastern coast. The drift-line community is widespread and comprises sea beet *Beta vulgaris*, *maritima* and orache *Atriplex*. The site also includes a series of percolation lagoons that have developed in the shingle bank adjacent to the shore at the mouth of the Ore estuary. The salinity of the lagoons is maintained by percolation through the shingle, although at high tides sea water can overtop the shingle bank. The fauna of these lagoons includes typical lagoon species, such as the cockle *Cerastoderma glaucum*, the ostracod *Cyprideis torosa* and the gastropods *Littorina saxatilis tenebrosa* and *Hydrobia ventrosa*. The nationally rare starlet sea anemone *Nematostella vectensis* is also found at the site.

The Staverton Park & The Thicks SAC is located approximately 6.5km to the south-east of Wickham Market. The site is representative of old oak *Quercus* spp. woods, and its ancient oaks have rich invertebrate and epiphytic lichen assemblages. Despite being in the most 'continental' part of southern Britain, the epiphytic lichen flora of this site includes rare and Atlantic species, such as *Haemotomma elatinum*, *Lecidea cinnabarina*, *Thelotrema lepadinum*, *Graphis elegans* and *Stenocybe septata*. Part of the site includes an area of old holly *Ilex aquifolium* trees that are probably the largest in Britain. The site has a very well-documented history and good conservation of woodland structure and function.

The Minsmere to Walberswick Heaths and Marshes SAC is located approximately 18km to the north-east of Wickham Market. Lowland dry heaths occupy an extensive area of this site on the east coast of England, which is at the extreme easterly range of heath development in the UK. The heathland is predominantly heather – western gorse (*Calluna vulgaris* – *Ulex gallii*) heath, usually more characteristic of western parts of the UK. This type is dominated by heather, western gorse and bell heather *Erica cinerea*. Shingle beach forms the coastline at Walberswick and Minsmere. It supports a variety of scarce shingle plants including sea pea *Lathyrus japonicus*, sea campion *Silene maritima* and small populations of sea kale *Crambe maritima*, grey hair-grass *Corynephorus canescens* and yellow horned-poppay *Glaucium flavum*. A well-developed beach strandline of mixed sand and shingle supports annual vegetation. Species include those typical of sandy shores, such as sea sandwort *Honckenya peploides* and shingle plants such as sea beet *Beta vulgaris maritima*.

The Dews Pond SAC is located approximately 18km to the north-east of Wickham Market. It comprises a series of 12 ponds set in an area of formerly predominantly arable land. The ponds range from old field ponds created for agricultural purposes to some constructed in recent years specifically for wildlife. Some of the land has been converted from arable to grassland, with a variety of grassland types present. Other habitats include hedges and ditches. Great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* have been found in the majority of ponds on the site.

### **Environmental Stewardship Schemes**

Environmental Stewardship Schemes replaced Environmentally Sensitive Areas which were introduced in 1987 to offer incentives to encourage farmers to adopt agricultural practices which would safeguard and enhance parts of the country of particularly high landscape, wildlife or historic value. Land within the Wickham Market Neighbourhood Plan area is designated as an ESA. The ESA designation does not however have any planning status and cannot be used for decision-making purposes.

### **Designated Heritage Assets**

Wickham Market contains a number of heritage assets. The National Heritage List for England ([the List](#)) records 40 entries in the parish, including three Grade 2\* listed buildings.

In 1970 the historic village core was designated as a Conservation Area and then extended in 1977 to include the north of the village.