



# WHY FARMING MATTERS IN COASTAL SUFFOLK



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## Coastal Suffolk

-  Area covered by this report.
-  Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB



# FRESH, TASTY FOOD AND A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

A PERSONAL VIEW BY WRITER, BROADCASTER AND SUFFOLK HOTELIER RUTH WATSON



Bill Shankly famously said about football: "It's not a matter of life or death, it's much more important than that." I feel the same way about food.

Theoretically, it may be just an agglomeration of nutrients. In reality, food does far more than just keep us alive: it seduces and satisfies, elates and energises us. There are few things more life enhancing than the sharing of an honest meal with friends and family.

Living in coastal Suffolk, we are manifestly blessed with fertile soils. Our farmers produce everything

from free-range pork, lamb and potatoes to cauliflowers, carrots, apples and wheat.

Currently, chefs throughout the land are loudly espousing the use of locally-grown produce. The notion seems to have descended as some kind of revelation. But while it is perfectly reasonable to bring in mangoes from India, hasn't it always been obvious that Suffolk-grown asparagus will be fresher, better tasting and of sounder provenance than asparagus grown in Thailand?

Just as importantly, by buying locally-produced food we also help sustain the economic, cultural and spiritual essence of our immediate environment.

As I look out of my study window, I can see our own (organic) farmland smothered in the clover and grass that will go to feed a neighbouring beef herd. On the ground, the bees are fervently working the flowers while overhead the swallows are swooping and swirling around the open cart sheds.

If there is a better place to live and work – or visit – than Suffolk, I don't know of it.

Ruth Watson, 2010



# A GROWING FUTURE FOR COASTAL SUFFOLK

The farmed landscape of coastal Suffolk supports outstanding food production while sustaining habitats of international importance.

Agriculture truly takes centre stage here, with farmers and growers perfectly placed to:

- Contribute towards our food and fuel needs
- Manage our countryside and protect our environment
- Support the rural community in terms of access, employment, leisure, recreation and education
- Drive the food and tourism-based local economy.

But coastal Suffolk also faces major risks associated with the threat of climate change. It seems more and more likely that, in the long term, the area will be subject to increased frequency and severity of floods and droughts, putting productive farmland, homes and businesses under threat.

This report celebrates the contribution made by agriculture and horticulture within this unique location, designated as an AONB and recognised as a nationally-important landscape. In particular, it looks at how growers are using the free-draining soils of east Suffolk and access to irrigation water to produce high value, high quality vegetable crops.

It also assesses the potential impact of climate change and shows how, with the right policies in place, farmers and growers can begin to deliver solutions.

We face a future in which society will demand that our farmers produce more while impacting less on the environment. Farmers and growers in coastal Suffolk are ready to rise to that challenge.

The NFU would like to thank East Suffolk Water Abstractors Group for its support in compiling this report.

## Government position

Defra's structural reform plan confirms a Government commitment to 'support and develop British farming and encourage sustainable food production' while seeking to support a 'strong and sustainable green economy, resilient to climate change'.

## Our priorities for farming

- Committed long-term investment in the maintenance of existing sea and river defences.
- A simplified consents procedure to allow farmers to carry out their own minor repairs on seawalls, leaving the Environment Agency to carry out more substantive works.
- Transfer of land that is currently part of the Suffolk River Valleys Environmentally Sensitive Area into environmental stewardship schemes designed to meet the needs of lowland graziers.
- Technical innovation to increase the sustainable use of water on farms and training programmes to help farmers adopt techniques that maximise efficient use of water.



*Farmland and the River Orwell from Shotley Church  
(Photo Malcolm Farrow)*



# WHY FARMING MATTERS IN COASTAL SUFFOLK

THE COASTAL SUFFOLK LANDSCAPE IS A FARMED LANDSCAPE. FARMERS HERE DEMONSTRATE A TALENT FOR GROWING THE FOOD THAT WE EAT WHILE MANAGING THE INTERNATIONALLY IMPORTANT ENVIRONMENT THAT WE CHERISH.

Farming in coastal Suffolk is different to the rest of the county, and the reason why lies in the ground. Underlying geomorphology consists of marine sands and gravels, known as 'crag', which make the soil light and free-draining. This soil type, combined with a favourable climate, enables farming - and the food processing and retail activities that depend on it - to make a significant contribution to the rural economy.

The catchment is archaeologically significant as well. Deposits of London clay at Ferry Cliff on the Deben Estuary, for example, have exposed the remains of fossil mammals including the oldest known rodents and hoofed animals from the British Isles. These include fossils of Hyracotherium, a fox-sized ancestor to the modern horse and zebra<sup>1</sup>.

The largely undeveloped coast is made up of a mosaic of estuaries, salt marshes, eroding cliffs and shingle banks. The importance of the local landscape is recognised by its designation as the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which covers 150 square miles of countryside. This includes coastal lowlands, ancient woodland, grazing marshes, wildlife-rich wetlands and the historic sandling heaths.

The environmental value of the area is recognised by the widespread designation of nationally important habitats (sites of special scientific



*The largely undeveloped coast is made up of a mosaic of estuaries, salt marshes, eroding cliffs and shingle banks (Photo Ludwig Haskins)*



*Cattle graze by the ruins of Leiston Abbey chapel (Photo Charles Cuthbert)*

interest), with some classified as significant in European terms (Natura 2000). Some estuaries are listed as internationally important wetland sites under the Ramsar convention.

Farmers in coastal Suffolk protect and enhance this natural environment, particularly through their management of grazing livestock. Viable livestock enterprises are crucial to the maintenance of the AONB because they allow important plant and wildlife species to flourish and archaeological sites to be preserved.

Coastal Suffolk is home to over 100,000 people in an area which spans three district authorities.

The area is dominated by water, and human intervention is needed to manage the risks of floods and droughts. The walls that protect the estuaries and coast from the sea are maintained by the Environment Agency, while the drainage of freshwater from farmland is managed by East Suffolk Internal Drainage Board.

Access to freshwater for the irrigation of crops has transformed the farmed landscape, enabling farmers to grow high quality vegetables for which the area is now noted. Farming depends on the availability of a secure supply of water.

<sup>1</sup> Natural England

## Suffolk Food Hall, Wherstead



*Grower Henry Dobell restocking apples*

Suffolk Food Hall is run by Oliver, Robert and Andrew Paul. The hall is a prime example of farm diversification as it is based in a converted cattle shed.

The aim of the food hall is to provide a viable local alternative to multiple retailers by offering originality, provenance and traditional produce to consumers. The hall opened in 2007 and already has an annual turnover of £2 million and 55 employees.

Suffolk Food Hall aims to source the highest quality fresh produce locally. All its meat comes from local farms, as does the flour that is used in the bakery. However, to become a viable alternative to supermarkets the hall has to offer the widest possible product range. This means that, despite its best efforts, some produce is from further afield.

# WHY FARMING MATTERS TO THE ECONOMY

**A MILD CLIMATE, LIGHT SANDY SOILS AND A WELL-DEVELOPED BUSINESS INFRASTRUCTURE ALLOW FARMERS IN COASTAL SUFFOLK TO MAKE AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY AND THE LOCAL ECONOMY.**



*Potato harvesting in coastal Suffolk  
(Photo Ludwig Haskins)*

Agriculture is big business in coastal Suffolk, with farmers and growers playing a significant role as part of East of England's £8 billion<sup>1</sup> food and farming industry.

In common with the rest of the region, the area is well known for cereal crops. But the free-draining soils of east Suffolk are ideal for field-scale vegetable production, which is particularly important locally because of the high value of crops produced and the large number of people needed to harvest them. Horticultural businesses growing nursery stock and flowers are also major employers.

Although modest in terms of land mass, the area achieves relatively high levels of output of these crops. Coastal Suffolk is particularly noted for early and late season production. One third of the county's potatoes, vegetables and salad crops are grown on just one fifth of Suffolk's farmed area.

Sugar beet grown in coastal Suffolk is delivered to British Sugar's factory at Bury St Edmunds and contributes to overall factory production of 200,000 tonnes of sugar each year.

Suffolk also has a great tradition of pig farming, with about one fifth of the UK's pork originating from the county.

Local farms employ 2,200 people<sup>2</sup>, with many more jobs dependent on the farming sector in associated industries such as food processing and haulage.

<sup>1</sup> East of England Development Agency 2020 Vision

<sup>2</sup> Defra June Survey 2008



### Key crops in coastal Suffolk

Crop	Volume of coastal Suffolk produce (tonnes)	Value of coastal Suffolk output (£)
Carrots	90,500	£5 million
Potatoes	121,000	£20 million
Onions	54,400	£7 million

Source: East Suffolk Water Abstractors Group survey 2010

### Three Musketeers Ltd, Rendlesham

Three Musketeers, or 3Ms, is a marketing and supply management company representing six farmers in coastal Suffolk. Together, the group supplies 50,000 tonnes of potatoes, 30,000 tonnes of onions and 8,000 tonnes of carrots and parsnips to retail customers.

3Ms has an annual turnover of £13 million, employs six permanent staff and more than 50 seasonal workers. The company manages planting schedules and supply to customers but does not get involved in the growing of crops.

The planting schedules are prepared four to six months in advance and are tailored to each individual grower and their particular fields. This practice provides customers with one strong supply route, meaning a secure quantity, quality and guarantee of supply.

Grower and product identity is also paramount to 3Ms. Rather than pooling and averaging payments, individual growers are paid the full



Three Musketeers Graham Thorne, Richard Pipe and John Patrick (Photo Ludwig Haskins)

return on the quality of the produce they supply, which encourages excellence from growers.

In the autumn of 2010, the group was in the early stages of building an anaerobic digestion plant. The aim of the plant is to reduce waste, improve soil organic matter and fertility, and produce electricity and gas. After conversion, the latter will also be used to fuel the lorries that transport 3Ms' produce.

### Key issues

Farmers are tasked with increasing production to help meet rising global demand for food while minimising their impact on the environment. At the same time, productive farmland is also threatened by potential coastal flooding and salt water incursion.

### Government position

Defra's structural reform plan states that the Government will promote increased domestic food production, ensure that consumers can be confident about where their food comes from and drive sustainable food procurement by the Government and the public sector.

### We would like to see:

- Policies that encourage farmers to grow more food while impacting less on the environment.
- Increased procurement of local food, especially by the public sector, with an emphasis on food produced to Red Tractor assured standards.
- Research and development programmes that give farmers the tools they need to meet future food and energy needs.



# WHY WATER RESOURCES MATTER

WATER IS AT THE HEART OF FARMING IN COASTAL SUFFOLK. FRUIT AND VEGETABLES DEPEND ON IT TO MAXIMISE CROP YIELDS AND QUALITY. A SECURE SUPPLY OF WATER IS THEREFORE ESSENTIAL.



*Irrigation in coastal Suffolk  
(Photo Ludwig Haskins)*

Coastal Suffolk is one of the driest parts of the country, with local rainfall typically two thirds of the national average. Farming accounts for only 30% of the total annual water use in the catchment<sup>1</sup>. But farmers tend to need water at times of high temperatures and low flows and summer abstraction can reach two thirds of total daily use.

When supplies are low, farmers and growers lose out to competing demands for water from homes, business and the environment. Climate change

forecasts suggest that the risk of drought will increase in the long term as a result of hotter, drier summers, reduced water availability and greater water demand.

Field-scale vegetable production has come to the fore over the past 50 years as a result of technological advances in farming methods, not least improvements in land drainage and the uptake of better irrigation systems and techniques.

Farmers make their water go further by harvesting

rainfall, understanding crop and soil moisture needs and by irrigating in a timely, accurate and uniform manner.

They are also making much more effective use of fertilisers and pesticides. By applying them more efficiently, water quality improves and production costs are controlled.

Many farmers and growers now build their own reservoirs as well. These on-farm water storage facilities are environmentally sustainable because





they are filled when water is plentiful (usually during the winter months) and then used for irrigation when water is in short supply.

Environment Agency figures show that more than one quarter (26%) of water abstracted for irrigation within the Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy for East Suffolk (which includes coastal Suffolk) comes from on-farm reservoirs. The reservoirs store enough water to fill 2,050 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Farmers are also getting much better at working together. The East Suffolk Water Abstractors Group (ESWAG) was formed in 1997 to protect the interests of irrigators and continues to be one of the most influential farmer groups of its type. By representing all abstractors in the coastal Suffolk catchment, ESWAG improves communication between farmers, the food industry and the Environment Agency as water regulator.

<sup>1</sup> East Suffolk Water Abstractors Group

### Tim Pratt, Wantisden Hall Farms, Wantisden

Tim Pratt is the farm manager of Wantisden Hall Farms, a second generation business farming 1,300 hectares, including contract land farmed for neighbours. The farm grows potatoes, carrots, onions and sugar beet.

This is a Linking Environment And Farming (LEAF) demonstration farm and is visited by school parties, university students and local groups. Tim also farms and manages Staverton Park, a site of international importance for several species of wood beetles and the largest area of pollarded oak in Europe.

Water is a vital natural resource for the business, which, despite the amount of land it manages, only has a handful of borehole abstraction points. To improve water security, irrigation reservoirs were constructed in the 1970s to hold rain and groundwater and



*Tim Pratt by one of the farm reservoirs*

conifers were planted as wind breaks to reduce drying-out and the need for crop irrigation.

Tim is keen to reduce the farm's environmental impact by improving the efficiency of its energy consumption, and has upgraded from diesel to electric water pumps.

### Key issues

Irrigation is essential for fruit and vegetable production, but access to water is vulnerable because farming must compete with local homes and businesses, and a highly protected environment.

### Government position

Defra's structural reform plan states that the Government will support a strong and sustainable green economy, resilient to climate change and that it will 'reform the water industry to enhance competition and improve conservation'.

### We would like to see:

- Policies that allow greater farm reservoir capacity and more opportunities for farmers to share water resources.
- Development of a simple and flexible abstraction licensing regime.
- Initiatives to encourage more efficient use of water through, for example, benchmarking.

# WHY FLOOD PROTECTION MATTERS

**THE COAST EXERTS A MAJOR INFLUENCE OVER THIS LOW-LYING FARMED CATCHMENT. PRODUCTIVE FARMLAND IS PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO THE INGRESS OF SALTWATER, BUT FRESHWATER FLOODING FROM RIVERS CAN ALSO THREATEN CROPS AND LIVESTOCK.**

Suffolk's coastline is typically defended by earthen banks. These seawalls have successfully withstood most tides since the 1953 floods, but low levels of maintenance leave them in poor condition to face the dual pressures of sea level rise and increased storminess predicted to result from climatic change.

Flooding harms agriculture in a number of ways. Inundation of fields with saline water and freshwater destroys crops and harms livestock.

Farmland itself is adversely affected, particularly by saltwater, which has long-term implications for soil fertility and may lead to permanent loss of land. In addition, many of the lowland freshwater marshes, which act as a natural store of water for irrigation, are most at risk from flooding.

In 2010, the East Suffolk Water Abstractors Group carried out a survey of land up to the five metre contour that highlighted the significant economic consequences of seawall failure. The survey valued the immediate impact of a major flood on farm produce, employment, local economic benefit and land lost at £127 million.

The ongoing farming loss from a combination of lost produce and access to freshwater was estimated at about £36 million per year.

As this table shows, while only 320 hectares of irrigated land would potentially be lost as a direct consequence of flooding, a further 7,000 hectares would no longer produce vegetable crops because of lost access to irrigation water.

Potential Impact of Flooding in Coastal Suffolk			
	Current land available for agriculture and conservation (ha)	Land available for agriculture and conservation if sea defences fail (ha)	Percentage loss of productive land
Irrigated land	12,042	4,643*	59%
Arable marsh	2,277	20	99%
Grazing marsh	1,291	0	100%

**Source:** East Suffolk Water Abstractors Group survey 2010

\*Only 320 hectares would be lost to the sea but 7,079 hectares would no longer be capable of growing field vegetables.



*Coastal erosion at Bawdsey  
(Photo Malcolm Farrow)*



## Richard Pipe, A.W. Mortier Farms, Alderton



*There is an extensive irrigation infrastructure at A.W. Mortier Farms (Photo Ludwig Haskins)*

Richard Pipe is part of A.W. Mortier Farms, a family-run farming business which grows sugar beet, wheat, barley, potatoes, onions, carrots, parsnips and dwarf beans.

Richard's farm is nationally significant as it is the sole supplier of in-season turnips to major UK supermarkets. The 1,500 tonnes of this crop produced each year are picked by hand to ensure quality and taste.

The farm can only produce such important and high quality crops through continued water provision, which is achieved through an extensive irrigation infrastructure. This comprises multiple delivery systems including centre pivots, boom and rain guns, delivering water to more than 2,000 hectares of farmland.

Without water, not only would crops fail, but

the local community would be affected as well. A significant loss of vegetable crop production would lead to job losses and the local economy would suffer.

In 2008, a project was completed where three forward-thinking farmers, including Richard, provided private investment towards the improvement costs and maintenance of a vital section of local seawall.

Each of the farmers donated one hectare of agricultural land to the East Lane Trust charity. The charity sold the land for property development and donated the proceeds to Suffolk Coastal District Council. This money was then used to help bridge the gap between the Environment Agency's contribution and the allocated cost of work, so that the crucial maintenance work could go ahead.

### Key issues

There are 4000 hectares of farmland directly at risk of flooding, with a further 7000 hectares of vegetable growing land indirectly vulnerable to the impact if flood defences are compromised.

### Government position

Defra's structural reform plan confirms a Government commitment to 'help communities adapt to climate change by... implement[ing] the findings of the Pitt review to improve our flood defences'.

### We would like to see:

- Committed long-term investment in the maintenance of existing sea and river defences.
- A simplified consents procedure to allow farmers to carry out their own minor repairs on seawalls, leaving the Environment Agency to carry out more substantive works.
- Schemes to harness partnership working by supplementing public funds with private investment.
- Flood risk appraisals that evaluate agricultural land based on the food it will produce over time, rather than its current market value.

# WHY THE FARMED LANDSCAPE MATTERS

**GRAZING MEADOWS, MARSHES AND HEATHS ARE ICONIC FEATURES OF COASTAL SUFFOLK. THIS FARMED LANDSCAPE SUPPORTS IMPORTANT HABITATS AND SPECIES DEPENDENT ON VIABLE LIVESTOCK ENTERPRISES.**

The marshes and heaths of coastal Suffolk have been managed by graziers for centuries. Grazing sustains valuable ecosystems and prevents the reversion of grassland to scrub.

The importance of these landscape features was recognised in 1970 with the designation of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The area boasts nationally important habitats and wildlife, with 85% of the heaths designated as sites of special scientific interest. Many larger sites are further designated as part of the European network of nature conservation sites (Natura2000), with the Orwell, Deben, Alde-Ore and Minsmere sites recognised as internationally important wetlands under the Ramsar convention.

Agri-environment schemes reward farmers for sympathetic management of these landscapes and the biodiversity they support. These schemes are spread across 17,000 hectares of farmland and make a major contribution to conservation and farming profitability. Scheme payments are vital to graziers. Many livestock businesses would be commercially unviable without them.

Grazed farmland provides a perfect home for wildfowl and wintering and breeding waders, such as lapwing and redshank. Dairy and sheep farms also attract species such as yellow wagtail and reed bunting.

Schemes including the Suffolk River Valleys Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme (ESA) and Countryside Stewardship have helped to

**Edward Greenwell, Gedgrave**



Edward Greenwell farms 440 hectares at Gedgrave, comprising a traditional mix of arable and grass with areas of saltmarsh and woodland. The farm is surrounded on three sides by the Alde and Ore estuaries and is typical of this area in that it achieves high yields of vegetable and cereal crops on the higher land, with livestock grazing the coastal margins.

Twenty years ago, he converted 88 hectares of arable land to grazing marsh under the Suffolk River Valleys Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme (ESA). This grazing land is extensively managed with little or no nutrient inputs. The marshes are grazed by sheep and cattle, and provide a haven for numerous bird species and mammals. In addition to their conservation value, the grazing marshes provide the farm's largest source of water, since they act as natural water filters and storage facilities.



*The marshes and heaths of coastal Suffolk have been managed by graziers for centuries (Photo Malcolm Farrow)*



## Richard and Hazel Wrinch, Hill House Farm, Shotley

Hill House Farm is a 270 hectare farm owned by Richard and Hazel Wrinch. The farm produces wheat, barley, sugar beet and potatoes and includes 52 hectares of coastal grazing marsh alongside the River Orwell, land that is of outstanding botanical interest.

The grazing marshes have been managed in an environmentally sympathetic way by the Wrinches under the Environmentally Sensitive Areas scheme for the last 10 years and the farm is also in both Entry Level and Higher Level Environmental Stewardship.

The farm supports a wealth of wildlife with wading birds such as lapwing, curlew, redshank and snipe and farmland birds including grey partridge, skylark, corn bunting, turtle dove and yellowhammer.

Richard and Hazel have restored their wet ditches to benefit water voles and also hope to attract barn owls.

They are working to improve their native woodland as well and enhance their population of corn marigold, a rare plant associated with arable farming.

*Richard and Hazel Wrinch  
(Photo Warren Page/Natural England)*



protect and enhance many ecologically valuable habitats. Significant areas of grazing marsh have been retained thanks to ESA, while Countryside Stewardship has supported heaths and meadows. As these come to an end, it will be essential for farmers to transfer their land into the new environmental stewardship schemes.

Farmers also manage water levels in the marshes. In doing this for the benefit of farmed livestock, they also deliver wider environmental benefits. For example, by creating damp grassland, marshes provide habitats for breeding waders such as lapwings and flooded areas for winter wildfowl.

### Key issues

Farming practices are integral to the maintenance and preservation of the meadows, heaths and grazing marshes of coastal Suffolk. But farmers need continued access to properly-funded environmental stewardship schemes, with continuity and simplicity in scheme types.

### Government position

Defra's structural reform plan confirms a Government commitment to 'enhance and protect the natural environment, including biodiversity...by reducing pollution and preventing habitat loss'.

### We would like to see:

- An environmental stewardship scheme with creative options designed to meet the needs of lowland graziers by recognising that farming on the grazing marshes can be commercially unviable.
- Carefully targeted advice and information to help farmers improve their soil management techniques, thereby conserving the long-term fertility and productivity of this precious resource.
- Continued emphasis on industry-led initiatives to improve water quality such as the Campaign for the Farmed Environment and Catchment Sensitive Farming.



# WHY TOURISM MATTERS IN COASTAL SUFFOLK

COASTAL SUFFOLK IS A HUGE POPULAR TOURIST DESTINATION, AND TOURISM IS A MAJOR CONTRIBUTOR TO THE LOCAL ECONOMY. THE FARMED LANDSCAPE PROVIDES AN IDYLIC BACKDROP TO ATTRACT VISITORS.

Coastal Suffolk is home to one of the most important lowland landscapes in England. Large numbers of visitors enjoy its mix of shingle beaches, cliffs, marshes, estuaries, heaths, forests and farmland.

With agriculture making up two thirds of coastal Suffolk's land area<sup>1</sup>, farming plays a pivotal role in managing and maintaining the landscape that visitors travel to see. Farmers are also diversifying their businesses to provide accommodation and leisure activities to help meet this growing demand.

Tourism within Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB is worth £166 million a year, with 2.4 million day visits and 500,000 people staying for longer<sup>2</sup>.

An analysis of day visitors carried out in 2006<sup>3</sup> showed that about half came to visit the countryside, spending just over £33 million between them to support the local economy. The

same survey concluded that tourism supports 3,600 jobs within the AONB boundaries.

Local food and drink is starting to play a growing role in attracting tourists. The annual Aldeburgh Food and Drink Festival showcases the variety and quality of locally-produced food and beverages, with events including a conference, talks, workshops and cookery demonstrations.

And a new outdoor festival called Woodwose highlights the link between food and the countryside with a series of guided walks, starting from local pubs. Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB worked with Suffolk brewer Adnams to produce the set of 24 new walks.

<sup>1</sup> Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Management Summary 2008

<sup>2</sup> Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB

<sup>3</sup> Economic Impact of Tourism in the East of England's Distinctive Landscape, East of England Tourism



Day trips to Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB		
Destination	Number of trips	Amount spent
Countryside visits	1,196,778	£33.28 million
Coastal visits	1,008,000	£33.26 million
Urban visits	201,000	£8.47 million

**Source:** East of England Tourism survey 2006



## The Hewitt family, Butley Mills, Chillesford

Butley Mills is a former working mill, which once supplied local livestock farmers with dry ingredients for animal feed.

By the end of the 20th century, most of its output was devoted to feeding the Hewitt family's expanding pig herd at Hill Farm, Chillesford near Woodbridge, but that came to an end when the herd was lost to swine fever in 2000. Since then the family has developed the old mill building into five apartments for self-catering holidays.

Structural changes have been kept to a minimum to retain the character of the building and the ground floor includes a bridge over the original water race, once used to power the mill's water wheel.

The family worked hard to ensure the building remained true to its past, using local labour and local materials, including ash for the impressive central staircase that leads to four of the apartments.

Each apartment has a name with a local connection such as Thomas Crisp, named after the breeder of the first Suffolk Punch, and Samphire, named after the locally-grown delicacy.

The adjoining Mill House has also been renovated and now provides two self-catering



*Butley Mills is proving popular for short breaks*

cottages, each with its own garden by the mill pond.

The accommodation can cater for up to 30 people and it is proving particularly popular for midweek and weekend short breaks.

### Key issues

Farmers' management of the countryside underpins rural tourism. Viable farming businesses are essential for this to continue within coastal Suffolk.

### Government position

The Government believes tourism offers a huge economic opportunity, driving new growth in the regions and helping rebalance the economy. It is looking to local authorities and the private sector to lead this growth, with support from Whitehall.

### We would like to see:

- Planning policies that allow farm businesses to diversify to help meet tourism demand.
- Simplified and flexible rural development schemes that support farm modernisation and diversification.
- Further promotion of local food and drink as a tourist attraction in coastal Suffolk.

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