

# 5 ways to reduce impact of development

## PROPOSAL WAT 3 (088): North of Thetford Road

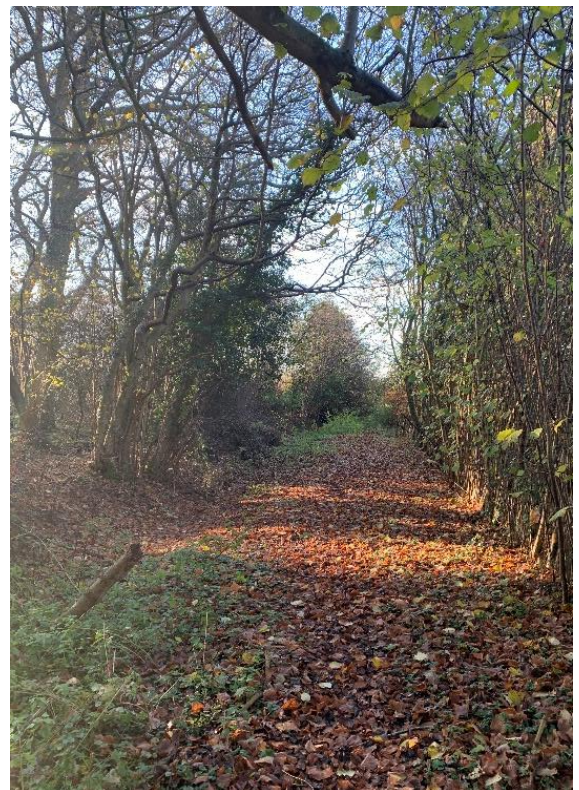
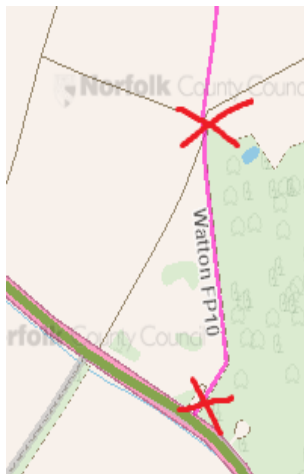
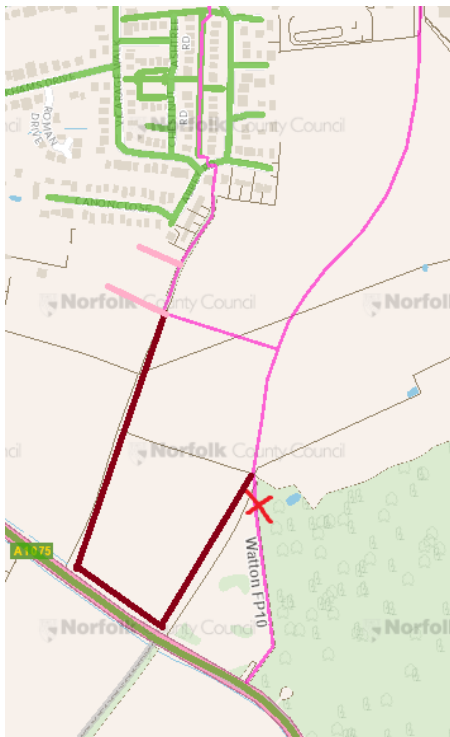
### 1. Alter and protect footpaths:

The original 2 footpaths are (Watton FP13) Priory Rd and (Watton FP9/10) Wood Lane, with a further 2 entrances added in recent development of the Wayland Fields estate. The new additions were added to the old rail crossing in 2005 and 2024/2025.

Create a new public path creation agreement that alters the final stretch of the footpath that intrudes into the Woodland area. It does not have a destination and encourages dog-walkers to step into woodland which is prohibited by Norfolk Wildlife Trust. People have said online that if they can't walk dogs on the footpaths outside of the woods, they would just go in.

Footpaths are essential to the health and wellbeing of residents. If the footpaths were connected there would be an accesable mile long walk which could have disabled or cyclist and dogwalking provision.

As you can see in the image below, the present footpath leads to a bush by the edge of Thetford Rd. The recent additional entrances are in pink, and the intrusion of 'right of way' into the woods is identified with an X.



## **2. Nature barrier for light and sound pollution:**

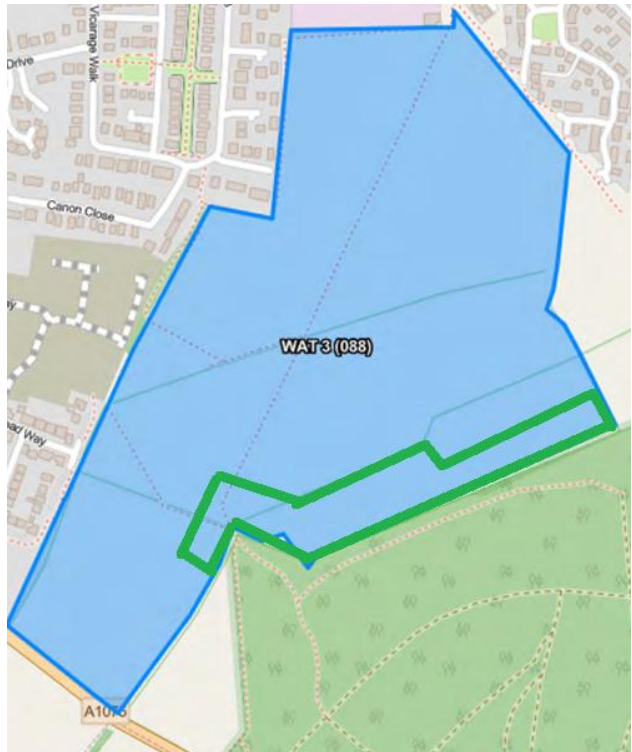
The plan should include a woodland border tree line for habitat creation, and to shade light pollution from 300 dwellings. And a natural ground barrier to prevent unnecessary trespassing over embankments and ditches. Native plants are preferred to play a role in local ecologies but faster growing species are also beneficial to ensure aims are achieved.

10% increased biodiversity target is not enough when you are dealing with grade 2 listed ancient woodland which is also an SSSI and is Watton's identity. Grass monocultures shouldn't count and have been proven as a poor source of water attenuation. There is a clear difference between recreational space which is sports and health provision to green open space which is still a great amenity and is what is wanted.

Please consider a tree line barrier or leave the already in place nature barrier in place. And consider habitat creation such as bat or bird boxes to blend the different areas together. Even areas left untouched are habitats.

On a separate but important note, displacing the masses of muntjac from open fields will direct them into the woods. This will lead to more ground fauna being damaged or eaten as well as direct damage to the chances of the Yellow Star of Bethlehem flowering which gave the adjacent site its conservation status. There are millions of muntjac where they shouldn't be – and development will push them into gardens and protected woodland.

As you can see in the image below, there is a field on the southeastern edge of the site proposal which is already ideal as a buffer to protect wildlife from pollution or human interference. This would be ideal in the hands of Norfolk Wildlife Trust so they can protect the ancient woodland from development.



### 3. Protect the character of the landscape:

**Flood Basin:** The previous estate built next to the site has a large water attenuation basin to hold the excess surface water. I would like to see another basin to protect the houses that also supports the ecology and character of the site. There is also a 5ft deep watercourse ditch along the back of bungalows north of the site which I'd like to see preserved.

**Babes in the Woods:** Various theories have been suggested as to how the legend of the Babes in the Wood came to be associated with Watton's Wayland Wood.

One of them is that the Elizabethan Manor House, standing a half mile to the south-east, contained — until about a hundred years ago — a carved overmantel of the period, depicting the story of the Babes, so even in Elizabeth 1st time it was already a legend. It was also in this house that the Wicked Uncle, who paid two ruffians to dispose of the Babes, was supposed to have lived.

From the 14th century until 1975 the wood was owned by the de Grey Family, but it was almost lost during Elizabethan times when Robert de Grey, a staunch Papist, who owned it at the time, was in Norwich gaol (jail) after having refused to attend the Anglican services or to pay the fines incurred by his action.

The tale is also depicted on our Town Sign and adopted by our Town Council. The children under the tree are taken from ‘Babes in the Wood’, the legend that two children were abandoned in Wayland Wood and left to die. The tale was first published by Thomas Millington in Norwich in 1595.

There are 5 oak trees on site, with ages estimated between 180 and 237.

## **Breckland Landscape Character Assessment Settlement Fringe Study**

**(2007):** considers there to be three-character areas on land surrounding Watton, one of which being the ‘Wayland Plateau’ which states:

*‘The overall management objective for Wayland Plateau should be to conserve existing small-scale features such as woodland and common land, whilst maintaining the open, expansive views. The small-scale intimate character of the villages should be retained and enhanced. Opportunities should be sought to strengthen the biodiversity of the character area in line with the Norfolk BAP objectives (field margins and ancient woodland) and the principles and guidelines of the Norfolk Ecological Network Mapping Project.*

### **The Old Turnstile:**

Every week, I walk past this rotting relic of the past. This part of the site isn’t even recognised as part of the footpath despite regular use. There is a gap in the thicket next to it to get through – or walk down the field to the actual footpath. It would be a shame to see this go as it contributes to the character of the site.



## **4. Utilise natural divides and corridors / TPOs:**

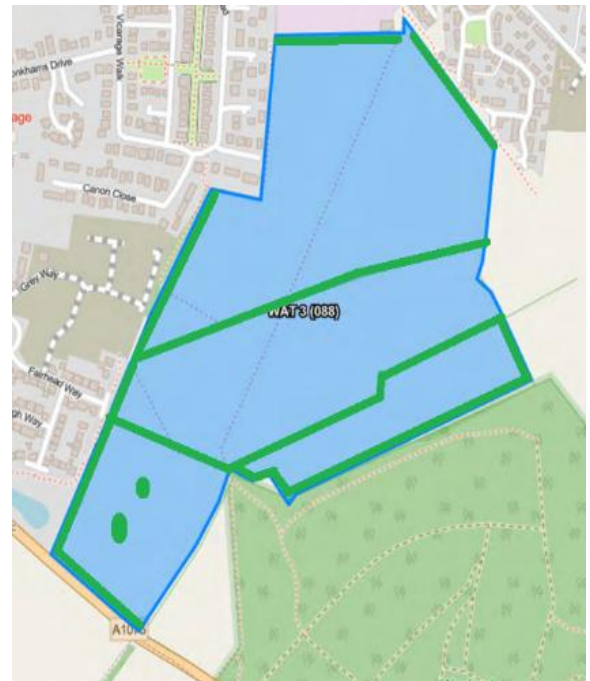
The corridors of trees and shrubs between plots of land on this site are an essential food source for many birds, rodents and deer. Heart of England state, ‘hedgerows in the Forest are particularly valuable to wildlife, supporting around 50% of our mammals, 30% of our butterflies and 80% of our

woodland birds, as well as amphibians and reptiles too.' This is a huge % of wildlife. Please consider saving the established ecology from demolition and protecting the oak trees with Tree Protection Orders (TPO).

There are x2 oak trees in the centre of the southern field which contribute to the character, history of the site and provide shade and habitat. They are directly next to a public footpath, and without them, the landscape is just a field outside of the woods. There are a total of 5 oak trees on or adjacent to the site that could qualify for a TPO. I would suggest asking for a provisional TPO which lasts for 6 months, to protect the trees from harm in the interim of decision making.

Rough estimations put the 5 oak trees between 180 and the oldest of approx. 237 years. Some have been trimmed, and some have active dead wood and hollowing trunks. For context, the oldest oak on site may have seen the days before the industrial revolution under King George III.

Oak tree's hold a special connection with Watton, being on our town sign in memory to 'The babes in the woods' and it's written that the Wayland Hundred once goverened from under a large oak tree. Today there are very few oaks left in the wood. Pollen samples found under Neolithic barrows have also indicated oak forest based soil in Breckland.





## 5. Demographic provision:

Watton has a varied demographic of people who live next to this site and use the public footpath. The largest groups of people impacted by this proposal will be 65+ homeowners, dog-walkers and young people. They are interested in health and reliable local public services, however are dissuaded by the population growth that is needed to secure the additional services they would want.

Please consider what is best for the demographic you wish to serve with the local plan. We need houses and the goal is steep, but this can't damage town identity, diminish property values or impose a too large impact to their way of life.

## **This plan does not align with the Vision for Watton, set out in our neighborhood plan, or follows Breckland's own design guide.**

Specifically, the required proportion of affordable housing being met does not accomplish the goal of policy 5, housing mix. Through consultation with residents, Watton Town Council found that bungalows, warden assisted, retirement and care homes as well as family and starter homes. Breckland's own housing strategy agrees that there remains an under-delivery of new affordable housing.

### **In Breckland's Design Guide it states:**

*'1.2: All development proposals in Breckland must demonstrate how they respond to positive aspects of local character. The first step is developing an understanding of local character and identifying the important positive features for the design of the development to respond to.'*

- There is no mention of Wayland Woods, acknowledgement of heritage or other positive aspects of the site.

*'1.3: Development must be well-integrated into its surroundings so that it contributes to the wider area and helps to create successful new communities.'*

- They should mitigate the industrial site & impact on woodland while maintaining a quality footpath through landscaping and biodiversity increase.
- Reduce density of buildings so they might complement the existing houses and character of the site.
- Ensure its well connected with footpath alterations and include dog bins. The connections should prefer pedestrian and cycle provision over roadways to reduce pollution and maintain character.

*'1.4: The design of new development should ensure it is future proofed. This means embedding inclusive design and sustainable principles into projects, so that new places and buildings are resilient and attractive for all users into the future.'*

- New development must manage water consumption and surface water drainage responsibly. Consider another attenuation basin to reduce risk of flooding.
- Nature-friendly development encourages biodiversity and provides habitats for wildlife. Breckland has many locally and nationally important species and habitats,

which development needs to help protect. I don't see how this development nature friendly.

**Issues raised by members of the public:**

Watton Town Council held a public meeting on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December looking to consult the public regarding Breckland District Council's Local Plan Consultation. The information was gathered through written comments, open discussion, email and the meeting recorded.

(Comments have been submitted in addition to this document).

Written by Tomos Hutchings, Councillor for Watton Town Council, Member of Watton and Saham Flood Action Group & Norfolk Wildlife Trust Volunteer