



Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Determination

North Herts District Council
Wymondley Neighbourhood Plan Screening Determination

A report by The Wymondley Parish Neighbourhood Plan Forum, drawn from the broader consultation by CAG Consultants, on behalf of the North Herts District Council

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1. Introduction

This report sets out a draft Screening Determination for the Wymondley Neighbourhood Plan and has been prepared by The Wymondley Parish Neighbourhood Plan Forum on behalf of the North Hertfordshire District Council. The purpose of the screening is to assess if the Neighbourhood Plan will require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). More detail is given in the following sections on SEA and Neighbourhood Plans and the Wymondley Neighbourhood Plan specifically.

The assessment of the Wymondley Neighbourhood Plan and the Draft Determination is included in sections 5 and 6.

2. Strategic Environmental Assessment context

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).

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.

Before the responsible body makes a formal determination, there is a requirement to consult three statutory consultation bodies designated in the regulations (Historic England, the Environment Agency & Natural England) on whether an environmental assessment is required. This draft document has been produced to facilitate that consultation.

3. Neighbourhood Plans and Strategic Environmental Assessment

Planning Practice Guidance states¹ 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 and Programmes Regulations 2004”*.

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 neighbourhood plan will require a strategic environmental assessment”*². In this case North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) is providing assistance by undertaking the screening determination.

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*

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

² ibid

³ Paragraph: 046 Reference ID: 11-046-20150209

- *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”.*

The 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 Neighbourhood Plan

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.

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.)

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.

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.)

See Annex 1 for Neighbourhood Plan Area

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.

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.

<p>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.</p> <p>Wymondley Parish remains a safe place to live, including pedestrian and vehicle safety on our narrow roads.</p> <p>Protection and enhancement of the local landscape and biodiversity of the Parish of Wymondley.</p> <p>Protection and enhancement of the local landscape and biodiversity of the Parish of Wymondley.</p> <p>Maintain, and where possible enhance the distinctive views on entering and leaving Wymondley Parish, adjoining villages and within the village itself.</p> <p>Protect important green and open spaces within Wymondley Village and Wymondley Parish and establish new green and open spaces within new developments.</p> <p>Support, maintain and develop community facilities for the benefit of all residents and the business community.</p> <p>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</p>
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5. Screening assessment

As noted above, the Regulations specify a set of criteria which must be used to assess whether any plan covered by the Regulation is likely to have a significant environmental effect and therefore require a SEA. The table below considers each of these criteria 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	No	A Neighbourhood Plan is at the bottom of the planning hierarchy and

programmes including those in a hierarchy.		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 protection)	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 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 or 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

		<p>Open Spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>

6. Screening determination

In summary, it is concluded that the Wymondley Neighbourhood Plan is not likely to have significant environmental effects and therefore a SEA is not required. The principal reasons for this conclusion are:

- No sites are allocated for development in the Plan.
- The Plan focuses on protecting the quality of the village 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. 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.
- 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 as already noted, key plan policies are designed to protect these features, and the Plan is supported by a comprehensive Natural and Historic Environments Assessment.