

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 Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Development Plan

03 SEPTEMBER 2019

SUMMARY

Following consultation with statutory bodies, South Oxfordshire District Council (the 'Council') determines that Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Development Plan (Aston Rowant NDP) 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 Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Development Plan (Aston Rowant NDP) required a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2011/42/EC (the Directive) and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the Regulations). A Habitats Regulation Screening Assessment is included in Appendix 2.
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 and Natural England. The results of the screening process are detailed in this Screening Statement.

THE SCREENING PROCESS

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Table 1 in Appendix 1 sets out the criteria from the Practical Guide, along with an assessment of the Aston Rowant NDP against each criterion to ascertain whether a SEA is required.

4. Part of the screening process also includes the Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening, which can be found in Appendix 2. The Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening concluded that the Aston Rowant NDP 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 Aston Rowant NDP is not required.
5. Appendix 3 considers whether the plan is likely to have likely significant effects on the environment.
6. These two assessments feed into Table 1 and the SEA screening statement.
7. The council's screening opinion concluded that the implementation of the Aston Rowant NDP would not result in likely significant effects on the environment and therefore would not require an SEA.

ASTON ROWANT NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

8. The Aston Rowant NDP will contain policies to address the following goals and objectives:

Goals

1. To provide existing and future residents with the opportunity to live in a decent home.
2. To protect the surrounding countryside, landscape, designated open spaces, farming and ecosystems.
3. To reduce road traffic congestion and improve road safety.
4. To promote new development for housing, leisure, community facilities and employment opportunities in accordance with locally defined needs.
5. To maintain the character and vitality of the parish's villages and hamlets and to enhance access to the countryside.
6. To promote high quality in the design of new buildings conducive with the need to reduce pollution and decrease energy-consumption.

Objectives

1. To provide existing and future residents with the opportunity to live in a decent home by:-

- a) providing a limited number (no more than 25?) of new dwellings to meet local needs within settlement boundaries defined in the ARNP or to infilling within established frontages in Kingston Stert;
- b) allowing for the provision of a mix of new housing types and sizes commensurate with recognised local trends and requirements;
- c) meeting identified local need for affordable housing for families/individuals with local connections and/or employment;
- d) limiting new development to schemes of no more than five new dwellings, excluding changes of use or redevelopment;

2. To protect the area's local character, the surrounding countryside, landscape, designated open spaces, farming and ecosystems by:-

- a) defining open spaces on which new development will be precluded;
- b) protecting, enhancing and conserving the AONB, the agricultural /woodland character of the area and significant views into and across the parish;
- c) protecting the area's heritage assets, notably the conservation areas, listed buildings, historic settlement pattern, byways and distinctive local buildings;
- d) promoting exclusive agricultural and woodland use of all land outside of defined settlements.

3. To reduce traffic congestion and improve road safety by:-

- a) promoting new development only within walking distance of local facilities and amenities;
- b) securing, through development and alternative funding, traffic-calming measures on the B4009 through the plan area;
- c) improving the standard and maintenance levels of footpaths and byways in the plan area, including pedestrian and cycling links to the Oxford Tube bus stops;
- d) promoting home-working and local employment opportunities.

4. To promote new development for housing, leisure, community facilities and employment in accordance with locally-defined needs by:-

- a) promoting new dwellings through the re-use of existing buildings, the sub-division of larger properties and the redevelopment of large dwellings/sites;
- b) creating the opportunity for the retention and provision of community assets and local facilities.
- c) maintaining the open nature of identified recreational and leisure spaces;
- d) securing homes for local agricultural workers.

5. To maintain the character and vitality of the parish's villages and hamlets and to enhance access to the countryside by:-

- a) protecting identified and unidentified heritage assets;
- b) maintaining appropriate conservation area boundaries in Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount;
- c) taking opportunities for the planting of new trees in association with new development, along established byways and through the replacement of trees lost through commercial woodland management;
- d) improving maintenance of established footpaths byways and bridleways.

6. To promote high quality in the design of new buildings, conducive with the need to reduce pollution and decrease energy-consumption by:-

- a) integrating new housing into the villages so as to maintain their essentially rural and informal character;

- b) seeking the use of materials in character with the area and reflecting its proximity to the Chilterns;
- c) insisting upon compliance with the most appropriate standards aimed at the creation of zero-carbon housing;
- d) conserving and enhancing biodiversity.

9. The Neighbourhood Plan proposes to allocate sites for future development that has not already been identified in the adopted Core Strategy, the proposed number of units are minor in scale and their location has been carefully considered to ensure no significant effects arise. (as detailed in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 – sections d, f and g) it is considered the proposals in the plan will not have a significant effect on the environment and therefore an SEA is not required. The site assessment process (please see Appendix 6) identified 5 potential suitable sites. The neighbourhood plan proposes to accommodate approximately 17 dwellings across 2 sites.

10. It is therefore concluded that the implementation of the Aston Rowant NDP would not result in likely significant effects on the environment.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

11. The Screening Opinion was sent to Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England on 27th November 2018 for a four week consultation period. The responses in full are in Appendix 5.

12. Historic England confirmed that based on the information they have been provided, they are content for the plan to proceed without SEA at this time, but only with the caveat that if either of the proposed allocation sites would adversely affect the special interest, character or appearance of either the Kingston Blount or Aston Rowant Conservation Areas and/or should either or both of the sites be found to have archaeological significance and/or the proposed sites change, they may wish to revise that opinion.

13. Natural England confirmed they agree with the assessment that the Neighbourhood Plan does not require an SEA or Appropriate Assessment.

14. The Environment Agency did not respond.

CONCLUSION

15. As a result of the screening undertaken by the council and the responses from the statutory consultees the following determination has been reached.

16. The Aston Rowant NDP is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, either alone or in combination with other plans or programmes; therefore, an Appropriate Assessment for the Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Development Plan is not required.
17. Based on the assessment presented in Appendices 3, the Aston Rowant NDP is unlikely to have a significant effect on the environment.
18. The Aston Rowant NDP does not require a Strategic Environment Assessment.

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

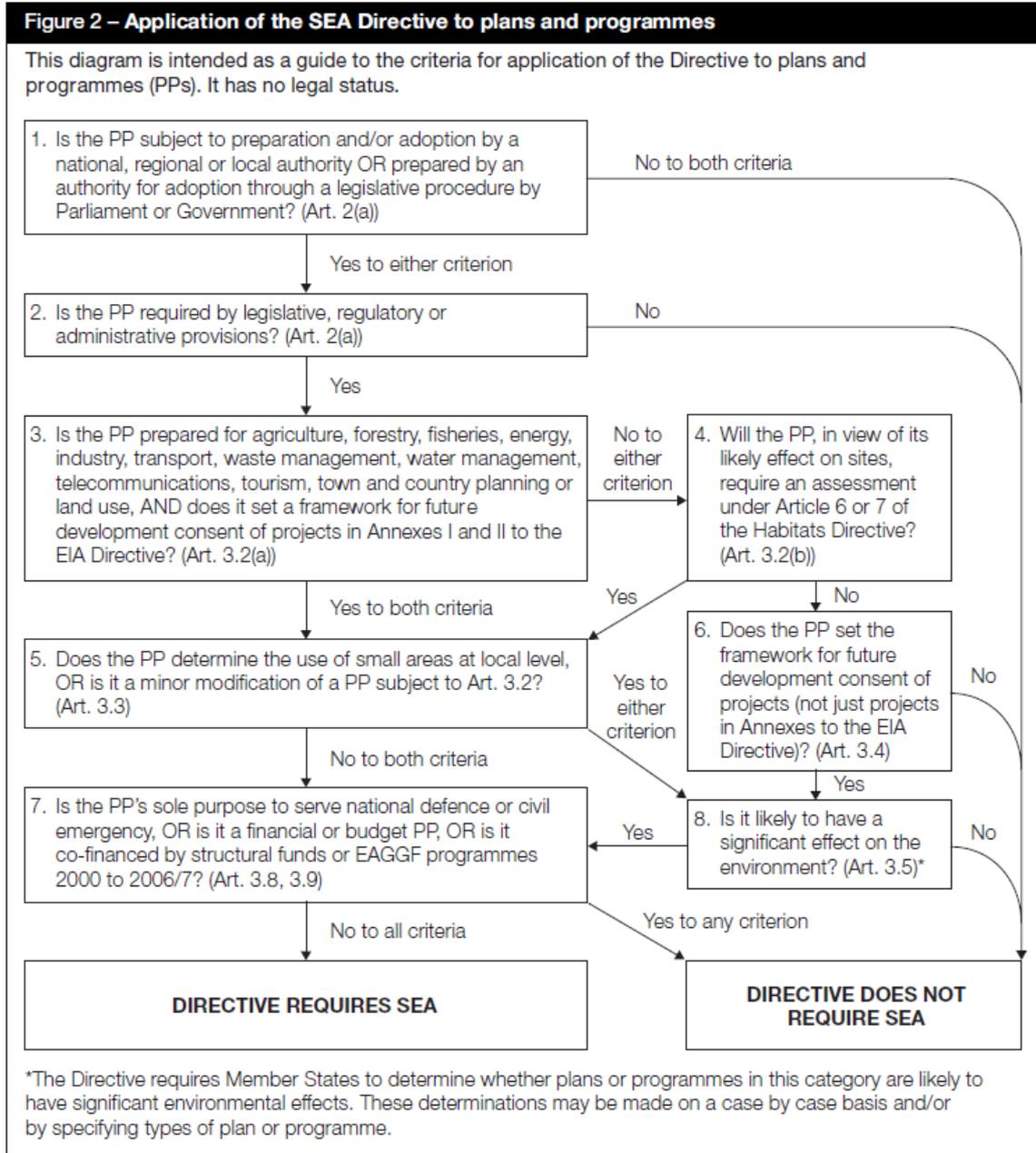


Table 1: Application of SEA Directive as shown in Appendix 1

[Note to author – most of these boxes contain standard text –greyed out. Those where specific details need to be included are Qs 3,4,5 & 8]

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 Aston Rowant NDP Steering Group, a working group who report to the Aston Rowant 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</p>

		<p>environmental effects and hence whether SEA is required under the Directive.</p> <p>National Planning Practice Guidance (Paragraph: 027 Reference ID: 11-027-20150209) 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.</p>
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	<p>The Aston Rowant NDP is prepared for town and country planning and land use and will set out a framework for future development in Aston Rowant, including the development of residential/leisure/community* uses. <i>However, these projects are not of the scale referred to in Article 4(2) of the EIA Directive – listed at Annex II of the directive.</i></p>
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	<p>The Aston Rowant NDP is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites. See Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Opinion for the Aston Rowant NDP in Appendix 2.</p>
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	<p>The Aston Rowant NDP will determine the use of sites/small areas at a local level.</p>

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 Aston Rowant NDP 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	No likely significant effects upon the environment have been identified. See assessment of the likely significance of effects on the environment in Appendix 3.

Appendix 2 - Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Statement for the Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Development Plan

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 emerging Local Plan³ from March 2019 as its basis for assessment. From this, the Local Authority will determine whether the Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Development Plan 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:

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

² The South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (December 2012) and the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (January 2006).

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

“105.—(1) Where a land use plan—

- (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."

ASSESSMENT

5. There is 4 Special Area of Conservation (SACs) within 17km of the Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Development Plan. This is as follows:

Within South Oxfordshire

- Chilterns Beechwoods SAC 3.12km
- Aston Rowant SAC
- Little Wittenham SAC
- Hartslock Wood SAC

Aston Rowant SAC

Aston Rowant is classified as 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 SAC.

Special Area of Conservation objectives

1 Avoid the deterioration of the qualifying natural habitats and significant disturbance to them, ensuring the integrity of the site is maintained and makes a full contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status for the qualifying features on this site.

2 Subject to natural change, maintain or restore:

- the extent and distribution of natural habitats, and habitats of protected species;
- the structure and function of habitats, and habitats of protected species
- the supporting processes on which protected species and their habits rely;
- the population of protected species; and
- the distribution of protected species within the site.

Site Improvement Plan: pressures, threats and related development

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 juniper and deer threaten beech. With regard to the types of development that may be brought forward in the Local Plan, air pollution could impact the site.

Key environmental conditions supporting the site

1. Regular management to keep vegetation open and allow seedlings to establish
2. Prevention of rabbit grazing on seedlings
3. Minimal air pollution

Chilterns Beechwoods SAC

Site description 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.

1 Avoid the deterioration of the qualifying natural habitats and significant disturbance to them, ensuring the integrity of the site is maintained and makes a full contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status for the qualifying features on this site.

2 Subject to natural change, maintain or restore:

- the extent and distribution of natural habitats, and habitats of protected species;
- the structure and function of habitats, and habitats of protected species
- the supporting processes on which protected species and their habits rely;

- the population of protected species; and
- the distribution of protected species within the site.

Site Improvement Plan: pressures, threats and related development:

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. With regard to the types of development that may be brought forward in the Local Plan, air pollution and visitor disturbance could impact the site.

Key environmental conditions supporting the site

1. Minimal air pollution
2. Managed public access
3. Appropriate management of grasslands
4. Absence of direct fertilisation

Hartslock Wood SAC

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*.

Special Area of Conservation objectives

1 Avoid the deterioration of the qualifying natural habitats and significant disturbance to them, ensuring the integrity of the site is maintained and makes a full contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status for the qualifying features on this site.

2 Subject to natural change, maintain or restore:
the extent and distribution of natural habitats, and habitats of protected species;

- the structure and function of habitats, and habitats of protected species
- the supporting processes on which protected species and their habits rely;

- the population of protected species; and
- the distribution of protected species within the site.

Site Improvement Plan: pressures, threats and related development

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.

Key environmental conditions supporting the site

1. Appropriate management of grazing
2. Minimal air pollution
3. Absence of direct fertilisation

Little Wittenham SAC

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.

Special Area of Conservation objectives

1 Avoid the deterioration of the qualifying natural habitats and significant disturbance to them, ensuring the integrity of the site is maintained and makes a full contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status for the qualifying features on this site.

2 Subject to natural change, maintain or restore:

- the extent and distribution of natural habitats, and habitats of protected species;
- the structure and function of habitats, and habitats of protected species
- the supporting processes on which protected species and their habits rely;
- the population of protected species; and
- the distribution of protected species within the site.

Site Improvement Plan: pressures, threats and related development

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.

Key environmental conditions supporting the site

1. Suitable foraging and refuge habitat within 500 metres of the pond
2. Relatively unpolluted water of neutral pH
3. Some ponds deep enough to retain water throughout February to August at least one year in three

There are also these significant areas of designation within 5km of Aston Rowant:

- Aston Rowant SSSI
- Aston Rowant NNR
- Aston Rowant Cutting SSSI
- Wormsley Chalk Banks SSSI
- Shirburn Hill SSSI
- Watlington and Pyrton Hills SSSI
- Chinnor Chalk Pit SSSI
- Chinnor Hill SSSI
- Watlington Chalk Pit LNR
- Knightsbridge Lane SSSI

The majority of the above designations are outside of the built-up area of the village. There is an SSSI located on the edge of the NDP designated area which is located approximately 1km from the built up area of Aston Rowant. One of the plan's main objectives is to conserve the village, its character and setting. This means that development is likely to be located within or adjoining the existing built form. Within this context site allocations are unlikely to be located within less than 1km from the designations detailed above. Furthermore, the proposed level of growth is very modest and the predicted effects associated to this scale of development are not considered to be significant.

In addition, the Council may rely upon the conclusions of the recent HRA of the emerging Local Plan (January 2018 updated in March 2019) in respect of the potential effects of the proposals in the Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Plan alone or in combination with other plans or projects. The HRA for the emerging Local Plan ([direct link available here](#)) assessed the collective delivery of 500 dwellings in Smaller Villages, such as Aston Rowant (see Table 2-2 Development quantum assessed in this HRA). As the scale and type of development promoted through the Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Plan is directly comparable to the development assessed by the HRA for the emerging Local Plan, in the council's opinion, the Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Plan does not require an Appropriate Assessment.

The HRA of the emerging Local Plan concluded that the proposals within the emerging Local Plan would not have any adverse effects on the Natura 2000 network of sites, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects (see paragraph 6.5 on page 51).

The Council has considered the HRA of the emerging Local Plan (March 2019) in respect of the potential in combination effects of the proposals in the Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Plan. As the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2034 covers the period from 2011 to 2034, 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. We are also aware of the following emerging neighbourhood plans Wheatley and Kidmore End. Both neighbourhood plans propose to allocate sites, Kidmore End is proposing to allocate a quantum of 4 dwellings and Wheatley 90 dwellings, both have had already had HRA screening assessments undertaken by the district council where it was concluded that the plans are unlikely to cause significant effects on Natura 2000 sites.

Appendix 2 of this assessment has considered how the development proposed in the Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites. Given the modest scale of development proposed and having regard to [the](#) conclusions of Appendix 2, it is considered that the development proposed in the Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Plan is not likely to give rise to significant in combination effects.

6. Detailed information about the location, qualifying features and vulnerabilities of the European sites included in the screening assessment is presented in Appendix 1 of South Oxfordshire Local Plan Habitats Regulations Assessment Report ([March 2019](#)).
7. As required under Regulation 106 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the 'Habitats Regulations'), the qualifying body (Aston Rowant 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;
 - Non-physical disturbance e.g. noise/vibration or light pollution;
 - Air pollution;
 - Increased recreation pressure; and
 - Changes to hydrological regimes.

8. The Plan does not allocate any sites for development or promote additional development beyond what is supported in the adopted Development Plan.

CONCLUSION

9. The Aston Rowant NDP is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, therefore, an Appropriate Assessment of the Aston Rowant NDP is not required.

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

1. Characteristics of the Plan, having regard to:		Is there a likely significant positive or negative effect?
(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 Aston Rowant NDP 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 Core Strategy (2012) and Local Plan 2011 (2006); and the emerging Local Plan 2034. Proposed site allocations are of a small scale and are not of the scale <i>referred to in Article 4(2) of the EIA Directive – listed at Annex II of the directive.</i>	No likely significant positive or negative effect.
(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;	A Neighbourhood Development Plan must have regard to national policy and be in conformity with the Local Plan for the District. It does not influence other plans. It should also take account of the emerging planning policy. The Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to influence other Plans or Programmes within the Statutory Development Plan.	No likely significant positive or negative effect.
(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the	National policy requires a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread through plan-making, including the	No likely significant positive or negative effect.

<p>integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;</p>	<p>Aston Rowant NDP. A basic condition of the Aston Rowant NDP is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Within this wider context the Aston Rowant NDP itself is unlikely to have a significant positive or negative effects. It is noted that a number of the NDP objectives do relate to the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view of promoting sustainable development. These include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To provide existing and future residents with the opportunity to live in a decent home. 2. To protect the surrounding countryside, landscape, designated open spaces, farming and ecosystems. 3. To reduce road traffic congestion and improve road safety. 4. To promote new development for housing, leisure, community facilities and employment opportunities in accordance with locally defined needs. 5. To maintain the character and vitality of the parish's villages and hamlets and to enhance access to the countryside. 6. To promote high quality in the design of new buildings conducive with the need to reduce pollution and decrease energy-consumption. <p>From the objectives that have been provided, policies within the NDP are likely to address the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing the <i>provision of housing within the Aston Rowant parish through the</i> 	
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	<p><i>allocation of sites. This is considered to cause moderate positive economic and social effects through bringing people to the area.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The protection of green spaces and the historic environment will have a moderate positive environmental effects.</i> • <i>Leisure and community facilities will have a moderate positive social and economic effects.</i> <p><i>In order to meet the basic conditions the plan will have to integrate environmental considerations in particular with a view to promote sustainable development. Given the small scale of the development proposed in the plan and provided they are not located on or near sensitive locations, the effects predicted above are not likely to be significant.</i></p>	
<p>(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and</p>	<p>Aston Rowant contains the following environmental designations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation area • Chilterns AONB • Listed buildings • Nature and Conservation Target Areas Local Wildlife site • SSSI • Archaeological Constraints 	<p>No likely significant positive or negative effect.</p>

- Ancient Woodland
- Flood Zones 2 & 3
- National Nature Reserve

It is clear there are sensitivities within the Aston Rowant Parish. There is currently not an adopted Conservation Area Appraisal or management plan for the Aston Rowant Conservation Area and therefore detailed information on the risks and vulnerability of the Conservation Area or listed buildings and their setting is not readily available. However, the NDP is required to be in conformity with national and local adopted strategic policies which require the conservation of heritage assets within this context the NDP is not likely to have significant effects.

There are four Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) within 17km of Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Development Plan. These are as follows:

- Chilterns Beechwoods SAC
- Aston Rowant SAC
- Little Wittenham
- Hartslock Wood

There are also these significant areas of designation within 5km of Aston Rowant:

- Aston Rowant SSSI
- Aston Rowant NNR
- Aston Rowant Cutting SSSI
- Wormsley Chalk Banks SSSI
- Shirburn Hill SSSI

- Watlington and Pyrton Hills SSSI
- Chinnor Chalk Pit SSSI
- Chinnor Hill SSSI
- Watlington Chalk Pit LNR
- Knightsbridge Lane SSSI

There are also a number of BAP priority Habitats within the parish area. Whilst these are not referred to in the SEA directive or EIA regulations, they should be a consideration in plan making and taken into consideration when allocating sites. BAP priority habitats are those that were identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) the site assessment process identified sites to be allocated which avoid the BAP habitats and therefore it is considered there would not be a likely significant impact.

The majority of the above designations are outside of the built up area of the village. There is an SSSI located on the edge of the NDP designated area which is located approximately 1km from the built up area of Aston Rowant. One of the plan's main objectives is to conserve the village, its character and setting. This means that development is likely to be located within or adjoining the existing built form. Within this context the potential site allocations are detailed below including their distances from the designated areas and their suitability, availability and achievability

Site 3 – B4009 frontage in KB-

	<p>The site is adjacent to Kingston Blount and within 700m of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Beauty; and 1.2km of the Aston Rowant SSSI and the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC. The site is adjacent to Kingston Blount Conservation Area and Grade II Listed Buildings.</p> <p>Site found to be suitable, available and achievable in the SHELAA (Site 1015). It is close to the village centre and public transport and therefore is in a suitable location for development. Currently well screened and development here could be integrated well into the village.</p> <p>Site 6 – The Cherry Tree PH</p> <p>The site is within the Kingston Blount Conservation Area and adjacent to a Grade II listed barn and Old Tudor House; 750m from the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Beauty; and 1.2km from the Aston Rowant SSSI, and the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC.</p> <p>Site is favourably located within the village; however development proposals must conserve or enhance the significance of the setting of the conservation area, and adjacent heritage assets. The public house is suitable for conversion to café and B&B type accommodation. The site is potentially suitable for allocation subject to development respecting the existing heritage and landscape character.</p> <p>Site 7 – Infill site on Butts Way</p> <p>The site is within 700m of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding</p>	
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	<p>Beauty; and 1km of the Aston Rowant SSSI, Aston Rowant SAC, Aston Rowant NNR and the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC.</p> <p>Site is outside the settlement boundary contrary to Policy H4 Towns and Villages of the Local Plan. However, provided the plot is of a sufficient size and the tree can be preserved it could be a suitable location for an additional house, as it is an infill site between existing housing plots.</p> <p>Site 9 – Aston Park Stud, AR Road</p> <p>The site is within 1km of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Beauty; and 1.2km of the Aston Rowant SSSI, Aston Rowant SAC and Aston Rowant NNR. The site is in close proximity to Aston Rowant Conservation Area.</p> <p>Site found to be suitable, available and achievable in the SHELAA. Close to village facilities. Continuation of linear form of village. Limited impact on character of village.</p> <p>Site 38 – Town Farm</p> <p>Site is adjacent to Kingston Blount Conservation Area. The site is within 1km of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Beauty; and 1.4km from Aston Rowant SSSI and the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC.</p> <p>Potentially suitable for redevelopment for residential use subject to scale and design of proposals being sympathetic to the character and setting of the landscape and Conservation Area.</p>	
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	<p>Furthermore, the plan is likely to allocate part of two sites to accommodate the level of growth proposed. The site assessment process (please see Appendix 6) identified 5 potential suitable sites. The neighbourhood plan is proposes approximately 17 dwellings across the 2 sites. The proposed level of growth is very modest and the predicted effects associated to this scale of development are not considered to be significant.</p> <p>National and local strategic planning policies require the protection of the above designations and therefore in order to meet basic conditions the Aston Rowant NDP will be required to protect these to be in conformity. Within this context it is considered the Aston Rowant NDP would not give rise to significant effects.</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).	The proposed development in the Aston Rowant NDP has been judged not to have a likely significant impact on Community legislation due to the amount of the proposed residential development being of a local small scale and the proposals likely effects are unlikely to have significant positive or negative effects on community legislation such as waste management or water protection.	No likely significant positive or negative effect.
2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:		
(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;	The Neighbourhood Plan is generally likely to influence development for a period of 15 years from its adoption, which is in line with national guidance. The Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have modest but enduring positive environmental effects by seeking the preservation of the	No likely significant positive or negative effect.

	<p>surrounding countryside, landscape, designated open spaces, farming and ecosystems. The Aston Rowant NDP therefore offers an opportunity to enhance the natural environment and the cultural heritage of the area through the proposals being considered. It is clear that a main effect on the parish is the impact of the allocated sites, householder and small scale infill development on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area or listed buildings, their settings and the setting of the AONB. The effects of this are not likely to be reversible as they relate to development. the effects will be of a local scale and the plan aims to ensure development conserves and enhances the NDP area through the plan objectives to develop detailed design policies following a detailed site assessment which avoids placing development on or near sensitive locations that would cause a likely significant effect.</p>	
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;	<p><i>It is intended that the positive effects of providing residential development will have positive cumulative benefits for the area, however, given the size of the proposed site allocations within the plan and the likely inclusion of detailed design policies to help conserve the Conservation Area, listed buildings and the setting of the AONB it is considered that the scope and coverage of the plan it is not likely to create any likely significant cumulative effects.</i></p>	No likely significant positive or negative effect.
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects;	<p>The effects of the Plan are unlikely to have transboundary³ impacts.</p>	No likely significant positive or negative effect.

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

<p>(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);</p>	<p>The policies in the plan are unlikely to present risks to human health or the environment.</p>	<p>No likely significant positive or negative effect.</p>
<p>(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);</p>	<p><i>The Aston Rowant NDP relates to the parish of Aston Rowant. The scale of development proposed is small and therefore the potential for environmental effects is also likely to be small and localised.</i></p>	<p>No likely significant positive or negative effect.</p>
<p>(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>	<p>Aston Rowant contains the following Special Natural Characteristics and Cultural Heritage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation area • Chilterns AONB • Listed buildings • Nature and Conservation Target Areas Local Wildlife site • Archaeological Constraints • Ancient Woodland • Flood Zones 2 & 3 • National Nature Reserve <p>There are four Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) within 17km of Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Development Plan. These are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chilterns Beechwoods SAC • Aston Rowant SAC • Little Wittenham • Hartslock Wood 	<p>No likely significant positive or negative effect.</p>

More detail on each Special Area of Conservation objectives; pressures, threats related to development; and the key environmental conditions supporting the site, can be found on appendix 2.

There are also following significant areas of designation within 5km of Aston Rowant:

- Aston Rowant SSSI
- Aston Rowant NNR
- Aston Rowant Cutting SSSI
- Wormsley Chalk Banks SSSI

- Shirburn Hill SSSI

- Watlington and Pyrton Hills SSSI
- Chinnor Chalk Pit SSSI
- Chinnor Hill SSSI
- Watlington Chalk Pit LNR
- Knightsbridge Lane SSSI

There are also a number of BAP priority Habitats within the parish area. (See Appendix 4- BAP priority habitat map) Whilst these are not referred to in the SEA directive or EIA regulations, they should be a consideration in plan making and taken into consideration when allocating sites. BAP priority habitats are those that were identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP). The potential site allocations carefully consider the BAP habitats and are not located on or near a BAP habitat and therefore ensures the proposals in the Plan do not give rise to

	<p>significant adverse environmental effects.</p> <p>The Aston Rowant NDP offers an opportunity to enhance the natural environment and the cultural heritage of the area through the proposals being considered. It is clear that the aspects of the plan that are most likely to effect the special natural characteristics and cultural heritage are the site allocations, householder and small scale infill development. These forms of development may impact on the integrity of protected sites and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, listed buildings, their settings and the setting of the AONB.</p> <p>Given the small scale of the proposed residential development, the proposals in the plan are not considered to create significant effects.</p> <p>The Aston Rowant NDP aims to ensure development conserves and enhances the Special Natural Characteristics and Cultural Heritage within the neighbourhood area. Indeed its objectives include: maintaining the character and vitality of parish's villages and hamlets, developing detailed design policies and identifying suitable sites for development.</p> <p>The SACs and SSSIs are located outside the NDP designated area however there is an SSSI located on the edge of the NDP designated area which is located approximately 1km from the built-up area of Aston Rowant.</p>	
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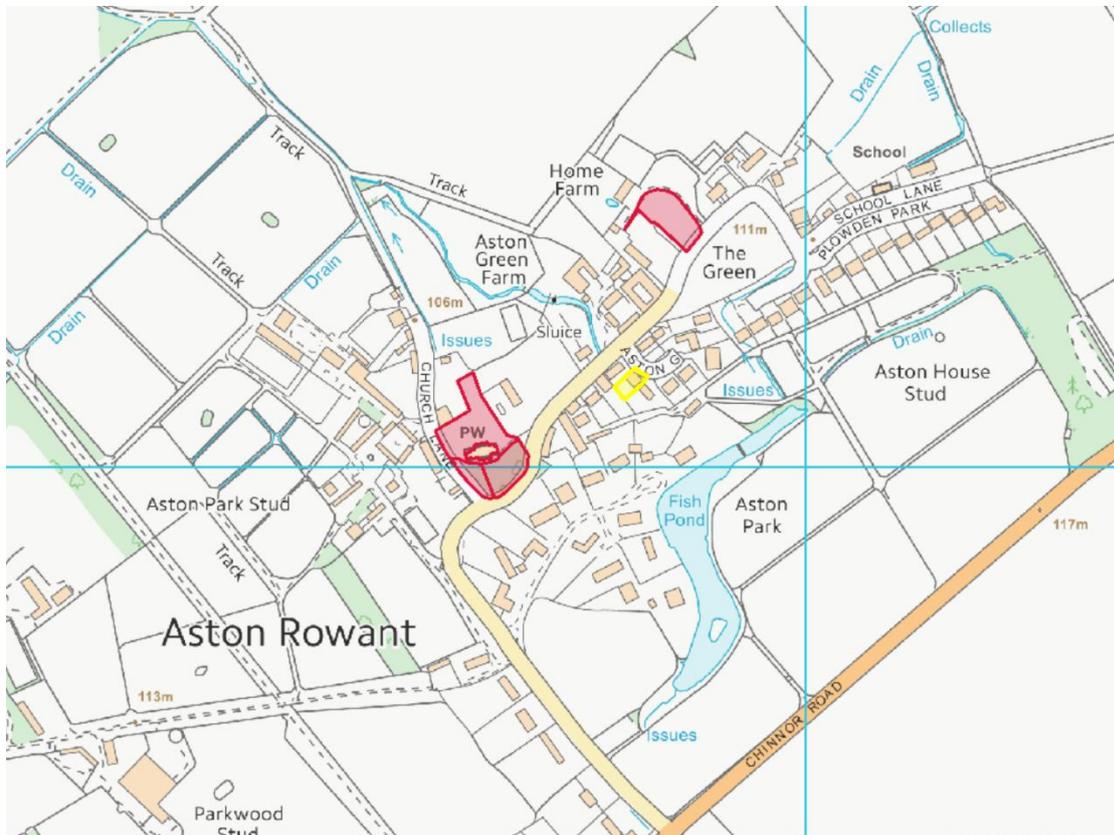
	<p>The majority of the above designations are outside of the built-up area of the village. There is an SSSI located on the edge of the NDP designated area which is located approximately 1km from the built-up area of Aston Rowant. One of the plan's main objectives is to conserve the village, its character and setting. Taking into consideration the location of the potential site allocations development is to be located within or adjoining the existing built form and therefore is not considered to cause likely significant effects. Furthermore, the proposed level of growth is very modest and the predicted effects associated to this scale of development are not considered to be significant.</p> <p>The HRA Screening Assessment in appendix 2 concluded that: The Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Development Plan 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 Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Development Plan is not required.</p> <p>Neighbourhood plans are required to be in conformity with national and local adopted strategic policies which require the protection of the above designations . Within this context the NDP is not likely to have significant effects.</p> <p>It is clear there are sensitivities regarding cultural heritage within the Aston Rowant Parish. There is currently not an adopted Conservation Area Appraisal or</p>	
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	<p>management plan for the Aston Rowant Conservation Area and therefore detailed information on the risks and vulnerability of the Conservation Area or listed buildings and their setting is not readily available. However, the site assessment process has carefully considered cultural heritage and identified a range of suitable sites capable of being taken forward without giving rise to significant effects.</p> <p>Whilst the objectives imply that policies of the plan will seek to protect the rural character of the parish, the surrounding countryside, landscape, designated open spaces, farming and ecosystems. The neighbourhood plan is considered to have a neutral effect on cultural heritage because there is no indication given in the objectives that the plan would go beyond national and local policy and therefore it is considered that the effects of the proposals in the plan are not likely to be significant.</p> <p>Given the nature and scope of the NDP, environmental quality standards or limit values are not considered likely to be significantly effected.</p> <p>In light of the small quantum of development proposed, particularly in the form of small residential site allocations, the plan is not likely to cause significant effects in relation to intensive land use.</p>	
(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national,	The scale of development proposed is modest and given the objectives of the plan, the proposed site allocations are likely to be closely related to the built form and will not significantly	No likely significant positive or negative effect.

Community or international protection status.	intrude into open countryside. Within this context, the effects predicted above are not likely to be significant.	
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Appendix 4 – BAP Map

The areas shown in red are the BAP priority Habitats within the parish area



Appendix 5 – Statutory Consultee Responses

Historic England:



Ms Cheryl Soppet
Planning Policy Officer (Neighbourhood Planning)
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District
Councils
135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park
Oxfordshire, OX14 4SB.

Our ref: HD/P5355/
Your ref:
Telephone 01483 252040
Fax

15th January 2019

Dear Ms Soppet,

Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Plan - SEA Screening Opinion

Thank you for your e-mail of 19th December and the attached Appendix 6 Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Plan Site Assessment.

We note that, for the two sites that we believe will be allocated in the Plan (Sites 3 and 9), the Assessment identifies that: "*Site is adjacent to Kingston Blount Conservation Area and Grade II Listed Buildings*" and "*The site is in close proximity to Aston Rowant Conservation Area*" respectively.

However, there is no indication that there has been a detailed assessment of the potential impact of the development of these two sites on the special interest, character or appearance of either conservation area (or, for site 3, on the significance of the listed buildings). Neither is there any reference in the Assessment to the Historic Environment Record for non-designated archaeological remains, so we are not clear if this has been consulted as part of the site assessments.

We have previously identified the proximity of the proposed sites to the conservation areas. We do not feel, therefore, that the Assessment gives us any more comfort as regards the potential impact of the development of these sites on these qualities of the conservation areas, or potentially on archaeological remains.

Accordingly, we remain of the view as expressed in my letter of 12th December 2018 that, based on the evidence currently available to us, we do have significant reservations about the Council's Screening Opinion and its conclusion that the proposals in the Plan will not have a significant effect on the environment and that therefore an SEA is not required.

Nevertheless, based on the information we have, as previously stated, we are content for the plan to proceed without SEA at this time, but only with the caveat that if either of the proposed allocation sites would adversely affect the special interest, character or appearance of either the Kingston Blount or Aston Rowant Conservation Areas and/or should either or both of the sites be found to have archaeological significance and/or the proposed sites change, we may wish to revise that opinion.

- 2 -

We may also wish to revise that opinion when we see the draft Plan if it creates a presumption in favour of development where none currently exists e.g. through infill development within a settlement boundary.

Also as previously stated, we are concerned at the apparent allocation of sites that may affect the special interest, character and appearance of the Kingston Blount and Aston Rowant Conservation Areas and the contribution of their settings to those qualities and the significance of listed buildings (and on potential archaeological interest) in the absence of both a broader assessment of the special interest, character and appearance of the Conservation Areas and site-specific detailed assessments.

We note that Planning Practice Guidance states:

“How detailed should the survey be?”

Site surveys should be proportionate to the detail required for a robust appraisal. For example, the assessment will need to be more detailed where sites are considered to be realistic candidates for development.

Paragraph: 015 Reference ID: 3-015-20140306”

The lack of these detailed assessments may therefore give cause for objections to the allocations when the Regulation 14 consultation on the Plan is undertaken. However, this is a matter more appropriate for that consultation.

We hope these comments make our position clear. However, if you do have any queries please do contact me.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Small". The signature is written in a cursive style with a capital 'M' and 'S'.

Martin Small Principal Adviser, Historic Environment Planning
(Bucks, Berks, Oxfordshire, Hampshire, IoW, South Downs NP and Chichester)
martin.small@historicengland.org.uk

Natural England:

Date: 14 December 2018
Our ref: 265954



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T 0300 060 3900

South Oxfordshire District Council

BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Sir or Madam,

Planning Consultation: Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Plan revised SEA and HRA Screening

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 27th November 2018.

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.

Natural England is a statutory consultee in neighbourhood planning and must be consulted on draft neighbourhood development plans by the Parish/Town Councils or Neighbourhood Forums where our interests would be affected by the proposals made.

In our review of the Aston Rowant Neighbourhood Plan SEA and HRA screenings we note that;

- The draft Neighbourhood Plan has not yet been produced
- there are designated sites or protected landscapes within the impacts zones of the Neighbourhood Plan area, however, the Plan allocates no more than 25 additional dwellings. Natural England was given additional information on 19/07/18 on the planned locations of these dwellings.

Having seen additional information relating to the planned locations of new dwellings in the Parish, Natural England would like to confirm we agree with the assessment that the Neighbourhood Plan does not require an SEA. In addition, we are satisfied that the Neighbourhood Plan can rely on the Habitats Regulations Assessment for the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan and therefore does not need an Appropriate Assessment. This is on the basis that only those dwellings provided in the additional information come forward in the Neighbourhood Plan.

We would like to highlight the potential need for an LVIA for the two larger development sites in the parish due to being in the setting of the Chilterns AONB. We suggest you discuss this matter with the LPA and perhaps the Chilterns AONB Board.

When preparing your Neighbourhood Plan, we recommend adding a series of environmental objectives and policies. Environmental policies at the neighbourhood plan level are a good opportunity to define local priorities for biodiversity conservation and enhancement, and to think about identifying key habitats, species and opportunities to improve habitat connectivity and green infrastructure. Please consider adding to the neighbourhood plan:

- Policies on biodiversity net gain. We would like to draw your attention to the requirement to conserve biodiversity and provide a net gain in biodiversity through planning policy (Section 40

of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and paragraphs 170 and 175 of the National Planning Policy Framework). Please ensure that any development policy in your plan includes wording to ensure "all development results in a biodiversity net gain for the parish". Where appropriate, on-site enhancements such as new roosting features for bats or nesting features for birds should be incorporated into the fabric of development. Policies around Biodiversity Net Gain should propose the use of a biodiversity measure for development proposals. Examples of calculation methods are included in Annex A;

- Policies around connected Green Infrastructure (GI) within the parish. Elements of GI such as open green space, wild green space, allotments, and green walls and roofs can all be used to create connected habitats suitable for species adaptation to climate change. Green infrastructure also provides multiple benefits for people including recreation, health and well-being, access to nature, opportunities for food growing, and resilience to climate change. Please see Paragraph 171 of the NPPF for further reference. Annex A provides examples of Green Infrastructure;
- Policies around Connectivity in the parish. Proposals for development should provide wildlife corridors that allow wildlife to move from one area of habitat to another. Where ecologically relevant, fences and walls are encouraged to incorporate features that allow dispersal of wildlife through areas of green space and gardens. We recommend keeping green space within villages and across developments in order to maintain connectivity of wider ecological networks. Removal of green space in favour of development may have serious impacts on biodiversity and connected habitat and therefore species ability to adapt to climate change. Green spaces in built-up areas also help the health and wellbeing of residents. For further reference please see paragraphs 170, 171 and 174 of the NPPF.
- Policies on priority habitats and species. Planning policies should promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, and promote the recovery of priority species populations. Please consult Annex A for guidance on how to find priority species and habitats in the Aston Rowant neighbourhood area. For further reference please see paragraph 174 of the NPPF.

The recently produced [Neighbourhood Plan for Benson](#), in South Oxfordshire provides an excellent example. We are of the opinion that the policy wording around the Environment, Green Space and Biodiversity is exemplar. We would recommend you considering this document when reviewing yours.

Annex A provides information on the natural environment and issues and opportunities for your Neighbourhood planning.

Yours sincerely

Milena Petrovic
Adviser
Sustainable Development
Thames Team

Appendix 6: Site Assessment