

Carbrooke Neighbourhood Plan

Strategic Landscape Gap Evidence Paper

May 2026

Contents

Purpose of the Paper	2
Strategic Planning Context.....	2
Community Evidence	3
Settlement Context and Spatial Structure	4
Landscape Character and Structure.....	7
Relationship between Carbrooke and Watton SUE	9
Key Sensitivities	10
Likely Development Scenario Without Additional Guidance	11
Why Additional Spatial Guidance is Required	12
Role and Function of the Strategic Landscape Gap	13
Extent and Boundary Justification	14
Transitional Edge	16
Conclusion	17

Purpose of the Paper

This evidence paper has been prepared to inform the development of a policy within the Carbrooke Neighbourhood Plan relating to the southern landscape setting of Carbrooke and the relationship between the village and the proposed Watton Strategic Urban Extension (SUE), comprising land north and east of Shrublands.

The Watton SUE was identified as a preferred strategic allocation in the emerging Breckland Local Plan Regulation 18 Preferred Options document published in October 2025. Since that consultation, Breckland Council has continued preparing its Regulation 19 Pre-Submission Local Plan. At the time this paper was prepared, the Regulation 19 Plan had not yet been published for statutory consultation.

The purpose of the paper is to assess the role and function of the land to the south of Carbrooke in planning terms, with particular regard to settlement pattern, landscape character, heritage setting and the relationship between the village and the proposed strategic growth area. It considers whether there is a clear justification for identifying this land as a Strategic Landscape Gap and, if so, the appropriate extent and function of that designation.

The paper does not seek to challenge the principle of development of the Watton SUE, nor the scale of growth identified through the Local Plan process. Instead, it provides an evidence-based assessment of how that growth can be integrated in a manner that respects the character and identity of Carbrooke, maintains its rural setting, protects important landscape structure, and retains an appropriate degree of separation between the village and the expanding urban edge of Watton.

The findings of this paper will inform the drafting of neighbourhood plan policy, including the identification of a Strategic Landscape Gap and associated transitional edge, to guide the form and layout of development through the masterplanning process and to help manage future change along the southern edge of the village.

Strategic Planning Context

The land to which this paper relates lies adjacent to the proposed strategic allocation known as the Watton SUE (North and East of Shrublands), identified in the emerging Breckland Local Plan (Regulation 18, October 2025). The draft Local Plan identifies this site for approximately 1,000 dwellings, together with supporting infrastructure, green infrastructure and community facilities. The allocation is required to come forward through a comprehensive masterplanning process to ensure coordinated delivery.

The Regulation 18 draft policy for the Watton SUE sets out a number of requirements, including high quality design, the retention and enhancement of existing landscape features such as hedgerows and trees, the provision of green corridors, biodiversity net gain and the delivery of public open space. These requirements are intended to ensure that development is integrated appropriately within its wider landscape and environmental context.

At this stage, the Local Plan has not yet progressed to Regulation 19 and therefore the allocation remains at a preferred options stage. However, it represents the emerging strategic direction of growth for the area. In this context, the role of the

Neighbourhood Plan is not to challenge the principle of strategic growth, but to provide locally specific guidance to help ensure that development responds appropriately to the character, landscape setting and settlement pattern of Carbrooke.

National planning policy supports the preparation of neighbourhood plans to shape and direct development in their area, provided they are aligned with the strategic policies of the development plan and do not undermine the delivery of strategic growth. This includes the ability to develop locally distinctive policies relating to design, landscape, green infrastructure and settlement character.

Within this context, the proposed Strategic Landscape Gap is intended to provide a locally informed spatial framework to guide the relationship between the Watton SUE, the southern landscape setting of Carbrooke, and future growth pressures along the southern edge of the village. The designation is not intended to prevent strategic growth from coming forward, but to help ensure that development is integrated in a manner which respects the rural setting, landscape structure, heritage context and identity of the village, while maintaining an appropriate degree of separation from the expanding urban edge of Watton.

Community Evidence

Community engagement has been undertaken as part of the preparation of the Carbrooke Neighbourhood Plan, including a resident survey. The survey included questions about settlement identity, the relationship between Carbrooke and Watton, and the role of open land between the older part of Carbrooke and future development.

The survey received 26 responses. The results should be interpreted with care, as this is a small and self-selecting sample. Responses were also weighted towards residents in the older part of Carbrooke: 22 respondents said they lived in Carbrooke village, the older part of Carbrooke, while 4 said they lived in one of the newer housing areas off Norwich Road. The survey therefore provides useful evidence of local views, but should be read alongside the wider settlement, landscape and planning evidence set out in this paper.

Within that context, the responses show strong concern among respondents regarding the potential for coalescence between Carbrooke and Watton, and a clear preference for maintaining separation between the existing village and future development. When asked how important it is to maintain clear separation between the older part of Carbrooke and future development in the parish, 22 of 26 respondents said this was “very important” and a further 2 said it was “quite important”. There was also strong support for Carbrooke retaining a distinct identity separate from Watton. In response to this question, 21 of 26 respondents said this was “very important” and 4 said it was “quite important”.

Respondents also highlighted the importance of preserving the distinct identity of the village, protecting its countryside setting, and managing the impact of large-scale development on local roads and the wider environment. These themes were consistent across both structured responses and free text comments, although they should also be understood in the context of the small response base.

The issues identified through community engagement relate directly to the spatial and landscape relationship between Carbrooke and the proposed Watton SUE. The following sections of this paper consider these issues in detail, drawing on settlement analysis, landscape character evidence and assessment of change to determine whether a Strategic Landscape Gap is justified.

Settlement Context and Spatial Structure

Carbrooke is characterised by a dispersed and predominantly linear settlement pattern, rather than a compact or nucleated form. While the historic core of the village is focused around Church Street and the parish church, the settlement extends along a network of rural lanes including Bridge Street, Mill Lane, Broadmoor Road and Drury Lane. This pattern reflects the village's origins as an agricultural settlement, with development historically aligned along routes serving the surrounding farmland.

Figure 1: View along Church Street within the historic core of Carbrooke, illustrating its narrow road width, traditional buildings and strong rural character



Figure 2: Traditional brick cottages in Carbrooke, showing historic character, narrow plot widths and strong building line close to the road



The Breckland Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2022) identifies Carbrooke as an “Agricultural Village” in origin, with a settlement form classified historically as a “Continuous Rural Row” and in its modern form as an “Interrupted Rural Row”. This typology is defined by buildings arranged in a linear form along a principal route, maintaining a direct relationship with the road, and transitioning relatively quickly from rear plots to open countryside. Although some gaps in frontage have emerged over time, the overall linear structure remains the defining characteristic of the village.

The southern and western edges of Carbrooke are formed by development along a series of rural lanes, including Drury Lane, Bridge Street, Summer Lane and parts of Mill Lane. These edges are notable for their immediate relationship with the surrounding countryside. Built form frequently backs directly onto open agricultural land, with rear garden boundaries often defined by hedgerows, trees or simple fencing, beyond which the landscape opens out into fields. There is generally no substantial suburban-style buffer or secondary layer of development between the settlement edge and the wider countryside. As a result, the edge of the village retains a distinctly rural character, with open agricultural land experienced directly alongside built form.

Drury Lane itself reinforces this rural edge condition. The carriageway is narrow and informal in character, functioning effectively as a single-track route in places, with passing opportunities occurring informally. There is no continuous footway provision, and pedestrian movement is accommodated through informal means such as trodden verges or narrow carriageway margins. This contributes to a strong sense of rurality and reinforces the perception of the village as being closely integrated with its agricultural surroundings.

Figure 3: Drury Lane showing informal pedestrian movement along the carriageway edge, with no formal footway provision



In contrast, more recent development located to the south of Norwich Road, associated with the expansion of Watton, is characterised by a planned estate form. This includes a more regular layout, higher density housing, defined street hierarchy and areas of public open space incorporated within the development. The

relationship between built form and surrounding land is more controlled and enclosed, with clear delineation between developed areas and managed open space.

Figure 4: Recent estate development south of Norwich Road, illustrating planned layout, higher density housing and defined street structure



Figure 5: Estate development south of Norwich Road, showing a more enclosed and urbanised relationship between built form and open space



This contrast is important in understanding the spatial relationship between Carbrooke and the proposed Watton SUE. The SUE represents a continuation of this estate-type form of development extending north of Norwich Road. Without appropriate spatial separation and a managed transition, this form of development would extend toward the existing rural edge of Carbrooke along Drury Lane. This has the potential to alter the current settlement pattern by introducing a more continuous urban form, reducing the distinction between the dispersed village and the larger urbanising area associated with Watton.

The spatial structure and rural setting of Carbrooke therefore rely not only on its linear form, but also on the presence of open agricultural land around the southern and western edges of the village, which defines settlement limits, maintains

separation from strategic growth to the south, and allows the village to continue to be experienced as a distinct rural settlement within a wider agricultural landscape.

Landscape Character and Structure

The land to the south of Carbrooke, including the area between the village and Norwich Road, forms part of a wider agricultural landscape that contributes to the setting of the village and defines its relationship with surrounding settlements. This landscape is characterised by medium to large arable fields, strong hedgerow boundaries, mature trees within those hedgerows, and occasional drainage features. The landform is gently undulating, allowing for filtered views across the landscape while retaining a sense of enclosure created by the field pattern.

Figure 6: View across the agricultural land between Carbrooke and Norwich Road, forming part of the proposed Strategic Landscape Gap and location of the Watton SUE



Figure 7: View from the gap looking north toward Carbrooke village, with the church visible in the distance, illustrating the village's relationship with its rural setting



This landscape structure is not incidental. The network of hedgerows and field boundaries provides a coherent and legible framework which helps define the relationship between settlement and countryside, reinforces the distinction between Carbrooke and the expanding urban edge of Watton, and contributes to the rural setting of the village. While views across the land are possible, they are typically experienced through gaps in vegetation or as glimpses, reinforcing the perception of a rural landscape rather than a continuous open expanse. This balance between openness and enclosure is a defining characteristic of the area.

The Breckland Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2022) identifies the parish as lying predominantly within the “Settled Tributary Farmland” landscape type. This landscape is described as comprising agricultural land with variable field patterns, vegetated boundaries and dispersed settlement form. Villages within this landscape are typically experienced as distinct entities, separated by farmland and connected by narrow rural lanes. The presence of agricultural land between settlements is therefore a key characteristic of the wider landscape, rather than an incidental or undeveloped condition.

The continuity of open agricultural land along the southern edge of the village is an important component of this landscape character and contributes to the perception of Carbrooke as a settlement contained within a wider rural landscape.

The Character Assessment also identifies that vertical features, such as church towers, often act as visual markers within this landscape type. In Carbrooke, the parish church performs this role, with views of the tower available from parts of the surrounding agricultural land. These views are experienced within a rural context, where the foreground is defined by farmland and hedgerows. This contributes to the legibility of the village within the landscape and reinforces its identity as an agricultural settlement.

The existing agricultural landscape along the southern edge of Carbrooke therefore performs a number of important functions. It provides a physical and visual buffer

between Carbrooke and the urban edge of Watton, maintains the rural setting of the village, and supports the existing settlement pattern identified in the Character Assessment. The hedgerow structure in particular provides a defensible and established framework which defines field parcels and reinforces the perception of separation.

If this landscape were to be substantially altered through the extension of built development northwards from Norwich Road and into the agricultural land along the southern edge of Carbrooke, the underlying landscape structure would be disrupted. The removal or fragmentation of hedgerows, combined with the introduction of built form into currently open fields, would reduce the effectiveness of this landscape in providing separation. It would also alter the way in which the village is experienced, replacing a rural foreground with a more urbanised edge condition.

The sensitivity of this landscape is therefore closely linked to its role in maintaining settlement separation and reinforcing village identity. Its value lies not only in its visual qualities, but in its structural function within the wider spatial arrangement of Carbrooke and Watton. Retaining this framework is an important consideration in ensuring that the proposed Watton SUE can be integrated without fundamentally altering the character and setting of the existing village.

Relationship between Carbrooke and Watton SUE

The emerging Breckland Local Plan (Regulation 18, October 2025) identifies land north and east of Shrublands as a strategic allocation, referred to as the Watton SUE. The allocation extends north of Norwich Road into land that currently forms part of the agricultural landscape surrounding the southern edge of Carbrooke. As such, it represents a significant change in the relationship between the existing urban edge of Watton and the rural settlement of Carbrooke.

At present, Carbrooke and Watton are experienced as distinct settlements. This distinction is reinforced by the presence of intervening agricultural land, which provides both physical and visual separation. The open landscape along the southern edge of Carbrooke allows the village to continue to be experienced as a separate rural settlement rather than as part of a continuous urban area.

The Watton SUE allocation would introduce a substantial area of new development into this currently open landscape. Development would extend northwards toward the southern edge of Carbrooke, including areas in proximity to Drury Lane, Summer Lane and Broadmoor Road. This has the potential to reduce the extent and continuity of agricultural land surrounding the village and alter the way in which Carbrooke is experienced in relation to the expanding urban edge of Watton.

The Local Plan requires the allocation to be brought forward through a comprehensive masterplanning process, including provision for green infrastructure, public open space and landscape features. While these elements are important in shaping the environmental quality of the development, they do not in themselves guarantee the retention of a meaningful landscape gap or the continuation of the village's rural setting.

In the absence of a defined spatial framework, there is a risk that development could extend toward existing village edges in a manner that reduces the depth of open land surrounding Carbrooke and creates a more immediate relationship between new built form and the village edge. Over time, this could erode the distinction between the dispersed village form of Carbrooke and the more continuous urban form associated with Watton.

The relationship between Carbrooke, the Watton SUE and the wider southern landscape edge of the village is therefore a key consideration in planning for the area. This evidence paper therefore considers whether a Strategic Landscape Gap, together with an associated transitional edge adjacent to the Watton SUE allocation, is necessary to maintain settlement identity, landscape structure and the rural setting of the village.

Key Sensitivities

Drawing on the settlement context, landscape character and spatial relationship described above, a number of key sensitivities are identified in relation to the land along the southern edge of Carbrooke and its relationship with the proposed Watton SUE. These sensitivities relate to the way in which the existing landscape and settlement pattern function, and how they may be affected by large-scale development.

A primary sensitivity is the role of the intervening agricultural land in maintaining separation between Carbrooke and the expanding urban edge of Watton, while also preserving the rural setting of the village. This separation is not simply a matter of distance, but of how the settlements are perceived within the landscape. The current extent of open land allows Carbrooke to be experienced as a distinct rural village, set apart from the more urbanising edge of Watton. A substantial reduction in this open land, or the introduction of built form into its northern extent, would diminish this distinction and alter the perceived relationship between the two settlements.

The rural edge condition along Drury Lane is particularly sensitive to change. Similar characteristics are also evident along other parts of the southern edge of the village, including sections of Summer Lane and Mill Lane. The existing relationship between built form and open countryside is immediate and largely unmediated, with agricultural land forming the direct setting to the rear of properties. This creates a soft and informal transition between settlement and landscape. The introduction of a more engineered or enclosed edge, or the proximity of estate-type development to this boundary, would alter this condition and result in a more urbanised character at the edge of the village.

A further sensitivity relates to the existing landscape structure, in particular the network of hedgerows and field boundaries. These features provide both visual filtering and spatial definition, contributing to the legibility of the landscape and its role in reinforcing settlement distinction and defining the relationship between village and countryside. The removal, fragmentation or enclosure of these features within a development layout would weaken this structure and reduce the effectiveness of the landscape in maintaining separation.

Views toward the village, including glimpsed views of the church tower, represent an additional sensitivity. These views are typically experienced across agricultural land and are framed by hedgerows and field boundaries. They contribute to the understanding of Carbrooke as a settlement within a rural landscape. Development that reduces the depth of open land in the foreground, or introduces built form into these view corridors, would alter the character and context in which these views are experienced.

The experience of movement through the area is also relevant. Routes such as Drury Lane, Summer Lane and Mill Lane are characterised by their rural form, limited width and informal pedestrian provision. They currently function within a landscape context rather than an urban one. Changes to the surrounding land use and the introduction of development in close proximity have the potential to alter both the character and function of these routes, including increased traffic movement and a shift toward a more urbanised environment.

Taken together, these sensitivities indicate that the agricultural landscape along the southern edge of Carbrooke and the Watton SUE performs an important role in maintaining settlement identity, landscape structure and the rural setting of the village. These characteristics are not easily replicated through internal design measures within the allocation and are dependent on the retention of sufficient open land between the two areas.

Likely Development Scenario Without Additional Guidance

In the absence of a defined spatial framework to guide the relationship between the Watton SUE and the southern edge of Carbrooke, the allocation would be expected to come forward through the masterplanning process in accordance with the requirements of the Local Plan. While this process includes provision for open space, green infrastructure and landscape features, it does not prescribe the retention of a meaningful landscape gap or the continuation of the village's existing rural edge character.

Without specific policy direction, there is a reasonable likelihood that development could extend northwards toward the southern edge of Carbrooke in a manner that prioritises efficient land use and continuity of layout. This could result in built form being located in relatively close proximity to existing village edges, with intervening land used primarily for internal open space, drainage infrastructure or landscape buffers associated with the development itself, rather than as a strategic landscape feature.

Such an outcome would reduce the depth and continuity of the agricultural land currently surrounding the village. While some areas of undeveloped land may remain within the overall layout, these would form part of the development and would not function as a distinct landscape setting or separation feature. The perception of Carbrooke as a separate rural settlement would therefore be diminished, even if a physical gap remains in planning terms.

The introduction of built form closer to the village edge would also alter the existing rural edge condition, particularly along routes such as Drury Lane and Summer Lane. The current transition from built development to open countryside would

become more enclosed and urban in character, changing the way in which the village is experienced when approached from the south and west.

In addition, the incorporation of land into the development parcel increases the likelihood of changes to the existing landscape structure. Hedgerows and field boundaries may be partially removed, reconfigured or enclosed within the layout, reducing their role in defining space, filtering views and reinforcing the distinction between settlement and countryside.

The experience of movement through the area is also likely to change. Increased traffic movement, together with the urbanisation of surrounding land, could alter the character of rural lanes and routes which currently function within a predominantly agricultural landscape setting.

Taken together, these changes would not necessarily result in the physical merging of Carbrooke and Watton, but would lead to a gradual erosion of the characteristics that currently distinguish them. The loss of a clear rural setting and the introduction of a more continuous urban edge would alter the relationship between the village and the wider landscape in a way that would be difficult to reverse.

This assessment indicates that reliance on the standard requirements of the Local Plan, including internal open space provision, is unlikely to secure the retention of a meaningful and functional landscape setting for Carbrooke or maintain an effective degree of separation from strategic growth to the south. A more explicit spatial approach is therefore required to ensure that the identified sensitivities are appropriately addressed.

Why Additional Spatial Guidance is Required

In considering how best to respond to the sensitivities identified in this paper, a number of alternative approaches have been considered. These relate to how the relationship between the Watton SUE, the southern edge of Carbrooke and the surrounding agricultural landscape could be managed without the identification of a Strategic Landscape Gap.

One option is to rely on the provision of public open space, green infrastructure and landscaping delivered as part of the Watton SUE allocation. The Local Plan requires the inclusion of such features within the development, and these are expected to contribute positively to environmental quality and amenity. However, this approach would result in open land being delivered primarily as part of the development itself, rather than as a distinct landscape setting to the village. Such areas would be experienced as components of the urban extension, with their layout and function driven largely by the needs of the development. While they may provide visual relief within the scheme, they would not necessarily maintain the existing rural edge character or the continuity of open agricultural land surrounding Carbrooke.

A second option is to rely solely on the masterplanning process to secure an appropriate relationship between the allocation and the existing settlement. While masterplanning provides an opportunity to shape the layout and design of development, it does not in itself guarantee that sufficient open land will be retained in the most sensitive locations. In the absence of clear spatial guidance, decisions

regarding the extent and location of open space may be influenced by competing objectives, including efficient land use, infrastructure requirements and delivery considerations. This approach would therefore provide limited certainty that the identified landscape and settlement sensitivities would be appropriately addressed.

A further option would be to seek a reduction in the extent of the Watton SUE allocation in order to retain a larger area of undeveloped land around the village. However, the allocation forms part of the emerging strategic growth strategy for the area, and its extent is being considered through the Local Plan process. It would not be appropriate for the Neighbourhood Plan to seek to reduce or undermine a strategic allocation, particularly prior to the Local Plan reaching Regulation 19 stage.

Taken together, these approaches do not provide a sufficiently robust mechanism for maintaining the rural setting, settlement identity and landscape structure of Carbrooke as strategic growth comes forward to the south. Internal open space provision does not perform the same function as a distinct landscape setting, reliance on masterplanning alone provides limited certainty, and reducing the allocation boundary would not align with the strategic role of the Local Plan.

Within this context, the identification of a Strategic Landscape Gap, supported by a defined transitional edge adjacent to the allocation, represents a proportionate and landscape-led approach. It allows the strategic allocation to come forward while providing a clear spatial framework to guide how development relates to the village and the wider agricultural landscape surrounding it.

Role and Function of the Strategic Landscape Gap

The preceding sections of this paper have identified a number of sensitivities relating to the southern edge of Carbrooke, including settlement identity, landscape structure, rural edge character and the relationship between the village and the expanding urban edge of Watton. They have also demonstrated that these characteristics are unlikely to be adequately protected through standard development mitigation measures alone.

Within this context, the Strategic Landscape Gap provides a clear spatial framework to guide how strategic growth should relate to Carbrooke and its surrounding landscape. Its purpose is not to prevent development from taking place, but to retain sufficient open agricultural land to maintain the village's rural setting, preserve its distinction from the expanding urban edge of Watton and protect the continuity of the existing landscape structure.

The Strategic Landscape Gap performs several interrelated functions. It maintains separation between the village and strategic growth to the south, retains the open agricultural setting surrounding Carbrooke, safeguards the network of hedgerows and field boundaries which structure the landscape, and helps preserve the dispersed rural character of the settlement edge. It also supports the continued experience of Carbrooke as a distinct village within a wider agricultural landscape, particularly when approached along routes such as Drury Lane and Summer Lane.

In addition to the gap itself, a defined transitional edge adjacent to the Watton SUE allocation is necessary to ensure that development responds appropriately to the

retained landscape setting. The transitional edge provides space for structural planting, landscape features and a gradual transition between built form and open countryside. By setting development back from the Strategic Landscape Gap, it helps avoid the creation of a hard urban edge and reinforces the role of the gap as a meaningful landscape feature rather than residual open space within the development.

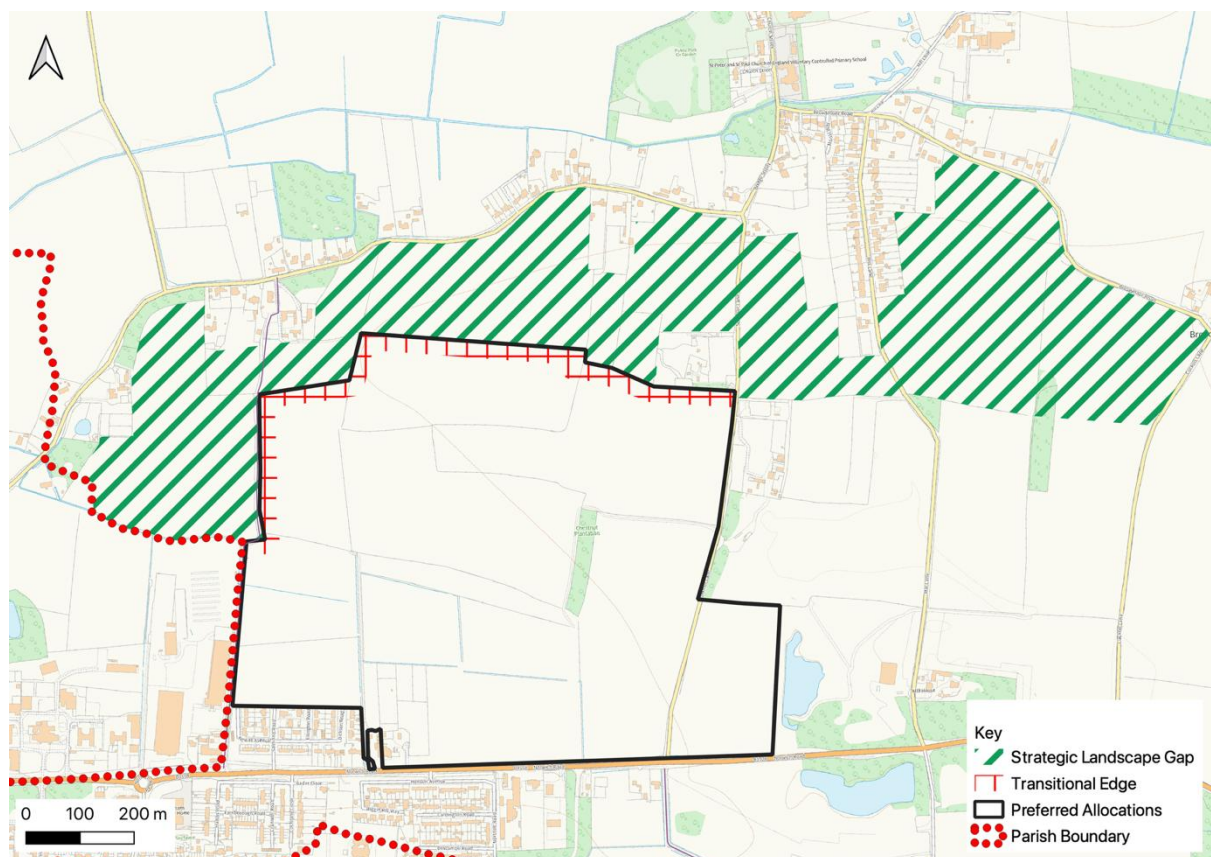
Importantly, this approach does not seek to reduce the extent of the Watton SUE allocation or undermine the strategic growth objectives of the emerging Local Plan. Instead, it provides a locally specific framework to guide how development is arranged and integrated within the landscape. In doing so, it supports the delivery of a landscape-led approach to growth which responds appropriately to the character and setting of Carbrooke.

The Strategic Landscape Gap and associated transitional edge therefore represent a proportionate and evidence-based response to the scale and location of the proposed development. Together, they provide a mechanism for accommodating strategic growth while maintaining settlement identity, landscape structure and the rural setting of the village.

Extent and Boundary Justification

The extent of the proposed Strategic Landscape Gap is shown below.

Figure 8: Strategic Landscape Gap Boundary Plan



The boundary of the Strategic Landscape Gap has been defined with reference to the existing settlement pattern of Carbrooke, the underlying landscape structure and the functional role of the surrounding agricultural land in maintaining the village's rural setting and separation from the expanding urban edge of Watton.

The northern boundary broadly follows the existing settlement edge of Carbrooke, including development along Drury Lane, Summer Lane, Bridge Street and parts of Mill Lane. This edge is irregular and varied in character, reflecting the dispersed and linear form of the village. In many locations, built form transitions directly into open agricultural land with limited intervening development. Defining the boundary in this way ensures that the designation responds to the existing settlement pattern and reflects the point at which the village gives way to countryside.

To the south and east, the boundary predominantly follows existing field patterns, hedgerows and landscape features. These elements provide a clear and defensible framework on the ground and reflect the established grain of the landscape. In locations where field boundaries are less clearly defined, the boundary has been aligned to maintain continuity of the landscape gap and to reflect the wider landscape structure surrounding the village.

The extent of the designation has been informed by the need to retain a sufficient depth and continuity of open agricultural land along the southern edge of Carbrooke. In the western part of the designation, this land performs an important role in maintaining separation between Carbrooke and the proposed Watton SUE. Further east, the land contributes more strongly to the rural setting of the village and the continuity of its surrounding agricultural landscape. Together, these functions support the continued perception of Carbrooke as a distinct rural settlement.

The designation has not been drawn to prevent the delivery of strategic growth or to reduce the extent of the Watton SUE allocation. Instead, it seeks to identify the minimum extent of land necessary to maintain the key landscape and settlement functions identified within this paper. This includes maintaining settlement distinction, retaining the existing rural edge character of the village and safeguarding the continuity of the landscape structure surrounding Carbrooke.

A key consideration in defining the boundary is the distinction between a strategic landscape setting and areas of open space delivered as part of the development itself. While the Watton SUE is expected to include green infrastructure, public open space and sustainable drainage features, these elements will form part of the urban extension and will be designed, managed and experienced accordingly. They do not perform the same function as undeveloped agricultural land in maintaining the rural setting and landscape separation of Carbrooke.

The Strategic Landscape Gap is therefore intended to retain land in its existing open and predominantly agricultural character, supported by the continuation of hedgerows, field patterns and landscape features. This ensures that the southern edge of Carbrooke continues to be experienced as part of a wider rural landscape, rather than as the edge of a continuous urban area.

The resulting boundary provides a clear, defensible and proportionate spatial framework which responds to the existing settlement form, landscape structure and strategic growth context of the area.

Transitional Edge

In addition to the Strategic Landscape Gap, a transitional edge is identified within the Watton SUE along those parts of the allocation adjoining the Strategic Landscape Gap, as shown on Figure 8.

The transitional edge establishes a clear setback of development from the Strategic Landscape Gap and guides how the northern edge of the allocation should be designed and integrated with the surrounding landscape. This is necessary to ensure that the Strategic Landscape Gap functions as a distinct area of countryside, rather than being perceived as part of the development.

The transitional edge is indicated as having a depth of approximately 30 metres. This dimension is considered capable of accommodating structural planting, green infrastructure and a gradual transition in character between the built form of the development and the open agricultural land within the Strategic Landscape Gap. It provides space for meaningful landscape structure, rather than a narrow or token buffer.

The purpose of the transitional edge is not simply to provide open space, but to create a clear and legible distinction between the urban form of the Watton SUE and the retained countryside beyond. Development within this zone should be limited in scale and designed to support this transition. Appropriate uses may include structural planting, landscape features, biodiversity enhancement and sustainable drainage, provided these remain subordinate to the primary landscape function of the zone. Built development, including residential curtilage, should not extend into this zone.

Built form should be set back from the boundary of the Strategic Landscape Gap, and the interface between development and the gap should avoid the creation of a hard or abrupt urban edge. The design of this interface should ensure that the gap continues to be experienced as part of the wider countryside, rather than as an extension of the development.

The exact layout and treatment of the transitional edge will be determined through the masterplanning process. However, it should be sufficiently robust to ensure that the function of the Strategic Landscape Gap is maintained. In this respect, the transitional edge should generally provide a depth of approximately 30 metres, with localised variation where necessary to respond to landscape features or strengthen the effectiveness of the transition.

The transitional edge therefore complements the Strategic Landscape Gap by controlling how development relates to it. Together, they provide a coherent and proportionate approach to maintaining settlement separation, protecting the rural setting of Carbrooke and ensuring that the northern edge of the Watton SUE is designed in a landscape-led manner.

Conclusion

This evidence paper has examined the relationship between Carbrooke, the proposed Watton SUE and the surrounding agricultural landscape in the context of settlement form, landscape character, heritage setting and spatial structure. It has identified that the open land along the southern edge of the village performs an important role in maintaining the distinct identity, rural setting and landscape framework of Carbrooke.

The analysis demonstrates that this land contributes to the separation between Carbrooke and the expanding urban edge of Watton, while also reinforcing the dispersed linear form of the village and the continuity of the surrounding agricultural landscape. It supports the existing settlement pattern identified in the Breckland Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment, contributes to the setting of the historic core and helps define the experience of movement along rural lanes such as Drury Lane and Summer Lane.

The assessment of likely development scenarios indicates that, in the absence of a defined spatial framework, development associated with the Watton SUE could extend toward the southern edge of Carbrooke in a manner that would reduce the depth and continuity of the existing agricultural landscape. While open space and green infrastructure would be provided as part of the allocation, these elements would form part of the urban extension and would not perform the same function as a distinct landscape setting to the village.

Alternative approaches have also been considered, including reliance on internal open space provision, masterplanning alone and reduction of the allocation boundary. These approaches were found either to provide insufficient certainty that the identified sensitivities would be addressed or to conflict with the strategic role of the allocation within the emerging Local Plan.

In response, the identification of a Strategic Landscape Gap, supported by a transitional edge adjacent to the Watton SUE allocation, is considered to provide a proportionate and evidence-based solution. The Strategic Landscape Gap retains the minimum extent of open land necessary to maintain settlement distinction, protect the rural setting of Carbrooke and safeguard the continuity of the surrounding landscape structure, while the transitional edge ensures that development is designed and arranged in a manner that responds appropriately to these characteristics.

This approach does not seek to reduce the extent of the allocation or undermine the strategic growth objectives of the emerging Local Plan. Instead, it provides a clear spatial framework to guide how development is integrated with the existing village and surrounding landscape, ensuring that growth can be accommodated in a landscape-led manner.

The evidence therefore supports the inclusion of a policy within the Carbrooke Neighbourhood Plan to designate a Strategic Landscape Gap and require a transitional edge adjacent to the Watton SUE allocation. Together, these measures represent a locally distinctive but strategically aligned response to the scale and location of proposed growth.