

# **Initial Screening Opinion 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 Wantage Neighbourhood Development Plan**

**13 JANUARY 2022**

## **SUMMARY**

In this initial screening opinion, Vale of White Horse District Council (the 'Council') determines that Wantage Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

This screening opinion is for consideration by the statutory consultees whose input will inform the final screening statement.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. This initial screening opinion has been used to determine whether or not the contents of the emerging Wantage Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) 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. This initial screening opinion was subject to consultation with Historic England, the Environment Agency and Natural England. The results of the screening process are detailed in a 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 Wantage NDP 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. The Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening concluded that the Wantage NDP is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, therefore, an Appropriate Assessment for the Wantage NDP is not required.
5. Appendix 3 considers whether the plan is likely to have likely significant effects on the environment.
6. These two assessments feed into Table 1 and the SEA screening opinion.
7. The council's screening opinion concluded that the implementation of the Wantage NDP would not result in likely significant effects on the environment and therefore would not require a SEA.

## **WANTAGE NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

8. The Wantage NDP will contain the following vision, objectives and policies:

### Vision

*"Our view of what Wantage will be like in 2031 ....*

- *The town has retained its special historic and architectural character by carefully managing change within its built up area and by protecting its setting and surrounding open countryside whilst allowing for sustainable development in appropriate locations.*
- *The market square and shops are thriving and have experienced an increased footfall of customers. The Town Centre has become more accessible for all, providing a safe environment for all users of the space, including visitors, residents and businesses.*
- *There is a well-connected network of green spaces throughout and around the town.*
- *Letcombe Brook is protected and the biodiversity and landscape along the Brook is enhanced.*
- *There is a mix of high quality housing, suitable for families and a diverse population, with adequate parking.*
- *It is a town where residents can move around easily with improved accessibility into the Town Centre by public transport, car, cycle and on foot.*
- *The cycling route network has been better integrated and now links up with green spaces, the Town Centre and public transport services.*

- *The transport and parking systems are sufficient to deal with the numbers of visitors to Wantage from the surrounding areas.*
- *Important views of local landmarks and landscape have been preserved within and around the town.*
- *Shopping, education, health, sports and leisure, entertainment, social, and cultural opportunities have been improved for the wellbeing of the community.*
- *It is a clean town with low levels of pollution.*
- *All residents have improved access both to community facilities and to green spaces and surrounding countryside.*
- *There is a vibrant and diverse economy from micro, small and start up businesses to medium and large businesses, and sustainable business and employment opportunities.*

## **Core Objectives**

*“For this vision to be realised, a number of strategic objectives need to be achieved by the Neighbourhood Plan over the next few years:*

### **A Successful Town Centre**

- *To maintain the viability and vitality of the Town Centre serving a growing local population by resisting the loss of existing retail space in the key shopping frontages where possible, and by planning for new retail development where demand dictates and for transport management, improved car parking and use of shared space.*

### **Green Infrastructure**

- *To conserve and improve the ecological, water management and recreational value of Letcombe Brook as an essential green infrastructure asset for the town.*
- *To create a viable green infrastructure network including green spaces and amenity areas, with enhanced connectivity through new and improved footpaths and cycleways.*
- *To conserve the special landscape and scenic beauty of the North Wessex Downs AONB and its setting.*

### **Maintaining Our Heritage**

- *To sustain and enhance the special significance of the variety of heritage assets in the town.*
- *To require high design standards in all future development that reflects the distinct character of the town.*

### **Meeting Local Housing Need**

- *To provide housing types that focus on a wide range of requirements including affordability, first home buyers, downsizers, home workers and self-builders.*

### **Viable Community Assets**

- *To protect and encourage the improvement of cherished community*

assets.

### **List of Policies**

1. Town Centre Policy Area
  2. Protection of Employment Sites
  3. Design – General Principles
  4. Design – Character Area
  5. Design – Housing Types
  6. Green Infrastructure Network
  7. Green Infrastructure – Letcombe Brook
  8. Green Infrastructure – Local Green Spaces
  9. Infrastructure Investment
  10. Community Facilities
  11. Community Assets
9. The SEA screening process is concerned with whether a neighbourhood plan is likely to have a significant environmental effect. Within this context, wider considerations of the draft neighbourhood plan's potential conformity with the Basic Conditions are not considered and as a consequence, the council is required to consider the proposals in the plan as they are, not as they may be modified (if necessary) to meet the Basic Conditions.
10. The Wantage NDP, through Policy 1: Town Centre Policy Area, will seek to support the Town Centre's vitality and viability by encouraging town centres uses whilst resisting town centre uses in areas outside of the Town Centre Policy area. It also seeks to encourage proposals for employment uses outside of the defined primary and secondary shopping frontages.
11. The Wantage NDP will aim to maintain and enhance the character of the conservation area and character areas of the settlement with a design policy that sets out the different conservation and character areas. It will also seek to ensure that residential development meets the needs of current and future residents of Wantage through housing design.
12. The NDP will also seek to create a Green Infrastructure Network which will assist in the connection of green spaces in the Neighbourhood Area. Policy 7 in the Plan will also seek to conserve and enhance Letcombe Brook and its biodiverse, landscape and recreational value. In addition, the Plan looks to allocate Local Green Spaces.
13. Policies in the Wantage NDP will aim to support sustainable development in the Town that will not adversely impact on the character of the town, and its setting in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
14. Overall, we note that the plan does not allocate any sites for development and places great emphasis on conserving the character and appearance

of the area. It seeks to mitigate against potential environmental effects associated with development, which falls within the boundary of Wantage.

15. It is therefore concluded that the implementation of the Wantage NDP is unlikely to result in significant effects on the environment.

## **CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

16. The Screening Opinion was sent to Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England on 9 August 2021 for a four week consultation period. The responses in full are in Appendix 4.

17. Historic England agree with the Council's view that the Wantage NDP would not lead to significant effects on the historic environment and therefore the Wantage NDP does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment.

18. Natural England agree that the plan will not have significant effects on sensitive sites which Natural England has a statutory duty to protect, therefore, no SEA or Appropriate Assessment is required.

## **CONCLUSION**

19. As a result of the screening undertaken by the Council, the following determination has been reached.

20. The Wantage NDP is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, therefore, an Appropriate Assessment for the Wantage Neighbourhood Development Plan is not required.

21. Based on the assessment presented in Appendices 1 & 3, the Wantage NDP is unlikely to have a significant effect on the environment.

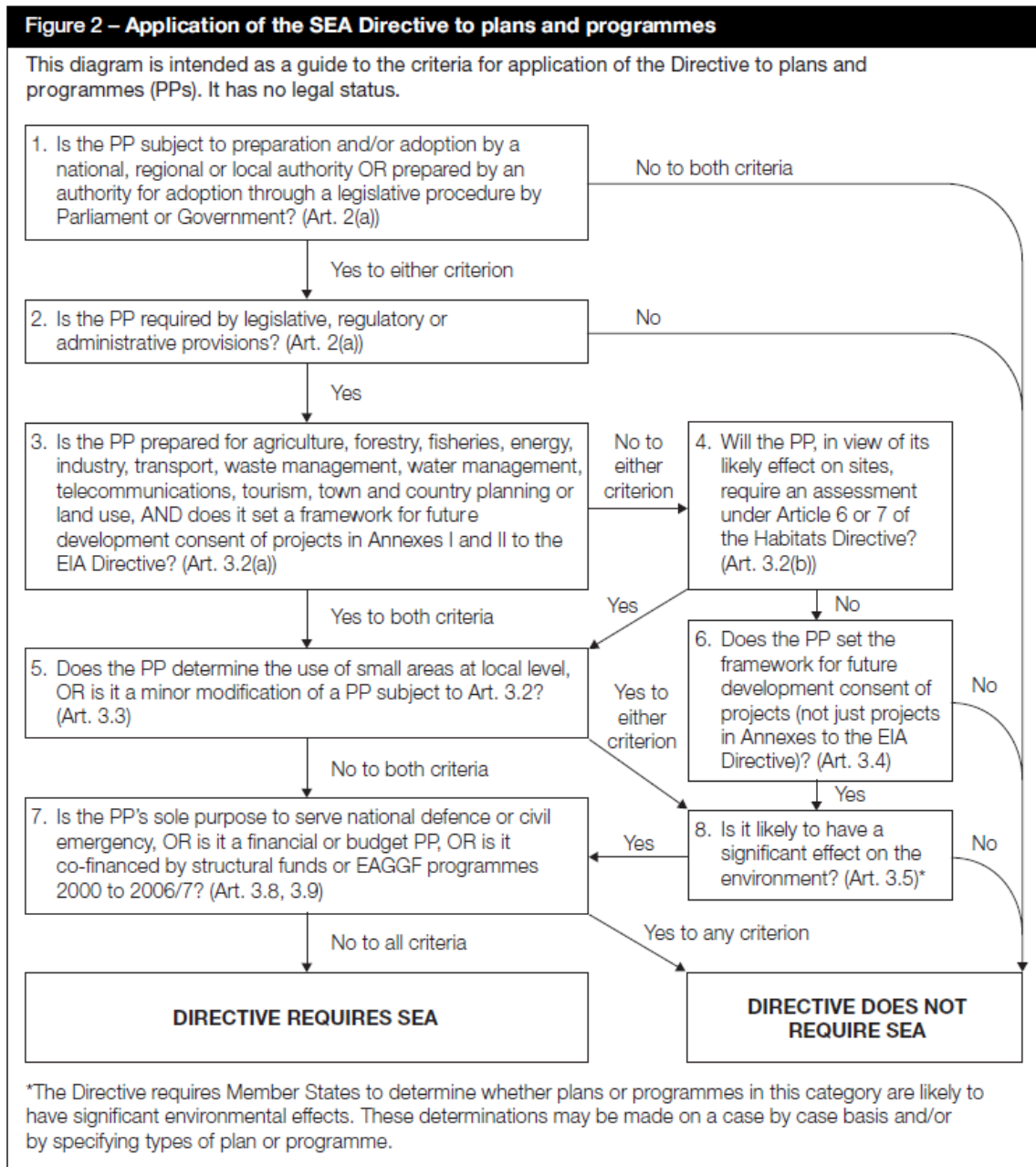
22. The Wantage NDP therefore does not require a Strategic Environment Assessment.

Authorised by: Harry Barrington-Mountford

Signed: 

Date: 13 January 2022

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



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

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

<p>3. Is the Neighbourhood Plan prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II (see Appendix 2) to the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2(a))</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>The Wantage NDP is prepared for town and country planning and land use and will not set out a framework for future development of projects that would require an EIA.</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 Wantage NDP is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites. See Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Opinion for the Wantage NDP in Appendix 2.</p>
<p>5. Does the Neighbourhood Plan determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art. 3.2? (Art. 3.3)</p>	<p>Y</p>	<p>The Wantage NDP 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 Wantage NDP will include a series of policies to guide development within the parish boundary. 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, 3.9)</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>N/A</p>



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

## INTRODUCTION

1. The Local Authority is the “competent authority” under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, and needs to ensure that Neighbourhood Plans have been assessed through the Habitats Regulations process. This looks at the potential for significant impacts on nature conservation sites that are of European importance<sup>1</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>2</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 Local Plan Part 1<sup>3</sup> and Part 2<sup>4</sup> as its basis for assessment. From this, the Local Authority will determine whether the Wantage Neighbourhood Development Plan is likely to result in significant impacts on Natura 2000 sites either alone or in combination with other plans and policies and, therefore, whether an ‘Appropriate Assessment’ is required.

## LEGISLATIVE BASIS

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

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

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

*“105.—(1) Where a land use plan—*

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

<sup>2</sup> The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031

<sup>3</sup> Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 1 Habitat Regulations Assessment February 2015

<sup>4</sup> Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 1 Habitat Regulations Assessment February 2018

- (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. There are two European sites with the Vale of White Horse District – Cothill Fen SAC and Hackpen Hill SAC. European sites also lie in adjoining districts and those with potential for longer range and indirect effects include Oxford Meadows SAC (Oxford City) and Little Wittenham SAC (South Oxfordshire). The Wantage NDP has the following relationships with these areas:

- Cothill Fen SAC (Approx. 13km)
- Little Wittenham SAC (Approx. 18km)
- Hackpen Hill SAC (Approx. 3km)
- Oxford Meadows SAC (Approx. 22km)

### Cothill Fen SAC (Approx. 13km)

6. Cothill Fen is designated as a SAC for its calcium-rich, spring fed fens and alder woodlands on floodplains.
7. 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 water-fed fens.

### Little Whittenham SAC (Approx. 18km)

8. 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.

9. The main pressures and threats to this site include the impact of public access and disturbance, and invasive fish species upon great crested newt.

#### Hackpen Hill SAC (Approx. 3km)

10. Hackpen Hill has slopes with a wide variety of aspect and gradient. Most of the grassland is dominated by red fescue *Festuca rubra*, but this is replaced by upright brome *Bromus erectus* on some middle and lower slopes. The herb flora includes horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, common rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium*, dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, autumn gentian *Gentianella amarella*, fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* and frog orchid *Coeloglossum viride*. An enclosed, ungrazed strip on Hackpen Down contains hawthorns and elder scrub, interspersed with upright brome grassland and herbs including sainfoin *Onobrychis viciifolia* and basil thyme *Acinos arvensis*.
11. The key environmental conditions that support the features of European interest are appropriate management, minimal air pollution, and absence of direct fertilisation.

#### Oxford Meadow SAC (Approx. 22km)

12. Oxford Meadow is designated as a SAC for its lowland hay meadows and creeping marshworts.
13. The main pressures and threats to this site include the impacts of hydrological changes and the invasive species of *Crassula* upon creeping marshworts.

### **ASSESSMENT**

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

- Physical loss of/damage to habitat;

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

15. The Plan does not allocate any sites for development or promote additional development beyond what is supported in the adopted Development Plan. None of the SACs are located within the Wantage NDP area and the closest is approximately 3km from the boundary of the NDP area. Therefore, the Wantage NDP is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, taking the above into account.

16. The Council has considered the HRA of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 2 (October 2019) in respect of the potential in combination effects of the proposals in the Wantage Neighbourhood Plan. As the Wantage NDP is not proposing any additional development beyond that already considered in Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1 or Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 2, we consider that the Wantage NDP is not likely to give rise to significant in combination effects.

17. Appendix 2 of this assessment has considered how the development proposed in the Wantage Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites. Given the plan does not propose any allocations and having regard to the conclusions of Appendix 2, it is considered that the development proposed in the Wantage Neighbourhood Plan is not likely to give rise to significant in combination effects.

## **CONCLUSION**

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

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

<b>1. Characteristics of the Plan, having regard to:</b>	
(a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;	The Wantage NDP would, if adopted, form part of the Statutory Development Plan and as such does contribute to the framework for future development consent of projects. However, the Plan will sit within the wider framework set by the National Planning Policy Framework, the strategic policies of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1 (December 2016) and the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 2 (October 2019).
(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;	<p>A Neighbourhood Development Plan must have regard to national policy and be in conformity with the Local Plan for the District. It does not influence other plans.</p> <p>The Wantage Neighbourhood plan is unlikely to influence other Plans or Programmes within the Statutory Development Plan.</p>
(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;	<p>National policy requires a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread through plan-making, including the Wantage NDP. A basic condition of the Wantage NDP is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.</p> <p>It is noted that a number of the NDP objectives do relate to the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view of promoting sustainable development. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To require high design standards in all future development that reflects the distinct character of the town.</li> <li>- To sustain and enhance the special significance of the variety of heritage assets in the town.</li> <li>- To conserve and improve the ecological, water management and recreational value of Letcombe Brook as an essential green infrastructure asset for the town.</li> <li>- To create a viable green infrastructure network including green spaces and amenity areas, with enhanced connectivity through new and improved footpaths and cycleways</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To conserve the special landscape and scenic beauty of the North Wessex Downs AONB and its setting.</li> <li>- To provide housing types that focus on a wide range of requirements including affordability, first home buyers, downsizers, home workers and self-builders.</li> <li>- To protect and encourage the improvement of cherished community assets.</li> </ul> <p>In order to meet the basic conditions the plan will have to integrate environmental considerations in particular with a view to promote sustainable development.</p>
<p>(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and</p>	<p>The environmental impact of the proposals within the Wantage NDP is likely to be minimal as the plan does not allocate any sites for development or support additional development beyond what is supported in the Development Plan. Policies in the Wantage NDP will aim to support sustainable development in the Town that will not adversely impact on its character and heritage. Maintaining the vitality of the Town Centre and creating a green infrastructure network are particularly important for the Plan.</p> <p>The Wantage NDP will contain policies to maintain the character of the Town and to require high design standards for new development.</p> <p>Policies in the Wantage NDP will aim to support sustainable development in the Town. Retaining the distinctive character and appearance of the Town and its various heritage assets is particularly important. The plan does not allocate any sites for development but seeks to ensure any housing sites that do come forward meets people's needs.</p> <p>The Wantage NDP contains the following environmental designations:</p> <p><i>Flood Zones</i>  <i>BAP priority habitats</i>  <i>TPOs</i>  <i>AONB</i></p> <p>There are also the following designations outside the NDP area (the distances are approximate and measured from the NDP area):</p> <p><i>Hackpen, Warren and Gramps Hill Downs SSSI – 2km</i></p>



	<p><i>White Horse Hill SSSI- 7km</i>  <i>Westfield Farm Chalk Bank SSSI – 7km</i>  <i>River Lambourn SSSI – 7km</i>  <i>Seven Barrows SSSI – 7km</i>  <i>Crocker’s Hole SSSI – 7km</i>  <i>Shellingford Crossroads Quarry SSSI – 8km</i>  <i>Cleeve Hill SSSI – 8km</i>  <i>Frilford Heath, Ponds and Fens SSSI – 9km</i>  <i>Fernham Meadows SSSI – 9km</i>  <i>White Shute SSSI – 9km</i>  <i>Barrow Farm Fen SSSI – 10km</i>  <i>Ashridge Wood SSSI – 10km</i>  <i>Parkfarm Down SSSI – 10km</i>  <i>Fognam Chalf Quarry SSSI – 10km</i></p> <p><i>Cothill Fen SAC - 13km</i>  <i>Little Wittenham SAC - 18km</i>  <i>Hackpen Hill SAC - 3km</i>  <i>Oxford Meadows SAC - 22km</i></p> <p>Given the NDP is not allocating sites and the fact that at Market Towns there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development within the existing built area in accordance with Core Policy 1 of the Local Plan 2031: Part One, we are of the opinion the Neighbourhood Plan does not propose any development that is likely to harm these designations. The plan seeks to conserve Wantage’s character and setting. The policies in the Neighbourhood Plan will require these designations, where they relate to the designated neighbourhood area, 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 Wantage NDP has been judged not to have an impact on Community legislation.</p>
<p><b>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:</b></p>	
<p>(a) the probability, duration,</p>	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan is generally likely to influence development for a period of 10 years from its adoption, which is in line with national guidance. The Wantage</p>

<p>frequency and reversibility of the effects;</p>	<p>NDP is likely to have significant and enduring positive environmental effects. Some of the effects are not likely to be reversible as they relate to development. However, they will be of a local scale through limited infill sites and redevelopment within the Town.</p> <p>The plan proposes to maintain the vitality of the Town Centre, establish a green infrastructure network, protect Local Green Spaces and existing facilities. This will have positive cumulative benefits for the area. However, given the scale of what is proposed the positive effect is not likely to be significant.</p> <p>The plan is also likely to have modest positive social effects through the protection of local green spaces, support for good design, and protection of community assets.</p>
<p>(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;</p>	<p>The proposed policies relating to the Town Centre, employment, design and the green infrastructure network are intended to have positive social, economic, and environmental cumulative effects.</p>
<p>(c) the transboundary nature of the effects;</p>	<p>The effects of the Plan are unlikely to have transboundary<sup>5</sup> impacts.</p>
<p>(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);</p>	<p>The policies in the plan are unlikely to present risks to human health or the environment.</p>
<p>(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);</p>	<p>The Wantage NDP relates to the parishes of Wantage and part of Grove. The NDP is not allocating any sites for development. Therefore, as it will not promote any development that is above and beyond what is already supported in the Development Plan, the potential for environmental effects is also likely to be small and localised.</p>
<p>(f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: (i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;</p>	<p>The Wantage NDP area contains the following special natural characteristics and cultural elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listed buildings</li> <li>Conservation Area</li> <li>Archaeological constraints</li> <li>TPOs</li> <li>Ancient Woodlands</li> <li>Local Wildlife Sites</li> <li>Great Crested Newt Distribution</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> Transboundary effects are understood to be in other Member States.

<p>(ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or  (iii) intensive land-use; and</p>	<p>Protected Species Buffer  Flood Zone</p> <p>The Wantage NDP offers an opportunity to enhance the natural environment and the cultural heritage of the area through the proposals being considered.</p> <p>The main vulnerability of the neighbourhood area is the potential impact of development within the Town boundary on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, listed buildings and archaeological sites. However, strategic Core Policy 4 of the Local Plan 2031: Part One sets out that there is a presumption in favour for sustainable development within the existing built area of Market Towns. The Wantage NDP is seeking to add value to this strategic policy by, identifying character areas, setting out design principles and introducing a green infrastructure network. The plan contains two specific objectives relating to the historic environment, which are: to sustain and enhance the special significance of the variety of heritage assets in the town; and to require high design standards in all future development that reflects the distinct character of the town. Therefore, it is considered that there would not be likely significant effects to the environment as a result of the Wantage NDP.</p>
<p>(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.</p>	<p>The area covered by the Wantage Neighbourhood Plan includes part of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).</p> <p>The Neighbourhood Development Plan does not seek to allocate development and the AONB is outside of the Town Centre boundary as defined by the Local Plan 2031: Part One, and the proposed design policy of the Wantage NDP seeks to protect views into the AONB from the built up area. Therefore, there is unlikely to be a significant effect on the AONB resulting from the Neighbourhood Development Plan.</p>

## APPENDIX 4

### NATURAL ENGLAND

Date: 16 August 2021  
Our ref: 363432  
Your ref: Wantage Neighbourhood Plan – SEA & HRA Screen



Ms Dorottya Faludi  
Enquiries Officer/Assistant Planning Officer (Neighbourhood)  
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**BY EMAIL ONLY - [dorottya.faludi@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:dorottya.faludi@southandvale.gov.uk)**

Dear Ms Faludi

#### **Wantage Neighbourhood Plan – SEA & HRA Screening**

Thank you for your consultation request on the above dated and received by Natural England on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

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/Habitats Regulation Assessment**

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

#### **Neighbourhood Plan**

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

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

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

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

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

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

For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to [consultations@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:consultations@naturalengland.org.uk)

Yours sincerely

Isabella Jack  
Sustainable Development Adviser  
Thames Solent Area Team, Natural England

## HISTORIC ENGLAND

Dear Robyn and Ben

Responding to Dorotyya's consultation on the draft screening opinion for SEA of the Wantage Neighbourhood plan I am happy to confirm Historic England's agreement that the plan does not merit SEA based on the information provided.

We reserve the right to request a review of this decision should the plan change significantly in scope at a later stage of drafting.

Yours sincerely

Robert Lloyd-Sweet

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



Historic England