

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan

Environmental Report Update

September 2019

REVISION SCHEDULE					
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1	Sept 2019	Environmental Report Update submitted alongside the Neighbourhood Plan	Rosie Cox Environmental Planner	Mark Fessey Associate Director	Steve Smith Technical Director

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AECOM Infrastructure & Environment UK Limited
 2 Leman Street, London E1 8FA
 Telephone: 020 7061 7000

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan (WNP).
- 1.1.2 The WNP is being prepared by the WNP Committee, which convened in January 2016 with 21 members, including three Wheatley Parish Councillors (one of them a District Councillor), one Holton Parish Councillor, and the Business Manager of Wheatley Park Academy.
- 1.1.3 The WNP is being prepared in the context of the adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan and the new emerging Local Plan, which was submitted to Government for examination in March 2019. Once the WNP has been 'made' (following a referendum) it will have material weight in deciding on planning applications, alongside the latest adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan.
- 1.1.4 SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and maximising the positives. SEA of the WNP is a legal requirement.¹

1.2 SEA explained

- 1.2.1 It is a requirement that SEA is undertaken in-line with the procedures prescribed by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, which transposed into national law EU Directive 2001/42/EC on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).
- 1.2.2 In-line with the Regulations, a report (known as **the Environmental Report**) must be published for consultation alongside the draft plan that 'identifies, describes and evaluates' the likely significant effects of implementing 'the plan, and reasonable alternatives'.² The report must then be taken into account, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.
- 1.2.3 More specifically, the Report must answer the following three questions:
1. What has plan-making / SEA involved **up to this point**?
 - Including in relation to 'reasonable alternatives'.
 2. What are the SEA findings **at this stage**?
 - i.e. in relation to the draft plan.
 3. What happens **next**?

1.3 This Environmental Report Update³

- 1.3.1 This report is an update to the WNP Environmental Report, which was published alongside the 'pre-submission' version of the plan, under Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012) in May 2019. This Environmental Report Update is submitted alongside the WNP under Regulation 15, and published under Regulation 16.

Structure of this report

- 1.3.2 This report essentially **answers questions 1, 2 and 3 in turn**, in order to provide the required information. Each question is answered within a discrete 'part' of the report. Before answering Q1, two initial questions are answered in order to further set the scene.

¹ Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended) requires that each Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to the Local Authority alongside either: A) an environmental report; or, B) a statement of reasons why SEA is not required, prepared following a 'screening' process completed in accordance with Regulation 9(1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations. The WNP was subject to screening in 2017, at which time it was determined that SEA *is* required.

² Regulation 12(2) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

³ See **Appendix I** for further explanation of the regulatory basis for answering certain questions within the Environmental Report, and a 'checklist' explaining more precisely the regulatory basis for presenting certain information.

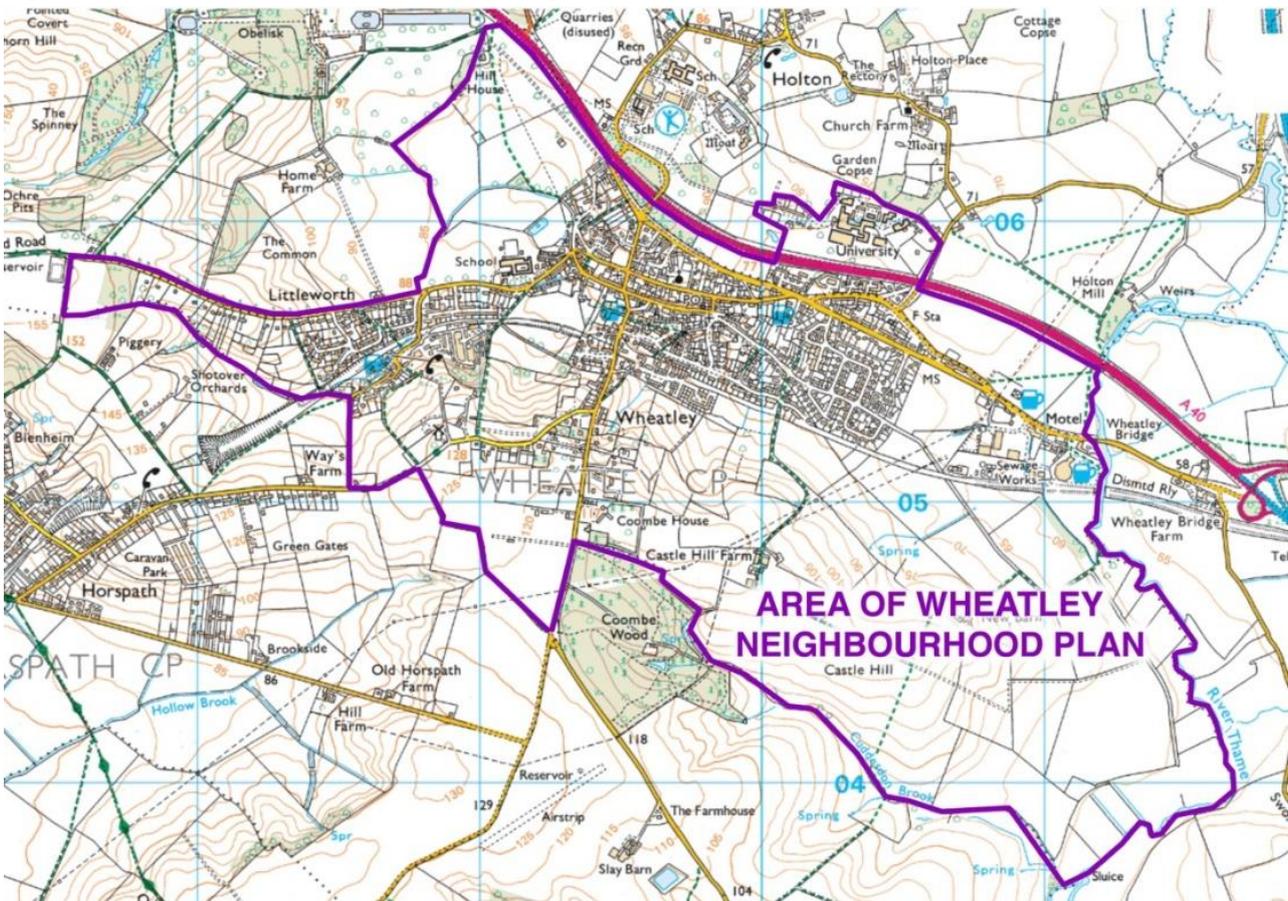
2 WHAT IS THE PLAN SEEKING TO ACHIEVE?

2.1 Overview

2.1.1 As discussed above, once the WNP has been ‘made’ (following a successful referendum) it will form part of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan, at which time it will have material weight in the determination of planning applications, i.e. applications relating to changes in land use.

2.1.2 The area covered by the WNP is Wheatley Parish - see **Figure 3.1**.

Figure 3.1: Area covered by the Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan



2.2 The South Oxfordshire Local Plan

2.2.1 As discussed above, the WNP is being prepared in the context of the adopted and emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan. The WNP must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan, supplementing these with locally specific policies as appropriate.

2.2.2 The emerging Local Plan is at an advanced stage of preparation, with the plan having been submitted to Government for examination in March 2019, and planning inspectors now having been appointed. The latest situation (August 2019) is that, whilst there has been a dialogue between the Council and the Inspectors, via the Programme Officer, relating to Council meetings (both dates and resolutions), there has not been any issuing of any questions nor have there been any dates for the hearing sessions proposed.

2.2.3 The emerging Local Plan provides strong support for neighbourhood planning and seeks to empower local communities to direct development in their areas by supporting the “way of life” of rural communities. The objectives of the emerging Local Plan seek to deliver high quality development, respecting the scale and character of villages such as Wheatley.

- 2.2.4 The South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (2012) identifies Wheatley as one of 12 settlements classed as 'larger village' within the District. This remains the case within the publication version of the emerging Local Plan. Also, Littleworth - which adjoins Wheatley (see Figure 3.1) - has 'smaller village' status.
- 2.2.5 The emerging strategy for housing is for larger villages to grow by around 15% over the plan period (see Table 5 of the submission Local Plan) and smaller villages to grow by 5% to 10% (Policy H8). Taking into consideration 'completions and commitments' (i.e. the number of homes built or with planning permission, since the start of the plan period, i.e. 2011), this leaves an outstanding target of ***in the region of 200 homes***.
- 2.2.6 The other key point to note is that Policy STRAT14 proposes a strategic allocation at 'Land at Wheatley Campus, Oxford Brookes University', which falls within the WNP area.⁴ Policy STRAT14 identifies the potential for the site to deliver at least **300 homes**.
- 2.2.7 The implication of Policy STRAT14 (which can be assumed to have some weight, now that the Local Plan has been submitted, albeit it is yet to be subject to examination) is that there is no strict requirement for the WNP to provide for any new homes (as **300 > 200**).
- 2.2.8 However, the Council has made clear that it would support allocation of one or more additional sites, if proposed through the Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan, with Policy STRAT6 (Green Belt) identifying that "*detailed amendments to the Green Belt made by the Wheatley Neighbourhood Development Plan must be in compliance with requirements of the NPPF and the need identified within the Local Plan.*"

2.3 WNP vision and objectives

- 2.3.1 Whilst there is no strict requirement to allocate land for development through the WNP, there is the potential to do so nonetheless, in order to achieve the established vision for Wheatley.⁵ A central aspect of the vision for Wheatley is as follows -

"Revitalise the villages of Wheatley and Holton and thereby act as a catalyst for fulfilling housing needs, enabling village enhancement, expanding employment possibilities and rationalising the layout of light industry in Wheatley.

- 2.3.2 The full range of vision statements and objectives established to guide preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan is presented within Section 6 of the WNP document. Suffice to say here that the list covers the following topic headings: Housing and land-use; Social infrastructure; Retail services; Village centre; Industrial and commercial environment and infrastructure; Traffic and transport; Village character; Quality of the environment and natural landscape; Employment opportunities.

2.4 What is the WNP not seeking to achieve?

- 2.4.1 It is important to emphasise that neighbourhood plan-making is a *relatively* strategic undertaking, in that consideration of some detailed issues naturally falls outside its scope, in the knowledge that such issues can be sufficiently addressed through subsequent planning applications. The strategic nature of the plan is reflected in the scope of the SEA.

⁴ This Strategic Allocation replaces the partially saved Local Plan (2011) policy CSEM5 'Oxford Brookes University'.

⁵ It is also the case that Wheatley will benefit from a degree of protection against speculative applications, should the WNP allocate land for additional housing. This is on the basis of the Ministerial Letter of 12 December 2016, which provides for protection against speculative applications where: A) there is a Neighbourhood Plan in place that allocates land for housing; and B) the District is able to demonstrate a three year housing land supply (as opposed to a five year housing land supply, which is the default situation).

3 WHAT IS THE SCOPE OF THE SEA?

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The aim here is to introduce the reader to the scope of the SEA, i.e. the list of topics and issues/objectives that should be drawn upon as a methodological ‘framework’ to guide the assessment of the emerging draft WNP, and reasonable alternatives.

N.B. further information on the scope of the SEA is presented in **Appendix II**.

Consultation on the scope

3.1.2 The Regulations require that “*When deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in the Environmental Report [i.e. the SEA scope], the responsible authority shall consult the consultation bodies*”. In England, the consultation bodies are the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England.⁶ As such, these authorities were consulted on the SEA scope in 2018.⁷

3.2 The SEA framework

3.2.1 Table 3.1 presents the list of topics and objectives that forms the core of the SEA framework.

Table 3.1: The SEA framework

Topic	Objective
Air quality	Improve air quality in the Neighbourhood Plan area and minimise and/or mitigate against all sources of environmental pollution.
Biodiversity	Protect and enhance all biodiversity and geological features.
Climate change	Reduce the level of contribution to climate change made by activities within the Neighbourhood Plan area
	Support the resilience of the Neighbourhood Plan area to the potential effects of climate change, including flooding
Landscape and heritage	Protect, maintain and enhance the heritage resource, including the historic environment and archaeological assets within, and within the setting of, the Neighbourhood Plan area.
	Protect and enhance the character and quality of landscapes and townscapes.
Land and resources	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land.
	Promote sustainable waste management solutions that encourage the reduction, re-use and recycling of waste.
	Use and manage water resources in a sustainable manner.
Population and community	Cater for existing and future residents’ needs as well as the needs of different groups in the community, and improve access to local, high-quality community services/facilities.
	Reduce deprivation and promote a more inclusive and self-contained communities.
	Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing, and ensure an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes, types and tenures.
Health and wellbeing	Improve the health and wellbeing of residents within the Neighbourhood Plan area.
Transport	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.

⁶ In-line with Article 6(3) of the SEA Directive, these consultation bodies were selected because ‘by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities, [they] are likely to be concerned by the environmental effects of implementing plans and programmes.’

⁷ The SEA Scoping Report is available at: <http://wheatleyneighbourhoodplan.co.uk/>

PART 1: WHAT HAS PLAN-MAKING / SEA INVOLVED UP TO THIS POINT?

4 INTRODUCTION (TO PART 1)

4.1.1 The aim here is to explain how work was undertaken to develop and assess **reasonable alternatives** in summer 2018, ahead of finalising the Pre-submission Plan.⁸

4.1.2 More specifically, this part of the report presents information on the consideration that has been given to reasonable alternative approaches to addressing a particular issue that is of central importance to the plan (see Chapter 3), namely the allocation of land for housing.

N.B. henceforth, alternative approaches to the allocation of land for housing are referred to as **alternative housing growth scenarios**.

Structure of this part of the report

4.1.3 This part of the report is structured as follows -

Chapter 6 - explains the process of **establishing** housing growth scenarios;

Chapter 7 - presents the outcomes of **assessing** housing growth scenarios;

Chapter 8 - explains reasons for **establishing** the preferred option, in light of the assessment.

Who's responsibility?

4.1.4 It is important to be clear that -

- Establishing reasonable alternatives - is the responsibility of the plan-maker, with AECOM acting in an advisory capacity.
- Appraising the reasonable alternatives - is the responsibility of AECOM.
- Establishing the preferred option - is the responsibility of the plan-maker.

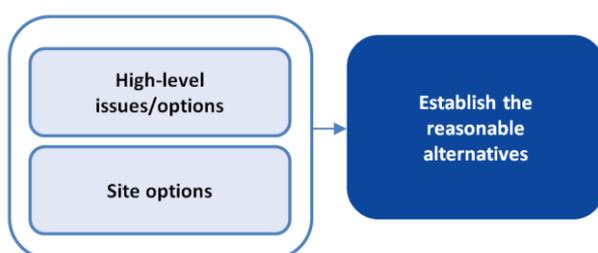
⁸ There is a requirement for the Environmental Report to present an assessment of 'reasonable alternatives' and 'an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with'. The aim is to inform the consultation, and subsequent plan finalisation.

5 ESTABLISHING THE REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 The aim here is to discuss the key steps taken to inform the establishment of alternative housing growth scenarios. Ultimately, the aim is to present ‘an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with’, in accordance with the SEA Regulations.⁹
- 5.1.2 Specifically, there is a need to: **1)** explain strategic issues/objectives with a bearing on the allocation of land for housing; **2)** discuss work completed to examine site options (i.e. sites potentially in contention for allocation); and then **3)** explain how the ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ understanding generated was married together in order to arrive at a single set of alternative housing growth scenarios for the WNP. **Figure 5.1** explains this stepwise process.

Figure 5.1: Establishing the reasonable alternatives



5.2 Strategic issues / objectives

- 5.2.1 Firstly, there is a need to reiterate the context provided by the South Oxfordshire Local Plan, as already discussed above (Section 2.2). The key message is that: there is no strict requirement to allocate land for housing through the WNP, but the emerging Local Plan is nonetheless supportive of allocation of land for housing through the WNP.
- 5.2.2 Secondly, there is a need to discuss further the established vision for Wheatley, and the objectives that have been established for the WNP. In particular, a key element of the vision involves ‘rationalisation’ of land uses leading to village enhancement, with the existing employment site at Littleworth redeveloped for housing, and employment relocated to the east of the village. Also, there is also an established need for affordable housing in the shorter term, i.e. ahead of housing at the Wheatley Campus strategic allocation (2022 at the earliest).

5.3 Site options

- 5.3.1 The second step involved identifying and assessing the site options that are potentially in contention for allocation through the WNP. Site options can be thought of as the ‘building blocks’ for establishing reasonable alternative housing growth scenarios.
- 5.3.2 There is a need to consider site options under three sub-headings.

Littleworth industrial area

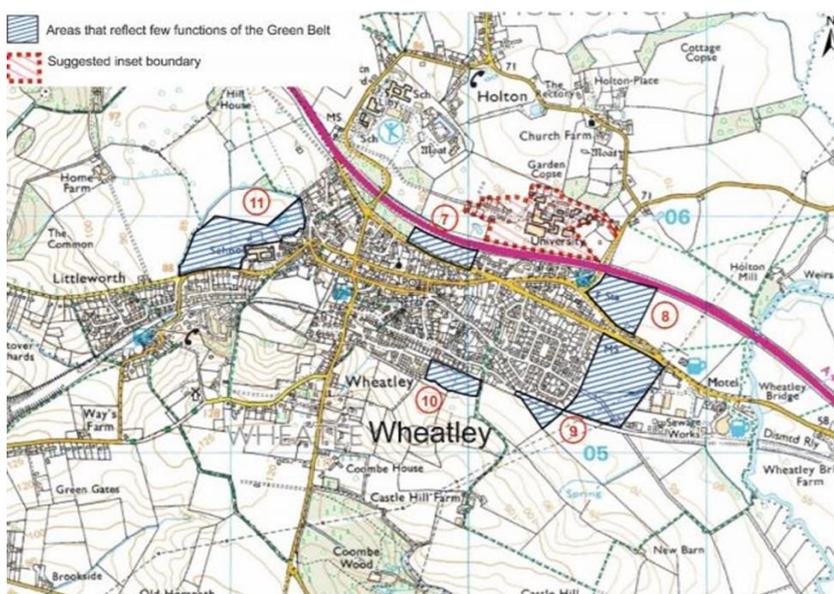
- 5.3.3 Littleworth industrial area (also known as site WHE22) - a small site comprising an industrial/commercial area, as well as rising and well vegetated land to the rear of the existing buildings. Redevelopment of this site is a key objective of the WNP (see para 5.2.4), with the view of the Parish Council being that a housing scheme would significantly improve the urban realm in this area. However, redevelopment of this site for housing would lead to the loss of valued employment land. This site is discussed further below, in **Section 5.4**.

⁹ Schedule II of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (‘SEA’) Regulations 2004

Green Belt sites

- 5.3.4 An important starting point, when considering Green Belt sites potentially in contention for allocation through the WNP, was the South Oxfordshire Green Belt Study (2015),¹⁰ which identified several parcels of land surrounding Wheatley as 'reflecting few functions of the Green Belt' - see Figure 5.2. Other Green Belt parcels - noting that all land surrounding the Wheatley falls within the Oxford Green Belt - can be screened out of further consideration.¹¹
- 5.3.5 Of the five Green Belt parcels identified in Figure 5.1, the following three were ruled out:
- Green Belt parcel 7 – has now been built-out.
 - Green Belt parcel 10 - is subject to a notable constraint in that it is known to be at risk from surface water flooding, and is now used for surface water attenuation. The site could feasibly have some development capacity, but this is likely to be very limited, and in any case the surface water flood risk issue means that the site performs relatively poorly.¹²
 - Green Belt parcel 11 - comprises a primary school and its playing fields. There is no suggestion that the site is available for redevelopment.
- 5.3.6 With regards to the two remaining Green Belt parcels:
- Green Belt parcel 8 - is a relatively simple entity, in that it comprises a single agricultural field. It is considered further in **Section 5.4**.
 - Green Belt parcel 9 - is more complex, comprising four distinct irregularly shaped fields, with the two southern having lower development potential. Specifically, taking each in turn: the field to the north of the dismantled railway is crossed by two power lines; whilst the small triangular field to the south of the dismantled railway is seemingly land-locked, i.e. access would not be achievable. Only the northern two fields of Site 9 are therefore taken forward for further consideration within **Section 5.4**.

Figure 5.2: Summary findings of the South Oxfordshire Green Belt Study



¹⁰ See <http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/evidence-studies>

¹¹ This is because it would be difficult or impossible to demonstrate the 'exceptional circumstances' necessary to enable release of other sites from the Green Belt, in the knowledge that there are alternative sites that perform fewer Green Belt functions.

¹² In July 2012 there was an intense, short rainstorm that caused flooding in the Wheatley. Water ran off the fields to the south of Beech Road, pooling to the south of Beech Road (within WHE13a) and then flooding houses in Beech Road, before then flowing further north to flood properties in Roman Road and eventually Ambrose Rise. To reduce the flood risk, the local farmer (Castle Hill Farm) made the field to the south of Beech Road (WHE13a) available and South Oxfordshire District Council excavated a number of large channels linked by small pipes across the slope and then a channel to take the flow down the slope and to a local existing drain.

Other site options

5.3.7 Finally, there is a need to comment on two smaller, less strategic site options:

- Firstly, Land at Park Hill (also known as site WHE28) – consists of three detached houses with large gardens, well related to the village centre and the schools, which was recently the subject of a refused planning application for a 75-bedroom residential care home. This site is ruled-out for allocation at the current time, as there is uncertainty regarding whether a suitable scheme can be viably delivered; however, WNP recognise the need to maintain a ‘watching brief’, given the need to increase the stock of homes for the elderly in Wheatley.
- West of Asda, South of London Road (also known as site WHE16) - this is a small site within the Green Belt at the eastern extent of the plan area, currently comprising six bungalows and some under-used open space. The site is considered to contribute little to Green Belt purposes, and development could serve to improve the built environment, improving the road infrastructure and delivering landscaping to mitigate the detrimental influence of neighbouring land uses, namely employment, retail and the sewage works. It is considered further in **Section 5.4**.

5.4 The reasonable alternatives

5.4.1 On the basis of the discussion above it is clear that there is a need to examine further the matter of whether the WNP should support redevelopment of Littleworth Industrial Estate, and if so which of the two Green Belt parcels - namely Green Belt parcel 8 or 9 - should be allocated in order to replace the industrial land lost, alongside enabling housing.

N.B. The assumption, for the purposes of establishing housing growth scenarios, is that either GB parcel could and would deliver a mixed use scheme, sufficient to replace the industrial land lost through redevelopment of the Littleworth Industrial Estate; however, it is noted that GB parcel 8 has only been promoted for housing, to date.

5.4.2 This leads to the identification of three reasonable alternative housing growth scenarios - see **Table 5.1**. These are considered to be the ‘reasonable’ alternatives in that they are underpinned by a sound understanding of strategic (‘top down’) and site specific (‘bottom-up’) issues and opportunities, and also on the basis that they are suitably wide ranging and distinct. ‘Unreasonable’ options not examined further include:

- Lower growth - a marginally lower growth approach might feasibly be examined involving non-allocation of the ‘West of Asda, South of London Road’ site; however, on balance it is considered appropriate to hold allocation of this site ‘constant’ across the scenarios. This is a small site associated with limited strategic issues/impacts.
- Higher growth - a large scheme involving allocation of both Green Belt parcels would involve an unreasonably high quantum of housing growth, and it is not thought that there is a need / demand for expansion of the employment land offer, of this scale.

Table 5.1: The reasonable alternatives

Site		Use(s)	Number of homes		
			Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Completions and commitments		Housing	131		
OBU Wheatley Campus			300		
Allocations	West of Asda	Housing	10		
	Littleworth industrial area		0	~25	
	Green Belt parcel 8	Mixed use	0	~35	0
	Green Belt parcel 9 (northern part)		0	0	55
Total homes (net increase) 2011 - 2033			441	501	521

6 APPRAISING REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The aim of this chapter is to present assessment findings in relation to the housing growth scenarios introduced above.

6.2 Alternatives assessment findings

6.2.1 **Table 6.1** presents assessment findings in relation to the three housing growth scenarios. Within each row (i.e. for each of the topics that comprise the SEA framework) the columns to the right hand side seek to both **categorise** the performance of each option in terms of ‘significant effects’ (using **red / green**) and also **rank** the alternatives in order of performance. Also, ‘ = ’ is used to denote instances where it not possible to differentiate the alternatives.

Table 6.1: Alternatives assessment findings

Topic	Rank of performance / categorisation of effects		
	Option 1 Low growth	Option 2 GB parcel 8	Option 3 GB parcel 9
Air quality	★1	2	★1
Biodiversity	=	=	=
Climate change	=	=	=
Landscape and historic environment	★1	2	2
Land, soil and water resources	★1	2	2
Population and community	3	2	★1
Health and wellbeing	3	2	★1
Transportation	=	=	=

Commentary

- Air quality - this is not considered to be a major issue, with no Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) designated locally; however, Option 2 performs relatively poorly due to proximity of GB parcel 8 to the A40. It is considered likely that residents of any scheme on this site would be subject to some degree of noise and potentially air pollution from the road; however, it is recognised that there would be good potential to avoid/mitigate impacts, including potentially by locating employment adjacent to the road.
- Biodiversity - neither of the Green Belt parcels that would deliver higher growth are thought to have notable biodiversity value, and so these options are judged to perform on a par with low growth. GB parcel 9 would seem more sensitive than GB parcel 8, on the basis that it is associated with some shrubby, recently established habitats, plus a narrow lane (not publically accessible), associated with mature vegetation, runs through the site (dividing the two component fields). However, the difference between the two sites is considered marginal, especially once account is taken of the proposal to enhance the vegetated lane as part of an accessible green corridor (Green Route), and ‘contour’ development to provide a soft transition from the urban development to the Green Belt to the south.

Topic	Rank of performance / categorisation of effects		
	Option 1 Low growth	Option 2 GB parcel 8	Option 3 GB parcel 9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Climate change - the key consideration relates to climate change adaptation, and specifically the matter of flood risk, with none of the options associated with any climate change mitigation considerations. Flood risk is an issue for both of the GB parcels in question, in that a narrow band of flood risk runs along the London Road / Old London road, clipping the southern edge of GB parcel 8, and the northern edge of GB parcel 9 (also affecting the West of Asda, South of London Road site, which is a constant across the scenarios). It is anticipated that development, or at least residential development, within the flood risk zone can be avoided; however, there is also a need to consider the possibility of the road flooding, leading to difficulties with access/egress. GB parcel 9 may lend itself to two points of access (the feeder road which already services the existing industrial area, and the London Road to the north) helping to allay any concerns. - Landscape and historic environment - the SODC GB Study (2015) identified GB parcels 8 and 9 as reflecting ‘few functions’ of the Green Belt, but that is not to suggest that they reflect no functions. Parcel 8 could well be the more sensitive site, from a Green Belt perspective, recognising that the new Green Belt boundary would be relatively weak (at the site’s eastern extent); however, there is no firm evidence upon which to reach a conclusion. In more general landscape terms there is thought to be little to differentiate the sites, with both quite well screened at close proximity and not thought to contribute notably to any important longer distance views (notably from the footpaths that run up Castle Hill, to the south); whilst in heritage terms neither site is thought to be subject to any notable constraint. - Land, soil and water resources - there is quite a strong likelihood that both sites comprise ‘best and most versatile’ (BMV) agricultural land, with the low resolution nationally available dataset suggesting a likelihood that the sites comprise land of ‘grade 2’ quality (and neither site having been surveyed in detail, applying the ‘post 1988’ criteria). GB parcel 9 is a larger site, such that there would be greater loss of agricultural land; however, the difference in scale is fairly marginal, and it is also noted that the site is not currently in agricultural use. - Population and community - a mixed use scheme at GB parcel 9 would deliver on the objective of ‘village rationalisation’ in a way that a mixed use scheme at GB parcel 8 would not. There would be a clear logic to the layout of Wheatley, with all major employment uses focused at the eastern extent of the village, and the rest of the village given over to residential, community and small scale employment. GB parcel 9 may also have the potential to deliver new burial space in a location that has been identified as more suitable than GB parcel 8 (when judged against criteria covering matters including access and setting); however, this is highly uncertain. <p>Finally, there is a need to consider the local housing needs that would be met sooner under Options 2 and 3; however, this is a relatively marginal consideration, as the Wheatley Campus strategic allocation should begin to deliver new homes in the early 2020s (N.B. given a strong local housing market there is not considered to be any concern that a higher growth approach through the WNP could lead to a risk of delayed build-out of allocated sites).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health and wellbeing - development at GB parcel 9 would contribute significantly to the ambition of delivering a new green corridor (Green Route), through Wheatley. The narrow lane that runs through the site would be made publically accessible, thereby greatly increasing the potential for residents to walk or cycle to the Asda store, at the village’s eastern extent, and the River Thame corridor beyond. - Transportation - GB parcel 9 would have two access points, including access onto the London Road. Conversely, GB parcel 8 would have only one access point, onto the narrower Old London Road. However, it is not clear that access to GB parcel 8 is problematic, and the site would benefit from being in very close proximity to the OBU Wheatley Campus site, which is due to be redeveloped. 			

7 DEVELOPING THE PREFERRED APPROACH

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 The aim of this Chapter is to present the WNP Committee's response to the alternatives assessment / reasons for supporting the preferred approach in-light of alternatives.

7.2 The Parish Council's outline reasons

"Option 3 is the preferred option, in accordance with the alternatives assessment findings. Option 3 is found to perform well in terms of a number of objectives, in particular the socio-economic objectives, given the potential to deliver upon the objective of village 'rationalisation'.

Option 1 (do minimum) is certainly a genuine option, and it is notable that the assessment identifies this as the preferable option in certain environmental terms; however, the Parish Council feels that the inevitable environmental draw-backs to housing growth are warranted, given the potential for significant socio-economic benefits. Village rationalisation will also go hand-in-hand with improved ability to reach destinations within the village by walking/cycling, which is an important consideration from an environmental (climate change) perspective.

With regards to Option 2, the assessment shows this option to perform poorly. It is also noted that the assumption underpinning the assessment - namely that the site would be made available for mixed use development, thereby enabling employment uses lost through the redevelopment of Littleworth Industrial Estate to be relocated - may well not hold true."

PART 2: WHAT ARE SEA FINDINGS AT THIS CURRENT STAGE?

8 INTRODUCTION TO PART 2

8.1.1 This part of the report presents an assessment of the Neighbourhood Plan as a whole, which comprises 20 policies:

- H1 - Design and Character Principles
- H2 - Landscape Character
- H3 - Mix and Size of New Housing
- H4 - In-fill and Self Build Dwellings
- P1 - Parking provision
- T1 Impact of Development on the Road Network
- SCI1 - Community Assets
- SCI2 - Improvement to Community Assets
- B1 - Burial Provision
- VCE1 - Wheatley Village Centre
- E1 - Supporting Wheatley's Economy
- EN1 - Biodiversity
- DQS1 - Individual and Community Energy Projects
- SPOBU - WHE25 - The OBU Site
- GBBA1 - Green Belt Boundary Amendments
- SPES1 - WHE16 - The Bungalow's Site
- SPES2 - WHE22 - The Littleworth Industrial Area
- SPES3 - WHE15 - Miss Tomb's Field
- SPES4 - WHE17 - Mobbs' Land
- SPGR - Green Route

8.1.2 An important point to note is the distinction between SPOBU, which deals with WHE25, namely the Oxford Brookes University (OBU) Wheatley Campus site, and SPES1 - SPES4, which deal with sites WHE16, 22, 15 and 17 respectively. Specifically, it is important to note that Policy SPOBU does not 'allocate' the OBU site, but rather simply provides support for allocation of the site through the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan. The other policies are formal allocations (albeit development cannot happen ahead of adoption of Policy STRAT6: Green Belt of the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan).

8.1.3 The implication of the above discussion is that Policy SPOBU is not a focus of the assessment presented below.

8.2 Methodology

8.2.1 The assessment identifies and evaluates 'likely significant effects' on the baseline, drawing on the sustainability objectives identified through scoping (see Table 4.1) as a methodological framework. The SEA framework comprises the following seven topics -

- Biodiversity
- Climate change
- Landscape and historic environment
- Land, soil and water resources
- Population and community
- Health and wellbeing
- Transport

- 8.2.2 Every effort is made to predict effects accurately; however, this is inherently challenging given the strategic nature of the policies under consideration and understanding of the baseline (now and in the future under a 'no plan' scenario) that is inevitably limited. Given uncertainties there is a need to make assumptions, e.g. in relation to plan implementation and aspects of the baseline that might be impacted. Assumptions are made cautiously, and explained within the text (with the aim of striking a balance between comprehensiveness and conciseness). In many instances, given reasonable assumptions, it is not possible to predict 'significant effects', but it is possible to comment on merits (or otherwise) of the draft plan in more general terms.
- 8.2.3 Finally, it is important to note that effects are predicted taking account of the criteria presented within Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations.¹³ So, for example, account is taken of the probability and reversibility of effects as far as possible. Cumulative effects are also considered, i.e. the potential for the WNP to impact an aspect of the baseline when implemented alongside other plans, programmes and projects.

9 ASSESSMENT OF THE DRAFT PLAN

9.1 Introduction

- 9.1.1 The assessment of the draft plan is presented as a series of narratives, one for each of the SEA framework headings established through scoping (see Table 3.1).

9.2 Air quality

- 9.2.1 Air Quality has been recorded by SODC in Wheatley centre since 2006. Notably, NO₂ had fallen dramatically from 28 to 24, 2014-2015. Prior to that since 2006 the annual average had been 29.4 NO₂. SODC explained that '*unusually stable weather conditions*' caused the dip in 2015. By 2016 the annual measure had gone back up to 27 NO₂.
- 9.2.2 The WNP reproduces extracts from OCC Local Transport Plan (LTP) (2012) which state that "*Wheatley, near J8, M40, has some traffic management problems and is used by some drivers as a rat-run into Oxford to avoid congestion on main routes. Room for pedestrians and for access to the countryside could be improved. Noise from the A40 has been highlighted.*" Wheatley is at one end of a Secondary Interurban Corridor [Oxford to M40] and at one end of a Primary Interurban Corridor [Aylesbury – M40 – Oxford]", and as such, the OCC LTP (2012) highlights that while J8 of the M40 is not congested, "*it does attract traffic through nearby village (i.e. Wheatley) for access to the M40*".
- 9.2.3 It is recognised that there is no specific policy on air quality within the WNP. Indirectly however, a number of policies are seen to address the issue of congestion and traffic management, with focus placed on encouraging sustainable transport uses.
- 9.2.4 **Policy T1** (Impact of Development on the Road Network) seeks to minimise the impact of existing and additional congestion on the road network, requiring allocated residential providers to "*provide a Travel Plan, setting out how opportunities for encouraging, facilitating and supporting the use of, and improvements to, sustainable transport modes have been maximised.*" Policy T1 highlights that the Travel Plan will address specific issues, including "*the impact on general air quality*". Proposals should consider carefully and as a high priority the traffic and air quality impacts of their proposals and show that they will not lead to significant air quality impacts and unacceptable traffic.

¹³ Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

- 9.2.5 It is recommended by SODC, and endorsed by WNP, that no housing development should be considered as acceptable if as a consequence the Air Quality Strategy objectives are exceeded. As such, **Policy H1** (Design and Character Principles) encourages developers to “*incorporate where possible walking and cycling routes, and where possible, enhance and connect existing walking and cycling routes*”. The support for public footpath/cyclepath enhancements is reiterated through the Village Enhancement Site policies. Notably, **Policy SPES2** (WHE22) requires proposals to “*retain an area adjoining the road as an open green space/village green and provide a footpath that links with the main footpath to Coopers Close.*”
- 9.2.6 **Policy EN1** (Biodiversity) supports “*net gains in biodiversity, through the creation of new habitats, the enhancement of existing sites, and the development and implementation of ecological management plans*”. In this context the provision of new green space and planting through Policy EN1 will support the dissipation and absorption of pollutants.
- 9.2.7 In **conclusion**, the proposed policies should help to ensure that the housing growth does not lead to a significant negative effect on air quality (i.e. neutral effects are predicted). Housing growth is supported at extremities of the village, but there should nonetheless be good potential to access the village centre by walking and cycling.

9.3 Biodiversity

- 9.3.1 The key nationally designated site of biodiversity importance which falls within the Neighbourhood Plan area is Littleworth Brick Pit Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which is located within the Neighbourhood Plan area, to the southwest. Just outside of the Neighbourhood Plan area lie numerous other nationally designated biodiversity sites, namely Coombe Wood Ancient Woodland to the south, Lyehill Quarry SSSI to the northwest, Holton Wood SSSI to the north, and Brasenose Wood and Shotover Hill SSSI to the west.
- 9.3.2 SSSI Impact Risk Zones are a GIS tool/dataset which maps zones around each SSSI according to the particular sensitivities of the features for which it is notified. They specify the types of development that have the potential to have adverse impacts at a given location. Natural England is a statutory consultee on development proposals that might impact on SSSIs. Although the WNP area is within the SSSI IRZs for these sites, the IRZs do not relate to the type of development to be proposed through the WNP. Nonetheless, Policy SPES2 (WHE22) takes a precautionary approach to development at the Littleworth Industrial Area, given the rear of the site rises fairly steeply through well vegetated land up to a SSSI. In line with Policy SPES2, proposals must ensure “*the integrity of the neighbouring SSSI is not compromised*”.
- 9.3.3 More broadly, urban and rural biodiversity assets within and around the Neighbourhood Plan area are protected through **Policy EN1** (Biodiversity). Policy EN1 supports net gains in biodiversity through “*the creation of new habitats, the enhancement of existing sites, and the development and implementation of ecological management plans*”. This is further supported through **Policy H2** (Landscape Character) which requires development to “*be sensitive and make a positive contribution to the local character of the area*”.
- 9.3.4 The WNP highlights the biodiverse nature of the area, supporting a great diversity of local habitats and consequent biodiversity. Notably, West Field is an area of ancient grassland within the WNP area and the Shotover Target Conservation Area, valued for its classic ridge and furrow. This area is rich in biodiversity, changing between ridge and furrow, and there is also a stream from the springs which emerges from Shotover Hill. The WNP recognises the significant wildlife value of Shotover through Policy EN1, supporting “*the aims of the Shotover Target Conservation Area*”.

- 9.3.5 Numerous biodiversity assets are further identified through the WNP, including the presence of tree preservation orders (particularly around the OBU site), heathland and grassland (which in places displays classic ridge and furrow; as discussed above), ancient woodland species and reptile species (notably slowworm and common lizard). These important biodiversity features arguably could benefit from being listed within Policy EN1 (Biodiversity), to ensure development proposals are required to consider, and plan for the biodiversity assets present in the area, supporting connectivity. This would strengthen the WNP ensuring that adverse effects on biodiversity are resisted, having a long term positive effect on the quality of the local biodiversity resource.
- 9.3.6 Wheatley is a Larger Village inset within the Green Belt, and as such, the WNP recognises that it *“is important that new developments make and maintain provision for green space within the site.”* In this context, **Policies SPES1 – SPES4** provide specific criteria for the Wheatley’s Village Enhancement Sites. Policy SPES3 (WHE15), for example, requires development proposals to deliver a *“nature corridor (at least 20m wide) with winding path and planting to eastern and western boundaries of the development to ensure gap between the rear gardens of the Avenue, proposed new housing and commercial development.”* This will improve habitat connectivity; enhancing the network of natural green corridors throughout the Neighbourhood Plan area, enabling both wildlife and people to move through the landscape.
- 9.3.7 In **conclusion**, the growth strategy gives rise to relatively limited concerns, and a robust policy framework is proposed, hence neutral effects are predicted.

9.4 Climate change

- 9.4.1 In terms of climate change mitigation, road transport is proportionally a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in the area. This is discussed under ‘Air quality’ above.
- 9.4.2 The WNP further supports climate change mitigation through promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy. In this context, the WNP states that *“the community welcomes the development of innovative high-quality sustainable homes that can act as exemplars for other villages and towns, and for the country as a whole.”* Proposals in Wheatley and Holton that promote community energy projects taking advantage of initiatives within the government’s Community Energy Strategy including the Rural and Urban Community Energy Funds will be supported through **Policy DQS1** (Individual and Community Energy Projects). Policy DQS1 backs renewable energy projects where they *“conform to good-quality existing design guidance provided by the New South Oxfordshire Design Guide, and the Chilterns Building Design Guide”*.
- 9.4.3 The WNP recognises that it is important that new developments make and maintain provision for green space. **Policy EN1** (Biodiversity) supports *“the protection and enhancement of urban and rural biodiversity”*, and it is stressed through the WNP that *“Contributions and arrangements will be sought for management of spaces, expected to be carried out by SODC or Wheatley Parish Council.”* Specifically, Policy SPES3 (WHE15) supports mixed use development at Miss Tomb’s Field where it includes *“enhancement of the public realm within the site through design and landscape measures, public open space and/or financial contributions, subject to viability.”* Enhancements to GI networks will promote climate change mitigation through supporting carbon sequestration and promoting sustainable modes of transport; and climate change adaptation through helping to limit the effects of extreme weather events and regulating surface water run-off.
- 9.4.4 In relation to flood risk in the Neighbourhood Plan area the addressing of issues linked to fluvial, groundwater and surface water flooding are likely to be supported by the provisions of the NPPF. Likewise, the flood risk, SuDS and surface water flooding policies proposed through the emerging SODC Local Plan will further help limit adverse effects in this regard.

9.4.5 In **conclusion**, whilst the above approaches will contribute positively towards addressing climate change, these are not seen to be significant in the context of the SEA process. As such, the WNP is predicted to have a **neutral effect** on climate change. There is the potential for some minor long term positive effects but these are uncertain at this stage and dependent on the implementation of proposed measures.

9.5 Landscape and historic environment

9.5.1 The Neighbourhood Plan area has a valued landscape and a rich historic environment, lying next to Shotover Country Park, within the Green Belt, and surrounded by parkland and woodland which provide the setting of the Chilterns. In this context, the Parish Councils of Wheatley and Holton seek to progress the work already undertaken to preserve Viewing Corridors within the Neighbourhood Area. The WNP highlights that the Parish Councils “*will seek to encourage development proposals to take full account of the important views and landscapes that are in the district*”. In this context, the WNP further states that a number of development considerations will be supported, including the “*redevelopment of a site that affords the opportunity to improve the visual aspect of the site and its surroundings*” (the OBU Wheatley Campus site; not an allocation).

9.5.2 **Policy H2** (Landscape Character) is therefore focused on protecting the local landscape, requiring that “*All new development should be sensitive and make a positive contribution to the local character of the area*”. **Policy H2** further seeks to ensure that development proposals take into account specific landscape assets, further requiring that “*key visual landscapes (eg Castle Hill, the Howe, Westfield, the prospects from OBU) will be preserved*”.

9.5.3 In this context, **Policy H1** (Design and Character Principles) requires that “*proposals must show clearly how the scale, mass, density, layout and design of the site, building or extension fits in with the character of the immediate area and wider context within the village*”. Developers are encouraged, through Policy H1, to adopt a *layout which provides a high quality landscape scheme*” and proposals which “*complement, enhance and reinforce local character*”. This will contribute towards minimising adverse effects on the landscape character, supporting local distinctiveness and protecting important views.

9.5.4 Policy H1 further seeks to ensure that new development is well related to the existing settlement and is also in keeping with surrounding residential properties, having a positive effect on local townscape. In line with Policy H1 new development must “*respond to the historic grain of the development in the village, including its road and footpath network and historic property boundaries*”. Additionally, Policy H1 requires that new development “*be subservient in scale and, whether of a traditional or modern design, should draw from the local palette of vernacular building materials*”. The promotion of high quality design and layout which considers the surrounding environment will ensure the valued local character is maintained and enhanced.

9.5.5 The setting of historic environment will also be supported by the policies which seek to protect townscape and landscape quality. To this effect, Policy H2 (Landscape Character) requires that “*new developments will demonstrate how they will respond to the local character together with mitigation on any impact on local heritage assets or the conservation area*.” However, while Policy H2 does require that new development *mitigate* any adverse effects on heritage assets, it does not drive improvement or enhancement. It is therefore recommended that either Policy H2 be updated, or a heritage policy in itself be included within the WNP. Additionally the updated/new policy could benefit from identifying the heritage assets (designated and non-designated) in the area, to further ensure development proposals are required to take into consideration the value of the assets present. This would ensure that adverse effects on designated heritage assets are resisted, having a long term positive effect on the local historic environment.

- 9.5.6 In terms of the Village Enhancement Sites (**Policies SPES1 – SPES4**) the WNP recognises the potential for the redevelopment of brownfield sites in the village to lead to positive effects on the local landscape and historic environment. In this context, Policy SPES1 (WHE16) supports development at The Bungalows' Site provided "*the development has no greater impact on the surrounding environment and where possible enhances the landscape and scenic beauty.*" It is further considered through Policy SPES2 (WHE22) that the change of land use from industrial to residential may present the opportunity for "*enhancement of the public realm within the site through design and landscape measures, public open space and/or financial contributions, subject to viability.*" This is further reiterated through Policy SPES3 (WHE15) and SPES4 (WHE17).
- 9.5.7 In **conclusion**, the WNP is predicted to have residual **uncertain minor positive effects** on landscape and historic environment. The implementation of proposed measures, growth proposed through the emerging Local Plan, and release of Green Belt at the east/west extremities of Wheatley will likely determine the significance of effects.
- ## 9.6 Land, soil and water resources
- 9.6.1 In terms of the location of the best and most versatile agricultural land, a detailed classification has not been undertaken within the Neighbourhood Plan area. As such, there is a need to rely on the nationally available 'Provisional Agricultural Land Quality' national dataset.¹⁴ The provisional Agricultural Land Quality dataset shows that the WNP area is predominately covered by Grade 3 agricultural land, however, the data does not differentiate as to whether this is Grade 3a (e.g. the best and most versatile) or lower quality 3b land. Therefore it cannot be determined at this stage if the development of sites supported through the WNP would result in the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land.
- 9.6.2 It is also recognised that loss of best and most versatile agricultural land is dependent on the adoption of the Local Plan and subsequent release of Green Belt land in Wheatley. This will allow the WNP to support the coordinated development of WHE15, WHE16, WHE17 and WHE22. This approach is set out through **Policies SPES1 – 4** and aligned with Policy GBBA1 (Green Belt Boundary Amendments).
- 9.6.3 However, it is important to note that, of the sites allocated for development in Policy SP3, WHE 16 and 22 consist of previously developed land; while WHE15/17 is not currently used for agricultural purposes and is already surrounded by development on three sides. The impact on agriculture should therefore be minimal.
- 9.6.4 **Policy EN1** (Biodiversity) promotes "*net gains in biodiversity, through the creation of new habitats and the enhancement of existing sites*". Enriched habitats and species and facilitating enhancements to green infrastructure provision in the area will support the quality of land and water resources. This will promote the ability of natural processes to support soil and water quality.
- 9.6.5 This is further supported through **Policy H1** (Design and Character Principles) which requires development to "*maximise the opportunities for open space*". Policy H1 further promotes development which encourages healthy and sustainable design and energy efficiency, which in turn will stimulate resilience to climate change. This is reinforced through Policy DQS1 (Individual and Community Energy), and will help limit resource use.
- 9.6.6 In **conclusion**, the WNP is predicted to result in a **significant negative effect** in respect of this SEA theme due to the permanent loss of best and most versatile agricultural land.

¹⁴ Natural England (2011): 'Agricultural Land Classification map London South East Region, [online] available at: <<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/141047?category=5954148537204736>> last accessed 02/03/18

9.7 Population and community

- 9.7.1 While the OBU site (WHE25) is set to deliver a significant amount of housing growth in the area, there remains pressure on land to provide additional housing requirements. As such, the WNP's strategy is focused on intensification (including higher density) and partial redistribution and/or change of use of land. **Policy GBBA1** (Green Belt Boundary Amendments) highlights that *"detailed amendments to the Green Belt boundary have been made to accommodate allocations at WHE15, WHE16 and WHE17"*. However, this policy only comes into effect once the need for changes to Green Belt boundaries in Wheatley has been established through strategic planning policies. This is expected to be achieved through the adoption of the SODC Local Plan 2011 – 2033.
- 9.7.2 In the event of the release of Green Belt land in Wheatley (as set out in Figure 10.2 of the WNP) the WNP will support the coordinated development of WHE15, WHE16, WHE17 and WHE22. **Policies SPES1 – 4** set out the commercial and residential development that will be supported at these sites, in respect of each other and the provisions set out in Policy GBBA1 (Green Belt Boundary Amendments).
- 9.7.3 To this effect, the WNP states that *"Such a Village Enhancement Plan will provide housing in a shorter timescale than that envisaged for the OBU site and at the same time improve connectivity through the village, rationalise light industry and provide opportunities for employment at the expense of only a small loss of Green Belt."*
- 9.7.4 **Policy SPES2** also supports the redevelopment of Littleworth Industrial Area (WHE22), provided that: *"Suitable provision for the relocation of the businesses on site is made available in Wheatley; or It is agreed by the Council that the existing businesses on site are no longer viable, it is evidenced that there is no market interest in the site following one year of active and efficient marketing, and the change of use will not lower the employment capacity of the District."*
- 9.7.5 In this context, four sites have been assigned for the following development:
- WHE15 for commercial development, housing and public open space;
 - WHE17 for commercial development;
 - WHE16 for residential development; and
 - WHE22 for conversion from light industrial to housing.
- 9.7.6 **Policy SPES3** notably seeks to deliver mixed development at WHE15, including housing, commercial development and public open space. In accordance with Policy SPES3 *"Recreational space [will be] allocated to merge with the adjacent Green Belt together with a games area adjacent to Elton Crescent"* and proposals will also include *"Enhancement of the public realm within the site through design and landscape measures, public open space and/or financial contributions, subject to viability."* This will support quality of life of residents in the Neighbourhood Plan area.
- 9.7.7 **Policy H3** (Mix and Size of New Housing) also sets out criteria for new development, including ensuring that proposals provide details on how new development meet the needs of different groups in the community (including young people, local workers, small families, the elderly and older residents). In this context, Policy SPES1 (WHE16) requires *"housing to be delivered in accordance with Policy H3"*.
- 9.7.8 The WNP recognises that housing needs in terms of size, type and tenure will vary over the lifetime of the WNP. **Policy H2** (Design and Character Principles) therefore states that *"proposals must show clearly how the scale, mass, density, layout and design of the site, building or extension fits in with the character of the immediate area and wider context within the village"*. This will ensure that future development proposals are able to respond to the housing needs at the time.

- 9.7.9 **Policy H4** (Infill and Self-Build Dwellings) supports infill housing development and self-build development where it constitutes sustainable development. This will provide opportunities for self-builders to build the type of home they require on an affordable basis, and to deliver high quality development that is well-located to the existing built up area.
- 9.7.10 Wheatley provides some important opportunities for local employment which the WNP recognises need to be retained and enhanced. In particular, the needs of small and medium-sized businesses in the business, professional, creative industries and information technology sectors must be supported, as well as more traditional industries and arts and crafts, to maintain a functioning local economy. In this context, **Policy E1** (Supporting Wheatley's Economy) "*supports and encourages the development of existing businesses and forging of commercial initiatives.*" Industrial and office activity will be directed towards the eastern end of the village at the industrial estate which will be protected for employment.
- 9.7.11 It is also noted that Policy E1 (Supporting Wheatley's Economy) seeks to improve Wheatley's appeal, prioritising employment proposals which "*improve the appearance of the village*", further promoting Wheatley's economic growth.
- 9.7.12 Wheatley has a strong and healthy village centre, with a diverse mix of independent traders serving the local rural district. However, in keeping with national trends in recent years, the village has lost a number of its pubs and at present has only two restaurants. **Policy VCE1** (Wheatley Village Centre) therefore seeks to enhance the viability and vitality of the village centre, requiring that "*any new housing, retail, leisure and office development should be in locations which are accessible to the village centre by walking, cycling and public transport, and have appropriate on and/or off-street car parking provision.*" This will positively contribute towards maintaining Wheatley village centre as the heart of the community as a destination for shopping, employment and socialising. In this context, Policy P1 (Parking Provision) seeks to limit parking on village roads and lanes. This will reduce congestion from on-street parking, improving accessibility to, and attractiveness of the village centre.
- 9.7.13 The WNP highlights that constraints on land availability in Wheatley reduce opportunities to deliver new community facilities. **Policy SCI1** (Community Assets) therefore seeks to "*resist development proposals that will result in either the loss of or significant harm to a designated Asset of Community Value.*" Existing facilities, notably the Merry Bells and Wheatley Scout Movement, provide important community services in relatively outdated buildings. **Policy SC12** (Improvement to Community Assets) supports opportunities to provide these services within larger facilities that retain the existing services and provide space for additional community functions. This will increase community cohesion and overall neighbourhood satisfaction, leading to significant positive effects on population and community.
- 9.7.14 A key issue for the Neighbourhood Plan area, highlighted repeatedly through consultation exercises, is the lack of burial ground space in the area. St. Mary's CE Church is surrounded by an extensive cemetery which has served the community since 1857. However the need for further burial capacity is now at a critical level and it is imperative that a new site (approx. 0.3 Ha) is found. **Policy B1** (Burial Provision) therefore supports "*natural burial ground proposals for the development of a natural burial ground, including any necessary, permanent ancillary structures for the management of the burial arrangements*". This is expected to lead to long term minor positive effects on the community, particularly considering the existing elderly population present. New burial space will improve overall neighbourhood satisfaction, principally for those who have been residing in the village for many years and feel an emotional attachment to the area.
- 9.7.15 In conclusion, the WNP is predicted to have a **significant positive effect** on population and community. It is though that the WNP will provide a robust development management policy framework for this topic, supporting the overall quality of life of residents.

9.8 Health and wellbeing

- 9.8.1 The health and wellbeing of residents will be supported by the WNP policies which support a high quality public realm, local distinctiveness and landscape/townscape character. In this context maintaining and enhancing the attractiveness of the Neighbourhood Plan area will positively affect residents' quality of life, contributing to the satisfaction of residents with their neighbourhood as a place to live.
- 9.8.2 The WNP recognises that it *"is important that new developments make and maintain provision for green space within the site."* Further to this, the WNP states that Green Infrastructure (GI) should be considered in conjunction with playing pitches and the facilities to support them. In this context developers are encouraged, through **Policy H1** (Design and Character Principles), to adopt a *"layout [that] maximises the opportunities for open space and recreation facilities"*, ensuring residents have sufficient access to deliver key health benefits. This is delivered specifically through the criteria for regeneration associated with the Village Enhancement Sites (**Policies SPES1 – 4**). In this context, Policy SPES3 (WHE15) supports development provided *"recreational space is allocated to merge with the adjacent Green Belt together with a games area adjacent to Elton Crescent"* and *"enhancement of the public realm within the site through design and landscape measures, public open space and/or financial contributions, subject to viability"*.
- 9.8.3 **Policy VCE1** (Wheatley Village Centre) promotes physical and psychological wellbeing in the town centre, supporting proposals for new housing, retail, leisure and office development where there is sufficient access to the village centre by walking, cycling and public transport. This is further supported by **Policy T1** (Impact of Development on the Road Network) and SPRG (Green Route) which supports the provision of new or improved walking or cycling routes, and improvements to public transport, ensuring that routes in and through housing developments link to the wider networks, to provide safe routes to the village centre, its important public services and facilities. To this effect, Policy SPRG states that *"any implementation of a development plan for the Enhancement Sites that improves and promotes footpaths, walkways and cycle routes together with delivering completion of a Green Route through Wheatley will be supported."* This is further promoted through the specific criteria for Village Enhancement Sites; notably **Policy SPES2** (WHE22) supports development provided it will *"retain an area adjoining the road as an open green space/village green and provide a footpath that links with the main footpath to Coopers Close"*.
- 9.8.4 **Policy GBBA1** (Green Belt Boundary Amendments) highlights that commercial and residential development at WHE15, WHE16, WHE17, and WHE22 will be pursued once the need for changes to Green Belt boundaries in Wheatley has been established through strategic planning policies. This is expected to be achieved through the adoption of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2034. Through working with SODC, the Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan Group have established that exceptional circumstances exist that permit the release of land from the Green Belt in Wheatley. This includes *"making efficient use of land that has few essential characteristics of the Green Belt parcels"*, and therefore are not of value to the health and wellbeing of residents (i.e. do not provide good quality accessible green space).
- 9.8.5 Exceptional circumstances for Green Belt release in Wheatley also include *"to enable development to take place to provide for a mix of uses to the benefit of existing and future residents"*. In this context, the regeneration of sites WHE15, WHE16, WHE17, and WHE22 (as discussed above) is expected to result in improved community cohesion, expanding the small community to the east of the village to deliver improved neighbourhood satisfaction. Site specific criteria is set out through **Policies SPES1 – 4**, which seeks to maximise positive effects in this respect. Notably, Policy SPES3 (WHE15) encourages proposals to deliver *"enhancement of the public realm within the site through design and landscape measures, public open space and/or financial contributions, subject to viability."* This has the potential for long term positive effects on health and wellbeing. However it is noted that this is uncertain at this stage, as the regeneration of sites is dependent on the release of Green Belt through the emerging Local Plan.

9.8.6 In conclusion, the WNP is predicted to have a **significant positive effect** on health and well-being. It is thought that the WNP will provide a robust development management policy framework for this topic, supporting the overall physical, mental and psychological health of residents.

9.9 Transportation

9.9.1 The WNP highlights that traffic congestion within Wheatley causes major inconvenience to road users, cyclists and pedestrians, and creates an unpleasant environment, particularly within the village centre. **Policy T1** (Impact of Development on the Road Network) seeks to minimise the impact of existing and additional congestion on the road network through supporting the provision of new or improved walking or cycling routes, improvements to public transport, and the incorporation of electric car charging points. In this context, Policy T1 requires allocated residential providers to *“provide a Travel Plan, setting out how opportunities for encouraging, facilitating and supporting the use of, and improvements to, sustainable transport modes have been maximised.”* This is echoed through Policy E1, which prioritises employment proposals which *“mitigate known traffic issues.”* This will contribute towards improved movement and reduced congestion throughout the village.

9.9.2 The promotion of sustainable transport is further supported through **Policy H1** (Design and Character Principles), which states that *“proposals should incorporate where possible walking and cycling routes, and where possible, enhance and connect existing walking and cycling routes”*. Developers are therefore encouraged, through Policy H1, to consider contributing positively to local walking and cycling routes.

9.9.3 A key consideration for the Neighbourhood Plan has been village centre car parking; being an issue raised at consultation. **Policy P1** (Parking Provision) promotes *“innovative solutions to parking arrangements”*, recognising that the use of ‘tandem’ parking does not benefit the village. The WNP stresses the reality that both spaces are rarely used, resulting in on-street parking becoming the norm, enhancing levels of congestion. In line with Policy P1 new development will not necessitate large expanses of driveway, or parking on village roads or lanes. This aims to enhance access to the village centre for residents and visitors, and contribute to limiting bottlenecks of roads.

9.9.4 The WNP provides specific criteria for the Village Enhancement Sites WHE15, WHE16, WHE17 and WHE22 (**Policies SPES1 - 4**), identifying the key considerations at each location. In terms of transportation, Policies SPES1 – 3 all support proposals which *“incorporate appropriate access from Littleworth Roads [or London Road as appropriate] to ensure that the development is serviced adequately”*. This will promote safe, sustainable access for residents throughout the village. Additionally, *“good Green Route access to the Primary School”* is supported at WHE15 through Policy SPE3. This is in line with the provisions set out in **Policy SPGR** (Green Route), and will improve the attractiveness of the existing cycle/footpath networks, encouraging new/existing residents to convert to cleaner modes of travel for local journeys.

9.9.5 The constrained nature of the roads in Littleworth is recognised through policies SPES1 - 4, requiring that provision is made to regularise and accommodate the need for parking, and to avoid on-street parking. In this context, Policy SPES2 (WHE22) supports housing proposals at the Littleworth Industrial Area where they *“retain an area adjoining the road as provision for resident parking for use by designated terrace houses and flats neighbouring the development on north side of Littleworth Road.”* This supports **Policy P1** (Parking Provision) discussed above, contributing positively towards maintaining the attractiveness of the village, avoiding congestion and upholding safe, accessible streets for walking and cycle use.

9.9.6 In **conclusion**, the WNP is predicted to have a **minor positive effect** on transportation. Whilst there is uncertainty regarding proposed measures, growth proposed through the new Local Plan, and Green Belt release, it is thought that the WNP will provide a robust development management policy framework for this topic.

10 CONCLUSIONS AT THIS CURRENT STAGE

- 10.1.1 In conclusion, the draft plan assessment presented in Chapter 9 concludes that the submission version of the WNP is likely to lead to positive effects in relation to several SEA themes. These benefits largely relate to the Neighbourhood Plan's focus on enhancing the quality of life of residents through supporting the delivery of housing, employment and improved connectivity throughout the village. The WNP sets out the approach for the redevelopment of Village Enhancement Sites, once Green Belt release is confirmed through the emerging Local Plan. In this context the WNP seeks to meet local needs in more accessible locations; supporting local economic vitality while also protecting the natural environment.
- 10.1.2 This conclusion supports the findings of the alternatives assessment presented within Chapter 6, which identified the preferred growth scenario as broadly performing well relative to alternatives, although alternatives were found to have a degree of merit in certain respects. Careful account was taken of alternatives when selecting the preferred option and finalising the plan for consultation, as discussed in Chapter 7.
- 10.1.3 However, a significant negative effect is predicted both within Chapter 6 and Chapter 9 in respect of 'Land, Soil and Water' due to the preferred housing growth strategy likely involving loss of high quality ('best and most versatile') agricultural land.
- 10.1.4 Finally, for completeness, it is appropriate to give consideration to the performance of the plan and alternatives in respect of the (relevant) effect characteristics listed within Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations:
- Probability of effects - a notable uncertainty is discussed in respect of loss of agricultural land, in that the Village Enhancement sites will only be able to come forward following release of the land from the Green Belt by the Local Plan.
 - Duration of effects - effects discussed will generally be permanent, e.g. it is assumed that improved village connectivity brought about by development of the village enhancement sites would be maintained in perpetuity.
 - Frequency of effects - many of the effects discussed will be broadly continuous. The appraisal has not focused on the matter of construction impacts, but it goes without saying that construction the allocated sites will affect the amenity of local residents.
 - Reversibility of effects - most of the effects discussed will be irreversible, or at least will not be reversible in the foreseeable future.
 - Cumulative nature of the effects - a key consideration is delivery of the village enhancement sites alongside the OBU Wheatley Campus site, which is a strategic allocation in the submission version of the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan.
 - Risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents) - road safety is an important consideration locally, but it is not thought likely that the WNP will have any notable implications in this respect.
 - The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects - the appraisal has involved discussion of wide-ranging impact receptors.
 - The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to special natural characteristics or cultural heritage - the appraisal includes a focus on valued aspects of the baseline, including the designated conservation area.
 - The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values - no aspect of the baseline has been identified whereby there is a breach of environmental quality standards or limit values.
 - The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised protection status - none in the vicinity of Wheatley, other than Green Belt, which is not strictly a landscape designation.

PART 3: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

11 INTRODUCTION TO PART 3

11.1.1 This part of the report explains next steps that will be taken as part of plan-making and SEA.

12 PLAN FINALISATION

12.1.1 This Environmental Report accompanies the Pre-Submission version of the WNP for consultation.

12.1.2 Following consultation, any representations made will be considered by the WNP Committee, when finalising the plan for submission.

12.1.3 The 'Submission' version of the plan will then be passed to South Oxfordshire District Council (alongside an Updated Environmental Report, if necessary). The plan and supporting evidence will then be published for a further consultation, and then subjected to Independent Examination.

12.1.4 At Independent Examination, the Neighbourhood Plan will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the South Oxfordshire District emerging Local Plan and extant Core Strategy.

12.1.5 If the subsequent Independent Examination is favourable, the WNP will be subject to a referendum, organised by South Oxfordshire District Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the Neighbourhood Plan, then it will be 'made'. Once made, the WNP will become part of the Development Plan for South Oxfordshire District, covering the defined Neighbourhood Plan Area.

13 MONITORING

13.1.1 The SEA regulations require 'measures envisaged concerning monitoring' to be outlined in this report. This refers to the monitoring of likely significant effects of the WNP, with a view to identifying any unforeseen effects early, and taking remedial action as appropriate.

13.1.2 The plan document explains that the performance of the plan will be reviewed after one year, but does not discuss particular monitoring indicators. On the basis of the appraisal presented above, it is suggested that monitoring might focus upon:

- The needs of businesses displaced from the Littleworth Industrial area
- Need for retirement and extra care housing
- Increased walking and cycling to key destinations in the village

APPENDIX I – REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

As discussed in Chapter 2 above, Schedule 2 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans Regulations 2004 (the Regulations) explains the information that must be contained in the Environmental Report; however, interpretation of Schedule 2 is not straightforward. Table A links the structure of this report to an interpretation of Schedule 2 requirements, whilst Table B explains this interpretation.

Table A: Questions answered by this report, in-line with an interpretation of regulatory requirements

		Questions answered	As per regulations... the Env Report must include...
Introduction	What's the plan seeking to achieve?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes
	What's the SEA scope?	What's the sustainability 'context'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level • Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance
		What's the sustainability 'baseline'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan • The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected • Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance
		What are the key issues and objectives that should be a focus?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key environmental problems / issues and objectives that should be a focus of (i.e. provide a 'framework' for) assessment
Part 1	What has plan-making / SEA involved up to this point?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with (and thus an explanation of the 'reasonableness' of the approach) • The likely significant effects associated with alternatives • Outline reasons for selecting the preferred approach in-light of alternatives assessment / a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the draft plan
Part 2	What are the SEA findings at this current stage?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The likely significant effects associated with the draft plan • The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the draft plan
Part 3	What happens next?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of the monitoring measures envisaged

Table B: Questions answered by this report, in-line with regulatory requirements

<u>Schedule 2</u>	<u>Interpretation of Schedule 2</u>	
<i>The report must include...</i>	<i>The report must include...</i>	
(a) an outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;	An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes	i.e. answer - <i>What's the plan seeking to achieve?</i>
(b) the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan	Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance	i.e. answer - <i>What's the 'context'?</i>
(c) the environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;	The relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level	
(d) any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC;	The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan'	
(e) the environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or Member State level, which are relevant to the plan and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;	The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected	i.e. answer - <i>What's the 'baseline'?</i>
(f) the likely significant effects on the environment including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors;	Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance	
(g) the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan;	Key environmental problems / issues and objectives that should be a focus of appraisal	i.e. answer - <i>What are the key issues & objectives?</i>
(h) an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information	An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with (i.e. an explanation of the 'reasonableness of the approach')	i.e. answer - <i>What has Plan-making / SA involved up to this point?</i> [Part 1 of the Report]
(i) a description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring.	The likely significant effects associated with alternatives, including on issues such as... ... and an outline of the reasons for selecting the preferred approach in light of the alternatives considered / a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the draft plan.	
	The likely significant effects associated with the draft plan	i.e. answer - <i>What are the assessment findings at this current stage?</i> [Part 2 of the Report]
	The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the draft plan	
	A description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring	i.e. answer - <i>What happens next?</i> [Part 3 of the Report]

Whilst Tables A and B signpost broadly how/where this report meets regulatory requirements, as a supplement, Table C presents a discussion of more precisely how/where regulatory requirements are met.

Table C: ‘Checklist’ of how and where (within this report) requirements are / are being met.

Regulatory requirement	Discussion of how requirement is met
Schedule 2 of the regulations lists the information to be provided within the Environmental Report	
a) An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme, and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;	Chapter 2 (‘What’s the plan seeking to achieve’) presents this information.
b) The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme;	These matters have been considered in detail through dedicated scoping work, which has involved dedicated consultation on a Scoping Report. The ‘SEA framework’ – the outcome of scoping - is presented within Chapter 3 (‘What’s the SEA scope?’). Also, more detailed messages - i.e. messages established through context and baseline review - are presented within Appendix II.
c) The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;	
d) Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC.;	
e) The environmental protection, objectives, established at international, Community or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental, considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;	<p>The SEA framework is presented within Chapter 3 (‘What’s the scope of the SEA’). Also, messages from the context review are presented within Appendix II.</p> <p>With regards to explaining “<i>how... considerations have been taken into account</i>”, Chapter 7 explains the Parish Council’s ‘reasons for supporting the preferred approach’, i.e. explains how/why the preferred approach is justified in-light of alternatives assessment (and other factors).</p>
f) The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors. (Footnote: These effects should include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects);	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 6 presents alternatives assessment findings (in relation to housing growth, which is a ‘stand-out’ plan policy area). • Chapters 9 presents an assessment of the draft plan. <p>With regards to assessment methodology, Chapter 8 explains the role of the SEA framework/scope, and the need to consider the potential for various effect characteristics/ dimensions, e.g. timescale.</p>

Regulatory requirement	Discussion of how requirement is met
g) The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme;	The assessment highlights certain tensions between competing objectives, which might potentially be actioned by the Council, when finalising the plan. Also, a number of specific recommendations are made.
h) An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information;	<p>Chapters 4 and 5 deal with ‘Reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with’, in that there is an explanation of the reasons for focusing on particular issues and options.</p> <p>Also, Chapter 7 explains the Parish Council’s ‘reasons for selecting the preferred option’ (in-light of alternatives assessment).</p>
i) description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Art. 10;	Chapter 13 presents measures envisaged concerning monitoring.
j) a non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings	The NTS is a separate document.
<p>The Environmental Report must be published alongside the draft plan, in-line with the following regulations</p>	
<p>authorities with environmental responsibility and the public, shall be given an early and effective opportunity within appropriate time frames to express their opinion on the draft plan or programme and the accompanying environmental report before the adoption of the plan or programme (Art. 6.1, 6.2)</p>	<p>The Environmental Report was published for consultation alongside the Pre-submission version of the WNP earlier in 2019.</p> <p>At the current time, this Environmental Report Update is submitted published alongside the Submission version of the WNP.</p>
<p>The Environmental Report must be taken into account, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.</p>	
<p>The environmental report prepared pursuant to Article 5, the opinions expressed pursuant to Article 6 and the results of any transboundary consultations entered into pursuant to Article 7 shall be taken into account during the preparation of the plan or programme and before its adoption or submission to the legislative procedure.</p>	<p>Assessment findings presented within the Environmental Report, and consultation responses received, informed preparation of the submission version of the WNP.</p> <p>Assessment findings presented within this Environmental Report Update, and consultation responses received, will inform finalisation of the WNP.</p>

APPENDIX II – CONTEXT AND BASELINE REVIEW

Introduction

Whilst Chapter 3 presents a summary of the SEA scope, in the form of the SEA framework, this appendix presents more detailed information. Specifically, this appendix presents a discussion of key issues and objectives under each of the SEA topic headings, also giving consideration to how the SEA scope was modified following consultation.

Air quality

- Future development within the Neighbourhood Plan area has the potential to increase traffic congestion.
- According to the 2016 Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR) for South Oxfordshire the monitoring location along Wheatley High Street has shown a decrease in pollution levels from 2012-2015. However results for 2016 show a marked increase in pollution levels from 2015.
- District-wide renewable energy actions within the 2014 Air Quality Action Plan for South Oxfordshire, along with the sustainable transport related goals within the current Local Transport Plan (LTP4 2015-2031), and the corresponding implementation plan identified within the Sustainable Transport Study Stage 2 (2017) (discussed in Chapter 9) have the potential to support improvements to air quality over the longer term.

Objective	Supplementary questions to guide assessment
Improve air quality in the Neighbourhood Plan area and minimise and/or mitigate against all sources of environmental pollution.	Will the option/proposal help to - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the use of sustainable modes of transport, including walking, cycling and public transport? • Promote development that will not contribute to the degradation of air quality? • Implement measures (such as landscaping and green infrastructure) which will help support air quality in the Neighbourhood Plan area?

Biodiversity

- Coombe Wood is an Ancient & Semi Natural Woodland located just outside of the Neighbourhood Plan area, adjacent to the southern boundary. Coombe Wood is important for its wildlife, soils, recreational value and cultural, historical and landscape value.
- Littleworth Brick Pitt SSSI is located within the WNP area, to the southwest of Littleworth. The site is recognised for its earth heritage / geodiversity.
- There are three other SSSIs located within 2km of the WNP area. Lyehill Quarry SSSI is also designated for its geological value. Holton Wood SSSI and Brasenose Wood and Shotover Hill SSSI are designated for their biological value.
- Although the WNP area is within SSSI IRZs for all four above discussed SSSIs, the IRZs do not relate to the type of development to be proposed through the WNP.

Objective	Supplementary questions to guide assessment
Protect and enhance all biodiversity and geological features.	<p>Will the option/proposal help to -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid, or if not minimise impacts on biodiversity, including nationally designated sites, and provide net gains where possible? • Protect and enhance ecological networks, including multifunctional green infrastructure? • Protect and enhance semi-natural habitats? • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of biodiversity and geodiversity?

Climate change

- In relation to GHG emissions, source data from UK local authority and regional carbon dioxide emissions National Statistics suggests that South Oxfordshire has generally had lower domestic and Transport emissions per capita total in comparison to the trends for the South East and England between 2005 and 2012.
- There are areas of land, particularly central and to the east of the Neighbourhood Plan area, which are located in Flood Risk Zone 2 and Flood Risk Zone 3.
- The WNP should seek to increase the resilience of Wheatley to the effects of climate change by supporting and encouraging climate change adaptation strategies.

Objective	Supplementary questions to guide assessment
Reduce the level of contribution to climate change made by activities within the Neighbourhood Plan area	<p>Will the option/proposal help to -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the number of journeys made and reduce the need to travel? • Promote the use of sustainable modes of transport, including walking, cycling and public transport? • Increase the number of new developments meeting or exceeding sustainable design criteria? • Generate energy from low or zero carbon sources? • Reduce energy consumption from non-renewable resources?
Support the resilience of the Neighbourhood Plan area to the potential effects of climate change, including flooding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that inappropriate development does not takes place in areas at higher risk of flooding, taking into account the likely future effects of climate change? • Improve and extend green infrastructure networks in the plan area to support adaptation to the potential effects of climate change? • Sustainably manage water run-off, reducing surface water runoff (either within the plan area or downstream)? • Ensure the potential risks associated with climate change are considered through new development in the Neighbourhood Plan area? • Increase the resilience of biodiversity to the effects of climate change, including through enhancements to ecological networks?

Land, soil and water resources

- The provisional Agricultural Land Quality dataset shows that there are significant areas of Grade 3 and some pockets of Grade 2 agricultural land present within the Neighbourhood Plan area. However, the data does not differentiate as to whether this is Grade 3a (e.g. the best and most versatile) or lower quality 3b land.

- The River Thames is the main watercourse flowing alongside the Neighbourhood Plan area, adjacent to the Plan area’s eastern boundary. Holton Brook, Common Brook and Cuddesdon Brook tributaries feed into the River Thames, located to the north and south of the Neighbourhood Plan area respectively. The 2015 water quality data from the Environment Agency suggests that water quality across the different streams and brooks in the River Thames catchment are either “moderate” or “poor”. No areas of the catchment achieve “good” status currently.
- The entire Neighbourhood Plan area is situated within the Thames (Scotsgrove Brook to Thames) NVZ Zone for groundwater.

Objective	Supplementary questions to guide assessment
Ensure the efficient and effective use of land.	Will the option/proposal help to - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the use of previously developed land? • Avoid the development of the best and most versatile agricultural land, which in the Neighbourhood Plan area may comprise Grade 3a agricultural land?
Promote sustainable waste management solutions that encourage the reduction, re-use and recycling of waste.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the amount of waste produced? • Support the minimisation, reuse and recycling of waste? • Maximise opportunities for local management of waste in order to minimise export of waste to areas outside? • Encourage recycling of materials and minimise consumption of resources during construction?
Use and manage water resources in a sustainable manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support improvements to water quality? • Minimise water consumption? • Protect groundwater resources?

Landscape and historic environment

- The WNP area falls within two NCA profiles: 109 Midvale Ridge, and 108 Upper Thames Clay Vales. The Midvale Ridge NCA covers the western extent of the WNP area, and is described as a band of low-lying limestone hills stretching east–west from the Vale of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire to Swindon. The Upper Thames Clay Vales NCA covers the east of the WNP area, and is described as a broad belt of open, gently undulating lowland farmland on predominantly Jurassic and Cretaceous clays.
- The 2017 South Oxfordshire Landscape Character Assessment found that WNP area is located within Character Area 1: Oxford Heights. The landscape is characterised by predominately rural and unspoilt character with some urban influences on the fringes of Wheatley and Littleworth.
- The Neighbourhood Plan area has a rich historic environment, recognised through the 57 statutory listed buildings and the Wheatley Conservation area. Additionally, just outside the Neighbourhood Plan area are two scheduled monuments and a registered park and garden.
- There are no designated heritage assets within the WNP area currently on Historic England’s Heritage at Risk Register.

Objective	Supplementary questions to guide assessment
Protect, maintain and enhance the heritage resource, including the historic environment and archaeological assets located within and within the setting of the Neighbourhood Plan area.	Will the option/proposal help to - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve and enhance the significance of buildings and structures of architectural or historic interest, both designated and non-designated, and their setting? • Conserve and enhance the special interest, character and appearance of the Wheatley Conservation Area and its setting? • Support the integrity of the historic setting of key buildings of heritage interest? • Conserve and enhance local diversity and character? • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of the historic environment? • Conserve and enhance archaeological remains, including historic landscapes? • Support the undertaking of archaeological investigations and, where appropriate, recommend mitigation strategies.
Protect and enhance the character and quality of landscapes and townscapes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the integrity of the Landscape in the Neighbourhood Plan area, in accordance with the South Oxfordshire Landscape Character Assessment? • Conserve and enhance landscape and townscape features?

Population and community

- Based on the most recent census data available, the population of the Neighbourhood Plan area remained relatively constant between 2001 and 2011, in contrast to the increases observed for South Oxfordshire, the South East, and England.
- Whilst population growth has been relatively stagnant in the WNP area, it is noted that since 1980 431 homes have been built. This is an increase of 24.7%.
- A significantly larger number of residents within the Neighbourhood Plan area are within the older age category (60+) in comparison to the regional and national trends.
- Households within the Neighbourhood Plan area are relatively not deprived in comparison to regional and national averages.
- The majority of residents within the Neighbourhood Plan area own a household either outright or by mortgage (77.08%) at a higher rate than the District, regional, and national averages.

Objective	Supplementary questions to guide assessment
Cater for existing and future residents' needs as well as the needs of different groups in the community, and improve access to local, high-quality community services and facilities.	Will the option/proposal help to - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the development of a range of high quality, accessible community facilities? • Encourage and promote social cohesion and encourage active involvement of local people in community activities?
Reduce deprivation and promote a more inclusive and self-contained communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise fuel poverty? • Maintain or enhance the quality of life of existing local residents? • Improve the availability and accessibility of key local facilities, including specialist services for disabled and older people?

<p>Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing, and ensure an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes, types and tenures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the provision of a range of house types and sizes? • Support enhancements to the current housing stock? • Meet the needs of all sectors of the community? • Provide quality and flexible homes that meet people’s needs? • Promote the use of sustainable building techniques, including use of sustainable building materials in construction? • Provide housing in sustainable locations that allow easy access to a range of local services and facilities?
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Health and wellbeing

- 83.93% of residents in the Neighbourhood Plan area consider themselves as having ‘very good health’ or ‘good health’, slightly lower than the total for South Oxfordshire (85.91%) but higher than the totals for the South East (83.6%) and England (81.4%).
- The total percentage of residents in the WNP area who report either ‘bad health’ or ‘very bad health’ (4.11%) is higher than the District total (3.35%) but lower than the regional (4.34%) and national total (5.4%).
- Based on the 2011 census data, 83.21% of residents within the WNP area report that their activities are not limited, slightly lower than the total for South Oxfordshire (86.22%) but greater than the totals for the South East (84.29%) and England (82.40%).

Objective	Supplementary questions to guide assessment
<p>Improve the health and wellbeing residents within the WNP area.</p>	<p>Will the option/proposal help to -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote accessibility to a range of leisure, health and community facilities, for all age groups? • Address the specific challenges outlined in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment? • Provide and enhance the provision of community access to green infrastructure, in accordance with Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards? • Reduce noise pollution? • Promote the use of healthier modes of travel? • Improve access to the countryside for recreational use?

Transportation

- There are no railway stations located within the Neighbourhood Plan area. The nearest railway station is Oxford, located 9km west of Wheatley.
- The 275 and 280 are the main bus services for the WNP area, connecting residents to Oxford, High Wycombe and Aylesbury.
- Wheatley provides a virtual 2- mile slip road along the A40 to the M40, being located at one end of the Oxford- M40 corridor, and at one end of the Aylesbury-M40 –Oxford corridor. Improved access to the M40 has resulted in increased levels of traffic for Wheatley.
- Issues of congestion, parking and HGVs extend throughout the village, causing major inconveniences to road users, cyclists and pedestrians, particularly in the village centre.
- The National Cycle Route 57 runs through the Neighbourhood Plan area along Church Road and Old London Road. When complete, this will run west to east from Cricklade in Wiltshire to Welywn Garden City in Hertfordshire. This cycle track runs alongside the A40 linking Wheatley to Oxford.

- Over 88% of residents within the Neighbourhood Plan area have access to a car or van, perhaps in part due to the rural setting of Wheatley.
- A higher proportion of residents use a car or van to get to work compared to regional and national percentages.

Objective	Supplementary questions to guide assessment
Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.	Will the option/proposal help to - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage modal shift to more sustainable forms of travel? • Enable sustainable transport infrastructure enhancements? • Facilitate working from home and remote working? • Improve road safety? • Reduce the impact on residents from the road network?