

Draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan 2024-2041

Strategic Environmental
Assessment (SEA) and Habitats
Regulations Assessment (HRA)
Screening Opinion



July 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

This screening report is designed to determine whether the content of the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

Whether a Neighbourhood Development Plan requires a SEA, and if so the level of detail needed, will depend on what is proposed in the draft Neighbourhood Development Plan. The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) states that a SEA may be required, for example, where:

- the Neighbourhood Development Plan allocates sites for development;
- the Neighbourhood Development Plan Area contains sensitive natural or heritage assets that may be affected by the proposals in the plan;
- the Neighbourhood Development Plan may have significant environmental effects that have not already been considered and dealt with through the SEA of the Local Plan in the area.

The screening report also examines the potential impact of the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan on internationally designated wildlife sites and determines if the plan requires a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

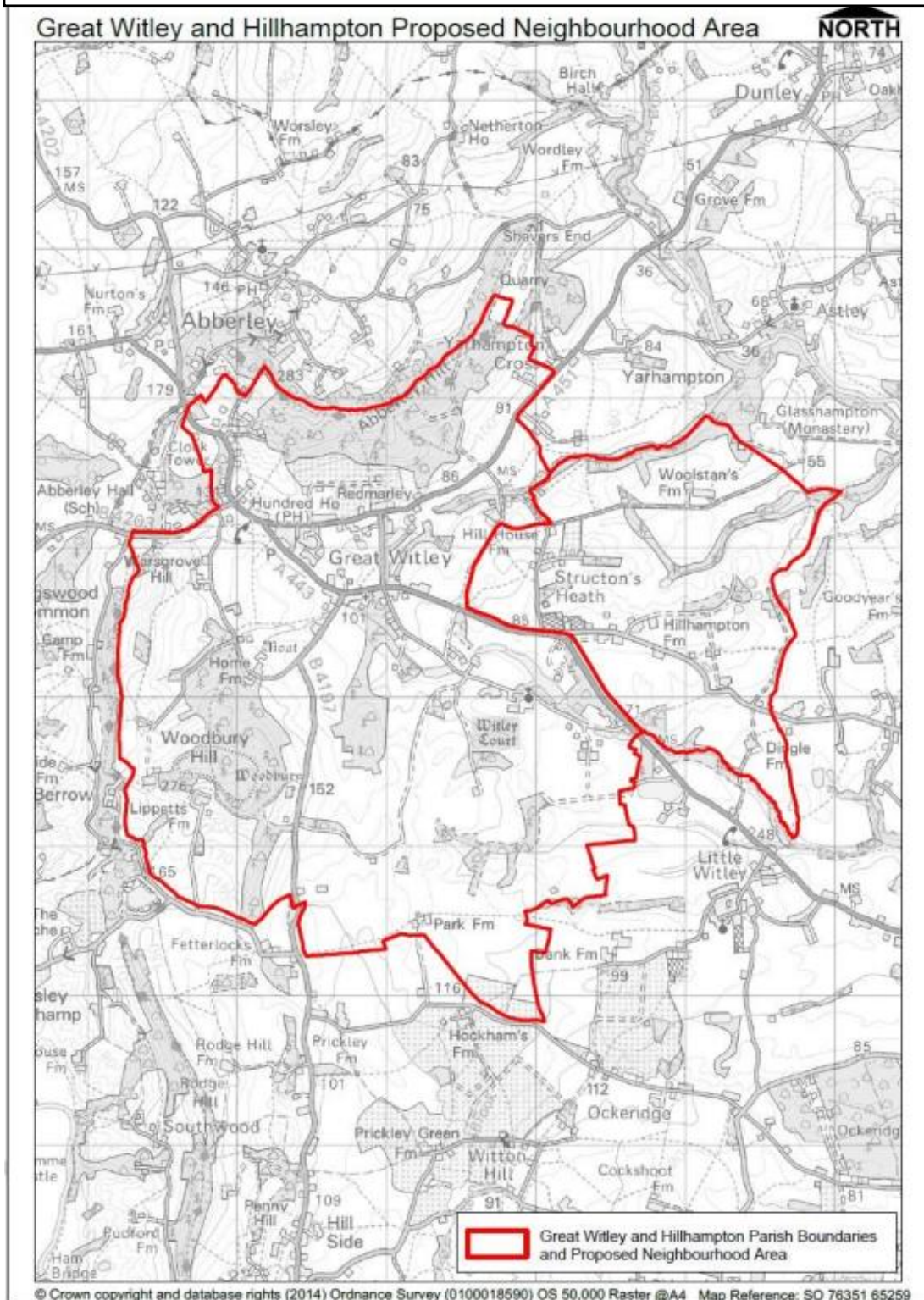
When deciding on whether the proposals are likely to have significant effects, the local authority is required to consult Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency. Where the local planning authority determines that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects (and, accordingly, does not require an environmental assessment) it should prepare a statement of its reasons for the determination.

1.2 DRAFT GREAT WITLEY AND HILLHAMPTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN SUMMARY

The draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan is essentially a community-led framework for guiding future development and growth of the parish from 2024-2041. 10 draft policies have been proposed, focusing on topics including Landscape Character, Local Green Spaces, Housing, Employment, Community Facilities and Renewable and Low Carbon Energy.

1.3 GREAT WITLEY AND HILLHAMPTON DESIGNATED NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA

Figure 1 – Designated Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Area



1.4 DRAFT GREAT WITLEY AND HILLHAMPTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN POLICY SUMMARIES

Ten policies are proposed in the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan (GWHNP); they are summarised below.

DRAFT POLICY	SUMMARY
<p>GWH1 Landscape Character</p>	<p>Policy GWH1 requires development proposals to demonstrate that the guidelines for the Landscape Type of the proposal site have positively influenced the design, scale and layout and landscape character has been strengthened wherever possible.</p> <p>The policy also sets out that development which would harm the landscape setting of the village will not be supported.</p>
<p>GWH2 Key Views</p>	<p>Policy GWH2 states that development that would have a significant visual impact on the key views (listed in the policy) would require a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment or similar study to ensure the impacts are acceptable.</p>
<p>GWH3 Local Green Space</p>	<p>Policy GWH3 sets out three local green spaces that shall be protected.</p>
<p>GWH4 Heritage</p>	<p>Policy GWH4 requires development proposals to protect, conserve and where possible enhance the historic environment including Witley Court and its setting.</p>
<p>GWH5 Housing Mix</p>	<p>Policy GWH5 sets out housing mix requirements; proposal of 5 or more dwellings must provide dwellings that contribute towards the areas housing needs such as smaller family housing, starter homes and housing to meet the needs of older people.</p>
<p>GWH6 Design of New Housing</p>	<p>Policy GWH6 requires proposals for new housing to maintain and enhance the rural character of the area through things such as matching the character of adjoining development, avoiding unacceptable impacts on amenity and local infrastructure and incorporating sustainability measures.</p>
<p>GWH7 Householder Development</p>	<p>Policy GWH7 supports householder development provided that the proposal is subordinate to the existing dwelling, complements the existing dwelling and does not result in the loss of amenity space or parking.</p>
<p>GWH8 Small-scale development</p>	<p>Policy GWH8 supports small-scale employment in line with SWDP12 provided that they of an acceptable scale, traffic</p>

DRAFT POLICY	SUMMARY
	generation would be acceptable and there would not be adverse impacts on amenity of residents.
GWH9 Community Facilities	Policy GWH9 sets out criteria for when the loss of community facilities would be supported and supports the creation of new built community facilities provided they do not have harmful impacts.
GWH10 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy	Policy GWH10 supports renewable and low carbon energy proposals (not including wind energy) subject to criteria.

1.5 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SEA) PROCESS

The basis for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) legislation is European Directive 2001/42/EC which was transposed into English law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, or SEA Regulations. Detailed guidance on these Regulations can be found in the Government publication “A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive” (OPDM 2005).

The SEA process aims to ensure that likely significant environmental effects arising from a Plan are identified, assessed, mitigated, communicated and monitored, and that opportunities for public involvement are provided. It enables environmental considerations to be accounted for in decision-making throughout the production of a Plan in an integrated manner.

Figure 2 sets out the screening procedure and how a plan should be assessed against the SEA Directive criteria. This outline procedure has then been applied to the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan in Table 1.

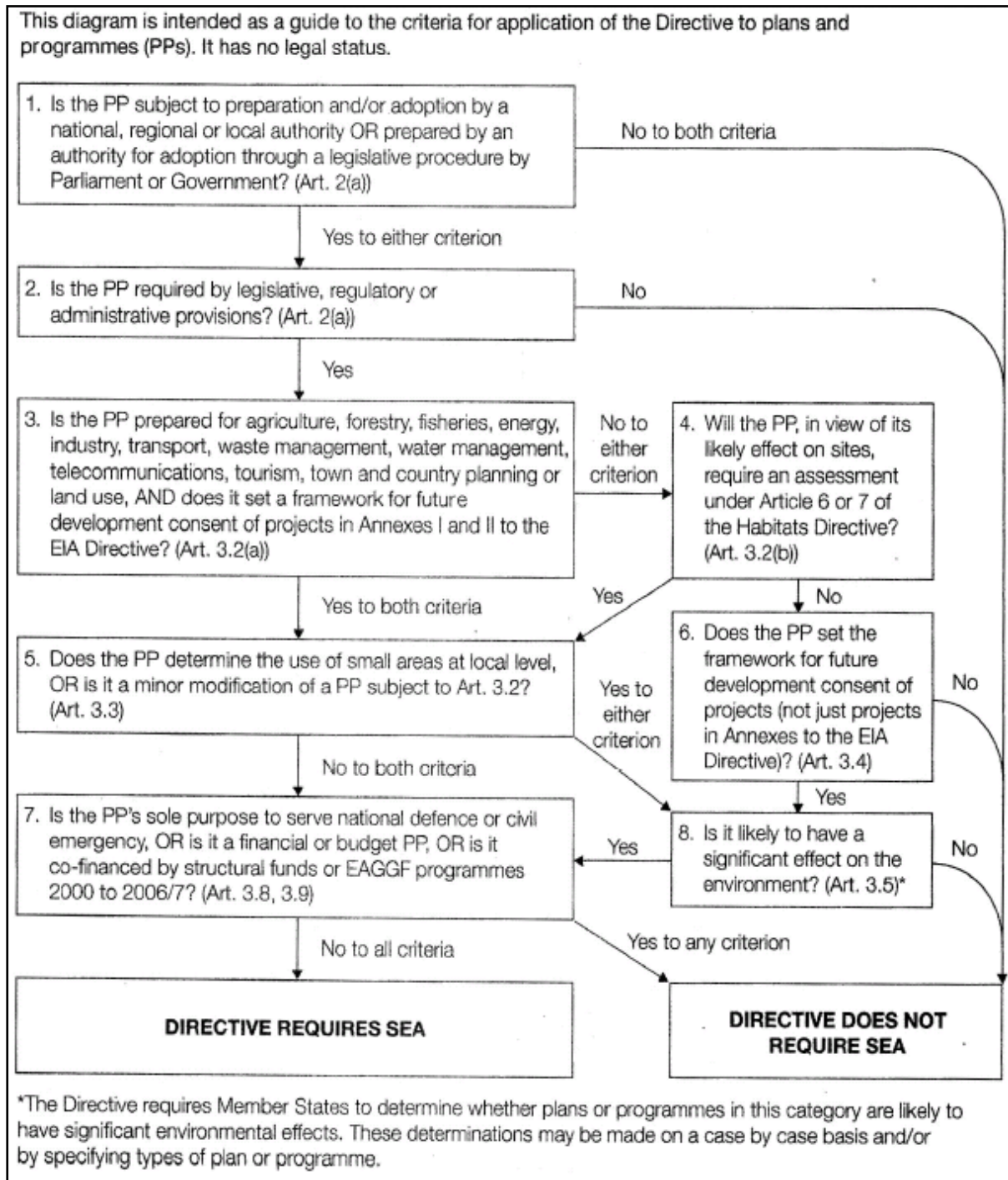


Figure 2 – Application of the SEA Directive to Plans and Programmes

Table 1: Assessment of the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan using SEA Directive Criteria

Stage	Y/N	Reason
1. Is the Neighbourhood Plan subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Art. 2(a))	Y	This Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared by a qualifying body the Localism Act 2011. If the Plan is passed by means of an either Examination and/or Referendum, it will be formally adopted by the Local Planning Authority. It will then form part of the local development framework and be afforded significant weight in planning decisions.
2. Is the Neighbourhood Plan required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))	N	Creation of a Neighbourhood Plan is not a legal requirement, and the Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared voluntarily by the local qualifying body in line with the provisions of the Localism Act. If the Plan is adopted however, it will form part of the statutory development plan, and it is therefore considered necessary to answer the following questions to determine if an SEA is required.
3. Is the Neighbourhood Plan prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2(a))	Y	The Plan is prepared for town and country planning and sets out a framework for future development consent of projects.
4. Will the Neighbourhood Plan, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.2 (b))	N	See Screening Opinion for HRA in Section 3 of this report.
5. Does the Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan	Y	The Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan is made up of a number

determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art. 3.2? (Art. 3.3)		of policies which, when adopted, will form part of the Local Development Framework, and so will have significant weight in planning decisions. The Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan includes design policies for three sites which are allocated in the adopted SWDP.
6. Does the Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art 3.4)	Y	When adopted, the Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan will be a statutory planning document. It will form part of the Local Development Framework and so will have significant weight in planning decisions. The responsibility for issuing development consent will remain with the Local Authority.
7. Is the Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Art 3.8, 3.9)	N	Not Applicable
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)	N	The Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan is not considered to have significant effect on the environment. To investigate the likelihood of potential impacts further a case-by-case assessment has been conducted, the full results of which can be found in Table 2.

Based upon the initial screening carried out against the criteria in Table 1 above, the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan may have a significant effect on the environment. To explore these potential effects further, a case-by-case assessment has been conducted. The criteria used in the undertaking of such an assessment are drawn from Article 3.5 (Annex II) of the SEA directive, and the results are shown in Table 2.

1.6 HABITATS REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT (HRA) PROCESS

The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) refers to the assessment required for any plan or project to assess the potential implications for European wildlife sites. The HRA therefore

looks at whether the implementation of the plan or project would harm the habitats or species for which European wildlife sites are designated. The relevant European wildlife site designations are Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), which together form part of the Natura 2000 network.

In addition to SPAs and SACs, Ramsar sites are also designated areas which, as a matter of government policy, are to be treated in the same way as European wildlife sites (although they are not covered by the Habitats Regulations). European wildlife sites and Ramsar sites are collectively known as internationally designated wildlife sites.

The legislation sets out a process to assess the potential implications of a plan on internationally designated wildlife sites. The first stage of this process is a screening exercise where the details of nearby internationally designated sites are assessed to see if there is the potential for the implementation of the plan to have an impact.

2. SEA SCREENING

2.1 SEA SCREENING ASSESSMENT

European Directive 2001/42/EC requires a full Strategic Environmental Assessment to be undertaken for certain types of plans and programmes that would have a significant environmental effect.

Table 2 below provides the screening determination of the need to carry out a full Strategic Environmental Assessment for the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan . This has been made in accordance with the Regulations and will be subject to consultation with the strategic environmental bodies before Malvern Hills District Council makes its determination on the necessity for a full Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Table 2 – The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004: Schedule 1 - Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects on the environment.

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects (SEA Directive, Annex II)	Likely to have significant environmental effects?	Summary of significant events
1(a) the degree to which the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan 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 Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan would, if adopted, form part of the statutory Development Plan and as such would contribute to the framework for future development consent of projects. This is unlikely to have significant environmental effects.

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects (SEA Directive, Annex II)	Likely to have significant environmental effects?	Summary of significant events
1(b) the degree to which the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;	NO	The draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan , when adopted, will be used alongside the South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP), and any subsequently adopted versions of the SWDP, in the determination of planning applications.
1(c) the relevance of the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;	NO	The policies of the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan are not considered to have a significant impact on the integration of environmental considerations.
1(d) environmental problems relevant to the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan :	NO	The draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan is more likely to promote environmental sustainability than create any environmental problems.
1(e) the relevance of the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan for the implementation of community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management and water protection);	NO	The policies of the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan are not considered to be relevant to the implementation of EC legislation.
2(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan ;	NO	It is considered unlikely that there will be any irreversible damaging environmental impacts associated with the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan . The Plan features policies which seek to protect and enhance the natural and built environment, and the plan is therefore likely to result in

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects (SEA Directive, Annex II)	Likely to have significant environmental effects?	Summary of significant events
		beneficial rather than damaging effects.
2(b) the cumulative nature of the effects of the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan ;	NO	The policies of the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan are unlikely to have any significant cumulative negative environmental impacts.
2(c) the transboundary nature of effects of the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan ;	NO	The draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to have any significant negative environmental impacts on adjoining parishes.
2(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents) due to the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan ;	NO	It is considered that there will be no risk to human health or the environment as a result of the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan.
2(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);	NO	The policies of the Neighbourhood Development Plan apply to the entirety of Great Witley and Hillhampton parish and are unlikely to significantly affect areas beyond the Neighbourhood Area boundary.
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 or limit values; or (iii) intensive land-use; and	NO	The draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan will not have any substantial impact on these factors.
2(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a	NO	The policies of the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan are unlikely to have a negative

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects (SEA Directive, Annex II)	Likely to have significant environmental effects?	Summary of significant events
recognised national, community or international protection status.		impact on any environmental designations in the Neighbourhood Area.

2.2 SEA SCREENING OPINION

The draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan does not include housing allocations. The assessment shown in Table 1 above identifies no potential significant negative effects arising from the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan and as such, will not require a full SEA to be undertaken. This determination was subject to the findings of consultation and the formal views of the statutory environmental bodies. This view is taken as the policies in the Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan seek to reinforce and do not deviate from the remit of the emerging policies of the South Worcestershire Development Plan.

3. HRA SCREENING

3.1 HRA SCREENING ASSESSMENT

There are no internationally designated wildlife sites within the Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Area. For the purposes of this screening assessment, sites that fall within a 20km radius are also considered. Lyppard Grange SAC is approximately 17km south-east of the Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Area.

Lyppard Grange Ponds SAC is located on the eastern outskirts of Worcester, situated amongst a recent housing development on former pastoral farmland. The site comprises two ponds in an area of grassland and scrub (public open space). The site provides habitat for Great Crested Newts *Triturus Cristatus*, which are dependent on both the existing terrestrial habitat (to provide foraging areas and refuge) and on the aquatic habitat (for breeding).

The potential impact of development on Lyppard Grange SAC was examined by a full HRA as part of the production of the South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP). The HRA screening of the SWDP concluded that there was uncertainty with regard to the potential for significant effects on two sites as a result of increased disturbance, in particular due to increased recreational activity. Concerns were raised specifically relating to the Lyppard Grange SAC and the potential impact of proposed development on water levels and quality.

As a result of the concerns raised, a full Appropriate Assessment (AA) was conducted (this can be viewed on the SWDP website – <http://www.swdevelopmentplan.org>). The AA concluded that the policies of the SWDP (including land allocations) were not likely to have adverse

effects on the integrity of the Lyppard Grange SAC. In addressing concerns relating to possible increased disturbance at the SAC, it was concluded that the location of the sites in relation to the neighbourhood plan area and also the availability of more suitable areas of open space for recreation in close proximity would keep potential impacts to a minimum. It was also considered that the policies of the SWDP would sufficiently mitigate the potential impact of proposed developments on the water environment, leading to minimal effect on the SAC sites.

The policies in the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan are considered to be in general conformity with the SWDP, and with this and the SWDP AA in mind, it can be considered that the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan will have no negative impact on internationally designated wildlife sites.

3.2 HRA SCREENING OPINION

As a result of the above assessment, it is considered that the policies of the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan need to be in general conformity with those contained in the SWDP. It is therefore concluded that the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to have a negative impact on any internationally designated wildlife sites and as such, the recommendation is made that a full HRA AA is not required.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Following the assessment made in Table 2, it is considered that a full SEA is not required for the Draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan Review as it is considered unlikely that there will be any significant environmental impacts as a result of The Plan. The Plan features policies which seek to protect and enhance the natural and built environment, and the plan is therefore likely to result in beneficial rather than damaging effects.

There are no internationally designated wildlife sites within the Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Area, with one identified within a 20km radius having been assessed in the SWDP HRA AA. As the Draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan, if adopted, would be considered to be in general conformity with the SWDP, it is considered that a HRA AA is not required.

Both above-mentioned recommendations were subject to consultation with the statutory environmental bodies (i.e. the Environment Agency (i.e. Natural England, Historic England and Environment Agency). The consultation period ran from Wednesday 21st February to Friday 5th April (accounting for bank holidays). All three consultation responses are included in Section 5 of this report, however, in short, all three statutory environmental bodies agreed that neither a full SEA nor HRA AA are required. Natural England advised that MHDC sought the views of internal specialist officers at the Council on whether these assessments are required with regard to local data that NE do not hold. Both the Natural Heritage and Biodiversity Officer and The Tree and Landscape Officer at Malvern Hills District Council concluded that an SEA or HRA is likely not required.

For the full consultation responses from the three statutory environmental bodies, see Section 5

5. STATUTORY ENVIRONMENTAL BODIES CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Historic England



Miss Ellie Muckle
Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils
Civic Centre
Queen Elizabeth Drive
Pershore
WR10 1PT

Direct Dial: 0121 625 6887

Our ref: PL00795408

7 March 2024

Dear Miss Muckle

GREAT WITLEY AND HILLHAMPTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN SEA & HRA SCREENING OPINION CONSULTATION

Thank you for your consultation and the invitation to comment on the SEA Screening Document for the above Neighbourhood Plan.

For the purposes of consultations on SEA Screening Opinions, Historic England confines its advice to the question, "Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment?" in respect of our area of concern, cultural heritage.

Our comments are based on the information supplied with the screening request. 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 the 'SEA' Directive], Historic England concurs with your view that the preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.

Regarding HRA Historic England does not disagree with your conclusions but would defer to the opinions of the other statutory consultees.

The views of the other statutory consultation bodies should be taken into account before the overall decision on the need for a SEA is made. If a decision is made to undertake a SEA, please note that Historic England has published guidance on Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Historic Environment that is relevant to both local and neighbourhood planning and available at: <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/sustainability-appraisal-and-strategic-environmental-assessment-advice-note-8/>

I trust the above comments will be of help in taking forward the Neighbourhood Plan.

Yours sincerely,

P. Boland.



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HistoricEngland.org.uk



Historic England is subject to both the Freedom of Information Act (2000) and Environmental Information Regulations (2004). Any information held by the organisation can be requested for release under this legislation.



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Environment Agency

Malvern Hills District Council
Forward Planning
The Council House Avenue Road
Malvern
Worcestershire
WR14 3AF

Our ref: SV/2010/104077/OT-
26/IS1-L01
Your ref:
Date: 04 April 2024

FAO: Ellie Muckle

Email Cc to: neighbourhoodplanning@malvern hills.gov.uk

Dear Ellie,

Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan - Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Opinion Consultation

I refer to your email of 21 February with regard to the Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) Pre-Submission Screening Opinion. We have reviewed the submitted documentation and offer the following comments for your consideration at this time.

Flood Risk: Based on our indicative Flood Map for Planning (Rivers and Sea), the NDP area has no main rivers within the vicinity and only minor ordinary watercourses, thus the plan area is shown to be predominantly located in Flood Zone 1, and therefore has a low fluvial flood risk potential.

It should be noted that the Flood Map provides an indication of 'fluvial' flood risk only. You are advised to discuss matters relating to surface water (pluvial) flooding with the drainage team at Malvern Hills District Council as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA).

Site Allocations: We would not, in the absence of any site allocations proposed within the NDP, offer any bespoke comment at this time.

However, please note that other potential development areas may be at flood risk given the presence of 'ordinary watercourses' which are un-modelled based on the scale and nature of the stream and receiving catchment (less than 3km²).

SEA / HRA Screening Opinion

To assist your Council's determination of the SEA and HRA Screening Opinion (dated March 2024), we note the conclusions achieved:

Environment Agency
Hafren House Welshpool Road, Shelton, Shrewsbury, SY3 8BB.
Customer services line: 03708 506 506
www.gov.uk/environment-agency
Cont/d..

- The SEA Screening Opinion concludes that the NDP does not include any housing allocations and thus identifies *'no potential significant negative effects arising from the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan and as such, will not require a full SEA to be undertaken.'*
- The HRA Screening Opinion concludes that the nearest SAC (Lyppard Grange Ponds) is 17km East and thus *'the draft Great Witley and Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to have a negative impact on any internationally designated wildlife sites and as such, the recommendation is made that a full HRA AA is not required.'*

We therefore agree and advise based on the Screening Report submitted and in consideration of matters within our remit that the NDP is considered unlikely to have significant environmental impacts and or significant effects on European designated sites, based on the above conclusions we do not believe a full Appropriate Assessment (AA) will be required.

Furthermore, we do not offer detailed bespoke advice on policy but advise you ensure conformity with the local plan and refer to guidance within our area neighbourhood plan "pro-forma guidance", I have attached this for your consideration. Notwithstanding the above, for example it is important that these plans offer robust confirmation that development is not impacted by flooding and that there is sufficient wastewater infrastructure in place to accommodate growth.

I trust the above is of assistance at this time.

Yours faithfully

Mr. Ewan Burvill
Planning Officer

Direct e-mail ewan.burvill@environment-agency.gov.uk

Natural England

Date: 10 April 2024
Our ref: 467592
Your ref: Great Witley & Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan



Ms Ellie Muckle
Wychavon & Malvern Hills District Council

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Dear Ms Muckle

Great Witley & Hillhampton Neighbourhood Plan - Revised SEA & HRA Screening Consultation

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated and received by Natural England on 21 February 2024.

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.

Screening Request: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

It is Natural England's advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that:

- significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes are unlikely; and,
- significant effects on Habitats sites¹, either alone or in combination, are unlikely.

The proposed neighbourhood plan is unlikely to significantly affect any Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection areas (SPA), Ramsar wetland or sites in the process of becoming SACs or SPAs ('candidate SACs', 'possible SACs', 'potential SPAs') or a Ramsar wetland. The plan area is unlikely to have a significant effect on a National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or Heritage Coast, and is unlikely to impact upon the purposes for which these areas are designated or defined.

Guidance on the assessment of Neighbourhood Plans, in line with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 is contained within the [Planning Practice Guidance](#). This identifies three triggers that may require the production of an SEA:

- 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.

¹ Habitats sites are those referred to in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (Annex 2 - glossary) as "any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 for the purpose of those regulations, including candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and any relevant Marine Sites".

Natural England does not hold information on the location of significant populations of protected species, so is unable to advise whether this plan is likely to affect protected species to such an extent as to require an SEA. Further information is included in Natural England's [standing advice](#) on protected species.

Furthermore, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all environmental assets. The plan may have environmental impacts on priority species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites, soils and best and most versatile agricultural land, or on local landscape character that may be sufficient to warrant an SEA. Information on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees is set out in Natural England/Forestry Commission [standing advice](#).

We therefore recommend that advice is sought from your ecological, landscape and soils advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local soils, best and most versatile agricultural land, landscape, geodiversity and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by the plan before determining whether a SEA is necessary.

Natural England reserves the right to provide further advice on the environmental assessment of the plan. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make. If a SEA is required, Natural England must be consulted at the scoping and environmental report stages.

Please send any new consultations, or further information on this consultation to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk

Yours sincerely

Sally Wintle
Consultations Team