



Norfolk County Council



**Local Plan for the Broads
Statement of Common Ground
Between Broads Authority and Norfolk County Council
Relating to PUBSSA47
June 2018**

1. Introduction

1.1. The Inspector appointed to undertake the examination of the Local Plan for the Broads has requested that a Statement of Common Ground be produced by Norfolk County Council and the Broads Authority. This is in relation to Matter 12 for Policy PUBSSA47: Changes to the Acle Straight (A47T).

2. Background

2.1. The Broads Local plan includes policy PUBSSA47 to guide the design and delivery of road schemes on the Acle Straight.

2.2. Norfolk County Council objected to this policy as written in the Publication version of the Local Plan because it considered that the policy, as currently drafted did not offer a balanced view of consideration of the likely positive impacts (both positive and negative) of schemes.

3. Matters on which the parties agree

3.1. The Broads Authority and Norfolk County Council have held meetings to consider the representations on policy PUBSSA47 made by the County Council.

3.2. Revised wording for policy PUBSSA47 has been drafted which is included at Appendix A.

3.3. Norfolk County Council agrees that the revised wording of policy PUBSSA47 in Appendix A is acceptable. Norfolk County Council will withdraw the objection to current policy PUBSSA47 on the basis that revised wording of policy PUBSSA47 in Appendix A is proposed modification to the Broads Local Plan

3.4. The Broads Authority agrees that the revised wording of policy PUBSSA47 in Appendix A is acceptable and is supported as a proposed modification to the Broads Local Plan.

Signed by:

Marie-Pierre Tighe, Director of Strategic Services for the Broads Authority

Richard Doleman, Principal Infrastructure and Economic Growth Planner for Norfolk County Council
15 June 2018

Appendix A: Agreed revised policy PUBSSA47

Policy PUBSSA47: Road schemes on the Acle Straight (A47T)

See Map: [Appendix I: Acle Straight and considerations/constraints](#)

The Authority will work proactively with promoters and designers of any schemes /proposals for changes to the Acle Straight at an early stage and throughout the process, especially at the feasibility and design stages.

Any proposed scheme will need to be justified. Proposed schemes need to consider the special qualities of the Broads and the fact that it is a protected landscape of national importance. Proposals will need to undertake comprehensive scoping of constraints and opportunities at the earliest stage to set out the nature and scale of any resultant impacts (negative or positive) from proposals, demonstrate how any negative impacts would be avoided, mitigated or compensated and take opportunities to enhance the special qualities of the area and people's enjoyment of them.

Transport infrastructure, including roads, accesses, bridges, lighting, signing, other street furniture and public transport infrastructure need to be balanced against the overall impact of the scheme on the special qualities of the Broads and carefully designed and maintained to take full account of the valued characteristics of the special qualities of an iconic and highly protected landscape.

The Authority acknowledges that schemes will be designed to national guidance and requirements. Proposals will need to ensure they consider and address potential impacts to the following locally important characteristics: wildlife, habitats and species, land management practices, landscape tranquillity and visual amenity, surface water (including pollution risk from spills), existing footpath/Public Right of Way networks and designated or undesignated heritage assets or their setting, including waterlogged archaeology and traditional dyke networks.

Lighting in any scheme needs to be kept to a minimum, thoroughly justified and well designed so as to not contribute to light pollution.

Schemes will need to consider the provision of a strategic walking and cycling route between Acle and Great Yarmouth and interpretation measures and opportunities to safely enjoy and appreciate the iconic views to the mills and over the marshes.

Constraints and features

- Entire length of Acle Straight in Flood Zone 3 (EA mapping) and indicative 3b using SFRA 2017 mapping.
- Western end: Damgate Marshes SSSI, Halvergate Marshes SSSI, Broadland SPA, Broadland Ramsar site and The Broads SAC.
- Eastern end: Breydon Water LNR, SSSI, Ramsar Site, SPA, Outer Thames Estuary SPA.
- Stracey Arms Drainage Mill (listed building) is next to the Acle Straight.
- Other listed buildings with a view towards the Acle Straight that can be viewed from the road.
- Halvergate Marshes Conservation Area.
- The Broads is a site identified by Historic England as having exceptional potential for waterlogged archaeology.
- Undesignated heritage assets that contribute to the cultural heritage of the area, such as the WW2 defences and assets identified on the Norfolk HER and Broads Local List.
- Numerous accesses to tracks, for example to farms.
- Numerous level crossings accessed from the Acle Straight.

- Branch Road junction.
- Little Whirlpool Ramshorn Snail (*Anisus vorticulus*) is a European protected species.
- The Acle Straight runs in between railway line and river.
- Open and flat landscape.
- Historic dyke networks with associated features.
- Rights of Way.
- Future changes resulting from the HLF project.
- Users of the Acle Straight experience congestion regularly.
- Serious accidents on the Acle Straight are higher than the national average (13%) and the average for Norfolk County (16%).

Reasoned justification

Background to the A47 and Acle Straight

The A47 Trunk Road passes through the Broads Authority area and this policy relates to the section of the A47 between Acle and Great Yarmouth, known as the Acle Straight.

The A47 is the main east-west connection in northern East Anglia. It links Lowestoft to Great Yarmouth and then with Norwich, King's Lynn and Peterborough to the A1, with connections to the Midlands and the north of England. At Great Yarmouth and Norwich, connections to Europe and beyond are available via the port and airport. New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership's Economic Strategy considers this route of strategic importance.

The Acle Straight is a single carriageway with at-grade roundabouts at each end. This section of the A47 has high vehicle flows including a high use by HGVs resulting in longer and more unreliable journey times, as well as delays and congestion at junctions. The two-way Annual Average Weekday Flow (AAWF) on the A47 at Acle Straight is approximately 21,000 vehicles, including a significant HGV percentage of more than 17% in the AM peak period.

The Acle Straight has an accident rate above that of the national average, with a total of 59 personal injury accidents occurring in the past 5 years (2011-2016) including 3 fatal and 16 serious injuries. The proportion of fatal and serious accidents for this section of single carriageway road is significantly higher than the national average (13%) and the average for Norfolk County (16%). Accidents on the Acle Straight have also resulted in road closures, with traffic having to be diverted onto unsuitable alternative routes. Incident records show that the greatest delays in the area occur due to accidents, with the average delay exceeding over two hours.

What could happen to the Acle Straight and why

There is an ambition promoted by the A47 Alliance to dual the A47 for its full length, including the stretch between Acle and Great Yarmouth. The A47 Alliance brings together the business community, local authorities, MPs and stakeholders along the whole of the trunk road route between Peterborough and Lowestoft. Partners, including the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough and New Anglia LEPs are working together to make the case for improvements and to secure the investment required to make it happen. This is a long-term ambition for post-2021.

In the medium term, Highways England plan to undertake safety improvements at key locations on the Acle Straight.

In December 2014, funding was announced in the Government's Autumn Statement to deliver changes along the A47, including safety improvements along the Acle Straight. Two schemes in particular are of relevance:

- A47/A12 Great Yarmouth: junction improvements, including reconstruction of the Vauxhall roundabout.
- Safety improvements at key hotspots, and joint working with Natural England to establish environmental impacts and mitigation measures for the medium and long term which could include installation of safety barriers, junction improvements and road widening or capacity improvements.

The Authority acknowledges that changes to the Acle Straight could bring benefits in relation to road safety, improved management of surface water and pollutants, and the economy of the local area in particular economic growth of the sub-region of Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft and wider region¹ through reduced congestion and delays and more reliable journey times. There are also opportunities associated with schemes as mentioned in the policy, such as the potential for archaeological finds, a new route alongside a dualled road, and potential for interpretation of the Broads.

Determining applications relating to the Acle Straight

The Broads Authority would not determine any future planning application for dualling the Acle Straight. The scheme is likely to be determined as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) by the Planning Inspectorate, because the developable area could be over 12.5Ha and because the scheme could have environmental impacts².

There is a possibility that the dualling of the Acle Straight will come forward during this Local Plan period and the purpose of this policy is to identify important issues and considerations in determining the suitability of any proposal.

The Acle Straight and the Broads

The first statutory purpose of the Broads Authority is conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Broads. Section 17A of The Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988 imposes a statutory duty on authorities to have regard to the relevant statutory purposes when exercising their functions that can affect land in the Broads. For the avoidance of doubt, the special characteristics of the Broads are those set out at section 8.4. Furthermore, of particular importance and relevance in understanding the impacts of any scheme are the Broads Landscape Sensitivity Study and Broads Landscape Character Assessment. Areas 19, 24, 25 and 20 of these studies are the relevant areas for consideration.

The Authority acknowledges that schemes will be designed to national guidance and requirements; the policy and the following information highlights and explains locally important criteria that need addressing in any scheme. It is considered that the clear guidance the policy and supporting text provides will assist in the development and design of any future scheme.

Fundamentally, because of the potential adverse impacts that changes to the highway schemes/changes to the Acle Straight may have on the landscape, visual amenity, historic environment, ecology, habitats, access and special characteristics¹ of the Broads, of either a temporary or permanent nature, any changes to the Acle Straight will need to be designed to reduce and avoid such impacts in the first place. Only then can mitigation be considered. These specific criteria need to be considered and addressed as part of any scheme.

¹ A47 Wider Economic Benefits (2012) www.a47alliance.co.uk/assets/AgendasMinutes/Wider-Economic-Benefits-A47.pdf

² NSIP: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2013/1883/pdfs/ukxi_20131883_en.pdf

Wildlife and habitats

The Broads is one of the nation's richest areas for biodiversity, with European designated habitats and species flanking and occupying the habitats close to the existing road. European and nationally protected species such as water vole, bat and otter are likely to be impacted by any changes. Water voles have suffered drastic declines across the country in recent years, although populations in the Broads are still high. Any loss of water vole habitat in the ditches would need to be compensated and water vole populations translocated.

Any increase in lighting could potentially cause adverse impacts on bat populations in the area. Light pollution is known to deter bats from commuting and foraging areas, delay their emergence for hunting and cause disturbance to roosts.

The area is already a significant site for otter mortality. Road widening risks making this worse, so the Authority would expect changes that underline the need to include enhancements, such as wildlife crossing points. Other impacts on wildlife, such as increased barn owl road fatalities, would also need to be addressed.

Many of the grazing marsh ditches hold conservation designations of European importance, supporting important plant and invertebrate communities. Any impacts to the ditch network would need to address this loss, considering alternatives, mitigation (including translocation), compensation, long term conservation and monitoring.

One of the already specified issues that changes to the Acle Straight would need to address is the Little Whirlpool Ramshorn Snail. The dykes around the current road are one of the few habitats of this species, which is on an international 'red list' of endangered species. It is a small aquatic snail with a flattened spiral shell of approximately 5mm in diameter. It has been declining from the UK since the 1960s, although the reason for the decline is not clear. A study investigating the potential to translocate the snail (AECOM, March 2015) concluded that translocation was a potential option, but identified various considerations such as:

- Pathogen transference has been highlighted as an issue, and as such receptor and donor sites should derive from the same drainage unit.
- Donor sites must have a robust population and only sites with no current population should be used as receptor site.
- In order to ascertain these sites and to increase knowledge of the target species, robust pre-translocation survey is a necessity.
- In addition, receptor sites will need to be properly assessed to ensure the receiving habitat is suitable.

Large scale changes such as dualling the Acle Straight are likely to result in the loss of habitat as the surrounding dykes could be lost, as could some marshland. The Authority would expect any loss to be avoided and then minimised, with compensation likely to be required. Areas requiring compensation include the need to secure land purchase, conservation management or long term covenants for defined enhancements, and monitoring regimes. In the first place a scoring system for compensation should be worked up by independent consultant and agreed by all parties.

Landscape and tranquillity

Another key issue is the impact of changes to the road on the landscape character of the Halvergate Conservation Area. The A47 crosses an area known as the Halvergate marshes or Halvergate triangle. This area forms one of the defining landscapes of the Broads Authority Executive Area, being a vast panoramic expanse of grazing marsh dotted with windmills and often teaming with

wildlife. The sheer scale, inaccessibility and emptiness of much of the marshland means it remains largely quiet and isolated. It is designated as a Conservation Area and its biodiversity interest is recognised through national and international designations. The dualling of the Acle Straight has the potential to cause significant adverse effects to both the existing landscape character of the area (including tranquillity through increased traffic noise) and nature conservation interests.

Notwithstanding the above, it is recognised that the current use of the road, which is often characterised by congestion, does not always positively contribute to a sense of tranquillity in the area and improvements to the road which better facilitate the movement of traffic could potentially result in benefits to tranquillity in the area.

Proposed highway options are likely to range in scale, nature and extent. A number of key characteristics have the potential to be affected through changes to the highway/schemes, through both the construction phase and as a result of the completed project. The significance of the effects on the landscape and visual amenity of the area (adverse or beneficial) of any option proposed will need to be assessed in accordance with current guidelines. Reference will need to be made to the current landscape character assessments for Local Character Areas 19, 24, 25 and 20 and the Conservation Area appraisal.

Dualling of the Acle Straight has the potential to cause significant adverse effects on the existing landscape character. Mitigation of these effects may be challenging and would need to recognise that common methods such as screening tree belts may be highly intrusive in terms of the extensive open landscape character.

Noise is an important aspect of tranquillity. Schemes should seek to address this, but the provision of noise barriers would be detrimental to the iconic landscape viewing potential along this route. There could be scope for low noise surfacing.

Surface water

Changes to the Acle Straight could result in more impermeable surfaces, leading to a greater volume of surface run off to wash more pollutants off the road surface. The sensitive habitats nearby could be adversely affected by pollutants.

Any changes to the Acle Straight would need to address increased risk of flooding at that point and elsewhere by implementing sustainable drainage or SuDS, and by considering potential hazard to water quality from the surface runoff. Water may require additional treatment prior to disposal and adequate steps need to be put in place. Where any SuDS are proposed, it is important to demonstrate that the SuDS hierarchy (see policy PUBDM5) has been followed both in terms of:

- Surface water disposal location, prioritised in the following order: disposal of water to shallow infiltration, to a watercourse, to a surface water sewer, combined sewer / deep infiltration (generally greater than 2m below ground level); and
- The SuDS components used within the management train (source, site and regional control).

The CIRIA SuDS Manual C753 (2015) looks at designing sustainable surface water drainage from highways, and designing for water quality issues. Additional measures to address accidental spills will also need to be considered.

The Acle Straight is almost entirely within an Internal Drainage Board (IDB) area and the Water Management Alliance should be consulted at an early stage. If infiltration is not favourable, they

should be consulted to establish if surface water drainage discharge to a managed network would require consent.

The Environment Agency should also be consulted with regard to water quality and any particularly sensitive receptors nearby as well as in relation to strategic flood risk and any mitigation required to compensate for any floodplain affected. The Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010 may be of relevance as well.

Light pollution

The Authority's Dark Sky Report (2016) shows that the Acle Straight has good quality dark skies, with the western end in particular having very good quality dark skies³. Any schemes need to be assessed in line with policy PUBDM21 Light pollution and dark skies.

Walkers, cyclists and horse riders

Changes to the Acle Straight offer the opportunity to improve provision for walkers, cyclists and horse riders and provide new facilities. The Broads Integrated Access Strategy has an aim for a shared use path along the length of the Acle Straight, which would provide a new link to enable non car journeys between Acle and Great Yarmouth.

Interpretation and appreciation

The route is a tourist route as well an access route. Changes to the Acle Straight could include provision of parking laybys, allowing people the opportunity to appreciate the iconic landscape. The Authority would expect these areas to have no impediment to the view, and to provide interpretation points that would add to the visitor experience of the Broads.

HLF scheme⁴

The Broads Landscape Partnership has received a grant of £2.6m from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) through its Landscape Partnership (LP) programme for the Water, Mills and Marshes project. The project aims to enrich and promote heritage sites in the area between Norwich, Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Acle and Loddon, unlock the benefits of this distinctive landscape for local people and give them the skills to protect it as a legacy for future generations. Iconic drainage mills on Halvergate marshes, an area which boasts one of the greatest concentrations in Europe, will be documented and renovated through a Heritage Construction Skills training scheme.

Delivery of the HLF project is set for 2018 to 2022. At the time of writing, the results of the scheme and their impact on the landscape in the Halvergate Marshes area is not known. The changes to the area will be an important consideration for any proposals to change the Acle Straight.

Heritage assets

The listed Stracey Arms Drainage Mill is located immediately adjacent to the Acle Straight. The impacts of changes on this heritage asset will need to be addressed. There are many other intervisible (seen from each perspective) drainage mill structures, both nationally and locally listed, collectively forming the largest grouping in the UK. All of them contribute to the historic character of the drained marshland. The Norfolk HER contains many records relating to the area both in terms of archaeology and built form, an example being the World War 2 defences that remain in situ on the marshes.

³ The readings taken along the Acle Straight were all over 20 arc magnitudes per second with those to the western end of the Acle Straight in particular being over 20.5 arc magnitudes per second.

⁴ Water, Mills and Marshes: www.broads-authority.gov.uk/looking-after/projects/water-mills-and-marshes

The special historic interest of Halvergate marshes is particularly significant as a constantly evolving cultural landscape. That evolution is illustrated by numerous remnant structures, landscape and archaeological features, that collectively contribute to the historic significance of the area. Historic England has recognised this significance in terms of undiscovered archaeology and identified the Broads as an area of *exceptional potential for waterlogged heritage*. See policy PUBDM10 Heritage Assets, which relates to archaeology.

Virtually the whole of the Acle Straight corridor lies within the Halvergate Marshes Conservation Area, a designated Heritage Asset characterised by the cultural landscape and the features within it.

The Authority would expect that the historic significance, including the potential archaeological significance of the area, is fully assessed and analysed in any proposal for changes to the Acle Straight. The historic environment is a finite resource and once lost cannot be replaced. The Authority therefore expects that any adverse impact on the historic environment, either built, landscape or archaeological, is kept to an absolute minimum, and that any adverse impact resulting from change is fully assessed and can be justified in line with the tests set out in section 12 of the NPPF. Where justification for harm can be made, any impact or harm should be mitigated, including improvements to existing features.

Practicalities

The current route has various pinch points bounded by river on one side and railway on the other. Further, numerous farm accesses and the road towards Halvergate will need to be accommodated. This may mean that any scheme cannot be fitted 'on-line' and a wider route choice corridor has to be considered. This could have immense implications on the landscape, heritage and ecology and could alter the attitude of the Authority to any proposals. Constraint scoping needs to be undertaken very early in the process.

Evidence used to inform this section includes

- Broads Dark Skies Report (2016): www.broads-authority.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/757402/Broads-Authority-Dark-Skies-Study-March-20161.pdf
- Halvergate Marshes conservation area appraisal: Not on line
- Landscape Character Assessment (2017).
- Landscape Sensitivity Study (2012)
- Feasibility study on the translocation of the little whirlpool ramshorn snail (AECOM 2015) [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/454014/Feasibility Study Lesser Whirlpool Ramshorn Snail DRAFT Redacted.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/454014/Feasibility_Study_Lesser_Whirlpool_Ramshorn_Snail_DRAFT_Redacted.pdf)
- Broads Plan 2017
- Rights of Way/Access Improvement Plans