

LDĀ DESIGN

Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Natural Beauty and Special Qualities Indicators

VI.8

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1.0 Introduction

Discussions have been held between the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Partnership, Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Coastal District Council and EDF Energy with the purpose of establishing what constitutes the natural beauty and special qualities of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB.

The findings of these discussions are contained in the following tables. The Natural Beauty and Special Qualities Indicators described cover the whole of the AONB, and not just the Sizewell site and its immediate hinterland.

This document sets out the Natural Beauty and Special Qualities of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The document has been developed by EDF Energy, as part of their preparatory work for the proposed Sizewell project in consultation and agreement with the AONB Partnership, Suffolk Coastal District Council and Suffolk County Council.

It follows a rigorous criteria based approach, building on the existing Natural England process for the designation of protected landscapes. It forms an important part of the baseline to help inform the design of the proposed development and against which to judge the effects of the proposed development on the protected landscape and its special qualities, but clearly will be of significant wider benefit to the AONB Partnership in articulating what is characteristic and special about this nationally important landscape including its relationship to adjacent offshore areas.

2.0 Natural Beauty Indicators

The Natural Beauty Indicators for the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB presented below are structured to follow Natural England’s guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England¹:

Factor	Example Sub-Factor	Example Indicator	Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Indicator
Landscape quality	Intactness of the landscape in visual, functional and ecological perspectives	Characteristic natural and man-made elements are well represented throughout	<p>Close-knit interrelationship of semi-natural and cultural landscapes (notably sea, coast, estuaries, reedbeds, Sandlings heath, forest, farmland and market towns) and built heritage features (such as Martello towers, pill boxes, river walls), creating a juxtaposition of elements in a relatively small area.</p> <p>The AONB contains important areas of heath and acid grassland, and it supports a high number of protected species populations. As such it has importance in a national context for biodiversity.</p>
	The condition of the landscape’s features and elements	Landscape elements are in good condition	Strong overall character, albeit that the evolving nature of intensively farmed arable land with agricultural fleece/polythene and outdoor pig rearing can divide opinion on landscape condition in visually sensitive locations such as on valley sides.
	The influence of incongruous features or elements (whether man-made or natural) on the perceived natural beauty of the area	Incongruous elements are not present to a significant degree, are not visually intrusive, have only localised influence or are temporary in nature	<p>A small number of large scale and long established elements on the coast of the AONB divide opinion, being regarded by some as incongruous features and by others as enigmatic; for example the complex military site at Orford Ness. The power stations at Sizewell also divide opinion in this way, however in many views, particularly of the B station, the apparent uncluttered simple appearance and outline as well as the lack of visible human activity, partially mitigate the adverse visual impacts.</p> <p>Offshore wind turbines at Greater Gabbard, Galloper and the more distant London Array are visible from some stretches of the coastline. These create a cluttered horizon and, like the large scale elements onshore, also divide opinion.</p>
Scenic quality	A distinctive sense of place	Landscape character lends a clear and recognisable sense of place	Unique character defined by semi-natural and cultural landscapes (notably sea, coast, estuaries, reedbeds, Sandlings heath, forest, farmland and villages) and built heritage features (such as Martello towers, pill boxes, river walls), creating a juxtaposition elements in a relatively small area.
	Striking landform	Landform shows a strong sense of scale or contrast	<p>Sea cliffs and shingle beaches contrasting to flat and gently rolling Sandlings heaths and farmland.</p> <p>Extensive shingle beaches and shallow bays provide opportunities for long distance and panoramic views including out to sea and along the Heritage Coast. Views to coastal landform also possible from locations offshore.</p>

		Landscape displays a 'rhythm' dictated by a series of east-west rivers and estuaries, and the interfluves that lie between them.
	There are striking landform types or coastal configurations	Coastal cliffs, shingle spits, estuaries and beaches are striking landform features.
Visual interest in patterns of land cover	Land cover and vegetation types form an appealing pattern or composition in relation to each other and/or to landform which may be appreciated from either a vantage point or as one travels through a landscape	<p>Varied habitats and land cover in intricate mosaic corresponding to natural geography (landform, geology, soils & climate) and displaying seasonal differences, either as a result of natural processes or past and current farming and land management regimes.</p> <p>Elevated vantage points provide impressive views over low lying coastal marshes, estuaries, beaches and expansive long distance views out to sea. Views to the coastline from out at sea are also noted.</p>
Appeal to the senses	Strong aesthetic qualities, reflecting factors such as scale and form, degree of openness or enclosure, colours and textures, simplicity or diversity, and ephemeral or seasonal interest	<p>Close-knit interrelationship of constituent features creates a juxtaposition of colours and textures (such as coniferous forests, reedbeds, intertidal mud flats and heathland, sand dunes and shingle beaches) that is further enhanced by seasonal changes.</p> <p>Strong aesthetic, spatial and emotional experiences - for example in the contrast between open and exposed areas on the coast, seaward or within estuaries with more traditional enclosed farmland areas.</p>
	Memorable or unusual views and eye-catching features or landmarks	Large open vistas across heaths and along the coast, out to sea and from sea to the coastline. Landmarks include historic structures such as medieval churches, Martello towers and lighthouses, the House in the Clouds (Thorpeness) and Snape Maltings, the riverside at Woodbridge with iconic Tide Mill, along with more modern structures including Sizewell A and B and former military site at Orford Ness.
	Characteristic cognitive and sensory stimuli (e.g. sounds, quality of light, characteristic smells, characteristics of the weather)	Sensory stimuli enhanced by quality of light/space (the big 'Suffolk skies'), areas with dark skies and sound (e.g. bird calls, curlews on heath and geese on estuaries, the wind through reeds in estuaries, waves on shingle).

Relative wildness	A sense of remoteness	Relatively few roads or other transport routes	Absence of major coastal road or rail route, due to estuaries, and intermittent 'soft edged', often lightly trafficked access routes across the AONB to the coastline from main routes inland, has contributed to the relatively undeveloped character of the Suffolk coast.
		Distant from or perceived as distant from significant habitation	Pockets of relative wildness associated with coast, estuary and forests in this largely farmed and settled landscape.
	A relative lack of human influence	Extensive areas of semi-natural vegetation	Semi-natural habitats evident, notably on the Sandlings heaths, marshes, reedbeds, estuaries and along the coastline.
		Uninterrupted tracts of land with few built features and no overt industrial or urban influences	Largely undeveloped coastline and offshore areas and areas of semi-natural habitat including Sandlings heath, forests, reedbeds, estuaries and marshland. Landscape interspersed with isolated villages, and built heritage assets such as Martello towers, pill boxes, river walls that contribute to character. A small number of large scale and industrial elements on the coast of the AONB are long established, notably Sizewell A and B and the former military site at Orford Ness, whilst offshore wind turbines at Greater Gabbard, Galloper and the more distant London Array are visible from stretches of the coastline.
	A sense of openness and exposure	Open, exposed to the elements and expansive in character	Big 'Suffolk skies' and expansive views offshore emphasise sense of openness and exposure on open and exposed coastline and on the Sandlings heaths.
	A sense of enclosure and isolation	Sense of enclosure provided by (e.g.) woodland, landform that offers a feeling of isolation	Forestry plantations create sense of enclosure and isolation contrasting to open and more exposed areas along the coast and on the Sandlings heaths.
A sense of the passing of time and a return to nature	Absence or apparent absence of active human intervention	Significant areas of semi natural landscape and seascape notably along the coastline, offshore and within undeveloped estuaries where there is little evidence of apparent human activity despite the sea walls and coastal marshes.	
Relative tranquillity	Contributors to tranquillity	Presence and / or perceptions of natural landscape, birdsong, peace and quiet, natural-looking woodland, stars	Areas of semi natural habitat, where there is a general absence of development and apparent human activity, contribute to a sense of relative tranquillity. Further enhanced by sounds (bird calls, the wind through reeds in estuaries, waves on shingle) and relatively dark skies.

		at night, stream, sea, natural sounds and similar influences	
	Detractors from tranquillity	Presence and/or perceptions of traffic noise, large numbers of people, urban development, overhead light pollution, low flying aircraft, power lines and similar influences	Some local detractors from tranquillity include the seasonal influx of visitors to coastal towns, low flying aircraft noise and urban development on fringes of the AONB.
Natural heritage features	Geological and geomorphological features	Visible expression of geology in distinctive sense of place and other aspects of scenic quality	Boundary of the AONB is broadly geological marking the border between the inland boulder clay and the coastal fringe. Visible and striking expressions of geology and sedimentation on faces of crumbling coastal cliffs. Use of flint, local crag and Aldeburgh brick for building are indicators of local geology.
		Presence of striking or memorable geomorphological features	Low crumbling cliffs and steep banks of pebbles on shingle beaches contribute to a landscape of constant change. Striking and memorable geomorphological features include the vast cusped foreland shingle spit of Orford Ness and river estuaries such as the estuary of the River Alde.
	Wildlife and habitats	Presence of wildlife and / or habitats that make a particular contribution to distinctive sense of place and other aspects of scenic quality	Varied, nationally and internationally protected sites such as SSSI, SPA and SAC, semi natural habitats designated for their nature conservation interest and range of species supported (including shingle beaches, intertidal and offshore areas, reedbeds, grazing marshes and Sandlings heaths). Intricate mosaic, highly dynamic and sensitive regimes (due to periodic flooding) along with rapid transitions add to biodiversity interest, distinctive landscape character and scenic quality.
		Presence of individual species that contribute to sense of place, relative wildness or tranquillity	Varied protected species across major habitat types, for example breeding and wading birds in estuaries and reedbeds; rare communities of salt tolerant plants on the coast; and birds and invertebrates on the Sandlings heaths.
Cultural heritage	Built environment, archaeology and designed landscapes	Presence of settlements, buildings or other structures that make a	Villages and small towns, particularly at 'end of the road' coastal and estuary locations, such as Pin Mill, Ramsolt and Walberswick and built heritage assets such as military structures (e.g. Martello towers, castle at Orford and pillboxes); Low Countries influence on

		particular contribution to distinctive sense of place and other aspects of scenic quality	architecture (as at Aldeburgh); and use of soft hued red brick and pink render with thatch or pantiles contribute to sense of place.
		Presence of visible archaeological remains, parkland or designed landscapes that provide striking features in the landscape	Archaeological and historic sites and features include prehistoric and later burial monuments (including the Anglo-Saxon burial ground at Sutton Hoo); early medieval churches (many of which pre-date the Domesday survey); historic field and settlement patterns; and evidence of land reclamation dating back to the 12 th century. Distinctive vernacular use of flint, clunch and brick. Designed landscapes are important notably along southern estuaries and in the northern part of the AONB, including Thorpeness Model Village.
	Historic influence on the landscape	Visible presence of historic landscape types or specific landscape elements or features that provide evidence of time depth or historic influence on the landscape	Field patterns reflect process of land management and enclosure stretching back many centuries. Evidence of reclamation of former intertidal areas to form freshwater grazing marsh dating back to the 12 th century. Prehistoric and later burial monuments (such as at Sutton Hoo), early medieval churches/religious houses and castles. There is also more recent military and infrastructure elements particularly on the coast (e.g. Martello towers, former military installations at Orford Ness), WW11 airfields, radar installations and pillboxes that form part of the long history of <i>"Suffolk's Defended Shore"</i> . More latterly the Sizewell nuclear complex highlights evidence of time depth across the landscape. Both the nuclear complex and the nearby infrastructure associated with offshore energy generation are part of a developing story of the Suffolk's Energy Coast. There are often strong associations between these features and areas of more remote coastal landscape character. Some of the military structures by reason of their scale, design, and cultural importance have now become an accepted part of the landscape, such as the Martello towers or the pagodas. Whereas other infrastructure, such as electricity pylons and the power stations are still cited by some as visual detractors in the landscape, despite the test of time.
		Perceptions of a harmonious balance between natural and cultural elements in the landscape	Rural landscape and smaller settlements (notably using vernacular building materials) display a harmonious balance between natural and cultural elements in the landscape, some of which date back several hundreds of years. Association between reedbeds and thatched roofs and local crag and flint where used as building materials.

		that stretch back over time	History of river use with Thames barges indicating links to past maritime heritage, and contemporary recreational use of the estuaries and coast, with many boatyards and in-river moorings.
	Characteristic land management practices	Existence of characteristic land management practices, industries or crafts which contribute to natural beauty	Landscape character and diversity of habitat types dependent on wide range of land management practices, several of which date back many centuries. Examples include pasturing; grazing on coastal marshes; forestry; extensive grazing to maintain heathland; reed cutting; and ditch/marshland and hydrological management. Small scale fishing industry results in boats, nets, pots and storage buildings on some stretches of coastline.
	Associations with written descriptions	Availability of descriptions of the landscape in notable literature, topographical writings or guide books, or significant literature inspired by the landscape.	Associations with numerous writers including George Crabbe, (e.g. the poem 'The Borough', 1810), P.D. James and Arthur Ransome.
	Associations with artistic representations	Depiction of the landscape in art, other art forms such as photography or film, through language or folklore, or in inspiring related music	Landscape, towns, coastal areas and the sea captured in, or formed the inspiration for, the works of various artists and composers including J.M.W. Turner (e.g. 'Aldborough, Suffolk' c.1826) and Benjamin Britten (e.g. the opera 'Peter Grimes' c.1945). Annual arts and music festival established in 1948, by Benjamin Britten along with singer Peter Pears and writer Eric Crozier.
	Associations of the landscape with people, places or events	Evidence that the landscape has associations with notable people or events, cultural traditions or beliefs	Wide range of 'stories' describing historical events or activities relate to the landscape and features within the landscape, including stories related to smuggling; the creation of Minsmere; and the loss of Dunwich to the sea. More recent stories include the discovery of the Sutton Hoo ship burial in 1939, the 1953 flood, and experimental projects; Cobra Mist at Orford Ness and Radar at Bawdsey Manor.

3.0 Special Qualities Indicators

In addition to the Natural Beauty Indicators the following Special Qualities Indicators for the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB are considered relevant:

Factor	Example Sub-Factor	Example Indicator	Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Indicator
Health and Well-being	Access along defined routes for walking and cycling	Presence of network of local and strategic access routes	Extensive rights of way network (including promoted and long distance routes), offering access to key landscape types (such as coast, Sandlings heath, forest, wetlands and estuaries) and between centres of population and key tourist destinations.
	Open access to areas of semi natural landscape	Presence of designated areas for open access	Areas designated as open access land, including extensive nature reserves, notably on heathland, along the coast and within woodland/forest provide opportunities for health improvement.
	Opportunities for active and passive recreation	Presence of range of facilities and opportunities for diverse recreational pursuits	Opportunities for a range of active and passive recreational pursuits on the coast and offshore and inland including rambling, boating, bird-watching and fishing at sea and in the estuaries and rivers. In addition, many sporting events held in the landscape, such as the Heritage Coast Run and Suffolk Coast Cycle route.
Community	Relationship between people and place	Evidence that communities have a long established connection to the places in which they live and work	Strong sense of local and family heritage (including dialect), and evidence of long established connections to the landscape – such as fishermen and larger estates.
		Evidence that communities have a close relationship to their surroundings	Active commoners, farmers and artistic community demonstrate strong links between communities and their landscape. Increasing number of community-led initiatives, particularly on the coast and estuaries.
		Evidence of a local food culture	Opportunities to ‘taste’ the landscape with great significance placed on local food and drink (e.g. Adnams Brewery, local smokeries and oysterages and annual food and drink festival held in Aldeburgh).

Economy	Landscape, community and economy closely intertwined	Evidence that the landscape and community forms an important part of the local economy	The landscape is an important contributor to the local economy. The coast in particular is a major tourist destination. Other notable contributors to the local economy are recreational sailing (with associated boatyards and moorings), farming, energy generation at Sizewell and attractions/events in and close to the AONB such as Minsmere RSPB Reserve, Snape Maltings, Latitude Festival and Aldeburgh Festival.
		Evidence of Community conservation schemes through which funding for grass-roots community and conservation projects within the AONB is secured.	Local visitor payback scheme, currently called 'AONB Community and Conservation Fund', into which tourism businesses contribute 'visitor payback funds' which are then used to support grass roots conservation, access and education projects.
		Evidence of clearly defined 'brand' that is underpinned by the local landscape	Active promotion of the Suffolk Coast as a tourist destination founded on the special qualities of the area and more specifically as part of branding associated with local products (e.g. Adnams) and the 'energy coast'.
Ecosystem Goods and Services	Landscape delivers broad range of ecosystem goods and services	Evidence that the landscape performs a diverse range of ecosystem services	One of the most significant ecosystems in lowland UK containing several broad habitat types which perform a wide range of ecosystem goods and services under the three broad categories of 'provisioning', 'cultural' and 'regulating' ⁱⁱ (e.g. regulating climate, carbon storage, water storage, flood defence, flood prevention and climate change adaptation through linked habitats).

4.0 References

ⁱ Natural England (2011) Guidance for Assessing Landscapes for Designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England

ⁱⁱ UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) The UK National Ecosystem Assessment: Synthesis of the Key Findings. UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge.

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