

## 6. Non-Technical Summary

### Context

- 6.1. The subject of this Environmental Report is the draft Swaffham Bulbeck Neighbourhood Plan (SBNP), which is expected to be published for consultation in September 2021<sup>50</sup>. The plan has been prepared by Swaffham Bulbeck Parish Council with the support of local volunteers. This Environmental Report documents the *Strategic Environmental Assessment* (SEA) of the draft SBNP. It will be published alongside the draft SBNP during consultation, and is expected to be submitted alongside the SBNP prior to the independent examination of the neighbourhood plan.
- 6.2. SEA is a crucial part of preparing a neighbourhood plan and is essential in demonstrating the plan meets the *basic conditions*<sup>51</sup> and other statutory requirements. Whilst SEA originates from a European Directive<sup>52</sup>, the process has been incorporated into UK law<sup>53</sup> and remains in force despite the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

### Screening exercise

- 6.3. In June 2021, East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC) undertook an initial screening assessment of the SBNP which concluded the plan requires a full Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) – this is commonly referred to as being *screened in*.
- 6.4. ECDC also concluded that the SBNP is not likely to lead to adverse harm to sites designated for nature conservation through the National Sites Network<sup>54</sup> or Ramsar Sites. Therefore, a full Habitats Regulations Assessment is not required.

### Scope

- 6.5. ECDC's screening assessment findings and scope of the Environmental Report were set out in a *Scoping Report*. The Scoping Report was published for consultation with statutory consultation bodies<sup>55</sup> between 28 June and 02 August 2021. The responses from the statutory bodies have been taken into consideration in carrying out the SEA.
- 6.6. The methodology<sup>56</sup> applied in this SEA and the content of this Environmental Report, 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 are described in Section 3.

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<sup>50</sup> Regulation 14 pre-submission stage consultation.

<sup>51</sup> As set out in 8(2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

<sup>52</sup> Namely, *Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment* (the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive).

<sup>53</sup> As *The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004* (i.e. the 'SEA Regulations').

<sup>54</sup> Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas formerly part of the Natura 2000 network.

<sup>55</sup> The consultation bodies are Environment Agency, Historic England, and Natural England.

<sup>56</sup> Set out in section 2.

- 6.7. Section 4 provides assessment of the SBNP's policies against various *SEA themes*<sup>57</sup> to identify the likelihood of significant effects on the environment. This assessment draws on the environmental constraints and characteristics identified in section 3.
- 6.8. The assessment 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.**
- 6.9. 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.
- 6.10. 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.

#### Alternative policy options

- 6.11. The assessment<sup>58</sup> identifies just one draft policy which could give rise to 'likely significant effects' – draft *Policy SWB8 – Cemetery / Pony Field Site*. The policy allocates 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*.
- 6.12. 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 are:
- **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.

#### SEA Framework

- 6.13. Section 5 appraises options 1 and 2 against an SEA Framework. The SEA Framework has been compiled using objectives from ECDC's latest *Sustainability Appraisal Framework*. The SEA Framework includes only SA Objectives relevant to the scope of the SEA.

#### Recommended option and mitigation measures

- 6.14. The purpose of the appraisal against the SEA Framework is to identify measures to reduce, prevent or avoid adverse effects on the environment. Following appraisal against the SEA Framework, it is recommended that:

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<sup>57</sup> The SEA themes are defined by the SEA Regulations 2004 and include biodiversity; population; human health; fauna; flora; soil; water; air; climatic factors; material assets; cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological heritage; landscape; and the inter-relationship between these issues.

<sup>58</sup> At section 4.

- 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.**

### Monitoring

- 6.15. The purpose of monitoring is to identify adverse effects and enable appropriate remedial action following the plan's implementation. ECDC 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.**

### Conclusions

- 6.16. The assessment has concluded that as currently drafted, the SBNP could lead to significant effects on the environment.
- 6.17. ECDC is satisfied that, subject to incorporating the measures recommended in this Environmental Report, such effects can be adequately mitigated or avoided.