

St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan

2019 – 2036 Submission Version

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Updated Screening Opinion – February 2021

Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening opinion

Introduction

This re-screening opinion has been prepared to determine whether or not a full Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required. This is to ensure that the proposed Plan is in accordance with Regulations 5 and 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the regulations) and to meet the 'Basic Conditions' for Neighbourhood Development Plans set out in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (amended).

Background

A re-screening report was produced by consultants and is attached at Appendix 1. The report concluded that there are unlikely to be significant detrimental environmental impacts as a result of the policies contained within the St Stephen Parish Neighbourhood Plan and that the SEA is therefore unlikely to be required.

In accordance with the regulations, Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency were consulted on the findings of the screening report during January 2021. The following responses were received (reproduced in full at Appendix 2).

Consultation Body	Summary of Response
Natural England	Agree with the conclusion of the SEA screening report that a Strategic Environmental Assessment would not be required.
Historic England	We note that the plan does not now propose to allocate sites for development. There are therefore no likely significant effects arising from the production of this plan.
Environment Agency	On the basis that future development is steered away from the sensitive aspects of the environment highlighted above, 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.

Conclusion

The screening report concludes that an SEA is likely to be required. Historic England has concurred with this whilst Natural England has suggested that one is not required from its perspective. **It is determined therefore that the plan does require an SEA.**

Appendix 1:

St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan – Screening Opinion (sent to consultees on 18 January 2021)

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Appendix A: Copy of the Screening Opinion, May 2019 (separate pdf)

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of this report

A draft version of the St Stephen Parish Neighbourhood Plan was screened in early 2019 to determine whether or not it required a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/ EC and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations.

A Screening Opinion was published in May 2019 stating that an SEA was required, primarily because of the inclusion of site allocations on previously undeveloped greenfield land and the potential impacts this might have. A copy of the Screening Opinion, May 2019, is contained in Appendix A of this report (separate pdf).

Since that initial screening, changes have been made to the Neighbourhood Plan that are considered significant enough to warrant a new screening. All site allocations have been removed from the Neighbourhood Plan. This is due to the fact that all proposed sites were located in the Green Belt; the Neighbourhood Plan was seeking to amend the Green Belt boundaries, as enabled through para 136 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and allocate them for housing.

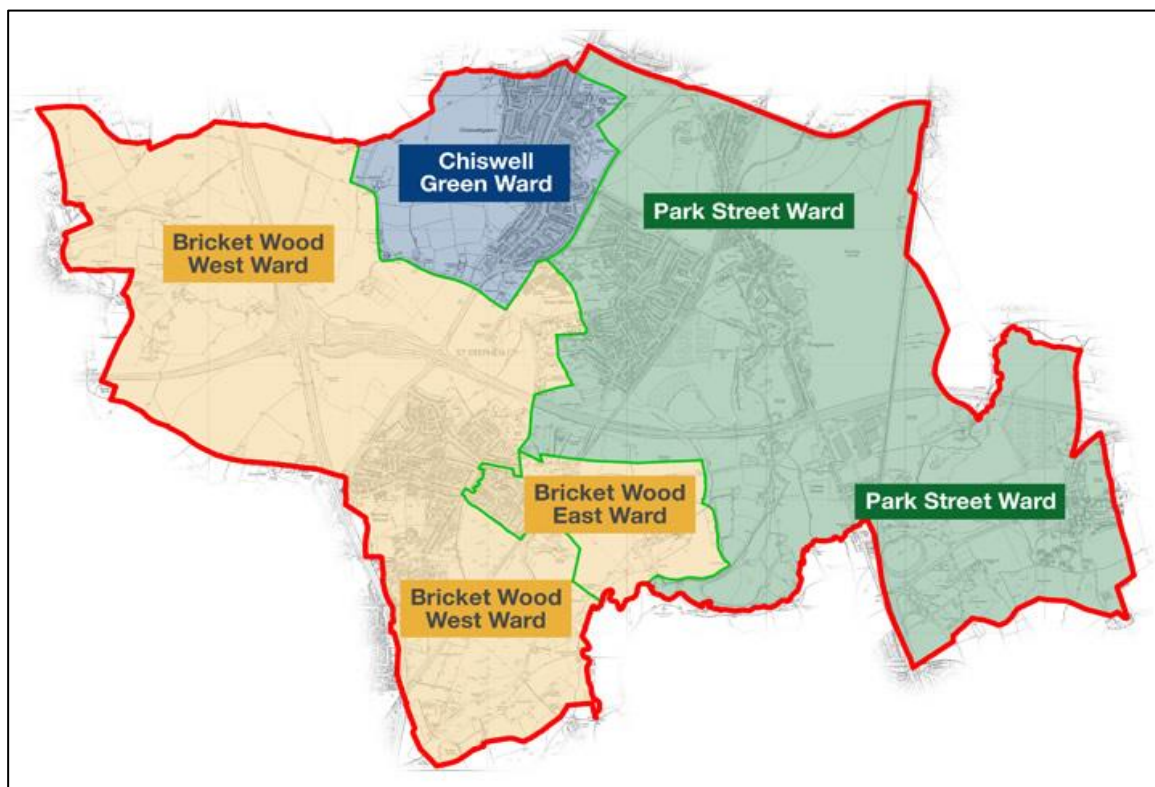
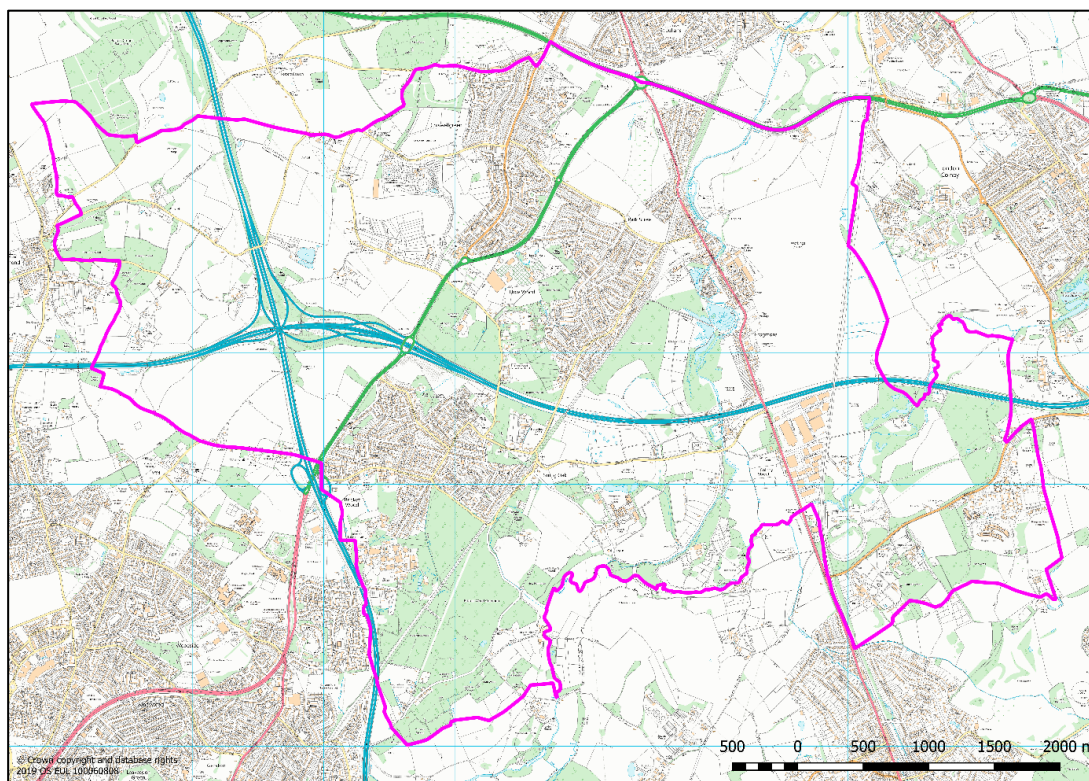
Whilst the NPPF enables neighbourhood plans to make alterations to the Green Belt boundary, however, this can only happen where a need to do so has been established at the strategic level, in this case the St Albans Local Plan. St Albans had been working on a new Local Plan to replace the saved policies of the existing Local Plan Review 1994. It had been anticipated that the new Local Plan 2018 would establish a strategic need for the review of Green Belt boundaries at the neighbourhood level. It was also anticipated that the emerging Local Plan 2018 would have been adopted well in advance of the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan.

In fact, the emerging St Albans Local Plan 2018 was withdrawn on 19 November 2020 following its Examination. The existing adopted Local District Plan Review 1994 does not establish a strategic need to review Green Belt boundaries at the Neighbourhood level.

Therefore, the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan does not seek to allocate sites for housing.

The purpose of this report is to provide an assessment of the most recent version of the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan to inform a re-screening of it for SEA purposes.

1.2 Maps of the St Stephen Parish designated area



1.3 The St Stephen Neighbourhood Development Plan 2019 to 2036

The Neighbourhood Development Plan sets out planning policies for St Stephen Parish. Once formally adopted, a Neighbourhood Plan carries the same legal weight as Local Development Plans adopted up by the Local Planning Authority (LPA), in this case St Albans District Council.

The St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan vision is:

This Neighbourhood Plan will go a long way to ensuring that in years to come St Stephen Parish will be a pleasant place to live, work and visit by:

- Retaining the individual character of each village;
- Protecting the Green Belt from inappropriate development¹;
- Putting green and open spaces, trees and woodlands at the heart of planning;
- Providing community leisure and recreation facilities to meet all residents' needs;
- Ensuring housing developments include smaller, affordable properties for first-time buyers, to help keep younger people in the villages, and also provide properties tailored to the ageing population;
- Ensuring that community facilities, such as health and medical centres, are within easy reach of all residents and there are sufficient education establishments for the young of the Parish to be able to attend without lengthy journeys by public or private transport;
- Supporting an effective public transport service and convenient and safe routes to encourage walking and cycling;
- Maintaining all existing rights of way and creating new ones to establish a linked-up network;
- Managing traffic, traffic speed and reducing the number of vehicles travelling through the Parish's villages to other destinations;
- Ensuring any development is sustainable and minimises the use of extra resources; and
- Supporting local retail businesses and the commercial sector in general.

To deliver this Vision, the following 10 Objectives have been established:

Theme	Objective
Housing, Character and Design of Development	<p>1. Support the development of housing that meets an identified local need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Smaller, more affordable properties for first-time buyers, thus helping to attract and retain more young people in the villages;

¹ Para 143 to 147 of the NPPF:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810197/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Properties suitable for existing older residents wishing to downsize; and • Housing suitable for and affordable to local workers. <p>2. Ensure new housing reflects the existing character of the Parish in terms of design, quality, style and materials (whilst not excluding more contemporary design where appropriate) with sustainable energy and water conservation measures included in plans.</p> <p>3. Counter the use of divisive gated communities.</p> <p>4. Retain the village character of each settlement and extend protection to non-designated heritage assets.</p>
Green Spaces and Environment	<p>5. Ensure that development is sensitively designed to be attractive, mitigate climate change, promote biodiversity and reduce the Parish's carbon footprint.</p> <p>6. Enhance and preserve valued green and open spaces, fields, trees and woodlands, ponds, lakes and water courses, within and around each village.</p> <p>7. Protect and increase wildlife habitats.</p>
Transport and Movement	<p>8. Improve transport and movement, in particular through further development of public transport provision and other non-car travel modes, whilst ensuring a safe environment for pedestrians and cyclists as well as motorists.</p>
Community Facilities	<p>9. Ensure that the provision of local amenities and infrastructure is sufficient to address the needs of existing and future residents.</p>
Business and Local Economy	<p>10. Strengthen, support and promote appropriate local economic activity in retail, industrial, commercial and professional fields while ensuring that such ventures are located in suitable and appropriate areas of the Parish.</p>

1.4 St Albans Local Plan

The current adopted St Albans Local Plan is The District Local Plan Review 1994. Local Plans “expired” after 27th September 2007 unless “saved”, in whole or in part. In 2007, a Direction was made saving specified policies of the District Local Plan Review 1994, i.e. they are still part of the development plan for St Albans.

St Albans District Council had been in the process of developing a new Local Plan for the district – the Local Plan 2018 - which would set out policies for development up to 2036. The emerging Local Plan 2018 was withdrawn on 19 November 2020 following its Examination². A new Local Plan is now being prepared but is at a very early visioning stage. Therefore the Local District Review 1994³ provides the strategic context for the St Stephen Parish Neighbourhood Plan.

² <https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/withdrawal-draft-local-plan-2018>

³ <https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/current-local-plan>

2 LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

2.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

The government has confirmed (24 October 2018) that both Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) will continue to operate with 'no substantive changes' following Brexit⁴. Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of plans and programmes on the environment states:

"Environmental assessment is an important tool for integrating environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

(10) All plans and programmes which are prepared for a number of sectors and which set a framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annexes I and II to Council Directive 85/337/EEC of 27 June 1985 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment(7), and all plans and programmes which have been determined to require assessment pursuant to Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna(8), are likely to have significant effects on the environment, and should as a rule be made subject to systematic environmental assessment. When they determine the use of small areas at local level or are minor modifications to the above plans or programmes, they should be assessed only where Member States determine that they are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

(11) Other plans and programmes which set the framework for future development consent of projects may not have significant effects on the environment in all cases and should be assessed only where Member States determine that they are likely to have such effects."

The St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan may influence frameworks for future development, or be used ancillary to those plans and programmes that do set such a framework, and as such it has been determined that the principle of the Neighbourhood Plan should be screened for the necessary application of the SEA Directive.

The Report from the Commission to The Council, The European Parliament, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions states, on the application and effectiveness of the Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment (Directive 2001/42/EC), that

'the following P&P, and modifications to them, are covered when prepared and/or adopted by an authority[2] and required pursuant to legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions:

- P&P prepared for certain sectors and which set the framework for future development consent in respect of projects under the Environmental Impact Assessment-EIA-Directive.*
- P&P requiring an assessment under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC).*
- P&P setting the framework for development consent in respect of projects (not limited to those listed in the EIA Directive; see above) and determined by "screening" as being likely to have significant environmental impacts".*

This report represents this screening process in regard to the content and influence of the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan.

⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5bd07150ed915d78ad8d4ea0/181011_---_FINAL_---_Combined_EIA_SEA_Misc_Planning_Exit_Regs.pdf

3 SEA SCREENING

3.1 When is SEA required?

Planning Practice Guidance – Strategic environmental assessment requirements for neighbourhood plans (Paragraph: 026 Reference ID: 11-026-20140306⁵) states that,

“In some limited circumstances, where a neighbourhood plan is likely to have significant environmental effects, it may require a strategic environmental assessment. Draft neighbourhood plan proposals should be assessed to determine whether the plan is likely to have significant environmental effects. This process is commonly referred to as a “screening” assessment and the requirements are set out in regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

If likely significant environmental effects are identified, an environmental report must be prepared in accordance with paragraph(2)and (3) of regulation 12 of those Regulations.

One of the basic conditions that will be tested by the independent examiner is whether the making of the neighbourhood plan is compatible with European Union obligations (including under the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive).

To decide whether a draft neighbourhood plan might have significant environmental effects, it must be assessed (screened) at an early stage of the plan’s preparation according to the requirements set out in regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. These include a requirement to consult the environmental assessment consultation bodies.

Each consultation body will be able to advise on particular topics relevant to its specific area of expertise and responsibility, and the specific information that it holds.

Where it is determined that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects (and, accordingly, does not require an environmental assessment), a statement of reasons for the determination should be prepared. A copy of the statement must be submitted with the neighbourhood plan proposal and made available to the independent examiner.”

The extract below from government guidance ‘A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive’ sets out the process for determining whether SEA is required:

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal# covid19>

Figure 2 – Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes

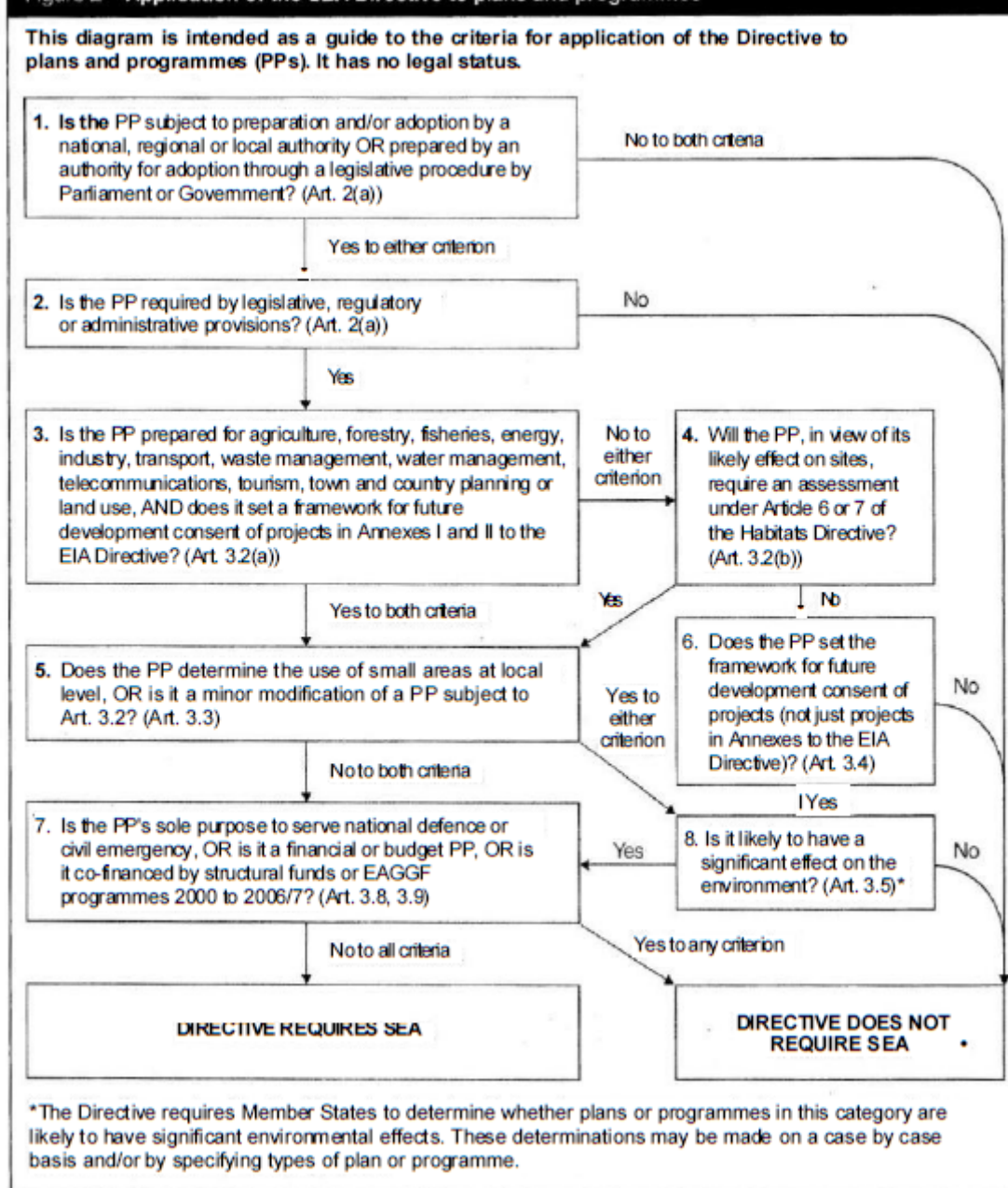


Table 1 below shows the assessment of whether the neighbourhood plan will require full SEA. The questions below are drawn from the diagram above which sets out how the SEA Directive should be applied:

Table 1: Establishing the need for SEA

Stage	Yes/No	Reason
1. Is the PP (plan or programme) subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Art. 2(a))	Yes	The PP will be prepared by St Stephen Parish Council and will be 'brought into force' by St Albans City and District Council. Go to Stage 2

2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))	Yes	<p>A Neighbourhood Plan is not required by legislation, instead being optional under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011.</p> <p>If, however, a Neighbourhood Plan is 'brought into force' it will form part of the Development Plan for the District. There should therefore be a screening process to consider whether the PP is likely to have significant environmental effects, and therefore whether SEA is required.</p> <p>Go to Stage 3</p>
3. Is the PP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2(a))	Yes AND No	<p>Prepared for town and country planning.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>The PP will sit within a wider framework (NPPF and Local Plan) and although the PP will set out a framework for future development, such projects are not on the scale referred to in Article 4(2) of the EIA Directive.</p> <p>Go to Stage 4</p>
4. Will the PP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.2 (b))	No	<p>There are no Natura 2000 (Habitats Directive relevant) sites in the District or adjacent to / in the vicinity of the PP area, therefore an assessment is not required.</p> <p>Go to Stage 6</p>
5. Does the PP determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art. 3.2? (Art. 3.3)		Not applicable.
6. Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art 3.4)	Yes	<p>The PP will be used, together with national planning policy and Local Plan policy, to assess and determine planning applications in St Stephen parish.</p> <p>Go to Stage 8</p>
7. Is the PP's sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF		Not applicable

programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Art 3.8, 3.9)		
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)	No	<p>The St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan does not propose to allocate sites for development.</p> <p>Rather it proposes a series of policies to underpin the contribution of the natural and built environment to the parish and the way it is considered in planning policy.</p> <p>For instance, it describes the character of the parish at a more local level to that included in the District Local Plan Review; it sets out non-designated heritage assets; it defines the green infrastructure for the parish; and it proposes the designation of Local Green Spaces.</p> <p>In this way, the Plan is considered to have a positive effect on the environment.</p> <p>The Plan is not therefore considered to have a significant effect on the environment (see also assessment in Table 2).</p> <p>SEA is Not Required.</p>

The following section looks at the criteria for assessing the effects of the Neighbourhood Plan and the identified effects of the Neighbourhood Plan in line with the criteria. Crucially, it will determine whether there are any likely significant effects on the environment.

3.2 Criteria for Assessing the Effects of the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of Directive 2001/42/EC are set out below:

Annex II of SEA Directive 2001/42/EC – Significant Effects

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

3.3 Likely Significant Effects on the Environment resulting from the Neighbourhood Plan

The following assessment will consider the likelihood of the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan (at January 2021) to have significant effects on the environment.

Table 2: Potential significant effects	
Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects (Annex II SEA Directive)	Likelihood and summary of significant effects
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,	<p>The Plan will sit within the wider planning policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the adopted Development Plan (the Local Plan Review 1994). The Neighbourhood Plan sets out policies that will be used to help determine planning applications within the Neighbourhood Plan area, adding local detail to the national and strategic policies to ensure that development happens in a way that is sympathetic to the existing context. It also seeks to safeguard important areas – including green spaces and historic assets – from detrimental impacts of development. For instance:</p> <p>Policy S1 (Location of development): this policy sets out that development should be focussed to the most sustainable locations of the parish, within the built up area boundary.</p> <p>Policy S3 (Character of development) and Policy S5 (Design of development) set out criteria to ensure that any new development is of a high quality and respects the context within which it is located.</p> <p>Policies within Section 6 of the Plan seek to safeguard the natural environment, for instance through the identification of the local green infrastructure network and safeguard the River Ver against detrimental development.</p>
b) degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy,	<p>The Plan, once made, will form part of the development plan for the district, adding additional local detail to district-wide policies, for instance on local character and green space. In this way, it adds local detail</p>

	that will have a direct influence on the way in which planning applications are considered.
c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	<p>The Plan will sit within the wider planning policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the adopted Development Plan (the Local Plan Review 1994). The Neighbourhood Plan sets out policies that will be used to help determine planning applications within the Neighbourhood Plan area, adding local detail to the national and strategic policies. It also seeks to safeguard sites – including green spaces and historic assets – from detrimental impacts of development.</p> <p>A key factor for the Plan is promoting sustainable development. It does this by supporting new development to take place in the most sustainable parts of the parish, within the built up area boundaries. It then sets out locally specific criteria to ensure that any such development is in keeping with the current context, in terms of the built environment and wider landscape. It then sets out specific policies exploring how particular assets – both heritage and natural – should be safeguarded.</p> <p>Built environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy S1 (Location of development): this policy sets out that development should be focussed to the most sustainable locations of the parish, within the built up area boundary. • Policy S3 (Character of development) and Policy S5 (Design of development) set out criteria to ensure that any new development is of a high quality and respects the context within which it is located. <p>Natural environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy S6 (Minimising the impact of development): sets out more detailed information, at a local level, as to what comprises local landscape character. • Policy S7 (Protecting natural habitats and species): sets out the protected and non-designated features of the landscape that should be considered as part of development proposals and seeks a net gain in biodiversity.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy S8 (Protection and Maintenance of Local Green Spaces): proposes the designation of Local Green Spaces considered demonstrably special to the local community. • Policy S9 (The River Ver): sets out criteria to ensure the ongoing protection of this important resource. • Policy S20 (Green infrastructure and development): maps the GI network for the parish that should be protected as an important space for wildlife (and to a lesser extent recreation).
d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme,	<p>The parish is situated within Green Belt and Policy S1 seeks to safeguard this from inappropriate development by directing development to within the built up area boundaries. Additional natural features in the parish have been identified and mapped with policies seeking that they be protected and that development should result in a net biodiversity gain.</p> <p>The parish is also rich in built heritage assets and policies S3-S5 add additional local detail to that contained at the strategic level to ensure that development proposals are in keeping with local character. Furthermore, they identify non-designated heritage assets that should be a material considering impacts of any future planning applications.</p>
e) 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).	
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	<p>The Plan will be used to assist in the determination of planning applications within St Stephen Parish. The policies are anticipated to support the need for sustainable development.</p> <p>There are also policies that seek to designate, for the longer term, certain parts of the parish that are considered important from a heritage and green space perspective, for instance through the designation of Local Green Spaces. Such designations would be expected to last beyond the lifespan of plan.</p>

b) the cumulative nature of the effects,	The Plan is not expected to result in negative cumulative effects as no site allocations are being considered.
c) the transboundary nature of the effects,	<p>The Plan covers the area administered by the St Stephen Parish Council only.</p> <p>Because of the hierarchy of Neighbourhood Plan, national policy (NPPF) and Local Plan, policy decisions taken in respect of the Plan area will not have transboundary impacts.</p>
d) the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents),	The Plan policies and proposals do not present significant or direct risks to 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),	The Plan area covers approximately 2,330 hectares and has a population of approximately 13,865 (2011 census).
<p>f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</p> <p>i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage,</p> <p>ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values,</p> <p>iii) intensive land-use,</p>	<p>The parish is rich in natural landscape features and heritage assets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Built environment qualities</u>: There are two Conservation Areas in the Parish. There are over 50 nationally listed Buildings and a number of locally listed buildings, all of the latter within Conservation Areas. There is one Scheduled Monument (Replica of the Mohne Dam, in the grounds of the Building Research Establishment, Garston). • <u>Natural / semi natural environment and biodiversity</u>: The Plan covers significant areas of open agriculture and other rural land uses. The Plan area is also largely covered by the Watling Chase Community Forest designation. There are patches of ancient woodland. There are two SSSIs, Bricket Wood Common and Moor Mills Quarry. There are no Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) in the area. The Plan has been formulated around the need to avoid impacts on these designations. • <u>Landscape quality</u>: the Plan does not seek to allocate sites. It does seek to safeguard landscape quality through a series of policies

	<p>identifying key local natural features and the green infrastructure network for instance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Air pollution</u>: Traffic levels can increase air pollution effects. There are no AQMAs in the Neighbourhood Plan area and no site allocations are being included that could lead to increased vehicles. The Plan does promote active travel, supporting provision for walking, cycling and horse-riding. • <u>Water resources</u>: Development levels increase effects on water resources and water quality. The area is subject to water stress. Groundwater resources are important / potentially vulnerable.
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3.4 Preliminary Conclusions of the SEA

As a result of the assessment in section 4, it is concluded that **there are unlikely to be** significant environmental effects arising directly from decisions taken through the St Stephen Neighbourhood Development Plan (see Table 2).

A Screening Request will be reissued to the environmental assessment consultation bodies; Historic England, the Environment Agency and Natural England, in order to seek their views before finalising this report.

Appendix 2: Responses from the Relevant Bodies

Natural England

Date: 21 January 2021
Our ref: 340562
Your ref: St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan

Isabel Crozier
Assistant Clerk
isabel@ststephenparishcouncil.gov.uk

BY EMAIL ONLY



Hornbeam House
Crewe Business Park
Electra Way
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 6GJ

T 0300 060 3900

Dear Ms Crozier,

St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan SEA re-screening request

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 19 January 2021

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.

Natural England does not have any specific comments on this draft neighbourhood plan.

However, we refer you to the attached annex which covers the issues and opportunities that should be considered when preparing a Neighbourhood Plan.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening

Natural England considers that, based on the material supplied with the consultation, in so far as our strategic environmental interests are concerned, significant environmental effects resulting from the neighbourhood plan are unlikely. We therefore agree with the conclusion of the SEA screening report that a Strategic Environmental Assessment would not be required.

Further guidance on deciding whether the proposals are likely to have significant environmental effects and the requirements for consulting Natural England on SEA are set out in the [National Planning Practice Guidance](#).

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening

Natural England agrees with the report's conclusions that the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan would not be likely to result in a significant effect on any European Site, either alone or in combination and therefore no further assessment work would be required.

For any further consultations on your plan, please contact: consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Ben Jones
Consultations Team

Historic England

Sent: Friday, January 29, 2021 6:47:13 PM

Subject: RE: St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan SEA re-screening request

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for inviting Historic England to comment on this consultation for the re-screening of the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan. 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 St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan, as amended) 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 Council considers that the plan will not have any significant effects on the historic environment. We note that the plan does not now propose to allocate sites for development. **There are therefore no likely significant effects arising from the production of this plan.** We also welcome the addition of the two historic environment policies, and are pleased to see that both are focused specifically on protecting St Stephen's distinctive local qualities and non-designated heritage assets. This reflects the particular opportunity that neighbourhood plans represent, allowing greater protection of aspects of places that are not able to be fully identified by district/borough or national planning policy.

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 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. To avoid any doubt, this does not reflect our obligation to provide further advice on later stages of the 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) where we consider that, despite the 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.

Please do contact me, either via email or the number below, if you have any queries.

Kind regards,

Historic Places Adviser - East of England
Historic England

Environment Agency

Sent: 19 January 2021 12:36

Subject: RE: St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan SEA re-screening request

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for consulting us on the SEA screening opinion for the St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan.

Based on a review of environmental constraints for which we are a statutory consultee, we find that there are areas of flood risk, watercourses and areas for the protection of groundwater within the neighbourhood plan area. In particular we note that:

- The neighbourhood plan lies within areas of flood zones 2 and 3
- The River Ver and River Colne run through the neighbourhood plan area
- There are areas designated as Source Protection Zones and which are located on aquifers within your plan area

On the basis that future development is steered away from the sensitive aspects of the environment highlighted above, **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.

For your information, together with Natural England, English Heritage 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 <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/consider-environment-neighbourhood-plans/>

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

Planning Advisor, Hertfordshire and North London Sustainable Places
Environment Agency