

4.4 Sustainable communities

Introduction



The natural world touches our lives every day and we rely on the natural systems that support us. Our natural environment underpins our health, wealth and happiness and gives us a sense of place, pride and identity. A healthy natural environment can support economic growth and social regeneration, improve public health, improve educational outcomes, reduce crime and antisocial behaviour, improve quality of life and help communities adapt to climate change. Good businesses recognise that maintaining and enhancing natural capital, the services and materials provided by the environment are essential for them as well as for communities.

The interaction of people with their environment, resulting in living, working landscapes that respond to environmental, social and economic changes, has made the area what it is today. As well as clear differences in the character of buildings and settlements, different local customs, festivals, historical associations and language all contribute to the area's

distinctive and diverse cultural character. Common rights are important in embodying traditional relationships with the land, particularly in the western part of the North Norfolk Heritage Coast. Maintaining natural beauty includes maintaining its distinctive communities, and sustainable communities will only be possible if their economic and social needs are met at the same time as they continue to adapt to change.

This Management Plan focuses on the conservation and enhancement of the area's special qualities of natural beauty, the pressures that affect them or may do so in the future and their management in order to meet the purpose of designation of the area. Although the importance of social issues in the area are recognised by the Norfolk Coast Partnership, it is beyond the scope of this plan to put forward policies and actions to address most of these issues, since they do not directly affect the area's natural beauty. The relevant partners have policies and mechanisms to manage them, however, and will do so whilst taking account of the area's sensitivities and managing potential impacts on its natural beauty.

Two key issues that do relate more closely to natural beauty, however, are affordable housing and second homes. The availability of affordable housing and local jobs are inseparable, although the need for affordable housing in different parts of the area varies. The main issue for this plan is how affordable housing is provided while respecting the area's character (*see section 4.2 Built and historic environment*). A study in 2005 investigated the subject of affordable housing in the AONB.

Houses bought and used as second, holiday or retirement homes contribute to the shortage of affordable housing in many areas. This in turn contributes to young people moving away from the area and results in changes in the area's age profile and in the structure of its communities. Empty second and holiday-let houses also tend to affect community vibrancy and character, especially in the winter months. There are local initiatives in place or in progress to provide affordable local housing, in addition to provision as part of commercial housing development schemes.

There can be tension and differences between people moving to the area and families who have lived here for generations, and a weakening of the character of local communities, but 'incoming' people can also bring valuable new perspectives, skills, knowledge and employment opportunities which benefit the area, as well as helping to build support and understanding of the AONB.

Coastal settlements have long existed with the risks of flooding and erosion, but the difficulty of managing this while maintaining functioning coastal communities is increasing under the pressures of increased rates of sea level rise and communities need support in adapting to change.

Key issues

- The area has large numbers of second / holiday homes, particularly in some coastal settlements, which affects the cost and availability of housing for local workers and others e.g. new businesses and their owners.
- The shortage of both affordable housing and secure, full-time, well-paid local jobs in the area affects the ability of young people with family connections to live and work in the area, affecting the character of communities.
- For a sustainable future for the area and its communities, all aspects of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental), within which conserving natural beauty needs to be included and integrated, need to be taken into account. Communities need planning and support to achieve this.
- Coastal communities are additionally affected by coastal change, which will be increased by sea level rise. They need support for planning and adaptation to coastal change.