

Your ref: |
Our ref: 6.3a HGNP
Please ask for: David Marlow
Direct dial no: 01424 787635
Date: 17 December 2018



Andrew Brown
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by email |

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director

Town Hall
Bexhill-on-Sea
East Sussex TN39 3JX

Dear Andrew

SEA Screening for the Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan

Further to your request for an SEA screening opinion I have now received the comments of the Statutory Environmental Bodies (SEB's) which are as stated below :

Natural England

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 7th November 2018 which was received by Natural England 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.

Screening Request: Strategic Environmental Assessment Neighbourhood Plan

Guidance on the assessment of Neighbourhood Plans in light of the SEA Directive 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.

It is our advice that if the Neighbourhood Plan allocates sites for development, other than those that have already been allocated within the Local Plan, the Neighbourhood Plan has potential to impact upon the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). 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. 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.

Historic England

Thank you for consulting Historic England on the request for a screening opinion for SEA of Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan. Historic England's remit is to advise the Parish Council and Local Planning Authority as the responsible bodies in determining whether the plan has potential for likely significant environmental effects within our areas of interest, in order that these are given appropriate assessment throughout the development of the plan. We may do this either before or after the District Council has issued a draft screening opinion, although it helps to undertake screening early in the plan making process in order that SEA can appropriately influence the assessment of options and identification of necessary mitigation. Where there is uncertainty we will take a 'worst case scenario' approach. Nevertheless as more information becomes available through the plan making process we are happy to review our opinion where the scope or detail of plan policies and proposals, and the reasonable alternatives considered, have changed substantially. The reasons for screening in a neighbourhood plan for SEA should be taken into consideration in considering the scope of the environmental report baseline and sustainability objectives.

In this case the plan documents provided, including the mapped sites being considered allow a readable level of clarity over the potential for the plan options to have likely significant environmental effects. The plan is expected to allocate sites for up to 75 dwellings in addition to two sites for other purposes and is likely to identify a number of sites as local green space (some of which may seek to protect land that is important to the local community for its historic significance).

The entire plan area is located within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Whilst this designation is intended to protect the natural heritage and scenic value of the area, these are significantly affected by the area's cultural heritage, including its history of management and rural industry and, as such, their successful management should also take into account impacts on heritage assets and historic landscape character as a whole. This is made clear through the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan. Allocating sites for housing within this area, particularly outside the envelope of an existing settlement's built up areas, is likely to have effects for the scenic beauty of the AONB.



Having reviewed the sites proposed for consideration we note that several, including a number of those not previously assessed through SEA/SA of the local plan, have potential to have effects on the settings of listed buildings. Site HG22, for example, has potential effects for the setting of Grade II* listed Iridge Place. Other sites with potential indirect effects on listed buildings include (but are not limited to): HG 26, HG25, HG 23, HG5 and HG4, HG6, HG20, HG30 and unnumbered site south of Station Road, Hurst Green. Information on some of these sites including assessment of their suitability will have been gathered through the SA of the local plan. However, where they are being considered as alternatives alongside newly identified sites they will need to be included in an assessment of comparative suitability with regard to their significant environmental effects and potential for mitigation of harmful impact (or indeed the securing of positive environmental outcomes).

Impacts from development to listed buildings and historic landscape character, including indirect impacts to setting are likely to be long term and irreversible (unless suitable mitigation is identified during the plan making process). Impacts to either heritage assets or historic landscape character may be positive or negative and are likely to require specialist knowledge to assess.

Listed buildings are of national importance and the protection of their fabric and setting is a requirement of legislation and national policy.

As such we feel that there is potential for likely significant environmental effects from some plan options being considered and, as such, recommend that the Parish and District Councils do screen the plan in for SEA so long as the intention to allocate sites for development is a part of the scope of the plan.

We hope these comments are of assistance to both the Parish and District Council but would be pleased to answer queries relating to them if necessary.

Environment Agency

Thank you for consulting us on the above screening opinion. We have no comments to make. Please note we do not routinely comment at the screening stage, but welcome submissions at the scoping stage for comments. Consultations at the scoping stage will be listed as discretionary pre-application advice. This is a chargeable service

Conclusion

In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, an SEA should be undertaken for the Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan (HGNP). I have set out the reasoning below in relation to the criteria for determining the likely significance of effects as contained in Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

1. The HGNP will allocate sites and form part of the 'development plan' and thereby exert a direct and substantial influence over development proposals coming forward in the period.
2. As regards the characteristics of the area covered by the HGNP (as set out in Schedule 1(2) of the regulations), I note particularly that:
 - a) the area is wholly within the High Weald AONB, which enjoys the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty;



- b) land within Hurst Green village and its environs are affected by or adjacent to Listed Buildings and other Heritage Assets relating to the historic character of the High Weald AONB.

Also, to clarify the process in relation to the 'scoping' stage, RDC has already produced a 'Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report' that is considered applicable to the SEA process of Neighbourhood Plans produced within the District. It can be found on our web-site here: <http://www.rother.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=5006>

Particular reference should be made to the 'Sustainability Appraisal Framework' (Task A4) which contains decision-aiding questions to help inform the SEA process. As the Scoping Report states, this framework *'is also considered relevant and applicable to Neighbourhood Plans produced within the District'*. The scope of information to be included in the environmental report should address the SEA objectives set out below. The level of detail should reflect the geographical extent of the NP as far as practicable, drawing on the Council's own Scoping Report referred to above and baseline information already provided and any available from other sources to meet regulatory requirements.

In relation to the SEA process for the Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan, it is considered that the following objectives from the Sustainability Appraisal Framework should be screened in for SEA purposes:

- 7: Improve accessibility to services and facilities for all ages across the District
- 9: Improve efficiency in land use and encourage the prudent use of natural resources
- 10: Reduce road congestion and pollution levels and ensure air quality continues to improve by increasing travel choice and reducing car usage
- 11: Reduce emissions of greenhouse gases
- 12: Minimise the risk of flooding and resulting detriment to people and property
- 13: Maintain, improve and manage water resources in a sustainable way
- 14: Conserve and enhance bio-diversity and geo-diversity
- 15: Protect and enhance the high quality natural and built environment

In addition, whilst these objectives are likely to be most relevant to this particular Neighbourhood Plan in terms of potential significant environmental effects, you may wish to also consider the other SA/SEA objectives in the Framework for the purposes of assessing the overall sustainability of proposed policies.

If there are any queries we would be happy to advise further and please accept our apologies in the delay in getting this response to you.

Yours sincerely,



David Marlow
Planning Policy Manager

