



**Strategic Environmental Assessment
Screening Determination Statement
for
Wymondley Parish Neighbourhood
Plan**

February 2019

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report sets out a Screening Determination for the Wymondley Parish Neighbourhood Plan. The purpose of the screening is to assess if the Neighbourhood Plan will require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). More detail is set out in the following sections on Neighbourhood Plans and SEA (Section 3) and the Wymondley Neighbourhood Plan (Section 4) specifically.
- 1.2. The assessment of the Wymondley Neighbourhood Plan and the determination is included in Section 7.

2. Strategic Environmental Assessment Context

- 2.1. European Union Directive 2001/42/EC requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment to be undertaken for certain types of plans or programmes that could have significant environmental effects. The Directive has been transposed into law for England and Wales in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the Regulations).
- 2.2. Under the Regulations, the responsible body is required to determine whether a plan covered by the Regulations is likely to have significant environmental effects, and therefore whether a SEA is required. This process is called screening, and is undertaken using a specified set of criteria (set out in Schedule 1 of the Regulations). The Regulations require that the results of this process are set out in an SEA Screening Determination (this document), which must be publicly available.
- 2.3. Before the responsible body makes a formal determination, there is a requirement to consult three statutory consultation bodies designated in the Regulations (the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England) on whether an environmental assessment is required. Consultation took place in January and February 2018 and responses were received from Historic England and Natural England.

3. Neighbourhood Plans and Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 3.1. Planning Practice Guidance states that *“to decide whether a draft neighbourhood plan might have significant environmental effects, it must be assessed (screened) at an early stage of the plan’s preparation according to the requirements set out in Regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans, Programmes Regulations 2004”*¹.
- 3.2. The Guidance also suggests that *“the local planning authority, as part of its duty to advise or assist should consider putting in place processes to determine whether the proposed*

¹ Paragraph : 028 Reference ID: 11-028-20150209

*neighbourhood plan will require a strategic environmental assessment*². In this case, the Council is providing assistance by undertaking the screening determination.

3.3. The Guidance notes particular circumstances which may require a SEA³:

“A strategic environmental assessment may be required, for example, where:

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

3.4. This Screening Determination has taken account of the Guidance in reaching its conclusions, and it notes that the particular circumstances described above are encompassed by the criteria outlined in Schedule 1 of the Regulations.

4. Wymondley Parish Neighbourhood Plan

4.1. Wymondley is essentially a small rural parish to the east of Hitchin, created in 1937 by merging the two former parishes of Great and Little Wymondley (which, contrary to its name, has since the mid-1850's had the greater population). Great Wymondley is situated approximately 1/2 mile to the north, and is substantially smaller.

4.2. The Parish includes the hamlets of Titmore Green, Redcoats Green and Todds Green and the surrounding rural area - stretching from the edges of Hitchin in the north, to the edges of Stevenage in the south. (The Wymondley Parish Map below refers.) Titmore Green is a farming community and Todds Green is a cluster of houses separated from Stevenage by the A1 (M), and from the Wymondley villages by the Wymondley Bypass (A 602). The East Coast Main Line railway also cuts through the Parish. (Further information on transport links is contained in Section 10.)

4.3. The Parish is set in a historic rolling, agricultural landscape which is predominantly arable, with pockets of horse (and other) grazing near its settlements. Its historic settlement pattern is one of settlements and farms. The various enclosed field patterns tell their own tale of differing cultivation methods throughout the centuries. It is populated with a good variety of native species in small woodland copses and hedgerows, (which maintain the more enclosed historic character of the area); and characterised by expansive, open views of the countryside from its settlements – which create a sense of space and openness. There are spring-fed ponds at Wymondley Priory.

² ibid

³ Paragraph: 046 Reference ID: 046-20150209

- 4.4. Winding country lanes edged by tall hedgerows (and some high hedge banks) abound; and the Parish is also crossed by a network of footpaths, some of Roman origin – which mainly connect urban areas and smaller settlements. These include two long-distance paths – namely the Hertfordshire Way and Gypsy Lane. These would be vulnerable to inappropriate or unsympathetic development, a fact which was recognised when the A602 was designed to allow continuity of rights of way where footpaths have been crossed by the road. (More detail on footpaths is given in Sections 9 and 10 on Green Infrastructure and Spaces and Transport Links.)
- 4.5. See Appendix 1 for a map of the designated neighbourhood planning area.
- 4.6. The Plan is the result of consultation within the community through questionnaires and informal open consultation events. It has also involved liaison with statutory bodies such as Historic England and Natural England and dialogue between the NHDC and the wider community, either through direct communication or through the Wymondley Neighbourhood Plan dedicated web site and Facebook pages.
- 4.7. The Plan does not include proposals for housing or other development. Its overall approach is to support appropriate development which protects the character of the village and the environment. The Plan objectives are shown in the box below.

Sensitive and intelligent development at an appropriate size scale and in accordance with the existing character of Wymondley Parish, including its greenery, wildlife habitats, its built and archaeological heritage and connectivity to the countryside. Any development would need to provide mixed housing growth that encompasses the needs of all ages and social strata with an emphasis on young families, elderly downsizers and affordable homes.

Wymondley Parish remains a safe place to live, including pedestrian and vehicle safety on our narrow roads.

Protection and enhancement of the local landscape and biodiversity of the Parish of Wymondley.

Protection and enhancement of the local landscape and biodiversity of the Parish of Wymondley.

Maintain, and where possible enhance the distinctive views on entering and leaving Wymondley Parish, adjoining villages and within the village itself.

Protect important green and open spaces within Wymondley Village and Wymondley Parish and establish new green and open spaces within new developments.

Support, maintain and develop community facilities for the benefit of all residents and the business community.

Support the rural economy and facilitate and increase the opportunity to work in Wymondley and for others to enjoy the opportunities for recreation and improving health and well-being

5. Screening Assessment

5.1. As noted above, the Regulations specify a set of criteria which must be used to assess whether any plan covered by the Regulations is likely to have a significant environmental effect and therefore require a SEA. The table below considers each of these in turn.

Table 1 : Assessment of likelihood of significant effects on the environment

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects	Likely to have significant effects?	Justification for assessment
1 (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.	No	The framework for development in Wymondley Parish is currently set by the saved policies of the existing North Hertfordshire Local Plan and the NPPF. A new Local Plan is currently being developed, with adoption timetabled for March 2018. The Wymondley Neighbourhood Plan does not include site allocations or provide for any other projects which are likely to have significant effects.
1 (b) The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans or programmes including those in a hierarchy.	No	A Neighbourhood Plan is at the bottom of the planning hierarchy and must be in conformity with the Local Plan.
1 (c) The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.	No	The Plan focuses on protecting the quality of the Parish and its environment, particularly in the case of any development which arises out of the existing District planning framework or the developing new Local Plan (which has been subject to sustainability appraisal at all stages). It is considered that the Neighbourhood Plan's likely impact will be to have a positive effect on the environment by providing an additional layer of protection.
1 (d) Environmental problems relevant to the plan	No	None have been identified
1 (e) The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste management or water	No	The Plan will be in conformity with the saved Local Plan Policies, the NPPF and the emerging Local Plan which have taken account of existing European and National legislation for environmental protection. As noted above it is likely to have a positive effect by assisting with

protection.		improving environmental protection.
2 (a) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects.	No	No significant effects have been identified
2 (b) The cumulative nature of the effects.	No	No significant effects have been identified
2 (c) The trans-boundary nature of the effects.	No	No significant effects have been identified
2 (d) The risks to human health of the environment (e.g. due to accidents)	No	No significant effects have been identified
2 (e) The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected).	No	No significant effects have been identified
2 (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 (iii) Intensive land-use	No	The neighbourhood area does contain sensitive features, particularly heritage features as noted above but there are no proposals in the Plan which are likely to have significant environmental effects on these features. In fact key Plan policies are designed to protect these features. A detailed and thorough Character Assessment for the area has been produced and published alongside the Neighbourhood Plan. The following specific policies protect sensitive features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NHE14 Hedgerows and Trees • NHE15 Local Green Spaces and Open Spaces • NHE4 Wildlife • NHE13 Heritage Assets and Archaeological Heritage • NHE16 Key Views and Vistas
2 (g) The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, community or international protection status.	No	As noted above Wymondley is located on the edge of the Chilterns AONB. Any effects are likely to be positive. The views of the AONB from the village will be protected by policy NHE1. As also discussed above, any other effects are also likely to be positive. The Habitats Regulation Assessment screening report produced by NHDC in February 2013 concluded that in combination, there is not

	likely to be any significant combined impact on European sites from any plans or projects developed for the District.
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6. Consultation Responses

- 6.1. Consultation with the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England on the draft SEA Screening Determination between June and July 2017. One response was received during the consultation period from Historic England and a further response was received from Natural England after the close of the consultation period. Both responses stated that there was no need for a SEA to be undertaken. Copies of these responses are attached as Appendices 2 (Historic England) and 3 (Natural England).
- 6.2. Following the exploratory meeting held by the independent examiner for the Wymondley Parish Neighbourhood Plan, the District Council asked the Environment Agency again if there were any comments. A response was received stating that the Environment Agency did not consider that there to be any potential significant environmental effects. A copy of the response is attached as Appendix 4.

7. Screening Determination

- 7.1. In summary, it is concluded that the Wymondley Parish Neighbourhood Plan is not likely to have significant environmental effects and therefore a SEA is not required. The principal reasons for this conclusion are set out below:
- There are no sites allocated for development;
 - The neighbourhood plan focuses on protecting the quality of the village and its environment;
 - The neighbourhood plan does not seek to change the outcomes of development proposals in the existing or emerging Local Plan to the extent that it might lead to substantively different effects to those already assessed;
 - The neighbourhood area does contain natural and heritage features but there are no proposals in the neighbourhood plan which are likely to have significant environmental effects on these features.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Map of the Neighbourhood Plan Area

Appendix 2 – Response from Historic England – June 2017

Appendix 3 – Response from Natural England – August 2017

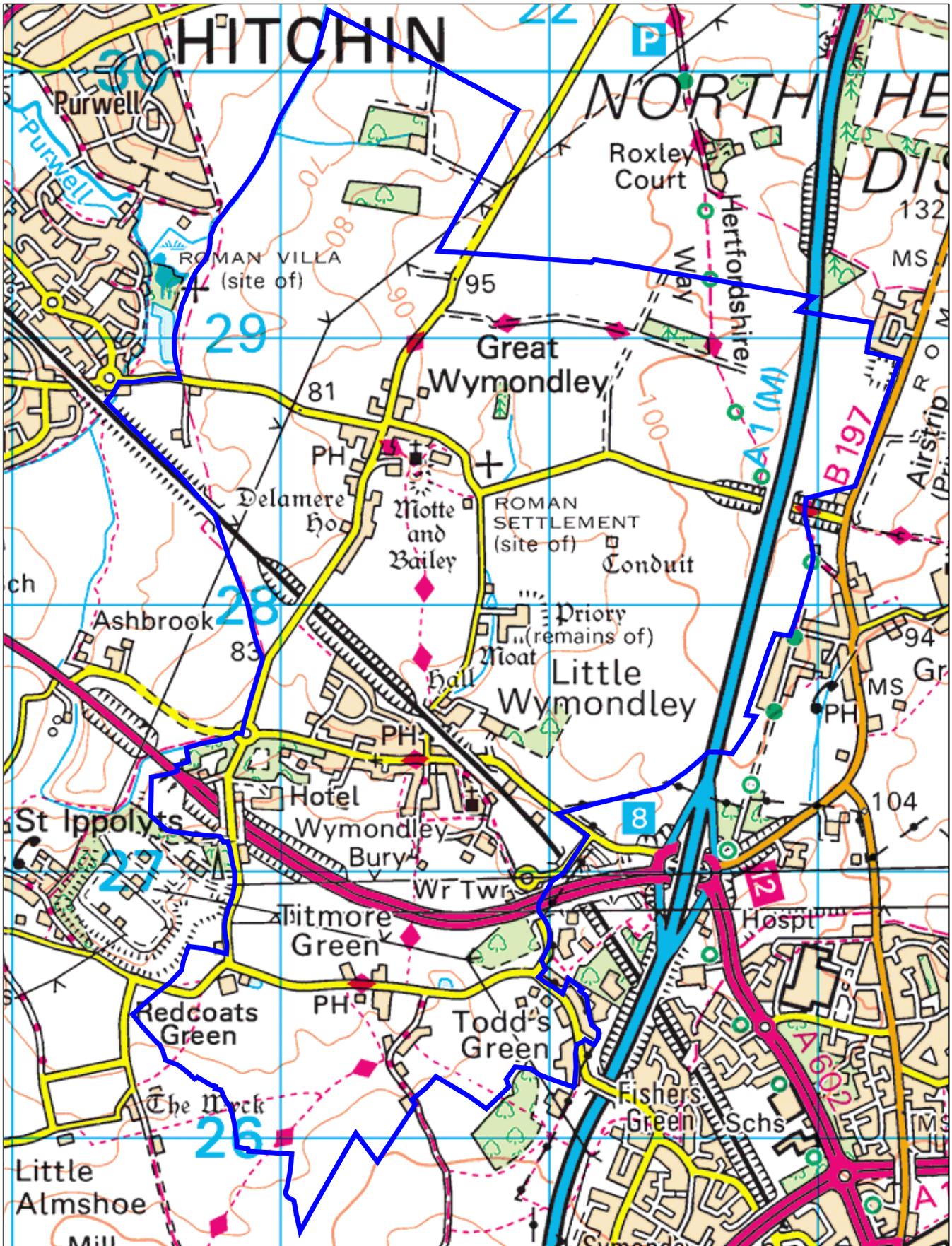
Appendix 4 – Response from the Environment Agency – February 2019

Appendix 1 – Map of the Wymondley Neighbourhood Planning Area

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



Designated Neighbourhood Plan Area: Wymondley



Scale: 1:20000
Date: 26:02:19

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Appendix 2 – Response from Historic England – June 2017



Historic England

EAST OF ENGLAND OFFICE

Ms Clare Skeels
Strategic Planning and Projects Group, North
Hertfordshire District Council
PO Box 10613
Nottingham
NG6 6DH

Direct Dial: 01223 582746

Our ref: PL00108722

29 June 2017

Dear Ms Skeels

I refer to your letter of 12 June 2017 and the enclosed Screening Opinion for the above document. For the purposes of this consultation, Historic England will confine its advice to the question, "Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment?" in respect of our area of concern, the historic environment. Our comments are based on the information supplied with the Screening Opinion.

The Screening determination report indicates that the Parish Council considers that *"there are no proposals in the Plan which are likely to have a significant environmental effect"* on 'heritage features' in the area. There are also no site allocations proposed in the Plan.

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 that the preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.

The views of the other three 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.

We should like to stress that this opinion is based on the information provided by you with your letter dated 12 June 2017. 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/guidance) where we consider that, despite the SEA, these would have an adverse effect upon the environment.



24 BROOKLANDS AVENUE, CAMBRIDGE, CB2 8BU

Telephone 01223 582749

HistoricEngland.org.uk





Historic England

EAST OF ENGLAND OFFICE

Historic England strongly advises that the conservation and archaeological staff of the North Hertfordshire District Council and Hertfordshire County Council 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 HER; how the 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.

Yours sincerely,

Edward James
Historic Places Advisor, East of England
Edward.James@HistoricEngland.org.uk

cc: Mark Simmons, Conservation Officer, North Herts District Council



24 BROOKLANDS AVENUE, CAMBRIDGE, CB2 8BU

Telephone 01223 582749

HistoricEngland.org.uk



Historic England is subject to the Freedom of Information Act, 2000 (FOIA) and Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). All information held by the organisation will be accessible in response to an information request, unless one of the exemptions in the FOIA or EIR applies.

Appendix 3 – Response from Natural England – August 2017

Date: 10th August 2017
Our ref: 218127 Wymondley NP SEA Screening
Your ref:



Clare Skeels,
Senior Planning Officer - North Hertfordshire District Council
PO Box 480. M33 0DE
By email only: Clare.Skeels@north-herts.gov.uk

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

T 0300 060 3900

Dear Clare Skeels,

Wymondley Parish Neighbourhood Plan: Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulation Assessment Screening

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated the 23rd June 2017 which was received by email on the same date.

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.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Where Neighbourhood Plans could have significant environmental effects, they may require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) under the Environment Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. Further guidance on deciding whether the proposals are likely to have significant environmental effects and the requirements for consulting Natural England on SEA are set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal#strategic-environmental-assessment-requirements-for-neighbourhood-plans>

Natural England welcomes the production of an SEA Screening Report and is satisfied that a conclusion that **an SEA is not required** is appropriate.

Habitat Regulations Assessment

Where a Neighbourhood Plan could potentially lead to significant environmental effects it will be necessary to screen the Plan in relation to the Habitats and Species Regulations (2010), as amended (the 'Habitats Regulations'). One of the basic conditions that will be tested at Examination is whether the making of the plan is compatible with European obligations and this includes requirements relating to the Habitats Directive.

In relation to the Habitats Regulations, a Neighbourhood Plan cannot progress if the likelihood of significant effects on any European Site, either alone (or in combination with other plans and projects) cannot be ruled out (see Schedule 2, The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012). Therefore measures may need to be incorporated into the Neighbourhood Plan to ensure that any likely significant effects are avoided in order to secure compliance with the Regulations. A screening exercise should be undertaken if there is any doubt about the possible effects of the Plan on European protected sites. This will be particularly important if a Neighbourhood Plan is to progress before a Local Plan has been adopted and/or the

Neighbourhood Plan proposes development which has not be assessed and/or included in the Habitats Regulations Assessment for the Local Plan.

Natural England welcomes the consideration given to the Habitats Regulations. We are satisfied that the conclusion of the Local Planning Authority (as competent authority) that there are no likely significant effects on European sites is appropriate, and therefore advise that **further Habitats Regulations Assessment is not required.**

We would be happy to comment further should the need arise but if in the meantime you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

For any queries relating to the specific advice in this letter only please contact Jamie Melvin on 020 802 61025. For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

We really value your feedback to help us improve the service we offer. We have attached a feedback form to this letter and welcome any comments you might have about our service.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Jamie Melvin
Planning Lead Adviser – West Anglia Team

Appendix 4 – Response from Environment Agency – February 2019

Dear Clare,

Thank you for consulting us on your draft SEA screening report for the Wymondley neighbourhood plan.

Based on a review of the environmental constraints affecting your neighbourhood plan area we have no comments to make, we do not consider there to be any potential significant environmental effects.

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

Kind Regards,

Stuart Cook BSc(Hons)
Sustainable Places Planning Advisor
Environment Agency
Hertfordshire & North London – Welwyn Garden City Team

✉ Alchemy Office, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL7 1HE
☎ External: 0208 474 5017 | Internal: 45017
✉ Email: HNL.SustainablePlaces@environment-agency.gov.uk

Email dated : Monday 18 February 2019, 14:33