

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

07 DECEMBER 2021

SUMMARY

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

INTRODUCTION

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

THE SCREENING PROCESS

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

4. Part of the screening process is the Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening, which can be found in Appendix 2. The Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening concluded that the Sonning Common NDP Review is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, therefore, an Appropriate Assessment for the Sonning Common NDP Review is not required.
5. Appendix 3 considers whether the plan is likely to have likely significant effects on the environment.
6. These two assessments feed into Table 1 and the SEA screening opinion.
7. The council's screening opinion concluded that the implementation of the Sonning Common NDP Review would not result in likely significant effects on the environment and therefore would not require a SEA.

SONNING COMMON NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

8. The review of the Sonning Common NDP will seek to do the following:
 - To revise the original Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan approved at referendum in October 2016 in order to maintain full statutory weight;
 - To revise the allocations made in the first SCNDP to reflect changes in circumstances;
 - To revise existing objectives and policies where necessary; and
 - To add new policies.
9. A large majority of the existing policies in the Sonning Common NDP will remain in place, with amendments made to improve their effectiveness. The following is due to happen:
 - Policy H1 (housing distribution) to be revised to take account of differences between allocations and actual number of houses built or proposed, and the withdrawal of reserve sites 7 and 7a;
 - H2 (housing mix) to be modified;
 - H2a (extra care) to be modified;
 - Policies D1, D1a, D1b (design) to remain unchanged;
 - Policies VC1 & 2 (village centre) to remain unchanged;
 - Policy EE1 (employment sites) to be reviewed;

- Policies CSH 1&1a (community education and facilities) to remain unchanged;
- Policy CSH2 (land for recreation) and supporting text to be reviewed;
- Policy MRP1 (traffic calming) to be reviewed;
- Policy MRP1a (footpaths/cyclepaths) to remain unchanged;
- Policies ENV1-3 (environment) to remain unchanged;
- Policy DE1 (delivery) and the accompanying protocol to be reviewed;
- Site allocations to be reviewed to reflect changed circumstances;
- Policy HP1 (traffic management) to be reviewed; and
- Policy HR1 (release of reserve sites) to be reviewed.

10. The following new elements will be introduced:

- NEW POLICIES: Settlement boundary
- INCREASED ALLOCATIONS: 50 (instead of 37) on SON15
- NEW RESERVE ALLOCATION: 20+ on SON23 (Johnson Matthey car park)

11. It is intended that the plan will include the following allocations:

- SON15 (SHLAA 994) – increase from 37 homes to 50;
- SON23 (Johnson Matthey car park) – reserve site for 20+ smaller homes;
- Retention of SON8 (Kennylands Gymnastics) – reserve site for 14 homes; and
- Memorial Hall Field – community uses

12. The review of the Sonning Common NDP is currently being prepared and the Regulation 14 consultation is underway. The plan will seek to carry forward existing allocations, reserve allocation SON 8 from the made Sonning Common Neighbourhood Plan, amend existing allocation SON15 to increase the number of dwellings on site from 37 to 50, and allocate SON 23 as a reserve site for 20+ smaller homes.

13. The location of the SON15, which is the only site proposing to deliver additional dwellings, has been considered through this screening to determine if the proposals will lead to significant effects (as detailed in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3). SON 8 is a reserve site being carried forward from the made plan and SON 23 is a new reserve site.

14. Within the designated neighbourhood area one potential large site already benefits from planning permission at a site known as Little Sparrows, where appeal APP/Q3115/W/20/3265861 was allowed and planning permission was granted on 25 June 2021. The Sonning Common NDP Review may allocate this site as it benefits from planning permission, we do not consider that the inclusion of the site as an allocation would give rise to likely significant effects if it already benefits from planning permission.
15. The Sonning Common NDP Review is also proposing to introduce a settlement boundary for the village.
16. As the Plan is only seeking to allocate an additional 13 dwellings within the neighbourhood area, identify an additional reserve site, and propose a settlement boundary for the village of Sonning Common, it is concluded that the implementation of the Sonning Common NDP Review would not result in likely significant effects on the environment.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

17. The Screening Opinion was sent to Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England on 26 October 2021 for a four week consultation period. The responses in full are in Appendix 4.
18. The response from Historic England is in Appendix 4. Historic England asked the district council to consider whether the former walled garden and gardeners' cottage merit consideration as non-designated heritage assets, as a result of their apparent history as part of the Blount's Court Estate and any historic or architectural interest they may provide.
19. The council agrees that the Blounts Court buildings and former garden wall should be considered non-designated heritage assets. The high brick and flint wall around the existing car park is almost certainly the remaining part of the kitchen garden wall to the historic estate of Blounts Court and has some local heritage interest as a result. The main house and part of the former stable block are still extant within the Johnson Matthey Technology Centre. There remains some legibility of the presence of the former estate in this area, albeit altered by C20 development of the laboratories, which provides an indication of the historic development of this part of Sonning Common.
20. However, we consider that the nature of the wall and relationship to Blounts Court is such that development on the car park could be carefully managed throughout the planning process to preserve their significance. As such, potential reserve allocation of the car park site is considered unlikely to have a significant effect on their interest and therefore would not trigger the need for an SEA.
21. Natural England were not able to fully assess the potential impacts of this plan and the Environment Agency did not respond.

CONCLUSION

22. As a result of the screening undertaken by the Council and the responses from the statutory consultees, the following determination has been reached.
23. The Sonning Common NDP Review is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, therefore, an Appropriate Assessment for the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan is not required.
24. Based on the assessment presented in Appendices 1 & 3, the Sonning Common NDP is not likely to have a significant effect on the environment.
25. The Sonning Common NDP Review does not require a Strategic Environment Assessment.

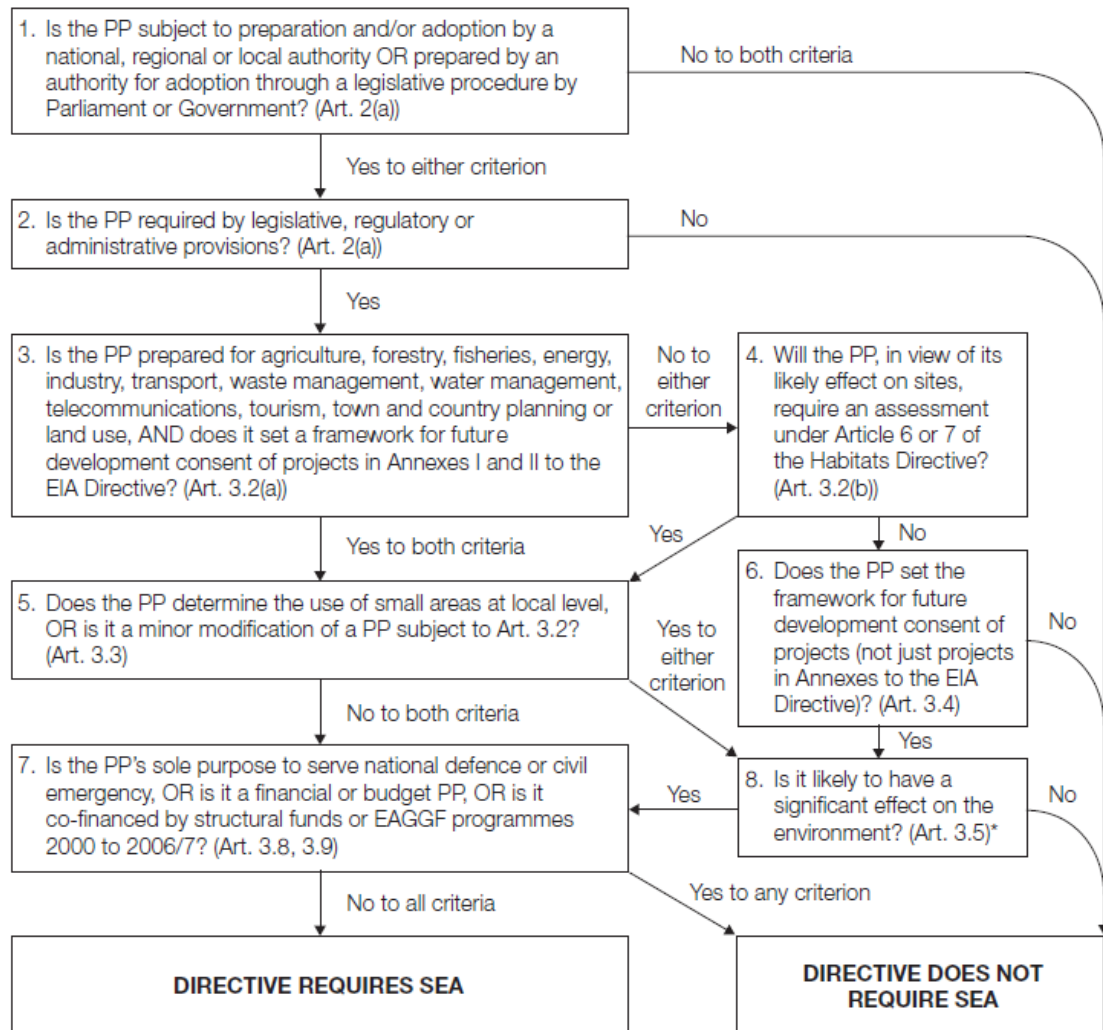
Authorised by: Harry Barrington-Mountford

Date: 07/12/2021

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

Figure 2 – Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes

This diagram is intended as a guide to the criteria for application of the Directive to plans and programmes (PPs). It has no legal status.



*The Directive requires Member States to determine whether plans or programmes in this category are likely to have significant environmental effects. These determinations may be made on a case by case basis and/or by specifying types of plan or programme.

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

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

3. Is the Neighbourhood Plan prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II (see Appendix 2) to the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2(a))	N	The Sonning Common NDP is prepared for town and country planning and land use and will not set out a framework for future development of projects that would require an EIA.
4. Will the Neighbourhood Plan, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.2 (b))	N	The Sonning Common NDP is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites. See Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Opinion for the Sonning Common NDP in Appendix 2.
5. Does the Neighbourhood Plan determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art. 3.2? (Art. 3.3)	Y	The Sonning Common NDP will determine the use of sites/small areas at a local level.
6. Does the Neighbourhood Plan set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art 3.4)	Y	When made, the Sonning Common NDP will include a series of policies to guide development within the village. This will inform the determination of planning applications providing a framework for future development consent of projects.
7. Is the Neighbourhood Plan's sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Art 3.8, 3.9)	N	N/A

8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)	N	The plan is not likely to have significant effects on the environment. See assessment of the likely significance of effects on the environment in Appendix 3.
---	---	---

Appendix 2 - Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA)

Screening Opinion for the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan

INTRODUCTION

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

LEGISLATIVE BASIS

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

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

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

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

² The South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035

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

“105.—(1) Where a land use plan—

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

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

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

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

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

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

EUROPEAN SITES

5. The HRA of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 used a screening distance of 17km to identify European sites which could be affected by development from the plan. This distance has been subject to consultation with Natural England and reflects the average travel to work distance in the district. As such, the same distance has been applied in this HRA Screening.
6. The following European sites lie wholly or partly within 17km of neighbourhood area of Sonning Common and have been taken into consideration:
 - Hartslock Wood SAC – approximately 7km
7. This site hosts the priority habitat type "orchid rich sites". The steep slopes of this site on the chalk of the Chilterns comprise a mosaic of chalk grassland, chalk scrub and broadleaved woodland. The chalk grassland mostly consists of a mosaic of shorter-turf NVC type CG2 Festuca ovina–Avenula pratensis grassland and taller CG3 Bromus erectus grassland. The site supports one of only three UK populations of monkey orchid Orchis simia, a nationally rare Red Data Book species. The bulk of this site lies on a steep slope above the River Thames. Recent storms and landslips have resulted in a diverse agestructure for the yew population. Open patches show a rich flora including local species such as southern wood-rush Luzula forsteri, wood barley Hordelymus europaeus and narrow-lipped helleborine Epipactis leptochila.
8. The main threat to this site is air pollution and the risk of atmospheric nitrogen deposition upon the dry grasslands and yew-dominated woodland. It is assumed that only those roads forming part of the primary road network (motorways and 'A' roads) might be likely to experience any significant increases in vehicle traffic as a result of

development (i.e. greater than 1,000 AADT). As such, as the site is not within 200 metres of a motorway or 'A' road, likely significant effects from traffic-related air pollution is ruled out.

- Chilterns Beechwood SAC – approximately 13km

9. The Chilterns Beechwoods SAC comprises nine separate sites scattered across the Chilterns. There are three features of interest: semi-natural grasslands and scrubland on chalk; Asperulo-Fagetum beech woodland (for which this is considered to be one of the best areas in the UK and lies in the centre of the habitat's UK range); and Stag beetle *Lucanus cervus*, for which the area is considered to support a significant presence. The rare coralroot *Cardamine bulbifera* is found in these woods.
10. The main pressures and threats to this site include the impacts of forestry and woodland management, disease, deer and the invasive species of grey squirrel upon beech. Additionally, the changes in species distribution of stag beetle as well as the impact of public access and disturbance upon stag beetle. Air pollution and the impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition also threaten the dry grasslands, beech and stag beetle.

- Aston Rowant SAC – approximately 14.5km

11. Aston Rowant is classified as SAC because it supports one of the largest remaining populations of juniper in lowland Britain. It is selected as an example of juniper formations on the chalk in the south east of England. At this site juniper is present as part of a mixed scrub community but also occurs as isolated bushes in chalk grassland. In common with most lowland populations of juniper, successful reproduction and survival of new generations of bushes is extremely rare and conservation is currently dependent upon significant levels of management intervention. The low level of reproductive success is the main threat to the feature at this site. Aston Rowant also supports Asperulo-Fagetum beech forests although this is not a primary reason for classification as SAC.
12. The main pressures and threats to this site include an unsustainable on-site population, changes in species distribution, disease of juniper as well as the impacts of air pollution and the risks of atmospheric nitrogen deposition upon juniper. Additionally, conflicting conservation objectives threaten beech.

- Little Wittenham SAC – approximately 7km

13. One of the best-studied great crested newt sites in the UK, Little Wittenham comprises two main ponds set in a predominantly woodland

context (broadleaved and conifer woodland is present). There are also areas of grassland, with sheep grazing and arable bordering the woodland to the south and west. The River Thames is just to the north of the site, and a hill fort to the south. Large numbers of great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* have been recorded in the two main ponds, and research has revealed that they range several hundred metres into the woodland blocks.

14. The main pressures and threats to this site include the impacts of public access and disturbance, and invasive fish species upon great crested newt. With regard to the types of development that may be brought forward in the Local Plan, visitor disturbance could impact the site.

ASSESSMENT

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

Physical loss of/damage to habitat:

16. Any development resulting from the Neighbourhood Plan will be located within the neighbourhood area. There are no European sites within the neighbourhood plan area, therefore the loss of habitats from within the boundaries of a European site can be ruled out in relation to all sites.
17. Loss of habitat from outside of the boundaries of a European site could still affect the integrity of that site if it occurs in an area used by the qualifying species of the site (e.g. for off-site breeding, foraging or roosting). Two of the European sites included in this assessment have mobile species amongst their qualifying features that could travel outside of the site to make use of other areas of habitat:
 - Long Wittenham SAC; great crested newt.
 - Chiltern Beechwood SAC; stage beetle.
18. The HRA (March 2019) produced alongside the Local Plan 2035 states that great crested newts will travel away from their breeding ponds, during the terrestrial phase of their lifecycle, but not large distances. 500 metres is considered an appropriate buffer distance inside which great crested newts might be found, from their breeding location. The site listing for Little Wittenham SAC states that great crested newts

have been found to range several hundred metres into the site's woodland blocks. Research has found that great crested newts at Little Wittenham SAC migrate within woodland and do not over-winter in the arable farmland. All of the woodland within 500 metres of the ponds at Little Wittenham SAC is within the SAC boundary. Therefore potential loss of or damage to off-site habitats associated with Little Wittenham SAC can be screened out of further assessment.

19. Bisham Wood SSSI, which is the part of the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC that supports the qualifying stag beetle population, is greater than 2 km from the District boundary. Therefore potential loss of or damage to off-site habitats associated with Chilterns Beechwoods SAC can be screened out of further assessment.

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

20. The most recent HRA of the South Oxford Local Plan 2035 (March 2019) states:

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

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

Air pollution:

22. Air pollution is most likely to effect European sites where plant, soil and water habitats are the qualifying feature, but some qualifying animal species may also be affected, either directly or indirectly, by any deterioration in habitat as a result of air pollution. Deposition of pollutants to the ground and vegetation can alter the characteristics of the soil, affecting the pH and nitrogen availability that can then affect plant health, productivity and species composition.
23. Based on the Highways Agency Design for Road and Bridges (DMRB) Manual Volume 11, Section 3, Part 120 (which was produced to provide advice regarding the design, assessment and operation of trunk roads (including motorways)), it is assumed that air pollution from roads is unlikely to be significant beyond 200m from the road itself.
24. The only European sites within 17km of Sonning Common that are within 200m of strategic road are Aston Rowant SAC (M40) and Chilterns Beechwoods SAC (A404), both are over 13km from the neighbourhood area.

25. The HRA sets out that SODC commissioned Atkins to model the effects of the Local Plan on traffic flows within the District. No traffic data were available for the roads adjacent to Burnham Beeches SAC, Chilterns Beechwoods SAC and Windsor Forest & Great Park SAC, as they are located too far outside of the Atkins model network to be reasonably or reliably predicted. Although these locations lie within the initial screening radius of 17 km, the actual distance which would need to be travelled to reach these locations by car from the plan area exceeds this distance for most routes (e.g. Henley on Thames to Burnham Beeches is 17 km as the crow flies, however the quickest route by car is 32km). It can therefore reasonably be expected that the contribution of growth within the Local Plan area to traffic flows at these locations would be de minimis, and as such they are screened out from any further assessment.

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

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

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

Increased recreation pressure; and

28. The HRA of the South Oxford Local Plan 2035 (March 2019) states:

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

29. The HRA of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 sets out that the potential for effects depends upon the scale of development proposed and the features for which the site is designated. However, as a conservative estimate, it is assumed that any development within 7 km of a sensitive site could have impacts due to recreation. Where site specific information indicates that development beyond 7 km could produce recreation impacts, this will be taken into account; for example at Little Wittenham SAC, where development in the eastern fringes of the Vale of White Horse District could be relevant.

30. Sonning Common is approximately 7km from Little Wittenham SAC, which is part of a larger site managed by the Earth Trust as a nature reserve. The areas which are most important to the population of great crested newts (GCN) have restricted access which is designed to prevent conflicts between the visiting public, the newts and their habitat.
31. The increased visitor levels which are likely to occur as a result of the modest increase in population in Sonning Common may result in increased pressure on the habitats on the reserve as a whole. However, due to restricted access to the areas where newts are primarily found, the increased visitor numbers will be concentrated onto other habitats on the reserve. These habitats are not related to the primary reasons for the selection of the SAC.
32. Great crested newts are not believed to be particularly sensitive to human disturbance provided their breeding ponds are not affected and their primary terrestrial habitat and hibernacula are not adversely affected. Provided controls on access to the most sensitive areas are maintained (i.e. ponds and hibernacula are not disturbed) there is no reason to believe that there would be any significant effect on the integrity of the site or the primary reason for the selection of the site.
33. The HRA of the Local Plan 2035 identifies that at the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC, public access / disturbance is only identified in relation to the stag beetle population. The portion of the SAC that supports the stag beetle population (Bisham Woods SSSI) is greater than 7km from the District boundary, and therefore is considered unlikely to result in likely significant effects from development within South Oxfordshire, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.
34. Therefore, likely significant effects in relation to visitor pressure and the impact of recreation can be ruled out and do not need to be considered further.

Changes to hydrological regimes.

35. European sites at which aquatic or wetland environments support qualifying features have the potential to be affected by changes in water quantity or quality. The only European site close to Sonning Common with aquatic or wetland habitats is Little Wittenham SAC. Its ponds support great crested newts, but changes to water quality or quantity have not been identified as an issue at this site within the Site Improvement Plan: Little Wittenham (SIP122); this site has therefore been screened out.

Potential in combination effects.

36. The Council has considered the HRA of the Local Plan (March 2019) in respect of the potential in combination effects of the proposals in the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Plan. The South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 covers the period from 2011 to 2035, the quantum of development proposed in the Local Plan includes some completed and committed development (committed development includes sites under construction, with planning permission, made neighbourhood plan allocations and allocations carried forward from the Local Plan 2011 and Core Strategy). The policies that enabled those developments to be permitted have already been subject to HRA as part of the Core Strategy, Local Plan 2011 or as part of the HRA for the relevant NDP. The Local Plan includes a housing requirement to be met by the Sonning Common NDP, which the review of the Sonning Common NDP seeks to respond to. The policies in the Local Plan (Policy H4) are subject to an Appropriate Assessment informing the Local Plan process. Therefore, having regard to conclusions of paragraphs 5 to 33 of the HRA of the Local Plan (March 2019), it is considered that the proposals in the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Plan are not likely to give rise to significant in combination effects.

CONCLUSION

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

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

1. Characteristics of the Plan, having regard to:	
(a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;	The Sonning Common NDP would, if adopted, form part of the Statutory Development Plan and as such does contribute to the framework for future development consent of projects. However, the Plan will sit within the wider framework set by the National Planning Policy Framework, and the strategic policies of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.
(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;	A Neighbourhood Development Plan must be in conformity with the Local Plan for the District. It does not influence other plans. It should also take into account of the emerging planning policy. The Sonning Common NDP Review is unlikely to influence other Plans or Programmes within the Statutory Development Plan.
(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;	National policy requires a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread through plan-making, including the Sonning Common NDP Review. A basic condition of the Sonning Common NDP Review is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and	<p>The environmental impact of the proposals within the Sonning Common NDP Review is likely to be minimal due to the scale of the development proposed.</p> <p>The Sonning Common NDP area contains the following environmental designations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - BAP priority habitats - Protected species buffer - Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - Tree Preservation Orders <p>There are the following SACs within 17km of the Sonning Common NDP area. These are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hartslock Wood SAC – 7km - Little Wittenham SAC – 17km - Aston Rowant SAC - 14.5km

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chilterns Beechwood SAC – 13km <p>There are also the following SSSI's located within the following distances of the Sonning Common NDP area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bear, Oveys & Great Bottom Woods SSSI - 1.3km - Highlands Farm Pit SSSI - 2km - Harpsden Wood SSSI - 3.2km - Lambridge Wood SSSI- 3.5km <p>The plan will seek to carry forward existing allocations and reserve sites from the made Sonning Common Neighbourhood Plan, amend existing allocation SON15 to increase the number of dwellings on site from 37 to 50, and include an additional reserve site allocation. The NDP Review is also proposing a settlement boundary.</p> <p>As the proposed plan is only increasing the number of dwellings on an existing allocation by 13 dwellings, it is considered that the effects of the proposals are not likely to be significant.</p> <p>The plan proposes a settlement boundary to define the built-up area of Sonning Common for development. We have considered whether focusing new development within the village boundaries, which has also been a historic focus of settlement activity, could result in the plan directing new development to sites that could potentially have significant effects on the historic environment including conservation areas, listed buildings and archaeological remains.</p> <p>Careful consideration of the proposed settlement boundary in relation to how South Oxfordshire Local Plan guides the location and scale of development indicates that the proposed boundaries merely aid the interpretation of existing policies.</p> <p>Policy H1 in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 sets out:</p>
--	---

	<p><i>'3. Residential development on sites not allocated in the Development Plan will only be permitted where:</i></p> <p><i>iii) it is development within the existing built-up area of Towns and Larger Villages as defined in the settlement hierarchy (shown in Appendix 7); provided an important open space of public, environmental, historical or ecological value is not lost, nor an important public view hard'</i></p> <p>The proposed boundary does not exclude any sites that could be considered as within the existing built-up area. The built-up area does not contain a Conservation Area and has limited listed buildings and archaeological remains. Therefore, it is considered that the Sonning Common NDP Review would not give rise to significant effects.</p>
(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).	The proposed development in the Sonning Common NDP Review has been judged not to have an impact on Community legislation.
2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:	
(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan is generally likely to influence development for a period of 15 years from its adoption, which is in line with national guidance. The Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have modest but enduring positive environmental effects.</p> <p>It is clear that the main effect on the parish will be the impact of the settlement boundary and increase of dwellings on allocation SON15. The effects of this are not likely to be reversible as they relate to development. The effects will be of a local scale and the principles guiding development in the NDP include protecting and enhancing the setting in the rural landscape, promoting overall sustainability, supporting and enhancing the village centre, and protecting the character of the NDP designed area. Some existing</p>

	<p>policies will be retained and reviewed, and new policies will be introduced where necessary. Policies will be developed which guide development to the most appropriate locations to avoid supporting development near sensitive locations that would cause likely significant effects.</p>
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;	<p>It is intended that the positive social effects of providing residential development will have positive cumulative benefits for the area. However, given the scale of the proposed development (13 dwellings), it is considered that the scope and coverage of the plan is not likely to create any likely significant cumulative effects.</p>
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects;	<p>The effects of the Plan are unlikely to have transboundary³ impacts.</p>
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);	<p>The policies in the plan are unlikely to present risks to human health or the environment.</p>
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);	<p>The Sonning Common NDP Review relates to the parish of Sonning Common. The parish is focused around the larger village of Sonning Common, which is surrounded by the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The scale of development proposed is small and therefore the potential for environmental effects is also likely to be small and localised.</p>
<p>(f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</p> <p>(i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;</p> <p>(ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or</p> <p>(iii) intensive land-use; and</p>	<p>The Sonning Common NDP area contains the following special natural characteristics and cultural heritage elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listed buildings - Local heritage assets - Archaeological constraints - Non-designated heritage assets - Chilterns AONB - Ancient woodland - TPOs <p>There are the following SACs within 17km of the Sonning Common NDP area. These are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hartslock Wood SAC – 7km - Little Wittenham SAC – 17km - Aston Rowant SAC - 14.5km

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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chilterns Beechwood SAC – 13km <p>There are also the following SSSI's located within the following distances of the Sonning Common NDP area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bear, Oveys & Great Bottom Woods SSSI - 1.3km - Highlands Farm Pit SSSI - 2km - Harpsden Wood SSSI - 3.2km - Lambridge Wood SSSI- 3.5km <p>The Sonning Common NDP offers an opportunity to enhance the natural environment and the cultural heritage of the area through the proposals being considered. It is clear that the aspects of the plan that are most likely to effect the special natural characteristics and cultural heritage are the site allocations (those carried forward and the extension of SON15 by 13 dwellings), householder development and development within the built-up area. These forms of development may impact on the integrity of protected sites and the character and appearance of listed buildings, their setting and the AONB setting.</p> <p>In relation to the reserve sites identified in the plan, the Johnson Matthey carpark is surrounded by a high brick and flint wall around the existing car park, which is considered a non-designated heritage asset. It is almost certainly the remaining part of the kitchen garden wall to the historic estate of Blounts Court and has some local heritage interest as a result. The main house and part of the former stable block are still extant within the Johnson Matthey Technology Centre. There remains some legibility of the presence of the former estate in this area, albeit altered by C20 development of the laboratories, which provides an indication of the historic development of this part of Sonning Common. As such, the Blounts Court buildings and former garden wall should be considered non-designated heritage assets. However, we consider that the nature of the wall and relationship to Blounts Court is such that development on</p>
--	---

	<p>the car park could be carefully managed throughout the planning process to preserve their significance. As such, potential allocation of the car park site is considered unlikely to have a significant effect on their interest.</p> <p>Given the small scale of the proposed residential development, the proposals in this plan review are not considered to create significant effects.</p> <p>The SACs and SSSI are located outside the NDP designated area. Hartslock Wood SAC is the closest SAC to the designated neighbourhood area, approximately 7km from the neighbourhood plan boundary. Bear, Oveys and Great Bottom Woods SSSI is the closest SSSI to the neighbourhood area, approximately 1.3km from the Sonning Common NDP area.</p> <p>The majority of the above designations are outside of the built-up area of the village. The principles guiding development in the NDP includes protecting and enhancing the setting in the rural landscape. Taking into consideration the location of the site allocation which is to be expanded, development is to be located within or adjoining the existing built form and therefore is not considered to cause likely significant effects. Furthermore, the proposed level of growth is very modest (13 dwellings) and the predicted effects associated to this scale of development are not considered to be significant.</p> <p>The HRA Screening Assessment in appendix 2 concluded that: The Sonning Common NDP Review is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects therefore, an Appropriate Assessment of the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan Review is not required.</p> <p>There are some sensitivities regarding cultural heritage within the Sonning Common NDP area, with a number of listed buildings</p>
--	--

	<p>spread around the parish. There is currently no collective detailed information on the risks and vulnerability of the listed buildings and their setting readily available. However, these are limited and sparsely located across the neighbourhood area. It is considered that the proposals in the plan review are capable of being taken forward without giving rise to significant effects.</p> <p>The guiding principles of the Sonning Common NDP Review imply that policies in the plan will protect and enhance the setting of the village in the rural landscape. The neighbourhood plan is considered to have a neutral effect on cultural heritage because there is no indication given in the objectives that the plan would go beyond national and local policy and therefore, it is considered that the effects of the proposals in the plan are not likely to be significant.</p> <p>Given the nature and scope of the NDP, environmental quality standards or limit values are not considered likely to be significantly effected.</p> <p>In light of the small quantum of development proposed, the plan is not likely to cause significant effects in relation to intensive land use.</p>
<p>(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.</p>	<p>The Sonning Common NDP designated area includes part of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, recognised to contain some of the finest landscapes in England. The built-up area of the village is not within AONB, and SON15 which is the only site proposing to deliver an additional 13 dwellings, also falls outside of the AONB. SON23, the proposed reserve site does lie within the AONB, however as it is a reserve site the effects predicted are not likely to be significant.</p> <p>The scale of development is modest, as it relates to the expansion of an existing allocation. Therefore, the effects predicted are not likely to be significant.</p>

APPENDIX 4

From: Lloyd Sweet, Robert

Sent: 23 November 2021 19:58

To: Rosalynn.Whiteley@southandvale.gov.uk <Rosalynn.Whiteley@southandvale.gov.uk>

Subject: Sonning Common Neighbourhood Plan Review – SEA and HRA Screening Opinion –
Please reply by 23 November

Dear Ms. Whiteley

Thank you for consulting Historic England on the initial screening opinion for Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Plan. Historic England's remit is limited to the historic environment including advising on the conservation and enjoyment of heritage assets and championing good design and planning in historic places. As such we limit our consideration of the plan's potential for like significant environmental effects to areas within our remit and silence soon other matters should not be treated as agreement or consent.

We were consulted on screening of the made neighbourhood plan in 2014 and agreed with the Council's view at that time that SEA was merited for the preparation of the neighbourhood plan. This was on the basis of likely on significance effects on the cultural heritage of the Chilterns AONB and other heritage assets. The made plan allocates sites for development of a total of 195 homes and was informed by the preparation of a sustainability appraisal incorporating SEA.

As far as we understand the revised plan does not include these allocations but identifies an additional site for 16 dwellings (Site 8) and a reserved site for at least

20 dwellings. The latter site (site 23 in the plan) is located in the Chilterns AONB but is a brown field site (currently used as a car park) and is bordered to the south and east by a green field site that has recently received planning permission at appeal for a large care home development. The site is bounded on the roadside by a high wall that may represent part of a large walled garden enclosure, which may be part of the landscape of the former Blounts Court Estate. The site also includes a small 19th century cottage that may be a related gardeners' accommodation (Blount's Court Cottage). The former mansion of Blount's Court lies to the north of the site and, with its 19th century stable buildings has been converted as part of the Johnson Matthey Laboratories. Blount's Court Farmhouse and barn are both Grade II listed buildings that lie some 10 meters to the south. Blount's Court as an estate is traceable to the early 15th century and the house has been found to contain medieval elements (see Victoria County History Oxfordshire, Vol. 16). The house and farm were property of the Stonnor family from the late 15th century and remained in the same landholding until the 1930s. A record from the late 19th century includes a record of the outbuildings including an ornamental dairy, coach house and stables. Whilst in the 1960s it included "an old world gardeners' cottage".

Understanding the relationship between these structures and their relative significance as part of a combined country estate landscape would take some research and there has clearly been opportunity for consideration of the impact of change in their setting already as a result of the recent planning case and appeal. The mansion at Blount's Court is not a listed building. It is the Local Planning Authority's responsibility to determine whether features of the historic environment merit consideration in planning matters as 'non-designated' heritage assets and we therefore leave it to South Oxfordshire District Council to determine whether the former walled garden and gardeners' cottage merit this status as a result of their apparent history as part of the Blount's Court Estate and any historic or architectural interest they may provide and, as such, whether the potential development of the walled garden, now a car park, represents a 'significant' environmental effect on this basis. We note the 'garden wall' is likely to be only a partial survival of the enclosure. We also recommend that SODC give consideration to whether development of the reserve site 23 has potential to have effects for the AONB as a protected landscape.

I can confirm that we have already commented on a scoping report for SEA of the revised plan, which suggests that data has been gathered ready to complete an environmental report if one is needed.

Yours sincerely

Robert Lloyd-Sweet

Robert Lloyd-Sweet | Historic Places Adviser | South East England | Historic England
Cannon Bridge House | 25 Dowgate Hill | London | EC4R 2YA