

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 Benson Neighbourhood Development Plan Review

08 JULY 2022

SUMMARY

Following consultation with the statutory bodies, South Oxfordshire District Council (the 'Council') determines that Benson 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 Benson Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) Review requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2011/42/EC (the Directive) and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the Regulations).
2. Any land use plan or programme 'which sets the framework for future development consent of projects' must be screened according to a set of criteria from Annex II of the Directive and Schedule 1 of the Regulations. These criteria include exceptions for plans 'which determine the use of a small area at local level' or which only propose 'minor modifications to a plan', if it is determined that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects.
3. The initial screening opinion was subject to consultation with Historic England, the Environment Agency and Natural England. The results of the screening process are detailed in this Screening Statement.

THE SCREENING PROCESS

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

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

BENSON NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW

6. The Benson NDP Review will contain the following vision, objectives and policies:

Vision

Benson will accommodate the level of growth required to meet our local housing needs, while conserving and enhancing its heritage and protecting its rural setting beneath the Chiltern Hills and alongside the River Thames. Our Neighbourhood Plan encourages a modern, thriving and self-confident village centre, together with the facilities and infrastructure necessary to meet the economic, social and environmental needs of the community. As part of this, the planning process will promote development that is:

- sustainable - recognising both the enormous benefits and the increasing risks of living alongside a powerful river
- sensitive - integrating well with the rest of the village
- well designed - setting standards that ensure Benson retains its distinctive character.

Objectives

In order to achieve the above Vision a number of objectives have been identified as follows:

- Provide sufficient housing to meet local needs;
- Cater for growth in a manner that maintains the distinct and separate character of the village;
- Cater for growth in a manner that conserves and enhances heritage within the Neighbourhood Plan area;
- Cater for growth in a manner which respects Benson's setting in the rural landscape and its close association with the River Thames;
- Ensure that Benson has a modern, vibrant village centre;
- Ensure there are adequate facilities to serve our growing local population;
- Ensure the sustainability of economic activity in the Neighbourhood Plan area;
- Safeguard and enhance existing green infrastructure and secure the provision of additional green space connected to the wider countryside;
- Ensure that new development is sited, planned and executed in a way that takes account of climate change;
- Ensure that new development is sited, planned and executed in a way that takes account of the natural environment;
- Ensure that new development contributes towards the free and safe flow of traffic and has a minimum impact on the existing highway infrastructure;

- Encourage walking and cycling to get around the village by providing a network of safe pedestrian and cyclist routes, in particular to the centre;
- Encourage sustainable modes of transport by all means available.

Policies

- NP1 – Housing Allocation Policy
- NP2 – Land to the north of Littleworth Road – Residential development
- NP3 – Land at Hale Road – Residential development
- NP4 – Land to the north and north east of The Sands – Residential development
- NP5 – Riverside Policy
- NP6 – Conservation and Heritage
- NP7 – Design
- NP8 – Traffic Flow
- NP9 – Pedestrian and Cyclists
- NP10 – Access to Public Transport
- NP11 – Sustainable Travel
- NP12 – Community Facilities
- NP13 – Benson Library
- NP14 – Shops
- NP15 – Village Centre
- NP16 – Assets of Community Value
- NP17 – Internet Provision
- NP18 – Broadband
- NP19 – Allotments
- NP20 – Outdoor Recreation
- NP21 – Protection of Local Green Space
- NP22 – Creating new Local Green Space
- NP23 – Biodiversity
- NP24 – Wildlife Corridors
- NP25 – Green Infrastructure Management
- NP26 – Watercourses
- NP27 – Distinctiveness of Settlement
- NP28 – Important Views
- NP29 – Landscape Buffers
- NP30 – Sustainable Drainage System

7. The Benson NDP was adopted as part of the district council's development plan on 23 August 2018. The plan was tested against the now superseded Core Strategy and Saved policies from the Local Plan,

however it was prepared considering the emerging Local Plan, particularly the emerging policy direction and its reasoning and evidence. The plan was supported by a Sustainability Appraisal Report which included a Strategic Environmental Assessment.

8. The Benson NDP Review proposes to update some of the existing policies, as well as introduce some new policies. The NDP vision remains the same and the objectives remain largely unchanged. Most of the existing allocations are being carried forward, with some updates to the policy wording to help refine the allocations further. The most significant updates to the Benson NDP Review include the proposed introduction of settlement boundaries at Benson and Preston Crowmarsh and a new riverside policy. Whilst other modifications are likely to be proposed to some the existing policy wording, these are not likely to be substantial.
9. All of the sites have outline planning permission and 2 out of the 3 allocated sites are under construction.
10. The Benson NDP Review will continue to plan positively, with a wide range of policies covering for example: design, conservation and heritage, sustainable travel, Local Green Spaces, biodiversity, and important views.
11. Policies in the Benson NDP Review will continue to support sustainable appropriate development in the neighbourhood area, which will not adversely impact on the rural nature of the parish. Catering for growth in a manner which respects Benson's setting in the rural landscape and its close association with the River Thames is particularly important.
12. 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.
13. Careful consideration of the proposed boundaries in relation to how the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 guides the location and scale of development (mainly through policies H1, H3, H4, and H16) indicates that the proposed boundaries merely add detail and aid the interpretation of existing policies.
14. The designated neighbourhood area includes the settlements of Benson, identified as a Larger Village, and Preston Crowmarsh, identified as an Other Village in the local plan settlement hierarchy (Appendix 7 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035). Within Benson, residential development on sites not allocated in the Development Plan will only be permitted in accordance with part 3 of Policy H1. In Preston Crowmarsh, development will be permitted in accordance with Policy H16, with development limited to infill and the redevelopment of previously developed land or buildings.

15. The proposed settlement boundaries do not seek to restrict development that would be considered appropriate in accordance with H1 and H16, relating to the respective settlement. As the boundaries, in practical terms, do not provide a more restrictive interpretation of the relevant policies in the Local Plan 2035, the council has concluded that the proposals in the plan will not have significant effects on the historic environment.
16. The proposed boundaries do not provide a less restrictive interpretation of the relevant policies in the Local Plan 2035, therefore, the proposals in the plan are not considered to have likely significant environmental effects.
17. Overall, we note that the plan does not allocate any new sites for development, it carries over the existing allocations, and continues to place great emphasis on conserving the character and appearance of the area. The allocations also already benefit from planning permission, either outline or reserved matters, with some currently being built out.
18. It is therefore concluded that the implementation of the Benson NDP Review would not result in likely significant effects on the environment.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

19. The screening opinion was sent to Natural England, The Environment Agency and Historic England on 23 March 2022 for a four-week consultation period. The responses in full are presented in Appendix 4.
20. The Environment Agency did not provide comments on this SEA Screening.
21. Historic England confirmed their agreement, that the Benson NDP Review does not need a SEA.
22. Natural England confirmed their agreement, that the Benson NDP Review does not need a SEA.

CONCLUSION

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

Authorised by: Harry Barrington-Mountford
Head of Policy and Programmes

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Harry BM', written in a cursive style.

Date: 08/07/2022

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

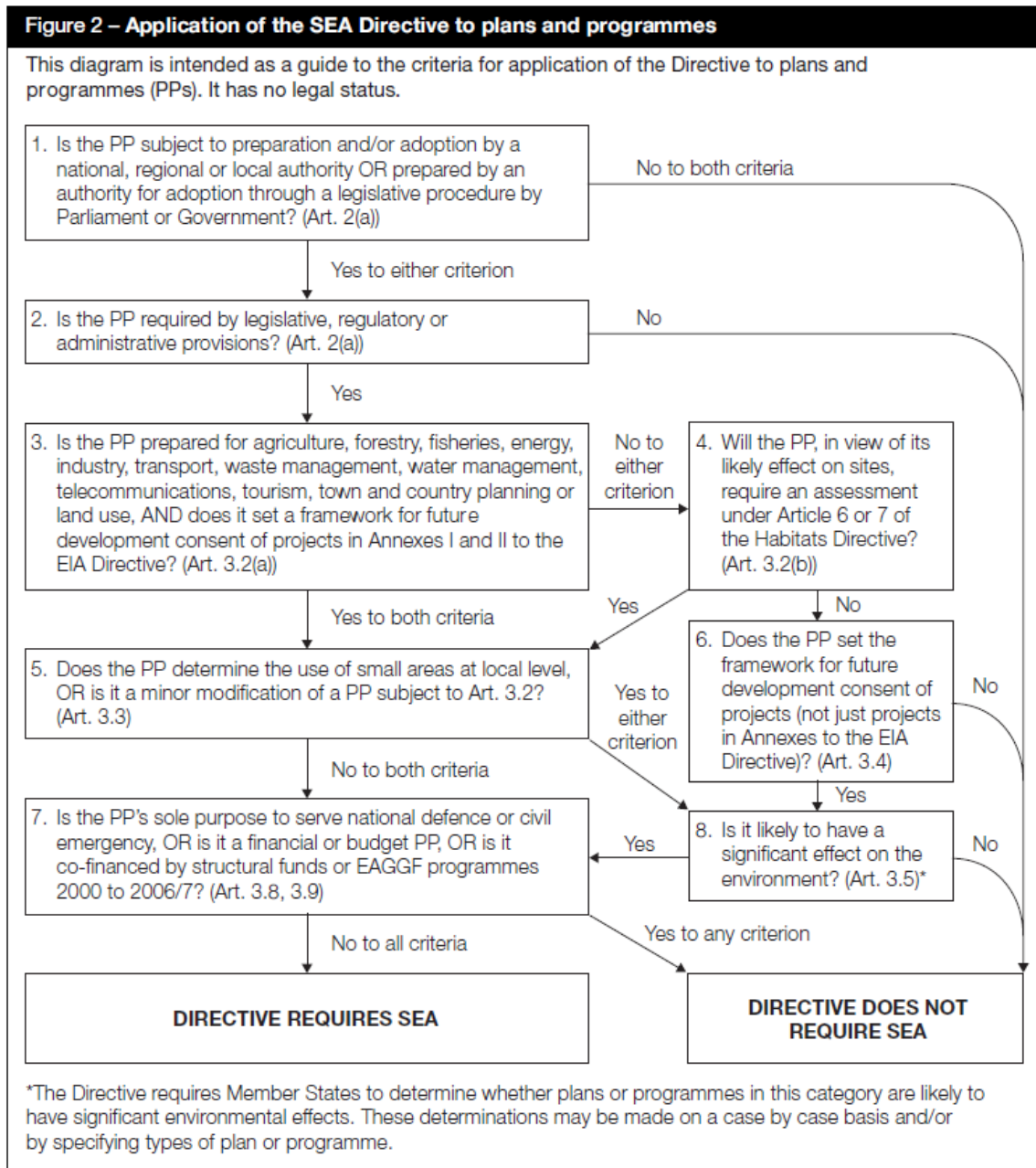


Table 1: Application of SEA Directive as shown in Appendix 1

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

Stage	Y/N	Explanation
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 Benson NDP Steering Group, a working group who report to the Benson 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>

<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))</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>The Benson NDP Review is prepared for town and country planning and land use and will not set out a framework for future development of projects that would require an EIA.</p>
<p>4. Will the Neighbourhood Plan, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.2 (b))</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>The Benson NDP is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites. See Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Opinion for the Benson NDP in Appendix 2.</p>
<p>5. Does the Neighbourhood Plan determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art. 3.2? (Art. 3.3)</p>	<p>Y</p>	<p>The Benson NDP Review will determine the use of sites/small areas at a local level.</p>
<p>6. Does the Neighbourhood Plan set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art 3.4)</p>	<p>Y</p>	<p>When made, the Benson NDP Review will include a series of policies to guide development within the village. This will inform the determination of planning applications providing a framework for future development consent of projects.</p>
<p>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,</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>N/A</p>

3.9)		
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 Benson Neighbourhood Development Plan Review

INTRODUCTION

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

LEGISLATIVE BASIS

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

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

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

“105.—(1) Where a land use plan—

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

² The South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (December 2020).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

EUROPEAN SITES

5. The HRA of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 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 Benson and have been taken into consideration:
 1. Little Wittenham SAC – Approximately 3km (South Oxfordshire District Council)
7. One of the best-studied great crested newt sites in the UK, Little Wittenham comprises two main ponds set in a predominantly woodland context (broadleaved and conifer woodland is present). There are also areas of grassland, with sheep grazing and arable bordering the woodland to the south and west. The River Thames is just to the north of the site, and a hill fort to the south. Large numbers of great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* have been recorded in the two main ponds, and research has revealed that they range several hundred metres into the woodland blocks.
8. The main pressures and threats to this site include the impacts of public access and disturbance, and invasive fish species upon great crested newt. With regard to the types of development that may be brought forward in the Local Plan, visitor disturbance could impact the site.
 2. Hartslock Wood SAC – Approximately 9km (South Oxfordshire District Council)
9. This site hosts the priority habitat type "orchid rich sites". The steep slopes of this site on the chalk of the Chilterns comprise a mosaic of

chalk grassland, chalk scrub and broadleaved woodland. The chalk grassland mostly consists of a mosaic of shorter-turf NVC type CG2 *Festuca ovina*–*Avenula pratensis* grassland and taller CG3 *Bromus erectus* grassland. The site supports one of only three UK populations of monkey orchid *Orchis simia*, a nationally rare Red Data Book species. The bulk of this site lies on a steep slope above the River Thames. Recent storms and landslips have resulted in a diverse age structure for the yew population. Open patches show a rich flora including local species such as southern wood-rush *Luzula forsteri*, wood barley *Hordelymus europaeus* and narrow-lipped helleborine *Epipactis leptochila*.

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

3. Aston Rowant SAC – Approximately 9km (South Oxfordshire District Council)

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.

4. Chiltern Beechwood SAC – Approximately 11km (South Oxfordshire District Council and Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire)

13. 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.

14. 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.

ASSESSMENT

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

- Physical loss of/damage to habitat;
- Non-physical disturbance e.g. noise/vibration or light pollution;
- Air pollution
- Increased recreation pressure; and
- Changes to hydrological regimes

16. The Benson NDP adopted in 2018 was supported by a Habitats Regulations Assessment³. The HRA considered whether the plan could have a significant effect on the integrity of important wildlife sites, either alone or in combination with other plans, including the South Oxfordshire Local Plan. The HRA assessed the Neighbourhood Plan as it proposed to allocate a total of 565 homes. It also took into account the emerging Local Plan at the time, which asked for 15% growth at Larger Villages such as Benson. The HRA assessed the likely significant effects on the European sites within 17km of Benson. It concluded that the Benson Neighbourhood Plan would not give rise to likely significant effects on European sites, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects, and Appropriate Assessment was therefore not required.

17. The Benson NDP Review is not proposing to allocate any new sites for development. The plan seeks to carry forward the existing allocations, propose settlement boundaries for Benson and Preston Crowmarsh, introduce a riverside policy, and update some of the existing policies. All of the allocation sites have outline planning permission and 2 out of the 3 sites are under construction.

³ [Benson Neighbourhood Plan Habitats Regulations Assessment \(July 2018\)](#)

18. In addition the South Oxfordshire Local Plan Habitats Regulations Assessment Report (March 2019) considered the Benson Neighbourhood Plan 2018 and the provision of 565 houses over the plan period of 2018-2033 that the neighbourhood plan was making. The granting of outline permissions has result in the number of homes to be delivered on the allocations totalling 559 homes, slightly less than was considered in the Local Plan Habitats Regulations Assessment Report. The Benson NDP Review is not seeking to increase the provision and therefore, the in-combination effects of the proposed growth in Benson has been considered.
19. The Plan does not allocate any additional sites for development or promote additional development beyond what is supported in the adopted Development Plan.

CONCLUSION

20. The Benson 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 Benson NDP Review is not required.

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

1. Characteristics of the Plan, having regard to:	
(a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;	The Benson NDP Review would, if adopted, form part of the Statutory Development Plan and as such does contribute to the framework for future development consent of projects. However, the Plan will sit within the wider framework set by the National Planning Policy Framework, the strategic policies of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.
(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;	A Neighbourhood Development Plan must be in conformity with the Local Plan for the District. It does not influence other plans. The Benson 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 Benson NDP Review. A basic condition of the Benson 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 Benson NDP Review is likely to be minimal due to the scale of development proposed.</p> <p>The Benson NDP area contains the following environmental designations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chiltern Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - Ancient Woodland - BAP priority habitats - Flood Zones - Protected species buffer - Tree Preservation Orders <p>There are the following SACs within 17km of the Benson NDP area: These are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Little Wittenham SAC – approx. 3km - Hartslock Wood SAC – approx. 9km

- Aston Rowant SAC – approx. 9km
- Chilterns Beechwood SAC – approx. 11km

There are also the following SSSI's located within the following distance of Benson NDP area:

- Swyncombe Downs SSSI – approx. 2km
- Little Wittenham SSSI – approx. 3km
- Warren Banks SSSI – approx. 3km
- Priest's Hill SSSI – approx. 5km

The plan will seek to carry forward the existing allocations, introduce settlement boundaries at Benson and Preston Crowmarsh, update existing policies and introduce a new riverside policy.

As the plan is proposing to carry forward existing allocations, which already benefit from planning permission, it is considered that the effects of the proposals are not likely to be significant.

The plan also proposes a settlement boundary to define the built-up areas of Benson and Preston Crowmarsh. 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.

Careful consideration of the proposed settlement boundary in relation to how South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 guides the location and scale of development indicates that the proposed boundaries merely aid the interpretation of existing policies.

	<p>In relation to the Benson, 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: iii) it is development within the existing builtup 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>In relation to Preston Crowmarsh, Policy H16 in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 035 sets out:</p> <p><i>‘1. Within Smaller Villages and Other Villages, development should be limited to infill and the redevelopment of previously developed land or buildings.’</i></p> <p>The proposed boundary does not exclude any sites that could be considered as within the existing built-up area.</p> <p>The Benson NDP Review area also contains the following designations:</p> <p><i>Conservation areas (Benson and Preston Crowmarsh)</i> <i>Listed buildings</i> <i>Archaeological constraints</i></p> <p>We are of the opinion the Neighbourhood Plan does not propose any development that is likely to harm these designations as the plan seeks to conserve the village, its character and setting. The policies in the Neighbourhood Plan will require these designations to be protected and therefore there would not be likely significant effects to the environment.</p>
(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of	The proposed development in the Benson NDP Review has been judged not to have an impact on Community legislation.

Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).	
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 Benson NDP is likely to have modest but enduring positive environmental effects. The effects are not likely to be reversible as they relate to development. However, they will be of a local scale through limited infill sites within the village boundaries.</p> <p>It is clear that the main effect on the parish will be the impact of the settlement boundaries. 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. Existing 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> <p>As the allocations are being carried forward from the made Benson NDP, therefore we do not consider that these will have an effect.</p>
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;	It is intended that the positive social effects of providing residential development through the existing allocations will have positive cumulative benefits for the area.
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects;	The effects of the Plan are unlikely to have transboundary ⁴ impacts.
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);	The policies in the plan are unlikely to present risks to human health or the environment.

⁴ Transboundary effects are understood to be in other Member States.

<p>(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);</p>	<p>The Benson NDP Review relates to the parish of Benson, which includes the villages of Benson and Preston Crowmarsh. The Benson NDP Review is not proposing any new development, therefore the potential for environmental effects is likely to be small and localised.</p>
<p>(f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: (i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; (ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or (iii) intensive land-use; and</p>	<p>The Benson 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 - Conservation Areas (Benson and Preston Crowmarsh) - Chilterns AONB - Ancient Woodland - Tree Preservation Orders <p>There are also the following SSSI's located within the following distance of Benson NDP area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Swyncombe Downs SSSI – approx. 2km - Little Wittenham SSSI – approx. 3km - Warren Banks SSSI – approx. 3km - Priest's Hill SSSI – approx. 5km <p>The Benson NDP Review 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 carried forward site allocations, 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, the conservation areas, and the AONB setting.</p> <p>In relation the site allocations, these are being carried forward from the made Benson NDP. All the sites already benefit from outline planning permission, with 2 of the 3</p>

sites currently being built out. As such, the continuation of the allocations in the Benson NDP Review are not considered to create significant effects.

The SACs and SSSI are located outside the NDP designated area. Little Wittenham SAC is the closest SAC to the designated neighbourhood area, approximately 3km from the neighbourhood plan boundary. Swyncombe SSSI is the closest SSSI to the neighbourhood area, approximately 2km from the Benson NDP area.

The above designations are outside of the built-up areas of the villages. The principles guiding development in the NDP includes catering growth in a manner that respects Benson's setting in the rural landscape and its close association within the River Thames. Taking into consideration the progress on the existing site allocations, with building works taking place on some sites, they are therefore not considered to cause likely significant effects.

The HRA Screening Assessment in appendix 2 concluded that: The Benson 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 Benson Neighbourhood Development Plan Review is not required.

The main vulnerability of the parish is the impact of householder and small scale developments within the village boundaries on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, listed buildings and archaeological sites. However, given the proposed settlement boundaries merely add detail and aid the interpretation of the existing Local Plan policies, it is considered that the effects of the proposals in the plan are not likely to be significant.

The objectives of the Benson NDP Review set out how the plan will cater for growth in a manner which conserves and enhances

	<p>heritage within the neighbourhood area. The 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>Environmental quality standards or limit values are not considered likely to be significantly affected by the Benson NDP Review.</p> <p>In light of the modifications proposed in the Benson NDP Review, 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 Benson NDP designation 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 villages of Benson and Preston Crowmarsh are not within AONB, and the existing allocations are not within the AONB. Therefore, it is considered that the effects predicted are not likely to be significant.</p>

Appendix 4 – Statutory Consultee Responses

NATURAL ENGLAND

Date: 19 April 2022
Our ref: 386905
Your ref: 20220315



South Oxfordshire District Council
135 Eastern Avenue
Milton Park
Milton
OX14 4SB

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

BY EMAIL ONLY

T 0300 060 3900

Dear Rosalynn

Benson Neighbourhood Plan Review- SEA Screening Opinion

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 23 March 2022 which was received by Natural England on the same date.

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

Screening Request: Strategic Environmental Assessment

It is our advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that, in so far as our strategic environmental interests (including but not limited to statutory designated sites, landscapes and protected species, geology and soils) are concerned, that there are unlikely to be significant environmental effects from the proposed plan.

Neighbourhood Plan

Guidance on the assessment of Neighbourhood Plans, in light of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (as amended), is contained within the [National Planning Practice Guidance](#). The guidance highlights three triggers that may require the production of an SEA, for instance where:

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

We have checked our records and based on the information provided, we can confirm that in our view the proposals contained within the plan will not have significant effects on sensitive sites that Natural England has a statutory duty to protect.

We are not aware of significant populations of protected species which are likely to be affected by the policies / proposals within the plan. It remains the case, however, that the responsible authority should provide information supporting this screening decision, sufficient to assess whether protected species are likely to be affected.

Notwithstanding this advice, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all potential environmental assets. As a result the responsible authority should raise environmental issues that we have not identified on local or national biodiversity action plan species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites or local landscape character, with its own ecological and/or landscape advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local landscape and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by this plan, before determining whether an SA/SEA is necessary.

Please note that Natural England reserves the right to provide further comments on the environmental assessment of the plan beyond this SEA/SA screening stage, should the responsible authority seek our views on the scoping or environmental report stages. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make.

For any queries relating to the specific advice in this letter only please contact Laura Elphick at laura.elphick@naturalengland.gov.uk. For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Yours faithfully

Laura Elphick
Sustainable Development Lead Adviser
Thames Solent Team

From: Elphick, Laura <Laura.Elphick@naturalengland.org.uk>
Sent: 29 April 2022 09:32
To: Whiteley, Rosalynn
Subject: RE: 20220315 Benson NDP SEA Screening Opinion

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

****EXTERNAL****

Dear Rosalynn

I am sorry for the confusion over this. I can confirm having reviewed the Screening Opinion that the comments in my letter are applicable to both the SEA and the HRA assessment.

Kind regards

Laura

HISTORIC ENGLAND

From: Winter, Edward <Edward.Winter@HistoricEngland.org.uk>
Sent: 20 April 2022 11:11
To: Whiteley, Rosalynn
Subject: RE: Benson Neighbourhood Plan Review - SEA Screening Opinion - Please reply by 20 April

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

****EXTERNAL****

Dear Rosalynn

Thank you for consulting Historic England on the Benson Neighbourhood Plan Review - SEA Screening Opinion.

Historic England agrees with South Oxfordshire District Council's opinion that SEA is not required.

Kind regards

Edward Winter LLB MA MRTPI
Historic Environment Planning Adviser
Regions Group (London & South East)
Historic England, Floor 4, The Atrium, Cannon Bridge House, 25 Dowgate Hill, London, EC4R 2YA
07557 831241