

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Gerrards Cross Neighbourhood Plan

Environmental Report

November 2022

Quality information

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Revision History

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Non-Technical Summary (NTS)

Introduction

AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Gerrards Cross Neighbourhood Plan (GXNP).

SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and maximising positive effects. SEA of the GXNP is a legal requirement¹. This is a Non-Technical Summary (NTS) of the SEA Environmental Report.

The GXNP is being prepared by the Town Council in the context of the adopted South Bucks District Local Plan (SBDLP) and the South Bucks Core Strategy (SBCS), which form part of the Development Plan for the South Bucks Area of Buckinghamshire Council. Once 'made' the GXNP will have material weight when deciding on planning applications, alongside the SBDLP and SBCS.

The GXNP will be published alongside the 'pre-submission' version of the Plan, under Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended).

Structure of the Environmental Report/ NTS

SEA reporting essentially involves answering the following questions in turn:

1. What has plan-making / SEA involved up to this point?
 - including in relation to 'reasonable alternatives'.
2. What are the SEA findings at this stage?
 - i.e., in relation to the draft plan.
3. What happens next?

Each of these questions is answered in turn within a discrete 'part' of the Environmental Report and summarised within this NTS. However, firstly there is a need to set the scene further by answering the questions 'What is the Plan seeking to achieve?' and 'What's the scope of the SEA?'

What is the Plan seeking to achieve?

The GXNP has a clear vision, which is:

"In 2036 Gerrards Cross has conserved, protected and enhanced the quality of life within the town, which is enjoyed and cherished by those who live and work here. The town now has a growing community, and by having positively planned through our Neighbourhood Plan for the increase in the number of new homes, we have attracted new people who want to live and work here and contribute positively to the culture and ethos of the town. By having preserved what is best about Gerrards

¹ Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended) requires that each Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to the Local Authority alongside either: a) an environmental report; or, b) a statement of reasons why SEA is not required, prepared following a 'screening' process completed in accordance with Regulation 9(1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations ('the SEA Regulations'). The D&RNP was subject to informal screening by South Norfolk Council in 2021 and Scoping consultation in 2022 sought the wider opinions of statutory consultees.

Cross i.e. it's heritage, eclectic mix of housing and its unique culture and community spirit, we have made Gerrards Cross a great place to live, work and play.

Through our Neighbourhood Plan for the town, we have successfully addressed the five main themes outlined in it and we now have:

- *A thriving local economy, with new shops and businesses providing a wide range of retail, restaurants and entertainment facilities to both residents and visitors.*
- *The protection of the character of the town centre has led to an increase in the number of visitors coming to the town with significant improvements to the local economy.*
- *New development, which has been designed sympathetically in size, scale and character, to be in keeping with existing buildings and which has contributed towards the sustainability of Gerrards Cross. This has encouraged new people to move into Gerrards Cross, who have contributed to the maintenance of the vibrancy and economy of the town.*
- *A safe community where people feel comfortable using the local facilities at all times of day or night due to measures in place to improve traffic management and good community policing. New walkways and cycle paths have been introduced creating a safer pedestrian environment. The new commuter parking facilities at the station have encouraged people to use this mode of public transport rather than their cars. This has reduced congestion and encouraged people to use the town centre as a place to stop and walk around.*
- *A new GP Surgery in Gerrards Cross which has improved health & well-being for all the community by meeting their primary healthcare needs, whilst also reducing the need to travel to local villages and towns for GP provision.*
- *A town with a strong community spirit integrating well with new residents, and opportunities for all to live a fulfilling, healthy and safe life.”*

A total of 19 strategic objectives, which address five topics, have been identified through engagement with the community. These are:

- **Town Centre**
 - Resist the re-use of retail premises for residential development.
 - Re-use or redevelop empty premises where possible.
 - Encourage and support new businesses and retail opportunities in order to maintain the vibrant feel of a thriving town centre that is the hub of the community.
- **Housing**
 - To allocate a site for future development in Gerrards Cross to meet the identified needs of the community.
 - Ensure future housing is developed sympathetically and in character to the existing built environment of Gerrards Cross.
 - Provide a housing mix that meets the needs of the community including the provision of smaller two and three bed properties.
 - Where appropriate and possible, retain and redevelop existing buildings.

- Encourage greater local participation initiatives by discouraging gated developments.
- Ensure that previously developed land, particularly where vacant, derelict or underused, is prioritised for development over greenfield sites.
- **Traffic and transport**
 - Manage the growing volume of traffic.
 - Provide parking for commuters, shoppers and residents.
 - Provide more cycle paths in order to cut the volume of traffic and promote a healthy lifestyle.
- **Environment and character**
 - Preserve the existing Green Belt around the town.
 - Preserve the heritage and historic character of Gerrards Cross
 - Ensure landscaping and planting schemes where possible are proposed and implemented within all new developments.
 - To maintain strategic gaps surrounding Gerrards Cross.
 - Preserve and protect woodlands, commons and green open spaces that are important to the community of Gerrards Cross.
- **Community health and leisure**
 - Provide appropriate space for the provision of a new GP surgery in Gerrards Cross.
 - Support and improve sports and community facilities.

What is the scope of the SEA?

The scope of the SEA is reflected in a list of topics, objectives, and assessment questions, which, taken together indicate the parameters of the SEA and provide a methodological 'framework' for assessment. A summary framework is presented below, and a full framework which includes assessment questions is provided within the main Environmental Report (see **Table 3.1**).

SEA theme	SEA objective(s)
Air quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve air quality within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.
Biodiversity and geodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity.
Climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities within the neighbourhood area. • Support the resilience of the neighbourhood area to the potential effects of climate change, including flooding.
Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape and villagescape.
Historic environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect, conserve and enhance the historic environment within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.
Land, soil and water resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the efficient and effective use of land.

SEA theme	SEA objective(s)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect and enhance water quality and use and manage water resources in a sustainable manner.
Community wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure growth in the neighbourhood area is aligned with the needs of all residents, improving accessibility, anticipating future needs and specialist requirements, and supporting cohesive and inclusive communities.
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.

Plan-making/ SEA up to this point

An important element of the required SEA process involves assessing 'reasonable alternatives' in time to inform development of the draft proposals, and then publishing information on reasonable alternatives for consultation alongside the draft proposals.

As such, Part 1 of the Environmental Report explains how work was undertaken to develop and assess a 'reasonable' range of alternative approaches for the GXNP.

This part considers the strategic parameters provided by the Local Plan, alongside the identified sites that are available over the plan period and arrives at the following:

One 'green' [referring to the findings of the Site Options Assessment] site is identified, located within the settlement boundary, and is the preferred option for allocation in the GXNP (Site GX1 – Orchehill Rise Car Park and Station Overflow Car Park). Both Sites GX2 and GX8 are not considered as reasonable alternatives to the preferred approach, as a 'red' site with significant constraints (Site GX2), and an unavailable site (Site GX8).

The only alternative to the preferred approach would require the release of Green Belt land for development. This is considered 'unreasonable' due to the following points:

- There is a brownfield alternative within the settlement boundary (Site GX1) which reduces the potential to argue 'exceptional circumstances'.*
- There is no community desire to develop within the Green Belt.*
- The core GXNP objective to protect the Green Belt.*

It is recognised that the emerging Local Plan may establish a strategic need for Green Belt release around Gerrards Cross, however, this is considered a strategic planning matter for the Local Plan, weighted by wider district housing needs and evidence.

On this basis, it is recognised that there are no 'reasonable' alternatives to the preferred spatial strategy of the GXNP. Whilst wider policies are being introduced through the GXNP, none of these are considered policies which are likely to give rise to significant impacts (National Planning Practice Guidance is clear that SEA should focus on matters likely to give rise to significant effects), whereby reasonable alternative policy approaches should be explored. These policies will be appraised in terms of their potential effects in the next section of this report.

Assessment findings at this stage

Part 2 of the Environmental Report presents an assessment of the current version of the GXNP. Assessment findings are presented as a series of narratives under the 'SEA framework' topic headings. The following conclusions are reached:

Conclusions

The Gerrards Cross Neighbourhood Plan proposes small-scale growth at a single brownfield site within the settlement area, that displays minimal constraints. It is likely that development could successfully integrate with the existing settlement and wider neighbourhood area. These are the predominant reasons why no significant negative effects are considered likely through the implementation of the GXNP. However, one minor constraint has been identified in the spatial strategy, which is the potential displacement of parked vehicles at peak times (with the associated loss of overflow carparking space in the centre) which could negatively impact upon the designated conservation area. Minor negative effects are therefore concluded in relation to the historic environment at this stage.

Significant positive effects are considered likely in relation to community wellbeing with the cumulative effort to tailor housing delivery to meet local needs, deliver development in an accessible location, safeguard infrastructure, promote active healthy lifestyles, protect green spaces and community identities, and support appropriate employment and retail development. These efforts, alongside the prioritisation of brownfield development, also predominantly form the basis for concluding minor positive effects in relation to the climate change, landscape, land, soil, and water resources, and transportation themes, and broadly neutral effects in relation to the air quality theme.

With the recommendations of the HRA being integrated into the GXNP, broadly neutral effects (i.e., no significant deviation from the baseline) are also anticipated in relation to biodiversity and geodiversity.

Recommendations

No significant effects are considered likely in implementation of the GXNP; however, one recommendation is identified in relation to the land, soil, and water resources theme:

- It is recommended that Policy 4 is updated to reflect the need to investigate any potential contamination onsite and ensure appropriate remediation prior to development if necessary.

Next steps

Part 3 of the report explains the next steps that will be taken as part of plan-making and SEA.

Plan finalisation

Following consultation, responses received will be considered and the GXNP and SEA Environmental Report will be finalised for submission.

Following submission, the GXNP and supporting evidence will be published for further consultation, and then subjected to Independent Examination. At

Independent Examination, the GXNP will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the Local Plan.

If the examination leads to a favourable outcome, the GXNP will then be subject to a referendum, organised by Buckinghamshire Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the Neighbourhood Plan, then it will be 'made'. Once 'made', the GXNP will become part of the Development Plan for Buckinghamshire, covering the defined neighbourhood area.

Monitoring

The SEA regulations require 'measures envisaged concerning monitoring' to be outlined in this report. This refers to the monitoring of likely significant effects of the Neighbourhood Plan to identify any unforeseen effects early and take remedial action as appropriate.

It is anticipated that monitoring of effects of the Neighbourhood Plan will be undertaken by Buckinghamshire Council as part of the process of preparing its Annual Monitoring Report (AMR). No significant negative effects are considered likely in the implementation of the GXNP that would warrant more stringent monitoring over and above that already undertaken by the Council.

1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1 AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Gerrards Cross Neighbourhood Plan (GXNP).
- 1.2 The GXNP is being prepared under the Localism Act 2011 and the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and in the context of the adopted South Bucks District Local Plan (SBDLP) and South Bucks Core Strategy (SBCS), which form part of the Development Plan for the South Bucks Area of Buckinghamshire Council.
- 1.3 Once 'made' the GXNP will have material weight when deciding on planning applications, alongside the SBDLP and SBCS.
- 1.4 SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and maximising positive effects. SEA of the GXNP is a legal requirement².

SEA explained

- 1.5 It is a requirement that SEA is undertaken in-line with the procedures prescribed by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, which transposed into national law EU Directive 2001/42/EC on SEA.
- 1.6 In-line with the Regulations, a report (known as the Environmental Report) must be published for consultation alongside the draft plan that "*identifies, describes and evaluates*" the likely significant effects of implementing "*the plan, and reasonable alternatives*"³. The report must then be considered, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.
- 1.7 More specifically, the Report must answer the following three questions:
 1. What has plan-making / SEA involved up to this point?
 - including in relation to 'reasonable alternatives'.
 2. What are the SEA findings at this stage?
 - i.e., in relation to the draft plan.
 3. What happens next?

² Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended) requires that each Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to the Local Authority alongside either: a) an environmental report; or, b) a statement of reasons why SEA is not required, prepared following a 'screening' process completed in accordance with Regulation 9(1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations ('the SEA Regulations'). The D&RNP was subject to informal screening by South Norfolk Council in 2021 and Scoping consultation in 2022 sought the wider opinions of statutory consultees.

³ Regulation 12(2) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

This Environmental Report

- 1.8 This report is the Environmental Report for the GXNP. It is published alongside the 'pre-submission' version of the Plan, under Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended).
- 1.9 This report essentially answers questions 1, 2 and 3 in turn, to provide the required information⁴. Each question is answered within a discrete 'part' of the report.
- 1.10 However, before answering question 1, two initial questions are answered to further set the scene; what is the plan seeking to achieve? And what is the scope of the SEA?

⁴ See **Appendix A** for further explanation of the regulatory basis for answering certain questions within the Environmental Report, and a 'checklist' explaining more precisely the regulatory basis for presenting certain information.

2. What is the plan seeking to achieve?

Introduction

2.1 This section considers the strategic planning policy context provided by the adopted SBDLP and SBCS, before then presenting the Neighbourhood Plan vision and objectives. **Figure 2.1** below presents the neighbourhood area.

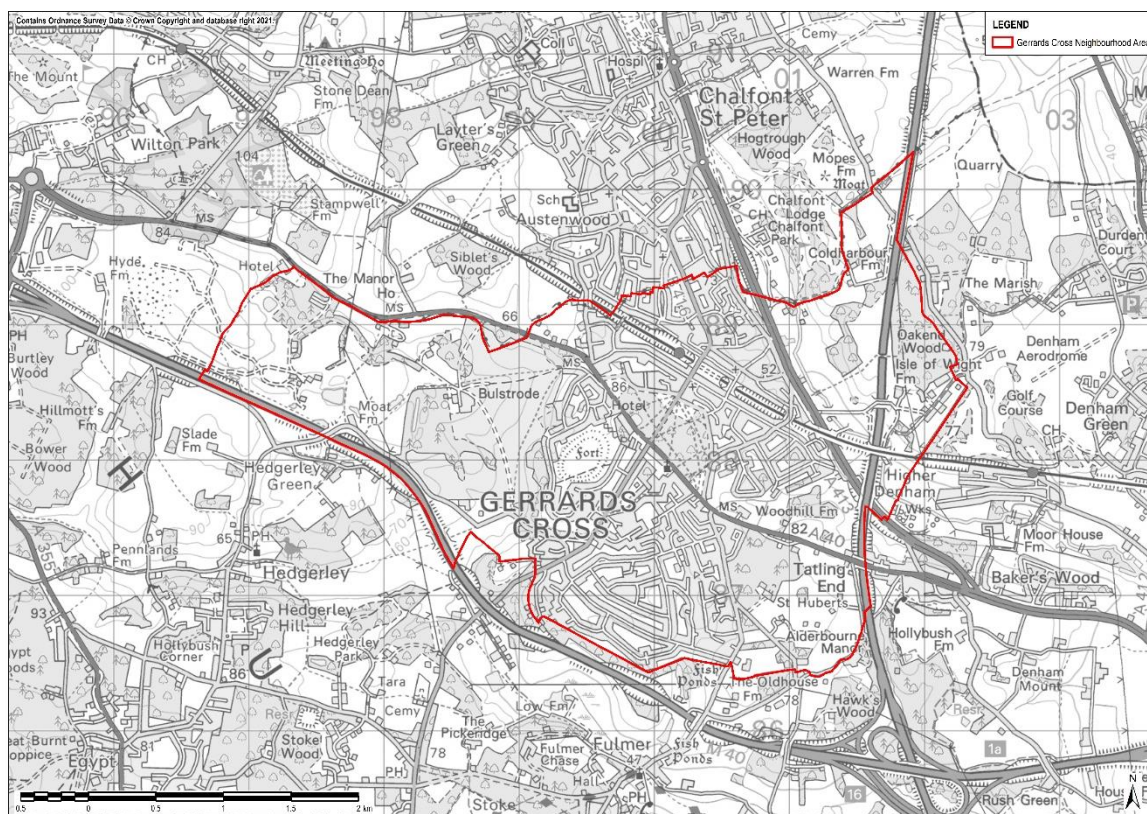


Figure 2.1 Gerrards Cross neighbourhood area

Strategic planning policy context

- 2.2 As mentioned above, the GCNP is being prepared in the context of the SBDLP and SBCS, which form part of the Development Plan for South Bucks District.
- 2.3 The SBDLP was adopted in March 1999 as a statutory plan for the district. In 2007, following direction from the Secretary of State, 75 policies in the SBDLP were saved for continued use, and all others expired.⁵ The SBCS, which was adopted in February 2011, replaced a further 22 policies in the SBDLP. There are now 53 saved Local Plan policies in place within the SBCS, which presents the ‘big picture’, setting a long-term vision, objectives, and broad strategy for accommodating future development in the district in the period to 2026.⁶
- 2.4 South Bucks, alongside Chiltern, Wycombe and Aylesbury Vale district councils formed a new unitary authority in April 2020 and are now working to produce a new Local Plan covering the whole authority area, which will replace the SBDLP and ensure that the Local Plan is consistent with the most recent

⁵ Buckinghamshire Council (1999): ‘South Bucks District Local Plan’, [online] available to access via [this link](#)

⁶ Buckinghamshire Council (2011): ‘South Bucks Core Strategy’, [online] available to access via [this link](#)

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The new Local Plan is still at very early stages of development, having conducted a ‘call for sites of previously developed land’ in 2021, and a ‘wider call for sites’ (to include greenfield development sites) more recently concluding in September 2022.

- 2.5 The SBCS sets out a settlement hierarchy, which places settlements within the district into the follow categories: Principal Settlements, Secondary Settlements, Tertiary Settlements and Rural Settlements. Gerrards Cross, alongside Beaconsfield and Burnham, is identified as a Principal Settlement as it has the best range of facilities and services, including access to a frequent rail service. It is also identified as a District Centre in the retail hierarchy set out in the SBCS. By aiming to focus more new housing development in these settlements, new residents will have better access to local facilities, shops, and services, as well as good access to public transport services.
- 2.6 Considering the above, the SBCS sets out that 287 new dwellings will be built within the built-up area of Gerrards Cross in the period 2006 to 2026. Over this period, the rate of new housing development will slow. Together with more stringent design policies, the combined effect will be to soften and slow the impact new development has on the townscape character of Gerrards Cross. In addition to this, approximately 800 square metres of new comparison goods floorspace will be developed in the period post 2016, which will significantly strengthen the role of Gerrards Cross centre. Further employment floorspace will also be supported within Gerrards Cross centre.
- 2.7 Neighbourhood plans will form part of the Development Plan for the district, alongside, but not as a replacement for the adopted Local Plan. The current development framework seeks to give communities a strategic context within which appropriate community-led planning policy documents, including neighbourhood plans, can be brought forward. The housing supply required over the GCNP period will be determined in consultation with Buckinghamshire Council and will seek to align with the emerging Local Plan.

GXNP vision and strategic objectives

- 2.8 The GXNP has a clear vision, which is:

“In 2036 Gerrards Cross has conserved, protected, and enhanced the quality of life within the town, which is enjoyed and cherished by those who live and work here. The town now has a growing community, and by having positively planned through our Neighbourhood Plan for the increase in the number of new homes, we have attracted new people who want to live and work here and contribute positively to the culture and ethos of the town. By having preserved what is best about Gerrards Cross i.e., its heritage, eclectic mix of housing and its unique culture and community spirit, we have made Gerrards Cross a great place to live, work and play.

Through our Neighbourhood Plan for the town, we have successfully addressed the five main themes outlined in it and we now have:

- *A thriving local economy, with new shops and businesses providing a wide range of retail, restaurants and entertainment facilities to both residents and visitors.*

- *The protection of the character of the town centre has led to an increase in the number of visitors coming to the town with significant improvements to the local economy.*
- *New development, which has been designed sympathetically in size, scale, and character, to be in keeping with existing buildings and which has contributed towards the sustainability of Gerrards Cross. This has encouraged new people to move into Gerrards Cross, who have contributed to the maintenance of the vibrancy and economy of the town.*
- *A safe community where people feel comfortable using the local facilities at all times of day or night due to measures in place to improve traffic management and good community policing. New walkways and cycle paths have been introduced creating a safer pedestrian environment. The new commuter parking facilities at the station have encouraged people to use this mode of public transport rather than their cars. This has reduced congestion and encouraged people to use the town centre as a place to stop and walk around.*
- *A new GP Surgery in Gerrards Cross which has improved health & well-being for all the community by meeting their primary healthcare needs, whilst also reducing the need to travel to local villages and towns for GP provision.*
- *A town with a strong community spirit integrating well with new residents, and opportunities for all to live a fulfilling, healthy and safe life.”*

2.9 A total of 19 strategic objectives, which address five topics, have been identified through engagement with the community. These are:

- **Town Centre**
 - Resist the re-use of retail premises for residential development.
 - Re-use or redevelop empty premises where possible.
 - Encourage and support new businesses and retail opportunities in order to maintain the vibrant feel of a thriving town centre that is the hub of the community.
- **Housing**
 - To allocate a site for future development in Gerrards Cross to meet the identified needs of the community.
 - Ensure future housing is developed sympathetically and in character to the existing built environment of Gerrards Cross.
 - Provide a housing mix that meets the needs of the community including the provision of smaller two and three bed properties.
 - Where appropriate and possible, retain and redevelop existing buildings.
 - Encourage greater local participation initiatives by discouraging gated developments.
 - Ensure that previously developed land, particularly where vacant, derelict or underused, is prioritised for development over greenfield sites.

- **Traffic and transport**
 - Manage the growing volume of traffic.
 - Provide parking for commuters, shoppers and residents.
 - Provide more cycle paths in order to cut the volume of traffic and promote a healthy lifestyle.
- **Environment and character**
 - Preserve the existing Green Belt around the town.
 - Preserve the heritage and historic character of Gerrards Cross
 - Ensure landscaping and planting schemes where possible are proposed and implemented within all new developments.
 - To maintain strategic gaps surrounding Gerrards Cross.
 - Preserve and protect woodlands, commons and green open spaces that are important to the community of Gerrards Cross.
- **Community health and leisure**
 - Provide appropriate space for the provision of a new GP surgery in Gerrards Cross.
 - Support and improve sports and community facilities.

3. What is the scope of the SEA?

Introduction

3.1 The aim here is to introduce the reader to the scope of the SEA, i.e., the sustainability themes and objectives that should be a focus of the assessment of the plan and reasonable alternatives. Further information, including the policy review and baseline information that has supported the development of key sustainability issues and objectives, is presented in the **SEA Scoping Report (August 2022)**.

Consultation

3.2 The SEA Regulations require that “*when deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in the report, the responsible authority shall consult the consultation bodies*”. In England, the consultation bodies are the Environment Agency, Historic England, and Natural England.⁷ As such, these authorities were consulted in August 2022. No response was received from Historic England, and whilst a response was received from the Environment Agency, they had no specific comments to make. A more detailed response was received from Natural England, which requested further consideration of the following plans and projects:

- Natural Environment Partnership Green Infrastructure Opportunities Mapping
- Natural Environment Partnership Forward to 2030: Biodiversity Action Plan
- Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019-2024

3.3 These plans have been considered in greater detail through the subsequent assessment (as being reported at this stage).

The SEA framework

3.4 The SEA scope is summarised in a list of themes, objectives, and assessment questions, known as the SEA framework. **Table 3.1** presents the SEA framework as broadly agreed in 2022.

Table 3.1 SEA framework

SEA topic	SEA Objective	Assessment questions (will the proposal help to...)
Air quality	Improve air quality within and surrounding the neighbourhood area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the use of sustainable modes of transport, including walking, cycling and public transport? • Implement measures (such as appropriate planting and provision of green infrastructure) which will help support air quality in the neighbourhood area?
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and enhance internationally, nationally and locally designated sites, including supporting habitats and mobile species that are important to the integrity of these sites, including SACs?

⁷ These consultation bodies were selected “*by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities, [they] are likely to be concerned by the environmental effects of implementing plans and programmes*” (SEA Directive, Article 6(3)).

SEA topic	SEA Objective	Assessment questions (will the proposal help to...)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and enhance semi-natural habitats, as well as priority habitats and species, including ancient woodland? • Achieve biodiversity and environmental net gains and support the delivery of ecosystem services and multifunctional green infrastructure networks? • Increase the resilience of biodiversity in the area to the effects of climate change, including through enhancements to ecological networks? • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of biodiversity and geodiversity?
Climate change	Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities within the neighbourhood area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the number of journeys made by polluting vehicles? • Promote the use of sustainable modes of transport including walking, cycling and public transport? • Increase the number of new developments meeting or exceeding sustainable design criteria? • Generate energy from low or zero carbon sources? • Reduce energy consumption from non-renewable resources?
	Support the resilience of the neighbourhood area to the potential effects of climate change, including flooding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid development in areas at risk of flooding, considered the likely future effects of climate change? • Ensure that inappropriate development does not take place in areas at higher risk of flooding, considering the likely future effects of climate change? • Improve and extend green infrastructure networks in the neighbourhood area to support adaptation to the potential effects of climate change? • Sustainably manage water runoff, reducing surface water runoff (either within the neighbourhood area or downstream)? • Ensure that potential risks associated with climate change are considered through new development in the neighbourhood area? • Increase the resilience of biodiversity in the neighbourhood area to the effects of climate change, including through enhancements to ecological networks?
Landscape	To protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape and villagescape.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve and enhance the AONB? • Protect and/ or enhance local landscape character and quality of place, including LCAs? • Conserve and enhance local identity, diversity and settlement character? • Identify and protect locally important viewpoints which contribute to character and sense of place? • Protect visual amenity and locally important views in the neighbourhood area? • Retain and enhance landscape features that contribute to the water setting, or rural setting, including trees and hedgerows?
Historic environment	Protect, conserve, and enhance the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the integrity and the historic setting of the conservation areas?

SEA topic	SEA Objective	Assessment questions (will the proposal help to...)
	historic environment within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve and enhance buildings and structures of architectural or historic interest, both designated and non-designated, and their settings? • Protect the integrity of the historic setting of key monuments of cultural heritage interest as listed in the Buckinghamshire HER? • Support the undertaking of early archaeological investigations and, where appropriate, recommend mitigation strategies? • Support access to, and the interpretation and understanding of, the historic evolution and character of the neighbourhood area?
Land, soil and water resources	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid the loss of high-quality agricultural land and resources? • Support the continued operation of waste infrastructure within and surrounding the neighbourhood area? • Promote any opportunities for the use of previously developed land, or vacant/ underutilised land?
	Protect and enhance water quality and use and manage water resources in a sustainable manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid impacts on water quality? • Support improvements to water quality? • Ensure appropriate drainage and mitigation is delivered alongside development? • Protect waterbodies from pollution? • Maximise water efficiency and opportunities for water harvesting and/ or water recycling? • Improve the resilience of water supplies?
Community wellbeing	Ensure growth in the neighbourhood area is aligned with the needs of all residents, improving accessibility, anticipating future needs and specialist requirements, and supporting cohesive and inclusive communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing? • Support the provision of a range of house types and sizes? • Meet the needs of all sectors of the community? • Provide flexible and adaptable homes that meet people's needs, particularly the needs of an ageing population? • Improve the availability and accessibility of key local facilities, including specialist services for disabled and older people? • Encourage and promote social cohesion and active involvement of local people in community activities? • Facilitate green infrastructure enhancements, including improved access to open space? • Maintain or enhance the quality of life of existing residents?
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage a modal shift to more sustainable forms of travel and enable active travel enhancements? • Improve local connectivity and pedestrian and cyclist movement? • Facilitate working from home to reduce the use of private vehicles to access workplaces outside of the neighbourhood area? • Improve road safety, particularly through measures to reduce speeding and facilitate safer crossings on key roads?

Part 1: What has plan-making/ SEA involved to this point?

4. Plan-making/ SEA to date

Overview

- 4.1 Whilst work on the Neighbourhood Plan has been underway for some time, the aim here is not to provide a comprehensive explanation of all the work carried out to date, but rather to explain work undertaken to develop and appraise reasonable alternatives, recognising the regulatory requirement to present “*an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with*”⁸.
- 4.2 Specifically, there is a need to explain the strategic parameters that have a bearing on the establishment of options (in relation to the level and distribution of growth) and the work that has been undertaken to date to examine site options (i.e., sites potentially in contention for allocation in the GXNP). These parameters are then drawn together in order to arrive at ‘reasonable alternatives’.

Strategic parameters

- 4.3 As discussed in **Section 2.1**, the GXNP is being prepared in the context of the South Bucks District Local Plan (SBDLP) and the South Bucks Core Strategy (SBCS), which form part of the Development Plan for the South Bucks Area of Buckinghamshire Council.
- 4.4 The SBCS sets out that 287 new dwellings will be built within the built-up area of Gerrards Cross in the period 2006 to 2026. Over this period, the rate of new housing development will slow. Together with more stringent design policies, the combined effect will be to soften and slow the impact new development has on the townscape character of Gerrards Cross. The housing allocation set out within the SBCS has already been fulfilled, and there is no identified strategic requirement for further development at this stage.
- 4.5 However, the Steering Group have identified high levels of affordable housing need throughout the settlement, and it is also recognised that the emerging Buckinghamshire Local Plan, which is due to be adopted by April 2025, may yet establish further strategic housing needs within the neighbourhood area as it will cover the period up to 2040 (and Gerrards Cross is a principal settlement in the district). It is also recognised that Gerrards Cross is constrained by the extent of Green Belt land surrounding the settlement, whereby exceptional circumstances would need to justify any Green Belt release for strategic development.

⁸ Schedule 2(GX78) of the SEA Regulations

Site options

- 4.6 **Table 5.1** identifies the eight sites put forward and therefore available for development within the neighbourhood area. These sites were identified through a local 'call for sites' process. This was held to seek out site options in case Buckinghamshire Council require the neighbourhood area to deliver homes as part of their emerging Local Plan.
- 4.7 The sites were assessed against a range of environmental criteria and given a score accordingly to represent a summary of the 'high-level issues assessment'. Sites GX1 and GX8 were scored light green, reflecting that some positive impacts are likely, although these are unlikely to be significant. Sites GX3, GX4, GX5, GX6, and GX7 were scored amber, reflecting that there is potential for negative impacts and uncertainty around whether there is a reasonable prospect of these being mitigated. Site GX2 was scored red, reflecting a potential for significant negative impacts that would be difficult to mitigate.
- 4.8 Site GX1 was scored light green because it is very well located to the town centre and has no fundamental constraints. However, the site is limited by its size and will therefore make a limited contribution towards addressing housing needs (including affordable housing) and wider objectives.
- 4.9 Whilst Site GX8 scored light green within the assessment, the site is in multiple ownership. It was submitted as a potential acquisition opportunity which has failed to materialise. As a result, the site is not considered to be available over the Plan period.
- 4.10 Sites GX3, GX4, GX5, GX6, and GX7 were scored amber predominantly due to their location in the Green Belt. The assessment incorporates the findings of the Buckinghamshire Green Belt Assessment⁹ which considers that the land incorporating Sites GX3, GX4, GX5, and GX7 contributes strongly to the purposes of the Green Belt. Site GX6 is identified as the only site to fall within an area considered to make a moderate contribution to Green Belt purposes.
- 4.11 Finally, Site GX2 was scored red because it is considered that access to the site is likely to prevent the site from being developable. Access is only possible via a very small service road off Packhorse Road. This service road is only just wide enough for a single vehicle and not suitable for main vehicular access to the site. Whilst alternative access could be provided off Station Approach, this would have to be aligned to drop down approximately 10-15m from the site. Such access would likely require a significant proportion of the site, thereby reducing its developable area. It would also be likely to increase the cost of the development to an extent which could make the development unviable.

Table 5.1 Assessment of sites available for development

Site	Site Description	Size (Ha)	Capacity	Green Belt
GX1	Orchehill Rise Car Park and Station Overflow Car Park	0.35	21	No
GX2	Overflow Car Park	0.14	8	No
GX3	Site next to Apple Tree Pub on A40	1.53	46	Yes
GX4	Raylands Mead	1.05	32	Yes
GX5	North of Raylands Mead, west of Bull Lane	0.44	13	Yes
GX6	Strip to the west of A413 next to Lower Road	5.11	153	Yes
GX7	Land to the east of A413 bounded by M25 and Railway	0.60	18	Yes
GX8	Land either side of Camp Road	6.15	185	No

Establishing reasonable alternatives

- 4.12 Considering the above, one 'green' site is identified, located within the settlement boundary, and is the preferred option for allocation in the GXNP (Site GX1 – Orchehill Rise Car Park and Station Overflow Car Park). Both Sites GX2 and GX8 are not considered as reasonable alternatives to the preferred approach, as a 'red' site with significant constraints (Site GX2), and an unavailable site (Site GX8).
- 4.13 The only alternative to the preferred approach would require the release of Green Belt land for development. This is considered 'unreasonable' due to the following points:
- There is a brownfield alternative within the settlement boundary (Site GX1) which reduces the potential to argue 'exceptional circumstances'.
 - There is no community desire to develop within the Green Belt.
 - The core GXNP objective to protect the Green Belt.
- 4.14 It is recognised that the emerging Local Plan may establish a strategic need for Green Belt release around Gerrards Cross, however, this is considered a strategic planning matter for the Local Plan, weighted by wider district housing needs and evidence.
- 4.15 On this basis, it is recognised that there are no 'reasonable' alternatives to the preferred spatial strategy of the GXNP. Whilst wider policies are being introduced through the GXNP, none of these are considered policies which are likely to give rise to significant impacts (National Planning Practice Guidance is clear that SEA should focus on matters likely to give rise to significant effects), whereby reasonable alternative policy approaches should be explored. These policies will be appraised in terms of their potential effects in the next section of this report.

Part 2: What are the SEA findings at this stage?

5. Introduction (to Part 2)

5.1 The aim of this chapter is to present appraisal findings and recommendations in relation to the current version of the Gerrards Cross Neighbourhood Plan. This chapter presents:

- An appraisal of the current version of the Gerrards Cross Neighbourhood Plan under the eight SEA topic headings; and
- The overall conclusions at this current stage and recommendations for the next stage of plan-making.

Gerrards Cross Neighbourhood Plan policies

5.2 The Gerrards Cross Neighbourhood Plan puts forward 18 policies to guide development in the neighbourhood area. **Table 5.1** groups the drafted policies under five broad policy themes set out within the Gerrards Cross Neighbourhood Plan.

Table 5.1: GXNP policies

Policy Number	Policy Name
Town Centre	
Policy 1	Re-use of retail premises
Policy 2	Small scale business development
Policy 3	New businesses and retail support
Housing	
Policy 4	Orchehill Rise Car Park and Station Overflow Carpark
Policy 5	General design of residential development
Policy 6	Housing Mix
Policy 7	Existing Buildings
Policy 8	Brownfield Land
Policy 9	Lifetime neighbourhoods and security
Transport and Movement	
Policy 10	Highway Improvements
Policy 11	Off-street Parking
Policy 12	Retention of public car parking
Policy 13	Pedestrian access and walkway routes
Environment	
Policy 14	Green Belt, safe guarded land and Gerrards Cross Settlement Boundary
Policy 15	Protection and enhancement of Local Green Space
Policy 16	Trees and Landscape
Policy 17	Protection of Historic Environment
Policy 18	Strategic Gaps

Methodology

- 5.3 The assessment identifies and evaluates 'likely significant effects' on the baseline, drawing on the sustainability objectives identified through scoping (see **Table 3.1**) as a methodological framework.
- 5.4 Every effort is made to predict effects accurately; however, this is inherently challenging given the strategic nature of the policies under consideration and understanding of the baseline (now and in the future under a 'no plan' scenario) that is inevitably limited. Given uncertainties there is a need to make assumptions, e.g., in relation to plan implementation and aspects of the baseline that might be impacted. Assumptions are made cautiously and explained within the text (with the aim of striking a balance between comprehensiveness and conciseness). In many instances, given reasonable assumptions, it is not possible to predict 'significant effects', but it is possible to comment on merits (or otherwise) of the draft plan in more general terms.
- 5.5 Finally, it is important to note that effects are predicted taking account of the criteria presented within Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. So, for example, account is taken of the probability, duration, frequency, and reversibility of effects as far as possible. Cumulative effects are also considered, i.e., the potential for the Neighbourhood Plan to impact an aspect of the baseline when implemented alongside other plans, programmes, and projects. These effect 'characteristics' are described within the assessment as appropriate.

6. Assessment of the plan

Introduction

- 6.1 The assessment is presented below under eight topic headings, reflecting the established assessment framework (see **Table 3.1**). A final section (**Chapter 7**) then presents overall conclusions.

Air quality

- 6.2 Within the Gerrards Cross neighbourhood area there is an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) declared for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) along a sub-section of the M25. Other than this area, Gerrards Cross does not experience any significant air pollution issues; though localised traffic increase and congestion linked to development may cause concern and a decrease in air quality linked to increased emissions.
- 6.3 The site allocation policy identifies a very small-scale development site (for around seven homes) near the centre of the settlement, adjacent to the train station. The site is considered as ideally located to maximise the benefits of accessibility and thus reduce the need to travel by private car. The scale of development proposed is also not considered likely to give rise to any significant effects.
- 6.4 Wider plan policies will indirectly help to mitigate any minor effects arising. This includes Policy 10, which indicates proposals that improve the flow of traffic and demonstrate traffic impact mitigation techniques will be supported. Policy 5 indicates housing proposals will need to include good pedestrian and cycle connections with the town and surrounding countryside, promoting active transportation methods, further supporting by promoted walking routes under Policy 13. Policy 16 further ensures trees and hedgerows are protected as far as possible in development, which will help safeguard features that support clean air.
- 6.5 Wider potential employment and retail development is also captured within the policy framework (though not specifically allocated for), and Policies 2 and 3 seek to ensure appropriate locations for such uses that minimise traffic generation.
- 6.6 In conclusion, no significant effects are considered likely with regards to air quality. Wider plan policies which set out criteria for development and associated traffic and transportation provide support for maintaining air quality in the neighbourhood area, predominantly by reducing congestion and offering active transportation options. Given the scale of development proposed through the plan, alongside its accessible location, no significant deviations from the baseline are anticipated. As such, it is concluded there will be broadly **neutral effects** overall.

Biodiversity and geodiversity

- 6.7 The Gerrards Cross neighbourhood area is in proximity internationally and nationally designated biodiversity sites; as such, development within the neighbourhood area could have adverse impacts on the biodiversity and

geodiversity of designated features. Additionally, there is a variety of habitats within Gerrards Cross, and parts of the neighbourhood area are countryside that also contribute to the biodiversity and geodiversity of Gerrards Cross and should be maintained and enhanced.

- 6.8 In relation to the internationally designated sites (Burnham Beeches), the Plan has been subject to a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) which has concluded no likely significant effects provided the recommended policy wording is incorporated into the GXNP.
- 6.9 The proposed site allocation is a current car park with limited ecological features, and the supporting policy makes no provision for biodiversity and geodiversity enhancement, nor are there specific provisions in the wider policy framework that are linked to this theme. However, the environmental policies could indirectly help to improve biodiversity and geodiversity, specifically Policies 14, 15, and 16, which work to protect specific green areas and landscape features in Gerrards Cross. By protecting these features, the GXNP is safeguarding areas that already have or could come to have biodiversity value. With a wider commitment underway (e.g., the Environment Bill) to deliver biodiversity net gains in development, development provides a good opportunity to increase ecological features in this area of the settlement.
- 6.10 In conclusion, limited effects in relation to biodiversity are anticipated in implementation of the GXNP. Given the site allocation is brownfield land with limited ecological features, and wider ecological connections with the site are mitigated through the HRA, no significant deviations from the baseline are anticipated and **broadly neutral effects** are concluded.

Climate change

- 6.11 The transport sector is the largest contributor to emissions in Buckinghamshire, in which Gerrards Cross is located, due to motorways and connecting routeways that allow access to larger cities like London. In the absence of strategic (higher-level) transport interventions (outside of the scope of the GXNP), sustainable transport access improvements and electric vehicles would help to reduce the impact of transportation emissions and there is charging infrastructure within Gerrards Cross to facilitate a shift to electric vehicles. Furthermore, Gerrards Cross contains a variety of services and facilities that can support day-to-day needs (and thus reduce the need to travel). In terms of flood risk, the neighbourhood area does experience surface water flooding, with low and medium risk areas being concentrated along the river Misbourne.
- 6.12 The proposed site allocation is ideally located to provide good access to the train station and local service offer. Furthermore, only small-scale development is proposed which is unlikely to lead to significant traffic or air quality impacts. The site surrounded by areas of medium to low surface water flood risk, and as such, development should incorporate appropriate sustainable drainage to minimise any future impacts associated with expansion of flood risk areas. The policy provisions of the Local Plan and NPPF should ensure that appropriate drainage solutions are included, but the policy framework of the GXNP could be enhanced by recognising the potential for future flood risk issues at the site, and the need to mitigate against this.

- 6.13 Wider plan policies could also indirectly help to mitigate any adverse impacts development will have on climate change through reducing emissions, especially linked to transportation. Policies 2 and 5 set out the need to ensure there will not be a significant increase in traffic from any future employment development. Policy 7 builds on this and ensures the local highway network is capable of accommodating additional traffic. These policies work to reduce the number of vehicles on the road, and therefore reduce associated emissions that contribute to climate change. Additionally, the environment policies contribute to climate change mitigation by preserving green spaces (Policies 14 and 15) and trees and hedgerows (Policy 16). This helps to mitigate against the effects of climate change by keeping green spaces undeveloped, and retaining key biodiversity features, that can act as carbon stores. It is noted there is no policy provision linked to flood risk; however, the higher-level policy framework provided by the Local Plan and the NPPF is likely to ensure that suitable drainage is considered in development and no significant adverse effects arise. Policy measures which seek flood betterment in development (e.g., improved drainage) could enhance positive effects arising.
- 6.14 In conclusion, the site proposed through the GXNP is considered likely to support good access to sustainable transport modes, including active travel opportunities, and is a small-scale development which minimises the likelihood of negative effects. However, sustainable drainage systems should be considered onsite to avoid any potential future surface water flood risk issues. Assuming this is delivered in line with Local Plan/ NPPF requirements, significant effects are likely to be avoided. The wider policy framework provides additional mitigation (seeking to reduce emissions and maintain ecological/ green infrastructure networks which contribute to resilience) which could indirectly lead to **minor positive effects**.

Landscape

- 6.15 The Gerrards Cross neighbourhood area overlaps with one National Character Area: Thames Valley. Three local character areas are also defined within the neighbourhood area. Of note, Gerrards Cross is within proximity to the Chiltern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and as such development proposals will need to be considerate of potential impacts on the landscape setting, including views to and from the AONB. Additionally, the neighbourhood area overlaps with and is surrounded by Green Belt land, which maintains a natural gap between settlements to help prevent urban coalescence.
- 6.16 The proposed site allocation lies centrally, as a brownfield site (a current carpark) within the settlement area. Small-scale development (seven homes) is also being proposed. Effects are therefore likely to relate predominantly to the immediate townscape setting and limit impacts in relation to the wider landscape (including the Chiltern Hills AONB). As brownfield development, there is also a recognised opportunity to improve the function and aesthetics of this area of land currently used as a car park. The site allocation policy (Policy 4) indicates development will need to incorporate a landscape scheme to minimise any effects of development on the surrounding area, including visually.
- 6.17 Wider plan policies also work to protect the landscape setting. Policy 5 stipulates proposals will need to incorporate the Chiltern and South Bucks

Character Study 2017. It also states that housing development will be encouraged to use local materials and building styles. This will guide housing design to be in-keeping with the surrounding built-up area, which will reduce visual impact. Design that is in-keeping with the local character of the area is also reflected in Policy 7. The environment policies work well to ensure the landscape is maintained and enhanced by limiting development outside of the settlement boundary (as countryside) and within the Green Belt (Policy 14). Protected green spaces are also considered to act as mini landscape buffers in the built-up area (Policy 15) and Strategic Gaps are identified through Policy 18 which will provide long-term protection for these greenfield areas.

- 6.18 In conclusion, the policies within the Gerrards Cross Neighbourhood Plan work well to maintain and enhance the landscape and mitigate any potential impacts development could bring. The site allocation policy works well to ensure the development incorporates a landscape scheme that will reduce the visual impact and encourages proposals that utilise local building materials and techniques to make the development blend with the existing built-up area. As a brownfield site there is a recognised opportunity to improve the immediate townscape setting. The wider plan policies work well to ensure proposals fully consider the landscape context, reducing the potential for future coalescence and maintaining landscape buffers and designated areas. As such, **minor long-term positive effects** are concluded as likely in relation to landscape.

Historic environment

- 6.19 The Gerrards Cross neighbourhood area has a rich historic environment – including nationally designated heritage assets, locally important historic features, scheduled monuments, the two conservation areas and buried artifacts. As such, it will be important for new development proposed through the GXNP to be considerate of the area's diverse historic environment and features that contribute to it.
- 6.20 The proposed site allocation is not located near to any of the Listed Buildings in the Parish, it does however, lie wholly within the Conservation Area. Although the site allocation policy (Policy 4) does not make specific provisions for the historic environment, it does indicate proposals will need to: include landscaping to reduce any potential landscape and visual impacts, refer to the Chiltern and South Bucks Character Study 2017 to guide housing design, and ensure that building heights do not exceed the surrounding buildings. This will lower the impact of development on the historic environment by ensuring new housing design is in-keeping with the surrounding area; this alongside landscaping will help maintain or improve heritage settings. It is also recognised that the site is brownfield, currently in use as a car park. Whilst this means development has the potential to improve the immediate townscape setting (through the removal of large numbers of cars and introduction of in-keeping dwellings), it is also recognised that this may displace parking to some degree, with a potential to negatively impact the conservation area. However, the carpark is currently used predominantly as an overflow carpark, so impacts may be more limited to peak times.
- 6.21 Wider plan policies work to protect the historic environment. The environment policies positively impact the historic environment by seeking improvements to the landscape setting of designated and non-designated heritage assets, which

could further improve the interpretation, understanding and significance of the historic environment. Policies 1 and 2 indicate schemes would need to ensure that the reuse of buildings for new business and retail outlets are appropriate to the historic character of the structures and consider the surrounding historic context. Policy 5 stipulates proposals will need to incorporate the Chiltern and South Bucks Character Study 2017. This will guide housing design to be in-keeping with surrounding structures (e.g., using external materials that work well with the existing external materials on structures), thus reducing the impact development will have on the setting of historic environment assets by ensuring development does not detract from the visual understanding of the asset. The historic environment specific policy (Policy 17) provides further protection for heritage assets in the neighbourhood area, indicating all historic environment assets will be conserved and enhanced.

- 6.22 In conclusion, the site allocation proposed is relatively constrained by its location within the designated conservation area. Whilst the small-scale development proposed is likely to be in-keeping with the character of the area, there is a potential to displace traffic on peak occasions, which could impact the conservation area through increased occurrences of on-street parking for example. On this basis, **minor negative effects** are concluded as likely at this stage. In the absence of alternative carparking provisions, it is recognised that these effects are largely unavoidable without changing the spatial strategy, for which the wider performance of the site against the range of environmental and social themes will need to be weighted by plan-makers.

Land, soil, and water resources

- 6.23 It is predicted that the Gerrards Cross neighbourhood area overlaps with higher quality agricultural land outside of the built-up area and as such, the centrally located brownfield site proposed for development in the GXNP is likely to avoid effects arising in relation to high-quality soils. Given its former use as a car park, there may be a requirement for land remediation (if the site is contaminated) which should be appropriately considered in any scheme. Development that delivers remediation will ultimately have positive effects for soil resources in the long-term. Furthermore, the site allocation policy (Policy 4) seeks houses which are built to the highest standards of construction (Code for Sustainable Homes and BREEAM standards, or equivalent), which will assist in avoiding or minimising any land, soil, and water contamination, whilst maximising the efficient use of natural resources.
- 6.24 Policy 8 stipulates proposals that previously developed / 'brownfield' land will be given a priority over proposals that use 'greenfield' land where it is a viable option. This will continue to minimise the loss of higher quality agricultural land in the neighbourhood area. The safeguarding of land and soil resources is further reflected in the environment policies, which together indirectly positively impact land, soil, and water resources by preserving green spaces and important environmental features. Safeguarding against contamination is also a feature of Policy 5, which indicates there should be adequate storage for bins and recycling, which will prevent waste from entering natural resource stores.
- 6.25 The small-scale development proposed within an area of existing water infrastructure connections is not considered likely to lead to any significant effects in relation to water resources (which is managed at a catchment scale).

It is noted however, that the main waterbody in the area has a failed chemical quality status. It will thus be important to ensure that future development avoids impacts in relation to water quality. The BREEAM equivalent standards outlined above as a benchmark for development will assist in this respect. The proposed site allocation is also not in the vicinity of the river and has good potential therefore to avoid negative effects.

- 6.26 In conclusion, the allocation of, and prioritisation of brownfield land is likely to avoid adverse effects arising in relation to soil resources, and the GXNP is considered to perform well in this respect in relation to efficient land use. It is recommended that Policy 4 is updated to reflect the need to investigate any potential contamination onsite and ensure appropriate remediation prior to development. Assuming the recommendation is incorporated, no significant deviations from the baseline would be anticipated, and brownfield prioritisation (and potential land remediation) would be considered for potential **minor long-term positive effects**.

Community wellbeing

- 6.27 The residents of Gerrards Cross benefit from access to a reasonable range of services and facilities within the settlement, as well as the countryside (being surrounded by Green Belt land). However, resident engagement through the planning process has identified local housing needs for small and medium homes, affordable housing, and affordable retirement accommodation, and the area, whilst identified as of low deprivation overall, performs less favourably in relation to the 'barriers to housing and services' deprivation domain.
- 6.28 The GXNP proposes one site allocation delivering small-scale development (around seven homes) alongside new open space on-site. The site allocation policy (Policy 4) seeks a minimum of 35% of the anticipated housing to be two or three bed houses to accommodate the needs of the local community. This is a clear benefit to community wellbeing addressing the needs outlined through engagement.
- 6.29 The wider GXNP policies also work to enhance community wellbeing. Policy 2 supports the expansion and retention of existing local businesses, especially when this would offer employment opportunities to local people. Policy 5 ensures new housing development provides pedestrian and cycle connections to the town and countryside as well as cycle storage facilities. Increased connectivity is also a theme of Policy 9, which indicates housing developments need to be inclusive in terms of design, connectivity and permeability and be safe and secure. This allows for greater levels of active transportation, which promotes mental and physical health and wellbeing, as well as a greater feeling of security in the neighbourhood area. Active transportation is also a major feature of Policy 13. Policy 15 has a clear community wellbeing benefit, as it designates Local Green Spaces which can be used for recreation; thus, securing their long-term use. Policy 18 designates Strategic Gaps that work to keep distinct and separate communities and prevent coalescence; as such, development proposals within these gaps that have the potential to lead to visual coalescence or erode the community identity will not be supported.
- 6.30 In conclusion, the policies within the GXNP work to improve resident wellbeing, through tailored housing delivery, safeguarding infrastructure, promoting active healthy lifestyles, protecting green spaces and community identities, and

supporting appropriate employment development. Cumulatively, it is therefore considered likely that **major long-term positive effects** will arise in relation to community wellbeing.

Transportation

- 6.31 Gerrards Cross is considered to have an extensive public transportation network, including a train station, multiple bus stops and services, and several public footpaths. Whilst the local road network is well-established, additional traffic resulting from development within or in proximity to the neighbourhood area may have an impact on traffic and pedestrian safety.
- 6.32 Small-scale development is proposed through the Plan at a single site that is well connected within the settlement area, relatively central, and where suitable access is likely to be achieved. Notably, the site provides excellent access to the train station.
- 6.33 Wider Gerrards Cross Neighbourhood Plan policies work to provide guidance regarding transportation. Policy 2 indicates new business ventures will be supported where they do not create significant additional traffic on the roads. This is built on in Policy 3, indicating proposal locations need to be appropriate in terms of traffic and access and provide suitable parking. Additionally, Policy 7 requires proposals for adapting existing structures to consider the impact on the local highway network and whether it is capable of accommodating any additional traffic as a result of the proposal. These policies demonstrate development will need to carefully consider and minimise any impacts in relation to the road network. This feeds into Policy 10, which indicates proposals to improve the flow of traffic and pedestrian safety will be strongly supported, and development that results in increased traffic levels will need to provide a strategy to mitigate traffic impacts and ensure easy access for pedestrians and cyclists. Policies 5 and 13 work to provide good pedestrian and cycle connections with the town and countryside to allow for sustainable and active transport to the town centre, public transport facilities, and services and infrastructure like schools. This will promote walking and cycling in the neighbourhood area which in turn could reduce the number of vehicles on the road.
- 6.34 In conclusion, the proposed small-scale development site is an a highly accessible location reducing the need for a car, and the wider GXNP policies work to ensure development fully considers its potential impact on the local highway network, and pedestrian and cycle access is maintained and improved to provide active transport options within and in proximity to the neighbourhood area. As such, **minor long-term positive effects** are concluded as most likely.

Cumulative effects

- 6.35 No significant cumulative effects are anticipated as a result of the spatial strategy, which proposes small-scale brownfield development centrally within the settlement. Minor positive effects are concluded in relation to supporting housing delivery across the district and housing market area.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- 7.1 The Gerrards Cross Neighbourhood Plan proposes small-scale growth at a single brownfield site within the settlement area, that displays minimal constraints. It is likely that development could successfully integrate with the existing settlement and wider neighbourhood area. These are the predominant reasons why no significant negative effects are considered likely through the implementation of the GXNP. However, one minor constraint has been identified in the spatial strategy, which is the potential displacement of parked vehicles at peak times (with the associated loss of overflow carparking space in the centre) which could negatively impact upon the designated conservation area. Minor negative effects are therefore concluded in relation to the historic environment at this stage.
- 7.2 Significant positive effects are considered likely in relation to community wellbeing with the cumulative effort to tailor housing delivery to meet local needs, deliver development in an accessible location, safeguard infrastructure, promote active healthy lifestyles, protect green spaces and community identities, and support appropriate employment and retail development. These efforts, alongside the prioritisation of brownfield development, also predominantly form the basis for concluding minor positive effects in relation to the climate change, landscape, land, soil, and water resources, and transportation themes, and broadly neutral effects in relation to the air quality theme.
- 7.3 With the recommendations of the HRA being integrated into the GXNP, broadly neutral effects (i.e., no significant deviation from the baseline) are also anticipated in relation to biodiversity and geodiversity.

Recommendations

- 7.4 No significant effects are considered likely in implementation of the GXNP; however, one recommendation is identified in relation to the land, soil, and water resources theme:
- It is recommended that Policy 4 is updated to reflect the need to investigate any potential contamination onsite and ensure appropriate remediation prior to development if necessary.

Part 3: What are the next steps?

8. Next steps and monitoring

- 8.1 This part of the report explains the next steps that will be taken as part of plan-making and SEA.

Plan finalisation

- 8.2 Following consultation, responses received will be considered and the GXNP and SEA Environmental Report will be finalised for submission.
- 8.3 Following submission, the GXNP and supporting evidence will be published for further consultation, and then subjected to Independent Examination. At Independent Examination, the GXNP will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the Local Plan.
- 8.4 If the examination leads to a favourable outcome, the GXNP will then be subject to a referendum, organised by Buckinghamshire Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the Neighbourhood Plan, then it will be 'made'. Once 'made', the GXNP will become part of the Development Plan for Buckinghamshire, covering the defined neighbourhood area.

Monitoring

- 8.5 The SEA regulations require 'measures envisaged concerning monitoring' to be outlined in this report. This refers to the monitoring of likely significant effects of the Neighbourhood Plan to identify any unforeseen effects early and take remedial action as appropriate.
- 8.6 It is anticipated that monitoring of effects of the Neighbourhood Plan will be undertaken by Buckinghamshire Council as part of the process of preparing its Annual Monitoring Report (AMR). No significant negative effects are considered likely in the implementation of the GXNP that would warrant more stringent monitoring over and above that already undertaken by the Council.

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