Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report: Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan

March 2025

Huntingdonshire DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Ordnance Survey HDC 100022322

1. Introduction

1.1. This screening report is designed to establish whether or not a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required for the Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004[1]. It is also intended to determine whether a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) is required in accordance with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive and regulation 62 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). To meet the basic conditions the Neighbourhood Plan must be prepared in a manner which is compatible with European Union obligations (under retained EU law).

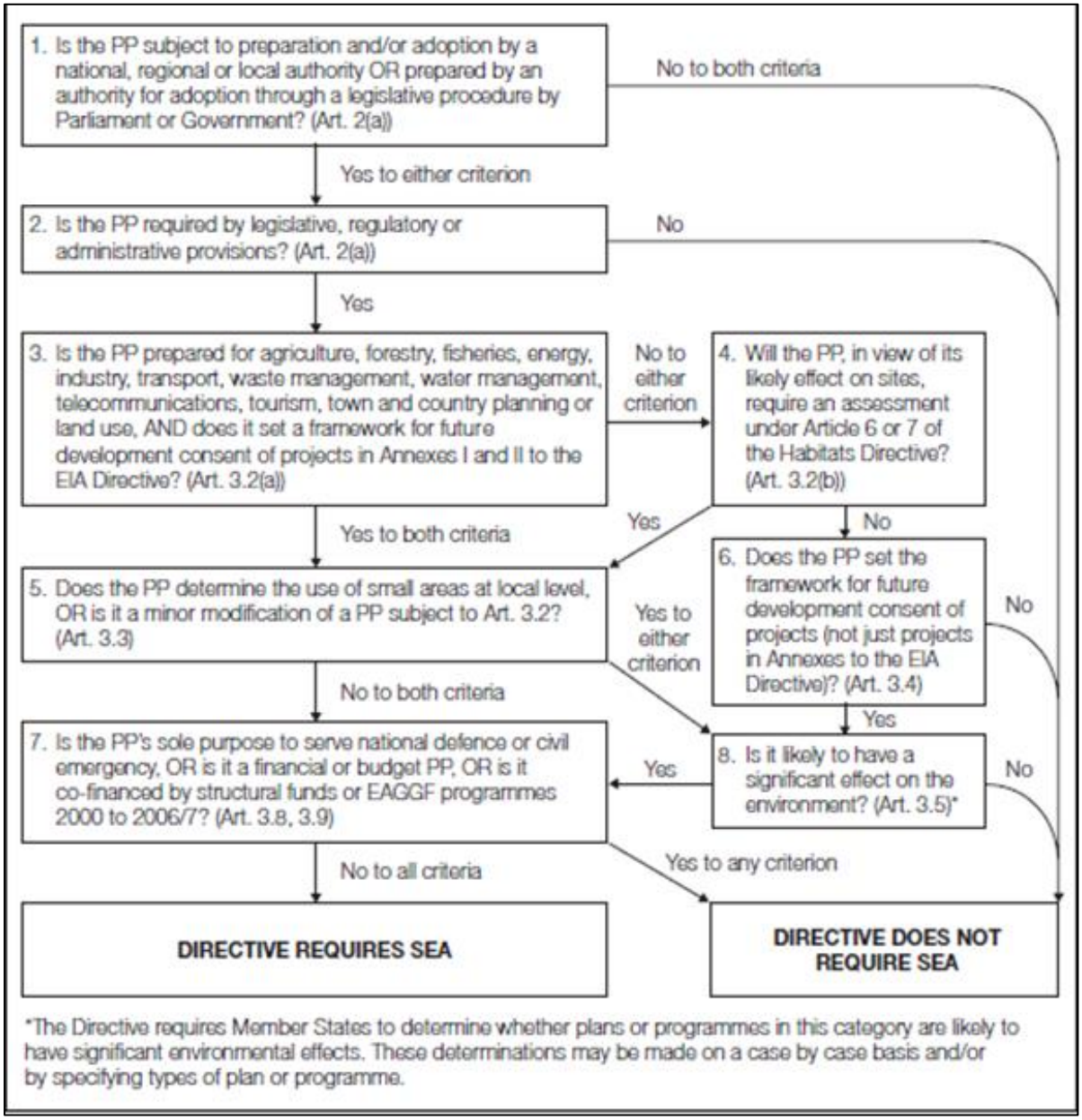
1.2. The purpose of SEA is to secure a high level of protection for the environment and to integrate environmental considerations into the preparation of plans to promote sustainable development. To establish whether a SEA is required a screening assessment is undertaken which considers the proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan against a series of criteria set out in the SEA Directive. Figure 1 overleaf sets out the screening process and how the Neighbourhood Plan is assessed against the criteria.

1.3. Where the Neighbourhood Plan could have significant environmental effects it may require a SEA where for example:

- The Neighbourhood Plan allocates a higher level of development than is already identified in the development plan
- Where 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 effects that have not already been considered through a sustainability appraisal of the Local Plan
- Where the cumulative impact of the policies and proposals when assessed together may give rise to a likely significant environmental effect.

[1] The existing body of environmental regulation is retained under EU law.

Figure 1: Application of criteria of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes



1.4. The formal criteria for assessing the likely significance of effects are set out in Schedule 1 of the Regulations and are shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Criteria for determining likely significance of effects on the environment from Schedule 1 of the Regulations

1. The characteristics of neighbourhood plans, having regard, in particular, to
   - the degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources,
   - the degree to which the plan influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy,
   - the relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development,
   - environmental problems relevant to the plan,
   - the relevance of the plan for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or waste protection).

2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to
   - the probability , duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects,
   - the cumulative nature of the effects,
   - the trans boundary nature of the effects,
   - the risks to human health of the environment (e.g. due to accidents),
   - the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected),
   - the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:
     - special natural characteristics or cultural heritage,
     - exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values,
     - intensive land-use,
     - the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.

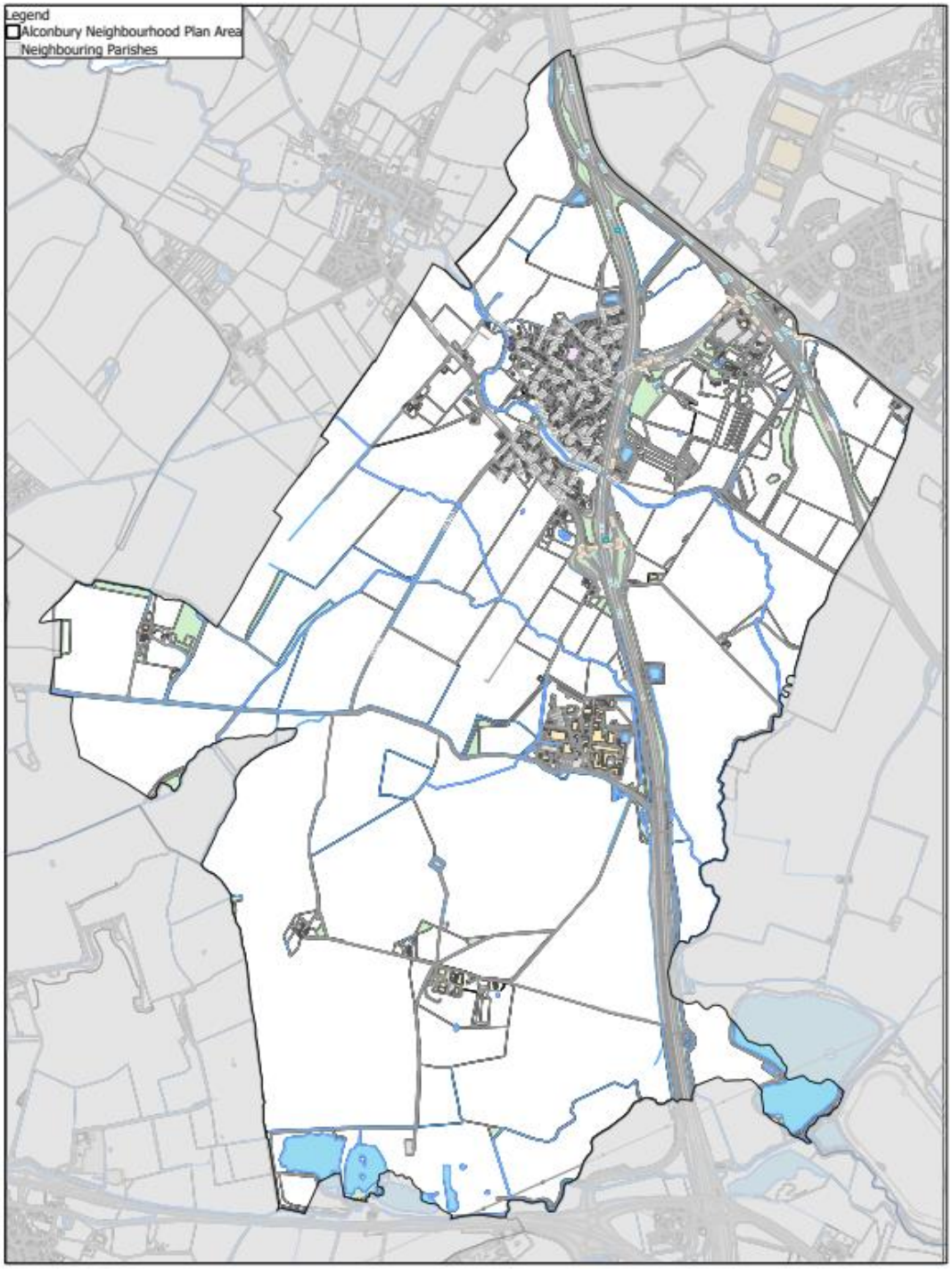
1.5. A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) may also be required under Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) to accompany the Neighbourhood Plan where the policies and proposals of the plan may give rise to significant effects on internationally designated wildlife sites. These are defined as any site of wildlife interest designated as a Special Protection Area under the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) or as a Special Area of Conservation designated under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). In addition sites designated under the Ramsar Convention (Iran 1971 as amended 1992) are also considered. Generally, sites within 15kms of the Neighbourhood Plan boundary should be included within a HRA.

1.6. The process to establish whether a HRA is necessary starts with a screening exercise to determine whether any internationally designated sites might be exposed to likely significant effects as a result of implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan and therefore whether further stages of the HRA process are required.

2. Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan

2.1. The Alconbury Neighbourhood Area was designated on 27 February 2023 covering the whole of the parish area. Alconbury Parish Council, as the qualifying body for the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan has delegated the responsibility for its production to the Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan Group. A map of the designated neighbourhood area is shown below.

Figure 3: Alconbury Neighbourhood Area



2.2. The parish of Alconbury is located in the centre of the district about 6km northwest of Huntingdon. The A1(M) cuts through the parish but the built form of the village is located to west of the A1(M), to the east of the A1(M) is the ongoing development of Alconbury Weald. The 2021 Census identified a resident population of 1,464 within Alconbury parish.

2.3. The draft vision for the Neighbourhood Plan is:

'To steadfastly preserve and enhance the distinctive rural character, strong sense of community and unique identity of Alconbury Parish. We are committed to ensuring that every development aligns seamlessly with the village's historical character, maintain its size and amenities, while proactively advancing flood risk management to safeguard our communtiy for future generations.'

2.4. The vision is underpinned by nine objectives and eleven policies, these are organised under six broad themes as follows:

Theme 1 – Village and Settlement Character

Objective 1
- Alconbury to remain a village with an identity that is clearly distinct from nearby settlements

Linked policy
- AL1 – A spatial strategy for Alconbury

Objective 2
- To safeguard Alconbury's rural quality by preserving and enhancing the landscape characteristics that are considered to be distinctive and make it special

Linked policy
- AL2 – Protecting and enhancing Alconbury's landscape and settlement character

Objective 3
- Conserve and enhance Alconbury's valued heritage assets and its historic environment

Linked policy
- AL3 – Conserving and enhancing Alconbury's non-designated heritage assets

Objective 4
- Maintain and enhance open, green spaces that are important to the community

Linked policy
- AL4 – Local Green Spaces

Theme 2 – Built Environment

Objective 5
- New development will be of a high quality design and contribute positively to village character

Linked policy
- AL5 – Delivering high quality design that is sensitive to Alconbury's distinctive character

Theme 3 – Flooding Objective 6 • New development will not exacerbate existing flood risk in the parish and all opportunities must be taken to reduce levels of risk Linked policy • AL6 – Addressing flood risk appropriately when development is proposed via a planning application
Theme 4 – Moving around the village and parish safely and through active travel modes Objective 7 • Our village streets will retain their rural character where it is enjoyable and safe to walk around and opportunities will be taken to improve and expand: o Walkable routes between residential areas and village services o The network of safe and attractive off-road routes that link Alconbury village with neighbouring settlements Linked policy • AL7 – Maintaining well connected neighbourhoods and addressing barriers to moving around the village more safely using active travel choices • AL8 – Protecting and improving Alconbury's network of rural routes
Theme 5 – Infrastructure Objective 8 • Ensure infrastructure is always capable of providing good provision for the village for both hard infrastructure such as roads and soft infrastructure such as services and facilities Linked policy • AL9 – Protecting and improving Alconbury's community facilities • AL10 – Alconbury community infrastructure priorities
Theme 6 – Natural Environment Objective 9 • Biodiversity in the parish will be protected and enhanced. Its contribution to supporting key sites of ecological value in neighbouring parishes will be recognised and reinforced. Linked policy • AL11 – Protecting and enhancing the natural environment

2.5. It does not make any site-specific allocations and nor does the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 as Alconbury is classified as a small settlement.

3. SEA Screening Assessment

3.1. Table 1 below shows the assessment of whether the Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan will require a full SEA.

Table 1: Assessment of requirement for SEA

Stage	Question Path	Yes/ No	Assessment
1. Is the Plan subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Article 2(a))	If 'No' to both SEA is not required If 'Yes' to either go to Question 2	Yes	Alconbury Parish Council is the qualifying body preparing the Neighbourhood Plan under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. Subject to successful examination and referendum it will be 'made' by Huntingdonshire District Council.
2. Is the Plan required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Article 2(a))	If 'No' SEA is not required If 'Yes' go to Question 3	Yes	Preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan is optional; there is no absolute legislative, regulatory or administrative requirement to do so. However, once 'made' the Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan would form part of the statutory development plan and be used in determining planning applications, so it is considered necessary to answer the remaining questions to determine further if an SEA is required.
3. Is the Plan prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Article 3.2(a))	If 'No' to either go to Question 4 If 'Yes' to both go to Question 5	Yes No	The Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan is prepared to set out a framework for town and country planning and the future development of a number of land uses within the parishes, although it does not anticipate managing development of the scale and nature envisaged by Annex I and Annex II.
4. Will the Plan, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Article 3.2(b))	If 'No' go to Question 6 If 'Yes' go to Question 5	No	See screening assessment for HRA in Section 4.

5. Does the Plan determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Article 3.2? (Article 3.3)	If 'No' to both go to Question 7 If 'Yes' to either go to Question 8	N/A	
6. Does the Plan set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Article 3.4)	If 'No' SEA is not required If 'Yes' go to Question 8	Yes	The Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan contains policies against which planning applications within the neighbourhood area will be considered.
7. Is the Plan's sole purpose to serve national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget plan or programme, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Article 3.8, 3.9)	If 'No' to all SEA is required If 'Yes' to any SEA is not required	N/A	
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Article 3.5)*	If 'No' SEA is not required If 'Yes' go to Question 7	No	No development is allocated. However, there is potential for development arising from the objectives and policies within the plan.

*The Directive requires Member States to determine whether plans or programmes in this category are likely to have significant environmental effects. These determinations may be made on a case by case basis and/or by specifying types of plan or programme.

3.2. Under criterion 8 of Table 1 it is necessary to undertake an assessment of the likelihood of the Neighbourhood Plan having a significant effect on the environment based on the criteria set out in Figure 2 (preceding). Table 2 below sets out this assessment.

Table 2: Assessment of likelihood of significant effects on the environment

Significant effect criteria	Assessment
The characteristics of the plan, having regard to:	
The degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources	The Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate any sites for development in the parish, nor does the Huntingdonshire Local Plan. While not allocating any sites, the Neighbourhood Plan supports development proposals within the built up area of the village and provides some support for development outside of the built up area where it accords with criteria within policy AL1: A Spatial Strategy for Alconbury. The Plan supports high quality design, development that addresses flood risk, supporting improved footpaths and connectivity, has identified local green spaces and has identified a list of community infrastructure priorities and community actions.
The degree to which the Plan influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy.	The Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan does reflect and support the strategic policies of the Local Plan to 2036. It should not significantly influence other plans and programmes but may have a limited degree of influence over adjoining neighbourhood plans if they come forward.
The relevance of the Plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.	The Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan is expected to protect and enhance the natural environment and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development within the neighbourhood area. Its policies will have a positive impact on local environmental assets and places valued by local people. The likelihood of significant negative effects on the environment is therefore, minimised.
Environmental problems relevant to the Plan.	There is risk of flooding from fluvial and surface water within the parish which the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to address through theme 3. This flood risk is attributed to Alconbury Brook which runs through the centre main village and also a network of local drains and brooks. No

	development is allocated in these affected areas.
The relevance of the Plan for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).	The considerations of such plans and European legislation were taken into account in the production of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan.
Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:	
The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects.	Policies within the Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan facilitate some new development, so some environmental change will occur. However, the objectives and policies are generally intended to ensure new development meets local needs and is sustainable. The frequency of effects is expected to be low. The duration and reversibility of effects arising from built development are long term and poor.
The cumulative nature of the effects of the Plan.	The cumulative effects of the policies and proposals of the Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan are unlikely to be significant on the local environment, many elements are intended to help protect it.
The trans-boundary nature of the effects of the Plan.	The plan identifies an aspiration for enhanced active travel routes and connectivity within the village. It also sets public rights of way within the village and connecting to adjoining communities and wildlife sites which may impact upon adjoining neighbourhood plans if they come forward.
The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)	Improved active travel, cycleway and walking connectivity may offer opportunities to improve human health arising from the policies or proposals of the Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan. The protection and enhancement of the natural environment including protected sites, areas of woodland, orchards, Alconbury Brook corridor as well as other wildlife corridors within the neighbourhood plan area in addition to improved connectivity to these will improve human health and the natural environment as well as support the local economy.

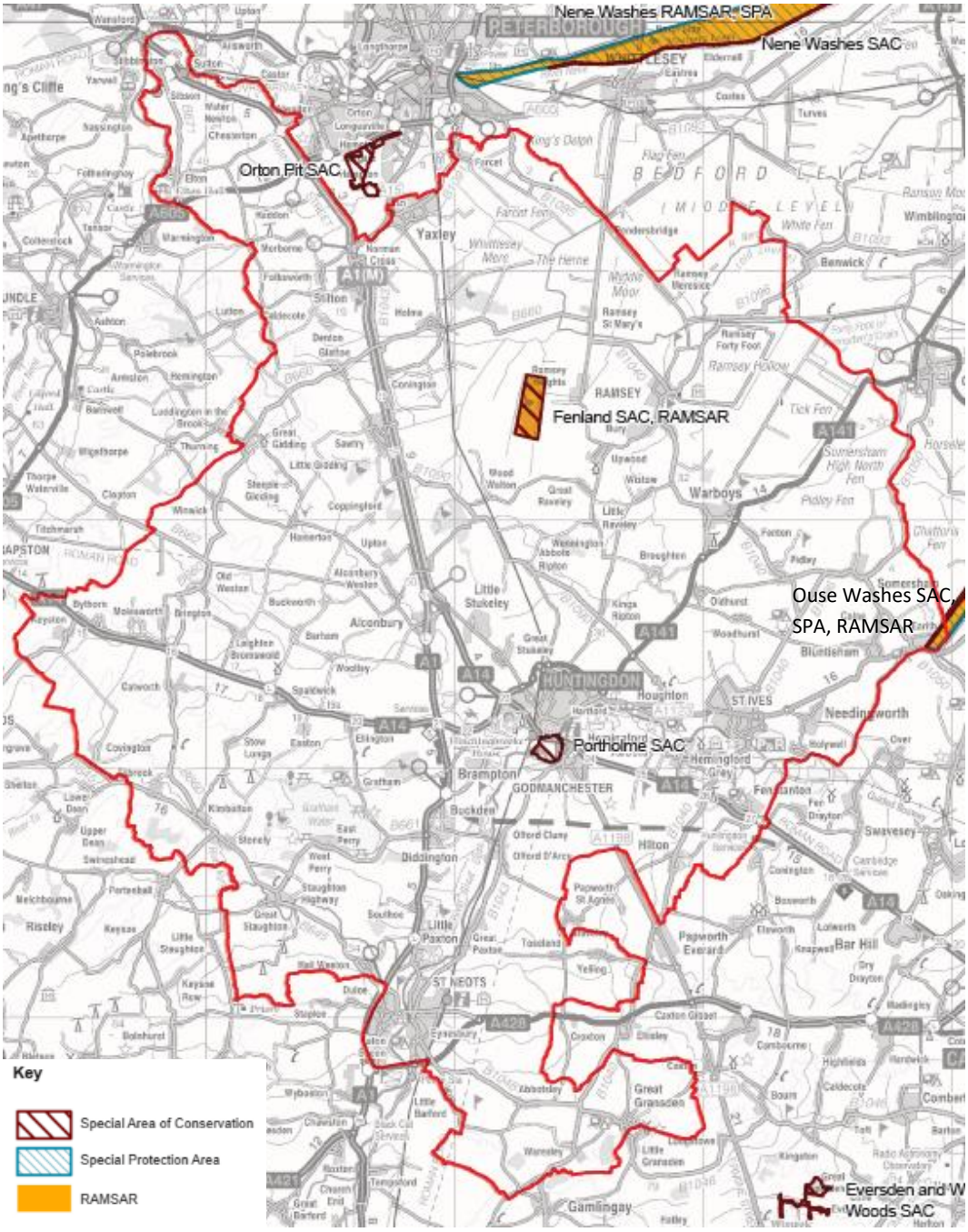
The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected) by the Plan.	The Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan has a resident population of 1,464 as recorded in the 2021 Census.
The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected by the Plan due to: • Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage • Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values • Intensive land use • The effects of the Plan on areas or landscapes which have recognised national, community or international protection status.	Alconbury has a conservation area, with 40 listed buildings and three scheduled monuments. The Neighbourhood Plan has several design, landscape and heritage policies intended to shape development so that they reflect local character and design and preserve important landscape views. There is also a specific policy about conserving and enhancing Alconbury's non-designated heritage assets. The Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan is intended to enhance the natural and cultural assets of the area and provide greater opportunities for people to enjoy them.

4. HRA Screening Assessment

4.1. Internationally designated wildlife sites are accorded the highest level of protection under European legislation. The purpose of the screening assessment is to ascertain whether there is potential for implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan to have significant effect on any such site.

4.2. Figure 3 below shows the internationally designated sites within a 15km radius of the neighbourhood area boundary.

Figure 2: Internationally designated wildlife sites



4.3. The Portholme Special Area of Conservation, Ouse Washes Special Area of Conservation/ Special Protection Area/Ramsar site, Fenland Special Area of Conservation and Woodwalton Fen Ramsar sites are located within 15kms of the Alconbury neighbourhood area.

4.4. **Portholme SAC** is within Huntingdonshire District, close to the town of Huntingdon. It is designated as SAC for its lowland hay meadows. It is the largest surviving traditionally-managed meadow in the UK, with 91ha of alluvial flood meadow (7% of the total UK resource). There has been a long history of favourable management and very little of the site has suffered from agricultural improvement, and so it demonstrates good conservation of structure and function. It supports a small population of fritillary *Fritillaria meleagris*. Portholme SAC occupies a similar area to Portholme Site of Special Scientific Interest.

4.5. **Ouse Washes SAC** was designated for its spined loach *Cobitis taenia* populations within the River Ouse catchment. The Counter Drain, with its clear water and abundant macrophytes, is particularly important, and a healthy population of spined loach is known to occur. The SAC only covers the Counter Drain and not adjacent land designated as SPA and Ramsar.

4.6. **Ouse Washes SPA** is a functional washland, with extensive winter flooding and traditional forms of agricultural management, including grazing and mowing of permanent grassland and rotational ditch clearance. It supports a great number of breeding and wintering wetland birds.

4.7. **Ouse Washes Ramsar site** supports nationally and internationally important numbers of wintering waterfowl and nationally important numbers of breeding waterfowl. It is also of note for the large area of unimproved neutral grassland communities which it holds, and for the richness of the aquatic flora within the associated watercourses.

4.8. **Fenland SAC** falls partly within Huntingdonshire continuing to the north east. The SAC and Ramsar site is made up of three component Sites of Special Scientific Interest, which are Woodwalton Fen SSSI, Chippenham Fen SSSI and Wicken Fen SSSI. The part of Fenland SAC within Huntingdonshire is Woodwalton Fen SSSI. Fenland SAC contains one of the most extensive examples of the tall herb-rich East Anglian fen-meadow. The individual sites within Fenland SAC each hold large areas of calcareous fens, with a long and well-documented history of regular management.

4.9. **Woodwalton Fen Ramsar site** occupies a similar area to Woodwalton Fen SSSI (a component site of Fenland SAC). The site is within an area that is one of the

remaining parts of East Anglia which has not been drained. The fen is near natural and has developed where peat-digging took place in the 19th century. The site has several types of open fen and swamp communities. The site supports fen violet *Viola persicifolia* and fen wood-rush *Luzula pallidula* and a large number of wetland invertebrates including 20 British Red Data Book species. Aquatic beetles, flies and moths are particularly well represented.

4.10. The criteria for determining if an individual policy, or a combination of policies, would have a likely significant effect, and require assessment, are based on the characteristics of the relevant European site and the objectives set by Natural England. The main factors to consider are:

- Development on or adjacent to the European site destroying part or all of the site, or changing the ecological functioning of the site (e.g. disrupting water flows or migration routes)
- Increased public recreation, causing disturbance to birds, damage to vegetation, increased littering / flytipping or leading to management compromises (e.g. grazing being restricted).
- Reduction in water levels or flow, from increased water demand in the District requiring greater water abstraction
- Reduction of water quality, from increased discharges of sewage and surface water drainage, or from pollution incidents, either during, or after, construction

4.11. The implications of the policies and proposals of the Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan have been assessed against each of the internationally designated sites within 15kms to establish the likelihood of a significant effect on the features which justified their designation. The outcomes are set out in Tables 3 – 5 below.

Table 3: Likely significant effects on Portholme

Site name	**Portholme SAC**
Distance to neighbourhood area	5km
Reasons for designation	Lowland hay meadow
Vulnerability[2]	This alluvial flood meadow has had a long history of favourable management and demonstrates good conservation of structure and function. Traditionally the site is cut for hay followed by aftermath grazing in late summer and autumn. Part of the site is subject to a Countryside

[2] Data summarised from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee Natura 2000 data forms

	Stewardship agreement aimed at maintaining the alluvial flood meadow. The Environment Agency has produced a Water Level Management plan
Impact as a result of the plan	The neighbourhood plan area is located north west of Portholme SAC beyond the A141 and A14. Scale of growth envisaged is unlikely to result in significant air or water quality impacts or any other impacts on the SAC.
Significance of risk	Insignificant
Cumulative impacts with other plans	Impacts from the Local Plan to 2036 have been assessed separately and appropriate changes or mitigation put in place.

Table 4: Likely significant effects on Ouse Washes

Site name	**Ouse Washes SAC/ SPA/ Ramsar site**
Distance to neighbourhood area	14.5km
Reasons for designation	Support for breeding and over-wintering wetland birds. Spined loach population. Functional washland comprising unimproved neutral grassland. Diverse aquatic flora.
Vulnerability	Much of the conservation importance of the Ouse Washes is due to its continued use as functional washland, with extensive winter flooding and traditional forms of agricultural management, including grazing and mowing of permanent grassland and rotational ditch clearance. In recent years, summer flooding (April- May) has adversely affected both the breeding birds and the traditional washland management regime. This is now being managed through the Ouse Washes Management Strategy. Siltation and nutrient enrichment continue to be a problem.
Impact as a result of the plan	The neighbourhood plan area is located some 14.5km to the west of the Ouse Washes SAC/SPA/Ramsar beyond the A1(M). Scale of growth envisaged is unlikely to result in significant air or water quality impacts or any other impacts on the designated site.
Significance of risk	Insignificant
Cumulative impacts with other plans	Impacts from the Local Plan to 2036 have been assessed separately and appropriate changes or mitigation put in place.

Table 5: Likely significant effects on Fenland SAC/ Woodwalton Fen

Site name	Fenland SAC/ Woodwalton Fen Ramsar site
Distance to neighbourhood area	8km
Reasons for designation	Fenland meadow on calcareous or peaty soil.
Vulnerability	The fenland grasslands are dependent upon traditional management practices of cutting and grazing by livestock. In recent decades scrub and woodland have spread at the expense of fen vegetation. The three constituent sites are all National Nature Reserves and the site management plans include actions to address this problem. Woodwalton Fen takes water in the summer months from the surrounding drains. In the winter months the fen is designed to be used as a flood storage area, although this occurs infrequently. In both these circumstances the water entering the Fen is high in nutrients from agricultural run-off.
Impact as a result of the plan	The neighbourhood plan area is located to the southwest of the Fenland SAC and Woodwalton Fen Ramsar site beyond the A1(M). Scale of growth envisaged is unlikely to result in significant air or water quality impacts or any other impacts on the designated site.
Significance of risk	Insignificant
Cumulative impacts with other plans	Impacts from the Local Plan to 2036 have been assessed separately and appropriate changes or mitigation put in place.

5. Conclusions

5.1. This report contains the assessments of the need for the Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan to be subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment as required by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 and Habitats Regulation Assessment as required by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

5.2. The assessment for both of these has been undertaken based on the policies and proposals set out in Alconbury (version 9 draft pre-Regulation 14 consultation dated March 2025) Neighbourhood Plan and within the strategic framework established in the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 (2019).

5.3. In relation to the requirement for Strategic Environmental Assessment to be undertaken, the assessment set out in section 3 concludes that as the Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan will not have significant effects on the environment. Therefore, an assessment is not required.

5.4. In relation to the requirement for Habitats Regulations Assessment to be undertaken, the assessment set out in section 4 concludes that as the Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any internationally designated sites either on its own or in combination with any other plans. Therefore, an assessment is not required.

Appendix 1: Consultation Responses

Responses to the consultation agreed with the conclusions of the screening report. The responses from the three statutory bodies of Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency are included below.

Historic England – response dated 1 May 2025

Dear Natalie,

Re: SEA/HRA Screening Opinion on the draft Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan

Thank you for consulting us on the SEA/HRA Screening Opinion for the draft Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan. As the Government's adviser on the historic environment, Historic England welcomes the opportunity to comment.

Having reviewed both the draft Plan and the Screening Opinion, we support the conclusion that neither a Strategic Environmental Assessment nor a Habitats Regulations Assessment is required.

I would be grateful if you could confirm receipt of this email.

Best wishes,

Andrew Marsh BSc MA MRTPI
Historic Environment Planning Adviser
Development Advice | East of England
Historic England
Mobile: 07557 828181
Direct line: 01223 582734

Historic England
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Follow us on Twitter at@HE_EoE

Environment Agency – response dated 28 April 2025

Environment Agency

Natalie Elworthy
Huntingdonshire District Council
Pathfinder House St. Marys Street
Huntingdon
Cambridgeshire
PE29 3TN

Our ref: AC/2025/132683/01-L01

Date: 28 April 2025

Dear Natalie,

SEA SCREENING OPINION

ALCONBURY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN- HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Thank you for consulting us on the Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report for the Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan.

Flood Risk

Based on a review of environmental constraints for which we are a statutory consultee, we find that there are areas of fluvial flood risk and watercourses within the neighbourhood plan area. In particular, we note that the boundary does extend into areas of Flood Zones 2 and 3 and includes a designated Main River.

On the basis that future development is steered away from the sensitive aspects of the environment highlighted, we do not consider there to be potential significant environmental effects relating to these environmental constraints. Nevertheless, we recommend the inclusion of relevant policies to cover the management of flood risk. Allocation of any sites and any windfall development delivered through the Plan period should follow the sequential approach. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 161 sets this out.

Water Quality

We have identified that the Plan area boundary includes the Water Recycling Centre Alconbury, which is currently operating close to or exceeding its permitted capacity. Providing the plan does not allocate sites for growth development across the plan period, we do not have any significant concerns. We would still expect to see consideration for any windfall developments captured in a relevant policy for water quality in the catchment of the plan area and serving WRC.

Informative

We encourage you to seek ways in which your neighbourhood plan can improve the local environment. For your information, together with Natural England, Historic

Environment Agency
Bromholme Lane, Brampton, Huntingdon, PE28 4NE.
Customer services line: 03708 506 506
www.gov.uk/environment-agency
Cont/d..

England and Forestry Commission we have published joint guidance on neighbourhood planning, which sets out sources of environmental information and ideas on incorporating the environment into plans. This is available at: How to consider the environment in Neighbourhood plans - Locality Neighbourhood Planning

We trust that this advice is useful.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Megan Turnpenney
Sustainable Places - Planning Advisor

Team e-mail: Planning.Eastanglia@Environment-agency.gov.uk
Team number: 02084 745242

Natural England – response dated 1 May 2025

Date: 01 May 2025
Our ref: 507159
Your ref: Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan

Ms Natalie Elworthy
Huntingdonshire District Council

BY EMAIL ONLY
Natalie.Elworthy@huntingdonshire.gov.uk

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Electra Way
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CW1 6GJ

T 0300 060 3900

Dear Ms Elworthy

Alconbury Neighbourhood Plan - SEA/HRA Screening Opinion Consultation

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated and received by Natural England on 24 March 2025.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

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

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

- **significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes are unlikely; and,**
- **significant effects on Habitats sites[1], either alone or in combination, are unlikely.**

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

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

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

Natural England does not hold information on the location of significant populations of protected species, so is unable to advise whether this plan is likely to affect protected species to such an extent

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

as to require an SEA. Further information is included in Natural England's standing advice on protected species.

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

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

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

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

Yours sincerely

Sally Wintle
Consultations Team