

Valuing the Broads

The Norfolk and Suffolk Broads is renowned as the UK's premier wetland, an ever evolving landscape shaped and influenced over time, with its own distinctive character and 'sense of place'. Understanding what is valued about the Broads will help us sustainably manage this special landscape now and into the future.

The ecosystems of the Broads – the complex interactions between plants and animals and their physical environment - provide a wide range of important goods and services. These include provision of water flow, clean water and air, recreation and amenity, archaeological remains, education, jobs, food production, visual beauty and inspiration, flood management and climate regulation, including carbon storage.

A priority wetland

The Broads is a priority Wetland Vision area, reflecting the national importance of the largest expanse of species rich fen in lowland Britain. Its biodiversity value is recognized by a wide range of international, national and local nature conservation designations.

A delicately balanced mosaic of tidal rivers and their tributaries, shallow lakes ('broads'), reed beds, grazing marshes, wet woodland, peat fen, estuarine salt marshes, intertidal mudflats and coastal formations, each with their own characteristics, provide vital habitats for a diverse range of plant and animal species.

The area is home to over 11,000 recorded species, including 1519 priorities for conservation, some of which are restricted largely or entirely to the Broads within the UK. Iconic species include the swallowtail butterfly, holly-leaved naiad, fen orchid, marsh harrier and the elusive bittern.

Agriculture is a significant part of the local landscape and economy, taking advantage of its flat and fertile river valleys. It is primarily a mix of livestock grazing and some arable cropping, with grassland the dominant feature in the flood plain. The fen peat soils formed by the Broads wetland vegetation store 38.8 million tonnes of carbon. Under the right hydrological and land management conditions, this carbon will remain locked in the peat and continue to capture 1-2 tonnes of CO₂ per hectare a year.

Wetlands are a vital natural resource, providing a wide range of important goods and services



The bittern, a rare species particularly associated with the Broads



© Tom Mackie

“...a breathing space for the cure of souls”

Ted Ellis

A rich landscape heritage

Home to around 6,500 people, the Broads has a rich historic and cultural value, with 25 designated Conservation Areas, 15 Scheduled Ancient Monuments and nearly 1000 sites worthy of inclusion on the Historic Environment Record.

The ‘broads’ themselves are a result of medieval peat diggings, making the area arguably one of England’s most extensive industrial monuments. The local landscape character has been shaped over centuries by the way local traders and merchants, marshmen, farmers, millwrights and fishermen have lived and worked. Villages and settlements are often grouped round a parish staithe, riverside common, ferry or bridge, with buildings that reflect local activities, such as riverside chalets, marsh cottages, boatyards and boatsheds, agricultural buildings and drainage mills.

A breathing space

Tourism and recreation drive the economy of the Broads, with 7 million visitors a year contributing more than £450m to the local economy and supporting over 6000 jobs. It is one of Europe’s most popular inland waterways, with 200km of meandering, lock-free rivers and open water bodies to be explored. Boating provides opportunities to experience the special qualities of the Broads in a unique way, and can enhance

the sense of seclusion, tranquillity and wildness in this level, open landscape of big skies. Angling is a popular pastime, and many people enjoy land-based pursuits such as walking, cycling, bird watching, visiting historic and cultural assets such as mills and churches, and simply sitting by the water in quiet reflection.

A sustainable future

The Broads is ever changing, influenced over time by people, climate and the environment. Looking forward, the area faces significant challenges from more rapid climate change and sea level rise, as well as other impacts from habitat loss and fragmentation, nutrient enrichment and pollution, development pressures and increasing demands on energy, food and water resources.

The ecological status of the habitats and many of the ecosystems values within the Broads are highly dependent upon sustainable water management and land use practices in the Broads and its wider catchment, and an ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

As a member of the UK family of National Parks and global network of protected landscapes, the Broads has a key role in demonstrating how wetland resources can be managed sustainably for the benefit of both people and nature.