

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 Cumnor Neighbourhood Development Plan Review

31 JULY 2025

SUMMARY

Following consultation with statutory bodies, Vale of White Horse District Council (the 'Council') determines that the Cumnor Neighbourhood Development Plan Review (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 Cumnor Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) Review requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2011/42/EC (the Directive) and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the Regulations).
2. Any land use plan or programme 'which sets the framework for future development consent of projects' must be screened according to a set of criteria from Annex II of the Directive and Schedule 1 of the Regulations. These criteria include exceptions for plans 'which determine the use of a small area at local level' or which only propose 'minor modifications to a plan', if it is determined that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects.
3. This 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 Cumnor NDP Review 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 CUMNOR NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW

9. The Cumnor NDP Review will contain the following aims & objectives and policies:

Aims and Objectives

Aims	Objectives
1. Protect and enhance the green & blue spaces within Cumnor Parish.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Conserves and enhances local green spaces, SSSIs (Spring Farm, The Hurst, Wytham Great Wood), nature reserves (e.g. Pinkhill, Shrike and Buckthorn) ii. Protects & enhances the biodiversity of green & blue spaces and local wildlife sites by increasing habitats and wildlife corridors iii. Protects and conserves the Green Belt within the Parish iv. Preserves historically important landscapes and important views (within the Parish so also preserving views both from Oxford into the Parish and out from the Parish) v. Maintains and enhances the extensive network of public footpaths
2. Support opportunities for local employment within the parish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Encourages the reuse of brownfield sites for generating employment on a scale appropriate for the location and where this will enhance the character and amenity of the immediate surroundings
3. Ensure that our infrastructure supports the needs of new and existing residents of Cumnor Parish.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Ensures new development does not exacerbate, and where possible, mitigates current problems with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. groundwater flooding, water drainage and sewage problems b. air quality c. traffic noise d. parking e. road safety by reducing traffic speeds throughout the Parish where it is considered appropriate f. heavy goods vehicles using routes through the Parish as 'rat runs' g. aircraft noise ii. Supports the health & wellbeing of residents through the provision of a Parish based GP surgery iii. Supports the identification of a secular burial ground

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iv. Maintains & enhances Parish assets such as village halls, pubs, community centres, recreation facilities, sports venues v. Supports the improved connectivity of the Parish (within & beyond) through a comprehensive network of cycling and walking routes vi. Ensures the continued existence of shops, restaurants/cafes, pubs and independent specialist businesses vii. Supports improved broadband provision to all residents in the Parish viii. Encourages the provision and use of public transport within the Parish
4. Maintain and enhance the character of Cumnor Parish.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Respects the existing character of the Parish and its existing settlements. Any development should preserve or enhance this character. ii. Supports initiatives that preserve our historic environment e.g. listed buildings, buildings of local interest, paleogeographic sites and archeologically important sites
5. Provide a well-balanced mix of housing to meet identified needs of Cumnor Parish.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Provides a mix of housing types, including smaller houses with gardens, for singles, couples and older residents wishing to downsize on suitable sites. ii. Provides appropriately sized, affordable houses (3 bedroom or less) on suitable sites. iii. Integrates new housing into the Parish that maintains and enhances the existing character of our area.

Policies

LGS1 Local Green Space Designation

DBC1 General Design Principles in the Parish

DBC2 Cumnor Conservation Area

DBC3 Design in the Low-Density Areas

DBC4 Development in the Green Belt

DBC5 Lower Cumnor Hill/Third Acre Rise Area of Special Local Character

DBC6 Conserving and Enhancing Local Heritage Assets

DBC7 Important Views

RNE1 Green Infrastructure

RNE2 Flood Risk

RES1 Residential Mix & Standards

RES2 Care Homes & residential Institutions

EBC1 Community, Sports & Recreation Facilities

EBC2 Farmoor Reservoir

EBC3 River environment & access

TI1 Sustainable Transport

TI2 Cycle Routes

TI3 Footpaths & Bridleways

TI4 Digital Connectivity

Policies LGS1, DBC3, RES1, RES2, TI2, and TI4 to be retained as within the made NDP.

Policy DBC1 to be modified to clarify some aspects of design such as providing a clearer definition of what back land development is, as well as refining the scale of development that is deemed acceptable in the area.

Policy DBC2 to be modified setting out an appropriate approach to retrofitting in the conservation area e.g. solar panels.

Policy DBC4 could potentially be modified. The Parish Council is currently examining what the new NPPF provisions on Grey Belt will mean and how it can seek to respond to it here. At the very least, the Parish Council wishes to ensure that its design policies are appropriate to guide the design of any potential future Grey Belt schemes.

Policy DBC5 to be modified to take a more specific approach in order to make it clear what type and scale of development would be considered to undermine the local character.

Policy DBC6 to be modified by expanding the description for the identified Local Heritage Assets, as well as assessing additional candidates.

Policy DBC7 to be modified to respond to monitoring of the policy which shows that the assessment of harm is limited and mitigation measures agreed are inadequate.

Policy RNE1 to be modified upon reviewing updated documents relating to green infrastructure.

Policy RNE2 to be modified upon reviewing planning applications where the existing policy has not been applied appropriately.

Policy EBC1 to be modified to ensure that subsequent replacement development plan policies will continue to apply.

Policy EBC2 to be modified to support floatovoltaics at the reservoir if it can be demonstrated that the long-term implications for biodiversity have been understood and appropriately mitigated.

Policy EBC3 to be retained as is, with updated supporting text to reflect the current situation with the environmental state of the River.

Policy TI1 to be retained as is, with updated supporting text to recognise national policy's updated provisions towards the vision-led approach to transport.

Policy TI3 to be modified following further investigation into the impacts of solar power station proposals on public rights of way.

10. The Cumnor NDP Review will contain a range of policies to maintain the character and heritage of the town, as well as specifying design criteria for new development.

11. Policies in the Cumnor NDP Review aim to support sustainable development in the village that will not adversely impact on its rural nature. Retaining the character and appearance of the village is particularly important. The plan does not allocate any sites for housing.

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 Cumnor NDP Review would not result in likely significant effects on the environment.

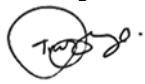
CONSULTATION RESPONSES

14. The screening opinion was sent to Natural England, The Environment Agency, Historic England and Oxfordshire County Council on 2 July 2025 for a four-week consultation period. The responses in full are presented in Appendix 4.
15. The Environment Agency did not provide comments on this SEA and HRA Screening.
16. Historic England confirmed their agreement that the Cumnor NDP Review does not need an SEA.
17. Natural England confirmed their agreement that there are unlikely to be significant environmental effects from the proposed plan review and also agreed that the Cumnor NDP Review does not require further HRA assessment. They did not have any specific comments on the draft Neighbourhood Plan Review.
18. Oxfordshire County Council did not provide comments on this 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 Cumnor NDP Review is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, therefore, an Appropriate Assessment for the Cumnor Neighbourhood Development Plan Review is not required.
21. Based on the assessment presented in Appendices 1 & 3, the Cumnor NDP Review is not likely to have a significant effect on the environment.
22. The Cumnor NDP Review does not require a Strategic Environment Assessment.

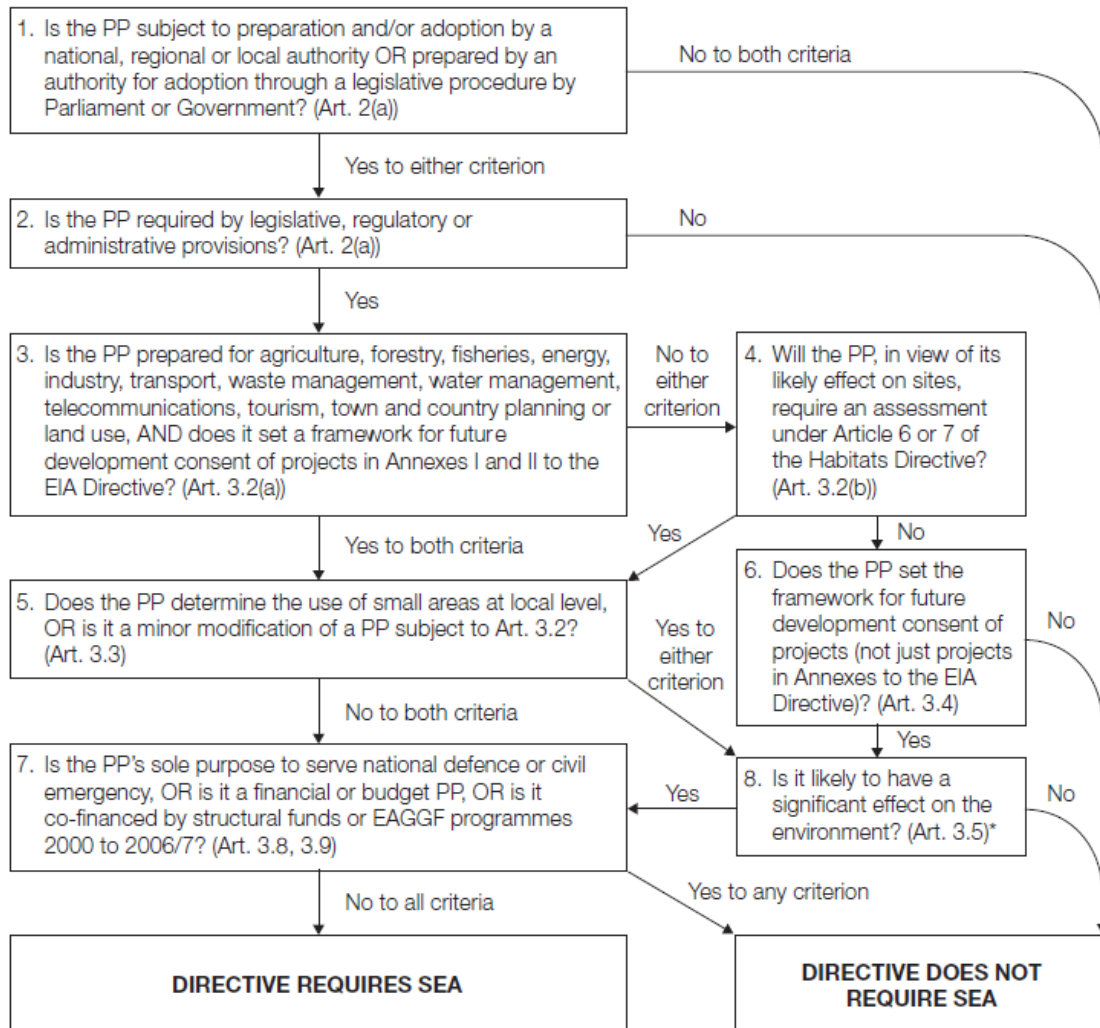
Authorised by: Tim Oruye - Head of Policy and Programmes

Signed: 
Date: 31 July 2025

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

Figure 2 – Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes

This diagram is intended as a guide to the criteria for application of the Directive to plans and programmes (PPs). It has no legal status.



*The Directive requires Member States to determine whether plans or programmes in this category are likely to have significant environmental effects. These determinations may be made on a case by case basis and/or by specifying types of plan or programme.

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

Stage	Y/N	Explanation
1. Is the Neighbourhood Plan subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Art. 2(a))	Y	<p>The preparation of and adoption of the Neighbourhood Development Plan is allowed under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. The Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared by the Cumnor NDP Steering Group, a working group who report to the Cumnor Parish 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"> • The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 • The Neighbourhood Planning (referendums) Regulations 2012 • The Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 • The Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 • The Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 • The Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2017
2. Is the NP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))	Y	<p>Whilst the Neighbourhood Development Plan is not a requirement and is optional under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011, it will, if “made”, form part of the Development Plan for the District. It is therefore important that the screening process considers whether it is likely to have significant environmental effects and hence whether SEA is required under the Directive.</p>

		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 regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 .
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 Cumnor NDP Review 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 Cumnor NDP Review is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites. See Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Opinion for the Cumnor NDP Review 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 Cumnor NDP Review 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 Cumnor NDP Review will include a series of policies to guide development within the parish, but will not allocate sites for specific development. 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 Cumnor Neighbourhood Development Plan Review

INTRODUCTION

1. The Local Authority is the “competent authority” under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, and needs to ensure that Neighbourhood Plans have been assessed through the Habitats Regulations process. This looks at the potential for significant impacts on nature conservation sites that are of European importance¹, also referred to as Natura 2000.
2. This Screening Assessment relates to a Neighbourhood Development Plan that will be in general conformity with the strategic policies within the development plan² (the higher level plan for town and country planning and land use). This Screening Assessment uses the Habitats Regulations Assessment of Vale of White Horse District Council’s Local Plan 2031 Part 2 (LPP2)³ as its basis for assessment. From this, the Local Authority will determine whether the Cumnor Neighbourhood Development Plan Review is likely to result in significant impacts on Natura 2000 sites either alone or in combination with other plans and policies and, therefore, whether an ‘Appropriate Assessment’ is required. 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.”

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

² The South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (December 2020)

³ 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) and Little Wittenham SAC (South Oxfordshire). Cumnor NDP Review has the following relationships with these areas:
 - Cothill Fen SAC (Approx. 4km)
 - Oxford Meadows SAC (Approx. 5km)
 - Little Wittenham SAC (Approx. 12km)
 - Hackpen Hill SAC (Approx. 20km)

Cothill Fen SAC – Approximately 4km (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.

Oxford Meadow SAC – approximately 5km (Oxford City Council)

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

Little Wittenham SAC – approximately 12km (South Oxfordshire District Council)

10. 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.
11. The main pressures and threats to this site include the impacts of public access and disturbance, and invasive fish species upon great crested newt.

Hackpen Hill SAC – approximately 20km (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.

ASSESSMENT

14. As required under Regulation 106 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the 'Habitats Regulations'), the qualifying body (Cumnor Parish 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;

15. 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.
16. 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.
17. 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).
18. 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."

19. 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.
20. 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 Cumnor Neighbourhood Plan Review, 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

21. 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.”
22. 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
23. 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.”
24. The Vale of White Horse HRA screened out significant effects on Oxford Meadows SAC due to recreational pressure.
25. 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 Cumnor NDP Review

is not allocating any sites and is approximately 4km from the SAC, it is considered that recreational disturbance effects can be screened out.

26. Cumnor is approximately 12km 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.
27. The increased visitor levels which are likely to occur as a result of the modest increase in population in Cumnor 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.
28. 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.
29. 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.

30. 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.
31. 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.

32. 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 there would be 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 overlaps with the Cumnor NDP Review area. However as the NDP Review is not proposing any allocations, 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.

In combination effects

33. 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 Cumnor Neighbourhood Plan Review. The Plan Review 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 Cumnor NDP Review area, with the closest approximately 4km. Therefore, the Cumnor NDP Review is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, taking the above into account.

CONCLUSION

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

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

1. Characteristics of the Plan, having regard to:	
(a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;	The Cumnor NDP Review would, if adopted, form part of the Statutory Development Plan and as such does contribute to the framework for future development consent of projects. However, 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 Cumnor Neighbourhood Plan Review is unlikely to influence other Plans or Programmes within the statutory Development Plan.
(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;	National policy requires a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread through plan-making, including the Cumnor NDP Review. A basic condition of the Cumnor NDP Review is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The plan review adds local detail to policies encouraging high quality design, protecting landscape, biodiversity and water environments, while aligning with new national priorities for climate action and sustainable transport. It provides a strong, locally-focused framework that helps deliver sustainable, place-led development consistent with the district's wider vision and planning strategy. 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 Cumnor NDP Review 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 Cumnor NDP Review will aim to support sustainable development in the village. Retaining the character and distinctiveness

	<p>of the village is particularly important, with the neighbourhood plan review updating the design criteria for new development.</p> <p>The Cumnor NDP Review area contains the following environmental designations:</p> <p><i>Oxford Green Belt</i> <i>Conservation area</i> <i>Listed buildings</i> <i>Flood Zones</i> <i>Archaeological constraints</i> <i>Ancient Woodland</i> <i>BAP priority habitats</i> <i>Scheduled Monuments</i> <i>Local Wildlife Sites</i></p> <p>There are 2 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) within approx. 5km of the Cumnor Neighbourhood Development Plan Review area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cothill Fen SAC approx. 4km • Oxford Meadows SAC approx. 5km <p>There are also several SSSIs within 10km of the Cumnor Neighbourhood Plan Review area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmoor Reservoir SSSI within NDP area • Hurst Hill SSSI approx. 1.1km • Wytham Woods SSSI approx. 2.5km • Cothill Fen SSSI approx. 2.8km • Appleton Lower Common SSSI approx. 4.5km • Dry Sandford Pit SSSI approx. 4.5km • Frilford Heath, Ponds and Fen SSSI approx. 4.5km • Pixey and Yarnton Meads SSSI approx. 5.7km • Iffley Meadows SSSI approx. 6km • Barrow Farm Fen SSSI approx. 6.6km • Culham Brake SSSI approx. 9km • Sidling's Copse and College Pond SSSI approx. 9.8km • Woodeaton Wood SSSI approx. 10.3km
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	<p>Given the NDP Review is not allocating sites we are of the opinion the Neighbourhood Plan Review does not propose any development that is likely to harm these designations as the plan seeks to conserve the village, its character and setting. The policies in the Neighbourhood Plan Review will require these designations to be protected and therefore there would not be likely significant effects to the environment.</p>
<p>(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).</p>	<p>The proposed development in the Cumnor NDP Review has been judged not to have an impact on Community legislation. The Plan includes an updated policy relating to Farmoor Reservoir SSSI to ensure its continued ecological and recreational function is not prejudiced.</p>
<p>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:</p>	
<p>(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;</p>	<p>The Cumnor 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 Review 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 open spaces generally. The Parish lies within the Green Belt and faces several important social challenges, including the protection and improvement of community facilities, a shortage of affordable housing, and transport</p>

	and accessibility barriers for residents. The modified Neighbourhood Plan seeks to influence these issues positively.
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;	It is intended that the positive social effects of providing residential development through infill 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 ⁴ 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 Cumnor NDP Review relates to the parish of Cumnor. The NDP Review 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 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 Cumnor NDP Review 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, 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 Cumnor NDP Review is unlikely to have significant effects on Natura 2000 sites, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects; therefore, an Appropriate Assessment of the Cumnor NDP Review is not required.</p> <p>Environmental quality standards or limit values are not considered likely to be</p>

⁴ Transboundary effects are understood to be in other Member States.

	<p>significantly affected by the Cumnor NDP Review.</p> <p>In light of the proposals in the Cumnor NDP Review, 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.	<p>The Cumnor NDP Review area is entirely covered by the Oxford Green Belt. The plan aims to support limited infill development in the Green Belt consistent with local policy, provided it is of an appropriate scale.</p> <p>The scale of development proposed is modest and given the objectives of the plan the effects are not likely to be significant.</p>

Appendix 4 – Statutory Consultee Responses

HISTORIC ENGLAND



Historic England

By email only to: [REDACTED]@southandvale.gov.uk

Our ref: PL00799346
Your ref: Cumnor Neighbourhood Plan SEA

Main: 020 7973 3700
e-seast@historicengland.org.uk
[REDACTED]@historicengland.org.uk

Date: 30/07/2025

To whom it may concern

Cumnor Neighbourhood Plan SEA Screening Opinion

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

The information supplied indicates that the plan will not have any significant effects on the historic environment. We also note there are no site allocations.

On the basis of the information supplied, and in the context of the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment Regulations [Annex II of 'SEA' Directive], Historic England concurs with the Council that the preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.

The views of the other two statutory consultation bodies should be taken into account before the overall decision on the need for an SEA is made.

I should be pleased if you can send a copy of the determination as required by REG 11 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.



Historic England, 4th Floor, The Atrium, Cannon Bridge House, 25 Dowgate Hill, London EC4R 2YA
Telephone 020 7973 3700 HistoricEngland.org.uk
Please note that Historic England operates an access to information policy.
Correspondence or information which you send us may therefore become publicly available.





Historic England

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

Historic England strongly advises that the conservation and archaeological staff of the relevant local authorities are closely involved throughout the preparation of the plan and its assessment. They are best placed to advise on; local historic environment issues and priorities, including access to data held in the Historic Environment Record (HER), how the allocation, policy or proposal can be tailored to minimise potential adverse impacts on the historic environment; the nature and design of any required mitigation measures; and opportunities for securing wider benefits for the future conservation and management of heritage assets.

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

Yours sincerely

[Redacted signature]

Historic Places Adviser



Historic England, 4th Floor, The Atrium, Cannon Bridge House, 25 Dowgate Hill, London EC4R 2YA
Telephone 020 7973 3700 HistoricEngland.org.uk

Please note that Historic England operates an access to information policy.

Correspondence or information which you send us may therefore become publicly available.



NATURAL ENGLAND

Date: 29 July 2025
Our ref: 517683
Your ref: Cumnor Neighbourhood Plan



[REDACTED]
South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse District Councils

BY EMAIL ONLY
planning.policy@southandvale.gov.uk

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

T 0300 060 3900

Dear [REDACTED]

Cumnor Neighbourhood Plan -Review - SEA/HRA Screening Opinion Consultation

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated and received by Natural England on 2 July 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 sites¹, 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

¹ 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

Yours sincerely


Consultations Team