11. Agricultural land classification

11.1 Land in England and Wales is classified according to its ability to grow crops. This work was originally started in the 1960s with the most recent review of guidelines carried out in 1988. Agricultural land is divided into five grades as follows:

Grade 1 – excellent quality agricultural land
Grade 2 - very good quality agricultural land
Grade 3 – good to moderate quality agricultural land
Sub-grade 3a – good quality agricultural land
Sub-grade 3b – moderate quality agricultural land
Grade 4 – poor quality agricultural land
Grade 5 – very poor quality agricultural land

11.2 The 1988 Agricultural Land Classification guidelines amalgamated sub-grades 3b and 3c into a new grade 3b. The published general classifications map for England and Wales does not map these sub-grades because the maps are based on surveys carried out prior to the sub-division of grade 3. The surveys were carried out prior to the publication of the first Agricultural Land Classification maps in 1976. Maps showing the agricultural land classifications based on current guidelines are not available except for limited sites where a detailed assessment has been carried out after 1988.

11.3 Agricultural land classification is a material consideration in planning decisions. Where development over 20 hectares affecting agricultural land is proposed there is a requirement for consultation with Natural England.

11.4 Agricultural land subgrade 3a is included in the classification of the 'Best and Most Versatile' agricultural land. The NPPF (paragraph 112) contains requirements to ensure that the 'Best and Most Versatile' (BMV) agricultural land is safeguarded.

11.5 If land is proposed for silica sand extraction on over 20 hectares of land within agricultural grades 1, 2, or 3a an agricultural land report will be required to assess the potential long term impact on agricultural land quality, as set out in Core Strategy Policy DM16. However, as soils with sand topsoils are not eligible for Grades 1, 2 or 3a[1], it is considered unlikely that sites within these areas would contain high quality silica sand of commercial interest. Proposals for site allocations with grades 1, 2 or 3a would need to contain evidence that the silica sand was of commercial interest for industrial uses.

11.6 If there is the potential for impacts on agricultural land quality the land quality report should outline any public benefit to the development which would clearly outweigh these impacts. Where land in agricultural grade 3 is proposed, a land quality report will be required to divide the land into sub-grades 3a and 3b, and Policy DM16 will apply to sub-grade 3a.

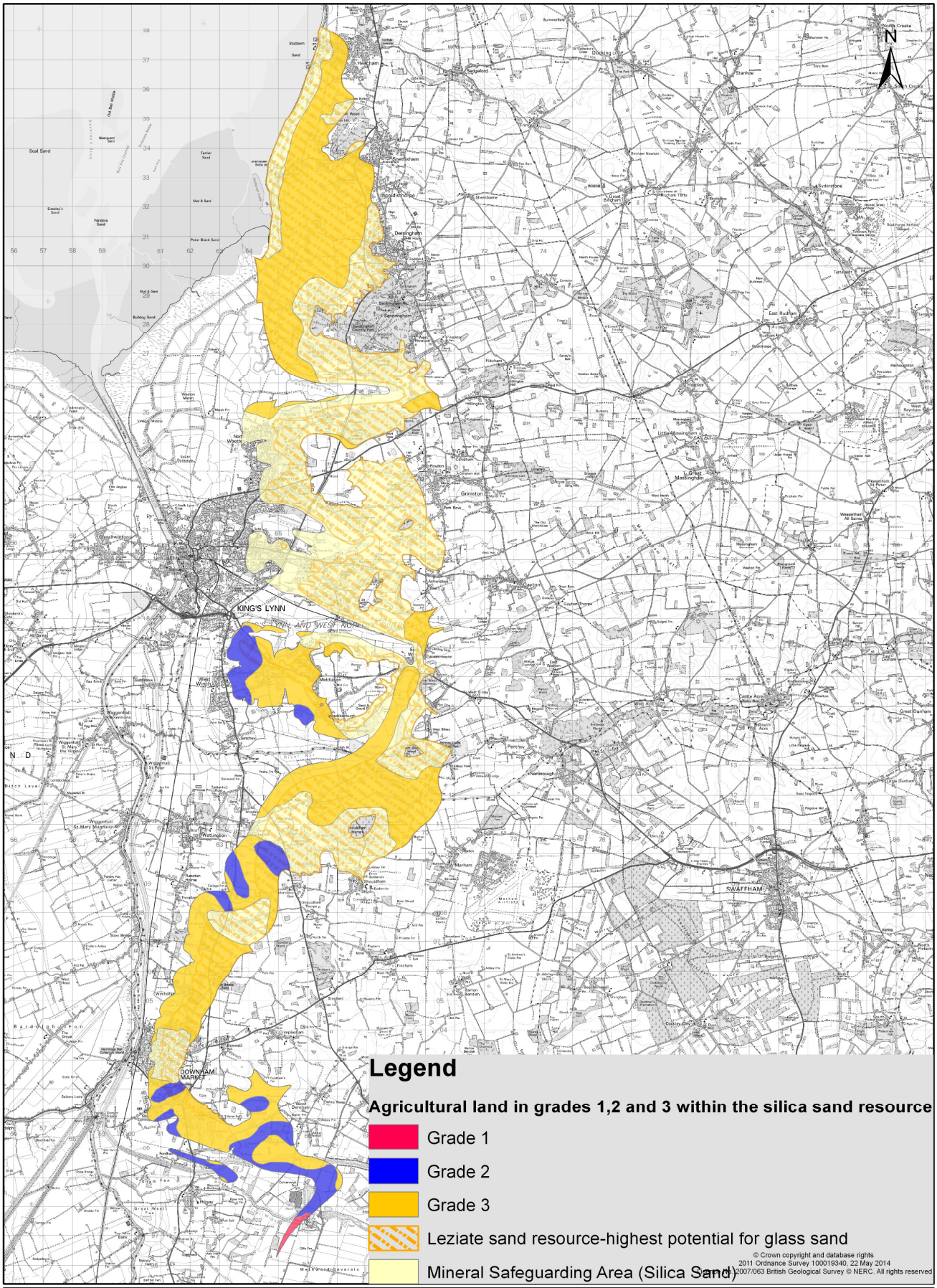
11.7 It is proposed that if insufficient potential specific site allocations are submitted all land which is within agricultural grades 1, 2, or 3 will be excluded

[1] 'Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales, Revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land', October 1988 (MAFF)

from the silica sand resource to be considered as potential Preferred Areas or Areas of Search. This is because all previous silica sand workings have been located on grades 4 and 5 and as sand topsoils are not eligible for higher agricultural grades, these areas are less likely to generate suitable planning applications for silica sand extraction.

Question 11: Should agricultural land grades 1, 2 and 3 be removed from consideration as potential Preferred Areas or Areas of Search for future silica sand extraction? Please supply information/evidence to support your view.

Relevant chapter of the National Planning Policy Framework: 11. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment Relevant Norfolk Minerals and Waste Core Strategy Policies: CS14 – Environmental Protection DM16 – Soils Relevant King's Lynn and West Norfolk Core Strategy Policies: None



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12. Flood Risk

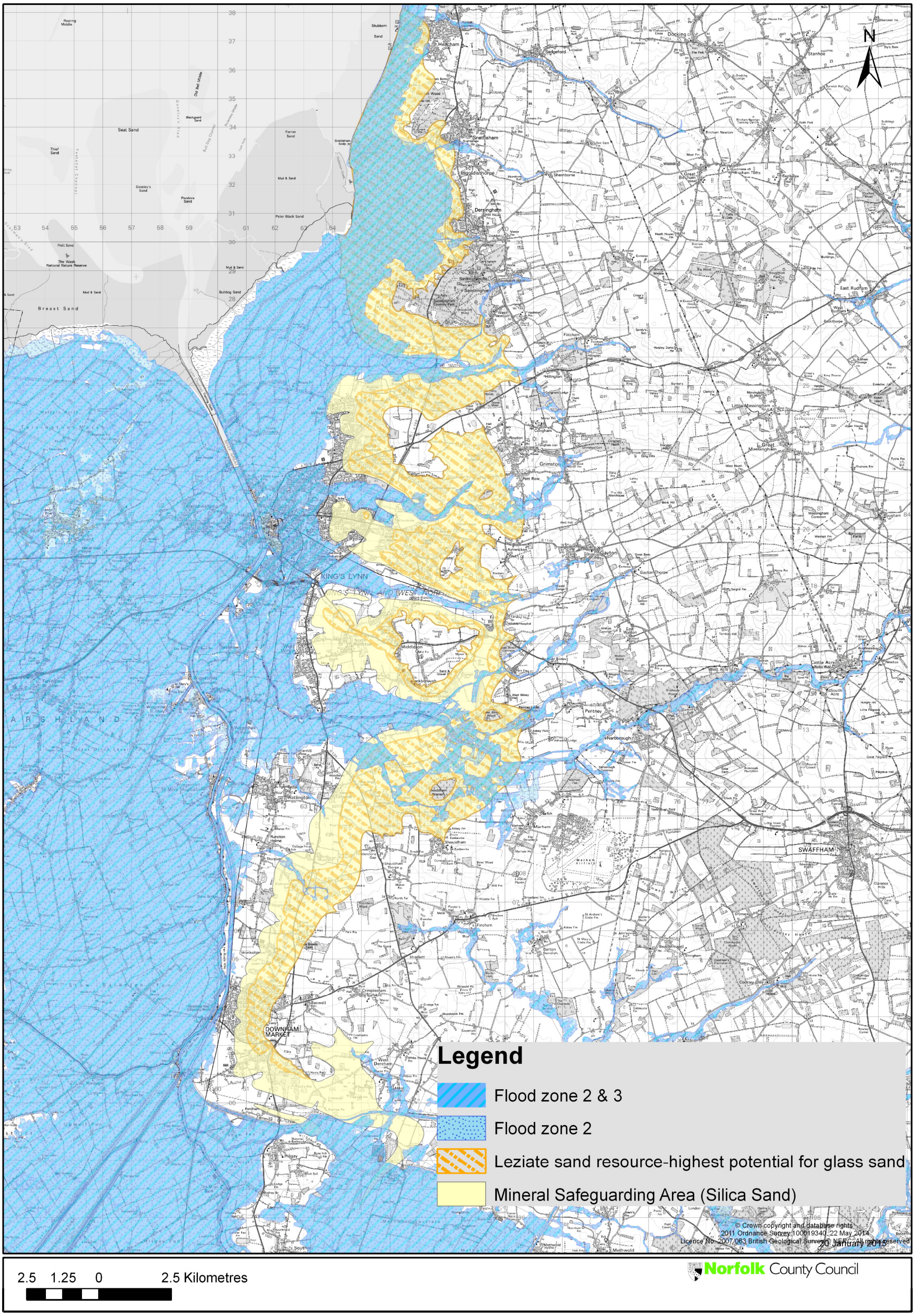
12.1 In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 100) a sequential test will be carried out on Specific Sites, Preferred Areas and Areas of Search for silica sand. The extraction of silica sand is a 'water compatible' development in the context of paragraph 7-066 (Table 2: Flood Risk Vulnerability Classification) of the National Planning Practice Guidance. In accordance with Core Strategy Policy DM4 (Flood Risk) and paragraph 103 of the National Planning Policy Framework, for all development over 1 hectare in size in Flood Zone 1 and all development within flood zones 2 and 3, a site specific Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) will be required at the planning application stage. The site specific FRA must identify and assess the risks of all forms of flooding to and from the development and demonstrate how these flood risks will be managed so that the development remains safe throughout its lifetime, taking climate change into account. The scale, nature and location of the proposed development will inform the scope of the FRA required.

12.2 The Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk commissioned a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, the final version of which was published in October 2010. This document agreed on Page 42 that sand and gravel workings are a water compatible use as in PPS25. The silica sand workings in Norfolk operate in a similar way to sand and gravel workings and are considered to be similar in terms of flood risk.

12.3 Flood risk zones 2 and 3 indicate where flood events have occurred in the past that may resulted in the deposition of clays, silts and other contaminants which will have reduced the quality of the silica sand resource and/or increased overburden depth.

Question 12: Should land in flood zones 2 & 3 be removed from consideration as potential Preferred Areas or Areas of Search for future silica sand extraction? Please supply information/evidence to support your view.

Relevant chapter of the National Planning Policy Framework: 10. Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change 13. Facilitating the sustainable use of minerals Relevant Norfolk Minerals and Waste Core Strategy Policies: CS13 – Climate Change and Renewable Energy Generation DM4 – Flood Risk Relevant King's Lynn and West Norfolk Core Strategy Policies: CS01 – Spatial strategy CS08 – Sustainable development



20 January 2015

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