

Odiham and North Warnborough Neighbourhood Plan Update

SEA Screening Opinion

Prepared for Hart District Council

March 2024

Quality information

Prepared by

Mark Fessey
Associate Director

Checked by

James Riley
Technical Director

Approved by

Nick-Chisholm Batten
Technical Director

Prepared for:

Hart District Council

Prepared by:

AECOM Limited

© 2024 AECOM Limited. All Rights Reserved.

This document has been prepared by AECOM Limited (“AECOM”) in accordance with its contract with Hart District Council (the “Client”) and in accordance with generally accepted consultancy principles and the established budget. Any information provided by third parties and referred to herein has not been checked or verified by AECOM, unless otherwise expressly stated in the document. AECOM shall have no liability to any third party that makes use of or relies upon this document.

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Scope of the emerging plan	2
3.	Scope of environmental issues	4
4.	Screening assessment	5
5.	Screening opinion.....	6
	Appendix 1: Screening criteria.....	7

1. Introduction

Overview

- 1.1 This Strategic Environmental Assessment (**SEA**) Screening Opinion has been prepared in relation to the Odiham and North Warnborough Neighbourhood Plan Update by AECOM, on behalf of Hart District Council. The purpose of the Screening Opinion is to set out AECOM's opinion in relation to whether SEA is required alongside the process of preparing of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.2 This Screening Opinion is provided to the statutory consultation bodies for SEA (the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England) for their opinion. Subsequently, Hart District Council will make a final decision.

Background to SEA screening

- 1.3 SEA is a systematic process undertaken to evaluate the likely significant environmental effects of an emerging plan and reasonable alternatives. The requirement for SEA in England was introduced through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes ('SEA') Regulations (2004), which were prepared in order to transpose the EU SEA Directive (2001).
- 1.4 One of the 'basic conditions' that a neighbourhood plan is tested against is compatibility with European Union obligations, including under the SEA Directive. However, neighbourhood plans only require SEA where they are likely to lead to significant environmental effects. In order to decide whether there is the likelihood of significant environmental effects all neighbourhood plans must be 'screened' having regard to the criteria set out in Annex 2 of the SEA Directive, which is transposed into the SEA Regulations as Schedule 1.
- 1.5 In essence, screening involves exploring potential cause-effect relationships between the plan and the environmental baseline.
- 1.6 Where it is determined that significant environmental effects are likely an SEA process is required. If the outcome of screening is a conclusion that SEA is not required, then a statement of reasons should be prepared.¹

Structure of this report

- 1.7 This report is structured as follows:
 - Section 2 – explores the scope of the Neighbourhood Plan Update.
 - Section 3 – introduces relevant environmental issues.
 - Section 4 – assesses the potential for the Neighbourhood Plan Update to lead to significant environmental effects on the environmental baseline.
 - Section 5 – sets out the screening opinion.

¹ Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012) requires that Neighbourhood Plans are submitted to the Local Authority alongside either: A) an SEA ('environmental') report; or, B) a statement of reasons why SEA is not required.

2. Scope of the emerging plan

- 2.1 A working draft version of the Pre-submission Neighbourhood Plan Update was made available to inform this Screening Opinion. Specifically, this is the outcome of the updating process that the Parish Council intends to publish for consultation under Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations.
- 2.2 However, this draft is naturally subject to change. As such, it is important to 'screen' on the basis of a broad understanding of the scope of the updating process, more so than on the basis of emerging draft proposals.
- 2.3 It is also important to be clear that the focus of this Screening Opinion is the scope of proposed / potential modifications to the adopted ('made') version of the Neighbourhood Plan (2017). This is because aspects of the made Neighbourhood Plan that are not proposed to change form part of the baseline.
- 2.4 Proposed introductory text within the draft consultation document introduces the scope of the updating process:

“Recognising best practice, Odiham Parish Council has been monitoring the Plan’s performance throughout its early years and in 2023 agreed to review and update the document to ensure that it remains current and robust enough to continue to stand up to challenge. As Hart DC does not need the Parish to allocate more sites for housing, and after taking specialist advice, a limited review - and subsequent update – is considered most appropriate.

Many of the proposed changes in the following text are factual or technical in nature to comply with latest legislation or to reflect other initiatives like our new Conservation Area Appraisal 2022 and the registration of [two] assets of community value. There are also suggested improvements here and there to further strengthen wording in line with environmental considerations and aspirations previously expressed by the community.”

- 2.5 In short, the scope of the updating process is quite limited.
- 2.6 With regards to the plan vision and objectives, there is only one proposed change, namely addition of the following sentence within the vision: *“Particular attention will be paid to increasing biodiversity in public open spaces and encouraging management of privately owned spaces to do the same.”*
- 2.7 The following is an overview of the proposed changes within the draft policies provided for review (albeit recalling they are potentially subject to change):
- Policy 1 (Spatial Plan for Parish) – simply presents a **factual update**, confirming the number of homes that have so far been delivered across the seven sites allocated within the made Neighbourhood Plan (2017). Specifically, 24 homes have delivered, leaving 95 homes still to deliver.
 - Policy 2 (Housing Development Sites) – there is only one proposed change, namely addition of a policy criterion for the largest of the seven allocations (Site 2v; **Land at Dunleys Hill**; 30 homes).
Specifically, the new policy criterion clarifies that the site must deliver a new public open space. This is an important point **discussed further below**.

- Policy 3 (Local Gap) – no significant changes.
- Policy 4 (Housing Mix) – a very modest change, with new reference to achieving a good housing mix at *all* housing sites.
- Policy 5 (General Design Principles) – a new policy criterion referencing new evidence from the Odiham and North Warnborough Conservation Areas Appraisal (ONWCAA; 2022). Specifically, there is new policy on accounting for valued **open spaces within the Conservation Area**.
- Policy 6 (Odiham Conservation Area) - again, there are new policy criterion dealing with conserving **specific aspects of the Conservation Area**, informed by the ONWCAA (2022).
- Policy 7 (North Warnborough Conservation Area) – as above.
- Policy 8 (Basingstoke Canal Conservation Area) – no proposed changes.
- Policy 9 (**Odiham High Street**) – changes to reflect the new use class orders, namely new use class E. **Discussed further below**.
- Policies 10 (Education) and 11 (Local Green Spaces) – no changes.
- Policy 12 (Natural Environment) – a new criterion requires that proposals “include measures to enhance **biodiversity in public spaces**.”
- Policy 13 (Assets of Community Value) – no significant changes.
- Policy 14 (**Dunleys Hill Open Space**) – new wording to clarify that the open space is to be delivered by the development defined in Policy 2v.
- Policy map – no substantive changes (i.e. all changes are editorial).

2.8 In summary, within the working draft version of the Pre-submission Neighbourhood Plan Update reviewed, the key proposed changes are:

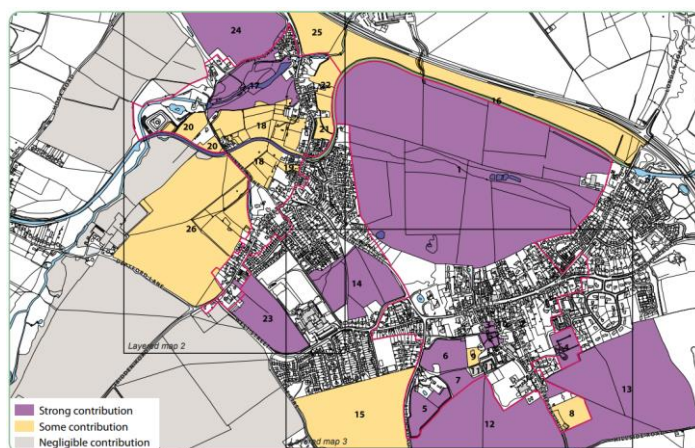
- **Policy 2v: Land at Dunleys Hill** – it is important that this site delivers an adjacent open space (Dunley’s Hill Open Space). This is the clear intention made Neighbourhood Plan (2017), but the drafting is not as clear as ideally would be the case, which has led to issues. The new proposal is correct this drafting issue, which would be broadly a ‘positive’ (see **Section 4**).
- **Biodiversity in open spaces** – this new emphasis might apply to the proposed new Dunley Hill Open Space which, as discussed, is already providing challenging to deliver. See further discussion in **Section 4**.
- **Odiham High Street** – the policy is not likely to have a significant bearing on housing delivery or a designated conservation area.
- **Conservation areas** – a ‘positive’ from a historic environment perspective and not likely to have any significant bearing on housing delivery.

2.9 The crucial point to note is no potential for significant changes to the committed strategy for growth via the existing allocations. [Guidance](#) is clear that the question of whether a neighbourhood plan ‘allocates’ is a key screening factor.

3. Scope of environmental issues

- 3.1 An important starting point is proximity to components of the **Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA)**. Specifically, the majority of the settlement area within the Parish falls within the 5-7km zone of influence, within which there are certain requirements placed on developments, with a view to mitigating recreational pressure on the SPA.
- 3.2 This is a particular consideration for three adjacent allocations within the made Neighbourhood Plan (2017), namely: Site 2i (9 homes); Site 2ii (has been built for 16 homes); and Site 2v (a planning application was previously refused and then dismissed at appeal, and a new outline application is currently under consideration for up to 30 homes). This is because the three sites in combination would deliver in excess of 50 homes – a key threshold.
- 3.3 This matter was considered in detail at the time of preparing the made Neighbourhood Plan, and it was concluded that recreational pressure from the three adjacent sites would be suitably mitigated by delivery of a new adjacent open space, namely Dunleys Hill Open Space (coupled with an appropriate financial contribution to SAMM Strategic Access Management and Monitoring). Specifically, the open space must be delivered by Site 2v (and a key aim of the updating process is to clarify this point, as discussed above).
- 3.4 Other environmental issues include:
- Two adjacent conservation areas containing many designated assets. A joint appraisal was recently completed, which includes a focus on the contribution that open spaces make to the conservation areas, including open spaces outside but adjacent to the conservation areas – see below.
 - Basingstoke Canal – is another designated conservation area and is also nationally designated as a Site of Special Scientific interest (SSSI).
 - Community issues – the key matter for consideration is potentially housing need, as there have been some delays to delivering the housing growth proposed by the made Neighbourhood Plan (2017).

Figure 3.1: Contribution of open spaces to the conservation areas



4. Screening assessment

- 4.1 **Table 4.1** discusses the potential for significant environmental effects under a series of topic headings, which reflects the list of topics presented in Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations. This list of topics is only an indicative starting-point for SEA but is an appropriate framework under which to undertake screening.
- 4.2 The assessment also accounts for the ‘significance criteria’ set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. Further information is presented in **Appendix 1**.

Table 4.1: Assessment of potential significant environmental effects

Topic	Discussion of potential environmental effects	Potential for significant effects?
Biodiversity	Mitigating recreational pressure on the SPA is a key issue for the plan, but the aim of the plan is simply to ensure that previously agreed mitigation is delivered in practice. There is no potential for impacts to nationally or locally designated habitats, nor any other priority habitats.	Uncertain
Cultural heritage	There is extensive sensitivity, but there is no potential for the updating process to result in development over-and-above the baseline situation.	No
Landscape	There is a designated Landscape Gap between Odiham and North Warnborough (also largely falling within the Odiham Conservation Area). However, there is no potential for the updating process to result in development over-and-above the baseline situation.	No
Population and health	There is a need to support planned housing growth, recognising that there are likely to be significant locally arising housing needs (N.B. a Housing Needs Assessment has not been undertaken), also recognising that Odiham is a higher order settlement in Hart District benefiting from a secondary school (with land safeguarded for a 2.8 ha expansion). The Neighbourhood Plan Update will look to require that existing allocation 2v delivers a new public open space, but there is no reason to assume that this would significantly impact viability.	No
Climatic factors	There are not thought likely to be any significant issues or opportunities in respect of either mitigation or adaptation.	No
Soil	The land proposed to be delivered as a new public open space (Dunley’s Hill) is currently under arable cultivation and is likely to comprise best and most versatile agricultural land, noting that adjacent land has been surveyed and found to comprise grade 2 quality land. However, the quantum of agricultural land proposed to be taken out of productive use is modest. Also, and importantly, it is important to recall that the open space is an existing requirement within the made plan (2017).	No

Topic	Discussion of potential environmental effects	Potential for significant effects?
Water	There are not thought likely to be any significant issues in respect of either water resources / availability or water quality (including wastewater related issues).	No
Air	There are no Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) in the vicinity of the parish, nor any other known issues.	No
Material assets	There are no identified issues over-and-above those discussed under other topic headings.	No

5. Screening opinion

- 5.1 The screening assessment presented in Section 4 concludes there is there is **no potential for significant effects** in most respects, essentially because the allocation of land for development is outside the scope of the updating process. This is in the context of guidance emphasising the question of whether a neighbourhood plan “allocates sites for development” as a key screening factor.
- 5.2 However, Table 4.1 records an ‘uncertain’ conclusion in respect of biodiversity. This is because the plan deals with mitigating recreational pressure on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, which automatically triggers a need for the Appropriate Assessment (AA) stage of Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and, where AA is required it can be suggested that there is an automatic requirement for SEA, on the basis of [Regulation 5\(3\)](#) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (SEA) Regulations 2004. In practice though, the AA has been completed and concluded no potential for significant adverse effects on the SPA, hence it is suggested that SEA is not triggered.
- 5.3 For these reasons, it is considered that **SEA is not required**.
- 5.4 The comments of the SEA statutory consultees are sought on this opinion, and we are particularly keen to hear from Natural England given the AA issue.

Appendix 1: Screening criteria

As discussed, Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations presents a list of criteria that must be taken into account as part of SEA screening. These criteria fed into the assessment presented in Section 4. However, it is appropriate to also present a discussion under each of the criteria headings in turn.

Criteria	Significant effect?	Discussion
1. The characteristics of the NP, having particular regard to:		
(a) the degree to which the NP sets out a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.	No	The update deals with policies that will be taken into account as part of any future planning applications, but does not allocate land for development, which is a key consideration when screening, as set out in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).
(b) the degree to which the NP influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	No	The updated plan could influence future local plan-making but not to any significant extent, and there is no reason to suggest any issues.
(c) the relevance of the NP for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	No	The plan is relevant to the integration of environmental and wider sustainable development considerations as part of the process of considering planning applications locally. However, effects will be broadly positive, and not significant to the extent that SEA is warranted, with a view to ensuring that benefits are maximised / opportunities realised.
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme	No	There are a range of environmental sensitivities and issues, as discussed in Sections 3 and 4. Having taken these into account, the conclusion is that there is not likely to be the potential for significant effects.
(e) the relevance of the plan for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example plans and programmes related to waste management or water protection)	No	It is not anticipated that the plan will have a notable bearing, in this respect.

Criteria	Significant effect?	Discussion
2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular,		
(a) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	No	Importantly, it is not an objective of the updating process to allocate sites for development. The policy proposals in the plan are potentially reversible, e.g. through a plan review.
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects	No	A primary consideration is the cumulative effect of the NP Update and the Local Plan, also mindful of any future Local Plan Update. A key consideration is providing for the Local Plan housing requirement and, more broadly, meeting housing needs district-wide. This is discussed above.
(c) the trans boundary nature of the effects	No	A cross-border consideration discussed above is the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. Otherwise there are limited or no cross-border issues.
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accident)	No	No particular concerns in respect of impacts to human health can be envisaged. As discussed, open space is a key focus of the updating process.
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	Uncertain	Issues are primarily very localised, but the Thames Basin Heaths SPA is a larger-than-local issue, as is potentially meeting housing needs.
(f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Special natural characteristics or heritage ▪ Exceeded env. quality standards or limit values ▪ Intensive land use 	Uncertain	There are a range of environmental sensitivities, as discussed, including the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, three designated conservation areas and nearby nationally designated SSSIs. Also, land between Odiham and North Warnborough is locally designated as a landscape gap.
(g) areas or landscapes with a recognised protection status	Uncertain	