

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Stoke Poges Neighbourhood Plan

Environmental Report

September 2023

Quality information

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Non-Technical Summary (NTS)

Introduction

AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Stoke Poges Neighbourhood Plan (hereafter referred to as “the SPNP”). The SPNP is being prepared under the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 and in the context of the adopted South Bucks Local Plan (1999) and South Bucks Core Strategy (2011), as well as the emerging Bucks Local Plan. Once ‘made’, the SPNP will have material weight when deciding on planning applications, as part of the local development framework for Buckinghamshire.

SEA is a required process 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.¹ This Non-Technical Summary (NTS) provides a summary for the full Environmental Report for the SPNP. It is 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/ this 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 following objectives have been established in the development of the SPNP:

- To manage growth through sensitive infill and other schemes that meet local needs.
- To conserve the special heritage assets of the Parish and its landscape setting.
- To protect and improve the ecological value and connectivity of the green infrastructure assets of the Parish.

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. Whilst no initial screening was undertaken, the Parish and District agreed a high likely requirement for SEA and the initial steps of the SEA process involved obtaining views from consultees on both the need for SEA alongside the suggested scope of the SEA.

- To create and integrate a safe and convenient walking and cycling network to serve the settlements and improve access to neighbouring settlements and the wider countryside.

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.

SEA topic	SEA objective
Climate change and flood risk	Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities within the neighbourhood area and increase resilience to the potential effects of climate change, including flooding.
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.
Historic environment	Protect, conserve, and enhance the historic environment within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape.

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 SPNP. Specifically, Part 1 of the report:

- 1) Explains the process of establishing the reasonable alternatives.
- 2) Presents the outcomes of assessing the reasonable alternatives; and
- 3) Explains reasons for developing a preferred option, considering the assessment.

Establishing the alternatives

The Environmental Report explains how reasonable alternatives were established following a process of considering how much growth, and where growth should be located.

This work identified that there is no strategic need to allocate sites for development within the SPNP. However, the Parish Council recognise that there are a number of small sites which could be permitted for housing growth over the plan period, given they fall within the settlement area, or within the remit of Local Plan Policy GB3, and are thus acceptable in principle assuming they accord with the wider policy framework. The Parish Council recognises the potential to shape development at

these sites to ensure that housing being delivered in the village is suited to the local needs identified through the supporting HNA and in-keeping with village character.

On this basis, two alternatives are identified:

- **Option 1:** Essentially a ‘do-nothing’ approach, which relies on the wider thematic policies of the Local Plan and SPNP to guide development at the small sites. Deemed a ‘policy off’ approach.
- **Option 2:** Develop additional policy and design guidance for development at the small sites. Deemed a ‘policy-on’ approach.

Assessment method and outcomes

The two options identified are subject to high-level assessment. For each of the options, the assessment examines likely significant effects on the baseline, drawing on the sustainability themes and objectives identified through scoping (see Table 3.1) as a methodological framework. Where appropriate neutral effects, or uncertainty will also be noted.

Within each row of **the summary table below** (i.e., for each of the topics that comprise the SEA framework) the columns to the right-hand side seek to both **rank** the alternatives in order of performance and **categorise** the performance of each option in terms of effects on the baseline (using red, amber, green, and blue). **Red** indicates a significant negative effect; **amber** a negative effect that is of limited significance; **light green** a positive effect that is of limited significance; and **dark green** a significant positive effect. **Blue** is assigned where effects are likely to be neutral or uncertain.

Every effort is made to predict effects accurately, however, where there is a need to rely on assumptions to reach a conclusion on a ‘significant effect’ this is made explicit in the appraisal text. Where it is not possible to predict likely significant effects based on reasonable assumptions, efforts are made to comment on the relative merits of the alternatives in more general terms and to indicate a rank of preference. This is helpful, as it enables a distinction to be made between the alternatives even where it is not possible to distinguish between them in term of ‘significant effects’. **Numbers** are used to highlight the option or options that are preferred from an SEA perspective with 1 performing the best. Also, ‘=’ is used to denote instances where the alternatives perform on a par.

Summary table of assessment findings

SEA topic	Option 1 (Policy-off approach)	Option 2 (Policy-on approach)
Climate change and flood risk	2	1
Community wellbeing	2	1
Historic environment	2	1
Landscape	2	1

Given the existing suite of policies provided by the Local Plan, and the small-scale infill nature of the development sites within the village area or within the remit of Local Plan Policy GB3, no significant effects are considered likely (with likely impacts being managed through the development management process). Marginal

differences are drawn which relate to the potential to enhance policy mitigation with a policy-on approach (Option 2) when compared to a policy-off approach (Option 1). These differences are summarised for each SEA topic below:

Climate change and flood risk – with a policy-on approach (Option 2) there is greater potential to guide the design and location of sustainable drainage systems supporting new development and enhance the potential quality of water management measures onsite. This could include an identified preference for nature-based solutions for example, which provide multiple benefits for climate change, flood risk, and biodiversity.

Community wellbeing – Option 2 (a policy-on approach) ultimately provides more potential to shape the type of housing development coming forward at these sites. Left to market preference, it is deemed likely that a low number of larger homes would be delivered to maximise potential profits, whereas a policy guided approach under Option 2 could identify the types, sizes, and preferred density and tenures of homes at these sites. Most notably, developing supporting policy would provide site promoters with insight into the potential to deliver a higher density, smaller homes scheme (such as flats) that is still commercially attractive and provides much needed housing types matched to local needs. In addition, Option 2 (a policy-on approach) provides the opportunity to identify a design code that will ensure development is in-keeping with local character, identifies opportunities to promote accessibility (for example by connecting with existing footpaths or cycle routes), and maximises the potential for green infrastructure enhancements (to the benefit of the local community).

Historic environment – very marginal differences are anticipated given the existing policy stipulations for development in relation to the historic environment. Most notably, the SPNP offers the chance to identify any non-designated heritage assets of local value that may be affected by development proposals, and enhance the protections afforded to these assets. However, this could be addressed under wider thematic policy and thus could occur under both options. However, given Option 2 (a policy-on approach) could deliver site-specific design criteria, this option provides enhanced potential to identify any expected on-site mitigation measures early in the development process, and consult on these through the plan process.

Landscape – no significant impacts are predicted in relation to the wider landscape, given the policy remit which allows for small-scale infill within the village and key areas washed over by Green Belt. Effects are likely to predominantly relate to the immediate setting of the village, and any views that may be interrupted by development proposals at small sites. The SPNP offers the chance to identify any key views and enhance the protections afforded to these. However, this could be addressed under wider thematic policy and thus could occur under both options. Despite this, it is recognised that Option 2 (a policy-on approach) provides the opportunity to identify site-specific design codes that ensure development is in-keeping with character, protects key features, and promotes valued design aspects.

The assessment clearly shows that Option 2 has greater potential to enhance the positive effects arising from development, most prominently in relation to the community wellbeing SEA theme. To reiterate, no significant negative effects are predicted under either option being considered. Some minor uncertainty exists in relation to the landscape and historic environment themes, which reflects the dependency on detailed design proposals.

Developing the preferred approach

The Parish Council's preferred approach is **Option 2** (a policy-on approach) – to develop policy and design guidance that will influence the design of development at small sites likely to come forward over the plan period. This reflects the marginal differences in the options, and notably the potential for Option 2 to perform more positively in relation to the SEA objectives, most notably in relation to the community wellbeing objective.

Assessment findings at this stage

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

Overall, the SPNP is not considered likely to lead to any significant negative effects under any of the SEA topics that are a focus of this SEA.

Minor positive effects are anticipated under the community wellbeing SEA topic as the policy framework of the draft SPNP successfully addresses the range of issues that fall under this SEA topic, from housing needs to access to services and facilities and green space. The spatial strategy supports this by promoting small-scale (infill) development in the most accessible locations.

Broadly neutral to minor positive effects are predicted under the climate change and flood risk SEA topic. This is because the policy framework of the draft SPNP encourages energy efficient development and supports active travel, whilst the spatial strategy promotes development in the most accessible locations and avoids development in areas of high flood risk.

Residual neutral effects are considered likely under the landscape SEA topic due to the level consideration given to the local landscape, including the Green Belt, through both the policy framework and spatial strategy/ design code of the draft SPNP, and again because of the limited infill development expected over the plan period.

Uncertainty is noted under the historic environment SEA topic in the absence of detailed planning applications for the Rogers Close site, which lies adjacent to a conservation area and grade II listed building. Nevertheless, it is recognised that the draft SPNP's policy framework and design code do a good job in protecting both designated and non-designated heritage assets and no significant effects are deemed likely.

At this stage, no specific recommendations are made as the draft SPNP and accompanying design code sufficiently address the main constraints of the neighbourhood area.

Next steps

Following Regulation 14 consultation and consideration of responses, the SPNP and SEA Environmental Report will be finalised for submission.

Following submission, the Plan and supporting evidence will be published for further consultation, and then subjected to Independent Examination. At Independent Examination, the SPNP 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 SPNP will then be subject to a referendum, organised by Bucks Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the SPNP, then it will be 'made'. Once 'made', the SPNP will become part of the Development Plan for Bucks, covering the defined neighbourhood area.

1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1 AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Stoke Poges Neighbourhood Plan (hereafter referred to as “the SPNP”). The SPNP is being prepared under the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 and in the context of the adopted South Bucks Local Plan (1999) and South Bucks Core Strategy (2011), as well as the emerging Bucks Local Plan. Once ‘made’, the SPNP will have material weight when deciding on planning applications in the neighbourhood area, as part of the Buckinghamshire local development framework.
- 1.2 SEA is a required process for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating potential negative effects and maximising potential positive effects.²

SEA explained

- 1.3 It is a requirement that the SEA process is undertaken in-line with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. The Regulations stipulate that 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 when finalising the plan.
- 1.4 More specifically, the report can be structured to address requirements by answering 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 current draft plan.
 - 3) What happens next?

This Environmental Report

- 1.5 This report is the Environmental Report for the SPNP. It is published alongside the ‘submission’ version of the Plan, under Regulation 16 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended). The report answers the three questions outlined above in turn, as discrete ‘parts’ of the report. However, before answering these questions, two further introductory sections are presented to further set the scene (**Chapters 2 and 3**).

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. The SPNP was officially ‘screened in’ by Bucks Council as requiring SEA in September 2022.

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

2. What is the plan seeking to achieve?

Introduction

2.1 This section is an introductory chapter to consider the context provided by both Buckinghamshire Council's local development framework, and the vision and objectives of the SPNP. The designated neighbourhood area lies within Buckinghamshire, to the north of Slough (see **Figure 2.1** below).

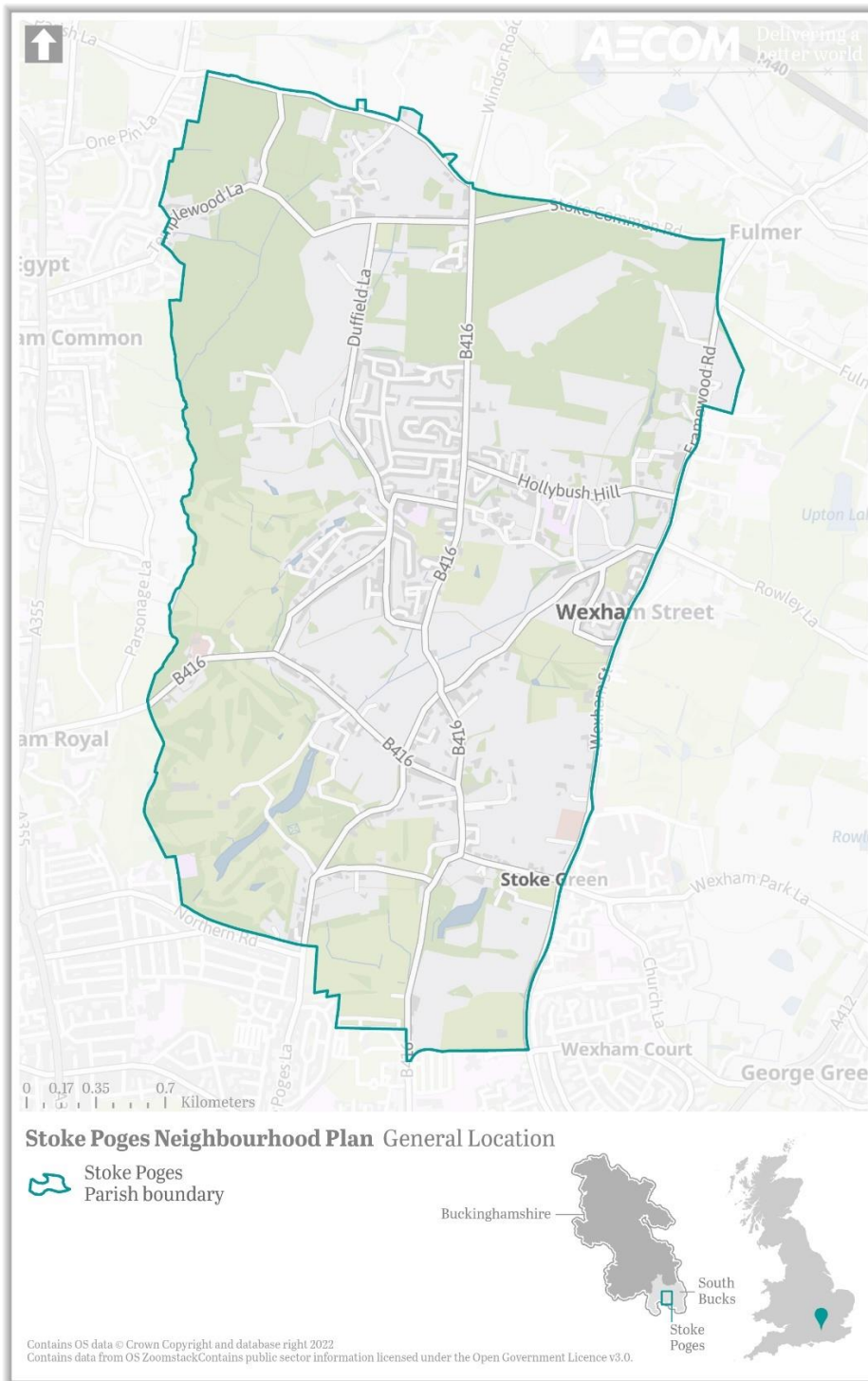


Figure 2.1 Stoke Poges neighbourhood area

Local development framework for Bucks

- 2.2 The existing local development framework for Bucks comprises the South Bucks Core Strategy, adopted in 2011, as well as saved policies from the South Bucks Local Plan, adopted in 1999.
- 2.3 In April 2020, Buckinghamshire Council came into effect, bringing together the former Buckinghamshire County Council and former district councils of Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe. As a result, the new Council inherited the local development plan documents previously adopted by each of the former councils. These documents are still relevant to each of the former district areas and will apply for the purposes of deciding planning applications until a new Local Plan for Buckinghamshire is adopted.
- 2.4 The new Local Plan will cover the whole of the Buckinghamshire Council area, likely for the period up to 2040. The Council published a Local Development Scheme in February 2021, which details the timetable for preparing the new Local Plan. Most recently, the Council finished a wider call for sites, including greenfield sites, in September 2022. Once adopted, the new Local Plan will set the strategy for growth and change in Buckinghamshire up to 2040, allocate sites to deliver the strategy, and establish the policies against which planning applications will be determined.
- 2.5 At present, there is no established housing target for the neighbourhood area or identified unmet housing needs. The village of Stoke Poges is inset from the Metropolitan Green Belt largely confining future development to within the settlement area. However, development may be permitted within Green Belt land in exceptional cases. Notably, saved Policy GB3 (Residential Infilling in Green Belt Settlements) of the South Bucks Local Plan suggests that Wexham Street, which is 'washed over' by the Green Belt, is an appropriate location for infill development.

Vision and Objectives of the SPNP

- 2.6 The following vision and objectives have been established in the development of the SPNP:

“Well-designed infill development within the development constraints of Stoke Poges and Wexham Street has helped to address a local need for smaller ‘zero carbon ready’ homes whilst maintaining the openness and permanence of the Green Belt. The quality of life for both present and future generations has been improved by protecting and improving our facilities and the environment.”

- To manage growth through sensitive infill and other schemes that meet local needs.
- To conserve the special heritage assets of the Parish and its landscape setting.
- To protect and improve the ecological value and connectivity of the green infrastructure assets of the Parish.
- To create and integrate a safe and convenient walking and cycling network to serve the settlements and improve access to neighbouring settlements and the wider countryside.

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 topics and objectives that should be a focus of the assessment of the Plan and reasonable alternatives.
- 3.2 The SEA Scoping Report (January 2023) sets out the policy context and baseline information that has informed the development of key issues and the identification of appropriate sustainability objectives.

Consultation

- 3.3 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.⁴
- 3.4 As such, these authorities were consulted over the period 10th January 2023 to 14th February 2023. Responses were received from Historic England and Natural England and neither authority had specific comments to make but included general information and supporting documents. No response was received from the Environment Agency. Scoping consultation responses are detailed in **Appendix 2**.

The SEA framework

- 3.5 The SEA framework presents a list of topics, objectives, and assessment questions that together comprise a framework to guide the appraisal. A summary framework of the topics and objectives is provided in **Table 3.1** below, with the full framework presented in **Appendix 2**.

Table 3.1 Summary SEA framework

SEA topic	SEA objective
Climate change and flood risk	Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities within the neighbourhood area and increase resilience to the potential effects of climate change, including flooding.
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.
Historic environment	Protect, conserve, and enhance the historic environment within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape.

⁴ These consultation bodies were selected “*by reason of their specific environmental responsibility, [they] are likely to be concerned by the environmental effects of implementing plans and programmes*” (SEA Directive, Article 6(3))

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

4. Introduction (to Part 1)

Overview

- 4.1 Whilst work on the SPNP has been underway for some time, the aim here is not to provide a comprehensive explanation of work to date, but rather to explain work undertaken to develop and appraise reasonable alternatives.
- 4.2 More specifically, this part of the report presents the information on the consideration given to reasonable alternative approached to addressing a particular issue that is of central importance to the Plan, namely the allocation of land for housing development (or alternative sites). Whilst the SPNP may not allocate land for housing development purposes, it recognises that there are a handful of small sites in the village that may be developed over the plan period.
- 4.3 The decision was taken to develop reasonable alternatives in relation to the matter of allocating land for development given that housing growth is known to be a matter of key interest amongst residents and other stakeholders, and that the delivery of new homes is most likely to have significant effects compared to other proposals within the Plan. National Planning Practice Guidance is clear that SEA should focus on matters likely to give rise to significant effects. Wider thematic policy is explored in Part 2 of this report.

Structure of this part of the report

- 4.4 Part 1 of the Environmental Report is structured as follows:
 - **Chapter 5** explains the process of establishing reasonable alternatives.
 - **Chapter 6** presents the outcomes of appraising the reasonable alternatives; and
 - **Chapter 7** explains the Steering Group's reasons for selecting the preferred approach considering the alternatives.

5. Establishing reasonable alternatives

Introduction

- 5.1 The aim of this chapter is to explain the process that led to the establishment of alternatives and thereby present “*an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with*”.⁵
- 5.2 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 SPNP). These parameters are then drawn together in order to arrive at ‘reasonable alternatives’.

How much growth?

- 5.3 As noted previously, the existing local development framework for Bucks comprises the South Bucks Core Strategy, adopted in 2011, as well as saved policies from the South Bucks Local Plan, adopted in 1999.
- 5.4 The new Local Plan will cover the whole of the Buckinghamshire Council area, likely for the period up to 2040. Most recently, the Council finished a wider call for sites, including greenfield sites, in September 2022 and completed consultation on the vision and objectives for development and transport in Buckinghamshire in June 2023.
- 5.5 At present, there is no established housing growth target for the neighbourhood area. The village of Stoke Poges is inset from the Metropolitan Green Belt and is therefore where future development within the neighbourhood area will likely occur. However, development may be permitted within Green Belt land in exceptional cases. Notably, saved Policy GB3 (Residential Infilling in Green Belt Settlements) of the South Bucks Local Plan suggests that Wexham Street, which is ‘washed over’ by the Green Belt, is an appropriate location for infill development. Development over the plan period is expected to be formed predominantly of infill development or small-scale windfall developments.
- 5.6 Whilst no strategic housing growth target has been established, the Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) supporting the SPNP has identified clear affordability issues. This includes around 26 households in need of affordable rented housing in Stoke Poges. The HNA suggests a 50% rent to 50% ownership split in future development to strike a balance between providing homes for those with the most acute needs (households seeking affordable rented tenures) whilst also addressing the affordability issues and larger scale of demand associated with market ownership.

Where could growth be located?

- 5.7 The SPNP does not allocate sites for future development within the neighbourhood area. However, it proposed site-specific design codes for six sites that were identified through the neighbourhood plan process as having

⁵ Schedule 2(8) of the SEA Regulations

potential to help meet local housing needs. This is because Stoke Poges is currently lacking suitably sized homes for first-time buyers and downsizers. These sites had to meet one of two criteria: a) lie within the inset boundary of Stokes Poges, or b) be small enough in size (>0.5ha) to qualify as ‘limited infilling’ as defined by Policy GB3 of the South Bucks Local Plan. Five of the six sites identified meet criteria a), and the remaining site meets criteria b). These sites are outlined in **Table 5.1** below and shown in **Figure 5.1** below. All sites are small-scale sites of less than 0.3ha.

Table 5.1 Description of the sites identified within the SPNP

Site Name	Location	Area (ha)
Rogers Close	North of Rogers Lane, Stoke Poges	0.27
Thames Court	West of Bells Hill, Stoke Poges	0.22
West End Court	South of West End Lane and West of Rogers Lane, Stoke Poges	0.11*
Deans Close	End of Deans Close, Wexham Street	0.08
Bells Hill Green	West of Bells Hill Green, Stoke Poges	0.05
Neville Close	End of Neville Close, Stoke Poges	0.04

* Total area of the three sites that make up this site

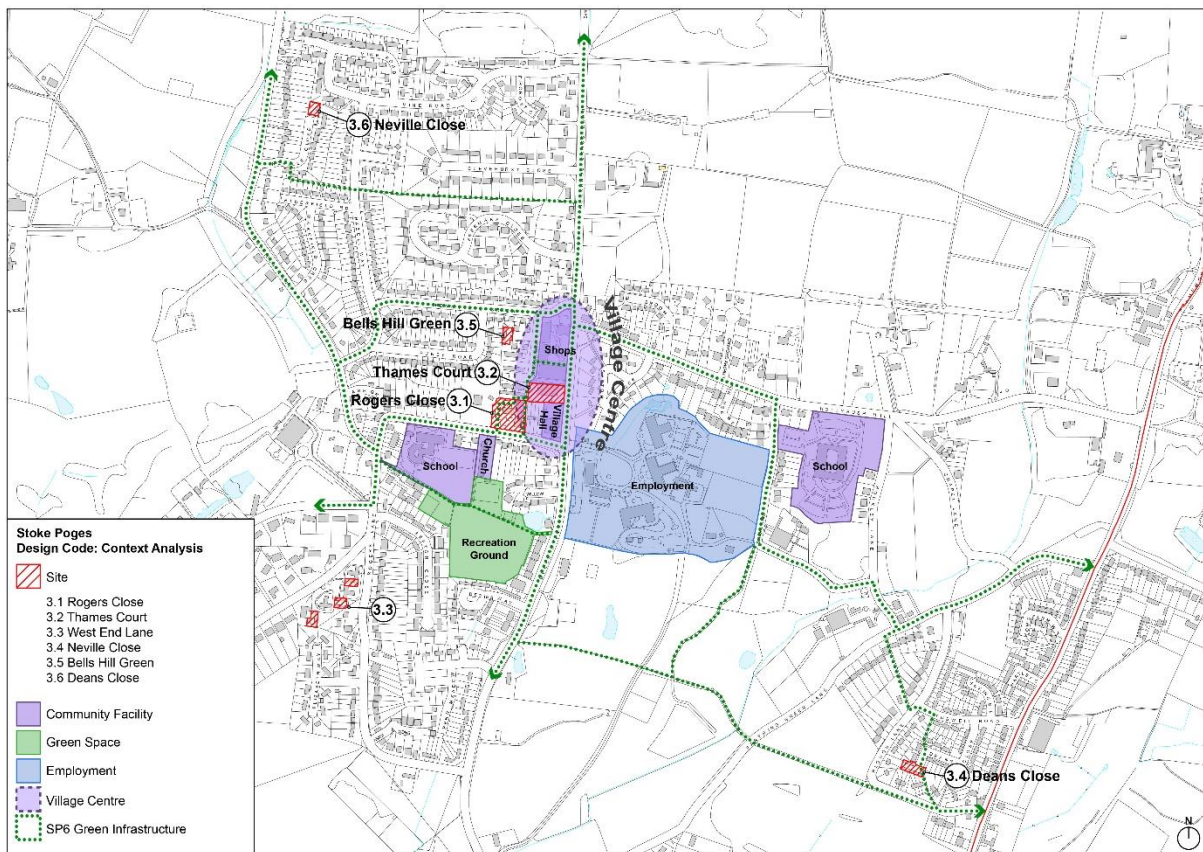


Figure 5.1 Location of the sites identified through the SPNP

Establishing alternatives

5.8 As noted, there is no strategic need to allocate sites for development within the SPNP. However, the Parish Council recognise that there are a number of small sites which could be permitted for housing growth over the plan period, given they fall within the settlement area, or within the remit of Local Plan Policy GB3, and are thus acceptable in principle assuming they accord with the wider policy framework. The Parish Council recognises the potential to shape development at these sites to ensure that housing being delivered in the village is suited to the local needs identified through the supporting HNA and in-keeping with village character.

5.9 On this basis, two alternatives are identified:

- **Option 1:** Essentially a 'do-nothing' approach, which relies on the wider thematic policies of the Local Plan and SPNP to guide development at the small sites. Deemed a 'policy off' approach.
- **Option 2:** Develop additional policy and design guidance for development at the small sites. Deemed a 'policy-on' approach.

6. Appraising reasonable alternatives

Methodology

- 6.1 The two options identified are subject to high-level assessment and the summary findings are discussed below.
- 6.2 For each of the options, the assessment examines likely significant effects on the baseline, drawing on the sustainability themes and objectives identified through scoping (see Table 3.1) as a methodological framework. Where appropriate neutral effects, or uncertainty will also be noted.
- 6.3 Within each row of **Table 6.1** (i.e., for each of the topics that comprise the SEA framework) the columns to the right-hand side seek to both **rank** the alternatives in order of performance and **categorise** the performance of each option in terms of effects on the baseline (using red, amber, green, and blue). **Red** indicates a significant negative effect; **amber** a negative effect that is of limited significance; **light green** a positive effect that is of limited significance; and **dark green** a significant positive effect. **Blue** is assigned where effects are likely to be neutral or uncertain.
- 6.4 Every effort is made to predict effects accurately, however, where there is a need to rely on assumptions to reach a conclusion on a 'significant effect' this is made explicit in the appraisal text. Where it is not possible to predict likely significant effects based on reasonable assumptions, efforts are made to comment on the relative merits of the alternatives in more general terms and to indicate a rank of preference. This is helpful, as it enables a distinction to be made between the alternatives even where it is not possible to distinguish between them in term of 'significant effects'. **Numbers** are used to highlight the option or options that are preferred from an SEA perspective with 1 performing the best. Also, '=' is used to denote instances where the alternatives perform on a par.
- 6.5 Finally, it is important to note that effects are predicted considering the criteria presented within the Regulations.⁶ So, for example, account is taken of the duration, frequency, and reversibility of effects.

⁶ Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

Appraisal findings

Table 6.1: Summary of assessment findings

SEA topic	Option 1 (Policy-off approach)	Option 2 (Policy-on approach)
Climate change and flood risk	2	1
Community wellbeing	2	1
Historic environment	2	1
Landscape	2	1

Discussion

- 6.6 Given the existing suite of policies provided by the Local Plan, and the small-scale infill nature of the development sites within the village area or within the remit of Local Plan Policy GB3, no significant effects are considered likely (with likely impacts being managed through the development management process). Marginal differences are drawn which relate to the potential to enhance policy mitigation with a policy-on approach (Option 2) when compared to a policy-off approach (Option 1). These differences are summarised for each SEA topic below:
- 6.7 **Climate change and flood risk** – with a policy-on approach (Option 2) there is greater potential to guide the design and location of sustainable drainage systems supporting new development and enhance the potential quality of water management measures onsite. This could include an identified preference for nature-based solutions for example, which provide multiple benefits for climate change, flood risk, and biodiversity.
- 6.8 **Community wellbeing** – Option 2 (a policy-on approach) ultimately provides more potential to shape the type of housing development coming forward at these sites. Left to market preference, it is deemed likely that a low number of larger homes would be delivered to maximise potential profits, whereas a policy guided approach under Option 2 could identify the types, sizes, and preferred density and tenures of homes at these sites. Most notably, developing supporting policy would provide site promoters with insight into the potential to deliver a higher density, smaller homes scheme (such as flats) that is still commercially attractive and provides much needed housing types matched to local needs. In addition, Option 2 (a policy-on approach) provides the opportunity to identify a design code that will ensure development is in-keeping with local character, identifies opportunities to promote accessibility (for example by connecting with existing footpaths or cycle routes), and maximises the potential for green infrastructure enhancements (to the benefit of the local community).
- 6.9 **Historic environment** – very marginal differences are anticipated given the existing policy stipulations for development in relation to the historic environment. Most notably, the SPNP offers the chance to identify any non-designated heritage assets of local value that may be affected by development proposals, and enhance the protections afforded to these assets. However, this could be addressed under wider thematic policy and thus could occur under both options. However, given Option 2 (a policy-on approach) could

deliver site-specific design criteria, this option provides enhanced potential to identify any expected on-site mitigation measures early in the development process, and consult on these through the plan process.

- 6.10 **Landscape** – no significant impacts are predicted in relation to the wider landscape, given the policy remit which allows for small-scale infill within the village and key areas washed over by Green Belt. Effects are likely to predominantly relate to the immediate setting of the village, and any views that may be interrupted by development proposals at small sites. The SPNP offers the chance to identify any key views and enhance the protections afforded to these. However, this could be addressed under wider thematic policy and thus could occur under both options. Despite this, it is recognised that Option 2 (a policy-on approach) provides the opportunity to identify site-specific design codes that ensure development is in-keeping with character, protects key features, and promotes valued design aspects.
- 6.11 The assessment clearly shows that Option 2 has greater potential to enhance the positive effects arising from development, most prominently in relation to the community wellbeing SEA theme. To reiterate, no significant negative effects are predicted under either option being considered. Some minor uncertainty exists in relation to the landscape and historic environment themes, which reflects the dependency on detailed design proposals.

7. Developing the preferred approach

- 7.1 The Parish Council's preferred approach is **Option 2** (a policy-on approach) – to develop policy and design guidance that will influence the design of development at small sites likely to come forward over the plan period. This reflects the marginal differences in the options, and notably the potential for Option 2 to perform more positively in relation to the SEA objectives, most notably in relation to the community wellbeing objective.

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

8. Introduction (to Part 2)

8.1 The aim of Part 2 is to present appraisal findings and recommendations in relation to the current version of the SPNP. This part of the report presents:

- An outline of the Plan contents, aims, and objectives.
- An appraisal of the Plan under the four SEA topic headings.
- Consideration of cumulative effects; and
- The overall conclusions at this stage and recommendations for the next stage of plan-making.

SPNP policies

8.2 The SPNP proposes twelve policies, including three that relate to the accompanying design code. These policies are listed in **Table 8.1** below.

Table 8.1 SPNP policies

Policy reference	Policy name
SP1	Design Code – Stoke Poges Sites
SP2	Design Code – Wexham Street Site
SP3	Sefton Park
SP4	Housing Mix and Tenure
SP5	Passivhaus Buildings
SP6	Design Code – Parish Wide
SP7	Local Heritage Assets
SP8	Rural Resilience
SP9	Green Infrastructure
SP10	Local Green Spaces
SP11	Local Access Network
SP12	Dark Skies

Methodology

- 8.3 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.
- 8.4 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.
- 8.5 Finally, it is important to note that effects are predicted taking account of the criteria presented within Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. 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 SPNP 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.

9. Appraisal of the SPNP

Plan contents, aims, and objectives

- 9.1 A focus of the SPNP is the design code which accompanies it; this is in place to ensure that future development comprises well-designed infill development that complements the neighbourhood area's historic environment and local landscape. The SPNP also focuses on delivering smaller 'zero carbon ready' homes, maintaining the openness and permanence of the Green Belt, and improving the quality of life of residents by protecting and improving local facilities and the environment.
- 9.2 Whilst the SPNP does not allocate sites for development, its design code provides design guidance for six sites that were identified through the neighbourhood plan process as having potential to help meet local housing needs. These sites had to meet one of two criteria: a) lie within the inset boundary of Stokes Poges, or b) be small enough in size (>0.5ha) to qualify as 'limited infilling' as defined by Policy GB3 of the South Bucks Local Plan.
- 9.3 The draft SPNP contains several land use policies: rather than focusing on the allocation of sites, these policies instead centre around the role of the design code in shaping future development. Policy SP1 (Design Code – Stoke Poges Sites) supports the development of five sites in Stokes Poges under the condition that they have full regard to the site-specific design codes. Similarly, Policy SP2 (Design Code – Wexham Street Site) supports the development of a site in Wexham Street under the same condition.
- 9.4 More broadly speaking, Policy SP6 (Design Code – Parish Wide) responds to the Government's encouragement that neighbourhood plans should set out local design guidance. In the context of Stoke Poges, a design code will help to ensure future development does not negatively impact the significance and setting of heritage assets in the neighbourhood area.
- 9.5 Policy SP3 (Sefton Park) guides any future limited infilling, partial or full redevelopment of previously developed land at the office campus Sefton Park, which contains grade II listed building Sefton Park. Policy SP7 (Local Heritage Assets) further identifies a number of local heritage assets in the neighbourhood area that, whilst not designated, have local heritage values. The policy seeks to prevent the harm or loss of these assets because of future development, where possible.
- 9.6 The draft SPNP aims to ensure that proposals for residential development contribute to a mixed and balanced community through Policy SP4 (Housing Mix and Tenure). The policy outlines a preference for 1- and 2-bedroom homes, and tenures that favour those looking to rent or own their first home. It also focuses on homes for downsizers and specialist housing for older people. The policy highlights that the starting point for affordable homes should comprise a 50/ 50 split of homes for rent and homes for sale.
- 9.7 Climate change mitigation is addressed through Policy SP5 (Passivhaus Buildings) of the draft SPNP. This policy seeks to ensure that the energy performance of future development in Stoke Poges meet the Passivhaus, or equivalent, standard of building design, improving energy efficiency.

- 9.8 Policy SP8 (Rural Resilience) proposes the establishment of a 'shared back garden' linking the communities of Stoke Poges and Farnham Common. This will comprise green and blue infrastructure assets, including informal recreation space, a footpath/ cycle network and land of biodiversity value. The policy requires all development proposals within its broad location to make provision for its delivery and management. Adding to this, Policy SP9 (Green Infrastructure) designates a green infrastructure network, comprising the 'shared back garden', Stoke Common SSSI, land with known biodiversity value, woodlands, significant hedgerows and lines of trees, and watercourses and waterbodies. The policy requires that all development proposals that lie within/ adjacent to the network have full regard to maintaining and improving its functionality.
- 9.9 Policy SP10 (Local Green Spaces) designates six areas of Local Green Spaces (LGS) within the neighbourhood area. The policy only identifies LGS outside of the Green Belt, because areas within the Green Belt are already provided protection via this designation. Development proposals within LGS will only be supported in very special circumstances.
- 9.10 With a focus on active travel, Policy SP11 (Local Access Network) identifies a 'Local Access Network' for the purposes of supporting walking and cycling within Stoke Poges and the wider area. Development proposals that lie within/ adjacent to the network should sustain or enhance the functionality of the network through appropriate site layout.
- 9.11 Finally, the rural nature of Stokes Poges is considered through Policy SP12 (Dark Skies), which outlines that all development proposals should be designed to prevent/ minimise light pollution where possible.

Climate change and flood risk

- 9.12 In 2018, CO₂ emissions per capita in South Bucks were almost double that of Buckinghamshire as a whole, the South East of England, and England. The transport sector was the largest contributor to CO₂ emissions in South Bucks during this year. This is addressed through Policy SP5 of the draft SPNP, which seeks to ensure that future development in Stoke Poges is energy efficient, reducing operational CO₂ emissions. Meanwhile, Policy SP11 supports walking and cycling in the neighbourhood area.
- 9.13 The six sites set out within the draft SPNP's design code are located within the existing built-up areas of the neighbourhood area. The five sites within the village of Stoke Poges have good pedestrian/ cycle connectivity and are near the village centre, Sefton Park office campus, Stoke Poges School, and Stoke Poges Recreation Ground. The three sites located in the centre of the village (Rogers Close, Thames Court and Bells Hill Green) are particularly well located. The site in Wexham Street (Deans Close) is near Plough Lane Recreation Ground, Tubwell Stores convenience shop and The Stag pub. In addition, Stoke Poges village is only 1.5km from the site and accessible via a local bus service (and within walking/ cycling distance for some).
- 9.14 Regarding flood risk, most of the neighbourhood area lies within Flood Zone 1. The exception to this is a narrow strip of land in the southwestern part of the neighbourhood area, within Stoke Park, which lies within Flood Zone 2/ 3.

Nevertheless, all six sites within the design guide of the draft SPNP fall outside of this area, within Flood Zone 1.

- 9.15 Surface water flood risk is more widespread in Stoke Poges. It is particularly high along the neighbourhood area's network of brooks/ streams, including, but not limited to, a stream/ brook running parallel to Farthing Green Lane, as well as a large area by Salthill Stream on the western edge of the village of Stoke Poges. However, none of the six sites within the design guide of the draft SPNP fall within these areas at high risk of surface water flooding.
- 9.16 Overall, the policy framework of the draft SPNP addresses climate change mitigation by encouraging energy efficiency development and supporting the use of active travel. In addition, the spatial strategy locates development in areas near existing services and facilities and avoids development in areas of high fluvial/ surface water flood risk. As a result of this, broadly **neutral to minor positive effects** are predicted under this SEA topic.

Community wellbeing

- 9.17 Over two thirds of the existing housing stock in Stoke Poges comprises 3-bedroom plus detached homes. Combined with the neighbourhood area being amongst the most expensive areas in the country to buy a home, this largely restricts first time buyers from getting onto the housing ladder. In addition, the population of Stoke Poges is ageing, and this has resulted in further demand for smaller homes from older people looking to downsize. There is also no specialist housing for old people in the neighbourhood area. The draft SPNP seeks to address these issues through Policy SP4.
- 9.18 In terms of access to services and facilities, as outlined under the climate change and flood risk SEA topic, all six sites within the draft SPNP's design code have good access to local services and facilities. Notably, the community can access a wider range of higher order retailers in Uxbridge, High Wycombe, Windsor, Farnham Common, and to a lesser extent, Slough. However, these settlements are largely only accessible by car. Policy SP11 of the draft SPNP partially addresses this issue by supporting the delivery of an improved active travel network in the neighbourhood area, making walking, and cycling more attractive.
- 9.19 Stoke Poges is well served with regards to access to green space. There are several formal green spaces found in the central and southern areas of the neighbourhood area. Additionally, most of the neighbourhood area benefits from being located within the Metropolitan Green Belt. Policy SP10 of the draft SPNP seeks to protect the neighbourhood area's provision of green space through LGS designations, whilst Policy SP9 designates a green infrastructure network. All six sites within the draft SPNP's design code have good access to green space/ infrastructure.
- 9.20 Stoke Poges has a relatively low level of deprivation. However, there are a few pockets of deprivation relating to two IMD domains: 'barriers to housing and services' and 'crime'. The delivery of affordable housing through Policy SP4 of the draft SPNP, as well as the delivery of an improved active travel network through Policy SP11, address the 'barriers to housing and services' domain to some degree. However, crime is not a focus of the draft SPNP.

9.21 Overall, the policy framework of the draft SPNP successfully addresses the wide range of issues that fall under this SEA topic, from housing needs to access to services and facilities and green space. In addition, the spatial strategy promotes development in highly accessible locations. Therefore, **minor positive effects** are anticipated under this SEA topic.

Historic environment

- 9.22 A relatively dense concentration of listed buildings can be found in the central and southern parts of the neighbourhood area. These are largely covered by four conservation areas: Framewood Road, Stoke Poges West End, Stoke Green, and Stoke Park. Notably, two of these conservation areas partially overlap with Grade II Registered Parks and Gardens Stoke Park and Stoke Place. The neighbourhood area also contains one Scheduled Monument. Policy SP6 of the draft SPNP seeks to protect and enhance the setting and significance of these heritage assets by ensuring that future development is appropriately designed informed by the design code. Meanwhile, Policy SP7 (Local Heritage Assets) provides some protection to local heritage assets, which are not afforded protection through designation.
- 9.23 With regards to the spatial strategy, only one site within the draft SPNP's design code is constrained – this is Rogers Close. This site is adjacent to the Stoke Poges West End Conservation Area, including Grade II Listed Building 'Uplands'. In response to this, the design code for this site outlines that the character of development, and building materials used, will need to respect, and compliment the setting and significance of the conservation area. In addition, existing trees along the site's southern boundary are to be retained to partially screen the site from the conservation area.
- 9.24 Overall, whilst it is recognised that one of the six sites considered through the draft SPNP's design code has the potential to impact the historic environment, this is unlikely to be significant given the measures outlined within the design code. The policy framework of the draft SPNP also supports the design code by protecting both designated and non-designated heritage assets. Nevertheless, in the absence of detailed planning applications, potential effects remain **uncertain** at this stage but are considered **likely to be minor** in nature.

Landscape

- 9.25 Stoke Poges has a flat, lowland topography, with a mixed-use landscape, characterised by urban development and areas of farmland. In addition, parkland landscape provides important historical, ecological, and recreational value and a distinctive rural character in an otherwise busy landscape. Tree cover is sparse and largely limited to the parkland landscape.
- 9.26 The entire neighbourhood area lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt; however, the main part of the village inset. The remaining built-up areas, including the lower part of West End Lane, Park Road (B416), Church Lane, Grays Park Road, Templewood Lane, and Wexham Street, are 'washed over' by the Green Belt. Whilst the Green Belt designation provides protection to the area it covers, Policy SP10 of the draft SPNP identifies six areas of LGS outside of the Green Belt which it seeks to protect.

- 9.27 Other policies within the draft SPNP that are relevant to this SEA topic include Policy SP8, which proposes the establishment of a ‘shared back garden’, and Policy SP9, which designates a green infrastructure network. Furthermore, Policy SP12 seeks to minimise/ prevent light pollution within the neighbourhood area, thus protecting its rural character.
- 9.28 With regards to the spatial strategy, the draft SPNP’s design code includes several measures that protect or enhance the neighbourhood area’s landscape. This includes retaining and protecting existing trees, hedgerows and verges and delivering green infrastructure on-site. Concerning the Green Belt, five of the six sites outlined in the design code lie within the inset boundary of Stokes Poges. Meanwhile, the sixth site – Neville Close – in Wexham Street qualifies as ‘limited infilling’ as defined by Policy GB3 of the South Bucks Local Plan. In this respect, the spatial strategy performs well.
- 9.29 Overall, given that the draft SPNP gives due consideration to the local landscape, including the Green Belt, through both its policy framework and spatial strategy/ design code and future development is likely to continue to be limited to minor infill, **residual neutral effects** are predicted as most likely.

Cumulative effects

- 9.30 Alongside the provisions of the South Bucks Local Plan, South Bucks Core Strategy, and NPPF, the SPNP seeks to support high-quality housing delivery in line with forecasted needs over the Plan period whilst avoiding significant effects in relation to the SEA topics explored in detail above. As a result of this, **positive cumulative effects** are anticipated.

10. Conclusions and recommendations

- 10.1 Overall, the SPNP is not considered likely to lead to any significant negative effects under any of the SEA topics that are a focus of this SEA.
- 10.2 Minor positive effects are anticipated under the community wellbeing SEA topic as the policy framework of the draft SPNP successfully addresses the range of issues that fall under this SEA topic, from housing needs to access to services and facilities and green space. The spatial strategy supports this by promoting small-scale (infill) development in the most accessible locations.
- 10.3 Broadly neutral to minor positive effects are predicted under the climate change and flood risk SEA topic. This is because the policy framework of the draft SPNP encourages energy efficient development and supports active travel, whilst the spatial strategy promotes development in the most accessible locations and avoids development in areas of high flood risk.
- 10.4 Residual neutral effects are considered likely under the landscape SEA topic due to the level consideration given to the local landscape, including the Green Belt, through both the policy framework and spatial strategy/ design code of the draft SPNP, and again because of the limited infill development expected over the plan period.
- 10.5 Uncertainty is noted under the historic environment SEA topic in the absence of detailed planning applications for the Rogers Close site, which lies adjacent to a conservation area and grade II listed building. Nevertheless, it is recognised that the draft SPNP's policy framework and design code do a good job in protecting both designated and non-designated heritage assets and no significant effects are deemed likely.
- 10.6 At this stage, no specific recommendations are made as the draft SPNP and accompanying design code sufficiently address the main constraints of the neighbourhood area.

Part 3: What are the next steps?

11. Next steps and monitoring

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

Plan finalisation

11.2 Following submission, the SPNP and supporting evidence will be published for further consultation, and then subjected to Independent Examination. At Independent Examination, the SPNP will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the Local Plan.

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

Monitoring

11.4 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.

11.5 It is anticipated that monitoring of effects of the SPNP 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 SPNP that would warrant more stringent monitoring over and above that already undertaken by Bucks Council.

Appendices

Appendix A - Regulatory requirements

As discussed in **Chapter 1**, Schedule 2 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans Regulations 2004 (the Regulations) explains the information that must be contained in the Environmental Report; however, interpretation of Schedule 2 is not straightforward. **Table AA-1** links the structure of this report to an interpretation of Schedule 2 requirements, whilst **Table AA-2** explains this interpretation. **Table AA-3** identifies how and where within the Environmental Report the regulatory requirements have/ will be met.

Table AA-1 Questions answered by this Environmental Report, in-line with an interpretation of regulatory requirements

	Questions answered	As per regulations... the Environmental Report must include...	
Introduction	What's the plan seeking to achieve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes 	
	What's the SEA scope?	What's the sustainability 'context'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance
		What's the sustainability 'baseline'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance
		What are the key issues and objectives that should be a focus?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key environmental problems / issues and objectives that should be a focus of (i.e., provide a 'framework' for) assessment
Part 1	What has plan-making / SEA involved up to this point?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with (and thus an explanation of the 'reasonableness' of the approach) The likely significant effects associated with alternatives Outline reasons for selecting the preferred approach in-light of alternatives assessment / a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the draft plan 	
Part 2	What are the SEA findings at this current stage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The likely significant effects associated with the draft plan The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce, and offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the draft plan 	
Part 3	What happens next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A description of the monitoring measures envisaged 	

Table AA-2: Questions answered by this Environmental Report, in-line with regulatory requirements

<u>Schedule 2</u>	<u>Interpretation of Schedule 2</u>	
<i>The report must include...</i>	<i>The report must include...</i>	
(a) an outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;	An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes	i.e. answer - <i>What's the plan seeking to achieve?</i>
(b) the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan	Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance	i.e. answer - <i>What's the 'context'?</i>
(c) the environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;		
(d) any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC;	The relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level	i.e. answer - <i>What's the 'baseline'?</i>
(e) the environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or Member State level, which are relevant to the plan and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;	The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan'	
(f) the likely significant effects on the environment including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors;	The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected	
(g) the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan;	Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance	i.e. answer - <i>What are the key issues & objectives?</i>
(h) an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information	Key environmental problems / issues and objectives that should be a focus of appraisal	
(i) a description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring.	An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with (i.e. an explanation of the 'reasonableness of the approach)	i.e. answer - <i>What has Plan-making / SA involved up to this point?</i> [Part 1 of the Report]
	The likely significant effects associated with alternatives, including on issues such as... ... and an outline of the reasons for selecting the preferred approach in light of the alternatives considered / a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the draft plan.	
	The likely significant effects associated with the draft plan	i.e. answer - <i>What are the assessment findings at this current stage?</i> [Part 2 of the Report]
	The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the draft plan	
	A description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring	i.e. answer - <i>What happens next?</i> [Part 3 of the Report]

Table AA-3: ‘Checklist’ of how (throughout the SEA process) and where (within this report) regulatory requirements have been, are, and/ or will be met.

Regulatory requirement	Discussion of how requirement is met
Schedule 2 of the regulations lists the information to be provided within the SA Report	
1. An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme, and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;	Chapter 2 (‘What is the plan seeking to achieve’) presents this information.
2. The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme;	These matters have been considered in detail through scoping work, which has involved dedicated consultation on a Scoping Report. The ‘SEA framework’ – the outcome of scoping – is presented within Chapter 3 (‘What is the scope of the SEA?’).
3. The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;	
4. Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC.;	
5. The environmental protection, objectives, established at international, Community or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental, considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;	The SEA framework is presented within Chapter 3 (‘What is the scope of the SEA’). With regards to explaining “ <i>how...considerations have been taken into account</i> ”, Chapter 7 explains the Steering Group’s ‘reasons for supporting the preferred approach’, i.e., explains how/ why the preferred approach is justified in light of alternatives appraisal.
6. The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape, and the interrelationship between the above factors. (Footnote: These effects should include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects);	Chapter 6 presents alternatives appraisal findings (in relation to housing growth, which is a ‘stand-out’ plan policy area). Chapters 9 presents an appraisal of the plan. With regards to assessment methodology, Chapter 8 explains the role of the SEA framework/scope, and the need to consider the potential for various effect characteristics/ dimensions, e.g., timescale.
7. The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme;	The assessment highlights certain tensions between competing objectives, which might potentially be actioned by the Examiner, when finalising the plan. Also, specific recommendations are made in Chapter 10.
8. An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information;	Chapters 4 and 5 deal with ‘Reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with’, in that there is an explanation of the reasons for focusing on issues and options. Also, Chapter 7 explains the Parish Council’s ‘reasons for selecting the preferred option’ (in-light of alternatives assessment).
9. Description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Art. 10;	Chapter 11 presents measures envisaged concerning monitoring.

Regulatory requirement

Discussion of how requirement is met

10.A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings

The NTS is provided at the beginning of this Environmental Report.

The SA Report must be published alongside the Draft Plan, in accordance with the following regulations

authorities with environmental responsibility and the public, shall be given an early and effective opportunity within appropriate time frames to express their opinion on the Draft Plan or programme and the accompanying environmental report before the adoption of the plan or programme (Art. 6.1, 6.2)

At the current time, this Environmental Report is published alongside the 'draft SPNP, with a view to informing Regulation 14 consultation.

The SA must be considered, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.

The environmental report prepared pursuant to Article 5, the opinions expressed pursuant to Article 6 and the results of any transboundary consultations entered into pursuant to Article 7 shall be taken into account during the preparation of the plan or programme and before its adoption or submission to the legislative procedure.

Assessment findings presented within this Environmental Report, and consultation responses received, have been fed back to the Steering Group and have informed plan finalisation.

Appendix B - Scoping information

As detailed in **Chapter 3** of the main report, this appendix provides the scoping information. Scoping consultation was undertaken during the period 10th January 2023 to 14th February 2023 and the responses received from statutory consultees are provided in **Table AB-1** below. No response was received from the Environment Agency.

Following the consultation responses, the SEA framework that has been used in the report has been provided in **Table AB-2** below.

Scoping consultation

Table AB-1 Scoping consultation responses

Consultation response	SEA response/ action
Historic England	
Louise Dandy, Historic Places Advisor	
<p>RE: Stoke Poges Neighbourhood Plan SEA Scoping Opinion</p> <p>Thank you for your email regarding the above consultation. As the Government's adviser on the historic environment Historic England is keen to ensure that the protection of the historic environment is fully taken into account at all stages and levels of the local planning process. Therefore we welcome this opportunity to review this request for a Scoping Opinion. For the purposes of this consultation, Historic England will confine its advice to the question, "Is it (the neighbourhood plan) likely to have a significant effect on the historic environment?". Our comments are based on the information supplied with the Scoping Opinion.</p>	<p>Many thanks for taking the time to review and respond to scoping consultation. We note that Historic England's agrees with the proposed scope, which includes an objective dedicated to the historic environment.</p>
<p>The supporting information supplied with the consultation indicates that within the plan area there is a range of designated historic environment assets. There is also likely to be other features of local historic, architectural, or archaeological value, and consideration should also be given to the wider historic landscape.</p>	
<p>Given the likely significant effects (both positive and negative) upon the historic environment, Historic England hence concurs with the Council's view and</p>	

considers that a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required and the Scope contained within the Scoping Report is acceptable.

We should like to stress that this opinion is based on the information provided by you. To avoid any doubt, this does not reflect our obligation to provide further advice on later stages of the SA/SEA process and, potentially, object to specific proposals which may subsequently arise (either as a result of this consultation or in later versions of the plan/guidance) where we consider that, despite the SA/SEA, these would have an adverse effect upon the environment.

Natural England
Sally Wintle, Consultation Team

Stoke Poges Neighbourhood Plan - SEA
Scoping Report Consultation

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated and received by Natural England on 10 January 2023.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Many thanks for taking the time to review and respond to scoping consultation. We note that Natural England does not foresee any significant impacts in relation to the natural environment and by extension we infer that Natural England is satisfied with the proposed scope of the SEA. This still contains a landscape objective, which seeks to assess impacts predominantly in relation to the immediate townscape setting.

**Screening Request: Strategic
Environmental Assessment**

It is our advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that, in so far as our strategic environmental interests (including but not limited to statutory designated sites, landscapes and protected species, geology and soils) are concerned, that there are unlikely to be significant environmental effects from the proposed plan.

Neighbourhood Plan

Guidance on the assessment of
Neighbourhood Plans, in light of the

Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (as amended), is contained within the National Planning Practice Guidance. The guidance highlights three triggers that may require the production of an SEA, for instance where:

- a neighbourhood plan allocates sites for development
- the neighbourhood area contains sensitive natural or heritage assets that may be affected by the proposals in the plan
- the neighbourhood plan may have significant environmental effects that have not already been considered and dealt with through a sustainability appraisal of the Local Plan.

We have checked our records and based on the information provided, we can confirm that in our view the proposals contained within the plan will not have significant effects on sensitive sites that Natural England has a statutory duty to protect.

We are not aware of significant populations of protected species which are likely to be affected by the policies / proposals within the plan. It remains the case, however, that the responsible authority should provide information supporting this screening decision, sufficient to assess whether protected species are likely to be affected.

Notwithstanding this advice, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all potential environmental assets. As a result the responsible authority should raise environmental issues that we have not identified on local or national biodiversity action plan species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites or local landscape character, with its own ecological and/or landscape advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local landscape and biodiversity

receptors that may be affected by this plan, before determining whether an SA/SEA is necessary.

Please note that Natural England reserves the right to provide further comments on the environmental assessment of the plan beyond this SEA/SA screening stage, should the responsible authority seek our views on the scoping or environmental report stages. This includes any third-party appeal against any screening decision you may make.

Table AB-2 SEA framework

SEA topic	SEA objective	Assessment questions (will the option/ proposal help to...)
Climate change and flood risk	Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities within the neighbourhood area and increase resilience to the potential effects of climate change, including flooding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the number of journeys made and reduce the need to travel? • Promote the use of more sustainable modes of transport, including walking, cycling, public transport, and EV infrastructure? • Increase the number of new developments meeting or exceeding sustainable design criteria? • Generate energy from low or zero carbon sources, or reduce energy consumption from non-renewable resources? • 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? • Sustainably manage water run-off, reducing runoff where possible? • Increase the resilience of biodiversity in the area to the effects of climate change, including through enhancements to ecological networks?

SEA topic	SEA objective	Assessment questions (will the option/ proposal help to...)
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?
Historic environment	Protect, conserve, and enhance the historic environment within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the integrity of the historic setting of the conservation area? • 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 BHER? • Support the undertaking of early archaeological investigations and, where appropriate, recommend mitigation strategies? • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of the historic evolution and character of the neighbourhood area?
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and/ or enhance local landscape character and quality of place? • Conserve and enhance local identity, diversity, and settlement character?

SEA topic	SEA objective	Assessment questions (will the option/ proposal help to...)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify and protect locally important viewpoints which contribute to character and sense of place?• Retain and enhance landscape features that contribute to the water setting, or rural setting, including trees and hedgerows?

