

# 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 North Hinksey Neighbourhood Development Plan

07/06/2018

## SUMMARY

In this screening opinion, Vale of White Horse District Council (the 'Council') determines that North Hinksey Neighbourhood Development Plan (North Hinksey NDP) does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) appropriate assessment.

## INTRODUCTION

1. North Hinksey Parish Council has requested that Vale of White Horse (VoWH) District Council 'screen' the North Hinksey Neighbourhood Plan, to determine whether there is a requirement for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and HRA appropriate assessment. This report presents the Council's Screening Opinion.

## BACKGROUND

2. One of the basic conditions that a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) must be tested against is whether the making of the NP is compatible with European Union obligations, including requirements under the SEA Directive. The aim of the SEA Directive is:

*"to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development, by ensuring that an environmental assessment is carried out **of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.**"*

3. In order to decide whether a proposed NP is likely to have significant environmental effects, and hence requires SEA, it should be 'screened' at an early stage, i.e. once the plan remit and objectives have been formulated.
4. Screening is 'Stage A' in Government's six stage approach to SEA for NPs. If it is determined, through screening, that SEA is not required, then plan-

makers need not concern themselves with subsequent stages of the SEA process.<sup>1</sup>

5. This Screening Assessment relates to a Neighbourhood Development Plan that will be in general conformity with the strategic policies within the development plan<sup>1</sup> (the higher-level plan for town and country planning and land use). This Screening Assessment uses the Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Vale of White Horse District Council's emerging Local Plan as its basis for assessment. From this, the Local Authority will determine whether the Neighbourhood Development Plan is likely to result in significant impacts on Natura 2000 sites either alone or in combination with other plans and policies and, therefore, whether an 'Appropriate Assessment' is required.

## WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SCREENING?

6. The SEA Regulations, which transpose the SEA Directive into law, state that a screening determination should be reached by 'the responsible authority'. In this case, the responsible authority is VoWH District Council.
7. The Local Authority is the "competent authority" under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, 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 importance<sup>1</sup>, also referred to as Natura 2000.
8. The responsible authority must reach a determination in consultation with the statutory consultation bodies designated under the SEA Regulations, which are Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England.

## SCREENING METHODOLOGY

9. Screening essentially involves giving consideration to the anticipated scope of the plan in question and the nature of environmental issues (including opportunities for enhancement) locally, before coming to a conclusion on the potential for a cause-effect relationship, i.e. the likelihood of the plan leading to 'significant effects on the environment'.
10. Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations lists a series of criteria that should be taken into account when establishing the potential for the plan to result in significant effects. Furthermore, Schedule 2 lists a series of broad environmental issues that should be considered.<sup>2</sup> The criteria/issues listed

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<sup>1</sup> <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal/sustainability-appraisal-requirements-for-neighbourhood-plans/>

<sup>2</sup> Also, when identifying 'issues' as part of screening, it is appropriate to give consideration to the presence and condition of 'sensitive areas' as defined by national guidance at: <http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/blog/guidance/environmental-impact-assessment/screening-schedule-2-projects/interpretation-of-project-categories/>. These sensitive areas are defined for the purpose of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening, as opposed to SEA screening, but are nonetheless relevant.

in the Regulations are helpful in that they provide a methodological basis for screening.

11. Finally, it is important to note that guidance on NP SEA Screening is provided within Government's Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). The guidance is brief, but the following advice is helpful:<sup>1</sup>

*“Whether a neighbourhood plan proposal requires a strategic environmental assessment, and (if so) the level of detail needed, will depend on what is proposed. A strategic environmental assessment may be required, for example, where:*

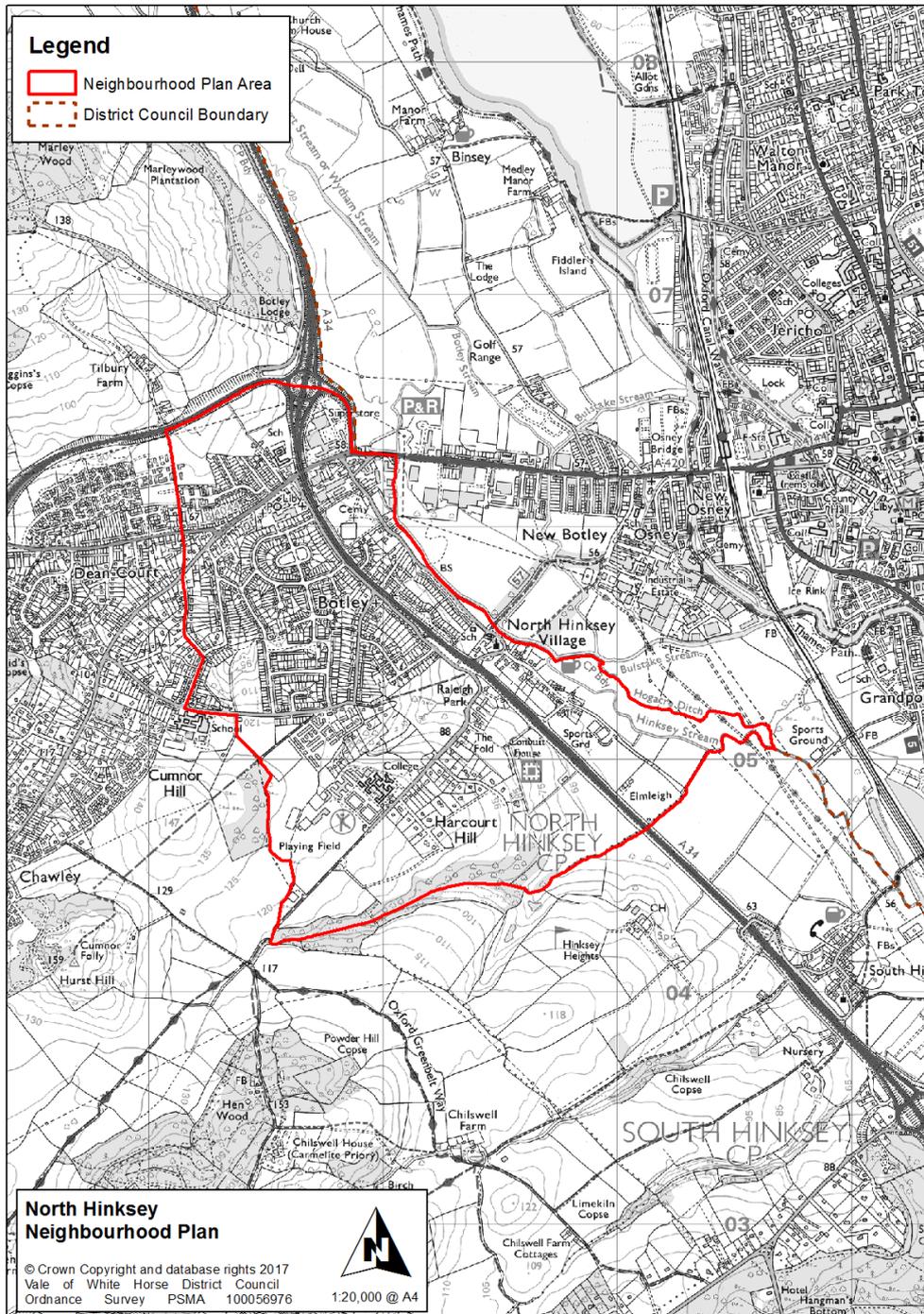
- *a neighbourhood plan allocates sites for development*
- *the neighbourhood area contains sensitive natural or heritage assets that may be affected by the proposals in the plan*
- *the neighbourhood plan is likely to have significant environmental effects that have not already been considered and dealt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

12. The approach to screening the North Hinksey Neighbourhood Plan for the purposes of HRA is considered separately and this is presented in Appendix 2 of this Statement.

## THE EMERGING NORTH HINKSEY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

13. The NP area covers all of North Hinksey parish. The Parish and the Plan boundaries are the same and that is shown on **Figure 1**.

*Figure 1: The plan area*



14. The NP will sit alongside, and complement, the VoWH Local Plan 2031 Part 1 (LPP1), which was adopted in December 2016. LPP1 does not allocate any sites for residential development in North Hinksey Parish. The emerging Local plan 2031 Part 2 (LPP2) was submitted to the Secretary of

State and is currently in the early stages of Examination. LPP2 does not proposed to allocate any additional sites for development in the parish.

15. The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group recently consulted on a draft version of their Neighbourhood Plan with the local community<sup>3</sup>. The steering group is currently in the process of reviewing the comments received and updating the Neighbourhood Plan prior to formally submitting it to the Council.

16. The **vision** of the draft Neighbourhood Plan is as follows:

*“By 2031, North Hinksey will be an inclusive parish of high quality design containing a wide-ranging mix of services and facilities, both commercial and social, to service the local community. It will foster diverse employment and a healthy economy. It will encourage, and improve the infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport, and reduce reliance on private car journeys. It will make best use of utilities, and benefit from new low carbon and energy-efficient technologies. It will protect and enhance its green spaces, wildlife, and the semi-rural nature of its location. It will retain its own identity and role within the Vale of White Horse, and its historic setting, while at the same time developing its relationship with neighbouring Oxford City.”*

17. The **objectives** of the draft Neighbourhood Plan are as follows:

- Attractive housing that meets the needs of the whole community;
- A good place to work and do business in, and for shoppers;
- A fully integrated and effective transport system that copes fully with local demands;
- Appropriate levels of social infrastructure for a community of our size and mix of demographics;
- Affordable and sustainable access to water, electricity and gas meets the needs of current residents in a way that secures their provision for the future; and
- Retention of the current semi-rural feel to the area, with good public access to green spaces and the local countryside

18. The draft Neighbourhood Plan contains a number of policies which are categorised under the following headings.

- Housing;
- Economy & Employment;

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<sup>3</sup> North Hinksey Parish Neighbourhood Plan (Draft October 2017), available to download online at: <http://www.nhinkseynp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/North-Hinksey-Neighbourhood-Plan-draft-Oct-2017-website-version.pdf>

- Transport;
- Social Infrastructure;
- Utilities;
- Green Spaces and the Natural Environment; and
- Oxford Brookes University Harcourt Hill Campus.

19. The following section provides a summary of the policies proposed in the draft Neighbourhood Plan under the headings above. It also considers the potential for environmental effects to occur as a result of these policies.

## **SCREENING ANALYSIS**

### **Overview of the plan area**

20. North Hinksey Parish is located on the western edge of Oxford City, within the district of Vale of White Horse. It contains the smaller village of North Hinksey, and the core of the Local Service Centre of Botley. It is also home to the Harcourt Hill Campus (Oxford Brookes University).

21. The northern boundary of the parish is defined by the A420, and the eastern boundary by the Hinksey stream and Hogacre ditch. The southern and western boundaries are defined by physical features including ditches and walls. The built-up area of Botley extends into the neighbouring parish of Cumnor to the west, where the neighbourhoods of Cumnor Hill, Dean Court and Chawley exist.

### *Housing*

22. No housing site allocations are proposed in the draft Neighbourhood Plan. Both Botley and North Hinksey are inset to the Oxford Green Belt which restricts the potential for development to take place outside the built-up area of these settlements.

23. Policies proposed in the draft Neighbourhood Plan principally relate to appropriate scale, character, design and affordable housing. A policy is also proposed for any land that may in due course be removed from the Green Belt for development to be subject to a set of design criteria and processes to ensure excellence in architecture and carbon neutral design.

24. It is unlikely that the policies in this section will result in any likely adverse environmental effects, either alone or in combination with other plans in the area.

### *Economy and Employment*

25. No new employment allocations are proposed in the draft Neighbourhood Plan. Draft policies support new employment development within the existing built up area, subject to some criteria, including the adequate provision of electric vehicle charging points and promote measures which reduce the need to travel by private motor car. A draft policy also seeks to protect existing areas of employment from alternative uses.
26. It is unlikely that the policies in this section will result in any likely adverse environmental effects, either alone or in combination with other plans in the area.

### *Transport*

27. A number of draft policies are proposed in this section which seek to improve public transport connectivity, adequate car parking provision, safe site access and improved transport connectivity for the parish.
28. It is unlikely that the policies in this section will result in any likely adverse environmental effects, either alone or in combination with other plans in the area.

### *Social Infrastructure*

29. A single policy seeks to add greater protection to a number of leisure and social facilities as well as historic buildings, monuments, churches and other sites. The policy also supports development of new or extended leisure and social facilities, subject to criteria.
30. It is unlikely that this policy will result in any likely adverse environmental effects, either alone or in combination with other plans in the area.

### *Utilities*

31. A draft policy relates to flooding and generally supports development proposals where they can demonstrate that they will not contribute to flood risk within the parish, in accordance with Core Policy 42 of Local Plan 2031 Part 1. It also sets specific criteria for a 'zone of potential groundwater flood risk' within the parish. This is supported by evidence prepared by external consultants to inform the Neighbourhood Plan.
32. A second draft policy in this section promotes sustainable design, energy efficiency and renewable energy for future development proposals.
33. It is unlikely that the policies in this section will result in any likely adverse environmental effects, either alone or in combination with other plans in the area. It is likely that these policies may result in minor improvements to the local environment.

### *Green Spaces and the Natural Environment*

34. A draft policy seeks to designate a number of areas within the district as local green spaces. A separate draft policy sets a range of supportive criteria that seeks to increase biodiversity and enhance natural habitats, green routes and wildlife corridors, and protect valued views and green settings.
35. It is unlikely that the policies in this section will result in any likely adverse environmental effects, either alone or in combination with other plans in the area. It is likely that these policies may result in minor improvements to the local environment.

### *Oxford Brookes University Harcourt Hill Campus*

36. A draft policy seeks some requirements for future proposals at the Harcourt Hill Campus, in addition to those set out in Core Policy 9 of Local Plan 2031 Part 1. This includes a landscaping and tree planting strategy, a flood risk assessment and drainage strategy for the whole of the campus.
37. It is unlikely that this policy will result in any likely adverse environmental effects, either alone or in combination with other plans in the area.

## **RESPONSES FROM THE STATUTORY CONSULTEES**

38. The Council consulted with the statutory consultees, Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England on the screening opinion from 26 March 2018 until 16 April 2018. Responses were received from each of the three bodies, and these are attached as Appendix 3.
39. Historic England note that no new housing or employment site allocations are proposed in the draft Neighbourhood Plan, and that the plan contains a policy that seeks to add greater protection to a number of leisure and social facilities as well as historic buildings, monuments, churches and other sites. Historic England agree with the Council's opinion that the Neighbourhood Plan is not likely to have a significant effect on the historic environment and therefore does not require an SEA.
40. The Environment Agency confirmed that they are unable to make any detailed input on neighbourhood plans prepared within this local authority area.
41. Natural England note that there are no designated sites or protected landscapes within the impact zones of the Neighbourhood Plan area and the plan does not allocate any additional sites for development. Natural England agree with the Council's opinion that the Neighbourhood Plan does not require an SEA.

## CONCLUSION (SCREENING STATEMENT)

42. As a result of the screening undertaken by the Council, the following determination has been reached.
43. The North Hinksey Neighbourhood Development Plan is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, therefore, an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
44. Based on the assessment presented in **Appendices 1 and 2** of this Screening Opinion, the North Hinksey Neighbourhood Development Plan is not likely to have a significant effect on the environment.
45. In **conclusion**, the Council's opinion is that the plan does not require SEA or HRA.

## APPENDIX 1: REGULATORY CHECKLIST

As discussed above, under 'Screening methodology', Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations lists a series of criteria that should be taken into account when establishing the potential for the plan to result in significant effects. The aim of this appendix is to discuss matters under each criterion in turn.

Criteria	Significant effect?	Discussion
<b>1. The characteristics of the NP, having particular regard to:</b>		
(a) the degree to which the NP sets out a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.	No	The draft Neighbourhood Plan does not seek to allocate any sites for development.
(b) the degree to which the NP influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	No	The NP seeks to be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the adopted Local Plan 2031 Part 1 and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It does not influence other plans and programmes.
(c) the relevance of the NP for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	No	A number of policies seek to promote sustainable development that can be considered to be in conformity with the NPPF. This is a 'basic condition'/requirement of the Neighbourhood Plan making process. The draft plan includes support for low-carbon developments, support for public transport improvements, sustainable construction and design, support for enhancements to biodiversity and natural habitats, reducing flood risk, protecting the local character of the area and important views.
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme	No	There are little environmental issues locally which are of particular note. No SSSIs or SACs exist within the parish. A number of SSSIs are located in the nearby area, namely Hurst Hill SSSI (600m to the south west), Wytham Woods SSSI (250m to the north), and Iffey Meadows SSSI (1,750m to the south east). The southern end of Oxford Meadows SAC is approximately 1,300m from the edge of the parish. Cothill Fen SAC is located approximately 3.5km from the parish. It

Criteria	Significant effect?	Discussion
		is unlikely that the North Hinksey NDP will result in impacts to these designations.
(e) the relevance of the plan for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example plans and programmes related to waste management or water protection)	No	The Seacourt/Hinksey stream abuts the eastern boundary of the site, before cutting through the parish at the south-eastern corner. This flows into the River Thames via the Bulstake Stream by Osney Mead Industrial Estate and through a number of other streams and drains in the area. The area of flood zone that lies predominantly to the east of the parish boundary (some area of Flood Zone exists within south eastern corner of the parish, adjacent to North Hinksey village and sports grounds) is currently being considered as part of a wider Flood Alleviation Scheme for Oxford by the Environment Agency.
<b>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular,</b>		
(a) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	No	The majority of undeveloped land in the parish forms part of the Oxford Green Belt, which offers a high level of protection. The Neighbourhood Plan does not propose any allocations, and seeks to designate some areas as Local Green Space. Any development is likely to come forward on land that has been previously developed.
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects	No	Local Plan Part 1 does not allocate sites for new development in the parish. Core Policy 11 of LPP1 promotes redevelopment of the Botley Central Area. Local Plan 2031 Part 2 has now been submitted and no additional sites are proposed to be allocated through that plan. As no sites are proposed to be allocated through the Neighbourhood Plan, the cumulative nature of any effects as a result of these plans and policies are not likely to be significant.
(c) the trans-boundary nature of the effects	No	The effects of the Plan are unlikely to have transboundary <sup>4</sup> impacts.

<sup>4</sup> Transboundary effects are understood to be in other Member States.

Criteria	Significant effect?	Discussion
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accident)	No	<p>The policies in the plan are unlikely to present risks to human health or the environment.</p> <p>Some policies may result in positive improvements to the local highway network, such as improved public transport, providing additional employment opportunities in the parish will reduce the need to travel, safe access for pedestrians and cyclists, and support for dedicated cycle lanes on key routes. It is considered that the effects of these policies would not result in likely significant effects.</p>
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	No	<p>New development may have some correlation with the wider area, including Oxford City and along the strategic transport corridors such as the A34 and A420. However, it is unlikely that the policies in the plan will result in likely significant effects beyond the parish boundaries.</p>
(f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage</li> <li>▪ Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values</li> <li>▪ Intensive land use</li> </ul>	No	<p>North Hinksey village contains a conservation area however no conservation area is present for the centre of Botley. A Character Area assessment has been prepared which identifies features which are considered to be important locally. There are a number of listed buildings within the parish. Many of these are located within the historic core of North Hinksey village and to a lesser extent at Old Botley, to the east of the A34. A small area of Ancient Woodland exists at Hutchcomb's Copse.</p>
(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status	No	<p>The parish contains an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) which adjoins the A34 along part of Westminster Way and close to the historic core of North Hinksey village.</p> <p>The Neighbourhood Plan contains a number of policies which seek to improve air quality conditions, including promoting sustainable modes of transport and encouraging the provision of electric vehicle charging points.</p>

Criteria	Significant effect?	Discussion
		<p>The parish also plays an important part in the protection of Oxford City's skyline, including its 'dreaming spires'. There are important views to and from Raleigh Park.</p> <p>The parish is not within the setting of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.</p> <p>Draft policies in the plan seek to protect locally important buildings, important views, and promote environmental initiatives such as low carbon development, electric charging points, and sustainable modes of transport (bus/cycling/walking). The draft Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to give rise to significant effects for these criteria.</p> <p>The Neighbourhood Plan has been judged not to have an impact on Community legislation as the level of development proposed has been included as part of the SEA and HRA of the adopted Local Plan 2031 Part 1 and emerging Local Plan 2031 Part 2.</p>

## Appendix 2 - Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Opinion for the North Hinksey Neighbourhood Development Plan

### INTRODUCTION

1. The Local Authority is the “competent authority” under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, 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 importance<sup>5</sup>, 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 plan<sup>6</sup> (the higher-level plan for town and country planning and land use). This Screening Assessment uses the Habitats Regulations Assessment of Vale of White Horse District Council’s emerging Local Plan as its basis for assessment. From this, the Local Authority will determine whether the North Hinksey Neighbourhood Development Plan is likely to result in significant impacts on Natura 2000 sites either alone or in combination with other plans and policies and, therefore, whether an ‘Appropriate Assessment’ is required.

### LEGISLATIVE BASIS

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

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

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<sup>5</sup> Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for other species, and for habitats.

<sup>6</sup> Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1 (adopted December 2016); Saved Policies of Local Plan 2011

## ASSESSMENT

4. There are two Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) within 5km of the North Hinksey Neighbourhood Development Plan:
  - a. Oxford Meadows SAC (<1.5km)
  - b. Cothill Fen SAC (<3.5km)

### *Oxford Meadows SAC*

5. The site is designated as an SAC for its:
  - a. Lowland hay meadows; and
  - b. Creeping marshwort
6. The HRA to support the emerging Local Plan 2031 Part 2 found that in relation to Oxford Meadows SAC that the site is not currently suffering from poor air quality<sup>7</sup>. It also notes that the most recent Condition Assessment for the SAC has indicated that all of the site was in favourable condition.
7. North Hinksey lies <1.5km from Oxford Meadows SAC and could therefore potentially contribute to an increase in visitors to the SAC. The HRA accompanying Vale's Local Plan 2031 Part 2 notes that the majority of users of the site come from Oxford City. Only 4% of residents who use the site for recreational purposes are from other parts of Oxfordshire (outside of Oxford City), and come from settlements including Kennington, Botley, North Hinksey and Wytham<sup>8</sup>.
8. No allocations for residential or employment development are proposed in the emerging Neighbourhood Plan and therefore the Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to contribute to significant recreational pressure.
9. In considering the potential for Air Quality impacts on this SAC, paragraph 8.5.7 of the HRA (February 2018 Update) for Vale's Local Plan 2031 Part 2 notes the following:

*“The increase in development proposed within the VoWH LPP1 and LPP2 is likely to result in increased car use on roads that pass within 200m of the SAC (namely the A34 and A40), notably as a consequence of housing and business development. It is reasonable to assume that the increased population (both residential and business) will lead to increased vehicle movements. When coupled with the new homes identified for the local authorities surrounding the Vale of White Horse, there is an even greater likelihood of an increase in traffic*

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<sup>7</sup> Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 2: Habitats Regulations Assessment February 2018 Update. Paragraph 8.3.3

<sup>8</sup> Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 2: Habitats Regulations Assessment February 2018 Update. Paragraph 8.5.2

*movements along the A34 and A40 which run adjacent to the Oxford Meadows SAC.”*

10. In considering the cumulative impact of plans in the area, paragraph 8.5.24 of the same HRA notes the following:

*“There will be population increases in neighbouring districts (currently committed or projected to be up to 22,840 new dwellings in Cherwell, 9,132 in Oxford, 17,050 in South Oxfordshire, up to 10,500 in West Oxfordshire, 22,000 in Swindon, 8,400 in the Cotswold District, 10,500 in West Berkshire, and 920 in the Marlborough Area of Wiltshire). Development of new housing in adjacent local authorities combined with development under VoWH LPP1 and LPP2 is likely to lead to increased road transport on the A34 and A40 that pass through, or within 200m of, Oxford Meadows SAC. The Oxfordshire Planning Policy Group strategic study into effects of new development on air quality at Oxford Meadows SAC will lead to strategic approaches toward mitigation for any effects on the SAC. Until such point as the conclusions are taken forward to apply to strategic development across Oxfordshire and beyond it is considered that the modelling of air quality effects on the SAC from strategic planning within VoWH, and associated mitigation approaches remain a robust approach to ensuring no likely significant adverse effects on the SAC.”*

11. As no allocations are proposed in the North Hinksey Neighbourhood Development Plan, development in this location is likely to come forward in a similar manner to the strategic policies of the adopted Local Plan 2031 Part 1 and emerging Part 2 plan.
12. The development potential of the parish is constrained by the Oxford Green Belt which is tightly wrapped around the settlements of North Hinksey village and the local service centre of Botley. The majority of development in the parish is likely to come forward through the effective re-use of previously developed land.
13. The draft Neighbourhood Plan contains a number of policies which are likely to mitigate air quality impacts on the SAC, through the promotion of sustainable modes of transport (supportive policies for improved public transport, dedicated cycle lanes, improved access for cyclists and pedestrians) as well as the adequate provision of charging points for electric vehicles. Draft policy also TR5 supports improvements to the A34 where it reduces pollution from traffic noise and emissions.
14. Therefore, it is considered that the positive approach taken by the emerging policies in the North Hinksey NDP minimise the potential impact that growth may have on the air quality of Oxford Meadows SAC.

## *Cothill Fen SAC*

15. The site is designated as an SAC for its:

- a. Calcium-rich, spring-water-fed fens; and
- b. Alder woodland on floodplains

16. The HRA to support the emerging Local Plan 2031 Part 2 found that in relation to Cothill Fen SAC that the site is currently suffering from poor air quality<sup>9</sup>. It also notes that the most recent Condition Assessment for the SAC has indicated that 65% of the site was in favourable condition with the remainder recovering from unfavourable status. This was principally due to a lack of management and low water levels.

17. The Site Improvement Plan for Cothill Fen indicates the following threats that, at the least are identified as requiring investigation:

- a. Hydrological changes;
- b. Water pollution; and
- c. Air pollution

18. The draft Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate sites for development, with any development likely to constitute the effective re-use of previously development land. Having regard to the SAC's location relative to the parish of North Hinksey, it is considered that the emerging Neighbourhood Plan, taken alone or in combination with other plans and policies in the area, is unlikely to result in significant effects on Cothill Fen SAC.

## **CONCLUSION**

19. The North Hinksey NDP is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, therefore, an Appropriate Assessment for the North Hinksey NDP is not required

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<sup>9</sup> Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 2: Habitats Regulations Assessment February 2018 Update. Paragraph 5.3.3

## APPENDIX 3: RESPONSES FROM THE STATUTORY CONSULTEES

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Historic England

Neighbourhood Planning Enquiries Officer  
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse  
District Councils  
135 Eastern Avenue  
Milton Park  
Oxfordshire OX14 4SB.

Our ref:  
Your ref:

Telephone 01483 252040  
Fax

15<sup>th</sup> April 2018

Dear Mr

### **North Hinksey Neighbourhood Plan - SEA and HRA Screening Opinion**

Thank you for your e-mail of 26<sup>th</sup> March seeking the views of Historic England on whether or not the policies and proposals of the North Hinksey Neighbourhood Plan are likely to have significant environmental effects and therefore whether or not it should be subject to strategic environmental assessment.

According to the National Heritage List for England, the parish contains 15 listed buildings and one scheduled monument, and potentially a number of locally important heritage assets. There is, therefore, the potential for the historic environment of the Plan area to be affected by any development promoted or allowed for by the Neighbourhood Plan should it do so.

However, we note that no new housing or employment sites are proposed in the draft Neighbourhood Plan. Furthermore, we note that the draft Plan contains a policy that seeks to add greater protection to a number of leisure and social facilities as well as historic buildings, monuments, churches and other sites (although we have concerns about the adequacy of this policy as regards the protection of heritage assets).

We therefore agree with the Council's draft Opinion that the North Hinksey Neighbourhood Development Plan is not likely to have a significant effect on the (historic) environment and thus need not be subject to strategic environmental assessment.

However, should the draft Plan be amended to allocate sites for development or otherwise include policies or proposals that might have an effect or effects on the historic environment, we may wish to review our opinion.

In this respect, we do not entirely agree with the comment in paragraph 40 of the Council's draft Opinion that "*If the plan is screened-out, then North Hinksey Parish Council may continue with plan-making without having to give further thought to SEA requirements*" – we would suggest that the Parish Council should continue to bear the potential need for SEA in mind as they continue to develop the Plan.

However, we do agree with the Council's comment in the same paragraph: "*however, they might still deem it appropriate to undertake an SEA-like process, with a view to developing the most sustainable plan.*"

We hope these comments are helpful. Please contact me if you have any queries.

Thank you again for consulting Historic England.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Small  
Principal Adviser, Historic Environment Planning  
(Bucks, Oxon, Berks, Hampshire, IoW, South Downs and New Forest National Parks and Chichester)

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Date: 28 March 2018  
Our ref: 242733



Vale of White Horse District Council

**BY EMAIL ONLY**

Customer Services  
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Dear Sir or Madam,

### **Planning Consultation: North Hinksey Neighbourhood Plan SEA Screening**

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 26 March 2018.

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.

Natural England is a statutory consultee in neighbourhood planning and must be consulted on draft neighbourhood development plans by the Parish/Town Councils or Neighbourhood Forums where our interests would be affected by the proposals made.

In our review of the North Hinksey Neighbourhood Plan SEA screening we note that;

- there are no designated sites or protected landscapes within the impacts zones of the Neighbourhood Plan area and the Plan does not allocate any additional sites for development.

As a result we agree with the assessment that the Neighbourhood Plan does not require an SEA.

However, we would like to draw your attention to the requirement to conserve biodiversity and provide a net gain in biodiversity through planning policy (Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and section 109 of the National Planning Policy Framework). Please ensure that any development policy in your plan includes wording to ensure "all development results in a biodiversity net gain for the parish".

The recently produced [Neighbourhood Plan for Benson](#), in South Oxfordshire provides an excellent example. Although the Plan has not been to referendum yet, we are of the opinion that the policy wording around the Environment, Green Space and Biodiversity is exemplar. We would recommend you considering this document, when reviewing yours.

#### Further Recommendations

Natural England would also like to highlight that removal of green space in favour of development may have serious impacts on biodiversity and connected habitat and therefore species ability to adapt to climate change. We recommend that the final local plan include:

- Policies around connected Green Infrastructure (GI) within the parish. Elements of GI such as open green space, wild green space, allotments, and green walls and roofs can all be used to create connected habitats suitable for species adaptation to climate change. Green infrastructure also provides multiple benefits for people including recreation, health and well-

being, access to nature, opportunities for food growing, and resilience to climate change. Annex A provides examples of Green Infrastructure;

- Policies around Biodiversity Net Gain should propose the use of a biodiversity measure for development proposals. Examples of calculation methods are included in Annex A;

Annex A provides information on the natural environment and issues and opportunities for your Neighbourhood planning.

Yours sincerely

Pierre Fleet  
Adviser  
Sustainable Development  
Thames Team

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**From:** Planning\_THM  
**Sent:** 28 March 2018 16:41  
**To:**  
**Subject:** RE: North Hinksey neighbourhood plan SEA Screening Opinion

Dear Mr

Thank you for consulting the Environment Agency on your SEA screening opinion for the North Hinksey Neighbourhood Plan.

We regret that at present, the Thames Area Sustainable Places team is unable to review this consultation. This is due to resourcing issues within the team, a high development management workload and an increasing volume of neighbourhood planning consultations. We have had to prioritise our limited resource, and must focus on influencing plans where the environmental risks and opportunities are highest. For the purposes of neighbourhood planning, we have assessed those authorities who have “up to date” local plans (plans adopted since 2012, or which have been confirmed as being compliant with the National Planning Policy Framework) as being of lower risk. At this time, therefore, we are unable to make any detailed input on neighbourhood plans being prepared within this local authority area.

However, together with Natural England, English Heritage and Forestry Commission, we have published joint guidance on neighbourhood planning, which sets out sources of environmental information and ideas on incorporating the environment into plans. This is available at:  
[http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140328084622/http://cdn.environment-agency.gov.uk/LIT\\_6524\\_7da381.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140328084622/http://cdn.environment-agency.gov.uk/LIT_6524_7da381.pdf)

Thames Sustainable Places Team  
**Environment Agency** | Red Kite House, Wallingford, OX10 8BD

***Speak to us early about environmental issues and opportunities*** - We can provide a free pre-application advice note or for more detailed advice / meetings / reviews we can provide a project manager to coordinate specialist advice / meetings which costs £84 per hour. For more information email us at [planning\\_THM@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:planning_THM@environment-agency.gov.uk)

