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CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION 2

2.0 METHODOLOGY..... 3

3.0 PLANNING POLICY 4

4.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE STRATEGIC GAP..... 8

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF THE STRATEGIC GAP 11

6.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS 15

FIGURES

- Figure 1: Location Plan
- Figure 2: Landscape Character
- Figure 3: Designations
- Figure 4: Topography
- Figure 5: Viewpoint Plan
- Figure 6-13: Photo Viewpoints

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 FPCR Environment and Design Ltd (FPCR) are a multi-disciplinary environmental and design consultancy with over 50 years' experience of architecture, landscape, ecology, urban design, masterplanning and environmental impact assessment. The practice is a member of the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment and is frequently called upon to provide expert evidence on landscape and visual issues at Public and Local Plan Inquiries.
- 1.2 FPCR were commissioned by Gladman Developments Ltd to carry out a Strategic Gap (SG) Assessment upon the designated Gap between Settlements; Wymondham and Hethersett in Norfolk. This is identified within Policy DM 4.7 – *Gaps Between Settlements within the Norwich Policy Area* of the South Norfolk 'Development Management Policies Document' which forms part of the adopted Local Plan. These 'Gaps between Settlements', also known as 'Local Gaps' are also referred to as 'Strategic Gaps' within this report.
- 1.3 The SG is located between the eastern and western edges of Wymondham and Hethersett respectively. The south of the SG is bound by the A11. To the north, the boundary is less well defined but does not extend beyond High Green. Norwich Common (B1172) bisects the SG east - west and is the main point of access between Wymondham and Hethersett within the SG. (See Figure 1).
- 1.4 This report does not assess the landscape or visual effects of potential development. The purpose of the designation is to prevent coalescence of settlements, not to protect landscape, and therefore the impact of potential proposed development has been assessed on this basis.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 The SG is identified within Policy DM 4.7 of the South Norfolk Local Plan: 'Development Management Policies Document'. The assessment has identified the purposes of Gaps between Settlements within national and South Norfolk local policy but has assessed the SG against the Chris Blandford Associates (CBA) 'South Norfolk Local Landscape Designations Review Strategic Gaps/Important Breaks', September 2012, which wholly focusses on the strategic gap designation and identifies the purposes of the SG therein.
- 2.2 The assessment comprises a broad description of the topography, landscape character, environmental designations and visual attributes of the Strategic Gap area, drawing upon any relevant published documents within which the gap is discussed further, including; the 'Wymondham Area Action Plan' and the 'Joint Core Strategy for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk' details of which can be found under the planning policy section.
- 2.3 The assessment will review the physical and perceptual separation between Wymondham and Hethersett and assess the potential impact of additional development at Wymondham's settlement edge upon the purposes of the SG.

3.0 PLANNING POLICY

National Context

- 3.1 The initial concept of a ‘Strategic Gap’ was included in government research paper ‘Strategic gap and green wedge policies in structure plans’ (January 2001). The report discusses the purpose and use of Strategic Gaps, along with Green Wedges and Rural Buffers, to protect the areas of land not large enough to be defined as Green Belt, making suggestions for clarification of their role in planning guidance.
- 3.2 According to the research, the basic purposes of a Strategic Gap are to protect the setting and separate identity of settlements, and avoid coalescence; retain the existing settlement pattern by maintaining the openness of the land; and retain the physical and psychological benefits of having open land near to where people live.
- 3.3 In respect of Strategic Gaps, the essence of their support appears to reside in three basic arguments. These are:
- The need to protect the setting and separate identify of settlements, by avoiding their coalescence.
 - The need to retain the openness of the land by resisting greenfield growth, and thus conserving the existing character of an area in terms of its current mix of urban and rural development.
 - The need to provide real access and recreational benefits to urban dwellers, and the perceived (psychological) as well as real benefits of having open countryside near to where people live.
- 3.4 Structure Plans have now been abolished, and there is no specific mention of Strategic Gaps within any current national planning policy, however the designation is a tool used by some local authorities to protect countryside outside of the Green Belt from development. There is no nationally agreed definition for the term ‘Strategic Gap’.

National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019)

- 3.5 The NPPF does not contain any specific policies relating to Strategic Gaps, but requires consideration of the landscape character and beauty of the countryside. Paragraph 170 states that:
- “Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by...”*
- “...protecting and enhancing valued landscapes...”*; and
- “recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside...”*
- 3.6 The NPPF reflects the government’s recent emphasis on localism and neighbourhood planning, giving power to local communities to protect special protection green areas of particular importance to them either within Neighbourhood Plans or Local Plans. Paragraph 99 states that:
- “The designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them.”*
- 3.7 Paragraph 100 goes on to set out the conditions for use of such a policy within Local Plans or Neighbourhood Plans:
- “The Local Green Space designation should only be used where the green space is:*

- *in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;*
 - *demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and*
 - *local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.*
- 3.8 In relation to the protection from development afforded by a Local Green Space designation, Paragraph 101 of the NPPF states that this should be consistent with policy for managing development in Green Belt.
- 3.9 Strategic Gaps, as they are used by South Norfolk District Council, fit between the role of Green Belts and Local Green Spaces, a role which the NPPF does not provide. Whilst Strategic Gaps are local designations, the role is strategic in what they are trying to achieve in policy terms. The role they play is much more akin to that of Green Belt, than Local Green Space.
- 3.10 It is considered that the Strategic Green Gap is an 'extensive tract of land' in comparison to what would be considered as 'Local Green Space' as defined in paragraph 100 of the NPPF where SGs serve a more strategic role and consequently of a larger scale.
- 3.11 Local Green Spaces have the aim of preserving the setting, character and distinctiveness that is present within a locality. Green Belt designation is not appropriate for delivering this aim, as it is purely concerned with the prevention of urban sprawl and coalescence. NPPF Paragraph 134 sets out the five purposes of Green Belt, which are:
- *"to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
 - *to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
 - *to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
 - *to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
 - *to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land."*
- 3.12 It would seem from the purposes set out by CBA (Paragraph 3.4.2 of the 'Local Landscape Designations Review Strategic Gaps/Important Breaks', September 2012) that the purpose of these accords with several of the purposes of Green Belt largely preventing coalescence and preserving settlement pattern.
- 3.13 Despite the NPPF not allowing for policies to provide the wholesale protection of landscapes from development, it does highlight the need for good design including landscaping. Paragraph 127 states:
- "Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:"*
- "...will function well and add to the overall quality of the area..."*
- "...are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;" and*
- "...are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting..."*
- 3.14 The NPPF also includes the overall commitment to delivering growth in sustainable locations. Paragraph 11 states: *"Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable*

development.” A holistic approach is encouraged, balancing benefits with impacts across all aspects of the development process.

Local Context

South Norfolk Local Plan Development Management Policies Document, Adopted 2015

- 3.15 Policy DM 4.7 of the adopted local plan specifically relates to Strategic Gaps:

“DM 4.7 STRATEGIC GAPS BETWEEN SETTLEMENTS WITHIN THE NORWICH POLICY AREA

Development will be permitted in the Strategic Gaps identified on the Policies Map, between the development boundaries of the Settlements listed below, where it would not erode or otherwise undermine the openness of the Strategic Gap, and complies with other Development Plan policies.”

- 3.16 The policy goes on to list the two Gaps. ‘Wymondham – Hethersett’ for which this report covers and Cringleford – Hethersett.

- 3.17 The justification for the SG is outlined below;

“Within ‘Strategic Gaps’ development that would result in a loss of the sense of openness and which diminishes the gap between the settlements in question will be resisted. However, some types of development may be acceptable. Forms of development that may be acceptable (so long as they preserve the openness of the Gap), include buildings for agriculture or forestry (where planning permission is required), facilities for outdoor sport and recreation cemeteries and extensions to, or replacement of, existing buildings, provided they are in keeping with the scale of the original building.”

Wymondham Area Action Plan, Adopted 2015

- 3.18 The Wymondham Area Action Plan gives further detail on the Wymondham - Hethersett SG expanding on the policy set out in the local plan.

- 3.19 The action plan states that;

“A strategic gap has been defined to maintain the separation of Wymondham and Hethersett and safeguard the identity of each settlement. The importance of this gap is confirmed in Policy 10 of the JCS. Policy 4.7 of the Development Management Policies Document seeks to maintain the openness of the strategic gap between Wymondham and Hethersett and inappropriate development which has an unacceptable impact on the openness and separation afforded by the gap will not be permitted. Future growth to the north and north-east of Wymondham is therefore constrained.”

- 3.20 The plan goes on to say that;

“Maintaining the separate identities of Wymondham and Hethersett has long been an important policy requirement in South Norfolk. The Development Management Policies document contains a Strategic Gap policy (DM 4.7) based on a study prepared by the Council’s landscape consultants, Chris Blandford Associates. Whilst some minor boundary amendments have been made in response to the CBA report to reflect development sites which have been approved since 2001 (such as Carpenter’s Barn) and allocations in this Wymondham Area Action Plan (such as the extension to Elm Farm Business Park) the CBA report concluded that new development on land located north or east of Carpenter’s Barn would likely be seen in glimpsed views from a permissive bridleway to the south of The Wong, resulting in a reduction in gap/break openness. The report

also concluded that further development in this area would result in a component of development “sprawl” into the rural landscape that provides the setting for Wymondham, and the recommendation that the current strategic gap boundaries be maintained (with minor amendments) was accepted.”

Joint Core Strategy for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk, 2011, amendments adopted 2014

- 3.21 Strategic Gaps are explicitly mentioned in Policy 2 and 10 of the Joint Core Strategy as detailed below;

“POLICY 2: PROMOTING GOOD DESIGN

All development will be designed to the highest possible standards, creating a strong sense of place. In particular development proposals will respect local distinctiveness including as appropriate:

- a. the historic hierarchy of the city, towns and villages, maintaining important strategic gaps*

POLICY 10: LOCATIONS FOR MAJOR NEW OR EXPANDED COMMUNITIES IN THE NORWICH POLICY AREA

Wymondham - this location is dependent on expanded capacity of the A11/A47 Thickthorn junction and will deliver expansion of the town to include:

- b. at least 2,200 dwellings located in a number of sites providing easy access to local jobs, services and facilities and the town centre, whilst maintaining the strategic gap to the north and north-east and the historic setting of the town and abbey*
- c. expansion of the town centre of a quality that will retain and enhance the distinctive character of the existing historic centre*
- d. extensive levels of green infrastructure to create a ‘Ketts Country’ pastoral landscape of grass, wood, hedgerow and wetland habitat. This will also strengthen the importance and role of the Tiffey valley, the landscape setting of the town and strategic gaps, particularly towards Hethersett.”*

South Norfolk Local Landscape Designations Review Strategic Gaps/Important Breaks, Chris Blandford Associates, September 2012

- 3.22 The review carried out by Chris Blandford Associates has formed the criteria against which the report has assessed the potential effectiveness of land within the SG. The purposes of the SG as identified in the review are outlined below;

“The two basic purposes of a strategic gap designation, as identified by CBA through a review of the findings of previous Local Plan and planning appeal inquiries, are as follows:

- to protect the setting and separate identity of settlements, and avoid coalescence; and*
- to retain the existing settlement pattern by maintaining the openness of the land.*

CBA have used these two basic purposes to identify whether or not it is appropriate in planning terms to designate an area as a Strategic Gaps/Important Breaks, i.e. does an area of land (1) help avoid coalescence, thereby protecting the setting and separate identity of settlements, and (2) help maintain the openness of the land, thereby retaining the existing settlement pattern.”

4.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE STRATEGIC GAP

4.1 The following section provides a baseline description of the topography, landscape character, environmental designations and visual attributes of the Strategic Gap area, using mapping and published assessments, combined with site assessment.

4.2 As described in the South Norfolk Local 'Landscape Designations Review Strategic Gaps/Important Breaks', September 2012;

'The gap/break between Wymondham and Hethersett is approx. 2-2.5km long, 1- 1.5km wide and is located in a predominantly rural area southwest of Norwich. The B1172 passes through the centre of the gap/break and the A11 passes along its southern boundary.'

Landscape Character

4.3 The vast majority of the SG lies within LCT D: 'Settled Plateau Farmland' and NPA D1: 'Wymondham Settled Plateau Farmland' as defined by the 'South Norfolk Landscape Assessment', 2001. (See Figure 2). The NPAs provide a greater level of detail in terms of landscape character. The Norwich Policy Areas (NPAs) were later reviewed by CBA in the 'South Norfolk Local Landscape Designations Review, Landscape Character Areas and River Valleys in the Norwich Policy Areas', 2012. The characteristics remained largely the same for NPA D1 'Wymondham Settled Plateau Farmland' however some additional points were included in the later report. A small area to the north east of the SG falls within LCT C: 'Tributary Farmland and Parkland' and NPA C1: 'Yare Tributary Farmland with Parkland'. Due to proximity from the site and the comparatively small area this occupies within the SG this landscape character has not been further discussed within the assessment.

4.4 Key characteristics outlined in the CBA, 2012 report of NPA D1 'Wymondham Settled Plateau Farmland' include;

- *'A settled landscape with large edge-of-plateau towns (including market towns and those of more modern origin) and villages plus smaller, nucleated settlements which are dispersed across the plateau;*
- *Large expanse of flat landform with little variation over long distances with strong open horizons – the archetypal 'Norfolk' landscape of popular imagination;*
- *Large-scale open arable fields including sugarbeet, cereal and oilseed rape monocultures creating simple, often monotonous, character;*
- *Large town of Wymondham, with its strongly historic core and a high number of historic buildings from the 15th -19th centuries, dominates the western edge of this character area;*
- *Highly cohesive and well-preserved medieval settlement pattern within Wymondham;*
- *Long views from plateau edge, including to Norwich from the northern plateau edge; September 2012 20 Landscape Character Areas & River Valleys in the Norwich Policy Area;*
- *Vernacular buildings particularly brick built, timber-framed, and stepped gables. Some isolated churches, sometimes hidden by dense screening churchyard vegetation;*
- *A number of landscaped parks and associated halls to the west of Norwich show that this was a favoured area for the city's wealthy and influential to build convenient country residences.'*

- 4.5 Those specifically relating to the openness of the landscape include;
- *'Poor hedgerows generally, which accentuates the openness of the landscape. The resulting wide verges beside roads often contain attractive wildflowers. Some mature hedgerow trees are found, particularly beside roads, which are a distinctive feature. Areas of more intact hedgerow network sometimes occur around settlements;*
 - *Sparsely wooded but with occasional woodland blocks, sometimes associated with former parkland areas, creating a more wooded character and wooded horizons in parts of this generally open landscape.'*
- 4.6 Sensitivities and Vulnerabilities highlighted in the CBA, 2012 report for NPA D1 in relation to the SG include;
- *'Erosion of historic buildings and features/loss of historic settlement pattern as a result of infill development, particularly within Wymondham and Hethersett;*
 - *new large-scale developments at the north-eastern edges of Wymondham which extend urban influences into the surrounding landscape and are potentially visible in views from the surrounding plateau landscape;*
 - *the potential for settlement coalescence, particularly associated with the vulnerable A11 corridor or B1172 between Wymondham and Hethersett.'*
- 4.7 Development considerations within the CBA, 2012 report under NPA D1 include;
- *'Respect the distinctive settlement pattern comprising concentrations of development at plateau edge locations, and smaller nucleated village settlements and dispersed buildings across the plateau;*
 - *Maintaining the nucleated clustered character of the settlements and limit edge sprawl out into the adjacent landscape; well-planned infill and edge development may be acceptable;*
 - *Maintaining strategic gaps between settlements, and in particular prevent further growth of Wymondham and/or Hethersett which would lead to coalescence of settlement along the A11 leading to the merger of Wymondham/Hethersett or Hethersett/Norwich;*
 - *Ensure that any new infill development respects the historic settlement pattern and vernacular built character, particularly within, or in proximity to, the historic cores of Wymondham and Hethersett.'*
- 4.8 The Landscape Character Assessment emphasises the importance of limiting sprawl, but acknowledges that well-planned infill and edge development may be acceptable. It goes on to state that further settlement growth that leads to coalescence along the A11 corridor should be prevented.
- 4.9 The CBA South Norfolk 'Local Landscape Designations Review Strategic Gaps/Important Breaks' (2012) further goes on to describe the landscape at a more refined level of detail. Key characteristics include;
- *"The local landscape is flat to gently rolling with levels varying approximately between 45 and 51m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD).*
 - *Vegetation within the gap/break is dominated by arable fields and small blocks of woodland. Fields sizes are generally large to medium in scale. Field boundaries are generally defined by*

trimmed hedgerows and some hedgerows have been removed for field enlargement. There are few hedgerow trees. There are several small blocks of woodland scattered across the western and southern parts of the gap/break, including The Wong, a linear block of woodland associated with former parkland. The A11 is lined by a dense tree/shrub belt.

- *The principal land use in the gap break is arable agriculture. The fields, hedgerows and woodland blocks all contribute to the setting and separate identities of the adjacent settlements and provide an essential contribution to the purpose and effectiveness of the gap in terms of conserving openness and preventing settlement coalescence.”*

Designations

- 4.10 The designations within the vicinity of the SG are shown at Figure 3. There are no notable landscape or heritage designations within the SG. A small area of ancient woodland is located in the southern part of the SG. There are four listed buildings/monuments including Kett's Oak and several farmsteads located within the SG.

Topography

- 4.11 The topography of the SG and its setting is illustrated at Figure 4. The south eastern land within the SG is the highest within the study area, with levels generally falling away gradually to the north. The highest point within the SG of around 55m AOD is located southeast between Wymondham and Ketteringham whilst the lowest point of 35m AOD is found north of the SG to the west of Hethersett. Land in the surrounding study area is gently rolling, dropping along river courses to approximately 15m AOD at the lowest points.

Visual Attributes

- 4.12 Four photo viewpoints, demonstrating the views experienced from three locations within and on the boundary of the SG are shown at Figures 6-9. The locations of these viewpoints are identified at Figure 5. These illustrate the relatively contained nature of views from key locations within the SG and highlight the restricted locations from which the SG is perceived by receptors. These limited number of visual receptors within and on the edges of the SG include users of the B1172, residents and users of the Park Farm Hotel and in an increasingly limited capacity users of a public right of way Wymondham 26 due to new development. Viewpoints are largely centred on the B1172 as a result of this. The central section of the SG represented by Viewpoints 2a and 2b provide the greatest level of openness with lack of built form and settlement edge visible from these locations.
- 4.13 The gently undulating landform and vegetation pattern generally limits wider visibility within this area. Built form along the B1172 is often present within views with frequent small blocks of woodland, hedgerows and hedgerow trees limiting any potentially long distant views, these are mainly to the north. Views south are quickly curtailed by the A11 tree belt that screens most views of the A11 from the SG.
- 4.14 Inter-visibility is also limited along the B1172 by mature hedgerows, tree belts and a copse of trees. Properties located within the SG along the B1172 towards Hethersett are present in most views when approaching Hethersett.

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF THE STRATEGIC GAP

Purposes for the Gap

5.1 This section assesses the Strategic Gap against the identified purposes of the SG as set out in the CBA review of Strategic Gaps in order to ascertain whether the designation could be compromised as a result of proposed development at Wymondham's eastern boundary.

5.2 The two basic purposes, as identified by CBA through a review of findings of previous Local Plan and planning appeal inquiries, are as follows:

- a. *“to protect the setting and separate identity of settlements, and avoid coalescence; and*
- b. *to retain the existing settlement pattern by maintaining the openness of the land.”*

a. Identity of Settlements and Coalescence

Physical Separation and Coalescence

5.3 At the narrowest point the SG width is approximately 1.48km. (See Figure 1). In terms of physical separation, it is considered that development that does not exceed this minimum width and therefore maintains the minimum physical distance between Wymondham and Hethersett will not compromise coalescence. The CBA report goes on to acknowledge that reducing the gap to exclude the Business Park (development at Wymondham's most western point) would not compromise the two functions despite the physical reduction of the SG. As stated at 4.8.5;

“As the Elm Farm Business Park is likely to act as a new gateway to the town on the westward approach along the B1172, it is recommended that the existing gap/break boundary should be relocated eastwards to the exclude this business park from the gap/break. The adjacent line of residential properties on the northern side of the road would consequently also be excluded from the gap/break”

It is therefore considered that Wymondham's settlement edge does have potential capacity for additional development without compromising the physical separation between the two settlements.

Perceived Separation and Inter-visibility

5.4 As described in the CBA report (Section 4.7) regarding perceived separation it is important that there is;

1. *“there is a visual break when travelling from Wymondham to Hethersett and*
2. *it is perceived, as far as possible, in the travellers' minds that they are leaving one settlement and passing through open countryside before arriving in another settlement.”*

5.5 Any potential for inter-visibility between the two settlements is along the B1172 only. Views from the A11 are currently obscured by the existing mature tree belt and views from FP Wymondham 26 are curtailed by existing vegetation and new housing that is currently under construction (Ref: 2012/0839, 2014/1969, 2015/1405). There are currently no further footpaths in which both Wymondham and Hethersett could be perceived at the same time.

- 5.6 A series of photo viewpoints have been taken to demonstrate the lack of inter-visibility between the two settlements. The viewpoints have been plotted on a plan (Figure 5) to identify the locations of the photographs. See Figures 10-13 for viewpoints in particular Viewpoint A, B & C.

Viewpoint A - View west towards Wymondham on the B1172 (Norwich Common) from the eastern boundary of the Strategic Gap at Hethersett

- 5.7 This viewpoint demonstrates the lack of views towards Wymondham when travelling west from Hethersett along Norwich Common (B1172). The lack of inter-visibility is due to existing vegetation and built form already located within the SG. Development located on the edge of Wymondham that does not exceed the existing built development boundary is unlikely to be perceived from this location and therefore perceived separation will be maintained.

Viewpoint B - View south west from New Road towards Wymondham from the western boundary of the Strategic Gap

- 5.8 Viewpoint B demonstrates views south west towards Wymondham from the SG boundary and the end of Bridleway Great Melton BR5. It shows the lack of inter-visibility at this location due to the topography and existing vegetation. Development on Wymondham's boundary is unlikely to have an effect on inter-visibility from this location due to distance and intervening features.

- 5.9 Viewpoint C - View east towards Hethersett from the western boundary of the Strategic Gap

- 5.10 As demonstrated by this viewpoint, there are currently no views from the edge of Wymondham of Hethersett's settlement edge to the east. The viewpoint furthermore highlights the lack of inter-visibility between the edge of the Wymondham and those properties located within the SG on the approach to Hethersett. At this minimum width there is no inter-visibility and no perception of another settlement, development that does not extend beyond this will therefore not affect separation of the settlements.

- 5.11 In terms of separation and inter-visibility, it is anticipated that development that does not exceed the minimum width of the SG is unlikely to affect the perceived separation of Wymondham and Hethersett and will not physically contribute to the coalescence of the two settlements. Development that does not extend beyond existing settlement edges will continue to maintain a sense of leaving one settlement and entering another when travelling along the B1172.

b. Settlement Pattern and Openness of Land

Settlement Pattern

- 5.12 Wymondham has historically been a nucleated town like many of the settlements in the area as identified in the landscape character assessment;
- *"A settled landscape with large edge-of-plateau towns (including market towns and those of more modern origin) and villages plus smaller, nucleated settlements which are dispersed across the plateau;*
 - *Large town of Wymondham, with its strongly historic core and a high number of historic buildings from the 15th -19th centuries, dominates the western edge of this character area;"*
- 5.13 Numerous development sites, however, particularly to the north east of Wymondham, currently under construction or with consent are cumulatively changing the settlement pattern of Wymondham. (See Figure 1).

- 5.14 These development sites to the north east of the town have contributed to the alteration of the settlement pattern extending Wymondham closer to Hethersett along the B1172. Any additional development in this area would therefore not be uncharacteristic and would contribute to the already changing physical settlement pattern, as the nucleated form of the town is further diluted becoming more linear in form towards Hethersett.
- 5.15 Furthermore, recently completed development to the south of Wymondham has already contributed to the breakdown of the nucleated pattern of the town, extending settlement outwards along Silfield Road in a similar manner to that of development out to the west.
- 5.16 It is anticipated that there would be a change in settlement pattern as a result of any further proposed development however Wymondham is undergoing settlement change as a result of already numerous new developments coming forward for housing.

Maintaining Settlement Pattern through Openness of Land

- 5.17 Although, as acknowledged above, the settlement pattern in Wymondham is already undergoing change, retaining openness is identified as a way to maintain settlement pattern within the CBA report. It should be noted that no formal definition of openness is outlined in the CBA report. For the purposes of assessing this it has been presumed in its simplest form as the 'absence of development'.
- 5.18 When assessing openness, a series of photo viewpoints have been taken to demonstrate the perception of openness and the effect potential new development may have on this. The viewpoints have been plotted on a plan to identify the locations of the photographs (see Figure 5). See Figures 10-13 for viewpoints, in particular Viewpoint A, D & E.

Viewpoint A – View west towards Wymondham on the B1172 (Norwich Common) from the eastern boundary of the Strategic Gap at Hethersett

- 5.19 Viewpoint A demonstrates the lack of openness when leaving Hethersett and entering the SG along the B1172 towards Wymondham. Built form is present in this view due to the existing properties located within the SG along the B1172, these along with vegetation obscure any long distant views from this location minimising openness at this point.

- 5.20 Viewpoint D – View south from B1172 (Norwich Common) from within the Strategic Gap

The viewpoint represents views south and south east from the B1172 upon leaving Wymondham and entering into the SG. The view demonstrates relatively open views, views are curtailed by tree planting that lines the A11. There are no views of Hethersett from this location. Any potential new development that lies within the existing settlement edge and does not encroach beyond the existing built development will not affect views of openness from this location leaving Wymondham.

Viewpoint E - View south from B1172 (Norwich Common) along the Strategic Gap boundary leaving Wymondham

The viewpoint represents views south from the B1172 upon leaving Wymondham, whilst this viewpoint demonstrates a worse-case scenario, where there is a break in the built form, existing properties obscure the majority of views of the SG at this point. Additional development may result in the loss of any glimpsed views of the SG as shown in the viewpoint however these views are always perceived with the surrounding context of Wymondham in view, therefore already minimising the potential openness these views may have. Existing trees and hedgerows along the B1172 further restrict views of the SG along this boundary.

- 5.21 Where possible, openness should be maintained in particular for those entering Wymondham from Hethersett along the B1172. Any potential loss of openness can be mitigated against to some extent by proposed tree planting along the exposed boundary, reducing the potential impact of new development on the approach to Wymondham from Hethersett albeit foreshortening views. It is to note that many of the views within the SG are not characteristic long distant views as identified in the Landscape Character Assessment, especially views south, as woodland planting along the A11 breaks the views at this point. Tree planting therefore, as way of mitigation would not be uncharacteristic as a mechanism for further assimilating development into the landscape.

6.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The assessment considers the impact potential new development along Wymondham's eastern settlement boundary may have on the SG. To do this, the land has been assessed to understand how it performs against the purposes of the SG, as identified by the 2012 review, undertaken by Chris Blandford Associates. The assessment considers whether development would "erode or otherwise undermine" the openness of the SG, which would be contrary to Policy DM 4.7 of South Norfolk Local Plan (2015). On the basis of the two purposes of the SG the following conclusions can be made;

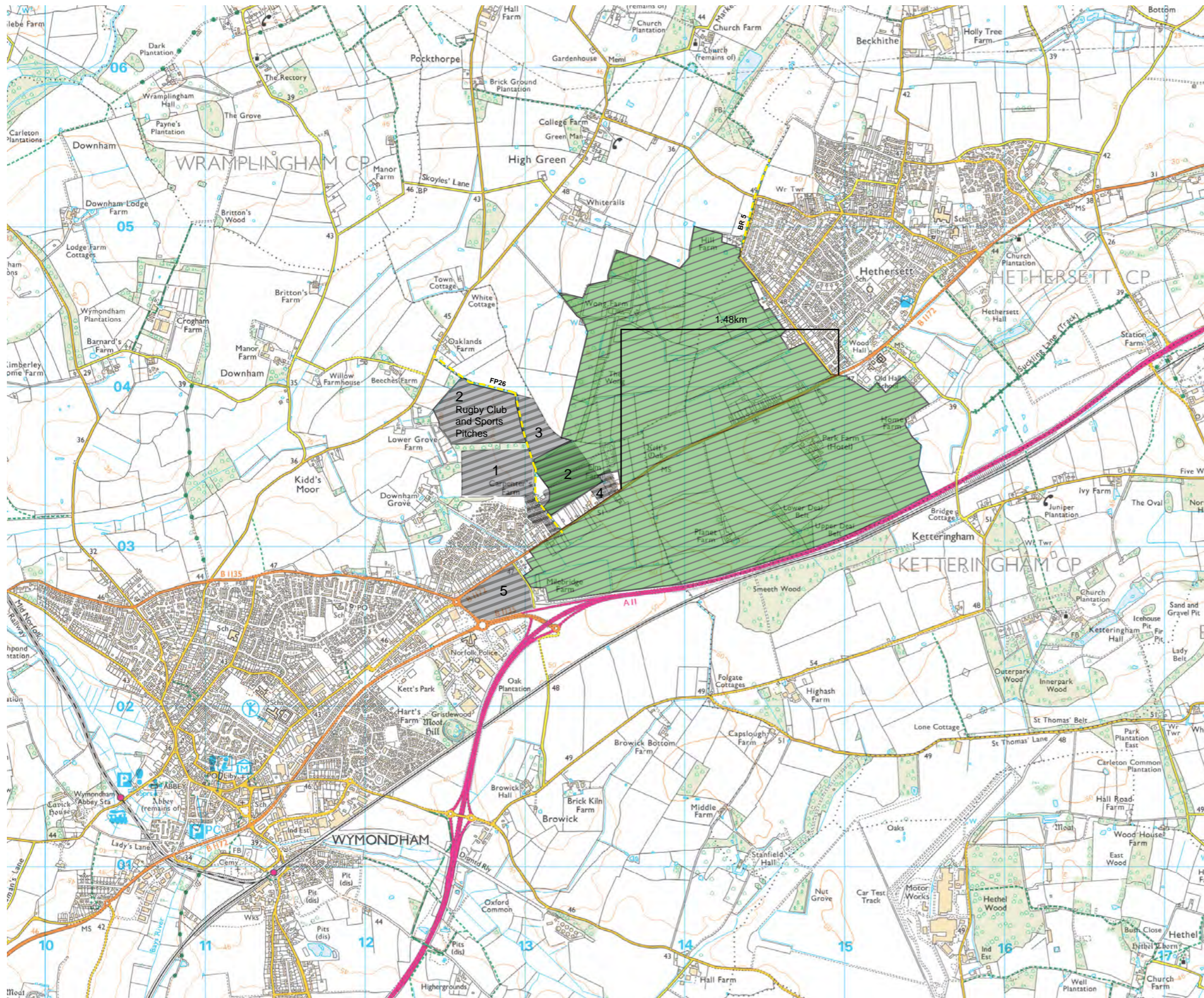
- The Landscape Character Assessment emphasises the importance of limiting sprawl, but acknowledges that well-planned infill and edge development may be acceptable.
- There is limited visibility of surrounding countryside from Footpath Wymondham 26 due to existing vegetation and new development currently under construction. As a result views from potential receptors are largely restricted to along the B1172.
- The CBA report concluded that new development, already consented, on land located north or east of Carpenter's Barn would likely be seen in glimpsed views, resulting in a reduction in gap/break openness.
- Perceived openness and separation are only experienced along the B1172 as there is limited visibility from the A11 due to the mature tree belts planted to the north of it.
- By maintaining the minimum width of the SG it is unlikely that any further development will compromise inter-visibility, physical separation or perceived openness.
- Existing vegetation and built form (within the SG) provide a lack of inter-visibility between the two settlements generally maintaining perceived separation.
- There would be a physical alteration of settlement pattern as a result of any additional proposed development albeit Wymondham currently undergoing settlement pattern change with numerous new housing sites currently under construction with consent.
- Openness is likely to be reduced in some capacity as a result of any additional development however by not encroaching beyond the minimum width of the gap, a clear sense of leaving one settlement and entering another will be maintained due to lack of inter-visibility and existing landscape features obscuring views. Mitigation in the form of tree planting will contribute to reducing the potential impact of proposed development on openness.

6.2 Proposed development would have a physical impact on the SG, further changing the settlement pattern of Wymondham by extending built form north east along the B1172 towards Hethersett, however should the minimum width of the SG be retained, physical separation should be maintained.

6.3 In terms of perceived separation, by maintaining the minimum width of physical separation a sense of leaving one settlement and entering another, would still be maintained. Openness would be reduced as a result of the extension of Wymondham's built edge, this would be predominantly travelling west towards Wymondham from Hethersett and to some extent for receptors looking south from the B1172 upon leaving Wymondham. It is to note however, that openness is already restricted at this point within the SG due to existing vegetation, built form and topography and mitigation in the form of tree planting would contribute to further minimising the effect of this.




Conclusion

- 6.4 In terms of separation between Wymondham and Hethersett, proposed development that does not extend beyond the minimum width of the SG (approx. 1.48km) would still ensure that the separate identity of the settlements is retained. Development within this parameter would not lead to coalescence of these settlements, either when considered in isolation, or cumulatively (should the five consented development identified in Figure 1 be built).
- 6.5 Development considered cumulatively along this eastern boundary would inevitably result in an extension to Wymondham in an easterly direction. Given that the five developments referenced have already been consented, there is an acknowledgement that the land does present potential opportunities to meet housing need without resulting in further impact on the SG purposes at this location.
- 6.6 As with any development on greenfield sites and within the SG, there will inevitably be an impact on openness, as arable land is replaced with built development and associated infrastructure. The existing hedgerows and belts of trees between the two settlements help somewhat to fragment the perception of openness, and prevent open views between the two settlements. Additional planting along exposed boundaries would also further limit the perceived impact on openness when experienced from visual receptors further east. Should the significant tranche of open land retained between the existing Wymondham settlement edge and Hethersett be maintained, it is not considered that the openness, inter-visibility or physical separation would be compromised.
- 6.7 Guidelines recommended for any future development at Wymondham's eastern settlement edge in order to minimise the impact on the SG are summarised below;
- Ensure development does not extend east beyond Elm Farm Business Park to ensure a clear sense of leaving Wymondham when travelling in the direction of Hethersett.
 - Provide vegetated edges along exposed eastern boundaries of development to mitigate against potential impact on openness.
- 6.8 It is not anticipated that the SG would be materially affected by proposed development that adheres to the and as such the SG will continue to function against its purposes.

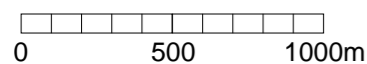


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-  **Consented Development**
 1. REF 2012/0839, 2014/1969, 2015/1405 - 350 dwellings - Approved
 2. REF 2014/0799 - Up to 90 dwellings off Tuttle Lane, Up to 300 off Norwich Common with associated sports facilities - Approved
 3. REF 2019/0184 150 Dwellings - Pending
 4. REF 2014/1824, 2017/2924 Extension to Business Park - Approved
 5. REF 2012/1385/O and 2014/2042 - 264 dwellings - Approved
-  **Strategic Gap Policy**
As per South Norfolk's Local Plan Policies Map 2015, Wymondham Area Action Plan, Policies Map, 2015 and Hetherset Map 003, 2015
-  **Public Right of Way**

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client
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project
Norwich Common,
Wymondham

drawing title
SITE LOCATION



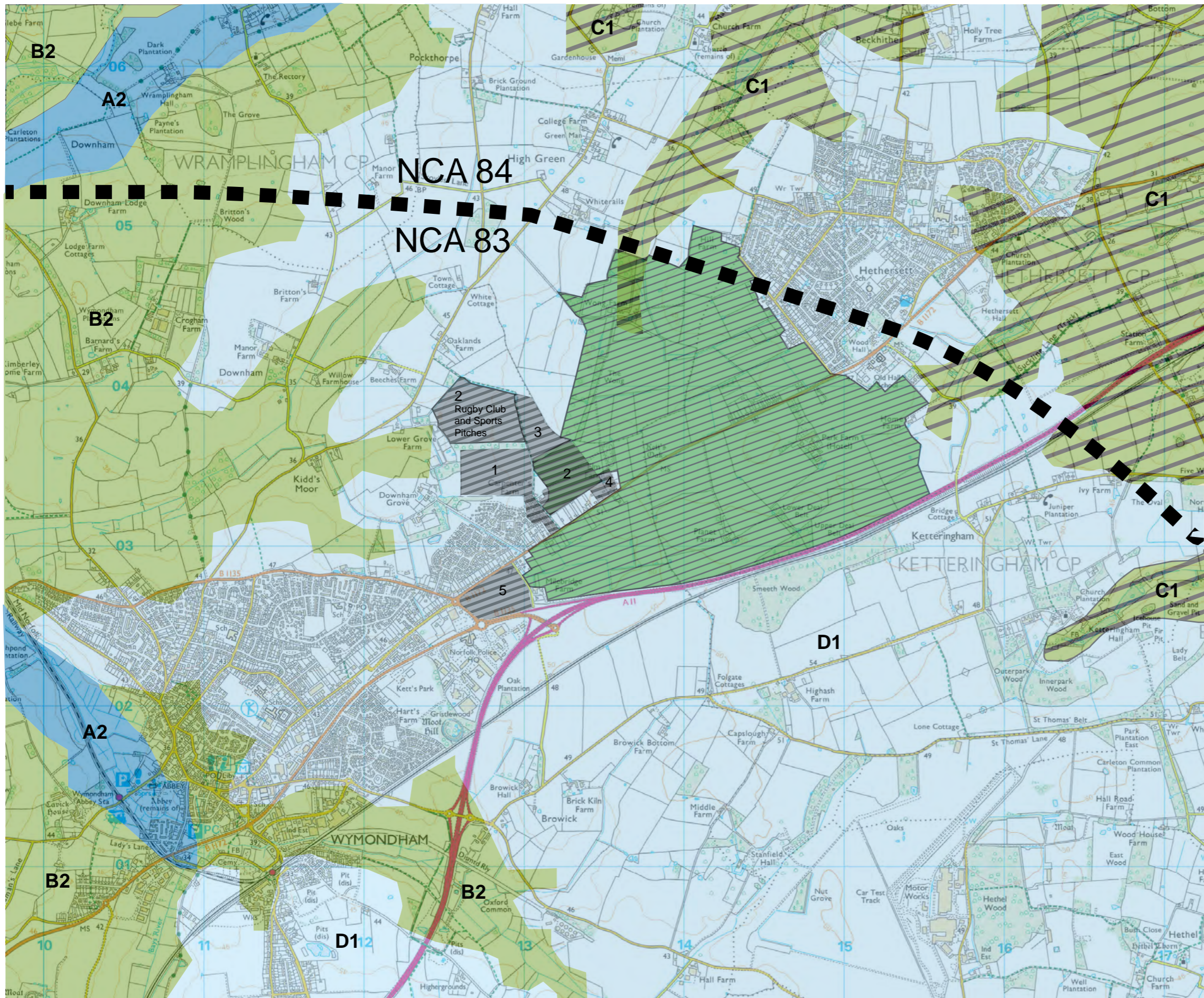
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Figure 1





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Strategic Gap Policy
As per South Norfolk's Local Plan Policies Map 2015, Wymondham Area Action Plan, Policies Map, 2015 and Hethersett Map 003, 2015

- National Character Areas (NCA)**
- NCA Boundary**
 - NCA 83 - South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands
 - NCA 84 - Mid Norfolk

South Norfolk Landscape Types and Norwich Policy Areas (NPAs) (Land Use Consultants 2001 Landscape Assessment) & Chris Blandford Associates 2012 South Norfolk Local Landscape Designations Review

- D1** Type: Settled Plateau Farmland
Area: Wymondham Settled Plateau Farmland
- B2** Type: Tributary Farmland
Area: Tiffey Tributary Farmland
- C1** Type: Tributary Farmland and Parkland
Area: Yare Tributary Farmland with Parkland
- A2** Type: Rural River Valley
Area: Yare/Tiffey Rural River Valley

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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

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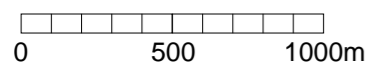
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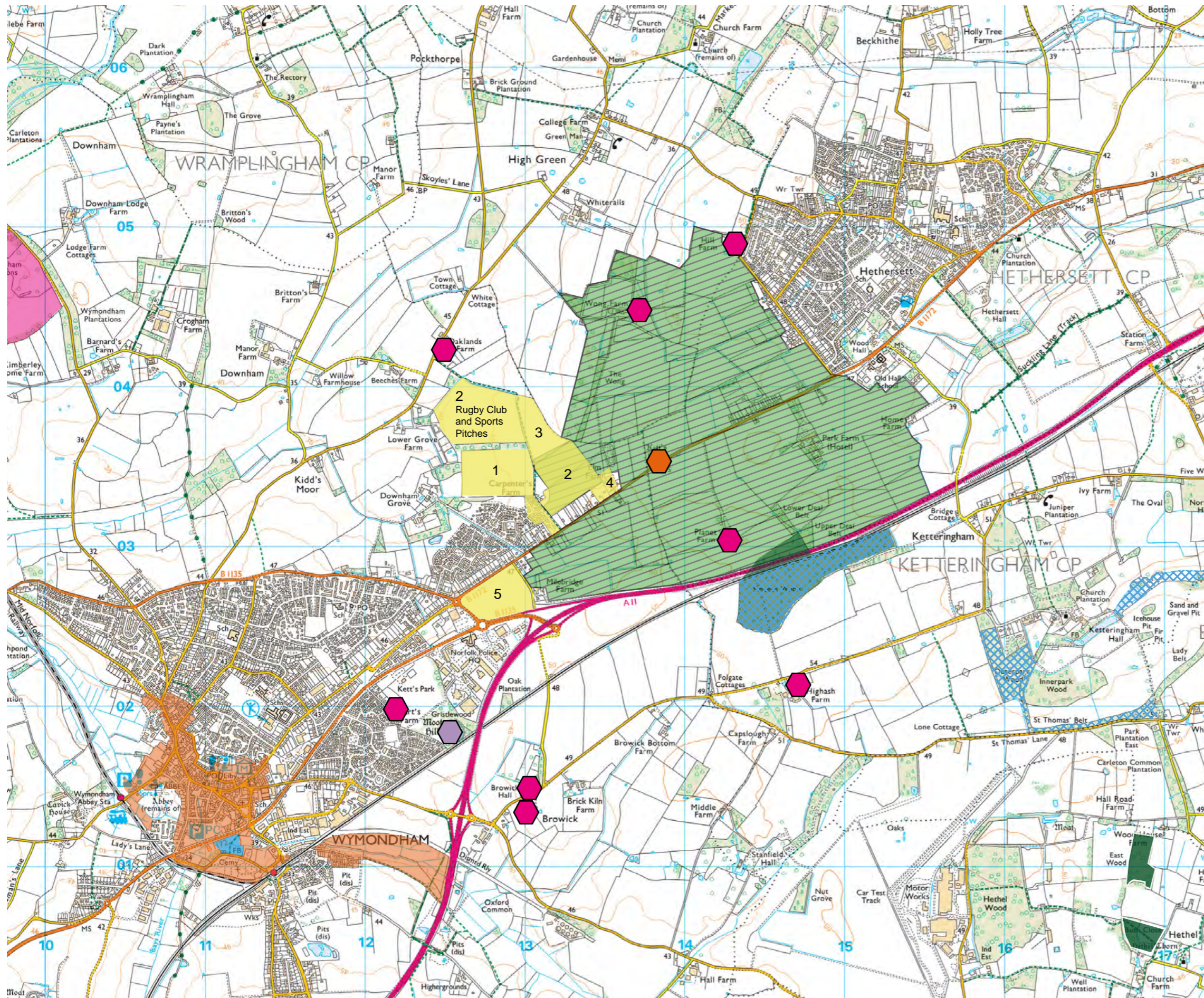
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Figure 2











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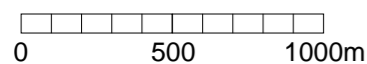


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- 
Strategic Gap Policy
 As per South Norfolk's Local Plan Policies Map 2015, Wymondham Area Action Plan, Policies Map, 2015 and Hethersett Map 003, 2015
- 
Local Nature Reserve
- 
Conservation Areas
(south-norfolk.gov.uk)
- 
Listed Buildings within and in close proximity to the Strategic Gap
- 
Scheduled Monuments within and in close proximity to the Strategic Gap
- 
Kett's Oak
- 
Kimberley Hall Registered Parks and Gardens
- 
Ancient Woodland
- 
County Wildlife Sites

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project
Norwich Common, Wymondham

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DESIGNATIONS

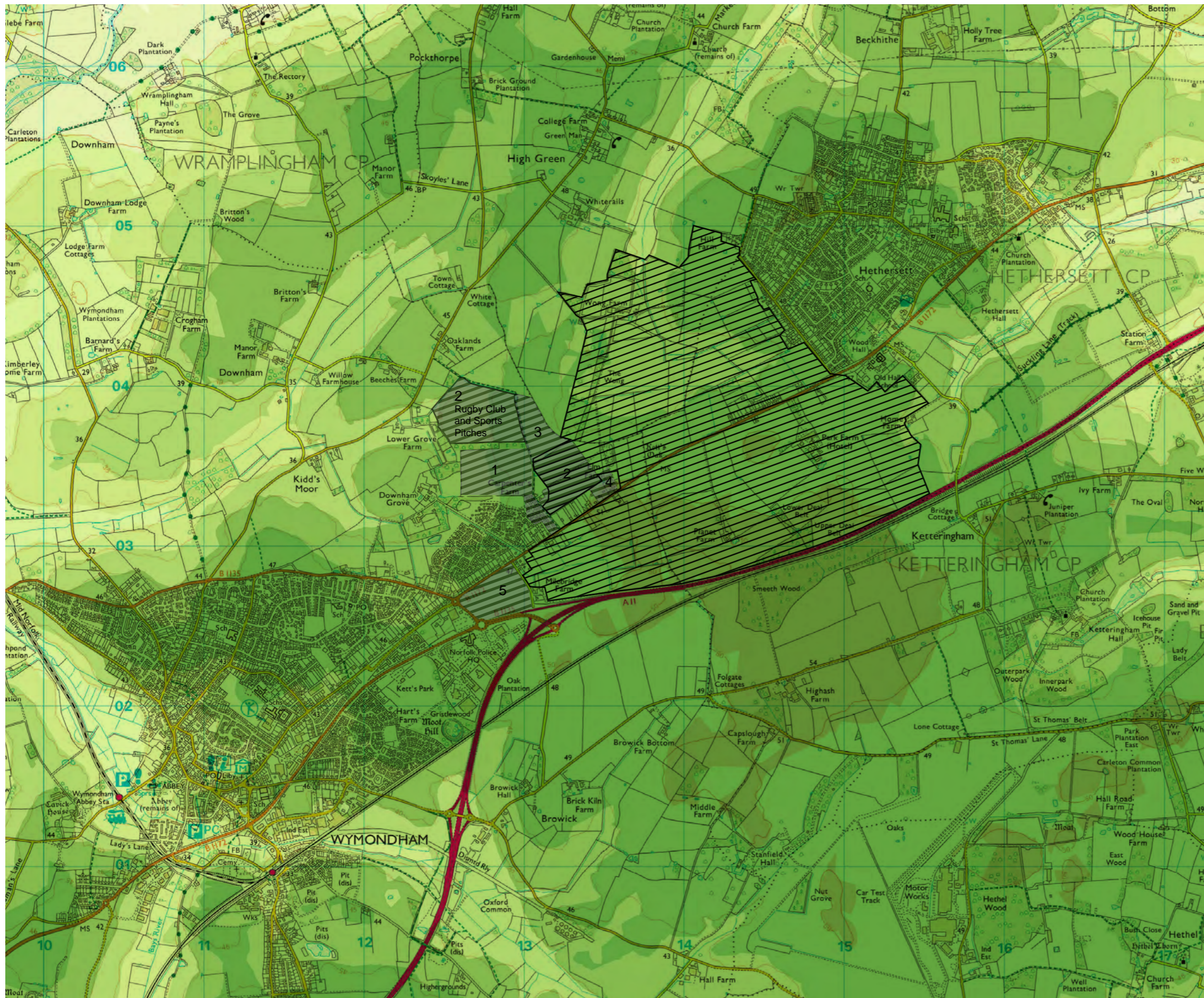
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Figure 3








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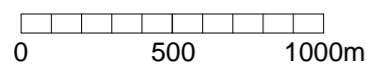
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Strategic Gap Policy

As per South Norfolk's Local Plan Policies Map 2015, Wymondham Area Action Plan, Policies Map, 2015 and Hethersett Map 003, 2015

-  50m - 55m AOD
-  45m - 50m AOD
-  40m - 45m AOD
-  35m - 40m AOD
-  30m - 35m AOD
-  25m - 30m AOD
-  20m - 25m AOD
-  15m - 20m AOD

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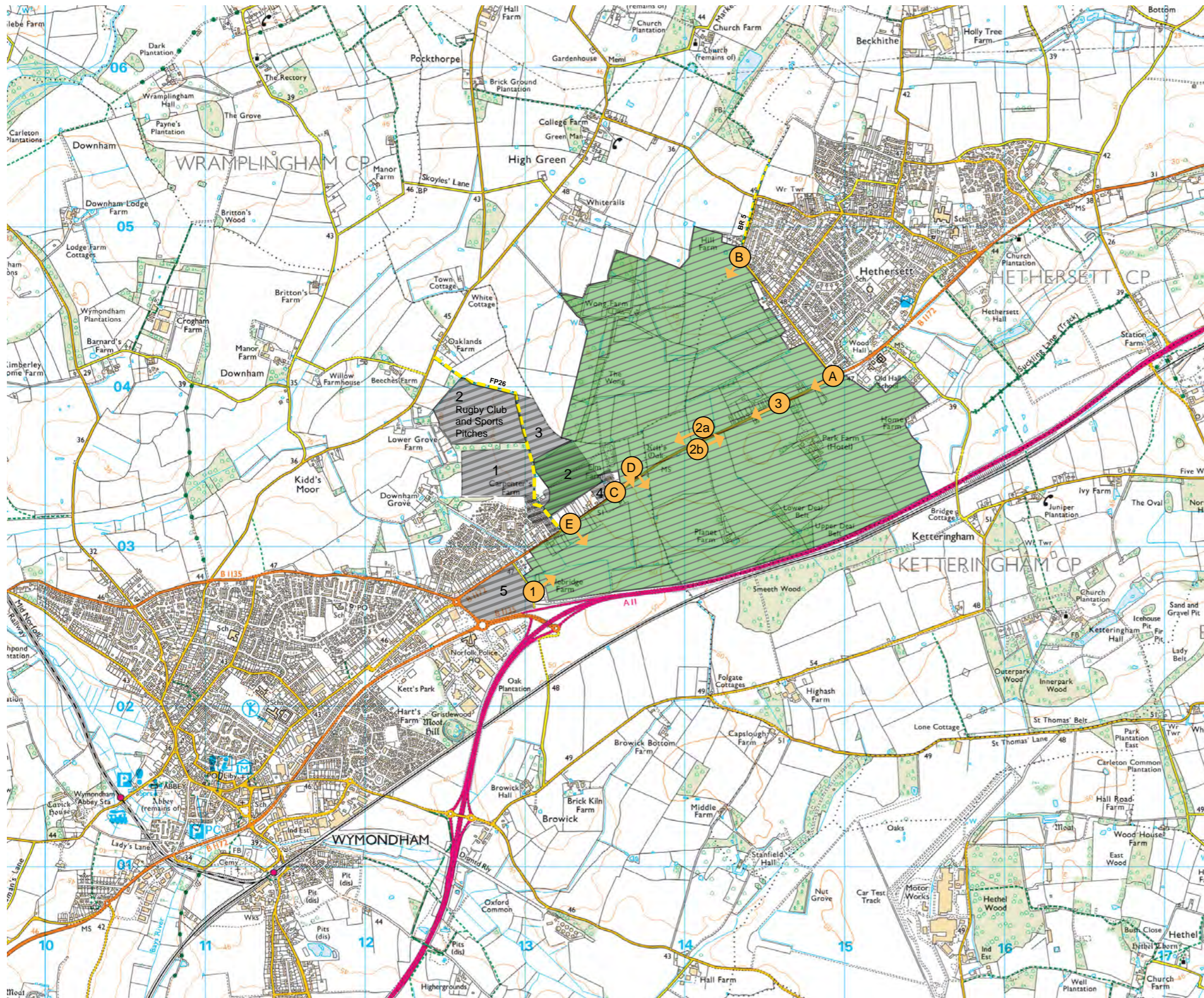
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Figure 4

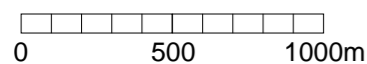


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-  **Public Right of Way**
-  **Strategic Gap Policy**
As per South Norfolk's Local Plan Policies Map 2015, Wymondham Area Action Plan, Policies Map, 2015 and Hethersett Map 003, 2015
-  **Photo Viewpoints**

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VIEWPOINTS

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Figure 5