

Screening Statement on the determination of the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 and European Directive 2001/42/EC for the Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan Review

24 JANUARY 2025

SUMMARY

Following consultation with the statutory bodies, South Oxfordshire District Council (the 'Council') determines that the Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) Review does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

INTRODUCTION

1. An initial screening opinion was used to determine whether or not the contents of the emerging Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) Review required a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC (the Directive) and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the Regulations).
2. Any land use plan or programme 'which sets the framework for future development consent of projects' must be screened according to a set of criteria from Annex II of the Directive and Schedule 1 of the Regulations. These criteria include exceptions for plans 'which determine the use of a small area at local level' or which only propose 'minor modifications to a plan', if it is determined that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects.
3. The initial screening opinion was subject to consultation with Historic England, the Environment Agency, Natural England and Oxfordshire County Council. The results of the screening process are detailed in this Screening Statement, made available to the public.

THE SCREENING PROCESS

4. Using the criteria set out in Annex II of the Directive and Schedule 1 of the Regulations, a Screening Opinion determines whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant environmental effects.
5. The extract from 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive' in Appendix 1 provides a flow diagram to demonstrate the SEA screening process.
6. Table 1 in Appendix 1 sets out the criteria from the Practical Guide, along with an assessment of the Watlington NDP Review against each criterion to ascertain whether a SEA is required.

7. Also part of the screening process is the Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening, which can be found in Appendix 2, and the assessment of likely significance effects on the environment, which can be found in Appendix 3.
8. These two assessments feed into Table 1 and the SEA screening opinion.

THE WATLINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW

9. The Watlington NDP Review contains the same policy topic areas as the made Watlington NDP (2018), with some updates to policy wording and the addition of a design code. The review will contain the following aims and objectives:

Aims and Objectives

ACO1. Aims to protect and enhance what makes Watlington special:

- *its historic character including the Conservation Area, listed buildings and other heritage assets*
- *its scale and distinctiveness as a small, rural, Chilterns town*
- *its High Street and small independent shops*
- *its setting in the Chilterns National Landscape*
- *its landscape setting at the foot of the Chilterns Escarpment*
- *its rural setting surrounded by farmland*

Objectives:

- a) Review and confirm definition, scope and reach of the Conservation Area together with a future Management Plan
- b) Protect the setting of the town, especially from the National Landscape to the South and the East by ensuring that development proposals enhance it and do not have an adverse impact on it.
- c) Conserve the rural landscape of the NL and the setting of the small settlements within the WNDP area by keeping any loss of agricultural land to a minimum
- d) Protect views both into and out of the National Landscape to maintain the character of Watlington as a small Chilterns town at the foot of the escarpment
- e) Develop and implement a plan to make the town centre more user-friendly and attractive to residents and visitors
- f) Maintain the character and appearance of the High Street by protecting shop frontages and, where possible, supporting independent retail traders

ACO2. Aims to conserve and enhance the natural environment by:

- *contributing to nature recovery by enhancing biodiversity and protecting and increasing habitats and wildlife corridors*
- *protecting and creating green spaces and green infrastructure*
- *conserving water resources*
- *protecting ponds and streams*
- *preventing flooding*

Objectives:

- a) Ensure that all Policies in the WNDP contribute to the reduction and mitigation of the impact of climate change on the natural environment
- b) Explore and maximise the opportunities to support nature recovery on all planning applications
- c) Ensure that long term management plans are in place for green spaces
- d) Protect wildlife from the impact of artificial light at night (ALAN) by taking action, where possible, to minimise light spill and promote dark skies
- e) Work with developers and landowners to identify areas where high sequestration habitats (such as managed deciduous woodland) can replace low sequestration habitats
- f) Ensure that all new planting schemes for trees and hedges use locally native species and provide food sources for wildlife
- g) Record and protect existing ponds and water courses
- h) Ensure that the chalk streams in the area are fully recognised for their national importance, that they are protected and are not adversely affected by development proposals.
- i) Ensure that sustainable drainage schemes contribute to the provision of new wildlife habitats
- j) Encourage the establishment of areas of wetland where appropriate
- k) Protect areas designated as 'Local Green Spaces'. Review the current list to consider opportunities for enhancing existing green spaces and identifying further green spaces and green infrastructure
- l) Promote the provision of community green spaces including orchards and allotments

ACO3. Aims for designing a green, sustainable locality by:

- *Changing the way we use resources to ensure that they remain available for future generations*
- *Changing the way we build so that construction utilises low carbon technologies and renewable energy*

- *Recognising how we can reduce our carbon footprint*
- *Monitoring and reporting on actions to reduce climate impact in our parish*

Objectives:

- a) Promote the use of renewable energy and supporting community energy schemes
- b) Expect high standards of energy efficiency in all new dwellings including extensions and refurbishments
- c) Encourage development which makes provision for future proofing for changing climate, including more extreme weather and environmental conditions.
- d) Encourage schemes for the conservation and re-use of water
- e) Encourage coherent, user-friendly design which facilitates social inclusion and integration to achieve healthy, supportive communities

ACO4. Aims for meeting housing challenges:

- *Providing a well-balanced mix of housing to meet identified local needs*
- *Ensuring that 40% of new housing is for affordable homes in line with SODC policy, with at least 25% of those for people with strong connections with Watlington*
- *Demonstrating the wider benefits of sustainable developments and re-developments*
- *Encouraging developers to go beyond current building regulations and practice*
- *Working closely with OCC, SODC and other providers to ensure adequate infrastructure is provided to meet local need*
- *Ensuring that all new development is well designed*
- *Using Watlington Parish Council's role in planning to promote the highest insulation standards and non-carbon energy sources in all new builds and building modifications*
- *Catering for an increase in need for home working facilities, particularly post-Covid*

Objectives:

- a) Update information on local housing needs by carrying out regular surveys
- b) Implement survey outcomes in co-operation with SODC, affordable housing providers and other organisations
- c) Include suitable opportunities for self-build homes and community-led housing projects
- d) Ensure that new housing developments are designed and built to optimise physical and visual flows and integration into the existing built form with easy access to the town centre and other facilities
- e) Support SODC policy on affordable housing, ensuring that developments are fully integrated
- f) Meet SODC commitments on achieving building targets while protecting Watlington from unplanned and inappropriate developments
- g) Reflect Watlington's rural setting abutting the Chilterns National Landscape and a requirement for new housing to demonstrate a 'soft edge' to the countryside through promotion of appropriate housing densities, layout and landscaping
- h) Ensure that the development design process reflects local need for different house types, decent size, family-friendly gardens and access to green space
- i) Ensure that development plans provide flexible internal spaces for changing needs including working from home.
- j) Encourage owners of existing homes to eco-upgrade their houses to include energy conserving and renewable energy features when planning extensions

ACO5. Aims to resolve traffic and transport issues:

- *improve the health and wellbeing of people who live in, work in and visit Watlington*
- *Improve air quality by reducing traffic emissions*
- *reduce the need for travel and car dependency*
- *improve the public realm at the town centre to make it a safer part of the town*
- *reduce the damage to historic buildings through vibration and water spray*
- *reduce congestion by better management of through traffic*
- *improve safety by reducing traffic speeds throughout the parish*
- *minimise the impact of traffic generated by new development*
- *reduce the number of unauthorised HGVs using the town centre as a through route*

- *improve access to public transport to Junction 6 of the M40 motorway, Oxford and other locations*
- *provide good connectivity within the town and surrounding settlements by improving the network of cycle paths, footpaths and bridleways*

Objectives:

- a) Work with OCC towards the completion of the Watlington Relief Road in 2024/2025
- b) Ensure that developer Traffic Management Plans for the WRR and all other developments have the minimum possible impact on the town, parish and neighbouring parishes and are effectively monitored and enforced
- c) Work with OCC Trading Standards and Thames Valley Police to improve signage of the existing restricted weight limits throughout the town and parish and improve enforcement
- d) Review and implement proposals in the Watlington Traffic Management Plan to reduce the impact of continuing through traffic
- e) Gain approval for the partial closure of Pyrton Lane and conversion into a 'Green Lane'
- f) Investigate and implement, if supported locally, converting Britwell Rd and Cuxham Road into a one-way system
- g) Introduce traffic calming, seating areas and planting to improve air quality and ambience in the town centre
- h) Ensure the town centre is accessible by safe footpaths and cycle ways from all new developments
- i) Produce a Local Infrastructure Plan for Walking and Cycling
- j) Encourage the County Council to ensure that bus services meet the public transport needs of the community, and that the financial contribution from housing development is used to provide enhanced services in the future
- k) Investigate opportunities, demand and a business case for community transport schemes
- l) Encourage people to minimise carbon-generating travel
- m) Encourage a switch to electric and other sources of sustainable power for vehicles by supporting the installation of charging points in both public and private locations, in all new developments and in all new parking and garaging proposals
- n) Review provision for vehicle and cycle parking

ACO6. Aims to support the local economy by:

- improving access to the town centre for visitors and tourists
- improving car parking and signage

- encouraging small businesses, start-ups and homeworking
- changing the way we work to ensure that work and employment is sustainable and has a minimal carbon footprint
- supporting the provision of fast broadband and fibre to the premises throughout the parish

Objectives:

- a) Work with SODC to ensure they understand, document and help mitigate the possible impact on Watlington's economy and position as a Local Service Centre from their SODC Local Plan 2035 STRAT7- a "New 21st Century Market Town" proposed to be built at Chalgrove Airfield
- b) In particular, model the impact of the possible transfer to Chalgrove of Watlington's largest single employer – the Icknield Community College – and agree a contingency strategy that could protect both the employment and future business opportunities in the town
- c) Survey future requirements for retail, office and workshop space to establish need and opportunities
- d) Ensure that new developments allow for space for new business use as well as future home working facilities
- e) Analyse how public spaces in the town centre could be improved in appearance and made more accessible
- f) Evaluate the impact of pedestrianisation of the High Street, with associated street furniture
- g) Ensure that all new developments have clear and safe footpath and cycleway access to the town centre and key amenities
- h) Investigate the provision of cycle racks in the town centre to encourage more frequent visits (and a reduction of motorised vehicle traffic)
- i) Use planning regulations to protect existing retail and office space and prevent change of use to other uses
- j) Identify and register Assets of Community Value (ACV) to protect and enhance buildings and services important for the community and our position as a recognised Local Service Centre
- k) Use funds available from the Community Infrastructure Levy to protect and enhance our community facilities and public spaces
- l) Recognise tourism as an important contributor to the local economy and agree a new strategy focused on the actions and resources needed to increase visitor numbers and visit duration

ACO7. Aims to ensure that local infrastructure is in place to meet the needs of a growing population by:

*Ensuring that there is sufficient provision for primary health care
Ensuring that there is good provision for child care including nurseries*

Ensuring that there is good provision for recreation and sport
Ensuring that there are enough community spaces for a range of different activities
Ensuring that communications networks provide up to date services
Ensuring that the water supply is secure and that there is sufficient capacity for waste water treatment

Objectives:

- (a) Assess the capacity of local services including water supply and waste water treatment
 - (b) Assess the capacity of local schools, pre-schools and nurseries to provide places for more children
 - (c) Assess the capacity of local health services to provide for an increased number of patients
 - (d) Seek land for additional facilities for sport and recreation
 - (e) Assess the range of community facilities against the changing needs of a growing population and providing new or re-purposed facilities where needed
 - (f) Work with OCC and local providers to upgrade communications networks
10. The Watlington NDP was adopted as part of the district councils development plan on 23 August 2018. The plan was tested against the now superseded Core Strategy (2012) and Saved policies from the Local Plan 2011, however it was prepared considering the emerging Local Plan, particularly the emerging policy direction and its reasoning and evidence. The Watlington NDP Review will contain similar aims and objectives to the previous NDP which aim to protect the built up area of the village, through protecting its design and character whilst also accommodating the identified housing and community needs.
11. This plan includes a new design code and corresponding policy. There is also reference to the design code within the policies throughout the document. There are some changes to other existing policies within the plan and some new policies. The revised NDP does not allocate any more sites than the made 2018 NDP. The Watlington NDP Review will be bringing forward Sites B and C from the made plan as they have not been developed yet. These sites currently have planning permission for 130 new homes, but there is a current application for an increase on Site C from 60 to 75 new homes. If this is approved the two sites will deliver a total of 145 homes. This assessment has considered the potential increase of the number of houses to the existing sites as unlikely to cause further significant effects, and therefore would not result in further likely significant effects on the environment or need for a further SEA.

12. Given most of the sites have gained planning permission and the level of development proposed in the NDP Review is minor, it is concluded that the implementation of the Watlington NDP Review would not result in likely significant effects on the environment.

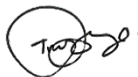
CONSULTATION RESPONSES

13. The screening opinion was sent to Natural England, The Environment Agency, Oxfordshire County Council and Historic England on 1 November 2024 for a four-week consultation period. The responses in full are presented in Appendix 4.
14. The Environment Agency did not provide comments on this SEA Screening.
15. Historic England confirmed their agreement that the Watlington NDP Review does not need an SEA.
16. Natural England confirmed their agreement that there are unlikely to be significant environmental effects from the proposed plan and also agreed that the Watlington Plan Review does not require further HRA assessment. They did not have any specific comments on the draft Neighbourhood Plan Review.
17. Oxfordshire County Council did not provide comments on this SEA Screening.

CONCLUSION

18. As a result of the screening undertaken by the Council, the following determination has been reached.
19. The Watlington NDP Review is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, therefore, an Appropriate Assessment for the Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan Review is not required.
20. Based on the assessment presented in Appendices 1 & 3, the Watlington NDP Review is not likely to have a significant effect on the environment.
21. The Watlington NDP Review does not require a Strategic Environment Assessment.

Authorised by: Tim Oruye **Signed:**



Date: 24/01/2025

Appendix 1 – Extract from ‘A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive’ (DCLG) (2005)

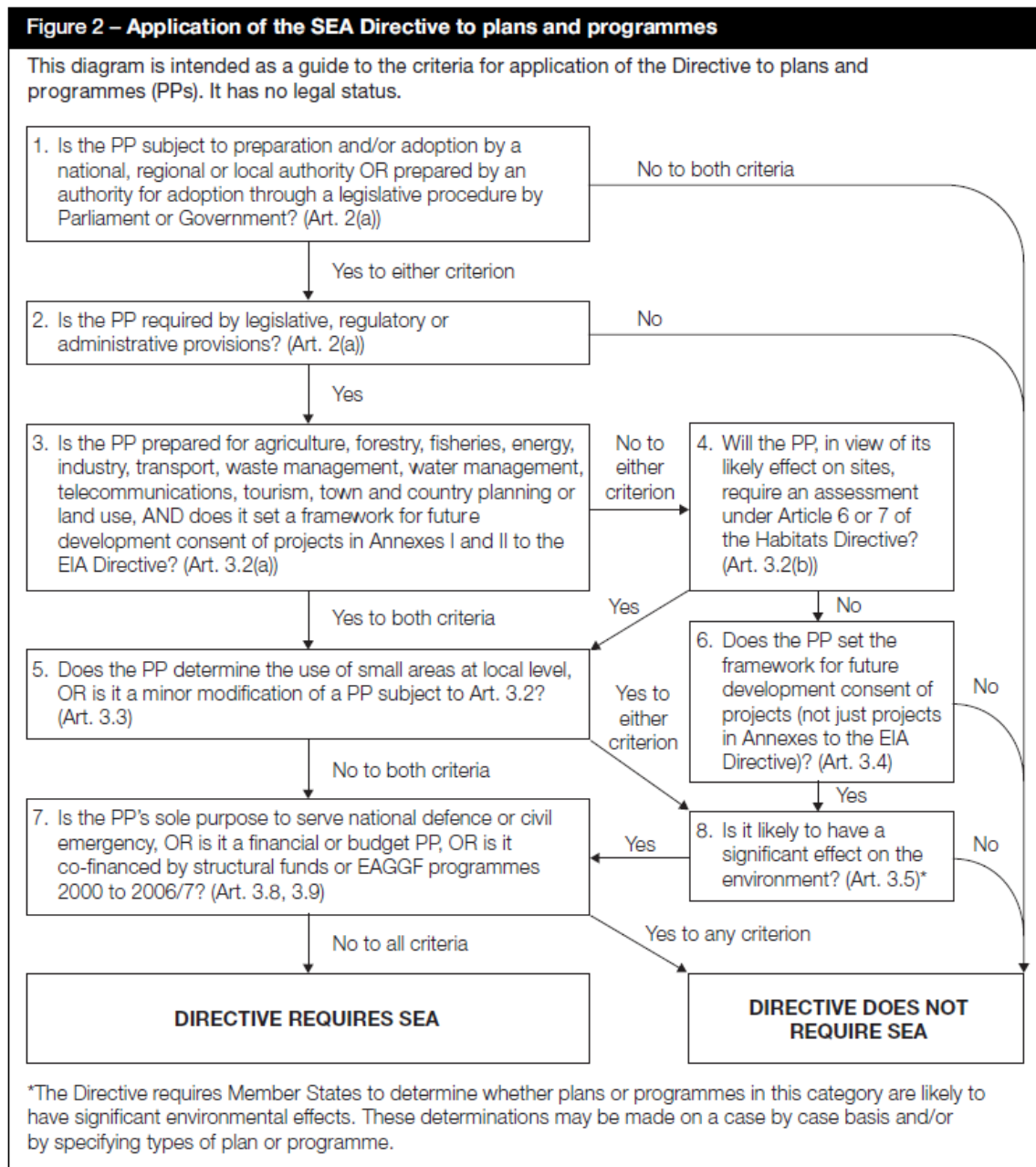


Table 1: Application of SEA Directive as shown in Appendix 1

Stage	Y/N	Explanation
<p>1. Is the Neighbourhood Plan subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Art. 2(a))</p>	Y	<p>The preparation of and adoption of the Neighbourhood Development Plan is allowed under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. The Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared by the Watlington NDP Steering Group, a working group who report to the Watlington Parish Council (as the “relevant body”) and will be “made” by South Oxfordshire District Council as the local authority. The preparation of Neighbourhood Plans is subject to the following regulations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 • The Neighbourhood Planning (referendums) Regulations 2012 • The Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 • The Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 • The Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 • The Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2017
<p>2. Is the NP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))</p>	Y	<p>Whilst the Neighbourhood Development Plan is not a requirement and is optional under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011, it will, if “made”, form part of the Development Plan for the District. It is therefore important that the screening process considers whether it is likely to have significant environmental effects and hence whether SEA is required under the Directive.</p>

		National Planning Practice Guidance (Paragraph: 051 Reference ID: 41-051-20150209) sets out that draft neighbourhood plan proposals should be assessed to determine whether the plan is likely to have significant environmental effects. This assessment should be undertaken in accordance with the requirements set out in regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 .
3. Is the Neighbourhood Plan prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II (see Appendix 2) to the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2(a))	N	The Watlington NDP Review is prepared for town and country planning and land use and will not set out a framework for future development of projects that would require an EIA.
4. Will the Neighbourhood Plan, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.2 (b))	N	The Watlington NDP Review is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites. See Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Opinion for the Watlington NDP Review in Appendix 2.
5. Does the Neighbourhood Plan determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art. 3.2? (Art. 3.3)	Y	The Watlington NDP Review will determine the use of sites/small areas at a local level.
6. Does the Neighbourhood Plan set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art 3.4)	Y	When made, the Watlington NDP Review will include a series of policies to guide development within the village. This will inform the determination of planning applications providing a framework for future development consent of projects.

7. Is the Neighbourhood Plan's sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Art 3.8, 3.9)	N	N/A
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)	N	The plan is not likely to have significant effects on the environment. See assessment of the likely significance of effects on the environment in Appendix 3.

Appendix 2 - Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Opinion for the Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan Review

INTRODUCTION

1. The Local Authority is the “competent authority” under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, and needs to ensure that Neighbourhood Plans have been assessed through the Habitats Regulations process. This looks at the potential for significant impacts on nature conservation sites that are of European importance¹, also referred to as Natura 2000.
2. This Screening Assessment relates to a Neighbourhood Development Plan that will be in general conformity with the strategic policies within the development plan² (the higher level plan for town and country planning and land use). This Screening Assessment uses the Habitats Regulations Assessment of South Oxfordshire District Council’s Local Plan³ as its basis for assessment. From this, the Local Authority will determine whether the Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan Review is likely to result in significant impacts on Natura 2000 sites either alone or in combination with other plans and policies and, therefore, whether an ‘Appropriate Assessment’ is required.

LEGISLATIVE BASIS

3. Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive provides that:

“Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [European] site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site’s conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.”

4. Regulations 105-106 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 state:

“105.—(1) Where a land use plan—

¹ Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for other species, and for habitats.

² The South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (December 2020)

³ South Oxfordshire Local Plan Habitats Regulations Assessment Report (March 2019)

- (a) is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and*
- (b) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site, the plan-making authority for that plan must, before the plan is given effect, make an appropriate assessment of the implications for the site in view of that site’s conservation objectives.*
- (2) The plan-making authority must for the purposes of the assessment consult the appropriate nature conservation body and have regard to any representations made by that body within such reasonable time as the authority specifies.*
- (3) The plan-making authority must also, if it considers it appropriate, take the opinion of the general public, and if it does so, it must take such steps for that purpose as it considers appropriate.*
- (4) In the light of the conclusions of the assessment, and subject to regulation 107, the plan-making authority must give effect to the land use plan only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the European site or the European offshore marine site (as the case may be).*
- (5) A plan-making authority must provide such information as the appropriate authority may reasonably require for the purposes of the discharge by the appropriate authority of its obligations under this Chapter.*
- (6) This regulation does not apply in relation to a site which is—*
- (a) a European site by reason of regulation 8(1)(c), or*
- (b) a European offshore marine site by reason of regulation 18(c) of the Offshore Marine Conservation Regulations (site protected in accordance with Article 5(4) of the Habitats Directive).*

106.—(1) A qualifying body which submits a proposal for a neighbourhood development plan must provide such information as the competent authority may reasonably require for the purposes of the assessment under regulation 105 or to enable it to determine whether that assessment is required.

(2) In this regulation, “qualifying body” means a parish council, or an organisation or body designated as a neighbourhood forum, authorised for the purposes of a neighbourhood development plan to act in relation to a neighbourhood area as a result of section 61F of the TCPA 1990 (authorisation to act in relation to neighbourhood areas)(159), as

applied by section 38C of the 2004 Planning Act (supplementary provisions)(160).

(3) Where the competent authority decides to revoke or modify a neighbourhood development plan after it has been made, it must for that purpose make an appropriate assessment of the implications for any European site likely to be significantly affected in view of that site's conservation objectives; and regulation 105 and paragraph (1) apply with the appropriate modifications in relation to such a revocation or modification.

(4) This regulation applies in relation to England only."

EUROPEAN SITES

5. The HRA of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 used a screening distance of 17km to identify European sites which could be affected by development from the plan. This distance has been subject to consultation with Natural England and reflects the average travel to work distance in the district. As such, the same distance has been applied in this HRA Screening.
6. The following European sites lie wholly or partly within 17km of Watlington and have been taken into consideration:
 1. Little Wittenham SAC – approximately 10.1 km (South Oxfordshire District Council)
7. One of the best-studied great crested newt sites in the UK, Little Wittenham comprises two main ponds set in a predominantly woodland context (broadleaved and conifer woodland is present). There are also areas of grassland, with sheep grazing and arable bordering the woodland to the south and west. The River Thames is just to the north of the site, and a hill fort to the south. Large numbers of great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* have been recorded in the two main ponds, and research has revealed that they range several hundred metres into the woodland blocks.
8. The main pressures and threats to this site include the impacts of public access and disturbance, and invasive fish species upon great crested newt. With regard to the types of development that may be brought forward in the Local Plan, visitor disturbance could impact the site.
 2. Aston Rowant SAC – approximately 3.2km (South Oxfordshire District Council)
9. Aston Rowant is classified as a SAC because it supports one of the largest remaining populations of juniper in lowland Britain. It is selected

as an example of juniper formations on the chalk in the south east of England. At this site juniper is present as part of a mixed scrub community but also occurs as isolated bushes in chalk grassland. In common with most lowland populations of juniper, successful reproduction and survival of new generations of bushes is extremely rare and conservation is currently dependent upon significant levels of management intervention. The low level of reproductive success is the main threat to the feature at this site. Aston Rowant also supports *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forests although this is not a primary reason for classification as a SAC.

10. The main pressures and threats to this site include an unsustainable on-site population, changes in species distribution, disease of juniper as well as the impacts of air pollution and the risks of atmospheric nitrogen deposition upon juniper. Additionally, conflicting conservation objectives threaten beech.

3. Chiltern Beechwood SAC – approximately 7.6km (South Oxfordshire District Council)

11. The Chilterns Beechwoods SAC comprises nine separate sites scattered across the Chilterns. There are three features of interest: semi-natural grasslands and scrubland on chalk; *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech woodland (for which this is considered to be one of the best areas in the UK and lies in the centre of the habitat's UK range); and Stag beetle *Lucanus cervus*, for which the area is considered to support a significant presence. The rare coralroot *Cardamine bulbifera* is found in these woods.

12. The main pressures and threats to this site include the impacts of forestry and woodland management, disease, deer and the invasive species of grey squirrel upon beech. Additionally, the changes in species distribution of stag beetle as well as the impact of public access and disturbance upon stag beetle. Air pollution and the impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition also threaten the dry grasslands, beech and stag beetle.

4. Hartslock Wood SAC – Approximately 15.7km (South Oxfordshire District Council)

13. This site hosts the priority habitat type "orchid rich sites". The steep slopes of this site on the chalk of the Chilterns comprise a mosaic of chalk grassland, chalk scrub and broadleaved woodland. The chalk grassland mostly consists of a mosaic of shorter-turf NVC type CG2 *Festuca ovina*–*Avenula pratensis* grassland and taller CG3 *Bromus erectus* grassland. The site supports one of only three UK populations of monkey orchid *Orchis simia*, a nationally rare Red Data Book species. The bulk of this site lies on a steep slope above the River

Thames. Recent storms and landslips have resulted in a diverse age structure for the yew population. Open patches show a rich flora including local species such as southern wood-rush *Luzula forsteri*, wood barley *Hordelymus europaeus* and narrow-lipped helleborine *Epipactis leptochila*.

14. The main threat to this site is air pollution and the risk of atmospheric nitrogen deposition upon the dry grasslands and yew-dominated woodland. With regard to the types of development that may be brought forward in the Local Plan, air pollution could impact the site.

ASSESSMENT

15. As required under Regulation 106 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the 'Habitats Regulations'), the qualifying body (Watlington Parish Council) provided the required information to enable South Oxfordshire District Council to determine whether the assessment under Regulation 105 is required. Consideration has been given to the potential for the development proposed by the neighbourhood plan to result in significant effects associated with:

Physical loss of/damage to habitat:

16. Any development resulting from the Neighbourhood Plan will be located within the neighbourhood area. There are no European sites within the Neighbourhood Plan area, therefore loss of habitat from within the boundaries of a European site can be ruled out in relation to all sites.
17. Loss of habitat from outside of the boundaries of a European site could still affect the integrity of that site if it occurs in an area used by the qualifying species of the site (e.g. for off-site breeding, foraging or roosting). One of the European sites included in this assessment have mobile species amongst their qualifying features that could travel outside of the site to make use of other areas of habitat:
 - Little Wittenham SAC; great crested newt.
18. The HRA (March 2019) produced alongside the Local Plan 2035 states that great crested newts will travel away from their breeding ponds, during the terrestrial phase of their lifecycle, but not large distance. 500 metres is considered an appropriate buffer distance inside which great crested newts might be found, from their breeding location. The site listing for Little Wittenham SAC states that great crested newts have been found to range several hundred metres into the site's woodland blocks. Research has found that great crested newts at Little Wittenham SAC migrate within woodland and do not over-winter in the arable farmland. All of the woodland within 500 metres of the ponds at Little Wittenham SAC is within the SAC boundary. Therefore potential loss of

or damage to off-site habitats associated with Little Wittenham SAC can be screened out of further assessment.

Non-physical disturbance e.g. noise/vibration or light pollution;

19. The most recent HRA of the South Oxford Local Plan (March 2019) states:

'Using a precautionary approach, we have assumed that the effect of noise, vibration and light are most likely to be significant if development takes place within 500 metres of a European site with qualifying features sensitive to these disturbances, or known off-site breeding, foraging or roosting areas.'

20. None of the European sites are within 500 metres of the designated area. Therefore, effects in relation to noise, vibration and light pollution can be screened out of further assessment.

Air pollution;

21. Air pollution is most likely to affect European sites where plant, soil and water habitats are the qualifying feature, but some qualifying animal species may also be affected, either directly or indirectly, by any deterioration in habitat as a result of air pollution. Deposition of pollutants to the ground and vegetation can alter the characteristics of the soil, affecting the pH and nitrogen availability that can then affect plant health, productivity and species composition.
22. Based on the Highways Agency Design for Road and Bridges (DMRB) Manual Volume 11, Section 3, Part 120 (which was produced to provide advice regarding the design, assessment and operation of trunk roads (including motorways)), it is assumed that air pollution from roads is unlikely to be significant beyond 200m from the road itself.
23. The European sites within 17km of Watlington that are within 200m of strategic roads are Aston Rowant SAC (M40) and Chilterns Beechwoods SAC (A404, A4010). As highlighted above, Watlington is approximately 3.2km from the Aston Rowant SAC and 7.6km from the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC.
24. The HRA sets out that SODC commissioned Atkins to model the effects of the Local Plan on traffic flows within the District. No traffic data was available for the roads adjacent to the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC and, as they are located too far outside of the Atkins model network to be reasonably or reliably predicted. Although this location lies within the initial screening radius of 17 km, the actual distance which would need to be travelled to reach these locations by car from the plan area exceeds this distance for most routes. It can therefore reasonably be expected that the contribution of growth within the Local Plan area to

traffic flows at these locations would be de minimis, and as such they are screened out from any further assessment.

25. In relation to the Aston Rowant SAC the HRA (March 2019) states:

'In light of the above analysis, it is concluded that the ecological effects of the predicted increase in NO_x concentrations and nutrient nitrogen deposition would either be negligible, or that any small effects would be highly unlikely to result in a deterioration in the condition of the qualifying features, and as such it is concluded that the in-combination effects of planned growth would not result in an adverse effect on the integrity of the Aston Rowant SAC.'

26. Therefore, given the modest scale of proposed development in the Watlington Neighbourhood Plan Review and distance of the SACs from the proposed development, effects in relation to air quality can be screened out and do not need to be considered further.

Increased recreation pressure; and

27. The most recent HRA of the South Oxford Local Plan (March 2019) states:

'Natural England's Site Improvement Plans record the threats and pressures relevant to each European site. Public access or disturbance are not identified as current threats or pressures at the following sites, despite their lying close to large settlements: Aston Rowant SAC, Hartslock Wood SAC, Cothill Fen SAC, and Oxford Meadow SAC.'

28. The HRA of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan sets out that the potential for effects depends upon the scale of development proposed and the features for which the site is designated. However, as a conservative estimate, it is assumed that any development within 7 km of a sensitive site could have impacts due to recreation. Where site specific information indicates that development beyond 7 km could produce recreation impacts, this will be taken into account; for example at Little Wittenham SAC, where development in the eastern fringes of the Vale of White Horse District could be relevant.

29. Watlington is approximately 10.1km from Little Wittenham SAC, which is part of a larger site managed by the Earth Trust as a nature reserve. The areas which are most important to the population of great crested newts (GCN) have restricted access which is designed to prevent conflicts between the visiting public, the newts and their habitat.

30. The increased visitor levels which are likely to occur as a result of the modest increase in population in Watlington may result in increased pressure on the habitats on the reserve as a whole. However, due to restricted access to the areas where newts are primarily found, the

increased visitor numbers will be concentrated onto other habitats on the reserve. These habitats are not related to the primary reasons for the selection of the SAC.

31. Great crested newts are not believed to be particularly sensitive to human disturbance provided their breeding ponds are not affected and their primary terrestrial habitat and hibernacula are not adversely affected. Provided controls on access to the most sensitive areas are maintained (i.e. ponds and hibernacula are not disturbed) there is no reason to believe that there would be any significant effect on the integrity of the site or the primary reason for the selection of the site.

Changes to hydrological regimes.

32. European sites at which aquatic or wetland environments support qualifying features have the potential to be affected by changes in water quantity or quality. The European sites close to Watlington are:
 - Little Wittenham SAC: its ponds support great crested newts, but changes to water quality or quantity have not been identified as an issue at this site – the site has therefore been screened out.
33. The types of development that have the potential to affect water quality / quantity or flow regimes at sensitive European sites are residential or employment development that would involve significant increase in demand for water supply and treatment, and infrastructure development that requires significant excavation in proximity to watercourses or groundwater.
34. The scale of development proposed in the Watlington Neighbourhood Plan Review is modest; therefore, likely significant effects in relation to water quality and quantity can be screened out and does not need to be considered further.
35. The Council has considered the HRA of the Local Plan (March 2019) in respect of the potential in combination effects of the proposals in the Watlington Neighbourhood Plan Review. Notably the Watlington NDP Review will only include sites for housing development that were allocated in the made Watlington NDP. The Watlington NDP Review will be bringing forward Sites B and C from the made plan August 2018, as they have not been developed yet. These sites currently have planning permission for 130 new homes but there is a current application for an increase on Site C from 60 to 75 new homes. If this is approved the two sites will deliver a total of 145 homes. This assessment has considered the potential increase of the number of houses to the existing site is unlikely to cause further significant effects.

36. The South Oxfordshire Local Plan covers the period from 2011 to 2035, the quantum of development proposed in the Local Plan includes some completed and committed development (Committed development includes sites under construction, with planning permission, made neighbourhood plan allocations and allocations carried forward from the Local Plan 2011 and Core Strategy). The policies that enabled those developments to be permitted have already been subject to HRA as part of the Core Strategy, Local Plan 2011 or as part of the HRA for the relevant NDP. Paragraph 5 to 37 of this assessment has considered how the development proposed in the Watlington Neighbourhood Plan Review is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites. The Local Plan HRA (March 2019) has a section on neighbourhood plans in Appendix 2 page 90 which considered the in-combination effects of the housing allocations in neighbourhood plans and the Local Plan. This assessment considered the delivery of 260 dwellings allocated in the Watlington NDP. As the Watlington NDP Review is not allocating additional sites than the 260 dwellings considered by the Local Plan HRA (March 2019) it is therefore not likely to give rise to significant in-combination effects.

CONCLUSION

37. The Watlington NDP Review is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, therefore, an Appropriate Assessment for the Watlington NDP Review is not required.

Appendix 3 - Assessment of the likely significance of effects on the environment

1. Characteristics of the Plan, having regard to:	
(a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;	The Watlington NDP Review would, if adopted, form part of the Statutory Development Plan and as such does contribute to the framework for future development consent of projects. However, the Plan will sit within the wider framework set by the National Planning Policy Framework, the strategic policies of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.
(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;	A Neighbourhood Development Plan must be in conformity with the Local Plan for the District. It does not influence other plans. The Watlington Neighbourhood Plan Review is unlikely to influence other Plans or

	Programmes within the statutory Development Plan.
(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;	National policy requires a presumption in favour of sustainable development, including the Watlington NDP Review. A basic condition of the Watlington NDP Review is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The plan review includes a design code which defines Watlington character areas. It looks at the form and layout of Watlington, it's rural character, materials and details, green features, sustainable features and rural hinterland which is aimed at development to meet the needs of residents now and in the future.
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and	<p>The environmental impact of the proposals within the Watlington NDP Review is likely to be minimal due to the scale of the development proposed.</p> <p>The Watlington NDP Review area contains the following environmental designations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Air Quality Management -Archaeological constraints -BAP priority habitats -Conservation Areas -Flood Zones 2 and 3 -Listed building structures -Local heritage asset -Local nature reserve -Local Wildlife sites -National nature reserves -National Landscapes (AONBs) -Proposed local wildlife sites -Protected species buffer -Scheduled Ancient Monuments <p>There are the following SACs within 17km of the Watlington NDP Review. These are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Little Wittenham SAC – 10.1km -Aston Rowant SAC – 3.2km -Chilterns Beechwood SAC- 7.6km -Hartlock Wood – 15.7km

	<p>There are also the following SSSI's located within the following distances of the Watlington NDP Review area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Watlington and Pyrton Hills SSSI- within the NDP area -Shirburn Hill SSSI- 1.8km -Aston Rowant Cutting SSSI- 4.8km -Aston Rowant SSSI- 4.4km -Knightsbridge Lane SSSI – 2.1km -Swyncombe Down SSSI- 2.9km -Pishill Woods SSSI -Wormsley Chalk Banks SSSI- 5km -Swains Wood SSSI- 5km <p>Given the NDP is not allocating further development of dwellings than the previous plan, the amount of potential infill sites within the village and their relationship to the designations within the NDP area, the proposals in the plan are unlikely to harm these designations. Therefore, the effects are not likely to be significant.</p>
<p>(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).</p>	<p>The proposed development in the Watlington NDP Review has been judged not to have an impact on Community legislation.</p>
<p>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:</p>	
<p>(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;</p>	<p>The Watlington NDP Review is likely to have modest but enduring positive environmental effects. The effects are not likely to be reversible, as they relate to development. However, the proposals are minor and will be of a local scale.</p> <p>The NDP Review proposes to introduce some changes to existing policy wording and the inclusion of a Design Code.</p> <p>The effects will be of a local scale and the policies in the Neighbourhood Plan add detail to existing development plan policies offering protection to the natural</p>

	environment, Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings and designated heritage assets to sustain and enhance their significance and setting. No new/additional development other than that allocated in the original NDP is proposed that would cause likely significant effects. Given the scale of what is proposed, the effects are not likely to be significant.
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;	It is intended that the positive social effects of providing residential development will have positive cumulative benefits for the area.
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects;	The effects of the Plan are unlikely to have transboundary ³ impacts.
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);	The policies in the plan are unlikely to present risks to human health or the environment.
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);	The NDP Review relates to the parish of Watlington. The potential for environmental effects is likely to be small and localised.
(f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: (i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; (ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or (iii) intensive land-use; and	<p>The environmental impact of the proposals within the Watlington NDP Review is likely to be minimal due to the scale of the development proposed.</p> <p>The Watlington NDP Review area contains the following environmental designations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Air Quality Management -Archaeological constraints -BAP priority habitats -Conservation Areas -Flood Zones 2 and 3 -Listed building structures -Local heritage asset -Local nature reserve -Local Wildlife sites -National nature reserves -National Landscapes (AONBs) -Proposed local wildlife sites -Protected species buffer -Scheduled Ancient Monuments

³ Transboundary effects are understood to be in other Member States.

	<p>There are the following SACs within 17km of the Watlington NDP Review. These are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Little Wittenham SAC – 10.1km-Aston Rowant SAC – 3.2km-Chilterns Beechwood SAC- 7.6km-Hartlock Wood – 15.7km <p>There are also the following SSSI's located within the following distances of the Watlington NDP Review area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Watlington and Pyrton Hills SSSI- within the NDP area-Shirburn Hill SSSI- 1.8km-Aston Rowant Cutting SSSI- 4.8km-Aston Rowant SSSI- 4.4km-Knightsbridge Lane SSSI – 2.1km-Swyncombe Down SSSI- 2.9km-Pishill Woods SSSI-Wormsley Chalk Banks SSSI- 5km-Swains Wood SSSI- 5kmh <p>Given the NDP is not allocating further development of dwellings than the previous plan, the amount of potential infill sites within the village and their relationship to the designations within the NDP area, the proposals in the plan are unlikely to harm these designations. Therefore, the effects are not likely to be significant.</p> <p>The Watlington NDP Review offers an opportunity to enhance the natural environment and the cultural heritage of the area through the proposals being considered.</p> <p>The adopted 2018 NDP already included policies ensuring development would maintain, restore or enhance the local landscape character. Taking into consideration the proposals in the plan Review, they are not considered to cause likely significant effects to special natural characteristics or cultural heritage.</p>
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	<p>The HRA Screening Assessment in Appendix 2 concluded that the Watlington NDP Review is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects; therefore, an Appropriate Assessment of the Watlington NDP Review is not required.</p> <p>The objectives of the Watlington NDP Review continue to set out how the plan will honour the historic and rural character of the parish and its setting, as well as maintain and enhance the natural environment and green spaces. The plan is considered to have a neutral effect on cultural heritage because there is no indication given in the plan Review and appendices that the plan would go beyond national and local policy and therefore, it is considered that the effects of the proposals in the plan Review are not likely to be significant.</p> <p>Environmental quality standards or limit values are not considered likely to be significantly affected by the Watlington NDP Review.</p> <p>In light of the minor proposals in the Watlington NDP Review, the plan is also not likely to cause significant effects in relation to intensive land use.</p>
<p>(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.</p>	<p>The area covered by the Watlington NDP Review includes part of the Chilterns National Landscape, recognised to contain some of the finest landscapes in England. The importance of the National Landscape is already recognised in the existing NDP. The plan Review continues the aim to 'safeguard the intrinsic character and heritage of Watlington, its surrounding countryside and its setting. Therefore, in light of the minor additional proposals in the Watlington NDP Review, the plan is not likely to cause significant effects on the National Landscape.</p>

Appendix 4 – Statutory Consultee Responses

HISTORIC ENGLAND



Our ref: PL00797326

To: [REDACTED]
Assistant Planning Officer
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils
planning.policy@southandvale.gov.uk

02 December 2024

Dear [REDACTED]

Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan Review: Screening Report for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Thank you for consulting Historic England about the above screening opinion.

In terms of our area of interest, given the nature of the plan review, we concur with your assessment that the plan is unlikely to result in any significant environmental effects and note that the made neighbourhood plan has already been subject to Sustainability Appraisal/SEA. As a result, we endorse the conclusion that it is not necessary to undertake SEA of this plan review.

The views of the other statutory consultation bodies should be taken into account before the overall decision on the need for an SEA is made.

If you have any queries about any of the matters raised above or would like to discuss anything further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED], BSc, MRTPI
Historic Environment Planning Adviser
Development Advice – London and the South East Region
[\[REDACTED\]@historicengland.org.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@historicengland.org.uk)



4TH FLOOR, CANNON BRIDGE HOUSE, 25 DOWGATE HILL, LONDON EC4R 2YA

Telephone 020 7973 3700
HistoricEngland.org.uk

Historic England is subject to both the Freedom of Information Act (2000) and Environmental Information Regulations (2004). Any information held by the organisation can be requested for release under this legislation.

NATURAL ENGLAND

Date: 06 December 2024
Our ref: 492570
Your ref: Watlington NDP SEA & HRA screening opinion



Planning.policy@south&vale.gov.uk

BY EMAIL ONLY

Hornbeam House
Crewe Business Park
Electra Way
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 6GJ

T 0300 060 3900

Dear [REDACTED]

Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan Review SEA & HRA Screening Opinion Consultation.

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 01 November 2024 which was received by Natural England on the same date.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Screening Request: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

It is Natural England's advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that:

- significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes are unlikely; and,
- significant effects on Habitats sites¹, either alone or in combination, are unlikely.

The proposed neighbourhood plan is unlikely to significantly affect any Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection areas (SPA), Ramsar wetland or sites in the process of becoming SACs or SPAs ('candidate SACs', 'possible SACs', 'potential SPAs') or a Ramsar wetland. The plan area is unlikely to have a significant effect on a National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or Heritage Coast, and is unlikely to impact upon the purposes for which these areas are designated or defined.

Guidance on the assessment of Neighbourhood Plans, in line with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 is contained within the [Planning Practice Guidance](#). This identifies three triggers that may require the production of an SEA:

- a neighbourhood plan allocates sites for development
- the neighbourhood area contains sensitive natural or heritage assets that may be affected by the proposals in the plan
- the neighbourhood plan may have significant environmental effects that have not already been considered and dealt with through a sustainability appraisal of the Local Plan.

¹ Habitats sites are those referred to in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (Annex 2 - glossary) as "any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 for the purpose of those regulations, including candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and any relevant Marine Sites".

Natural England does not hold information on the location of significant populations of protected species, so is unable to advise whether this plan is likely to affect protected species to such an extent as to require an SEA. Further information is included in Natural England's [standing advice](#) on protected species.

Furthermore, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all environmental assets. The plan may have environmental impacts on priority species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites, soils and best and most versatile agricultural land, or on local landscape character that may be sufficient to warrant an SEA. Information on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees is set out in Natural England/Forestry Commission [standing advice](#).

We therefore recommend that advice is sought from your ecological, landscape and soils advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local soils, best and most versatile agricultural land, landscape, geodiversity and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by the plan before determining whether a SEA is necessary.

Natural England reserves the right to provide further advice on the environmental assessment of the plan. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make. If a SEA is required, Natural England must be consulted at the scoping and environmental report stages.

Please send any new consultations, or further information on this consultation to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk

Yours sincerely



Consultations Team
