



# DEDHAM VALE

AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (AONB)  
AND STOUR VALLEY

Management Plan 2016-2021

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Front cover image: *Bales and balloon over the Dedham Vale AONB* | Anthony Burch

Back cover image: *The Mill Stream (1814-15)* by John Constable (1776 – 1837)

With kind permission of the Ipswich Borough Council Collection (Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



*Fields just outside Bures* | Marcia Mellor

## AONB and Stour Valley

The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley Project area make up around 117 square miles of the Essex/Suffolk border in the East of England. The AONB is part of a suite of nationally protected landscapes that include National Parks and Heritage Coasts. The Dedham Vale AONB is the fourth smallest AONB of the AONBs in England and Wales. It was designated to ensure the natural beauty and special qualities of the area are conserved and enhanced for future generations. Much of the eastern end of the AONB is associated with the celebrated landscape artist, John Constable, and many of the views he painted remain recognisable today. Much of the middle section of the Stour Valley is associated with the nationally recognised artist Thomas Gainsborough. The wildlife and landscape views of the AONB and Stour Valley ensure that the area remains a nationally important asset.

## The AONB and Stour Valley Management Plan

The plan is drawn up by a partnership of organisations that have an interest in the area. These are drawn from the environmental; agricultural; business; community sectors and local authorities. The plan guides the work of these organisations and seeks to balance the need of the different sectors and ensuring that the AONB and Stour Valley remains an example of the finest landscape in the country. It is a statutory duty on local authorities with part of an AONB in their area to produce and review a management plan every five years.

The plan sets out a vision for the area and topic areas offering guidance on how the area should be managed.

## A Vision for the Area

The Plan outlines a vision for the area as:

*The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley Project area is a distinctive landscape with agriculture and wildlife at its core that retains its natural beauty and special qualities, which is conserved and enhanced by a wide ranging partnership. It is an area where residents feel a strong sense of belonging, visitors are welcomed to enjoy the countryside and the heritage is understood and appreciated by all.*

## Management Plan Topics

The plan has a series of strategic topics that outline the key issues and offer management objectives and policies to secure the vision for the area:

### 1. The Countryside

The plan seeks to conserve and enhance the AONB and Stour Valley by ensuring that land use decisions and development proposals reflect the special qualities of the area.

### 2. Residents and Villages

The plan seeks to encourage residents to contribute to the high quality environment they live in through engagement in projects and the planning system to ensure development is appropriate.

### 3. Enjoying the Area

The plan seeks to encourage visitors and residents to enjoy the landscapes, natural heritage and historic nature of the area without compromising its special qualities for future generations.

### 4. The River and Its Tributaries

The plan recognises that the Stour and its tributaries play an important part in the natural beauty of the area and in providing opportunities for quiet informal recreation. It also recognises the importance of flood risk management.

### 5. Climate Change

The plan recognises a wide body of evidence suggesting changes to the global climate. The plan seeks to highlight the potential impact of climate change on the area and how negative impacts can be reduced or mitigated against.

### 6. Working Together

The plan sets out how different organisations can work together to ensure the best for the AONB and Stour Valley. A Partnership made up of representatives of the environmental; agricultural; business; community sectors; amenity societies and local authorities, including parish councils, provide a forum for discussion on the best way to manage the area for the widest possible positive outcome.



Cattle Crossing | Nic Brown

## The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Partnership

It is an aspiration of the Partnership to work together to secure a high quality landscape in the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley underpinned by sustainable economic growth.

The Partnership is made up of 15 organisations and is the only body responsible for co-ordinating work to conserve and enhance the AONB and Stour Valley. The Partnership is co-ordinated by the AONB team, which is employed by Suffolk County Council and funded by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and Local Authorities. Much of the project work undertaken by the AONB team is funded by external grants, sponsorship and work in kind. The Partnership meets at least twice a year, to consider important issues related to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty in the AONB and Stour Valley.



*St Mary's Church, Belchamp Walter | Jane Ford*

# 1. FOREWORD



*Wooded Landscape with Herdsman Seated, (c. 1748)*  
by Thomas Gainsborough (1727 – 1788)  
With kind permission of Gainsborough's House, Sudbury

## 1.1 Chairmen of the Joint Advisory Committee and Partnership

The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley is one of England's finest landscapes with its riverside meadows, picturesque villages and rolling farmland. It is further set apart from other landscapes by its associations with some of England's most notable artists, including John Constable, Thomas Gainsborough and Sir Alfred Munnings.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) places a duty on Local Authorities to prepare and publish a five year Management Plan for AONBs and this is the third edition since 2000. We are delighted to be able to include much of the delightful Stour Valley in this plan, part of which we aspire to be designated as AONB.

For over 30 years the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Joint Advisory Committee and Partnership have worked to ensure that the natural beauty and special qualities of the area is conserved and enhanced for future generations. While this benefits those that live in the area it plays an increasingly important part in supporting local businesses that are encouraging visitors to enjoy the area becoming a driver in retaining and attracting the best

staff with all it has to offer. Sometimes known as 'natural capital' the combination of landscape, history and wildlife is a big pull to those that want to enjoy the beautiful places with all they have to offer.

Times move on and this plan reflects the new priorities for conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area as well as being presented in a more simplified structure. We believe that the Local Authorities recognise the importance of the nationally designated area and all the benefits that can bring to business, wildlife and local communities. The AONB Partnership has developed over the last five years with new partners bringing a fresh focus to ensuring the area remains special.

It is not just the work of the AONB Joint Advisory Committee and Partnership to ensure the area remains important and retains its natural beauty, everyone has a role to play in ensuring that the area remains one of England's finest. We will continue to work with everyone to ensure all views are heard and that the best decisions are made for the AONB and Stour Valley.



Councillor Nigel Chapman  
Chairman of the Joint Advisory Committee



Robert Erith TD DL  
Chairman of the Partnership

## 2. INTRODUCTION



*September Afternoon on the Stour, Dedham (1939)*

by Sir Alfred Munnings (1878 – 1959)

Copyright the estate of Sir Alfred Munnings / The Munnings Art Museum, Dedham, Essex

## 2.1 Purpose of the Document

*“ I am convinced that the way to keep the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley an example the finest countryside in England is to work in Partnership with all the individuals and organisations that have an interest in the area. This plan will help us all working to the same objective, to keep the unspoilt rural character of the area that has evolved through generations of farmers working the land that is rich in wildlife, views and opportunities for getting out there and enjoying it.*

*We must all work together, under the umbrella of this plan, to ensure our children and our children's children can enjoy this very special place. A special place that people will come and enjoy and help build a sustainable local economy.*

*Our natural environment is under threat and I am convinced the only way that we can protect this special area is to work together with a common aim. This plan sets out how we can deliver what we want for the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley.* ”

Gareth Dalglish, Principal Advisor, Natural England

This Management Plan sets out the management objectives for the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley Project area. The management objectives are those agreed by the Local Authorities that have part of the AONB or Stour Valley Project area within their boundary and by organisations represented on the Project's Partnership, see appendix 2 for details of governance structures.

Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000)<sup>1</sup> requires Local Authorities to formulate policy for the management of AONBs. This Management Plan formulates that policy. Section 85 of the Act places a duty on all relevant authorities to *'have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty'*.

This Management Plan is set in the context of national and local policy and strategy and supports those policies and strategies that seek to advance the purposes of the AONB designation. This primary purpose is to conserve and enhance natural beauty with secondary purposes to meet the needs of recreation, safeguarding agriculture, forestry, and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities.<sup>2</sup>



Cows on Clare Common

<sup>1</sup> Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/part/IV>

<sup>2</sup> Purposes of AONB designation at <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/designations/aonb/>

## 2.2 Statement of Commitment

Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley Partnership members endorse this plan by agreeing the following statement:

*We endorse the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Management Plan 2016-21 and will use it as a guiding framework for maintaining and enhancing the special qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley. We will work in partnership with other organisations to deliver the vision for the area and maintain its natural beauty and special qualities.*

*As required by Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 this plan formulates policy for AONB local authorities relating to the management of the Dedham Vale AONB.*



*Children's craft workshop during the HLF Managing a Masterpiece project*



*Baythorne Hall, near Stoke by Clare*

## 2.3 What is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is an area of high scenic quality which has statutory protection in order to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of its landscape. In addition to high scenic quality AONBs often have strong associations with artists, heritage features or wildlife habitat. AONBs cover around 15% of the land area of England. There are currently 33 AONBs wholly in England one spanning the English/Welsh border, four wholly in Wales and a further 8 in Northern Ireland. Information on AONBs can be found on the National Association for AONBs website.<sup>3</sup>



Early photo of Dedham Lock

## 2.4 The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley Project

The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is situated on the Essex/Suffolk border in the East of England. It was designated as an AONB in 1970. The AONB covers the lower reaches of the River Stour and is bounded to the east by the Cattawade Marshes where the river becomes tidal. The western boundary runs between Bures and Wormingford. The northern and southern boundaries are situated a few kilometres either side of the river, at times following the Rivers Box and Brett that are tributaries of the Stour. See map on pages 16-17. The Dedham Vale AONB is the fourth smallest AONB in England at 90 square kilometres (around 35 square miles). It is essentially a farmed landscape, with a population of around 10,000. The area is

characterised by its picturesque villages, rolling farmland, rivers, meadows, ancient woodlands and a wide variety of local wildlife that combine to create what many describe as the traditional English lowland landscape.

A Landscape Character Assessment of the area recognises six distinct types of landscape: Valley Floor; Rolling Valley Farmlands; Rolling Estate Farmlands; Plateau Farmlands; Undulating Ancient Farmlands and Undulating Estate Farmlands, details of which can be seen on the Suffolk Landscape website, (the Essex side of the AONB is included in this mapping).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> National Association for AONBs website at <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/>

<sup>4</sup> Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment at <http://www.suffolklandscape.org.uk/default.aspx>

An Historic Landscape Study of the AONB and Project area provides historic layer to the Landscape Character Assessment. This work was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of the Managing a Masterpiece Landscape Partnership Scheme, and is also available to view on the Suffolk Landscape website.<sup>5</sup>

The Landscape of the area is described in Natural England's National Character Assessment 86, the summary of which states:

*'It is an ancient landscape of wooded arable countryside with a distinct sense of enclosure. The overall character is of a gently undulating, chalky boulder clay plateau, the undulations being caused by the numerous small-scale river valleys that dissect the plateau. There is a complex network of old species-rich hedgerows, ancient woods and parklands, meadows with streams and rivers that flow eastwards. Traditional irregular field patterns are still discernible over much of the area, despite field enlargements in the second half of the 20th century. The widespread moderately fertile, chalky clay soils give the vegetation a more or less calcareous character. Gravel and sand deposits under the clay are important geological features, often exposed during mineral extraction, which contribute to our understanding of ice-age environmental change'.<sup>6</sup>*

The Stour Valley Project area, upstream of the AONB, follows the River Stour that predominately forms the boundary between Essex and Suffolk. The Project area is 302 square kilometres (around 181 square miles) running from the Western AONB boundary past Sudbury and Haverhill to near the Cambridgeshire border at Great Bradley. It extends three to four kilometres either side of the River Stour with extensions along the Bumpstead Brook, Belchamp Brook and River Glem. See map on pages 16-17.

The Project area is predominately rural and often demonstrates medieval settlement patterns. In places the growth of villages and changes to agricultural practices have altered the landscape but not fundamentally changed it. Many of the villages retain their historic centres and have timber framed buildings, imposing churches and village greens. Historic hamlets and isolated farm buildings are scattered throughout the landscape.

The area has many woodlands situated within the tributary valleys but much of the valley floor is given over to arable crops with the notable exception of Sudbury Common Lands where large tracts of water meadows remain as an important feature of the landscape.



Aerial image of Nayland looking north | Mike Page

<sup>5</sup> Stour Valley Historic Landscape Study at <http://www.suffolklandscape.org.uk/managing%20a%20masterpiece.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> National Character Area 86 South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland at <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/509567797335040?category=587130>

## 2.5 Natural Beauty and Special Qualities

The Natural Beauty and Special Qualities of the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are neatly summarised in the Countryside Commission's publication 'The Dedham Vale Landscape'.<sup>7</sup> This document comments that the AONB landscape is:

*'...important because of its unspoilt rural character. It has remained remarkably free from the intrusion of modern development...'*

It goes on to comment:

*'Rich agricultural landscapes and woods are complemented by the consistent use of local building materials and colours in the villages and isolated cottages.'*

*'The visual harmony gives the AONB its strong sense of unity, which is vital to its aesthetic appeal and sense of place. Within this overall character, the landscape is greatly enhanced by rich contrasts in scenery and characteristic details.'*

The Landscape Character is assessed in the Historic Landscape Study<sup>8</sup> commissioned by the Heritage Lottery Funded Managing a Masterpiece Landscape Partnership Scheme.

The key Natural Beauty characteristics can be summarised as:

### Landscape quality:

A distinctive valley floor, with the River Stour gently running through it, flanked by water meadows with characteristic drainage ditches. The valley sides demonstrate a pattern of woodlands consistent with the local topography, soil type and agricultural viability. Fields on the valley sides tend to be small and irregular bounded by hedgerows that can be traced back over many generations. The mosaic of features combines to contribute towards important ecological networks.

The boundary features are in good condition, despite the ravages of elm disease in the 1970s and changes to farming practices although there has been much restoration in the last 30 years due to changes in attitudes and the implementation of agri-environment schemes.

Landscape quality is enhanced by a sense of tranquillity experienced in the area. Some forms of development and recreational pursuits can lead to a loss of relative tranquillity which the Campaign to Protect Rural England<sup>9</sup> includes:

- Perceived links to nature
- Positive features in the landscape
- The importance of wildlife
- Peace, quiet and calm

The Campaign to Protect Rural England notes that factors included in the loss of tranquillity include:

- Disruptive behaviour of other people
- Noise, especially from cars
- Overt signs of human development
- Negative features in the landscape

The River Stour retains a natural appearance despite its function as a navigation and current role as a conduit for the water supply system. Some modification to land use has taken place on the banks in the form of willow plantations.

### Scenic quality:

A distinctive sense of place is achieved due to the landform, woodland cover, and land-use and settlement pattern. Villages play a key part in contributing to the scenic quality, being historic in nature with many timber framed building and often dominated by churches situated in prominent locations. The sense of place is further enhanced by the areas close association England's finest landscape artist, John Constable.

As the area is sparsely populated the landscape suggests a timeless quality providing views, which are often surprisingly long from higher ground, without the clutter of present day infrastructure. This contributes to an intimate feel of the landscape and if further enhanced by an attractive pattern of arable, pasture and woodland.

### Special qualities:

The special qualities of the AONB can be summarised as:

- Iconic lowland river valley associated with the artist John Constable RA, the views he painted are still recognisable today
- Historic villages with timber framed housing and prominent churches
- Valley bottom grazing marshes with associated drainage ditches and wildlife
- Naturally functioning River Stour with associated tributaries, meres and historic river management features
- Semi natural ancient woodlands on valley sides with associated wildlife
- Traditional field boundaries intact and well managed
- Apparent and buried archaeology indicating millennia of human activity
- A sense of relative tranquillity
- Surprisingly long distance views from higher ground along the valley in an area associated with large skies

<sup>7</sup> *The Dedham Vale Landscape: An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*. Countryside Commission CCP516 1997 ISBN 0 86170 475 4 Available from Natural England (hard copy only) at <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/designations/aonb/dedhamvalemanagement.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> *Historic Landscape Study* at [http://www.suffolklandscape.org.uk/userfiles/pdfs/DV%20Hist%20landscape%20Study/Core\\_Document\\_MaM\\_LandscapeCharacterStudy.pdf](http://www.suffolklandscape.org.uk/userfiles/pdfs/DV%20Hist%20landscape%20Study/Core_Document_MaM_LandscapeCharacterStudy.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> *Campaign to Protect Rural England: Tranquil Places* at: <http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/countryside/tranquil-places>

## 2.6 Responsibility for Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley

Natural England is responsible for designating land as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and any future boundary variations. Natural England is also responsible for offering advice to Government and others on how AONBs should be managed and protected.

In section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) 'all relevant authorities' have a responsibility to have due regard for the purposes of the AONB 'in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or as to affect land in an AONB' A relevant authority is any Minister of the Crown, public body, statutory undertaker or person holding public office. A list of relevant authorities is given in section 4.2 appendix 3.

The relevant Local Authorities with respect to the AONB has a duty to prepare and publish a Management Plan for the area and review it every five years. In the case of the Dedham Vale AONB the relevant Local Authorities are Babergh District Council; Colchester Borough Council; Essex County Council; Suffolk County Council and Tendring District Council.

Beyond the AONB boundary, Local Authorities took a decision to offer an 'AONB service' to the Stour Valley Project area. This decision brings two further Local Authorities, Braintree District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council into the Partnership.

To ensure the efficient and co-ordinated management of the AONB and Stour Valley Project area, a Joint Advisory Committee and Partnership were formed in 1993. The former deals in particular with the governance of the AONB team, a staff unit that acts as the operation arm of the Partnership, funded by Defra and Local Authorities. The Partnership itself is made up of organisations with particular interest in the AONB and Stour Valley and each member works to implement the Management Plan. Membership of the Joint Advisory Committee and Partnership is outlined in appendix 2.



*Walkers on the Stour Valley Path*

## 2.6.1 Determining planning applications in the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Unlike in National Parks, planning decisions relating to development applications in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) remain with the Local Planning Authorities. The National Planning Policy Framework highlights the importance of development plans in decision making and notes Local Planning Authorities should have specific policies relating to the conservation and enhancement of AONBs. Where development plans are absent, silent or relevant policies are out of date the National Planning Policy Framework notes that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty<sup>10</sup> regardless of the status or content of the Local Plan.



*River Stour*

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<sup>10</sup> See National Planning Policy Framework paragraphs 14 and 115 at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policyframework--2>

## 2.7 Area Covered by the Plan

The designated Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley Project area is shown in the map below. It is an aspiration of the AONB Partnership to extend the AONB into part of what is now the Stour Valley Project area.

The Plan seeks to outline the management of both the designated AONB and the Stour Valley Project area.



## 2.8 International, National and Local Context

Protected areas such as the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) remain the fundamental concept of national and international conservation strategies supported by Governments. AONBs are recognised as Category V Protected Landscapes under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (ICUN) global framework <sup>11</sup>.

The UK Government promotes the importance of the AONB designation through its own plans, strategy and policy such as its Landscape Position Statement<sup>12</sup> drawn up for Defra by Natural England and The National Planning Policy Framework.<sup>13</sup>

The Rural Economy Growth Review<sup>14</sup> in 2011 and the Natural Environment White Paper<sup>15</sup> (2011) both recognise the role of protected landscapes in connecting people with nature and contributing to the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the areas.

AONBs make up around 15% of the land mass of England and work collaboratively through the National Association for AONBs<sup>16</sup> to further the socio-economic and environmental wellbeing of our finest landscapes.

Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000)<sup>17</sup> places a duty on all public bodies and statutory undertakers to 'have regard' to the purposes of conserving and enhancing natural beauty of AONBs.

At a local level, Local Planning Authorities, in addition to responsibilities outlined in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000), have developed plans, policies and strategies to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB.

Local Authorities have taken the decision to provide an AONB type service to the wider Stour Valley as defined by the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project area.



Map showing the AONBs in Britain – they cover 18% of our countryside

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/gpap\\_home/gpap\\_quality/gpap\\_pacategories/gpap\\_category5/](http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/gpap_home/gpap_quality/gpap_pacategories/gpap_category5/)

<sup>12</sup> [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20101015025248/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/landscape-ps\\_tcm6-14812.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20101015025248/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/landscape-ps_tcm6-14812.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rural-economy-growth-review>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-natural-choice-securing-the-value-of-nature>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/section/85>

## 2.9 Statement of Significance

The Statement of Significance defines the natural beauty, character and special qualities of the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley Project area. It provides the criteria against which impacts on the nationally designated landscape can be judged.

*The Dedham Vale AONB is a subtle lowland river valley with an assemblage of features associated with this landscape still in place and intact. These features include a gently winding river and tributaries; gentle valley sides with scattered woodlands; sunken rural lanes; picturesque villages with imposing churches and historic timber framed buildings; scattered farmsteads and agricultural buildings; small fields enclosed by ancient hedgerows; riverside grazing meadows with associated drainage ditches and visible and hidden archaeology providing evidence of human habitation over previous millennia.*

*The area remains an overwhelmingly agricultural landscape, free of incongruous development and large scale industrial developments. Despite some intrusions of human activity in the twentieth and twenty first centuries, the area retains a rural charm and tranquillity and is largely free of infrastructure associated with modern life.*

*The essential character of the Dedham Vale AONB was established in the middle of the previous millennium and has remained intact despite social, technological events. The fundamental beauty of the area and the scenes of a working landscape were captured by England's finest landscape artist, John Constable RA. The sites of those outdoor paintings are still recognisable in the heart of what is now the AONB.*

The key components of the AONB are:

- A gentle and subtle lowland river valley with the River Stour gently meandering through it. The valley is cut down through boulder clays that overlay sands and gravels into clay deposits and Thanet and Reading beds. As the River Stour winds its way to the estuary the floodplain becomes dominated by grazing marshes that are made up of alluvium deposits and gravel terraces.
- The settlements of the area are largely historic and dominated by timber framed buildings around the village centres. Churches with impressive towers dominate the surrounding countryside. The rural character is further defined by scattered agricultural farmsteads and the visible and buried archaeology of the area.
- The routeways around the AONB broadly follow the valley contours as they characteristically wind their way around the landscape. Other routes link the flood plains to the higher land and are often steep, sunken and bounded by banks with ancient hedgerows and wildflower rich verges. The navigation on the River Stour provides an alternative way to explore the area beyond the footpaths and bridleways of the area.
- A pattern of semi natural ancient woodlands on the valley sides, often irregular in shape with natural springs and minor brooks. The woodlands create an impression of an intimate landscape.
- The patterns of fields are defined by ancient hedgerows and tree lines in much of the area although the grazing marshes associated with the valley floor are often subdivided by a series of drainage ditches and dykes.



Aerial of River Stour near Higham | Mike Page



Nayland



Sunken lane near Polsted



Farmland

The components of the Dedham Vale AONB combine to create important ecological networks and support a diverse range of wildlife particularly at the transition from one habitat type to another. The value of the landscape is widely appreciated by residents and those that come to the area, in particular its heritage; artistic connections; views and feeling of being in countryside uncluttered by modern infrastructure.

Much of the Stour Valley Project area shares similar characteristics to the Dedham Vale AONB, particularly the area nearest the existing AONB.

The Stour Valley Project area is predominately rural with a medieval settlement pattern. The area has many of the characteristics associated with the AONB including the patterns of woodland on the valley sides, the River Stour running gently through it and a scattering of historic picturesque villages.

Woodlands are situated within the tributary valleys and on the valley sides. Much of the valley floor has been given over to arable crops with the notable exception of the Sudbury Common Lands. Generally fields have been enlarged but some evidence of former boundaries can still be seen.



Arger Fen bluebells | Steve Aylward



River Stour at Dedham | Visit Essex

## 2.10 Vision Statement

It is the aim of this plan that:

*The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley Project area is a distinctive landscape with agriculture and wildlife at its core that retains its natural beauty and special qualities, which is conserved and enhanced by a wide ranging partnership. It is an area where residents feel a strong sense belonging, visitors are welcomed to enjoy the countryside and the heritage is understood and appreciated by all.*



Flatford canoe safari | Outdoor Hire Centre



Apple pressing at Flatford

## 2.11 Natural Beauty and Special Qualities Document

The Natural Beauty and Special Qualities of the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and an area to the West of its current boundary are described in two documents commissioned by the AONB team and paid for by donations from Parish Councils and Amenity Societies. The document forms the basis of understanding the qualities of the area and follows the format of the designation process of AONBs.



*Kings Marsh at Sudbury Common Lands*



*Aerial image of Dedham and surrounding river valley | Mike Page*

## 2.12 Review of 2010-2015 plan

The last Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley Project area Management Plan was adopted by the Partnership in 2010. Regular monitoring was undertaken and progress against the action plan was reported to the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Partnership. An evaluation of the previous plan has drawn the following conclusions:

- The AONB vision, statement of significance and management objectives are largely valid but need minor modifications to reflect contemporary thinking and the priorities of the Partnership
- The AONB Partnership has been broadened to reflect the increasing importance of working together to secure positive outcomes for the area's landscape and wildlife
- 74% of actions have been totally completed. 86% of the actions from the last plan had been at least partially completed.
- Reductions in funding to the AONB team, resulting in a staff reduction within the core staff team, have been offset by securing externally funded project activity, sponsorship of individual projects and increasing use of volunteers.



*Bikes at Flatford*



*Visitors enjoy a boat trip on Stour Trusty II*



*Constable Country Volunteers Rangers welcome visitors*

Notable successes during the plan period 2010-2015 include:

- Improved information for visitors and residents
- Securing externally funded project activity, notably Managing a Masterpiece<sup>18</sup>, a Heritage Lottery Funded Landscape Partnership Scheme and the River Stour Project funded by the Environment Agency.
- Landscape enhancements in the form of undergrounding low voltage overhead power cables via Ofgem allowance
- Development of the Stour Valley Environment Fund, administered by the Essex Community Foundation
- Supporting sustainable transport initiatives, notably support for the Dedham Vale Hopper Bus
- Sponsorship of individual projects from local and regional businesses such as downloadable circular walk guides; Stour Valley Path guide and AONB visitor guide
- A Partnership aspiration to extend the current boundary of the AONB
- Recognition by National Grid, during their proposals to strengthen their distribution network, that the Stour Valley shares many of the characteristics of the AONB
- Increasing volunteer activity in both numbers and breadth of activity
- c£250,000 distributed to local community groups, businesses and individuals for Sustainable Development Projects



*Overhead lines at Flatford, due to be undergrounded in the lifetime of this plan*



*Learning about non-native invasive plants*



*School craft workshop during the HLF Managing a Masterpiece project*

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.managingamasterpiece.org/>

### 3. CONTEXT AND ISSUES



*A Suffolk Landscape (1936)* by John Nash (1893 – 1977)

The Estate of John Nash. All Rights Reserved 2010 / Bridgeman Art Library. Photo © Tate, London 2016

### 3.1 The Countryside

“ *The tranquil landscape of the River Stour valley, the setting for many of the paintings of the renowned artist John Constable is in many ways the quintessential lowland river valley of England. The great landscape artist is quoted when writing about the Dedham Vale:*

*'The sound of water, escaping from mill dams, & willows, old rotten planks, slimy posts, and brickwork, I love such things'*

*The evocative quote will strike a chord with many of us that love the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley, and we will all have our favourite aspects of the area. Whatever our favourite element we should not forget that it is shaped by those that work. The hedgerows, the trees and woodland or the wildlife it supports are all there because people care with a passion about their local area.*

*Modern life presents many pressures to one of the smallest AONBs in England and we must be vigilant to keep the countryside of the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley a cherished place to live.* ”

Charles Clover, Chairman, Dedham Vale Society

The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley Project area is a place that provokes strong feelings of loyalty, pride and passion. This sense of place and belonging was in part the driving force for the 1960s campaign to recognise the special landscape of the Dedham Vale through AONB designation. This local distinctiveness should be safeguarded by all those with an interest in the area.

The nationally applied AONB designation ensures that the area receives special protection to conserve and enhance its natural beauty. This special consideration was reaffirmed in the National Planning Policy Framework published in 2012.<sup>19</sup> The definition of natural beauty encompasses the area's scenic quality but also includes the conservation of its flora, fauna, geological and physiographical features.<sup>20</sup>

Agriculture is the primary driver for landscape management in the area, and many of the key landscape features such as hedgerows, grasslands and woodlands are dependent on farming practices. Agriculture is supported to conserve and enhance these features by a series of agri-environment schemes, sponsored by Defra through European Union programmes.



Farming in the Stour Valley

<sup>19</sup> National Planning Policy Framework at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

<sup>20</sup> Section 92(2) of the Countryside and Rights Of Way Act (2000) at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/contents>

The value of the countryside in the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley is recognised by many organisations that seek to conserve and enhance its natural beauty. The European Landscape Convention<sup>21</sup> seeks to integrate policy to protect all landscapes. Local Planning Authorities seek to protect these special landscapes through their policy in their Local Plans.

Natural England has produced guidance for the management of this special landscape through a series of National Character Areas (NCA). NCA 86<sup>22</sup> covers much of the AONB and Stour Valley and provides a broad range of information that can be used by individuals and communities to help achieve greater enhancement of the distinctive features of the landscape. The profiles include a description of how the natural environment can contribute to the welfare of people and protect resources provided in each character area and how these benefit people, wildlife and the economy. They identify opportunities for positive environmental change and provide the best available information and evidence as a context for local decision making and action.

The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Partnership, see appendix 2, resolved in 2009 that their long term ambition is for a review of the boundary of the AONB with a desire to see the current

boundary extended westwards towards Sudbury. In 2014 the Partnership submitted additional information to Natural England, the body with the power to designate AONBs, to demonstrate how the proposed area satisfies the statutory designation criteria as set out in Natural England's Designation Strategy.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the Partnership's long term ambition, the Local Authorities with parts of the area involved, Essex and Suffolk counties and Braintree and Babergh districts have written letters of support for the proposal to extend the current AONB boundary. A boundary extension would see a further area of the Stour Valley protected and the area benefit from additional resources to conserve and enhance its natural beauty such as the opportunity to bid for funding to underground overhead power cables and projects to enhance the landscape or mitigate negative impacts of infrastructure.

The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Partnership support projects that promote food and local energy sustainability where they can be demonstrated to meet with the purposes of the AONB designation.

The AONB and Stour Valley countryside is subject to many pressures, some which are described below:



*Heron and swans*



*Wiston Hall pumpkins*

<sup>21</sup> European Landscape Convention at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/236096/8413.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/236096/8413.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> National Character Area 86, South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland at [http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications/nca/south\\_suffolk\\_and\\_north\\_essex\\_clayland.aspx](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications/nca/south_suffolk_and_north_essex_clayland.aspx)

<sup>23</sup> Natural England's designation strategy at <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/designations/designationsstrategy.aspx>

### 3.1.1 Landscape

There have been many landscape gains over the past thirty years alongside an increased awareness of the special qualities of the landscape and its natural and built heritage. Environmental Stewardship, European Union funding channelled through DEFRA, to farmers and landowners to make environmental gains through the Higher Level and Entry Level Schemes has contributed to significant landscape and wildlife gains. There have been numerous projects to enhance the features that make the area so important; from hedgerow schemes and woodland management to the reversion of arable land to grassland. The significance of the villages to the character of the area has been increasingly recognised and local development plans have reinforced the need for high quality development to contribute to that character.

There are still many challenges to retaining the landscape character of the area, such as incremental development, leading to suburbanisation of the countryside. The demand for infrastructure to support modern living continues and can pose a risk to landscape quality. Where the proposals are for relatively small scale infrastructure development, careful design and siting can mitigate these impacts satisfactorily. The threat of major infrastructure projects and development continues, and there is a high potential for such developments to have a negative impact

on the natural beauty of the area. The Partnership continues to engage in debates around the merits or otherwise of such proposals and is actively involved in consultation opportunities relating to major infrastructure development.

Renewable energy proposals, be they wind, solar, hydro, biofuel etc. can have a significant impact upon the landscape quality of the area. The Partnership has developed a position statement<sup>24</sup> on renewable energy and seeks to support such development where it does not have a significant adverse impact upon the natural beauty of the area.

The countryside of the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley is subject to what many see as overwhelming evidence of climate change. Any significant change in the climate will present challenges to the area including an increase in flooding events, and impacts on farming, wildlife, transport systems and tourist businesses. Increased understanding of the potential impacts of climate change and the need to adapt conservation, farming, and transport and tourism sectors will need to be addressed. Management objectives contained within this Plan seek to support adaptation measures to offset the impacts of climate change.



Power lines at Sulleys Manor Farm, Lower Raydon

<sup>24</sup> Renewable Energy in the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty at <http://www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org/planning-and-projects/planning-and-development/>

### 3.1.2 Wildlife

Habitats and the transition between habitats, provide some excellent conditions for wildlife in the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley countryside. The area has seven Sites of Special Scientific Interest<sup>25</sup> (the nation's best wildlife and or geological sites). Around 2% of the land area of the AONB is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, including part of the Special Protection Area and Ramsar site known as the Stour and Orwell Estuaries. These sites are particularly vulnerable to changes in management, potential impacts of climate change, fragmentation of habitat and loss of connectivity. In addition to the Sites of Special Scientific Interest there are 94 Local or County Wildlife Sites<sup>26</sup> which are selected by Local Authorities and support a wide range of wildlife.

Wildlife habitats are becoming increasingly fragmented which is recognised by the Lawton report in 2010 (Making Space for Nature)<sup>27</sup> which called for bigger better and more joined up approach to nature conservation. The wildlife in the AONB and Stour Valley can only thrive if the principles of the Lawton report are applied and that the approach is one of landscape scale conservation.

Countryside Stewardship is an agri environment scheme designed to help landowners and land managers make environmental improvements, including those that support wildlife to their land<sup>28</sup>. It is supported by the Common Agricultural Policy.



Young Barn Owls | Neil Catchpole

<sup>25</sup> Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Explanation at <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/designations/ssi/>

<sup>26</sup> Local Wildlife Sites. Explanation at <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/designations/localsites/default.aspx>

<sup>27</sup> Making Space for Nature at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/218690/201009space-for-nature.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/218690/201009space-for-nature.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Information on Countryside Stewardship at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cap-reform-introducing-countryside-stewardship>

### 3.1.3 Current Pressures

Current pressures on the countryside in the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley include:

- Economies of Scale in farming leading to use of larger vehicles on rural roads
- Incremental changes in land use such as farmland being converted to horse paddocks or large gardens
- Loss of relative tranquillity due to changes in recreational pursuits and commercial and recreational overflying
- Industrial scale renewable energy projects such as solar farms
- Loss of wildlife habitat and species
- Increasing pests and diseases such as Chalara
- Urbanisation of the area through insensitive infrastructure developments such as transport, communication and utilities infrastructure and technological developments



*Stour Valley landscape*

### 3.1.4 The Countryside: Management Objectives

- Land use management decisions demonstrate consideration to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley.
- The landscape features of the AONB and Stour Valley are conserved and enhanced.
- The AONB and Stour Valley's heritage, landscape and wildlife are widely acknowledged and understood.



Wormingford 'dragon', Old Bures | Cathy Shelbourne



Robin at Rodbridge | Stephen Thomson

### 3.1.5 Management Plan Policies:

- Lobby for national and local planning policies to reflect the significance of the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley.
- Support development that contributes to the appropriate economic development and contributes to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB and Stour Valley.
- Protect the area, including its setting, from developments that detract from its natural beauty and special qualities, including its relative tranquillity.
- Resist fragmentation of farmland and wildlife habitats and encourage landscape scale co-ordination of initiatives, including Environmental Stewardship, to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley.
- Support the aspiration to extend the AONB boundary to the west of its existing limit.
- Improve understanding of the AONB and Stour Valley in particular its natural beauty and special qualities.
- Maintain the local distinctiveness of the AONB and Stour Valley.
- Work in partnership to minimise impacts of diseases and pests such as Chalara on the landscape features.



*Cropmarks*

## 3.2 Villages and Residents

*“The Stour Valley is famed for its picturesque villages. Indeed many new visitors to the area are bowled over by not just the examples of historic buildings in our villages but the sheer number of them too. That is before you start exploring some of the fine churches that often date back many hundreds of years and were built to exacting standards with flint knapped walls.*

*Many of those residents contribute to the Stour Valley. Whether they work in the land based industries or participate in some other way through looking after bits of their local environment or contribute to projects that support their local community.”*

Jeremy Cohen, Former chairman of the Dedham Vale Society and current Partnership member

The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley is a relatively sparsely populated area with most people living in village settlements that can trace their history back to the Saxon period and are listed in the Domesday Book of 1086.

The majority of the settlements have a distinctive settlement pattern with dwellings clustered around small angular greens or tyes. Medieval churches have often been built in prominent positions and knapped in flint reflecting the areas prosperity and the importance of religion during the time of construction.

Villages show a rich heritage of building styles, reflecting changing building techniques, fashions and relative wealth over the centuries of development but many retain a core of medieval timber framed buildings. Beyond the villages there are a series of isolated farmsteads and manorial halls (often moated) reflecting the areas agricultural heritage and accumulated wealth.

According to a survey by Lloyds Bank<sup>29</sup> the price of homes in the Dedham Vale AONB continue to be above the national average and increasing at a faster rate than those in surrounding areas.

The population profile of the East of England, that includes the AONB and Stour Valley, shows that the population has a slightly older demographic and a higher growth rate than the national average.<sup>30</sup>



Dedham High Street

<sup>29</sup> Survey results at: [http://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/globalassets/documents/media/press-releases/lloyds-bank/2012/1106\\_aonb.pdf](http://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/globalassets/documents/media/press-releases/lloyds-bank/2012/1106_aonb.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Office of National Statistics at: <http://ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nsl=Population#tab-data-tables>

### 3.2.1 Current Trends

Data provided by Defra's rural statistics unit in 2012<sup>31</sup> shows the following information about the AONB:

- There are 385 businesses operating in the area (19% Professional, scientific and technical services; 12% in agriculture, forestry and fishing; 7% in information and communication and 4% in accommodation and food services).
- 2,455 people are employed in the area including 295 in agriculture, forestry and fishing.
- There are 35 tourism related businesses supporting 445 jobs.
- The average gross annual income for those living in the area is £38,480 being above the East of England (rural) region average of £35,650.

The data reflects a perception of the AONB and Stour Valley area as a relatively wealthy area with important economic activity in the agriculture, information and communications technology and tourism sectors.

The premium on house prices in the area reflects the position that the area is seen as a desirable place to live, given its natural beauty and accessibility to London.



Bell cage of St Mary's Church, East Bergholt | Simon Davis

<sup>31</sup> Defra Rural Statistics at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics>

### 3.2.2 Development and Infrastructure

For the area to thrive, the AONB and Stour Valley must accommodate development and infrastructure that does not detract from its natural beauty and special qualities. Development needs to be designed to enhance the areas natural beauty and be of a scale that is does not have a negative impact upon the areas special qualities. The recognition of the areas qualities is best addressed when Local Planning Authorities engage with local communities and representative organisations to ensure all issues are considered when planning new development and infrastructure proposals.

The Partnership, through the staff team, welcomes the opportunity to comment on planning applications in the AONB and Stour Valley, and encourages the Local Planning Authorities to consult with the team on development applications that impact upon the special qualities of the area due to their scale or location.

Consideration should be given to the Partnership aspiration to extend the AONB boundary, to the west of its current boundary, when determining development proposals.



*Flatford Lock*

### 3.2.3 Infrastructure

Local infrastructure for residents and visitors that can impact upon the purposes of the AONB designation and the beauty of the Stour Valley includes the road network, local energy distribution networks and communications infrastructure.

The local road network often reflects historical transport routes and form part of the special qualities of the area. Sunken lanes are often designated as protected lanes<sup>32</sup> in district and borough council local plans and these are at risk from use over by commuters using them as 'rat runs' and by oversized vehicles relying on inappropriate satellite navigation system routes.

Local electricity distribution networks can have a detrimental impact on the natural beauty of the area and new connections should consider the potential impact on the AONB and Stour Valley landscape. An Ofgem scheme<sup>33</sup> to underground low voltage overhead power cables in designated protected landscapes, such as AONBs, should be used where possible to offset the negative impacts of this type of infrastructure.

Communications infrastructure including masts to host mobile technology, communication 'boxes' and cables hosting telephone

and internet connections have the potential to conflict with the primary purposes of the AONB and the natural beauty of the Stour Valley. It is widely recognised that this form of technology is vital to residents' everyday lives, including the operation of local businesses, and as such careful consideration should be given to the positioning of this type of infrastructure.

National infrastructure in the AONB and Stour Valley such as trunk roads; national rail routes; national grid energy transmission equipment and water transfer structures can negatively impact upon the purposes of the AONB and the natural beauty of the Stour Valley. It is recognised that national infrastructure is vital to the country's well being and has benefits for local residents but the importance of the national designation of AONB in the Dedham Vale means that decisions relating to national infrastructure projects need to take into account the primary purposes of the designated landscape<sup>34</sup>.

Infrastructure relating to the transfer of water along the River Stour is discussed in sections 3.4 and 3.4.1.



Early photo of Flatford lock

<sup>32</sup> Essex protected Lanes at <http://www.placeservices.co.uk/projects/protected-lanes/>

<sup>33</sup> Details of operation of Ofgem allowance in Dedham Vale AONB at <http://www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org/planning-and-projects/undergrounding-projects-2/>

<sup>34</sup> See section 85 of Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/section/8>

### 3.2.4 Historic and new settlements

The AONB and Stour Valley has a wide range of previously occupied sites, such as Clare Camp; Court Knoll; Mount Bures and Wormingford Lodge. These sites are often Scheduled Monuments<sup>35</sup> and are important to help the understanding and provide an opportunity to explore the areas past and its inhabitants for by professionals and local residents.

New housing and business development is welcomed where it sits well with the patterns of historic villages and where it contributes to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley. Developments that promote a sense of place and contribute to the architectural patterns of the area and seek to meet the needs of the community in terms of affordable housing are welcomed. Development should be directed away from areas at risk to flooding.

New development should reflect the purposes of the AONB designation and the natural beauty of the Stour Valley and be of an appropriate scale, conserve historic features and reflect the local character.

### 3.2.5 Current Pressures

Current pressures on the Residents and Villages in the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley include:

- Affordability of housing
- Viability of local businesses, particularly their connectivity through mobile and broadband connections
- Visitor pressure during peak periods at visitor hot spots
- Access to services
- Issues relating to an aging population



Family enjoying the Stour at Sudbury | David Taylor, River Stour Trust

<sup>35</sup> See definition of Scheduled Monuments at <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/listing/scheduled-monuments/>

### 3.2.6 Residents and Villages: Management Objectives

- Residents live in and contribute to a high quality environment.
- Development recognises the natural beauty of the area and contributes to the areas natural capital.
- Infrastructure is fit for purpose and does not detract from the qualities of the area including its relative tranquillity.

### 3.2.7 Management Plan Policies

- Ensure Local Plans reflect the need to conserve and enhance the AONB and Stour Valley
- Support development that contributes to the conservation and enhancement of local character
- Encourage communities to increase their understanding of the area and become involved in environmental projects to conserve and enhance the area
- Promote the appeal and distinctiveness of villages to help develop the visitor attractiveness
- Promote the role of villages as centres of rural economy, particularly their shops and service providers
- Lobby for Local Enterprise Partnerships to support activity that recognises the economic benefits of the area's natural capital
- Support the provision of high quality infrastructure, including roads, where it does not detract from the area's special qualities
- Work with Amenity Societies such as Dedham Vale Society and Colne Stour Countryside Association whose objectives support the Partnership's work
- Utilise Ofgem allowances and similar schemes to remove unsightly and redundant infrastructure from the landscape



*Great Bradley, near the source of the River Stour*

### 3.3. Enjoying the Area

“ Characterised by open spaces and ever changing big skies the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley countryside is perfect for a stroll, ride or a leisurely picnic or a place to treat yourself to a fine meal.

Contained within the one of England's most cherished landscapes are picturesque villages, rolling farmland, rivers, meadows and ancient woodlands are opportunities to walk and ride or you can take to the water by canoe, or let a near silent electric boat take you on a watery adventure.

For those whose aspirations go beyond the physical there is the chance to explore picturesque villages and impressive churches. If the mood takes you, you can walk in the footsteps of John Constable and see the views he painted nearly 200 years ago, which are still recognisable today. Otherwise you may wish to discover more about some of England's other fine artists at museums dedicated to Gainsborough and Munnings.

With a wealth of historical sites, including castles, archaeological sites and ancient buildings the area has much to offer. After a hard time exploring there are plenty of places to enjoy a meal or rest throughout the area. ”

Elli Constantatou, Tourism Marketing & PR Manager, Visit Essex

The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley is a place to enjoy. The area offers a wide variety of opportunities for walking; riding; boating; formalised sport; discovering history and heritage; wildlife watching; fine or rustic dining; environmental education; countryside sports; geocaching; environmental volunteering and visiting historical sites and buildings.

The tourism industry and charities rely on the many opportunities for enjoying the area and it is vital to the local economy of North Essex and South Suffolk. The industry is reliant on the natural beauty and special qualities of the area to attract people to them. It is a primary long term interest for this sector of the economy that the AONB and Stour Valley retains and enhances its landscape quality. It is important that the AONB Partnership and AONB team itself works closely with businesses to maintain these qualities.



Dedham High Street

An introduction to visiting the area is available from the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project's website<sup>36</sup> and from a downloadable guide of the AONB<sup>37</sup>.

Many people enjoy the area through the Public Rights of Way network, either using published guides for circular routes or the long distant paths such as the Stour Valley Path for walks or rides that include both bridleways and unclassified roads. There is a wide range of organisations that run guided events.

Local businesses offer the opportunity for superb dining in a wide variety of establishments from fine dining to traditional foods, often with associated accommodation.

There are opportunities to enjoy the area by volunteering to help the area's wildlife and undertake landscape improvements. Groups from the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project, the National Trust, RSPB, Sudbury Common Lands Charity, Wildlife Trusts, Parish Councils and Community groups offer regular opportunities.



*Family visiting Cherry Wood*

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<sup>36</sup> Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project website at <http://www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org/enjoying-the-area/>

<sup>37</sup> AONB guide at <http://www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org/publications/guide-to-the-aonb/>

### 3.3.1 Appeal of the Area

Much of the attraction to residents and visitors alike is the relative tranquillity and unspoilt nature of the AONB and Stour Valley. Although visitors are always encouraged and welcome to enjoy the AONB and Stour Valley there has been a recognition that developing the shoulder season (spring and autumn) for visits is important for individual businesses viability and protecting the experience of visiting the AONB and Stour Valley.

In addition to its natural beauty the area is known for its association with artists such as Constable, Gainsborough and Munnings. There is also a wealth of historical features that draw visitors including the Stour navigation, wealth of archaeology and historic and picturesque villages.

Likewise visitors are encouraged to visit in a sustainable way, by coming by train or using more sustainable transport methods once they have arrived in the area.

The growth in the popularity of cycling, canoeing, walking and running due to the desire for improving health and the positive experiences gained naturally fit with the aims of the AONB and Stour Valley.

Activities such as golf, country sports and learning about rural crafts are well catered for in the area and can fit well with the purposes of the AONB and contribute to the wellbeing of the Stour Valley.



*The Stour Lighter 'John Constable'* – restored during the HLF project Managing a Masterpiece – does regular trips | [River Stour Trust](#)

### 3.3.2 Co-ordination and Developing the Area for Tourism

The AONB and Stour Valley runs across many administrative boundaries but there has never been one organisation directly co-ordinating either tourism activity or promotion across the whole area. Specific parts of the AONB and Stour Valley and tourism sectors have been promoted and marketed by individual businesses and different organisations.

A Visitor Management Group, operating in the Flatford area, has for many years brought representatives of the different interests together to influence behaviour of visitors once they have arrived in the area but promotion of the area is largely down to individual organisations choices.

The development of a group to promote the area and communicate what the AONB and Stour Valley has to offer, while encouraging appropriate behaviour from those that do come to enjoy the natural beauty and special qualities of the area, is likely to be welcomed by those in the private, public and third sectors.



Road sign in the Dedham vale

### 3.3.3 A Fragile Environment

Those that come to the area enjoy the relative tranquillity and unspoilt nature of the area. Large scale recreational facilities and noisy or intrusive pastimes are likely to have a negative impact on the special qualities of the area and its relative tranquillity.

The intimate nature of the AONB and Stour Valley can require careful consideration of visitor facilities and infrastructure, in respect of signs and car parking. Any development should consider the primary purpose of the AONB, to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.

### 3.3.4 Information

Information provided for visitors is key to increasing visitor numbers, enjoyment, understanding and encouraging appropriate behaviour. Information is currently available from a wide range of sources and in different formats.

Information should reflect the different interests in the area and it is appropriate that information is available in a wide variety of formats including: books and pamphlets; leaflets; web based; via social media; static displays; staff and press articles.

It is appropriate that information is disseminated by a variety of methods providing it is fit for purpose and meets the needs of visitors. There is some benefit in having cross promotion between organisations and sectors, and shared messages relating to the area's natural beauty would contribute to the primary purposes of the AONB and supporting the conservation of the Stour Valley.

### 3.3.5 Current Pressures

Current pressures on Enjoying the Area in the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley include:

- Lack of a body to market the area and co-ordinate the visitor offer
- Minimal facilities to make a visit more sustainable eg cycle hire, dedicated cycle routes, public transport
- Concentration of visitor activity at certain times of the year and to certain destinations



River Stour at Dedham – visitors can enjoy exploring with Stour Trusty II and rowing boats | [Visit Essex](#)

### 3.3.6 Enjoying the Area: Management Objectives:

- Promote enjoyment of the AONB and Stour Valley.
- Promote visitor activity that does not detract from the areas natural beauty and special qualities including its relative tranquillity.
- Improve understanding of the AONB and the features that contribute to its natural beauty and special qualities.

### 3.3.7 Management Plan Policies

- Support new visitor facilities that reflect the scale and qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley.
- Support activity that encourages residents to use the countryside on their doorstep.
- Support activity to encourage visits that do not adversely impact the area's natural beauty.
- Support initiatives to encourage sustainable transport to and from the area and for travel within the area.
- Make improvements to the Public Rights of Way network and develop new opportunities for walking and riding.
- Support initiatives such as the Expect and Respect element of the Quiet Lanes project and Protected Lanes projects across AONB and Stour Valley.
- Support co-ordination of the visitor product including provision of information.
- Raise awareness of the importance of the AONB designation to visitor service providers and visitors.
- Promote behaviours that do not adversely impact the special qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley.
- Promote the introduction of appropriate speed limits within the AONB.



*Dedham Vale Youth Rangers putting up new dog signage to help encourage good dog behaviour*

### 3.4. The River and its Tributaries

“ The River Stour is a remarkable feature. Once it was a vitally important trade link boosting commerce between London and the near continent to the Stour Valley and Sudbury. Goods such as bricks and wool travelling downstream and ‘night soil’ (fertiliser in the form of droppings of horses drawing carriages in London) coming upstream.

The river has always been an important wildlife corridor and a place for people to enjoy getting out on and near the water. The river and its tributaries are home to species such as otter, water vole, kingfisher and a diverse range of fish. The quiet or lucky visitor will sometimes be fortunate to catch a glimpse of these charismatic river residents.

The river is navigable by unpowered craft such as canoes and kayaks from Brundon Mill to Cattawade. The River Stour Trust runs electrically powered passenger boat trips from Sudbury and between Flatford and Dedham in the summer months. Many people enjoy getting out on the water and this is a wonderful way of taking in the landscapes of the Stour Valley that so inspired artists such as John Constable, John Nash and Thomas Gainsborough.

The river plays a vital role in the Ely Ouse to Essex Transfer Scheme transporting water from Denver in Norfolk to Abberton and Hanningfield reservoirs to provide a public water supply in Essex. The river is important to many aspects of our lives and this management plan will help all those with an interest in the river, its tributaries and the Stour Valley to get the best outcome for all.

We will continue to work closely with the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project and partner organisations, landowners and local communities to further enhance river habitats and continue to improve water quality in the Stour and its tributaries. ”

Will Akast, Catchment Delivery Manager, Environment Agency

The River Stour forms the spine of the Stour Valley and contributes to the landscape character of the area. The river and its tributaries are an important habitat for wildlife with transitional areas between the river and land, and those areas that are ‘wet’ of particular importance to wildlife.



Sunrise across the River Stour at Sudbury | Anthony Burch

The river plays an important part in people's enjoyment of the area, from angling and wildlife watching and provides a backdrop for walking and riding. The navigation of the main river was confirmed by an act of Parliament in 1705. More recently restrictions have been placed on the use of the navigation: Unpowered craft are permitted to travel between Sudbury and Cattawade, but there are restrictions on powered craft. A guide to the navigation is available on the government website<sup>38</sup>.

The river is an important conduit for the transfer of water, an important source of water for public water supply and as a source of irrigation for agriculture. It has been heavily modified by human activity for the purposes of extraction, navigation and flood control. The transfer of drinking water from Norfolk to Essex and London is known as the Ely Ouse to Essex Water Transfer Scheme. Information on the scheme is available on Essex and Suffolk Water's website.<sup>39</sup> The scheme transfers water from Denver in Norfolk to the Abberton and Hanningfield reservoirs using water that would otherwise flow into the Wash but can only be used providing a Minimum Residual Flow to the Wash is maintained at Denver. In previous dry or drought years, flows in the River Stour have been supported by the Ely Ouse Essex Transfer Scheme (EOETS)

to enable transfers to both Abberton and Hanningfield Reservoirs. Developments during the last plan period have seen an increase in the capacity of Abberton reservoir and ability to transfer water to it from the River Stour.

During the period 2010 to 2014, Essex & Suffolk Water has increased the capacity of Abberton Reservoir by 60% and increased its daily pumping capacity at its river intakes. This means that when natural (unsupported) river flows are high, a greater volume of water can be abstracted and used to fill the increased storage provided by the enlarged Abberton Reservoir. This means that the likelihood of the EOETS being needed in the short to medium term is reduced. Indeed, the EOETS was not used for public water supply transfers during 2014.

The combined effects of abstractions and supplies from Essex & Suffolk Water for agricultural use may result in prolonged periods when very little water flows into the estuary, particularly when large volumes are being abstracted to refill Abberton Reservoir. During periods of very low flow the water company is required to operate their intakes to ensure that water flowing into the reach downstream of Stratford St Mary is allowed to continue downstream and discharge to the estuary.



Flatford Bridge in the rain | James Hunt

<sup>38</sup> Guide to Stour Navigation at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/289831/gean0911budo-e-e.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/289831/gean0911budo-e-e.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> Information on Ely Ouse to Essex Water Transfer Scheme at <https://www.eswater.co.uk/your-home/your-services/denver-licence-variation.aspx>

Much of the river is defined in the landscape by plantations of cricket bat willows along the banks of the main river. These willows grow to maturity in around 20 years and can provide an important source of income to riparian landowners. The trees can offer some benefit in cooling river waters in the summer months supporting wildlife. However, they are not as effective at shading or providing wildlife habitat as native trees that would historically have been found along the Stour Valley such as alder and black poplar.

The green grey colouring of the leaves, uniform spacing and age of cricket bat willows can detract from the landscape character of the AONB and Stour Valley as well as limiting space for native characteristic trees. Once the cricket bat willows reach maturity and are harvested local residents and visitors can become concerned about the loss of trees although harvesting is usually accompanied by replanting.

### 3.4.1 Demand for Water

The UK Groundwater Forum estimates that there has been a 70% increase in demand for water in 30 years.<sup>40</sup> The AONB and Stour Valley is one of the driest in England with around 110 days where rain is recorded and an annual rainfall measurement of 568mm compared a national average of 133 days and 855mm.<sup>41</sup> This increasing demand in a dry area of the country means greater pressure on the water supply network including the River Stour that forms part of this network.

An abstraction licensing strategy has been produced by the Environment Agency setting out how water resources are managed in the Essex Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy (CAMS) area. It provides information about where water is available for further abstraction and an indication of how reliable a new abstraction license may be.<sup>42</sup>



*River Brett river restoration project, October 2014*

<sup>40</sup> UK Groundwater Forum report at [http://www.groundwateruk.org/sustainable\\_groundwater\\_management.aspx](http://www.groundwateruk.org/sustainable_groundwater_management.aspx)

<sup>41</sup> Weather data from Met office at <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/>

<sup>42</sup> Abstraction Licensing Strategy at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cams-essex-abstraction-licensing-strategy>

### 3.4.2 Water Quality

Water quality in the river Stour and its tributaries is subject to national and European legislation including the Water Framework Directive.<sup>43</sup> The directive seeks to improve the ecological and chemical status of the surface water in terms of its:

- Biological quality (fish, benthic invertebrates, aquatic flora).
- Hydro morphological quality such as river bank structure, river continuity or substrate of the river bed.
- Physical-chemical quality such as temperature, oxygenation and nutrient conditions.
- Chemical quality that refers to environmental quality standards for river basin specific pollutants.

There are a variety of initiatives to improve water quality aimed at improving the ecological state of the river including River Basin Management Plans, Catchment Sensitive Farming, Nitrate Vulnerable Zones and Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy.

Water quality can be adversely impacted by invasive plant species. Exposed bare river banks under species such as Himalayan Balsam over winter are at greater risk of erosion increasing the sediment load of the river. Other problems associated with non-native species are de-oxygenation and the shading of native in channel submerged macrophytes.



*River restoration feature called a 'berm' at Langham*

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<sup>43</sup> Water Framework Directive information at [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/index_en.html)

### 3.4.3 Recreational Use

The river provides many opportunities for fishing, particularly its strong coarse fishing interest. Fishing remains the highest participation sport in England. Many of the fishing rights are owned by clubs such as the London Anglers Club and Colchester Angling Preservation Society.

In addition to some minority sports such as wild swimming, including the municipal swimming facility on the Stour at Sudbury, many people enjoy spending time next to the river. Access is limited to where Public Rights of Way adjacent to the river, public open spaces such as the Sudbury Common Lands and some land owned by businesses that use the attraction of the river to attract custom, such as the Henny Swan public house and Milsom's Hotel and Restaurant.

The river is enjoyed by many using boats. There are boats to hire at Dedham and Flatford, river trips on electric craft from Sudbury, such as the Stour Lighter restored through the Managing a Masterpiece Landscape Partnership Scheme and Dedham and guided canoe trips along the length of the navigation. The River Stour Trust is a registered charity dedicated to the conservation and restoration of the Stour Navigation. The Environment Agency is the navigation authority and as such manages the navigation that is limited to self-propelled vessels for the length of the Navigation, Sudbury to Cattawade and specific rights for certain powered crafts along specific stretches.

### 3.4.4 Flooding

Many people believe the climate to be changing and the UK as a whole is experiencing wetter summers and more extreme weather events. These factors can increase the risk of flooding to homes and property in the AONB and Stour Valley. The stewardship of the countryside has done and will continue to reduce this flood risk with increasing land in permanent pasture and agricultural practices to reduce the speed of run off from farmed land.

The operation of the sluice gates associated with the many mills plays a part in managing water levels on the river, as can soft engineering projects that direct excessive flows away from sensitive areas.

Routine maintenance of the river and of river control structures, ensuring development takes into account flood risk areas and use of the Environment Agency's flood alert systems, can help reduce the risk of floods and the impacts of any floods that might happen to people and property.



*Flooding at Dedham*

### 3.4.5 River Morphology

The River Stour has been subject to many alterations by humans over many centuries. Evidence of these alterations can be seen throughout the AONB and Stour Valley including its most iconic scene at Flatford, the site of John Constable's 'The Haywain', where the river has been diverted to provide water for the local Mill.

These alterations of the river have resulted in water being encouraged to flow quickly away resulting in riparian areas being drier than in the past and a consequent reduction in their value to wildlife. To counteract this there have been many schemes to improve the wildlife and landscape function of the river.

For instance under the Water Framework Directive mitigation measures need to be put in place for water bodies with a modified function (such as flood defence and navigation) in order for them to achieve good ecological potential. These include increasing in channel morphological diversity, retaining marginal aquatic and riparian habitats and improving floodplain connectivity.

Examples of the kind of projects that we need to see throughout the Stour catchment are the recent river habitat enhancement projects undertaken on the Stour, Brett and Belchamp Brook in 2014 by the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project and Environment Agency working with willing landowners.

The improvements to the navigation have included new cuts, most noticeably at Wormingford where a new channel was cut and a flood relief channel at Nayland. Navigation improvements have included dredging of the channel to ensure that there is sufficient water depth for the Stour lighters.

The river's course has also been manipulated many times by the needs of agriculture. Even more noticeable is the protection of agricultural land by the creation of river banks, or levees, to protect agricultural land from flooding.

The cumulative impact of the changes in the rivers morphology for the purposes of industrial navigation and flood defence have had a negative impact on the ability of the river to act as a wildlife habitat. Water is encouraged to flow quickly away and down the river and areas that were once wetter than they are today have less value to wildlife. To counteract this there have been many schemes to improve the wildlife, and landscape, function of the river.



*Woody debris structure added to the upper River Stour, to help diversify habitats*

### 3.4.6 Current pressures

Current pressures on Rivers and Tributaries in the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley include:

- Demand for agricultural, horticultural and recreational water supplies
- Loss of wildlife associated with riparian habitats
- Loss of native trees associated with the riverside
- Demand for potable water
- Loss of natural processes operating in the river system
- Requirement to improve ecological condition of catchment through the Water Framework Directive
- Recreational use of the river
- Ely-Ouse to Essex water transfer scheme
- Expansion of scope for non-native wildlife species
- Costs of maintaining river structures falling to landowners

### 3.4.7 The River and its Tributaries: Management Objectives

- The river and its tributaries contributes to the landscape quality of the area
- Wetland habitats provide an important wildlife habitat
- Flood defence schemes protect people and property and contribute to the areas natural beauty and wildlife habitat
- The river provides opportunities for quiet informal recreation



Otter | Simon Litten, FLPA

### 3.4.8 Management Plan Policies

- Develop opportunities for landscape and wildlife enhancements to the river environment.
- Support projects to implement the Water Framework Directive by making improvements to the ecological status of the water bodies in addition to schemes at a catchment scale within the AONB and Stour Valley Project area.
- Seek to ensure that active navigation features are maintained to a high standard and pay regard to the AONB and Stour Valley qualities.
- Promote the need for flood control and water transfer schemes to be well co-ordinated and enhance the areas landscape and wildlife habitats.
- Support recreational activity that does not detract from the special qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley.
- Promote sustainable irrigation schemes for local farms.
- Conserve and enhance historic environment of the river including previously used navigation structures and riparian habitats.
- Support projects that implement the Water Framework Directive and those that have environmental benefit at a catchment level.

### 3.5. Climate Change

“ *The problems associated with climate change will have a significant impact upon the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley. More extreme weather events, milder winters and wetter summers are all predicted to happen.*

*This will change the nature of the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley. Farmers will review what crops and livestock it is commercially advantageous to grow, wildlife in our countryside will change and there is the potential for increased pests and diseases thriving in changing conditions.*

*The behaviour of people is also likely to change. Different behaviours will influence many aspects of our lives in the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley.* ”

Charles Aldous, Dedham Vale Society

There is a wide body of evidence suggesting global climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports in 2014 that:

'In recent decades, changes in climate have caused impacts on natural and human systems on all continents and across oceans. Impacts are due to observed climate change, irrespective of its cause, indicating the sensitivity of natural and human systems to changing climate'.<sup>44</sup>

Any significant change to the climate is likely to present challenges to the AONB and Stour Valley. Climate change has the potential to change many aspects of the AONB and Stour Valley. In the short to medium term this is likely to include impacts on the issues described below.

<sup>44</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Synthesis Report 2014 at [http://www.ipcc.ch/news\\_and\\_events/docs/ar5/ar5\\_syr\\_headlines\\_en.pdf](http://www.ipcc.ch/news_and_events/docs/ar5/ar5_syr_headlines_en.pdf)

### 3.5.1 Surface Flooding

Increase in the likelihood of flooding due to changes in rainfall patterns leading to potential for damage to property and infrastructure and disruption to economic activity.

### 3.5.2 Agriculture

Agriculture is highly dependent on specific climate conditions. Given the interdependence of many factors impacted by climate change it is difficult to predict what the overall impact of climate change on agriculture will. Increased temperatures and a wetter climate and an increase the severity of droughts and floods could pose significant challenges. It could become more difficult to grow crops and raise animals that have traditionally been associated with the AONB and Stour Valley.

### 3.5.3 Wildlife

Many wildlife species are dependent upon specific environmental conditions and changes to climate will have an impact upon wildlife habitats. Changes to the climate are likely to lead to wildlife adapting and moving both within the AONB and Stour Valley but also in and out of the area.

### 3.5.4 Tourism

Changes to climate and associated weather in the AONB and Stour Valley will impact upon the desirability of outdoor recreation and the landscapes and wildlife that visitors come to enjoy.

### 3.5.5 Infrastructure

More extreme weather associated with climate change has the potential to have adverse impacts on infrastructure associated with transport, communications and utilities. An infrastructure that can cope with climate change might have a greater adverse impact on the visual amenity of the AONB and Stour Valley.

### 3.5.6 Adaptation

In the AONB and Stour Valley there is a growing acknowledgement of climate change and the need for adaptation. Government; Local Authorities; publically funded organisations; the charity sector; communities and the private sector are all undertaking adaptation projects to offset the impacts of climate change.

There remains a need to increase the understanding of potential changes to the climate and the need to develop long term strategies to adapt to the issues that will arise. For many of the challenges to be faced a landscape scale approach of coordinated activity across areas such as the AONB and Stour Valley can contribute to the efforts to mitigate negative impacts.

Additionally there is a growing understanding of the need to reduce our 'carbon footprint'. Positive action to mitigate problems associated with the use of carbon related fossil fuels and environmental concerns are associated with many projects in the AONB and Stour Valley. These include projects promoting more sustainable transport, encouraging leisure activity closer to home and promoting local produce.



Surface water flooding at Flatford | James Hunt

### 3.5.7 Current pressures

Current pressures on Climate Change issues in the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley include:

- Lack of alternative to private motor car transport and need for integrated rural transport plan
- Increasing vulnerability to extreme weather events
- Changing conditions for wildlife

### 3.5.8 Climate Change: Management Objectives

- Promote projects that seek to reduce or mitigate factors contributing towards climate change
- Raise awareness of the potential of climate change to impact upon the AONB and Stour Valley environment

### 3.5.9 Climate Change: Management Plan Policy

As climate change cuts across so many issues there will be no specific management plan policies listed. Instead, Management Plan policy relating to climate change is included in the management plan policy of the other themes contained within this plan.



*Poppies*

## 3.6. Working Together

“ *Much of my life has been spent working in partnerships. They have been made up of people with different skills and objectives who work together for the common good. This is true for the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley. With so many activities and ambitions in the area a strong management plan, that binds these interests together and sets out a shared vision of what we can achieve, is not just desirable but essential for us all.*

*There are many competing interests in the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley but also many common goals, not least the desire by all to ensure that the area retains its gentle beauty for future generations to enjoy.*

*Discussion at the Partnership and formulation of a five year management plan allows every point of view to be heard. Ways forward can then be found that will satisfy all who wish to see the Stour, from its source down through Gainsborough and Constable Country, remain one of the most beautiful and treasured river valleys in England. ”*

Robert Erith TD DL, Chairman of the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Partnership

### 3.6.1 Working across the area

The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley is a high quality landscape and a benefit to all those that live, visit or work in the area. The AONB designation comes from central government and recognises the importance of the area to the nation, through recognition in both national and local policy and funding for an AONB team.

To safeguard the natural beauty of the area, with all the associated benefits to people, wildlife and business, is beyond what a small AONB team can deliver. It is vital, and a necessity, that organisations work in partnership to maintain the special qualities of the area.

The AONB team is well placed to drive forward projects to conserve and enhance the areas natural beauty, but it is through a partnership that real benefits can be accrued. This plan sets out the AONB and Stour Valley Partnership's objectives to ensure that the area retains its special qualities but it is individual partner actions, often working in conjunction with one another, which will see the most benefit.

Where there are conflicting aims and objectives between partners all partners recognise they are working to support the delivery of the primary aim of the AONB designation. The AONB team is well placed to act as an honest broker to support partners to deliver projects that meet the aspiration of this plan and its vision.



Stour Valley Path waymark near Bures

It is an aspiration of the Partnership to work together to secure a high quality landscape in the Dedham Vale underpinned by sustainable economic growth. A vibrant visitor business sector relies on the special landscape of the area, often referred to as an area's natural capital. The AONB designation can conserve and enhance the landscape in a way that local businesses can use to drive visitor business to them but also help them to retrain and recruit the best possible staff.

In addition to a wide range of organisations seeking to ensure the AONB and Stour Valley remains a special place the communities remain at the heart of area. There are many strong communities throughout the AONB and Stour Valley that are delivering projects that benefit the wildlife; landscape; understanding; built environment; social cohesion and recreation opportunities of the area. The AONB team and its partners will continue to support these communities where it can through practical support, advice and information.

Parish Councils are a key partner in working to conserve and enhance the Natural Beauty and Special Qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley and a key way to disseminating information on the work of the Partnership. In recent times many Parish Councils have contributed financially to support the staff team.

Two amenity societies, the Dedham Vale Society and the Colne Stour Countryside Association have many similar aims to the Partnership and in recent times have supported the staff team through sharing knowledge more recently through financial contributions.

The AONB team administers two small grant schemes<sup>45</sup> that seek to improve the environmental, social and economic wellbeing of the area. These funds are open to communities, individuals, charities and businesses. These funds contribute to developing projects that support the management of the AONB and Stour Valley and gain the maximum benefit for the area.

The AONB team is the only organisation that specifically works across a range of disciplines to champion the area. The work of the AONB team includes project delivery and raising awareness of AONB and Stour Valley issues. However, it is the strength of the Partnership and its constituent organisations that promote working together to deliver the work required to ensure the AONB remains a high quality landscape.



*Sheep at Valley Farm*

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<sup>45</sup> Information on AONB and Stour Valley grant schemes at <http://www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org/grants-and-funding/>

### 3.6.2 Funding and operation of staff team

The staff team that seeks to co-ordinate activity in the AONB and Stour Valley area is publicly funded for its core activity. Defra provide up to 75% of core funds for work within the AONB with the remainder coming from local authorities. In the Stour Valley area local authorities provide all the funds for the core costs.

As pressure has increased on the public purse and both Defra and local authorities have reduced their grants the staff team, guided by the Joint Advisory Committee has sought to reduce costs and diversify its income.

The AONB team has reduced costs by restructuring in 2010 and again in 2014. The 2014 restructure involved bring two AONB teams together to reduce duplication of effort. In addition the new joint team is located in one office further reducing overheads.

The AONB team has successfully diversified its income for expenditure on project work that delivers the vision of the AONB management plan. This has included significant grant awards from organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and the European Union and sponsorship of individual projects such as the publication of guides.

The work of the AONB team is guided by an annual business plan that is approved and monitored by the Joint Advisory Committee made up of funding partners.

It is expected that public funding for the core team will continue to be under pressure for the lifetime of this management plan and the need to work in partnership and secure external funds for project work will be vital if the vision contained in this management plan is to be delivered.



*Stour Valley Volunteers build an otter holt*

### 3.6.3 Current Pressures

Current pressures on Working Together in the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley include:

- Partner resources required to implement plan policies
- Multiple pressures on special qualities of the area
- Requirement to diversify funding for project activity

### 3.6.4 Working Together: Management Objectives

- The Partnership will co-ordinate activity to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley
- The Partnership will seek to reach decisions on the basis of discussion and consensus.

### 3.6.5 Working Together: Management Plan Policy

- This Management Plan will be the basis of partnership member policy of the management of the AONB and Stour Valley
- Partners will work to ensure the special qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley are conserved and maintained.



*Melford Hall*

## 4. APPENDICES



*'Silent Night' at Arger Fen (2014) by Clare Curtis*

With kind permission of the artist

## 4.1 Appendix 1: Glossary

AONB:	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. An area of land designated by government for the purposes of conservation and in recognition of their landscape quality.
AONB team:	The staff unit employed to undertake the statutory requirements of AONB authorities' responsibilities and to co-ordinate activity to deliver work to deliver the management plan vision.
Dedham Vale AONB:	One of 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England, Wales and northern Ireland on the Essex/Suffolk Border running from Cattawade to east of Bures.
DEFRA:	The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. A government department that provides up to 75% of core funding to AONB team and is responsible for policy and regulation on the natural environment.
Infrastructure:	Physical structures that enable society to operate eg roads, railways' phone masts and electricity transmission networks.
Joint Advisory Committee, (JAC):	A grouping of funding partners providing strategic guidance and scrutiny for the AONB team.
Natural Beauty:	A term not defined in legislation but widely accepted to meaning scenic beauty underpinned by a coherent landform, geology, plants and animals and environmental and cultural heritage.
Navigation (River Stour):	A 1705 Act of Parliament that gave powers to named commissioners to deepen channels, create locks & weirs and remove obstacles to navigation on the river
Partnership:	When written with an upper case P it relates to an alliance of statutory agencies, local authorities, charitable organisations, voluntary organisations and membership organisations that have a particular interest in the AONB and Stour Valley
Special Qualities:	Those aspects of the AONB and Stour Valley that contribute to its natural beauty. This may include landform, geology, wildlife, heritage features, cultural associations, sense of place and scenic quality.
Stour Valley:	An area of land on the Essex Suffolk border running from Cattawade to Great Bradley near the Cambridgeshire border
Stour Valley Project area:	The mid and upper part of the of the Stour Valley that is not designated as AONB

## 4.2 Appendix 2: Governance Structures

The AONB team will work to an annual business plan which will require approval from the main funding partner, DEFRA, and the Joint Advisory Committee.

The AONB staff team are employed by a 'host' local authority, currently Suffolk County Council. Suffolk County Council provides management support to the lead AONB Officer. Other members of the AONB team are managed by the AONB team.

The AONB team reports to a Joint Advisory Committee made up of representatives of the Local Authority funding partners. The Joint Advisory Committee provides strategic guidance to the AONB staff team and has responsibility to set, monitor and scrutinise the AONB budget.

The AONB and Stour Valley Partnership develops the AONB management plan and champions the AONB and Stour Valley.

Individual Partnership members deliver projects to implement the management plan and secure the delivery of the plan's vision.

The annual Forum is an opportunity for the AONB and Stour Valley community and those with a professional interest to hear presentations on issues of interest to the area and engage in discussion around the presentations.

The AONB and Stour Valley Partnership may form Topic Working Groups. These groups act independently of the Partnership but may report to Partnership meetings.

The lead AONB officer may be supported by officers from the local authority funding partners in a group known as the Officer Steering Group.

## 4.2.1 Appendix 3: List of Public Bodies with Duty of Regard to the Dedham Vale AONB under Section 85 of CROW Act 2000

The term, 'public bodies' includes all arms of both central and local government:

Environment Agency (EA);  
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra);  
Forestry Commission (FC);  
Natural England (NE);  
Parish councils and joint committees of local authorities; and  
Regulatory bodies of statutory undertakers such as  
Ofcom (Office of Communications),  
Ofgem (Office of Gas and Electricity Markets), etc.

## 4.3 Appendix 4: AONB and Stour Valley Facts

### 4.3.1 Agricultural Survey of Dedham Vale AONB 2007

Farm Type	Number
Cereals	20
General Cropping	21
Horticulture	10
Specialist Pig	0
Specialist Poultry	6
Dairy	0
Grazing Livestock (lowland)	27
Mixed	6
Other	110
Total	200

Farm Size	Number
<5	99
5-<20	43
20-<50	27
50-<100	11
>100	25
Total	205

Land Use		
Type	Holdings	Area (ha)
Farmed Area	171	9,185
Rented	39	2,427
Owned land	173	6,854
Crops and Bare Fallow	63	4,670
Temporary Grass	25	394
Permanent Grass	129	2,365
Rough Grazing	10	113
Woodland	61	959
Set Aside	42	426
All Other	47	259

Crops		
Type	Holdings	Area (ha)
Wheat	32	1,701
Winter Barley	17	547
Spring Barley	23	558
Potatoes	10	354
Sugar Beat	19	569
Horticulture	17	395
Field Beans	5	50
Oilseed Rape	9	234
Maize	7	37
Other Arable Crops	6	44
Bare Fallow	17	149
All Veg and Salad	9	381
Veg (Open)	10	384
Total Fruit	11	10

Crops		
Type	Holdings	Number
Cattle	27	1,981
Pigs	21	1,353
Sheep	33	5,074
Goats	5	23

Labour		
Type	Holdings	Number
Farmers (Full time)	37	50
Farmers (Part time)	88	139
Managers (Full time)	9	12
Managers (Part time)	9	7
Workers (Full time)	15	31
Workers (Part time)	13	38
Casual	17	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>349</b>

#### 4.3.2 Built Conservation Areas (Dedham Vale AONB only)

Area	Number	Size (sq km)
Suffolk (all Babergh)	7	3.70
Essex (all Colchester)	5	0.69
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4.39 or 4.9% of AONB</b>

#### 4.3.2 Built Conservation Areas (Dedham Vale AONB only)

Industry Type	Number
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	45
Mining and quarrying	0
Manufacturing	20
Construction	56
Wholesale and retail trade	40
Transport and storage	5
Accommodation and food service	15
Information and communication	30
Financial and insurance services	15
Real estate	15
Professional, Scientific and technical	75
Administration and support services	20
Public administration and defence	0
Education	10
Human health and social work	15
Arts, entertainment and recreation	10
Other service activities	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>385</b>

Micro Businesses	
Number of Micro Businesses	275
Percentage of businesses that are micro	71
Total employment in micro businesses	725
Percentage of employment in micro	30%

Tourism Businesses	
Type	Number
Accommodation for visitors	15
Culture, Sport and Recreation	5
Food and beverage serving	10
Passenger transport and travel	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>

Economic Activity	
Total working age population	3,200
Claimant count (Q2 2012)	1.6%

Household Income (2010/11)	Dedham Vale	East of England (rural)
Average (mean) gross household income	38,480	35,650

Source: CACI Paycheck data 2010/11

House Prices–Average (£)		
House type	Dedham Vale AONB	East of England (rural)
Overall	395,400	255,000
Detached	580,400	331,400
Semi-detached	277,200	204,600
Terraced	241,800	180,000

Source: Land Registry sales data 2011

Average House Price/ Average Household Income Ratio	
Area	Ratio
Dedham Vale AONB	10.3:1
East of England (All)	6.6:1
East of England (Rural)	7.2:1

Source: Land Registry sales data 2011/ CACI Paycheck data 2010/11

### 4.3.2 Built Conservation Areas (Dedham Vale AONB only)

Area of AONB	9,007 Hectares
Area of ancient woodland	133.7 Hectares
Area of Sites of Special Scientific Interest	c180 Hectares
Forestry Commission holdings	0 Hectares
Designation Order	Confirmed 20 May 1970
Designation order for extension (Polstead, Sulleys Hill, Raydon)	Confirmed 21 August 1978
Designation Order for extension (Nayland with Wissington)	Confirmed 19 September 1991
Stour river length: Nayland Weir-Langham Weir	6km
Stour river length: Langham Weir-Brett	1.5km
Stour river length: Brett-Black Brook	5km
Stour river length: Black Brook-Flatford Mill	3km
Stour river length: Flatford Mill-Cattawade	3.5km
Box river length: Polstead-Stour	7km
Brett river length: Shelley-Stour	4km

### 4.3.5 Visitor figures data (Dedham Vale AONB)

Location	Year	Vehicles	People*
Dedham Car Park	2013	62,149	142,955
Flatford Car Park	2013	91,914	212,117

\*Visitor numbers are obtained by applying a multiplier to vehicle figures

## 4.4 Appendix 5: Summary of Management Plan Policies

Topic	Policy	Lead Partner
<b>The Countryside</b>	Lobby for national and local planning policies to reflect the significance of the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley.	<b>AONB team</b>
	Support development that contributes to the appropriate economic development and contributes to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB and Stour Valley.	<b>Partnership</b>
	Protect the area, including its setting, from developments that detract from its natural beauty and special qualities, including its relative tranquillity	<b>Local Planning Authorities</b>
	Resist fragmentation of farmland and wildlife habitats and encourage landscape scale co-ordination of initiatives, including Environmental Stewardship, to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley.	<b>Local Planning Authorities</b>
	Support the aspiration to extend the AONB boundary to the west of its existing limit.	<b>AONB team</b>
	Improve understanding of the AONB and Stour Valley in particular its natural beauty and special qualities	
	Maintain the local distinctiveness of the AONB and Stour Valley.	<b>Partnership</b>
	Work in partnership to minimise impacts of diseases and pests such as Chalara on the landscape features.	
<b>Residents and Villages</b>	Ensure Local Plans reflect the need to conserve and enhance the AONB and Stour Valley	<b>AONB team</b>
	Support development that contributes to the conservation and enhancement of local character	<b>Local Planning Authorities</b>
	Encourage communities to increase their understanding of the area and become involved in environmental projects to conserve and enhance the area	<b>AONB team</b>
	Promote the appeal and distinctiveness of villages to help develop the visitor attractiveness	<b>Visit Essex/ Visit Suffolk</b>
	Promote the role of villages as centres of rural economy	<b>Parish Councils</b>
	Lobby for Local Enterprise Partnerships to support activity that recognises the economic benefits of the area's natural capital	<b>AONB team</b>
	Support the provision of high quality infrastructure, including roads, where it does not detract from the area's special qualities	<b>Partnership</b>
	Work with Amenity Societies such as Dedham Vale Society and Colne Stour Countryside Association whose objectives support the Partnership's work	<b>Partnership</b>
	Utilise Ofgem allowances and similar schemes to remove unsightly and redundant infrastructure from the landscape	<b>AONB team</b>

<b>Enjoying the Area</b>	Support new visitor facilities that reflect the scale and qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley.	<b>Partnership</b>
	Support activity that encourages residents to use the countryside on their doorstep.	<b>AONB team</b>
	Support activity to encourage visits that do not adversely impact the area's natural beauty.	<b>Partnership</b>
	Support initiatives to encourage sustainable transport to and from the area and for travel within the area.	<b>AONB team</b>
	Make improvements to the Public Rights of Way network and develop new opportunities for walking and riding.	<b>Highways Authorities</b>
	Support initiatives such as the Expect and Respect element of the Quiet Lanes project and Protected Lanes projects across AONB and Stour Valley.	<b>AONB team</b>
	Support co-ordination of the visitor product including provision of information.	<b>AONB team</b>
	Raise awareness of the importance of the AONB designation to visitor service providers and visitors.	<b>AONB team</b>
	Promote behaviours that do not adversely impact the special qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley.	<b>AONB team</b>
	Promote the introduction of appropriate speed limits within the AONB.	<b>Partnership</b>
<b>The River and its Tributaries</b>	Develop opportunities for landscape and wildlife enhancements to the river environment.	<b>River Stour Project</b>
	Support projects to implement the Water Framework Directive by making improvements to the ecological status of the water bodies in addition to schemes at a catchment scale within the AONB and Stour Valley Project area.	<b>AONB team</b>
	Active navigation features are maintained to a high standard and pay regard to the AONB and Stour Valley qualities.	<b>Environment Agency</b>
	Promote the need for flood control and water transfer schemes to be well co-ordinated and enhance the areas landscape and wildlife habitats.	<b>Environment Agency</b>
	Support recreational activity that does not detract from the special qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley.	<b>Partnership</b>
	Promote sustainable irrigation schemes for local farms.	<b>Partnership</b>
	Conserve and enhance historic environment of the river including previously used navigation structures and riparian habitats.	<b>Local Planning Authorities</b>
	Support projects that implement the Water Framework Directive and those that have environmental benefit at a catchment level.	<b>AONB team</b>
<b>Working Together</b>	This Management Plan will be the basis of partnership member policy of the management of the AONB and Stour Valley	<b>Partnership</b>
	Partners will work to ensure the special qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley are conserved and maintained.	<b>Partnership</b>

