

Renhold Neighbourhood Development Plan
Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report

October 2024

Prepared by Renhold Neighbourhood Plan Working Group for Renhold Parish Council

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1. Introduction

1.1 This screening report has been prepared to determine whether or not the content of the Renhold Neighbourhood Plan (NP) requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. These require an SEA to be undertaken for: (i) Plans which are prepared for Town and Country Planning or land use and which set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive; or (ii) Plans which have been determined to require an assessment under the Habitats Directive.

1.2 Plans which determine 'the use of a small area at local level' or which only propose 'minor modification to a plan' might be exempt if they are unlikely to have significant environmental effects. Neighbourhood Plans containing land allocations for development that are not included in the local authority's plan, are more likely to require an SEA. The main determining factor as to whether an SEA is required on a Neighbourhood Plan is if it is likely to have a significant effect on the environment.

1.3 Section 2 of this report outlines the regulations that set the need for this screening exercise. The process and criteria of the assessment are set out in Section 3. A brief summary of the draft Renhold Neighbourhood Plan is provided in Section 4.

1.4 The screening assessment of the likely significant environmental effects of the Neighbourhood Plan is set out in Section 5 and the outcome of the screening is provided in Section 6. Section 7 contains the determination as to whether an SEA is required.

2. Legislative Background

2.1 The basis for Strategic Environmental Assessments legislation is European Directive 2001/42/EC which was transposed into English law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, or SEA Regulations. The Regulations continue to apply after the end of the transition period following the UK's formal departure from the EU. Regulation 9 sets out the process as follows:

'Determinations of the responsible authority

(1) The responsible authority shall determine whether or not a plan, programme or modification of a description referred to in

- (a) paragraph (4) (a) and (b) of regulation 5;
- (b) paragraph (6)(a) of that regulation; or
- (c) paragraph (6) (b) of that regulation,

is likely to have significant environmental effects.

(2) Before making a determination under paragraph (1) the responsible authority shall –

- (a) take into account the criteria specified in Schedule 1 to these Regulations;
- and
- (b) consult the consultation bodies.

(3) Where the responsible authority determines that the plan, programme or modification is unlikely to have significant environmental effects (and, 3 accordingly, does not require an environmental assessment), it shall prepare a statement of its reasons for the determination.

The regulations define a responsible authority as:

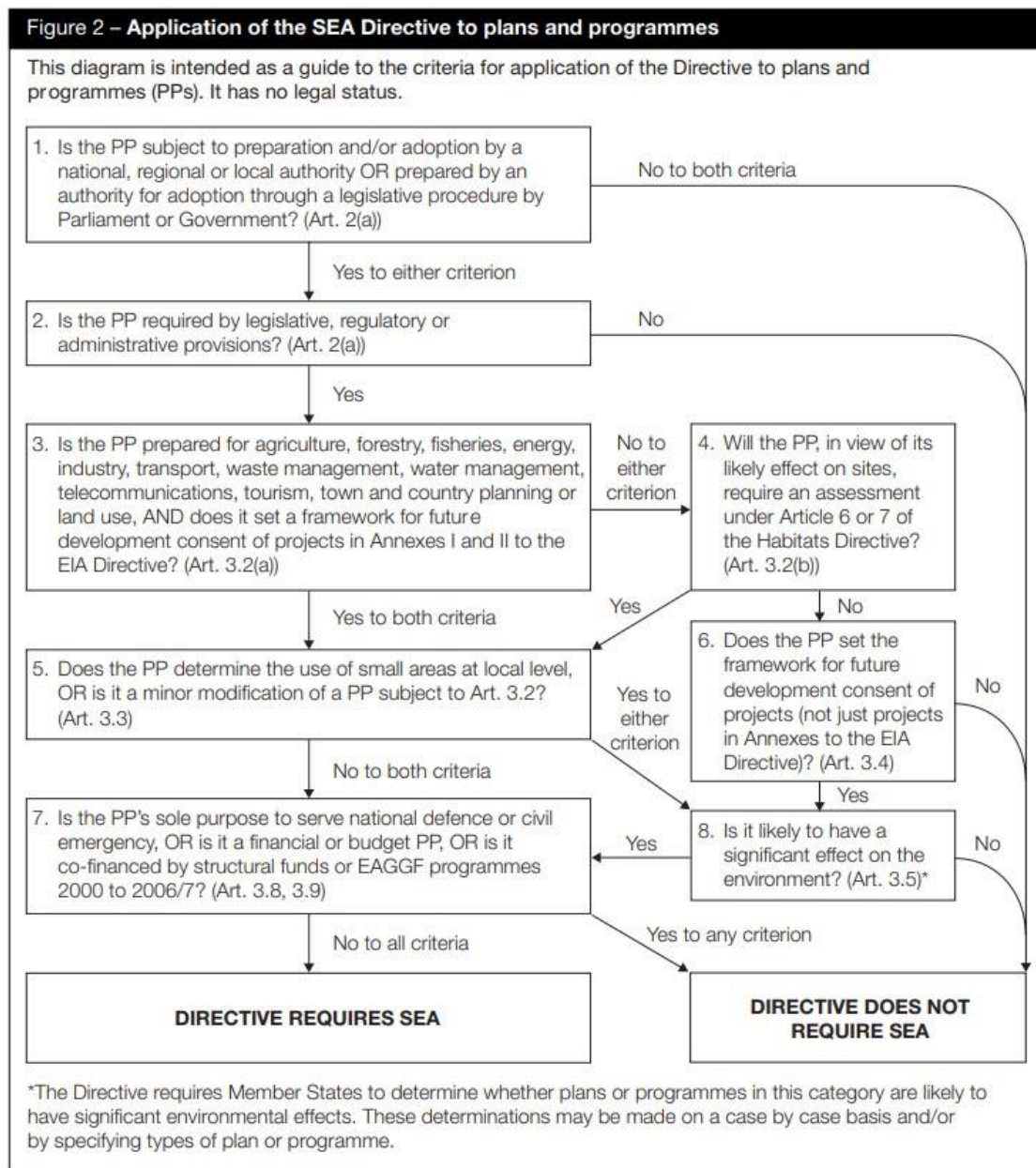
- (a) the authority by which or on whose behalf it is prepared; and
- (b) where, at any particular time, that authority ceases to be responsible, or solely responsible, for taking steps in relation to the plan or programme, the person who, at that time, is responsible (solely or jointly with the authority) for taking those steps'.

2.2 The Government has stated that Sustainability Appraisals are not needed for Neighbourhood Plans (see NPPG). It must however be demonstrated how the NP contributes to achievement of sustainable development in the area.

3. Screening Assessment Process

3.1 The screening opinion assessment is undertaken in two parts: the first part will assess whether the plan falls into a category of plans requiring SEA; and the second part of the assessment will consider whether the NP is likely to have a significant effect on the environment, using criteria drawn from Schedule 1 of the EU SEA Directive and the UK Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

3.2 The government guidance 'A practical guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive 2005' sets out the approach to be taken in determining whether an SEA is required.



3.3 The criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of Directive 2001/42/EC and Schedule 1 of The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 are set out below:

1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to:

- 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 degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy,
- the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development,
- environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme,
- the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste management or water 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 transboundary nature of the effects,
- the risks to human health or 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.

Source: Annex II of SEA Directive 2001/42/EC

3.4 The three statutory consultation bodies (Historic England, Environment Agency and Natural England) are required to be consulted to determine whether they agree with the findings and conclusions of this screening opinion, in establishing whether the Renhold Neighbourhood Plan requires an SEA and whether it may have a significant environmental effect. The statutory bodies were consulted in October 2024 and, when the responses to the consultation are received, they will be included in Section 8.

4. Summary of the draft Renhold Neighbourhood Plan

4.1 Renhold's Neighbourhood Plan sets out a Vision which encompasses three strands: Countryside, Community and Connectedness. It seeks to preserve the distinctive character of the Parish, to ensure that the needs and aspirations of our residents are reflected in the appropriate provision of community facilities and infrastructure, and that it enhances the natural environment and biodiversity of the Parish. The Neighbourhood Plan contains nine objectives and nine policies that are aimed towards achieving the Plan's Vision. The document is divided into nine chapters which explain the description of the Parish, the community consultations which have taken place and the key issues which have arisen, the Vision and Objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan, planning policies, and arrangements for implementation, monitoring and review, together with other (non land-use) actions and aspirations.

4.2 The Housing Needs Survey identified a local need for a small-scale housing development for affordable housing and, for that reason, seven of the sites identified in the Call for Sites Submission for the Bedford Local Plan 2030 were assessed to see if any of them would be suitable. None of them were considered suitable.

4.3 A key policy in the Plan concerns development design and sustainability principles, which should be demonstrated in all future development proposals wherever possible – Design Codes have been prepared by AECOM as an Appendix to the Plan to add depth and illustration to that policy; and to enhance the character and local distinctiveness and suggest measures to improve the overall cohesiveness and sustainability of the Parish. The Plan seeks

to retain the rural character of the Parish as well as protecting and enhancing its natural and historic assets.

5. Assessment

5.1 The first part of the assessment is to establish the need for the SEA. The table below shows the assessment determining whether the NP falls into a category of plans requiring SEA. The references to Articles are from Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Council on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment.

Stage	Y/N	Reasons
1. Is the NP subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Article. 2(a))	Y	The Local Authority has a statutory obligation to make a Neighbourhood Plan once it has successfully passed the stages as set out in the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations.
2. Is the NP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Article. 2(a))	Y	While it is not mandatory for a Neighbourhood Plan to be prepared, however once made, it is part of the development plan for assessing planning applications.
3. Is the NP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Article. 3.2(b))	N	The NP is prepared for town and country planning and land use purposes but does not explicitly set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I or II of the EIA Directive.
4. Will the NP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.2 (b))	N	An appropriate Assessment screening has been carried out to show that an assessment is not required.

5. Does the NP determine the use of small areas at local level OR is it a minor modification of a plan/programme (Article 3.3)	Y <i>If yes, go to Q8</i>	Yes, the Neighbourhood Plan relates to the local area of the designated Neighbourhood Area.
6. Does the NP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Article. 3.4)		N/A
7. Is the NP's sole purpose to serve national defence or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Article. 3.8 & Article. 3.9)		N/A
8. Is the NP likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Article. 3.5)	N	See the following table

5.2 The next step in the screening assessment is to establish whether the NP is likely to have a significant effect on the environment. The criteria for determining the likely significance of effects are drawn from the Annex II of SEA Directive 2001/42/EC and is also set out in Schedule 1 of The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

Criteria for determining the likely significant effects (Annex II SEA Directive)	Summary of significant effects	Likely to have significant environmental effects Y/N
<u>Plan Characteristics</u>		
1a. 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.	Following an assessment of the seven smallest sites identified in the 2030 Local Plan Call for sites submission, none of the sites were deemed to be suitable to meet the local housing need of small-scale affordable homes.	N
1b. The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy.	The NP will be complementary to the Bedford Borough Development Plan, including the Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030 which has been subject to SEA.	N
1c. The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.	The achievement of sustainable development is one of the basic conditions that a Neighbourhood Plan must meet.	N
1d. Environmental problems relevant to the plan.	There are no environmental problems relevant to the NP in this Parish	N
1e. The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection or renewable energy generation)	The plan does not relate to waste management or water protection. Amongst other things, the Design and Sustainability Policy encourages energy efficiency such as the installation of renewable and low carbon sources.	N

<u>Effects and Area Characteristics</u>		
2a. The probability, duration, frequency, and reversibility of the effects		N/A
2b. The cumulative nature of the effects		N/A
2c. The transboundary nature of the effects	It is not considered that the proposals will have any material impact outside the parish. Any effects will be mitigated within the area.	N
2d. The risks to human health or environment (e.g. due to accidents)	The allocations are only for local green space and it is not considered that they will cause a risk to human health or the environment. On the contrary, implementation of the design and sustainability and local greenspace policies will reduce risks to health or the environment.	N
2e. The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The population estimated from the 2021 census was 3400 and the dwellings' estimate was 1300. The area of the Parish is 884 hectares which equates to a population density of -3.85 people per hectare.	N

<p>2f. 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; or Intensive land use</p>	<p>The plan includes policies to ensure that cultural heritage is either preserved or enhanced. There are no special natural characteristics that are related to the Parish. No potential development site is within the immediate setting of the Grade I listed All Saints Church.</p>	<p>N</p>
<p>2g. The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, community or international protection status.</p>	<p>There are no national or internationally recognised areas or landscapes within the Parish.</p>	<p>N</p>

6. Screening Outcome

6.1 The screening assessment undertaken in Section 5 concludes that it is unlikely there will be any significant environmental effects arising from the Renhold Neighbourhood Plan.

7. Determination

7.1 Based on the above information, the 'Responsible Body' being Renhold Parish Council, concludes that a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.

8. Responses received from Statutory Consultees

8.1 Natural England

8.2 Historic England

8.3 Environment Agency

