

Wiltshire Council

Strategic Environmental Assessment

**Screening determination for the Draft Warminster Neighbourhood
Plan**

August 2023

Wiltshire Council


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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document provides a screening determination of the need to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Draft Warminster Neighbourhood Plan (hereafter 'draft WNP').
- 1.2 Wiltshire Council, as the 'Responsible Authority'¹ under the SEA Regulations², is responsible for undertaking this screening process. It will determine if the draft WNP is likely to have significant environmental effects, and hence whether SEA is required.
- 1.3 This process has been carried out in accordance with the requirements of European Directive 2001/42/EC³, often known as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive, which has been transposed into English law by the SEA Regulations.

2. Legislative requirements

2.1 The Localism Act 2011 requires neighbourhood plans to comply with EU legislation. The screening procedure outlined in this report meets the requirements of the SEA Directive and Regulations, as introduced in Section 1 of this document.

2.2 Regulation 5 of the SEA Regulations requires an environmental assessment of plans which:

- 1. are prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use (Regulation 5, para. (2)(a), **and** which set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annex I or II to Council Directive 85/337/EEC (EIA Directive) on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (Reg. 5, para. (2)(b)
- 2. in view of the likely effect on sites, have been determined to require an assessment pursuant to Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) (Reg. 5, para. (3)
- 3. set the framework for future development consent of projects⁴ (Reg. 5, para. (4)(b)
- 4. are determined to be likely to have significant environmental effects as determined under regulation 9(1) (Reg. 5, para. (4)(c)

An environmental assessment need not be carried out for:

- a) plans which determine the use of a small area⁵ at local level (Regulation 5, para. (6)(a); or
- b) plans which are a minor modification⁶ to a plan or programme (Regulation 5, para. (6)(b) unless it has been determined under regulation 9(1) that the plan is likely to have significant environmental effects.

2.3 The diagram⁷ below shows the SEA Directive's requirements and its application to neighbourhood plans:

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? (SEA Directive Art. 2(a))

in Wiltshire Council's guide *Neighbourhood planning the plan*.
2004

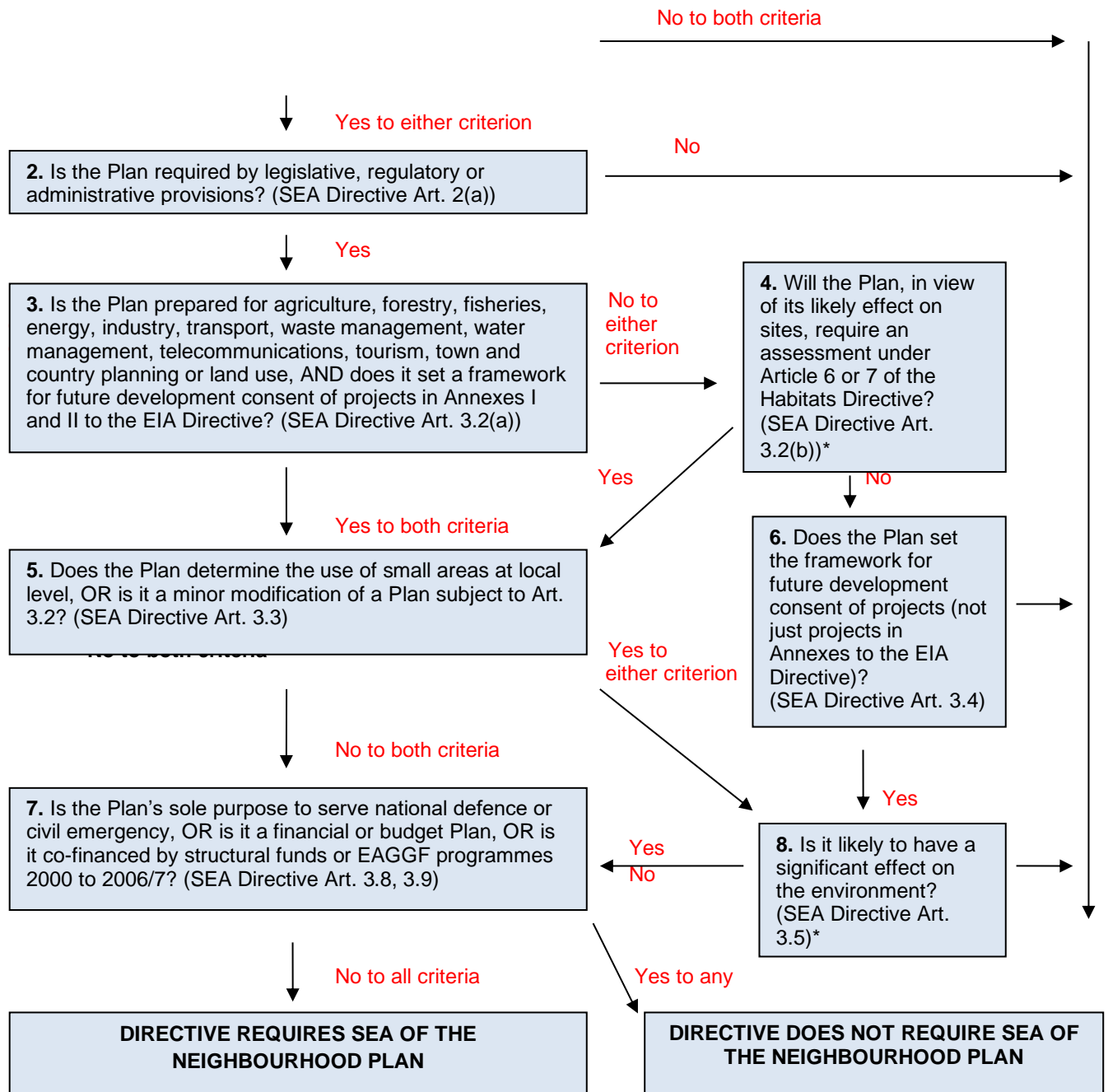
³ European Directive 2001/42/EC "on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment"

⁴ European Commission guidance states that plans and programmes which set the framework for future development consent of projects would normally contain 'criteria or conditions which guide the way a consenting authority decides an application for development consent'. Development consent is defined in the EIA Directive as "the decision of the competent authority or authorities which entitled the developer to proceed with the project" (Article 1(2) of the EIA Directive).

⁵ European Commission guidance suggests that plans which determine the use of small areas at local level might include "a building plan which, for a particular, limited area, outlines details of how buildings must be constructed, determining, for example, their height, width or design"

⁶ 'Minor modifications' should be considered in the context of the plan or programme which is being modified and of the likelihood of their having significant environmental effects. A modification may be of such small order that it is unlikely to have significant environmental effects.

⁷ Taken from *A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive* ODPM, 2005)

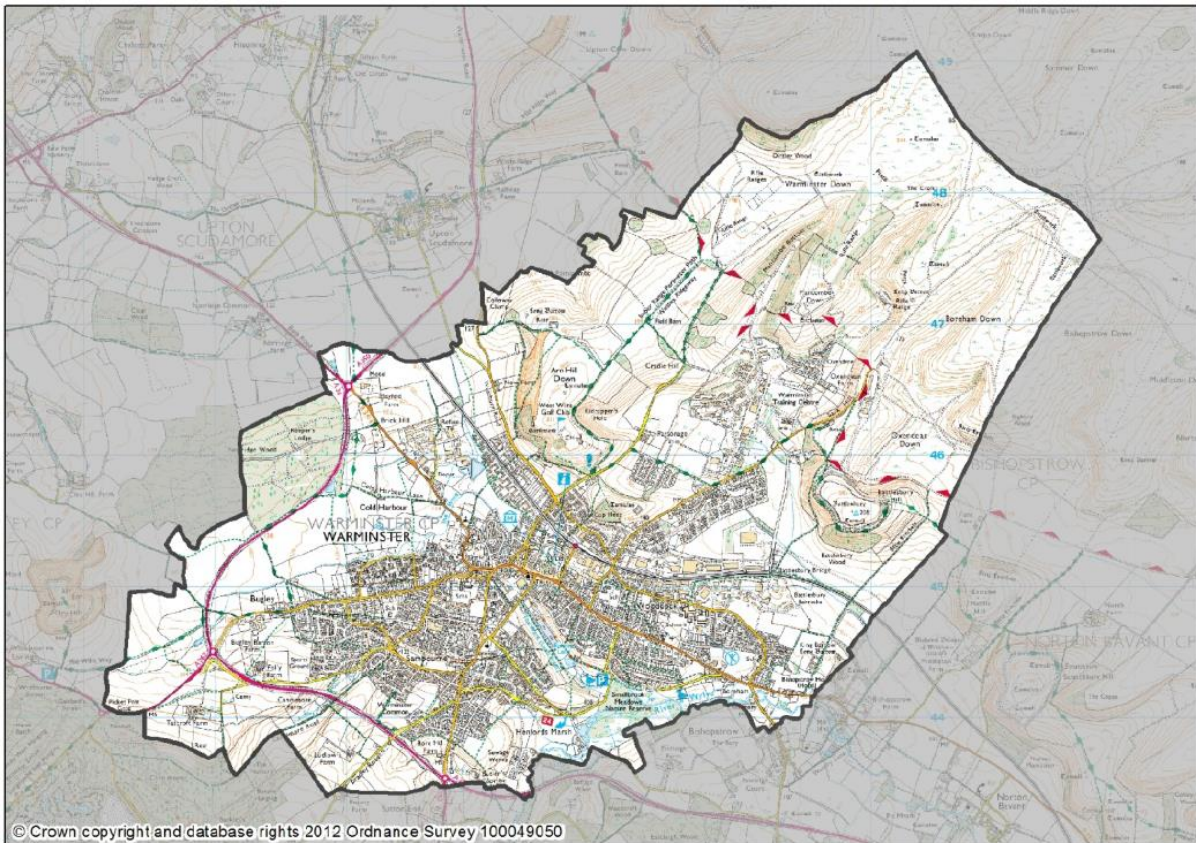


* Plans falling in this category (No.8) will be screened by Wiltshire Council to determine if they are likely to have significant environmental effects. This determination will be made on a case-by-case basis for neighbourhood plans coming forward in Wiltshire.

NB This diagram is intended as a guide to the criteria for application of the Directive to neighbourhood plans. It has no legal status.

3. The Draft Warminster Neighbourhood Plan

- 3.1 The parish of Warminster is preparing a neighbourhood plan under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011.
- 3.2 The designation of the Warminster Neighbourhood Area was made on 5th March 2013 (see map of area outlined in black below). For the designation notice see <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planning-neighbourhood-latest-news>



3.3 This screening decision is based on, and accompanied by, a draft review of policies in the neighbourhood plan dated February 2023.

4. SEA Screening assessment

4.1 Wiltshire Council, as the 'Responsible Authority', considers that the draft WNP falls within the scope of the SEA Regulations on the basis that it is a plan that:

a) is subject to preparation or adoption by an authority at national, regional or local level (Regulation 2);

b) is prepared for town and country planning or land use and it is a plan that sets the framework for future development consent of projects generally (Regulation 5); and

c) will apply to a wider area other than a small area at local level and is not a minor modification to an existing plan or programme (Regulation 5).

4.2 A determination under Regulation 9 is therefore required as to whether the draft WNP is likely to have significant effects on the environment.

4.3 The screening requirements set out in Regulation 9 and Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations includes two sets of characteristics for determining the likely significance of effects on the environment. These relate to i) the characteristics of the draft WNP and ii) the characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected by the draft WNP. In making a determination, Wiltshire Council will take into account the criteria specified in Schedule 1 of the Regulations which are follows:

1. The characteristics of the 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;

(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;

(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;

(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and

(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).

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;

(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;

(c) the transboundary nature of the effects;

(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);

(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);

(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

(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.

The screening assessment of the draft WNP is set out below:

Criteria (Schedule 1 SEA Regs.)	Significant environmental effects likely?	Justification and evidence
1. The characteristics of plans, having regard, in particular, to:		
(a) the degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regards to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources	No	The neighbourhood plan covers the Warminster parish area only. Warminster is identified as a market town in the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS). Whilst the draft Plan does set a framework for projects at the parish level, it does not set a framework for a significant degree of projects or other activities.
(b) the degree to which the plan influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	No	The draft WNP is produced by the local community to influence development at the local parish level. The draft WNP will not have a significant influence on other plans and programmes or those in a hierarchy. All neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area, contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and have regard to national policies.
(c) the relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations, in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	No	The draft WNP is a land-use plan that promotes sustainable development, in general conformity with the Local Plan and national planning guidance. It is not a Plan specifically relating to the integration of environmental considerations.
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan	No	There are no known specific environmental problems relevant to this Plan. The parish is mostly designated as a market town in the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS).
(e) 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)	No	The neighbourhood plan is not relevant as a plan for implementing community legislation.
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	Yes	The draft WNP covers the market town of Warminster. There are no proposed development site allocations. Policies seek to protect and enhance the natural, built and historic environment. Policies supporting new development do not introduce anything that is over and above that supported by the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS). The Council's ecologist has confirmed that, having been screened under the Habitats Regulations, an appropriate assessment (AA) will be required. Whilst the NP does not allocate any sites for development, it does however

		support development within the NP area. The NP must therefore be subject to appropriate assessment due to the potential for recreational effects on the River Avon SAC. As an AA is required, an SEA is also required.
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects	No	No specific cumulative effects of the proposals are considered likely.
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects	No	No transboundary effects with other EU countries are considered likely to be significant.
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents)	No	There are no significant environmental effects considered likely to risk human health or the environment.
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	Yes	<p>The draft WNP covers the market town of Warminster. The 2021 Census records 18,016 people living in the parish. The geographical size of the town and support for development within the draft Plan mean that it is considered likely to have some significant environmental effects which should be investigated through an SEA assessment.</p> <p>The Council's ecologist has confirmed that, having been screened under the Habitats Regulations, an appropriate assessment (AA) will be required. Whilst the NP does not allocate any sites for development, it does however support development within the NP area. The NP must therefore be subject to appropriate assessment due to the potential for recreational effects on the River Avon SAC. As an AA is required, an SEA is also required.</p>
(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;	Yes	<p>The draft WNP covers the market town of Warminster. There are no proposed development site allocations. Policies seek to protect and enhance the natural, built and historic environment. Policies supporting new development do not introduce anything that is over and above that supported by the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS).</p> <p>The draft Plan is considered unlikely to have significant environmental effects due to exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values or intensive land-use.</p> <p>The Council's ecologist has confirmed that, having been screened under the Habitats Regulations, an appropriate assessment (AA) will be required. Whilst the NP does not allocate any sites for development, it does however support development within the NP area. The NP must therefore be subject to appropriate assessment due to the potential for recreational effects on the River Avon SAC. As an AA is required, an SEA is also required.</p>
(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	Yes	<p>The draft WNP covers the market town of Warminster. There are no proposed development site allocations. Policies seek to protect and enhance the natural, built and historic environment. Policies supporting new development do not introduce anything that is over and above that supported by the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS).</p> <p>The Council's ecologist has confirmed that, having been screened under the Habitats Regulations, an appropriate assessment (AA) will be required. Whilst the NP does not allocate any sites for development, it does however support development within the NP area. The NP must therefore be subject to appropriate assessment due to the potential for recreational effects on the River Avon SAC. As an AA is required, an SEA is also required.</p>

5. SEA Screening decision

5.1 Regulation 9 of the SEA Regulations requires that the responsible authority (Wiltshire Council) shall determine whether or not a plan is likely to have significant environmental effects. The responsible authority shall —

- (a) take into account the criteria specified in Schedule 1 to these Regulations; and
- (b) consult the consultation bodies (Historic England, Natural England, Environment Agency).

5.2 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.

5.3 Wiltshire Council considers that the draft WNP **is likely to have significant environmental effects** and accordingly **a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required**. This decision is made for the following reason:

Reason 1: The Council's ecologist has confirmed that, having been screened under the Habitats Regulations, an appropriate assessment (AA) will be required. Whilst the NP does not allocate any sites for development, it does however support development within the NP area. The NP must therefore be subject to appropriate assessment due to the potential for recreational effects on the River Avon SAC. As an AA is required, an SEA is also required.

5.4 This SEA screening has been undertaken on a draft review of the neighbourhood plan policies dated February 2023. It is possible that these proposals may change. If the draft Plan is subsequently amended significantly from these proposals i.e. changes that substantially alter the draft plan and/or are likely to give rise to additional significant environmental effects, or it is subsequently decided that the draft Plan should be subject to an Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Regulations, this SEA screening must be reviewed. In this instance, the Qualifying Body should request a revised SEA screening assessment from Wiltshire Council.

6. Consultation on SEA screening decision

6.1 This screening decision was sent to Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic England, requesting comments within a 5-week period from 20th July 2023 to 24th August 2023.

6.2 Comments were received from all three consultees who agreed that an SEA was required for the plan. These comments are included in Appendix 1.

Historic England

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your SEA Screening consultation associated with a review of the Warminster Neighbourhood Plan.

Based on the draft review document I can confirm that there are no issues associated with the policies it proposes upon which we are likely to wish to comment in detail.

There does not appear to be an historic environment issue(s) which in itself would generate significant effects likely to prompt the need for a full SEA. However, we note the connection between the need for an AA and wider SEA implications, and we therefore have no objection to the view that as a consequence a full SEA is required.

Environment Agency

Dear [REDACTED]

Draft Warminster Neighbourhood Plan - SEA screening

Thank you for consulting the Environment Agency on the above SEA screening.

Screening Decision

We have no objection to the LPA's screening decision.

Policies

The draft plan includes a comprehensive range of policies, from the perspective of the Environment Agency.

Draft Policy NHE4 - Green and Blue Infrastructure

This policy could reference the Wiltshire Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy.

Draft Policy NHE8 - Managing Flood Risk

This policy could also reference the Wiltshire Design Guide.

Draft Policy NHE10 – Trees, Shrubs and Hedgerows

We strongly support a policy specifically about trees as they offer many different benefits, including urban shading, ecological benefits, and slowing the flow of surface water. We would encourage this policy to go further however, particularly in relation to tree maintenance and making adequate space for new trees. Many young urban trees fail because they are not given adequate space in new developments and they are not well cared for and protected when they are young/newly planted. This policy could include measures to address these risks.

We look forward to seeing further drafts of the Warminster Neighbourhood Plan.

Natural England

Dear [REDACTED],

Draft Warminster Neighbourhood Plan - SEA Screening Consultation

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 20 July 2023.

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.

Natural England is a statutory consultee in neighbourhood planning and must be consulted on draft neighbourhood development plans by the Parish/Town Councils or Neighbourhood Forums where they consider our interests would be affected by the proposals made.

We have considered the screening assessment of the Neighbourhood Plan against the requirements of the criteria set out in the SEA Directive. Based on the information provided, Natural England agrees the Neighbourhood Plan appears likely to give rise to significant environmental effects and your conclusion that a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required is reasonable.

We would be happy to comment further should the need arise but in the meantime if you have any queries relating to the above please contact me via email – [REDACTED]
For any further consultations on your plan, please contact: [REDACTED]