



Wilder Hickling

A haven for nature, heritage and people

Phase 1: Discovery stage



norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk

A unique place

With its wide open skies, reedbeds, woodland and unspoilt landscape, Hickling Broad and Marshes lies at the heart of the Broads National Park — a place where habitats are protected, wildlife can thrive, and people can learn, explore and enjoy the many benefits of being in nature.

Extraordinary encounters with nature are always around the corner — from the passing flutter of a swallowtail butterfly, the low boom of a bittern, the chattering of bearded tits among the reeds, to the feeling of water trickling through fingers on a boat trip.

Hickling Broad and Marshes is open and welcome to all. Constantly changing, yet somehow also timeless, the nature reserve is a place for all seasons. It invites everyone to dwell and find their own sense of place, including those for whom peace, tranquility and a special view are the stuff of lifelong memories.

It is a space evocative of the past and hopeful for the future, a magical place that will weave its way into the hearts of generations to come.

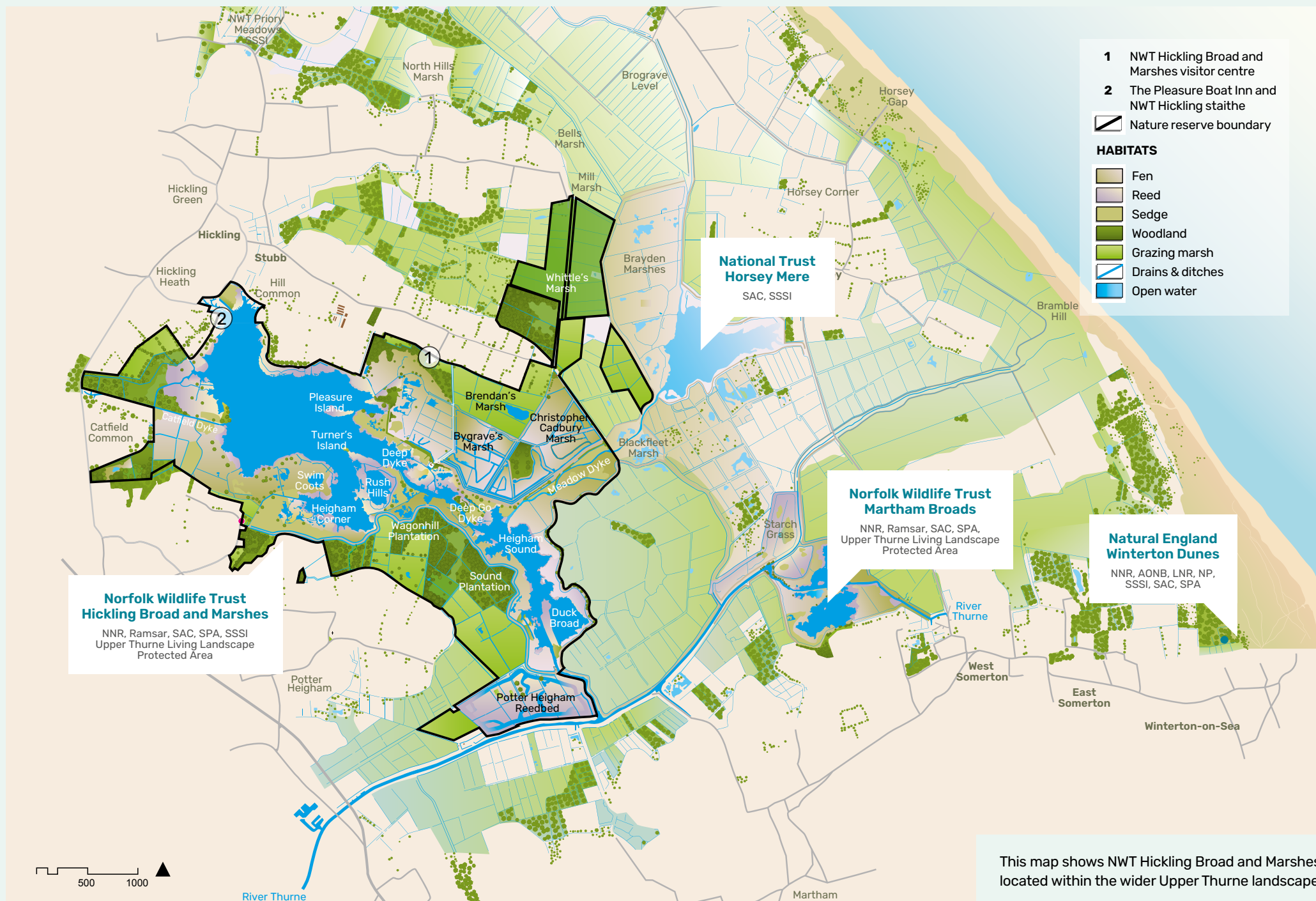
Our Vision

'At its heart, Hickling Broad and Marshes is a site where nature is abundant and thriving. An important part of the wider Broadland landscape, it is a haven for many of the UK's rarest animals and plants.'

It is also a gateway for people to explore, enjoy and be inspired to act for nature through a range of inclusive experiences that connect them to the Broads and its evocative landscape. With strong connections to the local community, Hickling Broad and Marshes is a place that is loved and nurtured, as NWT continues to ensure it meets the future needs of both wildlife and people.'

A national public appeal in 2017 allowed Norfolk Wildlife Trust to purchase Hickling Broad and Marshes in its entirety. As the principal landowner for the nature reserve, NWT embarked on designing a vision for the site. Like so many projects, work was put on hold during the pandemic only to resume in 2023 when NWT purchased a plot of land at Hickling staithe, which included the Pleasure Boat pub, adjacent buildings and a large car park, together with associated moorings. Following the renovation and re-opening of the pub in 2024, NWT is keen to progress an updated vision for Hickling, created with the help of consultant landscape architects and specialist ecological advice.





This map shows NWT Hickling Broad and Marshes located within the wider Upper Thurne landscape.

What we want to achieve

Wilder Hickling: A haven for nature, heritage and people is critical in delivering Norfolk Wildlife Trust's mission to create more space for nature to thrive and inspire more people to act for nature. The updated vision and spatial plan for Hickling Broad and Marshes will deliver four broad outcomes:



Ecological resilience:

The natural assets of the Broad and surrounding habitats are safeguarded and enhanced to enable wildlife and people in the Upper Thurne area to thrive, including being better able to adapt to the impacts of climate change.



Social impact:

A wider diversity of people have increased access to Hickling Broad and Marshes, enjoying the wellbeing benefits that nature brings and being inspired to take action to protect it.



Economic sustainability:

The contribution that the natural capital of the Broad makes to local livelihoods is better recognised, valued and sustained alongside the development of new contributions to local economies.



Heritage enhancement:

The significance of the natural and social heritage embodied in the biodiversity, geography, culture and buildings found at Hickling Broad and Marshes is brought to life for visitors.

Our priorities for delivering each outcome are illustrated overleaf and provide a focus for investment over the short, medium and longer-term.

Ecological resilience

We will:

- Deliver plans for climate adaptation for key species by working to re-establish natural ecological processes.
- Identify opportunities for enhancing and expanding the area of land across the Upper Thurne that is managed with biodiversity as the prime or significant objective.
- Identify opportunities to protect and enhance the natural assets that contribute towards the sequestration and storage of carbon.

Deliverables will include:

- Reconnect 63 hectares of drained land within Hickling nature reserve reedbeds to Hickling Broad - re-establishing a larger, more resilient natural floodplain. In this area, we'll create additional pools, nesting islands, and reed-edge habitat to increase the diversity of habitats before breaching the old floodwall to allow water levels to naturally ebb and flow.
- Raise water levels across 45 hectares of publicly accessible marshes to create a shifting mosaic of tall herb fen and open water habitats supported by a dynamic and as close to naturally functioning water system as currently possible. We'll adapt reserve infrastructure to the higher water levels, to retain public access to this area.
- Restore and introduce sustainable management of existing wetland scrapes, providing improved habitat for waterbirds and waders, and creating opportunities for close encounters with wildlife.
- Restore 45 hectares of wet grazing marsh, raising water levels, introducing new wet features to create additional foraging habitats and introducing conservation grazing.



Social impact

We will:

- Deliver visitor experiences which embody a 'wild, wilder, wildest' approach across Hickling Broad and Marshes to ensure the needs and expectations of a wider diversity of people are met, including young people and people with limited access to nature.
- Develop a recreation offer which is delivered with minimal impact to the sensitive habitats of the Broad and surrounding area.
- Develop and install innovative visitor infrastructure across the nature reserve such as raised viewing platforms rather than fixed hides so that it is adapted to cope with climate change and a changing environment.

Deliverables will include:

- Creation of an 'experience arc' around the northern edge of Hickling Broad to enable visitors to experience the natural environment and open water of the Broad through the creation of walks, viewing points and immersive moments.
- A new Welcome Cabin, which will be a focal point for connecting NWT Hickling staithe with the facilities at the NWT nature reserve by boat, cycle and foot.
- Enhanced trail from the NWT Hickling staithe to the existing NWT visitor centre at Hickling Broad, to make the nature reserve more accessible to visitors on foot through specific small-scale interventions such as path improvements and signage.
- Extended visitor experience at the nature reserve, including the development of new walks, viewing points and wildlife experiences so that it becomes more inclusive and accessible to a wider diversity of people.
- Installation of a changing places toilet at NWT Hickling staithe as part of our commitment to accessibility.
- Working with the Nancy Oldfield Trust to enable the provision of fully accessible boat trips which will run from NWT Hickling staithe.

Economic sustainability

We will:

- Ensure that the expansion of the visitor offer continues to support local employment and volunteering opportunities through direct employment as well as supporting services including hospitality and tourism.
- Work closely with our landlord tenants at the Pleasure Boat Inn to optimise the visitor experience and support the pub in being a successful enterprise.

Deliverables will include:

- EV charging points installed for cars and electric bikes across the NWT car park facilities at Hickling.
- Development of a business case including income-generation opportunities to support the future economic resilience of our work for nature and wildlife as well as the local tourism industry.
- Building on the success of the newly renovated Pleasure Boat pub by working with our tenant Landlord to encourage and engage a new audience to ensure the longer-term sustainability of the business.



Heritage enhancement

We will:

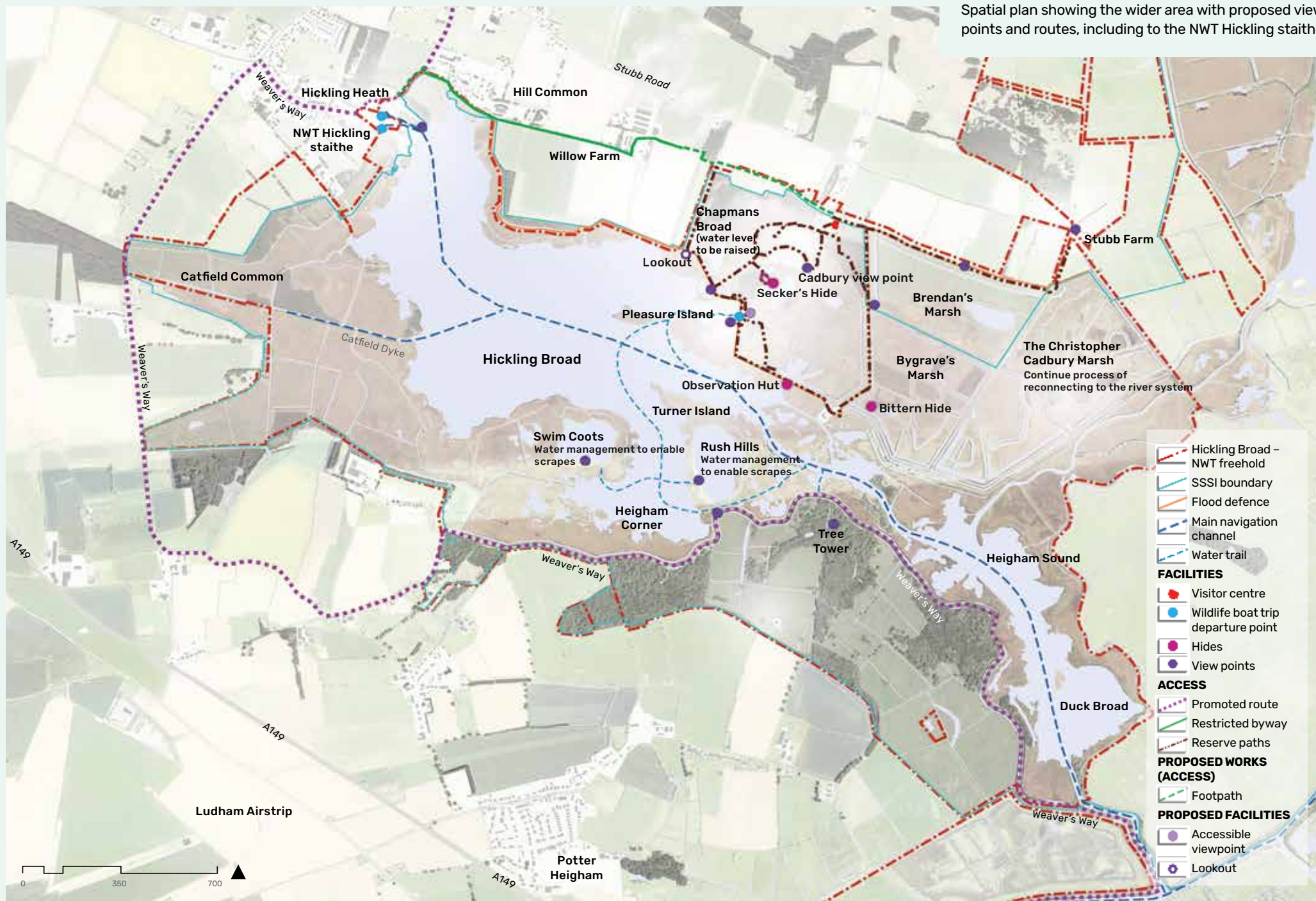
- Find innovative ways to tell the story of the Broads, its natural and social history and impact.
- Deliver memorable experiences that encourage visitors to find out more about the heritage of the site.
- Undertake sensitive building restoration which preserves the built heritage of the site.

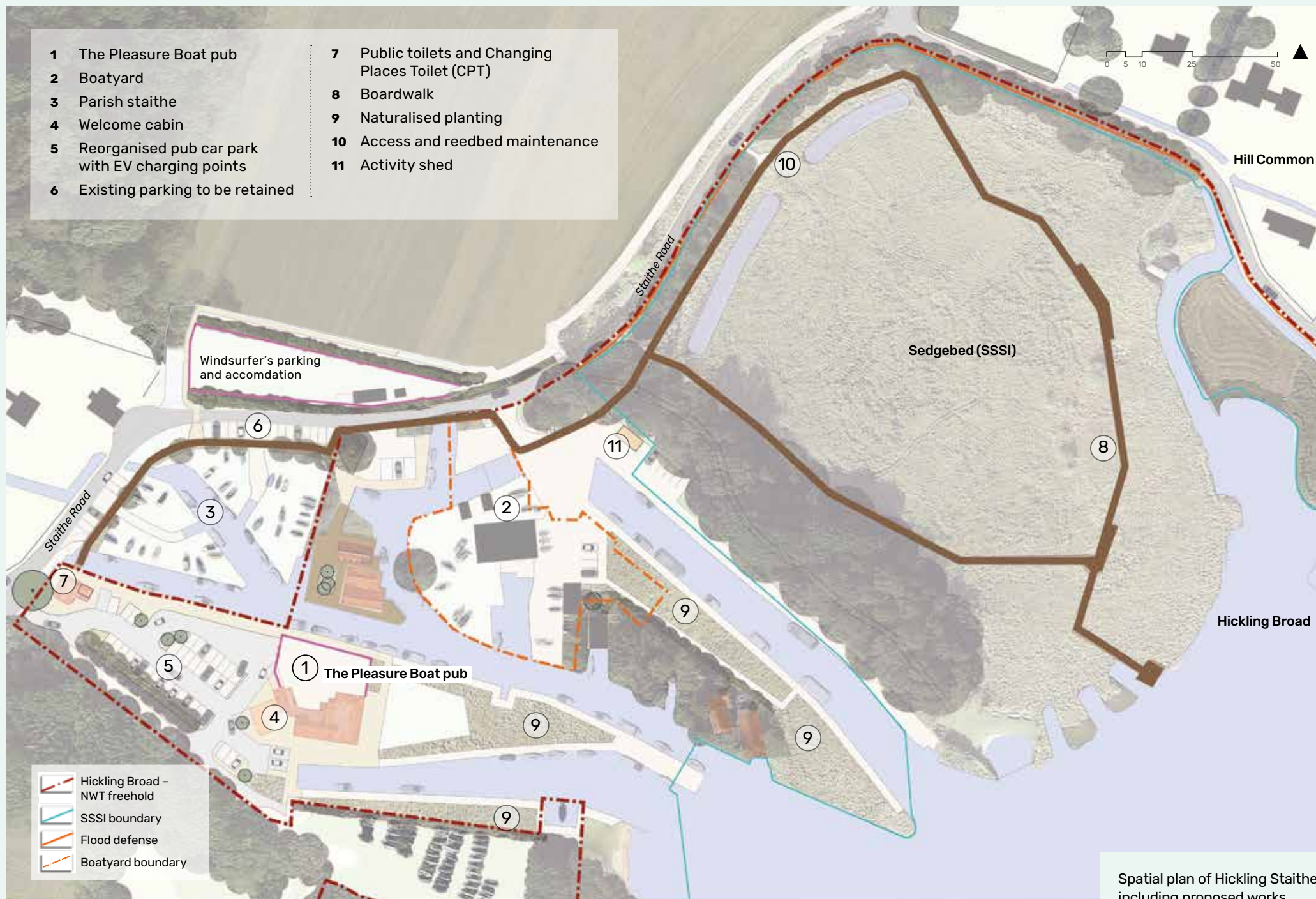
Deliverables will include:

- Sensitive, appropriate and accessible interpretation across the site which helps to tell the natural and social history of Hickling Broad and Marshes.
- Car park improvements to ensure from the point of arrival the natural heritage of the site is evident, through using reed and sedge to 'naturalise' the boundaries, blurring lines between the built and natural environments.



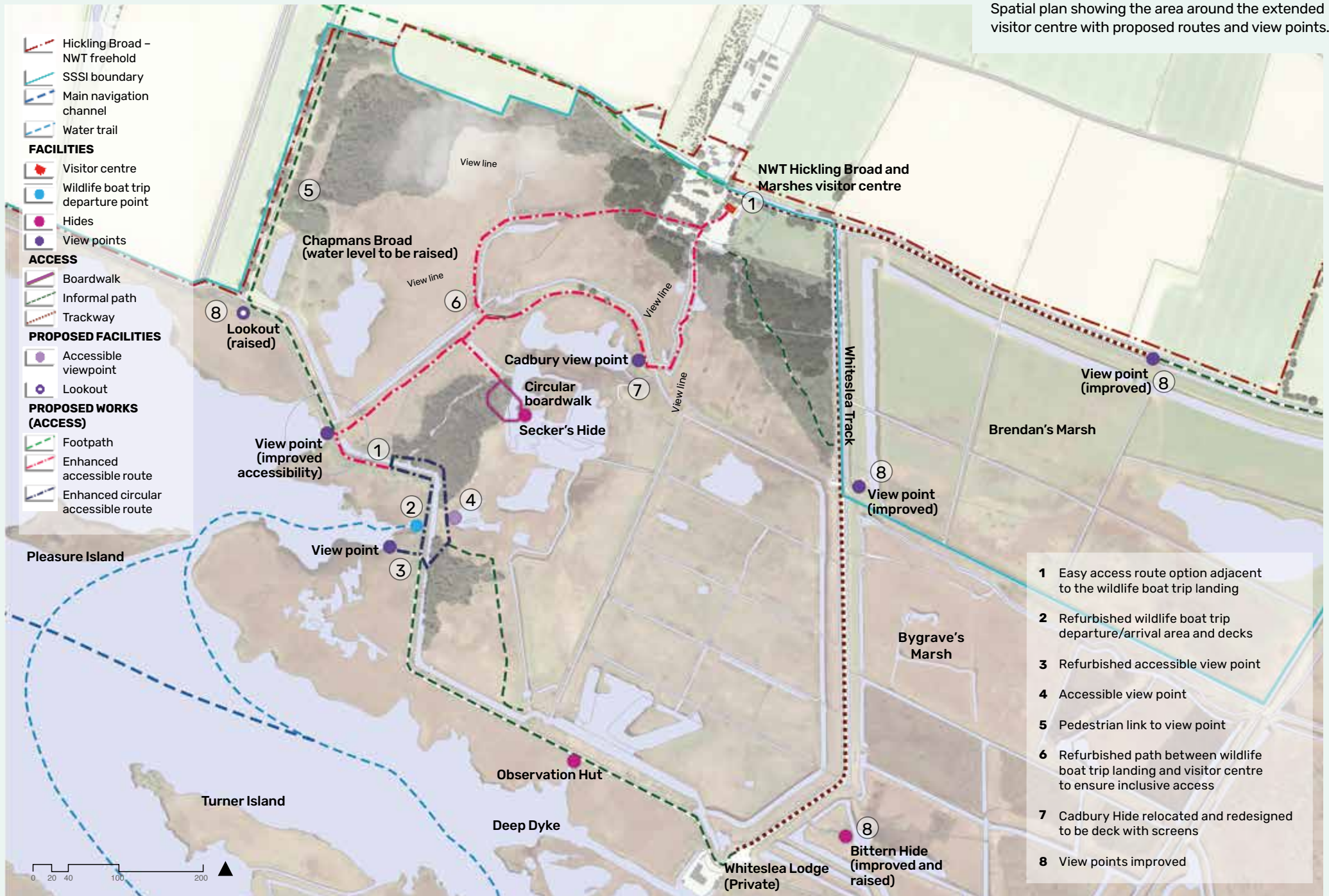
Spatial plan showing the wider area with proposed view points and routes, including to the NWT Hickling staithe.





Spatial plan of Hickling Staithe, including proposed works.

Spatial plan showing the area around the extended visitor centre with proposed routes and view points.



Turning vision into reality



In implementing ***Wilder Hickling: A haven for nature, heritage and people***, NWT recognises the challenge of balancing the desire to improve accessibility and connectivity to enable more people to engage with nature and wildlife, whilst also protecting the valued feeling of wildness and the unspoilt nature of the Broad and marshes.

Maintaining this balance is at the heart of this project. We will be guided by commitments which safeguard the landscape character of the area, respond to the local vernacular, ensure biodiversity considerations are fully incorporated with no loss of biodiversity value, and apply the principles of sustainable development.

Our initial priorities will focus on enabling access to the Broad and supporting visitors to understand and appreciate the area's unique natural and social heritage. Alongside this we will continue to work with partners, landowners and stakeholders to develop and implement plans for climate adaptation.

Over the following six years as design plans are taken forward and implemented, ***Wilder Hickling: A haven for nature, heritage and people*** will help to ensure that the wildlife and habitats of the Broad and marshes continue to thrive and that visitors and the local community are connected with, inspired by and value Norfolk's wildlife and wild spaces.

This exciting and transformational project needs not just a bold vision but also bold support.

To find out more about getting involved and supporting this project email fundraising@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk



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