



East Cambridgeshire
District Council

Addendum to SEA Environmental Report: Draft Swaffham Bulbeck Neighbourhood Plan

June 2022

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The purpose of this addendum is to review representations received during consultation on the *Environmental Report* and consider whether further assessment is required to ensure the legislative requirements for *Strategic Environmental Assessment* and/or *Habitats Regulation Assessment* are met.
- 1.2. Swaffham Bulbeck Parish Council, a qualifying body for the purposes of neighbourhood planning, are currently preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan (SBNP) for the Swaffham Bulbeck Neighbourhood Area.
- 1.3. In June 2021, East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC) undertook a screening assessment of the SBNP. From this assessment, ECDC concluded that the SBNP as drafted at the time:
 - **requires** a full Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) - the plan was *screened in* for SEA; and
 - **does not require** a full Habitats Regulations Assessment - the SBNP was *screened out* for the purposes of Habitats Regulation Assessment.
- 1.4. ECDC's screening assessment, its findings, and the proposed scope of the Environmental Report were set out in the *SEA Scoping Report: Swaffham Bulbeck Neighbourhood Plan (June 2021)*. The methodology applied in the SEA reflect requirements set out in relevant legislation. This includes key information about the Neighbourhood Plan and Neighbourhood Area, including an outline of the content and objectives of the SBNP, its relationship with other relevant plans and programmes, and relevant environmental characteristics of the Neighbourhood Area.
- 1.5. The Scoping Report was published for consultation with statutory bodies between 28 June and 02 August 2021. Following consultation on the Scoping Report, ECDC carried out the Strategic Environmental Assessment, documenting this in the *Environmental Report*.
- 1.6. The Environmental Report was published alongside the draft SBNP for pre-submission 'Regulation 14' consultation. Statutory consultation bodies were invited to make comments on the Environmental Report from 21 September to 2 November 2021.

2. Summary of Environmental Report's Findings and Recommendations

- 2.1. The assessment presented in the Environmental Report identifies the potential for likely significant effects to arise in respect of:
 - **Sensitive SSSIs, including Devil's Dyke SSSI, due to the potential for increased recreational pressure from proposed development; and**
 - **The historic environment, notably the significance of the Swaffham Bulbeck Conservation Area and certain Listed Buildings in the vicinity of the proposed site allocation.**
- 2.2. These potential effects relate to *Biodiversity, flora and fauna* and *cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological heritage* SEA themes. For all other SEA themes, no likely significant effects on the environment were identified.
- 2.3. A number of the SBNP's objectives and policies are particularly environmentally conscientious and address environmental issues positively by seeking to improve the quality of new

development to reduce its impacts on the environment. The assessment concluded that such policies and objectives, whilst positive, are not likely to constitute 'significant effects' for the purposes of SEA.

- 2.4. The assessment identifies just one draft policy which could give rise to 'likely significant effects', draft *Policy SWB8 – Cemetery / Pony Field Site*. The draft policy proposes allocation of a site for major residential development of approximately 45 dwellings. The policy requires the scheme to be *community-led*, and includes a number of design principles for the development of the site informed by a *Landscape Character Assessment and Settlement Fringe Sensitivity Study*.
- 2.5. Section 4 attempts to identify alternative site options. However, due to the presence of environmental and policy constraints, and lack of known available land including – particularly for *community-led development*, no alternative site options could be identified. In the absence of alternative sites, for the purposes of SEA the options considered were:
- **Option 1: Policy SWB8 – Cemetery / Pony Field Site** i.e. the SBNP as drafted; and
 - **Option 2: SBNP with policy SWB8 omitted** i.e. the SBNP without a site allocation for major residential development.
- 2.6. The draft SBNP was appraised against a SEA Framework to identify measures to reduce, prevent or avoid adverse effects on the environment. Following appraisal against the SEA Framework, the report recommended that:
- Option 2 (SBNP with Policy SWB8 omitted) be rejected as, whilst it avoids the potential adverse effects on the environment, it fails to realise the benefits growth can provide in terms of meeting housing needs and improving accessibility. Furthermore, the option would likely have adverse consequences in terms of inclusivity and community involvement as it conflicts with the community's aspiration to deliver a major, community-led housing development, as illustrated through the SBNP.
 - Option 1 (SBNP Policy SWB8) be retained - *subject to the inclusion of the following mitigation measures* to mitigate potential adverse effects on the environment, including the integrity of sensitive SSSIs and heritage assets:
 - **Make provision for a minimum of 1.8ha of informal open space for general recreation and leisure use, or appropriate alternative mitigation to avoid or limit impacts on nearby sensitive sites designated for nature conservation.**
 - **The design of the scheme should respond appropriately to Swaffham Bulbeck's rich historic environment and be informed by a Heritage Statement which, as a minimum, should:**
 - **identify the relationship of the site to heritage assets;**
 - **demonstrate understanding of significance and contribution made by heritage assets and their settings;**
 - **quantify the impact of the development on the special character of heritage asset; and**
 - **illustrate and justify the mitigation measures which have been taken in designing the scheme to avoid or limit harm to heritage assets and their settings.**

- 2.7. In addition, the report recommended that the SBNP include monitoring indicators. The purpose of monitoring is to identify adverse effects and enable appropriate remedial action following the plan's implementation.
- 2.8. The report recommends that Swaffham Bulbeck Parish Council monitor the implementation of the SBNP using the following relevant indicators and targets:
- **Condition of Devil's Dyke SSSI - 100% of site area to meet 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' condition; and**
 - **Number of designated heritage assets in the Neighbourhood Area – With no net reduction in the number of designated historic assets in the Neighbourhood Area.**
- 2.9. In summary, the assessment concluded that the draft SBNP could lead to significant effects on the environment. However, the report confirms that, subject to incorporating the measures recommended in this Environmental Report, such effects can be adequately mitigated or avoided.

3. Statutory Consultation Bodies Responses to Environmental Report

- 3.1. Swaffham Bulbeck Parish Council invited the Statutory Consultation Bodies¹ to comment on the Environmental Report between 21 September and 2 November 2021.
- 3.2. One response was received from Natural England, and is reproduced at Appendix 1 for reference.
- 3.3. Regarding the significance of likely significant environmental effects, its response Natural England stated:
- It is our advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that, in so far as our strategic environmental interests (including but not limited to statutory designated sites, landscapes and protected species, geology and soils) are concerned, that there are unlikely to be significant environmental effects from the proposed plan*
- 3.4. Regarding likely significant effects on designated habitats, Natural England confirmed:
- We have checked our records and based on the information provided, we can confirm that in our view the proposals contained within the plan will not have significant effects on sensitive sites that Natural England has a statutory duty to protect.*
- 3.5. No responses were received from other statutory consultation bodies.

4. Analysis and Conclusions

- 4.1. Natural England's consultation response suggests that implementation of the draft SBNP, where modified to reflect the recommendations of the Environmental Report, is not likely to give rise to likely significant effects on the environment or designated habitats.
- 4.2. It is therefore concluded that no additional assessment is required in the context of Strategic Environmental Assessment or Habitats Regulation Assessment. The assessment and recommendations presented in the Environmental Report therefore remain valid.

¹ Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England.

- 4.3. It should be noted that there may be circumstances in which the Environmental Report could become invalid. For example, if Swaffham Bulbeck Parish Council made significant and extensive changes to its draft policies necessitating a new assessment in the context of SEA; or significant changes to the environmental or legislative context within which the assessment was carried out.

Appendix 1: Consultation Responses (Environmental Report)

Natural England, dated 07 October 2021

Swaffham Bulbeck Neighbourhood Plan – SEA environmental report consultation

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated and received by Natural England on 21 September 2021

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.

It is our advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that, in so far as our strategic environmental interests (including but not limited to statutory designated sites, landscapes and protected species, geology and soils) are concerned, that there are unlikely to be significant environmental effects from the proposed plan.

Neighbourhood Plan

Guidance on the assessment of Neighbourhood Plans, in light of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (as amended), is contained within the National Planning Practice Guidance. The guidance highlights three triggers that may require the production of an SEA, for instance 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 may have significant environmental effects that have not already been considered and dealt with through a sustainability appraisal of the Local Plan.

We have checked our records and based on the information provided, we can confirm that in our view the proposals contained within the plan will not have significant effects on sensitive sites that Natural England has a statutory duty to protect.

We are not aware of significant populations of protected species which are likely to be affected by the policies / proposals within the plan. It remains the case, however, that the responsible authority should provide information supporting this screening decision, sufficient to assess whether protected species are likely to be affected.

Notwithstanding this advice, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all potential environmental assets. As a result the responsible authority should raise environmental issues that we have not identified on local or national biodiversity action plan species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites or local landscape character, with its own ecological and/or landscape advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local landscape and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by this plan, before determining whether an SA/SEA is necessary.

Please note that Natural England reserves the right to provide further comments on the environmental assessment of the plan beyond this SEA/SA screening stage, should the responsible authority seek our views on the scoping or environmental report stages. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make.

For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

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