

Carbrooke Neighbourhood Plan

Character Appraisal and Design Evidence

May 2026

Contents

Introduction	2
Methodology.....	2
Settlement Character Areas	3
Historic village core.....	3
Post-war residential development (north of Norwich Road).....	5
Recent estate development (south of Norwich Road).....	5
Assessment of Character Areas	7
Layout and street pattern	7
Density and spatial character	7
Landscape and settlement edge.....	7
Materials and architectural detailing	8
Streetscape and parking.....	8
Summary	8
Key Issues and Design Challenges.....	9
Design Response Framework	10
Character areas within the SUE	10
Edge character area	11
Intermediate character area.....	12
Core character area.....	12
Summary	13
Implications for the Neighbourhood Plan.....	14
Summary of design principles.....	14
Policy implications	15

Introduction

This Character Appraisal has been prepared to support the Carbrooke Neighbourhood Plan. Its purpose is to provide an evidence-based assessment of the parish's built character and to identify the features that contribute to its local distinctiveness.

National planning policy places significant weight on achieving well-designed places and recognises the importance of understanding local character. The National Design Guide and the Breckland Design Guide both emphasise the need for development to respond to its context. Neighbourhood Plans play an important role in interpreting this at a local level, supported by proportionate and place-specific evidence.

This document provides that evidence. It draws on site analysis and a detailed photographic survey of the parish to identify the defining characteristics of Carbrooke. This includes the historic village core, later phases of development, and the relationship between the built form and the surrounding landscape.

Particular attention is given to the transition between the existing settlement and areas of planned growth. This reflects the importance of understanding how different parts of the parish relate to one another, and how character changes across the settlement.

The appraisal focuses on:

- The form, layout and grain of development
- Building types, scale and materials
- Streetscape and boundary treatments
- Landscape structure and the settlement edge
- Key features that contribute to local identity

The appraisal is based on visual character evidence, not a full architectural, heritage or landscape assessment. The findings of this document provide an evidence base to inform the design policies contained within the Neighbourhood Plan. It establishes a robust understanding of existing character, against which future development proposals can be considered.

Methodology

This appraisal is based on direct observation and analysis of the built environment within Carbrooke parish. A site walkover survey was undertaken on 19 February 2026, supported by a comprehensive photographic record, to capture the defining features of the settlement and its different areas.

The assessment focuses on physical and observable characteristics of the built environment. This includes the form and layout of development, building types and scale, materials, boundary treatments, and the relationship between buildings, streets and landscape.

The parish has been analysed by identifying broad character areas, reflecting variations in age, layout and form of development. These areas are not defined by

administrative boundaries but by consistent and recognisable physical characteristics on the ground.

The appraisal also considers the relationship between the settlement and its surrounding landscape, including the transition between the built-up area and open countryside. Particular attention has been given to areas where change is most likely to occur, including the edges of the settlement.

This document is informed by:

- Site walkover and visual assessment
- Photographic survey of key features and views
- Review of relevant national and local design guidance, including the National Design Guide and Breckland Design Guide
- Understanding of planned growth within the parish and adjoining Carbrooke village

The approach is proportionate and focused on identifying the key characteristics that define local distinctiveness. It does not seek to provide an exhaustive architectural survey, but instead highlights the features that are most relevant to understanding the character of the parish.

Settlement Character Areas

Carbrooke comprises three distinct character areas:

- Historic village core
- Post-war residential development (north of Norwich Road)
- Recent estate development (south of Norwich Road)

These areas differ in layout, density, materials and landscape relationship. The following tables summarise the defining characteristics of each area.

Historic village core

The historic village core represents the earliest phase of development within Carbrooke. It is centred around the church and surrounding lanes, and is characterised by its informal layout, varied building forms and strong relationship with the surrounding landscape. Development has evolved incrementally, resulting in a loose grain and a high degree of visual variation. Buildings sit comfortably within a green setting, with mature vegetation and soft boundaries playing a key role in defining character.



Feature	Description
Layout and street pattern	Organic and irregular. Buildings arranged along narrow lanes with no consistent alignment
Density and spatial grain	Low density. Varied plot sizes with generous spacing in places
Building height and form	Typically 1 or 2 storeys. Simple forms with varied rooflines
Materials	Traditional palette including red brick, flint, timber framing and clay pantiles
Architectural detailing	Varied and informal. Traditional features with no standardisation
Boundary treatment	Soft boundaries. Hedgerows, planting and low-key enclosures
Relationship with landscape	Strong. Mature trees, verges and planting are integral to character
Streets and public realm	Narrow, rural in character, limited formal surfacing or footways
Overall character	Informal, rural and landscape-led

Post-war residential development (north of Norwich Road)

Development to the north of Norwich Road reflects post-war expansion of the village. This area introduces a more ordered and consistent layout, with regular plots and uniform building lines. The architecture is simple and functional, with limited variation in materials or detailing. While some landscape features remain, the character is more defined by built form than by its setting.



Feature	Description
Layout and street pattern	Ordered layout with defined streets and consistent building lines
Density and spatial grain	Moderate to low density. Regular plots with uniform spacing
Building height and form	Predominantly 2 storeys. Simple rectangular forms
Materials	Predominantly red brick with limited variation
Architectural detailing	Minimal. Functional and repetitive elevations
Boundary treatment	Generally open frontages with some fencing to rear
Relationship with landscape	Limited but present. Grass verges and occasional trees
Streets and public realm	Wide streets with grass verges. Informal on-street parking common
Overall character	Suburban, simple and consistent

Recent estate development (south of Norwich Road)

The area to the south of Norwich Road represents recent residential growth, delivered as a planned estate development. This area is characterised by higher density, a more complex street layout and a broader palette of materials. Architectural detailing is used to create variation, although it is applied in a consistent and standardised manner. Public open space and formal landscaping are integrated into the layout, creating a cohesive but clearly suburban character.



Feature	Description
Layout and street pattern	Planned layout with connected streets, shared surfaces and turning heads
Density and spatial grain	Higher density. Compact plots with reduced spacing between dwellings
Building height and form	Predominantly 2 storeys. Mix of detached, semi-detached and terraces
Materials	Mixed palette including red and buff brick, render and cladding
Architectural detailing	Applied detailing such as porches, lintels and dormers. Consistent across development
Boundary treatment	Mixed. Railings, low walls, hedging and fencing
Relationship with landscape	Managed and designed. Formal open space and play areas integrated into layout
Streets and public realm	Engineered streets with traffic calming and defined parking arrangements. Parking on-plot, on-street and parking courts, vehicles often prominent
Overall character	Suburban, planned and standardised

Assessment of Character Areas

The three identified character areas within Carbrooke demonstrate a clear progression in the form, layout and appearance of development. Together, they illustrate a shift from an informal, landscape-led rural settlement to more uniform and planned suburban forms of development. This transition is evident in the way buildings are arranged, the density of development, the role of landscape, and the overall streetscape. These differences are important in understanding the existing character of the parish and in identifying the key issues that future development will need to address.

Layout and street pattern

The historic village core is defined by an organic and irregular pattern of development. Buildings are arranged along narrow lanes with no consistent alignment, reflecting incremental growth over time. This creates a varied and informal spatial character.

In contrast, the post-war development to the north of Norwich Road introduces a more ordered layout, with defined streets and consistent building lines. The pattern is simple and functional, with a clear structure but limited variation.

The recent estate development to the south of Norwich Road is more complex in its layout, with connected streets, shared surfaces and engineered turning heads. While this creates a cohesive structure, it reflects a standardised approach to estate design, with less reference to local patterns of development.

This progression demonstrates an increasing degree of planning and standardisation in layout, moving away from the informal and locally distinctive patterns evident in the historic core.

Density and spatial character

The historic core is characterised by a low-density and varied spatial grain, with buildings set within generous plots in places and a noticeable degree of openness. Spacing between buildings is inconsistent, contributing to a loose and informal character.

Post-war development introduces a more consistent density, with regular plots and uniform spacing. While still relatively spacious, the overall pattern is more controlled and predictable.

The recent estate development is notably more compact, with higher density and reduced spacing between dwellings. Plots are smaller and more tightly arranged, resulting in a more enclosed and urbanised character.

This trend indicates a gradual increase in density and a corresponding reduction in openness, particularly in more recent phases of development.

Landscape and settlement edge

In the historic core, landscape plays a fundamental role in defining character. Mature trees, hedgerows and grass verges are integral to the setting, and the boundary between built form and countryside is soft and permeable.

Within the post-war area, landscape features remain present but are less dominant. Grass verges and occasional trees contribute to the streetscape, but the overall character is more defined by built form.

In the recent estate development, landscape is more formally designed and integrated into the layout through planned open spaces and planting. While this provides structure and amenity, it differs from the informal and inherent landscape character of the historic core.

This shift reflects a move from a landscape-led settlement to one where landscape is applied as part of the design, rather than forming the underlying structure. As a result, the transition between built development and the surrounding countryside becomes more defined and, in some cases, more abrupt.

Materials and architectural detailing

The historic core displays a varied and authentic palette of materials, including red brick, flint, timber framing and clay pantiles. Architectural detailing is informal and reflects different periods of development, with little standardisation.

Post-war development is more limited in its material palette, predominantly using red brick with minimal detailing. Elevations are simple and functional, with repetition across the area.

The recent estate development introduces a wider range of materials, including buff brick, render and cladding, alongside applied architectural features such as porches, lintels and dormers. While this creates visual variation, it is typically applied in a consistent manner across the development.

This demonstrates that increased variation in materials does not necessarily result in stronger local character, particularly where detailing is applied uniformly rather than emerging from local building traditions.

Streetscape and parking

The historic core is characterised by informal streets with limited formalisation and low levels of visible parking. Vehicles are present but do not dominate the streetscape.

In the post-war area, streets are wider with grass verges, and on-street parking is common. While vehicles are more visible, the overall streetscape remains relatively simple and uncluttered.

In the recent estate development, streets are engineered with defined parking arrangements, including on-plot parking, on-street spaces and parking courts. In many cases, vehicles are a prominent feature of the street scene.

This reflects an increasing dominance of vehicles within the public realm, which has a noticeable impact on the character and visual quality of more recent development.

Summary

The analysis of these character areas highlights a clear and consistent pattern of change. The historic village core is defined by its informal layout, strong relationship with the landscape, and varied but coherent material palette. More recent

development introduces increasing levels of standardisation, higher densities and a reduced role for landscape in defining character.

Without careful consideration, future development is likely to follow established estate models, resulting in further standardisation and a continuation of these trends. In particular, there is a risk that new development at the edge of the settlement could create a more abrupt and suburban transition to the surrounding countryside, failing to reflect the softer, landscape-led character that defines the historic village.

These findings demonstrate the need for a clear design approach to guide future development, ensuring that it responds appropriately to local character and reinforces the distinct identity of Carbrooke.

Key Issues and Design Challenges

The analysis of Carbrooke's character areas highlights a number of considerations that are directly relevant to future development within the parish, particularly in the context of the proposed Watton Strategic Urban Extension (SUE).

A key consideration is the contrast between the historic village core and more recent forms of development. The village is characterised by an informal layout, strong integration with the surrounding landscape, and a soft transition between built form and open countryside. In contrast, more recent development reflects increasingly uniform estate layouts, higher densities and a more engineered relationship with the public realm.

This contrast is most evident at the settlement edge. The existing edge of Carbrooke, particularly along routes such as Drury Lane, is defined by a direct relationship between built development and open agricultural land. This creates a clear and legible transition from settlement to countryside, which contributes to the rural character and identity of the village.

The proposed Watton SUE represents a substantial extension of development toward this edge. While the allocation includes provision for green infrastructure and open space, the preceding analysis suggests that, in the absence of locally specific guidance, development may reflect more typical estate patterns. This has the potential to introduce a more uniform and compact form of development in closer proximity to the existing village, resulting in a more pronounced transition between built form and countryside.

In this context, there is a need to carefully consider how new development relates to the existing settlement. In particular, future development should seek to:

- Maintain a clear distinction between the village and the surrounding countryside
- Respond positively to the established character of the parish
- Avoid abrupt or overly engineered settlement edges
- Ensure that landscape continues to play a defining role in the setting of development

These considerations relate not only to the appearance of development, but to the underlying structure of the settlement and how it is experienced. The relationship

between built form, layout and landscape is central to maintaining the distinct identity of Carbrooke.

The Strategic Landscape Gap and associated transitional edge identified in the *Strategic Landscape Gap Evidence Paper* provide an important spatial framework for managing the relationship between the existing village and the Watton SUE. These measures establish a clear approach to maintaining separation and protecting the rural setting of the village.

However, they do not in themselves determine the form and character of development within the allocation. There is therefore a need for a complementary design approach to guide how development is arranged and designed, particularly in areas closest to the existing settlement.

This points to the need for a locally informed design that reflects the characteristics identified in this appraisal and ensures that development within the Watton SUE integrates appropriately with its context.

Design Response Framework

The analysis of character and the issues identified above point to the need for a clear and structured design response to guide development within the Watton Strategic Urban Extension (SUE).

The purpose of this section is to set out an evidence-based framework for how development can respond to the character of Carbrooke, particularly in relation to the settlement edge and the transition between the existing village and the proposed allocation.

This framework builds on the findings of the *Strategic Landscape Gap Evidence Paper*, which establishes the importance of maintaining a clear area of open land between Carbrooke and the Watton SUE, together with a defined transitional edge. These elements provide the primary spatial structure for managing the relationship between the existing settlement and new development.

Within this context, it is important to recognise that the Watton SUE will represent a substantial area of new development, and that it is likely to include elements of contemporary estate design. The objective is not to replicate the historic village form, but to ensure that development responds appropriately to its context and delivers a coherent transition in character.

A key component of this approach is the establishment of a graduated response across the site, reflecting proximity to the existing settlement edge and the sensitivity of that interface.

Character areas within the SUE

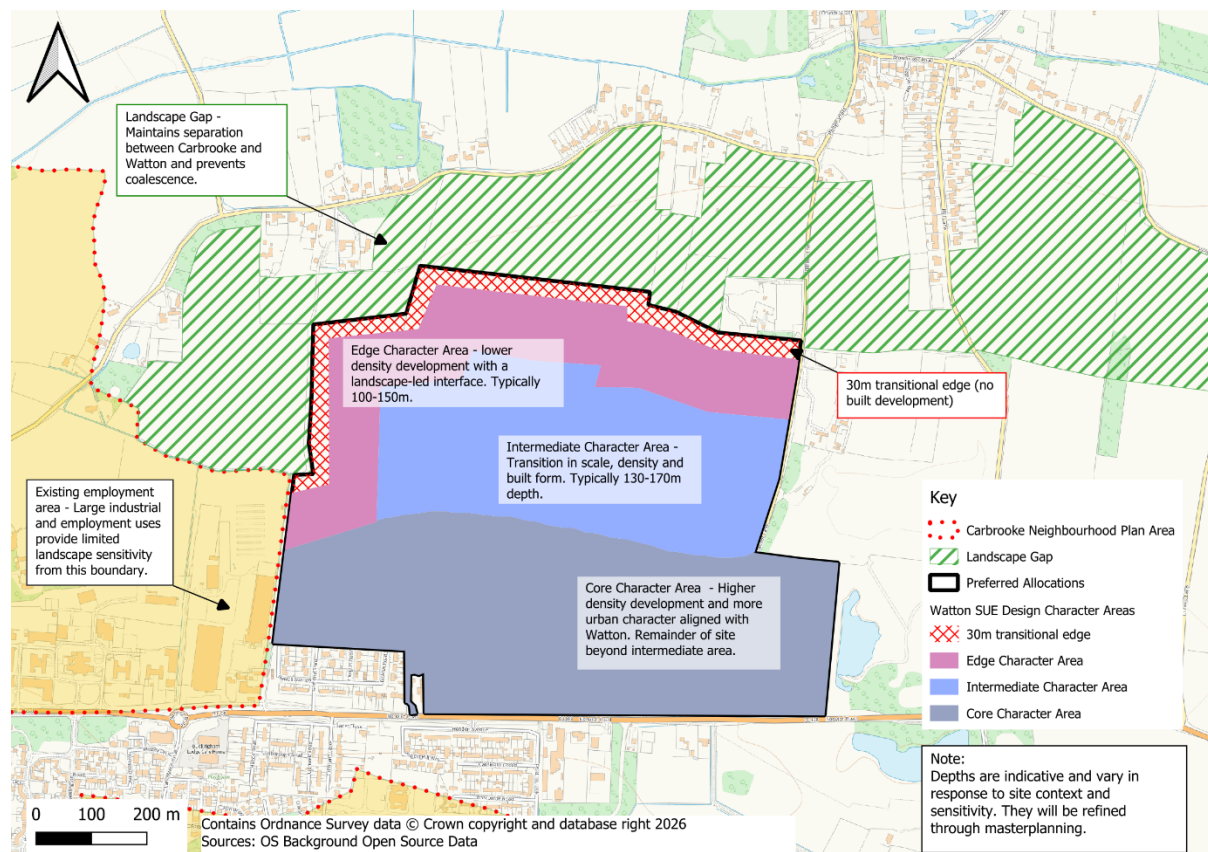
Based on the analysis of existing character and the identified sensitivities, the SUE can be understood as comprising three broad character areas:

- **Edge Character Area** – located adjacent to the transitional edge and closest to Carbrooke
- **Intermediate Character Area** – forming the middle part of the development

- **Core Character Area** – representing the main body of the allocation

These areas are not intended to define precise boundaries, but are indicative, and describe a progression in character and development form across the site. The indicative depths shown are intended to illustrate a graduated design response across the allocation rather than prescribe fixed development parcels. They have been informed by the broad dimensions of the allocation, the relationship with the existing village edge and the need to provide a meaningful transition between landscape-sensitive and more urban parts of the site. Their precise extent should be tested and refined through comprehensive masterplanning.

Figure 1: Indicative landscape buffer and design character areas for Watton SUE



Edge character area

The Edge Character Area represents the most sensitive part of the allocation in design terms due to its proximity to the Strategic Landscape Gap, Transitional Edge and open countryside. This area would typically extend approximately 100-120m beyond the Transitional Edge, although the exact extent may vary in response to site context and masterplanning.

Development within this area should provide a carefully designed transition between the landscape setting of Carbrooke and the more urban character of the wider SUE. In locations closest to the existing village, development should draw particular inspiration from the characteristics of the historic settlement identified in this appraisal. Across the character area as a whole, development should be characterised by:

- Lower densities and a more open spatial grain;
- A strong relationship between built form, trees, hedgerows and green infrastructure;
- More varied building lines and informal street layouts;
- Smaller development parcels and a reduced sense of standardisation;
- Strong landscape structure and planting along the settlement edge.

The aim is to create a landscape-led form of development that reinforces the separation between Carbrooke and Watton, responds positively to the site's rural setting, and provides a gradual transition from the Strategic Landscape Gap and Transitional Edge to the more urban character of the allocation.

Intermediate character area

The Intermediate Character Area provides the transition between the landscape-led character of the Edge Character Area and the more urban form of the Core Character Area. This area would typically extend approximately 130-170m beyond the Edge Character Area, although the exact extent may vary in response to site context and masterplanning.

Development within this area should establish a balanced suburban character that responds to the site's landscape setting whilst accommodating the scale of growth envisaged within the Watton SUE. This area should provide a clear progression in density, layout and built form between the edge and core of the development.

Key characteristics should include:

- Medium-density development with a clear and legible street hierarchy;
- Strong green infrastructure and landscape features integrated throughout the layout;
- Streets and public spaces designed around people rather than vehicles;
- Variation in building form, street patterns and character to avoid excessive uniformity;
- Well-defined public spaces and green corridors linking different parts of the development;
- Continued reference to local materials and architectural cues, whilst allowing a more contemporary interpretation of local character.

The Intermediate Character Area plays an important role in ensuring a gradual transition between the landscape-sensitive edge of the allocation and the more urban character of the development core. It should help create a cohesive neighbourhood structure whilst maintaining a strong relationship with the wider landscape framework.

Core character area

The Core Character Area represents the least sensitive part of the allocation in relation to the setting and character of Carbrooke, being located furthest from the Strategic Landscape Gap, Transitional Edge and the existing settlement of Carbrooke. This area comprises the remainder of the site beyond the Edge and Intermediate Character Areas.

Development within this area is likely to accommodate the highest densities within the allocation and may adopt a more compact and urban form, reflecting the strategic scale and function of the Watton SUE. Whilst a more contemporary suburban character is anticipated, development should continue to respond to the principles established throughout the wider site and maintain a clear relationship with the overall landscape framework.

Key characteristics should include:

- A coherent and legible street network with clear connections to surrounding neighbourhoods;
- Higher densities focussed around key routes, local centres and community facilities where appropriate;
- Well-designed public spaces that provide focal points within the development;
- Strong pedestrian and cycle connectivity throughout the site;
- Continued use of high-quality materials and architectural detailing that reflects local character in a contemporary manner;
- Integration of green infrastructure, sustainable drainage and tree planting throughout the development.

The Core Character Area should provide the primary focus for new housing, services and community infrastructure within the allocation whilst contributing positively to the overall identity and quality of the Watton SUE.

Summary

Taken together, the Strategic Landscape Gap, Transitional Edge and design character areas establish a framework for managing the relationship between the proposed Watton Strategic Urban Extension and the existing settlement of Carbrooke.

The evidence presented within this report demonstrates that different parts of the allocation have varying sensitivities and therefore require different design responses. The proposed character areas provide a graduated transition in development form, moving from a landscape-led edge that responds to the rural setting of Carbrooke, through an intermediate area that balances landscape and urban influences, to a more compact and structured core that reflects the strategic scale of the allocation.

This approach recognises that the majority of the Strategic Urban Extension will inevitably take on the characteristics of a modern urban neighbourhood. However, it also demonstrates that development can respond positively to local character, landscape setting and settlement identity through a clear design framework that varies across the site.

The character areas identified in this report provide an evidence-based foundation for future neighbourhood plan policies and masterplanning guidance, helping to ensure that the Watton Strategic Urban Extension is integrated successfully into its surroundings whilst maintaining the distinct identity and setting of Carbrooke.

Implications for the Neighbourhood Plan

The character appraisal and analysis set out in this document, together with the findings of the Strategic Landscape Gap Evidence Paper, help to inform locally specific design policies within the Carbrooke Neighbourhood Plan.

The evidence demonstrates that Carbrooke has a distinct and recognisable character, defined by its informal layout, strong relationship with the surrounding landscape, and relatively low-density development pattern. More recent development within the parish reflects a shift toward more standardised layouts, higher densities and a more engineered public realm. While these forms of development are characteristic of contemporary housing delivery, they differ from the qualities that define the historic settlement.

In the context of the proposed Watton Strategic Urban Extension (SUE), there is a need to ensure that new development responds appropriately to these characteristics. The Strategic Landscape Gap Evidence Paper establishes the importance of maintaining a clear area of separation between Carbrooke and the SUE, together with a defined transitional edge where built development is excluded. This provides a robust spatial framework for managing the interface between the existing village and the allocation.

However, the evidence also indicates that the form and character of development within the SUE will be equally important in achieving a successful outcome. In particular, development closest to the existing settlement will need to respond more directly to the characteristics of Carbrooke, while areas further from the edge can accommodate a more typical suburban form.

This supports a policy approach based on:

- A clear spatial structure, including the Strategic Landscape Gap and transitional edge
- A graduated response in character and density across the allocation
- A requirement for development to demonstrate how it responds to local character

Summary of design principles

The table below summarises the key characteristics that should inform development across the SUE, based on the evidence presented in this document.

Criteria	Edge Character Area (adjacent to transitional edge)	Intermediate Character Area	Core Character Area
Density	Lower density, reflecting more open grain	Moderate density	Higher density appropriate to strategic allocation
Layout and grain	Loose, less uniform layout. Avoid rigid uniform patterns	Structured but varied layout	More compact and structured estate layout acceptable
Building line	Varied and less formal alignment	Generally consistent with some variation	Consistent building lines

Criteria	Edge Character Area (adjacent to transitional edge)	Intermediate Character Area	Core Character Area
Landscape structure	Strong landscape framework. Buildings set within planting	Integrated landscape structure	Landscape as part of planned open space
Relationship to edge	Soft transition. Development sits back from edge and responds to countryside setting	Transitional relationship	Limited relationship with settlement edge
Materials	Predominantly red brick, clay tiles, limited render. Reference to local vernacular	Mixed materials, including brick and render	Wider material palette acceptable
Architectural detailing	Simple forms, limited but meaningful detailing. Avoid overly standardised features	Moderate variation in detailing	Standard housebuilder detailing acceptable
Boundary treatment	Soft boundaries. Hedging and planting dominant	Mix of boundary treatments	Formal boundaries and enclosures acceptable
Streets and parking	Reduced dominance of vehicles. Informal character encouraged	Balanced approach to parking	Standard parking arrangements acceptable

Policy implications

The evidence presented in this document indicates that a design-led policy approach is required to guide development within the Watton SUE. In particular, policy should:

- Require development to demonstrate a clear response to the character of Carbrooke
- Secure a graduated transition in density, layout and landscape from the edge of the allocation toward its core
- Reinforce the role of landscape as a defining feature, particularly at the settlement edge
- Ensure that materials and architectural detailing reflect the local vernacular, particularly in areas closest to the existing village
- Be supported by a comprehensive masterplanning process that defines character areas and design principles across the site

This approach will ensure that new development is integrated with its context and contributes positively to the character and identity of the parish, while remaining consistent with the strategic requirements of the Local Plan.