

AINA CASE STUDY

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The Broads: an iconic waterway network



Careful management is needed to balance the needs of the environment with more than two million visitors each year

The Broads are located in Norfolk and Suffolk and extend over the lower valleys of the Waveney, Yare and Bure, together with a number of their tributaries. The nature of this low-lying land is diverse, and the wetland habitats include rivers, streams, dykes and open water. The area covers some 30,000 hectares, and the 60-plus water bodies range in size from tiny isolated lakes to large expanses such as Hickling Broad. Many were created through peat digging, and the majority are tidal, though only the lower reaches are saline or brackish.

Alarming environmental degradation led to the creation of the Broads Authority, which is responsible for conserving and enhancing natural beauty, promoting public enjoyment, and protecting the interests of navigation. Recreation includes sailing, motor-boating, rowing, canoeing, fishing and bird watching, and with more than two million visitors each year the area requires sensitive management for nature conservation and amenity use to coexist successfully.

Important issues are nutrient enrichment, with the resultant loss of species and habitats, and sediment accumulation. This is mainly due to treated sewage effluent inputs and agricultural practices in the upper part of the catchments. In order to maintain navigation, an intensive dredging programme is maintained. All broads are privately owned although around 75% of the water space is navigable. Some areas contain voluntary exclusion zones to protect wintering wild birds and these are usually well respected by boaters.

Sustainability is seen as a core value, and the Broads Authority works with the Green Blue initiative to encourage environmentally friendly boating. Some boatyards are now at the forefront of the development and design of sustainable boating and electric boats are available for hire linked to a network of charging points.

The Broads Plan sets a vision and long-term 20-year aims for the future. It also specifies short-term priority objectives which are supported by an Action Plan. A wide range of organisations are involved in preparing and implementing the plan and its effectiveness is monitored via a set of indicators. Four main themes are followed: Living Landscape; Water, Habitats and Wildlife; Tourism and Recreation; and Understanding the Broads. Research work is also carried out and early consultation with stakeholders is essential to minimise conflict.