

Houghton Neighbourhood Plan

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

Introduction

This statement has been prepared by Test Valley Borough Council (as responsible authority) to determine whether or not a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and/or a Habitats Regulations Assessment are required for the draft Houghton Neighbourhood Plan following the submission of a screening opinion.

The Regulations advise that where the responsible authority determines that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects (and, accordingly, does not require an environmental assessment), it shall prepare a statement of its reasons for the determination. This statement fulfils that requirement.

Context

The preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan involves a series of stages as required by legislation before it can be 'made'. To be 'made', a Neighbourhood Plan must meet certain Basic Conditions. These include that the making of the plan *"does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations"*.

One of these obligations is Directive 2001/42/EC 'on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment'. This is often referred to as the strategic environmental assessment (or SEA) Directive. The SEA Directive seeks *"to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes."* The SEA Directive is transposed into UK law through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the 'SEA Regulations') and it is these Regulations that the neighbourhood plan will need to be compatible with.

Another key obligation is Directive 92/43/EEC 'on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora', often referred to as the Habitats Directive. This has been translated into UK law via The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Under the 'Habitats Regulations' an assessment referred to as an Appropriate Assessment must be undertaken if a Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have a significant effect on a European protected wildlife site.

Under both the SEA and Habitats Regulations it is the Council's role to advise whether further work is required once the first stage, a screening assessment, has been undertaken by the Parish Council on its Neighbourhood Plan.

Process

A screening report has been produced on behalf of Houghton Parish Council (Annex A). This was submitted to the Council on the 4th November 2019. The report concluded that a full SEA would not be required. In accordance with the regulations, Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency were consulted on the findings of the screening report. The consultation started on the 5th November for a five week period ending on 11th December. A summary of the responses received and the Council's response is outlined in Table A. Copies of the responses are included at Annex B.

Table A: Summary of Responses

Consultation body (date of response)	Consultation response (summary)	Test Valley BC response
Environment Agency No response received	<i>No response received</i>	N/A
Natural England 11 th December	Thank you for submitting a screening request for the Houghton Neighbourhood Plan SEA and HRA. Based on the location of the neighbourhood and the information submitted in support of the screening request, notably that the plan will not be allocating sites for development, <u>Natural England do not consider that a SEA is required.</u> Based on this same information we concur with the conclusion that an <u>appropriate assessment would not be required.</u>	Response noted
Historic England 11 th December	The Screening Report indicates that the Parish Council considers that the plan will not have any significant effects on the historic environment. We note that the neighbourhood plan does not seek to allocate land for development. On the basis of the information supplied, and in the context of the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment Regulations [Annex II of 'SEA' Directive], <u>Historic England concurs with the Parish Council that the preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.</u>	Response noted

Conclusion

Having regard to the letter and associated briefing note that the Parish Council provided (Annex A), the consultation responses from Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic England indicated that having regard to the matters within their remit, the proposed Neighbourhood Plan would not be likely to have significant environmental effects.

The Council has had due regard to the statutory consultee responses and the criteria within Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations in coming to a view on whether the proposed Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects. Based on the summary of the proposed Neighbourhood Plan (as provided within the Briefing Note), it is the Council's opinion that the Plan would not be likely to have significant environmental effects. On this basis, a Strategic Environmental Assessment would not be required for the proposed Houghton Neighbourhood Plan.

With regards to the Habitats Regulations and whether an Appropriate Assessment is required, the Council concludes that the proposed Neighbourhood Plan is not likely to have a significant effect on European designations. This is supported by the response from Natural England.

A response was sent to the Parish Council on the 23 December (see Annex C).

Annex A

**Letter requesting a
screening opinion and
supporting report**

HOUGHTON PARISH COUNCIL

Chairman: Cllr Alan Young

Clerk: Mrs Clare Cotterell

Parish Council Office: Homeleigh, Jacks Bush, Lopcombe, Salisbury SP5 1BZ

Tel: 01264782869 email: houghtonparishcouncil@gmail.com

Test Valley Borough Council
Beech Hurst
Weyhill Road
Andover
Hants SP10 3AJ

4th November 2019

For the attention of Sarah Hughes, Neighbourhood Planning Officer

Dear Ms Hughes

Houghton NDP - Request for screening opinion on requirement for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA)

As you know, Houghton Parish Council are in the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). An outline of the emerging NDP has been developed with regard to a vision, objectives and planning policies, and we will shortly be starting to write the document itself.

We are aware of the need to consider the implications for environmental assessment and have read your helpful guidance note of December 2016.

In line with that guidance, we are now writing to request a screening opinion on the need for SEA and HRA. We enclose a supporting report, prepared by our consultant, that aims to provide sufficient information for you and others to consider whether our NDP is likely to have significant environmental effects.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any further information at this stage. You are welcome to contact our consultant direct (his details are at the end of the supporting report); please copy me in to any correspondence.

Yours sincerely

CLCotterell

Mrs C L Cotterell
Parish Clerk and RFO to Houghton Parish Council

Houghton Neighbourhood Development Plan

Request for a screening opinion on the need for Strategic
Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations
Assessment

Supporting report

November 2019

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared to accompany a request by Houghton Parish Council to Test Valley Borough Council for a screening opinion as to whether the proposed Houghton Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) is likely to have significant environmental effects, and so require Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).
- 1.2 The request is made pursuant to Regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.¹ This requires the consideration of specified criteria, listed in Schedule 1 to the Regulations. The Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England should be consulted (the consultation bodies).
- 1.3 The Parish Council is also seeking an opinion from the Borough Council as to whether an appropriate assessment of the NDP will be required under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.² Such a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) must be undertaken if the NDP is deemed likely to have a significant effect on a European site of nature conservation importance, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.
- 1.4 Guidance on these matters has been produced for NDP groups by the Borough Council.³ The guidance advises groups to seek a screening opinion from the Borough Council at the earliest stage of plan preparation. It requires that the request be accompanied by a report that includes a summary of what the plan is likely to propose (e.g. types of policies and the broad quantum and approximate locations of any potential development) and any features of the Neighbourhood Area which may be affected.
- 1.5 This report confirms the overall parameters of the proposed NDP and relevant environmental considerations to enable a screening opinion on the need for SEA and HRA to be provided by the Borough Council. It provides:
 - A summary of the relevant environmental features in the Houghton Neighbourhood Area (section 2);
 - A summary of the proposed Houghton NDP (section 3); and
 - An initial assessment of the potential for significant environmental effects, against the Schedule 1 criteria (section 4).

¹ SI 2004 No. 1633.

² Pursuant to Regulations 105 and 106 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 SI 2017 No. 1012 as amended.

³ Test Valley Borough Council, Neighbourhood Development Plans, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment Guidance, December 2016

2. Environmental features in the Houghton Neighbourhood Area

- 2.1 The Neighbourhood Area was designated in June 2017 (Figure 1). It covers the administrative area of Houghton Parish Council, an area of 1,688 hectares. The Neighbourhood Area extends to the west and south-west of Stockbridge and principally comprises open countryside and scattered woodland. Its eastern boundary is marked by the River Test.



© Crown copyright and database rights (2019) Ordnance Survey (0100048066).

Figure 1: Houghton Neighbourhood Area

2.2 The resident population of the Neighbourhood Area is estimated as 435 as at 2016.⁴ Houghton is the main focus of settlement and has developed organically alongside the river, using the flat land of the valley floor for building. The village retains a clear linear form although more recent development has extended up the valley slope to the west, for instance at Stevens Drove.

2.3 The principal natural environment features to be considered are:

- River Test Site of Special Scientific Interest.
- 3 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation:
 - TV0214 Eveley Wood (3 sites)
 - TV0231 Wallop Brook Meadows (east)
 - TV0267 Horsebridge Water Meadows Central.
- Habitats recorded on Natural England's Magic Map:⁵
 - Floodplain grazing marsh, woodland and lowland fens in the Test river valley
 - Floodplain grazing marsh, good quality semi-improved grassland, purple moor grass and rush pastures and lowland meadows in the Wallop Brook corridor
 - Ancient and semi-natural woodland at Eveley Wood
 - Other scattered areas of deciduous and coniferous woodland including Saddler's Plantation at Houghton Down.
- Flood Zones 2 and 3 associated with the corridors of the River Test and the Wallop Brook.

2.4 The principal historic environment features to be considered are:

- Houghton and Bossington Conservation Area, comprising the historic core of the village on the river valley floor as well as water meadows and other open land. The Conservation Area extends beyond the boundary of the Neighbourhood Area to the south.
- 45 listed buildings, all grade II except for three listed grade II*: Houghton Lodge, the Old Rectory, and All Saints Church.
- A Scheduled Ancient Monument: John of Gaunt's Deer Park Pale.
- A registered Historic Park and Garden: Houghton Lodge (grade II*).

⁴ Test Valley Borough Council, Houghton parish profile.

⁵ <http://www.natureonthemap.naturalengland.org.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

3. Summary of the proposed NDP

Scope and format of the proposed NDP

3.1 The scope and format of the emerging NDP has been informed by community consultation, with a residents' survey in 2018 canvassing views on a range of topics including housing and development, community facilities, business and infrastructure, and environment. The survey achieved a response rate of 50%, demonstrating significant community interest in the plan process.

3.2 The NDP's draft vision reflects the findings of the residents' survey. The vision is that by the end of the plan period in 2029:

The village of Houghton will be a peaceful and tranquil village with a strong sense of community. It will have maintained its rural character, protected its heritage and be surrounded by accessible unspoilt countryside.

3.3 This vision is supported by six draft objectives, as follows:

- To conserve the rural character of the village and to preserve and enhance the things that are valued by the people of Houghton such as its peace and tranquillity.
- To ensure that any future development is in keeping with the rural setting and meets the needs of the community.
- To protect the Conservation Area, important buildings and open spaces.
- To ensure that any future development takes account of the impact on the community including infrastructure and amenities.
- To protect the recreational areas and access to open countryside.
- To protect and enhance the community facilities.

3.4 The NDP will set out nine planning policies to help achieve the vision and objectives. The proposed policies cover a range of natural and built environment and community matters and are listed in Table 1.

3.5 The policies will be supplemented by a set of "Community Actions" which will be specified in respect of non-land use matters which have arisen through the NDP consultations and information gathering. These include traffic management, highway and verge maintenance, public transport, and mobile and broadband communications.

Relationship to Test Valley Borough Revised Local Plan 2011-2029

3.6 The proposed policies in the NDP will add local detail to, but not duplicate, the planning policies of the Test Valley Borough Revised Local Plan 2011-2029 (TVBRLP), which was adopted in January 2016.

Policy reference and title	Purpose
HTN1 Sustainable development	Provide for sustainable development by balancing social, economic and environmental objectives.
HTN2 Community services and facilities	Identify community services and facilities.
HTN3 Type of new housing	Encourage new housing to be of a size, type and tenure to meet local needs.
HTN4 Village design	Provide guidance on criteria to be used when assessing the design of development proposals, taking account of the emerging Village Design Statement.
HTN5 Houghton and Bossington Conservation Area	Provide guidance on assessment of development proposals affecting the Houghton and Bossington Conservation Area,* incorporating key principles from the Conservation Area Policy into the development plan.
HTN6 Landscape character	Provide guidance on protecting, conserving and enhancing the landscape character of the Neighbourhood Area.
HTN7 Landscape views	Identify important local views of the wider landscape and the settlements within it, such views to be respected by development proposals and retained.
HTN8 Local Green Spaces (LGS)	Designate LGS of particular importance to the local community where the relevant criteria in the National Planning Policy Framework are met (NPPF).
HTN9 Renewable energy projects	Provide guidance on how proposals for larger-scale renewable energy projects such as solar farms will be assessed.

Table 1: Houghton NDP proposed policies

* the southern part of the Conservation Area is outside the Neighbourhood Area.

- 3.7 TVBRLP policy COM2 identifies Houghton as one of a number of “rural villages” in the settlement hierarchy, and provides that the associated scale of housing and economic development will comprise:
- Windfalls
 - Rural Affordable Housing sites
 - Replacement dwellings
 - Community-led Development
 - Small business uses
 - Re-use of Buildings.
- 3.8 The TVBRLP provides a settlement boundary for Houghton,⁶ thereby defining the extent of the village for planning purposes. Outside the settlement boundary, policy COM2 provides that development is to be restricted to a number of specific circumstances. This is in line with national planning policy to protect the countryside and promote sustainable development in rural areas.
- 3.9 The NDP will strongly endorse the overall approach to the location and management of new development established through the policies of the TVBRLP. The NDP will not allocate sites for development.⁷ It is not expected to propose or anticipate any rural exception affordable housing under Local Plan policy COM8 or community-led development under policy COM9.
- 3.10 New development in the NDP plan period to 2029 will therefore be limited to windfall sites within the defined settlement boundary, where these can be brought forward within TVBRLP policies E1 and E9 (these policies address high quality development and heritage assets respectively).
- 3.11 The NDP will not include proposals for development in excess of that already considered through the Local Plan process and its environmental assessments.
- 3.12 In respect of biodiversity and the historic environment, these are addressed by TVBRLP policies E5 and E9 respectively, as well as by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). No further provision is required or is proposed to be made on these matters in the NDP, save for proposed policy HTN5 for the Houghton and Bossington Conservation Area which will add local detail to the Borough-wide approach.

⁶ Inset Maps 24 Houghton (North) and 25 Houghton (South) and Bossington.

⁷ The allocation of sites for development is given in Planning Practice Guidance as an example of the circumstances in which plans may be likely to have a significant effect on the environment (Paragraph: 073 Reference ID: 41-073-20190509)

4. Potential for significant environmental effects

4.1 This section assesses the emerging Houghton NDP against each of the criteria for determining the likely significance of effects on the environment, as defined in Schedule 1 to the 2004 Regulations. The assessments given in Table 2 below are offered as a starting point for consideration by the Borough Council as the responsible authority, and by the consultation bodies.

Criteria	Assessment of the Houghton NDP	Significant environmental effect?
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 Houghton NDP will include policies against which development proposals in the Neighbourhood Area will be considered, in conjunction with policies in the TVBRLP and the NPPF. The NDP will be in general conformity with strategic policies in the Local Plan. Its policies will be criteria-based and will focus on seeking the protection and enhancement of the existing character of the village and the surrounding countryside. They will not propose new development in addition or in contradiction to that provided for in the TVBRLP. They will provide a basis for decision-making in relation to proposals, rather than setting a framework for projects or allocating resources.	N
(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;	The Houghton NDP will, when made, form part of the statutory Development Plan. There are no plans or programmes that need to be in conformity with it. The NDP will therefore not significantly influence other plans and programmes.	N
(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;	The Houghton NDP will seek to promote sustainable development and include policies as listed in Table 1 to protect and enhance environmental and heritage assets and features. It will have a positive effect on the natural and built environment, adding local detail to TVBRLP policies and those in the NPPF. Any development proposed will be in accordance with the environmental protection policies of the TVBRLP and the NPPF, which also seek to achieve sustainable development.	N

Criteria	Assessment of the Houghton NDP	Significant environmental effect?
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and	None identified specific to the Houghton NDP. In respect of the water environment, TVBRLP policy E7 already addresses issues of water supply, waste water treatment and sewerage capacity in enabling planned levels of growth, and the NDP will not provide for additional development over and above that provided for in the Local Plan.	N
(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).	The Houghton NDP will contain policies to protect and enhance the natural and built environments. As such it will aid in the implementation of EU legislation on the environment. In respect of the water environment, including issues of water supply, waste water treatment and sewerage capacity, TVBRLP policy E7 already seeks water quality improvements to support the attainment of the requirements of the Water Framework Directive. The NDP will not provide for additional development over and above that provided for in the Local Plan.	N
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 Houghton NDP will contain policies whose main focus is the protection and enhancement of the existing character of the village and surrounding countryside. It will not allocate sites for development. The overall effect of the NDP, given its focus on environmental protection and enhancement, is expected to be strongly positive.	N
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;	The Houghton NDP will add local detail and give effect to the TVBRLP and the NPPF in respect of existing designations such as the Conservation Area. Reflecting this alignment of plans and policies, any cumulative effects arising from the operation of the NDP with respect to the built and natural environment of the Neighbourhood Area are expected to be strongly positive.	N
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects;	The Houghton NDP will not have any transboundary effects.	N

Criteria	Assessment of the Houghton NDP	Significant environmental effect?
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);	There are considered to be no risks to human health arising from the Houghton NDP.	N
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);	The Houghton Neighbourhood Area extends to 1,688 hectares (2.7% of the area of Test Valley Borough) with an estimated 2016 population of 435 (0.4% of the Borough population). The NDP has a restricted local focus and as a result the overall environmental effects of the Plan, which are themselves expected to be positive, will be relatively limited in magnitude and spatial extent.	N
(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	(i) relevant natural characteristics and cultural heritage factors are summarised above at paras. 2.3 and 2.4. The Houghton NDP will include policies to protect and enhance these characteristics and factors as relevant; (ii) None identified specific to the Houghton NDP. In respect of the water environment, TVBRLP policy E7 seeks water quality improvements to support the attainment of the requirements of the Water Framework Directive. The NDP will not provide for additional development over and above that provided for in the Local Plan. (iii) None identified.	N
(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	Effects on designated sites are considered above. For European sites they will also be addressed in determining whether an appropriate assessment (HRA) of the NDP will be required under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.	N

Table 2: Consideration of Houghton NDP against the Schedule 1 criteria

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The overall conclusion arising from Table 2 is that the proposed Houghton NDP is unlikely to have significant environmental effects and therefore does not require SEA. It is recommended that a determination to this effect is considered.
- 5.2 In respect of HRA, a screening opinion is required to determine whether the Houghton NDP is likely to have a significant effect on any European site of nature conservation importance. There are no European sites within, or in near vicinity of, the Neighbourhood Area. The nearest such site is the Mottisfont Bats Special Area of Conservation, 3.2 km to the south-west at its closest point. The limited scale of development which may arise through the NDP is entirely consistent with that provided for in the TVBRLP, which has already been assessed under the Habitats Regulations. Taking all this into account, significant effects on European sites arising from the proposed Houghton NDP are unlikely. An appropriate assessment (HRA) is not considered to be required.

Dr DJ Nicholson MRTPI

DJN Planning

Ltd 01432

850117

plan@oldschool50.myzen.co.uk

November 2019

Annex B
Responses from Natural England
and Historic England

From: Brown, Nicola
Sent: 11 December 2019 15:42
To: Neighbourhood Planning
Subject: Screening Opinion for SEA / HRA for the Houghton Neighbourhood Plan

Dear Sarah

Thank you for submitting a screening request for the Houghton Neighbourhood Plan SEA and HRA. Based on the location of the neighbourhood and the information submitted in support of the screening request, notably that the plan will not be allocating sites for development, Natural England do not consider that a SEA is required. Based on this same information we concur with the conclusion that an appropriate assessment would not be required.

Kind regards

Nicola

Sustainable Development Lead Advisor
Thames Solent Area Team
Natural England
4th Floor
Eastleigh House
Upper Market Street
Eastleigh
SO50 9YN



Historic England

Ms Sarah Hughes
Test Valley Borough Council
Neighbourhood Planning

Direct Dial: -

Our ref: PL00635001
11 December 2019

Dear Ms Hughes

RE: Houghton Neighbourhood Plan SEA Screening

Thank you for your email of 5th November 2019 regarding the above consultation. As the Government's adviser on the historic environment Historic England is keen to ensure that the protection of the historic environment is fully taken into account at all stages and levels of the local planning process. Therefore we welcome this opportunity to review the Screening Report for this plan. For the purposes of this consultation, Historic England will confine its advice to the question, "Is it (the Houghton Neighbourhood Plan) likely to have a significant effect on the historic environment?". Our comments are based on the information supplied with the Screening Opinion.

The Screening Report indicates that the Parish Council considers that the plan will not have any significant effects on the historic environment. We note that the neighbourhood plan does not seek to allocate land for development. On the basis of the information supplied, and in the context of the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment Regulations [Annex II of 'SEA' Directive], Historic England concurs with the Parish Council that the preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.

The views of the other two statutory consultation bodies should be taken into account before the overall decision on the need for an SEA is made.

I should be pleased if you can send a copy of the determination as required by REG 11 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. We should like to stress that this opinion is based on the information provided by you with your correspondence dated 5th November 2019. To avoid any doubt, this does not reflect our obligation to provide further advice on later stages of the SA/SEA process and, potentially, object to specific proposals which may subsequently arise (either as a result of this consultation or in later versions of the plan/guidance) where we consider that, despite the SA/SEA, these would have an adverse effect upon the environment.

Historic England strongly advises that the conservation and archaeological staff of the relevant local authorities are closely involved throughout the preparation of the plan and its assessment. They are best placed to advise on; local historic environment issues and priorities, including access to data held in the Historic Environment Record (HER), how the allocation, policy or proposal can be tailored to minimise potential adverse impacts on the historic environment; the nature and design of any required mitigation measures; and opportunities for securing wider benefits for the future conservation and management of heritage assets.

Yours sincerely,

Hannah Blackmore Business Officer

Checked by Rob Lloyd Sweet- Historic Places Advisor



4TH FLOOR, CANNON BRIDGE HOUSE, 25 DOWGATE HILL, LONDON EC4R 2YA

Telephone 020 7973 3700
HistoricEngland.org.uk



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

Annex C

Letter to Parish Council

Mrs Clare Cotterell
Clerk
Houghton Parish Council

Planning and Economic Development
Beech Hurst
Weyhill Road
Andover, Hants SP10 3AJ
Telephone 01264 368000
Minicom 01264 368052
Web site www.testvalley.gov.uk

Contact: Sarah Hughes
Telephone: 01264 368000
E-mail: shughes@testvalley.gov.uk
Your ref:
Our ref: Houghton NDP
Date: 23 December 2019

Dear Ms Cotterell

Houghton Neighbourhood Plan

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

I write in response to your request for a screening opinion for Strategic Environmental Assessment in relation to the proposed Houghton Neighbourhood Plan. This request was received by the Council on the 4th November 2019. Regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 requires that the responsible authority (Test Valley Borough Council) shall determine whether or not a plan is likely to have significant environmental effects.

As part of making this assessment, the responsible authority shall —
(a) take into account the criteria specified in Schedule 1 to these Regulations; and
(b) consult the consultation bodies.

The Regulations advise that where the responsible authority determines that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects (and, accordingly, does not require an environmental assessment), it shall prepare a statement of its reasons for the determination. This statement will be published on our website in due course.

Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic England, as the statutory consultation bodies for the Regulations, were consulted on this SEA screening request. The consultation started on 5th November 2019 for a five week period, ending on 11th December 2019.

Having reviewed the letter and associated report provided, the consultation response from Natural England and Historic England indicate that having regard to the matters within their remit, the proposed Neighbourhood Plan would **not be likely** to have significant environmental effects.

The Council has had due regard to the statutory consultee responses and the criteria within Schedule 1 of the Regulations in coming to a view on whether the proposed Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects. Based on the summary of the proposed Neighbourhood Plan (as provided within the supporting report), it is the Council's opinion that the Plan would not be likely to have significant environmental effects. On this basis, a Strategic Environmental Assessment would not be required for the proposed Houghton Neighbourhood Plan.

With regards to the Habitats Regulations Assessment and whether an Appropriate Assessment is required, the Council concludes that the proposed Neighbourhood Plan is not likely to have a significant effect on European designations. . This view is supported by Natural England.

You are advised that if the anticipated vision and scope of policies for the Neighbourhood Plan are subject to significant change, it would be appropriate to review the Screening Opinion and the position regarding the Habitat Regulations Assessment.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hughes
Neighbourhood Planning Officer