

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

08 MAY 2024

SUMMARY

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

INTRODUCTION

1. This initial screening opinion has been used to determine whether or not the contents of the emerging Wallingford Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) Review requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2011/42/EC (the Directive) and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the Regulations).
2. Any land use plan or programme 'which sets the framework for future development consent of projects' must be screened according to a set of criteria from Annex II of the Directive and Schedule 1 of the Regulations. These criteria include exceptions for plans 'which determine the use of a small area at local level' or which only propose 'minor modifications to a plan', if it is determined that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects.
3. The initial screening opinion was subject to consultation with Historic England, the Environment Agency and Natural England. The results of the screening process are detailed in this Screening Statement.

THE SCREENING PROCESS

1. Using the criteria set out in Annex II of the Directive and Schedule 1 of the Regulations, a Screening Opinion determines whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant environmental effects.
2. The extract from 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive' in Appendix 1 provides a flow diagram to demonstrate the SEA screening process.

3. Table 1 in Appendix 1 sets out the criteria from the Practical Guide, along with an assessment of the Wallingford NDP Review against each criterion to ascertain whether a SEA is required.
4. Also part of the screening process is the Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening, which can be found in Appendix 2, and the assessment of likely significance effects on the environment, which can be found in Appendix 3.
5. These two assessments feed into Table 1 and the SEA screening opinion.

WALLINGFORD NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW

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

Vision

The Wallingford Neighbourhood Plan sets out a positive vision for the future of the town, putting sustainable development at the heart of its proposals, recognising how important social, economic and environmental objectives are to the town. The Plan will encourage a vibrant thriving town centre with a range of independent shops and homes to support its economy and provide and maintain the focal hub of our community.

This Plan aims to:

- Protect and enhance the well-established character of Wallingford.
- Ensure that growth in Wallingford to 2035 will be managed carefully, resulting in sustainable and well-designed development that maintains the town's special character.
- Ensure that the town centre will continue to serve as the focal point for activities which strengthen the local economy and enhance a community sense of place.
- Create opportunities to make Wallingford a hub for people enjoying the heritage of the town, the River Thames and the surrounding countryside, and to encourage development of sustainable tourism based on the heritage and natural assets of the town.
- Ensure that housing for an increasing local population will consist of a mix of types, including homes for first time buyers, social and private, family-sized and retirement accommodation. It will be supported by appropriate parking, transport.

Objectives

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

- The growth of Wallingford to 2035 will be managed carefully and sustainably, conserving and enhancing the town's unique heritage assets, historic and landscape setting, and the natural environment.
- New homes will be located on allocated sites set out in this Plan to meet local housing needs in terms of affordability and social housing, family and retirement homes.
- New homes will meet sustainability and design requirements to ensure climate change resilience and future use of sustainable resources including sustainable water use are built-in.
- New development will be provided with necessary infrastructure to provide for the well-being and needs of residents and those who depend on the facilities and services in the town.

Policies

- WS1 – The Local Strategy for Wallingford
- WS2 – The Land Allocation for Housing in Wallingford
- WS3 – Development Within the Built-up Area
- WS4 – Affordable Housing & Housing Mix
- HD1 – Design
- HD2 – Sustainable Design
- HD3 – Shopfronts and Signs
- HD4 – Avoidance of Light Pollution
- HA1 – The Historic Environment
- HA2 – Effects of Development on Historic and Heritage Assets
- HA3 – Views and Vistas
- EV1 – Green Spaces and Green Corridors
- EV2 – Protect Existing Amenity Spaces and Wallingford Green Network
- EE1 – Safeguard Existing Local Employment Sites
- TC1 – Primary Shopping Area
- TC2 – New Uses for Buildings within the Primary Shopping Area
- TC3 – Regal Site
- TC4 – Improve the Visitor Economy
- TC5 – Public and Private Car Parks
- TC6 – Preservation of Visitor Accommodation
- MC1 – Impact of Development Proposals on the Highway Network
- MC2 – Access to Public Transport

- MC3 – Cycling
- MC4 – Safe Active Travel
- MC5 – Vehicle Parking
- MC6 – Cholsey and Wallingford Railway Corridor
- MC7 – Provision of Electric Vehicle Charging Points
- CF1 – Protecting Existing Facilities
- CF2 – Support for New Formal and Informal Sport and Community Facilities
- CF3 – Wallingford's Riverside
- CF4 – Local Amenity Provision
- CF5 – Health & Well-being Service Provision

7. The Wallingford NDP was adopted as part of the district council's development plan on 20 May 2021. The plan was tested against the now superseded Core Strategy and Saved policies from the Local Plan, however it was prepared considering the emerging Local Plan, particularly the emerging policy direction and its reasoning and evidence. The plan was supported by a Strategic Environmental Assessment.
8. The Wallingford NDP Review proposes to update and remove some of the existing policies, as well as introduce some new policies. The NDP vision and objectives remain largely unchanged. The existing allocations are being carried forward, with the only change relating to the introduction of a new medical facility in place of a previously proposed school at Site E (Winterbrook Meadows). Amongst the most significant updates in the Wallingford NDP Review include the introduction of a settlement boundary. Whilst other modifications are likely to be proposed to some of the existing policy wording, these are not likely to be substantial.
9. The Wallingford NDP Review will continue to plan positively, with a wide range of policies covering for example: design, conservation and heritage, sustainable travel, green spaces, and important views.
10. Policies in the Wallingford NDP Review will continue to support sustainable appropriate development in the neighbourhood area, which will not adversely impact on the nature of the town. Catering for growth in a manner which respects Wallingford's setting and its close association with the nearby Chilterns and North Wessex Downs National Landscapes is particularly important.
11. We have considered whether focusing new development within the town boundaries, which has also been a historic focus of settlement activity, could result in the plan directing new development to sites that could potentially have significant effects on the historic environment including conservation areas, listed buildings and archaeological remains.

12. Careful consideration of the proposed boundaries in relation to how the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 guides the location and scale of development (mainly through policies H1, H3, and H16) indicates that the proposed boundaries merely add detail and aid the interpretation of existing policies.
13. The designated neighbourhood area comprises the settlement of Wallingford identified as a town in the local plan settlement hierarchy (Appendix 7 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035). Within Wallingford, residential development on sites not allocated in the Development Plan will only be permitted in accordance with part 3 of Policy H1.
14. As the boundary, in practical terms, does not provide a more restrictive interpretation of the relevant policies in the Local Plan 2035, the council has concluded that the proposal in the plan will not have significant effects on the historic environment.
15. The proposed boundary does not provide a less restrictive interpretation of the relevant policies in the Local Plan 2035, therefore, the proposal in the plan is not considered to have likely significant environmental effects.
16. Overall, we note that the plan does not allocate any new sites for development, it carries over the existing allocations, and continues to place great emphasis on conserving the character and appearance of the area. The Site E allocation also already benefits from planning permission, with some currently being built out.
17. It is therefore concluded that the implementation of the Wallingford NDP Review would not result in likely significant effects on the environment.


CONSULTATION RESPONSES

18. The screening opinion was sent to Natural England, The Environment Agency and Historic England on 4 April 2024 for a four-week consultation period. The responses in full are presented in Appendix 4.
19. The Environment Agency did not provide comments on this SEA Screening.
20. Historic England confirmed their agreement, that the Wallingford NDP Review does not need a SEA.
21. Natural England confirmed their agreement that there are unlikely to be significant environmental effects from the proposed plan and also agreed that the Wallingford Plan Review does not require further HRA assessment. They did not have any specific comments on the draft Neighbourhood Plan Review.

CONCLUSION

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

Authorised by: Tim Oruye – Head of Policy and Programmes

Signed: 
Date: 08/05/2024

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

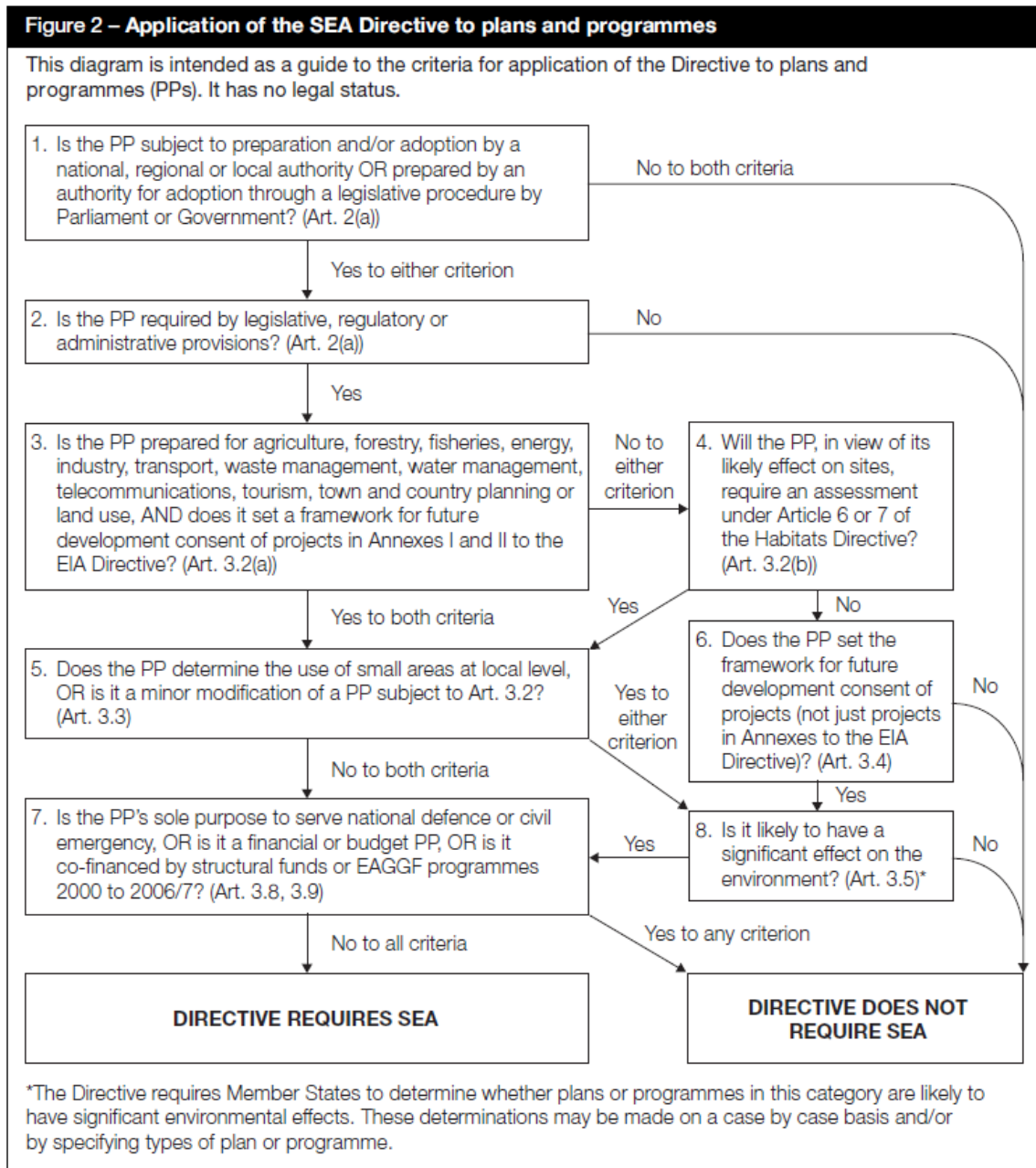


Table 1: Application of SEA Directive as shown in Appendix 1

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

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

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

3.9)		
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)	N	The plan is not likely to have significant effects on the environment. See assessment of the likely significance of effects on the environment in Appendix 3.

Appendix 2 - Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Opinion for the Wallingford Neighbourhood Development Plan Review

INTRODUCTION

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

LEGISLATIVE BASIS

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

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

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

“105.—(1) Where a land use plan—

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

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

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

- (a) *is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and*
- (b) *is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site, the plan-making authority for that plan must, before the plan is given effect, make an appropriate assessment of the implications for the site in view of that site's conservation objectives.*

(2) *The plan-making authority must for the purposes of the assessment consult the appropriate nature conservation body and have regard to any representations made by that body within such reasonable time as the authority specifies.*

(3) *The plan-making authority must also, if it considers it appropriate, take the opinion of the general public, and if it does so, it must take such steps for that purpose as it considers appropriate.*

(4) *In the light of the conclusions of the assessment, and subject to regulation 107, the plan-making authority must give effect to the land use plan only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the European site or the European offshore marine site (as the case may be).*

(5) *A plan-making authority must provide such information as the appropriate authority may reasonably require for the purposes of the discharge by the appropriate authority of its obligations under this Chapter.*

(6) *This regulation does not apply in relation to a site which is—*

- (a) *a European site by reason of regulation 8(1)(c), or*
- (b) *a European offshore marine site by reason of regulation 18(c) of the Offshore Marine Conservation Regulations (site protected in accordance with Article 5(4) of the Habitats Directive).*

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

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

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

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

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

EUROPEAN SITES

5. The HRA of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan used a screening distance of 17km to identify European sites which could be affected by development from the plan. This distance has been subject to consultation with Natural England and reflects the average travel to work distance in the district. As such, the same distance has been applied in this HRA screening.
6. The following European sites lie wholly or partly within 17km of Wallingford and have been taken into consideration:
 1. Little Wittenham SAC – Approximately 2.5km (South Oxfordshire District Council)
7. One of the best-studied great crested newt sites in the UK, Little Wittenham comprises two main ponds set in a predominantly woodland context (broadleaved and conifer woodland is present). There are also areas of grassland, with sheep grazing and arable bordering the woodland to the south and west. The River Thames is just to the north of the site, and a hill fort to the south. Large numbers of great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* have been recorded in the two main ponds, and research has revealed that they range several hundred metres into the woodland blocks.
8. The main pressures and threats to this site include the impacts of public access and disturbance, and invasive fish species upon great crested newt. With regard to the types of development that may be brought forward in the Local Plan, visitor disturbance could impact the site.
 2. Hartslock Wood SAC – Approximately 8.5km (South Oxfordshire District Council)
9. This site hosts the priority habitat type "orchid rich sites". The steep slopes of this site on the chalk of the Chilterns comprise a mosaic of

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

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

3. Aston Rowant SAC – Approximately 12km (South Oxfordshire District Council)

11. Aston Rowant is classified as SAC because it supports one of the largest remaining populations of juniper in lowland Britain. It is selected as an example of juniper formations on the chalk in the south east of England. At this site juniper is present as part of a mixed scrub community but also occurs as isolated bushes in chalk grassland. In common with most lowland populations of juniper, successful reproduction and survival of new generations of bushes is extremely rare and conservation is currently dependent upon significant levels of management intervention. The low level of reproductive success is the main threat to the feature at this site. Aston Rowant also supports *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forests although this is not a primary reason for classification as SAC.

12. The main pressures and threats to this site include an unsustainable on-site population, changes in species distribution, disease of juniper as well as the impacts of air pollution and the risks of atmospheric nitrogen deposition upon juniper. Additionally, conflicting conservation objectives threaten beech.

4. Chiltern Beechwood SAC – Approximately 14km (South Oxfordshire District Council and Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire)

13. The Chilterns Beechwoods SAC comprises nine separate sites scattered across the Chilterns. There are three features of interest: semi-natural grasslands and scrubland on chalk; *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech woodland (for which this is considered to be one of the best areas in the UK and lies in the centre of the habitat's UK range); and Stag beetle *Lucanus cervus*, for which the area is considered to

support a significant presence. The rare coralroot *Cardamine bulbifera* is found in these woods.

14. The main pressures and threats to this site include the impacts of forestry and woodland management, disease, deer and the invasive species of grey squirrel upon beech. Additionally, the changes in species distribution of stag beetle as well as the impact of public access and disturbance upon stag beetle. Air pollution and the impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition also threaten the dry grasslands, beech and stag beetle.
15. Cothill Fen SAC – approximately 16km (Vale of White Horse District Council)
16. Cothill Fen is designated as a SAC for its calcium-rich, spring fed fens and alder woodlands on floodplains.
17. The main pressures and threats to this site include the impact of water pollution and hydrological changes, as well as air pollution and the impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition upon the calcium-rich waterfed fens.

ASSESSMENT

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

Physical loss of habitat – Noise, vibration and light pollution

19. Any development resulting from the Neighbourhood Plan will be located within the neighbourhood area. There are no European sites within the Neighbourhood Plan area, therefore loss of habitat from within the boundaries of a European site can be ruled out in relation to all sites.
20. Loss of habitat from outside of the boundaries of a European site could still affect the integrity of that site if it occurs in an area used by the qualifying species of the site (e.g. for off-site breeding, foraging or roosting). Two of the European sites included in this assessment have mobile species amongst their qualifying features that could travel outside of the site to make use of other areas of habitat:
 - Little Wittenham SAC; great crested newt; and
 - Chiltern Beechwoods SAC: stag beetle.

21. The HRA (March 2019) produced alongside the Local Plan 2034 states that great crested newts will travel away from their breeding ponds, during the terrestrial phase of their lifecycle, but not large distances. 500 metres is considered an appropriate buffer distance inside which great crested newts might be found, from their breeding location. The site listing for Little Wittenham SAC states that great crested newts have been found to range several hundred metres into the site's woodland blocks. Research has found that great crested newts at Little Wittenham SAC migrate within woodland and do not over-winter in the arable farmland. All of the woodland within 500 metres of the ponds at Little Wittenham SAC is within the SAC boundary. Therefore potential loss of or damage to off-site habitats associated with Little Wittenham SAC can be screened out of further assessment.
22. The HRA (March 2019) produced alongside the Local Plan 2035 states that where stag beetle is a qualifying feature of a site, the individuals may travel outside of the SAC boundary, although it is unlikely that they will travel far – it is generally only the male stag beetle that flies during the summer months, and the female beetle rarely flies. The preferred habitat for stag beetles is old, established woodland, and the larvae feed on rotting tree matter. As the beetle larvae take years to develop, they can be vulnerable to tree clearance and the 'tidying up' of wood in parks and especially gardens. Research suggests that 2 km may be an appropriate buffer inside which sites could be functionally connected, as this is the distance that males travel to females during the breeding season. Chilterns Beechwoods SAC is a composite of nine SSSIs.
23. Bisham Woods SSSI, which is the part of the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC that supports the qualifying stag beetle population, is greater than 2 km from the District boundary. Therefore potential loss of or damage to off-site habitats associated with Chilterns Beechwoods SAC can be screened out of further assessment.

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

24. The HRA of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (March 2019) states:

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

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

Air Pollution

26. Air pollution is most likely to affect European sites where plant, soil and water habitats are the qualifying features, but some qualifying animal species may also be affected, either directly or indirectly, by any deterioration in habitat as a result of air pollution. Deposition of pollutants to the ground and vegetation can alter the characteristics of the soil, affecting the pH and nitrogen availability that can then affect plant health, productivity and species composition.
27. Based on the Highways Agency Design for Road and Bridges (DMRB) Manual Volume 11, Section 3, Part 120 (which was produced to provide advice regarding the design, assessment and operation of trunk roads (including motorways)), it is assumed that air pollution from roads is unlikely to be significant beyond 200m from the road itself.
28. The European sites within 17km of Wallingford that are within 200m of strategic roads are the Aston Rowant SAC (M40) and Chilterns Beechwoods SAC (A404, A4010). However, the Wallingford NDP Review is allocating 1 housing site, totalling 502 houses. This site has already been granted consent, therefore the NDP will not result in any additional 'new' homes over and above those with extant planning permission.
29. Therefore, the likely significant effects in relation to air pollution can be ruled out and do not need to be considered further.

Impacts of recreation – visitor pressure

30. The HRA of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (March 2019) states:

'Natural England's Site Improvement Plans record the threats and pressures relevant to each European site. Public access or disturbance are not identified as current threats or pressures at the following sites, despite their lying close to large settlements: Aston Rowant SAC, Hartslock Wood SAC, Cothill Fen SAC, and Oxford Meadow SAC.'
31. The HRA of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 sets out that the potential for effects depends upon the scale of development proposed and the features for which the site is designated. However, as a conservative estimate, it is assumed that any development within 7 km of a sensitive site could have impacts due to recreation. Where site specific information indicates that development beyond 7 km could produce recreation impacts, this will be taken into account; for example at Little Wittenham SAC, where development in the eastern fringes of the Vale of White Horse District could be relevant.
32. Little Wittenham SAC is part of a larger site managed by the Earth Trust as a nature reserve. The areas which are most important to the population of great crested newts (GCN) have restricted access which is designed to prevent conflicts between the visiting public, the newts and their habitat.

33. The increased visitor levels which are likely to occur as a result of the modest increase in population in Wallingford may result in increased pressure on the habitats on the reserve as a whole. Due to the restricted access policies to the areas where newts are primarily found, the increased visitor numbers will be concentrated onto other habitats on the reserve. These habitats are not related to the primary reasons for the selection of the SAC.
34. Great crested newts are not believed to be particularly sensitive to human disturbance provided their breeding ponds are not affected and their primary terrestrial habitat and hibernacula are not adversely affected. Provided controls on access to the most sensitive areas are maintained (i.e. ponds and hibernacula are not disturbed) there is no reason to believe that there would be any significant effect on the integrity of the site or the primary reason for the selection of the site.
35. At Chiltern Beechwood SAC, public access/disturbance is only identified in relation to the stag beetle population. The portion of the SAC that supports the stag beetle population (Bisham Woods SSSI) is greater than 7km from the District boundary, and therefore is considered unlikely to result in likely significant effects from development within South Oxfordshire, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects.
36. Therefore, likely significant effects in relation to visitor pressure and the impacts of recreation can be ruled out do not need to be considered further.

Water quality and quantity

37. European sites at which aquatic or wetland environments support qualifying features have the potential to be affected by changes in water quantity or quality. The only European sites close to Wallingford with aquatic or wetland habitats are Little Wittenham SAC and Cothill Fen SAC. At Little Wittenham SAC its ponds support great crested newts, but changes to water quality or quantity have not been identified as an issue at this site, this site has therefore been screened out.
38. Cothill Fen SAC has calcium rich springwater-fed dens that have been identified as sensitive to water pollution and hydrological changes. The types of development that have the potential to affect water quality/quantity or flow regimes at sensitive European sites are residential or employment development that would involve significant increase in demand for water supply and treatment, and infrastructure development that requires significant excavation in proximity to watercourses or groundwater.
39. However, the Wallingford NDP Review is allocating one housing site, totalling 502 houses. This site has already been granted consent, therefore the NDP will not result in any additional 'new' homes or development over and above those with extant planning permission.

40. Potential water quality and hydrological effects have therefore been screened out of further assessment for all sites.

Cumulative effects

26. The Council has considered the HRA of the Local Plan (March 2019) in respect of the potential in combination effects of the proposals in the Wallingford NDP Review. As the South Oxfordshire Local Plan covers the period from 2011 to 2035, the quantum of development proposed in the Local Plan includes some completed and committed development (Committed development includes sites under construction, with planning permission, made neighbourhood plan allocations and allocations carried forward from the Local Plan 2011 and Core Strategy). The policies that enabled those developments to be permitted have already been subject to HRA as part of the Core Strategy, Local Plan 2011 or as part of the HRA for the relevant NDP. Paragraph 5 to 40 of this assessment has considered how the development proposed in the Wallingford NDP Review is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites.

27. The Local Plan 2035 sets out the housing requirement for Wallingford in Policy H3, and the NDP Review is carrying over the allocation of 502 dwellings in line with this, which has already been granted planning permission. The cumulative effects of the housing have therefore already been considered in the Local Plan HRA. The addition of a new medical facility proposed at Site E in place of a previously proposed school would not constitute a material change in terms of environmental impact. The Wallingford NDP Review does not result in any additional 'new' homes or significant changes and therefore the in-combination effects do not need to be assessed further.

CONCLUSION

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

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

1. Characteristics of the Plan, having regard to:	
(a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location,	The Wallingford NDP Review would, if adopted, form part of the Statutory Development Plan and as such does contribute to the framework for future development consent of projects. However,

nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;	the Plan will sit within the wider framework set by the National Planning Policy Framework, the strategic policies of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.
(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;	A Neighbourhood Development Plan must be in conformity with the Local Plan for the District. It does not influence other plans. The Wallingford NDP Review is unlikely to influence other Plans or Programmes within the statutory development plan.
(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;	National policy requires a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread through plan-making, including the Wallingford NDP Review. A basic condition of the Wallingford NDP Review is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and	<p>The environmental impact of the proposals within the Wallingford NDP Review is likely to be minimal due to the scale of development proposed.</p> <p>The Wallingford NDP Review area contains the following environmental designations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - BAP priority habitats - Flood Zones - Great Crest Newt Distribution - Protected species buffer - Tree Preservation Orders <p>There are the following SACs within 17km of the Wallingford NDP Review area: These are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Little Wittenham SAC – approx. 2.5 - Hartslock Wood SAC – approx. 8.5km - Aston Rowant SAC – approx. 12km - Chilterns Beechwood SAC – approx. 14km - Cothill Fen SAC- approx. 16km <p>There are also the following SSSI's located within the following distance of Wallingford NDP Review area:</p>

- Little Wittenham SSSI – approx. 2.5km
- Warren Bank SSSI – approx. 5km
-

The plan will seek to carry forward the existing allocations, with the addition of a new medical facility proposed at Site E (Winterbrook Meadows) in place of a previously proposed school. The plan also includes a new settlement boundary, an updating of existing policies, and the addition of a new policy relating to shop fronts (Policy HD3). Policy TC6 which relates to the provision of coach parking has been removed from the plan.

As the plan is proposing to carry forward the existing allocation, which already benefits from planning permission, it is considered that the effects of the proposals are not likely to be significant. Notwithstanding the proposal of a new medical facility at Site E in place of the previously proposed school, the facility would fall within the boundaries of the site and would not constitute a material change in terms of its environmental impact.

The plan also proposes a settlement boundary to define the built-up areas of Wallingford. We have considered whether focusing new development within the town boundary, which has also been a historic focus of settlement activity, could result in the plan directing new development to sites that could potentially have significant effects on the historic environment including conservation areas, listed buildings and archaeological remains.

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

	<p>In relation to Wallingford, Policy H3 in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 sets out that proposals will be expected to ensure that:</p> <p><i>'ii) The western and southern boundaries are reinforced with significant landscape buffers, with no built development along the western boundary adjacent to the bypass.</i></p> <p>The proposed boundary excludes landscape buffers alongside the western boundaries to ensure the prevention of built development adjacent to the bypass.</p> <p>The Wallingford NDP Review area also contains the following designations:</p> <p><i>Conservation areas Listed buildings Archaeological constraints</i></p> <p>We are of the opinion the Neighbourhood Plan does not propose any development that is likely to harm these designations as the plan seeks to conserve the town, its character and setting. The policies in the Neighbourhood Plan will require these designations to be protected and therefore there would not be likely significant effects to the environment.</p>
<p>(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).</p>	<p>The proposed development in the Wallingford NDP Review has been judged not to have an impact on Community legislation.</p>
<p>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:</p>	
<p>(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;</p>	<p>The Wallingford NDP Review is likely to have modest but enduring positive environmental effects. The effects are not likely to be reversible as they relate to development.</p>

	<p>However, they will be of a local scale through limited infill sites within the town boundary.</p> <p>It is clear that the main effect on the town will be the impact of the settlement boundary. The effects of this are not likely to be reversible as they relate to development. The effects will be of a local scale and the principles guiding development in the NPD include protecting and enhancing the setting in the rural landscape, promoting overall sustainability, supporting and enhancing the town centre, and protecting the character of the NDP designed area. Existing policies will be retained and reviewed, and new policies will be introduced where necessary. Policies will be developed which guide development to the most appropriate locations to avoid supporting development near sensitive locations that would cause likely significant effects.</p> <p>As the housing allocation is being carried forward from the made Wallingford NDP, we do not consider that this will have an effect.</p>
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;	It is intended that the positive social effects of providing residential development through the existing allocations will have positive cumulative benefits for the area.
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects;	The effects of the Plan are unlikely to have transboundary ³ impacts.
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);	The policies in the plan are unlikely to present risks to human health or the environment.
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);	The Wallingford NDP Review relates to the town of Wallingford. The Wallingford NDP Review is not proposing any new development that does not already have planning permission, therefore the potential for environmental effects is likely to be small and localised.
(f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: (i) special natural characteristics or cultural	<p>The Wallingford NDP Review area contains the following special natural characteristics and cultural heritage elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listed Buildings - Local heritage assets

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

heritage;
(ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or
(iii) intensive land-use; and

- Archaeological constraints
- Conservation Areas
- Chilterns National Landscape setting
- North Wessex Downs National Landscape setting
- Tree Preservation Orders

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

- Little Wittenham SSSI – approx. 2.5km
- Warren Bank SSSI – approx. 5km

The Wallingford NDP Review offers an opportunity to enhance the natural environment and the cultural heritage of the area through the proposals being considered. It is clear that the aspects of the plan that are most likely to effect the special natural characteristics and cultural heritage are the carried forward site allocation, householder development and development within the built up area. These forms of development may impact on the integrity of protected sites and the character and appearance of listed buildings, their setting, the conservation areas, and the National Landscape setting.

In relation to the site allocation, this is being carried forward from the made Wallingford NDP. As such, the continuation of the allocation in the Wallingford NDP Review is not considered to create significant effects. Notwithstanding the proposal of a new medical facility at Site E in place of the previously proposed school, the facility would fall within the boundaries of the site and would not constitute a material change in terms of its environmental impact.

The SACs and SSSI are located outside the NDP designated area. Little Wittenham SAC is the closest SAC to the designated neighbourhood area, approximately 2.5km

from the neighbourhood plan boundary. Little Wittenham SSSI is the closest SSSI to the neighbourhood area, approximately 2.5km from the Wallingford NDP area.

The above designations are outside of the built-up areas of the town. The objectives guiding development in the NDP include ensuring that all new development respects the natural environment of Wallingford, including the safeguarding and enhancement of surrounding ecological networks, water quality and green infrastructure. Taking into consideration the progress on the existing site allocation, with building works taking place, they are therefore not considered to cause likely significant effects.

The HRA Screening Assessment in appendix 2 concluded that: The Wallingford NDP Review is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects therefore, an Appropriate Assessment of the Wallingford Neighbourhood Development Plan Review is not required.

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

The objectives of the Wallingford NDP Review set out how the plan will cater for growth in a manner which conserves and enhances heritage within the neighbourhood area. The plan is considered to have a neutral effect on cultural heritage because there is no indication given in the objectives that the plan would go beyond national and local policy and therefore, it is considered that the effects of the proposals in the plan are not likely to be significant.

	<p>Environmental quality standards or limit values are not considered likely to be significantly affected by the Wallingford NDP Review.</p> <p>In light of the modifications proposed in the Wallingford NDP Review, the plan is not likely to cause significant effects in relation to intensive land use.</p>
(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	<p>The Wallingford NDP Review designation area falls within the setting of the part of the Chilterns National Landscape and the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. The existing allocations do not fall within the National Landscapes and it is therefore predicted that its effects are not likely to be significant.</p>

Appendix 4 – Statutory Consultee Responses

HISTORIC ENGLAND

By email only to: planning.policy@southandvale.gov.uk

Our ref: PL00795595

Your ref: Wallingford Neighbourhood Plan SEA

Main: 020 7973 3700

e-seast@historicengland.org.uk

Date: 13/05/2024

To whom it may concern

Wallingford Neighbourhood Plan SEA Review Screening Opinion

Thank you for inviting Historic England to comment on this consultation. As the Government’s adviser on the historic environment Historic England is keen to ensure that the protection of the historic environment is fully taken into account at all stages and levels of the local planning process. For the purposes of this consultation, Historic England will confine its advice to the question, “Is it (the Neighbourhood Plan Review) likely to have a significant effect on the historic environment?”. Our comments are based on the information supplied.

The information supplied indicates that the plan review will not have any significant effects on the historic environment.

On the basis of the information supplied, and in the context of the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment Regulations [Annex II of

'SEA' Directive], Historic England concurs with the Council that the preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required. The views of the other two statutory consultation bodies should be taken into account before the overall decision on the need for an SEA is made. I should be pleased if you can send a copy of the determination as required by REG 11 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

We should like to stress that this opinion is based on the information provided by you with your correspondence. To avoid any doubt, this does not reflect our obligation to provide further advice on later stages of the SEA process and, potentially, object to specific proposals which may subsequently arise (either as a result of this consultation or in later versions of the plan) where we consider that, despite the SEA, these would have an adverse effect upon the environment.

Historic England strongly advises that the conservation and archaeological staff of the relevant local authorities are closely involved throughout the preparation of the plan and its assessment. They are best placed to advise on; local historic environment issues and priorities, including access to data held in the Historic Environment Record (HER), how the allocation, policy or proposal 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.

Please do contact me, via email if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely

Louise Dandy
Historic Places Adviser

NATURAL ENGLAND

Date: 30 April 2024
Our ref: 471994
Your ref: Wallingford Neighbourhood Plan
Mr Edward Williamson
South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse District
Council

BY EMAIL ONLY

planning.policy@southandvale.gov.uk

Dear Mr Williamson

Wallingford Neighbourhood Plan – 2024 Review - SEA/HRA Screening Opinion Consultation

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated and received by Natural England on 4 April 2024.

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

Screening Request: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

It is Natural England's advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that:

- **Significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes are unlikely; and,**
- **Significant effects on Habitats sites⁴, either alone or in combination, are unlikely.**

The proposed neighbourhood plan is unlikely to significantly affect any Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection areas (SPA), Ramsar wetland or sites in the process of becoming SACs or SPAs ('candidate SACs', 'possible SACs', 'potential SPAs') or a Ramsar wetland. The plan area is unlikely to have a significant effect on a National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or Heritage Coast, and is unlikely to impact upon the purposes for which these areas are designated or defined.

Guidance on the assessment of Neighbourhood Plans, in line with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 is contained within the Planning Practice Guidance. This identifies three triggers that may require the production of an SEA:

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

Natural England does not hold information on the location of significant populations of protected species, so is unable to advise whether this plan is

⁴ Habitats sites are those referred to in the National Planning Policy Framework (Annex 2 - glossary) as "any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 for the purpose of those regulations, including candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and any relevant Marine Sites".

likely to affect protected species to such an extent as to require an SEA. Further information is included in Natural England's standing advice on protected species.

Furthermore, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all environmental assets. The plan may have environmental impacts on priority species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites, soils and best and most versatile agricultural land, or on local landscape character that may be sufficient to warrant an SEA. Information on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees is set out in Natural England/Forestry Commission standing advice.

We therefore recommend that advice is sought from your ecological, landscape and soils advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local soils, best and most versatile agricultural land, landscape, geodiversity and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by the plan before determining whether a SEA is necessary.

Natural England reserves the right to provide further advice on the environmental assessment of the plan. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make. If a SEA is required, Natural England must be consulted at the scoping and environmental report stages.

Please send any new consultations, or further information on this consultation to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk

Yours sincerely

Sally Wintle
Consultations Team

