

# **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 Abingdon Neighbourhood Development Plan**

**7 JULY 2025**

## **SUMMARY**

Following consultation with statutory bodies, Vale of White Horse District Council (the 'Council') determines that the Abingdon Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. An initial screening opinion was used to determine whether or not the contents of the emerging Abingdon Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/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, Natural England and Oxfordshire County Council. The results of the screening process are detailed in this Screening Statement.

## **THE SCREENING PROCESS**

4. 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.
5. 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.
6. Table 1 in Appendix 1 sets out the criteria from the Practical Guide, along with an assessment of the Abingdon NDP against each criterion to ascertain whether a SEA is required.

7. 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.
8. These two assessments feed into Table 1 and the SEA screening opinion.

## **THE ABINGDON NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

9. The Abingdon NDP will contain the following vision, aims & objectives and policies:

### Vision

*'Our vision for Abingdon is that it becomes one of the most attractive towns on the Thames. Its rich historical heritage, place at the heart of a world class scientific technology hub and mix of residential, retail, commercial, leisure and tourist spaces makes it an attractive, sustainable place to live, work and visit.*

*So that future businesses and people can thrive and be healthy, mixed residential and commercial buildings are woven into green spaces. Vibrant communities are people centric, linked by safe walking and cycling routes to public transport hubs reducing the impact of private vehicles.*

*The town centre is easy to get around and serves as the centre for retail, tourism and socialising but is better linked by a cultural corridor to an arts, cultural and heritage quarter, on north bank of the Thames, with safer access to the south side of the river, connecting the town with its surrounding countryside.*

*New developments respect the town's character but are well-designed, forward-looking, and regenerative to reduce their environmental impact. Abingdon is continually improving, making it even better for generations yet to come.'*

### Aims and Objectives

1. *Ensure that land made available for new developments that better facilitate and maintain a vibrant, connected, economically active and sustainable Abingdon without adding to congestion or flood-risk.*
2. *Create a convenient, robust, and flexible network of streets and spaces that promote all modes of active travel leading to reduced reliance on*

*private vehicles. To support this, there is a need for enhanced public transport, walking and cycling links.*

- 3. Improve connections of the outlying suburbs to the historic centre by foot, cycle and public transport which are currently hindered by highway barriers and gaps in the walking and cycling routes. Remove the barriers to easy movement created by busy roads by putting in place direct, street level crossings for pedestrians and cyclists.*
- 4. Implement the walkable neighbourhood model across the whole of Abingdon through the development of safe, sustainable, liveable, and mixed communities with active transport to jobs and easy access to essential services that meet the daily needs of the community.*
- 5. Facilitate a reduction in carbon emissions and contribute to achieving the national goal of Net Zero by 2050.*
- 6. Improve the sustainability of both conversions and new build development property through use of low carbon materials, construction methods to facilitate low carbon running costs.*
- 7. Minimise future flood risk by protecting and, where possible, extending the functional floodplain. Require new developments to provide multifunctional mitigation measures, such as sustainable urban drainage systems, to ensure that rainwater is attenuated within the site.*
- 8. Maintain, protect, and enhance the distinctive visual character, views and heritage of Abingdon, its immediate historic setting and vistas, and its connections to the surrounding areas.*
- 9. Protect and enhance low carbon economic activity, to encourage the promotion of innovative and high quality employment space. New employment venues should be part of both existing and new mixed use neighbourhoods, moving away from employment zoning, subject to respect for the character, scale, and appearance of such areas. The retention of existing skills, and the development of new ones through youth apprenticeships and placement schemes with local business and colleges will be encouraged.*
- 10. Protect, maintain, and enhance the natural environment, including local green spaces, parks, trees and green buffers, habitats, and all wildlife corridors alongside their connection to the wider landscape, promoting biodiversity and by planting native species.*
- 11. Protect existing, and deliver new easily accessible, community infrastructure, including for primary health care, skills development, recreation, sport, leisure, and cultural enrichment, to fill existing gaps and support the future of Abingdon and its population growth.*

## Policies

Policy ATC 1 – Central Abingdon Regeneration  
Policy ATC 2 – Townscape and Heritage  
Policy ATC 3 – Connections and Permeability  
Policy ATC 4 – Contemporary Sense of Place  
Policy ATC 5 – The Green Town Centre  
Policy ATC 6 – Flexibility and Multi-functionality  
Policy BE 1 – Protect and Enhance Economic Activity  
Policy BE 2 – Provision for innovative work spaces, new and small businesses  
Policy BE 3 – Skills development  
Policy BE 4 – New employment premises and design quality  
Policy BEH 1 – Design quality  
Policy BEH 2 – Conversion and Extensions of existing properties  
Policy BEH 3 – Quality streets and spaces  
Policy WN 1 – Walkable Neighbourhoods  
Policy TAM 1 – The pedestrian experience  
Policy TAM 2 – Cycling Networks  
Policy ACS 1 – Arts and Cultural Facilities  
Policy ACS 2 – Cultural Corridor/Cultural Quarter Development  
Policy ACS 3 – Heritage Trails and wayfinding systems  
Policy AC 4 – Sports facilities  
Policy FYP 1 – Access to Youth-focused spaces  
Policy LGS 1 – Equal access to Green Spaces  
Policy LGS 2 – Biodiversity Net Gain  
Policy LGS 3 – Wildlife Corridors  
Policy LGS 4 – Green and Blue Infrastructure Protection and Enhancement  
Policy LGS 5 – Local Green Space Designation

10. The Abingdon NDP will contain a comprehensive range of policies to maintain the character, culture and heritage of the town, as well as specifying design criteria for development.
11. Policies in the Abingdon NDP aim to support sustainable development in the town that will not adversely impact on its character, while aiming to improve the current appeal, walkability and usability of the town centre particularly. The plan does not allocate any sites for housing but does include support for the Central Abingdon Regeneration Framework (CARF) document, which sets out ambitions to regenerate and rejuvenate the town centre, focusing specifically on a few areas to be updated/redeveloped, potentially through a change of use.

12. 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.
13. It is therefore concluded that the implementation of the Abingdon NDP would not result in likely significant effects on the environment.

## **CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

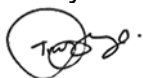
14. The screening opinion was sent to Natural England, The Environment Agency, Historic England and Oxfordshire County Council on 15 May 2025 for a four-week consultation period. The full responses are presented in Appendix 4.
15. The Environment Agency did not provide comments on this SEA and HRA Screening Opinion.
16. Historic England did not provide comments on this SEA and HRA Screening Opinion.
17. Natural England confirmed their agreement that there are unlikely to be significant environmental effects from the proposed plan and also agreed that the Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan does not require further HRA assessment. They did not have any specific comments on the draft Neighbourhood Plan.
18. Oxfordshire County Council confirmed that they have no comments on the Abingdon SEA and HRA Screening Opinion.

## **CONCLUSION**

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

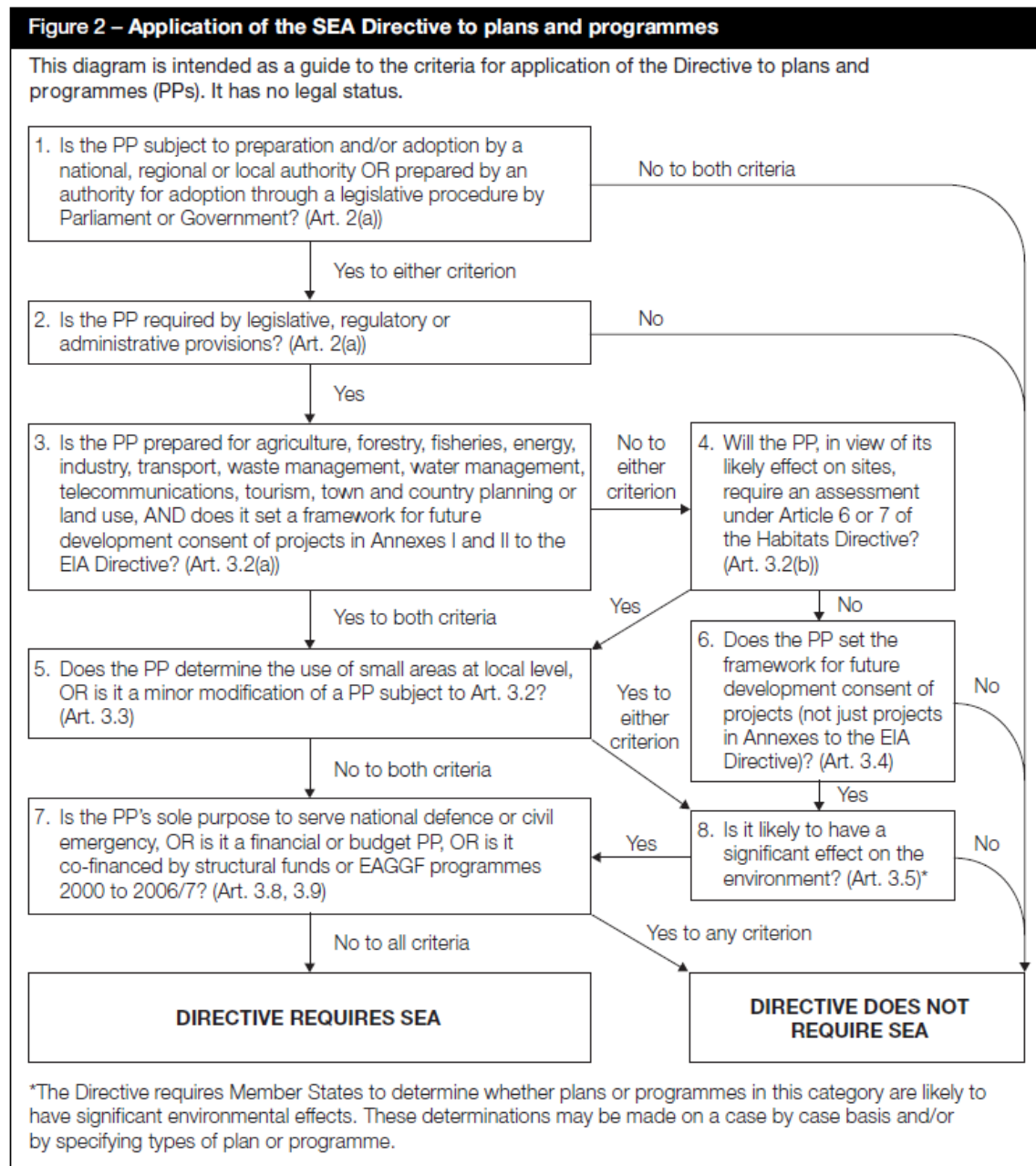
Authorised by: Tim Oruye

Signed:



Date: 07/07/2025

## 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**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Y/N</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
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 Abingdon NDP Steering Group, a working group who report to the Abingdon Town Council (as the “relevant body”) and will be “made” by Vale of White Horse District Council 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>
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>

		National Planning Practice Guidance (Paragraph: 051 Reference ID: 41-051-20150209) sets out that draft neighbourhood plan proposals should be assessed to determine whether the plan is likely to have significant environmental effects. This assessment should be undertaken in accordance with the requirements set out in <a href="#">regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004</a> .
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))	N	The Abingdon 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.
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))	N	The Abingdon NDP is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites. See Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Opinion for the Abingdon NDP in Appendix 2.
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)	Y	The Abingdon NDP will determine the use of sites/small areas at a local level.
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)	Y	When made, the Abingdon NDP will include a series of policies to guide development within the town. This will inform the determination of planning applications providing a framework for future development consent of projects.



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)	N	N/A
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 Abingdon 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 District Council’s Local Plan 2031 Part 2 (LPP2)<sup>3</sup> as its basis for assessment. From this, the Local Authority will determine whether the Abingdon 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. An updated HRA has been produced during the preparation of the emerging Joint Local Plan. Where relevant, findings from this report have been identified in the analysis of significant impacts.

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

<sup>2</sup> The South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (December 2020)

<sup>3</sup> Vale of White Horse LPP2 Habitats Regulations Assessment (February 2018 Update)

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

*“105.—(1) Where a land use plan—*

- (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 within 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), Little Wittenham SAC (South Oxfordshire) and River Lambourn SAC (West Berkshire). Abingdon NDP has the following relationships with these areas:

- Cothill Fen SAC (Approx. 2.5km)
- Little Wittenham SAC (Approx. 7.5km)
- Oxford Meadows SAC (Approx. 7.5km)
- Hackpen Hill SAC (Approx. 17km)
- River Lambourn SAC (Approx 22km)

### Cothill Fen SAC – Approximately 2.5km (Vale of White Horse District Council)

6. Cothill Fen is designated as a SAC for its calcium-rich, spring fed fens and alder woodlands on floodplains. Cothill Fen is an exceptionally important site with an outstanding range of nationally rare habitats which support a large number of rare invertebrates and plants. The habitats consist of calcareous fen, calcareous grassland, woodland and scrub of varying degrees of wetness. The habitat supports over 330 species of vascular plant and over 120 nationally scarce or rare 13 invertebrates, including the nationally rare Southern Damselfly (*Coenagrion mercuriale*).

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 waterfed fens.

Little Wittenham SAC – approximately 7.5km (South Oxfordshire District Council)

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 impacts of public access and disturbance, and invasive fish species upon great crested newt.

Oxford Meadow SAC – approximately 7.5km (Oxford City Council)

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

Hackpen Hill SAC – approximately 17km (Vale of White Horse District Council)

12. 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*.
13. The key environmental conditions that support the features of European interest are appropriate management, minimal air pollution, and absence of direct fertilisation.

### River Lambourn SAC – approximately 22km (West Berkshire Council)

14. The River Lambourn SAC is a site of approximately 27 hectares located wholly within West Berkshire and consists of the River Lambourn water body. The Lambourn supports Bullhead (*Cottus gobio*) populations inhabiting chalk streams in central southern England. Good water quality, coarse sediments and extensive beds of submerged plants provide an excellent habitat for the species. The presence of Brook lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*) is also a qualifying feature of the site.
15. The main pressures and threats to this site include the impacts of hydrological changes, pollution to groundwater and invasive non-native species.

### **ASSESSMENT**

16. As required under Regulation 106 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the 'Habitats Regulations'), the qualifying body (Abingdon 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:
  - Atmospheric Pollution;
  - Recreational Disturbance; and
  - Water Quality and Quantity.

#### Atmospheric pollution;

17. Air pollution is most likely to affect European sites where plant, soil and water habitats are the qualifying feature, 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.
18. 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.
19. The European sites that are within 200m of strategic roads are Oxford Meadows SAC (A34 and A40) and Cothill Fen SAC (Honeybottom Lane and Besselsleigh Road).

20. Air quality is listed as a threat to Cothill Fen SAC. The Vale of White Horse HRA (2018) stated:
- “The main routes for vehicular traffic will not be the country lanes around Cothill Fen but the major roads (e.g. A34) to the east that provide commuter links. There is an expectation that significant increases in vehicular movements within 200m of Cothill Fen SAC are unlikely, and it is therefore considered unlikely that any air quality impact on Cothill Fen will arise.”
21. Air pollution is not listed as a threat to Oxford Meadows SAC in the Vale of White Horse HRA (2018), and it was considered that the mitigation and monitoring approaches identified are sufficient to ensure there will not be adverse effects on Oxford Meadows SAC, within the context of the forecast improving trend. but the qualifying habitats (lowland hay meadows and creeping marshwort) are sensitive to changes in air quality.
22. The submission Joint Local Plan HRA (2024) is still awaiting additional work in regards to air quality before significant effects can be ruled out at Cothill Fen SAC and Oxford Meadows SAC. However, given that there are no allocations proposed in the Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan, the NDP will not add in combination effects, therefore significant effects on the SACs in relation to air quality can be screened out and do not need to be considered further.

Recreation disturbance; and

23. The HRA of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan (June 2018) stated:
- “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.”
24. It should be emphasised that many European sites are National Nature Reserves (e.g. Cothill Fen) or nature reserves managed by wildlife trusts or nature conservation charities, at which access is encouraged and resources are available to ensure that recreational use is managed appropriately
25. In relation to Oxford Meadows SAC the Vale of White Horse Local Plan HRA (2018) advised
- “A survey undertaken during October 2011 by Oxford City Council to inform the Oxford Sites and Housing DPD identified that over 80% of visitors to the Oxford Meadows SAC live within 5km of the site.”

26. The Vale of White Horse HRA screened out significant effects on Oxford Meadows SAC due to recreational pressure.
27. The JLP HRA Appropriate Assessment (Dec 2024) clarified that the Cothill Fen SAC is “not generally promoted for public access and is unlikely to attract visitors from a long distance. Development very close to the site could generate visitors (e.g. dog walkers from within c.1km away), but as the site is very wet, visitors naturally follow the boardwalk paths. The site is mainly considered to be sensitive to changes in groundwater or hydrology, not recreation.” As the closest part of the NDP area is approximately 2.5km from Cothill Fen SAC it is considered that recreational disturbance effects can be screened out.
28. Abingdon is approximately 7.5km from Little Wittenham SAC, which is part of a larger site managed by the Earth Trust as a nature reserve. The Earth Trust restricts access to the most sensitive areas of the SAC by maintaining a signed network of paths and a pond viewing area, within the woodland. 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.
29. The increased visitor levels which are likely to occur as a result of the modest increase in population in Abingdon may result in increased pressure on the habitats on the reserve as a whole. However, due to restricted access 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.
30. 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.
31. The JLP HRA (2024) states that the latest Natural England condition assessment of the great crested newt features (22/07/2010) still recorded ‘favourable’ status. Given the low sensitivity of the great crested newt population to recreational disturbance and the visitor management measures in place likely significant effects alone and in combination to the Little Wittenham SAC are screened out.

#### Water Quality and Quantity.

32. European sites at which aquatic or wetland environments support qualifying features have the potential to be affected by changes in water quantity or quality. New development can alter the quality of the



water environment through direct contamination to those locations which are hydrologically connected to a development site but also through changes in the demand for wastewater treatment.

33. Water quantity also plays a critical role in the health and biodiversity of river catchments, including water levels (depth and volumetric flow) and velocity in the river, and water table levels in the floodplain. These properties in turn influence rates of siltation and erosion, dissolved oxygen, and pollutant and nutrient concentrations. Low flow rates affect food availability for riparian fauna, may limit migration and dispersal, and can alter the structure, composition and condition of vegetation communities. New homes require the development of new infrastructure, including the provision of fresh water supply. Increases in water demand can impact upon those locations where water is abstracted.
34. The European sites which identify a hydrological risk are:
  - Cothill Fen SAC: Cothill Fen SAC owes its existence to unusual hydrological conditions arising from changes in the underlying geology (Natural England, 2016b). The site has calcium-rich springwater fed fens which are sensitive to water pollution and hydrological changes (Natural England, 2014b). The 2018 HRA concluded that no adverse effects on the integrity of Cothill Fen SAC. The Council commissioned a Lowlands Fens study in 2024 (Morris et al.) to identify sites supporting this habitat types and to identify spatial risk zones around each site where hydrological impacts of development in these zones could result in adverse effects to the site's fen habitat. The catchment stretches northwards from the SAC and given Abingdon is at least 2.5km south of the SAC, it is considered that likely significant effects to the Cothill Fen SAC can be screened out.
  - Oxford Meadows SAC: the site is sensitive to hydrological changes. The site runs alongside the River Thames. A survey undertaken in August 2014 indicated that the population of creeping marshwort in Port Meadow has significantly declined in size. It is considered that this change may be associated directly or indirectly with hydrological changes possibly deeper, more prolonged and frequent flood episodes. The Oxford Meadows SACO also notes that creeping marshwort populations are critically dependent on surface and groundwater supply, and that maintaining the quality and quantity of water supply is very important, especially at certain times of year. Poor water quality and inadequate quantities of water can adversely affect the structure and function of this habitat type (Natural England, 2019e). Although the 2024 Water Cycle Study report confirms there could be shortfalls in water supply in the Districts, the majority of the Districts are supplied by

groundwater sources in the chalk aquifers which run along the southern extent of both. Therefore, whilst abstractions may increase to meet increased demand, these abstractions are considered too distant (and downstream) to have an impact on the Oxford Meadows SAC flow regime.

Furthermore other options to increase water supply and improve water quality all lie downstream of the Oxford Meadows SAC and therefore likely significant water quality effects to the Oxford Meadows SAC can be ruled out.

- River Lambourn SAC: the sites are sensitive to hydrological changes and water quality. The River Lambourn is also affected by Natural England's 2022 advice on nutrient impacts on habitats sites. The 2018 HRA scoped out the River Lambourn SAC from the HRA as it was deemed that no actual pathway existed connecting it to development in Vale of White Horse. The 2024 JLP HRA considered impacts, but concluded likely significant effects to the River Lambourn SAC are screened out. Abingdon is approx. 22km from the SAC and does not fall within the catchment and therefore, likely significant effects to the River Lambourn SAC are screened out.

#### In combination effects

35. 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 Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan. 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 Abingdon NDP area and the closest is approximately 2.5km from the boundary of the NDP area. Therefore, the Abingdon 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.

#### **CONCLUSION**

36. The Abingdon 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 Abingdon NDP is not required.

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

1. Characteristics of the Plan, having regard to:	
(a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;	The Abingdon 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, and the strategic policies of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031.
(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 Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan 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 Abingdon NDP. A basic condition of the Abingdon NDP is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The plan includes a focus on the regeneration of the town centre, including improving the design and quality of streets and spaces, as well as maintaining the character of the area. There is a policy specifically relating to the 'green town centre' as well as promoting equal access to green spaces more generally across the neighbourhood area. In addition, there are policies on biodiversity net gain, wildlife corridors and the protection of green and blue infrastructure. There is also a strong focus on protecting and promoting the heritage and cultural assets and feel of the area. This focus combined with the relevant policies will help to provide development which meets the needs of residents now and in the future.
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and	The environmental impact of the proposals within the Abingdon 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

	<p>Abingdon NDP will aim to support sustainable development in the town. Retaining and improving the character, heritage and appearance of the town is particularly important.</p> <p>The Abingdon NDP area contains the following environmental designations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Archaeological constraints</li> <li>- BAP priority habitats</li> <li>- Conservation Areas</li> <li>- Flood Zones – Zone 2 and 3</li> <li>- Green Belt</li> <li>- Listed building structures</li> <li>- Local heritage asset</li> <li>- Local Wildlife sites</li> <li>- Local Nature Reserves</li> <li>- Protected species buffer</li> <li>- Scheduled Ancient Monuments</li> <li>- Registered Parks and Gardens</li> <li>- Ancient Woodland</li> </ul> <p>There are the following SACs within 17km of the Abingdon NDP (the distances are measured from the edge of the neighbourhood area). These are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cothill Fen SAC (Approx. 2.5km)</li> <li>- Little Wittenham SAC (Approx. 7.5km)</li> <li>- Oxford Meadows SAC (Approx. 7.5km)</li> <li>- Hackpen Hill SAC (Approx. 17km)</li> </ul> <p>There are also the following SSSI's located within the following distances of the Abingdon NDP area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Culham Brake SSSI (Approx 0.5km)</li> <li>- Barrow Farm Fen SSSI (Approx 1km)</li> <li>- Sugworth SSSI (Approx 1km)</li> <li>- Dry Sandford Pit SSSI (Approx 2km)</li> <li>- Cothill Fen SSSI (Approx 2.5km)</li> </ul> <p>Given the NDP is not allocating any sites, and the policies in the Neighbourhood Plan will require these designations to be protected; therefore there would not be likely significant effects to the environment.</p>
(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of	<p>The proposed development in the Abingdon NDP has been judged not to have an impact on Community legislation.</p>

Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).	
<b>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:</b>	
(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;	<p>The Abingdon NDP is likely to have modest but enduring positive environmental effects. The effects are not likely to be reversible, as they relate to development. However, the proposals are minor and will be of a local scale.</p> <p>The policies in the Neighbourhood Plan add detail to existing development plan policies offering protection to the natural environment, Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings and designated heritage assets to sustain and enhance their significance and setting. 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 positive social effects through the provision of residential development through infill (as supported by the development plan as a whole) and the protection of local green spaces and biodiversity generally.</p>
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;	It is intended that the positive social effects of providing residential development 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 <sup>4</sup> 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 Abingdon NDP relates to the parish of Abingdon. The NDP is not allocating any sites for development, and therefore as it will not promote any development that is above and beyond what is already supported in the Development Plan, the potential for

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

	environmental effects is also 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 heritage; (ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or (iii) intensive land-use; and	<p>The Abingdon 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 area is the impact of householder and small scale developments on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, listed buildings and archaeological sites. However, given that the plan aims to ensure development conserves and enhances the Conservation Area through detailed design policies, whilst actively seeking to improve the cultural and heritage offering through heritage trails and a focus on the sense of place, it is considered there would not be likely significant effects to the environment</p> <p>The HRA Screening Assessment in Appendix 2 concluded that the Abingdon NDP 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 Abingdon NDP is not required.</p> <p>Environmental quality standards or limit values are not considered likely to be significantly affected by the Abingdon NDP.</p> <p>In light of the proposals in the Abingdon NDP, the plan is also 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.	There are no areas or landscapes with recognised national, Community or international protection status affected by the neighbourhood plan.

# Appendix 4 – Statutory Consultee Responses

## NATURAL ENGLAND

Date: 11 June 2025  
Our ref: 512864  
Your ref: Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan



Mr Edward Williamson  
South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse District Councils

**BY EMAIL ONLY**  
[planning.policy@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@southandvale.gov.uk)

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

T 0300 060 3900

Dear Mr Williamson

### **Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan - Review - SEA/HRA Screening Opinion consultation**

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated and received by Natural England on 15 May 2025.

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 sites<sup>1</sup>, 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 likely to affect protected species to such an extent

<sup>1</sup> 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".

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](mailto:consultations@naturalengland.org.uk)

Yours sincerely

Sally Wintle  
Consultations Team



## **OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**From:** [Desorgher, Scarlet - Oxfordshire County Council](#) on behalf of [PlanningInOxfordshire](#)  
**To:** [Planning Policy S&V](#); ["planning\\_THM@environment-agency.gov.uk"](#); ["e-seast@HistoricEngland.org.uk"](#); [Natural England](#); [PlanningInOxfordshire](#)  
**Cc:** [Deborah Bryson](#)  
**Subject:** RE: Tetsworth Neighbourhood Plan Review and Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan SEA/HRA Screening Opinions – please reply by 12 June  
**Date:** 06 June 2025 10:58:13

**\*\*EXTERNAL\*\***

Good morning,

On behalf of Oxfordshire County Council, we have no comments in relation to either of these reports.

Thank you for including us in this consultation.

**Scarlet Desorgher**

**Assistant Strategic Planner**

**Strategic Planning**

**Place Shaping Services**

*Email:* [Scarlet.Desorgher@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Scarlet.Desorgher@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

*Mob:* 07704667942

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**From:** Planning Policy S&V <planning.policy@southandvale.gov.uk>  
**Sent:** 15 May 2025 17:26  
**To:** 'planning\_THM@environment-agency.gov.uk' <planning\_THM@environment-agency.gov.uk>; 'e-seast@HistoricEngland.org.uk' <e-seast@HistoricEngland.org.uk>; Natural England <consultations@naturalengland.org.uk>; PlanningInOxfordshire <PlanningInOxfordshire@Oxfordshire.gov.uk>  
**Cc:** Deborah Bryson <Deborah.Bryson@southandvale.gov.uk>  
**Subject:** Tetsworth Neighbourhood Plan Review and Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan SEA/HRA Screening Opinions – please reply by 12 June

**CAUTION:** This email originated from outside of the organisation. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Good afternoon,

I am writing on behalf of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils to seek your views on the attached draft SEA and HRA Screening Opinions for Tetsworth Neighbourhood Plan Review and Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan. The conclusion of these reports is that no further SEA or HRA work is required.

We would be grateful if you could please review these opinions and provide responses by **5pm on Thursday 12 June**, even if you have no comments.

Kind regards,

Edward Williamson  
Assistant Planning Officer (Enquiries)  
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils  
Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon, OX14 3JE  
Telephone: 07598545955  
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