Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan

Sustainability Appraisal

Incorporating the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report forms the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Consultation Draft Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan. The Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan will be a development plan document adopted by Ashford Borough Council and will cover a number of issues relating to the development of the parish of Bethersden over the period to 2030.

The purpose of Sustainability Appraisal (SA)

1.2 The purpose of the SA is to ensure that the principles of sustainable development are considered throughout the plan making process and that the final Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan has considered all aspects of economic, social and environmental sustainability in its production.

1.3 Strategic Environmental Assessment is a requirement of the EC Directive on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (Directive 2001/42/EC) known as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive. This is transposed into UK law through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 which applies to plans with significant environmental effects (SEA Regulations). Throughout this report where Sustainability Appraisal is referred to the requirements of the SEA Directive have been incorporated.

The Stages of an SA

1.4 The diagram in Figure 1. overleaf sets out the different stages in the SA process and how they relate to the stages in the Neighbourhood Plan production. This Report forms Stages B and C, and is known as the SA Report.

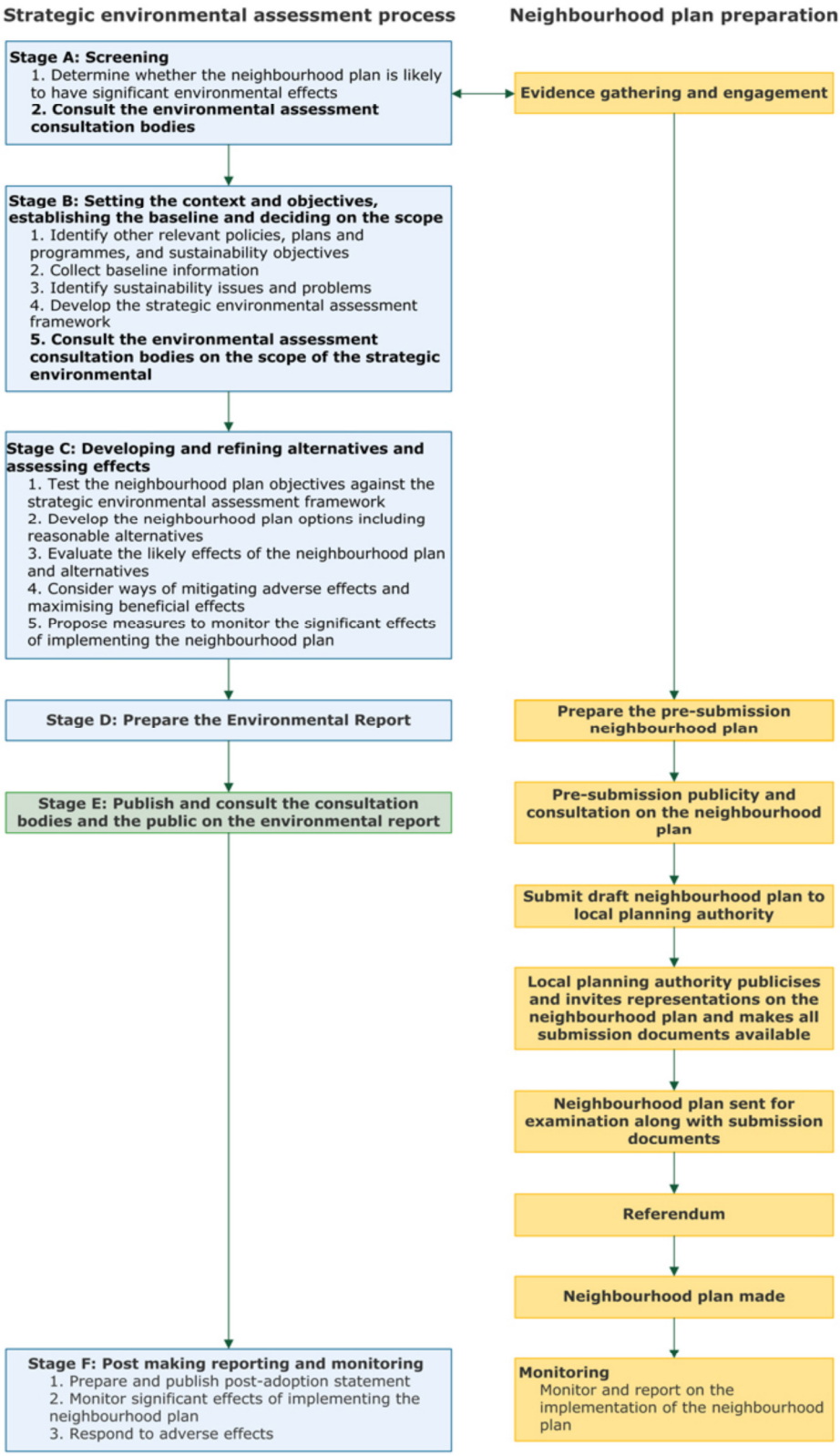


Figure 1: The SA/SEA Process

Neighbourhood Planning Policy Context

1.5 The Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan must be in compliant with higher level planning policy. This means that it must be in conformity with national and local planning, including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and the Ashford Core Strategy (2008) and the Tenterden and Rural Sites Development Plan Document (2011).

1.6 The Draft Ashford Borough Local Plan 2030 (Regulation 19 Version) was published for public consultation in 2016. This Plan is currently on schedule to be submitted towards the end of 2017 following a consultation period on the main changes proposed to the Regulation 19 Draft during July and August 2017. As the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan will cover the period 2015 – 2030 it will therefore also be required to be in accordance with the strategic policies of the Ashford Local Plan 2030.

1.7 A full review of the planning policy context is set out in the SA Scoping Report 2017 (Appendix D)

Bethersden Parish

1.8 The Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan Area (shown in Figure 2) was designated in February 2014 and covers the parish of Bethersden, a rural parish with a population of 1,481 in 2011, some 6 miles to the south west of the town of Ashford. The village of Bethersden is home to half the population of the parish, with smaller hamlets at Wissenden, Tuesnoad and Brissenden.

1.9 The character of Bethersden today is based on a legacy of nearly 1000 years of farming in this area. In 1640 the population of the parish stood at 400. This increased to over 1,120 by the 1850s. The 1908 Ordnance Survey map shows the village in two parts, the larger part along The Street, linked by a well-used footpath across open fields (now George Field) to a smaller group of buildings including the Forge, at the point where Forge Hill meets the A28 at Forge Corner. The Street was mainly residential but included shops, St. Margaret's church and the pub. Forge Corner was more commercial in character, with a blacksmith's forge and carpenters workshops, ideally placed on the main road from Ashford to Tenterden.

1.10 Today the A28 runs through the parish, with the centre of the village of Bethersden itself lying to the north. Forge Corner is now mainly residential but The Street has changed only slightly in recent years. The centre of the village is

predominantly residential in character but has also retained a modest retail core with a number of shops and a pub, and enjoys a highly attractive Conservation Area including many listed buildings. Significant developments of both Council and private housing have occurred here from the 1930s through to the 1970s, with two smaller developments in the 1990s, and most recently Millfields Close in 2015.

1.11 Agricultural employment in the parish has declined since the middle of the last century, but a surprising diversity of other businesses has evolved, covering retail, manufacturing and service industries based in and around the village, often in converted agricultural buildings, resulting in a thriving mixed use character to Bethersden today.

1.12 Bethersden has long been a proactive community, enthusiastic, as the Draft NP recognises[1] about shaping its own future. It has previously produced a Parish Plan (2003) and a Design Statement (2003).

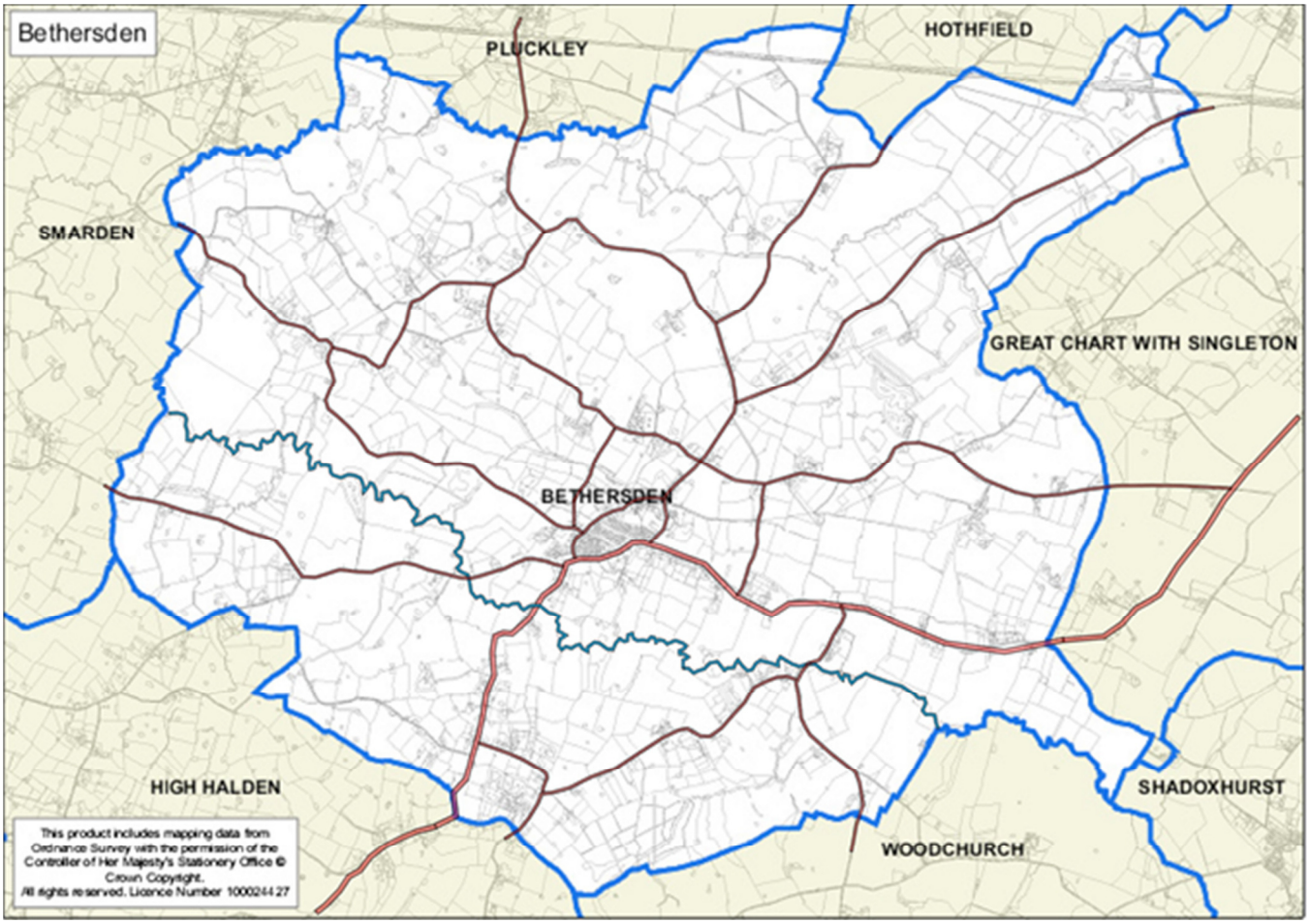
Structure of Report

1.13 This Report is structured as follows :

- Section 2 provides feedback in the consultation responses received on the SA Scoping Report and any changes that were made as a result of these responses,
- Section 3 introduces the Bethersden NP Objectives and tests them against the SA framework as set out in the Scoping Report,
- Section 4 explains the development of the NP so far, focusing on the different approaches and options for growth that have been put forward and how these have been assessed during the process. This Chapter also briefly summarises the consultation that has taken place on the NP to date,
- Section 5 appraises these options against the SA Framework, highlighting areas where the option could be strengthened in terms of sustainability and suggesting ways of mitigating any negative effects,
- Section 6 outlines the selection of the preferred development option for the Plan and the measures that have been taken to enhance the overall sustainability of the Plan,
- Section 7 concludes the SA report and outlines the next steps in the process and ongoing monitoring.

[1] Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan Consultation Draft 2016, section 5.5

Figure 2 Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan Area



2. SCOPING REPORT CONSULTATION

Background

2.1 A screening opinion (Stage A) was undertaken by Ashford Borough Council on the requirement for an SEA and HRA for the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan in September 2014[2]. This screening opinion was consulted on in compliance with regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. Responses were received from Natural England and Environment Agency. No response was received from Historic England. Copies of responses are found in Appendix B of this Report. This consultation identified that the Bethersden NP was unlikely to have any significant and /or negative environmental effects, including impact on European designated habitats or species. Therefore the screening assessment recommended that a full SEA/HRA did not need to be undertaken for the NP.

2.2 Following the Regulation 14 consultation on the Draft Neighbourhood Plan in 2016, an extensive representation was received from Historic England in November 2016. This response is included in Appendix C of this Report. In summary the response advised that on the basis of the proposed allocation of three housing sites in the Neighbourhood Plan, two within the Bethersden Conservation Area, and all of which, in its opinion, would affect the setting of a number of listed buildings, Historic England considered that the Plan was likely to have significant environmental effects on the historical environment, and that an SEA may now be required, unless the site allocation policies had previously been considered within the SEA of a higher level or equivalent plan document.

2.3 The currently adopted higher level plan for the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan is the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD (2010). Sites A and C were screened in full as part of the SA into that DPD. However, most of Site B was not subject to SA screening (this was noted in the inspectors report). For this reason, an SEA of this Neighbourhood Plan is deemed to be required.

[2] Appendix A of this Report

2.4 In response to the Regulation 14 representation from Historic England, an extension to the screening assessment was therefore drawn up by Ashford Borough Council in February 2017. This recommended that an SEA was now required for the NP in respect of the likely significant effects of the Plan on cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological heritage. This screening assessment addendum is found as an appendix 1 to the 2017 Scoping Report (Appendix D of this Report).

Consultation Responses

2.5 The Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan Sustainability Screening Report was available for consultation over a five week period between 9 March and 13 April 2017. Responses were received from the three statutory consultees. These are included in full in Appendix E of this Report.

2.6 In summary, the Environment Agency reiterated its support for the draft NP including the protection of local habitats but requested that this include the protection and enhancement of the biodiversity of the river Beult and its corridor. In particular, as part of the River Beult's upper reaches flow through the Neighbourhood Plan area, the Agency hoped that, in future, actions to deliver the objectives will include work to protect and enhance this important Water Framework Directive (WFD) water body which, further downstream, is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. It expressed interest in working with residents of Bethersden to help ensure any development proposed is in the most appropriate location and also to help deliver WFD measures to improve the river, as specified in the River Basin Management Plan that help achieve their objectives.

2.7 In addition it noted that there is no mention of the risk of flooding particularly as one of the proposed allocated sites within the conversation area, identified in Figure 3 (eastern site) falls partly within flood zone 3. Any planning application for development at this site will have to be supported by a site specific flood risk assessment. The Environment Agency recommends that development on this site avoids the area that floods, which lies along the south-west boundary.

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

2.9 Historic England responded to state that the draft scoping report identifies the impact of development on the form and setting of the conservation area as a key issues to be considered in the environmental report. Whilst form is an element of character, government guidance through the NPPF is that decisions affecting heritage assets should be considered with regard to their impact on the asset's 'significance', which in the case of conservation area is defined as the special historic or architectural interest. Nevertheless, the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires councils to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas. Whilst the settlement form and setting are important as parts of Bethersden's character and significance there are other elements of the area's character or appearance that could be affected by the plan's proposals. Specifically its green and rural character could be affected by development. Rather than focus on a specific element of character at the scoping stage it would recommend the second bullet point at 5.2 is amended to read:
"*The impact of development on the significance and character or appearance of the conservation area and its setting".*

2.10 It also noted that the Environmental Report could provide a list of key character features that could be affected by plan options that have been assessed. As such it is helpful that the settlement form is identified already as a factor that will be taken into account, to which Historic England would expect to see the rural, green and open character of those parts of the conservation area included as fields or paddocks at the time of their inclusion in the area.

2.11 In summary, Historic England supports the sustainability framework as set out, which includes prompts to include consideration of predicted effects and opportunities for mitigation, which are both important elements of the SEA process. It also supports the criteria, with the suggestion that the 'views' indicator should seek to "maintain or enhance the character of key views of heritage assets".

Amendments to the SA Scoping Report

2.12 As a result of these comments the SA Framework was amended to incorporate wording as suggested by Historic England.

2.13 With regard to the flood zone issue raised by the Environment Agency concerning one of the proposed site allocations in the NP, the NPPF[3] requires

[3] NPPF paragraph 100

that inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk, but where development is necessary, making it safe without increasing flood risk elsewhere. To this end it states that a sequential, risk-based approach to the location of development should be undertaken to avoid where possible flood risk to people and property and manage any residual risk.

3. SA FRAMEWORK AND NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN OBJECTIVES

3.1 Current guidance on land use and spatial plans advocates the use of objectives in the SA process. The identification of objectives therefore forms the basis for this appraisal. It provides the starting point for ensuring that both the SEA/SA and sustainability issues are at the heart of, and are fully integrated into, the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan.

The Sustainability Framework

3.2 The Sustainability Appraisal Framework was developed in the Scoping Report and is shown in Figure 2 overleaf. It has been amended to incorporate the changes requested as a result of the Scoping Report consultation. The Framework is used to test to the compatibility of the objectives of the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan in terms of sustainability. The Framework is then also used to test the options for growth and to appraise the Plan as whole.

3.3 The objectives listed in the Framework are based on those in the Ashford Core Strategy Sustainability Appraisal Report. They have been amended and adapted to reflect the more locally specific baseline information and the key issues highlighted in Sections 4 and 5 of the SA Scoping Report for the Bethersden NP as well as the responses to the Screening Report consultation from Historic England.

Table 1: Sustainability Framework for the Bethersden NP

Objective	Criteria	Indicators	Targets	Predicted effect	Comments / Mitigation
Conservation and enhancement of the historic environment and built heritage of the Parish	Protect, maintain and enhance the historic environment and setting – with particular reference to the open rural character of the Conservation Area, historic streets/routes and all listed buildings	Maintain or enhance the character of key views of heritage assets amid complementary settings.	Enhance appreciation of key assets within their spatial contexts.		
To ensure that development responds appropriately to and enhances landscape/ townscape character, quality and topography	Conserve and enhance the character and quality of open spaces, rural vistas and character, maintaining and strengthening local distinctiveness and sense of place.Improve footpaths and routes through, and views of the historic settlement.	Continued appreciation of the rural and agricultural heritage of this settlement. Increased number of routes within and beyond the historic core.	Maintenance and enhancement of historic form, along with enhanced opportunity for biodiversity.		

Appraisal Scale			
++	Significant positive effect	**+**	Positive effect
0	Neutral (no effect)	**?**	Effect uncertain
-	Negative effect	**--**	Significant negative effect

Testing the Neighbourhood Plan Objectives

3.4 The Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan is grounded in a community vision for the parish which is set out in Section 2 of the Consultation Draft Neighbourhood Plan 2016.

"Our vision is for Bethersden to continue to thrive by meeting the changing needs of the community whilst preserving the distinctive character, landscape and setting of the parish that has evolved over nine centuries". [4]

This vision supports the vision in the emerging Ashford Local Plan 2030:

The identity and attractive character of the Borough's rural area, with its range of attractive settlements, wealth of heritage assets and its expansive countryside, including the Kent Downs AONB to the north and the High Weald AONB to the south, will be protected and enhanced." [5]

Each policy in the NP has been tested to ensure that it meets the vision and accords with the response and objectives of local people.

3.5 There are six overarching Objectives for the NP as a whole

1: Preserve and protect the rural environment and local distinctive character.

2: Provide adaptable low-density housing development in keeping with the local area and appropriate to the needs of all its residents.

3: Provide recreational and leisure facilities for all age groups.

4: Promote the retention of local amenities.

5: Promote local employment opportunities.

6: Maintain a safe, caring and inclusive community.

There are also three sub-sets of Objectives for each of the three Sections of the Plan itself:

- Managing our Rural Environment

[4] *Consultation Draft Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan(2016) page 5*
[5] *Ashford Local Plan Reg 19 Draft, para 3.11*

- Housing
- Economy, Communications, Transport and Infrastructure

MANAGING OUR RURAL ENVIRONMENT

a) Preserve the unique character and setting of the village by retaining those open spaces that add to the distinctive open feel and reinforce the sense that you are in a village rather than an urban area

b) Protect the rural countryside to preserve the rural setting, habitat and environment of the parish

c) Support and allow for the expansion of the recreational needs and amenities of the community whilst preserving the rural setting of the village

d) Enhance the network of footpaths and define cycle routes to improve local communication within the parish.

e) Support industrial and commercial development at a scale that does not damage the environment and complements the existing quiet and tranquil setting and quality of rural life.

HOUSING

a) Provide new housing where it meets an identified need

b) Provide community benefit as a result of any new housing development

c) A range of new housing will be supported on suitable sites at appropriate lower densities as in the Developers Site Design Brief (See Appendix I Consultation Statement) to provide sufficient public open space, so that the built development retains a rural character and is not intrusive in the surrounding environment.

d) Provide housing that is adaptable (see developers Brief) and in particular meets the needs of older people, and reflects local needs and is located within easy access to all local amenities.

ECONOMY, COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

a) Development which encourages local employment, particularly where it is located adjacent to or within existing commercial zones.

b) Conversion of existing buildings, especially underused agricultural buildings, and the small-scale expansion of existing employment premises across the Parish.

c) Services provided which support home working and commercial development e.g. good high speed internet coverage.

d) New commercial development shall not inhibit the free flow of traffic, which includes speed management, traffic calming and good vehicle access.

e) Services provided to support commercial developments e.g. adequate power, and waste disposal.

f) Development that supports the vibrancy and vitality of Bethersden Parish by diversifying and enhancing the range of local shops and related commercial services for the local community.

g) Development including external lighting which manages to reduce energy usage, impact on biodiversity, visual impact, light pollution and any potential harm to local residents and to the local character of the area. Where this is in doubt, applications should be accompanied by a formal lighting assessment to ensure it complies with national and local authority requirements in our rural area.

h) New developments which do not create noise pollution particularly when close to residential areas.

NP OBJECTIVES	SUSTAINABILITY OBJECTIVES	
	Conservation and enhancement of the historic environment and built heritage of the Parish	To ensure that development responds appropriately to and enhances landscape/ townscape character, quality and topography
1	++	++
2	?	+
3	+	+
4	++	++
5	?	+
6	0	0
a	++	++
b	++	++
c	+	+
d	++	++
e	+	+
a	?	?
b	0	0

c	+	+
d	+	+
a	0	?
b	0	?
c	0	0
d	+	+
e	0	0
f	+	+
g	+	++
h	0	+

Table 2 Sustainability Appraisal of NP Objectives

4.DEVELOPING THE OPTIONS

4.1 Having identified a need for 34 new dwellings in the parish over the Neighbourhood Plan period, options for the allocation of housing sites were invited and examined by the Neighbourhood Plan Working Groups in order to determine a preferred option.

4.2 In total 10 potential sites were considered. Nine of these were those that came forward as part of the Call for Sites for the Ashford Local Plan to 2030, undertaken by the Borough Council. As this process had recently taken place it was decided not to replicate the process with regard to the Neighbourhood Plan.

4.3 One additional site was proposed on the far northern edge of the Parish near the Golf Course and the M20. The location of this site was not deemed to be in compliance with the overall Vision of the Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish. It was not in a sustainable location, proposed for luxury homes only and accessed via a narrow lane. On advice from Borough Council, the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group ruled this proposal out at the first stage for inclusion in the Plan, leaving it as a matter to be dealt with instead via the Local Plan or a planning application.

Site Assessment Criteria

4.4 As a result of initial consultation and consideration of national and local policy, criteria for the assessment of the options were developed using methodology provided by Ashford Borough Council with locally detailed requirements tailored to the needs of Bethersden Parish. (Site Assessment sheets for each site are included in the Site Appraisal Document produced by the Neighbourhood Plan Group and which forms part of the Evidence Base to the Neighbourhood Plan).

4.5 In addition public exhibitions were held by the Neighbourhood Plan Working Groups on the 17th January 2015 and subsequently in August/September 2015 when the community were asked to vote on the results of the Working Groups recommendations. Feedback from these public consultation events identified a desire for a mix of housing: starter homes, family homes, and homes suitable for older people, with a proportion of affordable (local needs) housing. Feedback from consultation also demonstrated strong support for the principle of retaining the green and open rural feel of the settlement, which is characteristic of both the parish of Bethersden and the village itself.

5. APPRAISING THE SPATIAL OPTIONS

5.1 Table 4 below appraises each of the nine sites examined by the Group against the SA Framework set out in Table 1 of this Report, being considered reasonable alternatives for the purposes of Stage C of the SEA process.

5.2 As outlined earlier the SA Framework adopted here is limited to the objectives arising from the representation received from Historic England to the Regulation 14 consultation of the Neighbourhood Plan. As a result it should be borne in mind that it does not examine reasonable alternatives against the full breadth of Sustainability Objectives. The Ashford Core Strategy SA Report, from which the Objectives for this SEA are drawn, covers a total of nine areas from biodiversity, water and human health issues to climate change, social inclusiveness and economic development. The SA Report for the Regulation 19 Draft Ashford Local Plan 2030 (2016) similarly addresses sustainability in the round, assessing the Draft Plan against 13 Objectives. These are set out in Table 3 below to provide the wider context for the remit of this Report.

SA Objective	Theme: Protection of the Environment and Climate Change
1	Biodiversity
2	Landscape
3	Cultural Heritage and Archaeology
4	Water
	Theme: Social Progress
5	Housing and Affordable Housing
6	Access to Services and Social Inclusion
7	Health and Wellbeing
8	Sustainable Travel
9	Infrastructure Delivery and Availability
	Theme: Natural Resources and Material Assets
10	Land Use, Geology
11	Minerals and Waste and Soil
	Theme: Economy and Employment
12	Economic Growth, Employment and Skills
13	Town and District Centre Vitality

Table 3: SA Objectives for Reg 19 Draft Ashford Local Plan 2030.

Site Options	SUSTAINABILITY OBJECTIVES	
	Conservation and enhancement of the historic environment and built heritage of the Parish	**To ensure that development responds appropriately to and enhances landscape/ townscape character, quality and topography**
1 (WC34) land to rear of Lovelace Court, Wissenden Lane	**-**	**0**
2 (WC5) land between Bethersden Primary School and Courtlands, Church Hill	**-**	**-**
3 (WC2) land NW of Millfields, Pluckley Road	**0**	**-**
4 (WC31) land opposite Mill House	**0**	**-**
5 (WC3) land to the north of the recreation ground, Mill Road	**0**	**--**
6 (WC33) land to N and W of Village Hall, Forge Hill	**0**	**-**
7 (WC4) land between Forge Hill and the A28	**0**	**--**
8 (WC87) Ashford Road, to the rear of Bailey Fields	**0**	**-**
9 (WC1) Ashford Road, to the rear of Bailey Fields	**0**	**-**

Table 4: Sustainability Appraisal of Reasonable Alternatives

6. PREFERRED OPTION AND MITIGATION

Selection of Preferred Option

6.1 The scoring that is given in Sustainability Appraisals is qualitative in nature and, as such, placing too much significance on scoring should be avoided. It is rarely possible or indeed appropriate to simply allocate sites with the highest SA score without taking account of other relevant factors. Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that the circumstances of this SA Report are unusual in that the focus of the Framework against which reasonable alternatives are scored is highly limited, considering solely of heritage matters.

6.2 At a high level, site selection must be in accordance with national and local planning policy and with the overall vision and objectives of the draft Neighbourhood Plan. In the case of this Neighbourhood Plan, sites appear to have been chosen to accord with the objective of concentrating development in the village itself, while avoiding harm to both its rural setting and the open countryside of the remainder of the parish. Such sites as were selected were considered by the parish council neighbourhood plan group relative to the needs identified in the Plan and to the settlement's existing size, character and provision of services. In this the Neighbourhood Plan conforms to the overarching strategic policies of the Draft Ashford Local Plan and which provide the core principles that planning applications will be expected to adhere to. Policy SP1 a) in particular applies

SP1 a) To focus development at accessible and sustainable locations which utilise existing infrastructure, facilities and services wherever possible and makes best use of suitable brownfield opportunities[6]

6.3 In this context, it must be borne in mind that sites can be considered unsuitable for cultural and heritage reasons, but still be highly sustainable for other reasons. Consideration should also be had to the subjective nature of some of the criteria.

6.4 The preferred way forward has therefore been selected on the basis of:

- The SA process,
- The vision and objectives of the NP,
- An appraisal of the planning policies of the emerging Ashford Local Plan and the NPPF,

[6] *Ashford Local Plan Reg 19 Draft, Policy SP1 Strategic Objectives*

- Results of public meetings with local residents and members of the business community in Bethersden parish carried out as part of the NP preparation by the NP Group.

6.5 Following a full site assessment by the NP Working Groups, four sites were presented to local residents and stakeholders and considered again by the NP Working Groups and a final preferred option of three sites was confirmed - WC33, WC5 and WC34, referred to in the Regulation 14 Consultation Neighbourhood Plan Draft, 2016 as Sites A, B and C. The NP Working Groups' basis for such a preferred option is set out in detail in the evidence base to the NP and is summarised below:

WC1 Not suitable - The site is located at a peripheral position on the outskirts of the village, far removed from the central services & outside the village envelope. To the south of the site lies open countryside.

WC2 Not suitable - The site lies outside the village envelope, with wide ranging and expansive views over the surrounding countryside. It is bordered to the south by new development at Millfields. Development here would close off the remaining open space in the row of houses from the eastern end of the Pluckley Road.

WC3 Not suitable – There is no residential housing on this side of Mill Road and development of this substantial site would be out of keeping with the built form of this area, which on this side of Mill Road is open country used for agriculture.

WC4 Not suitable - It does not have easy access to the central amenities, is adjacent to the very noisy A28 and would constitute ribbon development, which does not have public support, as it would spoil the open aspect to the village from the eastern approach. In addition, this site suffers from inundation/standing water following heavy rain. This surface water flooding requires pumping out from the houses to relieve the situation on regular basis.

WC5 Suitable - While the site is in the conservation area, careful planning could ensure its enhancement and protection. This site can meet the needs for affordable housing close to the school and village centre amenities, including bus services. By allowing some development on the upper part of the site, the lower part could be preserved as green public open space, and would retain the highly valued views and vistas. The lower part of this site is partly located in Flood Zones 2 and 3, and any development should avoid this area. The provision of a small public car park will reduce the pressure on parking in School Road with its associated risks to pedestrians during school drop off and pick up times.

As with all the sites allocated for development, at least 30% of the site should be retained as green public open space.

WC31 Not suitable - Our neighbourhood plan is designed to support families and also older residents in the village, encouraging development this far from the village centre would be contrary to these aims. Any development on this site would be visually intrusive and severely compromise the countryside setting.

WC33 Suitable - Particularly for retirement housing, due to its location near to the village centre its close access to the village hall and existing retirement bungalows in The Dene. While this site is located in the conservation area, careful planning could ensure its enhancement and protection. Carefully placed dwellings here would enable

the creation of a corridor of protected green space, linked to the existing green space in the George Field, while also protecting valuable views and vistas. A benefit to the community would include the creation of an extension to the village hall, providing a wellbeing / community resource aimed at the growing elderly local population. As with all the sites allocated for development, at least 30% of the site should be retained as green public open space.

WC34 Suitable - This site is deemed suitable for development, as it lies within the village envelope, within easy walking distance of the school and other amenities, making it good for families. However, it is located adjacent to Lovelace House, which is a listed building and has local historical value, and any development should be designed to be respectful of this location. The possible benefit of this site is for a car park for use by school visitors, reducing congestion at school drop off and pick up times. Development here will have a relatively low impact on the village as a whole as it has no adverse impact on key views and vistas (apart from consideration of any impact on Lovelace House, as above). The site is adjacent to an existing development of family homes.

As with all the sites allocated for development, at least 30% of the site should be retained as green public open space.

WC87 Not suitable - Our neighbourhood plan is designed to support families and also older residents in the village, encouraging development this far from the village centre would be contrary to these aims. Any development on this site would be visually intrusive and severely compromise the countryside setting.

Site Assessments, undertaken by Bethersden NP Working Groups 2015

Mitigating negative effects

6.5 A key role of the SA process is to highlight areas where there is a possibility to increase the sustainability of the NP, either through maximising potential positive impacts or through highlighting areas where mitigation is needed against any negative effects. In this instance, it is important to address the environmental dimension of sustainable development[7] and the specific concerns raised by Historic England with regard to the likely significant environmental effect on the Bethersden Conservation Area and its "green and rural character"[8].

6.6 The Bethersden Conservation Area covers the core of this small village and contains many listed buildings. Views out over the surrounding countryside and of the attractive Conservation Area itself from its wider surroundings are an important component of the Conservation Area and, together with a network of popular public rights of way extending out from the village into the adjoining fields, result in a village strongly visually and physically rooted in its rural setting. In line with national and local planning policies the Neighbourhood Plan aims to preserve such a relationship and, as a result, to concentrate additional development requirements within the village, rather than adopting the more dispersed approach of ribbons of development extending out from the existing built up area. In this regard it is

[7] NPPF, paragraph 7
[8] Response to SEA Scoping Report Addendum (February 2017) from Historic England dated 6.4.17

therefore considered that the development of areas of countryside on the fringes of the village would be more harmful to the existing green and rural character of the Bethersden Conservation Area than the policy approach adopted in the Draft Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan 2016 provided that the Neighbourhood Plan is amended to incorporate modifications to the wording of the site policies to the satisfaction of Historic England.

6.7 The three modest housing allocations within and adjoining the Conservation Area will undoubtedly impact on its character and setting. However, it is concluded that with appropriate wording added to Draft Policies H3, H4 and H5, to be agreed with Historic England, together with the higher level policies on design and protection of heritage assets contained within the NPPF and the emerging Ashford Local Plan 2030 any potential impact can be satisfactorily mitigated so as to prevent significant harm arising to its green and rural character.

6.8 With regard to the suggestion in the response by Historic England to the Scoping Report Addendum that this SEA Report provide a list of key character features that could be affected by neighbourhood plan options, it is not considered that this SEA is the appropriate vehicle to propose such a listing. Instead such issues should be addressed and determined in the updating of the Bethersden Conservation Area Appraisal, scheduled to be undertaken by the Borough Council, including settlement form. It is suggested that the Neighbourhood Plan Working Groups are proactive in this process through discussions with the Conservation Team at the Borough Council.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 In the first instance additional wording, in the form of criteria with which any applications for the development of each site will need to comply, should be drafted and included within Policies H3, H4 and H5 of the Draft Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan by the Neighbourhood Plan Working Groups in consultation with Historic England to prevent significant harm to heritage assets and the setting of the Conservation Area.

7.2 In addition, wording should be added to Policy H4 to take account of the fact that an area of land in the south western part of the site falls within Flood Zone 3 and therefore that a full flood risk assessment will need to be carried out in consultation with the Environment Agency, and that it is unlikely that development in this part of the site would be acceptable.

7.3 Finally, the protection and enhancement of the Bethersden Conservation Area, its setting and the heritage assets of the Neighbourhood Plan Area should be added to the criteria of the General Design Brief (as set out on page 37 of Draft Neighbourhood Plan 2016) that will be applied to all developments coming forward within the Neighbourhood Plan Area over the Plan period.

Next Steps

7.4 The Consultation Draft Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan along with this Sustainability Appraisal report will be subject to a statutory consultation period of six weeks. This is likely to take place during summer 2017. Responses received should be reviewed by the NP Group and the Plan amended as appropriate. If changes to the Plan affect the outcome of the SA, then arrangements should be made for the SA to be reviewed at this time.

7.5 The Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan has adopted the Sustainability Framework insofar as it relates to heritage from the Ashford Core Strategy. It also reflects the Sustainability Framework of the Draft Local Plan 2030. Monitoring of the Neighbourhood Plan with regard to Heritage Assets should therefore be undertaken using the same methodology as that of the Local Plan, given that both Plans run to 2030. It is recommended that the Neighbourhood Plan Working Groups are proactive in this process through discussions with the Borough Council.

Appendix A

SA Screening Report 2014

Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan

Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report

And

Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report

Prepared by Ashford Borough Council on behalf of Bethersden Parish Council

DATE: September 2014

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APPENDIX

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1. Non-technical Summary

1.1 A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required under European legislation for all plans which may have a significant effect on the environment. This particularly relates to plans which allocate development sites, including Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans.

1.2 The purpose of SEA is to provide a high level of protection of the environment and to integrate environmental into the preparation and adoption of plans with a view to promoting sustainable development.

1.3 The SEA process sets out criteria for assessing the significance of the impact of a plan on the environment. For example, if a plan proposes a housing development it may have an impact on the wildlife of the area or have an impact on landscape. If a significant effect is possible, the assessment requires the consideration of options and for the evaluation of the potential effects on the environment.

1.4 To ascertain if SEA is required, a "screening" exercise is undertaken which looks at the proposals in a Neighbourhood Plan to see if a significant effect is likely. The criteria for doing this are set out in the relevant legislation.

1.5 A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) is a process which looks at the potential impact of proposals within a plan on internationally designated wildlife sites. For the purpose of the HRA, internationally designated wildlife sites are Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar wetland sites, also known as Natura 2000 sites.

1.6 The initial stage of the HRA process involves consideration of the reasons for designation and the conservation objectives of each internationally designated wildlife site within a reasonable distance of the Neighbourhood Plan Area and the potential impact of the proposals within the plan on these.

1.7 This report details the assessment of the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan against the need for an SEA or HRA to be produced to accompany the Plan. It concludes that an SEA and HRA is not likely to be required to accompany the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan.

1.8 This report has been sent to the three statutory consultees for planning, including the Environment Agency, English Heritage and Natural England to elicit their views on its contents. This consultation period is to be carried out between the 5th September and the 17th October 2014. We are currently awaiting responses.

The results of this consultation are included at Appendix 2 and a formal screening opinion has been issued to Bethersden Parish Council indicating the outcomes of the screening stage including responses to this consultation.

2. The Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan

2.1 Bethersden is a village located approximately 8 miles south west of Ashford in Kent. It has a population of 1481 people, with 629 households[9]. The village has good access to transport links, as it is located on the main road route (A28) between Ashford and Tenterden. It also has access to good rail links through Ashford International rail station which has high speed services to London and the Continent, in addition to rail services available at Pluckley, only 4 miles away.

2.2 The Bethersden NP project is led by a Steering Group which includes parish councillors, residents and other community stakeholders and is overseen by the Parish Council. The Steering Group first outlined a proposal for a Neighbourhood Plan for their village at the Bethersden Church Fete in

[9] 2011 Census, www.ons.gov.uk

August 2013. The steering group potentially seek to allocate development sites and where appropriate establish local policies for Bethersden through the NP process.

2.3 The Parish Council formerly requested that Ashford Borough Council designate the administrative area of Bethersden Parish Council as a Neighbourhood Area on the 5th December 2013. Following a period of 6 weeks public consultation Ashford Borough Council approved the designation of the Bethersden Neighbourhood Area on the 13th February 2014 (See Figure 1).

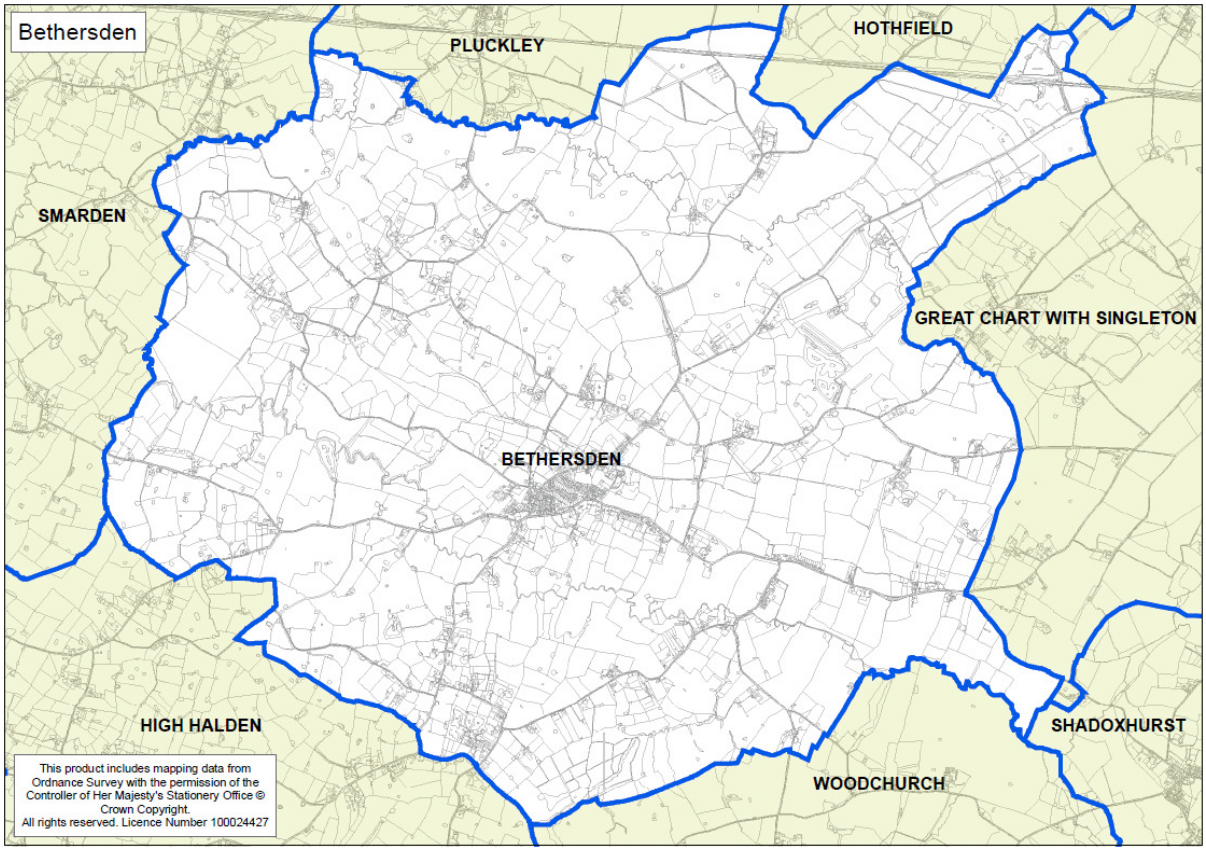


Figure 1: Bethersden Neighbourhood Area Boundary

2.4 The Bethersden NP has the following vision and objectives:

"Our vision is for Bethersden to continue to thrive, meeting the changing needs of the community whilst preserving the distinctive character, landscape and rural setting of the parish that has evolved over nine centuries of history.

Achieved through the following:-

- Promoting local employment opportunities
- Protecting the rural environment and local distinctiveness
- Maintaining a safe, caring and inclusive community
- Supporting low density housing development in keeping with the local area and appropriate to the needs of its residents
- Encouraging the development of recreational and leisure facilities for all age groups
- Promoting local amenities that meet the day to day needs of its residents
- Retaining and improving existing transport links"

2.5 The Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan steering group has indicated that the approximate parameters of development they are looking to secure through the plan process is; residential development up to 100 dwellings, which would incorporate an element of retirement housing.

2.6 This report focuses on the screening of the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan against the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulation Assessment. It will be supported by the Appropriate Assessments and screening exercises already carried out for the Ashford Borough Core Strategy 2008 and the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD.

3. Strategic Environmental Assessment

3.1 The basis for Strategic Environmental Assessments and Sustainability Appraisal legislation is European Directive 2001/42/EC and was transposed into English law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, or SEA Regulations. Detailed Guidance of these regulations can be found in the Government publication "A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive" (ODPM 2005).

3.2 To establish if a plan needs to be accompanied by a full SEA, a "screening" assessment is required against a series of criteria set out in the SEA Directive. A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive[10] sets out in a diagrammatic form the series of criteria (reproduced below at Figure 2).

3.3 By following the step by step guide (See Figure 3) it is possible to identify that the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan does not require a full SEA. However, if the issues addressed in the Neighbourhood Plan should change then a new screening process will need to be undertaken to determine whether an SEA will be required.

[10] ODPM September (2005) 'Practical guidance on applying European Directive 2001/42/EC'

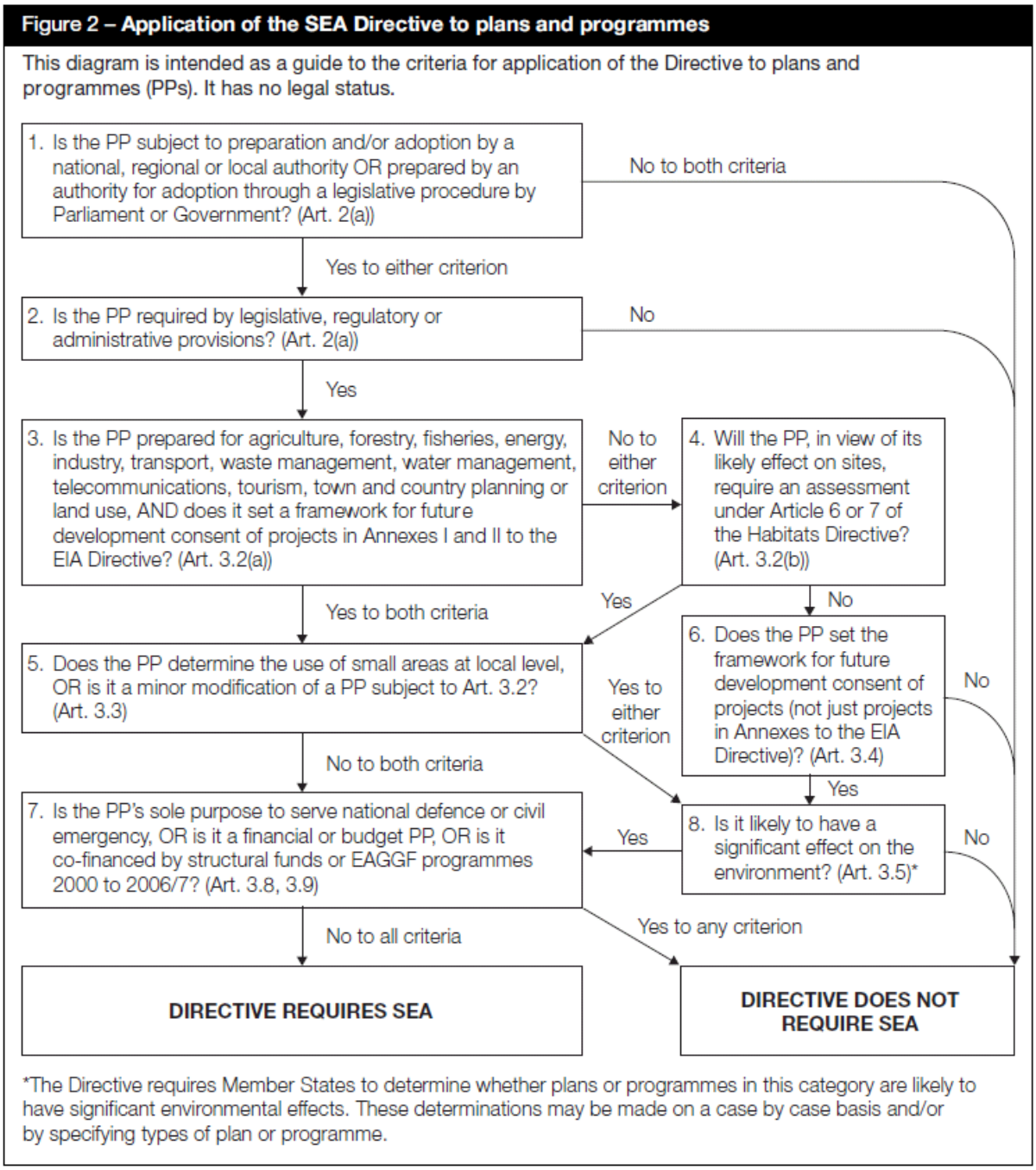


Figure 2: Application of the SEA Directive to plans to programmes, reproduced from ODPM September (2005) 'Practical guidance on applying European Directive 2001/42/EC'

Screening Stages	Answer	Reasons
1. Is the PP 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))	Yes	The preparation of and adoption of the NP is allowed under The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. The preparation of the NP is subject to the following regulations: The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and The Neighbourhood Planning (referendums) Regulations 2012 ***Move to question 2.***
2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))	Yes	Whilst the provision of a Neighbourhood Plan is optional, it will form part of the Development Plan for the Ashford District. It is therefore important that the screening process considers whether it is likely to have significant environmental effects and hence whether SEA is required under the Directive. ***Move to question 3.***
3. Is the PP 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)) 4. Will the PP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.2(b))	Yes	Whilst the NP allocates sites, the development proposed is not included in Annexes I and II of the EIA Directive (see Appendix 1 for list). ***Move to question 5.***
5. Does the PP 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)	Yes	The NP determines small sites at local level ***Move to question 8.***
6. Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art. 3.4)		The NP is to be used for determining future planning applications

7. Is the PP's sole purpose to serve 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)	
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)*	No ***Directive does not require SEA***

Figure 3: Utilising the step-by-step guide at Figure 2 in relation to the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan.

4. HRA Screening Assessment

4.1 The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) refers to the appropriate 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. European wildlife sites are often known as Natura 2000 sites and include:

• Special Protection Areas (SPA) designated under the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC)

• Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)

4.2 In addition to SPAs and SACs sites Ramsar sites are designated under the Ramsar Convention (Iran 1971 as amended by the Paris Protocol 1992). Although they are not covered by the Habitats regulations, as a matter of Government policy, Ramsar sites should be treated in the same way as European wildlife sites.

4.3 Firstly, it should be noted that the Ashford Borough Core Strategy was subject to HRA during its production, as was the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD, which covered the Bethersden parish area. The Appropriate Assessment for the Tenderden and Rural Sites DPD concluded that the potential significant effects identified, are either assessed as not having a significant impact on the European sites or are mitigated by the approach set out within Core Strategy, the Tenterden & Rural Sites DPD and other related documents (including the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan and the Ashford Integrated Water Management Study).

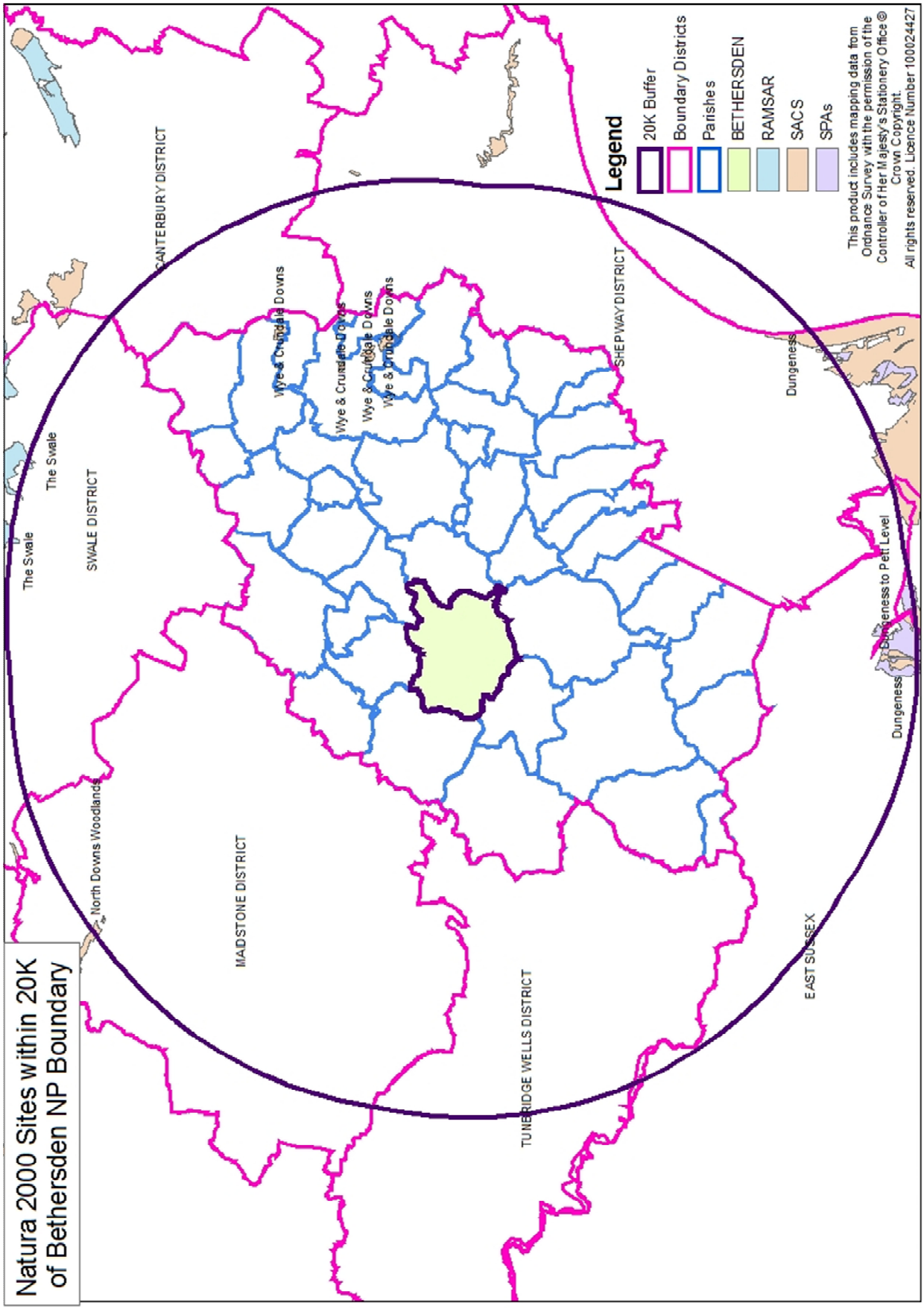
4.4 The first stage of the HRA process is a "screening" exercise where the details of nearby internationally designated sites are assessed to see if there is the potential for the implementation of the Plan to have an impact on the site. Therefore, the following paragraphs will screen the potential impact of the proposals for the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan on these sites within 20km of the Neighbourhood Area Boundary.

4.5 The following Natura 2000 sites are located within 20km of the Bethersden Neighbourhood Area boundary (See Figure 4 for mapping).

SACs:	**SPAs**	**Ramsar Sites:**
Wye and Crundale Downs SAC	Dungeness to Pett Level SPA	The Swale
North Downs Woodlands SAC		
Dungeness SAC		

4.6 The NP is unlikely to have a substantial effect on these Natura 2000 protected sites. Of the 5 Natura 2000 sites identified, Wye and Crundale SAC is closest, lying some 12 km away. The Wye and Crundale SAC is identified as semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia)[11] , it is considered to be one of the best areas of its kind in the United Kingdom and also an important Orchid site. The Bethersden NP is unlikely to affect this site as the JNCC and DEFRA state that this site is only vulnerable to changes in the grazing management of the site, especially in areas in private ownership. Neither of which will be affected by the Bethersden NP.

[11] Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and Defra website: http://jncc.defra.gov.uk



4.7 The other 4 Natura sites are only just found within the 20km zone and it is considered that the NP will not affect these Natura 2000 sites over and above the impacts identified in the Habitats

Regulation Assessment Screening Report carried out for the Core Strategy. Therefore, it is concluded that a full Appropriate Assessment is not deemed to be required.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations:

5.1 A screening assessment to determine the need for a SEA in line with regulations and guidance was undertaken and can be found in chapter 3 of this report. The assessment finds no significant and / or negative effects will occur as a result of the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan. The assessment also finds many of the policies are in conformity with the local plan policies which have a full SA/SEA which identified no significant effects will occur as a result of the implementation of policies.

5.2 From the findings of the screening assessment it is recommended that a full SEA does not need to be undertaken for the NP.

5.3 A screening assessment to determine the need for a HRA in line with regulations and guidance was undertaken and can be found in chapter 4 of this report. The assessment finds no likely significant effects will occur as a result of the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan and any affects that may occur have already been assessed as part of the Ashford Borough Core Strategy and Tenterden and Rural Sites Appropriate Assessment.

Appendix 1: *Reproduction of European Directive 2001/42/EC*[12]

[12] Not repeated in full here .

Appendix B

SA Screening Report 2014 Responses

From: Lister, John (NE) [mailto:John.Lister@naturalengland.org.uk]
Sent: 17 October 2014 11:04
To: planningpolicy@ashford.gov.uk.
Subject: 131349 - Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan - SEA/HRA Screening

Attn - Danielle Dunn
Dear Danielle
Thank you for consulting Natural England on the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan SEA and HRA screening report.
Subject to the scale of development in the NP broadly according with the Ashford Plan, and based on your Screening Report, I am of the view that an SEA and HRA will not be needed for the NP.
If discussion would be helpful, please give me a call.
If you wish to comment on the service provided by Natural England - please use the appended form.

Yours sincerely

John Lister

Lead Adviser
Kent, West Sussex, East Sussex Team (Area 14)
Natural England
Mobile - 0790 060 8172
www.naturalengland.org.uk

Ashford Borough Council
Planning Policy
Civic Centre Tannery Lane
Ashford
Kent

Our ref: KT/2006/000228/OR-03/PO1-L01
Your ref:
Date: 17 October 2014

TN23 1PL

Dear Sir/Madam

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) screening report for Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan

Thank you for consulting us on the above.

We agree with the conclusion that an SEA is not required.

We would like the following comments noted.

We note and welcome the objectives stated in section 2.4 and, in particular, the intention, within the plan, to protect “the rural environment and local distinctiveness”.

As part of the River Beult’s upper reaches flow through the Neighbourhood Plan area, it is hoped that, in future, actions to deliver the objectives will include work to protect and enhance this important Water Framework Directive (WFD) water body which, further downstream, is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

We would be interested in working with residents of Bethersden to help ensure any development proposed is in the most appropriate location and also to help deliver WFD measures to improve the river, as specified in the River Basin Management Plan that help achieve their objectives.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

Ms Jennifer Wilson

Planning Specialist

Direct dial 01732 223272

Direct e-mail kentplanning@environment-agency.gov.uk

Appendix C

Regulation 14 Consultation 2016 Historic England response



Mr. K. Brannan

c/o

Mason Brannan Architects

Wissenden Lane - Bethersden

Ashford - Kent - TN26 3EL

keith.brannan@mason-brannan.co.uk

by email only

Our ref: 2016.11.30 Bethersden NP Prre-submission HE RLS Comments

Your ref:

01483 252028

Telephone

Fax

30th November 2016

Dear Mr. Brannan

Re: Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan Pre-submission Version Consultation

Thakyou for consulting Historic England on the Pre-submission version of the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan. Historic England's remit is to provide advice on planning for the historic environment including the conservation of heritage assets and championing of good design. As such we have restricted our comments to those areas of the plan where we feel our interests would be affected

To judge the plan by its stated objectives we have considered whether the plan meet its objectives to:

- achieve the community's wish to preserve the open spaces, rural vistas and rural character or general sense of openness throughout the village?
- preserve the unique character and setting of the village by retaining those open spaces that add to the distinctive open feel and reinforce the sense that you are in a village rather than an urban area?
- protect the rural countryside to preserve the rural setting, habitat and environment of the parish?
- support and allow for the expansion of the recreational needs and amenities of the community whilst preserving the rural setting of the village?
- enhance the network of footpaths and define cycle routes to improve local communication within the parish?
- support industrial and commercial development of a scale that enhances the environment and complements the existing quiet and tranquil setting and quality of rural life?

We have also considered whether the plan would promote sustainable development as defined within the policies of the National Planning Policy Framework and followed processes described in the National Planning Practice Guidance, whether it would support or compromise the District Council in fulfilling its duties under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and whether, it has fulfilled EU obligations.

Policy R1: We support Policy R1 as an appropriate means to implement local understanding of the importance of particular elements of the conservation area.

Policy R2: The policy text appears to be incomplete within the pre-submission version of the plan. What existing features should new development be designed to sit appropriately beside? We would suggest that the policy at present adds little that is not otherwise required in either retained or emerging Local Plan Policy and recommend identifying more explicitly which features of local character, such as the mix of scale, locally distinctive materials used or characteristic placement of buildings in relation to the public realm, that new development should be designed to preserve or enhance – this may vary between areas within the settlement which may require definition. Alternatively this might already be combined with Policy H7 as a more general policy to geuide the design of new development and secure this as a guide to features of the village that new development should respect in its character and appearance.

Policy R3: The policy justification text, which is concerned with the special local character of footpath surfaces (a commendable recognition of local character detail) and the recreational value of the footpath and bridlepath network, bears little relation to the Policy itself. We do not object to the policy and would indeed seek to see it strengthened by the addition of mapping showing the historic rural lanes, ancient woodlands and natural features that should be preserved, however this requires a more thorough justification that sets out what value these features have that is

specific to the plan area, which might generate a more locally specific policy direction.

Justification of Policy R 6 appears to argue that the village needs to expand in order to support the recreation and leisure facilities that it currently contains. It would seem to be a more appropriate direction of argument that the village should contain leisure and recreation facilities that meet the needs of its population. Again, we do not object to the policy but would suggest it requires further justification, particularly where land East of Mill Road will be removed from other forms of development for an, at present, unjustified future recreational use. It is also unclear whether the land East of Mill Road is to be maintained for recreational and community use (as proposed in the policy) or for the rural nature of the area.

Policy R8 Justification and Sustainable and Resilient Community: It is unclear how the Justification relates to the policy, for example the justification discusses the need for new development to provide community infrastructure, whilst the policy is concerned with managing the impact of energy efficiency measure or local energy generation within new development or as an addition to existing development. The policy does not make clear how these elements of development will benefit the Parish.

Policy R8: Reference to the need to conform with other policies in the plan is considered superfluous and would in fact suggest that policies in other documents (such as the Local Plan Strategic Policies) are not relevant. The Development Plan is considered 'as a whole'. Given that such development is likely to have a greater impact on heritage assets including the parish' listed buildings and conservation area than on more recent buildings and areas of development, it would be appropriate to refer to heritage assets within the policy, including the approach set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. The policy could also benefit from some clarity As such we would suggest amending

Policy H1: The policy identifies a total number of 40 dwellings to be constructed over the plan period and that these will be developed on a number of defined sites. The number of dwellings to be constructed does not appear to be based on the housing needs assessment, which at the most, appears to require 27 dwellings to be constructed. The justification to the policy states that the exception site at Mill Road will provide 27 dwellings, fulfilling the assessed need. Whilst the neighbourhood plan may allocate land to provide more dwellings than is required by the District Council's Strategic policies or the objectively assessed need an oversupply would not count as providing a public benefit that would count as weighing against harm to the significance of a heritage asset. As we have noted that two of the proposed site allocations have serious potential to result in harm to the significance of heritage assets we consider this suggests that that harm is not clearly justified on the basis of meeting the objectively assessed housing need.

Policy Justification H3 and Policy H3: The justification suggests that the development of this site would result in serious harm to the significance of the conservation area by reducing the open rural character of the conservation area, reducing the pattern of historic fields that surrounded the historic focus of settlement along The Street, severing a visual link from historic settlement to the countryside and joining up the historically distinct settlement areas at The Street and at the bottom of Forge Hill. The befit of providing a footpath access from George Field to the Village Hall seems a relatively minor benefit that could be achieved without this scale of development and would represent only a minor improvement to the present access via footpath from Forge Hill. Moreover the allocation would appear to fail to deliver several objectives of the plan i.e. to protect the unique rural character and setting of the village, to protect the countryside environment and setting of the village. Indeed, given the provision for recreational space secured elsewhere in the plan it is not clear that the additional public open space secured through the allocation is required or considered a benefit and, in any case, it is not secured within the policy.

Our own assessment is that the site does contribute to the significance of the conservation area as surviving part of the ring of small fields or paddocks that historically surrounded and served the village of Bethersden as part of its immediate setting, beyond which the small settlement at Forge Hill grew up following the diversion of the Ashford – Tenterden Road south of the village. These contribute to the character of the conservation area by creating a significant gap of green open space formed of small fields and paddocks, surrounded by traditional hedgerows and mature trees that surround the houses and gardens on either side of The Street. This ring of small fields has been eroded in the past by development, including the development of Forgefield in the 1960s (prior to the designation of the conservation area) and more recently at George Field. However the contribution Site A makes is limited at present by the lack of public access, including visual access, as well as an apparent lack of a beneficial use to maintain the area. There is, therefore, potential for development to better reveal the area's significance and to address areas of threat to the conservation area. As such, some, albeit limited, development could be beneficial to the community by providing improved access to the conservation area and by securing its better management as green open space. We would consider allocation of part of the site as appropriate on this basis. Specifically, land on the south western edge of the site (directly west of the Village Hall) including a part of, but not all, the area identified as suitable for 8 dwellings on the inset diagram to the policy, could be developed without significantly compromising the setting of the village's historic core and the character of the conservation area. However, this would need to be properly justified as an allocation delivering substantial public benefits whilst the benefits to be delivered including providing public access to and management of the area in the north of the site would need to be secured within the allocation policy itself. At present we would have to conclude that Policy H3 and

allocation of Site A for 14 dwellings would be considered unsustainable and therefore fails to meet the basic conditions.

Policy H4: We do not feel the section of the plan referred to at Section 5.4 provides an adequate justification for the allocation of this site. If anything this might provide justification for the number of units allocated across the parish at Policy H1 but that case remains to be made.

We note that the justification provided at the section titled Policy Justification: H4 identifies the need to preserve vistas of the church, particularly when entering The Street from the west. However, we also note that the unnumbered plan illustrating Policy R1 identifies the vista from the corner of Church Hill and Horsenden Lane across open fields including the site as one of those that should be respected. Given that the site occupies land level with and rising from Church Hill we do not consider that an approach of 'low rise' development would significantly reduce the visual impact of the proposed housing in these views. Indeed, it would extend the harm to the historic settlement's character that resulted from development of Forgefields through the conservation area, effectively cutting Bethersden School and its playing field off from the rest of the conservation area.

The conservation area provides protection for both the areas of built development and the ring of small fields and paddocks that historically surrounded the core of the settlement. Whilst many of the historic buildings within the conservation area receive protection as listed buildings, the conservation area is the principal means by which the fields, as evidence of the historic development and economy of the small settlement, are protected. They play an important role in providing a visual separation between the historic village and the more recent development of the later 20th century that has so altered the character of the landscape to the south of Church Hill. Indeed they are integral to the character of the area that is desirable to preserve. The National Planning Policy Framework is clear that great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets, including conservation areas, and that harm tor loss to them requires clear and convincing justification.

The field forming Site B is highly visible from Church Hill and, forms an element of views from Church Hill from points along the road that illustrates its agricultural past as part of the setting of the village. This contributes to an understanding of the historic extent of Bethersden as a small rural settlement with an exceptionally close relationship with its rural setting which north of Church Hill The Street is well preserved from 20th century development. The open nature of this land also contributes to views from the footpath leading northward from the churchyard that also provide an appreciation of the area's historic rural character. The contribution of the open land to the green foreground of views of St Mary's Church on its hill top location is also important to the setting of this Grade I listed building. We consider the proposed amount of development, including a 20 space public car park and 16 dwellings as an intensification of use and an urbanising impact on the area's character that would result in substantial harm to the conservation area through loss

to its historic interest (impact on the illustrative value of the fields surrounding the settlement) and loss of the historic rural character of the village, that would bot be justified by the amount of development delivered or other public benefits secured. Again, given the public space already available in the village we cannot see that the provision of additional public space is necessarily a public benefit that would justify harm, whilst the area already makes a considerable positive contribution to the conservation area and, as such, development is unlikely to provide any enhancement to it. Therefore, we conclude that the proposal to allocate Site B under Policy H4 would result in unsustainable development and unjustified substantial harm to the conservation area and therefore would fail to meet the basic conditions.

With regard to Site C and Policy H5 we consider this to be a less sensitive location, albeit contributing to the setting of the listed buildings at Lovelace Farm, The Oast and Whiston House. In this location a development of suitable quality of design could be achieved that avoided significant impact on these heritage assets. Nevertheless, we would request that the allocation policy is amended to clearly identify heritage assets that will need to be considered in the development of proposals for new development: We would recommend using wording such as:

" Development proposals should clearly set out how the scale, layout, materials and design have been prepared to protect the settings of the listed buildings at The Oast, Whiston House and Lovelace Farm, including measures taken to mitigate and negative impacts resulting from harm as a result of development. Development will be expected to maintain a green frontage to Wissenden Lane that preserves the rural setting of Lovelace Farm."

In each of the three allocations site policies we are unclear what considerations have been taken into account in assessing these sites as suitable for development but would identify the need to consider impacts on heritage assets (including no-designated heritage assets and archaeological remains as an essential part of the process. We have not seen evidence within the plan to suggest that consideration of impacts on archaeological remains has been a part of the plan development and would request that is considered in the preparation of the Submission version of the plan. If they have not done so previously the Parish Council are advised to contact Kent County Council's archaeological team for assistance.

Policy H7 Housing Design Standards: As the Village Design Statement is not in itself a policy document it cannot set standards that new development must meet. It does however set guidelines that, if followed, should ensure development meets the need to protect local character and identity. As such we would suggest rewording the policy to state "Proposals for new development should set out how the design has ben developed to protect the area's unique local character including identifying how it has incorporated the guidelines set out in the Village Design Statement".

Strategic Environmental Assessment

We note that Ashford District Council have issued a screening determination with regard to the need to undertake SEA for the plan and that, following consultation with the statutory bodies they screened out the need to undertake SEA. Unfortunately we do not have a record of being consulted on this screening opinion (I note in the same period this took place that we did respond to similar consultations for Wye with Hinxhill and Worth Neighbourhood Plans). The plan seeks to allocate three sites for development, two of which lie within a conservation area and all of which would effect the setting of several listed buildings. As such, all of these sites would be considered to have likely significant environmental effects. Therefore, the plan would be considered to fall within the parameters set out in the SEA regulations and may now require SEA to inform its preparation unless the site allocation policies have previously been considered within the SEA of a higher level or equivalent plan document. We will be requesting that Ashford Borough Council review their screening determination and have therefore, copied them into this correspondence. Whilst I can understand that this is frustrating, particularly at this late stage, fulfilling the need to undertake SEA where it is required is necessary to meet the basic conditions.

We are sorry that these comments are a rather negative response to the Pre-submission version of the neighbourhood plan. Where we can see a way that the plan can be enhanced to achieve the objectives set out or to meet National Planning Policy and legislative requirements for the conservation of the historic environment we have done so. However, we feel that at present the need to afford 'great weight' to the conserve of the conservation area has not been clearly demonstrated in the plan and, as such the allocation policies for Sites A and B would, in our view, be judged to fail the test of the basic conditions and as such these either need to be removed or considerably amended

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss our comments or options for moving forwards with the plan.

Yours sincerely

Robert Lloyd-Sweet

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Appendix D

SA Scoping Report 2017

Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan

Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report

And

Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report

Prepared by Ashford Borough Council on behalf of Bethersden Parish Council

February 2017

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1. Non-technical Summary

1.1 A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required under European legislation for all plans which may have a significant effect on the environment. This particularly relates to plans which allocate development sites, including Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans.

1.2 The purpose of SEA is to provide a high level of protection of the environment and to integrate environmental into the preparation and adoption of plans with a view to promoting sustainable development.

1.3 The SEA process sets out criteria for assessing the significance of the impact of a plan on the environment. For example, if a plan proposes a housing development it may have an impact on the wildlife of the area or have an impact on landscape. If a significant effect is possible, the assessment requires the consideration of options and for the evaluation of the potential effects on the environment.

1.4 To ascertain if SEA is required, a "screening" exercise is undertaken which looks at the proposals in a Neighbourhood Plan to see if a significant effect is likely. The criteria for doing this are set out in the relevant legislation.

1.5 A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) is a process which looks at the potential impact of proposals within a plan on internationally designated wildlife sites. For the purpose of the HRA, internationally designated wildlife sites are Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar wetland sites, also known as Natura 2000 sites.

1.6 The initial stage of the HRA process involves consideration of the reasons for designation and the conservation objectives of each internationally designated wildlife site within a reasonable distance of the Neighbourhood Plan Area and the potential impact of the proposals within the plan on these.

1.7 This report details the assessment of the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan against the need for an SEA or HRA to be produced to accompany the Plan. It concludes that an SEA and HRA is not likely to be required to accompany the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan.

1.8 This report was sent to the three statutory consultees for planning, including the Environment Agency, Historic England (then English Heritage) and Natural England to elicit their views on its contents. This consultation period is to be carried out between the 5th September and the 17th October 2014. Responses were initially received from the Environment Agency and Natural England. A response was received from Historic England in November 2016.

The results of this consultation are included at Appendix 2 and a formal screening opinion has been issued to Bethersden Parish Council indicating the outcomes of the screening stage including responses to this consultation.

2. The Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan

2.1 Bethersden is a village located approximately 8 miles south west of Ashford in Kent. It has a population of 1481 people, comprising 629 households[13]. The village has good access to transport links, as it is located on the main road route (A28) between Ashford and Tenterden. It also has access to good rail links through Ashford International rail station which has high speed services to London and the Continent, in addition to rail services available at Pluckley, only 4 miles away.

2.2 The Bethersden NP project is led by a Steering Group which includes parish councillors, residents and other community stakeholders and is overseen by the Parish Council. The Steering Group first outlined a proposal for a Neighbourhood Plan for their village at the Bethersden Church Fete in August 2013. The steering group potentially seek to allocate development sites and where appropriate establish local policies for Bethersden through the NP process.

2.3 The Parish Council formerly requested that Ashford Borough Council designate the administrative area of Bethersden Parish Council as a Neighbourhood Area on the 5th December 2013. Following a period of 6 weeks public consultation Ashford Borough Council approved the designation of the Bethersden Neighbourhood Area on the 13th February 2014 (See Figure 1).

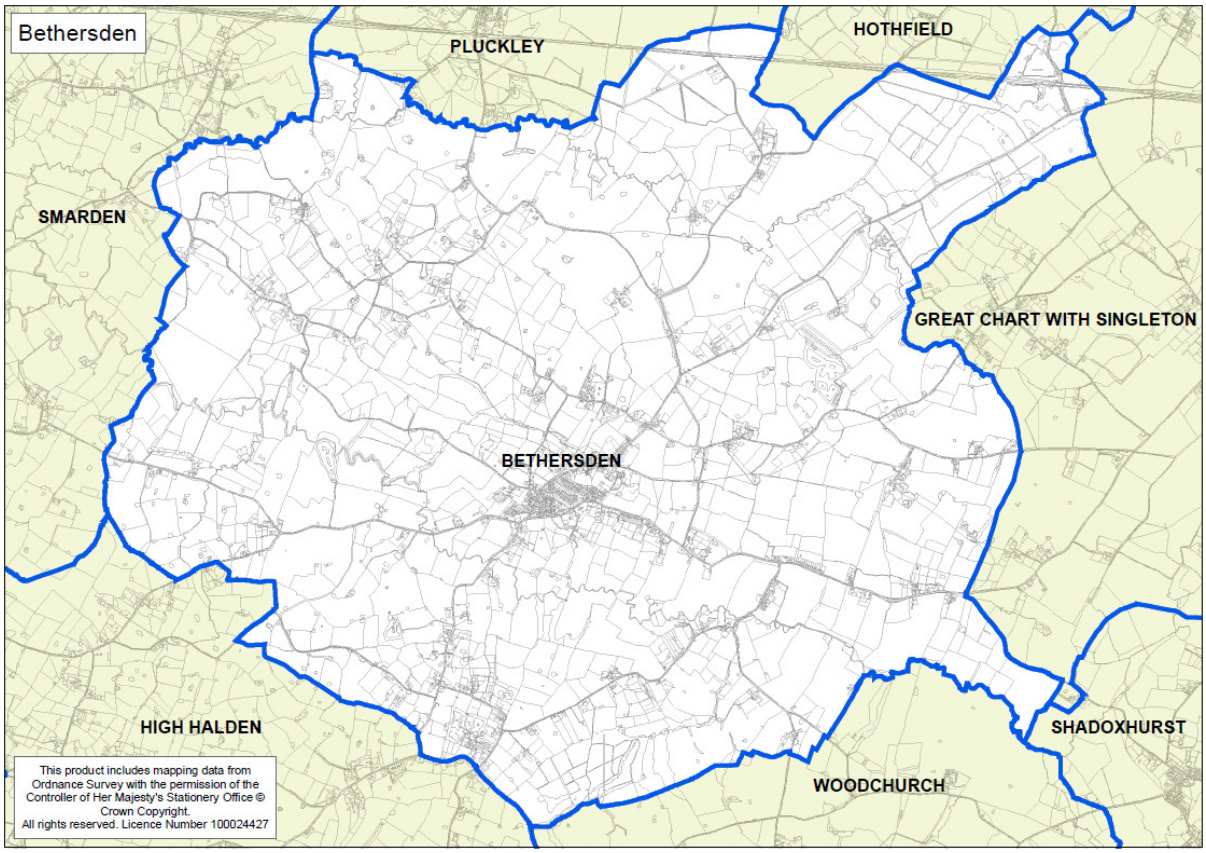


Figure 3: Bethersden Neighbourhood Area Boundary

2.4 The Bethersden NP has the following vision and objectives:

"Our vision is for Bethersden to continue to thrive, meeting the changing needs of the community whilst preserving the distinctive character, landscape and rural setting of the parish that has evolved over nine centuries of history.

[13] 2011 Census, www.ons.gov.uk

Achieved through the following:-

- Promoting local employment opportunities
- Protecting the rural environment and local distinctiveness
- Maintaining a safe, caring and inclusive community
- Supporting low density housing development in keeping with the local area and appropriate to the needs of its residents
- Encouraging the development of recreational and leisure facilities for all age groups
- Promoting local amenities that meet the day to day needs of its residents
- Retaining and improving existing transport links"

2.5 The Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan steering group has indicated that the approximate parameters of development they are looking to secure through the plan process is; residential development up to 100 dwellings, which would incorporate an element of retirement housing.

2.6 This report focuses on the screening of the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan against the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulation Assessment. It will be supported by the Appropriate Assessments and screening exercises already carried out for the Ashford Borough Core Strategy 2008 and the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD.

3. Strategic Environmental Assessment

3.1 The basis for Strategic Environmental Assessments and Sustainability Appraisal legislation is European Directive 2001/42/EC and was transposed into English law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, or SEA Regulations. Detailed Guidance of these regulations can be found in the Government publication "A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive" (ODPM 2005).

3.2 To establish if a plan needs to be accompanied by a full SEA, a "screening" assessment is required against a series of criteria set out in the SEA Directive. A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive[14] sets out in a diagrammatic form the series of criteria (reproduced below at Figure 2).

3.3 By following the step by step guide (See Figure 3) it is possible to identify that the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan does not require a full SEA. However, if the issues addressed in the Neighbourhood Plan should change then a new screening process will need to be undertaken to determine whether an SEA will be required.

[14] ODPM September (2005) 'Practical guidance on applying European Directive 2001/42/EC'

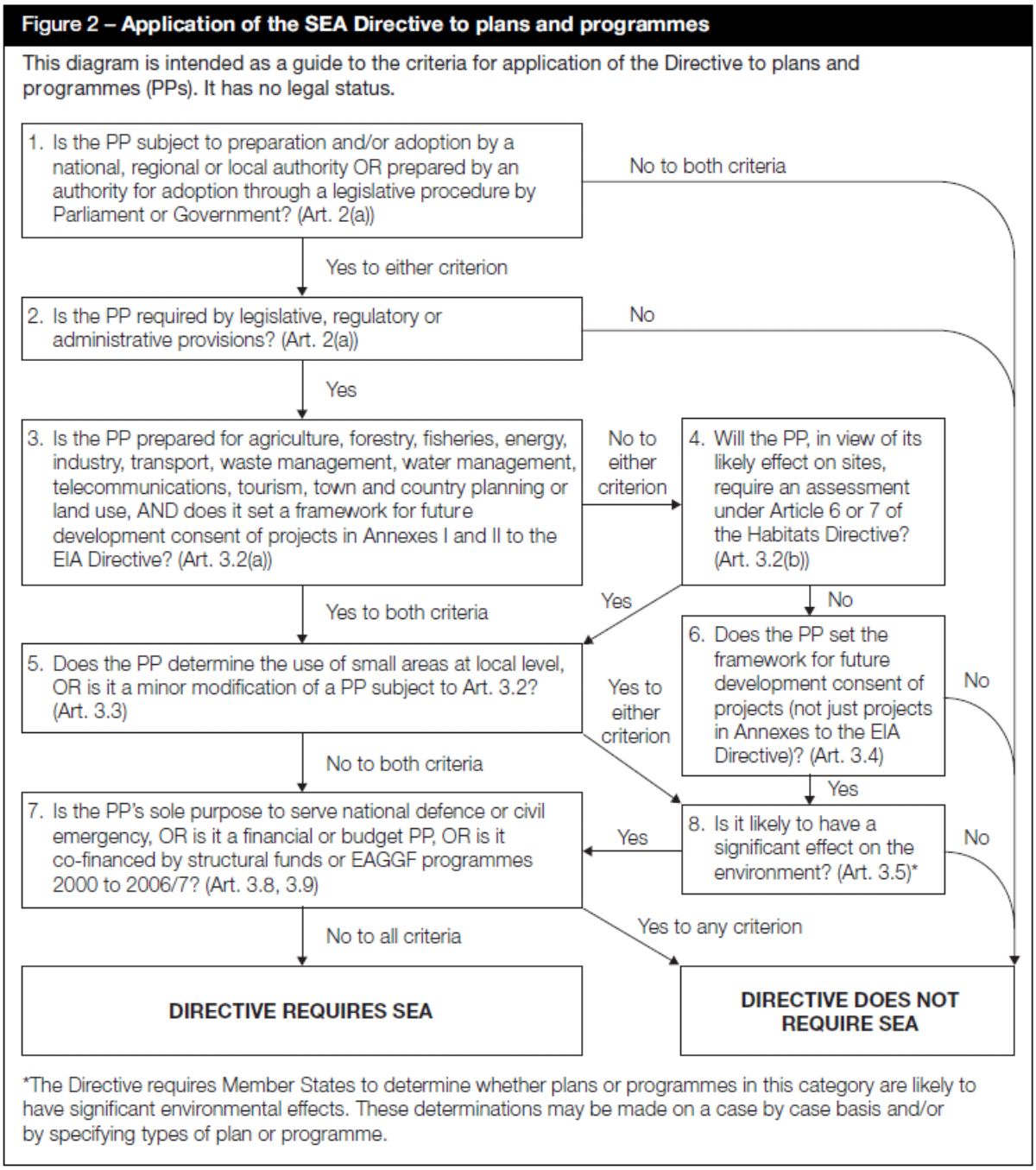


Figure 4: Application of the SEA Directive to plans to programmes, reproduced from ODPM September (2005) 'Practical guidance on applying European Directive 2001/42/EC'

Screening Stages	Answer	Reasons
1. Is the PP subject to preparation	Yes	The preparation of and adoption of the

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))		NP is allowed under The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. The preparation of the NP is subject to the following regulations: The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and The Neighbourhood Planning (referendums) Regulations 2012
		Move to question 2.
2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))	Yes	Whilst the provision of a Neighbourhood Plan is optional, it will form part of the Development Plan for the Ashford District. It is therefore important that the screening process considers whether it is likely to have significant environmental effects and hence whether SEA is required under the Directive.
		Move to question 3.
3. Is the PP 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))	Yes	Whilst the NP allocates sites, the development proposed is not included in Annexes I and II of the EIA Directive (see Appendix 1 for list). ***Move to question 5.***
4. Will the PP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.2(b))		
5. Does the PP 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)	Yes	The NP determines small sites at local level ***Move to question 8.***
6. Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art. 3.4)		The NP is to be used for determining future planning applications
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)*	Yes	Two of the three allocated sites within the Neighbourhood Plan area wholly within the Bethersden Conservation Area, so designated to safeguard the historic pattern of individual dwellings surrounded by paddocks, as well as to safeguard associated Listed Buildings. There is a potential for significant

		impact in respect of both of these. ***Move back to question 7.***
7. Is the PP's sole purpose to serve 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)	No (all criteria)	**Directive Requires SEA**

Figure 5: Utilising the step-by-step guide at Figure 2 in relation to the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan

4. HRA Screening Assessment

4.1 In any eventuality, the Neighbourhood Plan requires screening with regard to its likely effect on sites pursuant to Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive (2001/42/EC). The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) refers to the appropriate 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. European wildlife sites are often known as Natura 2000 sites and include:

- Special Protection Areas (SPA) designated under the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC)
- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)

4.2 In addition to SPAs and SACs sites Ramsar sites are designated under the Ramsar Convention (Iran 1971 as amended by the Paris Protocol 1992). Although they are not covered by the Habitats regulations, as a matter of Government policy, Ramsar sites should be treated in the same way as European wildlife sites.

4.3 Firstly, it should be noted that the Ashford Borough Core Strategy was subject to HRA during its production, as was the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD, which covered the Bethersden parish area. The Appropriate Assessment for the Tenderden and Rural Sites DPD concluded that the potential significant effects identified, are either assessed as not having a significant impact on the European sites or are mitigated by the approach set out within Core Strategy, the Tenterden & Rural Sites DPD and other related documents (including the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan and the Ashford Integrated Water Management Study).

4.4 The first stage of the HRA 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 on the site. Therefore, the following paragraphs will screen the potential impact of the proposals for the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan on these sites within 20km of the Neighbourhood Area Boundary.

4.5 The following Natura 2000 sites are located within 20km of the Bethersden Neighbourhood Area boundary (See below for mapping).

SACs:	**SPAs**	**Ramsar Sites:**
Wye and Crundale Downs	Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay	Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay
Dungeness		

4.5 The Core Strategy (2008) was subject to HRA during its production. An Appropriate Assessment was carried out for the Core Strategy, in combination with other plans and concluded that there was likely to be significant effects on the integrity of the Wye and Crundale Downs; and the Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay.

4.6 The potential significant effects identified were:

- Risks of effects from increased recreational pressure;
- Risk of effects from region-wide air pollution;
- Risk of effects from Waste Water Treatment Works and landfill discharges.

4.7 The Appropriate Assessment then made an assessment of the significant effects and considered whether appropriate avoidance or mitigation measures were in place. Mitigation measures were extracted from the Appropriate Assessment of the draft South East Plan, the Sustainability Appraisal for the Core Strategy as well as the plan preparation process.

4.8 The Appropriate Assessment concluded that *'the plan preparation process, influenced by the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) has ensured that options are chosen which have sufficiently reduced the impacts of these significant effects that the Core Strategy impacts on the integrity have been nullified'.*

4.9 As part of this HRA Screening process, desk based analysis has been undertaken to determine which Natura 2000 sites may be affected by the Wye Neighbourhood Plan. The information has been obtained from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee www.jncc.gov.uk and Natural England. The assessment is based on assumptions made within the Core Strategy Appropriate Assessment as well as proximity of the internationally designated wildlife sites, which have been measured in a linear form and by distance travelled by vehicle. The following tables give details of the Natura 2000 sites relevant to the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan.

Site Name	**Wye and Crundale Downs SAC (111.32ha)**
Distance to Bethersden Village	15 km
Reason for designation	Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) for which this is considered to be one of the best areas in the United Kingdom, which is considered to be the priority sub-type: "important orchid sites" (51.69%). *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forests (1.8% cover).
Vulnerability	Continuous grazing management on this site is essential to maintain the interest. Grazing on some parts of the site has been intermittent in recent years, leading to some increase in scrub and rank grasses. Within the part of the site managed as a National Nature Reserve, a programme of scrub clearance and the reintroduction of grazing are addressing this problem. On other parts, discussion with private land managers is being used to encourage traditional management.
Impact as a result of the Neighbourhood Plan	Increased visitors to the site may interrupt progress towards achieving conservation objectives by disturbing the programme of scrub clearance and having potential conflict with the reintroduction of grazing animals to the site. Increased visitor numbers may cause the paths to deteriorate in condition and increase trampling pressure on the grassland which may disrupt orchid habitats. While there is a theoretical potential for increased visitor numbers to the site from new development, it is sufficiently distant from the allocations so that the risk is not substantial. There are various other wildlife and outdoor recreation sites within a closer distance of these sites that this.
Significance of Risk	Ensuring residents have a choice of recreational facilities within a close distance to their home will help reduce pressure from visitor numbers to the Wye and Crundale Downs. Policy CS18 of the Core Strategy requires developments to make a provision for open space where a need is generated by new development. This is supported by the Public Green

	Spaces and Water Environment SPD (2012) that promotes greater accessibility to public places, parks and green space. A key objective of the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan is for development to be focused in and around the historic centre, with residents able to walk to the centre of the village within 5 minutes. The plan aims to allocate a limited number of sites in the most sustainable locations with options being tested through the SA process to assess potential social, economic and environmental effects; this will include the atmospheric integrity and air quality effects of development sites. The Bethersden NP proposes to limit unsustainable traffic flows requiring development which may result in an increase in flows to demonstrate no adverse impact through detailed Transport Statements, as well as specific policies encouraging working patterns that diminish the need for travel.
Cumulative impacts of other plans	Mitigation measures within the Core Strategy together with the limited allocations together with mitigation proposals within the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan should be sufficient to determine that in combination there will be no adverse effect upon the integrity of the SAC.

Site Name	**Dungeness SAC (3241.43ha)**
Distance to Bethersden Village	20 km
Reason for designation	Tidal rivers, Estuaries, Mud flats, Sand flats, Lagoons (including saltwork basins) (20%) Salt marshes, Salt pastures, Salt steppes (1%) Coastal sand dunes, Sand beaches, Machair (2%) Shingle, Sea cliffs, Islets (64%) Inland water bodies (Standing water, Running water) (2%) Bogs, Marshes, Water fringed vegetation, Fens (10%) Coniferous woodland (1%) Annual vegetation of drift lines, for which this is one of only four known outstanding localities in the United Kingdom. It is considered to be rare as its total extent in the United Kingdom is estimated to be less than 100 hectares. Perennial vegetation of stony banks, considered to be one of the best areas in the United Kingdom. One of the best areas in UK for *Triturus cristatus.*
Vulnerability	The shingle vegetation is very vulnerable to disturbance by vehicles and walkers, although the coastal shingle (drift-line) vegetation has much greater potential for recovery than the perennial vegetation of shingle banks that occurs further inland. Extensive areas of the site are now managed as a Nature Reserve at both Dungeness and Rye Harbour, with emphasis on interpretation of the site's value and on appropriate public

	access. A ranger helps to enforce local bylaws which aim to prevent damage from trampling, motorbike activity and illicit gravel extraction. The wetlands which support great crested newt were formerly grazed, maintaining open unshaded vegetation. This practice largely ceased in the 1950s, and since then there has been invasion of ponds by willows shading the water. Management by hand has now been undertaken to reduce this problem, and restoration of light grazing is being investigated. Abstraction of water is thought to have damaged some of the shingle wetlands as well as components of the perennial vegetation of the shingle beach. This will be addressed through the relevant review provisions of the Habitats Regulations. The site is close to an active airport which carries a potential risk from air pollution, although current levels of air traffic and motor vehicles are not thought to cause a problem.
Impact as a result of the Neighbourhood Plan	These vulnerabilities highlight visitor pressure and water quality issues from over-abstraction to be the main threats to these habitats. However, in terms of the latter, the South East Water WRMP demonstrates sufficient capacity to serve the neighbourhood plan's proposed growth in its whole network.
Significance of Risk	Information ascertained from the Rother & Shepway Core Strategy HRA, points to analysis of visitor distance travelled to the Dungeness Point with the greatest number of visitors (66%) coming from a travel zone greater that 50miles / 80km away. This indicates that the majority of visitors travel from further afield than Bethersden, and as such the level of proposed development within the NP is likely to have only a limited impact. Much of the public accessible areas are managed by the Nature Reserve which includes sustainable access initiatives and promoting green infrastructure away from the European sites. Ashford's Core Strategy (2008) is proactive in promoting green infrastructure by applying green space standards to all new residential development of more than 15 dwellings. Whilst there is no clear link between proposed development in Bethersden and abstraction from the Denge gravel aquifer underlying Dungeness, Ashford's Core Strategy sets a minimum water efficiency target of no more than 105 litres per person per day, and there is justification for the optional restriction to 110lpppd within the Water Cycle Study (WCS) that will accompany the emerging Local Plan to 2030.
Cumulative impacts of other plans	Mitigation measures within the Core Strategy together with the limited allocations together with mitigation proposals within the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan should be sufficient to determine that in combination there will be no adverse effect upon the integrity of the SAC.

Site Name	**Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay SPA (4010.29ha)**
Distance to Bethersden Village	12.9 km
Reason for designation	The site qualifies under **article 4.2** of the Directive (2009/147/EC) as it is used regularly by over 20,000 waterbirds (waterbirds as defined by the Ramsar Convention) in any season: In the non-breeding season, the area is regularly used by 34,625

	individual waterbirds (5 year peak mean 2002/3 – 2006/7), including (but not limited to) Bewick's swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*, European white-fronted goose *Anser albifrons albifrons*, wigeon *Anas penelope*, gadwall *A. strepera*, shoveler *A. clypeata*, pochard *Aythya ferina*, little grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, coot *Fulica atra*, golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, sanderling *Calidris alba*, ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* and common sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*.
Vulnerability	The shingle vegetation providing waterbird habitat is very vulnerable to disturbance by vehicles and walkers, although the coastal shingle (drift-line) vegetation has much greater potential for recovery than the perennial vegetation of shingle banks that occurs further inland. Extensive areas of the site are now managed as a Nature Reserve at both Dungeness and Rye Harbour, with emphasis on interpretation of the site's value and on appropriate public access. A ranger helps to enforce local bylaws which aim to prevent damage from trampling, motorbike activity and illicit gravel extraction. The wetlands, which support a number of protected species, were formerly grazed, maintaining open unshaded vegetation. This practice largely ceased in the 1950s, and since then there has been invasion of ponds by willows shading the water. Management by hand has now been undertaken to reduce this problem, and restoration of light grazing is being investigated. Abstraction of water is thought to have damaged some of the shingle wetlands as well as components of the perennial vegetation of the shingle beach. This will be addressed through the relevant review provisions of the Habitats Regulations. The site is close to an active airport which carries a potential risk from air pollution, although current levels of air traffic and motor vehicles are not thought to cause a problem.
Impact as a result of the Neighbourhood Plan	These vulnerabilities highlight visitor pressure and water quality issues from over-abstraction to be the main threats to these habitats.
Significance of Risk	Information ascertained from the Rother & Shepway Core Strategy HRA, points to analysis of visitor distance travelled to the Dungeness Point with the greatest number of visitors (66%) coming from a travel zone greater that 50miles / 80km away. This indicates that the majority of visitors travel from further afield than Bethersden, and as such the level of proposed development within the NP is likely to have only a limited impact. Much of the public accessible areas are managed by the Nature Reserve which includes sustainable access initiatives and promoting green infrastructure away from the European sites. Ashford's Core Strategy (2008) is proactive in promoting green infrastructure by applying green space standards to all new residential development of more than 15 dwellings. Whilst there is no clear link between proposed development in Bethersden and abstraction from the Denge gravel aquifer underlying Dungeness, Ashford's Core Strategy sets a minimum water efficiency target of no more than 105 litres per person per day, and there is justification for the optional restriction to 110lpppd within the Water Cycle Study (WCS) that will accompany the emerging Local Plan to 2030.
Cumulative	Mitigation measures within the Core Strategy together with the limited

impacts of other plans	allocations together with mitigation proposals within the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan should be sufficient to determine that in combination there will be no adverse effect upon the integrity of the SPA.

Site Name	**Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Ramsar (6377.63ha)**
Distance to Bethersden Village	9.4 km
Reason for designation	**Criterion 1: contains representative, rare, or unique examples of natural or near-natural wetland types -** Annual vegetation of drift lines and the coastal fringes of perennial vegetation of stony banks (Ramsar wetland type E – sand, shingle or pebble shores). Natural shingle wetlands: saline lagoons (Ramsar wetland type J – coastal brackish/saline lagoons), freshwater pits (Ramsar wetland type K – coastal freshwater lagoons) and basin fens (Ramsar wetland type U – non-forested peatlands). **Criterion 2:** supports threatened ecological communities – Bryophytes: assemblage of wetland thread-mosses *Bryum* species Vascular plants: species associated with grazing marsh and saltmarsh Invertebrates: Shallow open water and emergent vegetation, largely comprising common reed *Phragmites australis* and bulrush *Typha latifolia*, supports a rich water beetle assemblage. Other noteworthy aspects of the invertebrate assemblage include a suite of reed beetles *Donacia*, snail-killing flies (Sciomyzidae) and soldierflies (Stratiomyidae) that are typical of coastal marshes. The site further qualifies under **Criterion 2** because it supports vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered species. **Criterion 5:** regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds. **Criterion 6:** supports 1% of the individuals in the populations of the particular species or subspecies of waterbird in any season (*Cygnus olor* and *Anas clypeata*).
Vulnerability	The shingle vegetation is very vulnerable to disturbance by vehicles and walkers, although the coastal shingle (drift-line) vegetation has much greater potential for recovery than the perennial vegetation of shingle banks that occurs further inland. Extensive areas of the site are now managed as a Nature Reserve at both Dungeness and Rye Harbour, with emphasis on interpretation of the site's value and on appropriate public access. A ranger helps to enforce local bylaws which aim to prevent damage from trampling, motorbike activity and illicit gravel extraction. The wetlands which support great crested newt were formerly grazed, maintaining open unshaded vegetation. This practice largely ceased in the 1950s, and since then there has been invasion of ponds by willows shading the water. Management by hand has now been undertaken to reduce this problem, and restoration of light grazing is being investigated. Abstraction of water is thought to have damaged some of the shingle

	wetlands as well as components of the perennial vegetation of the shingle beach. This will be addressed through the relevant review provisions of the Habitats Regulations. The site is close to an active airport which carries a potential risk from air pollution, although current levels of air traffic and motor vehicles are not thought to cause a problem.
Impact as a result of the Neighbourhood Plan	These vulnerabilities highlight visitor pressure and water quality issues from over-abstraction to be the main threats to these habitats. However, in terms of the latter, the South East Water WRMP demonstrates sufficient capacity to serve the neighbourhood plan's proposed growth in its whole network.
Significance of Risk	Information ascertained from the Rother & Shepway Core Strategy HRA, points to analysis of visitor distance travelled to the Dungeness Point with the greatest number of visitors (66%) coming from a travel zone greater that 50miles / 80km away. This indicates that the majority of visitors travel from further afield than Bethersden, and as such the level of proposed development within the NP is likely to have only a limited impact. Much of the public accessible areas are managed by the Nature Reserve which includes sustainable access initiatives and promoting green infrastructure away from the European sites. Ashford's Core Strategy (2008) is proactive in promoting green infrastructure by applying green space standards to all new residential development of more than 15 dwellings. Whilst there is no clear link between proposed development in Bethersden and abstraction from the Denge gravel aquifer underlying Dungeness, Ashford's Core Strategy sets a minimum water efficiency target of no more than 105 litres per person per day, and there is justification for the optional restriction to 110lpppd within the Water Cycle Study (WCS) that will accompany the emerging Local Plan to 2030.
Cumulative impacts of other plans	Mitigation measures within the Core Strategy together with the limited allocations together with mitigation proposals within the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan should be sufficient to determine that in combination there will be no adverse effect upon the integrity of the Ramsar site.

4.6 The NP is unlikely to have a substantial effect on these Natura 2000 protected sites. Of the four Natura 2000 sites identified, the Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Ramsar site is closest, some 9.4km as the crow flies. This is a large area with a diverse coastal landscape comprising a number of habitats, which appear to be unrelated to each other. However, all of them exist today because coastal processes have formed and continue to shape a barrier of extensive shingle beaches and sand dunes across an area of intertidal mud and sand flats. The Bethersden NP is unlikely to affect this site as, although sensitive to visitor pressure, the numbers proposed in this plan are not high, and Natural England raises no objection to the quantum of allocation.

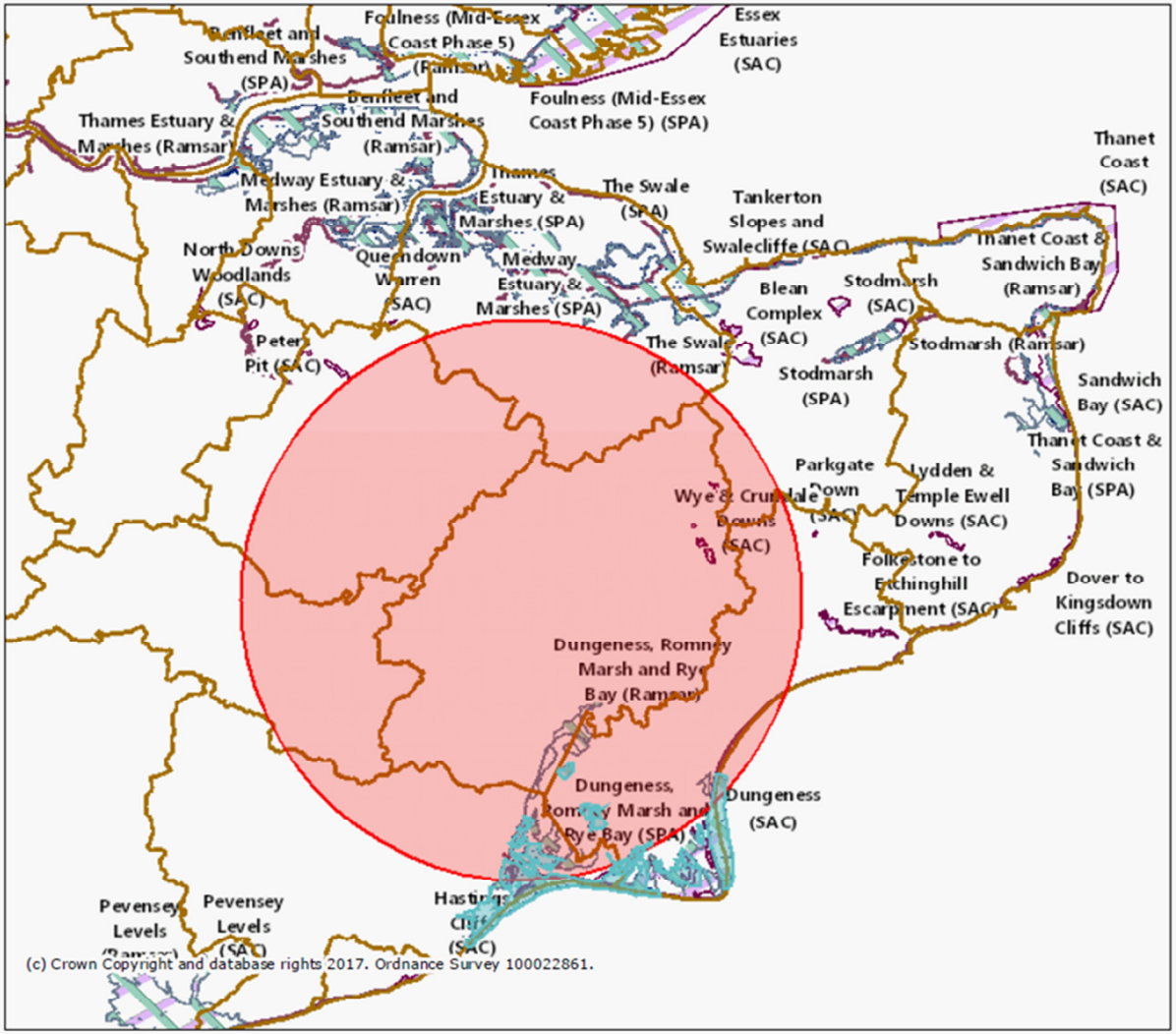
4.7 Wye and Crundale SAC is second-closest, lying some 12 km away. The Wye and Crundale SAC is identified as semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia)[15] , it is considered to be one of the best areas of its kind in the United Kingdom and also an important Orchid site. The Bethersden NP is unlikely to affect this site as the JNCC and DEFRA state that this site is only vulnerable to

[15] Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and Defra website: http://jncc.defra.gov.uk

changes in the grazing management of the site, especially in areas in private ownership. Neither of which will be affected by the Bethersden NP.

4.8 Another two Natura 2000 sites are only just found within the 20km zone of the whole Parish (rather than the 20km zone for the village itself). These include the North Downs Woodlands (SAC) and The Swale (Ramsar) and it is considered that the NP will not affect these Natura 2000 sites over and above the impacts identified in the Habitats Regulation Assessment Screening Report carried out for the Core Strategy. Therefore, it is concluded that a full Appropriate Assessment is not required.

MAGIC Natura 2000 Sites with 20km of Bethersden NP boundary



Legend

- LAU1 - Districts and Unitary Authorities (England and Wales)
- Ramsar Sites (England)
- Special Areas of Conservation (England)
- Special Protection Areas (England)

Projection = OSGB36
xmin = 479000
ymin = 87270
xmax = 718100
ymax = 207300
Map produced by MAGIC on 6 February, 2017.
Copyright resides with the data suppliers and the map must not be reproduced without their permission. Some information in MAGIC is a snapshot of the information that is being maintained or continually updated by the originating organisation. Please refer to the metadata for details as information may be illustrative or representative rather than definitive at this stage.

5. Additional screening as a result of site allocations

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

SEA Requirement	Comments
1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to -	
(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;	The plan is topic based and will be applied within the parish of Bethersden. It will also directly influence the location, nature and scale of development proposals.
(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;	The plan sits within the local development plan and must be in conformity with strategic policies in the development plan. It is unlikely to influence other plans and programmes.
(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;	The plan is likely to promote sustainable development and this will be detailed in the Scoping Report. It will not have any significant impacts on the natural environment.
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and	None in respect of the natural environment
(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).	This plan has no relevance to the implementation of Community legislation, but will need to take into account the Water Framework Directive.
2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to -	
(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;	The plan sets out the Neighbourhood's requirements for the achievement of sustainable development. It is likely that positive environmental, economic and social effects will occur from the plan's implementation. Effects in respect of cultural heritage could well be significant, and are likely to be felt early in the plan's the 15 year period (2015-2030).

	The Neighbourhood, however, reserves the right to review the plan if any unexpected consequences occur within that time period.
	Some element of overall environmental change will take place. There maybe short-term negative affects resulting from the allocated sites being developed. Over the medium to long term effects are likely to be more positive as policies provide environmental protection.
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;	The plan is expected to allocated sites, some of which may not have been quantified within the adopted Core Strategy (2008), however they will need to be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the adopted Core Strategy (2008). Therefore the cumulative effects of the proposals are unlikely to contribute to a significant negative impact on the environment within the Parish.
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects;	While the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan covers the whole parish, its allocations are limited to the settlement of Bethersden which is some distance from neighbouring parishes.
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);	Limited
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);	The Parish of Bethersden will be affected by the plan, however the allocated sites are all related to Bethersden village only.
(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	The plan will not impact the natural environment, but is likely to have a significant impact on the Conservation Area and has the potential for impact on the setting of Grade I listed building.
(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	Will impact the Bethersden Conservation Area, and potential for impact on setting of Grade I listed building (church)
	The Upper Beult river (High Halden and

Bethersden Stream) flows through the parish circa 400m south of the village, but its flood zone is well clear of proposed development.

There are significant parcels of Ancient Woodland, some of which are local wildlife sites, across the Parish. The closest of these to any proposed allocation is the substantial Odiam/Lamberden Wood circa 340m west of the settlement.

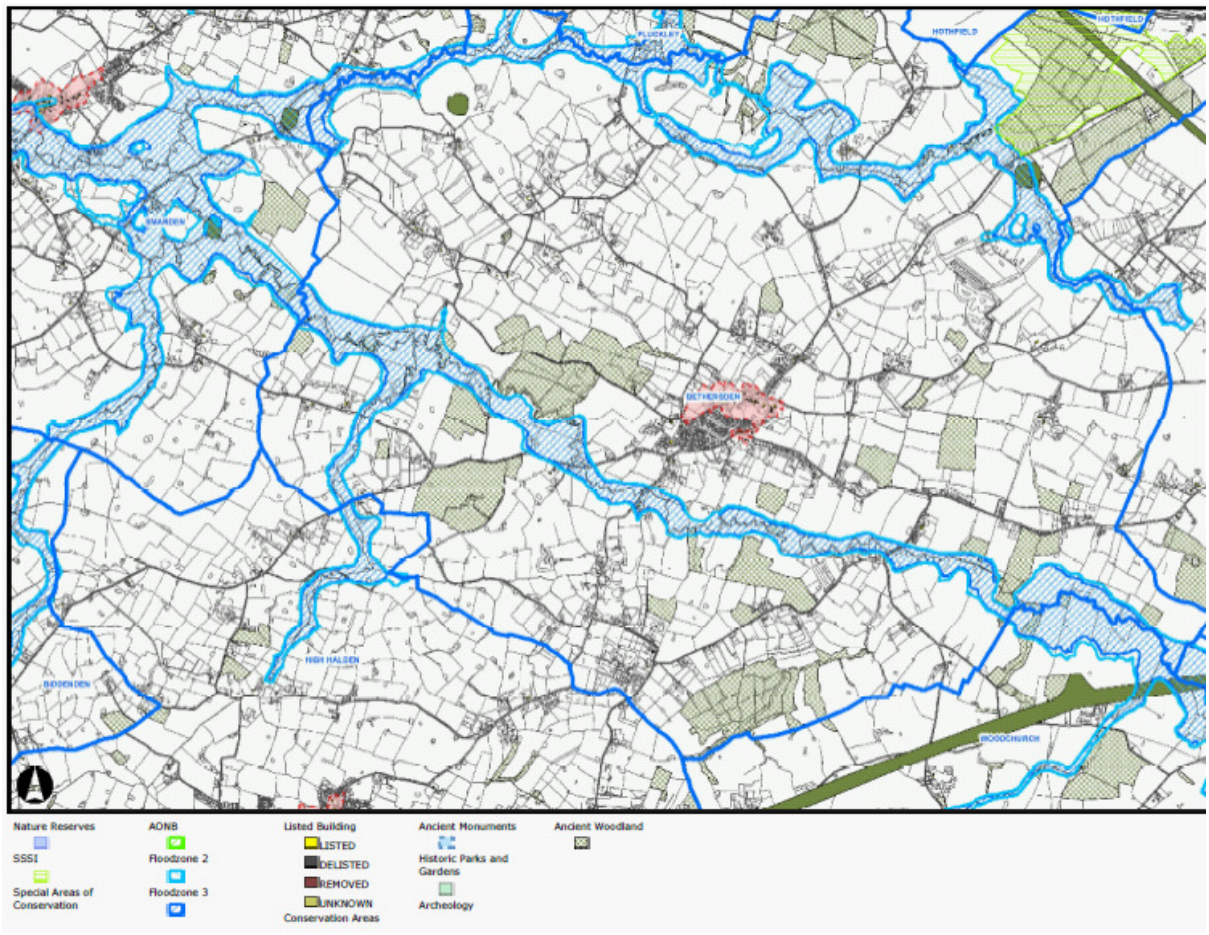


Figure 6: Constraints map of Bethersden Parish

6. Conclusions and Recommendation

6.1 A screening assessment to determine the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in line with regulations and guidance was undertaken and can be found in chapter 3 of this report. The assessment finds that significant and / or negative effects with regard to cultural heritage assets could occur as a result of the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan.

6.2 While the assessment finds many of the policies are in conformity with the local plan policies which have a full SA/SEA which identified no significant effects will occur as a result of the implementation of policies, the impact of designation within the Conservation Area is untested.

6.3 From the findings of the screening assessment it is recommended that a full SEA needs to be undertaken for the neighbourhood plan, as per the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC). To fulfil the requirements of the SEA Directive, the Neighbourhood Plan must assess options in working towards bring the objectives of the plan forward, notably alternative sites.

6.4 A screening assessment to determine the need for an Appropriate Assessment as per the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). The Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) considers potential impacts of the plan on internationally designated wildlife sites within 20km of the Neighbourhood Area. The assessment above has looked in simple terms at the emerging contents of the Bethersden neighbourhood plan and concludes that its proposals will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of internationally designated sites either on its own or in combination with other plans. This can be found in chapter 4 of this report. The assessment finds no likely significant effects will occur as a result of the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan and any affects that may occur have already been assessed as part of the Ashford Borough Core Strategy and Tenterden and Rural Sites Appropriate Assessment.

6.5 Should the content of the plan change significantly then this scoping report will need to be revisited.

Appendix 1: *Reproduction of European Directive 2001/42/EC*[16]

[16] Not repeated in full here

Appendix E

Responses to 2017 Screening/Scoping Report

From: KSLPlanning [mailto:KSLPlanning@environment-agency.gov.uk]
Sent: 16 March 2017 14:50
To: Matthew Nouch
Subject: RE: Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan: SEA Scoping Report for comment

Dear Matthew

Thank you for consulting us on the above SEA scoping report. We have the following comments to make.

Section 1.6 states under Environmental objective the following:

"Environmental:

Preserving the rural and open character of the village and the wider parish; protection of local habitats; expanding recreational needs and countryside accessibility; promoting sustainable drainage and energy."

We support the protection of local habitats but this should include the protection and enhancement of the biodiversity of the river Beult and its corridor.

In addition we note that there is no mention of the risk of flooding particularly as one of the proposed allocated sites within the conversation area, identified in Figure 3 (eastern site) falls partly within flood zone 3. Any planning application for development at this site will have to be supported by a site specific flood risk assessment. We would recommend that development on this site avoids the area that floods, which lies along the south-west boundary.



We would also wish to reiterate our previous comments 17th October 2014 on the screening opinion that as part of the River Beult's upper reaches flow through the Neighbourhood Plan area, it is hoped that, in future, actions to deliver the objectives will include work to protect and enhance this important Water Framework Directive (WFD) water body which, further downstream, is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

We would be interested in working with residents of Bethersden to help ensure any development proposed is in the most appropriate location and also to help deliver WFD measures to improve the river, as specified in the River Basin Management Plan that help achieve their objectives.

We hope you find these comments useful.

Kind Regards

Jennifer Wilson

Planning Specialist (KSL - Kent)

kslplanning@environment-agency.gov.uk

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T 0300 060 3900

Dear Mr Nouch

Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan - Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Report

Thank you for your consultation on the above which was dated and received by Natural England on 24th March 2017.
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
It is our advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that, in so far as our strategic environmental interests are concerned (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 SEA Directive is contained within the National Planning Practice Guidance[i]. 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
Sharon Jenkins
Consultations Team

From: Lloyd Sweet, Robert [mailto:Robert.LloydSweet@HistoricEngland.org.uk]
Sent: 06 April 2017 17:21
To: Matthew Nouch
Subject: Re: Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan: SEA Scoping Report for comment

Dear Matthew

Re: Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan: SEA Scoping Report for comment

Thank you for consulting Historic England on the draft scoping report for the Bethersden Neighbourhood plan. Historic England's remit is to provide advice on planning for the historic environment and, as such, our comments relate to how areas within our interest should be dealt with in the SEA/SA. These comments are without prejudice to those we may wish to make on any planning application within the area.

Section 5.2: The draft scoping report identifies the impact of development on the form and setting of the conservation area as a key issues to be considered in the environmental report. Whilst form is an element of character government guidance through the NPPF is that decisions affecting heritage assets should be considered with regard to their impact on the asset's 'significance', which in the case of conservation area is defined as the special historic or architectural interest. Nevertheless, the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires councils to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas. Whilst the settlement form and setting are important as parts of Bethersden's character and significance there are other elements of the area's character or appearance that could be affected by the plan's proposals. Specifically it's green and rural character could be affected by development. Rather than focus on a specific element of character at the scoping stage we would recommend the second bullet point at 5.2 is amended to read:

". The impact of development on the significance and character or appearance of the conservation area and its setting". This might be extended in the Environmental Report by

providing a list of key character features that could be affected by plan options that have been assessed. As such it is helpful that the settlement form is identified already as a factor that will be taken into account, to which we would expect to see the rural, green and open character of those parts of the conservation area included as fields or paddocks at the time of their inclusion in the area.

We are pleased to support the sustainability framework as set out, which includes prompts to include consideration of predicted effects and opportunities for mitigation, which are both important elements of the SEA process. We feel the Criteria reflect our comments above, although we would suggest that the 'views' indicator should seek to "maintain or enhance the character of key views of heritage assets".

We hope these comments are of assistance to the Borough Council and Parish Council in taking forward the SA/SEA but would be pleased to answer any queries relating to them or to provide further information if necessary.

Yours sincerely

Rob Lloyd-Sweet | Historic Places Adviser | Historic Places | South East

Direct Line: 01483 252028

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