

Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036



Determination Statement on the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan 2019.

April 2019

Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

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Glossary and Abbreviations

ABNP	Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan
Core Strategy	WBC local plan adopted in 2010
LPU	Local Plan Update
MDD	Managing Development Delivery (Supplements Core Strategy, adopted in 2014)
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019)
NPSG	Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
Plan Area	The approved plan area comprising the parishes of Arborfield & Newland and Barkham
SANG	Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
VDS	Village Design Statement
WBC	Wokingham Borough Council

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Under “The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004”¹ (the SEA Regulations), Councils must, where appropriate, carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of any land-use plan or programme ‘which sets the framework for future development consent of projects’.
- 1.2 However, there are exceptions to this requirement 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.²
- 1.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), paragraph 32, advises that Local Plans and spatial development strategies should be informed throughout their preparation by a sustainability appraisal that meets the relevant legal requirements. It goes on to say that a Neighbourhood Plan may require Strategic Environmental Assessment, but only where there are potentially significant environmental effects.
- 1.4 The first part of the SEA process is to screen the relevant plan or programme to test whether a SEA is required. The Council has a duty to consult with specified environmental organisations (Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency) when determining the need for an SEA.
- 1.5 The European Community (EC) Directive on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (92/43/EEC) (commonly known as the Habitats Directive) provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance.
- 1.6 Articles 3-9 provide the legal means to protect habitats and species of EC interest through the establishment and conservation of a European-wide network of sites known as Natura 2000. Natura 2000 sites are Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated under the Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas (SPA) designated under the conservation of wild birds (79/409/EEC) (commonly known as the Birds Directive).
- 1.7 Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive sets out the decision-making tests for plans and projects affecting Natura 2000 sites. Article 6(3) establishes a requirement for an assessment as outlined below:

“Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans and projects, shall be subject to assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site’s conservation objectives. In 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 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.”
- 1.8 This report constitutes the final determination statement as to the need for a full SEA under Regulation 9(3) of the SEA Regulations and a full HRA under Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive. The report sets out the SEA and HRA screening process of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan, along with the reasoning behind the final determination that a SEA and HRA are not required. The Council consulted upon its provisional view as detailed in section 6 of this statement.

¹ Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2004/1633/contents/made>.

² Ibid: 5(6)b

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2. Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

2.1 Arborfield and Newland, and Barkham Parish Councils are preparing a Neighbourhood Plan which will be submitted to the Borough Council to undertake an Examination of the document. This process will ensure the Plan meets the basic conditions set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as applied by Section 38A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The Neighbourhood Plan will amplify the policies within Wokingham Borough Council's Core Strategy (adopted 29 January 2010) and Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Local Plan (adopted 21 February 2014) with regard to the parishes of Arborfield and Newland, and Barkham. Once adopted, the Neighbourhood Plan will cover the period up to 2036, in line with the new Local Plan for Wokingham when it is adopted in 2022.

2.2 The Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan will contain policies to support development in the parishes that will assist in delivering the vision for the Neighbourhood Plan: *'A sustainable future for Arborfield and Barkham as a thriving and accessible community, managing development to be inclusive for all age groups and enhancing the identity and rural setting of the villages.'*

2.3 The plan's four objectives are:

Protecting identity and rural setting of the villages

- Protect and enhance the countryside – new development should blend into the landscape, not dominate landscape views
- Retain separation of settlements to preserve their individual identities
- Recognise and enhance heritage and natural environment and increase conservation designations where possible
- Enhance the natural and historic setting of Arborfield Cross village centre and Barkham Street

Thriving communities (includes community facilities and recreation)

- Provide full range of facilities – schools, leisure amenities, retail, medical
- Promote a strong rural economy

Accessibility (transport and greenways)

- Minimise congestion on residential roads
- Expand opportunities for sustainable transport

Managing development (housing, design and parking)

- Match housing to local needs – starter homes, key workers homes, lifetime homes and care of the elderly
- Require high quality design incorporating efficient use of resources

2.4 The plan contains policies regarding the protection and enhancement of the natural and historic environments; preservation of settlement separation; the provision of community facilities and the expansion of existing businesses; the design of any new development; the management of development traffic; and the provision of alternative travel opportunities.

2.5 The plan does not allocate any sites for housing or other land uses not already allocated in the adopted Local Plan.

Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

- 2.6 In relation to natural heritage, the nearest Special Area of Conservation is the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, some 5.6km away at its nearest point. There are no Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the plan area, although Longmoor Bog is hard on the boundary with Finchampstead parish. Bramshill Plantation, another SSSI, is just over the border and into Hampshire and 2.5km away at its nearest point.
- 2.7 Arborfield Cross Conservation Area was adopted in March 2000 and extends through the main street (Eversley Road), incorporates the area around The Bull public house and into Sindlesham Road. There are a substantial number of listed buildings in and around the Conservation Area and, indeed, throughout the Neighbourhood Plan area. Two Areas of Special Character seek to protect the historic environment of the area around Chamberlains Farm in Arborfield, and Barkham Street in Barkham.

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3. Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 3.1 Under the SEA Regulations, local authorities must, where appropriate, carry out a SEA of land-use and spatial plans.
- 3.2 Regulation 5 (2) of the SEA Regulations describes that an environmental assessment should be undertaken for a plan or programme which –
- (a) is prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, and
 - (b) sets the framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annex I or II to Council Directive 85/337/EEC on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment, as amended by Council Directive 97/11/EC.
- 3.3 The Neighbourhood Plan falls under criterion (a) of Regulation 5(2), being a plan prepared for town and country planning or land use. However, for a plan or programme to be deemed relevant under SEA Regulation 5(2) it must also be consistent with sub-paragraph (b).
- 3.4 In respect of sub-paragraph (b) the ABNP will supplement existing policy within the Core Strategy and MDD, providing further guidance on development in Arborfield and Barkham. The Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to relate to any of the uses listed under Annex I or II of EC Directive 85/337/EEC as amended by Directive 97/11/EC.
- 3.5 Further to the above, Regulation 5(6) of the SEA Regulations indicates that an environmental assessment need not be carried out –
- (a) for a plan or programme of the description set out in paragraph (2) or (3) which determines the use of a small area at local level; or
 - (b) for a minor modification to a plan or programme of the description set out in either of those paragraphs,
- unless it has been determined under regulation 9(1) that the plan, programme or modification, as the case may be, is likely to have significant environmental effects, or it is the subject of a direction under Regulation 10(3).
- 3.6 Since the ABNP must be in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the Core Strategy and the MDD², and because the ABNP only applies to the Plan Area, it is therefore considered to fall under criterion (a) of Regulation 5(6). It is only, therefore, if it is considered 'likely' that the Neighbourhood Plan will have significant environmental effects that a full SEA is required.³
- 3.7 The Regulations advise that the likelihood of any significant environmental effects should be determined by a screening process, which should use a specified set of criteria (set out in Schedule 1 to the Regulations). The results of this process must be summarised in an SEA screening statement, which must be publicly available.

³ Para 8 (1) (a) (2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (inserted by the Localism Act 2011)

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4. Habitats Regulations Assessment

- 4.1 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (commonly known as the Habitat Regulations) requires the assessment of land use plans. The adoption of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan will confirm the document as a part of the development plan for determining planning applications within Wokingham Borough and it will constitute a land use plan for the purpose of the Habitats Regulations.
- 4.2 Regulation 105(1) provides an opportunity to determine that significant environmental effects are unlikely and thus not requiring the undertaking of an appropriate assessment.
- 4.3 Under Regulation 105(2), before making a determination under Regulation 105(1), the council is required to consult Natural England as the appropriate environmental body and have regard to any representations made.
- 4.4 Additionally, Regulation 5(3) of the SEA Regulations indicates that an SEA could be required where:

“The description is a plan or programme which, in view of the likely effect on sites, has been determined to require an assessment pursuant to Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive.”
- 4.5 WBC, in consultation with Natural England, has formed the view that any net increase in residential development between 400m and 5km straight-line distance from the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (SPA) is likely to have a significant effect on the integrity of the SPA, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects. An Appropriate Assessment has been carried out as part of the Local Plan process which includes regard to mitigation requirements.
- 4.6 The strategy is for relevant developments to make financial contributions towards the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) in perpetuity as an alternative recreational location to the SPA and financial contributions towards Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) measures.
- 4.7 With respect to the legislation, it is recognised that the above approach through the Council’s Core Strategy and MDD considered the delivery of additional dwellings in Arborfield and Barkham pursuant to Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. Therefore, it has already been determined – and impact avoidance and reduction measures established to allow – that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA. .
- 4.8 Since the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate any sites not already allocated by the Borough Council’s Core Strategy or the MDD, it is not considered that the ABNP will itself require an assessment under the Habitats Directive (pursuant to The Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations 2017). It is recognised that all applications for residential development in Arborfield and Barkham would in any event need to be assessed for whether they require an assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. Where a proposed residential development was considered to generate likely significant effects upon the SPA, these would need to be addressed before the authority could apply the approach in the ABNP.
- 4.9 This conclusion does not factor in any measures contained within the Neighbourhood Plan intended to avoid or reduce the harmful effects of the plan and is therefore consistent with the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) judgement People over Wind, Peter Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta (April 2018). This concerns a judgement by the Court held that that Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive requires that measures which are intended to avoid or reduce the harmful effects of a plan or project on a European Protected Site should not be taken into consideration at the screening stage.

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5. SEA Screening of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

5.1 The screening process set out in Regulation 9 of and Schedule 1 to the SEA Regulations includes two sets of characteristics for determining the likely significance of effects on the environment as follows:

- 1) The characteristics of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan; and
- 2) The characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected.⁴

5.2 Under each characteristic are a number of criteria against which to assess the Neighbourhood Plan. These criteria are assessed individually for the ABNP in Table 1 below.

⁴ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/1633/pdfs/ukxi_20041633_en.pdf

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Table 1: Assessment of likely significance of effects on the environment⁵		
Criteria	Details	Likely Significant effect?
1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, 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 ABNP would, if made, form part of the Statutory development plan and as such contributes to the framework for future development consent of projects. However, the Plan sits within the wider framework set by the National Planning Policy Framework, the Council's adopted Core Strategy and MDD Local Plan and the projects which this Plan sets a framework for are local in nature and have limited resource implications.	No
(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;	The Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan will be in conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework. The policies within the document will conform to the Council's strategic policies and complement the adopted Core Strategy and MDD. The Plan is unlikely to influence other plans or programmes within the Statutory development plan.	No
(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;	The Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan contains policies that ensure development is suitable for Arborfield and Barkham and seeks to conserve the environmental features as they currently exist. These policies will be in conformity with national and local policies as required by the basic conditions. Any development would also be subject to the policies in the Core Strategy and the MDD and therefore all environmental considerations would be covered by policy.	No

⁵ Environmental Protection The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004) (Schedule 1).

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<p>(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and</p>	<p>The Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan contains the following environmental features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • respect for local landscape quality, ensuring that natural views and vistas are maintained wherever possible; • Protection of settlement separation; • Promotion of sustainable development; • Protection of trees and hedgerows; • Encouragement for protecting and enhancing biodiversity; and • Inclusion of measures to lessen the risk of flooding <p>These policies will supplement policies CP1, CP3, CP7, CP8, and CP11 of the Core Strategy together with polices CC02, CC03, CC04, CC09, CC10, TB01, TB02, TB21, TB22, and TB23 of the MDD and is not being prepared in order to tackle a particular environmental problem.</p>	<p>No</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 Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan is not relevant to the implementation of EC legislation on the environment.</p>	<p>No</p>

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2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to—		
(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;	The Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan supplements policy within the adopted Core Strategy and the MDD, providing further guidance on the requirements for development in the Neighbourhood Plan area. Since the ABNP does not allocate specific sites within the parish, it is extremely unlikely that its implementation will generate significant environmental effects. This is because any sites where a planning application is submitted to which the ABNP is then applied will only be acceptable to the authority where environmental effects do not arise or can be appropriately mitigated. Therefore, the approach within the ABNP does not affect how the authority would consider applications with respect of these issues.	No
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;	As noted above, the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan would not in itself result in new activities with any significant environmental effects. Therefore, it is extremely unlikely that any cumulative impacts will arise. Where they are likely to arise, the Council through determining planning applications will ensure such issues are appropriately considered and addressed. Whilst cumulative issues could arise from, for example, the delivery of housing in proximity to the SPA, these would need to be addressed through the approach in the Core Strategy and MDD rather than the ABNP. Therefore, the approach within the Neighbourhood Plan does not affect how the authority would consider applications with respect of these issues.	No

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<p>(c) the trans-boundary nature of the effects;</p>	<p>As noted above, the ABNP would not in itself result in new activities with any significant environmental effects. Therefore, it is extremely unlikely that any trans-boundary impacts will arise. Where they are likely to arise, the Council through determining planning applications will ensure such issues are appropriately considered and addressed. The approach within the ABNP does not affect how the authority would consider applications with respect of these issues.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);</p>	<p>The policies in the ABNP are not considered to lead to increased risks to human health or the environment. The approach within the ABNP does not affect how the authority would consider applications with respect of these issues.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);</p>	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan provides refinements and enhancements to policies in the Core Strategy and MDD for Arborfield and Barkham but will not change the focus of the policy approach of the Core Strategy and is therefore not considered to have any significant impacts in this regard. The approach within the Neighbourhood Plan does not affect how the authority would consider applications with respect of these issues.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>(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>	<p>Since the Neighbourhood Plan amplifies the approach of the Core Strategy, it is not considered to significantly affect any of these matters directly. Where applications are submitted which could affect these matters, the Council through determining planning applications will ensure such issues are appropriately considered and addressed. The approach within the Neighbourhood Plan does not affect how the authority would consider applications with respect of these issues.</p>	<p>No</p>

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<p>(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Community or international protection status.</p>	<p>In relation to natural heritage, the nearest Special Area of Conservation is the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, some 5.6km away at its nearest point. There are no Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the plan area, although Longmoor Bog is hard on the boundary with Finchampstead parish. Bramshill Plantation, another SSSI, is just over the border and into Hampshire and 2.5km away at its nearest point. Where applications are submitted which could affect these sites, the Council through determining planning applications will ensure such issues are appropriately considered and addressed. The approach within the ABNP does not affect how the authority would consider applications with respect of these issues.</p>	<p>No</p>
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6. Consultation with Statutory Bodies

6.1 The Council has a duty to consult with specified environmental organisations (Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency) when determining the need for SEA and, in situations where an SEA is deemed not to be required, it also has a duty to prepare a statement of its reasons for this determination. An SEA Screening Statement was sent to the following organisations:

- The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (Historic England);
- Natural England; and
- The Environment Agency.

6.2 This notification was sent by the Council on 26 February 2019 with a request for any comments on the Draft SEA Determination Statement to be returned by 3 April 2019 as part of a five-week consultation. There is no set timescale for the length of this consultation in the SEA Regulations, with a period of five weeks generally considered a suitable timeframe. 6.3

The Council received responses from Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency. The Environment Agency was unable to resource a review of the plan, but agreed that it related to an area where environmental risks were lower, implying that no SEA or HRA would be required. Natural England and Historic England agreed that the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Development Plan was unlikely to require a SEA or HRA. The responses can be found as appendices to this statement.

7. Conclusion

7.1 The Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan will amplify the policies within Wokingham Borough Council's Adopted Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan with respect to the parishes of Arborfield and Newland, and Barkham. Following consultation it is considered that it is not likely that the Plan will have any significant environmental impacts and, therefore, that a SEA is not required. It is also considered that the Plan is unlikely to have a significant effect upon Special Areas of Conservation or Special Protection Areas and therefore a Habitat Regulations Assessment is likewise not required (either on its own or as part of the SEA).

From: [Planning_THM](#)
To: [James McCabe](#)
Subject: RE: SEA/HRA Scoping Statement Consultation - Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan ~ [UNCLASSIFIED]~
Date: 14 March 2019 09:30:04
Attachments: [image001.gif](#)
[image002.gif](#)
[image003.gif](#)
[image004.gif](#)
[image005.gif](#)
[image006.png](#)

Thank you for consulting the Environment Agency on your SEA and HRA scoping opinion for the draft Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Development Plan.

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

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

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

Planning_THM@environment-agency.gov.uk

Speak to us early about environmental issues and opportunities - We can provide a free pre-application advice note or for more detailed advice / meetings / reviews we can provide a project manager to coordinate specialist advice / meetings which costs £100 per hour plus 20% VAT. For more information email us at planning_thm@environment-agency.gov.uk



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James McCabe
Senior Planning Officer
(Growth and Delivery Specialist)
Strategy & Commissioning (Place)
Wokingham Borough Council
Civic Offices, Shute End
Wokingham, RG40 1BN.

Our ref:
Your ref:

Telephone 01483 252040
Fax

1st April 2019

Dear Mr McCabe,

SEA/HRA Scoping Statement Consultation - Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

Thank you for your e-mail of 26th February seeking the views of Historic England on your Council's draft SEA Screening Report for the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan.

The National Heritage List for England has two Grade II* and 29 Grade II listed building records, four scheduled monument records and one Grade II* Registered Historic Park or Garden record for Arborfield with Newland and Barkham parishes. In addition, the Screening Report refers to the Arborfield Cross Conservation Area and to two Areas of Special Character protecting the historic environment of two areas within the wider Plan area.

The Plan area has, therefore, a sensitive historic environment, which could be affected by development in accordance with the policies and proposals of the Plan, depending, of course, on what those policies are.

We note that the Council's draft SEA Screening Report states that the Plan does not allocate any sites for housing or other land uses not already allocated in the adopted Local Plan. Neither does it appear that the Plan will introduce a presumption in favour of development where none currently exists e.g. by defining a new or extended settlement policy boundary.

From the list of policies set out in paragraph 2.4 of the Screening Report, it would appear to us that none would be likely to have significant negative environmental effects, but are intended to have positive effects. Neither the SEA Directive nor the Regulations make any distinction between negative and positive effects, but we are satisfied that, based on the information currently available to us, the policies and proposals of the Plan would not be likely to adversely affect the historic environment of the Plan area.



Historic England, Eastgate Court, 195-205 High Street, Guildford GU1 3EH

Telephone 01483 25 2020 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.



We therefore concur with the Council's provisional conclusion that it is not likely that the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan will have any significant (adverse) environmental impacts and that, accordingly, it not need be subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment.

However, we may wish to revise this Opinion should the Plan contain policies not listed in the Council's Screening Report.

We hope these comments are helpful.

Thank you again for consulting Historic England.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Small". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Martin Small Principal Adviser, Historic Environment Planning
(Bucks, Berks, Oxfordshire, Hampshire, IoW, South Downs NP and Chichester)
martin.small@historicengland.org.uk

Date: 10 April 2019
Our ref: Aborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan



Wokingham Borough Council

BY EMAIL ONLY

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T 0300 060 3900

Dear Sir/Madam,

Planning Consultation: Aborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan SEA Screening

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 26th February 2019.

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

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

In our review of the Aborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan SEA/ HRA screening we note that;

- there are designated sites or protected landscapes within the impacts zones of the Neighbourhood Plan area, however, the Plan does not allocate any additional sites for development.

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

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

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

Further Recommendations

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

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

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

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

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

Yours sincerely

Jessica James
Lead Adviser
Sustainable Development
Thames Team

Annex A - Neighbourhood planning and the natural environment: information, issues and opportunities

Natural Environment Information Sources

The [Magic](http://magic.defra.gov.uk/)¹ website will provide you with much of the nationally held natural environment data for your plan area. The most relevant layers for you to consider are: **Agricultural Land Classification, Ancient Woodland, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Local Nature Reserves, National Parks (England), National Trails, Priority Habitat Inventory, public rights of way (on the Ordnance Survey base map) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (including their impact risk zones)**. Local environmental record centres may hold a range of additional information on the natural environment. A list of local record centres is available [here](#)².

Priority habitats are those habitats of particular importance for nature conservation, and the list of them can be found [here](#)³. Most of these will be mapped either as **Sites of Special Scientific Interest**, on the Magic website or as **Local Wildlife Sites**. Your local planning authority should be able to supply you with the locations of Local Wildlife Sites.

National Character Areas (NCAs) divide England into 159 distinct natural areas. Each character area is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity. NCA profiles contain descriptions of the area and statements of environmental opportunity, which may be useful to inform proposals in your plan. NCA information can be found [here](#)⁴.

There may also be a local **landscape character assessment** covering your area. This is a tool to help understand the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape and identify the features that give it a sense of place. It can help to inform, plan and manage change in the area. Your local planning authority should be able to help you access these if you can't find them online.

If your neighbourhood planning area is within or adjacent to a **National Park** or **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty** (AONB), the relevant National Park/AONB Management Plan for the area will set out useful information about the protected landscape. You can access the plans on from the relevant National Park Authority or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty website.

General mapped information on **soil types** and **Agricultural Land Classification** is available (under 'landscape') on the [Magic](http://magic.defra.gov.uk/)⁵ website and also from the [LandIS website](http://www.landis.org.uk/)⁶, which contains more information about obtaining soil data.

Natural Environment Issues to Consider

The [National Planning Policy Framework](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2)⁷ sets out national planning policy on protecting and enhancing the natural environment. [Planning Practice Guidance](http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/natural-environment/)⁸ sets out supporting guidance.

Your local planning authority should be able to provide you with further advice on the potential impacts of your plan on the natural environment and the need for any environmental assessments.

¹ <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

² <http://www.nbn-nfbr.org.uk/nfbr.php>

³ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140711133551/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/habsandspeciesimportance.aspx>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making>

⁵ <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

⁶ <http://www.landis.org.uk/index.cfm>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

⁸ <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/natural-environment/>

Landscape

Paragraph 109 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) highlights the need to protect and enhance valued landscapes through the planning system. Your plans may present opportunities to protect and enhance locally valued landscapes. You may want to consider identifying distinctive local landscape features or characteristics such as ponds, woodland or dry stone walls and think about how any new development proposals can respect and enhance local landscape character and distinctiveness.

If you are proposing development within or close to a protected landscape (National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) or other sensitive location, we recommend that you carry out a landscape assessment of the proposal. Landscape assessments can help you to choose the most appropriate sites for development and help to avoid or minimise impacts of development on the landscape through careful siting, design and landscaping.

Wildlife habitats

Some proposals can have adverse impacts on designated wildlife sites or other priority habitats (listed [here](#)⁹), such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or [Ancient woodland](#)¹⁰. If there are likely to be any adverse impacts you'll need to think about how such impacts can be avoided, mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated for.

Priority and protected species and habitat

You'll also want to consider whether any proposals might affect priority species (listed [here](#)¹¹) or protected species. Natural England has produced advice [here](#)¹² to help understand the impact of particular developments on protected species. Consideration should also be given to the potential environmental value of brownfield sites, often found in urban areas and former industrial land, further information including links to the open mosaic habitats inventory can be found [here](#).

Ancient woodland and veteran trees-link to standing advice

You should consider any impacts on ancient woodland and veteran trees in line with paragraph 118 of the NPPF. Natural England maintains the Ancient Woodland [Inventory](#) which can help identify ancient woodland. Natural England and the Forest Commission have produced [standing advice](#) for planning authorities in relation to ancient woodland and veteran trees. It should be taken into account by planning authorities when determining relevant planning applications. Natural England will only provide bespoke advice on ancient woodland/veteran trees where they form part of a SSSI or in exceptional circumstances

Biodiversity net gain

Under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 Local Planning Authorities are required to conserve biodiversity. The NPPF section 109 states "*the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity wherever possible*". Suitable methods for calculating biodiversity net gain can include the Defra biodiversity offsetting metric¹³ and the environment bank biodiversity impact calculator¹⁴. Natural England would expect a policy within the Neighbourhood Plan to include wording to ensure that net biodiversity gain is achieved.

⁹<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140711133551/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/habsandspeciesimportance.aspx>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-and-veteran-trees-protection-surveys-licences>

¹¹<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140711133551/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/habsandspeciesimportance.aspx>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/protected-species-and-sites-how-to-review-planning-proposals>

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/biodiversity-offsetting#guidance-for-offset-providers-developers-and-local-authorities-in-the-pilot-areas> Note; the 'Guidance for developers' and 'Guidance for offset providers' documents provide a calculation method.

¹⁴ <http://www.environmentbank.com/impact-calculator.php> , and http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0ahUKEwi7vcb10aDQAhVMDcAKHb8IDEUQFggsMAI&url=http%3A%2F%2Fconsult.welhat.gov.uk%2Ffile%2F4184236&usq=AFQjCNFfkbJJQ_UN0044Qe6rmiLffxckg

Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

Soil is a finite resource that fulfils many important functions and services for society. It is a growing medium for food, timber and other crops, a store for carbon and water, a reservoir of biodiversity and a buffer against pollution. If you are proposing development, you should seek to use areas of poorer quality agricultural land in preference to that of a higher quality in line with National Planning Policy Framework section 112. For more information, see our publication [Agricultural Land Classification: protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land](#)¹⁵.

Green Infrastructure, Improving Your Natural Environment.

Inclusion of Green Infrastructure (GI) in to development plans can provide multifunctional benefits to the area. These can include opportunities for recreation, health and wellbeing and access to nature as well as providing connected habitats for wildlife.

Your plan or order can offer exciting opportunities to enhance your local environment through inclusion of GI. If you are setting out policies on new development or proposing sites for development, you may wish to consider identifying what environmental features you want to be retained, connected, enhanced or new features you would like to see created as part of any new development. Examples might include:

- Providing a new footpath with landscaping through the new development to link into existing rights of way or other green spaces.
- Restoring a neglected hedgerow or creating new ones.
- Creating a new pond as an attractive feature on the site.
- Planting trees characteristic to the local area to make a positive contribution to the local landscape.
- Using native plants in landscaping schemes for better nectar and seed sources for bees and birds.
- Incorporating swift boxes or bat boxes into the design of new buildings.
- Considering how lighting can be best managed to encourage wildlife.
- Adding a green roof or walls to new or existing buildings.

You may also want to consider enhancing your local area in other ways, for example by:

- Setting out in your plan how you would like to implement elements of a wider Green Infrastructure Strategy in your community.
- Assessing needs for accessible greenspace and setting out proposals to address any deficiencies or enhance provision.
- Identifying green areas of particular importance for special protection through Local Green Space designation (see [Planning Practice Guidance on this](#)¹⁶).
- Managing existing (and new) public spaces to be more wildlife friendly (e.g. by sowing wild flower strips in less used parts of parks, changing hedge cutting timings and frequency).
- Planting additional street trees.
- Identifying any improvements to the existing public right of way network, e.g. cutting back hedges, improving the surface, clearing litter or installing kissing gates) or extending the network to create missing links.
- Restoring neglected environmental features (e.g. coppicing a prominent hedge that is in poor condition or clearing away an eyesore).

Green Roofs

¹⁵ <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/35012>

¹⁶ <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space/local-green-space-designation/>

Natural England is supportive of the inclusion of living roofs in all appropriate development. Research indicates that the benefits of green roofs include reducing run-off and thereby the risk of surface water flooding; reducing the requirement for heating and air-conditioning; and providing habitat for wildlife.

We would advise your council that some living roofs, such as sedum matting, can have limited biodiversity value in terms of the range of species that grow on them and habitats they provide. Natural England would encourage you to consider the use of bespoke solutions based on the needs of the wildlife specific to the site and adjacent area. I would refer you to <http://livingroofs.org/> for a range of innovative solutions.