

# Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan Review

Environmental Report

June 2022



## Quality information

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# Non-Technical Summary

AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan Review (WNPR).

The WNPR is being prepared by Wheatley Parish Council, under the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 and in the context of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan (2020). Once 'made' the WNPR will have material weight when deciding on planning applications, alongside the South Oxfordshire Local Plan.

SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and maximising positive effects. Central to the SEA process is publication of an Environmental Report alongside the draft plan that presents certain required information. The aim is to inform the consultation and, in turn, plan finalisation.

Preparing the Environmental Report essentially involves answering three questions:

1) What has plan-making / SEA involved **up to this point?**

- including in relation to 'reasonable alternatives'.

2) What are the SEA findings **at this stage?**

- i.e. in relation to the draft plan.

3) What happens **next**

## This Environmental Report

This is the Non-Technical Summary (NTS) of the Environmental Report for the WNPR, in which the three questions are answered in turn. Firstly, there is a need to set the scene further by answering the question: What's the scope of the SEA?

## What is the scope of the SEA?

The scope of the SEA is reflected in a list of topics and objectives, which, taken together indicate the parameters of the SEA and provide a methodological 'framework' for assessment. The following topics form the core of the framework:

- Air quality
- Biodiversity
- Climate change
- Community wellbeing
- Heritage
- Landscape
- Land, soil and water resources
- Transport

## Plan making/ SEA up to this point

An important element of the required SEA process involves assessing **reasonable alternatives** in time to inform development of the draft plan, and then publishing assessment findings in the Environmental Report.

As such, Part 1 of this report explains how work was undertaken to develop and assess a 'reasonable' range of alternative approaches to the allocation of land for housing.

The process of arriving at reasonable alternatives involved a process of considering the strategic context ('top down' factors), alongside understanding of the sites available and in contention for allocation ('bottom up' factors). The process is set out in Section 5.

Ultimately two reasonable alternatives for housing were identified as reasonable and so warranting formal assessment under the SEA framework – see Table A.

*Table A. The reasonable alternatives*

Site		Use(s)	Number of homes	
			Option 1	Option 2
Completions and commitments*		Housing	175	
OBU Wheatley Campus			500	
Allocation s	West of Asda	Housing		
	Green Belt Parcel 8	Mixed use	~35	0
	Green Belt Parcel 9 (northern part)		0	55
<b>Total homes (net increase) 2011 - 2033</b>			<b>710</b>	<b>730</b>

\*1<sup>st</sup> April 2021

## Assessment findings at this stage

Part 2 of this report presents an assessment of the WNPR as a whole, as it stands at the current time (consultation on the pre-submission plan).

Assessment findings are presented as a series of narratives under the SEA framework.

### Assessment methodology:

The table below presents a summary of the reasonable alternatives appraisal. Within each row of the table, the performance of each of the reasonable alternatives is categorised in terms of significant effects using **red** / **green**,<sup>1</sup> and the scenarios are also ranked in order of preference (where 1 is judged best). Also, '=' is used to denote instances where it not possible to differentiate the alternatives.

The assessment reaches the following overall conclusions (see overleaf):

<sup>1</sup> **Red** indicates a significant negative effect; and **green** a significant positive effect

*Table B. Alternatives assessment findings*

Topic	Rank of performance/ categorisation of effects	
	Option 1 GB Parcel 8	Option 2 GB Parcel 9
Air quality	2	★1
Biodiversity	=	=
Climate change	=	=
Community wellbeing	2	★1
Historic environment	=	=
Landscape	=	=
Land, soil & water resources	=	=
Transportation	=	=
<p><b>Summary commentary</b></p> <p>The assessment shows Option 2 is best-performing in relation to the air quality and community wellbeing topics. Option 2 is more likely to support WNPR objectives by delivering mixed-use development to the east of the village.</p> <p>However, it is for the decision-maker (also consultees), not this assessment, to assign weight to the various pros and cons and then arrive at a conclusion on which scenario is best-performing overall.</p>		

The plan-makers responded to the reasonable alternatives assessment as follows:

*“Option 2 is the preferred option, in accordance with the alternatives assessment findings. Option 2 is found to perform well in terms of a number of objectives, in particular the socio-economic objectives, given the potential to deliver upon the objective of village ‘rationalisation’.*

*With regards to Option 1, the assessment shows this option to perform poorly. It is also noted that the assumption underpinning the assessment - namely that the site would be made available for mixed use development, thereby enabling employment uses lost through the redevelopment of Littleworth Industrial Estate to be relocated - may well not hold true.”*

## Assessment findings at this stage

Part 2 of the Environmental Report presents an assessment of the draft WNPR as a whole, as it stands at the current time (consultation on the pre-submission plan).

Assessment findings are presented as a series of narratives under the SEA framework. The assessment reaches the following overall conclusions:

- **Significant positive effects** are anticipated in relation to the community and wellbeing SEA theme as a result of the delivery of employment development alongside housing growth and buffer provided to better secure housing delivery. The potential for improved connectivity throughout the village via a green route

also has the potential to deliver significant positive effects supporting wider health, community, accessibility, biodiversity, landscape and active travel objectives.

- **Minor positive effects** are therefore predicted for the WNPR in relation to transportation, delivering coordinated development that is well connected, addressing parking and congestion issues where possible, and supporting a modal shift.
- **Uncertain minor positive effects** are predicted on landscape and historic environment given the unconstrained nature of Village Enhancement Sites and limited contribution of sites to the Green Belt. Furthermore, opportunities exist in terms of enhancement of assets and the wider public realm, however there is a level of uncertainty at this stage.
- **Minor negative effects** are anticipated in relation to land and soil resources, given an element of greenfield (and potential high-quality agricultural land) development. However, it is recognised that this is largely reflective of a lack of suitable alternative and available brownfield sites.
- **Neutral effects** are concluded in relation to climate change and biodiversity, predominantly reflecting the potential for connected and resilient development, and the low level of growth proposed. However potential opportunities surrounding biodiversity net-gain requirements could lead to minor positive effects in the longer term, and therefore a level of uncertainty has been concluded at this stage. Broadly neutral effects are concluded in relation to water resources and air quality, with no significant deviation from the baseline anticipated.

The assessment set out two recommendations for improving the sustainability performance of the current draft of the WNPR, as follows:

- Policy EN1 supports “net gains in biodiversity, through the creation of new habitats, the enhancement of existing sites, and the development and implementation of ecological management plans”. Given that there is now a mandatory requirement for 10% biodiversity net gain, it is recommended that Policy EN1 seeks to support net gains in biodiversity that exceed 10%, recognising that 10% is now the baseline. The policy could go further by setting out support for 20% net gain. Setting this ambitious target could lead to significant positive effects for biodiversity.
- Numerous biodiversity assets are identified through the WNPR. These important biodiversity features arguably could benefit from being listed within Policy EN1 (Biodiversity), to ensure development proposals are required to consider, and plan for the biodiversity assets present in the area, supporting connectivity. This would strengthen the WNPR, ensuring that adverse effects on biodiversity are resisted, having a long-term positive effect on the quality of the local biodiversity resource.

## Next steps

This Environmental Report is published alongside the pre-submission version of the WNPR. Following consultation, any representations made will be considered by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, when finalising the plan for submission.

The 'submission' version of the plan will then be submitted to South Oxfordshire District Council. The plan and supporting evidence will be then published for further consultation, and then submitted for examination.

If the outcome of the Independent Examination is favourable, the WNPR will then be subject to a referendum, and the plan will be 'made' if more than 50% of those who vote are in support.



# 1. Introduction

## Background

- 1.1 AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan Review (WNPR).
- 1.2 The WNPR is being prepared by the community through the Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, under the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 and in the context of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan (2020). Once 'made' the WNPR will form part of the Development Plan for South Oxfordshire and will supersede the adopted Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan (2021).
- 1.3 SEA is a required process for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and maximising positive effects.<sup>2</sup>

## SEA explained

- 1.4 It is a requirement that the SEA process is undertaken in-line with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.
- 1.5 In-line with the Regulations, a report (known as the Environmental Report) must be published for consultation alongside the draft plan that "identifies, describes and evaluates" the likely significant effects of implementing "the plan, and reasonable alternatives". The report must then be taken into account, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.
- 1.6 More specifically, the Report must answer the following three questions:
  1. What has plan-making / SEA involved up to this point?
    - including in relation to 'reasonable alternatives'.
  2. What are the SEA findings at this stage?
    - i.e. in relation to the draft plan.
  3. What happens next?

## This Environmental Report

- 1.7 This report is the Environmental Report for the WNPR. It is published alongside the 'pre-submission' version of the Plan, under Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended).
- 1.8 This report answers questions 1, 2 and 3 in turn, to provide the required information. Each question is answered within a discrete 'part' of the report.
- 1.9 Before answering Q1, two further introductory sections are presented.

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<sup>2</sup> Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended) requires that each Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to the Local Authority alongside either: A) an environmental report; or, B) a statement of reasons why SEA is not required, prepared following a 'screening' process. The WNPR was subject to screening in 2022, on the basis of which it was determined that there is a requirement for SEA (i.e. the plan was 'screened-in').

## 2. The scope of the WNPR

### Introduction

- 2.1 This section considers the context provided by the South Oxfordshire Local Plan before setting out the WNPR vision and objectives.
- 2.2 The neighbourhood plan area is shown in Figure 2.1, covering the parish of Wheatley, including the small village of Littleworth, together with the built up part of the Oxford Brookes University campus and the two residential plots that lie in the parish of Holton.

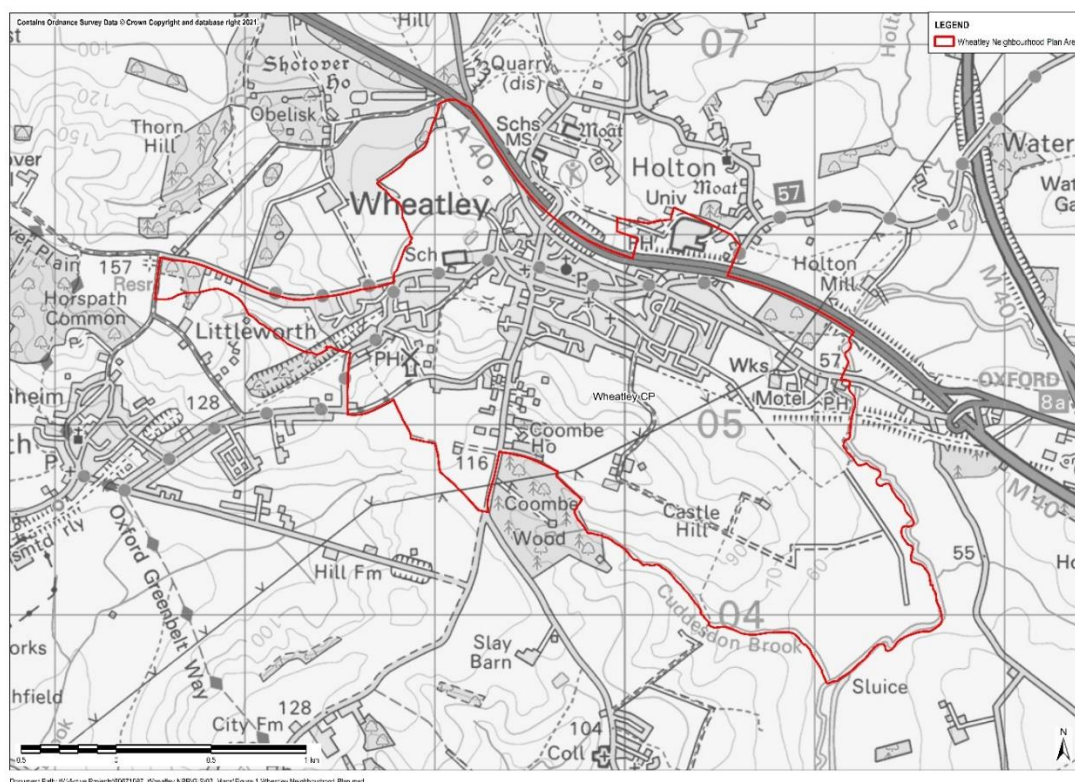


Figure 2.1 Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan area

### The Local Plan context

- 2.3 The South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (December 2020) (referred to here as the Local Plan) defines Wheatley as one of the District's "Larger Villages", with a wide range of services and facilities in sustainable locations. The Local Plan proposes the provision of 15% growth in the Larger Villages. Also, Littleworth - which adjoins Wheatley (see Figure 2.1 above) - has 'smaller village' status.
- 2.4 The overall strategy for housing (Policy STRAT1) is for larger villages to grow by around 15% over the plan period (see Table 4f of the Local Plan) and smaller villages to grow by 5% to 10% (Policy H8).
- 2.5 Local Plan Policy STRAT14 proposes a strategic allocation at 'Land at Wheatley Campus, Oxford Brookes University', which falls within the WNP area. Policy STRAT14 identifies the potential for the site to deliver approximately 500 homes.

- 2.6 Taking into consideration the strategic allocation, in addition to ‘completions and commitments’ (i.e. the number of homes built or with planning permission as of 1 April 2020) this leaves an outstanding target of 0 homes.
- 2.7 While there is now no strict requirement for the WNPR to provide for any new homes, the Council has made clear that it would support allocation of one or more additional sites, if proposed through the Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan, with Policy STRAT6 (Green Belt) identifying that *“detailed amendments to the Green Belt made by the Wheatley Neighbourhood Development Plan must be in compliance with requirements of the NPPF and the need identified within the Local Plan.”*

### WNPR vision and objectives

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

*“Revitalise the villages of Wheatley and Holton and thereby act as a catalyst for fulfilling current and future housing needs.”*

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

## 3. The scope of the SEA?

- 3.1 The aim here is to introduce the reader to the scope of the SEA, i.e. the sustainability topics and objectives that should be a focus of the assessment of the plan and reasonable alternatives.
- 3.2 The SEA Regulations require that “*when deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in the report, the responsible authority shall consult the consultation bodies*”. In England, the consultation bodies are the Environment Agency, Historic England, and Natural England.<sup>3</sup> As such, these authorities were consulted in April 2021. Appendix II presents further information.

### The SEA framework

- 3.3 Table 3.1 overleaf presents a list of topics and objectives that together form the back-bone of the SEA scope. Together they comprise a ‘framework’ under which to undertake assessment.

*Table 3.1: The SEA framework*

SEA theme	SEA objective
Air quality	Improve air quality in the WNPR area and minimise and/or mitigate against all sources of environmental pollution.
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Protect and enhance all biodiversity and geological features.
Climate change	Reduce the level of contribution to climate change made by activities within the WNPR area
	Support the resilience of the WNPR area to the potential effects of climate change, including flooding
Health and wellbeing	Improve the health and wellbeing of residents within the Neighbourhood Plan Area.
Community wellbeing	Ensure growth in the WNPR area is aligned with the needs of all residents, improving accessibility, anticipating future needs and specialist requirements, and supporting cohesive and inclusive communities
Historic environment	Protect, maintain and enhance the heritage resource, including the historic environment and archaeological assets located within and within the setting of the WNPR area.
Landscape	To protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape and villagescape.
	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land.
Land, soil and water resources	Promote sustainable waste management solutions that encourage the reduction, re-use and recycling of waste.
	Use and manage water resources in a sustainable manner.
Transport	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.

<sup>3</sup> These consultation bodies were selected “*by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities, [they] are likely to be concerned by the environmental effects of implementing plans and programmes*” (SEA Directive, Article 6(3)).

## **Part 1: What has plan-making/ SEA involved to this point?**

## 4. Introduction (to Part 1)

- 4.1 The Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) was made in May 2021. Shortly after, work on the Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan Review (WNPR) commenced and has included the preparation of a Village Design Guidance & Codes Document (AECOM 2021), along with other new/ updated evidence to help inform the Plan review.
- 4.2 However, the aim here is not to provide a comprehensive explanation of work to date. Rather, the aim is to explain work undertaken to develop and appraise **reasonable alternatives**.
- 4.3 More specifically, this part of the report presents information on the consideration given to reasonable alternative approaches to addressing a particular issue that is of central importance to the plan, namely the allocation of land for affordable housing, or affordable housing scenarios.

### Who's responsibility?

- 4.4 It is important to be clear that:
- **Defining scenarios** - is ultimately the responsibility of the plan-maker, although the SEA consultant (AECOM) is well placed to advise.
  - **Assessing scenarios** - is the responsibility of the SEA consultant.
  - **Selecting a preferred scenario** - is the responsibility of the plan-maker.

### Structure of this part of the report

- 4.5 This part of the report is structured as follows:
- **Chapter 5** - explains the process of defining scenarios;
  - **Chapter 6** - presents the outcomes of assessing scenarios;
  - **Chapter 7** - explains reasons for selecting the preferred scenario.

# 5. Defining scenarios

## Introduction

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

## Strategic issues

- 5.3 Firstly, there is a need to reiterate the context provided by the South Oxfordshire Local Plan, as already discussed above (Section 2.2). The key message is that: there is no strict requirement to allocate land for housing through the WNPR in light of the strategic allocation at Oxford Brookes University (Policy STRAT4) for 500 homes.
- 5.4 Nonetheless, the Local Plan is supportive of allocation of land for housing through the WNPR.
- 5.5 Secondly, there is a need to discuss further the established vision for Wheatley, and the objectives that have been established for the WNP, and carried forward through the WNPR. In particular, a key element of the vision involves ‘rationalisation’ of land uses leading to village enhancement, with the existing employment site at Littleworth redeveloped for housing, as set out within the adopted WNP (2021). To address this employment deficit, commercial businesses and non-retail businesses will be relocated where practical to the eastern perimeter of the village.
- 5.6 Also, there is also an established need for affordable housing in the shorter term, i.e. ahead of housing at the Wheatley Campus strategic allocation (note - although the site has planning permission, this is only outline and the site currently does not have a buyer. The timing of delivery is therefore uncertain).

## Site options

- 5.7 The second step involved identifying and assessing the site options that are potentially in contention for allocation through the WNPR.
- 5.8 The SEA for the WNP (2019) considered site options under three sub-headings:
- Littleworth industrial area
  - Green Belt sites
  - Other site options
- 5.9 These three sub-headings have been revisited below to reflect the current situation (May 2022) in terms of site availability.

### Littleworth industrial area

- 5.10 Littleworth industrial area (also known as site WHE22) - a small site comprising an industrial/commercial area, as well as rising and well vegetated land to the rear of the existing buildings. Redevelopment of this site was a key objective for the Parish, with the site allocated in the adopted Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan (2021) for “residential purposes”. Therefore, there is no need to consider this site further through the Plan review. However, consideration should be given to the deficit in employment land which now exists in light of the allocation of WHE22 through the adopted Plan, without the allocation of Village Enhancement Sites.

### Green Belt sites

- 5.11 An important starting point, when considering Green Belt sites potentially in contention for allocation through the WNPR, was the South Oxfordshire Green Belt Study (2015),<sup>4</sup> which identified several parcels of land surrounding Wheatley as ‘reflecting few functions of the Green Belt’ - see Figure 5.2. Other Green Belt parcels - noting that all land surrounding the Wheatley falls within the Oxford Green Belt - can be screened out of further consideration.<sup>5</sup>
- 5.12 Of the five Green Belt parcels identified in Figure 5.3, the following three were ruled out in 2019, and this remains the case:
- Green Belt parcel 7 – has now been built-out.
  - Green Belt parcel 10 - is subject to a notable constraint in that it is known to be at risk from surface water flooding, and is now used for surface water attenuation. The site could feasibly have some development capacity, but this is likely to be very limited, and in any case the surface water flood risk issue means that the site performs relatively poorly.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/evidence-studies>

<sup>5</sup> This is because it would be difficult or impossible to demonstrate the ‘exceptional circumstances’ necessary to enable release of other sites from the Green Belt, in the knowledge that there are alternative sites that perform fewer Green Belt functions.

<sup>6</sup> In July 2012 there was an intense, short rainstorm that caused flooding in the Wheatley. Water ran off the fields to the south of Beech Road, pooling to the south of Beech Road (within WHE13a) and then flooding houses in Beech Road, before then flowing further north to flood properties in Roman Road and eventually Ambrose Rise. To reduce the flood risk, the local farmer (Castle Hill Farm) made the field to the south of Beech Road (WHE13a) available and South Oxfordshire District Council excavated a number of large channels linked by small pipes across the slope and then a channel to take the flow down the slope and to a local existing drain.

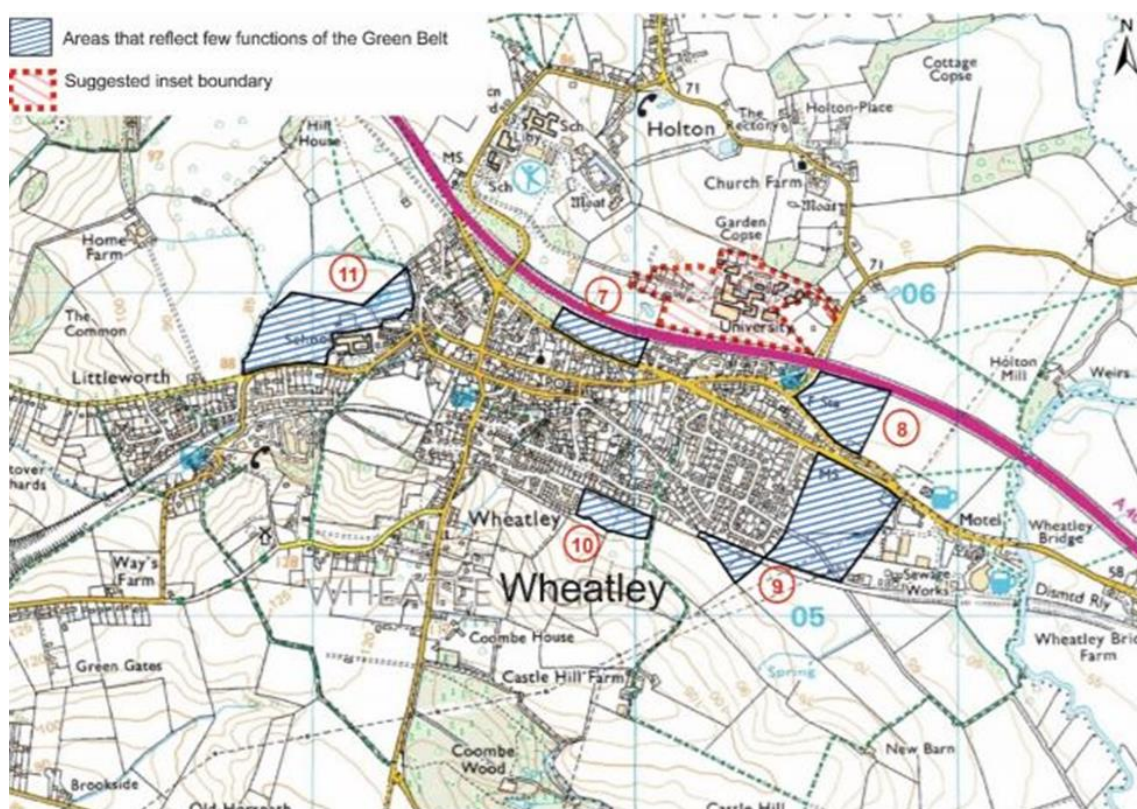


- Green Belt parcel 11 - comprises a primary school and its playing fields. There is no suggestion that the site is available for redevelopment.

5.13 With regards to the two remaining Green Belt parcels, the situation also remains the same as it was in 2019:

5.14 Green Belt parcel 8 - is a relatively simple entity, in that it comprises a single agricultural field. It is considered further in Section 5.4.

5.15 Green Belt parcel 9 - is more complex, comprising four distinct irregularly shaped fields, with the two southern having lower development potential. Specifically, taking each in turn: the field to the north of the dismantled railway is crossed by two power lines; whilst the small triangular field to the south of the dismantled railway is seemingly land-locked, i.e. access would not be achievable. Only the northern two fields of Site 9 are therefore taken forward for further consideration within Section 5.4.



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

### Other site options

5.16 Finally, in terms of the two smaller, less strategic site options:

5.17 Land at Park Hill (also known as site WHE28) – the three detached houses at this site have been demolished and an application for a 65-bedroom care home has been granted. This is now being built out. The site is therefore ruled-out for allocation through the WNPR.

5.18 West of Asda, South of London Road (also known as site WHE16) - this is a small site within the Green Belt at the eastern extent of the plan area, currently comprising six bungalows and some under-used open space. The site is considered to contribute little to Green Belt purposes, and development could serve to improve the natural and built environment. Taking each in turn,

recognising the limited access to recreation in the parish, part of the site could deliver recreational space, and there is the potential to create a green route from the east of the village (Littleworth to Asda), supporting active travel. In terms of the built environment, development could improve the road infrastructure and deliver landscaping to mitigate the detrimental influence of neighbouring land uses, namely employment, retail and the sewage works. It is considered further in Section 5.4.

## The reasonable alternatives

- 5.19 On the basis of the discussion above it is clear that there is a need to examine further the matter of which of the two Green Belt Parcels - namely Green Belt Parcel 8 or 9 - should be allocated in order to replace the industrial land lost at WHE22, alongside enabling housing.
- 5.20 N.B. The assumption, for the purposes of establishing reasonable alternatives is that either GB Parcel could and would deliver a mixed-use scheme, sufficient to replace the industrial land lost through redevelopment of the Littleworth Industrial Estate; however, it is noted that GB Parcel 8 has only been promoted for housing, to date.
- 5.21 This leads to the identification of two reasonable alternatives for housing growth - see Table 5.1. These are considered to be the 'reasonable' alternatives in that they are underpinned by a sound understanding of strategic ('top down') and site specific ('bottom-up') issues and opportunities, and also on the basis that they are suitably wide ranging and distinct. 'Unreasonable' options not examined further include:
- Lower growth - a marginally lower growth approach might feasibly be examined involving non-allocation of the 'West of Asda, South of London Road' site; however, on balance it is considered appropriate to hold allocation of this site 'constant' across the scenarios. This is a small site associated with limited strategic issues/impacts.
  - Higher growth - a large scheme involving allocation of both Green Belt Parcels would involve an unreasonably high quantum of housing growth, and it is not thought that there is a need / demand for expansion of the employment land offer, of this scale.

*Table 5.1 The reasonable alternatives*

			Option 1	Option 2
Completions and commitments*			175	
OBU Wheatley Campus		Housing	500	
Allocations	West of Asda	Housing		
	Green Belt Parcel 8		~35	0
	Green Belt Parcel 9 (northern part)	Mixed use	0	55
<b>Total homes (net increase) 2011 - 2033</b>			<b>710</b>	<b>730</b>

\*1<sup>st</sup> April 2021

## 6. Appraising reasonable alternatives

### Introduction

6.1 The aim of this chapter is to present assessment findings in relation to the reasonable alternatives introduced above.

### Alternatives assessment findings

6.2 Table 6.1 presents assessment findings in relation to the two reasonable alternatives for housing growth within Wheatley. Within each row of the table, the performance of each of the reasonable alternatives is categorised in terms of significant effects using **red** / **green**,<sup>7</sup> and the scenarios are also ranked in order of preference (where 1 is judged best).

6.3 Also, ' = ' is used to denote instances where it not possible to differentiate the alternatives.

*Table 6.1 Alternatives assessment findings*

Topic	Rank of performance/ categorisation of effects	
	Option 1 GB Parcel 8	Option 2 GB Parcel 9
Air quality	2	★1
Biodiversity	=	=
Climate change	=	=
Community wellbeing	2	★1
Historic environment	=	=
Landscape	=	=
Land, soil & water resources	=	=
Transportation	=	=

<sup>7</sup> Red indicates a significant negative effect; and green a significant positive effect

## Commentary

- Air quality - this is not considered to be a major issue, with no Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) designated locally; however, Option 1 performs relatively poorly due to its proximity to the A40. It is considered likely that residents of any scheme on this site would be subject to some degree of noise and potentially air pollution from the road; however, it is recognised that there would be good potential to avoid/mitigate impacts, including potentially by locating employment uses adjacent to the road.
- Biodiversity - neither of the Green Belt parcels that would deliver higher growth are thought to have notable biodiversity value, and so these options are judged to perform on a par with low growth. GB parcel 9 would seem more sensitive than GB parcel 8, on the basis that it is associated with some shrubby, recently established habitats, plus a narrow lane (not publicly accessible), associated with mature vegetation, runs through the site (dividing the two component fields). However, the difference between the two sites is considered marginal, especially once account is taken of the proposal to enhance the vegetated lane as part of an accessible green corridor (Green Route), and 'contour' development to provide a soft transition from the urban development to the Green Belt to the south.
- Climate change - the key consideration relates to climate change adaptation, and specifically the matter of flood risk, with none of the options associated with any climate change mitigation considerations. Flood risk is an issue for both of the GB parcels in question, in that a narrow band of flood risk runs along the London Road / Old London Road, clipping the southern edge of GB Parcel 8, and the northern edge of GB Parcel 9 (also affecting the West of Asda, South of London Road site, which is a constant across both scenarios). It is anticipated that development, or at least residential development, within the flood risk zone can be avoided; however, there is also a need to consider the possibility of the road flooding, leading to difficulties with access/egress. GB Parcel 9 may lend itself to two points of access (the feeder road which already services the existing industrial area, and the London Road to the north) helping to allay any concerns.
- Community and wellbeing - a mixed use scheme at GB Parcel 9 would deliver on the objective of 'village rationalisation' in a way that a mixed-use scheme at GB Parcel 8 would not. There would be a clear logic to the layout of Wheatley, with all major employment uses focused at the eastern extent of the village, and the rest of the village given over to residential, community and small-scale employment. Development at GB Parcel 9 would also contribute significantly to the ambition of delivering a new green corridor (Green Route), through Wheatley. The narrow lane that runs through the site would be made publicly accessible, thereby greatly increasing the potential for residents to walk or cycle to the Asda store, at the village's eastern extent, and the River Thames corridor beyond. Further community benefits could be delivered at GB Parcel 9 through new burial space. GB Parcel 9 has been identified as more suitable than GB Parcel 8 (when judged against criteria covering matters including access and setting); however, this is highly uncertain.

Finally, there is a need to consider the local housing needs, and highlight the merit of Option 2 in delivering higher growth; however, this is a relatively marginal consideration, as the Wheatley Campus strategic allocation should shortly begin to deliver new homes. Nonetheless, while the OBU site does have outline planning permission, it is noted that the site is currently experiencing delivery

issues. (N.B. given a strong local housing market there is not considered to be any concern that a higher growth approach through the WNPR could lead to a risk of delayed build-out of allocated sites).

- Historic environment - neither site is thought to be subject to any notable heritage constraint. Site allocations are located to the east of the village which is 20<sup>th</sup> Century, distant from the Wheatley Conservation Area. It is also assumed that neither site hold any archaeological potential.
- Landscape - the SODC GB Study (2015) identified GB Parcels 8 and 9 as reflecting 'few functions' of the Green Belt, but that is not to suggest that they reflect no functions. Parcel 8 could well be the more sensitive site, from a Green Belt perspective, recognising that the new Green Belt boundary would be relatively weak (at the site's eastern extent); however, there is not firm evidence upon which to reach a conclusion. In more general landscape terms there is thought to be little to differentiate the sites, with both quite well screened at close proximity and not thought to contribute notably to any important longer distance views (notably from the footpaths that run up Castle Hill, to the south). With respect to land, soil and water resources, there is quite a strong likelihood that both sites comprise 'best and most versatile' (BMV) agricultural land, with the low resolution nationally available dataset suggesting a likelihood that the sites comprise land of 'grade 2' quality (and with neither site having been surveyed in detail the 'post 1988' criteria have been applied). Green Belt Parcel 9 is a larger site, such that there would be greater loss of agricultural land; however, the difference in scale is fairly marginal, and it is also noted that the site is not currently in agricultural use.
- Transportation - GB Parcel 9 would have two access points (one for housing and one for commercial), including access onto the London Road. Conversely, GB Parcel 8 would have only one access point, onto the narrower Old London Road. However, it is not clear that access to GB Parcel 8 is problematic, and the site would benefit from being in very close proximity to the OBU Wheatley Campus site, which is due to be redeveloped.

# 7. Developing the preferred approach

## Introduction

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

## The Parish Council's outline reasons

*“Option 2 is the preferred option, in accordance with the alternatives assessment findings. Option 2 is found to perform well in terms of a number of objectives, in particular the socio-economic objectives, given the potential to deliver upon the objective of village ‘rationalisation’.*

*With regards to Option 1, the assessment shows this option to perform poorly. It is also noted that the assumption underpinning the assessment - namely that the site would be made available for mixed use development, thereby enabling employment uses lost through the redevelopment of Littleworth Industrial Estate to be relocated - may well not hold true.”*

## **Part 2: What are the SEA findings at this stage?**

## 8. Introduction (to Part 2)

- 8.1 The aim of this section is to present an assessment of the current ‘pre-submission’ version of the WNPR.
- 8.2 The WNPR puts forward 21 policies to guide development in the Neighbourhood Plan area.
- 8.3 These policies are set out in Table 8.1 below.

*Table 8.1 WNPR policies*

<b>Policy no.</b>	<b>Title</b>
H1	Design and Character Principles
H2	Landscape Character
H3	Mix and Size of New Housing
H4	In-fill and Self Build Dwellings
P1	Parking provision
T1	Impact of Development on the Road Network
SCI1	Safeguarding Community Facilities
SCI2	Improvement to Community Facilities
B1	Burial Provision
VCE1	Wheatley Village Centre
E1	Supporting Wheatley’s Economy
EN1	Biodiversity
HE1	Historic Environment
DQS1	Individual and Community Energy Projects
SPOBU	WHE25
GBBA1	Green Belt Boundary Amendments
SPES1	WHE16
SPES2	WHE22
SPES3	WHE15
SPES4	WHE17
SPGR	Green Route



## Methodology

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

- Air quality
- Biodiversity
- Climate change
- Community wellbeing
- Historic environment
- Landscape
- Land, soil and water resources
- Transport

8.5 Every effort is made to predict effects accurately; however, this is inherently challenging given the strategic nature of the policies under consideration and understanding of the baseline (now and in the future under a 'no plan' scenario) that is inevitably limited. Given uncertainties there is a need to make assumptions, e.g. in relation to plan implementation and aspects of the baseline that might be impacted. Assumptions are made cautiously, and explained within the text (with the aim of striking a balance between comprehensiveness and conciseness). In many instances, given reasonable assumptions, it is not possible to predict 'significant effects', but it is possible to comment on merits (or otherwise) of the draft plan in more general terms.

8.6 Finally, it is important to note that effects are predicted taking account of the criteria presented within Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. So, for example, account is taken of the probability and reversibility of effects as far as possible. Cumulative effects are also considered, i.e. the potential for the WNPR to impact an aspect of the baseline when implemented alongside other plans, programmes and projects.

# 9. Assessment of the Draft WNPR

## Introduction

- 9.1 The assessment is presented below under eight topic headings, reflecting the established assessment framework (see Section 3). A final section (Chapter 10) then presents overall conclusions and recommendations.

## Air quality

- 9.2 Air Quality has been recorded by SODC in Wheatley centre at three monitoring sites (S27, S78, S79), since 2006. In 2020, S27 recorded an annual mean level of 17.3µg/m<sup>3</sup> for NO<sub>2</sub> and 15.9µg/m<sup>3</sup> for S78 and S79; all of these are below the annual mean concentration limit of 40µg/m<sup>3</sup>. This demonstrates a continued reduction in pollution levels in Wheatley since 2017.
- 9.3 The WNPR reproduces extracts from OCC Local Transport Plan (LTP) (2012) which state that “Wheatley, near J8, M40, has some traffic management problems and is used by some drivers as a rat-run into Oxford to avoid congestion on main routes. Room for pedestrians and for access to the countryside could be improved. Noise from the A40 has been highlighted.” Wheatley is at one end of a Secondary Interurban Corridor [Oxford to M40] and at one end of a Primary Interurban Corridor [Aylesbury – M40 – Oxford]”, and as such, the OCC LTP (2012) highlights that while J8 of the M40 is not congested, “it does attract traffic through nearby village (i.e. Wheatley) for access to the M40”.
- 9.4 It is recognised that there is no specific policy on air quality within the WNPR. Indirectly however, a number of policies are seen to address the issue of congestion and traffic management, with focus placed on encouraging sustainable transport uses.
- 9.5 Policy T1 (Impact of Development on the Road Network) seeks to minimise the impact of existing and additional congestion on the road network, particularly the village centre. Specifically, “new or improved walking or cycling routes, [and] improvements to public transport routes” are supported through Policy T1. This is reiterated through Policy H1 (Design and Character Principles) encouraging developers to “incorporate”, “enhance”, and “connect” walking and cycling routes. Furthermore, “the incorporation of electric car charging points” (Policy T1) will contribute positively towards addressing impacts on general air quality.
- 9.6 Policy EN1 (Biodiversity) supports “net gains in biodiversity, through the creation of new habitats, the enhancement of existing sites, and the development and implementation of ecological management plans”. In this context the provision of new green space and planting through Policy EN1 will support the dissipation and absorption of pollutants.
- 9.7 In conclusion, the proposed policies should help to ensure that the proposed housing growth does not lead to a significant negative effect on air quality (i.e. **neutral effects** are predicted). Housing growth is supported at extremities of the village, but there should nonetheless be good potential to access the village centre by walking and cycling.

## Biodiversity

- 9.8 The key nationally designated site of biodiversity importance which falls within the Neighbourhood Plan area is Littleworth Brick Pit Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which is located within the Neighbourhood Plan area, to the southwest. Just outside of the Neighbourhood Plan area lie numerous other nationally designated biodiversity sites, namely Coombe Wood Ancient Woodland to the south, Lyehill Quarry SSSI to the northwest, Holton Wood SSSI to the north, and Brasenose Wood and Shotover Hill SSSI to the west.
- 9.9 SSSI Impact Risk Zones are a GIS tool/dataset which maps zones around each SSSI according to the particular sensitivities of the features for which it is notified. They specify the types of development that have the potential to have adverse impacts at a given location. Natural England is a statutory consultee on development proposals that might impact on SSSIs. Although the Neighbourhood Plan area is within the SSSI IRZs for these sites, the IRZs do not relate to the type of development to be proposed through the WNPR. Nonetheless, Policy SPES2 (WHE22) takes a precautionary approach to development at the Littleworth Industrial Area, given the rear of the site rises fairly steeply through well vegetated land up to a SSSI. In line with Policy SPES2, proposals must ensure “the integrity of the neighbouring SSSI is not compromised”.
- 9.10 More broadly, urban and rural biodiversity assets within and around the Neighbourhood Plan area are protected through Policy EN1 (Biodiversity). Policy EN1 supports “net gains in biodiversity, through the creation of new habitats, the enhancement of existing sites, and the development and implementation of ecological management plans”. Given that there is now a mandatory requirement for 10% biodiversity net gain,<sup>8</sup> it is recommended that Policy EN1 seek to support net gains in biodiversity that exceed 10%, recognising that 10% is now the baseline. The policy could go further by setting out support for 20% net gain. Setting this ambitious target could lead to significant positive effects for biodiversity.
- 9.11 The WNPR highlights the biodiverse nature of the area, supporting a great diversity of local habitats and consequent biodiversity. Notably, West Field is an area of ancient grassland within the WNPR area and the Shotover Target Conservation Area, valued for its classic ridge and furrow. This area is rich in biodiversity, changing between ridge and furrow, and there is also a stream from the springs which emerges from Shotover Hill. The WNPR recognises the significant wildlife value of Shotover through supporting text of Policy EN1, supporting “the aims of the Shotover Target Conservation Area”. While the WNPR could be strengthened by moving this text directly in to Policy EN1, Policy EN1 will deliver positive effects more broadly through supporting proposals that would “protect or enhance rural and urban biodiversity”, including “the enhancement of existing sites.”
- 9.12 Numerous biodiversity assets are further identified through the WNPR, including the presence of tree preservation orders (particularly around the OBU site), heathland and grassland (which in places displays classic ridge and furrow; as discussed above), ancient woodland species and reptile species (notably slowworm and common lizard). As above, these important biodiversity

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents/enacted>

features arguably could benefit from being listed within Policy EN1 (Biodiversity), to ensure development proposals are required to consider, and plan for the biodiversity assets present in the area, supporting connectivity. This would strengthen the WNPR ensuring that adverse effects on biodiversity are resisted, having a long-term positive effect on the local biodiversity resource.

- 9.13 Wheatley is a Larger Village inset within the Green Belt, and as such, the WNPR recognises that it “is important that new developments make and maintain provision for green space within the site.” In this context, Policies SPES1 – SPES4 provide specific criteria for the Wheatley’s Village Enhancement Sites. Policy SPES3 (WHE15), for example, requires development proposals to deliver a “wildlife corridor (at least 20m wide) with winding path and planting to eastern and western boundaries of the development to ensure gap between the rear gardens of The Avenue, proposed new housing and commercial development.” This will improve habitat connectivity; enhancing the village’s network of natural green corridors, enabling both wildlife and people to move through the landscape.
- 9.14 In conclusion, the growth strategy gives rise to relatively limited concerns, and a robust policy framework is proposed, therefore **uncertain neutral effects** are predicted. The level of uncertainty surrounds recommendations made above, with the potential for residual positive effects if adopted.

## Climate change

- 9.15 In terms of climate change mitigation, road transport is proportionally a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in the area. This is discussed under ‘Air quality’ above.
- 9.16 The WNPR further supports climate change mitigation through promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy. In this context, the WNPR states that “the community welcomes the development of innovative high-quality sustainable homes that can act as exemplars for other villages and towns, and for the country as a whole.” Proposals in Wheatley and Holton that promote community energy projects taking advantage of initiatives within the government’s Community Energy Strategy (including the Rural and Urban Community Energy Funds) will be supported through Policy DQS1 (Individual and Community Energy Projects). Policy DQS1 backs renewable energy projects where they “have regard to good quality existing design guidance provided by the South Oxfordshire Design Guide and the Chilterns Building Design Guide, and are appropriately located”.
- 9.17 The WNPR recognises that it is important that new developments make and maintain provision for green space. Policy EN1 (Biodiversity) supports “the protection and enhancement of urban and rural biodiversity”, and it is stressed through the WNPR that “Contributions and arrangements will be sought for management of spaces, expected to be carried out by SODC or Wheatley Parish Council.” Specifically, Policy SPES3 (WHE15) supports mixed-use development at Miss Tomb’s Field where it includes “enhancement of the public realm within the site through design and landscape measures, public open space and/or financial contributions, subject to viability.” Enhancements to GI networks will promote climate change mitigation through supporting carbon sequestration and promoting sustainable modes of transport; and climate

change adaptation through helping to limit the effects of extreme weather events and regulating surface water run-off.

- 9.18 In relation to flood risk in the Neighbourhood Plan area the addressing of issues linked to fluvial, groundwater and surface water flooding are likely to be supported by the provisions of the NPPF. Likewise, the flood risk, SuDS and surface water flooding policies proposed through the SODC Local Plan will further help limit adverse effects in this regard.
- 9.19 In conclusion, whilst the above approaches will contribute positively towards addressing climate change, these are not seen to be significant in the context of the SEA process. As such, the WNPR is predicted to have a **neutral effect** on climate change. There is the potential for some minor long term positive effects but these are uncertain at this stage and dependent on the implementation of proposed measures.

## Community wellbeing

- 9.20 While the OBU site (WHE25) is set to deliver a significant amount of housing growth in the area, there is currently uncertainty around delivery. Therefore, there remains pressure on land to provide additional housing requirements. As such, the WNPR's strategy is focused on intensification (including higher density) and partial redistribution and/or change of use of land. Policy GBBA1 (Green Belt Boundary Amendments) highlights that "detailed amendments to the Green Belt boundary have been made to accommodate allocations at WHE15, WHE16 and WHE17". This policy is underpinned by the recently adopted Local Plan which establishes the need for the release of Green Belt in Wheatley. Specifically, Policy STRAT6 identifies that "detailed amendments to the Green Belt made by the Wheatley Neighbourhood Development Plan must be in compliance with requirements of the NPPF and the need identified within the Local Plan."
- 9.21 Amending the Green Belt boundary in Wheatley allows for the WNPR to deliver the coordinated development of WHE15, WHE16, WHE17 and WHE22. WNPR Policies SPES1 – 4 set out the commercial and residential development that will be supported at these sites, in respect of each other and the provisions set out in Policy GBBA1 (Green Belt Boundary Amendments). The WNPR states that "Such a Village Enhancement Plan will provide housing to meet bespoke local needs and at the same time improve connectivity through the village, rationalise light industry and provide opportunities for employment at the expense of only a small loss of Green Belt."
- 9.22 In this context, four Village Enhancement Sites have been assigned for the following development:
- WHE15 for commercial development, housing and public open space;
  - WHE17 for commercial development;
  - WHE16 for residential development; and
  - WHE22 for conversion from light industrial to housing (as per the WNP).

- 9.23 Exceptional circumstances for Green Belt release in Wheatley also include “to enable development to take place to provide for a mix of uses to the benefit of existing and future residents”. In this context, the regeneration of sites WHE15, WHE16, and WHE17 as discussed above is expected to result in improved community cohesion, expanding the small community to the east of the village to deliver improved neighbourhood satisfaction. Site specific criteria is set out through Policies SPES1 – 4, which seeks to maximise positive effects in this respect. Notably, in accordance with Policy SPES3 (WHE15) “Recreational space [will be] allocated to merge with the adjacent Green Belt together with a games area adjacent to Elton Crescent” and proposals will also include “Enhancement of the public realm within the site through design and landscape measures, public open space and/or financial contributions, subject to viability.”
- 9.24 Accessible, connected neighbourhoods are further supported by Policy H1 (Design and Character Principles), Policy T1 (Impact of Development on the Road Network) and Policy SPRG (Green Route). Notably, Policy SPRG supports “proposals for the creation of a Green Route stretching from Littleworth in the west to the Asda supermarket in the east”. The Green Route would connect the whole village to retail, Primary school and recreational facilities, and is therefore a key consideration for the spatial strategy. Figure 11.1 of the WNPR document shows the location of site allocations in relation to the green route, with Policy SPES3 (WHE15) specifically requiring that proposals have “good Green Route access to the Primary School.” This opportunity for improved pedestrian and cycle accessibility throughout the village will support the health and well-being of residents by enhancing access to open space, facilitating improvements in levels of physical activity and enhancing social interaction between new and existing residents.
- 9.25 Policy H3 (Mix and Size of New Housing) also sets out criteria for new development, including ensuring that proposals provide details on how new development meet the needs of different groups in the community (including young people, local workers, small families, the elderly and older residents). In this context, Policy SPES1 (WHE16) requires “housing to be delivered in accordance with Policy H3”.
- 9.26 Wheatley provides important opportunities for local employment which is recognised through Policy E1 (Supporting Wheatley’s Economy). Policy E1 “supports the development of new businesses and the expansion and/or reconfiguration of existing businesses within the built-up area of Wheatley.” This includes a diverse mix of independent traders serving the local rural district.
- 9.27 However, in keeping with national trends in recent years, and the impact of COVID-19, the village has lost a number of its pubs and at present has only two restaurants. Policy VCE1 (Wheatley Village Centre) therefore seeks to enhance the viability and vitality of the village centre, requiring that “any new housing, retail, leisure and office development should be in locations which are in or adjacent to the village centre.” This will positively contribute towards maintaining Wheatley village centre as the heart of the community as a destination for shopping, employment and socialising. Industrial and office activity will be directed towards the eastern end of the village at the industrial estate which will be protected for employment.

- 9.28 The WNPR highlights the fact that constraints on land availability in Wheatley reduce opportunities to deliver new community facilities. Policy SCI1 (Safeguarding Community Facilities) therefore seeks to resist development proposals that will “result in the loss of an essential community facility or service.” Existing facilities, notably the Merry Bells and Wheatley Scout Movement, provide important community services in relatively outdated buildings. Policy SC12 (Improvement to Community Assets) supports opportunities to provide these services within improved facilities and additional community functions.
- 9.29 Community functionality is further supported through Policy H1 (Design and Character Principles), which states that “proposals must show clearly how the scale, mass, density, layout and design of the site, building or extension fits in with the character of the immediate area and wider context within the village”. This will ensure new development complements the existing village, increasing community cohesion and overall neighbourhood satisfaction, leading to significant positive effects on community and wellbeing.
- 9.30 A key issue for the Neighbourhood Plan area, highlighted repeatedly through consultation exercises, is the lack of burial ground space in the area. St. Mary’s CE Church is surrounded by an extensive cemetery which has served the community since 1857. However, the need for further burial capacity is now at a critical level and it is imperative that a new site (approx. 0.3 Ha) is found. Policy B1 (Burial Provision) therefore supports “proposals for the development of a natural burial ground, including any necessary, permanent ancillary structures for the management of the burial arrangements”. This is expected to lead to long term minor positive effects on the community, particularly considering the existing elderly population present. New burial space will improve overall neighbourhood satisfaction, principally for those who have been residing in the village for many years and feel an emotional attachment to the area.
- 9.31 In conclusion, the WNPR is predicted to have a **significant positive effect** on community wellbeing. It is thought that the WNPR will provide a robust development management policy framework for this topic, supporting the overall quality of life of residents.

## Historic environment

- 9.32 The WNPR seeks to preserve the designated historic heritage assets and their settings, both above and below ground including listed buildings, scheduled monuments and the conservation area. This is achieved through Policy HE1 (Historic Environment), which requires that these assets “as listed in Appendix 1 of the Plan, will be conserved and enhanced for their historic significance.” Policy HE1 further sets out considerations for “proposals for development that affect non-designated historic assets”. Consideration will be given to “the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset as set out in the NPPF”. Policy HE1 is therefore considered to lead to long term positive effects, ensuring that development proposals take into consideration the value of the assets present, and that adverse effects on designated heritage assets are resisted.

- 9.33 With a wealth of historic environment assets which are recognised as key contributors to the attractiveness of Wheatley, Policy H1 (Design and Character Principles) seeks to ensure that new development is well related to the existing settlement, and is also in keeping with surrounding residential properties. In line with Policy H1 new development must “respond to the historic grain of the development in the village, including its road and footpath network and historic property boundaries”. Additionally, Policy H1 requires that new development “be subservient in scale and, whether of a traditional or modern design, should draw from the local palette of vernacular building materials”. The promotion of high-quality design and layout which considers the surrounding environment will ensure the valued local character is maintained and enhanced, having a positive effect on local townscape.
- 9.34 The setting of historic environment will also be supported by the policies which seek to protect townscape and landscape quality. To this effect, Policy H2 (Landscape Character) requires that “new developments “fits in with the character of the immediate area and wider context within the village”. Furthermore, proposals will be supported “provided they are designed to enhance the setting of the conservation area and its settings.” Driving improvement/ enhancement of the historic environment is predicted to lead to long term positive effects on the local historic environment.
- 9.35 The Village Enhancement Sites (Policies SPES1 – SPES4) are not constrained by designated historic assets. The WNPR recognises the potential for the redevelopment of brownfield sites in the village to lead to positive effects on the historic environment. In this context, as set out above under the Landscape theme, Policy SPES2 (WHE22) highlights that the change of land use from industrial to residential may present the opportunity for “enhancement of the public realm within the site through design and landscape measures, public open space and/or financial contributions, subject to viability.” This is further reiterated through Policy SPES3 (WHE15) and SPES4 (WHE17).
- 9.36 In conclusion, the WNPR is predicted to have broadly neutral effects on the historic environment. While there are historic environment sensitivities present within the plan area, it is not considered that proposed site allocations are particularly constrained. Furthermore, the WNPR provides a robust framework in this respect.
- 9.37 In conclusion, the WNPR is predicted to have residual **uncertain minor positive effects** on the historic environment. This is given the absence of historic constraints in relation to Village Enhancement Sites, and the opportunities presented through redevelopment of brownfield land (i.e. enhancement of the public realm and improved accessibility and understanding of assets). There is however a level of uncertainty regarding the implementation of proposed measures, and specific design and layout of Village Enhancement Sites.



## Landscape

- 9.38 The Neighbourhood Plan area has a valued landscape and a rich historic environment, lying next to Shotover Country Park, entirely within the Green Belt, and surrounded by parkland and woodland which provide the setting of the Chilterns. In this context, the Parish Councils of Wheatley and Holton seek to progress the work already undertaken to preserve Viewing Corridors within the Neighbourhood Area. The WNPR highlights that the Parish Councils “will seek to encourage development proposals to take full account of the important views and landscapes that are in the district”. In this context, the WNPR further states that a number of development considerations will be supported, including the “redevelopment of a site that affords the opportunity to improve the visual aspect of the site and its surroundings” (the OBU Wheatley Campus site; not an allocation).
- 9.39 Policy H2 (Landscape Character) is therefore focused on protecting the local landscape, requiring that “development proposals should take account of their relationship with the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.” Policy H2 further seeks to ensure that development proposals take into account specific environmental assets, stating that proposals “should protect and enhance valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or of geological value together with soils subject to their compliance with other development plan policies”. As set out in supporting policy text, this includes several views unique to the village, including Castle Hill and the poplar ridge of “Cuddesdon on the hill” to the south, and towards the east is the Chiltern ridge.
- 9.40 In this context, Policy H1 (Design and Character Principles) requires that “proposals must show clearly how the scale, mass, density, layout and design of the site, building or extension fits in with the character of the immediate area and wider context within the village”. Developers are encouraged, through Policy H1, to adopt a layout which provides a high-quality landscape scheme” and proposals which “complement, enhance and reinforce the local distinctiveness of the village”. This will contribute towards minimising adverse effects on the landscape character, supporting local character and protecting important views.
- 9.41 In terms of the Village Enhancement Sites (Policies SPES1 – SPES4) the WNPR recognises the potential for the redevelopment of brownfield land in the village to lead to positive effects on the local landscape. In this context, Policy SPES1 (WHE16) supports development at The Bungalows’ Site provided “the development has no greater impact on the surrounding environment and where possible enhances the landscape and scenic beauty.” It is further considered through Policy SPES3 (WHE15) that a mixed development proposal may present the opportunity for “enhancement of the public realm within the site through design and landscape measures, public open space and/or financial contributions, subject to viability.” This is further reiterated through Policy SPES4 (WHE17).

9.42 In conclusion, the WNPR is predicted to have residual **uncertain minor positive effects** on landscape, given the redevelopment of brownfield land and opportunity presented for enhancement of the public realm. Furthermore, it is recognised that the SODC GB Study (2015) identified site allocations as reflecting ‘few functions’ of the Green Belt. There is however a level of uncertainty regarding the implementation of proposed measures, and specific design and layout of Village Enhancement Sites.

## Land, soil and water resources

9.43 In terms of the location of the best and most versatile agricultural land, a detailed classification has not been undertaken within the Neighbourhood Plan area. As such, there is a need to rely on the nationally available ‘Provisional Agricultural Land Quality’ national dataset. The provisional Agricultural Land Quality dataset shows that the WNPR area is predominately covered by Grade 3 agricultural land, however, the data does not differentiate as to whether this is Grade 3a (e.g. the best and most versatile) or lower quality 3b land. Therefore, it cannot be determined at this stage if the development of Village Enhancement Sites supported through the WNPR would result in the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land. However, it is important to note that, of the sites allocated for development in Policies SHES1-4, WHE16 and WHE22 consist of previously developed land; while WHE15/17 is not currently used for agricultural purposes and is already surrounded by development on three sides. The impact on agriculture should therefore be minimal.

9.44 Policy EN1 (Biodiversity) promotes “net gains in biodiversity, through the creation of new habitats and the enhancement of existing sites”. Enriched habitats and species and facilitating enhancements to green infrastructure provision in the area will support the quality of land and water resources. This will promote the ability of natural processes to support soil and water quality.

9.45 This is further supported through Policy H1 (Design and Character Principles) which requires development to “maximise the opportunities for open space”. Policy H1 further promotes development which encourages healthy and sustainable design and energy efficiency, which in turn will stimulate resilience to climate change. This is reinforced through Policy DQS1 (Individual and Community Energy Projects), and will help limit resource use.

9.46 In conclusion, the WNPR is predicted to have **minor negative effects** in relation to this SEA theme due to the potential permanent loss of best and most versatile agricultural land, given support for development of a greenfield site that may or may not comprise best and most versatile agricultural land, albeit the site is not currently in agricultural use.

## Transportation

- 9.47 The WNPR highlights that traffic congestion within Wheatley causes major inconvenience to road users, cyclists and pedestrians, and creates an unpleasant environment, particularly within the village centre. Policy T1 (Impact of Development on the Road Network) seeks to minimise the impact of existing and additional congestion on the road network through supporting the “provision of new or improved walking or cycling routes, improvements to public transport, and the incorporation of electric car charging points.” This is echoed through Policy H1 (Design and Character Principles), which states that “proposals should incorporate where possible walking and cycling routes, and where possible, enhance and connect existing walking and cycling routes”. Additionally, Policy E1 prioritises employment proposals which “do not generate any unacceptable traffic impacts.” It is considered that the policy framework will contribute towards improved movement and reduced congestion throughout the village.
- 9.48 As set out in the WNPR document, further pressure on parking facilities is a big issue for Wheatley, not only in the centre but also in the wider village. Policy P1 (Parking Provision) promotes “innovative and attractive arrangements” for car-parking, recognising that the use of ‘tandem’ parking does not benefit the village. The WNPR stresses the reality that both spaces are rarely used, resulting in on-street parking becoming the norm, enhancing levels of congestion. In line with Policy P1 new development will not necessitate large expanses of driveway, or ad hoc parking on grass verges or pavements. This aims to enhance access to the village centre for residents and visitors, and contribute to limiting bottlenecks of roads.
- 9.49 The WNPR provides specific criteria for the Village Enhancement Sites (Policies SPES1 - 4), identifying the key considerations at each location. In terms of transportation, Policies SPES1 – 3 all support proposals which “incorporate appropriate access from London Road [and Littleworth Road as appropriate] to ensure that the development is serviced adequately”. This will promote safe, sustainable access for residents throughout the village. Additionally, “good Green Route access to the Primary School” is supported at WHE15 through Policy SPE3. This is in line with the provisions set out in Policy SPGR (Green Route), and will improve the attractiveness of the existing cycle/footpath networks, encouraging new/existing residents to convert to cleaner modes of travel for local journeys.
- 9.50 The constrained nature of the roads in Littleworth is recognised through policy SPES1 (WHE16) which requires the “delivery of public parking for adjacent businesses that currently use the site for ad hoc parking (30+ cars) occupying approximately 0.07HA.” This will help to avoid on-street parking, supporting Policy P1 (Parking Provision) discussed above.
- 9.51 In conclusion, the WNPR is predicted to have a **minor positive effect** on transportation. It is thought that the WNPR will provide a robust development management policy framework for this topic, contributing positively towards addressing local congestion issues and upholding safe, accessible streets for walking and cycle use.

# 10. Conclusions and recommendations

## Conclusions at this stage

- 10.1 Overall, the draft Plan appraisal has served to highlight the potential for both positive and negative effects of significance.
- 10.2 **Significant positive effects** are anticipated in relation to the community and wellbeing SEA theme as a result of the delivery of employment development alongside housing growth to meet local needs. The potential for improved connectivity throughout the village via a green route also has the potential to deliver significant positive effects supporting wider health, community, accessibility, biodiversity, landscape and active travel objectives.
- 10.3 **Minor positive effects** are predicted for the WNPR in relation to transportation, delivering coordinated development that is well connected, addressing parking and congestion issues where possible, and supporting a modal shift.
- 10.4 **Uncertain minor positive effects** are predicted on landscape and historic environment given the unconstrained nature of Village Enhancement Sites and limited contribution of sites to the Green Belt. Furthermore, opportunities exist in terms of enhancement of assets and the wider public realm, however there is a level of uncertainty at this stage.
- 10.5 **Minor negative effects** are anticipated in relation to land and soil resources, given an element of greenfield (and potential high-quality agricultural land) development. However, it is recognised that this is largely reflective of a lack of suitable alternative and available brownfield sites.
- 10.6 **Neutral effects** are concluded in relation to climate change and biodiversity, predominantly reflecting the potential for connected and resilient development, and the low level of growth proposed. However potential opportunities surrounding biodiversity net-gain requirements could lead to **minor positive effects** in the longer term, and therefore a level of **uncertainty** has been concluded at this stage. Broadly **neutral effects** are concluded in relation to water resources and air quality, with no significant deviation from the baseline anticipated.

## Recommendations at this stage

10.7 Two recommendations have been made for improving the sustainability performance of the current draft of the WNPR. These are set out below:

1. Policy EN1 supports “net gains in biodiversity, through the creation of new habitats, the enhancement of existing sites, and the development and implementation of ecological management plans”. Given that there is now a mandatory requirement for 10% biodiversity net gain,<sup>9</sup> it is recommended that Policy EN1 seek to support net gains in biodiversity that exceed 10%, recognising that 10% is now the baseline.

The policy could go further by setting out support for 20% net gain. Setting this ambitious target could lead to significant positive effects for biodiversity.

2. Numerous biodiversity assets are identified through the WNPR. These important biodiversity features arguably could benefit from being listed within Policy EN1 (Biodiversity), to ensure development proposals are required to consider, and plan for the biodiversity assets present in the area, supporting connectivity. This would strengthen the WNPR, ensuring that adverse effects on biodiversity are resisted, having a long-term positive effect on the quality of the local biodiversity resource.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents/enacted>

## **Part 3: What are the next steps?**

## 11. Plan finalisation

- 11.1 This Environmental Report accompanies the Pre-Submission version of the WNPR for consultation.
- 11.2 Following consultation, any representations made will be considered by the WNPR Committee, when finalising the plan for submission.
- 11.3 The 'Submission' version of the plan will then be passed to South Oxfordshire District Council (alongside an Updated Environmental Report, if necessary). The plan and supporting evidence will then be published for a further consultation, and then subjected to Independent Examination.
- 11.4 At Independent Examination, the Neighbourhood Plan will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the South Oxfordshire District emerging Local Plan and extant Core Strategy.
- 11.5 If the subsequent Independent Examination is favourable, the WNPR will be subject to a referendum, organised by South Oxfordshire District Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the Neighbourhood Plan, then it will be 'made'. Once made, the WNPR will become part of the Development Plan for South Oxfordshire District, replacing the WNP in covering the defined Neighbourhood Plan Area.

## 12. Monitoring

- 12.1 The SEA regulations require 'measures envisaged concerning monitoring' to be outlined in this report.
- 12.2 It is anticipated that monitoring of effects of the Neighbourhood Plan will be undertaken by South Oxfordshire District Council as part of the process of preparing its Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).
- 12.3 The SEA has not identified any potential for significant negative effects that would require closer monitoring, led by the Parish Council.

# Appendices



# Appendix I: Meeting the Regulations

As discussed in Chapter 1 above, Schedule 2 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans Regulations 2004 (the Regulations) explains the information that must be contained in the Environmental Report; however, interpretation of Schedule 2 is not straightforward. Table AI.1 links the structure of this report to an interpretation of Schedule 2 requirements, whilst Table AI.2 explains this interpretation. Table AI.3 identifies how and where within this report the requirements have/ will be met.

*Table AI.1: Questions answered by this report, in-line with an interpretation of regulatory requirements*

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

**Table A1.2: Interpretation of the regulations**

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

**Table AI.3: ‘Checklist’ of how (throughout the SEA process) and where (within this report) regulatory requirements are met**

Regulatory requirement	Discussion of how requirement is met
<b>A) The Environmental Report must present certain information</b>	
1. An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme, and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;	Chapter 2 (‘What is the plan seeking to achieve’) presents this information.
2. The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme;	These matters have been considered in detail through scoping work, which has involved dedicated consultation on a Scoping Report.
3. The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;	The ‘SEA framework’ – the outcome of scoping – is presented within Chapter 3 (‘What is the scope of the SEA?’).
4. Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC.;	More detailed messages, established through a context and baseline review are also presented in Appendix II.
5. The environmental protection, objectives, established at international, Community or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental, considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;	The SEA framework is presented within Chapter 3 (‘What is the scope of the SEA’). Also, Appendix II presents key messages from the context review.  With regards to explaining “ <i>how...considerations have been taken into account</i> ”, Chapter 7 explains ‘reasons for supporting the preferred approach’, i.e. explains how/ why the preferred approach is justified in light of alternatives assessment.
6. The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors. (Footnote: These effects should include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects);	Chapter 6 presents alternatives assessment findings (in relation to housing growth, which is a ‘stand-out’ plan policy area). Chapters 9 presents an assessment of the draft plan.  With regards to assessment methodology, Chapter 8 explains the role of the SEA framework/scope, and the need to consider the potential for various effect characteristics/ dimensions.
7. The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme;	The assessment highlights certain tensions between competing objectives, which might potentially be actioned when finalising the plan, and specific recommendations are made in Section 9.

Regulatory requirement	Discussion of how requirement is met
8. An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information;	Chapters 4 and 5 deal with 'Reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with', in that there is an explanation of the reasons for focusing on particular issues and options. Also, Chapter 7 sets out reasons for selecting the preferred option (in-light of alternatives assessment).
9. Description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Art. 10;	Chapter 11 presents measures envisaged concerning monitoring.
10. A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings	The NTS is provided at the beginning of this Environmental Report.
<b>B) The Report must be published for consultation alongside the draft plan</b>	
Authorities with environmental responsibility and the public, shall be given an early and effective opportunity within appropriate time frames to express their opinion on the Draft Plan or programme and the accompanying environmental report before the adoption of the plan or programme (Art. 6.1, 6.2)	At the current time, this Environmental Report is published alongside the 'pre-submission' version of the Neighbourhood Plan, with a view to informing Regulation 14 consultation.
<b>C) The report must be taken into account, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan</b>	
The environmental report prepared pursuant to Article 5, the opinions expressed pursuant to Article 6 and the results of any transboundary consultations entered into pursuant to Article 7 shall be taken into account during the preparation of the plan or programme and before its adoption or submission to the legislative procedure.	This Environmental Report, and consultation responses received, will be taken into account when finalising the plan.

# Appendix II The Scope of the SEA

## Introduction

This appendix presents additional information on the SEA scope, namely key issues under each of the SEA framework headings. As set out in the Scoping Report, these key issues were identified following a review of the context and baseline.

Additionally, this appendix presents a summary of responses received as part of the scoping consultation.

## Air quality

- According to the 2021 ASR for South Oxfordshire, Wheatley NO<sub>2</sub> levels did not exceed the national annual average, and NO<sub>2</sub> levels have been declining in Wheatley since 2017.
- Future development within the WNPR area has the potential to increase traffic along the A40/M40 corridor. The effects of the WNPR in relation to traffic and congestion will be explored under the 'Transportation' SEA theme.
- District-wide renewable energy actions discussed within the latest AQAP for South Oxfordshire have the potential to maintain and improve air quality. This will be explored in the 'Climate Change' SEA theme. Additionally, the Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP4 2015-2031) and the Sustainable Transport Study Stage 2 (2017) also demonstrate opportunities to maintain and improve air quality; these will be discussed in the 'Transportation' SEA theme.
- The WNPR could present opportunities to improve accessibility and support more local and sustainable journeys/connections. These opportunities will be explored in the 'Community Wellbeing' and 'Transportation' SEA themes.
- Designated biodiversity and geodiversity sites within and in proximity to the WNPR area are potentially sensitive to air pollution issues. The effects of the WNPR in relation to these concerns will be explored under the 'Biodiversity and Geodiversity' SEA theme.

## Biodiversity

- Coombe Wood is an ancient and semi-natural woodland located just outside of the WNPR area, adjacent to the southern boundary. It has important wildlife, soils and recreational, cultural, historical and landscape value.
- Littleworth Brick Pitt SSSI is located within the WNPR area, and Lyehill Quarry, Holton Wood and Brasenose Wood and Shotover Hill SSSIs are located within 1km of the WNPR area.
- Although the WNPR area is within SSSI IRZs for the aforementioned SSSI designations, the IRZs do not relate to the type of development expected to be proposed through the WNPR.
- There are a variety of BAP Priority Habitats located within or in proximity to the WNPR area. These BAP habitats likely support populations of protected species.

## Climate change

- Climate change has the potential to lead to an increase in extreme weather events, including relating to extremes in precipitation and temperature.
- The transport sector continues to be a key challenge in terms of reducing emissions. The WNPR should provide opportunities to guide development towards sustainable transport within the Neighbourhood Development Plan area and connecting to other parishes in the area. This should be done in line with the national Road to Zero report.
- Flood risk is a key issue for the parish. There are areas of land, particularly central and to the east of the WNPR area, which are located in Flood Risk Zone 2 and Flood Risk Zone 3.

## Community wellbeing

- The WNPR area has experienced a steady increase in population for the period 2011-2020. The population is somewhat ageing, with 25.4% of the 2020 population within the over 65 age band.
- Based on the 2019 IMD data Wheatley parish has no significant deprivation issues; although deprivation is notably varied across the parish's three LSOAs.
- There are a range of existing services, facilities and amenities within the WNPR area, including health services and schools. However, a wider variety of services can be found in the neighbouring settlement of Oxford.
- There is no secondary school in the parish, however the nearest is in Holton which is a short distance away.
- As the requirements of the working population continue to change, there is likely to be a greater need for adaptable dwellings that can accommodate flexible working practices which might include co-working facilities or hubs.

## Historic environment

- The WNPR area contains a number of designated heritage assets, including three Grade II\* and 52 Grade II listed buildings, a Grade I register park and garden and a conservation area.
- As well as this, the HER highlights 92 locally important heritage features which provide local historic significance to the WNPR area. These sensitivities should therefore be appropriately considered in future growth strategies.
- Although there are no heritage assets on the Heritage at Risk Register 2021, it is important to remember that registers for areas outside of London do not contain information about the status of Grade II listed buildings. As such, it is currently not possible to determine whether any of the Grade II listed buildings within the WNPR area are at risk.
- It will be important to ensure that future development avoids/minimises impacts upon the historic environment and maximises opportunities to improve the public realm and green infrastructure, to the indirect benefit of heritage settings.

## Landscape

- The WNPR area falls within two NCAs. The Midvale Ridge NCA covers the western extent of the WNPR area and the Upper Thames Clay Vales NCA

covers the east of the WNPR area. Both of these NCA profiles contribute to the unique landscape observed in the area.

- The 2017 South Oxfordshire Landscape Character Assessment characterises Wheatley's as predominately rural and unspoilt in character with some urban influences on the fringes of Wheatley and Littleworth.
- There are numerous TPOs within the parish.

## Land, soil and water resources

- The provisional Agricultural Land Quality dataset shows that there are significant areas of Grade 3 and some pockets of Grade 4 agricultural land present within the WNPR area. However, the data does not differentiate as to whether this is Grade 3a (e.g. the best and most versatile) or lower quality 3b land. As a finite resource, BMV land should be trained where possible in future growth.
- The Thame (Scotsgrove Brook to Thames) Water Body is the main watercourse in the WNPR area, running along parts of the northern and eastern parish boundaries. It was awarded a moderate ecological status in 2019 but failed the chemical status test for the same year due to the presence of priority hazardous substances and priority substances.
- The entire WNPR area is situated within two NVZ zones.

## Transportation

- Public transport is limited to the 280/X8, BROOKESbus U1 and NU1, Thames Travel 46 and the Red Rose 275 bus services. There are no railway stations in the parish area, however Oxford, Haddenham and Thame Parkway and Didcot Parkway are accessible to the residents of Wheatley parish.
- There are numerous PRoW present in the WNPR area. In addition, the National Cycle Route 57 runs through the parish.
- Wheatley provides a virtual 2-mile slip road along the A40 to the M40, being located at one end of the Oxford-M40 corridor, and at one end of the Aylesbury-M40-Oxford corridor. Improved access to the M40 has resulted in increased levels of traffic for Wheatley, which has resulted in congestion and parking issues as well as an increase in HGVs moving through the parish. These issues are a major inconvenience for road users, cyclists and pedestrians. It is likely that traffic noise will continue to be an issue for the parish.
- The recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to change travel patterns in the short, medium, and longer term.
- There is a need to promote an effective pedestrian, cycling and movement strategy for the parish that would include a Green Route, providing access devoid of issues with road traffic.

## Scoping consultation responses

The draft SEA scoping report was shared with the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England for formal consultation in 2022. The responses received and how they have been addressed are presented below.

*Table All.1: SEA scoping consultation responses*

<b>Consultee</b>	<b>Consultation response summary</b>	<b>AECOM response</b>
<b>Environment Agency</b>	No response received.	
<b>Historic England</b>	<p>In terms of the historic environment, we consider that the report has identified the plans and programmes which are of relevance to the development of the plan, that it has established an appropriate baseline against which to assess the plan's proposals, that key sustainability issues have been identified and the scoping report has put forward an appropriate framework for assessing the likely significant effects which this plan might have upon the historic environment.</p> <p>Historic England strongly advises that the conservation team of South Oxfordshire District Council and the Country Archaeologist are involved throughout the preparation of the SEA of this plan. They are best placed to advise on local historic environment issues and priorities, including access to data held in the HER, how the policies and proposals can be tailored to minimise potential adverse impacts on the historic environment, the nature and design of any required mitigation measures, and opportunities for securing wider benefits for the future conservation and management of heritage assets. Historic England has produced guidance for all involved in undertaking SEA/SA exercises which gives advice on issues relating to the historic environment.</p>	Noted.
<b>Natural England</b>	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.	Noted.



