

## Further Comments on the River Wensum SSSI and SAC

Natural England

### Background to designation, distribution of features and impact of abstraction

- The River Wensum was designated an SSSI in 1993 and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in 2000. It was selected as being one of the best examples of a particular river type. The river's condition at the time of selection was not a selection criteria.
- The River Wensum was selected as a 'whole river SSSI'. It is classified as a River Type III: "lowland chalk & oolite river with generally stable flow regime" with a transition in its downstream section to River Type I "lowland river with minimal gradients on mixed geology in England". The river exhibits differing characteristics and features throughout its length.
- In terms of its SSSI interest, it is only on the lower river that the Type I river is expressed. Type I River supports a key European habitat for this SAC - Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculion fluitantis* and *Callitricho-Batrachion* vegetation.
- Of the 72 km of river channel that form the River Wensum SSSI, 7 km lies downstream of the Costessey abstraction. However, this impacted length represents a much greater proportion of the river habitat in terms of area. This is calculated as 15.15% of the river habitat of the SSSI. In addition, the lower reaches of the river support mature river, with characteristics not found on the mid or upper reaches.
- The impacted lower 7km of river does support examples of the *Ranunculion fluitantis* and *Callitricho-Batrachion* SAC vegetation. This vegetation would be more extensive if this river section was restored and in a favourable condition. Indeed increased abstraction above the current historic level is likely to result in a further reduction in the expression of this feature in the lower river reach.

### Conservation objectives, restoration of the SAC and prevention of further deterioration.

- The Conservation Objectives for this site are, subject to natural change, to maintain the following habitats in favourable condition (or restore to favourable condition if features are judged to be unfavourable), with particular reference to any dependent component special interest features (habitats, vegetation types, species, species assemblages etc.) for which the land is designated (SSSI, SAC).
- The Review of Consents (RoC) has identified a flow deficit at Hellesdon Mill which is currently estimated to be up to 49 MI/d at low flows. A

progressive approach to the implementation of the RoC solution has been agreed, whereby AWS will initially progress a sustainability change (SC) from the surface water intake at Costessey which alleviates the low flow deficit by 20 MI/d. AWS will evaluate the options described in the Needs and Alternatives report to confirm costs (capital and operating), delivery times, project risks and issues. This evaluation will include a full cost benefit analysis of the options available and will be complete by 2012. AWS will plan to achieve the initial SC of 20MI/d, as far as possible, within the AMP5 period 2010-15. The Environment Agency and Natural England will confirm the additional SC required to meet the appropriate flow standard for the River Wensum by June 2013. AWS will then adopt this additional SC in their final business plan for PR14 with the aim of achieving the full SC required by the RoC within the AMP6 period 2015-2020.

- The 'Statement of common understanding on water resources' agreed by Anglian Water, Environment Agency, Natural England for the forthcoming Examination in Public recognises the current unfavourable condition of the lower reach of the River Wensum and sets out an agreed way forward in the restoration of the SAC site in accordance with the above point. It also sets out the agreed need to prevent further deterioration in the period up to full restoration of the site.
- The principle of no deterioration is enshrined in Article 6(2) of the 'Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). Member states shall take appropriate steps to avoid, in the Special Areas of Conservation, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species... The Habitats Directive are transposed through The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010.
- The principle of no deterioration is also enshrined in Article 1 of the European Community Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC). The purpose of this Directive is to establish a framework for the protection of inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater which: (a) prevents further deterioration and protects and enhances the status of aquatic ecosystems.

4<sup>th</sup> November 2010